

THE NE'ER-DO-WELL

A Romance of the Panama Canal
BY
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Weeks snorted at this. "Why, I've got it already. I've been paid. Mrs. Cortlandt sent me her check." He winked one red eye in a manner that set Runnels to thinking deeply.

CHAPTER XIII. "8838."

FOR a few days after this conversation the master of transportation was in doubt as to what course he should pursue. In the end he did nothing, and the letter from St. Louis was permanently filed away. There were several reasons for this action. For one thing, he was a salaried man and could not afford to lose his job. What influenced him most, however, was his genuine liking for Anthony.

The first thing Kirk did when pay day came was to inclose the greater part of his salary in an envelope and send it to John Weeks, with a note explaining that he had withheld only enough for his own actual needs, and promising to continue reducing his indebtedness by a like amount monthly. He was surprised beyond measure to have the remittance promptly returned. The brief letter that accompanied it brought him a flush of discomfort. What the deuce had made Mrs. Cortlandt do that? For a time he was undecided whether to be offended at her conduct or gratified, and he had not settled the matter to his satisfaction when he called upon her that evening.

"Weeks wrote me you had squared my account with him," he said awkwardly. "I'm tremendously obliged, of course, and—I'll give this to you instead of him." He offered her the envelope with his pay inclosed.

"Don't be silly, Kirk," she said in a matter of fact tone. "I didn't wish Weeks to have any opportunity to talk. You need this money and I don't."

"Perhaps I should have offered it to Mr. Cortlandt."

"Stephen knows nothing about the Weeks affair. If you choose to regard my little favor as a debt, however, please let it run on until you are better able to pay."

But Anthony remained inflexible, and at last she accepted his proffer with some impatience.

"You are the most foolish person I ever knew," she remarked. "You have the most disappointing way of receiving favors. I had a decent position for you, but you would go to collect fares. I hope you have had enough of it by now and are ready to take something worth while."

"Not until it comes naturally. No hop, skip and jump for mine."

Edith sighed. "It is terribly dull for me here at present," she said. "Mr. Cortlandt is very busy; I have no one to talk to, no one to amuse me. Why, I've scarcely seen you since you went to work. Will you come to the dance tomorrow night?"

He shook his head.

"The music is good. You will meet some nice people. If you remember, one of your qualifications for a position was that you are a good waltzer."

"I can't mingle with the 'quality.'"

"Be sensible. This is an invitation."

"I've learned something about canal conditions. What would people say if Mrs. Stephen Cortlandt were seen dancing with the new collector of No. 2? Besides, to tell the sordid truth, I haven't any clothes."

Edith silently extended the envelope in her hand, but he laughed.

"Perhaps I'll come to the next dance. I'll be rich then. See!" He showed her a long slip of paper consisting of five coupons, each numbered "8838."

"Lottory tickets!"

He nodded. "Allan had a very particular dream about the number 8, so I invested \$5 'silver' on his hunch. It's the number of my automobile license." Kirk sighed at the memory of his new French car. "You don't object to such gambling?"

for a few trips so I'll have a chance to see the fun."

Inasmuch as No. 6 did not leave until 1 o'clock on Sunday, he had ample time in which to witness the lottery drawing, a thing he had been curious to see since he had first heard of it. This form of gambling was well recognized, it seemed; not only the natives, but all classes of canal zone workers, engaged in it freely. The drawings were conducted under rigid government supervision.

Allan, vastly excited, was, of course, waiting to accompany him.

"Oh, boss," exclaimed the negro, "I feel that we shall h'experience good fortune today!"

"Did you buy a ticket?"

"No, sar; I h'invested all my monies traveling on those railroad trains."

"Now see how foolish you are. If you'd stayed at home you might have bought the winning number today."

"I prefer to h'accompany you. But I have been thinking to make you a proposition of partnership, Master h'Anthony. I will stay home and dream numbers, which you can purchase with your salary. In that manner we shall certainly burst this lottery. I do not desire the profits, however, for being partners with you. I would like you to have plenty of monies, that is all. I love you, sar."

"Don't! You embarrass me."

The drawing, which was for a capital prize of \$15,000 ("silver"), had drawn a larger crowd than usual, and when the two reached Cathedral square they found the lottery building and plaza thronged to overflowing with the usual polyglot elements that make up these Latin-American gatherings.

By dint of considerable effort Kirk succeeded in working his way through the wide double doors, and, being much above the average height, he was able to get a good view of the proceedings. Upon a platform a group of ceremonious officials were gathered about a revolving wire cage, so arranged that it could be whirled rapidly upon its axis. Into it were put ten ivory spheres, resembling billiard balls in size and appearance. When this had been done the cage was closed, and a very badly frightened twelve-year-old girl was selected at random from the audience, then lifted to the stage, where it required the commands and entreaties of her excited parents to prevent her from dissolving in tears. At a word from the master of ceremonies the cage was spun until the ivory balls inside leaped and capered like captive squirrels. Then at another signal it was stopped. The door was opened, and the little girl reached in a trembling hand and selected a sphere. It proved to be hollow, with two halves screwed together, and in full sight of the assembly it was opened, displaying a bit of paper inside.

"Ocho!" cried the announcer, and a card bearing the numeral "8" was raised. The paper was replaced inside the ivory ball, the ball itself was dropped into the wire cage, the door was closed and once more the cage was spun.

Kirk was much interested in the scene, not from any faintest hope that he would draw a prize, but purely from the novel atmosphere and color of the thing. While his eyes were busied and just as the child prepared to draw another ball he felt a clutch upon his arm and, glancing down, beheld the glowing black eyes of Senor Ramon Alvarez fixed upon him. He carried a dapper little cane, with which he tapped his former prisoner to attract his attention.

At sight of him Kirk drew down his brows and said gruffly:

"Don't poke me with that umbrella."

He turned away, but again Alvarez touched him.

"I will spit wit' you, hombre," he said.

"If you keep jabbing me with that crutch I'll break it, and then you can't walk home."

Ramon jerked his head toward the square outside in an imperious fashion, and Kirk, curious to learn the cause of unusual excitement, followed him without demer. When they had reached the street the Spaniard turned with flashing eyes and a mischievous smile.

"Pretty well. How goes it with you?"

"So! You've succeeded in your cowardly attempt?"

"My what?"

"I lose my possession as comandante of police."

"You don't say so!" Kirk's face broke into a smile of real pleasure.

"That makes it you to laugh, then?" exclaimed the Panamanian excitedly. "Perhaps you shall answer to those detestable actions, senior."

"Perhaps! I see you blame me for the loss of your job. Well, maybe you won't beat up the next American you get your hands on."

"But—I have another possession!" Ramon exclaimed. "I've been promoted! I am appoint' yesterday by his excellency the presidente to be his secretary."

"I suppose it's a good job, but you ought to be selling poison in a drug store."

Narrowing his eyes, Alvarez said meaningly in a voice that none might overhear, "Panama is sometimes very on'healthy city for fat Americans." He ran a hostile glance up and down Anthony's burly frame. "It is the climate per'aps—of too great 'eat. The senior is reech man's son, eh? Those do not geeve the appearance."

With supreme insolence he touched one of the buttons upon Kirk's linen uniform with his cane, whereat the American snatched the stick out of his hand, broke it and tossed it into the street. His blood was up, and in another breath he would have struck the



"You have won the capital prize."

Spaniard, regardless of consequences, but just at that moment Allan dashed out of the crowd crying breathlessly:

"Oh, boss! Oh, boss! Glory to God, it is true! Oh-h-h, glory!" Seizing Kirk's hands, he kissed them before the other could prevent, then ran on frantically: "Come quick! Come! Come! Come!"

"Look out!" snapped Kirk angrily.

"What's happened?"

"The dream! The dream is come! Oh, God, sar! You—you have won the capital prize, sar! You—do not say you have lost the ticket or I shall die and kill myself!"

"Here it is!" In his hand Anthony waved a slip of paper, out of which leaped four big, red numbers—"8838."

"Diablo!" came from behind him, and he turned to behold Alvarez, livid of face and with shaking hand, fling a handful of similar coupons after the broken cane. Without another word or a glance behind him the Panamanian made off across the plaza, barely in time to escape the crowd that surged around the two he had quitted.

Bombarded by a fusillade of questions in a dozen tongues, jostled by a clamoring, curious throng, the lucky owner of 8838 fought his way back into the lottery building, and as he went the news spread like flaming oil.

There it was, plainly displayed, "8838!" There could be no possible mistake, and it meant 15,000 silver pesos, a princely fortune indeed for the collector of No. 2.

Promptly at five minutes to 1 o'clock that afternoon Allan Allan, late of Jamaica, strode through the Panama railroad station and flaunted a first class round trip ticket to Colon before the eyes of his enemy, the gateman. He was smoking a huge Jamaican cigar, and his pockets bulged with others. When he came to board the train he called loudly for a porter to bring him the step and once inside selected a shady seat with the languid air of a bored globe trotter.

Only when Kirk appeared upon his rounds did he forgo his haughty com'placency. Then his wide lips, which

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