

CHAPTER XXII

Northward, along the leeward coast of Malaita, the Ariel worked her leisurely way, threading the colour-riotous lagoon that lay between the shore-reefs and outer-reefs, daring passages so narrow and coral-patched that Captain Winters averred each day added a thousand grey hairs to his head, and dropping anchor off every walled inlet of the outer reef and every mangrove swamp of the mainland that looked promising of cannibal life. For Harley and Villa Kennan were in no hurry. So long as the way was interesting, they dared not how long it proved from anywhere to anywhere.

During this time Jerry learned a new name for himself--or, rather, an entire series of names for himself. This was because of an aversion on Harley Kennan's part against renaming a named thing.

"A name he must have had," he argued to Villa. "Haggin must have named him before he sailed on the Arangi. Therefore, nameless he must be until we get back to Tulagi and find out his real name."

"What's in a name?" Villa had begun to tease.

"Everything," her husband retorted. "Think of yourself, shipwrecked, called by your rescuers 'Mrs. Riggs,' or 'Mademoiselle de Maupin,' or just plain 'Topsy.' And think of me being called 'Benedict Arnold,' or "

Judas,' or . . . or . . . 'Haman.' No, keep him nameless, until we find out his original name."

"Must call him something," she objected. "Can't think of him without thinking something."

"Then call him many names, but never the same name twice. Call him 'Dog' to-day, and 'Mister Dog' to-morrow, and the next day something else."

So it was, more by tone and emphasis and context of situation than by anything else, that Jerry came hazily to identify himself with names such as: Dog, Mister Dog, Adventurer, Strong Useful One, Sing Song Silly, Noname, and Quivering Love-Heart. These were a few of the many names lavished on him by Villa. Harley, in turn, addressed him as: Man-Dog, Incorruptible One, Brass Tacks, Then Some, Sin of Gold, South Sea Satrap, Nimrod, Young Nick, and Lion-Slayer. In brief, the man and woman competed with each other to name him most without naming him ever the same. And Jerry, less by sound and syllable than by what of their hearts vibrated in their throats, soon learned to know himself by any name they chose to address to him. He no longer thought of himself as Jerry, but, instead, as any sound that sounded nice or was love-sounded.

His great disappointment (if "disappointment" may be considered to describe an unconsciousness of failure to realize the expected) was in the matter of language. No one on board, not even Harley and Villa, talked Nalasu's talk. All Jerry's large vocabulary, all his proficiency

in the use of it, which would have set him apart as a marvel beyond all other dogs in the mastery of speech, was wasted on those of the Ariel. They did not speak, much less guess, the existence of the whiff-whuff shorthand language which Nalasu had taught him, and which, Nalasu dead, Jerry alone knew of all living creatures in the world.

In vain Jerry tried it on the lady-god. Sitting squatted on his haunches, his head bowed forward and held between her hands, he would talk and talk and elicit never a responsive word from her. With tiny whines and thin whimperings, with whiffs and whuffs and growly sorts of noises down in his throat, he would try to tell her somewhat of his tale. She was all meltingness of sympathy; she would hold her ear so near to the articulate mouth of him as almost to drown him in the flowing fragrance of her hair; and yet her brain told her nothing of what he uttered, although her heart surely sensed his intent.

"Bless me, Husband-Man!" she would cry out. "The Dog is talking. I know he is talking. He is telling me all about himself. The story of his life is mine, could I but understand. It's right here pouring into my miserable inadequate ears, only I can't catch it."

Harley was sceptical, but her woman's intuition guessed aright.

"I know it!" she would assure her husband. "I tell you he could tell the tale of all his adventures if only we had understanding. No other dog has ever talked this way to me. There's a tale there. I feel its

touches. Sometimes almost do I know he is telling of joy, of love, of high elation, and combat. Again, it is indignation, hurt of outrage, despair and sadness."

"Naturally," Harley agreed quietly. "A white man's dog, adrift among the anthropophagi of Malaita, would experience all such sensations and, just as naturally, a white man's woman, a Wife-Woman, a dear, delightful Villa Kennan woman, can of herself imagine such a dog's experiences and deem his silly noises a recital of them, failing to recognize them as projections of her own delicious, sensitive, sympathetic self. The song of the sea from the lips of the shell--Pshaw! The song oneself makes of the sea and puts into the shell."

"Just the same--"

"Always the same," he gallantly cut her off. "Always right, especially when most wrong. Not in navigation, of course, nor in affairs such as the multiplication table, where the brass tacks of reality stud the way of one's ship among the rocks and shoals of the sea; but right, truth beyond truth to truth higher than truth, namely, intuitional truth."

"Now you are laughing at me with your superior man-wisdom," she retorted.

"But I know--" she paused for the strength of words she needed, and words forsook her, so that her quick sweeping gesture of hand-touch to heart named authority that overrode all speech.

"We agree--I salute," he laughed gaily. "It was just precisely what I was saying. Our hearts can talk our heads down almost any time, and, best all, our hearts are always right despite the statistic that they are mostly wrong."

Harley Kennan did not believe, and never did believe, his wife's report of the tales Jerry told. And through all his days to the last one of them, he considered the whole matter a pleasant fancy, all poesy of sentiment, on Villa's part.

But Jerry, four-legged, smooth-coated, Irish terrier that he was, had the gift of tongues. If he could not teach languages, at least he could learn languages. Without effort, and quickly, practically with no teaching, he began picking up the language of the Ariel. Unfortunately, it was not a whiff-whuff, dog-possible language such as Nalasu had invented. While Jerry came to understand much that was spoken on the Ariel, he could speak none of it. Three names, at least, he had for the lady-god: "Villa," "Wife-Woman," "Missis Kennan," for so he heard her variously called. But he could not so call her. This was god-language entire, which only gods could talk. It was unlike the language of Nalasu's devising, which had been a compromise between god-talk and dog-talk, so that a god and a dog could talk in the common medium.

In the same way he learned many names for the one-man god: "Mister Kennan," "Harley," "Captain Kennan," and "Skipper." Only in the intimacy of the three of them alone did Jerry hear him called: "Husband-Man," "My

Man," "Patient One," "Dear Man," "Lover," and "This Woman's Delight." But in no way could Jerry utter these names in address of the one-man nor the many names in address of the one-woman. Yet on a quiet night with no wind among the trees, often and often had he whispered to Nalasu, by whiff-whuff of name, from a hundred feet away.

One day, bending over him, her hair (drying from a salt-water swim) flying about him, the one-woman, her two hands holding his head and jowls so that his ribbon of kissing tongue just missed her nose in the empty air, sang to him: "Don't know what to call him, but he's mighty lak' a rose!"

On another day she repeated this, at the same time singing most of the song to him softly in his ear. In the midst of it Jerry surprised her. Equally true might be the statement that he surprised himself. Never, had he consciously done such a thing before. And he did it without volition. He never intended to do it. For that matter, the very thing he did was what mastered him into doing it. No more than could he refrain from shaking the water from his back after a swim, or from kicking in his sleep when his feet were tickled, could he have avoided doing this imperative thing.

As her voice, in the song, made soft vibrations in his ears, it seemed to him that she grew dim and vague before him, and that somehow, under the soft searching prod of her song, he was elsewhere. So much was he elsewhere that he did the surprising thing. He sat down abruptly,

almost cataleptically, drew his head away from the clutch of her hands and out of the entanglement of her hair, and, his nose thrust upward at an angle of forty-five degrees, he began to quiver and to breathe audibly in rhythm to the rhythm of her singing. With a quick jerk, cataleptically, his nose pointed to the zenith, his mouth opened, and a flood of sound poured forth, running swiftly upward in crescendo and slowly falling as it died away.

This howl was the beginning, and it led to the calling him "Sing Song Silly." For Villa Kennan was quick to seize upon the howling her singing induced and to develop it. Never did he hang back when she sat down, extended her welcoming hands to him, and invited: "Come on, Sing Song Silly." He would come to her, sit down with the loved fragrance of her hair in his nostrils, lay the side of his head against hers, point his nose past her ear, and almost immediately follow her when she began her low singing. Minor strains were especially provocative in getting him started, and, once started, he would sing with her as long as she wished.

Singing it truly was. Apt in all ways of speech, he quickly learned to soften and subdue his howl till it was mellow and golden. Even could he manage it to die away almost to a whisper, and to rise and fall, accelerate and retard, in obedience to her own voice and in accord with it.

Jerry enjoyed the singing much in the same way the opium eater enjoys his dreams. For dream he did, vaguely and indistinctly, eyes wide open and

awake, the lady-god's hair in a faint-scented cloud about him, her voice mourning with his, his consciousness drowning in the dreams of otherwhereness that came to him of the singing and that was the singing. Memories of pain were his, but of pain so long forgotten that it was no longer pain. Rather did it permeate him with a delicious sadness, and lift him away and out of the Ariel (lying at anchor in some coral lagoon) to that unreal place of Otherwhere.

For visions were his at such times. In the cold bleakness of night, it would seem he sat on a bare hill and raised his howl to the stars, while out of the dark, from far away, would drift to him an answering howl. And other howls, near and far, would drift along until the night was vocal with his kind. His kind it was. Without knowing it he knew it, this camaraderie of the land of Otherwhere.

Nalasu, in teaching him the whiff-whuff language, deliberately had gone into the intelligence of him; but Villa, unwitting of what she was doing, went into the heart of him, and into the heart of his heredity, touching the profoundest chords of ancient memories and making them respond.

As instance: dim shapes and shadowy forms would sometimes appear to him out of the night, and as they flitted spectrally past he would hear, as in a dream, the hunting cries of the pack; and, as his pulse quickened, his own hunting instinct would rouse until his controlled soft-howling in the song broke into eager whinings. His head would lower out of the entanglement of the woman's hair; his feet would begin making restless,

spasmodic movements as if running; and Presto, in a flash, he would be out and away, across the face of time, out of reality and into the dream, himself running in the midst of those shadowy forms in the hunting fellowship of the pack.

And as men have ever desired the dust of the poppy and the juice of the hemp, so Jerry desired the joys that were his when Villa Kennan opened her arms to him, embraced him with her hair, and sang him across time and space into the dream of his ancient kind.

Not always, however, were such experiences his when they sang together. Usually, unaccompanied by visions, he knew no more than vaguenesses of sensations, sadly sweet, ghosts of memories that they were. At other times, incited by such sadness, images of Skipper and Mister Haggin would throng his mind; images, too, of Terrence, and Bidy, and Michael, and the rest of the long-vanished life at Meringe Plantation.

"My dear," Harley said to Villa at the conclusion of one such singing, "it's fortunate for him that you are not an animal trainer, or, rather, I suppose, it would be better called 'trained animal show-woman'; for you'd be topping the bill in all the music-halls and vaudeville houses of the world."

"If I did," she replied, "I know he'd just love to do it with me--"

"Which would make it a very unusual turn," Harley caught her up.

"You mean . . .?"

"That in about one turn in a hundred does the animal love its work or is the animal loved by its trainer."

"I thought all the cruelty had been done away with long ago," she contended.

"So the audience thinks, and the audience is ninety-nine times wrong."

Villa heaved a great sigh of renunciation as she said, "Then I suppose I must abandon such promising and lucrative career right now in the very moment you have discovered it for me. Just the same the billboards would look splendid with my name in the hugest letters--"

"Villa Kennan the Thrush-throated Songstress, and Sing Song Silly the Irish-Terrier Tenor," her husband pictured the head-lines for her.

And with dancing eyes and lolling tongue Jerry joined in the laughter, not because he knew what it was about, but because it tokened they were happy and his love prompted him to be happy with them.

For Jerry had found, and in the uttermost, what his nature craved--the love of a god. Recognizing the duality of their lordship over the Ariel, he loved the pair of them; yet, somehow, perhaps because she had

penetrated deepest into his heart with her magic voice that transported him to the land of Otherwhere, he loved the lady-god beyond all love he had ever known, not even excluding his love for Skipper.