

THE Ne'er-Do-Well

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SYNOPSIS.

Kirk Anthony, son of a rich man, with college friends, gets into a fracas in a New York resort.

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 Alvarez, 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 Johnson, head of the canal. The Cortlandts are intriguing to make Alvarez'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.

Kirk kisses Mrs. Cortlandt and is then ashamed to think he has violated Cortlandt's trust in him. Cortlandt, alarmed by his wife's absence, rescues her and Kirk from the island. In the country near Panama Kirk meets a charming Spanish girl.

The girl tells him her name is "Chiquita." He learns later that that means only "little one." Kirk begins his work.

Mrs. Cortlandt has learned who Jefferson Locke is.

Locke (real name Wellar) is a swindler and has disappeared. His description fits Kirk. The latter tries in vain in Panama to learn something of Chiquita and meets Alvarez again.

Kirk wins the capital prize, \$15,000, in the lottery. He and Runnels make plans for advancement. The Cortlandts, having turned from the older Alvarez, intend to make Senor Garavel, a banker, president of Panama.

[Continued from last week.]

Allan, vastly excited, was, of course, waiting to accompany him.

"Oh, boss," exclaimed the negro, "I feel that we shall h'experience good fortune today."

"Did you buy a ticket?"

"No, sar: I h'invested all my monies traveling on those railroad trains."

"Now see how foolish you are. If you'd stayed at home you might have bought the winning number today."

"I prefer to h'accompany you. But I have been thinking to make you a proposition of partnership, Master h'Anthony. I will stay home and dream numbers, which you can purchase with your salary. In that manner we shall certainly burst this lottery. I do not desire the profits, however, for being partners with you. I would like you to have plenty of monies, that is all. I love you, sar."

"Don't! You embarrass me."

The drawing, which was for a capital prize of \$15,000 ("silver"), had drawn a larger crowd than usual, and when the two reached Cathedral square they found the lottery building and plaza thronged to overflowing with the usual polyglot elements that make up these Latin-American gatherings.

By dint of considerable effort Kirk succeeded in working his way through the wide double doors, and, being much above the average height, he was able to get a good view of the proceedings. Upon a platform a group of ceremonious officials were gathered about a revolving wire cage, so arranged that it could be whirled rapidly upon its axis. Into it were put ten ivory spheres, resembling billiard balls in size and appearance. When this had been done the cage was closed, and a very badly frightened twelve-year-old girl was selected at random from the audience, then lifted to the stage, where it required the commands and entreaties of her excited parents to prevent her from dissolving in tears.

At a word from the master of ceremonies the cage was spun until the ivory balls inside leaped and capered like captive squirrels. Then at another signal it was stopped. The door was opened, and the little girl reached in a trembling hand and selected a sphere. It proved to be hollow, with two halves screwed together, and in full sight of the assembly it was opened, displaying a bit of paper inside.

"Ocho!" cried the announcer, and a card bearing the numeral "8" was raised. The paper was replaced inside the ivory ball, the ball itself was dropped into the wire cage, the door was closed and once more the cage was spun.

Kirk was much interested in the scene, not from any faintest hope that he would draw a prize, but purely from the novel atmosphere and color of the thing. While his eyes were busiest and just as the child prepared to draw another ball he felt a clutch upon his arm and, glancing down, beheld the glowing black eyes of Senor Ramon Alvarez fixed upon him. He carried a dapper little cane, with which he tapped his former prisoner to attract his attention.

At sight of him Kirk drew down his brows and said gruffly:

"Don't poke me with that umbrella." He turned away, but again Alvarez touched him.

"I will spik' wit' you, hombre," he said.

"If you keep jabbing me with that crutch I'll break it, and then you can't walk home."

Ramon jerked his head toward the square outside in an imperious fashion, and Kirk, curious to learn the cause of unusual excitement, followed him without demur. When they had reached the street the Spaniard turned with flashing eyes and a mirthless smile.

"Well!" he said dramatically. "Pretty well. How goes it with you?"

"So! You 'ave succeeded in your cowardly attempt?"

"My what?"

"I lose my poaseetion as comandante of police."

"You don't say so!" Kirk's face broke into a smile of real pleasure.

"Ha! Makes it you to laugh, then?" exclaimed the Panamanian excitedly. "Per'aps you shall answer to those detestable actions, senor."

"Per'aps! I see you blame me for the loss of your job. Well, maybe you won't beat up the next American you get your hands on."

"Bot—I 'ave another poaseetion!" Ramon exclaimed. "I 'ave been promote! I am appoint' yesterday by his excellency the presidente to be his secretary."

"I suppose it's a good job, but you ought to be selling poison in a drug store."

Narrowing his eyes, Alvarez said meaningfully in a voice that none might overhear, "Panama is sometimes very on'calthy city for fat Americans." He ran a hostile glance up and down Anthony's burly frame. "It is the climate per'aps—of too great 'eat. The senor is reech man's son, eh? Those do not geere the appearance."

With supreme insolence he touched one of the buttons upon Kirk's linen uniform with his cane, whereat the American snatched the stick out of his hand, broke it and tossed it into the street. His blood was up, and in another breath he would have struck the



"You have won the capital prize."

Spaniard, regardless of consequences, but just at that moment Allan dashed out of the crowd crying breathlessly:

"Oh, boss! Oh, boss! Glory to God, it is true! Oh-h-h, glory!" Seizing Kirk's hands, he kissed them before the other could prevent, then ran off frantically: "Come quick! Come! Come! Come!"

"Look out!" snapped Kirk angrily. "What's happened?"

"The dream! The dream is come! Oh, God, sar! You—you have won the capital prize, sar! You—do not say you have lost the ticket or I shall die and kill myself!"

"Here it is!" In his hand Anthony waved a slip of paper, out of which leaped four big, red numbers—"8388."

"Diable!" came from behind him, and he turned to behold Alvarez, livid of face and with shaking hand, fling a handful of similar coupons after the broken cane. Without another word or a glance behind him the Panamanian made off across the plaza, barely in time to escape the crowd that surged around the two he had quitted.

Bombarded by a fusillade of questions in a dozen tongues, jostled by a clamorous, curious throng, the lucky owner of 8388 fought his way back into the lottery building, and as he went the news spread like flaming oil.

There it was, plainly displayed, "8388!" There could be no possible mistake, and it meant 15,000 silver pesos, a princely fortune indeed for the collector of No. 2.

Promptly at five minutes to 1 o'clock that afternoon Allan Allan, late of Jamaica, strode through the Panama railroad station and flaunted a first class round trip ticket to Colon before the eyes of his enemy, the gateman. He was smoking a huge Jamaican cigar, and his pockets bulged with others. When he came to board the train he called loudly for a porter to bring him the step and once inside selected a shady seat with the languid air of a bored globe trotter.

Only when Kirk appeared upon his rounds did he forego his haughty complacency. Then his wide lips, which nature had shaped to a perpetual grin, curled back as they were intended, his smile lit up the car, and he burst into loud laughter.

Kirk found that the report of his good fortune had spread far and wide; he was hailed a score of times for congratulations; operators at the various stations yelled at him and waved their hands; Runnels wired "Hurray!" at Gatun. A certain respect was in these greetings, too, for he had suddenly become a character.

As yet, however, he had not fully considered what this windfall meant to him. His first thought had been that he could now discharge his debts, go back to New York and clear himself before the law. Yet the more he thought of it the less eager he became to return. Seven thousand five hundred dollars in gold to Kirk Anthony of Panama, collector, was a substantial fortune. To Kirk Anthony of Albany, distributor, it was nothing. Suppose he went home and squared

his account with the police, what would he do then? Nothing, as usual. Here, he was proving that the Anthony breed was self supporting at least. And there was another reason, the weightiest of all. Long before he had reached the end of his run he realized that not 100 times the amount of this capital prize would tempt him to leave Panama before he had seen Chiquita.

Chiquita was beginning to seem like a dream. At times during the past week he had begun to wonder if she were not really a product of his own imagination. His fancy had played upon her so extravagantly that he feared he would not know her if ever they came face to face.

This was most unsatisfactory, and he reproached himself bitterly for the involuntary faithlessness that could allow her image to grow dim. He was almost without hope of seeing her again. And then, with the inconsequence of dreams and sprites, she appeared to him.

It was but a glimpse he had and a tantalizing flash of recognition from her eyes. It happened in the dusk during the confusion that accompanied the arrival of No. 7 at Panama. It lasted only a moment, and he lost sight of her again in the crowd.

But there was no doubt that she had recognized him, and nothing now could prevent him from continuing his search. The trouble was that his present occupation allowed him no opportunity. He was tied to the railroad except at night.

It was perhaps two weeks later that a serious shakeup occurred in the office force, of which no one seemed to know the cause. There was a mad scramble for advancement all along the line, in which Kirk took no part. But unexpectedly Runnels summoned him to his office.

"How would you like an inside position?" said the master of transportation, eyeing him keenly.

"So soon?"

"I said I'd advance you if you made good." He paused an instant, then said deliberately, "When you get the hang of things here you'll have a chance to be my assistant."

Kirk opened his eyes in amazement. "Gee! That's great! But do you think I can get away with it?"

"Not at once. It will take time, of course, and you'll have to work like the devil. Look here, Anthony, I'm partly selfish in this, for I believe you're the sort I'm going to want with in the next year. The superintendent has had an offer from a big system in the states, and he's going to quit when his vacation comes. He likes me and he says I'll probably step into his shoes. Do you understand what that means? I'll need fellows I can count on—fellows who won't double cross me to make a dollar for themselves, or knife me when my back is turned. I've got to have an efficient, noiseless organization. Otherwise we'll all go under, for we'll be into politics up to our necks. I think you're my sort, so if you'll stick to me I'll help you and for every step I take I'll drag you up one."

"It's a go!" The two young men clasped hands heartily. Runnels had struck the right note. Beside his former desire to prove himself a man, Kirk now felt a strong sense of loyalty to the one who had recognized his worth.

When he told his good news to Mrs. Cortlandt, her surprise was so cleverly simulated that he never dreamed that she had been at great pains to bring this thing about. Not that Runnels was indisposed to act upon his own initiative, but the circumstances that had made his action possible had been due to her. It was hard to help a man against his will, but she profited by experience and took the line of least resistance.

The young man himself did not inquire too closely into the occasion of his advancement, and Edith Cortlandt was but little in his mind. He was consumed with the thought of Chiquita. He hoped that his new work

would allow him more control of his time and perhaps put him in the way of learning her name. He could move in better society now.

CHAPTER XIV.

Garavel and His Daughter.

THESE were busy days for the Cortlandts. They entertained constantly, and the occasions when they dined without from one to a dozen guests became so exceptional as to elicit remark around the hotel. Most of their efforts were devoted to certain Panamanians of the influential class, and in company with one or more of these Cortlandt made frequent trips to the various quarters of the republic, sometimes absenting himself for days at a time.

During these intervals his wife assumed the direction of affairs and continued to entertain or be entertained. Her energy and resource seemed inexhaustible. Soon she became the social dictator of the city, and the most exclusive circles, American and Panamanian alike, allowed her to assume control.

The result was just what had been designed. Tourists and visiting newspaper people spoke glowingly of the unity between the two nations and wondered at the absence of that Spanish prejudice of which they had heard so much. Those who chanced to know the deeper significance of it all and were aware of the smoldering resentment that lay in the Latin mind commented admiringly upon her work and wondered what effect it would have upon the coming election.

No one but the women herself and her husband really understood the tremendous difficulties of their task or the vital issues at stake. All who

came into contact with her recognized the master mind directing the campaign and, consciously or unconsciously, relegated her husband to the background.

To the Latin intellect this display of power on the part of the woman was a revelation. She knew the effect she produced and made the most of it.

Old Anibal Alvarez was perhaps the last fully to appreciate her. He did, however, learn in time that while he could successfully match his craft against that of the husband, the wife read him unerringly. The result was that he broke with them openly.

When news of this reached the members of the canal commission they were alarmed, and Colonel Johnson felt it necessary to make known their views upon the situation. Accordingly, a few nights later the Cortlandts dined at his handsome residence on the heights above Culebra. After their return to Panama the colonel, in whom was vested the supreme authority over his nation's interests, acknowledged that his acquaintance with diplomacy was as nothing as compared with Edith Cortlandt's.

"She thinks Garavel is the proper man," he said to Colonel Bland.

"Garavel is a banker. He's not a politician."

The chief engineer laughed. "All Spanish-Americans are politicians, colonel. They can't help it."

"Would he accept?"

"It is her business to find out. I had my doubts."

"But could he win? It would be a calamity if he had American backing and failed. It would mean disaster."

"Cortlandt has been working carefully, and he has been in all the seven provinces. He admits that it might be done, and she is certain. Of course it will mean a fight—Alvarez won't give up easily—but if Garavel should be the next president it would be a fine thing for both countries."

Over at Panama the Cortlandts were looking for a house to lease. Affairs had reached a point where it seemed advisable to give up their quarters at the Tivoli and enter into closer contact with the life of the Spanish city. Meanwhile they gave a ceremonious little dinner, the one and only guest being Andres Garavel, the banker.

Of all the charming peoples of Central America there are perhaps none more polished and well bred than the upper class Panamanians. Of this agreeable type Senor Garavel was an admirable example, having sprung from the finest Castilian stock, as a name running back through the pages of history to the earliest conquests attested.

The present bearer of the name was of distinguished appearance. He was swarthy of skin, his hair was snow white, and he had stern black eyes of great intelligence. He was courtly and deliberate, evincing a pride that sprang not only from good blood but from good deeds. His poise was that of a man with heavy responsibilities, for Andres Garavel was a careful banker and a rich one. He was widely traveled, well informed and an agreeable talker.

"I am so disappointed that your daughter could not come," Edith told him for the second time. "I'm afraid she objects to our American informality."

"No, no, my dear lady," said their guest. "She admires American customs, as I do. We are progressive—we have traveled. In my home, in my private life, perhaps, I am a Panamanian, but in my business and in my contact with other people I am as they are. It is the same with my daughter. She has had a wide education for a child. She has traveled, she speaks five languages, and yet underneath it all she is a Garavel and hence a Panamanian. She is all I have, and my life is hers."

The meal progressed with only the customary small talk to enliven it, but as soon as the three had adjourned to the Cortlandt suite the host of the evening proceeded to approach the subject

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