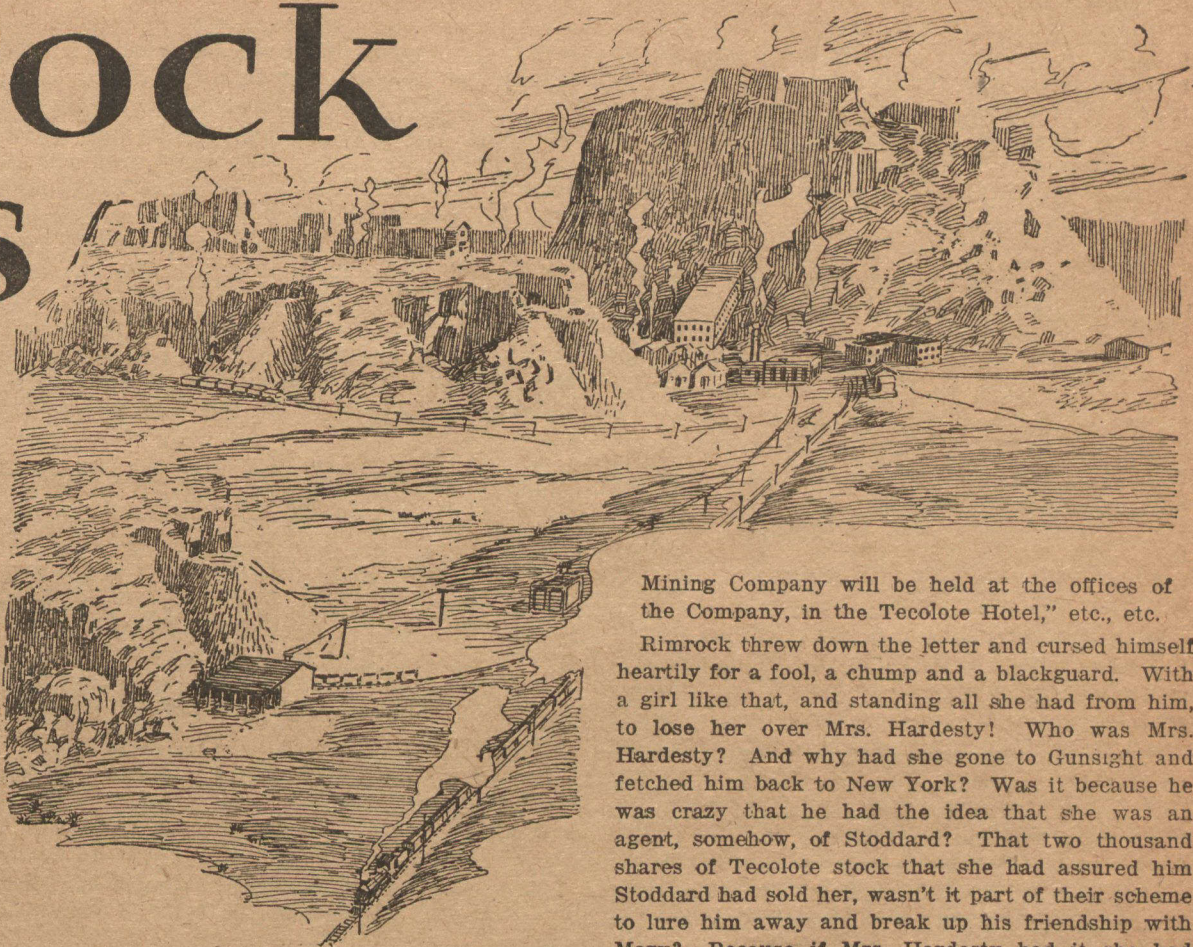


Rimrock Jones

By DANE COOLIDGE

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ILLUSTRATED BY T. W. McLEAN

RIMROCK JONES, prospector, discovers the Tecolote copper mine in Arizona. The mine is rich in ore, but Rimrock is "broke." He gets \$10 from Lockhart, a local banker. With it he plays Faro and wins thousands. Another throw and he loses all. While searching for "Apex" McBain, his chief enemy, he meets Mary Fortune, McBain's typist. To her he explains how McBain euchred him out of the mine that put Gunsight on the map. She lends him \$400 on the security of an un-named share in the Tecolote. Rimrock comes back later with a bag of gold ore on which he gets \$2,000 loan from Lockhart. The ore was borrowed from a Mexican; whereby Rimrock begins to get even with a man who had previously robbed him. Rimrock goes down to New York and floats a company. He comes back, repays Lockhart, and tries to pay Mary Fortune her \$400. Mary insists on the "share" he had promised her. She names one per cent. Rimrock is trapped. That one per cent. throws the casting vote to Mary. The New York man has 49; Rimrock 51. It takes Rimrock's 50 and Mary's 1, to control the mine.

In a motor-ride to the Tecolote Rimrock proposes marriage to Mary Fortune. She postpones her decision. Surveyors arrive to line the railroad from Gunsight to Tecolote. "Apex" McBain and his gang undertake to jump Rimrock's claim. Rimrock arrives on the scene single-handed with his gun. In the scrimmage, he shoots McBain. Rimrock is placed under arrest on a charge of murder. Unable to get bail, he also refuses to engage a lawyer, preferring to conduct his own case on a man-justice basis. Meanwhile Mary is made Secretary of the Company. Jepson, manager for the New York interests, arrives. Mary visits Rimrock in jail and urges him to secure counsel. He refuses. Rimrock's trial comes on. He is acquitted, and returns to Gunsight. Mrs. Hardesty, the "Tiger Lady," arrives in Gunsight. She is a friend of the New York interests. Rimrock meets her and takes her up to the hotel balcony, forgetting his appointment with Mary there. Mary sees them and slips away unseen. She later informs Rimrock that she is going to New York to have a long-deferred operation performed. He intuitively perceives that she is jealous. Mary leaves for the East, and Rimrock is in a fix. Somebody should stay and oversee Jepson, and Rimrock has promised Mrs. Hardesty to return to New York. She suggests that Rimrock follow Mary, and explain, which he decides to do.

Rimrock searches in New York for months without finding Mary. The "Tiger Lady" gradually weaves a spell of fascination around him. While at the opera with her, he sees Mary. She recognizes Rimrock, but in anger at "the other woman" she passes on. Rimrock tries to overtake her, but is held back by the "Tiger Lady." She asks him to her rooms, but he refuses.

CHAPTER XX.

A Letter From the Secretary.

AS MRS. HARDESTY guessed, Rimrock was hurrying away in order to follow Mary Fortune; and as Rimrock guessed, she had invited him in to keep him from doing just that. She had failed, for once, and it hurt her pride; but Rimrock failed as well. After a swift spin through the streets he returned to his hotel and called up his detective in a rage.

"Say, what kind of an agency are you running, anyhow?" he demanded when he got his man. "Ain't you been working ten months to find Mary Fortune? Well, I met her to-night, on the street. What's that you say? There's three million people! Well, I don't care if there's six—I want you to find that girl! No, stop her nothing! You lay a hand on her and I'll come down to your office and kill you. Just tell me where she is and keep an eye on

her and I don't care what you charge. And paste this in your hat—if you don't find that girl you'll have to sue for your pay!"

The agency had to sue, for ten days later, Rimrock received a letter from her hand. It was mailed from Gunsight, Arizona, and was strictly business throughout. It was, in fact, the legal thirty days' notice of the annual meeting of the Company

"In the town of Gunsight, county of Geronimo, Territory of Arizona, on Tuesday, the 22nd day of December, to transact the following business, viz.:

"1—to elect a Board of Directors.

"2—to transact any other business that may properly come before the meeting."

RIMROCK read it over and his courage failed him—after all he was afraid to face her. He did not flatter himself that she hated him; she despised him, and on account of Mrs. Hardesty. How then could he hasten back to Gunsight and beg for a chance to explain? She had fled from his presence ten months before, on the day after Mrs. Hardesty came; and ten months later, when she met him by accident, he was with Mrs. Hardesty again. As far as he knew Mrs. Hardesty was a perfect lady. She went out everywhere and was received even by millionaires on terms of perfect equality—and yet Mary Fortune scorned her. She scorned her on sight, at a single glance, and would not even argue the matter. Rimrock decided to use "the enclosed proxy."

He made it out in the name of L. W. Lockhart and returned it by the following mail, and then he called up the detective agency and told them to go ahead and sue. He told them further that he was willing to bet that Stoddard knew where she was all the time; and if they were still working for him, as he strongly suspected, they could tell him she was back in Gunsight. Rimrock hung up there and fell to pacing the floor, and for the first time the busy city looked gray. It looked drab and dirty, and he thought longingly of the desert with its miles and miles of clean sand. He thought of his mine and how he had fought for it, and of all his friends in the straggling town; of Old Juan and L. W. and hearty Old Hassayamp with his laugh and his Texas yupe. And of Mary Fortune, the typist, as he had known her at first—but now she was sending letters like this:

"Dear Sir:

"You are hereby notified that the regular Annual Meeting of the Stockholders of the Tecolote

Mining Company will be held at the offices of the Company, in the Tecolote Hotel," etc., etc.

Rimrock threw down the letter and cursed himself heartily for a fool, a chump and a blackguard. With a girl like that, and standing all she had from him, to lose her over Mrs. Hardesty! Who was Mrs. Hardesty? And why had she gone to Gunsight and fetched him back to New York? Was it because he was crazy that he had the idea that she was an agent, somehow, of Stoddard? That two thousand shares of Tecolote stock that she had assured him Stoddard had sold her, wasn't it part of their scheme to lure him away and break up his friendship with Mary? Because if Mrs. Hardesty had it she had never produced it, and there was no record of the transfer on the books. Rimrock brought down his fist and swore a great oath never to see the woman again. From the day he met her his troubles had begun—and now she claimed she loved him!

Rimrock curled his lip at the very thought of any New York woman in love. There was only one woman who knew what the word meant, and she was in Gunsight, Arizona. He picked up her letter and scanned it again, but his eyes had not learned to look for love. Even the driest formula, sent from one to another, may spell out that magic word; may spell it unconsciously and against the will, if the heart but rules the hand. Mary Fortune had told him in that briefest of messages that she was back in Gunsight again; and furthermore, if he wished to see her, he could do so in thirty days. It told him, in fact, that while their personal relations had been terminated by his own unconsidered acts; as fellow stockholders, perhaps even as partners, they might meet and work together again. But Rimrock was dense, his keen eyes could not see it, nor his torn heart find the peace that he sought. Like a wounded animal he turned on his enemy and fought Stoddard to keep down the pain. And back at Gunsight, trying to forget her hate, Mary Fortune fought her battle alone.

THERE was great excitement—it amounted almost to a panic—when Mary Fortune stepped in on Jepson. During her unexplained absence he had naturally taken charge of things, with L. W., of course, to advise; and to facilitate business he had moved into the main office where he could work with the records at hand. Then, as months went by and neither she nor Rimrock came back to assert their authority, he had rearranged the offices and moved her records away. Behind the main office, with its plate-glass windows and imposing furniture and front, there were two smaller rooms; the Directors' meeting place and another, now filled with Mary's records. A clerk, who did not even know who she was, sat at his ease behind her fine desk; and back in the Directors' room, with its convenient table, L. W. and Jepson were in conference. She could see them plainly through the half-opened door, leaning back and smoking their cigars, and in that first brief interval before they caught sight of her she sensed that something was wrong.

Of course there were apologies, and Jepson insisted upon moving out or giving her any room she chose, but Mary assured him she had not come back permanently and the smaller room would do just as well. Then she set about writing the notices of the annual meeting, which had to be sent out by her