

Boothby Guy

The Beautiful White Devil



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Содержание

CHAPTER I	5
CHAPTER II	12
CHAPTER III	19
CHAPTER IV	29
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	33

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CHAPTER I

HOW I COME TO HEAR OF THE BEAUTIFUL WHITE DEVIL

The night was sweltering hot, even for Hong Kong. The town clock had just chimed a quarter-past ten, and though the actual sound of the striking had died away, the vibration of the bells lingered for nearly half a minute on the murky stillness of the air. In spite of the exertions of the punkah coolie, the billiard-room of the Occidental Hotel was like the furnace-doors of Sheol. Benwell, of the Chinese Revenue cutter *Y-Chang*, and Peckle, of the English cruiser *Tartaric*, stripped nearly to the buff, were laboriously engaged upon a hundred up; while Maloney, of the San Francisco mail-boat, and I, George De Normanville, looked on, and encouraged them with sarcasms and utterly irrational advice. Between times the subdued jabbering of a group of rickshaw coolies, across the pavement, percolated in to us, and mingled with the click of the billiard balls and the monotonous whining of the punkah rope; then the voice of a man in the verandah upstairs, singing to the accompaniment of a banjo, drifted down, and set us beating time with our heels upon the wooden floor.

The words of the song seemed strangely out of place in that heathen land, so many thousand miles removed from Costerdom. But the wail of the music had quite a different effect. The singer's voice was distinctly a good one, and he used it with considerable ability:

"She wears an artful bonnet, feathers stuck all on it,
Covering a fringe all curled;
She's just about the neatest, prettiest, and sweetest
Donna in the wide, wide world.
And she'll be Mrs. 'Awkins, Mrs. 'Enry 'Awkins,
Got her for to name the day.
We settled it last Monday, so to church on Sunday,
Off we trots the donkey shay.

"Oh, Eliza! Dear Eliza! If you die an old maid
You'll only have yourself to blame.
D'ye hear Eliza – dear Eliza!
Mrs. 'Enry 'Awkins is a fust-class name."

Half a dozen other voices took up the chorus, and sent it rolling away over the litter of sampans alongside the wharf, out to where the red and blue funnel boats lay at anchor half a mile distant. The two players chalked their cues and stopped to participate.

"Oh, Eliza! Dear Eliza! If you die an old maid
You'll only have yourself to blame.
Oh, Eliza! Dear Eliza!
Mrs. 'Enry 'Awkins is a fust-class name."

The music ceased amid a burst of applause.

"Sixee, sixee – sevenee-three," repeated the marker mechanically.

"Give me the rest, you almond-eyed lubber," cried Peckle with sudden energy; "we'll return to business, for I'll be hanged if I'm going to let myself be beaten by the bo'sun tight and the midshipmite of a bottle-nosed, unseaworthy Chinese contraband."

Maloney knocked the ash off his cigar on his chair-arm and said, by way of explanation, "Our friend Peckle, gentlemen, chowed last night at Government House. He hasn't sloughed his company manners yet."

Benwell sent the red whizzing up the table into the top pocket, potted his opponent into the right-hand middle, by way of revenge, and then gave the customary miss in baulk.

"A Whitechapel game and be hanged to you," said Peckle contemptuously. "I'll bet you a dollar I – Hullo! who's this? 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-coloured hair. He was in a profuse perspiration, and so much out of breath that for quite two minutes he was unable to answer their salutations.

"Poddy is suffering from a bad attack of suppressed information," said Benwell, who had been examining him critically. "Better prescribe for him, De Normanville. Ah, I forgot, you don't know one another. Let me introduce you – Mr. Horace Venderbrun, Dr. De Normanville. Now you're acquainted, 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 to-morrow in order to witness your interment in the Happy Valley."

"Well, in the first place," began Mr. Venderbrun, "you must know – "

"Hear, hear, Poddy. A dashed good beginning!"

"Shut up, Peckle, and give the minstrel a chance. Now, my Blondel, pipe your tuneful lay."

"You must know that the *Oodnadatta* – "

"Well – well, Skipper – Perkins, martinet and teetotaller; 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 seven o'clock. Surrounded by junks instantly. Skipper despatched third officer in launch full steam for assistance. Gunboat went down post haste, and, like most gunboats, arrived too late to be of any use. Apologies, Peckle, old man! Skipper and ten men shot, chief officer dirked, 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 junks 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 anything 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."

"Hear, hear, to that. Now for your defence, Peckle."

"Go ahead; let me have it. I'm down and I've got no friends; but it's all very well for you gentlemen of England, who sit at home in ease, to sneer. If you only knew as much as we do of the lady you wouldn't criticise so freely. Personally, I believe she's a myth."

"Don't try it, old man. We all know the Lords Commissioners will stand a good deal, but, believe me, they'll never swallow that. They've had too many proofs to the contrary lately."

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. 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 predecessor 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."

Venderbrun 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 Rangoon, July 24, 18 – . Got hold of some native prince blowing the family treasure and blackmailed him out of half a million of dollars. 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 forty-eight hours out of Singapore, junks 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 fifty thousand pounds and her passengers of three thousand more."

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

"White yacht hanging about all the time. 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 good-bye. 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 four hundred thousand guilders, when he was put ashore again. Two months later, Vesey – you know Vesey – of Johore Street, probably the richest man in Hong Kong, met a woman staying at this very hotel. She pretended to be 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 heave-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 cheque for fifty thousand pounds, and, by Jove, the money was paid on the nail. Chinese Government have 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 *Ooloomoo*. Her ladyship, whom you know was mixed up in that Belleville business, had her famous diamonds with her – said to be worth thirty thousand pounds. There was also eighty thousand 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 Hong Kong 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 despatches 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."

"Bravo, Poddy! The little man's getting quite enthusiastic."

"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 to-day, and gone to-morrow. White yacht seen near Singapore to-day – copper-coloured 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."

"All the same, as I said before, I'd like to see her."

"Well, I shouldn't be surprised if your wish is gratified before long. They're simply bound to catch her; the wonder to me is that they haven't done so months ago."

"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 honour 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."

With that we went upstairs. All the way I was puzzling my brains to think what he could want with me. The man was so mysterious, and yet so palpably desirous of pleasing, that I was becoming quite interested. One thing was certain – I had never seen him before in my life.

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 passers-by, 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 remember 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 pegs."

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. Presently the pegs were forthcoming, and when I had signed the *chit* I asked his business.

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

"Not only in Hong Kong, 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 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 a thousand pounds?"

"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 small-pox, 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 a thousand pounds 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 small-pox on the following terms and conditions: The remuneration shall be one thousand pounds; the doctor shall give his word of honour 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 again?"

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

"And when must he start?"

"At once, without delay. Say twelve o'clock to-night."

"It is nearly eleven 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 thousand pounds 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 pocket-book. From this he took five one hundred pound 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 a hundred cases, out of which quite fifty have proved fatal. Your position will be no sinecure. You will have your work cut out for you."

"So it would appear. Now, if you will excuse me, I will go out and endeavour 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 twelve o'clock precisely. For the present, adieu!"

He shook me by the hand, picked up his hat and umbrella, and disappeared down the staircase, while I returned to my room to pack.

CHAPTER II

AN EVENTFUL VOYAGE

The last stroke of twelve 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. The soft moonlight flooded everything, threw quaint shadows upon the wharf planks, shone upon the sleeping sampans beside it, and gurgled in oily wreaths on the placid water in the depths between them. Very few people were abroad, and those who were had no attention to spare for me. The Sikh policeman, who passed and repassed, alone seemed to wonder what a white lord could be doing in such a place at such a time. But doubtless he had had experience of the curious ways of Sahibdom, and, being a wise man, if he possessed any curiosity, he refrained from giving me evidence of the fact.

Suddenly the patter of naked feet behind me caught my ear. A Chinese chair, borne by two stalwart bearers, was approaching. Very naturally I settled it in my own mind that it contained the man whom I was to meet, and turned to receive him. But when the conveyance was set down, it was not the respectable Englishman I had seen before who stepped out of it, but a portly Chinaman of considerable rank and dignity. He was gorgeously clad in figured silk; his pigtail reached halfway to his heels and was adorned with much ornamentation; and I noticed that he wore large tortoiseshell spectacles which, while they completely hid his eyes, gave a curious effect to his otherwise not unhandsome countenance. Having descended from his equipage, he dismissed his bearers, and began to stump solemnly up and down the landing-stage, drawing closer and closer to me at every turn. Presently he summoned up courage enough to accost me. To my surprise he said:

"What for you come here one piecee look see?"

Not being an adept at pigeon English, I simply answered —

"I'm afraid I don't understand you."

"What for you come here look see?"

"I'm waiting for a friend."

"Your friend allee same Engleesman?"

"Yes, I believe he's an Englishman."

"You go 'way look see chop-chop?"

"You'll excuse me, but that's my own affair, I think."

"Allee same smallee pox, I think!"

"You may think what you please."

"S'posing you say, smallee poxee, allee same one piecee thousan' pound?"

"I'm afraid I can't continue this conversation. Good evening."

I turned on my heel, and was about to leave him, when he stopped me by saying in excellent English:

"Thank you, Dr. De Normanville. I'm quite satisfied."

"Good gracious, what's all this?"

"Why, it means that I have been trying you, that's all. Forgive the deception, but the importance of our mission must be my excuse. Now we must be going. Here is the boat."

As he spoke, a large sampan shot out from among its companions and came swiftly towards the wharf.

"Two cautions before we embark. The first — remember that I am a Chinaman, and speak only pigeon English. The second — if you are armed, be careful of your revolver. The men who work the junk we are going down to meet are not to be trusted; hence my disguise."

He left me and descended the steps. The sampan by this time had come alongside; a woman was rowing and a vigorous conversation in Chinese ensued. When it was finished my companion beckoned to me, and picking up my bag I went down to him. Next moment I was aboard and stuffed away in the little pokey rat-hole of a cabin amidships. My friend took his place beside me, a small boy took the helm, and we pushed off. Not a word was spoken, and in this fashion for nearly an hour we pursued our way down the harbour, passed a flotilla of junks, threaded a course between the blue and red funnel boats, and finally swept out into the clear space that stretches away from Port Victoria as far as Green Island.

For hours we seemed to be imprisoned in that stuffy little cabin. Like most sampans, the boat smelt abominably, and as we could only see the mechanical rowing of the women in the well forrard, and hear the occasional commands of the tiny boy steering aft, our enjoyment may be placed on the debit side of the account without any fear of miscalculation.

At length my companion, who had not uttered a word since he stepped aboard, began to show signs of impatience. He rose from his seat and peered out into the night. Presently he appeared to be a little relieved in his mind, for he reseated himself with a muttered "Thank goodness," and gave himself up to a careful consideration of our position. Through a slit in the tarpaulin I could just see that we were approaching a big junk, whose ample girth almost blocked the fairway. Her great, square cut stern loomed above us, and round it our coxswain steered us with a deftness extraordinary.

As we came alongside one of the women rowing drew in her oar and said a few words to my companion. In answer he stepped out of the shelter and called something in Chinese. A voice from the junk replied, and the answer being evidently satisfactory we hitched on and prepared to change vessels. A rope was thrown to us, and when it had been made fast my guide signed to me to clamber aboard. I did so, and the next moment was on the junk's deck assisting him to a place beside me.

Two or three men were grouped about amidships watching us, and one, the owner, or skipper of the boat I presumed, entered upon a longwinded conversation with my conductor. As they talked I heard the sampan push off and disappear astern. Then our crew fell to work – the great sails were hoisted, a hand went aft to the tiller, and within five minutes we were waddling down the straits at a pace that might possibly have been four knots an hour. All this time my companion had not addressed me once. His whole attention seemed to be concentrated upon the work going on around him. He treated me with the contemptuous indifference generally shown by Chinamen towards barbarian Englishmen, and this I was wise enough not to resent.

I will not deny, however, that I was nervous. The mysterious errand on which I was bound, the emphatic, but not reassuring, warning of my astute companion, and the company in which I now found myself, were calculated to have this effect. But as we left the land behind us and waddled out to sea, my fears began in a measure to subside, and I found myself gazing about me with more interest than I should at any other time have thought possible.

The junk was one of the largest I had ever seen, and, like most of her class, appeared to be all masts, sails, and stern. The crew were as usual very numerous, and a more evil-looking lot no one could possibly wish to set eyes on; the face of one little pock-marked fellow being particularly distasteful to me. That this individual, for some reason, bore me no good will I was pretty positive, and on one occasion, in passing where I stood, he jolted against me in such a fashion and with such violence that he nearly capsized me. At any other time I should have resented his behaviour, but, bearing in mind my companion's advice, I held my peace.

By this time it was nearly two o'clock. The wind was every moment freshening and a brisk sea rising. The old tub began to pitch unpleasantly, and I found repeated occasion to thank my stars that I was a good sailor. Sharp dashes of spray broke over her decks at every plunge, soaking us to the skin, and adding considerably to the unpleasantness of our position. Still, however, my companion did not speak, but I noticed that he watched the men about him with what struck me as increased attention.

Seeing that I had had no sleep at all that night it may not be a matter of much surprise that I presently began to nod. Stowing myself away in a sheltered corner, I was in the act of indulging in a nap when I felt a body fall heavily against me. It was my companion who had dropped asleep sitting up, and had been dislodged by a sudden roll of the ship. He fell clean across me, his face against my ear. Next moment I knew that the catastrophe was intentional.

"Keep your eyes open," he whispered as he lay; "there is treachery aboard. We shall have trouble before long."

After that you may be sure I thought no more of sleep. Pulling myself together I slipped my hand into the pocket that had contained my revolver, only to find, to my horror and astonishment, that it was gone. My pocket had been picked since I had come aboard the junk.

My consternation may be better imagined than described, and as soon as I could find occasion I let my companion know of my misfortune.

"I gave you fair warning," he replied calmly, "now we shall probably both lose our lives. However, what can't be cured must be endured, so pretend to be asleep and don't move, whatever happens, until you hear from me. That little pock-marked devil haranguing the others forrard is Kwong Fung, the most notorious pirate along the whole length of the coast, and if we fall into his hands, well, there will not be two doubts as to what our fate will be."

He tumbled over on to his side with a grunt, while I shut my eyes and pretended to be asleep. It was growing cold; the wind was rising and with it the sea. Already the stars in the East were paling perceptibly, and in another hour, at most, day would be born.

It's all very well for people to talk about coolness and presence of mind in moments of extreme danger. Since the events I'm now narrating took place, I've been in queerer quarters than most men, and though I've met with dozens who could be brave enough when the actual moment for fighting arrived, I've never yet encountered one who could lie still, doing nothing, for three-quarters of an hour, watching his death preparing for him, and not show some sign of nervousness. Frankly, I will admit that I was afraid. To have to lie on that uncomfortable heaving deck, a big sea running, and more than a capful of wind blowing, watching, in the half dark, a gang of murderous ruffians plotting one's destruction, would try the nerves of the boldest of men. Small wonder then that my lower limbs soon became like blocks of ice, that my teeth chattered in my head, and that an indescribable sinking sensation assumed possession of my internal regions. I could not take my eyes off the group seated frog fashion on the deck forrard. Their very backs held an awful fascination for me.

But, as it soon turned out, my interest in them was almost my undoing. For had I not been so intent upon watching what was before me I should perhaps have heard the rustling of a human body outside the bulwarks against which I had seated myself. In that case I should have detected the figure that had crawled quietly over and was now stealing along the deck towards where I lay. In his hand he carried a thin cord at the end of which was a noose just capable of encircling my head.

Suddenly I felt something touch my throat. I lifted my head, and at the same instant the truth dawned upon me. *I was being strangled.* How long a time elapsed between the cord's touching my neck and my losing consciousness I could not say, but brief as was the interval, I can recollect seeing my companion half raise himself. Then came a flash, a loud report, a sudden singing in my ears, and I remember no more.

When I recovered my wits again my companion was bending over me.

"Thank God," he said piously, "I began to think the brute had done for you. Now pull yourself together as fast as you can, for there's going to be serious trouble."

I looked round me as well as I could. By my side lay the body of the man, with the cord still in his hand, and from the way in which one arm was stretched out and the other doubled under him, I gathered that he was dead. Amidships the crew of the junk were assembled, listening to the excited oratory of the little pock-marked devil against whom my companion had warned me. He held in his hand a revolver – mine, I had no difficulty in guessing – and, from the way in which he turned and

pointed in our direction, I understood that he was explaining to the others the necessity which existed for exterminating us without delay. I turned to my companion and warmly thanked him for the shot that had saved my life.

"Don't mention it," he answered coolly. "It was fortunate I saw him coming. You must remember that besides saving you it has put one of our adversaries out of the way, and every one against odds like this counts. By the way, you'd better find something to lay about you with – for from all appearance we're in for a big thing."

Under the bulwarks, and a little to the left of where I sat, was a stout iron bar some two feet six in length. I managed to secure it, and having done so, felt a little easier in my mind.

As I crawled back to my station another report greeted my ears, and at the same instant a bullet bedded itself in the woodwork, within an inch of my left temple.

"That's the introduction," said my imperturbable friend with a grim smile. "Are you ready? He's got the only weapon among them and five more cartridges left in it. Keep by me and give no quarter – for remember if they win they'll show you none."

Bang! Another bullet whizzed past my ear.

Bang! My companion gave a low whistle and then turned to me.

"Grazed my forearm," he said calmly, and then raising his pistol shot the nearest of our assailants dead. The man gave a little cry, more like a sob, and with outspread arms fell on his face upon the deck. The next roll of the vessel carried him into the lee scuppers, where for some time he washed idly to and fro. Never in my life before had I seen anything so coolly deliberate as the way in which he was picked off. It was more like rabbit shooting than anything else.

"Two cartridges gone!" said my comrade.

As he spoke a bullet tore up the deck at my feet, while another grazed my right shoulder.

"Four. Keep steady; he's only two left. Look out *then*, for they'll rush us to a certainty! I wish I could get another shot at them first."

But this wish was not destined to be gratified. The scoundrels had had sufficient evidence of his skill as a marksman, and being prudent, though precious, villains they had no desire to receive further proof of it. They therefore kept in shelter.

Minute after minute went slowly by, and everyone found the night drawing further off the sky, and the light widening more perceptibly. But still no sign came from those in hiding forrard. To my mind this watching and waiting was the worst part of the whole business. All sorts of fresh horrors seemed to cluster round our position as we crouched together in the shelter aft.

Suddenly, without any warning, and with greater majesty than I ever remember to have observed in him before or since, the sun rose in the cloudless sky. Instantly with his coming, light and colour shot across the waters, the waves from being of a dull leaden hue became green and foam-crested, and the great fibre sails of the junk from figuring as blears of double darkness, reaching up to the very clouds, took to themselves again their ordinary commonplace and forlorn appearance.

Our course lay due east, and for this reason the sun shone directly in our faces, dazzling us, and for the moment preventing our seeing anything that might be occurring forrard. I could tell that this was a matter of some concern to my companion, and certainly it was not to remain very long a matter of indifference to me.

The sun had been above the sky line scarcely a matter of two minutes when another shot was fired from forward, and I fell with a cry to the deck. Next moment I had picked myself up again, and, feeling very sick and giddy, scrambled to my companion's side. He was as cool and apparently as unconcerned as ever.

"The other was the prologue – this is going to be the play itself. Keep as close to me as you can, and above all things fight to the death – accept no quarter, and give none."

The words were hardly out of his mouth before we heard a scampering of bare feet upon the deck, and a succession of shrill yells, and then the vessel paying off a little on her course showed

us the ruffians climbing on to the raised poop upon which we stood. To my horror – for, strangely enough, in that moment of intense excitement, I was capable of a second emotion – I saw that they were six in number, while a reinforcement, numbering three more, waited upon the fo'c's'le head to watch the turn of events.

As the head of the first man appeared my companion raised his pistol and pulled the trigger. The bullet struck the poor wretch exactly on the bridge of the nose, making a clear round hole from which, an instant later, a jet of blood spurted forth. A second bullet carried another man to his account, and by this time the remaining four were upon us.

Of what followed in that turmoil I have but a very imperfect recollection. I remember seeing three men rush towards me, one of whom I knew for Kwong Fung, the little pock-marked rascal before mentioned, and I recollect that, with the instinct of despair, I clutched my bar of iron in both hands and brought it down on the head of the nearest of the trio with all my force. It caught him on the right temple, and crushed the skull in like a broken egg-shell. But the piratical scoundrels had forgotten the man lying on the deck. In their haste to advance they omitted to step over his body, caught their feet and fell to the ground. At least, I am wrong in saying they fell to the ground, for only the pock-marked rascal fell; the other tripped, and would have recovered himself and been upon me had I not sprung upon him, thrown away my bar, caught up his companion's knife, which had fallen from his hand, and tried my level best to drive it in above his shoulder-blade. But it was easier said than done. He clutched me fiercely and, locked hard and fast, we swayed this way and that, fighting like wild-cats for our lives. He was a smaller man than I, but active as an acrobat, and in the most perfect training. Up and down, round and round we went, eyes glaring, breath coming in great gasps, our hands upon each other's throats, and every moment drawing closer and closer to the vessel's side.

Though the whole fight could not have lasted a minute it seemed an eternity. I was beginning to weaken, and I saw by the look in his hateful almond eyes that my antagonist knew it. But he had bargained without his host. A heavy roll sent the little vessel heeling over to the port side, and an instant later we were both prone upon the deck rolling, tumbling, fighting again to be uppermost. From the manner in which I had fallen, however, the advantage now lay with me, and you may be sure I was not slow to make the most of it. Throwing myself over and seating myself astride of him, I clutched my adversary by the throat, and, drawing back my arm, struck him with my clenched fist between his eyes. The blow was given with all my strength, and it certainly told. He lay beneath me a bleeding and insensible mass. Then staggering to my feet I looked about me. On the deck were four dead bodies; two on the break of the poop lying faces down, just where they had fallen, one at my feet, his skull dashed in and his brains protruding, a horrible sight, – another under the bulwarks, his limbs twitching in his death agony, and his mouth vomiting blood with automatic regularity. My companion I discovered seated astride of another individual, admonishing him with what I knew was an empty revolver to abstain from any further attempt to escape.

"I think we have got the upper hand of them now," he said as calmly as if he were accustomed to going through this sort of thing every day of his life. "Would you be so good as to hand me that piece of rope? I must make this slippery gentleman fast while I have him."

"Surely it's the leader of the gang," I cried, at the same time doing as he had asked me. "The man you pointed out to me, Kwong Fung?"

"You're quite right. It is."

"And now that you have him, what will his fate be?"

"A short shrift and a long rope, if I have anything to do with the matter. There! That's right, I don't think you'll get into much mischief now, my friend."

So saying he rose to his feet, rolled the man over on to his back, and turned to me.

"My goodness, man, you're wounded," he cried, spinning me round to find out whence the blood was dripping.

And so I was, though in my excitement I had quite forgotten the fact. A ball had passed clean through the fleshy part of my left arm, and the blood flowing from it had stiffened all my sleeve.

With a gentleness one would hardly have expected to find in him, my friend drew off my coat and cut open my shirt sleeve. Then bidding me stay where I was while he procured some water with which to bathe the wound, he left me and went forrard. I did not, however, see him return, for now that the excitement had departed, a great faintness was stealing over me. The sea seemed to be turning black, and the deck of the junk to be slipping away from under me. Finally, my legs tottered, my senses left me, and I fell heavily to the ground.

When I came to myself again I was lying on a pile of fibre sails under the shelter of an improvised awning. My companion, whose name I discovered later was Walworth, was kneeling beside me with a preternaturally grave expression upon his usually stolid face.

"How do you feel now?" he inquired, holding a cup of water to my lips.

I drank eagerly, and then replied that I felt better, but terribly weak.

"Oh, that's only to be expected," he answered reassuringly. "We ought to be glad, considering the amount of blood you must have lost, that it's no worse. Keep up your heart. You'll soon be all right now."

"Has anything happened?"

"Nothing at all! We're the victors without doubt. As soon as you can spare me I'm going forrard to rouse out the rest of the gang, and get the junk on her course again. We've no time to waste pottering about here."

"I'm well enough now. Only give me something to protect myself with in case of accident."

"Here's your own revolver, of which I relieved our pock-marked friend yonder. I've refilled it, so, if you want to, you can do damage to the extent of six shots – two for each of the three remaining men!"

After glancing at his own weapon to see that it was fully charged, he picked his way forrard and called in Chinese to those in hiding to come forth, if they wished to save their lives. In response to his summons three men crawled out and stood in a row. After he had harangued them, I noticed that he questioned them eagerly in turn, and was evidently much perturbed at the answers he received. When he had said all that he had to say he searched for something, and, not finding it, left them and came back to me. Before making any remark he turned over the bodies on the deck, and, when he had done so, seemed still more put out.

"What's the matter?" I inquired. "Are we in for any more trouble?"

"I'm afraid so. That rascally captain, seeing how the fighting was going, and dreading my vengeance, must have jumped overboard, leaving no man save myself capable of navigating the junk. Added to which the food and water supply – which, had this trouble not occurred, and we had got further upon our way, would have been ample for our requirements – will only last us, at most, two more meals. However, it's no good crying over spilt milk; we must do our best with what we've got, and having done that we can't do more. Let us hope we'll soon pick up the boat of which we're in search."

"And what boat may that be?"

"Why, the vessel that is to take us to the island, to be sure. What other could it be?"

"I had no idea that we were in search of one."

"Well, we are; and it looks as if we shall be in search of her for some time to come. Confound those treacherous beggars!"

As he said this he assumed possession of the tiller, the vessel's head was brought round to her course, and presently we were wobbling along in a new and more westerly direction.

Hour after hour passed in tedious monotony, and still we sailed on. The heat was intense – the wind dropped toward noon, and the face of the deep then became like burnished silver – almost

impossible to look upon. But no sign of the craft we were in search of greeted our eyes; only a native boat or two far away to the eastward and a big steamer hull down upon the northern horizon.

It was not a cheerful outlook by any manner of means, and for the hundredth time or so I reproached myself for my folly in ever having undertaken the voyage. To add to my regret my arm was still very painful, and though, to a certain extent, I was protected from the sun by the awning my friend had constructed for me, yet I began to suffer agonies of thirst. The afternoon wore on – the sun declined upon the western horizon, and still no wind came. It looked as if we were destined to spend yet another night upon this horrible junk, the very sight of which had become beyond measure loathsome to me. As darkness fell, it seemed peopled with ghosts, for though the bodies of those killed in the late affray no longer defaced the deck with their ghastly presence, I could not drive the picture they had presented from my brain.

When the sun disappeared below the horizon, a great peace fell upon the deep, broken only by the groaning of our timbers and the ill-stepped masts. Little by little darkness stole down upon us, a few stars came into the sky, followed soon after by multitudes of others. But there was no wind at all, and by this time my thirst was excruciating. About seven o'clock my companion brought me a small cup of water, hardly sufficient to wet my lips, but more precious than any diamonds, and held it while I drank.

"I'm sorry to say that's all we have," he said solemnly when I had finished it. "Henceforward we must go without."

His words seemed to toll in my ears like a death knell, and I became thirsty again immediately. I suppose I must have been in a high state of fever; at any rate I know that I have never spent such another night of pure physical agony in my life.

I was asleep next morning when the sun rose, but his heat soon woke me to the grim reality of our position. My companion was still at the tiller, and from where I lay I could see that we were still sailing in the same direction. He called to me to know how I felt, and to show him that I was better, I endeavoured to rise, only to fall back again in what must have been a dead faint.

I have no recollection of what followed immediately upon my recovering myself, except a confused remembrance of craving for water – water! water! water! But there was none to be had even if I had offered a hundred pounds for a drop.

Towards evening our plight was indeed pitiable. We were all too weak to work the boat. Friends and foes mingled together unmolested. Unable to bear his agony one of the men jumped overboard, and so ended his sufferings. Others would have followed his example, but my companion promised that he would shoot the next man who attempted it, and so make his end still more certain.

About half-past seven the sun sank beneath the horizon, and with his departure a welcome breeze came down to us. Within an hour this had freshened into a moderate gale. Then, just before darkness obscured everything, a cry from one of the Chinamen forrard brought my companion to his feet. Rushing to the side he stared towards the west.

"Yes! Yes it is! We're saved, De Normanville – we're saved. As he says, it is the schooner!"

Then for the fourth time during that eventful voyage my senses deserted me!

CHAPTER III

THE BEAUTIFUL WHITE DEVIL

When I opened my eyes again I found myself, to my intense astonishment, lying, fully dressed, in a comfortable hammock beneath a well-constructed awning. The canvas walls of my resting-place prevented me from seeing anything more of my surroundings than my toes, but when I lifted myself up and peered over the side, it was not the junk's evil planks that I saw before me, but the deck of a handsome, well-appointed yacht. My hammock was seemingly swung amidships, and judging from the side upon which I looked – save the man at the wheel and a couple of hands polishing brasswork forrard – I appeared to have the entire deck to myself. Whose boat was she? How had I come to be aboard her? And how long had I been there? But though I puzzled my brains for an answer to these questions I could find none. My memory refused to serve me, and so, feeling tired, I laid myself back again upon my pillow and once more closed my eyes.

I had scarcely done so before I heard a noise on the other side which caused me to look over again. How shall I describe what I saw there? Three years have passed since then, but I have the recollection of even the minutest detail connected with the picture that was before me at that moment just as plainly engraved upon my memory as if it had occurred but yesterday.

Seated in a long cane chair, one elbow balanced on the arm-rest and one tiny hand supporting her dimpled chin, was the most beautiful woman – and I say it advisedly, knowing it to be true – that I had ever or have ever beheld, or shall ever behold, in my life. Though she was seated, and for that reason I could not determine her exact height, I was convinced it was considerably above the average; her figure, as much as I could see of it, was beautifully moulded; her face was exquisitely shaped; her eyes were large, and of a deep sea-blue; while the wealth of rippling hair that crowned her head was of a natural golden hue, and enhanced rather than detracted from the softness of her delicate complexion. As if still further to add to her general fairness, she was dressed entirely in white, even to her deck shoes and the broad Panama hat upon her head. Only one thing marred the picture. By her side, presenting a fitting contrast to so much loveliness, crouched, his head resting between his forepaws, a ferocious white bulldog, who ever and anon looked up with big bloodshot eyes into her face as if to make quite sure that there was no one within reach whom she might wish him to destroy.

She was evidently absorbed in her own thoughts, and presently the hand that was hanging down beside the chair found the dog's head, and began softly to stroke his tulip ears. Then her eyes looked up, caught mine, and seeing that I was no longer asleep she rose and came towards me.

"So you are awake at last, Dr. De Normanville?" she said with a smile. And as I heard her it struck me that her voice was even more beautiful than all her other attributes put together. "You have had a long sleep. Twelve hours!"

"Twelve hours?" I cried in amazement, at the same time gazing at her with admiration only too plainly written on my face. "You don't mean to say that I've been twelve hours asleep? I can hardly believe it. Why it seems only a few minutes since we were aboard that rascally junk. And what has happened since then? Is this the vessel we left Hong Kong to meet?"

"Yes. This is the boat. We were just beginning to grow anxious about you when the junk was sighted. I am afraid, from your companion's account, you must have had a desperate time on board her."

"I should not care to go through it again, certainly," I answered truthfully. "One such experience is enough to last a man a lifetime. By the way, how is my companion? I hope he is none the worse for his adventures."

"You need have no fear on that score; he is accustomed to that sort of thing and thrives on it, as you may have noticed. He is below at present, but as soon as he comes on deck I will send him

to you. Now you had better lie down again and try to get some more sleep. You must remember that your strength is of the utmost value to us."

"I don't think I quite understand. But before we go any further will you tell me what yacht this is and to whom I am indebted for my rescue?"

"This yacht is called the *Lone Star*," she answered, "and I am the owner." As she said this she looked at me in rather a queer sort of a way, I thought. But I let it pass and asked another question.

"I am very much afraid you will think me pertinacious, but is it permissible for me to know your name?"

"You may certainly know it if you wish to!" she answered with a short and, I could not help thinking, rather bitter laugh; "But I don't think you will be any too pleased when you hear it. My real name is Alie, but by the benighted inhabitants of this part of the globe I am called by another and more picturesque cognomen."

She stopped, and I almost caught my breath with excitement. A light was breaking upon me.

"And that is –" I said, trying in vain to keep my voice down to a steady level.

"The Beautiful White Devil," she answered, with another of her peculiar smiles, and then, calling her bulldog to her, she bowed to me, turned on her heel, and went slowly aft along the deck.

I laid myself back in my hammock, my heart – why, I could not say – beating like a piston-rod, and tried to think the situation out. So my thoughtless wish was gratified after all: I had now seen the Beautiful White Devil face to face, and, what was more to the point, I was likely to be compelled to see more of her than I should consider necessary for my own amusement. Like the Sultan of Surabaya and Vesey of Hong Kong, I was now her prisoner. And by what a simple ruse I had been caught! By all that was reasonable in woman, however, what possible advantage could she hope to gain by abducting me? At the very most, I could not lay my hands on more than three thousand pounds, and what earthly use could that be to a woman who was known to deal in millions? But perhaps, I reflected, it was not money she was after; perhaps she had some other desperate game to play – some other move in that wonderful life of hers in which my science could be of use to her and the nature of which I could not be expected to fathom. Situated as I was, she could compel me to do her bidding if she pleased, or make it extremely awkward for me if I felt it my duty to refuse.

You will doubtless have noticed that I had quite abandoned the idea of the small-pox epidemic. The notion of that island with the raging pestilence probably only existed in the fertile brain of the man who had been sent to induce me to leave Hong Kong. But in that case – and here the original argument wheeled back upon me – what possible advantage could accrue to her through abducting me? There were hundreds of richer men in Hong Kong. Why had not one of them been chosen? But as the more I thought it out, the farther I seemed to be from getting at the truth of it, I gave the problem up and turned my thoughts in another direction.

As I did so I heard somebody coming along the deck. This time it was a man's footstep, so I looked out to see who it might be. It was Walworth, the individual who had visited me in Hong Kong and enticed me away. He was dressed in European habiliments now, and carried a cigarette in his hand. Seeing that I was aware of his presence he came across to the hammock and held out his hand.

"Good morning, doctor!" he said cheerily enough. "I'm glad to see you're better. All things considered you've had a nasty time of it since you said good-bye to the Victoria Hotel – haven't you?"

"A pretty cheeky way of putting it, considering he was the cause of it all," I thought to myself. "However, I'll give him a Roland for his Oliver! He shall not think I'm wanting in pluck."

"You have certainly contrived a good many stirring adventures for my entertainment, I must say," I answered aloud. "But will you tell me one thing? Why did you not let me know in Hong Kong who my hostess would turn out to be?"

"Because in that case you would probably have informed the police, and we should not then have been able to give ourselves the pleasure of your company and assistance."

"Well, all I can say is, I am sorry you didn't try for higher game while you were about it. For even with that five hundred you gave me, your leader will only get a sop for her pains. You can't force blood out of a stone, can you?"

He seated himself in the chair she had occupied, and lit a fresh cigarette. Having done so, he continued:

"I don't know that I quite follow you!"

"Well, I don't think I could make it much plainer without being absolutely rude. The long and the short of it is, Mr. Walworth, if it's money you're after – why not have gone in for a pigeon better worth plucking?"

"But then we're not after the money, you see. Why should I have paid you that five hundred else? No! Dr. De Normanville, you need have no fear on that score – our motive was perfectly honest. We are on our way to the island now where the small-pox exists, and believe me, when your work is accomplished, you will be conveyed safely back to your hotel. I can't say more than that. Play fair by us and we'll play fair by you. In the meantime we shall hope to make your stay with us as pleasant as possible."

I breathed freely again. I was not abducted. I was only wanted in my professional capacity after all. Well, that was a relief. I was in a unique position, for it was evident I was not only to be permitted the opportunity of making the Beautiful White Devil's acquaintance, but I was to be well paid for doing so. In the first freedom from anxiety I began to look forward with almost pleasure to what lay before me.

"Don't you think you could get up for a little while?" Walworth said, when he had finished his smoke; "it would do you good. Let me help you."

With his assistance I scrambled out of the hammock into a cane chair alongside the companion hatch. I was still very weak, and incapable of much exertion. There could be no doubt that I had lost a good deal more blood than I had at first imagined.

Once seated in the chair I looked about me. I was now permitted a full and uninterrupted view of the vessel, and was able to make good use of my eyes. Roughly speaking, that is to say as far as I could tell, not being a nautical man, she must have been a topsail schooner of about three hundred tons burden, with auxiliary steaming power, for I could see the funnel, which was not in use just then, lying along the deck. In what part of the world she had been built I could not tell; but wherever it was, she did credit to her designer, for her lines were perfection, and nothing short of it. If ever a boat were built for speed she was that one, and I said as much to my companion, who laughed.

"There can be no doubt about that," he answered. "But then, you see, no other boat but the fastest built would suit her ladyship. Believe me, there are times when even the *Lone Star* is pretty well put to it to throw dust in her enemies' eyes. If you feel strong enough, shall we take a walk round and examine her?"

There was nothing I should have liked more, so, taking the arm he offered me, we set off. The first thing that attracted my attention was the spotless neatness and cleanliness prevailing. The decks, which were flush fore and aft, were as white as curds; the brasses on the wheel, capstans, masts, skylights, belaying pins, shone till you could see your face in them. Not a detail seemed to have been overlooked. Even the great sheets of canvas, bellying into balloons above our heads, appeared at first sight to have been lately washed, while the very ropes were white and, when not in actual use, flemish-coiled upon the decks. She carried six boats, an unusually large number for a craft of her size; two were surf-boats, I found on inspection; two were uncollapsible lifeboats; one was an ordinary ship's gig, while the other was a small steam launch of excellent build and workmanship. For a craft of three hundred tons her spars were enormous: her topmast head must have been a hundred and fifty feet from her deck, if an inch, while from her rig forrard I could guess the amount of extra canvas she was capable of carrying. Walking to the side, I discovered that she was painted white, with a broad

gold stripe a little above the water-line; below this she was sheathed with copper, which shone like gold whenever the water left it.

Inside the bulwarks, and reaching to within an inch of the scuppers, were some contrivances that caused me a considerable amount of curiosity. At first glance they looked like reversible shop shutters more than anything else, being about six feet long by three wide, and were attached to the rail of the bulwarks by enormous hinges. On my asking for what purpose they were intended, my guide again laughed, and said:

"You must not ask too many questions, my friend, for obvious reasons. In this case, however, and since you have given your word not to tell what you may see, I will explain."

Detaching the catch of one, he lifted it from the deck and threw it over the side, where it hung, just reaching to the top of the copper below water.

"Do you grasp the idea?" he continued. "The next one fits into that, and the next one into that again, and so on all round the boat. You see, they can be attached in no time, and when they are once fixed, the shape of the masts altered, the funnel differently cased or done away with altogether, the character of her bows and stern changed beyond recognition by another appliance, she can be three different crafts inside of twenty-four hours."

This then accounted for the number of different vessels the Beautiful White Devil was supposed to possess. I began to understand the marvellous escapes more clearly now.

"And whose idea was this ingenious invention?" I ventured to ask.

"Like most of our things, her ladyship's own," he replied. "And wonderfully successful it has proved."

"And shall I be presuming too much on your good nature if I seek to learn something of the lady herself?"

"Ah! I'm afraid there I cannot satisfy your curiosity," he answered, shaking his head. "We have strict instructions on that point, and there's not a man aboard this ship who values his life so little as to dream of disobeying. One piece of advice I will give you, however, for the sake of what we went through together yesterday. Take care how you behave towards her. In spite of her quiet demeanour and frank, artless manner, she sees, takes in, and realises the motive and importance of everything you say or do. If you act fairly towards her, she will act fairly by you; but if you play her false you're a dead man. Remember that. Now you must excuse me if I go to my duties. My absence in Hong Kong has delayed my work sadly. And there goes eight bells."

As the silvery voice of a bell chimed out from the fo'c's'le, he left me and went below. Hardly knowing what to do with myself, I went back to my chair. A tall man with a gray beard close-cropped, sharp glittering eyes, and a not unhandsome face, marred, however, by what looked like a sabre cut extending from the left temple to his chin, resigned the deck to another officer and went below.

While the watch was being changed I had an opportunity of examining the crew; they were nearly all natives, smart, intelligent-looking fellows, and excellently disciplined. Whether they were Dyaks or Malays, however, I had not sufficient experience to determine, and, for more than one reason, I did not like to ask.

It was a lovely morning; the sea was as blue as the sky, a fresh wind was driving the schooner along at an exhilarating pace, and, looking over the side at the line of foam extending from either bow, I was afforded a very good idea of what an exceptional sailor the *Lone Star* really was.

Being a little tired after my perambulations, I lay back in my chair, and shutting my eyes, fell to ruminating on the queer trick Fate had played me. So far I could hardly accept my position as real. It was difficult to believe that I, George De Normanville, unromantic, plodding student of Guy's, – now M.D., of Cavendish Square, London, whose sole aim in life, a year ago, had been to put a brass plate upon his front door, and collect wealthy hypochondriacal lady patients, – was now medical adviser to a mysterious female, who perambulated Eastern waters in a chameleon craft, blackmailing rajahs, abducting merchants, levying toll on mail boats, and bringing down on her devoted head the wrath of

all sorts of nations, principalities, and powers. And then another point struck me. While outwardly so fair, what sort of a woman was she at heart? From Walworth's warning I had gathered that I must be careful in my dealings with her.

But at that moment my reverie was interrupted by the appearance of a neatly-clad steward, who in broken English presented me with an invitation from her ladyship to tiffin in the saloon in half an hour. This was an unexpected honour, and one which, you may be sure, I did not hesitate to accept. I wanted, however, to make a suitable toilet first, but where to do it puzzled me, for so far as I knew no cabin had yet been apportioned to me. I placed my difficulty before an officer who was standing near me. He said something in native dialect to the steward, who replied, and then turned again to me.

"Your traps have been placed in a cabin next to Mr. Walworth's, he says, and if you will follow him he will conduct you to it."

I followed the steward down the main companion (I afterward discovered that the one aft was sacred to her ladyship) as requested, and found myself in a large mess-room, in which three officers were seated at lunch. On either side a number of fair-sized berths were situated. The one set apart for me was nearest the companion, and contained a bunk, a small settee and locker combined, a wash-hand basin, and a place for hanging clothes. The first operation was to shave, a bath followed, to which another steward conducted me, after which I returned to my berth, dressed my wound, and, having selected a clean suit of white ducks, attired myself and repaired on deck.

Punctual to the stroke of two bells (one o'clock) I was summoned to the after-saloon by my first messenger. I followed him, and descending the companion, the scantling of which was prettily picked out in white and gold, found myself in her ladyship's own quarters. There was no one present, and I must own I was glad of that, for I wanted an opportunity to look about me. In the small space I can allot to it, it would be difficult to do adequate justice to the cabin in which I found myself, but for the better understanding of my story I must endeavour to give you some description of it. In the first place, you must understand that the companion-ladder opened directly into the saloon itself. This otherwise commonplace effect, was, however, rendered most artistic by a heavy pile of carpet which covered the steps, and by the curtains which draped the entrance and the portholes. More of the same noiseless carpet covered the floor, while light was supplied from ports on either side, and from a richly decorated skylight in the deck above. The effect of the thick butt of the mainmast was entirely taken away by a number of artfully contrived and moulded Japanese mirrors, which, besides fulfilling their original purpose, gave an additional air of light and elegance to the room. The walls, which were exquisitely panelled and moulded in ivory and gold, were loaded with bric-a-brac of every description, including much china and many pictures of rare value, while deep chairs and couches, Turkish and Indian divans, piles of soft cushions and furs were scattered about here and there, as if inviting the cabin's occupants to an existence of continual repose. A grand piano stood in one corner, firmly cleated to the deck; on the bulkhead above it was an exquisitely inlaid Spanish guitar, and a Hungarian zither, while above them again were several fine specimens of the old Venetian lute. Altogether a more luxurious and beautifully furnished apartment it has never been my good fortune to behold, and I settled myself down in a comfortable chair prepared to spend a really critical and enjoyable time. Then a daintily-bound volume, open on a cushion near where I sat, attracted my attention. I took it up to find that it was a volume of Heine's poems in the original.

"So my lady understands German, and reads Heine too, does she?" I said to myself. "I must –"

But I was prevented saying what I would do by the drawing aside of a curtain that covered a door at the further end of the saloon, and the entrance of my hostess herself. If she were capable of such a weakness, my astonishment must have flattered her, for, prepared as I was to see a beautiful woman, I had no idea she would prove as lovely as she looked then. She had discarded the close-fitting white dress she had worn earlier in the day, and was now attired in some soft clinging fabric of a dark colour, which not only brought out all the lines of her superb figure, but rendered her even more attractive than before. There must have been a quantity of jet scattered about the costume, for I was

conscious of a shimmering sensation which accompanied her every movement. She carried herself with a truly regal air, and I had a better opportunity permitted me now of seeing what a beautiful face it really was, and how exquisitely her head was set upon her shoulders. Her hands and feet were very small, so was her mouth, while her ears were like shells tucked into fragrant nests against her head. But the glory that eclipsed all others was the wealth of golden hair that crowned her. Such hair I have never seen before or since. It seemed to have caught all the sunshine of the world and to be jealous of dispersing it again.

Once more, as if to afford as great a contrast as possible to so much loveliness, the same ferocious bulldog followed at her heels, and, when she approached me, stood regarding me with calmly scrutinising eyes.

"Welcome to my cabin, Dr. De Normanville," she said, coming over to me and holding out her tiny hand with a frank gesture. "I am delighted to see that you are looking so much better."

"I'm feeling quite strong again, thank you," I answered, completely carried away by the charm of her manner. "I cannot think what made me break down in that undignified fashion. I'm afraid you will despise me for giving such an exhibition of weakness."

She seated herself in a deep chair beside me and slowly fanned herself with a black ostrich plume, at the same time stroking the dog's ugly head with her little foot.

"I don't really see why I should," she said seriously, after a moment's pause. "You must have had a terrible time on that horrible junk. I feel as if I was personally to blame for it. However, I shall have more to say on that subject later; in the meantime let us be thankful that you came out of it as safely as you did. I do not like the Chinese!"

I saw a little shudder sweep over her as she said this, so to turn the conversation into a pleasanter channel, I commented on the sailing qualities of her schooner. The subject evidently pleased her, for her eyes sparkled with a new light.

"There is no boat like her in the wide, wide world," she cried enthusiastically. "I had her built for me on my own lines, and I have tried her on every wind, and in every sea, till I have come to know her better than a rider knows his horse. She is the most beautiful and the swiftest craft in the world. And there are times, Dr. De Normanville," – here she sank her voice a little, and it seemed to me it trembled, – "when it is of the utmost importance to me that I should move quickly. She has saved my life not once, but a hundred times. Can you wonder, therefore, that I love her? But I'm afraid you are too prejudiced against me to have much sympathy in my escapes."

"I hope you will not think so. I – "

"Forgive my interrupting you. But don't you think it would be better if we sat down to table instead of discussing my unfortunate self?"

She pressed an electric bell in the woodwork by her side and ordered tiffin. When it was served we went over to the table and the meal commenced.

I am not going to tell you what we ate, for, to confess the honest truth, within half an hour I had forgotten what it was myself. I only know that it was admirably cooked and served. As it proceeded we chatted on various minor matters, literature of all nations, music and painting, and it was not until we had finished, and the cloth had been removed and we were alone together, that my hostess touched upon the reason of my presence on board.

"You know, of course, Dr. De Normanville," she said, ensconcing herself in a big chair when we had left the table, "why I sent for you?"

"It was explained to me by your messenger. But I must confess I do not quite understand it yet. He said something about an island."

"And he was quite right. An outbreak of small-pox has occurred on the island which I make my depot. Where that island is, I cannot of course tell you. But you will see it for yourself soon enough. In the meantime I may inform you that the havoc wrought by the disease has been terrible, and it was

only when I found that I could make no headway against it myself that I determined to send to Hong Kong for assistance. To get hold of you was a piece of good fortune I did not expect."

I bowed my acknowledgment of the compliment she paid me, and asked if she herself had been much among the cases.

"Why, of course!" she answered. "My poor people call me their mother, and naturally turn to me for assistance in their trouble. It went to my very heart not to be able to help them."

"But were you quite wise, do you think, to run so much risk?"

"I did not think of myself at all. How could I? Do you think of the risk you run when you are called in to an infectious case?"

"I take all proper precaution, at least. When were you vaccinated last, may I ask?"

"In Rome, in June, 1883."

"Then, with your permission, I'll do it again, and at once. You cannot be too careful."

Receiving her assent I went off to my cabin, where I had noticed that a large portion of my medical outfit had been stored, and having obtained what I sought, returned with it to the saloon. Alie, for by that name I must henceforward call her, was waiting for me, her arm bared to the shoulder. Never, if I live to be a hundred, shall I forget the impression that snow-white arm made upon me. It seemed like an act of basest sacrilege to perform even such a simple operation upon it. Beelzebub, the bulldog, evidently thought so too, for he watched me attentively enough during the whole of the time it took me. However, it had to be done, and done it accordingly was. Then, when I had put my paraphernalia back into its case, I bade her good-bye, and turned to go. She stopped me, however, and held out her hand.

"Do you know, Dr. De Normanville, I want to make you like me. I want you to forget, if you can, – while you are with us, at any rate, – the stories you have heard about me. Some day, perhaps, I will attempt to show you that I am not altogether as bad as people have painted me."

For the moment I was so completely carried away by her outburst of girlish frankness that I hardly knew what to say.

"Pon my soul, I really don't believe you are!" I blurted out, like a schoolboy.

"Thank you for that, at least," she said, smiling at my earnestness; and then, making me a little curtsey, she turned and disappeared through the door by which she had first entered the saloon.

Putting my case into my pocket, I looked round the room once more, and then went up on deck, not knowing what to think. It seemed impossible to believe that this frank, beautiful girl, whose eyes were so steady and true, whose voice had such a genuine, hearty ring in it, could be the notorious criminal of whom all the East was talking. And yet without a shadow of a doubt it was so. And if it came to that, what was I, staid, respectable George De Normanville, doing, but aiding and abetting her in her nefarious career? True, I might salve my conscience with the knowledge that I had been drawn into it unconsciously, and was only acting in the interests of humanity, but it was nevertheless a fact, and one that I could not have disputed if I had wanted to, that I was the paid servant of the Beautiful White Devil.

It was just two bells in the first dog watch when I came on deck, and hard upon sundown. The great round sun, which had been so busy all day long, now rested in a bed of opal cloud scarcely a hand's breadth above the edge of the horizon. The breeze had moderated, since midday, and now the water around us was almost without a ripple, but glorified with flakes and blotches of almost every colour known to man. Near at hand it was a mixture of lemon and silver, a little further almost a lilac-purple, further still a touch of pale heliotrope meeting salmon-pink and old gold, while under the sun itself a blotch of red, fierce as a clot of blood, worked through the cloud till it got back to gold, then to salmon-pink, then through purple up again to the lemon and silver sky. It was a wonderful sunset, and a fitting termination to an extraordinary day.

After dinner, of which I partook in the officer's mess-room, I returned to the deck. It was nearly eight o'clock, and as fine a night as I had seen since I came into the East. Lighting a cigar I walked

aft, and, leaning upon the taffrail, scanned the quiet sea. Situated as I was, it is not to be wondered at that a variety of thoughts thronged my brain. I tried to think what my dear old mother would have said could she have seen the position my over-rash acceptance of a tempting offer had placed me in. From my mother, who, with my father, had been dead nearly five years, my thoughts passed on to other relatives – to a girl whom I had once thought I loved, but who had jilted me in favour of a brother student. The old heartache was almost gone now, but it had been a most unfortunate affair; since then, however, I flattered myself, I had been heart-whole, and I deluded myself with the notion that I was likely to remain so.

Since dinner the breeze had freshened, and the schooner, with all sail set, was now slipping swiftly through the water. I turned, and, leaning against the rail, looked aloft at the stretch of canvas which seemed to reach up almost to the stars, then back again at the wake and the wonderful exhibition of phosphorised water below the counter.

Suddenly I became aware of someone standing by my side, and turning my head, I discovered it was none other than the Beautiful White Devil herself. She was still dressed in black, with a sort of mantilla of soft lace draped about her head.

"What a supreme fascination there is about the sea at night, isn't there?" she said softly, looking down at the sparkling water. I noticed the beauty of the little white hand upon the rail as I replied in appropriate terms.

"I never can look at it enough," she continued almost unconsciously. "Oh, you black, mysterious, unfathomable depths, what future do you hold for me? My fate is wrapped up in you. I was born on you; I was brought up on you; and if my fate holds good, I shall die and be buried in you."

"At any rate, you need give no thought to that contingency for very many years to come," I answered bluntly. "Besides, what possible reason can you have for thinking you will end your days at sea?"

"I don't know, Dr. De Normanville. It would puzzle me to tell you. But I feel as certain of finding my grave in the waves as I am that I shall be alive to-morrow! You don't know what the sea has been to me. She has been my good and my evil genius. I love her in every mood, and I don't think I could hope for a better end than to be buried in her breast. Oh, you beautiful, beautiful water, how I love you – how I love you!"

As she spoke she stretched her arms out to where the stars were paling in anticipation of the rising moon. In any other woman such a gesture would have been theatrical and unreal in the extreme. But in her case it seemed only what one might expect from such a glorious creature.

"There is somebody," she continued, "who says that 'the sea belongs to Eternity, and not Time, and of that it sings its monotonous song for ever and ever.'"

"That is a very beautiful idea," I answered, "but don't you think there are others that fully equal it? What do you say to 'The sea complains upon a thousand shores'?"

"Or your English poet Wordsworth, 'The sea that bares her bosom to the wind'?"

"Let me meet you with an American: 'The sea tosses and foams to find its way up to the cloud and wind.' Could anything be finer than that? There you have the true picture – the utter restlessness and the striving of the untamed sea."

"'Would'st thou,' so that helmsman answered,
'Learn the secret of the sea?
Only those who brave its dangers
Comprehend its mystery!'"

"Bravo! That caps all."

For some seconds my companion stood silent, gazing across the deep. Then she said, very softly:

"And who is better able to speak about its dangers than I, whose home it is? Dr. De Normanville, I think if I were to tell you some of the dangers through which I have passed you would hardly believe me."

"I think I could believe anything you told me."

"I rather doubt it. You see, you have no idea what an extraordinary existence mine is. Why! my life is one long battle with despair. I am like a hunted animal flying before that hell-hound, man. Do you know how near I was to being caught once? Let me tell you about it, and see if it will convey any idea to you. It was in Singapore, and I was dining at the house of a prominent police official, as the friend of his wife. I had met her some months before under peculiar circumstances, and we had become intimate. During the meal my host spoke of the Beautiful White Devil, and commented on her audacity. 'However, we have at last received a clue concerning her,' he said. 'She is not far away from Singapore at the present moment, and I have every reason to believe that in forty-eight hours she will be in our hands.' I had a full glass of champagne in my hand at the moment, and it is a compliment to the strength of my nerves to say that I raised it to my lips, before answering him, without spilling one drop."

"And did he never suspect?"

"No, indeed. To tell the truth, I doubt if he knows to this day how close the Beautiful White Devil really was to him. Yet one moment's hesitation might have cost me my life. Another time I attended a Viceregal ball in Colombo in the capacity of an heiress from England. In the middle of the evening the partner with whom I was dancing, a young inspector of police, apologised for having to leave me. He said he had received information concerning the Beautiful White Devil, who was known to be in the town. During supper he had been telling me about his prospects, and the girl who was coming out from England to marry him when he got his step. 'It will be a good thing for you if you catch this woman, won't it?' I inquired. 'It will get me promotion, and that will mean the greatest happiness of my life – my marriage!' he answered. 'Won't you wish me luck?' I did wish him luck, and then went off to dance the lancers with His Excellency the Governor."

"Do you think it wise to run such awful risks?" I asked, amazed at her audacity.

"Perhaps not; but in that particular case I could not help myself. I stood in need of some important information, and could trust nobody to obtain it but myself."

"It must have been a terrible five minutes for you."

"Yes; I almost fainted after the dance. His Excellency apologised profusely for the heat of the room."

As she finished speaking, the moon lifted her head above the horizon, and little by little rose into the cloudless sky. Under her glamour the sea became a floor of frosted silver, till even the spangled glory of the phosphorus was taken from the curdling wake.

"I expect you have been told some very curious stories about me, Dr. De Normanville?" my companion said, after a little while. "I wish I could induce you to tell me what you have heard. Believe me, I have a very good reason for wanting you to know the truth about me."

"That is easily told," I answered. "I have heard a great many variations of the same story, but knowing how news travels out here, I have placed very little credence in any of them."

"You have heard, perhaps, about the Sultan of Surabaya?"

I intimated that I had.

"At first you must have thought that rather a cruel action on my part. And yet, if you knew all, your blame would probably turn to admiration. You do not know, perhaps, what a character that man bore in his own state, the life he led, his excesses, his constant crimes, his tyranny over his unfortunate subjects. I tell you, sir, that that man was, and is, one of the greatest scoundrels upon the face of this earth. I had heard over and over again of him, and when I discovered that his people could obtain no redress for their grievances, I determined to meet him on his own ground. I arranged my plans accordingly, abducted him, made him disgorge a large sum of money, half of which I caused to be

anonymously distributed amongst the poor wretches he had robbed, and at the same time told him his character for the first and only time in his heathen existence, promising him as I did so that if he did not mend his ways, I'd catch him again and silence him for ever. Punishment was surely never more fitly earned. Then there was a merchant in Hong Kong, by name Vesey. I expect you have heard of him and the trick I played him? Well, that man made an assertion about me in a public place to the effect that I was – But never mind what it was. It was so vile that I cannot repeat it to you, but I made a vow I would be revenged on him for it, sooner or later. I *was* revenged, and in the only way he could be made to feel – that is, through his banker. He will never forgive me, of course. Now, what else have you heard?"

"Pardon my alluding to it," I said, "but – the *Vectis Queen*– the *Oodnadatta*."

"So you have heard of those affairs? Well, I do not deny them. I must have money. Look at the expenses I have to meet. Look at this boat – think of the settlement I maintain, of the hundreds of pensioners I have all through the East, of the number of people whose services it is necessary for me to retain. And, pray do not misunderstand me. To you it may seem that such transactions make me neither more nor less than a thief – a common cheat and swindler. In your eyes I may be that, but I must own I do not look upon it in the same light myself. I am, and have been all my life, at war with what you call Society – the reason I may perhaps explain to you some day. I know the risk I run. If Society catches me, in all probability my life will pay the forfeit. I know that, and I am naturally resolved not to be caught. One thing is certain, I prey only on those who can afford to lose, and, like the freebooters of romance, I make it my boast that I have never knowingly robbed a poor man, while, on the other hand, I have materially assisted many. There are those, of course, who judge me harshly. Heaven forbid that they ever find themselves in the position in which I am placed! Think of it! I am hunted by all men – every man's hand is against me; I am cut off from country and friends; a price is put upon my head, and for that reason I am obliged to distrust everyone on principle. Think of having the knowledge continually before you that if you are not constantly on the watch you may be caught. And then – "

"And then?"

I heard her grind her little white teeth viciously.

"There will be no *then*, Dr. De Normanville, so we need not talk of it; while I live they will never catch me, and when I am dead it cannot matter who has possession of my body. Good-night!"

Before I could answer she had left me and vanished down the companion ladder. I turned to the sea and my own thoughts. The ship's bell struck four (ten o'clock), the lookout at the fo'c's'le-head cried, "All's well!" silence reigned, a wonderful quiet broken only by the humming of the breeze in the shrouds, and the tinkling of the water alongside. I leant against the rail and considered the life of the Beautiful White Devil as I had heard it from her own lips.

CHAPTER IV

THE HOME OF THE BEAUTIFUL WHITE DEVIL

The sun next morning had scarcely made his appearance when I awoke to a knowledge of the fact that the yacht was stationary. Such a circumstance could have but one meaning: we had arrived at our destination. As soon, therefore, as this idea became properly impressed upon my mind, I sprang from my bunk, made for the port-hole, and, drawing back the little curtain that covered it, gazed out upon the world. And what a picture met my eager eyes! What a scene to paint in words or pigments! But oh, how difficult! If I were a literary craftsman of more than ordinary ability, I might possibly be able to give you some dim impression of what I saw. But being only an amateur word-painter of the sorriest sort, I very much fear it is a task beyond my capabilities. However, for the sake of my story, I suppose I must try.

To begin with, you must endeavour to imagine a small harbour, at most half a mile long by three-quarters wide, having upon the side towards which I looked a wide plateau extending almost to the sands that fringe the water's edge. Picture this tableland, or plateau, as I have called it, backed by a tall, forest-crowned hill, almost a mountain, which soars up and up a couple of thousand feet or more into the azure sky; while peering out of the jungle that ornaments its base may be seen the white roofs of houses, with, here and there, the thatch of a native hut of the kind usually met with on the west coast of Borneo and the islands thereabout.

So strikingly beautiful was the view, and so great was my curiosity to examine for myself this home of the Beautiful White Devil, for such I could not help feeling convinced it was, that I dressed with all possible speed and repaired on deck.

From this point of vantage the prospect was even more pleasingly picturesque than it had been from the port-hole of my cabin.

All round us the water was smooth as green glass, and so wonderfully transparent that, on leaning over the starboard bulwark, I could plainly discern the flaking of the sand at the bottom and the brilliant colours of the snout-nosed fishes as they swam past, at least a dozen fathoms below the surface.

To my surprise the harbour was entirely landlocked, and, though I searched for some time, I could discern no opening in the amphitheatre of hills through which a vessel of even the smallest size could pass in from the sea. But being more taken up with the beautiful scenery of the bay than its harbour facilities, I did not puzzle over this for very long.

So still was the morning that the smoke of the huts ashore went up straight and true into the air, the pale blue contrasting admirably with the varied greens of the foliage out of which it rose. Overhead, and around us, flocks of gulls, of kinds hitherto unknown to me, wheeled and screamed, while at intervals gorgeously-plumed parrots flew across our bows from shore to shore. Once a small green bird, apparently of the finch tribe, settled on the foreyard foot-rope, and a little later a tiny sand-piper came aboard, and hopped about the fo'c's'le as calmly as if he had been doing nothing else all his life.

When first I came on deck, with the exception of the cook in his galley, not a soul was to be seen. But presently, while I was watching the antics of the bird I have just described, my old acquaintance Walworth joined me at the rail, and laid himself out for conversation.

"Doctor," he said, "I want you to tell me candidly, if, in all your experience of the world, you have ever looked upon a fairer scene than that you have before you now?"

"No; I don't think I have," I answered. "It is marvellously beautiful, but all the same, I must own one or two things about it rather puzzle me."

"And what are they?"

"Well! in the first place, since I can see no opening in the hills, how did we get in here?"

"Ah! you have been thinking about that, have you? Well, to save you any further trouble on that score, let me tell you that if you were to look for a hundred years from where you stand now you would not be able to discover it. And, unless her ladyship gives permission, it would be as much as my life is worth for me to tell you. Now for your second question?"

"Well, I can see, say, a dozen huts, all told, over yonder," I answered. "Surely they don't constitute the settlement of which you spoke to me?"

"No; they do not. Those you see over there are only the outlying portions of the village, meant to deceive the crew of any vessel who might land and find their way in here; the real place itself lies five miles inland, round that hill, through the gap you can just make out alongside that bit of terra-cotta coloured cliff yonder."

"I see! And now, to change the subject. With regard to that lymph you procured for me in Hong Kong, where is it?"

"It has already been sent to your bungalow with the rest of the medical paraphernalia we brought with us."

"And her ladyship?"

"Went ashore as soon as we came to anchor. If I mistake not that's her boat coming off to us now."

As he spoke, a large white surf-boat put off from the beach, and, under the sturdy arms of her crew, came swiftly across the stretch of blue towards us. As she ranged alongside, I carefully examined the men rowing. They were of medium size, and evidently of the Dyak race, being taller than the average Malay, and inclining more to the build of the Solomon Islander than to any other class I could think of. They were bright, intelligent-looking fellows, and evidently well cared for. As soon as they had hitched on to the gangway, the coxswain came aboard, and said something in native to my companion, who, in reply, pointed to me.

Thereupon the man drew a note from his turban, and handed it to me with the confidence and easy bearing of one gentleman rendering a service to another. It was addressed in Alie's handwriting.

Though a considerable time has elapsed since my receipt of that little note, I can plainly recall the thrill that went through me as I opened it. It ran as follows:

DEAR DR. DE NORMANVILLE:

I beg you will forgive my not remaining on board to welcome you to my home, but as you will readily imagine I was most anxious to see for myself, at once, how things were progressing ashore. Unfortunately, however, I have nothing favourable to report. Will you come and breakfast with me immediately on receipt of this? My coxswain will show you the way. Then, afterward, I could take you, myself, round the settlement.

With very kind regards,

Believe me, truly your friend,

ALIE.

I thrust the note into my pocket, and having told Walworth what I was about to do, went below to my cabin to prepare for my excursion. Then returning to the deck I descended into the boat alongside, and we set off for the shore. As we rowed I was able to look back and observe, for the first time, the proportions and symmetry of the beautiful craft I had just left.

Indeed, a prettier picture than the *Lone Star* presented at that moment could not possibly be imagined. Her tall masts and rigging showed out clear-cut against the blue sky, while her exquisitely-modelled hull was reflected, with mirror-like distinctness, in the placid water around her; the brasswork upon her binnacle and wheel shone like burnished gold, and so clear was the water, that the whole of her bright copper sheathing, and even the outline of her keel, could plainly be distinguished.

Within five minutes of leaving her, our coxswain had deftly brought us alongside a small, but neatly-constructed, wooden jetty. Here I disembarked, and, escorted by that amiable individual, set off at once on our journey to the dwelling of my mysterious hostess.

Leaving the white, sandy foreshore of the bay, we passed by a well made track through the forest in a due northerly direction. And such a forest as it was! Such wealth of timber, such varieties of woods, shrubs, creepers, orchids, and flowers. On one hand, perhaps, an iron tree of imperial growth would tower above us; on another an enormous teak, with here and there the curious leaves and twisted outline of a gutta-percha – all mixed up with pipa palms, camphor trees, canes and bamboos of every possible hue and description. From tree to tree, across our path, birds of all kinds, including paddi birds, green pigeons, flycatchers, barbets, and sunbirds flew with discordant cries, while not once, but more often than I could count, hordes of monkeys swung themselves wildly from branch to branch overhead, chattering and calling to each other as if the whole wide world were there to applaud their antics. Our path was indeed a varied one; one moment we were surrounded on all sides by the forest, the next we were out on the bare face of the hill looking down upon the tops of trees. The bright sunshine flooded everything; while the fresh breeze from the sea was just cool enough to make the exertion of walking pleasant. Indeed, so enjoyable was it, that I was almost sorry when we left the forest for the last time and emerged on to a small plain, bounded by the scrub on one side and by the mountain on the other. On this I could discern a collection of huts and houses to the number of perhaps three hundred. But what struck me as most remarkable about them was the fact that they were arranged in streets, and that the majority of them were built on European lines; also in almost every case – and I was able to verify this later on – each one possessed a well-kept and apparently productive garden, varying in extent from a quarter up to as much in some cases as an acre. On the other side of the village furthest from where I stood, the forest began again, and ran in an unbroken mass up to the high mountain land before referred to. On the right side of this mountain, and distinctly visible from every part of the village, was a fine waterfall, perhaps a couple of hundred feet high, from which rose continually a heavy mist, catching in the sunlight every known colour of the rainbow. Altogether, a more picturesque little place could not have been discovered. It was quite in keeping with the woman, the yacht, the forest, and the harbour. And to think that this was the home of the Beautiful White Devil, the home of that mysterious woman whose so-called crimes and acts of daring were common gossip from Colombo to the farthest Saghalien coast.

Leaving the village on our left, we ascended the mountain side for a short distance by a well-worn track, then turning sharply to our left hand, wound round it to where another large plateau began. Reaching this, midway between the village and the waterfall, we saw before us a high and well-made picket fence in which was a gate. Through this gate we passed, and after carefully closing it behind us, followed a short track along a lovely avenue of Areca palms and india rubber trees towards a house we could just discern through the foliage; then, having ascended a flight of broad stone steps, flanked with quaint stone gods and images, we stood before the dwelling of the Beautiful White Devil.

I fear, deeply as the memory of it is impressed upon my mind, it is hardly in my power to convey to you any real impression of the building I had come so far to see, and in which I was destined to spend so many hours. Suffice it that it was an *adobe* construction – one story high, and designed on somewhat the same plan as an Indian bungalow; the walls were of great thickness, the better to withstand the heat, I suppose; the rooms presented the appearance of being lofty and imposing, while one and all opened by means of French windows on to the broad verandah which ran round the house upon every side. This verandah, and indeed the whole house, was embowered in dense masses of different-coloured creepers, which in the brilliant sunshine presented a most charming and novel effect. From the verandah on the left, or south, side, another broad flight of stone steps, similarly adorned with stone carvings, conducted one to the garden, while to the right, and scarcely more than a couple of hundred yards distant, crashed the waterfall I had seen from the hill, with a roar that could have been heard many miles away, down into the black pool two hundred feet below.

At the foot of the first steps my guide left me and returned to the harbour by the road along which he had come. I paused to recover my breath and watched him out of sight, then turning to the house ascended the flight of steps. Just as I reached the top, and was wondering how I might best make my presence known to those inside, I heard the rustling of a dress in the verandah; next moment Alie herself, clad in white from top to toe, as was her custom, came round the corner, followed by her enormous bulldog, and confronted me. I can see her now, and even after this lapse of time can feel the influence of her wonderful personality upon me just as plainly as if it were but yesterday I stood before her. Seeing me she said something to the dog, – who had uttered a low growl, – and stretched out her hand.

"Good-morning, Dr. De Normanville," she said, smiling as no other woman could ever do; "you received my note, then? I am glad to see you, and I make you welcome to my home."

"A Garden of Eden I should be inclined to call it," I answered, looking about me. "How many of us would be glad to dwell in it!"

She looked at me for a moment, and then asked somewhat bitterly:

"Pray is that pretty speech meant for Alie or the Beautiful White Devil? There is a difference, you know."

Then, not permitting me time to answer, she changed the subject by saying:

"Breakfast is on the table, I believe. Let us go in to it. Will you give me your arm?"

I did so, and together we passed from the creeper-covered verandah into a room straight before us.

In the previous chapter I have described to you Alie's cabin on board the *Lone Star*, and, in doing it, almost beggared myself of language; now I can only ask you to believe that rich as that cabin was in its appointments, in its arrangements, its curios and articles of *vertu*, the room which we entered now eclipsed it in every particular. Indeed, such another I never remember to have seen. From floor to ceiling it was filled with curiosities and articles of the greatest beauty and value. Rich Persian, Indian, Chinese, and Japanese hangings covered the walls, interspersed with such articles of pottery, silver, and china, as made me break the Tenth Commandment every time I looked at them. Native weapons of all kinds and of every nationality, some with plain, others with superbly jewelled, hilts; Indian, Cinghalese, Burmese, Siamese, Japanese, and Chinese bric-a-brac; two large cases of mineral specimens, comprising many precious stones; quite a dozen pictures of rare value, one looking suspiciously like a Titian; while fully a couple of hundred books, a grand piano, and at least half-a-dozen other musical instruments, including a harp and a guitar, helped to complete the furniture.

In the centre of the room stood the breakfast table, covered with an exquisitely embroidered white linen cloth, on which was displayed such a collection of beautiful gold and silver ware as I had never seen on a table before. Three heaps of fruit, consisting of durians, pisangs, bananas, mangoes, mangosteens, and custard apples were piled upon three lovely Sèvres dishes in the centre, flanked by two quaintly-shaped decanters filled with wine.

We seated ourselves at either end of the table, and my hostess struck a tiny silver gong by her side. Breakfast was instantly served by the same impassive servant who had waited upon us on board the yacht. If he felt any surprise at my presence on this occasion, he did not show it; indeed, it would almost have seemed as if he were not aware that I was the same person.

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