

# LOATHE AT FIRST SIGHT

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by Ellen Conford

"YOU ARE DRIPPING on my toes."

"I'm sorry. I was admiring you from afar, and I wanted to admire you from a-near. From afar you looked terrific."

"Oh, thanks a lot. Meaning, up close I look like a toad."

"That's not what I meant at all! You look good up close, too. I love your bathing suit."

"Then why do you keep staring at my toes?"

"It's that stuff you've got on them. What do you call that?"

"Nail polish."

"I know, I know. I meant, what colour is it?"

"Rosy Dawn. Look, what is this with my toes?"

"Rosy Dawn. That's kind of romantic. I would have thought it was just pink."

"Will you stop talking about my toes? What are you, weird or something?"

"No! Oh, boy, this whole conversation has gotten off on the wrong foot. Wrong foot—ha! Get it? Foot, toes?"

"Ha ha."

"Just a little humour to lighten up a tense situation. I thought you'd appreciate a good joke."

"I do appreciate a *good* joke."

"I just thought it was too early in our relationship to make personal comments about how great you look in a bathing suit."

"Our relationship? *What* relationship?"

"The one we're going to have."

"Oh really? Have you always been this unsure of yourself?"

"Have you always been this sarcastic? Look, I just wanted—"

"And besides, toes are personal. Personal comments about toes are just as—as personal as comments about how I look in a bathing suit."

"Well, all right, do you want me to tell you how I think you look in your bathing suit?"

"No. I'm really not interested in your opinion of how I look in my bathing suit."

"Okay, then. How do I look in mine?"

"Wet."

"Picture me dry."

"Please. I already had a nightmare last night."

"That's not very nice."

"Look, I'm sorry, but you just walk up to me, drip on my feet, and start raving about my toes and have the gall to make this incredible assumption that I'm going to be so devastated by your wit and charm—"

"And my good looks."

"—and your *modesty*, that I'll fall madly in love with you."

"Well, actually, I didn't expect you to fall madly in love with me in the first five minutes of our relationship."

"See, that's just what I mean! We don't have a relationship."

"I'm working on it. How'm I doing so far? Say, on a scale of one to ten."

"Minus three. Look, would you please move? You're standing in front of the sun and I'm going to have a big white stripe right in the middle of my back."

"Okay."

"I didn't mean for you to sit down. I meant for you to go away."

"But you didn't get a good look at me yet. All you could see when I was standing up was my knees. They're not necessarily my best feature. This way, you can look straight at me."

"Goody."

"Now, come on. I'm really pretty nice-looking."

"You're really pretty conceited."

"I'm just repeating what other people have told me. Some people think I look a lot like Burt Reynolds."

"Some people think the earth is flat."

"I'm getting this definite impression that you're not being dazzled by my wit and charm."

"How very observant of you."

"That's the first nice thing you've said to me."

"I was being sarcastic."

"I know, but I'm grasping at straws. I thought for sure if the wit and charm didn't work, I could always fall back on my good looks."

"You can fall back on your head, for all I care."

"This isn't going exactly as I planned it. Could we start all over again? Hi, there, my name's Alan. What's yours?"

"Hepzibah."

"... Hepzibah?... I see. And what do your friends call you?"

"Hepzibah."

"Uh, I don't want to insult you or anything, just in case your name really is Hepzibah, but I have this funny suspicion you're putting me on."

"Flurge."

"I beg your pardon."

"My last name. Flurge."

"*Hepzibah Flurge?*"

"Right."

"You're going to burst out laughing any minute, I can tell. Come on, look me straight in the eye and tell me your name is Hepzibah Flurge."

"My name is Hep—Hep—"

"I knew it! You can't even keep a straight face. You can't even say it... You know, you have beautiful eyes. What colour are they exactly?"

"Brown."

"I know, but there are little specks of something in them that—"

"Probably sand."

"Now, come on, don't go all cold and sarcastic on me again. We were doing so well a minute ago."

"I hadn't noticed."

"Sure, you were laughing and everything. Really sort of loosening up, know what I mean? You were right here; you wouldn't have missed it. What's your name, really?"

"Anne."

"There, that's better. Mine's Alan."

"You told me."

"I know, but I'm running out of ideas. I did all my best stuff already."

"That was your best stuff? You're in trouble."

"Well, help me out. What kind of a person are you to leave me floundering around for something to say like this? I mean, this is really embarrassing. The least you could do is hold up your end of the discussion."

"I didn't start this ridiculous conversation—if you can even call it a conversation. I don't see why I have to take any responsibility for keeping it up."

"What kind of an attitude is that? What if everybody felt that way? What kind of a world would this be?"

"Quiet."

"Boring."

"Peaceful."

"Not necessarily. If nobody communicated with anybody else there'd be wars all the time."

"There *are* wars all the time."

"... Uh, yeah. Well. Good point. Would you—um—like me to rub some suntan oil on your shoulders?"

"No, thank you."

"Would you like to rub some on mine?"

"Not particularly."

"Look, Anne, I'm getting desperate here. Where did I go wrong? Did I come on too strong?"

"Yes."

"A little heavy on the wit and charm?"

"Hey, I like wit and charm as much as the next person, but—"

"I overdid it."

"Yes."

"It was the toes, wasn't it? I really turned you off with that stuff about your toes."

"Yes."

"It was just what you call a conversational gambit. You know, an ice-breaker. I mean, not that I don't think your toes are extremely attractive—"

"Alan—"

"All right, all right, I swear I'll never mention your toes again. From this minute on, as far as I'm concerned, your toes don't exist. It's just—well, what *should* I have said?"

"What's wrong with hello?"

"Hello? Just hello? But what about after that? What happens after I say hello?"

"Who knows? If you don't try it you'll never find out."

"All right. Here goes. But I don't think this is going to work....  
Hello, Anne."

"Hello, Alan. How's the water?"

"Uh, it's very cold when you first go in, but it warms up after a while."

"A lot of things are like that, don't you think so, Alan?"

"I ... I think I see what you mean."

"I felt certain you would ..."