

Poison Island

A Doc Savage Adventure
#57

Kenneth Robeson
[Lester Dent]
1939

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William Harper Littlejohn, the bespectacled scientist who was the world's greatest living expert on geology and archaeology.

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

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

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

Brigadier General Theodore Marley Brooks, slender and waspy, he was never without his ominous, black sword cane.

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

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THE GOLDEN PERIL
THE GIGGLING GHOSTS
POISON ISLAND

POISON ISLAND

A DOC SAVAGE ADVENTURE

BY KENNETH ROBESON

POISON ISLAND

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POISON ISLAND

Chapter 1

THE HINDU SAID

On the morning of September 4th, the American newspapers carried a small item. It read:

BLANCO GRANDE, Hidalgo—An attempted revolution against the established government of this Central American republic was smashed at its very outset today, according to officials. About a dozen persons were killed. Police are searching for the revolutionists, who have taken to hiding.

That night—fortunately it was very dark—a large, sunburned young man, Herb March by name, climbed down out of the tree in which he had been sitting all day. The tree grew beside the Avenue Prado, which was a street that followed the water front of the town that was the principal and practically the only seaport of Hidalgo, the Central American republic where the revolution had stubbed its toe. It was a tree with a lot of leaves, and had been an excellent temporary refuge.

Herb March left the tree reluctantly. He peered about, hoping he wouldn't see any uniformed Hidalgoans with rifles. He made a mental note—no more revolutions.

If they caught him, he was sure there would be no more revolutions for Herb March. There would be adobe wall with some fresh bullet pocks in it, and a six-foot-long mound of new-tamped earth on the hill, which the jungle would soon cover.

And all because two hundred dollars a week for flying a plane and dropping a few bombs had looked like easy money to a young man tramping the tropics in search of adventure. The only bomb that had been dropped had been dropped by the government aviators—on the plane Herb had been hired to fly. And now they were looking for him.

It was a glorious tropical night, although there weren't any stars; there wasn't even a moon, in fact, and the breeze was hot and steamy enough to

be coming out of a tea kettle. It was glorious because it wasn't raining. Usually it rained.

Along the water front, and tied up to the piers, were boats. A motley assortment of seagoing wreckage, those boats; Herb March had peered out of the tree at them a few times during the day, and wondered why they didn't sink at their moorings.

One boat was an exception. It was a schooner, three-master, with a clipper-type bow and good freeboard. The schooner was a solid-looking vessel, obviously well rigged and manned by fellows who looked as if they took a bath occasionally. The boat had a neat, yachty quality about her, but she didn't have enough mahogany and brass to be a yacht. Most wonderful of all, the schooner flew the United States flag. The craft was named *Patricia*.

"Schooner," said Herb March, "you're going to acquire a stowaway."

Of course, there was the girl, too. Herb March had seen her from the tree. She had looked very interesting. She was a long girl with remarkable bronze hair. She seemed to be captain of the schooner.

"Bronze-haired girl," said Herb March, "I hope you're as nice as you look."

While he was prowling around seeking a way to get aboard the schooner unobserved, he met the Hindu.

Herb March nearly took the Hindu by the throat and choked him. Surprise almost caused him to do this. Astonishment at finding the Hindu unexpectedly at his side.

"Er—good evening," said Herb March, having swallowed twice, and put his large hands back in his pockets.

The Hindu pointed at the schooner.

"I have had a vision as I slept," said the Hindu. "And in the vision, I saw that boat, and the eye of evil upon it. There is no question about the eye of evil, for I saw it very clearly, and so the cargo of that boat shall be naught but death and mystery."

The brand of English language which the Hindu spoke was very clear. But his meaning wasn't.

"Come again," Herb March suggested.

"Do not stow away on that boat," said the Hindu.

"How did you—Hm-m-m. You read my mind, or something?"

"I read your mind—yes."

"That," said Herb March, "is a bit of hokum. Pure hokum."

Herb took his large hands out of his pockets. It was in his mind that he might have to choke this Hindu yet. Let that fellow read *that!*

“It would do you no good,” said the Hindu, “because I am a lowly fellow who is not trying to harm you, but only to do you a favor.”

“What would do me no good?”

“Choking me. You are thinking of doing so.”

Herb March began to get the creeps.

“Now look,” he said. “What the blazes is this? Who are you?”

“I am Mahatma Rhi, an humble student of the mind who is wandering over the world observing, I regret to say, the shallow layer of brains which seems to coat the inside of men’s skulls. Not, you understand, that I am trying to say that other races have mice minds, in comparison to my own. You get only what you labor toward, whether in India, or in Tulsa, Oklahoma.”

“I’m from Tulsa, Oklahoma,” said Herb March. “So be careful.”

“Yes,” said the Hindu. “You lived on South Boulder, and you sold advertising for the *Tulsa World*, a morning newspaper.”

Herb March’s creeps became large ones. He goggled at the Hindu, but the light was none too good, since it came from a street lamp half a block away, and he could distinguish nothing alarming about the other, except that the fellow seemed to be a Hindu. He wore voluminous robes, somewhat like Mahatma Ghandi. Herb had presumed most Hindus were scrawny specimens composed mostly of bones. This one was a husky-looking lad, however.

Herb March was entirely positive he had never seen the Hindu before. Which made the mind-reading strictly hair-raising stuff.

“What else about me?” Herb asked, after clearing his throat nervously.

“The local officials,” said the Hindu, “would like very much to catch you and shoot you for taking part in a very recent revolution.”

“And—”

“It would be very sad,” advised the Hindu, “if you should stow away on that schooner, as you are thinking of doing.”

“Sad, eh?”

“I have shown you my powers of the mind,” continued the Hindu, “in order to convince you that I know what I am talking about. If you are not convinced, it is unfortunate. Incidentally, I am merely doing this because I—ah—well, I like those who love adventure as you do. I am an adventurer myself—of the mind.”

Herb March rubbed his jaw; it was, incidentally, a large jaw.

“You know,” he said, “I think I’ll take the advice.”

“Good. Have you money?”

“I have forgotten what the word money means.”

The Hindu fumbled under the complicated sheet of a garment which he wore.

“Here,” he said, “is food for the body and poison for the mind.”

It was a sheaf of five of Uncle Sam’s perfectly good ten-dollar bills. Fifty dollars. Down here, you could have the president assassinated for money like that.

“Hey, what do I do with this?” Herb gasped.

“Roll cigarettes out of it, if you wish,” said the Hindu. “But if I were you, I would hire a native as a guide north to the border. Safety does not lie by the sea. The federal government of Hidalgo has several new Coast Guard patrol boats which they are very anxious to try out.”

“Thank you,” said Herb March. “Thank you very much.”

“Good-by,” the Hindu said.

“So long.”

Herb March walked away from the water front rapidly until he had penetrated some two hundred yards into the jungle. Then he sat down and drew a letter from his pocket, and began adding a postscript.

The letter was to Glendara Smith, who was Herb’s girl friend, and who was employed by an oil company in the United States. Herb had written the letter with difficulty while sitting in the tree that day, and it contained a recital of his troubles.

In the postscript, Herb stated that he was sailing north on the three-masted schooner named *Patricia*. He neglected to mention the bronze-haired girl, because you just don’t mention such things.

Herb managed to creep close to a mailbox and post the letter. Fortunately, he’d had enough stamps in his billfold.

In returning to the water front, Herb was very cautious. A redskin stalking a paleface scalp would not have been more silent.

Twenty minutes later, Herb was aboard the three-masted schooner, hidden in a lifeboat which had a canvas cover. He leaned back and relaxed, pleasantly sure that no one had seen him come board.

It had occurred to Herb that the Hindu had been a trifle too anxious for him not to sail on the schooner.

Chapter 2

THE EYE ON THE MAST

It was not exactly a surprise to Herb March when the schooner *Patricia* sailed at midnight, since he had noticed the gear had been made fast before sundown, as if in preparation for putting to sea, and in addition, the tide started going out about midnight and a sailing boat would naturally catch a favorable tide.

Furthermore, a long procession of half-naked jungle savages had filed aboard the schooner in the later afternoon, and each aborigine had carried a wooden case which he had deposited aboard the craft. The half-naked natives had then filed back into the jungle, passing near Herb's tree, and infrequently speaking to each other in a dialect which Herb was sure he had never before heard. The savages had doubtless brought the schooner whatever cargo she had come for.

"Cast off the fore and aft springlines," called a voice. "Stand by to hoist heads'ls."

It was the bronze-haired girl's voice. Herb March grinned and leaned back and wished he had a cigarette. After they were a few hours at sea, and he'd had a nap, he would step out and introduce himself. All of his troubles were practically over. He closed his eyes and decided he could sleep with bliss. Unfortunately, the lifeboat floorboards were hard.

There was a pile of canvas in the other end of the lifeboat, evidently a sail which someone had stowed in the craft, then forgotten. It would make a good bed. Herb March crawled to the canvas, grasped it and started to yank it into the shape of a pallet, and then hard fingers were around his neck, squeezing.

The arms came out of the canvas and took his throat with total unexpectedness. Furthermore, the hands attached to the arms seemed experienced at strangling. The fingertips dug in under Herb's ears. The thumbs crushed his windpipe, shut every vestige of air out of his lungs.

Herb tried to put a thumb in the other's eyes. A thumb in the eye is good for almost any close emergency. But the foe doubled up, wrapped legs around Herb, and trapped his arms in a scissors hold. The opponent exhibited the ability of a boa constrictor.

They lay there. Herb's lungs felt like a toy balloon being stepped on. About to burst. He tried the old wrestler's trick of throwing himself up and away, but the canvas over the boat prevented that from being effective.

Changing his tactics, Herb began to tremble as if he was losing consciousness. He wrenched his head about madly. That way, he distracted attention from his feet until he had them planted firmly against the boat ribs.

Herb lunged. His opponent's head banged a boat rib. The foe went limp.

Lying still and pumping air in and out of himself, Herb March concluded the fracas had not been heard. At least, no one came to investigate. Herb struck a match and examined his unconscious partner in the late hostilities.

The other stowaway was the mind-reading Hindu.

Herb searched the Hindu, doing a very thorough job.

"Tsk, tsk," he remarked. "I always thought they wore something under their bed sheets."

The Hindu regained his senses soon enough to indicate that he was made of tough material. He stirred about, brought both hands to his head, then lay motionless. His breathing became regular enough to show that his mind had cleared.

"I searched you," Herb remarked in a low voice, "and you didn't have a thing on you."

"So—" said the Hindu thoughtfully. "You did not take my advice. I had no idea it was you, a moment ago."

"I better give you back the fifty dollars, maybe. You seem to be broke."

"I carry my wealth in my head," said the Hindu.

Herb March felt in his pocket, suddenly wondering if the fifty had been a hypnotic trick. If it was, the trick still functioned, because the sheaf of bills was in his pocket. He had an impulse to return the money, but restrained it. What the heck! He hadn't made any promises when he took the fifty.

"I think we're about ten miles out from shore," Herb advised. "Can you swim that far?"

"Not," said the Hindu, "if I can avoid it."

"Then tell me why you stowed away aboard."

"I was fascinated."

"Fascinated?"

"Yes, I know that something fantastic is going to happen to this vessel, and I knew I should not come aboard, but my curiosity compelled me to do so anyway. I wished to learn of the infinity of evil, and one must have experience to learn, so I am aboard."

"Those," said Herb March, "are just words. They don't make sense, and they don't make truth. If you don't want me to throw you overboard, you'll

have to do better than that.”

“I was in that would-be revolution, too,” the Hindu said. “The Hidalgo government was looking for me, just as it was seeking you. Had they caught us, they would have stood us before the same wall. Possibly they would have buried us in the same grave.”

“That’s better,” said Herb March. “It makes sense.”

The Hindu sighed. “I was very tired. Soldiers chased me all day. Do you mind if I sleep?”

“Not if you don’t snore,” Herb told him. “Because I could use some sleep myself.”

Herb March leaned back, closed his eyes, and slept. The schooner was plunging slowly over large rolling swells and the motion of the boat and the not unmusical sighing gurgle as the bows broke the waves combined in something that was as soothing as a lullaby.

Only once did Herb awaken, and he lay silent, and after a mumble or two and a squirming movement, he went on breathing as a man does when he is asleep, although he was wide awake. The Hindu was searching him. Herb let the Hindu complete the frisking job, although when the fellow took the fifty dollars out and examined it, Herb decided there would be a fight to the last ditch unless the money went back where it had come from. It did. The Hindu lay down and slept. Herb March also slumbered.

Herb awakened with an appetite.

“I’m hungry,” he said. “How about you, Mahatma?”

“My mind,” said the Hindu, “has never been very successful at controlling my stomach.”

Herb lifted a corner of the lifeboat cover cautiously and took a look around. There was, to his relief, no land in sight.

“What do you say we get acquainted with our hosts?” he suggested.

“With me, that is—what you say—okey doke,” said the Hindu.

Herb March discovered that, at the close range, he approved even more of the bronze-haired girl.

“We are,” explained Herb, “refugees.”

“We were in an unsuccessful revolution together,” the Hindu elaborated.

It occurred to Herb that he only had the Hindu’s word that they had partaken of the same revolutionary fiasco, but he let it pass. The bronze-haired girl was smiling, and when she smiled, everything else became less important.

“You won’t take us back and turn us over to those dutiful fellows with rifles, I hope,” Herb said.

“You are a Yankee?” asked the girl. Her voice was a thing that Herb March found utterly pleasant.

“An Oklahoman,” Herb said. “It’s the same thing.”

“Then you’ll rate the spare cabin amidships,” said the girl.

The cabin was small, as are the quarters on most sailing vessels. There were two bunks, one above the other, and they drew straws, and Herb got the upper bunk.

“She’s wonderful,” Herb remarked. “Boy, oh, boy, even Oklahoma never had anything like her.”

“The young lady,” admitted the Hindu, “is rather attractive.”

By noontime, Herb learned that the bronze-haired girl was chaperoned by a French maid and a dark-skinned lady of the proportions and probable ability of a bouncer. He had supposed that discipline on a boat skippered by a girl would be lax, but he found it was the contrary. There was naval discipline and efficiency aboard. His appreciation of the girl increased.

That afternoon, the girl stood on the aft deck with a long-barreled single-action six-shooter of the variety popular during the heyday of Jesse James. The schooner was sailing through a stretch of sea where many Portuguese men-o’-war floated, like small purple toy balloons. The girl nonchalantly popped away at the floating men-o’-war with her cannon. She shot at least fifty times. Herb March was positive she hit at least fifty men-o’-war. He stood there with his mouth open.

“Do you never miss one?” he asked.

“Once I did, about three years ago,” the girl said. “That’s why I’m practicing.”

She smiled, and Herb March grinned.

“You might,” said the young woman, “like to have dinner with me tonight.”

The dining room aft was very pleasant, and the food, cooked by a Frenchman who was probably the husband of the maid, was superb. So was the wine. So was the hostess. Herb March felt an impulse to talk about himself.

“I am an adventurer,” Herb explained.

“It must be a very interesting life,” said the bronze-haired girl with intense interest.

Ah, she was impressed. Herb expanded, and began talking. He told her about the time the Mexican bandits began shooting at him when he was leading a donkey loaded with two hundred pounds of eighty-percent dynamite, and how the donkey followed him when he ran. He told all about the heck of a time he had getting away from the donkey and the dynamite while the bandit bullets whizzed about.

The story was Herb's ice-breaker. It was hilarious.

The bronze-haired girl laughed until her eyes were moist.

"That's wonderful!" she exclaimed.

Herb warmed up and told her about the time he was flying the plane over the jungle, and someone shot a hole in the gas tank, and he had to bail out with a parachute. Then the head-hunters chased him for days, but he got away by the skin of his teeth.

"Glorious," gasped the girl. "I wish I could have such experiences! I love adventure."

Herb thought, "Brothers, am I really getting places here?" And he told her about the time he moved into the royal palace of the king of a Balkan country at the point of a machine gun, and remained there until he got some back salary they owed him, after which he rode out of the palace on the king's pet elephant with the king on the elephant in front of him, and he was pursued by a howling populace until he reached the border. Herb couldn't resist bragging.

"Probably I have had," boasted Herb, "more adventures than any man alive."

"Then," said the bronze-haired girl, "you would like to meet my cousin. He is an adventurer, too."

"You have a cousin who is an adventurer?"

"His name," said the girl, "is Doc Savage."

Herb suddenly felt so ashamed of himself that he was a little sick.

Herb March felt like a pickaninny who had been beating his chest and bragging about what a fighter he was, only to discover he was talking to Joe Louis.

"Ugh!" he said. "As soon as I get my breath back, I'll crawl away."

Doc Savage was a man who had a world-wide reputation as a righter of wrongs and a nemesis of evildoers. Doc Savage was a sort of free-lance adventurer, and his feats and escapes were fabulous. Herb March had heard hardened soldiers of fortune speak of Doc Savage, the Man of Bronze, with a kind of breathless respect. He had seen an African slaver grow pale at

mere mention of the name of Doc Savage, and had seen a Malay pirate react the same way. The adventures of Doc Savage, and a group of five assistants who aided the Man of Bronze, made Herb March's feats seem rather milky.

Also, Doc Savage had a girl cousin named Patricia Savage, who occasionally joined the Bronze man.

Herb swallowed, said, "Your name is—"

"Pat Savage," said the bronze-haired girl. "Doc Savage is my cousin."

Herb March knew that his face was the color of a lobster that had been boiled.

When it came to adventuring, this girl had done more of it than he had ever hoped to do.

"Tell me more about your adventures," Pat Savage suggested.

"I—uh," Herb March said. "Well—er—ummmm. I—gosh!" Suddenly he found himself on his feet, flushing and bowing. "I'm sure I've taken up enough of your time," he said. "Excuse me. And good night."

"Then you must tell me more some other time," Pat Savage said. "I am fascinated by excitement. So often, Doc Savage will not allow me to help him. I even bought this schooner and fitted it out and went sailing the seven seas, hoping something exciting would happen to me. But it hasn't. And I'm disgusted."

Herb March escaped uncomfortably, and went and sat on the forward hatch, with his neck red. He had made a fourteen-carat clown out of himself, he felt, and it hurt him, because he really liked that girl.

The next morning, they found the eye on the mast.

Chapter 3

INTERRUPTED RADIO

The eye was red. That is, it was scarlet in color, and although at first it seemed to be painted there on the foremast, upon closer examination there was some doubt. It looked as if the eye was a part of the wood. It was a sinister kind of scarlet thing.

Herb March noticed the eye because he saw some of the crew standing and staring.

“I’ll swear the thing wasn’t there before,” one of the sailors muttered.

Herb found the Hindu lying on his bunk. The Hindu was trembling as though he had a chill, and his skin was wet from perspiration.

“You got the malaria?” Herb asked.

“I have terror,” the Hindu said.

“Eh?”

Hitherto the Hindu had spoken a very good grade of English, but now his voice was suffused with a guttural accent. Also, his breathing was noisy and by jerks. If ever a man was scared into a shaking heap, he appeared to be one.

“Have you seen the eye on the mast?” he gulped.

“Sure. I was just looking at it.”

“Do you know what it means?”

“Nothing, probably.”

The Hindu groaned, turned his face to the wall and trembled violently. Then he turned back again and stared strangely.

“Have you heard of the *Marie Celeste*?” the Hindu asked.

“Was she blonde or brunette?”

“This is nothing to gag about. The *Marie Celeste* was a ship, one of the great unsolved enigmas of the sea. Probably the most fantastic mystery the world ever saw. The *Marie Celeste* was found one day, sailing on the sea with all sails set, but without a soul aboard. The table was set, as if for dinner. Nothing was disturbed. Nothing was missing, except the crew and passengers. There was no sign of violence. Nothing. Just complete mystery.”

Herb March rubbed his jaw. He remembered, now, reading of the strange mystery of the *Marie Celeste*. The thing was an actual happening, and how it had occurred had never been explained.^[A]

[A]

Author's note—This is a true story. At noon on December 5, 1872, the *Marie Celeste* was sighted in mid-Atlantic by Captain Boyce of the *Dei Gratia* and his crew. They noticed the strange ship was yawing in a very remarkable manner, and they boarded her when they received no response to their salute.

The ship was absolutely deserted, but it was evident that it had been inhabited only recently. A half-finished meal was on the table, evidently their breakfast meal, and warm food on the stove. All the sailors' possessions had been left, the boats were still hanging from davits, but there was not a living soul aboard. The only thing missing on the boat was the chronometer, which simply added to the mystery.

There was no plausible explanation. The boat had encountered no bad weather, and there had been no illness on board, and no sign of any kind of disturbance.

Captain Boyce brought the *Marie Celeste* into Gibraltar, and reported what he had found. Authorities started checking, and she proved to be a U.S.A. brigantine of 206 tons, built in Nova Scotia and owned by a Mr. Winchester. She had left New York in September, 1872, on route for Genoa, under command of Captain Brigg.

The Court of Gibraltar awarded Captain Boyce and his crew \$8,000 for salvaging the ship, and the brigantine was returned to the American owner and sent to sea with a fresh crew.

But she had become a hoodooed ship. Sailors shunned her and great difficulty was experienced in getting her a crew. She ended her career in 1885 on the Cuban coast where she was wrecked under circumstances that seemed suspicious.

To this day no word has ever been received of the captain or the crew who disappeared off the *Marie Celeste* in mid-Atlantic.

“What,” he asked, “has the *Marie Celeste* got to do with us?”

“There was a red eye on the foremast of the *Marie Celeste*.”

“Huh? Wait a minute—I don’t remember any mention of such a thing in the stories I read.”

“I happen,” said the Hindu, “to have more information than ever was printed about the *Marie Celeste*. The information came to me—ah—from the son of a man who was one of those who found the *Marie Celeste*.”

Herb continued to rub his jaw. He did not know exactly what to think.

“There was a red eye on the foremast of the *Marie Celeste*,” he muttered. “What would you say that meant?”

The Hindu shuddered again, violently, and rolled over on his face.

“I wish,” he wailed, “That we were not on this boat.”

Late the following night, Herb March waited until the Hindu was asleep, then carefully slipped out of the cabin. To leave silently was a job, because Herb had the upper berth. He managed, then crouched outside the door and listened for some time, but the Hindu went on breathing regularly and deeply.

Herb March skulked along the deck, and eased down with his back against a porthole. He pulled out his watch, and sat there contemplating it. He was not interested so much in the watch as in the small compass fitted in the back of the watch. The compass was rugged, and it had always been fairly accurate.

In a few minutes, Herb wandered back and compared his watch compass with the big eight-inch dial of the ship’s compass in the binnacle.

Herb’s compass and the ship’s compass did not seem to read the same.

Herb contemplated the sky. It had been cloudy all day, and it was cloudy now, and, around this season of the year, it was likely to remain overcast for several days. Under such conditions, it was not feasible for the navigator to take sextant shots of sun or stars, hence navigation was probably being checked by use of the radio direction-finder.

Very cautiously, Herb approached the radio shack. There was no operator on duty, this being a small vessel.

There was a regular radio compass and a spare, the loop aerials of which protruded from the cabin top. These loops could be rotated, and pointers showed in what direction they were pointed when the signal was loudest.

Herb ambled back to the main cabin, and deliberately stole a quart of whiskey which he had noticed there during the day. He carried the whiskey

back to his cabin.

The Hindu was in his bunk, breathing noisily and regularly. Herb leaned over and hung a haymaker on the point of the Hindu's jaw, and the fellow gave a spasmodic jump and was senseless.

"Now," Herb said, "we'll see how you hold your liquor."

Herb March rarely took a drink himself, but observation had shown him about how much liquor was required to render a man completely intoxicated. Herb held the Hindu's nose, and began pouring the stuff down the man's throat.

Twenty minutes later, the Hindu revived.

"Whush shrong?" he wanted to know.

"Just what," Herb demanded, "is behind all this mystery?"

The Hindu batted his eyes. He was thoroughly inebriated. He shook his head. "Nush-shing," he said.

Herb March went to work on him very carefully. There was still plenty of whiskey in the bottle.

Three hours afterward, when the Hindu rolled over and opened his eyes blearily—thereby demonstrating he could come out from under the effects of liquor in a hurry—Herb March grinned at him.

"Brother," said Herb grimly, "did you talk a lot of words!"

"I . . . I talked?" the Hindu asked wildly.

"Yep."

"You—"

"Yep," Herb said. "I know a lot that I didn't know before."

The Hindu reared up in the bunk, tried to get out, and couldn't make it. He managed to roll off on the floor, then went through a series of earnest convulsions, but failed to make it to his feet. His physical faculties were still victims of the alcohol, although his mind seemed fairly clear.

Herb March said, "Good thing you can't walk, or I would have to knock you senseless again."

He left and went back to the radio shack. There were more expert radio men than Herb March pounding brass, but he knew enough to get by. He switched on the most powerful transmitter, and called until he got a New Orleans station. He began sending.

After Herb March had been transmitting with the radio for some moments, he sagged over and became mysteriously unconscious.

Chapter 4

SOMETHING TO WONDER ABOUT

Six weeks later, approximately, the American newspapers carried an item. It read:

NASSAU, Bahama Islands—A native boat arrived here today, and the crew reported having sighted a large schooner flying the American flag. Although the sails were set and everything seemed to be in order, there was no one aboard the schooner. A U.S. Coast Guard boat is investigating.

The newspaper item failed to mention that the investigating Coast Guard cutter had taken along the single member of the native boat crew who had boarded the derelict schooner. The native sailor was as black as a stove lid, and as worried as if he had been walking alone through the jungle and had heard a lion.

It was late afternoon when the Coast Guard cutter sighted the schooner. The sea was that unbelievable color of deep blue that is characteristic of the Caribbean, and the sun was a round copper filament creating heat in a crystal sky. The schooner sailed along like a picture ship under heads'ls, fores'l and reefed mains'l.

The Coast Guard skipper took a long look through his binoculars.

“Hell!” he said. “You can't tell me there isn't anybody aboard that hooker.”

But there wasn't. After the Coast Guard officer had run alongside in the launch and boarded the schooner and conducted a quick search, he found himself involuntarily passing his hand down over the back of his neck. The short hairs back there seemed to be wanting to stand on end.

There was no one on deck, nor was there any slightest sign of violence.

The lifeboats were all in place. Not one was missing.

The Coast Guard man went below again, and made a very slow and thorough tour through all parts of the vessel, having his men open lockers and peer under bunks and even lift the boards and look in the bilge with flashlights. The Coast Guard men finally gathered on deck and stood looking at each other.

Even the life preservers were all in place on deck. These bore the name of the schooner, and one of them hung close to the group of astounded men. The name on the preserver was:

The Coast Guard men couldn't think of anything to say. Everything was in order below decks. There was even a batch of biscuits, half baked, in the galley shipmate stove, and a partially completed pan of candy, which the cook had evidently been making, on top of the stove.

A wash of sailors' shirts and underclothes flapped on a line stretched in the fo'c's'le, and the seamen's belongings were intact in their ditty bags or in the lockers. There was no sign of any excitement, and certainly no trace of the ship being abandoned in a hurry, for there were small sums of money, which the sailors would certainly have taken along, in the fo'c's'le lockers.

"It gets me," muttered the Coast Guard skipper.

It got them all.

They looked at the logbook, and found entries therein showing that the schooner had left a Hidalgo seaport six weeks before and had cruised peacefully northward, making a slow passage because of light winds.

The logbook was complete up to one week previously, and the entries ended without any reference to any disaster, or any intention of abandoning ship.

The very last entry read:

"Light S. E. breeze. Everything very pleasant."

The Coast Guard officers looked for a while at the red eye on the foremast of the *Patricia*. It did not strike them as peculiar. They merely concluded that a sailor amused himself by fashioning a particularly vicious-looking optic on the mast.

That afternoon, the American newspapers carried another item. Large, and on the front pages, this time.

NASSAU, Bahama Islands—What may be one of the all-time fantastic mysteries of the sea confronted officials here tonight. A three-masted schooner was found with all sails set and everything in order aboard—but with everyone aboard inexplicably missing.

The schooner was the *Patricia*. Records show that the vessel was owned by Patricia Savage, who is a cousin of Clark Savage, Jr., better known as Doc Savage, a scientist and somewhat of a man of mystery.

There was a great deal more to the item—some papers ran several columns—but the body of the article added nothing much to the lead.

Chapter 5

DEATH AT SEA

Lieutenant Colonel Andrew Blodgett Mayfair and his pet pig, Habeas Corpus, were coming from a large industrial chemical plant when the newspaper story was drawn to his attention. Monk Mayfair, as he was more commonly known, had the Christmas spirit, for he had just collected ten thousand dollars for two days' work as a consulting expert for the chemical plant. Monk was one of the greatest living chemists, and he was accustomed to such fees. As a matter of fact, the advice he had given the chemical plant in those two days had saved the firm two or three hundred thousand dollars.

Monk looked like a pleasant ape, being not very high and practically that wide, and having a skin of rhinoceros texture which was coated with rusty shingle nails. His eyes were small, his mouth breathlessly huge, and his face as a whole obviously had been mistreated by other men's fists in the past.

The pet pig, Habeas Corpus, had very long legs, a scrawny body, a snout built for inquiry, and two ears that might well have started out to be wings. These two, Monk and the pig, made an astounding pair.

The newspaper reporters collared them.

"What goes on?" Monk asked, astonished.

They showed the homely chemist the newspaper story. It seemed they wanted follow-ups.

"Why don't you ask Doc Savage?" Monk suggested. "Doc is her cousin."

"We can't find him. Why don't you take us to him? You're one of his five assistants, aren't you?"

Monk was one of Doc Savage's aids, and so he knew better than to conduct any horde of newspaper reporters to Doc. The Man of Bronze did not care for publicity.

"Sorry. Doc might be at his headquarters," Monk said.

"We tried there."

"Too bad, gentlemen, too bad," Monk said expansively. "Well, it's nice to have seen you. Good afternoon."

Monk caught a lurking taxi and departed. The newshawks followed him, as he'd suspected they would.

"Step on it, my good fellow," Monk requested his driver.

The taxi driver was a lean gentleman with thin hips, good shoulders, a wide orator's mouth, and eyes that were full of rage.

"I'm not your good fellow!" he snapped. "For two cents, I would drive this hack in the river, and see that you were locked in it."

"You should be more courteous, chauffeur," Monk remarked. "And by the way, you might also keep my pet pig up there while you drive. Habeas likes to ride in front seats."

"You put that pig up here, and I'll have bacon for breakfast!" The driver turned around and glared. "Suppose those reporters had recognized me."

The driver was Brigadier General Theodore Marley Ham Brooks, noted as a lawyer, and famous as one of the best-dressed men of the day.

Also in the front seat was Ham's pet chimpanzee called Chemistry. At least, Ham claimed the animal was a chimp, although there was some doubt on the point, Monk insisting Chemistry was a runt baboon, and the zoo experts admitting frankly they didn't know what it was.

Ham was one of Doc Savage's group of five associates.

Monk and Ham usually teamed up, because they liked to quarrel. Possibly once or twice they had spoken a civil word to each other—by accident—but for the most part they engaged in a perpetual squabble.

Ham was not serving as Monk's chauffeur willingly. Ham had lost a bet. He had wagered that Monk could not date a pretty girl they had seen, and Monk had fooled him. However, Ham had not yet found out that the girl was a chorus cutie that Monk had hired for the gag.

"What were the reporters after you about?" Ham snarled.

Monk showed him the newspaper which one of the gentlemen of the press had handed him.

"Great Scott!" Ham exploded. "Doc will want to know about this."

Ham proceeded to drive in a way that made Monk squawk with anxiety, and they lost the reporters.

Ordinarily, Doc Savage was to be found on the eighty-sixth floor of one of New York's prominent skyscrapers, where he maintained one of the most complete libraries of scientific tomes in existence, and a laboratory which was so completely equipped that foreign scientists frequently came for the specific purpose of seeing the place.

Less widely known was the vast rambling old brick warehouse on the Hudson River water front, bearing the legend *Hidalgo Trading Company*.

This was Doc Savage's boathouse and airplane hangar.

When Monk and Ham drove up to the river-front warehouse—the place looked rickety, but actually had the strength of a fort—the sheet-steel doors opened automatically as Ham pressed a radio control in the cab. They drove inside and the doors rolled shut. The place was full of blinding light from overhead floodlamps.

A terrific roaring sound assailed their ears as they got out of the taxi. They grabbed frantically at their hats. A wind tunnel was in operation, a model of a fast plane, built exactly to scale, suspended inside. Behavior of the model was being registered on a complex instrument panel.

Doc Savage stood at the instrument board. His size was deceptive; he seemed of average muscular build until Monk and Ham stood beside him, then it was evident that he was a physical giant. Doc Savage's skin had been bronzed by tropical suns, and his hair was of a little darker bronze hue.

Monk's voice was ordinarily small and childlike, and now anxiety made it squeak.

"What do you make of this, Doc?" Monk asked, and passed over the newspaper.

Doc Savage's most striking characteristic, it was suddenly evident, was his eyes. These were of an unusual golden hue, somewhat like pools of flake gold being stirred always by tiny winds. Eyes that had an effect on strangers; eyes that seemed to radiate a compelling power.

Doc Savage read the newspaper item.

"We had better investigate," he said. "How soon can you get ready?"

"Half an hour," Ham said. "I've got to get some clothes—"

"Meet here," Doc Savage ordered. "Monk, you and I will pick up equipment cases at headquarters."

The bronze man's voice possessed unusual timbre and power and gave the impression of being controlled, deliberately subdued.

Doc Savage, Monk and Ham drove away in the taxicab, and the men who had been watching came out of the building across the water-front street. There were two of the men.

The pair of observers were worried, and they held a conference.

"They look excited," one said. "There ain't any doubt about it. They're gonna light out and investigate this thing."

"Yeah. But what can we do? Two of us can't stop 'em."

"We can try."

“Not me! My friend, don’t underestimate that bronze guy. I would rather take on the army and navy.”

The two men were dressed shabbily, after the style of the bums who frequented the decrepit water-front district. But they did not have the listless manner of vagrants.

The first man growled, “I know all about how tricky this Doc Savage is. But I also know we better do something. We were told to watch this place, in case Savage started to fly south to investigate what happened to his cousin’s schooner. We’re supposed to stop him.”

“How?”

“We know how to get into that warehouse, don’t we? We figured that out. You just swim around to the river end, and dive under the doors.”

“As cold as that water is? Whew!”

“I’ll do it. You keep your eyes open.”

One of the men crossed the street and made sure he was not observed, then quickly swung down among the piles of an ancient wharf which stood near the warehouse. He stripped off his outer clothing and entered the water.

Possibly fifteen minutes later, blue from the cold, he got out of the water, dragged on his clothing, and stumbled to his companion.

“All set,” he gasped. His teeth chattered. “Let’s get out of sight.”

They returned to the hiding place from which they had watched the massive warehouse hangar for days. The lair was a third-floor room in a flophouse frequented by sailors who were having tough going. The window made an excellent observation point.

Shortly they saw Doc Savage and his two aids return in the taxi. The cab disappeared into the warehouse.

The warehouse, which appeared so shabby from without, had a deceptive interior. In addition to a room, lately installed, where Doc Savage conducted aeronautical research, there was storage space for several planes of an assortment of sizes ranging from a small gyro which would arise and descend vertically, to a huge combination land-and-sea plane which had capacity for enormous distance flying, and was the logical ship for use on this trip south. There were boats as well, ranging from a small yacht down to, and even a submarine, a specialized craft which Doc Savage had once used for a trip under the polar ice.

When the pair in the flophouse next saw Doc Savage and Monk and Ham they were in a big plane which had taxied out of the warehouse. By

using binoculars the pair could discern the features of the bronze man and his two aids.

Suddenly waves flattened out behind the ship as the propellers drove air, and the craft scudded down the river pulling a long string of foam, bouncing a little as it got up on the waves. It took the air.

The plane flew southward, heading out toward the sea, where the air was less bumpy.

The two skulkers in the flophouse stared at each other. One was smirking; the other looked disgusted.

“I thought,” growled the disgusted one, “you said it was all set.”

“It is.”

“They took off, didn’t they? Hell! At the rate that plane can travel, they’ll be looking over the schooner in eight or ten hours.”

The smirking man grinned. He went to a bulky old suitcase in a corner and took out an all-wave radio, a set that covered the commercial bands as well as the broadcasting and short-wave.

“I think this thing will tune in the wave band used for S O S signals,” he said. He switched the set on and fooled with the dials.

“You mean you think something will happen?”

The smirking man reached in his pocket and drew out a thick glass bottle which had a glass stopper. He put this on the grimy table. The bottle was now empty, except for dregs of some liquid that had about the same color as old castor oil.

“What’s in that bottle?” the other asked.

“Figure it out. The exercise might help that thing you think is a brain.”

The disgusted man scowled, pulled the cork out of the bottle and managed to shake a drop of the contents out on the table. He watched what happened.

“Jeeps!” he said. “This stuff is eatin’ a hole in the table.”

The other chuckled. “It works slower on steel. It’ll take about an hour to eat a wing off that plane. I poured it inside a wing, where it’ll get at the fastenings that hold the wing to the plane.”

Instead of an hour, it was closer to forty-five minutes. They were fooling with the tuning dial again, and got in on the S O S after it started.

“—thirty-five miles west of Cape May,” Doc Savage’s unusual voice said. “A wing is slowly breaking off our plane and we have no chance of reaching shore. Even a landing on the sea is going to be very dangerous.

This is Doc Savage speaking. Our location is thirty-five miles west of Cape May. Please rush help.”

The bronze man’s voice was calm, almost conversational, but it still managed to convey a feeling of electric danger.

“The wing is breaking off slowly,” Doc Savage continued. “We are beginning to spin. We are thirty-five miles at sea, due west of Cape May. The sea is rough. In this cold weather, we will not be able to keep afloat long.”

The two men in the flophouse room crouched over the radio, their faces tense.

Doc Savage said, “We are spinning. We are going to strike, please send ___”

There was a loud crashing sound, and after that, the carrier wave of the transmitting station went off the air, and silence fell.

The two listeners stared at each other. “Well, that’s that,” one of them said.

“Yes, that takes a weight off my mind.”

“Maybe they’ll be picked up.”

The pair stuck close to the radio, tuning it in on the broadcast bands and catching news reports. They remained there for four hours, until they were finally relieved.

“There is now no doubt whatever,” said a news broadcaster, “that the plane in which Doc Savage and two friends crashed in the stormy Atlantic ocean off Cape May sank immediately, carrying those aboard to their death. Ships searching the vicinity have found floating oil, and several seat cushions identified as belonging to the Savage plane. No bodies have been recovered. Searchers believe it highly unlikely any bodies will be found, due to the rough seas.”

Chapter 6

THE WATCHERS

Among the innumerable radio listeners who heard the news broadcast concerning the fate of Doc Savage was a pretty young woman who had

some worries of her own.

Glendara Smith stared fixedly at the radio, her face growing pale. She jumped up, switched off the radio. Then she shuddered.

Dara was not a girl who looked like a bookkeeper—which she was—in the New York branch office of a Tulsa oil company. She bore more resemblance to a successful showgirl, having a bright manner and a wonderful quantity of red hair. Men were all the time following her around.

The latest and most persistent follower of Dara was a young man who answered to the name of Larry Forge.

Herb March wouldn't have liked that. Dara was engaged to Herb March, although she hadn't seen him for months. In fact, she had told Herb he had better not show his sunburned face until he had all that adventuring nonsense out of his system.

Dara got her hat and coat, then stood nervously watching the clock.

Larry Forge was supposed to call for her, and she had been planning to hook him for a dinner and an expensive show. It would serve him right, because he had been practically haunting her. It had gotten so he popped up everywhere. She half expected to find him in the closet when she went for her hat and coat. But he was a pleasant kind of a zany, she had to admit.

Came a low growl outside the door and a high-pitched howl. Dara opened it.

“Do you always let the wolf in?” Larry Forge asked.

“Always,” Dara said. “But this time he goes right out again. I'm sorry, but—”

“Sh-h-h-h,” Larry Forge breathed. “Look!”

He was a rangy young man, not particularly tall, but wide and muscular. His hair was sandy, and his eyes a lightly humorous blue. He spoke with a very vague accent, although he looked and acted perfectly American. The accent, he had explained, came from a Kansas boy spending too much time in European engineering schools. His wits were nimble, and he was always doing something delightfully wacky.

“Look!” Larry Forge repeated.

He made some passes, as if he was getting something out of the air, then examined the imaginary thing in his hand, and petted it, and there was a series of puppy yelps—although he made the sounds, of course. Larry then put the imaginary pup in his coat pocket—and took out a real one.

The pup was amazingly tiny, and as fluffy as a kitten. Dara suddenly decided it was the cutest little dog she had ever seen.

“Oh, he’s sweet!” she exclaimed.

“He’s in sugar-coated company, too,” Larry Forge assured her. Then he put the pup back to nestle contentedly in his coat pocket. “He’s yours, and we’ve got to feed him immediately in a good French restaurant I know about.”

He glanced intently at Dara.

“And you can tell me what’s wrong with you,” he added.

Dara had not intended to tell Larry Forge what was bothering her—she had met him only three days before, and he didn’t seem serious enough to be a good receptacle for her troubles—but now she changed her mind. The little dog did the trick. Dara was a pushover for little dogs; she’d always wanted one.

“Listen,” she said, “I’m worried about Herb March.”

“Who’s Herb March?”

“I’m engaged to him.”

“Then I don’t like him,” said Larry Forge amiably. “And if you’re trying to tell me you have a date with him tonight, we’ll wait here until he comes, then I’ll lick him. After that, we’ll go to the French restaurant with our dog ___”

Dara shook her head miserably. “Please don’t joke about it. This is serious.”

“How serious?”

“Herb March was in Hidalgo, a Central American republic, and he was on the wrong side of a revolution and had to leave in a hurry. He stowed away on a schooner named the *Patricia*.”

“You mean—”

“Exactly.” Dara unfolded a newspaper. “Have you read this?”

Larry Forge nodded. “Yes. That schooner—the *Patricia*—was found without anyone aboard. Very mysterious. But—ah—how do you know this fellow Herb March was aboard?”

“He wrote me, saying he was going to stow away aboard?”

“Maybe he didn’t make it.”

“But he did. He was on the schooner.” Dara bit her lips. “And he found out something—something fantastic was going to happen.”

“He found—how the blazes do you know *that*?”

“He sent me a radio message—” Dara hesitated, then shook her head. “I’ve got to go to Doc Savage’s office,” she said. “I have some information that may help solve this strange thing.”

Larry Forge shook his head. “You probably haven’t heard it yet, but Doc Savage and two of his men were killed in a plane crash at sea this afternoon.”

“I know. I’ve been listening to the radio.”

“Then going to his office will do no good.”

Dara remained firm. “But it will. I have read magazine and newspaper articles about this Doc Savage, and I happen to know that he has five assistants. Two of them were killed with him this afternoon, but there are still three left. They will want to know what I have to tell them.”

Larry Forge rubbed the side of his face dubiously. “You sure you want to get mixed up in this mess?”

“Of course,” Dara said grimly. “I may be able to help poor Herb.”

“You love the guy, eh?” Larry Forge asked gloomily.

“I don’t know.” Dara’s voice became slightly wild. “Oh, don’t stand there asking questions! I’m just telling you that our date is off.”

“No, it isn’t,” the young man assured her. “I’m going with you. I’m not an adventurer, but I can furnish moral assistance. My morals are very strong.”

“All right, then,” Dara agreed, finally, “but I hope you are not getting yourself into trouble on my account.”

“For you,” said Larry Forge, “I could stand some trouble, although I’m afraid I’ll never welcome it.”

They rode in Larry Forge’s car, a comfortably worn coupe. It was about midevening, so that the streets were thick with theater traffic. Going was slow.

“Mind telling me what was in this radiogram, from—uh—Herb March?”

“I—I would rather not,” said Dara. “After all, if the information is dangerous, I wouldn’t want to put you in the same boat with myself.”

“You sound dramatic.”

“I don’t mean to.” Dara shivered. “But I’m afraid. Herb’s radio message was really a note to be mailed to me by the operator of another ship, and it was interrupted in the middle as if—well—I’m afraid something happened to Herb while he was transmitting the note.”

Larry Forge opened his mouth, then closed it. He acted like a young man who was vastly puzzled, but who had decided not to be too prying.

The great spike of brick and steel that housed Doc Savage's office loomed about a dozen blocks ahead, discernible by the windows which were still lighted. There was a mooring mast for dirigibles on the top—the building had been constructed during the silly era of American finance, and the mooring mast was a wild publicity stunt of that day. The mast was bathed in a red glow of floodlights, which made it stand out distinctly high in the sky.

The car carrying Dara and Larry Forge had hardly turned toward the skyscraper when another machine smashed into them. There was a jangling crash of metal, and a bang as one tire blew out.

“Darn fools!” exploded Larry Forge.

The other car, a rattletrap sedan, was driven by two ragged fellows. The pair did not wait for developments. They sprang out of their old car and ran. Since this spot was out of the theatrical district, there was almost no traffic, and practically no one on the sidewalks. The two men glued their elbows to their ribs and stepped out.

“I'll get 'em!” yelled Larry Forge. “You wait here!”

Larry Forge then raced in pursuit of the two bums.

Dara, for some reason she could not have defined, shivered violently. She was scared. This crash had seemed, somehow, too pat. As if it had happened according to plan.

Frightened, Dara leaped out and ran for the nearest lighted doorway, which happened to be that of a cigar store at the end of the next block. Dara's only thought was that she didn't want to stay there where it was dark and lonely.

She had covered half the block when the explosion came. It was terrific. Whether the blast knocked her down, or she fell, she didn't know. But she was flat on her face. Glass was falling out of the windows all around her.

Dara twisted to look over her shoulder. She was just in time to see the engine of one of the automobiles stop rolling, not many yards from where she lay. There, was a mangled axle and one wheel attached to the engine, and a scab of metal that had been a fender.

Dara got to her feet and stepped into a doorway. She was not conscious of fear. Her head was perfectly clear, although her ears were ringing. Here was danger and sudden death—she would have died, had she been near the car—and she was aware of no particular emotion except that someone was trying to kill her, and that she had better use common sense.

She didn't know it, but she was proving that she had the soul of an adventurer herself.

Suddenly the vicinity swarmed with people. Crowds collect nowhere as quickly as in New York. The mob milled; fire trucks and police cars arrived, sirens howling like big cats. If Larry Forge had returned, there was small chance of finding him.

Dara sidled away, entered a subway, and got out a few minutes later at the station adjacent to the building which housed Doc Savage's headquarters.

She was wary now. Instead of going directly into the structure, she scouted the vicinity. And almost immediately, she became suspicious of two men.

The pair were well dressed, and they were doing too much looking around to be entirely innocent. When a policeman appeared, the two strolled away from the officer—which brought them toward Dara. She shrank back into a darkened doorway.

The two men stopped near enough for her to hear their voices distinctly.

“Doc Savage's men will like the way we did that job,” one said.

“They ought to,” agreed the other. “Dara Smith must have been blown to smithereens in that car. They couldn't seem to find enough of her body to even know there was a body.”

“You think we oughta collect our pay for the job tonight?”

“Maybe we better wait until tomorrow. I don't like the way that cop is gawking around.”

“Come on, then. Let's blow.”

The two walked away.

Glendara Smith changed her mind about going to see Doc Savage's men just yet.

Chapter 7

SIX ARGUMENTS

Glendara Smith returned to her small apartment and dug in an old telescope valise for the one material heritage she had received from her

father. Dara was an orphan. Her male parent had been Twisty Jim Smith, who had owned a reputation in the Southwest. Twisty Jim's nickname did not come from any deformity, but from the convulsion he went through when he drew a six-shooter and shot a bad man. Twisty Jim had been a famous sheriff. Dara had inherited his six-shooter.

The six-gun was a young cannon. It was a single-action thing, having no trigger or trigger guard, and with a spur welded onto the hammer. It was fired by fanning the hammer back with either the free hand or a thumb.

Dara loaded it, and put spare cartridges in her handbag. Then she heard a knock on her door. She opened the door and stepped back, the gun ready.

"Hey!" gasped Larry Forge. "Point that artillery the other way!"

Larry was perspiring, and had a haunted look. He came in, closed the door and leaned against it.

"Gosh—I—say, am I relieved!" he gulped. "I—I've died about nineteen deaths in the last hour. After that explosion, I couldn't find you. I was afraid—whew!" He mopped his forehead.

"Someone tried to kill me," Dara said grimly.

"That's what I realize now."

"I think," said Dara, "that Doc Savage's associates hired the job done."

"You—blazes!"

"I don't know what it means." Dara waved her big gun angrily. "I always thought this Doc Savage was a man who righted wrongs and punished evildoers who were outside the law. That's what the magazine articles said. But now—well—I doubt if the articles were right. I'm going to find out."

"What do you mean?"

"I'm paying Doc Savage's men a visit," Dara advised grimly, "to find out why they tried to blow me up."

"You—wait a minute now." Larry Forge looked concerned. "This is a job for the police."

"No."

"Why not?"

"Because I'm mad," Dara said.

Dara had inherited more than a six-shooter from her rip-roaring old father.

"I believe," said Larry Forge, "that I've become associated with a red-headed tarantula. But I like you anyway."

Dara said, "The thing for you to do is go away and forget."

“Not me. I’m going along.”

He had demonstrated his persistence, so Dara did not argue. Furthermore, she was glad to see the young man had some courage. They went down to the street and hailed a taxicab.

“You ride in the front seat,” Dara said. “If somebody starts shooting at me, there is no sense of you being in the back seat where you might be hit.”

“But—”

Dara gave him a poke with the six-shooter, and this so startled the young man that he sprang into the front seat. Dara got in the back.

“Doc Savage’s headquarters,” she said violently.

Later, an elevator let them out in a subdued-looking corridor where there was a bronze door bearing in small letters the words *Clark Savage, Jr.*

The man who answered their knock had fists the size of a pair of sirup cans. The rest of him was not small, but nothing to compare with those fists. He had a long, puritanical he-witch kind of face.

He spoke in what was apparently his normal tone, a voice so big that one got the impression the building was certainly shaking.

“Holy cow!” he said. “If you’re two more newspaper reporters—”

“We’re not,” Dara said, and showed him the business end of her six-shooter.

“Holy cow!” said the big-fisted, big-voiced man.

“Ordinarily,” said Dara, “I’m a young woman easily scared. But tonight something changed me. I guess I’m angry. People trying to kill you should make you angry, shouldn’t it? Back up!”

The big-fisted man retreated, and Dara and Larry came in and closed the door.

“Who are you?”

“Renny,” boomed the big-fisted man.

Dara nodded. “Renny Renwick, the eminent engineer. The magazine article mentioned you, too. Where are the others?”

“Johnny Littlejohn? Johnny is in the library.”

“Call him.”

“Johnny,” said Renny, “we’ve got company.” He nodded at the six-gun. “They brought their own entertainment.”

Johnny peered at the gun thoughtfully.

Dara waved her weapon. “See how well you can walk backward with your hands in the air. Practice by walking through this place while I search.”

Renny and Johnny obeyed, not seeming particularly agitated, because association with Doc Savage had accustomed them to the unexpected. Johnny—William Harper Littlejohn, eminent archaeologist, geologist and confirmed user of big words—was probably the more calm of the two.

Dara was surprised at the number of ponderous scientific-looking volumes in the library, and impressed by the array of equipment—very little of which she understood—in the laboratory. She was satisfied no one else lurked about the place.

“It strikes me,” said Dara, “that it takes a great deal of money to build this place and maintain it.”

Johnny and Renny glanced at each other, but did not comment.

“Doc Savage,” Dara continued, “is supposed to help people in trouble—and not charge for his services. Is that right?”

“True,” Renny admitted.

“It doesn’t make sense,” Dara snapped. “Doc Savage works for nothing. Yet he has tremendous sums of money to spend. You know what I think the answer to that is?”

Johnny and Renny stared at her.

“Doc Savage,” said Dara, “is probably a crook.”

Johnny and Renny opened mouths simultaneously to make a defense. Then they remembered that it is practically wasting breath to argue with an angry woman, so they said nothing.

Dara put a question bluntly. “Where is Herb March? What happened to him?”

“Huh?” said Renny.

“You were afraid I would give the authorities a tip that would enable them to find Herb March, weren’t you?” accused Dara. “That is why you tried to kill me.”

Renny said, “We never heard of anyone named Herb March.”

Dara sniffed. “I suppose you never heard of the schooner *Patricia*, either.”

Johnny and Renny both started. This suddenly began to make sense to them. They knew of the weird disappearance of the personnel of the *Patricia*; they had been left behind at headquarters to take care of things while Doc and Monk and Ham flew south to investigate the mystery. They had listened to the radio reports concerning Doc Savage’s disaster, and as a

matter of fact, the two of them had flown down there and circled the spot thirty-five miles west of Cape May where a smudge of floating oil and seat cushions belonging to Doc's plane had been found. Renny and Johnny were feeling grim. They had exhausted all the available flares in lighting the sea about the accident scene; they had flown back reluctantly, and were only waiting for daylight to return and continue the search. They were sick at heart. There seemed small possibility of Doc Savage's being alive.

Renny said, "We can explain how Doc Savage got the money to do the many remarkable things he has done—"

"Go ahead and explain it," said Dara.

"—providing you first make sense out of what you're trying to say," Renny continued. "We don't know Herb March. What happened to him? What has the mystery of the schooner *Patricia* got to do with it? We're very interested."

"You talk first." Dara waggled her big gun. "In case you've forgotten, I have six strong arguments in this thing."

They had returned to the reception room, a chamber that was not as large as the others, and which was furnished with an interesting-looking inlaid desk, a huge safe, and a few comfortable chairs.

Johnny said, "I think we are all becoming involved in some kind of a strange plot."

Dara glanced at him—and Renny sent a large chair tumbling toward her by giving it a bat with his huge hand.

It was a nice piece of calculation on Renny's part. The girl was taken by surprise. She had to jump to avoid the chair, and for an instant she was not in a position to fire her big six-shooter. Renny lunged and seized the gun.

Chapter 8

THE DECEIVERS

The minute Renny put his hand on the gun, there was no question about his getting the weapon. Renny's favorite way of celebrating something was to walk over to the handiest wooden door and knock a panel out with one of his freak fists. He could wrench the knob off practically any door with either hand. So he got the girl's gun.

“Run!” Dara shrieked at Larry Forge. “Get the police!”

Larry Forge had been jumping forward, but when he saw that Renny had the six-shooter, he changed his mind. He took flight. He lunged to the door whipped it open.

But Larry Forge’s flight ended at the door. He emitted a strangled gasp, put his hands up and walked backward from the door.

Six men who had been in the corridor now came into the place. They were an oddly assorted half dozen. Two of them had crashed the bomb car into the car in which Dara and Larry had been riding earlier in the evening. Two others Dara had heard talking in the street near this skyscraper, and had gathered from their words that they had been hired by Doc Savage’s men to do some bombing. The remaining pair, dressed like bums, were the ones who had been responsible for introducing the metal-eating acid into the wing of Doc Savage’s plane. One thing all six men had in common—neat blue revolvers, which they held cocked and pointed.

One of them took the part of the spokesman.

“If one of you makes a wrong jump,” he said, waving his gun, “there will be a lot of noise in here.”

Dara gasped and stared at them angrily. She didn’t feel any fear, and she wondered at herself. Ever since that explosion in the street after the automobile crash, she had not been in the least afraid of anything.

Renny and Johnny had been around enough to know bad actors when they saw them. These six men were bad actors. They looked like potential dealers of death.

Larry Forge was more reckless.

“Blast it,” he yelled. “What’s the meaning of this?”

“Shut up!” a man told him. “You just got involved because you were chasing a skirt, so we might let you go. But we won’t if you make too much noise with your mouth.”

Larry Forge clenched his fists, and looked around narrowly for something that could be used as a weapon. One of the men didn’t like the way he was glancing about. The fellow came over and kicked Larry’s shin, then belted him one in the face with a gun. Larry staggered back against a wall, holding his face with both hands. Some crimson began to leak out between his fingers.

“Our tempers ain’t so good,” said the man who had struck Larry.

They searched Renny and Johnny. They looked at Dara speculatively, then one of them searched her, and she was flushed and discomfited when he

finished. Larry Forge let himself be searched, but shook with rage.

“Now,” said the raider spokesman, “we will see if we can find some ropes.”

“Why not just shoot their heads off and get out of here?” growled one of his associates.

“Guns make a lot of noise, even up this high,” said the spokesman. “And anyway, we’ve got to get that letter and radiogram the girl received from Herb March.”

Renny and Johnny realized the situation was serious.

The reception room had huge windows, and out beyond these were the darkened buildings that made New York such a spectacular city. The theatrical district and Broadway, quite a number of blocks uptown, was a patchwork of brilliant electric signs. It was an inspiring sight. Renny and Johnny wondered if they would ever see it again.

“What,” Renny rumbled gloomily, “is the object of bumping us off?”

“We don’t want you investigating the mystery of the schooner *Patricia*,” said the spokesman promptly.

“Why not?”

“Oh, it’s just such an intriguing mystery that we thought it would be fun if it wasn’t solved.” The man whirled on the girl. “Where is the letter and the radio message?”

Renny started to boom out something angry, but refrained because he was hearing a sound.

The others heard the sound, too. It was a thumping and rattling sound, as if someone was trying to get a door open. The noise came from the laboratory.

“Is there a secret back door to this place, or something?” the spokesman snarled.

Renny looked as much like a liar as he could. “No,” he said.

“You’re lying!” rapped the man. He shoved out his gun threateningly. “Show us that back door.”

“Oh, all right,” Renny rumbled.

He started for the laboratory, and the lights went out. The darkness was sudden and complete. Renny dived flat on the floor, scrambled, and got behind the big safe. He bumped into Johnny, who was already there. Both of them felt in a rack that was cleverly concealed behind the safe, and which held machine pistols. The machine pistols had been designed by Doc Savage, and while hardly larger than conventional automatics, they could

pour out an incredible number of bullets in a short space of time. They were charged with mercy bullets, slugs that were capsules containing chemicals that produced unconsciousness.

“Who turned the lights out?” Renny breathed.

“Search me,” Johnny whispered back.

At this point, a fight broke out in the darkness. It began with a terrific blow, followed by a squawk of agony. Renny and Johnny presumed that hot-headed Larry Forge had popped somebody with his fist.

Leaning around the safe, Johnny aimed his machine pistol so as to send bullets about two feet above the floor, and yanked the trigger. The gun made an ear-splitting roar.

A voice spoke loudly when Johnny stopped firing. A crashing voice, imperative. It spoke ancient Mayan, a tongue which almost nobody but Doc Savage’s associates understood. They frequently used this old Mayan dialect when they did not want to be understood by outsiders.

“Don’t shoot,” the voice ordered. “You may hit me.”

Renny and Johnny did not fire again. Instead, they joined the fight. But the scrap was different now. The six raiders were scared. The roaring machine pistol had iced them with fear.

“Hell, it must be the cops!” the leader yelled “Get out of the place.”

Renny found a form, and swung so hard with his right fist that he fell down when he missed. There were two shots. The muzzle flame jumped ceilingward, a brief red torch. Somebody was evidently trying to make a light with his gun. It wasn’t effective.

The fight got all balled up in the door. Johnny clutched someone with his long bony arms, and got the fellow down. Not until Johnny struck, and the man yelped, did he realize it was Larry Forge he was fighting. “Sorry,” Johnny muttered, just as Larry Forge walloped him in the midriff. Johnny temporarily lost interest in everything but getting the paralysis out of his middle. Larry Forge packed dynamite in his fists.

The hallway was dark. The six men—they had been very lucky and all six were still on their feet, it developed later—got to the stairway at the end of the hall. They organized there, found all six of them were together, and began shooting. One had a flashlight. After the beam whitened the hallway, there was nothing to do but dive back into the reception room. Guns thundered, and lead scooped plaster off the walls.

Renny dashed to the telephone and tried to stop all elevators. He was too late making himself understood. The raiders got an elevator and rode down

to the street, where they had two cars waiting. They escaped—at least they were gone by the time Renny got downstairs. He went back.

Lights were on again in Doc Savage's headquarters. Renny looked around.

The raiders had managed to take the girl, Dara, with them when they escaped.

Doc Savage was there, although this did not surprise Renny. He had recognized the bronze man's voice speaking Mayan during the fight.

Johnny, sitting on the floor holding his middle, stared at Doc Savage.

"We thought you were dead," he said hoarsely.

The big bronze man said nothing. He had wrapped his belt around his leg above the knee and was drawing the belt tighter.

Renny understood, then, why Doc Savage had not followed him downstairs in pursuit of the fleeing raiders. One of the mercy bullets from the supermachine pistol had hit Doc in the leg, and the bronze man had saved himself from unconsciousness only by quick application of a tourniquet.

Before Doc said anything, he hobbled into the laboratory, where he filled a hypo needle with a chemical that would counteract the effects of the stuff in the mercy bullet. He treated himself. The wound itself was not serious, merely a bad bruise and some broken flesh. But he would be very groggy for an hour or so, in spite of his quick first-aid treatment.

Doc shuffled back into the reception room and sank in a chair.

Larry Forge sprawled in another chair, feeling gingerly of his battered features.

"Who is he?" Doc asked quietly.

Renny said, "You'll find out we don't know much about this, Doc. That fellow and a girl barged in here, and held us up. They seemed to think we knew what happened to a man named Herb March, and also what happened to the *Patricia*. Then those other fellows barged in, and were going to kill everybody."

"I'm Larry Forge," Larry explained. "And I don't know anything, either."

Larry Forge then explained how he happened to be with Glendara Smith, and recited what had happened to the young woman. When he finished, he looked at them steadily.

"I see that Dara was mistaken," he said. "You fellows are not crooks. Dara realized that, too, after it was too late."

“Then you were just innocently involved in this mystery,” Doc Savage said.

“Yes.” Larry Forge nodded grimly. “And now that I’m in it, I’m going to stay. I don’t like trouble. But I do like Glendara Smith. I love Dara. She may be engaged to this Herb March, who was on the schooner *Patricia* and disappeared with everybody else aboard, but I don’t care. I’m going to cut Herb March out, and marry his girl. But first, I’m going to rescue Dara from those devils.”

“How come,” Renny asked Doc, “that everybody thought you were dead? What happened? How did you escape? And how did you get back here so quick?”

He knew how Doc Savage had managed to make that noise in the laboratory that had distracted the raiders’ attention before the lights went out. There was an assortment of secret entrances and exits from headquarters, and the bronze man had simply used one of them that admitted into the lab.

“Someone poured acid in the wing of our plane,” Doc Savage explained without emotion. “We learned that before we took off from the river-front hangar.”

“Acid—how did you find it out?” Larry Forge asked wonderingly.

“You know there are burglar alarms all over that warehouse hanger,” Doc said. “The man with the acid entered by swimming under the outer doors. The burglar alarms have registers that show which one has functioned. The door alarm had registered.”

Larry Forge scratched his head. He was astounded.

“Granted you knew someone got into the hangar,” he said, “I still don’t see how you knew what the invader did.”

Doc advised patiently, “The hangar is brilliantly lighted by floodlamps. They burn all the time, and cannot be switched off except by one who has a key. The wires run in armored conduits buried in the brick walls, and the switch is inside a small safe.”

“But—”

“Camera,” Doc said. “It takes a picture of the hangar interior about once every second, and the film is automatically put through a developer and fixing solutions so that it can be scanned at once.”

“Oh.”

“We examined the acid, mopped it out, saw the damage wasn’t serious as yet, and took off. We simply flew out to sea, and staged a fake plane disaster.”

Larry Forge asked, “The idea of the fake disaster was what?”

“To throw our enemies off the trail,” Doc said. “An old trick. As long as they thought us dead, we could investigate without being in so much danger. After staging the disaster, we flew back to shore and wandered around in the clouds until it was dark, then landed twenty miles or so up the Hudson.”

Larry Forge shook his head in an amazed way. He did not say anything. Renny didn’t say anything, either, although he was wondering what had become of Monk and Ham.

After a few moments, Doc shook his head, as if to clear it.

“We will investigate the schooner *Patricia* immediately,” he said.

Larry Forge jumped up wildly. “Now look here!” he yelled. “Glendara Smith is in danger! We’ve got to help her, first!”

“My cousin, Pat, was on the schooner *Patricia*,” Doc Savage pointed out quietly. “We’ve got to help her. We have a clue—that is, we know our enemies do not want us to examine the *Patricia*. Therefore, it would be a good idea for us to look at the schooner. We will help Dara as soon as we have a clue to her whereabouts.”

Larry Forge was not satisfied by the logic.

“I can’t help thinking you’re damned selfish!” he snarled. “And I’m going with you, and see that you get right back here and on the job hunting for Dara.”

Chapter 9

THE WATCHMEN

In leaving Doc Savage’s headquarters, they used one of the secret exits. They entered a private elevator, which let them out in the basement, and passing through an unnoticeable panel, they walked down a long tunnel which admitted into the nearby subway. After making sure no trains were coming, they ran to the nearest subway station, climbed onto the platform, and took the next train. Later, half an hour of riding in a taxicab brought

them to the remote spot on the bank of the Hudson River where Doc's big plane was moored.

Larry Forge had been thinking during the ride. He had done a great deal of scowling, for apparently his first opinion was reversing itself, and he wasn't liking Doc Savage.

"Listen," Larry growled, "haven't you got a fifth assistant? Dara said she read that you had five helpers."

"Long Tom Robert, the electrical engineer, is the fifth man," Renny volunteered.

"Where is he?"

"In Africa," Renny said. "He's superintending the construction of a hydroelectric project."

"Humph!" Larry muttered. "I still think it's a dirty trick, doing something else before you rescue Dara."

"How," rumbled Renny, "do we know where your girl friend is?"

Logic, all right. But it did not soothe Larry Forge, and he remained in a surly rage during the entire flight southward.

They refueled once, at a small island in Chesapeake Bay, where the operator of the gasoline station knew them, and would fail to mention their visit. There was, as Doc pointed out, a possibility that their enemies did not yet know that he was alive, since the fight in the skyscraper had taken place entirely in the dark.

Daylight came, and the fabulous blue of the Gulf Stream was spread below them. Doc Savage flew, remaining alone in the cockpit, occasionally adjusting the radio dials, or using the radio direction-finder for bearings. Renny and Johnny remained in the cabin seats, having little to say to Larry Forge.

The schooner *Patricia* had been found in British territorial waters, but she had been taken over by a United States Coast Guard vessel, and she was an American ship, so there had been some argument about whether to take the boat to Nassau, which was a British possession, or to Miami, Florida, the nearest United States port. The Coast Guard boat had towed the *Patricia* to a small cove and anchored while the question of jurisdiction was being settled.

Doc Savage landed in the cove, and taxied alongside the Coast Guard cutter. He hailed the skipper of the cutter, and they did some conferring. Doc Savage held a high commission in the Coast Guard, the result of some work he had done for the service in the past, and he managed to convince the

captain that his visit to this spot, together with the fact that he was alive, should remain secret.

After that, they boarded the *Patricia*. The bronze man took along a small equipment case.

The schooner *Patricia* was a converted Nova Scotia-built fisherman, which to anyone who knew boats meant that she was one of the finest type of sailing craft being built today. In converting her, little had been done except installing comfortable owner's quarters aft, the adding of air conditioning, better crew accommodations, and a good Diesel engine. Her hull and rig remained unchanged.

"Nothing aboard has been moved," explained the Coast Guard skipper, "and you will find no fingerprints left by my men or myself. Everyone wore gloves, at my orders."

"Thank you," Doc Savage said.

The bronze man began his investigating.

Larry Forge scowled and watched; he thought they were on a wild-geese chase.

First, Doc Savage did sample collecting. He scraped fragments off the deck, the deckhouse, the cabin interiors. He took bits off all the food aboard. He clipped fragments of cloth off the garments hanging in lockers. He put each of these samples in a small bottle by itself, and corked the bottle tightly.

Secondly, he fingerprinted the boat rapidly, and photographed the prints. For this, he employed a fast-action camera of a type in use in better-equipped police departments.

Third, he scrutinized the hold of the vessel closely.

Fourth, he stood for some time examining the scarlet eye which was on the foremast.

The bronze man's final act was a thorough search of the *Patricia*. He hunted alone, while Johnny, Renny and Larry Forge stood on deck.

Hence Doc Savage was alone when he found the motion-picture camera. It was a home-movie camera, eight-millimeter, with a good lens. It belonged to Pat. Doc's five aids had chipped in and bought it for her as a birthday present.

The movie camera was hidden in the galley flour bin. There was film in it, and all but about ten feet of the film had been exposed.

Doc dusted the flour off, put the camera in a pocket, and said nothing about finding it.

The bronze man spent nearly two hours alone in his big plane, working with the clues he had collected, and a small portable laboratory, developed by Monk, which contained, in a surprisingly small space, materials for almost any lab analysis.

He called the others aboard.

“We had better get back to New York immediately,” he said.

It was night again when Doc Savage landed his plane near New York—on the south shore of Long Island, this time, where there was a small sound of water too shallow to be popular with boatmen, and surrounded by land too marshy even for summer cottages.

Doc Savage had been using the short-wave radio, and a boat approached shortly. It was a speedboat, long and dark, its interior half-filled with engine. The one man aboard brought the craft alongside expertly.

“What’d you find out?” he asked anxiously.

Renny leaned down to see who it was. “Monk!” he exploded. “Holy cow!”

“What did—”

“Nothing,” Renny said. “Monk, whatever happened to the *Patricia*, it seems to be the most incredible thing that ever occurred. There was nothing disturbed aboard. Nothing. Pat and everybody else seem to have simply vanished.”

Doc Savage did not comment. They anchored the big plane securely, and prepared to transfer to the speedboat.

Renny and Johnny matched coins to see who would remain with the plane, and long, bony Johnny got stuck with the watchman job.

Homely Monk told him, “Listen, you’re lucky. Look at me. I’m the unlucky guy. I matched with Ham to see who would bring the boat out here to get you, and I lost. You know what? It would be just my luck if Ham had to jump in and rescue Glendara Smith while I was gone. Imagine what a stand-in with the girl that would give him.”

Larry Forge was finding a seat in the speedboat. He sat down. Then he jumped up wildly.

“Hey!” he yelled. “What’d you say?”

Monk looked at him. “Who is this shouting fellow?”

“Name of Larry Forge,” Renny explained. “He thinks we’re sort of inefficient.”

Larry Forge bellowed, “Did you say something about Dara Smith?”

“I’m not deaf,” Monk said. “Ham and I have been watching Dara Smith and the fellows who have her prisoner, if that’s what you mean.”

“You—you—” Larry Forge gurgled.

“When those six scamps galloped out of Doc’s headquarters with her last night,” Monk elaborated, “we were posted downstairs in case just such a thing happened. We followed. We’ve been on the trail since. As long as they didn’t harm the girl, Doc said not to interfere.”

“I don’t understand this,” said Larry Forge wildly.

Monk glanced questioningly at Doc Savage.

“Go ahead and tell him,” Doc said.

“Well, the girl is in no immediate danger,” Monk explained. “The six men have orders to get a letter and a radiogram she received from Herb March before they do anything to her. By the way, I wonder what this Herb March looks like. You think he’ll be very stiff competition, providing he ain’t dead?”

“What are they doing to Dara?” barked Larry Forge.

“Nothing. Just not feeding her, is all. They plan to let her get good and hungry, to soften her up. Of course, they keep asking her where the letter and radiogram are.”

“And you just stand by?”

“We listen, too,” Monk advised. “That’s the main idea of us not interfering. We got microphones in the place.”

“What have you heard?”

“Well, practically nothing of any value,” Monk admitted. “But you never can tell. Our mike is in the same room with the girl. If we could get one in the other room, where the men eat and sleep, we might have some luck.”

Larry Forge sank down on a seat, and did not say another word during the entire run to Manhattan. It was a fast trip, and for a time when they were in the open sea, a violent one. The speedboat, making better than forty miles an hour, seemed to go from the top of one wave to another, and they had to clench their teeth and hold on.

The darkened spires of the Wall Street district—this was a late night hour—shoved up beside them as Doc guided the speedboat inshore. They rounded up to a wharf, made fast, then climbed out of the boat.

Larry Forge stopped Doc Savage and extended a hand.

“I’ve been a noisy clown,” Larry Forge said. “How about me apologizing?”

“Forget it,” Doc Savage said quietly.

“Thanks. I’m beginning to see how you got that reputation.”

Monk had a car waiting—the taxicab. The cab was one of Doc Savage’s special machines—overpowered and armor-plated, equipped with various unusual gadgets—but outwardly just another hack.

Monk switched on a two-way radio under the dash and picked up the microphone. “Hello, shyster,” he said.

“What is it, you missing link?” Ham’s voice asked.

“The girl all right?”

“Yes.”

“We’ll be with you shortly. Doc and the others are with me.”

Monk switched off the radio with a sigh of relief. “Thank blazes, Ham didn’t have to rescue her and make a hit.”

“Holy cow!” Renny rumbled. “It sounds like you’re falling for another girl.”

“This Dara Smith is wonderful,” Monk said ecstatically.

Larry Forge scowled. “Now let’s get something straight right now,” he growled. “I found Dara first.”

Monk returned the scowl. “So I’m going to have trouble with you, too.”

The pet pig, Habeas Corpus, was in the cab. The machine was crowded as it rolled rapidly uptown, but Habeas could take care of himself. Whenever anyone accidentally put a foot on the pig, he reciprocated by biting. He bit Larry Forge twice, and Larry swore violently.

“Wait a moment,” said Doc Savage suddenly.

They stopped the cab, and listened to a newsboy shouting headlines on a nearby corner.

“Another mystery ship found,” the boy shouted. “All hands missing.”

“Boy,” Doc Savage said quickly. “One of those papers, please.”

Chapter 10

THE KARL MAXIMUS

The newspapers had broken out their biggest and blackest headlines for this one:

ANOTHER DESERTED SHIP FOUND

Below that were more banks of dark headlines, then the story. It read:

BOSTON, Mass.—Radio reports reaching here this afternoon said the French liner *Versailles* had sighted and boarded a small steamer about two hundred miles at sea. The steamer was found to be entirely deserted.

The small steamer has been identified as the Brazilian-owned *Senora Dupree*. The *Senora Dupree* sailed from Maracaibo, Venezuela, five weeks ago, with a cargo of fuel oil in barrels and other goods. She had been reported overdue.

The captain of the French liner reported seeing the *Senora Dupree* drifting, and receiving no answer to hails, sent a searching party aboard.

Not a soul was on the *Senora Dupree*, the radio reports say. Everything seemed in order, the lifeboats were all hanging in their davits, and there was nothing to explain the mystery.

The mystery seems to resemble that of the schooner *Patricia*, which was recently found deserted near the Bahama Islands.

Doc Savage sat with the newspaper in his hands, and his strange flake-gold eyes were unusually animated.

“Wait here,” Doc said.

The bronze man entered an all-night drugstore, turning his coat collar up around his neck and borrowing Renny’s hat—Doc rarely wore a hat himself—to help hide his identity. He used the telephone, making several calls, then returned to the cab.

“The French liner is standing by,” he explained. “A tugboat is on its way out to sea to bring the *Senora Dupree* into Boston. The sea is calm enough for a plane to land.”

Renny rumbled, “You mean—”

“Yes. We will fly out there immediately and investigate.” He turned the taxi around and drove back to the speedboat.

“I’m going to stay here and see that nothing happens to Dara,” Larry Forge snapped.

“No,” Doc Savage said.

“But—”

“Monk and Ham work best by themselves,” Doc explained quietly. “We have had experience before when hot-headed outsiders upset their plans. While I appreciate your feelings, it is necessary for you to go with us.”

While there was nothing loud or bombastic about the bronze man’s statement, the words had an impressive quality that caused Larry Forge to subside. Monk returned to help Ham. Doc, Renny and Larry Forge rode in the speedboat back to the plane which was guarded by Johnny, and they took the air.

The *Senora Dupree* was slightly over three hundred feet long, which classed the vessel as a small steamer. She badly needed paint. Doc Savage chucked a parachute flare overside, then beat the light to the water, and landed.

The plane was equipped with a pneumatic raft boat which could be inflated with chemicals, and Doc and Johnny used this to paddle toward the steamer. The raft was clumsy, the sea was not as level as it could have been, and they had some difficulty, but finally shinnied up a rope ladder which someone dropped overside.

On board were a dozen French sailors and an officer of the nearby liner.

Doc Savage, in easy French—he had, by intensive study, learned to speak numerous languages with native fluency—explained that he was an investigating officer of the U.S. Coast Guard, which was technically the truth. He neglected to mention his name, however.

Doc took bottled samples which he scraped from various parts of the ship, or sliced off the food in the galley. Then he conducted a thorough search.

The *Senora Dupree*, being a larger vessel than the *Patricia*, presented an even more uncanny mystery. As reports had stated, there was no evidence of violence, no sign of a sudden flight from the ship.

One of the cabins had evidently been occupied by a woman and child, because there was a sewing machine in this cabin, and in the machine, a child’s garment, partly completed.

Doc Savage looked closely at the sewing machine.

“What’s the matter?” Johnny asked.

“A sewing machine with a child’s unfinished garment in it was found on the barkentine *Marie Celeste*, which was found deserted in 1872.”

“Quite a coincidence,” Renny muttered.

“Almost too much so,” Doc agreed dryly.

They found the scarlet eye on the mast. It looked very much like the fantastic crimson orb they had found on the foremast of the *Patricia*, and it was just as mysteriously inexplicable. Doc scraped off part of it and bottled the scrapings.

“What’s it put on there with—paint?” Johnny inquired.

The bronze man appeared not to hear—which set Johnny thinking. There was nothing wrong with Doc’s ears. The fact that he did not want to announce any theories about the eye on the mast probably meant he had figured out a great deal concerning the phenomenon.

They examined the hold.

There was not, they noticed, a great deal of cargo.

Doc’s last operation was the photographing of innumerable fingerprints.

Then they went back to their plane.

Larry Forge scowled at them and said, “Another blank, I see.”

Johnny, hearing that, smiled faintly. Blank, eh? He suspected not. If the search of the *Patricia* had been futile, he reflected, the bronze man would not have been in such a hurry to inspect the *Senora Dupree*. Still, for the life of him, he couldn’t see anything of value that Doc might have found.

Monk Mayfair and his pig, Habeas Corpus, met Doc Savage, Larry Forge and Johnny—Renny and Johnny had matched again to see who would remain and guard the plane, and Renny had fallen heir to the job this time—when they returned.

Monk explained: “Ham has used that pet What-is-it of his to plant a microphone in the room where the six men are living. And now Ham is bragging around in a way that’ll make you sick.”

They were in a part of the city where nobody paid much attention to his neighbors—possibly because looking around at the neighbors would make anybody ashamed. It was an old-law tenement area, a section where the firemen got white-headed at an early age, and the cops walked two by two and kept out of dark places.

The tenements were all shabby walk-ups, five stories high, narrow, dark. In the next block, one had caved in about a month ago.

The six men had their prisoner in the two rear rooms of a fifth floor.

Monk and Ham had rented several rooms in that and the adjoining tenement, and were conducting their operations from these. The chill fall air

was rancid with the smells of poor sanitation, and the rooms were damply frosty, in spite of the electric heater which Ham had installed for comfort.

“What’s this about planting another microphone?” asked Larry Forge.

There was some complicated-looking apparatus in the room, devices that somewhat resembled portable radios. Electric wires ran away from these.

“These are the amplifiers,” Ham told him. Ham sounded proud of himself. “They’re attached to microphones that can pick up the footsteps of a fly. The mikes will even work fairly well when connected by insulated wire no thicker than a hair. For some time, we have had a microphone in the room where they’re keeping the girl. Monk managed to reach inside the transom, cut a slit in the wallpaper, and hide the microphone under the paper. Monk thought he was pretty slick.”

Ham smirked at the homely chemist.

“However, we didn’t learn anything of value,” he added, “because those birds naturally aren’t telling the girl any more than she already knows. What we needed was to get a mike into the inner room. I just managed that, thanks to my pet, Chemistry.”

Monk scowled. “How?”

“By sending Chemistry in through the open window with another mike, a very small mike, disguised as a cigar butt,” Ham said, grinning. “Nobody is going to pick up an old cigar stub, and I took the precaution of making sure two of those fellows smoked cigars.” He began adjusting one of the amplifiers that resembled a portable radio. “Notice how effectively it works,” he said.

Out of the amplifier loud-speaker came the sounds of one man snoring and others breathing heavily.

“All we’ve got to do now,” Ham explained, “is wait for them to say something interesting.”

It was probably an hour before anything interesting happened. At this time, judging from the sounds, a man came in from the other room and kicked one of the sleepers in the ribs.

“What the hell is this?” the man demanded angrily. “Am I supposed to stand watch all night?”

“You don’t need to bust my ribs,” the other snarled.

“All right, I told you to get an alarm clock, didn’t I? The next time you don’t relieve me on time, it’ll be your neck I’ll bust.”

“Yah!” the man said, and added some profane personal opinions of the other. “Has the girl decided to talk yet?” he finished.

“No, but she’s getting damn hungry and sleepy. I think it’s about time to start using burning cigarettes on her face. Women don’t like to have their looks messed up.”

“I think so myself. We’ll see what Forty Mile says when he comes back.”

“Where is Forty Mile?”

“He went out on business.”

Someone swore at the pair, wanting to know how the blankety-blank anybody could get some sleep around there, and the conversation ended.

“Forty Mile,” explained Ham, “is the strawboss in charge of that devil’s half dozen in there. He went out about midnight. We didn’t try to follow him. We decided there was too much chance of them noticing us if we followed them around the streets.”

Doc Savage asked, “Just how much have you learned, really?”

“Nothing much but what we had already guessed,” Ham replied. “These six men were hired by somebody else. They were given two jobs. One was to prevent you and the rest of us investigating the mystery of the *Patricia*. And the other job was to get that radio message and letter the girl got from Herb March.”

It was near eight o’clock when Forty Mile came back. Apparently, he had an armload of newspapers.

“Boy, are the papers going wacky over the *Senora Dupree!*” he said. “It’s all over the front pages this morning. With pictures. It’s getting a bigger play even than the mystery of the schooner *Patricia*.”

“You hear from Jurl Crierson yet?”

Forty Mile apparently missed the query. He asked, “What?”

“The boss—Jurl Crierson. Did you get in touch with him?”

“No,” muttered Forty Mile. “I can’t imagine where he is.”

“What will happen?”

“What do you mean?”

“Will they hold up things, or go ahead?”

“About the *Karl Maximus*, you mean?”

“Sure—the *Karl Maximus*.”

“They’re going ahead,” said Forty Mile. “They can’t hold off, on account of there might not be another chance as good.”

“Will it happen today?”

“This afternoon, probably.”

Chapter 11

FIVE KICKING MULES

The sounds which came over the microphone pickup became less interesting as the men divided themselves into two groups, one to go out and have breakfast while the others remained behind on guard.

Monk leaned against the wall and scowled at Ham. Monk was happy enough that they had learned something of value, but he resented the gloating Ham was doing.

“By Jove,” said Ham, falling back on his Harvard accent which irritated Monk exceedingly, “We were fortunate. We learned two important facts almost immediately. Ever hear of the ringleader in this mystery, Doc?”

Doc Savage hesitated, then nodded. “The only other Jurl Crierson I can recall was the right hand of an—ah—politician in Europe. The politician was one of the—well, he was the latest kind. He built himself an organization, took over the government by force, then purged his enemies. It was quite a bloody business, that purge. It was under the direct charge of a man named Jurl Crierson, who seemed to be a fiend.”

“I remember that,” Monk said. “There was a lot in the newspapers about it. But the man who had made himself ruler of this European nation chased Jurl Crierson out of the country, didn’t he?”

“Yes. Jurl Crierson was supposed to get the job as war minister.”

“Exiled instead, wasn’t he?”

“Right. His chief evidently feared Crierson. He wasn’t exactly exiled, however. He left one jump ahead of the secret police, who doubtless had orders to shoot him on sight.”

“Jurl Crierson had a gift for organization, didn’t he?” Monk said, searching in his memory. “And he liked to be dramatic, too. Quite a show-off. And an almost fantastically clever man.”

Doc Savage nodded.

“What I want to know,” Ham snapped, “is whether this Karl Maximus is man, beast or fowl. What is it?”

Doc Savage turned quickly and moved toward the door.

“Where you goin’, Doc?” Monk asked.

“The *Karl Maximus* is a steamship,” the bronze man said. “It is a new ship, and a very large and fast one. It was built by the government of the country we were just talking about—the European nation ruled by Jurl Crierson’s son’s ex-friend. The *Karl Maximus* is the first of a number of such vessels, designed for the purpose of taking the South American trade away from the United States if it is humanly possible. There has been a good deal of calamity-howling in the United States Congress about this, because the *Karl Maximus* and other ships to follow will be operated under a government subsidy, and therefore can cut ocean shipping rates so low that our own privately owned steamship lines cannot possibly compete with them.”

The bronze man then went out.

“He didn’t,” Monk recollected, “explain where he was going.”

Larry Forge started for the door. “I believe I’ll see where he goes.”

“You stay here.” Monk took Larry Forge’s arm and led the young man to a chair. “We don’t want people stamping in and out of here and maybe getting us found out.”

Doc Savage returned.

“What did you do?” Monk asked.

“Sent a radiogram to the captain of the *Karl Maximus*,” said Doc Savage, “warning him to watch out for danger.”

Ham was crouching over the amplifier. He looked up.

“Sh-h-h,” he said. “This sounds bad to me.”

Stillness fell. Ham turned up the volume control of the amplifier, and the breathing of men became quite loud, and their voices low thunder that was ugly and threatening.

“Make sure she can’t tear that gag off,” growled the one they called Forty Mile. “And you, there by her head, you hold her nose. People can scream pretty loud through their nose, sometimes.”

“O.K.”

“Now look, sis,” Forty Mile continued. “We been nice and decent to you so far, but we’re all of a sudden impatient. We want that Herb March letter. We want the radio message. You got ’em hid somewhere. You turn ’em over to us, and we’ll be satisfied.”

Forty Mile paused, evidently to let that sink in.

“We won’t let you go right away afterward,” he continued, “but we’ll put you in a plane and send you up into Canada to a place we know about where you won’t be talking to the police, and you’ll be turned loose in a couple of months. Give her a chance to answer, guys.”

Glendara Smith’s response was an attempt to scream, which was thwarted quickly.

“Start lighting me cigarettes!” Forty Mile snarled. “We’ll take that out of her.”

Footsteps came in particularly loud, and scuffling sounds. That was because the tiny microphone lay on the floor, carefully masqueraded as a cigar stub.

Doc Savage said grimly, “Let’s go.”

Monk had been waiting for that. He was all set. But even then, he failed to beat Doc outside. They reached the door leading into the rooms where the girl was held.

“Renny would love to start things off by smacking that door with his fist,” Monk muttered, and he and Doc Savage hit the panel together.

Wood ripped, crashed. They piled into a filthy hogpen of a room. A man—he was getting a pack of cigarettes off a table—swore wildly. He tried to run backward and draw a gun at the same time.

Doc Savage seized the man’s coat, yanked. The coat came off the fellow in two parts. Then Doc scooped up the man, ran with him and used him as a ram to smash open the other door. He flung the fellow into the room.

“Back!” Doc rapped at those behind him. “There’s no need getting shot to pieces in this thing.”

The bronze man then brought from a pocket several small glass bulbs that were like marbles. They contained a citrine-looking liquid. He tossed them into the next room, and they broke.

Monk, Ham and Johnny knew what to do. Doc himself breathed instruction to Larry Forge: “Hold your breath.”

They took air into their lungs and kept it there. The glass bulbs contained a chemical that would cause quick unconsciousness. Doc had perfected the little anaesthetic bombs, had used them for a long time.

They let a long minute—the time necessary for the gas to do its work, then mingle with the air and become harmless—go past.

“All right!” Monk yelled, and sprang through the door.

Five shots crashed out as fast as an automatic could possibly be fired.

Monk came staggering backward through the door, arms across his midriff, his face terrible.

“They had gas masks!” he croaked. Then he folded over on the floor.

“Johnny—your machine pistol!” Doc said. “It has a mixed drum, hasn’t it?”

Johnny nodded. A mixed ammo drum was one charged with explosives, then smoke, then gas, then mercy slugs. He passed the weapon to Doc Savage.

“Back,” Doc said.

They retreated to the door by which they had entered. Doc lifted the machine pistol. It moaned. And roaring explosions shook the entire block. Rent lath and blasted plaster jumped about in showers. Great holes opened in the wall between the rooms.

The smokers followed, going through the holes, bursting in the other room. The smoke, as black as India ink, spread until it packed the room. The bronze man stopped firing then. The gas pellets would do no good. The men had masks.

“All right,” he said. “In after them!”

They dived into the room. The place was intensely dark from the smoke. Plaster dust and explosive fumes choked them.

Doc Savage found a man, felt for the fellow’s jaw. The man struck him, a terrific roundhouse blow. The bronze man staggered, but held onto the other, pulled him down, and wielded a fist. The foe went limp. Getting up, he held the man close as a shield.

A gun was crashing. Suddenly a fist blow silenced the weapon. Johnny said, “Ow! My fist!” Johnny always used small words when he was excited. After that, the man who had used the gun fell, sounding wooden when he hit the floor.

There was a scuffling sound at the window. Doc made for it. With his hands, he located a rope. They had lowered it from the window, and more men were sliding down it.

Seizing the rope, Doc tugged. There was more than one man on the rope, he judged from the weight. Three of them, probably. He began pulling the rope in, hand over hand, as rapidly as possible. But there must have been a good length of rope lying on the ground; he could tell from the way that the weight went off it that all three of the fugitives reached the ground safely.

He started to go out, to slide down the rope himself, but bullets came up, scooping off fragments of brick. Doc had shoved the machine pistol in his

pocket. He got it out, shot downward, placing the bullets well apart, hoping to hit someone by blind luck.

Then he knew, from the sound of men running, that he had missed.

“Stay here and mop up,” he called.

He raced back out of the smoke-filled room, downstairs. The light in the street was blinding after the darkness.

When he gained the corner, a car was going away, gathering speed. There was no other machine near in which he could follow. He went back.

Monk was leaning against a wall in the hallway, with more rage than agony on his homely face, still holding his midriff.

“We gotta improve these blasted bulletproof under-suits,” Monk croaked. “I feel like I been kicked by five mules.”

Doc Savage went on into the rooms where they had fought. He called, “Ham?”

“How is Monk?” Ham asked anxiously.

“Probably about to start cussing because he missed the fight. Who got away?”

“Three, all told,” Ham said disgustedly. “Forty Mile, and two others. But we’ve got three of them.”

“The girl?”

“She’s all right,” Ham said. And he added angrily, “You know what that Larry Forge is doing? He’s holding the girl in his arms and telling her *he* rescued her!”

“Which will make Monk even happier,” Johnny put in dryly.

“Get everyone out of here in a hurry,” Doc Savage directed, “before the police come. The police are swell, but this happens to be our own boatload of trouble.”

Chapter 12

THE NO-TALK MEDICINE

The morning sun slanted in through the great windows of Doc Savage's establishment on the eighty-sixth floor of the midtown building.

Doc Savage strode in from the elevators, dragging the last prisoner. This one was conscious, and they had tied his ankles and wrists. Doc put him in a chair. The fellow glanced at his two comrades, both of whom were still senseless from blows taken during the fight. The man licked his lips.

"Whatcha gonna do with us?" he asked wildly.

No one answered him.

Dara Smith entered, being helped very solicitously by Larry Forge.

The bronze man went to the telephone and gave the police a description of Forty Mile and the other pair who had escaped, and told them what he had been able to notice about the flight car. He gave the information as an anonymous tip, then broke the telephone circuit before the call could be traced.

The foes, having seen Monk in the tenement, doubtless knew by now that Doc and his men had not perished in a plane crash at sea.

"Why go on keeping secret the fact that we're alive?" Ham queried.

"The newspapers," Doc said.

The others understood. Doc Savage's strange life work of righting wrongs did not depend in any way upon newspaper publicity for its success, unlike the careers of actors and politicians. Being of a genuinely modest nature, he was embarrassed by the wild stuff the newspapers insisted on publishing about him. Furthermore such stories—sometimes they were accurate and gave enemies accurate data on his habits—could be dangerous.

Doc Savage prepared to question their prisoners. Monk, grinning fiercely, doused the two senseless ones with ice water. The pair opened their eyes, saw Monk, shuddered and acted as if they wished they could get unconscious again. Monk twisted their ears.

"All right, boys," the homely chemist told them, "let's hear a true story."

The trio had no thought of giving information, of course. They expressed their intentions with profanity. Monk put his thumb on their noses and pressed until tears came to their eyes.

"You were gonna use burning cigarettes on the girl," Monk said threateningly. "We've got worse methods than that."

The three just glared.

"Every living soul has disappeared mysteriously off two ships," Monk reminded them, "and you were trying to keep us from investigating. We want to know why. Your boss is a man named Jurl Crierson. We want to

know where he is. And something is going to happen to a new foreign ship named the *Karl Maximus*. We want to know all about that.”

They scowled at Monk.

“Say, he’s funny-lookin’, ain’t he?” one said.

Monk began taking off his coat.

Doc Savage went into the laboratory, where their extremely powerful radio apparatus was located. The bronze man worked with the dials until he located the frequency used by the steamer *Karl Maximus*, located in the South Atlantic. The *Karl Maximus* was en route from its foreign home port to Buenos Aires, with a load of manufactured goods. The craft was, the *Karl Maximus* radio operator assured Doc Savage, steaming along peacefully.

Doc left the radio tuned in on the steamer’s wave length.

When Doc went back into the reception room, he found that Larry Forge had triumphantly produced the woolly little dog which he had presented to Dara Smith. The pup had been there during the excitement that had intervened since the evening he had given the pet to the girl. Habeas Corpus and Chemistry, the other two pets, sat on the floor and looked at the pup with interest.

Monk shook his fist fiercely under the noses of the three prisoners. In his other hand, Monk held a bottle—filled with an incredibly bitter acid. It was harmless, although the captives didn’t know that.

“You see this stuff”—Monk shook the acid and it gurgled—“in this bottle? Well, it’ll make you permanently insane, but you’ll talk. It’ll drive you nuts, and you’ll never get over it. While you’re going crazy, your minds will get out of control, and you’ll tell all you know. Then you’ll be bats the rest of your lives. The pink elephants will chase you.”

It was a very convincing sales talk. The trio became shades paler.

“We’re in a bad humor,” Monk barked at them. “Either you talk, or we take a funnel and pour this down your gullets!”

There was on Monk’s visage no indication of bluff. Putting across a thing of this kind was Monk’s specialty, and nature, giving him the kind of face he owned, had equipped him for the job.

“We better,” gulped one of the prisoners, “do what Forty Mile said.”

The other two nodded, and they began to squirm and twist and double themselves in unusual shapes.

“Hah, they’re tryin’ to get away,” Monk said. “Fat chance they’ve got!”

Suddenly, Doc Savage leaped forward. It had dawned on him that what the captives were doing—getting their coat lapels in their mouths and

chewing on them. There was some kind of drug in the lapels, and they were getting the stuff.

“Bring stomach pumps!” the bronze man rapped.

A prisoner sneered.

“You’re too late,” he jeered. “Forty Mile said the stuff would work fast, and it is. I can already feel a queer sensation goin’ through me.”

“What the blazes is the stuff?” Monk yelled.

“Something that’ll make us unconscious for three or four days,” the man said. “You won’t be able to revive us, so you’ll play hell questioning us.”

Doc worked rapidly with restoratives and the stomach pumps, but with complete lack of success. The drug took effect with uncanny speed. The captives squirmed, groaned, had convulsions. And one at a time, they straightened out on the floor, quite limp.

“Maybe we can snap ’em out of it some way,” Monk muttered, disgustedly.

Doc Savage examined the three. He stood up.

“Not a chance,” he said.

“But if they’re only unconscious—”

“They’re dead,” the bronze man advised.

Once again there was stillness in the place, and no motion except the dust, not as much of it now, swirling in the slanting sunlight. At long intervals, for this was late enough in the fall so that there was not much static, the radio loud-speaker let out a cracking burst.

Horror was a tangible influence in the room, it having been smashed open to them anew that their enemies were grimly desperate. It was a coldly fiendish trick, making men think they were taking a drug to avoid questioning, when actually they were swallowing death. But it was effective.

Ham cleared his throat, and said, “Whew!” almost breathlessly.

Dara Smith made a stifled sobbing sound and leaped up, and Monk sprang forward quickly and led her into the laboratory, out of sight of the bodies.

Larry Forge scowled at Doc and asked, “What are you going to tell the police?” He got more concerned as he thought about it. “Why, dammit, we’ll all be arrested.”

Ham said, “Doc Savage has a high honorary commission on the New York force. I don’t think there will be trouble in that way.”

Later, Dara shook her head slowly at their questions. She was weak and a little ill, although her courage was unshaken, and she felt better than earlier, for she had consumed food.

“The letter and radio message are hidden in my apartment,” she said. “I’ll have to go get them.”

“I’ll go with you to get them,” said Larry Forge.

Doc interposed, “We will all go, with the exception of Johnny, who will stay here to watch headquarters—and that radio. Keep close tab on the steamer *Karl Maximus*, Johnny.”

“Right,” Johnny agreed. The long geologist and archaeologist never used his massive words on Doc Savage.

The ride to Glendara Smith’s small apartment was uneventful.

“Oh!” gasped Dara. “The place has been searched!”

Disintegrated would have been a more appropriate word than searched. Even the pillows had been taken apart, and creams and lotions taken out of jars and bottles in the bathrooms.

“Blazes!” Monk groaned. “Do you remember what was in the letter and radiogram, Dara?”

“I won’t have to depend on my memory,” the young woman explained.

She went to the window, opened it, and called, “Mrs. Sphinxman! Oh, Mrs. Sphinxman!” And when a fat woman put her head out of the window across the airshaft, Dara said, “Will you return the envelope I gave you to keep for me?”

“Of course, dearie,” said Mrs. Sphinxman. “I haven’t been seeing you around for a day or two. You been away?”

“Yes, I was away,” Dara said. She took the envelope which was passed across to her thrust in the bristles of a broom.

Herb March’s ears wouldn’t have been very red if he had watched them reading his letter to Dara. Herb was not a romantic writer, merely stating without drama that he had been involved in a Hidalgo, Central America, revolution and that he was stowing away on a schooner named the *Patricia*, the looks of which he liked. There was only one strange statement: “*I just met a Hindu who gave me fifty dollars, and who didn’t want me to stow away on the boat. I never saw the Hindu before.*”

Monk said, “That doesn’t tell us anything important. Why were those fellows so anxious to get the letter?”

“Probably because they simply knew there was a letter,” Doc suggested, “without being sure of what was in it.”

“That sounds reasonable,” put in Ham.

Dara said, “The radiogram is a little more to the point.”

The radio communication addressed to Dara, said:

I HAVE JUST LEARNED THAT SOMETHING MYSTERIOUS IS GOING ON ABOARD. THE MAGNETIC COMPASS HAS BEEN TAMPERED WITH AND THE RADIO COMPASS ALSO. BOTH COMPASSES HAVE BEEN THROWN OFF SO AS TO SEND THE BOAT FAR EAST OF ITS PROPER COURSE. THE HINDU IS BEHIND IT. I MADE HIM DRINK A BOTTLE OF WHISKEY AND HE TALKED SOME BUT IT DID NOT MAKE SENSE. HE MUMBLED STUFF ABOUT EVERYONE ABOARD VANISHING AND SOME OTHER STUFF. AS NEAR AS I CAN MAKE OUT.

That was all of the message. Although there was a period after the last word, the sense of the missive obviously was not complete.

“It looks unfinished,” Monk hazarded.

Doc Savage nodded agreement, asked, “You know nothing more than this?”

“That’s all,” Dara said. “I’m sorry, but I can see it doesn’t offer you any definite clue. I’m afraid it is of no value whatever.”

“On the contrary,” the bronze man said, “it shows us that the *Patricia* was deliberately led off her course. It proves that the vanishing of everyone aboard might not have been as fantastic as it appeared. Now, suppose we return to headquarters and check up on the *Karl Maximus*.”

Johnny met them as soon as they entered the skyscraper aerie. He was too excited to use big words.

“A United States submarine has stopped the *Karl Maximus*,” Johnny shouted, “and torpedoed it!”

Chapter 13

EUROPE’S ANGRY MAN

Doc Savage whipped to the commercial-wave-band radio and adjusted the dials. The operator of the *Karl Maximus* was speaking a foreign language.

“Seven lifeboats have been lowered,” the operator was saying, “and the crew have been removed, including those injured by the torpedo blast.”

He paused, while someone in the radio shack of the *Karl Maximus* spoke to him.

“I have been informed that the United States submarine is now out of sight, having taken a course westward toward its homeland. I am also asked to repeat that there is absolutely no doubt about the submarine being an American craft. They hailed us, announcing their United States identity. They ordered us to turn back. The submarine officers said the government of the United States had decided that our ship would no longer be allowed to trade with South America, and that all of them would be torpedoed if they persisted. It was ridiculous and high-handed behavior, and our captain told them so, asserting his intention of proceeding on his course. Then we were torpedoed. I will repeat our S O S.”

The foreign operator went on, giving latitude and longitude location, until suddenly he broke in, “I have to go now. We are sinking.”

It could not have been over two or three minutes later when they distinctly heard dull explosions, and a rushing of water into the radio shack, after which the carrier wave died.

“This is impossible!” Monk exploded.

Dara gasped, “But the United States government wouldn’t—”

“Exactly,” Doc Savage said. “The United States wouldn’t do such a thing. But that may not keep it from being serious.”

“The European nation that owns the *Karl Maximus* wouldn’t believe we would do such a thing.”

Doc shook his head dubiously. “With undeclared wars getting to be the fashion, no telling what they will think.”

The newspapers which hit the stands that afternoon showed what the European nation—or, rather, its ruler, for the government over there was strictly a one-man thing—thought about it.

There was a blazing speech in black type on the front pages. The one man who stood at the head of his nation—stood on the neck of his nation, some of the papers put it—had stood on a balcony and beat his chest and demanded to know just who the Hades the United States thought it was.

All naval leaves in the European nation had been canceled. The navy had been ordered tuned up.

“They had better keep their shirts on over there,” Monk said sourly. “They put on them mobilizing shows and bluff each other, but when they

pull that stuff on the U.S.A., they're growling at a different kind of a dog."

"Just the same," Larry Forge said in a grim voice, "this may turn out serious. Why don't they do something down in Washington?"

Down in Washington, they were going around pulling their hair. Every rank of naval officer from admiral down was running into the White House and out again.

The question was: Should the United States navy go into action in a big way to find the submarine? Or would the European government take that as a sign that the United States wanted to fight? It was a tough problem.

It was certain, however, that no United States submarine had torpedoed the *Karl Maximus*. That is, they were certain in the Navy Department.

Doc had analyzed the scrapings in the little bottles a second time. No one had been watching him, and he had not revealed his results.

He went back into the laboratory now, and locked the door. The eight-millimeter home-movie film had gone through a processing bath, and was ready to come off the drier. Doc entered the darkroom, spooled the film onto a reel, put it in a projector, and sat back to watch the picture. It was a color film.

A few shots of Patricia Savage moved across the screen. Pat photographed well, appearing vibrant and full of life, with her bronze hair particularly striking.

Then there was a picture of a husky and sunburned young man with a grin, Herb March, taken when he did not know he was being photographed. Doc recognized him from the description Dara had given.

Next, there was a shot of a brown Hindu in a voluminous gownlike garment and a turban. It was an arty shot, showing the Hindu walking away, his garment blowing in the wind, the bellying sails and the utter blue of the Caribbean making a striking background.

Then suddenly there was a long picture of Pat herself. Of her face. She must have held the camera at arm length, lens pointed at herself, and taken the shot. She was speaking, but there was no sound, the film being a silent one.

Pat's face was strained now. Something unpleasant had obviously happened.

Doc quickly reversed the film, and again ran the long sequence where Pat was speaking. The bronze man, this time, spoke into a dictaphone as he watched.

He was skilled at lip reading.

Patricia Savage said, “About half the crew are gone now. I think Herb March, a young man who stowed away in Hidalgo, is gone, too. It is all terrible and mysterious and I haven’t quite figured out what it is all about. The Hindu is the ringleader, only he isn’t a Hindu. I don’t know what he is, except that he is probably the most horrible thing that ever lived.”

The dictaphone made a slight whispering sound as it turned, recording Pat’s words as Doc repeated them. The projector buzzed.

“This whole mystery isn’t exactly what it appears to be, I suspect. I managed to overhear the Hindu talking, and two other ships are doomed besides my schooner. There may be more than two—I’m not sure. One of other ships is named the *Senora Dupree*, and I’m afraid you will be too late to help that, if you ever find this record I am taking. I think I can hide the camera where they won’t find it, but I’m not sure.”

At that point, Pat glanced around nervously.

“The third doomed ship is named the *Brazil Trader*, and it is sailing from Charleston, South Carolina, in about seven weeks. As soon as the *Brazil Trader* sails, it is doomed. If you can—”

That was all of the film that had been exposed—it ended with Pat giving another quick glance around, and an expression of alarm leaping over her features.

Plainly, she’d had to go hide the camera at that point.

Doc Savage went into the reception room. “Check up on a steamer named the *Brazil Trader*,” he said.

“Right,” Monk grunted, and began turning to the shipping sections of the newspapers.

Doc Savage transferred the dictaphone record to a transcriber with an electric pickup which played back through an amplifier and a loud-speaker. By the time he had done that, Monk came in.

“The *Brazil Trader* sails from Charleston, South Carolina, at eight o’clock in the morning,” the homely chemist advised.

Doc said, “You might call the others in.”

They gathered around the dictaphone transcriber, curious.

Doc explained about the hidden camera and the film. He then ran it for their benefit. There was only one remark made during the screening.

Dara said, “This Patricia Savage is a remarkably beautiful girl, isn’t she?”

Larry Forge was wise. A less canny fellow would have made some statement about it being plain to see how Herb March had happened to stow away aboard *that* schooner.

When Pat started speaking in the film, Doc put the dictaphone into operation. He kept a hand on the speed-control screw, so that his own voice rather closely matched Pat's lip movements—closely enough that the others would have no doubt about what Pat was saying.

They sat in stunned silence after the strange show ended.

“The *Brazil Trader*,” Ham said thoughtfully. “That’s our one and only clue, isn’t it, Doc?”

“It is the one we are going to act on,” the bronze man said.

Chapter 14

PARACHUTES

Colonel John Renny Renwick did not greet them very politely. Renny was a lover of action, and he had been sitting in a plane out on a part of Fire Island Sound where the water was not much more than knee-deep, and where there was nothing to look at and nothing to do except twiddle thumbs. He gave Dara a baleful stare. “Do we have to take her along?” he asked.

“I’m going,” Dara said. “Herb March is in trouble, and he appealed to me for help when he sent that radiogram. I’m not going to let him down.”

Monk said, “If we leave anybody behind, it should be Larry Forge.”

Ham plainly agreed with that. Both of them were trying to monopolize Dara’s company, and finding Larry Forge quite an obstacle.

Larry Forge blocked his fists and hardened his shoulders.

“Where Dara goes, I go,” he said. “Frankly, I’m no adventurer and I’m scared stiff, but I’m in this, and in it I stay. I know as much as the rest of you know about this Jurl Crierson, whoever he is, don’t I? Suppose he should order his men to kill me? Where would I be? Listen, I need you fellows’ protection. I’m going along.”

Since Doc Savage himself voiced no objection, the others agreed. It was immaterial to Johnny and Renny, except that Larry Forge would just be another one to take care of when they got into trouble. Monk and Ham of

course, would cheerfully have thrown him overboard—they did not like Larry Forge too much, and the fact that Larry did not approve of either Habeas Corpus or Chemistry did not lift him in their favor.

The big plane raced across the marsh and took the air. Doc, at the controls headed southward. The ship needed fuel again, the tanks hardly containing enough gasoline to carry them to Charleston.

“We will refuel at the same place as before, in the Chesapeake,” he said.

Larry Forge and Dara Smith came forward.

“I’ve been thinking,” Dara said. “Is it going to be safe to land openly at Charleston? I know Charleston is a city, but a plane as unusual as this one will attract attention, won’t it?”

“What do you suggest?” Doc asked.

“My oil company has a branch office in Charleston, and I worked there for a while,” Dara explained. “I know the surrounding country rather well. There is a little creek called Shipyard Creek near the city, and an abandoned lumber mill on the bank of the creek. If you can manage to land in the creek, and tie the plane in one of the abandoned slips at the lumber-yard dock, it would be safe.

“An excellent idea,” Doc agreed.

Dara and Larry returned to the cabin seats.

Renny squinted at Doc.

“Usually,” the big-fisted engineer said strangely, “you use your own ideas.”

It was late afternoon when they landed at the little island in the Chesapeake for refueling. They taxied up to the wharf, made fast, and the gasoline hose was dragged aboard. A rutted road led away from the station, and a hundred yards or so distant was a combination general store and lunchroom.

“I’m hungry,” said Dara. “I think I’ll go get something to eat.”

“All right,” Doc told her, “but make it a quick one.”

Larry Forge was plainly going to volunteer to go along with her, so Monk handed him the gasoline hose and said, “Make yourself something besides ornamental.”

Larry scowled, but took the hose. However, he was not very efficient with it, and Monk finally had to take it from him. Larry went and disappeared into the filling station.

The refueling job was eventually finished.

Doc whistled shrilly. Dara appeared in the distant lunchroom door, waved and ran toward them.

“Where’s Larry Forge?” Monk grumbled.

Larry was in the filling station, with the radio tuned in on a news broadcast. He looked up when Doc Savage appeared and made a clucking sound of concern.

“That thing of the torpedoed foreign ship is getting serious,” he said. “They are having riots in various parts of South America, and they’re obviously being incited by the agents of that European nation. Listen to this.”

The news commentator was saying:

“At three o’clock this afternoon, an ultimatum was laid down to the United States by the European nation owning the steamer *Karl Maximus*, which was torpedoed at sea. The ultimatum demanded ten million dollars indemnity to be paid in gold. It demanded that the crew of the submarine and the officers who ordered the torpedoing be court-martialed and shot. And as an additional gesture, the European power prepared for a general mobilization of its military forces.”

As they got back in the plane, Ham snorted. “That country is more than three thousand miles away. They probably figure it is safe to make a big noise.”

The flight to Charleston did not require long, because Doc opened up the motors, and their airspeed probably averaged somewhat over three hundred and fifty miles an hour, this plane being one of the fastest craft, for its size, as yet constructed.

Having thought for a while, Ham felt called upon to air his opinions of the European situation. Dara Smith and Larry Forge joined in spiritedly.

The political discussion bogged down of its own weight when Charleston came in sight. It was dark, and the city street lights had been switched on.

“Monk,” Doc Savage said, “break out parachutes.”

“Huh?”

“You don’t mind making an unscheduled landing—with the others? We’ll meet later at the old slave market in town.”

Monk squinted at Doc Savage. The homely chemist pursed his lips and whistled thoughtfully.

“You know,” he said, “I been figuring all along you know a lot more about this than you’ve been letting on.”

Chapter 15

IS A GIRL BAD?

Parachute jumping was not a new experience to Johnny, Renny, Ham and Monk. They had done a good deal of it. Dara was startled, but agreeable. Larry Forge, however, raised a howl, but finally consented.

Doc, alone in the plane, saw their chutes open, vague gray mushrooms in the growing murk, and noted that they would land in a cotton field, not far apart, and close to town.

Doc did not circle. He had cut the exhausts out of the silencers, and the great engines were making a roar that would carry for miles. Circling the plane might have been noticeable from the ground. Monk and Ham held their pets in their arms. Dara’s pup had been left behind in New York, with a pet shop.

Doc went in a long slide, picking up the harbor and the river and the great spidery framework of the bridge which spanned the river, the bridge that Charlestonians like to boast was the highest in the world. He banked to the right, came down slowly, switched on the powerful floodlights embedded in the wings.

Shipyard Creek was a ribbon of water, as crooked as an ailing snake in places. But there was a point where it widened out slightly in a stretch long enough for a landing.

It was not a particularly difficult landing, for the big ship had a newly developed type of wing flap that cut landing speed remarkably.

As soon as the ship was down, the floods lighted the ramshackle string of dockage that belonged to the abandoned sawmill yard. Doc taxied the plane slowly toward these.

The bronze man turned a lever on the instrument dial. Instantly, black smoke poured from the exhaust stacks of the idling engines. A chemical was being ejected into the fuel lines of the motors, after the fashion employed in

some military planes to lay a smoke screen. Doc let the smoke flow only briefly, then switched it off again and cut the motors.

The big plane slowed until it drifted idly on the creek, and the smoke mushroomed around it.

Doc went to the door, which was still open, and listened.

After he heard the motorboats, he jerked the firing pin of a large thermite grenade, and dropped it onto the cabin floor, then dived into the brackish water of Shipyard Creek.

The two motorboats came fast, one popping from under the old lumber docks, another shooting out of a side creek where it had lain, almost concealed by overhanging marsh grass.

The two motorboats converged on the plane. Men stood up in both craft. They had high-powered rifles.

“What the hell is making that smoke?” one barked.

“You in the plane!” another yelled. “Get your hands up and come—”

There was a flash and a bang. The top of the plane cabin split open, and the whole ship’s interior filled with flame. The thermite grenade was filled with the same stuff put in incendiary bombs to start fires, and it did its work perfectly. The gasoline tanks were ruptured, and suddenly the plane was bundled in flame, and burning gasoline began running over the water like fiery fingers.

Doc Savage screamed as if in mortal agony a few times. In the excitement, it was not likely that they would realize his voice did not come from the fire-ridden plane.

Then the bronze man dived, and swam away under the water. He had put in his mouth a pellet of chemical which slowly dissolved and while it did not supply his lungs with oxygen, it did enable him to stay under much longer than would have been possible otherwise.

He climbed out of the creek a safe distance away. Launching at once into a run, he was not far from the two motorboats when they pulled up to the old lumber dock. Close enough to hear.

“I still don’t see how it could have happened,” one of the men grumbled. “Hell, I never saw such a fire!”

“It looks simple to me,” another advised him. “The cabin got full of gasoline flames. Maybe a fuel line broke, or something. When they throttled the motors after landing, one of them backfired and set off the gas. Or maybe somebody started to light a cigarette.”

“Well, they all died, anyway.”

“Yes. They never had a chance.”

“Saved us some trouble.”

“I don’t mind being saved the trouble, I’m telling you. Ever since I found out we had been saddled with the job of waylaying that bronze guy, I’ve had goose bumps you could hang your hat on.”

They climbed out on the shore.

“Well, this is cleaned up. The job on the *Brazil Trader* can go ahead, huh?”

“No reason why not.”

“Do we go aboard tonight?”

“Tomorrow morning, just before she sails at eight, is soon enough.”

They went away in the darkness, and Doc Savage made no attempt to follow them.

Of all the historical landmarks pointed out to the tourists visiting the ancient city of Charleston, the old slave market is probably one of the most prominently designated. The structure itself is possibly disappointing as a spectacle, unless one cares to take the trouble of learning the past of the place, the number of slaves who were sold to the highest bidder upon the spot. The slave market is situated slightly outside the business district, and not far from the water front. The district is a dark one at night. Doc joined his friends there, and they found a booth in a small, gloomy restaurant where no one paid them particular attention.

“We might as well eat,” Doc said.

Monk demanded anxiously, “What happened, Doc? We thought we heard an explosion in the distance, over toward that Shipyard Creek, and we saw a heck of a big fire.”

Doc told them. His explanation was brief, but not dramatic.

He varied from fact in only one detail—he gave the impression that the ambush might have happened in a slightly different way.

“Possibly they were listening for the plane, and there were parties of them stationed at various points around Charleston,” he said. “In that way, they could have rushed to the spot after the ship landed, in time to stage the ambush.”

While that was a possibility, it wasn’t what had happened. Monk saw through it. The homely chemist drew Doc aside just before the main course of the dinner was served.

“Blazes, Doc,” Monk muttered. His voice was strained. “You know something? I feel—well—I’m kind of sick in my stomach. You see, the girl, Dara, knew where we were going to land. Matter of fact, she suggested that landing place. She went to the lunchroom on that island where we refueled in Chesapeake Bay, if you remember. Maybe there was a telephone in that lunchroom, too.”

“There probably was.”

“She could have used the phone to call down here and tell those fellows to have a reception committee ready for us.”

“I wouldn’t worry about it,” Doc said.

Monk squinted at the bronze man.

“You pick the damnedest things,” Monk muttered, “for us not to worry about.”

The meal was fair, about all that could be expected for thirty-five cents.

When the coffee was on the table, and while Monk and Ham were barking at each other, Doc Savage opened a small bottle in his pocket and let some of the pellets it contained roll out in his hand.

Doc dropped a pill in the coffee cup of each of the others, including those of his aids. He did not dope his own.

After the coffee had been downed, Doc said, “We have something to do now. We had better hurry.”

They went out into the thick darkness, and walked in a compact group. The bronze man had been in Charleston before. He picked out the darkest alleys.

“I feel danged sleepy all of a sudden,” Renny rumbled.

He promptly lay down and went to sleep.

Before the others could decide what ailed Renny, they also sank down in the darkness and slumbered. Only Doc Savage remained on his feet.

Chapter 16

A MYSTERY CREEPING

The steamer *Brazil Trader*, although a “tramp” ship, looked spick and span, and so her crew were proud of her and kept her neat. There were

accommodations for about three dozen passengers, and these were comfortable, hence usually fully occupied.

The crew might have left a little to be desired, but the officers wore their uniforms regularly, at least.

Cargo for this voyage was pine lumber, some machinery, and three large airplanes of the same type used by the United States Army. Those planes were unusual, the first shipment of the type, and there had been some newspaper publicity about them. A few antiadministration congressmen in Washington had indulged in calamity-howling about the planes, which accounted for the newspaper stories.

The United States government as a gesture of good will, was selling the planes to a South American government for its army. The United States had permitted the sale to France and England of late types of army planes, and so why not South America, too? Wasn't this half of the world one big happy family?

The planes were being shipped on the *Brazil Trader*.

The passenger accommodations were all booked.

One cabin had been booked at the last minute, and this was occupied by a crank. The crank was a big man, and he had white hair, a lump on his left cheek, a straggling mustache, and one arm.

The crank was carrying a shipment of jewelry, and that was why he refused to let the steward enter his cabin, or so he said. He ventured out of the cabin only occasionally, and had his meals served to him. He was a prodigious eater, judging from the food he consumed.

Once the steward, pondering over the quantity of food the crank made away with, wondered if there could be more than one man in that cabin. He dismissed the idea, however, for the time being, but resolved to make a mental note to investigate before the voyage ended. In the meantime, he paid no attention.

The steward just let the matter ride, and two otherwise uneventful days went past.

The crank, who did not venture abroad much during that day, did considerable nocturnal prowling, however. He was not noticed particularly. He was careful about that.

Mostly, the crank just stood in dark places and looked.

Once, he saw a man creep near the wheelhouse and hide something in a locker. The crank investigated, and found a powerful magnet which would

doubtless throw the magnetic compass off somewhat. The crank let the magnet stay where he found it.

The next night, all the officers' sextants disappeared. That caused quite a bit of cussing. Without sextants, it was impossible to shoot the stars and get an accurate fix to the ship's position.

Fortunately, there was still the radio compass, the officers remarked.

They did not know that the radio compass had been tampered with as well, so that the thing registered falsely. The loop-aerial indicator had been altered, shifted slightly, so that the pointer read differently.

This business of an altered radio compass was one that would soon be discovered. A day or two, and the navigators were almost sure to discover something was distinctly wrong.

That convinced the crank that it was time to go into action, so he went back to his cabin, unstrapped his arm from his side and became a two-armed man. He removed the lump from his left cheek—it was make-up, anyhow—and used chemicals to return his hair to its natural bronze color, and also take some of the pallid tinting off his cheeks.

The crank became Doc Savage. It had been by no means a perfect make-up, but he had kept under cover and had managed to get away with it, he hoped.

Monk Mayfair opened one eye, yawned, opened the other eye, and lay perfectly still for a while, waiting for the haze to go out of his head. His eyes were small, but then suddenly got very wide.

"Gleeps, that grub was doped!" he croaked suddenly. He reared up and snarled, "Lemme outa here! I'll wring somebody's neck! Where's Ham? It musta been one of his tricks!"

Doc Savage put a pillow over Monk's head and held it there, enforcing silence until the homely chemist understood the situation.

Monk then looked at Renny, Johnny, Ham, Larry Forge and Dara Smith. They lay in a neat row on the floor, slumbering.

"What was the stuff that put us to sleep?"

Doc told him. Monk looked relieved. He had worked out that tasteless sleeping compound in his own chemical laboratory, and he knew it was harmless.

"I simply dosed you again and again with the concoction," Doc explained. "As you know, one dose is only good for eight or ten hours. I also

fed you—a little.”

“But why? I mean—why keep us asleep?”

“There seemed to be a slight leak in our ranks,” Doc reminded. “Otherwise, how did those fellows know we were going to land in Shipyard Creek?”

Monk stared grimly at Dara Smith.

“I understand,” he said.

“It could have been Larry Forge,” Doc said. “He was in the filling station alone on that island in the Chesapeake—listening to the radio. But there was a telephone in the filling station.”

“I’ll watch him, too,” Monk muttered.

The others did not create quite as much furor as had Monk. Doc let their heads clear. Then he explained.

“The ship is being led off its course,” he said. “Not a great deal, but nevertheless off its course.”

He got no further than that at the moment, for there were two shots, placed close together, and a commotion of men running toward the bridge, then more shots, and sounds of the men running again, this time away from the bridge.

“The first person who shows his head,” a voice shouted, “is going to get it shot off!”

“We were a little late getting started,” Doc Savage said grimly.

They listened, and because there were no more shots, and no more yells, the bronze man got between the others and the door.

“Hold it,” he said. “They’re ready for trouble now, and we might stand very little chance.”

That was logical. They could hear men tramping up and down the deck, and looking out they saw some men herding a small group of sailors at the points of very modern automatic rifles.

“It’s too damn bad,” one of the riflemen said, “that they found out the compass had been doctored. Give us another half a day, and everything would have been swell.”

“During the shooting, did any of the bullets hit the boat?” another asked.

“I don’t think so.”

“If they see bullets embedded somewhere, after the boat is found adrift without any crew, it might not look as mysterious,” the other said.

The group tramped on, and Doc Savage began resuming his disguise as the crank jewelry salesman.

There was one bad point about the jewelry salesman disguise—he had no jewelry, which meant that he could not have the raiders searching the stateroom.

In one corner of the stateroom was a clothes locker, and by crowding, Monk, Ham and Renny managed to jam themselves into this. Dara and Larry Forge wedged under the bunk.

A few minutes later, there was a battering on the door.

“Open up!” a man yelled. “We’re simply searching everyone on the ship for arms. Behave yourself, and nothing unpleasant will happen to you.”

Doc Savage made his voice wild with fright.

“Go away,” he quavered. “I haven’t harmed anybody.”

They kicked on the door. They swore some. But the door was of steel, and probably an acetylene torch was the most effective way of opening it.

“Go around to the porthole and see what you can,” the voice ordered.

Doc Savage crouched against the bunk and began shaking and looking as scared as he could.

A man appeared at the porthole, which opened out on the deck.

“Open up!” he ordered.

Doc shook and clattered his teeth together, and finally covered his eyes and sank down on the floor as if he had fainted. The man outside opened the porthole, which was not locked, and tried to shove inside, but had no luck. It would have taken a very small boy to get through that porthole.

“Hell!” he told somebody. “The old crank is so scared he’s fainted, and I can’t crawl in this port.”

“Do you see any sign of the jewelry he was supposed to be carrying?”

“No. He would have that in the locker, or somewhere.”

“Well, we haven’t got time to fool with him now,” said the second voice. “Clamp a storm cover over this port so he can’t throw the jewelry out. Fasten the door somehow, and let him ride. We got jobs to do. And it’ll only be a few hours, anyway.”

That was the end of that. Someone with a hammer closed the port storm cover and knocked the dogs tight, and someone else worked on the door for a while. Since the door opened inward, evidently they put a timber across the outside and lashed it to the knob. Comparative silence fell.

Renny and Monk and Ham got out of the locker, and Dara and Larry Forge rolled out from under the bunk. They looked uneasy in the gloom of the cabin.

Monk said, "How in blazes we going to be able to tell where the ship is going? They closed the porthole and locked us in here."

Ham was thinking of something else, as well.

"I didn't have time to ask this before the excitement started," he said, "but what became of my pet, Chemistry?"

"And my Habeas?" Monk echoed.

"I left both pets in Charleston," Doc Savage explained. "In a pet shop. Getting the animals aboard was a little too inconvenient, considering the short time we had."

Doc Savage had brought only such equipment as himself and his men habitually carried on their persons, which meant that they might be handicapped if they had to wage any very extensive campaign against odds. Larry Forge was particularly discouraged. He sat down on the bunk, held his head, and muttered something about having become associated with a bunch of maniacs, and what would he give to be back safe on Broadway.

Monk was rather cheerful, for the situation agreed with his yen for excitement. Renny's long, puritanical face wore an expression unusually funeral-going, which meant that he was enjoying himself. The sadder Renny looked, the chances were, the more he was pleased. Ham had retained his unobtrusive-looking black cane—Doc had brought it aboard, knowing how much Ham prized the thing—and the dapper lawyer had pulled it apart at the handle and was examining the end of the thin sword blade which the cane shaft housed. There was a gummy chemical on the tip of the blade, stuff that would cause quick unconsciousness in any individual unfortunate enough to get pricked.

Dara Smith was not only calm; she was eager. If she had any qualms or fears, the parade of hectic events had erased them. She was completely the daughter of old Twisty Jim Smith, gun-fanning Western sheriff.

Ham said dryly, "Doc, you noticed that they said it would be only a few hours before this was settled. That doesn't sound as if we had much time."

Doc Savage examined the porthole. There was no manner of getting the outer cover open without creating an uproar, hence no way of seeing where the ship was going. The door offered as difficult a problem.

"We will wait for a while," he said.

They had killed time for four or five hours when the steamer whistle blew five short blasts in quick succession.

Chapter 17

STRANGE ISLAND

“That whistling,” Doc Savage said, “was undoubtedly some kind of signal.”

They strained their ears, for all the ship was suddenly very quiet. Then two shots came, faint and from a considerable distance.

The bronze man dug into his clothing. He wore, when it would possibly be convenient, a vest that was a kind of carry-all, having numerous small pockets. He removed a bottle containing a chemical.

The vial held, in fact, an acid mixture similar to the one which Jurl Crierson’s men had much earlier in this affair dumped into the wing of the bronze man’s big plane. An acid that would consume ordinary metals with extraordinary speed.

The cabin door ordinarily swung inward, hence the hinges were on the inside. They were a riveted type of hinge, therefore loosening them would have been a task. Doc carefully daubed the chemical on the hinges, repeating the process until he had used the entire contents of the vial.

They waited for a time, then it was a simple matter to pry the hinge side of the door inward. Ham tried to shove an arm through the narrow aperture, but there was not room; Dara did that part of the job, catching the bar which had been tied across the other side, and working it free. They lifted the door out and stepped into the passage.

“Now we’ll take ’em!” Monk said optimistically.

“Not so fast,” Doc warned. “Some strategy might be sensible until we find out just what is going on.”

They made a compact group—Doc and Renny leading, Dara and Larry Forge in the middle, and Monk and Ham and Johnny bringing up the rear—and moved toward the bow. Their first objective was to find what had become of the *Brazil Trader* crew. The solution of that was simple.

The steamer officers and crew were herded on the forecastle deck, where they were in plain view, with nowhere to go except overboard, there being no hatches in this small raised forecastle deck.

“Probably got a machine gun on the bridge, covering them,” Renny whispered.

Doc Savage distinguished half a dozen passengers with the prisoners. The other passengers, then, must have been the pirates who had taken over. That indicated a plan of long standing, for they would have had to book accommodations weeks in advance, as popular as were the sailings of these ships.

In the well deck between the fo’c’s’le deck and the deckhouse and bridge were two huge crates which contained the planes about which such a political fuss had been made. The other plane was boxed in the aft well deck, the craft being too large for hold storage.

Doc and the others crouched in the little smoking room and bar, watching through the bow portholes. From that vantage point, they could plainly see the island.

The island was obviously the destination of the ship, for speed had slackened.

“Whew!” Monk muttered.

He was evidently referring to the reefs. They stuck up like fangs everywhere; fangs that seemed slavering hungry, for the waves broke over them and made foam.

The island was somewhat like a green dog asleep in the sea with its head raised and its hindquarters almost submerged. There was a vast area of marsh and reefs spreading out to sea from the lower part of the island, and these would make it impossible for any ship or even small boat to approach from that direction. The higher part of the island—the head of the green dog—was even equipped with a mouth in the shape of a small harbor, the cliff-edged opening of which could be distinguished.

The whole island had a sinister, unpleasant aspect, an impression that did not grow entirely from the fact that it was apparently the pirate hangout. The vegetation, swampy mangroves on the low portion, scrawny palms where the beach was more sandy, and scars of nakedness on the high cliffs, combined to convey an impression of harshness. The green growth on the place did not look very healthy.

Monk threw another uneasy stare at the coral heads and reefs through which the steamer was being piloted.

“We better wait until she’s in that harbor and anchored before we start anything,” he said grimly. “If we distract the pilot’s attention, he’s liable to pile us on a reef.”

Doc Savage shook his head.

“On the contrary,” he said, “if we get into that harbor, we’ll be almost certain to die immediately.”

Dara Smith stared at Doc Savage strangely. “How would you know anything about that harbor?”

The bronze man did not answer.

“Let us see what we can do,” he said.

Outside the smoking-room door, a companionway led upward. It was narrow, and admitted to the bridge, the radio shack and the private cabins assigned to the captain and his officers.

There were two machine guns on the bridge. Both menaced the prisoners on the fo’c’s’le deck.

A pirate—taking over the ship had technically made Jurl Crierson’s men buccaneers—was steering. Two more were at each end of the bridge, scanning the water anxiously, calling out sharp orders. They seemed to know the channel.

Doc Savage ran for one machine gunner. Monk and Ham leaped for the other. Doc’s victim whirled and saw the bronze man, and instantly drew a knife. He held the blade ready, crouching on the balls of his feet.

The man knew how to use a knife. He was lithe and muscular, and as confident as a fencer. So Doc Savage twisted off his own coat as he ran, and using it like a bullwhip, cracked it across the man’s face. The fellow dodged. Doc tripped him. The man fell, but still kept the knife and was dangerous. Doc used the coat again, this time swiping it across the fellow’s eyes and blinding him. After that, it was simple to kick his hand so hard that the numbed fingers lost the blade.

Doc jerked the machine gun out off the bridge rail.

Monk and Ham had the other machine gunner between them, and were slugging the fellow. The gunner was probably already unconscious, but Monk kept knocking him against Ham, and Ham knocking him back against Monk.

Renny, rumbling, had almost reached the pilot who was conning channel at the port side of the bridge. The fellow was gaping at Renny, paralyzed

with astonishment.

Doc headed for the starboard pilot. That one was the strawboss of Dara's kidnapers—Forty Mile. He was a man who believed in preserving his own skin. So he whirled, scrambled over the bridge rail, and dropped to the deck below. He ducked through a door.

Renny struck his own victim. The fellow screamed, turned around, and scrambled over the end of the bridge into the sea. He swam away dazedly.

Bony Johnny, the last one onto the bridge said, "I'll be superamalgamated. That was a short job."

The job wasn't finished, though.

Doc leaned over the bridge rail. "Let's have some help!" he shouted. "We're making a break. It's the only chance we have for our lives!"

Monk heard that, and he decided that some of his guessing had been right. Doc seemed convinced that the little harbor toward which they were heading offered great danger. Monk had suspected that the bronze man already had a fairly good idea of the solution of the whole affair.

Doc seized the wheel. The steamer would naturally be equipped with an auxiliary steering gear back in the stern somewhere which could be disconnected from the bridge controls. His only chance—if he wanted to keep the ship out of the small cove—was to beach the craft before the auxiliary gear could be put in operation.

He put the wheel hard over to starboard. The speed, he let remain the same. The *Brazil Trader* swung slowly in answer to her helm.

Ex-prisoners were piling down off the fo'c's'le deck, yelling, racing aft.

Monk roared at them, "Up here! We've got two machine guns."

Renny had one of the machine guns, a heavy military weapon, and was packing it in his hands as if it might have been as light as a rifle.

Doc said, "Try to get control of the engine room. If we can take the ship back out to sea—"

The engines stopped. A moment later, the wheel went dead in the bronze man's hands. They had taken over the auxiliary controls aft.

In a short time the steamer slowly changed course again, swinging back. They were going to try to make the harbor mouth. It would be, Doc Savage saw, impossible. The engine pulsed again.

The bronze man seized the speaking tube and called a warning down it. "Swing to the starboard again, and reverse the engines," he said grimly. Someone returned profanity, and that was all the response he got.

A moment later, the *Brazil Trader* struck a reef. There was a rending, as if a big can opener had gone to work on the bottom. The craft shuddered, rolled slightly, and glanced off the first reef. Then it struck again, and wedged.

Doc raced to the radio shack. His idea was to send an S O S, and keep the signal going, in order that their whereabouts—he didn't know where they were, himself—might be ascertained by radio direction-finder bearings taken from distant points.

He did not stay in the radio shack long. The apparatus had been ruined by someone who knew just what parts to smash.

Monk called, "Doc, this hooker is sinking like a rock."

That was true. The steamer was already deep at the stern, although the bows were wedged high on the coral reef. But since there was very deep water around the reef, it was possible the vessel would slide back into deep water.

The crew of the ship had crowded onto the bridge.

Nearby somewhere, a machine gun slammed out a brief burst. Evidently it was Renny.

"Holy cow!" Renny rumbled. "They're getting ready to rush us."

Monk took another look at the rising water.

"They better rush for the lifeboats instead," the homely chemist muttered.

Doc Savage said, "Come on. We've got to get to the island."

They moved out onto the boat deck cautiously. Renny led, with his machine gun, and when shots snapped at them, Renny drove a burst of bullets that set the sniper in flight.

The lifeboat equipment was modern. It took only a moment to lower one of the boats. "Lower the first one empty," Doc said.

Their foes, shooting from portholes, riddled the bottom of the lifeboat before it ever reached the water.

"There is a donkey engine in the forward well deck," Doc Savage said. "Get scrub buckets out of the deck locker and bring the gasoline from the donkey." And after some had dashed off on that mission, the bronze man added. "Others of you might fetch pillows from the staterooms. Also bedclothing. Anything that will make a black smoke."

They tied sheets and pillows and bedclothing together in many bundles, doused these with gasoline and applied matches. Some of them they merely tossed overside. Some they suspended with wire hawsers. The smoke, spreading, enveloped and concealed the side of the ship.

“Now we can get the boats down,” Ham said.

They put three lifeboats over the side. When the last one was in the water, Doc Savage helped Renny, Monk and Ham lower the two machine guns. Then they slid down the davit lines themselves, and shoved off.

A few random shots were being fired, but these hit no one, for the smoke was dense.

Distance to the island was not more than two hundred yards. The sailors hit a rhythm with the oars, and the boats soon ground on the pale coral sand of the beach. Flying lead scooped up water around them, or knocked clouds of sand. They piled out of the boats, ran swiftly and reached the jungle. There was a plentiful scattering of big rocks in the undergrowth, and they took shelter behind these.

“They’re getting away themselves,” Monk shouted.

The corsairs had lowered a boat on the other side of the steamer. Only one boat, for there were not many of them. Their small number indicated why the fighting had not been more violent.

They seemed to have some idea of following Doc and the others.

“I’ll discourage ’em,” Renny said.

The big-fisted engineer, during his army days, had been something of a phenomenon as a machine gunner; he had never let his skill lapse. He lifted his rapid-firer, and was drawing a bead on Forty Mile when Doc Savage said, “No unnecessary killing.” Reluctantly, Renny put a bullet into the lifeboat near the bow waterline. The craft gave up attack ideas instantly.

Monk yelled, “Let’s follow along the shore and keep ’em from landing.”

Doc Savage vetoed that immediately.

“On the contrary,” he said, “we will get in our own boats and row down toward the swampy end of the island. There are undoubtedly tidal creeks running through those mangroves, and we can find a place to hide out.”

The crew of the *Brazil Trader* looked at their captain, wondering just who was in charge.

“I’m Captain York,” the skipper told Doc Savage dryly. “I have heard about you a few times, but never met you before. If you know what you’re doing, we’ll follow your suggestions. Or do you know? Why can’t we do as

the other fellow suggested—go along the shore and see that those pirates don't land? Maybe we can scare them into surrendering.”

“That would be dangerous,” Doc said. “Probably suicidal, in fact.”

Captain York considered. “All right,” he said. “But I hope you know what you're doing, like I said.”

Chapter 18

THE COVE OF WRECKS

The island, the high part of it, was obviously of volcanic origin, but the rest, the swampy mangrove portion, was purely the work of ages of the tiny organisms that had died and left their skeletons to build up in the formation known as coral. Mangrove swamps growing on a coral base, here in the Caribbean, were of a rather uniform nature. That is, almost always the swamps were veined with tidal creeks, usually several feet deep, twice or three times as wide, and very crooked. Moreover, encircling close to the mangroves there was almost a channel, sometimes deep and full of furiously racing tide water, and sometimes shallow and less turbulent.

The lifeboats found one of the bordering creeks, and followed it. The pirates in the distant lifeboat howled profanity at them, fired a few shots. But Renny, returning single shots with his machine gun, discouraged them. The machine gun and the rifles were both of the same caliber, hence of about equal range.

The tidal creek was deep, and the tide was, fortunately, coming in. They were carried along, frequently at almost motorboat speed, until Doc Savage picked one of the larger creeks, and they turned into this. Having followed the creek for some time, they turned off in a more shallow stream, thence into still smaller brooks, until they came to a point where the mangroves arched completely together overhead.

There was some grass, long coarse stuff, almost like the spines off palm fronds.

“Cut some small twigs and make a kind of canopy,” Doc suggested. “It will keep off the sun, and also afford concealment.”

Mosquitoes in innumerable platoons came to investigate, and remained to dodge swatting hands and try to cadge a meal.

Captain York confronted Doc Savage. The skipper of the *Brazil Trader* had something on his mind, and was determined to settle it.

“I know this much,” said Captain York. “I know my compasses were doctored and my sextant stolen, and my ship was led off her course. I know this is an uninhabited island somewhere in the Caribbean. I know some men who had booked on my boat as passengers suddenly became pirates and took over my craft when they learned I had discovered we were being led off our course.”

He paused and bit his lower lip.

“I know a silly red eye, apparently painted or stained, appeared on the mast of my vessel. Such an eye had appeared on the masts of two other ships—both of which were found without a soul aboard.” The skipper of the *Brazil Trader* was a bluff soul, and he didn’t believe in spooky manifestations. “That eye was crazy stuff, but just for my own satisfaction, I would like to know what it meant.”

“There are more important things,” Doc Savage said.

“I know that, too. Might you be telling me some of them now?”

“Your ship was probably the third vessel to fall victim to a very clever plan,” Doc Savage explained. “It was the fourth, if we include the *Karl Maximus*, the foreign ship that was torpedoed at sea, apparently by a United States submarine.”

Captain York scowled. “You mean that torpedoing is hooked in with what happened to my ship?”

“The same gang perpetrated the whole thing, it would appear. A gang headed by a man named Jurl Crierson.”

“Never heard of him.”

Doc Savage named the European nation which owned the torpedoed *Karl Maximus*, and added the name of the man who ruled it now with—if ever such a descriptive could be correctly applied—an iron hand.

“There was a Jurl Crierson,” Doc explained, “who was the right hand of that ruler during his rise to power. Jurl Crierson later had to flee for his life.”

“Was that the same Jurl Crierson?”

“It would be a good guess that they are the same.”

The bronze man swung into the mangroves, moved through them, and soon disappeared.

Captain York, anxious to pursue his conversation about the mystery, climbed into the mangroves, intending to follow Doc.

The mangroves were not large, hardly any of them being as tall as the usual orchard apple tree. The branches, even the smaller ones as tough as rusty wire and about the same color, were entwined in a thick tangle. The rapidity with which the bronze man had climbed along had deceived Captain York. He found progress almost impossible. He scraped skin off his shins, spiked himself on sharp branches, and finally fell on the back of his neck in the muck.

Captain York returned to the boat and sat washing himself.

“That fellow Savage is incredibly active, isn’t he?” he remarked.

“Wait until you see him with his shirt off,” said Monk whose favorite subject for bragging, next to himself, was Doc Savage. “The way he is muscled is a caution. He is by far the strongest and most active man I ever knew. He should be, too, because he spends about two hours every day taking exercises. If you get a chance, watch those exercises, too. They make you sweat, just to see ’em.”

“Why didn’t he want to tell me what he knew?” Captain York asked.

“Search me. You’ll find out he had a good reason though, before this is over.”

Captain York leaned back and considered the situation. Their position was dangerous, and he was placing all of his dependence on Doc Savage. Ordinarily, he did not depend on others; he was a man who preferred to do things himself. But he had instinctively let Doc Savage take charge. The big bronze man seemed to have a strong personality. Captain York probed around in his memory for what he could recall about Doc.

“I have heard,” he said, “that Savage owns a controlling interest in a number of steamship lines. He went into them with capital during the depression, when things were very bad, and refinanced the lines, as well as improving their efficiency. That took a great deal of money.”

“Yeah,” Monk said noncommittally.

“What I’m getting at,” said Captain York, “is this: Where does Doc Savage get his enormous quantities of money? I’ve heard others wonder about that.”

Monk had been afraid that was what he was getting at. The source of Doc Savage’s wealth was supposed to be a secret, although it was likely that a good detective could unearth the facts. Nevertheless, Monk wasn’t going to broadcast them.

The truth was that Doc Savage had a fabulous hoard of gold, a vein so rich that it was almost a mother lode, in a remote valley deep in the Central American republic of Hidalgo. The valley was watched over and guarded by descendants of the ancient Mayans, a strange people who had decided to live there forever, shut off from the savageries of the outer world. In return for a favor Doc Savage and his aids had once done them, they furnished the bronze man with gold. Doc had but to broadcast in the Mayan tongue, on a certain radio wavelength, at a certain hour on a certain day of each week, and a shipment of gold would be started for the outside world, no one knowing from whence it came, except the bronze man and those closely associated with him.

“I wouldn’t say,” Monk said.

Doc Savage finally extricated himself from the last of the mangroves, and because it had been an incredible struggle, he lay prone among the palmetto and cactus—this island, like most of those in the Caribbean, had a growth of cactus similar to that to be found in Arizona and other Western States—and rested. He also listened.

Suddenly, he rolled under some bushes.

A plane came overhead. It was a big seaplane, one capable of long-distance flights. Doc studied its markings closely. It was a foreign ship, rather clumsy-looking when compared to the modern streamlined craft that American factories were producing.

“Foreign plane,” he remarked thoughtfully. “That checks, and probably explains why they stole the *Brazil Trader*. They wanted those three United States military-type planes that are aboard.”

It was one of the few times that he had talked to himself.

Doc Savage watched the plane. It drifted back and forth above the mangrove swamp, and twice it dived and machine guns cackled. But neither dive was toward the place where the three lifeboats were hidden. Those aboard the plane were just shooting at likely spots.

The bronze man crawled forward, heading toward the higher ground and the little harbor. He moved very cautiously, taking his time—and blazing his trail. He had blazed his trail all the way in from the lifeboats.

For the trail-blazing, he used a chalk-like compound which he had taken from his vest. The stuff left no visible mark, however.

The sun dropped low in the sky as Doc reached the cove.

The cliffs were not high—a hundred feet, possibly. But they completely surrounded the little bay, except for the narrow gap which opened to the sea.

The place appeared, and it probably was, the crater of some ancient volcano, and the entrance was a crack which the tides of the centuries had opened.

Doc counted the boats beached around the cove. Seven. They were wrecked craft. All were small. Two of them had been burned to the water.

One of the vessels, the largest of the lot, interested the bronze man particularly. He worked to the edge of the cliff and strained his eyes until he made out the name of the vessel.

The craft that had interested him was a small motor ship of the type that plies among the Caribbean islands, the sort of vessel that is rapidly displacing the picturesque ramshackle schooners manned by black sailors.

This particular boat had disappeared a year or so before. Completely vanished, and no trace of it had been found.^[B]

[B] Author's note—The unexplained disappearance of a number of small ships has become one of the enigmas of the Caribbean. The most recent to vanish, an island trading craft carrying passengers, occurred in 1937. There was no hurricane reported at the time, and no S O S was received from the vessel, and no reliable trace of it was ever turned in. The fate of the ship is something that has yet to be explained.

Doc did not go down into the cove. He waited until he saw that seagulls, alighting on the wrecks, moved about with a satisfying display of life.

Then the bronze man worked his way down the cliff, selecting a spot which was not particularly steep, and where there was brush for cover.

The seaplane came back. The pilot landed outside the cove—the number of reefs broke the swell of the sea, and the water was comparatively smooth—then taxied inside the harbor. The plane was beached alongside the submarine.

Doc Savage discovered the submarine about the moment the seaplane was beached. The sub had been worked into a V-shaped indentation in the shore, and covered over with green canvas and brush which was evidently replenished frequently.

“No trace of ’em,” a man called.

Forty Mile and several other men got off the submarine.

“Hell, they’ve got to be in the mangrove somewhere!” Forty Mile said.

“Sure. But we’ll play hell finding them.”

“Their water won’t last forever,” Forty Mile said angrily. “We’ll wait and watch and see what happens.”

“Suppose they try to raid us. They could make a nice getaway in that sub. Then where would we be?”

Forty Mile made an angry noise. “I hope they try to get into this place,” he said.

The others understood what he meant, because they grinned.

Doc Savage eased backward, and when the men had moved out of sight, he climbed back up the cliff. He lost no time now. It was getting dark.

Once, faintly distinguishable in the murk, he glimpsed the *Brazil Trader*. The steamer had stuck on the reef. Astern, the water was almost over her hull, but the bows were still fairly high. And all three military planes were safe in their great boxes.

Doc retraced his steps exactly. And before he penetrated far into the mangroves, it was intensely dark.

He removed the largest article which his pocketed vest contained. It was a little larger than a flashlight of the flat type, and was in one sense a flashlight, for it gave off powerful ultraviolet light. Current was supplied by a tiny generator, actuated by a lever which could be worked with the fingers.

When he turned ultraviolet light upon the marks he had made with the chalk, they glowed with a faint bluish quality that was easily distinguished. The chalk was simply a substance, one of many, which fluoresced when exposed to ultraviolet light.

Even with that help—and he possibly would never have found the lifeboat without it—the trip back through the mangroves took a long time. Many times, he ripped his clothing; finally, when his coat was torn so badly that it would not stay upon him, he discarded it. Later, he ripped his trousers off above the knees, for the ends were flapping strings.

There seemed to be some dissension at the lifeboats. He heard the grumbling as he arrived.

Chapter 19

MUTINY

Unpleasant silence settled after the bronze man made his identity known and dropped into one of the lifeboats. Silence, except for the buzzing of the mosquitoes, and the angry rubbing of hands over tortured skin. They were afraid to slap at the pests because of the sound it would make.

“I know,” Doc Savage said quietly, “that this is an unpleasant place to wait.”

Captain York, spoke in a grim voice.

“I want you to know this is none of my doing,” he said. “But my men are objecting. Probably the mosquitoes had something to do with it. But they want action. They want to find out what is on the other part of the island. And they want to try and seize that plane.”

Doc Savage described what he had found. He gave a detailed word-picture of the cove, of the wrecks lying there, and of the submarine and the plane. He was interrupted.

“What’s to keep us from grabbing that plane?” a man growled.

“It would be impossible.”

“Impossible, nothing! We’ve got two machine guns. Listen, in France I licked a whole company of Boches single-handed with one of those things. And we’ve got *two*.”

“I have a plan,” Doc explained.

“Yeah? We’ve been following one of your plans. And the mosquitoes eat us up.”

“Shut up!” said Captain York harshly.

Doc Savage did not seem disturbed.

“Here is the plan,” he said. “Two of the lifeboats will hold all of you except Monk, Ham, Johnny, Renny, Larry Forge and myself. We will take one boat. You will take the other two, and row out to sea a short distance.”

“Yeah, and they’ll find us. They’re probably patrolling around the island in a boat.”

Doc glanced overhead. The sky had matted with clouds and the darkness was intense. Probably it would rain a little later.

“With a night like this, you will hardly be found,” he said. “However, you can stay here with the mosquitoes if you wish.”

The grumbler snorted.

“Quiet,” somebody told him. “You want ’em to hear us?”

“What I want to know,” said the dissenter, “is why the deuce we can’t all go and conduct a raid.”

Dara Smith put in, “Yes. That seems the sensible plan to me.”

“The girl even agrees. You see.”

What Doc saw was that he could spend the night arguing. He reached over in the darkness, found the man who was squawking, and took him by the neck. He did not choke him. He simply put pressure on some nerve centers, so that a quick and harmless temporary unconsciousness ensued.

“Captain York,” Doc said, “will you take charge of two of the boats and put out to sea? Not more than half a mile out, however. And do not go near the *Brazil Trader*. They will have a strong guard aboard. The steamer hasn’t sunk, incidentally, and apparently will not. It is in a position where it can be salvaged, so there will be no great loss to your owners.”

“That’s good news,” Captain York muttered. “Yes, I’ll take charge of the two boats.”

“We will leave you one machine gun,” Doc advised.

The groups separated, Doc and his aids getting in one of the lifeboats, and the others clustering in the remaining two craft. Doc discovered Dara Smith in his own boat, and put her in with Captain York, although the girl protested angrily.

“How do we get outa here in this dark?” another man complained.

The solution to that was tedious, but not difficult. The tide was now going out, and they simply followed the moving water. When they reached the open sea, they prepared to separate.

“What are *we* going to do, Doc?” Monk asked.

“Try to make that little cove safe for a general raid,” Doc Savage explained. “And collect more weapons, if we can.” His voice turned grim. “And find out what happened to Pat and Herb March and the others.”

“You mean,” Monk said, “that there is something about that cove which makes it too dangerous for all of us to stage the raid?”

“Exactly,” Doc said.

The boats separated, the two carrying Captain York, Dara and the *Brazil Trader* crew rowing out to sea. Doc Savage and his group were soon lost to sight.

Captain York sat in the stern of the leading lifeboat, occasionally giving a low order, and trying his best to steer a straight course, consulting a

compass which was a part of the lifeboat emergency equipment.

Shortly, the dissenter regained his senses. He felt of his neck and swore bitterly.

“What did that big guy do to me?” he demanded.

“Shut up,” ordered Captain York. “We’re on the high seas and I’m your skipper and you’re taking my orders.”

“I think they’re damned poor orders,” the other said, unimpressed. “I’m thinking about my neck, I am.”

The argument had appealed to some of the other crew members. They were isolated in these lifeboats, so puzzled they were distraught, and moreover, they were convinced that they outnumbered their foes, the pirates.

“There was only about a dozen of them guys,” a man pointed out. “And we’ve got one machine gun.”

“Sure,” said the man who had started the trouble. “We could clean house in a minute.”

The tiller handle was detachable from the rudder, and Captain York loosened it, held it in his fist like a club.

“There’s only one way to stop this,” he muttered.

But the troublemaker knocked Captain York senseless before the skipper could use the tiller handle.

That started the mutiny. Two of the officers did object, but they were pounded with fists until persuaded that silence was wise.

The man who had struck down the skipper took charge. He had been known as a squawker for a long time on the *Brazil Trader*, a man who was generally against everything, invariably declaring himself better fitted to give orders than those who were giving them, although he never showed any unusual efficiency in his own tasks. And like such individuals, untrained in handling men, he immediately assumed a blustering authority that, under other circumstances, would doubtless have gotten him a punch on the nose.

“Head straight for the cove,” ordered the self-appointed leader.

Shortly, they piled up on a reef. But the water was calm, and they got off again. After that, they kept very close to the shore until the tiny waves were making sobbing noises against the sheer sides of the cone-shaped higher part of the island.

They located the cove entrance.

“We go right in,” said the new chief.

“Hadn’t we better scout first—”

“Pipe down!”

He was leaving no doubt about who was the boss. He took charge of the machine gun personally, swearing when he found it did not contain as much ammunition as he had expected. “Probably Savage took most of the ammo for himself,” he growled. Which was an untruth, the drum in this gun holding nearly twice as many cartridges as the one in the weapon which Doc’s group carried.

“All right,” the new leader ordered. “Charge.”

They bent to the oars and surged into the walled-in cove. It was intensely dark, so black that they could distinguish nothing whatever. It was solely good luck that the two lifeboats stayed close together.

“Head for the beach,” ordered the mutineer. “We gotta land if we’re gonna do anything.”

Unfortunately, one of the lifeboats bumped the beach hard enough to make a distinct sound. After that, they sat very still, and more than one of them felt fear walking over his skin and leaving cold, bumpy tracks. But they heard no alarming sound.

“This is a pipe,” growled the leader. “Come in, guys.”

They got out of the lifeboats, bunched compactly, and crept forward, moving slowly and using their ears, until they had covered perhaps a hundred yards, when the first of them screamed piercingly.

Chapter 20

DEATH RAN AND YELLED

Doc Savage was lying on the rim of the cove when he heard the screech. The bronze man had been scouting noiselessly, getting the lay of the land and making certain preparations, and he had just returned to where his group lay concealed.

A second squall followed the first. Men’s voices, both. But they were so agonized that the sound was more like animals being torn apart. Then a man cursed, and the machine gun gobbled briefly. And there were moans mixed in with the screams.

“That’s the people in the other two lifeboats!” Renny rumbled.

“The fools!” Ham gasped. “Oh, the idiots!”

Doc Savage spoke suddenly. “We can’t just stand here. We may be able to save some of them. But—”

He did not finish. The others knew what he meant. To help, they would have to reveal their own presence, and that might defeat their entire plan. To save the lives of any of those down in the cove, they would have to sacrifice everything. But there was no doubt about what the bronze man would do.

Doc lifted his voice. It acquired crashing volume that carried to the frantic group below.

“Climb the cliff!” Doc shouted. “Do not try to escape in the boats. Climb the cliff.”

They heard him down below. And Dara, at least, recognized his voice.

“Where is there a place we can climb?” Dara shrieked.

Doc Savage produced a small flare. It was shaped like a penny firecracker, and was not much larger. He ignited it by twisting the cap, after which there was hissing and blinding light.

The bronze man threw the flare. It arched outward, fell and landed on the little beach far below, making an explosion of sparks, but continuing to burn. After that, there was enough light for those below to locate a part of the cliff that was not too steep to climb.

They were fortunate. Only about half a dozen of them could not climb. These remained, groveling in the sand, moaning and shrieking, or gradually becoming slack heaps.

Dara said something angry, and would have turned back with a few of the *Brazil Trader* crew to help the unfortunates.

“Keep away from them!” Doc Savage called.

Dara screamed, “We’ve got to help—”

“It’s poison gas!” Doc Savage shouted. “Get out of the stuff. You haven’t any masks.”

Although Dara had become a hothead, she could understand that. She still used her judgment. Moreover, she was very scared now, and willing to listen to reason.

The unfortunate raiding party clambered up the sloping portion of the cliff.

Shots began banging, a few scattered reports at first, then a slamming fusillade. The pirates had opened fire. One climber made a loud sobbing sound and wheeled around, dived, and went down the cliff bouncing and turning. Another lay down on a rock and did not move afterward.

The fugitives reached the top. The gas had burned the lungs of some of them, and they coughed and moaned. The flare burned itself out, so that there was darkness.

Dara Smith caught Doc Savage's arm. "You knew there was gas. How did you know that?"

"Both boats found deserted—the *Patricia* and the *Senora Dupree*—had been subjected to a blanket of gas," Doc explained.

In the darkness, there was comparative quiet. The shooting had stopped. One of the gas victims made a series of gagging sounds.

"But I don't understand—"

"We scraped samples off various parts of the ships and took specimens of the food," Doc advised. "Laboratory analysis showed the presence of absorbed gas. As soon as I found there was a harbor on this island, it was reasonable to assume the gassing had been done there."

Monk, who had been listening, made a grim noise. "If they gassed—Pat may be dead! They might've killed her!"

There was no answer to that—not just now.

Doc said, "Our plans are hopelessly ruined. I have a small gas mask, so I will try to get down into the cove and get some kind of boat out to sea."

Then a flare threw up blinding brilliance. It was a big flare, and some of Jurl Crierson's men had lighted it. Doc seized the machine gun, turned it on the flare. His stream of lead shattered the flare, scattered its burning fragments. But another flare came on, and another. Until it was plain they were surrounded.

"Get your hands up!" Forty Mile's voice ordered harshly.

Sailors off the *Brazil Trader* suddenly tried to break for freedom. Two led off; the others followed. One of them had brought the second machine gun, and he turned it loose wildly.

The flare-streaked darkness was thick with frantic runners. Shrubby grew thickly here on the harbor rim, and they evidently hoped to make a successful break—and all they did was plunge toward suicide. Rifles cracked as the attackers methodically shot down the fugitives.

"Get down on the ground!" Doc Savage shouted.

He was almost completely ignored. Only his four men and Dara Smith followed his suggestion, flattening out so that the bullets would not reach them.

Doc said, “We’ll try to work down to where we left our own lifeboat.”

But that didn’t work, either. Those who had tried to flee were giving up. They were running into the light, standing with their arms elevated.

Forty Mile’s voice barked out again.

“Doc Savage!” he shouted. “Stand up and get your arms in the air. You and your men!”

Instead of complying, the bronze man lay very still. The others were quiet beside him.

A hand grenade exploded. Dust showered them and rocks rolled across their prostrate forms.

“We’ve got dozens of them things!” Forty Mile called. “We’ll blow you to pieces if you don’t give up.”

Doc Savage, “We had better do what they say.”

“Doc!” Monk gasped. “They’ll shoot us down the minute they see us.”

“It seems to me they want us alive,” the bronze man suggested, “otherwise they would go ahead and massacre us.”

“Doc—don’t—”

“Lie still a moment,” the bronze man advised grimly. “If they start shooting at me, you’ll know it will do no good to surrender.”

Doc Savage then called out sharply that he was giving up. After that, he walked into the open, choosing, however, to walk among boulders that were large enough to offer shelter if he should have to flatten among them. But no one shot at him.

“All right,” he said. “They meant it.”

Monk and Ham and the others got up slowly. They joined Doc Savage. No one shot at them, either. After that, Doc breathed a little easier.

The prisoners were rounded up. Some of them, it became evident, had managed to escape for the time being.

“Where is Larry Forge?” Dara asked, peering about.

Forty Mile swore, said, “He seems to be one of them that got away. But don’t worry. We’ll catch him and bring him to you, sweet lady.”

The stockade was built under a thick cluster of palm trees where it could not very well be noticed by a plane flying overhead. It was made of stout timbers, apparently taken from the wrecked ships in the cove. These timbers, set side by side to make a wall, were hewn to sharp points, and in addition, strips of thorn bushes had been stapled to the wall. The needled points of the stockade piles, and the thorns, were coated with some brownish substance.

Forty Mile, as soon as he had escorted the prisoners inside the stockade gate, stopped and pointed at the material on the ends of the stockades and on the thorns.

“One of my pet ideas,” he said. “You see, there was too damn many rattlesnakes on this island at first, and we put in a lotta time huntin’ ’em. At first, we just fed the snakes to the sharks, and watched the sharks get tummy aches. Then I got the bright thought of making poison out of the snake poison, like the Indians probably did.”

No one said anything.

“I just wanted to advise you,” said Forty Mile, “not to try to climb the wall.”

Before any of the prisoners could get a chance at climbing the wall, they would have to get out of the cages. These cages were built upon posts, after the fashion of huts in many parts of the tropics. From the earth to the floor of each cage was something like eight feet. The cages were about the size of moving vans. Admission was gained through a hole in the floor, and the hole was closed by a trapdoor which could be padlocked from the bottom.

To further discourage any captive from leaving a cage, the ground below was kept covered with a scattering of poison-treated thorn bushes.

“Take off your shoes,” ordered Forty Mile. “Also all your clothes but the trousers.”

Doc counted eleven of the cages, and some of them were crowded.

“Say, what boat did you come from?” a feminine voice demanded from one of the cages.

“*Brazil Trader*,” Doc Savage said.

“I know that boat. They are picking them bigger now, aren’t they? Ours was just a schooner—”

“Don’t you recognize me, Pat?”

“Doc—Doc Savage!” Pat was shocked. “Oh, Doc! They . . . they brought you here, too!”

Pat was confined in a cage with several other women, including her maid and cook. The other feminine unfortunates had happened to be on pirated boats. Dara Smith was bundled in with Pat’s collection, after being relieved of her shoes.

Doc Savage and his men were distributed among the other cages, no two of them being placed together. Doc found himself incarcerated with two large Bimini blacks who were quite amiable and possessed of a genuine fear of the poisoned thorns on the ground below.

“Boss, yo’ sho’ you ain’t step on none of them theah thorns gettin’ up heah?” one dark man asked.

“I think not,” Doc told him.

The other black spoke with a Cockney accent and terminology that was startling to anyone accustomed to the Southern American Negro.

“Yer ’arf takin’ yer life in yer hand everytime yer climb in and out of these bloody cages,” he explained. “The bloomin’ thorns ’ave an ’abit of breakin’ off and layin’ on the ground.”

Forty Mile finished stowing the prisoners, and locked the stockade gate. It appeared that no attempt was made to keep the prisoners from conversation.

“Pat,” Doc Savage called.

“Yes.”

“Where are the guards stationed? And are we allowed to talk?”

“There is a tower at each corner, outside the stockade, where guards stand with searchlights and machine guns,” Pat explained. “And they do not object to our talking, except at times.”

“All right,” said the bronze man, “suppose you tell me what led up to your getting here.”

“They did it the same way they seem to have done it on every boat,” Pat explained. “Three of my sailors were hired away from me in Hidalgo. Jurl Crierson hired them, to get them off my boat. Then he and two of his men applied for the jobs. I hired two of them, but I didn’t hire Crierson himself. He was a young man who was—well—a little too prosperous, it seemed to me. And I didn’t like the way he looked at me.”

Off in the distance, there was yelling and shots. Evidently they had flushed up one of the *Brazil Trader* sailors who had escaped. The noise ended.

“Jurl Crierson disguised himself as a Hindu,” Pat continued, “and stowed away on board my boat. Oh, by the way—Herb! Herb March!”

“Present,” said Herb March. “Say, is this the Doc Savage who is your cousin that you’re talking to?”

“Yes,” Pat said. “Herb, meet Doc. Herb is all right, Doc, even if you can’t see him. He has a girl up North by the name of Dara—”

“I’m not up North any more,” Dara Smith interrupted gloomily.

“Dara!” Herb howled. “Great blazes! Dara, have they hurt you? If they have—I’ll wring their necks. I’ll tear ’em apart.”

“I’m all right,” Dara told him.

“Sweetheart!”

“Oh, darling Herb!”

“Fooley,” Monk said under his breath. “There goes my chances with that girl.”

Ham—their cages were close together—said, “Larry Forge won’t be very happy, either.”

“They haven’t caught Larry yet,” Monk pointed out.

Chapter 21

THE NABOB OF POISON ISLAND

There was shooting in the distance again, and more yells, coming from the same spot as the previous outbreak, so evidently the *Brazil Trader* sailor was still in flight.

Doc Savage said, “Go ahead, Pat. What happened?”

“Herb March stowed away on my schooner, too,” Pat explained. “He was suspicious of the Hindu, because the Hindu had given him fifty dollars to leave Hidalgo by another route. Herb was a fugitive from a revolution. We decided later that the Hindu—Jurl Crierson—had been in Hidalgo for some time, and knew Herb was a capable fellow. Anyway, Herb made the Hindu drink whiskey, and found out what was going to happen. So Herb went to the radio, and he didn’t know how to get in touch with you, so he sent a radiogram to his girl in New York, asking her to come to you and tell you what was happening. Only Herb was knocked senseless before he finished the message. One of Jurl Crierson’s men did that.”

“And afterward?”

“They simply took over the schooner,” Pat said. “They were very efficient pirates, I must say. They sailed the boat here, keeping the crew prisoners below decks. A fight broke out when they tried to bring us ashore, and they turned gas loose, and overcame the crew. Before the crew became conscious again, they had them prisoners here.”

“The gas isn’t fatal, according to my analysis,” Doc said.

“No, but it’s darned unpleasant stuff.”

“What about the gold?” Doc asked.

Monk bolted upright in his cage at that, and forgot his thwarted love affair.

“*Gold!*” the homely chemist barked.

Doc said, “You know all about our secret source of gold in the valley in Hidalgo.”

“Yes, but—”

“Pat,” Doc explained, “was bringing a shipment of that gold back to New York for us on our schooner.”

Pat, interrupting, elaborated. “Jurl Crierson was after that gold. He must have lurked in Hidalgo for weeks, until he found out that it was coming to my boat. He told us, boasting, that he had gotten drunk with a Hidalgan government official, and the man told him that we got gold from some mysterious place in the country, and that was the first Jurl Crierson knew about the treasure.”

Doc said, “He got your schooner for the gold aboard. He got the *Senora Dupree*, his second big ship, for the gasoline and oil that was in the cargo, didn’t he?”

“Yes. He had bought a submarine with the money off the *Patricia*. He had to have fuel for the sub. His money had all gone to buy the U-boat and to pay wages to his men, so he had to steal his fuel.”

“Holy cow!” Renny rumbled. “That was why the *Senora Dupree* was found deserted! We went aboard her, and I remember now that she didn’t have a full cargo. I just thought at the time that the boat had sailed light. Come to think of it, we didn’t have time to hear from the owners whether any cargo was missing.”

Captain York—he had turned up among the prisoners—put in with an angry ejaculation. “My guess,” he added, “is that they stole my ship to get the three big planes in my cargo.”

“No doubt,” Doc Savage agreed.

There was a brief silence.

“I’ll be superamalgamated,” said gaunt Johnny, “if I can understand one thing. Those red eyes on the masts of the ships. What was the idea of that silly business?”

“The red eye—a signal,” Pat said. “And a good-luck charm of Jurl Crierson’s. When the eyes appeared, it was a signal to the other pirates in the crew that the dirty work had started. They were too cautious to communicate with each other directly, you see. And furthermore, the scarlet eye seems to

impress Jurl Crierson as something that brings him good luck. You'll see them scattered around the island, here."

Johnny thought that over. It was wacky, but then so were a great many of Jurl Crierson's acts. The whole piracy business.

"He turned the ships loose, leaving them to look mysteriously deserted, because—"

"Because the boats were too big to keep in the little harbor here," Pat said. "His motive there was very simple. Naturally, he didn't want the ships to appear to have met violence, so he removed all traces of it."

Johnny grunted understandingly.

"All of which," he said, "in no way explains why that foreign ship, the *Karl Maximus*, was torpedoed by a submarine that claimed to be American."

Forty Mile arrived, with four of his men, and a prisoner they had seized. The captive had been shot in the arm. He was shoved in with Doc Savage.

"You're a doctor," Forty Mile said, "you can fix him up."

The prisoner, another *Brazil Trader* sailor, proved little damaged. He got up and shook the cage bars and made the island echo with his enraged howling. He promised to personally break every neck on the island. Then he fainted.

Doc talked as he worked over the sailor.

"The submarine which torpedoed the *Karl Maximus*," he explained, "is the same one that is now in the cove. It wasn't a United States sub. It only said it was."

"That's right," Pat assured him.

"The idea," Doc Savage added, "was to start a war between the United States and the European country."

Ham said disagreeably, "War wouldn't have broken out over one torpedoing."

"Jurl Crierson would have torpedoed other of the foreign country's ships," Doc said. "Or bombed them with the American military planes he was taking so much trouble to get off the *Brazil Trader*."

"But why? Why'd he want to start a war?" Ham sounded baffled. Then he suddenly remembered. "Say, I get it, I get it!"

"Jurl Crierson's motive," Doc advised, "was to get revenge on his former boss, the man who had exiled him, the ruler of the European power. A war would ruin the ruler. Particularly, a war with the United States. Is that a close guess, Pat?"

"That's more than a close guess," Pat advised. "It's a fact."

Monk entered the conversation again.

“While all this explaining is going on,” he said, “will somebody kindly whisper to me how we’re going to get out of this mess?”

There was an unpleasant silence.

The purpose of the prisoners being kept alive had puzzled Doc Savage. The answer and the sun arrived about the same time.

Forty Mile unlocked three of the cages and prodded out the captives therein. These were taken away under heavy guard.

“They’re constructing a hidden boathouse for the submarine,” someone advised, “and an underground hangar for their planes. They have kept most of the prisoners alive to do the work.”

The inhabitants of the cages showed physical traces of their enslavement. Doc noted, in the shape of sunken eyes, emaciation and general underfed appearance. He didn’t wonder at the hungry look, after he had his breakfast, which consisted of one item—a dish of breakfast food that was pursued by a cloud of flies.

“They haven’t bothered the women?” Doc asked grimly.

“No—except me,” Pat exhibited her arms, which bore long bruises. “They have whipped me several times.”

“Whipped you—why?”

“Because they think I should tell them the location of the valley where you have the gold supply.”

“I see,” Doc Savage said grimly.

“No doubt,” Pat added, “they kept you alive for the same reason.”

“They will torture me?”

“Torture,” said Pat, “will be a mild word for the things they’ll think up.”

Monk lay on the floor of his cage—an affair of poles that was astoundingly uncomfortable—and contemplated the poisoned thorns below.

“Them thorns,” announced Monk, “are silly. They’re a crackbrained business that you would expect of a Borneo wild man.” The homely chemist changed his position and eyed his bare feet. “But I guess they ain’t so batty, maybe. If I was to try to get out of this thing, I would land on ’em, wouldn’t I? D’you reckon them thorns would kill me?”

“They have killed one man,” Pat advised him. “Two others got over it, but we thought for a while they wouldn’t.”

Doc Savage explored about the cage, and finally selected one of the poles which was slightly split. He took hold of the split portion and tore it off, securing a strip about three feet long, thin, but rather wide. He split this, getting two narrow strips, and one wider.

“You might,” he suggested to the others, “place yourselves around me so that they won’t notice what we’re doing.”

The bronze man removed his belt. The buckle was a type that could be unsnapped. He took it off. The tongue of the buckle he proceeded to use as a point to scratch a long line down the belt leather, outlining a narrow thong. He scratched the line again and again, sinking it deeper and deeper, until finally he cut off a thong. He cut another, and with these two, he made a string and fashioned, with the piece of wood, a makeshift bow. After that, he began scraping at the other two pieces, making them into arrows. Blunt-pointed arrows.

“Psst!” Monk hissed from the nearby cage.

“Yes,” Doc said in a low voice.

“Doc, I just thought of something,” Monk whispered. “Back a year or two ago, when this Jurl Crierson was exiled, some wild newspaper stories appeared in America. Some of the stories said Jurl Crierson was really an insanely clever woman, and not a man at all.”

Ham had overheard, and he said, “Is that the best you can think of?”

“Well, it’s worth thinking about,” Monk advised, and glanced meaningfully in the direction of Dara Smith’s cage. “She could be outfoxing all of us. Just letting herself be a prisoner to get wise to any attempt to escape that we made.”

Chapter 22

THE BOW-AND-ARROW ROUTE

Doc Savage finished the furtive construction of his bow and two arrows, then spent a long time carefully testing them, handling the bow and snapping it, fitting the arrows and sliding them back and forth, until he had the feel of them. The others watched him, vastly puzzled. The arrows had such blunt points that they could hardly be intended as weapons.

Near noon, when it was very hot, with only a slight breeze blowing, Forty Mile appeared again. He had nearly a dozen men with him, and they carried enough weapons to be going bear hunting.

“Oh, oh!” Pat said grimly. “Doc, they’ve come for you.”

The bronze man went into action. Forty Mile was unlocking the stockade gate. Doc crouched against the cage end, somewhat concealed by men whom he beckoned quickly into position. He lifted the bow, drew back an arrow, calculated carefully, and let fly.

He missed.

His target was outside the stockade, almost concealed in the leaves of a tree. It seemed to be some kind of a cluster of leaves that might have been a bird nest recently built.

Doc launched his second arrow, and it impaled the thing that looked like a bird nest and the object was dislodged and fell to the ground.

Monk made his “*Psst!*” noise again. “What the heck?” he wanted to know.

Forty Mile had heard the nest of a thing fall. He looked up curiously, then shrugged and went on opening the gate.

Doc told Monk in a whisper, “You remember last night, just before the excitement broke out in the cove, I was away scouting?”

Monk said, “You were away for a heck of a long time. Did you—”

“I found this place. It was what we came to seek, anyway. I had returned to get you and the others to help raid it when the trouble in the cove began, and everything was ruined. But before leaving here, I made all my remaining gas grenades, the little glass ones, into a bundle with some rocks and put them in that tree, then disguised them with leaves. The wind will carry the gas this way.”

“But our anaesthetic gas will turn harmless before it reaches—”

“There is tear gas, as well. The stuff will hang low. It is heavier than air. We may miss most of it, as high above the ground as we are in these cages.”

“But how did you know the wind would be right?”

“We’re in the trade-wind section,” Doc said. “The wind usually blows from the same direction here.”

Monk nodded, then jumped and grabbed the roof poles of his cage and hung there. He was taking no chances on that tear gas. He had contributed his own chemical skill to the concoction of the stuff, and personally he would as soon have dived into a tank of sulphuric acid, except that the effects would have been more permanent. One dose of that gas, and a man

felt as if all the brimstone in Hades had been dumped upon him. Remarkable, considering that the stuff really had no fatal result.

Forty Mile gaped at Monk as he approached. The other men trailed Forty Mile closely.

“No tricks!” he said. “We’re gonna take you and ask you about that Hidalgo gold mine.”

Another man was boosted up by two of his fellows to unlock the trapdoor and throw it open.

Forty Mile wiped his eyes suddenly. “Say, what the—” Then he let out a bellow. “Ouch! My eyes!”

Doc Savage shouted at the other prisoners: “Stand up, everybody! Get up and hang from the ceiling, if you can!”

The advice was necessary. He could feel a trace of the gas in his eyes. Down on the ground, there was a thick blanket of the heavy stuff, being pushed along by the wind.

Forty Mile stumbled and fell. He got up, realized he had tumbled into the poisoned thorns and that some of them were sticking in his flesh. The sounds he made were not readily forgotten. His men tried to dash for the gate, but were blinded and failed to make it.

Only one guard had remained in the watchtower. Foolishly, he scrambled down and rushed into the stockade, hoping to help. He howled louder than any of the others when he barged into the gas.

“Stay in the cages!” Doc shouted. “We’ve got to wait for the wind to carry the gas away.”

“Holy cow, what else can we do?” Renny rumbled. “*We’re* locked in ours.”

Doc waited, embarrassed. In the excitement of the moment, he had overlooked the fact that the trapdoor in the bottom of his cage was the only one unlocked.

The fact that Monk chose the moment to emit a snort of mirth did not help the bronze man’s self-disgust. Monk, who was never impressed by danger, thought it was funny. It was not very frequently that they saw Doc make such a bobble.

Twice, Doc got down close to the cage trapdoor, only to have the gas sting his eyes. The third time, he decided it was safe, and dropped, using care that his bare feet landed on the spot that Forty Mile had kicked clear of thorns.

He went to Forty Mile, who was blinded and terror-stricken and helpless. Doc dropped him with a blow. Forty Mile had the keys to the other trapdoor padlocks.

The bronze man, using a rifle, cleared the thorns away under Monk's prison. The men from his own cage had joined him. He lifted one of them up, and they freed Monk.

Monk dropped down, grinning.

After that, they divided the job of opening the cages, and got it done quickly.

From the direction of the harbor, a voice was shouting, demanding to know what all the uproar was about.

They now had plenty of man power. More men, by fully three times, than they had weapons, although they knocked all of Jurl Crierson's corsairs senseless and disarmed them. There were rifles, and some revolvers, a few hand grenades.

Doc said, "Those of you who are unarmed, take the women and head for the swamp."

"Not me," Pat said. "I've been in that cage for weeks, and I prefer to take me some violent exercise."

Dara Smith said the same thing in different words.

"Come on," Doc directed.

They spread out—knowing what a machine gun would do to a compact group—and raced for the cove.

One man stood on the cove rim. It was he who had shouted the inquiry. Monk fired a rifle. The man howled, caved in sidewise, and crawled over the cliff rim. He had been shot in the leg.

"Good shot," Doc Savage said. "Do not kill any of them if you can help. That's the idea."

Monk did not feel exactly deserving of the praise. He had intended to shoot the man between the eyes. "The sights on this rifle must be jimmied," he muttered.

They reached the cliff rim, spread out along it.

Jurl Crierson's men had been working below, around the submarine. The crew of enslaved prisoners were far out near the harbor mouth, evidently rigging a camouflaged channel light. They had stopped labor, and were staring.

“I’ll shoot another one in the leg,” Monk said.

He aimed with great care, really at a leg this time, and pulled trigger. The bullet knocked up water approximately in the middle of the cove.

“Blazes!” Monk muttered. “This thing shoots around corners.”

He threw the rifle down, and pulled a grenade out of each trouser pocket.

Down below, some of the men were racing for the submarine. There was a naval rifle mounted on its deck. Others scattered for cover, and their weapons.

Two men, however, raced along the beach, doubling low and making a zig-zag course. They were not moving away but toward Doc and the others.

“They’re charging us, the fools!” Ham snapped.

He was wrong. The pair were headed for a small shack, carelessly thatched, which was located directly below. It was at this point that the easiest trail led down into the cove, and the thatched hut was located at the foot of the trail.

The two runners dived into the hut.

Monk took hold of the key of his grenade.

“Those two ran a long way,” he said, “to find a darned poor shelter—as I’ll now show ’em.”

“Don’t!” Doc rapped.

Whether Monk misunderstood or not was always a question. He later claimed he never even heard Doc Savage request him not to pitch the grenade. Monk could become deaf at very convenient moments.

Monk’s grenade arched out and down and landed on the hut roof. A ripping crash followed. The hut flew apart, with sand and smoke—and a rolling cloud of vile-looking vapor.

Monk peered at the spreading vapor.

“Hey!” he exploded. “They musta been keeping their gas in that place.”

The masks, too. They could see gas masks scattered over the sand, where the grenade blast had hurled them.

The gas spread rapidly. As it thinned out, they could not follow it with their eyes. But they could tell when it reached Jurl Crierson’s men, those who had not managed to get into the submarine.

Doc’s shouting finally persuaded the men working out near the cove mouth to plunge into the sea and swim around the headland to safety. Some of the group could not swim, but the others helped them.

It was midafternoon when big-fisted Renny approached Doc Savage and reported.

“We finally got them guys out of the submarine,” Renny explained. “They would have taken the hooker out to sea, only it was moored, and the engines weren’t strong enough to break the mooring lines. And Monk found a good rifle and sat on the cliff and wouldn’t let them untie the lines. They finally gave up.”

Behind Renny, Monk and Ham and a string of prisoners—those who had been barricaded in the submarine—approached. They bound them, then lined them up with the other captives.

“Is there a radio on the submarine?” Doc asked.

“Yes.”

“We will use it to call a British warship,” Doc decided. “They will take the prisoners off our hands.”

“Why a British ship?”

“This island is probably in British territory. Moreover, a British ship clearing up the mystery will make it more effective. Europe will be more apt to believe the British.”

Monk nodded, then looked at pretty Dara Smith, and sighed. No hope there, he decided. Dara had apparently decided she could use a young man around the house who was adventurer, and Herb March was definitely the choice.

“There’s one more bunch of prisoners,” Monk muttered. “We might as well go get ’em off the sub.”

“Jurl Crierson?” Doc asked.

“Sure. He’s one of ’em on the sub.”

Later, Doc Savage stood looking at Jurl Crierson.

“For your information,” the bronze man said, “your real identity was known long before we reached this island. I found your fingerprints on the *Patricia*, and also on the steamer *Senora Dupree*. I checked those prints with your own, taken when you were not suspecting, off the arm of a chair which you used in our New York office.”

Jurl Crierson only stared dully.

Herb March, who had come down to the sub with them, offered. “I know what it’s like to be thinking about a firing squad.”

Doc said, “As soon as you knew where we planned to land in Charleston, your natural act would be to try to get to a telephone and set up a trap. You did phone—when you were in that filling station on the island in

the Chesapeake. So we used the trap to make your men think we were dead, and then doped you so you could not tell them differently while we got aboard the *Brazil Trader*.”

The bronze man shook his head slowly. “You were very clever. You were playing everything safe. You had thugs under control here—but you were afraid that March might have gotten some news through to Dara, so you came up North yourself to be sure nothing would happen. You never made a single overt move against us all the time you were with us.”

Jurl Crierson, who was also Larry Forge, let his breath out and sank down in a pile on the sand.

Monk felt of his pulse, plainly hoping to find none.

“Heck,” Monk said. “He just fainted.”

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

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[The end of *Poison Island* by Lester Dent (as Kenneth Robeson)]