



SALVATION IN THE SOUTH SEAS

A Story of Fiji

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Chapter 1

Leba [pronounced *Lemba*] lay asleep on her sleeping mat in the corner of the vale [sometimes called a *bure*—a type of grass house] in which she lived with her mother and father on one of the islands of Fiji. One brown arm was across her eyes, as though to shut out the light. The tight, dark curls seemed to dance over her sleeping head.

Slowly her big brown eyes opened, as Leba felt her mother shaking her awake.



Show Illustration #1

Sitting up, Leba asked sleepily, “Where is Father?”

“You lazy girl!” her mother scolded. “Did you not hear the Tura ga-ni-Koro [Chief of the village] last night? This is the day of the big feast. Most of the men of the village have gone to catch fish for the feast. Your father is with them. And there is much work for us to do. Get up

and eat your breakfast! You are the only girl in the village who is permitted to sleep this late.”

“But I am only eight years old,” Leba pouted.

“Eight years old! Many of the younger girls have been at work for a long time. Do not think because your name means *Princess* that you are one.”

Leba remembered then. The night before, the chief had announced special orders for all the people in the village. Each one had been told what to do this day. Gladly they obeyed, for the people of these South Pacific islands loved their chief. They also loved the man who was governor of all the islands. He had been appointed by the queen of England. And they dearly loved and respected their queen.

Leba ate her breakfast of fish (which had been roasted on a hot stone), sticky dalo [a starchy vegetable], and some leftovers from the supper of the night before. There would be no more meals until the big feast which they would eat with neighbors. What a happy time they would have together! (Two meals a day were all that Leba had ever known.)

Each child of the village had been given extra work to do. Leba had to roll up the sleeping mats in her vale, sweep the mat which covered the floor made of earth and dry grass, and see that everything was clean and neat. After this she was free to play until her help was needed again. Leba was considered “spoiled” because she was an only child and her parents did not make her do as much work as other girls her age had to do.

Leba picked up her doll and went outside. She thought her doll was beautiful. It was made from the thick root of a plant, with a straight stick (forming arms) fastened to the root. The doll had two sticks for legs. Leba had heard about the dolls made of bottles, which the girls in the capital city (Suva) played with. But she was sure they could not be nicer than her own.

Leba walked down the path to where Bale lived, close to her vale. He had risen early to get his work done so he could be free to work on the little boat he was making.



Show Illustration #2

The sails were made of palm fronds but the boat itself was half a coconut shell.

“It’s a nice boat, Bale,” Leba said.

Bale only grunted. Leba thought he sounded a great deal like the pig which was his pet. The pig was nearby enjoying a nice, soft, muddy spot where the rain of the night had left a puddle.

Bale did not care about having girls around. But his good nature would not permit him to tell Leba to go home. So when Leba said, “Please, Bale, may I watch you sail your boat?” he grunted again.

Then he said, “Oh, all right. You may.”

Down the path the two children hurried. When they reached the water they waded in up to their necks. Bale gave his boat a push and he and Leba watched as it sailed away in the bright sunlight. “It is a lovely boat, Bale,” Leba said, watching the pleased expression on his face.

Girls like Leba are not so bad after all, Bale decided. They watched the boat until they could see it no longer.



Show Illustration #3

Then Leba and Bale sat on the beach and talked of the fun they would have that evening at the feast.

“And did you know, Bale, that my cousin Lania is coming to the feast today? I’d better go home and see if she has arrived yet. She is going to stay with us for a few days.”

“Well, I mean to keep out of her sight if I can,” Bale said. “I don’t like the things she says to me. You should not listen to her either, Leba. She is always trying to