

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 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 of camp with a roll at his saddle and the biggest conceit he had ever tumbled on at his heart. He waved a hand to them blithely as he went.

"It's a bit of a jog," he said, "but she's worth while, stranger, if you don't lie. Toast one you fellows to the luck of the camp."

And they gave him the laugh.

"Don't break up to it so fast," remarked Slivers to the tenderfoot who was gaping around. "He's Spanish-Irish but not big enough fool for a three-hundred-mile trail to a cache he can't lift. The roll's a bluff, and he's gone down to hold hands with Nell Lowry at the McTavish. She's got lips, too, you know, if they're not exactly virgin." Slivers was no poet.

Down in the rockbed of the arroyo, the cowboy's nag was hitting fire from the trail. It was early summer, and the moonlight shook phosphorescently in a light, cool breeze. Far, far in the distance behind, mountains and night grew

into one—an indistinguishable, hooded darkness—and where the arroyo went shallow and the saddle heights gave view the tumbled foothills piled back like fallen, glistening totems under the moon. For twenty miles the sharp clang of the hoofs rang out incessantly—then out of the arroyo and down the valley thudded heavily in the handicap of sand. The town lights ducked suddenly as horse and rider dipped into a gulch, and when they came again were no longer mystic earth stars bobbing poetry, but crude, spluttering reality.

At the "McTavish," Careless threw his reins over a post and sauntered in. There was an odor of beefsteak in the air, and stagnant tobacco smoke that bit at the eyes, but nowhere apparent the buxom form and full-lipped laugh of the waitress, Nell Lowry. A group of cattlemen in one corner were making a night of it, and just opposite two eastern-tailored strangers flashed diamonds over their soup. Careless swung himself to a table, rang up a boy, and sent him for a steak and the girl.

She came by and by when the steak was through—big, brown-eyed, and good to look at—and sat opposite him, her chin in her hands.

"It's four weeks," she said reproachfully in her broken, musical tones. "Where hev you been?"

"Been here for half an hour," responded the cowboy, "an' you weren't. Got another half to stay."

"If you're in sich a rush you'd better go right now."

He shoved away his plate and leaned forward on his hands also, a light smouldering in his eyes.

"You didn't mean that—you know it."

She nodded her head back slightly toward the other table where the noise had fallen to brow-bent ominous silence.

"Thar may be others that does, then," she signified, drumming one hand and holding him for a moment with the invitation of her eyes.