

# RED HAIR AND BLUE SEA



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**CHAPTER XI**

Olive marched proudly up the sands, the girl in his arms a dead burden. The rifle fire, as was to have been expected, had brought the villagers running from their thatches. Scarcely had the brown man emerged out of the sea than these Micronesians were swarming down. Excited voices filled the air. "O-lee-vay—O-lee-vay—O-lee-vay!"

So this, then, was where he could bring her; the home of his people, the place of his own abode.

Here were people moving about; brown men, yellow men, white men; the last in white clothing and white shoes, with white pith helmets pulled down over their noses to keep out the glare of the white sand. And here was even a white woman, who popped her head out a window like a cuckoo out of a clock.

And there, most astonishing of all, not five feet away and as real as life itself, stood John Thurston.

And he gazed at her sorrowfully and said, in the strangest voice: "Palm Tree! Oh, oh, Palm!"

It was not until fifteen hours after the brown man had restored Palmyra Tree to the world of the living that she once more opened her eyes. Then, in a half-waking fright, she reared herself up with a cry of "Olive!"

The next moment she found herself in her mother's arms.

When she roused again, several hours later, the Crawfords were at the bedside with her mother and father.

Palmyra sat up abruptly with the question: "Where have they got Ponape Burke?"

The four looked from one to another, hesitant.

At her first awakening the girl had been told how the Okayama had brought her people into this harbor on the search.

"You don't mean . . ." She paused, incredulous. "You don't mean the gunboat was right here when I came and didn't team out to catch him?"

She saw that this unbelievable thing was true. Unexpectedly, she sprang to her feet. "Where's Olive?" Her voice rang sharp, frightened.

But Olive himself was asleep. Her father began to explain. "The Pigeon of Noah is an American vessel."

"And there's been so much friction between Japan and America, interjected the mother.

"And Commander Sakamoto was sure if he seized the schooner on the high seas it would get into the American papers wrong and stir up more misunderstanding and ill will. . . ."

"So, my dear," finished Constance Crawford, "you were sacrificed to the ends of diplomacy. The Jap, finding you safe, decided the lesser evil was to let Burke escape."

"Dr. Crife's just had a long talk with Olive," said Mrs. Crawford. Dr. Crife of the mission was her host.

The girl exclaimed in astonishment. "He can, he can talk to him? He can understand him?"

She seemed hardly to believe. So utterly, with her, had the brown man been beyond reach of words, it had seemed no one, with Ponape Burke gone, could ever bridge that gap between Babel's most diverse languages.

"And to think," cried Constance, "they got the letter all wrong. Made us believe poor Olive, who was being so wonderful, was a villain."

The color flooded Palmyra's cheeks in the intensity of her interest.

"But this particular pastor couldn't explain clearly," said the father, "and the Jap, misled by your name, didn't understand at all. What Olive really writes in to beseech, in Jehovah's name, that whatever friends get the letter hurry with arms and many boats to a named island, there to help him save . . ."

"Dr. Crife says there's absolutely no question about that word 'save', put in Constance.

"Help him save the high chief young lady Palmtree."

The girl settled back among her pillows. Tears welled into her eyes. "It was enough that I should have wronged him," she said, "it is unthinkable you all should have been guilty of this crowning misconception."

She shifted uneasily, lay for some time in silence, gazing through the window.

"If they hadn't bungled the letter," she said at last wearily, "I should have been spared much. And if you hadn't let Ponape Burke escape, I shouldn't now be in danger still."

At last Palmyra could talk to Olive.

had for this white rascal a sort of love, but no sort of respect. Great souls must, of their nature, suffer petty tyranny. And Olive—often, according to his lights, regretting, disapproving, always, palliating—followed the despicable little Ponape.

She learned that Olive had not known Burke meant to abduct her. And she found that in the beginning he had thought it, not an abduction, but an elopement.

Only when the schooner got under way did he perceive that this was no adventure of Palmyra's own choice. Only when she did not soon begin to smile through her tears as many a native girl might have done, did he realize how terrible to her the situation.

Olive's first thought was that the girl would feel safer with a weapon; also that she might possibly need one. As he dared not give her the knife in daylight, he had dropped it through the skylight.

When the Japanese gunboat passed them so cruelly by, Olive had been as eager as she to attract attention. But he had known the distance too great.

As regarded Jaluit he had not gone there because it was so obviously the place he should have gone. Burke was sure to try that lagoon first.

This much Dr. Crife could read for her:

Incaruate there before this islander's eyes on the Rainbow, she had been not unlike a goddess; a being—as indeed she was—from another world. A high white princess, called for the stately life-giving palm and crowned with hair of flame, she had condescended to him with blankets when a brown creature was in misery with that most terrible of things—cold.

Olive was not in love with Palm Tree. One does not consider oneself privileged to fall in love with a goddess.

But from the deck at her feet, intimately yet afar, he had gazed up at her—fascinated.

If Palmyra now knew how Olive felt toward her she was far from knowing how she felt toward Olive.

And if her only difficulty with Van Buren Rutger had been a reluctance to give him pain, she found every difficulty with John Thurston.

Van himself had made things easy. Returning to the mission at a late hour the third night he had come upon Olive prowling about with a rifle. "Ponape is not dead," the brown man had explained simply. But that which others looked upon as a touching manifestation of devotion, Van chose to regard with suspicion. "Sakamoto shall know of this," was his comment.

Palmyra had been so incensed that, there and then, she had broken the engagement.

Van's dismissal placed him in that position wherein a weak man not infrequently lacks moral courage to turn upon his real rival. He must find an easier target for his resentment.

Thus Van, without in the least perceiving why, remained amiable toward Thurston, but developed an ugly spite against this man of darker skin.

But if Palmyra had freed herself of Van, she could not free herself of that which withheld her from Thurston.

Back there in the canoe, in her moment of revelation, she had yearned to meet him once more, face to face, that she might tell him the truth. But now that, astonishingly, she had awakened into the old life, she found herself quite unready to step up to him with any such confession.

She would love John Thurston; she did love John Thurston. But between them was the brown man Olive, and, leaning from behind his elbow, the face of Ponape Burke.

Concerning Olive she tried to justify herself on the ground of gratitude. Never had a girl more reason to be grateful. Was it not natural she should be eager to take him presents, to sit in his house questioning, to find herself hour by hour more curious concerning him, more interested in him than in any other living being?

Oddly enough—or rather, naturally enough—it did not come to her for some time to ask whether she might be in love with this brown man. Then the idea struck like an unexpected blow. She was stunned.

At first she put the thought from her in abhorrence. But in the still hours of the night it came back again and again. Could she indeed be in love with Olive? Was it possible for an American girl, under any circumstances whatever, to fall in love with a man of darker race?

She shuddered to think others might believe this thing of her.

She avoided Olive, kept to her room. She struggled to analyze her emotions, to weigh them dispassionately. And, honestly striving, she was at last able to say of herself that, in no sense, could she be accused of loving him.

Not for long did she find the answer. Then it came like a release from a prison cell. She was in love, not with Olive himself, but with his attributes.

She wanted to love John for the true manliness that was his. But, alas, those splendid qualities the two possessed in common had come to seem the personal qualities of Olive alone. She remembered how he had gone after the shark with the knife . . . and conquered. . . .

The sun was less than an hour high when Palmyra, as she had done for several mornings now, descended the winding stairway hewn in the hillside from the mission direct to the street of the town.

Island life already was astir. The girl was addressed by an old woman.

"Please you," said this crone in English, "you come for look for see ve'y fine Pingelap mat. You like too much for buy."

She would have refused, but now she caught a glimpse of Van approaching. Several times he had trapped her into painful interviews. But this morning she could use the ancient dame, as a gaping listener, to keep Van silent.

"Where is your 'ouse?" the girl asked tentatively.

The thatch toward which the crone pointed stood conspicuously. Immediately against one side was the water and a small wharf of coral fragments by which the traffic of the town went to the anchorage. As close on the inland side was the road and, opposite, the trading establishment of a white man and the high concrete wall of the Japanese police compound. The house was quite by itself on the water side of the highway, yet immediately in the center of village life.

Van now came sauntering up and Palmyra indicated the place.

"Come on," she invited. "My old lady is taking me for look-see for ve'y fine Pingey-something mat."

Several drops of rain fell.

Van agreed. "But there's a squall coming," he said. "I'll run back first for umbrellas."

As he turned away she hesitated, unexpectedly afraid at being left alone.

But as she moved forward a Japanese policeman, saluting benignly, reassured her. And she saw every step brought her nearer those two representatives of the civil and the moral law which lay at anchor beyond the wharf, the Okayama and that Iju Ran which is the latest, perhaps the last, of the Morning Stars in which the American missionaries have carried the Word.

The old woman's house was not only conspicuous in location but in appearance. The thatches of this island were rectangular, sharp roofed, sided with woven tat, narrow doored. But this was oval and open—vaguely the architecture of central Polynesia.

The girl stooped to enter, then drew back in one of those sudden apprehensions that still beset her. Who knew where Ponape Burke would strike? This house seemed safe; might indeed be safer than the mission. But yet . . .

She peered in; saw only three old women. No one could be in hiding, none approach without being seen.

Palmyra entered, advanced toward the central posts, glanced interestedly around.

Suddenly something dropped past her eyes, and the three old women hurled themselves at her.

So unexpected the attack from such as these, in an open shed such as this, at almost the settlement's busiest and most public spot, that the girl was caught unready. And before she could move a muscle, cry out, her throat was compressed—a terrible choking pressure. She fought for breath. Then, her arms pinioned, came relief and a fierce warning: "No 'peaky, no 'peaky!" At the moment of the onfall her guide, still behind her, had dropped round her throat a fibre loop, a brutal tourniquet with which she could, instantly, be strangled into silence—or death.

The women, fearing Van might soon arrive, prepared to take their prisoner immediately away.

At first Palmyra thought this impossible.

But now she made a discovery. Though the thatch was so notoriously to the forepart as to seem above suspicion, the high wall of the police compound ended directly opposite, and turned inland, leaving between it and the blank wall of the trader's a three-foot lane. This path, she recollected being told, ran back for half a mile, a mere passageway between the wall and the mangrove swamp upon which she had looked down from her mission window.

And the mouth of that hidden path was no more than twenty feet distant.

Until an alarm had been given the

people would be unsuspecting. The French trader across the way had locked up his place and gone out to breakfast. The native passersby were coming in detached groups. Palmyra's captors need wait only until no one was near. Then, closing round her, they could whisk her across, screening her with one or two of the ever-present umbrellas, raised either against a shower or the equatorial sun.

But almost at the moment of the sortie there came an interruption. One of the old women, stooping down to glance out, discovered the girl's father and mother and Constance Crawford approaching, already close. Panic ensued. If her captors had not been dangerous before, they certainly were now.

The prisoner would have screamed. Unconsciously, she extended her lungs to take in the necessary air. But, on the second, that fibre cord cut deep into the flesh.

Gasping, she was thrust under the mosquito net; thrown flat, head on bamboo pillow. Two of the hags followed her into the netting, sat pressed against her on either side. These snatched off her hat and veil, threw over her a covering.

Meanwhile the crone who had lured her here had taken a machete and seated herself on the patch of grass before the house.

Within the house, Palmyra's two guardians had begun a low-voiced singing. She perceived herself as a sick woman. These two kindly old souls sat inside the net to comfort her, while, before the hut, a third waited ready to answer solitious inquiry. And any commotion of struggle which might catch the transient eye would be taken for a round of that massage which is the native's cure-all.

Her captors had taken impish advantage of that trait in human nature which causes man never really to look at a thing in plain sight.

She was intensely alert. At the slightest opportunity she meant to scream, to fight. Since her escape from Burke she herself had carried a small automatic pistol. At the first chance she'd use it.

Now, however, she saw Van Buren Butger approaching, and sank back again. The others had not known. Van did know.

But just as the trio had strolled away and the newcomer almost reached the house, here, unexpectedly, was the man Martin. He ran up to Van. Excitedly he spoke.

"Say mister . . . Your lady friend. That red-headed girl."

Van drew back stiffly. "Miss Tree is in this house," he said.

Martin was vehement. No, that she wasn't! Outlaw natives had her.

Martin was vehement. Van stared, incredulous, yet alarmed.

"I got it straight," cried Martin. "There's twenty of 'em or more—all with guns. And they're running her for the Pueliko Rocks."

The Rocks were a noticeable formation not far inland.

All Van's suspicions of the brown man burst forth in the one cry: "Olive!"

Palmyra, seeing, hearing, burned with contempt.

The stranger now took the initiative. "I'll warn the Japs," he said. "You run for the mission. Remember the Pueliko Rocks."

But at this moment here came John Thurston. He was jumping up to the wharf from a boat. At sight of him Van's face lighted with relief.

Instantly, Thurston began to throw off his white coat.

"Olive? Nonsense!" "I tell you," Van affirmed shrilly, "she's in love with the damned kanaka and he, he's got her."

(Continued next week)

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