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THE NE'ER-DO-WELL

A Romance of the Panama Canal

BY

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Continued from Last Week.

"It's a go!" The two young men clasped hands heartily. Runnels had struck the right note. Beside his former desire to prove himself a man, Kirk now felt a strong sense of loyalty to the one who had recognized his worth.

his vacation comes. He likes me and he says I'll probably step into his shoes. Do you understand what that means? I'll need fellows I can count on—fellows who won't double cross me to make a dollar for themselves, or knife me when my back is turned. I've got to have an efficient, noiseless organization. Otherwise we'll all go under, for we'll be into politics up to our necks. I think you're my sort, so if you'll stick to me I'll help you, and for every step I take I'll drag you up one."

When he told his good news to Mrs. Cortlandt, her surprise was so cleverly simulated that he never dreamed that she had been at great pains to bring this thing about. Not that Runnels was indisposed to act upon his own initiative, but the circumstances that had made his action possible had been due to her. It was hard to help a man against his will, but she profited by experience and took the line of least resistance.

The young man himself did not inquire too closely into the occasion of his advancement, and Edith Cortlandt was but little in his mind. He was consumed with the thought of Chiquita. He hoped that his new work would allow him more control of his time and perhaps put him in the way of learning her name. He could move in better society now.

CHAPTER XIV.

Garavel and His Daughter.

THESE were busy days for the Cortlandts. They entertained constantly, and the occasions when they dined without from one to a dozen guests became so exceptional as to elicit remark around the hotel. Much of their efforts were devoted to certain Panamanians of the influential class, and in company with one or more of these Cortlandt made frequent trips to the various quarters of the republic, sometimes absenting himself for days at a time.

During these times his wife assumed the direction of affairs and continued to entertain or be entertained. Her energy and resources seemed inexhaustible. Soon she became the social dictator of the city. She moved in exclusive circles, and Americans and Panamanians alike followed her lead in the matter of social control.

The result was just what had been designed. Society and editing newspaper people talked glowingly of the amity between the two nations and wondered at the absence of that Spanish prejudice of which they had heard so much. Those who chanced to know the deeper significance of it all and were aware of the smoldering resentment that lay in the Latin mind commented admiringly upon her work and wondered what effect it would have upon the coming election.

No one but the woman herself and her husband really understood the tremendous difficulties of their task or the vital issues at stake. All who came into contact with her recognized the master mind directing the campaign and, consciously or unconsciously, relegated her husband to the background.

To the Latin intellect this display of power on the part of the woman was a revelation. She knew the effect she produced and made the most of it.

Old Anibal Alfarez was perhaps the last fully to appreciate her. He did, however, learn in time that, while he could successfully match his craft against that of the husband, the wife read him unerringly. The result was that he broke with them openly.

When news of this reached the members of the canal commission they were alarmed, and Colonel Jolson felt it necessary to make known their views upon the situation. Accordingly, a few nights later the Cortlandts dined at his handsome residence on the heights above Culebra. After their return to Panama the colonel, in whom was vested the supreme authority over his nation's interests, acknowledged that his acquaintance with diplomacy was as nothing as compared with Edith Cortlandt's.

"She thinks Garavel is the proper man," he said to Colonel Bland.

"Garavel is a banker. He's not a politician."

The chief engineer laughed.

"All Spanish-Americans are politicians, colonel. They can't help it."

"Would he accept?"

"It is her business to find out. I had my doubts."

"But could he win? It would be a calamity if he had American backing and failed. It would mean disaster."

"Cortlandt has been working carefully, and he has been in all the seven provinces. He admits that it might be done, and she is certain. Of course it will mean a fight—Alfarez won't give up easily—but if Garavel should be the next president it would be a fine thing for both countries."

Over at Panama the Cortlandts were looking for a house to lease. Affairs had reached a point where it seemed advisable to give up their quarters at the Tivoli and enter into closer contact with the life of the Spanish city. Meanwhile they gave a ceremonious little dinner, the one and only guest being Andres Garavel, the banker.

Of all the charming peoples of Central America there are perhaps none more polished and well bred than the upper class Panamanians. Of this agreeable type Senor Garavel was an admirable example, having sprung from the finest Castilian stock, as a name running back through the pages of history to the earliest conquests attested.

The present bearer of the name was of distinguished appearance. He was swarthy of skin, his hair was snow white, and he had stern black eyes of great intelligence. He was courtly and deliberate, evincing a pride that sprang not only from good blood but from good deeds. His poise was that of a man with heavy responsibilities, for Andres Garavel was a careful banker and a rich one. He was widely traveled, well informed and an agreeable talker.

"I am so disappointed that your daughter could not come," Edith told him for the second time. "I'm afraid she objects to our American informality."

"No, no, my dear lady," said their guest. "She admires American customs, as I do. We are progressive—we have traveled. In my home, in my private life, perhaps, I am a Panamanian, but in my business and in my contact with other people I am as they are. It is the same with my daughter. She has had a wide education for a child. She has traveled, she speaks five languages, and yet underneath it all she is a Garavel and hence a Panamanian. She is all I have, and my life is hers."

The meal progressed with only the customary small talk to enliven it, but as soon as the three had adjourned to the Cortlandt suit the host of the evening proceeded to approach the subject in his mind as directly as the circumstances permitted. Through a series of natural transitions the conversation was brought around to politics, and Garavel was adroitly sounded. But he displayed little interest. When at last he consented to show his awareness of the suggestion so constantly held out he spoke with deliberate intention.

"General Alfarez is my respected friend," he said, with a quietness that intensified his meaning, "and I rejoice that he will be the next president of Panama."

"You, of course, know that there is opposition to him?"

"All Panama knows that."

"General Alfarez does not seem to be a friend of the United States. May I speak frankly?"

Garavel inclined his white head without removing his intense, dark eyes from the speaker.

"Don Anibal Alfarez can never be president of Panama!"

The banker made no visible movement, yet the effect of this positive declaration was almost like that of a blow. After a pause he said:

"May I tell him you said so?"

"If you wish, but I do not think you will."

The hearer let his eyes flit questioningly to Mrs. Cortlandt's face to find her smiling at him.

"Believe me, dear lady," he said, "I suspected that there were grave reasons for this interview, but as yet I am at sea. I am not a politician, you know. I shall have no voice in our political affairs."

"Of course we know that, Senor Garavel, and of course there are grave reasons why we wished to talk with you. As Stephen has said, General Alfarez cannot be president"—

"Madam," he said coldly, "Panama is a republic. The voice of the people is supreme."

"Down in your heart do you really think so?" She was still smiling at him. "No! The United States is supreme."

"Ah! That day will come, perhaps—I have said so. I look forward to it as the best solution, but"—

"The day has come."

"Even so, Alfarez is an honorable man, a strong man and the wealthiest man in our country."

"You are also a rich man, a man of ability," said Cortlandt. "Your name is second to none in all Central America. There is no one better"—

"Impossible!" exclaimed the banker, in a strange voice. "I? No, no!"

"And why not? Have you never had political aspirations?"

"Of course. All men have dreams. I was secretary of finance under Amador, but the Garavels have never really been public men. Politics have been a curse to our house. My grandfather"—

"I know," broke in Mrs. Cortlandt. "But times have changed. Panama has seen her last revolution, and she needs a business man at her head. Panama is a healthy country, with no national debt. She is growing, developing. She holds the gateway to the western world, and her finances must be administered wisely. There is no one who can direct her so well as you."

"It is impossible!" repeated Garavel, his agitation growing more pronounced. "General Alfarez is my friend. His son will be my son."

"Ramon! Is Ramon engaged to your daughter?"

"Yes," exclaimed the banker, shortly. He began to pace the room.

"What difference would that make, if the young people love each other?"

"Certainly," Cortlandt agreed. "They are not children."

"As for love, Ramon loves, and—my daughter will love also, once she is married, for she is a Garavel."

"If Ramon isn't satisfactory to her, ought you to force her inclination?" Mrs. Cortlandt offered, eagerly. But the banker flung his arms aloft in a gesture of half humorous despair.

"Oh-h! These young ladies!" he cried. "They do not know what they want." He paused abruptly. "This comes upon me like a flood, my friends. I am swept away, and yet I—I will need to think seriously."

"Certainly."

"To an honorable man the salary will mean nothing. I have many affairs; I fear I cannot afford this sacrifice."

"Would you retire in favor of some one who could afford it?"

"Alfarez is honest."

"Alfarez cannot be president."

"It would require a great deal of money. I am considered a rich man, but I have discounted the future, and my enterprises"— He flung out his arms. "I have spread out. I must be careful. It is not alone my money that I have invested."

"It will require very little money," said Cortlandt. "I have been from David to Darien, from Bocas to Colon and I know the public sentiment."

It was midnight before Senor Andres Garavel, the banker, bade his friends goodby. When he descended the hotel steps to his carriage he held his white head proudly erect, and there was new dignity in his bearing.

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The winter season was at its height now. Every ship from the north came

"Oh-h! These young ladies!" he cried.

laden with tourists, and the social life of the city grew brilliant and gay. Now that nature smiled, the work upon the canal went forward with ever growing eagerness. Records were broken in every department, the railroad groaned beneath its burden, the giant human machine was strained to its fullest efficiency.

Young Anthony mastered the details of his work very rapidly. Being intensely interested in his work, he avoided all social entanglements, despite repeated invitations from Mrs. Cortlandt. But when the grand opera season began he made an exception and joined her box party on the opening night.

It seemed quite like old times to don an evening suit; the stiff white linen awakened a pang of regret. There was a somewhat formal dinner in the Cortlandts' new home, at which there were a dozen guests, so Kirk had no opportunity of speaking with his hostess until they had reached the theater.

"I've scarcely seen you lately," she said at the first opportunity. "You're a very neglectful young man. I began to think you were avoiding us."

"You must know better than that."

She regarded him shrewdly over her shoulder. "You're not still thinking of—that night at Taboga?"

He blushed and nodded frankly. "I can't help thinking about it. You were mighty nice to overlook a break like that, but"— Unconsciously his eyes shifted to Cortlandt, who was conversing politely with a giggly old lady.

She tapped his cheek lightly with her fan. "Just to show you how forgiving

There Was the Girl of His Dreams.

I am, I am going to ask you to go riding with me. The late afternoons are lovely now, and I've found a good horse for you. I suppose you ride?"

"I love it."

"Wednesday at 5, then." She turned to another guest, and Kirk leaned back to take in the scene about him.

CHAPTER XV.

Gertrudis Garavel.

LIKE most Latin-American cities, Panama prides herself upon her government theater. Although it remains dark most of the year, its brief period of opera is celebrated by a notable outpouring of Americans and Panamanians. It was an exceedingly well dressed audience, for although the pit was plentifully sprinkled with men in white, the two lower galleries were in solid full dress. In the center box of the first tier, ornately hung with flags and a coat of arms, Anibal Alfarez, head of