Adventure

by Jack London

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ADVENTURE

“We are those fools who could not rest In the dull earth we left behind, But burned with passion for the West, And drank strange frenzy from its wind. The world where

wise men live at ease Fades from our unregretful eyes, And blind across uncharted seas We stagger on our enterprise.”

“THE SHIP OF FOOLS.”

CHAPTER I—SOMETHING TO BE DONE

He was a very sick white man. He rode pick-a-back on a woolly-headed, black-skinned savage, the lobes of whose ears had been pierced and stretched until one had torn out, while the other carried a circular block of carved wood three inches in diameter. The torn ear had been pierced again, but this time not so ambitiously, for the hole accommodated no more than a short clay pipe. The man-horse was greasy and dirty, and naked save for an exceedingly narrow and dirty loin-cloth; but the white man clung to him closely and desperately. At times, from weakness, his head drooped and rested on the woolly pate. At other times he lifted his head and stared with swimming eyes at the cocoanut palms that reeled and swung in the shimmering heat. He was clad in a thin undershirt and a strip of cotton cloth, that wrapped about his waist and descended to his knees. On his head was a battered Stetson, known to the trade as a Baden-Powell. About his middle was strapped a belt, which carried a large-calibred automatic pistol and several spare clips, loaded and ready for quick work.

The rear was brought up by a black boy of fourteen or fifteen, who carried medicine bottles, a pail of hot water, and various other hospital appurtenances. They passed out of the compound through a small wicker gate, and went on under the blazing sun, winding about among new-planted cocoanuts that threw no shade. There was not a breath of wind, and the superheated, stagnant air was heavy with pestilence. From the direction they were going arose a wild clamour, as of lost souls wailing and of men in torment. A long, low shed showed ahead, grass-walled and grass-thatched, and it was from here that the noise proceeded. There were shrieks

and screams, some unmistakably of grief, others unmistakably of unendurable pain. As the white man drew closer he could hear a low and continuous moaning and groaning. He shuddered at the thought of entering, and for a moment was quite certain that he was going to faint. For that most dreaded of Solomon Island scourges, dysentery, had struck Berande plantation, and he was all alone to cope with it. Also, he was afflicted himself.

By stooping close, still on man-back, he managed to pass through the low doorway. He took a small bottle from his follower, and sniffed strong ammonia to clear his senses for the ordeal. Then he shouted, “Shut up!” and the clamour stilled. A raised platform of forest slabs, six feet wide, with a slight pitch, extended the full length of the shed. Alongside of it was a yard-wide run-way. Stretched on the platform, side by side and crowded close, lay a score of blacks. That they were low in the order of human life was apparent at a glance. They were man-eaters. Their faces were asymmetrical, bestial; their bodies were ugly and ape-like. They wore nose-rings of clam-shell and turtle-shell, and from the ends of their noses which were also pierced, projected horns of beads strung on stiff wire. Their ears were pierced and distended to accommodate wooden plugs and sticks, pipes, and all manner of barbaric ornaments. Their faces and bodies were tattooed or scarred in hideous designs. In their sickness they wore no clothing, not even loin-cloths, though they retained their shell armlets, their bead necklaces, and their leather belts, between which and the skin were thrust naked knives. The bodies of many were covered with horrible sores. Swarms of flies rose and settled, or flew back and forth in clouds.

The white man went down the line, dosing each man with medicine. To some he gave chlorodyne. He was forced to concentrate with all his will in order to remember which of them could stand ipecacuanha, and which of them were constitutionally unable to retain that powerful drug. One who lay dead he ordered to be carried out. He spoke in the sharp, peremptory manner of a man who would take no nonsense, and the well men who obeyed his orders scowled malignantly. One

muttered deep in his chest as he took the corpse by the feet. The white man exploded in speech and action. It cost him a painful effort, but his arm shot out, landing a back-hand blow on the black's mouth.

"What name you, Angara?" he shouted. "What for talk 'long you, eh? I knock seven bells out of you, too much, quick!"

With the automatic swiftness of a wild animal the black gathered himself to spring. The anger of a wild animal was in his eyes; but he saw the white man's hand dropping to the pistol in his belt. The spring was never made. The tensed body relaxed, and the black, stooping over the corpse, helped carry it out. This time there was no muttering.

"Swine!" the white man gritted out through his teeth at the whole breed of Solomon Islanders.

He was very sick, this white man, as sick as the black men who lay helpless about him, and whom he attended. He never knew, each time he entered the festering shambles, whether or not he would be able to complete the round. But he did know in large degree of certainty that, if he ever fainted there in the midst of the blacks, those who were able would be at his throat like ravening wolves.

Part way down the line a man was dying. He gave orders for his removal as soon as he had breathed his last. A black stuck his head inside the shed door, saying,—

"Four fella sick too much."

Fresh cases, still able to walk, they clustered about the spokesman. The white man singled out the weakest, and put him in the place just vacated by the corpse. Also, he indicated the next weakest, telling him to wait for a place until the next man died. Then, ordering one of the well men to take a squad from the field-force and build a lean-to addition to the hospital, he continued along the run-way, administering medicine and cracking jokes in bêche-de-mer English to cheer the sufferers. Now and again, from the far end, a weird wail was raised. When he arrived there he found

the noise was emitted by a boy who was not sick. The white man's wrath was immediate.

"What name you sing out alla time?" he demanded.

"Him fella my brother belong me," was the answer. "Him fella die too much."

"You sing out, him fella brother belong you die too much," the white man went on in threatening tones. "I cross too much along you. What name you sing out, eh? You fat-head make um brother belong you die dose up too much. You fella finish sing out, savvee? You fella no finish sing out I make finish damn quick."

He threatened the wailer with his fist, and the black cowered down, glaring at him with sullen eyes.

"Sing out no good little bit," the white man went on, more gently. "You no sing out. You chase um fella fly. Too much strong fella fly. You catch water, washee brother belong you; washee plenty too much, bime bye brother belong you all right. Jump!" he shouted fiercely at the end, his will penetrating the low intelligence of the black with dynamic force that made him jump to the task of brushing the loathsome swarms of flies away.

Again he rode out into the reeking heat. He clutched the black's neck tightly, and drew a long breath; but the dead air seemed to shrivel his lungs, and he dropped his head and dozed till the house was reached. Every effort of will was torture, yet he was called upon continually to make efforts of will. He gave the black he had ridden a nip of trade-gin. Viaburi, the house-boy, brought him corrosive sublimate and water, and he took a thorough antiseptic wash. He dosed himself with chlorodyne, took his own pulse, smoked a thermometer, and lay back on the couch with a suppressed groan. It was mid-afternoon, and he had completed his third round that day. He called the house-boy.

"Take um big fella look along Jessie," he commanded.

The boy carried the long telescope out on the veranda, and searched the sea.

“One fella schooner long way little bit,” he announced. “One fella Jessie.”

The white man gave a little gasp of delight.

“You make um Jessie, five sticks tobacco along you,” he said.

There was silence for a time, during which he waited with eager impatience.

“Maybe Jessie, maybe other fella schooner,” came the faltering admission.

The man wormed to the edge of the couch, and slipped off to the floor on his knees. By means of a chair he drew himself to his feet. Still clinging to the chair, supporting most of his weight on it, he shoved it to the door and out upon the veranda. The sweat from the exertion streamed down his face and showed through the undershirt across his shoulders. He managed to get into the chair, where he panted in a state of collapse. In a few minutes he roused himself. The boy held the end of the telescope against one of the veranda scantlings, while the man gazed through it at the sea. At last he picked up the white sails of the schooner and studied them.

“No Jessie,” he said very quietly. “That’s the Malakula.”

He changed his seat for a steamer reclining-chair. Three hundred feet away the sea broke in a small surf upon the beach. To the left he could see the white line of breakers that marked the bar of the Balesuna River, and, beyond, the rugged outline of Savo Island. Directly before him, across the twelve-mile channel, lay Florida Island; and, farther to the right, dim in the distance, he could make out portions of Malaita—the savage island, the abode of murder, and robbery, and man-eating—the place from which his own two hundred plantation hands had been recruited. Between him and the beach was the cane-grass fence of the compound. The gate was ajar, and he sent the house-boy to close it. Within the fence grew a number of lofty cocoanut palms. On either side the path that led to the gate stood two tall flagstaffs. They were reared on artificial mounds of earth that were ten feet high. The base of each staff was surrounded by short posts, painted white and connected

by heavy chains. The staffs themselves were like ships' masts, with topmasts spliced on in true nautical fashion, with shrouds, ratlines, gaffs, and flag-halyards. From the gaff of one, two gay flags hung limply, one a checkerboard of blue and white squares, the other a white pennant centred with a red disc. It was the international code signal of distress.

On the far corner of the compound fence a hawk brooded. The man watched it, and knew that it was sick. He wondered idly if it felt as bad as he felt, and was feebly amused at the thought of kinship that somehow penetrated his fancy. He roused himself to order the great bell to be rung as a signal for the plantation hands to cease work and go to their barracks. Then he mounted his man-horse and made the last round of the day.

In the hospital were two new cases. To these he gave castor-oil. He congratulated himself. It had been an easy day. Only three had died. He inspected the copra-drying that had been going on, and went through the barracks to see if there were any sick lying hidden and defying his rule of segregation. Returned to the house, he received the reports of the boss-boys and gave instructions for next day's work. The boat's crew boss also he had in, to give assurance, as was the custom nightly, that the whale-boats were hauled up and padlocked. This was a most necessary precaution, for the blacks were in a funk, and a whale-boat left lying on the beach in the evening meant a loss of twenty blacks by morning. Since the blacks were worth thirty dollars apiece, or less, according to how much of their time had been worked out, Berande plantation could ill afford the loss. Besides, whale-boats were not cheap in the Solomons; and, also, the deaths were daily reducing the working capital. Seven blacks had fled into the bush the week before, and four had dragged themselves back, helpless from fever, with the report that two more had been killed and kai-kai'd {1} by the hospitable bushmen. The seventh man was still at large, and was said to be working along the coast on the lookout to steal a canoe and get away to his own island.

Viaburi brought two lighted lanterns to the white man for inspection. He glanced at them and saw that they were burning brightly with clear, broad flames, and nodded his head. One was hoisted up to the gaff of the flagstaff, and the other was placed on the wide veranda. They were the leading lights to the Berande anchorage, and every night in the year they were so inspected and hung out.

He rolled back on his couch with a sigh of relief. The day's work was done. A rifle lay on the couch beside him. His revolver was within reach of his hand. An hour passed, during which he did not move. He lay in a state of half-slumber, half-coma. He became suddenly alert. A creak on the back veranda was the cause. The room was L-shaped; the corner in which stood his couch was dim, but the hanging lamp in the main part of the room, over the billiard table and just around the corner, so that it did not shine on him, was burning brightly. Likewise the verandas were well lighted. He waited without movement. The creaks were repeated, and he knew several men lurked outside.

"What name?" he cried sharply.

The house, raised a dozen feet above the ground, shook on its pile foundations to the rush of retreating footsteps.

"They're getting bold," he muttered. "Something will have to be done."

The full moon rose over Malaita and shone down on Berande. Nothing stirred in the windless air. From the hospital still proceeded the moaning of the sick. In the grass-thatched barracks nearly two hundred woolly-headed man-eaters slept off the weariness of the day's toil, though several lifted their heads to listen to the curses of one who cursed the white man who never slept. On the four verandas of the house the lanterns burned. Inside, between rifle and revolver, the man himself moaned and tossed in intervals of troubled sleep.

CHAPTER II—SOMETHING IS DONE

In the morning David Sheldon decided that he was worse. That he was appreciably weaker there was no doubt, and there were other symptoms that were unfavourable. He began his rounds looking for trouble. He wanted trouble. In full health, the strained situation would have been serious enough; but as it was, himself growing helpless, something had to be done. The blacks were getting more sullen and defiant, and the appearance of the men the previous night on his veranda—one of the gravest of offences on Berande—was ominous. Sooner or later they would get him, if he did not get them first, if he did not once again sear on their dark souls the flaming mastery of the white man.

He returned to the house disappointed. No opportunity had presented itself of making an example of insolence or insubordination—such as had occurred on every other day since the sickness smote Berande. The fact that none had offended was in itself suspicious. They were growing crafty. He regretted that he had not waited the night before until the prowlers had entered. Then he might have shot one or two and given the rest a new lesson, writ in red, for them to con. It was one man against two hundred, and he was horribly afraid of his sickness overpowering him and leaving him at their mercy. He saw visions of the blacks taking charge of the plantation, looting the store, burning the buildings, and escaping to Malaita. Also, one gruesome vision he caught of his own head, sun-dried and smoke-cured, ornamenting the canoe house of a cannibal village. Either the Jessie would have to arrive, or he would have to do something.

The bell had hardly rung, sending the labourers into the fields, when Sheldon had a visitor. He had had the couch taken out on the veranda, and he was lying on it when the canoes paddled in and hauled out on the beach. Forty men, armed with spears, bows and arrows, and war-clubs, gathered outside the gate of the compound, but only one entered. They knew the law of Berande, as every native knew the law of every white man’s compound in all the thousand miles of the far-flung Solomons. The one man who came up the path, Sheldon recognized as Seelee, the chief of

Balesuna village. The savage did not mount the steps, but stood beneath and talked to the white lord above.

Seelee was more intelligent than the average of his kind, but his intelligence only emphasized the lowness of that kind. His eyes, close together and small, advertised cruelty and craftiness. A gee-string and a cartridge-belt were all the clothes he wore. The carved pearl-shell ornament that hung from nose to chin and impeded speech was purely ornamental, as were the holes in his ears mere utilities for carrying pipe and tobacco. His broken-fanged teeth were stained black by betel-nut, the juice of which he spat upon the ground.

As he talked or listened, he made grimaces like a monkey. He said yes by dropping his eyelids and thrusting his chin forward. He spoke with childish arrogance strangely at variance with the subservient position he occupied beneath the veranda. He, with his many followers, was lord and master of Balesuna village. But the white man, without followers, was lord and master of Berande—ay, and on occasion, single-handed, had made himself lord and master of Balesuna village as well. Seelee did not like to remember that episode. It had occurred in the course of learning the nature of white men and of learning to abominate them. He had once been guilty of sheltering three runaways from Berande. They had given him all they possessed in return for the shelter and for promised aid in getting away to Malaita. This had given him a glimpse of a profitable future, in which his village would serve as the one depot on the underground railway between Berande and Malaita.

Unfortunately, he was ignorant of the ways of white men. This particular white man educated him by arriving at his grass house in the gray of dawn. In the first moment he had felt amused. He was so perfectly safe in the midst of his village. But the next moment, and before he could cry out, a pair of handcuffs on the white man’s knuckles had landed on his mouth, knocking the cry of alarm back down his throat. Also, the white man’s other fist had caught him under the ear and left him without

further interest in what was happening. When he came to, he found himself in the white man's whale-boat on the way to Berande. At Berande he had been treated as one of no consequence, with handcuffs on hands and feet, to say nothing of chains. When his tribe had returned the three runaways, he was given his freedom. And finally, the terrible white man had fined him and Balesuna village ten thousand cocoanuts. After that he had sheltered no more runaway Malaita men. Instead, he had gone into the business of catching them. It was safer. Besides, he was paid one case of tobacco per head. But if he ever got a chance at that white man, if he ever caught him sick or stood at his back when he stumbled and fell on a bush-trail—well, there would be a head that would fetch a price in Malaita.

Sheldon was pleased with what Seelee told him. The seventh man of the last batch of runaways had been caught and was even then at the gate. He was brought in, heavy-featured and defiant, his arms bound with cocoanut sennit, the dry blood still on his body from the struggle with his captors.

"Me savvee you good fella, Seelee," Sheldon said, as the chief gulped down a quarter-tumbler of raw trade-gin. "Fella boy belong me you catch short time little bit. This fella boy strong fella too much. I give you fella one case tobacco—my word, one case tobacco. Then, you good fella along me, I give you three fathom calico, one fella knife big fella too much."

The tobacco and trade goods were brought from the storeroom by two house-boys and turned over to the chief of Balesuna village, who accepted the additional reward with a non-committal grunt and went away down the path to his canoes. Under Sheldon's directions the house-boys handcuffed the prisoner, by hands and feet, around one of the pile supports of the house. At eleven o'clock, when the labourers came in from the field, Sheldon had them assembled in the compound before the veranda. Every able man was there, including those who were helping about the hospital. Even the women and the several pickaninnies of the plantation were lined

up with the rest, two deep—a horde of naked savages a trifle under two hundred strong. In addition to their ornaments of bead and shell and bone, their pierced ears and nostrils were burdened with safety-pins, wire nails, metal hair-pins, rusty iron handles of cooking utensils, and the patent keys for opening corned beef tins. Some wore penknives clasped on their kinky locks for safety. On the chest of one a china door-knob was suspended, on the chest of another the brass wheel of an alarm clock.

Facing them, clinging to the railing of the veranda for support, stood the sick white man. Any one of them could have knocked him over with the blow of a little finger. Despite his firearms, the gang could have rushed him and delivered that blow, when his head and the plantation would have been theirs. Hatred and murder and lust for revenge they possessed to overflowing. But one thing they lacked, the thing that he possessed, the flame of mastery that would not quench, that burned fiercely as ever in the disease-wasted body, and that was ever ready to flare forth and scorch and singe them with its ire.

“Narada! Billy!” Sheldon called sharply.

Two men slunk unwillingly forward and waited.

Sheldon gave the keys of the handcuffs to a house-boy, who went under the house and loosed the prisoner.

“You fella Narada, you fella Billy, take um this fella boy along tree and make fast, hands high up,” was Sheldon’s command.

While this was being done, slowly, amidst mutterings and restlessness on the part of the onlookers, one of the house-boys fetched a heavy-handled, heavy-lashed whip. Sheldon began a speech.

“This fella Arunga, me cross along him too much. I no steal this fella Arunga. I no gammon. I say, ‘All right, you come along me Berande, work three fella year.’ He say, ‘All right, me come along you work three fella year.’ He come. He catch plenty good fella kai-kai, {2} plenty good fella money. What name he run away? Me too

much cross along him. I knock what name outa him fella. I pay Seelee, big fella master along Balesuna, one case tobacco catch that fella Arunga. All right. Arunga pay that fella case tobacco. Six pounds that fella Arunga pay. Alle same one year more that fella Arunga work Berande. All right. Now he catch ten fella whip three times. You fella Billy catch whip, give that fella Arunga ten fella three times. All fella boys look see, all fella Marys {3} look see; bime bye, they like run away they think strong fella too much, no run away. Billy, strong fella too much ten fella three times."

The house-boy extended the whip to him, but Billy did not take it. Sheldon waited quietly. The eyes of all the cannibals were fixed upon him in doubt and fear and eagerness. It was the moment of test, whereby the lone white man was to live or be lost.

"Ten fella three times, Billy," Sheldon said encouragingly, though there was a certain metallic rasp in his voice.

Billy scowled, looked up and looked down, but did not move.

"Billy!"

Sheldon's voice exploded like a pistol shot. The savage started physically. Grins overspread the grotesque features of the audience, and there was a sound of tittering.

"S'pose you like too much lash that fella Arunga, you take him fella Tulagi," Billy said. "One fella government agent make plenty lash. That um fella law. Me savvee um fella law."

It was the law, and Sheldon knew it. But he wanted to live this day and the next day and not to die waiting for the law to operate the next week or the week after.

"Too much talk along you!" he cried angrily. "What name eh? What name?"

"Me savvee law," the savage repeated stubbornly.

"Astoa!"

Another man stepped forward in almost a sprightly way and glanced insolently up. Sheldon was selecting the worst characters for the lesson.

“You fella Astoa, you fella Narada, tie up that fella Billy alongside other fella same fella way.”

“Strong fella tie,” he cautioned them.

“You fella Astoa take that fella whip. Plenty strong big fella too much ten fella three times. Savvee!”

“No,” Astoa grunted.

Sheldon picked up the rifle that had leaned against the rail, and cocked it.

“I know you, Astoa,” he said calmly. “You work along Queensland six years.”

“Me fella missionary,” the black interrupted with deliberate insolence.

“Queensland you stop jail one fella year. White fella master damn fool no hang you. You too much bad fella. Queensland you stop jail six months two fella time. Two fella time you steal. All right, you missionary. You savvee one fella prayer?”

“Yes, me savvee prayer,” was the reply.

“All right, then you pray now, short time little bit. You say one fella prayer damn quick, then me kill you.”

Sheldon held the rifle on him and waited. The black glanced around at his fellows, but none moved to aid him. They were intent upon the coming spectacle, staring fascinated at the white man with death in his hands who stood alone on the great veranda. Sheldon has won, and he knew it. Astoa changed his weight irresolutely from one foot to the other. He looked at the white man, and saw his eyes gleaming level along the sights.

“Astoa,” Sheldon said, seizing the psychological moment, “I count three fella time. Then I shoot you fella dead, good-bye, all finish you.”

And Sheldon knew that when he had counted three he would drop him in his tracks.

The black knew it, too. That was why Sheldon did not have to do it, for when he had counted one, Astoa reached out his hand and took the whip. And right well Astoa laid on the whip, angered at his fellows for not supporting him and venting his anger with every stroke. From the veranda Sheldon egged him on to strike with strength, till the two triced savages screamed and howled while the blood oozed down their backs. The lesson was being well written in red.

When the last of the gang, including the two howling culprits, had passed out through the compound gate, Sheldon sank down half-fainting on his couch.

“You’re a sick man,” he groaned. “A sick man.”

“But you can sleep at ease to-night,” he added, half an hour later.

CHAPTER III—THE JESSIE

Two days passed, and Sheldon felt that he could not grow any weaker and live, much less make his four daily rounds of the hospital. The deaths were averaging four a day, and there were more new cases than recoveries. The blacks were in a funk. Each one, when taken sick, seemed to make every effort to die. Once down on their backs they lacked the grit to make a struggle. They believed they were going to die, and they did their best to vindicate that belief. Even those that were well were sure that it was only a mater of days when the sickness would catch them and carry them off. And yet, believing this with absolute conviction, they somehow lacked the nerve to rush the frail wraith of a man with the white skin and escape from the charnel house by the whale-boats. They chose the lingering death they were sure awaited them, rather than the immediate death they were very sure would pounce upon them if they went up against the master. That he never slept, they knew. That he could not be conjured to death, they were equally sure—they had tried it. And even the sickness that was sweeping them off could not kill him.

With the whipping in the compound, discipline had improved. They cringed under

the iron hand of the white man. They gave their scowls or malignant looks with averted faces or when his back was turned. They saved their mutterings for the barracks at night, where he could not hear. And there were no more runaways and no more night-prowlers on the veranda.

Dawn of the third day after the whipping brought the Jessie's white sails in sight. Eight miles away, it was not till two in the afternoon that the light air-fans enabled her to drop anchor a quarter of a mile off the shore. The sight of her gave Sheldon fresh courage, and the tedious hours of waiting did not irk him. He gave his orders to the boss-boys and made his regular trips to the hospital. Nothing mattered now. His troubles were at an end. He could lie down and take care of himself and proceed to get well. The Jessie had arrived. His partner was on board, vigorous and hearty from six weeks' recruiting on Malaita. He could take charge now, and all would be well with Berande.

Sheldon lay in the steamer-chair and watched the Jessie's whale-boat pull in for the beach. He wondered why only three sweeps were pulling, and he wondered still more when, beached, there was so much delay in getting out of the boat. Then he understood. The three blacks who had been pulling started up the beach with a stretcher on their shoulders. A white man, whom he recognized as the Jessie's captain, walked in front and opened the gate, then dropped behind to close it. Sheldon knew that it was Hughie Drummond who lay in the stretcher, and a mist came before his eyes. He felt an overwhelming desire to die. The disappointment was too great. In his own state of terrible weakness he felt that it was impossible to go on with his task of holding Berande plantation tight-gripped in his fist. Then the will of him flamed up again, and he directed the blacks to lay the stretcher beside him on the floor. Hughie Drummond, whom he had last seen in health, was an emaciated skeleton. His closed eyes were deep-sunken. The shrivelled lips had fallen away from the teeth, and the cheek-bones seemed bursting through the skin. Sheldon sent a house-boy for his thermometer and glanced questioningly at the

captain.

“Black-water fever,” the captain said. “He’s been like this for six days, unconscious. And we’ve got dysentery on board. What’s the matter with you?”

“I’m burying four a day,” Sheldon answered, as he bent over from the steamer-chair and inserted the thermometer under his partner’s tongue.

Captain Oleson swore blasphemously, and sent a house-boy to bring whisky and soda. Sheldon glanced at the thermometer.

“One hundred and seven,” he said. “Poor Hughie.”

Captain Oleson offered him some whisky.

“Couldn’t think of it—perforation, you know,” Sheldon said.

He sent for a boss-boy and ordered a grave to be dug, also some of the packing-cases to be knocked together into a coffin. The blacks did not get coffins. They were buried as they died, being carted on a sheet of galvanized iron, in their nakedness, from the hospital to the hole in the ground. Having given the orders, Sheldon lay back in his chair with closed eyes.

“It’s ben fair hell, sir,” Captain Oleson began, then broke off to help himself to more whisky. “It’s ben fair hell, Mr. Sheldon, I tell you. Contrary winds and calms. We’ve ben driftin’ all about the shop for ten days. There’s ten thousand sharks following us for the tucker we’ve ben throwin’ over to them. They was snappin’ at the oars when we started to come ashore. I wisht to God a nor’wester’d come along an’ blow the Solomons clean to hell.”

“We got it from the water—water from Owga creek. Filled my casks with it. How was we to know? I’ve filled there before an’ it was all right. We had sixty recruits-full up; and my crew of fifteen. We’ve ben buryin’ them day an’ night. The beggars won’t live, damn them! They die out of spite. Only three of my crew left on its legs. Five more down. Seven dead. Oh, hell! What’s the good of talkin’?”

“How many recruits left?” Sheldon asked.

“Lost half. Thirty left. Twenty down, and ten tottering around.”

Sheldon sighed.

“That means another addition to the hospital. We’ve got to get them ashore somehow.—Viaburi! Hey, you, Viaburi, ring big fella bell strong fella too much.”

The hands, called in from the fields at that unwonted hour, were split into detachments. Some were sent into the woods to cut timber for house-beams, others to cutting cane-grass for thatching, and forty of them lifted a whale-boat above their heads and carried it down to the sea. Sheldon had gritted his teeth, pulled his collapsing soul together, and taken Berande plantation into his fist once more.

“Have you seen the barometer?” Captain Oleson asked, pausing at the bottom of the steps on his way to oversee the disembarkation of the sick.

“No,” Sheldon answered. “Is it down?”

“It’s going down.”

“Then you’d better sleep aboard to-night,” was Sheldon’s judgment. “Never mind the funeral. I’ll see to poor Hughie.”

“A nigger was kicking the bucket when I dropped anchor.”

The captain made the statement as a simple fact, but obviously waited for a suggestion. The other felt a sudden wave of irritation rush through him.

“Dump him over,” he cried. “Great God, man! don’t you think I’ve got enough graves ashore?”

“I just wanted to know, that was all,” the captain answered, in no wise offended.

Sheldon regretted his childishness.

“Oh, Captain Oleson,” he called. “If you can see your way to it, come ashore to-morrow and lend me a hand. If you can’t, send the mate.”

“Right O. I’ll come myself. Mr. Johnson’s dead, sir. I forgot to tell you—three days ago.”

Sheldon watched the Jessie’s captain go down the path, with waving arms and loud curses calling upon God to sink the Solomons. Next, Sheldon noted the Jessie rolling lazily on the glassy swell, and beyond, in the north-west, high over Florida Island, an alpine chain of dark-massed clouds. Then he turned to his partner, calling for boys to carry him into the house. But Hughie Drummond had reached the end. His breathing was imperceptible. By mere touch, Sheldon could ascertain that the dying man’s temperature was going down. It must have been going down when the thermometer registered one hundred and seven. He had burned out. Sheldon knelt beside him, the house-boys grouped around, their white singlets and loin-cloths peculiarly at variance with their dark skins and savage countenances, their huge ear-plugs and carved and glistening nose-rings. Sheldon tottered to his feet at last, and half-fell into the steamer-chair. Oppressive as the heat had been, it was now even more oppressive. It was difficult to breathe. He panted for air. The faces and naked arms of the house-boys were beaded with sweat.

“Marster,” one of them ventured, “big fella wind he come, strong fella too much.”

Sheldon nodded his head but did not look. Much as he had loved Hughie Drummond, his death, and the funeral it entailed, seemed an intolerable burden to add to what he was already sinking under. He had a feeling—nay, it was a certitude—that all he had to do was to shut his eyes and let go, and that he would die, sink into immensity of rest. He knew it; it was very simple. All he had to do was close his eyes and let go; for he had reached the stage where he lived by will alone. His weary body seemed torn by the oncoming pangs of dissolution. He was a fool to hang on. He had died a score of deaths already, and what was the use of prolonging it to two-score deaths before he really died. Not only was he not afraid to die, but he desired to die. His weary flesh and weary spirit desired it, and why should the flame

of him not go utterly out?

But his mind that could will life or death, still pulsed on. He saw the two whale-boats land on the beach, and the sick, on stretchers or pick-a-back, groaning and wailing, go by in lugubrious procession. He saw the wind making on the clouded horizon, and thought of the sick in the hospital. Here was something waiting his hand to be done, and it was not in his nature to lie down and sleep, or die, when any task remained undone.

The boss-boys were called and given their orders to rope down the hospital with its two additions. He remembered the spare anchor-chain, new and black-painted, that hung under the house suspended from the floor-beams, and ordered it to be used on the hospital as well. Other boys brought the coffin, a grotesque patchwork of packing-cases, and under his directions they laid Hughie Drummond in it. Half a dozen boys carried it down the beach, while he rode on the back of another, his arms around the black's neck, one hand clutching a prayer-book.

While he read the service, the blacks gazed apprehensively at the dark line on the water, above which rolled and tumbled the racing clouds. The first breath of the wind, faint and silken, tonic with life, fanned through his dry-baked body as he finished reading. Then came the second breath of the wind, an angry gust, as the shovels worked rapidly, filling in the sand. So heavy was the gust that Sheldon, still on his feet, seized hold of his man-horse to escape being blown away. The Jessie was blotted out, and a strange ominous sound arose as multitudinous wavelets struck foaming on the beach. It was like the bubbling of some colossal cauldron. From all about could be heard the dull thudding of falling cocoanuts. The tall, delicate-trunked trees twisted and snapped about like whip-lashes. The air seemed filled with their flying leaves, any one of which, stem-on could brain a man. Then came the rain, a deluge, a straight, horizontal sheet that poured along like a river, defying gravitation. The black, with Sheldon mounted on him, plunged ahead into

the thick of it, stooping far forward and low to the ground to avoid being toppled over backward.

"'He's sleeping out and far to-night,'" Sheldon quoted, as he thought of the dead man in the sand and the rainwater trickling down upon the cold clay.

So they fought their way back up the beach. The other blacks caught hold of the man-horse and pulled and tugged. There were among them those whose fondest desire was to drag the rider in the sand and spring upon him and mash him into repulsive nothingness. But the automatic pistol in his belt with its rattling, quick-dealing death, and the automatic, death-defying spirit in the man himself, made them refrain and buckle down to the task of hauling him to safety through the storm.

Wet through and exhausted, he was nevertheless surprised at the ease with which he got into a change of clothing. Though he was fearfully weak, he found himself actually feeling better. The disease had spent itself, and the mend had begun.

"Now if I don't get the fever," he said aloud, and at the same moment resolved to go to taking quinine as soon as he was strong enough to dare.

He crawled out on the veranda. The rain had ceased, but the wind, which had dwindled to a half-gale, was increasing. A big sea had sprung up, and the mile-long breakers, curling up to the over-fall two hundred yards from shore, were crashing on the beach. The Jessie was plunging madly to two anchors, and every second or third sea broke clear over her bow. Two flags were stiffly undulating from the halyards like squares of flexible sheet-iron. One was blue, the other red. He knew their meaning in the Berande private code—"What are your instructions? Shall I attempt to land boat?" Tacked on the wall, between the signal locker and the billiard rules, was the code itself, by which he verified the signal before making answer. On the flagstaff gaff a boy hoisted a white flag over a red, which stood for—"Run to Neal Island for shelter."

That Captain Oleson had been expecting this signal was apparent by the celerity with which the shackles were knocked out of both anchor-chains. He slipped his anchors, leaving them buoyed to be picked up in better weather. The Jessie swung off under her full staysail, then the foresail, double-reefed, was run up. She was away like a racehorse, clearing Balesuna Shoal with half a cable-length to spare. Just before she rounded the point she was swallowed up in a terrific squall that far out-blew the first.

All that night, while squall after squall smote Berande, uprooting trees, overthrowing copra-sheds, and rocking the house on its tall piles, Sheldon slept. He was unaware of the commotion. He never wakened. Nor did he change his position or dream. He awoke, a new man. Furthermore, he was hungry. It was over a week since food had passed his lips. He drank a glass of condensed cream, thinned with water, and by ten o'clock he dared to take a cup of beef-tea. He was cheered, also, by the situation in the hospital. Despite the storm there had been but one death, and there was only one fresh case, while half a dozen boys crawled weakly away to the barracks. He wondered if it was the wind that was blowing the disease away and cleansing the pestilential land.

By eleven a messenger arrived from Balesuna village, dispatched by Seelee. The Jessie had gone ashore half-way between the village and Neal Island. It was not till nightfall that two of the crew arrived, reporting the drowning of Captain Oleson and of the one remaining boy. As for the Jessie, from what they told him Sheldon could not but conclude that she was a total loss. Further to hearten him, he was taken by a shivering fit. In half an hour he was burning up. And he knew that at least another day must pass before he could undertake even the smallest dose of quinine. He crawled under a heap of blankets, and a little later found himself laughing aloud. He had surely reached the limit of disaster. Barring earthquake or tidal-wave, the worst had already befallen him. The Flibberty-Gibbet was certainly safe in Mboli Pass. Since nothing worse could happen, things simply had to mend. So it was, shivering

under his blankets, that he laughed, until the house-boys, with heads together, marvelled at the devils that were in him.

CHAPTER IV—JOAN LACKLAND

By the second day of the northwester, Sheldon was in collapse from his fever. It had taken an unfair advantage of his weak state, and though it was only ordinary malarial fever, in forty-eight hours it had run him as low as ten days of fever would have done when he was in condition. But the dysentery had been swept away from Berande. A score of convalescents lingered in the hospital, but they were improving hourly. There had been but one more death—that of the man whose brother had wailed over him instead of brushing the flies away.

On the morning of the fourth day of his fever, Sheldon lay on the veranda, gazing dimly out over the raging ocean. The wind was falling, but a mighty sea was still thundering in on Berande beach, the flying spray reaching in as far as the flagstaff mounds, the foaming wash creaming against the gate-posts. He had taken thirty grains of quinine, and the drug was buzzing in his ears like a nest of hornets, making his hands and knees tremble, and causing a sickening palpitation of the stomach. Once, opening his eyes, he saw what he took to be an hallucination. Not far out, and coming in across the Jessie’s anchorage, he saw a whale-boat’s nose thrust skyward on a smoky crest and disappear naturally, as an actual whale-boat’s nose should disappear, as it slid down the back of the sea. He knew that no whale-boat should be out there, and he was quite certain no men in the Solomons were mad enough to be abroad in such a storm.

But the hallucination persisted. A minute later, chancing to open his eyes, he saw the whale-boat, full length, and saw right into it as it rose on the face of a wave. He saw six sweeps at work, and in the stern, clearly outlined against the overhanging wall of white, a man who stood erect, gigantic, swaying with his weight on the

steering-sweep. This he saw, and an eighth man who crouched in the bow and gazed shoreward. But what startled Sheldon was the sight of a woman in the stern-sheets, between the stroke-oar and the steersman. A woman she was, for a braid of her hair was flying, and she was just in the act of recapturing it and stowing it away beneath a hat that for all the world was like his own “Baden-Powell.”

The boat disappeared behind the wave, and rose into view on the face of the following one. Again he looked into it. The men were dark-skinned, and larger than Solomon Islanders, but the woman, he could plainly see, was white. Who she was, and what she was doing there, were thoughts that drifted vaguely through his consciousness. He was too sick to be vitally interested, and, besides, he had a half feeling that it was all a dream; but he noted that the men were resting on their sweeps, while the woman and the steersman were intently watching the run of seas behind them.

“Good boatmen,” was Sheldon’s verdict, as he saw the boat leap forward on the face of a huge breaker, the sweeps plying swiftly to keep her on that front of the moving mountain of water that raced madly for the shore. It was well done. Part full of water, the boat was flung upon the beach, the men springing out and dragging its nose to the gate-posts. Sheldon had called vainly to the house-boys, who, at the moment, were dosing the remaining patients in the hospital. He knew he was unable to rise up and go down the path to meet the newcomers, so he lay back in the steamer-chair, and watched for ages while they cared for the boat. The woman stood to one side, her hand resting on the gate. Occasionally surges of sea water washed over her feet, which he could see were encased in rubber sea-boots. She scrutinized the house sharply, and for some time she gazed at him steadily. At last, speaking to two of the men, who turned and followed her, she started up the path.

Sheldon attempted to rise, got half up out of his chair, and fell back helplessly. He was surprised at the size of the men, who loomed like giants behind her. Both were

six-footers, and they were heavy in proportion. He had never seen islanders like them. They were not black like the Solomon Islanders, but light brown; and their features were larger, more regular, and even handsome.

The woman—or girl, rather, he decided—walked along the veranda toward him. The two men waited at the head of the steps, watching curiously. The girl was angry; he could see that. Her gray eyes were flashing, and her lips were quivering. That she had a temper, was his thought. But the eyes were striking. He decided that they were not gray after all, or, at least, not all gray. They were large and wide apart, and they looked at him from under level brows. Her face was cameo-like, so clear cut was it. There were other striking things about her—the cowboy Stetson hat, the heavy braids of brown hair, and the long-barrelled 38 Colt's revolver that hung in its holster on her hip.

"Pretty hospitality, I must say," was her greeting, "letting strangers sink or swim in your front yard."

"I—I beg your pardon," he stammered, by a supreme effort dragging himself to his feet.

His legs wobbled under him, and with a suffocating sensation he began sinking to the floor. He was aware of a feeble gratification as he saw solicitude leap into her eyes; then blackness smote him, and at the moment of smiting him his thought was that at last, and for the first time in his life, he had fainted.

The ringing of the big bell aroused him. He opened his eyes and found that he was on the couch indoors. A glance at the clock told him that it was six, and from the direction the sun's rays streamed into the room he knew that it was morning. At first he puzzled over something untoward he was sure had happened. Then on the wall he saw a Stetson hat hanging, and beneath it a full cartridge-belt and a long-barrelled 38 Colt's revolver. The slender girth of the belt told its feminine story, and he remembered the whale-boat of the day before and the gray eyes that flashed beneath

the level brows. She it must have been who had just rung the bell. The cares of the plantation rushed upon him, and he sat up in bed, clutching at the wall for support as the mosquito screen lurched dizzily around him. He was still sitting there, holding on, with eyes closed, striving to master his giddiness, when he heard her voice.

“You’ll lie right down again, sir,” she said.

It was sharply imperative, a voice used to command. At the same time one hand pressed him back toward the pillow while the other caught him from behind and eased him down.

“You’ve been unconscious for twenty-four hours now,” she went on, “and I have taken charge. When I say the word you’ll get up, and not until then. Now, what medicine do you take?—quinine? Here are ten grains. That’s right. You’ll make a good patient.”

“My dear madame,” he began.

“You musn’t speak,” she interrupted, “that is, in protest. Otherwise, you can talk.”

“But the plantation—”

“A dead man is of no use on a plantation. Don’t you want to know about me? My vanity is hurt. Here am I, just through my first shipwreck; and here are you, not the least bit curious, talking about your miserable plantation. Can’t you see that I am just bursting to tell somebody, anybody, about my shipwreck?”

He smiled; it was the first time in weeks. And he smiled, not so much at what she said, as at the way she said it—the whimsical expression of her face, the laughter in her eyes, and the several tiny lines of humour that drew in at the corners. He was curiously wondering as to what her age was, as he said aloud:

“Yes, tell me, please.”

“That I will not—not now,” she retorted, with a toss of the head. “I’ll find somebody to tell my story to who does not have to be asked. Also, I want information. I

managed to find out what time to ring the bell to turn the hands to, and that is about all. I don't understand the ridiculous speech of your people. What time do they knock off?"

"At eleven—go on again at one."

"That will do, thank you. And now, where do you keep the key to the provisions? I want to feed my men."

"Your men!" he gasped. "On tinned goods! No, no. Let them go out and eat with my boys."

Her eyes flashed as on the day before, and he saw again the imperative expression on her face.

"That I won't; my men are men. I've been out to your miserable barracks and watched them eat. Faugh! Potatoes! Nothing but potatoes! No salt! Nothing! Only potatoes! I may have been mistaken, but I thought I understood them to say that that was all they ever got to eat. Two meals a day and every day in the week?"

He nodded.

"Well, my men wouldn't stand that for a single day, much less a whole week. Where is the key?"

"Hanging on that clothes-hook under the clock."

He gave it easily enough, but as she was reaching down the key she heard him say:

"Fancy niggers and tinned provisions."

This time she really was angry. The blood was in her cheeks as she turned on him.

"My men are not niggers. The sooner you understand that the better for our acquaintance. As for the tinned goods, I'll pay for all they eat. Please don't worry about that. Worry is not good for you in your condition. And I won't stay any longer than I have to—just long enough to get you on your feet, and not go away with the feeling of having deserted a white man."

“You’re American, aren’t you?” he asked quietly.

The question disconcerted her for the moment.

“Yes,” she vouchsafed, with a defiant look. “Why?”

“Nothing. I merely thought so.”

“Anything further?”

He shook his head.

“Why?” he asked.

“Oh, nothing. I thought you might have something pleasant to say.”

“My name is Sheldon, David Sheldon,” he said, with direct relevance, holding out a thin hand.

Her hand started out impulsively, then checked. “My name is Lackland, Joan Lackland.” The hand went out. “And let us be friends.”

“It could not be otherwise—” he began lamely.

“And I can feed my men all the tinned goods I want?” she rushed on.

“Till the cows come home,” he answered, attempting her own lightness, then adding, “that is, to Berande. You see we don’t have any cows at Berande.”

She fixed him coldly with her eyes.

“Is that a joke?” she demanded.

“I really don’t know—I—I thought it was, but then, you see, I’m sick.”

“You’re English, aren’t you?” was her next query.

“Now that’s too much, even for a sick man,” he cried. “You know well enough that I am.”

“Oh,” she said absently, “then you are?”

He frowned, tightened his lips, then burst into laughter, in which she joined.

“It’s my own fault,” he confessed. “I shouldn’t have baited you. I’ll be careful in the

future.”

“In the meantime go on laughing, and I’ll see about breakfast. Is there anything you would fancy?”

He shook his head.

“It will do you good to eat something. Your fever has burned out, and you are merely weak. Wait a moment.”

She hurried out of the room in the direction of the kitchen, tripped at the door in a pair of sandals several sizes too large for her feet, and disappeared in rosy confusion.

“By Jove, those are my sandals,” he thought to himself. “The girl hasn’t a thing to wear except what she landed on the beach in, and she certainly landed in sea-boots.”

CHAPTER V—SHE WOULD A PLANTER BE

Sheldon mended rapidly. The fever had burned out, and there was nothing for him to do but gather strength. Joan had taken the cook in hand, and for the first time, as Sheldon remarked, the chop at Berande was white man’s chop. With her own hands Joan prepared the sick man’s food, and between that and the cheer she brought him, he was able, after two days, to totter feebly out upon the veranda. The situation struck him as strange, and stranger still was the fact that it did not seem strange to the girl at all. She had settled down and taken charge of the household as a matter of course, as if he were her father, or brother, or as if she were a man like himself.

“It is just too delightful for anything,” she assured him. “It is like a page out of some romance. Here I come along out of the sea and find a sick man all alone with two hundred slaves—”

“Recruits,” he corrected. “Contract labourers. They serve only three years, and they are free agents when they enter upon their contracts.”

“Yes, yes,” she hurried on. “—A sick man alone with two hundred recruits on a

cannibal island—they are cannibals, aren't they? Or is it all talk?"

"Talk!" he said, with a smile. "It's a trifle more than that. Most of my boys are from the bush, and every bushman is a cannibal."

"But not after they become recruits? Surely, the boys you have here wouldn't be guilty."

"They'd eat you if the chance afforded."

"Are you just saying so, on theory, or do you really know?" she asked.

"I know."

"Why? What makes you think so? Your own men here?"

"Yes, my own men here, the very house-boys, the cook that at the present moment is making such delicious rolls, thanks to you. Not more than three months ago eleven of them sneaked a whale-boat and ran for Malaita. Nine of them belonged to Malaita. Two were bushmen from San Cristoval. They were fools—the two from San Cristoval, I mean; so would any two Malaita men be who trusted themselves in a boat with nine from San Cristoval."

"Yes?" she asked eagerly. "Then what happened?"

"The nine Malaita men ate the two from San Cristoval, all except the heads, which are too valuable for mere eating. They stowed them away in the stern-locker till they landed. And those two heads are now in some bush village back of Langa Langa."

She clapped her hands and her eyes sparkled. "They are really and truly cannibals! And just think, this is the twentieth century! And I thought romance and adventure were fossilized!"

He looked at her with mild amusement.

"What is the matter now?" she queried.

"Oh, nothing, only I don't fancy being eaten by a lot of filthy niggers is the least bit romantic."

"No, of course not," she admitted. "But to be among them, controlling them, directing them, two hundred of them, and to escape being eaten by them—that, at least, if it isn't romantic, is certainly the quintessence of adventure. And adventure and romance are allied, you know."

"By the same token, to go into a nigger's stomach should be the quintessence of adventure," he retorted.

"I don't think you have any romance in you," she exclaimed. "You're just dull and sombre and sordid like the business men at home. I don't know why you're here at all. You should be at home placidly vegetating as a banker's clerk or—or—"

"A shopkeeper's assistant, thank you."

"Yes, that—anything. What under the sun are you doing here on the edge of things?"

"Earning my bread and butter, trying to get on in the world."

"'By the bitter road the younger son must tread, Ere he win to hearth and saddle of his own,'" she quoted. "Why, if that isn't romantic, then nothing is romantic. Think of all the younger sons out over the world, on a myriad of adventures winning to those same hearths and saddles. And here you are in the thick of it, doing it, and here am I in the thick of it, doing it."

"I—I beg pardon," he drawled.

"Well, I'm a younger daughter, then," she amended; "and I have no hearth nor saddle—I haven't anybody or anything—and I'm just as far on the edge of things as you are."

"In your case, then, I'll admit there is a bit of romance," he confessed.

He could not help but think of the preceding nights, and of her sleeping in the hammock on the veranda, under mosquito curtains, her bodyguard of Tahitian sailors stretched out at the far corner of the veranda within call. He had been too

helpless to resist, but now he resolved she should have his couch inside while he would take the hammock.

“You see, I had read and dreamed about romance all my life,” she was saying, “but I never, in my wildest fancies, thought that I should live it. It was all so unexpected. Two years ago I thought there was nothing left to me but. . . .” She faltered, and made a moue of distaste. “Well, the only thing that remained, it seemed to me, was marriage.”

“And you preferred a cannibal isle and a cartridge-belt?” he suggested.

“I didn’t think of the cannibal isle, but the cartridge-belt was blissful.”

“You wouldn’t dare use the revolver if you were compelled to. Or,” noting the glint in her eyes, “if you did use it, to—well, to hit anything.”

She started up suddenly to enter the house. He knew she was going for her revolver.

“Never mind,” he said, “here’s mine. What can you do with it?”

“Shoot the block off your flag-halyards.”

He smiled his unbelief.

“I don’t know the gun,” she said dubiously.

“It’s a light trigger and you don’t have to hold down. Draw fine.”

“Yes, yes,” she spoke impatiently. “I know automatics—they jam when they get hot—only I don’t know yours.” She looked at it a moment. “It’s cocked. Is there a cartridge in the chamber?”

She fired, and the block remained intact.

“It’s a long shot,” he said, with the intention of easing her chagrin.

But she bit her lip and fired again. The bullet emitted a sharp shriek as it ricochetted into space. The metal block rattled back and forth. Again and again she fired, till the clip was emptied of its eight cartridges. Six of them were hits. The block still swayed at the gaff-end, but it was battered out of all usefulness. Sheldon was

astonished. It was better than he or even Hughie Drummond could have done. The women he had known, when they sporadically fired a rifle or revolver, usually shrieked, shut their eyes, and blazed away into space.

“That’s really good shooting . . . for a woman,” he said. “You only missed it twice, and it was a strange weapon.”

“But I can’t make out the two misses,” she complained. “The gun worked beautifully, too. Give me another clip and I’ll hit it eight times for anything you wish.”

“I don’t doubt it. Now I’ll have to get a new block. Viaburi! Here you fella, catch one fella block along storeroom.”

“I’ll wager you can’t do it eight out of eight . . . anything you wish,” she challenged.

“No fear of my taking it on,” was his answer. “Who taught you to shoot?”

“Oh, my father, at first, and then Von, and his cowboys. He was a shot—Dad, I mean, though Von was splendid, too.”

Sheldon wondered secretly who Von was, and he speculated as to whether it was Von who two years previously had led her to believe that nothing remained for her but matrimony.

“What part of the United States is your home?” he asked. “Chicago or Wyoming? or somewhere out there? You know you haven’t told me a thing about yourself. All that I know is that you are Miss Joan Lackland from anywhere.”

“You’d have to go farther west to find my stamping grounds.”

“Ah, let me see—Nevada?”

She shook her head.

“California?”

“Still farther west.”

“It can’t be, or else I’ve forgotten my geography.”

“It’s your politics,” she laughed. “Don’t you remember ‘Annexation’?”

“The Philippines!” he cried triumphantly.

“No, Hawaii. I was born there. It is a beautiful land. My, I’m almost homesick for it already. Not that I haven’t been away. I was in New York when the crash came. But I do think it is the sweetest spot on earth—Hawaii, I mean.”

“Then what under the sun are you doing down here in this God-forsaken place?” he asked. “Only fools come here,” he added bitterly.

“Nielsen wasn’t a fool, was he?” she queried. “As I understand, he made three millions here.”

“Only too true, and that fact is responsible for my being here.”

“And for me, too,” she said. “Dad heard about him in the Marquesas, and so we started. Only poor Dad didn’t get here.”

“He—your father—died?” he faltered.

She nodded, and her eyes grew soft and moist.

“I might as well begin at the beginning.” She lifted her head with a proud air of dismissing sadness, after, the manner of a woman qualified to wear a Baden-Powell and a long-barrelled Colt’s. “I was born at Hilo. That’s on the island of Hawaii—the biggest and best in the whole group. I was brought up the way most girls in Hawaii are brought up. They live in the open, and they know how to ride and swim before they know what six-times-six is. As for me, I can’t remember when I first got on a horse nor when I learned to swim. That came before my A B C’s. Dad owned cattle ranches on Hawaii and Maui—big ones, for the islands. Hokuna had two hundred thousand acres alone. It extended in between Mauna Koa and Mauna Loa, and it was there I learned to shoot goats and wild cattle. On Molokai they have big spotted deer. Von was the manager of Hokuna. He had two daughters about my own age, and I always spent the hot season there, and, once, a whole year. The three of us

were like Indians. Not that we ran wild, exactly, but that we were wild to run wild. There were always the governesses, you know, and lessons, and sewing, and housekeeping; but I'm afraid we were too often bribed to our tasks with promises of horses or of cattle drives.

"Von had been in the army, and Dad was an old sea-dog, and they were both stern disciplinarians; only the two girls had no mother, and neither had I, and they were two men after all. They spoiled us terribly. You see, they didn't have any wives, and they made chums out of us—when our tasks were done. We had to learn to do everything about the house twice as well as the native servants did it—that was so that we should know how to manage some day. And we always made the cocktails, which was too holy a rite for any servant. Then, too, we were never allowed anything we could not take care of ourselves. Of course the cowboys always roped and saddled our horses, but we had to be able ourselves to go out in the paddock and rope our horses—"

"What do you mean by rope?" Sheldon asked.

"To lariat them, to lasso them. And Dad and Von timed us in the saddling and made a most rigid examination of the result. It was the same way with our revolvers and rifles. The house-boys always cleaned them and greased them; but we had to learn how in order to see that they did it properly. More than once, at first, one or the other of us had our rifles taken away for a week just because of a tiny speck of rust. We had to know how to build fires in the driving rain, too, out of wet wood, when we camped out, which was the hardest thing of all—except grammar, I do believe. We learned more from Dad and Von than from the governesses; Dad taught us French and Von German. We learned both languages passably well, and we learned them wholly in the saddle or in camp.

"In the cool season the girls used to come down and visit me in Hilo, where Dad had two houses, one at the beach, or the three of us used to go down to our place in

Puna, and that meant canoes and boats and fishing and swimming. Then, too, Dad belonged to the Royal Hawaiian Yacht Club, and took us racing and cruising. Dad could never get away from the sea, you know. When I was fourteen I was Dad's actual housekeeper, with entire power over the servants, and I am very proud of that period of my life. And when I was sixteen we three girls were all sent up to California to Mills Seminary, which was quite fashionable and stifling. How we used to long for home! We didn't chum with the other girls, who called us little cannibals, just because we came from the Sandwich Islands, and who made invidious remarks about our ancestors banqueting on Captain Cook—which was historically untrue, and, besides, our ancestors hadn't lived in Hawaii.

"I was three years at Mills Seminary, with trips home, of course, and two years in New York; and then Dad went smash in a sugar plantation on Maui. The report of the engineers had not been right. Then Dad had built a railroad that was called 'Lackland's Folly,'—it will pay ultimately, though. But it contributed to the smash. The Pelaulau Ditch was the finishing blow. And nothing would have happened anyway, if it hadn't been for that big money panic in Wall Street. Dear good Dad! He never let me know. But I read about the crash in a newspaper, and hurried home. It was before that, though, that people had been dinging into my ears that marriage was all any woman could get out of life, and good-bye to romance. Instead of which, with Dad's failure, I fell right into romance."

"How long ago was that?" Sheldon asked.

"Last year—the year of the panic."

"Let me see," Sheldon pondered with an air of gravity. "Sixteen plus five, plus one, equals twenty-two. You were born in 1887?"

"Yes; but it is not nice of you."

"I am really sorry," he said, "but the problem was so obvious."

"Can't you ever say nice things? Or is it the way you English have?" There was a

snap in her gray eyes, and her lips quivered suspiciously for a moment. “I should recommend, Mr. Sheldon, that you read Gertrude Atherton’s ‘American Wives and English Husbands.’”

“Thank you, I have. It’s over there.” He pointed at the generously filled bookshelves. “But I am afraid it is rather partisan.”

“Anything un-English is bound to be,” she retorted. “I never have liked the English anyway. The last one I knew was an overseer. Dad was compelled to discharge him.”

“One swallow doesn’t make a summer.”

“But that Englishman made lots of trouble—there! And now please don’t make me any more absurd than I already am.”

“I’m trying not to.”

“Oh, for that matter—” She tossed her head, opened her mouth to complete the retort, then changed her mind. “I shall go on with my history. Dad had practically nothing left, and he decided to return to the sea. He’d always loved it, and I half believe that he was glad things had happened as they did. He was like a boy again, busy with plans and preparations from morning till night. He used to sit up half the night talking things over with me. That was after I had shown him that I was really resolved to go along.

“He had made his start, you know, in the South Seas—pearls and pearl shell—and he was sure that more fortunes, in trove of one sort and another, were to be picked up. Cocoanut-planting was his particular idea, with trading, and maybe pearling, along with other things, until the plantation should come into bearing. He traded off his yacht for a schooner, the Miélé, and away we went. I took care of him and studied navigation. He was his own skipper. We had a Danish mate, Mr. Ericson, and a mixed crew of Japanese and Hawaiians. We went up and down the Line Islands, first, until Dad was heartsick. Everything was changed. They had been

annexed and divided by one power or another, while big companies had stepped in and gobbled land, trading rights, fishing rights, everything.

“Next we sailed for the Marquesas. They were beautiful, but the natives were nearly extinct. Dad was cut up when he learned that the French charged an export duty on copra—he called it medieval—but he liked the land. There was a valley of fifteen thousand acres on Nuka-hiva, half inclosing a perfect anchorage, which he fell in love with and bought for twelve hundred Chili dollars. But the French taxation was outrageous (that was why the land was so cheap), and, worst of all, we could obtain no labour. What kanakas there were wouldn’t work, and the officials seemed to sit up nights thinking out new obstacles to put in our way.

“Six months was enough for Dad. The situation was hopeless. ‘We’ll go to the Solomons,’ he said, ‘and get a whiff of English rule. And if there are no openings there we’ll go on to the Bismarck Archipelago. I’ll wager the Admiraltys are not yet civilized.’ All preparations were made, things packed on board, and a new crew of Marquesans and Tahitians shipped. We were just ready to start to Tahiti, where a lot of repairs and refitting for the Miélé were necessary, when poor Dad came down sick and died.”

“And you were left all alone?”

Joan nodded.

“Very much alone. I had no brothers nor sisters, and all Dad’s people were drowned in a Kansas cloud-burst. That happened when he was a little boy. Of course, I could go back to Von. There’s always a home there waiting for me. But why should I go? Besides, there were Dad’s plans, and I felt that it devolved upon me to carry them out. It seemed a fine thing to do. Also, I wanted to carry them out. And . . . here I am.

“Take my advice and never go to Tahiti. It is a lovely place, and so are the natives. But the white people! Now Barabbas lived in Tahiti. Thieves, robbers, and

lairs—that is what they are. The honest men wouldn't require the fingers of one hand to count. The fact that I was a woman only simplified matters with them. They robbed me on every pretext, and they lied without pretext or need. Poor Mr. Ericson was corrupted. He joined the robbers, and O.K.'d all their demands even up to a thousand per cent. If they robbed me of ten francs, his share was three. One bill of fifteen hundred francs I paid, netted him five hundred francs. All this, of course, I learned afterward. But the Miélé was old, the repairs had to be made, and I was charged, not three prices, but seven prices.

"I never shall know how much Ericson got out of it. He lived ashore in a nicely furnished house. The shipwrights were giving it to him rent-free. Fruit, vegetables, fish, meat, and ice came to this house every day, and he paid for none of it. It was part of his graft from the various merchants. And all the while, with tears in his eyes, he bemoaned the vile treatment I was receiving from the gang. No, I did not fall among thieves. I went to Tahiti.

"But when the robbers fell to cheating one another, I got my first clues to the state of affairs. One of the robbed robbers came to me after dark, with facts, figures, and assertions. I knew I was ruined if I went to law. The judges were corrupt like everything else. But I did do one thing. In the dead of night I went to Ericson's house. I had the same revolver I've got now, and I made him stay in bed while I overhauled things. Nineteen hundred and odd francs was what I carried away with me. He never complained to the police, and he never came back on board. As for the rest of the gang, they laughed and snapped their fingers at me. There were two Americans in the place, and they warned me to leave the law alone unless I wanted to leave the Miélé behind as well.

"Then I sent to New Zealand and got a German mate. He had a master's certificate, and was on the ship's papers as captain, but I was a better navigator than he, and I was really captain myself. I lost her, too, but it's no reflection on my seamanship.

We were drifting four days outside there in dead calms. Then the nor'wester caught us and drove us on the lee shore. We made sail and tried to clew off, when the rotten work of the Tahiti shipwrights became manifest. Our jib-boom and all our head-stays carried away. Our only chance was to turn and run through the passage between Florida and Ysabel. And when we were safely through, in the twilight, where the chart shows fourteen fathoms as the shoalest water, we smashed on a coral patch. The poor old Miélé struck only once, and then went clear; but it was too much for her, and we just had time to clear away in the boat when she went down. The German mate was drowned. We lay all night to a sea-drag, and next morning sighted your place here."

"I suppose you will go back to Von, now?" Sheldon queried.

"Nothing of the sort. Dad planned to go to the Solomons. I shall look about for some land and start a small plantation. Do you know any good land around here? Cheap?"

"By George, you Yankees are remarkable, really remarkable," said Sheldon. "I should never have dreamed of such a venture."

"Adventure," Joan corrected him.

"That's right—adventure it is. And if you'd gone ashore on Malaita instead of Guadalcanal you'd have been kai-kai'd long ago, along with your noble Tahitian sailors."

Joan shuddered.

"To tell the truth," she confessed, "we were very much afraid to land on Guadalcanal. I read in the 'Sailing Directions' that the natives were treacherous and hostile. Some day I should like to go to Malaita. Are there any plantations there?"

"Not one. Not a white trader even."

"Then I shall go over on a recruiting vessel some time."

"Impossible!" Sheldon cried. "It is no place for a woman."

“I shall go just the same,” she repeated.

“But no self-respecting woman—”

“Be careful,” she warned him. “I shall go some day, and then you may be sorry for the names you have called me.”

CHAPTER VI—TEMPEST

It was the first time Sheldon had been at close quarters with an American girl, and he would have wondered if all American girls were like Joan Lackland had he not had wit enough to realize that she was not at all typical. Her quick mind and changing moods bewildered him, while her outlook on life was so different from what he conceived a woman’s outlook should be, that he was more often than not at sixes and sevens with her. He could never anticipate what she would say or do next. Of only one thing was he sure, and that was that whatever she said or did was bound to be unexpected and unsuspected. There seemed, too, something almost hysterical in her make-up. Her temper was quick and stormy, and she relied too much on herself and too little on him, which did not approximate at all to his ideal of woman’s conduct when a man was around. Her assumption of equality with him was disconcerting, and at times he half-consciously resented the impudence and bizarreness of her intrusion upon him—rising out of the sea in a howling nor’wester, fresh from poking her revolver under Ericson’s nose, protected by her gang of huge Polynesian sailors, and settling down in Berande like any shipwrecked sailor. It was all on a par with her Baden-Powell and the long 38 Colt’s.

At any rate, she did not look the part. And that was what he could not forgive. Had she been short-haired, heavy-jawed, large-muscled, hard-bitten, and utterly unlovely in every way, all would have been well. Instead of which she was hopelessly and deliciously feminine. Her hair worried him, it was so generously beautiful. And she was so slenderly and prettily the woman—the girl, rather—that it cut him like a

knife to see her, with quick, comprehensive eyes and sharply imperative voice, superintend the launching of the whale-boat through the surf. In imagination he could see her roping a horse, and it always made him shudder. Then, too, she was so many-sided. Her knowledge of literature and art surprised him, while deep down was the feeling that a girl who knew such things had no right to know how to rig tackles, heave up anchors, and sail schooners around the South Seas. Such things in her brain were like so many oaths on her lips. While for such a girl to insist that she was going on a recruiting cruise around Malaita was positive self-sacrilege.

He always perturbedly harked back to her femininenеss. She could play the piano far better than his sisters at home, and with far finer appreciation—the piano that poor Hughie had so heroically laboured over to keep in condition. And when she strummed the guitar and sang liquid, velvety Hawaiian hulas, he sat entranced. Then she was all woman, and the magic of sex kidnapped the irritations of the day and made him forget the big revolver, the Baden-Powell, and all the rest. But what right, the next thought in his brain would whisper, had such a girl to swagger around like a man and exult that adventure was not dead? Woman that adventured were adventuresses, and the connotation was not nice. Besides, he was not enamoured of adventure. Not since he was a boy had it appealed to him—though it would have driven him hard to explain what had brought him from England to the Solomons if it had not been adventure.

Sheldon certainly was not happy. The unconventional state of affairs was too much for his conservative disposition and training. Berande, inhabited by one lone white man, was no place for Joan Lackland. Yet he racked his brain for a way out, and even talked it over with her. In the first place, the steamer from Australia was not due for three weeks.

“One thing is evident: you don’t want me here,” she said. “I’ll man the whale-boat to-morrow and go over to Tulagi.”

“But as I told you before, that is impossible,” he cried. “There is no one there. The Resident Commissioner is away in Australia. Them is only one white man, a third assistant understrapper and ex-sailor—a common sailor. He is in charge of the government of the Solomons, to say nothing of a hundred or so niggers—prisoners. Besides, he is such a fool that he would fine you five pounds for not having entered at Tulagi, which is the port of entry, you know. He is not a nice man, and, I repeat, it is impossible.”

“There is Guvutu,” she suggested.

He shook his head.

“There’s nothing there but fever and five white men who are drinking themselves to death. I couldn’t permit it.”

“Oh thank you,” she said quietly. “I guess I’ll start to-day.—Viaburi! You go along Noa Noah, speak ’m come along me.”

Noa Noah was her head sailor, who had been boatswain of the Miélé.

“Where are you going?” Sheldon asked in surprise.—“Vlaburi! You stop.”

“To Guvutu—immediately,” was her reply.

“But I won’t permit it.”

“That is why I am going. You said it once before, and it is something I cannot brook.”

“What?” He was bewildered by her sudden anger. “If I have offended in any way—”

“Viaburi, you fetch ’m one fella Noa Noah along me,” she commanded.

The black boy started to obey.

“Viaburi! You no stop I break ’m head belong you. And now, Miss Lackland, I insist—you must explain. What have I said or done to merit this?”

“You have presumed, you have dared—”

She choked and swallowed, and could not go on.

Sheldon looked the picture of despair.

“I confess my head is going around with it all,” he said. “If you could only be explicit.”

“As explicit as you were when you told me that you would not permit me to go to Guvutu?”

“But what’s wrong with that?”

“But you have no right—no man has the right—to tell me what he will permit or not permit. I’m too old to have a guardian, nor did I sail all the way to the Solomons to find one.”

“A gentleman is every woman’s guardian.”

“Well, I’m not every woman—that’s all. Will you kindly allow me to send your boy for Noa Noah? I wish him to launch the whale-boat. Or shall I go myself for him?”

Both were now on their feet, she with flushed cheeks and angry eyes, he, puzzled, vexed, and alarmed. The black boy stood like a statue—a plum-black statue—taking no interest in the transactions of these incomprehensible whites, but dreaming with calm eyes of a certain bush village high on the jungle slopes of Malaita, with blue smoke curling up from the grass houses against the gray background of an oncoming mountain-squall.

“But you won’t do anything so foolish—” he began.

“There you go again,” she cried.

“I didn’t mean it that way, and you know I didn’t.” He was speaking slowly and gravely. “And that other thing, that not permitting—it is only a manner of speaking. Of course I am not your guardian. You know you can go to Guvutu if you want to”—“or to the devil,” he was almost tempted to add. “Only, I should deeply regret it, that is all. And I am very sorry that I should have said anything that hurt you.

Remember, I am an Englishman."

Joan smiled and sat down again.

"Perhaps I have been hasty," she admitted. "You see, I am intolerant of restraint. If you only knew how I have been compelled to fight for my freedom. It is a sore point with me, this being told what I am to do or not do by you self-constituted lords of creation.-Viaburi I You stop along kitchen. No bring 'm Noa Noah.—And now, Mr. Sheldon, what am I to do? You don't want me here, and there doesn't seem to be any place for me to go."

"That is unfair. Your being wrecked here has been a godsend to me. I was very lonely and very sick. I really am not certain whether or not I should have pulled through had you not happened along. But that is not the point. Personally, purely selfishly personally, I should be sorry to see you go. But I am not considering myself. I am considering you. It—it is hardly the proper thing, you know. If I were married—if there were some woman of your own race here—but as it is—"

She threw up her hands in mock despair.

"I cannot follow you," she said. "In one breath you tell me I must go, and in the next breath you tell me there is no place to go and that you will not permit me to go. What is a poor girl to do?"

"That's the trouble," he said helplessly.

"And the situation annoys you."

"Only for your sake."

"Then let me save your feelings by telling you that it does not annoy me at all—except for the row you are making about it. I never allow what can't be changed to annoy me. There is no use in fighting the inevitable. Here is the situation. You are here. I am here. I can't go elsewhere, by your own account. You certainly can't go elsewhere and leave me here alone with a whole plantation and two

hundred woolly cannibals on my hands. Therefore you stay, and I stay. It is very simple. Also, it is adventure. And furthermore, you needn't worry for yourself. I am not matrimonially inclined. I came to the Solomons for a plantation, not a husband."

Sheldon flushed, but remained silent.

"I know what you are thinking," she laughed gaily. "That if I were a man you'd wring my neck for me. And I deserve it, too. I'm so sorry. I ought not to keep on hurting your feelings."

"I'm afraid I rather invite it," he said, relieved by the signs of the tempest subsiding.

"I have it," she announced. "Lend me a gang of your boys for to-day. I'll build a grass house for myself over in the far corner of the compound—on piles, of course. I can move in to-night. I'll be comfortable and safe. The Tahitians can keep an anchor watch just as aboard ship. And then I'll study cocoanut planting. In return, I'll run the kitchen end of your household and give you some decent food to eat. And finally, I won't listen to any of your protests. I know all that you are going to say and offer—your giving the bungalow up to me and building a grass house for yourself. And I won't have it. You may as well consider everything settled. On the other hand, if you don't agree, I will go across the river, beyond your jurisdiction, and build a village for myself and my sailors, whom I shall send in the whale-boat to Guvutu for provisions. And now I want you to teach me billiards."

CHAPTER VII—A HARD-BITTEN GANG

Joan took hold of the household with no uncertain grip, revolutionizing things till Sheldon hardly recognized the place. For the first time the bungalow was clean and orderly. No longer the house-boys loafed and did as little as they could; while the cook complained that "head belong him walk about too much," from the strenuous course in cookery which she put him through. Nor did Sheldon escape being roundly lectured for his laziness in eating nothing but tinned provisions. She called him a

muddler and a slouch, and other invidious names, for his slackness and his disregard of healthful food.

She sent her whale-boat down the coast twenty miles for limes and oranges, and wanted to know scathingly why said fruits had not long since been planted at Berande, while he was beneath contempt because there was no kitchen garden. Mummy apples, which he had regarded as weeds, under her guidance appeared as appetizing breakfast fruit, and, at dinner, were metamorphosed into puddings that elicited his unqualified admiration. Bananas, foraged from the bush, were served, cooked and raw, a dozen different ways, each one of which he declared was better than any other. She or her sailors dynamited fish daily, while the Balesuna natives were paid tobacco for bringing in oysters from the mangrove swamps. Her achievements with cocoanuts were a revelation. She taught the cook how to make yeast from the milk, that, in turn, raised light and airy bread. From the tip-top heart of the tree she concocted a delicious salad. From the milk and the meat of the nut she made various sauces and dressings, sweet and sour, that were served, according to preparation, with dishes that ranged from fish to pudding. She taught Sheldon the superiority of cocoanut cream over condensed cream, for use in coffee. From the old and sprouting nuts she took the solid, spongy centres and turned them into salads. Her forte seemed to be salads, and she astonished him with the deliciousness of a salad made from young bamboo shoots. Wild tomatoes, which had gone to seed or been remorselessly hoed out from the beginning of Berande, were foraged for salads, soups, and sauces. The chickens, which had always gone into the bush and hidden their eggs, were given laying-bins, and Joan went out herself to shoot wild duck and wild pigeons for the table.

“Not that I like to do this sort of work,” she explained, in reference to the cookery; “but because I can’t get away from Dad’s training.”

Among other things, she burned the pestilential hospital, quarrelled with Sheldon

over the dead, and, in anger, set her own men to work building a new, and what she called a decent, hospital. She robbed the windows of their lawn and muslin curtains, replacing them with gaudy calico from the trade-store, and made herself several gowns. When she wrote out a list of goods and clothing for herself, to be sent down to Sydney by the first steamer, Sheldon wondered how long she had made up her mind to stay.

She was certainly unlike any woman he had ever known or dreamed of. So far as he was concerned she was not a woman at all. She neither languished nor blandished. No feminine lures were wasted on him. He might have been her brother, or she his brother, for all sex had to do with the strange situation. Any mere polite gallantry on his part was ignored or snubbed, and he had very early given up offering his hand to her in getting into a boat or climbing over a log, and he had to acknowledge to himself that she was eminently fitted to take care of herself. Despite his warnings about crocodiles and sharks, she persisted in swimming in deep water off the beach; nor could he persuade her, when she was in the boat, to let one of the sailors throw the dynamite when shooting fish. She argued that she was at least a little bit more intelligent than they, and that, therefore, there was less liability of an accident if she did the shooting. She was to him the most masculine and at the same time the most feminine woman he had ever met.

A source of continual trouble between them was the disagreement over methods of handling the black boys. She ruled by stern kindness, rarely rewarding, never punishing, and he had to confess that her own sailors worshipped her, while the house-boys were her slaves, and did three times as much work for her as he had ever got out of them. She quickly saw the unrest of the contract labourers, and was not blind to the danger, always imminent, that both she and Sheldon ran. Neither of them ever ventured out without a revolver, and the sailors who stood the night watches by Joan’s grass house were armed with rifles. But Joan insisted that this reign of terror had been caused by the reign of fear practised by the white men. She

had been brought up with the gentle Hawaiians, who never were ill-treated nor roughly handled, and she generalized that the Solomon Islanders, under kind treatment, would grow gentle.

One evening a terrific uproar arose in the barracks, and Sheldon, aided by Joan's sailors, succeeded in rescuing two women whom the blacks were beating to death. To save them from the vengeance of the blacks, they were guarded in the cook-house for the night. They were the two women who did the cooking for the labourers, and their offence had consisted of one of them taking a bath in the big cauldron in which the potatoes were boiled. The blacks were not outraged from the standpoint of cleanliness; they often took baths in the cauldrons themselves. The trouble lay in that the bather had been a low, degraded, wretched female; for to the Solomon Islander all females are low, degraded, and wretched.

Next morning, Joan and Sheldon, at breakfast, were aroused by a swelling murmur of angry voices. The first rule of Berande had been broken. The compound had been entered without permission or command, and all the two hundred labourers, with the exception of the boss-boys, were guilty of the offence. They crowded up, threatening and shouting, close under the front veranda. Sheldon leaned over the veranda railing, looking down upon them, while Joan stood slightly back. When the uproar was stilled, two brothers stood forth. They were large men, splendidly muscled, and with faces unusually ferocious, even for Solomon Islanders. One was Carin-Jama, otherwise The Silent; and the other was Bellin-Jama, The Boaster. Both had served on the Queensland plantations in the old days, and they were known as evil characters wherever white men met and gammed.

"We fella boy we want 'm them dam two black fella Mary," said Bellin-Jama.

"What you do along black fella Mary?" Sheldon asked.

"Kill 'm," said Bellin-Jama.

"What name you fella boy talk along me?" Sheldon demanded, with a show of rising

anger. “Big bell he ring. You no belong along here. You belong along field. Bime by, big fella bell he ring, you stop along kai-kai, you come talk along me about two fella Mary. Now all you boy get along out of here.”

The gang waited to see what Bellin-Jama would do, and Bellin-Jama stood still.

“Me no go,” he said.

“You watch out, Bellin-Jama,” Sheldon said sharply, “or I send you along Tulagi one big fella lashing. My word, you catch ’m strong fella.”

Bellin-Jama glared up belligerently.

“You want ’m fight,” he said, putting up his fists in approved, returned-Queenslander style.

Now, in the Solomons, where whites are few and blacks are many, and where the whites do the ruling, such an offer to fight is the deadliest insult. Blacks are not supposed to dare so highly as to offer to fight a white man. At the best, all they can look for is to be beaten by the white man.

A murmur of admiration at Bellin-Jama’s bravery went up from the listening blacks. But Bellin-Jama’s voice was still ringing in the air, and the murmuring was just beginning, when Sheldon cleared the rail, leaping straight downward. From the top of the railing to the ground it was fifteen feet, and Bellin-Jama was directly beneath. Sheldon’s flying body struck him and crushed him to earth. No blows were needed to be struck. The black had been knocked helpless. Joan, startled by the unexpected leap, saw Carin-Jama, The Silent, reach out and seize Sheldon by the throat as he was half-way to his feet, while the five-score blacks surged forward for the killing. Her revolver was out, and Carin-Jama let go his grip, reeling backward with a bullet in his shoulder. In that fleeting instant of action she had thought to shoot him in the arm, which, at that short distance, might reasonably have been achieved. But the wave of savages leaping forward had changed her shot to the shoulder. It was a moment when not the slightest chance could be taken.

The instant his throat was released, Sheldon struck out with his fist, and Carin-Jama joined his brother on the ground. The mutiny was quelled, and five minutes more saw the brothers being carried to the hospital, and the mutineers, marshalled by the gang-bosses, on the way to the fields.

When Sheldon came up on the veranda, he found Joan collapsed on the steamer-chair and in tears. The sight unnerved him as the row just over could not possibly have done. A woman in tears was to him an embarrassing situation; and when that woman was Joan Lackland, from whom he had grown to expect anything unexpected, he was really frightened. He glanced down at her helplessly, and moistened his lips.

“I want to thank you,” he began. “There isn’t a doubt but what you saved my life, and I must say—”

She abruptly removed her hands, showing a wrathful and tear-stained face.

“You brute! You coward!” she cried. “You have made me shoot a man, and I never shot a man in my life before.”

“It’s only a flesh-wound, and he isn’t going to die,” Sheldon managed to interpolate.

“What of that? I shot him just the same. There was no need for you to jump down there that way. It was brutal and cowardly.”

“Oh, now I say—” he began soothingly.

“Go away. Don’t you see I hate you! hate you! Oh, won’t you go away!”

Sheldon was white with anger.

“Then why in the name of common sense did you shoot?” he demanded.

“Be-be-because you were a white man,” she sobbed. “And Dad would never have left any white man in the lurch. But it was your fault. You had no right to get yourself in such a position. Besides, it wasn’t necessary.”

“I am afraid I don’t understand,” he said shortly, turning away. “We will talk it over

later on."

"Look how I get on with the boys," she said, while he paused in the doorway, stiffly polite, to listen. "There's those two sick boys I am nursing. They will do anything for me when they get well, and I won't have to keep them in fear of their life all the time. It is not necessary, I tell you, all this harshness and brutality. What if they are cannibals? They are human beings, just like you and me, and they are amenable to reason. That is what distinguishes all of us from the lower animals."

He nodded and went out.

"I suppose I've been unforgivably foolish," was her greeting, when he returned several hours later from a round of the plantation. "I've been to the hospital, and the man is getting along all right. It is not a serious hurt."

Sheldon felt unaccountably pleased and happy at the changed aspect of her mood.

"You see, you don't understand the situation," he began. "In the first place, the blacks have to be ruled sternly. Kindness is all very well, but you can't rule them by kindness only. I accept all that you say about the Hawaiians and the Tahitians. You say that they can be handled that way, and I believe you. I have had no experience with them. But you have had no experience with the blacks, and I ask you to believe me. They are different from your natives. You are used to Polynesians. These boys are Melanesians. They're blacks. They're niggers—look at their kinky hair. And they're a whole lot lower than the African niggers. Really, you know, there is a vast difference."

"They possess no gratitude, no sympathy, no kindliness. If you are kind to them, they think you are a fool. If you are gentle with them they think you are afraid. And when they think you are afraid, watch out, for they will get you. Just to show you, let me state the one invariable process in a black man's brain when, on his native heath, he encounters a stranger. His first thought is one of fear. Will the stranger kill him? His next thought, seeing that he is not killed, is: Can he kill the stranger? There

was Packard, a Colonial trader, some twelve miles down the coast. He boasted that he ruled by kindness and never struck a blow. The result was that he did not rule at all. He used to come down in his whale-boat to visit Hughie and me. When his boat's crew decided to go home, he had to cut his visit short to accompany them. I remember one Sunday afternoon when Packard had accepted our invitation to stop to dinner. The soup was just served, when Hughie saw a nigger peering in through the door. He went out to him, for it was a violation of Berande custom. Any nigger has to send in word by the house-boys, and to keep outside the compound. This man, who was one of Packard's boat's-crew, was on the veranda. And he knew better, too. 'What name?' said Hughie. 'You tell 'm white man close up we fella boat's-crew go along. He no come now, we fella boy no wait. We go.' And just then Hughie fetched him a clout that knocked him clean down the stairs and off the veranda."

"But it was needlessly cruel," Joan objected. "You wouldn't treat a white man that way."

"And that's just the point. He wasn't a white man. He was a low black nigger, and he was deliberately insulting, not alone his own white master, but every white master in the Solomons. He insulted me. He insulted Hughie. He insulted Berande."

"Of course, according to your lights, to your formula of the rule of the strong—"

"Yes," Sheldon interrupted, "but it was according to the formula of the rule of the weak that Packard ruled. And what was the result? I am still alive. Packard is dead. He was unswervingly kind and gentle to his boys, and his boys waited till one day he was down with fever. His head is over on Malaita now. They carried away two whale-boats as well, filled with the loot of the store. Then there was Captain Mackenzie of the ketch Minota. He believed in kindness. He also contended that better confidence was established by carrying no weapons. On his second trip to Malaita, recruiting, he ran into Bina, which is near Langa Langa. The rifles with

which the boat's-crew should have been armed, were locked up in his cabin. When the whale-boat went ashore after recruits, he paraded around the deck without even a revolver on him. He was tomahawked. His head remains in Malaita. It was suicide. So was Packard's finish suicide."

"I grant that precaution is necessary in dealing with them," Joan agreed; "but I believe that more satisfactory results can be obtained by treating them with discreet kindness and gentleness."

"And there I agree with you, but you must understand one thing. Berande, bar none, is by far the worst plantation in the Solomons so far as the labour is concerned. And how it came to be so proves your point. The previous owners of Berande were not discreetly kind. They were a pair of unadulterated brutes. One was a down-east Yankee, as I believe they are called, and the other was a guzzling German. They were slave-drivers. To begin with, they bought their labour from Johnny Be-blowed, the most notorious recruiter in the Solomons. He is working out a ten years' sentence in Fiji now, for the wanton killing of a black boy. During his last days here he had made himself so obnoxious that the natives on Malaita would have nothing to do with him. The only way he could get recruits was by hurrying to the spot whenever a murder or series of murders occurred. The murderers were usually only too willing to sign on and get away to escape vengeance. Down here they call such escapes, 'pier-head jumps.' There is suddenly a roar from the beach, and a nigger runs down to the water pursued by clouds of spears and arrows. Of course, Johnny Be-blowed's whale-boat is lying ready to pick him up. In his last days Johnny got nothing but pier-head jumps.

"And the first owners of Berande bought his recruits—a hard-bitten gang of murderers. They were all five-year boys. You see, the recruiter has the advantage over a boy when he makes a pier-head jump. He could sign him on for ten years did the law permit. Well, that's the gang of murderers we've got on our hands now. Of

course some are dead, some have been killed, and there are others serving sentences at Tulagi. Very little clearing did those first owners do, and less planting. It was war all the time. They had one manager killed. One of the partners had his shoulder slashed nearly off by a cane-knife. The other was speared on two different occasions. Both were bullies, wherefore there was a streak of cowardice in them, and in the end they had to give up. They were chased away—literally chased away—by their own niggers. And along came poor Hughie and me, two new chums, to take hold of that hard-bitten gang. We did not know the situation, and we had bought Berande, and there was nothing to do but hang on and muddle through somehow.

“At first we made the mistake of indiscreet kindness. We tried to rule by persuasion and fair treatment. The niggers concluded that we were afraid. I blush to think of what fools we were in those first days. We were imposed on, and threatened and insulted; and we put up with it, hoping our square-dealing would soon mend things. Instead of which everything went from bad to worse. Then came the day when Hughie reprimanded one of the boys and was nearly killed by the gang. The only thing that saved him was the number on top of him, which enabled me to reach the spot in time.

“Then began the rule of the strong hand. It was either that or quit, and we had sunk about all our money into the venture, and we could not quit. And besides, our pride was involved. We had started out to do something, and we were so made that we just had to go on with it. It has been a hard fight, for we were, and are to this day, considered the worst plantation in the Solomons from the standpoint of labour. Do you know, we have been unable to get white men in. We’ve offered the managership to half a dozen. I won’t say they were afraid, for they were not. But they did not consider it healthy—at least that is the way it was put by the last one who declined our offer. So Hughie and I did the managing ourselves.”

“And when he died you were prepared to go on all alone!” Joan cried, with shining eyes.

“I thought I’d muddle through. And now, Miss Lackland, please be charitable when I seem harsh, and remember that the situation is unparalleled down here. We’ve got a bad crowd, and we’re making them work. You’ve been over the plantation and you ought to know. And I assure you that there are no better three-and-four-years-old trees on any other plantation in the Solomons. We have worked steadily to change matters for the better. We’ve been slowly getting in new labour. That is why we bought the Jessie. We wanted to select our own labour. In another year the time will be up for most of the original gang. You see, they were recruited during the first year of Berande, and their contracts expire on different months. Naturally, they have contaminated the new boys to a certain extent; but that can soon be remedied, and then Berande will be a respectable plantation.”

Joan nodded but remained silent. She was too occupied in glimpsing the vision of the one lone white man as she had first seen him, helpless from fever, a collapsed wraith in a steamer-chair, who, up to the last heart-beat, by some strange alchemy of race, was pledged to mastery.

“It is a pity,” she said. “But the white man has to rule, I suppose.”

“I don’t like it,” Sheldon assured her. “To save my life I can’t imagine how I ever came here. But here I am, and I can’t run away.”

“Blind destiny of race,” she said, faintly smiling. “We whites have been land robbers and sea robbers from remotest time. It is in our blood, I guess, and we can’t get away from it.”

“I never thought about it so abstractly,” he confessed. “I’ve been too busy puzzling over why I came here.”

CHAPTER VIII—LOCAL COLOUR

At sunset a small ketch fanned in to anchorage, and a little later the skipper came ashore. He was a soft-spoken, gentle-voiced young fellow of twenty, but he won Joan's admiration in advance when Sheldon told her that he ran the ketch all alone with a black crew from Malaita. And Romance lured and beckoned before Joan's eyes when she learned he was Christian Young, a Norfolk Islander, but a direct descendant of John Young, one of the original Bounty mutineers. The blended Tahitian and English blood showed in his soft eyes and tawny skin; but the English hardness seemed to have disappeared. Yet the hardness was there, and it was what enabled him to run his ketch single-handed and to wring a livelihood out of the fighting Solomons.

Joan's unexpected presence embarrassed him, until she herself put him at his ease by a frank, comradely manner that offended Sheldon's sense of the fitness of things feminine. News from the world Young had not, but he was filled with news of the Solomons. Fifteen boys had stolen rifles and run away into the bush from Lunga plantation, which was farther east on the Guadalcanal coast. And from the bush they had sent word that they were coming back to wipe out the three white men in charge, while two of the three white men, in turn, were hunting them through the bush. There was a strong possibility, Young volunteered, that if they were not caught they might circle around and tap the coast at Berande in order to steal or capture a whale-boat.

"I forgot to tell you that your trader at Ugi has been murdered," he said to Sheldon. "Five big canoes came down from Port Adams. They landed in the night-time, and caught Oscar asleep. What they didn't steal they burned. The Flibberty-Gibbet got the news at Mboli Pass, and ran down to Ugi. I was at Mboli when the news came."

"I think I'll have to abandon Ugi," Sheldon remarked.

"It's the second trader you've lost there in a year," Young concurred. "To make it safe there ought to be two white men at least. Those Malaita canoes are always

raiding down that way, and you know what that Port Adams lot is. I've got a dog for you. Tommy Jones sent it up from Neal Island. He said he'd promised it to you. It's a first-class nigger-chaser. Hadn't been on board two minutes when he had my whole boat's-crew in the rigging. Tommy calls him Satan."

"I've wondered several times why you had no dogs here," Joan said.

"The trouble is to keep them. They're always eaten by the crocodiles."

"Jack Hanley was killed at Marovo Lagoon two months ago," Young announced in his mild voice. "The news just came down on the Apostle."

"Where is Marovo Lagoon?" Joan asked.

"New Georgia, a couple of hundred miles to the westward," Sheldon answered. "Bougainville lies just beyond."

"His own house-boys did it," Young went on; "but they were put up to it by the Marovo natives. His Santa Cruz boat's-crew escaped in the whale-boat to Choiseul, and Mather, in the Lily, sailed over to Marovo. He burned a village, and got Hanley's head back. He found it in one of the houses, where the niggers had it drying. And that's all the news I've got, except that there's a lot of new Lee-Enfields loose on the eastern end of Ysabel. Nobody knows how the natives got them. The government ought to investigate. And—oh yes, a war vessel's in the group, the Cambrian. She burned three villages at Bina—on account of the Minota, you know—and shelled the bush. Then she went to Sio to straighten out things there."

The conversation became general, and just before Young left to go on board Joan asked,—

"How can you manage all alone, Mr. Young?"

His large, almost girlish eyes rested on her for a moment before he replied, and then it was in the softest and gentlest of voices.

"Oh, I get along pretty well with them. Of course, there is a bit of trouble once in a

while, but that must be expected. You must never let them think you are afraid. I've been afraid plenty of times, but they never knew it."

"You would think he wouldn't strike a mosquito that was biting him," Sheldon said when Young had gone on board. "All the Norfolk Islanders that have descended from the Bounty crowd are that way. But look at Young. Only three years ago, when he first got the Minerva, he was lying in Suu, on Malaita. There are a lot of returned Queenslanders there—a rough crowd. They planned to get his head. The son of their chief, old One-Eyed Billy, had recruited on Lunga and died of dysentery. That meant that a white man's head was owing to Suu—any white man, it didn't matter who so long as they got the head. And Young was only a lad, and they made sure to get his easily. They decoyed his whale-boat ashore with a promise of recruits, and killed all hands. At the same instant, the Suu gang that was on board the Minerva jumped Young. He was just preparing a dynamite stick for fish, and he lighted it and tossed it in amongst them. One can't get him to talk about it, but the fuse was short, the survivors leaped overboard, while he slipped his anchor and got away. They've got one hundred fathoms of shell money on his head now, which is worth one hundred pounds sterling. Yet he goes into Suu regularly. He was there a short time ago, returning thirty boys from Cape Marsh—that's the Fulcrum Brothers' plantation."

"At any rate, his news to-night has given me a better insight into the life down here," Joan said. "And it is colourful life, to say the least. The Solomons ought to be printed red on the charts—and yellow, too, for the diseases."

"The Solomons are not always like this," Sheldon answered. "Of course, Berande is the worst plantation, and everything it gets is the worst. I doubt if ever there was a worse run of sickness than we were just getting over when you arrived. Just as luck would have it, the Jessie caught the contagion as well. Berande has been very unfortunate. All the old-timers shake their heads at it. They say it has what you

Americans call a hoodoo on it."

"Berande will succeed," Joan said stoutly. "I like to laugh at superstition. You'll pull through and come out the big end of the horn. The ill luck can't last for ever. I am afraid, though, the Solomons is not a white man's climate."

"It will be, though. Give us fifty years, and when all the bush is cleared off back to the mountains, fever will be stamped out; everything will be far healthier. There will be cities and towns here, for there's an immense amount of good land going to waste."

"But it will never become a white man's climate, in spite of all that," Joan reiterated. "The white man will always be unable to perform the manual labour."

"That is true."

"It will mean slavery," she dashed on.

"Yes, like all the tropics. The black, the brown, and the yellow will have to do the work, managed by the white men. The black labour is too wasteful, however, and in time Chinese or Indian coolies will be imported. The planters are already considering the matter. I, for one, am heartily sick of black labour."

"Then the blacks will die off?"

Sheldon shrugged his shoulders, and retorted,—

"Yes, like the North American Indian, who was a far nobler type than the Melanesian. The world is only so large, you know, and it is filling up—"

"And the unfit must perish?"

"Precisely so. The unfit must perish."

In the morning Joan was roused by a great row and hullabaloo. Her first act was to reach for her revolver, but when she heard Noa Noah, who was on guard, laughing outside, she knew there was no danger, and went out to see the fun. Captain Young had landed Satan at the moment when the bridge-building gang had started along the

beach. Satan was big and black, short-haired and muscular, and weighed fully seventy pounds. He did not love the blacks. Tommy Jones had trained him well, tying him up daily for several hours and telling off one or two black boys at a time to tease him. So Satan had it in for the whole black race, and the second after he landed on the beach the bridge-building gang was stampeding over the compound fence and swarming up the cocoanut palms.

“Good morning,” Sheldon called from the veranda. “And what do you think of the nigger-chaser?”

“I’m thinking we have a task before us to train him in to the house-boys,” she called back.

“And to your Tahitians, too. Look out, Noah! Run for it!”

Satan, having satisfied himself that the tree-perches were unassailable, was charging straight for the big Tahitian.

But Noah stood his ground, though somewhat irresolutely, and Satan, to every one’s surprise, danced and frisked about him with laughing eyes and wagging tail.

“Now, that is what I might call a proper dog,” was Joan’s comment. “He is at least wiser than you, Mr. Sheldon. He didn’t require any teaching to recognize the difference between a Tahitian and a black boy. What do you think, Noah? Why don’t he bite you? He savvee you Tahitian eh?”

Noa Noah shook his head and grinned.

“He no savvee me Tahitian,” he explained. “He savvee me wear pants all the same white man.”

“You’ll have to give him a course in ‘Sartor Resartus,’” Sheldon laughed, as he came down and began to make friends with Satan.

It chanced just then that Adamu Adam and Matauare, two of Joan’s sailors, entered the compound from the far side-gate. They had been down to the Balesuna making

an alligator trap, and, instead of trousers, were clad in lava-lavas that flapped gracefully about their stalwart limbs. Satan saw them, and advertised his find by breaking away from Sheldon's hands and charging.

"No got pants," Noah announced with a grin that broadened as Adamu Adam took to flight.

He climbed up the platform that supported the galvanized iron tanks which held the water collected from the roof. Foiled here, Satan turned and charged back on Matauare.

"Run, Matauare! Run!" Joan called.

But he held his ground and waited the dog.

"He is the Fearless One—that is what his name means," Joan explained to Sheldon.

The Tahitian watched Satan coolly, and when that sanguine-mouthed creature lifted into the air in the final leap, the man's hand shot out. It was a fair grip on the lower jaw, and Satan described a half circle and was flung to the rear, turning over in the air and falling heavily on his back. Three times he leaped, and three times that grip on his jaw flung him to defeat. Then he contented himself with trotting at Matauare's heels, eyeing him and sniffing him suspiciously.

"It's all right, Satan; it's all right," Sheldon assured him. "That good fella belong along me."

But Satan dogged the Tahitian's movements for a full hour before he made up his mind that the man was an appurtenance of the place. Then he turned his attention to the three house-boys, cornering Ornfiri in the kitchen and rushing him against the hot stove, stripping the lava-lava from Lalaperu when that excited youth climbed a veranda-post, and following Viaburi on top the billiard-table, where the battle raged until Joan managed a rescue.

CHAPTER IX—AS BETWEEN A MAN AND A WOMAN

It was Satan's inexhaustible energy and good spirits that most impressed them. His teeth seemed perpetually to ache with desire, and in lieu of black legs he husked the cocoanuts that fell from the trees in the compound, kept the enclosure clear of intruding hens, and made a hostile acquaintance with every boss-boy who came to report. He was unable to forget the torment of his puppyhood, wherein everlasting hatred of the black had been woven into the fibres of consciousness; and such a terror did he make himself that Sheldon was forced to shut him up in the living room when, for any reason, strange natives were permitted in the compound. This always hurt Satan's feelings and fanned his wrath, so that even the house-boys had to watch out for him when he was first released.

Christian Young sailed away in the Minerva, carrying an invitation (that would be delivered nobody knew when) to Tommy Jones to drop in at Berande the next time he was passing.

"What are your plans when you get to Sydney?" Sheldon asked, that night, at dinner.

"First I've heard that I'm going to Sydney," Joan retorted. "I suppose you've received information, by bush-telegraph, that that third assistant understrapper and ex-sailorman at Tulagi is going to deport me as an undesirable immigrant."

"Oh, no, nothing of the sort, I assure you," Sheldon began with awkward haste, fearful of having offended, though he knew not how. "I was just wondering, that was all. You see, with the loss of the schooner and . . and all the rest . . . you understand . . I was thinking that if—a—if—hang it all, until you could communicate with your friends, my agents at Sydney could advance you a loan, temporary you see, why I'd be only too glad and all the rest, you know. The proper—"

But his jaw dropped and he regarded her irritably and with apprehension.

"What is the matter?" he demanded, with a show of heat. "What have I done now?"

Joan's eyes were bright with battle, the curve of her lips sharp with mockery.

"Certainly not the unexpected," she said quietly. "Merely ignored me in your ordinary, every-day, man-god, superior fashion. Naturally it counted for nothing, my telling you that I had no idea of going to Sydney. Go to Sydney I must, because you, in your superior wisdom, have so decreed."

She paused and looked at him curiously, as though he were some strange breed of animal.

"Of course I am grateful for your offer of assistance; but even that is no salve to wounded pride. For that matter, it is no more than one white man should expect from another. Shipwrecked mariners are always helped along their way. Only this particular mariner doesn't need any help. Furthermore, this mariner is not going to Sydney, thank you."

"But what do you intend to do?"

"Find some spot where I shall escape the indignity of being patronized and bossed by the superior sex."

"Come now, that is putting it a bit too strongly." Sheldon laughed, but the strain in his voice destroyed the effect of spontaneity. "You know yourself how impossible the situation is."

"I know nothing of the sort, sir. And if it is impossible, well, haven't I achieved it?"

"But it cannot continue. Really—"

"Oh, yes, it can. Having achieved it, I can go on achieving it. I intend to remain in the Solomons, but not on Berande. To-morrow I am going to take the whale-boat over to Pari-Sulay. I was talking with Captain Young about it. He says there are at least four hundred acres, and every foot of it good for planting. Being an island, he says I won't have to bother about wild pigs destroying the young trees. All I'll have

to do is to keep the weeds hoed until the trees come into bearing. First, I'll buy the island; next, get forty or fifty recruits and start clearing and planting; and at the same time I'll run up a bungalow; and then you'll be relieved of my embarrassing presence—now don't say that it isn't."

"It is embarrassing," he said bluntly. "But you refuse to see my point of view, so there is no use in discussing it. Now please forget all about it, and consider me at your service concerning this . . . this project of yours. I know more about cocoanut-planting than you do. You speak like a capitalist. I don't know how much money you have, but I don't fancy you are rolling in wealth, as you Americans say. But I do know what it costs to clear land. Suppose the government sells you Pari-Sulay at a pound an acre; clearing will cost you at least four pounds more; that is, five pounds for four hundred acres, or, say, ten thousand dollars. Have you that much?"

She was keenly interested, and he could see that the previous clash between them was already forgotten. Her disappointment was plain as she confessed:

"No; I haven't quite eight thousand dollars."

"Then here's another way of looking at it. You'll need, as you said, at least fifty boys. Not counting premiums, their wages are thirty dollars a year."

"I pay my Tahitians fifteen a month," she interpolated.

"They won't do on straight plantation work. But to return. The wages of fifty boys each year will come to three hundred pounds—that is, fifteen hundred dollars. Very well. It will be seven years before your trees begin to bear. Seven times fifteen hundred is ten thousand five hundred dollars—more than you possess, and all eaten up by the boys' wages, with nothing to pay for bungalow, building, tools, quinine, trips to Sydney, and so forth."

Sheldon shook his head gravely. "You'll have to abandon the idea."

"But I won't go to Sydney," she cried. "I simply won't. I'll buy in to the extent of

my money as a small partner in some other plantation. Let me buy in in Berande!”

“Heaven forbid!” he cried in such genuine dismay that she broke into hearty laughter.

“There, I won’t tease you. Really, you know, I’m not accustomed to forcing my presence where it is not desired. Yes, yes; I know you’re just aching to point out that I’ve forced myself upon you ever since I landed, only you are too polite to say so. Yet as you said yourself, it was impossible for me to go away, so I had to stay. You wouldn’t let me go to Tulagi. You compelled me to force myself upon you. But I won’t buy in as partner with any one. I’ll buy Pari-Sulay, but I’ll put only ten boys on it and clear slowly. Also, I’ll invest in some old ketch and take out a trading license. For that matter, I’ll go recruiting on Malaita.”

She looked for protest, and found it in Sheldon’s clenched hand and in every line of his clean-cut face.

“Go ahead and say it,” she challenged. “Please don’t mind me. I’m—I’m getting used to it, you know. Really I am.”

“I wish I were a woman so as to tell you how preposterously insane and impossible it is,” he blurted out.

She surveyed him with deliberation, and said:

“Better than that, you are a man. So there is nothing to prevent your telling me, for I demand to be considered as a man. I didn’t come down here to trail my woman’s skirts over the Solomons. Please forget that I am accidentally anything else than a man with a man’s living to make.”

Inwardly Sheldon fumed and fretted. Was she making game of him? Or did there lurk in her the insidious unhealthfulness of unwomanliness? Or was it merely a case of blank, staring, sentimental, idiotic innocence?

“I have told you,” he began stiffly, “that recruiting on Malaita is impossible for a

woman, and that is all I care to say—or dare."

"And I tell you, in turn, that it is nothing of the sort. I've sailed the Miélé here, master, if you please, all the way from Tahiti—even if I did lose her, which was the fault of your Admiralty charts. I am a navigator, and that is more than your Solomons captains are. Captain Young told me all about it. And I am a seaman—a better seaman than you, when it comes right down to it, and you know it. I can shoot. I am not a fool. I can take care of myself. And I shall most certainly buy a ketch, run her myself, and go recruiting on Malaita."

Sheldon made a hopeless gesture.

"That's right," she rattled on. "Wash your hands of me. But as Von used to say, 'You just watch my smoke!'"

"There's no use in discussing it. Let us have some music."

He arose and went over to the big phonograph; but before the disc started, and while he was winding the machine, he heard her saying:

"I suppose you've been accustomed to Jane Eyres all your life. That's why you don't understand me. Come on, Satan; let's leave him to his old music."

He watched her morosely and without intention of speaking, till he saw her take a rifle from the stand, examine the magazine, and start for the door.

"Where are you going?" he asked peremptorily.

"As between man and woman," she answered, "it would be too terribly—er—indecent for you to tell me why I shouldn't go alligatoring. Good-night. Sleep well."

He shut off the phonograph with a snap, started toward the door after her, then abruptly flung himself into a chair.

"You're hoping a 'gator catches me, aren't you?" she called from the veranda, and as she went down the steps her rippling laughter drifted tantalizingly back through

the wide doorway.

CHAPTER X—A MESSAGE FROM BOUCHER

The next day Sheldon was left all alone. Joan had gone exploring Pari-Sulay, and was not to be expected back until the late afternoon. Sheldon was vaguely oppressed by his loneliness, and several heavy squalls during the afternoon brought him frequently on to the veranda, telescope in hand, to scan the sea anxiously for the whale-boat. Betweenwhiles he scowled over the plantation account-books, made rough estimates, added and balanced, and scowled the harder. The loss of the Jessie had hit Berande severely. Not alone was his capital depleted by the amount of her value, but her earnings were no longer to be reckoned on, and it was her earnings that largely paid the running expenses of the plantation.

“Poor old Hughie,” he muttered aloud, once. “I’m glad you didn’t live to see it, old man. What a cropper, what a cropper!”

Between squalls the Flibberty-Gibbet ran in to anchorage, and her skipper, Pete Oleson (brother to the Oleson of the Jessie), ancient, grizzled, wild-eyed, emaciated by fever, dragged his weary frame up the veranda steps and collapsed in a steamer-chair. Whisky and soda kept him going while he made report and turned in his accounts.

“You’re rotten with fever,” Sheldon said. “Why don’t you run down to Sydney for a blow of decent climate?”

The old skipper shook his head.

“I can’t. I’ve ben in the islands too long. I’d die. The fever comes out worse down there.”

“Kill or cure,” Sheldon counselled.

“It’s straight kill for me. I tried it three years ago. The cool weather put me on my

back before I landed. They carried me ashore and into hospital. I was unconscious one stretch for two weeks. After that the doctors sent me back to the islands—said it was the only thing that would save me. Well, I'm still alive; but I'm too soaked with fever. A month in Australia would finish me."

"But what are you going to do?" Sheldon queried. "You can't stay here until you die."

"That's all that's left to me. I'd like to go back to the old country, but I couldn't stand it. I'll last longer here, and here I'll stay until I peg out; but I wish to God I'd never seen the Solomons, that's all."

He declined to sleep ashore, took his orders, and went back on board the cutter. A lurid sunset was blotted out by the heaviest squall of the day, and Sheldon watched the whale-boat arrive in the thick of it. As the spritsail was taken in and the boat headed on to the beach, he was aware of a distinct hurt at sight of Joan at the steering-oar, standing erect and swaying her strength to it as she resisted the pressures that tended to throw the craft broadside in the surf. Her Tahitians leaped out and rushed the boat high up the beach, and she led her bizarre following through the gate of the compound.

The first drops of rain were driving like hail-stones, the tall cocoanut palms were bending and writhing in the grip of the wind, while the thick cloud-mass of the squall turned the brief tropic twilight abruptly to night.

Quite unconsciously the brooding anxiety of the afternoon slipped from Sheldon, and he felt strangely cheered at the sight of her running up the steps laughing, face flushed, hair flying, her breast heaving from the violence of her late exertions.

"Lovely, perfectly lovely—Pari-Sulay," she panted. "I shall buy it. I'll write to the Commissioner to-night. And the site for the bungalow—I've selected it already—is wonderful. You must come over some day and advise me. You won't mind my staying here until I can get settled? Wasn't that squall beautiful? And I suppose I'm

late for dinner. I'll run and get clean, and be with you in a minute."

And in the brief interval of her absence he found himself walking about the big living-room and impatiently and with anticipation awaiting her coming.

"Do you know, I'm never going to squabble with you again," he announced when they were seated.

"Squabble!" was the retort. "It's such a sordid word. It sounds cheap and nasty. I think it's much nicer to quarrel."

"Call it what you please, but we won't do it any more, will we?" He cleared his throat nervously, for her eyes advertised the immediate beginning of hostilities. "I beg your pardon," he hurried on. "I should have spoken for myself. What I mean is that I refuse to quarrel. You have the most horrible way, without uttering a word, of making me play the fool. Why, I began with the kindest intentions, and here I am now—"

"Making nasty remarks," she completed for him.

"It's the way you have of catching me up," he complained.

"Why, I never said a word. I was merely sitting here, being sweetly lured on by promises of peace on earth and all the rest of it, when suddenly you began to call me names."

"Hardly that, I am sure."

"Well, you said I was horrible, or that I had a horrible way about me, which is the same thing. I wish my bungalow were up. I'd move to-morrow."

But her twitching lips belied her words, and the next moment the man was more uncomfortable than ever, being made so by her laughter.

"I was only teasing you. Honest Injun. And if you don't laugh I'll suspect you of being in a temper with me. That's right, laugh. But don't—" she added in alarm, "don't if it hurts you. You look as though you had a toothache. There, there—don't

say it. You know you promised not to quarrel, while I have the privilege of going on being as hateful as I please. And to begin with, there's the Flibberty-Gibbet. I didn't know she was so large a cutter; but she's in disgraceful condition. Her rigging is something queer, and the next sharp squall will bring her head-gear all about the shop. I watched Noa Noah's face as we sailed past. He didn't say anything. He just sneered. And I don't blame him."

"Her skipper's rotten bad with fever," Sheldon explained. "And he had to drop his mate off to take hold of things at Ugi—that's where I lost Oscar, my trader. And you know what sort of sailors the niggers are."

She nodded her head judicially, and while she seemed to debate a weighty judgment he asked for a second helping of tinned beef—not because he was hungry, but because he wanted to watch her slim, firm fingers, naked of jewels and banded metals, while his eyes pleasured in the swell of the forearm, appearing from under the sleeve and losing identity in the smooth, round wrist undisfigured by the netted veins that come to youth when youth is gone. The fingers were brown with tan and looked exceedingly boyish. Then, and without effort, the concept came to him. Yes, that was it. He had stumbled upon the clue to her tantalizing personality. Her fingers, sunburned and boyish, told the story. No wonder she had exasperated him so frequently. He had tried to treat with her as a woman, when she was not a woman. She was a mere girl—and a boyish girl at that—with sunburned fingers that delighted in doing what boys' fingers did; with a body and muscles that liked swimming and violent endeavour of all sorts; with a mind that was daring, but that dared no farther than boys' adventures, and that delighted in rifles and revolvers, Stetson hats, and a sexless camaraderie with men.

Somehow, as he pondered and watched her, it seemed as if he sat in church at home listening to the choir-boys chanting. She reminded him of those boys, or their voices, rather. The same sexless quality was there. In the body of her she was

woman; in the mind of her she had not grown up. She had not been exposed to ripening influences of that sort. She had had no mother. Von, her father, native servants, and rough island life had constituted her training. Horses and rifles had been her toys, camp and trail her nursery. From what she had told him, her seminary days had been an exile, devoted to study and to ceaseless longing for the wild riding and swimming of Hawaii. A boy's training, and a boy's point of view! That explained her chafe at petticoats, her revolt at what was only decently conventional. Some day she would grow up, but as yet she was only in the process.

Well, there was only one thing for him to do. He must meet her on her own basis of boyhood, and not make the mistake of treating her as a woman. He wondered if he could love the woman she would be when her nature awoke; and he wondered if he could love her just as she was and himself wake her up. After all, whatever it was, she had come to fill quite a large place in his life, as he had discovered that afternoon while scanning the sea between the squalls. Then he remembered the accounts of Berande, and the cropper that was coming, and scowled.

He became aware that she was speaking.

"I beg pardon," he said. "What's that you were saying?"

"You weren't listening to a word—I knew it," she chided. "I was saying that the condition of the Flibberty-Gibbet was disgraceful, and that to-morrow, when you've told the skipper and not hurt his feelings, I am going to take my men out and give her an overhauling. We'll scrub her bottom, too. Why, there's whiskers on her copper four inches long. I saw it when she rolled. Don't forget, I'm going cruising on the Flibberty some day, even if I have to run away with her."

While at their coffee on the veranda, Satan raised a commotion in the compound near the beach gate, and Sheldon finally rescued a mauled and frightened black and dragged him on the porch for interrogation.

"What fella marster you belong?" he demanded. "What name you come along this

fella place sun he go down?"

"Me b'long Boucher. Too many boy belong along Port Adams stop along my fella marster. Too much walk about."

The black drew a scrap of notepaper from under his belt and passed it over. Sheldon scanned it hurriedly.

"It's from Boucher," he explained, "the fellow who took Packard's place. Packard was the one I told you about who was killed by his boat's-crew. He says the Port Adams crowd is out—fifty of them, in big canoes—and camping on his beach. They've killed half a dozen of his pigs already, and seem to be looking for trouble. And he's afraid they may connect with the fifteen runaways from Lunga."

"In which case?" she queried.

"In which case Billy Pape will be compelled to send Boucher's successor. It's Pape's station, you know. I wish I knew what to do. I don't like to leave you here alone."

"Take me along then."

He smiled and shook his head.

"Then you'd better take my men along," she advised. "They're good shots, and they're not afraid of anything—except Utami, and he's afraid of ghosts."

The big bell was rung, and fifty black boys carried the whale-boat down to the water. The regular boat's-crew manned her, and Matauare and three other Tahitians, belted with cartridges and armed with rifles, sat in the stern-sheets where Sheldon stood at the steering-oar.

"My, I wish I could go with you," Joan said wistfully, as the boat shoved off.

Sheldon shook his head.

"I'm as good as a man," she urged.

"You really are needed here," he replied.

“There’s that Lunga crowd; they might reach the coast right here, and with both of us absent rush the plantation. Good-bye. We’ll get back in the morning some time. It’s only twelve miles.”

When Joan started to return to the house, she was compelled to pass among the boat-carriers, who lingered on the beach to chatter in queer, ape-like fashion about the events of the night. They made way for her, but there came to her, as she was in the midst of them, a feeling of her own helplessness. There were so many of them. What was to prevent them from dragging her down if they so willed? Then she remembered that one cry of hers would fetch Noa Noah and her remaining sailors, each one of whom was worth a dozen blacks in a struggle. As she opened the gate, one of the boys stepped up to her. In the darkness she could not make him out.

“What name?” she asked sharply. “What name belong you?”

“Me Aroa,” he said.

She remembered him as one of the two sick boys she had nursed at the hospital. The other one had died.

“Me take ’m plenty fella medicine too much,” Aroa was saying.

“Well, and you all right now,” she answered.

“Me want ’m tobacco, plenty fella tobacco; me want ’m calico; me want ’m porpoise teeth; me want ’m one fella belt.”

She looked at him humorously, expecting to see a smile, or at least a grin, on his face. Instead, his face was expressionless. Save for a narrow breech-clout, a pair of ear-plugs, and about his kinky hair a chaplet of white cowrie-shells, he was naked. His body was fresh-oiled and shiny, and his eyes glistened in the starlight like some wild animal’s. The rest of the boys had crowded up at his back in a solid wall. Some one of them giggled, but the remainder regarded her in morose and intense silence.

“Well?” she said. “What for you want plenty fella things?”

“Me take ’m medicine,” quoth Aroa. “You pay me.”

And this was a sample of their gratitude, she thought. It looked as if Sheldon had been right after all. Aroa waited stolidly. A leaping fish splashed far out on the water. A tiny wavelet murmured sleepily on the beach. The shadow of a flying-fox drifted by in velvet silence overhead. A light air fanned coolly on her cheek; it was the land-breeze beginning to blow.

“You go along quarters,” she said, starting to turn on her heel to enter the gate.

“You pay me,” said the boy.

“Aroa, you all the same one big fool. I no pay you. Now you go.”

But the black was unmoved. She felt that he was regarding her almost insolently as he repeated:

“I take ’m medicine. You pay me. You pay me now.”

Then it was that she lost her temper and cuffed his ears so soundly as to drive him back among his fellows. But they did not break up. Another boy stepped forward.

“You pay me,” he said.

His eyes had the querulous, troubled look such as she had noticed in monkeys; but while he was patently uncomfortable under her scrutiny, his thick lips were drawn firmly in an effort at sullen determination.

“What for?” she asked.

“Me Gogoomy,” he said. “Bawo brother belong me.”

Bawo, she remembered, was the sick boy who had died.

“Go on,” she commanded.

“Bawo take ’m medicine. Bawo finish. Bawo my brother. You pay me. Father belong me one big fella chief along Port Adams. You pay me.”

Joan laughed.

“Gogoomy, you just the same as Aroa, one big fool. My word, who pay me for medicine?”

She dismissed the matter by passing through the gate and closing it. But Gogoomy pressed up against it and said impudently:

“Father belong me one big fella chief. You no bang ’m head belong me. My word, you fright too much.”

“Me fright?” she demanded, while anger tingled all through her.

“Too much fright bang ’m head belong me,” Gogoomy said proudly.

And then she reached for him across the gate and got him. It was a sweeping, broad-handed slap, so heavy that he staggered sideways and nearly fell. He sprang for the gate as if to force it open, while the crowd surged forward against the fence. Joan thought rapidly. Her revolver was hanging on the wall of her grass house. Yet one cry would bring her sailors, and she knew she was safe. So she did not cry for help. Instead, she whistled for Satan, at the same time calling him by name. She knew he was shut up in the living room, but the blacks did not wait to see. They fled with wild yells through the darkness, followed reluctantly by Gogoomy; while she entered the bungalow, laughing at first, but finally vexed to the verge of tears by what had taken place. She had sat up a whole night with the boy who had died, and yet his brother demanded to be paid for his life.

“Ugh! the ungrateful beast!” she muttered, while she debated whether or not she would confess the incident to Sheldon.

CHAPTER XI—THE PORT ADAMS CROWD

“And so it was all settled easily enough,” Sheldon was saying. He was on the veranda, drinking coffee. The whale-boat was being carried into its shed. “Boucher was a bit timid at first to carry off the situation with a strong hand, but he did very

well once we got started. We made a play at holding a court, and Telepasse, the old scoundrel, accepted the findings. He's a Port Adams chief, a filthy beggar. We fined him ten times the value of the pigs, and made him move on with his mob. Oh, they're a sweet lot, I must say, at least sixty of them, in five big canoes, and out for trouble. They've got a dozen Sniders that ought to be confiscated."

"Why didn't you?" Joan asked.

"And have a row on my hands with the Commissioner? He's terribly touchy about his black wards, as he calls them. Well, we started them along their way, though they went in on the beach to kai-kai several miles back. They ought to pass here some time to-day."

Two hours later the canoes arrived. No one saw them come. The house-boys were busy in the kitchen at their own breakfast. The plantation hands were similarly occupied in their quarters. Satan lay sound asleep on his back under the billiard table, in his sleep brushing at the flies that pestered him. Joan was rummaging in the storeroom, and Sheldon was taking his siesta in a hammock on the veranda. He awoke gently. In some occult, subtle way a warning that all was not well had penetrated his sleep and aroused him. Without moving, he glanced down and saw the ground beneath covered with armed savages. They were the same ones he had parted with that morning, though he noted an accession in numbers. There were men he had not seen before.

He slipped from the hammock and with deliberate slowness sauntered to the railing, where he yawned sleepily and looked down on them. It came to him curiously that it was his destiny ever to stand on this high place, looking down on unending hordes of black trouble that required control, bullying, and cajolery. But while he glanced carelessly over them, he was keenly taking stock. The new men were all armed with modern rifles. Ah, he had thought so. There were fifteen of them, undoubtedly the Lunga runaways. In addition, a dozen old Sniders were in the hands of the original

crowd. The rest were armed with spears, clubs, bows and arrows, and long-handled tomahawks. Beyond, drawn up on the beach, he could see the big war-canoes, with high and fantastically carved bows and sterns, ornamented with scrolls and bands of white cowrie shells. These were the men who had killed his trader, Oscar, at Ugi.

“What name you walk about this place?” he demanded.

At the same time he stole a glance seaward to where the Flibberty-Gibbet reflected herself in the glassy calm of the sea. Not a soul was visible under her awnings, and he saw the whale-boat was missing from alongside. The Tahitians had evidently gone shooting fish up the Balesuna. He was all alone in his high place above this trouble, while his world slumbered peacefully under the breathless tropic noon.

Nobody replied, and he repeated his demand, more of mastery in his voice this time, and a hint of growing anger. The blacks moved uneasily, like a herd of cattle, at the sound of his voice. But not one spoke. All eyes, however, were staring at him in certitude of expectancy. Something was about to happen, and they were waiting for it, waiting with the unanimous, unstable mob-mind for the one of them who would make the first action that would precipitate all of them into a common action. Sheldon looked for this one, for such was the one to fear. Directly beneath him he caught sight of the muzzle of a rifle, barely projecting between two black bodies, that was slowly elevating toward him. It was held at the hip by a man in the second row.

“What name you?” Sheldon suddenly shouted, pointing directly at the man who held the gun, who startled and lowered the muzzle.

Sheldon still held the whip hand, and he intended to keep it.

“Clear out, all you fella boys,” he ordered. “Clear out and walk along salt water. Savvee!”

“Me talk,” spoke up a fat and filthy savage whose hairy chest was caked with the unwashed dirt of years.

“Oh, is that you, Telepasse?” the white man queried genially. “You tell ’m boys clear out, and you stop and talk along me.”

“Him good fella boy,” was the reply. “Him stop along.”

“Well, what do you want?” Sheldon asked, striving to hide under assumed carelessness the weakness of concession.

“That fella boy belong along me.” The old chief pointed out Gogoomy, whom Sheldon recognized.

“White Mary belong you too much no good,” Telepasse went on. “Bang ’m head belong Gogoomy. Gogoomy all the same chief. Bimeby me finish, Gogoomy big fella chief. White Mary bang ’m head. No good. You pay me plenty tobacco, plenty powder, plenty calico.”

“You old scoundrel,” was Sheldon’s comment. An hour before, he had been chuckling over Joan’s recital of the episode, and here, an hour later, was Telepasse himself come to collect damages.

“Gogoomy,” Sheldon ordered, “what name you walk about here? You get along quarters plenty quick.”

“Me stop,” was the defiant answer.

“White Mary b’long you bang ’m head,” old Telepasse began again. “My word, plenty big fella trouble you no pay.”

“You talk along boys,” Sheldon said, with increasing irritation. “You tell ’m get to hell along beach. Then I talk with you.”

Sheldon felt a slight vibration of the veranda, and knew that Joan had come out and was standing by his side. But he did not dare glance at her. There were too many rifles down below there, and rifles had a way of going off from the hip.

Again the veranda vibrated with her moving weight, and he knew that Joan had gone into the house. A minute later she was back beside him. He had never seen her

smoke, and it struck him as peculiar that she should be smoking now. Then he guessed the reason. With a quick glance, he noted the hand at her side, and in it the familiar, paper-wrapped dynamite. He noted, also, the end of fuse, split properly, into which had been inserted the head of a wax match.

“Telepasse, you old reprobate, tell ’m boys clear out along beach. My word, I no gammon along you.”

“Me no gammon,” said the chief. “Me want ’m pay white Mary bang ’m head b’long Gogoomy.”

“I’ll come down there and bang ’m head b’long you,” Sheldon replied, leaning toward the railing as if about to leap over.

An angry murmur arose, and the blacks surged restlessly. The muzzles of many guns were rising from the hips. Joan was pressing the lighted end of the cigarette to the fuse. A Snider went off with the roar of a bomb-gun, and Sheldon heard a pane of window-glass crash behind him. At the same moment Joan flung the dynamite, the fuse hissing and spluttering, into the thick of the blacks. They scattered back in too great haste to do any more shooting. Satan, aroused by the one shot, was snarling and panting to be let out. Joan heard, and ran to let him out; and thereat the tragedy was averted, and the comedy began.

Rifles and spears were dropped or flung aside in a wild scramble for the protection of the cocoanut palms. Satan multiplied himself. Never had he been free to tear and rend such a quantity of black flesh before, and he bit and snapped and rushed the flying legs till the last pair were above his head. All were treed except Telepasse, who was too old and fat, and he lay prone and without movement where he had fallen; while Satan, with too great a heart to worry an enemy that did not move, dashed frantically from tree to tree, barking and springing at those who clung on lowest down.

“I fancy you need a lesson or two in inserting fuses,” Sheldon remarked dryly.

Joan’s eyes were scornful.

“There was no detonator on it,” she said. “Besides, the detonator is not yet manufactured that will explode that charge. It’s only a bottle of chlorodyne.”

She put her fingers into her mouth, and Sheldon winced as he saw her blow, like a boy, a sharp, imperious whistle—the call she always used for her sailors, and that always made him wince.

“They’re gone up the Balesuna, shooting fish,” he explained. “But there comes Oleson with his boat’s-crew. He’s an old war-horse when he gets started. See him banging the boys. They don’t pull fast enough for him.”

“And now what’s to be done?” she asked. “You’ve treed your game, but you can’t keep it treed.”

“No; but I can teach them a lesson.”

Sheldon walked over to the big bell.

“It is all right,” he replied to her gesture of protest. “My boys are practically all bushmen, while these chaps are salt-water men, and there’s no love lost between them. You watch the fun.”

He rang a general call, and by the time the two hundred labourers trooped into the compound Satan was once more penned in the living-room, complaining to high heaven at his abominable treatment. The plantation hands were dancing war-dances around the base of every tree and filling the air with abuse and vituperation of their hereditary enemies. The skipper of the Flibberty-Gibbet arrived in the thick of it, in the first throes of oncoming fever, staggering as he walked, and shivering so severely that he could scarcely hold the rifle he carried. His face was ghastly blue, his teeth clicked and chattered, and the violent sunshine through which he walked could not warm him.

“I’ll s-s-sit down, and k-k-keep a guard on ’em,” he chattered. “D-d-dash it all, I

always g-get f-fever when there's any excitement. W-w-wh-what are you going to do?"

"Gather up the guns first of all."

Under Sheldon's direction the house-boys and gang-bosses collected the scattered arms and piled them in a heap on the veranda. The modern rifles, stolen from Lunga, Sheldon set aside; the Sniders he smashed into fragments; the pile of spears, clubs, and tomahawks he presented to Joan.

"A really unique addition to your collection," he smiled; "picked up right on the battlefield."

Down on the beach he built a bonfire out of the contents of the canoes, his blacks smashing, breaking, and looting everything they laid hands on. The canoes themselves, splintered and broken, filled with sand and coral-boulders, were towed out to ten fathoms of water and sunk.

"Ten fathoms will be deep enough for them to work in," Sheldon said, as they walked back to the compound.

Here a Saturnalia had broken loose. The war-songs and dances were more unrestrained, and, from abuse, the plantation blacks had turned to pelting their helpless foes with pieces of wood, handfuls of pebbles, and chunks of coral-rock. And the seventy-five lusty cannibals clung stoically to their tree-perches, enduring the rain of missiles and snarling down promises of vengeance.

"There'll be wars for forty years on Malaita on account of this," Sheldon laughed. "But I always fancy old Telepasse will never again attempt to rush a plantation."

"Eh, you old scoundrel," he added, turning to the old chief, who sat gibbering in impotent rage at the foot of the steps. "Now head belong you bang 'm too. Come on, Miss Lackland, bang 'm just once. It will be the crowning indignity."

"Ugh, he's too dirty. I'd rather give him a bath. Here, you, Adamu Adam, give this

devil-devil a wash. Soap and water! Fill that wash-tub. Ornfiri, run and fetch ’m scrub-brush.”

The Tahitians, back from their fishing and grinning at the bedlam of the compound, entered into the joke.

“Tambo! Tambo!” shrieked the cannibals from the trees, appalled at so awful a desecration, as they saw their chief tumbled into the tub and the sacred dirt rubbed and soused from his body.

Joan, who had gone into the bungalow, tossed down a strip of white calico, in which old Telepasse was promptly wrapped, and he stood forth, resplendent and purified, withal he still spat and strangled from the soap-suds with which Noa Noah had gargled his throat.

The house-boys were directed to fetch handcuffs, and, one by one, the Lunga runaways were haled down out of their trees and made fast. Sheldon ironed them in pairs, and ran a steel chain through the links of the irons. Gogoomy was given a lecture for his mutinous conduct and locked up for the afternoon. Then Sheldon rewarded the plantation hands with an afternoon’s holiday, and, when they had withdrawn from the compound, permitted the Port Adams men to descend from the trees. And all afternoon he and Joan loafed in the cool of the veranda and watched them diving down and emptying their sunken canoes of the sand and rocks. It was twilight when they embarked and paddled away with a few broken paddles. A breeze had sprung up, and the Flibberty-Gibbet had already sailed for Lunga to return the runaways.

CHAPTER XII—MR. MORGAN AND MR. RAFF

Sheldon was back in the plantation superintending the building of a bridge, when the schooner Malakula ran in close and dropped anchor. Joan watched the taking in of sail and the swinging out of the boat with a sailor’s interest, and herself met the two

men who came ashore. While one of the house-boys ran to fetch Sheldon, she had the visitors served with whisky and soda, and sat and talked with them.

They seemed awkward and constrained in her presence, and she caught first one and then the other looking at her with secret curiosity. She felt that they were weighing her, appraising her, and for the first time the anomalous position she occupied on Berande sank sharply home to her. On the other hand, they puzzled her. They were neither traders nor sailors of any type she had known. Nor did they talk like gentlemen, despite the fact that there was nothing offensive in their bearing and that the veneer of ordinary social nicety was theirs. Undoubtedly, they were men of affairs—business men of a sort; but what affairs should they have in the Solomons, and what business on Berande? The elder one, Morgan, was a huge man, bronzed and moustached, with a deep bass voice and an almost guttural speech, and the other, Raff, was slight and effeminate, with nervous hands and watery, washed-out gray eyes, who spoke with a faint indefinable accent that was hauntingly reminiscent of the Cockney, and that was yet not Cockney of any brand she had ever encountered. Whatever they were, they were self-made men, she concluded; and she felt the impulse to shudder at thought of falling into their hands in a business way. There, they would be merciless.

She watched Sheldon closely when he arrived, and divined that he was not particularly delighted to see them. But see them he must, and so pressing was the need that, after a little perfunctory general conversation, he led the two men into the stuffy office. Later in the afternoon, she asked Lalaperu where they had gone.

“My word,” quoth Lalaperu; “plenty walk about, plenty look ’m. Look ’m tree; look ’m ground belong tree; look ’m all fella bridge; look ’m copra-house; look ’m grass-land; look ’m river; look ’m whale-boat—my word, plenty big fella look ’m too much.”

“What fella man them two fella?” she queried.

“Big fella marster along white man,” was the extent of his description.

But Joan decided that they were men of importance in the Solomons, and that their examination of the plantation and of its accounts was of sinister significance.

At dinner no word was dropped that gave a hint of their errand. The conversation was on general topics; but Joan could not help noticing the troubled, absent expression that occasionally came into Sheldon’s eyes. After coffee, she left them; and at midnight, from across the compound, she could hear the low murmur of their voices and see glowing the fiery ends of their cigars. Up early herself, she found they had already departed on another tramp over the plantation.

“What you think?” she asked Viaburi.

“Sheldon marster he go along finish short time little bit,” was the answer.

“What you think?” she asked Ornfiri.

“Sheldon marster big fella walk about along Sydney. Yes, me t’ink so. He finish along Berande.”

All day the examination of the plantation and the discussion went on; and all day the skipper of the Malakula sent urgent messages ashore for the two men to hasten. It was not until sunset that they went down to the boat, and even then a final talk of nearly an hour took place on the beach. Sheldon was combating something—that she could plainly see; and that his two visitors were not giving in she could also plainly see.

“What name?” she asked lightly, when Sheldon sat down to dinner.

He looked at her and smiled, but it was a very wan and wistful smile.

“My word,” she went on. “One big fella talk. Sun he go down—talk-talk; sun he come up—talk-talk; all the time talk-talk. What name that fella talk-talk?

“Oh, nothing much.” He shrugged his shoulders. “They were trying to buy Berande, that was all.”

She looked at him challengingly.

“It must have been more than that. It was you who wanted to sell.”

“Indeed, no, Miss Lackland; I assure you that I am far from desiring to sell.”

“Don’t let us fence about it,” she urged. “Let it be straight talk between us. You’re in trouble. I’m not a fool. Tell me. Besides, I may be able to help, to—to suggest something.”

In the pause that followed, he seemed to debate, not so much whether he would tell her, as how to begin to tell her.

“I’m American, you see,” she persisted, “and our American heritage is a large parcel of business sense. I don’t like it myself, but I know I’ve got it—at least more than you have. Let us talk it over and find a way out. How much do you owe?”

“A thousand pounds, and a few trifles over—small bills, you know. Then, too, thirty of the boys finish their time next week, and their balances will average ten pounds each. But what is the need of bothering your head with it? Really, you know—”

“What is Berande worth?—right now?”

“Whatever Morgan and Raff are willing to pay for it.” A glance at her hurt expression decided him. “Hughie and I have sunk eight thousand pounds in it, and our time. It is a good property, and worth more than that. But it has three years to run before its returns begin to come in. That is why Hughie and I engaged in trading and recruiting. The Jessie and our stations came very near to paying the running expenses of Berande.”

“And Morgan and Raff offered you what?”

“A thousand pounds clear, after paying all bills.”

“The thieves!” she cried.

“No, they’re good business men, that is all. As they told me, a thing is worth no more than one is willing to pay or to receive.”

“And how much do you need to carry on Berande for three years?” Joan hurried on.

“Two hundred boys at six pounds a year means thirty-six hundred pounds—that’s the main item.”

“My, how cheap labour does mount up! Thirty-six hundred pounds, eighteen thousand dollars, just for a lot of cannibals! Yet the place is good security. You could go down to Sydney and raise the money.”

He shook his head.

“You can’t get them to look at plantations down there. They’ve been taken in too often. But I do hate to give the place up—more for Hughie’s sake, I swear, than my own. He was bound up in it. You see, he was a persistent chap, and hated to acknowledge defeat. It—it makes me uncomfortable to think of it myself. We were running slowly behind, but with the Jessie we hoped to muddle through in some fashion.”

“You were muddlers, the pair of you, without doubt. But you needn’t sell to Morgan and Raff. I shall go down to Sydney on the next steamer, and I’ll come back in a second-hand schooner. I should be able to buy one for five or six thousand dollars—”

He held up his hand in protest, but she waved it aside.

“I may manage to freight a cargo back as well. At any rate, the schooner will take over the Jessie’s business. You can make your arrangements accordingly, and have plenty of work for her when I get back. I’m going to become a partner in Berande to the extent of my bag of sovereigns—I’ve got over fifteen hundred of them, you know. We’ll draw up an agreement right now—that is, with your permission, and I know you won’t refuse it.”

He looked at her with good-natured amusement.

“You know I sailed here all the way from Tahiti in order to become a planter,” she

insisted. “You know what my plans were. Now I’ve changed them, that’s all. I’d rather be a part owner of Berande and get my returns in three years, than break ground on Pari-Sulay and wait seven years.”

“And this—er—this schooner. . . . ” Sheldon changed his mind and stopped.

“Yes, go on.”

“You won’t be angry?” he queried.

“No, no; this is business. Go on.”

“You—er—you would run her yourself?—be the captain, in short?—and go recruiting on Malaita?”

“Certainly. We would save the cost of a skipper. Under an agreement you would be credited with a manager’s salary, and I with a captain’s. It’s quite simple. Besides, if you won’t let me be your partner, I shall buy Pari-Sulay, get a much smaller vessel, and run her myself. So what is the difference?”

“The difference?—why, all the difference in the world. In the case of Pari-Sulay you would be on an independent venture. You could turn cannibal for all I could interfere in the matter. But on Berande, you would be my partner, and then I would be responsible. And of course I couldn’t permit you, as my partner, to be skipper of a recruiter. I tell you, the thing is what I would not permit any sister or wife of mine—”

“But I’m not going to be your wife, thank goodness—only your partner.”

“Besides, it’s all ridiculous,” he held on steadily. “Think of the situation. A man and a woman, both young, partners on an isolated plantation. Why, the only practical way out would be that I’d have to marry you—”

“Mine was a business proposition, not a marriage proposal,” she interrupted, coldly angry. “I wonder if somewhere in this world there is one man who could accept me for a comrade.”

“But you are a woman just the same,” he began, “and there are certain conventions, certain decencies—”

She sprang up and stamped her foot.

“Do you know what I’d like to say?” she demanded.

“Yes,” he smiled, “you’d like to say, ‘Damn petticoats!’”

She nodded her head ruefully.

“That’s what I wanted to say, but it sounds different on your lips. It sounds as though you meant it yourself, and that you meant it because of me.”

“Well, I am going to bed. But do, please, think over my proposition, and let me know in the morning. There’s no use in my discussing it now. You make me so angry. You are cowardly, you know, and very egotistic. You are afraid of what other fools will say. No matter how honest your motives, if others criticized your actions your feelings would be hurt. And you think more about your own wretched feelings than you do about mine. And then, being a coward—all men are at heart cowards—you disguise your cowardice by calling it chivalry. I thank heaven that I was not born a man. Good-night. Do think it over. And don’t be foolish. What Berande needs is good American hustle. You don’t know what that is. You are a muddler. Besides, you are enervated. I’m fresh to the climate. Let me be your partner, and you’ll see me rattle the dry bones of the Solomons. Confess, I’ve rattled yours already.”

“I should say so,” he answered. “Really, you know, you have. I never received such a dressing-down in my life. If any one had ever told me that I’d be a party even to the present situation. . . . Yes, I confess, you have rattled my dry bones pretty considerably.”

“But that is nothing to the rattling they are going to get,” she assured him, as he rose and took her hand. “Good-night. And do, do give me a rational decision in the morning.”

CHAPTER XIII—THE LOGIC OF YOUTH

“I wish I knew whether you are merely headstrong, or whether you really intend to be a Solomon planter,” Sheldon said in the morning, at breakfast.

“I wish you were more adaptable,” Joan retorted. “You have more preconceived notions than any man I ever met. Why in the name of common sense, in the name of . . . fair play, can’t you get it into your head that I am different from the women you have known, and treat me accordingly? You surely ought to know I am different. I sailed my own schooner here—skipper, if you please. I came here to make my living. You know that; I’ve told you often enough. It was Dad’s plan, and I’m carrying it out, just as you are trying to carry out your Hughie’s plan. Dad started to sail and sail until he could find the proper islands for planting. He died, and I sailed and sailed until I arrived here. Well,”—she shrugged her shoulders—“the schooner is at the bottom of the sea. I can’t sail any farther, therefore I remain here. And a planter I shall certainly be.”

“You see—” he began.

“I haven’t got to the point,” she interrupted. “Looking back on my conduct from the moment I first set foot on your beach, I can see no false pretence that I have made about myself or my intentions. I was my natural self to you from the first. I told you my plans; and yet you sit there and calmly tell me that you don’t know whether I really intend to become a planter, or whether it is all obstinacy and pretence. Now let me assure you, for the last time, that I really and truly shall become a planter, thanks to you, or in spite of you. Do you want me for a partner?”

“But do you realize that I would be looked upon as the most foolish jackanapes in the South Seas if I took a young girl like you in with me here on Berande?” he asked.

“No; decidedly not. But there you are again, worrying about what idiots and the

generally evil-minded will think of you. I should have thought you had learned self-reliance on Berande, instead of needing to lean upon the moral support of every whisky-guzzling worthless South Sea vagabond."

He smiled, and said,—

"Yes, that is the worst of it. You are unanswerable. Yours is the logic of youth, and no man can answer that. The facts of life can, but they have no place in the logic of youth. Youth must try to live according to its logic. That is the only way to learn better."

"There is no harm in trying?" she interjected.

"But there is. That is the very point. The facts always smash youth's logic, and they usually smash youth's heart, too. It's like platonic friendships and . . . and all such things; they are all right in theory, but they won't work in practice. I used to believe in such things once. That is why I am here in the Solomons at present."

Joan was impatient. He saw that she could not understand. Life was too clearly simple to her. It was only the youth who was arguing with him, the youth with youth's pure-minded and invincible reasoning. Hers was only the boy's soul in a woman's body. He looked at her flushed, eager face, at the great ropes of hair coiled on the small head, at the rounded lines of the figure showing plainly through the home-made gown, and at the eyes—boy's eyes, under cool, level brows—and he wondered why a being that was so much beautiful woman should be no woman at all. Why in the deuce was she not carroty-haired, or cross-eyed, or hare-lipped?

"Suppose we do become partners on Berande," he said, at the same time experiencing a feeling of fright at the prospect that was tangled with a contradictory feeling of charm, "either I'll fall in love with you, or you with me. Propinquity is dangerous, you know. In fact, it is propinquity that usually gives the facer to the logic of youth."

"If you think I came to the Solomons to get married—" she began wrathfully. "Well,

there are better men in Hawaii, that's all. Really, you know, the way you harp on that one string would lead an unprejudiced listener to conclude that you are prurient-minded—"

She stopped, appalled. His face had gone red and white with such abruptness as to startle her. He was patently very angry. She sipped the last of her coffee, and arose, saying,—

"I'll wait until you are in a better temper before taking up the discussion again. That is what's the matter with you. You get angry too easily. Will you come swimming? The tide is just right."

"If she were a man I'd bundle her off the plantation root and crop, whale-boat, Tahitian sailors, sovereigns, and all," he muttered to himself after she had left the room.

But that was the trouble. She was not a man, and where would she go, and what would happen to her?

He got to his feet, lighted a cigarette, and her Stetson hat, hanging on the wall over her revolver-belt, caught his eye. That was the devil of it, too. He did not want her to go. After all, she had not grown up yet. That was why her logic hurt. It was only the logic of youth, but it could hurt damnably at times. At any rate, he would resolve upon one thing: never again would he lose his temper with her. She was a child; he must remember that. He sighed heavily. But why in reasonableness had such a child been incorporated in such a woman's form?

And as he continued to stare at her hat and think, the hurt he had received passed away, and he found himself cudgelling his brains for some way out of the muddle—for some method by which she could remain on Berande. A chaperone! Why not? He could send to Sydney on the first steamer for one. He could—

Her trilling laughter smote upon his reverie, and he stepped to the screen-door, through which he could see her running down the path to the beach. At her heels ran

two of her sailors, Papehara and Mahameme, in scarlet lava-lavas, with naked sheath-knives gleaming in their belts. It was another sample of her wilfulness. Despite entreaties and commands, and warnings of the danger from sharks, she persisted in swimming at any and all times, and by special preference, it seemed to him, immediately after eating.

He watched her take the water, diving cleanly, like a boy, from the end of the little pier; and he watched her strike out with single overhand stroke, her henchmen swimming a dozen feet on either side. He did not have much faith in their ability to beat off a hungry man-eater, though he did believe, implicitly, that their lives would go bravely before hers in case of an attack.

Straight out they swam, their heads growing smaller and smaller. There was a slight, restless heave to the sea, and soon the three heads were disappearing behind it with greater frequency. He strained his eyes to keep them in sight, and finally fetched the telescope on to the veranda. A squall was making over from the direction of Florida; but then, she and her men laughed at squalls and the white choppy sea at such times. She certainly could swim, he had long since concluded. That came of her training in Hawaii. But sharks were sharks, and he had known of more than one good swimmer drowned in a tide-rip.

The squall blackened the sky, beat the ocean white where he had last seen the three heads, and then blotted out sea and sky and everything with its deluge of rain. It passed on, and Berande emerged in the bright sunshine as the three swimmers emerged from the sea. Sheldon slipped inside with the telescope, and through the screen-door watched her run up the path, shaking down her hair as she ran, to the fresh-water shower under the house.

On the veranda that afternoon he broached the proposition of a chaperone as delicately as he could, explaining the necessity at Berande for such a body, a housekeeper to run the boys and the storeroom, and perform divers other useful

functions. When he had finished, he waited anxiously for what Joan would say.

“Then you don’t like the way I’ve been managing the house?” was her first objection. And next, brushing his attempted explanations aside, “One of two things would happen. Either I should cancel our partnership agreement and go away, leaving you to get another chaperone to chaperone your chaperone; or else I’d take the old hen out in the whale-boat and drown her. Do you imagine for one moment that I sailed my schooner down here to this raw edge of the earth in order to put myself under a chaperone?”

“But really . . . er . . . you know a chaperone is a necessary evil,” he objected.

“We’ve got along very nicely so far without one. Did I have one on the Miélé? And yet I was the only woman on board. There are only three things I am afraid of—bumble-bees, scarlet fever, and chaperones. Ugh! the clucking, evil-minded monsters, finding wrong in everything, seeing sin in the most innocent actions, and suggesting sin—yes, causing sin—by their diseased imaginings.”

“Phew!” Sheldon leaned back from the table in mock fear.

“You needn’t worry about your bread and butter,” he ventured. “If you fail at planting, you would be sure to succeed as a writer—novels with a purpose, you know.”

“I didn’t think there were persons in the Solomons who needed such books,” she retaliated. “But you are certainly one—you and your custodians of virtue.”

He winced, but Joan rattled on with the platitudinous originality of youth.

“As if anything good were worth while when it has to be guarded and put in leg-irons and handcuffs in order to keep it good. Your desire for a chaperone as much as implies that I am that sort of creature. I prefer to be good because it is good to be good, rather than because I can’t be bad because some argus-eyed old frump won’t let me have a chance to be bad.”

“But it—it is not that,” he put in. “It is what others will think.”

“Let them think, the nasty-minded wretches! It is because men like you are afraid of the nasty-minded that you allow their opinions to rule you.”

“I am afraid you are a female Shelley,” he replied; “and as such, you really drive me to become your partner in order to protect you.”

“If you take me as a partner in order to protect me . . . I . . . I shan’t be your partner, that’s all. You’ll drive me into buying Pari-Sulay yet.”

“All the more reason—” he attempted.

“Do you know what I’ll do?” she demanded. “I’ll find some man in the Solomons who won’t want to protect me.”

Sheldon could not conceal the shock her words gave him.

“You don’t mean that, you know,” he pleaded.

“I do; I really do. I am sick and tired of this protection dodge. Don’t forget for a moment that I am perfectly able to take care of myself. Besides, I have eight of the best protectors in the world—my sailors.”

“You should have lived a thousand years ago,” he laughed, “or a thousand years hence. You are very primitive, and equally super-modern. The twentieth century is no place for you.”

“But the Solomon Islands are. You were living like a savage when I came along and found you—eating nothing but tinned meat and scones that would have ruined the digestion of a camel. Anyway, I’ve remedied that; and since we are to be partners, it will stay remedied. You won’t die of malnutrition, be sure of that.”

“If we enter into partnership,” he announced, “it must be thoroughly understood that you are not allowed to run the schooner. You can go down to Sydney and buy her, but a skipper we must have—”

“At so much additional expense, and most likely a whisky-drinking, irresponsible,

and incapable man to boot. Besides, I'd have the business more at heart than any man we could hire. As for capability, I tell you I can sail all around the average broken captain or promoted able seaman you find in the South Seas. And you know I am a navigator."

"But being my partner," he said coolly, "makes you none the less a lady."

"Thank you for telling me that my contemplated conduct is unladylike."

She arose, tears of anger and mortification in her eyes, and went over to the phonograph.

"I wonder if all men are as ridiculous as you?" she said.

He shrugged his shoulders and smiled. Discussion was useless—he had learned that; and he was resolved to keep his temper. And before the day was out she capitulated. She was to go to Sydney on the first steamer, purchase the schooner, and sail back with an island skipper on board. And then she inveigled Sheldon into agreeing that she could take occasional cruises in the islands, though he was adamant when it came to a recruiting trip on Malaita. That was the one thing barred.

And after it was all over, and a terse and business-like agreement (by her urging) drawn up and signed, Sheldon paced up and down for a full hour, meditating upon how many different kinds of a fool he had made of himself. It was an impossible situation, and yet no more impossible than the previous one, and no more impossible than the one that would have obtained had she gone off on her own and bought Pari-Sulay. He had never seen a more independent woman who stood more in need of a protector than this boy-minded girl who had landed on his beach with eight picturesque savages, a long-barrelled revolver, a bag of gold, and a gaudy merchandise of imagined romance and adventure.

He had never read of anything to compare with it. The fictionists, as usual, were exceeded by fact. The whole thing was too preposterous to be true. He gnawed his moustache and smoked cigarette after cigarette. Satan, back from a prowl around the

compound, ran up to him and touched his hand with a cold, damp nose. Sheldon caressed the animal's ears, then threw himself into a chair and laughed heartily. What would the Commissioner of the Solomons think? What would his people at home think? And in the one breath he was glad that the partnership had been effected and sorry that Joan Lackland had ever come to the Solomons. Then he went inside and looked at himself in a hand-mirror. He studied the reflection long and thoughtfully and wonderingly.

CHAPTER XIV—THE MARTHA

They were deep in a game of billiards the next morning, after the eleven o'clock breakfast, when Viaburi entered and announced,—

"Big fella schooner close up."

Even as he spoke, they heard the rumble of chain through hawse-pipe, and from the veranda saw a big black-painted schooner, swinging to her just-caught anchor.

"It's a Yankee," Joan cried. "See that bow! Look at that elliptical stern! Ah, I thought so—" as the Stars and Stripes fluttered to the mast-head.

Noa Noah, at Sheldon's direction, ran the Union Jack up the flagstaff.

"Now what is an American vessel doing down here?" Joan asked. "It's not a yacht, though I'll wager she can sail. Look! Her name! What is it?"

"Martha, San Francisco," Sheldon read, looking through the telescope. "It's the first Yankee I ever heard of in the Solomons. They are coming ashore, whoever they are. And, by Jove, look at those men at the oars. It's an all-white crew. Now what reason brings them here?"

"They're not proper sailors," Joan commented. "I'd be ashamed of a crew of black-boys that pulled in such fashion. Look at that fellow in the bow—the one just jumping out; he'd be more at home on a cow-pony."

The boat's-crew scattered up and down the beach, ranging about with eager curiosity, while the two men who had sat in the stern-sheets opened the gate and came up the path to the bungalow. One of them, a tall and slender man, was clad in white ducks that fitted him like a semi-military uniform. The other man, in nondescript garments that were both of the sea and shore, and that must have been uncomfortably hot, slouched and shambled like an overgrown ape. To complete the illusion, his face seemed to sprout in all directions with a dense, bushy mass of red whiskers, while his eyes were small and sharp and restless.

Sheldon, who had gone to the head of the steps, introduced them to Joan. The bewhiskered individual, who looked like a Scotsman, had the Teutonic name of Von Blix, and spoke with a strong American accent. The tall man in the well-fitting ducks, who gave the English name of Tudor—John Tudor—talked purely-enunciated English such as any cultured American would talk, save for the fact that it was most delicately and subtly touched by a faint German accent. Joan decided that she had been helped to identify the accent by the short German-looking moustache that did not conceal the mouth and its full red lips, which would have formed a Cupid's bow but for some harshness or severity of spirit that had moulded them masculinely.

Von Blix was rough and boorish, but Tudor was gracefully easy in everything he did, or looked, or said. His blue eyes sparkled and flashed, his clean-cut mobile features were an index to his slightest shades of feeling and expression. He bubbled with enthusiasms, and his faintest smile or lightest laugh seemed spontaneous and genuine. But it was only occasionally at first that he spoke, for Von Blix told their story and stated their errand.

They were on a gold-hunting expedition. He was the leader, and Tudor was his lieutenant. All hands—and there were twenty-eight—were shareholders, in varying proportions, in the adventure. Several were sailors, but the large majority were

miners, culled from all the camps from Mexico to the Arctic Ocean. It was the old and ever-untiring pursuit of gold, and they had come to the Solomons to get it. Part of them, under the leadership of Tudor, were to go up the Balesuna and penetrate the mountainous heart of Guadalcanal, while the Martha, under Von Blix, sailed away for Malaita to put through similar exploration.

“And so,” said Von Blix, “for Mr. Tudor’s expedition we must have some black-boys. Can we get them from you?”

“Of course we will pay,” Tudor broke in. “You have only to charge what you consider them worth. You pay them six pounds a year, don’t you?”

“In the first place we can’t spare them,” Sheldon answered. “We are short of them on the plantation as it is.”

“We?” Tudor asked quickly. “Then you are a firm or a partnership? I understood at Guvutu that you were alone, that you had lost your partner.”

Sheldon inclined his head toward Joan, and as he spoke she felt that he had become a trifle stiff.

“Miss Lackland has become interested in the plantation since then. But to return to the boys. We can’t spare them, and besides, they would be of little use. You couldn’t get them to accompany you beyond Binu, which is a short day’s work with the boats from here. They are Malaita-men, and they are afraid of being eaten. They would desert you at the first opportunity. You could get the Binu men to accompany you another day’s journey, through the grass-lands, but at the first roll of the foothills look for them to turn back. They likewise are disinclined to being eaten.”

“Is it as bad as that?” asked Von Blix.

“The interior of Guadalcanal has never been explored,” Sheldon explained. “The bushmen are as wild men as are to be found anywhere in the world to-day. I have never seen one. I have never seen a man who has seen one. They never come down to the coast, though their scouting parties occasionally eat a coast native who has

wandered too far inland. Nobody knows anything about them. They don't even use tobacco—have never learned its use. The Austrian expedition—scientists, you know—got part way in before it was cut to pieces. The monument is up the beach there several miles. Only one man got back to the coast to tell the tale. And now you have all I or any other man knows of the inside of Guadalcanal."

"But gold—have you heard of gold?" Tudor asked impatiently. "Do you know anything about gold?"

Sheldon smiled, while the two visitors hung eagerly upon his words.

"You can go two miles up the Balesuna and wash colours from the gravel. I've done it often. There is gold undoubtedly back in the mountains."

Tudor and Von Blix looked triumphantly at each other.

"Old Wheatsheaf's yarn was true, then," Tudor said, and Von Blix nodded. "And if Malaita turns out as well—"

Tudor broke off and looked at Joan.

"It was the tale of this old beachcomber that brought us here," he explained. "Von Blix befriended him and was told the secret." He turned and addressed Sheldon. "I think we shall prove that white men have been through the heart of Guadalcanal long before the time of the Austrian expedition."

Sheldon shrugged his shoulders.

"We have never heard of it down here," he said simply. Then he addressed Von Blix. "As to the boys, you couldn't use them farther than Binu, and I'll lend you as many as you want as far as that. How many of your party are going, and how soon will you start?"

"Ten," said Tudor; "nine men and myself."

"And you should be able to start day after to-morrow," Von Blix said to him. "The boats should practically be knocked together this afternoon. To-morrow should see

the outfit portioned and packed. As for the Martha, Mr. Sheldon, we'll rush the stuff ashore this afternoon and sail by sundown."

As the two men returned down the path to their boat, Sheldon regarded Joan quizzically.

"There's romance for you," he said, "and adventure—gold-hunting among the cannibals."

"A title for a book," she cried. "Or, better yet, 'Gold-Hunting Among the Head-Hunters.' My! wouldn't it sell!"

"And now aren't you sorry you became a cocoanut planter?" he teased. "Think of investing in such an adventure."

"If I did," she retorted, "Von Blix wouldn't be finicky about my joining in the cruise to Malaita."

"I don't doubt but what he would jump at it."

"What do you think of them?" she asked.

"Oh, old Von Blix is all right, a solid sort of chap in his fashion; but Tudor is fly-away—too much on the surface, you know. If it came to being wrecked on a desert island, I'd prefer Von Blix."

"I don't quite understand," Joan objected. "What have you against Tudor?"

"You remember Browning's 'Last Duchess'?"

She nodded.

"Well, Tudor reminds me of her—"

"But she was delightful."

"So she was. But she was a woman. One expects something different from a man—more control, you know, more restraint, more deliberation. A man must be more solid, more solid and steady-going and less effervescent. A man of Tudor's type gets on my nerves. One demands more repose from a man."

Joan felt that she did not quite agree with his judgment; and, somehow, Sheldon caught her feeling and was disturbed. He remembered noting how her eyes had brightened as she talked with the newcomer—confound it all, was he getting jealous? he asked himself. Why shouldn't her eyes brighten? What concern was it of his?

A second boat had been lowered, and the outfit of the shore party was landed rapidly. A dozen of the crew put the knocked-down boats together on the beach. There were five of these craft—lean and narrow, with flaring sides, and remarkably long. Each was equipped with three paddles and several iron-shod poles.

"You chaps certainly seem to know river-work," Sheldon told one of the carpenters.

The man spat a mouthful of tobacco-juice into the white sand, and answered,—

"We use 'em in Alaska. They're modelled after the Yukon poling-boats, and you can bet your life they're crackerjacks. This creek'll be a snap alongside some of them Northern streams. Five hundred pounds in one of them boats, an' two men can snake it along in a way that'd surprise you."

At sunset the Martha broke out her anchor and got under way, dipping her flag and saluting with a bomb gun. The Union Jack ran up and down the staff, and Sheldon replied with his brass signal-cannon. The miners pitched their tents in the compound, and cooked on the beach, while Tudor dined with Joan and Sheldon.

Their guest seemed to have been everywhere and seen everything and met everybody, and, encouraged by Joan, his talk was largely upon his own adventures. He was an adventurer of adventurers, and by his own account had been born into adventure. Descended from old New England stock, his father a consul-general, he had been born in Germany, in which country he had received his early education and his accent. Then, still a boy, he had rejoined his father in Turkey, and accompanied him later to Persia, his father having been appointed Minister to that country.

Tudor had always been a wanderer, and with facile wit and quick vivid description

he leaped from episode and place to episode and place, relating his experiences seemingly not because they were his, but for the sake of their bizarreness and uniqueness, for the unusual incident or the laughable situation. He had gone through South American revolutions, been a Rough Rider in Cuba, a scout in South Africa, a war correspondent in the Russo-Japanese war. He had mushed dogs in the Klondike, washed gold from the sands of Nome, and edited a newspaper in San Francisco. The President of the United States was his friend. He was equally at home in the clubs of London and the Continent, the Grand Hotel at Yokohama, and the selector's shanties in the Never-Never country. He had shot big game in Siam, pearled in the Paumotus, visited Tolstoy, seen the Passion Play, and crossed the Andes on mule-back; while he was a living directory of the fever holes of West Africa.

Sheldon leaned back in his chair on the veranda, sipping his coffee and listening. In spite of himself he felt touched by the charm of the man who had led so varied a life. And yet Sheldon was not comfortable. It seemed to him that the man addressed himself particularly to Joan. His words and smiles were directed impartially toward both of them, yet Sheldon was certain, had the two men of them been alone, that the conversation would have been along different lines. Tudor had seen the effect on Joan and deliberately continued the flow of reminiscence, netting her in the glamour of romance. Sheldon watched her rapt attention, listened to her spontaneous laughter, quick questions, and passing judgments, and felt grow within him the dawning consciousness that he loved her.

So he was very quiet and almost sad, though at times he was aware of a distinct irritation against his guest, and he even speculated as to what percentage of Tudor's tale was true and how any of it could be proved or disproved. In this connection, as if the scene had been prepared by a clever playwright, Utami came upon the veranda to report to Joan the capture of a crocodile in the trap they had made for her.

Tudor's face, illuminated by the match with which he was lighting his cigarette,

caught Utami's eye, and Utami forgot to report to his mistress.

"Hello, Tudor," he said, with a familiarity that startled Sheldon.

The Polynesian's hand went out, and Tudor, shaking it, was staring into his face.

"Who is it?" he asked. "I can't see you."

"Utami."

"And who the dickens is Utami? Where did I ever meet you, my man?"

"You no forget the Huahine?" Utami chided. "Last time Huahine sail?"

Tudor gripped the Tahitian's hand a second time and shook it with genuine heartiness.

"There was only one kanaka who came out of the Huahine that last voyage, and that kanaka was Joe. The deuce take it, man, I'm glad to see you, though I never heard your new name before."

"Yes, everybody speak me Joe along the Huahine. Utami my name all the time, just the same."

"But what are you doing here?" Tudor asked, releasing the sailor's hand and leaning eagerly forward.

"Me sail along Missie Lackalanna her schooner Miélé. We go Tahiti, Raiatea, Tahaa, Bora-Bora, Manua, Tutuila, Apia, Savaii, and Fiji Islands—plenty Fiji Islands. Me stop along Missie Lackalanna in Solomons. Very soon she catch other schooner."

"He and I were the two survivors of the wreck of the Huahine," Tudor explained to the others. "Fifty-seven all told on board when we sailed from Huapa, and Joe and I were the only two that ever set foot on land again. Hurricane, you know, in the Paumotus. That was when I was after pearls."

"And you never told me, Utami, that you'd been wrecked in a hurricane," Joan said reproachfully.

The big Tahitian shifted his weight and flashed his teeth in a conciliating smile.

“Me no t’ink nothing ’t all,” he said.

He half-turned, as if to depart, by his manner indicating that he considered it time to go while yet he desired to remain.

“All right, Utami,” Tudor said. “I’ll see you in the morning and have a yarn.”

“He saved my life, the beggar,” Tudor explained, as the Tahitian strode away and with heavy softness of foot went down the steps. “Swim! I never met a better swimmer.”

And thereat, solicited by Joan, Tudor narrated the wreck of the Huahine; while Sheldon smoked and pondered, and decided that whatever the man’s shortcomings were, he was at least not a liar.

CHAPTER XV—A DISCOURSE ON MANNERS

The days passed, and Tudor seemed loath to leave the hospitality of Berande. Everything was ready for the start, but he lingered on, spending much time in Joan’s company and thereby increasing the dislike Sheldon had taken to him. He went swimming with her, in point of rashness exceeding her; and dynamited fish with her, diving among the hungry ground-sharks and contesting with them for possession of the stunned prey, until he earned the approval of the whole Tahitian crew. Arahu challenged him to tear a fish from a shark’s jaws, leaving half to the shark and bringing the other half himself to the surface; and Tudor performed the feat, a flip from the sandpaper hide of the astonished shark scraping several inches of skin from his shoulder. And Joan was delighted, while Sheldon, looking on, realized that here was the hero of her adventure-dreams coming true. She did not care for love, but he felt that if ever she did love it would be that sort of a man—“a man who exhibited,” was his way of putting it.

He felt himself handicapped in the presence of Tudor, who had the gift of making a show of all his qualities. Sheldon knew himself for a brave man, wherefore he made no advertisement of the fact. He knew that just as readily as the other would he dive among ground-sharks to save a life, but in that fact he could find no sanction for the foolhardy act of diving among sharks for the half of a fish. The difference between them was that he kept the curtain of his shop window down. Life pulsed steadily and deep in him, and it was not his nature needlessly to agitate the surface so that the world could see the splash he was making. And the effect of the other's amazing exhibitions was to make him retreat more deeply within himself and wrap himself more thickly than ever in the nerveless, stoical calm of his race.

"You are so stupid the last few days," Joan complained to him. "One would think you were sick, or bilious, or something. You don't seem to have an idea in your head above black labour and cocoanuts. What is the matter?"

Sheldon smiled and beat a further retreat within himself, listening the while to Joan and Tudor propounding the theory of the strong arm by which the white man ordered life among the lesser breeds. As he listened Sheldon realized, as by revelation, that that was precisely what he was doing. While they philosophized about it he was living it, placing the strong hand of his race firmly on the shoulders of the lesser breeds that laboured on Berande or menaced it from afar. But why talk about it? he asked himself. It was sufficient to do it and be done with it.

He said as much, dryly and quietly, and found himself involved in a discussion, with Joan and Tudor siding against him, in which a more astounding charge than ever he had dreamed of was made against the very English control and reserve of which he was secretly proud.

"The Yankees talk a lot about what they do and have done," Tudor said, "and are looked down upon by the English as braggarts. But the Yankee is only a child. He does not know effectually how to brag. He talks about it, you see. But the

Englishman goes him one better by not talking about it. The Englishman's proverbial lack of bragging is a subtler form of brag after all. It is really clever, as you will agree."

"I never thought of it before," Joan cried. "Of course. An Englishman performs some terrifically heroic exploit, and is very modest and reserved—refuses to talk about it at all—and the effect is that by his silence he as much as says, 'I do things like this every day. It is as easy as rolling off a log. You ought to see the really heroic things I could do if they ever came my way. But this little thing, this little episode—really, don't you know, I fail to see anything in it remarkable or unusual.' As for me, if I went up in a powder explosion, or saved a hundred lives, I'd want all my friends to hear about it, and their friends as well. I'd be prouder than Lucifer over the affair. Confess, Mr. Sheldon, don't you feel proud down inside when you've done something daring or courageous?"

Sheldon nodded.

"Then," she pressed home the point, "isn't disguising that pride under a mask of careless indifference equivalent to telling a lie?"

"Yes, it is," he admitted. "But we tell similar lies every day. It is a matter of training, and the English are better trained, that is all. Your countrymen will be trained as well in time. As Mr. Tudor said, the Yankees are young."

"Thank goodness we haven't begun to tell such lies yet!" was Joan's ejaculation.

"Oh, but you have," Sheldon said quickly. "You were telling me a lie of that order only the other day. You remember when you were going up the lantern-halyards hand over hand? Your face was the personification of duplicity."

"It was no such thing."

"Pardon me a moment," he went on. "Your face was as calm and peaceful as though you were reclining in a steamer-chair. To look at your face one would have inferred that carrying the weight of your body up a rope hand over hand was a very

commonplace accomplishment—as easy as rolling off a log. And you needn't tell me, Miss Lackland, that you didn't make faces the first time you tried to climb a rope. But, like any circus athlete, you trained yourself out of the face-making period. You trained your face to hide your feelings, to hide the exhausting effort your muscles were making. It was, to quote Mr. Tudor, a subtler exhibition of physical prowess. And that is all our English reserve is—a mere matter of training. Certainly we are proud inside of the things we do and have done, proud as Lucifer—yes, and prouder. But we have grown up, and no longer talk about such things."

"I surrender," Joan cried. "You are not so stupid after all."

"Yes, you have us there," Tudor admitted. "But you wouldn't have had us if you hadn't broken your training rules."

"How do you mean?"

"By talking about it."

Joan clapped her hands in approval. Tudor lighted a fresh cigarette, while Sheldon sat on, imperturbably silent.

"He got you there," Joan challenged. "Why don't you crush him?"

"Really, I can't think of anything to say," Sheldon said. "I know my position is sound, and that is satisfactory enough."

"You might retort," she suggested, "that when an adult is with kindergarten children he must descend to kindergarten idioms in order to make himself intelligible. That was why you broke training rules. It was the only way to make us children understand."

"You've deserted in the heat of the battle, Miss Lackland, and gone over to the enemy," Tudor said plaintively.

But she was not listening. Instead, she was looking intently across the compound and out to sea. They followed her gaze, and saw a green light and the loom of a

vessel's sails.

"I wonder if it's the Martha come back," Tudor hazarded.

"No, the sidelight is too low," Joan answered. "Besides, they've got the sweeps out. Don't you hear them? They wouldn't be sweeping a big vessel like the Martha."

"Besides, the Martha has a gasoline engine—twenty-five horse-power," Tudor added.

"Just the sort of a craft for us," Joan said wistfully to Sheldon. "I really must see if I can't get a schooner with an engine. I might get a second-hand engine put in."

"That would mean the additional expense of an engineer's wages," he objected.

"But it would pay for itself by quicker passages," she argued; "and it would be as good as insurance. I know. I've knocked about amongst reefs myself. Besides, if you weren't so mediaeval, I could be skipper and save more than the engineer's wages."

He did not reply to her thrust, and she glanced at him. He was looking out over the water, and in the lantern light she noted the lines of his face—strong, stern, dogged, the mouth almost chaste but firmer and thinner-lipped than Tudor's. For the first time she realized the quality of his strength, the calm and quiet of it, its simple integrity and reposeful determination. She glanced quickly at Tudor on the other side of her. It was a handsomer face, one that was more immediately pleasing. But she did not like the mouth. It was made for kissing, and she abhorred kisses. This was not a deliberately achieved concept; it came to her in the form of a faint and vaguely intangible repulsion. For the moment she knew a fleeting doubt of the man. Perhaps Sheldon was right in his judgment of the other. She did not know, and it concerned her little; for boats, and the sea, and the things and happenings of the sea were of far more vital interest to her than men, and the next moment she was staring through the warm tropic darkness at the loom of the sails and the steady green of the moving sidelight, and listening eagerly to the click of the sweeps in the rowlocks. In her mind's eye she could see the straining naked forms of black men bending

rhythmically to the work, and somewhere on that strange deck she knew was the inevitable master-man, conning the vessel in to its anchorage, peering at the dim tree-line of the shore, judging the deceitful night-distances, feeling on his cheek the first fans of the land breeze that was even then beginning to blow, weighing, thinking, measuring, gauging the score or more of ever-shifting forces, through which, by which, and in spite of which he directed the steady equilibrium of his course. She knew it because she loved it, and she was alive to it as only a sailor could be.

Twice she heard the splash of the lead, and listened intently for the cry that followed. Once a man's voice spoke, low, imperative, issuing an order, and she thrilled with the delight of it. It was only a direction to the man at the wheel to port his helm. She watched the slight altering of the course, and knew that it was for the purpose of enabling the flat-hauled sails to catch those first fans of the land breeze, and she waited for the same low voice to utter the one word "Steady!" And again she thrilled when it did utter it. Once more the lead splashed, and "Eleven fadom" was the resulting cry. "Let go!" the low voice came to her through the darkness, followed by the surging rumble of the anchor-chain. The clicking of the sheaves in the blocks as the sails ran down, head-sails first, was music to her; and she detected on the instant the jamming of a jib-downhaul, and almost saw the impatient jerk with which the sailor must have cleared it. Nor did she take interest in the two men beside her till both lights, red and green, came into view as the anchor checked the onward way.

Sheldon was wondering as to the identity of the craft, while Tudor persisted in believing it might be the Martha.

"It's the Minerva," Joan said decidedly.

"How do you know?" Sheldon asked, sceptical of her certitude.

"It's a ketch to begin with. And besides, I could tell anywhere the rattle of her main

peak-blocks—they're too large for the halyard."

A dark figure crossed the compound diagonally from the beach gate, where whoever it was had been watching the vessel.

"Is that you, Utami?" Joan called.

"No, Missie; me Matapuu," was the answer.

"What vessel is it?"

"Me t'ink Minerva."

Joan looked triumphantly at Sheldon, who bowed.

"If Matapuu says so it must be so," he murmured.

"But when Joan Lackland says so, you doubt," she cried, "just as you doubt her ability as a skipper. But never mind, you'll be sorry some day for all your unkindness. There's the boat lowering now, and in five minutes we'll be shaking hands with Christian Young."

Lalaperu brought out the glasses and cigarettes and the eternal whisky and soda, and before the five minutes were past the gate clicked and Christian Young, tawny and golden, gentle of voice and look and hand, came up the bungalow steps and joined them.

CHAPTER XVI—THE GIRL WHO HAD NOT GROWN UP

News, as usual, Christian Young brought—news of the drinking at Guvutu, where the men boasted that they drank between drinks; news of the new rifles adrift on Ysabel, of the latest murders on Malaita, of Tom Butler's sickness on Santa Ana; and last and most important, news that the Matambo had gone on a reef in the Shortlands and would be laid off one run for repairs.

"That means five weeks more before you can sail for Sydney," Sheldon said to Joan.

"And that we are losing precious time," she added ruefully.

"If you want to go to Sydney, the Upolu sails from Tulagi to-morrow afternoon," Young said.

"But I thought she was running recruits for the Germans in Samoa," she objected. "At any rate, I could catch her to Samoa, and change at Apia to one of the Weir Line freighters. It's a long way around, but still it would save time."

"This time the Upolu is going straight to Sydney," Young explained. "She's going to dry-dock, you see; and you can catch her as late as five to-morrow afternoon—at least, so her first officer told me."

"But I've got to go to Guvutu first." Joan looked at the men with a whimsical expression. "I've some shopping to do. I can't wear these Berande curtains into Sydney. I must buy cloth at Guvutu and make myself a dress during the voyage down. I'll start immediately—in an hour. Lalaperu, you bring 'm one fella Adamu Adam along me. Tell 'm that fella Ornfiri make 'm kai-kai take along whale-boat." She rose to her feet, looking at Sheldon. "And you, please, have the boys carry down the whale-boat—my boat, you know. I'll be off in an hour."

Both Sheldon and Tudor looked at their watches.

"It's an all-night row," Sheldon said. "You might wait till morning—"

"And miss my shopping? No, thank you. Besides, the Upolu is not a regular passenger steamer, and she is just as liable to sail ahead of time as on time. And from what I hear about those Guvutu sybarites, the best time to shop will be in the morning. And now you'll have to excuse me, for I've got to pack."

"I'll go over with you," Sheldon announced.

"Let me run you over in the Minerva," said Young.

She shook her head laughingly.

“I’m going in the whale-boat. One would think, from all your solicitude, that I’d never been away from home before. You, Mr. Sheldon, as my partner, I cannot permit to desert Berande and your work out of a mistaken notion of courtesy. If you won’t permit me to be skipper, I won’t permit your galivanting over the sea as protector of young women who don’t need protection. And as for you, Captain Young, you know very well that you just left Guvutu this morning, that you are bound for Marau, and that you said yourself that in two hours you are getting under way again.”

“But may I not see you safely across?” Tudor asked, a pleading note in his voice that rasped on Sheldon’s nerves.

“No, no, and again no,” she cried. “You’ve all got your work to do, and so have I. I came to the Solomons to work, not to be escorted about like a doll. For that matter, here’s my escort, and there are seven more like him.”

Adamu Adam stood beside her, towering above her, as he towered above the three white men. The clinging cotton undershirt he wore could not hide the bulge of his tremendous muscles.

“Look at his fist,” said Tudor. “I’d hate to receive a punch from it.”

“I don’t blame you.” Joan laughed reminiscently. “I saw him hit the captain of a Swedish bark on the beach at Levuka, in the Fijis. It was the captain’s fault. I saw it all myself, and it was splendid. Adamu only hit him once, and he broke the man’s arm. You remember, Adamu?”

The big Tahitian smiled and nodded, his black eyes, soft and deer-like, seeming to give the lie to so belligerent a nature.

“We start in an hour in the whale-boat for Guvutu, big brother,” Joan said to him. “Tell your brothers, all of them, so that they can get ready. We catch the Upolu for Sydney. You will all come along, and sail back to the Solomons in the new schooner. Take your extra shirts and dungarees along. Plenty cold weather down

there. Now run along, and tell them to hurry. Leave the guns behind. Turn them over to Mr. Sheldon. We won't need them."

"If you are really bent upon going—" Sheldon began.

"That's settled long ago," she answered shortly. "I'm going to pack now. But I'll tell you what you can do for me—issue some tobacco and other stuff they want to my men."

An hour later the three men had shaken hands with Joan down on the beach. She gave the signal, and the boat shoved off, six men at the oars, the seventh man for'ard, and Adamu Adam at the steering-sweep. Joan was standing up in the stern-sheets, reiterating her good-byes—a slim figure of a woman in the tight-fitting jacket she had worn ashore from the wreck, the long-barrelled Colt's revolver hanging from the loose belt around her waist, her clear-cut face like a boy's under the Stetson hat that failed to conceal the heavy masses of hair beneath.

"You'd better get into shelter," she called to them. "There's a big squall coming. And I hope you've got plenty of chain out, Captain Young. Good-bye! Good-bye, everybody!"

Her last words came out of the darkness, which wrapped itself solidly about the boat. Yet they continued to stare into the blackness in the direction in which the boat had disappeared, listening to the steady click of the oars in the rowlocks until it faded away and ceased.

"She is only a girl," Christian Young said with slow solemnity. The discovery seemed to have been made on the spur of the moment. "She is only a girl," he repeated with greater solemnity.

"A dashed pretty one, and a good traveller," Tudor laughed. "She certainly has spunk, eh, Sheldon?"

"Yes, she is brave," was the reluctant answer for Sheldon did not feel disposed to talk about her.

“That’s the American of it,” Tudor went on. “Push, and go, and energy, and independence. What do you think, skipper?”

“I think she is young, very young, only a girl,” replied the captain of the Minerva, continuing to stare into the blackness that hid the sea.

The blackness seemed suddenly to increase in density, and they stumbled up the beach, feeling their way to the gate.

“Watch out for nuts,” Sheldon warned, as the first blast of the squall shrieked through the palms. They joined hands and staggered up the path, with the ripe cocoanuts thudding in a monstrous rain all around them. They gained the veranda, where they sat in silence over their whisky, each man staring straight out to sea, where the wildly swinging riding-light of the Minerva could be seen in the lulls of the driving rain.

Somewhere out there, Sheldon reflected, was Joan Lackland, the girl who had not grown up, the woman good to look upon, with only a boy’s mind and a boy’s desires, leaving Berande amid storm and conflict in much the same manner that she had first arrived, in the stern-sheets of her whale-boat, Adamu Adam steering, her savage crew bending to the oars. And she was taking her Stetson hat with her, along with the cartridge-belt and the long-barrelled revolver. He suddenly discovered an immense affection for those fripperies of hers at which he had secretly laughed when first he saw them. He became aware of the sentimental direction in which his fancy was leading him, and felt inclined to laugh. But he did not laugh. The next moment he was busy visioning the hat, and belt, and revolver. Undoubtedly this was love, he thought, and he felt a tiny glow of pride in him in that the Solomons had not succeeded in killing all his sentiment.

An hour later, Christian Young stood up, knocked out his pipe, and prepared to go aboard and get under way.

“She’s all right,” he said, apropos of nothing spoken, and yet distinctly relevant to

what was in each of their minds. “She’s got a good boat’s-crew, and she’s a sailor herself. Good-night, Mr. Sheldon. Anything I can do for you down Marau-way?” He turned and pointed to a widening space of starry sky. “It’s going to be a fine night after all. With this favouring bit of breeze she has sail on already, and she’ll make Guvutu by daylight. Good-night.”

“I guess I’ll turn in, old man,” Tudor said, rising and placing his glass on the table. “I’ll start the first thing in the morning. It’s been disgraceful the way I’ve been hanging on here. Good-night.”

Sheldon, sitting on alone, wondered if the other man would have decided to pull out in the morning had Joan not sailed away. Well, there was one bit of consolation in it: Joan had certainly lingered at Berande for no man, not even Tudor. “I start in an hour”—her words rang in his brain, and under his eyelids he could see her as she stood up and uttered them. He smiled. The instant she heard the news she had made up her mind to go. It was not very flattering to man, but what could any man count in her eyes when a schooner waiting to be bought in Sydney was in the wind? What a creature! What a creature!

* * * * *

Berande was a lonely place to Sheldon in the days that followed. In the morning after Joan’s departure, he had seen Tudor’s expedition off on its way up the Balesuna; in the late afternoon, through his telescope, he had seen the smoke of the Upolu that was bearing Joan away to Sydney; and in the evening he sat down to dinner in solitary state, devoting more of his time to looking at her empty chair than to his food. He never came out on the veranda without glancing first of all at her grass house in the corner of the compound; and one evening, idly knocking the balls about on the billiard table, he came to himself to find himself standing staring at the nail upon which from the first she had hung her Stetson hat and her revolver-belt.

Why should he care for her? he demanded of himself angrily. She was certainly the

last woman in the world he would have thought of choosing for himself. Never had he encountered one who had so thoroughly irritated him, rasped his feelings, smashed his conventions, and violated nearly every attribute of what had been his ideal of woman. Had he been too long away from the world? Had he forgotten what the race of women was like? Was it merely a case of propinquity? And she wasn't really a woman. She was a masquerader. Under all her seeming of woman, she was a boy, playing a boy's pranks, diving for fish amongst sharks, sporting a revolver, longing for adventure, and, what was more, going out in search of it in her whale-boat, along with her savage islanders and her bag of sovereigns. But he loved her—that was the point of it all, and he did not try to evade it. He was not sorry that it was so. He loved her—that was the overwhelming, astounding fact.

Once again he discovered a big enthusiasm for Berande. All the bubble-illusions concerning the life of the tropical planter had been pricked by the stern facts of the Solomons. Following the death of Hughie, he had resolved to muddle along somehow with the plantation; but this resolve had not been based upon desire. Instead, it was based upon the inherent stubbornness of his nature and his dislike to give over an attempted task.

But now it was different. Berande meant everything. It must succeed—not merely because Joan was a partner in it, but because he wanted to make that partnership permanently binding. Three more years and the plantation would be a splendid-paying investment. They could then take yearly trips to Australia, and oftener; and an occasional run home to England—or Hawaii, would come as a matter of course.

He spent his evenings poring over accounts, or making endless calculations based on cheaper freights for copra and on the possible maximum and minimum market prices for that staple of commerce. His days were spent out on the plantation. He undertook more clearing of bush; and clearing and planting went on, under his

personal supervision, at a faster pace than ever before. He experimented with premiums for extra work performed by the black boys, and yearned continually for more of them to put to work. Not until Joan could return on the schooner would this be possible, for the professional recruiters were all under long contracts to the Fulcrum Brothers, Morgan and Raff, and the Fires, Philp Company; while the Flibberty-Gibbet was wholly occupied in running about among his widely scattered trading stations, which extended from the coast of New Georgia in one direction to Ulava and Sikiana in the other. Blacks he must have, and, if Joan were fortunate in getting a schooner, three months at least must elapse before the first recruits could be landed on Berande.

A week after the Upolu's departure, the Malakula dropped anchor and her skipper came ashore for a game of billiards and to gossip until the land breeze sprang up. Besides, as he told his super-cargo, he simply had to come ashore, not merely to deliver the large package of seeds with full instructions for planting from Joan, but to shock Sheldon with the little surprise born of information he was bringing with him.

Captain Auckland played the billiards first, and it was not until he was comfortably seated in a steamer-chair, his second whisky securely in his hand, that he let off his bomb.

"A great piece, that Miss Lackland of yours," he chuckled. "Claims to be a part-owner of Berande. Says she's your partner. Is that straight?"

Sheldon nodded coldly.

"You don't say? That is a surprise! Well, she hasn't convinced Guvutu or Tulagi of it. They're pretty used to irregular things over there, but—ha! ha!—" he stopped to have his laugh out and to mop his bald head with a trade handkerchief. "But that partnership yarn of hers was too big to swallow, though it gave them the excuse for a few more drinks."

“There is nothing irregular about it. It is an ordinary business transaction.” Sheldon strove to act as though such transactions were quite the commonplace thing on plantations in the Solomons. “She invested something like fifteen hundred pounds in Berande—”

“So she said.”

“And she has gone to Sydney on business for the plantation.”

“Oh, no, she hasn’t.”

“I beg pardon?” Sheldon queried.

“I said she hasn’t, that’s all.”

“But didn’t the Upolu sail? I could have sworn I saw her smoke last Tuesday afternoon, late, as she passed Savo.”

“The Upolu sailed all right.” Captain Auckland sipped his whisky with provoking slowness. “Only Miss Lackland wasn’t a passenger.”

“Then where is she?”

“At Guvutu, last I saw of her. She was going to Sydney to buy a schooner, wasn’t she?”

“Yes, yes.”

“That’s what she said. Well, she’s bought one, though I wouldn’t give her ten shillings for it if a nor’wester blows up, and it’s about time we had one. This has been too long a spell of good weather to last.”

“If you came here to excite my curiosity, old man,” Sheldon said, “you’ve certainly succeeded. Now go ahead and tell me in a straightforward way what has happened. What schooner? Where is it? How did she happen to buy it?”

“First, the schooner Martha,” the skipper answered, checking his replies off on his fingers. “Second, the Martha is on the outside reef at Poonga-Poonga, looted clean of everything portable, and ready to go to pieces with the first bit of lively sea. And

third, Miss Lackland bought her at auction. She was knocked down to her for fifty-five quid by the third-assistant-resident-commissioner. I ought to know. I bid fifty myself, for Morgan and Raff. My word, weren't they hot! I told them to go to the devil, and that it was their fault for limiting me to fifty quid when they thought the chance to salve the Martha was worth more. You see, they weren't expecting competition. Fulcrum Brothers had no representative present, neither had Fires, Philp Company, and the only man to be afraid of was Nielsen's agent, Squires, and him they got drunk and sound asleep over in Guvutu.

"'Twenty,' says I, for my bid. 'Twenty-five,' says the little girl. 'Thirty,' says I. 'Forty,' says she. 'Fifty,' says I. 'Fifty-five,' says she. And there I was stuck. 'Hold on,' says I; 'wait till I see my owners.' 'No, you don't,' says she. 'It's customary,' says I. 'Not anywhere in the world,' says she. 'Then it's courtesy in the Solomons,' says I.

"And d'ye know, on my faith I think Burnett'd have done it, only she pipes up, sweet and pert as you please: 'Mr. Auctioneer, will you kindly proceed with the sale in the customary manner? I've other business to attend to, and I can't afford to wait all night on men who don't know their own minds.' And then she smiles at Burnett, as well—you know, one of those fetching smiles, and damme if Burnett doesn't begin singing out: 'Goin', goin', goin'—last bid—goin', goin' for fifty-five sovereigns—goin', goin', gone—to you, Miss—er—what name, please?'

"'Joan Lackland,' says she, with a smile to me; and that's how she bought the Martha."

Sheldon experienced a sudden thrill. The Martha!—a finer schooner than the Malakula, and, for that matter, the finest in the Solomons. She was just the thing for recruits, and she was right on the spot. Then he realized that for such a craft to sell at auction for fifty-five pounds meant that there was small chance for saving her.

"But how did it happen?" he asked. "Weren't they rather quick in selling the

Martha?”

“Had to. You know the reef at Poonga-Poonga. She’s not worth tuppence on it if any kind of a sea kicks up, and it’s ripe for a nor’wester any moment now. The crowd abandoned her completely. Didn’t even dream of auctioning her. Morgan and Raff persuaded them to put her up. They’re a co-operative crowd, you know, an organized business corporation, fore and aft, all hands and the cook. They held a meeting and voted to sell.”

“But why didn’t they stand by and try to save her?”

“Stand by! You know Malaita. And you know Poonga-Poonga. That’s where they cut off the Scottish Chiefs and killed all hands. There was nothing to do but take to the boats. The Martha missed stays going in, and inside five minutes she was on the reef and in possession. The niggers swarmed over her, and they just threw the crew into the boats. I talked with some of the men. They swear there were two hundred war canoes around her inside half an hour, and five thousand bushmen on the beach. Said you couldn’t see Malaita for the smoke of the signal fires. Anyway, they cleared out for Tulagi.”

“But why didn’t they fight?” Sheldon asked.

“It was funny they didn’t, but they got separated. You see, two-thirds of them were in the boats, without weapons, running anchors and never dreaming the natives would attack. They found out their mistake too late. The natives had charge. That’s the trouble of new chums on the coast. It would never have happened with you or me or any old-timer.”

“But what is Miss Lackland intending to do?” Captain Auckland grinned.

“She’s going to try to get the Martha off, I should say. Or else why did she pay fifty-five quid for her? And if she fails, she’ll try to get her money back by saving the gear—spars, you know, and patent steering-gear, and winches, and such things. At least that’s what I’d do if I was in her place. When I sailed, the little girl had

chartered the Emily—‘I’m going recruiting,’ says Munster—he’s the skipper and owner now. ‘And how much will you net on the cruise?’ asks she. ‘Oh, fifty quid,’ says he. ‘Good,’ says she; ‘you bring your Emily along with me and you’ll get seventy-five.’ You know that big ship’s anchor and chain piled up behind the coal-sheds? She was just buying that when I left. She’s certainly a hustler, that little girl of yours.”

“She is my partner,” Sheldon corrected.

“Well, she’s a good one, that’s all, and a cool one. My word! a white woman on Malaita, and at Poonga-Poonga of all places! Oh, I forgot to tell you—she palavered Burnett into lending her eight rifles for her men, and three cases of dynamite. You’d laugh to see the way she makes that Guvutu gang stand around. And to see them being polite and trying to give advice! Lord, Lord, man, that little girl’s a wonder, a marvel, a—a—a catastrophe. That’s what she is, a catastrophe. She’s gone through Guvutu and Tulagi like a hurricane; every last swine of them in love with her—except Raff. He’s sore over the auction, and he sprang his recruiting contract with Munster on her. And what does she do but thank him, and read it over, and point out that while Munster was pledged to deliver all recruits to Morgan and Raff, there was no clause in the document forbidding him from chartering the Emily.

“‘There’s your contract,’ says she, passing it back. ‘And a very good contract it is. The next time you draw one up, insert a clause that will fit emergencies like the present one.’ And, Lord, Lord, she had him, too.

“But there’s the breeze, and I’m off. Good-bye, old man. Hope the little girl succeeds. The Martha’s a whacking fine boat, and she’d take the place of the Jessie.”

CHAPTER XVII—“YOUR” MISS LACKLAND

The next morning Sheldon came in from the plantation to breakfast, to find the

mission ketch, Apostle, at anchor, her crew swimming two mares and a filly ashore. Sheldon recognized the animals as belonging to the Resident Commissioner, and he immediately wondered if Joan had bought them. She was certainly living up to her threat of rattling the dry bones of the Solomons, and he was prepared for anything.

“Miss Lackland sent them,” said Welshmere, the missionary doctor, stepping ashore and shaking hands with him. “There’s also a box of saddles on board. And this letter from her. And the skipper of the Flibberty-Gibbet.”

The next moment, and before he could greet him, Oleson stepped from the boat and began.

“She’s stolen the Flibberty, Mr. Sheldon. Run clean away with her. She’s a wild one. She gave me the fever. Brought it on by shock. And got me drunk, as well—rotten drunk.”

Dr. Welshmere laughed heartily.

“Nevertheless, she is not an unmitigated evil, your Miss Lackland. She’s sworn three men off their drink, or, to the same purpose, shut off their whisky. You know them—Brahms, Curtis, and Fowler. She shipped them on the Flibberty-Gibbet along with her.”

“She’s the skipper of the Flibberty now,” Oleson broke in. “And she’ll wreck her as sure as God didn’t make the Solomons.”

Dr. Welshmere tried to look shocked, but laughed again.

“She has quite a way with her,” he said. “I tried to back out of bringing the horses over. Said I couldn’t charge freight, that the Apostle was under a yacht license, that I was going around by Savo and the upper end of Guadalcanal. But it was no use. ‘Bother the charge,’ said she. ‘You take the horses like a good man, and when I float the Martha I’ll return the service some day.’”

“And ‘bother your orders,’ said she to me,” Oleson cried. “‘I’m your boss now,’ said

she, ‘and you take your orders from me.’ ‘Look at that load of ivory nuts,’ I said. ‘Bother them,’ said she; ‘I’m playin’ for something bigger than ivory nuts. We’ll dump them overside as soon as we get under way.’”

Sheldon put his hands to his ears.

“I don’t know what has happened, and you are trying to tell me the tale backwards. Come up to the house and get in the shade and begin at the beginning.”

“What I want to know,” Oleson began, when they were seated, “is is she your partner or ain’t she? That’s what I want to know.”

“She is,” Sheldon assured him.

“Well, who’d have believed it!” Oleson glanced appealingly at Dr. Welshmere, and back again at Sheldon. “I’ve seen a few unlikely things in these Solomons—rats two feet long, butterflies the Commissioner hunts with a shot-gun, ear-ornaments that would shame the devil, and head-hunting devils that make the devil look like an angel. I’ve seen them and got used to them, but this young woman of yours—”

“Miss Lackland is my partner and part-owner of Berande,” Sheldon interrupted.

“So she said,” the irate skipper dashed on. “But she had no papers to show for it. How was I to know? And then there was that load of ivory nuts-eight tons of them.”

“For heaven’s sake begin at the—” Sheldon tried to interrupt.

“And then she’s hired them drunken loafers, three of the worst scoundrels that ever disgraced the Solomons—fifteen quid a month each—what d’ye think of that? And sailed away with them, too! Phew!—You might give me a drink. The missionary won’t mind. I’ve been on his teetotal hooker four days now, and I’m perishing.”

Dr. Welshmere nodded in reply to Sheldon’s look of inquiry, and Viaburi was dispatched for the whisky and siphons.

“It is evident, Captain Oleson,” Sheldon remarked to that refreshed mariner, “that Miss Lackland has run away with your boat. Now please give a plain statement of

what occurred."

"Right O; here goes. I'd just come in on the Flibberty. She was on board before I dropped the hook—in that whale-boat of hers with her gang of Tahiti heathens—that big Adamu Adam and the rest. 'Don't drop the anchor, Captain Oleson,' she sang out. 'I want you to get under way for Poonga-Poonga.' I looked to see if she'd been drinking. What was I to think? I was rounding up at the time, alongside the shoal—a ticklish place—head-sails running down and losing way, so I says, 'Excuse me, Miss Lackland,' and yells for'ard, 'Let go!'

"'You might have listened to me and saved yourself trouble,' says she, climbing over the rail and squinting along for'ard and seeing the first shackle flip out and stop. 'There's fifteen fathom,' says she; 'you may as well turn your men to and heave up.'

"And then we had it out. I didn't believe her. I didn't think you'd take her on as a partner, and I told her as much and wanted proof. She got high and mighty, and I told her I was old enough to be her grandfather and that I wouldn't take gammon from a chit like her. And then I ordered her off the Flibberty. 'Captain Oleson,' she says, sweet as you please, 'I've a few minutes to spare on you, and I've got some good whisky over on the Emily. Come on along. Besides, I want your advice about this wrecking business. Everybody says you're a crackerjack sailor-man'—that's what she said, 'crackerjack.' And I went, in her whale-boat, Adamu Adam steering and looking as solemn as a funeral.

"On the way she told me about the Martha, and how she'd bought her, and was going to float her. She said she'd chartered the Emily, and was sailing as soon as I could get the Flibberty underway. It struck me that her gammon was reasonable enough, and I agreed to pull out for Berande right O, and get your orders to go along to Poonga-Poonga. But she said there wasn't a second to be lost by any such foolishness, and that I was to sail direct for Poonga-Poonga, and that if I couldn't

take her word that she was your partner, she'd get along without me and the Flibberty. And right there's where she fooled me.

"Down in the Emily's cabin was them three soaks—you know them—Fowler and Curtis and that Brahms chap. 'Have a drink,' says she. I thought they looked surprised when she unlocked the whisky locker and sent a nigger for the glasses and water-monkey. But she must have tipped them off unbeknownst to me, and they knew just what to do. 'Excuse me,' she says, 'I'm going on deck a minute.' Now that minute was half an hour. I hadn't had a drink in ten days. I'm an old man and the fever has weakened me. Then I took it on an empty stomach, too, and there was them three soaks setting me an example, they arguing for me to take the Flibberty to Poonga-Poonga, an' me pointing out my duty to the contrary. The trouble was, all the arguments were pointed with drinks, and me not being a drinking man, so to say, and weak from fever . . .

"Well, anyway, at the end of the half-hour down she came again and took a good squint at me. 'That'll do nicely,' I remember her saying; and with that she took the whisky bottles and hove them overside through the companionway. 'That's the last, she said to the three soaks, 'till the Martha floats and you're back in Guvutu. It'll be a long time between drinks.' And then she laughed.

"She looked at me and said—not to me, mind you, but to the soaks: 'It's time this worthy man went ashore'—me! worthy man! 'Fowler,' she said—you know, just like a straight order, and she didn't mister him—it was plain Fowler—'Fowler,' she said, 'just tell Adamu Adam to man the whale-boat, and while he's taking Captain Oleson ashore have your boat put me on the Flibberty. The three of you sail with me, so pack your dunnage. And the one of you that shows up best will take the mate's billet. Captain Oleson doesn't carry a mate, you know.'

"I don't remember much after that. All hands got me over the side, and it seems to me I went to sleep, sitting in the stern-sheets and watching that Adamu steer. Then I

saw the Flibberty's mainsail hoisting, and heard the clank of her chain coming in, and I woke up. 'Here, put me on the Flibberty,' I said to Adamu. 'I put you on the beach,' said he. 'Missie Lackalanna say beach plenty good for you.' Well, I let out a yell and reached for the steering-sweep. I was doing my best by my owners, you see. Only that Adamu gives me a shove down on the bottom-boards, puts one foot on me to hold me down, and goes on steering. And that's all. The shock of the whole thing brought on fever. And now I've come to find out whether I'm skipper of the Flibberty, or that chit of yours with her pirating, heathen boat's-crew."

"Never mind, skipper. You can take a vacation on pay." Sheldon spoke with more assurance than he felt. "If Miss Lackland, who is my partner, has seen fit to take charge of the Flibberty-Gibbet, why, it is all right. As you will agree, there was no time to be lost if the Martha was to be got off. It is a bad reef, and any considerable sea would knock her bottom out. You settle down here, skipper, and rest up and get the fever out of your bones. When the Flibberty-Gibbet comes back, you'll take charge again, of course."

After Dr. Welshmere and the Apostle departed and Captain Oleson had turned in for a sleep in a veranda hammock, Sheldon opened Joan's letter.

DEAR MR. SHELDON,—Please forgive me for stealing the Flibberty-Gibbet. I simply had to. The Martha means everything to us. Think of it, only fifty-five pounds for her, two hundred and seventy-five dollars. If I don't save her, I know I shall be able to pay all expenses out of her gear, which the natives will not have carried off. And if I do save her, it is the haul of a life-time. And if I don't save her, I'll fill the Emily and the Flibberty-Gibbet with recruits. Recruits are needed right now on Berande more than anything else.

And please, please don't be angry with me. You said I shouldn't go recruiting on the Flibberty, and I won't. I'll go on the Emily.

I bought two cows this afternoon. That trader at Nogi died of fever, and I bought

them from his partner, Sam Willis his name is, who agrees to deliver them—most likely by the Minerva next time she is down that way. Berande has been long enough on tinned milk.

And Dr. Welshmere has agreed to get me some orange and lime trees from the mission station at Ulava. He will deliver them the next trip of the Apostle. If the Sydney steamer arrives before I get back, plant the sweet corn she will bring between the young trees on the high bank of the Balesuna. The current is eating in against that bank, and you should do something to save it.

I have ordered some fig-trees and loquats, too, from Sydney. Dr. Welshmere will bring some mango-seeds. They are big trees and require plenty of room.

The Martha is registered 110 tons. She is the biggest schooner in the Solomons, and the best. I saw a little of her lines and guess the rest. She will sail like a witch. If she hasn't filled with water, her engine will be all right. The reason she went ashore was because it was not working. The engineer had disconnected the feed-pipes to clean out the rust. Poor business, unless at anchor or with plenty of sea room.

Plant all the trees in the compound, even if you have to clean out the palms later on.

And don't plant the sweet corn all at once. Let a few days elapse between plantings.

JOAN LACKLAND.

He fingered the letter, lingering over it and scrutinizing the writing in a way that was not his wont. How characteristic, was his thought, as he studied the boyish scrawl—clear to read, painfully, clear, but none the less boyish. The clearness of it reminded him of her face, of her cleanly stencilled brows, her straightly chiselled nose, the very clearness of the gaze of her eyes, the firmly yet delicately moulded lips, and the throat, neither fragile nor robust, but—but just right, he concluded, an adequate and beautiful pillar for so shapely a burden.

He looked long at the name. Joan Lackland—just an assemblage of letters, of commonplace letters, but an assemblage that generated a subtle and heady magic. It

crept into his brain and twined and twisted his mental processes until all that constituted him at that moment went out in love to that scrawled signature. A few commonplace letters—yet they caused him to know in himself a lack that sweetly hurt and that expressed itself in vague spiritual outpourings and delicious yearnings. Joan Lackland! Each time he looked at it there arose visions of her in a myriad moods and guises—coming in out of the flying smother of the gale that had wrecked her schooner; launching a whale-boat to go a-fishing; running dripping from the sea, with streaming hair and clinging garments, to the fresh-water shower; frightening four-score cannibals with an empty chlorodyne bottle; teaching Ornfiri how to make bread; hanging her Stetson hat and revolver-belt on the hook in the living-room; talking gravely about winning to hearth and saddle of her own, or juvenilely rattling on about romance and adventure, bright-eyed, her face flushed and eager with enthusiasm. Joan Lackland! He mused over the cryptic wonder of it till the secrets of love were made clear and he felt a keen sympathy for lovers who carved their names on trees or wrote them on the beach-sands of the sea.

Then he came back to reality, and his face hardened. Even then she was on the wild coast of Malaita, and at Poonga-Poonga, of all villainous and dangerous portions the worst, peopled with a teeming population of head-hunters, robbers, and murderers. For the instant he entertained the rash thought of calling his boat’s-crew and starting immediately in a whale-boat for Poonga-Poonga. But the next instant the idea was dismissed. What could he do if he did go? First, she would resent it. Next, she would laugh at him and call him a silly; and after all he would count for only one rifle more, and she had many rifles with her. Three things only could he do if he went. He could command her to return; he could take the Flibberty-Gibbet away from her; he could dissolve their partnership;—any and all of which he knew would be foolish and futile, and he could hear her explain in terse set terms that she was legally of age and that nobody could say come or go to her. No, his pride would never permit him to start for Poonga-Poonga, though his heart whispered that nothing could be more

welcome than a message from her asking him to come and lend a hand. Her very words—"lend a hand"; and in his fancy, he could see and hear her saying them.

There was much in her wilful conduct that caused him to wince in the heart of him. He was appalled by the thought of her shoulder to shoulder with the drunken rabble of traders and beachcombers at Guvutu. It was bad enough for a clean, fastidious man; but for a young woman, a girl at that, it was awful. The theft of the Flibberty-Gibbet was merely amusing, though the means by which the theft had been effected gave him hurt. Yet he found consolation in the fact that the task of making Oleson drunk had been turned over to the three scoundrels. And next, and swiftly, came the vision of her, alone with those same three scoundrels, on the Emily, sailing out to sea from Guvutu in the twilight with darkness coming on. Then came visions of Adamu Adam and Noa Noah and all her brawny Tahitian following, and his anxiety faded away, being replaced by irritation that she should have been capable of such wildness of conduct.

And the irritation was still on him as he got up and went inside to stare at the hook on the wall and to wish that her Stetson hat and revolver-belt were hanging from it.

CHAPTER XVIII—MAKING THE BOOKS COME TRUE

Several quiet weeks slipped by. Berande, after such an unusual run of visiting vessels, drifted back into her old solitude. Sheldon went on with the daily round, clearing bush, planting cocoanuts, smoking copra, building bridges, and riding about his work on the horses Joan had bought. News of her he had none. Recruiting vessels on Malaita left the Poonga-Poonga coast severely alone; and the Clansman, a Samoan recruiter, dropping anchor one sunset for billiards and gossip, reported rumours amongst the Sio natives that there had been fighting at Poonga-Poonga. As this news would have had to travel right across the big island, little dependence was

to be placed on it.

The steamer from Sydney, the Kammambo, broke the quietude of Berande for an hour, while landing mail, supplies, and the trees and seeds Joan had ordered. The Minerva, bound for Cape Marsh, brought the two cows from Nogi. And the Apostle, hurrying back to Tulagi to connect with the Sydney steamer, sent a boat ashore with the orange and lime trees from Ulava. And these several weeks marked a period of perfect weather. There were days on end when sleek calms ruled the breathless sea, and days when vagrant wisps of air fanned for several hours from one direction or another. The land-breezes at night alone proved regular, and it was at night that the occasional cutters and ketches slipped by, too eager to take advantage of the light winds to drop anchor for an hour.

Then came the long-expected nor'wester. For eight days it raged, lulling at times to short durations of calm, then shifting a point or two and raging with renewed violence. Sheldon kept a precautionary eye on the buildings, while the Balesuna, in flood, so savagely attacked the high bank Joan had warned him about, that he told off all the gangs to battle with the river.

It was in the good weather that followed, that he left the blacks at work, one morning, and with a shot-gun across his pommel rode off after pigeons. Two hours later, one of the house-boys, breathless and scratched ran him down with the news that the Martha, the Flibberty-Gibbet, and the Emily were heading in for the anchorage.

Coming into the compound from the rear, Sheldon could see nothing until he rode around the corner of the bungalow. Then he saw everything at once—first, a glimpse at the sea, where the Martha floated huge alongside the cutter and the ketch which had rescued her; and, next, the ground in front of the veranda steps, where a great crowd of fresh-caught cannibals stood at attention. From the fact that each was attired in a new, snow-white lava-lava, Sheldon knew that they were recruits. Part

way up the steps, one of them was just backing down into the crowd, while another, called out by name, was coming up. It was Joan's voice that had called him, and Sheldon reined in his horse and watched. She sat at the head of the steps, behind a table, between Munster and his white mate, the three of them checking long lists, Joan asking the questions and writing the answers in the big, red-covered, Berande labour-journal.

"What name?" she demanded of the black man on the steps.

"Tagari," came the answer, accompanied by a grin and a rolling of curious eyes; for it was the first white-man's house the black had ever seen.

"What place b'long you?"

"Bangoora."

No one had noticed Sheldon, and he continued to sit his horse and watch. There was a discrepancy between the answer and the record in the recruiting books, and a consequent discussion, until Munster solved the difficulty.

"Bangoora?" he said. "That's the little beach at the head of the bay out of Latta. He's down as a Latta-man—see, there it is, 'Tagari, Latta.'"

"What place you go you finish along white marster?" Joan asked.

"Bangoora," the man replied; and Joan wrote it down.

"Ogu!" Joan called.

The black stepped down, and another mounted to take his place. But Tagari, just before he reached the bottom step, caught sight of Sheldon. It was the first horse the fellow had ever seen, and he let out a frightened screech and dashed madly up the steps. At the same moment the great mass of blacks surged away panic-stricken from Sheldon's vicinity. The grinning house-boys shouted encouragement and explanation, and the stampede was checked, the new-caught head-hunters huddling closely together and staring dubiously at the fearful monster.

“Hello!” Joan called out. “What do you mean by frightening all my boys? Come on up.”

“What do you think of them?” she asked, when they had shaken hands. “And what do you think of her?”—with a wave of the hand toward the Martha. “I thought you’d deserted the plantation, and that I might as well go ahead and get the men into barracks. Aren’t they beauties? Do you see that one with the split nose? He’s the only man who doesn’t hail from the Poonga-Poonga coast; and they said the Poonga-Poonga natives wouldn’t recruit. Just look at them and congratulate me. There are no kiddies and half-grown youths among them. They’re men, every last one of them. I have such a long story I don’t know where to begin, and I won’t begin anyway till we’re through with this and until you have told me that you are not angry with me.”

“Ogu—what place b’long you?” she went on with her catechism.

But Ogu was a bushman, lacking knowledge of the almost universal bêche-de-mer English, and half a dozen of his fellows wrangled to explain.

“There are only two or three more,” Joan said to Sheldon, “and then we’re done. But you haven’t told me that you are not angry.”

Sheldon looked into her clear eyes as she favoured him with a direct, untroubled gaze that threatened, he knew from experience, to turn teasingly defiant on an instant’s notice. And as he looked at her it came to him that he had never half-anticipated the gladness her return would bring to him.

“I was angry,” he said deliberately. “I am still angry, very angry—” he noted the glint of defiance in her eyes and thrilled—“but I forgave, and I now forgive all over again. Though I still insist—”

“That I should have a guardian,” she interrupted. “But that day will never come. Thank goodness I’m of legal age and able to transact business in my own right. And speaking of business, how do you like my forceful American methods?”

“Mr. Raff, from what I hear, doesn’t take kindly to them,” he temporized, “and you’ve certainly set the dry bones rattling for many a day. But what I want to know is if other American women are as successful in business ventures?”

“Luck, ’most all luck,” she disclaimed modestly, though her eyes lighted with sudden pleasure; and he knew her boy’s vanity had been touched by his trifle of tempered praise.

“Luck be blowed!” broke out the long mate, Sparrowhawk, his face shining with admiration. “It was hard work, that’s what it was. We earned our pay. She worked us till we dropped. And we were down with fever half the time. So was she, for that matter, only she wouldn’t stay down, and she wouldn’t let us stay down. My word, she’s a slave-driver—‘Just one more heave, Mr. Sparrowhawk, and then you can go to bed for a week’,—she to me, and me staggerin’ ‘round like a dead man, with bilious-green lights flashing inside my head, an’ my head just bustin’. I was all in, but I gave that heave right O—and then it was, ‘Another heave now, Mr. Sparrowhawk, just another heave.’ An’ the Lord lumme, the way she made love to old Kina-Kina!”

He shook his head reproachfully, while the laughter died down in his throat to long-drawn chuckles.

“He was older than Telepasse and dirtier,” she assured Sheldon, “and I am sure much wickeder. But this isn’t work. Let us get through with these lists.”

She turned to the waiting black on the steps,—

“Ogu, you finish along big marster belong white man, you go Not-Not.—Here you, Tangari, you speak ’m along that fella Ogu. He finish he walk about Not-Not. Have you got that, Mr. Munster?”

“But you’ve broken the recruiting laws,” Sheldon said, when the new recruits had marched away to the barracks. “The licenses for the Flibberty and the Emily don’t allow for one hundred and fifty. What did Burnett say?”

“He passed them, all of them,” she answered. “Captain Munster will tell you what he said—something about being blowed, or words to that effect. Now I must run and wash up. Did the Sydney orders arrive?”

“Yours are in your quarters,” Sheldon said. “Hurry, for breakfast is waiting. Let me have your hat and belt. Do, please, allow me. There’s only one hook for them, and I know where it is.”

She gave him a quick scrutiny that was almost woman-like, then sighed with relief as she unbuckled the heavy belt and passed it to him.

“I doubt if I ever want to see another revolver,” she complained. “That one has worn a hole in me, I’m sure. I never dreamed I could get so weary of one.”

Sheldon watched her to the foot of the steps, where she turned and called back,—

“My! I can’t tell you how good it is to be home again.”

And as his gaze continued to follow her across the compound to the tiny grass house, the realization came to him crushingly that Berande and that little grass house was the only place in the world she could call “home.”

* * * * *

“And Burnett said, ‘Well, I’ll be damned—I beg your pardon, Miss Lackland, but you have wantonly broken the recruiting laws and you know it,’” Captain Munster narrated, as they sat over their whisky, waiting for Joan to come back. “And says she to him, ‘Mr. Burnett, can you show me any law against taking the passengers off a vessel that’s on a reef?’ ‘That is not the point,’ says he. ‘It’s the very, precise, particular point,’ says she and you bear it in mind and go ahead and pass my recruits. You can report me to the Lord High Commissioner if you want, but I have three vessels here waiting on your convenience, and if you delay them much longer there’ll be another report go in to the Lord High Commissioner.’

“‘I’ll hold you responsible, Captain Munster,’ says he to me, mad enough to eat

scrap-iron. ‘No, you won’t,’ says she; ‘I’m the charterer of the Emily, and Captain Munster has acted under my orders.’

“What could Burnett do? He passed the whole hundred and fifty, though the Emily was only licensed for forty, and the Flibberty-Gibbet for thirty-five.”

“But I don’t understand,” Sheldon said.

“This is the way she worked it. When the Martha was floated, we had to beach her right away at the head of the bay, and whilst repairs were going on, a new rudder being made, sails bent, gear recovered from the niggers, and so forth, Miss Lackland borrows Sparrowhawk to run the Flibberty along with Curtis, lends me Brahms to take Sparrowhawk’s place, and starts both craft off recruiting. My word, the niggers came easy. It was virgin ground. Since the Scottish Chiefs, no recruiter had ever even tried to work the coast; and we’d already put the fear of God into the niggers’ hearts till the whole coast was quiet as lambs. When we filled up, we came back to see how the Martha was progressing.”

“And thinking we was going home with our recruits,” Sparrowhawk slipped in. “Lord lumme, that Miss Lackland ain’t never satisfied. ‘I’ll take ’em on the Martha,’ says she, ‘and you can go back and fill up again.’”

“But I told her it couldn’t be done,” Munster went on. “I told her the Martha hadn’t a license for recruiting. ‘Oh,’ she said, ‘it can’t be done, eh?’ and she stood and thought a few minutes.”

“And I’d seen her think before,” cried Sparrowhawk, “and I knew at wunst that the thing was as good as done.”

Munster lighted his cigarette and resumed.

“‘You see that spit,’ she says to me, ‘with the little ripple breaking around it? There’s a current sets right across it and on it. And you see them bafflin’ little cat’s-paws? It’s good weather and a falling tide. You just start to beat out, the two of you, and all you have to do is miss stays in the same baffling puff and the current

will set you nicely aground.’”

“‘That little wash of sea won’t more than start a sheet or two of copper,’ says she, when Munster kicked,” Sparrowhawk explained. “Oh, she’s no green un, that girl.”

“‘Then I’ll rescue your recruits and sail away—simple, ain’t it?’ says she,” Munster continued. “‘You hang up one tide,’ says she; ‘the next is the big high water. Then you kedge off and go after more recruits. There’s no law against recruiting when you’re empty.’ ‘But there is against starving ’em,’ I said; ‘you know yourself there ain’t any kai-kai to speak of aboard of us, and there ain’t a crumb on the Martha.’”

“We’d all been pretty well on native kai-kai, as it was,” said Sparrowhawk.

“‘Don’t let the kai-kai worry you, Captain Munster,’ says she; ‘if I can find grub for eighty-four mouths on the Martha, the two of you can do as much by your two vessels. Now go ahead and get aground before a steady breeze comes up and spoils the manoeuvre. I’ll send my boats the moment you strike. And now, good-day, gentlemen.’”

“And we went and did it,” Sparrowhawk said solemnly, and then emitted a series of chuckling noises. “We laid over, starboard tack, and I pinched the Emily against the spit. ‘Go about,’ Captain Munster yells at me; ‘go about, or you’ll have me aground!’ He yelled other things, much worse. But I didn’t mind. I missed stays, pretty as you please, and the Flibberty drifted down on him and fouled him, and we went ashore together in as nice a mess as you ever want to see. Miss Lackland transferred the recruits, and the trick was done.”

“But where was she during the nor’wester?” Sheldon asked.

“At Langa-Langa. Ran up there as it was coming on, and laid there the whole week and traded for grub with the niggers. When we got to Tulagi, there she was waiting for us and scrapping with Burnett. I tell you, Mr. Sheldon, she’s a wonder, that girl, a perfect wonder.”

Munster refilled his glass, and while Sheldon glanced across at Joan’s house,

anxious for her coming, Sparrowhawk took up the tale.

“Gritty! She’s the grittiest thing, man or woman, that ever blew into the Solomons. You should have seen Poonga-Poonga the morning we arrived—Sniders popping on the beach and in the mangroves, war-drums booming in the bush, and signal-smokes raising everywhere. ‘It’s all up,’ says Captain Munster.”

“Yes, that’s what I said,” declared that mariner.

“Of course it was all up. You could see it with half an eye and hear it with one ear.”

“‘Up your granny,’ she says to him,” Sparrowhawk went on. “‘Why, we haven’t arrived yet, much less got started. Wait till the anchor’s down before you get afraid.’”

“That’s what she said to me,” Munster proclaimed. “And of course it made me mad so that I didn’t care what happened. We tried to send a boat ashore for a pow-wow, but it was fired upon. And every once and a while some nigger’d take a long shot at us out of the mangroves.”

“They was only a quarter of a mile off,” Sparrowhawk explained, “and it was damned nasty. ‘Don’t shoot unless they try to board,’ was Miss Lackland’s orders; but the dirty niggers wouldn’t board. They just lay off in the bush and plugged away. That night we held a council of war in the Flibberty’s cabin. ‘What we want,’ says Miss Lackland, ‘is a hostage.’”

“‘That’s what they do in books,’ I said, thinking to laugh her away from her folly,” Munster interrupted. “‘True,’ says she, ‘and have you never seen the books come true?’ I shook my head. ‘Then you’re not too old to learn,’ says she. ‘I’ll tell you one thing right now,’ says I, ‘and that is I’ll be blowed if you catch me ashore in the night-time stealing niggers in a place like this.’”

“You didn’t say blowed,” Sparrowhawk corrected. “You said you’d be damned.”

“That’s what I did, and I meant it, too.”

"'Nobody asked you to go ashore,' says she, quick as lightning," Sparrowhawk grinned. "And she said more. She said, 'And if I catch you going ashore without orders there'll be trouble—understand, Captain Munster?'"

"Who in hell's telling this, you or me?" the skipper demanded wrathfully.

"Well, she did, didn't she?" insisted the mate.

"Yes, she did, if you want to make so sure of it. And while you're about it, you might as well repeat what she said to you when you said you wouldn't recruit on the Poonga-Poonga coast for twice your screw."

Sparrowhawk's sun-reddened face flamed redder, though he tried to pass the situation off by divers laughings and chucklings and face-twistings.

"Go on, go on," Sheldon urged; and Munster resumed the narrative.

"'What we need,' says she, 'is the strong hand. It's the only way to handle them; and we've got to take hold firm right at the beginning. I'm going ashore to-night to fetch Kina-Kina himself on board, and I'm not asking who's game to go for I've got every man's work arranged with me for him. I'm taking my sailors with me, and one white man.' 'Of course, I'm that white man,' I said; for by that time I was mad enough to go to hell and back again. 'Of course you're not,' says she. 'You'll have charge of the covering boat. Curtis stands by the landing boat. Fowler goes with me. Brahms takes charge of the Flibberty, and Sparrowhawk of the Emily. And we start at one o'clock.'

"My word, it was a tough job lying there in the covering boat. I never thought doing nothing could be such hard work. We stopped about fifty fathoms off, and watched the other boat go in. It was so dark under the mangroves we couldn't see a thing of it. D'ye know that little, monkey-looking nigger, Sheldon, on the Flibberty—the cook, I mean? Well, he was cabin-boy twenty years ago on the Scottish Chiefs, and after she was cut off he was a slave there at Poonga-Poonga. And Miss Lackland had discovered the fact. So he was the guide. She gave him half a case of tobacco for

that night's work—"

"And scared him fit to die before she could get him to come along," Sparrowhawk observed.

"Well, I never saw anything so black as the mangroves. I stared at them till my eyes were ready to burst. And then I'd look at the stars, and listen to the surf sighing along the reef. And there was a dog that barked. Remember that dog, Sparrowhawk? The brute nearly gave me heart-failure when he first began. After a while he stopped—wasn't barking at the landing party at all; and then the silence was harder than ever, and the mangroves grew blacker, and it was all I could do to keep from calling out to Curtis in there in the landing boat, just to make sure that I wasn't the only white man left alive.

"Of course there was a row. It had to come, and I knew it; but it startled me just the same. I never heard such screeching and yelling in my life. The niggers must have just dived for the bush without looking to see what was up, while her Tahitians let loose, shooting in the air and yelling to hurry 'em on. And then, just as sudden, came the silence again—all except for some small kiddie that had got dropped in the stampede and that kept crying in the bush for its mother.

"And then I heard them coming through the mangroves, and an oar strike on a gunwale, and Miss Lackland laugh, and I knew everything was all right. We pulled on board without a shot being fired. And, by God! she had made the books come true, for there was old Kina-Kina himself being hoisted over the rail, shivering and chattering like an ape. The rest was easy. Kina-Kina's word was law, and he was scared to death. And we kept him on board issuing proclamations all the time we were in Poonga-Poonga.

"It was a good move, too, in other ways. She made Kina-Kina order his people to return all the gear they'd stripped from the Martha. And back it came, day after day, steering compasses, blocks and tackles, sails, coils of rope, medicine chests, ensigns,

signal flags—everything, in fact, except the trade goods and supplies which had already been kai-kai'd. Of course, she gave them a few sticks of tobacco to keep them in good humour."

"Sure she did," Sparrowhawk broke forth. "She gave the beggars five fathoms of calico for the big mainsail, two sticks of tobacco for the chronometer, and a sheath-knife worth elevenpence ha'penny for a hundred fathoms of brand new five-inch manila. She got old Kina-Kina with that strong hand on the go off, and she kept him going all the time. She—here she comes now."

It was with a shock of surprise that Sheldon greeted her appearance. All the time, while the tale of happening at Poonga-Poonga had been going on, he had pictured her as the woman he had always known, clad roughly, skirt made out of window-curtain stuff, an undersized man's shirt for a blouse, straw sandals for foot covering, with the Stetson hat and the eternal revolver completing her costume. The ready-made clothes from Sydney had transformed her. A simple skirt and shirt-waist of some sort of wash-goods set off her trim figure with a hint of elegant womanhood that was new to him. Brown slippers peeped out as she crossed the compound, and he once caught a glimpse to the ankle of brown open-work stockings. Somehow, she had been made many times the woman by these mere extraneous trappings; and in his mind these wild Arabian Nights adventures of hers seemed thrice as wonderful.

As they went in to breakfast he became aware that Munster and Sparrowhawk had received a similar shock. All their air of camaraderie was dissipated, and they had become abruptly and immensely respectful.

"I've opened up a new field," she said, as she began pouring the coffee. "Old Kina-Kina will never forget me, I'm sure, and I can recruit there whenever I want. I saw Morgan at Guvutu. He's willing to contract for a thousand boys at forty shillings per head. Did I tell you that I'd taken out a recruiting license for the Martha? I did, and the Martha can sign eighty boys every trip."

Sheldon smiled a trifle bitterly to himself. The wonderful woman who had tripped across the compound in her Sydney clothes was gone, and he was listening to the boy come back again.

CHAPTER XIX—THE LOST TOY

“Well,” Joan said with a sigh, “I’ve shown you hustling American methods that succeed and get somewhere, and here you are beginning your muddling again.”

Five days had passed, and she and Sheldon were standing on the veranda watching the Martha, close-hauled on the wind, laying a tack off shore. During those five days Joan had never once broached the desire of her heart, though Sheldon, in this particular instance reading her like a book, had watched her lead up to the question a score of times in the hope that he would himself suggest her taking charge of the Martha. She had wanted him to say the word, and she had steeled herself not to say it herself. The matter of finding a skipper had been a hard one. She was jealous of the Martha, and no suggested man had satisfied her.

“Oleson?” she had demanded. “He does very well on the Flibberty, with me and my men to overhaul her whenever she’s ready to fall to pieces through his slackness. But skipper of the Martha? Impossible!”

“Munster? Yes, he’s the only man I know in the Solomons I’d care to see in charge. And yet, there’s his record. He lost the Umbawa—one hundred and forty drowned. He was first officer on the bridge. Deliberate disobedience to instructions. No wonder they broke him.

“Christian Young has never had any experience with large boats. Besides, we can’t afford to pay him what he’s clearing on the Minerva. Sparrowhawk is a good man—to take orders. He has no initiative. He’s an able sailor, but he can’t command. I tell you I was nervous all the time he had charge of the Flibberty at Poonga-Poonga when I had to stay by the Martha.”

And so it had gone. No name proposed was satisfactory, and, moreover, Sheldon had been surprised by the accuracy of her judgments. A dozen times she almost drove him to the statement that from the showing she made of Solomon Islands sailors, she was the only person fitted to command the Martha. But each time he restrained himself, while her pride prevented her from making the suggestion.

“Good whale-boat sailors do not necessarily make good schooner-handlers,” she replied to one of his arguments. “Besides, the captain of a boat like the Martha must have a large mind, see things in a large way; he must have capacity and enterprise.”

“But with your Tahitians on board—” Sheldon had begun another argument.

“There won’t be any Tahitians on board,” she had returned promptly. “My men stay with me. I never know when I may need them. When I sail, they sail; when I remain ashore, they remain ashore. I’ll find plenty for them to do right here on the plantation. You’ve seen them clearing bush, each of them worth half a dozen of your cannibals.”

So it was that Joan stood beside Sheldon and sighed as she watched the Martha beating out to sea, old Kinross, brought over from Savo, in command.

“Kinross is an old fossil,” she said, with a touch of bitterness in her voice. “Oh, he’ll never wreck her through rashness, rest assured of that; but he’s timid to childishness, and timid skippers lose just as many vessels as rash ones. Some day, Kinross will lose the Martha because there’ll be only one chance and he’ll be afraid to take it. I know his sort. Afraid to take advantage of a proper breeze of wind that will fetch him in in twenty hours, he’ll get caught out in the calm that follows and spend a whole week in getting in. The Martha will make money with him, there’s no doubt of it; but she won’t make near the money that she would under a competent master.”

She paused, and with heightened colour and sparkling eyes gazed seaward at the schooner.

“My! but she is a witch! Look at her eating up the water, and there’s no wind to

speak of. She's not got ordinary white metal either. It's man-of-war copper, every inch of it. I had them polish it with cocoanut husks when she was careened at Poonga-Poonga. She was a seal-hunter before this gold expedition got her. And seal-hunters had to sail. They've run away from second class Russian cruisers more than once up there off Siberia.

"Honestly, if I'd dreamed of the chance waiting for me at Guvutu when I bought her for less than three hundred dollars, I'd never have gone partners with you. And in that case I'd be sailing her right now."

The justice of her contention came abruptly home to Sheldon. What she had done she would have done just the same if she had not been his partner. And in the saving of the Martha he had played no part. Single-handed, unadvised, in the teeth of the laughter of Guvutu and of the competition of men like Morgan and Raff, she had gone into the adventure and brought it through to success.

"You make me feel like a big man who has robbed a small child of a lolly," he said with sudden contrition.

"And the small child is crying for it." She looked at him, and he noted that her lip was slightly trembling and that her eyes were moist. It was the boy all over, he thought; the boy crying for the wee bit boat with which to play. And yet it was a woman, too. What a maze of contradiction she was! And he wondered, had she been all woman and no boy, if he would have loved her in just the same way. Then it rushed in upon his consciousness that he really loved her for what she was, for all the boy in her and all the rest of her—for the total of her that would have been a different total in direct proportion to any differing of the parts of her.

"But the small child won't cry any more for it," she was saying. "This is the last sob. Some day, if Kinross doesn't lose her, you'll turn her over to your partner, I know. And I won't nag you any more. Only I do hope you know how I feel. It isn't as if I'd merely bought the Martha, or merely built her. I saved her. I took her off the reef. I

saved her from the grave of the sea when fifty-five pounds was considered a big risk. She is mine, peculiarly mine. Without me she wouldn't exist. That big nor'wester would have finished her the first three hours it blew. And then I've sailed her, too; and she is a witch, a perfect witch. Why, do you know, she'll steer by the wind with half a spoke, give and take. And going about! Well, you don't have to baby her, starting head-sheets, flattening mainsail, and gentling her with the wheel. Put your wheel down, and around she comes, like a colt with the bit in its teeth. And you can back her like a steamer. I did it at Langa-Langa, between that shoal patch and the shore-reef. It was wonderful.

"But you don't love boats like I do, and I know you think I'm making a fool of myself. But some day I'm going to sail the Martha again. I know it. I know it."

In reply, and quite without premeditation, his hand went out to hers, covering it as it lay on the railing. But he knew, beyond the shadow of a doubt, that it was the boy that returned the pressure he gave, the boy sorrowing over the lost toy. The thought chilled him. Never had he been actually nearer to her, and never had she been more convincingly remote. She was certainly not acutely aware that his hand was touching hers. In her grief at the departure of the Martha it was, to her, anybody's hand—at the best, a friend's hand.

He withdrew his hand and walked perturbedly away.

"Why hasn't he got that big fisherman's staysail on her?" she demanded irritably. "It would make the old girl just walk along in this breeze. I know the sort old Kinross is. He's the skipper that lies three days under double-reefed topsails waiting for a gale that doesn't come. Safe? Oh, yes, he's safe—dangerously safe."

Sheldon retraced his steps.

"Never mind," he said. "You can go sailing on the Martha any time you please—recruiting on Malaita if you want to."

It was a great concession he was making, and he felt that he did it against his better

judgment. Her reception of it was a surprise to him.

“With old Kinross in command?” she queried. “No, thank you. He’d drive me to suicide. I couldn’t stand his handling of her. It would give me nervous prostration. I’ll never step on the Martha again, unless it is to take charge of her. I’m a sailor, like my father, and he could never bear to see a vessel mishandled. Did you see the way Kinross got under way? It was disgraceful. And the noise he made about it! Old Noah did better with the Ark.”

“But we manage to get somewhere just the same,” he smiled.

“So did Noah.”

“That was the main thing.”

“For an antediluvian.”

She took another lingering look at the Martha, then turned to Sheldon.

“You are a slovenly lot down here when it comes to boats—most of you are, any way. Christian Young is all right though, Munster has a slap-dash style about him, and they do say old Nielsen was a crackerjack. But with the rest I’ve seen, there’s no dash, no go, no cleverness, no real sailor’s pride. It’s all humdrum, and podgy, and slow-going, any going so long as you get there heaven knows when. But some day I’ll show you how the Martha should be handled. I’ll break out anchor and get under way in a speed and style that will make your head hum; and I’ll bring her alongside the wharf at Guvutu without dropping anchor and running a line.”

She came to a breathless pause, and then broke into laughter, directed, he could see, against herself.

“Old Kinross is setting that fisherman’s staysail,” he remarked quietly.

“No!” she cried incredulously, swiftly looking, then running for the telescope.

She regarded the manoeuvre steadily through the glass, and Sheldon, watching her face, could see that the skipper was not making a success of it.

She finally lowered the glass with a groan.

“He’s made a mess of it,” she said, “and now he’s trying it over again. And a man like that is put in charge of a fairy like the Martha! Well, it’s a good argument against marriage, that’s all. No, I won’t look any more. Come on in and play a steady, conservative game of billiards with me. And after that I’m going to saddle up and go after pigeons. Will you come along?”

An hour later, just as they were riding out of the compound, Joan turned in the saddle for a last look at the Martha, a distant speck well over toward the Florida coast.

“Won’t Tudor be surprised when he finds we own the Martha?” she laughed. “Think of it! If he doesn’t strike pay-dirt he’ll have to buy a steamer-passage to get away from the Solomons.”

Still laughing gaily, she rode through the gate. But suddenly her laughter broke flatly and she reined in the mare. Sheldon glanced at her sharply, and noted her face mottling, even as he looked, and turning orange and green.

“It’s the fever,” she said. “I’ll have to turn back.”

By the time they were in the compound she was shivering and shaking, and he had to help her from her horse.

“Funny, isn’t it?” she said with chattering teeth. “Like seasickness—not serious, but horribly miserable while it lasts. I’m going to bed. Send Noa Noah and Viaburi to me. Tell Ornfiri to make hot water. I’ll be out of my head in fifteen minutes. But I’ll be all right by evening. Short and sharp is the way it takes me. Too bad to lose the shooting. Thank you, I’m all right.”

Sheldon obeyed her instructions, rushed hot-water bottles along to her, and then sat on the veranda vainly trying to interest himself in a two-months-old file of Sydney newspapers. He kept glancing up and across the compound to the grass house. Yes, he decided, the contention of every white man in the islands was right; the Solomons

was no place for a woman.

He clapped his hands, and Lalaperu came running.

“Here, you!” he ordered; “go along barracks, bring ’m black fella Mary, plenty too much, altogether.”

A few minutes later the dozen black women of Berande were ranged before him. He looked them over critically, finally selecting one that was young, comely as such creatures went, and whose body bore no signs of skin-disease.

“What name, you?” he demanded. “Sangui?”

“Me Mahua,” was the answer.

“All right, you fella Mahua. You finish cook along boys. You stop along white Mary. All the time you stop along. You savvee?”

“Me savvee,” she grunted, and obeyed his gesture to go to the grass house immediately.

“What name?” he asked Viaburi, who had just come out of the grass house.

“Big fella sick,” was the answer. “White fella Mary talk ’m too much allee time. Allee time talk ’m big fella schooner.”

Sheldon nodded. He understood. It was the loss of the Martha that had brought on the fever. The fever would have come sooner or later, he knew; but her disappointment had precipitated it. He lighted a cigarette, and in the curling smoke of it caught visions of his English mother, and wondered if she would understand how her son could love a woman who cried because she could not be skipper of a schooner in the cannibal isles.

CHAPTER XX—A MAN-TALK

The most patient man in the world is prone to impatience in love—and Sheldon was in love. He called himself an ass a score of times a day, and strove to contain

himself by directing his mind in other channels, but more than a score of times each day his thoughts roved back and dwelt on Joan. It was a pretty problem she presented, and he was continually debating with himself as to what was the best way to approach her.

He was not an adept at love-making. He had had but one experience in the gentle art (in which he had been more wooed than wooing), and the affair had profited him little. This was another affair, and he assured himself continually that it was a uniquely different and difficult affair. Not only was here a woman who was not bent on finding a husband, but it was a woman who wasn't a woman at all; who was genuinely appalled by the thought of a husband; who joyed in boys' games, and sentimentalized over such things as adventure; who was healthy and normal and wholesome, and who was so immature that a husband stood for nothing more than an encumbrance in her cherished scheme of existence.

But how to approach her? He divined the fanatical love of freedom in her, the deep-seated antipathy for restraint of any sort. No man could ever put his arm around her and win her. She would flutter away like a frightened bird. Approach by contact—that, he realized, was the one thing he must never do. His hand-clasp must be what it had always been, the hand-clasp of hearty friendship and nothing more. Never by action must he advertise his feeling for her. Remained speech. But what speech? Appeal to her love? But she did not love him. Appeal to her brain? But it was apparently a boy's brain. All the deliciousness and fineness of a finely bred woman was hers; but, for all he could discern, her mental processes were sexless and boyish. And yet speech it must be, for a beginning had to be made somewhere, some time; her mind must be made accustomed to the idea, her thoughts turned upon the matter of marriage.

And so he rode overseeing about the plantation, with tightly drawn and puckered brows, puzzling over the problem, and steeling himself to the first attempt. A dozen

ways he planned an intricate leading up to the first breaking of the ice, and each time some link in the chain snapped and the talk went off on unexpected and irrelevant lines. And then one morning, quite fortuitously, the opportunity came.

“My dearest wish is the success of Berande,” Joan had just said, apropos of a discussion about the cheapening of freights on copra to market.

“Do you mind if I tell you the dearest wish of my heart?” he promptly returned. “I long for it. I dream about it. It is my dearest desire.”

He paused and looked at her with intent significance; but it was plain to him that she thought there was nothing more at issue than mutual confidences about things in general.

“Yes, go ahead,” she said, a trifle impatient at his delay.

“I love to think of the success of Berande,” he said; “but that is secondary. It is subordinate to the dearest wish, which is that some day you will share Berande with me in a completer way than that of mere business partnership. It is for you, some day, when you are ready, to be my wife.”

She started back from him as if she had been stung. Her face went white on the instant, not from maidenly embarrassment, but from the anger which he could see flaming in her eyes.

“This taking for granted!—this when I am ready!” she cried passionately. Then her voice swiftly became cold and steady, and she talked in the way he imagined she must have talked business with Morgan and Raff at Guvutu. “Listen to me, Mr. Sheldon. I like you very well, though you are slow and a muddler; but I want you to understand, once and for all, that I did not come to the Solomons to get married. That is an affliction I could have accumulated at home, without sailing ten thousand miles after it. I have my own way to make in the world, and I came to the Solomons to do it. Getting married is not making my way in the world. It may do for some women, but not for me, thank you. When I sit down to talk over the freight on copra,

I don't care to have proposals of marriage sandwiched in. Besides—besides—"

Her voice broke for the moment, and when she went on there was a note of appeal in it that well-nigh convicted him to himself of being a brute.

"Don't you see?—it spoils everything; it makes the whole situation impossible . . . and . . . and I so loved our partnership, and was proud of it. Don't you see?—I can't go on being your partner if you make love to me. And I was so happy."

Tears of disappointment were in her eyes, and she caught a swift sob in her throat.

"I warned you," he said gravely. "Such unusual situations between men and women cannot endure. I told you so at the beginning."

"Oh, yes; it is quite clear to me what you did." She was angry again, and the feminine appeal had disappeared. "You were very discreet in your warning. You took good care to warn me against every other man in the Solomons except yourself."

It was a blow in the face to Sheldon. He smarted with the truth of it, and at the same time he smarted with what he was convinced was the injustice of it. A gleam of triumph that flickered in her eye because of the hit she had made decided him.

"It is not so one-sided as you seem to think it is," he began. "I was doing very nicely on Berande before you came. At least I was not suffering indignities, such as being accused of cowardly conduct, as you have just accused me. Remember—please remember, I did not invite you to Berande. Nor did I invite you to stay on at Berande. It was by staying that you brought about this—to you—unpleasant situation. By staying you made yourself a temptation, and now you would blame me for it. I did not want you to stay. I wasn't in love with you then. I wanted you to go to Sydney; to go back to Hawaii. But you insisted on staying. You virtually—"

He paused for a softer word than the one that had risen to his lips, and she took it away from him.

“Forced myself on you—that’s what you meant to say,” she cried, the flags of battle painting her cheeks. “Go ahead. Don’t mind my feelings.”

“All right; I won’t,” he said decisively, realizing that the discussion was in danger of becoming a vituperative, schoolboy argument. “You have insisted on being considered as a man. Consistency would demand that you talk like a man, and like a man listen to man-talk. And listen you shall. It is not your fault that this unpleasantness has arisen. I do not blame you for anything; remember that. And for the same reason you should not blame me for anything.”

He noticed her bosom heaving as she sat with clenched hands, and it was all he could do to conquer the desire to flash his arms out and around her instead of going on with his coolly planned campaign. As it was, he nearly told her that she was a most adorable boy. But he checked all such wayward fancies, and held himself rigidly down to his disquisition.

“You can’t help being yourself. You can’t help being a very desirable creature so far as I am concerned. You have made me want you. You didn’t intend to; you didn’t try to. You were so made, that is all. And I was so made that I was ripe to want you. But I can’t help being myself. I can’t by an effort of will cease from wanting you, any more than you by an effort of will can make yourself undesirable to me.”

“Oh, this desire! this want! want! want!” she broke in rebelliously. “I am not quite a fool. I understand some things. And the whole thing is so foolish and absurd—and uncomfortable. I wish I could get away from it. I really think it would be a good idea for me to marry Noa Noah, or Adamu Adam, or Lalaperu there, or any black boy. Then I could give him orders, and keep him penned away from me; and men like you would leave me alone, and not talk marriage and ‘I want, I want.’”

Sheldon laughed in spite of himself, and far from any genuine impulse to laugh.

“You are positively soulless,” he said savagely.

“Because I’ve a soul that doesn’t yearn for a man for master?” she took up the gage.

“Very well, then. I am soulless, and what are you going to do about it?”

“I am going to ask you why you look like a woman? Why have you the form of a woman? the lips of a woman? the wonderful hair of a woman? And I am going to answer: because you are a woman—though the woman in you is asleep—and that some day the woman will wake up.”

“Heaven forbid!” she cried, in such sudden and genuine dismay as to make him laugh, and to bring a smile to her own lips against herself.

“I’ve got some more to say to you,” Sheldon pursued. “I did try to protect you from every other man in the Solomons, and from yourself as well. As for me, I didn’t dream that danger lay in that quarter. So I failed to protect you from myself. I failed to protect you at all. You went your own wilful way, just as though I didn’t exist—wrecking schooners, recruiting on Malaita, and sailing schooners; one lone, unprotected girl in the company of some of the worst scoundrels in the Solomons. Fowler! and Brahms! and Curtis! And such is the perverseness of human nature—I am frank, you see—I love you for that too. I love you for all of you, just as you are.”

She made a moue of distaste and raised a hand protestingly.

“Don’t,” he said. “You have no right to recoil from the mention of my love for you. Remember this is a man-talk. From the point of view of the talk, you are a man. The woman in you is only incidental, accidental, and irrelevant. You’ve got to listen to the bald statement of fact, strange though it is, that I love you.”

“And now I won’t bother you any more about love. We’ll go on the same as before. You are better off and safer on Berande, in spite of the fact that I love you, than anywhere else in the Solomons. But I want you, as a final item of man-talk, to remember, from time to time, that I love you, and that it will be the dearest day of my life when you consent to marry me. I want you to think of it sometimes. You can’t help but think of it sometimes. And now we won’t talk about it any more. As between men, there’s my hand.”

He held out his hand. She hesitated, then gripped it heartily, and smiled through her tears.

“I wish—” she faltered, “I wish, instead of that black Mary, you’d given me somebody to swear for me.”

And with this enigmatic utterance she turned away.

CHAPTER XXI—CONTRABAND

Sheldon did not mention the subject again, nor did his conduct change from what it had always been. There was nothing of the pining lover, nor of the lover at all, in his demeanour. Nor was there any awkwardness between them. They were as frank and friendly in their relations as ever. He had wondered if his belligerent love declaration might have aroused some womanly self-consciousness in Joan, but he looked in vain for any sign of it. She appeared as unchanged as he; and while he knew that he hid his real feelings, he was firm in his belief that she hid nothing. And yet the germ he had implanted must be at work; he was confident of that, though he was without confidence as to the result. There was no forecasting this strange girl’s processes. She might awaken, it was true; and on the other hand, and with equal chance, he might be the wrong man for her, and his declaration of love might only more firmly set her in her views on single blessedness.

While he devoted more and more of his time to the plantation itself, she took over the house and its multitudinous affairs; and she took hold firmly, in sailor fashion, revolutionizing the system and discipline. The labour situation on Berande was improving. The Martha had carried away fifty of the blacks whose time was up, and they had been among the worst on the plantation—five-year men recruited by Billy Be-blowed, men who had gone through the old days of terrorism when the original owners of Berande had been driven away. The new recruits, being broken in under the new regime, gave better promise. Joan had joined with Sheldon from the start in

the programme that they must be gripped with the strong hand, and at the same time be treated with absolute justice, if they were to escape being contaminated by the older boys that still remained.

“I think it would be a good idea to put all the gangs at work close to the house this afternoon,” she announced one day at breakfast. “I’ve cleaned up the house, and you ought to clean up the barracks. There is too much stealing going on.”

“A good idea,” Sheldon agreed. “Their boxes should be searched. I’ve just missed a couple of shirts, and my best toothbrush is gone.”

“And two boxes of my cartridges,” she added, “to say nothing of handkerchiefs, towels, sheets, and my best pair of slippers. But what they want with your toothbrush is more than I can imagine. They’ll be stealing the billiard balls next.”

“One did disappear a few weeks before you came,” Sheldon laughed. “We’ll search the boxes this afternoon.”

And a busy afternoon it was. Joan and Sheldon, both armed, went through the barracks, house by house, the boss-boys assisting, and half a dozen messengers, in relay, shouting along the line the names of the boys wanted. Each boy brought the key to his particular box, and was permitted to look on while the contents were overhauled by the boss-boys.

A wealth of loot was recovered. There were fully a dozen cane-knives—big hacking weapons with razor-edges, capable of decapitating a man at a stroke. Towels, sheets, shirts, and slippers, along with toothbrushes, wisp-brooms, soap, the missing billiard ball, and all the lost and forgotten trifles of many months, came to light. But most astonishing was the quantity of ammunition-cartridges for Lee-Metfords, for Winchesters and Marlins, for revolvers from thirty-two calibre to forty-five, shot-gun cartridges, Joan’s two boxes of thirty-eight, cartridges of prodigious bore for the ancient Sniders of Malaita, flasks of black powder, sticks of dynamite, yards of fuse, and boxes of detonators. But the great find was in the house occupied by

Gogoomy and five Port Adams recruits. The fact that the boxes yielded nothing excited Sheldon's suspicions, and he gave orders to dig up the earthen floor. Wrapped in matting, well oiled, free from rust, and brand new, two Winchesters were first unearthed. Sheldon did not recognize them. They had not come from Berande; neither had the forty flasks of black powder found under the corner-post of the house; and while he could not be sure, he could remember no loss of eight boxes of detonators. A big Colt's revolver he recognized as Hughie Drummond's; while Joan identified a thirty-two Ivor and Johnson as a loss reported by Matapuu the first week he landed at Berande. The absence of any cartridges made Sheldon persist in the digging up of the floor, and a fifty-pound flour tin was his reward. With glowering eyes Gogoomy looked on while Sheldon took from the tin a hundred rounds each for the two Winchesters and fully as many rounds more of nondescript cartridges of all sorts and makes and calibres.

The contraband and stolen property was piled in assorted heaps on the back veranda of the bungalow. A few paces from the bottom of the steps were grouped the forty-odd culprits, with behind them, in solid array, the several hundred blacks of the plantation. At the head of the steps Joan and Sheldon were seated, while on the steps stood the gang-bosses. One by one the culprits were called up and examined. Nothing definite could be extracted from them. They lied transparently, but persistently, and when caught in one lie explained it away with half a dozen others. One boy complacently announced that he had found eleven sticks of dynamite on the beach. Matapuu's revolver, found in the box of one Kapu, was explained away by that boy as having been given to him by Lervumie. Lervumie, called forth to testify, said he had got it from Noni; Noni had got it from Sulefatoi; Sulefatoi from Choka; Choka from Ngava; and Ngava completed the circle by stating that it had been given to him by Kapu. Kapu, thus doubly damned, calmly gave full details of how it had been given to him by Lervumie; and Lervumie, with equal wealth of detail, told how he had received it from Noni; and from Noni to Sulefatoi it went on

around the circle again.

Divers articles were traced indubitably to the house-boys, each of whom steadfastly proclaimed his own innocence and cast doubts on his fellows. The boy with the billiard ball said that he had never seen it in his life before, and hazarded the suggestion that it had got into his box through some mysterious and occultly evil agency. So far as he was concerned it might have dropped down from heaven for all he knew how it got there. To the cooks and boats'-crews of every vessel that had dropped anchor off Berande in the past several years were ascribed the arrival of scores of the stolen articles and of the major portion of the ammunition. There was no tracing the truth in any of it, though it was without doubt that the unidentified weapons and unfamiliar cartridges had come ashore off visiting craft.

"Look at it," Sheldon said to Joan. "We've been sleeping over a volcano. They ought to be whipped—"

"No whip me," Gogoomy cried out from below. "Father belong me big fella chief. Me whip, too much trouble along you, close up, my word."

"What name you fella Gogoomy!" Sheldon shouted. "I knock seven bells out of you. Here, you Kwaque, put 'm irons along that fella Gogoomy."

Kwaque, a strapping gang-boss, plucked Gogoomy from out of his following, and, helped by the other gang-bosses; twisted his arms behind him and snapped on the heavy handcuffs.

"Me finish along you, close up, you die altogether," Gogoomy, with wrath-distorted face, threatened the boss-boy.

"Please, no whipping," Joan said in a low voice. "If whipping is necessary, send them to Tulagi and let the Government do it. Give them their choice between a fine or an official whipping."

Sheldon nodded and stood up, facing the blacks.

“Manonmie!” he called.

Manonmie stood forth and waited.

“You fella boy bad fella too much,” Sheldon charged. “You steal ’m plenty. You steal ’m one fella towel, one fella cane-knife, two-ten fella cartridge. My word, plenty bad fella steal ’m you. Me cross along you too much. S’pose you like ’m, me take ’m one fella pound along you in big book. S’pose you no like ’m me take ’m one fella pound, then me send you fella along Tulagi catch ’m one strong fella government whipping. Plenty New Georgia boys, plenty Ysabel boys stop along jail along Tulagi. Them fella no like Malaita boys little bit. My word, they give ’m you strong fella whipping. What you say?”

“You take ’m one fella pound along me,” was the answer.

And Manonmie, patently relieved, stepped back, while Sheldon entered the fine in the plantation labour journal.

Boy after boy, he called the offenders out and gave them their choice; and, boy by boy, each one elected to pay the fine imposed. Some fines were as low as several shillings; while in the more serious cases, such as thefts of guns and ammunition, the fines were correspondingly heavy.

Gogoomy and his five tribesmen were fined three pounds each, and at Gogoomy’s guttural command they refused to pay.

“S’pose you go along Tulagi,” Sheldon warned him, “you catch ’m strong fella whipping and you stop along jail three fella year. Mr. Burnett, he look ’m along Winchester, look ’m along cartridge, look ’m along revolver, look ’m along black powder, look ’m along dynamite—my word, he cross too much, he give you three fella year along jail. S’pose you no like ’m pay three fella pound you stop along jail. Savvee?”

Gogoomy wavered.

“It’s true—that’s what Burnett would give them,” Sheldon said in an aside to Joan.

“You take ’m three fella pound along me,” Gogoomy muttered, at the same time scowling his hatred at Sheldon, and transferring half the scowl to Joan and Kwaque. “Me finish along you, you catch ’m big fella trouble, my word. Father belong me big fella chief along Port Adams.”

“That will do,” Sheldon warned him. “You shut mouth belong you.”

“Me no fright,” the son of a chief retorted, by his insolence increasing his stature in the eyes of his fellows.

“Lock him up for to-night,” Sheldon said to Kwaque. “Sun he come up put ’m that fella and five fella belong him along grass-cutting. Savvee?”

Kwaque grinned.

“Me savvee,” he said. “Cut ’m grass, ngari-ngari {4} stop ’m along grass. My word!”

“There will be trouble with Gogoomy yet,” Sheldon said to Joan, as the boss-boys marshalled their gangs and led them away to their work. “Keep an eye on him. Be careful when you are riding alone on the plantation. The loss of those Winchesters and all that ammunition has hit him harder than your cuffing did. He is dead-ripe for mischief.”

CHAPTER XXII—GOGOOMY FINISHES ALONG KWAQUE ALTOGETHER

“I wonder what has become of Tudor. It’s two months since he disappeared into the bush, and not a word of him after he left Binu.”

Joan Lackland was sitting astride her horse by the bank of the Balesuna where the sweet corn had been planted, and Sheldon, who had come across from the house on foot, was leaning against her horse’s shoulder.

"Yes, it is along time for no news to have trickled down," he answered, watching her keenly from under his hat-brim and wondering as to the measure of her anxiety for the adventurous gold-hunter; "but Tudor will come out all right. He did a thing at the start that I wouldn't have given him or any other man credit for—persuaded Binu Charley to go along with him. I'll wager no other Binu nigger has ever gone so far into the bush unless to be kai-kai'd. As for Tudor—"

"Look! look!" Joan cried in a low voice, pointing across the narrow stream to a slack eddy where a huge crocodile drifted like a log awash. "My! I wish I had my rifle."

The crocodile, leaving scarcely a ripple behind, sank down and disappeared.

"A Binu man was in early this morning—for medicine," Sheldon remarked. "It may have been that very brute that was responsible. A dozen of the Binu women were out, and the foremost one stepped right on a big crocodile. It was by the edge of the water, and he tumbled her over and got her by the leg. All the other women got hold of her and pulled. And in the tug of war she lost her leg, below the knee, he said. I gave him a stock of antiseptics. She'll pull through, I fancy."

"Ugh—the filthy beasts," Joan gulped shudderingly. "I hate them! I hate them!"

"And yet you go diving among sharks," Sheldon chided.

"They're only fish-sharks. And as long as there are plenty of fish there is no danger. It is only when they're famished that they're liable to take a bite."

Sheldon shuddered inwardly at the swift vision that arose of the dainty flesh of her in a shark's many-toothed maw.

"I wish you wouldn't, just the same," he said slowly. "You acknowledge there is a risk."

"But that's half the fun of it," she cried.

A trite platitude about his not caring to lose her was on his lips, but he refrained from uttering it. Another conclusion he had arrived at was that she was not to be

nagged. Continual, or even occasional, reminders of his feeling for her would constitute a tactical error of no mean dimensions.

“Some for the book of verse, some for the simple life, and some for the shark’s belly,” he laughed grimly, then added: “Just the same, I wish I could swim as well as you. Maybe it would beget confidence such as you have.”

“Do you know, I think it would be nice to be married to a man such as you seem to be becoming,” she remarked, with one of her abrupt changes that always astounded him. “I should think you could be trained into a very good husband—you know, not one of the domineering kind, but one who considered his wife was just as much an individual as himself and just as much a free agent. Really, you know, I think you are improving.”

She laughed and rode away, leaving him greatly cast down. If he had thought there had been one bit of coyness in her words, one feminine flutter, one womanly attempt at deliberate lure and encouragement, he would have been elated. But he knew absolutely that it was the boy, and not the woman, who had so daringly spoken.

Joan rode on among the avenues of young cocoanut-palms, saw a hornbill, followed it in its erratic flights to the high forest on the edge of the plantation, heard the cooing of wild pigeons and located them in the deeper woods, followed the fresh trail of a wild pig for a distance, circled back, and took the narrow path for the bungalow that ran through twenty acres of uncleared cane. The grass was waist-high and higher, and as she rode along she remembered that Gogoomy was one of a gang of boys that had been detailed to the grass-cutting. She came to where they had been at work, but saw no signs of them. Her unshod horse made no sound on the soft, sandy footing, and a little further on she heard voices proceeding from out of the grass. She reined in and listened. It was Gogoomy talking, and as she listened she gripped her bridle-rein tightly and a wave of anger passed over her.

“Dog he stop ’m along house, night-time he walk about,” Gogoomy was saying,

perforce in bêche-de-mer English, because he was talking to others beside his own tribesmen. “You fella boy catch ’m one fella pig, put ’m kai-kai belong him along big fella fish-hook. S’pose dog he walk about catch ’m kai-kai, you fella boy catch ’m dog allee same one shark. Dog he finish close up. Big fella marster sleep along big fella house. White Mary sleep along pickaninny house. One fella Adamu he stop along outside pickaninny house. You fella boy finish ’m dog, finish ‘m Adamu, finish ’m big fella marster, finish ’m White Mary, finish ’em altogether. Plenty musket he stop, plenty powder, plenty tomahawk, plenty knife-fee, plenty porpoise teeth, plenty tobacco, plenty calico—my word, too much plenty everything we take ’m along whale-boat, washee {5} like hell, sun he come up we long way too much.”

“Me catch ’m pig sun he go down,” spoke up one whose thin falsetto voice Joan recognized as belonging to Cosse, one of Gogoomy’s tribesmen.

“Me catch ’m dog,” said another.

“And me catch ’m white fella Mary,” Gogoomy cried triumphantly. “Me catch ’m Kwaque he die along him damn quick.”

This much Joan heard of the plan to murder, and then her rising wrath proved too much for her discretion. She spurred her horse into the grass, crying,—

“What name you fella boy, eh? What name?”

They arose, scrambling and scattering, and to her surprise she saw there were a dozen of them. As she looked in their glowering faces and noted the heavy, two-foot, hacking cane-knives in their hands, she became suddenly aware of the rashness of her act. If only she had had her revolver or a rifle, all would have been well. But she had carelessly ventured out unarmed, and she followed the glance of Gogoomy to her waist and saw the pleased flash in his eyes as he perceived the absence of the dreadful man-killing revolver.

The first article in the Solomon Islands code for white men was never to show fear before a native, and Joan tried to carry off the situation in cavalier fashion.

“Too much talk along you fella boy,” she said severely. “Too much talk, too little work. Savvee?”

Gogoomy made no reply, but, apparently shifting weight, he slid one foot forward. The other boys, spread fan-wise about her, were also sliding forward, the cruel cane-knives in their hands advertising their intention.

“You cut ’m grass!” she commanded imperatively.

But Gogoomy slid his other foot forward. She measured the distance with her eye. It would be impossible to whirl her horse around and get away. She would be chopped down from behind.

And in that tense moment the faces of all of them were imprinted on her mind in an unforgettable picture—one of them, an old man, with torn and distended ear-lobes that fell to his chest; another, with the broad flattened nose of Africa, and with withered eyes so buried under frowning brows that nothing but the sickly, yellowish-looking whites could be seen; a third, thick-lipped and bearded with kinky whiskers; and Gogoomy—she had never realized before how handsome Gogoomy was in his mutinous and obstinate wild-animal way. There was a primitive aristocraticness about him that his fellows lacked. The lines of his figure were more rounded than theirs, the skin smooth, well oiled, and free from disease. On his chest, suspended from a single string of porpoise-teeth around his throat, hung a big crescent carved out of opalescent pearl-shell. A row of pure white cowrie shells banded his brow. From his hair drooped a long, lone feather. Above the swelling calf of one leg he wore, as a garter, a single string of white beads. The effect was dandyish in the extreme. A narrow gee-string completed his costume. Another man she saw, old and shrivelled, with puckered forehead and a puckered face that trembled and worked with animal passion as in the past she had noticed the faces of monkeys tremble and work.

“Gogoomy,” she said sharply, “you no cut ’m grass, my word, I bang ’m head

belong you."

His expression became a trifle more disdainful, but he did not answer. Instead, he stole a glance to right and left to mark how his fellows were closing about her. At the same moment he casually slipped his foot forward through the grass for a matter of several inches.

Joan was keenly aware of the desperateness of the situation. The only way out was through. She lifted her riding-whip threateningly, and at the same moment drove in both spurs with her heels, rushing the startled horse straight at Gogoomy. It all happened in an instant. Every cane-knife was lifted, and every boy save Gogoomy leaped for her. He swerved aside to avoid the horse, at the same time swinging his cane-knife in a slicing blow that would have cut her in twain. She leaned forward under the flying steel, which cut through her riding-skirt, through the edge of the saddle, through the saddle cloth, and even slightly into the horse itself. Her right hand, still raised, came down, the thin whip whishing through the air. She saw the white, cooked mark of the weal clear across the sullen, handsome face, and still what was practically in the same instant she saw the man with the puckered face, overridden, go down before her, and she heard his snarling and grimacing chatter-for all the world like an angry monkey. Then she was free and away, heading the horse at top speed for the house.

Out of her sea-training she was able to appreciate Sheldon's executiveness when she burst in on him with her news. Springing from the steamer-chair in which he had been lounging while waiting for breakfast, he clapped his hands for the house-boys; and, while listening to her, he was buckling on his cartridge-belt and running the mechanism of his automatic pistol.

"Ornfiri," he snapped out his orders, "you fella ring big fella bell strong fella plenty. You finish 'm bell, you put 'm saddle on horse. Viaburi, you go quick house belong Seelee he stop, tell 'm plenty black fella run away—ten fella two fella black fella

boy." He scribbled a note and handed it to Lalaperu. "Lalaperu, you go quick house belong white fella Marster Boucher."

"That will head them back from the coast on both sides," he explained to Joan. "And old Seelee will turn his whole village loose on their track as well."

In response to the summons of the big bell, Joan's Tahitians were the first to arrive, by their glistening bodies and panting chests showing that they had run all the way. Some of the farthest-placed gangs would be nearly an hour in arriving.

Sheldon proceeded to arm Joan's sailors and deal out ammunition and handcuffs. Adamu Adam, with loaded rifle, he placed on guard over the whale-boats. Noa Noah, aided by Matapuu, were instructed to take charge of the working-gangs as fast as they came in, to keep them amused, and to guard against their being stampeded into making a break themselves. The five other Tahitians were to follow Joan and Sheldon on foot.

"I'm glad we unearthed that arsenal the other day," Sheldon remarked as they rode out of the compound gate.

A hundred yards away they encountered one of the clearing gangs coming in. It was Kwaque's gang, but Sheldon looked in vain for him.

"What name that fella Kwaque he no stop along you?" he demanded.

A babel of excited voices attempted an answer.

"Shut 'm mouth belong you altogether," Sheldon commanded.

He spoke roughly, living up to the rôle of the white man who must always be strong and dominant.

"Here, you fella Babatani, you talk 'm mouth belong you."

Babatani stepped forward in all the pride of one singled out from among his fellows.

"Gogoomy he finish along Kwaque altogether," was Babatani's explanation. "He take 'm head b'long him run like hell."

In brief words, and with paucity of imagination, he described the murder, and Sheldon and Joan rode on. In the grass, where Joan had been attacked, they found the little shrivelled man, still chattering and grimacing, whom Joan had ridden down. The mare had plunged on his ankle, completely crushing it, and a hundred yards' crawl had convinced him of the futility of escape. To the last clearing-gang, from the farthest edge of the plantation, was given the task of carrying him in to the house.

A mile farther on, where the runaways' trail led straight toward the bush, they encountered the body of Kwaque. The head had been hacked off and was missing, and Sheldon took it on faith that the body was Kwaque's. He had evidently put up a fight, for a bloody trail led away from the body.

Once they were well into the thick bush the horses had to be abandoned. Papehara was left in charge of them, while Joan and Sheldon and the remaining Tahitians pushed ahead on foot. The way led down through a swampy hollow, which was overflowed by the Berande River on occasion, and where the red trail of the murderers was crossed by a crocodile's trail. They had apparently caught the creature asleep in the sun and desisted long enough from their flight to hack him to pieces. Here the wounded man had sat down and waited until they were ready to go on.

An hour later, following along a wild-pig trail, Sheldon suddenly halted. The bloody tracks had ceased. The Tahitians cast out in the bush on either side, and a cry from Utami apprised them of a find. Joan waited till Sheldon came back.

"It's Mauko," he said. "Kwaque did for him, and he crawled in there and died. That's two accounted for. There are ten more. Don't you think you've got enough of it?"

She nodded.

"It isn't nice," she said. "I'll go back and wait for you with the horses."

“But you can’t go alone. Take two of the men.”

“Then I’ll go on,” she said. “It would be foolish to weaken the pursuit, and I am certainly not tired.”

The trail bent to the right as though the runaways had changed their mind and headed for the Balesuna. But the trail still continued to bend to the right till it promised to make a loop, and the point of intersection seemed to be the edge of the plantation where the horses had been left. Crossing one of the quiet jungle spaces, where naught moved but a velvety, twelve-inch butterfly, they heard the sound of shots.

“Eight,” Joan counted. “It was only one gun. It must be Papehara.”

They hurried on, but when they reached the spot they were in doubt. The two horses stood quietly tethered, and Papehara, squatted on his hams, was having a peaceful smoke. Advancing toward him, Sheldon tripped on a body that lay in the grass, and as he saved himself from falling his eyes lighted on a second. Joan recognized this one. It was Cosse, one of Gogoomy’s tribesmen, the one who had promised to catch at sunset the pig that was to have baited the hook for Satan.

“No luck, Missie,” was Papehara’s greeting, accompanied by a disconsolate shake of the head. “Catch only two boy. I have good shot at Gogoomy, only I miss.”

“But you killed them,” Joan chided. “You must catch them alive.”

The Tahitian smiled.

“How?” he queried. “I am have a smoke. I think about Tahiti, and breadfruit, and jolly good time at Bora Bora. Quick, just like that, ten boy he run out of bush for me. Each boy have long knife. Gogoomy have long knife one hand, and Kwaque’s head in other hand. I no stop to catch ’m alive. I shoot like hell. How you catch ’m alive, ten boy, ten long knife, and Kwaque’s head?”

The scattered paths of the different boys, where they broke back after the disastrous

attempt to rush the Tahitian, soon led together. They traced it to the Berande, which the runaways had crossed with the clear intention of burying themselves in the huge mangrove swamp that lay beyond.

“There is no use our going any farther,” Sheldon said. “Seelee will turn out his village and hunt them out of that. They’ll never get past him. All we can do is to guard the coast and keep them from breaking back on the plantation and running amuck. Ah, I thought so.”

Against the jungle gloom of the farther shore, coming from down stream, a small canoe glided. So silently did it move that it was more like an apparition. Three naked blacks dipped with noiseless paddles. Long-hafted, slender, bone-barbed throwing-spears lay along the gunwale of the canoe, while a quiverful of arrows hung on each man’s back. The eyes of the man-hunters missed nothing. They had seen Sheldon and Joan first, but they gave no sign. Where Gogoomy and his followers had emerged from the river, the canoe abruptly stopped, then turned and disappeared into the deeper mangrove gloom. A second and a third canoe came around the bend from below, glided ghostlike to the crossing of the runaways, and vanished in the mangroves.

“I hope there won’t be any more killing,” Joan said, as they turned their horses homeward.

“I don’t think so,” Sheldon assured her. “My understanding with old Seelee is that he is paid only for live boys; so he is very careful.”

CHAPTER XXIII—A MESSAGE FROM THE BUSH

Never had runaways from Berande been more zealously hunted. The deeds of Gogoomy and his fellows had been a bad example for the one hundred and fifty new recruits. Murder had been planned, a gang-boss had been killed, and the murderers had broken their contracts by fleeing to the bush. Sheldon saw how imperative it

was to teach his new-caught cannibals that bad examples were disastrous things to pattern after, and he urged Seelee on night and day, while with the Tahitians he practically lived in the bush, leaving Joan in charge of the plantation. To the north Boucher did good work, twice turning the fugitives back when they attempted to gain the coast.

One by one the boys were captured. In the first man-drive through the mangrove swamp Seelee caught two. Circling around to the north, a third was wounded in the thigh by Boucher, and this one, dragging behind in the chase, was later gathered in by Seelee's hunters. The three captives, heavily ironed, were exposed each day in the compound, as good examples of what happened to bad examples, all for the edification of the seven score and ten half-wild Poonga-Poonga men. Then the Minerva, running past for Tulagi, was signalled to send a boat, and the three prisoners were carried away to prison to await trial.

Five were still at large, but escape was impossible. They could not get down to the coast, nor dared they venture too far inland for fear of the wild bushmen. Then one of the five came in voluntarily and gave himself up, and Sheldon learned that Gogoomy and two others were all that were at large. There should have been a fourth, but according to the man who had given himself up, the fourth man had been killed and eaten. It had been fear of a similar fate that had driven him in. He was a Malu man, from north-western Malaita, as likewise had been the one that was eaten. Gogoomy's two other companions were from Port Adams. As for himself, the black declared his preference for government trial and punishment to being eaten by his companions in the bush.

"Close up Gogoomy kai-kai me," he said. "My word, me no like boy kai-kai me."

Three days later Sheldon caught one of the boys, helpless from swamp fever, and unable to fight or run away. On the same day Seelee caught the second boy in similar condition. Gogoomy alone remained at large; and, as the pursuit closed in on

him, he conquered his fear of the bushmen and headed straight in for the mountainous backbone of the island. Sheldon with four Tahitians, and Seelee with thirty of his hunters, followed Gogoomy's trail a dozen miles into the open grass-lands, and then Seelee and his people lost heart. He confessed that neither he nor any of his tribe had ever ventured so far inland before, and he narrated, for Sheldon's benefit, most horrible tales of the horrible bushmen. In the old days, he said, they had crossed the grass-lands and attacked the salt-water natives; but since the coming of the white men to the coast they had remained in their interior fastnesses, and no salt-water native had ever seen them again.

"Gogoomy he finish along them fella bushmen," he assured Sheldon. "My word, he finish close up, kai-kai altogether."

So the expedition turned back. Nothing could persuade the coast natives to venture farther, and Sheldon, with his four Tahitians, knew that it was madness to go on alone. So he stood waist-deep in the grass and looked regretfully across the rolling savannah and the soft-swelling foothills to the Lion's Head, a massive peak of rock that upreared into the azure from the midmost centre of Guadalcanal, a landmark used for bearings by every coasting mariner, a mountain as yet untrod by the foot of a white man.

That night, after dinner, Sheldon and Joan were playing billiards, when Satan barked in the compound, and Lalaperu, sent to see, brought back a tired and travel-stained native, who wanted to talk with the "big fella white marster." It was only the man's insistence that procured him admittance at such an hour. Sheldon went out on the veranda to see him, and at first glance at the gaunt features and wasted body of the man knew that his errand was likely to prove important. Nevertheless, Sheldon demanded roughly,—

"What name you come along house belong me sun he go down?"

"Me Charley," the man muttered apologetically and wearily. "Me stop along Binu."

“Ah, Binu Charley, eh? Well, what name you talk along me? What place big fella marster along white man he stop?”

Joan and Sheldon together listened to the tale Binu Charley had brought. He described Tudor’s expedition up the Balesuna; the dragging of the boats up the rapids; the passage up the river where it threaded the grass-lands; the innumerable washings of gravel by the white men in search of gold; the first rolling foothills; the man-traps of spear-staked pits in the jungle trails; the first meeting with the bushmen, who had never seen tobacco, and knew not the virtues of smoking; their friendliness; the deeper penetration of the interior around the flanks of the Lion’s Head; the bush-sores and the fevers of the white men, and their madness in trusting the bushmen.

“Allee time I talk along white fella marster,” he said. “Me talk, ‘That fella bushman he look ’m eye belong him. He savvee too much. S’pose musket he stop along you, that fella bushman he too much good friend along you. Allee time he look sharp eye belong him. S’pose musket he no stop along you, my word, that fella bushman he chop ’m off head belong you. He kai-kai you altogether.’”

But the patience of the bushmen had exceeded that of the white men. The weeks had gone by, and no overt acts had been attempted. The bushmen swarmed in the camp in increasing numbers, and they were always making presents of yams and taro, of pig and fowl, and of wild fruits and vegetables. Whenever the gold-hunters moved their camp, the bushmen volunteered to carry the luggage. And the white men waxed ever more careless. They grew weary prospecting, and at the same time carrying their rifles and the heavy cartridge-belts, and the practice began of leaving their weapons behind them in camp.

“I tell ’m plenty fella white marster look sharp eye belong him. And plenty fella white marster make ’m big laugh along me, say Binu Charley allee same pickaninny—my word, they speak along me allee same pickaninny.”

Came the morning when Binu Charley noticed that the women and children had disappeared. Tudor, at the time, was lying in a stupor with fever in a late camp five miles away, the main camp having moved on those five miles in order to prospect an outcrop of likely quartz. Binu Charley was midway between the two camps when the absence of the women and children struck him as suspicious.

“My word,” he said, “me t’ink like hell. Him black Mary, him pickaninny, walk about long way big bit. What name? Me savvee too much trouble close up. Me fright like hell. Me run. My word, me run.”

Tudor, quite unconscious, was slung across his shoulder, and carried a mile down the trail. Here, hiding new trail, Binu Charley had carried him for a quarter of a mile into the heart of the deepest jungle, and hidden him in a big banyan tree. Returning to try to save the rifles and personal outfit, Binu Charley had seen a party of bushmen trotting down the trail, and had hidden in the bush. Here, and from the direction of the main camp, he had heard two rifle shots. And that was all. He had never seen the white men again, nor had he ventured near their old camp. He had gone back to Tudor, and hidden with him for a week, living on wild fruits and the few pigeons and cockatoos he had been able to shoot with bow and arrow. Then he had journeyed down to Berande to bring the news. Tudor, he said, was very sick, lying unconscious for days at a time, and, when in his right mind, too weak to help himself.

“What name you no kill ’m that big fella marster?” Joan demanded. “He have ’m good fella musket, plenty calico, plenty tobacco, plenty knife-fee, and two fella pickaninny musket shoot quick, bang-bang-bang—just like that.”

The black smiled cunningly.

“Me savvee too much. S’pose me kill ’m big fella marster, bimeby plenty white fella marster walk about Binu cross like hell. ‘What name this fellow musket?’ those plenty fella white marster talk ’m along me. My word, Binu Charley finish

altogether. S'pose me kill 'm him, no good along me. Plenty white fella marster cross along me. S'pose me no kill 'm him, bimeby he give me plenty tobacco, plenty calico, plenty everything too much."

"There is only the one thing to do," Sheldon said to Joan.

She drummed with her hand and waited, while Binu Charley gazed wearily at her with unblinking eyes.

"I'll start the first thing in the morning," Sheldon said.

"We'll start," she corrected. "I can get twice as much out of my Tahitians as you can, and, besides, one white should never be alone under such circumstances."

He shrugged his shoulders in token, not of consent, but of surrender, knowing the uselessness of attempting to argue the question with her, and consoling himself with the reflection that heaven alone knew what adventures she was liable to engage in if left alone on Berande for a week. He clapped his hands, and for the next quarter of an hour the house-boys were kept busy carrying messages to the barracks. A man was sent to Balesuna village to command old Seelee's immediate presence. A boat's-crew was started in a whale-boat with word for Boucher to come down. Ammunition was issued to the Tahitians, and the storeroom overhauled for a few days' tinned provisions. Viaburi turned yellow when told that he was to accompany the expedition, and, to everybody's surprise, Lalaperu volunteered to take his place.

Seelee arrived, proud in his importance that the great master of Berande should summon him in the night-time for council, and firm in his refusal to step one inch within the dread domain of the bushmen. As he said, if his opinion had been asked when the gold-hunters started, he would have foretold their disastrous end. There was only one thing that happened to any one who ventured into the bushmen's territory, and that was that he was eaten. And he would further say, without being asked, that if Sheldon went up into the bush he would be eaten too.

Sheldon sent for a gang-boss and told him to bring ten of the biggest, best, and

strongest Poonga-Poonga men.

“Not salt-water boys,” Sheldon cautioned, “but bush boys—leg belong him strong fella leg. Boy no savvee musket, no good. You bring ’m boy shoot musket strong fella.”

They were ten picked men that filed up on the veranda and stood in the glare of the lanterns. Their heavy, muscular legs advertised that they were bushmen. Each claimed long experience in bush-fighting, most of them showed scars of bullet or spear-thrust in proof, and all were wild for a chance to break the humdrum monotony of plantation labour by going on a killing expedition. Killing was their natural vocation, not wood-cutting; and while they would not have ventured the Guadalcanal bush alone, with a white man like Sheldon behind them, and a white Mary such as they knew Joan to be, they could expect a safe and delightful time. Besides, the great master had told them that the eight gigantic Tahitians were going along.

The Poonga-Poonga volunteers stood with glistening eyes and grinning faces, naked save for their loin-cloths, and barbarously ornamented. Each wore a flat, turtle-shell ring suspended through his nose, and each carried a clay pipe in an ear-hole or thrust inside a beaded biceps armlet. A pair of magnificent boar tusks graced the chest of one. On the chest of another hung a huge disc of polished fossil clam-shell.

“Plenty strong fella fight,” Sheldon warned them in conclusion.

They grinned and shifted delightedly.

“S’pose bushmen kai-kai along you?” he queried.

“No fear,” answered their spokesman, one Koogoo, a strapping, thick-lipped Ethiopian-looking man. “S’pose Poonga-Poonga boy kai-kai bush-boy?”

Sheldon shook his head, laughing, and dismissed them, and went to overhaul the dunnage-room for a small shelter tent for Joan’s use.

CHAPTER XXIV—IN THE BUSH

It was quite a formidable expedition that departed from Berande at break of day next morning in a fleet of canoes and dinghies. There were Joan and Sheldon, with Binu Charley and Lalaperu, the eight Tahitians, and the ten Poonga-Poonga men, each proud in the possession of a bright and shining modern rifle. In addition, there were two of the plantation boat's-crews of six men each. These, however, were to go no farther than Carli, where water transportation ceased and where they were to wait with the boats. Boucher remained behind in charge of Berande.

By eleven in the morning the expedition arrived at Binu, a cluster of twenty houses on the river bank. And from here thirty odd Binu men accompanied them, armed with spears and arrows, chattering and grimacing with delight at the warlike array. The long quiet stretches of river gave way to swifter water, and progress was slower and more dogged. The Balesuna grew shallow as well, and oftener were the loaded boats bumped along and half-lifted over the bottom. In places timber-falls blocked the passage of the narrow stream, and the boats and canoes were portaged around. Night brought them to Carli, and they had the satisfaction of knowing that they had accomplished in one day what had required two days for Tudor's expedition.

Here at Carli, next morning, half-way through the grass-lands, the boat's-crews were left, and with them the horde of Binu men, the boldest of which held on for a bare mile and then ran scampering back. Binu Charley, however, was at the fore, and led the way onward into the rolling foothills, following the trail made by Tudor and his men weeks before. That night they camped well into the hills and deep in the tropic jungle. The third day found them on the run-ways of the bushmen—narrow paths that compelled single file and that turned and twisted with endless convolutions through the dense undergrowth. For the most part it was a silent forest, lush and dank, where only occasionally a wood-pigeon cooed or snow-white cockatoos laughed harshly in laborious flight.

Here, in the mid-morning, the first casualty occurred. Binu Charley had dropped behind for a time, and Koogoo, the Poonga-Poonga man who had boasted that he would eat the bushmen, was in the lead. Joan and Sheldon heard the twanging thrum and saw Koogoo throw out his arms, at the same time dropping his rifle, stumble forward, and sink down on his hands and knees. Between his naked shoulders, low down and to the left, appeared the bone-barbed head of an arrow. He had been shot through and through. Cocked rifles swept the bush with nervous apprehension. But there was no rustle, no movement; nothing but the humid oppressive silence.

"Bushmen he no stop," Binu Charley called out, the sound of his voice startling more than one of them. "Allee same damn funny business. That fella Koogoo no look 'm eye belong him. He no savvee little bit."

Koogoo's arms had crumpled under him, and he lay quivering where he had fallen. Even as Binu Charley came to the front the stricken black's breath passed from him, and with a final convulsive stir he lay still.

"Right through the heart," Sheldon said, straightening up from the stooping examination. "It must have been a trap of some sort."

He noticed Joan's white, tense face, and the wide eyes with which she stared at the wreck of what had been a man the minute before.

"I recruited that boy myself," she said in a whisper. "He came down out of the bush at Poonga-Poonga and right on board the Martha and offered himself. And I was proud. He was my very first recruit—"

"My word! Look 'm that fella," Binu Charley interrupted, brushing aside the leafy wall of the run-way and exposing a bow so massive that no one bushman could have bent it.

The Binu man traced out the mechanics of the trap, and exposed the hidden fibre in the tangled undergrowth that at contact with Koogoo's foot had released the taut bow.

They were deep in the primeval forest. A dim twilight prevailed, for no random shaft of sunlight broke through the thick roof of leaves and creepers overhead. The Tahitians were plainly awed by the silence and gloom and mystery of the place and happening, but they showed themselves doggedly unafraid, and were for pushing on. The Poonga-Poonga men, on the contrary, were not awed. They were bushmen themselves, and they were used to this silent warfare, though the devices were different from those employed by them in their own bush. Most awed of all were Joan and Sheldon, but, being whites, they were not supposed to be subject to such commonplace emotions, and their task was to carry the situation off with careless bravado as befitted "big fella marsters" of the dominant breed.

Binu Charley took the lead as they pushed on, and trap after trap yielded its secret lurking-place to his keen scrutiny. The way was beset with a thousand annoyances, chiefest among which were thorns, cunningly concealed, that penetrated the bare feet of the invaders. Once, during the afternoon, Binu Charley barely missed being impaled in a staked pit that undermined the trail. There were times when all stood still and waited for half an hour or more while Binu Charley prospected suspicious parts of the trail. Sometimes he was compelled to leave the trail and creep and climb through the jungle so as to approach the man-traps from behind; and on one occasion, in spite of his precaution, a spring-bow was discharged, the flying arrow barely clipping the shoulder of one of the waiting Poonga-Poonga boys.

Where a slight run-way entered the main one, Sheldon paused and asked Binu Charley if he knew where it led.

"Plenty bush fella garden he stop along there short way little bit," was the answer. "All right you like 'm go look 'm along."

"'Walk 'm easy," he cautioned, a few minutes later. "Close up, that fella garden. S'pose some bush fella he stop, we catch 'm."

Creeping ahead and peering into the clearing for a moment, Binu Charley beckoned

Sheldon to come on cautiously. Joan crouched beside him, and together they peeped out. The cleared space was fully half an acre in extent and carefully fenced against the wild pigs. Paw-paw and banana-trees were just ripening their fruit, while beneath grew sweet potatoes and yams. On one edge of the clearing was a small grass house, open-sided, a mere rain-shelter. In front of it, crouched on his hams before a fire, was a gaunt and bearded bushman. The fire seemed to smoke excessively, and in the thick of the smoke a round dark object hung suspended. The bushman seemed absorbed in contemplation of this object.

Warning them not to shoot unless the man was successfully escaping, Sheldon beckoned the Poonga-Poonga men forward. Joan smiled appreciatively to Sheldon. It was head-hunters against head-hunters. The blacks trod noiselessly to their stations, which were arranged so that they could spring simultaneously into the open. Their faces were keen and serious, their eyes eloquent with the ecstasy of living that was upon them—for this was living, this game of life and death, and to them it was the only game a man should play, withal they played it in low and cowardly ways, killing from behind in the dim forest gloom and rarely coming out into the open.

Sheldon whispered the word, and the ten runners leaped forward—for Binu Charley ran with them. The bushman's keen ears warned him, and he sprang to his feet, bow and arrow in hand, the arrow fixed in the notch and the bow bending as he sprang. The man he let drive at dodged the arrow, and before he could shoot another his enemies were upon him. He was rolled over and over and dragged to his feet, disarmed and helpless.

"Why, he's an ancient Babylonian!" Joan cried, regarding him. "He's an Assyrian, a Phoenician! Look at that straight nose, that narrow face, those high cheek-bones—and that slanting, oval forehead, and the beard, and the eyes, too."

"And the snaky locks," Sheldon laughed.

The bushman was in mortal fear, led by all his training to expect nothing less than death; yet he did not cower away from them. Instead, he returned their looks with lean self-sufficiency, and finally centred his gaze upon Joan, the first white woman he had ever seen.

“My word, bush fella kai-kai along that fella boy,” Binu Charley remarked.

So stolid was his manner of utterance that Joan turned carelessly to see what had attracted his attention, and found herself face to face with Gogoomy. At least, it was the head of Gogoomy—the dark object they had seen hanging in the smoke. It was fresh—the smoke-curing had just begun—and, save for the closed eyes, all the sullen handsomeness and animal virility of the boy, as Joan had known it, was still to be seen in the monstrous thing that twisted and dangled in the eddying smoke.

Nor was Joan’s horror lessened by the conduct of the Poonga-Poonga boys. On the instant they recognized the head, and on the instant rose their wild hearty laughter as they explained to one another in shrill falsetto voices. Gogoomy’s end was a joke. He had been foiled in his attempt to escape. He had played the game and lost. And what greater joke could there be than that the bushmen should have eaten him? It was the funniest incident that had come under their notice in many a day. And to them there was certainly nothing unusual nor bizarre in the event. Gogoomy had completed the life-cycle of the bushman. He had taken heads, and now his own head had been taken. He had eaten men, and now he had been eaten by men.

The Poonga-Poonga men’s laughter died down, and they regarded the spectacle with glittering eyes and gluttonous expressions. The Tahitians, on the other hand, were shocked, and Adamu Adam was shaking his head slowly and grunting forth his disgust. Joan was angry. Her face was white, but in each cheek was a vivid spray of red. Disgust had been displaced by wrath, and her mood was clearly vengeful.

Sheldon laughed.

“It’s nothing to be angry over,” he said. “You mustn’t forget that he hacked off

Kwaque's head, and that he ate one of his own comrades that ran away with him. Besides, he was born to it. He has but been eaten out of the same trough from which he himself has eaten."

Joan looked at him with lips that trembled on the verge of speech.

"And don't forget," Sheldon added, "that he is the son of a chief, and that as sure as fate his Port Adams tribesmen will take a white man's head in payment."

"It is all so ghastly ridiculous," Joan finally said.

"And—er—romantic," he suggested slyly.

She did not answer, and turned away; but Sheldon knew that the shaft had gone home.

"That fella boy he sick, belly belong him walk about," Binu Charley said, pointing to the Poonga-Poonga man whose shoulder had been scratched by the arrow an hour before.

The boy was sitting down and groaning, his arms clasping his bent knees, his head drooped forward and rolling painfully back and forth. For fear of poison, Sheldon had immediately scarified the wound and injected permanganate of potash; but in spite of the precaution the shoulder was swelling rapidly.

"We'll take him on to where Tudor is lying," Joan said. "The walking will help to keep up his circulation and scatter the poison. Adamu Adam, you take hold that boy. Maybe he will want to sleep. Shake him up. If he sleep he die."

The advance was more rapid now, for Binu Charley placed the captive bushman in front of him and made him clear the run-way of traps. Once, at a sharp turn where a man's shoulder would unavoidably brush against a screen of leaves, the bushman displayed great caution as he spread the leaves aside and exposed the head of a sharp-pointed spear, so set that the casual passer-by would receive at the least a nasty scratch.

“My word,” said Binu Charley, “that fella spear allee same devil-devil.”

He took the spear and was examining it when suddenly he made as if to stick it into the bushman. It was a bit of simulated playfulness, but the bushman sprang back in evident fright. Poisoned the weapon was beyond any doubt, and thereafter Binu Charley carried it threateningly at the prisoner’s back.

The sun, sinking behind a lofty western peak, brought on an early but lingering twilight, and the expedition plodded on through the evil forest—the place of mystery and fear, of death swift and silent and horrible, of brutish appetite and degraded instinct, of human life that still wallowed in the primeval slime, of savagery degenerate and abysmal. No slightest breezes blew in the gloomy silence, and the air was stale and humid and suffocating. The sweat poured unceasingly from their bodies, and in their nostrils was the heavy smell of rotting vegetation and of black earth that was a-crawl with fecund life.

They turned aside from the run-way at a place indicated by Binu Charley, and, sometimes crawling on hands and knees through the damp black muck, at other times creeping and climbing through the tangled undergrowth a dozen feet from the ground, they came to an immense banyan tree, half an acre in extent, that made in the innermost heart of the jungle a denser jungle of its own. From out of its black depths came the voice of a man singing in a cracked, eerie voice.

“My word, that big fella marster he no die!”

The singing stopped, and the voice, faint and weak, called out a hello. Joan answered, and then the voice explained.

“I’m not wandering. I was just singing to keep my spirits up. Have you got anything to eat?”

A few minutes saw the rescued man lying among blankets, while fires were building, water was being carried, Joan’s tent was going up, and Lalaperu was overhauling the packs and opening tins of provisions. Tudor, having pulled through

the fever and started to mend, was still frightfully weak and very much starved. So badly swollen was he from mosquito-bites that his face was unrecognizable, and the acceptance of his identity was largely a matter of faith. Joan had her own ointments along, and she prefaced their application by fomenting his swollen features with hot cloths. Sheldon, with an eye to the camp and the preparations for the night, looked on and felt the pangs of jealousy at every contact of her hands with Tudor's face and body. Somehow, engaged in their healing ministrations, they no longer seemed to him boy's hands, the hands of Joan who had gazed at Gogoomy's head with pale cheeks sprayed with angry flame. The hands were now a woman's hands, and Sheldon grinned to himself as his fancy suggested that some night he must lie outside the mosquito-netting in order to have Joan apply soothing fomentations in the morning.

CHAPTER XXV—THE HEAD-HUNTERS

The morning's action had been settled the night before. Tudor was to stay behind in his banyan refuge and gather strength while the expedition proceeded. On the far chance that they might rescue even one solitary survivor of Tudor's party, Joan was fixed in her determination to push on; and neither Sheldon nor Tudor could persuade her to remain quietly at the banyan tree while Sheldon went on and searched. With Tudor, Adamu Adam and Arahu were to stop as guards, the latter Tahitian being selected to remain because of a bad foot which had been brought about by stepping on one of the thorns concealed by the bushmen. It was evidently a slow poison, and not too strong, that the bushmen used, for the wounded Poonga-Poonga man was still alive, and though his swollen shoulder was enormous, the inflammation had already begun to go down. He, too, remained with Tudor.

Binu Charley led the way, by proxy, however, for, by means of the poisoned spear, he drove the captive bushman ahead. The run-way still ran through the dank and

rotten jungle, and they knew no villages would be encountered till rising ground was gained. They plodded on, panting and sweating in the humid, stagnant air. They were immersed in a sea of wanton, prodigal vegetation. All about them the huge-rooted trees blocked their footing, while coiled and knotted climbers, of the girth of a man's arm, were thrown from lofty branch to lofty branch, or hung in tangled masses like so many monstrous snakes. Lush-stalked plants, larger-leaved than the body of a man, exuded a sweaty moisture from all their surfaces. Here and there, banyan trees, like rocky islands, shouldered aside the streaming riot of vegetation between their crowded columns, showing portals and passages wherein all daylight was lost and only midnight gloom remained. Tree-ferns and mosses and a myriad other parasitic forms jostled with gay-coloured fungoid growths for room to live, and the very atmosphere itself seemed to afford clinging space to airy fairy creepers, light and delicate as gem-dust, tremulous with microscopic blooms. Pale-golden and vermilion orchids flaunted their unhealthy blossoms in the golden, dripping sunshine that filtered through the matted roof. It was the mysterious, evil forest, a charnel house of silence, wherein naught moved save strange tiny birds—the strangeness of them making the mystery more profound, for they flitted on noiseless wings, emitting neither song nor chirp, and they were mottled with morbid colours, having all the seeming of orchids, flying blossoms of sickness and decay.

He was caught by surprise, fifteen feet in the air above the path, in the forks of a many-branched tree. All saw him as he dropped like a shadow, naked as on his natal morn, landing springily on his bent knees, and like a shadow leaping along the run-way. It was hard for them to realize that it was a man, for he seemed a weird jungle spirit, a goblin of the forest. Only Binu Charley was not perturbed. He flung his poisoned spear over the head of the captive at the flitting form. It was a mighty cast, well intended, but the shadow, leaping, received the spear harmlessly between the legs, and, tripping upon it, was flung sprawling. Before he could get away, Binu

Charley was upon him, clutching him by his snow-white hair. He was only a young man, and a dandy at that, his face blackened with charcoal, his hair whitened with wood-ashes, with the freshly severed tail of a wild pig thrust through his perforated nose, and two more thrust through his ears. His only other ornament was a necklace of human finger-bones. At sight of their other prisoner he chattered in a high querulous falsetto, with puckered brows and troubled, wild-animal eyes. He was disposed of along the middle of the line, one of the Poonga-Poonga men leading him at the end of a length of bark-rope.

The trail began to rise out of the jungle, dipping at times into festering hollows of unwholesome vegetation, but rising more and more over swelling, unseen hill-slopes or climbing steep hog-backs and rocky hummocks where the forest thinned and blue patches of sky appeared overhead.

“Close up he stop,” Binu Charley warned them in a whisper.

Even as he spoke, from high overhead came the deep resonant boom of a village drum. But the beat was slow, there was no panic in the sound. They were directly beneath the village, and they could hear the crowing of roosters, two women’s voices raised in brief dispute, and, once, the crying of a child. The run-way now became a deeply worn path, rising so steeply that several times the party paused for breath. The path never widened, and in places the feet and the rains of generations had scoured it till it was sunken twenty feet beneath the surface.

“One man with a rifle could hold it against a thousand,” Sheldon whispered to Joan. “And twenty men could hold it with spears and arrows.”

They came out on the village, situated on a small, upland plateau, grass-covered, and with only occasional trees. There was a wild chorus of warning cries from the women, who scurried out of the grass houses, and like frightened quail dived over the opposite edge of the clearing, gathering up their babies and children as they ran. At the same time spears and arrows began to fall among the invaders. At Sheldon’s

command, the Tahitians and Poonga-Poonga men got into action with their rifles. The spears and arrows ceased, the last bushman disappeared, and the fight was over almost as soon as it had begun. On their own side no one had been hurt, while half a dozen bushmen had been killed. These alone remained, the wounded having been carried off. The Tahitians and Poonga-Poonga men had warmed up and were for pursuit, but this Sheldon would not permit. To his pleased surprise, Joan backed him up in the decision; for, glancing at her once during the firing, he had seen her white face, like a glittering sword in its fighting intensity, the nostrils dilated, the eyes bright and steady and shining.

“Poor brutes,” she said. “They act only according to their natures. To eat their kind and take heads is good morality for them.”

“But they should be taught not to take white men’s heads,” Sheldon argued.

She nodded approval, and said, “If we find one head we’ll burn the village. Hey, you, Charley! What fella place head he stop?”

“S’pose he stop along devil-devil house,” was the answer. “That big fella house, he devil-devil.”

It was the largest house in the village, ambitiously ornamented with fancy-plaited mats and king-posts carved into obscene and monstrous forms half-human and half-animal. Into it they went, in the obscure light stumbling across the sleeping-logs of the village bachelors and knocking their heads against strings of weird votive-offerings, dried and shrivelled, that hung from the roof-beams. On either side were rude gods, some grotesquely carved, others no more than shapeless logs swathed in rotten and indescribably filthy matting. The air was mouldy and heavy with decay, while strings of fish-tails and of half-cleaned dog and crocodile skulls did not add to the wholesomeness of the place.

In the centre, crouched before a slow-smoking fire, in the littered ashes of a thousand fires, was an old man who blinked apathetically at the invaders. He was

extremely old—so old that his withered skin hung about him in loose folds and did not look like skin. His hands were bony claws, his emaciated face a sheer death's-head. His task, it seemed, was to tend the fire, and while he blinked at them he added to it a handful of dead and mouldy wood. And hung in the smoke they found the object of their search. Joan turned and stumbled out hastily, deathly sick, reeling into the sunshine and clutching at the air for support.

"See if all are there," she called back faintly, and tottered aimlessly on for a few steps, breathing the air in great draughts and trying to forget the sight she had seen.

Upon Sheldon fell the unpleasant task of tallying the heads. They were all there, nine of them, white men's heads, the faces of which he had been familiar with when their owners had camped in Berande compound and set up the poling-boats. Binu Charley, hugely interested, lent a hand, turning the heads around for identification, noting the hatchet-strokes, and remarking the distorted expressions. The Poonga-Poonga men gloated as usual, and as usual the Tahitians were shocked and angry, several of them cursing and muttering in undertones. So angry was Matapuu, that he strode suddenly over to the fire-tender and kicked him in the ribs, whereupon the old savage emitted an appalling squeal, pig-like in its wild-animal fear, and fell face downward in the ashes and lay quivering in momentary expectation of death.

Other heads, thoroughly sun-dried and smoke-cured, were found in abundance, but, with two exceptions, they were the heads of blacks. So this was the manner of hunting that went on in the dark and evil forest, Sheldon thought, as he regarded them. The atmosphere of the place was sickening, yet he could not forbear to pause before one of Binu Charley's finds.

"Me savvee black Mary, me savvee white Mary," quoth Binu Charley. "Me no savvee that fella Mary. What name belong him?"

Sheldon looked. Ancient and withered, blackened by many years of the smoke of the devil-devil house, nevertheless the shrunken, mummy-like face was unmistakably

Chinese. How it had come there was the mystery. It was a woman's head, and he had never heard of a Chinese woman in the history of the Solomons. From the ears hung two-inch-long ear-rings, and at Sheldon's direction the Binu man rubbed away the accretions of smoke and dirt, and from under his fingers appeared the polished green of jade, the sheen of pearl, and the warm red of Oriental gold. The other head, equally ancient, was a white man's, as the heavy blond moustache, twisted and askew on the shrivelled upper lip, gave sufficient advertisement; and Sheldon wondered what forgotten bêche-de-mer fisherman or sandalwood trader had gone to furnish that ghastly trophy.

Telling Binu Charley to remove the ear-rings, and directing the Poonga-Poonga men to carry out the old fire-tender, Sheldon cleared the devil-devil house and set fire to it. Soon every house was blazing merrily, while the ancient fire-tender sat upright in the sunshine blinking at the destruction of his village. From the heights above, where were evidently other villages, came the booming of drums and a wild blowing of war-conchs; but Sheldon had dared all he cared to with his small following. Besides, his mission was accomplished. Every member of Tudor's expedition was accounted for; and it was a long, dark way out of the head-hunters' country. Releasing their two prisoners, who leaped away like startled deer, they plunged down the steep path into the steaming jungle.

Joan, still shocked by what she had seen, walked on in front of Sheldon, subdued and silent. At the end of half an hour she turned to him with a wan smile and said,—

"I don't think I care to visit the head-hunters any more. It's adventure, I know; but there is such a thing as having too much of a good thing. Riding around the plantation will henceforth be good enough for me, or perhaps salving another Martha; but the bushmen of Guadalcanal need never worry for fear that I shall visit them again. I shall have nightmares for months to come, I know I shall. Ugh!—the horrid beasts!"

That night found them back in camp with Tudor, who, while improved, would still have to be carried down on a stretcher. The swelling of the Poonga-Poonga man's shoulder was going down slowly, but Arahu still limped on his thorn-poisoned foot.

Two days later they rejoined the boats at Carli; and at high noon of the third day, travelling with the current and shooting the rapids, the expedition arrived at Berande. Joan, with a sigh, unbuckled her revolver-belt and hung it on the nail in the living-room, while Sheldon, who had been lurking about for the sheer joy of seeing her perform that particular home-coming act, sighed, too, with satisfaction. But the home-coming was not all joy to him, for Joan set about nursing Tudor, and spent much time on the veranda where he lay in the hammock under the mosquito-netting.

CHAPTER XXVI—BURNING DAYLIGHT

The ten days of Tudor's convalescence that followed were peaceful days on Berande. The work of the plantation went on like clock-work. With the crushing of the premature outbreak of Gogoomy and his following, all insubordination seemed to have vanished. Twenty more of the old-time boys, their term of service up, were carried away by the Martha, and the fresh stock of labour, treated fairly, was proving of excellent quality. As Sheldon rode about the plantation, acknowledging to himself the comfort and convenience of a horse and wondering why he had not thought of getting one himself, he pondered the various improvements for which Joan was responsible—the splendid Poonga-Poonga recruits; the fruits and vegetables; the Martha herself, snatched from the sea for a song and earning money hand over fist despite old Kinross's slow and safe method of running her; and Berande, once more financially secure, approaching each day nearer the dividend-paying time, and growing each day as the black toilers cleared the bush, cut the cane-grass, and planted more cocoanut palms.

In these and a thousand ways Sheldon was made aware of how much he was

indebted for material prosperity to Joan—to the slender, level-browed girl with romance shining out of her gray eyes and adventure shouting from the long-barrelled Colt's on her hip, who had landed on the beach that piping gale, along with her stalwart Tahitian crew, and who had entered his bungalow to hang with boy's hands her revolver-belt and Baden-Powell hat on the nail by the billiard table. He forgot all the early exasperations, remembering only her charms and sweetnesses and glorying much in the traits he at first had disliked most—her boyishness and adventurousness, her delight to swim and risk the sharks, her desire to go recruiting, her love of the sea and ships, her sharp authoritative words when she launched the whale-boat and, with firestick in one hand and dynamite-stick in the other, departed with her picturesque crew to shoot fish in the Balesuna; her super-innocent disdain for the commonest conventions, her juvenile joy in argument, her fluttering, wild-bird love of freedom and mad passion for independence. All this he now loved, and he no longer desired to tame and hold her, though the paradox was the winning of her without the taming and the holding.

There were times when he was dizzy with thought of her and love of her, when he would stop his horse and with closed eyes picture her as he had seen her that first day, in the stern-sheets of the whale-boat, dashing madly in to shore and marching belligerently along his veranda to remark that it was pretty hospitality this letting strangers sink or swim in his front yard. And as he opened his eyes and urged his horse onward, he would ponder for the ten thousandth time how possibly he was ever to hold her when she was so wild and bird-like that she was bound to flutter out and away from under his hand.

It was patent to Sheldon that Tudor had become interested in Joan. That convalescent visitor practically lived on the veranda, though, while preposterously weak and shaky in the legs, he had for some time insisted on coming in to join them at the table at meals. The first warning Sheldon had of the other's growing interest in the girl was when Tudor eased down and finally ceased pricking him with his

habitual sharpness of quip and speech. This cessation of verbal sparring was like the breaking off of diplomatic relations between countries at the beginning of war, and, once Sheldon's suspicions were aroused, he was not long in finding other confirmations. Tudor too obviously joyed in Joan's presence, too obviously laid himself out to amuse and fascinate her with his own glorious and adventurous personality. Often, after his morning ride over the plantation, or coming in from the store or from inspection of the copra-drying, Sheldon found the pair of them together on the veranda, Joan listening, intent and excited, and Tudor deep in some recital of personal adventure at the ends of the earth.

Sheldon noticed, too, the way Tudor looked at her and followed her about with his eyes, and in those eyes he noted a certain hungry look, and on the face a certain wistful expression; and he wondered if on his own face he carried a similar involuntary advertisement. He was sure of several things: first, that Tudor was not the right man for Joan and could not possibly make her permanently happy; next, that Joan was too sensible a girl really to fall in love with a man of such superficial stamp; and, finally, that Tudor would blunder his love-making somehow. And at the same time, with true lover's anxiety, Sheldon feared that the other might somehow fail to blunder, and win the girl with purely fortuitous and successful meretricious show. But of the one thing Sheldon was sure: Tudor had no intimate knowledge of her and was unaware of how vital in her was her wildness and love of independence. That was where he would blunder—in the catching and the holding of her. And then, in spite of all his certitude, Sheldon could not forbear wondering if his theories of Joan might not be wrong, and if Tudor was not going the right way about after all.

The situation was very unsatisfactory and perplexing. Sheldon played the difficult part of waiting and looking on, while his rival devoted himself energetically to reaching out and grasping at the fluttering prize. Then, again, Tudor had such an irritating way about him. It had become quite elusive and intangible, now that he had tacitly severed diplomatic relations; but Sheldon sensed what he deemed a growing

antagonism and promptly magnified it through the jealous lenses of his own lover's eyes. The other was an interloper. He did not belong to Berande, and now that he was well and strong again it was time for him to go. Instead of which, and despite the calling in of the mail steamer bound for Sydney, Tudor had settled himself down comfortably, resumed swimming, went dynamiting fish with Joan, spent hours with her hunting pigeons, trapping crocodiles, and at target practice with rifle and revolver.

But there were certain traditions of hospitality that prevented Sheldon from breathing a hint that it was time for his guest to take himself off. And in similar fashion, feeling that it was not playing the game, he fought down the temptation to warn Joan. Had he known anything, not too serious, to Tudor's detriment, he would have been unable to utter it; but the worst of it was that he knew nothing at all against the man. That was the confounded part of it, and sometimes he was so baffled and overwrought by his feelings that he assumed a super-judicial calm and assured himself that his dislike of Tudor was a matter of unsubstantial prejudice and jealousy.

Outwardly, he maintained a calm and smiling aspect. The work of the plantation went on. The Martha and the Flibberty-Gibbet came and went, as did all the miscellany of coasting craft that dropped in to wait for a breeze and have a gossip, a drink or two, and a game of billiards. Satan kept the compound free of niggers. Boucher came down regularly in his whale-boat to pass Sunday. Twice a day, at breakfast and dinner, Joan and Sheldon and Tudor met amicably at table, and the evenings were as amicably spent on the veranda.

And then it happened. Tudor made his blunder. Never divining Joan's fluttering wildness, her blind hatred of restraint and compulsion, her abhorrence of mastery by another, and mistaking the warmth and enthusiasm in her eyes (aroused by his latest tale) for something tender and acquiescent, he drew her to him, laid a forcible

detaining arm about her waist, and misapprehended her frantic revolt for an exhibition of maidenly reluctance. It occurred on the veranda, after breakfast, and Sheldon, within, pondering a Sydney wholesaler's catalogue and making up his orders for next steamer-day, heard the sharp exclamation of Joan, followed by the equally sharp impact of an open hand against a cheek. Jerking free from the arm that was all distasteful compulsion, Joan had slapped Tudor's face resoundingly and with far more vim and weight than when she had cuffed Gogoomy.

Sheldon had half-started up, then controlled himself and sunk back in his chair, so that by the time Joan entered the door his composure was recovered. Her right forearm was clutched tightly in her left hand, while the white cheeks, centred with the spots of flaming red, reminded him of the time he had first seen her angry.

"He hurt my arm," she blurted out, in reply to his look of inquiry.

He smiled involuntarily. It was so like her, so like the boy she was, to come running to complain of the physical hurt which had been done her. She was certainly not a woman versed in the ways of man and in the ways of handling man. The resounding slap she had given Tudor seemed still echoing in Sheldon's ears, and as he looked at the girl before him crying out that her arm was hurt, his smile grew broader.

It was the smile that did it, convicting Joan in her own eyes of the silliness of her cry and sending over her face the most amazing blush he had ever seen. Throat, cheeks, and forehead flamed with the rush of the shamed blood.

"He—he—" she attempted to vindicate her deeper indignation, then whirled abruptly away and passed out the rear door and down the steps.

Sheldon sat and mused. He was a trifle angry, and the more he dwelt upon the happening the angrier he grew. If it had been any woman except Joan it would have been amusing. But Joan was the last woman in the world to attempt to kiss forcibly. The thing smacked of the back stairs anyway—a sordid little comedy perhaps, but to have tried it on Joan was nothing less than sacrilege. The man should have had

better sense. Then, too, Sheldon was personally aggrieved. He had been filched of something that he felt was almost his, and his lover's jealousy was rampant at thought of this forced familiarity.

It was while in this mood that the screen door banged loudly behind the heels of Tudor, who strode into the room and paused before him. Sheldon was unprepared, though it was very apparent that the other was furious.

"Well?" Tudor demanded defiantly.

And on the instant speech rushed to Sheldon's lips.

"I hope you won't attempt anything like it again, that's all—except that I shall be only too happy any time to extend to you the courtesy of my whale-boat. It will land you in Tulagi in a few hours."

"As if that would settle it," was the retort.

"I don't understand," Sheldon said simply.

"Then it is because you don't wish to understand."

"Still I don't understand," Sheldon said in steady, level tones. "All that is clear to me is that you are exaggerating your own blunder into something serious."

Tudor grinned maliciously and replied,—

"It would seem that you are doing the exaggerating, inviting me to leave in your whale-boat. It is telling me that Berande is not big enough for the pair of us. Now let me tell you that the Solomon Islands is not big enough for the pair of us. This thing's got to be settled between us, and it may as well be settled right here and now."

"I can understand your fire-eating manners as being natural to you," Sheldon went on wearily, "but why you should try them on me is what I can't comprehend. You surely don't want to quarrel with me."

"I certainly do."

“But what in heaven’s name for?”

Tudor surveyed him with withering disgust.

“You haven’t the soul of a louse. I suppose any man could make love to your wife—”

“But I have no wife,” Sheldon interrupted.

“Then you ought to have. The situation is outrageous. You might at least marry her, as I am honourably willing to do.”

For the first time Sheldon’s rising anger boiled over.

“You—” he began violently, then abruptly caught control of himself and went on soothingly, “you’d better take a drink and think it over. That’s my advice to you. Of course, when you do get cool, after talking to me in this fashion you won’t want to stay on any longer, so while you’re getting that drink I’ll call the boat’s-crew and launch a boat. You’ll be in Tulagi by eight this evening.”

He turned toward the door, as if to put his words into execution, but the other caught him by the shoulder and twirled him around.

“Look here, Sheldon, I told you the Solomons were too small for the pair of us, and I meant it.”

“Is that an offer to buy Berande, lock, stock, and barrel?” Sheldon queried.

“No, it isn’t. It’s an invitation to fight.”

“But what the devil do you want to fight with me for?” Sheldon’s irritation was growing at the other’s persistence. “I’ve no quarrel with you. And what quarrel can you have with me? I have never interfered with you. You were my guest. Miss Lackland is my partner. If you saw fit to make love to her, and somehow failed to succeed, why should you want to fight with me? This is the twentieth century, my dear fellow, and duelling went out of fashion before you and I were born.”

“You began the row,” Tudor doggedly asserted. “You gave me to understand that it

was time for me to go. You fired me out of your house, in short. And then you have the cheek to want to know why I am starting the row. It won't do, I tell you. You started it, and I am going to see it through."

Sheldon smiled tolerantly and proceeded to light a cigarette. But Tudor was not to be turned aside.

"You started this row," he urged.

"There isn't any row. It takes two to make a row, and I, for one, refuse to have anything to do with such tomfoolery."

"You started it, I say, and I'll tell you why you started it."

"I fancy you've been drinking," Sheldon interposed. "It's the only explanation I can find for your unreasonableness."

"And I'll tell you why you started it. It wasn't silliness on your part to exaggerate this little trifle of love-making into something serious. I was poaching on your preserves, and you wanted to get rid of me. It was all very nice and snug here, you and the girl, until I came along. And now you're jealous—that's it, jealousy—and want me out of it. But I won't go."

"Then stay on by all means. I won't quarrel with you about it. Make yourself comfortable. Stay for a year, if you wish."

"She's not your wife," Tudor continued, as though the other had not spoken. "A fellow has the right to make love to her unless she's your—well, perhaps it was an error after all, due to ignorance, perfectly excusable, on my part. I might have seen it with half an eye if I'd listened to the gossip on the beach. All Guvutu and Tulagi were laughing about it. I was a fool, and I certainly made the mistake of taking the situation on its assumed innocent face-value."

So angry was Sheldon becoming that the face and form of the other seemed to vibrate and oscillate before his eyes. Yet outwardly Sheldon was calm and

apparently weary of the discussion.

“Please keep her out of the conversation,” he said.

“But why should I?” was the demand. “The pair of you trapped me into making a fool of myself. How was I to know that everything was not all right? You and she acted as if everything were on the square. But my eyes are open now. Why, she played the outraged wife to perfection, slapped the transgressor and fled to you. Pretty good proof of what all the beach has been saying. Partners, eh?—a business partnership? Gammon my eye, that’s what it is.”

Then it was that Sheldon struck out, coolly and deliberately, with all the strength of his arm, and Tudor, caught on the jaw, fell sideways, crumpling as he did so and crushing a chair to kindling wood beneath the weight of his falling body. He pulled himself slowly to his feet, but did not offer to rush.

“Now will you fight?” Tudor said grimly.

Sheldon laughed, and for the first time with true spontaneity. The intrinsic ridiculousness of the situation was too much for his sense of humour. He made as if to repeat the blow, but Tudor, white of face, with arms hanging resistlessly at his sides, offered no defence.

“I don’t mean a fight with fists,” he said slowly. “I mean to a finish, to the death. You’re a good shot with revolver and rifle. So am I. That’s the way we’ll settle it.”

“You have gone clean mad. You are a lunatic.”

“No, I’m not,” Tudor retorted. “I’m a man in love. And once again I ask you to go outside and settle it, with any weapons you choose.”

Sheldon regarded him for the first time with genuine seriousness, wondering what strange maggots could be gnawing in his brain to drive him to such unusual conduct.

“But men don’t act this way in real life,” Sheldon remarked.

“You’ll find I’m pretty real before you’re done with me. I’m going to kill you

to-day."

"Bosh and nonsense, man." This time Sheldon had lost his temper over the superficial aspects of the situation. "Bosh and nonsense, that's all it is. Men don't fight duels in the twentieth century. It's—it's antediluvian, I tell you."

"Speaking of Joan—"

"Please keep her name out of it," Sheldon warned him.

"I will, if you'll fight."

Sheldon threw up his arms despairingly.

"Speaking of Joan—"

"Look out," Sheldon warned again.

"Oh, go ahead, knock me down. But that won't close my mouth. You can knock me down all day, but as fast as I get to my feet I'll speak of Joan again. Now will you fight?"

"Listen to me, Tudor," Sheldon began, with an effort at decisiveness. "I am not used to taking from men a tithe of what I've already taken from you."

"You'll take a lot more before the day's out," was the answer. "I tell you, you simply must fight. I'll give you a fair chance to kill me, but I'll kill you before the day's out. This isn't civilization. It's the Solomon Islands, and a pretty primitive proposition for all that. King Edward and law and order are represented by the Commissioner at Tulagi and an occasional visiting gunboat. And two men and one woman is an equally primitive proposition. We'll settle it in the good old primitive way."

As Sheldon looked at him the thought came to his mind that after all there might be something in the other's wild adventures over the earth. It required a man of that calibre, a man capable of obtruding a duel into orderly twentieth century life, to find such wild adventures.

"There's only one way to stop me," Tudor went on. "I can't insult you directly, I know. You are too easy-going, or cowardly, or both, for that. But I can narrate for you the talk of the beach—ah, that grinds you, doesn't it? I can tell you what the beach has to say about you and this young girl running a plantation under a business partnership."

"Stop!" Sheldon cried, for the other was beginning to vibrate and oscillate before his eyes. "You want a duel. I'll give it to you." Then his common-sense and dislike for the ridiculous asserted themselves, and he added, "But it's absurd, impossible."

"Joan and David—partners, eh? Joan and David—partners," Tudor began to iterate and reiterate in a malicious and scornful chant.

"For heaven's sake keep quiet, and I'll let you have your way," Sheldon cried. "I never saw a fool so bent on his folly. What kind of a duel shall it be? There are no seconds. What weapons shall we use?"

Immediately Tudor's monkey-like impishness left him, and he was once more the cool, self-possessed man of the world.

"I've often thought that the ideal duel should be somewhat different from the conventional one," he said. "I've fought several of that sort, you know—"

"French ones," Sheldon interrupted.

"Call them that. But speaking of this ideal duel, here it is. No seconds, of course, and no onlookers. The two principals alone are necessary. They may use any weapons they please, from revolvers and rifles to machine guns and pompoms. They start a mile apart, and advance on each other, taking advantage of cover, retreating, circling, feinting—anything and everything permissible. In short, the principals shall hunt each other—"

"Like a couple of wild Indians?"

"Precisely," cried Tudor, delighted. "You've got the idea. And Berande is just the

place, and this is just the right time. Miss Lackland will be taking her siesta, and she'll think we are. We've got two hours for it before she wakes. So hurry up and come on. You start out from the Balesuna and I start from the Berande. Those two rivers are the boundaries of the plantation, aren't they? Very well. The field of the duel will be the plantation. Neither principal must go outside its boundaries. Are you satisfied?"

"Quite. But have you any objections if I leave some orders?"

"Not at all," Tudor acquiesced, the pink of courtesy now that his wish had been granted.

Sheldon clapped his hands, and the running house-boy hurried away to bring back Adamu Adam and Noa Noah.

"Listen," Sheldon said to them. "This man and me, we have one big fight to-day. Maybe he die. Maybe I die. If he die, all right. If I die, you two look after Missie Lackalanna. You take rifles, and you look after her daytime and night-time. If she want to talk with Mr. Tudor, all right. If she not want to talk, you make him keep away. Savvee?"

They grunted and nodded. They had had much to do with white men, and had learned never to question the strange ways of the strange breed. If these two saw fit to go out and kill each other, that was their business and not the business of the islanders, who took orders from them. They stepped to the gun-rack, and each picked a rifle.

"Better all Tahitian men have rifles," suggested Adamu Adam. "Maybe big trouble come."

"All right, you take them," Sheldon answered, busy with issuing the ammunition.

They went to the door and down the steps, carrying the eight rifles to their quarters. Tudor, with cartridge-belts for rifle and pistol strapped around him, rifle in hand, stood impatiently waiting.

“Come on, hurry up; we’re burning daylight,” he urged, as Sheldon searched after extra clips for his automatic pistol.

Together they passed down the steps and out of the compound to the beach, where they turned their backs to each other, and each proceeded toward his destination, their rifles in the hollows of their arms, Tudor walking toward the Berande and Sheldon toward the Balesuna.

CHAPTER XXVII—MODERN DUELLING

Barely had Sheldon reached the Balesuna, when he heard the faint report of a distant rifle and knew it was the signal of Tudor, giving notice that he had reached the Berande, turned about, and was coming back. Sheldon fired his rifle into the air in answer, and in turn proceeded to advance. He moved as in a dream, absent-mindedly keeping to the open beach. The thing was so preposterous that he had to struggle to realize it, and he reviewed in his mind the conversation with Tudor, trying to find some clue to the common-sense of what he was doing. He did not want to kill Tudor. Because that man had blundered in his love-making was no reason that he, Sheldon, should take his life. Then what was it all about? True, the fellow had insulted Joan by his subsequent remarks and been knocked down for it, but because he had knocked him down was no reason that he should now try to kill him.

In this fashion he covered a quarter of the distance between the two rivers, when it dawned upon him that Tudor was not on the beach at all. Of course not. He was advancing, according to the terms of the agreement, in the shelter of the cocoanut trees. Sheldon promptly swerved to the left to seek similar shelter, when the faint crack of a rifle came to his ears, and almost immediately the bullet, striking the hard sand a hundred feet beyond him, ricochetted and whined onward on a second flight, convincing him that, preposterous and unreal as it was, it was nevertheless sober fact. It had been intended for him. Yet even then it was hard to believe. He glanced

over the familiar landscape and at the sea dimpling in the light but steady breeze. From the direction of Tulagi he could see the white sails of a schooner laying a tack across toward Berande. Down the beach a horse was grazing, and he idly wondered where the others were. The smoke rising from the copra-drying caught his eyes, which roved on over the barracks, the tool-houses, the boat-sheds, and the bungalow, and came to rest on Joan's little grass house in the corner of the compound.

Keeping now to the shelter of the trees, he went forward another quarter of a mile. If Tudor had advanced with equal speed they should have come together at that point, and Sheldon concluded that the other was circling. The difficulty was to locate him. The rows of trees, running at right angles, enabled him to see along only one narrow avenue at a time. His enemy might be coming along the next avenue, or the next, to right or left. He might be a hundred feet away or half a mile. Sheldon plodded on, and decided that the old stereotyped duel was far simpler and easier than this protracted hide-and-seek affair. He, too, tried circling, in the hope of cutting the other's circle; but, without catching a glimpse of him, he finally emerged upon a fresh clearing where the young trees, waist-high, afforded little shelter and less hiding. Just as he emerged, stepping out a pace, a rifle cracked to his right, and though he did not hear the bullet in passing, the thud of it came to his ears when it struck a palm-trunk farther on.

He sprang back into the protection of the larger trees. Twice he had exposed himself and been fired at, while he had failed to catch a single glimpse of his antagonist. A slow anger began to burn in him. It was deucedly unpleasant, he decided, this being peppered at; and nonsensical as it really was, it was none the less deadly serious. There was no avoiding the issue, no firing in the air and getting over with it as in the old-fashioned duel. This mutual man-hunt must keep up until one got the other. And if one neglected a chance to get the other, that increased the other's chance to get him. There could be no false sentiment about it. Tudor had been a cunning devil

when he proposed this sort of duel, Sheldon concluded, as he began to work along cautiously in the direction of the last shot.

When he arrived at the spot, Tudor was gone, and only his foot-prints remained, pointing out the course he had taken into the depths of the plantation. Once, ten minutes later, he caught a glimpse of Tudor, a hundred yards away, crossing the same avenue as himself but going in the opposite direction. His rifle half-leaped to his shoulder, but the other was gone. More in whim than in hope of result, grinning to himself as he did so, Sheldon raised his automatic pistol and in two seconds sent eight shots scattering through the trees in the direction in which Tudor had disappeared. Wishing he had a shot-gun, Sheldon dropped to the ground behind a tree, slipped a fresh clip up the hollow butt of the pistol, threw a cartridge into the chamber, shoved the safety catch into place, and reloaded the empty clip.

It was but a short time after that that Tudor tried the same trick on him, the bullets pattering about him like spiteful rain, thudding into the palm trunks, or glancing off in whining ricochets. The last bullet of all, making a double ricochet from two different trees and losing most of its momentum, struck Sheldon a sharp blow on the forehead and dropped at his feet. He was partly stunned for the moment, but on investigation found no greater harm than a nasty lump that soon rose to the size of a pigeon’s egg.

The hunt went on. Once, coming to the edge of the grove near the bungalow, he saw the house-boys and the cook, clustered on the back veranda and peering curiously among the trees, talking and laughing with one another in their queer falsetto voices. Another time he came upon a working-gang busy at hoeing weeds. They scarcely noticed him when he came up, though they knew thoroughly well what was going on. It was no affair of theirs that the enigmatical white men should be out trying to kill each other, and whatever interest in the proceedings might be theirs they were careful to conceal it from Sheldon. He ordered them to continue hoeing weeds in a

distant and out-of-the-way corner, and went on with the pursuit of Tudor.

Tiring of the endless circling, Sheldon tried once more to advance directly on his foe, but the latter was too crafty, taking advantage of his boldness to fire a couple of shots at him, and slipping away on some changed and continually changing course. For an hour they dodged and turned and twisted back and forth and around, and hunted each other among the orderly palms. They caught fleeting glimpses of each other and chanced flying shots which were without result. On a grassy shelter behind a tree, Sheldon came upon where Tudor had rested and smoked a cigarette. The pressed grass showed where he had sat. To one side lay the cigarette stump and the charred match which had lighted it. In front lay a scattering of bright metallic fragments. Sheldon recognized their significance. Tudor was notching his steel-jacketed bullets, or cutting them blunt, so that they would spread on striking—in short, he was making them into the vicious dum-dum prohibited in modern warfare. Sheldon knew now what would happen to him if a bullet struck his body. It would leave a tiny hole where it entered, but the hole where it emerged would be the size of a saucer.

He decided to give up the pursuit, and lay down in the grass, protected right and left by the row of palms, with on either hand the long avenue extending. This he could watch. Tudor would have to come to him or else there would be no termination of the affair. He wiped the sweat from his face and tied the handkerchief around his neck to keep off the stinging gnats that lurked in the grass. Never had he felt so great a disgust for the thing called “adventure.” Joan had been bad enough, with her Baden-Powell and long-barrelled Colt’s; but here was this newcomer also looking for adventure, and finding it in no other way than by lugging a peace-loving planter into an absurd and preposterous bush-whacking duel. If ever adventure was well damned, it was by Sheldon, sweating in the windless grass and fighting gnats, the while he kept close watch up and down the avenue.

Then Tudor came. Sheldon happened to be looking in his direction at the moment he came into view, peering quickly up and down the avenue before he stepped into the open. Midway he stopped, as if debating what course to pursue. He made a splendid mark, facing his concealed enemy at two hundred yards' distance. Sheldon aimed at the centre of his chest, then deliberately shifted the aim to his right shoulder, and, with the thought, "That will put him out of business," pulled the trigger. The bullet, driving with momentum sufficient to perforate a man's body a mile distant, struck Tudor with such force as to pivot him, whirling him half around by the shock of its impact and knocking him down.

"'Hope I haven't killed the beggar," Sheldon muttered aloud, springing to his feet and running forward.

A hundred feet away all anxiety on that score was relieved by Tudor, who made shift with his left hand, and from his automatic pistol hurled a rain of bullets all around Sheldon. The latter dodged behind a palm trunk, counting the shots, and when the eighth had been fired he rushed in on the wounded man. He kicked the pistol out of the other's hand, and then sat down on him in order to keep him down.

"Be quiet," he said. "I've got you, so there's no use struggling."

Tudor still attempted to struggle and to throw him off.

"Keep quiet, I tell you," Sheldon commanded. "I'm satisfied with the outcome, and you've got to be. So you might as well give in and call this affair closed."

Tudor reluctantly relaxed.

"Rather funny, isn't it, these modern duels?" Sheldon grinned down at him as he removed his weight. "Not a bit dignified. If you'd struggled a moment longer I'd have rubbed your face in the earth. I've a good mind to do it anyway, just to teach you that duelling has gone out of fashion. Now let us see to your injuries."

"You only got me that last," Tudor grunted sullenly, "lying in ambush like—"

“Like a wild Indian. Precisely. You’ve caught the idea, old man.” Sheldon ceased his mocking and stood up. “You lie there quietly until I send back some of the boys to carry you in. You’re not seriously hurt, and it’s lucky for you I didn’t follow your example. If you had been struck with one of your own bullets, a carriage and pair would have been none too large to drive through the hole it would have made. As it is, you’re drilled clean—a nice little perforation. All you need is antiseptic washing and dressing, and you’ll be around in a month. Now take it easy, and I’ll send a stretcher for you.”

CHAPTER XXVIII—CAPITULATION

When Sheldon emerged from among the trees he found Joan waiting at the compound gate, and he could not fail to see that she was visibly gladdened at the sight of him.

“I can’t tell you how glad I am to see you,” was her greeting. “What’s become of Tudor? That last flutter of the automatic wasn’t nice to listen to. Was it you or Tudor?”

“So you know all about it,” he answered coolly. “Well, it was Tudor, but he was doing it left-handed. He’s down with a hole in his shoulder.” He looked at her keenly. “Disappointing, isn’t it?” he drawled.

“How do you mean?”

“Why, that I didn’t kill him.”

“But I didn’t want him killed just because he kissed me,” she cried.

“Oh, he did kiss you!” Sheldon retorted, in evident surprise. “I thought you said he hurt your arm.”

“One could call it a kiss, though it was only on the end of the nose.” She laughed at the recollection. “But I paid him back for that myself. I boxed his face for him. And

he did hurt my arm. It's black and blue. Look at it."

She pulled up the loose sleeve of her blouse, and he saw the bruised imprints of two fingers.

Just then a gang of blacks came out from among the trees carrying the wounded man on a rough stretcher.

"Romantic, isn't it?" Sheldon sneered, following Joan's startled gaze. "And now I'll have to play surgeon and doctor him up. Funny, this twentieth-century duelling. First you drill a hole in a man, and next you set about plugging the hole up."

They had stepped aside to let the stretcher pass, and Tudor, who had heard the remark, lifted himself up on the elbow of his sound arm and said with a defiant grin,—

"If you'd got one of mine you'd have had to plug with a dinner-plate."

"Oh, you wretch!" Joan cried. "You've been cutting your bullets."

"It was according to agreement," Tudor answered. "Everything went. We could have used dynamite if we wanted to."

"He's right," Sheldon assured her, as they swung in behind. "Any weapon was permissible. I lay in the grass where he couldn't see me, and bushwhacked him in truly noble fashion. That's what comes of having women on the plantation. And now it's antiseptics and drainage tubes, I suppose. It's a nasty mess, and I'll have to read up on it before I tackle the job."

"I don't see that it's my fault," she began. "I couldn't help it because he kissed me. I never dreamed he would attempt it."

"We didn't fight for that reason. But there isn't time to explain. If you'll get dressings and bandages ready I'll look up 'gun-shot wounds' and see what's to be done."

"Is he bleeding seriously?" she asked.

“No; the bullet seems to have missed the important arteries. But that would have been a pickle.”

“Then there’s no need to bother about reading up,” Joan said. “And I’m just dying to hear what it was all about. The Apostle is lying becalmed inside the point, and her boats are out to wing. She’ll be at anchor in five minutes, and Doctor Welshmere is sure to be on board. So all we’ve got to do is to make Tudor comfortable. We’d better put him in your room under the mosquito-netting, and send a boat off to tell Dr. Welshmere to bring his instruments.”

An hour afterward, Dr. Welshmere left the patient comfortable and attended to, and went down to the beach to go on board, promising to come back to dinner. Joan and Sheldon, standing on the veranda, watched him depart.

“I’ll never have it in for the missionaries again since seeing them here in the Solomons,” she said, seating herself in a steamer-chair.

She looked at Sheldon and began to laugh.

“That’s right,” he said. “It’s the way I feel, playing the fool and trying to murder a guest.”

“But you haven’t told me what it was all about.”

“You,” he answered shortly.

“Me? But you just said it wasn’t.”

“Oh, it wasn’t the kiss.” He walked over to the railing and leaned against it, facing her. “But it was about you all the same, and I may as well tell you. You remember, I warned you long ago what would happen when you wanted to become a partner in Berande. Well, all the beach is gossiping about it; and Tudor persisted in repeating the gossip to me. So you see it won’t do for you to stay on here under present conditions. It would be better if you went away.”

“But I don’t want to go away,” she objected with rueful countenance.

“A chaperone, then—”

“No, nor a chaperone.”

“But you surely don’t expect me to go around shooting every slanderer in the Solomons that opens his mouth?” he demanded gloomily.

“No, nor that either,” she answered with quick impulsiveness. “I’ll tell you what we’ll do. We’ll get married and put a stop to it all. There!”

He looked at her in amazement, and would have believed that she was making fun of him had it not been for the warm blood that suddenly suffused her cheeks.

“Do you mean that?” he asked unsteadily. “Why?”

“To put a stop to all the nasty gossip of the beach. That’s a pretty good reason, isn’t it?”

The temptation was strong enough and sudden enough to make him waver, but all the disgust came back to him that was his when he lay in the grass fighting gnats and cursing adventure, and he answered,—

“No; it is worse than no reason at all. I don’t care to marry you as a matter of expedience—”

“You are the most ridiculous creature!” she broke in, with a flash of her old-time anger. “You talk love and marriage to me, very much against my wish, and go mooning around over the plantation week after week because you can’t have me, and look at me when you think I’m not noticing and when all the time I’m wondering when you had your last square meal because of the hungry look in your eyes, and make eyes at my revolver-belt hanging on a nail, and fight duels about me, and all the rest—and—and now, when I say I’ll marry you, you do yourself the honour of refusing me.”

“You can’t make me any more ridiculous than I feel,” he answered, rubbing the lump on his forehead reflectively. “And if this is the accepted romantic

programme—a duel over a girl, and the girl rushing into the arms of the winner—why, I shall not make a bigger ass of myself by going in for it."

"I thought you'd jump at it," she confessed, with a naïveté he could not but question, for he thought he saw a roguish gleam in her eyes.

"My conception of love must differ from yours then," he said. "I should want a woman to marry me for love of me, and not out of romantic admiration because I was lucky enough to drill a hole in a man's shoulder with smokeless powder. I tell you I am disgusted with this adventure tomfoolery and rot. I don't like it. Tudor is a sample of the adventure-kind—picking a quarrel with me and behaving like a monkey, insisting on fighting with me—'to the death,' he said. It was like a penny dreadful."

She was biting her lip, and though her eyes were cool and level-looking as ever, the tell-tale angry red was in her cheeks.

"Of course, if you don't want to marry me—"

"But I do," he hastily interposed.

"Oh, you do—"

"But don't you see, little girl, I want you to love me," he hurried on. "Otherwise, it would be only half a marriage. I don't want you to marry me simply because by so doing a stop is put to the beach gossip, nor do I want you to marry me out of some foolish romantic notion. I shouldn't want you . . . that way."

"Oh, in that case," she said with assumed deliberateness, and he could have sworn to the roguish gleam, "in that case, since you are willing to consider my offer, let me make a few remarks. In the first place, you needn't sneer at adventure when you are living it yourself; and you were certainly living it when I found you first, down with fever on a lonely plantation with a couple of hundred wild cannibals thirsting for your life. Then I came along—"

"And what with your arriving in a gale," he broke in, "fresh from the wreck of the schooner, landing on the beach in a whale-boat full of picturesque Tahitian sailors, and coming into the bungalow with a Baden-Powell on your head, sea-boots on your feet, and a whacking big Colt's dangling on your hip—why, I am only too ready to admit that you were the quintessence of adventure."

"Very good," she cried exultantly. "It's mere simple arithmetic—the adding of your adventure and my adventure together. So that's settled, and you needn't jeer at adventure any more. Next, I don't think there was anything romantic in Tudor's attempting to kiss me, nor anything like adventure in this absurd duel. But I do think, now, that it was romantic for you to fall in love with me. And finally, and it is adding romance to romance, I think . . . I think I do love you, Dave—oh, Dave!"

The last was a sighing dove-cry as he caught her up in his arms and pressed her to him.

"But I don't love you because you played the fool to-day," she whispered on his shoulder. "White men shouldn't go around killing each other."

"Then why do you love me?" he questioned, enthralled after the manner of all lovers in the everlasting query that for ever has remained unanswered.

"I don't know—just because I do, I guess. And that's all the satisfaction you gave me when we had that man-talk. But I have been loving you for weeks—during all the time you have been so deliciously and unobtrusively jealous of Tudor."

"Yes, yes, go on," he urged breathlessly, when she paused.

"I wondered when you'd break out, and because you didn't I loved you all the more. You were like Dad, and Von. You could hold yourself in check. You didn't make a fool of yourself."

"Not until to-day," he suggested.

"Yes, and I loved you for that, too. It was about time. I began to think you were

never going to bring up the subject again. And now that I have offered myself you haven't even accepted."

With both hands on her shoulders he held her at arm's-length from him and looked long into her eyes, no longer cool but seemingly pervaded with a golden flush. The lids drooped and yet bravely did not droop as she returned his gaze. Then he fondly and solemnly drew her to him.

"And how about that hearth and saddle of your own?" he asked, a moment later.

"I well-nigh won to them. The grass house is my hearth, and the Martha my saddle, and—and look at all the trees I've planted, to say nothing of the sweet corn. And it's all your fault anyway. I might never have loved you if you hadn't put the idea into my head."

"There's the Nongassla coming in around the point with her boats out," Sheldon remarked irrelevantly. "And the Commissioner is on board. He's going down to San Cristoval to investigate that missionary killing. We're in luck, I must say."

"I don't see where the luck comes in," she said dolefully. "We ought to have this evening all to ourselves just to talk things over. I've a thousand questions to ask you."

"And it wouldn't have been a man-talk either," she added.

"But my plan is better than that." He debated with himself a moment. "You see, the Commissioner is the one official in the islands who can give us a license. And—there's the luck of it—Doctor Welshmere is here to perform the ceremony. We'll get married this evening."

Joan recoiled from him in panic, tearing herself from his arms and going backward several steps. He could see that she was really frightened.

"I . . . I thought . . ." she stammered.

Then, slowly, the change came over her, and the blood flooded into her face in the

same amazing blush he had seen once before that day. Her cool, level-looking eyes were no longer level-looking nor cool, but warmly drooping and just unable to meet his, as she came toward him and nestled in the circle of his arms, saying softly, almost in a whisper,—

“I am ready, Dave.”

FOOTNOTES

{1} Eaten.

{2} Food.

{3} Mary—bêche-de-mer English for woman.

{4} Ngari-ngari—literally “scratch-scratch”—a vegetable skin-poisoning that, while not serious, is decidedly uncomfortable.

{5} Paddle

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