

## CHAPTER XXXVI

Winter came on in its delectable way in the Valley of the Moon. The last Mariposa lily vanished from the burnt grasses as the California Indian summer dreamed itself out in purple mists on the windless air. Soft rain-showers first broke the spell. Snow fell on the summit of Sonoma Mountain. At the ranch house the morning air was crisp and brittle, yet mid-day made the shade welcome, and in the open, under the winter sun, roses bloomed and oranges, grape-fruit, and lemons turned to golden yellow ripeness. Yet, a thousand feet beneath, on the floor of the valley, the mornings were white with frost.

And Michael barked twice. The first time was when Harley Kennan, astride a hot-blooded sorrel colt, tried to make it leap a narrow stream. Villa reined in her steed at the crest beyond, and, looking back into the little valley, waited for the colt to receive its lesson. Michael waited, too, but closer at hand. At first he lay down, panting from his run, by the stream-edge. But he did not know horses very well, and soon his anxiety for the welfare of Harley Kennan brought him to his feet.

Harley was gentle and persuasive and all patience as he strove to make the colt take the leap. The urge of voice and rein was of the mildest; but the animal balked the take-off each time, and the hot thoroughbredness in its veins made it sweat and lather. The velvet of young grass was torn up by its hoofs, and its terror of the stream was

such, that, when fetched to the edge at a canter, it stiffened and crouched to an abrupt stop, then reared on its hind-legs. Which was too much for Michael.

He sprang at the horse's head as it came down with forefeet to earth, and as he sprang he barked. In his bark was censure and menace, and, as the horse reared again, he leaped into the air after it, his teeth clipping together as he just barely missed its nose.

Villa rode back down the slope to the opposite bank of the stream.

"Mercy!" she cried. "Listen to him! He's actually barking."

"He thinks the colt is trying to do some damage to me," Harley said.

"That's his provocation. He hasn't forgotten how to bark. He's reading the colt a lecture."

"If he gets him by the nose it will be more than a lecture," Villa warned. "Be careful, Harley, or he will."

"Now, Michael, lie down and be good," Harley commanded. "It's all right, I tell you. It's all right. Lie down."

Michael sank down obediently, but protestingly; and he had eyes only for the horse's antics, while all his muscles were gathered tensely to spring in case the horse threatened injury to Harley again.

"I can't give in to him now, or he never will jump anything," Harley said to his wife, as he whirled about to gallop back to a distance. "Either I lift him over or I take a cropper."

He came back at full speed, and the colt, despite himself, unable to stop, lifted into the leap that would avoid the stream he feared, so that he cleared it with a good two yards to spare on the other side.

The next time Michael barked was when Harley, on the same hot-blood mount, strove to close a poorly hung gate on the steep pitch of a mountain wood-road. Michael endured the danger to his man-god as long as he could, then flew at the colt's head in a frenzy of barking.

"Anyway, his barking helped," Harley conceded, as he managed to close the gate. "Michael must certainly have told the colt that he'd give him what-for if he didn't behave."

"At any rate, he's not tongue-tied," Villa laughed, "even if he isn't very loquacious."

And Michael's loquacity never went farther. Only on these two occasions, when his master-god seemed to be in peril, was he known to bark. He never barked at the moon, nor at hillside echoes, nor at any prowling thing. A particular echo, to be heard directly from the ranch-house, was an unfailing source of exercise for Jerry's lungs. At such times that

Jerry barked, Michael, with a bored expression, would lie down and wait until the duet was over. Nor did he bark when he attacked strange dogs that strayed upon the ranch.

"He fights like a veteran," Harley remarked, after witnessing one such encounter. "He's cold-blooded. There's no excitement in him."

"He's old before his time," Villa said. "There is no heart of play left in him, and no desire for speech. Just the same I know he loves me, and you--"

"Without having to be voluble about it," her husband completed for her.

"You can see it shining in those quiet eyes of his," she supplemented.

"Reminds me of one of the survivors of Lieutenant Greeley's Expedition I used to know," he agreed. "He was an enlisted soldier and one of the handful of survivors. He had been through so much that he was just as subdued as Michael and just as taciturn. He bored most people, who could not understand him. Of course, the truth was the other way around. They bored him. They knew so little of life that he knew the last word of. And one could scarcely get any word out of him. It was not that he had forgotten how to speak, but that he could not see any reason for speaking when nobody could understand. He was really crusty from too-bitter wise experience. But all you had to do was look at him in his tremendous repose and know that he had been through the thousand hells, including

all the frozen ones. His eyes had the same quietness of Michael's. And they had the same wisdom. I'd give almost anything to know how he got his shoulder scarred. It must have been a tiger or a lion."

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The man, like the mountain lion whom Michael had encountered up the mountain, had strayed down from the wilds of Mendocino County, following the ruggedest mountain stretches, and, at night, crossing the farmed valley spaces where the presence of man was a danger to him. Like the mountain lion, the man was an enemy to man, and all men were his enemies, seeking his life which he had forfeited in ways more terrible than the lion which had merely killed calves for food.

Like the mountain lion, the man was a killer. But, unlike the lion, his vague description and the narrative of his deeds was in all the newspapers, and mankind was a vast deal more interested in him than in the lion. The lion had slain calves in upland pastures. But the man, for purposes of robbery, had slain an entire family--the postmaster, his wife, and their three children, in the upstairs over the post office in the mountain village of Chisholm.

For two weeks the man had eluded and exceeded pursuit. His last crossing had been from the mountains of the Russian River, across wide-farmed Santa Rosa Valley, to Sonoma Mountain. For two days he had laired and rested, sleeping much, in the wildest and most inaccessible precincts of

the Kennan Ranch. With him he had carried coffee stolen from the last house he had raided. One of Harley Kennan's angora goats had furnished him with meat. Four times he had slept the clock around from exhaustion, rousing on occasion, like any animal, to eat voraciously of the goat-meat, to drink large quantities of the coffee hot or cold, and to sink down into heavy but nightmare-ridden sleep.

And in the meantime civilization, with its efficient organization and intricate inventions, including electricity, had closed in on him. Electricity had surrounded him. The spoken word had located him in the wild canyons of Sonoma Mountain and fringed the mountain with posses of peace-officers and detachments of armed farmers. More terrible to them than any mountain lion was a man-killing man astray in their landscape. The telephone on the Kennan Ranch, and the telephones on all other ranches abutting on Sonoma Mountain, had rung often and transmitted purposeful conversations and arrangements.

So it happened, when the posses had begun to penetrate the mountain, and when the man was compelled to make a daylight dash down into the Valley of the Moon to cross over to the mountain fastnesses that lay between it and Napa Valley, that Harley Kennan rode out on the hot-blooded colt he was training. He was not in pursuit of the man who had slain the postmaster of Chisholm and his family. The mountain was alive with man-hunters, as he well knew, for a score had bedded and eaten at the ranch house the night before. So the meeting of Harley Kennan with the man was unplanned and eventful.

It was not the first meeting with men the man had had that day. During the preceding night he had noted the campfires of several posses. At dawn, attempting to break forth down the south-western slopes of the mountain toward Petaluma, he had encountered not less than five separate detachments of dairy-ranchers all armed with Winchesters and shotguns. Breaking back to cover, the chase hot on his heels, he had run full tilt into a party of village youths from Glen Ellen and Caliente. Their squirrel and deer rifles had missed him, but his back had been peppered with birdshot in a score of places, the leaden pellets penetrating maddeningly in a score of places just under the skin.

In the rush of his retreat down the canyon slope, he had plunged into a bunch of shorthorn steers, who, far more startled than he, had rolled him on the forest floor, trampled over him in their panic, and smashed his rifle under their hoofs. Weaponless, desperate, stinging and aching from his superficial wounds and bruises, he had circled the forest slopes along deer-paths, crossed two canyons, and begun to descend the horse-trail he found in the third canyon.

It was on this trail, going down, that he met the reporter coming up. The reporter was--well, just a reporter, from the city, knowing only city ways, who had never before engaged in a man-hunt. The livery horse he had rented down in the valley was a broken-kneed, jaded, and spiritless creature, that stood calmly while its rider was dragged from its back by the wild-looking and violently impetuous man who sprang out around a

sharp turn of the trail. The reporter struck at his assailant once with his riding-whip. Then he received a beating, such as he had often written up about sailor-rows and saloon-frequenters in his cub-reporter days, but which for the first time it was his lot to experience.

To the man's disgust he found the reporter unarmed save for a pencil and a wad of copy paper. Out of his disappointment in not securing a weapon, he beat the reporter up some more, left him wailing among the ferns, and, astride the reporter's horse, urging it on with the reporter's whip, continued down the trail.

Jerry, ever keenest on the hunting, had ranged farther afield than Michael as the pair of them accompanied Harley Kennan on his early morning ride. Even so, Michael, at the heels of his master's horse, did not see nor understand the beginning of the catastrophe. For that matter, neither did Harley. Where a steep, eight-foot bank came down to the edge of the road along which he was riding, Harley and the hot-blood colt were startled by an eruption through the screen of manzanita bushes above. Looking up, he saw a reluctant horse and a forceful rider plunging in mid-air down upon him. In that flashing glimpse, even as he reined and spurred to make his own horse leap sidewise out from under, Harley Kennan observed the scratched skin and torn clothing, the wild-burning eyes, and the haggardness under the scraggly growth of beard, of the man-hunted man.

The livery horse was justifiably reluctant to make that leap out and down



the bank. Too painfully aware of the penalty its broken knees and rheumatic joints must pay, it dug its hoofs into the steep slope of moss and only sprang out and clear in the air in order to avoid a fall. Even so, its shoulder impacted against the shoulder of the whirling colt below it, overthrowing the latter. Harley Kennan's leg, caught under against the earth, snapped, and the colt, twisted and twisting as it struck the ground, snapped its backbone.

To his utter disgust, the man, pursued by an armed countryside, found Harley Kennan, his latest victim, like the reporter, to be weaponless. Dismounted, he snarled in his rage and disappointment and deliberately kicked the helpless man in the side. He had drawn back his foot for the second kick, when Michael took a hand--or a leg, rather, sinking his teeth into the calf of the back-drawn leg about to administer the kick.

With a curse the man jerked his leg clear, Michael's teeth ribboning flesh and trousers.

"Good boy, Michael!" Harley applauded from where he lay helplessly pinioned under his horse. "Hey! Michael!" he continued, lapsing back into beche-de-mer, "chase 'm that white fella marster to hell outa here along bush!"

"I'll kick your head off for that," the man gritted at Harley through his teeth.

Savage as were his acts and utterance, the man was nearly ready to cry. The long pursuit, his hand against all mankind and all mankind against him, had begun to break his stamina. He was surrounded by enemies. Even youths had risen up and peppered his back with birdshot, and beef cattle had trod him underfoot and smashed his rifle. Everything conspired against him. And now it was a dog that had slashed down his leg. He was on the death-road. Never before had this impressed him with such clear certainty. Everything was against him. His desire to cry was hysterical, and hysteria, in a desperate man, is prone to express itself in terrible savage ways. Without rhyme or reason he was prepared to carry out his threat to kick Harley Kennan to death. Not that Kennan had done anything to him. On the contrary, it was he who had attacked Kennan, hurling him down on the road and breaking his leg under his horse. But Harley Kennan was a man, and all mankind was his enemy; and, in killing Kennan, in some vague way it appeared to him that he was avenging himself, at least in part, on mankind in general. Going down himself in death, he would drag what he could with him into the red ruin.

But ere he could kick the man on the ground, Michael was back upon him. His other calf and trousers' leg were ribboned as he tore clear. Then, catching Michael in mid-leap with a kick that reached him under the chest, he sent him flying through the air off the road and down the slope. As mischance would have it, Michael did not reach the ground. Crashing through a scrub manzanita bush, his body was caught and pinched in an acute fork a yard above the ground.

"Now," the man announced grimly to Harley, "I'm going to do what I said. I'm just going to kick your head clean off."

"And I haven't done a thing to you," Harley parleyed. "I don't so much mind being murdered, but I'd like to know what I'm being murdered for."

"Chasing me for my life," the man snarled, as he advanced. "I know your kind. You've all got it in for me, and I ain't got a chance except to give you yours. I'll take a whole lot of it out on you."

Kennan was thoroughly aware of the gravity of his peril. Helpless himself, a man-killing lunatic was about to kill him and to kill him most horribly. Michael, a prisoner in the bush, hanging head-downward in the manzanita from his loins squeezed in the fork, and struggling vainly, could not come to his defence.

The man's first kick, aimed at Harley's face, he blocked with his forearm; and, before the man could make a second kick, Jerry erupted on the scene. Nor did he need encouragement or direction from his love-master. He flashed at the man, sinking his teeth harmlessly into the slack of the man's trousers at the waist-band above the hip, but by his weight dragging him half down to the ground.

And upon Jerry the man turned with an increase of madness. In truth all the world was against him. The very landscape rained dogs upon him. But from above, from the slopes of Sonoma Mountain, the cries and calls of

the trailing poses caught his ear, and deflected his intention. They were the pursuing death, and it was from them he must escape. With another kick at Jerry, hurling him clear, he leaped astride the reporter's horse which had continued to stand, without movement or excitement, in utter apathy, where he had dismounted from it.

The horse went into a reluctant and stiff-legged gallop, while Jerry followed, snarling and growling wrath at so high a pitch that almost he squalled.

"It's all right, Michael," Harley soothed. "Take it easy. Don't hurt yourself. The trouble's over. Anybody'll happen along any time now and get us out of this fix."

But the smaller branch of the two composing the fork broke, and Michael fell to the ground, landing in momentary confusion on his head and shoulders. The next moment he was on his feet and tearing down the road in the direction of Jerry's noisy pursuit. Jerry's noise broke in a sharp cry of pain that added wings to Michael's feet. Michael passed him rolling helplessly on the road. What had happened was that the livery horse, in its stiff-jointed, broken-kneed gallop, had stumbled, nearly fallen, and, in its sprawling recovery, had accidentally stepped on Jerry, bruising and breaking his foreleg.

And the man, looking back and seeing Michael close upon him, decided that it was still another dog attacking him. But he had no fear of dogs. It

was men, with their rifles and shotguns, that might bring him to ultimate grief. Nevertheless, the pain of his bleeding legs, lacerated by Jerry and Michael, maintained his rage against dogs.

"More dogs," was his bitter thought, as he leaned out and brought his whip down across Michael's face.

To his surprise, the dog did not wince under the blow. Nor for that matter did he yelp or cry out from the pain. Nor did he bark or growl or snarl. He closed in as though he had not received the blow, and as though the whip was not brandished above him. As Michael leaped for his right leg he swung the whip down, striking him squarely on the muzzle midway between nose and eyes. Deflected by the blow, Michael dropped back to earth and ran on with his longest leaps to catch up and make his next spring.

But the man had noticed another thing. At such close range, bringing his whip down, he could not help noting that Michael had kept his eyes open under the blow. Neither had he winced nor blinked as the whip slashed down on him. The thing was uncanny. It was something new in the way of dogs. Michael sprang again, the man timed him again with the whip, and he saw the uncanny thing repeated. By neither wince nor blink had the dog acknowledged the blow.

And then an entirely new kind of fear came upon the man. Was this the end for him, after all he had gone through? Was this deadly silent,

rough-coated terrier the thing destined to destroy him where men had failed? He did not even know that the dog was real. Might it not be some terrible avenger, out of the mystery beyond life, placed to beset him and finish him finally on this road that he was convinced was surely the death-road? The dog was not real. It could not be real. The dog did not live that could take a full-arm whip-slash without wince or flinch.

Twice again, as the dog sprang, he deflected it with accurately delivered blows. And the dog came on with the same surety and silence. The man surrendered to his terror, clapping heels to his horse's old ribs, beating it over the head and under the belly with the whip until it galloped as it had not galloped in years. Even on that apathetic steed the terror descended. It was not terror of the dog, which it knew to be only a dog, but terror of the rider. In the past its knees had been broken and its joints stiffened for ever, by drunken-mad riders who had hired him from the stables. And here was another such drunken-mad rider--for the horse sensed the man's terror--who ached his ribs with the weight of his heels and beat him cruelly over face and nose and ears.

The best speed of the horse was not very great, not great enough to out-distance Michael, although it was fast enough to give the latter only infrequent opportunities to spring for the man's leg. But each spring was met by the unvarying whip-blow that by its very weight deflected him in the air. Though his teeth each time clipped together perilously close to the man's leg, each time he fell back to earth he had to gather

himself together and run at his own top speed in order to overtake the terror-stricken man on the crazy-galloping horse.

Enrico Piccolomini saw the chase and was himself in at the finish; and the affair, his one great adventure in the world, gave him wealth as well as material for conversation to the end of his days. Enrico Piccolomini was a wood-chopper on the Kennan Ranch. On a rounded knoll, overlooking the road, he had first heard the galloping hoofs of the horse and the crack of the whip-blows on its body. Next, he had seen the running battle of the man, the horse, and the dog. When directly beneath him, not twenty feet distant, he saw the dog leap, in its queer silent way, straight up and in to the down-smash of the whip, and sink its teeth in the rider's leg. He saw the dog, with its weight, as it fell back to earth, drag the man half out of the saddle. He saw the man, in an effort to recover his balance, put his own weight on the bridle-reins. And he saw the horse, half-rearing, half-tottering and stumbling, overthrow the last shred of the man's balance so that he followed the dog to the ground.

"And then they are like two dogs, like two beasts," Piccolomini was wont to tell in after-years over a glass of wine in his little hotel in Glen Ellen. "The dog lets go the man's leg and jumps for the man's throat. And the man, rolling over, is at the dog's throat. Both his hands--so--he fastens about the throat of this dog. And the dog makes no sound. He never makes sound, before or after. After the two hands of the man stop his breath he can not make sound. But he is not that kind of a dog. He

will not make sound anyway. And the horse stands and looks on, and the horse coughs. It is very strange all that I see.

"And the man is mad. Only a madman will do what I see him do. I see the man show his teeth like any dog, and bite the dog on the paw, on the nose, on the body. And when he bites the dog on the nose, the dog bites him on the cheek. And the man and the dog fight like hell, and the dog gets his hind legs up like a cat. And like a cat he tears the man's shirt away from his chest, and tears the skin of the chest with his claws till it is all red with bleeding. And the man yow-yowls, and makes noises like a wild mountain lion. And always he chokes the dog. It is a hell of a fight.

"And the dog is Mister Kennan's dog, a fine man, and I have worked for him two years. So I will not stand there and see Mister Kennan's dog all killed to pieces by the man who fights like a mountain lion. I run down the hill, but I am excited and forget my axe. I run down the hill, maybe from this door to that door, twenty feet or maybe thirty feet. And it is nearly all finished for the dog. His tongue is a long ways out, and his eyes like covered with cobwebs; but still he scratches the man's chest with his hind-feet and the man yow-yowls like a hen of the mountains.

"What can I do? I have forgotten the axe. The man will kill the dog. I look for a big rock. There are no rocks. I look for a club. I cannot find a club. And the man is killing the dog. I tell you what I do. I am no fool. I kick the man. My shoes are very heavy--not like shoes I



wear now. They are the shoes of the wood-chopper, very thick on the sole with hard leather, with many iron nails. I kick the man on the side of the face, on the neck, right under the ear. I kick once. It is a good kick. It is enough. I know the place--right under the ear.

"And the man lets go of the dog. He shuts his eyes, and opens his mouth, and lies very still. And the dog begins once more to breathe. And with the breath comes the life, and right away he wants to kill the man. But I say 'No,' though I am very much afraid of the dog. And the man begins to become alive. He opens his eyes and he looks at me like a mountain lion. And his mouth makes a noise like a mountain lion. And I am afraid of him like I am afraid of the dog. What am I to do? I have forgotten the axe. I tell you what I do. I kick the man once again under the ear. Then I take my belt, and my bandana handkerchief, and I tie him. I tie his hands. I tie his legs, too. And all the time I am saying 'No,' to the dog, and that he must leave the man alone. And the dog looks. He knows I am his friend and am tying the man. And he does not bite me, though I am very much afraid. The dog is a terrible dog. Do I not know? Have I not seen him take a strong man out of the saddle?--a man that is like a mountain lion?

"And then the men come. They all have guns-rifles, shotguns, revolvers, pistols. And I think, first, that justice is very quick in the United States. Only just now have I kicked a man in the head, and, one-two-three, just like that, men come with guns to take me to jail for kicking a man in the head. At first I do not understand. The many men

are angry with me. They call me names, and say bad things; but they do not arrest me. Ah! I begin to understand! I hear them talk about three thousand dollars. I have robbed them of three thousand dollars. It is not true. I say so. I say never have I robbed a man of one cent. Then they laugh. And I feel better and I understand better. The three thousand dollars is the reward of the Government for this man I have tied up with my belt and my bandana. And the three thousand dollars is mine because I kicked the man in the head and tied his hands and his feet.

"So I do not work for Mister Kennan any more. I am a rich man. Three thousand dollars, all mine, from the Government, and Mister Kennan sees that it is paid to me by the Government and not robbed from me by the men with the guns. Just because I kicked the man in the head who was like a mountain lion! It is fortune. It is America. And I am glad that I have left Italy and come to chop wood on Mister Kennan's ranch. And I start this hotel in Glen Ellen with the three thousand dollars. I know there is large money in the hotel business. When I was a little boy, did not my father have a hotel in Napoli? I have now two daughters in high school. Also I own an automobile."

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"Mercy me, the whole ranch is a hospital!" cried Villa Kennan, two days later, as she came out on the broad sleeping-porch and regarded Harley and Jerry stretched out, the one with his leg in splints, the other with his leg in a plaster cast. "Look at Michael," she continued. "You're

not the only ones with broken bones. I've only just discovered that if his nose isn't broken, it ought to be, from the blow he must have received on it. I've had hot compresses on it for the last hour. Look at it!"

Michael, who had followed in at her invitation, betrayed a ridiculously swollen nose as he sniffed noses with Jerry, wagged his bobtail to Harley in greeting, and was greeted in turn with a blissful hand laid on his head.

"Must have got it in the fight," Harley said. "The fellow struck him with the whip many times, so Piccolomini says, and, naturally, it would be right across the nose when he jumped for him."

"And Piccolomini says he never cried out when he was struck, but went on running and jumping," Villa took up enthusiastically. "Think of it! A dog no bigger than Michael dragging out of the saddle a man-killing outlaw whom scores of officers could not catch!"

"So far as we are concerned, he did better than that," Harley commented quietly. "If it hadn't been for Michael, and for Jerry, too--if it hadn't been for the pair of them, I do verily believe that that lunatic would have kicked my head off as he promised."

"The blessed pair of them!" Villa cried, with shining eyes, as her hand flashed out to her husband's in a quick press of heart-thankfulness. "The

last word has not been said upon the wonder of dogs," she added, as, with a quick winking of her eyelashes to overcome the impending moistness, she controlled her emotion.

"The last word of the wonder of dogs will never be said," Harley spoke, returning the pressure of her hand and releasing it in order to help her.

"And just for that were going to say something right now," she smiled.

"Jerry, and Michael, and I. We've been practising it in secret for a surprise for you. You just lie there and listen. It's the Doxology.

Don't Laugh. No pun intended."

She bent forward from the stool on which she sat, and drew Michael to her so that he sat between her knees, her two hands holding his head and jowls, his nose half-buried in her hair.

"Now Jerry!" she called sharply, as a singing teacher might call, so that Jerry turned his head in attention, looked at her, smiled understanding with his eyes, and waited.

It was Villa who started and pitched the Doxology, but quickly the two dogs joined with their own soft, mellow howling, if howling it may be called when it was so soft and mellow and true. And all that had vanished into the Nothingness was in the minds of the two dogs as they sang, and they sang back through the Nothingness to the land of Otherwhere, and ran once again with the Lost Pack, and yet were not

entirely unaware of the present and of the indubitable two-legged god who was called Villa and who sang with them and loved them.

"No reason we shouldn't make a quartette of it," remarked Harley Kennan, as with his own voice he joined in.