



If There Be Dragons

By Kay Hooper

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New York Times bestselling author Kay Hooper weaves seduction, suspense, and the paranormal into a spellbinding romance centered on an enigmatic woman—and the man whose touch threatened to expose her most intimate vulnerabilities.

What was a woman like Brooke Kennedy doing running a guest lodge alone in the Montana wilderness? And why was her best friend so worried about her? Those were the questions Cody Nash asked himself after agreeing to cancel his tropical vacation to go on a mission of mercy into blizzard country. For the strong and self-assured woman he found didn't need or want his help—but she was in trouble. Brooke had isolated herself from the world for reasons she wouldn't or couldn't say. But Cody didn't need to be a psychic to sense that Brooke was afraid. Even more, her fear had intensified from the moment he arrived. Now, as a dangerous storm strands them together, Cody must learn the well-guarded secret of this beautiful, gifted woman—if he can convince her to give him the one thing he needs to save her from a self-imposed exile: her trust.

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Editorial Review

About the Author

Kay Hooper, who has more than six million copies of her books in print worldwide, has won numerous awards and high praise for her novels. Kay lives in North Carolina, where she is currently working on her next novel.

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Chapter One

There was no answer at the front door. Cody shoved his hands deep into the pockets of his thickly quilted jacket and stepped back from the door, casting a hostile glance out over what would probably be a breathtaking view during daylight. At the moment he could only dimly discern the hulking and intimidating mountains looming all around the tiny valley.

Montana, he was thinking in disgust, and in the middle of winter too. He swore softly, moving out to the edge of the rustic redwood deck that pretended to be a front porch. The durable Jeep that had brought him with relative safety up the winding and icy road to this valley was making soft popping and crackling noises as its hot engine cooled down rapidly in the frigid air. Only those sounds and an occasional whine from the wind high above disturbed the silence.

Cody took care in stepping off the deck, avoiding the two shallow steps, which, he'd discovered only moments before, were slippery. He stood for a moment in the trampled snow that formed a rough walkway, staring at the rented Jeep and then looking around quickly for any sign of a garage. Another building off to one side attracted his attention, and he made his way in that direction cautiously, silently cursing his lack of forethought in not having worn thick boots; his ankle boots just didn't allow for nearly a foot of snow.

He glanced back at the lodge once, trying for the third time to gain some impression of size or style, but was defeated again. The tall trees surrounding the building shadowed it too heavily to offer even a dim silhouette. It was big, though; that much he was sure of. And not a light showed anywhere.

He located a window in the side of the fairly large outbuilding and brushed snow away from the shallow sill, cupping his hands around his eyes and leaning closer for a look inside. The interior was dim, but he felt his brows raise slightly as he identified the hulking shape of a Sno-Cat on the far side. Nearer, he could barely make out a Jeep very like his own but with a more battered appearance.

Cody let his arms drop and backed away from the window, stumbling over rocks bordering a narrow trodden path. Regaining his balance and absently watching his quiet curses assume a misty shape in the cold air, he began to follow the path that led between the garage and the lodge around to the back.

Where the hell was the woman anyway? Cody wondered. He was sure that Pepper had let her friend know that he was coming; she wasn't the type to forget to do something like that. He swore again. If Brooke Kennedy was so damn hostile that she wouldn't even show him a welcoming light or open a door to him, the hell with it!

"Be patient with her, Cody—she's had a rough time."

Pepper's last worried words to him surfaced in his mind, and Cody forced himself to calm down. But, he told himself firmly, if you can't find her, you can hardly help her. The thought cheered him slightly. Maybe she'd gone away for a while. He could take that cruise after all.

As he was rounding a dark corner something hit him squarely in the stomach, driving all the breath out of him in an astonished whoosh, and he folded up neatly before measuring his length backward in the snow.

He lay there for a moment, staring up at the stars and trying to remember if breathing was a voluntary or involuntary action. Voluntary? Maybe he'd better try.

The stars winked out for a second as his paralyzed diaphragm resisted his efforts, then Cody found himself drawing the cold night air into his lungs in relieved gasps. He just lay there and breathed for a moment, then was about to try and get up when a voice reached him out of the darkness.

"Don't move unless you want to hit the ground again. Tell me who you are and what you're doing here."

It was a husky, oddly gruff little voice, unmistakably feminine. And if there was any fear in the warning tone, it was strictly controlled.

The discomfort of lying in the freezing snow and the ache in his middle did nothing to improve Cody's already sour temper. "What the hell did you hit me with?" he demanded, irritated by the wheeze in his voice.

"My feet." It was still a gruff little voice, possessing a faint southern drawl and still containing a warning note. "Shall I demonstrate again?"

Instead of obeying the tone, Cody made a determined effort to gain his feet. "Now, look," he began, and broke off abruptly as he found himself once more sitting in the snow, his feet neatly cut from under him.

"Who are you?" she demanded, still nothing more than a voice out of the darkness.

If his good sense had prevailed, Cody would have sat meekly in the snow and explained who he was. But the culmination of a rough drive up here, a hostile welcome that had painfully deprived him of breath, and the current freezing of his nether regions lost him the battle between good sense and recklessness. He surged to his feet, attempting a feint sideways to avoid her obviously skilled defenses.

It wasn't her fault that he misjudged the slippery path and the angle of his dodge, both of which caused his left foot to slide violently to one side and bang painfully against the stone corner of the building. The violence behind that slide also twisted his ankle in a motion it rebelled against, and Cody sank back down on the path with a bitten-off groan as red-hot pain sliced all the way up to his skull.

At least the woman was still and silent, not laughing at him, he thought bitterly. He nursed the injured ankle with both hands and directed his gaze into the blackness out of which her voice had come. "My name is Cody Nash," he told her flatly through gritted teeth. "And if you're Brooke Kennedy, I've come to help you."

There was a moment of silence, then she said calmly, "If that's so, you're a day early; you weren't supposed to arrive until tomorrow."

Cody held on to his ankle and his temper with both hands. "I was warned in Butte that a storm was coming later tonight and advised to get up here while I still could. Satisfied?" he finished coldly.

She apparently wasn't. "Who sent you?"

His exasperated sigh misted in front of his eyes. "Pepper sent me. Right now she's back in Maine with an anxious husband, two dogs, a cat, and possible twins—and, if you ask me, worrying unnecessarily about a friend who can obviously take care of herself!"

A patch of darkness disconnected itself from the rest to kneel in front of him, and Cody cautiously studied the hooded form he could barely make out.

"How's the ankle?" she asked, no hint of apology in her tone.

"Sprained at the very least," he told her bitterly.

She offered a gloved hand. "I'll help you inside."

"Don't put yourself out," he advised with awful politeness.

The hooded form rose abruptly to its feet. "If you want to sit there on your bruised ego and freeze," she told him evenly, "then do it. I'll be sure someone digs you out in the spring."

An angry stab from his ankle and growing numbness made Cody decide to ignore his injured pride. Sighing, he held out a hand. "Sorry," he apologized ironically. "I get this way whenever I'm kicked in the stomach with no warning."

Silently she helped him to his one good foot, her arm going immediately around his waist to steady him on the slippery path. Throwing away the last of his pride, Cody let himself lean on her, his arm around her shoulders. She was strong, which surprised him since the form he was leaning on felt slender to the point of frailness even through her thick coat. She also moved with a cat-footed sureness along the icy path, even with his dot-and-carry movements beside her.

She guided him on around the building to a door that opened—thankfully—directly out onto a flat cement walkway. The door was opened swiftly and he was led inside to find a large and old-fashioned kitchen, its light due entirely to the blazing fire in the huge stone fireplace.

Cody eased himself down in a ladder-back chair by the round oak table, straining his eyes in the dimness to watch her cross the room to a counter. "You like darkness?" he asked.

There was the scrape of a match and then a flickering flame as she lit a large kerosene lantern on the counter. "Power's out," she told him briefly. "And so's the generator. Ice storm yesterday. That's why it was so slippery outside."

She certainly didn't waste words, he thought dryly. A box of matches slid across the table toward him, and before he could catch more than a glimpse of her still-hooded form, she was carrying her lighted lamp toward a second doorway.

"There's another lamp on the table. I'll go find the first-aid box."

Being careful with his throbbing ankle, Cody unfastened his jacket and shrugged out of it, hanging it on the back of another chair nearby. He found the matches and the lantern, even larger than the one she'd lit, trimming the wick and lighting it until the room was fairly bright.

He looked around at the spotless kitchen, the copper pots and pans hanging around a central work island, the colorful Navaho rugs and curtains. With light it was now a cheery room, and the warmth from the fire was beginning to seep into his frozen bones. Cody bent to remove his left boot, grimacing with every movement of the hot, swollen ankle.

Morosely he thought of the sunny cruise he should have been on, making a mental note to get even with Pepper before either of them was much older. He sat back in the surprisingly comfortable chair, listening to the crackle of the fire and the silence and wondering how soon he'd be able to attempt the drive back down. If the storm held off, he decided, he'd try tomorrow—ankle or no ankle. He wasn't about to hang around and try to help th...

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