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Clarion Review

General

Solitude Lost
Ron Mathis
Xlibris
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Two Stars (out of Five)

Clay Bannister is a simple man. He feels no need or desire for social attachment of any kind and lives quietly alone in a one-room cabin in an isolated part of the woods, basking in his solitude. But the day Angie Parker stumbles into his remote corner of wilderness, everything changes. Startled one night to hear a shot nearby, Clay investigates and discovers Angie being pursued through the snowy woods by a gunman. Clay saves her and brings her back to his tiny cabin, wondering, “Just what the heck am I going to do with a girl way up here on this mountain? I ain’t never done nothing to deserve this!”

As the snow-covered terrain is too dangerous for travel, Clay reluctantly adjusts to her staying for some time. When the weather clears and they head into the nearest town, the action picks up and Clay is once again called upon to save Angie. They soon discover who is behind the threat on her life, and as they fight to put a stop to a conspiracy, they begin to realize that their feelings for one another are stronger than they knew.

Solitude Lost has all the elements of an old-fashioned Western tale, complete with villain and hero, cattle and horses, and a damsel in distress. The brevity of the book, however, doesn’t allow for thorough development of story, characters, or relationships. The allegedly brewing romance is hindered by interactions which consist largely of misunderstandings that leave Angie inexplicably angry and Clay scratching his head in confusion, resulting in moments such as this:

“I didn’t call you ignorant,” he pleaded.

”You most certainly did!”

”Well, if you think I called you ignorant, I’m sorry.”

”You should be sorry.”

”I am.”

”Good!”

Such childish exchanges happen with distracting frequency, while dialogue could have been put to better use in fleshing out characters and explaining motivation. As it stands, any attraction between them remains a mystery. Angie’s sudden statement near the end that, “she would obey his requests no matter what they were!” lacks credibility and is at odds with her prior combative nature.

Solitude Lost has some appealing ideas which are regrettably overcome by novice errors and lack of depth in both story and characterization. Many questions are left unanswered, and characters tend to speak and behave in an exaggerated and unrealistic manner. An excessive number of exclamation points and a tendency to place character thoughts in quotes prove distracting as well.

While a novel about a solitary man who learns to share his life could be both amusing and uplifting, the author would do well to revisit Clay Bannister’s story after further research into the craft of writing and character development.

Jeannine Chartier Hanscom