

Webster —Man's Man

By PETER B. KYNE

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

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SYNOPSIS.

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

CHAPTER II.—At Denver Webster receives a letter from Billy Geary, his closest friend. Geary urges him to come to Sobrante, Central America, to finance 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, ill and penniless, is living on the charity of "Mother Jenks," keeper of a dramsop. 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. 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 is in a hospital at New Orleans two weeks. Geary bumbles his mission, Dolores easily seeing through his story. She greets Mother Jenks as her friend and benefactor. Geary falls desperately in love with the girl.

CHAPTER VII.

Webster reached New Orleans at the end of the first leg of his journey, to discover that he was one day late to board the Atlanta—a banana boat of the Consolidated Fruit company's line plying regularly between New Orleans and San Buenaventura—which necessitated a wait of three days for the steamer La Estrellita of the Caribbean Mail line, running to Caracas and way ports.

He decided to visit the ticket office of the Caribbean Mail line immediately and avoid the rush in case the travel should be heavy.

The steamship office was in Canal street. The clerk was waiting on two well-dressed and palpably low-bred sons of the tropics, to whom he had just displayed a passenger list which the two were scanning critically. Their interest in it was so obvious that unconsciously Webster peeped over their shoulders (no difficult task for one of his stature) and discovered it to be the passenger list of the steamer La Estrellita. They were conversing together in low tones and Webster, who had spent many years of his life following his profession in Mexico, recognized their speech as the bastard Spanish of the peon.

He sat down in the long wall seat and waited until the pair, having completed their scrutiny of the list, turned to pass out. He glanced at them casually. One was a tall thin man whose bloodshot eyes were inclined to "pop" a little—infallible evidence in the Latin-American that he is drinking more hard liquor than is good for him.

His companion was plainly of the same racial stock, although Webster suspected him of a slight admixture of negro blood. He was short, stocky, and aggressive looking; like his companion, bejeweled and possessed of a thin, carefully cultivated moustache that seemed to consist of about nineteen hairs on one side and twenty on the other. Evidently once upon a time, as the story books have it, he had been shot. Webster suspected a Mauser bullet, fired at long range. It had entered his right cheek, just below the malar, ranged downward through his mouth and out through a fold of fatty flesh under his left jaw. It must have been a frightful wound, but it had healed well except at the point of entrance, where it had a tendency to pucker considerably, thus drawing the man's eyelid down on his cheek and giving to that casual organ something of the appearance of a bulldog's.

Webster gazed after them whimsically as he approached the counter.

Children Cry
FOR FLETCHER'S
CASTORIA

"I'd hate to wake up some night and find that hombre with the pucker eye leaning over me. By the way," he continued, suddenly apprehensive, "do you get much of that parakeet travel on your line?"

"About 80 per cent. of it is of color, sir."

Webster pondered the 80-per-cent. probability of being berthed in the same stateroom with one of these people and the prospect was as revolting to him as would be an uninvited negro guest at the dining table of a southern family. He had all a Westerner's hatred for the breed.

"Well, I want a ticket to San Buenaventura," he informed the clerk, "but I don't relish the idea of a Greaser in the same stateroom with me. I wonder if you couldn't manage to fix me with a stateroom all to myself, or at least arrange it so that in the event of company I'll draw a white man."

"I'm sorry, sir, but I cannot guarantee you absolute privacy nor any kind of white man. It's pretty mixed travel to all Central American ports."

"How many berths in your first-class staterooms?"

"Two."

Webster smiled brightly. He had found a way out of the difficulty. "I'll buy 'em both, son," he announced.

"I cannot sell you an entire stateroom, sir. It's against the orders of the company to sell two berths to one man. The travel is pretty brisk and it's hardly fair to the public, you know."

"Well, suppose I buy one ticket for myself and the other for—well, for my valet, let us say. Of course," he added brightly, "I haven't engaged the valet yet and even should I do so I wouldn't be at all surprised if the rascal missed the boat!"

The clerk glanced at him with a slow smile, and pondered. "Well," he said presently, "if you care to buy a ticket for your valet, I'm sure I shouldn't worry whether or not he catches the boat. If my records show that the space is sold to two men and the purser collects two tickets, I think you'll be pretty safe from intrusion."

"To the harassed traveler," said Mr. Webster, "a meeting with a gentleman of your penetration is as refreshing as a canteen of cool water in the desert. Shoot!" and he produced a handful of gold.

"I will—provided I have one empty cabin," and the clerk turned from the counter to consult his record of berths already sold and others reserved but not paid for. Presently he faced Webster at the counter.

"The outlook is very blue," he announced. "However, I have one berth



"The Outlook Is Very Blue."

in No. 34 reserved by a gentleman who was to call for it by two o'clock to-day." He looked at his watch. "It is now a quarter of one. If the reservation isn't claimed promptly at two o'clock I shall cancel it and reserve for you both berths in that room. If you will be good enough to leave me your name and address I will telephone you after that hour. In the meantime, you may make reservation of the other berth in the same stateroom. I feel very confident that the reservation in No. 34 will not be called for, Mr.—"

"Webster—John S. Webster. You are very kind, indeed. I'm at the St. Charles."

"Be there at a quarter after two, Mr. Webster, and you will hear from me promptly on the minute," the clerk assured him; whereupon Webster paid for one berth and departed for his hotel with a feeling that the clerk's report would be favorable.

True to his promise, at precisely a quarter after two, the ticket clerk telephoned Webster at his hotel that the berth in No. 34 had been canceled and the entire stateroom was now at his disposal.

"If you will be good enough to give me the name of your valet," he concluded, "I will fill in both names on my passenger manifest and send the tickets to your hotel by messenger immediately. You can then sign the tickets—I have already signed them as witness—and pay the messenger."

"Well, I haven't engaged that valet as yet," Webster began.

"What's the odds? He's going to miss the boat, anyhow. All I require is a name."

"That ought to be a simple request to comply with. Let me see!"

"I read a book once, Mr. Webster, and the valet in that book was called Andrew Bowers."

"Bowers is a fine old English name. Let us seek no further. Andrew Bowers it is."

"Thank you. All you have to do then is to remember to sign the name, Andrew Bowers, to one ticket. Don't forget your valet's name now, and ball everything up," and the clerk hung up, laughing.

Half an hour later a boy from the steamship office arrived with the tickets, collected for them, and departed, leaving John Stuart Webster singularly pleased with himself and at peace with the entire world.

A "large" dinner at Antoine's that night (Webster had heard of Antoine's dinners, both large and small and was resolved not to leave New Orleans until he had visited the famous restaurant) and a stroll through the picturesque old French quarter and along the levee next day, helped to render his enforced stay in New Orleans delightful, interesting, and instructive. For Sunday he planned an early morning visit to the old French market, around which still lingers much of the picturesque charm and colorful romance of a day that is done—that echo of yesterday, as it were, which has left New Orleans an individuality as distinct as that which the olden, golden, goddess days have left upon San Francisco.

He rose before six o'clock, therefore, found a taxi, with the driver sound asleep inside, at the curb in front of the hotel; gave the latter his instructions, and climbed in.

Opposite Jackson Square the cloying sweetness of palmetto, palm, and fig burdened the air. Above the rumble of the taxi he could hear the distant babel of voices in the French market across the square, so he halted the taxicab, alighted, and handed the driver a bill.

"I want to explore this square," he said. He had recognized it by the heroic statue of General Jackson peeping through the trees. "I'll walk through the square to the market, and you may proceed to the market and meet me there. Later we will return to the hotel."

A Creole girl—starry-eyed, beautiful, rich with the glorious coloring of her race—passed him bound for the cathedral across the square, as Webster thought, for she carried a large prayer book on her arm. His glance followed the girl down the walk.

Presently she halted. A young man rose from a bench where he evidently had been waiting for her, and bowed low, his hat clasped to his breast, as only a Frenchman or a Spanish grandee can bow. Webster saw the Creole girl turn to him with a little gesture of pleasure. She extended her hand and the young man kissed it with old-fashioned courtesy.

John Stuart Webster with reverent and wistful eyes watched their meeting.

"Forty years old," he thought, "and I haven't spoken to a dozen women that caused me a second thought, or who weren't postmistresses or biscuit shooters! Forty years old and I've never been in love! Springtime down that little path and Indian summer in my old fool heart. Why, I ought to be arrested for failure to live!"

The lovers were walking slowly, arm in arm, along the path by which the girl had come, so with a courtesy and gentleness that were innate in him, Webster stepped out of sight behind the statue of Old Hickory; for he did not desire, by his mere presence, to intrude a discordant note in the perfect harmony of those two human hearts. He knew they desired that sylvan path to themselves; that evidently they had sought their early morning tryst in the knowledge that the square was likely to be deserted at this hour.

The young man was speaking as they passed; his voice was rich, pleasant, vibrant with the earnestness of what he had to say: with a pretty little silver mounted walking stick he slashed at spears of grass alongside the path; the girl was crying a little. Neither of them had seen him, so he entered a path that led from them at right angles.

He had proceeded but a few feet along this trail when, through a break in the shrubbery ahead of him, he saw two men. Brief as was his glimpse of them, Webster instantly recognized the two Central Americans he had seen in the steamship ticket office two days previous.

They were not waiting as wait two men abroad at this hour for a constitutional. Neither did they walk as walk men churchward bound: A slight, skulking air marked their progress, and caused Webster to wonder idly what they were stalking.

He turned into the path down which the two men had passed, not with the slightest idea of shadowing them; but because his destination lay in that direction.

Both men had forsaken the gravelled path and were walking on the soft velvet of blue grass lawn that fringed it! "Perhaps I'd better deaden my hoof beats also," John Stuart Webster soliloquized, and followed suit immediately.

He had scarcely done so when the men ahead of him paused abruptly. Webster did likewise, and responding—subconsciously, perhaps, to the remembrance of the menace in the glance of the man with the pucker eye—he stepped out of sight behind a broad oak tree. Through the trees and shrubbery he could still see the lovers, who had halted and evidently were about to part.

Webster saw the young man glance warily about; then, apparently satisfied there was none to spy upon them, he drew the girl gently toward him.



Drew the Girl Gently Toward Him.

She clung to him for nearly a minute, sobbing; then he raised her face tenderly, kissed her, pressed her from him, and walked swiftly away without looking back.

It was a sweet and rather touching little tableau; to John Stuart Webster, imaginative and possessed of a romantic streak in his nature, it was more than a tableau. It was a moving picture!

"I suppose her old man objects to the young fellow," he muttered to himself sympathetically, "and he can't come near the house. They've met here for the fond farewell, and now the young fellow's going out West to make his fortune, so he can come back and claim the girl. Huh! If he wants her, why the devil doesn't he take her? Hello! By Juddas priest! Now I know what those two parakeets are up to. One of them is the father of that girl. They've been spying on the lovers, and now they're going to corner the young fellow and shingle him for his nerve."

The girl had stood for a moment, gazing after her companion, before she turned with her handkerchief to her eyes, and continued on her way to the cathedral. Webster heard her sobbing as she stumbled blindly by, and he was distressed about her, for all the world loves a lover and John Stuart Webster was no exception to this universal rule.

"By George, this is pretty tough," he reflected. "That young fellow treated that girl with as much gentleness and courtesy as any gentleman should, and I'm for him and against this idea of corporal punishment. Don't you worry, Tillie, my dear. I'm going to horn into this game myself if it goes too far."

The two dusky skulkers ahead of him, having come to another cross-path, turned into it and came out on the main path in the rear of the young man. Webster noticed that the pair were still walking on the grass. He padded gently along behind them.

The four were now rapidly approaching the old French market, and the steadily rising babel of voices speaking in French, Italian, Spanish, Creole patois and Choctaw, was sufficient to have drowned the slight noise of the pursuit, even had the young man's mind not been upon other things, and the interest of the two Central Americans centered upon their quarry, to the exclusion of any thought of possible interruption.

Webster felt instinctively that the

two men would rush and make a concerted attack from the rear. He smiled.

"I'll just fool you two hombres a whole lot," he thought, and stooping, picked up a small stone. On the instant the two men, having approached within thirty feet of their quarry, made a rush for him.

Their charge was swift, but though it was, the little stone which John Stuart Webster hurled was swifter. It struck the young man fairly between the shoulderblades with a force sufficient to bring him out of his sentimental reverie with a jerk, as it were. He whirled, saw the danger that threatened him, and—sprang to meet it.

"Bravo!" yelled Webster, and ran to his aid, for he had seen now that it was to be knife work. Tragedy instead of melodrama.

The man with the pucker eye closed in with such eagerness it was apparent to Webster that here was work to his liking. The young man raised his light cane, but Pucker-eye did not hesitate. He merely threw up his left forearm to meet the expected blow aimed at his head, lunged forward and slashed viciously at the young man's abdomen. The latter drew back a step, doubled like a jack-knife, and brought his cane down viciously across the knuckles of his assailant's right hand.

"So it is thou, son of a m—," he called pleasantly in Spanish. "I fooled you that time, didn't I?" he added in English. "Thought I would aim for your head, didn't you?"

The blow temporarily paralyzed the assassin's hand; he dropped the knife, and as he stooped to recover it with his left hand, the young man, before retreating from Pop-eye, kicked Pucker-eye in the face and quite upset him.

"Stop it!" shouted Webster.

Pop-eye turned his head at the outcry. The man he was attacking felt into the position of a swordsman en garde, and thrust viciously with the ferrule at the face of the pop-eyed man, who, disregarding Webster's approach, seized the cane in his left hand and with a quick, powerful tug actually drew his victim toward him a foot before the latter let go the stick.

Before he could give ground again Pop-eye was upon him. He grasped the young man by the latter's left arm and held him, while he drew back for the awful disemboweling stroke. As his long arm sped forward the hook of John Stuart Webster's heavy cane descended upon that flexed arm in the crook of the elbow, snagging it cleverly.

The knife never reached its destination!

"You would, would you?" said Webster reproachfully, and jerked the fellow violently around. The man he had rescued promptly struck Pop-eye a terrible blow in the face with his left hand and broke loose from the grip that had so nearly been his undoing; then Webster tapped the assassin a meditative tap or two on the top of his skull for good measure and to awaken in him some sense of the impropriety and futility of resistance, after which Webster turned to discuss a similar question of ethics with Pucker-eye.

The scar-cheeked man was on his knees, groping groggily for his knife, for he had received a severe kick under the chin, and for the nonce was far from dangerous. Stooping, Webster picked up the knife; then with knife and cane grasped in his left hand he seized Pucker-eye by the nape with his right and jerked him to his feet. The assassin stood glowering at him in a perfect frenzy of brutish, inarticulate fury.

"Take the knife away from the other fellow before he gets active again," Webster called over his shoulder. "I'll manage this rascal. We'll march them over to the market and turn them over to the police." He spoke in Spanish.

"Thanks, ever so much, for my life," the young man answered lightly, and in English, "but where I come from it is not the fashion to settle these arguments in a court of law. To call an officer is considered unclimatic; to shoot a prisoner in this country is considered murder, and consequently I have but one alternative and I advise you, my good friend, to have a little of the same. I'm going to run like the devil."

And he did. He was in full flight before Webster could glance around, and in an instant he was lost to sight among the trees.

"That advice sounds eminently fair and reasonable," Webster yelled after him, and was about to follow when he observed that the young man had abandoned his pretty little silver-chased walking stick.

"That's too nice a little stick to leave to these brigands," he thought, and forthwith possessed himself of it and the pop-eyed man's knife, after which he tarried not upon the order of his going but went, departing at top speed.

The young man he had saved from being butchered was right. An en-tailance alliance with the police was

(Continued on Page Seven)

"WEBSTER— (Continued)

decidedly, not to ster's liking, for nately, form such a he hailed into court perhaps miss the Buenaventura.

He had planned to smoke a cigarette, hotel in time for a but his recent bout had blunted the edge ordered his driver to the hotel, spring gratulated himself on

CHAPTE

Webster's trunk w steamer early the f and at noon he enter hand baggage and w levee where La Estre gently at her mooring the congestion of freig chauffeur stopped his tance from the g Webster discharged h tip.

The latter, howe passenger's bag and ground, picked them for the gangplank.

"Never mind my Webster called after hi deck boys will care fo

The chauffeur turned generous with me, sir, "So I think I had bel baggage aboard. If you boy to handle it, you give another tip, and sheer wanton waste.

I earn the one you gav "I hadn't figured i son, so here's another being the only existin your speeles in captivi room is No. 34, upper d Webster answered, smil took the tip eagerly an ward the gangplank; th ter on duty shouldered a and he darted aboard.

Webster followed lels gangplank the purser's him, examined his tickets them.

"Where is the other man "You have two tickets her "Oh, that blamed vale Webster answered, and gla as if in search of that m tionary. "It would be lik fellow to miss the boat."

"When he comes—" Webster ceased speaki He was looking straiht malevolent orbs of Pucke was standing just behind the foot of the gangplank.

"I wonder if Pop-eye's ar Webster thought, and he f Pop-eye was standing in ba leaning over the railing of way.

"Which is the valet?" th clerk asked, scanning the na tickets.

"Andrew Bowers."

"All right, Mr. Webster," answered, with that gentia cat that seems inseparable from culling. "When Andrew c send him aboard."

He started to pass the ticl to Webster, but a detainin b ed on his arm, while a dark tl forefinger lifted the trailing tickets. Pucker-eye was e them also.

The purser's clerk drove h backward violently into Puc midriff and shook him off rou;

"What do you mean, you bi tan bound?" he demanded, when did you begin to O. K. my Pucker-eye made no repl stern reproof. He accepted th with equanimity and faced with an evil smile that indica recognition.

"Bueno," he said. "The se es sail on La Estrellita for S nventura, no?"

"So you came nosing around about it, eh? Doing a little pla shoe work, I see."

Pucker-eye bowed. By the sim ercise of courage and bad man had looked at John Stuart We tacker and was now familiar w name and destination.

Webster glowered darkly at P eye and said:

"Well, you scoundrelly cutt what are you going to do abo Try a little of your knife work o I suppose?"

The fellow grinned—the kind o that is composed of equal p ferocity and knowledge of su strength. That grin did more t concert Webster than the know that he had earned for himse bloodthirsty and implacable ene for Pucker-eye was the first of breed that Webster had ever smile under insult. That cool s infuriated him.

Pucker-eye took out a cigarette selected a cigarette and presented case to Webster. His bad maner selecting his own cigarette first deliberate, as Webster knew. It the Latin-American's method of sh ang his contempt.