

RIMROCK JONES

(Continued from page 18.)

shares, thousands of shares! And then when I called you up your clerk said you had gone. Well, I had my orders and you can't say I weakened—I bought thirty-two thousand shares!"

"Thirty-two thousand!" Well, what are you kicking about. That gives me control of the mine. But say, what the devil does this ticker mean, quoting Navajoa at six dollars a share?"

"It means!" shouted Buckbee, "that you bid up the market until I paid forty-three for the last and then Whitney H. Stoddard dumped every share he had and cut the ground out under your feet! You're obligated to make up a total deficiency of nearly a million at the bank; your loans have been called, and mine have been called, and the stock is forfeit for the debt. You've lost your stock that you bought on a margin and unless you can take up these loans, every blessed share of Navajoa will go to Stoddard and his bank."

"To Stoddard! Well, what does that bank outfit mean by grabbing all my shares? Ain't my name good for about fifty million? Did I ever default on a debt? I'm going right down there and tell that president to give me back every share, and if he don't—"

"Oh, now don't talk that stuff! Just go down and put up some collateral. That's all that will save you—they've got the law behind them and they're strictly within their rights. No, now listen! You borrowed a half a million dollars at the bank this morning and put up your Navajoa for collateral. It was worth twenty-four then, but now, by my ticker, it's only five and a half. Can't you see where you are? Stoddard caught you napping and he'll never let up till you're broke. You valued it at thirty, but he'll keep the market down to nothing until you settle up and liquidate those claims. Then the prices will soar, but you won't be in on it. He's got you trimmed, and no mistake."

"But I don't see it!" came back Rimrock insistently. "I want every one of those shares. And I've got the money—it ought to be here now—to pay every cent I owe. Say, come on up, Buckbee, and help me straighten this thing out—I was unexpectedly called away."

He hung up the phone and turned to the letters and telegrams that were strewn about the desk. There were notices from the bank and frantic demands that he put up more margin on his stock and a peremptory announcement that his loans had been called and must be taken up by the next day at noon—and a letter from Mary Fortune. He thrust it aside and searched again for some letter or telegram from L. W., and then he snatched up hers. There was something wrong and her letter might explain it—it might even contain his cheque.

He tore it open and read the first line and then the world turned black. The dividend had been passed! He hurled the letter down and struck it with his fist. Passed! He turned on his clerk and motioned him from the room with the set, glassy stare of a madman. Passed! And just at the time when he needed the money most! He picked up the letter and read a little further and then his hand went slack. She had voted against him—it was her vote and Stoddard's that had carried the day against L. W.!

He dropped the letter into a gaping wastebasket and sat back grinding his teeth.

"Damn these women!" he moaned and when Buckbee found him he was still calling down curses on the sex. In vain Buckbee begged him to pull himself together and get down to figures and facts, he brushed all the papers in a pile before him and told him to do it himself. Buckbee made memoranda and called up the bank, and then called up Stoddard himself; and still Rimrock sat cursing his luck. Even when Buckbee began to read the final statement his mind was far away—all he heard was the lump sum he owed, a matter of nearly a million.

"WELL, I'll tell you," he said, when Buckbee came to an end, "I'll fix it so you don't lost a cent. But that bank is different. They sold me out to Stoddard and peddled me my own stock twice. Now don't say a word, because I know better—it was like Davey Crockett's coonskin, that he kept stealing from behind the bar. They take my stock for security and then hand it to Stoddard and he sells it over to you, and by the time we get through Stoddard has still got the stock and I owe the bank a million. Those may not be big words but that's what's happened, like Crockett buying the drinks with his coonskin; but if they collect from me they'll have to sue. Now how can I fix it for you?"

"Well, just raise the money to meet my shortage—it's a matter of nearly six hundred thousand."

"All right," said Rimrock, "I'll tell you what I'll do. I just got some bad news from the mine. That big dividend that I absolutely counted on to meet all those obligations was held up—it wasn't passed. But here's the point: the money is still there, right in old L. W.'s bank; the only question is how to get it out. You show me how I can borrow on that tied-up dividend and I'll pay you back every dollar."

"The easiest thing in the world!" exclaimed Buckbee. "All you have to do is to put up your Tecolote stock."

"Nothing doing," said Rimrock, "show me some other way. You fellows know all the tricks."

"No, there's no other way," responded Buckbee earnestly. "That's the only way you can touch it, until the dividend's declared. The surplus in the bank is regarded in law simply as increasing the value of the shares; and so all you have to do is to prove its existence and put up your stock as security."

"And then, if I don't pay it back, the bank will keep my stock!" Rimrock stated it guardedly, but his eyes were snapping and his mouth had become suddenly hard. Don't you ever think it!" he burst out. "I don't put up that stock! No, by grab, not a single share of it, if I lose every cent I've got and leave my best friend in the hole! Do you know what I think?" he demanded portentously as he shook his finger under Buckbee's nose. "I believe every doggoned woman and broker in the whole crooked city of New York is working for—Whitney—H.—Stoddard!"

He paused and at a sudden guilty glance he dropped his hand and started back.

"My God!" he cried, "not you, too,

Buckbee? Don't tell me you're in on it, too? Well, I might as well quit, then! What's the use of trying when every friend you've got turns out a crook!" He slumped down in his chair and, rumpling up his hair, gazed at Buckbee with sombre eyes. "So! Old friend Buckbee, too? Well, Buckbee, what's the deal? Just tell me where I'm at and I'll leave this cursed town forever."

"Too bad, Old Scout," answered Buckbee kindly, "but you know I warned you, from the first. I'm a Stoddard man, and I told you to lay off—but here's where he's got you now. You owe money to his bank, and you owe it to me, and he's guaranteed us both against loss. Now he might step in and get a judgment against you and tie up every share you've got; but all the wants—and he told me so himself—is four thousand shares of Tecolote. That gives him control and, I'll tell you frankly, he's going to get those shares."

"Oh, he is, is he?" said Rimrock and then sat silent while Buckbee bit the tip from a cigar.

"Yes, he's going to get them," went on Buckbee quietly, "but here's how it looks to me. The loss you will suffer from those four thousand shares will be more than made up by the increase in the dividends on the rest. You are not a good business man and, more than that, you have gone off and neglected your mine. But give Stoddard the control and, the way he'll manage it, your stock will bring you in more. You've learned your lesson—just hold on to the rest and you'll always have money to burn. But, if you try to buck him, as sure as God made little fishes, he'll have your hide on the fence."

"D'ye think so?" enquired Rimrock and again he sat silent while Buckbee puffed away at his cigar.

"YES, he's a hard man to whip," went on Buckbee thoughtfully "they call him the Iron Man. Any place you hit him you only break your hand; but when he comes back—zowie!"

"Well, I guess you're right," answered Rimrock slowly, "New York's no place for me. It's back to the cactus where they fight it out with sixshooters and the man that wins grabs the loot. But here you can get some kind of a judgment and let the sheriff do the job."

Buckbee laughed lightheartedly and slapped him on the back, but Rimrock did not even smile.

"By George," exclaimed Buckbee, "I'll be sorry to lose you. You do have a way of putting things. But say, Old Sport, let's get this painful business over. When can you arrange to turn in that stock?"

"I don't know," grumbled Rimrock, "I'll have to think this over—maybe call in a lawyer or two. I'm not so sure about those hands-up judgments."

"Why, my dear boy," exclaimed Buckbee, "you don't doubt for a moment that a bank can attach your stock? You must bear in mind that they loaned you half a million on your mere name stuck to a note. Not a cent of collateral—and on the other half million you were distinctly notified it could be called. Why, the banks have a department where they grind out these actions just exactly as a mill grinds out corn. It's the simplest thing in the world."

"Well, I'll think it over," answered Rimrock non-committally, "unless

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