

THE NE'ER-DO-WELL

A Romance of the Panama Canal
BY
REX BEACH

COPYRIGHT, 1910, 1911, BY HARPER & BROTHERS

"Don't be foolish, Nathan talks too much. He'll offer you something better than that."

But Kirk was obdurate. "I'd prefer to start in as confidential adviser to the canal commission, of course, but I'd be a 'frost,' and my father would say 'I told you so.' I must make good for his sake, even if it's only counting cars or licking postage stamps. Besides, it isn't exactly the square thing to take money for work that somebody else does for you."

Mrs. Cortlandt laughed with a touch of annoyance.

"I think a few weeks in cap and buttons will cure you of this quixotic sentiment. Meanwhile I must admit it is refreshing." She stared unseeingly at the street lights for a moment. "But see here, Kirk, don't the collectors live in Colon?"

"I don't know," he replied, startled and flattered by her first use of his given name.

"I'll look it up tomorrow. You know I—Mr. Cortlandt and I will be in Panama, and I prefer to have you here. You see, we can do more for you. A little later she broke into a low laugh. "It seems strange to go driving with a conductor."

CHAPTER X.

A Night at Taboga.

DESPITE his great contentment in Mrs. Cortlandt's society Kirk found himself waiting with growing impatience for his active duties to begin. Curiously enough, this feeling was somehow connected with the thought of Edith herself. Why this should be so he did not trouble to inquire. They had become the best of good friends, he told himself, a consummation for which he had devoutly wished, yet for some indefinable reason he was dissatisfied.

He decided that he needed exercise and determined to take a tramp through the country, but on the evening before the day he had set for his excursion his plans were upset by a note from Mrs. Cortlandt, which the clerk handed him. It ran:

Dear Kirk—Stephen has arranged an outing for all three of us, and we are expecting you for tomorrow. It will be a really truly picnic, with all the delightful discomforts of such affairs. You are not to know where we are going until we call for you at 8. Faithfully and mysteriously yours, EDITH CORTLANDT.

The recipient of this kind invitation tossed it aside, with a gesture of impatience. For the moment he experienced a kind of boyish resentment at having his intentions thwarted that seemed out of proportion to the cause. But the emotion soon passed.

The next morning Edith appeared upon the hotel porch. She was alone. "Where's Mr. Cortlandt?" he inquired.

"Oh, some men arrived last night from Buenos Aires and telephoned that they must see him today on a matter of importance. I shall have to make up to you for his absence if I am able."

"Where is to be the scene of our revel?"

"Taboga," she said, with eyes sparkling. "You've never been there, but it's perfectly gorgeous. Please call a coach, our boat is waiting, and don't sit on the lunch."

Kirk obeyed, and they went clattering down the deserted brick street. Edith leaned back, with a sigh.

"I'm so glad to get away from that hotel for a day. If you only knew it, Kirk, you've captured the political calculations of the Panama Conservative party."

"I didn't know I had ever even rocked the boat."

"It runs back to your affair with Ramon."

"Really, did that affect it?"

"Rather. At any rate it gave an excuse for setting things in motion. There had been some doubt about the matter for a long time, and I was only too glad to exert my influence in the right direction, but—this is a picnic to an enchanted island, and here we are talking politics. We mustn't be so serious. School is out, and it's vacation. I want to romp and play and get my

face dirty.

The landing was thronged, and at sight of the newcomers loiterers gathered from all sides—a pirate throng, shouting a dozen dialects and forcing Kirk to battle lustily for his luggage. Stepping into a skiff, they were rowed to a launch, and a few moments later were gliding swiftly around the long rock rib that guards the harbor, a copper hued bandit at the wheel, a Nubian giant at the engine and an evil yellow faced desperado sprawling upon the forward deck.

Even before they had come to anchor at Taboga island a dozen boatmen were racing for them and crying for their patronage. At the water's edge they saw a tiny village nestled close against the mountains, its tiled roofs, rust red and grown to moss, its walls faded by wind and weather to delicate mauves and dove colors and greens impossible to describe.

The launch, when it came to rest, seemed suspended in air, and beneath



Slowly He Picked His Way Ashore.

it lay an entrancing sea garden. Over the engine had stopped its clatter a sleepy, peaceful silence settled over the harbor, unbroken by wheel or whistle, for in Taboga no one works and there are no vehicles.

"What a wonderful place!" exclaimed the young man fervently. "Why, it's like a dream—it can't be real! Then, as the boatmen renewed their begging, 'I wonder which large gentleman I'd better hire.'"

"Take the little boy, please," Edith called to an archaic who was manfully struggling with a pair of oars twice his own length, whereupon the older boatmen began to shove off with many oaths.

"Our choice has offended these genial bandits," Kirk observed as he helped her to a seat. "When shall we tell the lad to bring us off?"

"Four o'clock," answered Mrs. Cortlandt. "I arranged with the captain to be ready at that hour, so, you see, we have the whole day ahead of us."

Across the limpid shallows they glided, bravely propelled by their nine-year-old oarsman, but when the bow of their skiff grated upon the bottom they were still some yards from the shore.

"Looks as if we'd have to wade," said Kirk, then called to one of the nearby boatmen to lend the child a hand. But the fellow replied gruffly in some unintelligible jargon.

"He says he carries his passengers ashore in his arms," Edith translated.

"Really? Competition is spirited even on this heavenly isle. Well, that's easy!" Anthony untied his low shoes, kicked them off and rolled up his trousers.

"Permit me to help you," he said, "without embarrassing your wife."

She took up and showed him to gather her in his arms. Then for the first time she felt his strength as her body leaned to his. Slowly he picked his way ashore while she reclined in his embrace, her arms about his neck, her smooth cheeks brushing his. When he deposited her gently upon her feet he saw her face had gone white and that she was trembling.

His own face was glowing as he waded back to fetch the lunch basket and his footgear. Under the circumstances he had done the only natural, the only possible thing, yet it had queerly perturbed them both.

The two visitors explored the village, even to the quaint, twined chapel, with its impossible tines and rusted gilt, and soon found them eager to investigate the contents of their lunch basket. Taking a random path up the hill, they came at last to a spring of cool water, and here they spread their meal under a mango tree bent beneath tons of fruit.

The afternoon sped quickly. If at times Kirk found his companion regarding him with a strangely timid, half defiant look, he refused to connect it with the episode of their landing.

Promptly at 4 they came down the drunken little main street and out upon the beach. But no launch was in sight.

"Hello! Where's our boat?" exclaimed Kirk.

"The captain told me he'd be ready at 4. Perhaps he has run over to Taboguilla or— She hesitated with a troubled frown.

"You told him to wait?"

"Distinctly." Seeing an idler in the square above, she questioned him in Spanish. "This man says the launch left for Panama two hours ago. They went on a Sunday spree. He says they came ashore and bought a lot of liquor, and he heard them quarreling later."

"That means we'll have to get another boat."

"I don't know where we shall find one."

"Neither do I, but there must be some sort of craft that plies back and forth regularly."

"Only once or twice a week, I believe, and it belongs to the sanitarium. Perhaps we'd better wait awhile; our men may come back."

At last, as the sun was dipping into a bed of gold, Kirk broke out:

"Gee whiz! We've got to do something. Mr. Cortlandt will be getting worried."

"In all probability he won't know anything about it until too late to come for us. He is dining with those people from Bocas, and may not get back to the Tivoli before midnight."

"Nice fix we're in!" remarked Anthony. "I'd like to lay hands on that captain."

"We may have to stay here all night."

"Well, at least we have a haven of refuge. They'll take us in at the hospital."

"I don't care to ask them. There's some one up there I don't wish to see. That's why I didn't go near the place today."

He laughed to hide his embarrassment. "I'm wondering—what people will say."

"Oh, you mustn't be troubled about that. It isn't your fault, you know, anyhow. Besides, people won't say anything because they won't know anything about it—if we stay away from that sanitarium."

"It's getting along toward dinner time," he said, "so let's see what we can find in the way of food."

They stumbled out into the twilight street and began their search, but seen close at hand, the cooking arrangements of Taboga proved most attractive. But eventually they found a decent looking place, where they were taken in, and after an interminable wait, food was set before them—chicken, boiled with rice and coconut, black beans and cornmeal, fresh, warm milk and a wondrous assortment of hot-house fruits.

In spite of their equivocal situation, Edith seemed fully to have regained her spirits. Even the prospect of spending the night in this place apparently did not dismay her. They descended to the square again, stared at all the way through open doors and followed by a subdued murmur of comment. Then they sat for a long time watching the stars.

As if in despair over their impossible predicament, Edith gave way to a spirit of reckless vivacity, and Kirk with a man's somewhat exaggerated sympathy for a woman's sensitive feelings, loyally strove to help her make the best of things in her own way. There was no real concession of her reserve—no sacrifice of the feminine privilege of prompt and complete withdrawal. If he had struck a false note he knew that she would have turned frigid in an instant.

It was on their return to the home that the climax came, leaving him strangely shaken. Their course took them past a tiny cañon. Frightened by a drunken brawl within, she picked up her skirts and fled into the darkness. Kirk stumbling along behind her. At last she stopped out of breath, and he overtook her.

"You mustn't run through these dark alleys," he cried sharply. "You'll

break your neck. I'm impatient at this hysterical behavior, he seized her by the arm.

"Oh, I'm so frightened," she breathed, and he felt her tremble. She lifted her white face, and her eyes were luminous in the gloom.

Before he realized what he was doing his arms had closed around her and his lips had met hers. It may have been the romance of the night, the solitude, the intoxicating warmth of her breath. At any rate, he lost his head and knew nothing save that she was a woman and he a man. As for her, she offered no resistance, made no sign beyond a startled sigh as their lips came together.

But, impulsive as his action had been, it was no more sudden than his recoil. He released her and stepped back, crying:

"Oh, my God! I—I didn't mean that. Forgive me. Please." She said nothing, and he stammered desperately again: "You'll hate me now, of course, but I don't know what ails me. I forgot myself—you—everything. It was unpardonable, and I ought to be shot." He started off down the blind street, his whole body cold with apprehension and self disgust.

"Do you intend to leave me here in the middle of this?"

"No, no! Of course not. I'm rattled, that's all. I've just got a cowardly desire to flee and butt my head against the nearest wall. That's what I ought to do. I don't know what possessed me. I don't know what you'll think of me."

"We won't speak of it now. Try to compose yourself and find our lodging place."

"Why, yes, of course. I'll see that you're fixed up comfortably, and then I'll get out."

"Oh, you mustn't leave me!" she cried in a panic. "I couldn't stay in that awful place alone." She drew a little nearer to him, as if demanding his protection. A wave of tenderness

Continued on Page 5.

For Sale—One mare weight about 1400 pounds, works single or double, four choice Jersey heifers, 1 fresh Jersey cow. Located one half mile south of Monmouth.
N. Norton.

FOR SALE

About 2 head of full blood Duroc brood sows.

At Palmage station on I. & M. railroad. Comes soon.

Chas. J. Nicholson.

Get your visiting business cards printed at the Monitor office with a target satisfactory service.

For wet weather,—dry clothes and comfort wear Tower's Fish Brand REFLEX SLICKER. It is all you want, or can get, in a rough and ready service coat. Thoroughly waterproof and strong at every point. \$3.00 at your dealer's. Satisfaction Guaranteed. A. J. Tower Co. BOSTON. Tower Canadian Limited, Toronto. 613 Catalog free. TOWER'S FISH BRAND

"Safety First" Our Motto ON SHASTA ROUTE TRAINS

OF THE



The Exposition Line—1915.

And now is the time to see California; to live outdoors and enjoy the sunshine, flowers and summer sports. It is a trip you cannot afford to miss.

THREE FINE TRAINS DAILY

Including Shasta Limited the train of modern service with all steel up-to-the-minute equipment.

The California and San Francisco Express Trains with Standard Tourist and Chair Cars and dining service that will please.

Call on nearest S. P. Agent and let him outline a trip, quote fares and furnish Outing literature on California's famous resorts.

John M. Scott, General Passenger Agent, Portland, Ore.

There Should be a Victrola In Your Home

THE RED CROSS PHARMACY

V. J. Brown, Propr