

CHAPTER XXII

Not altogether unwillingly, in the darkness of night, despite that he disliked the man, did Michael go with Harry Del Mar. Like a burglar the man came, with infinite caution of silence, to the outhouse in Doctor Emory's back yard where Michael was a prisoner. Del Mar knew the theatre too well to venture any hackneyed melodramatic effect such as an electric torch. He felt his way in the darkness to the door of the outhouse, unlatched it, and entered softly, feeling with his hands for the wire-haired coat.

And Michael, a man-dog and a lion-dog in all the stuff of him, bristled at the instant of intrusion, but made no outcry. Instead, he smelled out the intruder and recognised him. Disliking the man, nevertheless he permitted the tying of the rope around his neck and silently followed him out to the sidewalk, down to the corner, and into the waiting taxi.

His reasoning--unless reason be denied him--was simple. This man he had met, more than once, in the company of Steward. Amity had existed between him and Steward, for they had sat at table, and drunk together. Steward was lost. Michael knew not where to find him, and was himself a prisoner in the back yard of a strange place. What had once happened, could again happen. It had happened that Steward, Del Mar, and Michael had sat at table together on divers occasions. It was probable that such a combination would happen again, was going to happen now, and, once

more, in the bright-lighted cabaret, he would sit on a chair, Del Mar on one side, and on the other side beloved Steward with a glass of beer before him--all of which might be called "leaping to a conclusion"; for conclusion there was, and upon the conclusion Michael acted.

Now Michael could not reason to this conclusion nor think to this conclusion, in words. "Amity," as an instance, was no word in his consciousness. Whether or not he thought to the conclusion in swift-related images and pictures and swift-welded composites of images and pictures, is a problem that still waits human solution. The point is: he did think. If this be denied him, then must he have acted wholly by instinct--which would seem more marvellous on the face of it than if, in dim ways, he had performed a vague thought-process.

However, into the taxi and away through the maze of San Francisco's streets, Michael lay alertly on the floor near Del Mar's feet, making no overtures of friendliness, by the same token making no demonstration of the repulsion of the man's personality engendered in him. For Harry Del Mar, who was base, and who had been further abased by his money-making desire for the possession of Michael, had had his baseness sensed by Michael from the beginning. That first meeting in the Barbary Coast cabaret, Michael had bristled at him, and stiffened belligerently, when he laid his hand on Michael's head. Nor had Michael thought about the man at all, much less attempted any analysis of him. Something had been wrong with that hand--the perfunctory way in which it had touched him under a show of heartiness that could well deceive the onlooker. The

feel of it had not been right. There had been no warmth in it, no heart, no communication of genuine good approach from the brain and the soul of the man of which it was the telegraphic tentacle and transmitter. In short, the message or feel had not been a good message or feel, and Michael had bristled and stiffened without thinking, but by mere knowing, which is what men call "intuition."

Electric lights, a shed-covered wharf, mountains of luggage and freight, the noisy toil of 'longshoremen and sailors, the staccato snorts of donkey engines and the whining sheaves as running lines ran through the blocks, a crowd of white-coated stewards carrying hand-baggage, the quartermaster at the gangway foot, the gangway sloping steeply up to the Umatilla's promenade deck, more quartermasters and gold-laced ship's officers at the head of the gangway, and more crowd and confusion blocking the narrow deck--thus Michael knew, beyond all peradventure, that he had come back to the sea and its ships, where he had first met Steward, where he had been always with Steward, save for the recent nightmare period in the great city. Nor was there absent from the flashing visions of his consciousness the images and memories of Kwaque and Cocky. Whining eagerly, he strained at the leash, risking his tender toes among the many inconsiderate, restless, leather-shod feet of the humans, as he quested and scented for Cocky and Kwaque, and, most of all, for Steward.

Michael accepted his disappointment in not immediately meeting them, for from the dawn of consciousness, the limitations and restrictions of dogs

in relation to humans had been hammered into him in the form of concepts of patience. The patience of waiting, when he wanted to go home and when Steward continued to sit at table and talk and drink beer, was his, as was the patience of the rope around the neck, the fence too high to scale, the narrowed-walled room with the closed door which he could never unlatch but which humans unlatched so easily. So that he permitted himself to be led away by the ship's butcher, who on the Umatilla had the charge of all dog passengers. Immured in a tiny between-decks cubby which was filled mostly with boxes and bales, tied as well by the rope around his neck, he waited from moment to moment for the door to open and admit, realised in the flesh, the resplendent vision of Steward which blazed through the totality of his consciousness.

Instead, although Michael did not guess it then, and, only later, divined it as a vague manifestation of power on the part of Del Mar, the well-tipped ship's butcher opened the door, untied him, and turned him over to the well-tipped stateroom steward who led him to Del Mar's stateroom. Up to the last, Michael was convinced that he was being led to Steward. Instead, in the stateroom, he found only Del Mar. "No Steward," might be described as Michael's thought; but by patience, as his mood and key, might be described his acceptance of further delay in meeting up with his god, his best beloved, his Steward who was his own human god amidst the multitude of human gods he was encountering.

Michael wagged his tail, flattened his ears, even his crinkled ear, a trifle, and smiled, all in a casual way of recognition, smelled out the

room to make doubly sure that there was no scent of Steward, and lay down on the floor. When Del Mar spoke to him, he looked up and gazed at him.

"Now, my boy, times have changed," Del Mar addressed him in cold, brittle tones. "I'm going to make an actor out of you, and teach you what's what. First of all, come here . . . COME HERE!"

Michael obeyed, without haste, without lagging, and patently without eagerness.

"You'll get over that, my lad, and put pep into your motions when I talk to you," Del Mar assured him; and the very manner of his utterance was a threat that Michael could not fail to recognise. "Now we'll just see if I can pull off the trick. You listen to me, and sing like you did for that leper guy."

Drawing a harmonica from his vest pocket, he put it to his lips and began to play "Marching through Georgia."

"Sit down!" he commanded.

Again Michael obeyed, although all that was Michael was in protest. He quivered as the shrill-sweet strains from the silver reeds ran through him. All his throat and chest was in the impulse to sing; but he mastered it, for he did not care to sing for this man. All he wanted of him was Steward.

"Oh, you're stubborn, eh?" Del Mar sneered at him. "The matter with you is you're thoroughbred. Well, my boy, it just happens I know your kind and I reckon I can make you get busy and work for me just as much as you did for that other guy. Now get busy."

He shifted the tune on into "Georgia Camp Meeting." But Michael was obdurate. Not until the melting strains of "Old Kentucky Home" poured through him did he lose his self-control and lift his mellow-throated howl that was the call for the lost pack of the ancient millenniums. Under the prodding hypnosis of this music he could not but yearn and burn for the vague, forgotten life of the pack when the world was young and the pack was the pack ere it was lost for ever through the endless centuries of domestication.

"Ah, ha," Del Mar chuckled coldly, unaware of the profound history and vast past he evoked by his silver reeds.

A loud knock on the partition wall warned him that some sleepy passenger was objecting.

"That will do!" he said sharply, taking the harmonica from his lips. And Michael ceased, and hated him. "I guess I've got your number all right. And you needn't think you're going to sleep here scratching fleas and disturbing my sleep."

He pressed the call-button, and, when his room-steward answered, turned Michael over to him to be taken down below and tied up in the crowded cubby-hole.

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During the several days and nights on the Umatilla, Michael learned much of what manner of man Harry Del Mar was. Almost, might it be said, he learned Del Mar's pedigree without knowing anything of his history. For instance he did not know that Del Mar's real name was Percival Grunsky, and that at grammar school he had been called "Brownie" by the girls and "Blackie" by the boys. No more did he know that he had gone from half-way-through grammar school directly into the industrial reform school; nor that, after serving two years, he had been paroled out by Harris Collins, who made a living, and an excellent one, by training animals for the stage. Much less could he know the training that for six years Del Mar, as assistant, had been taught to give the animals, and, thereby, had received for himself.

What Michael did know was that Del Mar had no pedigree and was a scrub as compared with thoroughbreds such as Steward, Captain Kellar, and Mister Haggin of Meringe. And he learned it swiftly and simply. In the day-time, fetched by a steward, Michael would be brought on deck to Del Mar, who was always surrounded by effusive young ladies and matrons who lavished caresses and endearments upon Michael. This he stood, although much bored; but what irked him almost beyond standing were the feigned

caresses and endearments Del Mar lavished on him. He knew the cold-blooded insincerity of them, for, at night, when he was brought to Del Mar's room, he heard only the cold brittle tones, sensed only the threat and the menace of the other's personality, felt, when touched by the other's hand, only a stiffness and sharpness of contact that was like to so much steel or wood in so far as all subtle tenderness of heart and spirit was absent.

This man was two-faced, two-mannered. No thoroughbred was anything but single-faced and single-mannered. A thoroughbred, hot-blooded as it might be, was always sincere. But in this scrub was no sincerity, only a positive insincerity. A thoroughbred had passion, because of its hot blood; but this scrub had no passion. Its blood was cold as its deliberateness, and it did nothing save deliberately. These things he did not think. He merely realized them, as any creature realizes itself in liking and in not liking.

To cap it all, the last night on board, Michael lost his thoroughbred temper with this man who had no temper. It came to a fight. And Michael had no chance. He raged royally and fought royally, leaping to the attack, after being knocked over twice by open-handed blows under his ear. Quick as Michael was, slashing South Sea niggers by virtue of his quickness and cleverness, he could not touch his teeth to the flesh of this man, who had been trained for six years with animals by Harris Collins. So that, when he leaped, open-mouthed, for the bite, Del Mar's right hand shot out, gripped his under-jaw as he was in the air, and

flipped him over in a somersaulting fall to the floor on his back. Once again he leapt open-mouthed to the attack, and was filliped to the floor so hard that almost the last particle of breath was knocked out of him. The next leap was nearly his last. He was clutched by the throat. Two thumbs pressed into his neck on either side of the windpipe directly on the carotid arteries, shutting off the blood to his brain and giving him most exquisite agony, at the same time rendering him unconscious far more swiftly than the swiftest anaesthetic. Darkness thrust itself upon him; and, quivering on the floor, glimmeringly he came back to the light of the room and to the man who was casually touching a match to a cigarette and cautiously keeping an observant eye on him.

"Come on," Del Mar challenged. "I know your kind. You can't get my goat, and maybe I can't get yours entirely, but I can keep you under my thumb to work for me. Come on, you!"

And Michael came. Being a thoroughbred, despite that he knew he was beaten by this two-legged thing which was not warm human but was so alien and hard that he might as well attack the wall of a room with his teeth, or a tree-trunk, or a cliff of rock, Michael leapt bare-fanged for the throat. And all that he leapt against was training, formula. The experience was repeated. His throat was gripped, the thumbs shut off the blood from his brain, and darkness smote him. Had he been more than a normal thoroughbred dog, he would have continued to assail his impregnable enemy until he burst his heart or fell in a fit. But he was normal. Here was something unassailable, adamantine. As little might he

win victory from it, as from the cement-paved sidewalk of a city. The thing was a devil, with the hardness and coldness, the wickedness and wisdom, of a devil. It was as bad as Steward was good. Both were two-legged. Both were gods. But this one was an evil god.

He did not reason all this, nor any of it. Yet, transmuted into human terms of thought and understanding, it adequately describes the fulness of his state of mind toward Del Mar. Had Michael been entangled in a fight with a warm god, he could have raged and battled blindly, inflicting and receiving hurt in the chaos of conflict, as such a god, being warm, would have likewise received and given hurt, being only a flesh-and-blood, living, breathing entity after all. But this two-legged god-devil did not rage blindly and was incapable of passion heat. He was like so much cunning, massive steel machinery, and he did what Michael could never dream he did--and, for that matter, which few humans do and which all animal trainers do: he kept one thought ahead of Michael's thought all the time, and therefore, was able to have ready one action always in anticipation of Michael's next action. This was the training he had received from Harris Collins, who, withal he was a sentimental and doting husband and father, was the arch-devil when it came to animals other than human ones, and who reigned in an animal hell which he had created and made lucrative.

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Michael went ashore in Seattle all eagerness, straining at his leash

until he choked and coughed and was coldly cursed by Del Mar. For Michael was mastered by his expectation that he would meet Steward, and he looked for him around the first corner, and around all corners with undiminished zeal. But amongst the multitudes of men there was no Steward. Instead, down in the basement of the New Washington Hotel, where electric lights burned always, under the care of the baggage porter, he was tied securely by the neck in the midst of Alpine ranges of trunks which were for ever being heaped up, sought over, taken down, carried away, or added to.

Three days of this dolorous existence he passed. The porters made friends with him and offered him prodigious quantities of cooked meats from the leavings of the dining-room. Michael was too disappointed and grief-stricken over Steward to overeat himself, while Del Mar, accompanied by the manager of the hotel, raised a great row with the porters for violating the feeding instructions.

"That guy's no good," said the head porter to assistant, when Del Mar had departed. "He's greasy. I never liked greasy brunettes anyway. My wife's a brunette, but thank the Lord she ain't greasy."

"Sure," agreed the assistant. "I know his kind. Why, if you'd stick a knife into him he wouldn't bleed blood. It'd be straight liquid lard."

Whereupon the pair of them immediately presented Michael with vaster quantities of meat which he could not eat because the desire for Steward

was too much with him.

In the meantime Del Mar sent off two telegrams to New York, the first to Harris Collins' animal training school, where his troupe of dogs was boarding through his vacation:

"Sell my dogs. You know what they can do and what they are worth. Am done with them. Deduct the board and hold the balance for me until I see you. I have the limit here of a dog. Every turn I ever pulled is put in the shade by this one. He's a ten strike. Wait till you see him."

The second, to his booking agent:

"Get busy. Book me over the best. Talk it up. I have the turn. A winner. Nothing like it. Don't talk up top price but way over top price. Prepare them for the dog when I give them the chance for the once over. You know me. I am giving it straight. This will head the bill anywhere all the time."