



RED WATER

By B. W. Watkin

I

DUNCAN McNEIL shifted the heavy pistol in his belt to a more comfortable angle and gazed without interest at a small vessel which had just hove to outside the lagoon and was now lowering a boat. The MacGregor Copra Company, his employers, made a certain allowance in their expense account for the entertainment of visiting skippers and traders. It was customary throughout the Pacific. The sum set aside for this purpose was not large, and Duncan, with Scotch thrift, had determined that as few inroads as possible should be made in it.

Followed by a horde of loafers from the village, he walked leisurely down to the beach debating whether to inform the newcomers that he

was out of gin or that a malady had broken out on the island.

Besides the half-caste mate and the four Tongan rowers there was a white man in the boat, a burly individual with a hawk like face and truculent chin. Instead of landing, the oarsmen kept the craft a few feet away from the shore, much to Duncan's secret amusement. He returned the stare of the passenger stolidly for several seconds, then curtly asked:

"Recruiting?"

The man in the boat looked perplexedly at the half-caste. "He means, Mr. Larkin, have we come after boys?"

"Boys?"

"Yes, sir, these natives here, he means."

"You call these whiskered savages boys!"

And what in hell would we want with them?"

"Laborers, sir, for the plantations."

"Oh," said the big man somewhat enlightened. "No," he continued, addressing Duncan, "we ain't looking for recruits. We was just passing by and saw your house, so we thought we'd make a friendly call."

"Better come in out of the sun and have a drink," suggested Duncan without enthusiasm. Observing the man looking doubtfully at the crowd of loitering natives, he added with a half-scornful glance at the other's revolver: "These niggers are harmless—at least when I'm around."

As they walked towards the house Duncan remarked:

"New to these islands, aren't you?" "Yes, I'm from America via the Fijis."

"You'll find this group somewhat different from the Fijis," observed Duncan after a pause. He went into little detail about the Sniders which some of the bush-fellows had taken, for the history of those captured rifles was an odyssey known from one end of the New Hebrides to the other. He pointed to the thick mass of vegetation that clothed the volcanic slopes on all sides.

"Not many callers at this place?" asked Larkin, when they were seated.

"You're the first white man that's visited the station in five months. No, except for the schooner that takes my copra twice a year and Father Jacques, the missionary, hardly anyone touches Tumalo. Place has got a bad name."

Larkin appeared to digest this; then remarked jerkily:

"It's like this, mister: I've two friends on board that vessel there. Tourists from the States. Thought a trip through the South Seas would be interesting. Can't see much from the deck of a wretched little sailing craft. We've been cruising round in the hopes of finding a spot where we could stay a few weeks and sort of recuperate. Now, you've got a big house here and plenty of room. If you'd consent to have us, we'd be willing to pay—pay handsomely."

Duncan puffed meditatively at his pipe for a few moments. "Why not stay at Vitu?" he suggested. "There's a pretty fair hotel there, good cooking, cold drinks, society, and such as that."

"That's just it," broke in the other. "Civilization. We want to get away from it. Local

color's what we're after. Nature in the raw. In fact, the letter's a necessity with me. I'm an etymologist."

He shot a keen glance at the young man as he uttered the last sentence. But Duncan was not visibly impressed. He continued smoking placidly.

"Fellow who chases butterflies, isn't it?"

The other gave him a pitying glance.

"Not that I know of. I'm a scientist studying the different branches of the human race."

"Humph," said Duncan indifferently. "Come, if you like, but you'll find Tumalo rather a tough place to stay—and expensive, too," he added as an afterthought.

Business on the plantation prevented Duncan from meeting his new guests at the beach when they arrived. He was therefore somewhat startled to discover on returning to the house that one of the friends Larkin had spoken of was a woman. Probably his astonishment showed in his face, for Larkin hastened to present him:

"Meet the Cliffs—Edna and Alf, Mr. McNeil," he said with that boisterous heartiness which people use when they wish to tide over a difficult situation.

Duncan mumbled an acknowledgment. The vessel which had brought them was now a speck on the horizon; otherwise he might have declined their company altogether. The presence of a white woman on Tumalo was not at all welcome. It would mean giving up the best room in the house, the abandonment of his usual attire of pajamas, and a host of other bachelor comforts and habits. He felt Larkin had taken an unfair advantage of his hospitality in omitting to give fuller details as to the sex of his "friends."

It was remarkable how little difference the advent of the three white people made to life on Tumalo. Things went on very much as before. The newcomers kept strictly to themselves, seldom venturing beyond the shade of the deep veranda. Except twice a day at meals Duncan hardly saw them. Now and then Larkin, who was undoubtedly the chief personality of the trio, would corner him and ask as to the frequency of visiting vessels, the distance to Vitu, the capital of the group, what steamers called there, and similar queries. About the natives and their customs he evinced no interest whatever. Once Duncan

mentioned his surprise at this, but the other waved his hand as if the matter weren't worth mentioning.

"Real savages, yes. But these islanders of yours.... My dear fellow, to a scientist they are of no importance."

"How about the bushmen in the interior?"

"Perhaps I may have a look at them later."

He turned the conversation adroitly into a discussion of the probability of their being a path across the island, and gleaned from Duncan many details regarding Father Jacques and the mission which lay a bare twelve miles in a straight line from the MacGregor beach, though two days were generally consumed in reaching the place by water, the only possible means of travel. He pooh-poohed Duncan's repeated warning never to venture out of sight of the house or plantation, till the trader, exasperated, cried:

"Well, if you want to go, go alone. Don't take the lady or Mr. Cliff."

Larkin grinned.

"I promise you that," he said; then, with a change of tone, "I was only joking. Say nothing of this to the others. Might make 'em nervous."

No one looking at Duncan McNeil's rather commonplace exterior would have judged that he was chockful of sentiment and romance. Cut off from all female society of his own race for two years, he easily fell a victim to the charms of Edna Cliff. About his own age and of sufficient personal attraction to pass muster in a crowd, she had not so far shown any great yearning for Duncan's society. Indeed, if the truth must be told, she rather avoided him. She and the two men sat together for hours, sometimes idly playing cards, more often in silence. Occasionally Duncan would hear their voices raised in quarrel, though he was never able to ascertain the cause of their disputes. In time he learned to distinguish the sneering laugh of Larkin, the tearful pleading of the girl, and the nasal whine of Alf Cliff.

The latter was a pale-faced, flabby man of about forty, with shifty eyes. He seldom spoke to Duncan, and the trader gathered that his reticence was due to an extreme jealousy. In a seemingly unostentatious manner Cliff saw to it that Duncan and the girl had no opportunity to talk alone. Not that Duncan had any great desire to do so. His shy nature revolted at the idea of a flirtation with

another man's wife, especially in so confined a sphere as Tumalo.

During the first fortnight after the arrival of Duncan's guests no vessel touched at the island, though Father Jacques frequently passed outside the reef in the fast launch owned by the mission. The first time the put-put of the motor was heard Larkin and his friends studied her with glasses till she had dwindled over the skyline. Afterwards all three questioned the trader as to her speed and sea-going capabilities, even the girl showing an interest in his answers. The only actual caller of any importance was the schooner *Bonita*, whose captain, Laroux, was an old acquaintance of Duncan's.

II

DUNCAN ate his noon breakfast on the *Bonita*, then at her skipper's invitation stayed to read the month-old newspapers from Suva and Sydney.

To one who has lived for any length of time without break on any of the lone islets of the Pacific there is an air of unreality about the chronicled happenings of civilization. Duncan perused the accounts of theft, divorces, and murders with the half-puzzled aloofness of one remote from such things, forgetting that similar deeds were taking place almost daily on Tumalo and the surrounding islands.

The difference lay in the fact that the Melanesian failed to coat his crimes with the veneer of hypocrisy. The issue of the *Sydney Morning Herald* he had hold of seemed chiefly concerned about the identity of some burglars who had raided the safe of a well-known George Street jeweler. Duncan wondered idly who would be lucky enough to earn the two thousand pounds which was offered for the recovery of the loot. Like many another lonely soul toiling for a pittance he had occasional dreams of sudden and easy wealth. It was astonishing, he thought, how little there was in the papers to interest a dweller among the realities of life. Even the dictionary, which, besides a few nautical books seemed to compose the *Bonita's* library, held more facts between its thumb-worn covers.

At two o'clock he said goodbye to Captain

Laroux and went ashore. Edna Cliff met him on the veranda. She was palpably agitated, and though the presence of any strong emotion save anger seldom becomes a woman, Duncan thought he had never seen her look so alluring.

"Larkin's cleared out; Alf's gone after him; and I know there'll be murder," she cried out almost before Duncan had reached the house.

"Why, Mrs. Cliff—" he began.

She gave him a queer look, then burst into tears. Between her sobs he managed to elicit the fact that Larkin under pretext of exploring the hinterland had gone out early in the morning before the others were up, taking with him, according to the beach natives, only a rifle and a small pack. From one of the houseboys' description of the latter, "little fella bokkis (box) belong-um skin belongum bullamacow," Alf and the girl had immediately recognized a small leather satchel which contained all the valuables they possessed in the world. Alf had seized another rifle and plunged into the bush barely an hour after Larkin's disappearance.

"I don't want the satchel. I want Alf," she wailed. "If we never see the thing again—" She stopped.

"But what's Larkin's idea of going into the interior? Does he mean to hide the thing?" asked Duncan.

"Hide it! No, he was going to clear out with it."

"Getting out of Tumalo's more difficult than you or Larkin think, Mrs. Cliff. I suppose he thought to cut around the plantation for a mile or so and come out on the beach again out of sight of the house. Then, possibly, he figured he might get natives to paddle him over to Malekulo. If he does, he's a goner. Why, they're worse cannibals over there than they are here!"

"You don't know Spud Larkin, Mr. McNeil. He's nobody's fool. He means to go right across this island of yours. You told him the other day it was only a few hours' walk to that old priest's house on the other side."

"I said a few miles, not a few hours," corrected Duncan. "But if he did reach the mission—which he hasn't one chance in a thousand of doing—he wouldn't be much better off as far as making a get-away than if he stayed here."

"Yes he would. The priest's launch. Larkin

had it all figured out. He could make that place you spoke of, Vitu, in thirty hours or so; and from there he could take the French steamer to Noumea. She's due at the capital in three or four days according to what you told him. Spud's a wizard in a motor boat."

Duncan laughed.

"Excuse me, Mrs. Cliff, but Larkin has no more chance of getting a trip in that launch than he has of traveling across this island alive. Father Jacques has strict orders from mission headquarters that the *Croix* is not to be used for any other purpose but missionary work. All the gold in the world wouldn't bribe the old man either."

She smiled rather sadly, sympathetically.

"What Spud Larkin wants, he generally takes. I don't suppose he intends to kill the priest, but if anyone interferes he won't stop at a little thing like shooting a few niggers."

"How do you know all this, Mrs. Cliff?"

She glanced at him timidly, then, avoiding his gaze, said almost in a whisper:

"We were talking it over the other day." "Oh."

Duncan's tone caused the girl to break into an outburst of weeping, much to his embarrassment.

"What do you want me to do, Mrs. Cliff?" he asked somewhat stiffly.

"Oh, I've no right to ask you, Mr. McNeil, but you always seem so—so capable. Alf's awfully hot-tempered, and if he catches up with Larkin there'll be murder done."

"You don't have to tell me that. I know Tumalo. Well, I'll go after him, though—"

He stopped, not wishing to add to the girl's distress.

"Did the satchel that Larkin took contain anything valuable, Mrs. Cliff?"

"Several thousand pounds worth of—securities." She pronounced the last word slowly as if in afterthought.

"I thought you Americans reckoned everything in dollars," remarked Duncan carelessly; then stared in amazement at having caused a fresh torrent of tears.

With an effort she mastered herself.

"Why shouldn't Larkin or Alf be able to cross the island? Isn't there a path?"

"Oh, there's a path all right, though I've

never been up it on this side more than a mile or so, and I know Father Jacques hasn't been a greater distance at his end. Still the bushmen come down to both beaches."

"Are those bushmen you talk of harmless natives like you have on the plantation here? Both Alf and Larkin reckoned they would be."

"My God!" exclaimed Duncan, "If that's the notion they've got they're as good as dead already."

She looked at him half doubtfully, though her face paled.

"Larkin said—"

"Mrs. Cliff," interrupted Duncan, "I don't care what Larkin said, or what is said by the Commissioner at Vitu, or the religious societies, or anybody. *All* the natives on Tumalo are bad, 'cross fella,' as they call it. These salt-water men you see hanging round the village would rather commit murder than—than eat. Though for the matter of that they often combine the two. It's only because they know me and because of the barbed wire fence round the house that the strip of beach on this side is safe for white people. As for the bush-men—well, the shore natives are afraid of *them*. They're tough birds back there in the scrub, let me tell you. Why they'd kai-kai *me*!"

There was no boasting in the young man's tone, yet the girl did not seem much impressed.

"Oh, the niggers are the least of Alf's troubles. It's the—the satchel he wants. And I hope he never gets it," she concluded inconsequentially.

"I am wasting time," exclaimed Duncan after a moment noting the girl's relief when he asked no further questions.

His preparations for the trip into the danger zone were simple. Larkin and Alf had taken the only rifles for which there was any ammunition on the station. Duncan contented himself with his Luger pistol and a long forked stick. Glancing round the room at the last moment he picked up a small phial and slipped it in his pocket.

"No use trying to get any of the beach natives to come with me, but I think Coga, my headman, will be game," he remarked to Edna, "He's a Solomon Islander and has a huge contempt for all savages outside his own country."

Coga, an unprepossessing black with earlobes bulging with assorted bric-a-brac,

expressed his entire willingness to "walk bush alonga white marster." His face fell somewhat when he learned that neither Duncan nor himself would carry muskets; but he quickly reappeared carrying a cruel-looking hardwood club, his fiber belt bristling with knives and trade tomahawks.

While Duncan had been nearly two years on Tumalo, in all that time he had no actual dealings with any of the interior natives, though he had occasionally seen them lurking well out of rifleshoot in the bush. He knew that they, or rather their women, came down at regular intervals to exchange yams for fish and salt with the women of the shore-dwellers. Also he had heard about Reilly, the original founder of the plantation, an old-timer in the Pacific, who had strolled a mile or so into the bush one day to see if the land was suitable for cotton growing, and had never come back.

Even the salt-water natives were in doubt as to his fate, though they told of hearing many conch horns booming on the high hills just after his disappearance. Familiarity with the coast tribes had naturally bred a certain contempt, but Duncan was far too levelheaded a young man not to know that the ferocity of the bush natives, untouched by any contact with the white man, had not been exaggerated.

The change from the glare of the beach to the murky gloom of the jungle was startling. It was like plunging down some dark and evil-smelling alley. The rank vegetation met over their heads and was so thick that never for a moment was there any danger of missing the tiny threadlike path that countless generations of savages had worn in their periodical trips to the coast. The heat was unbearable in spite of the fact that no ray of sun could penetrate that mass of foliage above them.

Duncan took the lead with Coga a pace or so behind. The black was plainly in his element. His huge nostrils sniffed the air like some hound on the scent of an invisible quarry, his extraordinary sense of hearing noted every rustle in the bush. Yet for all that the white man thought he would be better in the rear. To advance, however cautiously, on a hidden foe for whom you have a contempt, is to invite disaster. Duncan, apart from his own experience with the New Hebridean native, had heard too many tales of their uncanny aptitude for

bush warfare.

He kept the long stick he had brought before him close to the ground. And well that he did so. For they had scarcely covered two miles before the forked end caught an innocent-looking vine lying across the path, and in brushing aside it, snapped it. There was a dull thud, and a rusty spear, made from an old harpoon and heavily weighted, dropped vertically from above in the exact place where he would have been had his foot struck the vine.

"My word!" exclaimed Coga, examining the trap with professional interest. "Them bushfella cross along too much!"

Duncan wondered if the two men ahead of him had fallen victims to the snare, but Coga declared that it had only been recently set.

"Me thinkum bushfella fright along you too much," he said in naive compliment to his master's reputation.

"Them other white men—" began Duncan.

"Pretty soon deadfeller too much," interrupted Coga, adding indifferently, "mebbe bushfella kai-kai."

After this there was silence. The path wound steadily up, the trees opening out a little on either side, so that in places it was possible to see for quite a distance around them. Then suddenly, they heard the sullen boom of a conch shell seeming to come from a spot high above them. It was followed by another which sounded further off. Step by step, with infinite caution, the two advanced in the direction of the first noise. The forest at this elevation had dwindled to mere scrub, yet the going was extremely rough on account of the rocks scattered everywhere. Ahead they could see a tiny stream which gurgled and splashed in its course down the mountainside. Following this up they found themselves suddenly in the mouth of a natural amphitheater, the center of which was crowded with nearly naked savages.

They were a debased-looking lot with long fuzzy hair, cruel, bloodshot eyes, and bridgeless noses from which the nostrils flared in disgusting resemblance to an ape's. Some were squatting on their haunches jabbering ceaselessly at each other. The majority stood round a few painted older men who were blowing lustily on their rude trumpets of shell. Duncan noted the chest development of all, far in excess of that of the average "salt-water

fella."

Concealment was impossible. Duncan advanced slowly but without visible signs of hesitation into the open space. A simultaneous "Waugh!" of astonishment greeted his appearance. Those sitting sprang to their feet, while all regarded him with faces ominous, sinister, and threatening.

"Me thinkum them old fella be marster longa here," whispered Coga, indicating with a slight gesture a gray-bearded man who sat a little apart from the others and who was chiefly noticeable by the fact that he carried no weapons.

III

A GROUP of sullen warriors stood between Duncan and the old man, and as they showed no intention of moving out of the way he drew his Luger and carelessly twirled it by the trigger guard. With a shout they scattered, one or two raising hostile spears. But a wholesome respect for the white man's pistol, which no doubt they had often seen used with disastrous effect on cocoanut shells and bottles in Duncan's frequent practice, restrained them from any overt act.

The old fellow, whose chief claim to distinction was the extraordinary number and variety of the ornaments stuck in the lobes of his ears and through the nasal septum, regarded the white man with a grin almost jovial beneath its savage ferocity.

"What name you walk longa bush? White fella marster belong beach."

Then, as Duncan hesitated, "Me savvy English. Work longa Queen'land, two, t'ree year."

Duncan leaned against a large rock while Coga squatted alongside. The old man, who was evidently the witch-doctor of the tribe and who later volunteered the information that his name was Bini, regarded the Solomon Islander sourly.

"When name them Kanaka boy walk alonga you, marster?" he inquired suspiciously.

"Him boy belong me. No fright along you," replied Duncan indifferently. Then casually, "You fella see two fella white man walk longa bush?"

There was dead silence. The horde of savages, who had gradually pressed closer till now they stood in a solid mass behind the old man,

shot furtive glances at one another. Many of them were ex-laborers from the sugar plantations of Northern Australia and understood the colloquy. They interpreted in swift guttural accents to their companions.

Duncan waited a couple of minutes, then, pulling out his pipe, lit it, and remarked coldly:

"What name you no talk? Suppose them white man no come beach belong me, big fella fire canoe pretty soon walk Tumalo. My word! He cross fella. Kill plenty bushfella. Burn plenty house. Bushfella be finish."

There was a murmur among some of the audience, but Bini only grinned maliciously.

"White man belong big fella fire canoe, he no savvy bush."

Duncan changed his tactics.

"All right, you think me gammon longa you. I go look."

He hated to leave the shelter of his protecting rock, but to show the least sign of fear would be fatal. He strolled forward with Coga swinging his club behind. The crowd of monkeylike humans parted at his approach, but made no move to follow. Duncan walked steadily to the other end of the bowl where a collection of pandanos leaf huts near a spring bubbling from a cleft in the rocks denoted a village. Several women were clustered round a large stone slab engaged in some occupation he could not determine. Piles of wood and caldrons of water indicated preparations for a feast on a large scale.

Several pigs lay trussed on the ground close to a long object swathed in green leaves and tightly bound with fiber. A swarm of flies buzzed and hovered over everything. The women darted away with shrieks and disappeared into the huts. Duncan passed a hand swiftly over the iron pots, then edged gently towards the spring. He turned his back to the water, then sauntered to meet Bini who had followed behind.

"What name you look, marster?" demanded the latter arrogantly, while an evil-looking savage, who had accompanied him, growled what was undoubtedly a threat.

"This fella Tiliki, him chief," went on the old man. "He say you givum pistol, he no kill you. You walk beach."

Duncan laughed contemptuously.

"You fella kai-kai long-pig, eh? Suppose I

make water stop. You like drink blood all the time?"

Bini regarded him in amazement.

"What name—?"

But a roar of terror from Tiliki made him turn hastily. The chief was pointing in frozen horror at the tiny stream which was gradually changing from dark purple to a rich ruby red as it trickled slowly over the rocks.

"You lookum pot," suggested Duncan softly.

Some of the tribesmen who had been prowling in the rear pressed forward to see what was going on. They uttered a howl at the sight of the red fluid which only a few moments before had been clear water. In confusion they fell back hastily, some of them dropping their spears in their eagerness to get away from such devilish magic. Only Bini stood his ground. His knees were knocking together, and he regarded Duncan almost pathetically.

"I make water tambo (taboo) longa here—longa all place stop bush. Bush-fella drink blood all the time. Pretty soon he sick fella too much." "

Bini gave a gesture of sad assent.

"What name you want, marster?" he inquired humbly.

Duncan enumerated slowly.

"Two fella white man, two fella gun, little bokkis belong white man."

Bini considered this. It was plain he thought demands unreasonable.

"Big fella white man come along quick fella sun he jump up. Walk trap longa path. My word, he cross fella! Shoot one fella belong bush. Other fella bushman he kill. White man he there." He pointed to the ominous bundle lying near the tethered pigs. "Pretty soon small fella white man walk longa bush. My fella boy catch. He no die."

"Which way he stop?" asked Duncan.

Bini led him to one of the huts and pointed in the semi-darkness to something lying on the floors. Duncan struck a match and was relieved to discover that Alf was only secured by vine ropes and apparently unharmed. He had half feared to find the prisoner crippled, the Melanesian savage seldom bothering to truss a captive, preferring the much simpler method of breaking a limb or burning a sinew.

"You, McNeil?" groaned Alf, sitting stiffly up. "You came just in time. These devils would

have killed me tonight. They got Spud, and I believe they're going to—to—"

He became violently sick.

"You bet they are," said Duncan.

He had never liked Alf. There was something disagreeable in the man's make-up. He wondered what Edna could have ever seen in him. He passed a flask of spirit he had brought with him to Cliff, and shouted to Coga to stay with the rescued man till he came back.

"Which way bokkis?" he demanded of Bini when they were outside.

Still grumbling, the old man led the way to a large hut which stood on piles some distance away from the village. Undoubtedly the head-house, thought Duncan as he climbed the rickety ladder. There was the usual collection of junk inside: bundles of spears, crudely carved clubs, grotesque wooden images, and a few shriveled heads hanging from the roof beams, one of them only recently severed from its late, owner's body and startling in its contrasting color to the others. Bini pointed sulkily to a calabash half-full of pebbles and what looked like bars of lead. On the split-cane floor lay a small leather valise which had been hacked open.

Duncan picked up the calabash and sought the door to examine his find. The stones, of which there were only a handful, were none of them larger than a pea. They were of various colors, dark red, stry yellow, and dirty white. Few but experts can recognize valuable gems in the rough. Duncan fingered them doubtfully, then turned his attention to the metal bars. He picked one up and examined it. Its weight was astonishing. It was too dull for silver, and yet seemed heavier than a similar ingot of lead would be. On each bar some words had been stamped: *Lawson and Co., Sydney*.

Duncan had a vague feeling of having heard the name recently. Lawson, Lawson, he puzzled. They must be manufacturing jewelers. Jewelers. Why, only that morning—which seemed ten years ago—he had heard about some jeweler in Sydney, too. What was it? A robbery. Two thousand pounds for the recovery of certain stolen property. There was more in this than met the eye. He motioned Bini to follow and walked back to the hut.

"Alf Cliff, what was in that satchel Larkin

carried?"

"Several thousand pounds' worth of uncut diamonds and rubies and some platinum ingots. Have you found them?"

Duncan gazed at him coldly, but ignored the question.

"Were they yours?" queried McNeil.

"Certainly," began Alf loudly. "Larkin wasn't what you thought him. He was a—"

"—damned poor student of etymology, about on a par with me, though I do look up unfamiliar words when I come across a dictionary."

Alf's air of bravado, which he had assumed since his rescue, fell from him when Duncan mentioned the robbery he had read of in the Sydney newspaper. Finally he blurted out a disjointed tale about having been led into crime by Larkin.

Duncan cut him short.

"Did Mrs. Cliff know about the theft?"

"Mrs. Cliff? Oh, Edna. No, she didn't, not till we had left Suva on that little sailing vessel. Then, she tried to get me to return to Sydney. Fat chance I had." He broke into a further torrent of abuse against Larkin.

Duncan rejoined Bini who was waiting outside. The old man was intently regarding the stream which had resumed its natural color. He looked up quizzically at the white man.

"Me think you gammon alonga me."

"Oh, you think so, do you? You go look water stop longa pot."

Bini sidled up to one of the caldrons, dipped a finger in the blood-red liquid and cautiously tasted it. Apparently he was reassured at the harmlessness of the white man's magic, for his manner immediately became truculent again. Glancing round to see that none of his countrymen were within hearing, he whispered hoarsely:

"You fella show me makum water all same blood. You take'm white fella back beach. That fella." He pointed hastily to the hut where Alf was sitting, fearful lest Duncan might choose the defunct Larkin.

"Me want them small fella stones and white fella iron also."

"Too much you want," sneered the old man, turning the *bêche-de-mer* gibberish into excellent sarcasm. "Suppose," he went on with calculating slowness, "you fella show me fella make water all

same blood, you take'm white man." He held up the forefinger of one hand. "Or," he held up a finger of his other hand, "you fella take'm picanin stones and white fella iron."

Having offered this magnanimous choice he retired to a nearby hut and squatted in the shade with an air of indifference.

For a minute Duncan hesitated. He knew from the witch-doctor's manner that things had come to a showdown.

But what about Edna? There had been something delicious in the appealing way she had clung to his arm and begged him to bring Alf back. Would she do that if he returned without her—husband? It would be easy to invent a convincing story of having found both men murdered by the islanders. Yet he doubted if he could meet her eyes when he told his tale.

It was growing dark. In a few minutes night would be upon them.

"Cliff," he called. "Come on out here. We've got to beat it while the beating's good."

He turned to the witch-doctor.

"You fella Bini, you tell them fella boy clear to hell out of my way. This fella white man walk beach longa me."

He emptied the calabash of its precious contents and filled it with water at the stream.

"You look close, fella," he ordered the attentive savage. From the tiny phial he had brought with him he dropped a single crystal of permanganate of potash into the water.

"Suppose you wantum make river all same blood, you put plenty little fella sand in spring. Savvy? You walk long way little bit down bush longa me, I give you."

He indicated the phial.

The old man agreed without demur, accompanying the three men a mile or so down the path. As they parted Duncan casually inquired:

"What name you make longa them white fella iron?"

"Bullets," was the laconic answer.

"I've brought your husband back, Mrs. Cliff," Duncan said with studied indifference, shoving the weary Alf across the veranda towards a white figure huddled in a chair.

The girl rose with a glad cry. She did not rush forward into his arms and smother him with kisses as Duncan felt would be the proper thing to do.

"How can I ever thank you, Mr. McNeil? But you've made a little mistake about—about—"

She gave a suppressed titter, then began to cry softly. "I'll tell you in the morning," she sobbed.

Dumbfounded at such feminine behavior, Duncan beat a puzzled retreat. Alf kept to his bed the next day, and the girl and Duncan shared a silent breakfast. He had an idea she was laughing at him, as ever and anon she would glance mischievously at his somber face.

"Isn't Alf Cliff your husband?" asked Duncan abruptly.

"He's my brother."

"Then you're not married?"

"No, nobody has asked me as yet," she smiled.

"I never thought of that," replied Duncan innocently.

"Possibly you weren't interested enough?"

"Interested!" he almost shouted; then more calmly. "Perhaps later you might be induced to—that is, you said no one had asked you to—er—. You see I'm not much of a hand at this sort of thing, Edna, but—"

"Mr. McNeil, Duncan, what are you talking about?" whispered the girl softly, turning a flushed face towards him.

That evening as they sat rather close together on the veranda, Edna said:

"So much has happened lately that I never asked what became of Larkin. Not that it matters so long as he has gone."

Duncan did not reply. His ear had caught the dull booming of conch horns and the mutter of tom-toms far back in the forest above. The jungle held no secret this time.