

The Free Press Short Story

THE DOCTOR MAKES A CURE

By WALTER KELLS

MAYNARD TRAYNOR leaned up on the rail of the "S. S. Caymans," gazing at the sea-ey tropical shore. A tap upon the shoulder interrupted his contemplation of his future home. It was the ship's purser, accompanied by a tanned individual in spottish white duck, wearing sun glasses and a pith helmet.

"Doctor Traynor," said the purser, "this is Doctor Lindley of the Tropical Company."

"How do you do, sir?" Maynard greeted his new chief. His older colleague returned the greeting pleasantly.

After a brief delay the two landed and commenced a stroll through the quaint Dominican port.

After breakfast with the Lindleys, Maynard accompanied his superior to the company hospital, where he watched the morning routine.

"We have only sixty beds," he told Maynard later. "More than forty or fifty patients at one time is unusual. A few are surgical cases—accidents at the refinery, mostly. There's a fairly constant supply of malaria and dengue fever cases. Various tropical diseases make up the remainder."

"Just enough to keep you comfortably busy," suggested Maynard.

"Oh, one man can handle all this easily," returned the other, "but the company has finally consented to extend free medical care to the families of native laborers, which we never did before. That's where you come in. You can assist me when necessary, but the greater part of your time will be devoted to outside calls. I'll keep you busy. These peons have large families."

"Good," said Maynard. "Tropical medicine interests me. That's why I came here. I ought to get plenty of first-hand experience."

"There's not the slightest doubt of it," replied his senior. "You'll have to learn Spanish but you'll pick that up easily."

During internship at one of the big New York hospitals Maynard had become much interested in the study of tropical diseases. Afterward, an opportunity occurred to become junior doctor for the Tropical-Sugar Company at Santo Domingo. As this would afford him a wide experience with maladies peculiar to hot climates, he had decided to accept.

The life was not unpleasant. Maynard became increasingly aware that it was also highly useful. Until his arrival, these native women and children had received no medical care worthy of the name. Each village, usually, had its old "wise woman" whose medical lore was a curious mixture of practical remedy and outright superstition.

Doctor Lindley took a keen and sympathetic interest in the work. Maynard found his shrewd comments and practical suggestions of immeasurable value, particularly at first. In a talkative mood the older man confided his hopes.

"You know, Traynor, there are half a dozen sugar companies operating in this vicinity. All of these furnish medical care to employees. If they'd pool the sums each now spends separately on one large hospital could be established. It would be far more efficient than the present system."

"It sounds logical," said Maynard.

"Most of the resident managers are interested in the project and are convinced of its desirability. One or two are afraid it might result in increased expense, but it needn't. We could treat many poor peons who now get no care. The manager of Caribbean Cane is the real stumbling-block."

Common gossip among the American employees was that the activities of one Domingo Rodriguez were becoming a cause of much concern to the managers of the sugar companies.

Rodriguez was a Puerto Rican, a more intelligent type than the Dominican peons among whom he labored. He had worked for the Caribbean Company until the dissemination of communist propaganda among the laborers had been traced to him. He had been summarily discharged then.

Instead of going elsewhere to seek employment, however, Rodriguez had fled to the hills. Attracting to himself a small group of calicheiros, he commenced a series of depredations very disturbing to the hitherto peaceful community.

About this time a mild equinox was created at Tropical by the arrival of Virginia Snowden, the only daughter of the able and popular manager and his wife. Social activities at once began to boom. As one of the few available bachelors, Maynard found himself in constant demand.

The young lady had been attending college in America, but was back for a visit with her parents. She was pretty, undeniably clever, and modern to her finger tips.

Though she displayed no personal dislike, Virginia seemed to take a malicious pleasure in belittling the young doctor's work. It was more than mere teasing. She insisted that Maynard was wasting his time working among laborers' families. As far as his profession was

concerned, she contended, he was in a blind alley.

"I'm not very good at arguing my point of view," said Maynard, one evening, after the two had been engaged in the usual dispute. "Why not come with me to-morrow while I make my call? Perhaps you'll see for yourself what I find it impossible to explain."

"I'll do it," she agreed, "but don't be disappointed if I don't change my mind."

The following morning the young doctor stopped at Snowden's for Virginia, and they set out upon his daily round of visits. The patient resignation of these ignorant peasants, their complete confidence in the American doctor, their courage in the face of pain—these, Maynard believed, would affect the most hardened eye.

As the stars Virginia had been lively, inclined to chatter facetiously and joke. As the morning wore on she became quieter, more thoughtful. He made no comment. His plan seemed to be meeting a measure of success, but he had no wish to labor the point.

A few days later the manager's daughter volunteered to go with him again. Surprised and pleased, Maynard gladly accepted.

Her attitude underwent a gradual but noticeable change. She fell into the habit of accompanying the young doctor once or twice each week. Their friendship ripened quickly.

Virginia usually took upon herself the duties of chauffeur on such occasions. Sometimes she went in with Maynard to visit a patient. More often, she merely parked in the shade of some convenient palm, where the car was quickly surrounded by a gaping crowd of half-clad urchins. With these, the girl engaged in friendly conversation until the young doctor emerged again from the thatched hut he had entered.

Approaching, one day, the most remote of the villages which Maynard included in his rounds, they were startled by sounds of an unusual commotion. On the main and only street of the village, a milling crowd was visible. Shouting and cries of protest disturbed an otherwise peaceful scene.

"Turn the car around," ordered the doctor. "Keep the motor running," he instructed further. "You stay here. I'm going to see what's causing the excitement."

A quick protest sprang to her lips, but it went unuttered. Obviously Maynard expected to be obeyed.

Virginia maneuvered the car into a position from which she could watch. As the doctor approached, some one called out his name, and a momentary hush descended upon the crowd.

"What goes on here?" demanded Maynard in Spanish.

For a moment no one answered, but all eyes turned toward a gaunt, dressed figure, from whose right hip was slung a pearl-handled gun, encased in a leather holster.

The hard, black eyes of the native stared unwaveringly into the blue ones of the alighter American for a full minute before he replied.

"Why should the senior trouble himself with matters which are none of his concern?" he questioned.

"The welfare of these people is my concern," stated Maynard. "By what right do you molest them?"

"El Lobo acts in his own right," returned the other. "It is unwise for you to interfere, senior."

El Lobo (The Wolf). This, then, was Domingo Rodriguez, the Puerto Rican. A dangerous man, Maynard knew, but he did not falter.

"The name is familiar, no?" asked El Lobo, mockingly.

"As that of one who unwisely defies authority, and whose end may well prove unhappy. Why do you not leave these people in peace. They have not harmed you."

"The brow of the bandit darkened in anger. 'I am recruiting. What is it to you?'

Recruiting, Maynard knew, meant merely that the peons whom El Lobo wanted as members of his band were offered the disagreeable choice of joining his forces or being shot. The practice was a common one.

"There are none here who desire to join you," Maynard declared. "Go. Leave them to their own affairs."

The eyes of El Lobo glittered. "The senior presumes, but it shall be as he demands. Release those hordes," he ordered, nodding toward several terrified local youths.

"And you, senior," continued the Puerto Rican, "you shall accompany us in their stead. Tropical shall pay well for your freedom. If not—" he shrugged expressively. "That would be a matter for regret. Take him," he commanded.

"Before Maynard could move, several followers leaped to obey their chief. "The seniorita also," he continued, with an evil smile. "We lack feminine society. Seize her," he cried, pointing. Several ragged henchmen sprang to carry out his instructions. With a lunge,

Maynard freed himself momentarily, and turned toward the car.

"Virginia!" he called, urgently. "Go home!—Don't worry about me!"

The girl had been watching events with a gradually mounting apprehension, which gave place to actual terror as she saw the doctor seized. She dreaded to desert him but knew she was helpless against these marauders. Putting the car into gear she called back.

"I'll send help."

Maynard, meanwhile, had been roughly subdued. The outlaws cried out in anger when they saw their intended prey escaping. Shots were fired at the tires of the rapidly receding machine, but without effect. It disappeared down the dusty road.

Maynard grinned at the discomfited bandit leader, but El Lobo quickly regained his composure.

"Too bad," he declared, philosophically. "The society of the seniorita would have been most agreeable and profitable, too—but it was not to be. To home!" he commanded his latter-day followers. "Manana. Let us go!"

Muttered imprecations followed the group as they rode out of the village with the doctor in their midst. The villagers were thoroughly cowed, however, and dared not protest.

Meanwhile, Virginia reached home in safety and fearfully told her father of the capture. A few days later a note arrived from El Lobo demanding the immediate payment of twenty-five thousand dollars as the price of his captive's release.

Knowing that bargaining was expected, Mr. Snowden felt bound to hold down the expense to his company to the lowest possible figure. He countered with an offer of five thousand. Negotiations progressed at a snail's pace.

True to his professional instincts, the young doctor labored to better the lot of the miserable women and children in his wretched camp of the bandits.

Finding that one undernourished little boy with a clubfoot was the only son of the chief himself, Maynard made bold to approach El Lobo with suggestions for the child's cure. At first the bandit leader refused to listen, but at length the doctor broke down his hostility. Eventually, he learned the story.

Caribbean Cane, the company which had formerly employed Rodriguez, provided no medical care for workers' families, Maynard knew. Bitter with resentment at his inability to secure treatment for his crippled child, and unable to finance a trip elsewhere for treatment, the Puerto Rican had turned upon his employers, and commenced the radical propaganda which resulted in his dismissal.

Always suspicious, the father distrustful Maynard. "You North Americans," he exclaimed, "are all alike. You profess an interest in my baby only because you hope that I may set you free."

Seeing the uselessness of argument, Maynard desisted.

El Lobo was becoming impatient. He was particularly angered at the small sum offered for the young doctor's release.

"I think we send another letter," he rasped, one morning. "Maybe we send a finger from you with it, eh? Then they know I mean business."

Conforming to a custom of the country, El Lobo supplemented the pearl-handled, nickel-plated revolver which was his pride, with a broad-bladed curved machete. This he carried slung from his waist, unheeded. The Dominican peon is seldom without this great knife, which takes the place of half a dozen different tools. In an emergency, it also makes a formidable

weapon. This implement proved The Wolf's undoing.

Riding at his customary gallop, later that day, El Lobo took a violent fall when his horse stumbled. Thrown against the sharp edge of his own machete as he struck the ground, he received a terrible cut across the thigh. His followers brought the sorely-stricken leader into camp. Maynard was summoned.

From the way blood spurted from the wound, he knew an artery was severed. He ripped off the man's trouser leg and applied a hurriedly fashioned tourniquet.

"Rodriguez," Maynard said bluntly, "if the leg doesn't get proper attention, infection will set in and you will die. You'll have to go to the hospital."

"So you can send me to jail, eh? You like to see me shot for being a bandit?" Maynard restrained his impatience with an effort. "I have just prevented your death," he reminded. "Come. When you are well enough to leave the hospital, I promise you'll be permitted to go home when you wish. More than that, you'll father up that boy of yours and cure his bad foot. I believe Mr. Snowden will give you a job at Tropical, if you want it."

Further argument followed, but in the end the Puerto Rican was convinced that Maynard was not tricking him.

Arrived at the company hospital, the repentant outlaw was made comfortable and given treatment.

Following an explanation to Dr. Lindley, Maynard and his senior talked with Mr. Snowden. The resident manager agreed that the promises made to El Lobo should be fulfilled. Provision was also made for those of his followers who desired to work.

When all was settled, Mr. Snowden turned to his assistant with a twinkle in his eye. "There's a young lady over at our house who's very glad, indeed, to know of your safe return. I believe she would be interested in hearing the story."

A few days later Doctor Lindley called his assistant into his office. "My plan for a hospital is going through at once," he said. "Mr. Snow says Caribbean and all the others have agreed. Your little adventure was the argument which converted the skeptics. I am to be director with authority to pick my own staff. Would you like to come with me? I'll be a promotion."

"The salary," Doctor Lindley went on, with a sly smile, "will be entirely adequate for two."

The young doctor blushed. "If that's the case, I accept," he said.

FARMER GOT BEST OF ARGUMENT WITH MOTORIST

A one-man war against the post of the highways, the motorist who on the slightest provocation makes badman with his horn, was declared, waged and won the other day by a farmer on the Atherton bridge, near Orilla.

The farmer, seated on a loaded manure spreader, was driving his team across the bridge. He was driving slowly. He had to. The load was heavy, and his team was not built for speed.

The motorist, driving in a dashing sport coupe of expensive make, flashed into sight, and started to an unwilling crawl behind him. Oncoming traffic made passing impossible. The motorist honked his horn impatiently. The farmer did the only thing he could do—he kept on driving, neither faster nor slower, but at the same even pace. The motorist sounded his horn again. The farmer waved his hand to indicate he would turn out as soon as possible. That wasn't enough for the man in the pretty automobile. He honked again. He lost his temper. He kept on honking.

It was then that war was declared. The farmer lost his temper, too. He put his hand to the lever that is fixed to the side of all manure spreaders. It operates a gear-driven series of rollers which drag the manure to the back of the wagon and into the maw of revolving, paddle-like blades which scatter the stuff in all directions. The farmer pulled the lever. The roller rolled. The blades revolved.

The honking of the horn became a frantic wail as motorist and motor car disappeared in a reeking cloud. Still the farmer didn't look back. He just kept on driving—just kept on keeping the rollers rolling, and the blades revolving. The cloud kept growing. The horn stopped sounding. The coupe stalled. A very dapper little man sprang out of the splattered machine and raced up to the placid agriculturist on the manure spreader.

"Listen here, you..." he began.

"Friend," broke in the farmer, "that stuff on your car would have fertilized a whole field of corn. Maybe you can grow politeness in it. If you can, I'm satisfied. There's no charge. Giddap."

And he left the little motorist silent on the bridge.

SALLY'S SALLIES

Opportunity knocks for every man—a woman, of course, gets a ring.

FAIR EXCHANGE

They had decided to marry, and walked into the manse. The clergyman performed the ceremony, and afterwards gave the bridegroom a word or two of advice.

"Thank ye a thousand times, mon," the bridegroom returned, fervently. "I'm awfully sorry I canna pay ye as much as I wud like, sir, but—"

"That's all right—that's all right," interrupted the clergyman.

"If ye'll tak me down to your gas meter," continued the other, "I'll show ye hoo tae fix it so it winna register."

MOST PECULIAR

A passenger on an American train, looking under his bunk one morning, found one black shoe and one tan, and summoned the porter.

The porter scratched his head in bewilderment.

"Well, if dat don't beat all!" he said. "Dat's the second time dis mawning dat mistake happened."

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