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Adventure

A Romance of The South Seas

BY

JACK LONDON

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PROLOGUE.

In this remarkable romance of the south seas Jack London has rivaled the best efforts of Robert Louis Stevenson in the same field. Interest is aroused at once and becomes cumulative as Sheldon, the plucky owner of Berande plantation, though sick and weak, dominates 200 head hunting Solomon islanders by sheer grit and fear inspiring weapons; as Joan Lackland takes and holds her place beside him while he sears upon dark souls "the flaming mastery of the white man," as this man and woman, thrown together under most unconventional circumstances, work and fight side by side in their strange partnership. Their thrilling adventures among savage people recall the lines:

*"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 pickaback 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 whole 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 caliber 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 appointments. 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 clamor, as of lost souls wailing and of men in torment. A long, low shed showed 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 clamor 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 runway. 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 macerated. Their faces were asymmetrical, bestial; their bodies were ugly and spindly; they were 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 head necklaces and their leather belts, between which and their 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



"I KNOCK SEVEN BELLS OUT OF YOU, TOO MUCH, QUICK!"

he would be able to complete the round. But he did know, in large degree of certainty, that if he ever faints 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 runway, administering medicine and cracking jokes in beche-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 all 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 fathead make um brother belong you die close up too much. You fella finish sing out, sarvee? You fella no finish sing out I make finish quick."
He threatened the wailer with his fist, and the black covered down, glaring at him with swollen 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, washie brother belong you, washie 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, 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 checker board of blue and white squares, the other a white pennant centred with a red disk. It was the international code signal of distress.

The man ordered 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 boss' crew boss also he had in, to give assurance, as was the custom nightly, that the whole boats were hauled up and padlocked. This was a most necessary precaution, for the blacks were in a funk, and a whole boat left lying on the beach in the evening meant a loss of twenty blacks by morning. Since the blacks were worth \$30 a piece or less, according to how much of their time had been worked out, Berande plantation could ill afford the loss. Besides, whole 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,

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John F. Kerr, of Heathcote, a man about 65 years of age, died recently as the result of injuries sustained in a runaway accident.