

from the strings, and tearing it away, bow and all, handed it over to Careless.

Nothing perhaps could have been more in his element. It was one of the things on which he particularly prided himself anyway, but that night he played as he had never played before—played to a pair of lovely brown eyes across the fire, and with all the high, tender passion of his Spanish-Irish heart. From aeons and aeons far primitive unlimited things seemed to leap to his nimble fingers and into crisp, vibrant, moon-sheened air. And by and by the girl moved closer to him—and when at last he broke into the piquant vivacity of an old-time fandango, she got up and danced to his music with a free, artless grace. And of the whole camp there were only those two—the man playing—and the girl moving to the strains. Then, when it was all over she sank beside him in a breathless heap and Careless in the silence which followed, felt the soft brush of her beating body with a sense of intoxication.

The chief was the first to rouse himself from the spell of the incident. "Yeuh women better get to bed," he commanded gruffly. "Sammy take yer fiddle."

The man obeyed, following the three women out into the canvas-ghosted shadow of the rigs. He returned presently, however, throwing a sullen look at the girl, then flashed a gloomy inquiry on the chief. The latter, for the time deigned him no notice, but spoke again abruptly in a few minutes.

"Better to bed, Mag," he threw out sharply; "it's no time for moonin'."

The girl raised her head for an instant to sweep the three gypsies with a clear, steady glance. "An' wot 'er the rest o' yeuh gawin' to do?" she asked pertinently.

That was all that was said, but the question seemed to hang in the air. The silence grew ponderous with it by and by, and when the embers had died

out one by one and the moon drifted behind a cloud, the darkness came in the depths of the trees to sit sphinx-like—with the heavy faces of the three gypsies looming out of it, sinister and implacable. In the midst of it and with combative cheerfulness Careless tried to whistle an air once but it died somehow on his lips, then feeling the girl's head on his shoulder, and shielded partly as they were from the others, he stole an arm around her waist. When he looked up again—it may have been hours, for the darkness had now become a smiling protection—two of the three men's heads had disappeared. He wondered where, but in his nestling state of mind cared not to bother about it. Indeed, the hope formed quickly in his heart that the chief crouched there and becoming much too apparent in the returning moonlight would go soon too.

Then suddenly he was seized by four arms from behind and a knife glittered before his eyes, while the girl sprang up with a startled scream. That very moment, however, she had covered the gypsies with the glistening barrel of a tiny revolver, fired one quick shot with a sharp command, and the cowboy stood released, his own weapon in his hand. The chief, who had risen in protest, sat down again, snarling something at her fiercely, and she answered with a hot wrath that left him silent. Then she turned to Careless—still covering with his gun at his hip the two men who stood there transfixed and grinning evilly.

"Yer pony, stranger," she said with a bright glance, "an' I'll ride with yeuh a bit. It's all right now—they're not game."

Careless turned to her and laughed in the way he had, throwing the challenge of the words at those in front.

"I like yer style a heap," he said, his eyes shining with adoration, "an' you ken ride the hul darn way if you like an' think I'm good enough."