

The Real Adventure

By Henry Kitchell Webster

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COMES THE GREAT EVENT IN ROSE ALDRICH'S LIFE, THE PROSPECT OF A BABY, AND SHE REALIZES THAT WOMAN'S FINEST PROFESSION IS MOTHERHOOD—BUT PLANS GO SADLY AWRY

SYNOPSIS—Rose Stanton marries Rodney Aldrich, a rich young lawyer, after a brief courtship, and instantly is taken up by Chicago's exclusive social set and made a part of the gay whirl of the rich folk. It is all new to the girl, and for the first few months she is charmed with the life. And then she comes to feel that she is living a useless existence, that she is a social butterfly, a mere ornament in her husband's home. Rose longs to do something useful and to have the opportunity to employ her mind and utilize her talent and education. Rodney feels much the same way himself. He thinks he ought to potter around in society just to please his wife, when in reality he'd rather be giving his nights to study or social service of some sort. They try to reach an understanding, following the visit of two New York friends, who have worked out satisfactorily this same problem.

CHAPTER XI—Continued.

But she went steadily on. "You were always so dear about it. But tonight—oh, Rodney . . ." Her silly, ragged voice choked there and stopped, and the tears brimmed up and spilled down her cheeks. But she kept her face steadfastly turned to his.

"That's what I said about being married and not sowing wild oats, I suppose," he said glumly. "It was a joke. Do you suppose I'd have said it if I meant it?"

"It wasn't only that," she managed to go on. "It was the way they looked at the house; the way you apologized for my dress; the way you looked when you tried to get out of answering Barry Lake's questions about what you were doing. Oh, how I despised myself! And how I knew you and they must be despising me!"

"The one thing I felt about you all the evening," he said, with the patience that marks the last stage of exasperation, "was pride. I was rather crazily proud of you."

"As my lover you were proud of me," she said. "But the other man—the man that's more truly you—was ashamed, as I was ashamed. Oh, it doesn't matter! Being ashamed won't accomplish anything. But what we'll do is going to accomplish something."

"What do you mean to do?" he asked.

"I want you to tell me first," she said, "how much money we have, and how much we've been spending."

"I don't know," he said stubbornly. "I don't know exactly."

"You've got enough, haven't you, of your own . . . I mean, there's enough that comes in every year, to live on, if you didn't earn a cent by practicing law? Well, what I want to do, is to live on that. I want to live, however and wherever we have to—live on that—out in the suburbs

lying slack in her lap, all as if she hadn't heard. The long silence irked him. He pulled out his watch, looked at it, and began winding it. He mended the fire so that it would be safe for the night; bolted a window. Every minute or two he stole a look at her, but she was always just the same. Except for the faint rise and fall of her bosom, she might have been a picture, not a woman.

At last he said again, "Come along, Rose dear."

"It'll be too late in October," she said. "That's why I wanted to decide things tonight. Because we must begin right away." Then she looked up into his face. "It will be too late in October," she repeated, "unless we begin now."

The deep, tense seriousness of her voice and her look arrested his full attention.

"Why?" he asked. And then, "Rose, what do you mean?"

"We're going to have a baby in October," she said.

exception was the Junior League show in Easter week, for which she put in quite a lot of work. She was to have danced in it.

This is an annual entertainment by which Chicago sets great store. All the smartest and best-looking of the younger set take part in it, in costumes that would do credit to a chorus dresser, and as much of Chicago as is willing and able to pay five dollars a seat for the privilege is welcome to come and look. Delirious weeks are spent in rehearsal, under a first-class professional director; audience and performers have an equally good time, and Charity, as residuary legate, profits by thousands.

Rose dropped in at a rehearsal one day at the end of a solid two hours of committee work, found it unexpectedly amusing, and made a point, thereafter, of attending when she could. Her interest was heightened, if not wholly actuated, by some things Jimmy Wallace had been telling her lately about how such things were done on the real stage.

He had written a musical comedy once, lived through the production of it, and had spent a hard-earned two weeks' vacation tramping with it on the road, so he could speak with authority. It was a wonderful Odyssey when you could get him to tell it, and as Rose made a good audience, she got the whole thing at her dinner table.

The thing got a sociological twist eventually, of course, when Jane wanted to know if it were true that the chorus girls received inadequate pay. Jimmy demolished this with more wrath than he often showed. He didn't know any other sort of job that paid a totally untrained girl as well. It took a really accomplished stenographer, for instance, to earn as much a week as was paid the average chorus girl. The trouble was that the indispensable assets in the business were not character and intelligence and ambition, but just personal charms.

"But a girl who's serious about it, who doesn't have to be told the same thing more than once, and catches on, sometimes, without being told at all, why, she can always have a job and she can be as independent as any body. She can get twenty-five dollars a week or even as high as fifty."

The latter part of this conversation was what she was to remember afterward, but the thing that impressed Rose at the time, and that held her for hours looking on at the League show rehearsals, was what Jimmy had told her about the technical side of the work of production, the labors of the director, and so on.

As the weeks and months wore away, and as the season of violent alternations between summer and winter, which the Chicagoan calls spring, gave place to summer itself, Rose was driven to intrude herself more and more deeply behind this great expectation. It was like a dam holding back waters that otherwise would have rushed down upon her and swept her away.

And then came Harriet, Rodney's other sister, and the pressure behind the dam rose higher.

Rose had tried, rather unsuccessfully, to realize that there was actually in existence another woman who occupied, by blood anyway, the same position toward Rodney and herself that Frederica did. She felt almost like a real sister toward Frederica. But without quite putting the notion into words, she had always felt it was just as well that Harriet was an Italian contessa, four thousand miles away. Rodney and Frederica spoke of her affectionately, to be sure, but their references made a picture of a rather formidably correct, seriously aristocratic sort of person.

She'd discovered, along in the winter sometime, that Harriet's affairs were going rather badly. It was along in May that the cable came to Frederica announcing that Harriet was coming back for a long visit. "That's all she said," Rodney explained to Rose. "But I suppose it means the finish. She said she didn't want any fuss made, but she hinted she'd like to have Freddy meet her in New York, and Freddy's going. Poor old Harriet! We must try to cheer her up."

She didn't seem much in need of cheering up, Rose thought, when they first met. All that showed on her face was a highly polished surface was a

disposition to talk humorously over old times with her old friends, including her brother and sister, and a sort of dismayed acquiescence in the smoky seriousness, the inadequate civilization, of the city of her birth.

Toward Rose herself, the contessa was, one might say, studiously affectionate. She avoided being either disagreeable or patronizing. Rose could see, indeed, how she avoided it.

"Better cable Florence as soon as you can," she advised.

Rose protested when the plan for living six months more in Florence. McCrea's house was bronched to her. She made the best fight she could. But Harriet's arguments, re-stated now by Rodney with full conviction, were too much for her. When she broke down and cried, as she couldn't help doing, Rodney soothed and comforted her, assured her that this notion of hers about the expensiveness of it all, was just a notion, which she must struggle against as best she could. She'd see things in a truer proportion afterward.

Very fine and small and weak, Rose Stanton, lying in a bed with people about her, let her eyes fall heavily shut lest they should want her to speak or think. . . . Then, for a long time, nothing. Then presently, a hand, a firm, powerful hand, that picked up her heavy, limp wrist and two sensitive finger-tips that rested lightly on the upper surface of it. After that, an even, measured voice—a voice of authority, whose words no doubt made sense, only Rose was too tired to think what the sense was:

"That's a splendid pulse. She's doing the best thing she can, sleeping like that."

And then another voice, utterly unlike Rodney's and yet unmistakably his—a ragged voice that tried to talk in a whisper but couldn't manage it—broke queerly.

"That's all right," it said. "But I'll find it easier to believe when—"

She must see him—must know what it meant that he should talk like that. With a strong physical effort, she opened her eyes and tried to speak his name. She couldn't; but someone must have been watching and have seen, because a woman's voice said quickly and quietly "Mr. Aldrich."

And the next moment, vast and towering and very blurred in outline, but like his voice, unmistakably, was Rodney—her own big, strong Rodney. She tried to hold her arms up to him, but of course she couldn't.

And then he shortened suddenly. He had knelt down beside her bed, that was it. And she felt upon her palm the pressure of his lips, and his unshaven cheek, and on her wrist a warm wetness that must be—tears.

And then she knew. The urgency of a sudden terror gave her her voice. "Roddy," she said, "there was going to be a—baby. Isn't there?"

Something queerly like a laugh broke his voice when he answered. "Oh, you darling! Yes. It's all right. That isn't why I'm crying. It's just because I'm so happy."

"But the baby?" she persisted. "Why isn't it here?"

Rodney turned and spoke to someone else. "She wants to see," he said. "May she?"

And then a woman's voice (why it was the nurse, of course! Miss Harris, who had come last night) said in an indulgent, soothing tone: "Why, surely she may. Wait just a minute."

But the wait seemed hours. Why didn't they bring the baby—her baby? There! Miss Harris was coming at last, with a queer, bulky, shapeless bundle. Rodney stepped in between and cut off the view, but only to slide an arm under mattress and pillow and raise her a little so that she could see.

And then, under her eyes, dark red and hairy against the whiteness of the pillow, were two small heads—two small, shapeless masses leading away from them, twitching, squirming. She stared, bewildered.

"There were twins, Rose," she heard Rodney explaining triumphantly, but still with something that wasn't quite a laugh, "a boy and a girl. They're perfectly splendid. One weighs seven pounds and the other six."

Her eyes widened and she looked up into his face so that the pitiful bewilderment in hers was revealed to him.

"But the baby," she said. Her wide eyes filled with tears and her voice broke weakly. "I wanted a baby."

"You've got a baby," he insisted, and now laughed outright. "There are two of them. Don't you understand, dear?"

Her eyes drooped shut, but the tears came welling out along her lashes. "Please take them away," she begged. And then, with a little sob, she whispered: "I wanted a baby, not those."

Rodney started to speak, but some sort of admonitory signal from the nurse silenced him.

The nurse went away with her bundle, and Rodney stayed stroking Rose's limp hand.

In the dark, ever so much later, she awoke, stirred a little restlessly, and the nurse, from her cot, came quickly and stood beside her bed. She had something in her hands for Rose to drink and Rose drank it dutifully.

"Is there anything else?" the nurse asked.

"I just want to know," Rose said; "have I been dreaming, or is it true? Is there a baby, or are there twins?"

"Twins, to be sure," said the nurse cheerfully. "The loveliest, liveliest, little pair you ever saw."

"Thank you," said Rose. "I just wanted to know."

She shut her eyes and pretended to go to sleep. But she didn't. It was true then. Her miracle, it seemed somehow, had gone ludicrously awry.

Knowing that they have plenty of money to raise twins properly, why should Rose resent the fact that she has been presented with two babies instead of one?

She stared, bewildered.

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MONEY LENDER PITIED POOR

Chinese Shylock in Manchuria Gave Annual Sum for Relief Work to Relieve His Conscience.

A wealthy Chinese money lender in Manchuria was recently convicted of making false declaration regarding robberies of his caravans by Mongolian bandits. His conscience troubled him to such an extent that he offered to contribute an annual sum of \$750 for the relief of the poor, East and West says. This money was made the basis of a fund for feeding the helpless at Kungchuling.

Manchuria is terribly poor, despite the mineral and agricultural riches extracted from its soil and rocks, all of which products are shipped abroad. There are probably thousands of industrious natives unable, by unremitting toil, to earn more than a meager living. When to their natural difficulties are added the ravages of bandits and the evils of misgovernment, such as now prevails in many parts of China, abject poverty and starvation must be the lot of the people who, in the best of times, are only half fed.

A Family Secret.

"My dad could whip your dad with one hand tied behind him."
"Shucks! My dad could whip your dad with both hands tied behind him."
"He couldn't!"
"He could!"
"How could he? He couldn't do nothing 'cept butt my dad."
"That's just it. My mother says my dad has the hardest head of any man she ever knew."

A Teetotal Loss.

Mrs. Clubb—This article says that the reputation of the colonists for obedience went overboard at the Boston tea party.
Mr. Clubb—Yes, and a lot of other reputations have gone overboard at tea parties since.—Judge.

Many a man able to speak six languages never thinks of anything worth saying.



"OUR GROCER TOLD ME" — Bobby
After folks taste Post Toasties they don't like common corn flakes



"That's Why I Wanted to Decide Things Tonight."

somewhere, or in a flat, so that you will be free; and I can work—be some sort of help."

"You can wash the dishes and scrub the floors," he supplemented, "and I can carry my lunch to the office with me in a little tin box." He looked at his watch. "And now that the thing's reduced to an absurdity, let's go to bed. It's getting along toward two o'clock."

"You don't have to get to the office till nine tomorrow morning," said Rose. "And I want to talk it out now. And I don't think I said anything that was absurd."

"I shouldn't have called it absurd," he admitted after a rather long silence. "But it's exaggerated and unnecessary. Next October, when the lease on this house runs out, we can manage, perhaps, to change the scale a little. There you are! Now do stop worrying about it and let's go to bed." But she sat there just as she was, staring at the dying fire, her hands