

Webster -Man's Man

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CHAPTER XIII—Continued.

"I think so. I dare say Ricardo hopes to take Sarros by surprise, bottle the city garrison up in the quarter and the government palace and there besiege them. Having secured nominal control of a seaport, he can import arms and ammunition; also he can recruit openly, and at his leisure hunt down the outlying garrisons. The Sarros crowd doesn't suspect his presence in Sobrante, and by a quick, savage stroke he should be able to jerk this one-horse government up by the heels in jig time—particularly since the citizenry feel no loyalty toward the Sarros regime and are only kept in subjection through fear and lack of a leader. I'm going to play Ricardo to win, if he isn't killed in the opening row, for I'm certain he'll lead his men."

"I dare say he is greatly like his father—not afraid to die for his country," she replied presently. "I am glad to be here when he takes that risk."

"Oh, but you mustn't be here," Webster protested.

"Why?"

"Because there'll be street fighting—probably of a desperate character, and I understand your countrymen go rather war-mad and do things not sanctioned by The Hague tribunal. If there's a steamer in port at the time I'll put you aboard her until the issue is decided. I'm going to see Ricardo tomorrow night and learn the details of his plan of campaign; after that I'll be able to act intelligently."

Ricardo Ruey, with Dr. Pacheco and Colonel Caraveo, were engaged in consultation when Jack Webster, having left the Hotel Mateo via his bedroom window in order to avoid possible espionage and made his way to El Buen Amigo on foot, was announced by Mother Jenks. The three conspirators greeted him joyously, as indeed they should, for his loyal friendship had thus far been one of their principal bulwarks.

"Well," Webster inquired, after greeting them and carefully closing the door behind him, "here I am in Buenaventura, marking time and, like Mr. Micawber, waiting for something to turn up."

"You will not be required to wait long," Colonel Caraveo assured him. "Thanks to your kindly offices, the trap is already baited."

"Our friend, Ruey, has, since our first meeting, insisted on dispensing with my consent when using me to promote his enterprises, Colonel. Strange to say, I have been unable to berate him for his impudence. I was down at Leber's warehouse this afternoon. You have enough road-making tools consigned to me there to build a pretty fair highway to the gates of the government palace, I should say. I hope you have all pondered the result to me, an innocent bystander, if your enemies should take a notion to open one of those cases of shovels."

Colonel Caraveo favored him with a benignant smile. "You forget, my friend, that I am second in command in the intelligence department, and that during the absence of your particular friend, Rnoul Sarros, in New Orleans, I am first in command. Since I already know what those cases contain, naturally I shall not take the trouble to investigate."

"Well, that's a comfort, Colonel." "You have investigated your mining concession, Webster?" Ricardo Ruey asked.

"You bet."

"What did you find?"

"A couple of millions in sight."

Ricardo shook his head slowly. "It is not in sight, old man," he reminded Webster. "Without our aid—and you cannot have our aid unless our reputation is successful, when you shall have it freely—your millions are, most positively, not in sight. If you want those millions, friend Webster, there is but one way to get them—and that is to close your eyes and play our game to the limit. I wonder if you'd go further—about \$40,000 further, to be exact."

"I might, but I never go it blind for a wad like that. What's your trouble?"

"The individual in charge of the funds of the revolutionary junta in New Orleans was murdered last night;

the funds were deposited to his credit as agent in a certain bank, and before the junta can obtain legal possession of them again the psychological time for their use will have passed. "We have a steamer chartered, and 200 men, whose business it is to fight under any flag at \$5 gold per day and no questions asked, are now marking time on the Isle of Pines, off the coast of Cuba, waiting for our steamer to call for them and land them, with their rifles and ammunition and six 75-millimeter field guns and some rapid-fire Maxims, at San Bruno, some 18 miles up the coast from here."

"The guns and munitions are now in Tampa, having been shipped to our agent there on sight draft, with bill of lading attached; the steamer is chartered and en route to Tampa from Norfolk, Va., and we must pay the owners \$10,000 the day she begins taking on her cargo, and \$10,000 before she unloads it on lighters at San Bruno."

"We must also pay 200 men one month's pay in advance—that is, \$30,000; we cannot meet this expense and still take up that sight draft now awaiting our attention in the bank at Tampa."

"In return for this favor to the provisional government of Sobrante, you shall have the note of the provisional president, myself, and the provisional cabinet, Dr. Pacheco, Colonel Caraveo, and two other gentlemen whom you will meet in due course unless in the interim they should be killed. And as a bonus for saving this country from a brutal dictator, who is pillaging its resources for his personal profit, you shall have a deed of gift to that mining concession you and your friend, Geary, are so desirous of working; also the title shall be certified by the government and the Supreme court of Sobrante and absolutely secured to you against future aggression in the event that the new regime should be overthrown at some future date. Also you have my profound gratitude and that of my people."

"Tell me your plan of campaign," Webster suggested.

"In a secret rendezvous in the mountains I have 1,000 picked men—my father's veterans. They are armed with modern rifles and machetes. The nitrate company, which has been suffering from heavy export duties imposed by Sarros, has loaned me all the rolling stock of the railroad for one night. It will be mobilized at San Miguel de Padua by next Saturday night; my troops will arrive late the same afternoon and entrain at once."

"In the interim all telephone and telegraph communications with Buenaventura will be severed. The night previous our steamer will have discharged her cargo of men and munitions at San Bruno; a chain of outposts will at once be established and all communication with the capital will be shut off."

"On Saturday night, also, the Consolidated Fruit company's steamer, La Estrellita, will make port with 30 Americans in her stowage. These men will be road-makers and miners imported by Mr. J. S. Webster, and in order to make certain that they will come, you have already ordered them by cable. We have arranged with the port doctor to give La Estrellita a clean bill of health the very night she arrives. Hence the ship's authorities will not be suspicious. I hope, when we remove our men after dark and house them in Leber's warehouse, where they will spend the night unpacking those spades, picks and shovels of yours and getting the factory grease off them."

"At 4 o'clock in the morning various citizens of Sobrante, with rebellion in their hearts, will begin to mobilize at Leber's warehouse, where they will be issued rifles and ammunition and where they will wait until the action is opened to the south by the detachment from San Bruno, which, having marched from San Bruno the night before, will have arrived outside the city, and will be awaiting the signal from me. I will attack from the west—cautiously."

"Now, there are 5,000 government troops in the city and in various cantonments on the outskirts. These cantonments are to be rushed and set afire; I figure that the confusion of our sudden attack will create a riot—particularly when I do something that isn't very popular as a war feature—down this way, and that is charge—and keep on coming."

"The government troops will start to fall back on the city, only to find themselves flanked by a fierce artillery fire from the San Bruno contingent; the troops from the arsenal, the guards at the palace and the Fifteenth regiment of infantry, now stationed at the Cuartel de Infanteria, next the government palace, will be dispatched post haste to repulse the attack, and 400 men, with the machine gun company waiting in Leber's warehouse, will promptly move upon them from the rear and capture the arsenal. There are a few thousand rifles and a lot of ammunition stored there; I miss my guess if, as soon as the news of its capture by the rebels spreads through the city (and I shall have men to spread it), I shall not have a few thousand volunteers eager to help overthrow Sarros."

"Once cut off from the arsenal and the palace, Sarros must fight his way out of the city in order to have the slightest chance to suppress the rebellion, for he will have no refuge in the city. And with the railroad and all the rolling stock in our hands, without a commissary for his troops, without a base of supplies, even should the government troops fight their way through, they leave the city in my hands and I'll recruit and arm my men and hunt them down like jack rabbits at my leisure. Once let the arsenal and the palace fall into my hands, once let me proclaim myself provisional president, once let the people know that Ricardo Ruey, the beloved, lives again in the person of his son, and I tell you, Webster, this country is saved. How do you like my plan of campaign?"

"It couldn't be any better if I had planned it myself. You might accept my suggestion and armor that little motor truck of mine. It arrived on yesterday's steamer."

"And some armor sheet steel with it—sheet steel already loop-holed for the barrels of the two machine guns it will carry!" Dr. Pacheco cried joyously.

"Have you provided a chauffeur, Doctor?"

"I have—likewise an armored sheet-steel closet for him to sit in while chauffeuring."

"How about that loan to the provisional government?" Ricardo demanded pointedly.

Webster did not hesitate. After all, what was money to him now? Billy had gone away, his hopes raised high, already a millionaire after the fashion of mining men, who are ever ready to count their chicks before they are hatched, provided only they see the eggs. Besides, there was Dolores. Full well Webster realized that Billy, tossed back once more into the jaws of the well-known wolf of poverty, would not have the courage upon his return to Sobrante to ask Dolores to share his poverty with him; should



"Tell Me Your Plan of Campaign."

the revolution fall, Ricardo Ruey would be an outcast, a hunted man with a price on his head, and in no position to care for his sister, even should he survive long enough to know he had a sister. She would be alone in the world if he, John Stuart Webster, failed her now—more than ever she needed a man's strength and affection to help her navigate the tide-rips of life, for life to a woman, alone and unprotected and dependent upon her labor for the bread she must eat, must contain, at best, a full measure of terror and despair and loneliness. He pictured her through a grim procession of years of skimping and petty sacrifices—and all because he, John Stuart Webster, had hesitated to lend a dreamer and an idealist a paltry \$40,000 without security.

No, there was no alternative. If his friendship for Billy was worth a son, it was worth \$40,000; if his silent, unrequited love for Dolores Ruey was worthy of her, no sacrifice on his part could be too great, provided it guaranteed her happiness.

"Ruined again," he sighed. "This is only another of those numerous occasions when the tail goes with the hide. How soon do you want the money?"

Ricardo Luis Ruey leaned forward and gazed very earnestly at John Stuart Webster. "Do you really trust me that much, my friend?" he asked feelingly. "Remember, I am asking you for \$40,000 on faith."

"Old sport," John Stuart Webster answered, "you went overboard in Buenaventura harbor and took a chance among those big, liver-colored, hammer-headed sharks. And you did that because you had a cause you thought worth dying for. I never knew a man who had a cause that was worth dying for who would even espouse a cause worth swindling for. You win—only I want you to understand one thing, Ricardo: I'm not

doing this for the sake of saving that mining concession the Sarros government gave my friend, Geary. I'm above doing a thing like this for money—for myself. It seems to me I must do it to guarantee the happiness of two people I love: My friend, Geary, and the girl he's going to marry. I reject your promissory note and your promise of a deed of gift for that concession, and accept only your gratitude. There are no strings to this loan, because it isn't a loan at all. It's a bet. If you lose, I'll help you get out of the country and absolve you of any indebtedness to me. However, if you should win, I know you'll reimburse me from the national treasury."

"And you do not desire a bonus?" "Nothing that will cost the citizens of this country one penny of their heritage. I'm going to bet this money—bet it, understand, not loan it. However, if you want to be a sport and grant me a little favor in return, you can."

"Fire away."

"After I give you this money, I don't want the doctor and the colonel to kiss me to show how grateful they are."

"You wonderful fellow! Jack Webster, if I had a sister I should want her to marry you."

"Show how little you'd think of your sister—stating her to a sentimental jackass. Shall I cable the money to New Orleans in the morning?"

"That will do very nicely."

"To whom shall I cable the money?"

"Send it to the Playvonne National bank of New Orleans, with instructions to credit account No. 246, J. E. P., trustee. In this little game we are playing, my friend, it is safer to deal in numbers and initials rather than names. The local cable office leaks quite regularly."

"Very well, Ricardo, I'll attend to it first thing in the morning. Go to it and win, or there'll be several new faces whining around the devil, not the least of which will be mine. When you charge, remember you're charging for my \$40,000—and go through with it. I worked rather hard for that \$40,000, and if I must lose it, I do not want to do it in a half-hearted fight. Give me, at least, a bloody run for my money. I'll have a reserved seat somewhere watching the game."

"If you'll take my advice, you'll go aboard La Estrellita and stay there until the issue is decided. When the first gun is fired, it signals the open season on mining engineers who butt in on affairs of state."

"What! And me with a healthy bet down on the result! I hope I'm a better sport than that."

"You're incorrigible. Be careful, then, and don't get yourself potted by a stray bullet."

"Shall I see you fellows before the blow-off?"

"I scarcely think so."

"Then if you're through with me, I'll bid you all good-by and good luck. I'll have dinner with you in the palace Sunday evening."

"May I bring a guest?"

"By all means."

Webster shook hands with the trio and departed for his hotel. For the first time in many years he was heavy of heart, crushed. "Neddy Jerome was right," he soliloquized. "This is the last place on earth for me to have come to. I've made Neddy sore on me, and he's lost patience and put another man in the job he promised me; I've raised Billy's hopes sky-high and had to bet \$40,000 to keep them there; I've been fool enough to fall in love with my friend's fiancée; I'm a human cat's paw, and the finest thing I can do now is to go out next Sunday morning with that machine gun company from Leber's warehouse and get killed."

CHAPTER XIV.

The following morning Webster informed Dolores fully of his interview with her brother and his confederates the night before, concealing from her only the fact that he was financing the revolution and his reasons for financing it. He was still depressed, and Dolores, observing his mood, forbore to intrude upon it. Accordingly she claimed the prerogative of her sex—a slight headache—and retreated to her room, in the privacy of which she was suddenly very much surprised to find herself weeping softly because John Stuart Webster was unhappy and didn't deserve to be.

It was impossible, however, for Webster long to remain impervious to the note of ridiculousness underlying the forthcoming tragic events. Here was a little 2x4 poverty-stricken hot-bed of ignorance and intrigue calling itself a republic, a little stretch of country no larger than a couple of big western counties, about to indulge in the national pastime of civil war and unable to do it except by grace of an humble citizen of a sister republic!

Five or six thousand ignorant, ill-equipped, ill-drilled semi-brigands calling themselves soldiers, entrusted with the task of enabling one of their number to ride, horse and dog, over 1,000,000 people!

How farcical! No wonder Ricardo,

with his northern viewpoint, approached his patriotic task with gayety, almost with contempt. And when Webster recalled that the about-to-be-born provisional government had casually borrowed from him the sum of forty thousand dollars in order to turn the trick—borrowing it, forsooth, in much the same spirit a commuter boarding his train without the necessary fare halts a neighbor and borrows ten cents—his natural optimism asserted itself, and he chuckled as in fancy he heard himself telling the story to Neddy Jerome and being branded a liar for his pains.

"Well, I've had one comfort ever since I first saw that girl," he reflected philosophically. "While I've never been so unhappy as all my life before, or had to tear my soul out by the roots so often, things have been coming my way so fast from other directions that I haven't had much opportunity to dwell on the matter. And for these compensating offsets, good Lord, I thank Thee."

He was John Stuart Webster again when Dolores saw him next; during the succeeding days his mood of cheerfulness and devil-may-care indifference never left him. And throughout that period of marking time Dolores was much in his society, a condition which he told himself was not to his liking but which, nevertheless, he could not obviate without seeming indifferent to her happiness. And to permit his friend's fiancée to languish in loneliness and heart-break did not appear to John Stuart Webster as the part of a true friend or a courtly gentleman—and he remembered that she had once called him that.

They rode together in the cool of the morning; they drove together on the Malecon in the cool of the evening; chaperoned by Doñ Juan Cafetero and a grinning Sobrantean, they went shark fishing in Leber's lancha; they played dominoes together; they discussed, throughout the long, lazy, quiet afternoons, when the remainder of their world retired for the siesta, books, art, men, women, and things.

And not once, throughout two weeks of camaraderie, did the heart-racked Webster forget for a single instant that he was the new friend destined to become the old friend; never, to the girl's watchful eyes, did he betray the slightest disposition to establish their friendly relations on a closer basis.

Thus did the arrival of The Day find them. Toward sunset they rode out together along the bay shore and noted far out to sea the smear of smoke that marked the approach of La Estrellita—on schedule time.

"You will go aboard her tonight," Webster said very quietly to Dolores.

"And you?"

"I shall go aboard with you. I have arranged with Don Juan for him to stay ashore and to come out in Leber's lancha with the first reliable news of the conflict. If Ricardo wins the city, he wins the revolution, and you and I will then go ashore—to dine with him in the palace. If he loses the city, he loses the revolution, and we will both do well to remain aboard La Estrellita."

"And in that event, what will become of my brother?"

"I do not know; I forgot to ask him, but if he survives, I imagine he'll have sense enough to know he's whipped and will retreat on San Bruno, fighting a rear guard action, embark aboard the steamer that brought his men there, and escape."

"I'm worried about Mother Jenks."

"I have asked Mother Jenks to dine with us at 7:30 this evening, and have ordered a carriage to call for her. When she comes I'll tell her everything; then, if she wishes to stay ashore, let her. She's been through more than one such fracas and doesn't mind them at all, I dare say."

And in this Webster was right. Mother Jenks listened in profound silence, nodding her approval, as Webster related to her the story of the advent in the country of Ricardo Ruey and his plans, but without revealing the identity of Andrew Bowers.

At the conclusion of his recital the old publican merely said: "Gor' bil' me!"

After a silence she added: "My sainted 'Enry used to s'y the proper hods for a white man in a bally row o' this nature was 40 to 1. Gor', but how my sainted 'Enry would henjoy bettin' 're this night to 'elp with the guns." She sighed.

"How about a little bottle of wine to drink peace to your sainted 'Enry and luck to The Cause?" Webster suggested.

"That's wot I calls talkin'," Mother Jenks responded promptly, and Webster, gazing reflectively at the old lady's beard, wondered why she had not been born a man.

Dolores, fearful for her benefactor's safety, urged Mother Jenks to accompany them out aboard La Estrellita, but the old dame indignantly refused, and when pressed for a reason gave it with the utmost frankness: "They'll be tykin' Sarros, an' when they tyke 'im they'll back him ag'in the same wall be backed my sainted 'Enry and your father against, my dear. I've a notion that your father's son'll let Mrs. Col. 'Enry Jenks come to the party."

(TO BE CONTINUED.)