

# The Chalice of Courage

Being the Story of Certain Persons Who Drank of it and Conquered

## A Romance of Colorado

By **Cyrus Townsend Brady**

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Illustrations by **Ellsworth Young**

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CHAPTER XVII.

The Face in the Locket.

Left alone in the room she sat down again before the fire and drew from her pocket the packet of letters. She knew them by heart, she had read and reread them often when she had been alone. They had fascinated her. They were letters from some other man to this man's wife. They were signed by an initial only and the identity of the writer was quite unknown to her. The woman's replies were not with the others, but it was easy enough to see what those replies had been. All the passion of which the woman had been capable had evidently been bestowed upon the writer of the letters she had treasured.

Her story was quite plain. She had married Newbold in a fit of pique. He was an eastern man, the best educated, the most fascinating and interesting of the men who frequented the camp. There had been a quarrel between the letter writer and the woman; there were always quarrels, apparently, but this had been a serious one and the man had savagely flung away and left her. He had not come back as he usually did. She had waited for him and then, he had come back—too late!

He had wanted to kill the other, but she had prevented, and while Newbold was away he had made desperate love to her. He had besought her to leave her husband to go away with him. He had used every argument that he could to that end and the woman had hesitated and wavered, but she had not consented; she had not denied her love for him any more than she had denied her respect and a certain admiration for her gallant, trusting husband. She had refused again and again the requests of her lover. She could not control her heart, nevertheless she had kept to her marriage vows. But the force of her resistance had grown weaker and she had realized that alone she would inevitably succumb.

Her lover had been away when her husband returned prior to the last fatal journey. Enid Maitland saw now why she had besought him to take her with him, she was afraid to be left alone! She did not dare depend upon her own powers any more; her only salvation was to go with this man whom she did not love, whom at times she almost hated, to keep from falling into the arms of the man she did love. She had been more or less afraid of Newbold. She had soon realized, because she was not blinded by any passion as he, that they had been utterly mismatched. She had come to understand that when the same knowledge of the truth came to him, as it inevitably must some day, nothing but unhappiness would be their portion.

Every kind of an argument in addition to those so passionately adduced in these letters urging her to break away from her husband and to seek happiness for herself while yet there was time, besieged her heart, seconded her lover's plea and assailed her will, and yet she had not given way.

Now Enid Maitland hated the woman who had enjoyed the first young love of the man she herself loved. She hated her because of her priority of possession, because her memory yet came between her and that man. She hated her because Newbold was still true to her memory, because Newbold, believing in the greatness of her passion for him, thought it shame and dishonor to his manhood to be false to her, no matter what love and longing drew him on.

Yet there was a stern sense of justice in the bosom of this young woman. She exulted in the successful battle the poor woman had made for the preservation of her honor and her good name, against such odds. It was a sex triumph for which she was glad. She was proud of her for the stern rigor with which she had refused to take the easiest way and the desperation with which she had clung to him she did not love, but to whom she was bound by the laws of God and man, in order that she might not fall into the arms of the man she did love,

In defiance of right.

Enid Maitland and this woman were as far removed from each other as the opposite poles of the earth, but there was yet a common quality in each one of virtuous womanhood, of lofty morality. Natural, perhaps in the one and to be expected; unnatural, perhaps, and to be unexpected in the other, but there! Now that she knew what love was and what its power and what its force—for all that she had felt and experienced and dreamed about before were as nothing to what it was since he had spoken—she could understand what the struggle must have been in that woman's heart. She could honor her, reverence her, pity her.

She could understand the feeling of the man too; she could think much more clearly than he. He was distracted by two passions, for his pride and his honor and for her; she had as yet but one, for him. And as there was less turmoil and confusion in her mind, she was better capable of looking the facts in the face and making the right deduction from them.

She could understand how in the first frightful rush of his grief and remorse and love the very fact that Newbold had been compelled to kill his wife, of whom he was beginning to grow a little weary under such circumstances, had added immensely to his remorse and quickened his determination to expiate his guilt and cherish her memory. She could understand why he would do just as he had done, go into the wilderness to be alone in horror of himself and in horror of his fellow men to think only, mistakenly, of her.

Now he was paying the penalty of that isolation. Men were made to live with one another, and no one could violate the law natural, or by so long an inheritance as to have so become, without paying that penalty. His ideas of loyalty and fidelity were warped, his conceptions of his duty were narrow. There was something noble in his determination, it is true, but there was something also very foolish. The dividing line between wisdom and folly is sometimes as indefinite as that between comedy and tragedy, between laughter and tears. If the woman he had married and killed had only hated him and he had known it would have been different, but since he believed so in her love he could do nothing else.

At that period in her reflections Enid Maitland saw a great light. The woman had not loved her husband after all, she had loved another. That passion of which he had dreamed had not been for him. By a strange chain of circumstances Enid Maitland held in her hand the solution of the problem. She had but to give him these letters to show him that his golden image had stood upon feet of clay, that the love upon which he had dwelt was not his. Once convinced of that he would come quick to her arms. She cried a prayer of blessing on old Kirkby and started to her feet, the letters in hand, to call Newbold back to her and tell him, and then she stopped.

Woman as she was she had respect for the binding conditions and laws of honor as well as he. Chance, nay Providence, had put the honor of this woman, her rival, in her hands. The world had long since forgotten this poor unfortunate; in no heart was her memory cherished save in that of her husband. His idea of her was a false one to be sure, but not even to procure her own happiness could Enid Maitland overthrow that ideal, shatter that memory.

She sat down again with the letters in her hand. It had been very simple a moment since, but it was not so now. She had but to show him these letters to remove the great barrier between them. She could not do it. It was clearly impossible. The reputation of her dead sister who had struggled so bravely to the end was in her hands, she could not sacrifice her even for her own happiness.

"Quixotic," you say? I do not think so. She had blundered unwittingly, unwillingly, upon the heart secret of the other woman; she could not be-

tray it. Even if the other woman had been really unfaithful in deed as well as in thought to her husband



She Had but to Show Him Those Letters.

Enid could hardly have destroyed his recollection of her. How much more impossible it was since the other woman had fought so heroically and so successfully for her honor. Womanhood demanded her silence. Loyalty, honor, compelled her silence.

A dead hand grasped his heart and the same dead hand grasped hers. She could see no way out of the difficulty. So far as she knew no human soul except old Kirkby and herself knew this woman's story. She could not tell Newbold and she would have to impose upon Kirkby the same silence as she herself exercised. There was absolutely no way in which the man could find out. He must cherish his dream as he would. She would not enlighten him, she would not disabuse his mind, she could not shatter his ideal, she could not betray his wife. They might love as the angels of heaven and yet be kept forever apart—by a scruple, an idea, a principle, an abstraction, honor, a name.

Her mind told her these things were idle and foolish, but her soul would not hear of it. And in spite of her resolutions she felt that eventually there would be some way. She would not have been a human woman if she had not hoped, and prayed that. She believed that God had created them for each other, that he had thrown them together. She was enough of a fatalist in this instance at least to accept their intimacy as the result of His ordination. There must be some way out of the dilemma.

Yet she knew that he would be true to his belief and she felt that she would not be false to her obligation. What of that? There would be some way. Perhaps somebody else knew, and then there flashed into her mind the writer of the letters. Who was he? Was he yet alive? Had he any part to play in this strange tragedy aside from that he had already assayed?

Sometimes an answer to a secret query is made openly. At this juncture Newbold came back. He stepped before her unsteadily, his face now marked not only by the fierceness of the storm outside, but by the fiercer grapple of the storm in his heart.

"You have a right," he began, "to know everything now. I can withhold nothing from you."

He had in his hand a picture and something yellow that gleamed in the light. "There," he continued, extending them toward her, "is the picture of the poor woman who loved me and whom I killed, you saw it once before."

"Yes," she nodded, taking it from him carefully and looking again in a strange commixture of pride, resentment and pity at the bold, somewhat coarse, entirely uncultured, yet handsome face which gave no evidence of the moral purpose which she had displayed.

"And here," said the man offering the other article, "is something that no human eye but mine has ever seen since that day. It is a locket I took from her neck. Until you came I wore it next to my heart."

"And since then?"

"Since then I have been unworthy her as I am unworthy you, and I have put it aside."

"Does it contain another picture?"

"Yes."

"Of her?"

"A man's face."

"Yours?"

He shook his head.

"Look and see," he answered.

"Press the spring."

Suiting action to word, the next second Enid Maitland found herself gazing upon the pictured semblance of Mr. James Armstrong! She was utterly unable to suppress an exclamation and a start of surprise at the astonishing revelation! "The man looked at her curiously; he opened his mouth to question her but she recovered herself in part at least and swiftly interrupted him in a panic of terror lest she should betray her knowledge.

"And what is the picture of another man doing in your wife's locket?" she asked to gain time, for she very well knew the reply; knew it, indeed, better than Newbold himself! Who as it happened, was equally in the dark both as to the man and the reason.

"I don't know," answered the other.

"Do you know this man?"

"I never saw him in my life that I can recall."

"And have you—did you—"

"Did I suspect my wife?" he asked.

"Never. I had too many evidences that she loved me and me alone for a ghost of suspicion to enter my mind. It may have been a brother, or her father in his youth."

"And why did you wear it?"

"Because I took it from her dead heart. Some day I shall find out who the man is and when I shall I know there will be nothing to her discredit in the knowledge."

Enid Maitland nodded her head. She closed the locket, laid it on the table and pushed it away from her. So this was the man the woman had loved, who had begged her to go away with him, this handsome Armstrong who had come within an ace of winning her own affection, to whom she was in some measure pledged!

How strangely does fate work out its purposes. Enid had come from the Atlantic seaboard to be the second woman that both these two men loved!

If she ever saw Mr. James Armstrong again, and she had no doubt that she would, she would have some strange things to say to him. She held in her hands now all the threads of the mystery, she was master of all the solutions, and each thread was a chain that bound her.

"My friend," she said at last with a deep sigh, "you must forget this night and go on as before. You love me, thank God for that, but honor and respect interpose between us. And I love you, and I thank God for that, too, but for me as well the same barrier rises. Whether we shall ever surmount these barriers God alone knows. He brought us together, he put that love in our hearts, we will have to leave it to him to do as he will with us both. Meanwhile we must go on as before."

"No," cried the man, "you impose upon me tasks beyond my strength; you don't know what love is, you don't know the heart hunger, the awful madness I feel. Think, I have been alone with a recollection for all these years, a man in the dark, in the night; and the light comes, you are here. The first night I brought you here I walked that room on the other side of that narrow door like a lion pent up in bars of steel. I had only my own love, my own passionate adoration to move me then, but now that I know you love me, that I see it in your eyes, that I hear it from your lips, that I mark it in the beat of your heart, can I keep silent? Can I live on and on? Can I see you, touch you, breathe the same air with you, be pent up in the same room with you hour after hour, day after day, and go on as before? I can't do it, it is an impossibility. What keeps me now from taking you in my arms and from kissing the color into your cheeks, from making your lips my own, from drinking the light from your eyes?" He swayed near to her, his voice rose. "What restrains me?" he demanded.

"Nothing," said the woman, never shrinking back an inch, facing him

with all the courage and daring with which a Goddess might look upon a man. "Nothing but my weakness and your strength."

"Yes, that's it, but do not count too much upon the one or the other. Great God, how can I keep away from you; life on the old terms is insupportable. I must go."

"And where?"

"Anywhere, so it be away."

"And when?"

"Now."

"It would be death in the snow and in the mountains tonight. No, no, you cannot go."

"Well, tomorrow then. It will be fair, I can't take you with me, but I must go alone to the settlements, I must tell your friends you are here, alive, well. I shall find men to come back and get you. What I cannot do alone numbers together may effect. They can carry you over the worst of the trails, you shall be restored to your people, to your world again, you can forget me."

To be continued

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To be continued

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