

RED HAIR AND BLUE SEA



by **STANLEY R. OSBORN**
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Burke whirled, whipped out an order, sprang to the wheel. The kanakas worked like mad. Another order and the sails filled, the deck listed down and the Pigeon of Noah was under way.

The man at the wheel burst into that tittering laugh of his, now strained, false, sharp-edged with excitement, exultation.

"Remember, girl?" he cried. "Below on the Rainbow—night black? Wanted t'scare 'em a bit, says you? Pirates, bucket o' blood?" his laugh rose into a crow of triumph. "Well, kid, what about this here? Give 'em a hell of a startle, eh Palmie?"

As the Lupe-a-Noa filled away, the girl ran to the rail and sent over the water a frantic cry.

In the boat the two sailors sat, rigid, their oars poised. The red face of Johannsen emerged from the sea, ripping, blank with incredulity, convulsed with anger. Ponape Burke's strategy had deprived them of the launch in which they could have overhauled the schooner.

Ashore, the castaways stood perplexed, alarmed. Palmyra's action, rather than her voice, threw them into panic. They pointed, shouted, ran here and there, futile, absurd.

To Van Buren Rutger rushed the girl's mother with something in her hands. It was a rifle. As one of his accomplishments, Van had won trophies on the range. But now, confronted by that violence his training had taught him never touched the life of a gentleman, he faltered pal-

sied in a fear of wounding the girl herself.

Then John Thurston snatched the rifle. There was a flash and a bullet struck the Lupe-a-Noa, shattering the glass on the bin glass on the binnacle. A second flash, and Burke himself, staggered back. But before the schooner could fall off, he clutched the wheel again with one hand. As his left arm hung, the spot of blood, spreading slowly on the white cotton, was like some brilliant blossom.

Burke bellowed his rage. He had swung the vessel over so that Palmyra, all unaware, stood in the line of fire. Thurston could not shoot again.

At this triumph, Burke regained his good humor. The wound had proved unimportant. "John's the only man in that bunch," he conceded amiably. "If he was stealing my girl I'd give him more than a sore arm."

Palmyra was desperate. Behind her, her hand closed on an iron belaying pin. "You—you brute!" she cried. "Turn—this vessel—back. Turn it back instantly!"

She jerked the pin from its socket; took a step toward him, her eyes aflame. "You go back to that island . . ."

From behind, a hand closed on her wrist. Olive, grinning, took the belaying pin from her fingers, as if they had been a baby's, and returned it to the rack.

Palmyra sank against the cabin, helpless.

Not by accident had the Pigeon of

Noah risen from the sea upon the scene of their disaster. Back in the days before Honolulu this spider of a Burke had spun his web. He had talked of the atolls in the terms of a paradise until the voyagers were eager to behold. He had convinced Pedersen that, to take advantage of prevailing winds and current, he must lay his course from Honolulu first to the northern Gilberts—Butaritari or Apaiang—and thence make north and west into the Marshalls and the Carolines.

Burke had followed, then, holding back the first sailing Lupe-a-Noa to match the yacht's pace. Fortune had favored.

Informed as to the lagoons they would make, their order, he had meant to out sail them to an anchorage and, lying there unsuspected, to seize the girl at some favorable moment ashore. And then, the fleet Pigeon away with none in all those wild seas save the fat old Rainbow to pursue, what could have been more easy?

A sob of self-pity shook the girl, though even now she did not, in her innocence, comprehend the depth of his infamy.

The man himself, leaning over the wheel, sought, with an honest concern, to soothe her. Even she realized that he was moved by a real earnestness of emotion, conviction.

He gripped his hands upon the wheel in an excess of disdain.

"Cry yer eyes out for yer mother. That can't be helped. But the rest o' them dickey birds?" He snorted in derision. "Why, they . . . Y'think now you'll miss 'em. But wait. Tomorrow, next day. You'll be laughing, too; laughing at all of 'em—at Van. And then . . ." He spoke with the impressiveness of certitude. "Then you'll be thanking me."

He leered at her humorously.

Her hands clenched until the sharp nails brought the blood.

"Don't blame me!" he cried in a sudden flare of emotion. "Don't blame me. Blame yourself. I fought agin it—right along. Didn't I warn you? Warn y'how you'd set a poor starved devil like me a-fire? But you? Y'just had t'keep hanging around: you who was like, like God's daughter. Hanging around and hanging around 'till y'had me fair wild."

"I swore then I'd have you. Lucky for her folks I saw how t'trap y'on here. For, if need was, I'd of killed every soul of 'em in cold blood."

She shrank in loathing.

Burke was silent, conquering that evil flame of passion.

Then shortly: "Original Noah," the man jeered; "he went it blind. But me—I know our mountain top, every inch o't. And girl," he warned "when the Ark does hit dry land, make no mistake. You'll never see arey one o'yer folks again. For you they've perished off the face o'the earth. The flod's made a clean sweep. In all creation there's only you—and me."

Exaltation was in his gaze; obscure, intimidating.

"Come, girl, y'shall be a queen."

CHAPTER V.

Back ashore, where the moment of Palmyra Tree's abduction had found her fiance so afraid of wounding the girl that he could not raise a rifle in her defense, every passing circumstance was carrying forward the revelation of two characters.

Van, as he saw his betrothed thus torn from him, stood, staring after the schooner, his face convulsed. He had been thrust back into a despair tenfold that whence the Pigeon of Noah had first raised him.

Not so, however, John Thurston. As well as Van he knew nothing could be done. But he would not accede. Burke's crime had thrown him into a frenzy.

He ran across to Captain Pedersen. "Captain," he demanded, "what can we do? At once?"

The deposed sailing master looked back at him baggantly. "Nothing."

"But, but we must. I tell you we must. Man, we've got to get to sea. Today—now!"

Pedersen groaned. "I wish to God we could, Mr. Thurston. I'm as broke up as you. But there just ain't no use. Looks now, if we're ever to get off, we'll have to knock

together some sort of craft from the wreck."

Thurston cried out in protest. "Weeks, months. No! You, with all your sea experience, you must know some way. I, I demand . . ."

But Pedersen shook his head. Nothing whatever could be done.

Suddenly Thurston's face lighted. He stood in thought, his features taking on a more definite tinge of elation. "I've got it!" he cried, and whirled away.

The sailing canoes in which the Polynesian navigators of a bygone day covered the Pacific were catamarans. The explorers built two hulls, so narrow that neither, by itself, would float. But when the two were fixed, perhaps ten feet apart, by timbers lashed athwart their gunwales amidships, the double canoe became staunch enough—though boasting in all its parts no nail or bolt or rivet, its joints held by nothing stronger than breadfruit gum and twists of cord, its sails no more substantial than plaited leaf—to traffic all away and across the broad Pacific.

It was Thurston's idea now that, placing his four separately worthless boats in tandem, two on each side, he could lash them under a framework of the lighter spars into a machine which would carry a considerable spread of sail.

"If those old catamarans could hold together for a thousand miles," he explained, "ours ought to make the next island."

Work had been going on perhaps an hour when he appeared for the first time to become aware of Van Buren Rutger's drooping figure. John had completely forgotten the other man. Convicted, he ran over to him.

But Thurston attempted no explanation. He says that the best, the only way out, was to sketch the plan of action, seem to consult the other's judgment. He spoke briefly. "What do you think, Van?" he asked. "Isn't that as well as we can hope to do?"

(To be continued.)

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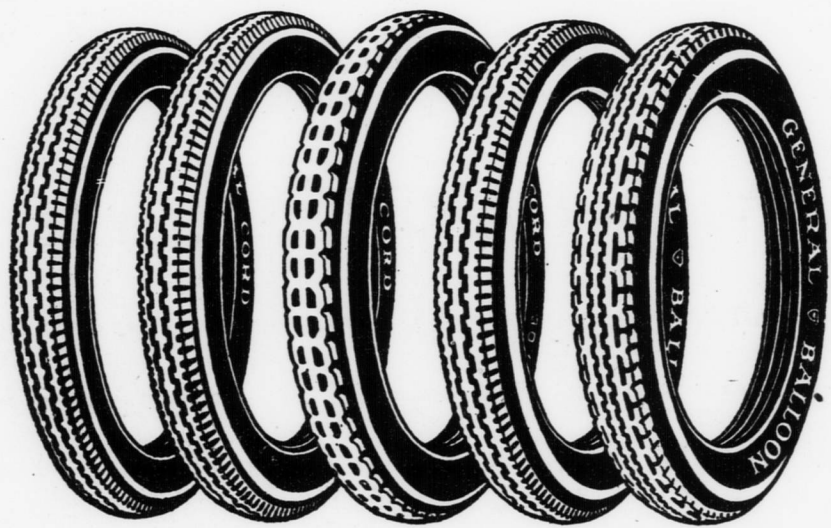
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