

CHAPTER XX

A week Jerry spent in the bush, deterred always from penetrating to the mountains by the bushmen who ever guarded the runways. And it would have gone hard with him in the matter of food, had he not, on the second day, encountered a lone small pig, evidently lost from its litter. It was his first hunting adventure for a living, and it prevented him from travelling farther, for, true to his instinct, he remained by his kill until it was nearly devoured.

True, he ranged widely about the neighbourhood, finding no other food he could capture. But always, until it was gone, he returned to the slain pig. Yet he was not happy in his freedom. He was too domesticated, too civilized. Too many thousands of years had elapsed since his ancestors had run freely wild. He was lonely. He could not get along without man. Too long had he, and the generations before him, lived in intimate relationship with the two-legged gods. Too long had his kind loved man, served him for love, endured for love, died for love, and, in return, been partly appreciated, less understood, and roughly loved.

So great was Jerry's loneliness that even a two-legged black-god was desirable, since white-gods had long since faded into the limbo of the past. For all he might have known, had he been capable of conjecturing, the only white-gods in existence had perished. Acting on the assumption that a black-god was better than no god, when he had quite finished the

little pig, he deflected his course to the left, down-hill, toward the sea. He did this, again without reasoning, merely because, in the subtle processes of his brain, experience worked. His experience had been to live always close by the sea; humans he had always encountered close by the sea; and down-hill had invariably led to the sea.

He came out upon the shore of the reef-sheltered lagoon where ruined grass houses told him men had lived. The jungle ran riot through the place. Six-inch trees, throated with rotten remnants of thatched roofs through which they had aspired toward the sun, rose about him. Quick-growing trees had shadowed the kingposts so that the idols and totems, seated in carved shark jaws, grinned greenly and monstrously at the futility of man through a rime of moss and mottled fungus. A poor little sea-wall, never much at its best, sprawled in ruin from the coconut roots to the placid sea. Bananas, plantains, and breadfruit lay rotting on the ground. Bones lay about, human bones, and Jerry nosed them out, knowing them for what they were, emblems of the nothingness of life. Skulls he did not encounter, for the skulls that belonged to the scattered bones ornamented the devil devil houses in the upland bush villages.

The salt tang of the sea gladdened his nostrils, and he snorted with the pleasure of the stench of the mangrove swamp. But, another Crusoe chancing upon the footprint of another man Friday, his nose, not his eyes, shocked him electrically alert as he smelled the fresh contact of a living man's foot with the ground. It was a nigger's foot, but it was

alive, it was immediate; and, as he traced it a score of yards, he came upon another foot-scent, indubitably a white man's.

Had there been an onlooker, he would have thought Jerry had gone suddenly mad. He rushed frantically about, turning and twisting his course, now his nose to the ground, now up in the air, whining as frantically as he rushed, leaping abruptly at right angles as new scents reached him, scurrying here and there and everywhere as if in a game of tag with some invisible playfellow.

But he was reading the full report which many men had written on the ground. A white man had been there, he learned, and a number of blacks. Here a black had climbed a coconut tree and cast down the nuts. There a banana tree had been despoiled of its clustered fruit; and, beyond, it was evident that a similar event had happened to a breadfruit tree. One thing, however, puzzled him--a scent new to him that was neither black man's nor white man's. Had he had the necessary knowledge and the wit of eye-observance, he would have noted that the footprint was smaller than a man's and that the toeprints were different from a Mary's in that they were close together and did not press deeply into the earth. What bothered him in his smelling was his ignorance of talcum powder. Pungent it was in his nostrils, but never, since first he had smelled out the footprints of man, had he encountered such a scent. And with this were combined other and fainter scents that were equally strange to him.

Not long did he interest himself in such mystery. A white man's

footprints he had smelled, and through the maze of all the other prints he followed the one print down through a breach of sea-wall to the sea-pounded coral sand lapped by the sea. Here the latest freshness of many feet drew together where the nose of a boat had rested on the beach and where men had disembarked and embarked again. He smelled up all the story, and, his forelegs in the water till it touched his shoulders, he gazed out across the lagoon where the disappearing trail was lost to his nose.

Had he been half an hour sooner he would have seen a boat, without oars, gasoline-propelled, shooting across the quiet water. What he did see was an Arangi. True, it was far larger than the Arangi he had known, but it was white, it was long, it had masts, and it floated on the surface of the sea. It had three masts, sky-lofty and all of a size; but his observation was not trained to note the difference between them and the one long and the one short mast of the Arangi. The one floating world he had known was the white-painted Arangi. And, since, without a quiver of doubt, this was the Arangi, then, on board, would be his beloved Skipper. If Arangis could resurrect, then could Skippers resurrect, and in utter faith that the head of nothingness he had last seen on Bashti's knees he would find again rejoined to its body and its two legs on the deck of the white-painted floating world, he waded out to his depth, and, swimming dared the sea.

He greatly dared, for in venturing the water he broke one of the greatest and earliest taboos he had learned. In his vocabulary was no word for

"crocodile"; yet in his thought, as potent as any utterable word, was an image of dreadful import--an image of a log awash that was not a log and that was alive, that could swim upon the surface, under the surface, and haul out across the dry land, that was huge-toothed, mighty-mawed, and certain death to a swimming dog.

But he continued the breaking of the taboo without fear. Unlike a man who can be simultaneously conscious of two states of mind, and who, swimming, would have known both the fear and the high courage with which he overrode the fear, Jerry, as he swam, knew only one state of mind, which was that he was swimming to the Arangi and to Skipper. At the moment preceding the first stroke of his paws in the water out of his depth, he had known all the terribleness of the taboo he deliberately broke. But, launched out, the decision made, the line of least resistance taken, he knew, single-thoughted, single-hearted, only that he was going to Skipper.

Little practised as he was in swimming, he swam with all his strength, whimpering in a sort of chant his eager love for Skipper who indubitably must be aboard the white yacht half a mile away. His little song of love, fraught with keenness of anxiety, came to the ears of a man and woman lounging in deck-chairs under the awning; and it was the quick-eyed woman who first saw the golden head of Jerry and cried out what she saw.

"Lower a boat, Husband-Man," she commanded. "It's a little dog. He mustn't drown."

"Dogs don't drown that easily," was "Husband-Man's" reply. "He'll make it all right. But what under the sun a dog's doing out here . . ." He lifted his marine glasses to his eyes and stared a moment. "And a white man's dog at that!"

Jerry beat the water with his paws and moved steadily along, straining his eyes at the growing yacht until suddenly warned by a sensing of immediate danger. The taboo smote him. This that moved toward him was the log awash that was not a log but a live thing of peril. Part of it he saw above the surface moving sluggishly, and ere that projecting part sank, he had an awareness that somehow it was different from a log awash.

Next, something brushed past him, and he encountered it with a snarl and a splashing of his forepaws. He was half-whirled about in the vortex of the thing's passage caused by the alarmed flirt of its tail. Shark it was, and not crocodile, and not so timidly would it have sheered clear but for the fact that it was fairly full with a recent feed of a huge sea turtle too feeble with age to escape.

Although he could not see it, Jerry sensed that the thing, the instrument of nothingness, lurked about him. Nor did he see the dorsal fin break surface and approach him from the rear. From the yacht he heard rifle-shots in quick succession. From the rear a panic splash came to his ears. That was all. The peril passed and was forgotten. Nor did he connect the rifle-shots with the passing of the peril. He did not know,

and he was never to know, that one, known to men as Harley Kennan, but known as "Husband-Man" by the woman he called "Wife-Woman," who owned the three-topmast schooner yacht Ariel, had saved his life by sending a thirty-thirty Marlin bullet through the base of a shark's fin.

But Jerry was to know Harley Kennan, and quickly, for it was Harley Kennan, a bowline around his body under his arm-pits, lowered by a couple of seamen down the generous freeboard of the Ariel, who gathered in by the nape of the neck the smooth-coated Irish terrier that, treading water perpendicularly, had no eyes for him so eagerly did he gaze at the line of faces along the rail in quest of the one face.

No pause for thanks did he make when he was dropped down upon the deck. Instead, shaking himself instinctively as he ran, he scurried along the deck for Skipper. The man and his wife laughed at the spectacle.

"He acts as if he were demented with delight at being rescued," Mrs. Kennan observed.

And Mr. Kennan: "It's not that. He must have a screw loose somewhere. Perhaps he's one of those creatures who've slipped the ratchet off the motion cog. Maybe he can't stop running till he runs down."

In the meantime Jerry continued to run, up port side and down starboard side, from stern to bow and back again, wagging his stump tail and laughing friendliness to the many two-legged gods he encountered. Had he

been able to think to such abstraction he would have been astounded at the number of white-gods. Thirty there were at least of them, not counting other gods that were neither black nor white, but that still, two-legged, upright and garmented, were beyond all peradventure gods. Likewise, had he been capable of such generalization, he would have decided that the white-gods had not yet all of them passed into the nothingness. As it was, he realized all this without being aware that he realized it.

But there was no Skipper. He sniffed down the forecastle hatch, sniffed into the galley where two Chinese cooks jabbered unintelligibly to him, sniffed down the cabin companionway, sniffed down the engine-room skylight and for the first time knew gasoline and engine oil; but sniff as he would, wherever he ran, no scent did he catch of Skipper.

Aft, at the wheel, he would have sat down and howled his heartbreak of disappointment, had not a white-god, evidently of command, in gold-decorated white duck cap and uniform, spoken to him. Instantly, always a gentleman, Jerry smiled with flattened ears of courtesy, wagged his tail, and approached. The hand of this high god had almost caressed his head when the woman's voice came down the deck in speech that Jerry did not understand. The words and terms of it were beyond him. But he sensed power of command in it, which was verified by the quick withdrawal of the hand of the god in white and gold who had almost caressed him. This god, stiffened electrically and pointed Jerry along the deck, and, with mouth encouragements and urgings the import of which Jerry could

only guess, directed him toward the one who so commanded by saying:

"Send him, please, along to me, Captain Winters."

Jerry wriggled his body in delight of obeying, and would loyally have presented his head to her outreaching caress of hand, had not the strangeness and difference of her deterred him. He broke off in mid-approach and with a show of teeth snarled himself back and away from the windblown skirt of her. The only human females he had known were naked Marys. This skirt, flapping in the wind like a sail, reminded him of the menacing mainsail of the Arangi when it had jarred and crashed and swooped above his head. The noises her mouth made were gentle and ingratiating, but the fearsome skirt still flapped in the breeze.

"You ridiculous dog!" she laughed. "I'm not going to bite you."

But her husband thrust out a rough, sure hand and drew Jerry in to him. And Jerry wriggled in ecstasy under the god's caress, kissing the hand with a red flicker of tongue. Next, Harley Kennan directed him toward the woman sitting up in the deck-chair and bending forward, with hovering hands of greeting. Jerry obeyed. He advanced with flattened ears and laughing mouth: but, just ere she could touch him, the wind fluttered the skirt again and he backed away with a snarl.

"It's not you that he's afraid of, Villa," he said. "But of your skirt. Perhaps he's never seen a skirt before."

"You mean," Villa Kennan challenged, "that these head-hunting cannibals ashore here keep records of pedigrees and maintain kennels; for surely this absurd adventurer of a dog is as proper an Irish terrier as the Ariel is an Oregon-pine-planked schooner."

Harley Kennan laughed in acknowledgment. Villa Kennan laughed too; and Jerry knew that these were a pair of happy gods, and himself laughed with them.

Of his own initiative, he approached the lady god again, attracted by the talcum powder and other minor fragrances he had already identified as the strange scents encountered on the beach. But the unfortunate trade wind again fluttered her skirt, and again he backed away--not so far, this time, with much less of a bristle of his neck and shoulder hair, and with no more of a snarl than a mere half-baring of his fangs.

"He's afraid of your skirt," Harley insisted. "Look at him! He wants to come to you, but the skirt keeps him away. Tuck it under you so that it won't flutter, and see what happens."

Villa Kennan carried out the suggestion, and Jerry came circumspectly, bent his head to her hand and writhed his back under it, the while he sniffed her feet, stocking-clad and shoe-covered, and knew them as the feet which had trod uncovered the ruined ways of the village ashore.

"No doubt of it," Harley agreed. "He's white-man selected, white-man bred and born. He has a history. He knows adventure from the ground-roots up. If he could tell his story, we'd sit listening entranced for days. Depend on it, he's not known blacks all his life. Let's try him on Johnny."

Johnny, whom Kennan beckoned up to him, was a loan from the Resident Commissioner of the British Solomons at Tulagi, who had come along as pilot and guide to Kennan rather than as philosopher and friend. Johnny approached grinning, and Jerry's demeanour immediately changed. His body stiffened under Villa Kennan's hand as he drew away from her and stalked stiff-legged to the black. Jerry's ears did not flatten, nor did he laugh fellowship with his mouth, as he inspected Johnny and smelt his calves for future reference. Cavalier he was to the extreme, and, after the briefest of inspection, he turned back to Villa Kennan.

"What did I say?" her husband exulted. "He knows the colour line. He's a white man's dog that has been trained to it."

"My word," spoke up Johnny. "Me know 'm that fella dog. Me know 'm papa and mamma belong along him. Big fella white marster Mister Haggin stop along Meringe, mamma and papa stop along him that fella place."

Harley Kennan uttered a sharp exclamation.

"Of course," he cried. "The Commissioner told me all about it. The

Arangi, that the Somo people captured, sailed last from Meringe Plantation. Johnny recognizes the dog as the same breed as the pair Haggin, of Meringe, must possess. But that was a long time ago. He must have been a little puppy. Of course he's a white man's dog."

"And yet you've overlooked the crowning proof of it," Villa Kennan teased. "The dog carries the evidence around with him."

Harley looked Jerry over carefully.

"Indisputable evidence," she insisted.

After another prolonged scrutiny, Kennan shook his head.

"Blamed if I can see anything so indisputable as to leave conjecture out."

"The tail," his wife gurgled. "Surely the natives do not bob the tails of their dogs.--Do they, Johnny? Do black man stop along Malaita chop 'm off tail along dog."

"No chop 'm off," Johnny agreed. "Mister Haggin along Meringe he chop 'm off. My word, he chop 'm that fella tail, you bet."

"Then he's the sole survivor of the Arangi," Villa Kennan concluded.

"Don't you agree, Mr. Sherlock Holmes Kennan?"

"I salute you, Mrs. S. Holmes," her husband acknowledged gallantly. "And all that remains is for you to lead me directly to the head of La Perouse himself. The sailing directions record that he left it somewhere in these islands."

Little did they guess that Jerry had lived on intimate terms with one Bashti, not many miles away along the shore, who, in Somo, at that very moment, sat in his grass house pondering over a head on his withered knees that had once been the head of the great navigator, the history of which had been forgotten by the sons of the chief who had taken it.