



Pregnant by the Texan (Texas Cattleman's Club: After the Storm, Book 3)

By Sara Orwig

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- Sales Rank: #300827 in eBooks
- Published on: 2014-12-01
- Released on: 2014-12-01
- Format: Kindle eBook

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Editorial Review

About the Author

Sara Orwig lives in Oklahoma and has a deep love of Texas. With a master's degree in English, Sara taught high school English, was Writer-in-Residence at the University of Central Oklahoma and was one of the first inductees into the Oklahoma Professional Writers Hall of Fame. Sara has written mainstream fiction, historical and contemporary romance. Books are beloved treasures that take Sara to magical worlds. She loves both reading and writing them.

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Early in December as the private jet came in for a landing, Aaron Nichols looked below. Even though the tornado had hit two months earlier, the west side of Royal, Texas, still looked unrecognizable.

No matter how many times he had gone back and forth between Dallas and Royal, he was shocked by the destruction when he returned to Royal. The cleanup had commenced shortly after the storm, but the devastation had been too massive to get the land cleared yet. Hopefully, he and his partner, Cole Richardson, could find additional ways for R&N Builders to help in the restoration. As he looked at the debris—the broken lumber, bits and pieces of wood and metal, a crumpled car with the front half torn away—he thought of the lives wrecked and changed forever. It was a reminder of his own loss over seven years ago that had hit as suddenly as a storm: a car accident, and then Paula and seventeen-month-old Blake were gone. With time the pain had dulled, but it never went away and in moments like this when he had a sharp reminder, the hurt and memories hit him with a force that sometimes made him afraid his knees would buckle.

Realizing his fists were doubled, his knuckles white, he tried to relax, to shift his thoughts elsewhere. He remembered the day in October when he had met Stella Daniels during the cleanup effort. He thought of their one night together and his desire became a steady flame.

He hoped he would see her on this trip, although since their encounter, he had followed her wishes and refrained from calling her to go out again. The agreement to avoid further contact hadn't stopped him from thinking about her.

At the time he and Stella parted ways, he expected it to be easy. In the seven years since he lost his wife and baby son, women had come and gone in his life, but he had never been close to any of them. Stella had been different because he hadn't been able to walk away and forget her.

He settled in the seat as the plane approached the small Royal airport. Royal was a West Texas town of very wealthy people—yet their wealth hadn't been enough to help them escape the whirlwind.

Almost an hour later he walked into the dining room at the Cozy Inn, his gaze going over the quiet room that was almost empty because of the afternoon hour. He saw the familiar face of Cole Richardson, whose twin, Craig, was one of the storm's fatalities. A woman was seated near Cole. Aaron's heart missed a beat when he saw the brown hair pulled back severely into a bun. He could remember taking down that knot of hair and watching it fall across her bare shoulders, transforming her looks. Stella Daniels was with Cole. Aaron almost whispered "My lucky day" to himself.

Eagerness to see her again quickened his step even though it would get him nowhere with her. He suspected

when she decided something, she stuck by her decision and no one could sway her until she was ready to change. Her outfit—white cotton blouse buttoned to her throat and khaki slacks with practical loafers—was as severe and plain as her hairdo. She wore almost no makeup. Few men would look twice at her and he wondered whether she really cared. Watching her, a woman who appeared straitlaced and plain, Aaron couldn't help thinking that the passionate night they'd had almost seemed a figment of his imagination.

As Aaron approached them, Cole stood and Stella glanced over her shoulder. Her gaze met Aaron's and her big blue eyes widened slightly, a look of surprise forming on her face, followed by a slight frown that was gone in a flash.

He reached Cole and held out his hand. "Hi, Cole. Have a seat."

"Aaron, good to see you," Cole said. Looking ready for construction work, he wore one of his T-shirts with the red, white and blue R&N Builders logo printed across the front. "You know Stella Daniels."

Bright, luminous eyes gazed at him as he took her hand in his. Her hand was slender, warm, soft, instantly stirring memories of holding her in his arms.

"Oh, yes," he answered. "Hi, Stella," he said, his voice changing slightly. "We've met, but if we hadn't, anyone who watches television news would recognize you. You're still doing a great job for Royal," he said, and she smiled.

One of the administrative assistants at town hall, Stella had stepped in, taking charge after the storm and trying to help wherever she could. It hadn't taken long for reporters to notice her and start getting her on camera.

Aaron shed his leather jacket and sat across from Cole, aware of Stella to his left. He caught a whiff of the rose-scented perfume she wore, something old-fashioned, but it was uniquely Stella and made him remember holding her close, catching that same scent then.

"I'm glad to have you back in Royal," Cole said. He looked thinner, more solemn, and Aaron was saddened by Cole's loss as well as the losses of so many others in town. He knew from experience how badly it could hurt.

"I know help is needed here, so I'm glad to be back."

"Thanks," Cole said. "I mean it when I say I appreciate that. When you can, drop by the Texas Cattleman's Club. They're rebuilding now and moving along. They'll be glad to have you here, too."

"Our club friends in Dallas said to tell you and the others hello."

Cole nodded as he glanced at Stella. "Getting to the business at hand, Stella and I were talking about areas where more lumber is needed—all over the west side of town, it seems."

"Each time I see Royal, I can't believe the destruction. It still looks incredible. I've made arrangements to get another couple of our work crews here."

"R&N Builders have helped tremendously," Stella said.

"I'm sure everyone in town thanks you for doing such a great job right from the start, Stella—acquiring generators, getting help to people and directing some of the rescue efforts. When disaster happens unexpectedly like that, usually all hell breaks loose and it takes a calm head to help the recovery," Aaron stated.

"Thanks. I just did what I could. So many people pitched in and we appreciate what R&N Builders, plus you and Cole individually, have donated and done to aid Royal."

"We're glad to. Everyone in the company wanted to help," Cole replied. "So we're adding two more work crews. Stella, you can help coordinate where they should go. I asked men to volunteer for the assignment. They'll be paid by us the same as if they were working on a job at home, but R&N is donating their services to help Royal rebuild."

"That would be a tremendous help," Stella said. "Local companies are booked solid for the next few months. There's so much to be done that it's overwhelming."

"Also, we might be able to get one of the wrecking companies we work with to come in here and pick up debris. I doubt you have enough help now when there's so much to clean up," Aaron said.

"We need that desperately. We have some companies from nearby towns, but we can use more help. There is an incredible amount of debris and it keeps growing as they get the downed trees cut up."

Cole made a note on a legal pad in front of him.

"Right now I wonder if we'll ever get all the debris cleared. It would be great to have more trucks here to help haul things away."

Stella made notes as they discussed possibilities for the next hour. Even as he concentrated on the conversation, Aaron could not keep from having a sharp awareness of Stella so nearby. He wished she had not asked him to back off and forget their night of passion.

He'd done so, but now that he was back in her presence, he found it difficult to keep memories from surfacing and wished he could take her out again, dance with her and kiss her, because it had been an exciting, fun night.

Her long slender fingers thumbed through the notebook she held as she turned to a page of figures. He recalled her soft hands trailing across his bare chest, and looked up to meet her blue-eyed gaze.

She drew a deep breath and her cheeks flushed as she looked down and bent over her open binder. Startled, he realized she had memories, too. The idea that she had been recalling that night stirred him and ignited desire. He wondered how many men paid no attention to her because of her buttoned-up blouses and austere appearance. Her actions that night hadn't been austere. Aware he should get his thinking elsewhere, he tried to focus on what Cole was saying.

At half past three Cole leaned back in his chair. "Sorry to have to break this up. You two can continue and, Aaron, you can fill me in later. I'm going out to a long-time friend Henry Markham's ranch to stay five or six days. He invited me out. He also lost his brother in the storm and he's had a lot of damage, so I'm going to help him. I'll see you both next week and we can continue this."

"Don't forget," Stella said, "I have to leave town for part of the day tomorrow. I'll be back in the afternoon." As Cole nodded, she looked at Aaron. "I'm flying to Austin where my sister lives."

"If you need to stay longer, you should," Cole said.

"I don't think I'll need to stay. Just a short time with her and then I'll be back."

Cole glanced at Aaron. "I'm glad you're here, Aaron. We've got good people running the place in Dallas while we're gone, so everything should be all right."

"It'll be fine. George Wandle is in charge. And if anything comes up he promised he would call one of us."

"Good deal." Cole stood, pulled on a black Western-cut jacket and picked up his broad-brimmed Resistol hat. "Thanks, Stella, for meeting with me."

"All the thanks go to you and Aaron for the help you and your company are giving to Royal. You've been terrific."

"We're glad to help where we can. Aaron, if you need me for anything, I have my phone with me."

"Sure, Cole."

Aaron watched his partner walk through the restaurant and then he turned back to Stella. "It's nice to see you again."

"Thank you. It's nice to see you, too. I really mean it. Your company has done so much to help."

"There's still so much more to do. How's the mayor?"

A slight frown creased her brow as she shook her head at him. "Since the mayor was in the town hall when it sustained a direct hit, he was hurt badly. He was on the critical list a very long time. He's hurt badly with broken bones, internal ruptures and complications after several surgeries. He was in the ICU for so long. With all the problems he's had, he's still a long way from healed."

"That's tough. Tough for him, for you, for all who work for him and for the town. The deputy mayor's death complicated things even more. No one's really in charge. You've sort of stepped into that void, Stella."

"I'm just doing what I can. There are so many things—from destroyed buildings to lost records and displaced pets. Megan Maguire, the animal shelter director, has worked around the clock a lot of the time. It just takes everybody pulling together and it's nice you're back to help."

He smiled at her. "Maybe, sometime, you need a night out to forget about Royal for a few minutes."

"Frankly, that sounds like paradise, but I don't have time right now. Someone texts or calls every other minute. This has been one of the quietest afternoons, but this morning was a stream of calls."

"Royal could manage without you for a couple of hours."

"Don't tempt me, Aaron," she said, smiling at him. "And I won't be here tomorrow."

"I have the feeling that you're working late into the night, too."

"You're right, but every once in a while now, there'll be a lull in the calls or appointments or hospital visits. Lately, I've had some nights to myself. While you're here, let me show you which projects Cole has finished and where we need the work crews next."

She spread a map on the table and he pulled his chair closer to her. Aware of her only inches away now, he once again inhaled a faint scent of her rose perfume. He helped her smooth the map out and leaned close, trying to focus on what she told him but finding it difficult to keep his attention from wandering to her so close beside him.

She showed him where they had repaired houses and finished building a new house. Stella told him about different areas on the west side of town, which had taken the brunt of the storm, the problems, the shortages of supplies, the people in the hospital. The problems seemed staggering, yet she was quietly helping, as were so many others she told him about.

He wondered if she had suffered some deep loss herself and understood their pain. He wouldn't ask, because she probably wouldn't want to talk about it. He didn't want anyone to ask him about his loss and he hadn't reached a point where he could talk about it with others. He didn't think he ever would. The hurt was deep and personal.

"Aaron?"

Startled, he looked at her. "Sorry, I was thinking about some of these people and their terrible losses. Some things you can't ever get back."

"No," she answered, studying him with a solemn expression. "Houses can be rebuilt, but lives lost are gone. Even some material possessions that hold sentimental value or are antiques—there's no replacing them. You can't replace sixty-year-old or older trees—not until you've planted new ones and let them grow sixty or seventy years. It tears you up sometimes." She smiled at him. "Anyway, I'm glad you're here."

"We'll just help where we can. To have a bed and a roof over your head is good and we need to work toward that for everyone."

"Very good. You and Cole are a godsend," she said, smiling at him and patting his hand.

He placed his hand on hers. Her hand was soft, warm, smooth. He longed to draw her into his arms and his gaze lowered to her mouth as he remembered kissing her before.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Willie Kelly:

The reserve untitled Pregnant by the Texan (Texas Cattleman's Club: After the Storm, Book 3) is the publication that recommended to you to see. You can see the quality of the book content that will be shown to a person. The language that author use to explained their ideas are easily to understand. The copy writer was did a lot of analysis when write the book, therefore the information that they share to your account is absolutely accurate. You also will get the e-book of Pregnant by the Texan (Texas Cattleman's Club: After

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