

# THE Ne'er-Do-Well

By REX BEACH

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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 institutes 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 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 Johnson, head of the canal. The Cortlandts are intruding 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.

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 Alfarez again.

Kirk wins the capital prize, \$5,000, in the lottery. He and Runnels make plans for advancement. The Cortlandts, having turned from the older Alfarez, intend to make Senor Garavel, a banker, president of Panama.

Alfarez's son, Kirk's foe, is engaged to Gertrudis, Garavel's daughter. She is Kirk's "Chiquita." He meets her again at the opera through Mrs. Cortlandt's aid.

Kirk makes love to Chiquita. Edith Cortlandt, infatuated with Kirk, goes riding with him frequently.

[Continued from last week.]

"No, no! Listen. It is the warning bell, and we must return."

The crowd was filing into the theater now. They fell in behind Senor Garavel and Mrs. Cortlandt.

"I'm going hunting again tomorrow," prophesied Kirk, "and I'm almost certain to lose my way—about 3 o'clock. Suppose we have another stroll after the next act?"

"I shall be with my father. Never before have I enjoyed so much liberty." She sighed gratefully.

"Oh, I detest your blaméd, strait-laced Spanish customs," he cried hotly. "What do they amount to, anyhow? I love you. I do, I do!"

She laughed and darted to her father's side.

"Don't you think Miss Garavel is a pretty girl?" Mrs. Cortlandt questioned, as they strolled toward their box.

"She's a dream." Anthony's tone left nothing unsaid.

"You got along together capitally. Most of the señoritas are impossible."

"By the way, what is her name?"

"Gertrudis. Rather pleasing, I think." Kirk thought so too. When, after an age, the curtain fell for a second time he escaped from his companions, mumbling some excuse or other, and made haste to find her again. But as he approached he felt a sudden pang of jealous rage.

Ramon Alfarez was beside her, and the two were chatting with an appearance of intimacy that made him furious. Close at hand stood Garavel, deep in conversation with Colonel Johnson.

"Ah, Ramon, I wish you to meet Mr. Anthony," said Gertrudis. "So! You have met before?"

"In Colon," Kirk explained, while Alfarez scorched him with his eyes. "Mr. Alfarez was very hospitable to me."

"Yes," the Spaniard exclaimed. "It is my great regret that Senor Anthony did not remain for longer. Does Senor Anthony discover our climate to be still agreeable?"

"Very. It hasn't grown too warm for me yet."

"We are but approaching our 'ot season.'" The speaker's eyes snapped.

Heretofore Kirk had hated Ramon in a careless, indifferent sort of way, feeling that he owed him a good drubbing, which he would be pleased to administer if ever a fitting time arrived. But now, since he saw that the jackanapes had the audacity to love Gertrudis, his feeling became intense. The girl, of course, was fully alive to the situation and, although she evidently enjoyed it, she did her best to stand between the two men.

As for Alfarez, he was quick to feel the sudden fierce hostility he had aroused, and it seemed to make him nervous. Moreover, he conceived that he had scored heavily by his last retort, at which Kirk had only smiled. It therefore seemed best to him to withdraw from the conversation (annoyingly conducted in English), and a few moments later he stalked majestically away. This was just what Kirk wanted, and he quickly suggested the balcony. But Gertrudis was obstinate. "I must remain with my father," she said.

"May I sit beside you, then? Do you know, I'm going to nestle up to your father and make him like me."

"Again you are speaking of that subject. I have known you but an hour, and you talk of nothing but my father, of me, of coming to call. I have lost all modesty to speak of those things. You force me to embarrass myself."

"You once spoke of a chap your people had picked out. It isn't—Alfarez?" She let her dark eyes rest upon his for a moment, and his senses swam. Then she nodded slowly.

"You do not like him?"

"Just like a nose bleed. The day you and I are married I'm going to send him a wreath of poison ivy."

"It pleases you always to joke."

"No joke about that. You won't give in, will you?"

"There is no question of force nor of surrender, señor. I insist now that we shall speak of other things."

A few moments later he was constrained to rejoin his hostess' party.

"When are you going back to Las Savannas?" he asked as he reluctantly arose.

"Tomorrow."

"The hunting ought to be good!"

But she frowned at him in annoyance, and he left her after all without knowing whether he had gained or lost ground. She was not so warm and impulsive as he had supposed. Her girlishness, her simplicity, her little American ways, cloaked a deep reserve and a fine sense of the difference in their positions. The plague of it was that if anything he was more in love with the definite and dazzling Gertrudis Garavel than he had been with the mysteriously alluring Chiquita. And then, too, there was Alfarez!

## CHAPTER XVI.

### An Awakening.

HE was in no more satisfactory frame of mind when, on the next afternoon, he shouldered his gun and set out for the country. He went directly to the fairy pool, and waited there in a very fever of anxiety. Despite the coolness and peace of the place, he felt his pulses throb and his face burn. If she came, it would mean everything to him. If she stayed away—why, then he would have to believe that after all the real Gertrudis Garavel had spoken last night at the opera. The sound of a voice shot through his troubled thoughts like a beam of sunlight through a dark room.

"Oh, Senor Antonio! How you startled me!"

Instantly his self-possession came back. He felt relieved and gay.

"Good afternoon, queen!" He rose and bowed politely. "I thought I saw one underneath the waterfall just now."

"Who would have expected you to be here?" she cried, with an extreme and obviously counterfeit amazement that filled him with delight.

"I'm lost," he declared; then, after one look into her eyes, he added, "Absolutely, utterly, irretrievably lost. Won't you sit down?"

"Since we have met quite by accident, perhaps it would not be so very improper." She laughed mischievously and settled uncertainly beside him like a butterfly just alighting, ready to take flight again on the instant.

"Perhaps I can help you to find your



"Oh, Senor Antonio! How you startled me!"

Dear Kirk—I hope you are heartily sick of yourself and ready to do something decent for a change. Knowing your aristocratic habits as I do, I realize you must owe a lot of money by this time, and your new friends must be getting tired of you. I have been expecting you to draw on me daily and am taking this occasion to warn you in your own expensively acquired college English that "there is nothing doing"—except upon one condition. If you will agree to behave yourself in fu-

way, señor?" she said, with ingenious politeness.

"You are the only one who can, Miss Garavel. I don't know that I ever told you, but I'm in love."

"Indeed?"

"I am the most miserably happy person in the world, for I have just this moment begun to believe that the young lady likes me a little bit."

"Oh! But I forgot—the real reason why I came. I have something I must tell you."

"All right. But honestly now, didn't you want to come?"

She turned upon him in a little burst of passion. "Yes!" she cried. "Of course I did! I wished to come, madly, señor. It makes my heart patter, like that"—she made her little fingers "patter"—"to be wooed even by a Yankee. But I do not love you in the least. Oh no! Even if I wished to do so, there are too many reasons why I could not, and when I explain you will understand."

"I know. It's Ramon Alfarez. You're halfway engaged to him. But you know you don't love him."

"Ah, it is not too sure! He is of fine family, he is rich, he is handsome. Not possibly could I care for any man who was not all of those. All my life I have thought him a very sweet gentleman, and for a long time it has been agreed that I should be his wife. There are so many reasons why I should say yes."

"You haven't mentioned any that would be blinding in law."

"My father's wish. Is not that sufficient?"

"You disregarded that once."

"That was but a flutter. All the time I knew I should be Ramon's wife when the time arrived. Perhaps I could refuse to wed a man my father chose for me, but no nice Spanish girl would dare to wed a man her father did not like. Do you see?"

"But it's no cinch your father won't positively hunger for me once we get chummy."

"You are too different, you disregard our customs, you are bold. You continue to come here against my wishes, which no Spanish gentleman would dare to do."

"Oh, I'm no Spanish gentleman. I'm just an emotional blond. But I'm bound to marry you. Let's arrange the details. Shall it be a church wedding?"

She laughed deliciously. "What a nice game it is we have played! But now I must talk seriously."

"You witch!" he breathed. "Do you think I could ever give you up?"

She checked him gravely. "Truly it was just a game, and yet it was not altogether so either. But here is what I came to say. The strangest thing has happened. Not until last night after the opera did I even dream of it, and even now I cannot believe. Oh, I am so proud! Coming home from the theater my father told me—oh, the most wonderful thing. I promised very faithfully not to tell, so—he is to be the next president—of—Panama."

"Pres"—Anthony stared at her in frank amazement. "Why, I thought Old Man Alfarez—"

"It seems your country does not like him because he hates Americans—see? Now that you know the truth you must see at once that by no means could I marry to a person like you."

"Why not?"

"Oh! Don't you understand? I shall be the finest lady in the republic. All the men will adore me. I will have suitors—not one or two as now, but many. My father will be the most famous man of all the republic—perhaps in the whole world, I don't know."

"I don't think it will make any difference with him when he knows who I am. I'll tackle your father, and I'll promise to vote for him."

"You are very funny." She gazed at him seriously, one tiny foot curled under her, her chin nestling into her palm.

"Do you love me?"

"Not one single speck. I merely like you to make love at me and cause my heart to jump."

The little hypocrite continued to voice words of warning and denial, though her eyes invited him, and for a long time they continued this delightful play of pleading and evasion. But at last Chiquita jumped up with a great appearance of alarm.

"Heavens, the time!" she cried. "I have stayed too long by much. Stephanie will miss me."

He rose and stretched out his hand as if to hold her.

"Shall I come again tomorrow?"

She grew suddenly earnest.

"No, no, señor. That is something you should not ask. If ever we are to meet again it must be with my father's consent. Please! Do not urge, for truly I would have to refuse." She let her palm rest in his an instant, and her cheek went scarlet as he pressed it to his lips. Then she said: "Go, Mr. Brazen One. How greatly it surprised me to find you here! I cannot say. It gave me such a start! And, Senor Antonio—my father may be found any day at his bank." Before he could detain her she was gone, flitting up the path with just one flashing smile of mischief over her shoulder.

Anthony went home with his head in the clouds. All his doubts were now at rest; for while Chiquita had stubbornly denied him all encouragement, he felt sure that her heart had answered. It was in the highest spirits, therefore, that he opened a letter he found awaiting him and read as follows:

Dear Kirk—I hope you are heartily sick of yourself and ready to do something decent for a change. Knowing your aristocratic habits as I do, I realize you must owe a lot of money by this time, and your new friends must be getting tired of you. I have been expecting you to draw on me daily and am taking this occasion to warn you in your own expensively acquired college English that "there is nothing doing"—except upon one condition. If you will agree to behave yourself in fu-

ture I will pay your debts, send you west and give you a job as operator at \$40 a month. But you will go where I send you and you will stay where you are put. I will do the thinking for both of us and judge of your associates. Maybe if you prove to be any good at all I will arrange with the police to let you spend your vacations in "that dear New York" which still shows signs of your red paint brush. I would be pleased to have an apology by return mail, so that I may meet you in New Orleans and start you off once more on the road to decency and self respect. You will never be a success at anything, but I am always ready to do my duty.

This is my last offer, and if you refuse you may distinctly and definitely go to the devil. As ever your loving father,  
DARWIN K. ANTHONY.

F. S.—I can get good operators for \$30 a month. The extra \$10 is pure sentiment.

Spurred by his present exhilaration, Kirk wrote an answer, which he read with a good deal of satisfaction before sealing it up:

Dear Dad—You affectionate letter with the kind offer to take charge of a siding out in the Dakotas is at hand. I would like to help you along with your business, but "Upward and Onward" is my motto, and you'll have to raise that salary a bit. I am drawing \$25 a month at present, quarters furnished and promotion promised. I have made some good investments, and there are no debts to settle. Inclosed find my best bank statement, which will doubtless prove a great disappointment to you.

If you need a good master of transportation I would be pleased to consider an offer at any time, provided the salary is satisfactory, but your proposal to edit my acquaintances is out of the question. My decency and self respect are doing well, thank you, and I like the climate.

The salary would have to be about \$5,000 a year. As always your devoted and obedient son,  
KIRK.

F. S.—I would not care to locate farther west than Buffalo. My wife might not like it.

Kirk lost no time in calling at the bank, but was disappointed to learn that Senor Andres Garavel had left the city for an unexpected business tour of the provinces and would not return for at least two weeks.

In the days that followed he saw nothing of Gertrudis, but a great deal of Edith Cortlandt. She had redeemed her promise of getting him a good horse—something rare in this country—and he was grateful for the exercise, which came as a welcome relief from his indoor toil. Soon their old friendly intercourse was going on as if it had never been interrupted.

As for Edith, this sempiternal intimacy came to be quite as much a pain as a pleasure to her. During these past few weeks she had been plunged in a mental turmoil, the signs of which she had concealed with difficulty. She had fought with herself; she had tried to reason; she had marshaled her pride, but all in vain. At last she awoke to the terrifying certainty that she was in love with Kirk. She began to look upon her husband with a quickened curiosity, and found him a stranger. For years she had made allowance for his weaknesses, ignoring them as she ignored his virtues, but never before had he appeared so colorless, so insignificant, above all so alien. She had barely tolerated him hitherto, but now she began to despise him.

If Cortlandt was aware of her change of feeling and its cause, his method of dealing with her showed some keenness. Silent contempt was what she could least endure from him of all men; yet this was just what his manner toward her expressed—if it expressed anything.

Even if he did suspect, what then? It was no affair of his; she was her own mistress. She had given him all he possessed, she had made a man of him. He was her creature, and had no rights beyond what she chose to give. They saw less and less of each other. Only before others, or at their frequent political councils, were they quite the same as they had been.

Of Anthony, on the other hand, she arranged to see more than ever, flattering him by a new deference in her manner, making him feel always at ease with her. In their frequent rides they covered most of the roads about the city, even to the ruins of old Panama. Then they began to explore the bypaths and trails.

One afternoon they turned into an unfrequented road that led off to the jungle from the main highway, walking their horses while they marveled at the beauty of the foliage. They burst out into a rocky glen, where a spring of clear water bubbled forth.

"What a discovery!" exclaimed Edith. "Help me down, please. I'm going to drink."

Kirk dismounted and lent her a hand. The horses snorted appreciatively and, stepping forward, thrust their soft muzzles eagerly into the stream, then fell to browsing upon the tender leaves at their shoulders.

Edith quenched her thirst, shook the cramp from her limbs and said: "Some time we will have to see where this road leads. There may be more surprises beyond." She broke a flower from its stem and fastened it in Kirk's buttonhole while he gazed down at her with friendly eyes.

"You're looking awfully well lately," he declared.

Glancing up, she met his gaze and held it for an instant. Something in her look gave him a little thrill of embarrassment.

"I think I'll give Marquis and Gyp their dessert," he said and, turning aside, began to gather a handful of the greenest leaves. The instant his eyes were off her she took the horses by the bridles, swung them about and with a sharp blow of her riding crop sent them snorting and clattering down the trail. Kirk wheeled barely in time to see them disappearing.

"Say, why did you do that?" he asked.

"Because I wanted to. Isn't that reason enough?" Her eyes were reckless and her lips white. "I did it because I wanted to talk with you."

"Well, those horses wouldn't over-hear."

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