

CHAPTER VIII

When, in half an hour, Van Horn's sweat culminated in profusion, it marked the breaking of the malarial attack. Great physical relief was his, and the last mists of delirium ebbed from his brain. But he was left limply weak, and, after tossing off the blankets and recognizing Jerry, he fell into a refreshing natural sleep.

Not till two hours later did he awake and start to go on deck. Half-way up the companion, he deposited Jerry on deck and went back to the stateroom for a forgotten bottle of quinine. But he did not immediately return to Jerry. The long drawer under Borckman's bunk caught his eye. The wooden button that held it shut was gone, and it was far out and hanging at an angle that jammed it and prevented it from falling to the floor. The matter was serious. There was little doubt in his mind, had the drawer, in the midst of the squall of the previous night, fallen to the floor, that no Arangi and no soul of the eighty souls on board would have been left. For the drawer was filled with a heterogeneous mess of dynamite sticks, boxes of fulminating caps, coils of fuses, lead sinkers, iron tools, and many boxes of rifle, revolver and pistol cartridges. He sorted and arranged the varied contents, and with a screwdriver and a longer screw reattached the button.

In the meantime, Jerry was encountering new adventure not of the pleasantest. While waiting for Skipper to return, Jerry chanced to see

the wild-dog brazenly lying on deck a dozen feet from his lair in the trade-boxes. Instantly stiffly crouching, Jerry began to stalk. Success seemed assured, for the wild-dog, with closed eyes, was apparently asleep.

And at this moment the mate, two-legging it along the deck from for'ard in the direction of the bottle stored between the yam sacks, called, "Jerry," in a remarkably husky voice. Jerry flattened his filbert-shaped ears and wagged his tail in acknowledgment, but advertised his intention of continuing to stalk his enemy. And at sound of the mate's voice the wild-dog flung quick-opened eyes in Jerry's direction and flashed into his burrow, where he immediately turned around, thrust his head out with a show of teeth, and snarled triumphant defiance.

Baulked of his quarry by the inconsiderateness of the mate, Jerry trotted back to the head of the companion to wait for Skipper. But Borckman, whose brain was well a-crawl by virtue of the many nips, clung to a petty idea after the fashion of drunken men. Twice again, imperatively, he called Jerry to him, and twice again, with flattened ears of gentleness and wagging tail, Jerry good-naturedly expressed his disinclination. Next, he yearned his head over the coming and into the cabin after Skipper.

Borckman remembered his first idea and continued to the bottle, which he generously inverted skyward. But the second idea, petty as it was, persisted; and, after swaying and mumbling to himself for a time, after

unseeingly making believe to study the crisp fresh breeze that filled the Arangi's sails and slanted her deck, and, after sillily attempting on the helmsman to portray eagle-like vigilance in his drink-swimming eyes, he lurched amidships toward Jerry.

Jerry's first intimation of Borckman's arrival was a cruel and painful clutch on his flank and groin that made him cry out in pain and whirl around. Next, as the mate had seen Skipper do in play, Jerry had his jowls seized in a tooth-clattering shake that was absolutely different from the Skipper's rough love-shake. His head and body were shaken, his teeth clattered painfully, and with the roughest of roughness he was flung part way down the slippery slope of deck.

Now Jerry was a gentleman. All the soul of courtesy was in him, for equals and superiors. After all, even in an inferior like the wild-dog, he did not consciously press an advantage very far--never extremely far. In his stalking and rushing of the wild-dog, he had been more sound and fury than an overbearing bully. But with a superior, with a two-legged white-god like Borckman, there was more a demand upon his control, restraint, and inhibition of primitive promptings. He did not want to play with the mate a game that he ecstatically played with Skipper, because he had experienced no similar liking for the mate, two-legged white-god that he was.

And still Jerry was all gentleness. He came back in a feeble imitation rush of the whole-hearted rush that he had learned to make on Skipper. He

was, in truth, acting, play-acting, attempting to do what he had no heart-prompting to do. He made believe to play, and uttered simulated growls that failed of the verity of simulation.

He bobbed his tail good-naturedly and friendly, and growled ferociously and friendly; but the keenness of the drunkenness of the mate discerned the difference and aroused in him, vaguely, the intuition of difference, of play-acting, of cheating. Jerry was cheating--out of his heart of consideration. Borckman drunkenly recognized the cheating without crediting the heart of good behind it. On the instant he was antagonistic. Forgetting that he was only a brute, he posited that this was no more than a brute with which he strove to play in the genial comradely way that the Skipper played.

Red war was inevitable--not first on Jerry's part, but on Borckman's part. Borckman felt the abysmal urgings of the beast, as a beast, to prove himself master of this four-legged beast. Jerry felt his jowl and jaw clutched still more harshly and hardly, and, with increase of harshness and hardness, he was flung farther down the deck, which, on account of its growing slant due to heavier gusts of wind, had become a steep and slippery hill.

He came back, clawing frantically up the slope that gave him little footing; and he came back, no longer with poorly attempted simulation of ferocity, but impelled by the first flickerings of real ferocity. He did not know this. If he thought at all, he was under the impression that he

was playing the game as he had played it with Skipper. In short, he was taking an interest in the game, although a radically different interest from what he had taken with Skipper.

This time his teeth flashed quicker and with deeper intent at the jowl-clutching hand, and, missing, he was seized and flung down the smooth incline harder and farther than before. He was growing angry, as he clawed back, though he was not conscious of it. But the mate, being a man, albeit a drunken one, sensed the change in Jerry's attack ere Jerry dreamed there was any change in it. And not only did Borckman sense it, but it served as a spur to drive him back into primitive beastliness, and to fight to master this puppy as a primitive man, under dissimilar provocation, might have fought with the members of the first litter stolen from a wolf-den among the rocks.

True, Jerry could trace as far back. His ancient ancestors had been Irish wolf-hounds, and, long before that, the ancestors of the wolf-hounds had been wolves. The note in Jerry's growls changed. The unforgotten and ineffaceable past strummed the fibres of his throat. His teeth flashed with fierce intent, in the desire of sinking as deep in the man's hand as passion could drive. For Jerry by this time was all passion. He had leaped back into the dark stark rawness of the early world almost as swiftly as had Borckman. And this time his teeth scored, ripping the tender and sensitive and flesh of all the inside of the first and second joints of Borckman's right hand. Jerry's teeth were needles that stung, and Borckman, gaining the grasp on Jerry's jaw, flung him

away and down so that almost he hit the Arangi's tiny-rail ere his clawing feet stopped him.

And Van Horn, having finished his rearrangement and repair of the explosive-filled drawer under the mate's bunk, climbed up the companion steps, saw the battle, paused, and quietly looked on.

But he looked across a million years, at two mad creatures who had slipped the leach of the generations and who were back in the darkness of spawning life ere dawning intelligence had modified the chemistry of such life to softness of consideration. What stirred in the brain crypts of Borckman's heredity, stirred in the brain-crypts of Jerry's heredity. Time had gone backward for both. All the endeavour and achievement of the ten thousand generations was not, and, as wolf-dog and wild-man, the combat was between Jerry and the mate. Neither saw Van Horn, who was inside the companionway hatch, his eyes level with the combing.

To Jerry, Borckman was now no more a god than was he himself a mere, smooth-coated Irish terrier. Both had forgotten the million years stamped into their heredity more feebly, less eraseably, than what had been stamped in prior to the million years. Jerry did not know drunkenness, but he did know unfairness; and it was with raging indignation that he knew it. Borckman fumbled his next counter to Jerry's attack, missed, and had both hands slashed in quick succession ere he managed to send the puppy sliding.

And still Jerry came back. As any screaming creature of the jungle, he hysterically squalled his indignation. But he made no whimper. Nor did he wince or cringe to the blows. He bored straight in, striving, without avoiding a blow, to beat and meet the blow with his teeth. So hard was he flung down the last time that his side smashed painfully against the rail, and Van Horn cried out:

"Cut that out, Borckman! Leave the puppy alone!"

The mate turned in the startle of surprise at being observed. The sharp, authoritative words of Van Horn were a call across the million years. Borckman's anger-convulsed face ludicrously attempted a sheepish, deprecating grin, and he was just mumbling, "We was only playing," when Jerry arrived back, leaped in the air, and sank his teeth into the offending hand.

Borckman immediately and insanely went back across the million years. An attempted kick got his ankle scored for his pains. He gibbered his own rage and hurt, and, stooping, dealt Jerry a tremendous blow alongside the head and neck. Being in mid-leap when he received the blow Jerry was twistingly somersaulted sidewise before he struck the deck on his back. As swiftly as he could scramble to footing and charge, he returned to the attack, but was checked by Skipper's:

"Jerry! Stop it! Come here!"

He obeyed, but only by prodigious effort, his neck bristling and his lips writhing clear of his teeth as he passed the mate. For the first time there was a whimper in his throat; but it was not the whimper of fear, nor of pain, but of outrage, and of desire to continue the battle which he struggled to control at Skipper's behest.

Stepping out on deck, Skipper picked him up and patted and soothed him the while he expressed his mind to the mate.

"Borckman, you ought to be ashamed. You ought to be shot or have your block knocked off for this. A puppy, a little puppy scarcely weaned. For two cents I'd give you what-for myself. The idea of it. A little puppy, a weanling little puppy. Glad your hands are ripped. You deserved it. Hope you get blood-poisoning in them. Besides, you're drunk. Go below and turn in, and don't you dare come on deck until you're sober. Savve?"

And Jerry, far-journeyer across life and across the history of all life that goes to make the world, strugglingly mastering the abysmal slime of the prehistoric with the love that had come into existence and had become warp and woof of him in far later time, his wrath of ancientness still faintly reverberating in his throat like the rumblings of a passing thunder-storm, knew, in the wide warm ways of feeling, the augustness and righteousness of Skipper. Skipper was in truth a god who did right, who was fair, who protected, and who imperiously commanded this other and lesser god that slunk away before his anger.