

CHAPTER VI

The adventure that was so to alter the future occurred when Michael, in no uncertain manner, announced to all and sundry his presence on the Makambo. It was due to Kwaque's carelessness, to commence with, for Kwaque left the stateroom without tight-closing the door. As the Makambo rolled on an easy sea the door swung back and forth, remaining wide open for intervals and banging shut but not banging hard enough to latch itself.

Michael crossed the high threshold with the innocent intention of exploring no farther than the immediate vicinity. But scarcely was he through, when a heavier roll slammed the door and latched it. And immediately Michael wanted to get back. Obedience was strong in him, for it was his heart's desire to serve his lord's will, and from the few days' confinement he sensed, or guessed, or divined, without thinking about it, that it was Steward's will for him to stay in the stateroom.

For a long time he sat down before the closed door, regarding it wistfully but being too wise to bark or speak to such inanimate object. It had been part of his early puppyhood education to learn that only live things could be moved by plea or threat, and that while things not alive did move, as the door had moved, they never moved of themselves, and were deaf to anything life might have to say to them. Occasionally he trotted down the short cross-hall upon which the stateroom opened, and gazed up

and down the long hall that ran fore and aft.

For the better part of an hour he did this, returning always to the door that would not open. Then he achieved a definite idea. Since the door would not open, and since Steward and Kwaque did not return, he would go in search of them. Once with this concept of action clear in his brain, without timidities of hesitation and irresolution, he trotted aft down the long hall. Going around the right angle in which it ended, he encountered a narrow flight of steps. Among many scents, he recognized those of Kwaque and Steward and knew they had passed that way.

Up the stairs and on the main deck, he began to meet passengers. Being white gods, he did not resent their addresses to him, though he did not linger and went out on the open deck where more of the favoured gods reclined in steamer-chairs. Still no Kwaque or Steward. Another flight of narrow, steep stairs invited, and he came out on the boat-deck. Here, under the wide awnings, were many more of the gods--many times more than he had that far seen in his life.

The for'ard end of the boat-deck terminated in the bridge, which, instead of being raised above it, was part of it. Trotting around the wheel-house to the shady lee-side of it, he came upon his fate; for he it known that Captain Duncan possessed on board in addition to two fox-terriers, a big Persian cat, and that cat possessed a litter of kittens. Her chosen nursery was the wheel-house, and Captain Duncan had humoured her, giving her a box for her kittens and threatening the

quartermasters with all manner of dire fates did they so much as step on one of the kittens.

But Michael knew nothing of this. And the big Persian knew of his existence before he did of hers. In fact, the first he knew was when she launched herself upon him out of the open wheel-house doorway. Even as he glimpsed this abrupt danger, and before he could know what it was, he leaped sideways and saved himself. From his point of view, the assault was unprovoked. He was staring at her with bristling hair, recognizing her for what she was, a cat, when she sprang again, her tail the size of a large man's arm, all claws and spitting fury and vindictiveness.

This was too much for a self-respecting Irish terrier. His wrath was immediate with her second leap, and he sprang to the side to avoid her claws, and in from the side to meet her, his jaws clamping together on her spinal column with a jerk while she was still in mid-air. The next moment she lay sprawling and struggling on the deck with a broken back.

But for Michael this was only the beginning. A shrill yelling, rather than yelping, of more enemies made him whirl half about, but not quick enough. Struck in flank by two full-grown fox-terriers, he was slashed and rolled on the deck. The two, by the way, had long before made their first appearance on the Makambo as little puppies in Dag Daughtry's coat pockets--Daughtry, in his usual fashion, having appropriated them ashore in Sydney and sold them to Captain Duncan for a guinea apiece.

By this time, scrambling to his feet, Michael was really angry. In truth, it was raining cats and dogs, such belligerent shower all unprovoked by him who had picked no quarrels nor even been aware of his enemies until they assailed him. Brave the fox-terriers were, despite the hysterical rage they were in, and they were upon him as he got his legs under him. The fangs of one clashed with his, cutting the lips of both of them, and the lighter dog recoiled from the impact. The other succeeded in taking Michael in flank, fetching blood and hurt with his teeth. With an instant curve, that was almost spasmodic, of his body, Michael flung his flank clear, leaving the other's mouth full of his hair, and at the same moment drove his teeth through an ear till they met. The fox-terrier, with a shrill yelp of pain, sprang back so impetuously as to ribbon its ear as Michael's teeth combed through it.

The first terrier was back upon him, and he was whirling to meet it, when a new and equally unprovoked assault was made upon him. This time it was Captain Duncan, in a rage at sight of his slain cat. The instep of his foot caught Michael squarely under the chest, half knocking the breath out of him and wholly lifting him into the air, so that he fell heavily on his side. The two terriers were upon him, filling their mouths with his straight, wiry hair as they sank their teeth in. Still on his side, as he was beginning to struggle to his feet, he clipped his jaws together on a leg of one, who screamed with pain and retreated on three legs, holding up the fourth, a fore leg, the bone of which Michael's teeth had all but crushed.

Twice Michael slashed the other four-footed foe and then pursued him in a circle with Captain Duncan pursuing him in turn. Shortening the distance by leaping across a chord of the arc of the other's flight, Michael closed his jaws on the back and side of the neck. Such abrupt arrest in mid-flight by the heavier dog brought the fox-terrier down on deck with, a heavy thump. Simultaneous with this, Captain Duncan's second kick landed, communicating such propulsion to Michael as to tear his clenched teeth through the flesh and out of the flesh of the fox-terrier.

And Michael turned on the Captain. What if he were a white god? In his rage at so many assaults of so many enemies, Michael, who had been peacefully looking for Kwaque and Steward, did not stop to reckon. Besides, it was a strange white god upon whom he had never before laid eyes.

At the beginning he had snarled and growled. But it was a more serious affair to attack a god, and no sound came from him as he leaped to meet the leg flying toward him in another kick. As with the cat, he did not leap straight at it. To the side to avoid, and in with a curve of body as it passed, was his way. He had learned the trick with many blacks at Meringe and on board the Eugenie, so that as often he succeeded as failed at it. His teeth came together in the slack of the white duck trousers. The consequent jerk on Captain Duncan's leg made that infuriated mariner lose his balance. Almost he fell forward on his face, part recovered himself with a violent effort, stumbled over Michael who was in for another bite, tottered wildly around, and sat down on the

deck.

How long he might have sat there to recover his breath is problematical, for he rose as rapidly as his stoutness would permit, spurred on by Michael's teeth already sunk into the fleshy part of his shoulder. Michael missed his calf as he uprose, but tore the other leg of the trousers to shreds and received a kick that lifted him a yard above the deck in a half-somersault and landed him on his back on deck.

Up to this time the Captain had been on the ferocious offensive, and he was in the act of following up the kick when Michael regained his feet and soared up in the air, not for leg or thigh, but for the throat. Too high it was for him to reach it, but his teeth closed on the flowing black scarf and tore it to tatters as his weight drew him back to deck.

It was not this so much that turned Captain Duncan to the pure defensive and started him retreating backward, as it was the silence of Michael. Ominous as death it was. There were no snarls nor throat-threats. With eyes straight-looking and unblinking, he sprang and sprang again. Neither did he growl when he attacked nor yelp when he was kicked. Fear of the blow was not in him. As Tom Haggin had so often bragged of Bidy and Terrence, they bred true in Jerry and Michael in the matter of not wincing at a blow. Always--they were so made--they sprang to meet the blow and to encounter the creature who delivered the blow. With a silence that was invested with the seriousness of death, they were wont to attack and to continue to attack.

And so Michael. As the Captain retreated kicking, he attacked, leaping and slashing. What saved Captain Duncan was a sailor with a deck mop on the end of a stick. Intervening, he managed to thrust it into Michael's mouth and shove him away. This first time his teeth closed automatically upon it. But, spitting it out, he declined thereafter to bite it, knowing it for what it was, an inanimate thing upon which his teeth could inflict no hurt.

Nor, beyond trying to avoid him, was he interested in the sailor. It was Captain Duncan, leaning his back against the rail, breathing heavily, and wiping the streaming sweat from his face, who was Michael's meat. Long as it has taken to tell the battle, beginning with the slaying of the Persian cat to the thrusting of the mop into Michael's jaws, so swift had been the rush of events that the passengers, springing from their deck-chairs and hurrying to the scene, were just arriving when Michael eluded the mop of the sailor by a successful dodge and plunged in on Captain Duncan, this time sinking his teeth so savagely into a rotund calf as to cause its owner to splutter an incoherent curse and howl of wrathful surprise.

A fortunate kick hurled Michael away and enabled the sailor to intervene once again with the mop. And upon the scene came Dag Daughtry, to behold his captain, frayed and bleeding and breathing apoplectically, Michael raging in ghastly silence at the end of a mop, and a large Persian mother-cat writhing with a broken back.

"Killeny Boy!" the steward cried imperatively.

Through no matter what indignation and rage that possessed him, his lord's voice penetrated his consciousness, so that, cooling almost instantly, Michael's ears flattened, his bristling hair lay down, and his lips covered his fangs as he turned his head to look acknowledgment.

"Come here, Killeny!"

Michael obeyed--not crouching cringingly, but trotting eagerly, gladly, to Steward's feet.

"Lie down, Boy."

He turned half around as he flumped himself down with a sigh of relief, and, with a red flash of tongue, kissed Steward's foot.

"Your dog, Steward?" Captain Duncan demanded in a smothered voice wherein struggled anger and shortness of breath.

"Yes, sir. My dog. What's he been up to, sir?"

The totality of what Michael had been up to choked the Captain completely. He could only gesture around from the dying cat to his torn clothes and bleeding wounds and the fox-terriers licking their injuries

and whimpering at his feet.

"It's too bad, sir . . ." Daughtry began.

"Too bad, hell!" the captain shut him off. "Bo's'n! Throw that dog overboard."

"Throw the dog overboard, sir, yes, sir," the boatswain repeated, but hesitated.

Dag Daughtry's face hardened unconsciously with the stiffening of his will to dogged opposition, which, in its own slow quiet way, would go to any length to have its way. But he answered respectfully enough, his features, by a shrewd effort, relaxing into a seeming of his customary good-nature.

"He's a good dog, sir, and an unoffending dog. I can't imagine what could a-made 'm break loose this way. He must a-had cause, sir--"

"He had," one of the passengers, a coconut planter from the Shortlands, interjected.

The steward threw him a grateful glance and continued.

"He's a good dog, sir, a most obedient dog, sir--look at the way he minded me right in the thick of the scrap an' come 'n' lay down. He's

smart as chain-lightnin', sir; do anything I tell him. I'll make him make friends. See. . . "

Stepping over to the two hysterical terriers, Daughtry called Michael to him.

"He's all right, savvee, Killeny, he all right," he crooned, at the same time resting one hand on a terrier and the other on Michael.

The terrier whimpered and backed solidly against Captain Duncan's legs, but Michael, with a slow bob of tail and unbelligerent ears, advanced to him, looked up to Steward to make sure, then sniffed his late antagonist, and even ran out his tongue in a caress to the side of the other's ear.

"See, sir, no bad feelings," Daughtry exulted. "He plays the game, sir. He's a proper dog, he's a man-dog.--Here, Killeny! The other one. He all right. Kiss and make up. That's the stuff."

The other fox-terrier, the one with the injured foreleg, endured Michael's sniff with no more than hysterical growls deep in the throat; but the flipping out of Michael's tongue was too much. The wounded terrier exploded in a futile snap at Michael's tongue and nose.

"He all right, Killeny, he all right, sure," Steward warned quickly.

With a bob of his tail in token of understanding, without a shade of

resentment, Michael lifted a paw and with a playful casual stroke, dabble-like, brought its weight on the other's neck and rolled him, head-downward, over on the deck. Though he snarled wrathily, Michael turned away composedly and looked up into Steward's face for approval.

A roar of laughter from the passengers greeted the capsizing of the fox-terrier and the good-natured gravity of Michael. But not alone at this did they laugh, for at the moment of the snap and the turning over, Captain Duncan's unstrung nerves had exploded, causing him to jump as he tensed his whole body.

"Why, sir," the steward went on with growing confidence, "I bet I can make him friends with you, too, by this time to-morrow . . ."

"By this time five minutes he'll be overboard," the captain answered.

"Bo's'n! Over with him!"

The boatswain advanced a tentative step, while murmurs of protest arose from the passengers.

"Look at my cat, and look at me," Captain Duncan defended his action.

The boatswain made another step, and Dag Daughtry glared a threat at him.

"Go on!" the Captain commanded.

"Hold on!" spoke up the Shortlands planter. "Give the dog a square deal. I saw the whole thing. He wasn't looking for trouble. First the cat jumped him. She had to jump twice before he turned loose. She'd have scratched his eyes out. Then the two dogs jumped him. He hadn't bothered them. Then you jumped him. He hadn't bothered you. And then came that sailor with the mop. And now you want the bo's'n to jump him and throw him overboard. Give him a square deal. He's only been defending himself. What do you expect any dog that is a dog to do?--lie down and be walked over by every strange dog and cat that comes along? Play the game, Skipper. You gave him some mighty hard kicks. He only defended himself."

"He's some defender," Captain Duncan grinned, with a hint of the return of his ordinary geniality, at the same time tenderly pressing his bleeding shoulder and looking woefully down at his tattered duck trousers. "All right, Steward. If you can make him friends with me in five minutes, he stays on board. But you'll have to make it up to me with a new pair of trousers."

"And gladly, sir, thank you, sir," Daughtry cried. "And I'll make it up with a new cat as well, sir--Come on, Killeny Boy. This big fella marster he all right, you bet."

And Michael listened. Not with the smouldering, smothering, choking hysteria that still worked in the fox-terriers did he listen, nor with quivering of muscles and jumps of over-wrought nerves, but coolly,

composedly, as if no battle royal had just taken place and no rips of teeth and kicks of feet still burned and ached his body.

He could not help bristling, however, when first he sniffed a trousers' leg into which his teeth had so recently torn.

"Put your hand down on him, sir," Daughtry begged.

And Captain Duncan, his own good self once more, bent and rested a firm, unhesitating hand on Michael's head. Nay, more; he even caressed the ears and rubbed about the roots of them. And Michael the merry-hearted, who fought like a lion and forgave and forgot like a man, laid his neck hair smoothly down, wagged his stump tail, smiled with his eyes and ears and mouth, and kissed with his tongue the hand with which a short time before he had been at war.