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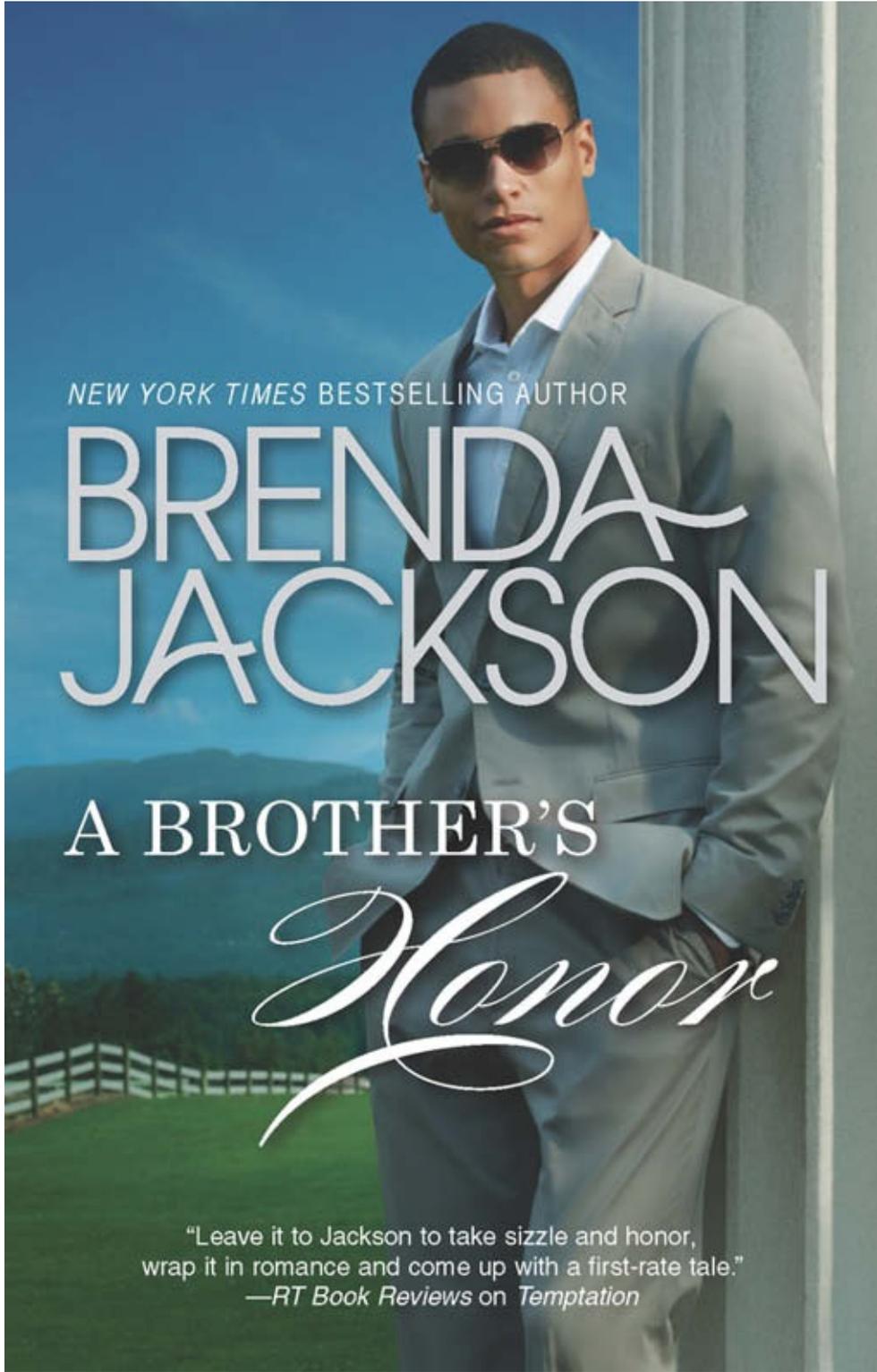
BRENDA JACKSON

A BROTHER'S

Honor

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wrap it in romance and come up with a first-rate tale."

—RT Book Reviews on *Temptation*



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The Granger brothers left behind their family's Virginia estate—and the bad memories it holds—years ago. But their dying grandfather's request brings them home: to a failing business, a legacy of secrets and a deathbed promise to make things right.

As the eldest brother, attorney Jace Granger is determined to take responsibility for Granger Aeronautics, his family's failing business. But the years of mismanagement seem impossible to untangle. As CEO, he hires a consultant to turn the company around. Smart, sexy Shana Bradford is the right person for the job—and the right woman to turn Jace's world upside down.

But the passion between them is jeopardized when old secrets begin to emerge. A woman from Jace's past suddenly reappears. And an explosive discovery changes everything Jace thinks he knows about his mother—and his father, who was convicted of her murder.

Jace Granger tried to leave his family history behind once before. But this time he needs to face the past...or risk losing his future.

Three brothers. One legacy. A lifetime of secrets.

Praise for the novels of

BRENDA
JACKSON

“Readers can’t deny that Jackson knows how to bring the heat, and more. Her characters are multidimensional, tantalizing and charming.”

—*RT Book Reviews* on *Texas Wild*,
4 ½ stars, Top Pick

“Brenda Jackson is the queen of newly discovered love... If there’s one thing Jackson knows how to do, it’s how to pluck those heartstrings and stir up some seriously saucy drama.”

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“This deliciously sensual romance ramps up the emotional stakes and the action with a bit of deception and corporate espionage....[S]exy and sizzling.”

—*Library Journal* on *Intimate Seduction*

“Jackson does not disappoint... first-class page-turner.”

—*RT Book Reviews* on *A Silken Thread*,
4 ½ stars, Top Pick

“Jackson is a master at writing.”

—*Publishers Weekly* on *Sensual Confessions*

**Brenda Jackson has written
over one hundred books featuring multicultural romances and strong, sexy
romantic heroes. The Grangers is her newest series
for Harlequin MIRA.**

Look for Brenda Jackson's next novel
in The Grangers series,

A SON'S PROMISE,

available June 2014.

BRENDA
JACKSON

A BROTHER'S

Honor

 HARLEQUIN® MIRA®

To the love of my life, my husband and best friend, Gerald Jackson, Sr.

To everyone who will be joining me
on the 2013 Cruise to Alaska. This one is for you!

To my Heavenly Father
who gave me the gift to write.

Be devoted to one another in brotherly love.
Honor one another above yourselves.
—*Romans 12:10*

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Prologue

“Foreman, has the jury reached a verdict?” the judge asked in the still, quiet courtroom, packed to capacity. The trial of the State of Virginia versus Sheppard Granger had lasted for five weeks, and the eight men and four women had deliberated for sixteen hours.

“Yes, we have, Your Honor.”

“Will you hand the verdict form to the court, please?”

Within seconds, the bailiff presented the form to the judge, who took a moment to read the document before handing it in turn to the clerk who faced those in the courtroom.

Sheppard Granger showed no emotion as the clerk began reading what would be his fate. At one point, he was tempted to glance over his shoulder to look at his three young sons—Jace, sixteen; Caden, fourteen; and Dalton, who would be turning twelve in a few days. He hoped and prayed that, no matter what the jury decided, they would believe he was an innocent man. There was no way he would have killed the mother of his beloved sons.

Instead, he listened as the clerk spoke the words... “Of the charge of first degree murder in the death of Sylvia Granger, we, the jury, find Sheppard Granger guilty.”

Sheppard suddenly felt his knees weaken, but he refused to go down, and he refused to glance back at his sons. His father, Richard Granger, would know what to do now. Richard would now become responsible for his grandsons, and he would be there for them since Sheppard would not.

The judge was talking, addressing the court. But whatever he was saying Sheppard couldn't hear for the pounding in his head. As far as Sheppard was concerned, nothing else mattered. Only one thought repeated itself in his head with blinding clarity—his life as he'd once known it was over.

PART I

We do not remember days; we remember moments.

–Anonymous

Chapter One

Fifteen years later

Hoping it wasn't obvious that he was watching the time, Jace Granger took a sip of his wine and looked straight ahead at the huge clock hanging on the wall, directly above the entrance of the upscale Los Angeles restaurant. He'd been there for exactly one hour and twelve minutes, and was biting at the bit to call it a night.

He appreciated his friend Alan Carter's concerns about his solitary life, but blind dates had never been Jace's thing, and he had known after the first ten minutes that he'd made a mistake by letting Alan talk him into one tonight. No doubt Angela Farlow was a looker—he would give her that, but so far it had been one hell of a night. For starters, she talked too damn much. She had a lot to say...a lot about practically nothing.

Jace took another sip of his wine and listened...or at least pretended to do so. The last couple of times he had tried interjecting his own thoughts and views, she had unabashedly cut them down, letting him know what she thought of any opinions other than her own.

Noticing a lull in the conversation, Jace shifted his gaze from the clock back to her and saw the sultry pout that touched her lips.

"Why do I get the feeling that I'm boring you?" she asked in a low tone.

Because you are, he was tempted to say. But being the gentleman that he was, instead he said, "On the contrary, I happen to find you anything but boring," plastering a smile on his face. "In fact, I find you simply fascinating." Now, that wasn't a lie. He doubted there were many women like her. Hell, he hoped not.

"Well," she said, smiling all over the place at the compliment. "I've talked enough about me. Now I want to hear about you. Alan tells me the two of you went to law school together and that, as a government attorney, you're in charge of making sure the great state of California stays on a straight and narrow path."

She rested her chin on her hands. "What made you want to work for the government instead of going into private practice? Alan said you graduated from UCLA at the top of your class."

Jace forced his body not to tense, something that usually happened whenever he was questioned about his decision to work in the public sector instead of the private, where he could have become a millionaire if he'd set his mind to it. Little did she know he had been groomed for just that kind of life and had intentionally walked away a long time ago.

His shoulders mimicked a careless shrug before giving her the same spiel he gave anyone who had the audacity to inquire. Briefly and thoroughly, with a not-so-smooth edge, he basically told her that he preferred working for the people instead of kissing asses for any amount of money. He really didn't expect people to understand and

didn't really give a damn if they didn't.

He took a sip of his drink and smiled inwardly. The woman was finally at a loss for words, and he understood her dilemma, honestly he did. She thought the same way his ex-wife did. Eve's belief had been that the more money you had, the happier you were. All he had to say to that theory was *bullshit*.

It didn't surprise him when his date suggested they end the evening. That was fine with him, since the last thing he wanted was to become involved with another woman who had the same mindset as his ex-wife.

An hour later, he was entering his condo, grateful the evening with Angela had ended and that his path wouldn't cross hers anytime soon. He figured she was probably on the phone with Alan at that very moment, giving him a piece of her mind about setting her up on a blind date with a man who evidently hadn't any plans of making anything of himself.

Jace pulled off his jacket and was about to take it to the closet and hang it up when his cell phone rang. He wondered if it was Alan calling him already. He checked caller ID and saw it wasn't Alan but his grandfather. It had to be past midnight in Virginia, and he wondered why the old man was calling so late.

"Yes, Granddad?"

"Jace?"

He frowned. It was not his grandfather's deep, authoritarian voice but that of a woman. A woman whose voice he recognized immediately as the family's housekeeper's. "Hannah?"

"Yes, it's me. You need to come home immediately."

His heart nearly stopped at the thought of returning there, a place he hadn't thought of as his home for years. "Why? What's wrong?"

"It's your grandfather. He's had a heart attack, and it doesn't look good. It's serious, Jace."

Jace drew in a deep breath. His strong, robust grandfather? Heart attack? But he knew Hannah. She had been housekeeper to the Grangers for years. She wasn't one for theatrics or drama. If she said it was serious, then it was. He rubbed his hand down his face. "All right, I'm on my way."

"What about your father, Jace? Can you get word to him?"

"Yes, I'll contact Warden Smallwood right away."

"All right. I tried calling Caden, but I couldn't leave a message. His voice mail box is full, and I have no idea how to reach Dalton. He changes phone numbers probably more than he changes his underwear," she quipped.

Jace couldn't help but smile. Hannah was still Hannah. "I'll get ahold of them, don't worry." He pushed to the back of his mind the memory of the heated argument between him and his brothers when they were together last year.

"But I am worried, Jace."

He knew she was and he could hear it in her voice. The usual no-nonsense tone was diluted with distress. Something that was uncommon for his grandfather's unflappable housekeeper. "Okay, just take it easy. We don't need you in the hospital, as well. Granddad's at St. Francis Memorial, right?"

"Yes, on the Ava Granger wing."

"Okay," he said, trying not to think about the fact that his grandfather was in the

part of the hospital that had been dedicated to Jace's grandmother over twenty years ago. Jace could remember that day well, especially the ceremony. They'd all been there. His grandfather, his brothers, his father...and his mother.

He immediately pushed the thought of his parents from his mind. To think about his mother meant remembering how she had died and that the law had decided his father had been the one responsible for ending her life.

"Jace, it will be good seeing you again, although I wish the circumstances of your coming home were different."

He wished the circumstances were different, too. "I'll catch the next available flight out, Hannah. Hold down the fort until I get there." He clicked off the phone and immediately called the airlines. He knew how to reach his brother Caden, but getting in touch with Dalton would be a challenge.

Moments later, after securing a flight, he went into the bedroom to pack.

Chapter Two

“Ladies and gentlemen, let’s give a round of applause for the man who has become one of the greatest saxophone players of all time, Caden Granger.”

Caden emerged on stage amid bright lights and faced the crowd that had packed the MGM Grand Garden Arena in Las Vegas. This was a musician’s dream come true and a testimony that he had arrived. It seemed only yesterday when his first gig out of college had been at a small local watering hole in Austin. At the time, he’d been part of a band—The Depots.

The group disbanded a few years ago when most of the members decided to enter the private sector after marrying and starting families. Only Caden and two others continued to pursue their dreams, and now all three had become successful in their own right. Royce Billingslea was lead drummer with Unexpected Truth, a rock group whose last two records hit number one on the pop charts, and Robert Tyndale and his guitar were the opening act for Beyoncé.

Caden smiled for his audience before lifting the sax to his mouth to belt out the first soulful number and get them in the groove. Then he would play a string of medleys to loosen them up before ending with several numbers that would have them not only letting their hair down but getting out of their shoes, as well.

He loved this. Performing. Stimulating the crowd while he himself became energized. Being on stage was always invigorating. Never a dull moment. And the ladies who paid top dollar for front-row seats were determined to make it worthwhile. A real kick to the ego...if you were a man who needed it. Luckily, he didn’t. However, that didn’t mean he didn’t appreciate their efforts in getting his attention. Whether it was wearing tops that showed more than an ample amount of cleavage, sitting with their legs wide-open, proudly flashing the fact they’d left their panties at home, or boldly licking their lips and swirling their tongues in a way that gave him more than an idea of what they’d like to do with their mouths if given the chance.

Unfortunately, they would be disappointed to know that when he played his sax, he tuned all of them out since his focus was on his music. Everything else became secondary. His music was and always would be his primary focus.

And it was only at this time that he allowed himself to be overcome with the one emotion he didn’t want to feel until now. The people who crowded the MGM Garden Arena were only listening to the music. However, he knew the unsung lyrics spoke of a pain that wouldn’t go away. It was pain that had been a part of his life for nearly fifteen years.

He would give anything...everything...to feel an ounce of his previous happiness. That was a state that eluded him at every turn, and if the way his life was going was any indication, it wouldn’t be anything he found anytime soon. He knew it and accepted it, but that didn’t make it right.

His life of happiness had ended the day his father had been locked up for a crime he

didn't commit. No matter how many others believed differently, he knew Sheppard Granger was an innocent man, but he just couldn't prove it.

Then there had been his teen years that had been snatched away from him—he and his brothers had been ostracized by people they'd known most all their lives. People hadn't wanted their children to be friends with the sons of a criminal. And last but not least there was Shiloh, who had caused him the greatest pain of all.

So he played the music that went with his songs of lost love, lost friends and elusive happiness. The music always started out this way for him. Low-key with a melody that he felt all the way in his bones. But then it began stirring his soul, seeping through his bloodstream and becoming a cleanser, ridding his mind of so many painful thoughts. And as he continued to play his music, he found a semblance of peace from a past he couldn't forget.

* * *

“You deliberately egged her on.”

“Excuse me?” Caden asked the woman who'd rounded on him. Chin up, spine straight, Rena Crews's pupils flared with the look of a woman totally pissed. Caden had seen that look before, and frankly, he was getting tired of it.

He had brought Rena on as a guitarist in his four-piece backup band last year. The ensemble would join him on stage for a couple of songs midset. She was a damn good musician, and he admired her talent. What he didn't like was her possessiveness.

They were lovers, and as far as he was concerned, that was all they were. She knew that, because he'd told her more than once that he wasn't married to anyone, nor was he involved in a serious relationship. She claimed she understood, and if that was the case, then why the drama?

She crossed her arms over her chest. “That woman who was sitting in the front row, seat ten. You know the one I'm talking about.”

“Yes. What about her?”

“She had no right to sit there and all but strip in front of you. She unbuttoned her blouse nearly to the waist.”

Caden lifted a brow. “Is that why you were off-key?”

He saw her flinch and knew his observation had been a direct hit. Rena was a perfectionist, good at what she did. Being off-key even for a second wasn't acceptable to her.

“Anyone would have...considering the circumstances.”

“I disagree. Neither Roscoe, Salem nor I were distracted. Only you.”

She was scowling when she said, “But surely you understand why.”

No, he didn't, and he was a little confused as to why she thought he would. “If there had been a need, Rena, security would have handled it. The only thing I understand is what I assumed you understood, as well. We were lovers for a while and nothing more.”

She lifted her chin at an angle that more than told him she was pretty pissed. “Were lovers?”

“Yes. *Were* lovers.” He was letting her know that their affair was officially over, a thing of the past. “I told you in the beginning where I stood when it came to serious

involvements or women who were looking for a commitment. You accepted my position.” Or so she’d claimed.

He rubbed his hand down his face, not believing he was having this conversation with her. It wasn’t as if he considered himself a playboy or anything; he just didn’t need or want a steady woman in his life for this very reason. It would take a special woman to put up with the long hours of practice, weeks of touring and groupies that came with those things. And then there was the fact that he didn’t want to share himself with anyone...other than in the bedroom.

She broke eye contact with him to snap closed her guitar case. “So now I know where you stand.”

“You should have known all along, Rena. So things end here and now. We go back to the way things were in the beginning. You stay in your bed, and I stay in mine.”

He paused a second and then added, “And what I do in mine and with whom is none of your business.”

He saw a flash of anger in her eyes, and when she started walking away, he fought back the feeling that he was behaving like an asshole. But he immediately convinced himself there was no reason for him to feel that way, since he’d told her up front how things were between them.

As soon as the door closed shut behind her, a little more forcibly than necessary, his cell phone went off. It was his private number. Few people had it.

Caden quickly pulled the phone from his back pocket and furrowed his brow when he saw it was Jace. It was unusual for his brother to call at this hour. Jace knew the best time to catch him was early in the mornings, before he headed out for the gym.

“Jace?” he said, after clicking on the call. “What’s up?”

“Hannah just called. It’s Granddad. He’s had a heart attack.”

Chapter Three

Dalton Granger sat by the bed, leaned back, stretched his legs out in front of him and sipped his wine while gazing at the naked woman. Lady Victoria Bowman had her curvy English ass reclining in bed, waiting for him to get a second wind.

If he didn't know better, he'd wonder just what meds she'd taken, since it had been one orgasm after another since he got here. But he did know better. Victoria cared too much for her body to ever use anything that would eventually harm it.

Dalton couldn't help but smile. He was twenty-seven to her forty-seven, and if she thought she'd gotten the best of him, she had another thought coming. Next time around, she would be the one getting her next wind and not him. He would guarantee it.

He took another sip of wine and continued to look at her. She was an extraordinary beauty with a figure that drew envious looks from much younger women. It was the norm for them to get together whenever he was in London, and it seemed over the past year that his business interests had brought him here a lot.

He glanced around the bedroom, staring at all the elegance around him. He bet that bedspread alone had cost a few thousand. The daughter of a wealthy businessman, Victoria was used to the best life had to offer and had grown up not expecting any less. *So had he.*

The tragedies of life had spared her but not him...or the entire Granger family, for that matter. His brothers were doing okay. Jace was an attorney out in L.A., and Caden was a musician, performing somewhere in the States. They got together at least once a year, but the last time, around September of last year, hadn't been pretty.

Caden and his group had been in Paris performing, and it was decided that Dalton and Jace would join him there. Things had been going great until that last night when Jace had suggested they surprise their grandfather and go home for the holidays.

Home?

Now that was a damn joke. He hadn't thought of Sutton Hills, the Granger estates in Virginia, as home since the day he'd left for college. He was eighteen at the time and had no reason to return. He and his grandfather had never gotten along, and there was no need to pretend they had.

And then there was the fact that the old man had made sure Dalton hadn't been able to touch his trust fund when he'd turned twenty-five like his brothers, claiming Dalton was too much of a playboy and would lose every cent within a year. If Richard Granger expected that to keep him down, he'd been wrong. Instead, Dalton had pushed himself, determined never to have to go to the old man for anything. He'd excelled in sports and had gone to the NFL straight from college. The signing fee alone had been nice, and the two-year stint had led to lucrative endorsement contracts.

Okay, he would admit he'd almost proven his grandfather right by nearly losing it all through a few shady investments and living in the fast lane. But in the end, he'd

managed to pull his shit together and become the self-made billionaire that he was.

“Are you going to sit over there for the rest of the night, Dalton?”

He chuckled and slowly rose to his feet. Like Victoria, he was as naked as the day he was born. “And just what has you in such a horny state, Victoria?” he asked, sliding his naked body back in bed beside hers.

Instead of answering, she glanced away. But not before he saw the sheen of tears in her eyes. “Victoria?” he asked softly, pulling her into his arms. They went back a long way. Sometimes he thought too long. Three years ago, almost down on his luck, he had met her father at a party while in London. Stuart Hunter, Earl of Falmouth, was nothing short of a financial genius.

For some reason, the old man took a liking to Dalton and invited him to one of his seminars. A year later, Dalton became the owner of more than twenty million in investment properties, including a number of apartment complexes in Paris and several shopping malls in Switzerland and the United States.

Victoria looked back at him and he saw even more tears. “It’s Derek. Father told me today he heard Derek is remarrying,” she said in a broken voice.

“I see.” And he did, more than he cared to. He knew that although five years ago she had divorced the bastard for screwing around on her, Victoria was still in love with the man.

“I gave him twelve years of my life, Dalton, and I thought they were good ones. I assumed our marriage was solid. He showed me in the worst possible way that it was not. And then to make matters worse, the woman is young enough to be his daughter,” she added snippily.

He decided now might not be a good time to remind her that she was old enough to be his mother. *His mother*. He pushed the painful memories of his mother and father away...and tightened his hold on Victoria. “Forget him, Victoria. He’s caused you nothing but pain. You deserve better.”

He’d told her that a number of times before. So had Stuart. But she refused to let go of a love that evidently controlled her heart. He couldn’t imagine loving anyone that much and that deeply.

“I tried forgetting him, Dalton.”

“But not hard enough,” he said with irritation in his voice. He thought of everything she had going for her and figured she didn’t need this drama. Hell, when it came to her, he couldn’t help but feel protective. They weren’t just occasional lovers; they were friends.

In a smooth move, he shifted their bodies to ease her on her back and glide between her legs. “I promise not to dwell on that million I lost last week if you promise not to think about that prick of an ex-husband of yours.”

She looked up at him, eyes widened. “You lost a million dollars? Does Father know?”

“No, and I don’t plan to tell him. I had it to lose, Victoria. Besides, I don’t want to hear one of his damn lectures.”

She nodded. “All right. Mum’s the word.”

He lowered his mouth, ready to take hers, when his cell phone went off. He wanted to ignore it but recognized Jace’s ring. His brother never called him at this hour just to shoot the bull. Something had to be wrong.

Victoria had seen the concerned look on his face and had reached over to grab the phone. She handed it to him. "I think you should take this."

He thought so, too. He clicked on, putting the phone on speaker. "What's up, Jace?"
"It's Granddad. He had a heart attack, and we're needed at home."

Dalton shifted off Victoria to ease back against the pillow. "And who the hell are we?"

"Damn it, Dalton. This isn't the time to act like an ass. Hannah called. It's serious."
"And I should care...why?"

Jace didn't say anything for a minute and then in an angry tone, he said, "Because he's your grandfather."

Dalton hadn't meant for those words to affect him, but they did. "The old man never cared about me and wouldn't care one way or the other if I were there or not. Everyone knows you were his favorite, like Caden was Dad's. I only had..." A lump formed deep in his throat when he finished by saying, "Mom."

He forced a smile through all the painful memories that suddenly emerged. Yes, he had been his mother's favorite. He'd known it, and so had his brothers. But he had been the youngest, so it stood to reason he'd found a special place in Sylvia Granger's heart.

"You won't let things die, will you? You like holding on to crap," Jace accused.

Yes, he did, mainly because years ago he'd decided to never allow anything or anyone get close enough to hurt him again, and clinging to crap made sure there was distance. As far as Dalton was concerned, he'd already lost both parents, so losing the old man wouldn't destroy him.

"Look, Dalton, my plane is boarding now. I'm on my way to Virginia. I got word to Dad through the warden and I talked to Caden a few moments ago. He's meeting me at the hospital, St. Francis Memorial."

"Just keep me posted."

"Is that all you got to say?" Jace asked angrily.

"Yes. Goodbye, Jace." And then he clicked off the phone.

Victoria took it out of his hand and placed it back on the nightstand. "You should go, Dalton."

He frowned at her. "Why?"

"Because he is your grandfather."

His frown deepened. He had confided in her years ago, so she knew his family history. The good, the bad and the ugly. "And?"

"And if you think what he did to you all those years ago, denying you access to your trust fund until your thirtieth birthday, was so wrong, then go and let him see that in spite of what he did, you became a huge success."

She paused a moment and then asked softly, "He doesn't know, does he?"

Dalton shook his head. "No." In fact, he doubted even his brothers knew of the vast amount of his wealth. His family assumed he was an American gigolo in England living off women.

"Then maybe it's time he did, before it's too late."

He shook his head. "It doesn't matter."

"I think it does."

He bit back a retort, one that would have burned the hell out of her ears. "You're