CHAPTER XVIII

The grizzled ship's steward and the rough-coated Irish terrier quickly became conspicuous figures in the night life of the Barbary Coast of San Francisco. Daughtry elaborated on the counting trick by bringing Cocky along. Thus, when a waiter did not fetch the right number of glasses, Michael would remain quite still, until Cocky, at a privy signal from Steward, standing on one leg, with the free claw would clutch Michael's neck and apparently talk into Michael's ear. Whereupon Michael would look about the glasses on the table and begin his usual expostulation with the waiter.

But it was when Daughtry and Michael first sang "Roll me Down to Rio" together, that the ten-strike was made. It occurred in a sailors' dance-hall on Pacific Street, and all dancing stopped while the sailors clamoured for more of the singing dog. Nor did the place lose money, for no one left, and the crowd increased to standing room as Michael went through his repertoire of "God Save the King," "Sweet Bye and Bye," "Lead, Kindly Light," "Home, Sweet Home," and "Shenandoah."

It meant more than free beer to Daughtry, for, when he started to leave, the proprietor of the place thrust three silver dollars into his hand and begged him to come around with the dog next night.

"For that?" Daughtry demanded, looking at the money as if it were

contemptible.

Hastily the proprietor added two more dollars, and Daughtry promised.

"Just the same, Killeny, my son," he told Michael as they went to bed, "I think you an' me are worth more than five dollars a turn. Why, the like of you has never been seen before. A real singing dog that can carry 'most any air with me, and that can carry half a dozen by himself. An' they say Caruso gets a thousand a night. Well, you ain't Caruso, but you're the dog-Caruso of the entire world. Son, I'm goin' to be your business manager. If we can't make a twenty-dollar gold-piece a night--say, son, we're goin' to move into better quarters. An' the old gent up at the Hotel de Bronx is goin' to move into an outside room. An' Kwaque's goin' to get a real outfit of clothes. Killeny, my boy, we're goin' to get so rich that if he can't snare a sucker we'll put up the cash ourselves 'n' buy a schooner for 'm, 'n' send him out a-treasure-huntin' on his own. We'll be the suckers, eh, just you an' me, an' love to."

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The Barbary Coast of San Francisco, once the old-time sailor-town in the days when San Francisco was reckoned the toughest port of the Seven Seas, had evolved with the city until it depended for at least half of its earnings on the slumming parties that visited it and spent liberally. It was quite the custom, after dinner, for many of the better classes of

society, especially when entertaining curious Easterners, to spend an hour or several in motoring from dance-hall to dance-hall and cheap cabaret to cheap cabaret. In short, the "Coast" was as much a sight-seeing place as was Chinatown and the Cliff House.

It was not long before Dag Daughtry was getting his twenty dollars a night for two twenty-minute turns, and was declining more beer than a dozen men with thirsts equal to his could have accommodated. Never had he been so prosperous; nor can it be denied that Michael enjoyed it. Enjoy it he did, but principally for Steward's sake. He was serving Steward, and so to serve was his highest heart's desire.

In truth, Michael was the bread-winner for quite a family, each member of which fared well. Kwaque blossomed out resplendent in russet-brown shoes, a derby hat, and a gray suit with trousers immaculately creased. Also, he became a devotee of the moving-picture shows, spending as much as twenty and thirty cents a day and resolutely sitting out every repetition of programme. Little time was required of him in caring for Daughtry, for they had come to eating in restaurants. Not only had the Ancient Mariner moved into a more expensive outside room at the Bronx; but Daughtry insisted on thrusting upon him more spending money, so that, on occasion, he could invite a likely acquaintance to the theatre or a concert and bring him home in a taxi.

"We won't keep this up for ever, Killeny," Steward told Michael. "For just as long as it takes the old gent to land another bunch of

gold-pouched, retriever-snouted treasure-hunters, and no longer. Then it's hey for the ocean blue, my son, an' the roll of a good craft under our feet, an' smash of wet on the deck, an' a spout now an' again of the scuppers.

"We got to go rollin' down to Rio as well as sing about it to a lot of cheap skates. They can take their rotten cities. The sea's the life for us--you an' me, Killeny, son, an' the old gent an' Kwaque, an' Cocky, too. We ain't made for city ways. It ain't healthy. Why, son, though you maybe won't believe it, I'm losin' my spring. The rubber's goin' outa me. I'm kind o' languid, with all night in an' nothin' to do but sit around. It makes me fair sick at the thought of hearin' the old gent say once again, 'I think, steward, one of those prime cocktails would be just the thing before dinner.' We'll take a little ice-machine along next voyage, an' give 'm the best.

"An' look at Kwaque, Killeny, my boy. This ain't his climate. He's positively ailin'. If he sits around them picture-shows much more he'll develop the T.B. For the good of his health, an' mine an' yours, an' all of us, we got to get up anchor pretty soon an' hit out for the home of the trade winds that kiss you through an' through with the salt an' the life of the sea."

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In truth, Kwaque, who never complained, was ailing fast. A swelling,

slow and sensationless at first, under his right arm-pit, had become a mild and unceasing pain. No longer could he sleep a night through. Although he lay on his left side, never less than twice, and often three and four times, the hurt of the swelling woke him. Ah Moy, had he not long since been delivered back to China by the immigration authorities, could have told him the meaning of that swelling, just as he could have told Dag Daughtry the meaning of the increasing area of numbness between his eyes where the tiny, vertical, lion-lines were cutting more conspicuously. Also, could he have told him what was wrong with the little finger on his left hand. Daughtry had first diagnosed it as a sprain of a tendon. Later, he had decided it was chronic rheumatism brought on by the damp and foggy Sun Francisco climate. It was one of his reasons for desiring to get away again to sea where the tropic sun would warm the rheumatism out of him.

As a steward, Daughtry had been accustomed to contact with men and women of the upper world. But for the first time in his life, here in the underworld of San Francisco, in all equality he met such persons from above. Nay, more, they were eager to meet him. They sought him. They fawned upon him for an invitation to sit at his table and buy beer for him in whatever garish cabaret Michael was performing. They would have bought wine for him, at enormous expense, had he not stubbornly stuck to his beer. They were, some of them, for inviting him to their homes--"An' bring the wonderful dog along for a sing-song"; but Daughtry, proud of Michael for being the cause of such invitations, explained that the professional life was too arduous to permit of such diversions. To

Michael he explained that when they proffered a fee of fifty dollars, the pair of them would "come a-runnin'."

Among the host of acquaintances made in their cabaret-life, two were destined, very immediately, to play important parts in the lives of Daughtry and Michael. The first, a politician and a doctor, by name Emory--Walter Merritt Emory--was several times at Daughtry's table, where Michael sat with them on a chair according to custom. Among other things, in gratitude for such kindnesses from Daughtry, Doctor Emory gave his office card and begged for the privilege of treating, free of charge, either master or dog should they ever become sick. In Daughtry's opinion, Dr. Walter Merritt Emory was a keen, clever man, undoubtedly able in his profession, but passionately selfish as a hungry tiger. As he told him, in the brutal candour he could afford under such changed conditions: "Doc, you're a wonder. Anybody can see it with half an eye. What you want you just go and get. Nothing'd stop you except . . . "

"Except?"

"Oh, except that it was nailed down, or locked up, or had a policeman standing guard over it. I'd sure hate to have anything you wanted."

"Well, you have," Doctor assured him, with a significant nod at Michael on the chair between them.

"Br-r-r!" Daughtry shivered. "You give me the creeps. If I thought you

really meant it, San Francisco couldn't hold me two minutes." He meditated into his beer-glass a moment, then laughed with reassurance. "No man could get that dog away from me. You see, I'd kill the man first. I'd just up an' tell 'm, as I'm tellin' you now, I'd kill 'm first. An' he'd believe me, as you're believin' me now. You know I mean it. So'd he know I meant it. Why, that dog . . . "

In sheer inability to express the profundity of his emotion, Dag Daughtry broke off the sentence and drowned it in his beer-glass.

Of quite different type was the other person of destiny. Harry Del Mar, he called himself; and Harry Del Mar was the name that appeared on the programmes when he was doing Orpheum "time." Although Daughtry did not know it, because Del Mar was laying off for a vacation, the man did trained-animal turns for a living. He, too, bought drinks at Daughtry's table. Young, not over thirty, dark of complexion with large, long-lashed brown eyes that he fondly believed were magnetic, cherubic of lip and feature, he belied all his appearance by talking business in direct business fashion.

"But you ain't got the money to buy 'm," Daughtry replied, when the other had increased his first offer of five hundred dollars for Michael to a thousand.

"I've got the thousand, if that's what you mean."

"No," Daughtry shook his head. "I mean he ain't for sale at any price. Besides, what do you want 'm for?"

"I like him," Del Mar answered. "Why do I come to this joint? Why does the crowd come here? Why do men buy wine, run horses, sport actresses, become priests or bookworms? Because they like to. That's the answer. We all do what we like when we can, go after the thing we want whether we can get it or not. Now I like your dog, I want him. I want him a thousand dollars' worth. See that big diamond on that woman's hand over there. I guess she just liked it, and wanted it, and got it, never mind the price. The price didn't mean as much to her as the diamond. Now that dog of yours--"

"Don't like you," Dag Daughtry broke in. "Which is strange. He likes most everybody without fussin' about it. But he bristled at you from the first. No man'd want a dog that don't like him."

"Which isn't the question," Del Mar stated quietly. "I like him. As for him liking or not liking me, that's my look-out, and I guess I can attend to that all right."

It seemed to Daughtry that he glimpsed or sensed under the other's unfaltering cherubicness of expression a steelness of cruelty that was abysmal in that it was of controlled intelligence. Not in such terms did Daughtry think his impression. At the most, it was a feeling, and feelings do not require words in order to be experienced or comprehended.

"There's an all-night bank," the other went on. "We can stroll over, I'll cash a cheque, and in half an hour the cash will be in your hand."

Daughtry shook his head.

"Even as a business proposition, nothing doing," he said. "Look you. Here's the dog earnin' twenty dollars a night. Say he works twenty-five days in the month. That's five hundred a month, or six thousand a year. Now say that's five per cent., because it's easier to count, it represents the interest on a capital value of one hundred an' twenty thousand-dollars. Then we'll suppose expenses and salary for me is twenty thousand. That leaves the dog worth a hundred thousand. Just to be fair, cut it in half--a fifty-thousand dog. And you're offerin' a thousand for him."

"I suppose you think he'll last for ever, like so much land'," Del Mar smiled quietly.

Daughtry saw the point instantly.

"Give 'm five years of work--that's thirty thousand. Give 'm one year of work--it's six thousand. An' you're offerin' me one thousand for six thousand. That ain't no kind of business--for me . . . an' him. Besides, when he can't work any more, an' ain't worth a cent, he'll be worth just a plumb million to me, an' if anybody offered it, I'd raise the price."