



## Beguiling the Boss (Rich, Rugged Ranchers Book 3)

By Joan Hohl

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*From Secretary to Wife?*

Jennifer Dunning's boss has made her an offer too good to refuse. Or is it? Jen knew Marshall Grainger's reputation with women before she took the job. Disillusioned with love, she expected to be immune to the sexy rancher's charms. But nothing could prepare her for the explosive power of their mutual attraction...nor for Marshall's proposal.

But Marshall, too, is cynical about love. And his only reason for marrying is to provide himself with heirs. So despite their fireworks in bed, how can Jen say "yes" to a loveless marriage—especially when it's not loveless for her?

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## **Beguiling the Boss (Rich, Rugged Ranchers Book 3) By Joan Hohl Bibliography**

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## **Editorial Review**

### About the Author

Joan Hohl is a bestselling author of more than sixty books. She has received numerous awards for her work, including a Romance Writers of America Golden Medallion award. In addition to contemporary romance, this prolific author also writes historical and time-travel romances. Joan lives in eastern Pennsylvania with her husband and family.

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Jennifer Dunning had always been indulged and she knew it. How could she not? From the day of her birth she had been pampered and cooed over, not only by her parents but by anyone and everyone who saw her. And yet, as far as she could recall, she had never acted out or thrown temper tantrums when she didn't get her way. She accepted a "no" as final and quietly moved on.

But now she sat on her bed in her room, where she had been hiding for the better part of the past two weeks, searching desperately on her electric-blue laptop for her new life. It was time to leave her parents' home in the exclusive gated community on the outskirts of Dallas. It was time to leave her parents, period.

Jennifer was stunningly beautiful—she had been as a baby, and was even more so at the age of twenty-eight. Tall and willowy with curves in all the right places, she was blessed with long honey-blond hair, dark brown eyes and classic features.

Jennifer was also restless, frustrated and edgy. She had quit her high-paying job as a personal assistant to the CEO of a large company two weeks ago. She was simply sick and tired of listening to the endless daily pep rallies given by her boss—the son of the company owner—who Jennifer considered unfit for the position he held. She was also tired of him eyeing her up and down every time they happened to be in the same room. He was a creep. So, deciding she had had enough, she had resigned.

Jennifer didn't actually need to work. Her parents were wealthy and she was their only child. She also had a large trust fund from her departed fraternal grandmother, and a smaller one from her maternal grandfather, who was still alive. But she liked working. She was intelligent, had a bachelor's degree in science and an MBA, and she enjoyed keeping busy, doing something useful. As a personal assistant, she'd been on her way up the career ladder.

Besides, working was much more interesting than the Dallas social scene. She found the scene boring, as well as pointless. As a youngster she had enjoyed the dancing lessons her mother insisted upon, and she also loved riding, after getting over the initial fear of her horse, which was huge compared to her six-year-old frame. No small ponies for her daughter, her mother had declared. Jennifer would attain her seat while on the back of a full-size Thoroughbred. And she had. Her seat was as elegant by the time she was eleven as that of any expert equestrian.

It was later, as she grew into her late teens, that Jennifer had become tired of the social scene. Lunch with the girls every Wednesday, listening to gossip she couldn't care less about—it had all started to feel so frivolous, and Jennifer had big plans for herself. She'd been preparing to go east, to the University of Pennsylvania and the Wharton School of Business. Her friends all had plans to attend the same college right there in Texas. In short, they were parting ways. But Jennifer decided she'd bear the lunches and the silly talk, as she thought of it, until the end of summer. Then she'd be on her own.

In contrast, her parents had been immersed in the social whirl all her life, unfortunately. It wasn't that they were uncaring—Jennifer knew her parents loved her. It was simply that they weren't there all that much. As a kid, she spent most of her free time with the housekeeper, Ida, who taught her how to clean, or with the cook, Tony, who practically made her a professional chef. As it turned out, Jennifer loved doing hard, honest work with her hands. It filled her with a purpose she hadn't known she'd needed.

After Jennifer finished school, she came back to Dallas and lived in her own apartment with a private entrance in her parents' house. She could have invited anyone she wanted to her place, but she had never had a man stay over. Not that her parents would have minded or objected. She was an adult, after all. It was just that none of the men she knew affected her *that way*.

Maybe because of what had happened during her junior year of high school.

She had never told her parents—or anyone else—about being caught alone on campus by a boy. She'd been leaving school later than most of the students following a meeting with her math teacher. It was January and almost dark, and she was distracted by thoughts of her conversation with the teacher. She wasn't fully alert while weaving through the rows of vehicles in the parking lot as she headed for her car.

The boy was a senior—a clean-cut, all-American star football player. Most of Jennifer's friends had crushes on him. Jennifer didn't, thinking him too cocky and into himself. Perhaps that was the reason he had accosted her that afternoon.

Trapping her between two parked cars, he fumbled with his pants zipper, exposing himself to her. At first, she was too shocked to think. But she came to her senses when he shoved his other hand up her skirt, attempting to yank her panties off.

Frantic, Jennifer had let out an earsplitting scream. Although the parking lot had appeared deserted, a male voice responded with a shouted, "Hey, what the hell?"

Mr. All-American let loose a savage curse, snarling, "You better keep your mouth shut about this, bitch." He sprinted away in the opposite direction.

Without thinking, Jennifer ran to her car, even as she could hear the man who had shouted running toward her. Her parents weren't home when she arrived there, shaken and teary-eyed. Hearing the boy's snarled threat echo in her mind, she had never told anyone of the incident.

Though Jennifer had been physically uninjured, the experience had left her wary of the opposite sex. Over time her anxiety had faded as she realized all males were not like Mr. All-American. She had even indulged her curiosity one time while in college. Although she liked the young man, the act was disappointing, leaving her feeling empty. And so, she had never invited a man to spend the night.

Not that her parents would have noticed even if their daughter was having a mad, passionate affair. They were busy socializing in Dallas and in the exclusive gated community where they resided, changing partners with their closest friends. Yes, changing partners.

Jennifer had only recently found out about her parents' game. She hadn't a clue how many friends there had been or how many years they had been experimenting. In truth, she didn't want to know. She could barely look at her parents' faces or be in their company for more than a few minutes. Even though she knew her parents' lifestyle was their business, she felt betrayed, as if they had been lying to her for years about who

they really were underneath the facade of "social appropriateness" and their picture-perfect marriage. It made her want to do something to shock them right back.

So she had resigned from her job the day after coming home from work and catching a glimpse of her father and his best friend's wife, Annette Terrell, in a compromising position in one room, and her mother and the woman's husband, William, in a similar position in another.

Now, two weeks later, Jennifer knew she had to leave home, to take a break until the hurt subsided. She could barely look at her parents without feeling ill, and wanting to cry. She loved them, but what she had witnessed had deeply shocked her. Perhaps someday, she would be able to be in the company of her parents without that awful image tormenting her. But that day had not yet arrived.

Alone in her bedroom, Jennifer sat cross-legged on her bed, her laptop balanced on her knees. She was searching for escape, and employment, to keep her mind occupied. In effect, she was intent on running away from home...and her memories. It was time to stop living in a house of lies.

One week later, Jen left her parents a note. It read:

*I'm off to see the Wizard—Marsh Grainger, that is, the famously elusive business wizard of Dallas. It's about a new job. I'll be in touch.*

She also emailed her best friends, whom she had met her first year in college. They had remained close ever since, staying in touch mostly by email, phone and texts. Although they all lived within driving distance, they led busy lives—three of the women were married with children, and the other two were busy chasing careers. Even so, "the gang" managed to get together every couple of months.

*Hi, all, she wrote them. I'm taking off for a while, will be in touch soon.*

Jennifer knew the next time she checked her email, there would be long messages from her friends, demanding to know exactly where she was and what she was up to, but she just wasn't ready to talk about what had happened. And she wasn't ready to tell them that she was interviewing with Marshall Grainger, whom they knew had a reputation as a womanizer.

Her mother probably knew, too. She fully expected her mother to start calling her cell phone as soon as she discovered that Jennifer was gone. That was okay—her parents could call all they wanted. It didn't mean she had to answer. After all, even she couldn't entirely explain why Marsh Grainger's ad for an office assistant had appealed to her. But she needed space and distance—and she was pretty sure the wizard, who was rumored to prefer his hill country ranch to the craziness of high society in Dallas, could help her with that.

Marshall Grainger needed help. He needed an office assistant as well as a cook who would also clean the sprawling Texas hill country home that doubled as his workplace.

A cousin in the wealthy Grainger family of Wyoming, South Dakota and Montana, Marsh was, in a word, loaded. He owned a huge cattle ranch in Colorado, run by an excellent manager and former Marine buddy, Matt Hayes. The ranch had been in Marsh's family for generations. Growing up, he had spent most of his summers there and he knew the ranching business inside and out.

But Marsh was not a cattleman at heart. He was a businessman, considered a force to be reckoned with in more ways than one. He was six foot four inches tall, slim and rangy with rugged features defined by high

cheekbones and a strong, square, rock-hard jaw. A thick mane of gleaming hair the exact shade of rich dark chocolate matched the slightly arched brows above slate-gray eyes.

While Marsh owned the building that housed his company, nestled among many other tall buildings in Dallas, he rarely traveled into the city. He avoided the scene in Dallas like the plague, preferring to work at home in the large house set dead center on more than fifty acres.

At present, Marsh was desperately trying not to allow himself to be hopeful. After weeks of using all avenues of advertisements available to him, there was a chance he'd soon be able to hand the ranch books, the household bills and several duties of his main business over to a new assistant.

Someone who was actually qualified had applied for the job. So what if she was a *she*?

Finished paying his current household and ranch bills, he picked up his coffee mug and glanced at his watch as he walked out of the assistant's office, hoping he wouldn't have to spend any time there again in the near future.

It was 1:36 p.m. The appointment with the applicant was at 2. Rinsing his mug, he proceeded to make a fresh pot of coffee. Then again, he mused, after her long drive, the woman might appreciate a cold drink. He checked the fridge; there was cola as well as bottled water. The beer was his. Now all he had to do was wait, which was not Marsh's strong suit. He got busy scouring the sink and wiping down the long countertop.

His former assistant had up and quit on him three months ago, and he hadn't been able to sleep since then—until last night. Just the thought of interviewing someone who was actually qualified and could lighten his load had allowed him to enjoy his first full night's sleep in a long time. Hopefully she would take to the place. At that thought, he grimaced as he sent a quick look around. While tidy, the kitchen needed a thorough cleaning. The same went for the rest of the house. He had done his best to keep up with everything, but the majority of his time was consumed by the myriad details of his businesses. At the end of the day he was only one man.

Marsh had never dreamed finding help would be so hard. After his assistant left, he had received many responses to his ads, but only a few were qualified, and even fewer of those were willing to relocate to "the sticks," as one respondent called it.

*The sticks?* Marsh had thought with amazement.

Didn't these city dwellers know how popular the hill country was with tourists? Apparently not. They hadn't a clue what they were missing.

But now, hopefully, things would return to normal.

If he could just replace his assistant—and the housekeeper that the man had taken with him to Vegas, to marry—life would be good again.

Marsh thought about what his assistant and the housekeeper had said to him when they'd quit. They had said they were in love.

Love. Yeah. Right.

And if that hadn't been bad enough, the teenage daughter of his nearest neighbor, who had been coming to the house once a week to help the housekeeper, had been ordered to quit. Her parents thought her being alone with him was a bad idea.

Marsh knew precisely what they meant by "bad idea." So he had a reputation with women. So what? He was a healthy male, and the key word was *women*. He was not interested in teenagers. He'd have laughed at the thought if he hadn't been so ticked off.

At the ripe old age of thirty-four, Marsh was bitter and he knew it. He hugged the truth to him like a heating pad, keeping the bitterness alive so he'd never forget.

He had been betrayed—twice. The first time was when he was six years old, by his mother, who had left his father to seek fun in the bright lights, taking a hefty chunk of his father's money with her. Marsh had doubled down on the pain of betrayal at age twenty-four by marrying in a haze of lust only to be told by his young wife that she wasn't about to waste her youth and beauty stuck in the hill country of Texas, popping out babies and ruining her figure. In hindsight, Marsh knew he should have discussed his desire for children before they were married. It would have saved him a lot of trouble and money—especially since he had known deep down inside that he wasn't in love with her. In his estimation, love was an illusion dreamed up by poets and romance writers. But he still would have had children with her, because he truly felt as if he was meant to be a father. He wanted an heir, someone to lavish love on—the only love he truly believed in—who would take over when he was gone.

In some ways, he got lucky. Though his ex took an even larger chunk of his money than his mother had taken of his father's, Marsh gladly wrote the check, happy to get the selfish woman who had clearly married him just for his wealth out of his life and his home.

Then, to top it all off, a couple years later his father had retired, retreating to the ranch where he completed his slow decline toward death, thus also deserting Marsh.

It had been a tough time.

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