



# RED HAIR AND BLUE SEA

by **STANLEY R. OSBORN**

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Van was silent for a long time; then, unexpectedly, laughed. "As good as any," he said. "As, as good as any," he said. "Go on your raft, and down, stay, and starve. What's the difference? As regards her—" he caught his breath in a broken exhalation—"she's gone."

Thurston gazed at him sullenly. "You, you mean you won't raise a hand for her?"

"Don't," Van answered wearily, "and neither will you. We can't." Thurston's face was resolute. "Perhaps you're right," he acknowledged. "Very likely so. But for me, I prefer to die—trying."

He would have hurried away but the other detained him.

"I'm not your kind of an ass," Van said. "You fool, you know there's no hope. Yet, by this silly work, you can kid yourself into a sort of relief. Me! . . ." It was as if he looked upon the girl lying dead. But he tore himself from this vision, became defiant. "You still think I'm yellow. Very well, then, I'll show you. I'll help now; and when you sail, I, too, shall go."

Thurston urged the men to work as the first color of the dawn touched the eastern sky the last of the stores and gear was lashed into place.

Thurston stooped over Van, who had fallen in the sleep of exhaustion, and waked him. "Say the word," he announced. "We're ready."

Van roused but slowly; then turned upon the stronger man in a futile rage at circumstance. "Damn you," he cried, "I'd rather stay here and die like a gentleman—clean and dry. But a moment later he sprang up with his old laugh. "After all, it's got to be the fish or the birds. I'm a braver man than you, you optimistic ass, because I know . . ." He did not finish his thought. "Come on. Let's get it over."

Twenty minutes later they were at sea.

Twenty hours later the catamaran was drifting, dismasted.

And Van Buren Rutger's the fault. He had been given the steering oar. But, sunk in dejection, he had, in a moment of inattention, allowed the too-heavy boom to jibe, carrying away the improvised tackle, and snatch the mast overboard. As a result Burke's rotten boat had fetched

free of its lashings and the raft floated a wreck.

Doomed never to rescue Palmyra from the villain Burke, John Thurston had yet gladly staked life itself upon a thousandth chance.

The Pigeon of Noah was flying into the unknown.

The face of the man Burke was a thing to wonder at. Under the exaltation of a master idea it had grown strange, compelling. His eyes gleamed, his tongue stumbled in its eagerness. For the first time in life he was to voice that which long had hidden in his evil mind. What had been only a vision of power was now to become an actuality. And so much, so very much, depended on kindling that wild spark he felt to glow within the soul of this girl he had seized for his own—his woman.

"Tanna!" he cried. "Tanna! Ever hear tell o' that island, Palm?" He laughed excitedly. "Indeed and I've took good care t'make y' acquaint. 'Tis for Tanna we'll be laying a course, you and me," he went on, with exuberant gesture acquired from natives. "Tanna, where we'll lord it like born king and queen."

"What a people! What a people t'work with!" His fingers opened and closed anticipatorily, with a cat-like zestfulness. "What can't we do t'hem Papuan wildmen," he cried, "and what can't we make 'em do for us. That's the ticket, Palm: what we can make 'em do for us!"

"Why, kid," he was expostulating a moment later, "this here big idea ain't something that popped into m'head just recent. Gosh, no. Had it in mind for years. But . . ." He hesitated, diffident; a thing so foreign to his usual brazen assurance as to seem histrionic. "But the fast is I was a-waiting for, for you!"

She was once more aware how very real his infatuation.

"I just had t'have a dame for this stunt," he went on passionately. "A real dame, a sure enough queen. And then I meets you. The very first watch I sees y'got the shape for it. And when y'lets out about pirate blood, I knows y'got the heart for it. 'Cause yer talk's on the square; more on the square than you yerself realizes."

The girl was increasingly understanding how irrevocably, on the

Rainbow, he had been misled by her caprice. Listening at first in a pleased surprise, he had been eagerly self-deceived. Sure that the lawless strain, persisting through environment, had at last roused, he was now convinced she was already in love with the life he typified—though she herself did not as yet perceive the fast—and hat, in the glamour this life cast upon himself, she would in time willingly come to be his own.

"And, girl," Ponape Burke was shouting, "there never, never was no King had such a Queen as you. Yer hair!" He exulted in the wonder of it. "That's how y'beat 'em all. For, didn't I tell y' the Tannamen saw red?—grabbed at red calico, smeared their faces bright and gay, rouged up the dead warrior gaudy t'meet his maker, wound their own heads all over with red vine t'cover the wool?"

"Don't y'understand? That's what I was waiting on. The queen o' my devil's own mission had t' have red hair. And, Palm, them Tannamen'll go plumb crazy with pious pagan joy when they sees yer locks a-lighting up, as the sun hits 'em, like a stove full o' coals busting into flame. Hair, I tell you, same as that o' some o' the big buck gods o' Melanesia themselves. Yes, I say it, girl—heathen hair!"

"Why, Palm, I wish t'the Lord y'could see yerself. I wish y'could understand yourself. Y'was plain born for the life. When I've waked y'up, you'll be eager for Tanna; for Tanna, where a man can be a man; where there's never a law but the law o' the cookpot and the sun and the wind—and the will o' you and me."

Ponape Burke did a jig step or two across the deck.

"Say, Palm, girl," he exclaimed; "say—you and yer heathen hair! Did I, or did I not, mention as how I was going t'make y'a real sure-enough queen?"

It was Burke's continuing delight in her every show of angry spirit, his self-restraining sense of competence to bring the comedy to an end any moment he chose, that most intimidated Palmyra.

"Wait 'till I've tamed you," he would laugh. "Then we'll get along fine. And you'll sure like Tanna when y'get the taste o' power in yer pretty mouth."

Only once had he laid a hand on her. That was when, in a fury, she had flown at him, clawing his face. He had held her away, loudly hilarious. "I'd steal a kiss," he cried, "if 'twasn't for my sore arm. But, no . . . I can wait till y'come free, poking out yer lips and begging me t'take a smack. 'Twon't be long."

Nor was her situation made easier by Burke's evil sense of humor. Possibly to hasten her surrender, more probably in a mere cruel amusement, it played upon her fears.

There was, for instances, the occasion when Olive, for the first time aboard the Pigeon of Noah, spoke to her.

Had it not been for those brown-shot eyes, always so stealthily upon her, she would sometimes have thought of this savage as a machine. There was a sort of unhuman precision about him.

And now, in this wise, the moment Burke had gone below, the brown man materialized himself at her side. She was never prepared for the exceeding change from his statuesque silences into the gesticular animation of his speech. He had opened his mouth, apparently for getting as on the Rainbow that they knew no word in common. Then, realizing, he stopped at a loss.

The girl shrank back; fled, in panic at the very nearness of him, toward the companionway. But there she recollected that Burke was at the foot of the ladder, and stood helpless.

Then the white man came climbing up. "Y' little vixen," he warned in a malicious enjoyment of the situation, "push me overboard . . ." He interrupted himself with a burst of laughter. "Gad," he cried, "but I'd hate t' give y'the chance! Push me overboard, and I'm gone. But—Olive's left. Remember that. I'm what stands between you. I ain't a-saying as how he'd love a red-headed goddess all his own. Oh, no! But I do see he's got his eye on y'like a wolf following a nice fat little lamb off into the timber."

The girl shuddered. Burke or

Olive? White savage or brown? A cry of despair rose to her lips but she fought it back. Her hand stole up toward the opening of her dress, lingered, fell again to her side.

Since that event—it was now her third day aboard the Lupe-a-Noa—she had been wondering whether Ponape Burke really did stand between her and his man. She had not forgotten Burke's saying that Olive, if he knew his power, could snap his master's back across one of those big brown knees like a piece of kindling. And she suspected at times that Olive might know this quite well.

The day with the disconcerting suddenness of the Equator, had faded and darkness would soon have been upon them. Burke had waved a hand toward the cabin with kingly gesture. "The royal chamber awaits, Queenie," he had said. "Hot as hell down there and you'll soon be

squawking for a hammock on deck. But tonight . . . There's a lock."

The girl had sprung, trembling, panting, for the companion, had slammed it shut and shot home the bolts. Then she had stumbled down the steps and thrown herself, sobbing, upon the bunk. She had borne up bravely so long as the sun remained, but on the closing in of night, with all its sinister implications, she had given away.

Sleep impossible, the night dragged on. Above decks there had been, as it seemed for hours, only the heavy breathing of slumber. At last, like a trapped animal herself, she had begun a futile prying. And then, without warning in that silence, there came, quite close at hand, a sound. The girl, crouched, tense. Again it came, hidden, menacing.

(Continued next week)

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