

Webster=Man's Man

By PETER B. KYNE

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

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CHAPTER XII—Continued.

"Sarro!" Webster replied smilingly. "That scoundrel makes a gamble out of an otherwise sure thing. However," he added, recalling the note received from Ricardo Ruy just before his departure from Buenaventura and reflecting that to be forewarned is to be forearmed, "we'll accept the gamble. That rascal can't live forever, and he may be eliminated before he causes us any trouble."

"What will it cost us to get this mine on a paying basis, Johnny?"

"Well, back home, I'd figure on spending at least \$100,000; but I dare say, taking into consideration the low cost of labor in Sobrante and the raw, natural resources of power and timber right on the ground, we ought to put this deal over for \$50,000 at the outside. Praise be, I have cash enough to do the trick without calling in any help, and such being the case, we'll not waste any time but hop to the job in a hurry and make the fur fly."

"Right, Jack. What's the program?"

"Well, first off, son, I'm not going to stay in this country and lose myself managing this mine. That's your job, because you're young and unimportant in your profession and have the ability to get away with the job. You can afford to spend the next 15 years here, but I cannot. I can only afford to come down here every couple of years and relieve you for a vacation."

"That's the way I figured it, Jack."

"All right then, Bill, let us start in by giving you your first vacation. If you're going to dig in here and make the fur fly, you've got to be in tip-top physical condition—and you are thin and gaunt and full of chills and fever. Just before I left Buenaventura I cashed a draft for \$5,000 on my letter of credit at the Banco Nacional, and placed it to the credit of your account there."

"Tomorrow morning you will take your horse, one pack mule, and one mozo and ride for San Miguel de Padua, where you will take the train for Buenaventura. In Buenaventura you may do what you please, but if I were you, boy, I'd try to get married and go back to the U. S. A. for my honeymoon. And when I finally hit a town that contained some regular doctors I'd let them pay me over and over again and overhaul my bearings and put me in such nice running order I'd be firing on all 12 cylinders at once."

"And when I was feeling tip-top once more I'd visit old John Stuart Webster and tell him so, after which I'd stand by for a cable from the said scoundrel inviting me to return and take up my labors."

Billy's wan yellow face lighted up like a sunrise on the desert. "I guess that plan's kind of poor," he announced feelingly. "You're right, Jack. I'm in rotten condition and I ought to be right before I start. Still, if I should arrange to get married before I leave, I'd like mighty well to have a good man and true see me safely over the hurdles."

"That's nice, son, but I haven't time to be your best man. Arranging the honeymoon lets me out, Bill. I'm in a hurry to finish here and get back, so the sooner we both start our prospective jobs the sooner we'll finish. Have a quiet little marriage, Bill, without any fuss or feathers or voices breathing over your Eden. What are the odds, provided you get hitched properly? Besides, I'm in mortal dread of that town of Buenaventura. The sewer system is bad; it's rotten with fever; and you'd better get that girl out of it P. D. Q., and the quicker the better. Myself, I prefer to stay up here in these mountains in a temperate climate where there are no mosquitoes."

Billy saw that Webster was serious and would resent any interference in his plans. "All right, Jack," he assented. "You're the boss."

"Fine. Now, Bill, you listen to father and be guided accordingly. When you get to Buenaventura, wire the Bingham Engineering company of Denver, using my name, and tell them to add to my order given them last month and held for shipping directions, 12 dozen picks, 12 dozen shovels, 12 dozen mauls, six dozen axes, brush knives, a big road plow, and whatever other things you happen to think of and which would come in handy when building our road. Also, when you get to New Orleans buy a stanch three-ton motor truck. We'll need it for getting in supplies from San Miguel de Padua. Pay for the truck also, and if you go broke and cannot reach me by cable, wire Neddy Jerome at the Engineers' club in Denver and kick his eye out in my honored name."

"I guess that's about all of your job, Bill. As for me, I'll camp right here. I'll have a deal of surveying to do and I plan to sweat the booze out of that Cafferty person. I'll make Don Juan my chain man and run the tail off him. Then I'll be busy with preliminary plans, arranging for labor and so on, and when I'm idle I'll go hunting."

In conformity with this plan, thereupon Billy said good-by to his friend

and packed out for San Miguel de Padua bright and early next morning. During the following ten days Webster managed to keep himself fairly busy around the camp at the mine; then for a week he hunted and fished, and finally, when that began to pall on him, his agile mind returned to business and the consideration of the possibility of a flaw in Billy's title to the claim; whereupon he suddenly decided to return to Buenaventura and investigate that title fully before proceeding to throw dollars right and left.

At the head of his little cavalcade, therefore, he rode out one morning for the railroad, whereat providence, in its inscrutable wisdom, ordained that en route he should fall in with no less a personage than Don Ricardo Luiz Ruy, nee Andrew Bowers. Ricardo was mounted, armed, and alone, and at sight of Webster he shouted with delight and spurred toward him.

"What the devil! You, Rick, the government cut-up. What are you doing in these parts?" Webster rode up and shook hands.

"Oh, I'm Robin Hooding it around this part of the country. It is so secluded, you know, and Sarros hasn't any friends or any telegraph lines or any garrisons up this way. I heard in San Miguel de Padua that you were camped yonder, and I was on my way over to confer with you on matters of state. Met your friend, Geary, at El Buen Amigo a couple of weeks ago, just before he sailed for the United States. He was telling me you had to have a lot of tools for road building, so I cabled in a secret cipher to the Sobrantean revolutionary Junta in New Orleans to ship these tools to you immediately. They arrived on the last trip of the Atlanta and now repose in Leber's warehouse waiting for you to call and remove them."

"You scoundrel! What have you sent me?"

"A couple of hundred rifles and three machine guns, branded axes, picks, shovels, plows, and so on. I also ran in three cases of ammunition, labeled grindstones, two more cases disguised as bolts, and quite several thousand labeled nails in kegs. I should feel rather sorry for you if my friend, Sarros, should get suspicious and investigate, but I haven't any fear that he will. You see, he knows you're here on legitimate business. He has investigated and learned that you are a bona fide mining engineer of considerable reputation—and then, you know, your friend, Geary, dickered with him for the concession. The mining property you are about to develop belongs to the people, not to Sarros; yet he has bartered it away and will divert the royalty to his own pocket instead of the public treasury."

"Hum-m-m! What do you want me to do with all those munitions consigned to me?"

"Arrange with Leber to keep them there until you get ready to build your road into the mine. I want them there when my American mercenaries arrive in Buenaventura. By the way, you are going to import these mer-



Mounted, Armed and Alone.

cenaries for me. They are American miners and road builders in the employ of the Honda Mining & Development company, which is to be the name of your enterprise. I hope you'll like the name, Webster. I picked it out myself."

"You cool scoundrel! You're making cat's paw out of me."

"That is because you happen to be so handy for my purpose. You see my plan, do you not? I'm going to attack Buenaventura from within and without. I'm going to come down on Sarros like a wolf on the fold, and the job is scheduled for next Saturday night a week."

"Look here, ~~Bill~~, my boy, I have

no desire to mix in the politics of this country."

"You have some desire, however, to mix in its wealth," Ricardo reminded him.

"Well?"

"It's the only man that can help you. By the way, do not order your machinery shipped until after I am seated firmly on the throne of my fathers."

"Why?"

"It's been framed with Sarros to let you spend your money on that concession and get the mine in running order; then a fake suit, alleging an error in the government survey, will be filed. It will be claimed that the concession given your friend, Geary, is, by virtue of erroneous government surveys, the property of a citizen of Sobrante. The courts here do as Sarros tells them. You are to be kicked out, busted, and despairing, and your nicely equipped little mine will be taken over as a government monopoly and run for the benefit of the government, to-wit, Sarros and his satellites. We had to cook up a dirty deal like that to save your life. Of course, now that I have warned you in time, you are safe. We schemed a proposition, however, that worked both ways. It enabled us to save you and to save us, by permitting the shipment, free of suspicion, of arms for the rebels that are to attack the city from within. Naturally I had to cache their arms within the city—and that was a hard problem until you happened along. Thank you, fairy godfather."

"My thanks are due you, Ricardo. I'm for you, first, last, and all the time, and against this Sarros outfit. By the way, how do you propose moving your machine guns?"

"We'll have to carry them, I guess."

"Well, I'll have a small auto-truck delivered in Buenaventura by that time. You might arrange to armor it with sheet steel; and with a couple of machine guns mounted in it, and a crew of resolute Americans behind the machine guns, you could enter from one end of the city to the other and clear a path for your infantry."

"Thank you, my friend. I'll borrow the motor truck and arrange to armor it. That's a bully idea. Are you bound for Buenaventura now?"

Webster nodded. "Then," Ricardo suggested, "I'll meet you in my room at El Buen Amigo next Wednesday night at 11 and explain the details of my plans to you if you care to hear them. I think they're all-right myself, but somehow I think I'd feel more certain of them if you approve them."

"I'll be there, Rick, and the day you run that outlaw Sarros off the grass you'll know why I am for you."

"Good-by, old man. You will never know how grateful you have made me."

Ruy shook hands with Webster and rode off through the timber, leaving John Stuart Webster to pursue the even tenor of his way, until at length he arrived once more in Buenaventura and sought accommodations at the Hotel Mateo. And there, as he entered the lobby and gazed through a glass door across the patio and into the veranda, he saw that which disturbed him greatly. In a big wicker rocker Dolores Ruy sat, rocking gently and busily stitching on a piece of fancy work!

Billy Geary gone back to the United States, and Dolores was still in Buenaventura! Amazing! Why, what the devil did Billy mean by letting her have her own way like that? Of course, they hadn't been married, or she would not now be out there on the veranda, and, of course, they hadn't quarreled, because that was an impossibility, and, of course, Billy had departed alone for the U. S. A., else he would have returned to their camp in the hills back of San Miguel de Padua.

"Well, I know what I'm going to do," Webster decided. "I'm not going to be led into temptation while Billy's not on the job—so I'll not put up at the Hotel Mateo after all. I'll just sneak around to El Buen Amigo and fix it with that old Mother Jenks not to tip off my presence in town to Dolores Ruy until I can get the lay of the land and see what the devil has happened to all my well-laid plans."

He retreated out the front door and called a carriage, into which he was about to step, bag and baggage, when Don Juan Cafetero came rushing up in great excitement. "Sure, where are ye going now, sor. Is there no room for ye in the Hotel Mateo?"

"Their beds have jiggers in them, and I just remembered that," Webster fibbed. "Hop in, John, and we'll drive around to Mr. Geary's lodgings in El Buen Amigo."

"But I come t'rough the patio just now," Don Juan explained, "an' who should I meet but the young lady."

"You infernal scoundrel! Did you tell her I was in town?"

"Sure I did, sor. An' why not?"

"None of your infernal business. You've spoiled everything. You're a muddle-headed monkey and I've a great notion to let you get drunk again. Take the baggage back into the hotel."

Don Juan Cafetero, greatly hum-

bled and rebuffed, stepped aside and watched Webster stride back into the hotel. "God love ye, sor," he mumbled, "knowin' what I know, is it likely I'd let ye make a monkey out av her or yerself? Ye made yer plans wit' Mlster Geary wit'out consulin' her. Now go, ye grand big divil, an' find out why she kicked yer schame to smitherens." And with a solemn and knowing wink at the duffle bag, Don Juan picked that article up and followed after his master.

CHAPTER XIII.

John Stuart Webster's agile brain was the repository of many conflicting emotions as he bathed, shaved, and changed from his soiled khaki field clothes to a suit of ducks before presenting himself before Dolores.

Had Billy's courage forsaken him at the last minute, with the result that he had gone back to the United States without having settled the question of Dolores' future? Had he proposed and been rejected, or had he proposed, been accepted, and had his plans for an immediate marriage vetoed by Dolores?

In either event, why had Billy failed to leave a note for him at the Hotel Mateo, or mailed him a letter to the Globo de Oro at San Miguel de Padua, advising him of the change in the plan of action outlined for him by Webster?

In the simplicity of his single-hearted devotion Webster was puzzled to understand how any woman in her right mind could fall to fall in love with Billy Geary. A man he was, from heels to hair, and a man with pros-



"Well, and Why Didn't You?"

pects far above the average. To Webster's way of thinking, the girl who married Billy might well count herself fortunate.

Dolores greeted him with unaffected pleasure. "Well, Caliph!" she said. Just that. It made Webster sensible of a feeling of having returned to her after an absence of several years. "I'm so glad to see you, Miss Ruy," he replied, and added boldly, "particularly since I didn't expect to."

She knew what her reply would lead to; nevertheless, with that disimulation which can only be practiced in perfection by a clever and beautiful woman, she answered with equal boldness: "Indeed! Pray why?"

"Well, for a pretty good reason, I think. A few weeks ago, after examining Billy's concession very thoroughly, I told him he was a potential millionaire. Now, while I disclaim any appearance of bragadocio, when John Stuart Webster, E. M., makes any mine owner a report like that, he is apt to be taken very seriously. And having made Billy a potential millionaire and arranged to give him three or four months' vacation back home, I had a notion he'd present to you a very valid reason why you should accompany him."

"You are very frank, Caliph."

"That's because I'm curious. He had a certain dream, and told me about it, and I did my little best to make it come true."

"I think I understand, Caliph. It would be very difficult, I think, for anybody to meet Billy without being attracted toward him. He's one of the dearest, most lovable boys in the world—and he did do me the signal honor of asking me to marry him. So there!"

"Well, and why didn't you?"

She smiled at his blunt insistence on forcing the issue. "For a number of excellent reasons, Caliph. In the first place, he wanted me to marry him immediately—and I wasn't ready to leave Sobrante, while Billy was. Indeed, it was highly necessary that he should leave immediately, for the sake of his health, and I had Billy's interest at heart sufficiently to insist upon it. You seem to forget that when a girl marries she must make some preparation for the event, and if she has any close relatives, such as a brother, for instance, she likes to have that relative present at the ceremony. You will recall, Caliph, that I have a brother and that you have promised to introduce me to him very shortly."

"By Judas, I never thought of that. Miss Ruy," the repentant Webster answered. "In fact, I wasn't thinking of anybody's interest in this matter but Billy's."

"Not even of mine, Caliph?" reproachfully.

"That goes without saying. Could I have done anything nicer for you than fix it for Bill so he would be in pos-

sition to marry you? Here you are, practically alone in the world—at least you were when Bill met you and fell in love with you—and I know that boy so well I was convinced, after meeting you, that his future happiness and yours would best be conserved if you married him. I realize this is a most unusual conversation—"

"Quite to be expected of an unusual man, Caliph. And I do not think you were one bit presumptuous. It was wonderfully dear of you, and I am profoundly grateful that Billy and I have such a true, unselfish friend, whose first thought is for our happiness. Of course, you realize how bad I felt to think I couldn't accede to Billy's plan. Billy's such a dear, it quite broke my heart to disappoint him, but a little temporary unhappiness will not ruin Billy, will it? It makes me feel blue to talk about it, Caliph."

"Not at all, not at all, Miss Ruy. Bill is one of the impulsive, whirlwind kind, up in the clouds today and down in the slough of despond tomorrow. He'll survive the shock. However, I'm glad to know everything will come out all right. Seeing you here gave me a momentary chill; I thought a cog had slipped somewhere, so I helped myself to Cupid's license and asked. A man cannot learn very much from a woman unless he asks questions, can he? I mean on the subject of love."

She smiled a little, wistful, knowing smile. "No, Caliph," she answered seriously, "somehow the Master of Things ordained that on the subject of love man must do all the talking."

"Yes, but on the other hand, woman has the last word—as usual. However, the only thing in your case and Billy's that worries me is the thought that since Bill left his magnet behind he will be drawn back here before he is in the kind of shape, physically, that I want him to be in before he relieves me on the job so I can go away."

"Do not worry on that point, Caliph. I am your ally there; between us both I think we can manage him."

"Fine business! And with those few kind words we'll dismiss William until you care to talk about him again, although if you're as deep in love as Bill you'll not stay off the subject very long. Hope you haven't been into mischief."

"I haven't been idle. I've made several dresses for Mother Jenks and done a lot of fancy work and begun the study of my mother tongue. If my brother should become president of this country, it would ill become his sister not to be able to speak Spanish. By the way, Billy told me you were going to remain up in the hills quite a while yet. What brought you back to town so soon?"

"Expected I'd have some freight arriving shortly."

"How long will you remain in Buenaventura?"

Considering the fact that he was no longer subject to temptation, since the object of his temptation was now definitely promised to his friend, Billy, Webster suddenly decided to remain until the political atmosphere should be cleared, although prior to his conversation with Dolores he had cherished a definite plan to go back to the hills within 48 hours.

"I'm going back," he replied soberly, "after I have kept my promise and introduced you to your brother in the government palace. If I cannot introduce him to you there, the title to our mining concession will be clouded, in which event it will not be necessary for Billy or myself to fuss with it further."

He related to her the information gleaned from her brother two days previously.

"It's no use for an individual to fight a government despot in courts controlled by the latter," he concluded. "Your brother must win and dispose the Sarros; then with the title to the property certified by the government as without a flaw, I may dare to spend \$50,000 developing it."

"And if my brother doesn't win?"

"I may never have an opportunity to present you to him. We mustn't be squeamish about this matter, Miss Ruy. If Ricardo doesn't turn the trick, he may go the way of his father, unless he can manage to get out of the country."

She was silent, digesting this grim alternative. "As I understand it, then, Caliph, Ricardo hopes to win his revolution when he strikes the first blow."

Melon Tidbit of Ancients.

Melons were first extensively cultivated in France early in the seventeenth century, but were known to the ancients from the commencement of our era. The Egyptians grew them. They are said to have been carried to America by Columbus, and to the Malay archipelago by the Portuguese. No other fruit is so variable in foliage and habit, or undergoes so many metamorphoses by crossing its varieties, all of which are fertile. They are grown extensively in Asia, but little care is bestowed on their cultivation, and they consequently never improve. They grow on sandbanks left dry by the falling rivers; if near a town a portion of the crop can be sold, but most of it is valueless, as it rots if taken any distance by cart or boat.

Chronic Insomnia.

"A woman," observed Mr. Henry Peck, "is never so sleepy at night as when she hears Friend Husband fumbling at the front door keyhole, and never so wide awake as when he is trying to tiptoe up the stairs.—American Legion Weekly.

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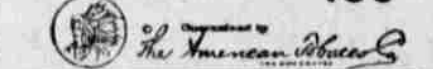
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Few Worth Listening To. "What's a self-made man, pa?" "Usually a bore when he starts telling about it."—Boston Transcript.

Just as Bad. Art Critic—"Have you ever been done in oil?" Vanderlop—"No; but I have in steel compass."

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