

MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE

CONTENTS FOR DECEMBER, 1913

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THE LIGHT OF WESTERN STARS*

BY ZANE GREY

AUTHOR OF "RIDERS OF THE PURPLE SAGE," ETC.

XXXVI

"STILLWELL!"

Madeline's cry was more than the utterance of a breaking heart. It was full of agony. It voiced the shattering of a structure built of false pride, of old beliefs, of ignorance of self.

The old cattleman stood mute before her, staring at her white face, at her eyes of flame.

"Stillwell! I am Stewart's wife!"

"Heavens, Miss Majesty!" he burst out. "I knowed somethin' terrible was wrong. Aw, sure it's a pity—"

"Do you think I'll let him be shot when I know him now—when I'm no longer blind—when I love him?" she asked with passionate swiftness. "I will save him! This is Wednesday morning. I have thirty-six hours to save his life. Stillwell, send for Link and the car!"

She went into her office. Her mind worked with extraordinary rapidity and clearness. Her plan, born in one lightning-like flash of thought, necessitated the careful wording of telegrams to Washington, to New York, to San Antonio. These were to Senators, Representatives, men high in public and private life, men who would remember her and who would serve her.

Never before had her position meant anything to her in comparison with what it meant now. Never in all her life had money seemed the power that it was then. She would use every means that it placed at her command—the wires and pulleys underneath the surface of political and international life—the open purchasing value of money, or the deep, underground, mysterious influences moved by gold.

She could save Stewart. She must await results—deadlocked in feeling, strained almost beyond endurance, because the suspense would be terrible; but she would allow no possibility of failure to enter her mind.

When she went outside the car was there, with Link, helmet in hand, a bright gleam in his eyes.

"Link, drive Stillwell to El Cajon in time for him to catch the El Paso train," she said. "Wait there for his return; and if any message comes from him telephone it to me at once."

Then she gave Stillwell the telegrams to send from El Cajon and drafts to cash in El Paso. She instructed him to go before the rebel junta, then stationed at Juarez, to explain the situation, to bid them expect messages from Washington requesting and advising Stewart's exchange as a prisoner of war, to offer to buy his release from the rebel authorities.

When Stillwell had heard her through his bowed form straightened and a ghost of his old smile just moved his lips. He was no longer young, and hope could not at once drive away stern and grim realities. As he bent over her hand his manner appeared courtly and reverent; but he seemed to feel that the moment was not one for him to break silence.

He climbed to a seat beside Link, who pocketed the watch he had been studying and leaned over the wheel. There was a crack, then a muffled sound bursting into a roar, and the big car jerked forward to bound over the edge of the slope, to leap down the long incline, to shoot out upon the level valley floor, and to disappear in moving dust.

* This story began in the May number of MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE

For the first time in days Madeline visited the gardens, the corrals, the lakes, the quarters of the cowboys. Though imagining she was calm, she feared she looked strange to Nels, to Nick, to Frankie Slade, to the boys best known to her. They seemed to be trying to say something to her, but they found themselves spellbound.

She wondered if they knew that she was Stewart's wife. No, Stillwell had not had time to tell them; besides, he would not have mentioned the fact. These cowboys only knew that Stewart was sentenced to be shot; they knew that if Madeline had not discharged him he would not have gone in desperate fighting mood across the border.

She spoke of the weather, of the horses and cattle; she asked Nels when he was to go on duty; and turned away from the wide, sunlit porch where the cowboys stood silent and bareheaded. Then one of her subtle impulses checked her.

"Nels, you and Nick need not go on duty to-day," she said. "I may want you. I—I—"

She hesitated, paused, and stood lingering there. Her glance had fallen upon Stewart's horse prancing in a near-by corral.

"I have sent Stillwell to El Paso," she went on. "He will save Stewart. I have to tell you—I am Stewart's wife!"

She felt the stricken amaze that made these men silent and immovable. With level gaze averted she left them and returned to her room.

The local newspapers, which came regularly a day late from El Paso and Douglas, had never won any particular interest from Madeline; now, however, she took up such copies as she could find and read all the information pertaining to the revolution. Every word seemed vital to her, of moving significant force:

AMERICANS ROBBED BY MEXICAN REBELS

MADERA, MEXICO, July 17.—Having looted the Madera Lumber Company's storehouses of twenty-five thousand dollars' worth of goods, and robbed scores of foreigners of horses and saddles, the rebel command of General Antonio Rojas, comprising a thousand men, started westward to-day through the State of Sonora for Aguaymas and Pacific coast points.

The troops are headed for Dolores, where a mountain pass leads into Sonora. Their entrance will be opposed by a thousand Ma-

derista volunteers, who are reported to be awaiting the rebel invasion.

Friction between Americans and foreigners has been at the bursting-point for several days. Horses and supplies were commandeered by the rebels. When they were ordered returned by General Rojas, the rebel soldiers protested that they needed mounts, and five hundred of them will have to travel afoot unless horses can be procured on the way.

General Emilio Campa, who was imprisoned by Rojas, was released to-day and started westward with three hundred followers.

The railroad south of Madera is being destroyed, and many Americans, who were traveling to Chihuahua from Juarez, are marooned here.

General Rojas, while here, executed five men for alleged offenses of a trivial character. General Rosalio y Hernandez, Lieutenant Cipriano Amador, and three soldiers were the unfortunates.

WASHINGTON, July 17.—Extreme agitation exists among the American and other foreign citizens along the line of the Mexican Northwestern Railroad as a result of the retreat of the insurgent army in that direction.

Somewhere in Mexico Patrick Dunne, an American citizen, is in prison under sentence of death. This much and no more the State Department learned through Representative Kinkaid, of Nebraska. Consular officers in various sections of Mexico have been directed to make every effort to locate Dunne and save his life.

MEXICO CITY, July 31.—The Mexican government has taken adequate steps to protect American lives and property on the border along the State of Chihuahua by despatching an army of several thousand men to the scene of the trouble. Such is the substance of a reply transmitted to Ambassador Calero at Washington by Foreign Minister Lascurrain.

LAS VARAS, SONORA, July 25 (by courier to Douglas, Arizona).—Hardships like those suffered by the army of Napoleon in crossing the Alps have been endured by the Federal column of General Sanjines, which has crossed the Sierra Madres and is now within fifty miles of Casas Grandes, the rebel capital of Sonora.

CASAS GRANDES, CHIHUAHUA, July 31.—Rebel soldiers looted many homes of Mormons near here yesterday. All the Mormon families have fled to El Paso. Although General Salazar had two of his soldiers executed yesterday for robbing Mormons, he has not made any attempt to stop his men looting the unprotected homes of Americans.

Last night's and to-day's trains carried

many Americans from Pearson, Madera, and other localities outside the Mormon settlements.

EL PASO, TEXAS, July 31.—Fears are entertained for one hundred Americans in the Dolores mining-camp in Mexico. It is reported that the rebels have taken the camp and seized all pack-animals, probably leaving the Americans with no means of getting to the United States.

Refugees from Mexico continued to pour into El Paso. About one hundred came last night, the majority of whom were men. Heretofore few men have come.

EL PASO, TEXAS, Aug. 3.—Mexican rebels and United States soldiers on patrol duty at the boundary in East El Paso exchanged shots across the Rio Grande last night. No one was hit by bullets.

The commander of the patrol station says that the soldiers reported that the first shots came from the Mexican side. After the first three or four shots the soldiers opened fire in return. He believes that the rebels fired at the United States soldiers to attract attention away from an attempt to smuggle ammunition across the border.

A hundred Mormons, armed with rifles which they did not surrender to the rebels last week, left Casas Grandes headed westward, ostensibly to round up cattle, but the rebels say they fear they are going to join the Federals and fight to avenge their treatment last week at the hands of the *insurrectos*.

Madeline read on in feverish absorption.

It was not a real war, but a starving, robbing, burning, hopeless revolution. Five men executed for alleged offenses of a trivial nature! What chance, then, had a Federal prisoner, an enemy to be feared, an American cowboy in the clutches of those crazed rebels?

Madeline endured patiently, endured for long, interminable hours while holding to her hope with indomitable will.

No message came. At sunset she went outdoors, suffering a torment of accumulating suspense. She faced the desert, hoping, praying for strength. The desert did not influence her as did the passionless, unchangeable stars that had soothed her spirit. It was red, mutable, shrouded in shadows, terrible like her mood. A dust-veiled sunset colored the vast, brooding, naked waste of rock and sand. The grim Chiricahuas frowned black and sinister. The dim blue domes of the Guadalupe seemed to whisper, to beckon to her. Beyond them somewhere was Stewart, await-

ing the end of a few brief hours—hours that to her were endless, insupportable.

Night fell; but now the white, pitiless stars failed her. Then she sought the seclusion and darkness of her room, there to lie with wide eyes, waiting, waiting. She had always been susceptible to the somber unrealities of the night, and now her mind slowly revolved round a vague and monstrous gloom. Nevertheless, she was acutely sensitive to outside impressions. She heard the measured tread of a guard, the rustle of wind stirring the window-curtain, the mournful wail of a coyote.

By and by the dead silence of the night surrounded her with leaden oppression. There was silent darkness for so long that when the window casements showed gray Madeline believed that it was only fancy and that dawn would never come. She prayed for the sun not to rise, not to begin its short twelve-hour journey toward what might be a fatal setting for Stewart. But the dawn did lighten—swiftly, she thought, remorselessly. Daylight had broken—and this was Thursday!

Sharp ringing of the telephone-bell startled her, roused her into action. She ran to answer the call.

"Hello! Hello, Miss Majesty!" came the hurried reply. "This is Link talkin'. Messages for you. Favorable, the operator said. I'm to ride out with them. I'll come a hummin'!"

That was all. Madeline heard the bang of the receiver as Stevens threw it down. She passionately wanted to know more, but was immeasurably grateful for so much.

Favorable! Then Stillwell had been successful. Her heart leaped. Suddenly she became weak and her hands failed of their accustomed morning deftness. It took her what seemed a thousand years to dress. Breakfast meant nothing to her except that it helped her to pass the dragging minutes.

Finally a low hum, mounting swiftly to a roar and ending with a sharp report, announced the arrival of the car. If her feet had kept pace with her heart she would have raced out to meet Link. She saw him, helmet thrown back, watch in hand. He looked up at her with his cool, bright smile, with his familiar apologetic manner.

"Fifty-three minutes, Miss Majesty!" he said. "I hed to ride round a herd of steers an' bump a couple off the trail."

He gave her a packet of telegrams.

Madeline tore them open with shaking fingers and began to read with dim eyes. Some were from Washington, assuring her of every possible service; some were from New York; others, written in Spanish, were from El Paso; and these she could not wholly translate in a brief glance.

Would she never find Stillwell's message? It was the last.

It read:

Bought Stewart's release. Also arranged for his transfer as prisoner of war. Both matters official. He's safe if we can get notice to his captors. Not sure I've reached them by wire. Afraid to trust it. You go with Link to Agua Prieta. Take the messages sent you in Spanish. They will protect you and secure Stewart's freedom. Take Nels with you. Stop for nothing. Tell Link all—trust him—let him drive that car.

STILLWELL.

XXXVII

THE first few lines of Stillwell's message lifted Madeline to the heights of thanksgiving and happiness. Then, reading on, she experienced a numb, icy, sickening pang. At the last line she flung off doubt and dread and faced the issue in white, cold passion.

"Read!" she said briefly, handing the telegram to Link. He scanned it and then looked blankly up at her. "Link, do you know the trails between here and Agua Prieta?" she asked.

"That's sure my old stampin'-ground! An' I know Sonora, too."

"We must reach Agua Prieta before sunset—long before, so if Stewart is in some near-by camp we can get to it—in time."

"Miss Majesty, it ain't possible!" he exclaimed. "Stillwell's crazy to say that."

"Link, can an automobile be driven from here into northern Mexico?"

"Sure; but it'd take time."

"We must do it in little time," she said eagerly. "Otherwise Stewart may be—probably will be—be shot!"

Link Stevens appeared suddenly to grow lax and shriveled, to lose all his peculiar brightness, to weaken and age.

"I'm only a—a cowboy, Miss Majesty." He almost faltered. It was a singular change in him. "That's an awful ride down over the border. If by some luck I didn't smash the car, I'd turn your hair gray. You'd never be no good after that ride!"

Madeline's words flowed in a torrent.

"I am Stewart's wife—I love him—I have been unjust to him—I must save him! Link, I have faith in you. I beseech you to do your best for Stewart's sake—for my sake. I'll risk the ride gladly—bravely. I'll not care where or how you drive. I'd far rather plunge into a cañon—go to my death on the rocks—than not try to save Stewart!"

"Miss Majesty, that ride figgers impossible, but I'll do it!" Link replied as the old spirit returned to his eyes. "I'll need mebbe half an hour to go over the car an' to pack on what I'll want."

She could not thank him. Her reply was merely a request that he would tell Nels and other cowboys off duty to come up to the house.

When Link had gone Madeline gave a moment's thought to preparations for the ride. She placed what money she had and the telegrams in a satchel. The gown she had on was thin and white, not suitable for travel, but she would not risk the losing of one moment in changing it. She put on a long coat and wound veils round her head and neck, arranging them in a hood, so that she could cover her face when necessary. She remembered to take an extra pair of goggles for Nels's use, and then, drawing on her gloves, she went out, ready for the ride.

Several cowboys were waiting. She explained the situation and left them in charge of her home. With that she asked Nels to accompany her down into the desert. He turned white to his lips, and Madeline remembered his mortal dread of the car and Link's driving.

"Nels, I'm sorry to ask you," she added. "I know you hate the car. But I need you—may need you, oh, so much!"

"Why, Miss Majesty, that's shore all a mistaken idee of yours about me hatin' the car," he said in his slow, soft drawl. "I was only jealous of Link—an' the boys, they made that joke up on me about bein' scared of ridin' fast. Shore I'm powerful proud to go. I reckon if you hedn't asked me my feelin's might hev been some hurt; because, if you're goin' down among the greasers, you want me."

His cool, easy speech, his familiar swag, the smile with which he regarded her, did not in the least deceive Madeline. His face was still white. Incomprehensible as it seemed, Nels had a dread, an uncanny

fear of that huge white automobile; but he lied about it in his eagerness to serve Madeline.

She heard the buzz of the car. Link appeared, driving up the slope. He made a short, sliding turn and stopped before the porch. He had tied two long, heavy planks upon the car, one on each side, and in every available space he had strapped extra tires. A huge cask occupied one back seat, and another seat was full of tools and ropes. There was just room in this rear part of the car for Nels to squeeze in.

Link put Madeline in front beside him, then bent over the wheel. Madeline waved her hand to the silent cowboys on the porch. Not an audible good-by was spoken.

The car glided out of the yard, bounced from level to slope, and started swiftly down the road, out into the open valley. Each stronger rush of dry wind in Madeline's face marked the increase of its speed. She took one glance at the winding cattle-road, smooth, unobstructed, disappearing in the gray of distance. She took another at the leather-garbed, leather-helmeted driver beside her; and then she drew the hood of veils over her face and fastened it round her neck so that there was no possibility of its blowing loose.

Harder and stronger pressed the wind till it was like sheeted lead forcing her back in her seat. There was a ceaseless, intense, inconceivably rapid vibration under her; occasionally she felt a long swing, as if she were to be propelled aloft; but no jars disturbed the easy celerity of the car.

To Madeline the time seemed to fly with the speed of miles. A moment came when she detected a faint difference in the rush and vibration, in the ceaseless sweeping of the invisible weight against her. This difference became marked. Link was reducing speed, and soon she realized that the car had slowed to normal travel.

Madeline removed her hood and goggles. It was a relief to breathe freely, to be able to use her eyes. To her right, not far distant, lay the little town of Chiricahua. The sight of it made her remember Stewart in a way strange to her constant thought of him.

Opposite Chiricahua, where the road forked, Link Stevens headed the car straight south and gradually increased speed. Madeline faced another endless gray incline. It was the San Bernardino

Valley. The singing of the car, the stinging of the wind, warned her to draw the hood securely down over her face again, and then it was as if she were riding at night.

Again the moments went by fleet as the miles. Seemingly there was an acceleration of the car till it reached a certain swiftness—a period of time in which it held that pace—and then a gradual diminishing of motion and sound. Uncovering her face she saw that Link was passing another village. Could it be Bernardino? She asked him, and repeated the question.

"Sure!" he replied. "Eighty miles!"

Link did not this time apologize for the work of his machine. Madeline marked the omission with her first thrill of the ride. Leaning over, she glanced at Link's watch, which he had fastened upon the wheel in front of his eyes. A quarter to ten! Link had indeed made short work of the valley miles.

Beyond Bernardino he sheered off the road and put the car to a long, low-rising slope. Here the valley appeared to run south under the dark brows of the Guadalupe. Link was heading southwest. Madeline observed that the grass began to fail as they climbed the ridge; bare, white, dusty spots appeared; there were patches of mesquit and cactus and scattering areas of broken rock.

She might have been prepared for what she saw from the ridge top. Beneath them the desert blazed. Seen from afar, it was striking enough, but riding down into its red jaws gave Madeline the first affront to her imperious confidence.

She saw a bare, hummocky ridge, down which the car was gliding, bounding, swinging, and this long slant seemed to merge into a corrugated world of rock and sand, patched by flats and basins, streaked with cañons and ranges of ragged, saw-toothed stone. The distant Sierra Madres were clearer, bluer, less smoky and suggestive of mirage than she had ever seen them.

The bouncing of the huge car, throwing Madeline about, fastened her attention upon the way Link Stevens was driving and upon the immediate foreground. Then she discovered that he was following an old wagon-road. At the foot of that long slope they struck into rougher ground, and here Link took a cautious, zigzag course.

The wagon-road disappeared, and then presently reappeared; but Link did not always hold to it. He made cuts, détours, crosses, and all the time seemed to be getting deeper into a maze of low red dunes, of flat cañon beds lined by banks of gravel, of ridges mounting higher.

Still Link kept on and never turned back. He never headed into a place that he could not pass. Up to this point of travel he had not been compelled to back the car; and Madeline began to realize that it was the cowboy's wonderful judgment of ground that made advance possible. He knew the country; he was never at a loss; after making a choice of direction he never hesitated.

Then, at the bottom of a wide cañon, he entered a wash where the wheels just barely turned in dragging sand. The sun beat down white-hot; the dust rose; there was not a breath of wind; there was no sound save the slide of a rock now and then down the weathered slopes and the labored chugging of the machine.

The snail pace, like the sand at the wheels, began to drag at Madeline's faith. Link gave over the wheel to Madeline and, leaping out, he called Nels. When they untied the long planks, and laid them straight in front for the wheels to pass over, Madeline saw how wise had been Link's forethought. With the aid of those planks they worked the car through sand and gravel otherwise impossible to pass.

This cañon widened and opened out, affording an unobstructed view for miles. The desert sloped up in steps, and in the morning light, with the sun bright on the mesas and escarpments, it was gray, drab, stone-colored, slate, yellow, pink, and, dominating all, a dull rust-red. There was level ground ahead, a wind-swept floor as hard as rock.

Link rushed the car over this free distance. Madeline's ears were filled with a droning hum, like the sound of a monstrosous, hungry bee, and with a strange, incessant crinkle, which she at length guessed to be the spreading of sheets of gravel from under the wheels. The giant car attained such a speed that she could only distinguish the colored landmarks to the fore, and these faded as the wind stung her eyes.

Then Link began the ascent of the first step—a long, sweeping, barren waste, with dunes of wonderful violet and heliotrope

hues. Here were well-defined marks of an old wagon-road, lately traversed by cattle. The car climbed steadily, surmounted the height, and faced another long bench which had been cleaned smooth by desert winds. The sky was an intense, light, steely blue, hard on the eyes. Madeline veiled her face, and did not uncover it until Link had reduced the racing speed.

Presently another height was reached, and here Madeline fancied that Link had driven the car to the summit of a high pass between two mountain ranges. The western slope appeared to be exceedingly rough and broken. Below it spread out another gray valley, at the extreme end of which glistened a white spot that Link grimly called Douglas. Part of that white spot was Agua Prieta, the sister town across the line. Madeline looked with eyes that fain would have pierced the intervening distance.

The descent of the pass began under difficulties. Sharp stones and cactus spikes penetrated the front tires, bursting them with ripping reports. It took time to replace them. The planks were called into requisition to cross soft places. A jagged point of projecting rock had to be broken with a sledge.

At length a huge stone appeared to hinder any further advance. Madeline caught her breath. There was no room to turn the car; but Link Stevens had no intention of such a thing. He backed the car to a considerable distance, then walked forward. He appeared to be busy around the boulder for a moment, and returned down the road on the run. A heavy explosion, a cloud of dust, and the rattle of falling fragments told Madeline that her indomitable driver had cleared a passage with dynamite. He seemed to be prepared for every emergency.

Madeline looked to see what effect the discovery of Link carrying dynamite would have upon the silent Nels.

"Shore now, Miss Majesty, there ain't nothin' goin' to stop Link," said Nels with a reassuring smile.

Madeline began to see her cowboy driver with clearer eyes, and his spirit awoke something in her that made danger of no moment. Nels likewise subtly responded; and though he was gray-faced, tight-lipped, his eyes took on the cool, bright gleam of Link's.

Cactus barred the way—rocks barred the

way—gullies barred the way, and all these Nels addressed in the grim humor with which he was wont to view tragic things. A mistake on Link's part, a slip of a wheel, a bursting of a tire at a critical moment, an instant of the bad luck which might happen a hundred times on a less perilous ride—any one of these might spell disaster for the car, perhaps death to its occupants.

Again and again Link used the planks to cross washes in sand. Sometimes the wheels ran all the length of the planks, sometimes they slipped off.

Presently he came to a ditch where water had worn deep into the road. Without hesitation he placed the planks, measuring distance carefully, and then started across. There was grave danger of ditching the machine. One of the planks split and sagged a little, but Link made the crossing without a slip.

The road led under an overhanging cliff and was narrow, rocky, and slightly down hill. Bidding Madeline and Nels walk round this hazardous corner, Link drove the car ahead. Madeline expected to hear it crash down into the cañon, but presently she saw Link waiting to take them aboard again.

Then came steeper parts of the road—places that Link could run down if he had space below to control the car, and, on the other hand, places where the little inclines ended in abrupt ledges upon one side or a declivity upon the other. Here the cowboy let the car slide down with ropes on the wheels and half-hitches upon spurs of rock.

Once, at a particularly bad spot, Madeline exclaimed involuntarily:

"Oh, time is flying!"

Link Stevens looked up at her as if he had been reprov'd for laziness or neglect of orders. Like a glint of steel on ice, his eye brightened coldly. Perhaps that utterance of Madeline's was needed to liberate his recklessness to its utmost. Certainly he put the car to seemingly impossible feats.

He rimmed gullies, he hurdled little ridges, he leaped breaks in the even road. He made his machine cling like a goat to steep inclines; he rounded corners with the inside wheels higher than the outside; he passed over banks of soft earth that caved in the instant he crossed weak places. He kept on and on, threading tortuous passages through rock-strewn patches, keeping to the old road where it was clear, aban-

doning it for open spaces, and always going down.

At length a mile of clean, brown slope, ridged and grooved like a wash-board, led gently down to meet the floor of the valley, where the scant grama-grass struggled to give a tinge of gray. The road appeared to become more clearly defined and could be seen striking straight across the valley and leading to a deep, narrow wash. It plunged down on one side and ascended on the other at a still steeper angle. The crossing would have been difficult for a horse; for an automobile it was impassable.

Link turned the car to the right, along the rim, and drove as far along the wash as the ground permitted. The gully widened and deepened all the way. Then he took the other direction. When he made this turn Madeline observed that the sun had perceptibly begun its slant westward. It shone in her face, glaring and wrathful.

Link drove back to the road, crossed it, and kept on down the line of the wash. It was a deep cut in red earth, worn straight down by swift water in the rainy seasons. In some places it was only five feet wide; but Link drove mile after mile looking vainly for a place to cross. Finally progress to the south was obstructed by impassable gullies where the wash plunged into the head of a cañon.

It was necessary to back the car for some distance before there was room to turn. Madeline looked at the imperturbable driver. His hard, immutable face revealed nothing. When he reached the narrowest part of the wash he got out of the car and walked from place to place. Once, with a little jump, he cleared the gulf. Then Madeline noted that the farther rim was somewhat lower. In a flash she divined Link's intention. He was hunting for a place to jump the car over the crack in the ground.

Soon he found one that seemed to suit him, for he tied his red scarf upon a greasewood bush. Then, returning to the car, he clambered in and broke his long silence by muttering:

"This ain't no air-ship, but I've outfigg'd thet durned wash!"

He backed up the gentle slope and halted just short of steeper ground. His red scarf waved in the wind. Hunching low over the wheel, he started, slowly at first, then faster and faster. The great car gave a spring like a huge tiger. The impact of

suddenly formed wind almost tore Madeline out of her seat. She felt Nels's powerful hands on her shoulders. She closed her eyes.

The jolting headway of the car gave place to a gliding rush. This was broken by a slight jar; and then above the hum and roar rose a cowboy yell. Madeline waited with strained nerves for the expected crash. It did not come. Opening her eyes, she saw the level valley floor without a break. She had not even noticed the instant when the car had shot over the wash.

Pulling the hood down over her face, she sank low in the seat. The whirl of the car now seemed to be a world-filling sound. Again the feeling of excitement, the poignancy of emotional heights, the ever-present, impending sense of catastrophe, became held in abeyance under the sheer intensity of physical sensations.

There came a time when all her strength seemed to unite in an effort to lift her breast against the terrific force of the wind, to draw air into her flattened lungs. She became partly dazed. The darkness before her eyes was not all occasioned by the hood that pressed like a stone mask on her face. She had a sense that she was floating, sailing, drifting, reeling, even while being borne swiftly as a thunderbolt. There was a long, blank period, from which she awakened to feel an arm supporting her.

Then she rallied. The velocity of the car had been cut to the speed to which she was accustomed. Throwing back the hood, she breathed freely again.

XXXVIII

THE car was bowling along a wide road upon the outskirts of a city. Madeline asked what place it could be.

"Douglas," replied Link. "An' jest around is Agua Prieta!"

That last name seemed to stun Madeline. She heard no more, and saw little, until the car stopped.

Nels spoke to some one. Then the sight of khaki-clad soldiers quickened Madeline's faculties. She was on the boundary-line between the United States and Mexico, and Agua Prieta lay before her.

A soldier, evidently despatched by Nels, returned and said that an officer would come at once. Madeline's attention was centered in the foreground, upon the guard over the road, upon the dry, dusty town

beyond, but she was aware of noise and people in the rear. A cavalry officer approached the car, stared, and removed his sombrero.

"Can you tell me anything about Stewart, the American cowboy who was captured by rebels a few days ago?" asked Madeline.

"Yes," replied the officer. "There was a skirmish over the line between a company of Federals and a large force of guerrillas and rebels. The Federals were driven west along the line. They say that Stewart fought recklessly and was captured. He got a Mexican sentence. He is known here along the border, and the news of his capture stirred up excitement. We did all we could to get his release. The guerrillas feared to execute him here, and believed that he might be aided to escape; so a detachment took him away to Mezquital."

"He was sentenced to be shot Thursday at sunset—to-night?"

"Yes. It was said that there is some personal resentment against Stewart. I regret that I can't give you definite information. If you are friends or relatives of Stewart, I might find—"

"I am his wife," interrupted Madeline. "Will you please read these?" She handed him the telegrams. "Advise me—help me—if you can!"

With a wondering glance at her the officer received the telegrams. He read several and whistled low in surprise. His manner became quick, alert, serious.

"I can't read these written in Spanish, but I know the names signed." Swiftly he ran through the others. "Why, these mean that Stewart's release has been authorized. They explain mysterious rumors we have heard here. Greaser treachery! For some strange reason messages from the rebel junta have failed to reach their destination. We heard reports of an exchange for Stewart, but nothing came of it. No one started for Mezquital with authority. What an outrage! Come, I'll go with you to General Salazar, the rebel chief in command. I know him. Perhaps we can find out something."

Nels made room for the officer, and Link sent the car whirling across the line into Mexican territory.

Madeline's perceptive sensibilities were now exquisitely alive. The white road led into Agua Prieta, a town of colored walls

and roofs. Goats and pigs and buzzards scattered before the roar of the machine. Native women wrapped in black mantles peeped through iron-barred windows. Men wearing huge sombreros, cotton shirts and trousers, bright sashes round their waists, and sandals, stood motionless to watch the car go by.

The road ended in an immense plaza, in the center of which was a circular structure that in some measure resembled a corral. It was a bull-ring, where the national sport of bull-fighting was carried on. Just now it appeared to be quarters for a considerable army. Ragged, unkempt rebels were everywhere, and the whole square was littered with tents, packs, wagons, arms. There were horses, mules, burros, and oxen.

The place was so crowded that Link was compelled to drive slowly up to the entrance to the bull-ring. Madeline caught a glimpse of tents inside; then her view was obstructed by a curious, pressing throng. The cavalry officer leaped from the car and pushed his way into the entrance.

"Link, do you know the road to Mezquital?" asked Madeline.

"Yes, I've been there."

"How far is it?"

"Aw, not so very far," he mumbled.

"Link! How many miles?" she implored.

"I reckon only a few."

Madeline knew that he lied, and asked him no more. How stifling was this crowded, ill-smelling plaza! The sun, red and lowering, had sloped far down in the west, but still burned with furnace heat. A swarm of flies whirled over the car. The shadows of low-sailing buzzards crossed Madeline's sight. Then she saw a row of the huge, uncanny birds sitting upon the tiled roof of a house. They had no air of sleeping or resting. They were waiting!

She fought off a horrible, ghastly idea before its full realization. These rebels and guerrillas—what lean, yellow, bearded wretches! They watched Link curiously as he worked over the car. No two were alike, but all were ragged. They had glittering eyes, sunk deep in their heads. They wore huge sombreros of brown and black felt, of straw, of cloth. Every man wore a belt or sash into which was thrust some kind of weapon. Some wore boots, some shoes, some moccasins, some sandals, and many were barefooted. They were

an excited, jibbering, gesticulating mob. Madeline shuddered to think how a frenzy to spill blood could run through these poor revolutionists. If it was liberty they fought for, they did not show intelligence in their faces. They were like wolves upon a scent.

Every man of the horde over which her swift glance roamed, however dirty and bedraggled he was, wore upon him some ornament, some tassel or fringe or lace, some ensign, some band, bracelet, badge, or belt, some twist of scarf, something that betrayed the vanity which was the poor jewel of their souls. It was in the race.

Suddenly the crowd parted to let the cavalry officer and a rebel of striking presence get to the car.

"Madam, it is as I suspected," said the officer quickly. "The messages directing Stewart's release never reached Salazar. They were intercepted. Even without them we might have secured Stewart's exchange if it had not been for the fact that one of his captors wanted him shot. This guerrilla intercepted the orders and then was instrumental in taking Stewart to Mezquital. It is exceedingly sad. Why, he is a free man this instant! I greatly regret—"

"Who did this—this thing?" cried Madeline, cold and sick. "Who is the guerrilla?"

"Señor Don Carlos Martinez. He has been a bandit, a man of influence in Sonora. He is more of a secret agent in the affairs of the revolution than an active participator; but he has seen guerrilla service."

"Don Carlos! Stewart in his power! Oh, Heavens!"

Madeline sank down, almost overcome. Then two great hands, powerful, thrilling, clasped her shoulders, and Nels bent over her.

"Miss Majesty, shore we're wastin' time here," he said.

His voice, like his hands, was uplifting. She wheeled to him in trembling importunity. How cold, bright, blue, the flash of his eyes! They told Madeline that she must not give up; but she could not speak her thought to Nels—she could only look at Link.

"It figgers impossible, but I'll do it!" said Link Stevens in answer to her voiceless query.

The cold, grim, wild quality in her cow-

boys blanched Madeline's face, steelled her nerve, called to the depths of her for that last supreme courage of a woman. The spirit of the moment was nature with Link and Nels; with her it must be passion.

"Can I get a permit to go into the interior—to Mezquital?" asked Madeline of the officer.

"You are going on? Madam, it's a forlorn hope. Mezquital is a hundred miles away; but there's a chance—the barest chance—if your man can drive this car. The Mexicans are either murderous or ceremonious in their executions. The arrangements for Stewart's will be elaborate; but, barring unusual circumstances, it will take place precisely at the hour designated. You need no permit. Your messages are official papers. To save time, and perhaps delay, I suggest that you might take this Mexican, Señor Montes, with you. He outranks Don Carlos and knows the captain of the Mezquital detachment."

"Ah! Then Don Carlos is not in command of the forces holding Stewart?"

"No."

"I thank you, sir. I shall not forget your kindness," concluded Madeline.

She bowed to Señor Montes and requested him to enter the car. Nels stowed some of the paraphernalia away, making room in the rear seat. Link bent over the wheel.

XXXIX

THE start was so sudden, with such crack and roar, that the crowd split in wild disorder. Out of the plaza the car ran, gathering headway; down a street lined by white and blue walls; across a square where rebels were building barricades; along a railroad-track full of iron flat cars that carried mounted pieces of artillery; through the outlying guards, who waved to the officer Montes.

Madeline bound her glasses tightly over her eyes and wound veils round the lower part of her face. She was all in a strange glow; she had begun to burn, to throb, to thrill, and she meant to see all that was possible.

The sullen sun, red as fire, hung over the mountain range in the west. How low it had sunk! Before her stretched a white road, dusty, hard as stone, a highway that had been used for centuries. If it had been wide enough to permit passing another vehicle it would have been a magnificent

course for automobiles; but the weeds and dusty flowers and mesquit boughs and arms of cactus brushed the car on both sides as it sped by.

Faster—faster—faster! Link Stevens hunched low over the wheel. His eyes were hidden under leather helmet and goggles, but the lower part of his face was unprotected. He resembled a demon, so dark and stone-hard and strangely grinning was he.

Madeline realized how matchless, how wonderful a driver was this cowboy. She divined that weakening could not have been possible to Link Stevens. He was a cowboy, and he really was *riding* that car—making it answer to his will as it had been born in him to master a horse. He had never driven to suit himself, had never reached an all-satisfying speed, until now. Beyond that his motive was to save Stewart—to make Madeline happy.

His own life was nothing to him. That gave him the superhuman nerve to face the peril of the ride. Because of his disregard of self he was able to operate the machine, to choose the power, the speed, the guidance, the going with the best judgment and highest efficiency possible. Madeline knew that he would get her to Mezquital in time to save Stewart or would kill her in the attempt.

The white, narrow road flashed out of the foreground and slipped with inconceivable rapidity under the car. When she marked a clump of cactus far ahead it seemed to shoot at her, to speed behind her, even the instant she noticed it. Link took the turns of the road as if he knew the way was cleared before him. He trusted to a cowboy's luck. A wagon in one of those curves, a herd of cattle, even a frightened steer, meant a wreck.

Madeline never closed her eyes at these fateful moments. If Link could stake himself upon such a chance, what could not she stake? So, while the great car hummed and thrummed and darted round the curves on two wheels and sped on like a bullet, Madeline lived that ride and meant to feel it to the uttermost.

But it was not all swift going. A stretch of softer ground delayed Link, made the car labor and pant and pound and grind through gravel. Moreover, the cactus plants assumed an alarming ability to impede progress. Long, slender arms of the ocotillo encroached upon the road;

broad, round leaves did likewise; fluted columns, fallen like timbers in a forest, lay along the narrow margins; the bayonet cactus and the bisnagi leaned threateningly; clusters of maguey, shadowed by the huge, looming saguaro, infringed upon the highway to Mezquital. And every leaf and blade and branch of cactus bore wicked thorns, any one of which might be fatal to a tire.

It came at length, the bursting report. The car lurched, went on like a crippled thing, and halted, obedient to the master hand at the wheel. Swift as Link was in replacing the tire, he lost time. The red sun, more sullen and duskier as it neared the black, bold horizon, appeared to mock Madeline, to eye her in derision.

Link leaped in and the car sprang ahead. The road-bed changed, the trees changed—all the surroundings changed except the cactus. There were miles of rolling ridges, rough in the hollows, and rocky bits of road and washes to cross, and a low, sandy swale where mesquits grouped a forest along a trickling sheet of water. Green things softened the hard, dry aspect of the desert. There were birds and parrots and deer and wild boars. All these Madeline remarked with clear eyes, with remarkable susceptibility of attention; but what she strained to see, what she yearned for, prayed for, was a straight and unobstructed stretch of road.

But the road began to wind up; it turned and twisted in tantalizing, lazy curves; it was in no hurry to surmount a hill that began to assume proportions of a mountain; it was leisurely, as were all things in Mexico except strife. That was quick, fierce, bloody—it was Spanish.

The descent from the elevation was difficult, extremely hazardous, yet Link Stevens drove fast. At the base of the hill rocks and sand all but halted him for good. Then, in taking an abrupt curve, a grasping spear ruined another tire. This time the car rasped across the road into the cactus, bursting the second front-wheel tire.

Like demons indeed Link and Nels worked. Shuddering, Madeline felt the declining heat of the sun, saw with gloomy eyes the shading of the light over the desert. She did not look back to see how near the red sphere was to the horizon. She wanted to ask Nels.

Strange as anything on this terrible ride was the absence of speech. As yet no word

had been spoken. Madeline wanted to shriek to Link to hurry; but he was more than humanly swift in all his actions. So, with mute lips, with the fire in her beginning to chill, with a lifelessness menacing her spirit, she watched, hoped against hope, prayed for a long, straight, smooth road.

Quite suddenly she saw it—miles, seemingly, of clear, narrow lane, disappearing like a thin white streak in distant green. Perhaps Link Stevens's heart leaped like Madeline's. The huge car, with a roar and a jerk, seemed to answer Madeline's call, a cry no less poignant because it was silent.

Faster—faster—faster! The roar became a whining hum. Then for Madeline sound ceased to be anything—she could not hear. The wind was now heavy, imponderable—no longer a swift, plastic thing, but solid, like an onrushing wall. It bore down upon Madeline with such resistless weight that she could not move.

The green of desert plants along the road merged into two shapeless fences sliding at her from the distance. Objects ahead began to blur—the white road to grow streaky, like rays of light—the sky to take on more of a reddening haze.

Madeline, realizing that her sight was failing her, turned for one more look at Link Stevens. It had come to be his ride almost as much as it was hers. He hunched lower than ever, rigid, strained to the last degree, a terrible, implacable driver. This was his hour, and he was great. If he so much as brushed a flying tire against one of the millions of spikes clutching out from the cactus there might be a shock, a splitting wave of air—an end!

Madeline thought she saw that Link's bulging cheek and jaw were gray, that his tight-shut lips were white, that the grinning smile was gone. Then he really was human—not a demon! She felt a strange sense of brotherhood with him. He understood a woman's soul as Monty Price had understood it.

Link was the lightning-forged automaton, the driving, relentless, unconquerable instrument of a woman's will. He was a man whose force was directed by a woman's passion. He reached up to her height—felt her love—understood the nature of her agony. These made him heroic; but it was the hard life, the wild years of danger on the desert, the companionship of ruthless men that made possible his physical achievement. Madeline loved his spirit

and gloried in the man. She had pictured upon her heart, never to be forgotten, this little hunched, deformed figure of Link's hanging with dauntless, deathless grip over the wheel, his gray face like a marble mask.

That was Madeline's last clear sensation upon the ride. Blinded, dazed, she succumbed to the strain upon her strength. She reeled and fell back, only vaguely aware of a helping hand. Confusion seized her senses. All about her was a dark chaos through which she was rushing, rushing, rushing under the wrathful red eye of a setting sun.

For moments, hours, ages she was propelled with the velocity of a shooting star. The earth seemed a huge automobile, and it sped with her down an endless white track through the universe. Looming, ghostly forms of cactus plants, large as pine-trees, stabbed her with giant spikes. She was floating in a shapeless, colorless, soundless cosmos of unrelated things, but always rushing onward, even to meet the darkness that haunted her and never reached her.

After an almost infinite time the rush ceased. Madeline distinguished voices, low at first and apparently far away. Then she opened her eyes to blurred but conscious sight.

The car had come to a stop. Link was lying face down over the wheel. Nels was rubbing her hands, calling to her. She saw a house with clean, whitewashed walls and brown-tiled roof. Beyond, over a dark mountain range, peeped the last red curve, the last beautiful ray of the setting sun.

XL

MADLINE saw that the car was surrounded by armed Mexicans. They presented a contrast to the others she had seen that day; she wondered a little at their silence, at their respectful front.

Suddenly a sharp-spoken order opened up the ranks next to the house. Señor Montes appeared in the break, coming swiftly. His dark face wore a smile; his manner was courteous, important, authoritative.

"Señora, it is not too late!" He spoke her language with an accent strange to her, so that it seemed to hinder understanding. "Señora, you got here in time," he went on. "El Capitan Stewart will be free."

"Free!" she whispered.

She rose, reeling.

"Come," replied Montes, taking her arm. "Pardon me, *señora*."

Without his assistance she would have fallen wholly upon Nels, who supported her on the other side. They helped her to alight from the car.

For a moment the white walls, the hazy red sky, the dark figures of the rebels whirled before Madeline's eyes. She took a few steps, swaying between her escorts; then the confusion of her sight and mind passed away. It was as if she quickened with a thousand vivifying currents, as if she could see and hear and feel everything in the world, as if nothing could be overlooked, forgotten, neglected.

She turned back, remembering Link. He was lurching from the car, helmet and goggles thrust back, the gray shade gone from his face, the cool, bright gleam of his eyes giving place to something warmer.

Señor Montes led Madeline and her cowboys through a hall to a *patio* and on through a large room with flooring of rough, bare boards that rattled, into a smaller room full of armed rebels facing an open window.

Madeline scanned the faces of these men, expecting to see Don Carlos; but he was not present. A soldier addressed her in Spanish too swiftly uttered, too voluble for her to translate. Like Señor Montes, he was gracious, and, despite his ragged garb and uncouth appearance, he bore the unmistakable stamp of authority.

Montes directed Madeline's attention to a man standing at the window. A loose scarf of vivid red hung from his hand.

"Señora, they were waiting for the sun to set when we arrived," said Montes. "The signal was about to be given for Señor Stewart's walk to death."

"Stewart's walk!" echoed Madeline.

"Ah, *señora*, let me tell you his sentence—the sentence I have had the honor and happiness to revoke for you."

Stewart had been court-martialed and sentenced according to a Mexican custom observed in cases of brave soldiers to whom honorable and fitting executions were due. His hour had been set for Thursday when the sun had sunk. Upon signal he was to be liberated and was free to walk out into the road, to take any direction he pleased. He knew his sentence—knew that death awaited him—that every possible avenue of escape was blocked by men with rifles ready; but he had not the slightest idea at

what moment or from what direction the bullets were to come.

"*Señora*, we have sent messages to every squad of waiting soldiers—an order that El Capitan is not to be shot. He is ignorant of his release. I shall give the signal for his freedom."

Montes was ceremonious, gallant, emotional. Madeline saw his pride and divined that the situation was one which brought out the vanity, the ostentation, as well as the cruelty of his race. He would keep her in an agony of suspense and let Stewart start upon that terrible walk in ignorance of his freedom.

Suddenly she had a horrible, quaking fear that Montes lied—that he meant her to be a witness of Stewart's execution. But no, the man was honest; he was only barbarous. He would satisfy certain instincts of his nature—sentiment, romance, cruelty—by starting Stewart upon that walk, by watching the man's actions in the face of seeming death, by seeing Madeline's agony of doubt, fear, pity, love.

Madeline felt that she could not endure the situation. She was weak and tottering.

"Ah, it will be one beautiful thing!" Montes caught the scarf from the rebel's hand. He was glowing, passionate; his eyes had a strange flash; his voice was low, intense. He was living something splendid to him. "I'll wave the scarf, *señora*. That will be the signal. It will be seen down at the other end of the road. Señor Stewart's jailer will see the signal, take off the prisoner's irons, release him, open the door for his walk. Stewart will be free; but he will not know. He will expect death. As he is a brave man, he will face it. He will walk this way. Every step of that walk he will expect to be shot from some unknown quarter; but he will not be afraid. *Señora*, I have seen El Capitan fighting in the field. What is death to him? You will know what a man he is. All the way he will expect cold, swift death; and here, at this end of the road, he will meet his beautiful lady!"

"Is there no—no possibility of a mistake?" faltered Madeline.

"None. My order included unloading of rifles."

"Don Carlos?"

"He is in irons and must answer to General Salazar," replied Montes.

Madeline looked down the deserted road. How strange to see the last ruddy glow of

the sun over the brow of the mountain range! The thought of that sunset had been torture for her; yet it had passed, and now the after-lights were luminous, beautiful, prophetic.

With a heart stricken by both joy and agony she saw Montes wave the scarf.

Then she waited. No change manifested itself down the length of that lonely road. There was absolute silence in the room behind her. How terribly, infinitely long seemed the waiting! Never in all her future life would she forget the quaint houses with their colored roofs. That dusty, bare road resembled one of the uncovered streets of Pompeii, with its look of centuries of solitude.

Suddenly a door opened and a tall man stepped out.

Madeline recognized Stewart. She had to place both hands on the window-sill for support while a storm of emotion swayed her. Like a retreating wave it rushed away. Stewart lived. He was free. He had stepped out into the light. She had saved him! Life changed for her in that instant of realization and became sweet, full, strange.

Stewart shook hands with some one in the doorway. Then he looked up and down the road. The door closed behind him. Leisurely he rolled a cigarette and stood close to the wall while he scratched a match. Even at that distance Madeline's keen eyes caught the small flame, the first little puff of smoke.

Stewart then took to the middle of the road and leisurely began his walk. To Madeline he appeared natural, stepping forward as unconcerned as if he were strolling for pleasure; but the absence of any other living thing, the silence, the red haze, the surcharged atmosphere—these were all unnatural.

From time to time Stewart stopped to turn face forward toward houses and corners. Only silence greeted these significant moves of his. Once he halted to roll and light another cigarette. After that his step quickened.

Madeline fell a prey to the incomprehensible variations of emotion possible to a woman. Every step Stewart took thrilled her. She had some strange, subtle intuition that he was not unhappy, even while he believed beyond shadow of doubt that he was walking to his death.

His steps dragged a little, though they

had begun to be swift. The hard physical nerve of the cowboy was perhaps in conflict with spiritual growth of the finer man, realizing too late that life ought not to be sacrificed.

At a point in the middle of the road even with the corner of a house and opposite to Madeline's position Stewart halted stock-still. He presented a fair mark to his executioners.

Only silence greeted him. As no shots came, his rugged dignity seemed to leave him for a reckless scorn. It was manifest in the way he strolled across to the corner of the house, rolled yet another cigarette, and, presenting a broad breast to the window, smoked and waited.

He held that position for a little while, and then, with a laugh and a shrug, he threw the cigarette into the road. He shook his head, as if at the incomprehensible motives of men who could now have no fair reason for delay.

Suddenly he made a quick action that was more than a straightening of his powerful frame and faced toward the north. Madeline read his thought. She knew that he was thinking of her—sending her a last silent farewell.

The next instant he was striding forward, to force by bold and scornful presence a speedy fulfilment of his sentence.

Madeline stepped into the doorway and crossed the threshold.

Stewart staggered as if indeed the bullets he expected had pierced him with a mortal wound. His dark face turned white. His eyes had the rapt stare, the wild fear of a man who sees an apparition, yet who doubts his sight. Perhaps he had called to her as the Mexicans call to their Virgin; perhaps he imagined sudden death had come unaware and this was her image appearing to him in some other life.

"Who—are—you?" he whispered.

She tried to lift her hands—failed—tried again, and held them out, trembling.

"It is I—Majesty—your wife!"

XLI

THE cowboys at Her Majesty's Rancho made Madeline's home-coming the event of their lives.

Stillwell handled the reins on the four-horse coach that brought Madeline, Stewart, Alfred, and Florence from El Cajon. The latter couple had encountered the big white car in the main street of Douglas

and had hailed it at the expense of dignity and with considerable risk.

Alfred was astounded at the meeting, overjoyed at Stewart's escape from the rebels, delighted with the romance that had for its inception a cowboy's wild wager. Nevertheless, despite all due respect to Padre Marcos and his marriage-service, he had marched his sister and Stewart off to a clergyman in Douglas and had had the ceremony repeated.

"Boys!" yelled old Stillwell, throwing the reins as the four horses crashed to a halt before the crowded porch of the ranch-house. "Boys, hyar's *his* Majesty, an' by that I mean hyar's Gene's queen come back. You can reserve your dutiful congratulations to her fer a fittin' hour when she's rested an' able to stand 'em."

Madeline and Florence eluded the roaring rush made by the cowboys upon their old foreman. Stewart, like a man bewildered in a blissful trance, abandoned himself to their rough and loyal onslaught.

It was interrupted by a rush and roar of another kind—no less than that of Link's great car bouncing over the bulge of the slope, humming into the yard, to stop at the porch with a crack and a bang. No longer was it a white car, but one of red dust and gray alkali.

"If we hedn't hed up-hill all the way from Douglas I'd beat thet train with the weddin'-party home!" Link said apologetically. "But at thet we come some so's to be in at the finish. Nels, you can slip thet half-hitch I roped on you. We're home!"

From somewhere under the robes and packs in the rear seat came a groan. The robes manifested life, moved, and lifted, with little streaks of dust and sand sliding down. A wild-eyed man appeared.

"Boys, gimme a drink!" he said huskily. It was the voice of Nels.

That night Madeline gave a dinner at which she wore the beautiful white gown with red roses on her breast. In her presence the cowboys maintained a decorum that attested to a vain and lofty appreciation of their new standing.

When congratulations were in order there were faint signs in the cowboys of a return to old habit and custom. They wanted to kiss the bride. Stillwell, Nels, Nick, Jim Bell, Frankie Slade, Ambrose—all these men offered their hearty felicitations.

tions without daring to do more than squeeze Madeline's hand.

Then frank-faced Danny Mains strode up to Madeline and with swift, gentle violence kissed her twice, once on each cheek. He wheeled quickly, a little abashed, but he recovered to swagger like a lord over his comrades.

Consternation reigned among those whose opportunity had passed. Link Stevens went up next; and Madeline felt that she would never be as certain that he offered to kiss her as she was positive that she wanted to kiss him. When the others had paid a like respect to the bride Nels and Nick, with the remaining bashful boys, pressed forward with a second and warmer congratulation.

Then Madeline, accompanied by Stewart and Alfred and Florence, left the cowboys to finish their wine, to be themselves without restraint. Some time later, when sounds of revelry came from the *patio*, Florence could not resist peeping through a window. With a bright smile she called to Madeline and the two men.

The scene that greeted Madeline was not exactly disorderly, but it was one of confusion. Stillwell was making a speech, laughing and weeping all at once. What he said was unintelligible. Nels had been sadly demoralized by a little champagne—or a great deal of champagne. He was most miserable. He had an arm round Nick's neck and he was whimpering:

"Mos' disgraceful act—of my life, Nick! Jevver believe I'd come back 'thout killin' a greaser? Wash over the Mexican line—je heah me?—an' never tried to trow—a gun on thet darned Don Carlos, er nobody! Nick, ole fren', I'm fadin' into the sere an' yellow—mos' yellow, I reckon. But how's a feller goin' to start anythin' with Miss Majesty around? Nick, I'm a goin' to resign my job an' go after thet greaser don!"

Link Stevens, suddenly accosted by some one, broke into declamatory speech.

"Ride of my life, fellers! Say, a mile a minnit wasn't nothin'. But I could hev rid faster if Miss Majesty hedn't fainted on my shoulder. Nels, he was scared to death; but I never turned a hair. Pie fer me—turnin' them infernal curves with cactus bayonets proddin' the tires! A hoss is a hoss, fellers; an', cripple as I am, I'll never go back on the cowboy's best friend. But say, fer action, fer gittin' somewhere, gim-

me thet big car! If hosses hed been carryin' us, where'd Gene Stewart—"

Link was interrupted by Danny Mains, who stood up, swaying over the table, his eyes bright, his face flushed. Plain it was that Danny's long sojourn up among the crags had rendered him, of all the cowboys present, most susceptible to the influence of wine.

"Boys, wasser masser with drinkin' to—wives we've got—an' hope to get? Wass you no-good cow-punchers need is wives! Look at me an' Gene an' have hopes. Times have changed. Any cowboy can find a wife—an' a home—an' maybe a gold-mine. Look at thisser Dan-ny Mains! I'm the livin' cowboy phil-philan-thro—I'm the cowboy's fren'. Anybody want a wife? I'll buy it. Anybody want a ranch? I'll buy it. An', boys, to celebrate this here occasion for my fren' Gene Stewart, I'm a goin' to buy that greaser revolution an' move it over into the Gul-luf of California!"

Late, when the windows had grown dark and all was silent, Madeline walked with Stewart under the light of the stars. The night was beautiful, one of those clear August nights when the sky was deep-blue velvet ablaze with great white diamonds.

Suddenly Stewart faced Madeline and reached for her shoulders with something of his old violence. He was dark-faced, fire-eyed.

"Is it true—is it true?" he whispered passionately.

"Is what true? That I am your wife? Yes, twice true!" she replied.

"No, not that. I can't believe the other. I have been in a spell. I can't realize—do you love me?"

"Yes," she answered softly.

"Majesty!"

There was then indeed the old, swift violence in the action with which he drew her into his arms and kissed her blindly with quivering lips. Madeline returned his first kiss; then she lay still, thrilling with the fire and power of his embrace, humble and wondering and grateful at the terrible earnestness of his love.

"What has come to me? Majesty—sweetheart—wife—make me understand!"

"I think, I know, Gene, that the same beautiful thing which has come to me has come to you—love!"