

## CHAPTER XIII--THE LOGIC OF YOUTH

"I wish I knew whether you are merely headstrong, or whether you really intend to be a Solomon planter," Sheldon said in the morning, at breakfast.

"I wish you were more adaptable," Joan retorted. "You have more preconceived notions than any man I ever met. Why in the name of common sense, in the name of . . . fair play, can't you get it into your head that I am different from the women you have known, and treat me accordingly? You surely ought to know I am different. I sailed my own schooner here--skipper, if you please. I came here to make my living. You know that; I've told you often enough. It was Dad's plan, and I'm carrying it out, just as you are trying to carry out your Hughie's plan. Dad started to sail and sail until he could find the proper islands for planting. He died, and I sailed and sailed until I arrived here. Well,"--she shrugged her shoulders--"the schooner is at the bottom of the sea. I can't sail any farther, therefore I remain here. And a planter I shall certainly be."

"You see--" he began.

"I haven't got to the point," she interrupted. "Looking back on my conduct from the moment I first set foot on your beach, I can see no false pretence that I have made about myself or my intentions. I was my

natural self to you from the first. I told you my plans; and yet you sit there and calmly tell me that you don't know whether I really intend to become a planter, or whether it is all obstinacy and pretence. Now let me assure you, for the last time, that I really and truly shall become a planter, thanks to you, or in spite of you. Do you want me for a partner?"

"But do you realize that I would be looked upon as the most foolish jackanapes in the South Seas if I took a young girl like you in with me here on Berande?" he asked.

"No; decidedly not. But there you are again, worrying about what idiots and the generally evil-minded will think of you. I should have thought you had learned self-reliance on Berande, instead of needing to lean upon the moral support of every whisky-guzzling worthless South Sea vagabond."

He smiled, and said,--

"Yes, that is the worst of it. You are unanswerable. Yours is the logic of youth, and no man can answer that. The facts of life can, but they have no place in the logic of youth. Youth must try to live according to its logic. That is the only way to learn better."

"There is no harm in trying?" she interjected.

"But there is. That is the very point. The facts always smash youth's

logic, and they usually smash youth's heart, too. It's like platonic friendships and . . . and all such things; they are all right in theory, but they won't work in practice. I used to believe in such things once. That is why I am here in the Solomons at present."

Joan was impatient. He saw that she could not understand. Life was too clearly simple to her. It was only the youth who was arguing with him, the youth with youth's pure-minded and invincible reasoning. Hers was only the boy's soul in a woman's body. He looked at her flushed, eager face, at the great ropes of hair coiled on the small head, at the rounded lines of the figure showing plainly through the home-made gown, and at the eyes--boy's eyes, under cool, level brows--and he wondered why a being that was so much beautiful woman should be no woman at all. Why in the deuce was she not carrot-haired, or cross-eyed, or hare-lipped?

"Suppose we do become partners on Berande," he said, at the same time experiencing a feeling of fright at the prospect that was tangled with a contradictory feeling of charm, "either I'll fall in love with you, or you with me. Propinquity is dangerous, you know. In fact, it is propinquity that usually gives the facer to the logic of youth."

"If you think I came to the Solomons to get married--" she began wrathfully. "Well, there are better men in Hawaii, that's all. Really, you know, the way you harp on that one string would lead an unprejudiced listener to conclude that you are prurient-minded--"

She stopped, appalled. His face had gone red and white with such abruptness as to startle her. He was patently very angry. She sipped the last of her coffee, and arose, saying,--

"I'll wait until you are in a better temper before taking up the discussion again. That is what's the matter with you. You get angry too easily. Will you come swimming? The tide is just right."

"If she were a man I'd bundle her off the plantation root and crop, whale-boat, Tahitian sailors, sovereigns, and all," he muttered to himself after she had left the room.

But that was the trouble. She was not a man, and where would she go, and what would happen to her?

He got to his feet, lighted a cigarette, and her Stetson hat, hanging on the wall over her revolver-belt, caught his eye. That was the devil of it, too. He did not want her to go. After all, she had not grown up yet. That was why her logic hurt. It was only the logic of youth, but it could hurt damnably at times. At any rate, he would resolve upon one thing: never again would he lose his temper with her. She was a child; he must remember that. He sighed heavily. But why in reasonableness had such a child been incorporated in such a woman's form?

And as he continued to stare at her hat and think, the hurt he had received passed away, and he found himself cudgelling his brains for some

way out of the muddle--for some method by which she could remain on Berande. A chaperone! Why not? He could send to Sydney on the first steamer for one. He could--

Her trilling laughter smote upon his reverie, and he stepped to the screen-door, through which he could see her running down the path to the beach. At her heels ran two of her sailors, Papehara and Mahameme, in scarlet lava-lavas, with naked sheath-knives gleaming in their belts. It was another sample of her wilfulness. Despite entreaties and commands, and warnings of the danger from sharks, she persisted in swimming at any and all times, and by special preference, it seemed to him, immediately after eating.

He watched her take the water, diving cleanly, like a boy, from the end of the little pier; and he watched her strike out with single overhand stroke, her henchmen swimming a dozen feet on either side. He did not have much faith in their ability to beat off a hungry man-eater, though he did believe, implicitly, that their lives would go bravely before hers in case of an attack.

Straight out they swam, their heads growing smaller and smaller. There was a slight, restless heave to the sea, and soon the three heads were disappearing behind it with greater frequency. He strained his eyes to keep them in sight, and finally fetched the telescope on to the veranda. A squall was making over from the direction of Florida; but then, she and her men laughed at squalls and the white choppy sea at such times. She

certainly could swim, he had long since concluded. That came of her training in Hawaii. But sharks were sharks, and he had known of more than one good swimmer drowned in a tide-rip.

The squall blackened the sky, beat the ocean white where he had last seen the three heads, and then blotted out sea and sky and everything with its deluge of rain. It passed on, and Berande emerged in the bright sunshine as the three swimmers emerged from the sea. Sheldon slipped inside with the telescope, and through the screen-door watched her run up the path, shaking down her hair as she ran, to the fresh-water shower under the house.

On the veranda that afternoon he broached the proposition of a chaperone as delicately as he could, explaining the necessity at Berande for such a body, a housekeeper to run the boys and the storeroom, and perform divers other useful functions. When he had finished, he waited anxiously for what Joan would say.

"Then you don't like the way I've been managing the house?" was her first objection. And next, brushing his attempted explanations aside, "One of two things would happen. Either I should cancel our partnership agreement and go away, leaving you to get another chaperone to chaperone your chaperone; or else I'd take the old hen out in the whale-boat and drown her. Do you imagine for one moment that I sailed my schooner down here to this raw edge of the earth in order to put myself under a chaperone?"

"But really . . . er . . . you know a chaperone is a necessary evil," he objected.

"We've got along very nicely so far without one. Did I have one on the Miele? And yet I was the only woman on board. There are only three things I am afraid of--bumble-bees, scarlet fever, and chaperones. Ugh! the clucking, evil-minded monsters, finding wrong in everything, seeing sin in the most innocent actions, and suggesting sin--yes, causing sin--by their diseased imaginings."

"Phew!" Sheldon leaned back from the table in mock fear.

"You needn't worry about your bread and butter," he ventured. "If you fail at planting, you would be sure to succeed as a writer--novels with a purpose, you know."

"I didn't think there were persons in the Solomons who needed such books," she retaliated. "But you are certainly one--you and your custodians of virtue."

He winced, but Joan rattled on with the platitudinous originality of youth.

"As if anything good were worth while when it has to be guarded and put in leg-irons and handcuffs in order to keep it good. Your desire for a

chaperone as much as implies that I am that sort of creature. I prefer to be good because it is good to be good, rather than because I can't be bad because some argus-eyed old frump won't let me have a chance to be bad."

"But it--it is not that," he put in. "It is what others will think."

"Let them think, the nasty-minded wretches! It is because men like you are afraid of the nasty-minded that you allow their opinions to rule you."

"I am afraid you are a female Shelley," he replied; "and as such, you really drive me to become your partner in order to protect you."

"If you take me as a partner in order to protect me . . . I . . . I shan't be your partner, that's all. You'll drive me into buying Parisulay yet."

"All the more reason--" he attempted.

"Do you know what I'll do?" she demanded. "I'll find some man in the Solomons who won't want to protect me."

Sheldon could not conceal the shock her words gave him.

"You don't mean that, you know," he pleaded.



"I do; I really do. I am sick and tired of this protection dodge. Don't forget for a moment that I am perfectly able to take care of myself. Besides, I have eight of the best protectors in the world--my sailors."

"You should have lived a thousand years ago," he laughed, "or a thousand years hence. You are very primitive, and equally super-modern. The twentieth century is no place for you."

"But the Solomon Islands are. You were living like a savage when I came along and found you--eating nothing but tinned meat and scones that would have ruined the digestion of a camel. Anyway, I've remedied that; and since we are to be partners, it will stay remedied. You won't die of malnutrition, be sure of that."

"If we enter into partnership," he announced, "it must be thoroughly understood that you are not allowed to run the schooner. You can go down to Sydney and buy her, but a skipper we must have--"

"At so much additional expense, and most likely a whisky-drinking, irresponsible, and incapable man to boot. Besides, I'd have the business more at heart than any man we could hire. As for capability, I tell you I can sail all around the average broken captain or promoted able seaman you find in the South Seas. And you know I am a navigator."

"But being my partner," he said coolly, "makes you none the less a lady."

"Thank you for telling me that my contemplated conduct is unladylike."

She arose, tears of anger and mortification in her eyes, and went over to the phonograph.

"I wonder if all men are as ridiculous as you?" she said.

He shrugged his shoulders and smiled. Discussion was useless--he had learned that; and he was resolved to keep his temper. And before the day was out she capitulated. She was to go to Sydney on the first steamer, purchase the schooner, and sail back with an island skipper on board. And then she inveigled Sheldon into agreeing that she could take occasional cruises in the islands, though he was adamant when it came to a recruiting trip on Malaita. That was the one thing barred.

And after it was all over, and a terse and business-like agreement (by her urging) drawn up and signed, Sheldon paced up and down for a full hour, meditating upon how many different kinds of a fool he had made of himself. It was an impossible situation, and yet no more impossible than the previous one, and no more impossible than the one that would have obtained had she gone off on her own and bought Pari-Sulay. He had never seen a more independent woman who stood more in need of a protector than this boy-minded girl who had landed on his beach with eight picturesque savages, a long-barrelled revolver, a bag of gold, and a gaudy merchandise of imagined romance and adventure.

He had never read of anything to compare with it. The fictionists, as usual, were exceeded by fact. The whole thing was too preposterous to be true. He gnawed his moustache and smoked cigarette after cigarette. Satan, back from a prowl around the compound, ran up to him and touched his hand with a cold, damp nose. Sheldon caressed the animal's ears, then threw himself into a chair and laughed heartily. What would the Commissioner of the Solomons think? What would his people at home think? And in the one breath he was glad that the partnership had been effected and sorry that Joan Lackland had ever come to the Solomons. Then he went inside and looked at himself in a hand-mirror. He studied the reflection long and thoughtfully and wonderingly.