The Light of Western Stars

A Romance

By Zane Grey

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"ALFRED!"

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, Sonita, take his horse and escape, then conducts Madeline to Florence Kingsley, friend of her brother.

CHAPTER II

—2—

A Secret Kept.

Because of that singular reply Madeline found faith to go farther with the cowboy. But at the moment she really did not think about what he had said. Any answer to her would have served if it had been kind.

As she walked on into the windy darkness, much relieved that he had answered as he had, reflecting that he had yet to prove his words true, she began to grasp the deeper significance of them. There was a revival of pride that made her feel that she ought to scorn to think at all about such a man.

Presently Madeline's guide turned off the walk and rapped at a door of a low-roofed house.

"Hullo—who's there?" a deep voice answered.

"Gene Stewart," said the cowboy. "Call Florence—quick!"

Thump of footsteps followed, a tap on a door, and voices. Madeline heard a woman exclaim: "Gene! here when there's a dance in town! Something wrong out on the range." A light flared up and shone bright through a window. In another moment there came a patter of soft steps, and the door opened to disclose a woman holding a lamp.

"Gene! Al's not—"

"Al is all right," interrupted the cowboy.

Madeline had two sensations then—one of wonder at the note of alarm and love in the woman's voice, and the other of unutterable relief to be safe with a friend of her brother's.

"It's Al's sister—came on tonight's train," the cowboy was saying. "I happened to be at the station, and I've fetched her up to you."

Madeline came forward out of the shadow.

"Not—not really Majesty Hammond!" exclaimed Florence Kingsley. She nearly dropped the lamp, and she looked astounded beyond belief.

"Yes, I am really she," replied Madeline. "My train was late, and for some reason Alfred did not meet me. Mr.—Mr. Stewart saw fit to bring me to you instead of taking me to a hotel."

"Oh, I'm so glad to meet you," replied Florence, warmly. "Do come in. I'm so surprised. I forget my manners. Why, you are white as a sheet. You must be tired. What a long wait you had at the station! If I had known you were coming! Indeed, you are very pale. Are you hurt?"

"No. Only I am very tired. Traveling so far by rail is harder than I imagined. I did have rather a long wait after arriving at the station, but I can't say that it was lonely."

Florence Kingsley searched Madeline's face with keen eyes, and then took a long, significant look at the silent Stewart. With that she deliberately and quietly closed a door leading into another room.

"Miss Hammond, what has happened?" She had lowered her voice.

"I do not wish to recall all that has happened," replied Madeline. "I shall tell Alfred, however, that I would rather have met a hostile Apache than a cowboy."

"Please don't tell Al that!" cried Florence. Then she grasped Stewart and pulled him close to the light. "Gene, you're drunk!"

"Now, see here, Flo—I only—"

"I don't want to know. I'd tell it, Gene, aren't you ever going to learn decency? Aren't you ever going to stop drinking? You'll lose all your friends. Molly and I have pleaded with you, and now you've gone and done—God knows what!"

"What do women want to wear veils for?" he growled. "I'd have known her but for that veil."

"And you wouldn't have insulted her. But you would the next girl who came along. Gene, you are hopeless. Now, you get out of here and don't ever come back."

"Flo!" he entreated.

"I mean it."

"I reckon then I'll come back tomorrow and take my medicine," he replied.

"Don't you dare!" she cried.

Stewart went out and closed the door.

"Miss Hammond, you—you don't know how this hurts me," said Florence. "What you must think of us! It's so unlucky that you should have had this happen right at first. Now, maybe you won't have the heart to stay. Oh, I've known more than one eastern girl to go home without ever learning what we really are out here. Miss Hammond, Gene Stewart is a fiend when he's drunk. All the same I know, whatever he did, he meant no shame to you. Come now, don't think about it again tonight." She took up the lamp and led Madeline into a little room. "Won't you let me help you undress—can I do anything for you?"

"You are very kind, thank you, but I can manage," replied Madeline.

"Well, then good night. The sooner I go the sooner you'll rest. Just forget what happened and think how fine a surprise you're to give your brother tomorrow."

With that she slipped out and softly shut the door.

As Madeline laid her watch on the bureau she noticed that the time was past two o'clock. It seemed long since she had gotten off the train. When she had turned out the lamp and crept wearily into bed she knew what it was, to be utterly spent. She was too tired to move a finger.

When she awakened the room was bright with sunlight. She was lazily and dreamily contemplating the mud walls of this little room when she remembered where she was and how she had come there.

Her great a shock she had been subjected to was manifest in a sensation of disgust that overwhelmed her. She even shut her eyes to try and blot out the recollection. She felt that she had been contaminated.

Presently Madeline Hammond again awoke to the fact she had learned the preceding night—that there were emotions to which she had heretofore been a stranger. She scarcely remembered when she had found it necessary to control her emotions. There had been no trouble, no excitement, no unpleasantness in her life. It had been ordered for her—tranquil, luxurious, brilliant, varied, yet always the same.

Then Madeline heard Florence rap on the door and call softly:

"Miss Hammond. Are you awake?"

"Awake and dressed, Miss Kingsley."

Presently there were slow, reluctant steps outside the front door, then a pause, and the door opened. Stewart stood bareheaded in the sunlight. Madeline's glance ran over him swift as lightning. But as she saw his face now she did not recognize it. The man's presence roused in her a revolt. Yet something in her, the incomprehensible side of her nature, thrilled in the look of this splendid dark-faced barbarian.

"Mr. Stewart, will you please come in?" she asked, after that long pause.

"I reckon not," he said. The hopelessness of his tone meant that he knew he was not fit to enter a room with her, and did not care or cared too much.

Madeline went to the door. The man's face was hard, yet it was sad, too. And it touched her.

"I shall not tell my brother of your—your rudeness to me," she began. It was impossible for her to keep the chill out of her voice, to speak with other than the pride and aloofness of her class. Nevertheless, despite her loathing, when she had spoken so far it seemed that kindness and pity followed involuntarily. "I choose to overlook what you did because you were not wholly accountable, and because there must be no trouble between Alfred and you. May I rely on you to keep silence and to seal the lips of that priest? You will spare me further distress, will you not, please?"

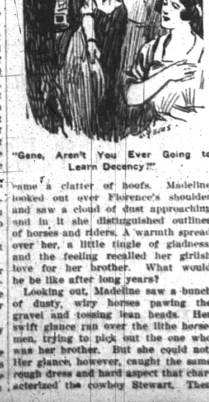
His hoarse reply was incoherent, but she needed only to see his working face to know his remorse and gratitude.

Madeline went back to her room; and presently Florence came for her, and directly they were sitting at breakfast. Madeline Hammond's impression of her brother's friend had to be reconstructed in the morning light. She felt a wholesome, frank, sweet nature. She liked the slow southern drawl. And she was puzzled to know whether Florence Kingsley was pretty or striking or unusual. She had a youthful glow and flush, the clear tan of outdoors, a face that lacked the soft curves and lines of eastern women, and her eyes were light gray, like crystal, steady, almost piercing, and her hair was a beautiful bright waving mass.

A sharp knock on the parlor door interrupted conversation. Florence's sister went to open it. She returned presently and said:

"It's Gene. He's been dawdlin' out there on the front porch, and he knocked to let us know Miss Hammond's brother is comin'."

Florence hurried into the parlor, followed by Madeline. The door stood open, and blackeyed Stewart sitting on the porch steps. From down the road came a clatter of hoofs. Madeline looked out over Florence's shoulder and saw a cloud of dust approaching and in it she distinguished outlines of horses and riders. A warmth spread over her, a little tingle of gladness, and the feeling recalled her girlish love for her brother. What would he be like after long years?



"Gene, Aren't You Ever Going to Learn Decency?"

Looking out, Madeline saw a bunch of dusty, wiry horses pawing the gravel and tossing lean heads. Her swift glance ran over the lithe horsemen, trying to pick out the one who was her brother. But she could not. Her glance, however, caught the same rough dress and hard aspect that characterized the cowboy Stewart. Then one rider threw his reins, leaped from the saddle, and came bounding up the porch steps. Florence met him at the door.

"Hello, Flo. Where is she?" he called, eagerly. With that he looked over her shoulder to espy Madeline. He actually jumped at her. She hardly knew the tall form and the bronzed face, but the warm flash of blue eyes was familiar. As for him, he had no doubt of his sister, it appeared, for with broken welcome he threw his arms around her, then held her off and looked searchingly at her.

"Well, sister," he began, when Florence turned hurriedly from the door and interrupted him.

"Al, I think you'd better stop the wrangling out there."

He stared at her, appeared suddenly to hear the loud voices from the street, and then, releasing Madeline, he said:

"By George! I forgot, Flo. There is a little business to see to. Keep my sister in here, please, and don't be fussed up, now."

He went out on the porch and called to his men:

"Shut off your wind, Jack! And you, too, Blaze! I don't want you fellows to come here. But as you would come, you've got to shut up. This is my business."

Whereupon he returned to Stewart, who was sitting on the fence.

"Hello, Stewart!" he said.

It was a greeting; but there was that in the voice which alarmed Madeline.

Stewart leisurely got up and leisurely advanced to the porch.

"Hello, Hammond!" he drawled.

"Drunk again last night?"

"Well, if you want to know, and if it's any of your mix, yes, I was—pretty drunk," replied Stewart.

It was a kind of cool speech that showed the cowboy in control of himself and master of the situation—not an easy speech to follow up with undue inquisitiveness. There was a short silence.

"D— it, Stewart," said the speaker, presently, "there's the situation: It's all over town that you met my sister last night at the station and—and insulted her. Gene, you've been on the wrong trail for some time, drinking and all that. You're going to the bad. But Bill thinks, and I think, you're still a man. We never knew you to lie. Now what have you to say for yourself?"

"Nobody is insinuating that I am a liar?" drawled Stewart.

"No."

"Well, I'm glad to hear that. You see, Al, I was pretty drunk last night, but not drunk enough to forget the least thing I did. I found Miss Hammond waiting alone at the station. She wore a veil, but I knew she was a lady, of course. I imagine now that I think of it, that Miss Hammond found my gallantry rather startling, and—"

At this point Madeline, answering to unconsidered impulse, eluded Florence and walked out upon the porch.

"Gentlemen," said Madeline, rather breathlessly; and it did not add to her calmness to feel a hot flush in her cheeks, "I am very new to western ways, but I think you are laboring under a mistake, which, in justice to Mr. Stewart, I want to correct. Indeed, he was rather—rather abrupt and strange when he came up to me last night; but as I understand him now, I can attribute that to his gallantry. He was somewhat wild and sudden and—sentimental in his demand to protect me—and it was not clear whether he meant his protection for last night or forever; but I am happy to say he offered me no word that was not honorable. And he saw me safely here to Miss Kingsley's home."

CHAPTER III

Sister and Brother.

Then Madeline returned to the little parlor with the brother whom she had hardly recognized.

"Majesty!" he exclaimed. "To think of your being here!"

The warmth stole back along her veins. She remembered how that pet name had sounded from the lips of this brother who had given it to her.

"Alfred!"

"Dear old girl," he said, "you haven't changed at all, except to grow lovelier. Only you're a woman now, and you've fulfilled the name I gave you. G—d! how sight of you brings back home! It seems a hundred years since I left. I missed you more than all the rest."

Madeline seemed to feel with his every word that she was remembering him. She was so amazed at the change in him that she could not believe her eyes. She saw a bronzed, strong jawed, eagle-eyed man, stalwart, superb of height, and, like the cowboys, belted, booted, spurred. She had hidden good-by to a dispirited, disinherited, dissolute boy. Well she remembered the handsome pale face with its weakness and shadows and careless smile, with the ever-present cigarette hanging between the lips. The years had passed, and now she saw him a man—the West had made him a man. And Madeline Hammond felt a strong, passionate gladness and gratefulness, and a direct check to her sudden inspired hatred of the West.

"Majesty, it was good of you to come. I'm all broken up. How did you ever do it? But never mind that now. Tell me about that brother of mine."

And Madeline told him, and then about their sister Helen. Question after question he fired at her; and she told him of her mother; of Aunt Grace, who had died a year ago; of his old friends, married, scattered, vanished. But she did not tell him of his father, for he did not ask.

Quite suddenly the rapid-fire questioning ceased; he choked, was silent a moment, and then burst into tears. It seemed to her that a long, stored-up bitterness was flooding away. It hurt her to see him—hurt her more to hear him. And in the succeeding few moments she grew closer to him than she had ever been in the past. Had her father and mother done right by him? Her pulse stirred with unwonted quickness. She did not speak, but she kissed him, which, for her, was an indication of unusual feeling. And when he recovered command over his emotions he made no reference to his breakdown, nor did she. But that scene struck deep into Madeline Hammond's heart. Through it she saw what he had lost and gained.

"Alfred, why did you not answer my last letters?" asked Madeline. "I had not heard from you for two years."

"So long? How time flies! Well, things went bad with me about the last time I heard from you. I always intended to write some day, but I never did. You remember all about my little ranch, and that for a while I did well raising stock? I wrote you all that. Majesty, a man makes enemies anywhere. Perhaps an eastern man in the West can make, if not so many, certainly more bitter ones. At any rate, I made several. There was a cattleman, Ward by name—he's gone now—and he and I had trouble over cattle. That gave me a back-set. Pat Hawe, the sheriff here, has been instrumental in hurting my business. He's not so much of a rancher, but he has influence at Santa Fe and El Paso and Douglas. I made an enemy of him. I never did anything to him. The real reason for his animosity toward me is that he loves Florence and Florence is going to marry me."

"Dear Old Girl," He said.

"Alfred!"

"What's the matter, Majesty? Didn't Florence impress you favorably?" he asked, with a keen glance.

"Why—yes, indeed. I like her. But I did not think of her in relation to you—that way. I am greatly surprised. Alfred, is she well born? What connections?"

"Florence is just a girl of ordinary people. She was born in Kentucky, was brought up in Texas. My aristocratic and wealthy family would scorn—"

"Alfred, you are still a Hammond," said Madeline, with uplifted head.

Alfred laughed. "We won't quarrel, Majesty. I remember you, and in spite of your pride you've got a heart. If you stay here a month you'll love Florence Kingsley. I want you to know she's had a great deal to do with straightening me up. . . . Well, to go on with my story. There's Don Carlos, a Mexican rancher, and he's my worst enemy. Don Carlos is a wily Greaser, he knows the ranges, he has the water, and he is dishonest. So he outfigured me. And now I am practically ruined. He has not gotten possession of my ranch, but that's only a matter of time, pending lawsuits at Santa Fe. At present I have a few hundred cattle running on Stillwell's range, and I am his foreman."

"Foreman?" queried Madeline.

"I am simply boss of Stillwell's cowboys, and right glad of my job."

Madeline was conscious of an inward burning. It required an effort for her to retain her outward tranquillity.

"Cannot your property be reclaimed?" she asked. "How much do you owe?"

"Ten thousand dollars would clear me and give me another start. But, Majesty, in this country that's a good deal of money, and I haven't been able to raise it. Stillwell's in worse shape than I am."

Madeline went over to Alfred and put her hands on his shoulders.

"We must not be in debt."

He stared at her as if her words had recalled something long forgotten. Then he smiled.

"How imperious you are! I'd forgotten just who my beautiful sister really is. Majesty, you're not going to ask me to take money from you?"

"I am."

"Well, I'll not do it. I never did, even when I was in college, and then there wasn't much beyond me."

"Listen, Alfred," she went on, earnestly, "this is entirely different. I had only an allowance then. You had no way to know that since I last wrote you I had come into my inheritance from Aunt Grace. It wasn't well, that doesn't matter. Only, I haven't been able to spend half the income. It's mine. It's not father's money. You will make me very happy if you'll consent. What is ten thousand dollars to me? Sometimes I spend that in a month. I throw money away. If you let me help you it will be doing me good as well as you. Please, Alfred."

"You always were the best of fellows, Majesty. And if you really care—if you really want to help me I'll be only too glad to accept. It will be fine. Florence will go wild. And that Greaser won't harass me any more. Majesty, pretty soon some titled fellow will be spending your money; I may as well take a little before he gets it all," he finished, jokingly.

"What do you know about me?" she asked, lightly.

"More than you think. Even if we are lost out here 12 the woolly West, we get news. Everybody knows about Anglesbury. And that new duke who chased you all over Europe, that Lord Castleton has the running now and seems about to win. How about it, Majesty?"

Madeline detected a hint that suggested scorn in his gay speech. And deep in his searching glance she saw a flame. She became thoughtful. She had forgotten Castleton, New York society.

"Alfred," she began, seriously, "I don't believe any titled gentleman will ever spend my money, as you elegantly express it."

"I don't care for that. It's you!" he cried, passionately, and he grasped her with a violence that startled her. He was white; his eyes were now like fire. "You are so splendid—so wonderful. People called you the American Beauty, but you're more than that. You're the American Girl! Majesty marry no man unless you love him, and love an American. Stay away from Europe long enough to learn to know the men—the real men of your own country."

"Alfred, I'm afraid there are not always real men and real love for American girls in international marriages. Alfred, tell me how you came to know about me, way out here? You may be assured I was astonished to find that Miss Kingsley knew me as Majesty Hammond."

"I imagine it was a surprise," he replied, with a laugh. "I told Florence about you—gave her a picture of you. And, of course, being a woman, she showed the picture and talked. She's in love with you. Then, you dear sister, we do get New York papers out here occasionally, and we can see and read. You may not be aware that you and your society friends are objects of intense interest in the U. S. in general, and the West in particular. The papers are full of you, and perhaps a lot of things you never did, Majesty. I must run down to the siding," consulting his watch. "We're loading a shipment of cattle. I'll be back by supper time and bring Stillwell with me. You'll like him."

Madeline went to her room, intending to rest awhile, and she fell asleep. She was aroused by Florence's knock and call.

"Miss Hammond, your brother has come back with Stillwell."

Madeline accompanied Florence to the porch. Her brother, who was sitting near the door, jumped up and said:

"Hello, Majesty!" And as he put his arm around her he turned toward a massive man whose broad, craggy face began to ripple and wrinkle. "I want to introduce my friend Stillwell to you. Bill, this is my sister Majesty. I've so often told you about—Majesty."

"An' Gene Stewart hed hit the trail for the border."

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Action Is All That Counts.

The fact is that in order to do anything in this world worth doing, we must not stand shivering on the bank thinking of the cold and the danger, but jump in and scramble through as well as we can.—Sydney Smith.

CONCERNING THAT FIRST DOLLAR

Small Amount, of Course, but It Has a Value Far Beyond Its Intrinsic Worth.

It is a very common thing to hear a clever, capable man or woman accused of not knowing "the value of a dollar," or of not being able to "save a dollar."

Before you can make money you must first have a true appreciation of the value of $1; not the value of $1,000 or $100,000, but the true value of $1, says a writer in Thrift.

You have often heard the expression: "To him a dollar looks as large as a house." While this expression is usually applied to a person who is miserly, it would nevertheless be an excellent thing if every thriftless person would place a higher appreciation upon $1.

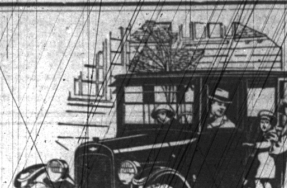
The average person does not throw his earnings away in large sums. He wastes $1 here and $1 there in an unthinking manner.

When you enter the office of a successful business man and find the first dollar he made in his business hanging upon the wall in a frame you can, almost invariably, look around and see a great, prosperous establishment. Whatever has been accomplished by that man is largely due to the value he placed upon the first dollar he made.

Every large fortune or prosperous business establishment has for its corner stone $1. When you save $1 and put it to work for you in a savings bank you have laid the foundation of your fortune and placed your first dollar saved where it is available for production.

Ten Commandments of Buddha.

Buddha, the great religious reformer of India, has 340,000 followers. Condensed into ten short precepts, his doctrines may be given as follows: 1. From the meanest insect up to man thou shalt kill no animal whatever. 2. Thou shalt not steal. 3. Thou shalt not commit adultery. 4. Thou shalt speak no word that is false. 5. Thou shalt drink no wine or anything to intoxicate. 6. Thou shalt avoid all anger, hatred and bitter language. 7. Thou shalt not indulge in idle of vain talk. 8. Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's goods. 9. Thou shalt not harbor pride, envy, revenge, or malice, or desire the death or misfortune of thy neighbor. 10. Thou shalt not follow the doctrines of strange gods.



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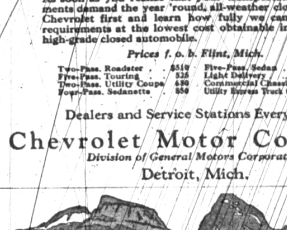

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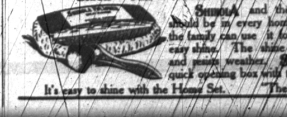

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