

RED HAIR and BLUE SEA

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WHAT HAPPENED BEFORE

Palmyra Tree, aboard the yacht Rainbow, 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 knot between his lips. The stowaway, Burke, and the brown man, Olive, go up on deck and tell stories of adventure which are not believed. Palmyra decides she loves Van. The night the engagement is announced the Rainbow hits a reef. John Thurston rescues both Van and Palmyra—but Palmyra thinks Van saved her. A sail is sighted three days on an island. It is Ponape, Burke, the stowaway! Burke abducts Palmyra. Burke has to put her ashore on an island, as a Japanese man-of-war is sighted and it would be dangerous to have her aboard. Olive swims to the island and joins Palmyra. She is in fear of the brown man. Olive and Palmyra swim to another island, from which Palmyra secretly sends a message to Van. Burke's ship approaches the island. Palmyra and Olive sail in a canoe, evading both Ponape's ship and the Japanese gunboat. Olive risks his life to get water for Palmyra. Ponape Burke makes desperate pursuit of Olive and Palmyra, even opening fire on them. Olive proves a friend. He brings Palmyra back among her people on an island. But there she soon falls into the hands of Burke's accomplices, and Thurston and Van are seeking her. Palmyra is taken by her captors to Ponape. Burke who leaves her in a hut with Martin on guard. Thurston and Tree are following the trail with seven other men. Now read on:—

CHAPTER XIII

Burke had spoken of the brown man's arrest. Meanwhile, Olive had tired of his enforced bath. Slowly Olive began to move downstream. Scarcely did the leaves that hid his head seem to stir as they skirted the bank, blending with the leaves of the background. Past Sentry Number One, past Number Two. Finally a friendly turn of the current and he could rise, dripping, and run for the suspected mangrove trail. Trotting through the mud, he had heard the outlander village. Then, hearing his name, he stopped, whirled around, encountered one Taruk, a member of Ponape Burke's crew. Taruk emerged from the thicket and the two shook hands. Olive slipped into that house third from land's end. He crouched, the central support hiding his face. A glance showed the tide was moving out. He could not await reinforcements. Opposite, Palmyra still leaned against the post, Martin behind her, the sentry natives in front. Then Olive, staking all in Burke's absorption, stroled out from shelter, grinned brazenly into the eyes of the startled sentry, entered that side of the prison house where the natives grouped. Unobtrusively, he dropped among them. Neither the girl nor her guard noted his coming. A native more or less meant nothing. But as Palmyra waited, with downcast gaze, her fingers working aimlessly at the hat and veil the old woman had brought along, she became gradually aware that, of the brown hands on the mats before her, one wore a mitten of tattoo. Her eyes focussed into interest. And then, astonishingly, she beheld on the brown forearm a name of five letters. A glad cry rose to her lips. But she suppressed it, drove from her face the exultation forming there. Her own salvation, this man's life, depended on her caution. The brown man opened his mouth and spoke aloud in the native tongue—direct to Martin. Olive's expression was that of formal politeness. But, though he had seemed to address the white man, he had not done so. "Men of the village of Tanapal, listen here unto me. The high lady Palmtree shall be saved. I speak the way." Olive was continuing in the tones of courtesy, looking at Martin, but in a speaking direct to the villagers. In a sentence he appealed to their cupidity, to their fear of the Japanese. Then without alteration of voice or manner, he added for the interpreter: "Make words, make words unto him. Anything—that shall mean nothing and have a pleasant sound." The interpreter had got the idea. Out came a flood of complimentary words which the white man made crude response, conceding nothing. And so, under the very nose of the unsuspecting Martin, almost within hearing of Burke, Olive worked out his attack. And Ponape Burke himself gave the signal. Springing up now, he bawled across to his mate: "Aho!—a-hoy there! Haven't them dam' Japs—ah got the Pigeon out yet? Give a hell the moment y'sight her. These Japs is maybe up t'something." He levelled his binoculars again upon the gunboat. Martin reached for his own, bent them upon that spot where the Lupe-a-Noa's topmasts must emerge from behind the taller trees. For perhaps forty seconds both men were absorbed. Then Martin, still seated, his shoulder against the girl's support, lowered his glasses, turned his head to speak to her. But Palmyra was gone! At Burke's order the crew, loading rifles, began to go through the thatches. Fortunately for Olive, Ponape remained in the open, bawling out commands and imprecations. The search, unsympathetic, was still sincere, for, though some of the brown seamen grinned behind the white men's backs, none would have dared pass the girl by. Yet the quest covered the islet without result. It was when Ponape Burke had stopped, completely at a loss, that a messenger came running from the Lupe-a-Noa. The schooner could not be got out. Diving, the natives had found under her nose two of the long hexagonal rocks from the ancient wall.

He would have been aghast to know that John Thurston had discovered the vessel; had reached her before the working party and while her watchman was irresponsibly absent, had, in the brief interval afforded, made good use of his engineering skill. With a block and tackle and a light spar from the schooner, Thurston, in a few minutes, had undone a labor at which slaves must have sweated for days. He had tumbled two of the stones of the wall into the canal. The Pigeon would not fly again until one month's highest tides came to lift her over. A figure broke from among the men, went bounding along the path toward the outer point, carrying in its arms a heavy burden. Burke uttered a cackle of triumph. For, as this figure ran, there was visible over its shoulder a white straw hat with a blue veil fluttered into view and below, Ponape saw the folds of a plaid raincoat. As he ran, however, he struck his foot against a tree root, staggered; the burden was hurled from his arms to the ground. But he did not pause. Two of the sailors, flanking along the beach, sprang upon him. Others joined in the struggle, and he was held. Ponape Burke had remained at his post, an amused spectator. Now, however, when the girl on the ground did not stir after her fall, he ran toward her. "Palm, he called; "Palmie, are y' hurt?" Another hundred feet and he stopped. Bewilderment turned into rage. For lying there in the hat, veil and raincoat was no Palmyra Tree. It was a big, rosy pig. Ponape Burke turned a savage face from this greasy pork to the man who had tricked him—his prisoner. Then an oath and a laugh struggled for simultaneous expression. For there, bloody, desperate, stood the brown man. The white man's features were distorted. "Where is she?" he demanded. Olive clamped his lips shut. It had been Burke's sudden descent upon the four houses which precipitated this catastrophe. The villagers, grown overconfident, had thought he would not look there again. Olive, having seen the messenger erroneously that the Pigeon was ready; that Ponape, seizing the girl now, could sail at once. In desperation the brown man snatched up the hat, veil and raincoat; and thrown these about his head, he fled to the east end of the coast. Running toward the outer end of the islet he had hoped to draw off Burke and the crew, so the villagers could rush Palmyra shoreward to safety. He would hold the pursuit by carrying the pig into the sea; perhaps himself escape if Ponape feared the sound of firing. But, one messenger, he had been caught before there was time to get the girl away. Hence it was that she herself, peering tensely out, saw Olive led to the main tree, his wrists bound behind his neck. She saw the master in vehement demand for her surrender; Olive shake his head in defiance. The villagers, crowding round Burke's guards, waited in consternation. Ponape turned to them. "If you would save this man's life—speak." But Olive, pale yet unflinching, besought their silence. They would have been glad to have this white woman of their hands and Olive free. The Japanese could not punish them for yielding to force. They wished to yield—but the will of this one being held them fast. Unnoticed, a boy had wormed his way into the crowd, a bit of paper folded small in his hand. His purpose was to toss the note so Ponape should get it, yet not know whence it came. But the urchin blundered. As the message left his fingers, Burke saw. The white man snatched up the paper, unfolded it. "Your sacred word to free Olive unharm'd (also the others), and I give myself up. He shall not die for me. If you promise, call loudly—yes." Burke uttered a crowd of victory. Whirling toward that point from whence he conceived the note to have come, he put his hands on his mouth and shouted: "No, NO, NO!" Then he clutched the boy by the wrist. "Show me where." His revolver menaced; the messenger began to cry. Under the muzzle of the big weapon the urchin quailed. He was appalled at Burke's anger. And he saw that his own people wavered. At last, therefore, he raised a trembling finger, pointed toward a group of thatches. The boy haltingly brought Ponape Burke to a hut. "In there," he whimpered. Burke sprang under, dragged his guide with him. The house had been searched before. It was empty now. The man's scrutiny took in every detail. Then he turned and the boy was in real danger. Savage irritation had all but overcome any sense of consequence. Suddenly Burke's eyes opened wide. He leaped to the centre of the house, stared up at the bundles of stiff bark cloth, gave one a prod with the revolver. From within there came a gasp of pain. Palmyra Tree had lost the bitter fight. Ponape Burke at last had won. "Y'shall see Olive hanged," he said. "And then, whether or no, y'shall go to Tanna." He dragged her toward the tree, the natives following, tongues a-click against teeth; the traitorous boy ahead, self-important, unscourged by any sense of guilt. At the tree Olive stood among uneasy guards, hands bound behind him, feet loosely tied, noosing nemp drawn taut across his limb. "Look at him—yer rope round his neck," Burke reproached. "Waiting, poor sucker, for y'tset him free. This here kanaka was good enough t'die for you. But when it comes yer turn?" He laughed with brutal insinuation. She could scarcely form the sounds. But at last she gasped out: "Let—him—gc." Olive knew not the words but he

knew their meaning. "Never!" he cried. "Tell her she shall not give herself for me." At this moment, however, there rose from the outskirts of the crowd a startled warning. "Zapance, Zapance, he come!" Burke, with an oath, snatched up his binoculars. Three boats from the Okayamas were already close. Rides bristled. While the others ran, Ponape Burke was carried only a step or two by the animal instinct of self-preservation. Then he stopped, started on, turned back. Horror sat upon that visage; lucid, yet doubly intense by the very inadequacy of its expression. He snatched forth the revolver. He could battle for her. Yes, kill him a dozen of those Japs. But—to what avail? Fighting or no, he'd lose her. "I can't go on without you," he said. "I can't go on without you. But if I can't live, I can die—with you." The boats, as one frantic glance told his victim, were still too far to see. The natives all had fled. Only Olive remained, bound hand and foot, the rope from the noose dragging across the limb above. Olive was writhing to sunder the seat belt which bound his arms. Olive—blood dripping from wrists torn in his struggle—hurled himself against the madman. The concussion of his bulk threw Ponape back. The bullet which bound his arms, Olive's brain flew harmlessly into space. The islander, by a supreme exert, snapped his bindings. He seized the other. He crushed his masser to nupt. He flashed in the muzzle pressed against Olive's side. The hand, gripped convulsively forced the hammer up towards its fatal blow. But now, astonishingly, all movement ceased. Firing from a distance, someone had drilled Ponape Burke through his evil heart. But, alas, the steel bullet had not stopped, its work performed. It had crashed on through the body of the heroic brown man who fought for her. The girl shrieked out, fell fainting. And then, as these three lay, there came a sound of hoofs, and a muddied, foam-flecked horse plunged up the village path with John Thurston. He sprang from his saddle, flung aside his gun, caught the unconscious girl up in his arms. When Palmyra Tree at last opened her eyes, she gazed up at John Thurston for a bewildered moment. Side by side two bodies lay. Palmyra snatched herself back from John as if his touch had burned. "And it was you," she cried, rigid in horror. "You who fired? Oh," she wailed, cannot bear that it should have been you—you who killed Olive." "But, Oh, no, no, lady," the surgeon interrupted in eager assurance. "This native man is not dead." She looked at that form in shuddering question. "Bullet knocked him out a little," explained the officer, "but it hit nothing to make this big man trouble. He will be something like when the prize-fighter gets knocked to sleep on the jaw." At his first sentence Palmyra's lips parted in a gasp of relief. Now, in the reaction, she wavered, closed her eyes dizzily, put out toward Thurs-

ton a groping hand. John caught her to him once more to uphold her. His heart was a throb with the knowledge that that pathetic blind groping had been for him. With her face upturned to him, appealing, close, Thurston, in that great yearning, so long denied, could not resist; would, despite the grinning audience, have kissed her again and again. But Commander Sakamoto, of a taciturn race was quick with a command which forced his unwilling men to the right-about; then chased the giggling villagers home with the sword of a samurai. A burial detail had carried Ponape Burke forever away; Ponape, who had staked all—and lost all. "And when," demanded John of Palmyra on the third day after, "and when shall the wedding be?" "The wedding," ordained the girl, "must take place before we leave this island. I insist, for one thing, despite your protest, because I think I shall always now be a little afraid—alone. But the real reason—" her voice vibrated with feeling—"is that then Olive, who made it possible for me to understand, to realize my own true love—that then Olive can be your—can be our best man." And so it was that O-lee-vay, commonly called Olive, who speaks no language known to civilized man, who sets fat pork with his fingers and anoints himself copiously with scented coconut oil and tumeric, stood up with John Thurston, the embodiment of civilization at its finest. Thurston could not give his best man a tie pin, for Olive seldom if ever wears a shirt. But he could see that the islander got Ponape Burke's swif schooner, the Lupe-a-Noa, trusted for the brown man's protection by the American mission and the Japanese navy, and manned by an already eager and worshiping crew.

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