

CHAPTER VII

For the rest of the voyage Michael had the run of the ship. Friendly to all, he reserved his love for Steward alone, though he was not above many an undignified romp with the fox-terriers.

"The most playful-minded dog, without being silly, I ever saw," was Dag Daughtry's verdict to the Shortlands planter, to whom he had just sold one of his turtle-shell combs. "You see, some dogs never get over the play-idea, an' they're never good for anything else. But not Killeny Boy. He can come down to seriousness in a second. I'll show you, and I'll show you he's got a brain that counts to five an' knows wireless telegraphy. You just watch."

At the moment the steward made his faint lip-noise--so faint that he could not hear it himself and was almost for wondering whether or not he had made it; so faint that the Shortlands planter did not dream that he was making it. At that moment Michael was lying squirming on his back a dozen feet away, his legs straight up in the air, both fox-terriers worrying with well-stimulated ferociousness. With a quick out-thrust of his four legs, he rolled over on his side and with questioning eyes and pricked ears looked and listened. Again Daughtry made the lip-noise; again the Shortlands planter did not hear nor guess; and Michael bounded to his feet and to his lord's side.

"Some dog, eh?" the steward boasted.

"But how did he know you wanted him?" the planter queried. "You never called him."

"Mental telepathy, the affinity of souls pitched in the same whatever-you-call-it harmony," the steward mystified. "You see, Killeny an' me are made of the same kind of stuff, only run into different moulds. He might a-been my full brother, or me his, only for some mistake in the creation factory somewhere. Now I'll show you he knows his bit of arithmetic."

And, drawing the paper balls from his pocket, Dag Daughtry demonstrated to the amazement and satisfaction of the ring of passengers Michael's ability to count to five.

"Why, sir," Daughtry concluded the performance, "if I was to order four glasses of beer in a public-house ashore, an' if I was absent-minded an' didn't notice the waiter 'd only brought three, Killeny Boy there 'd raise a row instanter."

Kwaque was no longer compelled to enjoy his jews' harp on the gratings over the fire-room, now that Michael's presence on the Makambo was known, and, in the stateroom, on stolen occasions, he made experiments of his own with Michael. Once the jews' harp began emitting its barbaric rhythms, Michael was helpless. He needs must open his mouth and pour forth an unwilling, gushing howl. But, as with Jerry, it was not mere

howl. It was more akin to a mellow singing; and it was not long before Kwaque could lead his voice up and down, in rough time and tune, within a definite register.

Michael never liked these lessons, for, looking down upon Kwaque, he hated in any way to be under the black's compulsion. But all this was changed when Dag Daughtry surprised them at a singing lesson. He resurrected the harmonica with which it was his wont, ashore in public-houses, to while away the time between bottles. The quickest way to start Michael singing, he discovered, was with minors; and, once started, he would sing on and on for as long as the music played. Also, in the absence of an instrument, Michael would sing to the prompting and accompaniment of Steward's voice, who would begin by wailing "kow-kow" long and sadly, and then branch out on some old song or ballad. Michael had hated to sing with Kwaque, but he loved to do it with Steward, even when Steward brought him on deck to perform before the laughter-shrieking passengers.

Two serious conversations were held by the steward toward the close of the voyage: one with Captain Duncan and one with Michael.

"It's this way, Killeny," Daughtry began, one evening, Michael's head resting on his lord's knees as he gazed adoringly up into his lord's face, understanding no whit of what was spoken but loving the intimacy the sounds betokened. "I stole you for beer money, an' when I saw you there on the beach that night I knew you'd bring ten quid anywheres. Ten

quid's a horrible lot of money. Fifty dollars in the way the Yankees reckon it, an' a hundred Mex in China fashion.

"Now, fifty dollars gold 'd buy beer to beat the band--enough to drown me if I fell in head first. Yet I want to ask you one question. Can you see me takin' ten quid for you? . . . Go on. Speak up. Can you?"

And Michael, with thumps of tail to the floor and a high sharp bark, showed that he was in entire agreement with whatever had been propounded.

"Or say twenty quid, now. That's a fair offer. Would I? Eh! Would I? Not on your life. What d'ye say to fifty quid? That might begin to interest me, but a hundred quid would interest me more. Why, a hundred quid all in beer 'd come pretty close to floatin' this old hooker. But who in Sam Hill'd offer a hundred quid? I'd like to clap eyes on him once, that's all, just once. D'ye want to know what for? All right. I'll whisper it. So as I could tell him to go to hell. Sure, Killeny Boy, just like that--oh, most polite, of course, just a kindly directin' of his steps where he'd never suffer from frigid extremities."

Michael's love for Steward was so profound as almost to be a mad but enduring infatuation. What the steward's regard for Michael was coming to be was best evidenced by his conversation with Captain Duncan.

"Sure, sir, he must 've followed me on board," Daughtry finished his unvarnished recital. "An' I never knew it. Last I seen of 'm was on the

beach. Next I seen of 'm there, he was fast asleep in my bunk. Now how'd he get there, sir? How'd he pick out my room? I leave it to you, sir. I call it marvellous, just plain marvellous."

"With a quartermaster at the head of the gangway!" Captain Duncan snorted. "As if I didn't know your tricks, Steward. There's nothing marvellous about it. Just a plain case of steal. Followed you on board? That dog never came over the side. He came through a port-hole, and he never came through by himself. That nigger of yours, I'll wager, had a hand in the helping. But let's have done with beating about the bush. Give me the dog, and I'll say no more about the cat."

"Seein' you believe what you believe, then you'd be for compoundin' the felony," Daughtry retorted, the habitual obstinate tightening of his brows showing which way his will set. "Me, sir, I'm only a ship's steward, an' it wouldn't mean nothin' at all bein' arrested for dog-stealin'; but you, sir, a captain of a fine steamer, how'd it sound for you, sir? No, sir; it'd be much wiser for me to keep the dog that followed me aboard."

"I'll give ten pounds in the bargain," the captain proffered.

"No, it wouldn't do, it wouldn't do at all, sir, an' you a captain," the steward continued to reiterate, rolling his head sombrely. "Besides, I know where's a peach of an Angora in Sydney. The owner is gone to the country an' has no further use of it, an' it'd be a kindness to the cat,

air to give it a good regular home like the Makambo."