

CHAPTER IX

The morning the Makambo entered Sydney harbour, Captain Duncan had another try for Michael. The port doctor's launch was coming alongside, when he nodded up to Daughtry, who was passing along the deck:

"Steward, I'll give you twenty pounds."

"No, sir, thank you, sir," was Dag Daughtry's answer. "I couldn't bear to part with him."

"Twenty-five pounds, then. I can't go beyond that. Besides, there are plenty more Irish terriers in the world."

"That's what I'm thinkin', sir. An' I'll get one for you. Right here in Sydney. An' it won't cost you a penny, sir."

"But I want Killeny Boy," the captain persisted.

"An' so do I, which is the worst of it, sir. Besides, I got him first."

"Twenty-five sovereigns is a lot of money . . . for a dog," Captain Duncan said.

"An' Killeny Boy's a lot of dog . . . for the money," the steward

retorted. "Why, sir, cuttin' out all sentiment, his tricks is worth more 'n that. Him not recognizing me when I don't want 'm to is worth fifty pounds of itself. An' there's his countin' an' his singin', an' all the rest of his tricks. Now, no matter how I got him, he didn't have them tricks. Them tricks are mine. I taught him them. He ain't the dog he was when he come on board. He's a whole lot of me now, an' sellin' him would be like sellin' a piece of myself."

"Thirty pounds," said the captain with finality.

"No, sir, thankin' you just the same, sir," was Daughtry's refusal.

And Captain Duncan was forced to turn away in order to greet the port doctor coming over the side.

Scarcely had the Makambo passed quarantine, and while on her way up harbour to dock, when a trim man-of-war launch darted in to her side and a trim lieutenant mounted the Makambo's boarding-ladder. His mission was quickly explained. The Albatross, British cruiser of the second class, of which he was fourth lieutenant, had called in at Tulagi with dispatches from the High Commissioner of the English South Seas. A scant twelve hours having intervened between her arrival and the Makambo's departure, the Commissioner of the Solomons and Captain Kellar had been of the opinion that the missing dog had been carried away on the steamer. Knowing that the Albatross would beat her to Sydney, the captain of the Albatross had undertaken to look up the dog. Was the dog, an Irish

terrier answering to the name of Michael, on board?

Captain Duncan truthfully admitted that it was, though he most ungenerously shielded Dag Daughtry by repeating his yarn of the dog coming on board of itself. How to return the dog to Captain Kellar?--was the next question; for the Albatross was bound on to New Zealand. Captain Duncan settled the matter.

"The Makambo will be back in Tulagi in eight weeks," he told the lieutenant, "and I'll undertake personally to deliver the dog to its owner. In the meantime we'll take good care of it. Our steward has sort of adopted it, so it will be in good hands."

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"Seems we don't either of us get the dog," Daughtry commented resignedly, when Captain Duncan had explained the situation.

But when Daughtry turned his back and started off along the deck, his constitutional obstinacy tightened his brows so that the Shortlands planter, observing it, wondered what the captain had been rowing him about.

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Despite his six quarts a day and all his easy-goingness of disposition,

Dag Daughtry possessed certain integrities. Though he could steal a dog, or a cat, without a twinge of conscience, he could not but be faithful to his salt, being so made. He could not draw wages for being a ship steward without faithfully performing the functions of ship steward. Though his mind was firmly made up, during the several days of the Makambo in Sydney, lying alongside the Burns Philp Dock, he saw to every detail of the cleaning up after the last crowd of outgoing passengers, and to every detail of preparation for the next crowd of incoming passengers who had tickets bought for the passage far away to the coral seas and the cannibal isles.

In the midst of this devotion to his duty, he took a night off and part of two afternoons. The night off was devoted to the public-houses which sailors frequent, and where can be learned the latest gossip and news of ships and of men who sail upon the sea. Such information did he gather, over many bottles of beer, that the next afternoon, hiring a small launch at a cost of ten shillings, he journeyed up the harbour to Jackson Bay, where lay the lofty-poled, sweet-lined, three-topmast American schooner, the Mary Turner.

Once on board, explaining his errand, he was taken below into the main cabin, where he interviewed, and was interviewed by, a quartette of men whom Daughtry qualified to himself as "a rum bunch."

It was because he had talked long with the steward who had left the ship, that Dag Daughtry recognized and identified each of the four men. That,

surely, was the "Ancient Mariner," sitting back and apart with washed eyes of such palest blue that they seemed a faded white. Long thin wisps of silvery, unkempt hair framed his face like an aureole. He was slender to emaciation, cavernously checked, roll after roll of skin, no longer encasing flesh or muscle, hanging grotesquely down his neck and swathing the Adam's apple so that only occasionally, with queer swallowing motions, did it peep out of the mummy-wrappings of skin and sink back again from view.

A proper ancient mariner, thought Daughtry. Might be seventy-five, might just as well be a hundred and five, or a hundred and seventy-five.

Beginning at the right temple, a ghastly scar split the cheek-bone, sank into the depths of the hollow cheek, notched across the lower jaw, and plunged to disappearance among the prodigious skin-folds of the neck. The withered lobes of both ears were perforated by tiny gypsy-like circles of gold. On the skeleton fingers of his right hand were no less than five rings--not men's rings, nor women's, but foppish rings--"that would fetch a price," Daughtry adjudged. On the left hand were no rings, for there were no fingers to wear them. Only was there a thumb; and, for that matter, most of the hand was missing as well, as if it had been cut off by the same slicing edge that had cleaved him from temple to jaw and heaven alone knew how far down that skin-draped neck.

The Ancient Mariner's washed eyes seemed to bore right through Daughtry (or at least so Daughtry felt), and rendered him so uncomfortable as to

make him casually step to the side for the matter of a yard. This was possible, because, a servant seeking a servant's billet, he was expected to stand and face the four seated ones as if they were judges on the bench and he the felon in the dock. Nevertheless, the gaze of the ancient one pursued him, until, studying it more closely, he decided that it did not reach to him at all. He got the impression that those washed pale eyes were filmed with dreams, and that the intelligence, the thing, that dwelt within the skull, fluttered and beat against the dream-films and no farther.

"How much would you expect?" the captain was asking,--a most unsealike captain, in Daughtry's opinion; rather, a spick-and-span, brisk little business-man or floor-walker just out of a bandbox.

"He shall not share," spoke up another of the four, huge, raw-boned, middle-aged, whom Daughtry identified by his ham-like hands as the California wheat-farmer described by the departed steward.

"Plenty for all," the Ancient Mariner startled Daughtry by cackling shrilly. "Oodles and oodles of it, my gentlemen, in cask and chest, in cask and chest, a fathom under the sand."

"Share--what, sir?" Daughtry queried, though well he knew, the other steward having cursed to him the day he sailed from San Francisco on a blind lay instead of straight wages. "Not that it matters, sir," he hastened to add. "I spent a whalin' voyage once, three years of it, an'

paid off with a dollar. Wages for mine, an' sixty gold a month, seein' there's only four of you."

"And a mate," the captain added.

"And a mate," Daughtry repeated. "Very good, sir. An' no share."

"But yourself?" spoke up the fourth man, a huge-bulking, colossal-bodied, greasy-seeming grossness of flesh--the Armenian Jew and San Francisco pawnbroker the previous steward had warned Daughtry about. "Have you papers--letters of recommendation, the documents you receive when you are paid off before the shipping commissioners?"

"I might ask, sir," Dag Daughtry brazened it, "for your own papers. This ain't no regular cargo-carrier or passenger-carrier, no more than you gentlemen are a regular company of ship-owners, with regular offices, doin' business in a regular way. How do I know if you own the ship even, or that the charter ain't busted long ago, or that you're being libelled ashore right now, or that you won't dump me on any old beach anywheres without a soo-markee of what's comin' to me? Howsoever"--he anticipated by a bluff of his own the show of wrath from the Jew that he knew would be wind and bluff--"howsoever, here's my papers . . . "

With a swift dip of his hand into his inside coat-pocket he scattered out in a wealth of profusion on the cabin table all the papers, sealed and stamped, that he had collected in forty-five years of voyaging, the

latest date of which was five years back.

"I don't ask your papers," he went on. "What I ask is, cash payment in full the first of each month, sixty dollars a month gold--"

"Oodles and oodles of it, gold and gold and better than gold, in cask and chest, in cask and chest, a fathom under the sand," the Ancient Mariner assured him in beneficent cackles. "Kings, principalities and powers!--all of us, the least of us. And plenty more, my gentlemen, plenty more. The latitude and longitude are mine, and the bearings from the oak ribs on the shoal to Lion's Head, and the cross-bearings from the points unnamable, I only know. I only still live of all that brave, mad, scallywag ship's company . . . "

"Will you sign the articles to that?" the Jew demanded, cutting in on the ancient's maunderings.

"What port do you wind up the cruise in?" Daughtry asked.

"San Francisco."

"I'll sign the articles that I'm to sign off in San Francisco then."

The Jew, the captain, and the farmer nodded.

"But there's several other things to be agreed upon," Daughtry continued.

"In the first place, I want my six quarts a day. I'm used to it, and I'm too old a stager to change my habits."

"Of spirits, I suppose?" the Jew asked sarcastically.

"No; of beer, good English beer. It must be understood beforehand, no matter what long stretches we may be at sea, that a sufficient supply is taken along."

"Anything else?" the captain queried.

"Yes, sir," Daughtry answered. "I got a dog that must come along."

"Anything else?--a wife or family maybe?" the farmer asked.

"No wife or family, sir. But I got a nigger, a perfectly good nigger, that's got to come along. He can sign on for ten dollars a month if he works for the ship all his time. But if he works for me all the time, I'll let him sign on for two an' a half a month."

"Eighteen days in the longboat," the Ancient Mariner shrilled, to Daughtry's startlement. "Eighteen days in the longboat, eighteen days of scorching hell."

"My word," quoth Daughtry, "the old gentleman'd give one the jumps. There'll sure have to be plenty of beer."

"Sea stewards put on some style, I must say," commented the wheat-farmer, oblivious to the Ancient Mariner, who still declaimed of the heat of the longboat.

"Suppose we don't see our way to signing on a steward who travels in such style?" the Jew asked, mopping the inside of his collar-band with a coloured silk handkerchief.

"Then you'll never know what a good steward you've missed, sir," Daughtry responded airily.

"I guess there's plenty more stewards on Sydney beach," the captain said briskly. "And I guess I haven't forgotten old days, when I hired them like so much dirt, yes, by Jinks, so much dirt, there were so many of them."

"Thank you, Mr. Steward, for looking us up," the Jew took up the idea with insulting oiliness. "We very much regret our inability to meet your wishes in the matter--"

"And I saw it go under the sand, a fathom under the sand, on cross-bearings unnamable, where the mangroves fade away, and the coconuts grow, and the rise of land lifts from the beach to the Lion's Head."

"Hold your horses," the wheat-farmer said, with a flare of irritation,

directed, not at the Ancient Mariner, but at the captain and the Jew.

"Who's putting up for this expedition? Don't I get no say so? Ain't my opinion ever to be asked? I like this steward. Strikes me he's the real goods. I notice he's as polite as all get-out, and I can see he can take an order without arguing. And he ain't no fool by a long shot."

"That's the very point, Grimshaw," the Jew answered soothingly.

"Considering the unusualness of our . . . of the expedition, we'd be better served by a steward who is more of a fool. Another point, which I'd esteem a real favour from you, is not to forget that you haven't put a red copper more into this trip than I have--"

"And where'd either of you be, if it wasn't for me with my knowledge of the sea?" the captain demanded aggrievedly. "To say nothing of the mortgage on my house and on the nicest little best paying flat building in San Francisco since the earthquake."

"But who's still putting up?--all of you, I ask you." The wheat-farmer leaned forward, resting the heels of his hands on his knees so that the fingers hung down his long shins, in Daughtry's appraisal, half-way to his feet. "You, Captain Doane, can't raise another penny on your properties. My land still grows the wheat that brings the ready. You, Simon Nishikanta, won't put up another penny--yet your loan-shark offices are doing business at the same old stands at God knows what per cent. to drunken sailors. And you hang the expedition up here in this hole-in-the-wall waiting for my agent to cable more wheat-money. Well, I guess we'll

just sign on this steward at sixty a month and all he asks, or I'll just naturally quit you cold on the next fast steamer to San Francisco."

He stood up abruptly, towering to such height that Daughtry looked to see the crown of his head collide with the deck above.

"I'm sick and tired of you all, yes, I am," he continued. "Get busy! Well, let's get busy. My money's coming. It'll be here by to-morrow. Let's be ready to start by hiring a steward that is a steward. I don't care if he brings two families along."

"I guess you're right, Grimshaw," Simon Nishikanta said appeasingly. "The trip is beginning to get on all our nerves. Forget it if I fly off the handle. Of course we'll take this steward if you want him. I thought he was too stylish for you."

He turned to Daughtry.

"Naturally, the least said ashore about us the better."

"That's all right, sir. I can keep my mouth shut, though I might as well tell you there's some pretty tales about you drifting around the beach right now."

"The object of our expedition?" the Jew queried quickly.

Daughtry nodded.

"Is that why you want to come?" was demanded equally quickly.

Daughtry shook his head.

"As long as you give me my beer each day, sir, I ain't goin' to be interested in your treasure-huntin'. It ain't no new tale to me. The South Seas is populous with treasure-hunters--" Almost could Daughtry have sworn that he had seen a flash of anxiety break through the dream-films that bleared the Ancient Mariner's eyes. "And I must say, sir," he went on easily, though saying what he would not have said had it not been for what he was almost certain he sensed of the ancient's anxiousness, "that the South Seas is just naturally lousy with buried treasure. There's Keeling-Cocos, millions 'n' millions of it, pounds sterling, I mean, waiting for the lucky one with the right steer."

This time Daughtry could have sworn to having sensed a change toward relief in the Ancient Mariner, whose eyes were again filmy with dreams.

"But I ain't interested in treasure, sir," Daughtry concluded. "It's beer I'm interested in. You can chase your treasure, an' I don't care how long, just as long as I've got six quarts to open each day. But I give you fair warning, sir, before I sign on: if the beer dries up, I'm goin' to get interested in what you're after. Fair play is my motto."

"Do you expect us to pay for your beer in addition?" Simon Nishikanta demanded.

To Daughtry it was too good to be true. Here, with the Jew healing the breach with the wheat-farmer whose agents still cabled money, was the time to take advantage.

"Sure, it's one of our agreements, sir. What time would it suit you, sir, to-morrow afternoon, for me to sign on at the shipping commissioner's?"

"Casks and chests of it, casks and chests of it, oodles and oodles, a fathom under the sand," chattered the Ancient Mariner.

"You're all touched up under the roof," Daughtry grinned. "Which ain't got nothing to do with me as long as you furnish the beer, pay me due an' proper what's comin' to me the first of each an' every month, an' pay me off final in San Francisco. As long as you keep up your end, I'll sail with you to the Pit 'n' back an' watch you sweatin' the casks 'n' chests out of the sand. What I want is to sail with you if you want me to sail with you enough to satisfy me."

Simon Nishikanta glanced about. Grimshaw and Captain Doane nodded.

"At three o'clock to-morrow afternoon, at the shipping commissioner's," the Jew agreed. "When will you report for duty?"

"When will you sail, sir?" Daughtry countered.

"Bright and early next morning."

"Then I'll be on board and on duty some time to-morrow night, sir."

And as he went up the cabin companion, he could hear the Ancient Mariner
maundering: "Eighteen days in the longboat, eighteen days of scorching
hell . . . "