



An Innocent in Paradise

By Kate Carlisle

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Editorial Review

About the Author

Kate Carlisle writes for Harlequin Desire and is also the New York Times bestselling author of the Bibliophile Mystery series for NAL. Kate spent twenty years in television production before enrolling in law school, where she turned to writing fiction as a lawful way to kill off her professors. She eventually left law school, but the urge to write has never left her.

Kate and her husband live near the beach in Southern California where she was born and raised.

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Logan Sutherland was strolling toward the hotel lobby of the exclusive Alleria Resort when the jarring sound of shattering glass reverberated from the cocktail lounge.

"Price of doing business," Logan muttered. But he stopped and listened for another moment.

And heard nothing. Not a sound.

"Hell," he said, and checked his watch. The conference call was scheduled to start in fifteen minutes. He didn't have time for this. But the ominous silence made him change direction and head for the bar.

Logan and his twin brother, Aidan, had made their fortunes designing and operating exotic, upscale cocktail bars in highend hotels all over the world. So the sound of breaking glassware was rarely a cause for alarm. But in his experience, the breakage was invariably followed by raucous cheers, jeers and laughter. Never silence.

Silence meant something was wrong. And Logan Sutherland was not a man who allowed things to go wrong without doing something about it.

He walked into the casually elegant bar and noted that the sound level still hadn't risen, even though the place was busy and most of the tables were occupied by hotel guests having a good time. Cocktail waitresses and waiters moved swiftly from table to table, serving drinks and appetizers. The quiet was disconcerting.

A small group of his people were gathered in a knot at the far end of the long bar, all of them crouched on the floor. He approached the head bartender on duty. "What's going on, Sam?"

Sam flicked his chin toward the other end of the bar. "New cocktail waitress dropped a full tray of drinks."

"Why is it so quiet?"

Sam took a few seconds to study the drink station halfway down the long bar where two junior bartenders were efficiently refilling the drink orders. Then he turned and made eye contact with Logan. "We're all a little worried about her, boss."

"Why?" Logan glanced again at the small crowd. "Did she cut herself?"

He lifted a shoulder. "Naw, she's just a real sweet kid. It wouldn't be nice to laugh at her."

Logan frowned at the brawny former Marine, then turned to get a better look at the new employee.

The small group of servers and busboys picked up the last of the big chunks of broken glass and dispersed, heading back to their own stations. One waitress remained as a busboy swept the residual shards of glass into a dustpan. Then she knelt down and, with several bar towels, sopped up the rest of the liquid.

"Thank you so much, Paolo," the waitress said, and squeezed the busboy's arm affectionately. He took the clump of towels from her and she headed back to the drinks station. That's when Logan got his first look at the "real sweet kid." And felt a solid wall of heat almost knock him off his footing.

His *second* thought was: *Hope she's wearing sunblock*, because her skin was so pale and smooth and creamy.

His *first* thought had been vividly X-rated and not suitable for discussion in mixed company.

And none of that made him happy.

She was a classic redhead with a peaches-and-cream complexion and a light dusting of freckles across her nose. Thick, dark red hair tumbled down her back in rich, lustrous waves. In her official uniform of bikini top and filmy sarong, Logan couldn't help but notice she had a world-class butt and perfect breasts.

She was tall, a quality Logan preferred in his women—not that it mattered, since he didn't have time for or interest in a relationship right now. On the other hand, who said anything about a relationship? He could always make time for sex. Maybe he ought to rethink his schedule since staring at her was causing him to calculate how quickly it would take to get her into his bed.

She walked with the sort of poise that some tall women possessed naturally. That made the fact that she'd spilled a large tray of drinks even more baffling to him, since she didn't seem clumsy at all. On the contrary, she appeared confident and self-assured. Smart. Hard to believe she'd ever spilled anything in her life.

So what kind of game was she playing?

Logan thought of his tough bartender, Sam, calling her sweet and worrying about her sensitivities. Well, Sam wouldn't be the first man drawn in by a conniving, manipulative woman.

The woman in question finally noticed Logan and her eyes lit up as she smiled directly at him. Okay, she was a stunner for sure. Logan felt as if he were the only man in the room and understood how his burly bartender had turned into such a pussycat in her presence.

Her mouth was wide and sexy, her lips full and lush. Her eyes were big and green and twinkled with an open friendliness that seemed genuine. She'd probably been practicing that generous smile forever. If nothing else, it would certainly help her garner the big tips.

Of course, she wouldn't be getting many tips if she kept spilling the customers' drinks. And that's why he was here, lest he forgot.

Before he could step up and introduce himself, the two bartenders finished her drink order and called her over.

"Oh, thank you, guys," she said, her voice as appealing as her smile. "You're both so sweet."

Logan watched the experienced bartenders' faces redden at the simple compliment, just as the woman pulled a small notebook from her waistband and studied it for a moment. She slipped the notebook away, then began arranging the drinks carefully on the tray in some kind of circular order. When she was finished, she grabbed the tray with both hands and started to lift it. There was a sudden hush around the room as the large

tray bobbed awkwardly and the woman's eyes widened.

Without thinking, Logan rushed to her. He whisked the tray out of her hands, lifted it onto his shoulder and held it in place with one hand. Then he looked down at her. "Where's this going?"

"Oh, aren't you wonderful?" she said with another wide-eyed smile. "It goes right over here." She led the way to a four-top by the wall of windows overlooking the white-sand beach. She gestured with her hand. "These drinks are for Mr. and Mrs. McKee and their friends."

"Hey, doll," the older man said. "I told you I'd come and get those drinks for you, but it looks like you found yourself a helper there."

A guest of the Alleria resort was willing to get his own drinks for her? Okay, that was bad enough, but did this guest actually think Logan was the waitress's lackey? It was about time he and Ms. Clumsy had a long talk.

"Oh, Mr. McKee, thank you for offering," the waitress said, then turned and patted Logan's arm. "But all the servers here are so helpful that—"

"It's no problem at all, sir," Logan interrupted, lowering the drink tray onto the edge of the table. He quickly passed the drinks out, then said as affably as he could manage, "Enjoy your cocktails."

"You betcha, pal," Mr. McKee said and took a big sip of his banana daiquiri. "Man, these go down smooth."

"Here you go, sweetie," Mrs. McKee said, and tucked a fifty-dollar bill into the waitress's hand. "That's for all your trouble."

"Oh, my goodness," the waitress said, staring at the money, then back at her customers. "Thank you so much."

"No, thank *you*, doll." Mr. McKee winked. "You're a cutie-pie and we're just sorry we loaded you up with our orders."

She waved off the apology. "Oh, that's—" "Thank you, Mr. and Mrs. McKee," Logan interrupted. "Please enjoy your day." Then he grabbed the waitress's arm and led her gently but firmly away from the table. He stopped at the bar, where he dropped off the tray, then scooted her across the room and out the door.

"Wait," she protested, squirming against him. "You have to let me go. I can't leave the lounge right now. I'm working."

"We're going to have a little talk first," Logan said, smiling grimly as he led her down the hall toward his office.

"Stop," she insisted as she struggled to pull her arm from his grasp. "Honestly, who do you think you are?"

"At the moment I'm your employer," he said, glaring down at her. "But I don't expect that status to last much longer."

Grace cringed at his revelation. Of all the people to have rescued her from another spilled tray of drinks, why did it have to be one of the Sutherland brothers?

Before leaving for Alleria, Grace had done some cursory research on Logan and Aidan Sutherland. They'd

risen to the top of the surfing world in their teenage years, then parlayed their winnings into fancy nightclubs and bars all over the world. Rumor had it they'd won their first bar in a college poker game; but Grace didn't believe that story was anything more than an urban legend.

The most recent story she'd read about the Sutherland twins centered on them joining forces with their cousins, the Duke brothers, who owned a number of luxurious resorts on the West Coast.

Grace had seen photographs of the Sutherland men online, but those pictures were all action shots of the brothers surfing or sailing. None of them had shown how good-looking they were up close, nor had the photos given her even one, tiny warning of the disconcerting amount of physical power and dynamism the man striding next to her would exude in person.

Halfway down the hall, her new boss stopped at a set of double doors and flicked a plastic card through a security slide. He ushered her through the door and into a large, beautifully furnished hotel suite. An attractive sofa and several overstuffed chairs in muted shades of chocolatebrown and rich taupe were clustered at one end of the large room. The other half of the room contained a set of large, elegant office furniture along with all the usual equipment necessary to run a twenty-first-century office.

"This is where you work?" She turned around s...

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