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Jerry of the Islands

FOREWORD

It is a misfortune to some fiction-writers that fiction and unveracity in the average person's mind mean one and the same thing. Several years ago I published a South Sea novel. The action was placed in the Solomon Islands. The action was praised by the critics and reviewers as a highly creditable effort of the imagination. As regards reality--they said there wasn't any. Of course, as every one knew, kinky-haired cannibals no longer

obtained on the earth's surface, much less ran around with nothing on, chopping off one another's heads, and, on occasion, a white man's head as well.

Now listen. I am writing these lines in Honolulu, Hawaii. Yesterday, on the beach at Waikiki, a stranger spoke to me. He mentioned a mutual friend, Captain Kellar. When I was wrecked in the Solomons on the blackbirder, the *Minota*, it was Captain Kellar, master of the blackbirder, the *Eugenie*, who rescued me. The blacks had taken Captain Kellar's head, the stranger told me. He knew. He had represented Captain Kellar's mother in settling up the estate.

Listen. I received a letter the other day from Mr. C. M. Woodford, Resident Commissioner of the British Solomons. He was back at his post, after a long furlough to England, where he had entered his son into Oxford. A search of the shelves of almost any public library will bring to light a book entitled, "A Naturalist Among the Head Hunters." Mr. C. M. Woodford is the naturalist. He wrote the book.

To return to his letter. In the course of the day's work he casually and briefly mentioned a particular job he had just got off his hands. His absence in England had been the cause of delay. The job had been to make a punitive expedition to a neighbouring island, and, incidentally, to recover the heads of some mutual friends of ours--a white-trader, his white wife and children, and his white clerk. The expedition was successful, and Mr. Woodford concluded his account of the episode with a statement to the effect: "What especially struck me was the absence of pain and terror in their faces, which seemed to express, rather, serenity and repose"--this, mind you, of men and women of his own race whom he knew well and who had sat at dinner with him in his own house.

Other friends, with whom I have sat at dinner in the brave, rollicking days in the Solomons have since passed out--by the same way. My goodness! I sailed in the teak-built ketch, the *Minota*, on a blackbirding cruise to Malaita, and I took my wife along. The hatchet-marks were still raw on the door of our tiny stateroom advertising an event of a few months before. The event was the taking of Captain Mackenzie's head, Captain Mackenzie, at that time, being master of the *Minota*. As we sailed in to Langa-Langa, the British cruiser, the *Cambrian*, steamed out from the shelling of a village.

It is not expedient to burden this preliminary to my story with further details, which I do make asseveration I possess a-plenty. I hope I have given some assurance that the adventures of my dog hero in this novel are real adventures in a very real cannibal world. Bless you!--when I took my wife along on the cruise of the *Minota*, we found on board a nigger-chasing, adorable Irish terrier puppy, who was smooth-coated like Jerry, and whose name was Peggy. Had it not been for Peggy, this book would never have been written. She was the chattel of the *Minota*'s splendid skipper. So much did Mrs. London and I come to love her, that Mrs. London, after the wreck of the *Minota*, deliberately and shamelessly stole her from the *Minota*'s skipper. I do further admit that I did, deliberately and shamelessly, compound my wife's felony. We loved Peggy so! Dear royal, glorious little dog, buried at sea off the east coast of Australia!

I must add that Peggy, like Jerry, was born at Meringe Lagoon, on Meringe Plantation, which is of the Island of Ysabel, said Ysabel Island lying next north of Florida Island, where is the seat of government and where dwells the Resident Commissioner, Mr. C. M. Woodford. Still further and finally, I knew Peggy's mother and father well, and have often known the warm surge in the heart of me at the sight of that faithful couple running side by side along the beach. Terrence was his real name. Her name was Bidy.

JACK LONDON WAIKIKI BEACH, HONOLULU, OAHU, T.H. June 5, 1915

CHAPTER I

Not until Mister Haggin abruptly picked him up under one arm and stepped into the sternsheets of the waiting whaleboat, did Jerry dream that anything untoward was to happen to him. Mister Haggin was Jerry's beloved master, and had been his beloved master for the six months of Jerry's life. Jerry did not know Mister Haggin as "master," for "master" had no place in Jerry's vocabulary, Jerry being a smooth-coated, golden-sorrel Irish terrier.

But in Jerry's vocabulary, "Mister Haggin" possessed all the definiteness of sound and meaning that the word "master" possesses in the vocabularies of humans in relation to their dogs. "Mister Haggin" was the sound Jerry had always heard uttered by Bob, the clerk, and by Derby, the foreman on the plantation, when they addressed his master. Also, Jerry had always heard the rare visiting two-legged man-creatures such as came on the Arangi, address his master as Mister Haggin.

But dogs being dogs, in their dim, inarticulate, brilliant, and heroic-worshipping ways misappraising humans, dogs think of their masters, and love their masters, more than the facts warrant. "Master" means to them, as "Mister" Haggin meant to Jerry, a deal more, and a great deal more, than it means to humans. The human considers himself as "master" to his dog, but the dog considers his master "God."

Now "God" was no word in Jerry's vocabulary, despite the fact that he already possessed a definite and fairly large vocabulary. "Mister Haggin" was the sound that meant "God." In Jerry's heart and head, in the mysterious centre of all his activities that is called consciousness, the sound, "Mister Haggin," occupied the same place that "God" occupies in human consciousness. By word and sound, to Jerry, "Mister Haggin" had the same connotation that "God" has to God-worshipping humans. In short, Mister Haggin was Jerry's God.

And so, when Mister Haggin, or God, or call it what one will with the limitations of language, picked Jerry up with imperative abruptness, tucked him under his arm, and stepped into the whaleboat, whose black crew immediately bent to the oars, Jerry was instantly and nervously aware that the unusual had begun to happen. Never before had he gone out on board the Arangi, which he could see growing larger and closer to each lip-hissing stroke of the oars of the blacks.

Only an hour before, Jerry had come down from the plantation house to the beach to see the Arangi depart. Twice before, in his half-year of life, had he had this delectable experience. Delectable it truly was, running up and down the white beach of sand-pounded coral, and, under the wise guidance of Bidy and Terrence, taking part in the excitement of the beach and even adding to it.

There was the nigger-chasing. Jerry had been born to hate niggers. His first experiences in the world as a puling puppy, had taught him that Bidy, his mother, and his father Terrence, hated niggers. A nigger was something to be snarled at. A nigger, unless he were a house-boy, was something to be attacked and bitten and torn if he invaded the compound. Bidy did it. Terrence did it. In doing it, they served their God--Mister Haggin. Niggers were two-legged lesser creatures who toiled and slaved for their two-legged white lords, who lived in the labour barracks afar off, and who were so much lesser and lower that they must not dare come near the habitation of their lords.

And nigger-chasing was adventure. Not long after he had learned to sprawl, Jerry had learned that. One took his chances. As long as Mister Haggin, or Derby, or Bob, was about, the niggers took their chasing. But there were times when the white lords were not about. Then it was "'Ware niggers!" One must dare to chase only with due precaution. Because then, beyond the white lord's eyes, the niggers had a way, not merely of scowling and muttering, but of attacking four-legged dogs with stones and clubs. Jerry had seen his mother so mishandled, and, ere he had learned discretion, alone in the high grass had been himself club-mauled by Godarmy, the black who wore a china door-knob suspended on his chest from his neck on a string of sennit braided from cocoanut fibre. More. Jerry remembered another high-grass adventure, when he and his brother

Michael had fought Owmi, another black distinguishable for the cogged wheels of an alarm clock on his chest. Michael had been so severely struck on his head that for ever after his left ear had remained sore and had withered into a peculiar wilted and twisted upward cock.

Still more. There had been his brother Patsy, and his sister Kathleen, who had disappeared two months before, who had ceased and no longer were. The great god, Mister Haggin, had raged up and down the plantation. The bush had been searched. Half a dozen niggers had been whipped. And Mister Haggin had failed to solve the mystery of Patsy's and Kathleen's disappearance. But Bidy and Terrence knew. So did Michael and Jerry. The four-months' old Patsy and Kathleen had gone into the cooking-pot at the barracks, and their puppy-soft skins had been destroyed in the fire. Jerry knew this, as did his father and mother and brother, for they had smelled the unmistakable burnt-meat smell, and Terrence, in his rage of knowledge, had even attacked Mogom the house-boy, and been reprimanded and cuffed by Mister Haggin, who had not smelled and did not understand, and who had always to impress discipline on all creatures under his roof-tree.

But on the beach, when the blacks, whose terms of service were up came down with their trade-boxes on their heads to depart on the Arangi, was the time when nigger-chasing was not dangerous. Old scores could be settled, and it was the last chance, for the blacks who departed on the Arangi never came back. As an instance, this very morning Bidy, remembering a secret mauling at the hands of Lerumie, laid teeth into his naked calf and threw him sprawling into the water, trade-box, earthly possessions and all, and then laughed at him, sure in the protection of Mister Haggin who grinned at the episode.

Then, too, there was usually at least one bush-dog on the Arangi at which Jerry and Michael, from the beach, could bark their heads off. Once, Terrence, who was nearly as large as an Airedale and fully as lion-hearted--Terrence the Magnificent, as Tom Haggin called him-- had caught such a bush-dog trespassing on the beach and given him a delightful thrashing, in which Jerry and Michael, and Patsy and Kathleen, who were at the time alive, had joined with many shrill yelps and sharp nips. Jerry had never forgotten the ecstasy of the hair, unmistakably doggy in scent, which had filled his mouth at his one successful nip. Bush-dogs were dogs--he recognized them as his kind; but they were somehow different from his own lordly breed, different and lesser, just as the blacks were compared with Mister Haggin, Derby, and Bob.

But Jerry did not continue to gaze at the nearing Arangi. Bidy, wise with previous bitter bereavements, had sat down on the edge of the sand, her fore-feet in the water, and was mouthing her woe. That this concerned him, Jerry knew, for her grief tore sharply, albeit vaguely, at his sensitive, passionate heart. What it presaged he knew not, save that it was disaster and catastrophe connected with him. As he looked back at her, rough-coated and grief-stricken, he could see Terrence hovering solicitously near her. He, too, was rough-coated, as was Michael, and as Patsy and Kathleen had been, Jerry being the one smooth-coated member of the family.

Further, although Jerry did not know it and Tom Haggin did, Terrence was a royal lover and a devoted spouse. Jerry, from his earliest impressions, could remember the way Terrence had of running with Bidy, miles and miles along the beaches or through the avenues of cocoanuts, side by side with her, both with laughing mouths of sheer delight. As these were the only dogs, besides his brothers and sisters and the several eruptions of strange bush-dogs that Jerry knew, it did not enter his head otherwise than that this was the way of dogs, male and female, wedded and faithful. But Tom Haggin knew its unusualness. "Proper affinities," he declared, and repeatedly declared, with warm voice and moist eyes of appreciation. "A gentleman, that Terrence, and a four-legged proper man. A man-dog, if there ever was one, four-square as the legs on the four corners of him. And prepotent! My word! His blood'd breed true for a thousand generations, and the cool head and the kindly brave heart of him."

Terrence did not voice his sorrow, if sorrow he had; but his hovering about Bidy tokened his anxiety for her. Michael, however, yielding to the contagion, sat beside his mother and barked angrily out across the increasing stretch of water as he would have barked at any danger that crept and rustled in the jungle. This,

too, sank to Jerry's heart, adding weight to his sure intuition that dire fate, he knew not what, was upon him.

For his six months of life, Jerry knew a great deal and knew very little. He knew, without thinking about it, without knowing that he knew, why Bidy, the wise as well as the brave, did not act upon all the message that her heart voiced to him, and spring into the water and swim after him. She had protected him like a lioness when the big puarka (which, in Jerry's vocabulary, along with grunts and squeals, was the combination of sound, or word, for "pig") had tried to devour him where he was cornered under the high-piled plantation house. Like a lioness, when the cook-boy had struck him with a stick to drive him out of the kitchen, had Bidy sprung upon the black, receiving without wince or whimper one straight blow from the stick, and then downing him and mauling him among his pots and pans until dragged (for the first time snarling) away by the unchiding Mister Haggin, who; however, administered sharp words to the cook-boy for daring to lift hand against a four-legged dog belonging to a god.

Jerry knew why his mother did not plunge into the water after him. The salt sea, as well as the lagoons that led out of the salt sea, were taboo. "Taboo," as word or sound, had no place in Jerry's vocabulary. But its definition, or significance, was there in the quickest part of his consciousness. He possessed a dim, vague, imperative knowingness that it was not merely not good, but supremely disastrous, leading to the mistily glimpsed sense of utter endingness for a dog, for any dog, to go into the water where slipped and slid and noiselessly paddled, sometimes on top, sometimes emerging from the depths, great scaly monsters, huge-jawed and horribly-toothed, that snapped down and engulfed a dog in an instant just as the fowls of Mister Haggin snapped and engulfed grains of corn.

Often he had heard his father and mother, on the safety of the sand, bark and rage their hatred of those terrible sea-dwellers, when, close to the beach, they appeared on the surface like logs awash. "Crocodile" was no word in Jerry's vocabulary. It was an image, an image of a log awash that was different from any log in that it was alive. Jerry, who heard, registered, and recognized many words that were as truly tools of thought to him as they were to humans, but who, by inarticulateness of birth and breed, could not utter these many words, nevertheless in his mental processes, used images just as articulate men use words in their own mental processes. And after all, articulate men, in the act of thinking, willy nilly use images that correspond to words and that amplify words.

Perhaps, in Jerry's brain, the rising into the foreground of consciousness of an image of a log awash connoted more intimate and fuller comprehension of the thing being thought about, than did the word "crocodile," and its accompanying image, in the foreground of a human's consciousness. For Jerry really did know more about crocodiles than the average human. He could smell a crocodile farther off and more differentiatingly than could any man, than could even a salt-water black or a bushman smell one. He could tell when a crocodile, hauled up from the lagoon, lay without sound or movement, and perhaps asleep, a hundred feet away on the floor mat of jungle.

He knew more of the language of crocodiles than did any man. He had better means and opportunities of knowing. He knew their many noises that were as grunts and slubbers. He knew their anger noises, their fear noises, their food noises, their love noises. And these noises were as definitely words in his vocabulary as are words in a human's vocabulary. And these crocodile noises were tools of thought. By them he weighed and judged and determined his own consequent courses of action, just like any human; or, just like any human, lazily resolved upon no course of action, but merely noted and registered a clear comprehension of something that was going on about him that did not require a correspondence of action on his part.

And yet, what Jerry did not know was very much. He did not know the size of the world. He did not know that this Meringe Lagoon, backed by high, forested mountains and fronted and sheltered by the off-shore coral islets, was anything else than the entire world. He did not know that it was a mere fractional part of the great island of Ysabel, that was again one island of a thousand, many of them greater, that composed the Solomon Islands that men marked on charts as a group of specks in the vastitude of the far-western South Pacific.