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A Romance of Colorado

By **Cyrus Townsend Brady**

Author of "The King and the Queen," "The Island of Regeneration," "The Better Man," "Hearts and the Highway," "As the Sparks Fly Upward," etc.

Illustrations by **Elsworth Young**
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Before she realized what he would be about he swerved his horse toward her, his arm went around her suddenly. Taken completely off her guard she could make no resistance, indeed she scarcely knew what to expect until he crushed her to him and kissed her, almost roughly, full on the lips.

"How dare you," cried the girl, her face aflame, freeing herself at last, and swinging her own horse almost to the edge of the road which here ran on an excavation some fifty feet above the river.

"How dare I?" laughed the audacious man, apparently no whit abashed by her indignation. "When I think of my opportunity I am amazed at my moderation."

"Your opportunity; your moderation?"

"Yes, when I had you helpless I took but one kiss; I might have held you longer and taken a hundred."

"And by what right did you take that one?" haughtily demanded the outraged young woman, looking at him beneath level brows while the color slowly receded from her face. She had never been kissed by a man other than a blood relation in her life—remember, suspicious reader, that she was from Philadelphia—and she resented this sudden and unauthorized caress with every atom and instinct of her still somewhat conventional being.

"But aren't you half-way engaged to me?" he pleaded in justification, seeing the unwonted seriousness with which she had received his impudent advance. "Didn't you agree to give me a chance?"

"I did say that I liked you very much," she admitted, "no man better, and that I thought that you might—"

"Well, then—" he began.

But she would not be interrupted. "I did not mean that you should enjoy all the privileges of a conquest before you had won me. I will thank you not to do that again, sir."

"It seems to have had a very different effect upon you than it does upon me," replied the man coolly. "I loved you before, but now, since I have kissed you, I worship you."

"It hasn't affected me that way," retorted the girl promptly, her face still frowning and indignant. "Not at all, and—"

"Forgive me, Enid," pleaded the other. "I just couldn't help it. You were so beautiful I had to. I took the chance. You are not accustomed to our ways."

"Is this your habit in your love affairs?" asked the girl swiftly and not without a spice of feminine malice.

"I never had any love affair before," he replied with a ready masculine mendacity, "at least none worth mentioning. But you see this is the west; we have gained what we have by demanding every inch that nature offers, and then claiming the all. That's the way we play the game out here and that's the way we win."

"But I have not yet learned to play the game," as you call it, by any such rules," returned the young woman determinedly, "and it is not the way to win me if I am the stake."

"What is the way?" asked the man anxiously. "Show me and I'll take it no matter what its difficulty."

"Ah, for me to point out the way would be to play traitor to myself," she answered, relenting and relaxing a little before his devoted wooing. "You must find it without assistance. I can only tell you one thing."

"And what is that?"

"You do not advance toward the goal by such actions as those of a moment since."

"Look here," said the other suddenly. "I am not ashamed of what I did, and I'm not going to pretend that I am, either."

"You ought to be," severely.

"Well, maybe so, but I'm not; I couldn't help it any more than I could help loving you the minute I saw you. Put yourself in my place."

"But I am not in your place, and I can't put myself there. I do not wish to. If it be true, as you say, that you have grown to care so much for me and so quickly—"

"If it be true?" came the sharp interruption as the man bent toward her, fairly devouring her with his bold, ardent gaze.

"Well, since it is true," she admitted under the compulsion of his protest. "That fact is the only possible excuse for your action."

"You find some justification for me, then?"

"No, only a possibility, but whether it be true or not, I do not feel that way—yet."

There was a saving grace in that last word, which gave him a little heart. He would have spoken, but she suffered no interruption, saying:

"I have been wooed before, but—"

"True, unless the human race has become suddenly blind," he said softly under his breath.

"But never in such ungente ways."

"I suppose you have never run up against a real red-blooded man like me before."

"I red-blooded be evidenced mainly by lacking of self control, perhaps I have not. Yet there are men that I have met that would not need to apologize for their qualities even to you, Mr. James Armstrong."

"Don't say that. Evidently I make but poor progress in my wooing. Never have I met with a woman quite like you"—and in that indeed lay some of her charm, and she might have replied in exactly the same language and with exactly the same meaning to him—"I am no longer a boy. I must be fifteen years older than you are, for I am thirty-five."

The difference between their years was not quite so great as he declared, but womanlike the girl let the statement pass unchallenged.

"And I wouldn't insult your intelligence by saying you are the only woman that I have ever made love to,

but there is a vast difference between making love to a woman and loving one. I have just found that out for the first time. I marvel at the past, and I am ashamed of it, but I thank God that I have been saved for this opportunity. I want to win you, and I am going to do it, too. In many things I don't match up with the people with whom you train. I was born out here, and I've made myself. There are things that have happened in the making that I am not especially proud of, and I am not at all satisfied with the results, especially since I've met you. The better I know you the less pleased I am with Jim Armstrong, but there are possibilities in me, I rather believe, and with you for inspiration, God!"—the man flung out his hand with a fine gesture of determination. "They say that the east and west don't naturally mingle, but it's a lie; you and I can beat the world."

The woman thrilled to his gallant wooing. Any woman would have done so; some of them would have lost their heads, but Enid Maitland was an exceedingly cool young person, for she was not quite swept off her feet, and did not quite lose her balance.

"I like to hear you say things like that," she answered. "Nobody quite like you has ever made love to me, and certainly not in your way, and that's the reason I have given you a half way promise to think about it. I was sorry that you could not be with us on this adventure, but now I am rather glad, especially if the even temper of my way is to be interrupted by anything like the outburst of a few minutes since."

"I am glad, too," admitted the man. "For I declare I couldn't help it. If I have to be with you either you have got to be mine or else you would have to decide that it could never be, and then I'd go off and fight it out."

"Leave me to myself," said the girl earnestly "for a little while; it's best so; I would not take the finest, noblest man on earth—"

"And I am not that."

"Unless I loved him. There is something very attractive about your personality; I don't know in my heart whether it is that, or—"

"Good," said the man, as she hesitated. "That's enough." He gathered up the reins and whirled his horse suddenly in the road. "I am going back. I'll wait for your return to Denver, and then—"

"That's best," answered the girl. She stretched out her hand to him, leaning backward. If he had been a different kind of a man he would have kissed it; as it was he took it in his own hand and almost crushed it with a fierce grip.

"We'll shake on that, little girl," he said, and then without a backward glance he put spurs to his horse and galloped furiously down the road.

No, she decided then and there, she did not love him, not yet. Whether she ever would she could not tell. And yet she was half bound to him. The recollection of his kiss was not altogether a pleasant memory; he had not done himself any good by that bold assault upon her modesty, that reckless attempt to rifle the treasure of her lips. No man had ever really touched her heart, although many had engaged her interest. Her experience therefore was not definitive or conclusive. If she had truly loved James Armstrong, in spite of all that she might have said, she would have thrilled to the remembrance of that wild caress. The chances, therefore, were somewhat heavily against him that morning as he rode down the trail alone.

His experiences in love affairs were much greater than hers. She was by

(To be Continued)



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