



RED HAIR AND BLUE SEA

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WHAT 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 it is a joke. Palmyra is shaken. Next day, Burke and the brown man go up on deck. The stowaways entertain them with wild tales of an adventurous 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.

Now read on:—

Daylight made clear two facts: the Rainbow had struck in such a way that it was impossible to get her off; the island was uninhabited.

As the exploratory boat rounded a spur of reef that covered the passage into the lagoon, opened out the largest island from the sea. Palmyra burst into an exclamation of delight.

She turned to John and Van. "It is pretty," she said, "but—cruel." She felt a first little shiver of realization. "There is nothing upon it. No shelter, no food."

Van gave her a haggard look. "And," he said, "there's not one drop of water. When we've used what we bring ashore."

Thurston whirled upon him. "Don't," he cried. "Don't dare tell them that. We'll filter salt water through this sand or rig a condenser with junk from the wreck."

Palmyra had not been consciously aware of Thurston's leadership until hours after the catastrophe, her attitude was typical of them all, perhaps even of Thurston himself. There had been something to do; the stronger nature had asserted itself. And the ship's company, acquiescing thus automatically, with scarcely any registered sense of change, paid him its highest compliment.

She had not thought to wonder why Thurston, rather than her fiancé, had been chosen. He had a reputation for efficiency in handling men. Van had had neither occasion nor opportunity.

Here spoke her good common sense. And, being unaware of Mrs. Crawford's original plot, she could hardly be expected to note that the wreck had reversed the situation that where, before, John had been put to disadvantage, now Van had been given the role he could not play.

The inevitable had occurred between these men. As Thurston had risen to leadership, so Van—had sunk to his place as a private in the ranks. Palmyra did not see, suspect.

They were easily cheered that first day. True, the island bore no sign of native visitation. But with their launch they could easily reach the nearest inhabited lagoon, or they could even build a sea-worthy craft from material of the wreck, were they not certain some passing sail would take them off.

Thus the first day. But when the second came and went and the third dawned upon an empty ocean, they began to despond. At night a beacon fire had blazed forth its appeal—they must soon turn to the Rainbow for fuel—and by day the launch waited to overhaul any passerby. But of what avail these upon a sea where no one seemed to venture.

And then, at midday, from the wreck across the lagoon, there boomed out the signal gun. A sail!—a sail!—a sail!!!

Rapidly the deliverer rose from the sea. A vessel of no great tonnage, she sailed with noticeable speed.

As the schooner bore down upon them she broke out the American colors. When she was abreast of their position she came about and then hove to in lee of the reef. A boat was lowered.

Palmyra through her glasses, saw that three men got into this boat. Two of them were undoubtedly native seamen. The third, who had been reconnoitering from the cross-trees, appeared to be a white man.

She watched them as they pulled rapidly through the passage and across the lagoon. Then in astonishment she lowered the binoculars to stare at Van Buren Rutger.

He was now dancing over the coral clinkers like a musical comedy buffoon.

"By the Great God Cash!" he cried. "If it isn't old Pirate Burke."

Almost from the moment Ponape Burke came running up the sands

Palmyra perceived a difference.

Was it that the ridiculous habiliments of the Rainbow had given way to the starched white of the tropical ship's master?

Or was it that she missed the obtrusive humility? No longer a stowaway, he spoke to Mrs. Crawford as master of one craft to another; a full note of equality.

Perhaps, after all, the fact might be no more than a juvenile sort of vanity in himself as master of that swift sail; a vanity bubbling over at unexpectedly finding its audience. And he must have had some vague hope of such a reunion as this. For he was saying now that, on the Rainbow, he'd withheld it on the chance of "surprising 'em" somewhere out here.

There could be no question of his fond pride in that fast craft. And had they seen . . .

He interrupted himself with the oddly un-adult mirth of his.

Had they seen her name? Oh, they'd laugh when they did see. They would never guess in a thousand years. Pigeon of Noah.

Van seized his hand with impulsive warmth. "Why then must be . . . Why, Mr. Noah, I didn't recognize you now you've shaved."

Burke guffawed delightedly. "I sure will feel like Noah," he said "a-taking you all on to the Ark, two by two."

He turned, presently, to the pile of salvaged stores and gear. The Pigeon, as was evident, could stow only the most valuable part. The rest must be left under canvas and sent for.

Details were arranged. Burke would get back aboard at once to take charge on the schooner. The yacht's launch, with three of her own men, would tow Burke's boat out, both loaded with stores. While these were unloading at the Lupe-a-Noa, Thurston would get his other boats into the water, sort over the supplies.

"We'll stow the very best first," said

in charge aboard," he explained. "I ain't got a mate. Still talking about you; your name and your—red hair."

The boat rounded the stern and the girl looked up to find—as if his eyes had never ceased to follow—the grinning stare of the man Olive fixed upon her just as it had faded out at Honolulu.

His great naked body rose above the rail and a thick bare arm came extending itself down toward her, inexorably.

The square fingers closed and her own hand was swallowed, disappeared in that grip clear to the wrist. There came a pull, as if the arm were to follow the hand in, and then Palmyra found herself on deck and standing free.

Johannsen had already clambered to the deck.

"We got t'keep four boats moving," Burke explained. "One pulling ashore empty, one loading there, one coming out with cargo, one discharging here. Each o'er boats' crews'll bring me a load and take back an empty at once. I'll clear the boat y'll leave. So now, you Rainbow boys, t'start her off, pass up the stuff in my own boat and take her ashore while my kanakas tackle the launch."

The girl's voice rose in surprise: "Oh, but they're not going already?"

Burke looked, grinning, from her to the naked savages of his crew. "Sort o' wild like, eh?" he asked.

But Johannsen reassured her: "I'm ordered to stay, miss."

Burke shot him a glance. "Sure." Then to the other two: "Johannsen'll tinker up the motor so, next trip, the launch won't have t'be pulled in."

A minute later the boat had cast off and the sailors were settling to their work. Johannsen, watching them, stood negligently at the rail.

"Handle her gently, boys," called Burke. "She's getting old."

The boat was now clear by perhaps ten fathoms.

a gentleman, he faltered, paled in a fear of wounding the girl herself.

Then John Thurston snatched the rifle. There was a flash and the bullet struck the Lupe-a-Noa, shattering the glass on the binnacle. A second flash and Burke himself staggered back. But before the schooner could fall off, he clutched the wheel again with one hand. As his left arm hung, the spot of blood, spreading slowly on the white cotton, was like some brilliant blossom.

Burke bellowed his rage. He had swung the vessel over so that Palmyra, all unaware, stood in the line of fire. Thurston could not shoot again.

At this triumph, Burke regained his good humor. The wound had proved unimportant. "John's the only man in that bunch," he conceded amiably. "If he was stealing my girl I'd give him more than a sore arm."

Palmyra was desperate. Behind her, her hand closed on an iron belaying pin. "You—you brute!" she cried. "Turn this vessel back. Turn it back instantly!"

She jerked the pin from its socket; took a step toward him, her eyes aflame. "You go back to that island . . ."

From behind, a hand closed on her wrist. Olive, grinning, took the belaying pin from her fingers, as if they had been a baby's, and returned it to the rack.

Palmyra sank against the cabin, helpless.

Not by accident had the Pigeon of Noah risen from the sea upon the scene of their disaster. Back in the days before Honolulu this spider of a Burke had spun his web. He had talked of the atolls in the terms of a paradise until the voyagers were eager to behold. He had convinced Pedersen that, to take advantage of prevailing winds and current, he must lay his course from Honolulu first to the northern Gilberts—Butaritari or Apaiang—and thence make north and west into the Marshalls and the Carolines.

Burke had followed, then, holding back the fast sailing Lupe-a-Noa to match the yacht's pace. Fortune had favored.

Informed as to the lagoons they would make, their order, he had meant to outsalt them to an anchorage and, lying there unsuspected, to seize the girl at some favorable moment ashore. And then, the fleet Pigeon away with none in all those wild seas save the fat old Rainbow to pursue, what could have been more easy?

A sob of self-pity shook the girl, though even now she did not, in her innocence, comprehend the depth of his infamy.

The man himself, leaning over the wheel, sought, with an honest concern to soothe her. Even she realized that he was moved by a real emotion, conviction.

He gripped his hands upon the wheel in an excess of disdain. "Cry yer eyes out for yer mother. That can't be helped. But the rest o' them dickey birds?" he snorted in derision. "Why, then . . . Y'think now you'll miss 'em. But wait. Tomorrow, next day, you'll be laughing too; laughing at all of 'em—at Van. And then . . ." He spoke with the impressiveness of certitude. "Then you'll be thanking me."

He leered at her humorously. Her hands clenched until the sharp nails brought the blood.

"Don't blame me!" he cried in a sudden flare of emotion. "Don't blame me. Blame yourself. I fought agin it—right along. Didn't I warn you? Warn y'how you'd set a poor starved devil like me a-fire? But you? Y'just had t'keep hanging around; you who was like, like God's daughter. Hanging around and hanging around 'till y'had me fair wild."

The flame of that fire leaped into his eyes. "I swore then I'd have you. Lucky for yer folks I saw how t'rap you on here. For, if need was, I'd of killed every soul of 'em in cold blood."

She shrank in loathing. Burke was silent, conquering that evil flame of passion.

Then shortly: "Original Noah." The man jeered: "he went it blind. But me—I know our mountain top, every inch o'it. And, girl," he warned, "when the Ark does hit dry land, make no mistake. You'll never see arrey one o'er folks again. For you, they've perished off the face o' the earth. The flood's made a clean sweep. In all creation there's only you—and me."

Exaltation was in his gaze; obscure, intimidating.

"Come, girl, y'shall be a queen."

(Continued next week.)

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"You—you brute!" she cried. "Turn—this vessel—back. Turn it back instantly!"

Burke in conclusion, "and then see what space we got left for second rate cargo."

The launch hove a line to the Pigeon's boat and one of the native boys stood ready to carry his master out.

Now, however, Palmyra, unable to satisfy a certain youthful poignant curiosity at long distance through her binoculars, spoke up eagerly. "Oh, Captain Burke, do please take me with you! I'd just love to be first aboard."

"Me, too," cried Constance.

The man was pleased, flattered.

"But—" he hesitated awkwardly—"the boat's heavy loaded 'and there won't be any room aboard while we're taking cargo. So I better invite only one this trip." He winked at Thurston.

"And Miss Tree she asked first, and seeing as how she was the best student I had for my South Sea lectures, seems as if she ought t'be first t'lay aboard a South Sea trader."

Thurston acquiesced. But as Burke was being carried down to the boats, John turned to Johannsen, acting as mate, and said: "You, yourself be one of our three men to go aboard and—stay."

The big sailor gave him a look to see if the order had more than ordinary routine significance, then lumbered after Burke.

In the boat the girl's mind was gradually brought back to the indefinable something in Burke's manner which she had not been able to analyze. For now it was so noticeably upon him that he was either constrained, absent or too painstakingly voluble.

"And how is Olive?" she asked in an awkward interval. "He's with you, of course?"

Ponape Burke assented. "Sort of

Suddenly Ponape Burke, with an agility unexpected in that plump body, leaped forward and plunged at the unsuspecting Johannsen's back! The next second the sailor was in the water.

Burke whirled, whipped out an order, sprang to the wheel. The kanakas worked like mad. Another order and the sails filled, the deck listed down and the Pigeon of Noah was under way.

The man at the wheel broke into that tittering laugh of his, now strained, false, shary-edged with excitement, exultation.

"Remember, girl?" he cried. "Below on the Rainbow—night black? Wanted t'scare 'em a bit, says you? Pirates, bucket o' blood?" his laugh rose into a crow of triumph. "Well, kid, what about this here? Give 'em a hell of a startle, eh, Palmie?"

As the Lupe-a-Noa filled away, the girl ran to the rail and sent over the water a frantic cry.

In the boat the two sailors sat, rigid their oars poised. The red face of Johannsen emerged from the sea, dripping, blank with incredulity, convulsed with anger. Ponape Burke's strategy had deprived them of the launch in which they could have overhauled the schooner.

Ashore, the castaways stood perplexed, alarmed. Palmyra's action, rather than her voice, threw them into panic. They pointed, shouted, ran here and there, futile, absurd.

To Van Buren Rutger rushed the girl's mother with something in her hands. It was a rifle. As one of his accomplishments, Van had won trophies on the range. But now, confronted by that violence his training had taught him never touched the life of

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