

# THE OUTLAW'S PUNISHMENT



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This book contains fantasy themes appropriate for mature readers only. Nothing in this book should be interpreted as Blushing Books' or the author's advocating any non-consensual sexual activity.

## CHAPTER 1



Everyone in the quiet, one street town of Los Desechos was out and dressed in their best. The men wore long pants, jackets and bolo ties. The women were in long dresses. Anne was no different, wearing a red dress that went down to her ankles, though the cut on the top showed off more than a fair share of her bosom. Not that she had any problem with that. Her long, mousy brown hair was gathered into one braid that fell down her back. After all, you had to look good for an execution, especially if it was your own.

"Get a move on, li'l missy."

Sheriff Aberdeen jabbed the barrel of his six-shooter into Anne's back, pushing her forward a few steps. Around her, the men and women of the shanty town stood in the shadows, side by side, watching her. She looked over their faces, but she couldn't recognize any of them. Her eyes turned forward, and there, she saw the platform constructed of old wooden planks. There was the noose, waiting for her.

"Don't make me tell you again." Another jab told her it was time to move.

Her right foot picked up and took her a step forward. Her left

foot followed. Slowly but surely, she marched toward her death. She had thought about how it was going to end a lot over her twenty-two years of life, but hung in the gallows of a backwater town miles from her family, by some two-bit peacekeeper, well, that had never been one of her considerations.

She thought back over her old life and wondered what she would do differently. It was a hard question to answer; there were so many things, but she knew one thing in particular. The thoughts helped distract her from the walk to the gallows, a mixed blessing. She felt the wood of the stairs give way under her weight slightly. She hesitated for a second before she continued to climb up the rickety platform.

"That's a good girl," the sheriff said behind her with a snicker.

She had heard those words before, but never before had they sounded so absolutely repulsive to her. Anne shuddered a bit under her dress before she made her way up to the top. She was pushed toward the center, and the noose was pulled around her neck and tightened. The sheriff holstered his gun and walked in front of her to address the town.

Anne pulled at the bonds holding her wrists behind her back again, now that he wasn't looking. The rope was coarse and rough against her skin, and the job was sloppy. Given fifteen minutes, she could be free. Unfortunately, she didn't have fifteen minutes to spare.

The sheriff finished his speech, reading off her rights to the town. In what could be one of her last coherent thoughts, she remembered how repulsive she found him. Sheriff Josiah Aberdeen was a fat man. His round head was balding, and his dark hair had migrated down toward his ears. He wore a black vest over his white shirt, with that dumb badge he was so proud of attached to his right breast. He smiled at her, showing off two rows of crooked, rotted teeth. He spat at her feet before he stepped to the side.

"Any last words, missy?"

"Yes," Anne took a deep breath, "Clayton James, if you're here—"

The crowd gasped, and everyone seemed to look between each other for a second, to try to see if he was. Of course, they would. Tiny little towns like this loved the legends of gunslingers who could come in and enforce the law. And James was one of the last ones. He was said to have taken on three men at once and out drew them all. He had been the man who stole her heart. She followed their gazes, hoping to catch a glimpse of those dark brown eyes. Aberdeen cleared his throat after a minute, drawing everyone's gazes back to him. He didn't want anyone taking away his moment.

"All right, everyone, let's get back to the matter at hand here. Now, finish what you were saying, miss. We don't want to be here all day."

She shot a glare at the sheriff that might've been more effective in any other circumstance. Still, she cleared her throat, and spoke up again. "James, I just want you to know," she almost smiled, "let's try to start things over in Hell."

A second later, a black bag was quite roughly pulled over her head. Anne was almost happy for it; it blocked out her vision of Aberdeen. It also did a pretty good job of muffling that awful raspy voice of his. It blocked out most all sound, actually. All she could hear was her own ragged breathing and the frantic beating of her heart.

"Stupid," she chastised herself under her breath.

For a second, she thought she heard something from outside the bag, the rough beating of horse's hooves on the hard packed dirt. Maybe something had changed. She felt a quick flutter of hope inside her chest. Had Clayton come for her after all?

Then she felt the trap door fall out from under her feet.