

RED HAIR AND BLUE SEA



by **STANLEY R. OSBORN**
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What's Happened Before

Palmyra Tree, aboard the yacht Rainbow, is startled by seeing a hand thrust through the port of her cabin. She makes a secret investigation and discovers a stowaway. She is disappointed in his mild appearance and tells him so. Obeying his command to glance at the door—she sees a huge fierce, copper-hued man—with a ten inch knife held between grinning lips! Burke, the stowaway, explains that it is a joke. But Palmyra is shaken. Next day, Burke and the brown man go on deck. The stowaway entertains them with wild tales of an adventuresome life—which his listeners refuse to believe!

Palmyra spends more and more time with the stowaways to avoid Van and John, but when the stowaways are put ashore at Honolulu she decides she loves Van. The night the engagement is announced the Rainbow hits a reef. In the excitement which follows John rescues both Van and Palmyra—but Palmyra thinks it is Van who saved her.

After three days spent on the uninhabited island, a sail is sighted. It proves to be Ponape Burke. Burke contrives to get Palmyra on board his boat alone—and the boat is under way before anything can be done! Now read what happens to Palmyra, kidnapped by Burke:

CHAPTER FIVE

Back ashore, where the moment of Palmyra Tree's abduction had found her fiancé so afraid of wounding the girl that he could not raise a rifle in her defense, every passing circumstance was carrying forward the revelation of two characters.

Van, as he saw his betrothed thus torn from him, stood, staring after the schooner, his face convulsed. He had been thrust back into a despair tenfold that whence the Pigeon of Noah had first raised him.

Not so, however, John Thurston. As well as Van he knew nothing could be done. But he would not accede. Burke's crime had thrown him into a frenzy.

He ran across to Captain Pedersen. "Captain," he demanded, "what can we do? At once?"

The deposed sailing master looked back at him haggardly. "Nothing." "But, but we must. I tell you we must. Man, we've got to get to sea. Today—now!"

Pedersen groaned. "I wish to God we could, Mr. Thurston. I'm as broke up as you. But there ain't no use. Looks now, if we're ever to get off, we'll have to knock together some sort of craft from the wreck."

Thurston cried out in protest. "Weeks, months. No! You, with all your sea experience, you must know some way. I, I demand . . ."

But Pedersen shook his head. He stood in thought, his features taking on a more definite tinge of elation. "I've got it!" he cried, and whirled away.

The sailing canoes in which the Polynesian navigators of a bygone day covered the Pacific were catamarans. The explorers built two hulls, so narrow that neither, by itself, would float. But when the two were fixed, perhaps ten feet apart, by timbers lashed athwart their gunwales amidships, the double canoe became staunch enough—though boasting in all its parts no nail or bolt or rivet, its joints held by nothing stronger than breadfruit gum and twists of cord, its sails no more substantial than plaited leaf—to traffic all way and across the broad Pacific.

It was Thurston's idea now that, placing his four separately worthless boats in tandem, two on each side, he could lash them under a framework of lighter spars into a machine which would carry a considerable spread of sail.

"If those old catamarans could hold together for a thousand miles," he explained, "ours ought to make the next island."

Work had been going on perhaps an hour when he appeared for the first time to become aware of Van Buren Rutger's drooping figure. John had completely forgotten the other man. Convicted, he ran over to him.

But Thurston attempted no explanation. He saw that the best, the only way out, was to sketch the plan of action, seem to consult the other's judgment. He spoke briefly. "What do you think, Van?" he concluded. "Isn't that as well as we can hope to do?"

Van was silent for a long time; then, unexpectedly, laughed. "As, as good as any," he said. "Go on your raft, and drown, stay, and starve. What's the difference? As regards her—" he caught his breath in a broken exhalation—"she's gone."

Thurston gazed at him somberly. "You, you mean you won't raise a hand for her?"

"I won't," Van answered wearily, "and neither will you. We can't."

Thurston's face was resolute. "Perhaps you're right," he acknowledged. "Very likely so. But for me, I prefer to die—trying."

He would have hurried away but the other detained him.

"I'm not your kind of an ass," Van said. "You fool, you know there's no hope. Yet, by this silly work, you can kid yourself into a sort of relief. Me! . . ." It was as if he looked upon the girl lying dead. But he tore himself from this vision, became defiant. "You, you still think I'm yellow. Very well, then. I'll show you. I'll help now; and when you sail, I, too, shall go."

Thurston urged the men to work as the first color of the dawn touched the eastern sky the last of the stores and gear was lashed into place.

Thurston stooped over Van, who had fallen in the sleep of exhaustion, and waked him. "Say the word," he announced. "We're ready."

Van roused but slowly; then turned upon the stronger man in a futile rage at circumstance. "Damn you," he cried, "I'd rather stay here and die like a gentleman—clean and dry. But a moment later he sprang up with his old laugh. "After all, it's got to be the fish or the birds. I'm a braver man than you, you optimistic ass, because I know . . ." He did not finish his thought. "Come on. Let's get it over."

Twenty minutes later they were at sea.

Twenty hours later the catamaran was drifting, dismasted.

And Van Buren Rutger's fault. He had been given the steering oar. But, sunk in dejection, he had, in a moment of inattention, allowed the too-heavy boom to gybe, carrying away the improvised tackle, and snatch the mast overboard. As a result Burke's rotten boat had fetched free of its lashings and the raft floated a wreck.

Doomed never to rescue Palmyra from the villain Burke, John Thurston had yet gladly staked life itself upon a thousandth chance.

The Pigeon of Noah was flying into the unknown.

The face of the man Burke was a thing to wonder at. Under the exaltation of a master idea it had grown strange, compelling. His eyes gleamed, his tongue stumbled in its eagerness. For the first time in life he was to voice that which long had hidden in his evil mind. What had been only a vision of power was now to become an actuality. And so much, so very much, depending on kindling that wild spark he felt to glow within the soul of his girl he had seized for his own—his woman.

"Tanna!" he cried. "Tanna! Ever hear tell o' that island, Palm?" He laughed excitedly. "Indeed and I've took good care t'make y'acquaint."

"Tis for Tanna we'll be laying a course, you and me," he went on, with exuberant gesture acquired from the natives. "Tanna, where we'll lord it like born king and queen."

"What a people! What a people t'work with!" His fingers opened and closed anticipatorily, with a cat-like zestfulness. "What can't we do t'them Papuan wildmen," he cried, "and what can't we make 'em do for us. That's the ticket, Palm: what we can make 'em do for us!"

"Why, kid," he was expostulating a moment later, "this here big idea ain't something that popped into m'head just recent. Gosh, no. Had it in mind for years. But . . ." He hesitated, diffident; a thing so foreign to his usual brazen assurance as to seem histrionic. "But the fact is I was a-waiting for, for you!"

She was once more aware how very real his infatuation.

"I just had t'have a dame for this stunt," he went on passionately. "A real dame, a sure enough queen. And then I meets you. The very first watch I sees y'got the shape for it. And when y'lets out about pirate blood, I knows y'got the heart for it. 'Cause yer talk's on the square; more on the square than you yerself realize."

The girl was increasingly understanding how irrevocably, on the Rainbow, he had been misled by her caprice. Listening at first in a pleased surprise, he had been eagerly self-deceived. Sure that the lawless strain, persisting through environment, had at last roused, he was now convinced she was already in love with the life he typified—though she herself did not as yet perceive the fact—and that, in the glamour this life cast upon himself, she would in time willingly come to be his own.

"And, girl," Ponape Burke was shouting, "there never, never was no King had such a Queen as you. Yer hair!" He exulted in the wonder of it. "That's how y'beat 'em all. For, didn't I tell y' the Tannamen saw

red?—grabbed at red calico, smeared their faces bright and gay, rouged up the dead warrior gaudy t'meet his maker, wound their own heads all over with red vine t'cover the wool? "Don't y'understand? That's what I was waiting on. The queen o' my devil's own mission had t' have red hair. And, Palm, them Tannamen'll go plumb crazy with pious pagan joy when they sees yer locks a-lighting up, as the sun hits 'em, like a stove full o' coals busting into flame. Hair, I tell you, same as that o' some o' the big buck o' Melanesia themselves. Yes, I say it, girl—heathen hair!"

"Why, Palm, I wish t'he Lord y'could see yerself. I wish y'could understand yerself. Y was plain born for the life. When I've waked y'up, you'll be eager for Tanna: for Tanna, where a man can be a man; where there's never a law but the law o' the cookpot and the sun and the wind—and the will o' you and me."

Ponape Burke did a jig step or two across the deck.

"Say, Palm, girl," he exclaimed; "say—you and yer heathen hair! Did I, or did I not mention as how I was going t'make y'a real sure-enough queen?"

It was Burke's continuing delight in her every show of angry spirit, his self-restraining sense of competence to bring the comedy to an end any moment he chose, that most intimidated Palmyra.

"Wait 'till I've tamed you," he would laugh. "Then we'll get along fine. And you'll sure like Tanna when y'get the taste o' power in yer pretty mouth."

Only once had he laid a hand on her. That was when, in a fury, she had flown at him, clawing his face. He had held her away, loudly hilarious. "I'd steal a kiss," he cried, "if 'twasn't for my sore arm. But, no . . . I can wait till y'come free, poking out yer lips and begging me t'take a smack. 'Twont be long."

Nor was her situation made easier by Burke's evil sense of humor. Possibly to hasten her surrender, more probably in a mere cruel amusement, it played upon her fears.

There was, for instance, the occasion when Olive, for the first time aboard the Pigeon of Noah, spoke to her.

Had it not been for those brown-shot eyes, always so stealthily upon her, she would sometimes have thought of this savage as a machine. There was a sort of unhuman precision about him.

And now, in this wise, the moment Burke had gone below, the brown man materialized himself at her side. She was never prepared for the exceeding change from his staccato silences into the gesticular animation of his speech. He had opened his mouth, apparently forgetting as on the Rainbow that they knew no word in common. Then, realizing, he stopped at a loss.

The girl shrank back; fled, in panic at the very nearness of him, toward the companionway. But there she recollected that Burke was at the foot of the ladder, and stood helpless.

Then the white man came climbing up. "Y' little vixen," he warned in a malicious enjoyment of the situation, "push me overboard . . ." He interrupted himself with a burst of laughter. "Gad," he cried, "but I'd hate t' give y' the chance! Push me overboard, and I'm gone. But—Olive's left. Remember that. I'm what stands between you. I ain't a-saying as how he'd love a red-headed goddess all his own. Oh, no! But I do see he's got his eye on y'like a wolf following a nice fat little lamb off into the timber."

The girl shuddered. Burke or Olive? White savage or brown? A cry of despair rose to her lips but she fought it back. Her hand stole upward toward the opening of her dress, lingered, fell again to her side.

Since that event—it was now her third day aboard the Lupe-a-Noa—she had been wondering whether Ponape Burke really did stand between her and his man. She had not forgotten Burke's saying that Olive, if he knew his power, could snap his master's back across one of those big brown knees like a piece of kindling. And she suspected at times that Olive might know this quite well.

The day, with the disconcerting suddenness of the Equator, had faded and darkness would soon have been upon them. Burke had waved a hand toward the cabin with kindly gesture. "The royal chamber awaits, Queenie," he had said. "Hot as hell down there and you'll soon be squawking for a hammock on deck. But tonight . . . There's a lock."

The girl had sprung, trembling, panting, for the companion, had slammed it shut and shot home the bolts. Then she had stumbled down the steps and thrown herself, sob-

bing, upon the bunk. She had borne up bravely so long as the sun remained, but on the closing in of night, with all its sinister implications, she had given way.

Sleep impossible, the night dragged on. Above decks there had been, as is seemed for hours, only the heavy breathing of slumber. At last, like a trapped animal herself, she had begun a futile prying. And then, without warning in that silence, there came, quite close at hand, a sound. Again it came, hidden, menacing. (Continued next week)

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