

# Webster=Man's Man

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CHAPTER XI.—Continued

The next morning Webster waited until Dolores appeared and then accompanied her into the dining room for breakfast.

"Well, how did you pass your first night in Buenaventura?" she inquired, in the manufacture of breakfast con-

"Not very well. Jiggers bit me and woke me up, and finally I fell into a trance and had vision—about you. After that I couldn't go to sleep again. I was fairly bursting to see you at breakfast and read your pain. I've just discovered a wonderful system."

"Show me," she flashed back at him and she extended her little hand. He picked it up gravely and with the dull tone of a fork made a great show of tracing the lines on her palm.

"You are about twenty-four years old, and your ancestors were pure-bred Castilians who came from Madrid, crossing the Atlantic in caravels. Ever since the first Ruey landed on this coast the family has been identified with the government of the country in one way or another. When you were quite a little girl, your father, Don Ricardo Ruey, at that time president of Sobrante, failed to suppress a revolution and was cornered in the govern-

ment palace, which was set afire.

"Through the bravery and devotion of a cockney gentleman, Colonel Henry Jenkins, an artillery officer in your father's army you were saved from perishing in the burning palace. Colonel Jenkins turned you over to his spouse, now known as Mother Jenkins, with instructions to raise you a lydy, and Mother Jenkins has carried out those instructions. Colonel Jenkins and your father were executed, and Mother Jenkins sent you to the United States to be educated. You had a brother, Ricardo Luis Ruey, older than yourself by seven or eight years, I should judge. In some mysterious manner you and your brother lost track of each other, and at the present moment he believes you perished in the flames that gutted the government palace.

"You're of a proud, independent nature; you work at something for a living, and inasmuch as you haven't been able to set aside a great deal of money from your earnings, you are planning to terminate your visit to your native land at an early date and return to the United States for the purpose of getting back to work. These plans, however, will never be consummated.

"Why? Because you are to be married to a nice man and live happily ever afterward, and about sixty days from now, if all goes well, I, John S. Webster, am going to introduce you to your long-lost brother Ricardo. You will first see Ricardo riding at the head of his victorious rebel troops as he enters Buenaventura. He will be the next president of this wretched country, if, fortunately, he is not killed in the revolution he is now fomenting against his father's ancient enemy. Your brother does not know you are living and it will be a proud and happy day for me when I bring him to you. In the interim, what do you propose having for breakfast? Ham and eggs sunny side up, an omelette or a cereal?"

He released her hand and favored her with the boyish grin that always had the effect of stripping the years from him as one strips the husk from a ripe ear of corn. She was gazing at him in wide-eyed amazement.

"Is my brother really alive?"

"He was as late as midnight last night. Do you recall the chap I saved from being assassinated in New Orleans?"

"Yes."

"Your worthy brother. And do you recall the chauffeur whose passage to this port I was forced to pay?"

"Yes."

"The same individual. I sent him ashore in the launch with Billy, and he has been housed at El Buen Amigo, but left early this morning for the back country to open a recruiting office."

She reached across the little table and squeezed his big brown hand impulsively. "You're the most wonderful man I ever knew. And does my poor brother know I am living, Mr. Webster?"

"No—and I'm not going to tell him. I think it will be much nicer to restore you to each other on the steps of the government palace on the day when the Ruey faction comes into its own again. That will make his victory all the sweeter. By the way, where was Ricardo when your father's ship of state went on the rocks?"

"At school in a military academy in Kentucky."

"It is a marvelous mix-up, which Ricardo can doubtless explain," Miss Ruey. I know he believes his sister perished with her father. Mother Jenkins didn't know where he was and couldn't communicate with him—and there you are. However, little old Jack Fix-it will bring you together again in due course. In the interim, how about those eggs? Straight up—or flip 'em!"

She beamed across at him. "We are going to be such good, true friends, aren't we?" she urged. He almost shivered, but managed a hypocritical nod. "While we have only known each

other twenty-four hours, it seems a great deal longer than that—probably because Billy has told me so much about you, and you're—so comfortable and easy to get acquainted with, and I—I can't very well express my gratitude for what you've done—for what you're going to do." Her voice faltered; she smiled roguishly through the tears of her emotion. "If I were only Billy, now, I could put my arm across your shoulders and settle the matter by saying: 'Johnny, you old horse-thief, you're all right!'"

"The best thing to do would be to cease puffing me up with importance. And now, before we climb out of the realm of romance and the improbable to the more substantial plane of things for breakfast, just one brief word of caution. Now that I have told you your brother lives and is in Buenaventura, forget it until I mention it again, because his presence here is his secret, not ours."

"All right, Caliph," she agreed. "I think I shall call you thereafter. Like the late Caliph Haroun Al Rashid, it appears you have a habit of prowling around o' nights in queer places, doing good deeds for your subjects. But tell me about my brother. Describe him to me."

"Not now. Here comes the head waiter with a cablegram for me, I think."

That functionary came to their table and handed one of the familiar yellow envelopes to each of them.

"We'll excuse each other," Dolores suggested. She read:

"Go you if I lose. You are a good, game little scout, and I like you fine. JEROME."

She glanced across at Webster, whose face was a conflicting study of emotions in which disappointment and amazement appeared to predominate.



You ancient scoundrel!

"You ancient scoundrel," she heard him murmur.

"What ho, Caliph! Unpleasant news?" she ventured.

"Yes—and no. I had one of the fitness jobs in the world all staked out—and now the boss cables me it's filled—by a better man."

"What are you going to do about it?"

"Well—as soon as I've had my breakfast, I'm going to cable Neddy Jerome and tell him I'm satisfied—satisfied to stay here and satisfied he's a liar. You see, Miss Ruey, he objected vigorously to my coming here in the first place—wanted me to take a 30-day vacation and then manage the Colorado Consolidated Mines company, Ltd., for him. I like Neddy and would have been glad to go to work for his company, but, of course, Billy comes first, and so I declined the offer.

Later I changed my mind, and last night I cabled him I'd accept it—he'd wait 60 days—possibly 90; and now he replies that he's sorry, but the job is filled by a better man. That's why I know he's a liar."

"I see. You figure there isn't a better mining engineer than you—eh, Caliph?"

He looked at her reproachfully. "No, but Neddy Jerome does, and I know he does because he has taken the trouble to tell me so more than once. And as a rule Neddy inclines toward the truth. However, it's just as well—" He paused, staring hard at her. "By the way, you foretold this! Why, this is amazing."

She could have wept with laughter. "Well"—soberly—"I told you some other things equally amazing, did I not?"

"Yes, you told me other things more or less interesting, but you foretold this. How do you account for that?"

"The witness declines to answer on the ground that she may incriminate herself and be burned for a witch."

"Remarkable woman!"

"You were about to remark that it is just as well—"

"That Neddy's reconciled to losing me, because since cabling him yesterday evening I've changed my mind again. I'm going to stay here now."

"Indeed! Why?"

"Just to be obstinate. Apparently I'm not wanted here by the powers that be; so just to rile them I'm going to hang around Sobrante and argue the question with them. By the way, I see you received a cablegram also.

Better news than mine, I hope."

She nodded. "I have little business deal on back home. Haven't got a great deal invested, but it looks as if I might make \$10,000."

He arched his eyebrows and favored her with a little disapproving grunt. Sounded like the prospectus of a fake mining promoter—yes, by thunder, that was it. Dolores was a school teacher, and school teachers and doctors are ever the mainstay of a swindler's sucker list.

"You won \$10 from me yesterday," he challenged. "Bet you another ten I can tell you the nature of your investment."

"Go you, if I lose!" Unconsciously she was learning the argot of the mafias of the species, as exemplified in Neddy Jerome's cablegram.

"It's a mining property."

"You win. It is," she answered truthfully, starting to open her purse.

"Quartz or placer?"

"I don't know. Explain."

He chuckled at her ignorance. "Quartz is gold-bearing rock, and placer is gold-bearing gravel."

"Then my mining property is placer, because it has lots of sand."

"I know it, I knew it," he warned her solemnly, and he shook an admonitory finger at her. "Black sand, eh? Is the gold very fine?"

"I think it is."

"Then you're stung good and deep—so don't delude yourself into thinking you have \$10,000 coming. I never knew a proposition for saving the fine gold in black sand that didn't turn out to be a fizzle. It's the hardest thing in the world to save. Now, listen; you tell me the name of the film-flam artist that got you into this deal, and when I get back to the United States I'll investigate the company; if it's an out-and-out swindle, I'll take that promoter by the throat and choke your money out of him, the scoundrel! It is just these fly-by-night fellows that ruin the finest gambling game in the world and scare off investors in legitimate mining propositions."

"Oh, you mustn't—really, Caliph. He's an old man, and I only did it to help him out."

"There should be no sentiment in business, Miss Ruey."

"Oh, well, let's be cheerful and hopeful, Caliph, and discuss a more important subject."

She was very serious now, for by her meddling she had, she realized, so arranged matters that at a time when John Stuart Webster's very life depended upon his immediate departure from Buenaventura, he was planning to stay and face the music, just to be obstinate. "You must reconsider your decision to remain in this country," she insisted. "Your life may be the price of liberty of action, you know. Isn't Billy capable of developing the mine after you advance the cash?"

"I wouldn't advance him a cent for his mine until I had investigated it myself."

"Then you should make some arrangements to safeguard yourself while making the investigation, and leave Sobrante immediately thereafter. Isn't that a sensible proposition?"

"Very—if I felt like leaving Sobrante. But I do not. If that mining concession is a potential winner, I'll have to stick around and make a winner out of it before I go away and leave Bill in charge. Besides, I'm worried about Bill. He's full of malarial fever, and last night I got thinking about him and decided to send him back to the Colorado mountains for a few months. I want some regular doctors to work on Bill so he'll be fit when he gets back on the job."

As a matter of fact, this idea of sending Billy to the United States had that moment occurred to Jack Webster; he reflected now that this plan was little short of an inspiration. It would give Billy and Dolores an opportunity to marry and have a honeymoon; it would leave him free of her disturbing presence, and enable him to leave Sobrante when the Gearys should return. He resolved to speak to Billy about it.

Dolores' voice broke in upon his沉思. "But Billy tells me you already have a fortune sufficient for the needs of a caliph without a court. Why risk your precious life to acquire more? Money isn't everything in life."

"No, but the game is."

"What game? Mining?"

"The game of life."

"But this is the game of death."

"Which makes life all the sweeter if I can beat the game. Perhaps I can better illustrate my point of view with a story. Some years ago I was sent to Arizona to examine a mining property and report upon it; if I advised its purchase, my principals were prepared to buy at my valuation. Well, when I arrived, I found a miserable

shanty close to a shaft and dump, and in the shanty I found a weather-beaten couple. The woman was probably forty but looked fifty. The man had never been anything but a hard-rock miner—\$4 a day had been the limit of his earnings in any one day until he stumbled on some float, traced it up, and located the claims I was there to examine and try to buy.

"His wife had been a miner's daughter, knowing nothing but drudgery and poverty and continuing that existence after marriage. For 20 years she had been darnin' her husband's socks, washing his clothes, and cooking his meals. Even after they uncovered the ledge, it wasn't worth any more than the country rock to them unless they could sell it, because the man had neither the money nor the ability to develop it himself. He even lacked the ability to sell it, because it requires real ability to unload any kind of a mine for \$1,000,000, and real nerve on the part of the man who buys. I examined the mine, decided it was cheap at \$1,000,000, and so reported to my principals. They wired me to close, and so I took a 60-day option in order to verify the title.

"Well, time passed, and one bright day I rode up to that shanty with a deed and a certified check for \$1,000,000 in my pocket; whereupon I discovered the woman had had a change of heart and bucked over the traces. No, sirree! She would not sign that deed—and inasmuch as the claim was community property, her signature was vitally necessary. She asked me so many questions, however, as to the size of the stamp mill we would install and how many miners would be employed on the job, that finally I saw the light and tried a shot in the dark. 'My dear Mrs. Skaggs,' I said. 'If you'll sign this deed and save us all a lot of litigation over this option you and your husband have given me, I'll do something handsome. I will—on my word of honor—I'll give you the exclusive boarding house privilege at this mine.'

"And what did she say, Caliph?"

"She said: 'Give me the pen, Mr. Webster, and please excuse my handwriting; I'm that nervous in business matters.'"

Dolores' silvery laughter rippled through the room. "But I don't see the point," she protested.

"We will come to it presently. I was merely explaining one person's point of view. You would not, of course, expect me to have the same point of view as Mrs. Skaggs of Arizona."

"Certainly not."

"All right! Listen to this! In 1907, at the height of the boom times in Goldfield, Nev., I was worth \$1,000,000. On the first day of October I could have cashed in my mining stocks for \$1,000,000—and I had a lot of cash in bank, too. But I'd always worked so hard and been poor so long that my wealth didn't mean anything to me. I wanted the exclusive privilege of more slavery, and so I staked a copper prospect, which later I discovered to consist of uncounted acres of country rock and about \$25 worth of copper stain. In order to save \$100 I did my own assessment work, drove a pick into my foot, developed blood poison, went to the hospital, and was nice and helpless when the panic came along the middle of the month. The bank went bust, and my ready cash went with it; I couldn't give my mining stocks away. Everybody knew I was a pauper—everybody but the doctor. He persisted in regarding me as a millionaire and sent me a bill for \$5,000."

"How perfectly outrageous! Why, Caliph, I would have let him sue me."

"I would have, too—but I didn't. I induced him to settle for \$100,000 shares of stock in my copper prospect. The par value was \$1 a share, and I was going to sell a block at 10 cents, but in view of high professional standing I let him have it for a nickel a share. I imagine he still has it. I bought back later all the other stock I sold, because the property was worthless, and in order to be a sport I offered him \$500 for his block, but he thought I was trying to swindle him and asked \$5,000."

"Oh, Caliph!"

"Wonderful game, isn't it—this game of life. So sweet when a fellow's taking chances! Now that I am fairly prosperous again, the only thing in life that really matters is the uncertainty as to whether, when finally I do leave Sobrante, I shall ride to the steamer landing in a hack or a car."

"But you could go in a hack this morning and avoid that uncertainty."

"The millionaire drudge I told you of could have gone to live in a pretty villa on the Riviera, but she chose a miner's boarding house."

"Then why," she persisted, "did you leave the United States with the firm intention of remaining in Sobrante indefinitely, change your mind before you were here eight hours, and cable this Neddy Jerome person you would return in 60 or 90 days—and the following morning decide to remain, after all?"

"My dear young lady, if I changed my clothes as often as I change my mind, the what-you-may-call-'em chaps monkeying may lead to unpleasant complications with your paternal government. A far more artistic and effective way of raising hell with you has been suggested to this higher-up individual, and he has accepted it. Indeed, the plan pleased him so much that he laughed quite heartily. Really, it is quite diabolical, but remember, he who laughs last laughs best—and I'm the villain in this sketch."

"Barring accidents, my dear Webster, you are good for at least six weeks of existence. Beyond that I dare not guarantee you."

"But why?"

"That," she answered gravely, "is a secret."

"Women delight to pry into men's secrets."

"I know it. Had a friend once-married. Every night after dinner he used to sit and stare into the fire and his wife used to ask him what he was thinking about. He would look up at her owlishly and tell her it was something he couldn't explain to her, because she'd