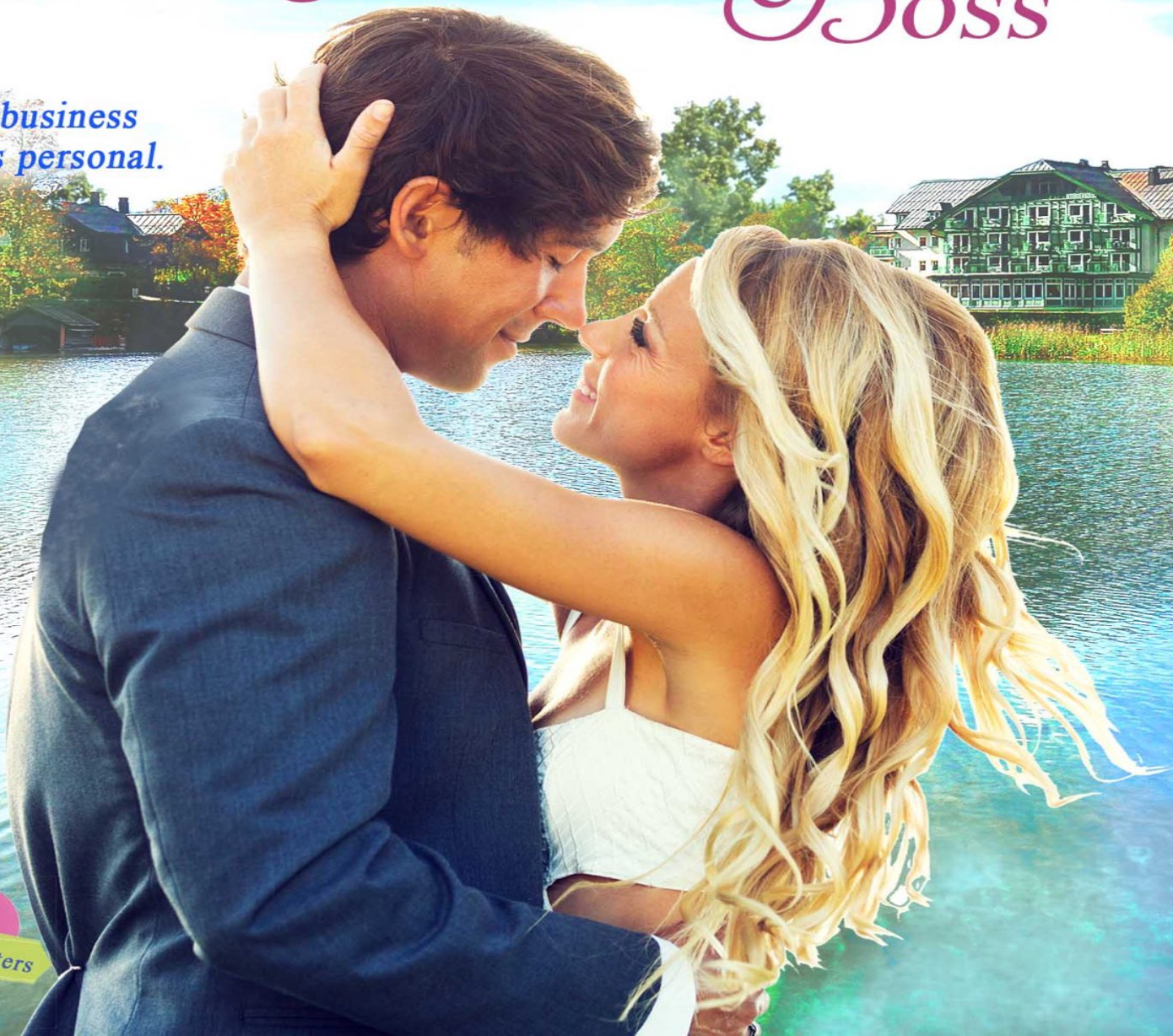


NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

JEAN ORAM

Falling for the Boss

*When business
becomes personal.*



The Summer Sisters

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FALLING FOR THE BOSS

A SMALL TOWN ROMANCE

JEAN ORAM



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FROM THE BACK COVER

One sexy, burned out billionaire. One spitfire graduate. One small island.

Tycoon Connor MacKenzie has it all from the penthouse to the world-dominating corporation. At least that's what everyone believes. Underneath it all, his life is disintegrating faster than a stock market crash.

When Connor's doctor forces him to take it easy and go deep into cottage country for some much needed R&R he lands on an old cottage veranda in Muskoka which lacks the luxuries he's accustomed to. Maya Summer, a recent business grad, has been waiting for opportunity to come a knockin' and not only has it arrived on her doorstep, but it's presented itself in a very sexy package. However, despite Maya's best advances and proposals, Connor's strict new "no-work diet" has them both starving for much more than just business.

Can Maya convince Connor to let her be his new right-hand business gal while gaining enough income to save her family's cottage? And will Connor, the workaholic, be able to resist her charms, both in and out of the boardroom?

This is the second book in the Summer Sisters series.

Falling for the Boss: A Small Town Romance

The Summer Sisters, Book 2

By Jean Oram

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Previously published as “Love and Dreams”

Fourth Edition

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All characters and events appearing in this book are fictitious. Any resemblance to real people, alive or dead, as well as any resemblance to events is coincidental and, truly, a little bit cool.

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A NOTE ON MUSKOKA

Muskoka is a real place in Ontario, Canada, however, I have taken artistic license with the area. While the issues presented in this book (such as water shed, endangered animals, heritage preservation, shoreline erosion, taxation, etc.) as well as the towns are real, to my knowledge, there is no Baby Horseshoe Island nor is there a Nymph Island, or a company called Rubicore Developments. The businesses and people are fictional, with the exception of The Kee to Bala, Duke's Marina, Windermere House, the Segwun and Wenonah.

Muskoka is a wonderful area, full of small towns, pristine woods and lakes, where movie stars and other celebrities do vacation amongst us regular folks. Yet, having spent many summers in the area during my youth and adulthood, I have yet to see a single celebrity--though a man my family presumed to be Kurt Browning's (a famous Canadian figure skating Olympian) father did offer to help me when the outboard fritzed out on me once. Darn outboard.

You can discover more about Muskoka online at www.discovermuskoka.ca/

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thank you to Lurie Twist, a member of my fan group on Facebook, for naming Connor MacKenzie's business, CM Enterprises. If you'd like to join in such fun and games as naming characters and more (as well as get incredibly rich and famous—hey, it could happen—by being mentioned in one of my books) join us at www.facebook.com/groups/jeanoramfans.

I would also like to thank my critique partners who, as always, do their best to keep me in line. As well, thank you to Emily and Erin for cruising the book for errors that slipped past me after making the corrections suggested by my wonderfully patient editor, Margaret.

Maya Summer shifted from foot to foot in the tall grass and squinted up at the sky. Where was that plane? She was more than ready for her future to land, and now it was delayed. She checked her watch and hurried into the private airstrip's terminal, a small shack, to use their washroom again.

M “I shouldn’t have had that extra cup of coffee,” she muttered. She was wired, jittery, and so nervous she wasn’t sure whether to throw up or break into delirious laughter.

“Meeting someone important, dear?” asked a woman as Maya hurried into the washroom’s one stall.

“Connor MacKenzie. I’m picking up Connor MacKenzie.” She grinned as she flushed the toilet, and refrained from giving a little happy dance there in the cramped enclosure.

Connor MacKenzie was coming to see *her*. Live with *her*.

“*The* Connor MacKenzie?” the woman asked, surprise evident in her voice, as she made room for Maya at the sink.

Maya nodded and adjusted her suit jacket in the mirror. It was kind of boxy, not as fitted as she’d been looking for, but it was all she’d been able to find at the local Salvation Army, and it went with her flared dress pants. She was going to spend the summer with Connor. Okay, okay, two weeks—only two weeks. *Oh, man. Breathe.* She had two weeks to convince Mr. MacKenzie that she was worth taking back to his Toronto office, where she’d

be employed as his right-hand woman. His personal assistant, Stella Bijania, had on-the-spot hired her less than twenty-four hours ago to take care of her boss during his impromptu retreat and do whatever was needed to ensure he got the downtime he was paying for. It was also her job to prevent him from falling too behind while in Muskoka.

She could do it. And she would do it well. In less than a month she'd be in the city, settling into a penthouse off Yonge Street, wearing Prada, because the devil wore Prada, and she was going to be the devil of the business world. Plus, she was about to learn the best strategies straight from the man who'd invented most of them as he went from MBA student to the new king of Bay Street as well as the city in less than a decade. He was barely older than she was, and he was already worth billions. The next two weeks were going to rock.

"He's going to change my life," Maya declared as she touched up her lipstick. He'd quickly see that she wasn't just another university grad with no experience. It was as her hero, the entrepreneurial Arlene Dickinson, said, "You have to surround yourself with people who are more talented than you are." And Maya was ready to surround herself with all things Connor MacKenzie. The man was a walking business bible she was eager to speed-read.

"Connor MacKenzie?" the woman repeated. "He's coming to Bracebridge?"

"The one and only. And no, he's coming to stay at my cottage. On an island." She barely held in a sigh of longing. He was smart, rich, and business-minded. Don't forget hot. Man, what she wouldn't give to wrap his expensive silk tie around her fist and pull his sweet lips against hers when she got the chance. That guy had a checkmark beside all the things a woman wanted in a man. Plus some.

"Are you his...?"

"Business associate." Maya followed the woman out of the washroom. Okay, she was going to be his assistant and, well, maid, while he took a business retreat at her family cottage for the next two weeks, but still. She was working *with* him. One on one. Discussing business things, creating presentations, drafting emails to all the bigwigs he associated with. She was

going to be the sexy, smart, witty woman in high heels and power suits nodding beside him, pointing out things he hadn't thought of, while he enjoyed his retreat from the city's stifling summer heat. He'd turn to her with respect brimming in his eyes, and ask how he'd ever got along without her. His lips would be just a whisper away from hers when he'd say...

"Is that him?" The woman pointed out the dusty window.

Maya staggered on her heels before catching herself. "He's waiting. I've left Connor MacKenzie waiting!" She scrambled out the door, before catching herself and adopting her best no-nonsense stride. Several feet away, she extended a hand for a shake. Too early. She hurried her pace, hoping he wouldn't notice.

"Mr. MacKenzie!"

He turned to her, all sexy five o'clock shadow and Gucci shades, ball cap parked low on his forehead.

"Mr. MacKenzie!" Maya reached to shake his hand, and he thrust a heavy duffel at her. The bag dropped, wrenching her shoulder. "Oomph!"

The man packed like a girl, with everything in one ginormous bag that was nearly impossible to lift without seeing a chiropractor afterward.

"Do you have other bags?" she asked, looking around for a laptop. He had to have a briefcase. Maybe two. "On the plane, perhaps?"

"That's all."

Where were his computer and business papers? Surely not in the duffel, getting crushed. Crushed like the disks in her spine, one by one, the longer she stood clinging to the bag's handles. She readjusted her grip and leaned back so she wouldn't be tempted to allow gravity to take over and cause her to kiss the tarmac.

"Good flight?"

She could barely believe how *human* he seemed in person. Not at all the bouncing, vibrant machine whose mouth could barely keep up with his ideas during his TED talk two years ago. Watched: 73 times. University essays written about or referencing that talk: 13.

But this man here in front of her? He wasn't exactly exuding power and energy. No overflowing enthusiasm. He was mellow. Really mellow.

It kind of bummed her out, actually. But at the same time, there was something irresistibly intriguing about his quietness.

Connor stared at her and, with a quick inhalation, she launched into her rehearsed introduction. “My name is Maya Summer. I’ll be your everything for the next two weeks.”

An eyebrow appeared over the frame of Connor’s sunglasses, beneath his sun-faded hat. “Everything?” he asked, his voice thick and rough, its tenor low.

Sweat pricked Maya’s back, and she knew it wasn’t caused by the heat of the July sunshine radiating off the cracked tarmac. It was the way his tone hinted at something less businesslike.

“Just about.” She shot him a playful smile.

Some women might think her ambitious to a fault, but she’d sleep her way out of a starting position in the mailroom if she had to. And with this man, it would not be a hardship. Give her half an excuse and she’d run her hands over those broad shoulders, down his chest and lower. Her eyes drifted where her imagination was going, before she caught herself.

Right. He was her boss. No need to make him feel similar to a piece of man meat. Not yet, anyway.

“You’ll be staying at my cottage for the next two weeks,” she said. “A quiet, rustic business retreat. And I will be available as your personal assistant—um, business executive. Are you sure you don’t have another bag?”

He gave a small shake of his head.

“Okay, great. So, I will be your liaison with...with, uh, everyone you require while you enjoy your retreat. Whatever you need, I can take care of it. And, uh...” Where had all her lines gone? She’d imagined a much brighter meeting. For example, one where he talked and shook her hand. One where he asked about her, or at least her qualifications, so she could tell him she’d graduated with distinction, made the dean’s list, won a scholarship from TD Mutual, and all that other stuff that made businessmen get excited when discussing the pillageable assets they could get for pennies on the dollar in their overeager assistants.

And okay, so things weren't unrolling the way she'd expected, but she was already learning things from him. For instance, when it came right down to choosing the proper power outfit, a short skirt was always the way to go.



MAYA UNLOCKED the trunk of her car and perched her sunglasses on her head as she hoisted Connor's bag into the trunk of her old Honda, her high heels sinking into the grass parking lot. Peering around the side of the car, she hoped Connor wouldn't notice the car's rust spots and its general lack of va-va-voom. She paused when he climbed into the backseat. Did she look as though she ran a car service? Why wouldn't he ride up front with her?

She clutched the wheel and promised herself that it was only jet lag making him seem different than she'd expected. Soon he'd perk up, fill her brain with valuable business tips, and the formal, boss-assistant line would become blurred.

The only problem with her jet lag theory was the flight from Toronto was super short. Maybe he'd been in France. Or up all night hashing out a deal. Maybe he trusted her, and that was why he was so quiet. Maybe this was the real Connor MacKenzie.

Yes, that was likely it. He could tell she was someone he could be himself around and that she wouldn't judge him. He'd be spilling his secrets and insecurities in a matter of hours, wondering how he'd ever managed to get by not sharing his burdens with someone like her.

"I thought you were my assistant?" he said as she started the engine.

"I *am* your assistant."

"How are you going to do that if you're driving taxi? This job has a very demanding schedule."

"Oh! The door? It's from the wreckers. Mrs. Star accidentally backed into it and the only door I could find was off one of Alvin's old taxis—it hit a moose. Anyway, Mrs. Star is on a pension and it didn't feel right for her to shell out for a proper door that matched. Especially since I'll be buying a new car in the fall. Why have either of us spend money painting over *Alvin's Taxi*

on this old clunker, right? Plus it's kind of fun. Sometimes I pick up fares to help pay for gas. Alvin doesn't mind as long as I charge reasonable rates and buy him a coffee every once in a while."

Silence.

Okay. Making the best out of a crappy old car didn't amuse him. Good to know.

Maya drove through the rocky terrain of the Canadian shield's countryside, forcing herself to not give excuses for her car's lack of newness, and parked at the docks where the family's old boat waited for them. She tried to surreptitiously fan herself with her suit jacket, hating the fact that Connor was comfortable in a faded T-shirt, shorts and a ball cap, while she was dying from the heat. But it was worth making a favorable impression, right?

"What are we doing?" Connor asked as she got out of the car.

"Taking a boat."

"A boat?"

Oh, thank the heavens for the breeze off the lake. She could stand here for hours.

Connor's voice sounded thick, slow. It was as if he was struggling his way through molasses. Was he on drugs? Was he on this retreat to try and get clean in private? Because she was so not the merry maid type and was not going to nurse him back to health. Play-acting nursemaid for a man as sexy as him? Oh, yeah. But cleaning up other people's vomit in a century-old cottage sounded like her idea of Hell with a capital H. Because, seriously, that stuff was not going to come out of the plain oak floorboards, and she'd rather go back to her crappy old service jobs if that was the way this was going to go down. Her family might need Connor's money in order to save their cottage, but a girl had to draw the line somewhere. Even for him.

"You're staying on an island," she informed him. "With me." A secret little jump of glee partied in her belly.

"An island?" He sat back in the seat as though stunned by the revelation, even though his tone remained flat and lifeless.

"Yes. It said as much in the ad."