

## ***THE REUNION GAME***

### CHAPTER ONE

There was no way sex with Graham Winchester was as good as she remembered.

Jane Smith stood alone in the crowded Legend VFW hall where her fifteenth year high school reunion was in full swing around her. She held a plastic wineglass of California merlot which gave her something to do with her hands, smiled at Betty Jo, the clerk from the Piggly Wiggly who waved from across the dance floor, and thanked her lucky stars for the relative darkness on the periphery of the dance floor.

He'd arrived. Heat surged through Jane's body. Graham Winchester—senior class president, debate team captain, yearbook staff member, valedictorian and Mr. Most Likely to Succeed—had finally come home to Legend.

For fifteen years, she fantasized about Graham. For fifteen years, she remembered that one night alone with him in the back seat of his family Chevy. Sure, it had been cliché. Graduation night. One thing leading to another. Each going their separate ways the next day.

She'd put him behind her and gotten on with her life. College first and then back to Legend to teach high school English. When her mom was diagnosed with cancer, she cared for her. After years as a volunteer at the county dog pound, she founded Legend's non-kill Pet Rescue. Last year, she'd quit teaching and opened a book store.

Yet she'd never forgotten Graham.

Cold, hard truth washed over Jane as she watched from the shadows. For all she accomplished, she was still stuck in high school. Her love life sucked. It'd been on hold for much too long.

She must exorcise the demon Graham had become and put him out of her mind and heart for the last time.

\*\*\*

You can never go home again.

The cliché rang in Graham's ears along with the sounds of Michael Jackson's *Thriller* pulsating from a DVD player set up on a folding table. What in the blazes was he doing here? He didn't belong in Legend any more.

The dimly lit VFW Hall was very different from the trendy, super chic Times Square dance clubs he usually frequented. Decked out with feathery table decorations, sprinkles of glitter and mirror balls throwing colored lights on the dance floor, the rented hall looked outdated and shabby like his memories of middle school sock hops.

"Graham Winchester?"

He hardly recognized Legend High's former All-State defensive back. Clint Roberts had put on a few pounds. When Dawn Smith dumped him to go out with Clint, he shouldn't have been surprised. After all, football was a big thing in Tennessee.

Bracing for a rush of old resentment, Graham extended his hand. "Clint, how are you?"

"Fine." Always a big guy, Clint towered over him. He transferred the bottle of beer he carried to his left hand and grasped Graham's. "Man, you don't look a day older. Can you believe it's been this long? That big city life must agree with you."

The bitterness Graham expected to feel failed to materialize. "Thanks, but I *feel* older."

"Know what you mean." Clint nodded. "So how's it goin'?"

"Can't complain."

"Yeah, same here. Hey, I heard you wrote a book. Claudia was telling me."

"Claudia?"

"Yeah, you remember, Claudia Ridgeway, now Claudia Jones."

Oh, his senior class secretary. A real one-person pep squad. How quickly he'd forgotten.

"You're the biggest thing that's happened to Legend since the Dragons

won the National Finals last fall," Clint said. "You and Dawn comin' home, the two of you voted most likely to succeed. It's the talk of the town."

*Most likely to succeed? What a joke.* His law career was at a standstill. Sure, he'd written one novel, but as his agent pointed out more than once, he was deep in the throes of writer's block with the deadline looming.

Graham shifted his stance. He was a fake, but he'd be damned if he'd let his classmates in on the horrible truth.

"What are you doing now?" Graham asked politely.

"Sellin' cars."

"Cars?"

"Yep, own the Ford dealership in town."

"That's impressive."

"Make a damn good living too. Certainly can't complain."

"I see." Graham shifted again and glanced around the darkened hall. "Are you married?"

"Hell, no. What about you?"

"No."

"Smart man," Clint shot back.

Graham didn't know how smart he was, but he nodded in response.

"So why haven't you gotten married?"

Clint's question caught Graham off guard. He took a deep breath, considering his answer. "Guess I never found the right woman," he said.

Clint nodded. "I found the right woman, but she up and left town fifteen years ago."

"For another man?"

"Nope. Hollywood."

"You mean you wanted to marry Dawn Smith?"

"We talked about it," Clint admitted, "but one day she took off to California and I went on to play ball for Tennessee."

"You must be bitter." The thought came out of his mouth before he realized it.

Clint shrugged. "Hell, no. Dawn had a lot of ambition. Look at what she's done."

Graham knew all about what small-town girl, Dawn Smith, had done with her ambition. He followed her career off and on, and in the last few weeks he looked up her name on the Internet. Dawn's official web site said she worked in a soap opera for five years and then graduated to sit coms. She was nominated for an Emmy, and had recently starred in her first motion picture. The girl from Legend, Tennessee, had become a movie star.

"You're a good man," Graham said, looking at Clint in a new way. "Did Dawn come tonight?"

"Sure thing. Haven't you noticed the crowd over by the bar?"

The group near the bar parted, and Graham caught a glimpse of his one-time steady. "I can't tell much about her from here."

"She's prettier than ever," Clint said with a touch of pride. Then in a confidential tone, he offered, "Divorced too."

Graham arched an eyebrow. "Love 'em and leave 'em?"

"Yep." Clint cleared his throat and lifted the bottle to his lips.

Because the ex-football player was strangely talkative, Graham pumped him again, "Whatever happened to her twin sister Jane?"

Clint tilted his head. "You didn't keep up with her?"

"No, we never had any contact after Dawn and I...well...you know."

That was a small evasion of truth. The fact was he had a whole lot of contact with Jane on graduation night after the ceremony. In the back seat of his dad's Chevy. It was their first time together. Their first and last.

Graham's pulse revved up at the surprisingly vivid memory. After that night, schoolwork and college frat life absorbed him. He moved to New York and joined a law firm, putting Dawn, Jane and the folks in Legend behind him.

"She's here," Clint said. "See her standing over there?"

Graham sought Jane out in the dim light, remembering how she'd reluctantly shared the job of yearbook editor with him. They fought like two boxers over every caption and picture. Graham smiled at the memory. It'd been

amusing to bait her. She'd taken everything so seriously. Not like her twin sister. No, Jane wasn't anything like Dawn.

Jane stood beside a man, but her posture was stiff and aloof, as if she didn't want to be with him. She wore a simple, but elegant blue dress with a high collar and short sleeves. Typical Jane. The smart twin. The one with as much natural reserve as beauty. There was something charming about the way she wore her blond hair in short, flirty curls.

"Who's she talking to?" Graham asked.

"Claudia's brother, Steven. See how he's putting the moves on her? Ever since his divorce, he's trying to get her to marry him."

So Jane wasn't married either.

"Hey, watch out. Here comes Claudia!" Following his warning, the big jock turned on his heels and departed.

Graham had time for one quick breath before Claudia Ridgeway, now Jones, descended on him like an avenging angel.