



## The Dangerous Jacob Wilde (The Wilde Brothers Book 1)

By Sandra Marton



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The Texan ranching grapevine is legendary, so Addison McDowell has heard all about Jacob Wilde's shameless past—and his scarred, solitary present. But her only focus is her future—which won't include this impossibly arrogant man!

Addison is no Texan wallflower—when Jake starts a fight, she's more than capable of finishing it! However, a searing attraction to a man she knows cannot love her back? *That* she has no idea how to handle....



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### Editorial Review

#### About the Author

Sandra Marton is a best-selling author for Harlequin Presents. Her stories all feature the sexy, gorgeous, complex, tough on the outside but tender on the inside Alpha heroes she loves to create. A four-time RITA finalist, Sandra has won eight Romantic Times Reviewers' Choice Awards for Best Harlequin Presents of the Year and she's been honored with Romantic Times' Career Achievement Award for Series Romance. Sandra lives in Connecticut with her husband.

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All his life, Jake Wilde had been a man women wanted and men envied.

At sixteen, he was a football hero. He had his pilot's license. He dated the Homecoming Queen...and all the princesses in her court, one at a time, of course, because he had scruples—and because, even then, he understood women.

He was smart, too, and ruggedly good-looking, enough so that some guy had once stopped him on the street in Dallas to ask if he'd ever considered heading east to sign as a model.

Jake almost decked him until he realized it wasn't a come-on but a serious offer. He thanked him, said, "No," and could hardly wait to drive his truck back to his family's enormous ranch so he could laugh about it with his brothers.

In a word, life was good.

Time blurred.

College. Three years of it, anyway. Then, for reasons that made sense at the time, he'd enlisted.

One way or another, all the Wildes had served their country, Travis as a hotshot fighter pilot, Caleb as an operative in one of those alphabet-soup government agencies nobody talked about. For Jake, it had been the army and a coveted assignment, flying Blackhawk helicopters on dangerous missions.

Then, in a heartbeat, everything changed.

His world. His life. The very principles that had always defined him.

And yet—

And yet, some things did not change.

He hadn't quite realized that until a night in early spring as he tooled along a pitch-black Texas road, heading for home.

Jake scowled into the darkness.

Correction.

He was heading for the place where he'd grown up. He didn't think of it as home anymore, didn't think of any place as home.

He'd been away four long years. To be precise, four years, one month and fourteen days.

Still, the road seemed as familiar as the back of his hand.

So had the drive from the Dallas-Fort Worth airport.

Fifty miles of highway, the turn onto Country Road 227, the endless length of it bordered on either side by fence posts, the cattle standing still as sentinels in the quiet of night and then, almost an hour later, the bashed-in section of fence that seemed to have always marked the juncture where a nameless dirt road angled off to old man Chambers's spread.

And he'd only stopped to check for IEDs once.

A record.

Jake made the turn onto the road, even after all these years automatically steering the '63 Thunderbird around the pothole by the bashed-in fence that marked the Chambers boundary. It was on the old man's land, which was why nobody had filled it in.

"Don't need nobody messin' with my property," Elijah Chambers would mumble if anyone was foolish enough to suggest it.

Jake's father despised the old guy but then, the General despised anybody who wasn't into spit and polish.

Even his own sons.

You grew up with a four-star father, you were expected to lead a four-star life.

Caleb used to say that when they were kids. Or maybe it had been Travis.

Maybe it had even been him, Jake thought, and came as close to a smile as he had in a very long time, but he squelched it, fast.

A man learned to avoid smiling when the end result might scare the crap out of small children.

Jake drummed his fingers against the steering wheel.

Maybe his best move was to turn the car around and head for...

Where?

Not D.C. Not the hospital. If he never saw another hospital in his lifetime, it would be too soon. Not the base or his town house in Georgetown. Too many memories and besides, he didn't belong on the base or in D.C. anymore, and he'd sold the town house, signed the papers just yesterday.

The truth was, he didn't belong anywhere, not even here in Texas and absolutely not on the half million acres of rolling hills and grassland that was *El Sueno*.

Which was why he had no intention of staying very long.

His brothers knew it and were doing their best to talk him out of leaving.

"This is where you belong, man," Travis had said.

"This is your home," Caleb had added. "Just settle in, take it easy for a while, get your bearings while you figure out what you want to do next."

Jake shifted his weight, stretched his legs as much as he could. The Thunderbird was a little cramped for a man who stood six foot three in his bare feet, but you made sacrifices for a car you'd rebuilt the summer you were sixteen.

Caleb made it sound easy. it wasn't.

He had no idea what he wanted to do next, not unless it involved turning back time and returning to the place where it had stopped, in a narrow pass surrounded by mountains that needled into a dirty gray sky....

"Stop it," he said, his voice sharp in the silence.

None of that.

He was going to spend a couple of days at the ranch. See his sisters. His brothers. His father. Then he'd take off.

Seeing his sisters would be great, as long as they didn't do anything stupid like tear up. The General? That would be okay, too. He'd probably give him a pep talk and as long as it didn't go on forever, he'd survive it.

As for his brothers...

To hell with it. There was nobody here to see what passed for a smile on his scarred face and the simple truth was, thinking about Caleb and Travis always made him smile.

The Wilde brothers had always been close. Played together as little kids, got into scrapes together as teens.

For as long as any of them could remember, they'd always loved the same things. Fast cars. Beautiful women. Trouble, with a capital *T*.

Peas in a pod, their sisters teased. Half sisters—the General had been married twice and the brothers and sisters had different mothers—and it was true.

Peas in a pod, for sure.

They were still close, even now, otherwise they wouldn't have been able to talk him into this visit—

Except, he'd done it on his own terms.

Well, more or less.

They'd wanted to send a jet for him.

"We have two of the damned things at *El Sueno*," Travis had said. "Hey, you know that better than we do. You're the guy who bought them, supervised their interior design, that whole bit. Why fly commercial if you don't have to?"

Why, indeed?

The part Travis hadn't mentioned was that Jake hadn't only bought the Wilde planes, he'd piloted them. Not now.

A pilot with one functional eye wasn't a pilot anymore, and the thought of returning home as a passenger on a jet he'd once flown was more than he figured he could handle.

So he'd told his brothers he didn't know when he'd be able to leave, blah, blah, blah, and finally, they'd eased off.

"It'll be simpler all around if I just get in Friday evening and rent a car."

As if, he thought now, and smiled again.

He'd been paged as soon as he stepped into the Dallas-Fort Worth airport. He'd considered ignoring the page but finally he'd gritted his teeth and marched up to the arrivals desk.

"Captain Jacob Wilde," he'd said briskly. "You've been paging me."

The clerk behind the counter had her back to him. She'd turned, professional smile in place.

And blanched.

"Oh," she'd stammered, "oh."

It had taken all his determination not to tell her that, yeah, despite the eye patch, she was looking at a face that was better suited to Halloween.

He had to give her credit. She'd recovered, fast. Got back her phony smile.

"Sir," she'd said, "we have something for you."

Something for him? What? It had better not be what some of the guys in the hospital had told him about, a welcoming committee of serious-faced civilians, all wanting to shake his hand.

No.

Thank God, it hadn't been that.

It had been a manila envelope.

Inside, he'd found a set of keys, directions to a particular parking garage.

And a note, his brothers' names scrawled at the bottom.

*Did you really think you could fool us?*

They'd left him his old Thunderbird to drive home.

It had been a crazy thing to do.

A damned crazy thing, indeed, Jake thought, and swallowed past a sudden tightness in his throat.

The car had made the miles through the endless expanse that was North Texas easier. .

And, suddenly, there it was.

The wide gate that marked the northernmost boundary of *El Sueno*.

Jake slowed the car, then let it roll to a stop.

He'd forgotten what it was like, seeing that huge wooden gate, the weathered cedar sign that spelled out *El Sueno*—The Dream—in big bronze letters.

It was all the same, except for the fact that the gate stood open.

His sisters' idea, he was certain, a sweet way lissa, Em and Jaimie had thought of to welcome him and remind him that this was his home. They'd be hurt when they realized home was the last place he wanted to be but he didn't see any way around it.

He had to keep moving.

He stepped hard on the gas and drove through the open gate, a rooster tail of Texas dust pluming out behind him.

He wouldn't even have come this weekend, except he'd run out of excuses.

"Yeah. Well, I'll see what I can do," Jake had replied, and Caleb had said, very calmly, fine, good plan, and if he decided that what he *couldn't* do was come home for a visit then, by God, he and Travis would have no choice but to fly to D.C., hog-tie him and drag his sorry ass home.

For all he knew, they would have.

Jake had thought it over and decided it was time to show his face—and wasn't that one hell of an expression to use, he thought grimly.

It wouldn't come as a surprise to his family. They'd all been at the hospital, waiting, when the transport plane first brought him back to the States. His sisters, his brothers, even the General, reminding everybody he was John Hamilton Wilde, *General John Hamilton Wilde*, United States Army, and he damned well wanted a private room for his wounded son and the attention of the best surgeons at Walter Reed.

Jake had been too out of it to argue but as the days and ...

## **Users Review**

### **From reader reviews:**

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