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## THE Ne'er-Do-Well

By **REX BEACH**

Author of "The Spoilers," "The Barner," "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 in hurt Jefferson Locke institutes 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.

Already a glare could be seen above the crowded portion of the city, and the two set off in that direction at a run, leaving the bugle sounding in the rear and the gallant firemen still wrestling with their uniforms. They had nearly reached the fire when around a corner back of them, with frightful speed and clangor, came a modern automobile fire truck, clinging to which was a swarm of little brown men in red shirts and helmets. Without a pause the Yankee machine whizzed on up the street, its gong clanging, its occupants holding on for dear life, the peaceful inhabitants of Colon fleeing from its path.

Kirk and his guide fell in behind and jogged to the scene of the conflagration.

A three storied building was already half gutted. Out of its windows roared long, fiery tongues. The structure snapped and volleyed a chorus to the sullen monotone of destruction. The street was littered with the household belongings of the neighborhood. On all sides was a bedlam which the arrival of the firemen only augmented. The fire captains shouted orders to the buglers, the buglers blew feebly upon their horns, the companies deployed in obedience to the buglers. Then everybody waited for further directions.

Again the trumpet sounded, whereupon each fireman began to interfere with his neighbor. A series of quarrels arose as couplings were made or broken. Then, after an interminable delay, water began to flow as if by a miracle; but, except in rare instances, it failed to reach the flames. A ladder truck, drawn by another excited company, now rumbled upon the scene, its arrival adding to the general disorder. Meanwhile the steady trade wind fanned the blaze to ever growing proportions.

"Why the devil don't they get closer?" Kirk inquired of his Jamaican companion.

"Oh, Lord, my God, it is too 'ot, sar, greatly too 'ot! It would take a stout 'eart to do such a thing."

"Nonsense! They'll never put it out this way. Hey!" Kirk attracted the attention of a nearby nozzlemann. "Walk up to it. It won't bite you." But the valiant fire fighter held stubbornly to his post, while the stream he directed continued to describe a graceful curve and spatter upon the sidewalk in front of the burning building. "You're spoiling that old woman's bed," Anthony warned him, at which a policeman with drawn club forced him back as if resentful of criticism.

For perhaps ten minutes there was no further change in the situation. Then a great shout arose as it was seen that the roof of an adjoining building had burst into flame. At this the fauflare of trumpets sounded again. Firemen rushed down the street, dragging a line of hose and drenching the onlookers. But, despite their hurry, they halted too soon, and their stream just failed to reach the blazing roof. By now the heat had grown really intense, and the more hardy heroes in the vanguard retreated to less trying positions. The voice of the crowd had arisen to a roar rivaling that of the flames.

Kirk pointed to the nearest fireman. "If he'd get up under that wall he could save the roof and be out of the heat. I can't stand this. Let's give him a hand, Allan."

"Very well, sar."

"Here! Help me get a kink in this hose. There! Now you hold it until you feel me pull." Kirk forced his way out through the crowd to find the fireman holding the nozzle, from which a feeble stream was dribbling, and mechanically directing it at the fire. Kirk laid hold of the canvas and, with a heave, dragged it along with its rightful guardian ten feet forward. But there had been no bugle blown order for this, and the uniformed man pulled backward with all his might, chattering at Kirk in Spanish. "Well, then, let go," Anthony shook

the Panamanian loose, then ran forward across the street until he brought up at the end of the slack and felt the hose behind him writhe and swell as Allan released his hold. The next instant the negro was at his side, and the two found themselves half bilastered by the heat that rolled out upon them. But the newly ignited roof was within range, and the stream they played upon it made the shingles fly.

The fireman they had despoiled began to drag at the hose from a safe distance, but when Kirk made as if to turn the nozzle upon him he scampered away amid the jeers of the crowd. A few moments later the American felt a hand upon his arm and saw an angry policeman who was evidently ordering him back. Behind him stood the excited nozzlemann with two companions.

"He says you should return the 'ose where you found it," Allan translated.

"Leave us alone," Kirk replied. "You fellows help the others. We'll attend to this." More rapid words and gesticulations followed, in the midst of which a dapper young man in a uniform somewhat more impressive than the others dashed up, flung himself upon Anthony and endeavored to wrench the hose from his hands. Meanwhile he uttered epithets in broken English which the other had no difficulty in understanding. Kirk promptly turned the nozzle upon him, and the full force of Colon's water pressure struck him squarely in the stomach, doubling him up like the kick of a mule. Down the newcomer went, then half rolled, half slid across the street as the stream continued to play upon him.

"I guess they'll keep away now," laughed Kirk, as he turned back to his self appointed task.

But an instant later a half dozen policemen advanced in a businesslike manner, and their leader announced, "Come, you are under arrest."

"Pinched—what for? We're doing a lot of good here."

"Come, queeck!"

"Oh, Lord, my God!" Allan mumbled. "I shall die and kill myself!"

"They won't do anything to us," Kirk assured him. "I've been pinched lots of times. We'll have to quit, though, and that's a pity. It was just getting good."

He surrendered the hose to a fireman, who promptly retreated with it to a discreet position, then followed his captors, who were now buzzing like bees.

"Don't get excited," he said to Allan, noting his frightened look. "They'll turn us loose all right."

But a moment after they were clear of the town he was surprised to see that the negro's captors had snapped "come along" upon him in spite of his repeated promises to go quietly. These handcuffs, Kirk saw, were of the type used upon desperate criminals, consisting of chains fitted with handles so contrived that a mere twist of the officer's hand would cut the prisoner's flesh to the bone. The men on each side of the Jamaican twisted stoutly, forcing the black boy to cry out in pain. He hung back, protesting:

"All right, sar, I'll come. I'll come." But again they tightened their instruments of torture and their victim began to struggle. At this an evil faced man in blue struck him brutally upon the head with his club, then upon the shoulders, as if to silence his groans. The boy flung up his manacled hands to shield himself, and the light from a

street lamp showed blood flowing where the chains had cut. The whole proceeding was so unprovoked, so sickening in its cruelty, that Kirk flew into a fury and disregarding his own captors, leaped forward before the policeman could strike a third time. He swung his fist and the man with the club hurtled across the street as if shot from a bow, then lay still in the gutter. With another blow he felled one of the handcuff men, but at the same time other hands grasped at him and he was forced to lay about vigorously on all sides.

They rushed him with the ferocity of mad dogs, and he knocked them spinning, one after another. A whistle blew shrilly, other uniforms came running, more whistles piped and almost before he realized it he found himself in the center of a pack of lean faced

brown men who were struggling to pull him down and striking at him with their clubs. With a sudden wild thrill he realized that this was no ordinary street fight; this was deadly; he must beat off these fellows or be killed. But as fast as he cleared them away, others appeared as if by magic, until a dozen or more were swarming upon him like hungry ants. Time and again they dragged him off his feet, only to have him shake them loose. But he was felled at last, and a moment later, with head reeling and wits flickering, he was dragged to his knees by handcuffs like those on Allan's wrists. The pain as the chains bit into his flesh brought him to his feet despite the blows and kicks that were rained upon him, crying hoarsely:

"Let me go, confound you! Let me go!"

But a wrench at the gyves took the fight out of him, for he felt that the bones in his wrists must surely be crushed. One side of his head was strangely big and numb. A warm stream trickled down his cheek, but he had no time to think of his condition for his assailants fell upon him with fresh fury and he reeled about, striving to shield himself. Every movement, however, was construed as resistance, and his punishment continued, until at last he must have fainted from pain or had his wits scattered by a blow on the head, for when he recovered consciousness he found himself in a filthy, ill lighted room, flung upon a wooden platform that ran along the wall, evidently serving as a bed. Near him Allan was huddled, his black face distorted with pain and ashen with apprehension.

"Where are we?" queried Anthony as he took in the surroundings.

"This is the prison, sar."

"Gee! I'm sick," Kirk lay back upon the platform and closed his eyes. "Did they hurt you much?"

"Oh, yes, very considerably."

"Sorry I got you into it, Allan. I never thought they'd be so cranky." Again he groaned. "I want a drink."

"Let me get it. Those Spiggoties will not give it to you."

Allan went to the door and called to the guard. An instant later he returned with a tin cup.

"I guess they knocked me out," Kirk said dazedly. "I never was hit like that before—and jalled! Say! We must get out of here. Call the chief or the man in charge, will you? I can't speak the language."

"Please, sar, if you b'anger them they will beat us again."

"Beat! Not here?"

"Oh yes. They might kill us."

"They wouldn't do that!"

"A white man they killed last h'automne, and several of my people have passed away in this prison. Nobody can 'ear nothing. Nobody knows what 'appens 'ere."

"Oh, well, they wouldn't dare touch us—I'm an American citizen. I'll notify the consul."

Roused at the mere suggestion, Kirk staggered to the door and shouted lustily. A sergeant appeared with the command to be quiet.

"Let me out of here!" loudly demanded the prisoner. "I want the chief, or the alcalde, or somebody in charge. I want to know what I'm booked for. I want to telephone—telephone, don't you understand—and arrange bail. Quick, now!"

But the officer merely frowned at him, obviously threatening a resort to force if this outburst did not cease at once. Then he went away. An hour passed, and he did not return. Then another hour followed, and Anthony, who had now begun to feel the effect of his drubbing more keenly, renewed his clamor, with the result that a half dozen policemen appeared. From their demeanor it looked as though they were really bent upon mischief, but Kirk soon saw that an official had come in answer to his call. He felt less reassured when he perceived that the person in uniform who now stepped forward was the same upon whom he had turned the hose earlier in the evening.

CHAPTER VII.  
El Comandante.

THE newcomer was a black haired, black eyed young fellow of perhaps thirty. While his skin was swarthy even in this poor light, it could be seen that he was of the real Castilian type and of a much better class than the others. He was slender and straight, his mouth small and decorated by a carefully pencilled little mustache, which was groomed to a needle sharpness.

"Eh! 'Ere you are," he began angrily. "Yes, I want to get out, too. What does this treatment mean?"

The newcomer stepped toward the other occupant of the cell, at which Allan broke out in terror: "Don't you touch me! I'm a British object!"

After scanning the Jamaican carefully the officer issued an order to one of his men, who left the room.

"And I'm an American," Anthony declared. "You'll have to answer for this."

"Per'aps you don' know who I am. I am Ramon Alvarez, comandante of police, an' you dare to t'row the water of the 'ose wagon upon my person. Your government will settle for those 'insult.' His white teeth showed in a furious snarl. The comandante's eyes flashed as he asked shortly, "What is your name?"

"Anthony. Your men tried to kill that boy, and when I wouldn't stand for it they beat me up."

"You struck me wit' the water of the 'ose carriage," repeated the other.

"I didn't know who you were. I was helping to stop that fire when you butted in. Those runts of yours got handcuffs on me and then beat me up. I'm sick. So's that boy. We need a doctor."

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Continued on page 7



He Swung His Fist, and the Man Hurtled Across the Street.