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The Chalice of Courage

A Romance of Colorado

By Cyrus Townsend Brady

CHAPTER IX.

"Over the Hills and Far Away." Recognition—or some other more potent instantaneous force—brought the woman to a sitting position. The man drew back to give her freedom of action, as she lifted herself on her hands. It was moments before complete consciousness of her situation came to her. The surprise was yet too great, she saw things dimly through a whirl of driving rain, of a rushing mighty wind, of a seething sea of water, but presently it was all plain to her again. She had caught no fair view of the man who had shot the bear as he splashed through the creek and tramped across the rocks and trees down the canon, at least she had not seen him full face, but she recognized him immediately. The thought tinged with color for a moment her pallid cheek.

"I fell into the torrent," she said feebly, putting her hand to her head and striving by speech to put aside that awful remembrance. "You didn't fall in," was the answer, "it was a cloudburst, you were caught in it."

"I didn't know."
"Of course not, how should you?"
"And how came I here?"
"I was lucky enough to pull you out."

"Did you jump into the flood for me?"
The man nodded.
"That's twice you have saved my life this day," said the girl, forcing herself, womanlike, to the topic that she hated.

"It's nothing," deprecated the other.
"It may be nothing to you, but it is a great deal to me," was the answer. "And now what is to be done?"
"We must get out of her at once," said the man. "You need shelter, food, a fire. Can you walk?"
"I don't know."

"Let me help you." He rose to his feet, reached down to her, took her hands in the strong grasp of his own and raised her lightly to her feet in an effortless way which showed his great strength. She did not more than put the weight of her body slightly on her left foot when a spasm of pain shot through her, she swerved and would have fallen had he not caught her. He sat her gently on the rock.
"My foot," she said piteously. "I don't know what's the matter with it."
Her high boots were tightly laced, of course, but he could see that her left foot had been badly mauled or sprained; already the slender ankle was swelling visibly. He examined it swiftly a moment. It might be a sprain, it might be the result of some violent thrust against the rocks, some whirling tree trunks might have caught and crushed her foot, but there was no good in speculating as to causes, the present patent fact was that she could not walk; all the rest was at that moment unimportant. This unfortunate accident made him the more anxious to get her to a place of shelter without delay. It would be necessary to take off her boot and give the wounded member proper treatment. For the present the tight shoe acted as a bandage, which was well.

When the man had withdrawn himself from the world, he had inwardly resolved that no human being should ever invade his domain or share his solitude, and during his long sojourn in the wilderness his determination had not weakened. Now his coming desire was to get this woman whom fortune—good or ill!—had thrown upon his hands to his house without delay. There was nothing he could do for her out there in the rain. Every drop of whiskey was gone, they were just two half-drowned, sodden bits of humanity cast up on that rocky shore, and one was a helpless woman.

"Do you know where your camp is?" he asked at last.
He did not wish to take her to her own camp, he had a strange instinct of possession in her. In some way he felt he had obtained a right to deal with her as he would, he had saved her life twice, once by chance, the other as the result of deliberate and heroic endeavor, and yet his honor and his manhood obliged him to offer to take her to her own people if he could. Hence the question, the answer to which he waited so eagerly.

"It's down the canon. I am one of Mr. Robert Maitland's party."
The man nodded, he didn't know Robert Maitland from Adam, and he cared nothing about him.
"How far down?" he asked.
"I don't know, how far is it from here to where you—"
"Where?"
"About a mile," he replied, fully understanding her request for

aid.
"Then I think I must have come at least five miles from the camp this morning."
"It will be four miles away, then," said the man.
The girl nodded.
"I couldn't carry you that far," he murmured half to himself; "I question if there is any camp left there anyway. Where was it, down by the water's edge?"
"Yes."
"Every vestige will have been swept away by that, look at it," he pointed over to the lake.
"What must we do?" she asked instantly, depending upon his greater strength, his larger experience, his masculine force.
"I shall have to take you to my camp."
"Is it far?"
"About a mile or a mile and a half from here."
"I can't walk that far."
"No, I suppose not. You wouldn't be willing to stay here while I went down and hunted for your camp?"
The girl clutched at him.
"I couldn't be left here for a moment alone," she said in sudden fever of alarm. "I never was afraid before, but now—"

"All right," he said, gently patting her as he would a child. "We'll go up to my camp and then I will try to find your people and—"
"But I tell you I can't walk."
"You don't have to walk," said the man.
He did not make any apology for his next action, he just stooped down and, disregarding her faint protests and objections, picked her up in his arms. She was by no means a light burden, and he did not run away with her as the heroes of romances do. But he was a man far beyond the average in strength, and with a stout heart and a resolute courage that had always carried him successfully through whatever he attempted, and he had need of all his qualities, physical and mental, before he finished that awful journey.

The woman struggled a little at first, then finally resigned herself to the situation; indeed, she thought swiftly, there was nothing else to do, she had no choice, she could not have been left alone there in the rocks in that rain, she could not walk. He was doing the only thing possible. The compulsion of the inevitable was upon them both.
They went slowly, the man often stopped for rest, at which times he would seat her tenderly upon some prostrate tree, or some rounded boulder, until he was ready to resume his task. He did not bother her with explanation, discussion or other conversation, for which she was most thankful. Once or twice during the slow progress she tried to walk, but the slightest pressure on her wounded foot nearly caused her to faint. He made no complaint about his burden and she found it, after all, pleasant to be upheld by such powerful arms; she was so sick, so tired, so worn out, and there was such assurance of strength and safety in his firm hold of her.

By and by, in the last stage of their journey, her head dropped on his shoulder and she actually fell into an



He Stared at Her in Great Alarm.

uneasy troubled sleep. He did not know whether she slumbered or whether she had fainted again. He did not dare to stop to find out, his strength was almost spent; in this last effort the strain upon his muscles was almost as great as it had been in the whirlpool. For the second time that day the sweat stood on his forehead, his legs trembled under him. How he made the last five hundred feet up the steep wall to a certain broad shelf perhaps an acre in extent where he had built his hut among the mountains, he never knew; but the last remnant of his force was spent

when he finally opened the unlatched door with his foot, carried her in the log hut and laid her upon the bed or bunk built against one wall of the cabin.

Yet the way he put her down was characteristic of the man. That last vestige of strength had served him well. He did not drop her as a less thoughtful and less determined man might have done, he laid her there as gently and as tenderly as if she weighed nothing, and as if he had carried her nowhere. So quiet and easy was his handling of her that she did not wake up at once.

He was out of his arms, he stood up and stared at her in great alarm, which soon gave way to reassurance. She had not fainted, there was a little tinge of color in her cheek that had rubbed up against his rough hunting coat; she was asleep, her regular breathing told him that. Sleep was of course the very best of medicines for her, and yet she should not be allowed to sleep until she had got rid of her wet clothing and until something had been done for her wounded foot. It was indeed an embarrassing situation.

He surveyed her for a few moments wondering how best to begin. Then realizing the necessity for immediate action, he bent over her and woke her up. Again she stared at him in bewilderment until he spoke.
"This is my house," he said, "we are home."
"Home!" sobbed the girl.
"Under shelter, then," said the man. "You are very tired and very sleepy, but there is something to be done; you must take off those wet clothes at once, you must have something to eat, and I must have a look at that foot, and then you can have your sleep."

The girl stared at him, his program, if a radical one under the circumstances, was nevertheless a rational one, indeed the only one. How was it to be carried out? The man easily divined her thoughts.
"There is another room in this house, a store room. I cook in there," he said. "I am going in there now to get you something to eat; meanwhile you must undress yourself and go to bed."

He went to a rude set of box-like shelves draped with a curtain, apparently his own handiwork, against the wall, and brought from it a long and somewhat shapeless woolen gown.
"You can wear this to sleep in," he continued. "First of all, though, I am going to have a look at that foot."

He bent down to where her wounded foot lay extended on the bed.
"Wait," said the girl, lifting herself on her arm, and as she did so he lifted his head and answered her direct gaze with his own. "I am a woman, absolutely alone, entirely at your mercy; you are stronger than I, I have no choice but to do what you bid me. And in addition to the natural weakness of my sex I am the more helpless from this foot. What do you intend to do with me? How do you mean to treat me?"

It was a bold, a splendid question, and it evoked the answer it merited.
"As God is my judge," said the man quietly, "just as you ought to be treated, as I would want another to treat my mother, or my sister, or my wife"—she noticed how curiously his lips suddenly tightened at that word—"if I had one. I never harmed a woman in my life," he continued more earnestly, "only one, that is," he corrected himself, and once again she marked that peculiar contraction of the lips. "And I could not help that," he added.

"I trust you," said the girl at last, after gazing at him long and hard as if to search out the secrets of his very soul. "You have saved my life and things dearer will be safe with you. I have to trust you."
"I hope," came the quick comment, "that it is not only for that. I don't want to be trusted upon compulsion."
"You must have fought terribly for my life in the flood," was the answer. "I can remember what it was now, and you carried me over the rocks and the mountains without faltering. Only a man could do what you have done. I trust you anyway."

"Thank you," said the man briefly as he bent over the injured foot again. The boot laced up the front, the short skirt left all plainly visible. With deft fingers he undid the sodden knot and unlaced it, then stood hesitatingly for a moment.
"I don't like to cut your only pair of shoes," he said as he made a slight motion to draw it off, and then observing the spasm of pain, stopped. "Needs must," he continued, taking out his knife and slitting the leather.

He did it very carefully so as not to ruin the boot beyond repair, and finally succeeded in getting it off without giving her too much pain. And she was not so tired or so miserable as to be unaware of his gentleness. His manner, matter of fact, business like, if he had been a doctor one would have called it professional, distinctly pleased her in this trying and unusual position. Her stocking was stained with blood. The man rose to his feet, took from a rude homemade chair a light Mexican blanket and laid it considerably across the girl.

"Now if you can manage to get off your stocking yourself, I will see what can be done," he said, turning away.
It was the work of a few seconds for her to comply with his request. Hanging the wet stocking carefully over a chair back, he drew back the blanket a little and carefully inspected the poor little foot. He saw at once that it was not an ordinary sprained ankle, but it seemed to him that her foot had been caught between two tossing logs, and had been badly bruised. It was very painful,

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but would not take so long to heal as a sprain. The little foot, normally so white, was now black and blue and the skin had been roughly torn and broken. He brought a basin of cold water and a towel and washed off the blood, the girl fighting down the pain and successfully stifling any outcry.
"Now," he said, "you must put on this gown and get into bed. By the time you are ready for it I will have some broth for you and then we will bandage that foot. I shall not come in here for some time, you will be quite alone and safe."
He turned and left the room, shutting the door after him as he went.

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Continued on page 7.