



CHAPTER XVII—Continued.

Stewart halted again. In the gloom Madeline discerned a log cabin, and beyond it spear-pointed dark trees piercing the sky line.

It turned out, however, that there need be no hurry about making the decision. Madeline would have welcomed any excuse to procrastinate; but, as it happened, a letter from Alfred made her departure out of the question for the present.

Madeline treated the remark with the same merry lightness with which it was received by the others; but after the train had pulled out and she was on her way home she remembered Helen's words and looks with something almost amounting to a shock.

Then the stirring memory of the day's adventure, the feeling of the beauty of the night, and a strange, deep-seated, sweetly vague consciousness of happiness portending, were all burned out in hot, pressing pain at the remembrance of Stewart's disgrace in her eyes.

CHAPTER XVIII

The Sheriff of El Cajon. About the middle of the forenoon of that day Madeline reached the ranch. Her guests had all arrived there late the night before, and wanted only her presence and the assurance of her well-being to consider the last of the camping trip a rare adventure.

Madeline's guests were two days in recovering from the hard ride. On the third day they leisurely began to prepare for departure. This period was doubly trying for Madeline. Her sister and friends were kindly and earnestly persistent in their entreaties that she go back East with them.

and disheveled and suffering. Madeline experienced the thrill that might be mentioned of this girl always gave her. It yielded to a hot pang in her breast—that live pain which so shamed her.

The dinner began quietly enough with the cowboys divided between embarrassment and voracious appetites that they evidently feared to indulge. Wine, however, loosened their tongues, and when Stillwell got up to make the speech everybody seemed to expect of him they greeted him with a roar.

Stillwell was now one huge, mountainous smile. He was so happy that he appeared on the verge of tears. He rambled on ecstatically till he came to raise his glass.

"An' now, girls an' boys, let's all drink to the bride an' groom; to their sincere an' lastin' love; to their happiness an' prosperity; to their good health an' long life. Let's drink to the untin' of the East with the West. No man full of red blood an' the real breath of life could resist a Western girl an' a good hoss an' God's free hand—that open country out there.

Through the open doors and windows of Madeline's chamber burst the sounds of horses stamping to a halt, then harsh speech of men, and a low cry of a woman in pain.

Rapid steps crossed the porch, entered Madeline's room. Nels appeared in the doorway. Madeline was surprised to see that he had not been at the dinner-table. She was disturbed at sight of his face.

"Stewart, you're wanted outdoors," called Nels, bluntly. "Monty, you slope out here with me. You, Nick, an' Stillwell—I reckon the rest of you had better shut the doors an' stay inside."

Nels disappeared. Quick as a cat Monty glided out. Madeline heard his soft, swift steps pass from her room into her office. He had left his guns there. Madeline trembled. She saw Stewart get up quietly and without any change of expression on his dark, sad face leave the patio.

"It's the sheriff of El Cajon!" he exclaimed, contemptuously. "Pat Hawe with some of his tough dep-

uties come to arrest Gene Stewart. They've got that poor little Mexican girl out there tied on a horse. Confound that sheriff!"

Madeline calmly rose from the table, closing Florence's retreating hand, and started for the door. The cowboys jumped up. Alfred barred her progress.

"Alfred, I am going out," she said. "No, I guess not," he replied. "That's no place for you. Maybe there'll be a fight. You can do nothing. You must not go."

"Wawa, I'll submit to arrest with any fuss," he said, slowly. "If you take the ropes off that girl." "None," replied the sheriff. "She got away from me once. She's hawg-tied now, an' she'll stay hawg-tied."

"All right, let's hurry out of here," said Stewart. "You've made annoyance enough. Ride down to the corral with me. I'll get my horse and go with you."

"Hold on!" yelled Hawe, as Stewart turned away. "Not so fast. Who's doin' this? You'll ride one of my pack-horses, an' you'll go in irons."

"Gene, you ain't goin' to stand fer them handcuffs?" he pleaded. "Yes," replied the cowboy. "Bill, old friend, I'm an outsider here. There's no call for Miss Hammond and—

"Wal, you might be too d— a considerate of Miss Hammond's sensitive feelin's." There was now no trace of the courteous, kindly old rancher. He looked harder than stone.

"See hyar, Pat Hawe, I know what's reasonable. Law is law. But in this country there always has been an is now a safe an' sane way to proceed with the law. Mebbe you've forgot that. I'm a-goin' to give you a hunch. Pat, you're not overkilled in these parts. You've rid too much with a high hand.

"I reckon I don't hev to take your word, Bill, or anybody else's." Stillwell's great bulk quivered with his rage, yet he made a successful effort to control it.

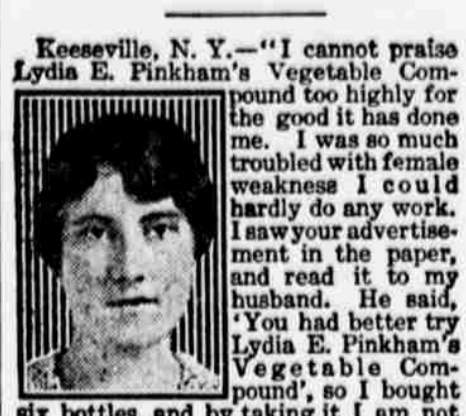
"Sneed dropped the manacles. Stewart's face took on a chalky whiteness. Hawe, in a slow, stupid embarrassment beyond his control, removed his sombrero in a respect that seemed wrenched from him.

"Mr. Hawe, I can prove to you that Stewart was not concerned in any way whatever with the crime for which you want to arrest him."

Similar Woods Differ in Tests. Osage orange and black locust are much alike in structure, strength, durability and color, although the former usually has more of a golden brownish tinge.

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He Was So Happy That He Appeared on the Verge of Tears.



"Senor Gene!" She Moaned. "Help Me! I So Seek."