

The Doctor's Strange Patient

Connecting Up a Mine in South America, a Spaniard and a Canadian

By PEARL FOLEY

Illustrated by Arthur Lismer

NED STIRLING pushed his lukewarm coffee from him with a frown, but accepting the penalty of a late-comer, was about to philosophically finish his dessert, when a noise in the opposite corner of the restaurant brought him to his feet in alarm. The foreign-looking youth, whose entrance had immediately preceded his own, had collapsed while eating his dinner, and Stirling, with all a medical man's instinct, hastened forward to wrestle with death.

"Heart failure, Doctor?" shivered the terror-stricken waiter.

Stirling shook his head, motioning towards a wine bottle on a neighbouring table. The man obeyed mechanically.

The stimulant, taking effect immediately, with a convulsive sigh life returned into the slight frame.

"Where am I?" questioned the dark eyes helplessly.

"Don't worry, you're all right," cheerfully reassured Stirling.

The boy's lips moved, forming the question his eyes had already asked, and he struggled weakly to rise.

"You're in Wiendieck's—can't you remember?" asked Stirling kindly, assisting him to a chair.

A helpless, vacant motion of his hand towards his head, was the only answer.

Stirling's face was grave. "Never mind, don't bother—I'll take you to my rooms across the way, and have you fixed up in no time," and tossing a bill to the flustered waiter, he led the dazed youth into the street.

In less than ten minutes Stirling paused with his companion in front of a large office building. Drawing a latch key from his pocket and opening the door, he stepped with him into the dark passage way. A turned switch in the wall instantly gave a flood of light, revealing the elevator cage which he opened, and in a few seconds they were both whirled to the fourth floor.

"Now we can make ourselves comfortable," said Stirling, as he led his patient into apartments on the left, and seated him in a large chair before the fire. The room was furnished as a den, and the bright coals in the grate spluttered out an impulsive welcome, enhancing the inviting capaciousness of the upholstered chairs, and casting reflecting, intimate, welcomes from the fine prints lining the walls.

Stirling took from a small panelled cupboard a bottle from which he poured a watery-looking liquid into a glass.

"Here is something will put ginger into you, young man," he smiled.

The boy mechanically drank the contents, handing back the glass in the same vacant manner. Stirling's keen glance noted the returning colour in the cheeks, too smooth for a man's, but the fine eyes still faced the world helplessly. That he was of more than ordinary calibre, was demonstrated by the easy, if languid grace of the slim body, the clear cut, delicate features, and small, well-shaped head, crowned with ridiculously soft curls.

Stirling's adventurous spirit was on the qui vive, and it was with decided reluctance he rose half an hour later from his surreptitious analysis, to attend a more practical case.

"The best remedy for you is a good night's rest," he remarked from the doorway, and wondered if it was relief that for an instant cleared the hazed eyes. "That davenport," he continued, "is a good shakedown, which I use in strenuous seasons. If you want anything in the night, push this button and the janitor, who has a room above, will be with you in an instant."

HE doubted if his statements were understood, but was reassured on this point at the low toned, "You are very good," and as he hurried away he found himself wondering he had never remarked before the musical softness of the English language. It took him back one year, and the soft intoxicating glow of Spanish life surged through him once more. With the collar of his great coat turned up to meet the protecting flaps from his fur cap, he sped in his sleigh over the snow-packed roads. But the winter wind, stinging and biting angrily at the unprotected parts of his face, could not dispel the recalled glamour of love, music and laughter, which for six months had thawed and warmed the soul of the practical Canadian Westerner.

The next morning, after telephoning an order for breakfast for two, to be served at his downtown

rooms, Ned Stirling jumped into his sleigh, while his housekeeper stood in the doorway, dolefully shaking her head at his ungodly abuse of his body.

"It's all right, Mrs. Patterson," he called over his shoulder, "I'm feeding curiosity first this morning."

It was with a strange eagerness he entered his rooms fifteen minutes later. The breakfast he had ordered was laid out on the small table before the fire. Roses nodded fragrantly over the Venetian centrepiece, and the aroma of coffee completed the homeliness of the scene. Seated in the same chair he had occupied the preceding night was the youthful stranger. A slight smile of greeting delighted Stirling. The dazed eyes were decidedly clearing.

"This looks quite cheerful," he remarked, advancing to the fire. "It takes a western winter to make a fellow appreciate the scent of coffee and ham. If you are as hungry as I am, we are going to do full justice to Wiendieck's catering."



The removal of the panel disclosed three pigeon-holed shelves, laden with rolls of parchment.

A smile was about all Stirling could get in response to his conversational efforts. At last he ventured out boldly, when he had helped his patient to ham and eggs, "Have you been long in Canada?"

The old blank look crept into the eyes while a helpless motion of the hand was the only reply.

"Do you remember my name?" continued Stirling—"I told you it last night."

"Doctor Stirling."

"Right O," beamed Stirling. "Do you know where I found you?"

"In Wiendieck's restaurant."

"Capital! Well, don't worry, everything will come back in time—now all you have to bother about is the breakfast before you."

Talking lightly and engagingly as he would to a child, Stirling spent an hour studying this new and perplexing case.

At nine o'clock he left the youth seated before the fire with a large album of Mexican views and scenes from South America. He was trying an experiment, and the start on the boy's part upon his pointing out a few photographs he had himself taken in Brazil and Venezuela, did not escape him.

Had Stirling turned back and seen the change his going had wrought in his patient, he would have been still more surprised.

When the door had closed on him, the dark eyes

of the youth blazed with a mixture of malice and triumph. The inert form grew taut. And when the slam of the elevator door announced Stirling's actual departure, the last trace of languor vanished. Cautiously he moved from the den into the front office where his actions betokened the dazed mind had only awakened to madness. Rapidly the small hands moved over the panelled walls. These motions continued on all four sides of the room. After, perhaps, a quarter of an hour of such fantastic motions, the knuckles rested on a panel in no particular differing from the others. But the hands grew suddenly rigid, and the head of the youth swayed back, while a low laugh broke from the curved lips. Stepping towards the door stealthily, he listened a moment, then apparently satisfied, approached the panel again. His hands moved rapidly, circularly and diagonally. So canny were the movements it was as if a sorcerer were at work, and when the oak wall, as if in obedience to some hidden power, slid noiselessly apart, revealing a two-foot space, it seemed to confirm this belief. The slim hands came together, and the eyes gleamed excitedly.

THE removal of the panel disclosed three pigeon-holed shelves, laden with rolls of parchment, each held in place by a rubber band. Eagerly seizing these, the youth unrolled them one by one. But each successive unrolling lessened the eager animation in his face, and when the last roll was restored and the panel slid back into place, he stood gazing at the wall in perplexed and miserable defeat.

The door of the outer room opened abruptly, and the change that swept over the youth would have rivalled Irving's best work. It was only the janitor, however, with a handful of mail, which he tossed to the small table and hurried out. Crossing the room listlessly, the boy picked up the letters, examining them carefully. One of the pile seemed to interest him, and as he inspected it more closely the effect on him was extraordinary.

Drawing from an inner pocket a round leather case containing a small bottle of clear liquid, and extracting the stopper which was flat edged and moistened, he drew it along the flap of the envelope, which immediately curled back. The revealed contents were instantly seized upon and scanned by eager, avaricious eyes. The letter was dated a month previous from Venezuela, and ran as follows:

"Dear old Fellow,—

"This will reach you about two months before you start with your expedition. At this writing we have had no word of your success with regard to translation of plans. Too bad you couldn't go to London yourself after the translator, but the Captain is the next best fellow. Of course, you didn't trust the papers out of your hands. For heaven's sake, old chap, be a Christian, and 'don't let thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth.'"

"I agree with you it's the only way, to keep a guard over the fellow who reads out the dope, until we place the Eldorado."

The letter here ceased to interest the reader, and refolding and sealing it he replaced it among the others.

STIRLING arrived fifteen minutes later to find his patient reclining before the grate, with a closed magazine held listlessly in his hand.

"Ah, still before the fire!" he exclaimed, in a hearty voice—"Well, it's the place a morning like this," and hanging his coat and hat on the oak tree he crossed to his mail. Taking the letters as they came, he skilfully disposed of them, some going into the waste basket and others into the wire holder on his desk. When he came to the last one, the Venezuela postmark brought more than ordinary pleasure to his face. Not waiting to slit open the envelope, he hastily tore away the flap. A look of surprise crossed his face as he did so, and he threw a quick glance at the languid figure across from him.

"Ever been in South America?" he inquired carelessly, when, after reading, he refolded and placed the letter in his breast pocket. The youth shook his head while the blank expression grew more pronounced.

A sudden peal of the phone demanded Stirling's departure to a serious case.

"I will have your lunch served from the hotel—the man will be over to take your order immediately," he said, hurrying away.

Stirling was met in the lower hall by the janitor.