

Rimrock Jones

CHAPTER I.

The Man with a Gun.

By DANE COOLIDGE

Author of "The Desert Trail"

THE peace of midday lay upon Gunsight, broken only by the distant chang, chang of bells as a ten-mule ore-team came toiling in from the mines. In the cool depths of the umbrella tree in front of the Company's office a Mexican ground-dove crooned endlessly his ancient song of love, but Gunsight took no notice. Its thoughts were not of love, but of money.

The dusty team of mules passed down the street, dragging their double-trees reluctantly, and took their cursing meekly as they made the turn at the tracks. A switch engine bumped along the sidings, snaking ore-cars down to the bins and bunting them up to the chutes, but except for its bangings and clamour the town was still. An aged Mexican, armed with a long bunch of willow brush, swept idly at the sprinkled street and Old Hassayamp Hicks, the proprietor of the Alamo Saloon, leaned back in his rawhide chair and watched him with good-natured contempt.

The town was dead, after a manner of speaking, and yet it was not dead. In the Gunsight Hotel where the officials of the Company left their women-folks to idle and fret and gossip, there was a restless flash of white from the upper veranda; and in the office below Andrew McBain, the aggressive President of the Gunsight Mining and Developing Company, paced nervously to and fro as he dictated letters to a typist. He paused, and as the clacking stopped a woman who had been reading a novel on the veranda rose up noiselessly and listened over the railing. The new typist was really quite deaf—one could hear every word that was said. She was pretty, too—and—well, she dressed too well, for one thing.

BUT McBain was not making love to his typist. He had stopped with a word on his lips and stood gazing out the window. The new typist had learned to read faces and she followed his glance with a start. Who was this man that Andrew McBain was afraid of? He came riding in from the desert, a young man, burly and masterful, mounted on a buckskin horse and with a pistol slung low on his leg. McBain turned white, his stern lips drew tighter and he stood where he had stopped in his stride like a wolf that has seen a fierce dog; then suddenly he swung forward again and his voice rang out harsh and defiant. The new typist took the words down at haphazard, for her thoughts were not on her work. She was thinking of the man with a gun. He had gone by without a glance, and yet McBain was afraid of him.

A couple of card players came out of the Alamo and stopped to talk with Hassayamp.

"Well, bless my soul," exclaimed the watchful Hassayamp as he suddenly brought his chair down with a bump, "if hyer don't come that locoed scoundrel, Rimrock! Say, that boy's crazy, don't you know he is—jest look at that big sack of rocks!"

He rose up heavily and stepped out into the street, shading his eyes from the glare of the sun.

"Hello, that, Rimmy!" he rumbled bluffly as the horseman waved his hand, "whar you been so long, and nothin' heard of you? There's been a woman hyer, enquirin' for you, most every day for a month now!"

PROBABLY you have never known what it means to be as poor as a junk-man in war-time one day and as rich as a copper king the next. And it's because most of us under such circumstances would make a bigger study in fool-dom than any we have ever met, that the character of Rimrock Jones becomes so everlastingly real. Rimrock is a character that you can talk about anywhere—only it's far better to have your copy of the paper along with you, because the character of Rimrock can only be got in Rimrock's own language. He is a master of language, and a man of action. A real swashbuckling, rampageous north wind, this man-justice miner from Gunsight, Arizona. Canada has known scores of characters just as uncommon. It takes half a dozen or more of these rolled into one to make Rimrock. Dane Coolidge has sat down with his spot-light on these hero-outlaw chaps who stand for justice and no law. He has studied them. Result—Rimrock.

Also there is a woman in the case. Mary Fortune was just about all that Rimrock wasn't, which was why she understood him.

This story of a man, a woman, and a mine, will last us four instalments. You will be looking for the next about this time in September.



"S that so?" responded Rimrock, guardedly. "Well, say, boys, I've struck it rich!"

He leaned back to untie a sack of ore, but Old Hassayamp was not to be deterred.

"Yes, sir," he went on opening up his eyes triumphantly, "a widdy woman—says you owe her two-bits for some bread!"

He laughed uproariously at this pointed jest and clambered back to the plank sidewalk where he sat down convulsed in his chair.

"Aw, you make me tired!" said Rimrock, shortly. "You know I don't owe no woman."

"You owe every one else, though," came back Hassayamp, with a Texas yupe; "I got you there, boy. You shore can't git around that!"

"Huh!" grunted Rimrock as he swung lightly to the

ground. "Two bits, maybe! Four bits! A couple of dollars! What's that to talk about when a man is out after millions? Is my credit good for the drinks? Well, come on in then, boys; and I'll show you something good!"

He led the way through the swinging doors and Hassayamp followed ponderously. The card players followed also and several cowboys, appearing as if by miracle, lined up along with the rest. Old Hassayamp looked them over grimly, breathed hard and spread out the glasses.

"Well, all right, Rim," he observed, "between friends—but don't bid in the whole town."

"When I drink, my friends drink," answered Rimrock and tossed off his first drink in a month. "Now!" he went on, fetching out his sack, "I'll show you something good!"

HE poured out a pile of blue-gray sand and stood away from it admiringly.

Old Hassayamp drew out his glasses and balanced them on his nose, then he gazed at the pile of sand.

"Well," he said, "what is it, anyway?"

"It's copper, by grab, mighty nigh ten per cent. copper, and you can scoop it up with a shovel. There's worlds of it, Hassayamp, a whole doggoned mountain! That's the trouble, there's almost too much! I can't handle it, man, it'll take millions to do it; but believe me, the millions are there. All I need is a stake now, just a couple of thousand dollars——"

"Huh!" grunted Hassayamp, looking up over his glasses, "you don't reckon I've got that much, do you, to sink in a pile of sand?"

"If not you, then somebody else," replied Rimrock, confidently. "Some feller that's out looking for sand. I heard about a sport over in London that tried on a bet to sell five-pound notes for a shilling. That's like me offering to sell you twenty-five dollars for the English equivalent of two bits. And d'ye think he could get anyone to take 'em? He stood up on a soap box and waved those notes in the air, but d'ye think he could get anybody to buy?"

He paused with a cynical smile and looked Hassayamp in the eye.

"Well—no," conceded Hassayamp, weakly.

"You bet your life he could!" snapped back Rimrock. "A guy came along that knowed. He took one look at those five-pound notes and handed up fifty cents."

"I'll take two of 'em," he says; and walks off with fifty dollars!"

Rimrock scooped up his despised sand and poured it back into the bag, after which he turned on his heel. As the doors swung to behind him Old Hassayamp looked at his customers and shook his head impressively. From the street outside Rimrock could be heard telling a Mexican in Spanish to take his horse to the corrals. He was master of Gunsight yet, though all his money had vanished and his credit would buy nothing but the drinks.

"WELL, what d'ye know about that?" observed Hassayamp, meditatively. "By George, sometimes I almost think that boy is right!"

He cleared his throat and hobbled towards the door and the crowd took the hint to disperse.

On the edge of the shady sidewalk Rimrock Jones, the follower after big dreams, sat silent, balancing