

# The Light of Western Stars

## A Romance By Zane Grey

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### DON CARLOS

SYNOPSIS.—Arriving at the lonely little railroad station of El Cajon, New Mexico, Madeline Hammond, New York society 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. 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. Alfred, action 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. Stillwell tells her how Stewart beat up the sheriff to save her from arrest and then lit out for the border. Danny Mains, one of Stillwell's cowboys, has disappeared, with some of Stillwell's money. His friends link his name with the girl Bonita. Madeline gets a glimpse of life on a western ranch. Stewart sends Madeline his horse Majesty. She buys out Stillwell and "Her Majesty's Rancho" becomes famous. She finds her life work under "The Light of Western Stars." Learning Stewart had been hurt in a brawl at Chiricahua, Madeline visits him and persuades him to come to the ranch as the boss of her cowboys. Jim Nels, Nick Steele, and "Monty" Price are Madeline's chief riders. They have a feud with Don Carlos vaqueros, who are really guerrillas.

### 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 looked 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.

"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' lon's around just 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 actoly don'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 fall 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



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

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.

"Wal, 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 Sauton'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 Sauton'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 Pelonchillo 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 Hammond can't be kept in the dark much longer. Make your report to her."

The cowboy shifted his dark gaze to Madeline. "Wal, we're losin' a few cut-throats on the open range. Night-drives by vaqueros. Some of these cattle are driven across the valley, others up in to 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 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?"

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 value 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. 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 hang in he has failed 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 amazin' strange," 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 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' rancho. 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 dusty, tired horses stood with drooping heads and bridles down, their wet flanks attesting to travel just ended.

"Wal, dog-gone it, Al, if there ain't Pat Hawe's boss 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: "Well, 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 butted in over hvar 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 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 muddle 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 Booby, 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



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

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 par-

sons," he said. How strange it was for Madeline to hear English spoken in a soft, whiningly 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 hvar," 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 for 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 Booby 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 Booby and faced the vaqueros was not significant of friendliness or trust.

"Stewart, you're dead wrong to bust open them boxes. That's ag'in 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 for such all-fired fuss as you're makin'. Stewart, I calculate you're some stuck on your new job an' want to make a big show before—"

"Hawe, stop slingin' 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 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 round Don Carlos grew louder and denser with the addition of armed vaqueros and bare-footed stable-boys and dusty-boated herdsmen and blanketed 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.

"All over the ride. Bolt now and keep your nerve!"

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

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