

A BEAUTIFUL PIRATE BY GUY BOOTHBY

Author of "A Bid for Fortune," "The Marriage of Estlin," etc., etc.

You would remember her name or face, as I assumed that character in order to try the effect of my disguise upon you. You are a wonderful actress. You would make your fortune on the stage. Do you think so? What a sensation it would cause in the east! But now to business. As we may not have another opportunity, let us see that our plans coincide. By the way, the French boat leaves tomorrow afternoon for Singapore. You have booked your passage of course?"

"I can quite understand it." "Yes. That was all. Nothing more was done. The man went free. The poor wretches were only natives, you must understand. And who cares about a few natives? No one. You may think I'm exaggerating, but I am not. Now it so happens that I have an agent living on that very island whom I can perfectly trust. He was a witness on the inquiry commission. He saw the flogging in question, and in due course he reported the facts to me. I must also tell you that that man boasted publicly that if he caught me he would—but there, I dare not tell you what he said he would do. Now his friends have used their influence, and he has been appointed to a post in one of the treaty ports of China. I hear he is a passenger on the mailboat touching at Singapore next week."

CHAPTER IX.

HOW WE SECURED IN OUR ENTERPRISE. On arrival at Singapore we took rickshaws and drove direct from the wharf to the Mandalay hotel, a palatial white building of two stories, boasting vivid green shutters on every window and broad, luxuriant verandahs on every floor. I was the first to reach it, and, remembering my position of casual acquaintance, I booked a room for myself, leaving Miss Sanderson and her companion to follow my example when they should arrive. It was then late in the afternoon, and by the time we had thoroughly settled in sight had fallen and the preliminary dressing gong had sounded for dinner. So far I had seen nothing of the person of whom we were in search, but I did not doubt that at the evening meal I should become acquainted with his whereabouts, even if I did not actually meet the man himself. The dining room at the Mandalay is at the rear of the hotel and looks out upon a charmingly arranged garden. Immediately upon my entering it a waiter came forward and conducted me to my place at a table near the window. On my left was seated a portly, red-faced gentleman, who, I discovered later, was an English merchant of considerable standing in the place. The chair on my right was vacant, but before we had dismissed the first course it was taken by a man who, my instincts told me, was none other than Mr. Ebbington himself. Why I should have come to this conclusion I cannot explain, but that I did think so and that I was right in so thinking I discovered a minute or two later, when a question was addressed to him by an acquaintance on the other side of the table. I continued the course without betraying my excitement, and when my plate was removed sat back and casually took stock of him. From Alie's account and some kind of preconceived notion as to what sort of appearance such a dastardly traitor should present I had expected to see a small, shifty-eyed, villainous type of man, wearing on his face some token of his guilt. But in place of that I discovered a stout, well-set-up, not unhand-some man about 40 years of age. His complexion was somewhat florid; his eyes were of an uncertain hue, between gray and steel blue; he had a pronounced nose and a heavy, almost double chin. Indeed, had it not been for his hesitating mode of speech I should have been inclined to put him down for a military man. During the progress of the meal I found an opportunity of doing him some small service, and on this meager introduction we fell into a desultory conversation, which embraced Singapore, the latest news from England and the prospects of a war between China and Japan. When dinner was over, I rose and followed him into the veranda, offered him a cigarette, which he accepted, and seated myself in a lounge chair beside him. We had not been smoking five minutes before my sweetest and her companion passed close to where we sat, en route to their rooms. As she came opposite to me Alie stopped. "Good evening, Dr. De Normanville," she said. "Isn't this hotel delightful?" I rose and uttered an appropriate reply, at the same time noticing that Ebbington was taking thorough stock of her. Then after another commonplace or two she bowed and passed on her way. I resumed my seat, and for nearly a minute we smoked in silence. Then my companion, who had evidently been carefully thinking his speech out, said with that peculiarly diffident utterance which, as I have said, was habitual to him: "You'll excuse what I am going to say, I hope, but a friend and I were having a little discussion before dinner. The proprietor tells me Miss Sanderson, the American heiress, is staying in the house. I do not wish to be impertinent, but might I ask if the lady to whom you have just been speaking is Miss Sanderson?" "Yes, she is Miss Sanderson," I replied. "You do not know her, then?" "Never saw her before in my life," was his reply. "Pieces of good fortune like that don't often occur in Singapore. If they did, often as we would be here very long, I can assure you, but perhaps I am talking in too familiar a strain about your friend? If so, you must forgive me."

"Indeed, no!" I answered. "Don't trouble yourself on that score. I traveled up with them from Batavia in the French boat that arrived this afternoon. From what little I have seen of her she seems very pleasant and, as you have observed, is evidently inclined to be friendly."

"There is no doubt about the money, I suppose?" he continued. "Since Vesey of Hongkong was so completely taken in by the Beautiful White Devil we have been a little skeptical on the subject of heiresses down this way." "On that point I'm afraid I cannot inform you," I said laughingly. "She seems, however, to travel in very good style and evidently denies herself nothing. But you spoke of the Beautiful White Devil. I am most interested in what I have heard of that personage. Are you well up in the subject?" "How should I be?" he answered, as I thought, a little quickly. "Of course I know what every other man in the east knows, but no more. Thank goodness she has never done me the honor of addressing me as she did the sultan of Surabaya and those other Japs. But with regard to Miss Sanderson, I wonder if I should be considered impertinent if I asked you to give me the pleasure of an introduction."

"Of course I did not tell him that it was the very thing of all others that I desired to do, but at the same time I could hardly conceal my exultation, I had, however, to keep my delight to myself for fear lest he should suspect, so I lit my cigar, which had gone out, and then said, with as much carelessness as I could assume: "I'm not sure whether I'm sufficiently intimate with her to take the liberty of introducing you, but as I said just now, she seems a jolly sort of girl and not inclined to be standoffish, so if ever I get an opportunity I don't mind risking it. Now, I think, if you'll excuse me, I'll say good night. That wretched old bucket of a steamer rolled so all the way up from Tanjong Priok that I have hardly had a wink of sleep these three nights past."

"Good night and thank you very much for your company. Glad to have met you, I'm sure." Next morning, as soon as breakfast was over, I went down into the town, shopping. When I returned about 11 o'clock, I discovered Alie and her companion sitting in the veranda, waiting for a double rickshaw which one of the hotel boys had gone out to procure. Ebbington was seated in a chair near by, and evidently seemed to consider this a good opportunity for effecting the introduction he had proposed the night before. I entered into conversation with him for a few moments, and then, crossing the veranda, asked the ladies in which direction they contemplated going. "Where do you think?" said Alie, with her best New York accent. "Well, first I guess we're going to look for a dry goods store, and then I reckon we'll just take a peaseur round the town."

"You should go and see Whampoa's garden," I said, hoping she would understand what I was driving at. "They tell me it's one of the sights of the place."

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Again Ebbington saw his chance.

day I shall have assisted you to the very best of my ability in the matter of this wretched fellow. What am I to do then? Am I to say farewell to you like a what?" Her voice had almost a falter in it as she replied: "Oh, no, we will not say 'Goodbye' here. Cannot you return with me? I have been counting so much on that." Here she paused for a moment. "But, no. Perhaps I ought not to ask you to have your work in life, and seeing what you have already done for us I should be the last to keep you from the path of duty."

(To Be Continued)