

THE LIGHT OF WESTERN STARS

A Romance

by Zane Grey

Illustrations by IRWIN MYERS

GENE'S HORSE

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, Gens 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 it 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.

CHAPTER V.—Continued.

The bawling and howling, the crackling of horns and pounding of hoofs, the dusty whirl of cattle, and the flying cowboys disconcerted Madeline and frightened her a little.

"Look, Miss Hammond, there's Don Carlos!" said Florence. "Look at that black horse!"

Madeline saw a dark-faced Mexican riding by. He was too far away for her to distinguish his features, but he reminded her of an Italian brigand. He bestrode a magnificent horse.

Stillwell rode up to the girls then and greeted them in his big voice.

"Right in the thick of it, hey? Wal, that's sure fine. I'm glad to see, Miss Majesty, that you ain't afraid of a little dust or smell of burnin' hide an' hair."

Madeline's brother joined the group, evidently in search of Stillwell. "Bill, Nels just rode in," he said.

"No! Any news of Danny Mains?"

"No. Nels said he lost the trail when he got on hard ground."

"Wal, wal. Say, Al, your sister is sure takin' to the round-up. An' the boys are gettin' wise. See that sun-of-a-gun Ambrose cuttin' capers all around. He'll sure do his prettiest. Ambrose is a ladies' man, he thinks."

The two men and Florence joined in a little pleasant teasing of Madeline, and drew her attention to what appeared to be really unnecessary feats of horsemanship all made in her vicinity. The cowboys evinced their interest in covert glances while recollecting an inso or while passing to and fro. It was all too serious for Madeline to be amused at that moment. She did not care to talk. She sat her horse and watched.

CHAPTER VI

A Gift and a Purchase.

For a week the scene of the round-up lay within riding-distance of the ranch-house, and Madeline passed most of this time in the saddle, watching the strenuous labors of the vaqueros and cowboys. She overestimated her strength, and more than once had to be lifted from her horse. Stillwell's pleasure in her attendance gave place to concern. He tried to persuade her to stay away from the round-up, and Florence grew even more solicitous.

Madeline, however, was not moved by their entreaties.

She grasped only dimly the truth of what it was she was learning—something infinitely more than the rounding up of cattle by cowboys, and she was loath to lose an hour of her opportunity.

Before the week was out, however, Alfred found occasion to tell her that it would be wiser for her to let the round-up go without grazing it further with her presence. He said it laughingly; nevertheless, he was serious. And when Madeline turned to him in surprise he said, bluntly:

"I don't like the way Don Carlos follows you around. Bill's afraid that Nels or Ambrose or one of the cowboys will take a fall out of the Mexican. They're itching for the chance. Of course, dear, it's absurd to you, but it's true."

Absurd it certainly was, yet it served to show Madeline how intensely occupied she had been with her own feelings, roused by the tumult and toll of the round-up. She recalled that Don Carlos had been presented to her, and that she had not liked his dark, striking face with its bold, prominent, glittering eyes and sinister lines; and she had not liked his suave, sweet, insinuating voice or his subtle manner, with its slow bows and gestures.

"Don Carlos has been after Florence for a long time," said Alfred. "He's not a young man by any means. He's fifty, Bill says; but you can seldom tell a Mexican's age from his looks. Don Carlos is well educated and a man we know very little about. Mexicans of his stamp don't regard women as we white men do. Now, my dear, beautiful sister from New York, I haven't much use for Don Carlos; but I don't want Nels or Ambrose to make a wild throw with a rope and pull the Don off his horse. So you had better ride up to the house and stay there."

"Alfred, you are joking, teasing me," said Madeline.

"Indeed not," replied Alfred. "How about it, Flo?"

Florence replied that the cowboys would upon the slightest provocation treat Don Carlos with less ceremony and gentleness than a roped steer. Old Bill Stillwell came up to be importuned by Alfred regarding the conduct of cowboys on occasion, and he not only corroborated the assertion, but added emphasis and evidence of his own.

"An', Miss Majesty," he concluded, "I reckon if Gene Stewart was ridin' for me, that grinnin' Greaser would hev had a bump in the dust before now."

Madeline had been wavering between sobriety and laughter until Stillwell's mention of his ideal of cowboy chivalry decided in favor of the laughter.

"I am not convinced, but I surrender," she said. "You have only some occult motive for driving me away. I am sure that handsome Don Carlos is being unjustly suspected. But as I have seen a little of cowboys' singular imagination and gallantry, I am rather inclined to fear their possibilities. So good-by."

Then she rode with Florence up the long, gray slope to the ranch-house. That night she suffered from excessive weariness, which she attributed more to the strange working of her mind than to riding and sitting her horse. Morning, however, found her in no disposition to rest. It was not activity that she craved, or excitement, or pleasure. An unerring instinct, rising clear from the thronging sensations of the last few days, told her that she had missed something in life. What-ever this something was, she had had hitherto intimations of it, hopes that faded on the verge of realizations, haunting promises that were unfulfilled. What-ever it was, it had remained hidden and unknown at home, and here in the West it began to allure and drive her to discovery. Therefore she could not rest; she wanted to go and see; it was no longer chasing phantoms; it was a hunt for treasure that held aloof, as intangible as the substance of dreams.

Upon the morning after the end of the round-up, when she went out on the porch, her brother and Stillwell appeared to be arguing about the identity of a horse.

"Wal, I reckon it's my old roan," said Stillwell, shading his eyes with his hand.

"Bill, if that isn't Stewart's horse my eyes are going back on me," replied Al. "It's not the color or shape—the distance is too far to judge by that. It's the motion—the swing."

"Al, maybe you're right. But they ain't no rider up on that hoss. Flo, fetch my glass."

Florence went into the house, while Madeline tried to discover the object of attention. Presently far up the gray hollow along a foothill she saw dust, and then the dark, moving figure of a horse. She was watching when Florence returned with the glass. Bill took a long look, adjusted the glasses carefully, and tried again.

"Wal, I hate to admit my eyes are gettin' pore. But I guess I'll hev to. That's Gene Stewart's hoss, saddled, an' comin' at a fast clip without a rider. It's amazin' strange, an' some in keepin' with other things concernin' Gene."

"Give me the glass," said Al. "Yes, I was right. Bill, the horse is not frightened. He's coming steadily; he's got something on his mind."

The wide hollow sloping up into the foothills lay open to unobstructed view, and less than half a mile distant Madeline saw the riderless horse coming along the white trail at a rapid canter. A shrill, piercing whistle pealed in.

"Wal, he's seen us, that's sure," said Bill.

The horse neared the corrals, disappeared into a lane, and then, breaking his gait again, thundered into the enclosure and pounded to a halt some twenty yards from where Stillwell waited for him.

One look at him at close range in the clear light of day was enough for Madeline to award him a blue ribbon over all horses, even the prize-winner, White Stockings. The cowboy's great steed was no lithe, slender-bodied mustang. He was a charger, almost tremendous of build, with a black coat faintly mottled in gray, and it shone like polished glass in the sun. Evi-

dently he had been carefully dressed down for this occasion, for there was no dust on him, nor a kink in his beautiful mane, nor a mark on his glossy hide.

"Come hyar, you son-of-a-gun," said Stillwell.

The horse dropped his head, snorted, and came obediently up. He was neither shy nor wild. Unhooking the stirrups from the pommel, Stillwell let them fall and began to search the saddle for something which he evidently expected to find. Presently from some where among the trappings he produced a folded bit of paper, and after scrutinizing it handed it to Al.

"Addressed to you; an' I'll bet you two bits I know what's in it," he said. Alfred unfolded the letter, read it, and then looked at Stillwell.

"Bill, you're a pretty good guesser. Gene's made for the border. He sent the horse by somebody, no names mentioned, and wants my sister to have him if she will accept."

"Any mention of Danny Mains?" asked the rancher.

"Not a word."

"That's bad. Gene'd know about Danny if anybody did. But he's a close-mouthed cuss. So he's sure hittin' for Mexico. Wonder if Danny's gone, too? Wal, there's two of the best cowmen I ever seen, gone to h—l, an' I'm sorry."

With that he bowed his head and, grumbling to himself, went into the house. Alfred lifted the reins over the head of the horse and, leading him to Madeline, slipped the knot over her arm and placed the letter in her hand.

"Majesty, I'd accept the horse," he said. "Stewart is only a cowboy now, and as tough as any I've known. But he comes of a good family. He was a college man and a gentleman once. He went to the bad out here, like so many fellows go, like I nearly did. Then he had told me about his sister and mother. He cared a good deal for them. I think he has been a source of unhappiness to them. It was mostly when he was reminded of this in some way that he'd get drunk. I have always stuck to him, and I would do so yet if I had a chance. You read the letter, sister, and accept the horse."

In silence Madeline bent her gaze toward her brother's face to the letter: "Friend Al: I'm sending my horse down to you because I'm going away and haven't the nerve to take him where he'd get hurt or fall into strange hands."

"If you think it's all right, why, give him to your sister with my respects. But if you don't like the idea, Al, or if she won't have him, then he's for you. I'm helping your sister will take him. She'll be good to him, and she can afford to take care of him. And, while I'm waiting to be plugged by a Greaser bullet, if I happen to have a picture in mind of how she'll look upon my horse, why, man, it's not going to make any difference to you. She needn't ever know it."

"Between you and me, Al, don't let her or Flo ride alone over Don Carlos' way. If I had time I could tell you something about that slick Greaser. And tell your sister, if there's ever any reason for her to run away from anybody when she's up on that roan, just let her lean over and yell in his ear. She'll find herself riding the wind. So long."

"GENE STEWART."

Madeline thoughtfully folded the letter and murmured, "How he must love his horse!"

"Well, I should say so," replied Alfred. "Flo will tell you. She's the only person Gene ever let ride that horse. Well, sister mine, how about it—will you accept the horse?"

"Assuredly. And very happy indeed am I to get him. Al, you said,

black muzzle against her. Sometimes, at the turns in their walk, he lifted his head and with ears forward looked up the trail by which he had come, and beyond the foothills. He was looking over the range. Someone was calling to him, perhaps, from beyond the mountains. Madeline liked him the better for that memory, and pitied the wayward cowboy who had parted with his only possession for very love of it.

At supper-time Madeline was unusually thoughtful. Later, when they assembled on the porch to watch the sunset, Stillwell's humorous complaints inspired the inception of an idea which flashed up in her mind swift as lightning. And then by listening sympathetically she encouraged him to recite the troubles of a poor cattleman. They were many and long and interesting, and rather numbing to the life of her inspired idea.

"Mr. Stillwell, could ranching here on a large scale, with up-to-date methods, be made—well, not profitable, exactly, but to pay—to run without loss?" she asked, determined to kill her new-born idea at birth or else give it breath and hope of life.

"Wal, I reckon it could," he replied, with a short laugh. "It'd sure be a money-maker. Why, with all my bad luck an' poor equipment I've lived pretty well an' paid my debts an' haven't lost any money except the original outlay. I reckon that's sunk fer good."

"Would you sell—if someone would pay your price?"

"Miss Majesty, I'd jump at the chance. Yet somehow I'd hate to leave hyar. I'd jest be fool enough to go sink the money in another ranch."

"Would Don Carlos and these other Mexicans sell?"

"They sure would. The Don has been after me for years, wantin' to sell the old rancho of his; an' these herdners in the valley with their stray cattle, they'd fall daid at sight of a little money."

"Please tell me, Mr. Stillwell, exactly what you would do here if you had unlimited means?" went on Madeline.

"Good Lud!" ejaculated the rancher. "Wal, Miss Majesty, it jest makes my old heart warm up to think of such a thing. I dreamed a lot when I first come hyar. What would I do if I had unlimited money? Listen. I'd buy out Don Carlos an' the Greasers. I'd give a job to every good cowman in this country. I'd make them prosper as I prospered myself. I'd buy all the good horses on the ranges. I'd fence twenty thousand acres of the best grazin'. I'd drill fer water in the valley. I'd pipe water down from the mountains. I'd dam up that draw out there. A mile-long dam from hill to hill would give me a big lake, an' hevin' an eye fer beauty, I'd plant cottonwoods around it. I'd fill that lake full of fish. I'd put in the biggest field of alfalfa in the Southwest. I'd plant fruit-trees an' garden. I'd tear down them old corrals an' barns an' bunk-houses to build new ones. I'd make this old rancho some comfortable an' fine. I'd put in grass an' flowers all around an' bring young pine trees down from the mountains. An' when all that was done I'd sit in my chair an' smoke an' watch the cattle stragglin' in fer water an' stragglin' back into the valley. An' that red sun out there wouldn't set on a happier man in the world than Bill Stillwell, last of the old cattlemen."

Madeline thanked the rancher, and then rather abruptly retired to her room, where she felt no restraint to hide the force of that wonderful idea, now full-grown and tenacious and alluring.

Upon the next day, late in the afternoon, she asked Alfred if it would be safe for her to ride out to the mesa.

"I'll go with you," he said gaily.

"Dear fellow, I want to go alone," she replied.

"Ah!" Alfred exclaimed, suddenly serious. He gave her just a quick glance, then turned away. "Go ahead. I think it's safe. I'll make it safe by sitting here with my glass and keeping an eye on you. Be careful coming down the trail. Let the horse pick his way. That's all."

She rode Majesty across the wide flat, up the zigzag trail, across the beautiful grassy level to the far rim of the mesa, and not till then did she lift her eyes to face the southwest. In that darkening desert there was something illimitable. Madeline saw the hollow of a stupendous hand; she felt a mighty hold upon her heart. Out of the endless space, out of silence and desolation and mystery and age, came slow-changing colored shadows, phantoms of peace, and they whispered to Madeline. They whispered that it was a great, grim, immutable earth; that time was eternity; that life was fleeting. They whispered for her to be a woman; to love someone before it was too late; to love anyone, everyone; to realize the need of work, and thus find happiness.

She rode back across the mesa and down the trail, and, once more upon the flat, she called to the horse and made him run. His spirit seemed to race with hers. The wind of his speed blew her hair from its fastenings. When he thundered to a halt at the porch steps Madeline, breathless and disheveled, alighted with the mass of her hair tumbling around her.

Alfred met her, and his exclamation, and Florence's rapt eyes shining on her face, and Stillwell's speechlessness made her self-conscious. Laughing, she tried to put up the mass of hair.

"My hat—and my combs—went to the wind. I thought—my hair would go, too. . . . There is the evening star. . . . I think I am very hungry. . . . And then she gave up trying to

fasten up her hair, which fell again in a golden mass.

"Mr. Stillwell," she began, and paused, strangely aware of a hurried note, a deeper ring in her voice. "Mr. Stillwell, I want to buy your ranch—to engage you as my superintendent. I want to buy Don Carlos' ranch and other property to the extent, say, of fifty thousand acres. I want you to buy horses and cattle—in short, to make all those improvements which you said you had so long dreamed of. Then I have ideas of my own, in the development of which I must have your advice and Alfred's. I intend to better the condition of those poor Mexicans in the valley. I intend to make life a little more worth living for them and for the cowboys of this range. Tomorrow we shall talk it all over, plan all the business details."

Madeline turned from the huge, ever-widening smile that beamed down upon her and held out her hands to her brother.

"Alfred, strange, is it not, my coming out to you? Nay, don't smile. I

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After Every Meal

WRIGLEY'S

The Great American Sweetmeat

provides pleasant action for your teeth, also penetrating the crevices and cleansing them.

Then, too, it aids digestion.

Use WRIGLEY'S after every meal—see how much better you will feel.

The Flavor Lasts

This smoker says Edgeworth gets better and better

But it doesn't—and no "improvements" are contemplated

To begin with, we had better quote Mr. Whitlock's letter in full. Not in a boastful spirit, but so we can refer back to it farther down in the column.

2844 Accorn Street, St. Louis, Missouri

Larus & Brother Company, Richmond, Va.

Gentlemen:

I wish to take this opportunity to tell you what I think of your Edgeworth Plug Slice Tobacco.

I have been a pipe smoker for about 18 years and during that time have naturally tried many different brands and blends of tobacco. I could not seem to find an ideal blend until about six months ago when, at the suggestion of a friend, I tried a pipe of Edgeworth Plug Slice.

I have been a constant user of Edgeworth since and can truthfully say that "Day by day in every way Edgeworth is getting better and better."

You have my permission to use this letter in any way you may desire if by so doing it will enable other pipe smokers to find a really cool, enjoyable and perfectly satisfactory man's smoke.

I beg to remain, Edgeworthly yours, Al. F. Whitlock.

We are indeed glad Edgeworth has given Mr. Whitlock such unqualified satisfaction, but we feel obliged to side-step his suggestion that "day by day in every way Edgeworth is getting better and better."

Our constant aim is quite to the contrary.

Just as it is, Edgeworth pleases thousands and thousands of pipe smokers throughout the country.

If we should try to "improve" Edgeworth or change it in the least, we might be doing an injustice to the men who have smoked Edgeworth for years and years and who expect to find it always the same good smoking tobacco.

And so we hope Mr. Whitlock will agree with us that, all things considered, it is best for us to go on making more of the same Edgeworth.

To add to our list of friends we are always glad to send free samples to anyone who cares to send us his name and address.

Just drop us a postcard and we shall immediately forward to you generous helpings of both Edgeworth Plug Slice and Ready-Rubbed.

For the free samples address Larus & Brother Co., 80 South 21st Street, Richmond, Va. If you will also add the name and address of your tobacco dealer, we shall appreciate your courtesy.

To Retail Tobacco Merchants: If your dealer cannot supply you with Edgeworth, Larus & Brother Company will gladly send you prepaid by parcel post a one- or two-dozen carton of any size of Edgeworth Plug Slice or Ready-Rubbed for the same price you would pay the jobber.

Vaseline

CARBOLATED

PETROLEUM JELLY

No skin break too small for notice.

Be very wary of cuts