CHAPTER III

Jerry quite forgot Meringe for the time being. As he well remembered, the hawk had been sharp of beak and claw. This air-flapping, thunder-crashing monster needed watching. And Jerry, crouching for the spring and ever struggling to maintain his footing on the slippery, heeling deck, kept his eyes on the mainsail and uttered low growls at any display of movement on its part.

The Arangi was beating out between the coral patches of the narrow channel into the teeth of the brisk trade wind. This necessitated frequent tacks, so that, overhead, the mainsail was ever swooping across from port tack to starboard tack and back again, making air-noises like the swish of wings, sharply rat-tat-tatting its reef points and loudly crashing its mainsheet gear along the traveller. Half a dozen times, as it swooped overhead, Jerry leaped for it, mouth open to grip, lips writhed clear of the clean puppy teeth that shone in the sun like gems of ivory.

Failing in every leap, Jerry achieved a judgment. In passing, it must be noted that this judgment was only arrived at by a definite act of reasoning. Out of a series of observations of the thing, in which it had threatened, always in the same way, a series of attacks, he had found that it had not hurt him nor come in contact with him at all. Therefore--although he did not stop to think that he was thinking--it was

not the dangerous, destroying thing he had first deemed it. It might be well to be wary of it, though already it had taken its place in his classification of things that appeared terrible but were not terrible. Thus, he had learned not to fear the roar of the wind among the palms when he lay snug on the plantation-house veranda, nor the onslaught of the waves, hissing and rumbling into harmless foam on the beach at his feet.

Many times, in the course of the day, alertly and nonchalantly, almost with a quizzical knowingness, Jerry cocked his head at the mainsail when it made sudden swooping movements or slacked and tautened its crashing sheet-gear. But he no longer crouched to spring for it. That had been the first lesson, and quickly mastered.

Having settled the mainsail, Jerry returned in mind to Meringe. But there was no Meringe, no Biddy and Terrence and Michael on the beach; no Mister Haggin and Derby and Bob; no beach: no land with the palm-trees near and the mountains afar off everlastingly lifting their green peaks into the sky. Always, to starboard or to port, at the bow or over the stern, when he stood up resting his fore-feet on the six-inch rail and gazing, he saw only the ocean, broken-faced and turbulent, yet orderly marching its white-crested seas before the drive of the trade.

Had he had the eyes of a man, nearly two yards higher than his own from the deck, and had they been the trained eyes of a man, sailor-man at that, Jerry could have seen the low blur of Ysabel to the north and the

blur of Florida to the south, ever taking on definiteness of detail as the Arangi sagged close-hauled, with a good full, port-tacked to the south-east trade. And had he had the advantage of the marine glasses with which Captain Van Horn elongated the range of his eyes, he could have seen, to the east, the far peaks of Malaita lifting life-shadowed pink cloud-puffs above the sea-rim.

But the present was very immediate with Jerry. He had early learned the iron law of the immediate, and to accept what was when it was, rather than to strain after far other things. The sea was. The land no longer was. The Arangi certainly was, along with the life that cluttered her deck. And he proceeded to get acquainted with what was--in short, to know and to adjust himself to his new environment.

His first discovery was delightful--a wild-dog puppy from the Ysabel bush, being taken back to Malaita by one of the Meringe return boys. In age they were the same, but their breeding was different. The wild-dog was what he was, a wild-dog, cringing and sneaking, his ears for ever down, his tail for ever between his legs, for ever apprehending fresh misfortune and ill-treatment to fall on him, for ever fearing and resentful, fending off threatened hurt with lips curling malignantly from his puppy fangs, cringing under a blow, squalling his fear and his pain, and ready always for a treacherous slash if luck and safety favoured.

The wild-dog was maturer than Jerry, larger-bodied, and wiser in wickedness; but Jerry was blue-blooded, right-selected, and valiant. The

wild-dog had come out of a selection equally rigid; but it was a different sort of selection. The bush ancestors from whom he had descended had survived by being fear-selected. They had never voluntarily fought against odds. In the open they had never attacked save when the prey was weak or defenceless. In place of courage, they had lived by creeping, and slinking, and hiding from danger. They had been selected blindly by nature, in a cruel and ignoble environment, where the prize of living was to be gained, in the main, by the cunning of cowardice, and, on occasion, by desperateness of defence when in a corner.

But Jerry had been love-selected and courage-selected. His ancestors had been deliberately and consciously chosen by men, who, somewhere in the forgotten past, had taken the wild-dog and made it into the thing they visioned and admired and desired it to be. It must never fight like a rat in a corner, because it must never be rat-like and slink into a corner. Retreat must be unthinkable. The dogs in the past who retreated had been rejected by men. They had not become Jerry's ancestors. The dogs selected for Jerry's ancestors had been the brave ones, the up-standing and out-dashing ones, who flew into the face of danger and battled and died, but who never gave ground. And, since it is the way of kind to beget kind, Jerry was what Terrence was before him, and what Terrence's forefathers had been for a long way back.

So it was that Jerry, when he chanced upon the wild-dog stowed shrewdly away from the wind in the lee-corner made by the mainmast and the cabin

skylight, did not stop to consider whether the creature was bigger or fiercer than he. All he knew was that it was the ancient enemy--the wild-dog that had not come in to the fires of man. With a wild paean of joy that attracted Captain Van Horn's all-hearing ears and all-seeing eyes, Jerry sprang to the attack. The wild puppy gained his feet in full retreat with incredible swiftness, but was caught by the rush of Jerry's body and rolled over and over on the sloping deck. And as he rolled, and felt sharp teeth pricking him, he snapped and snarled, alternating snarls with whimperings and squallings of terror, pain, and abject humility.

And Jerry was a gentleman, which is to say he was a gentle dog. He had been so selected. Because the thing did not fight back, because it was abject and whining, because it was helpless under him, he abandoned the attack, disengaging himself from the top of the tangle into which he had slid in the lee scuppers. He did not think about it. He did it because he was so made. He stood up on the reeling deck, feeling excellently satisfied with the delicious, wild-doggy smell of hair in his mouth and consciousness, and in his ears and consciousness the praising cry of Captain Van Horn: "Good boy, Jerry! You're the goods, Jerry! Some dog, eh! Some dog!"

As he stalked away, it must be admitted that Jerry displayed pride in himself, his gait being a trifle stiff-legged, the cocking of his head back over his shoulder at the whining wild-dog having all the articulateness of: "Well, I guess I gave you enough this time. You'll keep out of my way after this."

Jerry continued the exploration of his new and tiny world that was never at rest, for ever lifting, heeling, and lunging on the rolling face of the sea. There were the Meringe return boys. He made it a point to identify all of them, receiving, while he did so, scowls and mutterings, and reciprocating with cocky bullyings and threatenings. Being so trained, he walked on his four legs superior to them, two-legged though they were; for he had moved and lived always under the aegis of the great two-legged and be-trousered god, Mister Haggin.

Then there were the strange return boys, from Pennduffryn and the Bay of a Thousand Ships. He insisted on knowing them all. He might need to know them in some future time. He did not think this. He merely equipped himself with knowledge of his environment without any awareness of provision or without bothering about the future.

In his own way of acquiring knowledge, he quickly discovered, just as on the plantation house-boys were different from field-boys, that on the Arangi there was a classification of boys different from the return boys. This was the boat's crew. The fifteen blacks who composed it were closer than the others to Captain Van Horn. They seemed more directly to belong to the Arangi and to him. They laboured under him at word of command, steering at the wheel, pulling and hauling on ropes, healing water upon the deck from overside and scrubbing with brooms.

Just as Jerry had learned from Mister Haggin that he must be more

tolerant of the house-boys than of the field-boys if they trespassed on the compound, so, from Captain Van Horn, he learned that he must be more tolerant of the boat's crew than of the return boys. He had less license with them, more license with the others. As long as Captain Van Horn did not want his boat's crew chased, it was Jerry's duty not to chase. On the other hand he never forgot that he was a white-god's dog. While he might not chase these particular blacks, he declined familiarity with them. He kept his eye on them. He had seen blacks as tolerated as these, lined up and whipped by Mister Haggin. They occupied an intermediate place in the scheme of things, and they were to be watched in case they did not keep their place. He accorded them room, but he did not accord them equality. At the best, he could be stand-offishly considerate of them.

He made thorough examination of the galley, a rude affair, open on the open deck, exposed to wind and rain and storm, a small stove that was not even a ship's stove, on which somehow, aided by strings and wedges, commingled with much smoke, two blacks managed to cook the food for the four-score persons on board.

Next, he was interested by a strange proceeding on the part of the boat's crew. Upright pipes, serving as stanchions, were being screwed into the top of the Arangi's rail so that they served to support three strands of barbed wire that ran completely around the vessel, being broken only at the gangway for a narrow space of fifteen inches. That this was a precaution against danger, Jerry sensed without a passing thought to it.

All his life, from his first impressions of life, had been passed in the heart of danger, ever-impending, from the blacks. In the plantation house at Meringe, always the several white men had looked askance at the many blacks who toiled for them and belonged to them. In the living-room, where were the eating-table, the billiard-table, and the phonograph, stood stands of rifles, and in each bedroom, beside each bed, ready to hand, had been revolvers and rifles. As well, Mister Haggin and Derby and Bob had always carried revolvers in their belts when they left the house to go among their blacks.

Jerry knew these noise-making things for what they were--instruments of destruction and death. He had seen live things destroyed by them, such as puarkas, goats, birds, and crocodiles. By means of such things the white-gods by their will crossed space without crossing it with their bodies, and destroyed live things. Now he, in order to damage anything, had to cross space with his body to get to it. He was different. He was limited. All impossible things were possible to the unlimited, two-legged white-gods. In a way, this ability of theirs to destroy across space was an elongation of claw and fang. Without pondering it, or being conscious of it, he accepted it as he accepted the rest of the mysterious world about him.

Once, even, had Jerry seen his Mister Haggin deal death at a distance in another noise-way. From the veranda he had seen him fling sticks of exploding dynamite into a screeching mass of blacks who had come raiding from the Beyond in the long war canoes, beaked and black, carved and

inlaid with mother-of-pearl, which they had left hauled up on the beach at the door of Meringe.

Many precautions by the white-gods had Jerry been aware of, and so, sensing it almost in intangible ways, as a matter of course he accepted this barbed-wire fence on the floating world as a mark of the persistence of danger. Disaster and death hovered close about, waiting the chance to leap upon life and drag it down. Life had to be very alive in order to live was the law Jerry had learned from the little of life he knew.

Watching the rigging up of the barbed wire, Jerry's next adventure was an encounter with Lerumie, the return boy from Meringe, who, only that morning, on the beach embarking, had been rolled by Biddy, along with his possessions into the surf. The encounter occurred on the starboard side of the skylight, alongside of which Lerumie was standing as he gazed into a cheap trade-mirror and combed his kinky hair with a hand-carved comb of wood.

Jerry, scarcely aware of Lerumie's presence, was trotting past on his way aft to where Borckman, the mate, was superintending the stringing of the barbed wire to the stanchions. And Lerumie, with a side-long look to see if the deed meditated for his foot was screened from observation, aimed a kick at the son of his four-legged enemy. His bare foot caught Jerry on the sensitive end of his recently bobbed tail, and Jerry, outraged, with the sense of sacrilege committed upon him, went instantly wild.

Captain Van Horn, standing aft on the port quarter, gauging the slant of the wind on the sails and the inadequate steering of the black at the wheel, had not seen Jerry because of the intervening skylight. But his eyes had taken in the shoulder movement of Lerumie that advertised the balancing on one foot while the other foot had kicked. And from what followed, he divined what had already occurred.

Jerry's outcry, as he sprawled, whirled, sprang, and slashed, was a veritable puppy-scream of indignation. He slashed ankle and foot as he received the second kick in mid-air; and, although he slid clear down the slope of deck into the scuppers, he left on the black skin the red tracery of his puppy-needle teeth. Still screaming his indignation, he clawed his way back up the steep wooden hill.

Lerumie, with another side-long look, knew that he was observed and that he dare not go to extremes. He fled along the skylight to escape down the companionway, but was caught by Jerry's sharp teeth in his calf. Jerry, attacking blindly, got in the way of the black's feet. A long, stumbling fall, accelerated by a sudden increase of wind in the sails, ensued, and Lerumie, vainly trying to catch his footing, fetched up against the three strands of barbed wire on the lee rail.

The deck-full of blacks shrieked their merriment, and Jerry, his rage undiminished, his immediate antagonist out of the battle, mistaking himself as the object of the laughter of the blacks, turned upon them, charging and slashing the many legs that fled before him. They dropped

down the cabin and forecastle companionways, ran out the bowsprit, and sprang into the rigging till they were perched everywhere in the air like monstrous birds. In the end, the deck belonged to Jerry, save for the boat's crew; for he had already learned to differentiate. Captain Van Horn was hilariously vocal of his praise, calling Jerry to him and giving him man-thumps of joyful admiration. Next, the captain turned to his many passengers and orated in beche-de-mer English.

"Hey! You fella boy! I make 'm big fella talk. This fella dog he belong along me. One fella boy hurt 'm that fella dog--my word!--me cross too much along that fella boy. I knock 'm seven bells outa that fella boy. You take 'm care leg belong you. I take 'm care dog belong me. Savve?"

And the passengers, still perched in the air, with gleaming black eyes and with querulerus chirpings one to another, accepted the white man's law. Even Lerumie, variously lacerated by the barbed wire, did not scowl nor mutter threats. Instead, and bringing a roar of laughter from his fellows and a twinkle into the skipper's eyes, he rubbed questing fingers over his scratches and murmured: "My word! Some big fella dog that fella!"

It was not that Jerry was unkindly. Like Biddy and Terrence, he was fierce and unafraid; which attributes were wrapped up in his heredity. And, like Biddy and Terrence, he delighted in nigger-chasing, which, in turn, was a matter of training. From his earliest puppyhood he had been

so trained. Niggers were niggers, but white men were gods, and it was the white-gods who had trained him to chase niggers and keep them in their proper lesser place in the world. All the world was held in the hollow of the white man's hands. The niggers--well, had not he seen them always compelled to remain in their lesser place? Had he not seen them, on occasion, triced up to the palm-trees of the Meringe compound and their backs lashed to ribbons by the white-gods? Small wonder that a high-born Irish terrier, in the arms of love of the white-god, should look at niggers through white-god's eyes, and act toward niggers in the way that earned the white-god's reward of praise.

It was a busy day for Jerry. Everything about the Arangi was new and strange, and so crowded was she that exciting things were continually happening. He had another encounter with the wild-dog, who treacherously attacked him in flank from ambuscade. Trade boxes belonging to the blacks had been irregularly piled so that a small space was left between two boxes in the lower tier. From this hole, as Jerry trotted past in response to a call from the skipper, the wild-dog sprang, scratched his sharp puppy-teeth into Jerry's yellow-velvet hide, and scuttled back into his lair.

Again Jerry's feelings were outraged. He could understand flank attack. Often he and Michael had played at that, although it had only been playing. But to retreat without fighting from a fight once started was alien to Jerry's ways and nature. With righteous wrath he charged into the hole after his enemy. But this was where the wild-dog fought to best

advantage--in a corner. When Jerry sprang up in the confined space he bumped his head on the box above, and the next moment felt the snarling impact of the other's teeth against his own teeth and jaw.

There was no getting at the wild-dog, no chance to rush against him whole heartedly, with generous full weight in the attack. All Jerry could do was to crawl and squirm and belly forward, and always he was met by a snarling mouthful of teeth. Even so, he would have got the wild-dog in the end, had not Borckman, in passing, reached in and dragged Jerry out by a hind-leg. Again came Captain Van Horn's call, and Jerry, obedient, trotted on aft.

A meal was being served on deck in the shade of the spanker, and Jerry, sitting between the two men received his share. Already he had made the generalization that of the two, the captain was the superior god, giving many orders that the mate obeyed. The mate, on the other hand, gave orders to the blacks, but never did he give orders to the captain. Furthermore, Jerry was developing a liking for the captain, so he snuggled close to him. When he put his nose into the captain's plate, he was gently reprimanded. But once, when he merely sniffed at the mate's steaming tea-cup, her received a snub on the nose from the mate's grimy forefinger. Also, the mate did not offer him food.

Captain Van Horn gave him, first of all, a pannikin of oatmeal mush, generously flooded with condensed cream and sweetened with a heaping spoonful of sugar. After that, on occasion, he gave him morsels of

buttered bread and slivers of fried fish from which he first carefully picked the tiny bones.

His beloved Mister Haggin had never fed him from the table at meal time, and Jerry was beside himself with the joy of this delightful experience. And, being young, he allowed his eagerness to take possession of him, so that soon he was unduly urging the captain for more pieces of fish and of bread and butter. Once, he even barked his demand. This put the idea into the captain's head, who began immediately to teach him to "speak."

At the end of five minutes he had learned to speak softly, and to speak only once--a low, mellow, bell-like bark of a single syllable. Also, in this first five minutes, he had learned to "sit down," as distinctly different from "lie down"; and that he must sit down whenever he spoke, and that he must speak without jumping or moving from the sitting position, and then must wait until the piece of food was passed to him.

Further, he had added three words to his vocabulary. For ever after, "speak" would mean to him "speak," and "sit down" would mean "sit down" and would not mean "lie down." The third addition to his vocabulary was "Skipper." That was the name he had heard the mate repeatedly call Captain Van Horn. And just as Jerry knew that when a human called "Michael," that the call referred to Michael and not to Biddy, or Terrence, or himself, so he knew that Skipper was the name of the two-legged white master of this new floating world.

"That isn't just a dog," was Van Horn's conclusion to the mate. "There's a sure enough human brain there behind those brown eyes. He's six months old. Any boy of six years would be an infant phenomenon to learn in five minutes all that he's just learned. Why, Gott-fer-dang, a dog's brain has to be like a man's. If he does things like a man, he's got to think like a man."