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To our family and friends—

as always,

with love!

Adrienne and Sally

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One

Michael Winters stood with one hip resting against the bar, a scotch waiting near his hand. Across the room the dining area was filled with casually dressed diners. But here at the bar he was alone. He was glad for the solitude, glad to be watching instead of watched for a change. These few stolen minutes The Great American Bachelor: A Loveswept Classic Romance of privacy were more valuable than The Great American Bachelor: A Loveswept Classic Romance hard currency. All this recent publicity was grating, and he had had enough media attention to last him a long time. But after tonight it would be over. Or at least would be eased. Tomorrow he would get back to business, making decisions, issuing orders. So he stood there, grateful for the respite, letting his eyes roam the room, distanced, alone. He was not curious, or even interested in The Great American Bachelor: A Loveswept Classic Romance the people around him, just silent and watching. Then the attractive girl he had noticed earlier smiled.

Damn! he thought. There was a smile to knock your legs out from under you! He tossed down a mouthful of scotch and stared at her. She was pretty but not stunning. Slim, more coltish than willowy. Nice legs. Lovely shoulders. Age? He took another sip and let it burn its way down his throat. Maybe mid-twenties. But there was something The Great American Bachelor: A Loveswept Classic Romance else. What? *Something*. Narrowing his dark eyes, he studied her with an expert gaze. What The Great American Bachelor: A Loveswept Classic Romance was it?

Cathy Stephenson felt the hairs lifting along her arms. The air-conditioning, she The Great American Bachelor: A Loveswept Classic Romance wondered. She hadn't noticed it The Great American Bachelor: A Loveswept Classic Romance before. Maybe this boring date was beginning to affect her physically. With a little shrug she glanced around The Great American Bachelor: A Loveswept Classic Romance the room. Stopped. Glanced back to the bar. A little click happened in her head. She knew that man ... but how? She frowned, drawing her brows The Great American Bachelor: A Loveswept Classic Romance down over her wide brown eyes. She had caught him watching her and for a second had the oddest The Great American Bachelor: A Loveswept Classic Romance feeling that she knew him, recognized him. But no. A man like that she would not forget. And yet...

He put down his drink and met her eyes. Click.

Thump. Her heart made a strange noise. She took a quick look at Rod, her awful blind date, to see if he had heard it. But, typical of the evening, her date did not notice anything but himself. He continued to babble at her while tossing down drinks. She smiled reassuringly at him, nodded, then she looked back at the bar and the blood raced to her cheeks. The The Great American Bachelor: A Loveswept Classic Romance man had caught her staring.

Quickly she turned her attention back across the table to Rod. But all the little nerve endings at the nape of her neck were sending SOS's a mile a minute. Goodness, who was that, she wondered.

"Hey, doll, aren't ya'll impressed?" Rod demanded. "Tonight I wanted to bring you over here to the beach, give ya a sample of some real Florida cookin'. But I'll show you around Orlando sometime. Bet it's nothin' like Iowa—"

"Indiana," she corrected him. "I'm from Bloomington, Indiana."

"Well, I bet Indiana hasn't got anything to compare with Orlando. I mean, this town's booming! And have We got places to have fun: Church Street Station and Rosie O'Grady's, and some great bars down on South Orange Blossom Trail. I can even show you places that were here before all the tourists and you The Great American Bachelor: A Loveswept Classic Romance Yankees came bargain' in. Hey, don't feel bad. Not everyone can have life's advantages like me."

Cathy nodded and pasted a smile on her mouth.

"Native, that's me! You'll be glad you moved on down. As long as you don't let The Great American Bachelor: A Loveswept Classic Romance them work you to death at Tower Publishing; I mean, that sister of mine is one tough boss!"

The Great American Bachelor: A Loveswept Classic Romance

Which was The Great American Bachelor: A Loveswept Classic Romance how Cathy had ended up here in the first place.

A blind date! Cathy had not been on one in years. But it was hard to say no when the VP who

had just hired her as an assistant The Great American Bachelor: A Loveswept Classic Romance editor said she had a charming brother. Hard to say no when she suggested they double-date. Hard to say no when she called the night before with the flu, but said Rod was really looking forward to it.

For Cathy, under those circumstances, no was impossible.

So here The Great American Bachelor: A Loveswept Classic Romance she was, sitting The Great American Bachelor: A Loveswept Classic Romance in a crowded restaurant in Florida. She should have been excited, she knew, since this was her first night out since she moved south; instead, she was annoyed and uncomfortable, having doubts not just about tonight, but about her boss, her new job, her whole move south. What if her boss was anything like Rod?

Rod rambled on again, and Cathy nodded in reply at the appropriate moments. She had the feeling he was happier with an audience—a captive audience—than he would have been if she actually tried to say something.

So she nibbled on oyster crackers, sipped a glass of white wine, prayed for the evening to come to a quick conclusion, shyly keeping her eyes away from the bar.

Shyness was not a problem for the man at the bar. Not shyness, or reticence, or timidity. No. He had always believed you nail your colors to the mast and you fight to keep them there! Of course, for the magazine interview he had said something far more subtle and sophisticated. But the truth was the same. And he was bold as brass. So he stared at the girl. What the hell was she doing with that loser, he wondered as he nursed his scotch in silence.

At the table Rod was getting louder and more obnoxious by the moment. “Try some ‘gator tail!” he ordered. “Try the turtle soup. And loosen up. Relax.” When he ordered his third drink, Cathy finally objected.

“Rod, two’s enough. We have that long drive back to Orlando—”

“No The Great American Bachelor: A Loveswept Classic Romance problem. I’m not even feeling them.”

“That’s what worries me. How about if I drive back?” This was it. She would never accept a blind date again, not even for a boss.

“I said I’m fine. Lighten up.”

“I don’t want to lighten up. I either want to drive home or I want you to stop drinking.”

“Hey, I—” Then he bit off his words and grinned at her, lacing his fingers behind his head. “Sure, you drive. Fine with me. I always wanted a chauffeur.”

Dinner arrived at that moment. Cathy entertained a fleeting wish that he’d choke on his ‘gator,

but she pushed it away, determined to finish the evening on a positive note. She nibbled on her salad, carefully avoided looking at her entree, and strained for a glimpse of the ocean outside the windows.

That had been something, that first glimpse of the ocean! When she had stepped from the car, all she could see was ocean. It The Great American Bachelor: A Loveswept Classic Romance was dark as slate, and the rising moon had poured light over The Great American Bachelor: A Loveswept Classic Romance its surface like spilt milk. Or molten silver. Or a moth's pale, phosphorescent wing. Oh, and how it changed! Each second it was new, different, as the water heaved and rose and curled and crashed down on itself in spray and glory. Truly, that was something to write about someday, when she could do what she really wanted to do! She smiled, imagining it.

The The Great American Bachelor: A Loveswept Classic Romance man at the bar followed her gaze, wondering what she was thinking. What had made her smile like that? It couldn't have been her date.

"Off in dreamland again?" Rod smirked. He polished off his last drink and paid the check. Then The Great American Bachelor: A Loveswept Classic Romance he headed toward the door, not bothering to pull her chair The Great American Bachelor: A Loveswept Classic Romance out or hand her her sweater.

She followed, hesitating just once on the way to The Great American Bachelor: A Loveswept Classic Romance the door, almost unwillingly, near the bar. She glanced at the man. He was watching her, just as she knew he would be, with those intense blue, somehow familiar eyes, and an insane little smile leapt to The Great American Bachelor: A Loveswept Classic Romance her lips before she could bite it back. Get hold of yourself! she swore silently. Then she hurried, blushing, onto the porch.

The ocean was gone. A fat, thick fog had rolled in and all that was left of the Atlantic was its deep, disembodied roar. This evening was turning out to be a flop on all The Great American Bachelor: A Loveswept Classic Romance counts. With a sigh and a shrug she turned to Rod.

"Okay," she said, determined to carry this off with style. "How about the keys?"

He just looked at her.

"Rod," she said, trying to joke, "go ahead, toss me the keys. Here"—she was scooting backward, hands out like a receiver waiting for the football—"watch this catch! Come on, I'm ready."

"Forget it. I don't need you to drive me home." His voice was surly.

Anger made her gasp. She dug her heels in. "Rod, you said I could drive—"

"Now I'm saying you can't."

“But—”

“I’m fine, I told you. I had three little drinks. Hell, you want me to walk a straight line? Touch The Great American Bachelor: A Loveswept Classic Romance my finger to my nose?” He demonstrated as he spoke, every move and gesture dripping with sarcasm. “Want me to count backward from one hundred? Ninety-nine, ninety-eight, ninety-six, ninety—”

“Seven,” she snapped, eyes flashing.

“That’s what I said.”

“Forget it. I’ll get a ride.”

“From Cocoa Beach to Orlando? At night? Who you gonna ask, huh, some guy inside?”

The Great American Bachelor A Loveswept Classic Romance

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