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Opening Extract from...

The Gessami Residence

Written by Jane L. Gibson

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The Gessami Residence

Jane L Gibson

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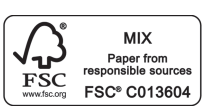

This book is dedicated to my girlfriends.

Those girls who are there for me no matter what. Helping me to laugh, have fun and drink a little too much on occasion. You're both my shopping companions and my inspiration. More importantly you are my best friends and always listen to me when I need to talk. You are with me through good times or bad and have entertained me so many times that I have lost count. Life would be far less colourful without you.

Thank you for being you.

Chapter 1

It had been three long years since my husband Paul had passed away suddenly. James and Mark, my two sons, had left home and gone to university and had a life of their own. At only forty-three I was starting to feel my age, although my three best friends Amanda, Elizabeth and Rose were always there to encourage me into seeing the brighter side of life.

Elizabeth, or 'Beth', being the oldest of all four of us had just divorced her very selfish and irritating husband and was definitely ready for some 'me' time. Amanda had long since thought that her husband was actually a cardboard cut-out, as his input into their relationship had resulted in a very non-existent role. She had often wondered if he was having an affair, but then decided that he was too lazy to even be bothered with that malarkey! Rose was the youngest of the four of us; she had at one point dated and been engaged to my husband's friend Robert, but she decided that she didn't want children and wanted to pursue her career. It ended amicably and she has remained one of our best friends for the last fifteen years.

So it transpired after a very heavy drinking session one night in town, that we all needed to get away for a couple of weeks; after all there were three of us that were single

and Amanda was just ready to have a change of scenery. It hadn't really occurred to me that the getting away was going to be an issue, until both Amanda and Beth decided they had missed out on their youth and wanted to *'live it up'* and get a good look at some *'younger men'* or in fact any *'eye candy'* would suffice, and of course drink plenty during the process. Probably a bad idea then that we let Rose decide where we were going and when, and then let her do all of the arranging of hotels, flights and payments and so on. She did have her own exclusive travel business and so it seemed the right thing to do, but as I dragged my suitcase down to the taxi that was waiting outside, to say that I was nervous was a complete understatement.

The early morning flight from Manchester Airport meant I felt half asleep – make-up was not my forte and at this time even worse. Rose had given us strict instructions to be at the airport for 6am sharp, to meet by the information desk in the terminal. We had been told what we would need to bring for the two-week duration, but we were still none the wiser as to where we were going. It all seemed very cloak-and-dagger, a little exciting I suppose but quite honestly I had got used to just being by myself of late, and so I wasn't sure how this whole 'girls getting away' weekend was going to pan out. My boys had told me the holiday would do me good, and as I am always stating that I feel old, perhaps this girls' holiday is just what I need.

Remarkably, as I exited the taxi at the terminal Amanda was just arriving and so I quickly rushed over to her. She seemed glad to see me too.

"Have you any idea where we are going?" I asked her hopefully.

"Not the slightest, but as some of us are on a budget I'm presuming not somewhere particularly five-star or exclusive, although Barbados would have been nice, or Mexico, or perhaps Miami would have been fun?" she chirped happily. She seemed much more relaxed about this than I was.

We strolled to the information desk inside; Rose was hopping around as if on hot coals as we walked toward her, her excitement all too obvious. She threw her arms around Amanda firstly and then myself. "I cannot tell you how excited I am about this trip," she confessed.

"Really? We wouldn't have guessed!" Amanda sarcastically replied as she turned and looked for Beth. Rose gave her a very sarcastic look in response. "Are we the first ones here? I thought Beth would have been raring to go."

"Yep, first ones here. It's going to be great; some time together has been long overdue, away from all of our miserable distractions," Rose stated. "What did Gerry have to say about you coming?" she then asked Amanda sincerely. Amanda stood her case up on its end and rested her arm on the extended handle.

"Really? Do you honestly think that he's even noticed that I've gone? God it's like living with a robot: same routine every day; same expression, same responses. I will be extremely surprised if he even notices any difference for at least a week and then he will probably get fed up of having to cook, so that will be the only reason he misses

me." She sounded honest in her comments, but we all knew that whatever she said about Gerry, it was obvious that he cared a lot about her. They had been married for twenty-five years and that in itself was enough to make any relationship a little stale.

"Oh come on, Amanda," I said. "At least you have him to moan about, eh?" I reminded her, trying to imply that it is better than my situation. She promptly stood and looked at me and then reached out and rubbed my arm.

"Yes, you're right. I'm so sorry, Jenny, I wasn't thinking," she grimaced. Luckily without having to dwell we were interrupted by the sound of Beth and when we turned it took us all a second to respond.

There she was, doing her best impression of a celebrity of some sort; big sunglasses, fake tan, wide brim hat and a very bright pink pair of cropped jeans along with a white linen top. We stared, she reached us took off her sunglasses and then in her own unique way simply said, "Tah dah!" and did us all a quick spin.

"Bloody hell, I don't know whether that puts the rest of us to shame or makes us look more mature?" Amanda was first to say.

"What? Oh come on – I was not going to pass up spending some of my divorce money on new outfits and hats and a tan, et cetera. It's a girls' holiday and I feel like being girly," Beth replied smiling as she popped her sunglasses back on.

"Well I think you look great," I said before trying not to smile too much. In fairness it wasn't the outfit that was a problem, it was more the fact that I would expect

someone half her age to be wearing it. But good on her for having the confidence to do so I thought, I wish that I were that brave.

"I think you look good too actually, Beth, not quite sure what you were aiming for but I would probably say it's along the lines of Samantha from *Sex and the City,*" Rose diplomatically said. Beth lowered her sunglasses for a moment and then shrugged her shoulders.

"I can live with that," she replied smugly.

We all quickly greeted each other properly and then made our way to the check-in desk following Rose like well-behaved school children. She stopped before we joined the queue and then faced us all. Oh God, this was the big reveal – I could feel it brewing and I hoped for something more than camping in France!

"Alright ladies, I think that I have held you in suspense for long enough. Due to the fact that a couple of us were on tighter budgets, I have had to bear that in mind with all other factors including food, drinking, the hotel and of course the eye candy." She stopped a moment as we all stood there eyebrows raised waiting to find out. "We are going to… Ibiza!" she excitedly expressed. With her hands clapping along in excitement, she obviously knew that was definitely not what we were expecting as no one spoke for a long while we just stood and looked at her.

"I'm sorry, run that by me again," Amanda said shaking her head.

"Ibiza, we're going to Ibiza," she confirmed again.

"That's what I thought you said," Amanda replied before rubbing her head. "Are you nuts? Have you seen

how old we are? Ibiza is full of twenty-one-year-olds trying to drink themselves to death, while partying in foam until about five in the morning," she finished.

"And your point being?" Rose then asked. "It is what you wanted. It's not all like that honestly, you're wrong, and it was one of the only places that ticked all of the boxes. Hey guys, don't get mad at me now, I spent ages on this." Rose sounded sad at our response and I felt sorry for her.

"Rose, I'm sure that you have spent an inordinate amount of time on planning, so thank you for that," I said trying to calm the others. I then turned to Amanda and Beth. "Come on, girls, it wasn't really about where we were going anyway, it was more about the fact that we went together. God it could have been a caravan in Scarborough for all I care, it will simply be good to be in each other's company." I tried to convince them, but I really don't know why because I was thinking exactly the same as Amanda.

Just as I finished speaking a group of around eight young men (we're probably talking early-to mid-twenties), arrived and walked past us and started queuing at the same desk. We all stopped and stared as they were overexcited and noisy and then I tried to carry on, but Beth had other ideas. "Well I don't care where we're going as long as you get me on the same plane as them," she remarked as she joined the queue behind them. We all watched her and then looked at each other and joined her and became mesmerised as she started flirting, then we started laughing, something that I hoped we would be doing a lot of!

Once we checked in and after trying to get Beth to stop following the poor men she seemed convinced that she was now somehow attached to, Rose insisted that we had a glass of champagne. Slightly early in the morning for me, but never the less I had decided to 'go with the flow' and so we perched ourselves on the stools at the bar and asked the waiter for a bottle – far more cost effective. Needless to say that giggling like teenagers became our main priority as we relived previous trips, which had not happened for at least three years due to different commitments from everyone. After the second glass, Amanda said that she was already relaxed just to be away from her mundane life, and she in particular said quite honestly she didn't care now where we were going. Rose was ecstatic that we were simply actually at the airport, and I think that she revelled in the knowledge that she had organised the whole thing. Beth moaned about the fact we had stopped her from tailing the poor guys from earlier, but we reassured her she would have the chance to do plenty of that when we got there. For me, I simply thanked them for being my friends, and in particular for their support over the last three years; it made me extremely proud to have friends like them, and I knew that a large part of our not going away was due to how they felt about my situation.

"Ah, thanks, Jenny," Beth replied as she rubbed my arm.

"Well, that just changed the mood slightly." Amanda grimaced. "Yeah, we love you too, but let's move on from this sombre confirmation," she finished as she winked at

me to show that she was jesting. I wiped my slightly damp eyes and then Rose raised her glass.

"To us, the best friends we could ever possibly have," she toasted. We all smiled and then clinked glasses. "To us."

We decided to do some duty free shopping, stocking up on make-up and perfume mainly and I purchased a new pair of sunglasses. Gucci, none the less; the ones that I had Paul had bought me about ten years ago and they were a little old and scratched. It was apparent that we were noisier than we should have been; everyone kept looking at us as they walked through, and with the help of the staff in there I think that we all had at least two different types of perfume sprayed on us. The other passengers had no idea what they had let themselves in for. Breakfast consisted of a quick bacon sandwich and then before we knew it, boarding was starting.

"We're in business class," Rose suddenly informed us.

"Excellent," Beth and Amanda chirped.

"How on earth did we afford that?" I asked.

"I know someone who has the power," Rose laughed.

"Luxury is what I aimed for, so more drinks on board."

"Actually, Rose, I take everything back I said before. This is panning out nicely," Amanda concluded.

Rose dragged us to the front of the queue once business class had been confirmed to board first. For some reason it felt somewhat embarrassing, but not for Beth however who made it her sole duty to deliberately squeeze past the young guys from earlier, winking at them as she went while they chided her about being in the 'posh' section.

Beth was lapping it up; Amanda grabbed her elbow and told her to leave them alone as they were young enough to be her sons. Probably not the best thing to say at this point, Beth was not happy and asked her if she was going to ruin all her chances at getting laid while we were away.

"For God's sake, is that all you think about?" Amanda retorted.

Beth laughed; "Yes, actually, right now it is."

Take-off was not my favourite part of the flight; Paul used to always hold my hand as I wasn't the best flier. The seats helped as I wasn't crammed in too tightly to Amanda at the side of me, she saw the look on my face and remembered and without thinking squeezed my hand. The cabin crew brought around some pre-flight drinks for us and that helped. Amanda leant over and whispered, "It won't take long, and then we will be at the 'Adventure Island'. Think about that for a while, you may even hook up with a tanned and handsome Ibizan!" she remarked happily.

I shot her a look of question."Hey, I'm not Beth; I didn't come on this trip just to get laid, you know."

"Yeah, but you never know. I think a holiday romance would be perfect to get you back in the saddle," she laughed.

"Are you wishing us all into bed with men, because you can't? Or is it just your dirty mind?" I then asked.

"A little bit of both I think. Hell, I would if I were you, as long as he hadn't just come out of nappies, which seems to be Beth's choice." She laughed a little more, which set me off too.

"Erm, hello, I am sat just here you know," Beth then commented as she punched Amanda's arm. Amanda however, carried on, laughing much to Beth's disgust, then she realised it was a little harsh as Beth too had recently had a pretty tough time.

"Hey, I'm just teasing, you go for it girl if you can get it," she finished as the air hostess arrived with more drinks for us. During all the conversation I realised I had been distracted from take-off, which I was now sure was Amanda's plan all along. She noted my realisation and tipped her glass to me.

"Chin chin," she expressed before chinking my glass. I reciprocated.

The flight was pretty quick in fairness, the food not bad either and before we knew it the captain had announced that we were descending towards the airport. Beth rubbed her hands together; during the flight she had moved the curtain behind her numerous times to try and see the young men she had accosted earlier. Every time she turned back to her chair with a grin on her face after miming God knows what to them in economy. Rose was busy getting things ready for our airport pick-up and, as she was super organised, she had booked a car to collect us and take us to the hotel. When the wheels hit the runway, Amanda let out a small whoop and Beth then high-fived her. It was obvious they were very happy to be here and that was great, although I hoped that the behaving like eighteen-year-olds would settle down just a little!

The carousel beeped and then the handlers started to feed the bags through very slowly, after fifteen minutes

everyone's bag had arrived except mine. I was just starting to panic slightly when I saw it appear at the top of the belt and slide its way around to me. It didn't fill me with confidence to think that I may have to share everyone else's eclectic choice of clothing, so when I pulled it from the carousel I patted it in appreciation that it hadn't got lost in transit.

"Right, let's go," Rose instructed as she marched on in front. We all followed feeling happier than when she first told us where we were going. Beth suddenly then spoke turning to us first;

"You know that film '*The Hangover*'? Maybe this is our kind of version of that," she laughed.

"I bloody hope not, I don't think I would survive that," I replied honestly.

"Well, unless Bradley Cooper is around… then that could change the decision?" Amanda enquired.

"Will you lot stop going on about getting drunk and getting laid? If we attempted anything like that quantity of drinking it would probably take about five days for us to recover… Well, it would take you three that long, being older of course," Rose then chipped in smiling from ear to ear.

"I've just decided that I don't like you anymore," Amanda said with a tone of sarcasm.

"You'll be this age at some point you know," Beth then added. Rose just shook her head and laughed;

"Well, as long as I act my age and certainly dress my age I'll be fine," she mimicked at Beth's appearance.

"Yeah, yeah – you're only jealous that I can pull this off," she replied while straightening her blouse.

Beth had for many years been very subdued in her clothing department. As her marriage started to fail a few years ago she started doing more of what she wanted, rather than what her husband expected. It had resulted in a very flamboyant and colourful Beth which I liked, actually. She was now dressing more like her personality and for all intents and purposes it made her happy. I linked arms with her in reassurance and continued dragging my bag. As we walked through the exit to arrivals, the brightness of the sun hit us all straight away and so we quickly reached for our sunglasses.

As promised there was a luxurious air-conditioned car waiting for us, which was a welcome retreat from the intense heat. The driver placed all of our bags into the boot, and just as I was about to climb in behind Rose and Amanda there was a sudden barrage of questions from the same group of young men that had caught Beth's eye in Manchester.

"Hey sexy lady with the big hat. Where are you going?" the tall blond one asked with expressive confidence. Beth turned and looked at them and I turned from the car door.

"Why, do you want to join us?" she quipped.

"For goodness sake, Beth, I didn't come on holiday to babysit for two weeks," Amanda chided her. Beth turned to the car and shushed Amanda which made both Rose and I laugh.

"My holiday is just not going to be the same without you," he then shouted as he held his hands to his heart and mimed undying love. "When will I see you again?" he asked as his friends simply laughed and pushed him to keep going.

"Oh honey, you couldn't keep up with me; not enough stamina, but if I bump into you I promise to let you buy me a drink," Beth then finished before blowing a big kiss and then climbing in the car.

At this point the driver was laughing to himself, and Rose, Amanda and I were simply staring at her. She let out a deep breath and then took off her sunglasses and looked at us, before banging her feet simultaneously on the floor and giggling like a schoolgirl. "I'm loving this, it's so much fun," she confirmed as she threw her head back and laughed. What else could we do but join her. We took in all of the sights on the way from the airport as we travelled toward our destination for the next two weeks; the scenery, it had to be said, was stunning.

Chapter 2

The car slowed at the impressive entrance of the Golden Palm Hotel. We all stared at the grand facade and then commented on how well Rose had done getting us into such a place on our budgets. Although San Antonio was well known for its clubbing and party scene, I have to say that this hotel had completely changed my opinion. It only got better as she then told us we had a two-bedroom suite, one of only four. The driver kindly gave us our bags and told us to have a good holiday, and then he left to continue with his day. Our bags glided over the cool cream marble floor, and as we walked to the reception we were very impressed with the overall look of the hotel and commented many times at Rose's fine decision.

Once checked in we rode the lift to the eighth floor (the top floor) and entered the room. It was very white: white leather sofa; white walls; white voile curtains; white linen; white tiling. The only thing not white was the cream carpet, which somehow looked like a mistake alongside everything else. It was however spacious, it had a small tea and coffee kitchenette area and the bedrooms were big and cool. Amanda slid open the doors to the balcony and then called us.

"Wow! Guys, you have to look at this view!" she said as we all made our way over. It was beautiful; a white sandy beach, shallow water leading to moored boats and some of them expensive looking too. The pool was below us and palm trees surrounded one side creating some welcome shade I suspect. There weren't as many people on the beach as I had expected for early afternoon.

"Have we arrived out of party season?" I asked innocently. Rose laughed;

"No, Jenny, you have to remember that people here party until six in the morning or later – so they sleep most of the day."

"Ah of course, stupid thing to say." I shook my head.

"Well it actually may work in our favour, being older and obviously unable to take in the party scene as Rose suggested, will mean that we have our pick of the sun loungers," Amanda then said.

"Very true, but surely young people wouldn't be able to afford to stay here?" Beth asked as she turned to Rose. Rose replied honestly;

"Well, in fairness, I was surprised at the deal I did receive on this. It has great write-ups, so I can't understand why more wouldn't stay, there seemed to be plenty of rooms left."

"Maybe it's a little too minimalistic? I mean, if you were twenty-one you would want to be in the centre of all the action, surely?" Beth then commented. We all agreed that she was probably right, as this hotel was a little way from the main areas. "It may mean that we have more exclusive men staying here," she winked at us.

"Oh God, we're back to sex again," Amanda said and we all sighed and laughed a little and left her on the balcony.

"What?" she asked. "I don't know what your problem is," she said as she followed us. We didn't comment but simply went to our rooms to unpack.

I had drawn Rose's name out to share a room with, it only needed me to pick being only four of us, but while on the plane Beth had moaned about Amanda's snoring and Rose had said she didn't want to share a room with Beth and a bevy of men, so while up in the air Rose wrote our names on a piece of paper shook them up in her hand and asked me to pick one. She seemed happy with my selection, and as much as Beth and Amanda moaned about each other they were only jesting as they had been close friends for nearly twenty years. Initially they met at work, a large insurance brokers in which they worked in the same office for nearly eight years. Amanda then decided to move to a smaller firm and Beth fancied a complete change two years after that and was offered a job with a client as a personal assistant. Beth still maintains to this day, that this was the best decision she ever made as she loves her job. Amanda still finds it difficult to find any excitement in insurance these days but continues to work in the same industry for fear of finding nothing else.

I had met Amanda in my late teens; she was dating Jonathan, who was one of my best friends at the time, and so we spent many weekends together along with my boyfriend, Matt. That was a long romance for me of nearly two years, but then he moved down to London

when he was offered a unique opportunity to finish his architectural qualification with a large London-based firm. Commuting from Manchester to London every weekend we knew was never going to viable while I was studying, and so we ended our relationship amicably and kept in touch and still do, remarkably. Amanda's short-lived relationship with Jonathan, of only nine months, was a shame, but Amanda and I got on really well and so had been friends since then. Jonathan had drifted a little after their break up as it was awkward for him to be around me and her at the same time. I hadn't heard anything from him after he joined an accountancy firm in Leeds, which I always thought was a shame and it wasn't from not trying. He'd found a new life and a new circle of friends but I always wished him well.

We unpacked, got our swimsuits on – or in Rose's case, bikini – and with covering beachwear we headed straight down to the pool. The poolside grill meant we could eat first after having been on the go for so long and then we lay down and soaked up the rays for about three hours. We had all taken an array of books with us; this was good as I never seemed to be able to focus long enough to read at home. The silence in the house meant I ended up looking around for something physical to do. I craved our regular girls' Wednesday lunches and every other Friday or Saturday night we tried to meet for a meal or drinks. I didn't realise how much I relied on these meetings with my friends until Paul had died; listening to my best friends and their troubles for a few hours was a great escape from my own.

The beach had become crowded from around three thirty onwards, and it was alive with the voices of the young people who had emerged from the rooms of the neighbouring hotels, after a long session of alcohol and dancing among other things I suspect. They were starting to get rowdier as the day progressed and this highlighted to us that the best time for peace and quiet was obviously mornings and early afternoon. By six o'clock there was music and more noise and suddenly it felt like we were in Ibiza!

We decided to retreat to our rooms and take a shower, so that we could venture out into the town and see what all the fuss was about. By the time we were ready to leave it was seven thirty and we decided to have a drink in the bar first. Beth ordered us all cocktails and insisted that they were her treat; after recent events she was just glad to have us all there with her. We laughed and talked and had another drink before deciding to venture outside. Amanda asked the barman which was the best place to start and he briefly pointed us in the right direction. I suppose we should have half expected to know what to see, but being out of the loop for so long made the venture into town a complete eye-opener.

To say that we got a few funny looks was an understatement, probably due to the fact that we obviously had far too many clothes on based on what these young girls were wearing, which boiled down to something about the size of the hand towel in my room – and that was a dress! We must have been staring as much as them: there were boys necking shots faster than you could count, girls

doing pretty much the same, people falling over so drunk they couldn't stand at only nine fifteen pm. I cannot tell you how many couples we counted who were aiming for death by tongue-down-your-throat, and the hands that were wandering were embarrassing for me to even look at. The music was loud from one bar to another and hurt the ears at times as each bar competed for a louder environment than the next.

We didn't even think about stopping, we just walked and watched and walked some more. As the street we were on started to quieten just a little and we felt like we had just left a war zone, Beth spotted a little bar by the beach which looked quieter and far more civilised so she pointed and grabbed Amanda by the elbow and dragged her along as we followed. She ordered us all beer and said that we needed something to quench our now dry mouths from so much gawping; at this point we still hadn't spoken and were dazed. We all drank quickly and then Amanda spoke."Well, I wasn't expecting that! I mean I've seen it on TV and I thought I knew what was going on at places like this – but witnessing it is another thing entirely. I feel exhausted just watching them – I'm sure our partying days at their age weren't that bad."

"Oh I don't know, Amanda. You've recounted numerous times of being drunk and making out with guys in your teens while dressing inappropriately." Beth reminded her.

"Yes, but at least I was dressed. I had clothing on. Inappropriate or not it covered the essentials – but these girls?" she relayed to us. We all looked at her for a minute

and then started laughing and reliving what we had just seen.

"I don't know why you're laughing Jenny, your boys will be on holiday living it up like them,"

Rose then said while raising her eyebrows sarcastically. I threw my head in my hands and grimaced. "Oh please, I hope not – I don't want to think about that!"

"Well I know my son lived it up on his holidays, and he had no problem telling me about each time he did either," Beth then added.

"Great," I said before taking another large gulp of beer. "My only concern is that we have to walk back through that." They all then sighed.

"Well, can I make a suggestion then?" Amanda asked. We all shrugged and said why not. "Let's get out-of-control drunk ourselves and then it may not bother us as much."

"Oh I don't think that's a good idea," I replied, thinking it had been a long time since I had consumed a lot of alcohol in one sitting.

"Well, I think it's a great idea. Let's get our party started," Beth agreed and Rose seemed intent on drinking a ridiculous amount too. I decided that I was not going to get my own way on this and I would have to join in.

Five drinks down in the small beach bar gave way to a slightly bizarre head rush. We laughed, laughed some more and by the time the sixth drink came which was another cocktail, I was fast becoming drunk. I could feel my legs doing that slightly merry little dance they do when your head's not quite telling them what to do properly. Rose had

been dancing in the middle of the floor to the numerous better songs that were played. It was commented on many times that apart from the few good songs around today, most of what they played in these bars, classed as modern pop, was like a head-pumping noise and nothing more. We craved some good old eighties music, something that we could dance to. So we took the brave decision to move back into the hustle of the town, knowing damn well that we were going to get more inquisitive stares.

"On the bright side, they are probably so drunk now that they won't even notice us," Beth stated hopefully.

"Sod them, we are here to enjoy ourselves just like them. However, you will not be seeing me in a dress like they're wearing," Amanda insisted.

"Thank God for that!" I piped up with a slight slur. "Mixing these drinks is not a good idea," I then finished while I leant on Amanda apologetically.

"Hey, don't be leaning on me after that," she laughed pushing me upright again.

"I'm heading down a slippery slope," I informed them.

"Good," Rose laughed. "It's great to see you letting your hair down."

I scowled. "You may not agree in the morning."

We finished the drinks and stood and decided that we would make our way back to the main street that we had first walked down. It was noisier, and busier than previously, but on the plus side I didn't care and they did look far drunker than us. It was eleven thirty now and I knew another hour of this would see me needing

to head back; the last thing I wanted was to be sick for the next two days, which at this rate was looking likely. Amanda was talking to everyone and anyone with Beth. Rose walked along with me but she was obviously scanning the crowds, and who could blame her? She was only thirty-five and had the body of a twenty-one-year-old; an exercise fanatic. That, mixed with her long brown hair and the skin of a woman ten years younger, was a combination causing attraction. I was just about to ask where we were heading as the bright lights and head-thumping noise were fast adding to my feeling of complete lack of control, when Beth shouted, "Yeah" and started heading toward a bar called Liquid Disco! I understood why as we got closer and caught them up; Madonna's 'Holiday' was playing and it instantly lifted my mood.

We walked inside and although not huge in comparison to some of the other bars, the atmosphere was great. There were some slightly older people in here which made us feel a little less alien. It was my round and so to ease the heavy alcohol I ordered four Sol with lime. It was necessary at this point to have something refreshing and that seemed like the perfect choice. With bottles in hand, Amanda manoeuvred us to the dance floor, the song had nearly finished and so our hope was that the eighties continued…We weren't disappointed when Soft Cell's 'Tainted Love' started which pulled most of the bar onto the dance floor with us and made for a great start to our dancing. It was like reliving our days of partying in our teens and twenties and suddenly

I felt far happier being here, so I told myself to just enjoy it.

Around seven songs later I had to take a break with Beth. We went to the bar and got a diet coke just to quench our thirst; it was heaven to my taste buds which were now getting that acid kickback from too much alcohol. We laughed at Rose and Amanda who were now in full swing, dancing around the floor with two guys who were probably in their early thirties. It was obvious what the guys were thinking as they were grinding close and Amanda's face was a picture as it started to dawn on her, so she made her excuses and made her way to us. I quickly told Beth not to let on we only had coke – Amanda would not be impressed with us if she realised this. She slumped herself across the bar;

"Holy crap. I thought he was going to just get his penis out right there!" she joked. We laughed agreeing that it was steamier than she realised. "What you drinking?" she then asked looking at me, but Beth was quick to answer.

"Rum and coke."

"Excellent idea." Amanda slurred a little as she leaned over and asked the barman for one. I looked at Beth and she just winked at me.

"We hopefully will recover quicker in the morning," she whispered.

We sat back and watched as Rose was getting attention from around four guys now that seemed intent on surrounding her. She could handle herself and this we knew, but as they started manhandling her, we all decided that we should step in. So we manoeuvred our way over

and surrounded her and then mimed that it was probably time to leave and move on. We all exited into the humid hot air and realised how nice it had been to be in the cool air inside. Walking along Rose then spotted a tequila bar. I grimaced as soon as she said it but we were already heading that way; two rounds later and that was me done. I could feel things starting to go out of focus slightly and quite honestly I needed my bed. As we had walked to a point where you could walk on the beach back to the hotel, I made my excuses and decided to head back. They did their best to deter me, but I just couldn't consume anything else. I told them to enjoy themselves and as I could see the hotel which didn't look too far I made my way back, which, truthfully, I soon realised was not as easy as I'd hoped, walking in sand with wedge heels on. As I made my way across the beach and they shouted goodnight I could hear Amanda; "Okay, just for the hell of it let's have one more shot here and then move on," she insisted. I was suddenly very glad that I was leaving.

Mumbling to myself and probably looking slightly insane, I struggled slowly through the sand, trying not to make eye contact with the many couples and crowds that were still partying hard. Sun loungers were now makeshift beds for making out, and I knew that I was staring occasionally. I now knew that I had enjoyed far too much drink, and that this dress was probably not the best idea, because if I fell arse over tit then I was sure going to be giving this whole beach a view of my knickers. I was trying my best as it was to hold it down in the cooler sea breeze and this was taking far too much concentration. I

was so close to the steps that led to the hotel, but I could walk in those wedges no longer and so I stopped and bent down to take them off. Not my best decision of the night it would appear. I had just managed to unhook the strap from my heels when that nauseating dizziness hit me from being bent at a completely inappropriate angle after alcohol. I steadied myself by placing one hand out onto the sand and then as I lifted my feet to slip them off I felt myself going… sideways! I couldn't do anything but laugh, and as I sat up and took hold of my shoes, sand in my hair and dress, not in the most ladylike position, I wondered how the hell I was going to get up. I didn't think for long: as I rested my head on my knees looking toward the steps that I was aiming for, I saw two feet skip down them and appear in front of me;

"Are you alright?" a very smooth sounding voice asked. I followed the linen trousers up his legs to an open necked shirt, and then grimaced knowing someone had just witnessed all of that. But then his face, oh my God his face; chiselled, tanned, dark blond hair and piercing eyes. I swallowed but hadn't answered.

"I'm sorry what did you say?" I asked, not sounding too slurred.

"Are you alright? I was just sitting here with my friend and noticed your unfortunate tumble," he said in an understated way. Now I was embarrassed.

"Oh God, I am so drunk. What was I thinking?" I said disappointed at myself while hiding my head in my hands.

"If it's any consolation, I have seen worse," he then said with a tone of sarcasm, but it eased my embarrassment. I

looked up from my hands and he had both of his reached out toward me. “May I help you?” he asked as he smiled and then he bobbed down a little nearer to meet my eyes.

He had very fine lines around his eyes, but they looked kind and genuine and as I took the sight of him again, I realised that he was probably in his forties like me. I smiled; I was at the hotel anyway so I had nothing to lose. I reached out my hands and placed them in his. His skin was warm and soft and as he squeezed my hands lightly he pulled me to standing. “Thank you,” I quickly said as he let go of one hand and reached for my shoes.

“My pleasure. Are you staying here?” he gestured to the hotel.

“Yes, unfortunately for you it would seem,” I replied. He laughed as he guided me up the stairs. His friend was stood at the top and also asked if I was alright. It was getting worse – two witnesses to my drunken state. I nodded sheepishly.

“I’ll be with you in a minute, Josh,” he then said as he continued past him while placing his arm around my waist.

“Sure, no rush,” his friend replied.

“I’m sure I will be fine now, honestly,” I remarked, but I knew without his help I would probably be taking one step forward and three to the side. He looked at me and smiled;

“Let’s make sure you reach your room safely,” he simply said, and knowing he was helping me I leaned into him a little, grateful for the support.

We entered the reception and then he asked which room I was staying in and I told him knowing I probably wouldn't get there alone. He pressed the button for the lift and we stood and waited when I caught a glimpse of myself in the reflective doors. I sighed.

"I'm not usually like this you know," I tried to convince him, he just smiled more. "My friends Amanda, Beth and Rose drove me to this," I added honestly.

"Well, you are in Ibiza, in one of the biggest partying towns," he remarked.

"Yes and think how much worse I would have been had I stayed out with them!" I then insisted as I prodded him on his chest – his very taught and firm chest which I stared at for a moment. Thank God the lift arrived right then, I knew I was blushing.

"They left you to make your own way back?" he asked sounding concerned.

"I insisted. I could see the hotel, I wasn't far away but it's just taken me longer than I thought walking in those stupid shoes," I replied tapping the heels that he held.

"You should be careful you know, these young men are out trying to grab anything they can. A beautiful woman like yourself could end up with too much attention," he then said. I smiled and looked at him.

"You're quite charming, aren't you?"

"I like to think so," he replied as he smiled more. I suddenly realised I had no idea who this guy was, and I was taking him to my room. What was I thinking? The lift stopped."So, here to unwind for a while then?" he asked.

I tried to stand up straight and replied. "Just a girls'

holiday. It's been too long since we last did it for various reasons which I will not bore you with, but this is our first night here, so I'm not doing too well, am I? I never drink this much, I didn't want to drink this much because of this…" I then gestured to my state as we arrived at our room door.

"If this is a much-needed break, then I don't think there's any need to worry. No harm done, eh?" he kindly said. "May I?" he then asked as he gestured for my key. Slightly reluctantly I gave it to him, but I had no need to be nervous. He walked me in, placed my shoes on the floor and then turned to face me. "It was a pleasure meeting you," he remarked. I rubbed my forehead.

"Now I know you're being charming. I'm sure I looked a real sight," I replied sobering up faster than I could have hoped for.

"You definitely looked a sight, but not in the way that you're thinking," he said and I blushed again. I reached out my hand as a gesture of thanks to shake his, he took it and shook it willingly, looking at our hands all the while. "I didn't catch your name, only your friends'," he pointed out.

I smiled. "Jenny. It's Jenny," I said, a little flustered.

"Well, Jenny. I hope to see you again." He sounded hopeful.

"Preferably not like this!" I remarked. He laughed as he made his way out of the door.

"Goodnight. I hope tomorrow isn't too painful," he grimaced while still laughing. I rolled my eyes at his comment, and then he tucked his hands in his pockets

and left towards the lift. It suddenly dawned on me that I had no idea what his name was, so I leant out from my door. The sight of him was delicious, cool and casual as he stood there and waited patiently.

"Hey!" I called as the lift arrived. He looked at me. "I didn't catch your name either?" He smiled.

"It's Ethan," he called back. "Good night, Jenny," he quietly said as he stepped into the waiting lift.

"Goodnight, Ethan, and thank you," I called back and then like a dream he was gone.

I closed the door, managed to pick up my shoes and went to get my pyjamas on. I thought about Ethan for a while as I drank a glass of water and then I looked through the window to the beach below that was still bustling with life. As I watched, I saw Ethan make his way back to his friend and while I stared from my unlit room I smiled. He sat and continued his drink and seemed deep in conversation, which was when I decided that the room was swaying a little again and my head was thumping. *Two paracetamols and bed,* I thought. *I need to switch off.* And as my head hit the pillow I was out cold.