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### THE Ne'er-Do-Well

By REX BEACH

Author of "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 insinuates 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.

Substituted water for gin each time it came his turn to drink.

Dawn found them in an east side tenement drinking place frequented by the lowest classes. Ringold was slumbering peacefully on a table; Anthony had discovered musical talent in the bartender and was seated at a battered piano laboriously experimenting with the accompaniment to an Irish ballad; Higgins and Locke were talking earnestly. Locke, as usual, sat facing the entrance, his eyes watchful, his countenance alert. To a sober eye it would have been patent that he was laboring under some strong excitement, for every door that opened caused him to start, every stranger that entered made him quake.

"Grandes' fellow I ever met," Higgins was saying for the hundredth time. "Got two faults, Anthony; he's modest as 'n' he's lazy—he won't work."

"You and he are good friends, eh?"

"Best ever."

"Would you like to play a joke on him?"

"Joke? Can't be done. He's wisest guy ever. I've tried it an' always get the wots' of it."

"I'll tell you how we can work it. I've got a ticket for Central America in my pocket. The boat sails at 10. Let's send him down there."

"Wha' for?"

Locke kept his temper with an effort. "To make a man of him. We'll go through his clothes, and when he lands he'll be broke. He'll have to work. Don't you see?"

"No." Anthony's friend did not see. "He don't want to go to Central America," he argued. "He's got a new automobile."

"But suppose we got him soused, went through his pockets and then put him aboard the boat. He'd be at sea by the time he woke up. He couldn't get back. He'd have to work. Don't you see? He'd be broke when he landed and have to rustle money to get back with. I think it's an awful funny idea."

The undeniable humor of such a situation finally dawned upon Higgins' mind.

"I'll get him full if you'll help manage it," Locke went on. "And here's the ticket." He tapped his pocket.

"Where'd you get it?"

"Bought it yesterday. It's first class and better, and he'll fit my description. We're about the same size. Wait." Locke rose and went to the bar, where he called loudly for the singer. Then when the bartender had deserted the piano he spoke to Anthony: "Keep it up, old man. You're doing fine."

For some moments he talked earnestly to the man behind the bar. No one observed the transfer of another of those yellow bills of which he seemed to have an unlimited store.

Strangely enough, Mr. Jefferson Locke's plan worked without a hitch. Within ten minutes after Kirk Anthony had taken the drink handed him he declared himself sleepy and rose from the piano, only to seek a chair, into which he flung himself heavily.

"It's all right," Locke told his drunken companion. "I've got a taxi waiting. We'll leave Ringold where he is."

Twenty-four hours later Adelbert Higgins undertook to recall what had happened to him after he left Muller's place on East Fourteenth street, but his memory was tricky. He recollected a vaguely humorous discussion of some sort with a stranger, the details of which were almost entirely missing. Unexpected and alarming occurrences made it imperative for him to terminate his connection with his college, as big Marty Ringold had done earlier in the day, and begin to pack his belongings. Partly out of deference to the frantic appeals of his widowed mother, partly owing to the telephoned advice of Mr. Michael Padden of Sixth avenue, who said the injured man had recognized one of his assailants, he booked passage to Japan by the next steamer out of Vancouver.

Strictly speaking, Kirk Anthony did

not awake to a realization of his surroundings, but became conscious of them through a long process of dull, dreamy speculation. He said to himself:

"Now, begin all over again, Kirk. Ringold was very drunk. Good! Everything is clear so far. Next you were playing a piano with yellow teeth while somebody sang something about a 'Little Brown Cot.' After that—Lord, you must have been drinking! Well, let's run through it again."

But his efforts were vain. He could recall nothing beyond the piano, so fell to wondering what hotel this could be.

"Some east side joint," he decided, "and a cheap one, too, from the size of this stall." He noted another brass bed close at hand and reasoned that Ringold or Higgins must have risen early, leaving him to finish his sleep. That was considerable, of course, but—Good heavens, it must be late! And he was due to motor to New Haven at noon! He raised himself suddenly and was half out of bed when he fell back with a cry as if an unseen hand had smitten him. He clapped both palms to his head, realizing that he was very sick indeed. The sensation was unlike anything he had ever felt before. His head was splitting, he felt a frightful nausea, the whole room was rocking and reeling as if to pitch him out of bed. It was terrible, so he arose blindly and felt his way toward the telephone. Failing to find it, he pushed a button instead, then tumbled back to bed. He heard the door open and a voice inquire:

"Did you ring, sir?"

"An hour ago. Haven't you more than one bellhop in this place?"

"I'm sorry, sir."

"And I'm sick, mighty sick. I'm going to die."

"I think not, sir. The others are sick too."

"Can I get you something, sir—a little champagne, perhaps, to settle your stomach?"

Anthony opened his eyes. "Hello! Are you the clerk?" Instead of the bellhop he had expected he beheld a man in white jacket and black trousers.

"No, sir, I'm the steward."

The inside shook his head faintly. "Funny place I've got into. What's the name of it?"

"This? Oh! The Santa Cruz."

"Never heard of it. Why didn't they give me a good room? This is fierce."

"S'nt A is considered very good, sir. It is one of the best on the line."

"Line?" Kirk grunted. "So this is some dead line dump. Well, I'm going to get out—understand? Hand me my trousers and I'll slip you a quarter."

The steward did as desired, but a blind search showed the pockets to be empty.

"Give me the coat and vest." But here again Kirk found nothing and was forced to apologize. "I'm getting sicker every minute."

"Perhaps you had better have the doctor?"

"Is there a good one handy?"

"Yes, sir."

"Here in the hotel?"

"This is a ship."

"A—what?" Anthony raised himself and stared at the white clad figure over the foot of his little brass bed.

"This is a ship, sir."

"You get out of here!" yelled the infuriated young man. The steward retreated hastily to the door.

"I beg pardon, sir. I will send the doctor at once."

"Must think I'm still drunk," mumbled Anthony dazedly as he once more laid his head upon his pillow with a groan.

When his dizziness had diminished sufficiently to permit him to open his eyes he scanned his surroundings more carefully. There were unfamiliar features about this place. While it was quite unlike an ordinary hotel room, neither did it resemble any steamship stateroom he had ever seen; it was more like a lady's boudoir. To be sure, he felt a sickening surge and roll now and then, but at other times the whole room made a complete revolution, which was manifestly contrary to the law of gravitation and therefore not to be trusted as evidence. The door opened for a second time and a man in uniform entered.

"I am the doctor."



"This is a ship, sir."

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"I am the doctor."

"I'm sick—awful sick, doctor."

The stranger pulled up a stool, seated himself beside the bed, then felt of Anthony's cheek.

"You have a fever."

"That explains everything. How are the other boys coming on?"

"Everybody is laid out. It's a bad night."

"Night? It must be nearly daylight by this time."

"Oh, no! It is not midnight yet."

"Not midnight? Why, I didn't turn in until—"

Anthony raised himself suddenly. "Good Lord! Have I slept all day?"

"You certainly have."

"Whose room is this?"

"Your room of course. Here, take one of these capsules. It will settle your stomach."

"Better give me something to settle my bill if I've been here that long. I'm broke again."

"You're not fully awake yet," said the doctor. "People have funny ideas when they're sick. Let me feel your pulse."

"The boys will think I'm lost. I never did such a thing before."

"Where do you think you are?" inquired the physician.

"I don't know. It's a nice little hotel, but—"

"This isn't a hotel. This is a ship."

"Doctor, you shouldn't make fun of a man at the point of death. It isn't professional."

"Fact," said the doctor, abstractedly gazing at his watch while he held Anthony's wrist between his fingers. "We are 150 miles out of New York. The first officer told me you were considerably intoxicated when you came aboard, but," he continued brusquely, rising and closing his watch with a snap, "you will remember it all in a little while, Mr. Locke."

"Wait!"

Again Anthony pressed his throbbing temples with both hot hands and strove to collect his whirling wits.

"Now, I know you are wrong, doctor, and I'll tell you why. You see, my name isn't Locke. It's Anthony. Locke went away on a ship, but I stayed in New York, understand? Well, he's the fellow you're talking to, and I'm asleep somewhere down around the Bowersy."

"Nevertheless this is a ship," the physician patiently explained, "and you're on it, and I'm talking to you. What is more, you have not exchanged identities with your friend Anthony, for your ticket reads 'Jefferson Locke.'"

#### CHAPTER III. Panama Next Stop.

"SAY!" Anthony raised himself excitedly on one arm, but was forced to lie down again without delay. "If this is a ship I must have come aboard. How did I do it? When? Where?"

"You came on with two men, or rather, between two men, about 8:30 this morning. They put you in here, gave you a ticket to the purser and went ashore. The slim fellow was crying, and one of the deckhands had to help him down the gangway."

"That was Higgins, all right. Now, doctor, granting just for the sake of argument that this is a ship and that I am Jefferson Locke, when is your next stop?"

"One week."

"What?" Kirk's eyes opened wide with horror. "I can't stay here a week."

"You will have to."

"But I tell you I can't—I just can't. I bought a new car the other day, and it's standing in front of the New York theater. Yes, and I have two rooms and a bath at the hotel at \$15 a day."

The physician smiled heartlessly. "You must have been drinking pretty heavily, but I guess you will remember everything by and by."

"I can't understand it," groaned the bewildered invalid. "What ship is this—if it is really a ship?"

"The Santa Cruz. Belongs to the Consolidated Fruit company. This is one of the bridal suits. It is 11:30 p. m., Nov. 21. We are bound for Colon. Good night. That capsule will make you sleep."

When the officer had gone Kirk turned over and fell asleep. Morning showed him the truth of the doctor's information. He awoke early, and, although his head still behaved queerly and he had moments of nausea, he dressed himself and went on deck.

A limitless, oily sea stretched out before his bewildered eyes. He touched the rail with his hands to verify his vision. He felt as if he were walking in his sleep. He realized that a great fragment had suddenly dropped out of his life's pattern.

Although Anthony was a youth of few responsibilities, he awoke suddenly to the fact that there were a thousand things that needed doing, a thousand people who needed to know his whereabouts, a thousand things that were bound to go wrong. For instance, there was his brand new French car, standing with motor blanketed beside the Forty-fifth street curb.

What had happened to it and to the urelin he had left in charge of it? He owed \$1,000 on its purchase, which he had promised to pay yesterday. That remittance from his father had come just in the nick of time. Suddenly he recalled placing the check in his bill case, and he searched himself diligently, but found nothing. It was simply imperative that he get some word ashore.

He let his eyes rove over the ship in desperation. Then a happy thought came to him.

"The wireless!" he said aloud. "Bonehead! Why didn't you think of that long ago?" A glance at the rigging showed him that the Santa Cruz was

Continued on page 7

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"I am very glad to say a few words in praise of Chamberlain's Cough Remedy," writes Mrs. Lida Dewey, Milwaukee, Wis. "I have used it for years both for my children and myself and it never fails to relieve and cure a cough or cold. No family with children should be without it as it gives almost immediate relief in cases of croup." Chamberlain's Cough Remedy is pleasant and safe to take, which is of great importance when a medicine must be given to young children. For sale by Benson's Pharmacy.

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