

THE Ne'er-Do-Well By REX BEACH Author of "The Spoilers," "The Barrier," "The Silver Horde," Etc. Copyright, 1910, 1911, by Harper & Brothers.

SYNOPSIS.

Kirk Anthony, son of a rich man, with college friends, gets into a fracas in a New York resort. A detective is hurt. Jefferson Locke insinuates himself into the college men's party. Locke, aided by Kirk's friend Higgins, who thinks it a joke, drugs Kirk and puts him aboard a ship bound for Colon. Kirk is on the passenger list as Locke. "Brooks" and without baggage aboard the ship Kirk makes the acquaintance of Mr. and Mrs. Stephen Cortlandt. Cortlandt is in the American diplomatic service and is going to Panama on a mission. In Colon Kirk, as the son of a big railroad man, is taken up by Weeks, American consul. Kirk's father repudiates him, and Weeks coats him out as an impostor. Kirk meets Allan, a Jamaican negro canal worker out of a job. The two are arrested by Colon police for helping to put out a fire. Kirk and Allan are treated brutally in a Colon jail by young Alfarez, commandant of police. Allan's release is obtained by the British consul, but Weeks refuses to aid Kirk. Mrs. Cortlandt gets a phone call.

[Continued from last week.]

True to the consul's prediction, a little later the Jamaican was led out of the cell, and from the fact that he was not brought back Kirk judged that the British intervention had been effectual. But it was not until the next morning, the second of his imprisonment, that the cell door opened once more, this time to admit the portly figure of John Weeks and the spruce person of Senor Ramon Alfarez. Kirk told his story as briefly and convincingly as he could. But when he had finished the consul shook his head. "I don't see what I can do for you," he said. "According to your own declaration you resisted a police officer. You'll have to take your medicine. You'll be tried as soon as they get around to it." "Look here!" Kirk showed the marks his assailants had left upon him. "Will you stand for that? I've been here two nights now without medical attention." "How about that, Alfarez?" The commandant shrugged his shoulders. "If he required a doctor, one shall be secure, but he is not severely injured. I've explained the frightful indignity to the honor of my person, yes? As for me, pooh! It is forget." He waved his hand grandly and smiled sweetly upon his fat visitor. "I guess you ain't hurt much," said Weeks, eyeing his countryman coldly. "You didn't get any more than was coming to you." "I won't stand for this!" cried the prisoner hotly. "The English consul got that nigger boy out and I want you to do the same for me." "You don't understand. I've got business interests in this country, and I can't dash about creating international issues every time an American gets locked up for disorderly conduct." "Are you really afraid to do anything?" Kirk inquired slowly. "Or is it because of our row?" "Oh, there's nothing personal about it! Of course, I'll see that you have a fair trial!" The commandant spoke up with ingratiating politeness. "The prisoner says he is reach man's son." Weeks snorted indignantly. "He gave you that fairy tale, eh? He said his name was Anthony, and his father was a railroad president, didn't he? Well, he imposed on me, too, but his name is Locke, and, as near as I can learn, he practically stowed away on the Santa Cruz." "Ah-h!" The officer's eyes widened as he turned them upon his prisoner. "He is then a w't you call tramp." "All I know is he stuck me for a lot of hills. I'll have to see that he gets fair treatment, I suppose, because he's an American, but that ends my duty." "Is this the best you'll do for me?" Kirk inquired, as Weeks made ready to go. "Yes." "Will you cable my father?" "At 25 cents a word? Hardly!" The speaker mopped his face, exclaiming, "There's no use of talking, I've got to get out in the air. It's too hot in here for me." Half an hour later the commandant returned to the cell, and this time he brought with him a number of his little policemen, each armed with a club. Feeling some menace in their coming, Kirk, who had seated himself dejectedly, arose to ask, "What's coming off?" Alfarez merely issued some directions in Spanish, and chain handcuffs

were once more snapped upon the prisoner's wrists. "So, you're going to hold my trial, eh?" cried Kirk. But the other snarled. "Senor Locke, you 'ave force' the water of the ose wagon upon my body for making the people laugh. Bueno! Now I shall laugh." He seated himself, then nodded at his men to begin. Mrs. Cortlandt answered her telephone for the second time, repeating with some impatience, "Tell the man I can't see him." "But he refuses to leave—says he must see you at once; it's important," came the voice of the clerk. "Oh, very well. I'll come down." She hung up the receiver with a snap. In the hotel lobby she was directed toward a very ragged, very woebegone young black on the rear porch, who at sight of her began to fumble his hat and run his words together so excitedly that she was forced to calm him. "Now, now! I can't understand a word. Who are you?" "H'Allan, mistress." "You say some one is ill?" "Oh, yes, he is very ill indeed, mistress—half covered with blood and his poor 'ands hall cut." "Who is it?" "Mr. h'Anthony!" "Anthony?" Mrs. Cortlandt started. "What has happened? Quick!" Had she been less acquainted with the Caribbean dialects she would have missed much of Allan's story. Rapidly she gathered the facts of the case, while her cheeks whitened and her eyes grew dark with indignation. "How did you get here?" she asked. "With my feet, mistress. Sometimes rode I on the train, but the train people are very common; they addressed me rudely and threw me by the way-side." "Couldn't you telephone?" "I do not understand 'ow." "Why didn't he notify me at once? If I had only known—" "Those 'artless Spiggotties would not hallow it. Oh, you will assist the poor man! Say it. Praise be to God, he is bleeding in the prison—" "Yes, yes, certainly." "God bless you, good mistress. He told me to find you and present his recital." "Here, take this money and go back to Colon by the first train. We may need you. Now go! I'll be there ahead of you." She ran up the hotel stairs as if pursued, bursting in upon her husband impetuously. "Young Anthony is in jail in Colon," she panted. "He's been locked up for three days, and they won't let him out." "The devil! You said he'd gone back to New York. What is it about?" "I thought he had. They arrested him for some silly thing, and he's hurt." She hurriedly recounted Allan's story, adding, in conclusion, "That black boy came all the way across the isthmus to tell us." "I'll get the American consul by phone." But Mrs. Cortlandt interrupted. "Weeks is a fool! He wouldn't do anything. Wait!" She stepped to the instrument and rang violently. "Give me Colonel Jolson's office, quickly. If he is not there, find him. I don't care where he is, find him; it is important. This is Mrs. Cortlandt speaking." "What do you mean to do?" said Cortlandt. "Go to Colon at once. This is young Alfarez's doing—the whipper snapper—you must lay him out for this. How dare he!" "Better go carefully. Remember General Alfarez is his father." "I understand. But we are bound to come to a breach sooner or later." "I hardly think so. I believe we can bring him around all right—anyhow, I haven't lost hope. Anthony chose the worst possible time for this escapade. I suppose it will mean diplomatic difficulties and all that, and once we lose old Alfarez—" "We will lose him anyhow," snapped the woman. "I've seen it coming, although you could not. I'll break Ramon for this." "Then you'll break us. Do you think Anthony is worth it?" "My dear Stephen, they nearly killed that poor boy, and I sha'n't allow it. Don Anibal Alfarez is not the only presidential timber in the republic. If he breaks with us it will cost him dearly. You think he is friendly, but I know that deep down in his crafty old heart he despises all us Americans. The moment he dares, he'll turn against us." Cortlandt's frosty countenance showed signs of unusual agitation as he answered: "You're mad! You threaten to ruin everything. You understand perfectly—there's no use of my explaining. Let me call on him this afternoon. He will instruct his son." "No! He would procrastinate as usual. There would be the customary delays and excuses, and meanwhile Anthony would be in jail at Colon. They would have a defense all prepared. Besides, if it's to be a fight we must have all the weapons possible—and this affair may prove a good one. Anyhow, you mustn't ask a favor of him at this time; he must ask, not you." The telephone rang, and the speaker snatched the receiver from his hook. "Hello! Colonel Jolson, I'm very glad I caught you, this is Mrs. Cortlandt. Colonel Jolson, young Ramon Alfarez has arrested Kirk Anthony, of whom I spoke to you. They have maltreated him, as usual, and have hidden him for three days. Yes, yes! I discovered it quite by accident while Mr. Cortlandt was downtown. Oh, this is serious, and I'm furious. * * * This will do no good; I have reasons

for preferring to handle it myself. * * * Thank you for the compliment. We must go to Colon at once, and I thought you might give us a special." There was a slight pause, then: "Good! That will do quite as well. In fifteen minutes. Thank you, Goodby." Turning to her husband, she explained swiftly: "The colonel's automobile will be waiting at the station in fifteen minutes. Are you ready?" "I think you are going about this in the wrong way," he said coldly. "When will you learn?" She checked her crisp words at the flush that leaped to his cheeks. "I beg your pardon, Stephen. Please do as Colonel Jolson has done and trust me to manage this affair." He bowed and left her, saying, "I will have a coach waiting at the door." Fifteen minutes later a gasoline railroad motor-car with two passengers in addition to its driver and flagman rolled out of the yards at Panama City and took the main line, running under orders like a special train.

CHAPTER VIII. Spanish Law.

SENOR RAMON ALFAREZ was considerably nonplused when his two distinguished visitors made known the nature of their errand. Cortlandt did most of the talking, his cold hauteur serving a good purpose and contrasting strongly with the suppressed excitement of his wife. "Pardon me, there is no necessity for delay," he said, as the commandant endeavored to formulate an excuse. "I trust I need not insist upon seeing the prisoner?" He raised his brows with a stare of inquiry that caused the other to reply hastily: "Of a certainty not, senor." "Then take us to him." "I will spare your lady the painful sight of the prison house. The prisoner shall be fetch' with all dispatch." "We will see him alone." Again the commandant hesitated, while his bright eyes searched their faces with a sudden uneasy curiosity. "He is resis' the officer by force an' he is injure'—oh, but only a leetle—it is no'ing. One is truly foolish for resis' the policemen, yes?" He shook his dark head sadly. "I think we understand the circumstances." Instead of ringing for an orderly the commandant excused himself, then, after a seemingly interminable delay, returned with Anthony and several policemen. At sight of his friends the young man made for them eagerly, crying: "Jove, I'm glad you came! I'd about given you up." "Allan only found us today," Mrs. Cortlandt replied. "Did he tell the truth? Have you been abused?" The young man turned a pair of smoldering eyes upon his enemies. He



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looked ill and haggard, although, except for the wound half concealed beneath his hair, he showed no marks. Then he held out his hands with a grim smile, and the woman uttered a low cry at what she saw. "They gave me another good beating yesterday," he said. "While you were in jail?" Cortlandt queried incredulously. "God!" "That's the fellow yonder," Kirk pointed to Alfarez, whose smile had disappeared. "Oh, the man is mistake," the latter hastened to aver. "He is crazee." "I gave you a wetting in public, and—" "Si, si! That is correct, Senor Cortlandt. He insult my person an' fight my soldiers. He is very toff person." "Did you know he had been maltreated in prison?" Cortlandt demanded. "Oh, senor!" Alfarez raised his hands in horrified disclaimer of the very thought, but his victim said: "Kirk made a threatening movement in the Spaniard's direction, despite the half dozen soldiers, but Edith Cortlandt checked him." "Wait, please," she said. Then to the commandant: "This is a serious matter, and if what he says is true your government will find itself in trouble." "But we 'ave no idea he is frien' of yours. If he should only spk your

'osbau's name, all would be different. For my part, I can prove he is treat with the 'ighes' courtesy an' kindness in my presence. Every man in the prison will testify to those fact.' "Why did you keep him locked up so long? Why didn't you try him?" said Cortlandt. "Ah! For that I shall inquire also I am inform', 'owever, that the w'at you call judge is seek'." "We'll look into that later. We're here now to arrange for Mr. Anthony's release." "The alcalde will be please' to accommodate at the earliest. I myself shall see to it. Tomorrow"— "There will be no tomorrow about it," Mrs. Cortlandt exclaimed, positively. "If you cannot arrange the bail yourself, my husband will take up the matter with the zone government, and Colonel Jolson will call upon the president of the republic within an hour. He is waiting word from us now." Senor Ramon Alfarez became suddenly galvanized. He broke into effusive apologies for even so small a delay as had already occurred. While, to be sure, no power was vested in him, and his willing hands were most miserably tied, nevertheless he would so far exceed his authority as to promise instant freedom to the prisoner. He hastened forth to set in motion the proper machinery, and while he was absent Kirk told his story. It left the woman white lipped and incoherent, and roused even the icy Cortlandt to genuine wrath. "Of course," the latter said, "Alfarez will prove by his men that it's all imagination on your part and that your injuries were sustained at the time of your arrest. He'll assume a righteous indignation and start a Spigotto investigation. You see, his father is the governor of Panama province and one of the strongest men in the republic, so Ramon will probably make good his position. Even so, you may recover damages." "I don't want damages," Kirk replied. "I want to get him out alone some time." "For heaven's sake, don't think of it!" Mrs. Cortlandt exclaimed. "All the American influence on the isthmus wouldn't help you then. Fifty men would perjure themselves to convict you." "No. That method doesn't work here," her husband agreed. "You're lucky to escape so easily. He will arrange bail, never fear, and you will probably not come to trial. He'll never forgive you, of course, but that won't matter to you." The first part of Mr. Cortlandt's prediction was soon proved true, for the sick alcalde recovered sufficiently to appear on the scene within half an hour. Then, after much signing of official documents and certain other formalities, Kirk Anthony walked out of the Colon jail in company with his friends.

In the midst of Kirk's expressions of gratitude for the timely intercession of Cortlandt and his wife, the former surprised him by saying in a genuinely hearty tone: "My wife has told me all about you, Anthony, and I want you to come over to Panama as my guest in the hotel until you hear from your father." When Kirk informed him of the cablegram that had cast him adrift in Panama, Cortlandt replied reassuringly: "Oh, well, your father doesn't understand the facts in the case, that's all. You sit down like a sensible person and write him fully." Seeing a warm second to his invitation in Mrs. Cortlandt's eyes, Kirk accepted gracefully, explaining, "You know this is the first time I was ever up against hard luck, and I don't know just how to act." "We've missed the 4:35, so we will have to return the way we came," said Cortlandt. "I'd like to stop at Gatun on a business matter of some importance, and if you don't mind a half hour's delay we'll do so." They pursued their way to the station. But here an unexpected embarrassment arose. As they made ready to board Colonel Jolson's motor-car they were annoyed to find that Allan insisted on going too. He insisted, moreover, in such extravagant fashion that Mrs. Cortlandt at last was moved to say, "For heaven's sake, let the poor thing come along." And thereafter the Jamaican boy sat on the step of the machine. Once more the little automobile took on the dignity of a regular train and sped out of the network of tracks behind Colon. As it gained speed Mrs. Cortlandt, to divert her guest's mind from his recent ordeal, began to explain the points of interest as they passed. She showed him the old French workings where a nation's hopes lay buried, the mechanical ruins that had cost a king's ransom, the Mount Hope cemetery, whither daily trains had borne the sacrifice before science had robbed the fever of its terrors. "Will they really finish the canal?" he asked. "Won't something happen?" "It is already dug. The rest is merely a matter of excavation and concrete. The engineering difficulties have all been solved, and the big human machine has been built up. What is more important, the country is livable at last. Over at Ancon hospital there is a quiet, hard working medical man who has made this thing possible. When the two oceans are joined together, and the job is finished, his will be the name most highly honored." "It must be nice to do something worth while," Anthony mused vaguely. "To do anything," his companion observed, with a shade of meaning; then, "It is amusing to look back on the old Spanish statement that it would be

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