



A Jackson Hole Homecoming (Rx for Love)

By Cindy Kirk

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Tripp Randall locked eyes, she knew they were soul mates. Now, fifteen years later, Anna's teenage dream is coming true: they're holding hands. They're going to the movies. They're even kissing! Too bad it's a complete charade that ends in thirty days.

When Anna agrees to be best friend Tripp's pretend girlfriend, she knows it's to comfort his ailing father, who yearns to see his son happily settled. Besides, Tripp is still grieving for his late wife. But his touch is so electrifying and his kisses are so...convincing. Anna has loved Tripp for such a long time. Is it possible that one month will be enough to open her soul mate's eyes to true love?

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A Jackson Hole Homecoming (Rx for Love) By Cindy Kirk Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #146072 in eBooks
- Published on: 2013-06-01
- Released on: 2013-06-01
- Format: Kindle eBook

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Editorial Review

About the Author

Cindy Kirk has loved to read for as long as she can remember. In first grade she received an award for reading one hundred books!

Since selling her first story to Harlequin Books in 1999, Cindy has been forced to juggle her love of reading with her passion for creating stories of her own. But it's worth it. Writing for Harlequin Special Edition is a dream come true.

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Adrianna Lee took a step back, her heart in her throat. As a nurse midwife, watching parents ooh and aah over their little one was her favorite part of the birthing process.

This time had been extra special because the baby she'd delivered was the new son of her friends Betsy and Ryan Har-court. Seeing Ryan's dark head pressed against Betsy's blond strands as they carefully checked out their new son's fingers and toes brought a quiver of longing.

When would it be her turn? When would she find a man to love and stand by her? A man eager to build a life with her? She'd imagined the scenario many times. But the man in her dreams wasn't some faceless entity. He had a face. And a name. Tripp Randall.

There was only one little problem. Okay, one *big* problem. He wasn't interested in her.

"I heard the good news."

Adrianna turned toward the deep voice and there he stood. The man who'd captured her heart at fourteen by gallantly carrying some branches to the curb for her. At the time he'd been a hunky seventeen-year-old capable of turning her knees to mush with a single glance. As the steady boyfriend of her neighbor, he'd also been unattainable.

These days he was the CEO of the Jackson Hole Hospital, a widower and *still* unattainable.

Tripp stepped close, keeping his voice low, as if not wanting to disturb the sleeping baby nestled in Betsy's arms. "How did everything go?"

"Perfect." Adrianna couldn't keep the pride from her voice. "He's a healthy eight-pound-six-ounce boy and Betsy barely broke a sweat."

"So not true," Betsy called out from the rocker. "Trust me, there's a good reason it's called labor."

Her dark-haired husband brushed a strand of hair back from his wife's face, his eyes filled with concern. "I didn't like seeing you in such pain. Even when Adrianna assured me everything was proceeding normally, I

worried."

Beside her, Adrianna felt Tripp stiffen. Pregnancy was a natural occurrence but not without risk. Tripp knew that better than most. He'd lost his wife, Gayle, and their unborn baby three years ago when the placenta had abruptly separated from the uterine wall. Adrianna raised her hand to touch his arm in a comforting gesture but pulled back at the last second.

Tripp rarely spoke of his loss. Adrianna remembered the moment she'd heard the news as if it were yesterday.

"I'm happy for you both," she heard Tripp say. If there was any inner turmoil, his voice gave nothing away. "Have you decided on a name?"

"Nathan." Betsy's radiant smile lit up the entire room. "It means 'he whom God has given.'"

"Nate Harcourt." Tripp cocked his head and appeared to roll the name around on his tongue. "I like it. Great name for a bull rider."

Ryan had been a champion bull rider before hanging up his spurs to attend law school.

Betsy's mouth widened in a perfect O and she glanced at her husband in horror. Obviously the thought of her baby boy one day straddling the back of a big bad bull didn't sit well with the new mom.

Ryan shot Tripp a glinting "you'll pay for that comment" before patting his wife's shoulder. "No need to think of that now, sweetheart. That's a lot of years away."

"C'mon." This time, Adrianna let her fingers curve around Tripp's arm. "You've caused enough trouble for one day. Let's give Betsy and Ryan time alone with their son."

Tripp managed to call out his congratulations before Adrianna pulled him into the hall and shut the door to the birthing suite behind them.

"Hey, if you wanted to get me alone all you had to do was ask."

The devilish twinkle in his eyes brought a smile to Adrianna's lips and made her forget the scolding words on her tongue.

The man had the soul of a mischievous imp. Not to mention he was too attractive for his own good. His collar-length hair was artfully disheveled, the blond waves practically inviting a woman's fingers to slide through the soft strands. The patch of scruff on his chin only added to his appeal.

Whenever she saw Tripp at Wally's Place—a popular local bar—dressed in jeans and boots with his fingers curved around a bottle of Dos Equis, it was hard to imagine he could be the CEO of a health system with a multimillion-dollar budget. But his performance spoke for itself. Even though he'd been in the position for less than a year, he'd already garnered praise for his innovative changes.

They'd barely stepped away from the door when a nurse approached Adrianna for her signature. As she scrawled her name on the prescription, Adrianna couldn't help noticing the pretty redhead checking out Tripp.

"We don't see you up on the Maternity floor much, Mr. Randall." The recently divorced nurse gazed at him through lowered lashes.

The RN clearly had the CEO in her crosshairs. Adrianna understood the appeal. Not only was Tripp wearing her favorite beige Armani suit with the blue tie that matched his eyes, but he also smelled terrific. A woman could get intoxicated simply breathing in the spicy scent of his cologne.

"What brings you up here today?" The nurse shifted from one foot to the other, clearly in no hurry to get back to her patients.

"Some friends had a baby." He slanted a smile in Adrianna's direction. "And I have a proposition for Ms. Lee."

A look of disappointment skittered across the nurse's face, but Tripp didn't appear to notice.

"Well, if I can ever be of service to you, don't hesitate to call me."

There was a decidedly suggestive undertone to the nurse's words that would be hard to miss, but Tripp's easy smile never wavered.

"I'll keep that in mind—" he glanced at her name tag "—Lila."

"It's Leila," the redhead corrected, then frowned as another nurse motioned to her from the doorway of one of the birthing suites. Still, she offered Tripp another smile before strolling off, her hips swinging from side to side.

Adrianna fought an unexpected surge of jealousy. She waited until Leila was out of earshot, then took out her irritation on him. "*Proposition*? Couldn't you think of a less suggestive word? The nurse probably thinks you want to sleep with me."

His eyes widened.

Adrianna stifled a groan. Talk about a Freudian slip.

"Nah." Tripp finally waved a dismissive hand. "Everyone knows we're just friends."

The words had barely left his lips when Adrianna's pager buzzed. She slipped it from her pocket and glanced down. A patient she'd been following had been admitted in labor.

"If you have a proposition for me, you'd better spit it out quick." Adrianna softened her abruptness with a smile. "I've got to run."

"The hospital fundraiser at the Spring Gulch Country Club is Saturday." Tripp shoved his hands in his pockets and rocked back on his heels. "The way I figure, it makes sense for us to go together."

"You're asking me to go with you? Why?" Adrianna didn't bother to curb her bluntness. She and Tripp had been down this road many times since he'd returned to Jackson Hole.

Even though neither could deny the curious energy between them, he'd made it clear on many occasions that

he had zero romantic interest in her. The last time the subject had come up she'd lied and said she felt the same way about him.

"I have to be there. You have to be there." His tone turned persuasive. "We might as well go together."

What he said made sense as far as it went. His was a command performance. As a member of the medical staff, her attendance at the annual fundraising dinner and dance was highly encouraged.

But there were any number of women in Jackson Hole who'd be happy to be his date.

"Why me?" she asked, puzzled. "Why not ask someone else? Someone who appeals to you?"

Merely saying the words brought a pang of regret. They could be so good together...if he'd just give her a chance.

"You're a beautiful woman." Tripp spoke quickly as she began edging her way down the hall. "Any man would be proud to have you by his side."

Adrianna stopped and fisted her hands on her hips. "You didn't answer my question."

This time Tripp didn't pretend to misunderstand. "With you there'd be no expectations. I could network without worrying I'm neglecting you. You could do the same. Don't we have fun when we're together?"

Adrianna reluctantly nodded. Yes, they always had fun. Yes, she enjoyed being with him, but that was no longer enough.

Last week she'd looked at the calendar and realized she'd turn thirty in a few weeks. She'd hoped that by this point she'd have a husband and a couple of kids.

That wasn't going to happen if she kept hanging around Tripp Randall. She *must* tell him no. After all, there were bound to be lots of single men at the event. There was no point in attending the function with Tripp, a man who'd made his feelings very clear. Unless...

"I'll go." Adrianna's heart skipped a beat at the smile he shot her. "On one condition."

He took her hand and brought it to his lips. "Whatever you want."

She ignored the tingles shooting up her arm and met his gaze. "You have to promise to introduce me to all your single friends."

Tripp ran a finger along the starched inside collar of his shirt and wondered why—just once—the hospital couldn't host a fundraiser where jeans and boots were de rigueur instead of formal attire.

Pick your battles, he told himself, and refocused on the soliloquy—er, conversation—that had been going on for endless minutes. When the portly gray-haired rancher—who happened to also be one of the trustees on the hospital board—paused after finishing a rather lengthy review of his Hereford breeding program, Tripp stuck out his hand. "Stop by my office anytime, Paul. Let me know how that new bull works out."

Even though Tripp had been away from horses and cattle for many years, the fact that he'd grown up

working on his father's land gave him an automatic "in" with many in the community, especially those involved in ranching.

But when Tripp had decided to return, it was his MBA in Healthcare Leadership at Yale and almost ten years of experience in health-care policy and economics that had made him a viable candidate for the CEO position.

"Mark my words, that bull will—"

"I think Tripp knows exactly what the bull will do. Let the boy get back to his date." Paul's wife pointed to some friends across the room and insisted her husband come with her to say hello.

"Nice to see you again, Marie," Tripp called out as she took her husband's arm in a steely grasp and they disappeared into the crowd.

Tripp snagged a glass of wine from a passing waiter and took a sip, surveying the large room. The Spring Gulch Country Club was where most hospital events were held and this year's fundraiser for pediatric monitoring equipment was no exception.

Tables with silent-auction items filled the perimeter of a large room just off the country club's foyer. A huge rustic stone fireplace acted as the focal point for the room. Chandeliers made out of antlers hung from the angled ceiling. Even though the beautiful hardwood floors and the tables topped with linen screamed elegance, the chandeliers added a distinctly casual touch.

Huge urns of flowers surrounded the shiny wooden dance floor. Crystal goblets and sterling-silver flatware gleamed in the candlelight. Most of those in attendance, men in tuxedos and women in cocktail dresses, were people Tripp had known his entire life.

When he caught a glimpse of his parents on the dance floor and his mother gave him a tremulous smile, Tripp realized once again how good it was to be back. Even though the man who'd once herded cattle all day was now having difficulty slow dancing with his wife, the fact that his dad was here and on his feet brought a thankful lump to Tripp's throat.

While Tripp didn't regret his years on the East Coast, he did regret staying away so long.

His sister had grown from a girl into a woman while he'd been away. He caught sight of her dancing with one of Travis Fisher's younger brothers, a big smile on her face. Like him, Hailey loved to dance.

Tripp realized he hadn't been on the dance floor yet this evening. But that could be easily remedied. Even though there were dozens of single women at tonight's event—including the red-haired maternity nurse, Leila—he would dance first with the woman he'd brought. He glanced around the ballroom until he spotted Adrianna walking with Lexi on the edge of the dance floor.

"You've got a good eye." A man's voice sounded from Tripp's left. "She's the prettiest filly in the stable."

Tripp turned. The man, standing with a glass of whiskey in one hand, was unfamiliar. Even though he had to be in his early thirties—which would make them close to the same age—he wasn't from Jackson Hole.

Tall, with an athletic build, the stranger had the confident stance of a person used to giving orders. His dark

hair was cut stylishly short and the Hublot Black Caviar on his wrist hadn't come off the ten-dollar watch rack. But it was his steely gray eyes that defined him.

Tripp extended his hand. "I don't believe we've met. I'm Tripp Randall, the CEO of the Jackson Hole Hospital."

The man returned Tripp's handshake with an equally strong grasp. "Winston Ferris." He flashed a smile showing a mouthful of perfect white teeth. "Call me Winn."

"Are you new to Jackson Hole, Winn?"

"I am," Winn acknowledged, his eye shifting back to the dance floor. "My father has been here a couple of years."

Jim Ferris. One of the newer members on the hospital's board of trustees. And, according to Tripp's dad, the one who'd been most resistant to hiring him.

Tripp had already forgiven the man for his error in judgment. After all, like his son said, Jim was relatively new to the community.

"Are you planning to stay?" Tripp didn't want to pry, but he was curious. Jim Ferris had recently outbid his father on the large cattle spread adjacent to their property.

"Haven't decided yet." Winn's eyes took on a lust-filled glow. "But if she'd give me a tumble, I'd definitely give more thought to hanging around."

Tripp shifted his gaze in the direction Winn stared. A group of women stood clustered together, laughing and talking. Any one of the beauties could have caught Winn's eye. But Tripp knew instantly which "filly" stood out from the herd.

When he'd picked up Adrianna tonight, he'd taken one look at her and immediately thought of a thousand things he'd rather be doing than attending a fundraiser.

Things he shouldn't be thinking about a woman who was only a friend. A woman who'd been his wife's friend. Even if Tripp had been ready to date again—to get naked with a woman again—it wouldn't be with Adrianna. It would be with someone new, not with someone so deeply linked to his past.

Yet, he couldn't deny there was chemistry between them. Desire had hit him full force when he'd first seen her this evening. He'd had to restrain himself from pulling her into his arms and scattering kisses across her face and neck. From pulling the pins from her hair so he could run his fingers through the silky strands. From easing the dress from her shoulders and letting it fall to the floor—

"Who is she?"

Tripp jerked his thoughts back to the present. Even though he should be relieved—after all, he had no business thinking of Adrianna in that manner—he found himself irritated by the man's persistence.

"Which one?" Tripp forced a bored tone.

Winn snorted. "The hot brunette. She's a dead ringer for that Brazilian actress."

Tripp took a sip of wine. "Adrianna Lee. She's a nurse midwife."

"Is she married?"

Tripp didn't like the way Winn looked at Adrianna, as if she were a piece of meat and he hadn't eaten in a week.

There was no point in lying. Winn could easily discover the truth for himself. "She's not."

"The night is definitely looking up." Winn grinned. "One more question. Do you know if she's seeing anyone?"

Tripp thought of the promise he'd made to Adrianna. But Winn was a new acquaintance, certainly not a friend. And even if he was, she deserved better than a man who'd compare her to a horse.

"Do you know if she's seeing anyone?" Winn repeated, a determined glint in his gray eyes.

Tripp smiled. "As a matter of fact, she's with me."

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