

CHAPTER V

For a number of days Michael saw only Steward and Kwaque. This was because he was confined to the steward's stateroom. Nobody else knew that he was on board, and Dag Daughtry, thoroughly aware that he had stolen a white man's dog, hoped to keep his presence secret and smuggle him ashore when the Makambo docked in Sydney.

Quickly the steward learned Michael's pre-eminent teachableness. In the course of his careful feeding of him, he gave him an occasional chicken bone. Two lessons, which would scarcely be called lessons, since both of them occurred within five minutes and each was not over half a minute in duration, sufficed to teach Michael that only on the floor of the room in the corner nearest the door could he chew chicken bones. Thereafter, without prompting, as a matter of course when handed a bone, he carried it to the corner.

And why not? He had the wit to grasp what Steward desired of him; he had the heart that made it a happiness for him to serve. Steward was a god who was kind, who loved him with voice and lip, who loved him with touch of hand, rub of nose, or enfolding arm. As all service flourishes in the soil of love, so with Michael. Had Steward commanded him to forego the chicken bone after it was in the corner, he would have served him by foregoing. Which is the way of the dog, the only animal that will cheerfully and gladly, with leaping body of joy, leave its food uneaten

in order to accompany or to serve its human master.

Practically all his waking time off duty, Dag Daughtry spent with the imprisoned Michael, who, at command, had quickly learned to refrain from whining and barking. And during these hours of companionship Michael learned many things. Daughtry found that he already understood and obeyed simple things such as "no," "yes," "get up," and "lie down," and he improved on them, teaching him, "Go into the bunk and lie down," "Go under the bunk," "Bring one shoe," "Bring two shoes." And almost without any work at all, he taught him to roll over, to say his prayers, to play dead, to sit up and smoke a pipe with a hat on his head, and not merely to stand up on his hind legs but to walk on them.

Then, too, was the trick of "no can and can do." Placing a savoury, nose-tantalising bit of meat or cheese on the edge of the bunk on a level with Michael's nose, Daughtry would simply say, "No can." Nor would Michael touch the food till he received the welcome, "Can do." Daughtry, with the "no can" still in force, would leave the stateroom, and, though he remained away half an hour or half a dozen hours, on his return he would find the food untouched and Michael, perhaps, asleep in the corner at the head of the bunk which had been allotted him for a bed. Early in this trick once when the steward had left the room and Michael's eager nose was within an inch of the prohibited morsel, Kwaque, playfully inclined, reached for the morsel himself and received a lacerated hand from the quick flash and clip of Michael's jaws.

None of the tricks that he was ever eager to do for Steward, would Michael do for Kwaque, despite the fact that Kwaque had no touch of meanness or viciousness in him. The point was that Michael had been trained, from his first dawn of consciousness, to differentiate between black men and white men. Black men were always the servants of white men--or such had been his experience; and always they were objects of suspicion, ever bent on wreaking mischief and requiring careful watching. The cardinal duty of a dog was to serve his white god by keeping a vigilant eye on all blacks that came about.

Yet Michael permitted Kwaque to serve him in matters of food, water, and other offices, at first in the absence of Steward attending to his ship duties, and, later, at any time. For he realized, without thinking about it at all, that whatever Kwaque did for him, whatever food Kwaque spread for him, really proceeded, not from Kwaque, but from Kwaque's master who was also his master. Yet Kwaque bore no grudge against Michael, and was himself so interested in his lord's welfare and comfort--this lord who had saved his life that terrible day on King William Island from the two grief-stricken pig-owners--that he cherished Michael for his lord's sake. Seeing the dog growing into his master's affection, Kwaque himself developed a genuine affection for Michael--much in the same way that he worshipped anything of the steward's, whether the shoes he polished for him, the clothes he brushed and cleaned for him, or the six bottles of beer he put into the ice-chest each day for him.

In truth, there was nothing of the master-quality in Kwaque, while

Michael was a natural aristocrat. Michael, out of love, would serve Steward, but Michael lorded it over the kinky-head. Kwaque possessed overwhelmingly the slave-nature, while in Michael there was little more of the slave-nature than was found in the North American Indians when the vain attempt was made to make them into slaves on the plantations of Cuba. All of which was no personal vice of Kwaque or virtue of Michael. Michael's heredity, rigidly selected for ages by man, was chiefly composed of fierceness and faithfulness. And fierceness and faithfulness, together, invariably produce pride. And pride cannot exist without honour, nor can honour without poise.

Michael's crowning achievement, under Daughtry's tutelage, in the first days in the stateroom, was to learn to count up to five. Many hours of work were required, however, in spite of his unusual high endowment of intelligence. For he had to learn, first, the spoken numerals; second, to see with his eyes and in his brain differentiate between one object, and all other groups of objects up to and including the group of five; and, third, in his mind, to relate an object, or any group of objects, with its numerical name as uttered by Steward.

In the training Dag Daughtry used balls of paper tied about with twine. He would toss the five balls under the bunk and tell Michael to fetch three, and neither two, nor four, but three would Michael bring forth and deliver into his hand. When Daughtry threw three under the bunk and demanded four, Michael would deliver the three, search about vainly for the fourth, then dance pleadingly with bobs of tail and half-leaps about

Steward, and finally leap into the bed and secure the fourth from under the pillow or among the blankets.

It was the same with other known objects. Up to five, whether shoes or shirts or pillow-slips, Michael would fetch the number requested. And between the mathematical mind of Michael, who counted to five, and the mind of the ancient black at Tulagi, who counted sticks of tobacco in units of five, was a distance shorter than that between Michael and Dag Daughtry who could do multiplication and long division. In the same manner, up the same ladder of mathematical ability, a still greater distance separated Dag Daughtry from Captain Duncan, who by mathematics navigated the Makambo. Greatest mathematical distance of all was that between Captain Duncan's mind and the mind of an astronomer who charted the heavens and navigated a thousand million miles away among the stars and who tossed, a mere morsel of his mathematical knowledge, the few shreds of information to Captain Duncan that enabled him to know from day to day the place of the Makambo on the sea.

In one thing only could Kwaque rule Michael. Kwaque possessed a jews' harp, and, whenever the world of the Makambo and the servitude to the steward grew wearisome, he could transport himself to King William Island by thrusting the primitive instrument between his jaws and fanning weird rhythms from it with his hand, and when he thus crossed space and time, Michael sang--or howled, rather, though his howl possessed the same soft mellowness as Jerry's. Michael did not want to howl, but the chemistry of his being was such that he reacted to music as compulsively as

elements react on one another in the laboratory.

While he lay perdu in Steward's stateroom, his voice was the one thing that was not to be heard, so Kwaque was forced to seek the solace of his jews' harp in the sweltering heat of the gratings over the fire-room. But this did not continue long, for, either according to blind chance, or to the lines of fate written in the book of life ere ever the foundations of the world were laid, Michael was scheduled for an adventure that was profoundly to affect, not alone his own destiny, but the destinies of Kwaque and Dag Daughtry and determine the very place of their death and burial.