

## CHAPTER XI

Before the voyage of the Mary Turner came to an end, Dag Daughtry, sitting down between the rows of water-casks in the main-hold, with a great laugh rechristened the schooner "the Ship of Fools." But that was some weeks after. In the meantime he so fulfilled his duties that not even Captain Doane could conjure a shadow of complaint.

Especially did the steward attend upon the Ancient Mariner, for whom he had come to conceive a strong admiration, if not affection. The old fellow was different from his cabin-mates. They were money-lovers; everything in them had narrowed down to the pursuit of dollars. Daughtry, himself moulded on generously careless lines, could not but appreciate the spaciousness of the Ancient Mariner, who had evidently lived spaciously and who was ever for sharing the treasure they sought.

"You'll get your whack, steward, if it comes out of my share," he frequently assured Daughtry at times of special kindness on the latter's part. "There's oodles of it, and oodles of it, and, without kith or kin, I have so little time longer to live that I shall not need it much or much of it."

And so the Ship of Fools sailed on, all aft fooling and befouling, from the guileless-eyed, gentle-souled Finnish mate, who, with the scent of treasure pungent in his nostrils, with a duplicate key stole the ship's

daily position from Captain Doane's locked desk, to Ah Moy, the cook, who kept Kwaque at a distance and never whispered warning to the others of the risk they ran from continual contact with the carrier of the terrible disease.

Kwaque himself had neither thought nor worry of the matter. He knew the thing as a thing that occasionally happened to human creatures. It bothered him, from the pain standpoint, scarcely at all, and it never entered his kinky head that his master did not know about it. For the same reason he never suspected why Ah Moy kept him so at a distance. Nor had Kwaque other worries. His god, over all gods of sea and jungle, he worshipped, and, himself ever intimately allowed in the presence, paradise was wherever he and his god, the steward, might be.

And so Michael. Much in the same way that Kwaque loved and worshipped did he love and worship the six-quart man. To Michael and Kwaque, the daily, even hourly, recognition and consideration of Dag Daughtry was tantamount to resting continuously in the bosom of Abraham. The god of Messrs. Doane, Nishikanta, and Grimshaw was a graven god whose name was Gold. The god of Kwaque and Michael was a living god, whose voice could be always heard, whose arms could be always warm, the pulse of whose heart could be always felt throbbing in a myriad acts and touches.

No greater joy was Michael's than to sit by the hour with Steward and sing with him all songs and tunes he sang or hummed. With a quantity or pitch even more of genius or unusualness in him than in Jerry, Michael

learned more quickly, and since the way of his education was singing, he came to sing far beyond the best Villa Kennan ever taught Jerry.

Michael could howl, or sing, rather (because his howling was so mellow and so controlled), any air that was not beyond his register that Steward elected to sing with him. In addition, he could sing by himself, and unmistakably, such simple airs as "Home, Sweet Home," "God save the King," and "The Sweet By and By." Even alone, prompted by Steward a score of feet away from him, could he lift up his muzzle and sing "Shenandoah" and "Roll me down to Rio."

Kwaque, on stolen occasions when Steward was not around, would get out his Jews' harp and by the sheer compellingness of the primitive instrument make Michael sing with him the barbaric and devil-devil rhythms of King William Island. Another master of song, but one in whom Michael delighted, came to rule over him. This master's name was Cocky. He so introduced himself to Michael at their first meeting.

"Cocky," he said bravely, without a quiver of fear or flight, when Michael had charged upon him at sight to destroy him. And the human voice, the voice of a god, issuing from the throat of the tiny, snow-white bird, had made Michael go back on his haunches, while, with eyes and nostrils, he quested the steerage for the human who had spoken. And there was no human . . . only a small cockatoo that twisted his head impudently and sidewise at him and repeated, "Cocky."

The taboo of the chicken Michael had been well taught in his earliest days at Meringe. Chickens, esteemed by Mister Haggin and his white-god fellows, were things that dogs must even defend instead of ever attack. But this thing, itself no chicken, with the seeming of a wild feathered thing of the jungle that was fair game for any dog, talked to him with the voice of a god.

"Get off your foot," it commanded so peremptorily, so humanly, as again to startle Michael and made him quest about the steerage for the god-throat that had uttered it.

"Get off your foot, or I'll throw the leg of Moses at you," was the next command from the tiny feathered thing.

After that came a farrago of Chinese, so like the voice of Ah Moy, that again, though for the last time, Michael sought about the steerage for the utterer.

At this Cocky burst into such wild and fantastic shrieks of laughter that Michael, ears pricked, head cocked to one side, identified in the fibres of the laughter the fibres of the various voices he had just previously heard.

And Cocky, only a few ounces in weight, less than half a pound, a tiny framework of fragile bone covered with a handful of feathers and incasing a heart that was as big in pluck as any heart on the Mary Turner,

became almost immediately Michael's friend and comrade, as well as ruler. Minute morsel of daring and courage that Cocky was, he commanded Michael's respect from the first. And Michael, who with a single careless paw-stroke could have broken Cocky's slender neck and put out for ever the brave brightness of Cocky's eyes, was careful of him from the first. And he permitted him a myriad liberties that he would never have permitted Kwaque.

Ingrained in Michael's heredity, from the very beginning of four-legged dogs on earth, was the defence of the meat. He never reasoned it. Automatic and involuntary as his heart-beating and air-breathing, was his defence of his meat once he had his paw on it, his teeth in it. Only to Steward, by an extreme effort of will and control, could he accord the right to touch his meat once he had himself touched it. Even Kwaque, who most usually fed him under Steward's instructions, knew that the safety of fingers and flesh resided in having nothing further whatever to do with anything of food once in Michael's possession. But Cocky, a bit of feathery down, a morsel-flash of light and life with the throat of a god, violated with sheer impudence and daring Michael's taboo, the defence of the meat.

Perched on the rim of Michael's pannikin, this inconsiderable adventurer from out of the dark into the sun of life, a mere spark and mote between the darks, by a ruffling of his salmon-pink crest, a swift and enormous dilation of his bead-black pupils, and a raucous imperative cry, as of all the gods, in his throat, could make Michael give back and permit the

fastidious selection of the choicest tidbits of his dish.

For Cocky had a way with him, and ways and ways. He, who was sheer bladed steel in the imperious flashing of his will, could swashbuckle and bully like any over-seas roisterer, or wheedle as wickedly winningly as the first woman out of Eden or the last woman of that descent. When Cocky, balanced on one leg, the other leg in the air as the foot of it held the scruff of Michael's neck, leaned to Michael's ear and wheedled, Michael could only lay down silkily the bristly hair-waves of his neck, and with silly half-idiotic eyes of bliss agree to whatever was Cocky's will or whimsey so delivered.

Cocky became more intimately Michael's because, very early, Ah Moy washed his hands of the bird. Ah Moy had bought him in Sydney from a sailor for eighteen shillings and chaffered an hour over the bargain. And when he saw Cocky, one day, perched and voluble, on the twisted fingers of Kwaque's left hand, Ah Moy discovered such instant distaste for the bird that not even eighteen shillings, coupled with possession of Cocky and possible contact, had any value to him.

"You likee him? You wanchee?" he proffered.

"Changee for changee!" Kwaque queried back, taking for granted that it was an offer to exchange and wondering whether the little old cook had become enamoured of his precious jews' harp.

"No changee for changee," Ah Moy answered. "You wanchee him, all right, can do."

"How fashion can do?" Kwaque demanded, who to his beche-de-mer English was already adding pidgin English. "Suppose 'm me fella no got 'm what you fella likee?"

"No fashion changee," Ah Moy reiterated. "You wanchee, you likee he stop along you fella all right, my word."

And so did pass the brave bit of feathered life with the heart of pluck, called of men, and of himself, "Cocky," who had been birthed in the jungle roof of the island of Santo, in the New Hebrides, who had been netted by a two-legged black man-eater and sold for six sticks of tobacco and a shingle hatchet to a Scotch trader dying of malaria, and in turn had been traded from hand to hand, for four shillings to a blackbirder, for a turtle-shell comb made by an English coal-passer after an old Spanish design, for the appraised value of six shillings and sixpence in a poker game in the firemen's fore-castle, for a second-hand accordion worth at least twenty shillings, and on for eighteen shillings cash to a little old withered Chinaman--so did pass Cocky, as mortal or as immortal as any brave sparkle of life on the planet, from the possession of one, Ah Moy, a sea-cock who, forty years before, had slain his young wife in Macao for cause and fled away to sea, to Kwaque, a leprous Black Papuan who was slave to one, Dag Daughtry, himself a servant of other men to whom he humbly admitted "Yes, sir," and "No, sir," and "Thank you, sir."

One other comrade Michael found, although Cocky was no party to the friendship. This was Scraps, the awkward young Newfoundland puppy, who was the property of no one, unless of the schooner Mary Turner herself, for no man, fore or aft, claimed ownership, while every man disclaimed having brought him on board. So he was called Scraps, and, since he was nobody's dog, was everybody's dog--so much so, that Mr. Jackson promised to knock Ah Moy's block off if he did not feed the puppy well, while Sigurd Halvorsen, in the forecastle, did his best to knock off Henrik Gjertsen's block when the latter was guilty of kicking Scraps out of his way. Yea, even more. When Simon Nishikanta, huge and gross as in the flesh he was and for ever painting delicate, insipid, feministic water-colours, when he threw his deck-chair at Scraps for clumsily knocking over his easel, he found the ham-like hand of Grimshaw so instant and heavy on his shoulder as to whirl him half about, almost fling him to the deck, and leave him lame-muscled and black-and-blued for days.

Michael, full grown, mature, was so merry-hearted an individual that he found all delight in interminable romps with Scraps. So strong was the play-instinct in him, as well as was his constitution strong, that he continually outplayed Scraps to abject weariness, so that he could only lie on the deck and pant and laugh through air-draughty lips and dab futilely in the air with weak forepaws at Michael's continued ferocious-acted onslaughts. And this, despite the fact that Scraps out-bullied him and out-scaled him at least three times, and was as careless and unwitting of the weight of his legs or shoulders as a baby elephant on a

lawn of daisies. Given his breath back again, Scraps was as ripe as ever for another frolic, and Michael was just as ripe to meet him. All of which was splendid training for Michael, keeping him in the tiptop of physical condition and mental wholesomeness.