

DOC SAVAGE

FIVE FATHOMS DEAD

Kenneth Robeson

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WHO IS

DOC SAVAGE

The bronze giant, who with his five aides became world famous, whose name was as well known in the far regions of China and the jungles of Africa as in the skyscrapers of New York.

There were stories of Doc Savage's almost incredible strength; of his amazing scientific discoveries of strange weapons and dangerous exploits.

Doc had dedicated his life to aiding those faced by dangers with which they could not cope.

His name brought fear to those who sought to prey upon the unsuspecting. His name was praised by thousands he had saved.

DOC SAVAGE'S AMAZING CREW

"Ham," Brigadier General Theodore Marley Brooks, was

never without his ominous, black sword cane.

"Monk," Lieutenant Colonel Andrew Blodgett Mayfair, just over five feet tall, yet over 260 pounds. His brutish exterior concealed the mind of a great scientist.

"Renny," Colonel John Renwick, his favorite sport was pounding his massive fists through heavy, paneled doors.

"Long Tom," Major Thomas J. Roberts, was the physical weakling of the crowd, but a genius at electricity.

"Johnny," William Harper Littlejohn, the scientist and greatest living expert on geology and archaeology.

**WITH THEIR LEADER, THEY WOULD
GO ANYWHERE, FIGHT ANYONE,
DARE EVERYTHING—SEEKING EXCITEMENT
AND PERILOUS ADVENTURE!**

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MEN OF FEAR, *and* THE PURE EVIL

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SUIT, LET'S KILL AMES, ONCE OVER
LIGHTLY, *and* I DIED YESTERDAY

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DISAPPEARING LADY, FIRE AND ICE, *and*
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Omnibus #7 THE MEN VANISHED, FIVE FATHOMS
DEAD, THE TERRIBLE STORK, *and*
DANGER LIES EAST

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DOC SAVAGE

FIVE FATHOMS DEAD

I

The telescope was of the type known as a spotting 'scope. They are manufactured for use on rifle ranges to locate the holes the bullets make in the targets. This one had a magnification factor of 40X. Powerful. Usually they have a power of about 20X.

For fifteen minutes, now, the man they were calling Whitey had been using the telescope. He used it patiently, intently, his lips wearing the fierce twist of a lynx waiting for a rabbit to venture within springing reach. With a telescope so powerful, any motion is a serious matter, for the objective will quickly jump out of the field of view; hence he'd made a rest for the telescope out of two bricks and a bit of fieldstone.

Presently the bushes parted nearby, a white face protruded, and said, "There's a cop coming."

"How close?"

"Pretty damn close!"

"He pay particular attention to you?"

"No. No, I don't think so."

"It's a wonder he didn't," the big man they called Whitey said bitterly. "You couldn't look more scared if you were playing in a Boris Karloff movie. Wipe that wild look off your puss. Here, have a sandwich."

Ostensibly, and for the benefit of anybody whose curiosity might be easy on the trigger, they were picnicking. This was March, late March, actually a bit early for a picnic. But today the sun was out brightly, spraying the green grass and the trees, which hadn't leafed out yet to any extent, with plenty of warm glory.

Here on the hill, the highest hill around about, it was balmy and bright, and there was just enough breeze to kick away the smell of the seashore, which was a mudflat below them. The place and the weather were all right for a picnic. The picnic baskets looked all right, and there was a raincoat in case it rained and a blanket for them to sit on.

The man they knew as Whitey handed the other man a ham sandwich, then he tossed the raincoat over the telescope, leaned back casually and selected a sandwich for himself.

The cop, old, grizzled, apple-cheeked, looked in on them. "Nice day, huh?" he said. He whacked the bushes with his stick.

"Sure."

"Enjoying yourselves?"

"Sure."

The cop's eyes were moving continually, touching everything. Old, wise, farmed out on this placid park beat the way an old horse is put out to grass, he was alert, hoped he would see some situation that needed a policeman, just so he could defeat boredom. He was not suspicious particularly. He was just looking around.

"They don't like it if you scatter a lot of papers around," he said.

"We won't."

"Seen anything of a dog? Little girl lost one."

"What kind of a dog?"

"Black one, short legs, long hair. Scotty, I reckon."

"Haven't seen it."

"Let me know if you do."

"Sure."

"So long." The old cop hit the bushes with his nightstick again. He went away.

The man known as Whitey grinned sardonically. He popped the rest of the ham sandwich in his mouth, chewed slowly. He was very big, but the middle of him looked flabby and his shoulders slouched, and he carried his mouth loosely. His skin

was just skin color, neither dark nor light, and his hair was just hair, also neither dark nor light. His eyes were the only really unusual thing about him, and they were rather shocking, for they were a pale gray—bone-colored—and he seemed to keep them closed or partly closed a good deal of the time. He wore brown sport clothes.

The other man gasped, "You think he's wise?"

The other man was named Eli Stanley. He was medium-sized and dressed in grays and would have been colorless except for a violent green necktie.

Whitey laughed. "Don't be silly." His laugh was as hard as two stones knocking together.

"Why'd he poke his nose in here?"

"Because he's a cop."

"Well, I dunno—"

"Because he's also an old cop and nothing ever happens on his beat and he wishes it would."

"But—"

"Forget it. Wipe that look off your face. Have a pickle." Whitey lifted the raincoat with which he had covered the telescope. The telescope had shifted its position slightly and, lying down to look again, he carefully changed it until it again pointed at the submarine in the anchorage westward of the cluster of brick buildings of the base. He eyed the submarine

for some time.

"They're fueling," he remarked, "for the whole trip."

"How can you tell?"

He looked annoyed. "The size of the fuel lines, the length of time since a man turned on the valves. It's very simple." He frowned at the other man, added, "Eli, I hope you prove to be a better man on assaying gold and evaluating jewels than I begin to suspect."

Eli scowled. "Have I said I knew anything about a submarine? If I did, I wouldn't know anything about an ex-Nazi submarine." Eli had his jaw shoved out. But he pulled it in presently, and then he looked a little frightened for his safety. "Not that I'm squawking, you understand," he said. He was afraid of this man Whitey.

Whitey acknowledged the other's nervousness with a slight, and fierce grin. He said, "Let's go. I've learned what I wanted to know about the submarine—they're putting to sea with full fuel tanks." He began packing the telescope in the picnic basket.

Eli watched him. They are all, Eli was thinking, wary of this Whitey.

They went to one of the better hotels in town. The National Household Specialties Company had a branch office on the fifth floor, a bedroom, two sitting rooms, one of which had

formerly been a bedroom, and an inner office for private business. The National Household Specialties Company was Whitey, plus eleven men. They were selling household electrical appliances—vacuum cleaners, electric mixers, refrigerators, home deep-freeze units, irons, anything electrical—door to door. They had paid their license fees. They were perfectly legal. If anyone should care to investigate the concern a bit farther, they would find that the home office in New York occupied a fairly impressive, but not too expensive, suite of offices in a midtown building, and, although the firm was expanding since the war it was not a mushroom affair. Nor was the firm a new one. It had been in existence some twenty-five years. It would have taken more digging, however, to unearth the fact that not more than a month ago the concern had changed hands.

The business of specialty selling from house to house was one which gave the salesman a logical excuse for getting around almost anywhere.

Colton, a short fat man, sold deep-freeze units, home size. He looked like a salesman; they all looked like salesmen.

Colton came in about four o'clock. He reported in the inner room. He smelled of liquor and his eyes were too bright.

He said, "This kid Flinch, this kid in the Navy—I got him a little tight. Nothing in the way of equipment has been taken off the sub. The sub put in to a South American port after the war ended, and the crew, the Nazi crew, was interned right aboard. They've been aboard most of the time since, except that they're interned ashore in barracks when the sub is in port. There was

some delay because of the diplomatic red tape before the U-boat was turned over to the U.S. Navy, and the Nazi crew was still kept aboard. The idea is that the Nazi crew is to teach U.S. Navy specialists anything new they know about submarine warfare—if anything."

Colton sounded like a salesman of the door-to-door species, as well as looking the part. As a matter of fact, he had received intensive training in the art for two weeks.

Colton continued, "The sub is going to be taken around through the Canal to the West Coast. To one of the sub bases on the West Coast. There, the Nazi crew is going to teach the Navy specialists what they know, before they're shipped back to Germany."

Whitey, listening to this, could have been asleep. The lids were lowered over his strangely bone-colored eyes.

"Original equipment is all aboard?"

"Yes."

"Never been touched?"

"Untouched."

"What about torpedoes?"

"Still aboard."

"Shells for the guns?"

"On board, too."

"What about the airplanes?"

"Two airplanes," Colton corrected. "They're both on board in flyable condition."

"Okay. That's all." Whitey didn't seem to awaken.

Colton went out. He met Eli Stanley in the outer room, and they went downstairs and had a drink. "Sell any vacuum cleaners?" Colton asked ironically when they were riding down in the elevators. "Three," Eli said. "Then me and the boss went on a picnic in the park. Not a bad guy, the boss."

Colton laughed. Eli didn't mean it about the boss being a great guy, and Colton didn't mean the laugh. Over whiskies in the hotel bar, they agreed that Whitey was a so-and-so, and hell on wheels.

"But, as long as we're tying into a thing like this, I'm glad he is," Eli said.

Whitey transacted more business. He took reports from Hiller and Ward. Hiller sold, ostensibly, vacuum cleaners, as did Eli. Hiller grinned slyly and said, "Mrs. Goss is talkative. Her husband, Ensign Goss, is sailing at eight o'clock tonight, she tells me."

Whitey scowled. "You make a date?"

"Certainly not."

"Why not?"

"I make a date. I don't show up. The submarine her husband's on disappears. Okay, she's liable to think of the two in connection, give it to the cops, and there you are."

Whitey's nod was barely perceptible, but approving. "That's using your head," he said. "So the sub sails at eight tonight. Okay. Get an early dinner. Be ready to move about six-thirty."

"The crew going to move out of town?"

"Certainly the crew isn't going to move out of town. Not for a few days."

Ward was a sleepy southerner with a voice which sounded as if there was sand in his throat. He was chewing on a long, almost-black cigar which was unlighted. He said, "I don't like that damned Colorado Jones. I not only don't like him; I can't take much more of him."

"Yeah?"

"I don't take that stuff, I tell you—"

"What about the supplies?"

"They're all right."

"Aboard the *Dancing Lady*?"

"That's right. And that Colorado Jones, I can't take. So help me, I'm gonna smear him."

"Never mind Colorado Jones. I'll handle Colorado Jones. Is there plenty of fuel aboard? How about the guns? How about the gas?"

"All taken care of."

"Good. Eat an early dinner. We go aboard about six-thirty. Pass the word along. Six-thirty."

Ward nodded. He said, somewhat maliciously, "I don't notice that Colorado Jones jumping when you speak to him, either."

Whitey's eyes seemed to close completely, his voice grew lazy, and he asked, "Think I'm not able to handle the situation?"

Ward thought about it for a moment. He looked at Whitey, considered Whitey's tone, the lazy way he had spoken. Ward began to get pale.

"I never said that," he muttered, and fled.

II

The yacht *Dancing Lady* was a yacht by conversion rather

than birth, having been constructed as a PT boat during the war, later sold as surplus, and converted into a fairly comfortable, and certainly speedy, private craft. In her vitals still reposed the original PT boat power-plant, a gas-devouring set of monsters which few private owners could afford to keep operating. But she was yachty-looking. She had a coat of glistening white, some mahogany and chrome had been applied here and there, and the interior was done in fairly luxurious shades of blue. At six o'clock, two men came aboard with a few cases of beer. They remained aboard. Presently others came with some food, some fishing equipment. Everyone remained aboard. Some came empty-handed, and didn't leave.

Whitey, the last to arrive, tilted a satisfied eye at the descending sun.

"Nice," he remarked. He indicated clouds which were gathering in the sky. "Going to be dark enough to satisfy everybody."

He went into the cabin. He told Colorado Jones, "Cast off. Let's get going."

"Got some drinks to mix," Colorado Jones said briefly, and moved on.

The man they called Whitey—he signed the name of Clarence Spencer to the company payroll checks, but that, everyone felt sure, probably wasn't his name—moved sleepily, but snakily, and was suddenly standing in front of Colorado Jones.

"Beg pardon?" he said.

"Huh?"

"Beg pardon; I didn't understand you—or did I?"

Colorado Jones rolled his lips inward slightly. He was big, six feet four, and built wide where giants are built wide. His fists were enormous, and scarred as if they had hit things. After his lips had rolled in, his shoulders crawled up a little and bunched, as if getting ready to jump, and he said, "I said I had some drinks to—"

The end of his speech was a report, dull and full of force. Whitey had hit him. Colorado Jones walked backward a few feet and lay down, rather awkwardly, on the cabin floor. He said, "Why, you hit me!" His speech was perfectly clear and lucid. He got up, addressed the other with his fists, a boxer's stance. There was some movement, a little fast for the eye, and Colorado Jones lay down again, the full length of him this time. The whites of his eyes showed, and all of his teeth that would show from drawn-back lips.

Tense, silent, swift, the way people come to a fight, heads appeared in the doors, faces at the windows. Not a word was said. But they were interested; each face was as intent in expression as the face of a surgeon making first cut.

"That's twice," said Colorado Jones. His voice was a trifle thick. "Let's see if it's a habit." His words stuck together.

He started to get up. Whitey kicked him in the face. The kick was not gentle, sporting, nor did it seem necessary.

Whitey lifted a foot casually and stamped down on Colorado Jones' stomach. He stamped again twice more, then watched the victim roll over and, bowing his back like an ill dog, become sick.

He said, when the other was silent, sweating and gasping, "I think the drinks can wait, don't you?"

Colorado Jones didn't say anything.

"Get us under way," Whitey said. "Then clean up your mess."

Jones didn't speak and didn't move.

Whitey kicked him where his pants were tight, hard enough to roll him half over, asked, "Something wrong with your ears?"

Colorado Jones crawled toward the deck. Hoarsely, he said, "Get the engine going. Cast off the spring-lines."

In the background, Eli nudged Colton.

"What do you think?" Eli whispered. "What do you think now?"

The *Dancing Lady* was fast. Leaving the harbor, she lifted her bow four or five feet above the water and knocked up sheets of spray that sprang outward like gull wings, sometimes thirty or forty feet long. Out beyond the breakwater and the sea buoy, when she hit the outside chop, the steersman needed a safety belt to stay in his seat.

"Slow her down," Whitey said. "Set the course about ninety degrees. Hold it for twenty minutes, then head out to sea until you lose the mainland."

"Aye, aye, sir," said Ward, who was steering.

Whitey laughed. "You're no sailor, so cut out the aye, aye stuff."

"Okay."

Colorado Jones crawled into the lounge. He crawled carefully, laboriously, on hands and knees, eyes fixed on the floor as if he wished to be very certain where he was going. Without saying anything, without looking up, he crawled aft. He was going to one of the little cabins, to a bunk. He passed from view.

Ward said, "I wonder if he's ruptured?"

Whitey asked casually, "Make any difference to you?"

"Not me," Ward said hastily. He looked frightened.

"There's a time to be sassy, if it's your nature to be sassy."

"Yes, sir."

"Also a time not to be."

"Yes, sir."

"Slow her down some more. Fifteen knots is fast enough."

"Yes, sir."

Without much humor—the way he did it was an insult—Whitey patted Ward on top of the head. "Keep saying 'yes, sir' and you'll get ahead," he said. "That's one way to do it."

He went below.

Ward's lips curled fiercely. This guy, he thought, is going to be bad. The way he is starting off, nobody is going to be able to get along with him. Ward thought of some expressive profanity, which he rolled around his tongue, but under his breath. . . . Give me a chance to fix that big guy's clock, and I will, he thought. Just gimme the chance. I hope to God I get the chance.

Whitey looked into the lounge. It was not a large room, and the occupants were sitting around, not looking too happy, most of them trying to register unconcern, as if taking a Nazi submarine away from the United States Navy was a little job they tossed off every day.

"Colton," Whitey said.

"Yeah?" Colton didn't jump, but he seemed to want to.

"Get that radar outfit set up."

"Is it dark enough?"

"Get it set up."

Rage, a dark current, deepened the color of Colton's face,

made his eyes shine. But he stood up and left.

Whitey moved on. He was very big in the cabin. The size of him, the power of him, his ferocity—they had not realized quite what a nasty fellow he was until they had seen him demonstrate on Colorado Jones—left an unpleasant aura in the cabin. They all felt this, but nobody spoke of it.

Colorado Jones had crawled into his bunk. Not entirely in. One leg he hadn't managed to get quite in. But he dragged a pail to the side of the bunk, and was hanging his face over it. He was as silent as if unconscious.

Whitey closed the door.

Loudly, grimly, he said, "Think you learned anything?"

The other rolled one eye up sickly at him and said, almost as loudly, "They don't do it like that in Colorado."

"Did you think this was Colorado?"

Colorado Jones didn't answer. He did, though, lift his head. He grinned. He said—with lips only; he made no sound—and grinned as he spoke, "I think we did all right."

Whitey watched his lips, seemed to read them, and said, "The idea is to get them to hating me enough to doublecross them with the other outfit if they get a chance."

He used his lips, alone, also.

Colorado Jones nodded.

Quite loudly, he said, "Okay, this isn't Colorado."

"You willing to let it go at that?" Also loudly.

"I guess so."

"If you change your mind, let me know."

"I will."

The sun left, and drew after it a monster of blackness that took the sea and held it in its warm belly. Everything was still, limpid, damp, clammy. Far in the east a little lightning licked the clouds with red tongues, but there was no sound from it, not this far away. Presently the breeze began to blow from the land to the sea; during the day it had blown the opposite way, from sea to land, because the sun had heated the land and the air had been heated in turn and expanded and risen, but now the sea was the warmer, and the air usually moves toward warm areas.

The converted PT boat ran silently over the dark sea like a cat with its claws sheathed. It was showing lights. There would be trouble with the coast guard if it was caught running without lights. But folds of cheesecloth had been masked over the lenses of green and red side-lights and white stern-light, so that they could not be seen more than a mile away.

Whitey worked with the radio loop. He took bearings, drew lines on the chart.

"Okay," he said. "We're off the submarine base about twenty miles." He glanced at his watch. "Eight-five. The sub should be coming out presently."

He moved aft. He passed orders.

"Every man have some tear gas handy. You will know how to use it?"

They knew how. If they didn't, they wouldn't have admitted it, because they had been instructed carefully on it.

"Have your masks handy. Don't wear them unless someone has to use tear gas. Whoever uses it first, give warning. Yell out, *Freddie fell overboard!* That's the signal. Everyone got it?"

They had it.

"Okay, now the poison gas. A last resort. If some of them barricades themselves in one of the compartments, we'll use it. Not otherwise. . . . And get this! I use the poison gas myself. Nobody else. Understand!"

They nodded. They weren't exactly sullen, but they weren't talkative either. Most of them, probably, had been thinking about something that was not a particularly elating thing to think about. It weighted down mouth corners and minds.

"The radar should pick up something by now," Whitey said.

He went to the bow.

III

The radar, a portable job—army surplus property sold to the public—was not the most modern type, but it was adequate for the job. The sea was not too rough to give them trouble using it but, at twenty miles, and with the boat lying as low as it did, they had difficulty picking up the submarine.

The night, now intensely black, lay around them. It was impossible to discern objects the length of the boat, the sea itself was a nothingness lost in blackness. The winking scarlet of lightning in the east was coming closer, and there was now a little thunder in short disgruntled peals.

"Nice night for it," Colton said.

"Shut up!" Whitey said.

He was fiddling with the radar, watching the screen. His mood was drawn, tense, tight. His breathing, audible, was long and harsh, but regular.

He swore violently, said, "Get to your stations! What are you crowding around for!"

The others had been gathered about. They scattered, took up their stations. This had all been planned, briefed, rehearsed. Probably few military operations had been prepared with more

meticulous care, greater attention to things that might go wrong. Each man was armed with what he was supposed to be armed with. Waiting, most of them reviewed what they were to do, the tasks assigned them. There was, somehow, no feeling that their leader, Whitey, was in a temper because of fear or nervousness. Whitey's temper had at no time in the past impressed anyone as belonging to a lamb.

The plan had one bad feature. They had never been aboard the submarine. Not aboard this particular sub. But they had been on another Nazi underseas boat, one that was open for public inspection in Boston harbor; to this craft each of them had made more than one trip, the visits being in the nature of the field-trips students make. They had been studying the sub and its operation.

If there was to be any hitch, it would be in the handling of the sub, probably. Actually, only four of them—there were sixteen men packed aboard the *Dancing Lady*—had had previous submarine experience. These four were navy men—two in the English Navy and two in the U. S. Navy. One of the Americans had been dishonorably discharged, and that matter had been gone into carefully by Whitey, because it was one of the threads by which Naval Intelligence—the FBI, the police, the Treasury Department and others would be on it eventually, no doubt—might get a clue. But their schooling had been lengthy, careful, and little had been overlooked.

Whitey grunted softly.

"Okay, I've got it. It's coming this way. We'll let them parallel us."

His voice, suddenly vibrant, carried to everyone. Even to Colorado Jones, who presently came crawling out on deck.

The plan was a simple and old one. They would get ahead of the submarine, kill their engines, lie wallowing in the sea until the sub was close enough, then, being careful not to use too bright a light, and not to shoot the light toward the shore, SOS for help in the International Morse code.

In about an hour and fifty minutes, they were in position.

The submarine was carrying surface riding lights. It came toward them, the sound of its surface engines a strong accompaniment. Whitey switched off the radar, which was no longer needed, and moved back to the deckhouse, leaned inside, and addressed the man riding the radio receiver.

"They doing anything on their frequency?" he demanded.

"Just finished a position report."

"They off the air?"

"Yes."

"Keep your ears glued to their frequency. It'll be our necks if they get an alarm out."

"Right."

When the submarine was a hundred yards distant, Whitey

used the light. He sent only the three letters, SOS. Three shorts, three longs, three shorts. Then he lifted his voice. "Ahoy-y-y-y, the submarine!" he yelled.

Such was the proximity of the underseas boat that they could hear the startled movement of the lookout. His, "Somebody hailing, sir!" came to them as if he were speaking in the darkness beside their boat. His voice was definitely Germanic, although he spoke English.

"Ahoy-y-y-y, the submarine!" Whitey shouted. "Can you give us some help. We need help!"

Surprise, slight excitement, swept the submarine; they could hear it making progress, first a petty officer calling out for the searchlight, someone else shouting from below to know what it was, then the sound of the cover being taken off the searchlight. At last, blinding, sudden, the searchlight beam impaled them.

"What's the trouble?" a good Yankee voice demanded.

"We need help."

"I asked you what the trouble was."

"We got a sick man, and not enough gas to get him to shore."

"Not enough fuel to reach port, you say?"

"That's right."

"We'll radio somebody to come out and get you."

"No, no, wait a minute! The guy is pretty sick. Haven't you got somebody aboard who can look at him?"

"No doctor on board."

"What's the matter with your pharmacist's mate, or somebody? You surely got somebody who knows first aid. This is important. The guy may die. In fact, we're afraid he is going to die."

"What ails him?"

"He got cut." Whitey cleared his throat, added, "We're coming alongside. We want some of you to look at this fellow." He sounded anxious to the point of terror.

The submarine fell for it, which was no surprise to anyone on the *Dancing Lady*, because the whole thing had been figured out with infinite care, the words to be shouted at the underseas boat being weighed carefully, and the nature of the various reasons they could have used as an excuse—out of fuel, sick, lost, on fire, somebody overtaking the U-boat with a naval officer—measured for convincingness. It was decided that low on fuel and a sick passenger was the surest combination which would let them get alongside the submarine, which was what they wanted.

"We're coming alongside," Whitey shouted.

The man in the sub conning tower cursed, and an officer scrambled up beside him; he also cursed, then yelled, "Take it

easy! Don't ram us!"

In the *Dancing Lady's* deckhouse, the man riding the radio said, "They ain't transmitted nothing yet."

"Stay on it if they do," Whitey said. "The minute their frequency is put in use—if you think they're using it, and you can sure tell, this close—use that gadget to blanket them out."

"Okay."

The Naval officer was cursing again, yelling at some sailors to fend off the fool yachtsmen. He called them damned fools. He did some of the yelling in German which he had evidently learned from one of those courses where you have a copy book and a phonograph record. Some of it the Nazi crew understood, but the rest of it confused them.

"Keep your pants on!" Whitey yelled at him. "I can bring this boat alongside an egg without cracking it!"

He proceeded to demonstrate that he could. The sea was not very rough, and the submarine, with a hull lying very deep in the water, did not make as much leeway from wind blowing against it; the *Dancing Lady*, brought up on the leeward side, held there with motors barely turning, was in perfect position.

Men began jumping from the yacht to the submarine. Most of them had ropes in their hands as an excuse for getting on the submarine. They tied the ends of the ropes to the first thing that came handy, and then began to distribute themselves over the sub.

In a few seconds, the men were well distributed over the sub deck.

They started dropping down the hatches into the innards of the U-boat.

"Here, here, you can't do that!" the officer yelled. "This is Navy property!"

Whitey shoved a large revolver under the officer's nose and demanded, "You know what this is?"

The man said, "Good God!" hoarsely. Then he added, "Why you—" He was moving when he started to say this, so Whitey hit him, using his left fist. The officer fell down rather heavily.

Whitey leaned over the edge of the conning tower to watch proceedings. Presently, when a square Nazi head popped up the conning tower hatch, he rapped the top of it with the revolver, grabbed the victim by the blouse front, hauled him out and spread him beside the officer. He resumed his survey of proceedings.

Things were going well.

The instructions had been—no shooting. No shooting at all. Threats, yes, and rapping of heads; then, if necessary, the tear gas. But no shooting. And, marvelously, it seemed to be coming off that way.

Eli appeared.

"We got 'em," he said.

"All of them?"

"Sure. It was a roll-over. Nobody was armed. The Nazis certainly weren't. And neither were the Navy boys, although we thought some of them might be and all of them had guns locked in their quarters or sea chests."

"Get them on deck.

"Okay."

"Without life-preservers."

Eli hesitated. "Right," he said. He sounded as if he had just shuddered.

"Wait! First, close the forward hatches. Better still, close all the hatches but the one in the conning tower."

Eli went away, after he had made some kind of a sound that denoted horror.

Whitey climbed down out of the conning tower. He sauntered forward to the point where the *Dancing Lady* lay, not nuzzling the sub now, but standing back a few yards. He called, "Colorado."

Harshly, tensely, Colorado Jones said, "Yeah?"

"Everybody off?"

"That's right."

"We made it."

"We shoulda, the way it was planned and practiced."

"You're sure nobody but you is on there?"

"I'm alone."

"Able to take her into port and tie her up?"

"I think so."

"Do that. Get going right now. Don't stick around."

"Right."

The *Dancing Lady* moved backward slowly about a hundred feet, became motionless for a few seconds, then lifted her bow slightly and turned and was lost in the darkness.

Colton had been standing near Whitey. Colton spat. He said, "You think you can trust that guy?"

"Maybe. Maybe not. But what has he got to gain by turning us in now? He's alone. The story he would have to tell is pretty cockeyed—and what would it get him? A long term in a federal jail. Maybe a rope around his neck, or the equivalent."

Colton nodded. He was convinced. "I guess you're right," he said.

The storm, for it was a storm, was coming out of the east fast. Black as the sky overhead, it was blacker in the east, and they could see, illuminated by the long crashing flashes of lightning, the nasty-looking roll-cloud that preceded the storm. A safe guess would be that it would be upon them in half an hour.

Ward, who looked and sounded like a sleepy southerner, spoke astonishingly fluent German. He used it to herd the Nazis forward. "*Wir müssen eilen!*" he shouted at them.

The Nazis went readily enough. They were confused. They didn't understand what was happening, and probably figured they had nothing to lose, for they were prisoners anyway. The U. S. Navy was keeping them in America, forcing them to disgorge what they knew about their submarine, and they had a normal amount of resentment over this over and above the fact that they were still, most of them, Nazis at heart, hence sullen about the whole thing. The Navy men were less docile.

The sub captain—he was Lieutenant Commander Charles Wake, U. S. N., a tall, hard-fisted, hard-jawed, blue-eyed man originally from Montana—was quite fierce about it. He had been thrown out of gear by the abruptness of the thing, but now he'd time to think, and he was getting ugly.

Suddenly he decided to balk.

"I'm damned if I'll go through with this!" he snarled.

Whitey scowled at him, then turned his head to ask one of

the pirates, "Everybody up from below?"

"Four or five to come. All Krauts."

Whitey told the sub skipper, "Shut up!" He used a level, conversational tone. "Shut up. One more word out of you and I'll stop you permanently."

"You dirty—"

Whitey shot the skipper once. Commander Wake raised on tiptoes, threw both arms outward as if he were attempting one stroke of the breast-stroke, and went down. He struggled convulsively after he fell, and in a moment, due to the fact that he had fallen partly across the rail, floundered over and hit the slick wet hull and slid down into the sea. He drifted away. For a few minutes—several of the pirates were holding flashlights—they could see his flailing arms and legs, occasionally his face, but presently the darkness and the sea swallowed him and there was only the splashing sounds he made, these growing weaker and fewer.

There was no more resistance, no more argument.

Whitey addressed the original crew of the submarine. His voice, deep, controlled, but also harsh, was understandable to every man of the crew, all of whom were now crowded forward on the deck. He said, "You men will stay where you are. If one of you moves, he will be shot." He turned to his own men, and with almost the same tone and delivery, said, "Let's see if you know enough to get her moving on the

surface."

The pirates went below.

Whitey stood in the conning tower. Colton was beside him. Colton muttered, "What if they find the Commander's body with a bullet hole in it? The body might be found."

"He was going to jump us. His men would have followed him. Somebody would have been hurt."

Colton said no more.

Shortly the submarine began moving. It did not travel fast, but everything seemed to be functioning normally, and one of the hi-jackers, calling up from below, reported, "We're not going to have any trouble with her."

Whitey said, "Get below, Mr. Colton." When Colton had descended to the control room used when the submarine was running submerged, Whitey also climbed down. He personally saw to it that the hatch was secured and fastened. His face was without expression.

"Take her under," he said.

Colton drew himself up sharply, became rigid with sick disbelief. He said, "For God's sake!" A moment later he licked his lips, his tongue making a quick serpentine swipe like the tongue of a serpent. Much the same feeling went through some of the others; no one was untouched by emotion, for the command was charged with evil. It meant, in effect, the death of everyone who had been aboard the submarine, Nazi and U.

S. sailor alike.

The shore was fully thirty miles away, with an offshore wind and an offshore set to the tide and currents, so that it was somewhat too supernatural a feat to expect anyone to swim to shore. Too, the storm was brewing, would break with whistling ferocity before long, would fill the air with driving rain and lash the sea into surface madness. The storm was an asset they had not reckoned on. It was, in effect, a gift conveyed on them by the forces of evil.

Harsh, fierce, Whitey snarled, "Take her under! What are you waiting on!"

Presently the sub dived.

They had not expected to be able to hear the men on deck scream as the green sea came up and poured over the steel hull and swallowed the sub—but they did. They heard the screams. They were not very loud. They were like kittens mewling, terrified kittens in a sack that had been dropped into a creek. The mewings did not last long, for the sub sank as the sack would have sunk.

"Keep your heads on your shoulders!" Whitey said. "This is the first dive. Don't muff it!"

The sub went down, and the meters read twenty, thirty, then forty feet. Whitey said, "Deep enough." The vessel leveled out at that depth. It planed along, driven by the electric motors, and the strangeness of the new medium held them, gripped them,

held their minds motionless and helpless to be stabbed anew by thoughts of the men left behind in the sea to die.

Whitey sensed this. He showed no concern. He went over and fiddled with an intercommunicator gadget, a device by which, if he spoke into a microphone at the command position, his voice would be carried throughout the submarine. He got the thing working, blew into it to test it, and, satisfied, said sharply, "Your attention, brothers. In fifteen minutes, we will surface, and run on the surface until one hour before daylight. The day run will be made submerged. The following night, practice maneuvers will begin, and will continue for one week as scheduled. . . . May I congratulate you, gentlemen? You are a fine, bloody bunch of cut-throats, and Henry Morgan and Captain Kidd would love you. Goodnight."

The loudspeakers stopped hissing, died an abrupt unreasoning death, but probably there was not an eye on board that did not continue to stare at the mechanical gadgets with hypnotized, and emotionally tortured, intensity. They were hardened men; they had also the advantage of knowing before hand what was to happen, since it had been planned, discussed, rehearsed, for days; but there had been something in the speech—deliberate, unmoved, cold—that had stunned them. Whitey's voice and words had been completely natural, hence entirely abnormal. The man should have had emotion. Elation or fear or horror. There certainly should have been horror, but there had been none, and it had been sickening, because this man was their leader, and nobody likes to follow an abnormal leader, not even an abnormal genius, nor an abnormally courageous man, for abnormality of any kind is too close to insanity to be comfortable.

There were, too, the men in the sea, the men swept off the deck when the submarine submerged, the men now far behind in the darkness and—for the storm would be here by now—the suffocating welter of water and wind that was a squall at sea. These men would be dying. They were quite possibly dying now. A sigh, the cast-off effusion of this death, seemed to sweep the neat steel walls and bulkheads and pipes and conduits, to linger and cling, to work its way into their minds and settle there, a clammy bat-like indescribable monster of a thing that could not be dislodged.

The submarine, moving forty feet below the surface, went its way as steadily as a coffin.

IV

Miss Brenda Linahan, on the staff of *Solar, The News Weekly*, was one of those young women who over-awe men. The over-awing was the final effect; she produced other effects first, because she was not difficult to gaze upon, and she always dressed well, or better, or—as Pete Idle, article editor of *Solar*, often said—just a little too sexy. Anyway, the first effects she produced were wolf-stirring. But getting to know her better was like listening and being intrigued by a wonderful symphonic radio program, then going backstage during rehearsals and suddenly discovering what an alarming, and unromantic, amount of cussing and sweating and confusion and downright genius went into the construction of the show.

Brenda was something like that. She would never fit in any guy's kitchen, unless it was a small kitchen equipped with nothing much but a cocktail shaker.

Brenda had been born in Texas, and Texas was button-busting proud of her in spite of all that Texas already had, or claimed it had, to be proud about. She had been a remarkably stupid little girl, people had thought, which only meant that she hadn't given a tap about doing the things little girls do. They seemed silly to Brenda, who had just simply been born too matured. This detached attitude lasted until college, and college proved barely adult enough to get her interest. People couldn't understand how she made the record she did, nor why she shot like a skyrocket through the succession of newspaper, magazine, and photo-magazine jobs she proceeded to hold and discard. It was no mystery to her co-workers. She was just too out and out good to be held by one firm very long. She was now with *Solar*, which was tops.

"Hello, Brenda," said Article Editor Pete Idle one morning in early, very early, April. "Sit down. Have a cigarette. I'll get O. J."

The morning was bright, but cold, and Brenda had sought to tone it down and defeat it with a brown tweed outfit. She was quite fetching. But fetching or not, she inspired no amour in Pete Idle, who was always alarmed by Brenda.

O. J. was the publisher. He was Mr. Big. He was the alpha and the omega, and Brenda was surprised, because O. J. was what is known as a business office man, and never, if it could be helped, confused himself by trying to deal personally with

his writing, photographic or reportorial geniuses. Brenda lit a cigarette.

"Now what?" she wondered.

O. J., a tall man with an aristocratic silver streak in his hair and a roving eye for a pretty leg, looked at Brenda with the kind of approval you lick your lips over, then, almost instantly, with fully equal disapproval. "What," he said darkly to Pete Idle, "are you trying to pull on me?"

"Me?" Pete was astonished.

"Listen, Pete," said O. J.. "This is no job to try to run your girl friends in on."

"She's not my girl friend!" Pete disclaimed.

"Why, darling, that's treason," Brenda said lightly.

Pete pointed his finger at O. J. "Look, you don't know who this girl is. I guess you only know her name, which is Brenda Linahan. I guess you had better make some inquiries about her."

O. J. grinned. "Later. Later. Is she good?"

"She's terrific."

"She looks it," said O. J., his grin on Brenda.

"Her looks are very fooling, boss."

"I like to be fooled," said O. J. "Miss Linahan, how about dinner with me tonight to discuss business and things."

"No, thanks," Brenda replied. She turned to Pete and added, "I don't know what this is, but I don't like it, I think."

"You will."

"Like it?"

"Sure."

"Make with words," Brenda invited, "and we'll see."

O. J. had one eye half-closed, probably wondering how he should react to a lady employee refusing him a date rather casually and as though she meant it. Somewhat disturbed, he said, "I think we're taking this too lightly. It isn't a small, frothy matter. Quite the contrary. It is a terrific matter."

"How can I take it seriously, when I don't know what it is?" Brenda asked. "Or do you simply mean that there is a law around here that says to take O. J. seriously?"

Pete winced.

"Cut it out," he said hastily, making soothing gestures. "Listen to me a minute, and I'll sober you up."

"Sober away."

Pete stared at Brenda impressively.

"Did you know that, in the last six months, four American ships have disappeared on the high seas, and seven have been boarded and looted by pirates?" he asked.

Brenda was drawing on a cigarette at the moment, and astonishment put smoke up her nostrils, so that she sneezed.

"Are you kidding?" she asked, brushing at ashes.

"Nary a kid."

Brenda's eyes narrowed. "There have been some newspaper items about ships lost. I didn't pay particular attention to them. After years of reading, during the war, of almost daily sinkings of ships, I suppose it becomes something you don't notice specially."

"That's why it hasn't created a rumpus."

"Disappearances, you said, didn't you?"

"Yes."

"A disappearance is different from a sinking. Or is it? Warships were usually announced as unreported and presumed lost, so one might become inured to that."

"Wreckage was found in three instances."

"Oh."

"The fourth just vanished—but it probably went down, too."

Brenda frowned at him. "You said seven have been boarded and looted by pirates?"

"Seven."

"Big ones?"

"Fairly. Two were."

"Now wait a minute," Brenda said. "Pirates take seven ships and not a word appears in the newspapers about it. That's not reasonable. What kind of bug dust are you giving me?"

"It's true."

"It can't be true."

"Oh, yes it can," Pete said. "Because the United States government, plus the other Allied governments, are keeping a blanket on it."

Brenda was skeptical. "They can't blanket something like that."

"They have."

"Well, I guess they could," Brenda admitted. "They kept some pretty big things quiet during the war, like atomic bombs and things." She examined Pete thoughtfully, then somewhat suspiciously. "What do you think you're going to talk me into?" she demanded.

"You," Pete said, "are going to find those pirates."

Brenda leaned back, placed her purse neatly on her knees, knocked ash from her cigarette onto Pete's desk, something she knew he didn't like anyone to do, then she said, "A very funny joke. Now, what have you really got on your mind?"

"I'm not kidding."

"Then God help *Solar*, *The News Weekly*, because its article editor has gone nuts. You really mean I'm to turn pirate catcher?"

"Pirate finder, I said."

"Finder, catcher, what's the difference?" Brenda still didn't quite believe the whole thing. Although the world had been full of fantastic, cockeyed stories the last few years, this one was a little bit fuzzy, even for 1946. She said thoughtfully, "Four ships have disappeared or sunk, and five have been hi-jacked. Who did the hi-jacking?"

"A submarine."

"You mean men on a submarine, don't you? It strikes me that—"

O. J. cleared his throat, doing this so that it said: Hold on, young lady, this is a serious matter. He said it aloud: "Hold on, young lady, this is serious."

"That's just what I started to say," Brenda assured him. "Such a serious matter should be presented more completely, and so that I can understand it."

"What don't you understand?" Pete demanded.

Brenda numbered off by holding one finger up. "First, the pirates are on a submarine?"

"Yes."

"Two, how do they know it isn't a Nazi or Jap submarine and crew which has decided not to give up the war?"

"The pirates were Americans."

"How could anybody be sure of that? Did they have passports, or something?"

"By their talk—"

"I've heard Nazis talk English that you would swear was Brooklyn American," Brenda interrupted. "Is there any more proof than that?"

"The U. S. Navy seems to think they're American renegades."

"What else does the U. S. Navy think?"

"They haven't said," Pete replied grimly. "As a matter of fact, they haven't said anything. All I know is what drifted out of the Navy Department through—well—through certain

sources I have."

Brenda was intent now. She knew about Pete's sources in the Navy—he had them in the Army, and in a lot of other unexpected places, too; it had even been rumored that Pete had a pipeline direct to a top Nazi during the war—all of which meant that Pete's information was probably correct. He thought it was, anyway. Otherwise he wouldn't have O. J. in on the thing. O. J. was known as a man who canned his employees when they made a fool out of *Solar, The News Weekly*. If Pete said there were pirates, there must be pirates. Brenda's eyes brightened. Her face lighted with interest. She shuddered.

"This is hotter than a frog in a frying-pan—if true," she said.

O. J. hit his knee a lick with his fist. "Exactly! That's what I told Pete. It's just what *Solar* needs in the way of a news exclusive." He caught himself up, and added hastily, "Not that we don't lead the field as it is."

Brenda was tempted to mention that she knew as well as anybody that *Solar, The News Weekly* was taking a beating now that the war was over and hot spot news photo coverage wasn't as important as it had been, and particularly since *Solar* had been a little slow to convert its coverage to interesting peacetime features.

"You can," she said, "count on me."

Pete grinned happily. "I knew we could depend on you. The other mags, those goats we've got for competition, will stick reporters on it when they get wind of it. Incidentally, I don't think they've got it yet. I think we've got an exclusive. *Solar*,

with a girl on the story, getting in first—story, pictures of the pirates—will be a world-beater. You'll be famous, Brenda. You can write your own ticket. Hollywood, anything. We'll raise your salary."

"We'll talk about money later," O. J. said cautiously. "The point Pete is making is this, Brenda: you have to deliver. You have to show up the men."

Brenda said suspiciously, "This must be pretty tough, the way you're selling it to me."

"I wouldn't kid you—it might be," Pete admitted.

"You know damned well it will be," Brenda said. "Now, where do I start?"

"There's one other angle," Pete said. "It won't help you, maybe, but you should know about it. Two weeks ago, the Navy lost a submarine. It disappeared. It was a Nazi sub, and it was enroute from New London to the Canal and around to the Pacific to the submarine facility at San Diego. Most of the Nazi crew was aboard, and some Navy officers, and they were going to have the Nazis cough up some more secrets of their sub warfare. The whole lot—sub, Nazis, Navy boys—vanished. Maybe the pirates got them, and maybe they didn't. Nobody seems to know, and they're keeping it quiet."

"Why keep it quiet?" Brenda was puzzled.

"God knows. Maybe because the Navy isn't happy unless it's keeping a secret."

O. J. said grimly, "I'm going to do an editorial on this business of secrecy when the time is ripe. I'll burn their pants off."

Brenda pondered.

"Where do I start?" she wished to know. "Where do I get on the trail of my first pirate?"

"That," said Pete, "is your problem."

"Oh, now, wait a minute! That's ridiculous. Surely you've got some ideas or an idea or—well, something."

"I have an idea," Pete confessed.

Brenda eyed him. "Your ideas generally stand my hair on end. Let's hear this one."

"Try Doc Savage."

Brenda started with surprise, then her eyes widened, became round and bright with pleasure, and she leaped to her feet. She told Pete, "Pete, you're a genius. You really are. A lovely genius, and you even have a brain. That's a wonderful idea."

O. J. was not so enthusiastic. "Doc Savage will throw you out on that lovely shell-pink ear, Miss Linahan," he predicted.

V

Brenda Linahan began operations by going to the Colony for lunch, because she was under the impression that she did her best thinking while consuming excellent food. Also there was an eminent scientist, a Mr. Ivanitz, who lunched there regularly. Mr. Ivanitz was twenty-eight years old and one of the brain-trust which had worked out the atomic bomb. He was also, Brenda happened to know, acquainted with Clark Savage, Jr., or Doc Savage, as he was known. Mr. Ivanitz was at the Colony, and Brenda showed him her teeth, the required amount of leg, and presently had Mr. Ivanitz dying to do her a favor.

"Oh, now, wait a minute!" Mr. Ivanitz gasped, when he found out what he had gotten himself into. "That's out of the question."

"You know him, don't you?"

"Sure, but—uh—not that well."

"I understand," said Brenda, "that this Doc Savage makes a business of punishing evil-doers and righting wrongs, and I have a job that is right in his lines."

"Stop your kidding," said Mr. Ivanitz, who had a shock of dark hair and was quite handsome.

"But I've heard that's his profession."

"But it sounds silly when you put it that way, and there isn't anything silly about the man himself, I can assure you. He's a

great scientist." Mr. Ivanitz became enthusiastic. "In the field of electronic research, he has done marvelous work. Why, without his contribution to the development of the mass spectograph that was used to separate uranium isotopes, the big colutron wouldn't have been—"

"Hold it, Ivy, hold it," Brenda said. "You're getting technical, and also you're getting beside the point, which is: can you introduce me?"

"Well. . ."

Brenda seized his arm. "Come on, sonny, before you change your mind."

Doc Savage's headquarters was on the eighty-sixth floor of a midtown building but, it developed, there was a certain process you went through, involving a visit to an office on the fifth floor for a screening inspection at the hands of what seemed to be a private detective agency. "If we're lucky," Mr. Ivanitz explained, "we'll find one of Doc Savage's assistants—he has five, all quite prominent in their professions—on the fifth floor. That will enhance our chances of getting in."

They were lucky. They found a very dapper gentleman, thin-waisted, with the wide mobile mouth of an orator. He was rather hatchet-faced, but otherwise modestly handsome. His clothing, however, was a sartorial experience, for everything he wore seemed to be impeccable and exactly the right thing for the time of day, the occasion.

"Brigadier General Theodore Marley Brooks," Mr. Ivanitz said, introducing the well-dressed gentleman.

Ham Brooks, thought Brenda, who had heard of him. And he has the eye, too. Mr. Brooks' eye was on her leg. She stood so as to give him a good view.

Mr. Ivanitz explained that Miss Linahan had an important matter to discuss with Doc Savage, and could a meeting be managed? . . . Ham took his eye off Brenda's curves long enough to state, enthusiastically, that he thought it could. He would go up right now, personally, and see. Would Mr. Ivanitz go along, while Miss Linahan waited?

They were back sooner than Brenda expected.

Their faces were longer than she had expected.

Ham Brooks apologized, "I'm sorry. . ."

"We was throwed out on our ears," said Mr. Ivanitz inelegantly. "That is, figuratively speaking."

"What's the matter with your influence?" Brenda asked Ham Brooks.

"It was your squire's fault." Ham indicated Mr. Ivanitz. "Everything went fine until Ivy happened to mention *Solar*, *The News Weekly*."

"You would have thought," said Mr. Ivanitz, "that I had withdrawn a snake from my mouth."

"Is something wrong with *Solar, The News Weekly*?" Brenda inquired.

Ham Brooks nodded. "Doc Savage is not on good terms with the publication."

"How come?"

"Doc doesn't like publicity. They tried to give it to him. Someone up there, a Mr. Pete Idle, attempted to force the matter, making, as I understand it, some threats about adverse publicity."

Brenda nodded. "That's Pete's approach on hard-to-gets. It has earned him a couple of pokes in the nose."

"Well, you're out of luck," Ham said regretfully. "However, I think that if you and I got together this evening for a little dinner and theater, I might figure out—"

"I'm figuring way ahead of you," Brenda said. "No sale. Thanks."

Escaping from Mr. Ivanitz was a simple matter. He had, it developed, a conference uptown which he must, absolutely must, attend. He helped Brenda into a cab and gave the driver the *Solar* building address, then stood back and waved goodbye regretfully. Three blocks up the street, Brenda told the driver, "Turn around and take me back to where you picked me up. I forgot something."

There was, in the same building which housed Doc Savage's headquarters, a rather impressive restaurant-bar. This bistro was on the street level and, Brenda had chanced to notice, probably had tables from which it was possible to observe, through plate glass windows, the lobby of the building. She found her surmise correct. There was a window, and a table nearby, unoccupied.

"A Russian and his helper," she told the waiter. The waiter, surprising her, nodded knowingly and left.

Brenda had no very definite plan—except that she wasn't giving up. She hoped that, if she concentrated on it, she would think of a way of getting to Doc Savage. Once she had him collared, selling him on this pirate story might be tough, and that needed thinking about also.

Probably, Brenda thought, he'll call the birdie wagon for me. The pirate story, she suddenly realized, sounded as crazy as anything. She kept an eye on the lobby area in front of the elevators. She believed she would know some of Doc Savage's other assistants by sight. There were, as Mr. Ivanitz had said, five of them. There was Monk Mayfair, a chemist; Renny Renwick, an engineer; Long Tom Roberts, an electrical wizard, and also Johnny Littlejohn, archaeologist and geologist. And, of course, the wolfish Ham Brooks. Brenda hoped she wouldn't have to add Ham Brooks, who certainly had an eye. And, speaking of eyes—what was wrong with the long, very capable looking man sitting at the next table. He had barely glanced at her.

It took about a minute more for Brenda to realize that the

man, like herself, was watching the lobby.

The waiter came with Brenda's vodka and beer chaser. She paid the check, knowing she might wish to leave in a hurry.

Finally the man stiffened, showed sharp interest. Looking beyond him, Brenda saw that Ham Brooks had left one of the elevators, was in front of the cigar stand making—she had a good idea—a tentative pass at the blonde there. Brenda shifted her gaze back to the man who was interested.

He was as interested as a bird watching a worm.

Ham crossed the lobby, departed.

The man remained where he was.

* * *

He was, Brenda decided, a man of more than ordinary sort, probably. At least he was more than just a long and capable looking man. He was distinctive. It was the sort of distinction that goes with accomplishing things, or rather becomes a habit when one accomplishes things. She knew the manner. There were plenty of bright young men around *Solar*, *The News Weekly* who had it. This man, however, was not particularly young. He was, she surmised, at least thirty-five, but he had not started going to seed. She would have pegged him as younger than thirty-five, except for the distinguished flash of white in the hair over his temples, a little more white on one side than the other.

He had merely resumed his waiting, as far as she could tell.

There is a chance, Brenda thought, that he only knew Ham Brooks by sight. The fellow might only be aware that Ham Brooks was a Doc Savage aide, and he might have enough interest, or be sufficiently impressed, by Doc Savage to create the excitement he had displayed. For the fellow had, for a moment when Ham was in view, been quite excited. Or was it tense? Brenda believed it was tense, rather than ordinary interested excitement. The idea intrigued her.

The gray-haired man sprang suddenly to his feet, did it so that it was almost a commotion. He headed for the exit.

Brenda swung her gaze over the lobby. She expected to see Doc Savage. But the only individual in sight who was at all distinctive was a very large man who was making his way toward the street. Not Doc Savage, Brenda decided immediately. Doc was a big man. But this fellow was more flabby, more rounded of shoulder, and carried himself as if he did not have much ambition.

Impulsively, Brenda decided to follow the white-haired man who had been watching the lobby, follow him far enough, at least, to ascertain whether there was anything mysterious afoot. She'd had a cute idea, or one that she hoped was cute. If she could approach Doc Savage from the angle that a mysterious man had been very interested in one of his aides, and hanging around his headquarters, it might get her a hearing.

The tall, white-haired man carried one shoulder lower than the other when he walked. He made his way to the street, paused to examine a haberdashery display in a shop, and Brenda was quite sure that he was waiting and watching for

someone.

The one waited and watched for proved to be the big, shapeless man with the slouching walk. He came to the corner, glanced idly about—enough of a glance for Brenda to catch a glimpse of his eyes and be shocked—after which he moved up the street. The drop-shouldered man trailed him. Brenda fell in behind.

Presently, thinking again of the shapeless man's strange, bone-colored eyes, she shivered.

The owner of the bone-colored eyes walked north on Fifth, turned right, crossed Madison and Lexington and had spaghetti and meat balls in a noisy and popular place on Forty-second Street. He ate in a booth, alone for the first ten minutes, after which he was joined by a guest.

The guest was a nondescript brown-haired man of slightly less than middle age whose principal characteristic was that he had no outstanding characteristics. He was just a man of about forty, and, taken out of the uniform he was wearing, it would have been difficult to pick him out of a crowd of more than a half dozen.

The low-shouldered man had coffee and ravioli and consumed it at a table. He spent most of the time pretending to read a newspaper. Brenda was sure about the pretending.

The bleach-eyed man and his visitor ate mostly in silence, the visitor less than his host—for the bigger man picked up the check. The visitor was ill at ease. When he spoke it was probably in a low voice and he leaned forward. He received an

envelope. It was fat. He put it carefully in his inside coat pocket, buttoned the coat.

Money, Brenda thought. He wouldn't handle anything but money that way, and with that look on his face.

The guest arose and left, and, as he passed Brenda, she was able to read the lettering over his coat pocket: Security Armored Car Service.

The bone-eyed man left presently, paid his check and bought a package of peppermints, then sauntered outdoors.

The drop-shouldered man took up the trail. So did Brenda, and the trail led to a good hotel on Madison Avenue, where the big man seemed to have a room. He went to his room, or disappeared into the elevators, and the man with the low shoulder resumed reading, this time a magazine, in the lobby.

I wish, Brenda thought, I had someone a little less conspicuous than me to do this shadowing.

She glanced at a clock, decided it might not be too late to catch Editor Pete Idle at the office, and tried it on the telephone.

"Pete, do you know anything about the Security Armored Car Service?" she asked.

"One of the big ones. They move your valuables from here to there. Why?"

"Can you find out if they have moved, or are going to move

in the near future, any merchandise that would interest a pirate?"

"What the hell!?" Pete gasped. She could visualize him beginning to spout excitement like a Roman candle.

"Can you?"

"I can try."

"Do that. And make it sizzle, will you. And ship me down a private detective or somebody who can do a following job. I think I'm a little conspicuous to get away with it forever myself."

"I'll say you're conspicuous. . . . Say, what is this, anyway? Have you turned up anything?"

"I wouldn't kid you, I'm just fishing," Brenda said soothingly. "Call me back at"—she glanced at the number on the telephone—"Vanderbilt 0-7821. If I don't answer, don't page me. It's a hotel lobby pay booth. I don't want attention called to me. And don't forget the nice, mouse-like, unobtrusive detective."

"Listen, give me the details of what you've—"

"And be laughed at?" Brenda said. "Nothing doing."

She purchased a fashion magazine at the newsstand and began reading in a chair near the phone booth.

Sixteen minutes later, the phone rang, but it was a male voice which inquired for Daisy, then tried to tell Brenda that she might do instead of Daisy Still. "Call Newhouse 9-0031, and ask for Miss Still," Brenda suggested. Newhouse 9-0031 was the number of the city morgue. A couple of minutes afterward, the phone rang again, and this time it was Pete, who sounded as if he had just lunched on lighted firecrackers.

"For God's sake, don't ball up whatever you've got!" he blurted. "Because I think you've got something hot. How did you do it, anyway? Did Doc Savage set you on to it? Did he? I never thought you'd see the guy."

"What have you found out?"

"Listen, why don't you—"

"Come on, come on, don't waste my time."

"The Security Armored Car Service this morning transferred some seven odd million dollars in gold bullion from the Federal Reserve vaults to the steamship *Poinsettia*, which sails for Cherbourg at midnight tonight. The heavy stuff is going to the French national banking system as part of a deal to stabilize the franc."

"How much?"

"Seven odd million."

"There's nothing odd about seven million of Uncle's little men. The ship is the *Poinsettia*?"

"*Poinsettia* is right."

"And it sails when?"

"Midnight."

"That's what I thought you said. Okay, Pete. You know where my apartment is. Dash over there and find my passport in the bookcase, upper left hand corner, and get it in the hands of whoever's hands it has to be in so I can sail on the *Poinsettia*. Incidentally, buy me a ticket on the ship, and deposit some expense money with the ship's purser. Better make it quite a sum."

"Listen, you want—I mean, I want more information!" Pete was beginning to stutter.

"You've got most of it. I simply picked up a suspicious fellow at Doc Savage's building and followed him and he met a driver for Security and some money changed hands. Oh yes, I mixed that up a little—I'm following another suspicious fellow who is following the first suspicious fellow."

"Untangle that," Pete requested.

"Untangle it yourself. What did you mean, suggesting I go see Doc Savage when you knew *Solar*, *The News Weekly*, and particularly a guy named Pete Idle, was on his dark list?"

"I couldn't think of anything better. I knew that if I hit a spark to get you started, something would develop. What did Doc Savage tell you?"

"Nothing."

"Why not? Isn't he interested in this pirate thing? It's big enough and right up his alley. What ails the guy? Why didn't he—"

"He threw me out. I didn't see him."

"Is Doc Savage involved in this affair?"

"How do I know! What about the detective?"

"I hope he is!" Pete said excitedly. "My God, I've always wanted a firsthand story of one of his cases in *Solar*! I've tried half a dozen times, and every time I get kicked in the snoot."

"What about an unnoticeable detective?"

"Oh, hell, I haven't had time."

"Well, get him down here," Brenda said sharply. "And get my passport to the ship."

"How'll I get in your apartment? What about a key?"

"Kick down the door," Brenda said, and hung up. She was exasperated because Pete hadn't sent someone to do the shadowing. The neglect was likely to prove serious.

Presently she knew it was serious, because Low-shoulder got up and sauntered out of the hotel, Bone-eye ahead of him, and there was nothing for Brenda to do but take up the tail end of the procession.

All of them rode three taxicabs downtown four blocks then across town to the North River piers, the journey ending at a pier around which swarmed the motor and foot traffic incidental to a sailing.

The honey which was drawing this bee-like activity was a passenger liner, modest in size as passenger liners went, but new and crisp looking. Brenda, as soon as she lost trace of both her quarry—this happened almost at once in the confusion—moved over to get a look at the name of the craft. *Poinsettia*. She was not surprised.

VI

The Gulf Stream, that great current that slides warmly across the Atlantic, has its beginning in the Gulf of Mexico, where it is born under the continuing tropical sun that nurses it and raises its temperature until it is many degrees warmer than almost any other sea. Then the forces, the mysterious astral and terrestrial forces that make tides, hurl it out through the narrow channel between Florida and the Bahamas, a channel about a mile deep and only fifty miles wide, where it moves with terrific speed for an ocean current, faster than a man would care to run for any great distance.

Almost blood-warm, charged with force, power, the current swings north and for innumerable leagues its line of demarcation with the rest of the Atlantic is as sharply drawn as

a pencil mark, and its vitality is not spent until it reaches the coasts of England, Scotland, Norway. They say that without the Gulf Stream, England would be as grim in climate as Labrador. All of which was contained in a lengthy speech which Brenda Linahan made to Pete Idle. Brenda was goading Pete, a rather agreeable pastime and quite a change for Pete.

"Shaddup!" Pete said morosely. "I don't give a damn about ocean currents and the climate of England. I also know when I'm being ridden."

Brenda explained that she was just pointing out the advantages of an ocean voyage, and the reason for the enjoyable weather they were having.

"Lay off," Pete requested.

They were occupying steamer chairs on the boat deck of the *Poinsettia*, new deck chairs, and the steamer rugs which were draped over their knees were also new; the ship had been used as a troop transport during the war, and since refurbished with new post-war equipment.

"You needed a rest, anyway," Brenda said.

"I know of nothing I needed less. I don't like boats. I get seasick. I don't like my cabin. I'm in a stall in the steerage with three other guys and all three are poker sharks. They play all night." He scowled darkly, added, "I bet I'd get a private cabin if they knew who I was."

Alarmed, Brenda warned, "Don't you start showing off! If news got out that you were aboard, it'd create a commotion."

Pete snorted. "I'm not that important."

"Who said you were important? All I mean is that our competition would think you were on the trail of a big story and stir up a fuss trying to find out what it was."

Pete thought this was probable. "The laugh would be on them. There isn't any story."

"We're not sure."

"I am! Three days, we've been at sea, and nothing has happened."

"Bone-eye and Droopy-shoulder are aboard."

"Means nothing, I've decided." Pete closed his eyes. "Go away. You irritate me. Everything irritates me."

Brenda laughed. "Well, you had to be chivalrous and dash aboard."

Pete lifted both hands in a gesture of holy horror and denied this. "God, don't accuse me of chivalry! Of drunkenness, yes. Of thievery, arson, libel, plagiarism, okay. Chivalry, no!" He closed his eyes again. "Let me sleep. I think the whole pirate scare was a damned lie somebody fed me, and I'm going to skin somebody alive for it. Go away. Goodbye."

"I think you were born a stinker," Brenda assured him, and went to her cabin to put on her bathing suit, then to the pool to see whether she was good enough bait to get some gullible guy to feed her free drinks.

Actually she was mighty glad good old Pete Idle was aboard, and she appreciated the sterling feelings of concern which had led him to drop everything at the office and sail with her. It was not, she knew, that Pete just wanted to be in on a big story. Pete, she suspected, didn't really believe this stuff about pirates. But he had been afraid he could be wrong, and he had sailed with her because he didn't have the kind of conscience that would let her face danger alone. It was nice of him. Also, O. J. would raise hell, the office would gossip, and Pete's girl friend would probably crown him.

The pool was not crowded. The weather outside was too nice, for the *Poinsettia* was ploughing lazily through the marvelous aquamarine blue of the Gulf Stream on an almost motionless sea.

"Hy'ah, lovely," a voice said.

Brenda jumped violently, looked around, and gave an even bigger jump. It was the man she had come to refer to as Drop-shoulder. He was grinning at her.

"Nice pool," he said. "And you make it very ornamental."

"Uh—thanks," Brenda said, feeling that her brain had stopped functioning for a moment. Did the fellow suspect her? Or was he just trying to make a pick-up.

"I was watching your diving form," the man said. "It was nice. Would it make you mad if I introduced myself?"

"Me, mad? Should it?" Brenda was trying not to be confused.

"I'm Davey Govern, and I hope not," the man said amiably. "My next move is to offer to buy you a drink. But should I make it now, or wait a while?"

"That," said Brenda, "is exactly why I put on this next-to-nothing bathing suit."

Govern laughed. He beckoned a waiter.

Brenda decided suddenly that she didn't like him, and more than that, she disliked him terrifically. The dislike, she concluded, was spark-plugged by fear. She tried to analyze the feeling in relation to the man's appearance.

He seemed, at close range, a younger man than she had thought. He was made of sinews and hard flesh and a skin that looked as if it should have been a pouch for bullets. His gray hair fooled me, she thought. He's only about thirty, but they've been a very busy thirty years. She could not quite put her finger on the reason for her fear, which she realized was going to grow into terror.

"Are you going to keep your name a secret?" he inquired.

"Name?" She felt jittery, as if she was unhooked for the moment.

"Something to call you by, at least."

"Oh! Brenda. Brenda Linahan." She decided to talk fast and

get loosened up. "I'm a writer, if you could call a trained seal on the staff of *Solar, The News Weekly* a writer. I'm enroute to"—she tried to think where she could be enroute to—"Switzerland. I'm going to do a story about the resurgence of the tourist trade in Switzerland." She thought this sounded rather plausible in view of how scared she felt.

Mr. Govern grinned. "That must explain the feeling I had that I'd seen you somewhere." His teeth were short, as if he'd been chewing on a file. "I did have a familiar feeling about you, you know."

"Oh, did you?"

"I must have seen your picture somewhere. I imagine it has appeared in the magazine, hasn't it?"

"Oh, yes," Brenda said, and realized she had a terrified desire to convince this fellow that she was nothing whatever except a staff writer headed for Switzerland. She wanted him to believe this. She felt, without knowing why she felt it so strongly, that it was worth her life to make him believe this.

"What'll you have?" The waiter was at their side.

"A Russian and his helper," Brenda said, then could have bitten the end off her tongue, for she remembered that was what she'd been drinking in the New York bistro where she had first seen him.

"Yes, I imagine a picture would explain why I seem to recall you," said Mr. Govern.

Pete Idle was alarmed when he cornered Brenda in the lounge later. "I saw you talking to that yegg. You scared the dickens out of me!"

"I scared myself." Brenda shivered. "I'm still weak in the knees. I don't why, either. I never met anybody before who made me think so much about a trunkful of rattlesnakes."

"What did you find out about him? Anything?"

Brenda permitted herself a satisfying shudder before she replied.

"I listened to his smoke screen, at least. He says his name is Mr. Davey Govern, and he is on his way to France to—he asked me not to laugh at this—learn to cook the way the French do. I didn't laugh. In fact, I could have screamed my head off. I tell you, that fellow—"

"Think he's a pirate?"

"If he isn't, Blackbeard certainly missed a bet."

"Think he suspects you?"

"Oh God, I wish I knew!" Brenda said fervently. "There's something about him that's horrible, that turns my blood cold, that—"

"Ps-s-s-s-t!" hissed Pete. "Speak of the devil . . ."

Mr. Govern was approaching them. He was neat in a hard razor-like fashion in evening clothes, and he smiled at Brenda, said, "I was wondering if you'd have dinner with me, Miss Linahan."

Save me, somebody, Brenda thought.

She said, "Oh, I'm awfully sorry. I have an engagement with Mr. Idle here."

"You're both invited," the man said, his face registering no visible emotion whatever.

"Nothing doing," Pete said abruptly. "I mean—well—nothing doing."

Mr. Govern said coldly, "Don't blame you, buddy."

He went away.

Pete said nothing in an impressed way for a little while after Mr. Govern had gone, then he muttered, "That clattering sound you hear is my knees knocking together." Brenda was surprised at how hoarsely impressed he sounded.

"What's the matter?"

"He scared me, too," Pete said. "Look, you lay off that guy. You've been trailing him around shipboard to see what he does, haven't you? Well, cut that out."

"But someone should—"

"I'll do it. I'll follow him." Pete considered this offer uneasily, added, "I wish to God I'd dug up that detective and we had him aboard. But I sent him down to that hotel in New York and he's probably waiting there yet. Say, if I'm going to follow him, is there anything in particular I should know? Has he got any little habits, and does he carry a gun?"

"I visualize guns sticking on him like scales on a fish, but I haven't seen any," Brenda said. "All he does is occasionally follow the bone-eyed man around the ship. I think, in fact, that he keeps track of the bone-eyed man most of the time. You'll notice the fellow is now in the dining room."

Pete shuddered. "I wish you'd quit calling him bone-eyed!"

"Why?"

"It's too—uh—prophetic."

It was agreed that Brenda was to switch her surveillance to the big man with the strange, pale eyes, and she was mighty glad to do it. She felt sorry for Pete, in case anything went wrong, because she suspected this guy Govern would make a grease spot of Pete. During dinner, though, she gave her concern for Pete an anesthetic by recalling several occasions when he had made her as mad as a hornet around the office. Finally she worked herself up to the point where she felt Pete would deserve most of whatever he got. It is never very hard to get mad at the boss.

The big man with the bone-colored eyes—he was down on

the ship register as Mr. Case, which meant nothing except that he must have a passport with that name and his picture on it—ate a leisurely meal. Then he went out and strolled the deck, rather purposefully it seemed to Brenda, for he ended up in a deck chair near the bow on the upper deck.

This part of the ship was a lonely spot, being too windy for any but the hardy passengers. The only sound of any consequence was the snarl of code and an occasional clatter of static from the radio shack which was nearby. A generator was also singing inside the radio shack. But the spot where the big man's chair was, Brenda noticed, gave a view of the sea ahead. She recalled that he had used this chair once or twice before. What was he doing? Settling down to watch the sea ahead?

Brenda decided to remain where she was, in the shadowy niche between a ventilator and a lifeboat, and watch.

Presently the big man put on a rather peculiar looking pair of goggles. She thought these were just goggles, until an operator stepped out of the radio shack letting a sweep of light from the door fall across the big man, and she discovered—before he hastily lowered the goggles—that they weren't ordinary.

Oh damn! Brenda thought.

She happened to know what kind of goggles they were because she had once done a story for Solar about them—not those particular goggles, but similar ones. They were ingenious filters which permitted the user to see black-light signals which, without the gadget, were quite invisible to the unaided

eye.

I'd better get Pete, she thought.

But she didn't go for Pete, because the night suddenly got full of events.

First, the big bone-eyed man arose with speed and purpose, put the goggles in his coat pocket, walked straight to the radio room and went inside. In a moment, there was a sound which Brenda knew absolutely was someone being hit with a fist, and hit hard.

A voice said, "Here! What's the big—" The voice must belong to one of the radio operators. It ended rather ominously, in a series of struggle sounds that were not very loud.

Brenda slipped off her footgear so that she wouldn't make any noise, and moved hastily to a point from which she had a view through the door into the radio shack.

The big bone-eyed man was systematically choking one radioman and the other one lay on the floor, motionless.

The radio shack, which contained all of the transmitting equipment for the *Poinsettia*, was not a large room, but it was crowded with shining black instrument panels in which indicator lights glowed, and the usual complicated looking array of stuff that one saw in radio shacks.

The bone-eyed man withdrew his right hand from the radio operator's throat, made a fist of it, and slammed the man on the jaw. He laid the unconscious radioman on the floor.

He began systematically smashing the transmitting equipment. He seemed to know what he was doing, for he was careful to pull a number of switches before he reached into the apparatus and tore out wires, or used a paperweight to batter radiotronic tubes into fragments.

The bridge, Brenda thought! I'd better tell the Captain!

But it would be necessary to pass the radio shack and climb a companionway to reach the bridge, and she was afraid she would be observed. Go back. That seemed the only thing to do. She whirled, ran swiftly, but only for about forty feet, whereupon a figure stopped her. She gasped, "Mister, a man is in the radio shack—Oh! Oh!"

"What did you say?" asked Mr. Govern quietly.

"Oh!"

"That's as good a comment as any, probably," he said dryly. "I would, however, confine myself to that and no more, if I were you."

He permitted her to look at the pistol, the destructive end of the pistol, which he was holding.

"See the nice big bullets in there?" he asked. "They're for you, my dear, if you open that pretty kisser."

VII

Frozen, horror fighting to get out of her throat, Brenda thought: I mustn't scream. I mustn't. He'll shoot. And yet, for three, five, ten seconds, it was almost impossible to keep from shrieking. Finally she realized that Pete Idle was standing beside the droop-shouldered Govern.

"Why don't you do something, you dope!" Brenda gasped.

Pete's eyes looked like boiled eggs in the darkness. "That's a gun he's got," he said. He sounded as if he hadn't been breathing for some time.

"How did he—"

"Catch me? I was following you. I was playing bodyguard. He came up behind me." Pete sounded bitter.

He sounded so tense and upset that Brenda became afraid he would try something reckless.

"Don't try anything, Pete," she urged.

"You're telling me," Pete mumbled.

Mr. Govern said softly, "Do you mind lapsing into silence? And stepping over there in those shadows. I prefer, incidentally, that you stand a bit ahead of me. About a yard ahead."

They moved over to the designated place, a spot where they were not very noticeable, because of the darkness and the

intrusion of a ventilator scoop, from the radio shack.

Pete whispered, "What's that guy doing in the radio—"

"Do you want your brains knocked out?" Mr. Govern inquired savagely.

Pete didn't. He was silent. Brenda was silent. If they breathed, they didn't notice it, and they didn't dare turn their heads, didn't feel any kind of a move was at all safe. They could see the radio shack door, and presently it swung lazily open, and the big bone-eyed man came out. He seemed in no hurry, but sauntered over to the rail and lounged there.

Hard, ominous, threatening, the gun in Mr. Govern's hand gouged Brenda's back.

"He disable the radio equipment?" Mr. Govern demanded in a very low whisper. "Nod, or shake your head. Don't speak."

Brenda nodded.

"Ah," said Mr. Govern. "I guess this is it. Just keep your mouths shut and your eyes open and I surmise you will see something interesting and exciting. If you are really an article writer for that magazine, Miss Linahan, you will possibly get some interesting material for a future article." He chuckled, and added, "If you are ever able to write it."

"May I ask a question?" Brenda whispered.

"Ummmmmm. One. Yes, one only."

"Are you and that man working together?"

"No," said Mr. Govern. He sounded bitter. "Now shut up!"

Brenda knew, certainly, positively, that the stage must be set for a pirate attack, and that it was going to come at any moment, but when it did come—about two minutes later—she was so astonished that she thought she was going to pass out. She could give no justification for her astonishment. She had been forewarned. But she was astonished anyway, because it was so unbelievable, so incredible. *Crack! . . . thump! First*, a fused shell exploded in front of the *Poinsettia*, and a moment later the sound reached them from the gun that had fired. The shell arrived an instant ahead of the gun sound.

There was, at first, only confusion on the bridge. Exclamations. Men running. A searchlight stuck a stiff rod-like beam of light into the sky; then the rod dipped.

A loud voice from the dark sea hailed them. It came, obviously, from a loudspeaker capable of great power and projection.

The mechanical voice-said: "Extinguish that searchlight if you don't want a torpedo in your guts!"

A voice, from one of the liner's officers, bellowed through the darkness: "What's the idea?"

Either not hearing, or ignoring the man, the loudspeaker said, "Heave to, if you don't want to be torpedoed. This is an

act of piracy. You are being held up and robbed. Follow instructions and your ship and passengers will not be harmed. Get funny, or disobey orders, and you will be sunk!"

There was a normal amount of cursing. A man came flying down from the bridge, dashed to the radio shack, looked inside, yelled, "Good God, both operators have been killed! The radio apparatus is smashed!"

There was another *Crack* and *thump!* as a second fused shell was exploded over the bows, but far enough ahead that there was no danger.

"That's good shooting," said Mr. Govern critically.

Brenda demanded, "Is this a trap?"

"What kind of a trap could it be?" Govern countered. "They picked a spot where there's not likely to be any ocean traffic along. It's night, so planes won't sight them, if there should be any planes, which is unlikely."

"I thought maybe it was a trap the Navy had set," Brenda explained. "Aren't you a Navy man?"

Mr. Govern laughed softly.

"No, darling," he said. "And shut up, will you?"

They noticed that the big man with the colorless eyes had merged into the shadows near the radio shack. He did not seem alarmed by the excitement, nor possessed of any urgency to do anything immediately.

From the bridge: "Who are you? What kind of crazy business is this?"

From the sea: "Put your searchlight on us for one minute, no longer. One minute only, or we'll shoot the bridge off your ship and you with it. Then you have another minute to decide to follow orders."

Stiffly, as if it were startled and confused, the searchlight beam dipped. The submarine was closer than Brenda had expected it to be. It was by no means alongside, however. The searchlight, in considerably less than a minute, lifted off the submarine. The operator seemed to be frightened.

Presently, the ship surrendered.

There was, considering the magnitude of the thing, remarkably little confusion about the act of piracy. It was evident that the corsairs knew exactly what they intended to do, and also that they knew the construction of the *Poinsettia*. They even, as the sub drew near, asked for the liner's captain by name. Captain Gristell. He cursed them miserably.

The loudspeaker said, "Captain, our man will now assume charge of your ship."

"Send him aboard," the Captain snarled.

"He is already aboard. He will come on the bridge now. He is not to be harmed, and his orders are to be followed implicitly. The alternative is a torpedo in your vessel, and we

shall also machine-gun officers and passengers when they take to the life-boats."

Pete muttered to Mr. Govern, "Isn't that your cue?"

"Not me. Who the hell do you think I am?" Govern demanded sourly.

"Who *are* you?"

"The guy who's gonna deposit some lead in you if you don't shaddup!" Mr. Govern seemed to be getting tense.

The man with the colorless eyes had gone on the bridge, they suddenly realized. They could hear Captain Gristell swearing, hear the big man silence him in short order. Amid a rapid-fire issuing of instructions across the narrowing stretch of sea between the submarine and the steamer, the merger of sub and liner was effected. In the meantime, a cargo port on a lower deck had been opened, and some kind of a landing stage lowered.

There was, while the sub was maneuvering, an interval of quiet, and they heard the bone-eyed man on the bridge instruct the Captain, "If your vault can be opened by anyone aboard, have it opened. Otherwise, we shall be forced to blow it, and the result might be some damage to your ship and passengers."

"Get the purser," the Captain mumbled. He seemed to be defeated.

"I'm going below to oversee the opening of the vault," the bone-eyed man said. "You will continue to follow instructions

as they come from the loudspeaker on the submarine."

The big man left the bridge.

Mr. Govern nudged Brenda with his gun, then used it to gouge Pete. "Get going. We'll drop down and watch the excitement."

Pete, his reportorial instincts aroused by the drama, was quite willing. Excitement had, for the time being, put aside some of his fears. They found a companionway and descended. On the lower decks, there was all the confusion that the situation called for. Stewards and crew members, hastily put to work by the bridge, were trying to keep things from getting out of hand, but were not doing too well, most of them being as confused as the passengers. There was a general, and normal, inclination on the part of everybody not to believe that there could not be such a thing as pirates holding up the ship.

Mr. Govern had placed his gun in the pocket of his dress coat.

"Don't think I won't, or can't, shoot," he warned. "Keep going."

Brenda suggested, "Why don't you just let us go?"

"Sister, I've got plans for you and the boy friend here," Mr. Govern said. "Don't irk me. Do what I tell you. A part of my plans consists of killing you if you give me trouble."

Somehow they had not the slightest doubt but that he meant this.

The robbery of the ship went forward, seemingly, in slow motion, but this was purely an illusion; when Pete Idle glanced at his watch and saw how little time had elapsed, he whistled in astonishment. Govern nudged him in the back, said, "Never mind being amazed. Keep going, or they'll have this job done and off here before we can tie into them."

"Godamighty!" Pete croaked. "Tie into them! Are you kidding?"

"Keep moving!"

It was early enough in the evening that almost no one had gone to bed, and the excitement had drawn everyone out on deck. They had some trouble with the crowds.

Mr. Govern seemed to know where he was going, and the route to get there, because presently they opened a door, stepped out on naked steel plates—and were confronted by a man with a gun. The fellow was obviously a pirate. He advised, "You'd better stay where you are."

He watched them intently. Behind him, men were either climbing aboard the liner, or going back aboard the submarine. Brenda's eyes flew wide. Those going aboard the sub were carrying small and extremely heavy burdens.

They'd already opened the vault!

"Goodbye seven million bucks," Brenda whispered to Pete.

Mr. Govern overheard. He asked, "How'd you know about the gold, my lovely?"

Brenda decided she'd said something wrong. Very wrong, probably, because she got the idea that Govern had drawn some kind of conclusion from her innocent remark, or had solidified some conclusion which he'd already had.

Intensely, terrifyingly, she began to wonder what Mr. Govern planned to do with Pete and herself. She had imagined that she was already about as scared as she could become. This was wrong. Terror grew until it began to make the ends of her fingers numb. There was something horrifying about the methodical efficiency with which the pirates marched back and forth. Not the least frightening fact was that they didn't look like the pirates always looked in the movies. They didn't even look tough. They were just men like—well—like poor old Pete, who was looking down at his knees, probably to see if they were shaking as hard as he thought they were.

Through the open loading port, Brenda could see the wet, hard iron hide of the submarine. She could hear the moist sob of water as waves sloshed over the deck of the underseas boat. The pirate who was watching her grinned lewdly. He was about twenty-five, had a small moustache, wore spectacles. He said, "Hy'ah, babe." Brenda shivered.

Unexpectedly, the man with the bone-colored eyes appeared. He seemed larger, more formidable. In an unpleasant tone, he said, "Snap it up! You're five minutes off schedule now!"

The pace of the burden-carriers quickened visibly.

They're afraid of him, Brenda thought. He must be the head guy.

The big man went to the landing stage, threw a glance downward, demanded, "Have they brought the old geezer aboard?"

Someone replied in the negative. The big man was indignant. "What the hell's keeping them! They should—" He paused, wheeled, shouted, "It's about time!"

Two pirates appeared, drag-carrying a slender man with perfectly white hair and a young-looking face. The prisoner had been somewhat manhandled and was leaking blood from scalp and lips. They straightened him out on the landing stage, kicked his rear, and went down to the submarine with him.

"Whoeee!" Pete said softly.

"What's the matter?" Brenda asked.

"That guy they took aboard—he's got a mint of money," Pete said. "Name's Ingraham. Oil man and Wall Street operator. I talked to him a few times. Knows a lot of people I know—or rather, he knew most of the prominent people I knew."

"Why did they take him aboard, do you suppose?" Brenda wanted to know.

The young pirate, the one keeping an eye on them, grinned

sardonically at her. "Don't be naïve, baby. Didn't you ever hear of ransom? It's done in the best of pirate circles."

Brenda shivered.

The young corsair eyed her. "You're not rich, are you, tutz?"

Brenda shook her head definitely not.

He sighed. "Too bad, because I'd like to kidnap you, tutz."

Mr. Govern spoke in a conversational tone to the young pirate. He said, "I think I can make you happy, sonny."

"Huh?"

"Tutz, here, and her pot-bellied friend are my prisoners," Mr. Govern explained. "Now don't get confused. And don't start shooting. I'm going to walk them out and talk to your head guy. I've got something to say to him. You understand?"

"I'm damned if I do." The young pirate was confused. "You wanta talk to Whitey?"

Govern nodded at the big man with the bone-colored eyes. "He Whitey?"

"Yeah."

"He's the one I wanta talk to." He started to nudge Brenda and Pete forward. The pirate's gun, suddenly leveled, made a distinct click as it cocked. "No, no, stick where you are!"

Mr. Govern froze. His hand with the gun was still in his jacket pocket. In a moment, the young pirate began staring intently at the hand. He licked his lips with a quick swipe of his tongue, asked, "Got a gun in there?"

"That's right. Don't make me use it. Call Whitey over here."

"You haven't got a chance."

"I know it," Mr. Govern said.

Brenda suddenly had a great respect for Mr. Govern's nerve. She hadn't imagined a man could sound so coldly determined when he was on the point of getting himself shot.

The young pirate did not take long to get a decision made.

"Whitey!" he called. "This guy's got a gun. He wants to talk to you. He's got something on his mind."

Whitey came over, coldly, without hesitation. . . . Just like in the films, Brenda thought in horror. Only such things never happen in life.

"Well?" Whitey examined Mr. Govern bleakly.

"I got things to say."

"Say them."

"This girl and this guy were following you around in New York."

Tension tightened Whitey's eyes down until they seemed closed. "Why?"

"That's what I thought you might like to ask them."

"How do you know they were following me?"

"Saw them."

"You were doing some following yourself?"

"That's right."

Whitey used his jaw to indicate the landing stage and said, "Go aboard. But first give that gun to Timmy, here, and if you've got more than one, give them all to Timmy."

"All three of us go aboard the sub?"

"That's right."

Mr. Govern used care not to move suddenly enough to alarm anyone and removed the gun from his pocket and passed it to Timmy, the young pirate, who was grinning. Timmy pocketed the gun, told Brenda, "Glad to have you aboard, tutz," and bowed at the landing stage. "Get moving."

Brenda presently discovered, stupefied, that she was going down wet iron steps toward a steel submarine deck over which waves broke and sent sheets of water sliding. She was walking, but she had no wish to be walking, and very little, almost none, of the physical feeling of movement. She supposed this must be what they meant when they spoke of fright and used the

term petrified. It was very descriptive. Petrified. She would always know what it meant.

Behind them, above them, Whitey said, "Lock these guests up. If they start anything, shoot them in a not too messy way."

VIII

A submarine was not a completely new experience to Miss Brenda Linahan. The smallness of quarters, the cramped confines of passages, did not astonish her, but did give her an acute attack of claustrophobia. She knew the tiny cubicle in which they were locked was the quarters of the skipper because of the presence of depth and speed gauges and a directional indicator, two telephones. . . . Mr. Govern immediately began going through a desk, yanking out the drawers, examining the contents. Pete glared at him and said, "Brother, you got us in a hell of a mess! I hope you're satisfied."

Mr. Govern grunted in triumph, and held up some official looking correspondence. "This submarine," he announced, "is a Nazi war prize which was stolen from the U. S. Navy about ten days ago." He made satisfied smacking noises with his lips. "By golly, I'm glad to know that. I was only able to get rumors that a submarine had been stolen, and wasn't able to confirm them. But they were the straight goods. That's fine."

"What's fine about it?" Pete snarled.

"Why, it proves they're just beginning pirates," Mr. Govern said. His lips curled with scorn. "Amateurs. First-timers. Punks." He sounded as if he didn't think much of the pirates.

Pete scowled at him.

"They seem pretty efficient to me, amateurs or not," Pete said.

Mr. Govern continued his search.

Brenda listened to movements on deck. She believed the sounds indicated the looting of the seven odd million dollars from the vaults of the *Poinsettia* was about finished, and that preparations were being made to escape with the loot. This proved to be correct, because presently the motors started. The motors, not the engines, she realized; that probably meant they were going to submerge at once, because the motors were used for underwater headway. She exclaimed, "They're going to submerge!"

"Naturally," said Mr. Govern contemptuously. "They don't want to give the steamer a chance to ram them."

Irked, Pete said, "Maybe they're not as dumb as you thought."

"Oh, they're not dumb," Mr. Govern admitted. "Just amateurs." He said amachors for amateurs. He sounded as if he was relapsing into a tough manner that was more natural with him.

Brenda suddenly realized that it was going to be a horrible experience when the sub dived. She pressed against the double-decker bunk, hands clenching the cold metal stanchions. She wished mightily that she had paid more attention to sensations on the one other occasion when she had been aboard a submarine when it dove. This had been about a year ago, and, unfortunately, there had been a handsome Naval lieutenant present who was more interesting than a submarine diving. She began to tremble violently, and finally blurted, "I'm scared!"

"What of?" asked Mr. Govern.

"Of what may happen when the submarine submerges!"

"Forget it. We've already submerged," said Mr. Govern in a conversational tone. Then—cruelly, considering how casually he had spoken—he swung his right fist from behind his hip and landed it on Pete's jaw. The blow was loud. Pete instantly fell down, eyes closed. "Glass jaw," said Mr. Govern, admiring his handiwork.

Brenda, suddenly more angry than she was afraid, looked around for some weapon with which to attack Mr. Govern.

"Cut it out, baby," he advised.

"Why did you hit Pete?" Brenda flared.

"Partly for satisfaction," said Mr. Govern. "I don't like the idea of him having such a pretty girl as you. And also he was thinking of bopping me. I could see it in his eye."

Brenda subsided and put herself to wondering who, and what, and why, Mr. Govern was. He was extraordinary. Extraordinarily horrible, she decided.

Half an hour later, the door to the tiny stateroom opened and a pair of gun muzzles looked in at them, Whitey back of the weapons. He examined Pete—Pete had just partially revived, was sitting on the floor holding his head with both hands—and did not seem surprised nor concerned. He glanced at Brenda. "Comfortable?"

"You let us go, if you know that's good for you!" she said angrily and, she realized when the words were out, foolishly.

Whitey laughed.

He gestured for Mr. Govern to step outside.

"You and I are going to talk now," he advised.

Govern shrugged. "Okay by me." He moved into the corridor, noted two armed men backing up Whitey, and grinned at them. Whitey closed and secured the cabin door and directed one of the armed men, "Better stick here on guard."

Mr. Govern was escorted to the control station, where it was possible to talk in comfort. He noted from the instruments that they were submerged and traveling southeast at about twelve knots. The fact that the instruments were German and marked in German gave him some trouble. He said, "You guys must have been busy practicing the last ten days."

Whitey looked at him unpleasantly. "How do you figure ten

days?"

"I heard a rumor that the Navy had lost this sub ten days ago."

"Who are you, brother?" Whitey asked harshly.

Mr. Govern grinned, without, however, putting much humor into the grimace. "Look, I'm going to give you the whole thing in a small package. First, I'm using the name of Govern, and it isn't my name and you don't give a damn what my name is, or if you do, it won't do you any good, because that's a personal matter I intend to keep to myself. Who am I, you say? Well, I'll tell you: I'm one of a group of men who, nearly a year ago, decided that as long as the world had gone crazy, they might as well do it too."

When Whitey looked as if he was going to interrupt, Govern held up a hand, said hastily, "Listen to it, will you, even if the build-up isn't interesting."

"Go ahead."

Originally—and by originally, he meant prior to a year ago, Mr. Govern explained—the men concerned in the story he was going to tell had been involved, most of them, in the war in one way or another. He compressed his lips, said sharply, "None of us were Japs, Germans or wops. Don't get that idea. We're Americans. Well, maybe a South American or two, and a couple of black boys who are as American as you or I, or maybe I should say English. They're Bimini Negroes. They knew the Bahama Island waters better than you know the palm of your hand.

"I'll not burden you with how we got together, but we did. Actually, we were gotten together by one man. This guy—and we might as well start calling him Cavu right now, because that is what he's called—is an extraordinary sort of fellow. He is a man of extreme vision, infinite patience for planning, startling imagination, and he is not troubled at all by morals, honesty, or conscience. A perfect man for the job. A man capable of organizing a band of pirates able to function in this year of 1946. And that is what he did."

Whitey sneered, said, "What are you giving me?"

"You already know about this, don't you? Not the details I'm giving you, but of our existence?"

Whitey said nothing.

"First, let me finish," Mr. Govern requested. "We were fairly well organized by the end of the war with Japan, and when that came, we managed to grab us a Japanese submarine. A nice one. Complete with airplane, torpedoes, and fuel supply. With that sub, we took another one. Five months were devoted to organization and drill, then we established a base and began operating. Now don't tell me you haven't heard of us."

Whitey scowled. "Okay. I heard rumors."

"Gave you the idea of going into the racket yourself, didn't it?"

"Maybe."

"Okay, now you know who I am and—"

"You haven't said who you were!" Whitey interrupted harshly.

"I represent the gentleman I've called Cavu. I'm supposed to ask you, and persuade you if possible to make a deal."

"Deal? What kind of a deal?"

"One big organization," said Mr. Govern, "can function with a lot more safety than two."

"Yeah? That's just a statement, and you're not going to be able to prove it."

"Look, I can give an example: take this ship you've knocked over tonight. What do you think will happen now? They'll set a bunch of booby traps on ships that sail in the future. But the main thing is, they'll keep this quiet. They've kept our own activities quiet, figuring, I imagine, that we'll get reckless or worried because of it. Anyway, there'll be booby traps from now on, and supposing we didn't know this and tried to knock off one of the ships. Suppose we did that? Too bad for us. Or suppose it had been us tonight and you tried it later. Too bad for you. Get the point?"

"You mean," said Whitey, "that, working separately, and neither one of us knowing what the other is doing, one of us is liable to stir up a hornet's nest that the other will fall into?"

"That's it."

"You've got something."

"What about it?"

"What about what?"

"How about joining up with us?"

Whitey frowned. "That'll take some talking over with the crew."

"Fair enough. Put it up to them."

Whitey moved over to examine the gauges, check the course and tell the steersman that there was no reason why they shouldn't surface and increase speed. "Where's Colorado Jones?" he demanded. The steersman, who was Colton, said, "He went back to check an oil leak to see if it's getting any worse." Presently Colorado Jones, big, sullen, sour-faced, returned. Whitey told him to surface and cruise, same course, at about three quarters speed.

Whitey went back to Mr. Govern. "You left out the girl and the guy with her."

"Uh-huh. They're magazine people, they say. I don't know about that. Maybe they are."

"Work for a magazine, eh? Why the hell'd you bring them aboard?"

"I gave it to you straight the first time. They were following you around in New York."

"Yeah? How do I know that's so?"

Mr. Govern explained where he had first noticed Brenda, describing the bar—he had, he explained, noticed Brenda at once, but without immediately realizing she was following Whitey—and continuing the description of the trailing to the restaurant where the driver of the armored truck had been paid off, then to the hotel, finally to the *Poinsettia*. The story was correct in detail except that it gave the impression that he, Mr. Govern, had followed Brenda, instead of the reverse being true. Finishing the story, he eyed Whitey narrowly, said suddenly, "That building where I picked her up—Doc Savage has his headquarters there, doesn't he?"

Whitey jumped. So did Colton and Colorado Jones, who were listening. Whitey recovered himself, scowled, blew out his cheeks. He said, "The office we use for a front is in that building. I located it there because I figured it would be a good idea to keep an eye on Doc Savage, because, sooner or later, he would probably stick his nose into this thing."

Govern nodded. "I knew your front was in the building. I also heard that was why."

Whitey said bitterly, "How'd you get that information?"

"You'll never know."

"Somebody in my outfit tipped you off."

Mr. Govern grinned. "I'll let you worry about it. Point is, thought the girl and the guy might know too much—about you, not about me. So I brought them along. By force. They didn't

wanna come. I did you a favor, see?"

"I wonder." Whitey was sullen, mulling over the suspicion, apparently, that someone in his crew had approached Govern, or had been persuaded to talk.

"How about having a meeting of your crew to discuss my proposition?"

Whitey swung to Colton. "What do you think about it?"

"I dunno." Colton was indecisive. "It's got its points. But I dunno. Would depend on whether we had to kick back a share to"—he nodded at Mr. Govern—"this guy's crowd."

"Why don't you," said Mr. Govern, "all assemble and I'll talk it over."

Whitey became sourly purposeful. "We'll do that. Colorado, pass the word along to Ward, Eli and the rest. Have the first watch assemble in the wardroom. We'll have to do this in two shifts."

* * *

The conference turned out to be a hard-fisted affair with nobody trusting anyone else and taking no special pains to be polite. Mr. Govern seemed to enjoy it and before the arguing recessed had conveyed the impression that he was able to be as hard as any occasion would warrant.

He said, "This is a merger, see? That's all. We share expenses, and the only expenses will be maintaining a base for

operations. We've already got a damned good base. If you guys have one, we'll vote on which one we'll use, or we might want to use both. Everybody contributes to maintaining the base."

They would keep books, Govern explained, and the expenses incidental to each act of piracy—items like buying off the armored truck guard who had tipped Whitey off that seven million dollars in bullion had been put aboard the *Poinsettia*—would be charged against the individual job, to be paid out of the proceeds of that haul. It was, Mr. Govern pointed out, a matter of business, a profitable deal bringing a profitable return to the operators.

"About this gold. It's hard to move gold these days. We may have to buy somebody to get it done, and another way is to go into the gold mining business and sell the gold as a product of the mine. That's complicated, because experts can tell pretty much where a piece of gold comes from, but it can be done, I've been assured. Any expenses of that sort would have to be paid out of the general fund to which you guys will contribute."

"What about ransom dough?" Ward asked.

Mr. Govern didn't think much of ransom, and he felt that his chief, Cavu, agreed with this in principle. "I know you've got a guy aboard you want to ransom," he said. "My vote would be to shoot him and forget it, but that's up to you guys, although I think Cavu will want a general vote by both crews on it."

Someone wished to know where the head guy got that name Cavu. "He a foreigner, or something?"

Mr. Govern laughed. "No foreigner. It sounds silly, but you know that Air Force term CAVU, meaning, 'ceiling and visibility unlimited'? Somebody hung it on the chief early in the deal, because of the uncanny way he had of figuring out what would happen. It stuck. Cavu. It isn't his name, but that doesn't matter."

Colorado Jones spit on the wardroom floor and said, "I don't think so damned much of the whole idea."

"By me, it don't look like a bad deal," Colton said. "It's got advantages. You take a syndicate, they always got it their way." His opinion seemed to be the majority one.

Whitey said, "It's up to you guys. I'm for it, or against it, whatever you say. But I want to do some more brain-beating over it before I commit myself finally."

It was decided everybody would do some thinking.

IX

Mr. Calvin R. Ingraham, the financier, had been lying on his back in a bunk staring fixedly at the oddly shaped steel ceiling plates overhead. Suddenly he sat up, grimacing with the effort, unlaced one shoe, pulled it off, stumbled to the door, a matter of hardly three feet, and beat on the door with the heel of the shoe. Over the hammering sound this made, he screamed,

"Help! Help! Let me out of here!" Presently someone on the other side of the door said angrily, "Cut that out, you old buzzard. You want me to hafta kick your pants up around your neck?" Ingraham continued hammering, and in a moment the door was wrenched open, Colorado Jones stepped inside, measured Ingraham carefully, and swung his fist. The blow drove Ingraham backward and he fell across the bunk, bending backward, shoulders, head and arms lying in the bunk. He hung there, dazed, his breathing blowing red bubbles off his lips. "I'm tryin' ta think, and you're botherin' me, dammit," Colorado Jones said, and went out and shut the door.

Calm fell again in that part of the submarine, and Colorado Jones appeared to immerse himself in thought, watched grinningly by a pirate who was about forty years old and having some difficulty with asthma, brought on, he claimed, by the bad air in the sub.

Presently Whitey approached and asked, "How's the old goose?"

"He's fine," Colorado Jones said.

Whitey growled, "Let's have a look at him," and, shoving open the door, swore in anger. Mr. Ingraham, the intended ransom victim, was now lying on the bunk, hanging his head over the edge and bleeding on the floor. "Who hit him?" Whitey demanded.

"The old goofer was makin' a racket," Colorado said angrily.

Whitey slammed the door and fastened it. "You keep your hands off him. You might kill him." He wheeled on the asthma

sufferer, ordered, "Clench, you take over. Colorado hasn't got sense enough to do it." He scowled at Colorado, said, "You come along with me. I'm going to talk to the girl and her boy friend."

Colorado hitched his pants. He didn't say anything. He was insulted.

Whitey posted Colorado Jones outside the stateroom which held Brenda Linahan and Pete Idle. He told the man who had been on watch there, "Colorado'll relieve you for a while. Had any trouble from inside?"

"Nah. I think tutz has been bawling though."

"You haven't molested her?"

The guard was the young pirate who had been on the landing stage of the *Poinsettia* when Mr. Govern made his entrance.

"Nah," he said.

"If there's any molesting, you're going to get into trouble," Whitey warned.

The boy grinned. "Match you for first crack," he offered. When Whitey didn't say anything, he sauntered off.

Colorado Jones, in a very low, very bitter, very enraged voice that reached only Whitey, said, "I can't take much more

of that kid. I'll smear him, the dirty little rat, so help me God! I can't take him. I really can't take him!"

Whitey glanced about swiftly, but there was no one in earshot. He said, "Take it easy, Renny. I think this thing is about in the bag."

"Figure they'll vote to join up?"

"Yes."

"I think so, too."

Whitey said, "That's what all the hell has been for, wasn't it?" He indicated the door. "I'm going in. If anyone comes, tap on the door with a coin if they show any inclination to stop and hang around."

"What are you going to tell the girl and the guy?"

"The truth, I suppose."

"I hope they can take it."

Whitey said he hoped so, too, and entered the cabin, actually the commander's cabin when the sub was under the Nazi flag.

Brenda Linahan had been sobbing—it had been a hysterical outbreak of frenzied rage and helplessness during which she had beaten the berth with her fists and said words a lady shouldn't know—but she had things under control. Pete Idle

had been looking at her in amazement, reflecting that the guy she married had better watch out about getting her mad.

"Get out of here!" Brenda screamed at Whitey.

Whitey ignored her uneasily, and finally indicated Pete's face. "What happened to your lip?"

"That guy Govern slugged me," Pete said, and added a personal opinion of Mr. Govern, using some of the words he had heard Brenda use a few moments ago.

"Cut that out!" Whitey said. "There's a lady present."

"I'm glad you told me," Pete said sourly. "Listen, she cusses like a stevedore. I just found it out."

Brenda addressed Pete angrily. "Why don't you hit him! He's probably got a gun. Take it away from him and use it to get us out of this mess!"

Pete examined Whitey for size. "No, I'll wait until something a little smaller, say a Sherman tank, comes along."

"Sit on the berth, you two," Whitey ordered.

The cabin, while not large, was fitted with the comforts to which Nazi commanders had considered themselves entitled. There was, in a corner, an ingenious folding lavatory and shaving mirror arrangement similar to those found in railway pullman roomettes. Whitey folded the basin down, ran water into it, removed a small case from his pocket, bent over the basin, and seemed to be doing something with his eyes. Still

engaged in that, he remarked, "These contact lenses aren't what they're cracked up to be when you have to wear them over an extended period of time. I think the fumes in the air aboard a submarine tend to cause irritation, also."

He straightened, turned, and they saw that he had used a small rubber suction cup to remove contact lenses from his eyes.

Pete and Brenda stared at him. Pete nearly fell off the bunk.

"Oh, for God's sake! . . . You're Doc Savage!" Pete said weakly.

Brenda flopped back on the bunk, brought both hands to her face and clamped them over her lips, fingers criss-crossed and pressing hard, and presently she giggled. Pete groaned. "She's going to have another attack!" he gasped. He seized Brenda's arms at the elbows, tried to pull her hands from her lips, failed, then shook her violently and said, "Stop it! Stop it, you hear!" He sounded small and frightened, like a child.

Brenda giggled again uncontrollably through and around her fingers, then said, "It's a silly damn comedy show, that's what it is! . . . The pirates have got poor Brenda and up gallops that gallant hero in disguise. Hurrah, here comes the cavalry!"

Doc Savage, with the removal of the contact lenses—they were tinted and gave his eyes the nasty bonelike coloration—had, seemingly, shed the whole character of Whitey, the pirate leader. The roundness went out of his shoulders, his face

settled into more normal lines, and he became competent, composed, quick-moving. He went to the bunk. "Let's see what we can do with her, Pete." He leaned over, slapped the girl's face once without much gentleness. The shock silenced her. He said quickly, "Comic opera or no comic opera, you are still on a submarine operated by pirates. They are, with the exception of myself and two other men who are my assistants, all genuine pirates. They fully intend to kill you. Now go ahead and have your little-girl tantrum."

Motionless, tense, Brenda kept her hands over her mouth for a few moments, but finally she took them away. Her eyes were again rational, but quite frightened.

"I guess," she said, "my hinges were a little loose. Having you turn up like that—you *are* Doc Savage, aren't you?"

"Yes."

"You handed me the shock of my life."

"Feel better?"

"I probably won't feel exactly right until I'm back in my apartment in New York and under the bed. But I think I've got hold of myself. Only, if you've got any more surprises, give me some warning."

Doc glanced at Pete. "Did Govern knock out any teeth when he hit you?"

Pete shook his head. "What is this, anyway? In case you don't know us, I'm Pete Idle, article editor of *Solar*, *The News*

Weekly, and this is Miss—"

"I know who you are," Doc said. "Ham Brooks described Miss Linahan, quite thoroughly when she came to see me in New York."

Brenda said, "Only I didn't see you. You remember?"

"Naturally not. But you should have told Ham you were working on this pirate affair." Doc smiled slightly. "Not that you would have gotten to see me—I think you can see why. I was quite busy being Whitey. But if you had told Ham what your business was, I think we would have managed to give you a bum steer that would have kept you out of the affair. At least, you wouldn't be here, now."

Brenda was impressed. "After this, I tell everybody all my business," she declared.

Pete made some frantic gestures. "I don't get this! I don't get it at all!"

"You bungled," Doc told him, "smack into the middle of a pirate-catching scheme."

Doc Savage sketched briefly—and Brenda and Pete immediately realized he must be skipping an enormous amount of detail—the scattered developments which had gradually gathered and funneled themselves into the present tense situation. First, as would be obvious, the regularly constituted channels of authority, federal—Navy, Coast Guard, Marine—as well as civil, had been unable to make effective headway toward finding and catching the corsairs. The pirates, Doc

explained, had planned too well, organized too tightly, and were too extremely cautious to be caught. The pirates had provided against every normal device of detection and apprehension. . . . Finally, Doc was called into the case, and given free rein—over the doubts and objections of several—to use his own methods, which were usually shaded with the bizarre.

"It takes a thief to catch a thief," Doc explained. "That was the theme we decided to work on. We were fortunate enough to get the cooperation of the Navy department, who enabled us to seize this submarine in a manner I believe was quite convincing."

Brenda, amazed, demanded, "You mean most of these men aboard are genuine pirates?"

"All but two."

"But how on earth did you manage to assemble a gang of genuine crooks?"

Doc said, "It wasn't too easy." He added that the gathering together of such a crew of rascals had been an essential part of the plan, however. "The whole object was to let the genuine pirates find out that another crew was going into the buccaneering business, on the theory that we would eventually get a line on them. We thought they might approach us as brother pirates. To use another old saw: 'Birds of a feather flock together.' Actually, we have just received a merger proposition from the other pirate gang, and we're thinking it over. Mr. Govern made the offer."

"Govern is one of the other pirate crew?"

"Quite a prominent member, evidently."

Brenda's reporter instinct asserted itself, and she demanded, "But how did you manage to take this sub away from the U. S. Navy so that it would look natural?"

Doc packed an outline of the operation into half a dozen sentences.

"You mean you submerged and left the Navy men in the sea to drown! Surely not—"

"That was part of the act," Doc explained. "The PT boat that had been converted into a yacht was standing by about a quarter of a mile away. It could not be seen in the darkness. Only one man was aboard—Colorado Jones, who, incidentally, is Renny Renwick—Lieutenant Colonel John Renwick—one of my associates. After we submerged, Renwick simply came back and picked up the Navy men. None of them, you may be sure, drowned."

"Wasn't that risky?"

"The sea wasn't rough. And the Navy had picked men who could swim, and who also wore, under their clothing, small emergency life belts which they could inflate."

Brenda shook her head. "I mean, later, wasn't it risky? Suppose the genuine pirates investigated to learn whether any of the Navy men were supposed to be lost were really lost. Consulted their families, for instance?"

"They did that, as a matter of fact," Doc said. "But we were unable to find and shadow the men who did the inquiring. That was a very disappointing failure. But to answer your question—the Navy crew, and the Nazis, from the submarine, were put aboard a battleship enroute to the Orient. They are being kept out of sight."

"Why, I think it was marvelous!" Brenda exclaimed.

Pete said he didn't feel it was so marvelous. "We're in a hell of a predicament, if you ask me," he said. "I would rather be locked up in the lion house at the zoo."

* * *

"But I don't understand why you brought Pete and me aboard," Brenda said to Doc Savage.

This made Doc uncomfortable. "There wasn't anything else to do. I was afraid leaving you behind would make Govern suspicious. He told me you had been shadowing me in New York, you remember. That was enough to make me very suspicious of you and a genuine pirate would have brought you aboard to question you, so that is what I had to do."

"I guess so," Brenda admitted.

"It was our own fault." Pete was very gloomy. "After this, I'm going to stick to my desk."

Doc explained, "In case you're wondering why I am telling you this, it's because your help will probably be needed. We're outnumbered. There's two of my men, myself and you two.

That's five. There'll be at least seventy men against us, including the other pirates. That's odds of fourteen to one. Probably that is the best we can expect."

"Oh my God!" Pete groaned.

"Colorado Jones is Renny Renwick," Brenda said. "Who is your other man?"

"I'd rather not tell you."

"Why not?"

"You might unconsciously give his identity away, if you knew him. He's an ace in the hole."

Pete muttered, "He can't be in any deeper hole than we're in. What's the program? What do you think will happen next?"

Doc said he was almost positive his crew would vote to talk over a merger with the other pirates and, in order to do this, they would probably visit the base from which the other pirates were operating. "I sincerely hope I'm right," he added. "Once I know where the pirate hangout is, I can contact the Navy and arrange for a raid on the place. That'll wind the whole thing up satisfactorily."

"Please don't make it sound so simple," Pete said nervously. "As scared as I am, it can't be that simple."

"Take it easy. Just hold everything, and wait for orders," Doc said. "Incidentally, I'm going to separate you and Miss Linahan, so you can get some sleep in privacy."

Brenda retained the Nazi captain's cabin. Pete was consigned to a smaller cubicle which was used for storage. While Pete was being locked up, Colton approached and said, "The guys want to take a vote. If we're going to talk it over with this other outfit, it will save time to head for their hideout now, and save maybe retracing our course."

"Okay," Whitey said.

The submarine was surfaced, and the machinery was stopped to permit everyone to attend except a single lookout who took a position at the radar apparatus, keeping an eye on the 'scope for ships or planes in the neighborhood.

The vote to confer with the other corsair organization about a merger was heavily affirmative, only three voting against it.

Doc Savage—he had replaced the contact lenses in his eyes and was again in the character of Whitey—stood up abruptly.

"Now wait a minute!" he said sharply. "This may be a hijacking gag. It may be a scheme to get us blocked up in some little harbor, or get us alongside a ship that will put a shell in us, disabling us so they can take that bullion away from us. We're not going to any base until I find out that it's safe."

Mr. Govern grinned.

"That's plain talk, and now I'll give you some of the same. If you think I'm going to tell you where our base is, you're crazy."

Colton asked, "How we going to get together, then?"

Mr. Govern said, "You've got a plane aboard, haven't you?"

"It's a Nazi plane."

"On floats?"

"Naturally."

"That's fine. I can fly one of them, I think. I wouldn't want to take it off on a rough sea, but if you can do that, I'll blindfold one of you and fly it to our base. Is it a two-place ship?"

"It's two-place."

"Okay. What do you think of the proposition?"

The suggestion seemed to be acceptable. Doc faced the assemblage and demanded, "Do you want to elect a man to make the trip? Or shall I go?"

"If you want the job, you're welcome to it," Colton said, and there was a general laugh.

X

Four days later, the submarine lay under a gray sky smoky with fog. The sea, infinitely clear, as blue as cobalt, ran in long

lazy swells, but there were few small waves. The whole sea, in fact, had a greasy, limpid look.

"The plane's got radar," Doc said. "I can find the sub coming back. But can you find your island?"

"Who said it was an island?" Mr. Govern countered. "You leave it to me."

"In this fog?"

"In this fog," Mr. Govern said. "I'll find it, don't you worry."

Colorado Jones leaned over the rail. He said, "You don't come back, I take command."

"You do not! We've been into that." Doc scowled at him, trying to make it good. "Colton is the man. Colton takes over. But I'll be back."

Colorado—Renny—spat disgustedly. He didn't say anything more.

They were getting the plane over the side, which was somewhat of a ticklish job, but not entirely new to them. They had done it twice before during training, and held many dry runs, not actually putting the plane on the sea, several times. There was a catapult for launching the ship, but Doc did not have too much faith in it, and had decided to take the ship off from the water. Conditions for a surface take-off were about as nearly ideal as they ever were at sea.

"You fly the forward cockpit," he told Mr. Govern. "The

Nazis were too tight to put flight instruments in both cockpits. Coming back, I'll take the front cockpit."

Mr. Govern had made a black hood which was to serve as a blindfold, and he passed this over.

"That do for a blindfold?"

"Don't see why not."

They got in the ship, and fastened the safety belts. Doc was uneasy about the plane, not trusting it, which was hardly justifiable, because the Nazis, regardless of what one thought of their political thinking, had been excellent mechanical workmen. He ran cockpit check twice, then got the engine turning. He felt completely unnatural in the cockpit, and remembered, with acute distress, that he hadn't test-flown the plane, and didn't know whether anyone else had. He fiddled with the controls, testing, examining, calculating.

"What's the holdup?" Govern demanded, turning his head.

"You want to take it off?" Doc demanded angrily. Govern said no more, and Doc felt he must be grinning. He eased the throttle open; they began to move. Presently they were in the air. So easily, so quickly, that it was surprising. The plane had good characteristics. It had vaulted off the top of a swell, and Doc eased it carefully over the next swell, began climbing.

He felt Govern take the stick. The man did some gentle S-turns, some coordination exercises, and seemed satisfied. He made a gesture of drawing his hands down over his eyes. The hood.

After that, for about two hours, it was intensely black.

He heard Govern beating the side of the fuselage, heard the man's voice, faint, torn by the wind, saying, "Take the hood off!"

Govern had changed the clock. That was the first thing Doc noticed, and it was important, and in an instant, Doc realized he had no way of knowing exactly how long they had flown, or knowing, probably, within half an hour's span. Tension would do that to a man. Destroy his judgment of time passage. Govern, a clever man, had thought of that.

They were still flying. Govern, pointing downward, yelled, "Look her over."

It wasn't an island. No island, Doc thought, astonished. Then he realized he really should have expected something like this. A ship. A rusty, small old tramp steamer. It looked like a rattletrap even from a thousand feet in the air.

No island. But there was a reef, or rather two parallel reefs with deep water between them in which the tramp lay. The reef formation was coral, and this was the Bahama region, somewhere near the edge of the Bahama Banks, which took in a lot of territory, many thousands of square miles.

Doc decided he did not recognize the place, but it would make no difference one way or the other if he did; tomorrow, even today, they could move the old steamer. The steamer was the thing. He watched it intently, examining it.

Cunning judgment they'd used on the ship. It was a liberty ship, an old one, but there were hundreds of standardized models exactly like it which had been turned out in the early rush of war shipbuilding. Proving it was a ship of specific identity would be difficult without a close range inspection. He imagined he wouldn't be allowed to take a close look, and he wasn't.

They landed. Doc did the landing, knew that Govern must be a little dubious of his ability to handle the Nazi ship, which was quite a sensible feeling to have. They got down all right.

"Taxi over to the lee of that reef to the right," Govern yelled. "And wait for a boat."

The boat, a launch which displayed considerably more speed than was to be expected of a tender from such a decrepit steamer, streaked toward, but not directly to them. It circled, warily, its motor went silent, and the occupants, half a dozen tough-looking men, stood staring at them.

"It's a great dog that has no tail," Mr. Govern told them loudly. Evidently this was some kind of password, because the launch approached at once.

"Your friends," Doc remarked, "look like a bunch of cut-throats."

"They are." Mr. Govern sounded amiable.

Doc concluded presently that Cavu, whoever he was, was

not in the launch, because a surly looking fellow with no forehead worth mentioning and twice as much jaw as he needed looked up at Govern and advised, "Big boy says for you to come aboard first. He wants to know what the hell you're doing before you bring this guy on board."

Govern turned to Doc. "Mind waiting?"

"I don't like it."

"Fat lot of good it'll do you." Govern got in the launch, and there was an argument about whether the launch would contribute its anchor, a small mushroom affair, to keep the plane from drifting. Nobody seemed in a very cooperative humor, but they finally tied the anchor line to the seaplane nose-cleat and dropped the anchor in the water, which was about two fathoms deep here. The launch left for the tramp steamer with Mr. Govern.

Doc Savage wished he had brought a pair of binoculars. It had not occurred to him to do so, because usually they were not very effective from a plane. He studied the steamer intently, and decided he probably could not identify it again if they took the trouble to make small changes in its rigging, which they probably would. As a measure of caution, he got the plane motor ready to start, and climbed out on the float and re-tied the anchor line in a knot which would slip loose if he ran for it, but would hold as long as the plane merely rode at anchor. That way, he could get away if necessary. He was glad to note that the cockpit was armored, however, so he moved up there to wait. Half an hour dragged past.

Only Govern and the helmsman were in the launch when it came back.

"Okay. I got him soothed down," Govern beckoned. "Get aboard."

"How does he feel about the proposition?" Doc climbed into the launch.

"Skittish. A lot depends on you. But the business details as I outlined them are still okay."

"Good enough."

"You got that black sack?"

"In my pocket."

"Put it over your head."

Later, when Doc got out on a landing stage, he fell over something and bruised his knees. "Get somebody to lead me, or I'm going to take this rag off my eyes!" he said angrily. Somebody laughed and said, "Tough guy, huh?" But he was taken by the elbow and guided up a considerable number of not too steady steel steps, then onto a deck, across the deck and over a raised ship threshold—he skinned one of his shins here—and the smell of a none too clean cabin assailed his nostrils.

"Sit down," Govern said.

"Do I take this hood off?"

"You leave it on."

"That wasn't in the bargain."

"It's in the bargain now," Govern said. "You try taking that off, and you'll get a knife or a bullet."

"This," Doc said, "is a good way to start a business conference."

"You don't have to see anybody to talk, do you?"

"Bring on your man!" Doc said angrily.

He tried to decide, by ear only, what was going on, but this proved difficult because of the amount of walking about, whispering, shuffling of feet, moving of furniture. He began to feel very creepy. Not that he had felt at ease before he came aboard.

The voice, when it finally addressed him, was disguised, he decided, by the speaker holding something in his mouth.

"I'm the stud duck around here," the voice advised.

"You're Cavu?"

"That's as good a name as any. Let's hear your proposition."

"Brother," Doc said violently, "we didn't make any proposition. Your man made it."

The voice became conciliatory. "I understand that. Go ahead and outline the thing as you conceive it. I want to see whether we understand each other."

Doc said that was reasonable. He ran over the terms that had been discussed—each group of pirates to keep its own swag, expenses on each job to be charged to that job, general expenses of maintaining the base—which would be the tramp steamer—divided among everyone. He reviewed the suggested method of using a gold mine to move gold bullion, and sharing expense of that. He said, "I think a better method would be to pro-rate the mine expenses in proportion to the amount of bullion each outfit moves."

"That's about what I had in mind." The voice sounded satisfied. "What guarantees have you got in mind?"

"Guarantees of what, for God's sake?"

"That you're on the up-and-up."

Doc snorted, and endeavored to sound as disgusted as Whitey should sound. "Listen, brother, we've both got to take chances until we get acquainted. We've got seven million in bullion aboard, and a good ransom prospect, and if anybody should worry about being doublecrossed, it's us."

"Ransom is out."

"That," Doc said, "reminds me of another point. Who's going to be top dog of this thing? And don't say you are, because you'll get an argument."

"Any objections to a joint command?"

"Not if it's really joint."

"Willing to abide by a general vote on this ransom question?"

"I suppose so."

"It's a deal."

When, a moment later, Doc asked, "Anything else you want to discuss?" it was Mr. Govern who answered. "He's gone. It's over. I'll go back with you."

"What the hell? Don't I get to take this blindfold off?"

"In the plane. In the plane."

In the launch, riding back to the plane, Doc realized gloomily that he had no idea what the steamer looked like at close range and that he stood no chance whatever of going before a court and identifying the man known as Cavu. It had been, the whole interview, melodramatic to the point of being silly, but it had been cautiously effective. They were clever.

"Take it off," Govern said. They were at the plane. Govern had a chart which he spread out when they were in the seaplane. "This is where we are." He marked a spot. "You know the position of your sub, so you can get us back."

Doc saw, astonished, that the submarine was not quite a hundred miles from the reef anchorage. "Do we bring our sub

here?"

"Why not?"

"I just wanted to know." Doc eyed him narrowly. "I thought you guys had two subs. I haven't seen any sign of them."

Mr. Govern said he thought that was funny indeed. Did anybody think he, or Cavu either, was sucker enough to lay both subs in where they could be picked up without much effort? "Anyway, they're out on jobs," he added. "One of them isn't due back for about thirty days. The other one will be in next week sometime."

"You don't," Doc said, "seem to trust me."

"Sure we trust you—as much as you trust us."

Doc said dryly, "This should be one big happy family. You ready to take off?" Mr. Govern said he was set. Both engines started without hesitancy, all the dials behaved as they should. The man in the launch had untied the anchor line, showing surprise at the kind of knot he found it tied with. The launch moved away. Doc let the plane weathercock itself into the wind, then opened the throttle and took off, passing near the tramp steamer at about the level of the vessel's deck.

On the steamer, there was some profanity, and nervous fingers on half a dozen machine guns which, concealed back of portholes, had been following the plane.

Somebody said, "Damn him! He came close so he could get a look at the deck."

Another man, who evidently had done some flying, said soothingly, "You can't see any detail to speak of, going past in a plane that fast. If he had taken a picture, that would be a different matter. But Govern will see he didn't."

"I say, we had him. Why let him go?"

"Because there's more of his men on the sub. Why not clean up the crowd, all at one lick?"

They watched the plane, climbing steadily, become indistinguishable against the somber sky. After that, there was a relaxing, and lighting of cigarettes. Amidships, they were lowering a box of hand grenades into the launch.

"They're a hundred miles away," said a man who, on the bridge, was working over a chart. "Give the plane an hour to reach there. Say the sub will make twenty knots. They won't cruise that, but say they do to be safe. That gives us six hours."

"Plenty of time."

The launch headed out toward the entrance to the pocket-like anchorage surrounded by the reef formation. Here there were two fingerboard markers of the type used to mark channels in shoal water, but which obviously did not indicate a channel. They were range sights. The launch, passing out to sea, kept them aligned behind and ran for about fifteen minutes at fair speed.

Hand grenades, tossed overboard, now made four loud gulping noises astern as they exploded; there was a pause, then another gulp. The launch made a lazy turning circle, and by the time this was completed, an underseas boat was breaking water. A few moments later, another surfaced. Both craft were of Japanese manufacture, and they had been lying in water of sufficient depth, and on dark bottom which blended with their hull coloring, effectively concealed.

The launch collected the commander and an officer from each sub, then headed back for the tramp.

"We've got a pretty set-up," the launch pilot volunteered.

The submarine officers were interested. Their vessels, equipped with radar, had submerged at the approach of the plane. The radar, effective at far more than eye range, had given them time to get down safely, and they had lain on the bottom until the signal, four explosions, a pause and another blast, indicated there was no longer danger. That was all they knew about the situation.

The launch pilot grinned at them.

"Doc Savage just paid us a visit," he said, blowing their hats off.

The conference aboard the steamer was a grim matter. One of the sub captains, whom they called Blackman, demanded to know the background of the whole thing.

"You remember Willie Colton?"

Blackman said sure he remembered Willie, the thieving so-and-so. What had he done, cut his own mother's throat?

"Nah, just sold out his pals again. You see Willie got himself in with a gang that was planning to seize a Nazi submarine from the U. S. Navy and go into the same business we're in. When the scheme got far enough along that Willie knew it would probably come off, he got word, indirectly, to Govern. The next time Govern was in New York, he looked up Willie, and Willie gave him the dope. So right away, plans were laid. Govern was to contact these new pirates and offer a merger, and get them down here where we could knock them off and grab us another submarine, plus whatever in the way of gravy they had aboard the sub at the time."

"Where does Doc Savage come in?"

"Right where he was least expected. He's the leader of this pirate gang."

"Oh, hell! I don't believe it!" Blackman's eyes narrowed speculatively. "Say, if Savage has turned pirate, he would be a damned good man to tie up with!"

"He ain't so don't start licking your lips, brother. Savage and some of his men are on the sub. Govern doesn't know how many of Savage's men, and neither does Willie Colton. Willie hadn't dreamed this pirate—they call him Whitey—was Doc Savage."

Blackman was skeptical. "You meanta tell me the rest of the

crew on the sub don't know Savage is their stud duck?"

"That's right. They're all genuine pirates but Savage, some of his men—Govern doesn't think it can be more than three or four aboard—and a newspaper or magazine writer, a girl, and some guy with her, and another guy they've got for ransom."

"Well, for God's sake! How did Govern get wise?"

"Govern," the other said, "used to be a college professor. You knew that, didn't you? He taught speech, and like some speech professors, he learned to read lips. Okay, he reads lips still. So he saw, saw mind you, a big guy they call Colorado Jones address this Whitey as Doc. That might have been all right—a lot of guys call other guys by the nickname Doc. But Whitey and this Colorado Jones said something about Pete somebody now having a gun, and Pete somebody is the magazine guy with the girl. That, and using his bean, tipped Govern off."

The explanations out of the way, the plan for trapping the submarine was laid. Govern, it was explained, was to convince Doc Savage that the other two submarines belonging to the pirates were absent on forays and would not return, the first one, for at least a week.

Returning for the conference, Doc's sub was to be induced to enter the anchorage within the reefs.

"Once inside, they're cornered. One of our subs takes up a position near the mouth of the channel to block escape. The

other sub will be lying in position, and all it has to do is raise its periscope for a signal, and let fly a torpedo when Savage's sub is in target position. Then it will surface and help shoot any survivors."

"What about Govern?"

"He won't be on Savage's sub then."

"How come?"

"He'll be in the launch, going ahead, showing the way into the channel. That way, he'll be in the clear."

"Think they'll fall for that?"

"Why not? It's a pipe. A pushover."

"Hell, he might just lie off the reef and keep us penned up in here until the Navy shows up."

"No, no, he can't. Because he's got a crew of genuine pirates. Govern figured out his whole plan. It must have been to turn pirate to get trace of us, then notify the Navy. That's what he'll try to do—play along until he can notify the Navy."

"Yeah, but what if—"

"Radio them before he gets here? Govern is gonna take care of that."

Blackman said, "It sounds okay to me, except the part about coming inside the anchorage with the subs. I don't like that

entrance channel. It's pretty narrow, and not too deep."

"You've been in before, haven't you?"

"Sure, sure." Blackman consulted his watch. "What if they get here during daylight and see us? You'll never get them inside then."

"You'll be submerged inside the anchorage. There's plenty of water to cover you. And they'll come in at night. Govern will see to that. They won't notice you."

"Then we better get active," Blackman said.

XI

The seaplane, veering suddenly, rammed its float into the hull of the submarine. There was a crunching as the tip of the left wing was mangled by the deck stanchions. Mr. Govern, looking as sorry as he could, yelled, "Hell, that was my fault! I tripped on the rudder by accident!" He was not sorry. He thought: boy, that fixes it so they won't be taking no other looks at the anchorage from the air right away. They won't find the subs.

There was some profanity and shoving, and a pirate fell overboard and was hauled back again, before the hoist gear was made fast and the plane lifted aboard and, wings folded,

was inserted in the deck hangar. Doc and Govern had gone below.

"One thing more, I forgot to tell you. Radio silence. You keep radio silence," Govern said.

"Haven't we been?" Doc scowled. "What is this, anyway?"

Govern shrugged. "That's Cavu's orders, not mine. I told him I didn't think there was a chance of you having pals you would call in after you got us located. He said it wouldn't hurt anyway."

"Pals?"

Mr. Govern grinned. "You'd be surprised how many million bucks there are on that old tramp steamer."

"Yeah? We weren't going to use the radio anyway. But that don't apply to radar."

"Not to radar," Mr. Govern said. "But I'm gonna fritz the radio, if you don't mind."

"The hell you are! I'm not going to have that set disabled!"

Mr. Govern said it wouldn't be disabled. He would merely take out some tubes. He said he was quite familiar with radio apparatus, and this seemed to be true, because he did nothing but remove the tubes, the strategic ones. Doc watched him.

They marked out the course on the chart, and turned it over to Eli Stanley, who was in charge of the current watch. After

he had fiddled with a computer, Eli said, "We'll probably get there before midnight."

Doc Savage and Govern, enroute to the galley to get something to eat, stopped to look in at the millionaire who was being held for ransom, Mr. Calvin R. Ingraham. A slender, tired, bruised and frightened figure, Mr. Ingraham scowled at them from the bunk. He cursed them bitterly. Govern laughed. Doc said, "You're on thin ice, brother." They re-fastened the door.

"My advice," said Govern when they were walking on to the galley, "is to tap that guy on the head and drop him overboard."

"You speak too lightly," Doc said, "of a hundred thousand dollars."

"Think we'll get that much out of him?"

"Why not?"

They had corned beef hash and biscuits and fruit, all from cans, in the galley. Mr. Govern said he thought he would get some sleep.

Doc Savage made sure Govern was, if not asleep, at least in his bunk, after which he collected Renny Renwick, alias Colorado Jones, and they got Pete Idle. They held a conference in Brenda Linahan's cabin.

"We're in a jam," Doc said bluntly. "They know I'm Doc Savage."

The cigarette Pete Idle held between his lips split and broke as his lips tightened and terror seemed to make his eyes go out of focus for a few moments, then cross, the left eye remaining fixed, the right one moving inward slowly until Pete had a vacuous, imbecile-like expression. Foolishly, he removed the wreck of the cigarette and pulled shreds of tobacco off his lip.

Brenda's reaction, more inward, hence probably more violent, was curtailed quickly by an instinctive rush of disbelief.

"I don't like the time you pick for jokes," she said.

Doc shook his head. "No joke. I wish it were."

"But how . . . ?"

"I don't know. We slipped somewhere. I'm sure Govern didn't know it when he came aboard, but I'm also positive he knows it now."

Renny Renwick was examining his large fists bitterly. "Holy cow! I wonder—you say you're sure? What gave you the tip-off?"

"It was largely, I think, the way they're doing this," Doc explained. He described with considerable exactness the flight, the landing, the interview—he was quite detailed about the interview, repeating much of it word for word—and the return. "Notice anything phony about the interview?" he asked Renny.

Renny stirred doubtfully. "Was that all that was said?"

"Yes."

"It seems to me this guy who talked to you when you were blindfolded, Cavu or whoever he was, might have shown more interest in practical details like how many men we've got, what kind of equipment, our contacts ashore, and such. You had a lot of such detail prepared, didn't you, stuff that was phony, but would check out as being true if they investigated it?"

"That's it."

Brenda was skeptical. "It seems to me you've based a terrible conclusion on awfully little."

"Well, add a little guesswork and hunching," Doc said.

"That's what I thought! You don't really know."

"I'm going to act as if I did," Doc assured her.

Pete, who was impressed by Doc Savage, asked Brenda, "Want to put a little bet on it? I'll lay you he's right. This thing was too good, and maybe too complicated, to last."

"Damn both your hunches! I wish I were back in New York," Brenda said bitterly. "I'm scared. I don't care who knows it. I've been scared for days. When Govern pointed that gun at me on the *Poinsettia*, I thought I was as frightened as I was capable of becoming. Every day since I've thought the same thing, and I keep being wrong."

Renny wished to know what Doc thought they should do about it. "We could, as a last resort, circulate a rumor in our crew and get them to thinking this other gang of pirates is going to hi-jack them out of their loot." He frowned, added, "But that wouldn't be too good. The tramp steamer would haul out of that anchorage, and probably be hard to find, no more identification than we've got. There was no name on it, you say?"

"No name. And it was exactly like most of the other Liberty ships that were turned out early in the war. Likewise, I think you're right about it slapping out. Probably if we're not there by midnight, the steamer will be gone by daylight."

"But surely Navy planes could find it," Brenda exclaimed.

"Might. But maybe not. And if they did, could they prove anything? As cunning as these fellows are, I'll bet you that by the time a boarding party went aboard, there wouldn't be a shred of evidence."

Renny thought so too. "They would find an innocent tramp steamer engaged in trading in the islands."

"Exactly what," Pete Idle wanted to know, "have they ordered you to do?"

"Enter the anchorage."

"The lagoon."

"It's not a lagoon. Just an anchorage. It's a horse-shoe shaped coral reef formation, partly exposed at low tide in a few places. But it won't be a coral island and a lagoon for a few thousand more years."

"Then what?"

"I don't know. And I don't intend to find out," Doc said.

"But—"

"We can't wait until they spring their trap." Doc was emphatic on that point. "If we do, we'll have to fight our own crew as well as theirs. Too big odds."

"Have you got a plan?"

Doc nodded. He got a paper out of the former Nazi skipper's desk and proceeded to sketch, with remarkable accuracy considering the brief time he'd had to study it, the anchorage. "This is fairly close to scale," he said. He marked figures here and there. "These are the approximate soundings in feet, as nearly as I could guess the depth." He sketched in the tramp steamer. "The old Liberty was there, but they may move it." He added some more soundings around the inlet.

Renny, who had been watching, grunted suddenly. "Holy cow! We can block the inlet!"

Pete leaned over his shoulder to look. "How?"

"With this sub."

Pete quickly turned the color of white lead. "Oh, cripes! Is that safe?"

"We'll be glad to have you come up with a better idea," Renny told him grimly.

XII

At twenty minutes past eleven, standard time, Mr. Govern said, "They see us." He whipped a flashlight across the conning tower rail, aimed it carefully, and gave four rapid blinks of light, a pause, then another blink. From the distant steamer in the anchorage came a single answering wink. "Good." Govern thrust the flashlight in his coat pocket. "Now we go in. The launch will pick us up outside and lead us in through the channel."

Doc Savage concluded that Mr. Govern had missed his calling in not having been an actor. He had said as much to Renny earlier, and Renny agreed, except that he added this could have been the next best thing to Mr. Govern not having been born at all. Renny now stood at Doc's elbow.

"Colorado," Doc said.

"Yeah?" Renny grunted.

"Go below. Check to make sure everyone is at emergency

stations. No leaving posts because of curiosity. Impress that on them."

"Okay." Renny slouched away.

Mr. Govern did not approve of Renny. "That fellow," he said, "should serve a hitch in the Navy. Teach him discipline."

"The only discipline Colorado understands is a hard fist."

"Yes. . . . I heard you had a fight with him the night you took the sub."

Doc made no comment. He put a pair of night glasses on the distant steamer, and observed the launch just leaving the landing stage. "They're coming," he remarked. He passed the glasses to Govern who, Doc noted, scanned the entire lagoon with them. A grim suspicion hit Doc. He thought: the man's not interested in the launch or steamer. He's searching the surface inside the anchorage. Why?

Doc became convinced that one or more of the pirate submarines was inside the anchorage.

The sub moved forward lazily under surface-engine power. Govern was still peering at the anchorage, but presently he handed the glasses back, and Doc, wary lest his attention was being cunningly misdirected, made a slow turn, covering the whole horizon with the lenses. He saw nothing, but the night was hazy, almost foggy, so not seeing anything did not necessarily mean there was nothing there.

He could hear the launch engine now, It was quite noisy,

and he wondered suddenly why they had taken off the muffler, then he remembered that on the other occasion he had heard the launch he had been deafened slightly by riding in the plane, so the launch exhaust might be no louder now than it had been.

Eli Stanley and Colton were on the outside bridge with Doc and Govern. "Maybe we oughta get the gratings off the boat islands," Eli suggested.

"What good could you do against them floating around in a lifeboat?" Doc asked.

Renny came up from below. "Everything okay," he said.

Govern, on edge, easily irritated, snarled at him, "Why don't you phrase it the proper way! Say, 'Everything secure, sir.'"

Renny looked at him coldly. "Nuts to you."

Doc Savage stepped close to Mr. Govern and swung his right fist against Govern's jaw. Govern saw the blow coming too late, and there was a bare instant when surprise and horror contorted his whole face. He fell heavily, and Renny caught him, lowered him to the deck.

"His hat and coat," Doc said. "Take them off. They're the same ones he was wearing this afternoon."

Eli and Colton gaped, mouths widely and roundly open, not, for the moment, able to breathe, they were so taken by astonishment.

Doc gave them as evil a look as he could put on over

excitement and said, "We're not going into this like sheep. But don't alarm the guys below."

Renny had Govern's coat and hat. Doc said, "Put them on."

Renny was reluctant. He knew the launch would be the safest spot when hell broke loose. "Hadn't you better—"

"No, you'll go in the launch."

The launch was close now. There were two men in it. If they were armed, the weapons were not in sight. The small boat made a circle, came in astern, and put-putted alongside. Doc gave orders. Eli and Colton, with boathooks, laid hold of the launch, and it laid heavily against the hull.

Doc jumped aboard the launch.

The pirates stared at him. "Hell, thought you were—where's Govern?" one muttered.

"Govern's indisposed. He's not coming."

The two men froze. It did them no good. Eli and Colton held the launch. Renny had a gun in his hand.

Doc also produced a gun. "Sit down. Act natural. And after you're down, take your guns out and drop them overboard. You're going to pilot us through the channel, and no funny business."

The two pirates stared at the menacing guns, at each other. Their eyes were wide, glittering in the darkness. "Better do it,

Ken," one said. And Ken nodded, then cursed bitterly. He shut up when Doc ordered him to do so.

"Get aboard," Doc told Renny. When Renny was in the launch, Doc himself climbed on deck. "Cast off."

As the launch eased forward, they heard Renny order, "Take us through the inlet. And if the sub goes aground, I'm going to shoot both of you immediately."

The two pirates seemed somewhat relieved.

"So that's what's eating you," one exclaimed.

Doc wheeled on Eli and Colton. "Get out on the bow, clear out. Use sounding leads, and use them fast. One of you on port and one on starboard. We don't want to take any chances of running out of water."

The pair moved with willing alacrity. Now they probably thought they understood the reasons for the violence and surprise. Doc was merely afraid the sub was going to be led aground. That was what they must think.

Doc took over the steering control. He called down, "Speed six knots ahead." And, a moment later, he also ordered, "Blow safety. Blow all tanks." That was a natural command, because they would know that the submarine should ride as high as possible while passing through the gap in the reef into the anchorage.

It would keep them busy below, too, give them something to think about.

Lifting slowly until, cork-like, it rode high on the surface, the submarine moved forward. A short wake streamed out aft. From the launch, Renny called out changes of course as they occurred, because the approach to the inlet was not direct. Reefs, coral heads, had to be dodged.

"By the mark, five." Eli sang out soundings.

Doc swung a gaze at the tramp steamer. Nothing alarming there. His eyes searched the comparatively calm water of the anchorage. There, he felt, was where trouble would come from when it came. Let it come, he thought. He left the wheel a moment to slug Govern's jaw again, insuring the man's continued unconsciousness.

"And a half, four!" Colton called the depth of water.

Four and a half fathoms. Twenty-seven feet. The depth should not get any less—he hardly expected it to be this shallow, and he listened intently, suspiciously.

"On the mark, five!" Colton yelled.

The bar! That was it. They had passed over the bar, where the water always shoaled up somewhat. He listened to Eli and Colton shout soundings, and the water deepened slightly. They were entering the channel.

Anxiously, he swung his eyes, trying to ascertain just how far they were into the inlet channel. Suddenly he broke out in cold perspiration. This was deadly. If they didn't get in far enough, or got too far.

"How much farther before we're out of the channel?" he shouted at Renny.

He could distinguish Renny leaning over one of the pirates in the launch. Then Renny bellowed, "Over halfway through!"

He saw Renny's arm rise, fall, saw the pirate go down. He saw Renny close with the other pirate, begin fighting, and saw a gun muzzle spit pale red flame.

He saw this, actually, while he was bawling into the speaking tube, "Full speed ahead! Full speed! Quick!"

Feverishly, he put the wheel to port. Put it over as far as it would go, to emergency turn. He could feel, distinctly, the power surge from the engines. The vessel gained speed. It was already going fairly fast, better than six knots, which was almost enough by itself. He held his breath, waiting.

The bow hit the left side of the channel. It hit hard and harshly, grinding, lifting, tearing at the coral, embedding itself.

"Kill starboard engine! Full speed, port engine!" he roared into the tubes.

Then he locked the rudder hard over, left it, and dropped below down the hatch.

Amazed, frightened, angry faces confronted him. He repeated his engine order. "Kill starboard engine. Full speed on port engine. Quick! Give it everything!" To the bewildered faces, he said, "Stay below! For God's sake, stay below!" He didn't want them out on deck if he possibly could prevent it. It

was something he couldn't prevent. But he might delay.

He squeezed past, went toward the bow. Reaching the cubicle where Pete Idle was confined first, he wrenched open the door, said, "This is it. Come on."

Pete was, he saw with relief, going to be all right. There was no more than a natural amount of fear and excitement on Pete's rather homely face. Pete had been supplied with a revolver and a box of cartridges, and he got these from where he had hidden them.

Doc indicated the gun. "You may not have to shoot it. Keep it out of sight. Shoot only as a last resort to save somebody's life."

Pete nodded, then shuddered and said, "Hell, don't scare me!"

"We'll get Miss Linahan."

Brenda was ready. Her color wasn't normal and she wasn't as talkative as usual. She also had a gun, which she had declared she wouldn't be able to shoot, and in addition she carried a folded sheet and the essential parts of a first-aid kit which she had made into a package. "Red Cross service," she explained. Pete grinned through his nervousness and assured her, "You're wonderful, baby."

"One more," Doc explained.

He reached the little cubicle where Mr. Calvin R. Ingraham, financier, was confined.

Pete was dubious. "Will that old gaffer be any help? Of course we ought to save his neck, but maybe he'll be safer—"

"I've been holding out on you." Doc was unfastening the door to the cubicle, which was hardly more than a locker. "This guy will be a lot of help. He's Ham Brooks—Brigadier General Theodore Marley Brooks. One of my associates."

Ham Brooks still looked like Mr. Ingraham, financier. But his manner wasn't Mr. Ingraham's cowed, how-dare-you manner.

Doc looked into the cubicle. "You hide the evidence?"

"Sure," Ham said. "If this flops, I hope they throw me back in there." He grinned at Brenda. "Haven't I seen you somewhere?"

"You should remember," she said.

Doc moved forward. "We'll go out through a gun access hatch. It'll be quicker."

The releasing of Brenda, Pete and Ham had taken time, although not as much time, probably, as it had seemed to Doc to require. He was pitting himself against astonishment, hoping confusion would hold the crew long enough for him to gain the deck. He realized now that he was going to lose. But he had expected that. Another thing he hadn't expected was four men, crowding around the gun access hatch, fighting to get it open and outside.

He said grimly, "One apiece for us. Don't shoot."

As he spoke, Ham went in ahead of him, grimly. Ham was fresh. Ham said loudly, "Here, boys, you've got to undog it at the top. Look at the top!" The subterfuge didn't quite work, because one man turned his head, recognized Ham as the prisoner for ransom, and yelled.

Ham clubbed the man, who promptly went down and slid past Ham's legs. Ham, probably thinking the man was knocked out, closed with another, but not as successfully. His intended victim got hold of Ham's gun arm with both hands, leaped up, and instantly locked both legs around Ham's middle in a scissors.

Action was vicious, silent, too fast for conscious thinking, planning, too swift for clear understanding. Doc, going forward, had his legs embraced by the man Ham had clubbed. If the clubbing had slowed up this fellow, it was not at all apparent.

Doc stumbled forward, knowing he was going to fall, but he got his hands on another man and pulled that one down. He was hit in the face. He struck back. He was down now. One man had his legs. He had one with his hands. Suddenly, somehow, Ham and the man he was wrestling with fell into the pile. Presently Pete Idle walked over the top of all of them to get at the remaining enemy, stepping, in the process, on Ham's face.

Pete was hit between the eyes with a gun barrel. There seemed no good reason why the blow should not have killed him. But it did not. All it did was start him batting his eyes uncontrollably at the rate of about twice a second, a symptom

that persisted, to his alarm, for several hours. Pete grabbed the gun that had hit him. He got it, fell over backward with it. His enemy, overbalanced, upset on top of him.

Now and for the following seconds, the cramped area was a senseless tangle of anatomy, gasps, curses, and sinew-wrenching effort. Brenda kept saying, "Hold him, so I can hit him!" to someone. She sounded, it seemed to Doc, so calm that he wondered about her sanity whenever he had time to wonder about anything.

Doc struck, twisted, gouged, bit whoever and whatever he could strike, twist, gouge or bite. In return he was struck, twisted, gouged and hit. He had, presently, the horrible feeling that they were going to fight there, like a barrellful of wildcats and snakes, forever, for all eternity.

He hardly knew when or how it was over, but it was, and Brenda was saying angrily to someone farther back in the submarine, "Go away, you!" and firing her gun.

They got the hatch open.

Doc had, fortunately, the foresight to yell, "Renny! Renny, be careful!" before they went out on deck. It was fortunate because Renny, in the launch which was now alongside the submarine, was calmly taking pot-shots at each and every head that appeared.

They scrambled out on the wet, slippery deck.

"In the launch," Doc said.

Brenda held back, gasping, "Mr. Ingraham—Ham Brooks is hit! He's down!"

Doc shoved her toward the launch, not gently, said, "Get going!" He turned back to see about Ham, but Ham came out of the hatch. "I got it," Ham said.

What he had got was a light machine gun, a Reising. They had planted it there previously. They had, as a matter of fact, planted the guns in several places on the sub for an emergency. But this seemed to be the only one they were going to be able to reach.

"Into the launch!"

Their boarding of the launch was, when they looked back on it later, comical, and it was certainly painful. Because each of them without exception lost footing on the slick sub hull and fell ignominiously into the craft. It was moving before they got untangled, and Renny was yelling angrily, "Holy cow, quit clowning! Use that machine gun! Use it!"

Doc, bruised and irked, said, "Run the launch!"

A moment later, Ham unlimbered the machine gun, and it frightened them all with its roar. He dusted off the conning tower. They could see a couple of tracers arch off strangely into the night.

Doc decided he would steer the launch. It would be very bad if they hit the reef at any point, or collided with a coral head. He took the helm from Renny, who demanded, "What kept you?"

Before he could answer, the launch hit a coral horn. The impact, not inconsiderable, upset them all, piled them against seats and thwarts. The launch heeling, grinding and rending, seemed to be on the point of capsizing, then didn't, and slid off the coral head and started moving again.

"We have a leak!" Brenda gasped, making what was probably the understatement of the night. A fire hose could not have put water in the launch faster than it was coming in.

Doc Savage, trying to visualize the lay of the reef, swung the launch so as to parallel it. There might be more coral heads, but they would have to take a chance with those. Renny, on all fours with a flashlight, was stuffing his coat in a rent. He said, "Five minutes, maybe, is all we can stay afloat."

"Enough," Doc said.

Pete Idle yelled, pointed, yelled again. Neither cry was words.

"Two submarines!" Brenda exclaimed.

I was right, Doc reflected grimly. They were inside, where I thought they were. Both subs in the anchorage. Trapped.

"We get a break," he said grimly.

"A good one would be a change," Brenda told him. "How do you figure—"

"Watch."

On the submarine jammed across the inlet, they had manned one of the deck guns, and it now fired, the flash lighting up the night, dashing dark red light across the water about them. Far away, far out beyond one of the submarines, the shell exploded.

Ham's grunt was disgusted. "I don't see how they missed at that point-blank range."

"They'll plant the next one," Renny said.

He was right. The second shot was a clean hit on a conning tower. Renny, with the appraising guess of an expert, said, "They didn't do any real damage. Just messed up the conning tower and probably killed a few guys." He strained his eyes. "Why don't those birds turn loose torpedoes?"

Doc said, "We could hardly see the wake." He was maneuvering the launch in toward the reef, beginning to wonder if they were going to go aground before they sank. He could see breakers ahead. That, he hoped, would be a part of the reef which was hardly below the surface. They grounded.

"Out and behind the launch," he advised. "Better work away from the launch, in case somebody pops a shell into it."

Brenda said, "I hear an airplane."

"Your imagination," Pete assured her. "Can you swim?"

"Of course."

"Well, I can't, so—"

The sea seemed to jump around them, and the tops fell off the small waves. The explosion, probably not as gigantic as they thought it was, did not upset them, but its shock, through the water, made their legs tingle.

"Torpedo," Doc said. "There should be three"—he paused to let three more terrific explosions occur in succession—"more, and there they are. One sub emptied all the bow tubes."

"I tell you, I hear an airplane—more than one," Brenda exclaimed.

The submarine lying in the inlet was badly mangled, but by no means demolished. There was no more firing from it, though.

Down through the darkened sky above, dropping from beneath the cloud overcast, two planes came slanting. Approximately over the inlet, they leveled out, and both of them dropped flares. The amount of light suddenly over the anchorage was stunning. Doc could see the faces of his companions clearly. He wheeled toward the northern horizon, and in a moment saw the flash of a medium caliber gun.

Pete heard the shell approaching, gasped, "Oh, oh, I know what that is." He dived under the surface. Doc hauled him out, explained, "The concussion might—"

Two thousand yards beyond the tramp steamer, the shell burst. It was not spectacular; its shock was a faint slap against their legs, stomachs, brought by the water. A second one fell a

hundred yards short of the steamer. Renny said, "The planes overhead are spotting!"

Then Brenda screamed, "Look! Look!" She was pointing into the north where, visibly outlined at intervals by the flash of its guns, stood a light cruiser.

Ham was laughing. "If I wasn't an old Army man, I'd say a kind word for the Navy," he said. "I'd say—" He didn't explain what he would have said, didn't finish, for his mouth roundly opened with horror, his eyes swelled and protruded, and in his neck, sinews whipped tight with horror.

Mr. Govern was walking out of the deep water on to the reef. It was incredible that he could have gotten there without being seen, heard, incredible that he could have gotten there at all. But he was there, and the revolver in his hand shaking just enough to make it frightening.

XIII

Another shell arched through the sky, hit the tramp steamer squarely; flame, pieces of ship, pieces of men, smoke, climbed around crazily above the deck; there was enough noise to interfere with what Mr. Govern was saying, but not enough noise to drown it out.

"Five of you," he was saying. "Five. Just right. Just enough

to go around." His voice, guttural, hoarse, veined with fear, was not quite rational. He did not explain why five was such a good number. They knew he must mean there were five bullets in his gun.

He peered at Ham and said, "So they bothered with you!" He seemed surprised. A wave, curling over the reef, breaking, sloshed past Govern's shoulders, for a moment immersing his arms, the gun. But he kept his balance and the wave was gone in a moment. He said, "These cartridges are waterproof." He scowled at Ham, asked, "Who the hell are you?"

Doc Savage said swiftly, "Tell him the story, Ham! Tell him! He should know it, before he does anything!"

"Radio!" Ham said. He was hoarse. He had to fight down the impulse to yell words. His story—the story wouldn't help them. It wouldn't stop Govern. Govern would shoot them as quick after he heard the story as before. But the story would do one thing; it would get them time. Govern might listen. Time. Time was, at this moment, all there was of life. "Radio!" Ham blurted. "I kept the cruiser posted by radio. As a matter of fact, the cruiser was following the *Poinsettia*, keeping out of sight below the horizon, from the time we sailed from New York."

Flames were climbing up from the tramp steamer. They gave enough light to stain Govern's face redly. He was pushing out his lower lip at them, disbelievingly. He said, "You, Mr. Calvin R. Ingraham, didn't have a radio."

"I'm Ham Brooks."

"We searched you," Govern said. "I searched you myself."

"It was planted."

"Where?"

"In that compartment where they imprisoned me on the sub. A good job of hiding it, too. Outside antenna and everything. Used one of the regular antenna, through concealed wiring."

A wave broke around, but not quite over, Mr. Govern again. It didn't bother him. He stood like a post. His gun and hand were one rigid object. The revolver, a hammer model, was cocked.

"How," he demanded, "did you know you'd get locked up in that compartment?"

Ham said, "Doc Savage was giving the orders aboard, remember? And also, that little cubbyhole was a logical place for a prisoner like me."

Govern licked salt water off his lips. "So you went aboard as a prisoner for that. Cute."

Ham was frightened now. Afraid they would be shot at once. It was pretty certain. He said, "I kept the radio operating almost steadily. It was the most feasible way of keeping an operator at a secret radio."

"Cute," Govern said.

Doc, urgently, said, "There's another angle. You better hear it." There was no other angle.

No other angle. But there was another wave, coming in slowly, swelling the way waves do when they move into shoal water. Not as large a wave as the others, a feeble wave. Doc watched it, and knew it was life and death. A very small wave, feeble, futile.

A shell hit one of the submarines. Hit it squarely, opening it forward of the conning tower, making a hole with jagged curled edges as if a piece the shape of a sunflower had been cut out of the steel.

Govern cocked his gun. He said, "Nothing I do will get me hanged any quicker. That's one satisfaction." He was waiting for the wave.

"One thing more!" Doc said urgently. "There's Cavu. Cavu. Let me tell you—"

"I'm Cavu," Mr. Govern said. "You can't tell me a damned thing about Cavu, because Cavu is me."

"I knew that," Doc said.

Govern stared. "For God's sake, when? The hell with it, never mind! Time is—" The wave came up around him. He went silent. The rising water covered his gun. He could have raised it, but he didn't because the gun had gotten wet when he was swimming and one more wetting would make no difference. The cartridges were, as he said, waterproof.

Doc said, "Take him, Renny!" He didn't, probably, get it all out. Because he was going forward, forward and down, diving into the wave. Now, for two or three seconds, Govern's—

Cavu's—gun would be immersed. They had to do it all in that time.

Govern's gun exploded. It did his ears no good. Did the gun no good, either, because, when the bullet trying to get out of the barrel encountered the resistance of water, the back-pressure of powder split the cylinder. The rest was merely a matter of beating Mr. Govern down, of holding him under water, of hammering him, choking him, of tying his wrists with his own belt. This they did with enthusiasm.

The light cruiser was coming in fast. Its guns were silent, and its searchlights thrust out long, white, rod-like beams that probed and searched. The submarine that had been hit was down by the stern; the other was flying a white cloth of some sort.

Doc watched the steamer.

"They're going to beach it," he said. "I hope they do. The loot they've taken may be aboard." He wheeled on Govern, demanded, "What about that? Is the loot your outfit has picked up on board the steamer?"

Govern said nothing most expressively.

"Cavu is silent," Ham said. He laughed. "It's aboard. He wouldn't have that look on his face if it weren't." He nudged Govern. "What about it?"

Pete Idle grinned. "Cavu wishes he could walk the plank." Pete looked at the burning steamer, the two subs, the oncoming cruiser. He became miserable, disgusted. "No cameraman!" he

complained. "All this, and no cameraman!"

Doc Savage relaxed. It was all right; things were back to normal. Pete Idle was again a magazine editor, worrying about *Solar*, *The News Weekly* and everything was fine.

Brenda clutched his arm, pointed happily at the cruiser.

"They've seen us," she said.

[The end of *Five Fathoms Dead* by Lester Dent (as Kenneth Robeson)]