

*Ask Me  
No Questions...  
I'll Tell You No Lies*

*Another Family Reunion Novel  
In The Wisdom of the Ancestors Series*

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# Prologue



*It is the worst possible night to be out and about,* Justin Willis McCoy thought, as a hurricane skirted the East Coast, bringing torrential rains, high winds, and rising ocean tides to his little slice of the South Carolina coastline. He stood inside the rear French doors of the still fragrant first-floor kitchen of the first resort hotel he ever purchased. He surveyed the furious Atlantic Ocean, as it surged, churned, and crashed against the shore like a wild thing hell bent on destruction. If the weather predictions were accurate, this hurricane could wreak more havoc, destroying his property, as Hurricane Sandy did, devastating the New Jersey and New York coasts.

This grand old lady, Oceans Inn Resort, his first foray into the hotel business, withstood many such storms since her construction in the early 1800s. She was an architectural wonder, built to last with her three stories of antebellum mansion located on forty acres of beachfront in a small southern community of Atlantic Beach along the Grand Strand. The Intracoastal Waterway was less than a mile away to the west and rising under the deluge of the heavy rains. With the Atlantic to its east, the Intercoastal to its west, and the water rising, the Grand Strand could cease to exist.

He could hear the creaks and moans, as the house fought to withstand the gale-force winds tugging at her hurricane shutters installed years ago on the windows and doors. Those shutters were among the best investments he made in the property. If this storm proved as dangerous and disastrous as predicted, his lady would again need an infusion of capital to restore her to her former glory. As his first and favorite resort, she would have anything and everything she needed from him. He loved her more than he loved any woman, except maybe one he never met.

He arrived from his Washington, DC, headquarters to assess the property hours before the storm shut down the airport. His Head of Major Projects, Michael Rodgers, suggested Oceans Inn Resort had seen better days and it was time to give up and sell this property or rebuild. Justin wasn't convinced. He rolled up his sleeves and helped his longtime, faithful employees close up the empty Inn in preparation for the harsh weather. Once everything was secure, most of the employees left to tend to their own homes. However, a few of the older women, who worked in the kitchen, stayed to make sure the food and supplies in the pantries were taken to a high floor in the Inn for storage in case of flooding. That task completed, his workers were now preparing for bed on the upper floors of the Inn to ride out the storm.

Because he was keeping vigil on the weather reports, and the Atlantic Ocean's surge now less than one hundred feet from the resort's foundation, he hadn't planned to get much sleep. There would be an incredible amount of beach erosion. Dredging would definitely have to begin to reclaim the beach.

His mind was on not only the storm, and the damage it would wreak on his ladylove, but also on the real threat David Delaware leveled against him earlier that day. The man was a criminal. According to investigative reports he received from Richardson

Investigation and Security, many times, Delaware had killed without malice or forethought. Never indicted for any crime, law enforcement agencies in several countries had Delaware and his Mafia family on their radar.

Justin knew, before entering a business deal to purchase the Delaware Group Hotel and Resort chain, that it was a dicey proposition at best. He tried making it a simple, clean acquisition as he had done before with other deals and then move on. However, the not-so-veiled threat of retribution from the Delawares had him concerned for his own safety and those close to him.

The raging storm outside wasn't the only thing that could possibly end his life.

"Justin?"

"Yes, Miss Nettie?" He turned from his troubling thoughts and vigilant attention to the ocean to regard his head cook's diminutive stature in her plain, cotton, nightclothes, and fuzzy, pink slippers. "I thought you were already asleep. It's late."

"I was about to turn out my light and close my shutters because I need to leave early in the morning, but I saw a car sitting out on the road near the front gate. The lights are on, but no one seems to be moving inside."

Justin tensed at the thought Frank Delaware might already be making good on his threat. "You're concerned about it?"

"I am, yes. I know it's a mess out there, Justin, but someone could be sick or injured. I won't rest until I know whoever it is will be all right. Maybe you could have a look?"

"Okay."

He donned a rain slicker, though it wouldn't be much protection against the elements. Still, if someone were after him, he wouldn't want harm to come to anyone in the Inn. He would

go out into the storm and meet his fate head-on. He made his way to the front door of the Inn, taking time to close and lock it behind him.

Indeed, there was a late model, black, SUV Escalade parked, blocking the property's front gate. He would be royally pissed if someone were just looking for directions, but for Miss Nettie Baker, he would do nearly anything she asked of him. She was the oldest and among the most faithful of his employees. She was a sous-chef of sorts when he was still a boy, working his way through college as a waiter and kitchen helper at the resort. Now he owned it and over one hundred hotels, resorts, and conference centers spanning the globe.

He headed out at a fast trot, dodging deep puddles, as furious wind and rain slapped him around. Trees had fallen and branches hurled around like javelins. He finally reached the car and cautiously approached the driver's side window.

What he saw he never would have expected.