

CHAPTER II

From the whaleboat, up the low side of the Arangi, and over her six-inch rail of teak to her teak deck, was but a step, and Tom Haggin made it easily with Jerry still under his arm. The deck was cluttered with an exciting crowd. Exciting the crowd would have been to untravelled humans of civilization, and exciting it was to Jerry; although to Tom Haggin and Captain Van Horn it was a mere commonplace of everyday life.

The deck was small because the Arangi was small. Originally a teak-built, gentleman's yacht, brass-fitted, copper-fastened, angle-ironed, sheathed in man-of-war copper and with a fin-keel of bronze, she had been sold into the Solomon Islands' trade for the purpose of blackbirding or nigger-running. Under the law, however, this traffic was dignified by being called "recruiting."

The Arangi was a labour-recruit ship that carried the new-caught, cannibal blacks from remote islands to labour on the new plantations where white men turned dank and pestilential swamp and jungle into rich and stately cocoanut groves. The Arangi's two masts were of Oregon cedar, so scraped and hot-paraffined that they shone like tan opals in the glare of sun. Her excessive sail plan enabled her to sail like a witch, and, on occasion, gave Captain Van Horn, his white mate, and his fifteen black boat's crew as much as they could handle. She was sixty feet over all, and the cross beams of her crown deck had not been

weakened by deck-houses. The only breaks--and no beams had been cut for them--were the main cabin skylight and companionway, the booby hatch for'ard over the tiny forecastle, and the small hatch aft that let down into the store-room.

And on this small deck, in addition to the crew, were the "return" niggers from three far-flung plantations. By "return" was meant that their three years of contract labour was up, and that, according to contract, they were being returned to their home villages on the wild island of Malaita. Twenty of them--familiar, all, to Jerry--were from Meringe; thirty of them came from the Bay of a Thousand Ships, in the Russell Isles; and the remaining twelve were from Pennduffryn on the east coast of Guadalcanar. In addition to these--and they were all on deck, chattering and piping in queer, almost elfish, falsetto voices--were the two white men, Captain Van Horn and his Danish mate, Borckman, making a total of seventy-nine souls.

"Thought your heart 'd failed you at the last moment," was Captain Van Horn's greeting, a quick pleasure light glowing into his eyes as they noted Jerry.

"It was sure near to doin' it," Tom Haggin answered. "It's only for you I'd a done it, anyways. Jerry's the best of the litter, barrin' Michael, of course, the two of them bein' all that's left and no better than them that was lost. Now that Kathleen was a sweet dog, the spit of Bidy if she'd lived.--Here, take 'm."

With a jerk of abruptness, he deposited Jerry in Van Horn's arms and turned away along the deck.

"An' if bad luck comes to him I'll never forgive you, Skipper," he flung roughly over his shoulder.

"They'll have to take my head first," the skipper chuckled.

"An' not unlikely, my brave laddy buck," Haggin growled. "Meringe owes Somo four heads, three from the dysentery, an' another wan from a tree fallin' on him the last fortnight. He was the son of a chief at that."

"Yes, and there's two heads more that the Arangi owes Somo," Van Horn nodded. "You recollect, down to the south'ard last year, a chap named Hawkins was lost in his whaleboat running the Arli Passage?" Haggin, returning along the deck, nodded. "Two of his boat's crew were Somo boys. I'd recruited them for Ugi Plantation. With your boys, that makes six heads the Arangi owes. But what of it? There's one salt-water village, acrost on the weather coast, where the Arangi owes eighteen. I recruited them for Aolo, and being salt-water men they put them on the Sandfly that was lost on the way to the Santa Cruz. They've got a jack-pot over there on the weather coast--my word, the boy that could get my head would be a second Carnegie! A hundred and fifty pigs and shell money no end the village's collected for the chap that gets me and delivers."

"And they ain't--yet," Haggin snorted.

"No fear," was the cheerful retort.

"You talk like Arbuckle used to talk," Haggin censured. "Manny's the time I've heard him string it off. Poor old Arbuckle. The most sure and most precautious chap that ever handled niggers. He never went to sleep without spreadin' a box of tacks on the floor, and when it wasn't them it was crumpled newspapers. I remember me well, bein' under the same roof at the time on Florida, when a big tomcat chased a cockroach into the papers. And it was blim, blam, blim, six times an' twice over, with his two big horse-pistols, an' the house perforated like a cullender.

Likewise there was a dead tom-cat. He could shoot in the dark with never an aim, pullin' trigger with the second finger and pointing with the first finger laid straight along the barrel.

"No, sir, my laddy buck. He was the bully boy with the glass eye. The nigger didn't live that'd lift his head. But they got 'm. They got 'm. He lasted fourteen years, too. It was his cook-boy. Hatcheted 'm before breakfast. An' it's well I remember our second trip into the bush after what was left of 'm."

"I saw his head after you'd turned it over to the Commissioner at Tulagi," Van Horn supplemented.

"An' the peaceful, quiet, everyday face of him on it, with almost the same old smile I'd seen a thousand times. It dried on 'm that way over the smokin' fire. But they got 'm, if it did take fourteen years. There's manny's the head that goes to Malaita, manny's the time untooken; but, like the old pitcher, it's taken in the end."

"But I've got their goat," the captain insisted. "When trouble's hatching, I go straight to them and tell them what. They can't get the hang of it. Think I've got some powerful devil-devil medicine."

Tom Haggin thrust out his hand in abrupt good-bye, resolutely keeping his eyes from dropping to Jerry in the other's arms.

"Keep your eye on my return boys," he cautioned, as he went over the side, "till you land the last mother's son of 'm. They've got no cause to love Jerry or his breed, an' I'd hate ill to happen 'm at a nigger's hands. An' in the dark of the night 'tis like as not he can do a fare-you-well overside. Don't take your eye off 'm till you're quit of the last of 'm."

At sight of big Mister Haggin deserting him and being pulled away in the whaleboat, Jerry wriggled and voiced his anxiety in a low, whimpering whine. Captain Van Horn snuggled him closer in his arm with a caress of his free hand.

"Don't forget the agreement," Tom Haggin called back across the widening

water. "If aught happens you, Jerry's to come back to me."

"I'll make a paper to that same and put it with the ship's articles," was Van Horn's reply.

Among the many words possessed by Jerry was his own name; and in the talk of the two men he had recognised it repeatedly, and he was aware, vaguely, that the talk was related to the vague and unguessably terrible thing that was happening to him. He wriggled more determinedly, and Van Horn set him down on the deck. He sprang to the rail with more quickness than was to be expected of an awkward puppy of six months, and not the quick attempt of Van Horn to cheek him would have succeeded. But Jerry recoiled from the open water lapping the Arangi's side. The taboo was upon him. It was the image of the log awash that was not a log but that was alive, luminous in his brain, that checked him. It was not reason on his part, but inhibition which had become habit.

He plumped down on his bob tail, lifted golden muzzle skyward, and emitted a long puppy-wail of dismay and grief.

"It's all right, Jerry, old man, brace up and be a man-dog," Van Horn soothed him.

But Jerry was not to be reconciled. While this indubitably was a white-skinned god, it was not his god. Mister Haggin was his god, and a superior god at that. Even he, without thinking about it at all,

recognized that. His Mister Haggin wore pants and shoes. This god on the deck beside him was more like a black. Not only did he not wear pants, and was barefooted and barelegged, but about his middle, just like any black, he wore a brilliant-coloured loin-cloth, that, like a kilt, fell nearly to his sunburnt knees.

Captain Van Horn was a handsome man and a striking man, although Jerry did not know it. If ever a Holland Dutchman stepped out of a Rembrandt frame, Captain Van Horn was that one, despite the fact that he was New York born, as had been his knickerbocker ancestors before him clear back to the time when New York was not New York but New Amsterdam. To complete his costume, a floppy felt hat, distinctly Rembrandtish in effect, perched half on his head and mostly over one ear; a sixpenny, white cotton undershirt covered his torso; and from a belt about his middle dangled a tobacco pouch, a sheath-knife, filled clips of cartridges, and a huge automatic pistol in a leather holster.

On the beach, Bidly, who had hushed her grief, lifted it again when she heard Jerry's wail. And Jerry, desisting a moment to listen, heard Michael beside her, barking his challenge, and saw, without being conscious of it, Michael's withered ear with its persistent upward cock. Again, while Captain Van Horn and the mate, Borckman, gave orders, and while the Arangi's mainsail and spanker began to rise up the masts, Jerry loosed all his heart of woe in what Bob told Derby on the beach was the "grandest vocal effort" he had ever heard from any dog, and that, except for being a bit thin, Caruso didn't have anything on Jerry. But

the song was too much for Haggin, who, as soon as he had landed, whistled Bidy to him and strode rapidly away from the beach.

At sight of her disappearing, Jerry was guilty of even more Caruso-like effects, which gave great joy to a Pennduffryn return boy who stood beside him. He laughed and jeered at Jerry with falsetto chucklings that were more like the jungle-noises of tree-dwelling creatures, half-bird and half-man, than of a man, all man, and therefore a god. This served as an excellent counter-irritant. Indignation that a mere black should laugh at him mastered Jerry, and the next moment his puppy teeth, sharp-pointed as needles, had scored the astonished black's naked calf in long parallel scratches from each of which leaped the instant blood. The black sprang away in trepidation, but the blood of Terrence the Magnificent was true in Jerry, and, like his father before him, he followed up, slashing the black's other calf into a ruddy pattern.

At this moment, anchor broken out and headsails running up, Captain Van Horn, whose quick eye had missed no detail of the incident, with an order to the black helmsman turned to applaud Jerry.

"Go to it, Jerry!" he encouraged. "Get him! Shake him down! Sick him! Get him! Get him!"

The black, in defence, aimed a kick at Jerry, who, leaping in instead of away--another inheritance from Terrence--avoided the bare foot and printed a further red series of parallel lines on the dark leg. This was

too much, and the black, afraid more of Van Horn than of Jerry, turned and fled for'ard, leaping to safety on top of the eight Lee-Enfield rifles that lay on top of the cabin skylight and that were guarded by one member of the boat's crew. About the skylight Jerry stormed, leaping up and falling back, until Captain Van Horn called him off.

"Some nigger-chaser, that pup, some nigger-chaser!" Van Horn confided to Borckman, as he bent to pat Jerry and give him due reward of praise.

And Jerry, under this caressing hand of a god, albeit it did not wear pants, forgot for a moment longer the fate that was upon him.

"He's a lion-dog--more like an Airedale than an Irish terrier," Van Horn went on to his mate, still petting. "Look at the size of him already. Look at the bone of him. Some chest that. He's got the endurance. And he'll be some dog when he grows up to those feet of his."

Jerry had just remembered his grief and was starting a rush across the deck to the rail to gaze at Meringe growing smaller every second in the distance, when a gust of the South-east Trade smote the sails and pressed the Arangi down. And down the deck, slanted for the moment to forty-five degrees, Jerry slipped and slid, vainly clawing at the smooth surface for a hold. He fetched up against the foot of the mizzenmast, while Captain Van Horn, with the sailor's eye for the coral patch under his bow, gave the order "Hard a-lee!"

Borckman and the black steersman echoed his words, and, as the wheel spun down, the Arangi, with the swiftness of a witch, rounded into the wind and attained a momentary even keel to the flapping of her headsails and a shifting of headsheets.

Jerry, still intent on Meringe, took advantage of the level footing to recover himself and scramble toward the rail. But he was deflected by the crash of the mainsheet blocks on the stout deck-traveller, as the mainsail, emptied of the wind and feeling the wind on the other side, swung crazily across above him. He cleared the danger of the mainsheet with a wild leap (although no less wild had been Van Horn's leap to rescue him), and found himself directly under the mainboom with the huge sail looming above him as if about to fall upon him and crush him.

It was Jerry's first experience with sails of any sort. He did not know the beasts, much less the way of them, but, in his vivid recollection, when he had been a tiny puppy, burned the memory of the hawk, in the middle of the compound, that had dropped down upon him from out of the sky. Under that colossal threatened impact he crouched down to the deck. Above him, falling upon him like a bolt from the blue, was a winged hawk unthinkably vaster than the one he had encountered. But in his crouch was no hint of cower. His crouch was a gathering together, an assembling of all the parts of him under the rule of the spirit of him, for the spring upward to meet in mid career this monstrous, menacing thing.

But, the succeeding fraction of a moment, so that Jerry, leaping, missed

even the shadow of it, the mainsail, with a second crash of blocks on traveller, had swung across and filled on the other tack.

Van Horn had missed nothing of it. Before, in his time, he had seen young dogs frightened into genuine fits by their first encounters with heaven-filling, sky-obscuring, down-impending sails. This was the first dog he had seen leap with bared teeth, undismayed, to grapple with the huge unknown.

With spontaneity of admiration, Van Horn swept Jerry from the deck and gathered him into his arms.