



JOANNA SIMS ROMANCE

PRESENTS



*“Jed Brand!” Her father bellowed from the porch. “You bring my daughter back here right this minute!”*

Setting: Billings, MT  
Circa: Late 1940s

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Jed Brand stumbled up the stairs of Maggie Vaughn’s family home on the outskirts of Billings, Montana. He’d come earlier to ask her to elope with him, but she turned him away. Five hours drinking in a local bar had only stiffened his resolve to make Maggie his wife.

“Maggie!” The cowboy whispered loudly as he bumped into the wall. “Maggie!”

A first floor window slid open and Maggie—his Maggie—appeared.

“Are you crazy!?” His fiery-haired love snapped at him under her breath.

Jed swayed sideways. “Crazy for you, darlin’.”

“Are you drunk, Jed Brand?”

“No.”

In the low light of the half moon, Jed could see the frown on his love’s fair face.

“A little.” He admitted loudly.

“Shhh!” The object of his affection kept glancing over her shoulder nervously. “You’ll wake the dead.”

The cowboy managed to get down on one knee without falling over. He took off his cowboy hat, held it to his heart, and held out a single, floppy wildflower he had picked on his way up the driveway.

“Marry me, Maggie.”

With a heavy, annoyed sigh, Maggie climbed out of the window. She ignored his offering, the wilted flower, as she reached back inside the window and hauled out a heavy bag.

“If you don’t want to get yourself shot, you’d best get up and get this bag.”

Jed plopped his hat back onto his head, tossed the flower over his shoulder, and stood up on wobbly legs. He leaned in for a kiss, but got a bag in his chest instead. Maggie pulled a second bag through the window and then hurried to the porch stairs.

“You won’t be sorry, Maggie,” Jed promised her.

Hand in hand, they made their way down the stairs. A single light appeared on the second floor of the house. The two young lovers, knowing that they’d been caught in the act, began to run up the long, grassy drive.

“Father’s awake!” Maggie tightened her grip on his hand. “Where’s your truck?”

“By the road. I didn’t want your Pop to hear me.”

“Too late!”

The sound of her family home's front door slamming open rang out in the quiet night. The sound must have rattled Maggie, because she tripped, dropping her bag.

“No!” Maggie gave up on whispering. “Don’t go back and get it! Father has a gun!”

Even if he hadn’t been so drunk, a city dweller with a gun wouldn’t have caused him pause in the slightest. All talk and no action, those folks.

“You go on.” He let go of her hand so he could go back and get the dropped bag. “He don’t know how to shoot.”

“He’s a crack shot, Jed!” Maggie cried out to him. “He will shoot you!”

“Jed Brand!” Her father bellowed from the porch. “You bring my daughter back here right this minute!”

“I’m gonna marry her, Vaughn!” the cowboy hollered back.

Jed bent down, scooped up the bag, and turned around to rejoin his bride-to-be. He heard Maggie’s father pump the shotgun. The cowboy shrugged it off as an empty threat—until the gun went off.

That made the cowboy start running. A second shot rang out, echoing in the night, and with a grunt of pain, Jed fell forward and landed, face-first, with a thud.

“Jed?!” Maggie’s scream reached him in the dark. “Jed?! Are you dead?!”