

THE
Ne'er-Do-Well

By
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"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 instigates 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 Panama railroad under Rannels, master of transportation.

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

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, \$15,000, in the lottery. He and Rannels 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.

She avows her love for him. Their ride and talk are interrupted by her husband. Kirk asks Garavel for his daughter's hand. The banker wishes her to marry Alfarez to advance his own ambitions. Clifford, a man from the States, asks Rannels about Kirk.

Kirk receives permission to call on Chiquita. Young Alfarez challenges him to a duel. Kirk laughs at him. Mrs. Cortlandt asks Kirk to call on her.

(Continued from last week.)

It was about this time, perhaps two weeks after Kirk had replied to his father's letter, that Rannels called him in one day to ask:

"Do you know a man named Clifford?"

"No."

"He dropped in this morning, claiming to be a newspaper man from the States; wanted to know all about everything on the canal and—the usual thing. He didn't talk like a writer, though. I thought you might know him. He asked about you."

"Me?" Kirk pricked up his ears.

"I gathered the impression he was trying to pump me." Rannels eyed his subordinate shrewdly. "I boosted you."

"Is he short and thick set?"

"No; tall and thin." As Kirk merely looked at him in a puzzled way, he continued: "I suppose we're all suspicious down here, there's so much of that sort of thing. If he has anything on you?"

"He's got nothing on me."

"I'm glad of that. You're the best man I have, and that shakeup I told you about is coming off sooner than I expected. I'd hate to have anything happen to you. Do you think you could hold down my job?"

"What? Do you really mean it?"

"I do."

"It goes without saying that I'd like to be master of transportation, but not until you're through."

"Well, the old man has had another row with Colonel Jolson and may not wait for his vacation to quit. I'm promised the vacancy."

"Then you have seen the colonel?"

"No, but I have seen Mrs. Cortlandt. I felt I had a right to ask something from her in return for what I did for you. I know that sounds rotten, but

you'll understand how it is. Colonel Jolson wants his brother-in-law, Blakeley, to have the place, but I'm entitled to it, and she has promised to fix it for me. If I go up you go too. That's why I was worried when this Clifford party appeared."

"There is something, I suppose, I ought to tell you, although it doesn't amount to much. I was mixed up in a scrape the night I left New York. A plain clothes man happened to get his head under a falling bottle and nearly died from the effects."

"This Clifford party is stopping at the Hotel Central. Better look him over."

"I will," said Kirk, feeling more concern than he cared to show, but his apprehension turned out to be quite unfounded. On inspection Clifford proved to bear no resemblance whatever to Williams, nor did he seem to have any concealed design. He was a good sort, apparently, with a knack of making himself agreeable, and in the weeks that followed he and Kirk became quite friendly. Meanwhile, no word had come from Senor Garavel, and Kirk was beginning to fret. But just as he had reached the limit of his patience he received a note which transported him with joy.

Senor Andres Garavel, he read, would be in the city on the following Tuesday evening, and would be pleased to have him call.

Even with his recent experiences of Spanish etiquette Kirk hardly realized the extent of the concession that had been made to him. He knew nothing of the tears, the pleadings and the spirited championship of his cause that had overborne the last parental objection. It was lucky for him that Chiquita was a spoiled child and Garavel a very Americanized Spaniard. However, as it was, he went nearly mad with delight and had hard work to refrain from shaving himself twice that Tuesday evening, so overcareful was he about his toilet, yet his excitement was as nothing compared to that of Allan, who looked on with admiration tempered by anxious criticism.

"It will be a grand wedding, sar," he exclaimed. "If Allan will be there for giving you away."

The residence of Senor Garavel is considered one of the show places of Panama. It is of Spanish architecture, built of brick and stucco and embellished with highly ornamental iron balconies. It stands upon a corner overlooking one of the several public squares, guarded from the street by a breast high stone wall crowned with a stout iron fence. Diagonally opposite and running the full length of the block is a huge weather stained cathedral, and fronting upon the intersecting street is a tiny shrine with an image of the Madonna smiling downward. At night its bright radiance illumines the darkness round about and lends the spot a certain sanctity.

An Indian woman, clad in barbarous colors, her bare feet incased in sandals, admitted him, and the banker himself met him in the hall. He led the way into a great barren parlor, where, to Kirk's embarrassment, he found quite a company gathered. His host formally presented him to them, one after another. There were Senor Pedro Garavel, a brother of Andres; Senora Garavel, his wife, who was fat and short of wind; the two Misses Garavel, their daughters; then a little wrinkled, brown old lady in stiff black silk who spoke no English. Kirk gathered that she was somebody's aunt or grandmother. Last of all, Gertrudis came shyly forward and put her hand in his, then glided back to a seat behind the old lady. Just as they were seating themselves another member of the family appeared—this time a second cousin from Guatemala. Like the grandmother, he was as ignorant of English as Kirk was of Spanish, but he had a pair of frightfully intense black eyes with which he devoured the American.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A Challenge and a Confession.

IT was very trying to be the target of so many glances. Instead of resuming their conversation the entire assemblage of Garavels waited calmly for their caller to begin, and he realized in a panic that he was expected to make conversation. He cast about madly for a topic.

His host helped him to get started, and he did fairly well until one of the Misses Garavel began to translate his remarks to the old lady and the ferocious cousin from Guatemala. As their replies were not rendered into English, he was left stranded. He knew that his whole salvation lay in properly impressing his auditors, so he began again and floundered through a painful monologue.

The night suddenly turned off sweetly hot, perspiration began to trickle down his brow, his collar became a tourniquet, and he cast appealing glances at the silent figure hidden demurely behind the rusty old lady in the black harness. The look of mingled pity and understanding she gave him somewhat revived his fainting spirit, and he determined to stick it out until the family were ready to retire and allow him a word with her alone. But idle hope! Gradually it dawned upon him that they had no such intention.

By now his collar had given up the struggle and lain limply down to rest. The whole experience was hideous, yet he understood quite well that these people were not making sport of him. All this was only a part of their foreign customs. They were gentlemanly, reared to a different code from his—that was all—and since he had elected to come among them he could only suffer and be strong.

What he ever talked about during that evening he never quite remem-

bered. When it came time to leave he expected at least to be allowed a farewell word or two with Gertrudis, but instead he was bowed out as ceremoniously as he had been bowed in and, finding himself at last in the open, sighed with relief. He felt like a paroled prisoner, but he thought of the girl's glance of sympathy and was instantly consoled. He crossed slowly to the plaza, pausing a moment for a good night look at the house, then, as he turned, he caught a glimpse of a figure slinking into the shadows of the side street and smiled indulgently. Evidently Allan had been unable to resist the temptation to follow him. But when he had reached his quarters he was surprised to find the boy there ahead of him.

"How did you beat me home?" he inquired.

"I have been waiting h'impatiently ever since you went out. To be sure, I have had one little dream."

"Didn't you follow me to the Garavels'?"

"Oh, boss! Never would I do such."

Seeing that the negro was honest, Kirk decided that somebody had been spying upon him, but the matter was of so little consequence that he dismissed it from his mind.

Although Rannels had spoken with confidence of the coming shakeup in the railroad organization, it was not without a certain surprise that he awoke one morning to find himself actively in charge of the entire system. He took no time in sending for Kirk, who took the news of their joint advancement with characteristic equanimity.

"Now, there is nothing cinched yet, understand," the acting superintendent cautioned him. "We're all on probation, but if we make good I think we'll stick."

"I'll do my best to fill your shoes."

"And I have the inside track on Blakeley, in spite of Colonel Jolson, so I'm not alarmed. The break came sooner than I expected, and now that we chaps are in control it's the chance of our lifetimes."

Kirk nodded. "You're entitled to all you get, but I've never quite understood how I managed to forge ahead so fast. I've been mighty lucky."

"You don't really call it luck, do you?" Rannels looked at him curiously.

"I'm not conceited enough to think I'm a downright genius."

"Why, the Cortlandts engineered everything. It was they who arranged your promotion to the office in the first place, and they're behind this last affair. They have stood back of you at every step and, incidentally, back of me and the other boys."

"When you say 'they' you of course mean 'she.'"

"Of course. One has to recognize him, though, as the head of the family. And he really did have a part in it too. At least if he had been against us we never would have won."

"I'd like to show the Cortlandts that we appreciate what they've done, but we can't openly thank her without humiliating him. I'd like to give him something."

"Suppose we give him a quiet little supper some night and tell him frankly how grateful we are. He's the sort to appreciate a thing like that, and it would be a delicate way of thanking his wife too."

"Good! I'll speak to the other fellows, and now the acting master of transportation is going to shake with the new acting superintendent and wish him every success."

Rannels grasped the outstretched hand.

"Say, Anthony," he said, "we're young and we have a start. I have what you lack, and you have what I lack. If we stick together, we'll own a railroad some day. Is it a go?"

"You bet!"

With a warm glow in his breast the new master of transportation plunged into his duties. He really was making a success, it seemed, although it was a bit disappointing to learn that he owed so much of it to Edith Cortlandt. But this last advancement, too, was very timely, for it would surely have its effect upon Andres Garavel.

But his new work brought new troubles and worries. He began to sleep shorter hours; he concentrated with every atom of determination in him; he drove himself with an iron hand. He attacked his task from every angle, and with his fine constitution and unbounded youthful energy he covered an amazing quantity of work. He covered it so well, moreover, that Rannels complimented him.

This stress of labor served one purpose for which he was very grateful; it separated him from Edith Cortlandt and took his mind from that occurrence in the jungle.

Soon after his promotion he received from Andres Garavel a warmly worded note of congratulation, and some few days later an invitation to dine, which he accepted eagerly.

The dinner proved to be another disappointing ordeal, for again he was allowed no opportunity of speaking with Gertrudis and had to content himself with feasting his eyes upon her. But, although the family were present en masse, as on the former occasion, they unbent to a surprising degree, and he found them truly gracious and delightful.

Later in the evening he found himself alone with Chiquita and the old Spanish lady, and, knowing that the latter could not understand a word of his tongue, he addressed himself to the girl with some degree of naturalness.

"I was sorry for you the last time, senor," she said, in reply to his half humorous complaint, "and yet it was funny; you were so frightened."

"It was my first memorial service. I thought I was going to see you alone."

"Oh, that is never allowed."

"Never? How am I going to ask you to marry me?"

Miss Garavel hid her blushing face behind her fan. "Indeed! You seem capable of asking that absurd question under any circumstances."

"I wish you would straighten me out on some of your customs."

She gave him an odd look, smiling timidly.

"As for tonight, do you attribute any meaning to my father's request that you dine with us?"

"Of course. It means I wasn't black-balled at the first meeting. I suppose."

She blushed delightfully again.

"Since you are so ignorant of our ways you should inquire at your earliest convenience. I would advise you, perhaps, to learn Spanish."

"Will you teach me? I'll come every evening."

She did not answer, for the old lady began to show curiosity, and a conversation in Spanish ensued which Kirk could not follow. He departed with a feeling of exaltation. Beyond doubt his suit was progressing—slowly, perhaps, but still progressing.

His understanding of Spanish customs received a considerable enlargement on the following day, when he met Ramon Alfarez outside the railroad office. Ramon had evidently waited purposely for him, and now began to voice a protest in the greatest excitement.

"You 'ave insult me," he cried furiously, "and now you 'ave the insu-



"Make it yourself ready to fight tomorrow."

lence to interfere in my affairs." He paused dramatically. "Make it yourself ready to fight on tomorrow."

"What's the use of putting it off? I couldn't make your weight in that time. I'll do it now, if you say."

"No, no! Ouderstan' we shall fight like gentlemen. I shall keel you with any weapon you prefer."

"By Jove!" Kirk exclaimed in amazement. "This is a challenge. You want to fight a duel! Why, this reads like a book!" He began to laugh, at which Ramon became white and calm. "Listen," Kirk went on, "I'll tell you what we'll do; we'll fight with fire hose again. I suppose you want satisfaction for that ducking."

"I prefer to shoot you, senor," the other declared quietly. "Those marriage shall never occur until first I walk upon your dead body. As matter of honor I offer you this opportunity biffore it is too late. All Panama is speaking of those engagements to Senorita Garavel. Come, then, must I insult you further?"

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