

Midnight Moon

Satin Daring thinks she has no other options than to run away when her father demands she marry someone she doesn't know. She wants to marry for love and won't settle for anything less.

Drake "Black Thunder" Peterson needs time away from his white grandfather to cool his anger when the old man tells him he's found the woman Drake is to marry. All Drake wants to do is get away and maybe go to the Blackfoot village and visit with his father's people until he is calm enough to discuss his future with his grandfather.

When Black Thunder and Satin's paths cross, they don't know their futures are destined as they struggle with their own lies and lives they've left behind. When they fall in love with each other only to be ripped apart, will they be able to find each other again? Will Drake/Black Thunder give up everything he fought so hard for just to have the woman he loves back in his arms?

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Chapter One

Cut Bank, Montana Territory 1840

Drake was standing alone looking up at the midnight moon. It always seemed to bring him an inner peace of mind and soul, which he really needed now. His white grandfather had informed him that he had found the perfect bride for him. *Some rich overly pampered girl more like it.* Drake thought to himself. All he wanted to do right now was get out of this place, maybe visit with his father's people or just go to his cabin out in the mountains, away from everybody and everything.

He lived a hard life being half Indian and half white. When he was a child it felt as if he didn't belong in either world. Being forced to grow up in the white man's world he was expected to be white, and now no one seemed to remember his Blackfoot blood except for him. The only thing they thought of was his grandfather's money and what it could buy. It had bought Black Thunder a white man's life as Drake Peterson, the only grandchild of Austin Peterson.

He had lost out on learning about his Indian heritage until he was old enough to decide what he wanted to do and big enough to tell his grandfather what he wanted without being knocked down whenever he spoke his feelings about his father's people.

His given Indian name was Black Thunder, but his white grandfather refused to call him by it, instead he called him Drake and gave him his last name Peterson. Now whenever he could escape the white man's way of life, he went by his given name Black Thunder, and he tried to get away as much as possible.

Right now he needed nothing more than to be away from Austin Peterson and the way he believed Black Thunder should live and who he should live it with. He wanted to be able to pick his own wife, when he was ready for one. At this moment in his life he just wanted to be free. After all he was only twenty-six. He didn't want to take over his grandfather's life once he was gone. He wanted a life of his own, one where no one was nice to him or talked to him just because of the money or status of his name.

Austin Peterson believed he could buy and sell people every day of his life. He had no regards for another person's feelings. Black Thunder didn't want to be like him. He didn't remember much of his father, since he was young when his father died, but now that he knew his father's

parents and their way of life, he wanted to be more like them, loving and caring. He wished that he could have been raised in their village and grown into the brave he had to learn to be once he was grown. It had taken a while for the other braves to want to include him in on anything, but Flying Eagle, his Blackfoot grandfather wouldn't let him give up until he was as good as any brave born and raised in his village.

Shaking his head, he went to his room to put some clothes together. He was leaving for a while in hopes that his grandfather would forget all about trying to marry him off to someone he'd never set eyes on before.

Drake changed into his buckskin britches and beaded shirt then took his other clothes and tied them to his horse Shadow once he had the big black stallion saddled. He was through listening to that old man. He had never asked to come here to live or asked the old man for anything. Sure he went to college on the old man's money and learned all about the white man's way of life. He always wore his hair short and his suits tailored. That's the way his grandfather ordered him to live, but once he was away from Austin and at his own cabin in the mountains, he was who he wanted to be—Black Thunder.

He might be the old man's only blood grandchild, but right now at this moment he didn't feel anything for Austin Peterson but contempt. After all, who did he think he was, telling Black Thunder who he would marry, especially when he'd never intended on getting married in the first place, let alone to someone he'd never met before? He hadn't even stuck around to hear the name of his intended bride. His temper had overridden every other instinct he had, so he knew the best thing for him to do was get away for a time.

Maybe he'd go hunting for a while, be alone and just think about his future. Most of the town's people near his cabin knew his white name so he wouldn't have any problems there. He liked to go to town when he was up at the mountains. The people there didn't know anything about his grandfather or his mixed blood, they just thought he was some sort of mountain man. He enjoyed going to the local tavern to play cards and just have a drink at times.

Most of the time when Drake was up in the mountains, he had a long beard and long hair. Right now his raven hair hung halfway down his back. He'd started letting it grow the first day the old man told him about the marriage idea. He kept it pulled back in a leather tie most of the time. He had shaved a few days ago, but his beard was slowly growing back in and would soon be a full-grown beard once more. Drake didn't realize that when he started out following the moon's light that it was actually leading him closer to his destiny.

Riding his black stallion, Shadow, Drake headed out toward his log cabin. He'd built it up in the hills between his father's people and his white grandfather's house. Once he was finally free to leave and be on his own he really didn't have any use for the old man, after everything he had put Drake and his mother through, but he wanted to stay close enough in case he was ever truly needed.

He stopped Shadow when he saw something white headed toward town. As it got closer he saw that it was the most beautiful white mare he'd ever laid eyes on. But what surprised him most was the young lady riding that white horse. He wondered who she was and why she was coming to the small, rugged town all alone in the middle of the night. She turned and looked in his direction, catching him off guard for a moment as she sat there staring at her.

"Good evening," he offered with a nod of his head as she started past him. She was beautiful, young, but beautiful nonetheless. From what he could see of her hair in the light cast by the full moon, it looked to be a deep brown, not like most browns that looked like dirt or mud, but a mixture of honey and molasses. He wasn't sure but he thought her eyes looked green, almost like a wildcat's eyes when the moon hit them. *Why is she staring at me like that?* It was a mixture of fright and fascination that he saw on her face and again he was wondering why she was alone but then decided it was none of his business as he spurred his horse and rode out of town.

Drake stopped Shadow in the trees just outside of town. He wasn't sure why but he just had the strangest compulsion to watch over the young woman. He shook his head as he sat there in the quiet for a short time. He didn't know what he was thinking. The lady probably stopped at the inn and got a room or had family she was going to see, but he just needed to make sure.

A few moments passed and then she appeared in his sights and headed farther into the trees, and once again Drake found himself wondering why she was out so late and all alone, and what the hell was she thinking, entering the woods so late at night? Drake rode a safe distance behind her. His training as a brave had taught him how to be silent on foot and horseback, so he didn't think she would know he was following her. She was getting close to his cabin, but he knew that there was no way she could have known he had a place there. No one ever came there.

It had been too long since he'd been hunting and he almost wasn't sure the cabin would still be here, or if it had been taken over by someone else by now. He was glad to see the place. His grandfather had kept him so busy these days and he hadn't had a chance to get away. He couldn't wait to get inside, build a fire, and sit in his chair and drink his whiskey until his problems disappeared tonight.

He thought if it didn't help being at the cabin and hunting, he'd travel to the Blackfoot camp to see his *aaáhss*, grandparents. He knew they'd be happy to welcome him to their home again.

Drake slowed Shadow and stayed hidden in the trees. He could see that she was starting to tire, but he knew that it wouldn't be long before she reached his cabin. What he didn't know was what he was going to do once they reached it.

* * * *

Satin Daring was standing on her balcony looking at the same moon, not feeling at peace with anything at the moment. Her father had just informed her that she was to be getting married in a few weeks to a man she didn't know. Still, she had a feeling that she wouldn't want to. She didn't care that he had gone to college and learned lots of things, or that he was the only grandchild of some rich old man that her father knew. She didn't even know his name yet. She hadn't stayed in her father's study long enough to find out who he was, it didn't matter.

She started to cry, not understanding why her father was forcing her to marry someone she didn't know, or ever want to know. He had never made her do anything she didn't want to before, so why now? She had always been free to do whatever she wanted to, whenever she wanted to.

Sometimes she loved to get on her horse, Snow, and just ride to her heart's content. She enjoyed adventures in the woods out past their land. Her father had taught her to shoot a gun, fish, and hunt. She never learned much about being a girl since her mother's death when she was only three. Now at the age of eighteen, she missed her mother more than she ever had before. Her mother had taken a terrible fall down the stairs, breaking her neck and killing her unborn child. Satin couldn't remember her very well now, but her father kept her mother's portrait hanging over their fireplace and he never remarried.

She figured he must have loved his wife very much to never find another to take her place. He always seemed so lonely to her. She felt sorry for him most of the time, wishing she knew what to do for him. All she knew now was that she had to find a way to get out of this place or get her father to change his mind before that day came.

She tried to change his mind desperately every day for weeks with the same ending, *No*, then he would dismiss her for the rest of the day. She spent most of her days in her room alone plotting, but today she decided was the last day. She decided it would be easier to run away than to try to persuade her father not to go through with this farce of a marriage.

Now the problem was where she would go once she left home. Satin knew she would have to find some kind of work, but the only thing she really knew how to do was sew, and that was only because the housekeeper taught her that much. She didn't do very well, but still she would be willing to try just about anything. As long as it was in a new town, far away from this place and far away

from the man her father intended on making her marry. He was probably some dirty old vulture anyway, or so grotesque that he couldn't find a woman that would have him.

She waited for her father to go to sleep, changed into her riding habit, and packed a few necessary things into a satchel. She went back to the balcony, remembering how she used to sneak out for a late night horseback ride as a young child. She smiled when she threw the satchel over the balcony, letting it hit the ground below. She climbed over the railing and down the rose trellis, then finally down to the ground. Slipping out of the house, she made her way to the stables. She knew well how to saddle her own horse, so being as quiet as she possibly could, she made her way to the barn and found her saddle and carried it to the stable, finding her white mare she'd appropriately named Snow.

"Hello Snow, how is my girl tonight?" she asked the horse, stroking its head and nose. She then walked around to the side of the horse, took the blanket off the wall, threw it over the horse's back, and then proceeded to place the saddle on. She fastened the cinch tight enough to hold it in place, yet not so tight that it would bother Snow.

Next came the bit and leads. She placed the bit in Snow's mouth, and then patted Snow's nose once more. Leading Snow out of the stall, Satin stopped long enough to grab a small rope to tie her satchel to the horse's saddle. She mounted the horse and rode away as silently as she could manage. She still had no idea of where she was going or what she would do once she got there. All she knew was she had to get far away from this place. She only wished she didn't have to hurt her father this way, but there was no other choice since he didn't care about hurting her.

Satin headed Snow toward the mountains, figuring she'd be able to camp somewhere up there at least for the night and perhaps find a room in a nice town tomorrow or the next day. Somewhere just to give her father time to realize the mistake he was making. It had been a while since she'd ridden so far, and she was surprised to see she was headed toward a town, then she heard something off to her side. She felt fear for her life for the first time as she looked toward the dark man sitting on an even darker horse. The instant his eyes met hers, Satin felt frozen to the spot. Snow must have felt similarly, for the horse stopped as well. His gaze was mesmerizing, and somewhat foreboding at the same time.

"Good evening."

His deep voice seemed to hold her there, and the only thing she could do was stare at him. She felt a little foolish that when she opened her mouth nothing came out. Her heartbeat hammered in her chest and she wondered if he could hear it from in the distance.

His hair was coal black and tumbled down across his thick black brows. He had a dark shadow of beard across his jawbone. He was different from the other men she knew. His eyes seemed to chill her as they held hers, but for some odd reason she just couldn't look away from him. She watched as he nudged his horse and took off out of the dirty-looking little town and disappeared in the dark crop of trees. He was dressed in buckskin clothing, but she didn't believe he was an Indian. From what she knew she didn't think they grew facial hair. Maybe he was a trapper or trader. She sat there giving him enough time to get a good distance ahead of her since he was headed in her direction.

She thought about staying in town tonight then leaving on the stagecoach tomorrow, but she wasn't so sure that would be a good idea. What if her father came there to look for her? He would surely check the stagecoach first. No, she decided she had to keep riding. She looked toward where the stranger had just ridden out of town and wondered where he was headed to. Maybe another town or maybe home. Something about him frightened her, yet called out to her at the same time. She just couldn't figure out what it was, all she knew was she wanted to follow him.

The farther Satin rode the more she felt as if someone was watching her, but she never saw anyone when she turned in her saddle to look. She also thought she'd heard a horse once or twice, but there was always nothing in sight when she looked back.

Satin rode for a while yet she didn't see the stranger. He must have gotten farther away from her than she thought. She saw a cabin standing just over the next clearing and smiled to herself. She was never so happy to see anyplace as she was that dark little cabin. Pushing her horse to go just a little farther and closer, she couldn't help but feel a little nervous the closer she got. *What if a killer or thief or just plain old outlaws live here, what would they do to me if I go in there?* But eventually her tiredness took over and she was willing to take her chances. Stopping Snow in front of the cabin, she slid down out of the saddle and walked up to the door. Slowly opening it, she peeked inside to find that it was empty and dark.

Walking Snow to the small barn just off to the left of the cabin, she unsaddled her then put her in a stall. There were no other horses there or any sign that one had been there recently. Removing the blanket, she put everything over the small wall. Going to the cabin, she slowly opened the door, calling out to see if anyone answered. When no one did she crept inside.

Satin decided to light a lantern so she could have a better look around before settling down for the night. The cabin was actually one large room. The kitchen was off to the right with a table on one side and two chairs, but absolutely no food anywhere to be found. The other side of the room had

a big bed with a side table. The fireplace was in the middle of the cabin, with a comfortable-looking chair and table on one side of it and a stack of wood lining the wall on the other in the sleeping area.

The fireplace was pretty big, made up of large stones from the floor all the way to the ceiling. The cabin wasn't large but it was comfortable and homey looking. She found some matches and candles on the table next to the bed. She lit a couple, placing them on both sides of the bed. She knelt by the fireplace and tried to build a fire without any luck. After all, it had been a while since she'd had to build one. She stood and walked to the bed, picked up a blanket, shook it out, and then made the bed.

The days were still warm, but the nights could get pretty cold, especially up here in the mountains. She had to admit she was a little frightened being out here all alone. She found herself jumping at every sound she heard and then there was the fact of not knowing who the cabin belonged to. What if it belonged to some old mountain man who might even be on his way back home even now, what would she do then? Satin decided she better get some sleep in while she still could. She began to strip down to her slip. Blowing out the lantern she'd left on the kitchen table, she made her way back to the bed. She lay down and pulled the blanket up over her just before leaning to each side to blow out the candles. She pulled the cover over her head when she heard noises that she couldn't explain away, and was soon fast asleep.