

RED HAIR AND BLUE SEA



by **STANLEY R. OSBORN**

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WHAT HAPPENED BEFORE
Palmira Tree and her parents, with Van Buren Ruler and John Thurston and some other friends, are cruising on the Yacht Rainbow.

CHAPTER II
Next morning Mrs. Crawford and her guests were gathered in lee of the deckhouse, bundled in their rugs.

The sun, only at intervals, had been blinking through, bringing a touch of warmth to the surface of the sea, charming the spreading canvas to life. As, presently, Palmira roused from her preoccupation to join the others in a laugh, the lunary glances down again and printed on the deck, black and sharp-edged, the lifting shadows of the sails.

Such a shade lay across the girl's face. When the Rainbow rose to a surge, the shadow moved, as a curtain up, and the sunbeams caught in turn and illuminated perfect teeth, dimples, eyes that danced with fun; set a flame the crown of bright hair, her most noticeable endowment.

But soon she was somber again. She had been shaken by that fierce visage leaping out at her from the dark.

She should have suspected a second presence. One glance at Burke's hand, gloved though it was, should have sufficed. It was small, pudgy, never the thick sinewy paw that had fastened upon the cabin port. Her wits about her, she should have mistrusted Burke's song; not have waited to be told afterwards that he was chanting, "Silent, go, stand against the door, knife in teeth, and look terrific."

At this point the shadow of the sail came swooping down again across Palmira's eyes and she awoke to find that Mrs. Durley, the stewardess, was regarding her with an amused and curious expression. The girl flushed guiltily.

Mrs. Durley stepped forward, hesitated, held out a card tray. "A gentleman to see you, Miss Tree," she announced.

"A gentleman to see Miss Tree?" inquired Mrs. Crawford in amused acceptance of the play. "Why, how unexpected."

"Airplane or sea horse?" questioned Van.

At this moment she caught sight of the man himself, standing in the alley between the house and the rail.

"Mrs. Crawford," she introduced, "this is Mr. Burke, the well-known pirate. Will be pleased, you know, to demonstrate walking the plank. I'm sure if you could see him scuttle a ship, you'd feel we'd been greatly distinguished."

By daylight the pirate's face had lost its cherubic aspect. Still singularly undeveloped as to line and feature, there was now more visibly upon it a maturity of significance that could only have been stamped by dissipation, hardship and danger, or some more violent temperamental urge than, at first view, could have been suspected.

But if Burke's face had gained in significance, his figure had not. Moreover, he now verged on the pathetic, shanking with cold. Palmira recollected, with a stab of pity, that brown creature down below.

The girl started, impulsively, to rise, then sank back again. She had seen the steward below, a short time past, overhauling blankets, a reserve supply for the men forward. If only she could manage to get one or two of these coverings.

Compassion urged the deed. But she was afraid.

Presently, however, a well-authenticated chain settled into place and two lips grew arbitrary. She arose, excused herself, and marched down the companionway. Yes, the blankets were still there. She snatched two, secured her torch and reached the bulkhead door, unchallenged.

She switched on the torch, forced herself forward. Then, after a moment's hesitation: "Here—you! Are you cold? I have two blankets."

She stood, waiting, listening. She could feel the darkness move with unseen menace. But the dead silence of that prisoned space gave no sound of life.

She might have swept the ray into all the corners, but she hesitated to repeat the vision of the night before. Rather, she held the blankets up invitingly and, in silence, turned the jet of light upon them. For almost a minute she waited thus. Then, suddenly, without warning preliminary of sound, there appeared within the outer circle of light the ends of four great massive square fingers.

Almost, the girl sprang back, cried out in panic.

A moment the fingers paused. Then they came thrusting toward her from the dark. For a flash it seemed that it must be herself they meant to seize. Then they closed upon the blankets, rested there an instant, withdrew with their prize again into the night whence they had come.

But, brief as the interval, it had been enough. Here at last was the hand that had been sent through the port: square, sinewy, brown, adorned even to the great-grandmother mits.

And only now did she belatedly realize that these mits were not of silk, but of tattooer's ink. When the girl came on deck next morning there the savage sat, cross-

legged on the fore-hatch, huddled under his blankets in the sun.

As Palmira and her parents appeared, Ponape Burke was explaining that the remote intelligence at his feet knew no word of any white man's language.

If the savage recognized her she was unable to note any change in his countenance. In deed, she saw that this copper mask would seldom, if ever, yield to the civilized eye any useful indication of the mood within.

Ponape Burke, showman, had seized a double handful of the bush of hair on the native's head, and was saying:

"Isn't so much that he's got hair," Burke was saying, "as that his hair ain't black, as you'd expect, but a pretty gar species of tan. White, in shades and gentis, is South Sea beauty-parlor stuff."

"This de-lightfully sanitary, ladies," the showman added, "and colors your hair up any shade o' blond y'like. But—" he tittered and glanced audaciously at Miss Tree's own head—"the very foxiest and most envied hue some of 'em succeeds in getting up is a real orange near-red."

Van laughed. "Oh, admirable," he cried. "An admirable effect. And never till the moment did I suspect. Why, Palm Tree..."

"Excuse me, miss," Ponape Burke said, "but didn't I hear this gent a-calling you 'Palm-tree'?"

She assented. "But what, what kind of a joke—" "It isn't a joke," she affirmed. "My family name is Tree and—" she glanced amusedly at Constance—"my given name is Palm."

The stowaway stared, grinned, repeated the name. He turned to his savage, spoke animatedly, nodded his head toward her. The brown man's eyes sought the girl's face once more and she felt sure he had, in some obscure way, been moved. There was certainly a something new upon that strange countenance.

As the savage sat upon the hatch, a corner of blanket touched the teakwood. When he reached down to rescue the fabric his thick right fore arm shot out from cover and so remained. The girl became aware of a line of blue-black marking along the inner side of this arm. She discovered with surprise that these markings were letters—her own alphabet. At first she did not catch the word because two of its symbols were upside down.

"Why," she cried impulsively, "what is that he has tattooed on his arm?"

Here the pirate took up the story of his brown companion's name. If it had been a pop bottle that the fat horizon-buster (white man) flung into the bird's nest fern beside the spring, this lion of a man would not be here. Far away on some somnolent speck of coral he would be drowning through the years; ignorant as to white men's ways, safe forever from the questionable leadership of Ponape Burke; never to touch and cross the life course of Miss Palmira Tree of Boston. But it was not a pop bottle that the fat horizon-buster flung into the bird's nest fern. It was a bottle which had held olives.

There, as the olive bottle had fallen, the island mother, her babe upon her hip, found it. She had held the empty bottle up before the eyes of the naked brown baby that he might admire the bright red and green of its lithograph. She had tried to make out the inscription upon it—

ONYX BRAND
The Hubbard Extra-Choice
QUEEN
OLIVE

The print was as oddly familiar, yet baffling unreadable, as a sentence in Russian would have been to Palmira. For in the mother's alphabet there were but fourteen letters, containing eleven of our consonants.

As her glance fell upon the word "Olive," she smiled. Here was a combination that spelled; every letter as familiar as if it had been the name of her own village.

"Behold, chiefly son," she had cried to the baby on her hip; "here is a so-island word—'O-l-i-v-e.' What to it, think you, is a meaning? And set forth upon a horizon-buster's strong-water bottle (to her all bottles meant liquor)."

Presently the mother's face had lighted with inspiration. Here, undoubtedly among warriors, was the great word. And here, upon her hip, was the greatest man alive. What better, then, than this for a name?"

And so it was the brown baby, to be know forever to all white men as "Olive," and to his South Sea kinsmen, according to their reading of its letters, as "O-lee-vay."

Burke's glance took in the silent motionless mass of man on the hatch with prideful ownership. Then he broke again into his oddly unadvised mirth. "Look at him now," he cried. "Look at him. Mad clear through."

They turned their smiling eyes upon the brown man. "Mad clear through," repeated his master. "Since Miss Tree pointed to his arm we all been laughing a lot. And he thinks it's at him."

Later in the day Palmira found her pirates alone. They sat side by side, gripping stolidly the khaki fabric that struggled, flapping to the wind behind their backs.

"Speaking o' this big brute," Burke began, indicating Olive; "he don't do nothing now but ask questions about you."

The girl did not know whether to like that or not. To begin with, said Burke, it was

knocks us, white and brown alike, dead in a row."

"But do you really believe Palm Tree's pirate has been in gun battles and all that?" Constance Crawford was asking.

Palmira now spoke. "It's nonsense to take that little man seriously," she affirmed.

"When he says such things," she added, "it's like hearing a baby swear; awful, and you ought to be shocked, but at the same time comic. I delight in his efforts to make himself out something brigandish."

John Thurston had not joined in the accord. As he stood holding to the main shrouds, the big muscles of arm and shoulder swelling under his coat, he was never quite the yachtsman on an idle cruise; always intangibly, a something of the construction engineer on his way to the Philippines to take charge of government work—the Rainbow to put him aboard a transport at Honolulu, or, possible, if time permitted, at Guam.

"You're probably right about Burke," he said presently. "But did you ever think how thoroughly we're bound down by the old conventional nonsense in character reading—phrenology and all that? A striping develops a big square jaw. Presto—we recognize a determined character, a human bulldog. Really, it's only more bone in his jaw. And if he has a broad high forehead..."

"Solid ivory again," said Van. "Palm's pirate couldn't be further from our fixed idea of a cut-throat: fierce moustachios, hawk nose, deep-set, piercing, evil eyes. Yet in real life you cold-blooded, murdering brute is quite as likely to be some effeminate youth selling soda water with a lisp..."

"Never," said Van, "did I have soda water with a lisp."

Palmira had been wondering why everyone on board—everyone except Constance—wanted her to marry Van. She saw that they all did, and she felt that their reasons must be good. Constance, of course, said it was only ancestors. The Tree family worshipped the family tree. "And Van," Constance had said commercially, "has the finest line of ancestors put out by any house in America." It was nothing in Van personally, she had added. "John does things. But Van only is things."

The girl got up, readily and stood at the rail gazing out over the sunset sea. As John Thurston went on to amplify his thought regarding Burke she glanced over her shoulder to scoff.

"I could chase your bad man over the deck with a feather duster." "I'm only windjamming, of course," Thurston laughed. "I don't doubt our stowaway's a little man, sufficiently blunt as to his moral perceptions, but quite harmless, making himself the hero of every gory story he picks up, eager to pose as a deepsea bad man. But still..."

During this idle chatter the girl had felt, growing with every moment, a fuller perception of herself aboard this yacht. Never until now had she had a complete realization of the intimacy of this cruise with Van and John; of the incredible nearness of these two to her. She had been, all at once, appalled. Thus they would go on through every waking hour, unescapable in their demands upon her love.

She had had a suffocating sense that never, for one instant, could

she protect herself from them and their problem. And then, as an inspiration, it had come to her that Ponape Burke should be her refuge. Until she was sure sure about the two—oh, so sure!—she could always fly to him. She'd demand her pirate's stories, and force Van and John to sit and listen, no matter how rebellious.

She had a sudden curiosity concerning this Ponape Burke in her new dependence upon him. She was eager to look at him. And she knew he would be perched upon the fore-hatch, his brown man as ever at his elbow, silent, motionless, a pagan joss.

She whirled about to gaze, then caught her breath in dismay. Unexpectedly, startlingly, the savage, unbeknown to any one of them all, had materialized himself here, was sitting almost within their circle. And his eyes were leveled upon her in a profound unblinking stare that seemed to have been going on for hours.

(Continued Next Week.)

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-Smiles-

Hostess's Daughter (trying desperately to keep the conversation going): Did you ever hear the joke about the curio dealer who had two skulls of Columbus—one when he was a boy and the other when he was a man?

Wiggins—No, I don't think I have. What is it?

Flubb: "He's always boasting that he keeps his word!"
Dubb: "Well, no one else ever takes it!"



LESSON No. 15

Question: Why is emulsified cod-liver oil so important as an added ration with milk in the diet of children?

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