ДЖЕК ЛОНДОН

ADVENTURE

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Adventure:

Содержание

Jack London 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

[1] Eaten.

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."

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[2] Food.

[3] Mary – bêche-de-mer English for woman.

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 femininess. 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."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.