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Adventure



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A Romance of The South Seas

JACK LONDON

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CHAPTER III.

WO 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 more. die. They believed they were going to die, and yet, believing this with tain Oleson asked, pausing at the bot absolute conviction, they somehow tom of the steps on his way to oversee lacked the nerve to rush the frail the disembarkation of the sick. wraith of a man with the white skin "No," Sheldon answered. "Is it and escape from the charnel house by down?" the whale boats. They chose the lingering death they were sure awaited. they were very sure would pounce upon them if they went up against . 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

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 tails in sight. His partner was on board, vigorous and hearty from six weeks recruiting in Malaita. He could take charge now and all would be well with Berande.

Sheldon lay in the steamer chair and watched the Jessie's whaleboat 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 big fella wind he come, strong fella 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 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.

"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

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

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

"One hundred and seven," he said. "Poor Hughie." Captain Oleson offered him some

whiskey. "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. Having given the orders, Sheldon lay back in his chair with closed eyes.

"It's been fair hell, sir," Captain Oleson began, then broke off to help himself to more whisky. "Contrary winds and calms. We've been 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. We got it from the waterwater 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 been buryin' them day an' night. The beggars won't live, dash them! They die out of spite. Only three of my crew left on its legs. Five more down. Beven dead. Oh, h-1 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 epital. We've got to get them ashore omehow. Viaburi! Hey, you, Viaburi, ring big fella bell strong fella too

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

"Have you seen the barometer?" Cap-

"It's going down."

"Then you'd better sleep aboard tothem rather than the immediate death night," was Sheldon's judgment. "Never mind the funeral. I'll see to poor Hughie. If you can see your way the master That he never slept they to it, come ashore tomorrow and lend me a hand. If you can't, send the

> Johnson's dead, sir. I forgot to tell you-three days ago."

> Sheldon 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 diffi cult to breathe. He panted for air. The faces and naked arms of the house boys were beaded with sweat.

"Marster," one of them ventured. 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 feelingnay, it was a certitude-that all he had to do was to shut his eyes and let go and that he would die, sink 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 twoscore deaths before he really died? Not only was he not afraid to die, but he desired

But his mind that could will life or death still pulsed on. He saw the two whaleboats land on the beach and the sick, on stretchers or pickaback, 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 for 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

tumbled the racing clouds. The first | cestilential land. breath of the wind, faint and silken, titudinous wavelets struck foaming on about could be heard the dull thudding of falling cocoanuts. The tall, delicate trunked trees twisted and snapped

about like whiplashes. The air seem-

ed filled with their flying leaves, any

one of which, stem-on, could brain a

man. Then came the rain, a deluge,

a straight, horisontal sheet that poured

along like a river, defying gravitation.



The black, with Shelden mounted on him, plunged ahead into the thick of it, stooping far forward and low to the ground to avoid being toppled over backward.

rainwater trickling down upon the cold

So they fought their way back up the beach. The other blacks caught hold of the man-horse and pulled and "Right O. I'll come myself. Mr. 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

> "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 overfall 200 yards from the 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 fron. 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 into immensity of rest. His weary the signal locker and the billiard rules body seemed torn by the oncoming 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 race borse, 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 outblew the first.

squall smote Berande, uprooting trees, skyward on a smoky crest and disoverthrowing copra sheds and rocking appear naturally, as an actual whalethe house on its tall piles, Sheldon boat's nose should disappear, as it slept. He was unaware of the com- slid down the back of the sea. He motion. He never wakened, nor did knew that no whaleboat should be he change his position or dream. He out there, and he was quite certain awoke a new man. Furthermore, he no men in the Solomons were mad was hungry. It was over a week enough to be abroad in such a storm. since food had passed his tips. He drank a glass of condensed cream | minute later, chancing to open his eyes, thinned with water, and by 10 o'clock he saw the whaleboat, full length, and he dared to take a cup of beef tea. saw right into it as it rose on the face He was cheered also by the situ- of a wave. He saw six sweeps at ation in the hospital. Despite the work, and in the stern, clearly outstorm there had been but one death, lined against the overhanging wall of and there was only one fresh case, while half a dozen boys crawled weak-While he read the service the blacks | iy away to the barracks. He wondergazed apprehensively at the dark line ed if it was the wind that was blowon the water, above which rolled and ing the disease away and cleansing the

By eleven a messenger arrived from tonic with life, fanned through his Balesuna village, dispatched by Seelee. dry baked body as he finished reading. The Jessie had gone ashore halfway certainly safe in Mboli pass. Since

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THE DARK LINE ON THE WATER.

"'He's sleeping out and far to night," Sheldon quoted as he thought of the dead man in the sand and the

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.

Then came the second breath of the between the village and Neal island. and she was just in the act of recapwind, an angry gust, as the shovels It was not till nightfall that two of turing it and stowing it away beneath worked rapidly filling in the sand. the crew arrived, reporting the drown- a hat that for all the world was like So heavy was the gust that Sheldon, ing of Captain Oleson and of the one his own "Baden-Powell." still on his feet, seized hold of his remaining boy. As for the Jessie, The boat disappeared behind the man-horse to escape being blown from what they told him, Sheldon wave and rose into view on the fact away. The Jessie was blotted out, and could not but conclude that she was of the following one. Again he looked a total loss. Further to hearten him into it. The men were dark skinned he was taken by a shivering fit. In and larger than Solomon islanders, but the beach. It was like the bubbling half an hour he was burning up. And the woman, he could plainly see, was he knew that at least another day white. Who she was and what she must pass before he could undertake was doing there were thoughts that even the smallest dose of quinine. He drifted vaguely through his consciouscrawled under a heap of blankets and ness. He was too sick to be vitally toa little later found himself laughing | terested, and, besides, he had a half aloud. He had surely reached the limit | feeling that it was all a dream. of disaster. Barring earthquake or "Good boatmen," was Sheldon's ve tidal wave, the worst had already be- dick as he saw the boat leap forwar fallen him. The Flibberty-Gibbet was on the face of a bure breaker. the

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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, marveled at the devils that were in him.

CHAPTER IV.

JOAN LACKLAND. 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 Be rande. A score of convalescents lingered in the hospital, but they were improving hourly. There had been out 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 reach ing in as far as the flagstaff mounds, the foaming wash creaming against the gateposts. 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 a hallucination. Not far out and coming in across the Jessie's anchor-All that night, while squall after age he saw a whaleboat's nose thrust

But the hallucination persisted. A 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 sternsheets between the stroke oar and the steersman. A woman she was, for a braid of her bair was flying.

Continued on page 7,

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