

The Beautiful White Devil.

CHAPTER IX.

HOW WE SUCCEEDED IN OUR ENTERPRISE. On arrival at Singapore we took rickshaws and drove direct from the wharf to the Mandalay hotel, a palatial white building of two stories, boasting vivid green shutters on every window and broad, luxurious verandas on every floor. I was the first to reach it, and, remembering my position of casual acquaintance, I booked a room for myself, leaving Miss Sanderson and her companion to follow my example when they should arrive.

It was then late in the afternoon, and by the time we had thoroughly settled in night had fallen and the preliminary dressing gong had sounded for dinner. So far I had seen nothing of the person of whom we were in search, but I did not doubt that at the evening meal I should become acquainted with his whereabouts, even if I did not actually meet the man himself.

The dining room at the Mandalay is at the rear of the hotel and looks out upon a charmingly arranged garden. Immediately upon my entering it a waiter came forward and conducted me to my place at a table near the window. On my left was seated a portly, red faced gentleman, who, I discovered later, was an English merchant of considerable standing in the place. The chair on my right was vacant, but before we had dismissed the first course it was taken by a man who, my instinct told me, was none other than Mr. Ebbington himself. Why I should have come to this conclusion I cannot explain, but that I did think so and that I was right in so thinking I discovered a minute or two later, when a question was addressed to him by an acquaintance on the other side of the table. I continued the course without betraying my excitement, and when my plate was removed sat back and casually took stock of him.

From Alie's account and some kind of preconceived notion as to what sort of appearance such a dastardly traitor should present I had expected to see a small, shifty eyed, villainous type of man, wearing on his face some token of his guilt. But in place of that I discovered a stout, well set up, not unhandsome man about 40 years of age. His complexion was somewhat florid; his eyes were of an uncertain hue, between gray and steely blue; he had a pronounced nose and a heavy, almost double chin. Indeed, had it not been for his hesitating mode of speech I should have been inclined to put him down for a military man.

During the progress of the meal I found an opportunity of doing him some small service, and on this meager introduction we fell into a desultory conversation, which embraced Singapore, the latest news from England and the prospects of a war between China and Japan. When dinner was over, I rose and followed him into the veranda, offered him a cheroot, which he accepted, and seated myself in a lounge chair beside him. We had not been smoking five minutes before my sweetheart and her companion passed close to where we sat, en route to their rooms. As she came opposite to me Alie stopped.

"Good evening, Dr. DeNormanville," she said. "Isn't this hotel delightful?" I rose and uttered an appropriate reply, at the same time noticing that Ebbington was taking thorough stock of her. Then after another commonplace or two she bowed and passed on her way. I resumed my seat, and for nearly a minute we smoked in silence. Then my companion, who had evidently been carefully thinking his speech out, said with that peculiarly diffident utterance which, as I have said, was habitual to him:

"You'll excuse what I am going to say, I hope, but a friend and I were having a little discussion before dinner. The proprietor tells me Miss Sanderson, the American heiress, is staying in the house. I do not wish to be impertinent, but might I ask if the lady to whom you have just been speaking is Miss Sanderson?"

"Yes, she is Miss Sanderson," I replied. "You do not know her, then?" "Never saw her before in my life," was his reply. "Pieces of good fortune like that don't often occur in Singapore. If they did, few of us would be here very long, I can assure you. But perhaps I am talking in too familiar a strain about your friend? If so, you must forgive me."

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

"There is no doubt about the money, I suppose?" he continued. "Since Vesey of Hongkong was so completely taken in by the Beautiful White Devil we have been a little skeptical on the subject of heiresses down this way."

"On that point I'm afraid I cannot inform you," I said laughingly. "She seems, however, to travel in very good style and evidently denies herself nothing. But you spoke of the Beautiful White Devil. I am most interested in what I have heard of that personage. Are you well up in the subject?"

"How should I be?" he answered, as I thought, a little quickly. "Of course I know what every other man in the east knows, but no more. Thank goodness she has never done me the honor of abducting me as she did the sultan of Surabaja and those other Johnnies. But with regard to Miss Sanderson, I wonder if I should be considered impertinent if I asked you to give me the pleasure of an introduction."

"Of course I did not tell him that it was the very thing of all others that I desired to do, but at the same time I could hardly conceal my exultation. I had, however, to keep my delight to myself for fear lest he should suspect, so I relit my cigar, which had gone out, and then said, with as much carelessness as I could assume:

"I don't know altogether whether I'm sufficiently intimate with her to take the liberty of introducing you, but, as I said just now, she seems a jolly sort of girl and not inclined to be standoffish, so if ever I get an opportunity I don't mind risking it. Now, I think, if you'll excuse me, I'll say good night. That wretched old bucket of a steamer rolled so all the way up from Tanjong Priok that I have hardly had a wink of sleep these three nights past."

"Good night and thank you very much for your company. Glad to have met you, I'm sure."

Next morning, as soon as breakfast was over, I went down into the town, shopping. When I returned about 11 o'clock, I discovered Alie and her companion sitting in the veranda, waiting for a double rickshaw which one of the hotel boys had gone out to procure. Ebbington was seated in a chair near by, and evidently seemed to consider this a good opportunity for effecting the introduction he had proposed the night before. I entered into conversation with him for a few moments, and then, crossing the veranda, asked the ladies in which direction they contemplated going.

"Where do you think?" said Alie, with her best New York accent. "Well, first I guess we're going to look for a dry goods store, and then I reckon we'll just take a peaser round the town."

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

"But how do you get there?" asked Alie, her quick perception telling her my object. "We must know the way, I reckon, before we start, or we'll just get lost, and then you'll have to call out all the town to find us."

"One moment and I'll inquire," Ebbington, having overheard what had passed between us, as I intended he should do, had risen, and now approached us. I turned to him and said:

"My friends want to find the way to Whampoa's garden, Mr. Ebbington. Could you direct them? But first perhaps I ought to introduce you. Mr. Ebbington, Mrs. Beecher, Miss Sanderson."

They bowed politely to each other, and then Ebbington, having begged the ladies' permission, gave instructions in Malay to the rickshaw cooly, who by this time had drawn up at the steps. Tendering their thanks to him, they stepped into their conveyance and were drawn away.

When they had disappeared round the corner, Ebbington crossed the veranda and, sitting down beside me, favored me with his opinions. Even in this short space of time the charm of the heiress seemed to have impressed itself upon him. Though inwardly writhing at the tone he adopted, I had to pretend to be interested. It was a difficult matter, however, and I was more relieved than I can say when he remembered business elsewhere and betook himself off to attend to it. So far all had gone well. The bait was fixed, and it would be surprising now if the victim did not walk into the trap so artfully contrived for him.

That evening after dinner I fell into casual conversation with the proprietor of the hotel, and it was not until nearly half an hour later that I managed to escape from him and get into the veranda. When I did, to my surprise I found the ladies reclining in their chairs, listening to the conversation of Mr. Ebbington. He was regaling them with a highly colored account of his experiences in the east, and from the attention his remarks were receiving it was evident he was doing ample justice to his subject. I pulled a chair up beside Alie and listened. Within five minutes, however, of my arrival he introduced Mr. Vesey's name, and instantly she stopped him by saying:

"Now, where have I heard that name before? It seems somehow to be very familiar to me."

"Perhaps you've heard the story of his abduction by the Beautiful White Devil," said Ebbington, who saw that I was about to speak and was anxious to forestall me.

"No, I guess not," answered Alie. "I reckon I was thinking of Klener W. Vesey of Wall street, who operates considerable in pork. But tell me, who is this Beautiful White Devil one hears so much about anyway?"

There was a pause, but I held my peace and let Ebbington's tongue run riot with him.

"Ah, there you have me at a disadvantage," he began, pluming himself for the big speech I could see was imminent. "Some say she's a European lady of title gone mad on Captain Murray and Clark Russell. Others aver that she's not a woman at all, but a man disguised in woman's clothes. But the real truth, I'm inclined to fancy, is that she's the daughter of a drunken old desperado, once an English naval man, who for years made himself a terror in these seas."

When I heard him thus commit himself, I looked across at Alie, half expecting that she would lose control of herself and annihilate him upon the spot. But save a little twitching round the corners of her mouth she allowed no sign of the wrath that I knew was raging within her breast to escape her. In a voice as steady as when she had inquired the way to Whampoa's garden that morning she continued her questions.

"I'm really quite interested. And pray what has this—what do you call her—Beautiful White Devil done to carry on the family reputation?" Again Ebbington saw his chance, and, like the born yarn spinner he was, took immediate advantage of it.

"What has she not done would be the best thing to ask. She has abducted the sultan of Surabaja, the rajah of Tavoy, Vesey of Hongkong and half a dozen Chinese mandarins at least. She has robbed the Vectis Queen; the Ooloomoo, and that with the governor of Hongkong on board; stopped the Oodnadatta only three months ago in the Ly-e-moon pass, when she went through the ulion room to the extent of over a million and a half, almost under the cruisers' noses."

"But what mission does she accomplish with this vast wealth when she has accumulated it, do you think, Mr. Ebbington?" said the quiet voice of Mrs. Beecher from the depths of her chair. "Does she do no good with it at all?"

"Good!" that wretched being replied, quite unconscious of the trouble he was heaping up for himself. "Why, she never did a ha'porth of good in her life. No, I'll tell you what she does do with it. It is well known that she has a rendezvous somewhere in the Pacific, a tropical island, they say, where scenes are enacted between her cruises that would raise blushes on the cheeks of an Egyptian mummy."

"You are evidently very much prejudiced against her," I answered hotly. "Now, I have heard some very different stories, and with all due respect to you, Mr. Ebbington—"

But fortunately at this juncture my presence of mind returned to me, and, a servant approaching to take our empty coffee cups, I was able to seize the opportunity and bring my riotous tongue to a halt. When the boy had gone, Alie turned the conversation into another channel, and after that all was plain sailing once more. To add to our enjoyment, about 10 o'clock another servant came to inform Mr. Ebbington that a gentleman desired to see him in the smoking room, and accordingly, bidding us good night, he went off to interview him. Mrs. Beecher then made an excuse and retired to her room, leaving us alone together.

"Alie," I said reproachfully, "if anything had happened just now you would have had only yourself to blame for it. That man's insolent lying was more than I could stand. In another moment if that servant had not come in I believe I should have lost control of myself and ten chances to one have ruined everything. Why did you do it?"

"Because I wanted to find out how he was in the habit of talking about me. That was why."

"But do you think he was really in earnest? May it not have been only a mask to prevent any one from suspecting that he is your agent in this place?"

"No. He meant it. Of that there can be no doubt. The man, I can see, for some inscrutable reason hates the real me with his whole heart and soul, and the treachery he is preparing now is to be his revenge. Couldn't you hear the change, the grating in his voice when my name occurred? Ah, Mr. Ebbington, my clever man, you will find that it is a very foolish policy on your part to quarrel with me."

"When do you mean to make the attempt to capture him?"

"On Friday evening—that is, the day after tomorrow. The new admiral will be here on Saturday morning at latest, and I must anticipate him, for I have learned that Ebbington received a note from the authorities this morning, definitely fixing the hour for the interview at 11 o'clock. He need make no arrangements, however, for he won't be there."

"It will be an awful moment for him when he realizes who you are. I would not be in his shoes for all the gold of India."

"You would never have acted as he has done," she answered softly, turning her head away.

This was the opportunity for finding out what she intended concerning myself, so I drew a little closer to her.

"Alie," I said, "the time has now come for me to ask you when you wish to say 'Goodby' to me. I have done my professional work for you, and on Friday I shall have assisted you to the very best of my ability in the matter of this wretched fellow. What am I to do then? Am I to say farewell to you here or what?"

Her voice had almost faltered in it as she replied:

"Oh, no, we will not say 'Goodby' here. Cannot you return with me? I have been counting so much on that." Here she paused for a moment. "But, no. Perhaps I ought not to ask you—you have your work in life, and seeing what you have already done for us I should be the last to keep you from the path of duty."

"If you wish me to come back with you, Alie," I answered quickly, "I will come with a glad heart. I have no duty to consider, and as I have given up my practice I have no patients to give me any concern. But how shall I get back to England later on?"

"I will arrange that you shall be sent down to Torres strait, and you can go home via Australia, if that will suit

you. Never fear. I will attend to that part of it when it becomes necessary."

"Then I will go with you."

"I thank you. Good night."

Next morning after breakfast I discovered that Miss Sanderson and her companion were setting off for a day's pleasure, and that Mr. Ebbington was to be their sole conductor and escort. It was noticeable that he had donned a new suit of clothes in honor of the occasion, and I saw that he wore a sprig of japonica in his buttonhole. From his expression I concluded that he was very well satisfied with himself, but whether he would have been quite so confident had he known who his fair friends really were was quite another matter and one upon which I could only conjecture.

We spent the afternoon with the ladies in the garden and at their request remained to take tea with them. During this al fresco meal, which was presided over by Miss Sanderson herself, my companion stated that it was his desire to arrange something a little out of the common for the ladies' amusement.

"What shall it be?" he asked with the magnificence of an oriental potentate to whom all things are possible. "A picnic? But that is not much fun here. A dance? But it's too hot for that. What would you like?"

Alie seemed to reflect for a few moments, and then she said, with an appearance of animation:

"Do you really want to give us a treat, Mr. Ebbington? Then I reckon the nicest thing you can possibly do on these hot nights would be to take us for a trip on the water. I know Mrs. Beecher thinks so too. Now you just get us a launch and trot us round. I guess that'll be real delightful."

She clapped her hands and appeared to be so pleased with the idea that, whatever he may himself have thought of it, there was nothing for Ebbington to do but to assent.

"We'll take some supper," she continued as if a new idea had struck her, "and you gentlemen shall bring your cigars, and we'll spend a delightful evening. I'm fonder of the sea than you can think. But I do just wish you could see New York harbor. You should see Newport, too, where my papa's got a cottage. It's real fine."

After dinner that evening Ebbington reported that he had engaged a steam launch and also that he had ordered the supper. Thereupon to encourage him Miss Sanderson professed herself to be looking forward to the trip more than she had ever done to anything else in her life.

Accordingly next evening immediately after dinner we saw that our charges were carefully wrapped up, chartered rickshaws and set off for the harbor. It was a lovely night, with a young moon just showing like a silver sickle above the roofs. We were all in the highest spirits, although I must confess my own were not unmixed with a slight dash of nervousness as to what the upshot of our excursion would be.

I had noticed all through the evening, and, for the matter of that, throughout the day, that Ebbington's manner toward Alie was every moment growing more unpleasantly familiar. By the time he had completed his first bottle of champagne at supper it was about as much as I could stand. Indeed, twice he called her by her assumed Christian name, and once he tried to take her hand. Remembering, however, what would follow later, I kept a tight rein upon myself and did not allow any expression of my feelings to escape me.

"After all give me American girls," our hero was saying, with an insolent freedom for which I could have kicked him, as he lit his cigar. "There's none of that stand offishness about them that there is with our English women. You can say more to them without their being offended and wanting to call their fathers in to you."

"You mean, perhaps, that we are more good natured," said Alie. "I'm afraid, however, we're sometimes unwise enough to permit people to become familiar on a three days' acquaintance, and that's a very foolish thing."

"Oh, come now, Miss Sanderson," said our host, uncorking another bottle of champagne, filling up Alie's glass and then helping himself liberally. "I think that's a little severe, isn't it? One thing I know, though, you don't mean it, do you?"

"I am not so certain of that," she replied. "It's just possible that I may be compelled to do so. But let us talk of something else. What a lovely night it is, isn't it? I think this harbor's just delightful by moonlight. Say, Mr. Ebbington, couldn't we come on tomorrow morning for awhile, about 11 o'clock. Just to oblige me, don't you think you could manage it?"

Knowing that it was the hour at which he was to see the admiral, I waited to hear what answer he would make. It was easy to see that he was a little nonplused, for he expressed his sorrow that through an important business engagement he would be quite unable to comply with her request and for some time sat in sulky silence. Just as he was going to speak again, however, we desisted a boat pulling across toward us from the wharfs on the other side. As it approached the shore Alie signed to me, and, divining her intention, I went down to inquire its errand. The boat having grounded, a native waded ashore and handed me a large packet and a letter, which I immediately conveyed to Alie. She took it, and then, turning to Ebbington, who had been surveying the scene with no small astonishment, said:

"I'm afraid, Mr. Ebbington, this means some business which will necessitate our going back to the hotel at once. Do you mind so very much?"

"Not at all," he answered promptly. Then, as if he thought he might turn it to account, he continued, "You know that my only ambition is to serve you."

Disregarding this polite speech, which was uttered with a leer that made my fingers itch to be alongside his head, Alie led the way up the plank and on board the launch again. We pushed off

from the shore and began to steam ahead. Then Alie nodded to me, and I tapped the engineer on the shoulder and signified that he should stop. He looked surprised, but obeyed. Ebbington, however, did not like this interference on my part and sprang to his feet.

"Why did you tell that man to stop?" he cried angrily. "I'll trouble you to remember that I'm"—

"And I'll just trouble you to sit down where you are and hold your tongue, Mr. Ebbington," said Alie, dropping her American accent altogether and drawing a revolver from beneath her cloak. "The game is over as far as you are concerned, so you may as well submit with as good a grace as possible."

"What does this mean, Miss Sanderson?" he cried excitedly.

"Sit down there as I tell you," she answered, "and don't make any noise, or you'll get into trouble. I shall an-



"What does this mean, Miss Sanderson?" he cried excitedly.

swer no questions, but if you attempt to move I promise you I'll shoot you there and then."

He said no more, but sat between us, trembling like the arrant coward he was. Alie went forward to the engineer and said something in Malay. Then, after a moment's conversation with one of the crew, she returned aft, took the tiller and steered for the open sea. The little craft fumed and fussed on her way for an hour or so, tossing the foam off either bow and covering the distance in first rate style.

Suddenly the lookout posted forward uttered a cry, and next moment we saw ahead of us a green light. It was obscured and revealed three times. This, I knew, was the yacht's signal, and in less than a quarter of an hour we were alongside, had hitched on and were safely aboard. The launch's crew was then suitably rewarded and sent back to Singapore.

As we reached the deck Ebbington must have read the yacht's name on a life buoy and realized into whose hands he had fallen. For a moment he stood rooted to the spot; then he staggered a pace forward, clutched at a stay, and, missing it, fell upon the deck in a dead faint. As I stooped to see what was the matter with him I felt the tremor of the screw. Our errand was accomplished. Singapore was a thing of the past. We were on our way back to the island once more.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

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