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always keep away from me and look like you didn't approve? Ain't a man got a right, if he's crowded too far, to stand up and fight for his own? Would you think any better of me if I'd quit in the pinch and let McBain get away with my mine? Wasn't he just a plain robber, only without the nerve, hiring gun-fighters to do the rough work? Why, Mary, I feel proud, every time I think about it, that I went there and did what I did. I feel like a man that has done a great duty and I can't stand it to have you disapprove. When I killed McBain I served notice on everybody that no man can steal from me, not even if he hides behind the law. And now, with all this coming up, I want you to tell me I did right!"

HE thrust out his big head and fixed her eyes fiercely, but she slowly shook her head.

"No," she said, "I can never say that. I think there was another way."

"But I tried that before, when he robbed me of the Gunsight. My God, you wouldn't have me go to law!"

"You didn't need to go to law," she answered, suddenly flaring up in anger. "I warned you in plenty of time. All you had to do was to go to your property and be there to warn him away."

"Aw, you don't understand!" he cried in an agony. "Didn't I warn him to keep away? Didn't I come to his office when you were right there and tell him to keep off my claims? What more could I do? But he went out there anyhow, and after that there was nothing to do but fight!"

"Well, I'm glad you're satisfied," she said after a silence. "Let's talk about something else."

"No, let's fight this out!" he answered insistently. "I want you to understand."

"I do," she replied. "I know just how you feel. But unfortunately I see it differently."

"Well, how do you see it? Just tell me how you feel and see if I can't prove I'm right."

"No, it can't be proved. It goes beyond that. It goes back to the way we've been brought up. My father was a judge and he worshipped the law—you men out West are different."

"Yes, you bet we are. We don't worship any law unless, by grab, it's right. Why, there used to be a law, a hundred years ago, to hang a man if he stole. They used to hang them by the dozen, right over there in England, and put their heads on a spike. Could you worship that law? Why, no; you know better. But there's a hundred more laws on our statute books to-day that date clear back to that time, and lots of them are just as unreasonable. I believe in justice, and every man for his own rights, and some day I believe you'll agree with me."

"That isn't necessary," she said, smiling slightly, "we can proceed very nicely without."

"Aw, now, that's what I mean," he went on appealingly. "We can proceed, but I want more than that. I want you to like me—and approve of what I do—and love and marry me, too."

He poured it out hurriedly and reached blindly to catch her, but she rose up and slipped away.

"No, Rimrock," she said as she gazed back at him from a distance, "you want too much—all at once. To love

and to marry are serious things, they make or mar a woman's whole life. I didn't come out here with the intention of marrying and I have no such intention yet. And to win a woman's love—may I tell you something? It can never be done by violence. You may take that big pistol and win a mountain of copper that is worth two hundred million dollars, but love doesn't come that way. You say you want me now, but to-morrow may be different. And you must remember, you are likely to be rich."

"Yes, and that's why I want you!" burst out Rimrock impulsively. "You can keep me from blowing my money."

"Absolutely convincing—from the man's point of view. But what about the woman's? And if that's all you want you don't have to have me. You'll find lots of other girls just as capable."

"No, but look! I mean it! I've got to have you—we can throw in our stock together!"

There was a startled pause, in which each stared at the other as if wondering what had happened, and then Mary Fortune smiled. It was a very nice smile, with nothing of laughter in it, but it served to recall Rimrock to his senses.

"I think I know what you mean," she said at last, "but don't you think you've said enough? I like you just as much; but really, Rimrock, you're not very good at explaining."

CHAPTER XV.

A Game For Big Stakes.

THE next thirty days—before the stockholders' meeting—were spent by Rimrock in trying to explain. In spite of her suggestion that he was not good at that art he insisted upon making things worse. What he wanted to say was that the pooling of their stock would be a happy—though accidental—resultant of their marriage; what he actually said was that they ought to get married because then they would stand together against Stoddard. But Mary only listened with a wise, sometimes wistful, smile and assured him he was needlessly alarmed. It was that which drove him on—that wistful, patient smile. Somehow he felt, if he could only say the right words, she would lean right over and kiss him!

But those words were never spoken. Rimrock was worried and harassed and his talk became more and more practical. He was quarreling with Jepson, who stood upon his rights; and Stoddard had served notice that he would attend the meeting in person, which meant it had come to a showdown. So the month dragged by until at last they sat together in the mahogany-furnished Directors' room. Rimrock sat at the head of the polished table with Mary Fortune near by, and Stoddard and Buckbee opposite. As the friend of all parties—and the retiring director—Buckbee had come in the interest of peace; or so he claimed, but how peace would profit him was a question hard to decide. It might seem, in fact, that war would serve better; for brokers are the sharks in the ocean of finance and feed and fatten where the battle is fiercest.

Whitney Stoddard sat silent, a tall, nervous man with a face lined deep with care, and as he waited for the conflict he tore off long strips of paper and pinched them carefully into