

The Light of Western Stars

A Romance

By Zane Grey

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CHAPTER XIV—Continued.

Stewart led Majesty out into the darkness past a line of mounted horses.

"Guess we're ready," he said. "I'll make the count." He went back along the line, and on the return Majesty heard him say several times, "Now everybody ride close to the horse in front, and ride quiet till daylight." Then the snorting and pounding of the big black horse in front of her told Majesty that Stewart had mounted.

"All right, we're off," he called. Majesty lifted and rode and let the roan go. The trail led in a roundabout way through shallow gullies full of stone and brush washed down by floods. At every turn now Majesty expected to come upon water and the waiting pack-train. But time passed, and miles of climbing and no water or horses were met. Expectation in Majesty gave place to desire; she was hungry.

Stewart kept on. It was eight o'clock by Majesty's watch when, upon turning into a wide hollow, she saw horses grazing on sparse grass, a great pile of canvas-covered bundles, and a fire round which cowboys and two Mexican women were busy.

Majesty sat her horse and reviewed her followers as they rode up single file. Her guests were in merry mood and they all talked at once.

"Breakfast—and rustic," called out Stewart, without ceremony.

For that matter, Majesty observed Helen did not show any marked contrast to the others. The hurry order did not interfere with the meal being somewhat in the nature of a picnic.

As soon as the pack-train was in readiness Stewart started it off in the lead to break trail. A heavy growth of shrub interspersed with rock and cactus covered the slopes, and now all the trail appeared to be uphill. The pack-train forged ahead, and the trailing couples grew farther apart. At noon they got out of the foothills to face the real ascent of the mountains.

Stewart waited for Majesty, and as she came up he said: "We're going to have a storm. Shall I call a halt and make camp?"

"Here? Oh no! What do you think best?"

"Well, if we have a good healthy thunderstorm it will be something new for your friends. I think we'd be wise to keep on the go. There's no place to make a good camp. If it rains, let it rain. The pack outfit is well covered. We will have to get wet."

"Surely," replied Majesty, and she smiled at his inference. She knew what a storm was to that country, and her guests had yet to experience one. "If it rains, let it rain."

Stewart rode on, and Majesty followed. The way led in a winding course through a matted, storm-wreathed forest of stunted trees. Even up to this elevation the desert reached with its gaunt hand. The clouds overspreading the sky, hiding the sun, made a welcome change. The pack-train rested, and Stewart and Majesty waited for the party to come up. Here he briefly explained to her that Don Carlos and his bandits had left the ranch some time in the night. The air grew oppressive; the horses panted, and "Sure it'll be a hummer," said Stewart. "The first storm almost always is bad. I can feel it in the air."

The air, indeed, seemed to be charged with a heavy force that was waiting to be liberated.

One by one the couples mounted to the cedar forest, and the feminine contingent declaimed eloquently for rest. But there was to be no permanent rest until night and then that depended upon reaching the crags. The pack-train waggled onward, and Stewart fell in behind. The storm-center gathered slowly around the peaks, low rumble and bowl of thunder increased in frequency; slowly the light shaded as smoky clouds rolled up; the air grew sultrier, and the expiring breeze puffed a few times and then failed.

An hour later the party had climbed high and was rounding the side of a great bare ridge that long had hidden the crags. The last burro of the pack-train plodded over the ridge out of Majesty's sight. She looked backward down the slope, amused to see her guests change wearily from side to side in their saddles. Far below lay the cedar flat and the foothills. Far to the west the sky was still clear, with shafts of sunlight shooting down from behind the encroaching clouds.

Stewart reached the summit of the ridge and, though only a few rods ahead, he waved to her, sweeping his hand round to what he saw beyond. It was an impressive gesture, and Majesty, never having climbed as high as this, anticipated much.

Majesty surmounted the last few steps and, snorting, halted beside Stewart's black. To Majesty the scene was as if the world had changed. The ridge was a mountain-top. It dropped before her into a black, stone-riddled, shrub-patched, many-canyoned gulf. Massed lanky clouds were piling across the peaks, obscuring the highest ones. A fork of white lightning flashed, and the booming of an avalanche, thunder followed.

Majesty glanced at Stewart. He had forgotten her presence. Immovable as stone, he sat his horse, dark-faced, dark-eyed, and, like an Indian unconscious of thought, he watched and watched. To see him thus, to find the strange affinity between the deed of this man become primitive,

and the savage environment that had developed him, were powerful helps to Majesty Hammond in her strange desire to understand his nature.

A cracking of iron-shod hoofs behind her broke the spell. Monty had reached the summit.

"Gee, what it won't all be done in a minute! Masses himself couldn't tell," observed Monty.

Then Dorothy himself to his side and looked.

"Oh, isn't it just perfectly lovely!" she exclaimed. "But I wish it wouldn't storm. We'll all get wet."

Once more Stewart faced the ascent, keeping to the slow leaves of the ridge as it rose southward toward the looming spires of rock. Soon he was off smooth ground, and Majesty, some rods behind him, looked back with concern at her friends. Here the real trail and hidden crags began, and a mountain storm was about to burst in all its fury.

The sky grew blacker; the slow-gathering clouds appeared to be suddenly agitated; they piled and rolled and mushroomed and obscured the crags. The air moved heavily and seemed to be laden with sulphurous smoke, and sharp lightning flashes began to play. A distant roar of wind could be heard between the peaks of thunder.

Stewart waited for Majesty under the lee of a shelving cliff, where the cowboys had halted the pack-train. Majesty was sensitive to the flashes of lightning. Majesty patted his neck and softly called to him. The weary burros nodded; the Mexican women covered their heads with their mantles. Stewart untied the slicker at the back of Majesty's saddle and helped her on with it. Then he put on his own.

The other cowboys followed suit. Presently Majesty was Monty and Dorothy rounding the cliff, and hoped the others would come soon.

A blue-white, knotted rope of lightning burned down out of the clouds, and instantly a thunder-clap crashed, seeming to shake the foundations of the earth. This moment of the breaking of the storm, with the strange growing roar of wind, like a moaning monster, was pregnant with a heart-disturbing emotion for Majesty Hammond. Glorious it was to be free, healthy, out in the open, under the shadow of the mountain and cloud, in the teeth of the wind and rain and storm.

Suddenly, as the ground quaked under her horse's feet, and all the sky grew black and crimsoned by flaming streaks, and between thunderous reports there was a strange hollow roar sweeping down upon her, she realized how small was her knowledge and experience of the mighty forces of nature.

With blacker gloom and deafening roar came the torrent of rain. It was a cloud-burst. It was like solid water tumbling down. For long Majesty sat her horse, head bent in the pelting rain. When its force lessened and she heard Stewart call for all to follow, she looked up to see that he was starting once more. She turned her horse into his trail.

Rain fell steadily. The fury of the storm, however, had passed, and the roll of thunder diminished in volume. The air had wonderfully cleared and was growing cool. Majesty began to feel uncomfortably cold and wet. Stewart was climbing faster than formerly, and she noted that Monty kept at her heels, pressing her on. Time had been lost, and the camp-site was a long way off. The stag-hounds began to lag and get footsore. The sharp rocks of the trail were cruel to their feet. Then, as Majesty began to tire, she noticed less and less around her. Her horse climbed and climbed, and brush and sharp corners of stone everlastingly pulled and tore at her wet garments. A gray gloom settled down around her. Night was approaching.

Stewart's horse was on a jog-trot now, and Majesty left the trail more to Majesty than to her own choosing. As black night began to envelop her surroundings, she marked that the fir trees had given place to pine forest. Suddenly a pin-point of light pierced

ment only because everybody was too lustily appeasing appetite.

For a few days the prevailing features of camp life for Majesty's guests were sleep and rest. The men were more warmly affected by the mountain air than the women.

This languorous spell disappeared presently, and then the days were full of life and action. Necessarily, of course, Majesty and her guests were now thrown much in company with the cowboys. And the party grew to be like one big family.

Majesty found the situation one of keen and double interest for her. If before she had cared to study her cowboys, particularly Stewart, now with the contrasts afforded by her guests, she felt by turns she was amused and mystified and perplexed and saddened, and then again suitably pleased.

From the thought of Stewart, and the watchfulness growing out of it, she discovered more about him. He was not happy; he often pined and down the grave at night; he absented himself from camp sometimes during the afternoon when Ned and Nick and Monty were there; he was always watching the trails, as if he expected to see some one come riding up. He alone of the cowboys did not indulge in the fun and talk around the campfire. He remained preoccupied and sad, and was always looking away into the distance. Majesty had a strange sense of his guardianship over her, and remembering Don Carlos, she imagined he worried a good deal over his charge, and indeed, over the safety of all the party.

A favorite lounging spot of Majesty was a shaded alcove under the lee of a crag facing the east. Here in the shade of the rocks, she and Edith would often lounge under a low-branched tree. Seldom they talked much, for it was afternoon and dreamy with the strange spell of this mountain fastness. There was smoky haze in the air, and the sun resting over the peaks, its shining edge in the blue sky, since that was the unbroken silence of the wild heights, and a soft wind laden with incense of pine.

One afternoon, however, Edith appeared prone to be seriously ill. Majesty saw, Majesty Hammond, do you intend to spend the rest of your life in this wilderness?" she asked, bluntly. Majesty was silent.

"Oh, it is glorious. Don't misunderstand me, dear," said Edith, earnestly, as she looked up at Majesty. "I love this wilderness. I love the quiet, the solitude, the beauty of it. I love it all. Look at Helen, too. Why, she is a ghost when we get here. Now she is brown and strong and beautiful. It was for nothing else than this wonderful gift of health I would love the West. But I have come to love it for other things—spiritual things. Edith, I have been studying you. I would feel what this life has made of you. When I came I wondered at your strength, your virility, your serenity, your happiness. And I was stunned. I wondered at the causes of your change. I know, you were once a feeble, sickly, unlovely, if not a society-sick of the horrible noxious ailments and contacts one can no longer escape in the cities. I am sick of all that, too, and I could tell you many women of our kind who suffer in a like manner. You have done what many of us want to do, but have not the courage. You have left it. I am not blind to the splendid difference you have made in your life. I think I would have discovered, even if your brother had not told me, what good you have done to the Mexicans and outlaws of your range. Then you have worked to do. That is much the secret of your happiness, is it not? Tell me. Tell me something of what it means to you."

"Work, of course, has much to do with any one's happiness," replied Majesty. "No one can be happy who has no work. As regards myself—for the rest I can hardly tell you. I have never tried to pack in words. Frankly, I believe, if I had not had money that I could not have found such contentment here. That is not in any sense a judgment against the West. But if I had been poor I could not have bought and maintained my ranch. Stillwell tells me there are many larger ranches than mine, but none just like it. They are almost paying my expenses out of my business. Think of that! My income, instead of being wasted, is mostly saved. I think I hope I am useful. Of course my ranch and range are real, my cowboys are typical. If I were to tell you how I feel about them I would simply be a story of how Majesty Hammond sees the West. They are true to the West. It is I who am strange, and what I feel for them may be strange, too. Edith, hold to your own impressions."

"But, Majesty, my impressions have changed. At first I did not like the wind, the heat, the sun, the endless open stretches, the noise. I do like them. Where else I saw only terrible wastes of barren ground now I see beauty and something noble. Then at first, your cowboys struck me as dirty, rough, loud, crude, savage—all that was primitive. But I was wrong. I have changed. The dirt was only dust, and this desert is so clean. They are still rough, loud, crude, and savage in my eyes, but with a difference. They are natural men. They are little children. Monty Pike is one of nature's

CHAPTER XV
The Crags

Glad indeed was Majesty to be lifted out of her horse beside a roaring fire, to see steaming pots upon red-hot coals. Except about her shoulders, which had been protected by the slicker, she was wringing wet. The Mexican women came quickly to help her change in a tent nearby; but Majesty preferred for the moment to watch her numb feet and hands and to warm the wetness and aches that only rest and sleep could alleviate.

Neither fatigue nor pain, however, nor the strangeness of being packed bed-sideline under canvas, nor the bowls of coyotes, kept Majesty's guests from stretching out with long, grateful sighs, and one by one dropping into a deep slumber. Majesty whispered a little to Florence, and laughed with her once or twice, and then the light flickering on the canvas faded and her eyelids closed. Darkness and roar of camp life, low voices of men, thump of horses' hoofs, coyote serenades, the sense of warmth and sweet rest—all drifted away.

When she awakened shrouded in swaying branches moved on the summit above her. Slow, regular breathing came to her, the deep slumber of her tent comrades. Now she observed faintly that Florence was missing from the number. Majesty rose and peeped out between the flaps.

An exquisitely beautiful scene surprised and enthralled her gaze. Eager to get out where she could enjoy an unrestricted view, she searched for her pack, found it in a corner, and then hurriedly and quietly dressed.

Her favorite stag-hounds, Huss and Tartar, were asleep before the door, and where they had been chained, she awakened them and loosened them, thinking the while that it must have been Stewart who had chained them near her. Close at hand also was a cowboy's bed rolled up in a tarpaulin.

The cool air, fragrant with pine and spruce and some needle-needles, rather sweet and tonic, made Majesty stand erect and breathe slowly and deeply. It was like drinking of a magic draught. She felt it in her blood, that it quickened its flow. Turning to look in the other direction, beyond the tent, she saw the remains of last night's temporary camp, and farther on, not above the eastern elevations, sent its rocky and golden shafts in between the towering rocks to tip the pine.

Majesty, with the hounds beside her, walked through the nearest grove. The ground was soft and springy and brown with pine-needles, not yet dry above the eastern elevations, sent its rocky and golden shafts in between the towering rocks to tip the pine.

Florence espied her under the trees and came running. She was like a young girl, with life and color and joy. She wore a flannel blouse, corduroy skirt, and moccasins. And her hair was fastened under a band like an Indian's.

"Nastleton's gone with a gun, for hours, it seems," said Florence. "Gene just went to hunt him up. The other gentlemen are still asleep. I imagine they sure will sleep up head in this air."

Then, business-like, Florence fell to questioning Majesty about details of a camp arrangement which Stewart and Florence herself, could hardly see to without suggestion.

As the day advanced the charm of the place grew upon Majesty. Even at noon, with the sun beaming down, there was comfortable warmth rather than heat. It was the kind of warmth that Majesty liked to feel in the spring.

Presently a chorus of merry calls attracted her attention, and she turned to see Helen limping along with Dorothy and Mrs. Beck and Edith supporting each other. They were all rested, but lame, and delighted with the place, and as hungry as bears awakened from a winter's sleep.

Then they had dinner, sitting on the ground after the manner of Indians; and it was a dinner that lacked merri-

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PINCHOT PLANS TOUR OF STATE

An Accounting of His Administration to be Given in a Series of Speeches

DATES WILL BE ANNOUNCED

Interesting News Items, Briefly Condensed, Picked Up at the Department, Which Are of Interest to the People of the State.

Harrisburg, Pa.,—Gov. Pinchot is planning a series of speeches this fall in which he will give an account of his administration.

Dates and places have not been worked out as the arrangements are dependent upon the developments in the anthracite strike parley and what may occur in the state government because of the strike, but it is expected the addresses will be delivered at widely separated places, the governor having a number of invitations to attend fairs and other gatherings from which to make his choice.

In anticipation of the speeches the governor has been discussing with various department heads what has been accomplished in their several lines through legislation, changes in administrative methods, economies and the like, the idea being to demonstrate the reduction of expense and efficiency of operation in which the code will play a prominent part.

State Treasurer Snyder Sued
Containing in it a "ministerial duty" of State Treasurer Charles A. Snyder to pay warrants which he had refused to pay. Attorney General George W. Blandford appeared before the Ingham county court with a petition for a writ of mandamus to compel Snyder to honor them. The proceeding is based on acts of 1911 and 1909. The warrants involved are those covered by regulations which Snyder recently refused to approve and which the court, by mandamus, directed him to return to Auditor General Lewis with his reasons for disapproval. Snyder complied, holding that the administrative code which he created or transferred the bureau and divisions whose warrants were held up was unconstitutional.

Delegates to Mine Congress
Coal men were formally informed of the appointment by Gov. Gifford of the Pennsylvania delegates to the American Mining Congress at Milwaukee, September 23 to 29. Charles J. Polke, state inspector of the Twenty-fifth Anthracite District, Lykens, Pa., and Alexander McCracken, state inspector of the First Bituminous District, Monaca, Pa., were appointed to the convention which will be attended by operators from all parts of the country.

Many After State Jobs
Major Lynn G. Adams will have no trouble recruiting the 150 men required for the new State Highway patrol. He would be able to raise a regiment as almost enough have applied. The men will be carefully selected and war veterans will figure considerably in the list. The new patrol will probably be in service in a month as the new officers will be trained at Mt. Gretna for a couple of weeks and given the instruction on law, self-control and courtesy which State Police standards demand.

Enforcing Pure Food Laws
A summarized report of the Bureau of Foods of the Department of Agriculture for the first six months of 1923 shows in round numbers that the bureau officials conducted 400 prosecutions of food law violators, collected 2,500 samples, issued 18,000 citations and turned \$23,000 in to the State Treasury in the form of fines and licenses. The report, submitted to Secretary Frank P. Williams by Director James East, groups the prosecutions under the twenty-eight food laws enforced by the bureau.

Would Recover Overcharges
Reparation of \$19,271 with interest for alleged over charges paid the Pennsylvania Railroad on wrought iron shipments from its plants to points in Western Pennsylvania is asked by the Hammond Iron Works, in a complaint filed with the Public Service Commission.

Metropolitan Survey Delayed
Gov. Pinchot has taken no steps toward appointing a commission to study a metropolitan district for Allegheny County. He has received many recommendations as to appointees, but has been unable to give the matter much attention owing to the press of urgent business.

Furthermore, convince the fellow who has stepped on the peel of a banana that the affirmative and negative both have it.

Judicious application of prison cells will materially reduce the traffic jam on the automobile route to the morgue and the hospital.

The bird who wanted to know whatever became of all the old swimming holes is advised that most of them are now water hazards.

TO BE CONTINUED

Origin of Old Saying
The saying, "Good Wine Needs No Bush," owes its origin to the ancient custom of hanging out an ivy bush at the doors of taverns—probably in honor of Bacchus, to whom the ivy was sacred—to inform travelers that "good cheer" might be found within. Many references to this custom are found in the old poets and dramatists. In Lily's "Euphues" are these lines: "Things of greatest profit are set forth with least price. Where wine is best, there needeth no ivy-bush."

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