

RED HAIR AND BLUE SEA



by **STANLEY R. OSBORN**
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SYNOPSIS

Palmyra Tree, about 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-headed man, with a ten-inch knife held between grinning lips! Burke, the stowaway, explains that it is a joke. But Palmyra is shaken. Next day, Burke and the brown man go up on deck. The stowaway entertains them with wild tales of an adventurous life, which his listeners refuse to believe. Now read on.

What Mrs. Crawford did not expect was that the real outlay, as she saw it, lay in depriving Thurston's long legs of a chance, in this less favored setting of Honolulu, to snap back in perspective.

By rejecting both her lovers—Van shortly after John—Palmyra had gained a reprieve from that question as to whether she were in love with one man or just dandy good pals with two.

The peaks of Oahu sank back into the moon, the deep, deep ocean, whence they had risen. One day two days, four, six upon a temperamental sea; a whole week of heavy skies and rain and storm seemed to have carried the girl no further.

A second week came and went; a week of summer sea and lustrous trades and flying yacht. But still no answer. The third week came and hurried its end. Intermittent now the breeze, for they touched the equatorial zone of light and variable seas. A whole day through, perhaps, the Rainbow would scarcely move.

Slowly, unconsciously, Palmyra had been responding to the conditions created by the wily Mrs. Crawford. As the breeze with each knot of westing, had been sinking more generously into the lullabums, the breath of his, or feeling had stirred, risen, fresh and constant, until it reached the deep sweep of a maid on's first, knowledgeable love.

Gradually she was confessing it now, his beloved recognition of love for the man of her parents' choice, Van Buren Rutger.

And she must have treated John Thurston abominably. With each

moment that she gave herself more convincingly up to love, her pity for Thurston grew.

But when, on the twenty-second evening, out from Honolulu—tomorrow they were to sight their first star—the boat came for the formal announcement of her betrothal, the girl was radiantly happy.

Time, at the moment when Mrs. Crawford spoke, it was upon the face of John Thurston that Palmyra's eyes rested, and she could but wince at the flash of pain there revealed. But no girl in love can, on her betrothal night, long be unhappy over the face of a rejected suitor.

So it was, that night, as Palmyra lay asleep in her stateroom, her body gently moving with the lift and fall of the yacht in the mid-Pacific calm, there was a tender smile upon her lips.

And the tender smile was still lingering, in an alluring warmth and sweetness and beauty, when the Rainbow, caught all unawares by a sudden squall, came down, with a crash upon the teeth of a reef—that should not have been there.

On a craft such as the Rainbow interest naturally centers about the navigation.

What better then for Mrs. Crawford in her amiable intrigue than to set up Van Buren Rutger as a gentleman navigator? How more pleasantly important than, handsome, graceful, jaunty in his white uniform, he poised with sextant to take the sun or bent over the charts with Constance and the Wanipolds and Palmyra!

In so featuring Van as a yachtsman, she was no more than a fairly competent amateur—the hostess had meant that Pedersen at the back ground, a Royal, unobtrusively, took up at his work at every point.

But the sailing master was a man vain, self-important, jealous of his prerogatives, touchy as to his dignity.

Not understanding Mrs. Crawford's motive, he chose to regard the arrangement as an imputation upon his seamanship, his fitness—which he himself doubted—longer to command.

Van soon discovered then that this sick and sulky old man was only making an outward show; in reality

having nothing whatever to do with the navigation, leaving the fate of the yacht absolutely in Van's own hands.

A certain inability to take a stand in anything unpleasant, difficult, to make up his mind and act in an emergency, kept Van at first from telling the hostess. Later he continued with an object. He knew she did not really rely on him in this showy fraud of navigation; he suspected Palmyra was not deceived. Knowing his own weakness, he had the weak man's fear of seeing that knowledge reflected in the faces of others. Therefore, he would, without aid, sail the Rainbow to and through the Line island groups. And then, when at last he told the girl, she could not but admire his performance.

On the night of the wreck, Van—really heroic in persisting against a quaking unconfidence that kept him often awake—had stolen on deck in the mid-watch to reassure himself. His first glance told him the clouds were gathering for a squall.

Like most unadventurous persons, Van rebelled at being thought timid. Before rousing the watch he paused to make sure the clouds meant wind. As he studied the sky he gradually became aware of a low sound as of an express train far away. Startled, he swept the sea, then laughed in self-contempt. More than once lately in dreams or waking, he had sprung up at that famished sound of surf. The yacht should not have lain about until late the next day. To call out there was an island a-lee, if there were none would be to make himself aware.

Staring now up at the blackening sky, again off into the gloom of sea, he stood, balanced in suspense between his fear of storm and ice-shore, and his dread of ridicule. For this first time Van held life, and death in his hands—and could not decide what to do.

The sound of surf being at its minimum after two days' calm, the first breath of the squall was upon the yacht before Van was galvanized into action by discovering, broad on the port bow a dire lowering something against the sky—the silhouette of palms.

But even as the doomed Rainbow thus lay between hammer and anvil, she could have been extricated had not Captain Pedersen himself gone to pieces.

In the previous remaining moments a bewildered crew tried to execute incoherent orders, while the yacht was beaten down upon the waiting coral.

Following the crash upon the reef, Thurston picked himself up and scrambled to the deck just as a sea came roaring aboard. Saved by a spring into the air, he waited a chance to reach Pedersen, whose condition he has sensed. Some of the sailing master he whirled him round. "You're drunk," he cried, "Or, or crazy."

The other quailed under the steady light in Thurston's eye.

"Get below."

"I'll take charge," Thurston announced.

The pump showed that the wreck was taking water badly. Such boats as could be launched were got ready. The men obeyed unquestioningly. They liked, respected Thurston. He knew little of ships but they recognized in his voice the quality of command.

During the hours which followed it might well have seemed to Palmyra that the wreck had been arranged for the sole purpose of bringing out the difference between John Thurston and Van Buren Rutger.

Where Van was sunk in self-accusing misery, Thurston's spirits were buoyant. The man was serene, methodical, busy. And he had action at last; intense, vital. In fighting to save the woman he loved he could forget, for the moment, that he had lost her forever.

When Van was soon sodden with fatigue, John seemed fresher with every hour.

It had been decided to leave the women in the cabin where they had been penned, rather than risk the ugly surf that broke about the after companionway.

But Van, in his self-accusing frenzy, was conscious only that he had placed his betrothed in the hands of death, that he must save her.

He rushed toward the cabin companionway. Before anyone noticed, he had thrown it open in the face of another sea. A second later he was swept down its steps by the flooding water.

Catching up Palmyra he struggled back and out again on the deck. Only then, at a warning cry, did he seem consciously to perceive what force it was that delivered these blows. Stopping short, he looked back. A crest reared above the wreck, gathering itself like some her, that he held her safe. Never did she suspect it was to another pair of

arms she owed her life. Of all these revelations, those manifestations of the weakness of Van Buren Rutger, the strength of John Thurston, the girl noted none. On the night of her betrothal she would scarcely have been like, under any circumstances, to draw comparisons. And here darkness and groping confusion and the voice of waters conspired with Thurston himself to hide the truth.

Palmyra's love weathered the storm, unquestioning, serene, animate beast for the spring. Van, horror-stricken, started one way, another; stood frozen in his tracks.

In an instant the sea would have been upon him. From that slithering, listing deck both man and girl would, in all chance, have been carried overboard to death.

In the blinding roar, all she knew was that Van's arms were around (Continued Next Week)

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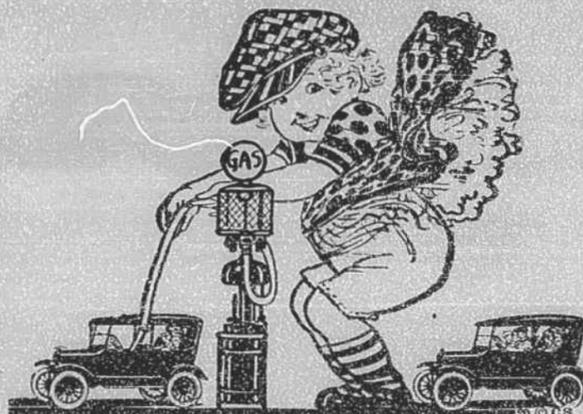
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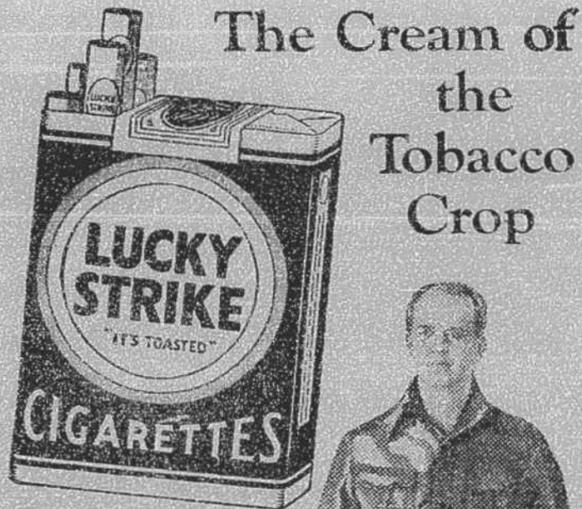
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