THE LIGHT OF WESTERN STARS

A Romance

by Zane Grey

Illustrations by IRWIN MYERS

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CHAPTER XIII.—Continued. —11—

"Now, Stillwell, out with it," she said, briefly.

"Wal, Miss Majesty, there's goin' to be a fight somewhere, an' Stewart wanted to get you all in before it come off. He says the valley's overrun by vaqueros an' guerrillas an' robbers, an' Lord knows what else."

He stamped off the porch, his huge spurs rattling, and started down the path toward the waiting men.

Stewart stood in his familiar attentive position, erect, silent, with a hand on pommel and bridle.

"Stewart, you are exceedingly—thoughtful of my interests," she said, wanting to thank him, and not readily finding words. "I would not know what to do without you. Is there danger?"

"I'm not sure. But I want to be on the safe side."

She hesitated. It was no longer easy for her to talk to him, and she did not know why.

"May I know the special orders you gave Nels and Nick and Monty?" she asked.

"Of course I'll tell you if you insist. My orders were that at least one of them must be on guard near you day and night—never to be out of hearing of your voice."

"I thought as much. Stewart, you still think Don Carlos tried to make off with me—may try it again?"

"I don't think. I know."

"And besides all your other duties you have shared the watch with these three cowboys?"

"Yes."

"It has been going on without my knowledge? How long is it to continue?"

"That's hard to say. Till the revolution is over, anyhow."

She mused a moment, looking away to the west, where the great, cold was filling with red haze. She believed implicitly in him, and the menace hovering near her fell like a shadow upon her present happiness.

"What must I do?" she asked.

"I think you ought to send your friends back East—and go with them, until this guerrilla war is over."

"Why, Stewart, they would be broken-hearted, and so would I."

He had no reply for that.

"If I do not take your advice it will be the first time since I have come to look to you for so much," she went on. "Cannot you suggest something else? My friends are having such a splendid visit. Helen is getting well. Oh, I should be sorry to see them go before they want to."

"We might take them up into the mountains and camp out for a while," he said, presently. "I know a wild place up among the crags. It's a hard climb, but worth the work. I never saw a more beautiful spot. Fine water, and it will be cool. Pretty soon it'll be too hot here for your party to go out-of-doors."

"You mean to hide me away among the crags and clouds?" replied Madeline, with a laugh.

"Well, it'd amount to that. Your friends need not know. Perhaps in a few weeks this spell of trouble on the border will be over till fall."

"You say it's a hard climb up to this place?"

"It surely is. Your friends will get the real thing if they make that trip."

"That suits me. Helen especially wants something to happen. Very well, I am decided. Stewart, of course you will take charge? I don't believe I— Stewart, isn't there something more you could tell me—why you think, why you know my own personal liberty is in peril?"

"Yes. But do not ask me what it is. If I hadn't been a rebel soldier I would never have known."

"If you had not been a rebel soldier, where would Madeline Hammond be now?" she asked earnestly.

He made no reply.

"Stewart," she continued, with warm impulse, "you once mentioned a debt you owed me—" And seeing his dark face pale, she wavered, then went on, "It is paid."

"No, no. That never can be paid."

Madeline held out her hand.

"It is paid, I tell you," she repeated.

Suddenly he drew back from the outstretched white hand that seemed to fascinate him.

"I'd kill a man to touch your hand. But I won't touch it on the terms you offer."

His unexpected passion disconcerted her.

"Stewart, no man ever before refused to shake hands with me, for any reason. It—it is scarcely flattering," she said, with a little laugh. "Why won't you? Because you think I offer it as mistress to servant—rancher to cowboy?"

"No."

"Then why? The debt you owed me is paid. I cancel it. So why not shake hands upon it, as men do?"

"I won't. That's all."

"I fear you are ungracious, whatever your reason," she replied. "Still, I may offer it again some day. Good-night."

He said good-night and turned. Madeline wonderingly watched him go down the path with his hand on the black horse's neck.

She went in to rest a little before dressing for dinner and, being fatigued from the day's riding and excitement, she fell asleep. When she awoke it was twilight. She wondered why her Mexican maid had not come to her, and she rang the bell. The maid did not put in an appearance, nor was there any answer to the ring. The house seemed unusually quiet. It was a brooding silence, which presently broke to the sound of footsteps on the porch. Madeline recognized Stillwell's tread, though it appeared to be light for him. Then she heard him call softly in at the open door of her office. The suggestion of caution in his voice suited the strangeness of his walk. With a boding sense of trouble she hurried through the rooms. He was standing outside her office door.

"Stillwell!" she exclaimed.

"Please come out on the porch."

She complied and, once out, was enabled to see him. His grave face, paler than she had ever beheld it, caused her to stretch an appealing hand toward him. Stillwell intercepted it and held it in his own.

"Miss Majesty, I'm amazin' sorry to tell worrisome news. But it can't be avoided. The fact is we're in a bad fix. If your guests ain't scared out of their skins it'll be owin' to your nerve an' how you carry out Stewart's orders."

"You can rely upon me," replied Madeline, firmly, though she trembled.

"Wal, what we're up against is this: that gang of bandits Pat Hawe was chasin'—they're hidin' in the house."

"In the house?" echoed Madeline, aghast.

"Miss Majesty, it's the amazin' truth, an' shamed indeed am I to admit it. Stewart—why, he's wild with rage to think it could hev happened. You see, it couldn't hev happened if I hedn't sloped the boys off to the got-lof links, an' if Stewart hedn't rid out on the mesa after us. It's my fault. But now we've got to face it—to figger. Now, listen. When Stewart left you an hour or so ago he follered me direct to where me an' the boys was tryin' to keep Pat Hawe from fearin' the ranch to pieces. At that we was helped. Pat all we could to find them bandits. But when Stewart got there he made a difference. Pat was nasty before, but seein' Stewart made him wuss. I reckon Gene to Pat is the same as red to a Greaser bull. Anyway, when the sheriff set fire to an old adobe hut Stewart called him an' called him hard. Pat Hawe hed six fellers with him, an' from all appearances bandit-huntin' was some fiesta. There was a row, an' it looked bad for a little. But Gene was cool, an' he controlled the boys. Then Pat an' his tough de-pooties went on huntin'. That huntin', Miss Majesty, petered out into nuthin' it was only a farce. Pat Hawe wasn't lookin' hard for any bandits; he wasn't dald set huntin' anythin', unless it was trouble, fer Stewart. Finally, when Pat's men made fer our storehouse, where we keep ammunition, grub, liquors, an' kitch, then Gene called a halt. An' he ordered Pat Hawe off the ranch. It was hyar Hawe an' Stewart locked horns. An' hyar the truth come out. There was a gang of bandits hid somewhere, an' at fust Pat Hawe hed been powerful active an' earnest in his huntin'. But suddenlike he'd fetched a peculiar change of heart. He had been some flustered with Stewart's eyes a pryin' into his moves, an' then, mebbe to hide somethin', mebbe jest nat'rul, he got mad. He hollered law. He pulled down off the shelf his old stock grudge on Stewart, accusin' him over again of that Greaser murder last fall. Stewart made him look like a fool—showed him up as bein' scared of the bandits or hevin' some reason fer dopin' off the trail. Anyway, the row started all right, an' it might hev amounted to a fight. In the thick of it, when Stewart was drivin' Pat an' his crowd off the place, one of them de-pooties lost his head an' went for his gun. Nels throwed his gun an' crippled the feller's arm. Monty jumped them an' throwed two forty-fives, an' fer a second or so it looked ticklish. But the bandit-hunters crawled, an' then lit out."

Stillwell paused in the rapid delivery of his narrative; he still retained Madeline's hand, as if by that he might comfort her.

"After Pat left we put our heads together," began the old cattleman, with a long respiration. "We rounded up a lad who had seen a cousin or so fellers—he wouldn't say they was Greasers—brinkin' through the shrubbery to the back of the house. That was while Stewart was ridin' out to the mesa. Then this lad seen your servants all runnin' down the hill toward the village. Now, heah's the way Gene figgers. There sure was some devilitry down along the railroad, an' Pat Hawe trailed bandits up to the ranch. He hunts hard an' then all to onct he quits. Stewart says Pat Hawe wasn't scared, but he discovered signs of somethin', or got wind in some strange way that there was in the gang of bandits somefellers he didn't want to ketch. Sabe? Then Gene, quicker'n a flash, springs his plan on me. He'd go down to Padre Marcos an' hev him help to find out all possible from your Mexican servants. I was to hurry up hyar an' tell you—give you orders, Miss Majesty. Ain't that amazin' strange? Wal, you're to assemble all your guests in the kitchen. Make a grand bluff an' pretend, as your help has left, that it'll be great fun fer your guests to cook dinner. The kitchen is the safest room in the house. While you're joshin' your party along, makin' a kind of picnic out of it, I'll place cowboys in the long corridor, an' also outside in the corner where the kitchen joins on to the main house. It's pretty sure the bandits think no one's wise to where they're hid. Stewart says they're in that end room where the alfalfa is, an' they'll slope in the night. Of course, with me an' the boys watchin', you-all will be safe to go to bed. An' we're to rouse your guests early before daylight, to hit the trail, up into the mountains. Tell them to pack outfits before goin' to bed. Say as your servants hev sloped, you might as well go campin' with the cowboys. That's all. If we hev any luck your friends'll never know they've been sittin' on a powder-mine. Now, Miss Majesty, I've used up a lot of time explainin'. You'll sure keep your nerve?"

"Yes," Madeline replied, and was surprised at herself.

"Better tell Florence. She'll be a power of comfort to you. I'm goin' now to fetch up the boys."

Instead of returning to her room Madeline went through the office into the long corridor. It was almost as dark as night. She fancied she saw a slow-gliding figure darker than the surrounding gloom; and she entered upon the fulfillment of her part of the plan in something like trepidation. Her footsteps were noiseless. Finding the door to the kitchen, and going in, she struck lights. Upon passing out again she made certain she discerned a dark shape, now motionless, crouching along the wall. But she mistrusted her vivid imagination. It took all her boldness to enable her unconcernedly and naturally to strike the corridor lights. Then she went on through her living rooms and thence into the patio.

Her guests laughingly and gladly entered into the spirit of the occasion. They trooped merrily into the kitchen. Madeline delaying at the door, took a sharp but unobtrusive glance down the great, barnlike hall. She saw nothing but blank dark space. Suddenly from one side, not a rod distant, protruded a pale, gleaming face breaking the even blackness. Instantly it flashed back out of sight. Yet that time was long enough for Madeline to see a pair of glittering eyes, and to recognize them as Don Carlos'.

Without betraying either hurry or alarm, she closed the door. It had a heavy, soft latch; she shook, noiselessly, shot. Then the cold amaze that had all but stunned her into inaction throbbed into wrath. How dared that Mexican steal into her home? What did he mean? Was he one of the bandits supposed to be hidden in her house? She was thinking herself into greater anger and excitement, and probably would have betrayed herself had not Florence, who had evidently seen her bolt the door and now read her thoughts, come toward her with a bright, intelligent gaze in her look. Madeline caught herself in time.

Thereupon she gave each of her guests a duty to perform. Leading Florence into the pantry, she unburdened herself of the secret in one brief whisper. Florence's only was to point out of the little open window, pausing which was a file of stealthily moving cowboys. Then Madeline lost both anger and fear, retaining only the glow of excitement.

The miscellaneous collection of dishes so confusingly contrived made up a dinner which they all heartily enjoyed. Madeline enjoyed it herself, even with the feeling of a sword hang-ing suspended over her.

The hour was late when she rose from the table and told her guests to go to their rooms, don their riding clothes, pack what they needed for the long and adventurous camping trip that she hoped would be the climax of their western experience, and to enatch a little sleep before the cowboys roused them for the early start.

Madeline went immediately to her room and was getting out her camping apparel when a knock interrupted her.

"Who's there?" she questioned.

"Stewart," came the reply.

She opened the door. He stood on the threshold.

"May I speak to you?" he asked.

"Certainly." She hesitated a moment, then asked him in and closed the door. "Is—is everything all right?"

"No. These bandits stile to cover pretty close. They must have found out we're on the watch. But I'm sure we'll get you and your friends away before anything starts."

"Do you have any idea who is hiding in the house?"

"I was worried some at first. Pat Hawe acted queer. I imagined he'd discovered he was trailing bandits who might turn out to be smuggling guerrilla cronies. But talking with your servants, finding a bunch of horses hidden down in the mesquite behind the pond—several things have changed my mind. My idea is that a cowardly handful of riffraff outcasts from the border have hidden in your house, more by accident than design. We'll let them go—get rid of them without even a shot. If I didn't think so—well, I'd be considerably worried. It would make a different state of affairs."

"Stewart, you are wrong. I saw one of these bandits. I distinctly recognized him."

One long step brought him close to her.

"Who was he?" demanded Stewart.

"Don Carlos."

He muttered low and deep, then said, "Are you sure?"

"Absolutely. I saw his entire face in the hall, then his face in the light. I could never mistake his eyes."

Madeline was tremblingly conscious that Stewart underwent a transformation. She saw as well as felt the leaping passion that changed him.

"Call your friends—get them in here!" he ordered, tersely, and wheeled toward the door.

"Stewart, wait!" she said.

He turned. His white face, his burning eyes, his presence now charged with definite, fearful meaning, influenced her strangely, weakened her.

"What will you do?" she asked.

"That needn't concern you. Get your party in here. Bar the windows and lock the doors. You'll be safe."

"Stewart! Tell me what you intend to do."

"I won't tell you," he replied, and turned away again.

"But I will know," she said. With a hand on his arm she detained him. She saw how he halted—felt the shock in him as she touched him. "Oh, I do know. You mean to fight!"

"Wal, Miss Hammond, isn't it about time?" he asked. There was weariness, dignity, even reproof in his question. "The fact of that Mexican's presence here in your house ought to prove to you the nature of the case. These vaqueros, these guerrillas, have found out you won't stand for any fighting on the part of your men. Don Carlos is a sneak, a coward, yet he's not afraid to hide in your own house. He has learned you won't let your cowboys hurt anybody. He's taking advantage of it. He'll rob, burn, and make off with you. He'll murder, too, if it falls his way. These Greasers use knives fo the dark. So I ask—isn't it about time we stop him?"

"Stewart, I forbid you to fight unless in self-defense. I forbid you."

"What I mean to do is self-defense. Haven't I tried to explain to you that just how we've wild times along this strip of border? Must I tell you again that Don Carlos is hand and glove with the revolution? The rebels are crazy to stir up the United States. You are a woman of prominence. Don Carlos would make off with you. If he got you, what little matter to cross the border with you? Well, where would the hue and cry go? Through the troops along the border? To New York? To Washington? Why, it would mean what the rebels are working for—United States intervention. In other words, war."

"Oh, surely you exaggerate!" she cried.

"Maybe so. But I'm beginning to see the Don's game. And, Miss Hammond, it's awful for me to think what you'd suffer if Don Carlos got you over the line. I know these low-caste Mexicans. I've been among the peons—the slaves."

"Stewart, don't let Don Carlos get me," replied Madeline, in sweet directness.

She saw him shake, saw his throat swell as he swallowed hard, saw the hard fierceness return to his face.

"I won't. That's why I'm going after him."

"But I forbade you to start a fight deliberately."

"Then I'll go ahead and start one without your permission." He shook off her hand and strode forward.

"Please, don't go!" she called, beseechingly. But he kept on. "Stewart!"

She ran ahead of him, intercepted him, faced him with her back against the door. He swept out a long arm as if to brush her aside. But it wavered and fell. Haggard, troubled, with working face, he stood before her.

"If's for your sake," he expostulated. "Let me out Miss Hammond. I'm going to take the boys and go after these guerrillas."

"No?"

"Good Heavens!" exclaimed Stewart. "Why not let me go? It's the thing to do. I'm sorry to distress you and your guests. Why not put an end to Don Carlos' badgering? Is it because you're afraid a rumpus will spoil your friends' visit?"

"It isn't—not this time."

"Then it's the idea of a little shooting at these Greasers?"

"No."

"You're sick to think of a little Greaser blood staining the halls of your home?"

"No."

"Well, then, why keep me from doing what I know is best?"

"Stewart, I—I—" she faltered, in growing agitation. "I'm frightened—confused. All this is too—too much for me. I'm not a coward. If you have to fight you'll see I'm not a coward. But your way seems so reckless—that hall is so dark—the guerrillas would shoot from behind doors. You're so wild, so daring, you'd rush right into peril. Is that necessary? I think—I mean—I don't know just why I feel so—so about you doing it. But I believe it's because I'm afraid you—you might be hurt."

"You're afraid I—I might be hurt?" he echoed, wonderingly, the hard whiteness of his face warming, flushing, glowing.

"Yes."

The single word, with all it might mean, with all it might not mean, softened him as if by magic, made him gentle, amazed, shy as a boy, stilling under a torrent of emotions.

Madeline thought she had persuaded him—worked her will with him. Then another of his startlingly sudden moves told her that she had reckoned too quickly. This move was to get her firmly aside so he could pass; and Madeline, seeing he would not hesitate to lift her out of the way, surrendered the door. He turned on the threshold. His face was still working, but the flame-pointed gleam of his eyes indicated the return of that cowboy ruthlessness.

"I'm going to drive Don Carlos and his gang out of the house," declared Stewart. "I think I may promise you to do it without a fight. But if it takes a fight, off he goes!"

"Stewart, I Forbid You to Fight, Unless in Self-Defense."

CHAPTER XIV

The Mountain Trail.

As Stewart departed from one door Florence knocked upon another and Madeline, far shaken out of her usual serenity, admitted the cool western girl with more than gladness. Just to have her near helped Madeline to get back her balance. She was conscious of Florence's sharp scrutiny, then of a sweet, deliberate change of manner. Florence might have been burning with curiosity to know more about the bandits hidden in the house, the plans of the cowboys, the reason for Madeline's suppressed emotion; but instead of asking Madeline questions she introduced the important subject of what to take on the camping trip. For an hour they discussed the need of this and that article, selected those things most needful, and then packed them in Madeline's duffle-bags.

That done, they decided to lie down, fully dressed as they were in riding-costume, and sleep, or at least rest, the little remaining time left before the call to saddle. Madeline turned out the light and, standing through her window, saw dark forms standing sentinel-like in the gloom. When she lay down she heard soft steps on the path. This fidelity to her swelled her heart. The need of it presaged that fearful something which, Either Stewart's passionate appeal to her, haunted her as inevitable.

Madeline did not expect to sleep yet she did sleep, and it seemed to have been only a moment until Florence called her. She followed Florence outside. She could discern saddled horses being held by cowboys. There was an air of hurry and mystery about the departure. Helen, who came tiptoeing out with Madeline's other guests, whispered that it was like an escape. She was delighted. The others were amused. To Madeline it was indeed an escape. She heard low voices, the champing of bits and thumping of hoofs, and she recognized Stewart when he led up Monkey for her to mount. Then came a pattering of soft feet and the whining of dogs. Gold nosed touched her hands, and she saw the long, gray, shaggy shapes of her pack of Russian wolf-hounds. That Stewart meant to let them go with her was indicative of how he studied her pleasure. She loved to be out with the hounds and her horse.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Great Writer Had No Jealousy.

In a diary of Henry Crabb Robinson, written in 1813, is this entry: "Poets are accused of being insensible to each other's merits. Hammond told me to day that he had seen a letter from Walter Scott stating that he had declined the laureateship in favor of Southey, saying: 'I am the more popular now, but posterity will inquire most about Southey.'"

Signs of Wisdom.

These are the signs of a wise man: to reprove nobody, to praise nobody; to blame nobody, nor even to speak of himself or his own merits.—Epictetus.

STONE MUST BE FREAK OR FOSSIL

Discovery in the Nevada Mountains Has Split the World's Scientists Into Two Camps.

A stone form exactly resembling the leather sole of a shoe, was found in the Nevada mountains. Geologists paleontologists and other scientific men were astounded with the specimen's similarity to a shoe, but none would accept it as anything but a freak of nature. This strange fossil or freak, was found imbedded in a mass of Triassic rock, which is considered by scientists to be from 100,000,000 to 200,000,000 years old. By those who consider it a freak rather than a fossil it has been pronounced one of the most remarkable natural imitations of an artificial object ever discovered by man.

Microphotographs of the fossil reveal very clearly the holes punched in the sole for stitching, and even the twist of the thread used in the welt is plainly shown. Its warp is brought out in unmistakable prominence. In every respect it duplicates the exact process which takes place in a worsted shoe. These facts would seem to prove beyond a reasonable doubt that it is the fossil of a real shoe, and that it was done by the hand of man. The upshot of the matter leads to one of these two scientific facts: Either man has lived on the earth three or four times as long as has hitherto been supposed, or geologists are badly mistaken in the age of the Triassic rocks in Nevada.

Reflection on Great Cities.

If you suppress the exorbitant love of pleasure and money, idle curiosity, inquitous purpose, and wanton mirth, what a stillness would there be in the greatest cities.—Bruyere.

Friendship.

Friends should be weighed, not told; who boasts to have even a multitude of friends has never had one.—Coleridge

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DEALT WITH MORTAL LIFE

There Are Ghosts in Shakespeare's Pages, but Subject Was Not His Province.

It is sometimes said that Shakespeare teaches little or nothing concerning life after death. They reply to that this was not his province. His genius was to paint the life of this world as he saw it. Mrs. Leo Grindon, who is a considerable authority on the bard and his works, maintains, nevertheless, that our greatest poet knew a great deal about spirits, and in a recent series of articles entitled "Shakespeare's Ghosts," she gives much information in support of her view. Taking "Cymbeline," she shows some striking parallels between the "supernatural" element in that play and the facts of modern spiritualism. From "The Winter's Tale" she collects the trance of Hermione and her appearance (in the ethereal body) to Antigonus while at sea. "Hamlet" naturally is fertile in illustrations both as regards the action of the play and the text.

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Miserly—Well, Thomas, you have cleaned up the place in great shape. What shall I pay you?

Hired Man—What's agreeable to you is agreeable to me, sir.

Miserly (handing him a quarter)—It seems to me you work awfully cheap, Thomas, but of course that's none of my business.—Boston Transcript.

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His Trouble.

"My stars!" surprisedly ejaculated a tourist who had stopped in the big road to ask a direction. "What makes that lad scratch himself so vigorously?"

"His last year's chiggers, I—p'tu—reckon," replied Gap Johnson of Rumpus Ridge.—Kansas City Star.

What's in a Name?

"What is this course in domestic science?" "Oh, it is a slick way to get girls to take cooking lessons."

HAY FEVER NOT THIS YEAR

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