



Snowbound with the Boss (Pregnant by the Boss)

By Maureen Child

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But Kate's left facing a dilemma—she's pregnant. How can she break her baby news to her unbearable boss? Soon there's an emotional storm brewing that makes the blizzard that stranded them look like child's play!

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Editorial Review

About the Author

Maureen Child is the author of more than 130 romance novels and novellas that routinely appear on bestseller lists and have won numerous awards, including the National Reader's Choice Award. A seven-time nominee for the prestigious RITA award from Romance Writers of America, one of her books was made into a CBS-TV movie called *THE SOUL COLLECTER*. Maureen recently moved from California to the mountains of Utah and is trying to get used to snow.

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Sean Ryan's dreams were of hot beaches, ten-foot waves and ice-cold beer.

His reality was just ice-cold.

January in Wyoming was just...wrong, he told himself. A California guy had no business standing knee-deep in snow. And if he'd had a choice, Sean wouldn't have been there at all.

But it was his turn to change a run-down hotel into a role-playing fantasy based on one of his company's bestselling video games. "Why I couldn't have gotten a damn hotel in Tahiti is a good question, though."

But then, Celtic Knot video games were all based on ancient legends, and as far as Sean knew, there were no legendary Celtic tales set around a beach in Tahiti. Too damn bad.

A tall man, with thick black hair that hung past the collar of the brown leather jacket he wore over sweaters, Sean tucked his hands into the pockets of his jeans and gave a quick look around. The great room of the old hotel was gigantic and echoed with the sound of his footsteps every time his scarred brown boots hit the wooden floor. There were enough windows in the room to make the snow-covered outside feel like the inside. Double-paned glass kept most of the cold out, but even then, so much glass was enough to chill the cavernous room.

The place wasn't huge, only a hundred and fifty rooms, yet it gave the feeling of more. Probably all the wood and glass, Sean told himself. He could see how the hotel would be once the renovations were complete. And God knew there would be plenty of those. Every room needed to be freshened, brought up-to-date and then stocked with gaming systems and flat-screen televisions. They'd get their artists in to do the murals on the walls, bringing the "Forest Run" video game to life and making this a prime destination for gamers from around the country.

And, he had to admit, the setting was perfect to mimic "Forest Run." The hotel sat on two hundred acres of land, with forests, meadows and a wide, beautiful lake. But he couldn't imagine people *wanting* to come to the middle of nowhere in the dead of winter when everything was covered in snow. Who the hell would pick *snow* over *sand*?

Not him, that was for sure. But he had to hope that there were plenty of gamers who actually enjoyed freezing temperatures. As for Sean, he couldn't wait to get back to Southern California. Shaking his head, Sean reminded himself that this trip was almost over. He'd been in Wyoming a week and now that all of the "consultations" with his contractor were finished, he'd be hopping into his company jet that afternoon and getting back to the real world. To his *life*.

Turning his back on the view, Sean glanced toward the ceiling at the sound of footsteps overhead. Instantly, a buzz of awareness shot through him. Scowling, he deliberately pushed aside the feeling, buried it deeply enough that he wouldn't have to acknowledge it.

Nope. When he left, Sean wouldn't miss the cold. Or the solitude, he assured himself. But the woman...that was a different story.

Kate Wells. Businesswoman, contractor, carpenter and current pain in his ass. He was only in Wyoming in the dead of winter because Kate, his contractor on this hotel job, had insisted they needed to meet on-site so she and her crew could get started on the interior renovations.

And from the minute he first saw her, construction work was the last thing on Sean's mind. Instead, he was focused on thick black hair, usually pulled into a pony-tail, lake-blue eyes and a mouth wide enough to give a man crazy, sex-fueled dreams.

It had been too long since he'd indulged himself in a really fiery affair, he assured himself. That's the only explanation for why his body was burning for a woman who wore a damn tool belt, of all things.

He looked toward the ceiling again, the scowl on his face deepening as she moved around upstairs with quick, sure steps. He'd never met a woman as sure of herself as Kate Wells. He'd always admired strong women, but she took things to a whole new level. She argued with him on everything and as irritating as that was, Sean also sort of enjoyed it—which only went to prove that all this cold had frozen and killed off too many of his brain cells.

Shaking his head, he turned on his cell phone and gave silent thanks that at least he had reception out here. Hitting the video-chat button, he dialed and then waited.

On the third ring, his brother Mike's face appeared on the screen.

"I hate Wyoming," Sean blurted.

Mike laughed and leaned back in his desk chair. Right behind his brother, Sean could see the view of the garden behind the old Victorian in Long Beach, California, that served as Celtic Knot's offices. "Don't hold back, tell me how you really feel."

"Funny." Easy for his older brother to be amused, Sean told himself. He wasn't in the middle of a forest with a woman who both attracted and infuriated him. Thinking of Kate, Sean glanced over his shoulder, just to make sure she hadn't sneaked up on him. When he was satisfied, he shifted his gaze back to the phone. Easier to not think of Kate when he was talking about something else entirely.

"It hasn't stopped snowing since I got here," he said. "There's like three feet of snow piling up out there and it's still coming down. I don't think it'll ever stop."

"Sounds cold." Mike gave a dramatic shudder.

"Ha!" Sean snorted. "Beyond cold. Beyond freezing. I'm wearing two sweaters under my jacket—*inside!*"

Chuckling, Mike asked, "What's it like when you're not complaining about how cold you are? Have you managed, in all your misery, to check out the land and the hotel?"

Trust Mike to stay on topic. Sean sighed, then grudgingly admitted, "Yeah, I looked it all over. It's pretty. Lots of trees. Lots of open land. And who knew the sky was so big when you get out of the city?"

"Yeah," Mike said, "I discovered that for myself when Jenny and I were in Laughlin."

Narrowing his gaze on his brother's image, Sean wondered what the hell had happened exactly between Mike and Jenny Marshall, one of the company's top artists. Mike hadn't talked about it and before Sean had had a decent chance to really interrogate him over it, he'd had to leave for Wyoming.

"Something tells me there's more to that story," Sean mused, promising himself that as soon as he got home again, he'd take Mike out for a few beers and pry the truth out of him.

"If there is," Mike told him, "you're not hearing it."

Not long-distance, anyway. But Sean had never been one to give up easily. And there was definitely something going on between his brother and Jenny. Still, that was for then, and right now Sean was more interested in getting out of Wyoming before he turned into a Popsicle.

"What's the hotel itself like, Sean?"

"Big. Cold. Empty." Sean blew out a frustrated breath and pushed one hand through his hair. He gave another quick look around and gave Mike a better answer. "The previous owner left some furniture downstairs, but the bedrooms are a refit from the ground up. No beds, no chairs, tables, *nada*"

He shot a glance at the battered leather sofa and two matching chairs that were drawn up in front of a massive fireplace in the great room. Sean didn't think much of the furniture, but since he and Kate were going to be stuck here for a while, he was grateful there was more than the floor to sit on.

"It's no big deal," Mike told him. "We would have redone the bedrooms the way we wanted anyway."

"True. And the bones of the place are good." Sean nodded to himself. "A lot of work to do to turn it into a 'Forest Run' fantasy, though."

"And is Kate Wells up to the task?"

"To hear her tell it," Sean muttered. He'd never met a woman so supremely confident in her own abilities. Just as he'd never come up against anyone so willing to argue with him. He was more accustomed to people who worked for him actually *working* for him. But this woman seemed to think *she* was in charge, and that was something he'd have to take care of real damn soon.

"Anyway," he said, once again forcefully pushing Kate out of his mind, "there's a hundred and fifty guest rooms, and they all need work."

Mike frowned. "If we go with your idea to hold our own 'game con' on the property, we'll need more rooms. Are there other hotels close by?"

"No. We're ten miles from the closest. It's a small town with two B and Bs and one motel right off the highway."

Mike's tight scowl deepened. "Sean, we can't go with a big conference if there's nowhere for people to stay." He took a breath and added, "And don't say people can pitch tents."

Sean laughed. "Just because I like camping doesn't mean I want strangers staying all over the property. Anyway, there's a bigger city about twenty-five miles from here, with more hotels." And that was where he was staying. A nice, comfortable, upscale hotel that he would have given anything to be in at that moment. He wanted a shower hot enough to melt the ice chips in his bloodstream. That wasn't going to happen anytime soon, though. "Kate—the contractor had another idea on that problem, too."

"What's she thinking?" Mike picked up his coffee and took a long drink.

Sean glared at his brother as annoyance sharpened his tone. "Is that a cappuccino? You bastard."

Mike grinned and took a longer drink. "I'll enjoy it for you."

"Thanks." The sarcasm was thick, but he knew Mike didn't care. Why the hell would he? Sean wondered. His older brother was at home in Long Beach with access to their favorite coffee shop, the bar down the street, ocean views and, most importantly, Mike wasn't freezing his ass off.

Damn, Sean missed civilization. Shaking his head, he said, "Kate thinks we should put in some small cabins, behind the main lodge, staggered back into the forest. Give people more privacy, a sense of being out in the wild."

Mike nodded, thinking about it. "It's a good idea."

"Yeah, I know."

"Yet you don't look happy about it."

"Because she was so damn sure she was right," Sean told him, remembering the conversation from the day before. Kate had had him trudging through snow to inspect the property and the areas she'd already selected for possible cabin sites.

As she'd laid it out for him, he could see it as it would be. Small cabins tucked into the woods would feed in to the fantasy of the place, and he was already considering how they could make each of the cottages different, give them each an identity that would be separate from the rest.

It irritated him, too, that he'd never considered anything like she was suggesting. But damn if the idea hadn't hit home with him. The fact that Kate had come up with it was annoying, but Sean was smart enough to know a good idea when he heard it.

"Yeah," Mike mused. "It's a pain when they're right, isn't it?"

"You have no idea," Sean muttered.

"I think I do." Mike took another deliberate sip of his cappuccino. "Sounds like you're having a great time."

Sean's eyes narrowed into slits. He'd have given his car for a hot cappuccino at that very moment. Just another irritation piled on top of everything else. "Yeah, it's a laugh riot. This woman is the most hardheaded

person I've ever dealt with and that includes *you*?"

Mike shrugged. "As long as she does good work, that's all you should care about."

His brother was right. That *was* all he should care about. But it wasn't. Instead, Sean was thinking about her hair, how thick and dark it was, and he couldn't help wondering what it would look like freed from its constant ponytail. He thought about the summer blue of her eyes and the way her tool belt hung low around curvy hips. He hated admitting it even to himself, but whenever she talked, he was so focused on her mouth, he hardly heard what she was saying.

Damn, he had to get out of Wyoming, fast.

Sean scrubbed one hand across his face and focused on the conversation with Mike. "Yeah, yeah. She wants to get her crew in here next week and start in on the rehab, and I don't see a problem with it." He paused and ran one finger around the collar of his black sweater. "As long as I can oversee it from California."

"Okay, but since you didn't take any of the artists with you, what'll she do about the painting we'll need done?"

"Come on," Sean said sharply, "I couldn't bring an artist out here when everyone's doing the final run on 'The Wild Hunt.'"

"True," Mike agreed. "Everyone here's working around the clock."

And Sean should have been. He had to connect with marketing and their clients, check the advertising that was lined up to push the new video game once it was released. Work was piling up for him in California, but he'd had to come out here to get the reno started since he had such a fiery contractor eager for the work to begin. This trip had been bad timing all the way around, really. Every artist at Celtic Knot was focused on the finishing touches of the video game that would be released in the summer, so he hadn't been able to justify pulling them away from their work yet.

"Anyway," Sean continued, "how hard is it to leave walls blank? They can paint it white or something and then when we bring the artists in, they'll have a blank canvas to work on."

"That'll work. You still coming home tomorrow?"

"That's the plan, thank God," Sean said. "Kate's outside, bringing her truck around. We're going to head back to town now. Naturally, it's still snowing."

"If it makes you feel any better, it's seventy-five here today."

"Great. Thanks. That just caps it." A door slammed at the front of the hotel. Kate called out something, and Sean looked to one side and shouted, "What?"

In the next second, Kate was standing in the doorway, shaking her head to send a flurry of fresh snow-flakes flying to the floor. "A blizzard's headed in," she said simply.

He covered the phone with his hand. "You're kidding."

"No joke," she said, shrugging. "The pass is already closed. We're not going anywhere."

"For how long?" he demanded. There was that shrug again. "No way to know."

"Perfect."

"What is it?" Mike asked.

"Karma probably," Sean told him, expressing his disgust. "Kate just heard on the truck radio that the pass down the mountain is closed. I'm snowed in."

Instead of sympathy, Sean watched as Mike unsuccessfully fought back laughter at the situation.

"Thanks for your concern."

Mike held up one hand and tried to stop laughing. "Sorry, sorry."

"How is this funny?" Sean snapped. "I'm trapped in an empty hotel with a crabby contractor and a mountain of snow outside the door."

"Clearly," Mike said finally, "it's only funny from California. But have you got food, heat?"

"We're covered," Kate said, her expression telling him exactly what she thought of the description *crabby*.

"Yeah," Sean said, then he turned to Kate. "Come here for a minute. Meet my brother."

She didn't look happy with the invitation—no surprise there, Sean thought. The woman had a chip on her shoulder the size of a redwood. She walked briskly across the room and stopped beside him to look at the phone screen.

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