

gone. He sprang hurriedly to his feet, then catching sight of the small parcel, wrapped neatly in a silk handkerchief that had been left on his blanket, made haste to open it. In it he found a photograph and a short note that had been scribbled with a lead pencil. It was the picture of his late companion in female dress,—a beautiful, piquant girl,—and with staring eyes he read the following:

"As I am my only sister, myself, I was afraid to let you see me again in daylight—your instinct being so keen. But you have the invite in spite of the actress. Good luck with her, too—though you are bound to fail for you will find her quite as difficult to know as she is beautiful—as difficult maybe as a cowboy girl!"

A signature and an address was attached and as Careless read the note over and over again and fancied he heard the laugh at the end of it a smile stole into his eyes.

"Hang it," he broke out, "if I'd only known he was a woman!"

Then, slowly and reminiscently, he got back in the saddle, following the trail straight into the sunrise.

It was noon almost when he reached the city and down a long avenue of overhanging trees and fine residences, where people turned to look after him, he drew up at length before the poster of a beautiful woman—a woman with masses of blonde, sunlit hair and the depth and brooding of an evening in her eyes. He stared at it long—so long that the face with its perfect lips seemed somehow to give back a silent challenge; then remembering the warning of the cowboy girl he threw back his head and laughed.

"We'll see if I fail," he said; "we'll see on the showdown."

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In a proscenium box in the theatre that night, coolly, superbly on his mettle, Careless sat with the curiosity

of a vast audience rippling toward him. They had smiled first, then looked with interest, then overlooked entirely the government party in the box behind and had eyes for him alone. To them in his buckskin togs—clean ones by the way—and a red silk kerchief at his neck, he represented the great untamed—the great untamed perhaps in a manner they had never quite seen it before—and with all his unscrupulous, piquant challenge Careless accepted the role and flung it back at them.

He was so infinitely "Careless" indeed, so thoroughly West and fit for anything, that he might have just been breaking a broncho back on the ranch, or making love to the waitress, Nell Lowry.

But when the curtain went up and the performance began everything went out of mind but that one woman. The tenderfoot back there had told no lie and for two acts he watched her, his youth singing in every pulse. Then just at the conclusion of the third act and her last thrilling appeal, while she stood for the moment alone on the stage and the audience still sat silent in the spell of it, he stepped quietly and quickly out of his box—across the footlights—and before she had quite wakened up to his presence, clasped her gently but firmly about the waist. For a moment—while he tried to reassure her, and the audience rose with snarls and hisses as a man at him—she struggled hotly, then her head thrown back, resigned herself with dignity. The sudden rush from behind the scenes Careless swept with the point of his six-shooter.

"Keep back you," he warned, "or someun'll get hurt—an' it wont be her."

Then he threw back his head and laughed suddenly at the richness of the situation, and half turned to the audience that hushed instantly at the sound of his voice.