

**THE**  
**Ne'er-Do-Well**

By  
**REX BEACH**  
Author of  
"The Spoilers," "The Barrier,"  
"The Silver Horde," Etc.

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**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.

"Broke" 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 casts 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.

Mrs. Cortlandt obtains Kirk's release by using influence with Colonel Jolson, head of the canal. The Cortlandts are intriguing to make Alfarez's father president of Panama.

Kirk's father casts him off finally, and Mrs. Cortlandt obtains for him a position on the Panama railroad under Runnels, master of transportation.

The Cortlandts and Kirk plan a picnic on the island of Taboga, near Panama. Cortlandt is detained and his wife and Kirk are marooned on the island.

(Continued from last week.)

Through this upheaval the motorcar penetrated, dodging trains of "flats," which moved sluggishly to afford them passage up and down over the volcanic furrows at the bottom of the gorge or along some shelf beneath which the foundations were being dug. At times a shovel reached out its five yard steel jaw and gently cleared the rails of debris, or boosted some bowlder from the path with all the skill of a giant hand and fingers. Up and down the canyon rolled spasmodic rumbblings, like broadsides from a fleet of battleships.

Mile after mile the sightseers rolled on, past scenes of never varying activity—past more shovels, more groups of drills, more dirt trains, more regiments of men—Runnels explaining, Kirk marveling until he was forced to exclaim:

"I had no idea it was so big. It doesn't seem as if they'd ever finish it."

"Oh, we'll finish it if we're let alone. You see there is too much politics in it; we never know how long our jobs will last. If some senator whose vote is needed on an administration matter wanted my position for his wife's brother, he could get it."

"I suppose I'm an example."

Runnels looked at him squarely before answering. "You are," said he, "although I wasn't thinking of you when I spoke. It's something we all feel, however."

Anthony flushed as he answered: "I don't remember ever taking anything I wasn't entitled to, and I didn't think when I was shoved in here that I'd shove some other fellow out. I suppose there is room at the bottom, and a fellow can work up."

"If he has it in him."

"I think I'll start there."

"I'm afraid you're a poor business man," said Runnels.

"Rotten!" Kirk admitted. "But I've an idea I can make good if I try."

"If you feel that way I certainly will help you," said the other warmly. "Of course I'll try to help you anyhow, but I like your spirit. With Mrs. Cortlandt to back me up, I'll see you go forward as fast as you deserve."

By now they were out of the cut and once more upon the main line at Bas Obispo, heading back toward the Pacific.

"You asked me to tell you something about her," Runnels continued. "I'm not sure my information is entirely correct, but, knowing who she is, I think I understand why she is in Panama. It is politics—big politics. The Spiggotties have an election next year, and it is necessary to get our wires well laid before it comes off. General Alfarez will probably be the next president."

"Alfarez! Not Ramon?"

"His father. You know we Americans occupy a peculiar position here, set down as we are in the midst of an alien people who hate us. Oh, they hate us, all right—all except a few of the better class."

"Why?"

"There are a good many reasons. For one thing, there's a sort of racial

antipathy. Besides, when we stole Panama we made the Colombians sore, and all Central America besides, for they realized that once we Ynkees got a foothold here we'd hang on and not only dominate this country, but all the neighboring republics as well."

"I had gathered something of the sort—but I had no idea there was so much in it. But we don't want these jungle countries," said Kirk.

"That's where you're wrong. By and by we'll need room to expand, and when that time comes we'll move south. Meanwhile our farsighted government is smoothing the way, and there's nobody better fitted for the preliminary work than Mr. Stephen Cortlandt of Washington, D. C., husband and clerk of the smartest woman in the business of chaperoning administrations. He's the figurehead behind which she works. She's a rich woman, she loves the game—her father was the greatest diplomat of his time, you know—and she married Cortlandt so she could play it. Any other man would have served as well, though I've heard that he showed promise before she blotted him out and absorbed him. But now he's merely her power of attorney."

Anthony pursed his lips into a whistle of astonishment.

"It's been a good thing for him," Runnels ran on, evidently warmed to his subject. "She's made his reputation; he has money and position. For my part, I'd rather remain insignificant and have a real wife."

"Don't they love each other?"

"Nobody knows. She's carved out of ice, and as for him, well, gratitude is a good deal like rust—in time it destroys the thing it clings to. I suppose I'm talking too much, but others would tell you the same things."

It was with quite a different eye that Kirk looked upon his host and hostess that evening. To his genuine liking for the latter was now added a worshipful admiration and a boyish gratification at her regard, which rather put her at a distance.

"It's all settled," said he. "I'm going to work in a few days as train collector."

"What?" Mrs. Cortlandt turned upon him sharply. "Runnels didn't offer you that sort of position?" Her eyes were dark with indignation. Kirk promptly came to the defense of his new friend.

"No, I asked for it."

"Oh, I see. Well, he will do much better by you than that."

"I don't want anything better to start with."

"But, my dear boy, a collector is merely a conductor. He takes tickets."

"Sure! I can do that. I might fall at something hard."

"No, no, no! I'll see that you don't fall. Don't you understand?"

"I understand a lot more than I did, Mrs. Cortlandt. That's why I don't want to rob some chap of a job he's entitled to, and I shan't. There's a collector quitting shortly."

"Is that really the reason, or do you think the work will be easier?"

Kirk stirred uncomfortably. "Oh, I'm not trying to dodge anything," he maintained. "On the contrary, the most amazing thing has happened—something I can't quite understand. I—I really want to work. Funny, isn't it? I didn't know people ever got that way, but—I'd like to help build this canal."

"But a conductor! Why, you're a gentleman."

"My dad was a brakeman."

"Don't be foolish. Runnels talks too much. He'll offer you something better than that."

But Kirk was obdurate. "I'd prefer to start in as confidential adviser to the canal commission, of course, but I'd be a 'frost' and my father would say 'I told you so.' I must make good for his sake, even if it's only counting cars or licking postage stamps. Besides, it isn't exactly the square thing to take money for work that somebody else does for you."

Mrs. Cortlandt laughed with a touch of annoyance.

"I think a few weeks in cap and buttons will cure you of this quixotic sentiment. Meanwhile I must admit it is refreshing." She stared uselessly at the street lights for a moment. "But see here, Kirk, don't the collectors live in Colon?"

"I don't know," he replied, started and flattered by her first use of his given name.

"I'll look it up tomorrow. You know I—Mr. Cortlandt and I will be in Panama, and I prefer to have you here. You see, we can do more for you. A little later she broke into a low laugh. "It seems strange to go driving with a conductor."

The recipient of this kind invitation tossed it aside, with a gesture of impatience. For the moment he experienced a kind of boyish resentment at having his intentions thwarted that seemed out of proportion to the cause. But the emotion soon passed.

The next morning Edith appeared upon the hotel porch. She was alone.

"Where's Mr. Cortlandt?" he inquired.

"Oh, some men arrived last night from Bocas del Toro and telephoned that they must see him today on a matter of importance. I shall have to make up to you for his absence if I am able."

"Where is to be the scene of our revel?"

"Taboga," she said, with eyes sparkling. "You've never been there, but it's perfectly gorgeous. Please call a coach, our boat is waiting, and don't sit on the lunch."

Kirk obeyed, and they went clattering down the deserted brick street. Edith leaned back, with a sigh.

"I'm so glad to get away from that hotel for a day. If you only knew it, Kirk, you've capsize the political calculations of the Panama Conservative party."

"I didn't know I had ever even rocked the boat."

"It runs back to your affair with Ramon."

"Really, did that affect it?"

"Rather. At any rate it gave an excuse for setting things in motion. There had been some doubt about the matter for a long time, and I was only too glad to exert my influence in the right direction, but—this is a picnic to an enchanted island, and here we are talking politics. We mustn't be so serious. School is out, and it's vacation. I want to romp and play and get my face dirty."

The landing was thronged, and at sight of the newcomers loiterers gathered from all sides—a pirate throng, shouting a dozen dialects and forcing Kirk to battle lustily for his luggage. Stepping into a skiff, they were rowed to a launch, and a few moments later were gliding swiftly around the long rock rib that guards the harbor, a copper hued bandit at the wheel, a Nubian giant at the engine and an evil yellow faced desperado sprawling upon the forward deck.

Even before they had come to anchor at Taboga island a dozen boatmen were racing for them and crying for their patronage. At the water's edge they saw a tiny village nestled close against the mountains, its tiled roofs, rust red and grown to moss, its walls faded by wind and weather to delicate mauves and dove colors and greens impossible to describe.

The launch, when it came to rest, seemed suspended in air, and beneath



Slowly He Picked His Way Ashore.

"Permit me to help you," he said, "without embarrassing our pilot."

She stood up and allowed him to gather her in his arms. Then for the first time she felt his strength as her body leaned to his. Slowly he picked his way ashore while she reclined in his embrace, her arms about his neck, her smooth cheek brushing his. When he deposited her gently upon her feet he saw her face had gone white and that she was trembling.

His own face was glowing as he waded back to fetch the lunch basket and his footgear. Under the circumstances he had done the only natural, the only possible thing, yet it had queerly perturbed them both.

The two visitors explored the village, even to the quaint, tawdry chapel, with its impossible blues and rusted gilt, and noon found them eager to investigate the contents of their lunch basket. Taking a random path up the hill, they came at last to a spring of cool water, and here they spread their meal under a mango tree bent beneath tons of fruit.

The afternoon sped quickly. If at times Kirk found his companion regarding him with a strangely timid, half defiant look, he refused to connect it with the episode of their landing.

Promptly at 4 they came down the drunken little main street and out upon the beach. But no launch was in sight.

"Hello! Where's our boat?" exclaimed Kirk.

The captain told me he'd be ready at 4. Perhaps he has run over to Taboguilla or— She hesitated with a troubled frown.

"You told him to wait?"

"Distinctly." Seeing an idler in the square above, she questioned him in Spanish. "This man says the launch left for Panama two hours ago. They went on a Sunday spree. He says they came ashore and bought a lot of liquor, and he heard them quarreling later."

"That means we'll have to get another boat."

"I don't know where we shall find one."

"Neither do I, but there must be some sort of craft that plies back and forth regularly."

"Only once or twice a week, I believe, and it belongs to the sanitarium. Perhaps we'd better wait awhile; our men may come back."

At last, as the sun was dipping into a bed of gold, Kirk broke out:

"Gee whiz! We've got to do something. Mr. Cortlandt will be getting worried."

"In all probability he won't know anything about it until too late to come for us. He is dining with those people from Bocas, and may not get back to the Tivoli before midnight."

"Nice fix we're in!" remarked Anthony. "I'd like to lay hands on that captain."

"We may have to stay here all night."

"Well, at least we have a haven of refuge. They'll take us in at the hospital."

"I don't care to ask them. There's some one up there I don't wish to see. That's why I didn't go near the place today."

He laughed to hide his embarrassment. "I'm wondering—what people will say."

"Oh, you mustn't be troubled about that. It isn't your fault, you know, anyhow. Besides, people won't say anything because they won't know anything about it—if we stay away from that sanitarium."

"It's getting along toward dinner time," he said, "so let's see what we can find in the way of food."

They stumbled out into the unlighted street and began their search, but, seen close at hand, the cooking arrangements of Taboga proved most unattractive. But eventually they found a decent looking place, where they were taken in, and, after an interminable wait, food was set before them—chicken, boiled with rice and coconut, black beans and cocunut, fresh, warm milk and a wondrous assortment of hot-house fruits.

In spite of their equivocal situation, Edith seemed fully to have regained her spirits. Even the prospect of spending the night in this place apparently did not dismay her. They descended to the square again, stared at all the way through open doors and followed by a subdued murmur of comment. Then they sat for a long time watching the stars.

As if in despair over their impossible predicament, Edith gave way to a spirit of reckless vivacity, and Kirk, with a man's somewhat exaggerated sympathy for a woman's sensitive feelings, loyally strove to help her make the best of things in her own way. There was no real concession of her reserve—no sacrifice of the feminine privilege of prompt and complete withdrawal. If he had struck a false note he knew that she would have turned frigid in an instant.

It was on their return to the house that the climax came, leaving him strangely shaken. Their course took them past a tiny cantina. Frightened by a drunken brawl within, she picked up her skirts and fled into the darkness, Kirk stumbling along behind her.

At last she stopped out of breath, and he overtook her.

"You mustn't run through these dark alleys," he cried sharply. "You'll break your neck." Half impatient at this hysterical behavior, he seized her by the arm.

"Oh, I'm so frightened!" she breathed, and he felt her tremble. She lifted her white face, and her eyes were luminous in the gloom.

Before he realized what he was doing his arms had closed around her and his lips had met hers. It may have been the romance of the night, the solitude, the intoxicating warmth

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**CHAPTER X.**

**A Night at Taboga.**

**D**ESPITE his great contentment in Mrs. Cortlandt's society, Kirk found himself waiting with growing impatience for his active duties to begin. Curiously enough, this feeling was somehow connected with the thought of Edith herself. Why this should be so he did not trouble to inquire. They had become the best of good friends, he told himself, a consummation for which he had devoutly wished, yet for some indefinable reason he was dissatisfied.

He decided that he needed exercise and determined to take a tramp through the country, but on the evening before the day he had set for his excursion his plans were upset by a note from Mrs. Cortlandt, which the clerk handed him. It ran:

Dear Kirk—Stephen has arranged an outing for all three of us, and we are counting on you for tomorrow. It will be a really truly picnic, with all the delightful discomforts of such affairs. You are not to know where we are going until we call for you at 8. Faithfully and mysteriously yours, EDITH CORTLANDT.

(Continued on page 7, Col. 1.)