

The Christmas Proposal

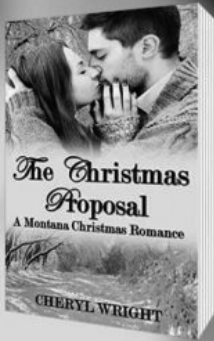
A Montana Christmas Romance
(Book One)

CHERYL WRIGHT

THE CHRISTMAS PROPOSAL

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A cute storyline, one pretty heroine, one handsome hero and one dastardly villain. Fun following along to their HEA. Looking forward to book 2.

-Amazon Reviewer - JudyE

Available at Amazon --> allauthor.com/amazon/23917/

CHAPTER ONE

Mandy Scott stood at the window staring at the covering of snow. It was pure white for as far as the eye could see.

She loved this time of year in Winston Montana with its snow-covered peaks and tree branches heavy with snow. She loved watching children throw snowballs at each other and toboggan down the slopes of the streets surrounding her little cottage.

Wrapping her arms around herself she sighed.

She loved it except that every year around this time she faced the same dilemma. Every year at this time she beat herself up about not having a significant other in her life.

Her sisters had all married, and her brother was engaged to a wonderful woman. She was the only one *left on the shelf* as they all laughingly called it.

Only it wasn't funny. Not really.

Mandy didn't see it as a joke. It stung every time someone made a comment about her relationship status. Or should she say *non-relationship* status?

At nearly thirty years old, everyone thought it was time.

Except Mandy.

She was happy with her life exactly the way it was. She loved her career as senior reporter at News of the Day and had no intention of leaving it any time soon.

The pressure she was put under leading up to the holidays each year was suffocating her.

Maybe she wouldn't go this year. That would solve all her problems.

Her parents put on a huge family party leading up to the holidays each year. Everyone attended. Everyone with their partners and their offspring, that is.

Then there was Mandy.

She had tried repeatedly to get out of going, but her mother always insisted. She'd even tried to use work as an excuse.

Her mother saw right through her excuses and demanded she go. For her own good of course.

She turned away from the scene in front of her. Suddenly she couldn't bear to watch the happy couples hand-in-hand, frolicking through the snow.

As much as she was happy with her life, sometimes it would be nice to have that special someone to love.

It was early November, and already she was worrying about the holidays.

* * *

Mandy tied her unruly red hair back in a ponytail, then pulled the apron around herself and prepared to help her mother with the holiday baking.

She had fond memories of standing in this very kitchen, helping her mother prepare for the upcoming celebrations.

They baked rum balls, biscuits, Christmas puddings and cakes, as well as traditional shortbread. There were weeks of baking with many of the items being bundled up to give as gifts, with the majority going to elderly friends who were no longer able to bake their own.

"Well, don't just stand there!" Helena Scott told her daughter. "There is so much to do in the next few weeks." There was nothing like being prepared.

Mandy instinctively knew what was coming next. "Who are you bringing to the family celebrations this year?" Her mother meant no harm, but it pulled at her heart strings every year to have to say the same thing.

Mandy adjusted her apron, tied it a little tighter. "I haven't decided yet." The words were out before she could stop them.

"How wonderful!" Helena exclaimed.

From the look on her face, Mandy knew she had to come through now. What had she done? She couldn't just dream a man out of thin air.

"Why have you kept him secret," her mother wanted to know. "What is his name, how old is he, when and where did you meet him, why haven't you...."

"Seriously, Mother!"

The room went quiet. "I'm sorry, darling," she said. "But this is so exciting."

Mandy rummaged through her mother's recipe books, pretending to try and decide what she would cook. "Rum balls look good," she said more brightly than she felt.

Now all she had to do was find her perfect date. It wouldn't be long, and her entire family would hear she was finally bringing a man to the celebrations.

* * *

Noah Gleeson stared at the mess around him.

Winston Montana was a long way from his home-town of Buckeye Arizona.

There was nothing left for him there, and when the opportunity for a transfer had presented itself, he grabbed it with both hands.

When he found out he'd be moving house less than two months before Christmas, he hesitated. Who wouldn't?

His hesitation didn't last long. Forty seconds, if that. With no family to consider, he'd decided to take the chance. Now, as he stood in his new kitchen surrounded by boxes, he wasn't so sure. But it was too late to back out now.

The moving company people had left less than an hour ago, and now Noah felt lost.

He'd bought this house sight unseen. A massive leap of faith on his part. Something he'd never done before with such a big purchase. But time was of the essence; he didn't have time to fly to Montana and check

out houses, and so he'd contacted an estate agent who had been recommended, and the rest was history.

He was more than happy with his purchase, and the agent had gone the extra mile. He arrived to find a bottle of champagne on the table, along with a box of chocolates.

He needed a strong coffee just thinking about it, but he had no idea where to find a coffee mug, let alone the coffee.

It seemed the perfect time to familiarize himself with his new home town.

As he wandered around the small town, the change of lifestyle hit him square in the face. He'd lived in Buckeye for most of his life and had enjoyed the city life, with all its restaurants, bars, and active nightlife.

Sure, there were stores. A café, dress shop, hairdresser and a few other stores, but it was not like anything he was used to. Noah was certain Winston would shut down around eight every night.

He had planned to eat out tonight, so he'd better get there early or risk missing out.

He came to a halt outside the quaint little café, contemplating whether or not to go in. He stared at the flashing holiday lights, daring him to ignore the upcoming celebrations.

He gingerly opened the door and forced his face into the mask he used to stop people wanting to know him.

* * *

"And this is Noah Gleeson, your new boss."

Mandy glanced up from her desk and eyed her new boss. She knew he was coming. Heck, she'd even applied for the position.

As one of the senior journalists at News of the Day, she thought she was a certainty to get it, but it wasn't to be. The company already had someone picked out at head office.

She tried not to let it get to her. After all, they had to work together.

"Pleased to meet you, Mr Gleeson," she said, swallowing back her pride, and extending her hand as she stood.

He smiled pleasantly beneath the mask, but Mandy could see right through him. He was going through the motions. She put it down to new job, new town.

"Noah, please," he said abruptly. "Mr Gleeson is," He stopped suddenly and swallowed. "was my dad."

"Oh." Mandy loved both her parents and couldn't bare to lose them. It was quite apparent he'd lost his dad. And fairly recently if she was any judge of character. "I'm sorry."

How terribly sad. But he brushed her words away with a flick of his hand.

He wasn't very old either. Maybe just a few years older than her?

Not that Mandy was interested in anything about Noah, except his work ethic. She distanced herself from most of her colleagues.

She enjoyed her privacy, as much as you could have in a small town like Winston, so she rarely fraternized with her work mates. Especially Harry Simpson. Even now she could feel his eyes burn a hole in her back.

"We'll get together soon, once I've settled in," he said.

She frowned. *Get together? What was that about?*

"So I can see where you're up to with your current assignments."

She nodded. Of course he'd need to know where she was at. It was his job.

The job she wanted.

She shook her self mentally. It was not Noah's fault she didn't get the job. She just had to move on and get on with it.

"My door is always open," he said, as he began to walk away.

She nodded but was convinced she wouldn't be spending much time with Noah Gleeson. Not if she could help it.

Mandy sat in the staff lunchroom nibbling on a sandwich. It had been a long day and it wasn't even half over yet.

She was working on a big assignment. Big for Winston anyway. One day she would break out of the small-town reporter persona she carried everywhere she went.

Her goal was to work in one of the big cities. Report on the important stuff. Investigative reporter, that was her dream job. Getting into the nitty-gritty of the latest political scandal or finding the killer on a cold case.

Instead she was writing about the Jones's 50th Wedding Anniversary and the Winston Cattery that needed more people to adopt.

In her heart, Mandy knew she would never leave this quaint little town. Her family were here – her tribe – and she would never abandon them.

She picked up her mug of coffee and was bringing it to her lips when she felt someone behind her. She spun around, spilling her coffee as she did.

"Heck!" It was everywhere. All over the table and threatening to spill onto her clothes.

Noah was there in a flash. "I'm sorry if I startled you," he said, reaching for a towel. "Let me clean up this mess."

They reached for the mug at the same time and their fingers brushed. He looked up suddenly. At the same time, she felt a buzz run through her.

"I, uh, thanks," she said, backing off. He had it under control.

"Any suggestions of where I could eat in this town?" The question came out of the blue. It was the last thing she expected him to say.

"The café?"

He nodded. "Yeah, been there a couple of times already. Thought there might be somewhere else."

"In Winston?" She laughed.

He smiled at her, and she felt her resolve melting.

"You could have dinner at my place tonight." The words were out before she could stop them. She bit her lip. Why on earth did she invite him to dinner?

Perhaps because he was new in town? Or maybe she was feeling a little vulnerable right now? *She was not lonely!*

Besides, it was only a friendly dinner welcoming a new colleague. Of her place of employment. She was being kind.

He frowned. "You don't have to," he said apologetically. "Please don't feel obligated."

"No. It's fine," she said. Was she trying to convince herself or Noah. "Is there anything you can't or don't eat?" Now she was sounding like her mother.

He rubbed his belly. "Cast iron stomach. I can handle pretty much anything you throw at me." He smiled. She liked it when he genuinely smiled, instead of the mask he seemed to wear most of the time.

"Then it's settled. Six o'clock, my place."

She spent the rest of the afternoon working out a dinner menu in her head as she worked on the local Sheriff's Office turning one hundred.

It was a beautiful old building, and she'd had the pleasure of a full tour, as well as interviewing the Sheriff and some of his more senior staff.

The two-page spread was due to be published in two days, in time for the celebrations, so she'd better get on with it.

Steak, baked potatoes, beans.

That sounded like a perfect meal for a man far from home. It also sounded a little cliché but heck, she was sure he'd like it.

What man didn't like a steak and three veg meal? Okay, two veg, but that was beside the point.

She sat tapping her pen on the desk as she thought.

"A penny for them."

She looked up to see Noah standing in front of her.

"Huh?"

“You looked deep in thought.” He stood staring down at her. “I wanted to check if I can bring anything tonight.”

“Tonight?” She shook herself. Her brain wasn’t working, she’d been so deep in her work.

“Dinner. Look, if you’ve changed your mind...”

She abruptly stood. “Of course not, I was just distracted is all.” She breathed in and the aroma of his cologne as it invaded her nostrils. “I, um,” she was unexpectedly tongue-tied.

He stood watching her. Waiting for her to get the words out.

Suddenly the words were rushing out of her mouth. “I thought we’d have steak. Is that okay?”

He rubbed his hands together. “I can’t remember the last time I had steak. It sounds wonderful.”

“Steak it is then.” She began to sit again. “I have to get back to this, sorry. I have a tight deadline.” She smiled gingerly and he turned to walk away but turned back again.

“You’d better give me your address.” She scribbled it on a piece of paper and handed it to him. Their fingers brushed, and she felt that tingle of a thrill again.

This absolutely wouldn’t do. And now she was having him to dinner. Her mother would be ecstatic.

* * *

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About the Author

1. <https://www.amazon.com/dp/B07HN3KJ32>

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Multi-published, award-winning author, Cheryl Wright, former secretary, debt collector, account manager, writing coach, and shopping tour hostess, loves reading.

She writes both contemporary and historical western romance, as well as a series of holiday romances.

She lives in Melbourne, Australia, and is married with two adult children and has six grandchildren.

When she's not writing, she can be found in her craft room making greeting cards, or in her kitchen baking.

Check out Cheryl's Amazon page for a full list of her other books:

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