



Stranded with the Tempting Stranger: The Executive's Surprise Baby

By Brenda Jackson, Catherine Mann

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Risky Business

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But as soon as Brandon met the beautiful heiress, the lines began to blur. Between the truth and the lies. Between her secrets and his. Between his ambition...and a chance to be loved. And as a storm gathered over the Caribbean, Brandon knew the reckoning was coming. And this time, winning could be the last thing he wanted.

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Editorial Review

About the Author

Brenda Jackson is a *New York Times* bestselling author of more than one hundred romance titles. Brenda lives in Jacksonville, Florida, and divides her time between family, writing and traveling. Email Brenda at authorbrendajackson@gmail.com or visit her on her website at brendajackson.net.

USA Today bestseller Catherine Mann has books in print in more than 20 countries with Desire, Romantic Suspense, HQN and other Harlequin lines. A five-time RITA finalist, she has won both the RITA and the Bookseller's Best Awards. Catherine resides in Florida with her aviator husband, their four children and a menagerie of pets. For more information, visit: <http://catherinemann.com>

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October

Cassie Sinclair-Garrison released an uneven breath when she rounded the corner in the lobby of her hotel. She stopped, totally mesmerized by the man standing at the counter to check in to the Garrison Grand-Bahamas. It had been a long time since any man had captured her attention like this one. He was simply gorgeous.

He stood tall at a height of not less than six-three with an athletic build that indicated he was a sportsman or someone who made it his business to stay in great physical shape. He was an American, she knew at once, studying his coffee-brown skin, his dark brown eyes and closely shaved head. And he wasn't here on business, she thought, noting the way he was immaculately dressed in a pair of dark brown trousers and a tan shirt that brought out the beautiful coloring of his skin.

She didn't know what, but there was something about him that demanded attention and from the way other women in the lobby were also staring, it was attention he was definitely getting.

Deciding she had more to do with her time than to practically drool over a man, Cassie pushed the button to the elevator that would take her to her office on the executive floor. It was an office that once belonged to her father.

Five years ago, when she was twenty-two, her father had made her manager and there hadn't been a time when he hadn't been pleased with the way she had handled things. That's why she wasn't surprised that upon his death he had left full ownership of the hotel to her. In doing so he had only confirmed what some of her employees had probably suspected all along—that she was John Garrison's illegitimate child.

A flutter of pain touched her heart as she thought of her parents. She stepped inside the elevator, glad it was

vacant because whenever she encountered these types of moments, she preferred being alone. Although she had tried putting on a good front over the past five months, it had been hard to first lose her mother in an auto accident and, little over a month later, lose her father when he'd died of a heart attack...although it was probably more of a broken heart.

She had wondered how he would be able to go on after her mother's death. The last time she had seen her father—just days before he passed when he had come to visit her—Cassie had seen the depths of pain in his eyes and she had wondered how he would get over the loss. He had said more than once that losing his Ava was like losing a part of him.

Even though he was a married man, that hadn't stopped him from falling in love with her mother, the beautiful and vivacious Ava Sinclair. And she had been John Garrison's true love for more than twenty-eight years.

According to her mother, she had met the wealthy and very handsome American in the States when he had been a judge and she a contestant in the Miss Universe beauty pageant as Miss Bahamas. Their paths had crossed a few years later, when he had visited the Bahamas to purchase land for this grand hotel he intended to build.

Although he had a family in Florida consisting of five kids, he was an unhappy man, a man who was no longer in love with his wife, but too dedicated to his children to walk away from his marriage.

Cassie hadn't understood their relationship until she was older, but it was beyond clear her parents had shared something special, something unique and something few people had. It was a love of a lifetime. Ava never made any demands on John, yet he had freely lavished her with anything and everything, and provided her and the child they had created with complete financial support.

Cassie knew that others who'd seen her parents together over the years had formed opinions on what the relationship was about. He was a married American and Ava was his Bahamian mistress. But Cassie knew their relationship was so much more than that. In her heart she believed they had been soul mates in the truest form. She had loved her parents deeply and they had loved her, a product of their love, and there hadn't been a day they hadn't let her feel or know it.

She had resented those times when her father would leave them to return to his family in Miami, a family she'd only found out about when she became a teenager. The truth had hurt, but then her mother and father had smoothed away the pain with the intensity of their love and had let her know that no matter what the situation was, the one thing that would never change or diminish was their love for her, as well as their love for each other. From that day forward, whether others did or not, Cassie understood and accepted her parents' unorthodox love affair.

She stepped off the elevator and walked into her office, stopping to smile at her assistant while picking up her messages off the woman's desk. "Good morning, Trudy."

"Good morning, Ms. Garrison."

Cassie liked the sound of that. She had begun using her father's last name within a week of his death. With both of her parents deceased, there were no secrets to protect and she had no reason to continue to deny herself the use of his name.

"Any additional messages?" she asked the older woman whom she had hired a few months ago.

"Yes. Mr. Parker Garrison just called and would like you to return his call."

Cassie forced the smile to stay on her face while thinking that no matter what Parker liked, he wouldn't be getting things his way since she wouldn't be returning his call. She could not forget the phone conversation they had shared nearly four months ago. He'd called within a week of the reading of John Garrison's will and he'd kept calling. Eventually, she had taken his call.

At the time she had been very aware that he, his siblings and mother had been shocked to discover at the reading of the will that John Garrison had an outside child. Of the five Garrison offspring, Parker had been the most livid because the terms of their father's will gave her and Parker equal controlling interest in Garrison, Inc., an umbrella corporation that oversaw the stocks and financial growth of all the Garrison-owned properties. He wasn't happy about it.

Their telephone conversation hadn't gone well. He had been arrogant, condescending and had even tried being intimidating. When he'd seen Cassie would not accept his offer to buy her out, he had done the unthinkable by saying she had to prove she was a Garrison, and had threatened her with a DNA test as well as the possibility of him contesting the will. Parker's threats had ticked her off and she was still angry.

"Ms. Garrison?"

Her assistant's voice recaptured her attention. The forced smile widened. "Thank you for delivering the message."

Cassie entered her office. She would think Parker would have more to do with his time these days. It didn't take long for news to travel over the hotel grapevine that the handsome and elusive playboy had gotten married. And not that she cared, but she'd also heard that another Garrison bachelor, Stephen, had gotten hitched, as well.

She had no intention of ever meeting any of her "siblings." She didn't know them and they didn't know her and she preferred things stayed that way. They had never been a part of her life and she had never been a part of theirs. She had a life here in the Bahamas and saw no need to change that.

As she sat behind her desk her thoughts shifted back to the guy she'd seen in the lobby. She couldn't help but wonder if he was married or single, straight or gay. She shrugged her shoulders knowing that it really didn't matter. The last thing she needed was to become interested in a man. Her man was the beautiful thirty-story building that was erected along the pristine shoreline of the Caribbean. And "her man" was a beautiful sight that took her breath away each time she entered his lobby. And she would take care of him, continue to make him prosper the way her father would want her to do. Now that her parents were gone, this hotel was the only thing she could depend on for happiness.

Brandon Washington glanced around the room he had been given, truly impressed. He had spent plenty of time at the Garrison Grand but there was something about this particular franchise that left him astonished. It was definitely a tropical paradise.

The first thing he'd noticed when he had pulled into the parking lot was that the structure was different from the sister hotel in South Miami Beach, mainly because it was designed to take advantage of the tropical island beach it sat on. And it was nested intimately among a haven of palm trees and a multitude of

magnificent gardens that were stocked with flowering plants.

The second was the warmth of the staff that had greeted him the moment he had walked into the beautiful atrium. They had immediately made him feel welcome and important.

And then it was his hotel room, a beautiful suite with a French balcony that looked out at the ocean. It had to be the most stunning waterscape view he'd ever seen.

Brandon was more than pleased with his accommodations. And since he planned to stay for a while, his comfort was of the utmost importance. He had to remind himself that this was not a vacation, but he'd come here with a job to do. He needed to uncover any secrets Cassie Sinclair-Garrison might have that could be used to persuade her to give up her controlling interest in Garrison, Inc., his most influential client. Not to mention that members of the family were close friends of his.

His father had been John Garrison's college friend and later his personal attorney for over forty years and Brandon had been a partner in his father's law firm. When his father was killed in a car accident three years ago, instead of transferring the Garrison business to a more experienced and older attorney, John had retained Brandon's firm, showing his loyalty to the Washington family and his faith in Brandon's abilities.

Brandon had known John Garrison all of his thirty-two years and he was a man Brandon had respected. And he considered Adam Garrison, one of John's sons, his very best friend. Now Brandon was here at the request of Parker and Stephen Garrison. It seemed John's illegitimate daughter refused to deal with the corporation in any way and had refused to discuss any type of a buyout offer with Parker.

Before resorting to a full-blown court battle, the two eldest brothers had suggested that Brandon travel to the Bahamas, assume a false identity to see if he could get close to Ms. Garrison and dig up any information on her present or her past, which would give them ammunition to later force her hand if she continued to refuse to sell her shares of Garrison, Inc. Another smart thing John had done was retain exclusive control of this particular hotel, the one Cassie had managed and now owned. No doubt it had been a brainy strategic move to keep his secrets well-hidden.

Brandon pulled his cell phone from his coat jacket when it rang. "Yes?"

A smile touched his lips. "Yes, Parker, I just checked in and just so you'll know, I'm registered under the name of Brandon Jarrett."

He chuckled. "That's right. I'm using my first and middle name since I want to keep my real identity hidden." A few moments later he ended his phone call with Parker.

Brandon began unpacking. He had brought an assortment of casual clothes since it was his intent to pose as a businessman who'd come to the island for a short but very needed vacation. That shouldn't be hard to do, because since John Garrison's death and his secrets had been revealed, Brandon had been working long hours with the Garrison family to resolve all the unwanted issues.

Contesting the will had been out of the question. No one wanted to air the family's dirty laundry. Doing so would definitely send John's widow, Bo-nita, over the edge. There were a number of people who would not sympathize with the woman, saying it was her drinking problem that had sent John into the arms of another woman in the first place and that he had stayed married to her longer than most men would have.

Then there would be others who would think that John's extramarital affair is what had driven the woman to drink. As far as Brandon was concerned, there was no way Bonita hadn't known about John's affair, given the amount of time he spent away from home. But from the look on her face during the reading of the will, she had not known a child had been involved. Now she knew, and according to Adam, his mother was hitting the bottle more than ever.

Brandon rubbed his chin, feeling the need of a shave. As he continued to unpack he knew that sometime within the next couple of days he would eventually cross paths with Cassie Sinclair-Garrison. He would make sure of it.

Users Review

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