

ARGUMENT

When Frederic was yet a little boy, his nurse (Ruth) was told to apprentice him to become a pilot. She heard the word incorrectly and apprenticed him to a band of *pirates*, remaining with them as a maid-of-all-work. Although Frederic loathed the trade to which he had thus been bound, he dutifully served. As the curtain rises, his indentures are almost up and he is preparing to leave the band and devote himself to the extermination of piracy.

He urges the pirates to join him in embracing a more lawful calling, but they refuse. Ruth, however, wishes to become Frederic's wife. Having seen but few women, he does not know whether she is really as pretty as she says she is, but he finally consents to take her.

Just then a group of girls, all the wards of Major-General Stanley, happen upon the scene. Frederic sees their beauty—and Ruth's plainness—and renounces her. Of these girls, Mabel takes a particular interest in Frederic, and he in her. The other girls are seized by the pirates and threatened with immediate marriage. When the Major-General arrives, he can dissuade the pirates only by a ruse: he tells them that he is an orphan, and so works upon their sympathies that they let him and his wards go free.

During the ensuing days and nights, however, this lie troubles the Major-General's conscience; he sits brooding over it at night in a Gothic ruin. He is consoled by his wards' sympathy and Frederic's plan of immediately leading a band of police against the pirates.

Meanwhile, the Pirate King and Ruth appear at the window and beckon Frederic. They have discovered that his indentures were to run until his twenty-first birthday, and—as he was born on February 29—he has really had as yet only five birthdays. Obeying the dictates of his strong sense of duty, he immediately rejoins the pirates. He tells them of the deception that has been practiced upon them, and they seize and bind the Major-General.

But the police come to the rescue and charge the pirates to yield, "in Queen Victoria's name." This they do. Ruth explains, however, that these men who appear to be lawless pirates are really "noblemen who have gone wrong," and they are pardoned and permitted to marry the Major-General's wards.