

# Red Hair AND Blue Sea

By STANLEY P. OSBORN

Just as the man-eater made to seize its prey Olive dropped below the surface. The heavy fish had no chance to stop. As it swept over his head the savage thrust upward with the knife in a lunge that reached the heart.

Olive did not waste time over the adventure of the shark. He had killed sharks before.

Throwing the canoe into its course, he sailed for the island.

For an interval they went on, before it became evident that Ponape Burke had made them out.

Presently the schooner was so close Palmyra could make out Ponape Burke on its deck, covering them with his glasses.

The reef wall was now so immediately at hand she could see that this rim, by reason of the coral broken off and packed down by the trample of the surf, was higher than the rest of the reef behind, the surface or reef-table, which outstretched inland to the beach. The barrier was armored in brown knobs of living coral, with their toothed faces like a giant nutmeg grater against which the sea could grind the canoe into splinters.

And now, as the girl looked, Olive dug his paddle in, put all his weight upon it. The craft veered and took a new course—straight for the reef. Palmyra sat stunned. She had hoped against hope that she was wrong, that he still saw a way. But here was surrender. Even for such a one there could be no further shift.

Scarcely had the canoe changed course than the Pigeon of Noah also swung in toward the reef. Palmyra could see Ponape Burke waving his arms, shouting orders. She gave one shuddering glance at the cauldron ahead, then back to the white man. The race was run.

And even now, in confirmation, Olive sprang up, let go the sheet, slashed the cords that held the mast; whipped the whole gear overboard.

But immediately, to her bewilderment, he seized the paddle again, plunged it into the water, began to speed toward the barrier.

The roar of the surf—most frightful of sounds—deafened her. But as she clung desperately to her place, staring ahead into the tumult of waters—she could smile. If Olive chose death to defeat, so could she. But, such her faith, she felt that, impossible as it seemed, he must still think to escape.

Now, as her navigator began to calculate the seas, to hold the canoe back at times, Palmyra saw there was a slight recession shoreward in the line of the reef. It swung in at this point just sufficiently to create a lee. The surf did not burst upon it with the direct drive of the wind and, protected through most of the year from the sweep of the trades, not so much broken coral had been packed down here and the rim was lower. In a flash she perceived that he must have had this place in mind from the first; that, the tide in their favor, it might be possible, in sufficiently skilled hands, to hurdle the reef.

There was just one phase in the rhythm of the surf when he could succeed. He must catch the moment when the wave had crashed down upon the coral teeth; when the violence of the impact had abated, but not one second of the precious after rush had been lost. For, if that had not carried him far enough, he would be caught by the recoil to follow, when the water flung upon the reef poured back into the ocean.

Olive paddled furiously to get far enough in so that the back-sweep could not grip them, drag them down to destruction. Nearly he had succeeded. But, the recoil having rained the coral almost bare, the outrigger struck a knob of the limestone, broke from the canoe.

Instantly, the man leaped out, caught the girl up in his arms. He sprang upon a coral boulder that raised them above the sliding water. The canoe sucked back over the brink, but Olive held.

The moment the downrush ended, he raced with his burden, bounding over the rough coral, until he had reached another knob rising above the level, perhaps fifty feet in from the edge. Here they weathered the next sea and its subsequent retreat.

Another dash across the shallows and they were safe from the ocean. But not from Ponape Burke.

As the brown man carried Palmyra, her face, over his shoulder, was turned toward the Lupe-a-Noa. The girl saw that the schooner, beaten at last, had gone about and was working back out of danger. She saw that the white man had clambered part way up the rigging. And then she gave a warning cry as, from the shrouds, there flashed out a spurt of flame.

Instantly, Olive, understanding, threw himself flat into the three-foot water. A bullet came cutting along the surface almost where they had

stood. Olive, leaping up, sprang with the girl behind another boulder in time to escape a second bullet.

Several shots Ponape Burke fired in his jealous rage, though now he had no target. Then, the Pigeon of Noah gaining way, drew off, and the pursuit, in this phase at any rate, was ended.

## 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 of 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, you don't mean . . ." She paused, incredulous. "You don't mean the gunboat was right here when I came and didn't steam 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 their 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 avillain."

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 it 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 the word 'save,'" put in Constance.

"Help him save the high chief young lady Palm-tree."

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. After all these days and years and centuries of silence, they two, by the intervention of Dr. Crife, had been made articulate.

She learned that the brown man served Ponape Burke in a debt of gratitude; the saving of his life. He 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 daytime, 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:

Incarnate 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 Palmyra 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 rival. He must find an easier target for his resentment. Thus Van, without 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 such a confession.

She would love John Thurston; she did love John Thurston. But between them was the brown man Olive, and leering 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 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, these 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 was already afoot. The girl was addressed by an old woman.

"Pleasy you," said this crone in English, "you come for lok for see ve'y fine Pinglap 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 game, 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 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 this place.

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

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