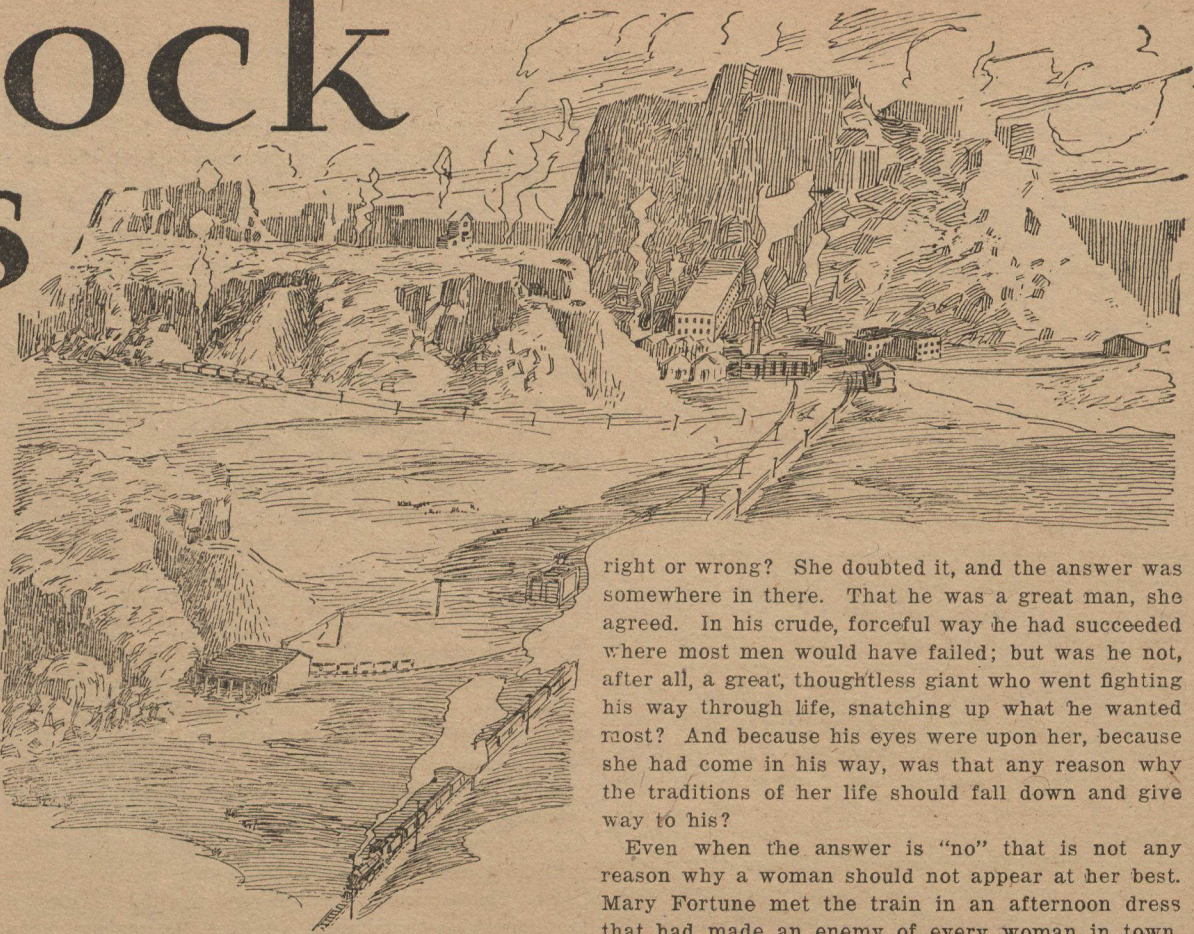


Rimrock Jones

By DANE COOLIDGE
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ILLUSTRATED BY T. W. McLEAN

THE first 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.

The second instalment introduces Rimrock in the somewhat clumsy and quite humorous role of love-maker. In a motor-ride to the Tecolote he proposes marriage to Mary Fortune. She postpones her decision, somewhat in anger. Surveyors arrive to line the railroad from Gunsight to Tecolote. In the stampede to the 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.

CHAPTER XII.

Rimrock's Big Day.

THE white heat of midsummer settled down on the desert and the rattlesnakes and Gila monsters holed up. As in the frozen East, they hibernated in winter to escape the grip of the cold, so in sun-cursed Pagaugeria, where the Tecolotes lie, they crawled as deep to get away from the heat. But in the Geronimo jail with its dead, fetid air, Rimrock Jones learned to envy the snakes. Out on the stark desert, where the men laid the track, the hot steel burned everything it touched; but the air was clean, and in the nights, when he suffocated, they lay cool and looked up at the stars. They did a man's work and drew their pay; he lay in the heat and waited.

Then the first cool days came and the Tecolote Mining Company resumed its work in feverish haste. An overplus of freight was jammed in the yards; the construction gangs laid track day and night; and from the end of the line, which crept forward each day, the freight waggons hauled supplies to the mine. There was a world of work, back and forth on the road; and in Tecolote and Gunsight as well. A magnificent hotel, with the offices of the Company, was springing up across the street from the Gunsight; at the mine there were warehouses

and a company store and quarters for the men on the flats where Rimrock had once pitched his tent.

Rimrock Jones must wait on law. No bail for him, for he had made a threat and then killed his man as he fled. And he would not deny it, nor listen to any lawyer; so he lay there till the circuit court convened. All through the slow inferno of that endless summer he had cursed the law's delay; but it held him, regardless, until the calm-eyed judge returned for the fall term of court. The jail was full to the last noisome cell-room and, caught with the rest, was Rimrock.

YET if Rimrock had suffered there had been compensation—Mary Fortune had written him every day. He knew everything that Jepson was doing; and he knew a little more about her. But only a little; there was something about her that balked him a thousand times. She eluded him, she escaped him, she ignored his hot words; she was his friend, and yet only so far. She did not approve of what he was doing, and she had taken him at his word. He had asked her, once, not to interfere in his case; and from that day she kept her hands off.

The day of the trial came and Hassayamp Hicks, with L. W. and a host of friends, went to Geronimo to cheer Rimrock by their presence. The papers came back full of the account of the case, but Mary Fortune did not appear in court. Even when the great day came when Rimrock was to make his appeal to the jury she remained in her office in Gunsight—and then came the telegram: "Acquitted!"

He had been right then, after all; he knew his own people! But then, there were other things, too. Mary Fortune was not so innocent that she had not noticed the strong interest which the newspapers had taken in his case. They had hailed him, in those last days, the first citizen of Geronimo County; and first citizens, as we know, are seldom hanged. The wonderful development of the Tecolote Mining Company had been heralded, month after month; and the name Rimrock Jones was always spoken with a reverence never given to criminals. He was the man with the vision, the big man of a big country, the man whose touch brought forth gold. And now he had won; his man-killing had been justified; and he was coming back—to see her.

She knew it. She even knew what he would hasten to say the first moment he found her alone. He was simple, in those matters; which made it all the more necessary to have the answer thought out in advance. But was life as simple as he insisted upon making it? Was every one either good or bad, and everything

right or wrong? She doubted it, and the answer was somewhere in there. That he was a great man, she agreed. In his crude, forceful way he had succeeded where most men would have failed; but was he not, after all, a great, thoughtless giant who went fighting his way through life, snatching up what he wanted most? And because his eyes were upon her, because she had come in his way, was that any reason why the traditions of her life should fall down and give way to his?

Even when the answer is "no" that is not any reason why a woman should not appear at her best. Mary Fortune met the train in an afternoon dress that had made an enemy of every woman in town. She had a friend in New York who picked them out for her, since her salary had become what it was. A great crowd was present—the whole populace of Gunsight was waiting to see their hero come home—and as the train rolled in and Rimrock dropped off, in the excitement she found tears in her eyes. But then, that was nothing; Woo Chong, the restaurant Chinaman, was weeping all over the place; and Old Hassayamp Hicks, hobbling off through the crowd, wiped his eyes and sobbed, unashamed. And then Rimrock seized her by both her hands and made her walk with him back to the hotel!

It was no time for discipline, that night; Rimrock was feeling too happy and gay. He would shake hands with a Mexican with equal enthusiasm, or a Chinaman, or a labourer off the railroad. They were all his friends, whether he knew them or not, and he called on the whole town to celebrate. The Mexican string band that had met him at the train was chartered forthwith for the night, Woo Chong had an order to bring all the grub in town and feed it to the crowd at the hotel, but Hassayamp Hicks refused to take any man's money, he claimed that the drinks were on him. And so, with the band playing "Paloma" on the veranda and refreshments served free to the town, Rimrock Jones came back, the first citizen of Gunsight, and took up his life with a bang.

He stood in the rotunda of the Hotel Tecolote and gazed admiringly at the striped marble pillars that he had ordered at great expense, and his answer was always the same.

"Why, sure not! I knowed that jury wouldn't convict. I picked them myself by the look in their eye, and every man had to be ten years in the Territory. A fine bunch of men—every one of 'em square—they can have anything I've got. That's me! You know Rimrock! He never forgets his friends! And he don't forget his enemies, either!"

And then came the cheers, the shouts of his friends. The only enemy he had was dead.

MARY FORTUNE had a room on the second floor of the hotel—one of the nicest of them all, now that the painters and paperhangers had finally left—and she came down late in an evening gown. The marble steps, which Rimrock had insisted upon having, led up and then turned to both sides, and as she came down, smiling, with her ear-phone left off and her hair in a glorious coil, Rimrock paused and his eyes grew big.

"By Joe, like the Queen picture!" he burst out impulsively and went bounding to meet her half way. And Mary Fortune heard him, in spite of her deafness; and understood—he meant the Empress Louise. He had seen that picture of the beloved Empress