

THE LIGHT OF WESTERN STARS

A Romance

by Zane Grey

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(Continued from last week.)

SYNOPSIS

CHAPTER I.—Arriving at the lonely little railroad station of El Cajon, New Mexico, Madeline Hammond, New York girl, finds no one to meet her. While in the waiting room a drunken cowboy enters, asks if she is married, and departs, leaving her terrified. He returns with a priest, who goes through some sort of ceremony, and the cowboy forces her to say "Si." Asking her name and learning her identity the cowboy seems dazed. In a shooting scrape outside the room a Mexican is killed. The cowboy lets a girl, "Bonita," take his horse and escape, then conducts Madeline to Florence Kingsley, friend of her brother.

CHAPTER II.—Florence welcomes her, learns her story, and dismisses the cowboy, Gene Stewart. Next day Alfred Hammond, Madeline's brother, takes Stewart to task. Madeline exonerates him of any wrong intent.

CHAPTER III

Sister and Brother.

Then Madeline returned to the little parlor with the brother whom she had hardly recognized.

"Madeline!" she exclaimed. "To think of your being here!"

The warmth stole back along her veins. She remembered how that pet name had sounded from the lips of this brother who had given it to her.

"Alfred!"

"Dear old girl," he said, "you haven't changed at all, except to grow



"Dear Old Girl," He Said.

lover. Only you're a woman now, and you've fulfilled the name I gave you. G—d! how sight of you brings back home! It seems a hundred years since I left. I missed you more than all the rest."

Madeline seemed to feel with his every word that she was remembering him. She was so amazed at the change in him that she could not believe her eyes. She saw a bronzed, strong-jawed, eagle-eyed man, stalwart, superb of height, and like the cowboys, belted, booted, spurred. She had bidden good-by to a disgraced, disinherited, dissolute boy. Well she remembered the handsome pale face with its weakness and shadows and careless smile, with the ever-present cigarette hanging between the lips. The years had passed, and now she saw him a man—the West had made him a man. And Madeline Hammond felt a strong, passionate gladness and gratefulness, and a direct check to her sudden inspired hatred of the West.

"Madeline, it was good of you to come. I'm all broken up. How did you ever do it? But never mind that now. Tell me about that brother of mine."

And Madeline told him, and then about her sister Helen. Question after question he fired at her; and she told him of her mother; of Aunt Grace, who had died a year ago; of his old friends, married, scattered, vanished. But she did not tell him of his father, for he did not ask.

Quite suddenly the rapid-fire questioning ceased; he choked, was silent a moment, and then burst into tears. It seemed to her that a long, stored-up bitterness was flooding away. It hurt her to see him—hurt her more to hear him. And in the succeeding few moments she grew closer to him than she had ever been in the past. Had her father and mother done right by him? Her pulse stirred with unworded questions. She did not speak, but she kissed him, which, for her, was an indication of unusual feeling. And when he recovered command over his emotions he made no reference to his breakdown, nor did she. But that scene struck deep into Madeline Hammond's heart. Through it she saw what he had lost and gained.

"Alfred, why did you not answer my last letters?" asked Madeline. "I had not heard from you for two years."

"So long? How time flies! Well, things went bad with me about the last time I heard from you. I always intended to write some day, but I

never did. You remember all about my little ranch, and that for a while I did well raising stock? I wrote you all that. Majesty, a man makes enemies anywhere. Perhaps an eastern man in the West can make, if not so many, certainly more bitter ones. At any rate, I made several. There was a cattleman, Ward by name—he's gone now—and he and I had trouble over cattle. That gave me a back-set. Pat Howe, the sheriff here, has been instrumental in hurting my business. He's not so much of a rancher, but he has influence at Santa Fe and El Paso and Douglas. I made an enemy of him. I never did anything to him. The real reason for his animosity toward me is that he loves Florence, and Florence is going to marry me."

"Alfred!"

"What's the matter, Majesty? Didn't Florence impress you favorably?" he asked, with a keen glance.

"Why—yes, indeed. I like her. But I did not think of her in relation to you—that way. I am greatly surprised. Alfred, is she well born? What connections?"

"Florence is just a girl of ordinary people. She was born in Kentucky, was brought up in Texas. My aristocratic and wealthy family would scorn."

"Alfred, you are still a Hammond?" said Madeline, with uplifted head.

Alfred laughed. "We won't quarrel, Majesty. I remember you, and in spite of your pride you've got a heart. If you stay here a month you'll love Florence Kingsley. I want you to know she's had a great deal to do with straightening me up. . . . Well, to go on with my story. There's Don Carlos, a Mexican rancher, and he's my worst enemy. Don Carlos is a wily Greaser, he knows the ranges, he has the water, and he is dishonest. So he outfigured me. And now I am practically ruined. He has not gotten possession of my ranch, but that's only a matter of time, pending lawsuits at Santa Fe. At present I have a few hundred cattle running on Stillwell's range, and I am his foreman."

"Foreman?" queried Madeline.

"I am simply boss of Stillwell's cowboys, and I'm glad of my job."

Madeline was conscious of an inward burning. It required an effort for her to retain her outward tranquillity.

"Cannot your property be reclaimed?" she asked. "How much do you owe?"

"Ten thousand dollars would clear me and give me another start. But, Majesty, in this country that's a good deal of money, and I haven't been able to raise it. Stillwell's in worse shape than I am."

Madeline went over to Alfred and put her hands on his shoulders.

"We must not be in debt."

He stared at her as if her words had recalled something long forgotten. Then he smiled.

"How impertinent you are! I'd forgotten just how beautiful sister really is. Majesty, you're not going to ask me to take money from you?"

"I am."

"Well, I'll not do it. I never did, even when I was in college, and then there wasn't much beyond me."

"Listen, Alfred," she went on, earnestly, "this is entirely different. I had only an allowance then. You had no way to know that since I last wrote you I had come into my inheritance from Aunt Grace. It was—well, that doesn't matter. Only, I haven't been able to spend half the income. It's mine. It's not father's money. You will make me very happy if you'll consent. What is ten thousand dollars to me? Sometimes I spend that in a month. I throw money away. If you let me help you it will be doing me good as well as you. Please, Alfred."

"You always were the best of fellows, Majesty. And if you really care—if you really want to help me—I'll be only too glad to accept. It will be fine. Florence will go wild. And that Greaser won't harass me any more. Majesty, pretty soon some titled fellow will be spending your money; I may as well take a little before he gets it all," he finished, jokingly.

"What do you know about me?" she asked, lightly.

"More than you think. Even if we are lost out here in the woolly West we get news. Everybody knows about Anglesbury. And that Dago duke who chased you all over Europe, that Lord Castleton has the running now and seems about to win. How about it, Majesty?"

Madeline detected a hint that suggested scorn in his gay speech. And deep in his searching glance she saw a flame. She became thoughtful. She had forgotten Castleton, New York society.

"Alfred," she began, seriously, "I don't believe any titled gentleman will ever spend my money, as you elegantly express it."

"I don't care for that. It's you!" he cried, passionately, and he grasped her with a violence that startled her.

He was white; his eyes were now like fire. "You are so splendid—so wonderful. People called you the American Beauty, but you're more than that. You're the American Girl! Majesty, marry no man unless you love him, and love an American. Stay away from Europe long enough to learn to know the men—the real men of your own country."

"Alfred, I'm afraid there are not always real men and real love for American girls in international marriages. Alfred, tell me how you came to know about me, 'way out here? You may be assured I was astonished to find that Miss Kingsley knew me as Majesty Hammond."

"I imagine it was a surprise," he replied, with a laugh. "I told Florence about you—gave her a picture of you. And, of course, being a woman, she showed the picture and talked. She's in love with you. Then, my dear sister, we do get New York papers out here occasionally, and we can see and read. You may not be aware that you and your society friends are objects of intense interest in the U. S. in general, and the West in particular. The papers are full of you, and perhaps a lot of things you never did. Majesty, I must run down to the siding," 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."

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

"Miss Hammond, your brother has come back with Stillwell."

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

"Hello, Majesty!" And 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 to you. Bill, this is my sister, the sister I've so often told you about—Majesty."

"Wal, wal, Al, this 's the proudest meenin' 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."

Madeline greeted him, and it was all she could do to repress a cry at the way 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 she fancied it a most extraordinary smile. The next instant 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 she had seen in Stewart was immeasurably intensified in this old man's face.

"Miss Majesty, it's plumb humillatint' to all of us that we wasn't on hand to

pay off hands an' my bills, an' I wanted that money to get in town before dark. Wal, Danny was held up. I don't distrust the lad. There's been strange Greasers in town lately, an' maybe they knew about the money comin'."

"Wal, when I arrived with the cattle I was some put to it to make ends meet. An' today 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 that money. An' I happened in at a hall we hev that does duty fer jail an' hospital an' election-post an' what not. Wal, just then it was doin' duty as a hospital. Last night was festa night—these Greasers hev a festa every week or so—an' one Greaser who had been bad hurt was layin' in the hall, where he hed been fetched from the station."

"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 Howe come in."

"Pat, he's the sheriff. He come into the hall, an' he was roarin' about things. He was goin' to arrest Danny Mains on sight. Wal, I jest polite-like told Pat that the money was mine an' he needn't get riled about it. An' if I wanted to trail the thief I reckon I could do it as well as anybody."

"Then he cooled down a bit an' was askin' questions about the wounded Greaser when Gene Stewart comes in. Whenever Pat an' Gene come together it reminds me of the early days back in the 'seventies. Jest naturally everybody shut up. Fer Pat hates Gene, an' I reckon Gene ain't very sweet on Pat."

"Hello Stewart! You're the feller I'm lookin' fer," said Pat. "There was some queer goings-on last night that you know somethin' about. Danny Mains robbed—Stillwell's money gone—your roan horse gone—an' the Greaser ran, too. Now, seein' that you was up late an' prowlin' round the station where this Greaser was bound, it ain't unreasonable to think



"You might know how he got plugged—is it?"

"Stewart laughed kind of cold, an' he rolled a cigarette, all the time eyein' Pat, an' then he said if he'd plugged the Greaser it'd never hev been such a bunglin' job."

"I can arrest you on suspicion, Stewart, but before I go that far I want some evidence. I want to find out what's become of your hoss. You've never lent him since you hed him, an' there ain't enough riders across the border to steal him from you. It's got a queer look—that hoss bein' gone. You was drunk last night?"

"Stewart never batted an eye.

"You met some woman on Number Eight, didn't you?" shouted Have.

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

"You met Al Hammond's sister, an' you took her up to Kingsley's. An' then, 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 fer one expected to see him jump like lightning, as he does when he's riled sudden. But he was calm an' he was thinkin' hard. Presently he said:

"Pat, that'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 a d—d 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 to hev a little visit. We're bad enough without bein' low-down as Greasers."

"It was a long talk for Gene, an' I was as surprised as the rest of the fellers. It was plain to me an' others who spoke of it afterward that Pat Howe hed forgotten the law an' the officer in the man an' his hate.

"'I'm a-go-in', an' I'm a-go-in' right now!' he shouted."

"Stewart seemed kind of chokin', an' he seemed to hev been bewildered by the idee of Howe's confrontin' you. An' finally he burst out: 'But, man, think you it is! It's Miss Hammond! If you see her, even if you was loosed or drunk, you—couldn't do it!'"

"'Couldn't I? Wal, I'll show you d—n quick. What do I care who she is? Them swell eastern women—I've heard of them. They're not so much. This Hammond woman—'"

"Suddenly Have shut up, an' with his red mug turnin' green he went for his gun."

Stillwell paused in his narrative to get breath, and he wiped his moist brow. And now 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 and threw it on the floor. An' what followed was beautiful. Sure it was the beautiful-est 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 that 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."

CHAPTER IV

A Ride From Sunrise to Sunset.

Next morning, when Madeline was aroused by her brother, it was not yet daybreak; the air chilled her, and in the gray gloom she had to feel around for matches and larap. Her usual languid manner vanished at a touch

of the cold water. Presently, when



"Well, if I Haven't Some Color!" She Exclaimed.

Alfred knocked on her door and said he was leaving a pitcher of hot water outside, she replied, with chattering teeth, "Th—thank y—ou, b—but I d—don't 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 things 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 new. Madeline quickly caught the feeling of brisk action that seemed to be in the air. 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 tomorrow. 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. 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. We're waiting."

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

"Mavinin', 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.

As Madeline gazed about her and listened to her companions, the sun rose higher and grew warm and soared 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 saw 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 that 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."

During lunch-time Madeline observed that she was an object of manifestly 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 whom had white hair—yet they acted 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.

"'Haw, haw!'" roared Stillwell. "Florence, you jest hit the nail on the head. 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 Booley an' Ned—they're young an' coltish—but Nels there, why, he's old enough to be the paw of both you girls. It sure is amazin' strange."

A silence ensued. The white-haired cowboy, Nels, fussed aimlessly over the campfire, 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 Booley an' Ned. There ain't no cowboy on this range that'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 go. Now, Bill, if you've sitch dog-gone good eyes mebbe you seen somethin' on the way out?"

"Nels, I hev'n't seen nothin'," he replied, bluntly.

"Test take a squint at these hoss tracks," said Nels, and he drew Stillwell a few paces aside and pointed to large hoofprints in the dust. "I reckon you know the hoss that made them?"

"Gene Stewart's roan, or I'm a son-of-a-gun!" exclaimed Stillwell, and he dropped heavily to his knees and began to scrutinize the tracks. Nels, who ever was straddlin' Stewart's hoss met somebody. An' they hauled up a bit, but didn't git down."

"Tolerable good for you, Bill, that reasonin'," replied the cowboy. "I reckon you know what hoss made the other tracks?"

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

"It was Danny Mains' bronc."

"How do you know that?" demanded Stillwell, sharply.

"Bill, the left front foot of that little hoss always wears a shoe that sets crooked. Any of the boys can tell you. I'd know that track if I was blind."

"Nels, you don't think the boy's sloped with that little hussy, Bonita?"

"Bill, he shore was sweet on Bonita, same as Gene was, an' Ed Linton before he got engaged, an' all the boys. She's shore chain-lightnin', that little black-eyed devil. Danny might hev sloped with her all right. Danny was held up on the way to town, an' then in the shame of it he got drunk. But he'll show up soon."

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

"That's as plain as the hoss' tracks." 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 Peiloncillo 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."

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 straightaway Florence began brightly to hum a tune and to busy herself repacking what was left of the lunch. Madeline suddenly conceived a strong liking and respect for this Western girl.

Soon they were once more bowing along the road down a gradual incline, and then they began to climb a long ridge that had for hours hidden what lay beyond. That climb was rather tiresome, owing to the sun and the dust and the restricted view.

Presently, at the top of the steep ascent, Stillwell got out and walked, leading the team. During this long climb fatigue claimed Madeline, and she drowsily closed her eyes, to find when she opened them again that the glaring white sky had changed to a steel-blue. The sun had sunk behind the foothills and the air was growing chilly. Stillwell had returned to the driving-seat and was chuckling to the horses. Shadows crept up out of the hollows.

"Wal, Flo," said Stillwell, "I reckon we'd better hev the rest of that 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 was glad to have the robes close around her and to lean against Florence. There were drowsier spells in which she lost a feeling of where she was, and these were disturbed by the jolt of wheels over a rough place. Then came a blank interval, short or long, which ended in a more violent lurch of the buckboard. Madeline awoke to find her head on Florence's shoulder. She sat up laughing and apologizing for her laziness. Florence assured her they would soon reach the ranch.

(To be continued.)

THE TONE IN "AFRICAN WIRELESS"

Matter That Has Long Baffled Europeans Seems to Have Been Cleared Up by Discovery.

Just at the time when the British are expecting authorization of their own wireless broadcasting, the secret of African "wireless"—the drum messages that have baffled the curiosity of travelers, explorers and big game hunters ever since they have known of it—has been discovered.

Everyone who has traveled in Africa has listened with a thrill to the drums of the natives rolling and tapping off a message to a distant village, which in turn sends it on. The message may be anything, a social announcement, a dance invitation or a tribal call to arms for war. That these messages are accurate has been proved time and again.

Always there has been an astonishing accuracy about native messages sent in this way, and the natural conclusion was that they used a code. This, indeed, was the general conclusion. But it is not so. The man who has discovered the secret, a well-known African explorer, tells the writer that the drum messages are tonic. That is they depend on tone. He has brought home to England the complete tone system.—Chicago American.

Saving Wild Life.

Lovers of woodland life will be heartened to learn that efforts for the conservation of the bison, or buffalo, as we more commonly say in America, have succeeded to the extent that there are 3,000 more of the animals now than two decades ago. The fact is of chief significance as showing a way of preventing the extinction of valuable or interesting species of wild life. If the states, with the co-operation of their citizens, will do half as much for the preservation of birds and game as the national government has done for the bison during these last 20 years, a stupid and shameful chapter of our history will be rewritten in happier terms.—Atlanta Journal.