

Long Time Coming

By Sandra Brown

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In more than fifty *New York Times* bestselling novels, Sandra Brown has captivated her millions of readers with stories of charismatic love and tantalizing twists of fate. In this classic tale, a woman is reunited with the man she has loved for years—and must reveal the secret that will jeopardize her chance for happiness at last.

He arrived out of the blue—a flesh-and-blood phantom from the past in a sports car as sleek and sexy as Law Kincaid himself. The world-famous astronaut was as devastatingly attractive as the first time Marnie Hibbs had laid eyes on him, seventeen years before. But she well knew the perils of falling for a ladies' man like Law. And this time she had someone besides herself to protect. Law is determined to discover who is sending him anonymous letters claiming he'd fathered a son he knows nothing about. Showing up at the Hibbs's return address from the letters seemed like a step in the right direction. Marnie swears she isn't the guilty party, but when Law meets her son, it's like a one-two punch to his solar plexus. The boy is nearly the spitting image of Law. Law can't remember sleeping with Marnie—then again, he can't remember much about his crazy past. But there's more to it than that: Marnie claims the boy isn't biologically hers.

As the tension between them becomes unbearable and the attraction undeniable, Marnie is forced to reveal a long-held secret...one that might cause her to lose both the boy she loves more than anyone—and the man she desires more than anything.

From the Hardcover edition.

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Editorial Review

About the Author
Sandra Brown is the author of more than fifty *New York Times* bestsellers, with over seventy million copies of her books in print. She and her family divide their time between South Carolina and Texas.

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Chapter One

The Porsche crept along the street like a sleek black panther. Hugging the curb, its engine purred so deep and low it sounded like a predator's growl.

Marnie Hibbs was kneeling in the fertile soil of her flower bed, digging among the impatiens under the ligustrum bushes and cursing the little bugs that made three meals a day of them, when the sound of the car's motor attracted her attention. She glanced at it over her shoulder, then panicked as it came to a stop in front of her house.

"Lord, is it that late?" she muttered. Dropping her trowel, she stood up and brushed the clinging damp earth off her bare knees.

She reached up to push her dark bangs off her forehead before she realized that she still had on her heavy gardening gloves. Quickly she peeled them off and dropped them beside the trowel, all the while watching the driver get out of the sports car and start up her front walk.

Glancing at her wristwatch, she saw that she hadn't lost track of time. He was just very early for their appointment, and as a result, she wasn't going to make a very good first impression. Being hot, sweaty, and dirty was no way to meet a client. And she needed this commission badly.

Forcing a smile, she moved down the sidewalk to greet him, nervously trying to remember if she had left the house and studio reasonably neat when she decided to do an hour's worth of yard work. She had planned to tidy up before he arrived.

She might look like the devil, but she didn't want to appear intimidated. Self-confident friendliness was the only way to combat the disadvantage of having been caught looking her worst.

He was still several yards away from her when she greeted him. "Hello," she said with a bright smile. "Obviously we got our signals switched. I thought you weren't coming until later."

"I decided this diabolical game of yours had gone on long enough."

Marnie's sneakers skidded on the old concrete walk as she came to an abrupt halt. She tilted her head in stunned surprise. "I'm sorry, I--"

"Who the hell are you, lady?"

"Miss Hibbs. Who do you think?"

"Never heard of you. Just what the devil are you up to?"

"Up to?" She glanced around helplessly, as though the giant sycamores in her front yard might provide an answer to this bizarre interrogation.

"Why've you been sending me those letters?"

"Letters?"

He was clearly furious, and her lack of comprehension only seemed to make him angrier. He bore down on her like a hawk on a field mouse, until she had to bow her back to look up at him. The summer sun was behind him, casting him in silhouette.

He was blond, tall, trim, and dressed in casual slacks and a sport shirt--all stylish, impeccably so. He was wearing opaque aviator glasses, so she couldn't see his eyes, but if they were as belligerent as his expression and stance, she was better off not seeing them.

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"The letters, lady, the letters." He strained the words through a set of strong white teeth.

"What letters?"

"Don't play dumb."

"Are you sure you've got the right house?"

He took another step forward. "I've got the right house," he said in a voice that was little more than a snarl.

"Obviously you don't." She didn't like being put on the defensive, especially by someone she'd never met over something of which she was totally ignorant. "You're either crazy or drunk, but in any case, you're wrong. I'm not the person you're looking for and I demand that you leave my property. Now."

"You were expecting me. I could tell by the way you spoke to me."

"I thought you were the man from the advertising agency."

"Well, I'm not."

"Thank God." She would hate having to do business with someone this irrational and ill-tempered.

"You know damn well who I am," he said, peeling off the sunglasses.

Marnie sucked in a quick, sharp breath and fell back a step because she did indeed know who he was. She raised a hand to her chest in an attempt at keeping her jumping heart in place. "Law," she gasped.

"That's right. Law Kincaid. Just like you wrote it on the envelopes."

She was shocked to see him after all these years, standing only inches in front of her. This time he wasn't

merely a familiar image in the newspaper or on her television screen. He was flesh and blood. The years had been kind to that flesh, improving his looks, not eroding them.

She wanted to stand and stare, but he was staring at her with unmitigated contempt and no recognition at all. "Let's go inside, Mr. Kincaid," she suggested softly.

Several of her neighbors, who had been taking advantage of the sunny weekend weather to do yard chores, had stopped moving, edging, and watering to gawk at the car and Miss Hibbs's visitor.
It wasn't out of the ordinary for a man to come to her house. Many of her clients were men and most of them consulted with her there. Generally they were stodgy executives in dark business suits. Few had deep tans, looked like movie stars, and drove such ostentatious cars.

This area of Houston wasn't glitzy like some of the newer neighborhoods. Most of the residents were middle-aged and drove sensible sedans. A Porsche on the block was a curious thing indeed. And to her neighbors' recollections, Marnie Hibbs had never engaged in a shouting match with anyone.

She turned on the squeaky rubber soles of her sneakers and led Law Kincaid up the sidewalk and through the front door of her house. Air-conditioning was a welcome respite from the humidity outside, but since she was damp with perspiration, the colder air chilled her. Or maybe it was her distinct awareness of the man behind her that was giving her goose bumps.

"This way."

She led him down a spacious hallway, the kind that could be found only in houses built before World War II, and toward the glassed-in back porch, which served as her studio. There she felt more at home, more at ease, and better able to deal with the astonishing reality that Law Kincaid had unexpectedly walked into her life again.

When she turned to face him, his arctic-blue eyes were darting around the studio. They connected with hers like magnets.

"Well?" he said tersely, placing his hands on his hips. He was obviously awaiting a full explanation for something Marnie was in the dark about herself.

"I don't know anything about any letters, Mr. Kincaid."

"They were mailed from this address."

"Then there's been a mistake at the post office."

"Unlikely. Not five times over the course of several weeks. Look, Mrs. uh . . . what was it again?"

"Hibbs. Miss Hibbs."

He gave her a swift, inquisitive once-over. "Miss Hibbs, I've been a bachelor for thirty-nine years.

"It's been a while since puberty. I don't remember every woman I've gone to bed with."

Her heart did another little dance number, and she took a quick, insufficient breath. "I've never been to bed

with you."

He threw one hip slightly off-center and cocked his head arrogantly. "Then how is it that you claim to have mothered a son by me? A son I'd never even heard of until I got your first letter several weeks ago."

Marnie stared at him with speechless dismay. She could feel the color draining from her face. It felt like the world had been yanked from beneath her feet.

"I've never had a child. And I repeat, I never sent you a letter." She gestured at a chair. "Why don't you sit down?" She didn't offer him a seat out of courtesy or any concern for his comfort. She was afraid that if she didn't sit, and soon, her knees would buckle beneath her.

He thought about it for a moment, gnawing irritably on the corner of his lower lip before he moved to a rattan chair. He sat down on the very edge of the cushion, as though wanting to be ready to spring off it if the need arose.

Self-conscious of her muddy sneakers, ragged cutoffs, and ancient T-shirt, Marnie sat in the matching chair facing his. She sat straight, keeping her dirty knees together and clasping her hands nervously on the tops of her thighs.

She felt unclothed and vulnerable as his incisive eyes moved over her, taking in her face, her uncombed hair, her yard work attire, and her grubby knees.

"You recognized me." He shot the sentence at her like a missile.

"Anybody who watches TV or reads a newspaper would recognize you. You're the most popular astronaut since John Glenn."

"And therefore I'm a visible target for every nutcase who comes down the pike."

"I am not a nutcase!"

"Then why the hell have you been sending me those letters? That's not even an original idea, you know. I get several dozen a day."

"Congratulations."

"They're not all fan letters. Some are hate mail from the religious crazies who believe we're going where God never intended man to go. Some credit God with the Challenger accident--His punishment for our tampering with heaven or nonsense to that effect. I've had proposals of marriage and of other assorted liaisons of a prurient and/or perverted nature," he said dryly.

"How nice for you."

Ignoring her snide remark, he continued. "But your letters had a stroke of originality. You were the first one to claim that I was the father of your child."

"Don't you listen? I told you I've never had a child. How could you possibly be the father?"

"My point exactly, Miss Hibbs!" he shouted.

Marnie stood. So did he. He tracked her when she moved to her drafting table and needlessly began rearranging sketch pencils and paintbrushes in their various canisters.

"You were also the first one to threaten me with public exposure if I didn't do what you wanted me to."

She turned to find him very close. She could even feel the fabric of his trousers against her bare legs. "What possible threat could I pose to you? You're the fair-haired child of the space program, hailed as a hero. You held every American spellbound in front of his television set while you and a Russian cosmonaut shook hands over a peace treaty in space.

"There was a ticker-tape parade in honor of you and your crew in New York. You had dinner at the White House with the President and First Lady. Almost singlehandedly you've turned around public opinion on NASA, which certainly wasn't favorable after Challenger. Critics of manned space flight are being ridiculed after what you've done.

"To pit little ol' me against a celebrity giant like you, I would have to be crazy or stupid. I assure you that I'm neither."

"You called me Law."

After her lengthy speech, his four-word rebuttal came as an anticlimax that took her off guard. "What?"

"When you first recognized me, you called me Law."

"Which happens to be your name."

"But the average man on the street would address me as Colonel Kincaid, nothing as familiar as Law. Unless we'd known each other well before."

She sidestepped that. "What did these alleged letters demand from you?"

"Money first."

"Money?" she exclaimed. "How crass."

"Followed by public acknowledgment of my son."

Marnie eased herself from between him and the drafting table. His closeness was wreaking havoc on her ability to think clearly. She began shuffling through a stack of sketches left lying on one of her worktables. "I'm a very independent, self-reliant person. I would never ask you or anybody else for money."

"This is a nice neighborhood, a big house."

"My parents'."

"They live here with you?"

"No. My father is dead. My mother suffered a stroke several months ago and is in a rest home." She slapped down the stack of sketches and faced him. "I manage to support myself. What business of yours is any of this?"

"I think the victim ought to get to know his extortioner." Huskily he added, "In every way."
His eyes moved over her again. This time more slowly and analytically. She saw them pause in the vicinity of her breasts, which the damp T-shirt did little to conceal. She could feel her nipples projecting against the worn, soft cotton and tried unsuccessfully to convince herself that the response resulted from the air-conditioning, and not Law Kincaid's stare.

"I'm afraid you'll have to excuse me now," she said with affected haughtiness. "I'm expecting someone soon and I've got to clean up."

"Who are you expecting? The agency man?" At her startled expression, he said, "You mentioned him when I first got here."

"He has an appointment to look at my proposed sketches for a commission."

"You're an artist?"

"An illustrator."

"For whom?"

"For myself. I freelance."

"What project are you working on?"

"The cover of the Houston telephone directory."

His tawny eyebrows rose a fraction, impressed. "That's quite a commission."

"I haven't gotten it yet." Marnie could have bitten her tongue the minute the words were out. He was shrewd enough to catch the slip.

"It would be an important commission to you?"

"Of course. Now, if you'll--"

He caught her arm as she tried to go around him, headed for the front door. "It must get tough, living from one commission to the next while you maintain this house and pay your sick mother's medical bills."

"I do fine."

"But you're not rich."

"Not by a long shot."

"That's why you've been writing me these threatening letters, isn't it? To get money from me?"

"No. For the umpteenth time, I haven't ever written you a letter."

"Blackmail's a serious crime, Miss Hibbs."

"And a charge too ridiculous even to discuss. Now, please let go of my arm."

He wasn't hurting her. But his encircling fingers held her much too close to him. She was close enough to smell his sexy cologne and the minty freshness of his breath, close enough to see the dark centers of eyes that had sold more copies of Time than any other issue in history when they'd graced the front cover.

"You seem reasonably intelligent," he said.

"Should I take that as a compliment?"

"So why did you send anonymous letters to me, then put your return address on the envelope?"
She gave a soft, disbelieving laugh and shook her head. "I didn't. Or was that a trick question designed to trap me? Where are these letters? May I see them? Perhaps after I saw them I could offer an explanation."

"Do I look stupid? I wouldn't hand them over to you so you could destroy the evidence."

"Oh, for heaven's sake," she cried. Then, staring up into his stern face, she said, "You're really taking this seriously, aren't you?"

"At first I didn't. You were just one crank in hundreds. But after the fifth letter, when you got really nasty about pinning a paternity rap on me, I thought it was time to confront you."

From AudioFile
With clear articulation and gender-specific characterizations, narrator Susan Denaker tells the romantic story of Marnie, her adopted son, David, and world-famous astronaut Law Kincaid. After Marnie's sister dies unexpectedly, Marnie adopts 4-year-old David. Their life is idyllic until David turns 15 and a mysterious letter is sent to Law Kincaid saying that David is his son. The tension of the story is tantalizing as long-held secrets are revealed. Denaker captures David's teen personality through soft accents and youthful exuberance. Her exceptional depiction of Marnie is engaging as Marnie experiences many emotions relating to Kincaid and his reaction to the surprising situation he finds himself in. This title will not disappoint Sandra Brown fans. G.D.W. © AudioFile 2006, Portland, Maine-- *Copyright © AudioFile, Portland, Maine*

Users Review

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