

The Ne'er-Do-Well.

[Continued from page 6, Col. 4.]

And you'll have some difficulty in breaking it up before I get out."
"You expect, then, to prove your innocence easily?"
"I do."
"But I hear there are other serious charges."
"It is quite the same with them."
"But suppose you should not clear yourself of this—murder. Would you wish to drag down my daughter's name?"
"Of course not."
"I understand you have not spoken of this marriage. Perhaps you might consent to remain silent. If by any chance you should be convicted of guilt what satisfaction could you derive from injuring me and mine?"
"None at all, sir."
"I am rich," Garavel went on meaningfully. "If you are acquitted I might perhaps arrange amply for your future—upon conditions."
"In other words, if I am to be hanged or shot or whatever it is they do to people down here you'll expect me to keep my mouth shut on general principles, and if I'm acquitted you'll pay me well to disappear. Is that it? Well, there is some family pride to that." He laughed lightly.
"My political future may depend upon it."
"If I can help you in that way I'll gladly keep silent as long as you wish, but I don't think I care to make any further terms."
"Make sure of this," snapped the father—"your marriage will be annulled, no matter what you prove or fail to prove. Already Chiquita is repentant, and I shall not rest until she is free. You have done me a great injury, and I shall not forget it."

On the following morning the leading American attorney of the city called at the jail, announcing that he had been retained as counsel, but refusing to tell who had employed him. Supposing, of course, that he had been sent by friends who wished no publicity in the matter, Kirk did not press him for information. Together they outlined their defense as best they could. With characteristic optimism Kirk insisted upon treating the charge against him as of little consequence, and it was not until he had undergone his preliminary hearing that he fully realized the gravity of his situation.

To his unspeakable indignation, the officer who had discovered Cortlandt's body swore that he had seen the deceased pass him shortly before the time of his death, evidently taking a walk along the water's edge for relief from the heat, and that immediately afterward, perhaps a minute or so, the prisoner had also passed, going in the same direction! There was a street light close by, he said, and there could be no possible mistake as to Anthony's identity. A few moments later there had been a pistol shot, muffled, but unmistakable, and the policeman had hastened in the direction from which it came. The prisoner had appeared suddenly out of the darkness and hurried past. In the politest manner possible, the witness declared, he had questioned him regarding the shot, but Mr. Anthony had neither stopped nor answered. On the contrary, he had broken into a run. The officer had considered this strange behavior; but, being at all times most respectful toward Americans, he had made no effort to detain him. Passing on, he had found the body of the dead man. A revolver was beside it.

When this amazing testimony was translated to Kirk he was astounded; but his indignation was as nothing to that which swept over him when a servant in the Alfarez household swore to having actually witnessed the murder.

This fellow declared that he had been troubled greatly with a toothache. Toward morning of the night in question, too restless for sleep, he had gone out upon the sea wall. Even now his face was swollen, and he made a determined effort to show the court the particular tooth which had made him an unwilling beholder of the tragedy. Overcome by exhaustion, he had fallen asleep after a time, and he was awakened by the sounds of a quarrel. On opening his eyes he saw two Americans, one of whom was Senior Cortlandt, and the other Kirk Anthony. Being utterly ignorant of their language, he had no means of knowing what was said, nor did he consider the altercation serious until the large man shot the Senior Cortlandt. Then, being terror stricken at what he had beheld, he had run away, entirely forgetting his toothache, which was quite gone. That was all he knew of the matter. He recognized Anthony as the man who had done the shooting. He was troubled greatly with toothaches.

Wade was called next and told the story of that damning incident at the supper party, being corroborated by the others. Then there were several witnesses who swore to inconsequent things.

For once in his careless life the young man realized that he was face to face with something bigger and stronger than his own determination, and it daunted him. He began to see that he had underestimated these foreigners, for it seemed an easy matter to convict an innocent man in these Central American courts. Suddenly he decided to cable for Darwin K. Anthony—the one man who was strong enough to save him.

When it came time for him to speak, he told a straight story about his own actions on that night, and he was cor-

roborated by Allan; but he knew that these words had little weight against that other testimony. Of course, he was remanded for trial.

Anson, the lawyer, gave him a ray of encouragement as he left.

"Don't go too much on this hearing," he said. "I think we'll pull you out all right."

"You think! I dare say Ramon Alfarez can get a dozen men to perjure themselves as easily as he got those two."

"Exactly. But I have a little coup that I intend to spring at the right moment."

"For heaven's sake, tell me what it is!"

"I'm sorry, but I can't just yet. In the first place, one must handle these people exactly right or they explode."

"But give me an idea at least. I'm really interested in the outcome of this case, you know."

Anson smiled. "Of course you are, and I'll tell you as soon as I can, but not now."

"These Spizcoties would enjoy standing me up against a wall with my head in a rage. They'd make it a holiday and ring all the bells in town."

"I can't assure you that it isn't serious," Anson acknowledged gravely, "for it is. Any time an American goes to court in this country it is serious. But that doesn't mean that we'll lose."

"You may be a good lawyer," said Kirk ruefully, "but you're a blamed poor comforter. I—I wish my dad was here. He'd fix it. He wouldn't let 'em convict me. He's great, my dad is. He can swear like the devil. I like him better than any man I've ever met, Anson."

He wrote a lengthy cablegram, which the lawyer, with a peculiar smile, agreed to dispatch at once. He spent a sleepless night. In the morning a message came signed by Copley—Kirk's heart leaped at the familiar name—saying that Darwin K. Anthony had left Albany for the west on Sunday night and could not be located for a few days.

"He was never gone when I needed money," the son mused. "He'll be worried when he hears about this, and he has enough to worry him as it is. I'm mighty sorry, but I simply must have him."

Anson brought in the day's papers, which alluded, as usual, to Cortlandt's death as a murder, and printed their customary sensational stories, even to



"I am free, free!"

a rehash of all that had occurred at the stag supper. This in particular made Kirk writhe, knowing as he did that it would reach the eyes of his newly made wife. He also wondered vaguely how Edith Cortlandt was bearing up under all this notoriety. The lawyer brought the further news that Allan was in captivity as an accessory to the crime and that henceforth Kirk need expect but few visitors. Somebody, probably Ramon Alfarez, had induced the officials to treat their prisoner with special severity.

During the days which followed, Kirk suffered more than he chose to confess even to his attorney. In the first place, it was hard to be denied all knowledge of what was going on—Anson would tell him little, except that he was working every day—and then, too, the long hours of solitude, gnawed at his self control. Runnels managed to see him once or twice, reporting that, so far as he could learn, Chiquita had disappeared. He took a message from Kirk to her, but brought back word that he could not deliver it.

It was on Sunday, a week after his arrest, that Edith Cortlandt came to Kirk. He was surprised to see the ravages that this short time had made in her, for she was pale and drawn and weary looking, as if from sleeplessness. Strange to say, these marks of suffering did not detract from her appearance, but rather enhanced her poise and distinction.

"I'm awfully glad to see you, Mrs. Cortlandt," he said as she extended her hand. "But do you think it was wise for you to come?"

She shrugged. "People can say no more than they have already said. My name is on every tongue, and a little more gossip can make matters no worse. I had to come. I just couldn't stay away. I wonder if you can realize what I have been through."

"It must have been terrible," he said gently.

"Yes, I have paid. It seems to me

that I have paid for everything I ever did. Those newspaper stories nearly killed me, but it wasn't that so much as the thought that you were suffering for my acts."

"I'm very sorry. You never thought for a moment that I did what they claim?"

"No, no! It has all been a mistake from the first. I was sure of that."

"You heard what those two men testified?"

"Bah! That is Ramon Alfarez. But he can do nothing. You will forgive me for what I said that night at the hotel, won't you? I didn't really mean to injure you, Kirk, but I was half hysterical. I had suffered so these last few months that I was ready to do anything. I never dreamed there was a way out of my misery, a way so close at hand. But somehow, even before General Alfarez's voice on the phone told me what had happened, I knew, and I—I felt—"

"I know you had a great deal to put up with," he said, "but for both our sakes I wish it had come in some other way."

"Oh, I don't care," she cried recklessly. "The one thing I can grasp in all this turmoil, the one thing that rings in my ears every moment, is that I am free, free! That is all that matters to me. You showed your loyalty to Stephen more than once, and, though your scruples angered me, I honor you for them now."

"Your husband's death can make no difference with us, Mrs. Cortlandt," he said gravely.

"We have talked openly before, and there is no need to do otherwise now. You mean by that that you don't care for me, but I know better. I believe there is a love so strong that it must find an answer. Although you may not care for me now as you care for—some one else—I know that I can make you forget her and put me in her place. I can help you, oh, so much!"

"Wait!" he said harshly. "You force me to break my word. I don't want to tell you this, but—I am married."

[Continued next week.]

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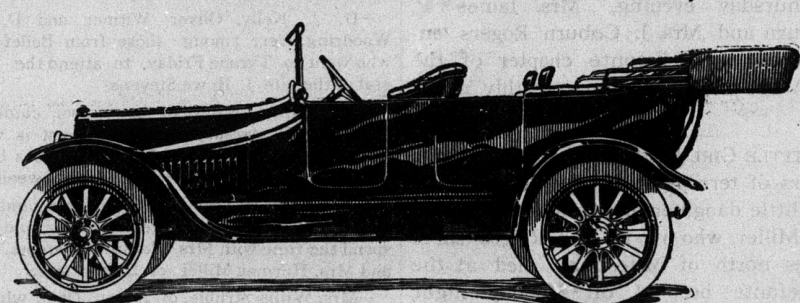
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