

interest with the others regarding them.

Careless glanced at the chief, who smiled back at him grimly. He had heard the jingle of coin in the cowboy's pocket, and was no fool at that stage of the game to mar financial possibilities through overhaste in anger. The others were scowling and a heavy, swarthy fellow with a red kerchief at his throat moved over and plucked the woman savagely by the arm, saying something in the gypsy argot. With the blood flaming at her cheeks she yanked herself fiercely away, hurling an epithet at him between her closed teeth—but heeded his warning none the less, for she remained afterward with downcast eyes, looking into the fire.

Addressing the chief this time, Careless was about to proceed as though nothing had happened when a welcome interruption ensued.

A short distance away around the bend in the trail the quick, nervous outbreak of a horse's hoofs swung suddenly to them—and one of the women uttered in high, shrill tones, "Ere's Mag!"

It was the immediate signal to the circle about to fall into waiting and silence.

A moment later and the rider had come up and dismounted with a leap, displaying in the twitching, tongued half-light a three-quarter skirt and a comely form. Then having loosed her horse with the celerity of long practice she moved over to the fire, whip in hand.

Met with a jargon of greetings and questions she stood staring around at them and blinking an extremely lovely pair of eyes at the light—then her glance suddenly fell on Careless and darted back to the others with swift inquiry.

The chief answered her for some short time in his own tongue, during which she darted bright little glances at the cowboy who had risen to his feet with a profound doffing of his sombrero, then as if accepting the in-

troduction she bowed in a friendly way, and, motioning him to sit down while she placed herself opposite, proceeded to inspect him thoroughly—the vital, clear-cut face with its power of eye and the lithe, graceful, buckskinned form. His frank admiration evidently bothered her not a bit, and she met it at length with a little of her own that was quite as frank.

She was nineteen or twenty, probably, with features inexpressibly charming in their natural invitation; dark with a clear skin and a cloud of hair, and of medium height, though queenly even in her unfashioned skirt. The masterly, passionate turn of the lips seemed to haunt the whole face, and the eyes gleamed out at times with just the slightest frown.

"So you're a cowpuncher," she interrogated in a somewhat harsh, though rich, voice when her inspection had subsided. "You mayn't alwus hev been that though, hev you?"

Careless shook his head retrospectively, in the manner of one looking back through infinite tragic experience, and laughed at her again before he spoke.

"No, I mayn't alwus hev been that," he signified.

"Wot do they call you?"

"Careless, just."

The girl threw back her head and laughed a round, throaty gurgle that caught the cowboy's tenor. "Well, you do look it," she emphasized: "you do look it."

Then suddenly the whole camp became infected and laughed, too—laughed with its eyes on Careless and with the firelight making its widespread faces ghoulish—all but the chief, who still retained his grim, hovering, statuesque silence.

With a swift glance in his direction the girl the next moment leaned forward with a quick change of tone.

"Youh bean't gawin' to stay here all night, I raickon," she said, with a light in her eyes that Careless, in the noonday of his chivalry, failed entirely to heed.