

When Danny opened the door to her room, a faint gust of wind washed her face and sent some loose strands of hair scattering. She looked across the room to the open window where the moonlight whispered and a midnight breeze rustled the curtain. She was tired. It had been a long and trying day.

She kicked off her shoes, and with moonlight guiding her path she went to the wardrobe and took out a nightgown of white cotton with lace at the neck and hem. She tossed it onto the bed, huffing to herself as she recalled the evening's events. What was it about the men in this country that they all seemed so arrogant? First, Lieutenant Colonel Custer with his disquieting manners, giving her the impression that at any moment he would pop. And then that Captain Hawkins whose blatant staring made her blush and whose sweet southern drawl couldn't quite mask the hostility in his voice. The worse one was that silver-eyed devil who had stolen a kiss. It didn't matter how handsome he was or that her pulse had raced when trapped in his arms. From what the men at dinner said, he was an outlaw and a killer. The only decent man she'd met this evening was John Avery. It was easy to like him. It had also been easy to see that he was quite smitten with Zoe.

Nudging the delicate straps off her shoulders, she pushed the gown of peach satin past her hips, letting it puddle at her ankles. She pulled the chemise up over her head and gave it a toss. Next came the petticoat and that infernal corset that made it difficult to breathe. Finally, she shimmied out of her silk pantalettes. "Men can be so coarse and arrogant, but at least they don't have all these clothes to wear," she griped to herself as she pulled the nightgown on over her head.

"You sure do know how to drive a man to some awful thoughts."

With a gasp, Danny whirled around, her hands instinctively clutching the front of the nightgown whose tiny fabric-covered buttons she'd left undone.

He was sitting in an armchair with one leg crossed over the other, looking so damnably casual, eyes glinting at her through the darkness, their striking color leaving little doubt that this was the man they'd been talking about at dinner, the very one who had stolen a kiss on the balcony.

"Y—you have to go," she said nervously as she inched toward the door.

"But Danny, I've been waiting for you."

He called her by name as if he knew her.

"I promise I won't tell anyone you were here."

"Why should I care if anyone knows I was here?"

"You're a wanted man. A killer."

"You shouldn't believe everything you hear," he said.

"Someone saw you rob a stagecoach."

"That doesn't make me a killer," he said tautly. "I was at the Bull's Head tonight and saw the way you danced. Does that make you a whore?"

"Certainly not!"

He cocked his head to the side as if to say, well there you go, and as he did the moonlight caught his features, rendering him impossibly handsome.

"Why were you at the hotel tonight? she asked, stalling for time.

"I came here to see someone."

She reached the door and felt for the knob.

He got up, and in several quick strides covered the distance between them. Reaching past her, he put an arm up sharply against the door, halting her flight.

The sudden closeness of him produced an unexpected effect, catching her off guard. She could feel his warmth so close to hers and smell the scent of the wind and the night in his hair and that of leather and horse that clung to his skin. She was shocked by the effect it had on her senses. She could not stop the sudden surge of blood through her body or prevent the warmth that began in the pit of her belly from spreading to every corner of her being until she felt herself burning up from the mere look in his eyes. What was happening? Why couldn't she move? Why was her voice locked in her throat instead of shouting at him to get out?

She wanted to beat at his chest and rake her fingernails across his face just for looking at her the way he was doing, as if he could see past her nightgown to her naked skin beneath. But a stronger impulse, one she did not fully comprehend, stayed her hands. She made a small motion in a vain attempt to move away from him, but she was trapped with no place to go.

His gaze traveled over her face and narrowed upon the silver necklace she was still wearing. She flinched when he reached his hand up and flicked the heart with the tip of his finger.

"Pretty," he said. "Where'd you get it?"

Danny swallowed hard. "It was a gift from my brother."

"Where'd he get it?"

"It's made from silver from our mine."

He glanced up. "Your mine?"

"Y—yes. The Silver Lady. Please," she implored. "Take anything you want. But not this."

His mouth widened into a sarcastic grin. "You can keep the necklace. One day it'll come in handy to remind you of what you lost."

Tawny eyes awash with confusion looked back at him through the moonlight. "I don't understand."

"You don't have to."

For several wordless moments it seemed as if all he was going to do was look at her, eyes prowling over her face like hungry predators.

"Do you want me to leave?"

Uncertainty shot through her like a hard-driven nail at the sound of his voice, lusty and urgent, so close to her ear.

She opened her mouth to speak, but all that emerged was a flutter of breath.

"Because if I stay, you know what's going to happen."