



## A Madaris Bride for Christmas (Madaris Family Saga)

By Brenda Jackson

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**In her 100th book, *New York Times* and *USA TODAY* bestselling author**

**Brenda Jackson**

**blends heated sensuality and drama into a dazzling new novel featuring one her most unforgettable Madaris heroes yet...**

One by one, Madaris men have surrendered to their grandmother's matchmaking. But Lee Madaris isn't letting anyone else control his destiny. He'll bring a bride of his own choosing to the family's holiday gathering—if his hotel's gorgeous new chef will agree to a marriage of convenience.

It's not just the chance to work at the Strip's hottest hotel that brought Carly Briggs to Vegas. Witnessing a crime in Miami may have made her a mob target. Though she's reluctant to complicate their working relationship, Lee's tempting offer is so hard to resist. And soon, desire is clouding their no-strings arrangement.

The danger that made Carly flee Miami is about to land at their door. So, Carly and Lee must decide who to trust, when to let go—and whether a love they never anticipated is strong enough to pass the ultimate test.

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**A Madaris Bride for Christmas (Madaris Family Saga) By Brenda Jackson Bibliography**

- Sales Rank: #210479 in Books
- Brand: Harlequin Kimani Arabesque
- Published on: 2013-10-29
- Released on: 2013-10-29
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 6.64" h x .85" w x 4.16" l, .0 pounds
- Binding: Mass Market Paperback
- 320 pages



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### Editorial Review

#### Review

"Fans of her tender and forbidden love stories will fall head over heels for Jackson's newest addition to the saga...sure to tantalize readers with this unforgettable tale of secret love and the unrelenting power of friendship."

-BookPage on *Inseparable*

"This deliciously sensual romance ramps up the emotional stakes and the action with a bit of deception and corporate espionage. Short, sexy, and sizzling...."

-Library Journal on *Intimate Seduction*

"Jackson does not disappoint...first-class page-turner."

- RT Book Reviews, 4½ stars Top Pick, on *A Silken Thread*

"Superb storytelling, an original plot and combustible chemistry between the leads will have readers flying through the chapters, desperate to see how Jackson's tale ends."

- RT Book Reviews, 4½ stars Top Pick, on *Bachelor Unclaimed*

"Jackson does a masterful job of drawing readers into the characters' lives and minds as she unfolds the story of their meeting, romance and happily ever after. A page-turner from start to finish."

- RT Book Reviews, 4½ stars Top Pick, on *Hidden Pleasures*

"Brenda Jackson has reached a new pinnacle of literary and commercial excellence..."

- RT Book Reviews, 4½ stars Top Pick, on *One Special Moment*

#### About the Author

A New York Times and USA TODAY bestselling and award-winning author of more than 100 romance titles, Brenda divides her time between family, writing and traveling . Readers may write Brenda at P.O. Box 28267, Jacksonville, Florida 32226, by email at [WriterBJackson@aol.com](mailto:WriterBJackson@aol.com) or visit her website at [brendajackson.net](http://brendajackson.net).

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Lee Madaris glanced at the clock on his wall before rubbing away the tension forming in the back of his neck. Although it was nearing midnight, he was still in his office working. It was imperative that he do so.

Five potential investors would be arriving tomorrow and spending four days at the Grand MD Vegas hotel. He would be catering to them at a level that was unprecedented. The five men had enough cumulative capital to balance the national budget, if they'd chosen to do so. However, balancing the national budget wasn't Lee's goal. His objective was to get them to invest in his next hotel—the Grand MD Paris.

After the success of the Grand MD Dubai, as well as all the attention the hotel in Vegas had received since opening its doors four months ago, a number of investors were ready to provide funds for his next venture. But he didn't want just anyone; he wanted men willing to take a chance on a hotel that would be

astonishingly different from its two predecessors. It would be a hotel of the future.

Both Grand MD hotels had been Madaris-Di Meglio joint ventures—highly successful and breaking sales records. But the third hotel, the one planned for Paris, France, would use state-of-the-art technology while maintaining the rich architectural design Paris was known for.

Lee's cousin and the architect in the family, Slade Madaris, had designed the first two Grand MDs and would likewise design the one proposed for Paris. Slade's design was nothing short of a masterpiece and would be unveiled at one of the meetings this week. Slade's twin brother, Blade, would be the structural engineer. No two Grand MD hotels would look the same. Each would have its own unique architecture and appeal.

Pulling in a deep breath, Lee returned his attention to the documents in front of him—bios on the five men. The name that topped the list was that of his grand-uncle Jake Madaris. Lee didn't need to read his uncle's bio.

The man was a walking genius when it came to playing the stock market, and as far back as Lee could remember, Jake had been financial adviser to the entire Madaris family. If it hadn't been for his uncle's smart move of establishing a trust fund for all his nieces and nephews when they were still in high school, Lee would not have had the money to partner with his good friend DeAngelo Di Meglio to build their first two hotels.

Jake and another family friend, Mitch Farrell, had been the hotels' financial backers. Mitch—the second man on the list—and Jake had already confirmed they were on board for the Paris hotel since the last two hotels had been a successful venture for them.

However, the price tag for a Paris hotel was higher than the price of the other two combined, and Jake had suggested bringing in other investors. All were good friends of Jake's, but his uncle had warned Lee that convincing them to invest would be Lee's responsibility.

He was ready.

The third person on the list was Kyle Garwood, a multimillionaire who made his primary home in Atlanta. Kyle was married, the father of six. Lee liked Kyle and highly respected him.

The last two men were sheikhs from the Middle East. Sheikh Rasheed Valdemon of Mowaiti had such a close relationship with the Madaris family that he had been named an honorary family member and occasionally went by the name of Monty Madaris when he did business in the United States.

Finally, there was Rasheed's brother-in-law, Sheikh Jamal Ari Yasir of Tahrn. Lee had never met Sheikh Yasir but had heard he was a shrewd businessman, always looking for a good investment. He was married to an American woman, the former Delaney Westmoreland.

Lee would be wining and dining the five men in the Grand MD style. Everything was in place and would be set in motion as soon as they arrived tomorrow morning.

Their visit had been strategically planned down to the last detail. They would be given a tour of the hotel before they were served lunch. Since tomorrow was a traveling day, no meetings had been planned. However, early the following day, Lee's skilled marketing team would kick things off with several video presentations and meetings. Around three, the men and their wives would be given the chance to rest and

relax before a dinner fit for royalty.

Afterward, they would enjoy the nightlife Vegas was famous for—from right inside the Grand MD. The casinos, live shows, state-of-the-art IMAX theater and the exquisite mall on the fifth floor that offered twenty-four-hour shopping all guaranteed that the Grand MD would gain a reputation as the hotel that never closed.

A winning hotel had to have a winning staff. He and Angelo had handpicked all of his executives and managers. Each had hotel experience and had come with sterling resumes and excellent recommendations. He and Angelo were pleased with every staff member, and those who didn't deliver were quickly replaced. Second-best was not an option at the Grand MD.

Lee moved away from his desk, intending to walk around and get his blood flowing, but the moment he stepped into the executive suite's lobby he stopped to stare at the huge picture hanging on the wall. It was a portrait of his great-grandmother Felicia Laverne Madaris the First, whom they fondly called Mama Laverne.

She was the matriarch of the Madaris family. Having borne seven sons, his grandfather Lee being one of them, Mama Laverne had raised her sons by herself after her husband, Milton, had died. All her sons were still alive except for Robert, who had been killed in the Vietnam War. Lee's grand-uncle Jake was Laverne's baby boy.

Mama Laverne had insisted that Lee hang this particular picture of her right there on that wall. She'd given the same directive to his other cousins. They all had the same framed photograph hanging in the offices of their various businesses. She was dressed in her Sunday best, with a huge dressy hat on her head, and she appeared to be looking directly at the viewer with those shrewd eyes and an all-knowing smile. At least she *was* smiling. A Mama Laverne frown could make him quake in his boots. She definitely liked giving orders, and she expected them to be carried out.

Lee chuckled. He wished he could say she was getting bossy in her old age, but as far back as he could remember, she'd always been bossy. Besides that, she was a notorious busybody when it came to meddling in the lives of her children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Even at ninetysomething, he figured she would still be around to meddle with the great-great-grands' lives as well.

He didn't want to think of a time when she would no longer be in their midst. Their love for her was the main reason why he and his still-single brothers and cousins overlooked a lot of her shenanigans, especially her determination to marry off each of them.

Closing the door behind him, he walked along the spacious lobby hallway, noting the elegance, style and sophistication that were such integral parts of his Vegas hotel. Besides being the tallest building on the Strip, with seventy-five floors, it had an amusement park on one of its lower levels, making it an ideal place to stay for both adults and families. From the carpeting on the floor to the paintings on the wall, from the furnishings to the hotel's special amenities, anyone would agree that the hotel deserved the seven-star rating reviewers were giving it.

Sliding back huge glass doors, he stepped out onto the terrace of the executive suite. Normally, he wasn't one who took the time to appreciate a lot of greenery, but with the quality of the hotel on his mind, he couldn't help doing so. Various plants had been flown in just for this terrace.

Lee inhaled deeply, breathing in the scent of the plants mixed with the September air. He looked beyond the

Vegas view to study the looming desert. The rain had lessened the heat and now a sultry breeze stirred the air. The sky overhead looked dark and dreary. There didn't seem to be a single star. A part of him longed to be back in Houston, gazing up into a Texas night.

Lee shook off the longing. He had too much work to do to be melancholy. He hadn't been home since last Christmas and another one would be coming up soon, but opening the two Grand MDs had taken up all his time, personally and professionally. Now luring investors for a third hotel would make him even busier.

Just as he turned to go back inside, his gaze landed on a woman standing on the balcony a couple of levels below. His breath was snatched from his lungs. A low groan passed from his lips as a jolt of sexual energy rocked him to the bone.

She was beautiful. Sensually stunning. Picture-perfect.

She stood leaning against the balcony rail, wearing a sexy green dress and chocolate-colored stilettos, her hair blowing in the breeze. From her expression, as she stared down below, he could tell she was fascinated by the bright lights of the Strip.

Was she a guest at the hotel? He scanned the balcony connected to a tri-level observation deck. It appeared she was alone. Something about her pulled at him. She looked happy, peaceful, but lonely.

Lee didn't know the woman yet he felt as if he could read her perfectly. He stood and watched her, totally mesmerized. A slow heat flowed through him and pooled in his groin—she was arousing him in a way no other woman had. What was there about her that made every muscle in his stomach tie into knots? Made full awareness of her fill his every pore?

Granted, he hadn't dated in a while because of his stringent work schedule, but still, there was something about this particular woman that had lust rushing through his veins.

Nothing like this had ever happened to him before. He checked his watch. It was getting late, but he had to meet that woman and find out why he found her so captivating.

Anticipation filled him as he made his way off the terrace and toward the elevator bank.

She simply loved it here, Carly thought. Bright lights lit the Strip and each hotel seemed to compete to shine the brightest.

It was hard to believe she had gotten the job of pastry chef at the Grand MD's Peyton's Place restaurant a little more than a month ago. The hotel had been gracious enough to give her time to resign from her job in Miami and remain in Florida long enough to pack up her things and attend Heather's wedding.

Initially, she had missed South Beach and wondered if she would ever get acclimated to Vegas's dry summer heat. But she had discovered that in addition to being a fun city with its infamous Strip, Vegas was also a nice place to live.

Her house was in a residential area of town not far from shopping. Because she had everything she needed right at her fingertips she rarely came into town on her days off.

*Except for today.*

Today was her twenty-eighth birthday, and she had decided to celebrate with a night on the town. She had even treated herself to a night at the Grand MD. It had to be the most beautiful hotel she had ever seen. Her room on the fiftieth floor was to die for and the service was excellent.

Carly had stumbled across this particular balcony a few weeks ago while on break. She loved the view, and it had become her favorite. There had been several other couples here earlier, enjoying the view as well, but they had departed, leaving her alone. She didn't mind. It was the story of her life.

Carly forced the depressing thought from her mind.

After all, it was her birthday and she intended to have fun. So far it had been a beautiful day. Before leaving home this morning she'd gotten calls from Aunt Ruthie and Heather. They had remembered, and they were the only two people in her life that counted.

There was a party going on in one of the ballrooms upstairs. She could hear the music playing, a Marvin Gaye classic. She felt like dancing. What the heck. It was her birthday and she had every right to be silly if she wanted to.

Turning from the rail, she waltzed across the floor. She closed her eyes and pretended she was at a party, celebrating her birthday in style, dancing around a ballroom filled with tall, dark, handsome men. One would come forward, claim her hand and ask—

"May I have this dance?"

At the sound of the deep, husky voice, Carly's eyes flew open and she stared into the most gorgeous pair of dark eyes she'd ever seen. And there was a very handsome face to go along with those eyes. Where on earth had he come from? She blinked, wondering if she was still clutching in the throes of her fantasy. She had to be.

"Are you real?" she asked, making sure she hadn't conjured him up in her mind.

He smiled and the sight of the dimple in his chin nearly brought her to her knees. It definitely caused every hormone in her body to sizzle.

"Yes, I'm real. Now, how about that dance," he said, taking her hand in his. A different song was playing now, this one by Luther Vandross.

Carly nodded her consent and he pulled her into his arms. The man was a total stranger. Had it not been her birthday, she would not have allowed him to hold her. But she had already decided that it was okay for her to act silly today. And it wasn't every day that such a good-looking man asked her to dance. Not only was he handsome, but he smelled good too. And to top it off, they danced well together. The way their bodies swayed and moved against each other had her fighting a desire she hadn't felt in close to four years.

A desire that had never been this strong.

She was reminded how it felt to be held by a man, in powerful arms. Every part of her body tuned in to the solid hardness of his. It was staggering; she was mindful of his every movement, the steady sound of his breathing, the way his arms encircled her waist.

Carly looked up at him to find him staring down at her. His predatory look made her insides simmer. Swallowing deeply, she said softly, "Where did you come from?"

He smiled again and she felt a tingling sensation in the pit of her stomach. "From my terrace."

She nodded. He was a guest at the hotel.

"What about you? Are you a guest here?" he asked.

"Yes." She wasn't lying. She had checked into the hotel that day. There was no need to tell him she also worked here. "It's a beautiful hotel."

"I think so too. I'm Lee, by the way."

"I'm Carly."

His smile widened. "Nice meeting you, Carly. Is there a reason you were dancing alone?"

Her face warmed as she wondered if he thought she'd looked ridiculous. "It's my birthday and—"

"Happy birthday," he said.

She smiled up at him. "Thanks. I was having my own private party of one."

He tilted his head. "That's no fun. A beautiful woman should never party alone."

He was smooth, she thought. As smooth as he was handsome. And she'd noticed he wasn't wearing a ring. She knew some men didn't cherish the sanctity of marriage vows, but she did.

"For me that's no problem. I'm a loner anyway," she said.

"Why?"

## Users Review

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