

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 marry him. Madeline, in a fit of rage, kills the priest. The cowboy, a Mexican, is killed. The cowboy's name is "Bonita," take his horse and escape. Then conducts Madeline to Florence Kinsley, 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, Al'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, arranged 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 Chiricahua, 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.—Jim Nels, Nick Steele, and "Monty" Price are Madeline's chief riders. They have a feud with Don Carlos vaqueros, who are really guerrillas. Madeline pledges Stewart to see that peace is kept.

CHAPTER X.—Madeline and Florence, returning home from Alfred's ranch, run into an ambush of vaqueros. Florence, knowing the Mexicans are after Madeline, decoys them away, and Madeline gets home safely but alone.

CHAPTER XI.—A raiding guerrilla band carries off Madeline. Stewart follows alone. The leader is a man with whom Stewart had served in Mexico. He releases the girl, arranging for ransom. Returning home with Stewart, Madeline finds herself strangely attracted.

CHAPTER XII.—Madeline's sister Helen, with a party of eastern friends, arrives at the ranch, craving excitement.

CHAPTER XIII.—For the guests' entertainment a game of golf is arranged. Stewart interrupts the game, insisting the whole party return at once to the house. He tells Madeline her guests are not safe while the Mexican revolution is going on, and urges them to go up to the mountains out of danger. They decide to do so.

CHAPTER XIV.—The guerrillas leave during the night, without making trouble. Madeline and her guests, with the cowboys, go up to the mountains.

CHAPTER XV.—Edith Wayne pleads with Madeline to return to the East, but she refuses.

CHAPTER XVI.—Wandering in the mountains, Madeline sees Stewart with the girl Bonita, and comes to the worst conclusions. At camp Stewart offers to explain. Madeline will not listen. Stewart, in a rage, starts to leave camp. Nels brings news that Don Carlos and his followers are coming.

CHAPTER XVII.—The women are concealed, and the approach of the guerrillas awaited. They come, blustering, but Stewart's determined attitude cowers them, and they leave hastily. The party at once begins its return to the ranch.

CHAPTER XVIII.—Alfred Hammond, who has been in California, writes Madeline announcing his immediate return and that he will marry Florence at once. He arrives, the wedding takes place, but the festivities are interrupted by the arrival of Pat Howe, sheriff of El Cajon, who declares his intention of arresting Stewart for the murder of a Mexican on the night when Stewart first met Madeline. To save Stewart, Madeline tells the whole story. Howe insults her, and Stewart, who is unarmed, is prevented by force from attacking him. "Monty" Price announces Howe and his deputy, and in a pistol duel kills them both, but loses his own life.

Madeline's dignity and self-possession had been disturbed by Stewart's impertinence. She broke into swift, disconnected speech:

"He came into the station—a few minutes after I got there. I asked—to be shown to a hotel. He said there wasn't any that would accommodate married women. He grasped my hand—looked for a wedding-ring. Then I saw he was—he was intoxicated. He told me he would go for a hotel porter. But he came back with a padre—Padre Marcos. The poor priest was—terribly frightened. So was I. Stewart had turned into a devil. He fired his gun at the padre's feet. He pushed me onto a bench. Again he shot—right before my face. I—I nearly fainted. But I heard him cursing the padre—heard the padre praying or chanting—I didn't know what. Stewart tried to make me say things in Spanish. All at once he asked my name. I told him. He jerked at my veil. I took it off. Then he threw his gun down—pushed the padre out of the door. That was just before the vaqueros approached with Bonita. Padre Marcos must have seen them—must have heard them. After that Stewart grew quickly sober. He told me he had been drinking at a wedding—I remember, it was Ed Linton's wedding. Then he explained—the boys were always gambling—he wagered he would marry the

first girl who arrived at El Cajon. I happened to be the first one. He tried to force me to marry him. The rest—relating to the assault on the vaquero—I have already told you."

Madeline ended, out of breath and panting, with her hands pressed upon her heaving bosom.

How rolled his red eyes and threw back his head.

"Ho, ho, ho! Ho, ho, ho! Say, Sneed, you didn't miss any of it, did you? Haw, haw! Best I ever heard in all my born days. Ho, ho!"

Then he ceased laughing, and with glinting gaze upon Madeline, insolent and vicious and savage, he began to drawl:

"Wal now, my lady, I reckon a story, if it tallies with Bonita's an' Padre Marcos, will clear Gene Stewart in the eyes of the court." Here he grew slower, more biting, sharper and harder of face. "But you needn't expect Pat Howe or the court to swallow that part of your story—about being detained unwilling!"

Madeline had not time to grasp the sense of his last words. Stewart had convulsively sprung upward, white as chalk. As he leaped at Howe Stillwell interposed his huge bulk and wrapped his arms around Stewart. There was



"He Wagered He Would Marry the First Girl Who Arrived at El Cajon."

a brief, whirling, wrestling struggle. Stewart appeared to be besting the old cattleman.

"Help, boys, help!" yelled Stillwell. "I can't hold him. Hurry, or there's going to be blood spilled!"

Nick Steele and several cowboys leaped to Stillwell's assistance.

"Gene! Why, Gene!" panted the old cattleman. "Sure you're loosed—to act this way. Cool down! Cool down! Why, boy, it's all right. Jest stand still—give us a chance to talk to you. It's only ole Bill, you know—your ole pal who's tried to be a daddy to you. He's only wanted you to hev sense—to be cool—to wait."

"Let me go! Let me go!" cried Stewart; and the poignancy of that cry pierced Madeline's heart. "Let me go, Bill, if you're my friend. I saved your life once—over in the desert. You swore you'd never forget. Boys, make him let me go! Oh, I don't care what Howe's said or done to me! It was that about her! Are you all a lot of Greasers? How can you stand it? D—n you for a lot of cowards! There's a limit, I tell you." Then his voice broke, fell to a whisper. "Bill, dear ole Bill, let me go. I'll kill him! You know I'll kill him!"

"Gene, I know you'd kill him if you hed an even break," replied Stillwell, soothingly. "But, Gene, why, you ain't even packin' a gun! An' there's Pat lookin' nasty, with his hand nervous-like. He seen you hed no gun. He'd jump at the chance to plug you now, an' then holler about opposition to the law. Cool down, son; it'll all come right."

Suddenly Madeline was transfixed by a terrible sound. Her startled glance shifted from the anxious group round Stewart to see that Monty Price had leaped down from the porch. He crouched down with his hands below his hips, where the big guns swung. From his distorted lips issued that sound which was combined roar and bellow and Indian war-whoop, and, more than all, a horrible warning cry. He was quivering, vibrating. His eyes, black and hot, were fastened with most piercing intentness upon Howe and Sneed.

"Git back, Bill, git back!" he roared. "Git 'em back!"

With one lunge Stillwell shoved Stewart and Nick and the other cowboys upon the porch. Then he crowded Madeline and Alfred and Florence to the wall, tried to force them farther. His motions were rapid and stern. But falling to get them through door and windows, he planted his wide person

between the women and danger. Madeline grasped his arm, held on, and peered fearfully from behind his broad shoulder.

"You, Howe! You, Sneed!" called Monty, in that same wild voice. "Don't you move a finger or an eyelash!"

Madeline's faculties nerved to keen, thrilling divination. She grasped the relation between Monty's terrible cry and the strange hunched posture he had assumed.

"Nels, git in this!" yelled Monty; and all the time he never shifted his intent gaze as much as a hair's-breadth from Howe and his deputy. "Nels, chase away them two fellers hangin' back here. Chase 'em, quick!"

These men, the two deputies who had remained in the background with the pack-horses, did not wait for Nels. They spurred their mounts, wheeled, and galloped away.

"Now, Nels, cut the gurl loose," ordered Monty.

Nels ran forward, jerked the halter out of Sneed's hand, and pulled Bonita's horse in close to the porch. As he slit the rope which bound her she fell into his arms.

"Have, git down!" went on Monty. "Face front an' stiff!"

The sheriff swung his leg, and, never moving his hands, with his face now a deathly, sickening white, he slid to the ground.

"Line up there beside your guerrilla pard. There! You two make a d—n fine pictor, a d—n a fine team of plizened coyote an' a cross between a wiu maie an' a Greaser. Now listen!"

Monty made a long pause, in which his breathing was plainly audible.

Madeline's eyes were riveted upon Monty. Her mind, swift as lightning, had gathered the subtleties in action and word succeeding his domination of the men. Violence, terrible violence, the thing she had felt, the thing she had feared, the thing she had sought to eliminate from among her cowboys, was, after many months, about to be enacted before her eyes. It had come at last. She had softened Stillwell, she had influenced Nels, she had changed Stewart; but this little black-faced, terrible Monty Price now rose, as it were, out of his past wild years, and no power on earth or in heaven could stay his hand. With eyes slowly hazing red, she watched him; she listened with thrumming ears; she waited, slowly sagging against Stillwell.

"Have, if you an' your dirty pard hev loved the sound of human voice, then listen an' listen hard," said Monty. "Fer I've been goin' contrary to my ole style jest to hev a talk with you. You all best get away on your nerve, didn't you? 'Cause why? You roll in here like a mad steer an' flash yer badge an' talk mean, then almost bluff away with it. You heerd all about Miss Hammond's cowboy outfit stoppin' drinkin' an' cussin' an' packin' guns. They've took on religion an' decent livin', an' sure they'll be easy to hobbie an' drive to jail. Howe, listen. There was a good an' noble an' be-otiful woman come out of the East somewheres, an' she brought a lot of sunshine an' happiness an' new ideas into the tough lives of cowboys. I reckon it's beyond you to know what she come to mean to them. Wal, I'll tell you. They-all went clean out of their heads. They-all got soft an' easy an' sweet-tempered. They got so they couldn't kill a coyote, a crippled calf in a mud-hole. Even me—an ole, worn-out, hobbie-legged, burned-up cowman like me! Do you git that? An' you, Mister Howe, you come along, not satisfied with roppin' an' beatin', an' Gaw knows what else, of that friendless little Bonita; you come along an' face the lady we fellers honor an' love an' reverence, an' you—you—H—'s fire!"

With whistling breath, foaming at the mouth, Monty Price crouched lower, hands at his hips, and he edged inch by inch farther out from the porch, closer to Howe and Sneed. Madeline saw them only in the blurred fringe of her sight. They resembled specters. She heard the shrill whistle of a horse and recognized Majesty calling her from the corral.

"That's all!" roared Monty, in a voice now strangling. Lower and lower he bent, a terrible figure of ferocity.



Lower and Lower He Bent, a Terrible Figure of Ferocity.

"Now, both you armed officers of the law, come on! Flash your guns! Throw 'em, an' be quick! Monty Price is done! There'll be daylight through you both before you fan a hammer! But I'm givin' you a chanst to sting me. You holler law, an' my way is the ole law."

His breath came quicker, his voice grew hoarser, and he crouched lower. All his body except his rigid arms quivered with a wonderful muscular convulsion.

"Dogs! Skunks! Buzzards! Flash them guns, er I'll flash mine! Aha!"

To Madeline it seemed the three stiff, crouching men leaped into instant and united action. She saw streaks of fire—streaks of smoke. Then a crashing volley deafened her. It ceased as quickly. Smoke veiled the scene. Slowly it drifted away to disclose three fallen men, one of whom, Monty, leaned on his left hand, a smoking gun in his right. He watched for a movement from the other two. It did not come. Then, with a terrible smile, he slid back and stretched out.

CHAPTER XIX

Unbridled.

In waking and sleeping hours, Madeline Hammond could not release herself from the thralling memory of that tragedy. She was haunted by Monty Price's terrible smile. Only in action of some kind could she escape; and to that end she worked, she walked and rode. She even overcame a strong feeling, which she feared was unreasonable disgust, for the Mexican girl Bonita, who lay ill at the ranch, bruised and feverish, in need of skillful nursing.

One afternoon she rode down to the alfalfa fields, round them, and back up to the spillway of the lower lake, where a group of mesquite-trees, owing to the water that seeped through the sand to their roots, had taken on bloom and beauty of renewed life. Under these trees there was shade enough to make a pleasant place to linger. Madeline dismounted, desiring to rest a little.

Her horse, Majesty, tossed his head and flung his mane and switched his tail at the flies. He would rather have been cutting the wind down the valley slope. Madeline sat with her back against a tree, and took off her sombrero. Suddenly Majesty picked up his long ears and snorted. Then Madeline heard a slow pad of hoofs. A horse was approaching from the direction of the lake. Madeline had learned to be wary, and, mounting Majesty, she turned him toward the open. A moment later she felt glad of her caution, for, looking back between the trees, she saw Stewart leading a horse into the grove. She would as lief have met a guerrilla as this cowboy.

Majesty had broken into a trot when a shrill whistle rent the air. The horse leaped and, wheeling so swiftly that he nearly unseated Madeline, he charged back straight for the mesquites. Madeline spoke to him, cried angrily at him, pulled with all her strength upon the bridle, but was helplessly unable to stop him. He whistled a piercing blast. Madeline realized then that Stewart, his old master, had called him and that nothing could turn him. She gave up trying, and the horse thumped into an aisle between the trees and, stopping before Stewart, whinnied eagerly.

"I want to talk to you," said Stewart.

Madeline started, turned to him, and now she saw the earlier Stewart, the man who reminded her of their first meeting at El Cajon, of that memorable meeting at Chiricahua.

"I want to ask you something," he went on. "I've been wanting to know something. That's why I've hung on here. But now I'm going over—the border. And I want to know. Why did you refuse to listen to me?"

At his last words that hot shame, tenfold more stifling than when it had before humiliated Madeline, rushed over her, sending the scarlet in a wave to her temples. Biting her lips to hold back speech, she jerked on Majesty's bridle, struck him with her whip, spurred him. Stewart's iron arm held the horse. Then Madeline, in a flash of passion, struck at Stewart's face, missed it, struck again, and hit. With one pull, almost drawing her from the saddle, he tore the whip from her hands. It was not that action on his part, or the sudden strong masterfulness of his look, so much as the livid mark on his face where the whip had lashed that quieted, if it did not check, her fury.

"That's nothing," he said, with something of his old audacity. "That's nothing to how you'd hurt me."

Madeline battled with herself for control. This man would not be denied. About him now there was only the ghost of that finer, gentler man she had helped to bring into being. The piercing dark eyes he bent upon her burned her, went through her as if he were looking into her soul. Then Madeline's quick sight caught a fleeting doubt, a wistfulness, a surprised and saddened certainty in his eyes, saw it shade and pass away. Her woman's intuition, as keen as her sight, told her Stewart in that moment had sustained a shock of bitter, final truth.

For the third time he repeated his question to her. Madeline did not answer; she could not speak.

"You don't know I love you, do you?" he continued, passionately. "That ever since you stood before me in that hole at Chiricahua I've loved you? You can't see I've been another man, loving you, working for you, livin' for you? You won't believe I've turned my back on the old wild life, that I've been decent and honorable and happy and useful—your kind of a cowboy? You couldn't tell, though I loved you, that I never wanted you to know it, that I never dared to think of you except as my angel, my holy Virgin? What do you know of a man's heart and soul? How could you tell of the love, the salvation of

a man who's lived his life in the silence and loneliness? Who could teach you the actual truth—that a wild cowboy, faithful to mother and sister, except in memory, riding a hard, drunken trail straight to hell, had looked to the face, the eyes of a beautiful woman infinitely beyond him, above him, and had so loved her that he was saved—that he became faithful again—that he saw her face in every flower and her eyes in the blue heaven?"

Madeline was mute. She heard her heart thundering in her ears.

Stewart leaped at her. His powerful hand closed on her arm. She trembled. His action presaged the old instinctive violence.

"No; but you think I kept Bonita up in the mountains, that I went secretly to meet her, that all the while I served you I was— Oh, I know what you think! I know now. I never knew till I made you look at me. Now, say it! Speak!"

White-hot, blinded, utterly in the fiery grasp of passion, powerless to stem the rush of a word both shameful and revealing and fatal, Madeline cried:

"Yes!"

He had wrenched that word from her, but he was not subtle enough, not versed in the mystery of woman's motive enough, to divine the deep significance of her reply.

For him the word had only literal meaning confirming the dishonor in which she held him. Dropping her arm, he shrank back, a strange action for the savage and crude man she judged him to be.

"But that day at Chiricahua you spoke of faith," he burst out. "You said the greatest thing in the world was faith in human nature. You said you had faith in me! You made me have faith in myself!"

His reproach, without bitterness or scorn, was a lash to her old egotistic belief in her fairness. She had preached a beautiful principle that she had failed to live up to.

"You think I am vile," he said. "You think that about Bonita! And all the time I've been . . . I could make you ashamed—I could tell you—"

His passionate utterance ceased with a snap of his teeth. His lips set in a thin, bitter line. The agitation of his face preceded a conclusive wrestling of his shoulders.

"No, no!" he panted. Was it his answer to some mighty temptation? Then, like a bent sapling released, he sprang erect. "But I'll be the man—the dog—you think me!"

He laid hold of her arm with rude, powerful clutch. One pull drew her sliding half out of the saddle into his arms. She fell with her breast against his, not wholly free of stirrups or horse, and there she hung, utterly powerless. Maddened, writhing, she tore to release herself. All she could accomplish was to twist herself, raise herself high enough to see his face. That almost paralyzed her. Did he mean to kill her? Then he wrapped his arms around her and crushed her tighter, close to him. She felt the pound of his heart; her own seemed to have frozen. Then he pressed his burning lips to hers. It was a long, terrible kiss. She felt him shake.

"Oh, Stewart! I—implore—you—let—me—go!" she whispered.

His white face loomed over hers. She closed her eyes. He rained kisses upon her face, but no more upon her mouth. On her closed eyes, her hair, her cheeks, her neck he pressed swift lips—lips that lost their fire and grew cold. Then he released her, and, lifting and righting her in the saddle, he still held her arm to keep her from falling.

For a moment Madeline sat on her horse with shut eyes. She dreaded the light.

"Now you can't say you've never been kissed," Stewart said. His voice



"Now You Can't Say You've Never Been Kissed," Stewart Said.

seemed a long way off. "But that was coming to you, so be game. Here!"

She felt something hard and cold and metallic thrust into her hand. He made her fingers close over it, hold it. The feel of the thing revived her. She opened her eyes. Stewart had given her his gun. He stood with his broad breast against her knee, and she looked up to see that old mocking smile on his face.

"Go ahead! Throw my gun on me! Be a thoroughbred!"

Madeline did not yet grasp his meaning.

"You can put me down in that quiet place on the hill—beside Monty Price."

Madeline dropped the gun with a shuddering cry of horror. The sense of his words, the memory of Monty, the certainty that she would kill Stewart if she held the gun an instant longer, tortured the self-accusing cry from her.

Stewart stooped to pick up the weapon.

"You might have saved me a h—l of a lot of trouble," he said, with another flash of the mocking smile. "You're beautiful and sweet and proud, but you're no thoroughbred! Majesty Hammond, adios!"

Stewart leaped for the saddle of his horse, and with the flying mount crashed through the mesquites to disappear.

CHAPTER XX

The Secret Told.

Late in the night Madeline fell asleep. In the morning she was pale and languid, but in a mental condition that promised composure.

It was considerably after her regular hour that Madeline repaired to her office. The door was open, and just outside, tipped back in a chair, sat Stillwell.

"Maw'nin', Miss Majesty," he said, as he rose to greet her with his usual courtesy. Madeline shrank inwardly, fearing his old lamentations about Stewart. Then she saw a dusty, ragged pony in the yard and a little burro drooping under a heavy pack. Both animals bore evidence of long, arduous travel.

"To whom do they belong?" asked Madeline.

"Them critters? Why, Danny Mains," replied Stillwell, with a cough that betrayed embarrassment.

"Is Danny Mains here?" she asked, in sudden curiosity.

The old cattleman nodded gloomily.

"Yep, he's hyar, all right. Sloped in from the hills an' he hollered to see Bonita. He's loosed, too, about that little black-eyed hussy. Why, he hardly said, 'Howdy, Bill,' before he began to ask wild an' eager questions. I took him in to see Bonita. He's been there more'n a half-hour now."

Rapid footsteps with an accompaniment of clinking spurs sounded in the hallway. Then a young man ran out upon the porch. He was a handsome, frank-faced boy. At sight of Madeline he slammed down his sombrero and, leaping at her, he possessed himself of her hands. His swift violence not only alarmed her, but painfully reminded her of something she wished to forget.

This cowboy bent his head and kissed her hands and wrung them, and when he straightened up he was crying.

"Miss Hammond, she's safe an' almost well, an' what I feared most ain't so, thank God," he cried. "Sure I'll never be able to pay you for all you've done for her. She's told me how she was dragged down here, how Gene tried to save her, how you spoke up for Gene an' her, too, how Monty at the last threw his guns. Poor Monty! We were good friends, Monty an' I. There's Nels an' Nick an' Gene, he's been some friend to me; but Monty Price was—he was grand. He never knew, any more than you or Bill, here, or the boys, what Bonita was to me."

Stillwell's kind and heavy hand fell upon the cowboy's shoulder.

"Danny, what's all this queer gab?" he asked. "An' you're talkin' some liberty with Miss Hammond, who never seen you before. I see you're not drinkin'. Come, ease up now an' talk sense."

The cowboy's fine, frank face broke into a smile. He dashed the tears from his eyes. Then he laughed. His laugh had a pleasant, boyish ring—a happy ring.

"Bill, old pal, stand bridle down a minute, will you?" Then he bowed to Madeline. "I beg your pardon, Miss Hammond, for seemin' rudeness. I'm Danny Mains. An' Bonita is my wife. I'm so crazy glad she's safe an' unharmed—so grateful to you that—why, sure it's a wonder I didn't kiss you outright."

"Bonita's your wife!" ejaculated Stillwell.

"Sure. We've been married for months," replied Danny, happily. "Gene Stewart did it. Good ole Gene. I guess maybe I haven't come to pay him up for all he's done for me! You see, I've been in love with Bonita for two years. An' Gene—you know, Bill, what a way Gene has with girls—he was—well, he was tryin' to get Bonita to have me."

(To be continued.)

Ancestors of the Necktie.

The necktie came into use as something with which to warm the neck in cold weather. The ruff was the forerunner of the bit of color that is knotted at a man's throat today.

After the ruff came neckcloths of Brussels lace, which were at one time worn so long that the ends were tucked in the waistcoat. Later a broad silk ribbon was worn and the grandfather of the cake eater wore a cravat which passed twice around the collar. The modern scarf made its appearance about forty years ago.

Softening Phonograph Tones.

Undesirable high tones, or "whistles," an annoyance commonly experienced by phonograph users, may be eliminated by the use of interference tubes. They consist of U-shaped metal appliances, designed to be incorporated in a main tube that is fitted between the reproducer and tone-arm of a talking machine. According to the inventor, the arrangement of bypaths for the sound waves causes certain of these to be considerably softened with but little loss in volume.