

A scenic landscape featuring a calm lake in the foreground, surrounded by lush greenery and autumn-colored trees. In the background, there are rolling mountains under a soft, golden sky. Several dark birds are shown in flight, scattered across the upper portion of the image. The overall atmosphere is peaceful and adventurous.

# Adventure

*by Jack London*



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## *Something to Be Done*

**H**e was a very sick white man. He rode pick-a-back on a woolly-headed, black-skinned savage, the lobes of whose ears had been pierced and stretched until one had torn out, while the other carried a circular block of carved wood three inches in diameter. The torn ear had been pierced again, but this time not so ambitiously, for the hole accommodated no more than a short clay pipe. The man-horse was greasy and dirty, and naked save for an exceedingly narrow and dirty loin-cloth; but the white man clung to him closely and desperately. At times, from weakness, his head drooped and rested on the woolly pate. At other times he lifted his head and stared with swimming eyes at the cocoanut palms that reeled and swung in the shimmering heat. He was clad in a thin undershirt and a strip of cotton cloth, that wrapped about his waist and descended to his knees. On his head was a battered Stetson, known to the trade as a Baden-Powell. About his middle was strapped a belt,

which carried a large-calibred automatic pistol and several spare clips, loaded and ready for quick work.

The rear was brought up by a black boy of fourteen or fifteen, who carried medicine bottles, a pail of hot water, and various other hospital appurtenances. They passed out of the compound through a small wicker gate, and went on under the blazing sun, winding about among new-planted cocoanuts that threw no shade. There was not a breath of wind, and the superheated, stagnant air was heavy with pestilence. From the direction they were going arose a wild clamour, as of lost souls wailing and of men in torment. A long, low shed showed ahead, grass-walled and grass-thatched, and it was from here that the noise proceeded. There were shrieks and screams, some unmistakably of grief, others unmistakably of unendurable pain. As the white man drew closer he could hear a low and continuous moaning and groaning. He shuddered at the thought of entering, and for a moment was quite certain that he was going to faint. For that most dreaded of Solomon Island scourges, dysentery, had struck Berande plantation, and he was all alone to cope with it. Also, he was afflicted himself.

By stooping close, still on man-back, he managed to pass through the low doorway. He took a small bottle from his follower, and sniffed strong ammonia to clear his senses for the ordeal. Then he shouted, "Shut up!" and the clamour stilled. A raised platform of forest slabs, six feet wide, with a slight pitch, extended the full length of the shed. Alongside of it was a yard-wide run-way. Stretched on the platform, side by side and crowded close, lay a score of blacks. That they were low in the order of human life was apparent at a glance. They

were man-eaters. Their faces were asymmetrical, bestial; their bodies were ugly and ape-like. They wore nose-rings of clam-shell and turtle-shell, and from the ends of their noses which were also pierced, projected horns of beads strung on stiff wire. Their ears were pierced and distended to accommodate wooden plugs and sticks, pipes, and all manner of barbaric ornaments. Their faces and bodies were tattooed or scarred in hideous designs. In their sickness they wore no clothing, not even loin-cloths, though they retained their shell armlets, their bead necklaces, and their leather belts, between which and the skin were thrust naked knives. The bodies of many were covered with horrible sores. Swarms of flies rose and settled, or flew back and forth in clouds.

The white man went down the line, dosing each man with medicine. To some he gave chlorodyne. He was forced to concentrate with all his will in order to remember which of them could stand ipecacuanha, and which of them were constitutionally unable to retain that powerful drug. One who lay dead he ordered to be carried out. He spoke in the sharp, peremptory manner of a man who would take no nonsense, and the well men who obeyed his orders scowled malignantly. One muttered deep in his chest as he took the corpse by the feet. The white man exploded in speech and action. It cost him a painful effort, but his arm shot out, landing a back-hand blow on the black's mouth.

"What name you, Angara?" he shouted. "What for talk 'long you, eh? I knock seven bells out of you, too much, quick!"

With the automatic swiftness of a wild animal the black gathered himself to spring. The anger of a wild animal was in his eyes; but he

saw the white man's hand dropping to the pistol in his belt. The spring was never made. The tensed body relaxed, and the black, stooping over the corpse, helped carry it out. This time there was no muttering.

"Swine!" the white man gritted out through his teeth at the whole breed of Solomon Islanders.

He was very sick, this white man, as sick as the black men who lay helpless about him, and whom he attended. He never knew, each time he entered the festering shambles, whether or not he would be able to complete the round. But he did know in large degree of certainty that, if he ever fainted there in the midst of the blacks, those who were able would be at his throat like ravening wolves.

Part way down the line a man was dying. He gave orders for his removal as soon as he had breathed his last. A black stuck his head inside the shed door, saying, -

"Four fella sick too much."

Fresh cases, still able to walk, they clustered about the spokesman. The white man singled out the weakest, and put him in the place just vacated by the corpse. Also, he indicated the next weakest, telling him to wait for a place until the next man died. Then, ordering one of the well men to take a squad from the field- force and build a lean-to addition to the hospital, he continued along the run-way, administering medicine and cracking jokes in beche-de-mer English to cheer the sufferers. Now and again, from the far end, a weird wail was raised. When he arrived there he found the noise was emitted by a boy who was not sick. The white man's wrath was immediate.



"What name you sing out alla time?" he demanded.

"Him fella my brother belong me," was the answer. "Him fella die too much."

"You sing out, him fella brother belong you die too much," the white man went on in threatening tones. "I cross too much along you. What name you sing out, eh? You fat-head make um brother belong you die dose up too much. You fella finish sing out, savvee? You fella no finish sing out I make finish damn quick."

He threatened the wailer with his fist, and the black cowered down, glaring at him with sullen eyes.

"Sing out no good little bit," the white man went on, more gently. "You no sing out. You chase um fella fly. Too much strong fella fly. You catch water, washee brother belong you; washee plenty too much, bime bye brother belong you all right. Jump!" he shouted fiercely at the end, his will penetrating the low intelligence of the black with dynamic force that made him jump to the task of brushing the loathsome swarms of flies away.

Again he rode out into the reeking heat. He clutched the black's neck tightly, and drew a long breath; but the dead air seemed to shrivel his lungs, and he dropped his head and dozed till the house was reached. Every effort of will was torture, yet he was called upon continually to make efforts of will. He gave the black he had ridden a nip of trade-gin. Viaburi, the house-boy, brought him corrosive sublimate and water, and he took a thorough antiseptic wash. He dosed himself with chlorodyne, took his own pulse, smoked a thermometer, and lay back on the couch with a suppressed groan. It

was mid-afternoon, and he had completed his third round that day. He called the house-boy.

"Take um big fella look along Jessie," he commanded.

The boy carried the long telescope out on the veranda, and searched the sea.

"One fella schooner long way little bit," he announced. "One fella Jessie."

The white man gave a little gasp of delight.

"You make um Jessie, five sticks tobacco along you," he said.

There was silence for a time, during which he waited with eager impatience.

"Maybe Jessie, maybe other fella schooner," came the faltering admission.

The man wormed to the edge of the couch, and slipped off to the floor on his knees. By means of a chair he drew himself to his feet. Still clinging to the chair, supporting most of his weight on it, he shoved it to the door and out upon the veranda. The sweat from the exertion streamed down his face and showed through the undershirt across his shoulders. He managed to get into the chair, where he panted in a state of collapse. In a few minutes he roused himself. The boy held the end of the telescope against one of the veranda scantlings, while the man gazed through it at the sea. At last he picked up the white sails of the schooner and studied them.

"No Jessie," he said very quietly. "That's the Malakula."

He changed his seat for a steamer reclining-chair. Three hundred feet away the sea broke in a small surf upon the beach. To the left he could see the white line of breakers that marked the bar of the

Balesuna River, and, beyond, the rugged outline of Savo Island. Directly before him, across the twelve-mile channel, lay Florida Island; and, farther to the right, dim in the distance, he could make out portions of Malaita--the savage island, the abode of murder, and robbery, and man-eating--the place from which his own two hundred plantation hands had been recruited. Between him and the beach was the cane-grass fence of the compound. The gate was ajar, and he sent the house-boy to close it. Within the fence grew a number of lofty cocoanut palms. On either side the path that led to the gate stood two tall flagstuffs. They were reared on artificial mounds of earth that were ten feet high. The base of each staff was surrounded by short posts, painted white and connected by heavy chains. The staffs themselves were like ships' masts, with topmasts spliced on in true nautical fashion, with shrouds, ratlines, gaffs, and flag-halyards. From the gaff of one, two gay flags hung limply, one a checkerboard of blue and white squares, the other a white pennant centred with a red disc. It was the international code signal of distress.

On the far corner of the compound fence a hawk brooded. The man watched it, and knew that it was sick. He wondered idly if it felt as bad as he felt, and was feebly amused at the thought of kinship that somehow penetrated his fancy. He roused himself to order the great bell to be rung as a signal for the plantation hands to cease work and go to their barracks. Then he mounted his man-horse and made the last round of the day.

In the hospital were two new cases. To these he gave castor-oil. He congratulated himself. It had been an easy day. Only three had died. He inspected the copra-drying that had been going on, and

went through the barracks to see if there were any sick lying hidden and defying his rule of segregation. Returned to the house, he received the reports of the boss-boys and gave instructions for next day's work. The boat's crew boss also he had in, to give assurance, as was the custom nightly, that the whale-boats were hauled up and padlocked. This was a most necessary precaution, for the blacks were in a funk, and a whale-boat left lying on the beach in the evening meant a loss of twenty blacks by morning. Since the blacks were worth thirty dollars apiece, or less, according to how much of their time had been worked out, Berande plantation could ill afford the loss. Besides, whale-boats were not cheap in the Solomons; and, also, the deaths were daily reducing the working capital. Seven blacks had fled into the bush the week before, and four had dragged themselves back, helpless from fever, with the report that two more had been killed and kai-kai'd {1} by the hospitable bushmen. The seventh man was still at large, and was said to be working along the coast on the lookout to steal a canoe and get away to his own island.

Viaburi brought two lighted lanterns to the white man for inspection. He glanced at them and saw that they were burning brightly with clear, broad flames, and nodded his head. One was hoisted up to the gaff of the flagstaff, and the other was placed on the wide veranda. They were the leading lights to the Berande anchorage, and every night in the year they were so inspected and hung out.

He rolled back on his couch with a sigh of relief. The day's work was done. A rifle lay on the couch beside him. His revolver was within reach of his hand. An hour passed, during which he did not

move. He lay in a state of half-slumber, half-coma. He became suddenly alert. A creak on the back veranda was the cause. The room was L-shaped; the corner in which stood his couch was dim, but the hanging lamp in the main part of the room, over the billiard table and just around the corner, so that it did not shine on him, was burning brightly. Likewise the verandas were well lighted. He waited without movement. The creaks were repeated, and he knew several men lurked outside.

"What name?" he cried sharply.

The house, raised a dozen feet above the ground, shook on its pile foundations to the rush of retreating footsteps.

"They're getting bold," he muttered. "Something will have to be done."

The full moon rose over Malaita and shone down on Berande. Nothing stirred in the windless air. From the hospital still proceeded the moaning of the sick. In the grass-thatched barracks nearly two hundred woolly-headed man-eaters slept off the weariness of the day's toil, though several lifted their heads to listen to the curses of one who cursed the white man who never slept. On the four verandas of the house the lanterns burned. Inside, between rifle and revolver, the man himself moaned and tossed in intervals of troubled sleep.



2

## *Something is Done*

In the morning David Sheldon decided that he was worse. That he was appreciably weaker there was no doubt, and there were other symptoms that were unfavourable. He began his rounds looking for trouble. He wanted trouble. In full health, the strained situation would have been serious enough; but as it was, himself growing helpless, something had to be done. The blacks were getting more sullen and defiant, and the appearance of the men the previous night on his veranda--one of the gravest of offences on Berande--was ominous. Sooner or later they would get him, if he did not get them first, if he did not once again sear on their dark souls the flaming mastery of the white man.

He returned to the house disappointed. No opportunity had presented itself of making an example of insolence or insubordination--such as had occurred on every other day since the sickness smote Berande. The fact that none had offended was in

itself suspicious. They were growing crafty. He regretted that he had not waited the night before until the prowlers had entered. Then he might have shot one or two and given the rest a new lesson, writ in red, for them to con. It was one man against two hundred, and he was horribly afraid of his sickness overpowering him and leaving him at their mercy. He saw visions of the blacks taking charge of the plantation, looting the store, burning the buildings, and escaping to Malaita. Also, one gruesome vision he caught of his own head, sun-dried and smoke-cured, ornamenting the canoe house of a cannibal village. Either the Jessie would have to arrive, or he would have to do something.

The bell had hardly rung, sending the labourers into the fields, when Sheldon had a visitor. He had had the couch taken out on the veranda, and he was lying on it when the canoes paddled in and hauled out on the beach. Forty men, armed with spears, bows and arrows, and war-clubs, gathered outside the gate of the compound, but only one entered. They knew the law of Berande, as every native knew the law of every white man's compound in all the thousand miles of the far-flung Solomons. The one man who came up the path, Sheldon recognized as Seelee, the chief of Balesuna village. The savage did not mount the steps, but stood beneath and talked to the white lord above.

Seelee was more intelligent than the average of his kind, but his intelligence only emphasized the lowness of that kind. His eyes, close together and small, advertised cruelty and craftiness. A gee-string and a cartridge-belt were all the clothes he wore. The carved pearl-shell ornament that hung from nose to chin and impeded

speech was purely ornamental, as were the holes in his ears mere utilities for carrying pipe and tobacco. His broken-fanged teeth were stained black by betel-nut, the juice of which he spat upon the ground.

As he talked or listened, he made grimaces like a monkey. He said yes by dropping his eyelids and thrusting his chin forward. He spoke with childish arrogance strangely at variance with the subservient position he occupied beneath the veranda. He, with his many followers, was lord and master of Balesuna village. But the white man, without followers, was lord and master of Berande--ay, and on occasion, single-handed, had made himself lord and master of Balesuna village as well. Seelee did not like to remember that episode. It had occurred in the course of learning the nature of white men and of learning to abominate them. He had once been guilty of sheltering three runaways from Berande. They had given him all they possessed in return for the shelter and for promised aid in getting away to Malaita. This had given him a glimpse of a profitable future, in which his village would serve as the one depot on the underground railway between Berande and Malaita.

Unfortunately, he was ignorant of the ways of white men. This particular white man educated him by arriving at his grass house in the gray of dawn. In the first moment he had felt amused. He was so perfectly safe in the midst of his village. But the next moment, and before he could cry out, a pair of handcuffs on the white man's knuckles had landed on his mouth, knocking the cry of alarm back down his throat. Also, the white man's other fist had caught him under the ear and left him without further interest in what was



happening. When he came to, he found himself in the white man's whale-boat on the way to Berande. At Berande he had been treated as one of no consequence, with handcuffs on hands and feet, to say nothing of chains. When his tribe had returned the three runaways, he was given his freedom. And finally, the terrible white man had fined him and Balesuna village ten thousand cocoanuts. After that he had sheltered no more runaway Malaita men. Instead, he had gone into the business of catching them. It was safer. Besides, he was paid one case of tobacco per head. But if he ever got a chance at that white man, if he ever caught him sick or stood at his back when he stumbled and fell on a bush-trail--well, there would be a head that would fetch a price in Malaita.

Sheldon was pleased with what Seelee told him. The seventh man of the last batch of runaways had been caught and was even then at the gate. He was brought in, heavy-featured and defiant, his arms bound with cocoanut sennit, the dry blood still on his body from the struggle with his captors.

"Me savvee you good fella, Seelee," Sheldon said, as the chief gulped down a quarter-tumbler of raw trade-gin. "Fella boy belong me you catch short time little bit. This fella boy strong fella too much. I give you fella one case tobacco--my word, one case tobacco. Then, you good fella along me, I give you three fathom calico, one fella knife big fella too much."

The tobacco and trade goods were brought from the store-room by two house-boys and turned over to the chief of Balesuna village, who accepted the additional reward with a non-committal grunt and went away down the path to his canoes. Under Sheldon's directions the

house-boys handcuffed the prisoner, by hands and feet, around one of the pile supports of the house. At eleven o'clock, when the labourers came in from the field, Sheldon had them assembled in the compound before the veranda. Every able man was there, including those who were helping about the hospital. Even the women and the several pickaninnies of the plantation were lined up with the rest, two deep--a horde of naked savages a trifle under two hundred strong. In addition to their ornaments of bead and shell and bone, their pierced ears and nostrils were burdened with safety-pins, wire nails, metal hair-pins, rusty iron handles of cooking utensils, and the patent keys for opening corned beef tins. Some wore penknives clasped on their kinky locks for safety. On the chest of one a china door-knob was suspended, on the chest of another the brass wheel of an alarm clock.

Facing them, clinging to the railing of the veranda for support, stood the sick white man. Any one of them could have knocked him over with the blow of a little finger. Despite his firearms, the gang could have rushed him and delivered that blow, when his head and the plantation would have been theirs. Hatred and murder and lust for revenge they possessed to overflowing. But one thing they lacked, the thing that he possessed, the flame of mastery that would not quench, that burned fiercely as ever in the disease-wasted body, and that was ever ready to flare forth and scorch and singe them with its ire.

"Narada! Billy!" Sheldon called sharply.

Two men slunk unwillingly forward and waited.

Sheldon gave the keys of the handcuffs to a house-boy, who went under the house and loosed the prisoner.

"You fella Narada, you fella Billy, take um this fella boy along tree and make fast, hands high up," was Sheldon's command.

While this was being done, slowly, amidst mutterings and restlessness on the part of the onlookers, one of the house-boys fetched a heavy-handed, heavy-lashed whip. Sheldon began a speech.

"This fella Arunga, me cross along him too much. I no steal this fella Arunga. I no gammon. I say, 'All right, you come along me Berande, work three fella year.' He say, 'All right, me come along you work three fella year.' He come. He catch plenty good fella kai-kai, {2} plenty good fella money. What name he run away? Me too much cross along him. I knock what name outa him fella. I pay Seelee, big fella master along Balesuna, one case tobacco catch that fella Arunga. All right. Arunga pay that fella case tobacco. Six pounds that fella Arunga pay. Alle same one year more that fella Arunga work Berande. All right. Now he catch ten fella whip three times. You fella Billy catch whip, give that fella Arunga ten fella three times. All fella boys look see, all fella Marys {3} look see; bime bye, they like run away they think strong fella too much, no run away. Billy, strong fella too much ten fella three times."

The house-boy extended the whip to him, but Billy did not take it. Sheldon waited quietly. The eyes of all the cannibals were fixed upon him in doubt and fear and eagerness. It was the moment of test, whereby the lone white man was to live or be lost.

"Ten fella three times, Billy," Sheldon said encouragingly, though there was a certain metallic rasp in his voice.

Billy scowled, looked up and looked down, but did not move.

"Billy!"

Sheldon's voice exploded like a pistol shot. The savage started physically. Grins overspread the grotesque features of the audience, and there was a sound of tittering.

"S'pose you like too much lash that fella Arunga, you take him fella Tulagi," Billy said. "One fella government agent make plenty lash. That um fella law. Me savvee um fella law."

It was the law, and Sheldon knew it. But he wanted to live this day and the next day and not to die waiting for the law to operate the next week or the week after.

"Too much talk along you!" he cried angrily. "What name eh? What name?"

"Me savvee law," the savage repeated stubbornly.

"Astoa!"

Another man stepped forward in almost a sprightly way and glanced insolently up. Sheldon was selecting the worst characters for the lesson.

"You fella Astoa, you fella Narada, tie up that fella Billy alongside other fella same fella way."

"Strong fella tie," he cautioned them.

"You fella Astoa take that fella whip. Plenty strong big fella too much ten fella three times. Savvee!"

"No," Astoa grunted.

Sheldon picked up the rifle that had leaned against the rail, and cocked it.

"I know you, Astoa," he said calmly. "You work along Queensland six years."

"Me fella missionary," the black interrupted with deliberate insolence.

"Queensland you stop jail one fella year. White fella master damn fool no hang you. You too much bad fella. Queensland you stop jail six months two fella time. Two fella time you steal. All right, you missionary. You savvee one fella prayer?"

"Yes, me savvee prayer," was the reply.

"All right, then you pray now, short time little bit. You say one fella prayer damn quick, then me kill you."

Sheldon held the rifle on him and waited. The black glanced around at his fellows, but none moved to aid him. They were intent upon the coming spectacle, staring fascinated at the white man with death in his hands who stood alone on the great veranda. Sheldon has won, and he knew it. Astoa changed his weight irresolutely from one foot to the other. He looked at the white man, and saw his eyes gleaming level along the sights.

"Astoa," Sheldon said, seizing the psychological moment, "I count three fella time. Then I shoot you fella dead, good-bye, all finish you."

And Sheldon knew that when he had counted three he would drop him in his tracks. The black knew it, too. That was why Sheldon did not have to do it, for when he had counted one, Astoa reached out his hand and took the whip. And right well Astoa laid on the whip,

angered at his fellows for not supporting him and venting his anger with every stroke. From the veranda Sheldon egged him on to strike with strength, till the two triced savages screamed and howled while the blood oozed down their backs. The lesson was being well written in red.

When the last of the gang, including the two howling culprits, had passed out through the compound gate, Sheldon sank down half-fainting on his couch.

"You're a sick man," he groaned. "A sick man."

"But you can sleep at ease to-night," he added, half an hour later.

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