

A BEAUTIFUL PIRATE

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"The Marriage of Esther," etc.

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CHAPTER I.

HOW I CAME TO HEAR OF THE BEAUTIFUL WHITE DEVIL.

The night was sweltering hot, even for Hongkong.

"Hello! Who's this?" said Peckle. "Poddy, by all that's human. Watchman, what of the night? Why this indecent haste?"

The newcomer was a short, podgy man, with a clean shaven, red face, white teeth, very prominent eyes, large ears and almost marmalade colored hair.

"Poddy is suffering from a bad attack of suppressed information," said Benwell, who had been examining him critically. "Better prescribe for him, Dr. Normanville. Ah, I forgot you don't know one another. Let me introduce you—Mr. Horace Vanderbrun, Mr. De Normanville. Now you're acquaint, as they say in the farces."

"Out with it, Poddy," continued Peckle, digging him in the ribs with the butt of his cue. "If you don't tell us soon, we shall be sorrowfully compelled to postpone our engagements tomorrow in order to witness your interment in the Happy Valley."

"Well, in the first place," began Mr. Vanderbrun, "you must know that the Oodnadatta—"

"Well—well, skipper—Perkins, martinet and teetotaler; chief officer, Bradburn; otherwise the China sea liar! What about her? She sailed this evening for Shanghai?"

"With a million and a half of specie aboard. Don't forget that. Went ashore in the Ly-ee-moon pass at 7 o'clock. Surrounded by junkies instantly. Skipper dispatched third officer in launch full steam for assistance. Gunboat went down posthaste, and, like most gunboats, arrived too late to be of any use. Apologies, Peckle, old man! Skipper and ten men shot, chief officer diked, first saloon passengers of importance cleaned of their valuables and locked up in their own berths. The bullion room was then rifled, and every red cent of the money is gone—goodness knows where. Now, what d'you think of that for news?"

"My gracious!"

"What junkies were they?"

"Nobody knows."

"The Ly-ee-moon pass too! Right under our very noses. Criminy! Won't there be a row?"

"The Beautiful White Devil again, I suppose?"

"Looks like it, don't it? Peckle, my boy, from this hour forward the papers will take it up, and—well, if I know any thing of newspapers, they'll drop it on to you gunboat fellows pretty hot."

"If I were the British navy, I'd be dashed if I'd be beaten by a woman."

I thought it was time to interfere.

"Will somebody take pity on a poor barbarian and condescend to explain?" I said. "Since I've been in the east I've heard nothing but Beautiful White Devil, Beautiful White Devil, Beautiful White Devil, Beautiful White Devil. Tiffin at government house, Colombo—Beautiful White Devil; club chow, Yokohama—Beautiful White Devil; flagship, Nagasaki—Beautiful White Devil, and now here. All Beautiful White Devil, and every yarn differing from its predecessors by miles. I can tell you I'm beginning to feel very much out of it."

Each of the four men started in to explain. I held up my hand in entreaty. "As you are strong, be merciful," I cried. "Not all at once."

One of the silent footed China boys brought me a match for my cigar and held it until I had obtained a light. Then, throwing myself back in the long cane chair, I bade them work their wicked wills.

"Let Poddy tell," said Peckle. "He boasts the most prolific imagination. Go on, old man, and don't spare him."

Vanderbrun pulled himself together, signed for silence and, having done so, began theatrically: "Who is the Beautiful Devil? Mystery. Where did she first hail from? Mystery. What is her name—I mean her real name, not the picturesque Chinese cognomen? Mystery. As far as can be ascertained she made her first appearance in eastern waters in Rangun July 24, 18—. Got hold of some native prince blowing the family treasure and blackmailed him out of \$500,000. A man would never have come out of the business alive, but she did, and, what is more, with the money to boot. Three months later the Vectis Queen went ashore, when 48 hours out of Singapore, junkies sprang up out of nowhere, boarded her in spite of stubborn resistance on the part of the ship's company, looted her bullion room of \$50,000 and her passengers of \$3,000 apiece."

"But what reason have you for connecting the Beautiful White Devil with that affair?"

"White yacht hanging about all the same. Known to be hers. Signals passed between them, and when the money was secured it was straightway carried on board her."

"All right. Go on."

"Quite quiet for three months. Then the sultan of Surabaya chanced to make the acquaintance in Batavia of an extraordinarily beautiful woman. They went about a good deal together, after which she lured him on board a steam yacht in Tanjong Priok, presumably to say goodby. Having done so, she coaxed him below, sailed off with him there and then kept him under lock and key until he had paid a ransom of over 400,000 guilders, when he was put ashore again. Two months later Vesey—you know Vesey—of Johore street, probably the richest man in Hongkong, met a woman staying at this very hotel. She presented to us just out from home and no end innocent."

"Well, Vesey was so awfully smitten that he wanted to marry her—bad as all that. She took him in hand and one day got him to take her for a cruise in his yacht. Of course he jumped at the chance, and off they sailed. Out at sea they were met by a white schooner. I believe Vesey was in the middle of protesting his undying love, and all that sort of thing, you know, when my lady clapped a revolver to his head and bade him behave to. A boat put off from the stranger, and both lady and friend boarded her. The long and the short of it was, when Vesey was released he had signed a check for £50,000, and, by Jove, the money was paid on the nail! Chinese government had a score against her for abducting a mandarin of the gold button. They tried to catch her, but failed. English cruiser went after her for two days and lost her near Formosa. Silence again for three months, then new governor and wife, Sir Prendergast Prendergast, were coming out here on the Oloomoo. Her ladyship, who, you know, was mixed up in that Belleville business, had her famous diamonds with her—said to be worth £30,000. There was also £80,000 in gold going up to Shanghai. It is supposed that the purser must have been bribed and in the business. At any rate when they arrived at Hongkong both bullion, diamonds and purser were mysteriously missing. Couldn't find a trace of 'em high or low. Whether they went overboard in a fog, whether they were still stowed away on board, nobody ever knew. They were gone; that was enough. The governor was furious and worried the admiralty so with dispatches that two cruisers were sent off with instructions to look for her. They potted about and at last sighted and chased her to the Philippines, where they lost her in a fog. Those are the principal counts against her, I believe. Rum story, ain't it?"

"Extraordinary! Has anybody ever seen her?"

"I should just think so; sultan of Surabaya, Vesey, native prince and all the people staying at this house when she was here."

"What description do they give of her?"

"Quite a young woman—eight and twenty at most, tall and willowy; beautiful features, clear cut as a cameo; exquisite complexion and rippling golden hair, a voice like a flute, figure like Venus and eyes that look through yours into the uttermost depths of your soul."

"And isn't she worth being enthusiastic about? By Jove! I'd like to know her history."

"And do you mean to tell me that with the English, American, French, German, Chinese and Japanese fleets patrolling these waters it's impossible to catch her?"

"Quite—up to the present. Look at the facts of the case. She's here today and gone tomorrow. White yacht seen near Singapore today—copper colored off Macassar on Thursday—black with white ports near Shanghai the week following. The police and the poor old admiral are turning gray under the strain."

"By Jove! I'd like to see her."

"Don't say that or you will. Nobody ever knows where she'll turn up next. It is certain that she has agents everywhere and that she's in league with half the junk pirates along the coast. Glad I'm not a man worth abducting."

"But in spite of what you say I can hardly believe that it's possible for a woman to carry on such a trade. It's like a romance."

"It's not like it; it is a romance, and a pretty unpleasant one too. Sultan of Surabaya and poor old Vesey were glad enough to see the final chapter of it, I can assure you. You should just hear the latter's description of the yacht and its appointments. He used to make us creep when he told us how this woman would sit on deck, looking him through and through out of her half closed eyes till he began to feel as if he'd have to get up and scream or sit where he was and go mad. He saw two or three things on board that boat that he says he'll never forget, and I gathered that he doesn't want any more excursions in the lady's company."

"He must be a man without imagination."

"He's a man blessed with good sound common sense. That's what he is."

"It seems incredible that she should have escaped so long."

Peckle took up his cue again.

"Hear, hear, to that. And now, Benwell, my boy, if you don't want to go to sleep in that chair turn out and finish the drubbing you've begun. I must be getting aboard directly."

Benwell rose and went round the table to where his ball lay under the cushion. The imperturbable marker called the score as if there had been no

pause in the game, and the match was once more getting under way when the swing doors opened and an elderly man entered the room. He was dressed in white from top to toe, carried a big umbrella and wore a broad brimmed solar topee upon his head. Once inside he paused as if irresolute, and then, looking round on its occupants, said politely:

"Forgive my intrusion, but can you tell me where I can find a gentleman named De Normanville?"

"I am that person," I said, rising from my chair.

"I hope you will not think me rude," he continued, "but if you could allow me the honor of five minutes' conversation with you I should be obliged."

"With pleasure."

I crossed the room to where he stood and signed him to a seat near the door.

"Pardon me," he said, "but the business about which I desire to consult you is of a highly important and confidential nature. Is there any room in the hotel where we can be alone?"

"Only my bedroom, I'm afraid," I answered. "We shall be quite free from interruption there."

"That will do excellently. Let us go to it."

Arriving at my room, I lit a candle and pushed a chair forward for him. Having done so, I took up my position beside the open window. Down in the street below I could hear the subdued voices of the passersby, the rattle of rickshaws and the chafing of sampans alongside the wharf. I remember, too, that the moon was just rising over the mainland, and to show how unimportant things become engraved upon the memory I recollect that it struck me as being more like the yolk of a hard boiled egg than ever I remembered to have thought it before. Suddenly I remembered the laws of hospitality.

"Before we begin business may I offer you some refreshment?" I asked. "B. and S.? Whisky?"

"I am obliged to you," he answered. "I think I will take a little whisky, thank you."

I put my head out of the door. A servant was passing.

"Boy, bring two whisky peps."

Then returning to my guest, I said:

"Do you smoke? I think I can give you a good cigar."

He took one from the box and lit it, puffing the smoke luxuriously through his nose.

"You are a stranger in Hongkong, I believe, Dr. De Normanville?" he began.

"Not only in Hongkong, but you might say in the east generally," I answered. "I am out on a tour to study Asiatic diseases for a book I am writing."



"You are a stranger in Hongkong, I believe."

"You have achieved considerable success in your profession, I believe. We have even heard of you out here."

I modestly held my tongue. But so pitiful is the vanity of man that from this time forward I began to look upon my companion with a more friendly air than I had hitherto shown him.

"Now forgive my impertinence," he continued, "but how long do you contemplate remaining in the east?"

"It is very uncertain," I replied, "but I almost fancy another six weeks will find me upon a P. and O. boat homeward bound."

"And in that six weeks will your time be very importantly occupied?"

"I cannot say, but I should rather think not. So far as I can tell at present my work is accomplished."

"And now will you let me come to business? To put it bluntly, have you any objection to earning £1,000?"

"Not the very least," I answered, with a laugh. "What man would have, provided, of course, I can earn it in a legitimate manner?"

"You have bestowed considerable attention upon the treatment of smallpox, I believe?"

"I have had sole charge of two small-pox hospitals, if that's what you mean."

"Ah, then our informant was right! Well, this business, in which £1,000 is to be earned, has to do with an outbreak of that disease."

"And you wish me to take charge of it?"

"That is exactly what I am commissioned to negotiate."

"Where is the place?"

"I cannot tell you."

"Not tell me? That's rather strange, is it not?"

"It is all very strange. But with your permission I will explain myself more clearly."

I nodded.

"It is altogether an extraordinary business. But, on the other hand, the

pay is equally extraordinary. I am commissioned to find a doctor who will undertake the combating of an outbreak of smallpox on the following terms and conditions: The remuneration shall be £1,000; the doctor shall give his word of honor not to divulge the business to any living soul; he shall set off at once to the affected spot, and he shall still further pledge himself to reveal nothing of what he may have heard or seen when he returns here again. Is that clear to you?"

"Perfectly. But it's a most extraordinary proposition."

"I grant you it is. But it is a chance that few men would care to let slip."

"How is the person undertaking it to find the place?"

"I will arrange that myself."

"And how is he to return from it?"

"He will be sent back in the same way that he goes."

"And when must he start?"

"At once, without delay; say 12 o'clock tonight."

"It is nearly 11 now."

"That will leave an hour. Come, Dr. De Normanville, are you prepared to undertake it?"

"I don't really know what to say. There is so much mystery about it."

"Unfortunately that is necessary."

I paced the room in anxious thought, hardly knowing what answer to give. Should I accept or should I decline the offer? The £1,000 was a temptation, and yet, supposing there were some treachery lurking behind it that, in my innocence of the east, I could not fathom—what then? Moreover, the adventurous side of the affair, I must own, appealed to me strongly. I was young, and there was something supremely fascinating about the compliment and the mystery that enshrouded it.

"Look here," I said at length. "Pay me half the money down before I start as a guarantee of good faith and I'm your man."

"Very good. I will even meet you there."

He put his hand inside his coat and drew out a pocketbook. From this he took five £100 Bank of England notes and gave them to me.

"There, you have half the money."

"Thank you. Really, I must beg your pardon for almost doubting you, but—"

"Pray say no more. You understand the conditions thoroughly. You are not to divulge a detail of the errand to any living soul now or when you return."

"I will give you my word I will not."

"Then that is settled. I am much obliged to you. Can you arrange to meet me on the wharf exactly at midnight?"

"Certainly. I will be there without fail. And now tell me something of the outbreak itself. Is it very severe?"

"Very. There have already been nearly 100 cases, out of which quite 50 have proved fatal. Your position will be no insecure. You will have your work cut out for you."

"So it would appear. Now, if you will excuse me, I will go out and endeavor to obtain some lymph. We shall need all we can get."

"You need not put yourself to so much trouble. That has been attended to. To prevent any suspicion arising from your asking for such a thing, we have laid in a stock of everything you can possibly need."

"Very well, then. I will meet you on the wharf."

"On the wharf at 12 o'clock precisely. For the present adieu."

CHAPTER II.

AN EVENTFUL VOYAGE.

The last stroke of 12 was just booming out on the muggy night when I stepped on to the landing stage to await my mysterious employer. The hotel servant who had carried my bag put it down and, having received his gratuity, left me.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

A Bit of London Weather.

Our weather is grown decidedly good for the last three days—very brisk, clear and dry. Before that it was as bad as weather at any time need be. Long continued plunges of wet, then clammy, glary days on days of half wet (a kind of weather peculiar to London, and fully uglier than whole wet)—a world of black sunless plaster [a soft mixture, neither one thing nor another], very unpleasant to move about in! The incessant travel makes everything mud here, in spite of all that clats [a clat, a wooden scraper] and besoms can do. A kind of mud, too, which is as fine as paint and actually almost sticks like a kind of paint. I took, at last, into the country, with old clothes and trousers folded up. There the mud was natural mud, and far less of it; indeed little of it in comparison with other country. We dry again in a single day of brisk wind.—Carlyle Cor. in Atlantic.

A cow when slowly milked will not only tend to reduce her yield in quantity and thus go prematurely dry, but it has been found from experiment that as between slow milking versus quick milking there was a difference of 10 per cent in the butter fat in favor of the quick milking, and that this difference continued during a greater part of the period of lactation. A cow to yield the largest quantity of the richest milk must be quickly milked and cleanly milked, for if this is not done the animal's yield is very much reduced in every respect.

FARM MILLS.

What Farmers Say About Machines For Grinding Grain at Home.

The Rural New Yorker gives expression to the ideas entertained by some of the farmers in regard to grinding grain with individual farm mills as follows:

Most farmers who have bought such mills agree that they save money by owning them. They save the miller's toll, the cost of running to and from the mill and can utilize stormy days when otherwise there would be little to do. They all seem to agree that it pays to grind the feed for most kinds of stock. Even in the west, where corn on the ear is so largely fed, and steers are followed by hogs in the pasture, all farmers now agree that it pays to grind.

With regard to powers, there seems to be a wide diversity of opinion. A great many farmers are using the sweep power and are apparently well satisfied with it. Others prefer the tread powers, chiefly for the reason that they occupy less room, are more easily put under shelter and give a little more power than the sweeps. Many farmers are using wind power to run their grinding mills. This seems to give fair satisfaction when pains are taken to work enough feed ahead to last while the wind does not blow. Steam or gasoline power, however, is much more satisfactory for the larger mills.

With regard to the kind of mills used, the majority of correspondents appear to be using small sweep mills or crushers. These grind an average of 10 or 12 bushels an hour and of course do not give as fine a feed as the larger and more powerful burr mills. Some farmers with these sweep mills follow the plan of grinding twice. First they grind their corn, cob and all, and then run this chop through the second time, mixed with oats or rye, thus making a fine feed, which gives better results than very coarse chop. The best work of course is done with the larger mills, but in order to make them profitable one must have a larger amount of grain to be ground more probably than average farmers can expect to feed during the year. One great advantage in favor of the sweep or tread powers is the fact that a farmer can hitch his horse to them at once and start up the mill without delay, while with steam considerable time is necessary before the mill will start.

The substance of the matter seems to be that a grinding mill pays good interest when a farmer has 1,000 or more bushels of grain to feed. The cheap sweep crushers or grinders are certainly giving fair satisfaction.

Fall Planting of Small Fruits.

I have been quite successful in planting raspberries in the fall. These should not be planted until October, and then the work may be done any time before the ground freezes. Dig your plants if you have them of your own, out the cans back to 8 or 12 inches and the roots to about the same length. Plow furrows for the red varieties about six feet apart and six inches deep. Set the plants about three feet apart in the furrow, enlarging it somewhat with the hoe and spreading the roots out, and covering them with fine soil, then at once place a mulch of manure around each plant. I have for years set raspberries and blackberries in this way in the fall, and not one plant in 100 has died. When setting these plants in the fall, the main thing is the mulch around them, then the freezing and thawing of the ground in the winter will not leave them out.

These directions, with a little modification, apply to planting grapes, currants and gooseberries if you have plants grown from cuttings which were set in nursery rows last spring. In planting grapes, the rows should be eight to ten feet apart and the vines six to eight feet apart in the rows, according to the variety. It is not quite as safe to plant grapevines in the fall as in the spring, but they will usually live in dry soils.

The successful planting of the small fruit trees, such as plums and cherries, depends on the condition of the soil. If it is not well drained—so well that there is no danger of water standing on it—the planting had better be deferred until spring. Generally in well drained soils, if mulching is attended to, it is safe to plant nearly all of the small fruits in the fall, and it often saves valuable time in the spring, says W. H. Jenkins in Ohio Farmer.

Clover in Winter.

"We are sure that clover grows more or less all through the winter," says Rural New Yorker. "Most of this growth is below ground. The roots of crimson clover in particular will make a very perceptible growth between November and March. Sod ground also retains and absorbs the nitrates which are formed in the soil during hot weather, and left unused by the summer crops. A large part of the waste of nitrogen in drainage waters occurs during October and November on bare ground. On our own light soil, we would not plow a good clover sod in the fall. The authorities do not agree as to the limit to which clover will accumulate nitrogen. The matter has not been fully studied out, but on ordinary soils we are not likely to overdo the matter of clover seeding."

Coal is a storehouse of colors, medicines, perfumes and explosives.