

The November

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American

Magazine



WALTER BEACH HUMPHREY

Zane Grey's thrilling new
Western romance—"N"

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The American Magazine

November, 1926

MERLE CROWELL, *Editor*

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CONTENTS

No. 5

"NEVADA." A novel. Part I Illustrated by S. Lockton Mulford	ZANE GREY	7
UNSUNG HEROES I HAVE KNOWN	E. ALEXANDER POWELL	12
IF YOU ASK ME: It is your nature to be decent as well as ornery	ROBERT QUILLEN	13
A HOUND IS THE PHILOSOPHER AMONG DOGS	ARCHIBALD RUTLEDGE	14
THOUSANDS BRING THEIR TROUBLES TO THIS QUIET TEACHER	SHERMAN GWINN	16
ERNEST R. GROVES. Portrait in photogravure		17
MAHLON E. LAYNE. Picture in photogravure		18
LAYNE FOUNDED HIS BUSINESS ON SEEPING SANDS	MAGNER WHITE	19
"LITTLE OLD MR. PIRT." A story Illustrated by Harry Fisk	CHARLES DIVINE	20
MY REASONS FOR BEING THANKFUL	EDGAR A. GUEST	23
CAPTAIN McLEOD RESCUES SHIPS FROM THE CLUTCH OF DAVY JONES	KEENE SUMNER	24
HOW TO TEACH A SMART CHILD	ALBERT EDWARD WIGGAM	26
OL' RING NECK. A story Illustrated by Charles Livingston Bull	DON CAMERON SHAFER	29
SCRUGGS BUILDS HOUSES BY A SENSE OF TOUCH	WILLIAM S. DUTTON	32
MOFFETT WAS ALWAYS TAGGING ON THE HEELS OF EXPERIENCE	CHARLES LANE CALLEN	34
CHARLES ALEXANDER MOFFETT. Portrait in photogravure		35
BERTON CHURCHILL. Portrait in photogravure		36
THE WORLD WAS HIS OYSTER BUT IT TOOK 35 YEARS TO OPEN IT!	MARY B. MULLETT	37
SCATTERGOOD CASHES IN ON HIS REPUTATION A story Illustrated by Paul Meylan	CLARENCE BUDINGTON KELLAND	38
HOW'S YOUR APPETITE?	WILLIAM S. SADLER, M. D.	42
"THE GROVES WERE GOD'S FIRST TEMPLES"	STUART MACKENZIE	44
THE GIRL WHO SET OUT TO MARRY MONEY. A story Illustrated by Frances Rogers	MARION POSCHMAN VALENSI	48
THE MAN BEHIND THE VOICE	ALLAN HARDING	51
"MERELY A SLIGHT OPERATION"	H. I. PHILLIPS	52
HUMAN NATURE AS SEEN BY A CLOTHING STORE SALESMAN	MILDRED HARRINGTON	54
MASQUERADE. A novel. Part V Illustrated by Frederic Anderson	HENRY KITCHELL WEBSTER	56
INTERESTING PEOPLE		
McCoy Franklin	Article by Mildred Harrington	60
Winfield Scott Guiles	Article by Mary Theresa Collins	61
Constance Torrey	Article by Duff Gilford	62
Daniel Reed	Article by Janie Gilreath Derieux	63
Mrs. Florence Stukel	Article by E. hel W. Siebl	64
THE COMMONEST MISTAKE PARENTS MAKE		
1st Prize—My Father Robbed Me of Faith in Myself	C. C.	125
2d Prize—Fear Instilled in Childhood Has Spoiled My Life	O. S. D.	125
3d Prize—"You'd Better be Good or the Cop Will Get You!"	A. G.	126
MY REASONS FOR BEING THANKFUL Prize contest announcement		157
THE FAMILY'S MONEY		
Saving is a Habit but Investing is a Science	S. E. V.	214

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Beginning—A Romance of the West

“Nevada”

By Zane Grey

ILLUSTRATED BY STOCKTON MULFORD

ASHIS goaded horse plunged into the road, Nevada looked back over his shoulder. The lane he had plowed through the crowd let him see back into the circle where three men lay prostrate. The blue smoke from his gun was rising slowly, floating away. The face of Ben Ide, his friend, shone white and convulsed in the sunlight.

“So long, Pard,” yelled Nevada, hoarsely, and stood in his stirrups to wave his sombrero high. That, he thought, was farewell forever to the man who had saved and succored and uplifted him, whom he loved better than a brother.

Then Nevada faced the yellow road

down which his horse was racing; and the grim and terrible mood returned to smother the heart-swelling emotion which had momentarily broken it.

There was something familiar and mocking about this precipitate flight on a swift horse, headed for the sage and the dark mountains. How often had he felt the wind sting his face on a run for his life! But it was not fear now, nor love of life, that made him a fugitive.

The last gate of the ranch was open; and Nevada flashed through it to turn off the road into the sage and go flying down the trail along the shore of the lake. The green water blurred on one side of him and the gray sage on the other. Even the winding trail was indistinct to eyes that still saw red. There was no need now for this breakneck ride. To be sure, the officers of the law would eventually get on his track, as they had been before; but thought of them scarcely lingered a moment in his consciousness.

The action of a swift and powerful horse seemed to be necessary to the whirling of his mind. Thoughts, feelings, sensations regurgitated around that familiar cold and horrible sickness of soul which had always followed the spilling of human blood, and which this time came back worse than ever.

The fierce running of the horse, along



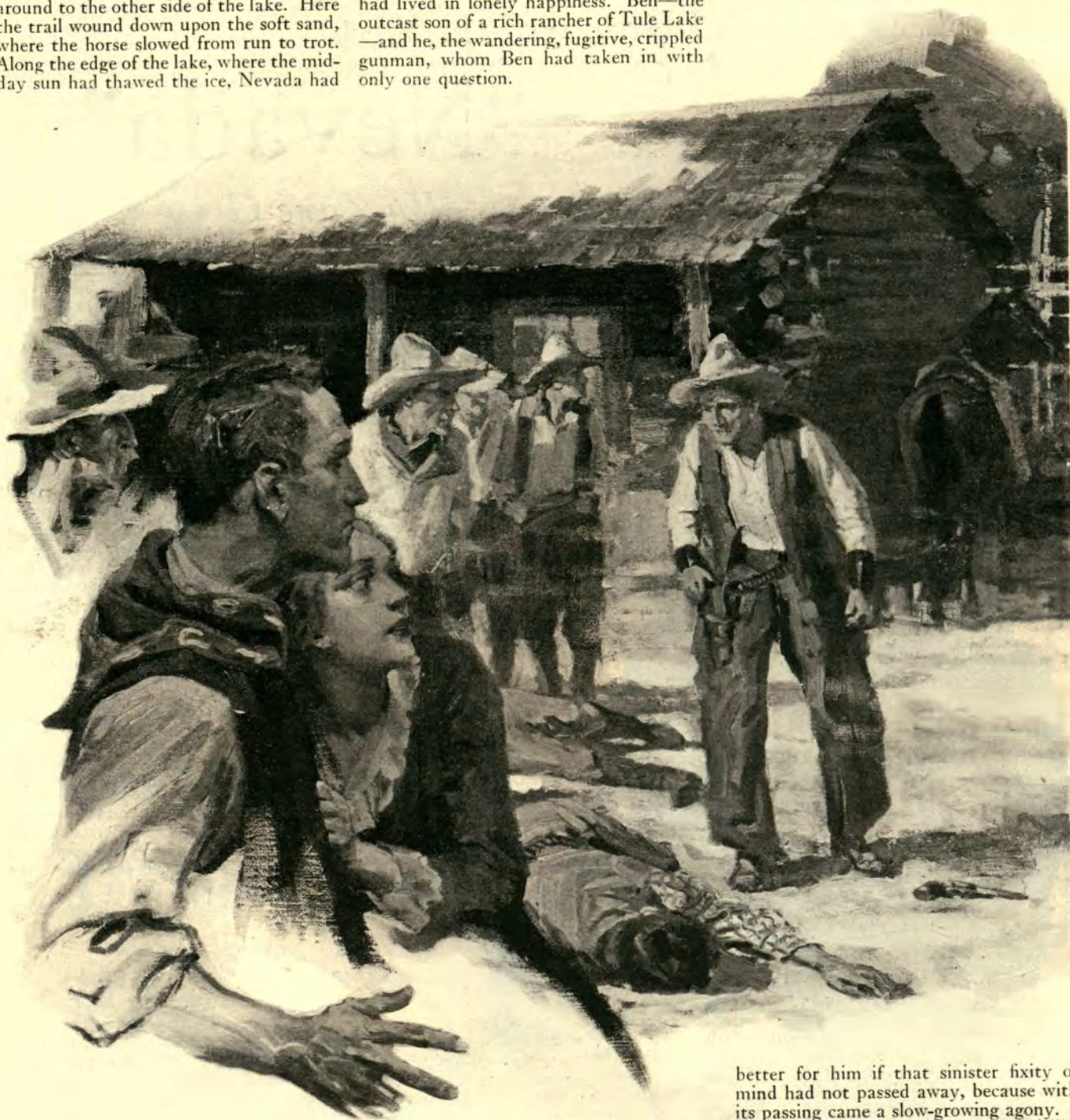
the levels, around the bends of the trail, leaping washes, plunging up and down the gullies, brought into tense play all Nevada's muscular force. It seemed like a mad race away from himself. Burning, and wet all over, he gradually surrendered to physical exertion.

Five miles brought horse and rider far around to the other side of the lake. Here the trail wound down upon the soft sand, where the horse slowed from run to trot. Along the edge of the lake, where the mid-day sun had thawed the ice, Nevada had

aid they gave in running down the red stallion! Yet, mad as that act had been, Nevada could only love Ben the more. Ben was the true wild-horse hunter.

Nevada reached the bluff where Forlorn River emptied into the lake, and climbed the sloping trail to the clump of trees, and the cabin where he and Ben had lived in lonely happiness. Ben—the outcast son of a rich rancher of Tule Lake—and he, the wandering, fugitive, crippled gunman, whom Ben had taken in with only one question.

He gazed across the lake toward the dots on the far gray slope—the dots that were the cabins and barns of the Blaine ranch. With the wrench which shook him then, the last of that icy nausea—that cold grip from bowels to heart—released its ghastly hold and yielded to the softening human element in Nevada. It would have been



a break in his strained mood. He saw the deep hoof tracks of horses along the shore, and the long cuts and scars on the ice, where he and Ben, and the freed outlaws, had run that grand wild stallion, California Red, to his last plunge, and fall.

As he passed that place, Nevada could not help but thrill when he remembered the strange, lucky catch of the wild horse Ben Ide loved so well. What a trick for fortune to play! How mad Ben had been—to bargain with the rustlers they had captured—to trade their freedom for the

"Where you from?" Ben had asked.

"Nevada," had been the reply. And that had been the only name Ben had ever known him by.

IT WAS all over now. Nevada dismounted from his wet and heaving horse. "Wal, Baldy," he said, throwing the bridle, "heah we are. Reckon the runnin's about over." And he sank heavily upon the porch step, pushed his sombrero back to run a hand through his wet hair, smoothing it away from his heated brow.

better for him if that sinister fixity of mind had not passed away, because with its passing came a slow-growing agony.

"Reckon I can't set heah mopin' like an owl," soliloquized Nevada, getting up. "Shore, the thing's done. An' I wouldn't have it otherwise. . . . Dear old Ben!"

But he could not just yet enter the cabin where he had learned the glory of friendship.

"He was the only pard I ever had, except a hoss or two. . . . Wal, Ben's name is cleared, thank God. Old Amos Ide knows the truth now, an' he'll have to beg forgiveness of Ben. But Ben, he'll never rub it in on the old gent. He'll be soft an' easy. Hart Blaine will know, too.

an' he'll have to come 'round to the boy. They'll all have to crawl for callin' Ben a rustler. . . . Ben will marry Ina now—an' he'll be rich. He's got California Red, too, an' he'll be happy."

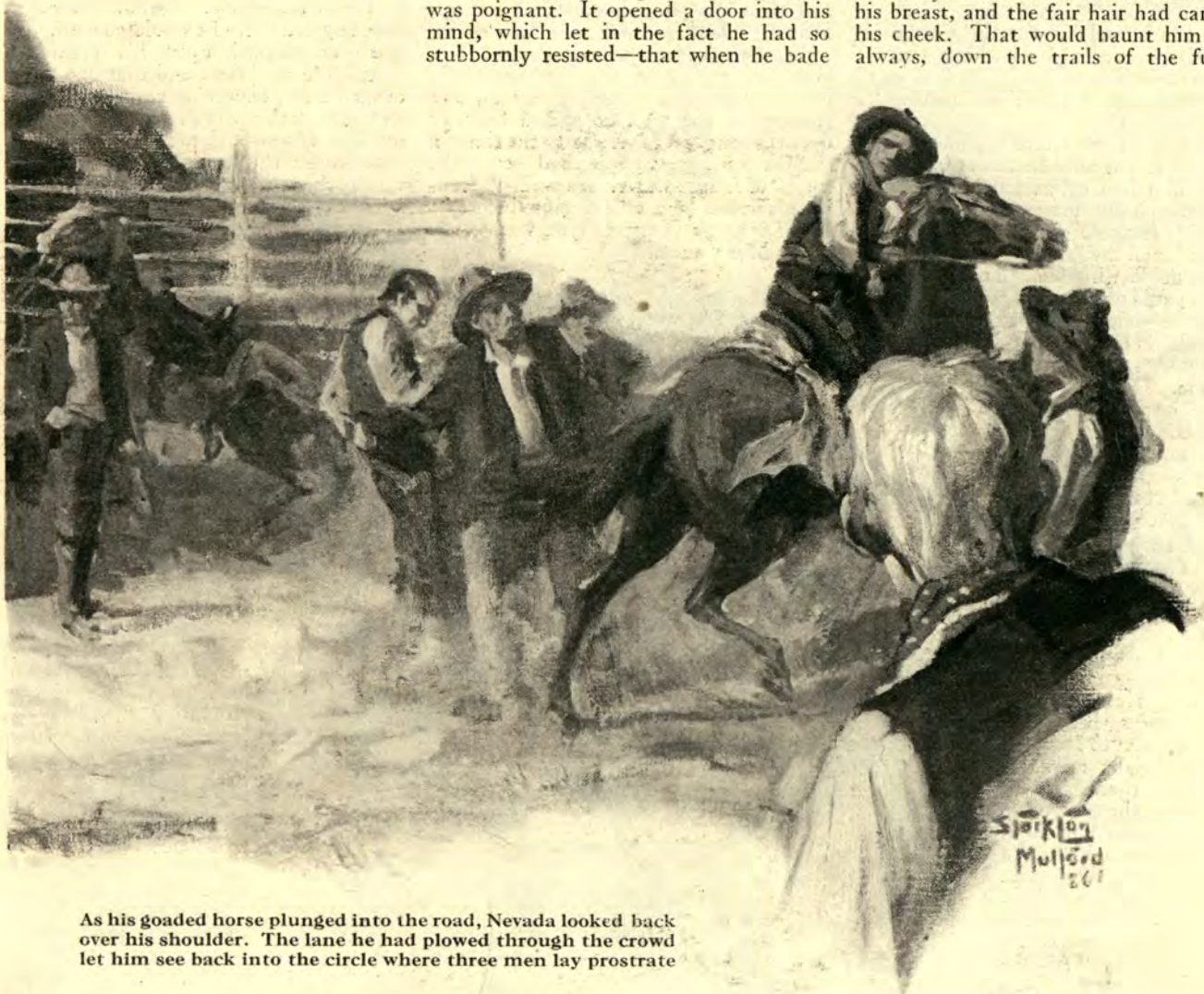
At that moment Nevada had not one regret. He was sustained and exalted by the splendid consciousness that he had paid his debt to his friend. He had saved Ben from prison, cleared his name of infamy, given him back to his lifelong sweetheart, Ina Blaine, and killed his enemies. Whatever had been the evil of

were horses in at the watering-trough. He caught one, and securing pack-saddle and packs he returned to the cabin. Here he hurriedly gathered his belongings, and food, blankets, ammunition. Then mounting his horse he drove the pack-horse ahead of him, and rode down to the shallow ford across Forlorn River.

FROM a ridge-top a mile or more up the lonely river Nevada gazed back at the cabin for the last time. Something surer than his intelligence told him that he would never see it again. The moment was poignant. It opened a door into his mind, which let in the fact he had so stubbornly resisted—that when he bade

warm. The short pieces of dead hard oak burned red, like coal. Nevada spread his palms to the heat, an old habit of comfort and pleasure. The moment came when Hettie Ide's features appeared clearly in the gold and red embers of the fire. Then shone her youthful face, crowned by fair hair, with earnest gray eyes, and firm, sweet lips. It looked older than the face of a sixteen-year-old girl—brave and strong and enduring.

Strange and terrible to recall—Nevada had kissed those sweet lips, and had been kissed by them! That face had lain upon his breast, and the fair hair had caressed his cheek. That would haunt him now, always, down the trails of the future,



As his goaded horse plunged into the road, Nevada looked back over his shoulder. The lane he had plowed through the crowd let him see back into the circle where three men lay prostrate

Nevada's life before he met Ben, whatever might be the loneliness and bitterness of the future—neither could change or mitigate the sweetness and glory of the service he had rendered.

Nevada went into the cabin. He had expected to find it, as always, clean and neat and comfortable. The room, however, was in rude disorder. It had been ransacked by violent hands. The fake sheriffs, who had come at the beck of Less Setter to arrest Ben, had not hesitated to stoop to thievery. They had evidently searched the cabin for money, or anything valuable.

Nevada gazed ponderingly around on this disorder.

"Wal," he muttered, grimly, "I reckon Less Setter won't be rammin' around heah any more!"

With that remark Nevada strode out and down the path to the corrals. There

good-by to the little cabin it was not only good-by to it and his friend, but to the most precious of all that had ever entered his life—Hettie Ide.

Nevada made that farewell, and then rode on, locked in thought which took no notice of the miles and the hours until it was time to make camp for the night.

By the time his few camp chores were done, night had fallen, pitch black, without any stars. Then came the hour he dreaded—that hour at the camp fire when the silence and solitude fell oppressively upon him. Always in his lonely travels this had been so, but now they were vastly greater and stranger. Something incomprehensible had changed him, sharpened his intelligence, augmented his emotions. Something tremendous had entered his life.

Nevada sat cross-legged, like an Indian, before his camp fire. It was small, but

shining out to him from every camp fire.

It was an hour when Nevada's love mounted to the greatness of sacrifice, when he cast forever from him any hope of possession, when he realized all that was left were the glory and the dream, and the changed soul which must be true to the girl who had loved him and believed in him.

BESIDE that first camp fire Nevada's heart broke. He had never realized the tenderness and loveliness of what he had cherished. It was as heart-stirring as that moment when Hettie and he, without knowing how it had come to pass, found themselves in each other's arms. What might have been! But that, too, had been only a dream. Still, Nevada knew he had dreamed it, believed in it, surrendered to

it. And some day he might have buried the past, even his name, and grasped the happiness Hettie's arms had promised.

Ben would have joyfully accepted him as a brother. But in hiding his real name, in living this character, Nevada, could he have been true to the soul Ben and Hettie had uplifted in him? Nevada realized that he could no longer have lived a lie. And though he would not have cared so much about Ben, he had not wanted Hettie to learn that he had been Jim Lacy, notorious from Lingville across the desert wastes of Nevada clear to Tombstone.

Nevada bowed his bare head over his camp fire, and a hard sob racked him.

"Shore—it's losin' her—that kills me!" he ground out between his teeth. "I cain't—bear it!"

When he crawled into his blankets at midnight it was only because the conflict within him had exhausted his strength. Sleep mercifully brought him oblivion, but with the cold gray dawn, his ordeal returned, and the knowledge that it would always abide with him. The agony was that he could not be happy without Hettie Ide's love—without sight of her, without her smile, her touch. He wanted to seek some hidden covert, like a crippled deer, and die. He wanted to plunge into the old raw life of the border, dealing death, and meeting death among those lawless men who had ruined him.

But he could not make an end to it all, in any way. The infernal paradox was that in thought of Ben's happiness, which he had made, there was an ecstasy as great as the agony of his own loss. Furthermore, Hettie's love, her embraces, her faith, had lifted him to some incredible height and fettered him there, forever to fight for the something she had created in himself. He owed himself a debt greater than that which he had owed Ben. Not a debt to love, but to faith! Hettie had made him believe in himself—in that newborn self which seemed now so all-compelling and so inscrutable.

"BALDY, I've shore got a fight on my hands," he said to his horse, as he threw on the saddle. "We've got to hit the back trails. We've got to eat an' sleep an' find some place where it's safe to hide. Maybe, after a long while, we can cross over the desert to Arizona, an' find honest work. But, by heaven, if I have to hide all my life, an' be Jim Lacy to the bloody end, I'll be true to this thing in my heart—to the name Ben Ide gave me—Nevada—to the name an' the man Hettie Ide believed in!"

Nevada traveled far that day and on the following day he climbed the divide

that separated the sage and forest country from the desert beyond. From a grassy saddle where autumn wild flowers still bloomed brightly, he gazed down the long, uneven slope of the range, to the canyoned and cedared strip of California, and on to the border of Nevada, bleak, wild, and magnificent. The gray and yellow desert stretched away illimitably, with vast expanse of hazy levels and endless barren ranges. The prospect in some sense resembled Nevada's future, as he pictured it in his mind.

He began the descent from the divide, and soon the great hollow and the upheaval of land beyond were lost to his sight. Before Nevada reached the end of that long mountain slope he heard the dreamy hum of a tumbling stream, and turning off the trail he picked his way over the roughest of ground to the rim of a shallow canyon, whence had come the sound of falling water. He walked, leading his horses for a mile or more before he found a break in the canyon wall where he could get down.

HERE, indeed, was a lonely retreat. Grass and wood were abundant, and tracks of deer and other game assured him he could kill meat. A narrow, sheltered

had possessed infinite charm. At no time in his life had he needed solitude as now.

Nevada did not count the days or nights. These passed as in a dream. He roamed up and down the canyon with his rifle, though he used it only when he needed meat. He spent hours sitting in sunny spots, absorbed in memory. His horses grew fat and lazy. Days passed into weeks. The cottonwoods shed their leaves to spread a golden carpet underneath. The nights grew cold and the wind moaned in the trees.

But the time came when solitude seemed no longer endurable. Nevada knew that if he lingered there he would go mad. For there encroached upon his dream of Hettie Ide and Ben, and that one short, beautiful and ennobling period of his life, a strange dark mood in which the men he had killed came back to him. Nevada had experienced this before. The only cure was work, action, a mingling with human kind, the sound of voices. Even a community of the most evil of men and women could save him from that haunting shadow in his mind.

It was a cold, bleak November day when Nevada rode into Lineville. Dust and leaves whipped up with the wind. Columns of blue wood smoke curled from the shacks and huts and houses of the straggling hamlet. Part of these habitations, those on one side of the road, lay in California, and those on the other lay in Nevada. The road was the line. Many a bullet had been fired from one state to kill a man in the other.

NEVADA halted before a gray cabin, set well back in a large plot of ground just inside the limits of the town. Corrals and sheds stood farther back, at the foot of the rocky slope. He remembered the rudely painted sign that had been nailed slantwise on the gate post: "Lodgings."

Dismounting, Nevada left his horses and went in, to go around to the back of the cabin. A wide, low porch had been stacked to the roof with cut stove-wood, handy to the door. Nevada hesitated a moment, then knocked. He heard a bustling inside, brisk footsteps, after which the door opened to disclose a buxom matron, with ruddy face, big frank eyes, and hair beginning to turn gray.

"Howdy, Mrs. Wood," he said.

The woman stared, then burst out, "Well, for goodness' sake—if it ain't Jim Lacy!"

"I reckon. Are you goin' to ask me in? I'm about froze."

"Jim, you know you never had to ask to come in my house," she replied, and drew him into a cozy little kitchen.

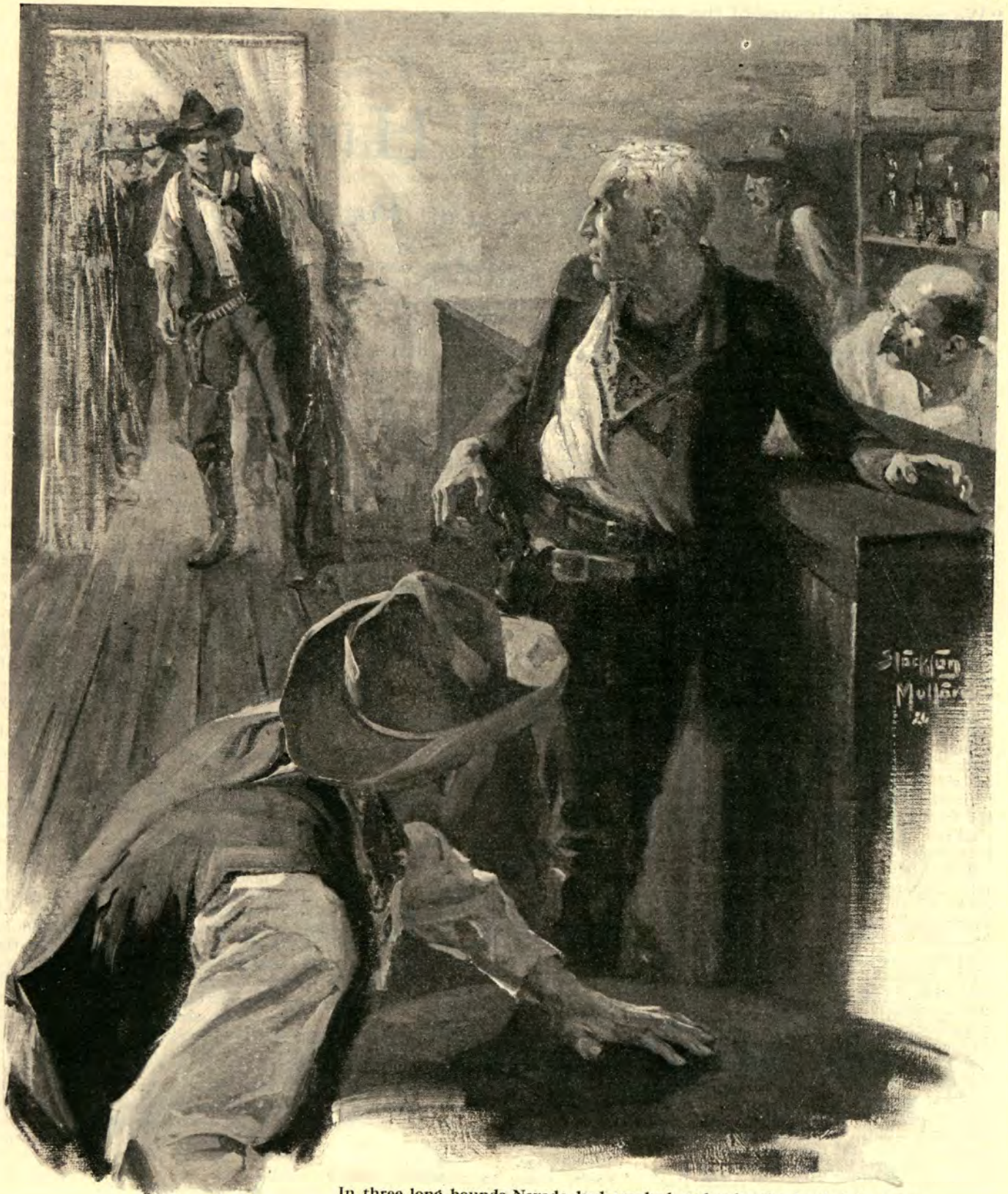
"Thanks, I'm glad to hear that. Shore



Lize leaned against his shoulder with the old coquetry that was a part of her, and which Nevada had once found pleasing, though he had never encouraged it

reach of the canyon, where the cottonwood trees still were green and gold and the grass grew richly along the stream, appeared a most desirable place to camp.

So he unpacked his horses, leisurely and ponderingly, as if time were naught, and set about making a habitation in the wilds. From earliest boyhood, this kind of work



In three long bounds Nevada had reached and split the beaded door-curtain. His swift eye swept all. "Cawthorne!" he yelled, in a piercing voice

seems like home to me—I've been lyin' out in the cold, an' starvin', for a long time."

"Son, you look it," she returned, nodding her head disapprovingly at him. "You used to be a handsome lad. How lanky you are! . . . What've you been up to?"

"Wal, Mrs. Wood," he drawled coolly, "have you heard about me lately?" And his eyes studied her face. Much might depend upon her reply.

"Nary a word, Jim. Not lately, or ever since you left."

"No? Wal, I am surprised, an' glad, too," replied Nevada, smiling his relief. "Reckon you couldn't give me a job? Helpin' around, like I used to, for my board."

"Jim, I jest could, an' I will," she declared. "You won't have to sleep in the barn either."

"Now, I'm dog-gone lucky, Mrs. Wood," replied Nevada gratefully.

"Humph! I don't know about that, Jim. Comin' back to Lineville can't be lucky. . . . Ah, boy, I'd hoped, if you was alive, you'd turned over a new leaf."

"It was good of you to think of me kind like that," he said, moving away from the warm stove. "I'll go out an' look after my pack an' horses."

"Fetch your pack right in. You can have the end room off the hall. There's a stove an' a box of wood in there."

Nevada brought (Continued on page 72)

"Nevada"

(Continued from page 11)

his pack in, put it down in the room she had designated, then returned for hot water, soap, and towel. When, a little later, he strode into the kitchen to eat the hot meal Mrs. Wood had prepared for him, she studied him with eyes as speculative as kind.

"Boy, somethin' has happened to you," she declared seriously. "You're older. Your eyes aren't like daggers any more. They've got shadows. . . . Jim, I once saw Billy the Kid, in New Mexico. You used to look like him, not in face or body or walk, but just some way, some *look* I can't describe. But now it's gone."

"Ahuh. Wal, I don't know whether or not you're complimentin' me," drawled Nevada. "Billy the Kid was a pretty wild hombre, wasn't he?"

"Humph! You'd have thought so if you'd gone through that Lincoln County cattle war with me an' my husband. They killed three hundred men, and my Jack was one of them."

"Lincoln County war?" mused Nevada. "Shore, I've heard of that too. An' how many of the three hundred did Billy the Kid kill?"

"Heaven only knows," she returned, fervently. "Billy had twenty-one men to his gun before the war, an' that wasn't countin' Greasers or Injuns. They said he was death on them. . . . Yes, Jim, you had the look of Billy, an' if you'd kept on you'd been another like him. But somethin' has happened to you. I ain't inquisitive, but have you lost your nerve? Gunmen do that sometimes, you know."

"Shore, that's it, Mrs. Wood. I've no more nerve than a chicken," drawled Nevada, with all his old easy coolness.

"Shoo! An' I'll bet that's all you tell me about yourself," she said. "Jim Lacy, you left here a boy, an' you've come back a man. Wonder what Lize Teller will think of you now. She was moony about you, the hussy!"

"Lize Teller," echoed Nevada, ponderingly. "Shore, I remember now. Is she heah?"

"She about bosses Lineville, Jim. She doesn't live with my humble self any more, but hangs out at the Gold Mine."

NEVADA, his meal finished, found a seat on a low bench between the stove and the corner, and settled himself for a talk. This woman held a unique position in the little border hamlet, in that she possessed the confidence of gamblers, miners, rustlers, everybody. She was a good soul, always ready to help anyone in sickness or trouble, and she had been like a mother to Nevada—no doubt owing to the fact that he had been the youngest of the notorious characters of Lineville.

"Lize married yet?" began Nevada casually.

"No, indeed, an' she never will be now," replied Mrs. Wood forcibly. "She had her chance, a decent cattle man named Holder, from Eureka. Then Cash Burridge rode in one day—after a long absence. 'Most as long as yours. He had plenty of money, as usual. Lost it as usual. Lize was clerk at the Gold Mine.

She got thick with Cash. He an' Holder had a mix-up over the girl, an' that settled her. Maybe I didn't give her a piece of my mind. But I might as well have shouted to the hills. She went from bad to worse. You'll see. Link Cawthorne's hangin' around her now."

"Cash Burridge back," rejoined Nevada, somberly, and he dropped his head. That name had power to make him want to hide the sudden fire in his eyes. "Reckon I'd plumb forgot Cash."

"Ha! Ha! Yes, you did, Jim Lacy," replied the woman knowingly. "No one would ever forget Cash, much less you. . . . Dear me, I hope you an' he don't meet again."

"Don't worry, Mother Wood. Reckon Cash an' I won't clash. Because I'm not lookin' for trouble."

"You never did, my boy; I'll swear to that. But you never run from it. An' you know Cash Burridge."

"Ahuh, I reckon, now you remind me. How about that high-flyin' Less Setter from the Snake River country. Has he ever been back?"

"No. That time you clashed with Setter was the only time he ever hit Lineville. No wonder! They said you'd kill him if he did. I remember, Jim, how that night after the row you talked a lot. It was the drink. You'd had trouble with Setter before you come to these parts. I never told it; but I remember."

"Wal, Mother, I came from the Snake River country too," replied Nevada, with slow, dark smile.

"It was said here that Less Setter was too big a man to fiddle around Lineville," returned the woman, passing by Nevada's cryptic remark, though it was not lost upon her. "Anyhow, he was a cunnin' swindler, low-down enough for any deal. An' he had a weakness for women. If nothin' else ever was his downfall that sure would be. He tried to take Lize Teller away with him."

"Wal, you don't say!" ejaculated Nevada, trying to affect the interest and surprise that were impossible for him to feel. Less Setter would never have a weakness for women again. He would never weave his evil machinations around Ben and Hettie Ide, or anyone else. For he and two of his arch conspirators had lain dead there in the courtyard before Hart Blaine's cabins on the shores of Wild Goose Lake ranch.

DEAD by Nevada's hand! That was the deed that had saved Ben Ide, and Hettie too. It seemed long past, yet how vivid the memory! The crowd that had melted before his charging horse! The terror of the stricken Setter! Revenge and retribution and death! Those villains lay prone under the drifting gun smoke, before the stricken onlookers. Nevada saw himself leap back to the saddle and spur his horse away. One look back! "So long, Pard!" One look at Ben's white convulsed face, which would abide with him forever.

During the hour, Mrs. Wood, who had a gift for learning and dispensing informa-

tion of all sorts, acquainted Nevada with all that had happened in Lineville since his departure. She did not confine herself to the gossip of the outlaw element who made of Lineville a rendezvous, but it was that gossip which lingered in Nevada's mind. Later, when he went into his little room, he performed an act almost unconsciously. The act of drawing his gun! There it was, as if by magic, level, low-down in his clutching hand. Sight of it so gave Nevada a grim surprise. How thoughtlessly and naturally the thing had come to pass!

"Reckon Mrs. Wood's talk about Burridge an' the rest of that outfit accounts for me throwin' my gun," he muttered to himself. "Funny. . . . No—not so darn funny, after all."

He had returned to an environment where proficiency with a gun was the law. Self-preservation was the *only* law among those lawless men with whom misfortune had thrown him. Therefore, he deliberately set about ascertaining just how much of his old incomparable swiftness on the draw remained with him after the long lack of practice.

"Slower'n molasses, as Ben used to say about me," he muttered. "But I've the feel, an' I can get it all back."

The leather holster on his belt was hard and stiff. He oiled it, and worked it soft with strong hands. The little room, which had only one window, began to grow dark as the short afternoon waned.

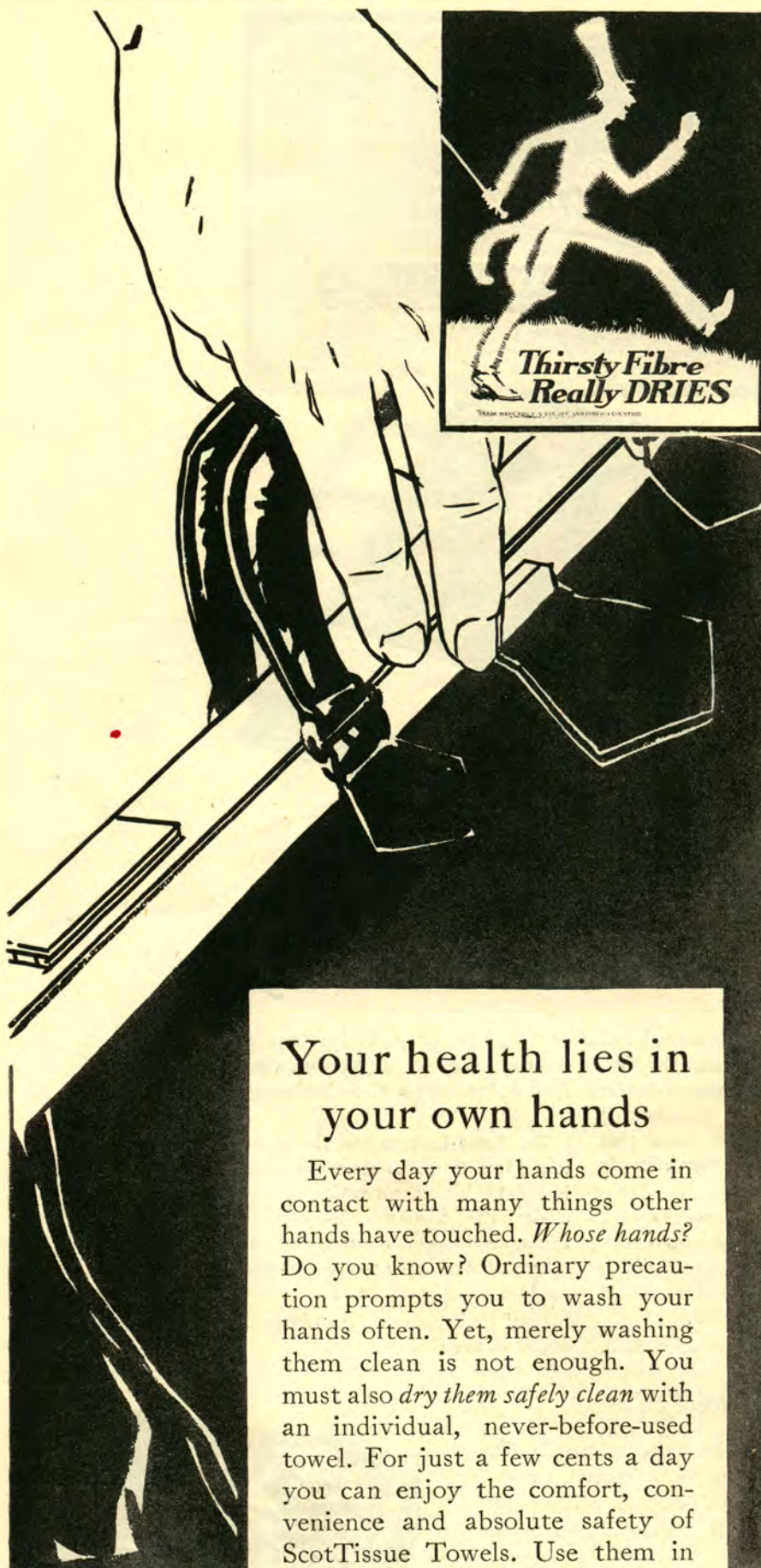
IT WAS still daylight, however, when Nevada went out, to walk leisurely down the road into town. He came at length to the narrow block where there were a few horses and vehicles along the hitching-rails, and people passing to and fro. There were several stores and shops, a saloon and a restaurant, that appeared precisely as they had always been.

After visiting a couple of places, where he renewed acquaintance with men who were glad to see him, Nevada crossed to the other side of the wide street and went down to the Gold Mine.

Dark had fallen and lamps were being lighted. The front of the wide two-story structure appeared quite plain and businesslike, deceiving to the traveler. It looked like a respectable hotel. But the Gold Mine was a tavern for the outlaw elect, a gambling hell and a drinking dive that could not have been equaled short of the Mexican border.

Nevada turned the corner to take the side entrance, which led into the long, dingily-lighted barroom. A half-dozen men stood drinking and talking at the bar. They noted Nevada's entrance, but did not recognize him, nor did he them. The bartender, too, was strange to Nevada. A wide portal, with curtain of strung beads, opened into a larger room, which was almost sumptuously furnished for such a remote settlement as Lineville.

The red hangings were new to Nevada, and some of the furniture. He remembered the gaudy pictures on the wall, the card and roulette tables, and particularly the large open fireplace, where some bil-



Your health lies in your own hands

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lets of wood burned ruddily. Six men sat around one table, and of those whose faces were visible to Nevada he recognized only one, that of a gambler called Ace Black. His cold eyes glinted on Nevada, then returned to his game.

Nevada took the seat on the far side of the fire, where he could see both entrances to the large room. At the moment there was something akin to bitter revolt at the fact of his presence there. He did not care to have Cash Burridge, or anyone ever associated with Setter, to think he would avoid them. Yet that was exactly what Nevada wanted to do. There must be no rebirth of his old recklessness. He would have to fight that as something untrue to Hettie Ide. And as a wave of sweet and bitter emotion went over him, a musical rattling of the beaded curtain door attracted his attention.

A GIRL entered. She had a pale face, and very large black eyes that seemed to blaze at Nevada.

She came slowly toward him, with the undulating movement of her lissom form that he remembered even better than her tragic face. Life had evidently been harsher than ever to Lize Teller.

Nevada rose, and, doffing his sombrero, shook hands with her.

"Jim Lacy!" she ejaculated, with stress of feeling that seemed neither regret nor gladness.

"Howdy, Lize," drawled Nevada. "Reckon you're sort of surprised to see me heah."

"I sure am, Jim. Surprised at your nerve, and more surprised at the look of you. What's happened? You've improved so I don't know you."

She leaned against his shoulder with the old coquetry that was a part of her, and which Nevada had once found pleasing, though he had never encouraged it.

"Thanks, Lize. Wal, there was shore room for improvement. Nothin' much happened, except I've been workin'. An' I quit the bottle."

"That's a lot, Jim, and I'm downright glad. I'll fall in love with you all over again."

"Please don't, Lize," he laughed. "I've quit throwin' guns, too. An' I reckon your fancy would make it unhealthy for me."

"Perhaps—but you sure have me guessin'," she replied, as she smoothed his hair and his scarf, while she gazed at him with deep-burning, inquisitive eyes. "Don't try to lie to me about your gun tricks, though. You forget, boy, I'm the only one around Lineville who had you figured."

"Lize, I don't know as I remember that," he said dubiously. He found she embarrassed him less than in former times. He had always feared Lize's overtures. But that dread was gone.

"Jim, you forget easily," she rejoined, with a touch of bitterness. "But, heaven knows, there was no reason for you to remember me. It was natural for me to miss you. For you were the only decent man I knew. . . . Where'd you say you'd been—workin'—all this long while?"

"Wal, now, Lize, I don't recollect sayin'," he drawled. "Shore never liked to talk about myself. What have you been doin'? I heah you're thick with Link Cawthorne."

"Bah! You can call it thick, if you

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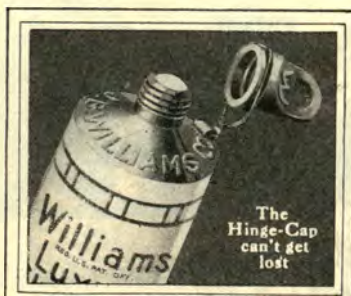
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like," she returned, scornfully. "But I call it thin. He's a jealous, tight-fisted brag. He's as mean as a coyote."

"Wal, Lize, wouldn't it be interestin' for me right now—if Link happened in?"

"What's come over you, Jim Lacy?" she demanded, staring at him in amazement. "Why, two years ago, if Link Cawthorne had come roaring in here with two guns you'd have laughed and turned your back." Then with a sudden change of manner and lowering of voice she queried sharply: "Jim, did you kill Less Setter?"

Nevada had braced himself for anything from this girl, so at the point-blank question, while it gave him a violent shock, he did not betray himself.

"Setter! . . . Is he daid?"

"Yes, he's daid," she replied, flippantly mimicking his Southern accent. "And a darn good thing. . . . Jim Lacy, I lay that to you."

"Wal, Lize, I cain't stop the wanderin' of your mind, but you're shore takin' a lot upon yourself," he returned coldly.

"Jim, I notice you don't *deny* it," she retorted, with her brilliant, searching eyes on him. "But listen. Only a few people in Lineville have heard Setter is dead. I heard it from a traveler who stayed here overnight. Setter had been shot by a wild-horse hunter over in California. I remembered that you had a grudge on Setter. Also, that you loved wild-horse hunting. And I put two and two together, and figured *you* had done for Setter. But I've never mentioned my suspicions to anyone. I'm not sure, but I don't believe anyone here has connected you with that little gun-play. . . . And now for what I was coming to. Did you ever hear of Hardy Rue?"

"Wal, yes, somewhere or other that name struck me. Never saw the man, though."

"He wasn't here during your time before. But he's here now, and he's the man for you to watch. Deep sort of chap, seldom talks, never drinks, hates women, and has an eye like a hawk. He's—Hello—somebody calling me. I forgot I have to work. I'll see you later. You bet I want to be around when Link strolls in!"

She ran from the room, leaving Nevada with plenty to think about.

GRADUALLY the gaming tables filled up. More than one keen-eyed player gave Nevada a careless nod of recognition. He was approached presently by two newcomers, one of whom, with eyes that had a trick of opening and shutting quickly, he recognized as a man named Blink Miller.

"Howdy, Blink," he replied to the other's greeting.

"You're lookin' fust-rate, Lacy," replied Miller. "Shake hands with my friend, Hardy Rue."

Nevada found himself under the surveillance of a quiet, penetrating, gray gaze. This man Rue was matured, a stalwart type of miner rather than the rangy rider. He had a hard, lined face, with prominent chin, and thin lips.

"Care to drink with me, Lacy?" he inquired.

"No, thanks," replied Nevada. "Reckon I'm not fixed to buy drinks; so I'm not acceptin' any."

"Ain't you grown awful particular since

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you've been away so long?" queried Miller, with a smile.

"Wal, Blink, come to think about it, I have," drawled Nevada, with all his old cool carelessness. "Particular aboot not owin' anybody favors, an' particular aboot who I drink with."

Rue gave Nevada an inscrutable look, more deceiving for the pleasant voice with which he accompanied it.

"But you're not particular about throwin' a gun on—anybody?" he queried.

Nevada's cool bright stare was not so deceptive. And then he drawled, "Not at all—not at all, Mr. Rue. Shore, it's just a habit. I never mean anythin' uncivil."

The two men passed on to a gaming table, where seats evidently awaited them. Nevada turned on his heel muttering, "Why cain't they let me alone!"

Among others who entered presently was Cash Burrridge. He was a tall man nearing forty, but he looked younger. He had the build of a horseman, a fine figure in top boots and spurs. Nevada was quick to see where he packed his gun, and that was significant. Burrridge was a handsome, dissolute man, blond, with a curling mustache, almost gold, and light, gleaming, restless blue eyes.

Nevada knew that Burrridge had seen him the instant of entrance, if not before, and he wondered what the outcome would be. It did not matter one way or another to Nevada. Burrridge had been the ring-leader in the stage hold-up to which Nevada had been a party. The one deed to which he owned with shame!

AT LENGTH Burrridge disengaged himself from his companions and deliberately walked around between the tables to get to Nevada.

"Jim, I'm dog-gone glad to see you," he said, extending his hand, and his handsome face corroborated his words.

"Howdy, Cash," replied Nevada, meeting the outstretched hand. "Reckon I'm glad you're glad to see me."

"It's good you blew in; I've often wondered what'd become of you. I'll tell you, Jim, I'm not curious about where you've been or what you've been doin'; but I'm plumb interested in what you're goin' to do. Are you plannin' to hole-up here this winter, same as the rest of us?"

"Reckon I am, as far as I know," returned Nevada, feeling his way.

"Jim, what'll you do after the snow flies?"

"I'll be hanged if I know," replied Nevada, truthfully enough.

"That's all I wanted to hear," spoke up Burrridge, with great satisfaction. "I've got a deal on—the biggest I ever handled. It's—"

"Cash, reckon you're not goin' to ask me to rustle cattle with you?"

"No. I swear I'm not," returned Burrridge. "It's an honest deal, Jim."

"Wal, I'm glad to heah you say that. An' I'll listen to you."

"This ain't the place for us to talk. Besides, I've a poker game on. But you wait till I tell you all about the deal."

Burrridge withdrew then to his card game, while Nevada returned to his chair. While the saloon and gambling-room filled up, Nevada sat beside the fire, glancing at it occasionally, but seeing always those who came in and went out.

After a while Lize Teller returned, and

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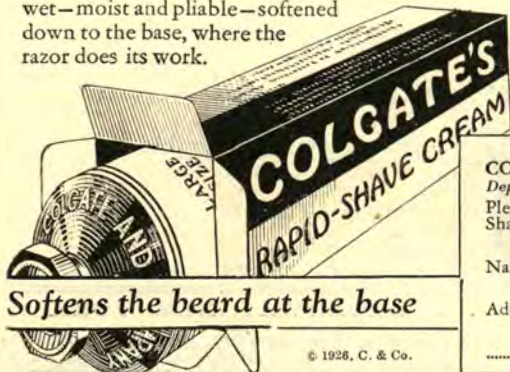
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before he could get up to offer her the chair she had plumped herself over the arm.

"Lize, shore if you want to make a show of yourself, you don't need to pick on me," mildly protested Nevada.

"Jim Lacy, there isn't a man in this room, except you, who wouldn't put his arm 'round me, if I sat like this on his chair."

"Wal, suppose you let me see some of them do it."

"Aha, you're the smart one. Listen! If you want to make me your friend—I say friend—forever, just be lover-like for a few minutes. Or if you can't be that, make a bluff at it."

Nevada laughed at her, in spite of the annoyance he could scarcely conceal. "What're you up to, Lize?"

"Link Cawthorne just came in," she replied, tossing her black head defiantly.

"So I reckoned," replied he. "Wal, Lize, it may be fun for you to use me in your little tricks, but it mightn't be funny for me. An' it might turn out bad for Link."

"That's why. He makes me sick! . . . There he comes," she whispered, in fiendish glee, and then leaned over Nevada, radiant with some feeling quite beyond his comprehension.

NEVADA looked up, not without a stir in his veins. Link Cawthorne stood with the curtain parted. How well Nevada remembered the heated face, the beady little eyes too close together; the reckless, weak, leering lips; the choice and manner of garb that inclined to dandyism.

For Nevada, the moment passed from a good-natured contempt for Link, and a vexation at his own part in this little farce, to something vastly different. It seemed to be premonition that amounted to shock. The sensation was so sudden and dismaying that it took violent effort of will, which was effected with Cawthorne's stalking across the room, to return to his cool, keen self.

Cawthorne halted before Lize and Nevada, bending his lean hawklike head, with his elbows crooked and his hands at his hips. His right hand covered the butt of a gun belted high. Whatever he had intended to say or do manifestly yielded to the passion which rose at close range. His gimlet-eyes fastened first upon Lize, who never turned her face away from Nevada. For a long moment this went on; and then her glance traveled from Cawthorne's boots slowly upward, at last to meet his piercing gaze with surprise that seemed as genuine as insolent.

"Oh, you here," she said. "Link, have you ever met my old friend, Jim Lacy?"

"Cat!" he spat out, fiercely, and his body jerked with the liberation of something in the word.

"Howdy, Link," interposed Nevada, thinking to pour oil on the troubled waters.

"Strikes me you're too familiar with Lize," flashed Cawthorne.

"Familiar? Say, you're out of your haid. If it's any of your business, we're old acquaintances. Shore I never had nothin' but a brotherly feelin' for her. An' if she wants to sit on the arm of my chair—"

"Pooh!" burst out Lize, airily.

That word must have been a blow to

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Cawthorne, and his whole body leaped with a muscular violence.

"Jim Lacy, you're a liar!" he burst out stridently.

Lize, swift as a panther, slid off Nevada's chair, to spring erect like a released willow bough. Nevada could not see her. He heard her panting breaths. He was gazing hard up at Cawthorne's face, which had suddenly turned white. A cessation of all sound from the gamblers was proof that they had heard Cawthorne denounce Nevada.

"Now, Link, I'm not a liar, an' you know it," replied Nevada, with apparent calmness. "Reckon I can make allowance for your feelin's."

THE young outlaw's face lost its pallor and rigidity. It waved red, and all at once his hair appeared to bristle. His youth, his fury, his conceit, not to define his lack of penetration, misled him into mistaking Nevada's reply.

"I'll have no allowances from you," he shouted. "I'm invitin' you for a little walk outdoors!"

Nevada calmly rose to his feet and stepped aside from the chair. "What for?" he queried.

"You know what for."

"I haven't an idee, Link," said Nevada. "Shore I see you're riled. But I reckon there's no call for me to get riled, too, about your mistake. It's cold outdoors. An' I like this warm fire. If you've any more to say, why, go ahead!"

Cawthorne expanded under this wholly unprecedented experience. To realize that Jim Lacy had refused the challenge born of wild hate had set him on the pinnacle of his dream of fame.

"Say?" he demanded, with hoarse and pompous contempt. "I've no more to say. I've called you. An' you're yellow. That's all!"

Whereupon he turned to the amazed and discomfited Lize, and, half leading, half dragging her, left the room. The business of the gamblers was resumed, with a loud laugh here and caustic remarks there. Nevada heard the content of some of them: "What's got into Lacy?" ... "He always was a decent chap." ... "Reckon he couldn't kill that durn fool right before the girl's eyes." ... "You're wrong, gentlemen," said a cold-voiced gambler. "That was a little by-play between a real gunman and a would-be. I've seen it often."

As Nevada resumed his chair, and drew it closer to the fire, these and other remarks did not escape him, and that of the gambler lingered with him moodily. Gradually, his momentary depression passed away. He saw Hettie Ide's face in the golden glow of the fire. How he quivered in heart and body! He had been put to the test, and he had been true to what she would have expected of him.

For a week Nevada stayed away from the Gold Mine. Then one night at supper Mrs. Wood spoke up seriously:

"Jim, that big-mouthed Link Cawthorne is braggin' around you're afraid to come down-town."

"Shore I don't care what Link says."

"Son, that's not the way of the West," she said gravely. "I've lived all my life on the frontier. No man can afford to lose the respect of his associates, even if they are mostly a worthless outfit of gamblers,

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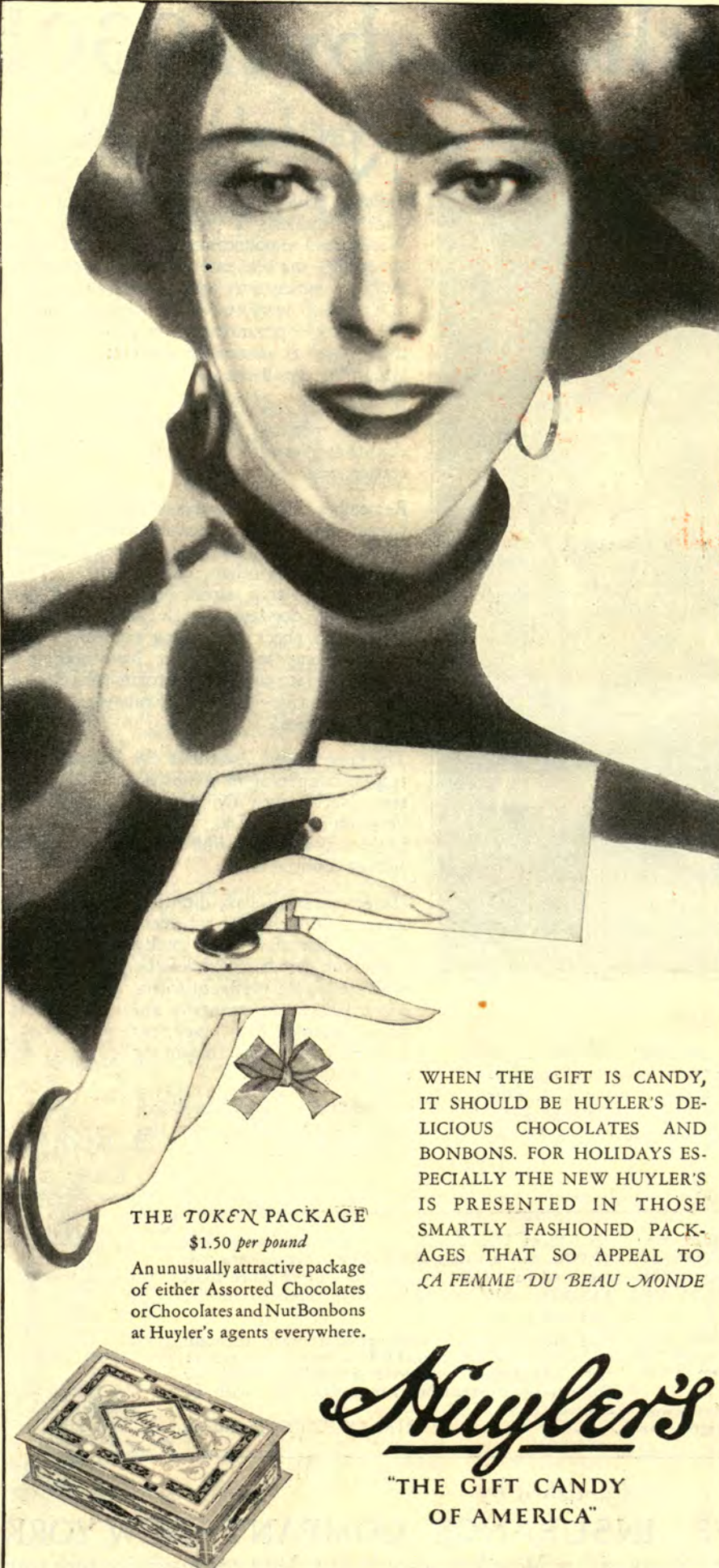
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rustlers, an' sech. They can't understand it. Least of all, Link Cawthorne can't. He's likely to shoot you from behind a corner an' swear he met you on an even break."

"But, Mother Wood, what can I do?"

"Well, as long as you're here in Lineville, be Jim Lacy, as they used to know him," she declared forcefully. "You don't want to have to kill Link. Jus' go down an' slap his face. Take his gun away from him, an' stick it down the back of his pants!"

Nevada laughed darkly. "Wal, maybe you're right," he said, with a sigh. "By gosh, I wish spring would come, so I could hit the trail."

"Mark my words, son," she replied, earnestly, "the best way for you to make sure of spring an' summer an' fall is to be yourself!"

NEVADA went back to the Gold Mine, dubious in mind, once more doubtful that he could ever escape the inevitable consequences of his name.

It chanced that Link Cawthorne was sober and deeply involved in a card game, where he was having a remarkable run of good luck. He merely sneered when Nevada strolled in.

Cash Burridge, however, made at once for Nevada, with all show of friendliness.

"Where you been, Lacy?" he inquired disapprovingly. "We've certainly looked for you here. Let's go up to my room, where we can have a quiet talk."

"Shore you're comfortable heah," remarked Nevada, gazing around after they had reached Burridge's room.

"I like it nice when I'm not in the saddle," returned Burridge. "Take a seat, an' if you won't drink have a smoke. . . . Jim, I want to tell you about my deal. I'll tell you straight. An' if you don't want to go in with me, it'll be all right; only I want you to respect my confidence here in Lineville. Will you do it?"

"I reckon," replied Nevada soberly.

Burridge showed satisfaction at that assurance; but he plainly hesitated over the next disclosure. Little flecks of light danced in his eyes, suddenly to coalesce in a set, cold gleam.

"Jim, you knew Setter was shot over in California?" he queried sharply.

"I heard it from Lize," rejoined Nevada, matter-of-factly.

"Killed by a wild-hoss hunter," went on Burridge. "Jim, there are men who connect you with that gunplay."

"Shore. I get blamed for a lot of things," returned Nevada.

"Well, that's none of my business," spoke up Burridge, with more relief. "Only, I want to say that whoever killed Setter did me a good turn."

"Me, too. Setter did me dirt once over on the Snake River."

Burridge drew a long breath and laid aside his cigar.

"LISTEN," he began with tenseness. "I was in on several deals with Setter. After he left here he sent for me to meet him at Klamath Falls. I did it. He had gotten in with big cattle men, an' had more money than he knew how to spend. He was goin' in for honest ranchin', an' wanted me as a partner."

"Well, the upshot was that he gave me a hundred thousand dollars to buy a well-



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stocked ranch in Arizona. I was to own half, an' to help him develop cattle an' horses on a big scale. He left the choice of place to me."

Burridge halted in his narrative, the recital of which manifestly stirred him deeply, and, picking up his cigar, he puffed on it a moment. Then he leaned back in his chair, with his light, hard eyes intent upon his listener.

"Well," he resumed, "I went to Arizona, an' rode hossback from the New Mexico border clear to the White Mountains. I bought out a rancher who wasn't keen to sell. He owned a big ranch, had miles of grazin' range, an' ten thousand head of stock. I ain't tellin' you the location until you decide to accept my offer. After the deal was settled an' property turned over to me, I began to get a few hunches. But I hustled back here an' sent word to Setter.

"I waited. No word came from him. I went back to Arizona—that was early last summer. Then I had my eyes opened. It was funny. Such a joke on me, an' especially Setter. Our cattle was bein' rustled right an' left! I suspected the very cowmen I'd taken over with the property. It was a grand big country—desert, canyon, plateau. There were many more ranchers an' cattle than I suspected. Some of these ranchers were rustlers, thick with the worst of the outfits.

"You've heard of the Hash Knife Gang an' the Pine Tree Outfit. But nobody seemed to know just *who* belonged to them, an' *who* didn't. Then there were some hard nuts known to everybody. This country around Lineville, even in gold-rush days, couldn't hold a candle to that neck of woods in Arizona!" Burridge made a final flourish with the cigar.

"NOW, when I got back here a few weeks ago I sent word to Setter, an' waited. No reply. Then we heard Setter was dead. Hardy Rue brought the news. I've a hunch Rue's got somethin' up his sleeve. Anyway, I'm not worryin'. That property in Arizona is mine. An' my job is to get back there to run it. Here's where you come in.

"Jim Lacy! That name wouldn't sound so pleasant to those outfits. I'll make you foreman an' give you an interest. It'll take some fightin' to keep my cattle. I want a bunch of the hardest-ridin' an' hardest-shootin' boys that can be hired. An' you to lead them! . . . An' now a last word, Jim. You know that many an honest an' prosperous rancher was once a rustler. . . . What do you think, an' what do you say?"

"Wal, Cash, reckon I'll think more'n I say," returned Nevada ponderingly. "You shore talked straight. I savvy when a man's tellin' me the truth. It's a darn interestin' story. What the courts might say about it I can't guess. But I reckon half that hundred thousand Setter gave you is honestly yours. Maybe the other half, too. Nobody could tell just how much money Setter earned, an' what he got speculatin'. Yes, sir, I reckon the Arizona ranch is yours all right."

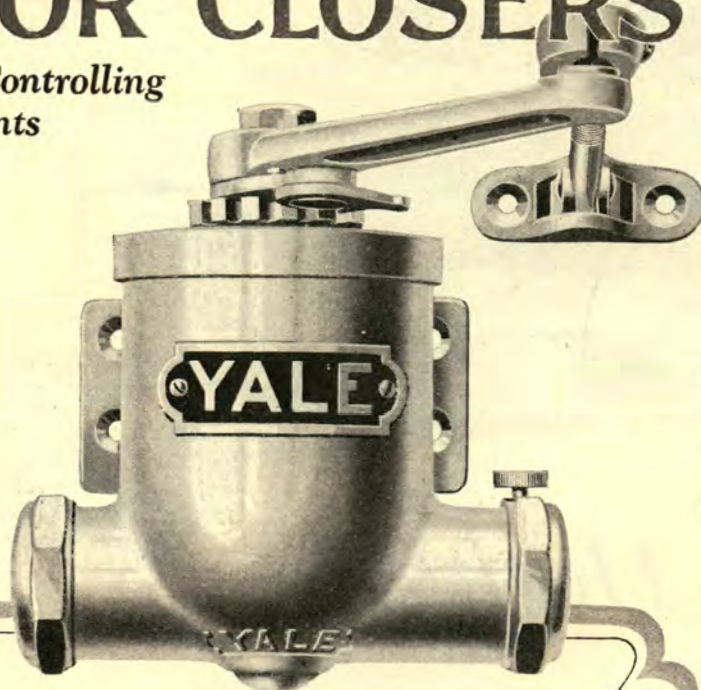
"Good. I'm glad you see the deal that way," replied Burridge, rubbing his hands together. "An' you'll accept my offer?"

"Cash, I can't promise that yet," responded Nevada slowly. "There's a couple of points that'll shore be hard to get over."

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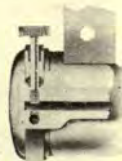


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Allows simple and positive control of the closing speed of the door under all conditions. The valve is slightly below the center line of the cylinder, insuring a smooth automatic checking action.



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"What are they, Jim? I might help you."

"Wal, the first is—your past deals might crop up any day."

"I thought long about that," returned Burrige, earnestly. "An' at last I figured myself free of any worry. I'm not known in Arizona. Idaho never knew me as Cash Burrige. An' what do any two-bit deals here amount to? They'll be forgotten after I've gone."

"Reckon you don't miss it far," replied Nevada. "But my second point is the serious an' important one. That is, so far as I am concerned."

"Shoot!" replied Burrige, with good-natured impatience.

"Wal, Cash, I don't mean any offense; but I'm just plain doubtful that you can ever go straight."

Burrige threw his cigar at the stove and the dark blood in a tide waved over his fair face. "By heaven, that sticks in my craw too! I wonder! But I'm no fool, an' I'm not without some brains."

"Shore. I admit that. But, Cash, you've asked my opinion, an' heah it is: You've a weakness for women an' red liquor. Can you stand prosperity?"

"Ha, I never had a chance to find out," replied Burrige, clenching his fist. "I've got it now. We'll see. I swear I want to make the best of it. An' I'd do better with my chance if I had you beside me. That's all."

"Wal, I appreciate that, Cash, an' I'll think it over. What I hate about it is livin' up to my name!"

THE snow fell, adding to Nevada's work at Mrs. Wood's. In the evenings, if the weather was not stormy he would drop in at the Gold Mine. Burrige had made another strong plea for Nevada to join him, and then had left for Arizona.

Lize Teller had passed from jest to earnest in her mood toward Nevada. She was vain, willful, and malignant when under the influence of drink. Her life worked daily toward some final tragedy. During the early part of the winter she had made love to Nevada, more, he thought, to inflame Cawthorne than for any other reason.

But the time came, which was coincident with Cawthorne's further bold attempt to force or aggravate Nevada into a fight, when she ceased wholly her flirting with Nevada. Soon after that she broke her engagement with Cawthorne, and took to wild flirtations and drinking bouts with the gamblers.

When Nevada at length took her to task, he received an impression that gave him concern.

"No decent man wants me!" she told him, bitterly.

From this speech, Nevada conceived the idea that somehow he had failed the girl. It could not have been otherwise, yet the fact hurt him. Another side of the situation was the peril she had incurred by jilting Cawthorne. There was, however, no use in talking to Lize about that. Whenever Cawthorne accosted her, whether humbly or harshly, or in a maudlin way, she flouted him as she would have a repulsive animal.

Days and weeks went by, and this situation wore on, growing toward its climax. One afternoon, Nevada, actuated by an impulse beyond his ken, bent his

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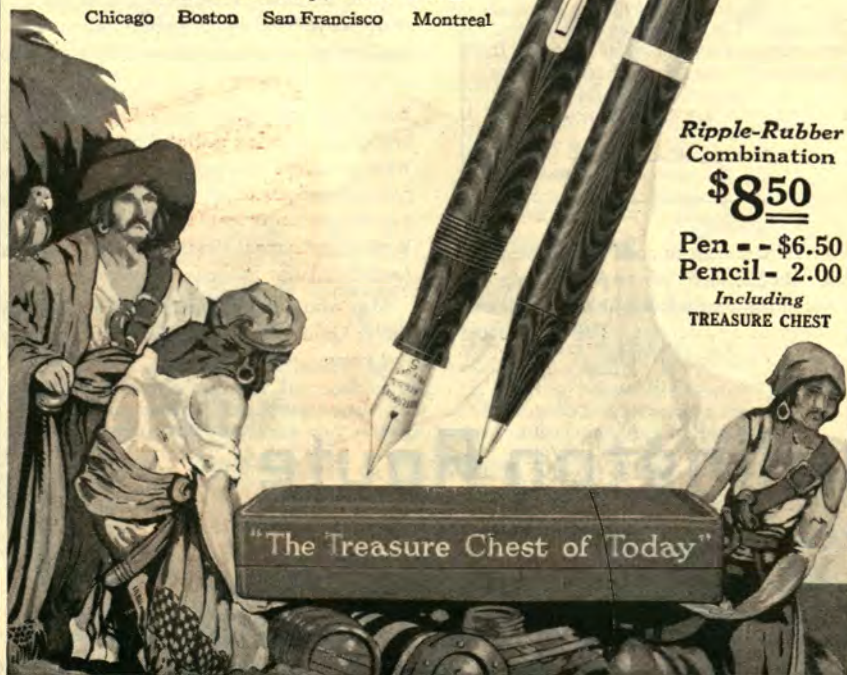
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steps toward the Gold Mine. All night an oppression had persisted through his slumbers, and all morning he had been restless, brooding.

He entered the place by the side door, and paused in the hall before the door of the gambling-room. The usual quiet of that den had been disrupted.

With left hand, sharp and quick, Nevada opened the door and entered sideways, his right arm crooked. The room was full of men, all standing. Cards, coins, chips, glasses on the tables showed evidence of having been violently abandoned. There followed whispers, a cough, shuffling of feet. The noise that had halted Nevada came from the saloon. Suddenly it augmented to a banging on the bar, accompanied by the bellow of a harsh voice:

"Rum! Hand it out—er I'll bust your head, too!"

Nevada strode to the nearest group of men. Something terrible had happened. He saw it in their faces. And like a flash he connected it with the raucous voice in the saloon.

"What's happened?" he queried.

"There's shore been a mess," replied one, wiping a moist face.

"Jim, we was playin' our caird games, quiet as usual," spoke up the gambler Ace Black, "when we heerd an awful row in the hall there. Then a woman's scream, an' after that a heavy fall. We all jumped up an' someone rushed out to see what it was. An' by—"

"Wal?" broke in Nevada, cool and grim, as Black choked.

"Lize Teller! She was layin' there, streamin' blood. Link Cawthorne had beat her over the head with his gun. She'll die! . . . An' listen to him!"

In three long bounds Nevada had reached and split the beaded door-curtain. His swift eye swept all.

"Cawthorne!" he yelled, in a piercing voice that brought an instant of breathless silence.

(To be continued)

"The Groves Were God's First Temples"

(Continued from page 47)

of thing happens with a planting of young trees. They must take part of their sustenance from Mother Earth; and the strong ones get the lion's share. Unless you give a special supply of food directly to the roots of the weaklings—put it into their very mouths, so to speak—they may starve to death.

"Most of the trees which are exceptionally large and beautiful have 'played a lone hand.' That is one way in which human beings differ from other forms of life. The man who plays a lone hand, who lives for himself alone, becomes mentally and spiritually stunted and deformed; for, to paraphrase a familiar saying, 'A man is a soul, but a tree is only a tree.'

"And yet, trees are the beloved friends of man, and pretty nearly the most valuable ones he possesses. Someone recently asked me what human existence would be like if there were no trees in the world.

"My answer was that, quite possibly,