

MUNSEY

The FLYING COURTSHIP

by E.J. Rath

A Long Novel of Full
Book-length, Published
Complete in This Issue
of Munsey's Magazine

JUNE
15 CENTS



LIGHT OF THE
WESTERN STARS
ZANE GREY 363

MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE

CONTENTS FOR JUNE, 1913

The entire contents of this magazine are protected by copyright, and must not be reprinted without the publishers' permission

Frontispiece

- Illustration to novel "The Flying Courtship" 326
From a drawing by P. J. Monahan, printed in colors

Special Articles

- The World's Greatest Traffic Problem . . . Isaac F. Marcossion 327
With sixteen portraits and illustrations
Why Are Women Less Truthful Than Men? . . . Karin Michaëlis 343
The House of Morgan Hugh Thompson 351
With five portraits and illustrations
The New British Ambassador F. Cunliffe-Owen 358
With portrait
A String of Short Stories Brander Matthews 390
With portrait

Complete Novel

- The Flying Courtship E. J. Rath 427
Illustrated by P. J. Monahan

Serial Stories

- The Light of Western Stars (Chapters VI-X) Zane Grey 363
Joan Thursday (Chapters XXXI-XXXIV) Louis Joseph Vance 395

Short Stories

- The Comforters Edward Boltwood 339
An Old Theory of Happiness C. S. Thompson 376
With two drawings by W. B. King
Food For Columbine Izola Forrester 383
With three drawings by C. D. Williams

Departments and Miscellaneous

- Editorial Department 346
The Stage 407
With portraits of nine theatrical celebrities
Financial Department 420
Poems By Sarah N. Cleghorn, Julian Durand, Faith Baldwin, Sennett Stephens, and Mary R. Kissam.

ISSUED MONTHLY BY THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY,
175 Fifth Avenue, New York, and Temple House, Temple Avenue, E. C., London
FRANK A. MUNSEY, President. RICHARD H. TITHERINGTON, Secretary. CHRISTOPHER H. POPE, Treasurer.
Single Copies, 15c. COPYRIGHT, 1913, BY THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY By the Year, \$1.50

THE LIGHT OF WESTERN STARS*

BY ZANE GREY

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

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED

ALFRED HAMMOND, the wayward son of a rich New Yorker, has left home to become a cattleman in New Mexico, and for several years has had little communication with his family. His sister, Madeline, known to her friends as "Majesty"—aged twenty-four, and possessed of a fortune of her own—suddenly decides to visit him. She telegraphs to him, but when her train arrives at El Cajon, about midnight, he is not at the station.

Her reception is a startling one. There has been a wedding at El Cajon that evening, and Gene Stewart, a reckless cowboy, has made a drunken wager that he will marry the first girl who comes to town. Encountering Miss Hammond at the station, he strips off her glove to see if she has a wedding-ring. Finding none, he drags in a terrified Mexican priest, and forces him, at the muzzle of a revolver, to hurry through some form of words, which Madeline is too utterly dazed to understand. The strange ceremony is broken off, however, when Stewart learns that she is Alfred Hammond's sister. He takes her to the house where her brother's fiancée, Florence Kingsley, lives with a married sister.

Here, in the morning, Alfred and Madeline meet. She finds that her brother has not prospered in business, and that he is now foreman on Bill Stillwell's ranch. Gene Stewart is deeply repentant, but the expected trouble between him and Alfred Hammond is averted by Madeline's diplomatic version of the events of the previous night.

VI

"MAJESTY, I must run down to the siding," said Alfred Hammond, consulting his watch. "We're loading a shipment of cattle. I'll be back by supper-time, and bring Stillwell with me. You'll like him. Give me the check for your trunk."

She went into the little bedroom and, taking up her bag, she got out a number of checks.

"Six! Six trunks!" he exclaimed. "Well, I'm very glad you intend to stay a while. I hope you packed a riding-suit. If not, you'll have to wear trousers. You'll have to do that, anyway, when we go up in the mountains."

"No!"

"You sure will, as Florence says."

"We shall see about that. I don't know what's in the trunks. I never pack anything. My dear brother, what do I have maids for?"

"How did it come that you didn't travel with a maid?"

"I wanted to be alone; but don't you worry—I shall be able to look after myself. I dare say it will be good for me."

She went to the gate with him.

"What a shaggy, dusty horse! He's wild, too. Do you let him stand that way, without being haltered? I should think he would run off."

"Tenderfoot! You'll be great fun, Majesty, especially for the cowboys; and in three days they'll be fighting one another over you. That's going to worry me. Cowboys fall in love with a plain woman, an ugly woman—any woman, so long as she's young. And you! Good Heavens, they'll go out of their heads!"

"You are pleased to be facetious, Alfred. I think I have had quite enough of cowboys, and I haven't been here twenty-four hours."

"Don't think too much of first impressions. That was my mistake when I ar-

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

rived here. Good-by—I'll go now. Better rest a while. You look tired."

The horse started as Alfred put his foot in the stirrup, and was running when the rider slipped his leg over the saddle. Madeline watched him in admiration. He seemed to be loosely fitted to the saddle, moving with the horse.

"I suppose that's a cowboy style," she said. "How different from the seat of the English Guards!"

Then Madeline sat upon the porch and fell to interested observation of her surroundings. Near at hand they were not prepossessing. The street was deep in dust, and the cool wind whipped up little puffs. The houses were low, square, flat-roof structures made of some kind of red cement. It occurred to her that this must be the adobe she had read about.

There was no one in sight. The long street appeared to have no end, though the line of houses did not extend far. Once she heard a horse trotting at some distance, and several times the ringing of a locomotive-bell. Where were the mountains? wondered Madeline. Soon, low over the house-roofs, she saw a rugged outline, dark-blue in the distance. It seemed to charm her eyes and fix her gaze.

She knew the Adirondacks; she had seen the Alps from the summit of Mont Blanc; she had stood under the mighty shadow of the Himalayas; but they had not drawn her as these remote Rockies. This dim horizon line, boldly cutting the blue sky, fascinated her. Florence Kingsley's expression, "beckoning mountains," returned to Madeline. She could not see or feel so much as that. Her impression was rather that these mountains were aloof, unattainable, that if approached they would recede or vanish like the desert mirage.

Madeline went to her room, intending to rest, and she fell asleep. She was aroused by Florence's knock and call.

"Miss Hammond! Your brother has come back with Stillwell."

"Why, how I have slept!" exclaimed Madeline. "It's nearly six o'clock."

"I'm sure glad. You were tired, and the air here makes strangers sleepy. Come, we want you to meet old Bill. He calls himself the last of the cattlemen. He has lived all his life in Texas and here."

Madeline accompanied Florence to the porch. Her brother, who was sitting near the door, jumped up and said:

"Hello, Majesty!"

As he put his arm around her, he turned toward a massive man, whose broad, craggy face began to ripple and wrinkle.

"I want to introduce my friend Stillwell. Bill, this is my sister—the sister I've so often told you about—Majesty."

"Wal, wal, Al, this is the proudest meetin' of my life!" replied Stillwell in a booming voice. He extended a huge hand. "Miss—Miss Majesty, sight of you is as welcome as the rain an' the flowers to an old desert cattleman."

It was all that Madeline could do to repress a cry as he crunched her hand in a grasp of iron. He was old, white-haired, weather-beaten, with long furrows down his cheeks, and with gray eyes almost hidden in wrinkles. If he was smiling, it was a most extraordinary smile; but an instant later she realized that it had been a smile, for his face appeared to stop rippling, the light died, and suddenly it was like rudely chiseled stone. The quality of hardness that she had seen in Stewart was immeasurably intensified in this old man's face.

"Miss Majesty, it's plumb humiliatin' to all of us that we wasn't on hand to meet you," Stillwell said. "Me an' Al stepped into the P. O. an' said a few mild an' cheerful things. Them messages ought to hev been sent out to the ranch. I'm afraid it was a bit unpleasant fer you last night."

"I was rather anxious, at first, and perhaps frightened," replied Madeline.

"Wal, I'm some glad to tell you that there's no man in these parts, except your brother, that I'd as lief hev meet you as Gene Stewart."

"Indeed?"

"Yes, an' that's takin' into consideration Gene's weakness, too. I'm allus fond of sayin' of myself that I'm the last of the old cattlemen. Wal, Stewart's the last of the cowboys. Sure, he's young, but he's the last of the old, picturesque style, an' chivalrous, too, I make bold to say, Miss Majesty, as well as the hard-ridin' kind. Folks are down on Stewart. I'm only sayin' a good word for him because he is down, an' mebbe last night he might hev scared you, you bein' fresh from the East."

Madeline liked Stillwell for his loyalty to the cowboy, but she remained silent.

"Miss Majesty, the day of the cattleman is about over; an' the day of the cowboy, such as Gene Stewart, is over. There's no place for Gene. If these weren't mod-

ern days, he'd come near bein' a gunman, same as we had in Texas when I ranched there in the seventies. But he can't fit nowhere now; he can't hold a job, an' he's goin' down."

"I am sorry to hear it," murmured Madeline. "But, Mr. Stillwell, aren't these modern days out here just a little wild, even yet? The conductor on my train told me of rebels, bandits, raiders. Then I have had other impressions of—well, that were wild enough for me."

"Wal, it's some more pleasant an' excitin' these days than for many years," replied Stillwell. "The boys hev took to packin' guns again, owin' to the revolution in Mexico. There's goin' to be trouble along the border. There's already been hold-ups on the railroads, an' raids along the Rio Grande valley. An' these little towns are full of greasers, all disturbed by the fightin' down in Mexico. We've been hevin' shootin' scrapes an' knifin' scrapes, an' some cattle-raidin'. I hev been losin' a few cattle right along. Reminds me of old times, an' pretty soon, if it doesn't stop, I'll take the old-time way to stop it!"

"Yes, indeed, Majesty," put in Alfred, "you have hit upon an interesting time to visit us."

"Wal, that sure 'pears to be so," rejoined Stillwell. "Stewart got in trouble down heah to-day, an' I'm more than sorry to hev to tell you thet your name figgered in it. But I couldn't blame him, fer I sure would hev done the same myself."

"That so?" queried Alfred, laughing. "Well, tell us about it."

It required no great perspicuity, Madeline thought, to see that Stillwell loved to talk. The way he squared himself and spread his huge hands over his knees suggested that he meant to do justice to this opportunity.

"Miss Majesty, I reckon, bein' as you're in the West now, thet you must take things as they come, an' mind each thing a little less than the one before. If we old fellers hedn't been thet way we'd never hev lasted. Last night wasn't particular bad, ratin' with some other nights lately. There wasn't much doin'; but I hed a hard knock. Yesterday, when we started in with a bunch of cattle, I sent one of my cowboys, Danny Mains, along ahead, carryin' money I hed to pay off the hands, an' I wanted thet money to get in town before dark. Wal, Danny never showed up. I don't distrust

the lad. I'm plumb sure he's been held up on the trail. There's been strange greasers in town lately, an' mebbe they knew about the money comin'. Wal, when I arrived with the cattle, I was some put to it to make ends meet; an' to-day I wasn't in no angelic humor. When I hed my business all done, I went around pokin' my nose heah an' there, tryin' to get scent of thet money. I happened in at a hall we hev thet does duty fer jail an' hospital an' election-post an' what not. Wal, jest then it was doin' duty as a hospital. Last night was *fiesta* night—these greasers hev a *fiesta* every week or so—an' one greaser who hed been bad hurt was layin' in the hall, where he hed been fetched from the station. Somebody hed sent off to Douglas fer a doctor, but he hedn't come yet. I've hed some experience with gunshot wounds, an' I looked this feller over. He wasn't shot up much, but I thought there was danger of blood-poisonin'.

"The hall was full of cowboys, ranchers, greasers, miners, an' town folks, along with some strangers. I was about to get started up this way when Pat Hawe come in. Pat, he's the sheriff. I reckon, Miss Majesty, thet sheriffs are new to you, an' fer sake of the West I'll explain to you thet we don't hev many of the real thing any more. Garrett, who killed Billy the Kid, an' was killed himself near a year or so ago—he was the kind of sheriff thet helps to make a self-respectin' country. But this Pat Hawe—wal, I reckon there's no good in me sayin' what I think of him. He come into the hall, an' he was roarin' about things. He was goin' to arrest Danny Mains on sight. He swore Danny made off with the money. Wal, I jest polite like told Pat thet the money was mine, an' he needn't get riled about it, but if I wanted to trail the thief I reckon I could do it as well as anybody. Pat howled thet law was law, an' he was goin' to lay down the law. Then he cooled down a bit, an' was askin' questions about the wounded greaser when Gene Stewart come in. Whenever Pat and Gene come together it reminds me of the old days, for Pat hates Gene, an' I reckon Gene ain't very sweet on Pat.

"Hullo, Stewart, you're the feller I'm lookin' fer," said Pat.

"Stewart eyed him an' said, mighty cool an' sarcastic:

"Hawe, you look a good deal fer me when I'm hittin' up the dust the other way."

"Pat went red at thet, but he held in.

"Say, Stewart, you-all think a lot of thet roan hoss of yourn, with the aristocratic name?"

"I reckon I do," replied Gene.

"Wal, where is he?"

"Thet's none of your business, Hawe."

"O-ho! It ain't hey? Wal, I guess I can make it my business. Stewart, there was some queer goin's-on last night thet you know somethin' about. Danny Mains gone—Stillwell's money gone—your roan hoss gone—thet little hussy Bonita gone—an' this greaser derned near gone, too! Now, seein' thet you was up late an' prowlin' 'round the station, where this greaser was found, it ain't onreasonable to think you might know how he got plugged, is it?"

"Stewart laughed kind of cold, an' he rolled a cigarette, all the time eyin' Pat. Then he said if he'd plugged the greaser it'd never hev been sich a bunglin' job.

"I can arrest you on suspicion, Stewart, but before I go thet far I want some evidence. I want to round up Danny Mains an' thet little greaser girl. I want to find out what's become of your hoss. It's got a queer look—thet hoss bein' gone!"

"You sure are a swell detective, Hawe, an' I wish you luck," said Stewart.

"Thet 'peared to nettle Pat beyond bounds, an' he stamped around an' swore. Then he hed an idea. It jest stuck out all over him, an' he shook his finger in Stewart's face.

"You was drunk last night?"

"Stewart never batted an eye.

"You met some woman at the station, didn't you?" shouted Hawe.

"I met a lady," replied Stewart, quiet an' menacin' like.

"You met Al Hammond's sister, an' you took her up to Kingsley's. An' cinch this, my cowboy cavalier, I'm goin' up there an' ask this grand dame some questions, an' if she's as close-mouthed as you are—I'll arrest her!"

"Gene Stewart turned white. I expected to see him jump like lightnin', as he does when he's riled sudden; but he was calm, an' thinkin' hard. Presently he said:

"Pat, thet's a fool idee, an' if you do the trick it'll hurt you all the rest of your life. There's absolutely no reason to frighten Miss Hammond, an' tryin' to arrest her would be such an outrage as won't be stood fer in El Cajon. If you're sore on me, send me to jail. I'll go. If you

want to hurt Al Hammond, go an' do it some man kind of way. Don't take your spite out on us by insultin' a lady who has come hyar fer a visit. We're bad enough without bein' low-down as greasers."

"It was a long talk fer Gene, an' I was as surprised as the rest of the fellers. Think of Gene Stewart talkin' soft an' sweet to thet red-eyed coyote of a sheriff! An' Pat, he looked so devilishly gleeful thet if somethin' about Gene hedn't held me tight I'd hev got in the game myself.

"I'm a goin', an' I'm a goin' right now!" he shouted.

"After thet any one could hev heerd a clock tick a mile off. Stewart seemed kind of chokin', an' finally he burst out:

"But, man, think who it is! It's *Majesty* Hammond! If you seen her face you couldn't do it, even if you was locoed or drunk!"

"Couldn't I?" said Hawe. "Wal, I'll show you darned quick! What do I care who she is? Them swell Eastern women—I've heerd of them. They're not so much. This Hammond woman—"

"Suddenly Hawe shut up an' went for his gun."

Stillwell paused in his narrative to get breath, and wiped his moist brow. His face began to lose its cragginess. It changed, it softened, it rippled and wrinkled, and all that strange mobility focused and shone in a wonderful smile.

"An' then, Miss Majesty, then there was somethin' happened. Stewart took Pat's gun away from him, an' throwed it on the floor. An' what followed was beautiful. It was the beautifulest sight I ever seen. Only it was over so soon! A little while after, when the doctor came, he hed another patient besides the wounded greaser, an' he said thet this new one would require about four months to be up an' around cheerful like again. An' Gene Stewart hed hit the trail for the border!"

VII

NEXT morning, when Madeline was aroused by her brother, it was not yet day-break. The air chilled her, and in the gray gloom she had to feel around for matches and lamp. Her usual languid manner vanished at a touch of the cold water. Presently, when Alfred knocked on her door and said he was leaving a pitcher of hot water outside, she replied, with chattering teeth:

"Th-thank y-you, b-but I d-don't ne-need any now."

She found it necessary, however, to warm her numb fingers before she could fasten hooks and buttons. And when she was dressed she marked in the dim mirror that there were tinges of red in her cheeks.

"Well, if I haven't some color!" she exclaimed.

Breakfast waited for her in the dining-room. The sisters ate with her. Madeline quickly caught the feeling of brisk action that seemed to be in the air. From the back of the house sounded the tramp of boots and voices of men, and from outside came a dull thump of hoofs, the rattle of harness, and the creak of wheels. Then Alfred came stamping in.

"Majesty, here's where you get the real thing," he announced merrily. "We're rushing you off, I'm sorry to say, but we must hustle back to the ranch. The fall round-up begins to-morrow. You will ride in the buckboard with Florence and Stillwell. I'll ride on ahead with the boys, and fix up a little for you at the ranch. Your baggage will follow, but won't get there till to-morrow some time. It's a long ride out—nearly fifty miles by wagon-road. Flo, don't forget a couple of robes. Wrap her up well, and hustle getting ready."

A little later, when Madeline went out with Florence, the gray gloom was lightening. Horses were champing bits and pounding gravel.

"'Mawnin', Miss Majesty," said Stillwell gruffly, from the front seat of a high vehicle.

Alfred bundled her up into the back seat, and Florence after her, and wrapped them with robes. Then he mounted his horse and started off.

"Gid-eb!" growled Stillwell, and with a crack of his whip the team jumped into a trot.

Florence whispered into Madeline's ear: "Bill's grouchy early in the mawnin'. He'll thaw out soon as it gets warm."

It was still so gray that Madeline could not distinguish objects at any considerable distance, and she left El Cajon without knowing what the town really looked like. She did know that she was glad to get out of it.

"Here come the cowboys," said Florence presently.

A line of horsemen appeared, coming from the right, and fell in behind Alfred.

Gradually they drew ahead, to disappear from sight. While Madeline watched them the gray gloom lightened into dawn. All about her was bare and dark; the horizon seemed close; not a hill or a tree broke the monotony.

A puff of cold wind struck her face, and she shivered. Noticing this, Florence pulled up the second robe and tucked it closely round her up to her chin.

"If we have a little wind you'll sure feel it," said the Western girl.

Madeline replied that she already felt it. The wind appeared to penetrate the robes. It was cold, pure, nipping. The air was so thin that she had to breathe as fast as if she were under ordinary exertion. It hurt her nose and made her lungs ache.

"Aren't you co-cold?" asked Madeline.

"I?" Florence laughed. "I'm used to it. I never get cold."

The Western girl sat with ungloved hands on the outside of the robe. Madeline thought she had never seen such a clear-eyed, healthy, splendid girl.

"Do you like to see the sun rise?" asked Florence.

"Yes, I think I do," replied Madeline thoughtfully. "Frankly, I have not seen it for years."

"We have beautiful sunrises, and sunsets from the ranch are glorious."

Long lines of pink fire ran level with the eastern horizon, which appeared to recede as day brightened. A bank of thin, fleecy clouds was turning rose. To the south and west the sky was dark, but every moment it changed, the blue turning bluer. The eastern sky was opalescent.

Then in one place a golden light gathered and slowly concentrated till it was like fire. The rosy bank of cloud turned to silver and pearl, and behind it shot up a great circle of gold. Above the dark horizon gleamed an intensely bright disc. It was the sun. It rose swiftly, blazing out the darkness between the ridges, and giving color and distance to the sweep of land.

"Fine mawnin', girls," said Stillwell, and stretched his huge arms as if he had just awakened. "Miss Majesty, it'll be some oninterestin' ride all mawnin'; but when we get up a bit you'll sure like it. There! Look to the southwest, jest over thet farthest ridge!"

Madeline swept her gaze along the gray, sloping horizon line to where dark-blue spires rose far beyond the ridge.

"Peloncillo Mountains," said Stillwell. "Thet's home, when we get there. We won't see no more of them till afternoon, when they rise up sudden like."

Peloncillo! Madeline murmured the melodious name. Where had she heard it? Then she remembered. The cowboy, Stewart, had told the little Mexican girl, Bonita, to "hit the Peloncillo trail." Probably the girl had ridden the big, dark horse over this very road at night, alone. Madeline had a little shiver that was not occasioned by the cold wind.

"There's a jack!" cried Florence.

Madeline saw her first jack-rabbit. It was as large as a dog, and its ears were enormous. It appeared to be impudently tame, and the horses kicked dust over it as they trotted by.

Old Bill and Florence vied with each other in calling Madeline's attention to many things along the way. Coyotes stealing away into the brush; buzzards flapping over the carcass of a cow that had been mired in a wash; queer little lizards running swiftly across the road; cattle grazing in the hollows; adobe huts of Mexican herders; wild, shaggy horses with heads high, watching from the gray ridges—at all these things Madeline looked, indifferently at first, because indifference had become habitual with her, and then with an interest which insensibly grew as she rode on.

She became conscious of the faint, but unmistakable, awakening of long-dead feelings—enthusiasm and delight. When she realized this she breathed deep of the cold, sharp air, and experienced an inward joy. She divined, though she did not know why, that henceforth there was to be something new in her life, something she had never felt before, something good for her soul, in the homely, the commonplace, the natural, and the wild.

Meanwhile, as Madeline gazed about her and listened to her companions, the sun rose higher and grew warm. It rose higher still, and grew hot. The horses held tirelessly to their steady trot, and mile after mile of rolling land slipped by.

From the top of a ridge Madeline looked down into a hollow, where a few of the cowboys had stopped and were sitting round a fire, evidently busy at the noonday meal. Their horses were feeding on the long, gray grass.

"Wal, smell of thet burnin' greasewood makes my mouth water," said Stillwell.

"I'm sure hungry! We'll noon hyar an' let the hosses rest. It's a long pull to the ranch."

He halted near the camp-fire, and, clambering down, began to unharness the team. Florence leaped out and turned to help Madeline.

"Walk round a little," she said. "You must be cramped from sitting still so long. I'll get lunch ready."

Madeline got down, glad to stretch her limbs, and began to stroll about. She heard Stillwell throw the harness on the ground and slap his horses.

"Roll, you sons of guns!" he said.

Both horses bent their forelegs, heaved down on their sides, and tried to roll over. One horse succeeded on the fourth try, and then heaved up with a satisfied snort and shook off the dust and gravel. The other one failed, and gave it up, half rose to his feet, and then lay down on the other side.

During lunch-time Madeline observed that she was an object of great interest to the three cowboys. She returned the compliment, and was amused to see that a glance their way caused them painful embarrassment. They were grown men—one of them had white hair—yet they seemed like boys caught in the act of stealing a forbidden look at a pretty girl.

"Cowboys are sure all flirts!" said Florence, as if stating an uninteresting fact; but Madeline detected a merry twinkle in her clear eyes.

The cowboys heard, and the effect upon them was magical. They fell to shamed confusion and to hurried, useless tasks. Madeline found it difficult to see where they had been bold, though evidently they were stricken with conscious guilt. She recalled appraising looks of critical English eyes, impudent French stares, burning Spanish glances—gantlets which any American girl has to run abroad. Compared to foreign eyes, the cowboys' were those of smiling, eager babies.

"Haw, haw!" roared Stillwell. "Florence, you jest hit the nail on the haid. Cowboys are all plumb flirts. I was wonderin' why them boys nooned hyar. This ain't no place to noon. Ain't no grazin', or wood wuth burnin', or nothin'. Them boys jest held up, throwed the packs, an' waited fer us. It ain't so surprisin' fer Booly an' Ned—they're young and coltish; but Nels there, why, he's old enough to be the paw of both you girls."

A silence ensued. The white-haired cowboy, Nels, fussed aimlessly over the camp-fire, and then straightened up with a very red face.

"Bill, you're a dog-gone liar!" he said. "I reckon I won't stand to be classed with Booly an' Ned. There ain't no cowboy on this range thet's more appreciatin' of the ladies than me, but I shore ain't ridin' out of my way. I reckon I hev enough ridin' to do. Bill, if you've sich good eyes, mebbe you seen somethin' on the way out?"

"Nels, I hev'n't seen a thing," Stillwell replied bluntly. His levity disappeared, and the red wrinkles narrowed round his searching eyes.

"Jest take a squint at these hoss-tracks," said Nels. He drew Stillwell a few paces aside, and pointed to large hoof-marks in the dust. "I reckon you know the hoss thet made them."

"Gene Stewart's roan, or I'm a son of a gun!" exclaimed Stillwell. He dropped heavily to his knees and began to scrutinize the tracks. "My eyes are sure pore; but, Nels, they ain't fresh."

"I reckon them tracks was made early yesterday mornin'."

"Wal, what if they was?" Stillwell looked at his cowboy. "It's sure as thet red nose of yourn Gene wasn't ridin' the roan."

"Who's sayin' he was? Bill, it's more'n your eyes thet's gittin' old. Jest foller them tracks. Come on!"

Stillwell walked slowly with his head bent, muttering to himself. Some thirty paces or more from the camp-fire he stopped short, and again flopped to his knees. Then he crawled about, evidently examining horse-tracks.

"Nels, whoever was straddlin' Stewart's hoss met somebody; an' they hauled up a bit, but didn't git down."

"Tolerable good fer you, Bill, thet reasonin'," replied the cowboy.

Stillwell presently got up and walked swiftly to the left for some rods, halted, faced toward the southwest, and then retraced his steps. He looked at the imper-turbable cowboy.

"Nels, I don't like this," he growled. "Them tracks make straight fer the Pelon-cillo trail."

"Shore," replied Nels.

"Wal?" went on Stillwell impatiently.

"I reckon you know what hoss made the other tracks."

"I'm thinkin' hard, but I ain't sure."

"It was Danny Mains's bronc."

"How do you know thet?" demanded Stillwell sharply.

"Bill, the left front foot of thet little hoss always wears a shoe thet sets crooked. I'd know thet track if I was blind."

Stillwell's ruddy face clouded, and he kicked at a cactus-plant.

"Was Danny comin' or goin'?" he asked.

"I reckon he was hittin' across country fer the Peloncillo trail; but I ain't shore of thet without back-trailin' him a ways. I was jest waitin' fer you to come up."

"Nels, you don't think the boy was in town an' thet he—he—stole my money an' sloped with thet little hussy Bonita?"

"Bill, I wouldn't believe Danny was a thief unless he said so; but he shore was sweet on Bonita, same as Gene was, an' Ed Linton before he got engaged, an' all the boys. Danny might hev sloped with her, all right. The boys think he was held up on the way to town, an' then, in the shame of it, he got drunk. I think thet way, too; an' of course, Danny might do anythin' when he was drunk. But, Bill, when he sobers up he'll be back to tell you—I'll bet on thet!"

"Wal, mebbe you an' the boys are right. I believe you are. I was sure fond of Danny. Nels, there ain't no doubt about who was ridin' Stewart's hoss?"

"Thet's as plain as the hoss's tracks."

"Wal, it's all amazin' strange. It beats me. I wish the boys would ease up on drinkin'! I was pretty fond of Danny an' Gene. I'm afraid Gene's done fer, sure. If he crosses the border, where he can fight, it won't take long fer him to get plugged. I guess I'm gettin' old. I don't stand things like I used to."

"Bill, I reckon I'd better hit the Pelon-cillo trail? Mebbe I can find Danny."

"I reckon you had, Nels," replied Stillwell; "but don't take more'n a couple of days. We can't do much on the round-up without you. I'm short of boys."

VIII

THAT ended the conversation. Stillwell immediately began to hitch up his team, and the cowboys went out to fetch their strayed horses. Madeline had been curiously interested, and she saw that Florence knew it.

"Things happen, Miss Hammond," she

said soberly, almost sadly, Madeline thought.

And then straightway Florence began to hum a tune and to busy herself repacking what was left of the lunch. Madeline conceived a strong liking and respect for this Western girl. She admired the consideration, or delicacy, or wisdom—whatever it was—that kept Florence from asking her what she knew or thought about the events that had taken place.

Soon they were once more bowling along the road down a gradual incline, and then they began to climb a long ridge that had for hours hidden what lay beyond. The climb was rather tiresome, owing to the sun and the dust and the restricted view. When they reached the summit, however, Madeline gave a little gasp of pleasure. A deep, gray, smooth valley opened below, and sloped up on the other side in little ridges like waves. These led to the foot-hills, dotted with clumps of brush or trees; and beyond rose dark mountains, pine-fringed and crag-spined.

"Wal, Miss Majesty, now we're gettin' somewhere," said Stillwell, cracking his whip. "Ten miles across this valley an' we'll be in the foot-hills where the Apaches used to run."

"Ten miles!" exclaimed Madeline. "It looks no more than half a mile to me."

"Wal, young woman, before you go to ridin' off alone you want to get your eyes corrected to Western distance. Now, what'd you call them black things, off there on the slope?"

"Horsemen. No—cattle," replied Madeline doubtfully.

"Nope. Jest plain, every-day cactus. An' look down the valley. Somethin' of a pretty forest, ain't thet?"

Madeline saw a beautiful forest in the center of the valley, toward the south.

"Wal, Miss Majesty, thet's jest this deceivin' air. There's no forest. It's a mirage."

"Indeed! How beautiful it is!"

Madeline strained her gaze on the dark blot, which seemed to float in the atmosphere, to have no clearly defined margins, to waver and shimmer; and then it faded and vanished.

The mountains dropped down again behind the horizon, and presently the road began once more to slope upward. The horses slowed to a walk. There was a mile of rolling ridge, and then came the

foot-hills. The road ascended through winding valleys. Trees and brush and rocks began to appear in the dry ravines. There was no water, yet all along the sandy washes were indications of floods.

"Miss Majesty," said Stillwell, "in the early days the Indians made this country a bad one to live in. I reckon you never heerd much about them times. Sure, you was hardly born then. I'll hev to tell you some day how I fought Comanches in the Panhandle—thet was northern Texas—an' I hed some mighty hair-raisin' scares in this country with Apaches."

He told her about Cochise, chief of the Chiricahua Apaches, the most savage and bloodthirsty tribe that ever made life a horror for the pioneer. Cochise befriended the whites once, but he was the victim of that friendliness, and he became the most implacable of foes. Then, as late as 1885, Geronimo, another Apache chief, went on the war-path, and left a bloody trail down the New Mexico and Arizona line almost to the border. Lone ranchmen and cowboys had been killed, and mothers had shot their children and then themselves at the approach of the Apache. The name Apache curdled the blood of any woman of the Southwest in those days.

Madeline shuddered, and was glad when the old frontiersman changed the subject and began to talk of the settling of the country by the Spaniards, the legends of lost gold-mines handed down to the Mexicans and strange stories of heroism and mystery and religion. The Mexicans had not advanced much, in spite of the spread of civilization to the Southwest. They were still superstitious, and believed the legends of treasures hidden in the walls of their missions, and that unseen hands rolled rocks down the gullies upon the heads of prospectors who dared to hunt for the lost mines of the *padres*.

"Up in the mountains back of my ranch there's a lost mine," said Stillwell. "Mebbe it's only a legend, but somehow I believe it's there. Other lost mines hev been found. An' as fer the rollin' stones, I sure know thet's true, as any one can find out if he goes trailin' up the gulch. Mebbe they're only the weatherin' of the cliffs."

So the old cattleman talked on while Madeline listened, and Florence dozed in her seat, and the sun began to wane, and the horses climbed steadily. Presently, at the foot of a steep ascent, Stillwell got out

and walked, leading the team. During this long climb fatigue claimed Madeline, and she drowsily closed her eyes.

When she opened them again, she found that the glaring white sky had changed to a steel-blue. The sun had sunk behind the foot-hills, and the air was growing chilly. Stillwell had returned to the driving-seat and was clucking to the horses.

"Wal, Flo," said the old ranchman, "I reckon we'd better hev the rest of thet there lunch before dark."

"You didn't leave much of it," laughed Florence, as she produced the basket from under the seat.

While they ate, the short twilight shaded and gloom filled the hollows. Madeline saw the first star, a faint, winking point of light. The sky had now changed to a hazy gray. Gradually it cleared and darkened, to show other faint stars. After that there came a perceptible deepening of the gray, and enlarging of the stars, and a brightening of new-born ones.

Night seemed to come on the cold wind. Madeline was glad to have the robes close around her and to lean against Florence. She grew so sleepy that she could not keep her weary eyelids from falling. There came a blank interval, short or long, which ended in a more violent lurch of the buckboard. She awoke, to find her head on Florence's shoulder. She sat up, laughing, and apologizing for her laziness.

Madeline observed then that the horses were once more trotting. The wind was colder, the night darker, the foot-hills flatter. The sky was now a wonderful deep velvet blue, blazing with millions of stars. Some of them were magnificent. Again Madeline felt the insistence of familiar, yet baffling, associations. These white stars called strangely to her.

IX

It was a crackling and roaring of fire that awakened Madeline next morning. The first thing she saw was a huge stone fireplace, in which lay a bundle of blazing sticks. Some one had kindled a fire while she slept. For a moment the curious sensation of being lost returned to her. She just dimly remembered reaching the ranch and being taken into a huge house and a huge, dimly lighted room. It seemed to her that she had gone to sleep at once and had awakened without remembering how she had got into bed.

But she was wide awake in an instant. The bed stood near one end of an enormous chamber. The adobe walls resembled a hall in an ancient feudal castle, stone-floored, stone-walled, with great darkened rafters running across the ceiling. The few articles of furniture were worn out and sadly dilapidated. Light flooded into the room from two windows on the right of the fireplace, two on the left, and another large window near the bedstead.

Looking out from where she lay, Madeline saw a dark, slow upsweep of mountain. Her eyes returned to the cheery, snapping fire, and she watched it while gathering courage to get up. The room was cold. When she did slip her bare feet out upon the stone floor, she very quickly put them back under the warm blankets.

She was still in bed trying to pluck up her courage when, with a knock on the door and a cheerful greeting, Florence entered carrying steaming hot water.

"Good mawnin', Miss Hammond! Hope you slept well. You sure were tired last night. I imagine you'll find this old rancho house as cold as a barn. It'll warm up directly. Al's gone with the boys and Bill. We're to ride down on the range after a while, when your baggage comes."

Florence wore a woolen blouse with a scarf round her neck, a short divided skirt of corduroy, and boots. While she talked she energetically heaped up the burning wood in the fireplace, laid Madeline's clothes at the foot of the bed, heated a rug, and put it on the floor by the bedside. Lastly, with a sweet, direct smile, she said:

"Al told me—and I sure saw myself—that you weren't used to—being without your maid. Will you let me help you?"

"Thank you, I am going to be my own maid for a while. I expect I do appear a very helpless individual, but really I do not feel so. Perhaps I have had just a little too much waiting on."

"All right. Breakfast will be ready soon, and after that we'll look about the place."

Madeline was charmed with the old Spanish house, and the more she saw of it the more she thought what a delightful home it could be made. All the doors opened into a courtyard, or *patio*, as Florence called it. The house was low, rectangular in shape, and so large that Madeline wondered if it had been a Spanish barracks.

Many of the rooms were dark, without windows, and they were empty. Others were full of rancher's implements, sacks of grain, and bales of hay. Florence called these last "alfalfa." The house itself appeared strong and well-preserved, and it was very picturesque; but in the living-rooms were only the barest necessities, and these were worn out and comfortless.

However, when Madeline went outdoors, she forgot the cheerless, bare interior. Florence led the way out on a porch and waved a hand at a vast, colored void.

"We're up at the edge of the foot-hills," Florence said. "You remember we rode around the northern end of the mountain range. Well, that's behind us now, and you look down across the line into Arizona and Mexico. That long slope of gray is the head of the San Bernardino Valley. Straight across you see the black Chiricahua Mountains, and away down to the south the Guadalupe Mountains. That awful red gulf between is the desert; and far, far beyond, the dim blue peaks are the Sierra Madre, in Mexico."

Madeline listened, gazed with straining eyes, and wondered if this was only a stupendous mirage, and why it seemed so different from all else that she had seen, and so endless, so baffling, so grand.

"It'll sure take you a little while to get used to being up high and seeing so much," explained Florence. "That's the secret—we're up high, the air is clear, and there's the whole bare world beneath us. Don't it somehow rest you? Well, it will. Now see those specks in the valley. They are stations—little towns. The railroad goes down that way. The largest speck is Chiricahua. It's over forty miles by trail. Here, round to the north, you can see Don Carlos's rancho. He's fifteen miles off, and I sure wish he were a thousand! That little green square about half-way between here and Don Carlos—that's Al's ranch. Just below us are the adobe houses of the Mexicans. There's a church, too. And here to the left you see Stillwell's corrals and bunk-houses and stables, all falling to pieces. The ranch has gone to ruin. All the ranches are going to ruin; but most of them are little one-horse affairs. And here—see that cloud of dust in the valley? It's the round-up. The boys are there, and the cattle. Wait—I'll get the glasses."

By their aid Madeline saw in the foreground a great, dense herd of cattle, with

dark, thick streams and dotted lines of animals scattered in every direction. She saw streaks and clouds of dust, grazing and running horses, horsemen standing still like sentinels, and others in action. She spent most of the morning on the porch, gazing out over the ever-changing vista.

At noon a teamster drove up with her trunks. Then, while Florence helped the Mexican woman get lunch, Madeline unpacked part of her effects and got out things for which she would have immediate need. After lunch she changed her dress for a riding-habit, and, going outside, found Florence waiting with the horses.

The Western girl's clear eyes seemed to take stock of Madeline's appearance in one swift, inquisitive glance, and then shone with pleasure.

"You sure look—you're a picture, Miss Hammond! That riding-outfit is a new one. What it'd look like on me or another woman I can't imagine; but on you it's—it's stunning! Bill won't let you go within a mile of the cowboys. If they see you, that'll be the finish of the round-up!"

While they rode down the slope, Florence talked about the open ranges of New Mexico and Arizona.

"Water is scarce," she said. "If Bill could afford to pipe water down from the mountains, he'd have the finest ranch in the valley."

She went on to tell that the climate was mild in winter and hot in summer. Warm, sunshiny days prevailed nearly all the year round. Some summers it rained, but occasionally there would be a dry year—the dreaded *ano seco* of the Mexicans. Rain was always expected and prayed for in the midsummer months, and when it came the grama-grass sprang up, making the valleys green from mountain to mountain.

The intersecting valleys, ranging between the long slopes of the foot-hills, afforded the best pasture for cattle, and these were jealously sought by the Mexicans, who had only small herds to look after. Stillwell's cowboys were always chasing these vaqueros off their employer's land. He owned twenty thousand acres of unfenced land adjoining the open range. Don Carlos had a larger acreage than that, and his cattle were always mingling with Stillwell's. In turn, Don Carlos's vaqueros were always chasing Stillwell's cattle away from the Mexican's watering-place. Bad feeling had been manifested for years, and

now relations were strained to the breaking-point.

It took Madeline and Florence half an hour to reach the outskirts of the scene of action. They drew rein near a huge wagon in the neighborhood of which were more than a hundred horses grazing and whistling and trotting about and lifting heads to watch the newcomers. Four cowboys stood mounted guard over the drove. Perhaps a quarter of a mile farther out was a dusty mêlée. A roar of tramping hoofs filled Madeline's ears. The lines of marching cattle had merged into a great moving herd, half obscured by dust.

"I can't make out what is going on," said Madeline. "I want to go closer."

They trotted across half the intervening distance; and when Florence halted again, Madeline was still not satisfied, and asked to be taken nearer. This time, before they reined in again, Al Hammond saw them and wheeled his horse in their direction. He yelled something which Madeline did not understand, and then halted them.

"Close enough!" he called, and in the din his voice was not very clear. "It's not safe. Wild steers! I'm glad you came, girls. Majesty, what do you think of that bunch of cattle?"

Madeline could scarcely reply, for the noise and dust and ceaseless action confused her.

"They're milling, Al," said Florence.

"We just rounded them up. They're milling, and that's bad. The vaqueros are hard drivers. They beat us all hollow, and we drove some, too." He was wet with sweat, black with dust, and out of breath. "I'm off now. Flo, my sister will have enough of this in about two minutes. Take her back to the wagon. I'll tell Bill you're here, and run in whenever I get a minute."

The bawling and bellowing, the cracking of horns and pounding of hoofs, the dusty whirl of cattle and the flying cowboys, disconcerted Madeline and frightened her a little, but she was intensely interested. She determined to stay there until she saw for herself what that strife of sound and action meant.

"Will you stay longer?" asked Florence. Receiving an affirmative reply, she warned Madeline: "If a runaway steer or angry cow comes this way, let your horse go. He'll get out of the way."

The great mass of cattle seemed to be eddying like a whirlpool, and Madeline

understood the significance of the range word "milling." But when she looked at one end of the herd, she saw cattle standing still, facing outward, and calves cringing close in fear. The motion of the cattle slowed from the inside of the herd to the outside, and gradually ceased. The roar and tramp of hoofs and crack of horns and thump of heads also diminished, but the bawling and bellowing continued. While she watched, the herd spread, grew less dense, and stragglers appeared to be about to bolt through the line of cowboys.

From that moment so many things happened, and so swiftly, that Madeline could not see a tenth of what was going on within eyesight. It seemed that horsemen darted into the herd and drove out cattle. Madeline pinned her gaze on one cowboy who rode a white horse and was chasing a steer. He whirled a lasso round his head, and threw it; the rope streaked out and the loop caught the steer's leg. The white horse stopped with wonderful suddenness, and the steer slid in the dust.

Quick as a flash the cowboy was out of the saddle, and, grasping the animal's legs before it could rise, he tied them with a rope. It had all been done almost as quickly as thought. Another man came running with what Madeline divined was a branding-iron. He applied it to the flank of the steer. Then the animal was up with a jump, looking for some way to run, and the cowboy was again circling his lasso.

Madeline saw fires in the background, with a man in charge, evidently heating the irons. Then this same cowboy roped a heifer, which bawled lustily when the hot iron seared its hide. Madeline saw the smoke rising from the touch of the iron, and the sight made her shrink and want to turn away, but she resolutely fought her sensitiveness. She had never been able to bear the sight of any animal suffering. The rough work in men's lives was as a sealed book to her; but now, for some reason beyond her knowledge, she wanted to see and hear and learn some of the everyday duties that made up those lives.

"Look, Miss Hammond, there's Don Carlos," said Florence. "Look at that black horse!"

Madeline saw a dark-faced Mexican riding by. He was too far away for her to distinguish his features, but he reminded her of an Italian brigand. He bestrode a magnificent horse.

Stillwell rode up to the girls and greeted them in his big voice.

"Right in the thick of it, eh? Wal, thet's sure fine. I'm glad to see, Miss Majesty, thet you ain't afraid of a little dust, or the smell of burnin' hide an' hair."

"Couldn't you brand the calves without hurting them?" asked Madeline.

"Haw! Haw! Why, they ain't hurt none. They jest bawl fer their mamas. Sometimes, though, we hev to hurt one jest to find which is his mama."

"I want to know how you tell what brand to put on calves that are separated from their mothers," demanded Madeline.

"Thet's decided by the round-up bosses. I've one boss, an' Don Carlos has one. They decide everything, an' they hev to be obeyed. There's Nick Steele, my boss. He's ridin' a bay in among the cattle there. He orders the calves and steers to be cut out. Then the cowboys do the cuttin' out an' the brandin'. We try to divide up the mavericks as near as possible."

At this juncture Madeline's brother joined the group, evidently in search of Stillwell.

"Bill, Nels just rode in," he said.

"Good! We sure need him. Any news of Danny Mains?"

"No. Nels said he lost the trail when he got on hard ground."

"Wal, wal! Say, Al, your sister is sure takin' to the round-up. An' the boys are gettin' wise. See that son of a gun, Ambrose, cuttin' capers all around! He'll sure do his prettiest. Ambrose is a ladies' man, he thinks."

Madeline did not care to talk. She sat her horse and watched.

X

FOR a week the scene of the round-up lay within riding distance of the ranch-house, and Madeline passed most of this time in the saddle, watching the strenuous labors of the vaqueros and cowboys. She overestimated her strength, and more than once had to be lifted from her horse. Stillwell's pleasure in her attendance finally gave place to concern. He tried to persuade her to stay away from the round-up, and Florence grew even more solicitous. Madeline, however, was not to be moved by their entreaties.

Before the week was out, however, Alfred found occasion to tell her that it would be wiser for her to let the round-up

go on without gracing it further with her presence. He said it laughingly; nevertheless he was serious. When Madeline turned to him in surprise, he added bluntly:

"I don't like the way Don Carlos follows you around. Bill's afraid that Nels or Ambrose or one of the cowboys will take a fall out of the Mexican. They're itching for the chance. Of course, dear, it's absurd to you, but it's true."

Absurd it certainly was, yet it served to show Madeline how intensely occupied she had been with her own feelings, roused by the tumult and toil of the round-up. She recalled that Don Carlos had been presented to her, and that she had not liked his dark, striking face, with its bold, prominent, glittering eyes and its sinister lines. She had not liked his suave, insinuating voice, or his subtle manner, with its slow bows and gestures. She had thought he looked handsome and dashing on his magnificent black horse. Now that Alfred's words made her think, she recalled that wherever she had been in the field, the noble horse, with his silver-mounted saddle and his dark rider, had been always in her vicinity.

"Don Carlos has been after Florence for a long time," said Alfred. "He's not a young man, by any means. He's fifty, Bill says; but you can seldom tell a Mexican's age from his looks. Don Carlos is a man we know very little about. Mexicans of his stamp don't regard women as we white men do. Now, my dear, beautiful sister from New York, I haven't much use for Don Carlos, but I don't want Nels or Ambrose to make a wild throw with a rope and pull the don off his horse; so you had better ride up to the house and stay there."

"Alfred, you are joking—teasing me!" said Madeline.

"Indeed not," replied Alfred. "How about it, Flo?"

Florence replied that upon the slightest provocation the cowboys would treat Don Carlos with less ceremony than a roped steer. Old Bill Stillwell not only corroborated the assertion, but added emphasis and evidence of his own.

"Miss Majesty," he concluded, "I reckon, if Gene Stewart was ridin' fer me, thet grinnin' greaser would hev hed a bump in the dust before now!"

Madeline had been wavering between sobriety and laughter until Stillwell's

mention of his ideal of cowboy chivalry decided her in favor of the laughter.

"I am not convinced, but I surrender," she said. "You have some occult motive for driving me away. I am sure that handsome Don Carlos is being unjustly suspected; but as I have seen a little of cowboys' singular imagination and gallantry, I am rather inclined to fear their possibilities. So—good-by!"

The next morning she voiced a desire to visit the Mexican quarters lying at the base of the foot-hills. Florence protested that this was no place to take her; but Madeline insisted, and it required only a few words and a persuading smile to win Florence over.

From the porch, the cluster of adobe houses added a picturesque touch of color and contrast to the waste of gray valley. Near at hand, they proved the enchantment lent by distance. They were old, crumbling, broken down, squalid. A few goats climbed around upon them; a few mangy dogs barked announcement of visitors; and then a troop of half-naked, dirty, ragged children ran out. The boys and girls were very shy, and at first retreated in affright; but kind words and smiles gained their confidence, and then they followed in a body, gathering a quota of new children at each house.

Madeline at once conceived the idea of doing something to better the condition of these poor Mexicans, and with this in mind she decided to have a look indoors. She had not believed such squalor could exist anywhere in America. The huts reeked with filth; vermin crawled over the dirt floors. There was absolutely no evidence of water, and she believed what Florence told her—that these people never bathed. There was little evidence of labor. Idle men and women, smoking cigarettes, lolled about, some silent, others jabbering. They did not resent the visit of the American women, nor did they show hospitality. They appeared stupid.

Disease was rampant in these hovels; when the doors were shut there was no ventilation; and even with the doors open Madeline felt choked and stifled. A powerful, penetrating odor pervaded the rooms that were less stifling than others, coming, as Florence explained, from a liquor which the Mexicans distilled from cactus. Here drunkenness was manifest—

a terrible, inert drunkenness that made its victims deathlike.

Madeline could not extend her visit to the little mission-house. She saw a *padre*, a starved, sad-faced man, who, she instinctively felt, was good. She managed to mount her horse and ride back to the house, but once there she grew faint, and Florence had almost to carry her indoors.

Upon the morning after the end of the round-up, when she went out on the porch, her brother and Stillwell appeared to be arguing about the identity of a horse.

"I reckon it's my old roan," said Stillwell, shading his eyes with his hand.

"Bill, if that isn't Stewart's horse my eyes are going back on me," replied Al. "It's not the color or shape—the distance is too far to judge by that. It's the motion—the swing."

"Al, mebbe you're right; but they ain't no rider up on thet hoss. Flo, fetch my glass."

Florence went into the house, while Madeline tried to discover the object of attention. Presently, far up the gray hollow along a foot-hill, she saw dust, and then the dark, moving figure of a horse. She was watching when Florence returned with the glass. Bill took a long look, adjusted the glasses, and tried again.

"Wal, I hate to admit my eyes are gettin' pore; but I guess I'll hev to. Thet's Gene Stewart's hoss, saddled, an' comin' at a fast clip, without a rider. It's amazin' strange, an' some in keepin' with other things concernin' Gene."

"Give me the glass," said Al. "Yes, I was right. Bill, the horse is not frightened. He's coming steadily; he's got something on his mind."

"Thet's a trained hoss, Al. He has more sense than some men I know. Take a look with the glasses up the hollow. See anybody?"

"No."

"Swing up over the foot-hills—where the trail leads. Higher, along thet ridge where the rocks begin. See anybody?"

"By Jove, two horses! But I can't make out much for dust. They are climbing fast. One horse has gone among the rocks. There, the other's gone. What do you make of that?"

"Wal, I can't make no more'n you; but I'll bet we know somethin' soon, fer Gene's hoss is comin' faster as he hears the ranch."

(To be continued)