

even raised skunks, when the bounty on them was high enough, and took the pay out of their hides. It was the same with McBain. If he didn't come through—Rimrock shook up his six-shooter and stalked resolutely off up the street.

The office of the Company was on the ground floor of the hotel—the corner room, with a rented office beyond—and as Rimrock came towards it he saw a small sign, jutting out from the farther door:

MARY ROGET FORTUNE

Typewriting.

HE glanced at it absently, for strange emotions came over him as he peered in through that plateglass window. It had been his office, this same expensive room; and he had been robbed of it, under cover of the law. He shaded his eyes from the glare of the street and looked in at the mahogany desk. It was vacant—the whole place was vacant—and silently he tried the door. That was locked. McBain had seen him and slipped away till he should get out of town.

"The sneaking cur!" muttered Rimrock, in a fury, and a passing woman drew away and half-screamed. He ignored her, pondering darkly, and then to his ears came a familiar voice. He listened, intently, and raised his head; then tiptoed along the wall. That voice, as he knew it, belonged to Andrew McBain, the man that stole mines for a living. He paused at the door where Mary Fortune had her sign, then suddenly forced his way in.

Without thinking, impulsively, he had moved towards that voice as a man follows some irresistible call. He opened the door and stood blinking in the doorway, his hand on the pistol at his side. Then he blinked again, for in the gloom of the back office there was nothing but a desk and a girl. She wore a harness over her head, like a telephone operator, and rose up to meet him tremulously.

"Is there anything you wish?" she asked him quietly, and Rimrock fumbled and took off his hat.

"Yes—I was looking for a man," he said at last. "I thought I heard him—just now."

He came down towards her, still looking about him, and there was a stir from behind the desk.

"No, I think you're mistaken," she answered bravely, but he could see the telltale fear in her eyes.

"You know who I mean!" he broke out roughly, "and I guess you know why I've come!"

"No, I don't," she answered, "but—but this is my office and I hope you won't make any trouble."

The words came with a rush, once she found her courage, but the appeal was lost upon Rimrock.

"He's here, then!" he said.

"Well, you tell him to come out. I'd like to talk with him on business—alone!"

He took a step forward and then suddenly from behind the desk a shadow rose up and fled. It was Andrew McBain, and as he dashed for the rear door the girl valiantly covered his retreat. There was a quick slap of the latch, a scuffle behind her, and the door came shut with a bang.

"Oho!" said Rimrock, as she faced him panting, "he must be a friend of yours."

"No, he isn't," she answered instantly, and then a smile crept into her eyes. "But he's—well, he's my principal customer."

"Oh," said Rimrock, "well, I'll let him live then." He turned away, still intent on his purpose, but at the door she called him back.

"What that?" he asked, as if awakened from a dream. "Why, yes, if you don't mind, I will."

CHAPTER III.

Miss Fortune.

IT was very informal, to say the least, for Mary Fortune to invite him to stay. To be sure, she knew him—he was the man with the gun, the man

of whom McBain was afraid—but that was all the more reason, to a reasoning woman, why she should keep silent and let him depart. But there was a business-like brevity about him, a single-minded directness, that struck her as really unique. Quite apart from the fact that it might save McBain, she wanted him to stay there and talk. At least so she explained it, the evening afterwards, to her censorious otherself. What she did was spontaneous, on the impulse of the moment, and without any reason whatever.

"Oh, won't you sit down a moment?" she had murmured politely; and the savage, fascinating Westerner, after one long look, had with equal politeness accepted.

"Yes, indeed," he answered when he had got his wits together, "you're very kind to ask me, I'm sure."

He came back then, a huge, brown, ragged animal and sat down, very carefully, in her spare chair. Why he did so when his business, not to mention a just revenge, was urgently calling him thence, was a question never raised by Rimrock Jones. Perhaps he was surprised beyond the point of resistance; but it is still more likely that, without his knowing it, he was hungry to hear a woman's voice. His black mood left him, he forgot what he had come there for, and sat down to wonder and admire.

He looked at her curiously, and his eyes for one brief moment took in the details of the headband over her ear; then he smiled to himself in his masterful way as if the sight of her pleased him well. There was nothing about her to remind him of those women who stalked up and down the street; she was tall and thin with swift, capable hands, and

Rimrock had the money, but Mary was the first person he had ever met who didn't want it.



every line of her spoke subtly of style. Nor was she lacking in those qualities of beauty which we have come to associate with her craft. She had quiet brown eyes that lit up when she smiled, a high nose and masses of hair. But across that brown hair that a duchess might have envied lay the metal clip of her ear-telephone, and in her dark eyes, bright and steady as they were, was that anxious look of the deaf.

"I hope I wasn't rude," she stammered nervously as she sat down and met his glance.

"Oh, no," he said, with the same carefree directness, "it was me, I reckon, that was rude. I certainly didn't count on meeting a lady when I came in here looking for—well, McBain. He won't be back, I reckon. Kind of interferes with business, don't it?"

He paused and glanced at the rear door and the typist smiled, discreetly.

"Oh, no," she said. And then, lowering her voice: "Have you had trouble with Mr. McBain?"

"Yes, I have," he answered. "You may have heard of me—my name is Henry Jones."

"Oh—Rimrock Jones?"

Her eyes brightened instantly as he slowly nodded his head.

"That's me," he said. "I used to run this whole town—I'm the man that discovered the mines."

"What, the Gunsight mines? Why, I thought Mr. McBain—"

"McBain what?"

"Why, I thought he discovered the mines."

Rimrock straightened up angrily, then he sat back in his chair and shook his head at her cynically.

"He didn't need to," he answered. "All he had to do was to discover an error in the way I laid out my claim. Then he went before a judge that was as crooked as he was and the rest you can see for yourself."

He thrust his thumb scornfully through a hole in his shirt and waved a hand in the direction of the office.

"No, he cleaned me out, using a friend of mine; and now I'm down to nothing. What do you think of a law that will take away a man's mine because it apexes on another man's claim? I discovered this mine and I formed the company, keeping fifty-one per cent. of the stock. I opened her up and she was paying big, when Andy McBain comes along. A shyster lawyer—that's the best you can say for him—but he cleaned me, down to a cent."

"I don't understand," she said at last as he seemed to expect some reply. "About these apexes—what are they, anyway? I've only been West a few months."

"Well, I've been West all my life, and I've hired some smart lawyers, and I don't know what an apex is yet. But in a general way it's the high point of

an ore-body—the highest place where it shows above ground. But the law works out like this: every time a man finds a mine and opens it up till it pays these apex sharps locate the high ground above him and contest the title to his claim. You can't do that in Mexico, nor in Canada, nor in China—this is the only country in the world where a mining claim don't go straight down. But under the law, when you locate a lode, you can follow that vein, within an extension of your end-lines, under anybody's ground. Anybody's!"

HE shifted his chair a little closer and fixed her with his fighting blue eyes.

"Now, just to show you how it works," he went on, "take me, for instance. I was just an ordinary ranch kid, brought up so far back in the mountains that the boys all called me Rimrock, and I found a rich ledge of rock. I staked out a claim for myself, and the rest for my folks and my friends, and then we organized the Gunsight Mining Company. That's the way

we all do, out here—one man don't hog it all, he does something for his friends. Well, the mine paid big, and if I didn't manage it just right I certainly never meant any harm. Of course I spent lots of money—some objected to that—but I made the old Gunsight pay.

"Then—" he raised his finger and held it up impressively as he marked the moment of his downfall—"then this McBain came along and edged into the Company and right from that day, I lose. He took on as attorney, but it wasn't but a minute till he was trying to be the whole show. You can't stop that man, short of killing him dead, and I haven't got around to that yet. But he bucked me from the start and set everybody against me and finally he cut out Lon Lockhart. There was a man, by Joe, that I'd stake my life on it he'd never go back on a friend; but he threw in with this lawyer and brought a suit against me, and just naturally took—away—my—mine!"

Rimrock's breast was heaving with an excitement so powerful that the girl instinctively drew away; but he went on, scarcely noticing, and with a fixed stare in his eyes akin to that of a madman.