



WEBSTER - MAN'S MAN

OR Peter B. Kyne

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

SYNOPSIS.

CHAPTER I.—John Stuart Webster, mining engineer, after climbing up a fortune in Death Valley, Calif., boards a train for the East. He befriends a young lady annoyed by a man, thoroughly treading the "peat."

CHAPTER II.—At Denver Webster receives a letter from Billy Geary, his closest friend. Geary urges him to come to Sobrante, Central America, to manage and develop a mining claim. He decides to go.

CHAPTER III.—Dolores Rucy, the young woman Webster befriended, and who has made a deep impression on him, as he has on her, is also on the way to Sobrante.

CHAPTER IV.—At Buenaventura, capital of Sobrante, Billy Geary, in disguise, is living on the "charity" of "Mother Jenks," keeper of a dramshop. She receives a cablegram from Dolores, telling of her coming.

CHAPTER V.—Dolores' father, Ricardo Rucy, president of Sobrante, had been killed in a revolution led by Sarros, the present executive. Dolores, a child of eight, was smuggled out of the country by Mother Jenks and supported by her in the United States. The old woman, ashamed of her occupation and habits of life, fears to meet Dolores, and sends Geary to the boat to say she has gone to the United States.

CHAPTER VI.—Webster, on his way to Sobrante, is taken ill on the train, and lies in a hospital at New Orleans two weeks. Geary bungles his mission. Dolores easily seeing through his story. She greets Mother Jenks as her friend and benefactor. Webster falls desperately in love with the girl.

CHAPTER VII.—At New Orleans, while waiting for the steamer to Buenaventura, Webster saves the life of a young man who is attacked by two assassins. The youth leaves Webster without disclosing his identity.

CHAPTER VIII.—On the steamer Webster finds his stateroom occupied by a stranger who declares his intention of being his guest to Buenaventura. At first Geary, Webster and the stranger, after a somewhat forcible argument, reach an amicable agreement. Webster recognizes him as the youth whose life he had saved the day before, though the other does not know Webster.

CHAPTER IX.—Arriving at Sobrante, Geary welcomes Webster and is instrumental in helping his friend's "guest" ashore. The latter is known to Webster as "Andrew Bowers." Geary houses him at Mother Jenks'. Webster gets the idea that Geary and Dolores are in love, and with the intention of giving Geary every chance he smilingly contradicts the girl's statement that they have met before.

CHAPTER X.—Webster receives a warning conveyed by "Don Juan Cafetero," really John J. Cafferty, Irishman of good qualities fallen through overindulgence in liquor, that there is a plot to assassinate him. Webster makes a firm friend of Cafferty. Later, the Irishman is insulted by a Sobrantean army officer and publicly ridicules him. A challenge to a duel is accepted under such stern conditions that the Sobranteans withdraw it.

CHAPTER XI.—Webster secretly visits "Andrew Bowers" at Mother Jenks'. He learns that "Howard Rucy," son of the assassinated president, brother of Dolores (whom he believes dead), and that a revolution is contemplated. Next morning he tells Dolores that he is her brother, of whom she has no recollection. He is in the country, projecting the overthrow of President Sarros. Very much in love with the girl, but believing that her affection has been bestowed on Geary, Webster leaves to investigate the mine which he has come to finance.

CHAPTER XII.—Webster, after looking it over, decides to put his whole fortune into the mine. He sends Billy Geary to the United States to purchase the necessary equipment, advising him to marry Dolores in Buenaventura before he leaves. Knowing that unless Billy can overtake Sarros his mine will be confiscated, Webster agrees to finance the venture. Returning to Buenaventura, he is astonished to find Dolores still there and Geary on his way to the United States.

"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 Rucy 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 Rucy. I know he believes his sister perished with her father. Mother Jenks 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 Buena-

ventura, 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 that hereafter. Like the late Caliph Haroun Al Raschid, 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 amusement 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 finest jobs in the world all staked out—and now the boss cubles 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 Rucy, 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 if 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—'ay this is amazing.'"

She could have wept with laughter. "Well—sincerely '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 a 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 male 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 knew 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 fluke. It's the hardest thing in the world to save. Now, listen; you tell me the name of the dim-dam 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 those 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 Rucy."

"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 but 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 cunning reflections. "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, tracked 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 darning 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

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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, street! She would not sign that there 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 his 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 steamship landing in a hack or a horse."

"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 mind as often as I change my mind, the what-you-may-call-'em chaps that manufacture a certain grand of clothes couldn't keep me dressed."

"But why?"

"That," he 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 outslily and tell her it was something he couldn't explain to her, be-

cause she'd never understand it—and that was all he would tell her, although right frequently, I dare say, he felt like telling her some things she could understand! She brooded over his secret until she couldn't stand it any more, and one day she packed her duds and flew home to mother. He let her stay there three months,

and finally one day he sent her a blue print of what he'd been thinking about."

"What was it?"

"An internal-combustion engine. You see, until she left him, he'd never been able to get set to figure out something in connection with the fuel valves—"

"Stop right there, Caliph. I'm rebuked. I'll let you get set to think—"

"I didn't mean that. You let me get set yesterday—and I figured it all out then—and last night—and a minute ago. I don't care to do any more thinking today. Please talk to me."

"And you refuse to tell me why you cabled your friend, Jerome?"

"You will never know. I told you it's a secret."

"Bet you I find out."

"How much? That \$10,000 you expect to make from the flour-gold in your black-sand claim? And, by the way, \$10, please. I won it for guessing you were interested in a mining proposition."

She returned to him the bill she had won from him the day before. "Ten thousand dollars suits me. Of course, I haven't got the money just now, and this is what Billy calls a finger bet, but if I lose, I guarantee to pay. Are we betting even money? I think that is scarcely fair. Under the circumstances I should be entitled to odds."

"Nothing doing! No odds on a bet of this nature to a seeress who has already jarred me from soul to veriform appendix by making good! You know too damned much already, and how you discovered it is a problem that may drive me crazy yet."

After breakfast they repaired to the veranda to await the result of Webster's experiment with Don Juan Cafetero. Sure enough, the wreck had again returned, he was seated on the edge of the veranda waiting for them; as they approached, he held up a grimy, quivering hand, in the palm of which lay—a five-dollar gold piece.

"What?" Mr. Webster said, amazed.

"Still unchanged?"

"I tried to change it at half a dozen cantinas," Don Juan wheezed, "but devil a bit av systim did any av thin have. Wan offered this in spiggoty money an' the other offered that, an' sure if I'd taken the best that was offered me in exchange, ye might have t'ought I'd tuk more nor wan drinkin'."

"Bravo! Three long, loud, raucous cheers for Don Juan Cafetero!" Dolores cried. "Was it a terrible task to come back without a drink, Don Juan?"

He shivered. "A shky-blue kangaroo wit' a pink tail an' green ears chased me into this patio, ma'am."

"You're very brave, Cafferty. How does it feel to win back your self-respect?" Webster asked him.

"Beggin' the young lady's pardon—it feels like hell, sor."

"Caliph, don't be cruel," Dolores pleaded. "Call a waiter and give Don Juan what you promised him."

So Webster went into the hotel bar and returned presently with a bottle of brandy and a glass, which he filled and held out toward Don Juan. "One of the paradoxes of existence, Don Juan," he observed, "lies in the fact that so many of the things in life that are good for us are bad for us. This jolt will disperse the meengerle and quiet your nerves, but nevertheless it is a nail in your coffin."

Webster, accompanied by his protegee, strolled uptown on a shopping tour. Here he outfitted Don Juan neatly but not grandly and added to his own personal effects two high-power sporting rifles, three large-caliber automatic pistols, and a plentiful supply of ammunition—after which he returned to the hotel, first having conducted Don Juan to a barber shop and given him instructions to report for orders and his mid-day drink the instant he should have acquired the outward evidences of respectability.

At the hotel Webster found two messages awaiting him. One was from Billy Geary, up at San Miguel de Padua, advising him that everything was in readiness for a trip to the mine; the other was a note from Ricardo Rucy, but signed with his alias of Andrew Bowers. Webster read:

"Dear Friend:

"A certain higher-up has been convinced that it would be extremely inadvisable to eliminate you now. It has been pointed out to this person that you are a prom. cit. up in your neck of the woods and dangerous to monkey with—personally and because such 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."

"Thine,

"ANDREW BOWERS."

"That makes it nice," the recipient of this comforting communication so blazoned. He went up to his room, packed a duffle bag with such belongings as he would find necessary during a prolonged stay in the mountains, and at luncheon was fortunate enough to find Dolores in the dining room when he entered.

"I'm going up to San Miguel de Padua this afternoon," he announced as he took his seat. A look of extreme anxiety clouded her lovely face, and he noticed it. "Oh, there's no risk," he hastened to assure her. "That scamp of a brother of yours, through his friends in high places, has managed to get me a reprieve." He handed her Ricardo's letter.

She looked up, much relieved, from her perspiration. "And how long do you expect to be gone, Caliph?"

"Quite a while. I'll be busy around that dratted concession for a couple of weeks, surveying and assaying and what-all; then, while waiting for our machinery and supplies to arrive from the United States, I shall devote my spare time to hunting and fishing and reforming Don Juan Cafetero. The cool hills for mine."

"What a selfish, unsocial program!" she reflected. "I wonder if it will occur to him to come down here once in a while and take me for a drive on the Malecon and talk to me to keep me from dying of ennui before I meet Ricardo. I'll wait and see if he suggests it."

However, for reasons best known to himself and the reader, Mr. Webster made no such interesting suggestion; so she decided that while he was tremendously nice, he was, nevertheless, a very queer man and thoroughly exasperating.

Just before the train pulled out John Stuart Webster took Dolores' hand. "Good-by, Seeress," he said very soberly. "The trail forks here for the first time—possibly the last, although I'll try to be on hand to make good on my promise to present you to your brother the day he occupies the palace. However, if I shouldn't be in town that day, just go up and introduce yourself to him. It's been wonderful to have met you and known you, even for such a brief period. I shall never forget you and the remarkable 24 hours just passed."

"I shall not soon forget them myself, Caliph—not you," she added. "Haven't you been a busy little cup of tea, Caliph! Within 24 hours after landing, you have changed your mind three times, lost the best job in the world, had your fortune told, been marked for slaughter, acquired a new-found friend and commenced actively and with extraordinarily good results the work of reforming him, soused a gentleman in the fountain, spurned another with the tip of your boot, rode with me around the Malecon and listened to the band concert, bundled poor Billy off to San Miguel de Padua, discovered my brother presumed to be dead, and received a reprieve from your enemies, while they perfect new plans for destroying you. Really, you are quite a caliph."

"Oh, there's a dash of speed in the old horse yet, Miss Rucy," he assured her laughingly. "Now listen; don't tell anybody about your brother, and don't tell Billy about my adventures since he left for San Miguel de Padua."

"But I'm not liable to see Billy—"

"Yes, you are—extremely liable. I'm going to send him back to you as soon as I can spare him, because I know you'll be lonesome and bored to death in this lonesome town, and Bill is bully good company. And I don't want you to tell him about the mess I'm in, because it would only worry him; he can't aid me, and the knowledge that I was in any danger, real or fancied, would be sufficient to cause him to rebel against my plans for his honeymoon—for his vacation. He'd insist on sticking around to protect me. He looked down at her little hand where it rested in his, so big and brown and hard; with his free hand he patted her hand paternally. "Good-by, Seeress," he said again; and turning to the steps, he leaped aboard just as the train started to move out of the station.

"Good—good-by—Caliph," she called mournfully. Then to herself: "Bless his heart, he did remember I'd be terribly lonely, after all. He isn't a bit queer, but oh, dear, he is so exasperating. I could bump his kind old head against a wall!" She turned her back on the train, fearful that from where he clung on the steps he could, even at that distance, see the sudden rush of tears that blinded her. However, Don Juan Cafetero, with his rubicund nose to the window of the last coach, did see them—saw her grope toward the carriage waiting to take her back to the hotel.

"Why, shure, the poor darlint's cryin'," he reflected. "Be the Great Gun an' Athlone! Shure I cought all along 'twas Billy Geary she had her eye on—God love him! An' he the same token, didn't she tell me I was to shay sober an' take care av Mishter Webster. Hab-hab-a-a! Well! I'll say nothin' an' I'll be neutral, but—but—but—"

From which it may be inferred that romance was not yet burned out of Don Juan's Gaelic soul. He would be "neutral," but—but—but—he reserved the right to butt in!

Continued in next issue.

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