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# The Chalice of Courage

A Romance of Colorado  
By Cyrus Townsend Brady

## CHAPTER XX

**The Converging Trails.**  
Whatever the feeling of the others, Armstrong found himself unable to sleep that night. It seemed to him that fate was about to play him the meanest and most fantastic of tricks. Many times before in his crowded life he had loved other women, or so he characterized his feelings, but his passion for Louise Rosser Newbold had been in a class by itself until he had met Enid Maitland. Between the two there had been many women, but these two were the high points, the rest was lowland.

Once before, therefore, this Newbold had cut in ahead of him and had won the woman he loved. Armstrong had cherished a hard grudge against him for a long time. He had not been of those who had formed the rescue party led by old Kirkby and Maitland which had buried the poor woman in the great butte in the deep canon. Before he got back to the camp the whole affair was over and Newbold had departed. Luckily for him, Armstrong had always thought, for he had been so mad with grief and rage and jealousy that if he had come across him, helpless or not, he would have killed him out of hand.

Armstrong had soon enough forgotten Louise Rosser, but he had not forgotten Newbold. All his ancient animosity had flamed into instant life again, at the sight of his name last night. The inveteracy of his hatred had been in no way abated by the lapse of time, it seemed.

Everybody in the mining camp had supposed that Newbold had wandered off and perished in the mountains, else Armstrong might have pursued him and hunted him down. The sight of his name on that piece of paper was outward and visible evidence that he still lived. It had almost the shock of a resurrection, and a resurrection of hatred rather than to love. If Newbold had been alone in the world, if Armstrong had chanced upon him in the solitude, he would have hated him just as he did, but when he thought that his ancient enemy was with the woman he now loved, with a growing intensity beside which his former resentment seemed weak and feeble he hated him yet the more.

He could not tell when the notice, which he had examined carefully, was written; there was no date upon it, but he could come to only one conclusion. Newbold must have found Enid Maitland alone in the mountains very shortly after her departure, and he had her with him in his cabin alone for at least a month. Armstrong gritted his teeth at the thought. He did not undervalue the personality of Newbold. He had never happened to see him, but he had heard enough about him to understand his qualities as a man. The tie that bound Armstrong to Enid Maitland was a strong one, but the tie by which he held her to him, if indeed he held her broken; perhaps it was broken already, and so he hated him still more and more.

Indeed, his animosity was so great and growing that for the moment he took no joy in the assurance of the girl's safety; yet he was not altogether an unfair man, and in answer to her thank God in his own mind that the woman he loved was alive and well, or had been when the note was written. He rejoiced that she had not been swept away with the flood or that she had not been lost in the mountains and forced to wander on finally to starve and freeze and die. In one moment her nearness caused his heart to throb with joyful anticipation. The certainty that at the first flush of day he should seek her again sent the warm blood to his cheeks. But those thoughts would be succeeded by the knowledge that she was with his enemy. Was this man to rob him of the latest love as he had robbed him of the first? Perhaps the hardest task that was ever laid upon Armstrong was to lie quietly in his sleeping bag and wait until the morning.

So soon as the first indication of dawn showed over the crack of the door, he slipped quietly out of his sleeping bag and without disturbing the others drew on his boots, put on his heavy fur coat and cap and gloves, slung his Winchester and his snow shoes over his shoulder, and without stopping for a bite to eat, softly opened the door, stepped out and closed it after him. It was quite dark in the bottom of the canon, although a few pale gleams overhead indicated the near approach of day. It was quite still, too. There were clouds on the mountain top heavy with threat of wind and snow.

The way was not difficult, the direction of it, that is, nor was the going very difficult at first; the snow was frozen and the crust was strong enough to bear him. He did not need his snow shoes, and, indeed, would have

and little chance to use them in the narrow, broken, rocky pass. He had slipped away from the others because he wanted to be first to see the man and the woman. He did not want any witnesses to that meeting. They would have come on later, of course; but he wanted an hour or two in private with Enid and Newbold without any interruption. His conscience was not clear. Nor could he settle upon a course of action.

How much Newbold knew of his former attempt to win away his wife, how much of what he knew he had told Enid Maitland, Armstrong could not surmise. Putting himself into Newbold's place and imagining that the engineer had possessed entire information, he decided that he must have told everything to Enid Maitland as soon as he had found out the quasi relation between her and Armstrong. And Armstrong did not believe the woman he loved could be in anybody's presence a month without telling something about him. Still, it was possible that Newbold knew nothing, and that he told nothing therefore.

The situation was paralyzing to a man of Armstrong's decided, determined temperament. He could not decide upon the line of conduct he should pursue. His course in this, the most critical emergency he had ever faced, must be determined by circumstances of which he felt with savage resentment he was in some measure the sport. He would have to leave to chance what ought to be subject to his will. Of only one thing he was sure—he would stop at nothing, murder, lying; nothing, to win the woman, and to settle his score with that man.

There was really only one thing he could do, and that was to press on up the canon. He had no idea how far it might be or how long a journey he would have to make before he reached that shelf on the high hill where stood that hut in which she dwelt. As the crow flies, it could not be a great distance, but the canon zigzagged through the mountains with as many curves and angles as a lightning flash. He plodded on, therefore, with furious haste, recklessly speeding over places where a misstep in the snow or a slip on the icy rocks would have meant death or disaster to him.

He had gone about an hour, and had perhaps made four miles from the camp when the storm burst upon him. It was now broad day, but the sky was filled with clouds and the air with driving snow. The wind whistled down the canon with terrific force. It was with difficulty that he made any headway at all against it. It was a local storm; if he could have looked through the snow he would have discovered calmness on the top of the peaks. It was one of those sudden squalls of wind and snow which rage with terrific force while they last, but whose rage was limited, and whose violent duration would be short.

A less determined man than he would have bowed to the inevitable and sought some shelter behind a rock until the fury of the tempest was spent, but there was no storm that blew that could stop this man so long as he had strength to drive against it. So he bent his head to the fierce blast and struggled on. There was something titanic and magnificent about this iron determination and persistence of Armstrong. The two most powerful passions which move humanity were at his service; love led him and hate drove him. And the two were so intermingled that it was difficult to say which predominated, now one and now the other. The resultant of the two forces, however, was an onward move that would not be denied.

His fur coat was soon covered with snow and ice, the sharp needles of the storm cut his face wherever it was exposed. The wind forced its way through his garments and chilled him to the bone. He had eaten nothing since the night before, and his vitality was not at its flood, but he pressed on, and there was something grand in his indomitable progress. Excelsior!

Back in the hut Kirkby and Maitland sat around the fire waiting most impatiently for the wind to blow itself out and for that snow to stop falling through which Armstrong struggled forward. As he followed the windings of the canon, not daring to ascend to the summit on either wall and seek short cuts across the range, he was sensible that he was constantly rising. There were many indications to his experienced mind; the decrease in the height of the surrounding pines, the increasing rarity of the icy air, the growing difficulty in breathing under the sustained exertion he was making, the quick throbbing of his accelerated heart, all told him he was approaching his journey's end.

He judged that he must now be drawing near the source of the stream.

and that he would presently come upon the shelter. He had no means of ascertaining the time. He would not have dared to unbuckle his coat to glance at his watch, and it is difficult to measure the flying minutes in such scenes as those through which he passed, but he thought he must have gone at least seven miles in perhaps three hours, which he fancied had elapsed, his progress in the last two having been frightfully slow. Every foot of advance he had had to fight for.

Suddenly a quick turn in the canon, a passage through a narrow entrance between lofty cliffs, and he found himself in a pocket or a circular amphitheater which he could see was closed on the farther side. The bottom of this enclosure or valley was covered with pines, now drooping under tremendous burdens of snow. In the midst of the pines a lakelet was frozen solid; the ice was covered with the same dazzling carpet of white.

He could have seen nothing of this had not the sudden storm now stopped as precipitately almost as it had begun. Indeed, accustomed to the grayness of the snow fall, his eyes were fairly dazzled by the bright light of the sun, now quite high over the range, which struck him full in the face.

He stopped, panting, exhausted, and leaned against the rocky wall of the canon's mouth which here rose sheer over his head. This certainly was the source of the trail, the lake was the source of the frozen rivulet along whose rocky and torn banks he had tramped since dawn. Here, if anywhere, he would find the object of his quest.

Refreshed by a brief pause, and encouraged by the sudden stilling of the storm, he stepped out of the canon and ascended a little knoll whence he had a full view of the pocket where the tops of the pines. Shading his eyes from the light with his hand as best he could, he slowly swept the circumference with his eager glance, seeing nothing until his eye fell upon a huge broken trail of rocks projecting from the snow, indicating the ascent to a broad shelf of the mountains across the lake to the right. Following this he saw a huge block of snow which suggested dimly the outlines of a hut!

Was that the place? Was she there? He stared fascinated and as he did so a thin curl of smoke rose above the snow heap and wavered up in the cold, quiet air! That was a human habitation, then. It could be none other than the hut referred to in the note. Enid Maitland must be there; and Newbold!

The lake lay directly in front of him beyond the trees at the foot of the knoll, and between him and the shore that led up to the hut. If it had been summer, he would have been compelled to follow the water's edge to the right or to the left; both journeys would have led over difficult trails, with little to choose between them, but the lake was now frozen hard and covered with snow. He had no doubt that the snow would bear him, but to make sure he drew his snow shoes from his shoulder, slipped his feet in the straps, and sped straight on through the trees and across it like an arrow from a bow.

In five minutes he was at the foot of the giant stairs. Kicking off his snow shoes, he scrambled up the broken way, easily finding in the snow

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It was fortunate, as it turned out, that this obligation detained him. He was that type of a merciful man whose mercies extended to his beasts. The poor little burros must be attended to and their safety assured so far as it could be, for it would be impossible for Enid Maitland to care for them. Indeed he had already exacted a promise from her that she would not leave the plateau and risk her life on the icy stairs with which she was so unfamiliar.

He had gone to the corral and shaken down food enough for them which it had been doled out to them day after day. He had also seen nothing of this had not the sudden storm now stopped as precipitately almost as it had begun. Indeed, accustomed to the grayness of the snow fall, his eyes were fairly dazzled by the bright light of the sun, now quite high over the range, which struck him full in the face.

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