

The Ne'er-Do-Well.

[Continued from page 6, Col. 4.]

"Eighty thousand, that's all, and he's got it on him."

"You're wrong there. He was broke when he landed. I ought to know."

"Oh, no! He came down on the Santa Cruz. I've seen the purse. He traveled under the name of Jefferson Locke. There's no mistake, and he couldn't have blown it all. No, it's sewed into his shirt, and I'm here to grab it."

Weeks whistled in amazement. "He is a shrewd one. Eighty thousand—Lord, I wish I'd known that! He's here, all right, working for the railroad and living at Panama. He's made good, too, and got some influential friends. Oh, this is great!"

"Working, hey? Clever stall! Do you see that?" Williams inclined his head for a fuller display of the disfiguration over his ear. "He hung that on me, with a bottle. I—near died."

He laughed disagreeably. "He'll go back and he'll go back quick. How do I get to Panama?"

Weeks consulted his watch hastily.

"You've missed the last train, but we'll go over together in the morning. I want to have a hand in this arrest for reasons of my own. I don't like him or his influential friends." He began to chuckle ponderously. "No; I don't like his influential friends, in particular."

While this scene was being enacted on the north side of the isthmus, Kirk Anthony over at the Tivoli hotel, was making himself ready for the ball with particular pains. Allan regarded him admiringly from many angles.

"Oh, Master h'Auntony," he exclaimed rapturously, "you are beautiful!"

"Thanks! Again thanks! Now, can you remember to do as I have told you?"

"I would die!"

"Don't say that again, I'm too nervous. Here are your instructions, once more. Keep both doors to this room locked and stand by the one to the veranda! Don't let any one in except Mr. Runnels and the man he'll bring. Don't—leave—this—spot, no matter what happens."

"I shall watch this h'apartment carefully, never fear."

"Remember, when I knock, so, let me in instantly, and keep your wits about you."

"H'Allen never fails, sar. But what is coming to pass?"

"Never mind what is coming to pass. This is going to be a big night, my boy—a very big night." Kirk strolled out into the hall and made his way to the lobby.

Already the orchestra was tuning up, the wide porches were filling with well dressed people, while a stream of coaches at the door was delivering the arrivals on the special from Colon. It was a very animated crowd, sprinkled



"Working, hey? Clever stall! Do you see that?"

Into the lobby came a mixed group, in which were Andres Garavel, his daughter, Ramon Alvarez and the Cortlandts. Kirk's face was white as he went boldly to meet them, but he did his best to smile unconcernedly. He shook hands with Edith and her husband, bowed to Gertrude, then turned to meet her father's stare.

"May I have a word with you, sir?" Garavel inclined his head silently. As the others moved on he said, "This is hardly a suitable time or place, Mr. Anthony."

"Oh, I'm not going to kick up a fuss. I didn't answer your note because there was nothing to say. You still wish me to cease my attentions?"

"I do. It is her wish and mine."

"Then I shall do so, of course. If Miss Garavel is dancing tonight I would like your permission to place my name on her program."

"No!" exclaimed the banker.

"Purely to avoid comment. Every one knows I have been calling upon her, and that report of our engagement got about considerably. It would set people talking if she snubbed me. That is the only reason I came to this dance. Believe me, I'd rather have stayed away."

"Perhaps you are right. Let us have no unpleasantness and no gossip about the affair by all means. I consent, then." Conversing in a friendly manner, they followed the rest of the party.

Kirk ignored Ramon's scowl as he requested the pleasure of seeing Chiquita's program, then pretended not to notice her start of surprise. After a frightened look at her father she timidly extended the card to him, and he wrote his name upon it.

As he finished he found Mrs. Cortlandt regarding him.

"Will you dance with me?" he inquired.

"Yes. I saved the fourth and the tenth." As he filled in the allotted spaces she said in a low voice: "You are the boldest person! Did Mr. Garavel give you leave to do that or?"

"Of course. Thank you." He made his way out of the press that had gathered and toward the open air.

Runnels pounced upon him just outside.

"Well, well, quick! Did you make it?"

"Number nine."

"Good! I was gnawing my finger nails. Whew! I'm glad that is over. Now pull yourself together and don't forget you have the first dance with Mrs. Runnels. There goes the music. I—I'm rattled to dance."

Anthony found his friend's wife bubbling with excitement and scarcely able to contain herself.

"Oh, I'll never live through it, I know," she cried, as soon as they were out upon the floor. "How can you be so calm?"

"I'm not. I'm as panicky as you are."

"And she, poor little thing! She seems frightened to death."

"But— isn't she beautiful?"

Now and then her eyes strayed to Kirk with a look that made his blood move quicker. It boded well for the success of his plans and filled him with a fierce, hot gladness. But how the moments dragged!

General Alvarez entered the room amid a buzz of comment. Then, as he greeted his rival, Garavel, with a smile and a handshake a round of applause broke forth. The members of the commission sought them both out, and congratulations were exchanged. At last the Garavel boom was launched in earnest.

Mrs. Cortlandt expressed a desire to sit out the fourth dance.

"So your engagement to Miss Garavel is broken?" she began, when she and Kirk had seated themselves in two of the big rockers that lined the porch.

"All smashed to pieces, running gear broken, steering knuckle bent, gasoline tank punctured. I need a tow."

"Mr. Garavel told me not an hour ago that as soon as he explained his wishes she consented to marry Ramon without a protest."

"A refusal would have meant the death of the old man's chances, I presume. She acted quite dutifully."

"Yes. If she had refused Ramon, I doubt if we could have saved her father. As it is, the general withdraws and leaves the field clear, the two young people are reunited, quite as if you had never appeared, and you—my dear Kirk, now what about you?"

"Oh, I don't count. I never have counted anything, you know. Is it true that Garavel is practically elected?"

"General Alvarez couldn't very well step in after he had publicly stepped out, could he? That would be a trifle too treacherous. He'd lose his support, and our people could then have an excuse to take a hand."

"I think you worked it cleverly, Mrs. Cortlandt," Kirk said. "Of course I had no chance to win against a person of your diplomatic gifts. I had my nerve to try."

"Yes. You see, it meant more to me than to you or to her. With you two it is but a romance, forgotten in a night."

"Suppose I don't choose to accept what it pleases people to hand me?"

"My dear Kirk!" She smiled. "You will have to in this case. There is nothing else to do."

He shook his head. "I hoped we could be friends, Mrs. Cortlandt, but it seems we can't be."

At this she broke out imperiously, her eyes flashing.

"You can't afford to break with me."

"Indeed! Why do you think that?"

"Listen! I've shown you what I can do in a few months. In a year you can be a great success. You want to become a big man like your father. Well, Runnels will be out of the way soon, Blakeley amounts to nothing. You will be the superintendent."

"So! That's not merely a rumor about Blakeley? Runnels is fired, eh?"

"Yes."

"If I choose not to give up Chiquita Miss Garavel, then what? It means the end of me here, is that it?"

"If you choose? Why, you have no choice whatever in the matter. It is practically closed. You can do nothing—although, if you really intend to make trouble, I shall walk inside when I leave and inform the old gentleman, in which case he will probably send the girl home at once, and take very good care to give you no further opportunity. Ramon is only too anxious to marry her. As to this being the end of you here, well, I really don't see how it could be otherwise."

"And if I don't agree you will tell Mr. Garavel that I'm going to make trouble?" She said nothing, so he went on cautiously, sparing for time.

"Well, inasmuch as this seems to be a plain business proposition, suppose I think it over. When it comes time for our next dance, I'll say yes or no."

"As you please."

"Very well. The music has stopped: we'd better go in."

As they rose she laid her hand upon his arm and he felt it tremble as she exclaimed:

"Believe me, Kirk, this isn't at all easy for me, but—I can't bear to lose."

[Continued next week.]

Looking Backward.

He was not very sober and had ridden for an hour or two in the taxicab when the chauffeur stopped. "How much do I owe?" asked the passenger. "Eighteen shillings and sixpence, sir," was the reply. There was a pause; then: "Well, look here, driver," said the passenger, "just back up and keep going backward till you come to two shillings—it's all I've got."—London Mail.

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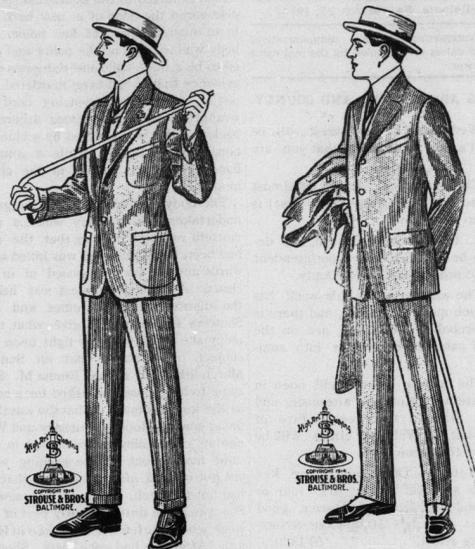
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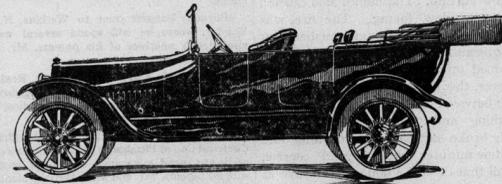
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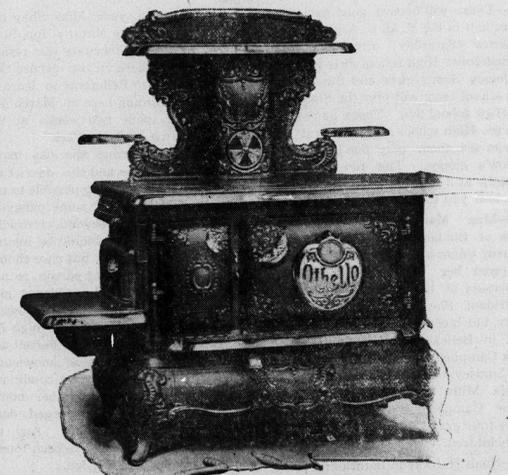
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