

Rimrock Jones

By DANE COOLIDGE
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LAST week's instalment of this story presented Rimrock, the Arizona justice-first enemy of bad law in the business of discovering and staking the Tecolote copper mine. In all the episodes of this Tecolote quest there is the spectacle of a big, earnest character battling and scheming for his rights, against a gang of law-protected scoundrels. "Stony busted," Rimrock gets the loan of \$10 from Lockhart, one of the gang. With the \$10 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, on the iniquitous "apex" system, euchred him out of the mine that put Gunsight on the map. He gets her sympathy to the extent of \$400, which she lends him on the security of an un-named share in the Tecolote. Rimrock trails away to the Tecolote; 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. With the \$2,000, Rimrock goes ahead on his Tecolote survey. He 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.

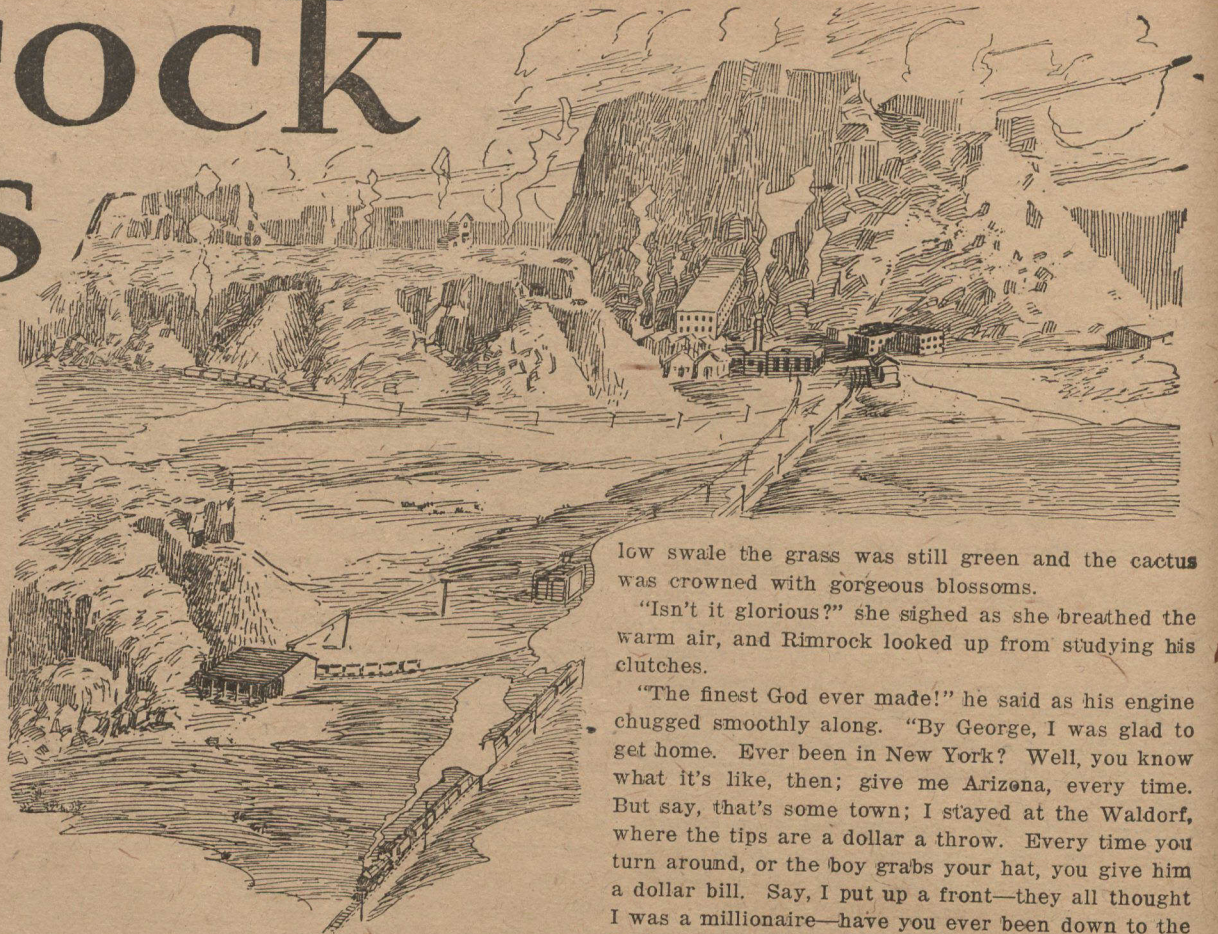
CHAPTER VIII.

A Flier in Stocks.

I was as dazzling to Rimrock as a burst of sunshine to a man just come up from a mine—that look in Mary Fortune's eyes. He went out of her office like a man in a dream and wandered off by himself to think. But that was the one thing he could not negotiate, his brain refused to work. It was a whirl of weird flashes and forms and colours, like a futurist painting gone mad, but above it all when the turmoil had subsided was the thought of going back. He had told her when he left her that he would come around again, and that fixed idea had held to the end. But how? Under what pretext? And would she break down his pretence with that smile?

Rimrock thought it over and it seemed best at the end to invite her to take a ride. There were certain things in connection with their mine which he wished very much to discuss, but how could he do it in the hotel lobby with the Gunsight women looking on? Since his rise to affluence one of them had dared to speak to him, but she would never do it again. He remembered too well the averted glances with which they had passed him, poor and ragged, on the street. No, he hated them passionately as the living symbols of Gunsight fraud and greed; the soft, idle women of those despicable parasites who now battered on what he had earned.

But Mary Fortune, how else was he to meet her without envious eyes looking on; or stealthy ears of prying women, listening at keyholes to catch every word? And out on the desert, gliding smoothly along in the best hired automobile in town, where better could he give expression to those surging confidences which he was impelled against his judgment to make? It was that same inner spirit that made all his troubles, now urging him he knew not where. All he knew for certain was that the shy woman-look had crept back for a moment into her eyes; and after that the fate of empires was as nothing to the import of her smile. Did she feel, as he felt, the mystic bond between them, the appeal of his young man's strength; or was that smile a mask, a provocative weapon, to veil her own thoughts while she read through his like a book? He gave it up; but



there was a way of knowing—he could call out that smile again.

The idle women of the Gunsight Hotel, sitting in their rockers on the upper porch, were rewarded on that day for many a wasted hour. For long months they had watched McBain's typist, with her proud way of ignoring them all; and at last they had something to talk about. Rimrock Jones in his best, and with a hired automobile, came gliding up to her office; and as he went tramping in every ear on the veranda was strained to catch his words.

"Aw, don't mind those old hens," he said after a silence, roaring it out that all could hear. "They're going to talk anyway, so let's take a ride; and make 'em guess, for once, what I say."

There was nothing, after that, for the ladies to do but retire in the best form they could; but as Mary Fortune came out in an auto bonnet with a veil and coat to match they tore her character to shreds from behind the Venetian blinds. So that was her game—she had thrown over McBain and was setting her cap for Rimrock Jones. And automobile clothes! Well, if that wasn't proof that she was living down a past the ladies would like to know. A typewriter girl, earning less than seventy dollars a month, and with a trunk full of joy-riding clothes!

With such women about her it called for some courage for Mary Fortune to make the plunge; but the air was still fragrant, spring was on the wind and the ground dove crooned in his tree. She was tired, worn out with the deadly monotony of working on day by day; and she had besides that soul-stirring elation of having won in the great game for her stock.

"It'll be a stockholders' meeting," Rimrock had explained in her ear. "We represent a majority of the stock. I want to tell you something big, where nobody else will hear. Come on, let your typewriting slide!"

AND Mary Fortune had laughed and run scampering up the stairs and come down with her gloves and veil, and as the automobile moved off she had that joyous sensation of something about to happen. They drove out of town on the one straight road that led to the Gunsight mine, and Rimrock was so busy with the mechanics of his driving that she had a chance to view the landscape by herself. The white, silty desert, stretching off to blue mountains, was set as regularly as a vineyard with the waxy, dark-green creosote bushes; and at uncertain intervals the fluted giant cactus rose up like sentinels on the plain. All the desert trees that grew near the town—the iron-woods and palo verdes and cat-claws and mesquite and salt-bushes—had been uprooted by the Mexicans in their search for wood; but in every

low swale the grass was still green and the cactus was crowned with gorgeous blossoms.

"Isn't it glorious?" she sighed as she breathed the warm air, and Rimrock looked up from studying his clutches.

"The finest God ever made!" he said as his engine chugged smoothly along. "By George, I was glad to get home. Ever been in New York? Well, you know what it's like, then; give me Arizona, every time. But say, that's some town; I stayed at the Waldorf, where the tips are a dollar a throw. Every time you turn around, or the boy grabs your hat, you give him a dollar bill. Say, I put up a front—they all thought I was a millionaire—have you ever been down to the curb market? Oh, don't you know what that is? Why, it's the place near Wall Street where they sell stock in the middle of the street."

HE negotiated a sand wash and nearly stripped a gear as he threw in the low by mistake.

"You bet, quite a country!" he went on, unconcerned. "I thought I knew sign language, but those curb brokers have got me beat. I can sit down with an Indian and by signs and sand-pictures I can generally make him savvy what I want, but those fellers back there could buy and sell me while I was asking the price of a horse. I was down there on Broad Street and a man in the crowd jumped up and let out a yell.

"Sold!" says a feller that's standing next to me, and began to make signs to a fellow in a second-story window and writes something down on a pad. I asked a man that was taking me around—they treated me right in that town—what in the world was going on, and he told me they'd made a trade in stock. The first fellow says:

"Sell five hundred shares of So-and-So at seventy-nine!" and the second man raises his right hand like an Indian how-sign and there's a twenty-thousand-dollar trade pulled off. They both write it down on a slip of paper and the man in the window does the telephoning. Say, I'm going back there when I got a stake, and try my hand at that game."

An expression of pain, as of some evil memory, passed swiftly over Mary Fortune's face and she turned from gazing at the mountains to give him a warning shake of the head.

"Don't you do it!" she said; but when he asked her why not she shut her lips and looked far away.

"You must've got bit some time," he suggested, cheerfully, but she refused for the moment to be drawn out.

"Perhaps," she replied, "but if that's the case my advice is all the more sound."

"No, but I'm on the inside," he went on, impressively. "I know some of those big ones personally. That makes the difference; those fellows don't lose, they skim the cream off of everything. Say, I ought to know—didn't I go in there lone-handed and fight it out with a king of finance? That's the man we're in with—I can't tell you his name, now—he's the one that owns the forty-nine per cent. They're crazy about copper or he'd never have looked at me—there's some big market fight coming on. And didn't he curse and squirm and holler, trying to make me give up my control? He told me in years he had never gone into anything unless he got more than half for a gift! But I told him 'no,' I'd been euchered out of one mine; and after his expert had reported on the property he came through and gave me my way.