CHAPTER VII

At seven in the morning, when Skipper rolled him out of the blanket and got up, Jerry celebrated the new day by chasing the wild-dog back into his hole and by drawing a snicker from the blacks on deck, when, with a growl and a flash of teeth, he made Lerumie side-step half a dozen feet and yield the deck to him.

He shared breakfast with Skipper, who, instead of eating, washed down with a cup of coffee fifty grains of quinine wrapped in a cigarette paper, and who complained to the mate that he would have to get under the blankets and sweat out the fever that was attacking him. Despite his chill, and despite his teeth that were already beginning to chatter while the burning sun extracted the moisture in curling mist-wreaths from the deck planking, Van Horn cuddled Jerry in his arms and called him princeling, and prince, and a king, and a son of kings.

For Van Horn had often listened to the recitals of Jerry's pedigree by Tom Haggin, over Scotch-and-sodas, when it was too pestilentially hot to go to bed. And the pedigree was as royal-blooded as was possible for an Irish terrier to possess, whose breed, beginning with the ancient Irish wolf-hound, had been moulded and established by man in less than two generations of men.

There was Terrence the Magnificent--descended, as Van Horn remembered,

from the American-bred Milton Droleen, out of the Queen of County Antrim, Breda Muddler, which royal bitch, as every one who is familiar with the stud book knows, goes back as far as the almost mythical Spuds, with along the way no primrose dallyings with black-and-tan Killeney Boys and Welsh nondescripts. And did not Biddy trace to Erin, mother and star of the breed, through a long descendant out of Breda Mixer, herself an ancestress of Breda Muddler? Nor could be omitted from the purple record the later ancestress, Moya Doolen.

So Jerry knew the ecstasy of loving and of being loved in the arms of his love-god, although little he knew of such phrases as "king's son" and "son of kings," save that they connoted love for him in the same way that Lerumie's hissing noises connoted hate. One thing Jerry knew without knowing that he knew, namely, that in the few hours he had been with Skipper he loved him more than he had loved Derby and Bob, who, with the exception of Mister Haggin, were the only other white-gods he had ever known. He was not conscious of this. He merely loved, merely acted on the prompting of his heart, or head, or whatever organic or anatomical part of him that developed the mysterious, delicious, and insatiable hunger called "love."

Skipper went below. He went all unheeding of Jerry, who padded softly at his heels until the companionway was reached. Skipper was unheeding of Jerry because of the fever that wrenched his flesh and chilled his bones, that made his head seem to swell monstrously, that glazed the world to his swimming eyes and made him walk feebly and totteringly like a drunken

man or a man very aged. And Jerry sensed that something was wrong with Skipper.

Skipper, beginning the babblings of delirium which alternated with silent moments of control in order to get below and under blankets, descended the ladder-like stairs, and Jerry, all-yearning, controlled himself in silence and watched the slow descent with the hope that when Skipper reached the bottom he would raise his arms and lift him down. But Skipper was too far gone to remember that Jerry existed. He staggered, with wide-spread arms to keep from falling, along the cabin floor for'ard to the bunk in the tiny stateroom.

Jerry was truly of a kingly line. He wanted to call out and beg to be taken down. But he did not. He controlled himself, he knew not why, save that he was possessed by a nebulous awareness that Skipper must be considered as a god should be considered, and that this was no time to obtrude himself on Skipper. His heart was torn with desire, although he made no sound, and he continued only to yearn over the companion combing and to listen to the faint sounds of Skipper's progress for'ard.

But even kings and their descendants have their limitations, and at the end of a quarter of an hour Jerry was ripe to cease from his silence. With the going below of Skipper, evidently in great trouble, the light had gone out of the day for Jerry. He might have stalked the wild-dog, but no inducement lay there. Lerumie passed by unnoticed, although he knew he could bully him and make him give deck space. The myriad scents

of the land entered his keen nostrils, but he made no note of them. Not even the flopping, bellying mainsail overhead, as the Arangi rolled becalmed, could draw a glance of quizzical regard from him.

Just as it was tremblingly imperative that Jerry must suddenly squat down, point his nose at the zenith, and vocalize his heart-rending woe, an idea came to him. There is no explaining how this idea came. No more can it be explained than can a human explain why, at luncheon to-day, he selects green peas and rejects string beans, when only yesterday he elected to choose string beans and to reject green peas. No more can it be explained than can a human judge, sentencing a convicted criminal and imposing eight years imprisonment instead of the five or nine years that also at the same time floated upward in his brain, explain why he categorically determined on eight years as the just, adequate punishment. Since not even humans, who are almost half-gods, can fathom the mystery of the genesis of ideas and the dictates of choice, appearing in their consciousness as ideas, it is not to be expected of a more dog to know the why of the ideas that animate it to definite acts toward definite ends.

And so Jerry. Just as he must immediately howl, he was aware that the idea, an entirely different idea, was there, in the innermost centre of the quick-thinkingness of him, with all its compulsion. He obeyed the idea as a marionette obeys the strings, and started forthwith down the deck aft in quest of the mate.

He had an appeal to make to Borckman. Borckman was also a two-legged white-god. Easily could Borckman lift him down the precipitous ladder, which was to him, unaided, a taboo, the violation of which was pregnant with disaster. But Borckman had in him little of the heart of love, which is understanding. Also, Borckman was busy. Besides overseeing the continuous adjustment, by trimming of sails and orders to the helmsman, of the Arangi to her way on the sea, and overseeing the boat's crew at its task of washing deck and polishing brasswork, he was engaged in steadily nipping from a stolen bottle of his captain's whiskey which he had stowed away in the hollow between the two sacks of yams lashed on deck aft the mizzenmast.

Borckman was on his way for another nip, after having thickly threatened to knock seven bells and the ten commandments out of the black at the wheel for faulty steering, when Jerry appeared before him and blocked the way to his desire. But Jerry did not block him as he would have blocked Lerumie, for instance. There was no showing of teeth, no bristling of neck hair. Instead, Jerry was all placation and appeal, all softness of pleading in a body denied speech that nevertheless was articulate, from wagging tail and wriggling sides to flat-laid ears and eyes that almost spoke, to any human sensitive of understanding.

But Borckman saw in his way only a four-legged creature of the brute world, which, in his arrogant brutalness he esteemed more brute than himself. All the pretty picture of the soft puppy, instinct with communicativeness, bursting with tenderness of petition, was veiled to

his vision. What he saw was merely a four-legged animal to be thrust aside while he continued his lordly two-legged progress toward the bottle that could set maggots crawling in his brain and make him dream dreams that he was prince, not peasant, that he was a master of matter rather than a slave of matter.

And thrust aside Jerry was, by a rough and naked foot, as harsh and unfeeling in its impact as an inanimate breaking sea on a beach-jut of insensate rock. He half-sprawled on the slippery deck, regained his balance, and stood still and looked at the white-god who had treated him so cavalierly. The meanness and unfairness had brought from Jerry no snarling threat of retaliation, such as he would have offered Lerumie or any other black. Nor in his brain was any thought of retaliation. This was no Lerumie. This was a superior god, two-legged, white-skinned, like Skipper, like Mister Haggin and the couple of other superior gods he had known. Only did he know hurt, such as any child knows under the blow of a thoughtless or unloving mother.

In the hurt was mingled a resentment. He was keenly aware that there were two sorts of roughness. There was the kindly roughness of love, such as when Skipper gripped him by the jowl, shook him till his teeth rattled, and thrust him away with an unmistakable invitation to come back and be so shaken again. Such roughness, to Jerry, was heaven. In it was the intimacy of contact with a beloved god who in such manner elected to express a reciprocal love.

But this roughness of Borckman was different. It was the other kind of roughness in which resided no warm affection, no heart-touch of love. Jerry did not quite understand, but he sensed the difference and resented, without expressing in action, the wrongness and unfairness of it. So he stood, after regaining balance, and soberly regarded, in a vain effort to understand, the mate with a bottle-bottom inverted skyward, the mouth to his lips, the while his throat made gulping contractions and noises. And soberly he continued to regard the mate when he went aft and threatened to knock the "Song of Songs" and the rest of the Old Testament out of the black helmsman whose smile of teeth was as humbly gentle and placating as Jerry's had been when he made his appeal.

Leaving this god as a god unliked and not understood, Jerry sadly trotted back to the companionway and yearned his head over the combing in the direction in which he had seen Skipper disappear. What bit at his consciousness and was a painful incitement in it, was his desire to be with Skipper who was not right, and who was in trouble. He wanted Skipper. He wanted to be with him, first and sharply, because he loved him, and, second and dimly, because he might serve him. And, wanting Skipper, in his helplessness and youngness in experience of the world, he whimpered and cried his heart out across the companion combing, and was too clean and direct in his sorrow to be deflected by an outburst of anger against the niggers, on deck and below, who chuckled at him and derided him.

From the crest of the combing to the cabin floor was seven feet. He had, only a few hours before, climbed the precipitous stairway; but it was impossible, and he knew it, to descend the stairway. And yet, at the last, he dared it. So compulsive was the prod of his heart to gain to Skipper at any cost, so clear was his comprehension that he could not climb down the ladder head first, with no grippingness of legs and feet and muscles such as were possible in the ascent, that he did not attempt it. He launched outward and down, in one magnificent and love-heroic leap. He knew that he was violating a taboo of life, just as he knew he was violating a taboo if he sprang into Meringe Lagoon where swam the dreadful crocodiles. Great love is always capable of expressing itself in sacrifice and self-immolation. And only for love, and for no lesser reason, could Jerry have made the leap.

He struck on his side and head. The one impact knocked the breath out of him; the other stunned him. Even in his unconsciousness, lying on his side and quivering, he made rapid, spasmodic movements of his legs as if running for'ard to Skipper. The boys looked on and laughed, and when he no longer quivered and churned his legs they continued to laugh. Born in savagery, having lived in savagery all their lives and known naught else, their sense of humour was correspondingly savage. To them, the sight of a stunned and possibly dead puppy was a side-splitting, ludicrous event.

Not until the fourth minute ticked off did returning consciousness enable Jerry to crawl to his feet and with wide-spread legs and swimming eyes adjust himself to the Arangi's roll. Yet with the first glimmerings of

consciousness persisted the one idea that he must gain to Skipper. Blacks? In his anxiety and solicitude and love they did not count. He ignored the chuckling, grinning, girding black boys, who, but for the fact that he was under the terrible aegis of the big fella white marster, would have delighted to kill and eat the puppy who, in the process of training, was proving a most capable nigger-chaser. Without a turn of head or roll of eye, aristocratically positing their non-existingness to their faces, he trotted for'ard along the cabin floor and into the stateroom where Skipper babbled maniacally in the bunk.

Jerry, who had never had malaria, did not understand. But in his heart he knew great trouble in that Skipper was in trouble. Skipper did not recognize him, even when he sprang into the bunk, walked across Skipper's heaving chest, and licked the acrid sweat of fever from Skipper's face. Instead, Skipper's wildly-thrashing arms brushed him away and flung him violently against the side of the bunk.

This was roughness that was not love-roughness. Nor was it the roughness of Borckman spurning him away with his foot. It was part of Skipper's trouble. Jerry did not reason this conclusion. But, and to the point, he acted upon it as if he had reasoned it. In truth, through inadequacy of one of the most adequate languages in the world, it can only be said that Jerry sensed the new difference of this roughness.

He sat up, just out of range of one restless, beating arm, yearned to come closer and lick again the face of the god who knew him not, and who,

he knew, loved him well, and palpitatingly shared and suffered all Skipper's trouble.

"Eh, Clancey," Skipper babbled. "It's a fine job this day, and no better crew to clean up after the dubs of motormen. . . . Number three jack, Clancey. Get under the for'ard end." And, as the spectres of his nightmare metamorphosed: "Hush, darling, talking to your dad like that, telling him the combing of your sweet and golden hair. As if I couldn't, that have combed it these seven years--better than your mother, darling, better than your mother. I'm the one gold-medal prize-winner in the combing of his lovely daughter's lovely hair. . . . She's broken out! Give her the wheel aft there! Jib and fore-topsail halyards! Full and by, there! A good full! . . . Ah, she takes it like the beauty fairy boat that she is upon the sea. . . I'll just lift that--sure, the limit. Blackey, when you pay as much to see my cards as I'm going to pay to see yours, you're going to see some cards, believe me!"

And so the farrago of unrelated memories continued to rise vocal on Skipper's lips to the heave of his body and the beat of his arms, while Jerry, crouched against the side of the bunk mourned and mourned his grief and inability to be of help. All that was occurring was beyond him. He knew no more of poker hands than did he know of getting ships under way, of clearing up surface car wrecks in New York, or of combing the long yellow hair of a loved daughter in a Harlem flat.

"Both dead," Skipper said in a change of delirium. He said it quietly,

as if announcing the time of day, then wailed: "But, oh, the bonnie, bonnie braids of all the golden hair of her!"

He lay motionlessly for a space and sobbed out a breaking heart. This was Jerry's chance. He crept inside the arm that tossed, snuggled against Skipper's side, laid his head on Skipper's shoulder, his cool nose barely touching Skipper's cheek, and felt the arm curl about him and press him closer. The hand bent from the wrist and caressed him protectingly, and the warm contact of his velvet body put a change in Skipper's sick dreams, for he began to mutter in cold and bitter ominousness: "Any nigger that as much as bats an eye at that puppy. . ."