



After Hours with Her Ex (Harlequin Desire)

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Lacy Sills Wyatt has barely recovered from Sam's desertion. Now he's her boss! How can she work with him every day? And how can she keep from falling for him all over again? The answer is: she can't. But when Lacy learns Sam has ulterior motives for rekindling their romance, she's not sure she can forgive him...not even with an unexpected pregnancy to consider!

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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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"You actually *can* go home again," Sam Wyatt murmured as he stared at the main lodge of his family's resort. "The question is, will anyone be happy to see you."

But then, why should they be? He'd left Snow Vista, Utah, two years before, when his twin brother had died. And in walking away, he'd left his family to pick up the pieces strewn in the wake of Jack's death.

Guilt had forced Sam to leave. Had kept him away. And now, a different kind of guilt had brought him home again. Maybe it was time, he told himself. Time to face the ghosts that haunted this mountain.

The lodge looked the same. Rough-hewn logs, gray, weathered shingles and a wide front porch studded with Adirondack chairs fitted with jewel-toned cushions. The building itself was three stories; the Wyatt family had added that third level as family quarters just a few years ago. Guest rooms crowded the bottom two floors and there were a few cabins on the property as well, offering privacy along with a view that simply couldn't be beat.

Mostly, though, the tourists who came to ski at Snow Vista stayed in hotels a mile or so down the mountain. The Wyatt resort couldn't hold them all. A few years ago, Sam and his twin, Jack, had laid out plans for expanding the lodge, adding cabins and building the Wyatt holdings into the go-to place in the Utah mountains. Sam's parents, Bob and Connie, had been eager to expand, but from the looks of it, any idea of expansion had stopped when Sam left the mountain. But then, a lot of things had stopped, hadn't they?

His grip tightened on his duffel bag, and briefly Sam wished to hell he could as easily get ahold of the thoughts racing maniacally through his mind. Coming home wouldn't be easy. But the decision was made. Time to face the past.

"Sam!"

The voice calling his name was familiar. His sister, Kristi, headed right for him, walking in long brisk strides. She wore an electric blue parka and ski pants tucked into black boots trimmed with black fur at the tops. Her big blue eyes were flashing—and not in welcome. But hell, he told himself, he hadn't been expecting a parade, had he?

"Hi, Kristi."

"Hi?" She walked right up to him, tilted her head back and met his gaze with narrowed eyes. "That's the best you've got? 'Hi, Kristi'? After two years?"

He met her anger with cool acceptance. Sam had known what he would face when he came home and there was no time like the present to jump in and get some of it over with. "What would you like me to say?"

She snorted. "It's a little late to be asking me what I want, isn't it? If you cared, you would have asked before you left in the first place."

Hard to argue that point. And his sister's expression told him it would be pointless to try even if he could. Remembering the way Kristi had once looked up to him and Jack, Sam realized it wasn't easy to accept that her hero worship phase was over. Of course, he'd pushed that phase over a cliff himself.

But this wasn't why he'd come home. He wasn't going to rehash old decisions. He'd done what he had to do back then, just as he was doing today.

"Back then, I would have told you not to go," Kristi was saying and as she stared up at him, Sam saw a film of tears cover her eyes. She blinked quickly, though, as if determined to keep those tears at bay—for which he was grateful. "You left us. Just walked away. Like none of us mattered to you anymore..."

He blew out a breath, dropped his duffel bag and shoved both hands through his hair. "Of course you mattered. All of you did. *Dor*

"Easy to say, isn't it, Sam?"

Would it do any good to explain that he had thought about calling home all the time?

No, he told himself. Because he hadn't called. Hadn't been in touch at all—except for a couple of postcards letting them know where he happened to be at the time—until his mother had found a way to track him down in Switzerland last week.

He still wasn't sure how she'd found him. But Connie Wyatt was a force to be reckoned with when she had a goal in mind. Probably, she had called every hotel in the city until she'd tracked him down.

"Look, I'm not getting into this with you. Not right now anyway. Not until I've seen Dad." He paused, then asked, "How is he?"

A flicker of fear darted across her eyes, then was swept away in a fresh surge of anger. "Alive. And the doctor says he's going to be fine. It's just sad that all it took to get you to come home was Dad having a heart attack."

This was going great.

Then it seemed her fury drained away as her voice dropped and her gaze shifted from him to the mountain. "It was scary. Mom was a rock, like always, but it was scary. Hearing that it was a warning made it a little better but now it feels like."

Her words trailed off, but Sam could have finished that sentence for her. A warning simply meant that the family was now watching Bob as if he were a live grenade, waiting to see if he'd explode. Probably driving his father nuts.

"Anyway," she said, her voice snapping back to knifelike sharpness. "If you're expecting a big welcome,

you're in for a disappointment. We're too busy to care."

"That's fine by me," he said, though damned if it didn't bother him to have his little sister be so dismissive. "I'm not here looking for forgiveness."

"Why are you here, then?"

He looked into his sister's eyes. "Because this is where I'm needed."

"You were needed two years ago, too," she said, and he heard the hurt in her voice this time.

"Kristi."

She shook her head, plastered a hard smile on her face and said, "I've got a lesson in a few minutes. I'll talk to you later. If you're still here."

With that, she turned and left, headed for one of the bunny runs where inexperienced skiers got their first introduction to the sport. Kristi had been one of the instructors here since she was fourteen. All of the Wyatt kids had grown up on skis, and teaching newbies had been part of the family business.

When she disappeared into the crowd, Sam turned for the main lodge. Well, he'd known when he decided to come home that it wasn't going to be easy. But then, nothing in the past two years had been easy, had it?

Head down, strides long, he walked toward home a lot slower than he had left it.

The lodge was as he remembered it.

When he left, the renovations had been almost finished, and now the place looked as though the changes had settled in and claimed their place. The front windows were wider; there were dozens of leather club chairs gathered in conversational groups and huddled in front of the stone hearth where a fire burned brightly.

It might be cold outside, with the wind and snow, but here in the lodge, there was warmth and welcome. He wondered if any of that would extend to him.

He waved to Patrick Hennessey, manning the reception desk, then skirted past the stairs and around the corner to the private elevator to the third floor. Sam took a breath, flipped open the numerical code box and punched in the four numbers he knew so well, half expecting the family to have changed the code after he left. They hadn't, though, and the door shushed open for him to step inside.

They'd installed the elevator a few years ago when they added the third story. This way, none of their guests accidentally gained access to the family's space and the Wyatt's kept their privacy. The short ride ended, the door swished open and Sam was suddenly standing in the family room.

He had time for one brief glance around the familiar surroundings. Framed family photos hung on the cream-colored walls alongside professional shots of the mountain in winter and springtime. Gleaming tables held handcrafted lamps and the low wood table set between twin burgundy leather sofas displayed a selection of magazines and books. Windows framed a wide view of the resort and a river-stone hearth on one wall boasted a fire that crackled and leaped with heat and light.

But it was the two people in the room who caught and held his attention. His mother was curled up in her favorite, floral upholstered chair, an open book on her lap. And his father, Sam saw with a sigh of relief, was sitting in his oversize leather club chair, his booted feet resting on a matching hassock. The flat-screen TV hanging over the fireplace was turned to an old Western movie.

On the long flight from Switzerland and during the time spent traveling from the airport to the lodge, all Sam had been able to think about was his father having a heart attack. Sure, he'd been told that Bob Wyatt was all right and had been released from the hospital. But he hadn't really allowed himself to believe it until now.

Seeing the big man where he belonged, looking as rugged and larger than life as usual, eased that last, cold knot in the pit of Sam's stomach.

"Sam!" Connie Wyatt tossed her book onto a side table, jumped to her feet and raced across the room to him. She threaded her arms around him and held on tightly, as if preventing him from vanishing again. "Sam, you're here." She tipped her head back to smile up at him. "It's so good to see you."

He smiled back at her and realized how much he'd missed her and the rest of the family. For two years, Sam had been a gypsy, traveling from one country to another, chasing the next experience. He'd lived out of the duffel bag he still held tightly and hadn't looked any further ahead than the next airport or train connection.

He'd done some skiing of course. Sam didn't compete professionally anymore, but he couldn't go too long without hitting the slopes. Skiing was in his blood, even when he spent most of his time building his business. Designing ski runs at some of the top resort destinations in the world. The skiwear company he and Jack had begun was thriving as well, and between those two businesses, he'd managed to keep busy enough to not do much thinking.

Now he was here, meeting his father's studying gaze over the top of his mother's head. It was both surreal and right.

With a deliberate move, he dropped the duffel bag, then wrapped both arms around his much-shorter mother and gave her a hard hug. "Hi, Mom."

She pushed back, gave his chest a playful slap and shook her head. "I can't believe you're really here. You must be hungry. I'll go fix you something—"

"You don't have to do that," he said, knowing nothing could stop her. Connie Wyatt treated all difficult situations as a reason to feed people.

"Won't be a minute," she said, then shot her husband a quick glance. "I'll bring us all some coffee, too. You stay in that chair, mister."

Bob Wyatt waved one hand at his wife, but kept his gaze fixed on his son. As Connie rushed out of the room and headed for the family kitchen, Sam walked over to his father and took a seat on the footstool in front of him. "Dad. You look good."

Scowling, the older man brushed his gray-streaked hair back from his forehead and narrowed the green eyes he'd bequeathed to his sons. "I'm fine. Doctor says it wasn't anything. Just too much stress."

Stress. Because he'd lost one son, had another disappear on him and was forced to do most of the running of

the family resort himself. Guilt Sam didn't want to acknowledge pinged him again as he realized that leaving the way he did had left everyone scrambling.

Frowning more deeply, his father looked over to the doorway where his wife had disappeared. "Your mother's bound and determined to make me an invalid, though."

"You scared her," Sam said. "Hell, you scared me."

His father watched him for several long minutes before saying, "Well now, you did some scaring of your own a couple years ago. Taking off, not letting us know where you were or how you were."

Sam took a breath and blew it out. And there was the guilt again, settling back onto his shoulders like an unwelcome guest. It had been with him so long now, Sam thought he would probably never get rid of it entirely.

"Couple of postcards just weren't enough, son."

"I couldn't call," Sam said, and knew it sounded cowardly. "Couldn't hear your voices. Couldn't—hell, Dad. I was a damn mess."

"You weren't the only one hurting, Sam."

"I know that," he said, and felt a flicker of shame. "I do. But losing Jack." Sam scowled at the memory as if that action alone could push it so far out of sight he'd never have to look at it again.

"He was your twin," Bob mused. "But he was our child. Just as you and Kristi are."

There it was. Sam had to accept that he'd caused his parents more pain at a time when they had already had more than enough loss to deal with. But back then, there had seemed to Sam to be only one answer.

"I had to go."

One short sentence that encapsulated the myriad emotions that had driven him from his home, his family.

"I know that." His father's gaze was steady and there was understanding there as well as sorrow. "Doesn't mean I have to like it, but I understand. Still, you're back now. For how long?"

He'd been expecting that question. The problem was, he didn't have an answer for it yet. Sam ducked his head briefly, then looked at his father again. "I don't know."

"Well," the older man said sadly, "that's honest at least."

"I can tell you," Sam assured him, "that this time I'll let you know before I leave. I can promise not to disappear again."

Nodding, his father said, "Then I guess that'll have to do. For now." He paused and asked, "Have you seen anyone else yet?"

"No. Just Kristi." Sam stiffened. There were still minefields to step through. Hard feelings and pain to be

faced. There was no way out but through.

As hard as it was to face his family, he'd chosen to see them first, because what was still to come would be far more difficult.

"Well then," his father spoke up, "you should know that—"

The elevator swished open. Sam turned to face whoever was arriving and instantly went still as stone. He hardly heard his father complete the sentence that had been interrupted.

"—Lacy's on her way over here."

Lacy Sills.

She stood just inside the room, clutching at a basket of muffins that filled the room with a tantalizing scent. Sam's heart gave one hard lurch in his chest. She looked good. Too damn good.

She stood five foot eight and her long blond hair hung in a single thick braid over her left shoulder. Her navy blue coat was unbuttoned to reveal a heavy, fisherman's knit, forest-green sweater over her black jeans. Her boots were black, too, and came to her knees. Her features were the same: a generous mouth; a straight, small nose; and blue eyes the color of deep summer. She didn't smile. Didn't speak. And didn't have to.

In a split second, blood rushed from his head to his lap and just like that, he was hard as a rock. Lacy had always had that effect on him.

That's why he'd married her.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Douglas Whatley:

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