

Webster—Man's Man

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

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CHAPTER XI—Continued.

Dolores' voice broke in upon his sun-ning reflections. "But Billy tells me you already have a fortune sufficient for the needs of a caliph without a court. Why risk your previous 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 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 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 backed over the traces. No, heart! 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—the game of life. So sweet when a fellow's taking chances! Now that I am fairly prosperous again, the only thing to life that really matters is the un-

certainly as to whether, when finally I do leave Sobrante, I shall ride to the steamship landing in a hack or a hearse."

"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 that manufacture a certain brand 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 owlishly and tell her it was something he couldn't explain to her, because 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 inlet 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 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 called your friend, Jerome?"

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

"Let you find out."

"How much? That \$10,000 you expect to make from the four-gold in your black-and-white claim? And by the way, \$10, please. I won't be 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 seecress who has already jugged me from soul to vermiform appendix by making good! You know too blamed 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 of avystim did any av thim have. Wan offered this in spigotty money an' the other offered that, an' sure if I'd taken the best that was offered me in exchange, ye might have thought 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 shiky-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 leddy'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 dispense the menagerie 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 outstayed Don Juan neatly but not gaudily and added to his own personal effects two high-power sporting rifles, three large-cal-

iber 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 Ruey, 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."

"Harring 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 soliloquized. 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 perch. "And how long do you expect to be gone, Caliph?"

"Quite a while. I'll be busy around that datted 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, Seecress," 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—nor 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 Ruey," 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 a 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, Seecress," 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 hump 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' Athlonie! Shure I tought all along 'twas Billy Geary she had her eye on—God love him! An' be the same token, didn't she tell me I was to stay 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 harnessed out of Don Juan's Gaelic soul. He would be "neutral," but—but—but—he reserved the right to butt in!

CHAPTER XII

Arrived at San Miguel de Padua about midnight, Webster found the climate temperate, in fact, decidedly cool. Billy was waiting for them and was properly amazed, but not scandalized when Don Juan Cafetero, abusing the station hands in a horrible hodgepodge of English and Spanish, superintended the landing of the baggage on the platform.

"I had to bring him with me," Webster explained. "I'm going to wear him, and after that baby quits crying for his bottle, believe me, Bill, we'll have the prince of a foreman for our mine. Quite a character, is Don Juan, when you dig down into him."

"Dig far enough into that ruin and you'll find fire crackers," Billy admitted. "However, John, I'm afraid he won't explode. The powder's damp. How did you leave Dolores?"

"Fit as a fiddle, Bill."

"How does she stack up on better acquaintance, Johnny?"

"She's a skookum lass. She sent her love and I promised to send you back to her P. D. Q. So don't bother me with talk about her. You'll see her again in a week or ten days, I hope."

"No? Is that so, Johnny? Billy for you, you old waanup cat. Tell Don Juan to steer you over to the Globo de Oro. He knows the place. I've got to go and hire a mule or some other quadruped for Don Juan if we're to avoid a late start in the morning. Good night, old fellow."

They were up at daybreak, and with three heavily laden pack mules in charge of two semi-sadken monos, while the cook jogged comfortably along on his big splay feet in the rear, they set out for Billy's concession.

For 30 miles they followed the highway, and then debouched to the southwest along a neglected road just wide enough to accommodate the clumsy ox carts of the peons. The country was sparsely settled and evidently given over to stock raising.

Darkness had descended on the valley by the time they had pitched camp at the claim. They were up at dawn the following morning, however, and immediately after breakfast Jack Webster went to his duffle bag and brought forth a dozen little canvas sacks and a prospector's hammer.

"Now then, William, my son," he announced, "light the lantern and we'll see if you've forgotten all I taught you about mining."

They clambered up the dump to a point where two light steel rails projected over the edge. On top of the dump, lying beside the rails, were two small, rusty, steel ore cars; the rails led from the edge of the dump to the mouth of a tunnel in the hillside and disappeared therein.

Webster stood a moment, looking around him. "How did you happen to locate this ledge?" he demanded. "Was it grass root stuff, with an outcropping here at the foot of the hill? No, of course, it wasn't. You haven't enough ore on the dump. What the devil were you doing at?"

"Only a small portion of that dump is mine, Jack, and I didn't locate the ground originally. I came into this valley from the south, and as I worked up the range, I found a bald spot close to the top of the hill, and a gallovs frame over an abandoned shaft. Naturally, I went down the shaft to see why it had been abandoned. To my surprise, I found a 12-foot vein of free-milling ore, on a contact between sandstone and Silurian limestone. The ledge stood straight up and down,

which seemed to argue great depth." "Somebody had found an outcropping on top of that hill," Webster declared with conviction, "and sunk a shaft on the vein to open it up and determine its width and direction. And what did you do, Bill?"

"I got my transit and ran a line from the shaft on the hill, following the direction in which the ledge was running, and marked out the exact point toward the base of the hill where I would start my tunnel to cut the ledge. To my surprise, I discovered my predecessor had selected that identical spot. So I verified my calculations and then sat down to think it over. I remembered that frequent and violent earthquakes occur in this country, and it seemed to me a reasonable hypothesis to blame some ancient and particularly violent seismic disturbance, which had faulted the vein and set it over a considerable distance. According to my calculation, that other man should have cut the vein at 83 feet—yet he had gone on 102 before quitting. So I got half a dozen peeps and drove ahead 19 feet on the other fellow's tunnel; and by Heck, Johnny, I cut the vein!"

"Bully boy! And then?"

"I drifted ten feet on the vein, and the ore suddenly gave out. It stopped just like that, proving I'd come to the upper end of the vein where it had faulted; so I just worked up and arooth, stoping and sinking a wise here and there, until just about the time my cash reserve was getting pretty low I poked up the true vein and opened it up for the full width. Come in, and I'll show you."

They entered the tunnel, to the signal dismay of dozens of large bats. When they reached the vein, Webster broke off samples of the ore every three or four feet, crawled after Billy up through the stopes and back to the true vein, from the face of which he also took numerous samples; then he crawled out into the sunshine again, hot, dirty, and perspiring.

"Billy, you'll be a real miner yet; see if you won't," was all the praise



"Billy, You'll Be a Real Miner Yet"

he tendered his youthful partner, standing beside him in anticipation of a compliment, as Webster got out his portable assay outfit.

For three days Webster worked, determining the values of each sample, only to find that his assays confirmed Billy's. "You were right, son," he finally announced. "This mine is a humdinger and no mistake; if you and I live ten years we'll be worth \$10,000,000 between us—maybe more."

Billy's jaundiced eyes glowed hungrily. "We'll put in a hundred stamps—"

"Well, we'll try ten for a starter," Webster interrupted dryly, "and add more as the mine pays its way. It's the sweetest mining proposition on earth—only, like all high-class goods, it has one flaw when you examine it closely."

"You're crazy," Billy challenged. "Name the flaw!"

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Derivation of Blackmail. Originally, blackmail was money paid, in troublous times, to protect householders and workers of the land against freebooters. The word "black" did not mean wicked or wrongful, but had the sense of to cherish or protect. This was a customary tribute of money, corn, cattle or the like anciently paid in the northern counties of England or Scotland for protection against pillage, just as insurance is now paid to corporations formed to provide it for a consideration. In the course of time the word took on added meanings, just as almost every other word has, and today it represents an attempt to hold up and defraud by means of intimidation and threats.

Dig Fish From Mud. In less civilized parts of the continent of Africa—on the Gambia river, for example—we find fish-spearing as well as mud-searching. The West African negroes are very fond of the "mud-eel," which, according to some naturalists, ought to be classed as a reptile, on account of its foot-like fins. When the floods subside thousands of these are left high and dry, and promptly bury themselves in the mud, which soon becomes hard and earthy, and here they would remain till the next inundation if the negroes did not come along with wooden forks and dig them out.—Hutchings.

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