

# OUR SHORT STORY PAGE

## MAUKI by JACK LONDON



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He weighed one hundred and ten pounds. His hair was kinky and negroid, and he was black. He was peculiarly black. He was neither blue-black nor purple-black, but plum-black. His name was Mauki, and he was the son of a chief. He had three *tambos*. *Tambo* is Melanesian for *tobacco*, and is first cousin to that Polynesian word. Mauki's three *tambos* were as follows: First, he must never shake hands with a woman, nor have a woman's hand touch him or any of his personal belongings. Secondly, he must never eat clams nor any food from a fire in which clams had been cooked. Thirdly, he must never touch a crocodile, nor travel in a canoe that carried any part of a crocodile, even if only as large as a tooth.

Of a different black were his teeth, which were deep-black, or, perhaps better, lamp-black. They had been made so in a single night, by his mother, who had compressed about them a powdered mineral which was dug from the landslide back of Port Adams. Port Adams is a salt-water village on Malaita, and Malaita is the most savage island in the Solomons—so savage that no traders nor planters have yet gained a foothold on it; while, from the time of the earliest *beche-de-mer* fishers and small-wood traders down to the latest labor-recruiters equipped with automatic rifles and gasoline engines, scores of white adventurers have been passed out by tomahawks and soft-nosed bullet.

Mauki's ears were pierced, not in one place, nor two places, but in a couple of dozen places. In one of the smaller holes he carried a slay pipe. The larger holes were too large for such use. The bowl of the pipe would have fallen through. In fact, in the largest hole in each ear he habitually wore round, wooden plugs that were an even four inches in diameter. Roughly speaking, the circumference of said holes was twelve and one-half inches. Mauki was catholic in his tastes. In the various smaller holes he carried such things as empty rifle cartridges, horseshoe nails, copper screws, pieces of string, blades of scimitar, strips of green leaf, and, in the cool of the day, scarlet hibiscus flowers.

Mauki's father was chief over the village at Port Adams, and thus, by birth a salt-water man, Mauki was half-ambiphilic. He knew the way of the fishes and oysters, and the reef was an open book to him. Canoes, also, he knew. He learned to swim when he was a year old. At seven years he could hold his breath a full minute and swim straight down to bottom through thirty feet of water. And at seven years he was stolen by the businessmen, who cannot even swim and who are afraid of salt water. Thereafter Mauki saw the sea only from a distance, through rifts in the jungle and from open spaces on the high mountain sides.

He became the slave of old Fanfoa, head chief over a score of scattered bush villages on the range-tips of Malaita, the smoke of which, on calm mornings, is about the only evidence the seafaring white men have of the teeming interior population. For the whites do not penetrate Malaita.

When Mauki was a young man of seventeen, Fanfoa got out of tobacco. He got dreadfully out of tobacco. It was hard times in all his villages. He had been guilty of a mistake. So was a harbor so small that a large schooner could not swing at anchor in it. It was surrounded by mangroves that overhung the deep water. It was a trap, and into the trap sailed two white men in a small ketch. They were after recruits, and they possessed much tobacco and trade goods, to say nothing of three rifles and plenty of ammunition. Now there were no salt-water men living at Suo, and it was there that the businessmen could come down to the sea. The ketch did a splendid trade. It signed on twenty recruits the first day. Even old Fanfoa signed on. And that same day the score of new recruits chopped off the two white men's heads; killed the boat's crew, and burned the ketch.

Thereafter, and for three months, there was tobacco and trade goods in plenty and to spare in all the bush villages. Then came the man-of-war, that threw shells for miles into the hills, frightening the people out of their villages and into the deeper bush. Next the man-of-war sent landing parties ashore. The villages were all burned, along with the tobacco and trade stuff.

It taught Fanfoa a lesson, but in the meantime he was out of tobacco. Also, his young men were too frightened to sign on with the recruiting vessels. That was why Fanfoa ordered his slave, Mauki, to be carried down and signed on for half a case of tobacco advance, along with knives, axes, calico and beads, which he would pay for with his toll on the plantations. Mauki was sorely frightened when they brought him on board the schooner. He was a lamb led to the slaughter.

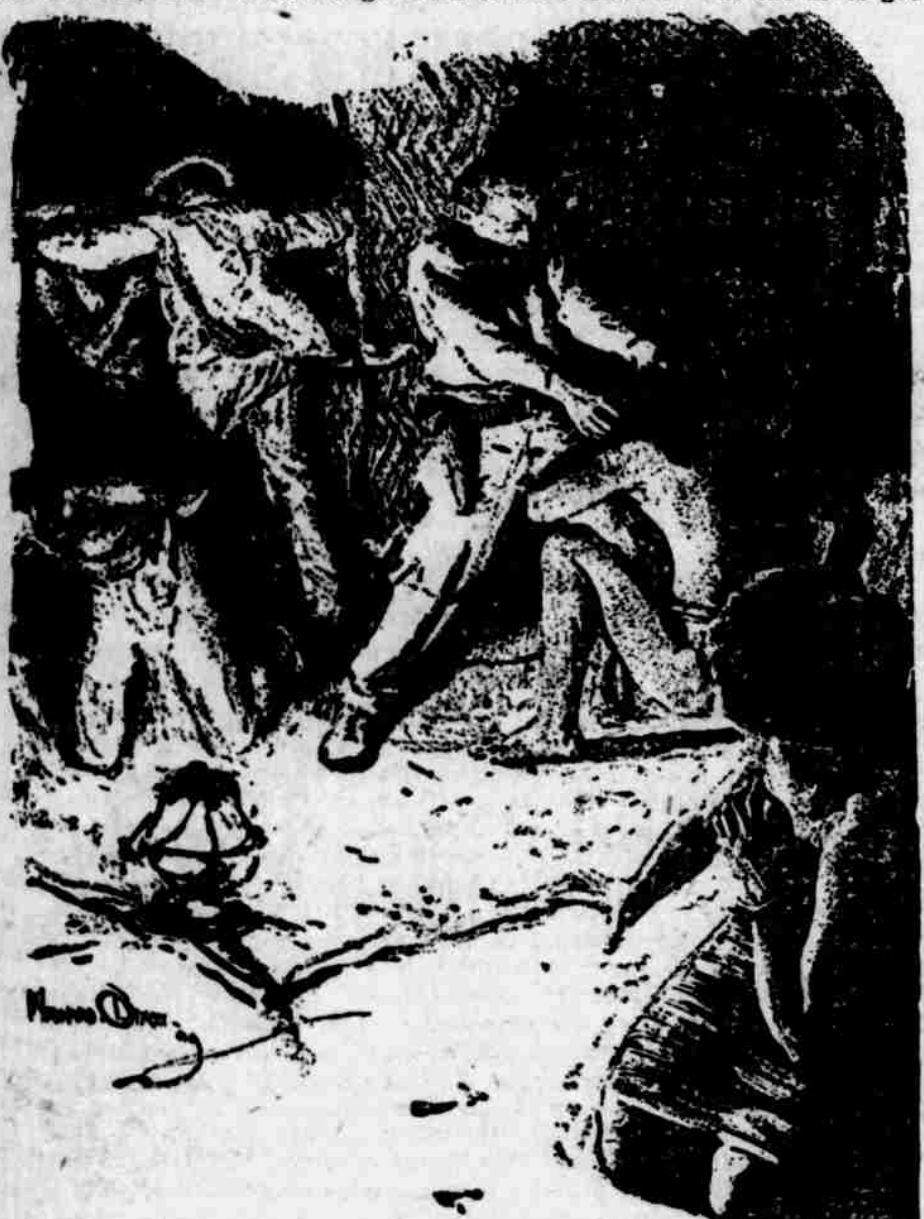
White men were ferocious creatures. They had to be, or else they would not make a practice of venturing along the Malaita coast and into all harbors, to see a schooner, when each schooner carried from fifteen to twenty blacks as boat's crew, and often as high as sixty or seventy black recruits.

After many days on the schooner, and after beholding more land and islands than he had ever dreamed of, he was landed on New Georgia and put to work in the field—working jungle and cutting cane grass. For the first time he knew what work was. Even as a slave to Fanfoa he had not worked like this. And he did not like work. It was too damn and in at dark, on two meals a day. And the food was tiresome. For weeks at a time they were given nothing but sweet potatoes to eat, and for weeks at a time it would be nothing but rice.

Among other things he learned *beche-de-mer* English, with which he could talk with all white men, and with all recruits who otherwise would have talked in a thousand different dialects. Also, he learned certain things about the white men, principally that they kept their word. If they told a boy he was going to receive a stick of tobacco, he got it. If they told a boy

they would knock seven bells out of him if he did a certain thing, when he did that thing seven bells invariably were knocked out of him. Mauki did not know what seven bells were, but they occurred in *beche-de-mer*, and he imagined them to be the blood and teeth that sometimes accompanied the process of knocking out seven bells. One other thing he learned: no boy was struck or punished unless he did wrong. Even when the white men were drunk, as they were frequently, they never struck unless a rule had been broken.

Mauki did not like the plantation. He hated work, and he was the son of a chief. Furthermore, it was ten years since he had been stolen from Port Adams by Fanfoa, and he was homesick. He was even homesick for the slavery under Fanfoa. So he ran away. He struck back into the bush, with the idea of working southward to the beach and stealing a canoe in which to go home to Port Adams. But the fever got



"If the White Men Told a Boy They Would Knock Seven Bells Out of Him, Seven Bells were Knocked Out of Him."

him, and he was captured and brought back more dead than alive.

A second time he ran away, in the company of two Malaita boys. They got down the coast twenty miles, and were hidden in the hut of a Malaita freeman, who dwelt in that village. But in the dead of night two white men came, who were not afraid of all the village people and who knocked seven bells out of the three runaway, tied them like pigs, and tossed them into the whaleboat. But the man in whose house they had hidden—seven times seven bells must have been knocked out of him from the way the hair, skin and teeth flew, and he was discouraged for the rest of his natural life from harboring runaway laborers.

For a year Mauki toiled on. Then he was made a house boy, and had good food and easy times, with light work in keeping the house clean and serving the white men with whisky and beer at all hours of the day and most hours of the night. He liked it, but he liked Port Adams more. He had two years longer to serve, but two years were too long for him in the throes of homesickness. He had grown wise with his year of service, and being now a house boy, he had opportunity. He had the cleaning of the rifles, and he knew where the key to the storeroom was hung.

He planned the escape, and one night ten Malaita boys and one boy from San Cristoval sneaked from the barracks and dragged one of the whaleboats down to the beach. It was Mauki who supplied the key that opened the padlock on the boat, and it was Mauki who equipped the boat with a dozen Winchester, an immense amount of ammunition, a case of dynamite with detonators and fuse, and ten cases of tobacco.

The northwest monsoon was blowing, and they fled south in the night time, hiding by day on detached and uninhabited islets, or dragging their whaleboat into the bush on the large islands. Thus they gained Guadalcanar, skirted halfway along it, and crossed the indispensable Straits to Florida Island. It was here that they killed the San Cristoval boy, saving his head and cooking and eating the rest of him.

The Malaita coast was only twenty miles away, but the last night a strong current and baffling winds prevented them from gaining across. Daylight found them still several miles from their goal. But daylight brought a cutter, in which were two white men who were not afraid of eleven Malaita men armed with twelve rifles.

Mauki and his companions were carried back to Tulagi, where lived the great white master of all the white men. And the great white master held a court, after which, one by one, the runaways were tied up and given twenty lashes each, and sentenced to a year of fifteen dollars. Then they were sent back to New Georgia, where the white men knocked seven bells out of them all around and put them to work. First Mauki was no longer house boy. He was put in the road-making gang. The fine of fifteen dollars had been paid by the white men from whom he had run away, and he was told that he would have to

work it out, which meant six months' additional toil. Further, his share of the stolen tobacco earned him another year of toil.

Port Adams was now three years and a half away, so he stole a canoe one night, hid on the islets in Manning Straits, passed through the Straits, and began working along the eastern coast of Ysabel, only to be captured, two thirds of the way along, by the white men on Merling Lagoon. After a week he escaped from them and took to the bush. There were no bush, natives on Ysabel, only salt-water men who were all Christians. The white men put up a reward of five hundred sticks of tobacco, and every time Mauki ventured down to the sea to steal a canoe he was chased by the salt-water men.

Four months of this passed, when the reward having been raised to a thousand sticks, he was caught and sent back to New Georgia and the road-building gang. Now a thousand sticks are worth fifty dollars, and Mauki had to pay the reward himself, which required a year and eight months' labor. So Port Adams was now five years away.

His homesickness was greater than ever, and it did not appeal to him to settle down and be good, work out his four years, and go home. The next time he was caught in the very act of running away. His case was brought before Mr. Haveby, the island manager of the Moonlight Soap Company, who adjudged him an incorrigible. The company had plantations on the Santa Cruz Islands, hundreds of miles across the sea, and there it sent its Solomon Islands' incorrigibles. And there Mauki was sent, though he never arrived. The schooner stopped at Santa Anna, and in the night Mauki swam ashore, where he stole two rifles and a case of tobacco from the trader and got away in a canoe to Cristoval.

Malaita was now to the north, fifty or sixty miles away. But when he attempted the passage he was caught by a light gale and driven back to Santa Anna, where the trader clasped him in his arms and held him against the return of the schooner from Santa Cruz. The two rifles the trader recovered, but the case of tobacco was charged up to Mauki at the rate of another year. The sum of years he now owed the company was six.

On the way back to New Georgia the schooner dropped anchor in Marau Sound, which lies at the southeastern extremity of Guadalcanar. Mauki swam ashore with handcuffs on his wrists and got away to the bush. The schooner went on, but the Moonlight Soap Company's schooner, which was to take Mauki back to New Georgia, was delayed by a gale, and Mauki was brought by the bushmen with a year and eight months tacked on to his account. Again, and before the schooner called in, he got away, this time in a whaleboat accompanied by a case of the trader's tobacco. But a northwest gale wrecked him upon Vag, where the Christian natives stole his tobacco and turned him over to the Moonlight trader who resided there. The tobacco the natives stole meant another year for him, and the tale was now eight years and a half.

"We'll send him to Lord Howe," said Mr. Haveby. "Bunster is there, and we'll let them settle it between them. It will be a case, I imagine, of Mauki getting Bunster, or Bunster getting Mauki, and good riddance in either event."

Nobody ever comes to Lord Howe, or Ontong-Java, as it is sometimes called. Thomas Cook & Son do not sell tickets to it, and tourists do not dream of its existence. No even a white missionary has landed on its shore. Its five thousand natives are as peaceable as its primitive. Yet they were not always peaceable. The "Sailing Directions" speak of them as hostile and treacherous. But the men who compile the "Sailing Directions" have never heard of the change that was worked in the hearts of the inhabitants, who, not many years ago, cut off a big bark and killed all hands with the exception of the second mate. This survivor carried the news to his brothers. The captains of three trading schooners returned with him to Lord Howe. They sailed their vessels right into the lagoon and proceeded to preach the white man's gospel that only white men shall kill white men, and that the lesser breeds must keep hands off.

The schooners sailed up and down the lagoon, harrying and destroying. There was no escape from the narrow sand circle, no bush to which to flee. The men were shot down at sight, and there was no avoiding being sighted. The villages were burned, the canoes smashed, the chickens and pigs killed, and the precious coconut trees chopped down. For a month this continued, when the schooners sailed away; but the fear of the white man had been sown into the souls of the Islanders and never again were they rash enough to harm one.

Max Bunster was the one white man on Lord Howe, trading in the pay of the ubiquitous Moonlight Soap Company. And the company billeted him on Lord Howe, because, next to getting rid of him, it was the most out-of-the-way place to be found. That the company did not get rid of him was due to the difficulty of finding another man to take his place. He was a strapping big German, with something wrong in his brain. Semi-madness would be a charitable statement of his condition. He was a bully and a coward, and a thrice bigger savage than any savage on the island. Being a coward, his brutality was of the cowardly order.

When he first went into the company's employ he was stationed on Savo. When a conscriptive Colonial was sent to take his place, he beat him up with his fists and sent him off a wreck in the schooner that brought him.

Mr. Haveby next selected a young Yorkshire giant to relieve Bunster. The Yorkshire man had a reputation as a bruiser and preferred fighting to eating. But Bunster wouldn't fight. He was a regular little lamb—for ten days, at the end of which time the Yorkshire man was prostrated by an attack of fever. Then Bunster went for him, among other things getting him down and jumping on him a score or so of times. Afraid of what would happen when his victim recovered, Bunster fled away in a cutter to Guvutu, where he signalled himself by beating up a young Englishman already crippled by a Boer bullet through both hips.

Then it was that Mr. Haveby sent Bunster to Lord Howe, the falling-off place. He celebrated his landing by mopping up half a case of gin and by thrashing the elderly and wheezy mate of the schooner which had brought him. When the schooner departed he called the kanakas down to the beach and challenged them to throw him in a wrestling bout, promising a case of tobacco to the one who succeeded. Three kanakas he threw, but was promptly thrown by a fourth, who, instead of receiving the tobacco, got a bullet through his lungs.

And so began Bunster's reign on Lord Howe. Three thousand people lived in the principal village; but it was deserted, even in broad day, when he passed through. Men, women and children fled before him. Even the dogs and pigs got out of the way, while the king was not above hiding under a mat. The two prime ministers lived in terror of Bunster, who never discussed any moot subject, but struck out with his fists instead.

Mauki had no idea of the sort of master he was to work for. He had had no warnings, and he had concluded, as a matter of course, that Bunster would be

like other white men, a drinker of much whisky, a ruler and a lawgiver who always kept his word and who never struck a boy undeserved. Bunster had the advantage. He knew all about Mauki, and gloated over the coming into possession of him. The last cook was suffering from a broken arm and a dislocated shoulder, so Bunster made Mauki cook and general house boy.

And Mauki soon learned that there were white men and white men. On the very day the schooner departed he was ordered to buy a chicken from Samisee, the native Tongan missionary. But Samisee had sailed across the lagoon and would not be back for three days. Mauki returned with the information. He climbed the steep stairway (the house stood on piles twelve feet above the sand) and entered the living room to report. The trader demanded the chicken. Mauki opened his mouth to explain the missionary's absence. But Bunster did not care for explanations. He struck out with his fist. The blow caught Mauki on the mouth and lifted him into the air. Clear through the doorway he flew, across the narrow veranda, breaking the top railing, and down to the ground. His lips were a contused, shapeless mass, and his mouth was full of blood and broken teeth.

"That'll teach you that back talk don't go with me," the trader shouted, purple with rage, peering down at him over the broken railing. Mauki had never met a white man like this, and he resolved to walk small. He saw the boat boys knocked about and one of them put in irons for three days, with nothing to eat, for the crime of breaking a rowlock while pulling. Then, too, he heard the gossip of the village and learned why Bunster had taken a third wife by force, as was well known. The first and second wives lay in the graveyard, under the white coral sand, with slabs of coral rock at heads and feet. They had died, it was said, from beatings he had given them. The third wife was certainly ill-used, as Mauki could see for himself.

But there seemed no way by which to avoid offending the white man, who seemed offended with life. When Mauki kept silent he was struck and called a sullen brute. When he spoke he was struck for giving back talk. When he was grave, Bunster accused him of plotting and gave him a thrashing in advance; and when he strove to be cheerful and to smile, he was charged with sneering at his lord and master and given a taste of stick. Bunster was a devil. The village would have done for him, had it not remembered the lesson of the three schooners. It might have done for him anyway, if there had been a bush to which to flee. As it was, the murder of the white man, of any white man, would bring a man-of-war that would kill the offenders and chop down the precious coconut trees. Then there were the boat boys, with minds fully made up to drown him by accident at the first opportunity to capsize the cutter. Only Bunster knew that the boat did not capsize.

Mauki was of a different breed, and, escape being impossible while Bunster lived, he was resolved to get the white man. The trouble was that he could never find a chance. Bunster was always on guard. Day and night his revolvers were ready to hand. He permitted nobody to pass behind his back, as Mauki learned after having been knocked down several times. Bunster knew that he had more to fear from the good-natured, even sweet-faced, Malaita boy than from the entire population of Lord Howe; and it gave zest to the programme of torment he was carrying out. And Mauki walked small, accepted his punishments, and waited.

All other white men had respected his *tambos*, but not so Bunster. Mauki's weekly allowance of tobacco was two sticks. Bunster passed them to his woman



"At Such Times the Hush of Death Falls on the Village."

and ordered Mauki to receive them from her hand. But this could not be, and Mauki went without his tobacco. In the same way he was made to miss many a meal, and to go hungry many a day. He was ordered to make chowder out of the big clams that grew in the lagoon. This he could not do, for clams were *tambo*. Six times in succession he refused to touch the clams, and six times he was knocked senseless. Bunster knew that the boy would die first, but called his refusal mutiny and would have killed him had there been another cook to take his place.

One of the trader's favorite tricks was to catch Mauki's kinky locks and bat his head against the wall. Another trick was to catch Mauki unawares and thrust the live end of a cigar against his flesh. This Bunster called vaccination, and Mauki was vaccinated a number of times a week. Once, in a rage, Bunster ripped the cup handle from Mauki's nose, bearing the hole clear out of the cartilage.

"Oh what a nuisance!" was his comment, when he surveyed the damage he had wrought. The skin of a shark is like sandpaper, but the skin of a ray fish is like a rasp. In the South Seas the

natives use it as a wood file in smoothing down canoes and paddles. Bunster had a mitten made of ray-fish skin. The first time he tried it on Mauki, with one sweep of the hand it fetched the skin off his back from neck to arm pit. Bunster was delighted. He gave his wife a taste of the mitten, and tried it thoroughly on the boat boys. The prime minister came in for a stroke each, and they had to grin and take it for a joke. "Laugh, curse you, laugh!" was the cue he gave.

Mauki came in for the largest share of the mitten. Never a day passed without a caress from it. There were times when the loss of so much cuticle kept him awake at night, and often the half-healed surface was raked raw afresh by the facetious Mr. Bunster. Mauki continued his patient wait, secure in the knowledge that sooner or later his time would come. And he knew just what he was going to do when the time did come.

One morning Bunster got up in a mood for knocking seven bells out of the universe. He began on Mauki and wound up on Mauki. In the interval knocking down his wife and hammering all the boat boys. At breakfast he called the coffee boys and threw the scalding contents of the cup into Mauki's face. By ten o'clock Bunster was shivering with rage, and half an hour later he was burning with fever. It was no ordinary attack. It quickly became pernicious, and developed into black-water fever. The days passed, and he grew weaker and weaker, never leaving his bed. Mauki waited and watched, the while his skin grew intact once more. He ordered the boys to beach the cutter, scrub her bottom, and give her a general overhauling. They thought the order emanated from Bunster and they obeyed. But Bunster at the time was lying unconscious and giving no orders. This was Mauki's chance, but still he waited.

When the worst was past, and Bunster lay convalescent and not conscious, but weak as a baby, Mauki packed his few trinkets, including the china cup handle, into his trade box. Then he went over to the village and interviewed the king and his two prime ministers.

"This fella Bunster, him good fella you like too much?" he asked.

They explained in one voice that they liked the trader not at all. The ministers poured forth a recital of all the indignities and wrongs that had been heaped upon them. The king broke down and wept. Mauki interrupted, rudely. "You serve me some big fella marster my country. You no like 'm this fella white marster. Me no like 'm. Plenty good you put hundred coconut, two hundred coconut, three hundred coconut along cutter. Him finish, you go sleep 'm good fella. Altogether kanaka sleep 'm good fella. Him by big fella noise along house, you no serve hear 'm fella noise. You altogether sleep strong fella too much."

In like manner Mauki interviewed the boat boys. Then he ordered Bunster's wife to return to her family house. Had she refused he would have been in a quandary, for his *tambo* would not have permitted him to lay hands on her. He had no choice. The house deserted, he entered the sleeping room, where the trader lay in a dose. Mauki first removed the revolvers, then placed the ray-fish mitten on his hand. Bunster's first warning was a stroke of the mitten that removed the skin the full length of his nose.

"Good fella, eh?" Mauki grinned, between two strokes of one of which swept the forehead bare and the other of which cleaned off one side of his face. "Laugh, curse you, laugh!"

Mauki did his work thorough, and the kanakas, hiding in their houses, heard the fella fella noise, that Bunster made and continued to make for an hour or more.

When Mauki was done, he carried the boat compass and all the rifles and ammunition down to the cutter, which he proceeded to ballast with cases of tobacco. It was while engaged in this that a hideous, skinless thing came out of the house and ran screaming down the beach till it fell in the sand and mowed and gibbered under the scorching sun. Mauki looked toward it and hesitated. Then he went over and removed the head, which he wrapped in a mat and stowed in the stern-locker of the cutter.

So soundly did the kanakas sleep through that long hot day that they did not see the cutter run out through the passage and head south, close-hauled on the south-east trade. Nor was the cutter ever sighted, on that long tack to the shores of Ysabel, and during the tedious haul a beat from there to Malaita. He landed at Port Adams with a wealth of rifles and tobacco such as no one man had ever possessed before. But he did not stop there. He had taken a white man's head, and only the bush could shelter him from the heat. He went to the bush villages, where he shot old Fanfoa and half a dozen of the chief men, and made himself the chief over all the villages. When his father died, Mauki's brother ruled in Port Adams, and joined together, salt-water men and bushmen, the resulting combination was the strongest of the ten-score fighting tribes of Malaita.

More than his fear of the British Government was Mauki's fear of the all-powerful Moonlight Soap Company; and one day a message came up to him in the bush, reminding him that he owed the company eight and one-half years of labor. He sent back a favorable answer, and then appeared the inevitable white man, the captain of the schooner, the only white man during Mauki's reign who ventured the bush and came out alive. This man not only came out, but he brought with him seven hundred and fifty dollars in gold sovereigns—the money price of eight years and a half of labor plus the cost price of rifles and cases of tobacco.

Mauki no longer weighs one hundred and ten pounds. His stomach is three times its former size, and he has four wives. He has many other things—rifles and revolvers, the handle of a china cup, and an excellent collection of bushmen's heads. But more precious than the entire collection is another head, perfectly dried and cured, with sandy hair and a yellowish beard, which is kept wrapped in the finest of fiber lava-lava. When Mauki goes to war with villages beyond his realm he invariably puts out this head, and solemnly. At such times the hush of death falls on the village, and not even a mischievous darts devil-dart on Malaita, and to the possession of it is ascribed all of Mauki's strength.

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