

"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.

"Don't seem to be enthusiastic over the ranch, eh, Michael?" Harley remarked.

He looked up at sound of his old name, and made acknowledgment by flattening his ears a quivering trifle and by touching his nose against Harley's shoulder.

"Nor does he seem demonstrative," was Villa's judgment. "At least, nothing like Jerry,"

"Wait till they meet," Harley smiled in anticipation. "Jerry will furnish enough excitement for both of them."

"If they remember each other after all this time," said Villa. "I wonder if they will."

"They did at Tulagi," he reminded her. "And they were full grown and hadn't seen each other since they were puppies. Remember how they barked and scampered all about the beach. Michael was the hurly-burly one. At least he made twice as much noise."

"But he seems dreadfully grown-up and subdued now."

"Three years ought to have subdued him," Harley insisted.

But Villa shook her head.

As the machine drew up at the house and Kennan first stepped out, a dog's whimperingly joyous bark of welcome struck Michael as not altogether unfamiliar. The joyous bark turned to a suspicious and jealous snarl as Jerry scented the other dog's presence from Harley's caressing hand. The next moment he had traced the original source of the scent into the limousine and sprung in after it. With snarl and forward leap Michael met the snarling rush less than half-way, and was rolled over on the bottom of the car.

The Irish terrier, under all circumstances amenable to the control of the master as are few breeds of dogs, was instantly manifest in Jerry and Michael as Harley Kennan's voice rang out. They separated, and, despite the rumbling of low growling in their throats, refrained from attacking each other as they plunged out to the ground. The little set-to had occurred in so few seconds, or fractions of seconds, that they had not begun to betray recognition of each other until they were out of the machine. They were still comically stiff-legged and bristly as they aloofly sniffed noses.

"They know each other!" Villa cried. "Let's wait and see what they will do."

As for Michael, he accepted, without surprise, the indubitable fact that Jerry had come back out of the Nothingness. Things of this sort had

begun to happen rapidly, but it was not the things themselves, but the connotations of them, that almost stunned him. If the man and woman, whom he had last seen at Tulagi, and, likewise, Jerry, had come back from the Nothingness, then could come, and might come at any moment, the beloved Steward.

Instead of responding to Jerry, Michael sniffed and glanced about in quest of Steward. Jerry's first expression of greeting and friendliness took the form of a desire to run. He barked invitation to his brother, scampered away half a dozen jumps, scampered back, and dabbled playfully at Michael with one forepaw in added emphasis of invitation ere he scampered away again.

For so many years had Michael not run with another dog, that at first Jerry's invitation had little meaning to him. Nevertheless, such running was an habitual expression of happiness and friendliness in dogdom, and especially strong had been his inheritance of it from Terrence and Bidy, the noted love-runners of the Solomons.

The next time Jerry dabbled at him with a paw, barked, and scurried away in an enticing semi-circle, Michael started involuntarily though slowly after him. But Michael did not bark; and, after half a dozen leaps, he came to a full stop and looked to Villa and Harley for permission.

"All right, Michael," Harley called heartily, deliberately turning his shoulder in the non-interest of consent as he extended his hand to help

Villa from the machine.

Michael sprang away again, and was numbly aware of an ancient joy as he shouldered Jerry who shouldered against him as they ran side by side. But most of the joy was Jerry's, as was the wildest of the skurrying and the racing and the shouldering, of the body-wriggling, and ear-pricking, and yelping cries. Also, Jerry barked; and Michael did not bark.

"He used to bark," said Villa.

"Much more than Jerry," Harley supplemented.

"Then they have taken the bark out of him," she concluded. "He must have gone through terrible experiences to have lost his bark."

\* \* \* \* \*

The green California spring merged into tawny summer, as Jerry, ever running afield, made Michael acquainted with the farthest and highest reaches of the Kennan ranch in the Valley of the Moon. The pageant of the wild flowers vanished until all that lingered on the burnt hillsides were orange poppies faded to palest gold, and Mariposa lilies, wind-blown on slender stems amidst the desiccated grasses, that smouldered like ornate spotted moths fluttering in rest for a space between flight and flight.

And Michael, a follower always where the exuberant Jerry led, sought throughout the passing year for what he could not find.

"Looking for something, looking for something," Harley would say to Villa. "It is not alive. It is not here. Now just what is it he is always looking for?"

Steward it was, and Michael never found him. The Nothingness held him and would not yield him up, although, could Michael have journeyed a ten-days' steamer-journey into the South Pacific to the Marquesas, Steward he would have found, and, along with him, Kwaque and the Ancient Mariner, all three living like lotus-eaters on the beach-paradise of Taiohae.

Also, in and about their grass-thatched bungalow under the lofty avocado trees, Michael would have found other pet--cats, and kittens, and pigs, donkeys and ponies, a pair of love-birds, and a mischievous monkey or two; but never a dog and never a cockatoo. For Dag Daughtry, with violence of language, had laid a taboo upon dogs. After Killeny Boy, he averred, there should be no other dog. And Kwaque, without averring anything at all, resolutely refrained from possessing himself of the white cockatoos brought ashore by the sailors off the trading schooners.

But Michael was long in giving over his search for Steward, and, running the mountain trails or scrambling and sliding down into the deep canyons, was ever expectant and ready for Steward to step forth before him, or to pick up the unmistakable scent that would lead him to him.

"Looking for something, looking for something," Harley Kennan would chant curiously, as he rode beside Villa and observed Michael's unending search. "Now Jerry's after rabbits, and fox-trails; but you'll notice they don't interest Michael much. They're not what he's after. He behaves like one who has lost a great treasure and doesn't know where he lost it nor where to look for it."

Much Michael learned from Jerry of the varied life of the forest and fields. To run with Jerry seemed the one pleasure he took, for he never played. Play had passed out of him. He was not precisely morose or gloomy from his years on the trained-animal stage and in Harris Collins's college of pain, but he was sobered, subdued. The spring and the spontaneity had gone out of him. Just as the leopard had claw-marked his shoulder so that damp and frosty weather made the pain of the old wound come back, so was his mind marked by what he had gone through. He liked Jerry, was glad to be with him and to run with him; but it was Jerry who was ever in the lead, who ever raised the hue and cry of hunting pursuit, who barked indignation and eager yearning at a tree'd squirrel in refuge forty feet above the ground. Michael looked on and listened, but took no part in such antics of enthusiasm.

In the same way he looked on when Jerry fought fearful comic battles with Norman Chief, the great Percheron stallion. It was only play, for Jerry and Norman Chief were tried friends; and, though the huge horse, ears laid back, mouth open to bite, pursued Jerry in mad gyrations all about the paddock, it was with no thought of inflicting hurt, but merely to act

up to his part in the sham battle. Yet no invitation of Jerry's could induce Michael to join in the fun. He contented himself with sitting down outside the rails and looking on.

"Why play?" might Michael have asked, who had had all play taken out of him.

But when it came to serious work, he was there even ahead of Jerry. On account of foot-and-mouth disease and of hog-cholera, strange dogs were taboo on the Kennan ranch. It did not take Michael long to learn this, and stray dogs got short shrift from him. With never a warning bark nor growl, in deadly silence, he rushed them, slashed and bit them, rolled them over and over in the dust, and drove them from the place. It was like nigger-chasing, a service to perform for the gods whom he loved and who willed such chasing.

No wild passion of love, such as he had had for Steward, did he bear Villa and Harley, but he did develop for them a great, sober love. He did not go out of his way to express it with overtures of wriggings and squirmings and whimpering yelpings. Jerry could be depended upon for that. But he was always seriously glad to be with Villa and Harley and to receive recognition from them next after Jerry. Some of his deepest moments of content, before the fireplace, were to sit beside Villa or Harley and lean his head against a knee and have a hand, on occasion, drop down on his head or gently twist his crinkled ear.

Jerry was even guilty of playing with children who happened at times to be under the Kennan aegis. Michael endured children for as long as they left him alone. If they waxed familiar, he would warn them with a bristling of his neck-hair and a throaty rumbling and get up and stalk away.

"I can't understand it," Villa would say. "He was the fullest of play, and spirits, and all foolishness. He was much sillier and much more excitable than Jerry and certainly noisier. He must have some terrible story to tell, if only he could, of all that happened between Tulagi and the time we found him on the Orpheum stage."

"And that may be the least little hint of it," Harley would reply, pointing to Michael's shoulder where the leopard had scarred it on the day Jack, the Airedale, and Sara, the little green monkey, had died.

"He used to bark, I know he used to bark," Villa would continue. "Why doesn't he bark now?"

And Harley would point to the scarred shoulder and say, "That may account for it, and most possibly a hundred other things like it of which we cannot see the marks."

But the time was to come when they were to hear him bark again--not once, but twice. And both times were to be but an earnest of another and graver time when, without barking at all, he would express in action the

measure of his love and worship of them who had taken him from the crate and the footlights and given him the freedom of the Valley of the Moon.

And in the meantime, running endlessly with Jerry over the ranch, he learned all the ways of it and all the life of it from the chickenyards and the duck-ponds to the highest pitch of Sonoma Mountain. He learned where the wild deer, in their season, were to be found; when they raided the prune-orchard, the vineyards, and the apple-trees; when they sought the deepest canyons and most secret coverts; and when they stamped out in open glades and on bare hillsides and crashed and clattered their antlers together in combat. Under Jerry's leadership, always running second and after on the narrow trails as a subdued dog should, he learned the ways and habits of the foxes, the coons, the weasels, and the ring-tail cats that seemed compounded of cat and coon and weasel. He came to know the ground-nesting birds and the difference between the customs of the valley quail, the mountain quail, and the pheasants. The traits and lairs of the domestic cats gone wild he also learned, as did he learn the wild loves of mountain farm-dogs with the free-roving coyotes.

He knew of the presence of the mountain lion, adrift down from Mendocino County, ere the first shorthorn calf was slain, and came home from the encounter, torn and bleeding, to attest what he had discovered and to be the cause of Harley Kennan riding trail next day with a rifle across his pommel. Likewise Michael came to know what Harley Kennan never did know and always denied as existing on his ranch--the one rocky outcrop, in the dense heart of the mountain forest, where a score of rattlesnakes denned

through the winters and warmed themselves in the sun.