

Webster-Man's Man

By PETER B. KYNE

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

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CHAPTER XVI.

While Ricardo watched beside the unconscious Webster one of his aides galloped up the street, to return presently with a detachment with stretchers, into which Webster and Don Juan Cafetero were laid and carried up the palace driveway into the huge golden reception hall where only the night before Sarros had greeted the belles and beaux of his capital. In the meantime Mother Jenks had succeeded in restoring Dolores to consciousness; supported by the indomitable old woman the girl slowly followed the grim procession until, at the door of the reception room, they found their further progress barred by a sentry.

"The red-haired man is dead," he informed them in response to their eager queries. "If you want his body," he continued, hazarding a guess as to their mission, "I guess you can have it. There he is." And the sentry pointed to the stretcher which had been set down along the wall of the reception hall.

"Ow about the other?" Mother Jenks demanded. Don Juan Cafetero had, unfortunately, been so much of a nuisance to her in life that she was not minded to be troubled greatly over him in death, although the Spartanlike manner of his exit had thrilled the British bulldog blood in her.

"The big fellow isn't quite dead yet, but I'm afraid he's a goner. The surgeons have him in this room now. Friend of yours, Miss?" he inquired in tones freighted with neighborly sympathy.

Dolores nodded. "Sorry I can't let you in, Miss," he continued, "but the General ordered me to keep everybody out until the doctors have finished looking him over. If I was you, I'd wait in that room across the hall; then you can get the first news when the doctors come out."

Mother Jenks accepted his advice and steered her charge into the room indicated. As they waited, Ricardo Ruyet stood anxiously beside the table on which John Stuart Webster's big, limp body reposed, while Doctor Pacheco, assisted by a Sorbantean confederate, went deftly over him with surgical scissors and cut the blood-soaked clothing from his body.

"He breathes very gently," the rebel leader said, presently. "Is there any hope?"

"The little doctor shrugged. "I fear not. That bayonet-thrust in the left side missed his heart but not his lung."

"But apparently he hasn't bled much from that wound."

"The hemorrhage is probably internal. Even if that congestion of blood in the lungs does not prove fatal very shortly, he cannot, in his weakened state, survive the traumatic fever from all these wounds. It is bound—hello, how our poor friend still lives with the bayonet broken off in his body—for here is steel—hah! Not a bayonet, but a pistol."

He unbuttoned the wounded man's coat and found a strap running diagonally up across his breast and over the right shoulder, connecting with a holster under the left arm. The doctor unbuckled this strap and removed the holster, which contained Webster's spare gun; Ricardo, glancing disinterestedly at the sheathed weapon, noted a small, new, triangular hole in the leather holster. He picked it up, withdrew the pistol, and found a deep scratch, recently made, along the blued steel close to the vulcanite butt.

When Ricardo glanced at Pacheco after his scrutiny of the pistol and holster, the doctor's dark eyes were regarding him mirthfully.

"I have been unnecessarily alarmed, my general," said Pacheco. "Our dear friend has been most fortunate in his choice of wounds—"

"He's a lucky Yankee; that's what he is, my dear Pacheco. A lucky Yankee!" Ricardo leaned over and examined the bayonet-wound in Webster's left side. "He took the point of the steel on his pistol he happened to be wearing under his left arm," he went on to explain. "That turned the bayonet and it slid along his ribs, making a superficial flesh-wound."

Pacheco nodded. "And this bullet merely burned the top of his right shoulder, while another passed through his biceps without touching the bone. His most severe wound is this job in the hip."

They stripped every stitch of clothing from Webster and went over him carefully. At the back of his head they found a little clotted blood from a small split in the scalp; also they found a lump of generous proportions. Pacheco laughed briefly but contentedly.

"Then he is not even seriously injured?" Ricardo interrupted that laugh.

"I would die of fright if I had to fight this fine fellow a month from today," the little doctor chirped. "The man is in superb physical condition; it is the bump on the head that renders him unconscious—not loss of blood."

As if to confirm this expert testimony Webster at that moment breath-

ed long and deeply, screwed up his face and shook his head very slightly. Thereafter for several minutes he gave no further evidence of an active interest in life—seeing which Pacheco decided to take prompt advantage of his unconsciousness and probe the wounds in his arm and shoulder for the fragments of clothing which the bullets must have carried into them. After ten minutes of probing Pacheco announced that he was through and ready to bandage; whereupon John Stuart Webster said faintly but very distinctly, in English:

"I'm awfully glad you are, Doc. It hurt like h—! Did you manage to get a bite on that fishing trip?"

"Jack Webster, you scoundrel!" Ricardo yelled joyously, and he shook the patient with entire disregard of the latter's wounds. "Oh, man, I'm glad you're not dead."

"Your sentiments appeal to me strongly, my friend. I'm—too—tired to look—at you. Who the devil—are you?"

Fell a silence, while Webster prepared for another speech. "Where am I?"

"In the palace. We won pulled-up, and that forty-thousand dollar bet of yours is safe. I'll cash the ticket for you tomorrow morning."

"D—n the forty thousand. Where's my Croppy Boy?"

"Your what?"

"My wild Irish blackthorn, Don Juan Cafetero."

"I hope, old man, he has ere now that which all brave Irishmen and true deserve—a harp with a crown. In life the Irish have the harp without the crown, you know."

"How did he die?" Webster whispered.

"He died hard, with the holes in front—and he died for you."

Two big tears trickled slowly through Webster's closed lids and rolled across his pale cheek. "Poor, lost, lonesome, misunderstood wretch," he murmured presently, "he was an extremist in all things. He used to sing those wonderfully poetic ballads of his people—I remember one that began: 'Green were the fields where my forefathers dwelt. I think his heart was in Kerry—so we'll send him there. He's my dead, Ricardo; care for his body, because I'm—going to plant Don Juan with the—shamrocks. They didn't understand him here. He was an exile—so I'm going to send him—home.'"

"He shall have a military funeral," Ricardo promised.

"From the cathedral," Webster added. "And take a picture of it for his people. He told me about them. I want them to think he amounted to something, after all. And when you get this two-by-four republic of yours going again, Rick, you might have your congress award Don Juan a thousand dollars or so for capturing Sarros. Then we can send the money to his old folks."

"But he didn't capture Sarros," Ricardo protested. "The man escaped when the guards cut their way through."

"He didn't. That was a ruse while he beat it out the gate where you found me. I saw Don Juan knock him cold with the butt of his rifle after I'd brought down his horse."

"Do you think he's there yet?"

"He may be—provided all this didn't happen the day before yesterday. If I wanted him, I'd go down and look for him, Rick."

"I'll go right away, Jack."

"One, minute, then. Send a man around to that little back street where they have the wounded—it's a couple of blocks away from here—to tell Mother Jenks and the young lady with her I'll not be back."

"They're both outside now. They must have gone looking for you, because they found you and Don Juan first and then told me about it."

"Who told you?"

"Mother Jenks."

"Oh! Well, run along and get your man."

Ricardo departed on the run, taking the sentry at the door with him and in his haste giving no thought to Mother Jenks and her companion waiting for the doctor's verdict. In the palace grounds he gathered two more men and bade them follow him; leading by twenty yards, he emerged at the gate and paused to look around him.

Some hundred feet down the street from the palace gate Sarros' bay charger lay dead. When Webster's bullet brought the poor beast down, his rider had fallen clear of him, only to fall a victim to the ferocity of Don Juan Cafetero. Later, as Sarros lay stunned and bleeding beside his mount, the stricken animal in its death-struggle had half risen, only to fall again, this time on the extended left leg of his late master; consequently when Sarros recovered consciousness following the thoughtful attentions of his assailant, it was to discover himself a hopeless prisoner. The heavy carcass of his horse plinned his foot and part of his leg to the ground, rendering him as helpless and desperate as a trapped animal.

For several minutes now he had been striving frantically to release himself; with his sound right leg pressed against the animal's backbone he tried to gain sufficient purchase to withdraw his left leg from the carcass.

As Ricardo caught sight of Sarros he instinctively realized that this was his mortal enemy; motioning his men to stand back, he approached the struggling man on tiptoe and thoughtfully possessed himself of the dictator's pistol, which lay in back of him, but not out of reach. Just as he did so, Sarros, apparently convinced of the futility of his efforts to free himself, surrendered to fate and commenced rather pitifully to weep with rage and despair.

Ricardo watched him for a few seconds, for there was just sufficient of the blood of his Castilian ancestors still in his veins to render this sorry spectacle rather an enjoyable one to him. Besides, he was 50 per cent Iberian, a race which can hate quite as thoroughly as it can love, and for a time Ricardo even nourished the thought of still further indulging his thirst for revenge by pretending to aid Sarros in his escape! Presently, however, he put the ungenerous thought from him; seizing the dead horse by the tail, he dragged the carcass off his enemy's leg, and while Sarros sat up, tailor-fashion, and commenced to rub the circulation back into the bruised member, Ricardo seated himself on the rump of the dead horse and appraised his prisoner critically.

Sarros glanced up, remembered his manners and very heartily and gracefully thanked his deliverer.

"It is not a matter for which thanks are due me, Sarros," Ricardo replied coldly. "I am Ricardo Luis Ruyet, and I have come back to Sorbante to pay my father's debt to you. You will remember having forced the obligation upon me in the cemetery some fifteen years ago."

For perhaps ten horrified seconds Sarros stared at Ricardo; then the dark blood in him came to his defense; his tense pose relaxed; the fright and despair left his swarthy countenance as if erased with a moist sponge, leaving him as calmly stoical and indifferent as a cigarero Indian. He fumbled in his coat pocket for a gold cigarette case, selected a cigarette, lighted it and blew smoke at Ricardo. The jig was up; he knew it; and with admirable nonchalance he declined to lower his presidential dignity by discussing or considering it. He realized it would delight his captor to know he dreaded to face the issue, and it was not a Sarros practice to give aid and comfort to the enemy, forced to admiration despite himself. Aloud he said: "You know the code of our people, Sarros. An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth."

Sarros bowed. "I am at your service," he replied carelessly.

"Then at daylight tomorrow morning I shall make settlement," Ricardo beckoned his men to approach. "Take this man and confine him under a double guard in the arsenal," he ordered. "Present my compliments to the officer in charge there and tell him it is my wish that a priest be provided for the prisoner tonight, and that tomorrow morning, at six o'clock, a detail of six men and a sergeant escort this man to the cemetery in the rear of the Cathedral de la Cruz. I will meet the detail there and take command of it."

Two of Ricardo's imported fighting men stepped to the prisoner's side, seized him, one by each arm, and lifted him to his feet; supported between them, he limped away to his doom, while his youthful conqueror remained seated on the dead horse, his gaze bent upon the ground, his mind dwelling, not upon his triumph over Sarros but upon the prodigious proportions of the task before him; the rehabilitation of a nation. After a while he rose and strolled ever toward the gate, where he paused to note the grim evidences of the final stand of Webster and Don Juan Cafetero before passing through the portal.

Ricardo had now, for the first time, an opportunity to look around him; so he halted to realize his homecoming, to thrill with this, the first real view of the home of his boyhood. The spacious lawn surrounding the palace had been plowed and scarred with bursting shrapnel from the field guns captured in the arsenal, although the building itself had been little damaged, not having sustained a direct hit because of Ricardo's stringent orders not to use artillery on the palace unless absolutely necessary to smother Sarros out. Scattered over the grounds Ricardo counted some twenty-odd government soldiers, all wearing that pathetically fat, crumpled appearance which seems inseparable from the bodies of men killed in action. The first shrapnel had probably commenced to drop in the grounds just as a portion of the palace garrison had been marching out to join the troops fighting at the cantonment barracks. Evidently the men had scattered like quail, only to be killed as they ran.

From this grim scene Ricardo raised his eyes to the palace, the castellated towers of which, looming through the tufted palms, were reflecting the setting sun. Over the balustrade of one of the upper balconies the limp body of a Sarros sharpshooter, picked off from the street, drooped grotesquely, his arms hanging downward as if in ironical welcome to the son of Ruyet the Beloved. The sight induced in Ricardo a sense of profound sadness; his Irish imagination awoke; to him that mute figure seemed to call upon him for pity, for kindness, for forbearance, for understanding and sympathy. Those outflung arms of the martyred peon symbolized to Ricardo Ruyet the spirit of liberty, shackled and helpless, calling upon him for deliverance; they brought to his alert mind a clearer realization of the duty that was his than he had ever had before. He had a great task to perform, a task inaugurated by his father, and which Ricardo could not hope to finish in his lifetime. He must solve the agrarian problem; he must develop the rich natural resources of his country; he must provide free, compulsory education and evolve from the ignorance of the peon an intelligence that would build up that which Sorbante, in common with her sister republics, so wickedly lacked—the great middle class that stands always as a buffer between the aggression and selfishness of the upper class and the helplessness and childishness of the lower.

Ricardo bowed his head. "Help me, O Lord," he prayed. "Thou hast given me in Thy wisdom a man's task. Help me that I may not prove unworthy."

Mother Jenks, grown impatient at the lack of news concerning Webster, left Dolores to her grief in the room across the hall and sought the open air, for of late she had been experiencing with recurring frequency a slight feeling of suffocation. She sat down on the broad granite steps, helped herself to a much-needed "bracer" from her brandy flask and was gazing pensively at the scene around her when Ricardo came up the stairs.

"Elo!" Mother Jenks saluted him.

"We're 'ave you been, Mr. Bowers?"

"I have just returned from capturing Sarros, Mrs. Jenks. He is on his way to the arsenal under guard."

"Gor strike me pink!" the old lady cried. "Ave I lived to see this day!"

Her face was wreathed in a happy smile. "I wonder 'ow the beggar feels to 'ave the shoe on the other foot, eh—the 'artless 'ound; I'm 'opin' this General Ruyet will 'ave the blighter shot."

"You need have no worry on that score, Mrs. Jenks. I'm General Ruyet. Andrew Bowers was just my summer name, as it were."

"Angels guard me! 'Wot the bloom-in' 'ell surprise won't we 'ave next. 'Wot branch of the Ruyet tribe do you belong to? Are you a nephew o' him that was president before Sarros shot 'im? Antonio Ruyet, who was 'arf brother to the president, 'ad a son 'e called Ricardo. Are you 'im, migh' I ask?"

"I am the son of Ricardo the Beloved," he answered proudly.

"Not the lad as was away at school when 'is father was hexecuted?"

"I am that same lad, Mrs. Jenks. And who are you? You seem to know a deal of my family history."

"I," the old publican replied with equal pride, "am Mrs. Col. 'Enery Jenks, who was your father's chief of 'artillery an' 'ad the hextreme honor o' dyin' in front of the same wall with 'im. By the w'y, 'ow's Mr. Webster?" she added, suddenly remembering the subject closest to her heart just then.

"His wounds are trifling. He'll live, Mrs. Jenks."

"Well, that's better than gettin' poked in the eye with a sharp stick," the old dame decided philosophically.

"Do you remember my little sister, Mrs. Jenks?" Ricardo continued. "She

"Hello, Seeress," he called weakly. "Little Johnny's been fighting again, and the bad boys gave him an all-fired walloping."

There was a swift rustle of skirts, and she was bending over him, her hot little palms clasping eagerly his pale, rough cheeks. "Oh, my dear, my dear!" she whispered, and then her voice choked with the happy tears and she was sobbing on his wounded shoulder. Ricardo stooped to draw her away, but John Stuart bent upon him a look of such frightfulness that he drew back abashed. After all, the past 24 hours had been quite exciting, and Ricardo reflected that John's inamorate was tired and frightened and probably hadn't eaten anything all day long, so there was ample excuse for her hysteria.

"Come, come, buck up," Webster soothed her, and helped himself to a long whiff of her fragrant hair. "Old man Webster had one leg in the grave, but they've pulled it out again."

Still she sobbed.

"Now, listen to me, lady," he commanded with mock severity. "You just stop that. You're wasting your sympathy; and while, of course, I enjoy your sympathy a heap, just pause to reflect on the result if those salt tears should happen to drop into one of my numerous wounds."

"I'm so sorry for you, Caliph," she murmured brokenly. "You poor, harmless boy! I don't see how any one could be so fondish as to hurt you when you were so distinctly a non-combatant."

"Thank you. Let us forget the Hague conference for the present, however. Have you met your brother?" he whispered.

"No, Caliph." "Ricardo." "Yes, Jack." "Come here. Rick, you scheming, unscrupulous, blood-thirsty adventurer, I have a tremendous surprise in store for you. The sweetest girl in the world—and she's right here—"

Ricardo laughingly held up his hand. "Jack, my friend," he interrupted, "you're too weak to make a speech. Don't do it. Besides, you do not have to." He turned and bowed gracefully to Dolores. "I can see for myself she's the sweetest girl in the world, and that she's right here." He held out his hand to her. "Jack thinks he's going to spring a surprise," he continued maliciously, "quite forgetting that a good soldier never permits himself to be taken by surprise. I know all about his little secret, because I heard you mourning for him when you thought he was dead." Ricardo favored her with a knowing wink. "I am delighted to meet the future Mrs. Webster. I quite understand why you fell in love with him, because, you see, I love him myself and so does everybody else."

With typical Castilian courtliness he took her hand, bowed low over it, and kissed it. "I am Ricardo Luis Ruyet," he said, anxious to spare his friend the task of further exhausting conversation. "And you are—"

"You're a consummate jackass!" growled Webster. "I'm only a dear old family friend, and Dolores is going to marry Billy Geary. You impetuous idiot! She's your own sister, Dolores Ruyet. She, Mark Twain, and I have ample cause for common complaint against the world because the reports of our death have been grossly exaggerated. She didn't perish when your father's administration crumbled, Miss Ruyet, this is your brother, Ricardo. Kiss her you damn' fool—forgive me, Miss Ruyet—oh, Lord, nothing matters any more. He's gumped everything up and ruined my party. I wish I were dead."

Ricardo stared from the outraged Webster to his sister and back again. "Jack Webster," he declared, "you aren't crazy, are you?"

"Of course, he is—the old dear," Dolores cried happily, "but I'm not." She stepped up to her brother, and her arms went around his neck. "Oh, Rick," she cried, "I'm your sister, Truly, I am."

"Dolores. My little lost sister. Dolores? Why, I can't believe it!"

"Well, you'd better believe it!" John Stuart Webster growled feebly. "Of course, you can doubt my word and get away with it, now that I'm flat on my back, but if you dare cast aspersions on that girl's veracity, I'll murder you a month from now."

He closed his eyes, feeling instinctively that he ought not spy on such a sacred family scene. When, however, the affecting meeting was over and Dolores was ruffling the Websterian forehead while her brother pressed the Websterian hand and tried to say all the things he felt, but couldn't express, John Stuart Webster brought them both back to a realization of present conditions.

"Don't thank me, sir," he piped in pathetic imitation of the small boy of melodrama. "I have only done my duty, and for that I cannot accept this purse of gold, even though my father and mother are starving."

"Oh, Caliph, do be serious," Dolores pleaded.

He looked up at her fondly. "Take your brother out to Mother Jenks and prove your case, Miss Ruyet," he advised her. "And while you're at it, I certainly hope somebody will remember I'm not accustomed to reposing on a center table. Rick, if you can persuade some citizen to put me to bed, I'd be obliged. I'm dead tired, old horse. I'm—ah—sleepy—"

His head rolled weakly to one side, for he had been playing a part and had nerved himself to finish it gracefully, even in his weakened condition. He sighed, moaned slightly, and slipped into unconsciousness.

(To be continued)

more fervently implored the Almighty to strike her pink, and the iron restraint of a long, hard, exciting day being relaxed at last, the good soul bowed her gray head in her arms and wept, moving her body from side to side the while and demanding, of no one in particular, a single legitimate reason why she, a blooming old baggage and not fit to live, should be the recipient of such manifold blessings as this day had brought forth.

In the meantime Ricardo, with his hand on the knob of the door leading to the room where Webster was having his wounds dressed, paused suddenly, his attention caught by the sound of a sob, long-drawn and inexpressibly pathetic. He listened and made up his mind that a woman in the room across the entrance hall was bewailing the death of a loved one who answered to the name of Caliph and John, darling. Further eavesdropping convinced him that Caliph, John, darling, and Mr. John Stuart Webster were one and the same person, and so he tilted his head on one side like a cock robin and considered.

"By jingo, that's most interesting," he decided. "The wounded hero has a sweetheart or a wife—and an American, too. She must be a recent acquisition, because all the time we were together on the steamer coming down here he never spoke of either, despite the fact that we got friendly enough for such confidences. Something funny about this. I'd better sound the old boy before I start passing out words of comfort to that unhappy female."

He pushed on into the room. John Stuart Webster had, by this time, been washed and bandaged, and one of the Sarros servants (for the ex-dictator's retinue still occupied the palace) had, at Dr. Pacheco's command, prepared a guest chamber upstairs and furnished a night gown of ample proportions to cover Mr. Webster's bebandaged but otherwise naked person. A stretcher had just arrived, and the wounded man was about to be carried upstairs. The late financial backer of the revolution was looking very pale and dispirited; for once in his life his whimsical, bantering nature was subdued. His eyes were closed, and he did not open them when Ricardo entered.

"Well, I have Sarros," the latter declared.

Webster paid not the slightest attention to this announcement. Ricardo bent over him. "Jack, old boy," he queried, "do you know a person of feminine persuasion who calls you Caliph?"

John Stuart Webster's eyes and mouth flew wide open. "What the devil!" he cried to roar. "You haven't been speaking to her, have you? If you have, I'll never forgive you, because you've spoiled my little surprise party."

"No, I haven't been speaking to her, but she's in the next room crying fit to break her heart because she thinks you've been killed."

"You scoundrel! Aren't you human? Go tell her it's only a couple of punctures, not a blowout." He sighed. "Isn't it sweet of her to weep over an old hunk like me!" he added softly. "Bless her tender heart!"

"Who is she?" Ricardo was very curious.

"That's none of your business. You wait and I'll tell you. She's the guest I told you I was going to bring to dinner, and that's enough for you to know for the present. Vaya, you idiot, and bring her in here, so I can assure her my head is bloody but unbowed. Doctor, throw that rug over my shanks and make me look pretty. I'm going to receive company."

His glance, bent steadily on the door, had in it some of the alert, bright wistfulness frequently to be observed in the eyes of a terrier standing expectantly before a rat hole. The instant the door opened and Dolores' tear-stained face appeared, he called to her with the old-time camaraderie, for he had erased from his mind, for the nonce, the memory of the tragedy of poor Don Juan Cafetero and was concerned solely with the task of banishing the tears from those brown eyes and bringing the joy of life back to that sweet face.

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RASMUSSEN TO STUDY ESKIMO Danish Explorer's Ambition Is Said to Be to Make Thorough Study of the Northern Race.

The remarkable studies carried out by the Danish explorer, Knud Rasmussen, among the Greenland Eskimos, are described by W. E. Ekblaw in the Geographical Review. Rasmussen, who is part Eskimo himself, was born and trained in languages and ethnology at the University of Copenhagen.

It is his ambition to make a thorough study of the whole Eskimo race, from eastern Greenland to Siberia, and he has already visited every Eskimo settlement in Greenland. It is said that he knows every Greenland Eskimo personally. Mr. Ekblaw believes it safe to say that no one else has ever come into such direct contact with a whole people as he has