

CHAPTER XVI

Two days later, as the steamer Mariposa plied her customary route between Tahiti and San Francisco, the passengers ceased playing deck quoits, abandoned their card games in the smoker, their novels and deck chairs, and crowded the rail to stare at the small boat that skimmed to them across the sea before a light following breeze. When Big John, aided by Ah Moy and Kwaque, lowered the sail and unstepped the mast, titters and laughter arose from the passengers. It was contrary to all their preconceptions of mid-ocean rescue of ship-wrecked mariners from the open boat.

It caught their fancy that this boat was the Ark, what of its freighting of bedding, dry goods boxes, beer-cases, a cat, two dogs, a white cockatoo, a Chinaman, a kinky-headed black, a gangly pallid-haired giant, a grizzled Dag Daughtry, and an Ancient Mariner who looked every inch the part. Him a facetious, vacationing architect's clerk dubbed Noah, and so greeted him.

"I say, Noah," he called. "Some flood, eh? Located Ararat yet?"

"Catch any fish?" bawled another youngster down over the rail.

"Gracious! Look at the beer! Good English beer! Put me down for a case!"

Never was a more popular wrecked crew more merrily rescued at sea. The young blades would have it that none other than old Noah himself had come on board with the remnants of the Lost Tribes, and to elderly female passengers spun hair-raising accounts of the sinking of an entire tropic island by volcanic and earthquake action.

"I'm a steward," Dag Daughtry told the Mariposa's captain, "and I'll be glad and grateful to berth along with your stewards in the glory-hole. Big John there's a sailorman, an' the fo'c's'le 'll do him. The Chink is a ship's cook, and the nigger belongs to me. But Mr. Greenleaf, sir, is a gentleman, and the best of cabin fare and staterooms'll be none too good for him, sir."

And when the news went around that these were part of the survivors of the three-masted schooner, Mary Turner, smashed into kindling wood and sunk by a whale, the elderly females no more believed than had they the yarn of the sunken island.

"Captain Hayward," one of them demanded of the steamer's skipper, "could a whale sink the Mariposa?"

"She has never been so sunk," was his reply.

"I knew it!" she declared emphatically. "It's not the way of ships to go around being sunk by whales, is it, captain?"

"No, madam, I assure you it is not," was his response. "Nevertheless, all the five men insist upon it."

"Sailors are notorious for their untruthfulness, are they not?" the lady voiced her flat conclusion in the form of a tentative query.

"Worst liars I ever saw, madam. Do you know, after forty years at sea, I couldn't believe myself under oath."

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Nine days later the Mariposa threaded the Golden Gate and docked at San Francisco. Humorous half-columns in the local papers, written in the customary silly way by unlicked cub reporters just out of grammar school, tickled the fancy of San Francisco for a fleeting moment in that the steamship Mariposa had rescued some sea-waifs possessed of a cock-and-bull story that not even the reporters believed. Thus, silly reportorial untruthfulness usually proves extraordinary truth a liar. It is the way of cub reporters, city newspapers, and flat-floor populations which get their thrills from moving pictures and for which the real world and all its spaciousness does not exist.

"Sunk by a whale!" demanded the average flat-floor person. "Nonsense, that's all. Just plain rotten nonsense. Now, in the 'Adventures of Eleanor,' which is some film, believe me, I'll tell you what I saw happen

. . . "

So Daughtry and his crew went ashore into 'Frisco Town unheralded and unsung, the second following morning's lucubrations of the sea reporters being varied disportations upon the attack on an Italian crab fisherman by an enormous jellyfish. Big John promptly sank out of sight in a sailors' boarding-house, and, within the week, joined the Sailors' Union and shipped on a steam schooner to load redwood ties at Bandon, Oregon. Ah Moy got no farther ashore than the detention sheds of the Federal Immigration Board, whence he was deported to China on the next Pacific Mail steamer. The Mary Turner's cat was adopted by the sailors' fore-castle of the Mariposa, and on the Mariposa sailed away on the back trip to Tahiti. Scraps was taken ashore by a quartermaster and left in the bosom of his family.

And ashore went Dag Daughtry, with his small savings, to rent two cheap rooms for himself and his remaining responsibilities, namely, Charles Stough Greenleaf, Kwaque, Michael, and, not least, Cocky. But not for long did he permit the Ancient Mariner to live with him.

"It's not playing the game, sir," he told him. "What we need is capital. We've got to interest capital, and you've got to do the interesting. Now this very day you've got to buy a couple of suit-cases, hire a taxicab, go sailing up to the front door of the Bronx Hotel like good pay and be damned. She's a real stylish hotel, but reasonable if you want to make it so. A little room, an inside room, European plan, of course, and then

you can economise by eatin' out."

"But, steward, I have no money," the Ancient Mariner protested.

"That's all right, sir; I'll back you for all I can."

"But, my dear man, you know I'm an old impostor. I can't stick you up like the others. You . . . why . . . why, you're a friend, don't you see?"

"Sure I do, and I thank you for sayin' it, sir. And that's why I'm with you. And when you've nailed another crowd of treasure-hunters and got the ship ready, you'll just ship me along as steward, with Kwaque, and Killeny Boy, and the rest of our family. You've adopted me, now, an' I'm your grown-up son, an' you've got to listen to me. The Bronx is the hotel for you--fine-soundin' name, ain't it? That's atmosphere. Folk'll listen half to you an' more to your hotel. I tell you, you leaning back in a big leather chair talkin' treasure with a two-bit cigar in your mouth an' a twenty-cent drink beside you, why that's like treasure. They just got to believe. An' if you'll come along now, sir, we'll trot out an' buy them suit-cases."

Right bravely the Ancient Mariner drove to the Bronx in a taxi, registered his "Charles Stough Greenleaf" in an old-fashioned hand, and took up anew the activities which for years had kept him free of the poor-farm. No less bravely did Dag Daughtry set out to seek work. This was

most necessary, because he was a man of expensive luxuries. His family of Kwaque, Michael, and Cocky required food and shelter; more costly than that was maintenance of the Ancient Mariner in the high-class hotel; and, in addition, was his six-quart thirst.

But it was a time of industrial depression. The unemployed problem was bulking bigger than usual to the citizens of San Francisco. And, as regarded steamships and sailing vessels, there were three stewards for every Steward's position. Nothing steady could Daughtry procure, while his occasional odd jobs did not balance his various running expenses. Even did he do pick-and-shovel work, for the municipality, for three days, when he had to give way, according to the impartial procedure, to another needy one whom three days' work would keep afloat a little longer.

Daughtry would have put Kwaque to work, except that Kwaque was impossible. The black, who had only seen Sydney from steamers' decks, had never been in a city in his life. All he knew of the world was steamers, far-outlying south-sea isles, and his own island of King William in Melanesia. So Kwaque remained in the two rooms, cooking and housekeeping for his master and caring for Michael and Cocky. All of which was prison for Michael, who had been used to the run of ships, of coral beaches and plantations.

But in the evenings, sometimes accompanied a few steps in the rear by Kwaque, Michael strolled out with Steward. The multiplicity of man-gods

on the teeming sidewalks became a real bore to Michael, so that man-gods, in general, underwent a sharp depreciation. But Steward, the particular god of his fealty and worship, appreciated. Amongst so many gods Michael felt bewildered, while Steward's Abrahamic bosom became more than ever the one sure haven where harshness and danger never troubled.

"Mind your step," is the last word and warning of twentieth-century city life. Michael was not slow to learn it, as he conserved his own feet among the countless thousands of leather-shod feet of men, ever hurrying, always unregarding of the existence and right of way of a lowly, four-legged Irish terrier.

The evening outings with Steward invariably led from saloon to saloon, where, at long bars, standing on sawdust floors, or seated at tables, men drank and talked. Much of both did men do, and also did Steward do, ere, his daily six-quart stint accomplished, he turned homeward for bed. Many were the acquaintances he made, and Michael with him. Coasting seamen and bay sailors they mostly were, although there were many 'longshoremen and waterfront workmen among them.

From one of these, a scow-schooner captain who plied up and down the bay and the San Joaquin and Sacramento rivers, Daughtry had the promise of being engaged as cook and sailor on the schooner Howard. Eighty tons of freight, including deckload, she carried, and in all democracy Captain Jorgensen, the cook, and the two other sailors, loaded and unloaded her at all hours, and sailed her night and day on all times and tides, one

man steering while three slept and recuperated. It was time, and double-time, and over-time beyond that, but the feeding was generous and the wages ran from forty-five to sixty dollars a month.

"Sure, you bet," said Captain Jorgensen. "This cook-feller, Hanson, pretty quick I smash him up an' fire him, then you can come along . . . and the bow-wow, too." Here he dropped a hearty, wholesome hand of toil down to a caress of Michael's head. "That's one fine bow-wow. A bow-wow is good on a scow when all hands sleep alongside the dock or in an anchor watch."

"Fire Hanson now," Dag Daughtry urged.

But Captain Jorgensen shook his slow head slowly. "First I smash him up."

"Then smash him now and fire him," Daughtry persisted. "There he is right now at the corner of the bar."

"No. He must give me reason. I got plenty of reason. But I want reason all hands can see. I want him make me smash him, so that all hands say, 'Hurrah, Captain, you done right.' Then you get the job, Daughtry."

Had Captain Jorgensen not been dilatory in his contemplated smashing, and had not Hanson delayed in giving sufficient provocation for a smashing, Michael would have accompanied Steward upon the schooner, Howard, and

all Michael's subsequent experiences would have been totally different from what they were destined to be. But destined they were, by chance and by combinations of chance events over which Michael had no control and of which he had no more awareness than had Steward himself. At that period, the subsequent stage career and nightmare of cruelty for Michael was beyond any wildest forecast or apprehension. And as to forecasting Dag Daughtry's fate, along with Kwaque, no maddest drug-dream could have approximated it.