

CHAPTER IX.

Prior to leaving New Orleans, Webster had cabled Billy Geary that he was taking passage on La Estrellita and stating the approximate date of his arrival at San Buenaventura—whence information descended upon that young man with something of the charm of a gentle rainfall over a hitherto arid district. He had been seeing Dolores Ruey at least once a day ever since her return to Sobrante. He was quick, therefore, to seize upon Webster's cablegram as an excuse to call upon Dolores and explain the mystery surrounding his friend's nonappearance.

"Well, Dolores," he began, in his excitement calling her by her first name for the first time, "I've heard from Jack Webster."

"What's the news, Billy?" Dolores inquired. From the first day of their acquaintance she had been growing increasingly fond of Geary; for nearly a week she had been desirous of calling him Billy, which is a comfortable name and, to Dolores' way of thinking, a peculiarly appropriate cognomen for such a distinctly American young man. At mention of the beloved word he glanced down at her pleasantly.

"Thank you," he said. "I'm glad you got around to it finally. Those that love me always call me Billy."

"You called me Dolores."

"I move we make it unanimous. I'm a foe to formality."

"Second the motion, Bill. So am I—when I care to be—and in our case your formality is spoiling our comradeship. And now, with reference to the extraordinary Senor Webster—"

"Why, the poor old horse has been down with pneumonia poisoning. They carried him off the train at St. Louis and stood him on his head and pumped him out, and just did manage to cancel his order for a new tombstone. He says he's feeling regularly again and has looked passage on La Estrellita, so we can look for him on the next steamer arriving."

"Oh, the poor fellow!" Dolores murmured—so fervently that Billy was on the point of hurrying his heart at her feet on the instant.

The thousand dollars Webster had cabled Billy "for a road-stake" had been dwindling rapidly under the stimulus of one continuous opportunity to spend the same in a quarter where it was calculated to bring the most joy. Mr. Geary was absolutely bogged in the quagmire of his first love affair, but until his mining concession should amply justify an avowal of his passion, an instinctive sense of the eternal fitness of things reminded Billy of the old proverb that a closed mouth catches no flies. And in the meantime (such is the optimism of youth) he decided there was no need for worry, for when a girl calls a fellow Billy, when she tells him he's a scout and doesn't care a whoop for any society except his—caramba! it's great!

A wireless from Webster warned Billy of the former's imminent arrival. Just before sunset Billy and Dolores, riding along the Malecon, sighted a blur of smoke far out to sea—a blur that grew and grew until they could make out the graceful white hull of La Estrellita, before the swift tropic night descended and the lights of the great vessel shimmered across the harbor.

"Too late to clear quarantine tonight," Billy murmured, as he and Dolores rode back to her hotel. "All the same, I'm going to borrow the launch



"That You, Billy?" He Shouted.

of my good friend Leber and his protegee Don Juan Cafetero, and go out to the steamer tonight. I can leave to a little way from the steamer and welcome the old rascal, anyhow."

Fortunately, good little Leber consented to Billy's request, and Don Juan Cafetero was sober enough to turn the engine over and run the launch. From the deck of the steamer Webster,

Webster—Man's Man

By PETER B. KYNE

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

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smoking his post-prandial cigar, caught sight of the launch's red and green sidelights chugging through the inky blackness; as the little craft slid up to within a cable's length of the steamer and hove to, something told Webster that Billy Geary would soon be paging him. He edged over to the rail.

"That you, Billy?" he shouted. "Hey! Jack, old pal!" Billy's delighted voice answered him.

"I knew you'd come, Billy boy. I knew you'd know it, Johnny. Can't come aboard, you know, until the ship clears, but I can lie off here and say hello. How is your internal mechanism?"

"Grand. However, your query reminds me I haven't taken the medicine the doctor warned me to take after meals for a couple of weeks. Wait a minute, Bill, until I go to my stateroom and do my duty to my stomach."

For ten minutes Billy and Don Juan Cafetero bobbed about in the launch; then a stentorian voice shouted from the steamer. "Hey, you! In the launch, there. Not so close. Back off."

Don Juan kicked the launch back fifty feet. "That will do," the voice called again.

"Hello!" Billy soliloquized. "That's Jack Webster's voice. Wonder what he's up to. I thought he acted strangely—preferring medicine to me the minute I hailed him!"

While he was considering the matter, a voice behind him said very softly and indistinctly, like a man with a harlequin:

"Mr. Geary, will you be good enough to back your launch a couple of hundred feet? When I'm certain I can't be seen from the steamer, I'll come aboard."

Billy turned, and in the dim light of his binnacle lamp observed a beautiful pair of white hands grasping the gunwale on the starboard quarter. He peered over and made out the head and shoulders of a man.

"All right," he replied in a low voice. "Hang where you are, and you'll be clear of the propeller."

He signaled Don Juan, who backed swiftly away, while Billy doused the binnacle lamp.

"That'll do," the thick voice said presently. "Bear a hand, friend, and I'll climb over."

He came, as naked as Mercury, sprawled on his belly in the cockpit, opened his mouth, spat out a compact little roll of tin foil, opened it and drew out a ball of paper which he flattened out on the floor of the cockpit and handed to Billy.

"Thank you," he said, very courteously and distinctly now. "My credentials, Mr. Geary, if you please."

Billy relighted the lamp and read: "Dear Billy:

"I do not know the bearer from Adam's off ox; all I know about him is that he has all the outward marks of a gentleman, the courage of a bear-cat, a sense of humor and a head for which the presidents of Sobrante will gladly pay a considerable number of pesos oro. Don't give up the head, because I like it and we do not need the money—yet. Take him ashore with you, anybody knowing it; hide him, clothe him, feed him—then forget all about him."

"Ever thine,
"J. S. WEBSTER."

"Kick the boat ahead again, Cafetero!" Billy ordered quietly. He turned to the late arrival. "Mr. Man, your credentials are all in apple-pie order. Do you happen to know that this bay is swarming with man-eating sharks?"

The man raised a fine, strong, youthful face and grinned at him. "Hobson's choice, Mr. Geary," he replied. "Afloat or ashore, the sharks are after me. Sir, I am your debtor." He crawled into the cabin and stretched out on the settee as John Stuart Webster's voice came floating across the dark waters.

"Everything well with you, Billy?"

"All is lovely, Jack, and the goose honks high. By the way, that friend of yours called with his letter of introduction. I took care of him."

"Thanks. I suppose you'll call for me in that launch tomorrow morning?"

"I'll be there."

"I'll be there."

"I'll be there."

"I'll be there."

"Surest thing you know, Jack, about flight, old top."

"Good-night, Billy."

Don Juan Cafetero swung the launch and headed back for the city. At Leber's little dock Billy stepped ashore, while Don Juan backed out into the dark bay again in order to avoid inquisitive visitors. Billy hastened to El Buen Amigo and returned presently with a bundle of clothes; at an agreed signal Don Juan kicked the launch into the dock again and Billy went aboard.

"Hat, shirt, necktie, duck suit, white socks and shoes," he whispered. "Climb into them, stranger."

Once more the launch backed out in the bay, where Webster's protegee dressed at his leisure, and Billy handed Don Juan a couple of pesos.

"Remember, John," he cautioned the bibulous one as they tied up for the night. "Nothing unusual happened tonight."

"Divil a thing, Mither Geary. Thank you, sir," the Gaelic wreck replied blithely and disappeared in the darkness, leaving Billy to guide the stranger to El Buen Amigo, where he was taken into the confidence of Mother Jenks and, on Billy's guarantee of the left bill, furnished with a room and bed to his own devices.

John Stuart Webster came down the gangplank into Leber's launch hard at the heels of the port doctor.

"You young horse thief," he cried, affectionately. "I believe it's the custom down this way for men to kiss each other. We'll dispense with that, but by—"

"He folded Billy in a paternal embrace, then held him at arm's length and looked him over."

"Lord, son," he said, "you're as thin as a snake. I'll have to feed you up."

As they sped toward the landing, he looked Billy over once more. "I have it," he declared. "You need a change of climate to get rid of that malaria. Just above this little old mining claim of yours, Bill, and then hike for God's country. Three months up there will put you right again, and by the time you get back, we'll be about ready to weigh the first cleanup."

Billy shook his head. "I'd like to mighty well, Jack," he replied, "but I just can't."

"Huh! I suppose you don't think I'm equal to the task of straightening out this concession of yours and making a hummer out of it, eh?"

The young fellow looked across at him sheepishly. "Mine?" he jeered. "Who's talking about a mine. I'm thinking of a girl!"

"Oh!"

"Some girl, Johnny."

"I hope she's not some parakeet," Webster bantered. "Have you looked up her pedigree?"

"Ah-h-h!" Billy spat over the side in sheer disgust. "This is an American girl—born here, but white—raised in the U. S. A. I've only known her three weeks, but—ah!" And Billy kissed his hand into space.

"Well, I'm glad I find you so happy, boy. When do you pull off the wedding?"

"Oh," said Billy, "that's premature, Jack. I haven't asked her. How could I until I'm able to support her?"

"Look here, son," Webster replied, "don't you go to work and be the kind of fool I was. You get married and take a chance. A man ought to marry young, Bill. Hang the odds. I know what's good for you."

At the hotel Billy sent a note to Dolores, advising her that John Stuart Webster had arrived—and would she be good enough to receive them?

Miss Ruey would be that gracious. She was waiting for them in the veranda just off the patio, outwardly calm, but inwardly a foment of conflicting emotions. As they approached she affected not to see them and turning, glanced in the opposite direction; nor did she move her head until Billy's voice, speaking at her elbow, said:

"Well, Dolores, here's my old Jack-partner waiting to be introduced. Jack, permit me to present Miss Dolores Ruey."

She turned her face and rose gracefully, marking with secret triumph the light of recognition that leaped to her eyes, hovered there the hundredth part of a second and departed, leaving those keen, quizzical blue orbs appraising her in the most natural manner imaginable. Webster bowed.

"It is a great happiness to meet you, Miss Ruey," he said gravely.

Dolores gave him her hand. "You have doubtless forgotten, Mr. Webster, but I think we have met before."

"Indeed!" John Stuart Webster murmured interestedly. "So stupid of me not to remember. Where did we meet?"

"He has a profound sense of humor," she soliloquized. "He's going to force me into the open. Oh, dear, I'm helpless." Aloud she said: "On the train in Death Valley last month, Mr. Webster."

Webster shook his head slowly, as if mystified. "I fear you're mistaken, Miss Ruey. I wasn't on the train in Death Valley last month. I was in Denver—so you must have met some other Mr. Webster."

She flushed furiously. "I didn't

think I could be mistaken," she answered a trifle coldly.

"It is my misfortune that you were," he replied graciously. "Certainly, had we met at that time, I should not have failed to recognize you now. Somehow, Miss Ruey, I never, have any luck."

She was completely outgeneraled, and having the good sense to realize it, submitted gracefully. "He's perfectly horrible," she told herself, "but at least he can lie like a gentleman—and I always did like that kind of man."

So they chatted on the veranda until luncheon was announced and Dolores left them to go to her room.

"Well?" Billy queried the moment she was out of earshot. "What do you think, Johnny?"

"I think," said John Stuart Webster, slowly, "that you're a good picker, Bill. She's my ideal of a fine young woman, and my advice to you is to marry her. I'll grub-stake you. Bill, this stiff collar is choking me; I wish you'd wait here while I go to my room and rustle up a soft one."

In the privacy of his room John Stuart Webster sat down on his bed and held his head in his hands, for he had just received a blow in the solar plexus and was still groggy. Presently, however, he pulled himself together and approaching the mirror looked long at his weather-beaten countenance.

"Too old," he murmured, "too old to be dreaming dreams."

He changed to a soft collar, and when he descended to the patio to join Billy once more he was, to all outward appearances, his usual unperturbed self, for his was one of those rare natures that can derive a certain comfort from the misery of self-sacrifice—and in that five minutes alone in his room John Stuart Webster had wrestled with the tragedy of his life and won.

He had resolved to give Billy the right of way on the highway to happiness.

In Mr. Webster's own whimsical phraseology, his clock had been fixed, on the instant he recognized in the object of his youthful partner's adoration the same winsome woman he had enthroned in his own secret castle of love. From that precise second Billy's preserve was as safe from encroachment by his friend as would be a bale of Confederate currency in an armor-steel vault on the three-thousand-foot level of a water-filled mine.

John Stuart Webster had unanimously resolved upon the course he should have pursued in the first place. He would investigate Billy's mining concession immediately; provided it should prove worth while, he would finance it and put the property on a paying basis; after which he would see to it that the very best doctors in the city of Buenaventura should inform Billy, unofficially and in the strictest confidence, that if he desired to preserve the life of Senor Juan Webster he should forthwith pack that rapidly disintegrating person off to a more salubrious climate.

Having made his decision, John Stuart Webster immediately took heart of hope and decided to lead trumps.

Dolores rejoined them for a siesta after luncheon.

Webster leaned over and slapped Billy Geary's knees affectionately.

"Well, Bill, you saffron-colored old wreck, how long do you suppose it will take for you to pick up enough strength and courage to do some active mining? I'm anxious to get that property on a paying basis, so I can get out of the country."

"Why, Johnny," the amazed Billy declared, "I thought you would stay and help run the mine."

"Indeed! Well, why do you suppose I spent so much time teaching you how to run a mine, you young fellow, if not against just such a time as this? You found this concession and tied it up; I'll finance it and help you get everything started; but after that, I'm through, and you can manage it on salary and name the salary yourself. You have a greater interest in this country than I, William; and so with your kind permission we'll hike up to that concession tomorrow and give it the double-O; then, if I can O. K. the property, we'll cable for the machinery I ordered just before I left Denver, and get busy. We ought to have our first clean-up within ninety days."

"Gosh, but you're in a hurry," Billy murmured. He disliked exceedingly the thought of having his courtship interrupted on a minute's notice.

"You know me, son. I'm a hustler on the job," Webster reminded him brutally; "so the sooner you start, the sooner you can get back and accumulate more malarial. What accommodations have you up there?"

"None, Jack."

"Then you had better get some, Billy. I think you told me we have to take horses at San Miguel de Padua to ride in to the mine." Billy nodded. "Then you had better buy a tent and bedding for both of us, ship the stuff up to San Miguel de Padua, go up with it and engage horses, a good cook, and a couple of reliable

men. When you get to the mine, ready telegraph me and I'll come up."

"Why can't you come up with me?" Billy demanded.

"I have to see a man, and write some letters and send a cablegram and wait for an answer. I may have to loaf around here for two or three days. By the way, what did you do for that friend I sent to you with the letter of introduction?"

"Exactly what you told me to do, Johnny."

"Where is he now?"

"At El Buen Amigo—the same place where I'm living."

"All right. When you get back to your hotel, you might tell my friend I shall expect him over to dine with me this evening, if he can manage it."

For an hour they discussed various subjects; then Billy, declaring the siesta was almost over and the shops reopening as a consequence, announced his intention of doing his shopping, said good-bye to Dolores and Webster, and lugubriously departed on the business in hand.

"Why are you in such a hurry, Mr. Webster?" Dolores demanded. "You haven't been in Buenaventura six hours until you've managed to make me perfectly miserable."

"I'm terribly sorry. I didn't mean to."

"Didn't you know Billy Geary is my personal property?"

"No, but I suspected he might be. Billy's generous that way. He never hesitates to give himself to a charming woman."

"This was a case of mutual self-defense. Billy hasn't any standing socially, you know. When old Mrs. General Maldonado lectured me (the dear, aristocratic soul conceived it to be her duty) on the impropriety of appearing on the Malecon with Billy and my guardian, who happens to be Billy's landlady, I tried to explain our American brand of democracy, but failed. So I haven't been invited anywhere since, and life would have been very dull without Billy. He has been a dear—and you have taken him away."

Webster laughed. "Well, be patient, Miss Ruey, and I'll give him back to you with considerable more money than he will require for your joint comfort. Billy is financial distress is a joy forever, but Billy in a top hat and a frock coat on the sunny side of Easy street will be absolutely irresistible."

"He's a darling. Ever since my arrival he has dedicated his life to keeping me amused," she rose. "Despite your wickedness, Mr. Webster, I am going to be good to you. Billy and I always have five o'clock tea here in the veranda. Would you care to come to my tea-party?"

"Nothing could give me greater pleasure," he assured her.

She nodded brightly to him. "I'm going to run up to my room and put some powder on my nose," she explained.

"But you'll return before five o'clock?" Webster was amazed to hear himself plead.

"You do not deserve such consideration, but I'll come back in about twenty minutes," she answered and left him.

As Webster viewed the situation, his decision to see as little as possible of Dolores during his brief stay in Sobrante was a wise one. The less he saw of her (he told himself), the better for his peace of mind, for he was forty years old, and he had never loved before. For him this fever that burned in his blood, this delicious agony that throbbled in his heart—and all on the very ghost of provocation—were so many danger-signals, heralds of that grand passion which, coming to a man of forty, generally lasts him the remainder of his natural existence.

Webster was forced to admit he was afraid of himself. His was the rapidly disappearing code of the old unlettered West, that a man shall never betray his friend in thought, word, or deed. To John Stuart Webster any crime against friendship was the most heinous in all the calendar of human "milly"; even to dream of slipping into Billy's shoes now would be monstrous; yet Webster knew he could not afford a test of strength between his ancient friendship for Billy and the masculine desire for a perfect mate. Remained then but one course:

"I must run like a road-runner," was the way Webster expressed it.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

Asthma Victims.—The man or woman subject to asthma is indeed a victim. What can be more terrifying than to suddenly be seized with paroxysms of choking which seem to paralyze the existence of life itself. From such a condition Dr. J. D. Kellogg's Asthma Remedy has brought many to completely restored health and happiness. It is known and prized in every section of this broad land.

Everyone reads the "Guide-Advocate Want Column" on page 4.

LAMBTON

The December session of Council opened in St. day of last week. W. Davis presiding.

In his opening address referred briefly to some of world and local interests had occurred since the J. The Empire had been a war over the Near E. He said, but fortunately appeared to have been least temporarily.

Ontario had suffered a and 1,800 families had been homeless and practica by the ravages of fire ar ated, the council might b on for assistance in this as well known, tried to through the bravery of th

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