

The Light of Western Stars

A Romance

By Zane Grey

Copyright by Harper and Brothers

EAST MEETS WEST

SYNOPSIS.—Arriving at the lonely little railroad station at 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 amazed. 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, son 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. Madeline makes Stewart promise that peace is kept. They raid Don Carlos' ranch for contraband arms. Madeline and Florence, returning home from Alfred's ranch, run into an ambush of vaqueros. Florence decoys them away, and Madeline gets home safely. A raiding guerrilla band carries off Madeline. Stewart follows alone. He releases the girl, arranging for ransom. Returning home with Stewart, Madeline finds herself strangely stirred.

CHAPTER XI—Continued.

"I've done the service. Only don't mention pay to me. But there's one thing I'd like you to know, and I find it hard to say. It's prompted, maybe, by what I know you think of me and what I imagine your family and friends would think if they knew. It's not prompted by pride or conceit. And it's this: Such a woman as you should never have come to this Godforsaken country unless she meant to forget herself. But as you did come, and as you were dragged away by those devils, I want you to know that all your wealth and position and influence—all that power behind you—would never have saved you from hell tonight. Only such a man as Nels or Nick Steele or I could have done that."

Madeline felt the great leveling force of the truth. Whatever the difference between her and Stewart, or whatever the imagined difference set up by false standards of class and culture, the truth was that here on this wild mountain-side she was only a woman and he was simply a man. It was a man that she needed, and if her choice could have been considered in this extremity it would have fallen upon him who had just faced her in quiet, bitter speech. Here was food for thought.

"I reckon we'd better start now," he said, and drew the horse to a large rock. "Come."

Madeline's will greatly exceeded her strength. For the first time she acknowledged to herself that she had been hurt. Still, she did not feel much pain except when she moved her shoulder. Once in the saddle, where Stewart lifted her, she drooped weakly. The way was rough; every step the horse took hurt her; and the slope of the ground threw her forward on the pommel.

"Here is the trail," said Stewart, at length.

Not far from that point Madeline swayed, and but for Stewart's support would have fallen from the saddle. She heard him swear under his breath.

"Here, this won't do," he said. "Throw your leg over the pommel. The other one—there."

Then, mounting, he slipped behind her and lifted and turned her, and then held her with his left arm so that she lay across the saddle and his knees, her head against his shoulder.

As the horse started into a rapid walk Madeline gradually lost all pain and discomfort when she relaxed her muscles. Presently she let herself go and lay inert, greatly to her relief. For a little while she seemed to be half drunk with the gentle swaying of a hammock. Her mind became at once dreamy and active, as if it thoughtfully recorded the slow, soft impressions pouring in from all her senses.

She could not believe the evidence of the day's happenings. Would any of her people, her friends, ever believe it? Could she tell it? She remembered the ghastly visages of those starved rebels, and marveled at her blessed fortune in escaping them. Stewart's arrival in the glade, the courage with which he had faced the outlawed men, grew as real to her now as the iron arm that clasped her. Had it been an instinct which had impelled her to save this man when he lay ill and hopeless in the shack at Chiricahua? In helping him had she hedged round her forces that had just operated to save her life or if not

that, more than life was to her? She believed so.

A heavy languor, like a blanket, began to steal upon her. She wavered and drifted. With the last half-conscious sense of a muffled throb at her ear, a something intangibly sweet, deep-toned, and strange, like a distant calling bell, she fell asleep with her head on Stewart's breast.

CHAPTER XII

Friends From the East.

Three days after her return to the ranch Madeline could not decipher any physical discomfort as a remembrance of her adventurous experiences. If it had not been for the quiet and persistent guardianship of her cowboys she might almost have forgotten Don Carlos and the raiders. Madeline was assured of the splendid physical fitness to watch this ranch life had developed her, and that she was assimilating something of the Western disregard of danger. A hard ride, an accident, a day in the sun and dust, an adventure with outlaws—these might once have been matters of large import, but now for Madeline they were in order with all the rest of her changed life.

There was never a day that something interesting was not brought to her notice. Stillwell, who had ceaselessly reproached himself for riding away the morning Madeline was captured, grew more like an anxious parent than a faithful superintendent. He was never at ease regarding her unless he was near the ranch or had left Stewart there, or else Nels and Nick Steele. Naturally, he trusted more to Stewart than to any one else.

"Miss Majesty, it's sure amazing strange about Gene," said the old cattleman, as he tramped into Madeline's office.

"What's the matter now?" she inquired.

"Wal, Gene has rustled off into the mountains again. He's sneaked off, an' Nels, who was down to the lower trail, saw him meet somebody that looked like Padre Marcos. Wal, I went down to the church, and, sure enough, Padre Marcos is gone. What do you think of that, Miss Majesty?"

"Maybe Stewart is getting religious," laughed Madeline. "Let him take his mysterious trips into the mountains. Here, Stillwell, I have news for you that may give you reason for worry. I have letters from home. And my sister, with a party of friends, is coming out to visit me. They are society folk, and one of them is an English lord. Let me read you a few extracts from my mail."

Madeline took up her sister's letter with a strange sensation of how easily sight of a crested monogram and scent of delicately perfumed paper could recall the brilliant life she had given up. She scanned the pages of beautiful handwriting. Helen seldom wrote letters, and she never read any-

one. I want them to be on their most elegant behavior. I do not care what they do, what measures they take to protect themselves, what tricks they contrive, so long as they do not overstep the limit of kindness and courtesy. I want them to play their parts seriously, naturally, as if they had lived no other way. My guests expect to have fun. Let us meet them with fun. Now what do you say?"

Stillwell rose, his great bulk towering, his huge face beaming.

"Wal, I say it's the most amazing fine idee I ever heard in my life."

"Indeed, I am glad you like it," went on Madeline. "Come to me again, Stillwell, after you have spoken to the boys. But now that I have suggested it, I am a little afraid. You know what cowboy fun is. Perhaps—"

"Don't you go back on that idee," interrupted Stillwell. He was assuring and bland, but his hurry to convince Madeline betrayed him. "Leave the boys to me. Why, don't they all swear by you, same as the Mexicans do to the Virgin? They won't disgrace you, Miss Majesty. They'll be simply immense. It'll beat any show you ever seen."

"I believe it will," replied Madeline. "Very well, we will consider it settled. My guests will arrive on May ninth. Meanwhile let us get Her Majesty's Rancho in shape for this invasion."

On the afternoon of the ninth of May, perhaps half an hour after Madeline had received a telephone message from Link Stevens announcing the arrival of her guests at El Cajon, Florence called her out upon the porch. Stillwell was there with his face wrinkled by his wonderful smile and his eagle eyes riveted upon the distant valley. Far away, perhaps twenty miles, a thin streak of white dust rose from the valley floor and slanted skyward.

"Look!" said Florence, excitedly. "What is that?" asked Madeline. "Link Stevens and the automobile!"

"Oh no! Why, it's only a few minutes since he telephoned saying the party had just arrived."

"Take a look with the glasses," said Florence.

One glance through the powerful binoculars convinced Madeline that Florence was right. And another glance at Stillwell told her that he was speechless with delight. "Wal, as Nels says, I wouldn't be in that there automobile right now for a million pesos," he remarked.

"Why? Is Stevens driving fast?"

"Good Lord! Fast? Miss Majesty, there ain't ever been anything except a streak of lightning run so fast in this country. I reckon I'd like to be harn when Link drives up, but I want to be with the boys down by the bunk. It'll be some fun to see Nels an' Monty when Link comes flyin' along."

"I wish Al had stayed to meet them," said Madeline.

Her brother had rather hurried a shipment of cattle to California; and it was Madeline's supposition that he had welcomed the opportunity to absent himself from the ranch.

"I am sorry he wouldn't stay," replied Florence. "But Al's all business now. And he's doing finely. It's just as well, perhaps."

"Surely. That was my pride speaking. I would like to have all my family and all my old friends see what a man Al has become. Well, Link Stevens is running like the wind. The car will be here before we know it. Florence, we've only a few moments to dress. But first I want to order many and various and exceedingly cold refreshments for that approaching party."

Less than a half-hour later Madeline went again to the porch and found Florence there.

"Oh, you look just lovely!" exclaimed Florence, impulsively, as she gazed wide-eyed up at Madeline. "And somehow so different!"

Madeline smiled a little sadly. Perhaps when she had put on that exquisite white gown something had come to her of the manner which befitted the wearing of it. She could not resist the desire to look fair once more in the eyes of those hypercritical friends. The sad smile had been for the days that were gone. For she knew that what society had once been pleased to call her beauty had faded since it had last been seen in a drawing-room. Madeline wore no jewels, but at her waist she had planned two great crimson roses. Against the dead whiteness of the desert.

"Link's hit the old round-up trail," said Florence, "and oh, isn't he riding that car!"

With Florence, as with most of the cowboys, the car was never driven, but ridden.

A white spot with a long trail of dust showed low down in the valley. It was now headed almost straight for the ranch. Madeline watched it growing larger moment by moment, and her pleasurable emotion grew accordingly. Then the rapid boat of a horse's hoofs caused her to turn.

Stewart was riding on his black horse. He had been absent on an important mission, and his duty had taken him to the international boundary line. His presence home long before he was expected was particularly gratifying to Madeline, for it meant that his mission had been brought to a

successful issue. Once more, for the hundredth time, the man's reliability struck Madeline. He was a doer of things.

Madeline advanced to the porch steps. And Stewart, after taking a parcel of papers from a saddle-bag, turned toward her.

"Stewart, you are the best of couriers," she said. "I am pleased."

Dust streamed from his sombrero as he doffed it. His dark face seemed to rise as he straightened weary shoulders.

"Here are the reports, Miss Hammond," he replied.

As he looked up to see her standing there, dressed to receive her eastern guests, he checked his advance with a violent action which recalled to Madeline the one he had made on the night she had met him, when she disclosed her identity. A man struck by a bullet might have had an instant jerk of muscular control such as convulsed Stewart. In that instant, as her keen gaze searched his dust-caked face, she met the full, free look of his eyes. Her own did not fall, though she felt a warmth steal to her cheeks. Madeline very seldom blushed. And now, conscious of her sudden color, a genuine blush flamed on her face. It was irri-



And Now, Conscious of Her Sudden Color, a Genuine Blush Flamed on Her Face.

tating because it was incomprehensible. She received the papers from Stewart and thanked him. He bowed, then led the black down the path toward the corral.

Madeline watched the weary horse and rider limp down the path. What had made her thoughtful? Mostly it was something new or sudden or inexplicable that stirred her mind to quick analysis. In this instance the thing that had struck Madeline was Stewart's glance. He had looked at her, and the old burning, inscrutable fire, the darkness, had left his eyes. Suddenly they had been beautiful. The look had not been one of surprise or admiration; nor had it been one of love. She was familiar, too familiar with all three. It had not been a gaze of passion, for there was nothing beautiful in that. Madeline pondered. And presently she realized that Stewart's eyes had expressed a strange joy of pride. That expression Madeline had never before encountered in the look of any man. Probably its strangeness had made her notice it and accounted for her blushing. The longer she lived among these outdoor men the more they surprised her. Particularly, how incomprehensible was this cowboy Stewart! Why should he have pride or joy at sight of her?

The approaching automobile was on the slope now, some miles down the long gradual slant. Its velocity was astounding. Long, gray veils, like pennants, streamed in the wind. A low rushing sound became perceptible, and it grew louder, became a roar. The car shot like an arrow past the alfalfa field, by the bunk-houses, where the cowboys waved and cheered. The horses and burros in the corrals began to snort and tramp and race in fright. At the base of the long slope of the foothill Link cut the speed more than half. Yet the car roared up, rolling the dust, flying capes and veils and ulsters, and crashed and cracked to a halt in the yard before the porch.

Madeline descried a gray, disheveled mass of humanity packed inside the car. Besides the driver there were seven occupants, and for a moment they appeared to be coming to life, moving and exclaiming under the veils and wraps and dust-shields.

Link Stevens stepped out and, removing helmet and goggles, coolly looked at his watch.

"An hour an' a quarter, Miss Hammond," he said. "It's sixty-three miles by the valley road, an' you know there's a couple of bad hills. I reckon we made fair time, considerin' you wanted me to drive slow an' safe."

From the mass of dusty-veiled humanity in the car came low exclamations and plaintive feminine wails.

Madeline stepped to the front of the porch. Then the deep voices of men and softer voices of women united in one glad outburst, as much a thanks-giving as a greeting, "Majesty!"

Helen Hammond was three years younger than Madeline, and a slender, pretty girl. Having recovered her

breath soon after Madeline took her to her room, she began to talk.

"Majesty, old girl, I'm here; but you can bet I would never have gotten here if I had known about that rife from the railroad. You never wrote that you had a car. I thought this was out West—stage-coach, and all that sort of thing. Such a tremendous car! And the road! What kind of a chauffeur is he?"

"He's a cowboy. He was crippled by falling under his horse, so I had him instructed to run the car. He can drive, don't you think?"

"Drive? Good gracious! He scared us to death, except Castleton. Nothing could scare that cold-blooded little Englishman. I am dizzy yet. Do you know, Majesty, I was delighted when I saw the car. Then your cowboy driver met us at the platform. What a queer-looking individual! He had a big pistol strapped to those leather trousers. That made me nervous. When he piled us all in with our grips, he put me in the seat beside him, whether I liked it or not. I was fool enough to tell him I loved to travel fast. What do you think he said? Well, he eyed me in a rather cool and speculative way and said, with a smile, 'Miss, I reckon anything you love an' want had will be coming to you out here!' I didn't know whether it was delightful candor or impudence. Then he said to all of us: 'Shore you had better wrap up in the veils an' dusters. It's a long, slow, hot, dusty ride to the ranch, an' Miss Hammond's order was to drive safe.' He got our baggage checks and gave them to a man with a huge wagon and a four-horse team. Then he cranked the car, jumped in, wrapped his arms round the wheel, and sank down low in his seat. There was a crack, a jerk, a kind of flash around us, and that dirty little town was somewhere on the map behind. For about five minutes I had a lovely time. Then the wind began to tear me to pieces. I couldn't hear anything but the rush of wind and roar of the car. I could see only straight ahead. What a road! I never saw a road in my life till today. Miles and miles and miles ahead, with not even a post or tree. That big car seemed to leap at the miles. It hummed and sang. I was fascinated, then terrified. We went so fast I couldn't catch my breath. The wind went through me, and I expected to be disrobed by it any minute. I was afraid I couldn't hold any clothes on. Presently all I could see was a flashing gray wall with a white line in the middle. Then my eyes blurred. My face burned. My ears grew full of a hundred thousand howling devils. I was about ready to die when the car stopped. I looked and looked, and when I could see, there you stood!"

"Helen, I thought you were fond of speeding," said Madeline, with a laugh.

"I was. But I assure you I never before was in a fast car; I never met a driver."

"Perhaps I may have a few surprises for you out here in the wild and woolly West."

Helen's dark eyes showed a sister's memory of possibilities.

"You've started well," she said. "I am simply stunned. I expected to find you old and dowdy. Majesty, you're the handsomest thing I ever laid eyes on. You're so splendid and strong, and your skin is like white gold. What's happened to you? What's changed you? This beautiful room, those glorious roses out there, the cool, dark sweetness of this wonderful house! I know you, Majesty, and though you never wrote it, I believe you have made a home out here. That's the most stunning surprise of all. Come, confess, I know I've always been selfish and not much of a sister; but if you are happy out here I am glad. You were not happy at home. Tell me about yourself and about Alfred. Then I shall give you all the messages and news from the East."

It afforded Madeline exceeding pleasure to have from one and all of her guests varied encomiums of her beautiful home, and a real and warm interest in what promised to be a delightful and memorable visit.

Of them all Castleton was the only one who failed to show surprise. He greeted her precisely as he had when he had last seen her in London. Madeline, rather to her astonishment, found him meeting her again pleasurable. She discovered she liked this imperturbable Englishman. Manifestly her capacity for liking any one had immeasurably enlarged. Quite unexpectedly her old girlish love for her younger sister sprang into life, and with it interest in these half-forgotten friends, and a warm regard for Edith Wayne, a chum of college days.

"There's a gang of bandits riding on the ranch!"

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Being Literal. The child was inspecting the guest with that frankness that characterizes children of four.

The guest—a good sport—who understood children, was submitting gamely to the inspection.

"My papa said sumpin' about you, mister."

"Indeed? I hope it was something nice."

"He said, my papa did, that you had sumpin' above your eyes 'sides hair."

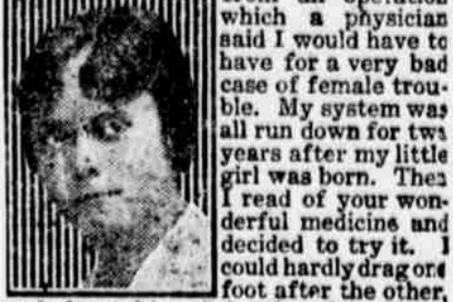
"Well, that was fine! He meant to say I had brains! I thank him for the compliment."

"I was just finkin'," went on the child, looking at the man's shining dome, "it's a good thing you has brains, or they surely wouldn't be no true in what my papa said."—Farm Life.

SAVED FROM AN OPERATION

Now Recommends Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound

Washington, D. C.—"Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound saved me from an operation which a physician said I would have to have for a very bad case of female trouble. My system was all run down for two years after my little girl was born. Then I read of your wonderful medicine and decided to try it. I could hardly drag my foot after the other, and after taking six bottles of the Vegetable Compound I felt like a new woman. I now do all my housework, also washing and ironing, and do not know what real trouble is. My health is fine and I weigh 140 pounds. When I started, taking it I weighed 97 pounds. I gladly recommend Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound to any one who is suffering from female trouble or is run down. You may see this testimonial for I am only too glad to let suffering women know that the Vegetable Compound did for me."—Mrs. I. D. HEWITT, 1529 Penna. Ave. S. E., Washington, D. C.



Such letters from women in every section of this country prove beyond question the merit of Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound.

Just the Place! Mr. Lundberg and wife are looking for a site for their new house. After a while they come to a spot and Mrs. Lundberg exclaims: "Oh, Adolph, this view strikes me hump!" "Well, dear, I think we will select this."—From Kasper, Stockholm.

Aspirin

Say "Bayer" and Insist



Unless you see the name "Bayer" on package or on tablets you are not getting the genuine Bayer product prescribed by physicians over twenty-two years and proved safe by millions for

Looking for Business. "I consider it unlucky to meet a cross-eyed person. Don't you?" "Not in my business." "What is your business?" "I'm an oculist."

Red Cross Ball Blue should be used in every home. It makes clothes white as snow and never injures the fabric. All good grocers.—Advertisement.

Fed Up. Peabody—Do you know anything about Russia? Warren—No, I've merely heard about it, read about it, and been there.—Life.

BACK ACHY?

Lame and achy in the morning? Tortured with backache all day long? No wonder you feel worn out and discouraged! But have you given any thought to your kidneys? Weak kidneys cause just such troubles; and you are likely to have headaches, too, with dizziness, stabbing pains and bladder irregularities. Don't risk neglect! Use Doan's Kidney Pills. Doan's have helped thousands. They should help you. Ask your neighbor!

A Nebraska Case. C. P. Burke, retired farmer, Greeley, Neb., says: "I had such pains and lameness in my back I could hardly bend over. My back felt tired just over my knees and at times I didn't have the will to stand. A neighbor told me to get Doan's Kidney Pills. I used Doan's and they drove the trouble from me and I haven't been bothered since."

Get Doan's at Any Store, 60c a Box DOAN'S KIDNEY PILLS FOSTER-MILBURN CO., BUFFALO, N. Y.

PARKER'S HAIR BALSAM. Restores Color and Promotes Growth of the Hair. Beauty to Gray and Faded Hair. L. O. PARKER, New York, N. Y.

HINDERCOONS. Removes Corns, Calluses, etc. Makes Walking Easy. No Pain or Swelling. Hindercoons Chemical Works, Philadelphia, Pa.