

# THE LIGHT OF WESTERN STARS

## A Romance

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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 sets 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.**—Alfred, scion of a wealthy family, had been dismissed from his home because of his dissipation. Madeline sees that the West has redeemed him. She meets Stillwell, Alf's employer, typical western ranchman. Madeline learns Stewart has gone over the border.

**CHAPTER IV.**—Danny Mains, one of Stillwell's cowboys, has disappeared, with some of Stillwell's money. His friends link his name with the girl Bonita.

**CHAPTER V.**—Madeline gets a glimpse of life on a western ranch.

**CHAPTER VI.**—Stewart's horse comes to the ranch with a note on the saddle asking Madeline to accept the beautiful animal. With her brother's consent she does so, naming him "Majesty," her own pet nickname. Madeline, independently rich, arranges to buy Stillwell's ranch and that of Don Carlos, a Mexican neighbor.

**CHAPTER VII.**—Madeline feels she has found her right place, under the light of the western stars.

**CHAPTER VIII.**—Learning Stewart had been hurt in a brawl at Chihuahua, and knowing her brother's fondness for him, Madeline visits him and persuades him to come to the ranch as the boss of her cowboys.

### CHAPTER IX

#### The New Foreman.

Toward the end of the week Stillwell informed Madeline that Stewart had arrived at the ranch and had taken up quarters with Nels.

"Gene's sick. He looks bad," said the old cattleman. "He's so weak an' shaky he can't lift a cup. Nels says that Gene has had some bad spells. A little liquor would straighten him up now. But Nels can't force him to drink a drop, an' he's had to sneak some liquor in his coffee. Gene's losin' his mind, or he's got somethin' powerful strange on it."

Stewart was really ill. It became necessary to send for a physician. Then Stewart began slowly to mend and presently was able to get up and about. Stillwell said the cowboy lacked interest and seemed to be a broken man. This statement, however, the old cattleman modified as Stewart continued to improve. Then presently it was a good augury of Stewart's progress that the cowboys once more took up the teasing relation which had been characteristic of them before his illness. A cowboy was indeed out of sorts when he could not vent his peculiar humor on somebody or something. Stewart had evidently become a broad target for their badinage.

"Wal, the boys are sure after Gene," said Stillwell, with his huge smile. "Joshin' him all the time about how he sits around an' hangs around an' loafers around jest to get a glimpse of you, Miss Majesty. Sure all the boys hev a pretty bad case over their pretty boss, but none of them is a marker to Gene. He's got it so bad, Miss Majesty, that he actoo'dn't know they are joshin' him. It's the amazin'est strange thing I ever seen."

Madeline smiled her amusement. It had been impossible for her to fail to observe Stewart's singular behavior. She never went out to take her customary walks and rides without seeing him somewhere in the distance. She was aware that he watched for her and avoided meeting her. When she sat on the porch during the afternoon or at sunset Stewart could always be described at some point near. He idled listlessly in the sun, lounged on the porch of his bunkhouse, sat whittling the top bar of the corral fence, and always it seemed to Madeline he was watching her. He was pale, haggard, drawn. His eyes held a shadow through which shone a soft, subdued light; and, once having observed this, Madeline fancied it was like the light in Majesty's eyes, in the dumb, worshipping eyes of her favorite stag-hound. She told Stewart that she hoped he would soon be in the saddle again, and passed on her way.

That Stewart loved her Madeline could not help but see. When she discovered this she felt a little surprise and annoyance. Then she interrogated herself, and concluded that it was not that Stewart was so different from his comrades, but that circumstances made him stand out from them. She recalled her meeting with him that night when he had tried to force her to marry him. This was unforgettable in itself. She recalled subsequent mention of him, and found it had been peculiarly memorable. The man and his actions seemed to hinge on events. Lastly, the fact standing clear of all others

in its relation to her interest was that he had almost been ruined, almost lost, and she had saved him. That alone was sufficient to explain why she thought of him differently. She had befriended, uplifted the other cowboys; she had saved Stewart's life. To be sure, he had been a ruffian, but a woman could not save the life of even a ruffian without remembering it with gladness. Madeline at length decided her interest in Stewart was natural, and that her deeper feeling was pity. Perhaps the interest had been forced from her; however, she gave the pity as she gave everything.

Stewart had taken up his duties as foreman, and his activities were ceaseless. He was absent most of the time, ranging down toward the Mexican line. When he returned Stillwell sent for him.

This was late in the afternoon of a day in the middle of April. Alfred and Florence were with Madeline on the porch.

Madeline saw the man she remembered, but with a singularly different aspect. His skin was brown; his eyes were piercing and dark and steady; he carried himself erect; he seemed preoccupied, and there was not a trace of embarrassment in his manner.

"Wal, Gene, I'm sure glad to see you," Stillwell was saying. "Where do you hail from?"

"Guadalupe canyon," replied the cowboy.

Stillwell whistled.

"Way down there! You don't mean you follered them hoss tracks that far?"

"All the way from Don Carlos' rancho across the Mexican line. I took Nick Steele with me. Nick is the best tracker in the outfit. This trail we were on led along the foothill valleys. First we thought whoever made it was hunting for water. But they passed two ranches without watering. At Seaton's wash they dug for water. Here they met a pack-train of burros that came down the mountain trail. The burros were heavily loaded. Horse and burro tracks struck south from Seaton's to the old California emigrant road. We followed the trail through Guadalupe canyon and across the border. On the way back we stopped at Slaughter's ranch, where the United States cavalry are camping. There we met foresters from the Peloncillo forest reserve. If these fellows knew anything they kept it to themselves. So we hit the trail home."

"Wal, I reckon you know enough?" inquired Stillwell, slowly. "Miss Ham-



"You Don't Mean You Follered Them Hoss Tracks That Far?"

mond can't be kept in the dark much longer. Make your report to her."

The cowboy shifted his dark gaze to Madeline. "We're losing a few cattle on the open range. Night-drives by vaqueros. Some of these cattle are driven across the valley, others up into the foothills. So far as I can find out no cattle are being driven south. So this raiding is a blind to fool the cowboys. Don Carlos is a Mexican rebel. He located his rancho here a few years ago and pretended to raise cattle. All that time he has been smuggling arms and ammunition across the border. He was for Madero against Diaz. Now he is against Madero because he and all the rebels think Madero failed to keep his promises. There will be another revolution. And all the arms go from the States across the border. Those burros I told about were packed with 'contraband goods.'"

"What is my—my duty? What has it to do with me?" inquired Madeline, somewhat perturbed.

"Wal, Miss Majesty, I reckon it hasn't nothing to do with you," put in Stillwell. "That's my bizness an' Stewart's. But I jest wanted you to know. There might be some trouble follerin' my orders."

"Your orders?"

"I want to send Stewart over to fire Don Carlos an' his vaqueros off the range. They've got to go. Don Carlos is breakin' the law of the United States, an' doin' it on our property an' with our hosses. Hev I your permission, Miss Hammond?"

"Why, assuredly you have! Stillwell, you know what to do. Alfred, what do you think best?"

"I'll make trouble, Majesty, but it's got to be done," replied Alfred. "Here you have a crowd of eastern friends due next month. We want the range to ourselves then. But, Stillwell, if you drive those vaqueros off, won't they hang around in the foothills? I declare they are a bad lot."

"He'll have to be forced off," replied Stewart, quietly. "The Don's pretty slick, but his vaqueros are bad actors. It's just this way: Don Carlos has vaqueros coming and going all the time. They're guerrilla bands, that's all. And they're getting uglier. There have been several shooting-scrapes lately. It's only a matter of time till something stirs up the boys here. Stillwell, you know Nels and Monty and Nick."

"Sure I know 'em, an' you're not mentionin' one more particular cowboy in my outfit," said Stillwell, with a dry chuckle and a glance at Stewart.

Madeline divined the covert meaning. "Stewart, I see you carry a gun," she said, pointing to a black handle protruding from a sheath swinging low along his leather chaps.

"Yes, ma'am."

"Why do you carry it?" she asked.

"Well," he said, "it's not a pretty gun—and it's heavy."

She caught the inference. The gun was not an ornament. His keen, steady, dark gaze caused her vague alarm. What had once seemed cool and audacious about this cowboy was now cold and powerful and mystical. Both her instinct and her intelligence realized the steel fiber of the man's nature. As she was his employer, she had the right to demand that he should not do what was so chillingly manifest that he might do. But Madeline could not demand. She felt curiously young and weak, and the five months of western life were as if they had never been. She now had to do with a question involving human life. And the blue she placed upon human life and its spiritual significance was a matter far from her cowboy's thoughts. A strange idea flashed up. Did she place too much value upon all human life?

She checked that, wondering, almost horrified at herself. And then her intuition told her that she possessed a far stronger power to move these primitive men than any woman's stern rule or order.

"Stewart, I do not fully understand what you hint that Nels and his comrades might do. Please be frank with me. Do you mean Nels would shoot upon little provocation?"

"Miss Hammond, as far as Nels is concerned, shooting is now just a matter of his meeting Don Carlos' vaqueros. As for Nick Steele and Monty, they're just bad men, and looking for trouble."

"How about yourself, Stewart? Stillwell's remark was not lost upon me," said Madeline, prompted by curiosity. "Stewart, I have come to love my ranch, and I care a great deal for my cowboys. It would be dreadful if they were to kill anybody, or especially if one of them should be killed."

"Miss Hammond, you've changed things considerable out here, but you can't change these men. All that's needed to start them is a little trouble. And this Mexican revolution is bound to make rough times along some of the wilder passes across the border. We're in line, that's all. And the boys are getting stirred up."

"Very well, then, I must accept the inevitable. I am facing a rough time. And some of my cowboys cannot be checked much longer. But human life is not for any man to sacrifice unless in self-defense or in protecting those dependent upon him. What Stillwell and you hinted makes me afraid of Nels and Nick Steele and Monty. Cannot they be controlled? I want to feel that they will not go gunning for Don Carlos' men. I want to avoid all violence. And yet when my guests come I want to feel that they will be safe from danger or fright or even annoyance. May I not rely wholly upon you, Stewart?"

"I hope so, Miss Hammond," replied Stewart. It was an instant response, but none the less fraught with consciousness of responsibility. He waited a moment, and then, as neither Stillwell nor Madeline offered further speech, he bowed and turned down the path, his long spurs clinking in the gravel.

"Wal, wal," exclaimed Stillwell, "that's no little job you give him, Miss Majesty."

"It was a woman's cunning, Stillwell," said Alfred. "Majesty, whatever actuated you, it was a stroke of diplomacy. Stewart has got good stuff in him. He was down and out. Well, he's made a game fight, and it looks as if he'd win. Trusting him, giving him responsibility, relying upon him, was the surest way to strengthen his hold upon himself. But, Majesty, remember, he's a composite of tiger breed and forked lightning, and don't imagine he has falled you if he gets into a fight."

### CHAPTER X

#### Don Carlos' Vaqueros.

Early the following morning Stewart, with a company of cowboys, departed for Don Carlos' rancho. As the day wore on without any report from him, Stillwell appeared to grow more at ease; and at nightfall he told Madeline that he guessed there was now no reason for concern.

"Wal, though it's sure amaz-

ing," he continued, "I've been worryin' some about how we was goin' to fire Don Carlos. But Gene has a way of doin' things."

Next day Stillwell and Alfred decided to ride over to Don Carlos' place, taking Madeline and Florence with them, and upon the return to stop at Alfred's ranch. They started in the cool, gray dawn, and after three hours' riding, as the sun began to get bright, they entered a mesquite grove, surrounding corrals and barns, and a number of low, squat buildings and a huge, rambling structure all built of



Then a Crowd of Men Tramped Pell Mell Out Upon the Porch.

adobe and mostly crumbling to ruin. Only one green spot relieved the bald red of grounds and walls; and this evidently was made by the spring which had given both value and fame to Don Carlos' range. The approach to the house was through a wide courtyard, bare, stony, hard packed, with hitching-rails and watering-troughs in front of a long porch. Several sties, tired horses stood with drooping heads and ridles down, their wet flanks attesting to travel just ended.

"Wal, dog-gone it, Al, if there ain't Pat Hawe's hoss I'll eat it," exclaimed Stillwell.

"What's Pat want here, anyhow?" growled Alfred.

No one was in sight; but Madeline heard loud voices coming from the house. Stillwell dismounted at the porch and stalked in at the door. Alfred leaped off his horse, helped Florence and Madeline down, and bidding them rest and wait on the porch, he followed Stillwell.

From the corridor came the rattling of spurs, tramping of boots, and loud voices. Madeline detected Alfred's quick notes when he was annoyed: "We'll rustle back home, then," he said. The answer came, "No!" Madeline recognized Stewart's voice, and she quickly straightened up. "I won't have them in here," went on Alfred.

"Outdoors or in, they've got to be with us!" replied Stewart, sharply. "Listen, Al," came the boom of Stillwell's big voice, "now that we've batted in over hyper with the girls, you let Stewart run things."

Then a crowd of men tramped pell-mell out upon the porch. Stewart, dark-browed and somber, was in the lead. Nels hung close to him, and Madeline's quick glance saw that Nels had undergone indescribable change. The grinning, brilliant-eyed Don Carlos came jostling out beside a giant, sharp-featured man wearing a silver shield. This, no doubt, was Pat Hawe. In the background behind Stillwell and Alfred stood Nick Steele, head and shoulders over a number of vaqueros and cowboys.

"Miss Hammond, I'm sorry you came," said Stewart, bluntly. "We're in a middle here. I've insisted that you and Flo be kept close to us. I'll explain later. If you can't stop your ears I beg you to overlook rough talk."

With that he turned to the men behind him: "Nick take Boley, go back to Monty and the boys. Fetch out that stuff. All of it. Rustle, now!"

Stillwell and Alfred disengaged themselves from the crowd to take up positions in front of Madeline and Florence. Pat Hawe leaned against a post and insolently ogled Madeline and then Florence. Don Carlos pressed forward. His swarthy face showed dark lines, like cords, under the surface. His little eyes were exceedingly prominent and glittering. To Madeline his face seemed to be a bold, handsome mask through which his eyes piercingly betrayed the evil nature of the man.

He bowed low with elaborate and sinuous grace. His smile revealed brilliant teeth, enhanced the brilliance of his eyes. He slowly spread deprecatory hands.

"Senoritas, I beg a thousand pardons," he said. How strange it was for Madeline to hear English spoken in a soft, winningly sweet accent! "The gracious hospitality of Don Carlos has passed with his house."

Stewart stepped forward and, thrusting Don Carlos aside, he called, "Make way, there!"

The crowd fell back to the tramp of heavy boots. Cowboys appeared staggering out of the corridor with long boxes. These they placed side by side upon the floor of the porch.

"Now, Hawe, we'll proceed with our business," said Stewart. "You see these boxes, don't you?"

"I reckon I see a good many things round here," replied Hawe, meaningly.

"Well, do you intend to open these boxes upon my say-so?"

"No!" retorted Hawe. "It's not my

place to meddle with property as come by express an' all accounted fer regular."

"I'll open them. Here, one of you boys, knock the tops off these boxes," ordered Stewart. "No, not you, Monty. You use your eyes. Let Boley handle the ax. Rustle, now!"

Monty Price had jumped out of the crowd into the middle of the porch. The manner in which he gave way to Boley and faced the vaqueros was not significant of friendliness or trust. "Stewart, you're dead wrong to bust open them boxes. That's agin' the law," protested Hawe, trying to interfere.

Stewart pushed him back. Then Don Carlos, who had been stunned by the appearance of the boxes, suddenly became active in speech and person. Stewart thrust him back also. The Mexican's excitement increased. He wildly gesticulated; he exclaimed shrilly in Spanish. When, however, the lids were wrenched open and an inside packing torn away he grew rigid and silent. Madeline raised herself behind Stillwell to see that the boxes were full of rifles and ammunition.

"There, Hawe! What did I tell you?" demanded Stewart. "I came over here to take charge of this ranch. I found these boxes hidden in an unused room. I suspected what they were. Contraband goods!"

"Wal, supposin' they are? I don't see any call fer sech all-fired fuss as you're makin'." Stewart, I kalkilate you're some stuck on your new job an' want to make a big show before—"

"Hawe, stop slinging that kind of talk," interrupted Stewart. "You got too free with your mouth once before! Now here, I'm supposed to be consulting an officer of the law. Will you take charge of these contraband goods?"

"Say, you're holdin' on high an' mighty," replied Hawe, in astonishment that was plainly pretended. "What're you drivin' at?"

Stewart muttered an imprecation. He took several swift strides across the porch; he held out his hands to Stillwell as if to indicate the hopelessness of intelligent and reasonable arbitration; he looked at Madeline with a glance eloquent of his regret that he could not handle the situation to please her. Then as he wheeled he came face to face with Nels, who had slipped forward out of the crowd.

Madeline gathered serious import from the steel-blue meaning flash of eyes whereby Nels communicated something to Stewart. Whatever that

something was, it dispelled Stewart's impatience. A slight movement of his hand brought Monty Price forward with a jump. In these sudden jumps of Monty's there was a suggestion of restrained ferocity. Then Nels and Monty lined up behind Stewart. It was a deliberate action, even to Madeline, unmistakably formidable. Pat Hawe's face took on an ugly look; his eyes had a reddish gleam. Don Carlos added a pale face and extreme nervousness to his former expressions of agitation. The cowboys edged away from the vaqueros and the bronzed, bearded horsemen who were evidently Hawe's assistants.

"I'm driving at this," spoke up Stewart, presently; and now he was slow and caustic. "Here's contraband of war! Hawe, do you get that? Arms and ammunition for the rebels across the border! I charge you as an officer to confiscate these goods and to arrest the smuggler—Don Carlos."

These words of Stewart's precipitated a riot among Don Carlos and his followers, and they surged wildly around the sheriff. The crowd around Don Carlos grew louder and denser with the addition of armed vaqueros and bare-footed stable-boys and dusty-booted herdsmen and blancketed Mexicans, the last of whom suddenly slipped from doors and windows and round corners. Shriek cries, evidently from Don Carlos, somewhat quieted the commotion. Then Don Carlos could be heard addressing Sheriff Hawe in an exhortation of mingled English and Spanish. He denied, he avowed, he proclaimed, and all in rapid, passionate utterance.

It seemed to Madeline that Don Carlos denied knowledge of the boxes of contraband goods, then knowledge of their real contents, then knowledge of their destination, and, finally, everything except that they were there in sight, damning witnesses to somebody's complicity in the breaking of neutrality laws. Passionate as had been his denial of all this, it was as nothing compared to his denunciation of Stewart.

"Senor Stewart, he keel my vaquero!" shouted Don Carlos, as, sweating and spent, he concluded his arraignment of the cowboy. "Him you must arrest! Senor Stewart a bad man! He keel my vaquero!"

"Do you hear that?" yelled Hawe. "The Don's got you figured fer thet little job at El Cajon last fall."

The clamor burst into a roar. Hawe began shaking his finger in Stewart's face and hoarsely shouting. Then a lithe young vaquero, swift as an Indian, glided under Hawe's uplifted arm. Whatever the action he intended, he was too late for its execution. Stewart lunged out, struck the vaquero, and knocked him off the porch. As he fell a dagger glittered in the sunlight and rolled clinking over the stones. The man went down hard and did not move. With the same abrupt violence, and a manner of contempt, Stewart threw Hawe off the porch, then Don Carlos, who, being less supple, fell heavily. Then the mob backed before Stewart's rush until all were down in the courtyard.

The shuffling of feet ceased, the clanking of spurs, and the shouting. Nels and Monty, now re-enforced by Nick Steele, were as shadows of Stewart, so closely did they follow him.



"Senor Stewart, He Keel My Vaquero!" Shouted Don Carlos.

Stewart waved them back and stepped down into the yard. He was absolutely fearless; but what struck Madeline so keenly was his magnificent disdain. Manifestly, he knew the nature of the men with whom he was dealing. From the look of him it was natural for Madeline to expect them to give way before him, which they did, even Hawe and his attendants sullenly retreating.

Don Carlos got up to confront Stewart. The prostrate vaquero stirred and moaned, but did not rise.

"You needn't jibber Spanish to me," said Stewart. "You can talk American, and you can understand American. If you start a rough-house here you and your Greasers will be cleaned up. You've got to leave this ranch. You can have the stock, the packs and traps in the second corral. There's grub, too. Saddle up and hit the trail. Don Carlos, I'm dealing more than square with you. You're lying about these boxes of guns and cartridges. You're breaking the laws of my country, and you're doing it on property in my charge. If I let smuggling go on here I'd be implicated myself. Now you get off the range. If you don't I'll have the United States cavalry here in six hours, and you can gamble they'll get what my cowboys leave of you."

Don Carlos was either a capital actor and gratefully relieved at Stewart's leniency or else he was thoroughly cowed by references to the troops.

"Si, Senor! Gracias, Senor!" he exclaimed; and then, turning away, he called to his men. They hurried after him, while the fallen vaquero got to his feet with Stewart's help and staggered across the courtyard. In a moment they were gone, leaving Hawe and his several comrades behind.

Hawe was spitefully ejecting a wad of tobacco from his mouth and swearing in an undertone about "white-livered Greasers." He cocked his red eye speculatively at Stewart.

"Wal, I reckon as you're so hell-bent on doin' it up brown that you'll try to fire me off'n the range, too?"

"If I ever do, Pat, you'll need to be carried off," replied Stewart. "Just now I'm politely inviting you and your deputy sheriffs to leave."

"We'll go; but we're comin' back one of these days, an' when we do we'll put you in irons."

"Hawe, if you've got it in that bad for me, come over here in the corral and let's fight it out. You've got it in for me, man to man. Speak up now and prove you're not the cowardly skunk I've always thought you. I've called your hand."

Muttering, cursing, pallid of face, Hawe climbed astride his horse. His comrades followed suit. Certain it appeared that the sheriff was contending with more than fear and wrath. Savagely he spurred his horse, and as it snorted and leaped he turned in his saddle, shaking his fist. His comrades led the way, with their horses clattering into a canter. They disappeared through the gate.

When, later in the day, Madeline and Florence, accompanied by Alfred and Stillwell, left Don Carlos' ranch it was not any too soon for Madeline. The inside of the Mexican's home was more unimpressive and uncomfortable than the outside. The halls were dark, the rooms huge, empty, and musty; and there was an air of silence and secrecy and mystery about them most fitting to the character Florence had bestowed upon the place.

On the other hand, Alfred's ranch-house, where the party halted to spend the night, was picturesquely located, small and cozy, camplike in the arrangement, and altogether agreeable to Madeline.

The day's long ride and the exciting events had wearied her. She rested while Florence and the two men got supper. During the meal it was not lost upon Madeline that Florence appeared unusually quiet and thoughtful. Madeline wondered a little at the cause. She remembered that Stewart had wanted to come with them, or detail a few cowboys to accompany them, but Alfred had laughed at the idea and would have none of it.

After supper Alfred monopolized the conversation by describing what he wanted to do to improve his home before he and Florence were married.

Then at an early hour they all retired.

Madeline's deep slumbers were disturbed by a pounding upon the wall, and then by Florence's crying out in answer to a call.

"Get up! Throw some clothes on and come out!"

(To be continued.)