

Webster—Man's Man

By PETER B. KYNE

Author of "Cappy Ricks," "The Valley of the Giants," Etc.

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"MOTHER!"

John Stuart Webster, mining engineer, boards a train in Death Valley, California, on his way back to civilization after cleaning up \$100,000. But he looks like a hobo. Then he meets a distressed lady, who makes his heart drop over. He eliminates the offending man. Being what he is and also glib, he does not take advantage of his opportunity. But he just has to find out that she is Dolores Rucy. In Denver he is offered a \$2,000-a-year job by a capitalist friend, Edward P. Jerome. He receives a delayed letter from his own particular pal, Billy Geary, asking him to finance a gold-mining proposition in Central America and go fifty-fifty with him on the profits. Thereupon he turns down the big job and decides to answer the call of friendship and adventure to Sobrante. Jerome goes with John to the depot. They meet the distressed lady on her way to the same train. John lifts his hat, but gets the cut direct from the girl, who does not recognize him. John tells Jerome the whole story. Jerome secretly sees the girl, offering her \$10,000 if she induces John to take his job inside of ninety days. The girl accepts. The scene now shifts to Buenaventura, Sobrante, where Geary, on his uppers, is eating his heart out looking for a cablegram from his old partner. He has existed for two months on credit extended by Mother Jenks, keeper of a respectable hotel. Dolores cables Henrietta Wilkins (Mother Jenks) that she is on her way to visit her. Mother Jenks breaks down and tells her story. She has been educating Dolores, who is the daughter of former President Rucy of Sobrante, deposed and executed by President Sarros. Mother Jenks doesn't want Dolores to find out she is no longer respectable. So she and Billy plan for him to meet the steamer and to turn the girl back.

CHAPTER VI—Continued.

So this was the vision he had volunteered to meet aboard La Estrellita, and by specious lies and hypocritical men, turn her back from the portals of Buenaventura to that dear old United States, which, Billy suddenly recalled with poignant pain, is a sizeable country in which a young lady may very readily be lost forever. With the quick eye of youth, he noted that Dolores was perfectly wonderful in a white flannel skirt and jacket, white buck boots, white panama hat with a gorgeous puggaree, a mannish little linen collar, and a red four-in-hand tie. From under that white hat peeped a profusion of crinkly brown hair with a slightly reddish tinge to it; her eyes were big and brown and wide apart, with golden flecks in them; their glance met Billy's hungry gaze simply, directly, and with a curiosity there was no attempt to hide. Her nose was patrician; her beautiful short upper lip revealed the tips of two perfect, milk-white front teeth; she was, Billy Geary told himself, a goddess before whom all low, worthless, ornery fellows like himself should grovel and die happy, if perchance she might be so minded as to walk on their faces! He was aroused from his critical inventory when the host spoke again:

"You haven't answered my question, sir!"

"No," said Billy. "I didn't. Stupid of me, too. However, come to think of it, you didn't ask me any question. You looked it. My name is Geary—William H. Geary, by profession a mining engineer and by nature an ignoramus, and I have called to deliver some disappointing news regarding Henrietta Wilkins."

"Is she—"

"She is. Very much alive and in excellent health—or rather was, the last time it was my pleasure and privilege to call on the dear lady. But she isn't in Buenaventura now. Mentally Billy asked God to forgive him his black-hearted treachery to this winsome girl. He loathed the task he had planned and foisted upon himself, and nothing but the memory of Mother Jenks' manifold kindnesses to him in a day, thanks to Jack Webster, now happily behind him, could have induced him to go through to the finish.

"Why, where is she?" Dolores queried, and Billy could have wept at the sight in those lovely brown eyes.

He waved his hand airily. "Quiteen sabe?" he said. "She left three weeks ago for New Orleans to visit you. I dare say you passed each other on the road—here, here, Miss Rucy. Don't cry."

He took a recess of three minutes, while Dolores dabbed her eyes and went through sundry other notions of being brave. Then he proceeded with his nefarious recital.

"When your cablegram arrived, Miss Rucy, naturally Mrs. Wilkins was not very receptive of it, and as I was the

only person who had her address, the cable agent referred it to me. Under the circumstances, not knowing where I could reach you with a cable informing you that Mrs. Wilkins was headed for California to see you, I had no other alternative but to let matters take their course. I decided you might arrive on La Estrellita, so I called to welcome you to our thriving little city, and, as a friend of about two minutes' standing, to warn you away from it."

Billy's mien, as he voiced this warning, was so singularly mysterious that Dolores' curiosity was aroused instantly and rose superior to her grief. "Why, what's the matter?" she demanded.

Billy looked around, as if fearful of being overheard. He lowered his voice. "We're going to have one grand little first-class revolution," he replied. "It's due to bust almost any night now, and when it does, the streets of San Buenaventura will run red with blood."

Dolores blanched. "Oh, dearie me," she quavered. "Do they still have revolutions here? You know, Mr. Geary, my poor father was killed in one."

"Yes, and the same old political gang that shot him is still on deck," Billy warned her. "It would be highly dangerous for a Rucy, man or woman, to show his or her nose around Buenaventura about now. Besides, Miss Rucy, that isn't the worst," he continued, for a whole-hearted lad was Billy, who never did anything by halves. "The city is reeking with cholera."

"Cholera!" Dolores' big brown eyes grew bigger with wonder and concern. "How strange the port authorities didn't warn us at New Orleans!"

"Fish! Tush! Fiddlesticks and then some. The fruit company censors everything, Miss Rucy, and the news doesn't get out."

"But the port doctor just said the passengers could go ashore."

"What's a human life to a doctor? Besides, he's on the slush-fund payroll and does whatever the highups tell him. You be guided by what I tell you, Miss Rucy, and do not set foot on Sobrante soil. If you stay aboard La Estrellita, you'll have your nice clean stateroom, your well-cooked meals, your bath, and the attentions of the stewardess. The steamer will be loaded in two days; then you go back to New Orleans, and by the time you arrive there I'll have been in communication by cable with Mother Jenks—I mean—"

"Mother who?" Dolores demanded.

"A mere slip of the tongue, Miss Rucy. I was thinking of my landlady. I meant Mrs. Wilkins—"

"I'm so awfully obliged to you, Mr. Geary. You're so kind, I'm sure I'd be a most ungrateful girl not to be guided by you accordingly. You wouldn't risk any friend of yours in this terrible place, would you, Mr. Geary?"

"Indeed, I would not. By permitting anybody I thought anything of to come to this city, I should feel guilty of murder."

"I'm sure you would, Mr. Geary. Nevertheless, there is one point that is not quite clear in my mind, and I wish you'd explain—"

"Command me, Miss Rucy."

"If this is such a frightful place, why are you so anxious, if I may employ such language, to humpwoggle your dearest friend, Mr. John S. Webster, into coming down here? Do you want to kill him and get his money—or what?"

Billy's face flamed at thought of the embarrassing trap his glib tongue had led him into. He cursed himself for a star-spangled jackass, and while he was engaged in this interesting pastime Dolores spoke again.

"And by the way, which is it? Miss Wilkins or Mrs. Geary? You've called her both, and when I reminded you she was a Miss, you agreed with me, whereas she is nothing of the sort. She's a Mrs. Then you blurted out something about a Mother Jenks, and finally, Mr. Geary, it occurs to me that for a complete stranger you are unduly interested in my welfare. I'm not such a goose as to assimilate your weird tales of death from disease. It occurs to me that if your friend John

S. Webster can risk Buenaventura, I can also."

"You—you know that old tarantula?" Billy gasped. "Why I—I came out to warn him off the grass, too."

Dolores walked a step closer to Billy and eyed him disapprovingly. "I'm so sorry I can't believe that statement," she replied. "It happens that I was standing by the companion-ladder when you came aboard and spoke to the purser; when you asked him if Mr. Webster was aboard, your face was alight with eagerness and anticipation, but when you had reason to believe he was not aboard, you looked so terribly disappointed I felt sorry for you."

"I'm going ashore, if it's the last act of my life, and when I get there I'm going to interview the cable agent; then I'm going to call at the steamship office and scan the passenger list of the last three north-bound steamers, and if I do not find Henrietta Wilkins' name on one of those passenger lists I'm going up to Calle de Concordia No. 19—"

"I surrender unconditionally," groaned Billy. "I'm a liar from beginning to end. I overlooked my hand. I beg of you to believe me, however, when I tell you that I only told you those whoppers because I was in honor bound to tell them. Personally, I don't want you to go away—at least, not until I'm ready to go away, too! Miss Rucy, my nose is in the dust. There is a fever in my brain and a misery in my heart—"

"And contrition in your face," she interrupted him laughingly. "You're forgiven, Mr. Geary—on one condition."

"Name it," he answered.

"Tell me everything from beginning to end."

So Billy told her. "I would much rather have been visited with a plague of boils, like our old friend, the late Job, than have to tell you this, Miss Rucy," he concluded his recital. "Man proposes, but God disposes, and you're here and bound to learn the truth sooner or later. Mother isn't a lady and she knows it, but take it from me, Miss Rucy, she's a grand old piece of work. She's a scout—a ring-tailed sport—a regular Indian and game as a gander."

"And I mustn't call at El Buen Amigo, Mr. Geary?"

"Perish the thought! Mother must call on you. El Buen Amigo is what you might term a hotel for tropical tramps of the masculine sex. Nearly all of Mother's guests have a past, you know. They're the submerged white trash of Sobrante."

"Then my benefactor must call to see me here?" Billy nodded. "When will you bring her here?"

Billy reflected that Mother Jenks had been up rather late the night before and that trade in the cantina of El Buen Amigo had been unusually brisk; so since he desired to exhibit the old lady at her best, he concluded it might be well to spar for wind.

"Tomorrow at 10," he declared. Dolores lifted her head. Something told her she had better leave all future details to the amiable William.

"I remember you inquired for your friend, Mr. Webster, when you came aboard the steamer."

"I remember it, too," Billy countered ruefully. "I can't imagine what's become of him. Miss Rucy, did you ever go to meet the only human being in the world and discover that for some mysterious reason he had failed to keep the appointment? Miss Rucy, you'll have to meet old John Stuart the minute the lights in Buenaventura. He's some boy."

"Old John Stuart?" she queried. "How old?"

"Oh, thirty-nine or forty on actual count, but one of the kind that will live to be a thousand and then have to be killed with an axe. He's coming to Sobrante to help me put over a mining deal."

"How interesting, Mr. Geary! No wonder you were disappointed."

The last sentence was a shaft deliberately launched; to Dolores' delight it made a keyhole in Billy Geary's heart.

"Don't get me wrong, Miss Rucy," he hastened to assure her. "I have a good mine, but I'd trade it for a hand-shake from Jack! The good Lord only published one edition of Jack, and limited the edition to one volume; then the plates were melted for the junk we call the human race. Two weeks ago, when I was sick and penniless and despairing, the possessor of a concession on a fortune, but without a centavo in my pockets to buy a banana, when I was a veritable beach-comber and existing on the charity of Mother Jenks, I managed finally to communicate with old Jack and told him where I was and what I had. There's his answer, Miss Rucy, and I'm not ashamed to say that when I got it I cried like a kid." And Billy handed her John Stuart Webster's remarkable cablegram, the receipt of which had, for Billy Geary, transformed night into day, purgatory into paradise. Dolores read it.

"No wonder you love him," she declared, and added artlessly: "His wife must simply adore him."

"He has no wife to bother his life, so he paddles his own canoe," Billy replied. "I don't believe the old sour

dough has ever been in love with anything more charming than the goddess of fortune. He's woman-proof."

"About Mrs. Jenks," Dolores continued, abruptly changing the subject.

"How nice to reflect that after she had trusted you and believed in you when you were penniless, you were enabled to justify her faith."

"You bet!" Billy declared. "I feel that I can never possibly hope to catch even with the old Samaritan, although I did try to show her how much I appreciated her."

"I dare say you went right out and bought her an impossible hat," Dolores challenged roughly.

"No, I didn't, for a very sufficient reason. Down here the ladies do not wear hats. But I'll tell you what I did buy her, Miss Rucy—and oh, by George, I'm glad now I did it. She'll wear them tomorrow when I bring her to see you. I bought her a new black silk dress and an old-lace collar, and a gold breast pin and a tortoise shell hair comb and hired an open carriage and took her for an evening ride on the Malecon to listen to the band concert."

"Did she like that?"

"She ate it up," Billy declared with conviction. "I think it was her first adventure in democracy."

Billy's pulse was still far from normal when he reached El Buen Amigo, for he was infused with a strange, new-found warmth that burned like malarial fever, but wasn't. He wasted no preliminaries on Mother Jenks, but bluntly acquainted her with the facts in the case.

Mother Jenks eyed him a moment widdly. "Gord's truth!" she gasped; she reached for her favorite elixir, but Billy got the bottle first.

"Nothing doing," he warned this strange publican. "Mother, you're funkling it—and what would your sainted Enery say to that? Do you want that angel to kiss you and get a whiff of this brandy?"

Mother Jenks' eyes actually popped. "Gord, Willie," she gasped, "aven't I told ye she's a lady! Me kiss the lamb! Hi frust, Mr. Geary, as 'ow I knows my place an' can keep it."

"Yes, I know," Billy soothed the frightened old woman, "but the trouble is Miss Dolores doesn't know hers—and something tells me if she does, she'll forget it. She'll take you in her arms and kiss you, sure as death and taxes."

And she did! "My lamb, my lamb," sobbed Mother Jenks the next morning, and rested her old cheek, with its rum-begotten hue, close to the rose-tinted ivory cheek of her ward. "Me—wot I am—an' to think—"

"You're a sweet old dear," Dolores whispered, patting the gray head; "and I'm going to call you Mother."

"Mr. William H. Geary," the girl remarked that night, "I know now why your friend, Mr. Webster, sent that cablegram. I think you're a scout, too."

For reasons best known to himself Mr. Geary blushed furiously. "I—I'd better go and break the news to Mother," he suggested lamely. She held out her hand; and Billy, having been long enough in Sobrante to have acquired the habit, bent his malarial person over that hand and kissed it. As he went out it occurred to him that had the lobby of the Hotel Mateo been paved with eggs, he must have floated over them like a wraith, so light did he feel within.

CHAPTER VII.

Webster reached New Orleans at the end of the first leg of his journey, to discover that he was one day late to board the Atlanta—a banana boat of the Consolidated Fruit company's line plying regularly between New Orleans and that company's depots at Limon and San Buenaventura—which necessitated a wait of three days for the steamer La Estrellita of the Caribbean Mail line, running to Caracas and way ports.

He decided to visit the ticket office of the Caribbean Mail line immediately and avoid the rush in case the travel should be heavy.

The steamship office was in Canal street. The clerk was waiting on two well-dressed and palpably low-bred sons of the tropics, to whom he had just displayed a passenger list which the two were scanning critically.

Their interest in it was so obvious that unconsciously Webster peeped over their shoulders (no difficult task for one of his stature) and discovered it to be the passenger list of the steamer La Estrellita. They were conversing together in low tones and Webster, who had spent many years of his life following his profession in Mexico, recognized their speech as the bastard Spanish of the peon.

He sat down in the long wall seat and waited until the pair, having completed their scrutiny of the list, turned to pass out. He glanced at them casually. One was a tall thin man whose bloodshot eyes were inclined to "pop" a little—infallible evidence in the Latin-American that he is drinking more hard liquor than is good for him.

His companion was plainly of the same racial stock, although Webster suspected him of a slight admixture of negro blood. He was short, stocky,

and aggressive looking; like his companion, bejeweled and possessed of a thin, carefully cultivated moustache that seemed to consist of about nineteen hairs on one side and twenty on the other. Evidently once upon a time, as the story books have it, he had been shot. Webster suspected a Manner bullet, fired at long range. It had entered his right cheek, just below the malar, ranged downward through his mouth and out through a fold of flabby flesh under his left jaw. It must have been a frightful wound, but it had healed well except at the point of entrance, where it had a tendency to pucker considerably, thus drawing the man's eyelid down on his cheek and giving to that visual organ something of the appearance of a bulldog's.

Webster gazed after them whimsically as he approached the counter.

"I'd hate to wake up some night and find that hombre with the puckered eye leaning over me. By the way," he continued, suddenly apprehensive, "do you get much of that paraquet travel on your line?"

"About 80 per cent. of it is off color, sir."

Webster pondered the 80-per-cent. probability of being berthed in the same stateroom with one of these

people and the prospect was as revolting to him as would be an invited negro guest at the dining table of a southern family. He had all a Westerner's hatred for the breed.

"Well, I want a ticket to San Buenaventura," he informed the clerk, "but I don't relish the idea of a Greaser in the same stateroom with me. I wonder if you couldn't manage to fix me with a stateroom all to myself, or at least arrange it so that in the event of company I'll draw a white man."

"I'm sorry, sir, but I cannot guarantee you absolute privacy nor any kind of white man. It's pretty mixed travel to all Central American ports."

"How many berths in your first-class staterooms?"

"Two."

Webster smiled brightly. He had found a way out of the difficulty. "I'll buy 'em both, son," he announced.

"I cannot sell you an entire stateroom, sir. It's against the orders of the company to sell two berths to one man. The travel is pretty brisk and it's hardly fair to the public, you know."

"Well, suppose I buy one ticket for myself and the other for—well, for my valet, let us say. Of course," he added brightly, "I haven't engaged the valet yet and even should I do so I wouldn't be at all surprised if the rascal missed the boat!"

The clerk glanced at him with a slow smile, and pondered. "Well," he said presently, "if you care to buy a ticket for your valet, I'm sure I shouldn't worry whether or not he catches the boat. If my records show that the space is sold to two men and the purser collects two tickets, I think you'll be pretty safe from intrusion."

"To the harassed traveler," said Mr. Webster, "a meeting with a gentleman of your penetration is as refreshing as a canteen of cool water in the desert. Shoot!" and he produced a handful of gold.

"I will—provided I have one empty cabin," and the clerk turned from the counter to consult his record of berths already sold and others reserved but not paid for. Presently he faced Webster at the counter.

"The outlook is very blue," he announced. "However, I have one berth in No. 34 reserved by a gentleman who was to call for it by two o'clock to-day." He looked at his watch. "It is now a quarter of one. If the reservation isn't claimed promptly at two o'clock I shall cancel it and reserve for you both berths in that room. If you will be good enough to leave me your name and address I will telephone you after that hour. In the meantime, you may make reservation of the other berth in the same stateroom. I feel very confident that the reservation in No. 34 will not be called for, Mr.—"

"Webster—John S. Webster. You are very kind, indeed. I'm at the St. Charles."

"Thanks, ever so much, for my life."

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Scandal is the tattle of fools who judge other people by themselves.

"LION" AT LITERARY FEAST

How Great Historian of Civilization Squeaked the Jackals Who Had Imagined Him Discomfited.

Lyolph Stanley was an Englishman of whom Lowell said that he "knew three times as many facts as any young man whatever had any business to know."

He had but one rival in that line: Palgrave, who compiled the "Golden Treasury." Much interest sprang up among their friends when the two went off on a trip together.

"It's an even chance which will return alive," said one man, solemnly. When they did come back, Palgrave was pale, emaciated, silent; but Stanley, it seemed, was unmoved and more all-knowing than ever.

One night, Buckle, the author of "The History of Civilization," was laying down the law on every subject, with a magnificent pomposity that made the table quake. At last he put forth some statement about the burning of a witch, and set the date a century out of the way. Stanley, who was present, had borne some preceding inaccuracies very well, with only a slight shaking of the head and a reddening of the face.

Suddenly his self-control gave way, and he leaped to his feet. He extended his hand, and piped forth, in a vigorous treble:

"I beg your pardon, but the last witch was burned at such-and-such a place, in such-and-such a year, in such-and-such a manner. And her name was so-and-so, and you will find all about it in a book to which I can easily refer you, and about which you evidently don't know."

Torrents of imprisoned knowledge were thereupon poured on Buckle's head, and the historian of civilization sat wrathful, extinguished, mute. But a little later he had his revenge. Some one mentioned a new dictionary as a good one.

"It is," said Buckle with solemnity. "It is one of the few dictionaries I have read through with pleasure."

The intimation that he had read any dictionary through with pleasure astonished the guests that they forgot his past discomfiture in new awe.

Noises Made by Elephants.

The elephant uses both his trunk and his lungs in calling, and he has a large variety of sounds and combinations of sound with which to express himself, writes Charles Mayer in Asia Magazine. When rushing an enemy he trumpets shrilly, when enraged by wounds he grumbles hoarsely from his throat; he expresses fear by a shrill, brassy trumpet and a roar; and pleasure by a continued low squeaking through his trunk.

When apprehensive of danger or when attempting to intimidate an enemy, he raps the end of his trunk smartly on the ground and trumpets. The peculiar noise sounds like that produced by the rolling up of a sheet of tin.

In a moment of danger, the elephant coils his trunk to protect it from injury. When he is engaged in heavy work, such as piling lumber, he may use his trunk to balance the load he is carrying on his tusks, but never to bear part of the burden. If an unharmed elephant must pull a rope, he holds it in his mouth, taking good care to keep his trunk out of the way.

Beetle Hurts Pulp Industry.

A gray-green beetle has much to do with the present shortage of paper. The beetle is the adult form of the aspen borer, a grub which often destroys whole plantations of the trees that are so essential to the pulp industry.

The beetle gnaws a slot in the bark and deposits one or two eggs therein. From these eggs come the trouble making grubs that gnaw into the heart and sapwood and so riddle the tree that the first strong wind snaps the weakened timber.

Poplar and aspen—both fast growing trees, and for this reason very valuable to manufacturers—are the objects of this borer's attacks. The imported Lombardy poplar and the commercial cottonwood of the Mississippi valley are very seldom injured, but all other native varieties are damaged by the grub.

In some areas, where poplar and aspen predominate, the standing dead, fallen and dying trees exceed 50 per cent of the total stand.

Supply of Ostrich Feathers.

In 1914 there were 1,500,000 ostriches in South Africa. These are now reduced to 300,000. Germany and Austria are still out of the market for feathers. England is taking a few and they are too costly for France. The ostrich feather business of the world is now in the hands of about six men, with headquarters in London. They hold from \$5,000,000 to \$10,000,000 worth of ostrich feathers, in normal times the world's supply for a year. The United States being practically the only market for the feathers, this country has the say as to the price, and is giving from \$80 to \$100 a pound, when in an active market they should bring from \$160 to \$200.

Frenzied Finance.

Roberts—What's the matter? Finances bothering you?

Richards—Yes, I owe Rogers \$5, and today I've got it, and he knows I've got it, and he knows I know he knows I've got it.—American Legion Weekly.

Necessarily Thus.

"And Jones, you tell me you believe in love?"

"Of course; certainly."

"At first sight?"

"Naturally. D'viah think anything like that'd follow a second look?"



"You Haven't Answered My Question,"

ago for New Orleans to visit you. I dare say you passed each other on the road—here, here, Miss Rucy. Don't cry."

He took a recess of three minutes, while Dolores dabbed her eyes and went through sundry other notions of being brave. Then he proceeded with his nefarious recital.

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