

RED HAIR AND BLUE SEA



by **STANLEY R. OSBORN**

ILLUSTRATIONS BY HENRY JAY LEE

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CHAPTER XII

Thurston thrust Van aside impatiently. "The Pueliko, you say?" he demanded at the man Martin.

Across the road a horse stood saddled. Thurston ran to it, jerked the reins free, jumped into the saddle. The girl's father, returning at this moment, came running up.

"Horse the beach," cried Thurston. "Yes! Van—the gambler, Martin—the police, Tree—you to the mission, I'm for the Pueliko." He whirled his horse.

"Wait, wait, Thurston," implored the father. "Here, take my revolver."

"Horse the beach and follow," came the answer, above the ring of hoof.

For a moment the three stood petrified, staring after him. Then they ran, in different directions, to carry out his orders.

Scarcely had they gone than two native men burst from the narrow footway and crossed to the thicket. A few seconds later, with the old women, they had rushed. Palmyra over the road and into the lane between the high blind wall and the salt-water march, where there were no eyes to see save those of the crabs that ran back and forth across the slime.

Van Buren Rucce ran down the wharf, jumped into Thurston's boat and was pulled to the Okayama.

Commander Sakamoto turned to Van. "But my dear Mister," he said, "something is wrong. How

can O-lee-vay have taken the young lady when O-lee-vay is locked here safe aboard? But he—satisfy me—he is only afraid for young lady. He means good. So I let him go, unless you

Van was aghast. "Absolutely no," he cried.

Sakamoto shrugged. "As you say," he conceded.

He gave an order and shortly the brown man appeared on deck. Olive must have divined on whose demand he was held.

At the sight of him Van's animosity flamed up. The white man sprang forward. "What have you done with her?" he demanded. Then turning to the interpreter: "What has he done with her?"

Olive seemed at a loss. He shot forth a question, received his answer, burst into a flood of entreaty.

"He say," repeated the interpreter, "he say turn him loose. He savvy too much. Go look see. Find girl damn too much quick."

The Japanese turned questioning to Van.

"No," cried the white man passionately. "No!"

The officer shrugged again. If Palmyra herself had been there, she would have marvelled that Van could remain blind to the sincerity of Olive's purpose.

As for the islander, he must have adjudged the situation hopeless. With a final look of dumb pleading, he whistled, ducked past his unready

guards and the clutching fingers of the others, and sprang over the starboard rail, foot first into the sea.

As Olive struck the line Sakamoto leaped for the gangway and into his cutter, which happened to be alongside.

"Grab him with an oar," ordered the commander. But it is not so easy to jab with a long oar.

Olive made a judicious feint, dived back under the vicious thrust of the port oars, and splashed ashore. The sailors floundered close in his wake.

Inland the main road from the beach was crowding in against the river. Soon the fugitive must cross one or the other in the open. He would be seen. He would be caught.

But... Olive did not cross the road. He did not cross the river. Nor was he caught. Merely—he disappeared.

He had lain all the while, in the river, down among the crowding water plants, only his nose up for air.

Normally the water, clear as dew, would have revealed him. But rain in the mountains, tropically copious, had raised the stream out of its banks, stained it earthy brown, dotted its surface with moving leaf and branch.

Meanwhile, John Thurston, putting his horse to a run, had soon reached the Pueliko Rocks.

A shoulder of basalt blocked the view ahead. He clambered up, had almost reached the top. Then, startlingly, the whistle of a bullet.

Thurston ducked behind a rock. "Meaning me," he questioned.

He raised his head cautiously. Bang! A leaf cluster came fluttering, like a wounded bird, to his feet.

Across the road, opposite, a great tree dominated the lush behind it. From among its many trunks a wispy of white smoke had floated out.

John, in his effort to locate the enemy, risked, standing up. A third bullet flattened itself against the rock.

"Seems they are here, after all," he conceded.

Reigning his horse he had galloped back to the road, with this turning movement in view, when he encountered the girl's father and seven other men. These were no advance guard. Sailors from the rainbow were following in to scour the brush.

"The lava caves," the father cried excitedly. "High in the mountains, Thurston, stand of here. They're filled, inaccessible, a terrible hiding place. My God, John, we've got to head 'em off from the caves."

Thurston told of the shooting. Thurston found what he sought—footprints.

Native men almost never wear shoes, then only shoes of cloth and rubber. But here, in the damp mould, someone had ascended toward the air tree, descended—wearing leather.

Thurston examined the prints at length. Then "if I'm any sort of Indian at all," he commented, "this was—Ponape Burke."

For a distance Thurston was able to ride. Then lava, clean washed, a stream, and three paths intersecting at the water.

It was well for Palmyra that she could not know what difficulties her lover had now to meet.

The bed of this stream, cast solid in one piece from nature's furnace, would have proved a test for the North Woods skill of any man. And in addition, Ponape Burke—if it were he—had taken pains to leave no mark.

Later, he found footprints again—had and bare. Ahead large trees told of dry land.

Thurston advanced stealthily, rifle ready. The elevation took on an unusual form. He recognized it, to his surprise, as an artificial island, one of these ruined fortresses or tums built by prehistoric conquerors on such islands as Kusaie and Ponape.

Could the girl be imprisoned here?

Opposite, there rose a twenty-foot wall of basaltic columnar blocks. But it was not at this wall that Thurston looked.

Lying under it, in what had been either the canal by which these long stones were floated in, or a dock for the praus or junks of the conquerors, was the schooner Lupe-a-Noa.

When Palmyra's captors hurried her into the footway they did not long continue in the dangerous direction of the Pueliko. Shortly they turned into a path that branched out among the mangroves. This path would bring them circuitously back to the sea at a point just outside the harbor entrance.

As the two men urged her along she knew she must soon confront Ponape Burke. Yet it was with a

gasn that, at a turning, she saw the leaf move and the man's face come looting out.

"Well, Palmie," he muttered, "I come back I get my kiss."

Her guards now for the first time releasing her hands, the girl snatched for her pistol and levelled it at him.

He was dressed, absurdly, in the gala attire of the Rainbow, even to the cane. She had not ordered "Hands up," but he had obeyed that formula, stood thus grinning at her. Now, however, so suddenly she could not pull the trigger, he brought the flexible stick down with whiplike cut across the back of her hand. The fingers, paralyzed, dropped the weapon.

An ugly light flashed into his eyes. "I ain't a-taking no chances (this time)," he explained.

As they moved forward again Ponape Burke became informative. Had been lying low here waiting an opportunity. This village was a good sort; not like the rest of the island; so dam' pious a kanaka wasn't supposed even to smoke. And from the point, a man could watch the Okayama at anchor or get away, quickly and unseen, to the hidden Lupe-a-Noa.

The one obstacle had been Olive. But they had discovered Van's antipathy; planned to get the islander out of the way through him. Gradually, Van had acted of his own accord.

For this work the man Martin had been useful, being new to the beach, unknown.

At the sea front the native men lifted Palmyra and Ponape Burke and waded with them through the thick-deep water to the islet.

At the end of the islet furthest from shore, Ponape Burke ordered his prisoner into the last thicket. She hesitated, gave the natives one despairing glance. She hated them for their curiosity, their complaisance.

She stooped, entered the house, sat upon a mat on the pebble floor, her back against one of the posts in the circle that upheld the eaves. Burke hurried away. The brown men were crowding into the opposite side of the hat. They dropped to stare, knee to knee, silent or whispering those behind, craning to look.

Martin came to take up the watch.

(Continued Next Week)

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Presumably some preachers forget their high calling and commence dealing in politics, and personalities, seemingly admittive of the fact that politics and the Gospel, politicians and religion are often uncorrelated factors.

Another presidential campaign will soon be in progress and again a few preachers over the country will forget their real work, that of preaching and teaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and will preach political propaganda from the pulpit.

when the pews are filled with a people seeking Biblical training and spiritual guidance.

Our spiritual preceptors should retain the dignity of that position and never let their attentions degenerate to mere political or personal bias. For the people lose the respect and reverence which is due a true minister of the Gospel. Enough damage will be done, enough mud will be slung from both sides, enough dissension and strife will occur during the present campaign, without the clergy of the nation entering into the political fracas.



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