

CLEM, THE OUTLAW.

By OPIE READ.
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 CHAPTER I.

The people of the Bald Knob neighborhood, on the Missouri Pacific railroad, were much interested in Clem Holder should go wrong. His people were surely honest, and certainly did everything that lay within the range of their ability to give the boy a start in life, but he went wrong. Not in the tiresome, everyday manner, mind you. He didn't steal a horse, and thereby invite the contempt of the neighbors. He did not commit an offense so commonplace and so free from exposure that a man of ordinary nerve would have contemplated it without alarm. No; he jumped on a pay car, robbed the passenger and killed a meddlesome fellow who ventured to protest or offer advice or sympathy.

What a handsome fellow Clem was! He was strong and of rather good size, but his features were so delicate and so refined as a girl's. His eyes were of that peculiar blue that bespeak innocence or devilry, you can never determine which, and his hair was long and inclined to curl. Had he been reared in the old atmosphere of Italy he would either have been an artist or a bandit. He had been morbidly restless all his life, dissatisfied with the present and feeling that the future had nothing for him, and when his parents had bade the world good night and gone to eternity he had yielded no longer to restraint.

The Missouri Pacific Railway company offered a large reward for him. The sheriff of the county happened to want money at that time and said that he believed he would go out and lead Clem to justice. He went out on a fairly good horse and came back in a wagon, and while his friends were burying him near old Missouri, the sheriff remarked that Clem always had been sort of independent fellow, and that he was "powerful slow" in yielding to persuasion. Well, a very noted man, a great catcher of illicit distillers, said that Clem must answer for his crimes, and, with a few selected men, went after him. Clem never expected it, and, well, he still refused to yield to persuasion, and when the fragments of the argument were gathered up the great catcher of illicit distillers was labeled and sent to his friends.

After several other attempts had been made the arrest of Clem Holder was regarded as an eventful but unenjoyable undertaking of the young fellow living in the hills, rode a good horse, and, in the opinion of many people who knew him, was about as near a king as an American could wish to be.

For many years Clem had been deeply in love with Silla Garrett, a handsome young woman, the belle of a hundred miles hence. She had a cold piece of prosa flesh. Your celebrated beauty may be cold, but she cannot hope to rival the imperial chilliness of the backwoods belle. The rough homage of the fellow, with his trousers in his boots, inspires more of a contemptuous loathing in a backwoods queen than the polished incense of the courtier could possibly inspire in a beauty celebrated by two continents.

Silla did not tell Clem that she would not marry him. When he had actually fallen at her feet, long before he had robbed the pay car, and implored her to be his wife, she had told him that she was so poor herself that she could not afford to marry a poor man. He had been kept so busy for a time after he committed the robbery that he did not have an opportunity to call on her, but several days after he had parted with the great catcher of illicit distillers he rode up to the fence surrounding old man Garrett's house and yelled, "Hello, in there!"

Silla came to the door and exclaimed, "Why, Clem Holder, what on earth are you doing here?"

"Oh, I'm out paying a few calls that I happened to owe. I've been kept pretty busy lately. I used to think that I might never get into business, but I've had no chance to complain since I took up railroad work."

"Clem Holder, you ought to be ashamed of yourself."

"Oh, I reckon it ain't as bad as that! I don't see why a man should be ashamed of himself when he's done as well as he can. In this life we ought to be censured

well enough as a poetic idea, but ill-mated love cannot last. Leading a dogged life, a life of hardship, you would soon lose your beauty, and then your outlaw husband would find you a burden on his hands. Now, you arrange it so we can capture him, and we will make you a queen. We will give you \$2,000 in money and will send you to St. Louis in a splendid palaco car, all your own. Be sensible."

"But how can I help you catch him?"

"Easily enough. The next time you see him you can make an appointment to meet him somewhere. You can give him something in a glass of water to make him sleep, and then slip a pair of handcuffs over his hands."

"Oh, I don't see how I could."

"You can, easily enough, if you are sensible. I tell you that it is your duty to do the most of yourself. Nature has done her part, and now you must do yours."

"Oh, I don't know what to do! But I would like so much to live in a palace."

"You can, just as well as not."

"I wish I knew what to do."

"You will know when you have studied over this matter in a sensible way. I will hang around in the neighborhood. When he comes again, you make an appointment to meet him."

"Yes, he will." The officer of the law knew that the robber would come soon. The shrewd fellow had adroitly sent to the mountains a report that Silla was to be married.

Several days passed. It was Sunday. Clem Garrett and his wife were at church. Silla was at home. A slight noise attracted her attention. She went to the door. Clem had just ridden up to the fence.

"Why, what are you doing here?"

"Looking for a man."

"What do you want with him?"

"What for?"

"Because he's going to marry you."

"Oh, what a goose you are! Nobody's going to marry me—that is, not now."

"I heard you were going to be married."

"You've heard more'n I ever did. Clem, you know I couldn't marry anybody but you."

"Well, but you won't even marry me."

"Yes, I will come time, but I can't now. Why haven't you been to see me?"

"If I had thought you wanted to see me, he said, "I would have risked anything and come. They have been pushing me mighty close lately. May I come in?"

"No, not now, but if you will come next Sunday you may."

"Say I may come in now."

"No; next Sunday. Everybody will be away then, and we'll just have a lovely time."

"The old people went to church the following Sunday. The girl eagerly watched for the coming of the young man. He came. He did not ride up to the fence. He came stealthily out of the woods. The girl met him at the door and kissed him. He attempted to take her in his arms, but she drew back and said:

"No, not now. After awhile you may. Sit down and talk to me nice—tell me how much you love me."

He put his Winchester rifle beside his chair. "If I were to tell you how much I love you, I—oh, I couldn't do it, that's all." He remained silent for a few moments, and then said, "Now that I have got in here I don't hardly know what to say." He was silent again. "I know, though," he began after a time, "that no human being was ever loved as much as you are. I have loved you ever since you were a child, and it has grown on me. The stronger I got the more I loved you. I have always had you in mind as an angel, the emblem of all that is good, and if I should lose confidence in you I wouldn't care to live. I know it sounds strange when I talk of anybody being good when I am so bad myself, but I can't help it."

"Oh, you'll never have cause to lose confidence in me, Clem! You look tired, don't you?"

"I am a little worn, for they push me mighty sometimes."

"Let me fix you something to eat?"

"No; I ain't hungry, Silla. It's suddenly spoke up, "I will always be gentle with you, it don't make any difference if I have killed men. Oh, you are an angel. Her hair had fallen loose, and, in a silken mass, was hanging about her shoulders. "I do believe you are the most beautiful creature in the world, and it wouldn't make any difference where you might go, all the other women would have to take a back seat."

"I hope you'll always think so, dear. Do let me fix you something. Oh, I have some of the best blackberry cordial you ever drank. I will do you as I did the railroad—rob you."

"And I will do you as I did Back Goodall ten years ago—kill you."

"All right, old man, I won't deny you the pleasure of tryin', but I'll protest against the accomplishment, as the fellow says. Well, I must be goin'. Good day!"

CHAPTER II.

Another attempt to capture Clem Holder was made, and all that kept a daring deputy sheriff from biting the dust was the fact that a rain had fallen the night before. But Clem was pushed so hard this time that he fled to the mountains.

One day a man called at old man Garrett's and asked for Silla. She came into the room, and the man said:

"I want to talk sense to you for a few moments."

"No."

"That's somethin' remarkable," she answered. "It ain't often that a man wants to talk sense to a woman."

He bowed and then said, "That fellow, Holder," said he, "has given me out that he got \$16,000 from the railroad company, but he didn't—he got only \$700."

"Is that all?" she asked, with falling countenance.

"Every cent."

"Then why are they tryin' so hard to catch him?"

"To make an example of him."

"But what have I got to do with it?"

"A good deal. You can help us catch him."

"But why should I want you to catch him?"

"Now, miss, let me talk sense. If you should let me away and marry him—hold on, he broke off, holding up one hand. "I know that you are going to say that it's none of my business, but be patient a moment. If you were to run away with him, he would lead you a dog's life. He hasn't money enough to get anywhere, and it would simply be a pay car. I'm not so mighty rich yet, but I've got enough to keep you from starvin'. Now, you just get up here behind me, and we'll leave the country. I'll take you away off somewhere, and you can live as happy as a king and queen. Come, Silla."

"Look here, man, do you take me for a fool?"

"It'd like to take you for anything. Come, Silla."

"Nonsense, Clem! Do you reckon I could marry a robber and it—wouldn't I?"

She shrieked and fell on the floor, and one of the men in his excitement trod on her beautiful hair.

The prisoner deserved no mercy, the judge said, and so said the jury.

A gallows was erected near the railroad track, and a man slowly swung to and fro, a weird accompaniment to the creaking of a beam overhead.

Two men were riding along a lonely road. "What peculiar noise is that?" one of them asked.

"You have heard of Clem, the outlaw, haven't you?" He loved old Garrett. "She's down there in the hollow, crying. Goes down there every day. She's all the time trying to tear something off her wrists. Crazy!"

THE END.

He fell in love with her before he found out that she was an idealist, and after that it was not an easy matter to reverse the recently developed current of his nature and fall out again.

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It was a great shock to him to learn that Miss Pearson was several degrees below that exalted niche. He didn't know or until then he had not been told. She was a poor creature, and he was not a poor creature. He was a practical man, and she was a practical woman. He was a practical man, and she was a practical woman. He was a practical man, and she was a practical woman.

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