

Ruined: Martini Club 4 – The 1920's

Alicia Dean

He pointed at the beauty Vince had been eyeballing earlier. “Ask Eliza. She works for Oscar too.”

An illogical wave of disappointment washed over him. He didn't even know the dame, why should he care if she was a party girl?

He stood and threw a few bills on the bar. “See you around, pal. A little tip, though.” He slapped Tim on the back hard enough that he coughed and nearly spit out his drink. “You might not want to razz any other former prizefighters you happen to meet.” He winked. “Not all of them are as much of a pussycat as I am.”

Tim's face paled, and he gave a jerky nod. “Sure yeah, thanks for the drink. Take it easy.”

Vince wound through the crowd until he reached the stool where the broad was sitting. She looked up at him, golden eyes rimmed by black make up, pouty pink lips made for kissing.

But then, that's what those lips got paid for—kissing and a whole lot more.

“Can I help you?” Her voice was just as he imagined, sweet with an underlying husky tone, but he hadn't predicted the English accent.

“Mind if I have a seat.”

She inclined her head. “Free country.”

“Yeah, but not everything is free, am I right?” He slid onto a barstool next to hers.

She raised a brow, a faint hint of amusement hovering on her lovely mouth. “You're quite astute, Mr...?”

“Taggart, Vince Taggart. And you are?”

“Eliza Gilbert. Is there something I can do for you?”

Instinct told him coming on too strong with the interrogation would make her clam up. Something about her made him think she would scare easily. She had a wary look, but at the same time, there was something defensive and tough behind the pretty façade. As if she was waiting for, expecting, an attack and when it came, she'd strike back like a wounded tigress.

“I saw you sitting here all alone, thought I'd stop by and say hi.”

She nodded. “My friend, Meggie...Lady Margaret...is the singer. I came to watch her show.”

“She's very good.” He glanced around nonchalantly. “Draws quite a crowd. Of course, the booze doesn't hurt anything. It's good to find a nice place to knock a few back.”

“You're not from here, are you?”

He grinned. “No, what was it, the accent?”

“Precisely.”

“Of course, with your accent, you're definitely a local.”

She laughed, an unexpected and delightful sound that he felt clear in his chest. “Right, a Yank through and through.” Her eyes twinkled. “Where are you from?”

“Philly, Philadelphia. I'm in town looking for someone. A girl. Her name's Cynthia Yost.” He showed her the photo. “Do you know her?”

Her brows drew together, and she shook her head. “She doesn't look familiar. She isn't in trouble, is she?”

“I'm afraid she might be. I haven't heard from her in days, and she was supposed to come home a week ago.”

“I'm sorry. I hope she's okay, but no, I don't know her.”

He didn't detect dishonesty in her response, but then, she was a pro. Maybe she was good at lying. He wouldn't push her tonight, but he'd be back and push a little harder next time. For now, he might as well play nice. "Can I buy you a drink?"

She favored him with another of those head spinning smiles. "That would be marvelous, thank you."