

# THE LIGHT OF WESTERN STARS

A Romance

by Zane Grey

Illustrations by IRWIN MYERS

If there were no movies with their capable actors to picture the stirring side of western life, if there were no other writers than Zane Grey to present the romance and thrill of the West, past and present, he alone could furnish a vivid and colorful history—a history no less authentic, even if long periods of residence in practically all the various parts of the West, and his knowledge of its incidents in the form of fiction. His pen has chosen to enlarge upon the dramatic phase of a life that certainly has been dramatic, nevertheless, a very real picture of the West as it was and as it is.

Without the breeding and the pioneer instinct which he inherited, Zane Grey would not have been the great writer of great western stories which he is today; but one may say that the spirit of the West and the spirit of the pioneer was born in him. He is a descendant of the famous Zane family which figured so largely in frontier history, and his birthplace, Zanesville, Ohio, takes its name from an ancestor on his mother's side.

Always an out-of-doors man, he has improved an opportunity to visit and spend long periods of residence in practically all the portions of the West. And he has gone into the out-of-way places, into the deserts, into the more remote mountains and to the difficult spots which the average traveler does not reach. He has lived the life and found it charming and has presented it with an intimacy and accuracy touched by few writers of either fiction or facts.

While gathering material for delightful novels, Mr. Grey has not overlooked the chance to familiarize himself with the charms of nature in its various manifestations. Best known to the general public for his romances, he is known to a great coterie of hunters, fishermen, and nature lovers for his books treating of the game, the fishing, the trees and other flora, the Indians, etc., of western America. Had he been raised on a cattle ranch, in a mining camp, among the Indians or with trappers and then sent away to school, he could hardly have been more efficient in presenting the charm of the West. As stated above, the reason lies in the fact that the love of it and the spirit of it were born in him.

## CHAPTER I

### A Gentleman of the Range.

When Madeline Hammond stepped from the train at El Cajon, New Mexico, it was nearly midnight, and her first impression was of a huge dark space of cool, windy emptiness, strange and silent, stretching away under great blinking white stars.

"Miss, there's no one to meet you," said the conductor anxiously.

"I wired my brother," she replied. "He will be here presently. But, if he should not come—surely I can find a hotel?"

"There's lodgings to be had, if you'll excuse me—this is no place for a lady like you to be alone at night. It's a rough little town—mostly Mexicans, miners, cowboys. And they carouse a lot. Besides, the revolution across the border has stirred up some excitement along the line. Miss, I guess it's safe enough, if you—"

"Thank you. I am not in the least afraid."

As the train started to glide away Miss Hammond walked toward the dimly lighted station. An oil-lamp gave out a thick yellow light. A telegraph instrument clicked faintly.

Madeline Hammond crossed the waiting-room to a window and, holding aside her veil, looked out. At first she could discern only a few dim lights, and these blurred in her sight. As her eyes grew accustomed to the darkness she saw a superbly built horse standing near the window. Beyond was a bare square. Through a hole in the window-glass came a cool breeze, and on it breathed a sound that struck coarsely upon her ear—a discordant mingling of laughter and shout, and the tramp of boots to the hard music of a phonograph.

"Western revelry," mused Miss Hammond, as she left the window. "Now, what to do? I'll wait here. Perhaps the station agent will return soon, or Alfred will come for me."

As she sat down to wait she reviewed the causes which accounted for the remarkable situation in which she found herself. That Madeline Hammond should be alone, at a late hour, in a dingy little western railroad station, was indeed extraordinary.

The close of her debutante year had been marred by the only unhappy experience of her life—the disgrace of her brother and his leaving home. She dated the beginning of a certain thoughtful habit of mind from that time, and a dissatisfaction with the brilliant life society offered her.

There had been months of unrest, of curiously painful wonderment that her position, her wealth, her popularity no longer sufficed. She believed she had lived through the dreams and fancies of a girl to become a woman of the world. And she had gone on as before, a part of the glittering show, but no longer blind to the truth—that there was nothing in her luxurious life to make it significant. And at last she knew what she needed—to be alone, to brood for long hours, to gaze out on lonely, silent, darkening stretches, to watch

the stars, to race her soul, to find her real self.

Then it was she had first thought of visiting the brother who had gone west to cast his fortune with the cattlemen. As it happened, she had friends who were on the eve of starting for California, and she made a quick decision to travel with them. When she calmly announced her intention of going out west her mother had exclaimed in consternation; and her father, surprised into pathetic memory of the black sheep of the family, had stared at her with glistening eyes. "Why, Madeline! You want to see that wild boy!" Then he had reverted to the anger he still felt for his wayward son, and he had forbidden Madeline to go. Her mother forgot her haughty poise and dignity. Madeline stood her ground, even to reminding them that she was twenty-four and her own mistress. In the end she had prevailed.

Madeline had planned to arrive in El Cajon on October 3, her brother's birthday, and she had succeeded, though her arrival occurred at the twenty-fourth hour. Her train had been several hours late. Whether or not the message had reached Alfred's hands she had no means of telling, and the thing which concerned her now was the fact that she had arrived and he was not there to meet her.

As Madeline sat waiting in the yellow gloom she heard the faint, intermittent click of the telegraph instrument, the low hum of wires, the occasional stamp of an iron-shod hoof, and a distant vacant laugh rising above the sounds of the dance. She became



She Became Conscious of a Slight Quickening of Her Pulse.

conscious of a slight quickening of her pulse. Madeline had only a limited knowledge of the West. Like all of her class, she had traveled Europe and had neglected America. She had been astounded at the interminable distance she had traveled, and if there had been anything attractive to look at in all that journey she had passed it in the night.

A faint sound like the rattling of thin chains diverted Madeline's attention. At first she imagined it was made by the telegraph wires. Then she heard a step. The door swung wide; a tall man entered, and with him came the clinking rattle. She realized then that the sound came from his spurs.

"Will you please direct me to a hotel?" asked Madeline, rising.

The cowboy removed his sombrero, and the sweep he made with it and the accompanying bow, despite their exaggeration, had a kind of rude grace. He took two long strides toward her.

"Lady, are you married?" In the past Miss Hammond's sense of humor had often helped her to overlook critical exactions natural to her breeding. She kept silence, and she imagined it was just as well that her veil hid her face at the moment. She had been prepared to find cowboys rather striking, and she had been warned not to laugh at them.

This gentleman of the range deliberately reached down and took up her left hand. Before she recovered from her start of amazement he had stripped off her glove.

"Fine spark, but no wedding ring," he drawled. "Lady, I'm glad to see you're not married."

He released her hand and returned the glove.

"You see, the only hotel in this here town is against boarding married women. Bad business for hotels to have married women. Keeps the boys away. You see, this isn't Reno."

Then he laughed rather boyishly, and from that, and the way he slouched on his sombrero, Madeline

realized he was instinctively recoiled she not only gave him a keener glance, but stepped into a position where a better light shone on his face. It was like red bronze, bold, raw, sharp. Like that of all women whose beauty and charm had brought them much before the world. Miss Hammond's intuition had been developed until she had a delicate and exquisitely sensitive perception of the nature of men and of her effect upon them. This crude cowboy, under the influence of drink, had affronted her; nevertheless, whatever was in his mind, he meant no insult. "I shall be greatly obliged to you if you will show me to the hotel," she said.

"Lady, you wait here," he replied, slowly, as if his thought did not come so swiftly. "I'll go fetch the porter."

She thanked him, and as he went out, closing the door, she sat down in considerable relief. It occurred to her that she should have mentioned her brother's name. Then she fell to wondering what living with such uncouth cowboys had done to Alfred. She alone of her family had ever believed in any latent good in Alfred Hammond, and her faith had scarcely survived the two years of silence.

Waiting there, she again found herself listening to the moan of the wind through the wires. Then Madeline heard a rapid pattering, low at first and growing louder, which presently she recognized as the galloping of horses. She went to the window, thinking, hoping her brother had arrived. But as the clatter increased to a roar, shadows sped by—lean horses, flying manes and tails, sombreroed riders, all strange and wild in her sight. Recalling what the conductor had said, she was at some pains to quell her uneasiness. Then out of the gloom two figures appeared, one tall, the other slight. The cowboy entered, pulling a disheveled figure—that of a priest, a padre, whose mantle had manifestly been disarranged by the rude grasp of his captor. Plain it was that the padre was extremely terrified.

Madeline Hammond gazed in bewilderment at the little man, so pale and shaken, and a protest trembled upon her lips; but it was never uttered, for this half-drunken cowboy now appeared to be a cool, grimacing devil; and stretching out a long arm, he grasped her and swung her back to the bench.

"You stay there!" he ordered. His voice, though neither brutal nor harsh nor cruel, had the unaccountable effect of making her feel powerless to move. No man had ever before addressed her in such a tone. It was the woman in her that obeyed—not the personality of proud Madeline Hammond.

The padre lifted his clasped hands as if supplicating for his life, and began to speak hurriedly in Spanish. Madeline did not understand the language. The cowboy pulled out a huge gun and brandished it in the priest's face. Then he lowered it, apparently to point it at the priest's feet. There was a red flash, and then a thundering report that stunned Madeline. The room filled with smoke and the smell of powder. When she could see distinctly through the smoke she experienced a sensation of immeasurable relief that the cowboy had not shot the padre. But he was still waving the gun, and now appeared to be dragging his victim toward her. What possibly could be the drunken fool's intention? This must be, this surely was a cowboy trick. Madeline no sooner thought of it than she made certain her brother was introducing her to a Wild West amusement. She could scarcely believe it, yet it must be true. Probably he stood just outside the door or window laughing at her embarrassment.

Anger checked her panic. She straightened up with what composure this surprise had left her and started for the door. But the cowboy barred her passage—grasped her arms. Then Madeline divined that her brother could not have any knowledge of this indignity. It was no trick. Poise, dignity, culture—all the acquired habits of character—fled before the instinct to fight. She was athletic. She fought. She struggled desperately. But he forced her back with hands of iron. She had never known a man could be so strong.

"What—do you—mean?" she panted. "Dearie, ease up a little on the bride," he replied, gaily.

Madeline thought she must be dreaming. She could not think clearly. She not only saw this man, but also felt his powerful presence. And the shaking priest, the haze of blue smoke, the smell of powder—these were not unreal.

Then close before her eyes burst another blinding red flash, and close at her ears belowered another report. Unable to stand, Madeline slipped down onto the bench. Her drifting faculties refused clearly to record what transpired during the next few moments; presently, however, as her mind steadied somewhat, she heard, though as in a dream, the voice of the padre hurrying over strange words. It ceased, and then the cowboy's voice stirred her.

"Lady, say SI—SI. Say it—quick! Say it—SI!"

From sheer suggestion, a force irresistible at this moment when her will was clamped by panic, she spoke the word.

"And now, lady—so we can finish this properly—what's your name?" Still obeying mechanically, she told him.

He stared for a while, as if the name had awakened associations in a mind somewhat befogged. He leaned back unsteadily.

"Madeline Hammond. I am Alfred Hammond's sister."

He put his hand up and brushed at an imaginary something before his eyes. "You're not—Majesty Hammond?"

How strange—stranger than anything that had ever happened to her before—was it to hear that name on the lips of this cowboy! It was a name by which she was familiarly known, though only those nearest and dearest to her had the privilege of using it. And now it revived her dulled faculties, and by an effort she regained control of herself.

"You are Majesty Hammond," and said.

"Lady, you wait here," he replied, slowly, as if his thought did not come so swiftly. "I'll go fetch the porter."

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"No, señor."

"I'm sure glad. I thought Danny was mixed up in that. He had still-well's money for the boys—I was afraid. . . . Say, Bonita, but you'll get in trouble. Who was with you?"

"What did you do?" "Senor Gene—they Don Carlos vaqueros—they quarrel over me. I only dance a leetle, smile a leetle, and they quarrel. I beg they be good—watch out for Sheriff Howe. . . . and now Sheriff Howe put me in jail. I so frighten; he try make leetle love to Bonita once, and now he hate me like he hate Senor Gene."

"Pat Howe won't put you in jail. Take my horse and hit the Peloncello trail. Bonita, promise to stay away from El Cajon."

"Si, Senor." He led her outside. Madeline heard the horse snort and champ his bit. The cowboy spoke low; only a few words were intelligible—"stirrups. . . . wait. . . . out of town. . . . mountain. . . . trail. . . . now ride!"

A moment's silence ensued, and was broken by a pounding of hoofs, a pattering of gravel. Then Madeline saw a big, dark horse run into the wide space. She caught a glimpse of wind-swept scarf and hair, a little form low down in the saddle. The horse was outlined in black against the line of dim lights. There was something wild and splendid in his flight.

Directly the cowboy appeared again in the doorway.

"Miss Hammond, I reckon we want to rustle out of here. Been bad goings-on. And there's a train due."

She hurried into the open air, not daring to look back or to either side. Her guide strode swiftly. She had almost to run to keep up with him.

Suddenly aware that she had been led beyond the line of houses, she spoke:

"Where are you taking me?"

"To Florence Kingsley," he replied. "Who is she?"

"I reckon she's your brother's best friend out here."

Madeline kept pace with the cowboy for a few moments longer, and then she stopped. It was as much from necessity to catch her breath as it was from recurring fear. The cowboy, missing her, came back the few intervening steps. Then he waited, still silent, looming beside her. "It's so dark, so lonely," she faltered. "How do I know. . . . what warrant can you give me that you—that no harm will befall me if I go farther?"

"None, Miss Hammond, except that I've seen your face."

## CHAPTER II

### A Secret Kept.

Because of that singular reply Madeline found faith to go farther with the cowboy. But at the moment she really did not think about what he had said. Any answer to her would have served if it had been kind.

As she walked on into the windy darkness, much relieved that he had answered as he had, reflecting that he had yet to prove his words true, she began to grasp the deeper significance of them. There was a revival of pride that made her feel that she ought to scorn to think at all about such a man.

Presently Madeline's guide turned off the walk and rapped at a door of a low-roofed house.

"Hullo—who's there?" a deep voice answered.

"Gene Stewart," said the cowboy. "Call Florence—quick!"

Thump of footsteps followed, a tap on a door, and voices. Madeline heard a woman exclaim: "Gene! here when there's a dance in town! Something wrong out on the range." A light flared up and shone bright through a window. In another moment there to be a patter of soft steps, and the door opened to disclose a woman holding a lamp.

"Gene! Al's not—"

"Al is all right," interrupted the cowboy.

Madeline had two sensations then—one of wonder at the note of alarm and love in the woman's voice, and the other of unutterable relief to be safe with a friend of her brother's.

"It's Al's sister—came on tonight's train," the cowboy was saying. "I happened to be at the station, and I've fetched her up to you."

Madeline came forward out of the shadow.

"Not—not really Majesty Hammond!" exclaimed Florence Kingsley. She nearly dropped the lamp, and she looked, astounded beyond belief.

"Yes, I am really she," replied Madeline. "My twin was late and for some reason Alfred did not meet me. Mr.—Mr. Stewart saw fit to bring me to you instead of taking me to a hotel."

"Oh, I'm so glad to meet you," replied Florence, warmly. "Do come in. I'm so surprised, I forget my manners. Why, you are white as a sheet. You must be tired. What a long wait you had at the station! If I had known you were coming! Indeed, you are very pale. Are you ill?"

"No. Only I am very tired. Traveling so far by rail is harder than I imagined. I did have rather a long wait after arriving at the station, but I can't say that it was lonely."

Florence Kingsley searched Madeline's face with keen eyes, and then took a long, significant look at the silent Stewart. With that she deliberately and quietly closed a door leading into another room.

"Miss Hammond, what has happened?" She had lowered her voice.

"I do not wish to recall all that has happened," replied Madeline. "I shall tell Alfred, however, that I would rather have met a hostile Apache than a cowboy."

"Please don't tell Al that!" cried Florence. Then she grasped Stewart and pulled him close to the light.

"Gene, you're drunk!"

"Now, see here, Flo, I only—"

"I don't want to know. I'd tell it. Gene, aren't you ever going to learn decency? Aren't you ever going to stop drinking? You'll lose all your friends. Molly and I have pleaded with you, and now you've gone and done—God knows what!"

"What do women want to wear veils for?" he growled. "I'd have known her but for that veil."

"And you wouldn't have insulted her. But you would the next girl who

came along. Gene, you are hopeless. Now, you get out of here and don't ever come back."

"Flo!" he treated.

"I mean it."

"I reckon then I'll come back tomorrow and take my medicine," he replied.

"Don't you dare!" she cried.

Stewart went out and closed the door.

"Miss Hammond, you—you don't know how this hurts me," said Florence. "What you must think of us! It's so unlucky that you should have had this happen right at first. Now, maybe you won't have the heart to stay. Oh, I've known more than one eastern girl to go home without ever learning what we really are out here. Miss Hammond, Gene Stewart is a fend when he's drunk. All the same I know, whatever he did, he meant no shame to you. Come now, don't think about it again tonight."

She took up the lamp and led Madeline into a little room. "Won't you let me help you undress—can't I do anything for you?"

"You are very kind, thank you, but I can manage," replied Madeline.

"Well, then, good night. The sooner I go the sooner you'll rest. Just forget what happened and think how fine a surprise you're to give your brother tomorrow."

With that she slipped out and softly shut the door.

As Madeline laid her watch on the bureau she noticed that the time was past two o'clock. It seemed long since she had gotten off the train. When she had turned out the lamp and crept wearily into bed she knew what it was to be utterly spent. She was too tired to move a finger.

When she awakened the room was bright with sunlight. She was lazily and dreamily contemplating the mud walls of this little room when she remembered where she was and how she had come there.

How great a shock she had been subjected to was manifest in a sensation of disgust that overwhelmed her. She even shut her eyes to try and blot out the recollection. She felt that she had been contaminated.

Presently Madeline Hammond again awoke to the fact she had learned the preceding night—that there were emotions to which she had heretofore been a stranger. She scarcely remembered when she had found it necessary to control her emotions. There had been no trouble, no excitement, no unpleasantness in her life. It had been ordered for her—tranquil, luxurious, brilliant, varied, yet always the same.

Then Madeline heard Florence rap on the door and call softly:

"Miss Hammond. Are you awake?" "Awake and dressed, Miss Kingsley."

Presently there were slow, reluctant steps outside the front door, then a pause, and the door opened. Stewart stood bareheaded in the sunlight. Madeline's glance ran over him swift as lightning. But as she saw his face now she did not recognize it. The man's presence roused in her a revolt. Yet something in her, the incomprehensible side of her nature, thrilled in the look of this splendid dark-faced barbarian.

"Mr. Stewart, will you please come in?" she asked, after that long pause.

"I reckon not," he said. The hopelessness of his tone meant that he knew he was not fit to enter a room with her, and did not care or cared too much.

Madeline went to the door. The man's face was hard, yet it was sad, too. And it touched her.

"I shall not tell my brother of your—your rudeness to me," she began.

It was impossible for her to keep the light out of her voice, to speak with other than the pride and aloofness of her class. Nevertheless, despite her loathing, when she had spoken so far it seemed that kindness and pity fol-

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