

"CARELESS"

BY BILLEE GLYNN



OLD BILL was in the habit of shaking his grizzled head over it.

"He was pek-u-lar," he would say, "pek-u-lar! The whul darn thing was pek-u-lar, in fact, till it looked like nuthin' more'n as if a page or two o' that magazine the Tenderfoot left behind with her picture in it 'ad somehow slipped covers an' got torn up on the trail till a feller couldn't help ridin' on romance nohow. A long trail it was, too, all the w'y to the capital from the foothill country, but it ran like a placer stream from beginnin' to end—bright with more'n one woman's eyes and the purtiest of the whul sex at the end of it.

"None of us believed him, of course, when he came back and spun the yarn—though he did do it so out of the or'inary, gentle and reserved like. The best lie he ever told, we said, and he had let loose some. Always runnin' to imagernation and head, that feller, like a buckin' bronco. But you couldn't help likin' him for wot he was any more'n you could guess wot that was goin' to be or had been. He never told us that. Just blew inter camp one mornin' a little poorer and gayer'n we'd ever seen anyone afore an' we called 'im "Careless" on the head of it, an' set up a drink that he didn't take.

"He wasn't very sociable in that line—didn't need to be, I raickon, for he was a little gay, more or less, alwus. Anyhow, when it came to a scrap he was his weight in wilcats, an' the beast that could buck 'im or he didn't look a picture on has yet to be bred

in the foothill country. Then he was such a bloomin' kid in it all—an unroped, reckless sort of young'un, with his smile an' his kurly hair, that the average woman simply went daft over 'im. At least the only average one we knew at the McTavish did, till he had to fight for her, and as for the other—well, as I've said afore, not a soul of us hitched up to it, till the newspaper came with the whul blame story, headed in big, black letters, when it made us sit up some an' take notice."

That was Old Bill's version of it and the man—but then Old Bill beneath his oilcloths was a poet born, just the same as Careless. Indeed if it came down to facts it might be ascertained that the Tenderfoot was a poet too. At any rate, though he had worked on the press in the East, he was a very young tenderfoot, and described her vividly as only a very young tenderfoot and newspaper man could. He told of the fine, fresh, virginal lines of her body, of the light in her eyes, of the siren sweetness of her voice, of the love at her lips. He told everything of her that was good and nothing that was bad, and he ended it all with the sweeping statement that both love and lips were still unclaimed—that in all the romance of her career and necessities of her art she had never been kissed, and that it was part of her fame as an actress and a woman.

He was a very young tenderfoot truly—and Careless who heard, was older only in act. He laughed his quick, musical laugh in a manner that was new and an hour later rode out