CHAPTER X

Michael left the Makambo as he had come on board, through a port-hole. Likewise, the affair occurred at night, and it was Kwaque's hands that received him. It had been quick work, and daring, in the dark of early evening. From the boat-deck, with a bowline under Kwaque's arms and a turn of the rope around a pin, Dag Daughtry had lowered his leprous servitor into the waiting launch.

On his way below, he encountered Captain Duncan, who saw fit to warn him:

"No shannigan with Killeny Boy, Steward. He must go back to Tulagi with us."

"Yes, sir," the steward agreed. "An' I'm keepin' him tight in my room to make safe. Want to see him, sir?"

The very frankness of the invitation made the captain suspicious, and the thought flashed through his mind that perhaps Killeny Boy was already hidden ashore somewhere by the dog-stealing steward.

"Yes, indeed I'd like to say how-do-you-do to him," Captain Duncan answered.

And his was genuine surprise, on entering the steward's room, to behold

Michael just rousing from his curled-up sleep on the floor. But when he left, his surprise would have been shocking could he have seen through the closed door what immediately began to take place. Out through the open port-hole, in a steady stream, Daughtry was passing the contents of the room. Everything went that belonged to him, including the turtle-shell and the photographs and calendars on the wall. Michael, with the command of silence laid upon him, went last. Remained only a sea-chest and two suit-cases, themselves too large for the port-hole but bare of contents.

When Daughtry sauntered along the main deck a few minutes later and paused for a gossip with the customs officer and a quartermaster at the head of the gang-plank, Captain Duncan little dreamed that his casual glance was resting on his steward for the last time. He watched him go down the gang-plank empty-handed, with no dog at his heels, and stroll off along the wharf under the electric lights.

Ten minutes after Captain Duncan saw the last of his broad back, Daughtry, in the launch with his belongings and heading for Jackson Bay, was hunched over Michael and caressing him, while Kwaque, crooning with joy under his breath that he was with all that was precious to him in the world, felt once again in the side-pocket of his flimsy coat to make sure that his beloved jews' harp had not been left behind.

Dag Daughtry was paying for Michael, and paying well. Among other things, he had not cared to arouse suspicion by drawing his wages from

Burns Philp. The twenty pounds due him he had abandoned, and this was the very sum, that night on the beach at Tulagi, he had decided he could realize from the sale of Michael. He had stolen him to sell. He was paying for him the sales price that had tempted him.

For, as one has well said: the horse abases the base, ennobles the noble. Likewise the dog. The theft of a dog to sell for a price had been the abasement worked by Michael on Dag Daughtry. To pay the price out of sheer heart-love that could recognize no price too great to pay, had been the ennoblement of Dag Daughtry which Michael had worked. And as the launch chug-chugged across the quiet harbour under the southern stars, Dag Daughtry would have risked and tossed his life into the bargain in a battle to continue to have and to hold the dog he had originally conceived of as being interchangeable for so many dozens of beer.

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The Mary Turner, towed out by a tug, sailed shortly after daybreak, and Daughtry, Kwaque, and Michael looked their last for ever on Sydney Harbour.

"Once again these old eyes have seen this fair haven," the Ancient Mariner, beside them gazing, babbled; and Daughtry could not help but notice the way the wheat-farmer and the pawnbroker pricked their ears to listen and glanced each to the other with scant eyes. "It was in '52, in 1852, on such a day as this, all drinking and singing along the decks, we

cleared from Sydney in the Wide Awake. A pretty craft, oh sirs, a most clever and pretty craft. A crew, a brave crew, all youngsters, all of us, fore and aft, no man was forty, a mad, gay crew. The captain was an elderly gentleman of twenty-eight, the third officer another of eighteen, the down, untouched of steel, like so much young velvet on his cheek. He, too, died in the longboat. And the captain gasped out his last under the palm trees of the isle unnamable while the brown maidens wept about him and fanned the air to his parching lungs."

Dag Daughtry heard no more, for he turned below to take up his new routine of duty. But while he made up bunks with fresh linen and directed Kwaque's efforts to cleaning long-neglected floors, he shook his head to himself and muttered, "He's a keen 'un. He's a keen 'un. All ain't fools that look it."

The fine lines of the Mary Turner were explained by the fact that she had been built for seal-hunting; and for the same reason on board of her was room and to spare. The forecastle with bunk-space for twelve, bedded but eight Scandinavian seamen. The five staterooms of the cabin accommodated the three treasure-hunters, the Ancient Mariner, and the mate--the latter a large-bodied, gentle-souled Russian-Finn, known as Mr. Jackson through inability of his shipmates to pronounce the name he had signed on the ship's articles.

Remained the steerage, just for'ard of the cabin, separated from it by a stout bulkhead and entered by a companionway on the main deck. On this

deck, between the break of the poop and the steerage companion, stood the galley. In the steerage itself, which possessed a far larger living-space than the cabin, were six capacious bunks, each double the width of the forecastle bunks, and each curtained and with no bunk above it.

"Some fella glory-hole, eh, Kwaque?" Daughtry told his seventeen-years-old brown-skinned Papuan with the withered ancient face of a centenarian, the legs of a living skeleton, and the huge-stomached torso of an elderly Japanese wrestler. "Eh, Kwaque! What you fella think?"

And Kwaque, too awed by the spaciousness to speak, eloquently rolled his eyes in agreement.

"You likee this piecee bunk?" the cook, a little old Chinaman, asked the steward with eager humility, inviting the white man's acceptance of his own bunk with a wave of arm.

Daughtry shook his head. He had early learned that it was wise to get along well with sea-cooks, since sea-cocks were notoriously given to going suddenly lunatic and slicing and hacking up their shipmates with butcher knives and meat cleavers on the slightest remembered provocation. Besides, there was an equally good bunk all the way across the width of the steerage from the Chinaman's. The bunk next on the port side to the cook's and abaft of it Daughtry allotted to Kwaque. Thus he retained for himself and Michael the entire starboard side with its three bunks. The

next one abaft of his own he named "Killeny Boy's," and called on Kwaque and the cook to take notice. Daughtry had a sense that the cook, whose name had been quickly volunteered as Ah Moy, was not entirely satisfied with the arrangement; but it affected him no more than a momentary curiosity about a Chinaman who drew the line at a dog taking a bunk in the same apartment with him.

Half an hour later, returning, from setting the cabin aright, to the steerage for Kwaque to serve him with a bottle of beer, Daughtry observed that Ah Moy had moved his entire bunk belongings across the steerage to the third bunk on the starboard side. This had put him with Daughtry and Michael and left Kwaque with half the steerage to himself. Daughtry's curiosity recrudesced.

"What name along that fella Chink?" he demanded of Kwaque. "He no like 'm you fella boy stop 'm along same fella side along him. What for? My word! What name? That fella Chink make 'm me cross along him too much!"

"Suppose 'm that fella Chink maybe he think 'm me kai-kai along him," Kwaque grinned in one of his rare jokes.

"All right," the steward concluded. "We find out. You move 'm along my bunk, I move 'm along that fella Chink's bunk."

This accomplished, so that Kwaque, Michael, and Ah Moy occupied the starboard side and Daughtry alone bunked on the port side, he went on

deck and aft to his duties. On his next return he found Ah Moy had transferred back to the port side, but this time into the last bunk aft.

"Seems the beggar's taken a fancy to me," the steward smiled to himself.

Nor was he capable of guessing Ah Moy's reason for bunking always on the opposite side from Kwaque.

"I changee," the little old cook explained, with anxious eyes to please and placate, in response to Daughtry's direct question. "All the time like that, changee, plentee changee. You savvee?"

Daughtry did not savvee, and shook his head, while Ah Moy's slant eyes betrayed none of the anxiety and fear with which he privily gazed on Kwaque's two permanently bent fingers of the left hand and on Kwaque's forehead, between the eyes, where the skin appeared a shade darker, a trifle thicker, and was marked by the first beginning of three short vertical lines or creases that were already giving him the lion-like appearance, the leonine face so named by the experts and technicians of the fell disease.

As the days passed, the steward took facetious occasions, when he had drunk five quarts of his daily allowance, to shift his and Kwaque's bunks about. And invariably Ah Moy shifted, though Daughtry failed to notice that he never shifted into a bunk which Kwaque had occupied. Nor did he notice that it was when the time came that Kwaque had variously occupied

all the six bunks that Ah Moy made himself a canvas hammock, suspended it from the deck beams above and thereafter swung clear in space and unmolested.

Daughtry dismissed the matter from his thoughts as no more than a thing in keeping with the general inscrutability of the Chinese mind. He did notice, however, that Kwaque was never permitted to enter the galley. Another thing he noticed, which, expressed in his own words, was: "That's the all-dangdest cleanest Chink I've ever clapped my lamps on. Clean in galley, clean in steerage, clean in everything. He's always washing the dishes in boiling water, when he isn't washing himself or his clothes or bedding. My word, he actually boils his blankets once a week!"

For there were other things to occupy the steward's mind. Getting acquainted with the five men aft in the cabin, and lining up the whole situation and the relations of each of the five to that situation and to one another, consumed much time. Then there was the path of the Mary Turner across the sea. No old sailor breathes who does not desire to know the casual course of his ship and the next port-of-call.

"We ought to be moving along a line that'll cross somewhere northard of New Zealand," Daughtry guessed to himself, after a hundred stolen glances into the binnacle. But that was all the information concerning the ship's navigation he could steal; for Captain Doane took the observations and worked them out, to the exclusion of the mate, and Captain Doane always methodically locked up his chart and log. That there were heated

discussions in the cabin, in which terms of latitude and longitude were bandied back and forth, Daughtry did know; but more than that he could not know, because it was early impressed upon him that the one place for him never to be, at such times of council, was the cabin. Also, he could not but conclude that these councils were real battles wherein Messrs. Doane, Nishikanta, and Grimahaw screamed at each other and pounded the table at each other, when they were not patiently and most politely interrogating the Ancient Mariner.

"He's got their goat," the steward early concluded to himself; but, thereafter, try as he would, he failed to get the Ancient Mariner's goat.

Charles Stough Greenleaf was the Ancient Mariner's name. This, Daughtry got from him, and nothing else did he get save maunderings and ravings about the heat of the longboat and the treasure a fathom deep under the sand.

"There's some of us plays games, an' some of us as looks on an' admires the games they see," the steward made his bid one day. "And I'm sure these days lookin' on at a pretty game. The more I see it the more I got to admire."

The Ancient Mariner dreamed back into the steward's eyes with a blank, unseeing gaze.

"On the Wide Awake all the stewards were young, mere boys," he

murmured.

"Yes, sir," Daughtry agreed pleasantly. "From all you say, the Wide Awake, with all its youngsters, was sure some craft. Not like the crowd of old 'uns on this here hooker. But I doubt, sir, that them youngsters ever played as clever games as is being played aboard us right now. I just got to admire the fine way it's being done, sir."

"I'll tell you something," the Ancient Mariner replied, with such confidential air that almost Daughtry leaned to hear. "No steward on the Wide Awake could mix a highball in just the way I like, as well as you. We didn't know cocktails in those days, but we had sherry and bitters. A good appetizer, too, a most excellent appetizer."

"I'll tell you something more," he continued, just as it seemed he had finished, and just in time to interrupt Daughtry away from his third attempt to ferret out the true inwardness of the situation on the Mary Turner and of the Ancient Mariner's part in it. "It is mighty nigh five bells, and I should be very pleased to have one of your delicious cocktails ere I go down to dine."

More suspicious than ever of him was Daughtry after this episode. But, as the days went by, he came more and more to the conclusion that Charles Stough Greenleaf was a senile old man who sincerely believed in the abiding of a buried treasure somewhere in the South Seas.

Once, polishing the brass-work on the hand-rails of the cabin companionway, Daughtry overheard the ancient one explaining his terrible scar and missing fingers to Grimshaw and the Armenian Jew. The pair of them had plied him with extra drinks in the hope of getting more out of him by way of his loosened tongue.

"It was in the longboat," the aged voice cackled up the companion. "On the eleventh day it was that the mutiny broke. We in the sternsheets stood together against them. It was all a madness. We were starved sore, but we were mad for water. It was over the water it began. For, see you, it was our custom to lick the dew from the oar-blades, the gunwales, the thwarts, and the inside planking. And each man of us had developed property in the dew-collecting surfaces. Thus, the tiller and the rudder-head and half of the plank of the starboard stern-sheet had become the property of the second officer. No one of us lacked the honour to respect his property. The third officer was a lad, only eighteen, a brave and charming boy. He shared with the second officer the starboard stern-sheet plank. They drew a line to mark the division, and neither, lapping up what scant moisture fell during the night-hours, ever dreamed of trespassing across the line. They were too honourable.

"But the sailors--no. They squabbled amongst themselves over the dew-surfaces, and only the night before one of them was knifed because he so stole. But on this night, waiting for the dew, a little of it, to become more, on the surfaces that were mine, I heard the noises of a dew-lapper moving aft along the port-gunwale--which was my property aft of the

stroke-thwart clear to the stern. I emerged from a nightmare dream of crystal springs and swollen rivers to listen to this night-drinker that I feared might encroach upon what was mine.

"Nearer he came to the line of my property, and I could hear him making little moaning, whimpering noises as he licked the damp wood. It was like listening to an animal grazing pasture-grass at night and ever grazing nearer.

"It chanced I was holding a boat-stretcher in my hand--to catch what little dew might fall upon it. I did not know who it was, but when he lapped across the line and moaned and whimpered as he licked up my precious drops of dew, I struck out. The boat-stretcher caught him fairly on the nose--it was the bo's'n--and the mutiny began. It was the bo's'n's knife that sliced down my face and sliced away my fingers. The third officer, the eighteen-year-old lad, fought well beside me, and saved me, so that, just before I fainted, he and I, between us, hove the bo's'n's carcass overside."

A shifting of feet and changing of positions of those in the cabin plunged Daughtry back into his polishing, which he had for the time forgotten. And, as he rubbed the brass-work, he told himself under his breath: "The old party's sure been through the mill. Such things just got to happen."

"No," the Ancient Mariner was continuing, in his thin falsetto, in reply

to a query. "It wasn't the wounds that made me faint. It was the exertion I made in the struggle. I was too weak. No; so little moisture was there in my system that I didn't bleed much. And the amazing thing, under the circumstances, was the quickness with which I healed. The second officer sewed me up next day with a needle he'd made out of an ivory toothpick and with twine he twisted out of the threads from a frayed tarpaulin."

"Might I ask, Mr. Greenleaf, if there were rings at the time on the fingers that were cut off?" Daughtry heard Simon Nishikanta ask.

"Yes, and one beauty. I found it afterward in the boat bottom and presented it to the sandalwood trader who rescued me. It was a large diamond. I paid one hundred and eighty guineas for it to an English sailor in the Barbadoes. He'd stolen it, and of course it was worth more. It was a beautiful gem. The sandalwood man did not merely save my life for it. In addition, he spent fully a hundred pounds in outfitting me and buying me a passage from Thursday Island to Shanghai."

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"There's no getting away from them rings he wears," Daughtry overheard Simon Nishikanta that evening telling Grimshaw in the dark on the weather poop. "You don't see that kind nowadays. They're old, real old. They're not men's rings so much as what you'd call, in the old-fashioned days, gentlemen's rings. Real gentlemen, I mean, grand gentlemen, wore rings

like them. I wish collateral like them came into my loan offices these days. They're worth big money."

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"I just want to tell you, Killeny Boy, that maybe I'll be wishin' before the voyage is over that I'd gone on a lay of the treasure instead of straight wages," Dag Daughtry confided to Michael that night at turning-in time as Kwaque removed his shoes and as he paused midway in the draining of his sixth bottle. "Take it from me, Killeny, that old gentleman knows what he's talkin' about, an' has been some hummer in his days. Men don't lose the fingers off their hands and get their faces chopped open just for nothing--nor sport rings that makes a Jew pawnbroker's mouth water."