THE MURDERER'S APE





The Murderer's Ape

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THE TYPEWRITER

The other day the Chief gave me an old typewriter, a 1908 Underwood No. 5. He'd bought it from a scrap merchant down by the harbor, here in Lisbon. Several of the keys were broken and the release lever was missing, but the Chief knows I like fixing broken things.

It's taken me a couple of evenings to mend my Underwood No. 5, and this is the first time I've written anything on it. Several of the keys still stick, but a pair of pliers and a few drops of oil will soon put them right.

That will have to wait until tomorrow. It's already dark outside my cabin window. The lights from the vessels lying at anchor on the river are reflecting in the black water. I've strung my hammock and I'm about to climb into it.

I hope I don't have those horrible dreams again tonight.

~

It's evening again.

The Chief and I were lucky today. Early every morning we go to a harbor café where unemployed sailors wait round hoping to get work for the day. There is not usually anything much, but today we struck lucky and so we have been heaving sacks of coal from dawn to dusk. The pay was poor, but we need every penny we can earn. My back aches, my arms ache and my fur is itchy with coal dust.

More than anything else, though, I'm tired. I didn't sleep well again last night. It must be at least a month since I had a full night's sleep undisturbed by nightmares.

The same dreams return time after time.

Some nights I'm back in the engine room of the *Song of Limerick*. I'm being held from behind by strong arms while the engine is racing and the ship is sinking.

Other nights I dream of Chief Inspector Garretta. It's dark and I don't know where I am. Among the tombs in Prazeres Cemetery, perhaps. The only things I can see are Garretta's small eyes, which shine with a cold gleam under the brim of his hat. And I can smell the acrid gunpowder from his revolver—the shot is still ringing in my ears.

The most horrible dream is the one about the Chief. I am standing in the rain waiting for him outside an iron gate in a high wall. Time passes and I'm chilled to the bone. I try to convince myself that the gate will open at any moment, but I know in my heart that I'm fooling myself. It's never going to open and the Chief is caught behind that wall forever.

There are times when I scream in my sleep. One night not long ago I was woken by the Chief rushing into my cabin waving a big pipe wrench. Hearing my screams, he'd thought someone had crept aboard and was going to hurt me. That was a distinct possibility, for we've made dangerous enemies in Lisbon.

I'm too tired to write any more at present. I'll probably write again tomorrow. I'm really pleased with my Underwood No. 5!



It's foggy tonight. It came rolling in from the Atlantic during the afternoon. I went up on deck just now and couldn't see beyond the cranes a short way along the quay. Every so often the gruff noise of foghorns and the ringing of ships' bells can be heard from the river. It sounds a bit ghostly.

The Chief and I have been carrying sacks of coal again today. I was thinking about my Underwood No. 5 while doing it, and now I've decided what I'm going to use it for.

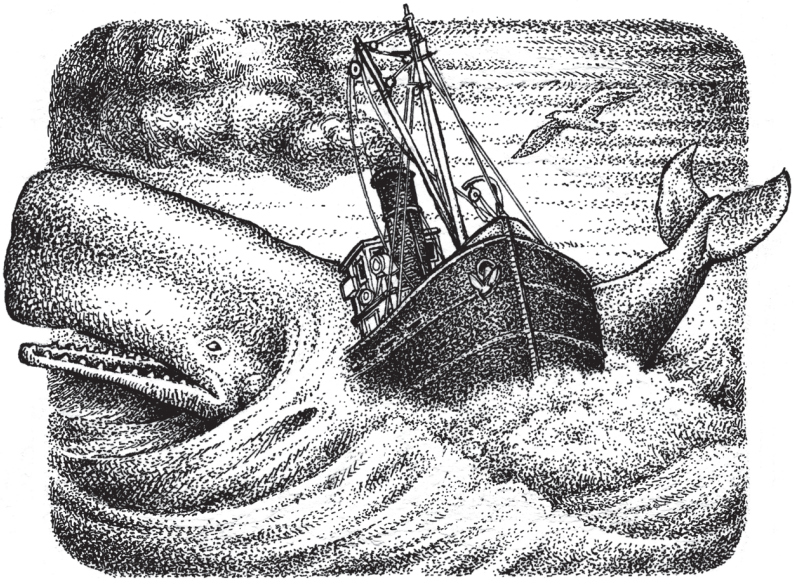
I am going to use it to tell the truth.

The truth about the murder of Alphonse Morro.

So that everyone knows what really happened.

And maybe the writing will help to rid me of my nightmares.

PART ONE



CHAPTER 1
Me, the Chief and the *Hudson Queen*

For those of you who don't know me, the first thing I need to say is that I'm not a human being, I'm an anthropoid ape. I've learned from scientists that I belong to the subspecies *Gorilla gorilla graueri.* Most of my kind live in Africa, in the thick jungle along the banks of the Congo River, and that's probably where I originally came from.

I don't know how I ended up among people, and I probably never shall know. I must have been very small when it

happened. Maybe I was caught by hunters or by natives and they then sold me on. My very first memory is of sitting on a cold stone floor with a chain round my neck. It may have been in the city of Istanbul, though I can't be completely certain.

Since then I've lived in the human world. I've learned how you human beings think and how to understand what you say. I've learned to read and to write. I've learned how people steal and deceive. I've learned what greed is. And cruelty. I have had many owners and I would prefer to forget most of them. I don't know which of them gave me my name. Or why.

But I'm called Sally Jones anyway.

~

Many people think the Chief is my present owner, but the Chief isn't the sort to want to own others. He and I are comrades. And friends.

The Chief's real name is Henry Koskela.

We first met many years ago when I stowed away on a freighter called the *Otago*. The crew found me, and the captain ordered them to throw me overboard. But the ship's chief engineer stepped in and saved my life. That was the Chief, that was.

We chanced to meet again a couple of years later in the

harbor district of Singapore. I was seriously ill and standing chained to a post outside a sleazy bar. The Chief recognized me and bought me from the bar owner. He took me with him to the ship he was working on and gave me food and medicine. That was the second time he saved my life.

When I eventually recovered I was allowed to help the Chief with various little jobs round the engine room. I liked the work, and thanks to the Chief I became good at it too. Everything I know about seamanship and ships' engines I've learned from him.

We've stuck together ever since, the Chief and I. From Southeast Asia we worked our way to Australia. We bought our own steamer, the *Hudson Queen,* in New York and ran her along the coasts of the Americas, Africa and Europe with various cargoes. We were our own masters and made enough money to keep the ship in good condition.

It was a good life, impossible to imagine a better one.

I hope it can be like that again.

~

Just under four years ago everything changed. That's when our misfortunes began. The Chief and I had been sailing in British waters the whole of that summer, and when autumn arrived we decided to head for warmer latitudes to avoid the winter storms in the North Sea. In London we

took on a cargo of tin cans bound for the Azores, a group of islands in the middle of the Atlantic.

The journey went well at the start. We had good weather and gentle winds, but our luck ran out early one morning when we collided with a whale. The whale survived, but the *Hudson Queen* took such a thump that her rudder was bent. While we were trying to mend the damage, the weather changed and a violent storm blew up. The *Hudson Queen* drifted helplessly, and if it hadn't been for the drag anchor we'd have been lost. It was only once the wind had eased that we managed to rig emergency steering, set a course for the Portuguese coast and seek refuge in Lisbon.

Once we had unloaded our cargo, the *Hudson Queen* had to go into dry dock for rudder repairs. That took a fortnight and cost all the money we had saved. The Chief went round all the shipping agents in the port, trying to arrange a new cargo, but he found nothing. The quayside was already lined with freighters with empty holds waiting for better days.

The weeks passed. It's never much fun to be stuck ashore, but there are worse ports than Lisbon to be stuck in. We used to spend our Saturdays riding round the city by tram. You won't find smarter trams than Lisbon trams anywhere in the world, not even in San Francisco.

Our mooring in the harbor was below the Alfama dis-

trict, a poor quarter of the city, sleepy by day and full of danger by night. No one batted an eye at the Siamese twins who sold shoelaces on Rua de São Pedro, nor at the Devil Dancers from the Pepper Coast who were to be found in the darkest alleyways when the moon was waning. In Alfama they didn't even bat an eye at an ape in a boiler suit, and that was good for me.

Most evenings we went to O Pelicano, an inn used by many seamen when they are in Lisbon. It's on Rua do Salvador, a dark and narrow lane rarely reached by the rays of the sun. The owner was called Senhor Baptista. He used to be a cook on the ships of the Transbrazil line and he always offered his guests a glass of aguardiente before they ate. Aguardiente is a sort of brandy, so I usually took a glass of milk instead.

I have many good memories of our evenings in O Pelicano, but I have a bad one too. Because it was in O Pelicano that we first met Alphonse Morro.