

CHAPTER XXI

Harry Del Mar found only a few white feathers on the floor of Dag Daughtry's room in the Bowhead Lodging House, and from the landlady learned what had happened to Michael. The first thing Harry Del Mar did, still retaining his taxi, was to locate the residence of Doctor Emory and make sure that Michael was confined in an outhouse in the back yard. Next he engaged passage on the steamship Umatilla, sailing for Seattle and Puget Sound ports at daylight. And next he packed his luggage and paid his bills.

In the meantime, a wordy war was occurring in Walter Merritt Emory's office.

"The man's yelling his head off," Doctor Masters was contending. "The police had to rap him with their clubs in the ambulance. He was violent. He wanted his dog. It can't be done. It's too raw. You can't steal his dog this way. He'll make a howl in the papers."

"Huh!" quoth Walter Merritt Emory. "I'd like to see a reporter with backbone enough to go within talking distance of a leper in the pest-house. And I'd like to see the editor who wouldn't send a pest-house letter (granting it'd been smuggled past the guards) out to be burned the very second he became aware of its source. Don't you worry, Doc. There won't be any noise in the papers."

"But leprosy! Public health! The dog has been exposed to his master. The dog itself is a peripatetic source of infection."

"Contagion is the better and more technical word, Doc.," Walter Merritt Emory soothed with the sting of superior knowledge.

"Contagion, then," Doctor Masters took him up. "The public must be considered. It must not run the risk of being infected--"

"Of contracting the contagion," the other corrected smoothly.

"Call it what you will. The public--"

"Poppycock," said Walter Merritt Emory. "What you don't know about leprosy, and what the rest of the board of health doesn't know about leprosy, would fill more books than have been compiled by the men who have expertly studied the disease. The one thing they have eternally tried, and are eternally trying, is to inoculate one animal outside man with the leprosy that is peculiar to man. Horses, rabbits, rats, donkeys, monkeys, mice, and dogs--heavens, they have tried it on them all, tens of thousands of times and a hundred thousand times ten thousand times, and never a successful inoculation! They have never succeeded in inoculating it on one man from another. Here--let me show you."

And from his shelves Waiter Merritt Emory began pulling down his

authorities.

"Amazing . . . most interesting . . ." Doctor Masters continued to emit from time to time as he followed the expert guidance of the other through the books. "I never dreamed . . . the amount of work they have done is astounding . . ."

"But," he said in conclusion, "there is no convincing a layman of the matter contained on your shelves. Nor can I so convince my public. Nor will I try to. Besides, the man is consigned to the living death of life-long imprisonment in the pest-house. You know the beastly hole it is. He loves the dog. He's mad over it. Let him have it. I tell you it's rotten unfair and cruel, and I won't stand for it."

"Yes, you will," Walter Merritt Emory assured him coolly. "And I'll tell you why."

He told him. He said things that no doctor should say to another, but which a politician may well say, and has often said, to another politician--things which cannot bear repeating, if, for no other reason, because they are too humiliating and too little conducive to pride for the average American citizen to know; things of the inside, secret governments of imperial municipalities which the average American citizen, voting free as a king at the polls, fondly thinks he manages; things which are, on rare occasion, partly unburied and promptly reburied in the tomes of reports of Lexow Committees and Federal Commissions.

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And Walter Merritt Emory won his desire of Michael against Doctor Masters; had his wife dine with him at Jules' that evening and took her to see Margaret Anglin in celebration of the victory; returned home at one in the morning, in his pyjamas went out to take a last look at Michael, and found no Michael.

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The pest-house of San Francisco, as is naturally the case with pest-houses in all American cities, was situated on the bleakest, remotest, forlornest, cheapest space of land owned by the city. Poorly protected from the Pacific Ocean, chill winds and dense fog-banks whistled and swirled sadly across the sand-dunes. Picnicking parties never came there, nor did small boys hunting birds' nests or playing at being wild Indians. The only class of frequenters was the suicides, who, sad of life, sought the saddest landscape as a fitting scene in which to end. And, because they so ended, they never repeated their visits.

The outlook from the windows was not inspiring. A quarter of a mile in either direction, looking out along the shallow canyon of the sand-hills, Dag Daughtry could see the sentry-boxes of the guards, themselves armed and more prone to kill than to lay hands on any escaping pest-man, much less persuavively discuss with him the advisability of his return to the

prison house.

On the opposing sides of the prospect from the windows of the four walls of the pest-house were trees. Eucalyptus they were, but not the royal monarchs that their brothers are in native habitats. Poorly planted, by politics, illy attended, by politics, decimated and many times repeatedly decimated by the hostile forces of their environment, a straggling corporal's guard of survivors, they thrust their branches, twisted and distorted, as if writhing in agony, into the air. Scrub of growth they were, expending the major portion of their meagre nourishment in their roots that crawled seaward through the insufficient sand for anchorage against the prevailing gales.

Not even so far as the sentry-boxes were Daughtry and Kwaque permitted to stroll. A hundred yards inside was the dead-line. Here, the guards came hastily to deposit food-supplies, medicines, and written doctors' instructions, retreating as hastily as they came. Here, also, was a blackboard upon which Daughtry was instructed to chalk up his needs and requests in letters of such size that they could be read from a distance. And on this board, for many days, he wrote, not demands for beer, although the six-quart daily custom had been broken sharply off, but demands like:

WHERE IS MY DOG?

HE IS AN IRISH TERRIER.

HE IS ROUGH-COATED.

HIS NAME IS KILLENY BOY.

I WANT MY DOG.

I WANT TO TALK TO DOC. EMORY.

TELL DOC. EMORY TO WRITE TO ME ABOUT MY DOG.

One day, Dag Daughtry wrote:

IF I DON'T GET MY DOG I WILL KILL DOC. EMORY.

Whereupon the newspapers informed the public that the sad case of the two lepers at the pest-house had become tragic, because the white one had gone insane. Public-spirited citizens wrote to the papers, declaiming against the maintenance of such a danger to the community, and demanding that the United States government build a national leprosarium on some remote island or isolated mountain peak. But this tiny ripple of interest faded out in seventy-two hours, and the reporter-cubs proceeded variously to interest the public in the Alaskan husky dog that was half a bear, in the question whether or not Crispi Angelotti was guilty of having cut the carcass of Giuseppe Bartholdi into small portions and thrown it into the bay in a grain-sack off Fisherman's Wharf, and in the

overt designs of Japan upon Hawaii, the Philippines, and the Pacific Coast of North America.

And, outside of imprisonment, nothing happened of interest to Dag Daughtry and Kwaque at the pest-house until one night in the late fall. A gale was not merely brewing. It was coming on to blow. Because, in a basket of fruit, stated to have been sent by the young ladies of Miss Foote's Seminary, Daughtry had read a note artfully concealed in the heart of an apple, telling him on the forthcoming Friday night to keep a light burning in his window. Daughtry received a visitor at five in the morning.

It was Charles Stough Greenleaf, the Ancient Mariner himself. Having wallowed for two hours through the deep sand of the eucalyptus forest, he fell exhausted against the penthouse door. When Daughtry opened it, the ancient one blew in upon him along with a gusty wet splatter of the freshening gale. Daughtry caught him first and supported him toward a chair. But, remembering his own affliction, he released the old man so abruptly as to drop him violently into the chair.

"My word, sir," said Daughtry. "You must 'a' ben havin' a time of it.--Here, you fella Kwaque, this fella wringin' wet. You fella take 'm off shoe stop along him."

But before Kwaque, immediately kneeling, could touch hand to the shoelaces, Daughtry, remembering that Kwaque was likewise unclean, had

thrust him away.

"My word, I don't know what to do," Daughtry murmured, staring about helplessly as he realised that it was a leper-house, that the very chair in which the old man sat was a leper-chair, that the very floor on which his exhausted feet rested was a leper-floor.

"I'm glad to see you, most exceeding glad," the Ancient Mariner panted, extending his hand in greeting.

Dag Daughtry avoided it.

"How goes the treasure-hunting?" he queried lightly. "Any prospects in sight?"

The Ancient Mariner nodded, and with returning breath, at first whispering, gasped out:

"We're all cleared to sail on the first of the ebb at seven this morning. She's out in the stream now, a tidy bit of a schooner, the Bethlehem, with good lines and hull and large cabin accommodations. She used to be in the Tahiti trade, before the steamers ran her out. Provisions are good. Everything is most excellent. I saw to that. I cannot say I like the captain. I've seen his type before. A splendid seaman, I am certain, but a Bully Hayes grown old. A natural born pirate, a very wicked old man indeed. Nor is the backer any better. He is middle-aged,

has a bad record, and is not in any sense of the word a gentleman, but he has plenty of money--made it first in California oil, then grub-staked a prospector in British Columbia, cheated him out of his share of the big lode he discovered and doubled his own wealth half a dozen times over. A very undesirable, unlikeable sort of a man. But he believes in luck, and is confident that he'll make at least fifty millions out of our adventure and cheat me out of my share. He's as much a pirate as is the captain he's engaged."

"Mr. Greenleaf, I congratulate you, sir," Daughtry said. "And you have touched me, sir, touched me to the heart, coming all the way out here on such a night, and running such risks, just to say good-bye to poor Dag Daughtry, who always meant somewhat well but had bad luck."

But while he talked so heartily, Daughtry saw, in a resplendent visioning, all the freedom of a schooner in the great South Seas, and felt his heart sink in realisation that remained for him only the pest-house, the sand-dunes, and the sad eucalyptus trees.

The Ancient Mariner sat stiffly upright.

"Sir, you have hurt me. You have hurt me to the heart."

"No offence, sir, no offence," Daughtry stammered in apology, although he wondered in what way he could have hurt the old gentleman's feelings.

"You are my friend, sir," the other went on, gravely censorious. "I am your friend, sir. And you give me to understand that you think I have come out here to this hell-hole to say good-bye. I came out here to get you, sir, and your nigger, sir. The schooner is waiting for you. All is arranged. You are signed on the articles before the shipping commissioner. Both of you. Signed on yesterday by proxies I arranged for myself. One was a Barbadoes nigger. I got him and the white man out of a sailors' boarding-house on Commercial Street and paid them five dollars each to appear before the Commissioner and sign on."

"But, my God, Mr. Greenleaf, you don't seem to grasp it that he and I are lepers."

Almost with a galvanic spring, the Ancient Mariner was out of the chair and on his feet, the anger of age and of a generous soul in his face as he cried:

"My God, sir, what you don't seem to grasp is that you are my friend, and that I am your friend."

Abruptly, still under the pressure of his wrath, he thrust out his hand.

"Steward, Daughtry. Mr. Daughtry, friend, sir, or whatever I may name you, this is no fairy-story of the open boat, the cross-bearings unnamable, and the treasure a fathom under the sand. This is real. I have a heart. That, sir"--here he waved his extended hand under

Daughtry's nose--"is my hand. There is only one thing you may do, must do, right now. You must take that hand in your hand, and shake it, with your heart in your hand as mine is in my hand."

"But . . . but. . ." Daughtry faltered.

"If you don't, then I shall not depart from this place. I shall remain here, die here. I know you are a leper. You can't tell me anything about that. There's my hand. Are you going to take it? My heart is there in the palm of it, in the pulse in every finger-end of it. If you don't take it, I warn you I'll sit right down here in this chair and die. I want you to understand I am a man, sir, a gentleman. I am a friend, a comrade. I am no poltroon of the flesh. I live in my heart and in my head, sir--not in this feeble carcass I cursorily inhabit. Take that hand. I want to talk with you afterward."

Dag Daughtry extended his hand hesitantly, but the Ancient Mariner seized it and pressed it so fiercely with his age-lean fingers as to hurt.

"Now we can talk," he said. "I have thought the whole matter over. We sail on the Bethlehem. When the wicked man discovers that he can never get a penny of my fabulous treasure, we will leave him. He will be glad to be quit of us. We, you and I and your nigger, will go ashore in the Marquesas. Lepers roam about free there. There are no regulations. I have seen them. We will be free. The land is a paradise. And you and I will set up housekeeping. A thatched hut--no more is needed. The work

is trifling. The freedom of beach and sea and mountain will be ours. For you there will be sailing, swimming, fishing, hunting. There are mountain goats, wild chickens and wild cattle. Bananas and plantains will ripen over our heads--avocados and custard apples, also. The red peppers grow by the door, and there will be fowls, and the eggs of fowls. Kwaque shall do the cooking. And there will be beer. I have long noted your thirst unquenchable. There will be beer, six quarts of it a day, and more, more.

"Quick. We must start now. I am sorry to tell you that I have vainly sought your dog. I have even paid detectives who were robbers. Doctor Emory stole Killeny Boy from you, but within a dozen hours he was stolen from Doctor Emory. I have left no stone unturned. Killeny Boy is gone, as we shall be gone from this detestable hole of a city.

"I have a machine waiting. The driver is paid well. Also, I have promised to kill him if he defaults on me. It bears just a bit north of east over the sandhill on the road that runs along the other side of the funny forest . . . That is right. We will start now. We can discuss afterward. Look! Daylight is beginning to break. The guards must not see us . . . "

Out into the storm they passed, Kwaque, with a heart wild with gladness, bringing up the rear. At the beginning Daughtry strove to walk aloof, but in a trice, in the first heavy gust that threatened to whisk the frail old man away, Dag Daughtry's hand was grasping the other's arm, his

own weight behind and under, supporting and impelling forward and up the hill through the heavy sand.

"Thank you, steward, thank you, my friend," the Ancient Mariner murmured in the first lull between the gusts.