

Webster=Man's Man

By PETER B. KYNE

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

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"KNIFE WORK."

John Stuart Webster, mining engineer, boards a train in Death Valley, California, on his way back to civilization after cleaning up \$20,000. But he looks like a hobnob. Then he meets a distressed lady, who makes his heart go over. He eliminates the offending man. Being what he is and also girl-shy, he does not take advantage of his opportunity. But he just has to find out that she is Dolores Ruy. In Denver he is offered a \$25,000-a-year job by a capitalist friend, Edward J. 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 disreputable 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 Ruy of Sobrante, deposed and executed by President Santos. 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. Billy bungles his job and Dolores lands and salutes Mother Jenks as "Mother." Billy promptly falls in love with Dolores. Webster in New Orleans secures a stateroom on La Estrellita by buying a ticket for a mythical valet.

CHAPTER VII—Continued.

"Be there at a quarter after two, Mr. Webster, and you will hear from me promptly on the minute," the clerk assured him; whereupon Webster paid for one berth and departed for his hotel with a feeling that the clerk's report would be favorable.

True to his promise, at precisely a quarter after two, the ticket clerk telephoned Webster at his hotel that the berth in No. 34 had been canceled and the entire stateroom was now at his disposal.

"If you will be good enough, to give me the name of your valet," he concluded, "I will fill in both names on my passenger manifest and send the tickets to your hotel by messenger immediately. You can then sign the tickets—I have already signed them as witness—and pay the messenger."

"Well, I haven't engaged that valet as yet," Webster began.

"What's the odds? He's going to miss the boat, anyhow. All I require is a name."

"That ought to be a simple request to comply with. Let me see!"

"I read a book once, Mr. Webster, and the valet in that book was called Andrew Bowers."

"Bowers is a fine old English name. Let us seek no further. Andrew Bowers it is."

"Thank you. All you have to do then is to remember to sign the name, Andrew Bowers, on one ticket. Don't forget your valet's name now, and 'all everything up,'" and the clerk hung up, laughing.

Half an hour later a boy from the steamship office arrived with the tickets, collected for them, and departed, leaving John Stuart Webster singularly pleased with himself and at peace with the entire world.

A "large" dinner at Antoine's that night (Webster had heard of Antoine's dinners, both large and small and was resolved not to leave New Orleans until he had visited the famous restaurant), and a stroll through the picturesque old French quarter and along the levee next day, helped to render his enforced stay in New Orleans delightful, interesting, and instructive. For Sunday he planned an early morning visit to the old French market, around which still lingers much of the picturesque charm and colorful romance of a day that is done—that echo of yesterday, as it were, which has left New Orleans an individuality as distinct as that which the olden, golden, goddess days have left upon San Francisco.

He rose before six o'clock, therefore; found a taxi, with the driver sound asleep inside, at the curb in front of the hotel; gave the latter his instructions, and climbed in.

Opposite Jackson Square the cloying sweetness of palmetto, palm, and fig burdened the air. Above the rumble of the taxi he could hear the distant babel of voices in the French market across the square, so he halted the taxicab, alighted, and handed the driver a bill.

"I want to explore this square," he said. He had recognized it by the heroic statue of General Jackson peeping through the trees. "I'll walk

through the square to the market, and you may proceed to the market and meet me there. Later we will return to the hotel."

A Creole girl—starry-eyed, beautiful, rich with the glorious coloring of her race—passed him bound for the cathedral across the square, as Webster thought, for she carried a large prayer book on her arm. His glance followed the girl down the walk.

Presently she halted. A young man rose from a bench where he evidently had been waiting for her, and bowed low, his hat clasped to his breast, as only a Frenchman or a Spanish grandee can bow. Webster saw the Creole girl turn to him with a little gesture of pleasure. She extended her hand and the young man kissed it with old-fashioned courtesy.

John Stuart Webster with reverent and wistful eyes watched their meeting.

"Forty years old," he thought, "and I haven't spoken to a dozen women that caused me a second thought, or



Drew the Girl Gently Toward Him.

who weren't postmistresses or black-shirted! Forty years old and I've never been in love! Springtime down that little path and Indian summer in my old fool heart. Why, I ought to be arrested for failure to live!"

The lovers were walking slowly, arm in arm, along the path by which the girl had come, so with a courtesy and gentleness that were innate in him, Webster stepped out of sight behind the statue of Old Hickory; for he did not desire, by his mere presence, to intrude a discordant note in the perfect harmony of those two human hearts. He knew they desired that sylvan path to themselves; that evidently they had sought their early morning tryst in the knowledge that the square was likely to be deserted at this hour.

The young man was speaking as they passed; his voice was rich, pleasant, vibrant with the earnestness of what he had to say; with a pretty little silver mounted walking stick he slashed at spears of grass alongside the path; the girl was crying a little. Neither of them had seen him, so he entered a path that led from them at right angles.

He had proceeded but a few feet along this trail when, through a break in the shrubbery ahead of him, he saw two men. Brief as was his glimpse of them, Webster instantly recognized the two Central Americans he had seen in the steamship ticket office two days previous.

They were not walking as walk two men abroad at this hour for a constitutional. Neither did they walk as walk men churchward bound. A slight, skulking air marked their progress, and caused Webster to wonder idly what they were stalking.

He had proceeded but a few feet along this trail when, through a break in the shrubbery ahead of him, he saw two men. Brief as was his glimpse of them, Webster instantly recognized the two Central Americans he had seen in the steamship ticket office two days previous.

Both men had forsaken the graveled path and were walking on the soft velvet of blue grass lawn that fringed it!

"Perhaps I'd better desist my hoof beats also," John Stuart Webster soliloquized, and followed suit immediately.

He had scarcely done so when the men ahead of him paused abruptly. Webster did likewise, and responding—subconsciously, perhaps, to the remembrance of the menace in the glance of the man with the puckered eye—he stepped out of sight behind a broad oak tree. Through the trees and shrubbery he could still see the lovers, who had halted and evidently were about to part.

Webster saw the young man glance warily about; then, apparently satisfied there was none to spy upon him, he drew the girl gently toward him. She clung to him for nearly a minute, sobbing; then he raised her face ten-

derly, kissed her, pressed her from him, and walked swiftly away without looking back.

It was a sweet and rather touching little tableau; to John Stuart Webster, imaginative and possessed of a romantic streak in his nature, it was more than a tableau. It was a moving picture!

"I suppose her old man objects to the young fellow," he muttered to himself sympathetically, "and he can't come near the house. They've met here for the fond farewell, and now the young fellow's going out West to make his fortune, so he can come back and claim the girl. Huh! If he wants her, why the devil doesn't he take her? Hello! By Judas priest! Now I know what those two parquets are up to. One of them is the father of that girl. They've been spying on the lovers, and now they're going to corner the young fellow and shingle him for his nerve."

The girl had stood for a moment, gazing after her companion, before she turned with her handkerchief to her eyes, and continued on her way to the cathedral. Webster heard her sobbing as she stumbled blindly by, and he was distressed about her, for all the world loves a lover and John Stuart Webster was no exception to this universal rule.

"By George, this is pretty tough," he reflected. "That young fellow treated that girl with as much gentleness and courtesy as any gentleman should, and I'm for him and against this idea of corporal punishment. Don't you worry, Tillie, my dear. I'm going to horn into this game myself if it goes too far."

The two dusky skulkers ahead of him, having come to another cross-path, turned into it and came out on the main path in the rear of the young man. Webster noticed that the pair were still walking on the grass. He padded gently along behind them.

The four were now rapidly approaching the old French market, and the steadily rising babel of voices speaking in French, Italian, Spanish, Creole patois and Choctaw, was sufficient to have drowned the slight noise of the pursuit, even had the young man's mind not been upon other things, and the interest of the two Central Americans centered upon their quarry, to the exclusion of any thought of possible interruption.

Webster felt instinctively that the two men would rush and make a concerted attack from the rear. He smiled.

"I'll just fool you two hombres a whole lot," he thought, and stooping, picked up a small stone. On the instant the two men, having approached within thirty feet of their quarry, made a dash for him.

Their charge was swift, but though it was, the little stone which John Stuart Webster hurled was swifter. It struck the young man fairly between the shoulderblades with a force sufficient to bring him out of his sentimental reverie with a jerk, as it were. He whirled, saw the danger that threatened him, and—sprang to meet it.

"Bravo!" yelled Webster, and ran to his aid, for he had seen now that it was to be knife work. Tragedy instead of melodrama.

The man with the puckered eye closed in with such eagerness it was apparent to Webster that here was work to his liking. The young man raised his light cane, but Pucker-eye did not hesitate. He merely threw up his left forearm to meet the expected blow aimed at his head, lunged forward and slashed viciously at the young man's abdomen. The latter drew back a step, doubled like a jack-knife, and brought his cane down viciously across the knuckles of his assailant's right hand.

"So it is thou, son of a pig," he called pleasantly in Spanish. "I fooled you that time, didn't I?" he added in English. "Thought I would aim for your head, didn't you?"

The blow temporarily paralyzed the assassin's hand; he dropped the knife, and as he stooped to recover it with his left hand, the young man, before retreating from Pop-eye, kicked Pucker-eye in the face and quite upset him.

"Stop it!" shouted Webster.

Pop-eye turned his head at the outcry. The man he was attacking fell into the position of a swordsman en garde, and thrust viciously with the ferrule at the face of the pop-eyed man, who, disregarding Webster's approach, seized the cane in his left hand and with a quick, powerful tug actually drew his victim toward him a foot before the latter let go the stick.

Before he could give ground again Pop-eye was upon him. He grasped the young man by the latter's left arm and held him, while he drew back for the awful disembowling stroke. As his long arm sped forward the honk of John Stuart Webster's heavy cane descended upon that flexed arm in the crook of the elbow, snagging it cleverly.

The knife never reached its destination!

"You would, would you?" said Webster reproachfully, and jerked the fellow violently around. The man he had rescued promptly struck Pop-eye a

terrible blow in the face with his left hand and broke loose from the grip that had so nearly been his undoing; then Webster tapped the assassin a meditative tap or two on the top of his sinful head for good measure and to awaken in him some sense of the impropriety and futility of resistance, after which Webster turned to discuss a similar question of ethics with Pucker-eye.

The scar-cheeked man was on his knees, groping, groggily for his knife, for he had received a severe kick under the chin, and for the nonce was far from dangerous. Stooping, Webster picked up the knife; then with knife and cane grasped in his left hand he seized Pucker-eye by the nape with his right and jerked him to his feet. The assassin stood gawking at him in a perfect frenzy of brutish, inarticulate fury.

"Take the knife away from the other fellow before he gets active again," Webster called over his shoulder. "I'll manage this rascal. We'll march them over to the market and turn them over to the police." He spoke in Spanish.

"Thanks, ever so much, for my life," the young man answered lightly, and in English, "but where I come from it is not the fashion to settle these arguments in a court of law. To call an officer is considered unclublike; to shoot a prisoner in this country is considered murder, and consequently I have but one alternative and I advise you, my good friend, to have a little of the same. I'm going to run like the devil."

And he did. He was in full flight before Webster could glance around, and in an instant he was lost to sight among the trees.

"That advice sounds eminently fair and reasonable," Webster yelled after him, and was about to follow when he observed that the young man had abandoned his pretty little silver-chased walking stick.

"That's too nice a little stick to leave to these brigands," he thought, and forthwith possessed himself of it and the pop-eyed man's knife, after which he hurried not upon the order of his going but went, departing at top speed.

The young man he had saved from being butchered was right. An entangling alliance with the police was, decidedly, not to John Stuart Webster's liking, for should he unfortunately form such an alliance, he would be haled into court as a witness and perhaps miss the steamer to San Buenaventura.

He had planned to spend an hour in the market, drink a cup of cafe noir, smoke a cigarette, and return to his hotel in time for a leisurely breakfast, but his recent bout with grim reality had blunted the edge of romance. He ordered his driver to take him back to the hotel, sprang inside and congratulated himself on his lucky escape.

CHAPTER VIII.

Webster's trunk went aboard the steamer early the following morning, and at noon he entered a taxi with his hand baggage and was driven to the levee where La Estrellita lay tugging gently at her mooring lines. Owing to the congestion of freight and traffic the chauffeur stopped his cab a little distance from the gangplank, where Webster discharged him with a liberal tip.

The latter, however, swung his passenger's bag and suitcase to the ground, picked them up and started for the gangplank.

"Never mind my baggage, lad," Webster called after him. "One of the deck boys will care for it."

The chauffeur turned. "You've been generous with me, sir," he answered, "so I think I had better carry your baggage aboard. If you permit a deck boy to handle it, you merely have to give another tip, and that would be sheer wanton waste. Why shouldn't I earn the one you gave me?"

"I hadn't figured it out that way, son, so here's another half dollar for being the only existing specimen of your species in captivity. My stateroom is No. 34, upper deck, port side," Webster answered, smiling. The man took the tip eagerly and hurried toward the gangplank; the quartermaster on duty shouldered a way for him and he darted aboard.

Webster followed leisurely. At the gangplank the purser's clerk halted him, examined his tickets and punched them.

"Where is the other man?" he asked. "You have two tickets here."

"Oh, that blatted valet of mine," Webster answered, and glanced around as if in search of that mythical functionary. "It would be like the stupid fellow to miss the boat," he added. "When he comes—"

Webster ceased speaking abruptly. He was looking straight into the malevolent orbs of Pucker-eye, who was standing just behind the clerk at the foot of the gangplank.

"I wonder if Pop-eye's around, also," Webster thought, and he faced about. Pop-eye was standing in back of him, leaning over the railing of the gangway.

"Which is the valet?" the purser's clerk asked, scanning the names on the tickets.

"Andrew Bowers," Webster thought, and he faced about. Pop-eye was standing in back of him, leaning over the railing of the gangway.

"All right, Mr. Webster," the other answered, with that genial camaraderie that seems inseparable from all of his calling. "When Andrew comes I'll send him aboard."

He started to pass the tickets back to Webster, but a detaining hand rested on his arm, while a dark thumb and forefinger lifted the trailing strips of tickets. Pucker-eye was examining them also.

The purser's clerk drove his elbow backward violently into Pucker-eye's midriff and shook him off roughly.

"What do you mean, you black-and-tan hound?" he demanded. "Since when did you begin to O. K. my work?" Pucker-eye made no reply to this stern reproof. He accepted the elbow with equanimity and faced Webster with an evil smile that indicated mutual recognition.

"Bueno," he said. "The sonor he sees sull on La Estrellita for San Buenaventura, no?"

"So you came nosing around to see about it, eh? Doing a little plain gun-shoe work, I see."

Pucker-eye bowed. By the simple exercise of courage and bad manners he had looked at John Stuart Webster's ticket and was now familiar with his name and destination.

Webster glowered darkly at Pucker-eye and said:

"Well, you soundly cutthroat, what are you going to do about it? Try a little of your knife work on me, I suppose?"

The fellow grinned—the kind of grin that is composed of equal parts of ferocity and knowledge of superior strength. That grin did more to disconcert Webster than the knowledge that he had earned for himself two bloodthirsty and implacable enemies, for Pucker-eye was the first of his breed that Webster had ever seen smile under insult. That cool smile infuriated him.

Pucker-eye took out a cigarette case, selected a cigarette and presented the case to Webster. His bad manners in selecting his own cigarette first was deliberate, as Webster knew. It was the Latin-American method of showing his contempt.

"We shall meet again, Meester Webster," he said. "May I offer a cigarette for thee—what you Americans call—the keepsake? No?" He smiled brightly and closed his puckered eye in a knowing wink.

Webster took his tickets from the purser, folded them, placed them in his pocket and for a few seconds regarded Pucker-eye contemptuously.

"When we meet again, you scum," he retorted quietly, "you shall have no difficulty in remembering me. You may keep your cigarette."

His long, powerful right arm shot out; like a forceps his thumb and forefinger closed over Pucker-eye's rather flat nose; he squeezed, and with a shrill scream of agony Pucker-eye went to his knees.

Still holding the wretch by his proboscis, Webster turned quickly in order that his face might be toward Pop-eye.

"Pop-eye," he said, "if you take a hand in this, I'll twist your nose, too and afterward I'll throw you in the river."

He turned to Pucker-eye.

"Up, thou curious little one," he said in Spanish, and jerked the unhappy rascal to his feet. The latter clawed ineffectually at the terrible arm which held him, until, presently discovering that the harder he struggled the harder Webster pinched his nose, he ceased his struggles and hung limply, moaning with pain and rage in the grip of the American.

"Good!" Webster announced, slackening his grip a little. With his left hand he deftly extracted a hair from each flank of the screaming little

scoundrel's scant mustache and held them before the latter's tear-filled eyes.

"My friend," he said gently, "mark how the gringo gives his little dark brother a lesson in department. Be bold, if I have given thee a souvenir of our meeting, I also have taken one. By this pinched and throbbing nose shall I be remembered when I am gone; by these hairs from thy rat's mustache shall I remember thee. Go, and thrust not that nose into a gringo's business again. It is unsafe."

"I am known as Mr. Andrew Bowers, valet de chambre to that prince of gentlemen, Mr. John S. Webster."

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Her Sad Farewell.

A very dignified man, whom I had known only a short while, came one evening to say good-by, as he was leaving on a long trip. When I ushered him into the parlor I discovered that my young brother had been crepe on all the furniture—Chicago Tribune.

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Times Change.

"Some people have queer ideas of Christmas giving," remarked the flat dweller, in a reminiscent mood.

"Well?"

"I once received a barrel of cider for a present."

"In the old days, of course?"

"In the old days. And, like the idiot I was, thought I had no place to put it. If a gift of that sort were to come my way now I'd store it somewhere if I had to sell the family piano, give away our phonograph and dismantle the spare bedroom."

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