

THE REAL ADVENTURE

By HENRY KITCHELL WEBSTER

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THE BIG STEP

Most romantic fiction ends with the hero and heroine about to marry and "live happily ever after." The author of this unusual serial begins his story with marriage and carries the romance for a period of several years into the realm of "double harness." Taking a couple from the well-to-do scale of the Middle West social scheme, Mr. Webster uses them to bring out some of the important problems confronting a great many young men and women who enter the bonds of matrimony in these days of equal suffrage, of women who'd rather work downtown than stay at home, and of new complications in the business of raising a family. "The Real Adventure" is thoroughly alive with action. You will enjoy the story not only for its romance but for the element in it that will make you think—and ponder the intimate happenings in your own family and in the families of your neighbors.

THE EDITOR.

CHAPTER I.

Beginning an Adventure.

"Indeed," continued the professor, glancing down at his notes, "if one were the editor of a column of—er—advice to young girls, one might crystallize the remarks I have been making this morning into a warning—never marry a man with a passion for principles."

It got a laugh, of course. Professorial jokes always do. But the girl didn't laugh. She came to with a start—she had been staring out the window—and wrote, apparently, the fool thing down in her notebook. It was the only note she had made in thirty-five minutes.

All of this brilliant exposition of the paradox of Rousseau and Robespierre (he was giving a course on the French revolution), the strange and yet inevitable fact that the softest, most sentimental, rose-scented religion ever invented, should have produced, through its most thoroughly infatuated disciple, the ghastliest reign of terror that ever shocked the world; his masterly character study of the "sea-green incorruptible," too humane to swat a fly, yet capable of sending half of France to the guillotine in order that the half that was left might believe unanimously in the rights of man—all this the girl had let go by unheard, in favor, apparently, of the drone of a street piano, which came in through the open window on the wings of a prematurely warm March wind.

Of all his philosophizing, there was not a pen-track to mar the virginity of the page she had opened her notebook to when the lecture began.

And then, with a perfectly serious face, she had written down his silly little joke about advice to young girls. There was no reason in the world for his paying any special attention to her; it annoyed him frightfully that he did.

She was good-looking, of course,—a rather boyishly splendid young creature of somewhere about twenty, with a heap of chestnut hair that had a sort of electric vitality about it. She had a strong chin, with a slight forward thrust, good straight-looking, expressive eyes, and a big, wide, really beautiful mouth, with square white teeth in it, which, when she smiled, exerted a sort of hypnotic effect on him. All that, however, left unexplained the quality she had of making you, whatever she did, irresistibly aware of her. And, conversely, unaware of everyone else about her.

Her name was Rosalind Stanton, but his impression was that they called her Rose.

The bell rang out in the corridor. He dismissed the class and began stacking up his notes. Then, "Miss Stanton," he said.

She detached herself from the stream that was moving toward the door and, with a good-humored look of inquiry about her very expressive eyebrows, came toward him.

"This is an idiotic question," he said as she paused before his desk. "But did you get anything at all out of my lecture except my bit of facetious advice to young girls about to marry?"

She flushed a little (a girl like that hadn't any right to flush: it ought to be against the college regulations), drew her brows together in a puzzled sort of way, and then, with her wide, boyish, good-humored mouth, she smiled. "I didn't know it was facetious," she said. "It struck me as pretty good. But—I'm awfully sorry if you thought me inattentive. You see, mother brought us up on the 'Social Contract' and the 'Age of Reason,' such things, and I didn't put it down because . . ."

"I see," he said. "I beg your pardon." She smiled, perfectly cheerfully

begged his pardon, and assured him she'd try to do better.

Another girl who had been waiting to speak to the professor, perceiving that their conversation was at an end, came and stood beside her at the desk—a scrawny girl with an eager voice, and a question she wanted to ask about Robespierre; and for some reason or other, Rosalind Stanton's valedictory smile seemed to include a consciousness of this other girl—a consciousness of a contrast. It might not have been any more than that, but somehow it left the professor feeling that he had given himself away.

There is nothing cloistral about the University of Chicago except its architecture. As she went out Rose felt that the presence of a fat about or a lady professor in the corridor outside the recitation-room would have fitted in admirably with the look of the warm gray walls and the carved pointed arches of the window and door casements, the blackened oak of the doors themselves.

She wasn't fully conscious of it on this March morning, but something had happened that made a difference. If she'd been ascending an imperceptible gradient for the past months, today she had come to a recognizable step up and taken it. Oddly enough, the thing had happened back there in the class-room as she stood before the professor's desk and caught his eye wavering between herself and the scrawny girl who wanted to ask a question about Robespierre. There had been more than blank, helpless exasperation in that look of his, and it had taught her something. She couldn't have explained what.

She went swinging along alone, her shoulders back, confronting the warm March wind, drawing long breaths into her good deep chest. She had just had, psychically speaking, a birthday.

She played a wonderful game of basketball that afternoon, and it was after five o'clock when, at the conclusion of the game and a cold shower, a rub, and a somewhat casual resumption of her clothes, she emerged from the gymnasium. High time that she took the quickest way of getting home, unless she wanted to be late for dinner.

But the exhilaration of the day persisted. She felt like doing something out of the regular routine. Even a preliminary walk of a mile or so before she should cross over and take the elevated, would serve to satisfy her mild hunger for adventure.

So, with her notebooks under her arm and her sweater-jacket unfastened, at a good four-mile swing she started north. In the purlieus of the university she was frequently hailed by friends of her own sex or the other. But though she waved cheerful responses to their greetings, she made

her stride purposeful enough to discourage offers of company. They all seemed young to her today. All her student activities seemed young. As if, somehow, she had outgrown them. The feeling was none the less real after she had laughed at herself for entertaining it.

She noticed presently that it was a good deal darker than it had any right to be at this hour, and the sudden fall of the breeze and a persistent shimmer of lightning supplied her with the explanation. When she reached Forty-seventh street, the break of the storm was obviously a matter of minutes, so she decided to ride across to the elevated—it was another mile, perhaps—rather than to walk across as she had meant to do.

She found quite a group of people waiting on the corner for a car, and the car itself, when it came along, was crowded. So she handed her nickel to the conductor over some-

body's shoulders, and moved back to the corner of the vestibule, which did very well until the next stop, where half a dozen more prospective passengers were waiting. They were in a hurry, too, since it had begun in very downright fashion to rain.

The conductor had been chanting, "Up in the car, please!" in a perfunctory cry all along. But at this crisis his voice got a new urgency. "Come on now," he proclaimed, "you'll have to get inside!"

From the steps the new arrivals pushed, the conductor pushed, and the sheeplike docility of an American crowd helped him. Regretfully, with the rest, Rose made her way to the door.

"Fare, please!" he said sharply as she came along.

She told him she had paid her fare; but for some reason he elected not to believe her.

"When did you pay?" he demanded. "A block back," she said, "when all those other people got on."

"You didn't pay it to me," he said truculently. "Come along! Pay your fare or get off the car!"

"I paid it once," she said quietly, "and I'm not going to pay it again." With that she started forward toward the door.

He reached out across his little rail and caught her by the arm. It was a natural act enough—not polite, to be sure, by no means chivalrous.

But it had a surprising result. The first thing she knew he found both wrists pinned in the grip of two hands; found himself staring stupidly into a pair of great blazing blue eyes—it's a wrathful color, blue, when you light it up—and listening, uncomprehendingly, to a voice that said, "Don't dare touch me like that!"

The episode might have ended right there, for the conductor's consternation was complete. But her notebooks were scattered everywhere and had to be gathered up, and there were two or three of the passengers who thought the situation was funny, and laughed, which didn't improve the conductor's temper.

Rose was aware, as she gathered up her notebooks, of another hand that was helping her—a gloved masculine hand. She took the books it held out to her as she straightened up, and said "Thank you," but without looking around for the face that went with it. The conductor had jerked the bell while she was collecting her notebooks, and the car was grinding down to a stop.

"You pay your fare!" he repeated, "or you get off the car right here!" "Right here" was in the middle of what looked like a lake, and the rain was pouring down with a roar. Before she could answer a voice spoke—a voice which, with intuitive certainty, she associated with the gloved hand that had helped gather up her notebooks—a very crisp, finely modulated voice.

"That's perfectly outrageous," it said. "The young lady has paid her fare." "Did you see her pay it?" demanded the conductor.

"Naturally not," said the voice: "I got on at the last corner. She was here then. But if she said she did, she did."

It seemed to relieve the conductor to have someone of his own sex to quarrel with. He delivered a stream of admonition somewhat sulphureously phrased, to the general effect that any one whose concern the present affair was not, could, at his option, close his jaw or have his block knocked off.

Rose became aware that inside a shaggy gray sleeve which hung beside her, there was a sudden tension of big muscles; the gloved hand which had helped gather up her notebooks clenched itself into a formidable fist. She spoke quickly and decisively: "I won't pay another fare; but, of course, you may put me off the car."

"All right," said the conductor. The girl smiled over the very gingerly way in which he reached out for her elbow to guide her around the rail and toward the step. Technically, the action constituted putting her off the car. She heard the crisp voice once more, this time repeating a number—"twenty-two-ought-five," or something like that—just as she splashed down into the hollow in the pavement. The bell rang twice, the car started with a jerk, there was another splash, and a big, gray-clad figure alighted in the lake beside her.

"I've got his number," the crisp voice said triumphantly. "But," gasped the girl, "but what in the world did you get off the car for?" It wasn't raining. It was doing an imitation of Niagara Falls, and the roar of it almost drowned their voices.

"What did I get off the car for?" he shouted. "Why, I wouldn't have missed it for anything. It was immense! It's so confounded seldom," he went on, "that you find anybody with backbone enough to stick up for a principle. . . ."

He heard a brief, deep-throated laugh and pulled up short with a "What's the joke?"

"I laughed," she said, "because you have been deceived." And she added quickly, "I don't believe it's quite so deep on the sidewalk, is it?" With that she waded away toward the curb.

He followed, then led the way to a lee wall that offered, comparatively speaking, shelter. Then, "Where's the deception?" he asked.

On any other day, it's probable she'd have acted differently—would have paid some heed, though a bit contemptuously, perhaps, to the precepts of ladylike behavior, in which she'd been admirably grounded. Today being today, she consigned ladylike considerations to the inventor of them, and gave instinct its head.

She laughed again as she answered his question: "The deception was that I pretended to do it from principle. The real reason why I shouldn't pay another fare is that I only had one more nickel. It's only about half a mile to the station, but from there home it's ten. So you see I'd rather walk this than that."

"But that's dreadful!" he cried. "Isn't there . . . Couldn't you let me . . ."

"Oh," she said, "it isn't as bad as that. It's just one of the silly things that happen to you sometimes, you know. I paid my subscription to The Maroon. . . ."

She didn't laugh audibly, but without seeing her face he knew she smiled, the quality of her voice enriching itself somehow. . . . "And I ate a bigger lunch than usual, and that brought me down to ten cents."

"You will make a complaint about that, won't you?" he urged. "Even if it wasn't on principle that you refused to pay another fare? And let me back you up in it. I've his number, you know."

"You deserve that, I suppose," she said, "because you did get off the car on principle. But—well, really, unless we could prove that I paid my fare, they'd probably think the conductor did exactly right. Of course he took hold of me, but then—well, think what I did to him!"

He grumbled that this was nonsense—the man had been guilty at least of excessive zeal—but he didn't urge her, any further, to complain.

"There's another car coming," he now announced, peering around the end of the wall. "You will let me pay your fare on it, won't you?" She hesitated. The rain was thinning. "I would," she said, "if I honestly wouldn't rather walk. Thanks, really very, very much, though. Don't you miss it?" She thrust out her hand. "Good-by!"

"I can't pretend to think you need an escort to the elevated," he said. "I saw what you did to the conductor. I haven't the least doubt you could have thrown him off the car. But I'd—really like it very much if you would let me walk along with you."

"Why," she said, "of course. I'd like it, too. Come along!"

CHAPTER II.

What Happened to Frederica's Plan. At twenty-seven minutes after seven that evening, Frederica Whitney was—about ten minutes before the hour at which she had invited guests to dinner—not quite near enough dressed to prevent a feeling that she had to hurry. Ordinarily she didn't mind. To Frederica at thirty, the job of being a radiantly delightful object of regard lacked the sporting interest of uncertainty—was almost too simple a matter to bother about.

But tonight she wished she'd started half an hour earlier. Even her husband discovered it. He brought in a cigarette, and stood smiling down at her with the complacent look that characterizes a married man of forty when he finds himself dressed in evening harness ten minutes before his wife. She shot a glance of rueful inquiry at him, and asked him what time it was.

"Seven twenty-two thirty-six," he told her. She made no comment except with her eyebrows, but he must have been looking at her, for he wanted to know, good-humoredly, what all the excitement was about.

"You could go down as you are and not a man here tonight would notice the difference. And as for the women—well, if they have something on you for once, they'll be all the better pleased."

"Don't try to be knowing and philosophical, and—Havelock Ellis, Martin dear," she admonished him, pending a minute operation with an infinitesimal hairpin. "It isn't your lay a bit. Just concentrate your mind on one thing, and that's being nice to Hermione Woodruff, and on seeing that Roddy is."

He asked, "Why Roddy?" in a tone that matched hers; looked at her, widened his eyes, said "Hub!" to himself and, finally, shook his head. "Nothing to it," he pronounced.

She dispatched the maid with the key to the wall safe in her husband's room. "Why isn't there?" she demanded. "Rodney won't look at young girls. They bore him to death. But Her-

mione can understand fully half the things he talks about. She's got lots of tact and skill, she's good-looking and no older than I and I'm two years younger than Roddy. She'll appreciate a real husband, after having been married five years to John Woodruff. And she's rich enough, now, so that his wild-eyed way of practicing law won't matter."

"All very nice and reasonable," he conceded, "but somehow the notion of Rodney Aldrich trying to marry a rich widow is one I'm not equal to." He looked at his watch again. "By the way, didn't you say he was coming early?"

She nodded. They heard, just then, faint and far away, the ring of the doorbell.

"Wait a second," he said. "Let's see if it's Roddy."

There was no mistaking the voice they heard speaking the moment the

door opened—a voice with a crisp ring to it that sounded always younger than his years. What they heard the butler say to him was disconcerting.

"You're terribly wet, sir!"

Frederica turned on her husband a look of despair. "He's walked through that rain! Do run down and send him up to me. I can imagine how he'll look."

She was mistaken about that, though. For once Frederica had over-estimated her powers, stimulated though they were by the way she heard her husband say:

"Praise heaven you can wear my clothes. Run along upstairs and break yourself gently to Freddy."

She heard him come squelching up the stairs and along the hall, and then in her doorway she saw him. His baggy gray tweed suit was dark with water and toned down by a liberal stipple of mud splatters. Both his side pockets had been, apparently, strained to the utmost to accommodate what looked like a bunch of pasteboard-bound notebooks, now far on the way to their original pulp, and lopped dependently outward. A melancholy pool had already begun forming about his feet. His face, above the dismal wreck, beamed good-humored, innocent affection at her. It was a big-featured, strong, rosy face, and the unmistakable intellectual power of it, which became apparent the moment he got his faculties into action, had a trick of hiding, at other times, behind a more robust simplicity.

"Good gracious!" he said. "I didn't know you were going to have a party. I thought it would just be the family. So instead of dressing, I thought I'd walk. And then it came on to rain, so I took a street car—and got put off. And here I am."

"Yes, here you are," said Frederica. "Don't be impossible, Rod. Don't you even know whose birthday party this is?"

He looked at her, frowned, then laughed. He had a great, big laugh. "I thought it was one of the kids," he said.

"Well, it isn't," she told him. "It's yours. And the people we're having were asked to meet you. And you've got just about seven minutes to get into Martin's other dress suit. I'll send Walters to lay it out."

This bluff young man surprises his scheming sister with the smart way in which he eludes her trap to marry him off—read it in the next installment.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)



She Went Swinging Along, Alone.



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Brazil Losing Rubber Trade.

One of the most striking economic changes in recent years has been the loss by Brazil of its dominant position in the rubber trade. Whereas, a few years back, the world looked to South America for most of its crude rubber, it is now getting the larger share from the far East. The Brazilian product is obtained from trees that grow wild, and little has been done toward cultivation of the trees. In Sumatra, Ceylon, Burmah and other countries millions of trees have been set out and are now coming into bearing. This domestic product is said to be slightly superior to that obtained from Brazil, and the trees improve with age. The financial loss to Brazil through its decreasing exports has become a serious matter.—New York Times.

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Once, for instance, he was in charge of a squad of musketry. "This," he said, "is the bayonet boss, and this is the bayonet bar. Boss and bar—you can easily remember that; where you get your money and where you spend it." The squad grinned sheepishly. But they understood—and remembered.

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