

A BEAUTIFUL PIRATE BY GUY BOOTHBY Author of "A Bid for Fortune," "The Marriage of Esther," etc., etc.



Our antagonist sent another shot after us.

give the necessary instructions. I waited about, and in half an hour the body was brought on deck, neatly swathed in a hammock and covered with a plain white cushion by way of a pall. Though we could hardly see each other over the pier, we took our place at the gangway, and I at once began to read the beautiful service for the burial of the dead at sea. When I arrived at the place where it is instructed that the body shall be cast into the deep, I gave a signal, and the stretcher was tilted so that the hammock and its grim contents slid off it and fell with a splash into the water alongside. Just as it disappeared a curious thing happened. The body could hardly have touched the water before the fog was lifted as though by some giant hand, and the sun shone brilliantly forth. The transition from the obscurity of somberness to bright sunshine was quite dazzling and set us all blinking like so many owls. Then I saw every face turn suddenly in one direction, and as they did so every mouth went down. Next moment the officer of the watch had bounded to the engine room telegraph, there was a confused stinging of bells in the bowels of the ship, and before a minute could have elapsed we were under way once more.

upon some work in the fore rigging uttered a cry in the native. Alle and her companion sprang to their feet, and though I did not understand what had happened I followed their example. We ran to the starboard bulwark, but nothing was to be seen there. Not being able to make it out, I asked what had occasioned the alarm. "One of the hands reports a boat away to starboard," said Alle. She turned to one of the younger officers, who was standing near, and pointing him aloft to take the boat's bearing. As soon as this was discovered the yacht sprang over on a tack that would bring us close up with it, and after that there was nothing for it but to wait patiently for the result. For some time we could not see anything; then a small black speck made its appearance about two points off our starboard bow and gradually grew plainer. "Keep her as she goes," said Alle to the man at the wheel, while we strained our eyes toward the tiny dot. Little by little it became more distinct until we were sufficiently near to make out with a glass that it was a man-of-war's gig pulled by two men and containing three others. Ten minutes later the yacht was hove to, and Patterson clambered on to the rail of the bulwark. "Are you strong enough to bring her alongside, do you think," he bellowed, "or shall we send a boat to tow you?" The man steering, who was evidently an officer, flung his mouth with his hands and shouted back that they thought they could manage it. Then, as if to prove his words, the men who had been rowing, but had now stopped, bit by bit the tiny craft crept over the dilly surface toward us until she was close enough for us to see with our naked eyes all that she contained. As she came alongside our gangway was lowered, and within an hour from the time of our first sighting her the boat's crew stood upon our deck. In spite of their man-of-war dress a more miserable, woe-begone appearance could not have been imagined than the party presented. It consisted of one lieutenant, a midshipman and three able seamen, and out of curiosity I glanced at the cap of the man standing nearest me. It bore the name H. M. S. Asiatic. Then I looked round for Alle, only to discover that she had mysteriously disappeared. It was left for Patterson to welcome the poor fellows to the yacht, and this he accordingly did with a hearty kindness that I should hardly have expected from him. "Before you tell me anything about yourselves," he said, "let me arrange for the comfort of your men." Then, calling a hand to him, he continued, pointing to the three Jacks who stood sheepishly by: "Take those men forward and tell the cook to give them all they want. You can supply them with hammocks for them, and find rooms somewhere for them to sleep in." Then, turning to the officers again, he said, "Will you be so good as to follow me, gentlemen?" and led the way down the companion to the cuddy. Thinking my professional services might possibly be required, I followed with Walworth. On reaching the cabin they were conducted to seats, and food was immediately set before them. They fell upon it like starving men, and for some time only the sound of steady munching and the clatter of knives and forks were to be heard. When they had finished, the midshipman without warning burst into a flood of tears and was led by Walworth to a cabin near by, where, when his torrent had worn itself out, the poor little chap fell fast asleep. "Now," said Patterson as soon as the lieutenant had finished his meal, "perhaps you will tell me your story?" "It won't take long to do that," the officer began. "I am the first lieutenant of her majesty's cruiser Asiatic. We were sent out from Singapore last Saturday in pursuit of this very yacht, if I mistake not. As you know, we almost picked you up in the fog, but when it lifted your superior steaming power enabled you to escape us. Then the typhoon caught us, and in looking after ourselves we lost sight of you altogether. We rode out the storm safely enough, but just at sundown yesterday she struck an uncharted rock and went down within five minutes." He stopped for a moment and covered his face with his hands. "This is terrible news!" cried Patterson, while we all gave utterance to expressions of horrified astonishment. "And was yours the only boat that got away?" "I'm very much afraid so," he replied. "At least I saw no other. Yes, you are right; it is terrible, and her majesty has lost a fine vessel and splendid ship's company in the Asiatic." When the poor fellow had finished his story, he was silent for some minutes. Indeed, so were we all. It seemed almost incredible that the great vessel we had admired and feared only the day before should now be lying, with the majority of her crew, deep down at the bottom of the ocean. "We are fortunate in having been able to pick you up," said Patterson after awhile. "An hour later and we should have changed our course and have been many miles away." "In that case we should have been dead men by nightfall," was the reply. "As it was, we lost one man." "How did it happen?" "The poor devil went mad and jumped overboard. Remember, we had no water and nothing to eat, and so you may imagine it was heart-breaking work pulling in that baking sun. The miracle to me is that the boy stood it as well as he did." "Poor little chap! It must have been a terrible experience for him." "And what do you intend doing with us?" asked the officer, after a little pause. "For, of course, we're your prisoners." "That I cannot say," Patterson answered. "It does not lie within my province. However, you'll hear soon enough—never fear. By the way, I suppose you will give me your word that you will not attempt to play us any tricks. You must remember, please, that I am all intents and purposes your superior." "I will give you my word. Is that enough?" "Quite enough. And now that you

have done so I make you free of our wardroom and its contents." All the time Patterson had been speaking I had noticed that the lieutenant, whose name, it transpired later, was Thorden, had been staring at his face as if trying to recall some circumstance it reminded him of. Just as we were preparing to go on deck again his memory seemed to come back to him. "I hope you will excuse what I am going to say, and stop me if I am recalling any unpleasant memories," he murmured, "but ever since I came aboard I've been wondering where we have met before. Aren't you Gregory, who was commander of the gunboat Purtilin in the Egyptian business of 1876?" Patterson fell back against the wall as if he had been shot. For a moment his face was as white as the paper I am now writing upon; then, with a great effort, he pulled himself together and answered: "I have quite forgotten that I had any existence at all in 1876. May I beg that you will not recall the fact to my memory?" Then, as if to change the subject, he continued: "I expect you would like to rest after all your troubles. Pray let me conduct you to a cabin."



Patterson fell back against the wall, interested in Patterson and could not help speculating as to what the reason could have been, that had induced him to abandon a career in which, even so many years ago, he seemed to have attained such exalted rank.

During the afternoon I received an invitation from Alle to dine with her that evening. She stated in the little note she sent me that she had also asked the rescued lieutenant, and his midshipman, and I gathered from this that something out of the common was to occur. About an hour before dusk, as I was reading in the officers' messroom, the lieutenant came out of his cabin and sat down at the table beside me. He looked round to see that we were alone, and then said in a confidential whisper: "Your position on board this boat, Dr. De Normanville, has already been explained to me. I'm sure I sympathize with you, but for rather selfish motives I am glad you are not in league with this extraordinary woman. I have received an invitation to dine in her cabin this evening, and I want you, if you will, to tell me something about her. Do you know enough to satisfy my curiosity?" "I won't tell you anything about her," I answered, with a laugh. "You must wait and judge for yourself. One caution, however, before you see her—beware how you behave toward her, and if I might venture a hint, make a good toilet. She's very particular, and it's well to humor her. My things are at your disposal, of course." He thanked me, and I saw no more of him or the midshipman until a few minutes before dinner time, when I met them on deck and accompanied them to Alle's saloon. Having descended the companion ladder, I drew back the curtain for them to enter. Prepared as I had no idea the lieutenant would be filled with such amazement as he betrayed when we entered the beautiful cabin I have before described. As good luck had it, Alle was not present, and so we were able to look about us undisturbed. "Why didn't you prepare me for this?" whispered my companion after he had glanced round the cabin. "I never saw anything like it before, and I've been aboard scores of yachts in my time." "There is but one Beautiful White Devil," I said with serio comic earnestness. "Curious china, skins, divans, musical instruments, a grand piano oven, and, by Jove, inlaid with tortoise shell and lapis lazuli! It's wonderful, it's superb! And now I want to see the woman who owns it all." "Steady," I whispered. "If I mistake not, here she comes." As I spoke the curtains at the other end of the cabin were parted by a tiny hand, and Alle, dressed entirely in black, stood before us. The color of her complexion exhibited her matchless figure to perfection. She stood for a moment in the doorway and then advanced toward us with that wonderful floating grace which always characterized her, giving me her little hand first and then turning toward her other guests. To the lieutenant she bowed and said, with a smile: "Sir, you must forgive my not having personally welcomed you to my boat, but for reasons which would not interest you I am not always able to do as much as I could wish. However, I hope my officers have taken every care of you." She shook hands with the handsome little midshipman as she spoke, and while she was doing so I had time to steal a look at the first lieutenant's face. The astonishment I saw depicted there almost caused me to laugh. He had been amazed at the beauty of the cabin, but that was nothing compared with the admiration he betrayed for the Beautiful White Devil herself. He murmured a confused but not altogether inappropriate reply to her last speech, and then we sat down to dinner. Her companion,

I learned on inquiry, was suffering from a severe headache and had elected to dine in her own cabin. The dinner was in the chef's best style, and its cooking, serving and variety, combined with the beauty and value of the table decorations, evidently completed the effect upon the officer that the cabin had begun. Alle herself was in excellent spirits and talked with the wit and cleverness of a woman who has perfected an originally liberal education by continual and varied study of the world and its inhabitants. By the time the meal was ended and we had hidden her good night the lieutenant was in a maze of enchantment. We went on deck together, and once there, out of earnest of the cabin, his enthusiasm broke loose. I will spare you, however, a recital of all the extravagant things he said. Let it suffice that I gathered enough to feel sure that when he got back to Hongkong he would add to rather than detract from the number of stories already in circulation about the too famous Beautiful White Devil. One promise, however, I took care to extract from both officers, and that was not to mention my name in connection with the yacht on their return to civilization. I made the excuse that if such a thing got known it might do me serious harm in the practice of my profession, and both men readily gave me their words that they would not breathe a syllable on the subject. Their stay with us, however, was not to be of as long duration as we had expected. For early next morning we sighted a small brigantine, who, on being hailed, stated that she was bound for Hongkong. Passages for the officers and their men were soon arranged, and, within an hour of picking her up she had cast a boat, we had bidden our naval visitors goodby and were standing on our fictitious course again. As soon, however, as they were out of sight the helm was put up and we were making a bee line back to the settlement. That evening as I was pacing the deck, smoking my cigar and wondering when the time would come for me to say farewell, I heard a light footstep behind me and next moment Alle came to my side. We paced the deck for a little while, talking commonplaces about the beauty of the night, the speed of her vessel, and the visit of the man-of-war's men; then she drew me to the stern and said: "Do you remember your first night on board this boat, when we discussed the sea and the poets who have written of her?" "It was the night of the first day I ever saw you," I answered. "Is it likely I should have forgotten it?" "Some men forget very easily," she answered, looking down at the sparkling water. "But I'll do you the justice to say I don't think you are one of that kind."

"And you are right; I am sure I am not. I think if I were lying dead in my grave, my brain would still remember you." She looked roguishly up into my face and said: "That is rather a big assertion for a medical man to make, is it not?" "Rather medicine," I cried impatiently. "It reminds me of the old world. And by the same token, Alle, I want to ask you something unpleasant again."

"And that is?" "When I am to say goodby to you?" "Tomorrow," she answered. "Tomorrow night, all being well, we will pick up a trading schooner off a certain island. Her owner is under an obligation to me and will take you on board and convey you to Thursday Island. Thence you can travel home via Australia and the canal or Honolulu and America, as you please."

I had expected that the parting was not far distant, but I did not think it would prove as close as this. I told Alle as much. "It is the only opportunity that may serve," she answered. "And I must not keep you with me too long for your own sake."

Under cover of the darkness I managed to find and take her hand. "It is only for a year, Alle. You understand that, don't you? At the end of a year you are to be my wife?" "If you still wish it, yes," she answered, but so softly that I had to strain my ears to catch it. Then with a whispered good night she slipped from me and went below. At sundown next evening, surely enough, a small topsail schooner hove in sight from behind an island, and seeing us ran up a signal. It was returned from our gaff, and as soon as I read it I

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