

Rimrock Jones

By DANE COOLIDGE

Author of "The Desert Trail"

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 to get the claim jumpers off his property, he shoots McBain. Rimrock is placed under arrest on a charge of murder. He goes to jail. 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. Gunsight property booms. Jepson, manager for the New York interests, arrives. Mary visits Rimrock in jail and urges him to secure counsel. He refuses. A hotel, with the company's offices, is built. Rimrock's trial comes on. He is acquitted, and returns to Gunsight. Rimrock interviews Jepson and tells him plainly that he, Rimrock, is boss, not the New York people. Rimrock, Mary and Jepson ride out to the mine. Rimrock is satisfied with the showing of the ore. They return to town. Rimrock proposes to Mary again, and is put off once more. A Directors' meeting is held. The New York interests propose marketing a hundred million shares of common stock. Rimrock declares against it. They wait for Mary's decision.

CHAPTER XV.—(Continued.)

"DID you get that, Miss Fortune?" asked Buckbee, suavely, "the proposition is to issue a hundred million shares of common and start them at, say, ten cents a share. Then by a little manipulation we can raise them to twenty and thirty, and from that on up to a dollar. At that price, of course, you can unload if you wish: I'll keep you fully informed."

"Yes, I understood it," she answered, "but I'm not in favour of it. I think all stock gambling is wrong."

"You—what?" exclaimed Buckbee, and Whitney H. Stoddard was so astounded that he was compelled to unmask. His cold, weary eyes became predatory and eager and a subtle, scornful smile twisted his lips. Even Rimrock was surprised. She was with him, that was enough; let the stock gamblers rage. He had won in the very first bout.

"But my dear Miss Fortune," began Stoddard, still smiling, "do you realize what you have done? You have rejected a profit, at the very least, of one or two million dollars."

"That may be," she said, "but I prefer not to take it unless we give something in return."

"But we do" broke in Buckbee, "that stock is legitimate. The people that buy it will get rich."

"But the people who buy it last will lose," she said. "I know, because I did it myself."

"Oho!" began Buckbee but at a glance from Stod-

ILLUSTRATED BY T. W. McLEAN

ard he drew back and concealed his smirk. Then for half an hour with his most telling arguments and the hypnotic spell of his eyes Whitney Stoddard outdid himself to win her over while Rimrock sat by and smiled. He had tried that himself in days gone by and he knew Stoddard was wasting his breath. She had made up her mind and that was the end of it—there would be no Tecolote common. Even Stoddard saw at last that his case was hopeless and he turned to the next point of attack. Rimrock Jones, he knew, opposed him on general principles—but the girl as a matter of conscience. They would see if that conscience could not be utilized.

"Very well," he said, "I'll withdraw my motion. Let us take up this matter of the saloon."

"What saloon?" demanded Rimrock, suddenly alert and combative, and Stoddard regarded him censoriously.

"I refer," he said, "to the saloon at the camp, which you have put there in spite of Jepson's protests. Now, outside the question of general policy—the effect on the men, the increase in accidents and the losses that are sure to result—I wish to protest, and to protest most vigorously, against having a whiskey camp. I want the Tecolote to draw the best type of men, men of family who will make it their home, and I think it's a sin under circumstances like this to poison their lives with rum. I could speak on this further, but I simply make a motion that Tecolote be kept a temperance camp."

He paused and met Rimrock's baleful glance with a thin-lipped fighting smile; and then the battle was on. There were hot words in plenty and mutual recrimination, but Stoddard held the high moral ground. He stuck to his point that employers had no right to profit by the downfall of their men; and when it came to the vote, without a moment's hesitation, Mary Fortune cast her vote with his.

"WHAT'S that?" yelled Rimrock, rising up black with anger and striking a great blow on the table. "Have I got to tell Hassayamp to go? This old friend of mine that helped me and staked me when nobody else would trust me? Then I resign, by grab. If I can't do a little thing like that, I'm going to quit! Right now! You can get another manager! I resign! Now vote on it! You've got to accept it or—"

"I accept it!" said Stoddard, and a wild look crossed Rimrock's face as he saw where his impetuosity had led him. But Mary Fortune, with an understanding smile, shook her head and voted no.

"How do you vote?" challenged Stoddard, trying

to spur him to the leap, but Rimrock had sensed the chasm.

"I vote no!" he said with answering scowl. "I'll take care of Mr. Hicks, myself. You must take me for a sucker," he added, as an afterthought, but Stoddard was again wearing his mask. It was Buckbee who indulged in the laugh.

"We can't all win," he said, rising up to go. "Think of me and that Tecolote common!"

RIMROCK grinned, but Stoddard had come there for a purpose and he did not choose to unbend.

"Mr. Jones," he began, as they were left alone, "I see we are not able to agree. Every point that I bring up you oppose it on general principles. Have you any suggestions for the future?"

"Why, yes," returned Rimrock, "since I'm in control I suggest that you leave me alone. I know what you'd like—you'd like to have me play dead, and let you and Jepson run the mine. But if you've got enough, if you want to get out, I might take that stock off your hands."

A questioning flash came into Stoddard's keen eyes.

"In what way?" he enquired, cautiously.

"Well, just place a value on it, whatever you think it's worth, and we'll get right down to business." Rimrock hitched up his trousers, and the square set of his shoulders indicated his perfect willingness to begin. "You're not the only man," he went on, importantly, "that's got money to put into mines."

"Perhaps not," admitted Stoddard, "but you take too much for granted if you think I can be bought out for a song."

"Oh, no," protested Rimrock, "I don't think anything like that. I expect you to ask a good price. Yes, a big price. But figure it out, now, what you've put into the mine and a reasonable return for your risk. Then multiply it by five, or ten, or twenty, whatever you think it's worth, and make me an offer on paper."

"Not at all! Not at all!" rapped out Stoddard, hastily, "I'm in the market to buy."

"Well, then, make me an offer," said Rimrock, bluffly, "or Miss Fortune here, if she'd like to sell. Here, I'll tell you what you do—you name me a figure that you'll either buy at, or sell! Now, that's fair, ain't it?"

A fretful shadow came over Stoddard's face as he found himself still on the defence and he sought to change his ground.

"I'll tell you frankly why I make this offer—it's on account of the Old Juan claim. If you had shown any tendency to be in the least reasonable I'd be the last to propose any change—"

"Never mind about that," broke in Rimrock, peremptorily, "I'll take your word for all that. The question is—what's your price?"

"I don't want to sell!" snapped out Stoddard, peevishly, "but I'll give you twenty million dollars for your hundred thousand shares of stock."

"You offered that before," countered Rimrock, coolly, "when I was shut up in the County jail. But I'm out again now and I guess you can see I don't figure on being stung."

"I'll give you thirty million," said Stoddard, speaking slowly, "and not a dollar more."

"Will you sell out for that?" demanded Rimrock, instantly. "Will you take forty for what you hold?"

