



Whispered Promises (Madaris Family Novels Book 2)

By Brenda Jackson



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When Halston Parker calls his daughter Caitlin to his deathbed, she's shocked to discover that her ex-husband, Dex Madaris, has been summoned as well. It's been four years since Caitlin felt the heat of Dex's touch, the urgency of his kisses and the promise of an everlasting love that never was. As a flood of bittersweet memories warms a cold and lonely night, Halston's real motive for the unexpected reunion comes to light. As does the daughter Dex never knew existed, a secret Caitlin has kept too long from the only man she's ever loved. A secret she fears Dex will never forgive.

...Deserves a second chance

Despite the past, Caitlin and Dex cannot resist the attraction, or fight their hunger to renew a once-in-a-lifetime passion they thought they'd lost forever. As each learns a lesson in faith and trust, they discover that no heartache, no betrayal, is strong enough to withstand the enduring power of true love.



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Editorial Review

About the Author

No Bio

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"Girl, take a look at the brother who just walked in."

"He's definitely a good-looking man."

"A real work of art."

"Handcrafted in all the right places."

"I wonder who's the lucky sister meeting him here."

"Wished it was me."

Feminine whispers rippled through the restaurant as a number of heads turned, and admiring eyes glanced toward the man entering the establishment.

Dex Madaris was oblivious to the attention he was getting. His gaze roamed the room before zeroing in on the dance floor. A few couples were dancing, locked in each other's embrace, slowly moving to the soft sound of the jazz music being played. No doubt they were caught up in their own private world, sharing whispered promises of love like he and Caitlin had once done.

Caitlin.

He took a deep breath. Everyone was entitled to at least one mistake in life, and Caitlin had been his.

"Welcome to Sisters. Will you be dining alone?"

A soft voice broke through Dex's reverie. He glanced down into a hostess's smiling face.

"I'm meeting my brother here. I believe he made reservations."

"What's the name?"

"Madaris."

The woman's smile widened. "So you're Clayton's brother?"

Dex raised a brow. "Yeah, one of them. I gather you know Clayton." It was more a statement than a question. He knew there weren't too many females in Houston who didn't know his younger brother, the confirmed bachelor.

A soft chuckle erupted from the woman's throat. "Oh yes, I know Clayton."

He slanted her a curious look, not failing to notice the light dancing in the depths of her dark eyes. He couldn't help wondering just how deep her acquaintance with his brother went.

"Clayton hasn't arrived yet, but if you'll follow me, I'll show you to your table."

She led the way to a table overlooking downtown Houston. Sitting down, Dex couldn't help noticing the number of females that were either dining alone or together in groups.

Sisters.

It suddenly dawned on him the connection between the name of the restaurant and the number of women that were there. Although quite a few men were in attendance, they were outnumbered by the women two to one. Evidently this restaurant was a meeting place where the sisters came to hang out and bond.

"Would you like to order now, or do you want to wait until Clayton gets here?"

"I'll wait."

"All right." A grin curved the woman's lips. "Clayton has told me a lot about you."

Dex gave her a dry look. "Really? And just what did he tell you?" Evidently, Clayton hadn't told her just how much Dex enjoyed his privacy.

"He said you're a workaholic and somewhat of a loner." Dex moved his shoulders in a noncommittal shrug. A workaholic and a loner. He knew in all honesty there was more than a little truth to Clayton's claim. Since his divorce from Caitlin four years ago, he had drowned himself in his work. He'd volunteered for longer hours and had taken on projects other geologists with Remington Oil hadn't wanted to be bothered with. Since returning to the States from Australia, he had formed his own company, Madaris Explorations, almost a year ago. He worked day and night to assure its success, and to prevent his mind from idle wandering to the past. The memories were too painful, and work, he'd discovered, was the best antidote for a distracted mind.

The waitress had said something. "What?" Dex shook himself out of his distraction and back into awareness.

"I said Clayton's here. He just walked in. I'll be back to take your order."

Dex glanced around and watched with amusement as Clayton stopped at a number of tables to greet the ladies. Dex shook his head as he reflected on just how different the three Madaris brothers were. Justin, his older brother by eighteen months, was considered the warm, loving, sensitive one. After suffering the pain of losing his first wife nearly twelve years ago, he was a happily married physician living near Dallas.

Dex knew that he himself was often viewed as a true-blue Scorpio man—deep, complex, intense and as serious as a heart attack. He was the Madaris not to cross.

Baby brother Clayton, two years younger, was a prominent attorney here in Houston and a womanizer of the third degree. Outgoing and friendly, the only time he was completely serious was in the courtroom. Unfortunately he was also a notorious busybody. He acted as if it was his God-given right to stick his nose into his brothers' affairs whenever he felt it was necessary.

"Sorry I'm late," Clayton said, sitting down. A mischievous grin played at the corners of his mouth. "So what do you think of this place? Have you ever seen so many gorgeous sisters under one roof before?"

The glint in Clayton's eyes confirmed Dex's suspicion that his brother was up to something. "No, can't say that I have."

Clayton leaned back in his chair. "Did you get the chance to check out any of the ladies?"

Dex decided to sidetrack Clayton's question. "And how was your day?"

"It was just another day. And don't change the subject. Did you get the chance to check out any of the ladies?"

"No."

"But you will."

Dex gave an exasperated sigh as he picked up his menu. "Maybe."

Clayton rolled his eyes. "Can't you get excited about anything other than rock formations and soil samples?"

Dexter Madaris stared long and hard at his brother. "Like I said, maybe."

Clayton snorted in frustration. "You're a hopeless case, Dex."

"Does that mean you're finally giving up on me?" Clayton chuckled. "It would serve you right if I did. But I won't let you off that easily. When was the last time you were with a woman?"

Dex raised a brow. "That is none of your business."

A burst of laughter exploded from Clayton's throat. "Hey, man. Come on. You can level with me. I'm blood, remember," he said when his laughter had subsided to a chuckle. "It's been that long, huh?"

Dex grinned and shook his head. "The last time for me, I'm sure, was probably not as recent as for you."

"Probably not," Clayton responded, scanning the menu.

"So what's the problem?"

"There isn't one. You may find this hard to believe, but there're more important things in life than sex."

"Really?" Clayton exclaimed in a tone of total disbelief.

"Name one."

Hearty laughter escaped from Dex's lips. It was a rare occurrence. "Now I happen to think you're the one who's a hopeless case."

Clayton smiled. "If I am, you better believe I'm definitely a very satisfied one. How about letting me fix you up with Cocoa over there? She's just what you need."

Dex's gaze followed Clayton's to the lone diner sitting across the room. The attractive woman was smiling at him. The meaning behind her smile, and the look she was giving him, were obvious. But he refused to acknowledge or to accept her open invitation. "Thanks, but I'll pass."

Clayton looked intently at Dex. "When will you bury the past?"

"I have."

"I don't think so. You're still carrying a torch for Caitlin." Dex gave Clayton a scathing look. "I hate to disappoint you, bro, but you're wrong."

"Am I?"

"Yes, you are. Caitlin's history."

"Then prove it. Let me introduce you to Cocoa."

"Clayton..." he began.

"You need a woman, Dex, and Cocoa is just the person for you. She'll make you think about something else besides work. Don't you know that all work and no play makes Dex a dull boy?"

Dex frowned. "Dull, huh? Then it's a good thing I won't be wasting Hot Chocolate's time."

"Her name's Cocoa, and she has a knack for undulling people."

"Yeah, I bet she does. Maybe some other—"

Dex suddenly stopped talking when his ears picked up the sound of the music being played. It was the song that had been playing the last time he and Caitlin had danced together. Even after four years, he could still remember the warm, soft feel of her in his arms; her body so close to his as he held her tight, not ever wanting to let go.

"Dex? Is something wrong?"

Dex took a deep, calming breath before answering, forcing the memory to pass. "No, there's nothing wrong. Let's go ahead and order. I need to make a stop by the office tonight. There's some work I need to finish up."

Long hours and hard work helped him to forget the things he didn't want to remember.

200 miles away

Caitlin Madaris stood near the window gazing at the beauty of the skyscrapers that spanned the moonlit sky.

In the distance below, specks of light could be seen reflecting from the blue waters of the San Antonio River.

A tremor shuddered through her as she desperately tried to appreciate the night's allure. It was useless. Her thoughts were miles and miles away. Drawing in a deep breath, she inhaled the disinfectant smell of the visitors' waiting room and swallowed the lump in her throat.

Fear and grief surged through her. Biting her lower lip, she clenched her hands together. She wanted to scream out her pain, yell out her anguish and tear the inner turmoil from within her. Unfortunately she couldn't. She could not lose control. Not now, not ever. She had to be strong. There were no family members she could turn to. Both of her parents had been the only child of their parents. There weren't any grandparents, aunts, uncles or cousins. There was no one to share her anguish.

The sound of footsteps echoed softly on the tiled floor. "Caitlin?"

Bracing herself, she turned around. Fighting back tears, she faced Dr. Flores. "How is he?" she asked, her voice remarkably steady. She searched the face of the gray-haired man wearing a white lab coat. He was not only her father's physician, but an old family friend, as well. Seeing his sullen expression, any hope she harbored vanished. Nevertheless, she willed herself not to panic.

Dr. Flores placed a gentle hand on her shoulder. "Your dad's condition is stable for now, and he seems to be resting comfortably. Although his medication has worn off and he's in pain, he refuses to swallow another dose until he speaks to you."

A terrifying weakness paralyzed Caitlin. Her father had always been a healthy man, except for a light heart attack a few years back from which he'd fully recovered.

"You can only visit him for a few minutes, Caitlin. Then I need to sedate him so he can rest comfortably through the night."

A sense of despair washed over her. Her dark eyes burned with fatigue brought on by a sleepless night. "So nothing has changed." It was more a statement than a question.

Dr. Flores hesitated before answering. "As I explained over the phone this morning, we diagnosed his condition over eight months ago. Since the tumor was discovered, its malignancy has spread very rapidly. Chemotherapy would have been useless. I advised him to tell you about his condition but he refused. He didn't want you to know he had prostate cancer until it became absolutely necessary."

Caitlin nodded, then asked the dreaded question she had to have answered. "How much longer?"

Louis Flores shrugged. "A matter of days, maybe a week. It's hard to say at this point. There's really nothing we can do for him, other than making him comfortable. He doesn't want you to see him this way, but has no choice."

Dr. Flores paused and then went on. "And another thing, Caitlin. Don't question anything he tells you. The reason he won't let me sedate him just yet is because he wants to be completely coherent when he talks to you. Don't think what he's saying is prompted by the medication."

Caitlin's instincts sensed a warning in Dr. Flores's words; a warning that went beyond mere medical advice. She lifted her eyes to his face, letting her gaze run over the distraught features he arduously shielded behind

a cloak of professionalism. "Dr. Flores—"

"No, Caitlin. Whatever Halston has to say, he'll tell you himself." An expression of tenderness softened his face.

"Let's not keep him waiting."

A short walk down the hall brought Caitlin to her father's room. Inhaling a deep breath, she walked over to the bed where he lay with his eyes closed. Taking a seat in the recliner next to the bed, she studied her father's pallid face. As if sensing her presence, a weak smile touched his mouth. His eyes opened slowly.

His gaunt appearance looked nothing like the robust man she'd always known and loved. Sickness had aged him beyond his fifty-eight years and he'd lost an enormous amount of weight. Caitlin had to bite back a strong urge to cry out in agony. Instead she remembered Dr. Flores's words and took her father's hand in hers. Immediately she sensed his loss of strength. Her heart ached.

Halston Parker forced out a ragged breath. "Caitlin?"

"Yeah, Dad. It's me. Don't try to talk now. I'm here, and I'm not going anywhere."

He closed his eyes, then reopened them. A hint of a smile barely touched his mouth. He stared at her. Caitlin wondered if he saw her or was visualizing her mother whom she favored, his beloved Catherine, who'd died eight years ago. He had taken her mother's sudden death from a ruptured appendix extremely hard, never fully recovering from it. It had been during that time their already close relationship had become even closer. He had devoted all of his time and attention to his only child. It was as if Caitlin had become the only thing that had kept him going in a world filled with extreme loneliness.

Caitlin sighed, remembering how, six months ago, he had encouraged her to accept a job offer that required a move to Fort Worth. He'd known about his condition and had sent her away to spare her the anguish of seeing him suffer. If only she had known...

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