

four hundred dollars was gone. That had given him the powder to shoot out his holes to the ten feet required by law, and enough actual cash to pay his Mexican locators and make a legal transfer of the claims; but four hundred dollars will not last a lifetime and Rimrock Jones was broke. He needed more money and he went perforce to the only man who could give it. It would be a fight, for L. W. was stubborn; but Rimrock was stubborn himself.

"L. W.," he said, when he found the banker in his private office in the rear, "you used to be white and I want you to listen before you spit out what you've got in your craw. You may have a grievance, and I don't deny it; but remember, I've got one, too. No, it isn't about my mine—I wouldn't sell you one share in it for your whole little jim-crow bank. I've done my first work and I've recorded my claims, and I'll offer them—somewheres else. All you know is gold and before we go any further, just run your eyes over that."

HE dumped the contents of his bag on the polished desk and L. W. blinked as he looked. It was picked gold quartz of the richest kind, with jewelry specimens on top, and as L. W. ran his hand through it his tight mouth relaxed from its bulldog grip on the cigar. "Where'd you get it?" he grunted, and Rimrock's eyes flashed as he answered, shortly:

"My mine."

"How much more you got?"

L. W. asked it suspiciously, but the gold-gleam had gone to his heart.

"About two tons of the best, scattered around on the different dumps, and a whole scad more that will ship. I knew you wouldn't lend on anything but gold-ore and I need money to pay off my Mexicans. I've got to save some ore bags to sack that picked rock in, and hire freighters to haul it in. Then there's the freight and the milling and with one thing and another I need about two thousand dollars."

"Oh! Two thousand dollars. Seems to me," observed L. W., "I've heard that sum mentioned before."

"You have, dad-burn ye, and this time I want it. What's the matter, ain't that ore good for it all?"

"It is, if you've got it, but I've come to the point where I don't place absolute confidence in your word."

"Oh, the hell you have!" said Rimrock, sarcastically, "that sounds like some lawyer talk. You might've learned it from Apex McBain when you was associated with him in a deal. I won't say what deal, but, refreshing your memory now, ain't my word as good as yours?"

He gazed intently at the hard-visaged L. W., whose face slowly turned brick red.

"NOW to get down to business," went on Rimrock, quietly, "I tell you that ore is there. If you'll loan me the money to haul in that rock I'll pay you back from my check. And I'll give you my note at one per cent. a month, compounded monthly and all that. I guess a man that can show title to twenty claims that turn out picked ore like that—well, he's entitled, perhaps, to a little more consideration than you boys have been showing me of late."

L. W. sat silent, his burning eyes on the gold, the cigar clutched fiercely in his teeth—then without a word he wrote a check and threw it across the desk.

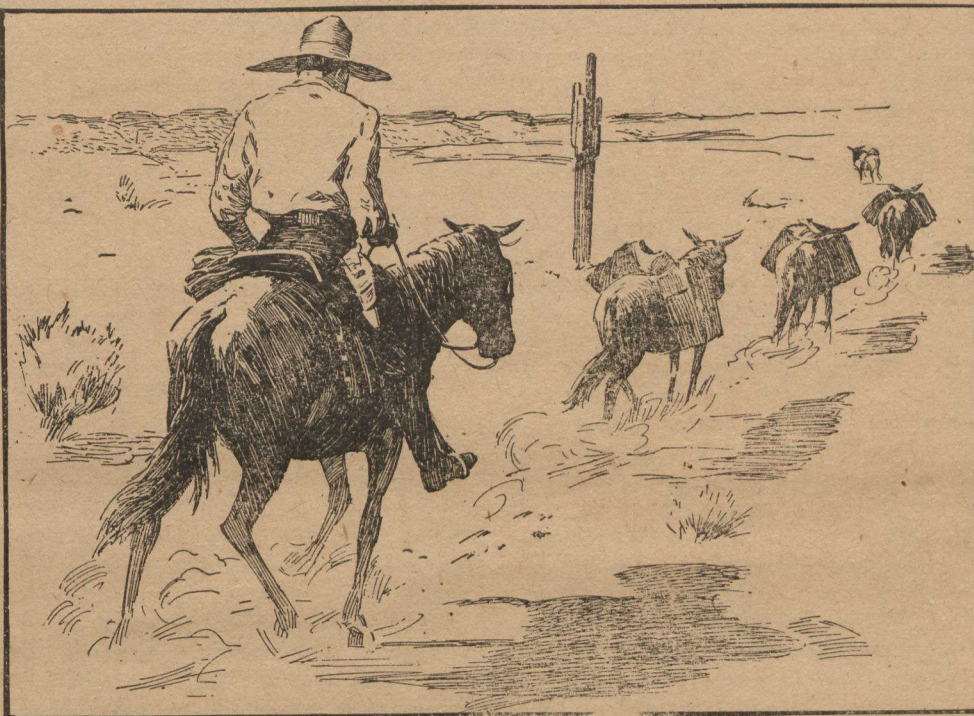
"Much obliged," said Rimrock, and without further words he stepped out and cashed the check. And then Rimrock Jones disappeared.

The last person in Gunsight to hear what had happened was Mary Fortune. She worked at her desk that day in a fever of expectation, now stopping to wonder at the strange madness that possessed her, now pounding harder to still her tumultuous thoughts. She did not know what it was that she expected, only something great and new and wonderful, something

to lift her at last from the drudgery of her work and make her feel young and gay. Something to rouse her up to the wild joy of living and make her forget her misfortunes. To be poor, and deaf, and alone—all these were new things to Mary Fortune; but she was none of them when he was near. What need had she to hear when she could read in his eyes that instant admiration that a woman values most? And poor? The money she had given had helped him, perhaps, to gain millions!

She worked late, that afternoon; and again, in the evening, she made an excuse to keep her office lit up. Still he did not come and she paced up the street, even listened as she passed by the saloons—then, overwhelmed with shame that she had seemed to seek him, she fled to her room and wept. The next day, and the next, she watched and listened and at last she overheard the truth. It was Andrew McBain, the hard, fighting Scotchman, who told the dreadful news—and she hated him for it, always.

"Well, I'm glad he's gone," he had replied to L. W., who had beckoned him out to the door. "He's a dangerous man—I've been afraid of him—you're



Rimrock Jones left town with four burro-loads of powder, some provisions and a cargo of tools.

lucky to get off at that."

"Lucky!" yelled L. W., suddenly forgetting his caution, "he touched me for two thousand dollars! Do you call that lucky? And here's the latest—he hasn't got a pound of picked ore! Even took away what he had; and that old, whiskered Mexican says he up and borrowed that from him!"

"That's a criminal act," explained McBain, exultantly, as he signaled L. W. to be calm. "Shh, not so loud, the girl might hear you. Let him go, and hold it over his head."

"No, I'll kill the dastard!" howled L. W., rebelliously, and slammed the door in a rage.

A swooning sickness came over Mary Fortune as she sat, waiting stonily, at her desk; but when McBain came back and sat down beside her she typed on, automatically, as he spoke. Then she woke at last, as if from a dream, to hear his harsh, discordant voice; and a sudden resentment, a fierce, passionate hatred, swept over her as he shouted in her ear. A hundred times she had informed him politely that she was not deaf when she wore her ear-phone, and a hundred times he had listened impatiently and gone on in his sharp, rasping snarl. She drew away shuddering as he looked over some papers and cleared his throat for a fresh start; and then, without reason that he could ever divine, she burst into tears and fled.

She came back later, but the moment he began dictating she pushed back her chair and rose up.

"Mr. McBain," she said tremulously, "you don't need to shout at me. I give you notice—I shall leave on the first."

It was plainly a tantrum, such as he had observed in women, a case, pure and simple, of nerves; but Andrew McBain let it pass. She could spell—a rare quality in typists—and was familiar with legal forms.

"Ah, my dear Miss Fortune," he began, propitiatingly, "I hope you will reconsider, I'm sure. It's a habit I have, when dictating a brief, to speak as though addressing the court. Perhaps, under the circumstances, you could take off your instrument and my voice would be—ahem—just about right."

"No! It drives me crazy!" she cried in a passion. "It makes everybody think I'm so deaf!"

SHE broke down at that and McBain discreetly withdrew and was gone for the rest of the day. It was best, he had learned, when young women became emotional, to absent himself for a time. And the next day, sure enough, she came back, smiling cheerfully, and said no more of leaving her job. She was, in fact, more obliging than before and he judged that the tantrum had passed.

With L. W., however, the case was different. He claimed to be an Indian in his hates; and a mining engineer, dropping in from New York, told a story that staggered belief. Rimrock Jones was there, the talk of the town, reputed to be enormously rich. He smoked fifty-cent cigars, wore an enormous black hat and put up at the Waldorf Hotel. Not only that, but he was in all the papers as associating with the kings of finance. So great was his prestige that the engineer, in fact, had been requested to report on his mine.

"A report?" shouted L. W., "what, a report on the Tecolotes? Well, I can save you a long, dusty trip. In the first place Rimrock Jones is a thorough-paced scoundrel, not only a liar, but a crook; and in the second place, these claims are forty miles across the desert with just two sunk wells on the road. I wouldn't own his mines if you would make me a present of them and a million dollars to boot. I wouldn't take them for a gift if that mountain was pure gold—how's he going to haul the ore to the railroad? Now listen, my friend, I've known that boy since he stood knee-high to a toad and of all the liars in Arizona he stands out, pre-eminently, as the worst."

"You question his veracity, then?" enquired the engineer, as he fumbled for some papers in his coat.

"Question nothing!" raved L. W. "I'm making a statement! He's not only a liar—he's a thief! He robbed me, the dastard; he got two thousand dollars of my money without giving me the scratch of a pen. Oh, I tell you—"

"Well, that's curious," broke in the engineer, as he stared at a paper, "he's got your name down here as a reference."

CHAPTER V.

The Prodigal's Return.

IT is an engineer's duty, when he is sent out to examine a mine, to make a report on the property, regardless. The fact that the owner is a liar and a thief does not necessarily invalidate his claims; and an all-wise Providence has, on several occasions, allowed such creatures to discover bonanzas. So the engineer hired a team and disappeared on the horizon and L. W. went off buying cattle.

A month passed by in which the derelictions of Rimrock were capped by the machinations of a rival cattle buyer, who beat L. W. out of a buy that would have netted him up into the thousands. Disgusted with everything, L. W. boarded the west-bound at Bowie Junction and flung himself into a seat in the half-empty smoker without looking to the right or left. He was mad—mad clear through—and the last of his cigars was mashed to a pulp in his vest. He had just made this discovery when another cigar was thrust under his nose and a familiar voice said:

"Try one of mine!"

L. W. looked at the cigar, which was undoubtedly expensive, and then glanced hastily across the aisle. There, smiling sociably, was Rimrock Jones.

L. W. squinted his eyes. Yes, Rimrock Jones, in