

THE MATCHMAKER AND THE MARINE

by Lucinda Race

EXCERPT

After making the short drive to the country club, Melinda parked in the crowded lot. As she crossed the parking area to the reception hall she daydreamed of how nice it would be to take off her pumps and walk barefoot. She reached for the brass knob on the carved wood door. Before she could turn the knob, it burst open. She took a step back. Her heel caught a crack in the stone step. She began to fall backward when strong hands caught her and held on tight.

A deep voice next to her ear said, "It's okay, I've got you."

Melinda looked up into warm brown eyes. It was the man from the chapel.

"Um, thank you." She smoothed her hand over her simple navy-blue dress and then pushed a curl behind her ear. "I'm not sure what happened."

"It looks like your heel got caught."

She gave him a small smile. "It's a good thing you were there to catch me."

With a slight stiff bow, he said, "Adam Bell, at your service, ma'am."

His face held little emotion, almost formal, she thought. People strolled past them into the building, but Melinda couldn't help but notice he carried himself with a distinct military bearing. Unsure if he was being old-fashioned or teasing her, she said, "We should go inside."

He crooked his arm and said, "I'd be happy to escort you safely through the door."

With a small laugh Melinda placed her hand on his arm. In a soft southern drawl, she said, "Thank you, kind sir."

"So, tell me, are you a friend of Stacey or Will?" he asked.

"I guess you could say both." She looked at him. "I'm Melinda Phillips."

His eyes grew wide. "You're the matchmaker?"

"I am." As they stepped through the doorway, she withdrew her hand.