

CHAPTER XXXIV

It was in the Orpheum Theatre, of Oakland, California; and Harley Kennan was in the act of reaching under his seat for his hat, when his wife said:

"Why, this isn't the interval. There's one more turn yet."

"A dog turn," he answered, and thereby explained; for it was his practice to leave a theatre during the period of the performance of an animal-act.

Villa Kennan glanced hastily at the programme.

"Of course," she said, then added: "But it's a singing dog. A dog Caruso. And it points out that there is no one on the stage with the dog. Let us stay for once, and see how he compares with Jerry."

"Some poor brute tormented into howling," Harley grumbled.

"But it has the stage to itself," Villa urged. "Besides, if it is painful, then we can go out. I'll go out with you. But I just would like to see how much better Jerry sings than does he. And it says an Irish terrier, too."

So Harley Kennan remained. The two burnt-cork comedians finished their

turn and their three encores, and the curtain behind them went up on a full set of an empty stage. A rough-coated Irish terrier entered at a sedate walk, sedately walked forward to the centre, nearly to the footlights, and faced the leader of the orchestra. As the programme had stated, he had the stage to himself.

The orchestra played the opening strains of "Sweet Bye and Bye." The dog yawned and sat down. But the orchestra was thoroughly instructed to play the opening strains over and over, until the dog responded, and then to follow on with him. By the third time, the dog opened his mouth and began. It was not a mere howling. For that matter, it was too mellow to be classified as a howl at all. Nor was it merely rhythmic. The notes the dog sang were of the air, and they were correct.

But Villa Kennan scarcely heard.

"He has Jerry beaten a mile," Harley muttered to her.

"Listen," she replied, in tense whispers. "Did you ever see that dog before?"

Harley shook his head.

"You have seen him before," she insisted. "Look at that crinkled ear. Think! Think back! Remember!"

Still her husband shook his head.

"Remember the Solomons," she pressed. "Remember the Ariel. Remember when we came back from Malaita, where we picked Jerry up, to Tulagi, that he had a brother there, a nigger-chaser on a schooner."

"And his name was Michael--go on."

"And he had that self-same crinkled ear," she hurried. "And he was rough-coated. And he was full brother to Jerry. And their father and mother were Terrence and Biddy of Meringe. And Jerry is our Sing Song Silly. And this dog sings. And he has a crinkled ear. And his name is Michael."

"Impossible," said Harley.

"It is when the impossible comes true that life proves worth while," she retorted. "And this is one of those worth-whiles of impossibles. I know it."

Still the man of him said impossible, and still the woman of her insisted that this was an impossible come true. By this time the dog on the stage was singing "God Save the King."

"That shows I am right," Villa contended. "No American, in America, would teach a dog 'God Save the King.' An Englishman originally owned

that dog and taught it. The Solomons are British."

"That's a far cry," he smiled. "But what gets me is that ear. I remember it now. I remember the day when we were on the beach at Tulagi with Jerry, and when his brother came ashore from the Eugenie in a whaleboat. And his brother had that self-same, lippy, crinkled ear."

"And more," Villa argued. "How many singing dogs have we ever known! Only one--Jerry. Evidently such a type occurs rarely. The same family would more likely produce similar types than different families. The family of Terrence and Bidy produced Jerry. And this is Michael."

"He was rough-coated, along with a crinkly ear," Harley meditated back. "I see him distinctly as he stood up in the bow of the whaleboat and as he ran along the beach side by side with Jerry."

"If Jerry should to-morrow run side by side with him you would be convinced?" she queried.

"It was their trick, and the trick of Terrence and Bidy before them," he agreed. "But it's a far cry from the Solomons to the United States."

"Jerry is such a far cry," she replied. "And if Jerry won from the Solomons to California, then is there anything more remarkable in Michael so winning?--Oh, listen!"

For the dog on the stage, now responding to its one encore, was singing "Home, Sweet Home." This finished, Jacob Henderson, to tumultuous applause, came on the stage from the wings and joined the dog in bowing. Villa and Harley sat in silence for a moment. Then Villa said, apropos of nothing:

"I have been sitting here and feeling very grateful for one particular thing."

He waited.

"It is that we are so abominably wealthy," she concluded.

"Which means that you want the dog, must have him, and are going to get him, just because I can afford to do it for you," he teased.

"Because you can't afford not to," she answered. "You must know he is Jerry's brother. At least, you must have a sneaking suspicion . . . ?"

"I have," he nodded. "The thing that can't sometimes does, and there is a chance that this may be one of those times. Of course, it isn't Michael; but, on the other hand, what's to prevent it from being Michael? Let us go behind and find out."

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"More agents of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals," was Jacob Henderson's thought, as the man and woman, accompanied by the manager of the theatre, were shown into his tiny dressing-room. Michael, on a chair and half asleep, took no notice of them. While Harley talked with Henderson, Villa investigated Michael; and Michael scarcely opened his eyes ere he closed them again. Too sour on the human world, and too glum in his own soured nature, he was anything save his old courtly self to chance humans who broke in upon him to pat his head, and say silly things, and go their way never to be seen by him again.

Villa Kennan, with a pang of disappointment at such rebuff, forwent her overtures for the moment, and listened to what tale Jacob Henderson could tell of his dog. Harry Del Mar, a trained-animal man, had picked the dog up somewhere on the Pacific Coast, most probably in San Francisco, she learned; but, having taken the dog east with him, Harry Del Mar had died by accident in New York before telling anybody anything about the animal. That was all, except that Henderson had paid two thousand dollars to one Harris Collins, and had found the investment the finest he had ever made.

Villa turned back to the dog.

"Michael," she called, caressingly, almost in a whisper.

And Michael's eyes partly opened, the base-muscles of his ears stiffened, and his body quivered.

"Michael," she repeated.

This time raising his head, the eyes open and the ears stiffly erect, Michael looked at her. Not since on the beach at Tulagi had he heard that name uttered. Across the years and the seas the word came to him out of the past. Its effect was electrical, for on the instant all the connotations of "Michael" flooded his consciousness. He saw again Captain Kellar, of the *Eugenie*, who had last called him it, and Mister Haggin, and Derby, and Bob of Meringe Plantation, and Biddy and Terrence, and, not least among these shades of the vanished past, his brother Jerry.

But was it the vanished past? The name which had ceased for years, had come back. It had entered the room along with this man and woman. All this he did not reason; but indubitably, as if he had so reasoned, he acted upon it.

He jumped from the chair and ran to the woman. He smelled her hand, and smelled her as she patted him. Then, as he recognized her, he went wild. He sprang away, dashing around and around the room, sniffing under the washstand and smelling out the corners. As in a frenzy he was back to the woman, whimpering eagerly as she strove to pet him. The next moment, stiff in a frenzy, he was away again, scurrying about the room and still whimpering.

Jacob Henderson looked on with mild disapproval.

"He never cuts up that way," he said. "He is a very quiet dog. Maybe it is a fit he is going to have, though he never has fits."

No one understood, not even Villa Kennan. But Michael understood. He was looking for that vanished world which had rushed back upon him at sound of his old-time name. If this name could come to him out of the Nothingness, as this woman had whom once he had seen treading the beach at Tulagi, then could all other things of Tulagi and the Nothingness come to him. As she was there, before him in the living flesh, uttering his name, so might Captain Kellar, and Mister Haggin, and Jerry be there, somewhere in the very room or just outside the door.

He ran to the door, whimpering as he scratched at it.

"Maybe he thinks there is something outside," said Jacob Henderson, opening the door for him.

And Michael did so think. As a matter of course, through that open door, he was prepared to have the South-Pacific Ocean flow in, bearing on its bosom schooners and ships, islands and reefs, and all men and animals and things he once had known and still remembered.

But no past flowed in through the door. Outside was the usual present. He came back dejectedly to the woman, who still called him Michael as she petted him. She, at any rate, was real. Next he carefully smelled and

identified the man with the beach of Tulagi and the deck of the Ariel, and again his excitement began to mount.

"Oh, Harley, I know it is he!" Villa cried. "Can't you test him? Can't you prove him?"

"But how?" Harley pondered. "He seems to recognize his name. It excites him. And though he never knew us very well, he seems to remember us and to be excited by us, too. If only he could talk . . . "

"Oh, talk! Talk!" Villa pleaded with Michael, catching both sides of his head and jaws in her hands and swaying him back and forth.

"Be careful, madam," Jacob Henderson warned. "He is a very sour dog; and he don't let people take such liberties."

"He does me," she laughed, half-hysterically. "Because he knows me. . . . Harley!" She broke off as the great idea dawned on her. "I have a test. Listen! Remember, Jerry was a nigger-chaser before we got him. And Michael was a nigger-chaser. You talk in beche-de-mer. Appear angry with some black boy, and see how it will affect him."

"I'll have to remember hard to resurrect any beche-de-mer," Harley said, nodding approval of the suggestion.

"At the same time I'll distract him," she rushed on.

Sitting down and bending forward to Michael so that his head was buried in her arms and breast, she began swaying him and crooning to him as was her wont with Jerry. Nor did he resent the liberty she took, and, like Jerry, he yielded to her crooning and softly began to croon with her. She signalled Harley with her eyes.

"My word!" he began in tones of wrath. "What name you fella boy stop 'm along this fella place? You make 'm me cross along you any amount!"

And at the words Michael bristled, dragged himself clear of the woman's detaining hands, and, with a snarl, whirled about to get a look at the black boy who must have just then entered the room and aroused the white god's ire. But there was no black boy. He looked on, still bristling, to the door. Harley transferred his own gaze to the door, and Michael knew, beyond all doubt, that outside the door was standing a Solomons nigger.

"Hey! Michael!" Harley shouted. "Chase 'm that black fella boy overside!"

With a roaring snarl, Michael flung himself at the door. Such was the fury and weight of his onslaught that the latch flew loose and the door swung open. The emptiness of the space which he had expected to see occupied, was appalling, and he shrank down, sick and dizzy with the baffling apparitional past that thus vexed his consciousness.

"And now," said Harley to Jacob Henderson, "we will talk business . . . "

CHAPTER XXXV

When the train arrived at Glen Ellen, in the Valley of the Moon, it was Harley Kennan himself, at the side-door of the baggage-car, who caught hold of Michael and swung him to the ground. For the first time Michael had performed a railroad journey uncrated. Merely with collar and chain had he travelled up from Oakland. In the waiting automobile he found Villa Kennan, and, chain removed, sat beside her and between her and Harley

As the machine purred along the two miles of road that wound up the side of Sonoma Mountain, Michael scarcely looked at the forest-trees and vistas of wandering glades. He had been in the United States three years, during which time he had been kept a close prisoner. Cage and crate and chain had been his portion, and narrow rooms, baggage cars, and station platforms. The nearest he had come to the country was when chained to benches in the various parks while Jacob Henderson studied Swedenborg. So that trees and hills and fields had ceased to mean anything. They were something inaccessible, as inaccessible as the blue of the sky or the drifting cloud-fleeces. Thus did he regard the trees and hills and fields, if the negative act of not regarding a thing at all can be considered a state of mind.