

DELANCEY STEWART



THE
GLITTERING LIFE
OF **EVIE MCKENZIE**



Delancey Stewart

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«HarperCollins»

Stewart D.

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«HarperCollins»,

Pride & Prohibition! New York socialite Evie McKenzie is happy. At least, she tells herself that she must be since she has a ring on her finger from the man of her dreams and the city's hottest speakeasy named in her honour. But a secret job as a gossip columnist brings the elusive and sinfully seductive Jack Taylor back into her orbit, and resisting him is twice as hard second time around. For speakeasy manager Tug Hadley, the roar of the twenties is practically deafening – her eyes and ears are full of opportunity, and she's ready to grab life with both hands. If only the man she loves weren't engaged to her best friend... Beneath the bootlegged booze and beaded flapper dresses, Evie and Tug must decide how much they're willing to risk to get what they want in this most decadent era of high-stakes hedonism. Don't miss this fantastic romantic sequel to Prohibited!

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Prohibited!

The Glittering Life of Evie McKenzie

Delancey Stewart



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[Chapter One](#)

Evie

‘Miss Evie, you’re doing it again. Breathe, sweetheart.’ Buck was guiding the small car through the narrow streets as he spoke, staring at Evie seated next to him.

A woman with a baby in a carriage was crossing the street up ahead. Evelyn’s eyes widened as they accelerated toward the woman, and she turned her head to find Buck still looking at her, concern spread across his gentle face. She found that Buck was right, she had been holding her breath. But she let it out to scream, ‘Buckie, look out!’

Buck hit the brakes, and the woman crossed, shooting a look of fear toward the little coupe as she disappeared between parked cars and back up onto the sidewalk. ‘Oh for Pete’s sake,’ Buck said.

‘It doesn’t help my nerves one little bit when you drive like a maniac!’ Evie pulled herself straighter and forced a deep breath in and out. ‘There, see? I’m breathing, okay?’ She smoothed her dark skirt and fidgeted with the little hat that covered her dark curls.

‘I don’t know why you’re lettin’ yer nerves get to you, Miss Evie. You’ll knock ‘em dead, I know it.’

Evie smiled at Buck. He was so much more than her family’s driver and butler. Buck had been with her since she was born, and as she was an only child, he had been her most faithful playmate when she was young. Now that she was a young woman, he seemed happy to be her co-conspirator, helping her manage things that her parents would certainly never approve of. Buck was nothing if not devoted to his charge. Sometimes Evie worried that her antics might compromise Buck’s job if her parents ever found out, but she suspected that her parents loved him just as much as she did. ‘Thanks, Bucky.’

Buck pulled the jalopy up to the imposing *Herald Tribune* offices at 43rd Street and turned to look at Evie.

‘Oh Buckie, now you look nervous!’ Evie reached a hand out to place along Buck’s pale chubby cheek. ‘Thanks for the ride. Will you wait?’

‘Of course I will. You go up there and show ‘em what you’re made of.’

Evie took a deep breath, doing her best to settle her rampaging nerves, and smiled at Buck. ‘I’ll sure try.’

The offices at the *Herald Tribune* were busy, and the constant movement between desks and phones ringing reminded Evie of a beehive. Men in dark suits manned most of the desks, many of them furiously typing as others spit words into their phones. A few turned to look as she passed between the desks, following the receptionist back to the office of James R. Tobias, the editor who had placed the advertisement that had brought her there.

The receptionist waved an arm toward an open door after she’d gone in herself to make sure Tobias was in. ‘Go on in,’ she said. She raised an eyebrow at Evie as she watched her enter. The skepticism in her look did little for Evie’s confidence.

‘Hello,’ the big man behind the desk said, rising. ‘Jim Tobias. Please sit down.’

Evie followed directions, placing her small bag on her lap and holding out a piece of paper outlining her scant qualifications.

The man waved it away as he sat. ‘You’re here about the ad, then?’

‘Yes sir, I go to the University, and I ...’

‘No, no. Stop right there.’ Tobias barked it, doing nothing to help Evie’s frazzled nerves.

‘All right,’ she tried again. ‘Well, sir, I’m Ev ...’

‘For God’s sake, don’t tell me your name!’

Evie swallowed her words and stared at the man. She could feel color rising up her neck as anger began to replace nervousness. He might be in charge, but Tobias was undeniably rude. ‘I might not have a lot of experience with jobs, sir, but it seems like telling you my name and giving you my qualifications would be the right way to start. Maybe I’ve come to the wrong place.’ Evie put her chin in the air, her Upper East Side roots getting the best of her. She didn’t care who this man was, he had no cause to be rude to a perfect stranger.

‘No, no, miss. I’m sorry. I come off rough, I know it.’ Tobias gave her an apologetic smile under his mustache and rubbed his ear. ‘It’s just that for this particular position, it’s better if I don’t know much about you.’

‘Why is that?’ Now Evie was curious.

‘We’re looking for a columnist who can get in with the society crowds, someone who belongs there already, maybe. Someone willing to be anonymous.’

‘Anonymous? Why?’

‘I’d like to do a new column as part of our society pages. A column that spills the news that other people aren’t talking about. A piece that will get people stewing ... But no one will talk to you if they know you’re the one ratting out all the juicy secrets, right?’ Tobias smiled, his dark eyes twinkling in the ruddy face.

‘I see,’ Evie said, her mind spinning. She had come here to be a real writer, to learn how a newspaper worked. She had no idea that the advertisement she’d seen at school was to work as a gossip writer. Her parents would never approve.

‘Forgive me saying, but you look like you might be the right type of girl. You know some of the people regular New Yorkers would like to read about?’

‘I’m not sure who that would be,’ Evie said, not sure if she should be offended.

‘Look, I’m willing to give you a try, sweetheart. I know this isn’t exactly hard news. But you got a chance here to be on the edge of somethin’ new – stir things up a bit. Can you get in with the right crowds? Politicians, celebrities, society types? Would you be comfortable at the clubs?’ He raised a bushy eyebrow and shook his head, then muttered to himself. ‘Naw, probably not. Good girls who can run around like debutantes don’t go to clubs. Maybe this isn’t gonna work.’

Evie smiled. He had no idea how comfortable she was with just those types of people, and clubs would be nothing new to her. Her boyfriend, Roger, was the owner of a speakeasy on the east side, and she’d had a short interlude with another club proprietor, too. Despite the fact that she was only eighteen, and a sheltered debutante, Evie had a wealth of experience in just the types of situations Tobias was looking for. ‘I think I could manage it.’

Tobias stopped muttering and stared, surprise raising his eyebrows high. ‘All right. Let’s try ‘er out. Write me a column – something juicy that will get people’s wheels spinning; something you’d have to be an insider to know. Five hundred words? I’ll give you a week.’

‘But I shouldn’t put my name on it?’

‘Put a name on it, sure. Just not your real name. Got me? And if I were you, I wouldn’t mention this to anyone. You’d be surprised how people quiet down around you if they think you’ve got an agenda.’

Evie nodded slowly as she thought about what she was being asked to do. ‘What about payment?’

Tobias regarded her with amusement sparkling in his eyes, his head tilted to one side. ‘Drivin’ a hard bargain?’

‘No, I just believe that I should be compensated for my work. I came here looking for a job, sir. Not a hobby.’

‘Of course you did.’ Tobias stood up. ‘This one’s a trial run. If it works out, we’ll give ya fifty cents a column.’

Evie tried not to react. Though fifty cents was not a lot, it was also more than she’d ever made doing anything, and it sounded a lot like freedom to her. She gave Tobias a curt nod to let him know that would be acceptable.

‘All right, kid. Good luck.’ Tobias waved her off, and Evie picked up her bag and let herself out, her smile growing wider as she made her way through the noisy offices and back down to the car, where Buck waited.

‘Well?’ he asked.

She jumped up and down and squealed. ‘I have a job, Bucky!’ Then, as a thought crossed her mind, she stood still and made her voice small. ‘Please don’t tell Daddy.’

‘Should I even ask why, Miss Evie?’ Buck opened the door for her and they drove back up to the McKenzie home on the Upper East Side.

‘It’d probably be better if you didn’t.’

‘Oh dear.’

‘Hello, darling.’ Evie’s mother had a knack for waiting just inside the door when Evie arrived home. Evie suspected that she could probably hear the car coming up the street. It wasn’t exactly quiet.

‘Mother.’ Evie couldn’t help but grin as she came inside. The chill March air clung to her coat and Buck pounded his hands on his thighs behind her, seeming to send puffs of cold off of him in clouds.

‘You look pleased.’ Mrs McKenzie looked worried as she said it, her lips pulling into a hard straight line and wrinkles appearing between her eyes.

‘And that makes you look worried,’ Evie said, hanging her coat. ‘I am happy, Mother. You should be happy, too.’

‘Why are we happy today?’

Buck passed them, heading for the kitchen, and Evie watched him go. He was a good friend to her. ‘No reason, Mother. It’s just a lovely day and I’m happy.’

Mrs McKenzie’s face relaxed. ‘Well, then I’m happy too.’ She turned to fuss with some things arranged on a shelf in the entry. As her hands moved over the shelf she said, ‘Evelyn, the Whites are coming for dinner. Please be ready at seven.’

‘That sounds lovely.’ Evie climbed the stairs to her own room, smiling at the thought of spending an evening with Roger. He had been at Yale for his last semester, but managed to return to the city almost every weekend to see her and to check in on his business. Evie sat on the edge of her bed, excited to tell him about her new job. But as she turned it over in her mind, she realized that she wouldn’t be able to. Mr Tobias had suggested that she couldn’t tell anyone. She sighed. It seemed Buck would be her sole conspirator, as he so often was.

Evelyn pulled open a book for school and tried to lose herself in Roman mythology, but found that her mind wouldn’t stay on her studies. As a new student at New York University, she felt she had a lot to prove – especially to her mother. But today she couldn’t focus. She was too excited. She pulled out a notebook instead, and began trying to think of a clever pseudonym for her column.

Chapter Two

Tug

Elizabeth ‘Tug’ Hadley leaned across the bar top, her gaze sweeping the small space before her. PJ and the boys were playing in the corner, their little trio throwing out notes that just a few years ago would have sounded cacophonous. Jazz had swept the city. The club was just beginning to fill up, and the little tables in the far corners held couples on dates, off-duty policemen and single men just looking to relax and unwind after a long week. To Tug, it was all perfect.

Ever since Roger and Chuck had asked her to manage their club, she’d felt like her life had found its rhythm. She would never be a debutante like her best friend Evie – not now, anyway – and her parents didn’t have enough money to quietly ignore her like Janie’s. No, she would have to be a different kind of woman altogether. The kind who made it on her own.

There had been a time when the idea of working at all would have been abhorrent – if not to her, then to her mother who essentially told her what to think about the world. Mrs Hadley had spent Tug’s childhood setting in place a fragile scaffolding that would allow her daughter to climb much higher than her own social standing had allowed her to do. She’d raised Tug to believe she would one day open her door to find the world delivered to her on a silver platter.

But those days were long since gone. Tug’s mother had taken Tug’s future with her when she’d left, and what Tug needed more than anything was for someone to believe in her ability to change, to redefine herself.

And Roger and Chuck had given her a shot.

‘You okay, Chuck? I’m going down to finish setting up our little experiment downstairs.’ Tug turned to the lanky blond man leaning across the bar top.

Chuck handed a drink to the red-cheeked man sitting alone at the end of the bar and shot Tug a smile. ‘I got it, Tug. You go ahead. I’ll be fine.’

‘I think Roger’s back. We should see him in a bit, so I want to make sure things are perfect.’ Tug pulled on her coat as she talked.

She cared what Roger thought. About her efforts at his club. And about her, too. It was pointless, really, and she knew it. She told herself every night just how ridiculous her crush was. But it didn’t seem to make a difference to her heart. Roger White was handsome and kind, successful and smart.

He was exactly the kind of man she'd been raised to marry. And he was practically engaged to her best friend. 'Let's make sure we keep everything spic and span.'

'I always do.' Chuck sighed.

Tug climbed up the stairs and let herself out onto the street, glancing around out of habit. The club, a small speakeasy called Evie's, had been raided a few times since she'd been managing the place. But they'd never run into any real trouble. And part of the reason for that was the clever system Roger had worked out to drop the liquor off the shelf at the quick pull of a switch. The downside to his system was that the bottles dropped a full story into the basement below the bar, shattering on impact. The basement had never been discovered by the authorities, since it didn't physically link to the building under which it sat. And according to public record, the building where Evie's operated had no basement. Tug suspected that oversight had been achieved by Roger's ability to charm people and to grease official palms when needed.

Tug climbed the stairs leading up to the front door of the residential building next door to the club and fitted her key into the lock. She pushed through the vestibule and walked quickly to a back stairwell that led down to the garden apartment below. She used another key to let herself in there.

A small desk sat against one wall, and a low table and a few chairs were scattered about the small space. Roger and Chuck used this apartment as an office, though Tug always imagined that it could be a cozy home if she just had the chance to bring in the right furniture and shine the place up a bit. She sometimes came over during the day and let herself in, just to escape the walls of her own home, which seemed to grow closer the older she got. She'd bring a book and spend hours in the quiet that the little space provided.

But today she had a different mission. She walked to the far wall of the little space and slid open the concealed door that appeared to be a simple paneled wall. It moved back to reveal a staircase to the basement. Tug flipped a switch, illuminating the bare bulb hanging below her and descended, shivering. She always felt a damp sense of foreboding as she went down to the basement passageway between the two buildings. She eyed it now, glancing back up the stairs out of habit.

The tunnel between the buildings wasn't walled in like a proper building would be. It was more like a mine shaft, the floor and walls made of damp hard stones meant to keep the earth from toppling in. Tug made her way around the support beams holding the ceiling in place and held her breath as she unlocked the door on the other side.

As she stepped into the damp dark space just below Evie's, she released her breath, wiping a hand across her brow. It took every ounce of bravery she had to venture through that tunnel each time she did it, as images of the walls toppling on her insisted on crowding her mind. But she wasn't just another dumb Dora. She was Tug. Tough and street-smart. Or at least that's what her father had told her all her life.

The basement beneath the club smelled of liquor, the inevitable result of avoiding the investigations of the Prohibition agents who liked to drop in upstairs. Tug picked up a broom and swept up some shattered glass that she hadn't noticed before, pushing it into a corner of the dark space. There were boxes piled in a corner. And against the far wall, there was a long open hole in the ceiling – one that happened to line up with the counter behind the bar in the club above. It had been a quick solution to a simple problem, but it lacked elegance. And it was wasteful.

Tug had helped pile the mattresses that waited beneath the hole now, and she found herself almost eager for a raid. She wanted to prove that her idea would work. She'd tested it with a few bottles full of water, and only one had broken when it had slid off the side. She'd rearranged the padding and hoped that next time the agents visited she'd be able to convert the club into an innocuous tea room without wasting a drop. She smiled at her own cleverness and pushed her way back out the door and through the tunnel, switching off the light as she returned to the apartment above. She

sighed, imagining once again that this might be her apartment someday, and then shook her head. Back to business. She left the apartment, and with another quick look around, she let herself out and returned to the club.

'Looks good,' she told Chuck as she let herself back behind the bar. The bottles along the back counter were arranged with enough space between them that they shouldn't crash into each other as they fell. It wasn't perfect, but it would probably work. Tug smiled at Chuck and pushed her coat back beneath the counter.

The evening flew as Tug attended to the guests that visited the club and managed the upkeep of everything from the bar top to the bathroom. She was surprised when Roger's deep voice rolled her way as she bent beneath the bar to wash some glasses, his rich baritone rumbling through her and warming her to her fingertips.

'Elizabeth, things are looking fine here.'

'Roger!' she smiled up at him. 'Is it another weekend already?'

'It is,' he said, his dark eyes dancing.

'Tug!' Evelyn McKenzie followed behind Roger. 'How are you, darling?'

'As good as can be expected,' Tug said. 'You know, the life of the working stiff.' Tug smiled. She was glad to see Evie, even if having Evie around impinged on her ability to pretend that she and Roger were a couple, something she sometimes did, though she certainly wasn't proud of it.

'Oh,' Evie smiled. 'You love it. Don't pretend you'd rather be anywhere else.'

'I do love it,' Tug smiled. 'I have no idea how you spend your days in those stuffy lectures. I wouldn't survive so many flat tires all in one place.'

Evie laughed. 'No, it's interesting, Tug! It really is.' Evie sat down at the bar and Chuck put a glass in front of her as Roger bent down to kiss her cheek.

'Do you mind if Tug talks business with Chuck and me for a couple minutes?' he asked.

'Course not. You three go ahead.'

Roger, Chuck, and Tug moved to the end of the small bar and surveyed the space together. It was packed at that hour, each small table surrounded by two or three people, the trio playing off in the corner and the bar lined with folks ready to give up their money for the gin they could no longer get in places that didn't have elaborate operating procedures or cops on the payroll. Evie's had both. And the place was flourishing as a result. It was bigger than a lot of clubs, and the tables scattered sparsely around the open floor had always bothered Tug's sense of aesthetic, as well as her desire to make money.

'We've got the sound now, Rog, but look at 'em. They want something else. Their feet are tapping, they're bobbing their heads. All that energy ...'

Roger looked around and then back at Tug. 'Something more, eh? Like what?'

'You're the big cheese,' Tug said. She turned to Chuck. 'And you're here all the time. You must have some thoughts. You tell me.'

'Baloney,' Chuck laughed. 'You're gonna tell us what you want to do, just like always. Let's hear it.'

'I'm not sure yet. Maybe just clear out some space to dance.'

'We don't have the room, Tug. Take out tables and we lose money. People need a place to sit while they get ossified.' Roger turned skeptical dark eyes on her, and Tug felt her mood deflate.

'Give her a chance, Rog. She's here day and night. She's got a feel for the place.' Chuck gave her an encouraging smile.

'This place needs something, Rog. Something to make it special,' Tug said.

'It's got you, Tug.'

Tug rolled her eyes. Roger had the money to bankroll the club and get it going, but he lacked the vision to see what it might be. And Chuck? She still hadn't figured him out. He seemed like he

was just along for the ride, but he shared the club equally with Roger, and Tug doubted he cared as little as it seemed. She was determined to show them what the club could be, and for them to enjoy the fruits of their success. 'I'm going to keep working on it.'

'I wouldn't expect any less.'

'This would be easier if you were a pushover, you know.'

Chuck laughed out loud and returned to serving customers. Roger grinned, and then moved to where Evie sat at the bar, leaning down to plant a kiss on her forehead.

Tug watched as Evie smiled up at him. It was like a painting. Everything with them was exactly as it should be. They were like Upper East Side royals, meant for each other. She loved Evie, but sometimes it was hard to watch the little rich girl get everything that Tug had once expected for herself. She'd once seen herself as Evie's equal. And while Evie certainly treated her the same way she always had, Tug knew that a divide that was worlds wide had opened between them. Evie stood on one side, with men like Roger and Chuck. And Tug watched from a distant shore. Life just unfolded for people like them, Tug thought. Other people had to fight for every little scrap. She swallowed down the bitter taste that had risen in her throat and forced herself to smile. Evie couldn't help where she was from anymore than Tug could.

'Cute, aren't they?' Chuck asked, making Tug jump. She hadn't realized he was watching the couple over her head.

She turned and looked up into his cheerful face. There was a wistful expression there she hadn't noticed before. She followed his gaze back to Roger and Evie. Could Chuck be jealous, too?

Chapter Three

Evie

Once Evie began to think of herself as a society columnist, everything she saw and heard seemed ripe for exploitation in a column. But two events had jumped out as the ideal subjects for her first piece. She handed the column to Mr Tobias and sat on the edge of her chair, waiting for his reaction.

'The Manhattan Mouth?' He raised a skeptical eyebrow and Evie felt her nerves spike. 'That's what you wanna be called, "Manhattan Mouth"?,' he mused to himself. 'Sounds kind of obnoxious, dontcha think?'

'Well, I ...' Evie began.

'Just give it a second to roll around in my head. Lemme read what you've got here.' Tobias bent over the words that Evie had spent hours typing onto the page. He read the page and then looked up at Evie again, a serious look on his face. He picked up the sheet of paper and snapped it in front of him, pulling it up in front of his face.

Evie fidgeted. It seemed he was going to read it again.

After another moment, he put the paper back down on his desk with a smack and grinned up at Evie. 'Here's what we're gonna do.' He leaned back in his chair, the smile still on his face. 'You're not gonna be the "Mouth." It just doesn't fit. But the Mouse, now ... what do you think?'

'The Manhattan Mouse?'

'Exactly.'

Evie smiled. It did sound more demure. And secretive. 'I like it. I think that's better.'

'Sure it is.' Tobias was still smiling.

'So ... the column?'

'Yeah, so you've got this Hattie Whozit left in the lurch by this rich kid just before the wedding ... for an older woman. I like that. That's perfect.' Tobias chuckled. He was staring at a spot on the wall just behind Evie's head. She guessed he was thinking as he spoke, and sat still despite the awkward feeling that she should turn and see what he was looking at. 'And then you've got this political type escorted from a club that "doesn't exist" by a cop who definitely knows it don't exist, and who certainly wasn't drinking there ... yeah, kid. Yeah, this is good stuff.'

‘Oh, I’m so glad you like it.’

‘How’d you get it?’

Evie sat up straighter. ‘Just like you said, sir. Just talked to a few people who know people, and ...’

‘Right, that’s good. Yeah, I don’t really want to know.’ Tobias fixed her with a stare. ‘Here’s a tip. Get people to tell you things about themselves. Then, get them to tell you things about other people that they promised they wouldn’t tell anyone.’

‘How?’

‘By threatening to talk about the things they told you about themselves. Collect secrets like coins, and you’ll be rich, kid.’

It made sense. But it sounded a little more unscrupulous than Evie was prepared to accept. She nodded, only to avoid any further suggestions that might make her second guess her newfound profession.

‘All right, Mouse. Get out there and dig up some dirt! Let’s have a column a week. Due on Tuesday.’

‘Yes, sir.’ Evie rose. Tobias was still grinning when she let herself out of his office and skipped down to the street, feeling a sense of independence that she had never experienced before.

That night Roger came to call, taking Evie to see a new picture called *The Ten Commandments* at the Fugazy Theater in the Village. They hadn’t had much time alone together since Roger had gone back to school after the holidays, and Evie found herself looking forward to having the generous smile and dark warm eyes all to herself for a change. ‘You look fantastic!’ Roger stood in the entry of Evie’s parents’ townhouse.

‘You do, darling, you look wonderful.’ Her father beamed at Roger’s side.

Evie had taken special care with her hair and even dared to rouge her lips and cheeks, despite her mother’s regular objections to face painting. She wore a pale green dress that hit just below her knee with a beaded neckline and a chiffon swag around the drop waist. Her satin heels pinched her feet, but since they’d be sitting down most of the night, she wasn’t concerned. She adjusted the headband she’d pulled around her dark bob and gave both men a bright smile as she reached the bottom of the stairs.

‘You look wonderful, too,’ she told Roger. And he did. His thick dark hair always made Evie want to run her hands through it, and the sparkle in his chocolate eyes sent a thrilling shiver down her spine.

He leaned forward to kiss her on the cheek and then shook hands with her father. ‘I’ll have her home at a decent hour, Mr McKenzie.’

‘We don’t worry when she’s with you, Roger,’ Evie’s father said, smiling.

Roger helped Evie on with her coat and they were off, braving the frosty evening breeze as they walked to Roger’s car, parked along the curb.

Roger had a convertible, but he’d pulled the top up to keep some of the wind off them as they drove downtown.

‘Are you warm enough, sweetie?’ Roger glanced over at Evie, who was shivering on the cold seat. ‘Oh, no, you’re not. You’re freezing! Scoot over,’ he said, holding one arm out to pull her close.

Evie moved in close to the warmth of Roger’s body, inhaling the scent of soap and leather that always seemed to linger on his skin. She leaned into him, closing her eyes and enjoying the sensation of comfort and security that she always found at his side.

Roger maneuvered the little car through the busy streets, and Evie was content to watch the world glide by. It was amazing to her that she’d ever considered Roger too boring a prospect for her. There was a time – before she knew that he was actually running a speakeasy – that she’d believed he was just another dull Upper East Side college boy. Her parents had paraded plenty of them through the parlor at the house after Evie had been presented to society. It seemed that the pressure was on to

plan out the rest of her life right away. And that had never really been what Evie wanted. But Roger was the perfect match for her sense of adventure. He was safe and predictable in the right ways, but had an unexpected dash of danger too. She gazed up at his profile, lit by the street lamps that glowed beyond the windows. He was close to perfect, she thought.

There had been another man, once. A man that appealed to her interest in the darker side of life. He'd been intriguing and seductive – the owner of another speakeasy she had been to with the girls. But in the end, she'd chosen Roger. And her mind strayed to the icy blue eyes of Jack Taylor only now and then. She assured herself that he had forgotten her, anyway. She hadn't seen him in months, and she certainly wouldn't seek him out now.

'What's going on in that head of yours?' Roger asked, his full lips smiling down at her.

'Just enjoying the ride,' she said, pushing thoughts of Jack from her mind.

'Well, I hope you won't be disappointed then,' he said. 'Because we're here.'

The Fugazy Theater rose before them, its name in lights on the vertical sign at the corner of the building. The marquee in front declared the Cecil DeMille movie 'Amazing', and Evie found herself looking forward to the show.

'I've heard that the Red Sea scene is incredible,' Roger told her as they took their seats.

'Oh, don't spoil it for me!'

'All right.' He held her hand through the show, and Evie enjoyed the sensation of sitting in a dark theater, holding Roger's hand. When he leaned in to whisper to her, his warm breath caressed her neck, and by the end of the picture, Evie found herself feeling flushed, and hoping that Roger didn't plan to simply take her home.

'Want to stop by the club?' he asked as he helped her into her coat. He played with the edge of his hat, and shifted his weight.

'Sure,' Evie said. 'Are you all right?' He seemed uncomfortable suddenly.

'Fine,' Roger said, smiling broadly but still looking uncertain.

Evie couldn't shake the sense that he was nervous about something, and he seemed distracted as he drove, whistling and grinning at her from time to time.

'You sure you're all right?' she asked him as they got out in front of the club.

'I'm fine,' he said, putting an arm around her. 'Never better.'

They descended the steps and Roger knocked on the door. A small window slid open and then shut again, and the door pulled inward. 'Hey boss,' said the man standing behind the door.

'Sal,' Roger said, taking off his hat.

The club was quiet, and it took a moment for Evie to realize that there was no one there. The band played quietly on the platform in the corner, and the tables all held candles, but there were no patrons sitting at the tables, chatting and drinking. She turned to Roger with a question in her throat, only to find him standing at the bar with his back to her. When he turned around, he had two glasses of champagne in hand, and a broad smile on his handsome face.

Evie's skin tingled with anticipation. Something was happening. Something big.

Roger walked to a table in the middle of the club as the doorman let himself out onto the street, leaving them alone. 'Join me?' Roger said.

Evie moved to the small table and smiled, taking the champagne that Roger held out to her. 'What's all this?'

Roger put his glass down and knelt before her. 'Evelyn McKenzie, darling,' he paused and then laughed. 'I can't tell you how nervous you've got me right now!'

'You?' Evie's body was buzzing and it felt as if electricity was zapping through her veins. Roger was proposing! Shock bubbled in her, and she knew she was smiling like a fool.

'Evelyn ... Evie,' he began again. 'You know I love you. I can't imagine a day where I don't have you in my life. I guess you know where I'm headed with this already ...' He reached into his pocket and pulled out a golden ring with three stones set in the top. 'Evie, will you marry me?'

Evie found herself giggling, and she reached down to pull Roger back to his feet. ‘Yes,’ she laughed. ‘I’d love to!’

Roger slid the ring onto her finger, and then leaned down to kiss her. His warm lips met hers and Evie felt the bubbles in her stomach turn to something warmer, something that had her mind buzzing and her fingers tingling. And when Roger’s tongue gently parted her lips, Evie found that her mind fled altogether and her body took over. But just as she found herself pressed against him, her entire body on fire as the stiffness pressed into her belly made her think of all that might be about to happen, Roger stepped back and waved her to her seat.

She smiled and tried to collect herself, suddenly embarrassed at her own ardor, and simultaneously disappointed that Roger seemed intent on adhering to the unwritten laws of propriety.

Despite her disappointment, Evie realized that Roger most likely wasn’t eager to do anything with the trio playing in the corner, and tried to put her deflated feelings aside. She should have more self-control, too, after all.

For the rest of the evening, they enjoyed the privacy that having the club to themselves afforded, and when Roger brought her home later, Evie felt like she’d been in a dream all night. She went up to her room and crawled into her bed, turning everything over in her mind. She was relieved that her mother didn’t seem to sense anything different when she’d greeted her at the door and wished her good night. She’d tell her about it tomorrow, but for tonight, she just wanted to enjoy her secret. She lay down and gazed at the ring sparkling on her hand.

She was going to be Mrs Roger White. She’d spend her life with Roger. He was perfect.

Why then, did her mind keep returning to another man, one with eyes like glaciers and fingers like fire?

Chapter Four

Tug

It was a rare night that Tug wasn’t at the club, slinging drinks and keeping an eye out to make sure no one got out of hand and the cops didn’t cause any problems. But Roger had assured her that she wasn’t needed, and had encouraged her to enjoy a night off. She could use a break anyway. But even with a night free, Tug found that her mind was on business. She rang Janie Evans and Evie, looking for accomplices to help her feel out the competition.

‘I’ve got plans with Roger tonight, Tug,’ Evie said.

Tug was surprised. ‘I thought he was working. He gave me the night off. Someone’s gotta take care of the club!’

‘I guess Chuck’s got it covered,’ Evie said.

‘That’s odd,’ Tug said. But she wasn’t going to worry too much about it. She was going to enjoy her night off, even if Evie had other plans. She would have liked for her to come, but consoled herself with the fact that Evie sounded a little disappointed not to be able to.

Janie took more convincing than Tug would’ve liked, but she wasn’t about to complain since she won her over in the end. ‘I’ll pick you up at nine!’

‘Your father’s letting you drive his car?’

‘What he doesn’t know won’t hurt him, right?’ The truth was that Tug’s father was rarely conscious by nine o’clock at night, and he certainly wouldn’t remember where he’d parked his beat-up jalopy. Tug borrowed it often since she’d learned to drive, and she’d become a proficient driver, even after a few cocktails.

‘See you then!’

Tug pulled up outside Janie’s parents’ place at exactly nine, and Janie darted out from behind a shrub on her neighbor’s front porch.

‘What are you doing?’ Tug asked, laughing as Janie got into the car and pulled her camel coat tight around her.

'I told my parents I was meeting some friends and I left a while ago,' she said, looking glum. 'They think I'm meeting some boys.'

'Oh?'

'They don't like me spending all my time with you and Evie. They're worried I'll never get married.' Janie stared out the front window, her eyes sad. 'They spent my whole life keeping me away from boys and now they're practically foisting me on them!'

Janie's parents had sheltered Janie to the point where she was practically a shut-in, but now that she was almost eighteen they wondered why there weren't suitors knocking down the door. Tug shook her head at the irony. Her own parents were separated, and the timing – just as she was preparing to debut – had removed any possibility of her joining the ranks of the marriageable society girls of her day. Instead of coaching her to the finish line she'd been pushing her toward for her entire childhood, her mother had moved out, taken every cent that she'd saved on Tug's behalf, and left Tug to nurse her father, who was more interested in drinking than he was in introducing her to the right type of man. Tug was on her own.

'We're not worrying about that for tonight, Jane.' She guided the car away from the curb. 'Tonight we are two girls on the town, out for a good time. And to pick up a few tips about how to get more people into the bar.'

'The first part sounds swell.'

'You need a drink or two and the second part will sound swell, too.'

The girls made their way to a club that Tug had heard her customers talking about, a place just north of the Village situated through a door in a back alley. The door wasn't marked, but Tug had asked enough questions about how to find the place that when she saw two young men disappearing down the alley, she was quick to follow them.

'We can't follow men we don't know into a dark alley!' Janie hissed.

'I need to see where the door is, Jane. Come on, or we'll be out on the sidewalk all night!' Tug pulled Janie behind her, following the men until they stopped and opened an unmarked door. The girls watched as the men disappeared through the door, light spilling out from inside. 'Come on!' Tug and Janie followed, pushing through the heavy wooden door to find themselves in a small square space lit by a single bulb glowing on the wall. The room was covered in wallpaper of heavy red flocked velvet, a pattern so dense and complicated that Tug felt the walls were moving as the velvet snaked around them. There was no clear exit from the room.

'I don't like this, Tug. Where did they go?'

'There's gotta be another door here. They didn't just disappear!' Tug began running her hands around the small room, her palms flat on the walls. After a moment, she became frustrated. Through the walls – or maybe the floor – they could hear the faint din of a band and of people's voices, but they could find no clear way inside. Just then, the door they had come through pushed open again, and they found themselves standing in the small space with a large round-faced man who seemed unsurprised to find them there.

'Hello, ladies,' he said.

Tug elbowed Janie hard, and Janie yelped.

The man laughed, his face reddening. He had what Tug's father would have called a baby face. In fact, Tug's father had many things to say about the particular man in front of them, and Tug had heard all of them, especially when the Yankees were winning.

She swallowed hard. 'You're ... you're Babe Ruth,' she said, looking up into the friendly face.

The man grinned as Janie gasped. 'I was this morning,' he said.

'My father's a big admirer of yours,' Tug told the big man. 'He thinks you're gonna win the pennant again this year.'

Ruth glowed, rubbing his hands together and swaying slightly on his feet. 'And what about you, what do you think?' He winked.

Tug giggled lightly and put a hand to her hair. 'I don't suppose you can show us how to get into this joint, can you? I can't seem to remember.'

'Sure I can,' Ruth said. He reached up and pressed a button in the high corner of the room, camouflaged by the detailed flocking of the wallpaper. A small hole flipped open at eye level in front of where Tug stood, and an eye appeared.

'Hey Tony,' the baseball player said. 'I've got a couple pals with me tonight.'

The entire wall before them swung inward, opening to a long hallway leading into the dark. Tug hesitated.

'Go on,' said Babe Ruth. 'It's right on down there. I'll show ya.' He placed a hand on the small of each girl's back, and ushered them into the darkness.

The sounds of the club increased in volume as they moved closer, and finally they came to another door, lit by another single bulb.

'Enjoy your evening, Mr Ruth.' The voice came from the darkness behind them.

'We will, Tony.' Ruth's hand dropped lower and he gave Tug's rear end a pat as he said it. She jumped, practically tripping through the door and into the club that had revealed itself before them.

The place was large – at least twice as big as Evie's, Tug thought. There was a band on a small stage in the center of the far wall, and there were girls on the stage in front of the band. They wore costumes and feathers on their heads attached to large headdresses. The costumes were slinky, revealing dresses, falling high above the girls' knees, and dropping daringly low in front.

Janie actually gasped when she saw them. 'Those girls must be prostitutes,' she hissed to Tug. 'What kind of place is this?' Her face was a mask of shock.

Tug looked around her, her smile widening. 'This, Jane, is the kind of place I'm gonna run one day.'

Ruth ushered them toward the bar, where he was immediately greeted by most of the men and several of the women who had been seated and standing there. Though a dark exotic-looking woman had wrapped herself around the ball player within minutes of his arrival, he still asked Tug and Janie what they'd like and handed their drinks to them, smiling broadly as he did so.

Janie and Tug sipped at their drinks and stared around them. There were couples dancing in the center of the floor, and the girls on stage were moving to the music, following some pre-choreographed steps that they had clearly rehearsed. And when the song came to an end, a woman with blonde hair appeared, holding a microphone. 'Give the little ladies a great big hand!' she called to the crowd, who complied with applause and cat calls.

'That's Texas Guinan,' Tug hissed to Janie.

'You know Texas?' Ruth asked, overhearing.

'No, I ... I met her one time,' Tug told him. 'I think she's amazing.'

'She's the bees' knees,' Ruth agreed.

'This is her club?' Janie asked, wide-eyed.

Ruth nodded, the dark-haired girl at his side practically climbing the big man as she regarded Janie and Tug with a look of pure malice. After a moment, Ruth had turned back to the bar, and Janie and Tug moved to the side.

The space was packed. Elegant chandeliers dangled from the ceiling, and the floor was waxed to a high shine. The bartenders wore a uniform of sorts, or at least they matched one another in crisp white shirts and red bow ties, and the two of them were in constant motion, pouring and mixing. The cocktails appearing on the bar top were more complicated than anything Tug made at Evie's, where there was little going on in the way of mixing things. Tug knew that mixers were a way to disguise lower quality alcohol, and Evie's didn't have that problem since their connections were at the Yale Club. The Club had been allowed to keep any alcohol purchased prior to Prohibition to serve to

private members once the Volstead Act went into effect. And they'd had a year to stock up in advance of the law being official. As a result, excessive quantities were procured, and eager entrepreneurs became rich quickly, supplying bars and individuals who had the right connections and cash.

Tug watched everything with an eye toward making Evie's better, and Texas Guinan did everything right as far as she was concerned. After a couple of hours, Janie insisted that they go home, though Tug would have been happy to stay all night. They thanked Babe Ruth and went back out into the frosty night, the dark sidewalks and silent streets a jarring contrast to the gay club interior.

Chapter Five

Evie

'You met Babe Ruth?' Evie stared at her friends as they sat together in the parlor of her parents' house. Tug's descriptions of their night out had Evie almost forgetting all about her own news. 'What was he like? Was he handsome?'

'He was zozzled,' Janie said flatly. It was clear she hadn't been as impressed with the famous player as Tug had.

'He was handsome,' Tug said, interrupting her friend. 'And generous, too. He bought our drinks all night, even though we barely spoke to him. The place, though, Evie. I've gotta talk to Roger ...'

'Roger!' Evie almost shouted. 'Oh girls, I have news, too! I can't believe I nearly forgot!'

Tug and Janie both sat up straighter, waiting for Evie's news.

Evie held out her hand, where the small gold ring shone brightly on her finger, the square diamond on top flanked by small triangular stones on either side. The band was etched in a scrolling pattern, making the whole thing appear delicate.

'That's some fancy handcuff,' Tug said, shaking her head. 'Guess this explains why I wasn't working last night.'

Evie watched her. For some reason, Tug didn't look happy for her. She was staring at the ring, looking almost angry about something. Janie, on the other hand, was bouncing in her seat.

'Oh, girls, this is swell! When do you think the wedding will be?' Janie's big brown eyes were wide, her face clear and open.

Evie smiled at her. 'My mother says it would be improper to wait less than a year. I'd like to finish school, but Mother says that would be too long.'

Tug smiled a thin smile and then poked Janie in the shoulder with one finger.

'Ouch! What was that for?'

'You're such a wurp sometimes. We don't want Evie married off and pregnant any sooner than she has to be.' Tug grinned at her friend. 'I say delay.' She winked.

Evie wondered if Tug had seen something on her face and was just repeating what she thought Evie wanted to hear. She wasn't in a hurry. In fact, though she was excited about the idea in some ways, another part of her felt like she'd just found her freedom – going to school, the job – and now Roger wanted her to give it up. 'Well I'm in no hurry,' she said, pulling her hand back to her lap. 'Tell me more about the club, girls!'

Tug and Janie told their friend about the dancers and the cocktails, the easy way Texas Guinan flitted between her guests, treating everyone like she'd known them forever. She'd even remembered Tug.

'She said it was nice to see me again,' Tug beamed.

'She probably says that to everyone,' Janie said, her voice low.

Tug shot her a fierce look.

Janie shrugged.

'It doesn't matter. That girl knows her onions, and I picked up some ideas out there last night. Now I just have to get Roger to listen.'

'Oh, he will,' Evie said. 'He's reasonable and he wants the club to do well ...'

'He wants the club to stay exactly as it is,' Tug said. 'But he'll listen to me.'

Something in Tug's tone made Evie watch her friend more closely, but she couldn't figure out quite what it was. Tug was a tough girl, and she rarely threw her feelings out for everyone to see.

'Tell me more about Babe Ruth,' Evie said, hoping the girls would come up with something she could use in her column. 'Did you see anyone else?'

'Well, Mr Ruth had some dumb Dora practically wrapped around his neck,' Janie said.

Evie's ears perked up. 'His wife?'

'Most definitely not his wife,' Janie said. She looked offended by even saying the words.

'That's something,' Evie made a mental note. 'Hey, you girls want to go out tomorrow? My folks will be at the show, and if I sneak out, they'll just think I'm with Roger.'

'I'll be at the club,' Tug said.

'I think one night in a week is enough for me,' said Janie. 'I'm exhausted. I didn't get to bed until after three o'clock!'

Tug rolled her eyes. 'I thought you wanted to meet a man, get married, and have some babies right away.'

Janie stiffened and her face grew stony. 'No, Tug. That's what my parents want. And I'm not sure the man they have in mind is ossified in a gin joint at two in the morning anyway.'

Evie leaned in, touching her friend's knee. 'What do you want, Jane?'

Janie was quiet a minute, staring at the shining ring on Evie's hand. 'I have no idea.'

Evie wrote a column about Ruth's appearance at Texas Guinan's club, but she worried Tobias would want something more. She went to Evie's that night hoping someone interesting might stumble in, but the same crowd of regulars sprawled at the tables and leaned up against the bar. Evie watched the familiar faces come and go and wondered if maybe Tug had a point about the place needing something else.

'It wouldn't hurt to listen to her ideas, would it?' she asked Roger as they sat together at a table in the corner of the dark club.

'I suppose not, but it bothers me that you both think there's something wrong here. We've got a nice quiet operation. We're making money, and as long as we keep things low-key, we don't run into problems.' Roger's dark eyes were fringed by lush lashes, and his smooth cheeks flushed as he spoke.

Evie put her hand in his and smiled up at him. He was undeniably handsome – the dark wavy hair that was begging to be tousled and the broad width of his shoulders always made her feel safe and warm. She leaned into his solid form, smiling.

Roger's fingers were running up and down her own. He stopped at the ring and lifted her hand to look at it. 'Do you like it, honey?'

'I love it, it's gorgeous!' Evie did love the ring. Still, something in her made her take it off when she went to bed. Removing it almost made her feel like she could still be free sometimes, which made her realize that wearing it made her feel trapped in some ways. She hated herself for wishing that Roger had waited longer before proposing to her. It made her more conscious of the way she felt in his presence every moment since he'd put the ring on her finger, as if anything short of perfect companionship might bode poorly for their future union.

'You sure?'

Evie's nerves danced. Had Roger seen some hesitation? 'Of course I am,' she said quickly. 'I love it.'

Buck dropped Evie at the University the following day for class.

'I'll be back this afternoon, Miss Evie,' he said with a wink.

'Thanks, Bucky.' Evie walked between the buildings, wandering up the long sidewalk toward her English class in no real hurry. She was early, and that gave her time to wander. The arch at Washington Square Park was Evie's favorite place to sit and watch people, and she was thankful that

the morning air wasn't as frigid as it had been. As March moved slowly into springtime, New York was waking up, and Evie looked forward to the coming heat. Though the balmy moisture that doused Manhattan in the summers could be oppressive, there was something about that desperate swelter that brought a sense of urgency to everything, including evenings out at the clubs.

Evie was sitting on a bench near the stone arch, thankful for the clear sky and her quiet thoughts, when her interest was drawn by a man walking by. He wore a crisply tailored suit and dark gray hat, and the way he moved across the square with purpose was almost feline – graceful, and dangerous somehow. The man was familiar, and something stirred in Evie as she watched him.

He reminded her of Jack Taylor. But if there was one place she would never run into Jack, it was at school.

Without thinking, she rose and found herself following him, walking slightly behind at a distance. As he reached the other edge of the square, he paused to cross the street. Evie lingered several feet behind him, staring down into the cover of the book she clutched in her arms and watching him through her peripheral vision.

The man stepped into the street, but then hesitated and turned around. In two quick steps he was standing directly in front of Evie, the icy blue eyes narrow as they regarded her.

A jolt ran through Evie. It was Jack. But how could it be? What would he be doing here?

'Hello, Miss McKenzie.' That voice, smooth and low.

Evie felt her stomach clench and a flush creep up her neck. 'Jack! What are you doing here?'

Jack's lip curled on one side, amusement lightening his features. 'You were aware that we lived in the same city, were you not? We did meet here in New York. I suppose the odds were good that we might meet again.'

'But, I ...' Evie found herself unable to speak, not a familiar situation for her. Seeing Jack brought back every encounter she'd had with him in a rush. She felt his hands on her body, even as he stood still before her on the corner. She felt his tongue teasing her neck and his hot breath on her ear. She could feel the way her body responded to him, to that low growling voice, to those penetrating eyes. She couldn't help glancing at the long elegant fingers that had made her feel things she didn't know she was even capable of. 'I just didn't expect to see you here at school.'

'I do have to leave the club sometimes, darling.' Jack spoke to her as if he saw her every day. None of her own surprise seemed to trouble him or ruffle that smooth exterior. Nothing in his manner now gave away the fact that just six months ago he had been at her door, asking her – and even her father – for permission to court her properly. And been turned down.

'Of course,' she said, feeling a crazy smile climb across her face. She tried to stop her reaction to him, the heat that had moved through her limbs, the jangling nerves warring in her stomach. 'It's nice to see you again, Jack,' she tried. Immediately the words seemed to fall flat. It was something far more than nice to see him, she realized. She felt something around him, ignited by his very existence in the space near her, something she had never felt with another person. She wanted to be as close to him as possible, she wanted him to claim her, to hold her and *take* her. The realization shocked her, and she felt wild, on the verge of losing control of herself.

Jack nodded curtly and turned, about to move away.

Evie couldn't just let him go. 'And Maison?' she asked. 'How are things going?' Jack's club was where she'd first met him, and where she'd seen him after that. At least until she'd realized that Roger meant something to her and that they might have a future together.

'The club is doing well. Thank you for your concern.' Jack's voice was cold and polite, almost a slap in the face considering the emotions that had erupted in Evie at seeing him.

Disappointment flooded her as he turned to leave again. Of course, she thought. What could she really expect? She had rebuffed him, possibly humiliated him. A man like Jack Taylor wouldn't take rejection well. She stood, staring after him, as he moved away from her, the feline grace that carried him forward leading her to think of other ways that his body moved.

Embarrassed by her inability to control her own mind, Evie turned away. She was upset. She felt almost crazed, like she should run after him, but she knew that was not an option. She had no real reason to detain him. And she was engaged to Roger!

Why then, did Jack's sculpted lips and icy blue eyes seem to push every other thought from her mind?

Evie sat back down until it was time for her class. And then she walked slowly to the lecture hall, a cloud of confusion hanging over her.

Chapter Six

Tug

'Now is the time to make some changes,' Tug told Roger as they both stood at the side of the bar. She hadn't mentioned his engagement, and neither had he. She had nursed her disappointment the night Evie had shown her the ring, and had since told herself that she was over it. Over her silly crush on him. From now on, it would be business only – not that it had ever been anything more. At least not for Roger. 'With the convention coming to town, there's gonna be a great chance to build the business, Roger. You're a businessman, don't you wanna see this place grow?'

'There's a danger in growth in this industry, Tug,' Roger's dark eyes regarded her with a twinkle of amusement, and Tug got the feeling that he merely tolerated her in his business, without taking her ideas seriously. 'Chuck,' Roger said, signaling the jovial blond man to the end of the bar. Chuck was Roger's partner in the business, but he preferred staying behind the bar to circulating among the crowd. Roger was the face of the bar, and Chuck had been more of the behind-the-scenes man. When Tug had come in, she'd found a fit naturally between the two responsibilities. And with Roger away at school four days out of the week, she often felt she was running the place on her own.

'Hmmm?' Chuck leaned across the bar on his elbows, a blond eyebrow raised.

'Tug here wants to make some big changes. I wondered what you think.'

'Texas Guinan has dancers,' Tug began. 'There's a real show going on, bringing 'em in. And they're mixing ritzy cocktails with fancy names.'

Chuck laughed. 'We don't need mixers, Tug. This isn't hooch we're pouring back here.'

'I know that.' Tug had been told a hundred times about their connection with the Yale Club, about the quality of the alcohol they served and about how no other place in the city could compete. 'But you're bringing in your Yalie friends when there's a whole city of people who'd be in here in a heartbeat if you just gave 'em what they wanted.'

'Maybe we want to control the type of fella we get in here,' Chuck said.

Roger nodded.

'But then again, maybe Tug has a point.' Chuck grinned, his white-blond hair reflecting the dim lights above the bar. 'I, for one, wouldn't mind some dancing girls in here.'

Roger crossed his arms and sighed heavily. 'It makes no sense to waste the good brown plaid on a bunch of dewdroppers and deadbeats.'

'That's what I've been saying,' Tug said. She put a hand on Roger's arm, trying to ignore the chill that ran through her at the sheer proximity of him. 'We get another connection, bring in some giggle water that we can mix, and make up some fancy cocktails. Stretch it out by adding fruit juice. That's what people want, anyway. Save the good stuff for those who know the difference!'

Roger stared at Tug for a long moment, and she met his gaze, working hard to keep herself from tumbling into the delicious brown depths of his moody eyes. 'All right, Tug,' Roger said.

Chuck grinned. 'This'll be fun,' he laughed, returning to the customers at the bar.

'I'll work on the connections. You take care of the show.'

'Really, Roger?' Tug launched herself at Roger, forgetting for a moment that he was Evie's fiancé. She pressed herself into his sturdy warmth, wrapping her arms around his neck and laughing.

His arms went around her and he laughed, too, holding her maybe a beat longer than was necessary and then releasing her.

Tug stepped away, smoothing her skirt and putting a hand to her hair, embarrassed suddenly. She couldn't wipe the smile from her face, though she wasn't sure if she was more pleased at getting her way or at having been in Roger's arms, even for a second.

Tug spent the next couple weeks working feverishly to implement her new vision for Evie's. She brought her father and one of his friends to build a small stage at one end of the long space, wide enough for the band to be elevated behind the dancers. Her father was easy enough to pay – she just offered him a bottle from the supply room.

Tug didn't think finding girls to make up the show would be especially difficult, either. After all, there were plenty of young girls around, looking to break into show business. 1924, and the years immediately preceding it, had been a revolution of sorts for women, after all. It had been women who had succeeded in pressing the temperance movement forward and ultimately persuading the bulk of Americans that Prohibition would build a stronger country. And on the heels of that political success came the women's suffrage movement. This was a time when women were demonstrating what they were capable of, and many of them were finding their own versions of power and independence. They were leaving home and pursuing their desires, even without the protection of a man at their side.

'I think I need twelve girls,' Tug told Chuck and Roger when she'd made a plan for the showgirls. 'Now I just need to get them hired, get some costumes, and figure out what exactly they're going to be doing up there.' She nodded at the newly completed stage, which was really just a platform up front.

'So when are these girls coming in?' Chuck asked, a mischievous sparkle lighting his face.

'Give me a week or two. The convention isn't until June, anyway. That gives us two months to get them ready to go. Have you Yalies found us a new connection yet? I've got a million ideas for fancy drinks, but I need to experiment.'

Roger looked grim. 'I'm still not sold on that part, Tug. We've got a solid connection at the club. This is a refined establishment, where people know they can get the good stuff.'

'We're not gonna change that,' Tug said, leaning across the bar to make her point. 'We're gonna build on that. Look around, Rog.'

Roger did as he was told, and Chuck followed suit.

'You got a couple off duties over there,' Tug pointed to the front table where two red-faced Irishmen were laughing quietly together. 'You got your Ivy pals out here.' Several small groups of well-dressed young men who could have been Roger's fraternity brothers clustered around the end of the bar. 'You're missing the flappers, boys. And when you get the girls in here, these boys start emptying their wallets. You want a place that the girls ask to come, a place where there's something for everyone.' She eyed Roger, ignoring the flush that crept up her neck when he watched her intently as he was doing now. 'You might as well just call this place Yale Club south.'

'She's got a point,' Chuck said, a low laugh following it as he shook his head. He smiled at Tug, admiration for her clear in the bright blue eyes.

Tug mimicked a curtsy for him and turned back to Roger. 'Whaddya think?'

'You're right,' he said. 'I'll work on it.'

Tug ducked behind the bar and grabbed her coat and purse. 'Now, if one of you fine gentlemen would escort me, I need to visit the competition.'

'What?' Chuck laughed.

'I need to talk to Ms Guinan again,' she said. 'And I can't exactly wander over to her place alone. Who's coming?' She looked back and forth between the two men, silently praying that Roger would volunteer.

'Sold,' Chuck said, picking his hat up from the back counter. 'You'll be okay, Rog?'

Roger looked skeptical but said, 'Sure.'

Tug felt disappointment wash over her, but quickly pushed it away. She pasted a big smile on her face and turned to her tall blond escort. 'Let's get a wiggle on, then!'

Together, Tug and Chuck stepped out into the glow of street lamps lining the midtown street. Winter was finally losing its grip on the city and a slight breeze carried a kiss of warmth with it as it wrapped around the couple walking towards Park Avenue.

‘So you and Roger met at school, huh?’ Tug asked as Chuck walked beside her.

‘We’ve known each other since we were kids,’ Chuck told her. His voice was deep and warm, and he had a way of sounding like he was always on the brink of laughter.

Tug turned her head to look at him. Chuck was tall and lanky. He didn’t have the broad build that Roger did, but his easy way of being in the world made him nice to be near. He always made Tug feel reassured, as if whatever problems were afoot would be easily solved.

‘We grew up together.’ Chuck had taken Tug’s arm as they’d left the club, and he guided her as they walked. ‘Roger’s father and mine have both been part of the club forever, and our mothers host one another regularly. We knew we’d be at Yale together from the time we were in short pants.’

Tug laughed at the idea of a tiny tow-headed Chuck and toddling Roger tumbling around together as kids. ‘Roger’s a good guy,’ she said, and then wanted to suck the words back in. Something in her wanted any excuse to say his name, to feel closer to him, even if it was just by talking about him.

Chuck looked thoughtful for a moment, and then said, ‘He is. He always has been. If Roger has a fault, it’s only that he sees everything in shades of black and white.’ He tightened his grip on Tug’s arm for a moment. ‘Well, you know that! You’ve seen how hard it is to get him to think about making changes to the club. He’s a creature of habit.’

Tug nodded. That made sense. ‘Look at you, Mr Insightful,’ she laughed. ‘Hey, what’s your full name, Chuck?’

‘You first. I know your mother didn’t name you “Tug.”’

A wry smile made Tug’s lips thin. She wasn’t a fan of her mother at this point, since the woman had changed the course of Tug’s life by simply disappearing from it at the stage where she needed her most. ‘Maybe she did,’ she said.

‘Come on,’ Chuck prodded.

‘It’s Elizabeth Claire.’

‘That’s lovely.’ They walked in silence for a moment, and he added, ‘It fits.’

Tug smiled. ‘Maybe it did, once. Your turn.’

‘Well it isn’t too hard to decipher,’ he said. ‘My name is Charles.’

‘But not just Charles,’ Tug prodded. No one from Chuck’s background had just one name.

‘Charles Merriweather Tate the fourth,’ Chuck confirmed.

‘My, my!’ Tug laughed.

‘Please call me Chuck,’ he said, his cheeks coloring.

‘Well I’m not going to call you “Merriweather.”’

They chatted and strolled, finally hiring a cab to deliver them to the sidewalk outside the hidden entrance to the club where Tug knew she could get the answers she needed.

Chuck let out a low whistle as they elbowed their way up to the bar between the other patrons. The club was raucous, with customers standing in every free inch of floor space, holding drinks, toasting, and laughing. There was a gorgeous black woman belting out a song in a low sultry voice, and the band was behind her as dancers filled the open space in front of her. Drinks slid back and forth across the smooth bar top, keeping the men behind it hopping around in an effort to keep up.

Tug handed Chuck the printed drink menu, which offered things like the Bee’s Knees, the Southside, and the Highball.

‘If you’re printing the drinks right here, how’s it gonna work when the Prohibition officers raid you?’ Chuck asked, his eyebrows high in confusion.

‘Mister,’ interrupted a tall bottle blonde wearing a necklace made of keys draped around her neck, ‘all we sell here is mixers. If these fine people bring in their own alcohol, I can’t exactly stop them, now can I?’ She smiled and then noticed Tug. ‘Haven’t we met before? Elizabeth, right?’

Tug nodded eagerly. ‘Ms Guinan, this is Chuck.’

‘He sure is,’ Guinan gave Chuck an appreciative look, running a hand down the length of his tie. ‘A pleasure,’ she drawled.

‘I have a question for you, Ms Guinan, if you have a minute.’ Tug sounded uncertain and wanted to kick herself. Here was her idol before her, and she sounded like a child.

Guinan didn’t budge, so Tug continued.

‘I just wondered, who teaches your fan dancers their numbers?’

The girls up front all lifted huge fans into the air, as if on cue.

‘Well, nobody, darlin’.’ They teach themselves!’ Guinan laughed. ‘When you hire a dancer, you hope they know how to dance! I just make a few suggestions and they do the rest.’

The simple nature of Guinan’s answer left Tug feeling even less confident.

‘Are you kids stealing my tricks?’ Guinan raised an eyebrow.

‘Just getting some ideas,’ Chuck jumped in. ‘I have a quiet club across town. Tug here thinks we need to shake things up a bit, and she’s always talking about how you’ve done it right.’

‘That’s lovely, darling,’ Guinan said. ‘But I do very little. I open my doors and welcome people in. They bring the spirit and the hooch. I just give them a place to enjoy it!’ She smiled a glittering smile, revealing perfect teeth. Guinan had been a showgirl herself, and Tug knew that she had appeared in lots of films. As Guinan moved off through the crowd, Tug realized that her background in theater was the reason she was so successful. She used her club like a stage, offering herself, the girls, and the music like acts in a show.

‘She’s incredible,’ Chuck said, his eyes watching the proprietress’s back move away.

‘She is,’ Tug nodded. She had learned a few things tonight. The club wasn’t the only thing that needed to change.

As Chuck helped Tug back out the door an hour later, she had big plans in mind.

‘Did you get what you needed?’ Chuck asked. He leaned forward to light the cigarette that Tug had pulled from her purse.

‘Butt?’ she asked, offering Chuck a cigarette.

He shook his head.

‘Thanks for the light,’ she said. ‘Yeah. I think I know what I need to know.’

They found a cab and rode together in silence.

Tug studied Chuck’s face as they moved through the streets in the bouncing car. He was handsome, she thought. She smiled when he caught her gazing at him and pulled her eyes away, a warm blush creeping up her cheeks. Tug had never really thought of Chuck that way. She’d been distracted by her silly crush on Roger. But she had no doubt that Chuck would soon have some society girl planning a big wedding, too. Her perspective on a few things had shifted tonight.

[Chapter Seven](#)

Evie

Evie sat through her classes feeling confused. Seeing Jack had stirred something within her, left her feeling dissatisfied. She arrived at the lecture hall for her last class of the afternoon and took a seat near the back, her gloom hanging low around her like a veil. She stared at the ring on her hand and gazed around at the room as students arrived. Wasn’t she where she wanted to be? She had fought for the chance to go to college. She’d been proposed to by the man of her choice, and she was slowly building a career as a journalist – even if she was beginning with gossip, a fact that she wasn’t altogether proud of. Still, Tobias loved her work, and the latest column about Babe Ruth’s carousing had him practically leaping from his seat as he read. She should be happy. Content, at least. But she wasn’t. Something was missing.

She was somewhat nervous about this particular class. Her previous teacher had announced before the spring break that she would not be returning, and that her class would be assumed by a new teacher at the University, though she hadn't mentioned a name. Evie hoped the new professor would be a good teacher.

'Take your seats please,' a rich deep voice rolled across the room from the podium at the front, and Evie's attention immediately shifted. 'We have quite a bit to cover this semester. Let's begin.'

There were still students standing in the rows ahead of her, and the professor was blocked from her view, but Evie's body seemed to know exactly who would be teaching her poetry course this semester. A snapping electricity filled the air, and every muscle in Evie's body tightened when she heard that voice. By the time the voice moved through the room again, announcing his name, Evie already knew.

'I'm Professor Taylor,' he said, just as the man in front of her took his seat.

Evie knew that when she was able to see the front of the room, she would find Jack Taylor standing there, impossibly. But when her eyes fell on the lean graceful form of the man who only a few months ago had known her in some very compromising ways ... Evie wasn't prepared for the heat that rose within her. She scrambled mentally for a recourse. Should she leave? Getting up and rushing out would surely cause a commotion – and then Jack would see her. But staying? Taking a class with Jack as her instructor? She didn't know if she could possibly manage it. Without thinking, she began to fan herself with her syllabus, and then cursed herself. The motion had pulled Jack's eyes directly to where she sat.

A sly smile pulled itself across Jack's face, and the icy eyes danced. He looked pleased to find Evie in his class, or maybe he was pleased to see her so clearly out of sorts. He gave a quick nod of his head, an acknowledgment, and then went on speaking.

Watching Jack prowl the front of the lecture hall for an hour, letting his smooth low tenor wash through her for that amount of time, had Evie's entire body buzzing by the time class had ended. She was just as confused as it finished as she had been when it had started. She was so worked up she wasn't sure she could walk properly. Her mind spun and her limbs felt separate from her body. Somehow, she took herself out to the curb where Buck waited with the car.

'Miss Evie, you look ... are you sick?' Buck took her books and helped her into the car.

'No, Bucky. I'm fine. Just ... overwhelmed is all.'

'If you say so,' Buck said, sounding uncertain.

'Don't tell my mother you found me this way, all right? She'll think it's proof that college is too much for me.'

'Of course I won't, Evie.'

Buck drove her home, and Evie closed her eyes, laying her head against the cool window. The only image that seemed to reside behind her eyelids was that of the glacier blue eyes and perfect lips that belonged to Jack Taylor – eyes and lips that she had been sure she was through imagining.

Roger and his parents joined Evie's family for dinner Friday evening at their townhouse. Roger's father was an exact replica of Roger – just several decades advanced. The pile of wavy dark hair that Evie loved on Roger was the same, just a silvery shade of gray. And they shared the same easy smile and quick mind. Roger's mother was a tall thin woman, also easy-going and quick to smile. Quite different from Evie's own mother, who fussed and worried constantly.

At dinner, Roger took her hand frequently and smiled, kissing her cheek several times. When he looked at her with those dark eyes, Evie's stomach jumped, but she was beginning to feel more guilty than giddy. When he put an arm around her shoulders and breathed into her ear, she got goosebumps and a wicked warmth crept between her legs. But when Roger turned his attention back to his meal, she wondered if her reaction was to him, or to her inability to stop imagining Jack Taylor sitting next to her, touching her. She hated herself for being so rattled by Jack's reappearance, and Roger

certainly didn't deserve such disloyalty. As they moved to the sitting room for scotch after dinner, she tried to force her dallying mind to behave.

'We've found a lovely townhome,' said Mrs White, smiling at Roger and Evie. 'I had planned to just give you the keys at the wedding, but I'm so excited, I don't think I can wait.'

Evie jolted forward in surprise. 'For us?' she cried. 'You bought us a house?'

'Really, Evie,' her mother scolded. Mrs McKenzie had rules about how one should react to gifts and discussions of money. Her general logic was that you should never act as if money were something worthy of excitement. A hard rule to follow when someone has just given you a house.

Roger laughed. 'It was going to be a surprise,' he said to Evie. 'It was Mother's idea, but we've been looking together. We'll need a place to live, darling!'

'Of course,' Evie said. 'How wonderful. Thank you so much.'

'Would you like to see it?' Mrs White asked. 'I can arrange for us to visit this weekend. If Roger doesn't have to work unreasonable hours at that investment firm of his, anyway.' Roger had still not told his family about his actual employment. Chuck's father had given both Roger and Chuck a promise of employment at his investment firm downtown, and had begun training them when they were available. Roger used the firm as cover for the time he spent at Evie's, and his parents never seemed to question it.

'I think I can find the time,' Roger smiled.

'I'd love to,' Evie said. The talk of a real home had brought her back to reality somehow. She couldn't fantasize about the rogue she'd once known. Jack Taylor had no place in her real life. She squeezed Roger's hand in excitement.

Around town, people were beginning to talk about the Manhattan Mouse. Evie had heard girls in one of her lectures discussing the exciting life that the Mouse must live, to be privy to the secrets that were exposed each week in the column.

'Did you see today's?' One girl pulled the paper from her bag in the row just ahead of Evie.

'No, let me see!' The other girl snatched the paper from her friend and opened it eagerly, then began to read aloud. 'The upcoming nuptials of Miss Evelyn McKenzie and Mr Roger White have been cemented with a promise more firm than any ring. The pair are the proud owners of an Upper East Side townhome seated nicely near the park. From their new abode, this high-society duo will no doubt have a flock of children at their heels soon after the knot is firmly tied. Miss McKenzie is currently a student at New York University, where she studies journalism. Mr White is finishing his last year at Yale, and is slated to be a junior investor at a firm on Water Street.' Both girls turned to eye Evie, but quickly turned back around when she caught them looking at her.

Evie still hated this column. Tobias had assigned her a topic, not something he normally did. But he had gotten wind of the wedding, and for some reason, he had a fixation on high-society marriages and debutantes, and asked Evie to cover this particular pair. At least she hadn't had to do much research.

The girl kept reading, though, and Evie gasped as the next part was read aloud to anyone close enough to listen.

'White's false front is shakily constructed, however, as it is common knowledge that he runs the quiet club on Midtown's east side, which used to go by the name "The White House." The name of the club was changed last winter, when this moneyed duo became a couple, and now Yalies who have grown tired of the wood paneling at the storied Yale Club have another place to imbibe – Evie's.

'White and his business partner may be advising clients about where to invest their money from behind the bar top, but this mouse suspects that they are simply taking their clients' money instead.'

Evie stood abruptly, attracting the attention of the students sitting around her. Class was about to begin, and the professor up front glared at her. 'If you'll take your seats,' she said, looking at Evie.

‘I’m so sorry, I have to ...’ Evie gathered her things and raced from the room. She hurried at a near run to the *Herald Tribune* offices, bursting into Tobias’s office without announcement.

‘Mouse,’ he smiled after looking momentarily surprised.

‘What did you do?’ she asked.

‘I added a bit. I didn’t think your latest effort was up to par. Your readers are looking for dirt, Mouse. Not architectural descriptions.’

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