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A Romance of Colorado By Cyrus Townsend Brady

CHAPTER XXI.

The Odds Against Him. The noise of the opening of the door and the inrush of cold air that followed awoke Enid Maitland to instant action. She rose to her feet and faced the entrance through which she expected Newbold to reappear—for of course the newcomer must be here and for the life of her she could not help that radiating flash of joy, the momentary anticipation of which fairly transfigured her being; although if she had stopped to reflect she would have remembered that not in the whole course of their acquaintance had Newbold ever entered her room at any time without knocking and receiving permission.

Some of that joy yet lingered in her lovely face when she tardily recognized the newcomer in the half light. Armstrong, scarcely waiting to close the door, sprang forward joyfully with his hands outstretched. "Enid!" he cried. Naturally he thought the look of expectant happiness he had surprised upon her face was for him and he accounted for its sudden disappearance by the shock of his unexpected, unannounced, abrupt, entrance. The warm color had flushed her face, but as she stared at him her aspect rapidly changed. She grew paler. The happy light that had shone in her eyes faded away and as he approached her she shrank back. "You!" she exclaimed almost in terror.

"Yes," he answered smilingly, "I have found you at last. Thank God you are safe and well. Oh, if you could only know the agonies I have gone through. I thought I loved you when I left you six weeks ago, but now—"

In eager impetuosity he drew nearer to her. Another moment and he would have taken her in his arms, but she would have none of him. "Stop," she said with a cold and inflexible sternness that gave pause even to his buoyant joyful assurance. "Why, what's the matter?" "The matter? Everything, but—" "No evasions, please," continued the man still cheerfully but with a growing misgiving. His suspicions, in abeyance for the moment because of his joy at seeing her alive and well, arose with renewed force. "I left you practically pledged to me," he resumed. "Not so fast," answered Enid Maitland, determined to combat the lightest attempt to establish a binding claim upon her.

"Isn't it true?" asked Armstrong. "Here, wait," he said before she could answer. "I am half frozen, I have been searching for you since early morning in the storm." He unbuttoned and unbelted his huge fur coat as he spoke and threw it carelessly on the floor by his Winchester leaning against the wall. "Now," he resumed, "I can talk better."

"You must have something to eat then," said the girl. She was glad of the interruption since she was playing for time. She did not quite know how the interview would end, he had come upon her so unexpectedly and she had never formulated what she would say to him, that which she felt she must say. She must have time to think, to collect herself, which he in his part was quite willing to give her, for he was not much better prepared for the interview than she. He really was hungry and tired, his early journey had been foolhardy and in the highest degree dangerous. The violence of his admiration for her added to the excitement of her presence, and the probable nearness of Newbold as to whose whereabouts he wondered were not conducive to rapid recuperation. It would be comfort to him also to have food and time.

"Sit down," she said. "I shall be back in a moment." The fire of the morning was still burning in the stove in the kitchen; to heat a can of soup, to make him some buttered toast and hot coffee, were the tasks of a few moments; she brought them back to him, set them on the table before him and bade him fall to. "By jove," exclaimed the man after a little time as he began to eat hastily but with great relish what she had prepared, while she stood over him watching him silently. "This is cozy. A warm, comfortable room, something to eat served by the finest woman in the world, the prettiest girl on earth to look at—what more could a man desire? This is the way it's going to be always in the future."

"You have no warrant whatever for saying or hoping that," answered the girl slowly but decisively. "Have I not?" asked the man quickly. "Did you not say to me a little while ago that you liked me better than any man you had ever met and that I might win you if I could? Well,

I can, and what's more, I will in spite of yourself, Enid,"—he laughed. "Why, the memory of that kiss I stole from you makes me mad." He pushed the things before him and rose to his feet once more. "Come, give me another," he said, "it isn't in the power of woman to stand against a love like mine."

"Isn't it?" "No, indeed." "Louise Newbold did," she answered very quietly but with the swiftness and the dexterity of a sword thrust by a master hand, a mighty arm. Armstrong stared at her in open mouthed astonishment. "What do you know about Louise Rosser or Newbold?" he asked at last.

"All that I want to know." "And did that damned hound tell you?" "If you mean Mr. Newbold, he never mentioned your name, he does not know you exist." "Where is he now?" thundered the man.

"Have no fear," answered the woman calmly, "he has gone to the settlements to tell them I am safe and to seek help to get me out of the mountains."

"Fear!" exclaimed Armstrong, proudly, "I fear nothing on earth. For years, ever since I heard his name in fact, I have longed to meet him. I want to know who told you about that woman—Kirkby?" "He never mentioned your name in connection with her."

"But you must have heard it somewhere," cried the man thoroughly bewildered. "The birds of the air didn't tell it to you, did they?" "She told me herself," answered Enid Maitland. "She told you? Why, she's been dead in her grave five years, shot to death by that murderous dog of a husband of hers."

"A word with you, Mr. Armstrong," said the woman with great spirit. "You can't talk that way about Mr. Newbold; he saved my life twice over, from a bear and then in the cloudburst which caught me in the canyon."

"That evens up a little," said Armstrong. "Perhaps for your sake I will spare him." "You!" laughed the woman contemptuously. "Spare him? Be advised, look to yourself, if he ever finds out what I know, I don't believe any power on earth could save you."

"Oh," said Armstrong carelessly enough, although he was consumed with hate and jealousy and raging against her clearly evident disdain. "I can take care of myself, I guess. Anyway I only want to talk about you, not about him or her. Your father—"

"Is he well?" "Well enough, but heart-broken, crushed. I happened to be in his house in Philadelphia when the telegram came from your uncle that you were lost and probably dead. I had just asked him for your hand," he added, smiling grimly at the recollection. "You had no right to do that."

"I know that." "It was not, it is not, his to give." "Still when I won you I thought it would be pleasant all around if he knew and approved."

"And did he?" "Not then, he literally drove me out of the house, but afterwards he said if I could find you I could have you; and, by Heaven, I have found you and I will have you whether you like it or not."

"Never," cried the woman decisively. The situation had got on Armstrong's nerves, and he must perforce show himself in his true colors. His only resources were his strength, not of mind but of body. He made another most damaging mistake at this juncture.

"We are alone here, and I am master, remember," he said meaningly. "Come, let's make up. Give me a kiss for my pains and—"

"I have been alone here for a month with another man," answered Enid Maitland who was strangely unafraid in spite of this threat. "A gentleman, he has never so much as offered to touch my hand without my permission; the contrast is quite to your disadvantage."

"Are you jealous of Louise Rosser?" asked Armstrong suddenly seeing that he was losing ground and casting about desperately to account for it, and to recover what was escaping him. "Why, that was nothing, a mere boy and girl affair," he began on with a spiteful good humor as if it were all a joke. "The woman was, I hate to say it, just crazy in love with me, but I really never cared anything especially for her; it was just a harmless sort of flirtation anyway. She afterward married this man Newbold and

that's all there was about it." The truth would not serve him and in his desperation and desire he stalked everything on this astounding lie. The woman he loved looked at him with her face as rigid as a mask. "You won't hold that against me, will you?" pleaded the man. "I told you that I'd been a man among men, yes, among women, too, here in this rough country, and that I wasn't worthy of you; there are lots of things in my past that I ought to be ashamed of and I am, and the more I see you the more ashamed I grow, but as for loving any one else, all that I've ever thought or felt or experienced before now is just nothing."

And this indeed was true, and even Enid Maitland with all her prejudice could realize and understand it. Out of the same mouth, was said of old, proceeded blessing and cursing, and from these same lips came truth and falsehood; but the power of the truth to influence this woman was as nothing to the power of falsehood. She could never have loved him, she now knew; a better man had won her affections, a nobler being claimed her heart; but if he had told the truth regarding his relationship to Newbold's wife and then had completed it with his passionate avowal of his present love for her, she would have at least admired him and respected him.

"You have not told me the truth," she answered directly; "you have deliberately been false." "Can't you see," protested the man drawing nearer to her, "how much I love you?"

"Oh, that; yes I suppose that is true; as far as you can love any one I will admit that you do love me." "So far as I can love any one?" he repeated after her. "Give me a chance and I'll show you."

"But you haven't told the truth about Mrs. Newbold. You have culminated the dead, you have sought to shelter yourself by throwing the burden of a guilty passion upon the weaker vessel; it isn't manlike, it isn't—"

Armstrong was a bold fighter, quick and prompt in his decisions. He made another effort to set himself right. He staked his all on another throw of the dice, which he began to feel were somehow loaded against him.

"You are right," he admitted, wondering anxiously how much the woman really knew. "It wasn't true, it was a coward's act, I am ashamed of it. I'm so mad with love for you that I scarcely know what I am doing, but I will make a clean breast of it now. I loved Louise Rosser after a fashion before ever Newbold came on the scene. We quarrelled to each other; a foolish quarrel arose, she was jealous of other girls—"

"And had she no right to be?" "Oh, I suppose so. We broke it off anyway and then she married Newbold, out of pique I suppose, or what you will. I thought I was heart-broken at the time, it did hit me pretty hard; it was five or six years ago; I was a youngster then, I am a man now. The woman has been dead long since; there was some cock-and-bull story about her falling off a cliff and her husband being compelled to shoot her. I didn't believe it at the time, and naturally I have been waiting to get even with him. I have been hating him for five years, but he has been good to you and we will let bygones be bygones. What do I care for Louise Rosser, or for him, or for what he did to her, now! I am sorry

that I said what I did, but you will have to charge it to my blinding passion for you. I can truthfully say that you are one woman that I have ever craved with all my heart. I will do anything, be anything, to win you."

It was very brilliantly done; he had not told a single untruth; he had admitted much, but he had withheld the essentials after all. He was playing against desperate odds, he had no knowledge of how much she knew, or where she had learned anything. Every one about the mining camp where she had lived had known of his love for Louise Rosser, but he had not supposed there was a single human soul who had been privy to his later developments, and he could not figure out any way by which Enid Maitland could have learned by any possibility any more of the story than he had told her. He had calculated swiftly and with the utmost nicety, just how much he should confess. He was a keen witted clever man and he was fighting for what he held most dear, but his eagerness and zeal, as they have often done, overrode his judgment, and he made another mistake at this juncture. His evil genius was at his elbow.

"You must remember," he continued, "that you have been alone here in these mountains with a man for over a month; the world—"

"What, what do you mean?" exclaimed the girl, who indeed knew very well what he meant, but who would not admit the possibility. "It's not every man," he added, blindly rushing to his doom, "that would care for you or want you—after that."

He received a sudden and terrible enlightenment. "You coward," she cried, with upraised hand, whether in protest or to strike him neither ever knew, for at that moment the door opened the second time that morning to admit another man.

CHAPTER XXII. The Last Resort of Kings and Men. The sudden entrance upon a quarrel between others is invariably at a disadvantage. Usually he is unaware of the cause of difference and generally he has no idea of the stage of development of the affair that has been

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