

## 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 feminineness. 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. There 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 Miele.

"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."