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Adventure



A Romance of The South Seas
 BY **JACK LONDON**
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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 200 slaves!" "Recruits," he corrected. "Contract laborers. 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 200 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 would not 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?" "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 whaleboat 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 until 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, 200 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 somber and sordid, like the business men at home. I don't know why you're here at all. You should be at home peacefully vegetating as a banker's clerk 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 youngest son must tread ere he win to heart 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 heart 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 beg pardon," he drawled. "Well, I'm a younger daughter, then," she amended; "and I have no heart 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 island and a cartridge belt?" he suggested. "I didn't think of the cannibal island, 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 hal-yards." 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 hit her hip and howled again. The bullet emitted a sharp shriek as it ricocheted 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 his. 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. "That's really good shooting—for a woman," he said. "You only missed it twice, and it was a strange weapon."



AGAIN AND AGAIN SHE FIRED

work when the crash came. But I do think it is the sweetest spot on earth—Hawaii, I mean. "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 barreled Colt's. "I was born at Hilo. That's on the island of Hawaii, the biggest and best in the group. 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 200,000 acres alone. It extended in between Mauna Kea and Mauna Loa, and it was there I learned to shoot goats and wild cattle. "Von had been in the army, and dad was an old seadog, and they were both stern disciplinarians—only Von's 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 thumps 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. "More than once 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. When I was sixteen we three girls were all sent up to California to Mills seminary, which was quite fashionable and stifying. 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. Dad had 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. We were ready to start to Tahiti, where a lot of repairs and refitting for the Mele 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 or sisters, and all dad's people were drowned in a Kansas cloudburst. 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 liars—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 10 francs his share was 3. "But when the robbers fell to cheating one another I got my first clews 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 in 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. "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. 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 of 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 Guadalcanar 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 Guadalcanar. I read in the Leading 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.

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. 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 superintending the launching of the whaleboat 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. 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 wash the whale boat tomorrow 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. There is only one white man, a third assistant under-trapper and ex-sailor—a common sailor. He is in charge of the government of the Solomons, to say nothing of a hundred or so negro prisoners. Besides, he is such a fool that he would fine you \$5 for not having entered at Tulagi, which is the port of entry, you know. He is not a man

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