

**WHEN THE
RED GODS CALL**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649733200

When the Red Gods Call by Beatrice Grimshaw

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BY

BEATRICE GRIMSHAW

AUTHOR OF "FIJI AND ITS POSSIBILITIES," "NEW GUINEA," ETC.



NEW YORK
MOFFAT, YARD & COMPANY

1911

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NEW YORK

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Published June, 1911

*He must go—go—go away from here!
On the other side the world he's overdue.
'Send your road is clear before you when the old
Spring fret comes o'er you,
And the Red Gods call for you!*

KIPLING

WHEN THE RED GODS CALL

PART I

HUGH LYNCH'S STORY

CHAPTER I

I AM writing this in prison.

I don't know that anyone will ever read it, but if anyone ever should, he need not picture to himself a cell in Portland or Wormwood Scrubbs, with a gas jet, and a Bible, and a spy-hole in the door, and a warder walking up and down outside. It is a very different sort of prison that holds me, Hugh Lynch—thirty-one years of age, and good for nothing any more—this dead, damp, choking-hot “northwestern” afternoon. The walls are corrugated iron, white-washed, and very clean; there is a sleeping mat on the floor, and a pillow and a box and a tin basin. The window is an open shutter, looking out to sea. I could break through it, or the floor, with a pen-knife, any night—supposing Wilks, the jailer, had not left the door open, as he generally does. Wilks is lazy, and does not much like the bother of having a white prisoner; he put me on parole the first day I was here, so that he should not be troubled to look after me. A cheap parole, truly! Where could a man escape to, in British New Guinea, as it remains even in this last quarter of the nineteenth century—

an unexplored wilderness of cannibal savages, about the last place on the face of God's earth.

People who are alive some twenty years hence may have a different tale to tell. A man has plenty of time to think in prison, and a pioneer has some right to prophesy. I would stake — what have I got to stake? Honor? "He that died o' Wednesday" may have it, not I, who live disgraced. Money? The crash that brought me here carried away that too; let it go — it's the least thing a man can lose. Love? Not safe to think about here, Hugh, while Wilks obligingly leaves you the use of your razor. Well, then, freedom, the only star in my black sky — a star a long way off. . . . I would stake my freedom that this wild country will be a great colony some day.

Who knows it as I do? Who has paid so for what he knows? Half drowned a dozen times on the river bars — nearly eaten by alligators oftener than I could remember — speared by a black brute in Orangerie Bay — caught and tied up for cooking on Ferguson Island — starved to a skeleton exploring in the Owen Stanley Range — down with fever gold-hunting in the wood-larks, in the Louisiades, up the Mambare River. Well, I'm not writing a boys' adventure book, but I never read one that had half the adventures in it I have had in this out-of-the-way, back-of-God-speed, dark, devilish hole of a British New Guinea.

. . . Which, in spite of all the names I call it, and all it has done to me, I can't help liking, even yet. That's the way with us in New Guinea — we

sow for someone else to reap. What have I reaped out of my six years in the country? Well, that is what I set out to write; I shall come to it by and by.

The days here are so long, in spite of the odd jobs of whitewashing, gardening, and grooming given me by the jailer, that I have felt obliged to make some occupation for the empty hours. I begged an old ledger, only quarter filled, from Wilks to-day, and in that I am going to write down, day by day, as time may serve, the whole truth about my wretched story—partly for my own employment, and partly because . . .

No, I won't write that second "because." I don't care if she ever does know. I don't care if she is dead. No more about her! I write to please myself, no one else.

How quiet the prison is! It is the hottest hour of the afternoon, the parrots have ceased their screaming in the bush that lies behind the hill, the leather-heads have not yet begun their evening squawking and scandalizing among the palm-tree tops. All the native prisoners are out working on the roads; Wilks, I suspect, is taking an afternoon nap after his mid-day "comforter." There is not a sound but the humming of the surf on the coral reef, a long way out at sea, and the little ruffle of the waves breaking on the beach below the jail. The sea is of a blue that hits you like a slap in the face; the white sand scorches your eyes, the tangle of bush and creepers on the shore is poisonously green. One can only say that