

"And do you understand," she challenged, "that I can vote against you and throw the control to Stoddard? Have you stopped to think that I may have ideas that are diametrically opposed to your own? Have you even considered that we might fall out—as we did once before, you remember—and that then I could use this against you?"

"I UNDERSTAND all that—and more besides," he said, as he met her eyes. "I want you, Mary. My God, I'm crazy for you. The whole mine is nothing to me now."

"Oh, yes, it is," she said, but her voice trailed off and she thought for a minute in silence.

"Very well," she said, "you have a right to your own way—but remember, this still leaves me free."

"You know it!" he exclaimed, "as the desert wind! Shake hands on it—we're going to be friends!"

"I hope so," she said, "but sometimes I'm afraid. We must wait a while and be sure."

"Ah, 'wait!'" he scolded. "But I don't like that word—but come on, let's get down to business. Where's this Abercrombie Jepson? I want to talk to him, and then we'll go out to the mine."

He grabbed up his hat and began to stride about the office, running his hand lovingly over the polished mahogany furniture, and Mary Fortune spoke a few words into the phone.

"He'll be here in a minute," she said, and began to straighten out the papers on her desk. Even to Rimrock Jones, who was far from systematic, it was evident that she knew her work. Every paper was put back in its special envelope, and when Abercrombie Jepson came in from his office she had the bundle back in the safe.

He was a large man, rather fat and with a ready smile, but with a harried look in his eye that came from handling a thousand details; and as Rimrock turned and faced him he blinked, for he felt something was coming.

"Mr. Jepson," began Rimrock, in his big, blustering voice, "I want to have an understanding with you. You're a Stoddard man, but I think you're competent—you certainly have put things through. But here's the point—I've taken charge now and you get your orders from me. You can forget Mr. Stoddard. I'm president and general manager, and whatever I say goes."

HE paused and looked Jepson over very carefully while Mary Fortune stared.

"Very well, sir," answered Jepson, "I think I understand you. I hope you are satisfied with my services?"

"We'll see about that later," went on Rimrock, still arrogantly. "I'll begin my tour of inspection to-day. But I'll tell you right now, so there won't be any mistake, that all I ask of you is results. You won't find me kicking about the money you spend as long as it comes back in ore. You're a competent man, so I've been given to understand, and, inside your field, you're the boss. I won't fire any of your men and I won't interfere with your work without having it done through you; but on the other hand, don't you forget for a single minute that I'm the big boss on this dump. And whatever you do, don't make the mistake of thinking you're working for Stoddard. I guess that will be all. Miss Fortune is going to be a director soon and I've asked her to go out with us to the mine."

A strange, startled look came over Jepson's face as he received this last bit of news, but he smiled and murmured his congratulations. Then he expressed the hope that he would be able to please them and withdrew with the greatest haste.

"Well!" observed Rimrock, as he gazed grimly after him, "I guess that will hold Mr. Jepson."

"Very likely," returned Mary, "but as a prospective director may I enquire the reason for this outburst?"

"You may," replied Rimrock. "This man, Abercrombie Jepson, was put over on me by Stoddard. I had to concede something, after holding out on the control, and I agreed he could name the supe. Well, now, after being the whole show, don't you think it more than likely that Mr. Jepson might overlook the main squeeze—me?"

He tapped himself on the breast and nodded his head significantly.

"That's it," he went on, as she smiled enigmatically. "I know these great financiers. I'll bet you right now our fat friend Abercrombie is down telegraphing the news to Stoddard. He's Stoddard's man, but I've got my eye on him, and if he makes a crooked move, it's bingo!"

"All the same," defended Mary, "while I don't like him personally, I think Jepson is remarkably efficient. And when you consider his years of experience and the technical knowledge he has—"

"That has nothing to do with it, as far as I'm concerned—there are other men just as good for the

price—but I want him to understand so he won't forget it that he's taking his orders from me. Now, I happen to know that our dear friend Stoddard is out to get control of this mine, and the very man that is liable to ditch us is this same efficient Mr. Jepson. Don't ever make the mistake of giving these financiers the credit of being on the level. You can't grab that much money in the short time they've been gathering without gouging every man you meet. So just watch this man Jepson. Keep your eye on his accounts, and remember—we're partners, now."

His big, excited eyes, that blazed with primitive emotion whenever he roused from his calm, became suddenly gentle and he patted her hand as he hurried off to order up the car.

All the way across the desert, as Mary exclaimed at the signs of progress, Rimrock let it pass in silence. They left the end of the railroad and a short automobile ride put them down at the Tecolote camp. Along the edge of the canyon, where the well-borers had developed water, the framework of a gigantic mill and concentrator was rapidly being rushed to completion. On the flats below, where Old Juan's burros had browsed on the scanty mesquite, were long lines of houses for the miners and a power plant to run the great stamps. A big gang of miners were running cuts into the hillside where the first of the ore was to come out, and like a stream of ants the workmen and teams swarmed about each mighty task, but still Rimrock Jones remained silent. His eyes opened wider at sight of each new miracle, but to Jepson he made no comments.

They went to the assay house, where the diamond drill cores showed the ore from the heart of the hills; and there at last Rimrock found his tongue as he ran over the assayer's reports.

"Pretty good," he observed, and this time it was Jepson who tightened his lips and said nothing. "Pretty good," repeated Rimrock, and then he laughed silently and went out and sat down on the hill. "A mountain of copper," he said, looking upward. "The whole butte is nothing but ore. Some rich, some low-grade, but shattered—that's the ideal! You can scoop it up with a steam shovel."

He whistled through his teeth, cocking his eye up at the mountain and then looking down at the town-site.

"You bet—a big camp!" And then to Jepson: "That's fine, Mr. Jepson; you're doing noble. By the way, when will that cook-house be done? Pretty soon, eh? Well, let me know; I've got a friend that's crazy to move in."

He smiled at Mary, who thought at once of Woo Chong, but Jepson looked suddenly serious.

"I hope, Mr. Jones," he said, "you're not planning to bring in that Chinaman. I've got lots of Bisbee men among my miners and they won't stand for a Chinaman in camp."



Whitney Stoddard sat silent, with a face lined deep with care.

"Oh, yes, they will," answered Rimrock, easily. "You wait, it'll be all right. And there's another thing, now I think about it; Mr. Hicks will be out soon to look for a good place to locate his saloon. I've given him the privilege of selling all the booze that is sold in Tecolote."

"Booze?" questioned Jepson, and then he fell silent and went to gnawing his lip.

"Yes—booze!" repeated Rimrock. "I know these Cousin Jacks. They've got to have facilities for spending their money or they'll quit you and go to town."

"Well, now really, Mr. Jones," began Jepson, earnestly, "I'd much prefer to have a dry camp. Of course you are right about the average miner—but it's better not to have them drunk around camp."

"Very likely," said Rimrock, "but Old Hassayamp is coming and I guess you can worry along. It's a matter of friendship with me, Mr. Jepson—I never go back on a friend. When I was down and out Old Hassayamp Hicks was the only man that would trust me for the drinks; and Woo Chong, the Chinaman, was the only man that would trust me for a meal. You see how it is, and I hope you'll do your best to make them both perfectly at home."

ABERCROMBIE JEPSON mumbled something into his moustache which Rimrock let pass for assent, although it was plainly to be seen by the fire in his eye that the superintendent was vexed. As for Mary Fortune, she sat at one side and pretended not to hear. Perhaps Rimrock was right and these first minor clashes were but skirmishes before a great battle. Perhaps, after all, Jepson was there to oppose him, and it was best to ride over him roughshod. But it seemed on the surface extremely dictatorial, and against public policy as well. Mr. Jepson was certainly right, in her opinion, in his attitude toward Hicks' saloon; yet she knew it was hopeless to try to move Rimrock, so she smiled and let them talk on.

"Now, there's another matter," broke in Jepson, aggressively, "that I've been waiting to see you about. As I understand it, I'm Mr. Stoddard's representative—I represent his interests in the mine. Very good; that's no more than right. Now, Mr. Stoddard has invested a large amount of money to develop these twenty claims, but he feels, and I feel, that that Old Juan claim is a continual menace to them all."

At the mention of the Old Juan Rimrock turned his head, and Mary could see his jaw set; but he listened somberly for some little time as Jepson went on with his complaint.

"You must know, Mr. Jones, that the history of the Old Juan makes it extremely liable to be jumped. We've had a strong guard set ever since you—well, continuously—but the title to that claim must be cleared up. It ought to be re-located—"

"Don't you think it!" sneered Rimrock, with a sudden insulting stare. "That claim will stay—just the way it is!"

"But the guards!" protested Jepson, "they're a continual expense—"

"You can tell 'em to come down," cut in Rimrock, peremptorily. "I'll look after that claim myself."

"But why not re-locate it?" cried Jepson, in a passion, "why expose us to this continual suspense? You can re-locate it yourself—"

"Mr. Jepson," began Rimrock, speaking through his teeth, "there's no one that questions my claim. But if any man does—I don't care who he is—he's welcome to try and jump it. All he'll have to do is whip me."

HE was winking angrily and Jepson, after a silence, cast an appealing glance at Mary Fortune.

"You've got a wonderful property here," he observed, speaking generally, "the prospects are very bright. There's only one thing that can mar its success, and that is litigation!"

"Yes," cried Rimrock, "and that's just what you'd bring on by your crazy re-location scheme! That Old Juan claim is good—I killed a man to prove it—and I'm not going to back down on it now. It won't be re-located and the man that jumps it will have me to deal with, personally. Now, if you don't like the way I'm running this proposition—"

"Oh, it isn't that!" broke in Jepson, hastily, "but