

RED HAIR AND BLUE SEA



by **STANLEY R. OSBORN**
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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 knife 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 after 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. Now read on—

Olive and Palmyra swim to another island, from which Palmyra secretly sends a note for aid. Burke's ship approaches the island.

Palmyra and Olive sail in a canoe, evading both Ponape's ship and the Japanese Gunboat Okayama, which has her friends on it. Olive risks his life to get water for Palmyra.

Ponape Burke makes desperate pursuit of Olive and Palmyra, even opening fire on them. Now read on—

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 warning 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: "Palmy Tree! Oh, oh, Palmy!"

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.

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 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 black-kets 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.

She wanted to love John for his 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 was already a-strir.

The girl was addressed by an old woman.

"Pleasy you," said this crone in English, "you come for look for see-vey 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 this place.

"Come on," she invited. "My old lady is taking me for look-see for see-vey 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 hut 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.

impossible.

But now she made a discovery. Though the thatch was so notoriously to the forefront 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 passers-by 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 her flesh.

Gasping, she was thrust under the mosquito net; thrown flat, head on bamboo pillow. Two of the hags followed 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 solicitous 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 Rutger approaching, and sank back again. The others had not known. Van did know.

But just as the trio had strolled away 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."

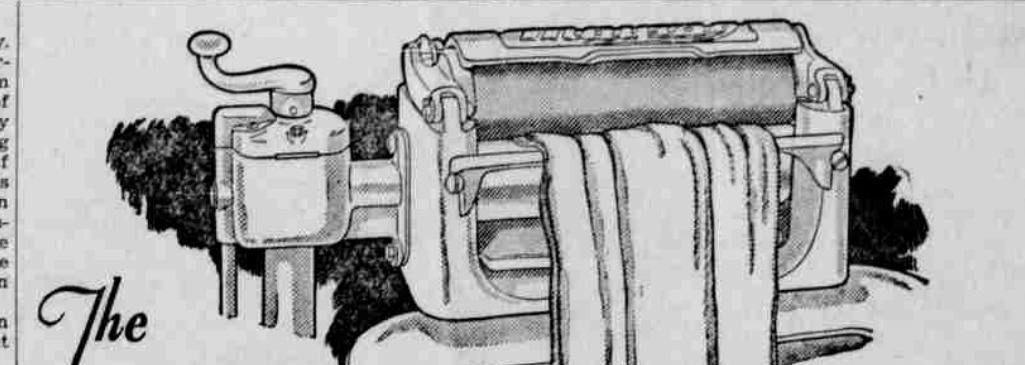
Van drew back stiffly. "Miss Tree is in the house," he said.

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

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 Puelliko Rocks."

The Rocks were a noticeable formation not far inland.



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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.

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 'peakey, no 'peakey!" 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