

ADVENTURE

By JACK LONDON

SYNOPSIS

Sheldon, owner of Berande plantation, though desperately ill, overcomes and controls 200 head hunting Solomon Islanders by force of will and weapons. Chief Neese calls with forty men.

He returns ARUNGA, a runaway laborer. Sheldon has Arunga and Billy whipped as well a matrimonial license increased. His partner, Hughie, and many laborers die.

Joan Lackland, a pretty girl, arrives with her crew of Tahitians, Sheldon becomes unconscious, and she takes charge of things.

She is a self-reliant American girl, a lover of adventure, a native of Hawaii and an orphan. Her ship has been wrecked. She proves to Sheldon that she can shoot.

She resents his friendly suggestions, and they quarrel. She makes it plain that she is not matrimonially inclined. She and Sheldon save two black women from death.

The savage laborers demand the women. Sheldon attempts to discipline them, and Joan shoots a native and saves his life. She scolds him for making her shoot.

Satan, a savage dog, arrives. Despite Sheldon's warnings Joan goes to explore an island she contemplates buying. Financial difficulties threaten Sheldon.

He falls in love with Joan. Left alone by Sheldon, Joan has trouble with Gogomy and other natives. Armed savages arrive, and danger threatens Sheldon and Joan.

Joan routs them with a fake dynamite cartridge, and Satan drives them into trees. Their chief is punished. Morgan and Raff have Sheldon in their power.

Joan offers to become his partner. His mention of "conventionalities" angers her. She needs no chaperon, she says. Sheldon finally accepts her as his partner.

Tudor and Von Bliz, gold seekers, arrive on the Martha. Joan and Tudor seem to interest each other. Sheldon becomes jealous.

Joan starts for Australia with her crew to buy a schooner, but stops at Guvutu and buys the Martha, which has been wrecked, for mere tin.

Captain Auckland tells how she did it and applauds her cleverness. Captain Oleson tells how she took the Filiberry Gibbet away from him to save the Martha.

Joan returns with the Martha in good condition. Her white assistants describe to her the business she has done. She refuses to let her run the Martha.

Sheldon proposes marriage, but Joan rebuffs him. They agree to continue as partners and friends. They discover a large number of hidden firearms.

Gogomy attacks Joan, who escapes and warns Sheldon. Gogomy sees with other savages, and Sheldon pursues. Bushmen murder all of Tudor's party except Tudor.

CHAPTER XVII AN OFFER OF MARRIAGE.

"BUT where was she during the nor'wester?" Sheldon asked.

"At Langa-Langa. Ran up there as it was coming on and laid there the whole week and traded for grub with the niggers. When we got to Tulagi there she was waiting for us and scrapping with Burnett. I tell you, Mr. Sheldon, she's a wonder, that girl, a perfect wonder."

Munster refilled his glass, and while Sheldon glanced across at Joan's house, anxious for her coming, Sparrowhawk took up the tale.

"Gritty! She's the grittiest thing, man or woman, that ever blew into the Solomons. You should have seen Poonga-Poonga the morning we arrived—Sniders popping on the beach and in the mangroves, war drums booming in the bush and signal smokes rising everywhere. 'It's all up,' says Captain Munster. 'Up your granny,' she says to him." Sparrowhawk went on.

"Why, we haven't arrived yet, much less got started. Wait till the anchor's down before you get afraid."

"That's what she said to me," Munster proclaimed. "And of course it made me mad, so that I didn't care what happened. We tried to send a boat ashore for a powwow, but it was fired upon. 'What we want,' says Miss Lackland, 'is a hostage. I'm going ashore tonight to fetch Kina-Kina himself on board, and I'm not asking who's game to go with me, for I've got every man's work arranged for him. I'm taking my sailors with me and one white man.' 'Of course I'm that white man,' I said, for by that time I was mad. 'Of course you're not,' says she. 'You'll have charge of the covering boat. Curtis stands by the landing boat. Fowler goes with me. Brahms takes charge of the Filiberry and Sparrowhawk of the Emily. And we start at 1 o'clock.'"

"My word, it was a tough job lying there in the covering boat. I never thought doing nothing could be such hard work. We stopped about fifty fathoms off and watched the other boat go in."

"Of course there was a row. It had to come, and I knew it, but it startled me just the same. I never heard such screaming and yelling in my life. The niggers must have just died for the bush without looking to see what was up, while her Tahitians let loose, shooting in the air and yelling to hurry 'em on. And then I heard them coming through the mangroves and an arrow strike on a gunwale and Miss Lackland laugh, and I knew everything was all right. We pulled on board without a shot being fired. And there was old Kina-Kina himself, being

hoisted over the rail, shivering and chattering like an ape. The rest was easy. Kina-Kina's word was law, and he was scared to death. And we kept him on board issuing proclamations all the time we were in Poonga-Poonga.

"It was a good move, too, in other ways. She made Kina-Kina order his people to return all the gear they'd stripped from the Martha. She—here she comes now."

It was with a shock of surprise that Sheldon greeted her appearance. The ready-made clothes from Sydney had transformed her. A simple skirt and shirt waist of some sort of wash goods set off her trim figure with a hint of elegant womanhood that was new to him. Brown slippers peeped out as she crossed the compound, and he once caught a glimpse to the ankle of brown openwork stockings. Somehow she had been many times the woman by these mere extraneous trappings.

"I've opened up a new field," she said as she began pouring the coffee. "Old Kina-Kina will never forget me, I'm sure, and I can recruit there whenever I want. I saw Morgan at Guvutu. He's willing to contract for a thousand boys at 40 shillings per head. Did I tell you that I'd taken out a recruiting license for the Martha? I did, and the Martha can sign eighty boys every trip."

Sheldon smiled a trifle bitterly to himself. The wonderful woman who had tripped across the compound in her Sydney clothes was gone, and he was listening to the boy come back again.

"Well," Joan said, with a sigh, "I've shown you hustling American methods that succeed and get somewhere, and here you are beginning your muddling again."

Joan stood beside Sheldon and sighed as she watched the Martha beating out to sea, old Kinaross, brought over from Savo, in command.

"My, but she is a witch! Look at her eating up the water, and there's no wind to speak of. Honestly, if I'd dreamed of the chance waiting for me at Guvutu when I bought her for less than \$300 I'd never have gone partners with you. And in that case I'd be sailing her right now."

"The justice of her contention came abruptly home to Sheldon.

"You make me feel like a big man who has robbed a small child of a lolly," he said, with sudden contrition.

"And the small child is crying for it."

She looked at him, and he noted that her lip was slightly trembling and that her eyes were moist.

"But the small child won't cry any more for it," she was saying. "This is the last sob. But some day I'm going to sail the Martha again. I know it. I know it."

In reply, and quite without premeditation, his hand went out to hers, covering it as it lay on the railing. But he knew beyond the shadow of a doubt that it was the boy that returned the pressure he gave, the boy sorrowing over the lost toy. The thought chilled him.

"Never mind," he said. "You can go sailing on the Martha any time you please—recruiting on Malaita if you want to."

It was a great concession he was making, and he felt that he did it against his better judgment. Her reception of it was a surprise to him.

"With old Kinaross in command?" she queried. "No, thank you. He'd drive me to suicide. I couldn't stand his handling of her. I'll never step on the Martha again unless it is to take charge of her. I'm a sailor, like my father, and he could never bear to see a vessel mishandled."

An hour later, just as they were riding out of the compound, Sheldon glanced at her sharply and noted her face mottling, even as he looked, and turning orange and green.

"It's the fever," she said. "I'll have to turn back."

By the time they were in the compound she was shivering and shaking, and he had to help her from her horse.

"Funny, isn't it?" she said, with chattering teeth. "Like seasickness—not serious, but horribly miserable while it lasts. I'm going to bed. Send Noa Noah and Viaburi to me. Tell Ornfrit to make hot water. I'll be out of my head in fifteen minutes. But I'll be all right by evening. Short and sharp is the way it takes me."

Sheldon obeyed her instructions, rushed hot water bottles along to her and then sat on the veranda gazing across the compound to the grass house. Yes, he decided, the contention of every white man in the islands was right—the Solomons was no place for a woman.

He clasped his hands and Lalaperu came running.

"Here, you," he ordered; "go along barracks, bring 'm black fella Mary, plenty too much, altogether."

A few minutes later the dozen black women of Berande were ranged before him. He looked them over critically, finally selecting one that was young, comely as such creatures went, and whose body bore no signs of skin disease.

"What name, you," he demanded. "Sangul?"

"Me Mabua," was the answer.

"All right, you fella Mabua. You finish cook along boys. You stop along white Mary. All the time you stop along. You savvy?"

"Me savvy," she grunted and obeyed his gesture to go to the grass house immediately.

"What name?" he asked Viaburi, who had just come out of the grass house.

"Big fella sick," was the answer.

"White fella Mary talk 'm too much allee time. Allee time talk 'm big fella schooner."

Sheldon nodded. He understood. It was the loss of the Martha that had

brought on the fever. He lighted a cigarette, and in the curling smoke of it caught visions of his English mother and wondered if she would understand how her son could love a woman who cried because she could not be skipper of a schooner in the cannibal isles.

The most patient man in the world is prone to impatience in love, and Sheldon was in love.

But how to approach her? He divined the fanatical love of freedom in her, the deep seated antipathy for restraint of any sort. No man would ever put his arm around her and win her. She would fluster away like a frightened bird. Approach by contact—that, he realized, was the one thing he must never do. His hand clasp must be what it had always been—the hand clasp of hearty friendship, and nothing more. And then, one morning, quite fortuitously the opportunity came.

"My dearest wish is the success of Berande," Joan had just said apropos of a discussion about the cheapening of freights on copra to market.

"Do you mind if I tell you the dearest wish of my heart?" he promptly returned. "I long for it. I dream about it. It is my dearest desire. It is for you some day when you are ready to be my wife."

She started back from him as if she had been stung. Her face went white on the instant, not from maidenly embarrassment, but from the anger which he could see flaring in her eyes.

"This taking for granted! This when I am ready!" she cried passionately. "Listen to me, Mr. Sheldon. I like you very well, though you are slow and a muddler, but I want you to understand once and for all that I did not come to the Solomons to get married. Getting married is not making my way in the world. It may do for some women, but not for me, thank you. When I sit down to talk over the freight on copra I don't care to have proposals of marriage sandwiched in. Besides—besides—"

Her voice broke for the moment, and when she went on there was a note of appeal in it that well nigh convicted him to himself of being a brute.

"Don't you see? It spoils everything. It makes the whole situation impossible—and I so loved our partnership and was proud of it. Don't you see? I can't go on being your partner if you make love to me. And I was so happy!"

Tears of disappointment were in her eyes, and she caught a swift sob in her throat.

"I warned you," he said gravely. "Such unusual situations between men and women cannot endure. I told you so at the beginning."

"Oh, yes; it is quite clear to me what you did. You took good care to warn me against every other man in the Solomons except yourself."

It was a blow in the face to Sheldon. He smarted with the truth of it, and at the same time he smarted with what he was convinced was the injustice of it. A gleam of triumph that flickered in her eye because of the sicker she had made decided him.

"It is not so one sided as you seem to think it is," he began. "I was doing very nicely on Berande before you came. I did not want you to stay. I wasn't in love with you then. I wanted you to go to Sydney, to go back to Hawaii. But you insisted on staying. You virtually—"

He paused for a softer word than the one that had risen to his lips, and she took it away from him.

"Forced myself on you—that's what you meant to say," she cried, the flags of battle painting her cheeks. "Go ahead. Don't mind my feelings."

"All right, I won't," he said decisively, realizing that the discussion was in danger of becoming a vituperative, schoolboy argument. "You have insisted on being considered as a man. Consistency would demand that you talk like a man and like a man listen to man talk. And listen you shall. It is not your fault that this unpleasantness has arisen. I do not blame you for anything—remember that—and for the same reason you should not blame me for anything."

"You can't help being yourself. You can't help being a very desirable creature so far as I am concerned. You have made me want you. You didn't intend to; you didn't try to. You were so made, that is all. And I was so made that I was ripe to want you. But I can't help being myself. I can't by an effort of will cease from wanting you any more than you by an effort of will can make yourself undesirable to me."

"Oh, this desire, this want, want, want!" she broke in rebelliously. "I am not quite a fool. I understand some things. I really think it would be a good idea for me to marry Noa Noah or Adam Adam or Lalaperu there or any black boy. Then I could give him orders and keep him penned away from me and men like you would leave me alone and not talk marriage and I want, I want."

Sheldon laughed in spite of himself and far from any genuine impulse to laugh.

"You are positively soulless," he said savagely.

"Because I've a soul that doesn't yearn for a man for master?" she took up the gauge. "Very well, then, I am soulless, and what are you going to do about it?"

"I am going to ask you why you look like a woman? Why you have the form of a woman, the lips of a woman, the wonderful hair of a woman? And I am going to answer because you are a woman, though the woman in you is asleep and that some day the woman will wake up."

"Heaven forbid!" she cried in such sudden and genuine dismay as to make him laugh and to bring a smile to her own lips against herself.

"I've got some more to say to you,"

Sheldon pursued. "I did try to protect you from every other man in the Solomons and from yourself as well. As for me, I didn't dream that danger lay in that quarter. So I failed to protect you from myself. I failed to protect you at all. You went your own wilful way just as though I didn't exist—wrecking schooners, recruiting on Malaita and sailing schooners, one lone, unprotected girl in the company of some of the worst scoundrels in the Solomons. I love you for that too. I love you for all of you, just as you are."

She made a move of distaste and raised a hand protestingly.

"Don't," he said. "You have no right to recede from the mention of my love for you. Remember, this is a man talk. From the point of view of the talk, you are a man. The woman in you is only incidental, accidental and irrelevant. You've got to listen to the bald statement of fact, strange though it is, that I love you. You are better off and safer on Berande, in spite of the fact that I love you, than anywhere else in the Solomons. But I want you, as a final item of man talk, to remember from time to time that I love you and that it will be the dearest day of my life when you consent to marry me. I want you to think of it sometimes. And now we won't talk about it any more. As between men, there's my hand."

He held out his hand. She hesitated, then gripped it heartily and smiled through her tears.

"I wish," she faltered, "I wish, instead of that black Mary, you'd given me somebody to swear for me."

And with this enigmatic utterance she turned away.

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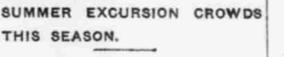
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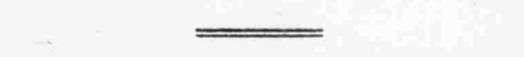
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