The Light of Western Stars

A ROMANCE by ZANE GREY

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AN UNKNOWN VOICE

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 "Bl." Asking her name and learning her identity the cowboy seems dazed. In a shooting scrape outside the room a Mexican is killed. The cowboys 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, scion 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.

CHAPTER XI—Continued.

—8—

She entered the last room. There was no lock or bar upon the door. But the room was large and dark, and it was half full of bales of alfalfa hay. Probably it was the safest place in the house; at least time would be necessary to find any one hidden there. She dropped her valuables in a dark corner and covered them with loose hay. That done, she felt her way down a narrow aisle between the piled-up bales and presently crouched in a niche.

With the necessity of action over for the immediate present, Madeline became conscious that she was quivering and almost breathless. Her skin felt tight and cold. There was a weight on her chest; her mouth was dry, and she had a strange tendency to swallow. Dull sounds came from parts of the house remote from her. In the intervals of silence between these sounds she heard the squeaking and rustling of mice in the hay. A mouse ran over her hand.

She listened, waiting, hoping, yet dreading to hear the clattering approach of her cowboys. There would be fighting—blood—men injured, perhaps killed. Even the thought of violence of any kind hurt her. But perhaps the guerrillas would run in time to avoid a clash with her men. She hoped for that, prayed for it. Through her mind flitted what she knew of Nels, of Monty, of Nick Steele; and she experienced a sensation that left her somewhat chilled and sick. Then she thought of the dark-browed, fire-eyed Stewart. She felt a thrill drive away the cold nausea. And her excitement augmented.

Waiting, listening increased all her emotions. Nothing appeared to be happening. Yet hours seemed to pass while she crouched there. Had Florence been overtaken? Could any of those lean horses outrun Majesty? She doubted it; she knew it could not be true. Nevertheless, the strain of uncertainty was torturing.

Suddenly the bang of the corridor door pierced her through and through with the dread of uncertainty. Some of the guerrillas had entered the east wing of the house. She heard a babel of jabbering voices, the shuffling of boots and clinking of spurs, the slamming of doors and ransacking of rooms.

Madeline lost faith in her hiding place. Moreover, she found it impossible to take the chance. The idea of being caught in that dark room by those ruffians filled her with horror. She must get out into the light. Swiftly she rose, and went to the window. It was rather more of a door than window, being a large aperture closed by two wooden doors on hinges. The iron hook yielded readily to her grasp, and one door stuck fast, while the other opened a few inches. She looked out upon a green slope covered with flowers and bunches of sage and bushes. Neither man nor horse showed in the narrow field of her vision. She believed she would be safer hidden out there in the shrubbery than in the house. The jump from the window would be easy for her.

She pulled at the door. It did not budge. It had caught at the bottom. Pulling with all her might proved to be in vain. Pausing, with palms hot and bruised, she heard a louder, closer approach of the invaders of her home. Fear, wrath, and impotence contested for supremacy over her and drove her to desperation. She was alone here, and she must rely on herself. And as she strained every muscle to break that obstinate door and heard the quick, harsh voices of men and the sounds of a hurried search she suddenly felt sure that they were hunting for her. She knew it. She did not wonder at it. But she wondered if she were really Madeline Hammond, and if it were possible that brutal men would harm her. Then the tramping of heavy feet on the floor of the adjoining room lent her the last strength of fear. Pushing with hands and shoulders, she moved the door far enough to permit the passage of her body. Then she stepped upon the sill and stepped through the aperture. She saw no one. Lightly she jumped down and ran in among the bushes. But these did not afford her the cover she needed. She stole from one clump to another, finding too late that she had chosen with poor judgment. The position of the bushes had drawn her closer to the front of the house rather than away from it, and just before her were horses, and beyond a group of excited men. With her heart in her throat Madeline crouched down.

A shrill yell, followed by running and mounting guerrillas, roused her hope. They had sighted the cowboys and were in flight. Rapid thumping of boots on the porch told of men hurrying from the house. Several horses dashed past her, not ten feet distant. One rider saw her, for he turned to shout back. This drove Madeline into a panic. Hardly knowing what she did, she began to run away from the house. Her feet seemed leaden. She felt the same horrible powerlessness that sometimes came over her when she dreamed of being pursued. Horses with shouting riders streaked past her in the shrubbery. There was a thunder of hoofs behind her. She turned aside, but the thundering grew nearer. She was being run down.

As Madeline shut her eyes and, staggering, was about to fall, apparently right under pounding hoofs, a rude, powerful hand clapped round her waist, clutched deep and strong, and swung her aloft. She felt a heavy blow when the shoulder of the horse struck her, and then a wrenching of her arm as she was dragged up. A sudden blighting pain made sight and feeling fade from her.

But she did not become unconscious to the extent that she lost the sense of being rapidly borne away. She seemed to hold that for a long time. When her faculties began to return the motion of the horse was no longer violent. For a few moments she could not determine her position. Apparently she was upside down. Then she saw that she was facing the ground, and must be lying across a saddle with her head hanging down. She could not move a hand; she could not tell where her hands were. Then she felt the touch of soft leather. She saw a high-topped Mexican boot, wearing a huge silver spur, and the reeking flank and legs of a horse, and a dusty, narrow strip of trail. Soon a kind of darkness veiled her eyes, her head swam, and she felt motion and pain only dully.

After what seemed a thousand weary hours some one lifted her from the horse and laid her upon the ground. Where, gradually, as the blood left her head and she could see, she began to get the right relation of things.

She lay in a sparse grove of firs, and the shadows told of late afternoon. She smelled wood smoke, and she heard the sharp crunch of horses' teeth nipping grass. Voices caused her to turn her face. A group of men stood and sat round a campfire eating like wolves. The looks of her captors made Madeline close her eyes, and the fascination, the fear they roused in her made her open them again. Mostly they were blue-bedled, thin-bearded Mexicans, black and haggard and starved. Whatever they might be, they surely were hunger-stricken and squalid. Not one had a coat. A few had scarfs. Some wore belts in which were scattered cartridges. Only a few had guns, and these were of diverse patterns. Madeline could see no packs, no blankets, and only a few cooking utensils, all battered and blackened. Her eyes fastened upon men she believed were white men; but it was from their features and not their color that she judged. Once she had seen a band of nomad robbers in the Sahara, and somehow was reminded of them by this motley outlaw troop.

They divided attention between the satisfying of ravenous appetites and a vigilant watching down the forest aisles. They expected some one, Madeline thought, and, manifestly, if it were a pursuing posse, they did not show anxiety. She could not understand more than a word here and there that they had uttered. Presently, however, the name of Don Carlos revived keen curiosity in her and realization of her situation, and then once more dread possessed her breast.

A low exclamation and a sweep of arm from one of the guerrillas caused the whole band to wheel and concentrate their attention in the opposite direction. They heard something. They saw some one. Grimy hands sought weapons, and then every man stiffened. Madeline saw what hunted men looked like at the moment of discovery, and the sight was terrible. She closed her eyes, sick with what she saw, fearful of the moment when the guns would leap out.

There were muttered curses, a short period of silence followed by whisperings, and then a clear voice rang out, "El Capitan!"

A strong shock vibrated through Madeline, and her eyelids swept open. Instantly she associated the name El Capitan with Stewart and experienced a sensation of strange regret. It was not pursuit or rescue she thought of then, but death. These men would kill Stewart. But surely he had not come alone. She heard the slow, heavy thump of hoofs. Soon into the wide aisle between the trees moved the form of a man, arms flung high over his head. Then Madeline saw the horse, and she recognized Majesty, and she knew it was really Stewart who rode the roan. When doubt was no longer possible she felt a suffocating sense of gladness and fear and wonder.

Many of the guerrillas leaped up with drawn weapons. Still Stewart approached with his hands high, and he rode right into the campfire circle. Then a guerrilla, evidently the chief, waved down the threatening men and strode up to Stewart. He greeted him. There was amaze and pleasure and respect in the greeting. Madeline could tell that, though she did not know what was said. At the moment Stewart appeared to her as cool and careless as if he were dismounting at her porch steps. But when he got down she saw that his face was white. He shook hands with the guerrilla, and then his glittering eyes roved over the men and around the glade until they rested upon Madeline. Without moving from his tracks he seemed to leap, as if a powerful current had shocked him. Madeline tried to smile to assure him she was alive and well; but the intent in his eyes, the power of his controlled spirit telling her of her peril and his, froze the smile on her lips.

With that he faced the chief and spoke rapidly in the Mexican jargon Madeline had always found so difficult to translate. The chief answered, spreading wide his hands, one of which indicated Madeline as she lay there. Stewart drew the fellow a little aside and said something for his ear alone. The chief's hands swept up in a gesture of surprise and acquiescence. Again Stewart spoke swiftly. His hearer then turned to address the band. Madeline caught the words "Don Carlos" and "pesos." There was a brief muttering protest which the chief thundered down. Madeline guessed her release had been given by this guerrilla and bought from the others of the band.

Stewart strode to her side, leading the roan. Majesty reared and snorted when he saw his mistress prostrate. Stewart knelt, still holding the bridle.

"Are you all right?" he asked.

"I think so," she replied, essaying a laugh that was rather a failure. "My feet are tied."

Dark blood blotted out all the white from his face, and lightning shot from his eyes. She felt his hands, like steel tongs, loosening the bonds round her ankles. Without a word he lifted her upright and then upon Majesty. Madeline reeled a little in the saddle, held hard to the pommel with one hand and tried to lean on Stewart's shoulder with the other.

Grimy Hands Sought Weapons, and Then Every Man Stiffened.

"Don't give up," he said.

She saw him gaze furtively into the forest on all sides. And it surprised her to see the guerrillas riding away. Putting the two facts together, Madeline formed an idea that neither Stewart nor the others desired to meet with some one evidently due shortly in the glade. Stewart guided the roan off to the right and walked beside Madeline, steadying her in the saddle. At first Madeline was so weak and dizzy that she could scarcely retain her seat. The dizziness left her presently, and then she made an effort to ride without help. Her weakness, however, and a pain in her wrenched arm made the task laborsome.

Stewart had struck off the trail, if there were one, and was keeping to denser parts of the forest. Majesty's hoofs made no sound on the soft ground, and Stewart strode on without speaking. Neither his hurry nor vigilance relaxed until at least two miles had been covered. The soft ground gave place to bare, rocky soil. The horse snorted and tossed his head. A sound of splashing water broke the silence. The hollow opened into a wide one, through which a little brook murmured its way over the stones. Majesty snorted again and stopped and bent his head.

"He wants a drink," said Madeline. "I'm thirsty, too, and very tired."

Stewart lifted her out of the saddle, and as their hands parted she felt something moist and warm. Blood was running down her arm and into the palm of her hand.

"I'm—bleeding," she said, a little unsteadily. "Oh, I remember. My arm was hurt."

She held it out, the blood making her conscious of her weakness. Stewart's fingers felt so firm and sure. Swiftly he ripped the wet sleeve. Her forearm had been cut or scratched. He washed off the blood.

"Why, Stewart, it's nothing. I was only a little nervous. I guess that's the first time I ever saw my own blood."

He made no reply as he tore her handkerchief into strips and bound her arm. His swift motions and his silence gave her a hint of how he might meet a more serious emergency. She felt safe. And because of that impression, when he lifted his head and she saw that he was pale and shaking, she was surprised. He stood before her folding his scarf, which was still wet, and from which he made no effort to remove the red stains.

"Miss Hammond," he said, hoarsely. "It was a man's hands—a Greaser's fingernails—that cut your arm. I know who he was. I could have killed him. But I mightn't have got your freedom. You understand? I didn't dare."

Madeline gazed at Stewart, astounded more by his speech than his excessive emotion.

"My dear boy!" she exclaimed. And then she paused. She could not find words.

He was making an apology to her for not killing a man who had laid a rough hand upon her person. He was ashamed that it seemed to be in a torture that she might not understand why he had not killed the man. There seemed to be something of passionate scorn in him that he had not been able to avenge her as well as free her.

"Stewart, I understand. You were being my kind of cowboy. I thank you."

But she did not understand so much as she implied. She had heard many stories of this man's cool indifference to peril and death. He had always seemed as hard as granite. Why should the sight of a little blood upon her arm pale his cheek and shake his hand and thicken his voice? What was there in his nature to make him implore her to see the only reason he could not kill an outlaw? The answer to the first question was that he loved her. It was beyond her to answer the second. But the secret of it lay in the same strength from which his love sprang—an intensity of feeling which seemed characteristic of these western men of simple, lonely, elemental lives. All at once over Madeline rushed a tide of realization of how greatly it was possible for such a man as Stewart to love her. The thought came to her in all its singular power. All her eastern lovers who had the graces that made them her equals in the sight of the world were without the only great essential that a lonely, hard life had given to Stewart. Nature here struck a just balance. Something deep and dim in the future, an unknown voice, called to Madeline and disturbed her. And because it was not a voice to her intelligence she deadened the ears of her warm and throbbing life and decided never to listen.

"Is it safe to rest a little?" she asked. "I am so tired. Perhaps I'll be stronger if I rest."

"We're all right now," he said. "I can get you home by midnight. They'll be some worried down there."

"What happened?"

"Nothing much to any one but you. That's the—the hard luck of it. Florence caught us out on the slope. We were returning from the fire. We were dead beat. But we got to the ranch before any damage was done. We sure had trouble in finding a trace of you." Nick spotted the prints of your heels under the window. And then we knew. I had to fight the boys if they'd come after you we'd never have gotten you without a fight. I didn't want that. I had to rope Monty. Honest, I tied him to the porch. Nels and Nick promised to stay and hold him till morning. That was the best I could do. I was sure lucky to come up with the band so soon. I had figured right. I knew that guerrilla chief. He's a bandit in Mexico. It's a business with him. But he fought for Madero, and I was with him a good deal. He may be a Greaser, but he's white."

"How did you effect my release?"

"I offered them money. That's what the rebels all want. They need money. They're a lot of poor, hungry devils."

"I gathered that you offered to pay ransom. How much?"

"Two thousand dollars Mex. I gave my word. I'll have to take the money I told them when and where I'd meet them."

"Certainly. I'm glad I've got the money." Madeline laughed. "What a strange thing to happen to me! I wonder what dad would say to that? Stewart, I'm afraid he'd say two thousand dollars is more than I'm worth. But tell me. That rebel chieftain did not demand money?"

"No. The money is for his men. We were comrades before Juarez. One day I dragged him out of a ditch. I reminded him. Then I—I told him something. I—I thought—"

"Stewart, I know from the way he looked at me that you spoke of me. I heard Don Carlos' name several times. That interests me. What have Don Carlos and his vaqueros to do with this?"

"That Greaser has all to do with it," replied Stewart, grimly. "He burned his ranch and corrals to keep us from getting them. But he also did it to draw all the boys away from your home. They had a deep plot, all right. I left orders for some one to stay with you. But Al and Stillwell, who're both hot-headed, rode off this morning. Then the guerrillas came down."

"Well, what was the idea—the plot—as you call it?"

"To get you," he said, bluntly.

"Me! Stewart, you do not mean my capture—whatever you call it—was anything more than mere accident?"

"I do mean that. But Stillwell and your brother think the guerrillas wanted money and arms, and they just happened to make off with you because you ran under a horse's nose."

"You do not incline to that point of view?"

"I don't. Neither does Nels nor Nick Steele. And we know Don Carlos and the Greasers. Look how the vaqueros chased Flo for you!"

"What do you think, then?"

"I'd rather not say. Once I heard Nels say he'd seen the Greaser look at you, and if he ever saw him do it again he'd shoot him."

"Why, Stewart, that is ridiculous. To shoot a man for looking at a woman! This is a civilized country."

"Well, maybe it would be ridiculous in a civilized country. There's some things about civilization I don't care for."

"What, for instance?"

"For one thing, I can't stand for the way men let other men treat women."

"But, Stewart, this is strange talk from you, who, that night I came—"

She broke off, sorry that she had spoken. His shame was not pleasant to see. Suddenly he lifted his head, and she felt scorched by flaming eyes.

"Suppose I was drunk. Suppose I had met some ordinary girl. Suppose I had really made her marry me. Don't you think I would have stopped being a drunkard and have been good to her?"

"Stewart, I do not know what to think about you," replied Madeline.

Then followed a short silence. Madeline saw the last bright rays of the setting sun glide up over a distant ridge. Stewart rebridled the horse and looked at the saddle girths.

"I got off the trail. About Don Carlos I'll say right out, not what Nels and Nick think, but what I know. Don Carlos hoped to make off with you for himself, the same as if you had been a poor peon slave girl down in Sonora. Maybe he had a deeper plot than my rebel friend told me. Maybe he even went so far as to hope for American troops to chase him. The rebels are trying to stir up the United States. They'd welcome intervention. But, however that may be, the Greaser meant evil to you, and has meant it ever since he saw you first. That's all."

"Stewart, you have done me and my family a service we can never hope to repay."

"She fell asleep with her head on Stewart's breast."

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

The Flapper on Art.

The Woman stood at the far end of a certain corridor in the Art Institute feasting her soul on the peace, beauty and symmetry of the Venus de Milo. Her solitude was broken by the click of brisk heels on the marble floor. Look ing back, she perceived a comely young girl hastening toward the statue. Upon arrival the flapper viewed the master piece with an appraising glance; then looking toward the Woman she remarked incoolically: "The Venus was some round-shouldered, wasn't she?" And, turning, she reported at the same rapid rate at which she had arrived.—Chicago Journal.

"Grocery" Stores.

Webster's dictionary gives as one of the meanings of the word "grocery" in the United States a "retail grocer's store." It is quite correct to use it in this sense and to pluralize it, so as to make it unnecessary to say "grocery stores," just as we have "bakeries," etc.

Nigerian Cradles.

The women of Nigeria carry their new-born babies in calabash shells.

SNAKE MAKES VALUABLE MOUSER

Boa-Constrictor Takes Place of House Cat in Some Mexican Households, and Does Well.

In Sinaloa, on the west coast of Mexico, is the old town of Mazatlan, which, because of its position as a port of entry, has an interesting history of various and numerous bombardments which took place during the never-ending revolutions in Mexico.

"Mazatlan," translated, means the "place of the deer." It could well be called "the place of the parrot." For these beautiful birds are sold along the sidewalk by peddlers. On the swinging doors of the hotel—if one can dignify the lodging house with such a name—is invariably seen a grave parrot, sitting, like a magistrate, and passing judgment on the passers-by.

But this is not the only representative of the animal kingdom in the history. For it boasts of a 10-foot boa constrictor, which hangs lazily from the ceiling or is curled up in a corner. Here the boa constrictor is the mouser. The Mexicans use it with great success in the place of the ordinary house cat. And it is no more dangerous than pussy herself. The snakes are faithful in their work and take the entire responsibility themselves of killing off rats. For if rat is found in their territory they take the precaution of removing any rivals in their art by first eating the cat.

Happy.

"They get along beautifully, don't they?"

"Yes. They are the happiest married people I know of. They can even play bridge whist together without arguing."

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Is a home setting made miserable? Are you torture by sharp, stabbing pains? Feel weak, tired, nervous and miserable? Then look to your kidneys, for these are common signs of kidney weakness. How many are suffering from backache, nagging bladder irregularities? Don't risk serious kidney sickness. Help your kidneys with Doan's Kidney Pills. Doan's Pills are used by thousands and should help you. Ask your neighbor!

A Michigan Case

Mrs. Geo. F. Ehrhart, 60 Forest St., Marquette, Mich., says: "My back was very lame and I felt tired and worn out when I stooped a catch took me and I had to grab something to keep from falling. Sometimes I would have a dizzy spell and I would awake in the night and think I was back in the woods. My kidneys seemed to be out of balance, causing my sight, far. I used Doan's Kidney Pills and they cured me."

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Kipling is Baldwin's Cousin.

The rise of the prime minister, Mr. Baldwin, has caused to be told once more the story of the four daughters of a Wesleyan Methodist minister, Rev. G. B. Macdonald, one of whom became the mother of the new prime minister. Another married Mr. Lockwood Kipling and became the mother of Mr. Rudyard Kipling. A third married Sir Edward Poynter, the late president of the Royal academy, and the fourth married that great artist, Sir Edward Burne-Jones. Their brother, Rev. F. W. Macdonald, won in his time the honor of being president of the Wesleyan Methodist conference. Mr. Baldwin, therefore, has had some distinguished uncles and cousins.—London correspondence in the Christian Century.

Official Bat Hunters in Ceylon.

Ceylon is infested with a fruit-eating bat, the species commonly known as "flying fox." The rodents have made such inroads on the fruit crops that the Ceylon government is making efforts to exterminate, or at least reduce the pests. Official bat hunters have been appointed and a campaign of shooting will be tried. This should be effective, for the bats hang inactive in the trees during the daytime in vast hordes.

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Pills and salts give temporary relief from constipation only at the expense of permanent injury, says an eminent medical authority.

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Can Only Work in Two Months.

In surveying the Mississippi delta in a seaplane atmospheric conditions are such that mapping flights can be made only during May and October.

Has Responsible Position.

"Recreation engineer" is the title given to a new official working under the direction of the United States forest service, for the development of public camp grounds and summer home sites in the national forests of the West. It is estimated that 5,500,000 tourists visit the national reservations yearly.—Popular Mechanics.

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