



MYSTERY ISLAND

A Doc Savage Adventure By Kenneth Robeson

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*Scanned and Proofed
by Tom Stephens*

CHAPTER I. THE MEN WHO WATCHED

ONE thing could be said about the conversation. It was monotonous. And it had been going on for some time.

"You missing link!"

"Yeah?"

"Nature sure had an accident when she made you."

"Oh, yeah?"

And so on, and on, and on. For the last two hours.

This conversation was taking place in a hotel lobby, the two participants occupying chairs that were there for the guests. Directly above the speakers was a mezzanine balcony. And two men were working at desks on this balcony.

The man at one of the desks on the balcony suddenly threw down his pencil and made choking noises. He was a large man, and the biggest thing about him was his fists. They would just about fill quart pails, his fists would.

"Holy cow!" he said.

He strode over to the balcony rail and looked down at the two fellows carrying on the conversation below. He could hear them much too plainly—the way you can hear two tomcats on a fence at midnight.

One said, "When you get in a taxi, they leave the 'Vacant' sign up."

The other said, "Oh, yeah?"

The man with the fists tried to pull out some of his hair. He walked over to the man who was working at the other desk on the balcony.

"Doc," he said.

"Yes, Renny." The other man did not look up. There were unusual points about this man, the first being his size. However, his Herculean build was so symmetrical that it was apparent only when compared to an object of ordinary size, the desk at which he sat, for instance. His skin was deeply bronzed by sun, and his hair was a shade of bronze only slightly darker than his skin. To look at him was to know immediately that you were looking at a person of dynamic power and extreme ability. There was that quality about him. "What is it, Renny?" he asked.

Renny—with the big fists—groaned.

"Doesn't that gabble downstairs bother you?" he asked wildly. "It's about to run me up a tree."

"Not particularly." The bronze man lifted his head to listen. His eyes were noticeable now—his most unusual feature. The eyes were strangely like pools of flake gold being always stirred by tiny winds. He said, "Let me hear what they are saying."

From below, the bickering voices came up.

One said, "With those ears, you look like a loving cup from the back."

The other said, "Oh, yeah?"

The bronze man remarked quietly, "Monk seems to be short on repartee. His principal part in the conversation seems to be, 'Oh, yeah?' It does sound a bit tiresome. What are they squabbling about?"

"Search me. Do they need a reason? I've heard them carry on for days without any reason." Renny frowned. "Monk's pet pig may have given fleas to Ham's pet chimp, or something. I don't know what it is about. How can I lay out emplacements for coast artillery with that racket going on? The answer is—I can't. I can't concentrate."

"No one has ever been able to stop Monk and Ham from quarreling," the bronze man said.

Big-fisted Renny turned his eyes upward, apparently in a desperate appeal for some kind of celestial deliverance. His gaze lit on the electric-light fixtures. One eye narrowed.

"I think," he said, "that I'll punctuate this quarrel."

He unscrewed two large electric-light bulbs from a fixture. He winked at Doc. "This will cost me fifteen cents apiece for the bulbs," he said, "but it'll be worth it. When these things break, they sound like shots. Watch."

Renny moved to the rail with the two bulbs.

"Monk and Ham will think they're shot," he said, chuckling.

He tossed both bulbs over the balcony railing.

Two loud reports came from below. Then there were three more reports, even louder.

Renny's jaw fell. "How'd I get so much noise out of two bulbs?" he gasped.

In the lobby below, someone emptied five bullets out of a six-shooter. Judging from the noise, it was a big six-shooter. A man howled in terror. Things upset violently. There were some back-alley words.

"Holy cow!" said Renny.

It was some time before the sedate hotel lobby recovered from the effects of what happened during the next few minutes. The room clerk at the desk never did fully recuperate. He was a sleek clerk, rather a panty-waist, and inclined to be supercilious to such of the customers as he did not think were millionaires. Really, the first thing he knew about the uproar was when a bullet parted his hair. It was sort of a cross-part, beginning at the left and running back to the right, and it just mowed off the hair and creased the scalp. Actually, that was all of the fray the clerk saw, because he sat down behind the big mahogany desk and began to call loudly for the manager, the police and his mother.

Fortunately, the hotel lobby had been almost empty at the time. This was lucky, because the place was rapidly filling with bullets, burned powder fumes, such pieces of furniture as could be thrown, and men who were trying to go places in a hurry, or disappear under such items as seat cushions.

It was all very confused. None of the eyewitnesses could give a coherent story. The participants, of course, had a vague idea of what was occurring.

Monk and Ham were two of the participants. Monk was behind a pillar that supported the balcony. The pillar was thin, and Monk was short and wide and hairy, so that part of him stuck out on each side of the column, even though he stood edgewise. Ham was in a large overstuffed divan. Ham was a slender man, dressed like a fashion advertisement, and he carried a black cane. The divan was amply large for him. Unfortunately, though, it was not bulletproof.

Monk and Ham's two pets were in the fray. That is, in it as much as their masters. Monk's pet was a long-legged, wing-eared runt pig, Habeas Corpus by name. Habeas had lined out across the lobby, squeaking at every jump. Ham's pet was an animal that was not exactly a monkey, or yet a chimpanzee, nor yet a scrub ape—science disagreed as to just what he was. His name was Chemistry. He resembled Monk somewhat, or would have, if he'd been wearing a baggy brown suit that needed pressing. If Chemistry had been clad, however, it was doubtful if he could have made the mighty leap that had put him on a chandelier, where he was now.

As nearly as Monk and Ham could figure, what had happened was this:

First, they had been conducting their usual quarrel. There had been two loud reports behind them.

Three perfect strangers had thereupon jumped up out of chairs in the hotel lobby and started shooting.

These three strange gentlemen completed the list of participants. They were average-looking fellows, nothing outstanding about them, or there hadn't been until they went into action. Now their hands were full of spouting steel, and to judge from their behavior, their minds were full of two ideas—first, to make corpses out of Monk and Ham; second, to get out of there in a hurry.

"Ham!" Monk squalled.

"What?" yelled Ham.

"Haven't you got a gun, or something?"

"No gun. I've got some tear gas."

"Well, use it, you overdressed shyster!" Monk howled.

Ham's tear gas was in a small grenade. He jerked this out of his pocket, flicked the firing lever, and tossed the thing out to let it hatch in the middle of the lobby. It made the sound of an elderly firecracker, and tear gas spouted to all four walls of the lobby.

The three strange gentlemen with too-ready guns began to have their troubles. Gas masks was an item with which they were not equipped.

"Gaa op gaten!"

one of them shouted.

Whatever this was, it opened the gate. The three strangers charged for the street door.

Something now occurred to Monk. He pulled a glass bottle out of his coat. He looked at the bottle; he had forgotten he had it.

Monk stepped out from behind the pillar, drew back his arm, and threw the bottle at one of the men. It was a good pitch. A big-leaguer could not have done better. The bottle hit the target in the middle of the back. It was a thin bottle; it was thrown hard; it broke. The contents, a liquid, spread over the man's back, and some of it splashed on his two companions.

They went on, dashing outdoors.

MONK, now that nobody was shooting at him, was belligerent. He raced across the lobby in pursuit. His mouth and eyes were both wide open as he charged, so he got a natural amount of the tear gas. By the time Monk reached the door, he was not seeing so well.

In front of the hotel, leading from the door down to the street, was a long flight of steps. Monk did not see these stairs, and under the stress of the moment, he forgot all about their being there.

He went down the steps the hard way.

The three strangers with the quick guns dashed up the street. There was a car waiting, a fourth stranger driving it. This machine and all four of the gentlemen left with all the haste possible.

Inside the hotel lobby, a dead quiet fell.

"Monk!" Ham called cautiously. Ham was still ensconced in the divan. He listened, heard no answer. "Monk?" he called again. "Monk, Monk!"

Silence.

"Oh, great grief!" Ham said wildly, anxiously. "Did they shoot you, Monk?"

Considering the things that Ham had been calling Monk a bit previously, his present concern over Monk's welfare was incongruous.

From the balcony above, the bronze man's voice came. It was calm, remarkably composed considering the young war which had just occurred.

The bronze man said quietly, "Monk followed them outdoors. I think he fell down the steps."

"Is Monk hurt?"

"I cannot tell," said the bronze man. "You feel your way out onto the street. Renny is up here with me. We will work around and out of the hotel the back way, to avoid the tear gas. We will meet you in front."

"Right-o," Ham said. "Who were those guys?"

"Didn't you know them?" the bronze man asked.

"I never saw them before."

"Meet us in front of the hotel. We will talk it over there."

The bronze giant and the one with the big fists, Renny, moved down the balcony, closing their eyes against the tear gas, and feeling their way, until they found a door which admitted them to the inclosed stairway. They descended the steps.

Renny said, "Ham didn't seem to know what happened."

"No, he did not," Doc agreed.

"I sure set off a Fourth of July with those two light bulbs," Renny said.

They reached an alley, walked through it, and moved around to the front of the hotel. They stopped at the foot of the flight of steps.

Monk was picking himself up, making faces and saying things. Ham stood over him solicitously.

Ham asked, "Did you miss the steps, Monk?"

"I missed the first one," Monk said, glaring, "but that was the only one I missed."

CHAPTER II. MONK PLANS A DATE

THE police were understandably perturbed over the situation. The sergeant in charge was a fellow who filled Size 12 shoes and a Size 48 suit very full of brawn and reddish hide, plus an aroused temper.

"What the blazes happened here?" he yelled. "Who turned that tear gas loose?"

Someone pointed out Ham, and said, "That fellow, I think."

"Hey, you!" The sergeant stalked over and gave Ham's shoulder a tap. "You let loose that tear gas?"

"Why, yes," Ham admitted.

"Well, well, well!" The officer put his fists on his hips and gave Ham the eyes. "And just how did you

happen to be carrying tear gas around, do you mind tellin' me?"

"Tear gas isn't a deadly weapon."

"It's a mighty funny weapon to have in your pocket," said the policeman. "Are you going to give me an argument, so I have to take you down to the station?"

"Look, officer," Ham said patiently. "I don't know who those three strangers were. I don't know why they started shooting. I never saw them before, and neither did Monk, Renny, or Doc. I tell you, it's as much a mystery to us as it is to you."

"Is how the tear gas was in your pocket a mystery, too?" the officer inquired.

Ham said, "Why, I was caught unarmed. I generally pack plenty of weapons. But this time, I only had my sword-cane and that stray tear-gas grenade. As a matter of fact, all of the men associated with Doc Savage generally find it best to have a little protection."

"Who?"

"Who—what do you mean?"

"Who did you say?"

"Doc Savage, you mean. I'm one of Doc's associates. He has five of them, four besides myself. Renny and Monk are two. The other two, Johnny Littlejohn and Long Tom Roberts, are out making an inspection trip."

"Oh," said the officer. The name of Doc Savage obviously meant something to him. His eyes moved around, located Doc, and he went over to the big bronze man. "Mr. Savage?" he asked.

"Yes," the bronze man said quietly.

"I just found out who you were," the policeman explained. "Do you want the police to go ahead with this, or would you prefer to take care of it yourself?"

Doc Savage shook the officer's hand. He explained, "Why, there was shooting, so it is work for the police, naturally. And if we can be of any help to you, we will be glad to co-operate."

"You can count on us doing the same thing, Mr. Savage," the officer said.

"It is a rather strange business," Doc told him. "Three strangers were sitting in the hotel lobby near two of my men. My two associates were carrying on an argument which disturbed a third associate, who was working up on the balcony. Hoping to stop the argument, this third associate—Renny Renwick, the noted engineer—unscrewed two light bulbs and dropped them over the railing. It was a joke. But the three strangers thought they were being shot at, evidently, so they unlimbered guns and started shooting at my friends. Then they fled."

Doc Savage then gave a description of the three strangers. He described details, tiny particulars about their skin, hair and dress, a picture so complete that he might have been looking at photographs of the trio.

HAVING completed the preliminary investigation, the police sergeant took his men out of the hotel, got them together, and gave them a little lecture.

"You fellows had better prove you are cops," he said. "Do you know who that big bronze fellow is?"

"They were calling him Doc Savage," a patrolman said.

"Is that all you know about him?"

"Yes."

"You're pretty dumb," said the sergeant. "This Doc Savage's full name is Clark Savage, Jr., and you will never meet a more unusual man. You got a look at his build? Well, he's stronger than he looks, according to what I've heard. But he's no muscle guy, I want to make that clear. He's a scientist. One of the greatest. They claim his ability as a surgeon is just about without equal.

"I got all this from the chief of the Federal Bureau of Investigation for this district, who knows Doc Savage," the officer continued. "It seems that Savage was trained from childhood by scientists and physical-culture experts and guys like that, the idea being to make a kind of physical and mental marvel out of him, so that he could follow a career of righting wrongs and punishing evildoers outside the law, or 'way off in the out-of-the-way parts of the earth where there ain't no law."

"What is Savage doing down here?" asked the patrolman who had never heard of Doc Savage.

"He's serving in a consulting capacity with the government engineers for that new fortified zone they're laying out around Charleston," the sergeant replied. "Savage and his five associates are here on that job."

"Why this lecture, sergeant?"

"I wanted you to know just how important this Doc Savage is. The man is quiet, and he don't blow his own horn. But they don't come much bigger than he is, I'm telling you."

"What are we supposed to do?" inquired the patrolman, rather lightly.

"You are supposed to talk less and use your head more," advised the sergeant. "Here's the reason I'm telling you this stuff: Doc Savage gets the co-operation of this police force, understand. He happens to be a man on the side of law and order, and those are the kind of fellows we will work with. Anyway, he's got government commissions that entitle him to our assistance, even if we didn't want to extend it."

"I see."

"The point I'm making," said the officer, "is that this Doc Savage is important people, and don't ever think different!"

BACK at the hotel, the excitement had died down, and Doc Savage had assembled his associates for a conference.

"Let us get the straight of what happened," the bronze man said.

There was no excitement in his manner, no evidence of agitation. Downstairs in the lobby, they had already counted seventeen bullet holes in the walls and furniture. But for all evidence of disturbance the bronze man gave, there had been nothing but a tea party. Anyone not knowing of the rigorous training he had undergone since childhood would have suspected there was something seriously wrong with his mind. But Monk and Ham and Renny knew that he merely had a superb self-control.

Monk and Ham had gotten rid of the effects of the tear gas, and had retrieved their pets, Habeas Corpus

and Chemistry.

Monk—full name Lieutenant Colonel Andrew Blodgett Mayfair: reputation, one of the world's greatest industrial chemists—had repaired the damage done by the tumble down the steps. He was pretty well masked with court plasters.

Ham—full name Brigadier General Theodore Marley Brooks, pride of the Harvard law alumni—had lost his concern about Monk. He had returned to the opposite extreme.

"You look," Ham informed Monk, "like a guy who got out of his grave to haunt a house, and couldn't find his way back again. But that's your normal looks."

"Yeah?" Monk said.

Renny, who was Colonel John Renwick, noted engineer, was not taking much part in the conversation. In fact, Renny was looking a little sheepish. His little joke had touched off the fireworks.

They got together in the parlor of the suite of rooms which they had at the hotel.

Doc Savage asked, "Does anyone know what the uproar was all about?"

No one did.

"Have you," Doc asked, "noticed those three strangers before today?"

Ham said, "I think I have. I saw one of them yesterday, and maybe before that, once or twice."

Renny said, "I saw them before, too. During the last few days. Since we came to Charleston."

"As for me," said Monk, "if I see 'em again, it's gonna be too bad for somebody!"

Doc Savage explained, "I have noticed two of the men previously. One of them I saw yesterday. One of them the day before. Which leads to the obvious conclusion that they have been shadowing us."

"Shadowing us? Why?" Renny scratched his head.

That happened to be the thing they were all wondering about.

Doc Savage got up and paced around the room. It was not much of a manifestation of emotion, but for the bronze man, it was considerable. He was censuring himself.

"We made the mistake," he said grimly, "of not keeping our eyes open. I should have realized that those strangers have been watching us for at least two days."

"Three strangers watching us," said Renny, "and we have no idea why."

"Three nervous strangers," Ham corrected. "Mighty nervous, too. When you dropped the light bulbs, they thought we'd started shooting."

"The worst part," Renny complained, "we got no way of tracing them."

Monk emitted a snort. A gleeful snort.

"There you're wrong," the homely chemist said. "Me, I pulled that bacon out of the fire."

Monk went to the telephone, said, "Operator, I want the police department. And right after I'm through

with them, I want all the telegraph companies that hire messengers, then I want all the taxicab companies in town, the milk companies that have drivers on the streets, and the bus company. Oh, yes, and all the department stores that hire delivery men."

Renny stared at Monk and said, "What the blazes?"

Ham shook his head hopelessly. "Come loose," Ham said. "I always knew he would."

Monk said, "Hello, police? Listen, this is Monk Mayfair, right-hand man to Doc Savage. I am offering a reward for barking dogs. Not a reward for the dogs. The reward is for any information leading to a spot where a dog, or dogs, is barking mysteriously. The reward is twenty dollars, cash."

The telephone receiver made rasping noises.

"What do I mean by mysteriously barking dogs?" Monk demanded. "Why, just that. There must be something mysterious about the dogs barking. They must bark for no reason, see. . . . Oh, they always seem to bark without a reason, you say? Listen, wise guy, I don't care whether you think my bearings are loose or not. I've got cash money, and that talks. Twenty bucks for any information leading to dogs that are barking strangely. They may be barking at a house, a car, a guy walking on the street, or anything. You pass the word along to your patrolmen and detectives. . . . Never mind what you think about the idea."

Ham said, "You see, the police think he's crazy, too."

Monk ignored all comments. He said, "All right, operator. Gimme the telegraph companies. I've got the same speech for them. And, operator, if you see a mysterious barking dog, you tell me about it, and you will win a reward of twenty dollars, all for yourself. . . . How mysterious, you say? Well, I'll be the judge of that, angel." He covered the mouthpiece with a hand, winked and said, "I wonder if she's as good-lookin' as she sounds."

"And I wonder," Ham said, "where we can get a strait jacket for you."

"Get outta here, so I can talk!" Monk yelled. "Say, operator, you wouldn't happen to be a married lady? You aren't. Say, I'll bet you would like to see my pet pig named Habeas Corpus."

Monk spent the next half-hour calling up people and offering twenty-dollar rewards for mysteriously barking dogs, making it clear that he was not interested in the dogs, but in the spot at which they did their barking. By the time he finished, it was evident that he was getting news of his reward to persons who were moving about the streets a great deal of the time. There was that much method to his madness.

"Her name is Hester," Monk announced finally.

"Who?" asked Renny.

"The telephone operator."

"Listen, do we bat you over the head," Renny demanded, "or do you make sense out of what you're doing?"

"He can't do it," Ham said. "It wont make sense."

"What'll you bet," Monk demanded, "that when we find the mysteriously barking dog, or dogs, we'll find our late visitors?"

"What?" Ham yelled. "How'll you do that?"

"That's my little secret," Monk assured him. "I think I'll make a date with Hester."

CHAPTER III. THE BARKING DOGS

It was dark in Charleston, South Carolina, the night being touched with a certain balmy quality that did not have the cool harshness of Northern nights, nor yet the sticky lethargy of tropical nighttime farther south. A nice kind of darkness.

"This is interfering with my date with Hester," Monk declared.

He got down flat on his stomach in the dust. Doc Savage, Ham and Renny did likewise. So did Long Tom Roberts and Johnny Littlejohn, the two of Doc's group of associates who had missed the tiff at the hotel. Long Tom and Johnny had since joined Doc's group, having returned from their daytime duty of selecting suitable locations for a string of land mines calculated to discourage an enemy from making a landing near Charleston, should that eventuality ever occur. Long Tom was an electrical wizard of note, and Johnny, being a geologist, probably one of the best there was, knew all about what was inside the earth. These two qualities fitted in nicely with the job of mining the terrain along the Carolina coast.

"Let me get this straight," said Long Tom, who was a scrawny fellow who looked as if he had matured in a mushroom cellar. "Some guys cut loose shooting this afternoon. And we want to know why."

"Yes," Doc said.

"And Monk thinks these fellows will be found around some mysteriously barking dogs?"

"Yes."

"An anomalistic equiparability, I'll be superamalgamated," remarked Johnny Littlejohn. He was a man as long as his words, and only somewhat thicker than a rake handle.

"Eh?" said Monk.

"He says the idea is nuts," said Ham. "Which is what I've been saying."

Monk snorted. "I found a case of mysteriously barking dogs, didn't I? And you said I wouldn't."

"Well—"

"They were barking at that boat, weren't they?" Monk demanded. He pointed. "That boat over there."

The craft which the chemist indicated was a type often seen along the Atlantic coast, but most frequently found in the Chesapeake Bay section. It looked like an old-time clipper ship, except that it was flatter, and the two masts slanted back rakishly, while the sails were fore-and-aft rigged, which meant they were roughly triangular in shape. It was a Chesapeake Bay bugeye type, a boat that was unusual in design because of its flat-bottomed construction, enabling it to sail in very shallow water. Originally they were developed for oyster fishing in the Chesapeake, and the bottom was made out of solid logs drifted together with Swedish iron rods.

This bugeye was spick-and-span, all brass and varnish. No workboat, obviously.

"A yacht," Renny said.

"The dogs," said Monk, "were standing on the dock and barking at the bugeye. A sailor would come out and chase the dogs away, but they, or other dogs, would come back and start barking. A little colored boy noticed it. I paid him twenty dollars reward."

Ham said: "Mysteriously barking dogs! For the love of little goons!"

Doc Savage entered the conversation. He spoke quietly, but he got attention on the instant. The bronze man said, "Ham, you and Renny and Long Tom get rowboats and approach the bugeye from the harbor side. When you are all set, imitate a seagull, and we will answer. After we answer, wait five minutes, then close in. We will do the same. And all of you be sure to wear these capes with the gasproof hoods, and have the hoods handy. Wearing those hoods, we'll be able to identify each other by touch, in the dark."

THERE was music somewhere in the still night. A banjo and an accordion, Negro voices singing. On a yacht tied in the basin a bit to the south, there was other music, a loud and blaring kind that came from a portable phonograph.

Doc Savage was alone with Monk and the big-worded Johnny Littlejohn. The others had moved off to find boats somewhere and approach their quarry from the water.

The bugeye sat silently on the dark harbor. Springlines which held it to the dock were slack. There was no light aboard.

Doc Savage moved forward alone. He made almost no noise, and it was nearly impossible to distinguish his figure from the lumps of shadow made by lumber heaps, boxes, piling. The effect was ghostly. He returned after a while.

"The cabin portholes of the bugeye are heavily curtained," he said. "But there are lights inside."

"That looks suspicious," said Johnny.

Such small words were rare for Johnny, except when he spoke to Doc Savage. Using small words with Doc was a mark of respect, evidently, because Johnny employed them on no one else. Except that he did occasionally become very excited and revert to single syllables for temporary periods.

Doc Savage said to Monk, "The matter of barking dogs being used to locate the three strangers interests us. I happen to know you have done considerable chemical experimentation, aimed at developing scents which would frighten or attract animals. The idea was to develop a more effective chemical concoction for keeping pet dogs and cats from sleeping on furniture, and that sort of thing. In connection with your experiments, didn't you develop a chemical mixture which would cause dogs to bark at any object on which they smell the stuff?"

"So you saw through it," Monk said.

"You had a bottle of the mixture with you in the hotel lobby," Doc said. "That right?"

Monk nodded. "I just happened to have it. Was the only thing I could think of to use on those guys."

"You didn't," said Doc, "just happen to have it, did you?"

Monk had the small, squeaky voice of a child. It turned very uneasy.

"I hope that idea don't occur to Ham," he said.

"Why?"

"Well," said Monk, "if you have to know the truth, I was carrying that stuff around to put on Ham's pet, Chemistry. And maybe I'd have put a little on Ham, too. Can you imagine how funny it would be, Ham going down the street, all dressed up the way he always is, with a herd of dogs following him and barking at him?" Monk chortled gleefully at the idea. "Boy, would that kill me off!" Then he turned uneasy again. "But if Ham got wise to it, the thing wouldn't be funny. He'd take out after me with that sword-cane of his."

Out on the water, a sea gull cried out raucously. Doc waited a moment, then answered with a similar cry. He got a response.

"We are all set to investigate that bugeye," the bronze man said. "Renny, Long Tom and Ham are ready."

MONK said, "I was going to take Hester canoeing in the moonlight. I hope this proves more interesting."

They approached the end of the dock, and the spidery rigging of the bugeye loomed up before them, the rakish masts spiking high into the darkness. Doc breathed, "You two fellows stick here a moment." Then the bronze man swung aboard the vessel. He had removed his footgear. The holystoned deck was smooth under his feet.

He felt his way to a companionway, listened, then eased down it. He was exercising every sense. The scientific training which he had undergone for years had developed his faculties to an extreme degree. His sense of smell, for instance, while falling far short of many animals, was keen enough to detect the near presence of a human being, particularly someone belonging to a boat, where, for some reason or other, baths are usually rather scarce.

Ahead of him was an open door, beyond it a lighted cabin. In the cabin were two people. A largish man with a white Vandyke beard, and the appearance of being very lazy. A girl who was tall and dark and nice, and very worth looking at.

The man drooped lazily in a chair, eyes closed. The girl was biting a pencil eraser, frowning at a crossword puzzle.

Doc watched them for a while.

Then the bronze man went back on deck, and found Monk and Johnny on the wharf.

"Can you bark like a dog, either of you?" Doc asked.

"Not me," Johnny said.

"I can't bark," Monk declared. "But I can howl like a hound named Ponto that we used to have."

"That will do," Doc said. "In about three minutes, start howling."

Doc Savage eased back into the innards of the boat. He watched through the door. The man with the white beard dozed placidly in his chair. The girl put several letters into the crossword puzzle. She looked very sweet as she tilted her head to one side and eyed what she had written. Evidently the letters did not fit. "Damn the blankety-blank luck to hell!" the girl said. "Why don't the stinkers make these puzzles up so the damned things will make sense?"

She added at least three cusswords that Doc had never heard before, and still looked just as sweet and smooth as she had before.

The man with the white beard opened one eye reluctantly. "Really, Miss Wilson," he said slowly, "your language irks me no end, don't you know?"

"Irk and be damned!" said the young woman. "If I ever meet a lazier man than you are, I hope somebody tells me."

At this point, Monk began imitating the hound named Ponto. A creditable imitation it was, too. The howls of Ponto drifted into the cabin.

Miss Wilson smiled. So did the languid gentleman.

"Another one," said Miss Wilson cheerfully.

"Yes, another dog," said the lazy man.

"Someone is bound," said Miss Wilson, "to report the mysteriously barking dogs to Doc Savage."

"And Doc Savage will come down here."

"Yes, he will come," said the lazy man. He grinned, not very pleasantly.

Doc Savage got back on deck as fast and as silently as he could and found Monk and Johnny and put a stop to Monk's imitation of Ponto.

"We're walking into something here," Doc Savage said in a whisper. "The purpose of that howling Monk was doing was to make a little test on two people on the boat. It was just a precaution. But they seem to know that we are looking for mysteriously barking dogs."

"That's impossible!" Johnny exclaimed.

"Nobody knows we're hunting mysterious dogs," Monk said.

"No one," Doc reminded him, "except possibly two hundred people whom you notified about the reward."

"Yeah, one of the reward hunters must've told 'em," Monk said. "I shoulda used a fake name, that's what I shoulda."

JOHNNY said, "Doc, what do you suggest we do about this? We have no idea what this is all about. We should get hold of somebody and learn something."

"We might do what they expect," Doc said, "and pay them a visit."

"You think something will happen then?"

"Yes, but no telling what."

Johnny, with his answer, showed the thing that—in reality—bound them all together. Love of excitement. He said, "Well, what are we waiting on?"

And Monk chuckled. "This may be more interestin' than takin' Hester canoein'."

"Have you seen Hester yet?" Johnny asked, reluctantly using small words.

"Not yet," Monk admitted. "But from her voice, I'll bet she's the kind of a gal who rings bells."

Doc outlined the plan of action. Monk was to creep down into the passageway amidships and keep an eye on Miss Wilson and the inert man with the white Vandyke. Johnny was to take the stern and work forward, looking for other persons. Doc would take the bow, where the crew might be expected to be found, and would work aft.

Monk took up his position. He reached the passage without trouble. He could see Miss Wilson and her companion. Monk saw no sense of just standing there watching them. So Monk calmly walked in on Miss Wilson and the lazy man.

"Hello, folks," Monk said. He showed them the business end of the weapon he was holding in his hand. "This ain't an automatic, as you may notice, if you're familiar with guns. It's a machine pistol. It shoots seven hundred and eighty-six bullets a minute."

After this speech, Monk looked at their faces.

He saw enough to realize he had made a very serious mistake.

In the stern, Johnny conducted an industrious, though very cautious, search of the cabins and staterooms as he came to them. He found no one.

In the bow, Doc Savage did the same thing. He likewise found nobody.

Doc and Johnny met on deck and exchanged reports. Then they crept down the companionway to the passage.

The door was still open, and they could see Monk sitting there in the cabin, acting quite sociable with Miss Wilson and her companion with the white chin whiskers.

"Monk," Doc said. "Are you all right?"

"Sure, I'm all right," Monk said.

"That is good," said Doc.

"Come on in and be sociable," Monk said. "I want you to meet my friends."

Monk then had a coughing spell, or what sounded and looked like one. Actually, the appearance was the only genuine thing about the spell. The coughing was a series of words in the ancient Mayan language, a tongue which Doc Savage and his five associates spoke fluently, and which they used—because of its peculiar nature, and the fact that almost no one else in the civilized world spoke it—to communicate with each other when they did not wish strangers to understand.

Monk's coughing Mayan words were very explicit.

"There are two guys on each side of the door with guns," was the general text of Monk's Mayan. "Four guys in all."

"COME right in," Monk added in English, finishing his coughing.

"I will be right in," Doc assured him.

The bronze man pulled the gas-proof hood of his cape over his head. The cape and the hood were made of transparent plastic material similar to the so-called "glass" of which suspenders, belts and such articles are commonly made. There was a snug elastic around the neck of the hood, and an adhesive material in addition, which sealed the hood airtight. It made a good gas outfit.

While one hand was taking care of that, Doc's other hand got out a gas grenade.

Evidently Monk could see Doc, because he had another coughing spell, and poured out excited Mayan.

"These fellows learned their lesson at the hotel," Monk said in the dialect. "They're wearing gas masks."

"Monk, I hope that cold gets better," Doc said.

He changed his gas grenade for another one, this one a smoker. He tossed it into the room. It let loose tremendously, poured out an incredible amount of smoke.

"Everyone move fast!" Doc called. His voice, without trace of excitement, was nevertheless a crashing sound.

Monk took the advice. He came out of his chair, grabbed up the chair, ran with it through the smoke. Like a knight of old in a tournament, but using the chair instead of a spear, Monk did his best to impale a gunman. He could not see his target, because of the smoke. He missed. He did not miss far, however, because the target was standing almost beside Monk when the latter crashed into the cabin bulkhead. The fellow rapped Monk on the head with a blackjack, and he seemed to put about all he had into the blow.

Monk's head was not that tough.

Doc said, "Johnny, get back on deck and waylay them as they come out." He said it in Mayan.

Then Doc did not enter the cabin. He sat down in the passage; or rather sank to one knee, with the other leg outstretched across the passage, to trip anybody who came out.

He got a victim at once. The man came cautiously. He touched Doc's leg. He swung a terrific blow with a fist and fired a revolver blindly, fortunately not in the direction of the floor.

Doc jerked the man's legs from under him. The fellow fell backward, and hard. With nice judgment, the bronze man's fist found the man's jaw about the time the fellow hit the floor. Doc held him for a moment, but the man was still.

No one else came out through the door.

There was a great deal of excited motion inside the cabin.

Miss Wilson cried, "Mr. Savage—they're crawling out through a porthole!"

There were two shots crowding each other, and Miss Wilson did not say anything more.

Doc Savage went into the cabin more cautiously and slowly than he should have, but he did not realize this until later. What made him overcareful was the knowledge that portholes in boats this size were ordinarily not large enough for a man to crawl through. Even in liners, they are seldom that large.

These portholes happened to be bigger.

Doc got to one of them in time to seize a shoe. There was a brief struggle, and he got the shoe, but not the man who had worn it. The latter dropped into the water with a splash.

The porthole was a tight squeeze for Doc. Normally it would have been impassable for a man of his size, but his muscles were supple and he understood how to make himself fit cramped spaces. He started through.

"Renny, Ham, Long Tom!" the bronze man called. "They are in the water. Pick them up."

There came a slapping glare of white, eye-hurting light—from a searchlight, evidently. One that was on a speedboat, judging from the roar of a powerful motor that now surged up. And there was a machine gun on the boat, as well. It began making a noise.

Doc got back out of the porthole in a hurry. He found Monk with his hands, dragged the homely chemist into the passage, and dropped him, then flung flat beside Monk. Bullets from that kind of a machine gun were the .30-caliber army type. The four-inch wood hull of the boat would not offer much discouragement to the slugs.

He heard the speedboat pick up the three swimmers, and there was shooting all the while. The boat went away, making the noise of a seaplane trying to take off. After that—silence.

CHAPTER IV. A SWAP

THE Carolina night was still and balmy around the boat. The music in the neighborhood, of course, had stopped.

Doc called, "Miss Wilson."

"Yes," Miss Wilson's voice answered. "I'm all right."

"How about your companion?"

"Mr. Lively, you mean," Miss Wilson said. "I don't know. Mr. Lively, are you still with us?"

"I believe I am, I hope, I hope," said the voice of the man with the white beard. "But I don't see why that thing couldn't have been conducted a little less actively."

Doc Savage went into the passage, and felt of Monk's wrist. Monk was breathing. Doc located the man he had knocked senseless.

The unconscious man seemed to be the sole result of their raid. Doc gave him another rap on the jaw to insure his remaining unconscious.

Going on deck, Doc found Johnny intact. The bronze man went to the rail, said, "Ham, Renny, Long Tom?"

"Throw us a rope," Long Tom's voice called.

"Throw them an anchor," Johnny suggested, so irritated he used small words. "They let those guys get away."

"I don't think that's funny," Long Tom climbed the rope Doc dropped to him. "I don't think it's a bit funny. You know what happened? They had a big machine gun on a speedboat. They turned a

searchlight on us, and began shooting."

Renny climbed on deck in time to add, "And we had to jump out of our boat, or get shot to pieces. We had to turn into submarines. It's lucky they didn't have depth bombs. They had every other kind of weapon."

Ham was the last to clamber on deck and stand dripping. His natty clothes were a mess. He had lost his sword-cane. His humor was bad. He said, "I haven't a thing to say."

Doc Savage gave them a terse summary of what had happened on the boat. "I do not think Monk is damaged badly," he said, "and we secured one prisoner."

"One prisoner, eh?" Ham thrust out his jaw. "Fine. We can try that new truth serum on him."

"Just a moment before we go below decks," Doc said. "There are two people down there. A Miss Wilson and a Mr. Lively. I do not know a thing about them, except that they have plenty of courage. The way they reacted to that fight, I think they are people who are accustomed to danger."

The bronze man turned his head. "Someone is coming on shore," he added.

It proved to be someone from the neighborhood who was understandably curious about the noise of a few minutes ago.

Renny said, "I'll take care of this."

"What's going on here?" the newcomer asked. "What happened?"

"Some practical joker," said Renny, "set off a string of firecrackers. It was a gag."

Rather to their surprise, the newcomer swallowed this as a fact. He went away, saying, "Well, then, I won't call the police."

"I guess it was such an uproar," Renny chuckled, "that he don't think it could be anything but a gag."

They could hear the man at the shore end of the wharf, telling someone that it had just been a bunch of crazy yachtsmen carrying on. So it was all right.

They went below. Moving down the passage, Ham got a glimpse of Miss Wilson.

"Brothers," Ham whispered. "Monk can have his Hester. I'll take Miss Wilson."

MISS WILSON told her story. She told it demurely with gentle little mannerisms, in a voice which would melt butter, and with complete clarity. Her manners were perfect.

She was English, and she had come to America with some refugee children, as governess and companion during the trip. That had been some time ago. She had not gone back to England because it was too dangerous, and she was afraid of the horrid old war, and anyhow, in England, she would be just another mouth to feed. She had saved a little money, and she was touring the United States in a modest way.

She had met Mr. Lively, Miss Wilson said, at a tea for the benefit of English refugees. Mr. Lively was an Englishman, or rather a Welshman. This boat, the *Osprey*, was Mr. Lively's yacht. Mr. Lively liked his boat a lot, and he had been very anxious to show it to Miss Wilson. In turn, Miss Wilson had been interested in Mr. Lively because she thought it was a shame that a Britisher would dawdle on his yacht

while his native land was in such a sad plight. Miss Wilson had thought she would like to reform Mr. Lively. Mr. Lively had told her he did not want to go back home and get in trouble, wars and things, because he would have to be very active, and he preferred not being very active.

"Definitely," said Mr. Lively to this. "Oh, very definitely."

So it seemed that Miss Wilson came down with Mr. Lively to look at the yacht *Osprey*, and they no more than got aboard than four uncouth fellows with pistols waylaid them, held them in the cabin, and waited for Doc Savage to appear.

"I am completely bewildered," said Miss Wilson. "The four men were interested in dogs which kept barking at the boat. They seemed to think that would mean that you would come, Mr. Savage." She shook her head. "I don't know the least thing about this mystery." She turned to Mr. Lively. "Do you know anything, Mr. Lively?"

"Nothing," said Mr. Lively. "Absolutely nothing."

Up to this point, Miss Wilson had been the utter little lady. Now there was a slight change. She stood up and walked over to Mr. Lively.

"You damned hyena!" she yelled at Mr. Lively. "Of all the rat-faced bums I ever met, you take the fur-lined cake. You dirty lunk, the hell with you! And for getting me in this mess, take this!"

She did several things to Mr. Lively.

Several seconds later, Mr. Lively came to himself. He was sitting on the floor. "What happened to me?" he mumbled.

"She stuck two fingers in your eyes," Renny informed him. "Then she kicked your shins, and then she parked as pretty a haymaker as I ever saw on your kisser."

"Oh," said Mr. Lively weakly. "Indeed!"

"I am sorry," Miss Wilson said. "When excitement gets too strong for me, I seem to become an entirely different kind of a person. An . . . er . . . rather uncouth person. It is a very peculiar thing about me."

By this time, Monk Mayfair had come out of the fog. Consciousness completely returned to him, he had remained flat on the floor, his eyes open, getting a full mental grasp of the situation. And it had dawned on him that the worst possible thing that could occur, from his viewpoint, had happened to him. He had missed a fight, or most of one.

"I never got to hit a lick," Monk said. He groaned. "I could of had more fun with Hester."

MISS WILSON, not knowing the sort of a character Monk was, got the wrong idea.

"Poor fellow, he's still dazed," she said.

"He's that way all the time," Ham informed her.

"Oh, yeah?" Monk said.

Big-fisted Renny Renwick brought a short length of rope from deck. He used this to tie the unconscious man. This fellow, Renny pointed out, was undoubtedly one of the trio who had staged the shooting affray

in the hotel lobby.

While Renny was pulling the knots tight, the fellow regained his senses.

"That's fine," Renny rumbled. "Now you can answer a lot of questions for us."

"*Nei!*"

the man said. "*Gaa vaek!*"

Renny turned his head. "Doc, what language is that?"

"One of the Scandinavian tongues," Doc said.

Renny gave the man a belt with his fist. "You want to speak English?" he asked. "Or you want to get along without your teeth?"

The man not only spoke English. He could turn it to sulphur. He said things that made Miss Wilson's best efforts look like buttercups in a barnyard. And he wouldn't talk, he said.

Renny put the heel of a shoe in the man's mouth. "I better gag you," said the big-fisted engineer. "Such language! Holy cow!"

Doc Savage remarked that it might be a good idea if they went on deck and did their talking, in view of the fact that their foes might conceivably return with reinforcements.

"Ham, you stay here and watch the prisoner," Doc said.

"Uh-huh," Ham said, not caring for the job, because he was beginning to approve of Miss Wilson's looks, if not her language, and he would have preferred to be with her.

They went on deck. Peace had returned to the night. The Negroes were singing again. Ham remained below decks with the captive. Mr. Lively yawned and collapsed languidly on a deck chair. "Deuced inconvenience, all this activity," he said.

"Mr. Lively," Doc Savage said, "have you any idea as to what this might be about?"

"Well, no-o-o," Mr. Lively said. "That is, there is one small point I haven't mentioned. For two days, I got the idea some men have been watching me."

"Two days," Renny interposed. "That's how long they've been shadowing us."

Doc asked, "What did you do about it, Mr. Lively?"

"Why, nothing," said the unlively Mr. Lively. "It was too much work."

Miss Wilson eyed him disgustedly. "I tell you," she said, "he's so lazy his heart only beats once every five minutes."

"It does a bit better than that whenever I look at you, my dear," said Mr. Lively gallantly.

Miss Wilson sniffed.

Sounds came up from below. Monk leaned over the companionway, called, "Everything all right?"

"What you hear," Ham called back, "is just this prisoner trying to swear around his gag. He's the first guy I ever saw who could make gruntings and buzzings sound like profanity."

MR. LIVELY began to show faint signs of life. He blinked lazily at Johnny Littlejohn.

"Beg pardon," Mr. Lively said, "but by any chance are you William Harper Littlejohn, the geologist and archaeologist?"

"Yes, that is right," Johnny admitted.

"Well, I say, now!" Mr. Lively spruced up. "That is a marvelous thing. You know, I've always wanted to meet you. You see, I'm a dabbler in geology myself, in my livelier moments, which I'll admit are as few as I can manage."

"Is that so?" said Johnny.

"Indeed, indeed," said Mr. Lively. "I particularly admired your improvement on the Sorby method of making thin sections of rock suitable for the microscope."

Johnny began to show interest.

"And I was much impressed by your book on movements with a horizontal component, involving some of the most difficult problems of modern geology," added Mr. Lively.

Johnny smiled. "Well, well, I'll be superamalgamated!" he said. "So you are a geologist!"

Mr. Lively looked at Johnny reverently.

"Only a mere tyro, a beginner, in knowledge," he said. "Compared to you, I have done nothing at all worth mentioning."

Johnny started.

"Wait a minute," he said. "There is a book on stratigraphy that was published shortly before the war."

"I wrote it," Mr. Lively confessed.

"Well, it was a good book," said Johnny.

Mr. Lively did everything but purr.

"Coming from you, Mr. Littlejohn, that is high praise indeed," he said. "Because there is no question but that you are the world's greatest expert on stratigraphy."

"Now, now," said Johnny. "There are people who know more about it than I do."

"Modest," said Mr. Lively, "but not true."

Miss Wilson showed some inclination to make amends toward Mr. Lively. "So you're a geologist," she said. "Well, I didn't suppose you were anything, as much as you hate to move around. Maybe I was a bit hasty in telling you what I thought of you."

Doc Savage had taken no part in the conversation. The bronze man ordinarily did not talk much. He was a better listener. However, when he was in a group, there was so much power about his personality that he was a very-much-felt presence, whether he had the floor or not.

Now Doc spoke. He said, "Mr. Lively, the fact that men have been shadowing you for the last two days

makes it appear that you may be in danger. Moreover, both you and Miss Wilson can identify those three fellows, so you may be in danger because of that as well."

"What do you suggest, Mr. Savage?" asked Mr. Lively.

"That we take precautions."

"How would it be," suggested Mr. Lively, "if you put one or more of your men with us as a bodyguard?"

"That might be a good idea," Doc said.

"Could I have Mr. Littlejohn?" asked Mr. Lively. "You see, I admire his geological ability greatly. I believe we would have something in common, and be less likely to grate on each other's nerves."

Monk said, "He hasn't started using his words on you yet."

Nevertheless, it seemed satisfactory with everyone that Johnny should serve as bodyguard to Mr. Lively and Miss Wilson.

Doc said, "The rest of us will stay here and see what luck we can have giving truth serum to our prisoner."

Miss Wilson said, "Oh, I forgot my coat. I'll have to go down to the cabin and get it. No, don't mind coming with me. I can find it myself."

The young woman went below decks. She was gone some time, so long that Monk leaned over and called, "Miss Wilson, can't you find your coat?"

"Coming." Shortly she appeared on deck. "I was saying a word to Mr. Ham Brooks," she said. "A most interesting and likable gentleman."

Monk snorted.

Doc Savage went with Johnny, Miss Wilson and Mr. Lively to a car which Mr. Lively said was his. It was a dashing sports roadster, the color of a freshly bathed canary.

Doc said, "Just a moment." He lifted the hood of the car, looked at the mechanism. He attached a small box of a device to one of the ignition wires. The others did not see him do this. He replaced the hood. "No bombs," he said. "There was just a chance."

Mr. Lively was demonstrating the gadgets on the dashboard. "Built for comfort," he said. "This is the radio." He switched on the radio: it warmed up; a series of loud popping noises came out of it. "Seems to be out of order. He switched off the radio.

Doc watched them disappear up the street. Mr. Lively was driving, and Johnny rode on the outside, with Miss Wilson in the middle.

DOC SAVAGE went back and joined Renny, Monk and Long Tom on the deck of the bugeye.

"Doc, you know something," Monk said. "That Mr. Lively was an awful slick talker."

"He should be," Doc Savage said. "He is one of the greatest geologists in the British Empire."

"Oh, was that straight stuff?"

"I heard him lecture once at a geological society," Doc said. "He is unquestionably Mr. Elvo Sinclair Lively, a very great geologist."

"A better geologist than Johnny?" Monk asked.

"There probably is no greater geologist in the world than Johnny," Doc Savage said quietly. "In certain specialized lines of knowledge concerning subterranean earth strata, Johnny is probably a century ahead of his time. If you could imagine a man living a hundred years ago and knowing all about modern radio, that would be equivalent to the position Johnny occupies in geology."

Renny suggested, "What do you say we go down and get the prisoner? Might as well pop that truth serum to him, and learn what this is all about."

They descended to the cabin where they had left Ham guarding the prisoner.

There was a form bunched up on the floor, knotted with ropes, gagged.

"Where's Ham?" Monk remarked.

The figure on the floor made honking nasal noises. Renny went over and bent down.

"Holy cow!" Renny exploded.

"What is wrong?" Long Tom asked.

"This is Ham!"

More light from the ceiling fixture showed it was Ham. Of the prisoner, there was no sign. They untied Ham.

"That Miss Wilson!" Ham yelled. "She hit me over the head, tied me up and gagged me. She turned the prisoner loose and he climbed out through the porthole."

"Miss Wilson let the prisoner loose!" Monk exploded.

"That's what I'm telling you."

"Then maybe it's not too late to catch the fellow swimming around in the bay!" Monk yelled.

During the next twenty minutes, they gave the water front a thorough search with flashlights and boats, but without success. The ex-captive had made good his departure. They returned to the bugeye, and were searching the craft when there was an interruption.

A portly gentleman stepped aboard. He was dignified, very well dressed. He turned on the deck lights. He adjusted rimless spectacles and stared at them.

"I demand to know who you fellows are," he said sharply.

"You sound," Monk said, "like you owned this boat."

"I do!" said the portly gentleman.

"You—" Monk swallowed. "I don't get it."

"I am Wilbur Smith-Stanhope," said the man. "This happens to be my vessel."

Monk said, "But a Mr. Lively just got through telling us he owned the boat."

"I never heard of any Mr. Lively," snapped Smith-Stanhope. "I do not know the gentleman."

"Can you prove you own this hooker?"

"I certainly can," said Smith-Stanhope. "Just accompany me to the cabin, and I will show you the ship's papers."

Doc Savage put in quietly, "That is not necessary. A man named Smith-Stanhope does own this boat."

They stared at the bronze man.

"When did you find that out, Doc?" Renny asked.

"As a matter of fact," Doc Savage said, "it was before we encountered the four men in the cabin. It was when I was searching the forward part of the vessel."

"Then Miss Wilson and Mr. Lively lied to us!" Renny bellowed. "Holy cow! And Johnny is with them, and he doesn't suspect anything. No telling what Johnny will get into!"

"Johnny," Doc Savage said, "can take care of himself." He added grimly, "Let us hope."

"But why did you let Johnny go with them?" Renny asked.

"There happens to be a very good reason," Doc said.

CHAPTER V. "PROTECTION" FOR JOHNNY

JOHNNY LITTLEJOHN was enjoying the leisurely drive upon which Mr. Lively was taking him. They had passed through the old section of Charleston, the part of town where there were overhanging balconies and pleasant, mellow narrow streets. They had crossed a bridge.

"I have a little place rented down toward Magnolia Gardens," explained Mr. Lively.

Mr. Lively was a careful driver, and he believed in taking his time. He seemed proud, judging from the few words he said, to be with Johnny, because of the latter's repute as a geologist. "I am deeply honored," he said.

Any man likes to feel that his presence honors another man, and Johnny was no exception, although he was a modest man.

Furthermore, Miss Wilson had developed into a lovely conversationalist. She was not using any back-alley words. She spoke a little of England, of her life there, which had been a modest one, the way she told it. She rather gave the idea that she liked America, and was contemplating settling down there. That was nice to hear, too, because a man could not help feeling that the United States could do with a few more girls as beautiful as Miss Wilson.

Altogether, Johnny had a swell trip.

It was not so honeyed when they reached a rather shabby cottage which sat back from the road in a growth of vegetation that was almost a tropical jungle.

"This is my little place," said Mr. Lively. "We are here, Miss Wilson."

"Yes, we are here," said Miss Wilson.

Miss Wilson took a small pistol out of a side pocket—it embarrassed Johnny, because she leaned across him, and her hair was fragrant against his nostrils, causing him to think that he would like to bite one of Miss Wilson's little shell-pink ears, while she was getting the pistol—and she jammed the gun in Johnny's ribs.

"I'll be superamalgamated!" Johnny said.

"You will be saturated with lead, you big-worded string of bones," said Miss Wilson, "if you as much as bat one damn eye at me!"

"What—"

"Button that lip, you bean pole," said Miss Wilson, "and get the hell out of this car!"

Miss Wilson was back in form.

Johnny alighted, and submitted to having his wrists tied with Mr. Lively's necktie. Mr. Lively did the tying, taking his lazy time, and doing a very thorough job of it. The necktie was so tough that Johnny could not break it.

"We are really doing you a favor," said Mr. Lively.

"Yes, I see," Johnny said sarcastically.

"This is a favor, really," insisted Mr. Lively.

"Oh, sure."

"We are protecting you."

"You are what?"

"Protecting you. We really are."

Johnny demanded, "Do you think you can suck me in with any kind of a story you tell me?" He was agitated enough that he was using small words exclusively.

"You do not understand," said Mr. Lively. "Why do you think those men were shadowing you the last two days?"

"They didn't shadow me alone," Johnny pointed out. "They were trailing Doc and the rest of us as well."

"They were only interested in you."

"Me? Why?"

"Because"—a trace of genuine reverence crept into Mr. Lively's voice—"you are the greatest living geologist."

"That doesn't make sense."

"They were getting ready to seize you. When your friend dropped those light bulbs over the balcony

railing in the hotel, it upset their plans. They were nervous and foolish enough to start shooting and give themselves away."

Johnny demanded, "What were these fellows going to do with me after they got me?"

"They intended to use you."

"Doc Savage's profession is righting wrongs and sort of taking care of fellows the law can't seem to touch," said Johnny. "Would that have anything to do with this?"

"Nothing whatever," said Mr. Lively. "They wanted you because you are the greatest living geologist."

Johnny eyed the gun which Miss Wilson was holding. "What is the idea of your grabbing me?"

"We're protecting you," explained Mr. Lively. "You see, it is to our interest that you do not help those fellows."

"If you think I'd help them," said Johnny, "you're crazy."

"They would force you. You don't know them. They are not only desperate—they are about as clever a gang of rogues as this century has seen."

A man came out of the shadows and said, "I think this palaver has gone far enough." He showed them the cylindrical snout of an automatic shotgun which had the barrel sawed off close to the magazine. "You know what this is?" he asked.

There was light enough to show what the gun was, and to reveal that the man was tall, although not nearly as tall as Johnny, and clad in a dark business suit, the knees and elbows of which were somewhat muddy, as if he had been crawling on the swampy earth. His face was shadowed.

"Drop the gun, my dear," he told Miss Wilson.

"Why, you blankety-blank ape!" said Miss Wilson. "Not by a damned sight I won't—"

The man said, "One of these shotgun shells would make quite a change in your face."

He stepped a little closer as he spoke. His voice was like a dog with a bone. They got a look at his face. They would have felt more easy if the face had remained shadowed. An utterly ugly face. Not ugly the way Monk, for instance, was ugly. Vicious. Miss Wilson let go her little pistol.

"This," said Mr. Lively dryly, "is your new employer."

"I don't want the job," Johnny said.

The unpleasant man was not disturbed.

"We did not suppose you would," he said. "But it doesn't bother us." He addressed the adjoining bushes, "Come on out, you fellows—"

The shrubbery began disgorging men. Johnny counted to seven, then lost track. There must have been at least a dozen, maybe more, back in the darkness. The unpleasant man, seeing Johnny's expression, said, "You see, we are not taking any chances. We know what we're doing."

"You don't know what you're bucking when you tackle Doc Savage," Johnny said grimly.

"Oh, but we do. If we had been able to work it the way we first planned, Savage would never have suspected anything. We were going to grab you, then make it look like you decided to go to the bedside of your ill Uncle Ned."

Johnny stared at him. "You know I have an Uncle Ned, and he's ill!" he exclaimed. "How'd you find that out?"

"Investigation," the man said dryly. "We were very careful. We'd better be, don't you think?" Then he grinned at Johnny. "You don't know how much is at stake, do you?"

"I have no idea what's behind this mess," Johnny admitted.

"That's swell," the man said.

There was the sound of a car on the road, a machine traveling fast. The automobile turned into the side road, approached boldly, and stopped. A man got out—the prisoner who had been on the bugeye. Not knowing the fellow had escaped, Johnny gaped at him.

The escaped prisoner from the bugeye looked at Miss Wilson. He said, "Well, I made it. And thanks for turning me loose."

Miss Wilson had made a frantic gesture for him to keep silent, but he hadn't noticed. "You knothheaded nitwit!" said Miss Wilson.

Mr. Lively's eyes were on Miss Wilson. Mr. Lively's face became pale, and his lips moved several times without sound. Finally he said, "You . . . you—why, I never dreamed!"

"Well, you know it now," Miss Wilson said. She went over angrily and kicked the late prisoner's shins, jerked his hat over his eyes, then picked up a stick and broke it over his head. "You dumb bunny!" she said.

"You're working with them!" Mr. Lively told her. It was a statement now, not a question.

"Yes, you fool," said Miss Wilson. "You finally found it out."

With fluttering gestures, Mr. Lively's hands went to his face, which seemed to grow whiter. "I . . . I think I'm going to faint," he said weakly. The next instant, he collapsed onto the ground.

Miss Wilson began laughing tremendously. The others began laughing, too.

The laughter stopped when Mr. Lively suddenly shot into the bushes, vanishing into the darkness. One moment he was there. The next, he was gone like a mouse into a hole.

FORTY-FIVE minutes later, Johnny was loaded into a car. Miss Wilson entered the machine. The vicious-looking leader also climbed in. His mood was not pleasant. All of them, in fact, were worried.

"So you didn't catch Mr. Lively," Johnny said.

"Shut up!" snarled the leader. He said to one of his men, "Gag this long string bean!"

Johnny was gagged, and the car set out. Two more machines carrying the rest of the gang—the cars had been concealed behind the ramshackle house—followed close behind. All the vehicles traveled fast. They had left Mr. Lively's car behind.

Fully an hour later, the cavalcade pulled up near a country crossroads where there was an open filling station.

"I'll telephone for orders," the leader said.

He was not gone long. He came back at a hurried trot. "Get going," he ordered. He scowled at Johnny. "We got our orders," he said. "This isn't going to be very funny for you."

CHAPTER VI. THE NOISE

THE pompous gentleman with the rimless spectacles, Wilbur Smith-Stanhope, had not left much chance for doubt in the minds of Doc Savage and the others about his owning the bugeye schooner named the *Osprey*. Smith-Stanhope had a habit of taking off his glasses—they pinched onto the bridge of his nose—and shaking them as he spoke, and he said his words as emphatically as if he might be driving nails. He had insisted on their going down into the cabin of the bugeye, and looking at the ship's papers; further than that, he had shown them photographs of himself and friends on the boat, a newspaper clipping which was dated, from a Miami paper, and which showed a picture of Smith-Stanhope on board the *Osprey*.

According to the newspaper clipping, Smith-Stanhope was a retired Wall Street stockbroker—one of the few who were smart enough to retire before the big pre-depression stock crash, the article added—who was spending his time cruising around the seven seas on his bugeye yacht, the *Osprey*. As a hobby, he experimented with short-wave radio.

"Are you a geologist?" Doc Savage asked him.

"Certainly not," said Smith-Stanhope, driving nails with his words. "What gave you that idea?"

Doc Savage said, "We regret disturbing your boat, but under the circumstances we could not avoid it. We were decoyed down here by some people who, for some reason or other, are making trouble."

"I do not understand why they picked my boat," said Smith-Stanhope.

Doc Savage made no comment. He indicated to his men that it was time they were leaving. In a close group, they went on deck, moved along the wharf, and prepared to climb into their cars. The machines, two of them, were rented, and of a type having high speed and stamina.

Entering the cars, after first inspecting them for attached explosives, they started the motors.

Smith-Stanhope came running to them.

"Wait!" he called. "Stop, please."

Doc halted his car. "Well?" he said.

Smith-Stanhope took off his glasses, put them on again nervously, and showed other signs of being perturbed. "I . . . er . . . I find this hard to say," he said.

"Hurry it up," Doc Savage said shortly.

"Was—you say one of the people on my boat was a woman?"

"Yes."

Smith-Stanhope gave more symptoms of being disturbed. "Will . . . will you come back to the boat?" he requested. "I want to . . . to show you a picture."

Doc Savage studied the man closely, then got out of the car. The others followed, and they returned to the bugeye, trailing Smith-Stanhope below to the owner's cabin. Curious, they watched Smith-Stanhope begin searching his desk, lockers and a bookcase. He explained that it was a photograph album he was looking for. And the book he finally took down—he had hunted fully five minutes—was an album of the old-fashioned family type. He turned to a picture.

"Is this the girl?" he asked.

Doc examined the photograph.

It was an excellent likeness of the unusual Miss Wilson.

"Yes," Doc said.

Smith-Stanhope went white.

"I was afraid so," he said. "I got to thinking after you gentlemen left. That explains how they happened to select my boat. That picture was taken several years ago."

"Who is she?" Doc asked.

"A niece of mine," said Smith-Stanhope. "Her name is not Wilson. It is Ethel Stanhope. Ten years ago, she gave me that picture."

"Was she born in England?"

"No. In Kentucky."

"What else do you know about her?"

"Nothing whatever," said Smith-Stanhope grimly. "I have not seen the young hell-raiser in five years. She always was a strange one, and I knew she would come to no good end."

DOC SAVAGE and his associates rode toward their hotel. They had left Smith-Stanhope on his boat, sitting in the cabin, head in hands, on account of Ethel Stanhope, alias Miss Wilson, whom he called the female black sheep of his family.

"I feel kinda sorry for the guy," Monk said. "He's such a stuffed shirt that something like this must hurt him."

"I don't know about Smith-Stanhope," Ham said. "I'm not sure I trust him."

"A guy like you," said Monk, "would look for bones in animal crackers. He's all right."

"You're as impressionable as you look, you hairy error!"

From this beginning, Monk and Ham managed to get a quarrel started. It was well warmed up by the time they reached their hotel.

Doc Savage noted at once that there was no sign of a report from Johnny Littlejohn. The bronze man got

on the telephone and checked with the operator, but she informed him that no one had left a message. Nothing from Johnny.

The bronze man went into his room, came back bearing a small metal case.

He beckoned at Long Tom Roberts.

"The rest of you stay here," Doc said. "You might as well get some sleep, or do whatever you want to do. Long Tom and I can do what needs to be done."

Monk consulted his watch. "Say, the evening is still young. I believe I'll look up Hester."

"Once she sees you, you won't get far with Hester," Ham said.

Monk grinned. "You don't know me. Around the ladies, I'm so dangerous that I oughta have a red lantern."

When Doc and Long Tom left the hotel, Monk was on the telephone talking to Hester and telling her how bored he had been because he couldn't be with her.

ONCE in the car on the street, where no one was near, Doc Savage drew an object from his pocket and showed it to Long Tom. "Know what it is?" the bronze man asked.

Examining the object, the electrical expert said, "It's one of those condensers they put on the ignition of cars to cut out interference with the car radio. A rather large one, of course. This one is even greasy and dirty. You must have taken it off a car."

Doc said, "If it deceives you, it would deceive anyone. It is not a condenser. It is a radio transmitter. Not a conventional type of transmitter—this one merely puts out interference on a short wave length."

Long Tom understood instantly.

"Oh, so we can use a direction finder to spot a car with this fastened to its ignition," he said. "I see. We have been using an ordinary type of midget transmitter in a box for that purpose, but anyone who searched his car could find such a gadget." He grinned at the device. "This thing is much better."

Doc said, "Remember when I looked under the hood of Mr. Lively's car, and made a remark about a possible bomb?"

"You attached one of these to his car!"

"Yes."

Long Tom's grin widened. "Let's get the radio direction finder to working, then." And he added grimly, "We know darned well there was something queer about that Miss Wilson, and maybe Mr. Lively, too. My guess is that Johnny may be in trouble."

Doc Savage nodded.

"But first," said the bronze man, "we are going to pay that bugeye schooner another visit."

"You mean to see Smith-Stanhope?"

"The last thing we want to do," Doc said, "is see Smith-Stanhope."

"I don't understand."

Long Tom did not open the subject again, but it was not because he had no curiosity. His curiosity took a leap, because of what he knew of Doc Savage's small, peculiar traits.

The bronze man had a habit, with which Long Tom was quite familiar, of not seeming to hear questions which he did not wish to answer. It was a trait of the bronze man to talk very little, particularly when he was in a group, and the things about which he spoke the least were those about which he was not entirely certain, but which might be important. So, when Doc seemed not to hear a question, it was a fair guess that the query concerned something vital.

Long Tom was still puzzled after Doc Savage completed his visit to Smith-Stanhope's bug-eye, the *Osprey*. The bronze man went alone, and silently. He returned the same way. He simply disappeared from the darkness beside the car, and after about ten minutes, he appeared there again.

Doc showed Long Tom a picture.

It was the photograph of Miss Wilson which had been in Smith-Stanhope's family album.

Doc said, "If ever an effort should be made to take this from me, do what you can to prevent it."

"Why?" asked Long Tom.

Again Doc Savage appeared not to hear a question. Long Tom subsided. The picture was important, evidently. But he could not see why.

"But he said Miss Wilson, his niece, gave him that picture ten years ago," Long Tom said. "It is of no value now."

Doc still said nothing. He got out the portable radio direction finder. It was contained in the metal case which he had brought with him from his hotel room.

TRACING a radio transmitter by use of a direction finder is ordinarily a sketchy proposition. First, there are always two bearings, and without a cross-bearing it is difficult to tell at which end of a straight-line directional bearing the transmitter lies. Doc's new gadget did not remedy this problem. They took a bearing, then drove several miles, and took another, a cross-bearing. This indicated the little condenser-transmitter—it gave out a sound resembling static—was to the south.

But the second difficulty of radio direction locating, Doc's gadget had overcome to a great extent. This is the problem of telling just how close the direction finder is to the transmitter. Doc's device gave out a much weaker signal on a slightly different wave length, this latter signal being receivable less than half a mile away. Therefore, when they picked up the second signal, they knew they were very close to Mr. Lively's car.

They managed to park their car among hushes, concealed. They went on afoot. They found Mr. Lively's ramshackle cabin, and his car.

They did this very silently, which was fortunate, because Mr. Lively shortly walked out of the swampy jungle.

Mr. Lively did not see them.

He was a mess. Muck covered him from head to foot, and he had lost most of his shirt, one leg out of his trousers, and had made a crude bandage for a scratch on his forehead with his handkerchief. He was also a scared mess. He crept like a dog skulking alleys, and Doc Savage's highly developed sense of hearing barely located him.

Mr. Lively sprang into his car. He left very fast.

Long Tom was astounded. "I wonder if he saw us. He sure acted scared."

Doc did not think Mr. Lively had been aware of their presence. The fact that they could trail Mr. Lively by use of the radio direction finder gave them plenty of time. Doc used a flashlight to examine the vicinity.

Considering that he had not seen what happened when Mr. Lively and Miss Wilson brought Johnny to the place, the bronze man's sign-reading was uncannily accurate.

"Mr. Lively and Miss Wilson brought Johnny here and made him a prisoner," Doc said. "Here are the marks where they made Johnny lie down to tie him, and traces of the rope around Johnny's ankles show here in the soft earth. Following that, a number of men, at least a dozen, appeared. Evidently they were enemies, because Mr. Lively fled. He did it with a trick. He fell down here, possibly faking a fainting spell, which gave him a chance to dive under these thorn bushes, and escape. He had to get down very low to get under the thorns, and a fainting spell was a logical ruse. Then the men took Johnny and Miss Wilson away in three cars. One of the cars had arrived after the excitement, the tire prints show, and the driver was the prisoner who got away from us, thanks to Miss Wilson, on the bug-eye. He was wearing a shoe with a torn sole, and the prints here are of such a shoe."

Long Tom swallowed. Personally, he had not been able to make head or tail of the footprints.

"Was Miss Wilson a prisoner, too?" he asked.

"There is no sign of her putting up a struggle," Doc said. He moved toward their concealed car. "We might as well follow Mr. Lively," he added.

MUCH of the country around Charleston is lowland. Almost tidal lowland, with extensive islands that are a part of the marsh country except for the creeks, some of them brackish with salt sea water shoved in by the tides. Spots so isolated that until recent years the natives seldom got as far as even nearby Charleston, and even today speak a local dialect composed of English and Gullah, which is hardly understandable to a Yankee.

The creek was wide. At this point, it was straight as a string for at least half a mile. There was tall shrubbery on the banks.

Mr. Lively had parked his car in the bushes.

The plane was moored to the steep mud bank. It was a lean, powerful ship, not an American plane.

The pilot was natty and uniformed. His manners were alert. The naval salute he gave Mr. Lively was snappy.

Doc Savage and Long Tom lay in the nearby weeds, and Long Tom touched the bronze man's arm. He whispered, "An English naval plane."

"Yes," Doc said

"And an English naval pilot," Long Tom added.

"Yes."

"Strange they'd be hiding out here," Long Tom said. "In fact, this whole business is strange."

Doc Savage made no comment. Mr. Lively and the naval pilot were conferring. Their voices were not loud enough to carry. Then both turned and walked into the shrubbery. The moon was up, and gave enough light to show what they were doing. They pulled loose vines away from a pile of five-gallon gasoline tins. They began refueling the plane.

Working together, Mr. Lively and the naval pilot would each pick up a five-gallon can, carry these to the plane, then assist each other in pouring the fuel into the tank.

"Long Tom," Doc said.

"Yes?"

"Go back to our car, and return to Charleston," Doc directed. "Round up our men, and stand by the radio. I will try to get orders to you later."

"What are you going to do?"

"Stow away on that plane."

Long Tom shivered. "Do you mind if I stick around until I see whether you make a go of it or not?"

"That might be best," Doc said.

WATCHING from the bank, Long Tom never was sure exactly when Doc Savage got aboard the plane. Naturally it had to be during one of the trips which Mr. Lively and the naval pilot made for gasoline tins. But Long Tom was watching the plane with intent nervousness, and still he did not see the bronze man get aboard.

Later, after the refueling was done, the plane took the air with Mr. Lively and the pilot inside. The ship's motor made a great roaring and the craft strung a thread of foam down the creek, a thread that spread widely in the moonlight, then slowly disappeared. It was gone by the time the motor moan was only an illusion in the night.

So unsure was Long Tom that he shouted a question.

"Doc!" he called. "Didn't you make it aboard?"

He got no answer.

CHAPTER VII. THE TERROR

DOC SAVAGE extricated himself from the tail compartment of the plane—a niche that contained such equipment as a folding boat and emergency rations—where he had been hiding. It was not a good spot of concealment, but it was the best that offered, and Mr. Lively and the pilot had not looked into it,

having no reason to suspect a stowaway.

Mr. Lively and the pilot sat side by side. Doc got close behind them without trouble.

He said, "I hope there will be no difficulty."

They reacted in the fashion of men startled out of their wits, which was natural. The pilot grabbed for a gun. Doc twisted it out of his hand.

"No, lieutenant!" Mr. Lively ordered the pilot hastily.

The tight-lipped, confused pilot muttered, "Yes, your lordship."

Doc Savage said, "So you are a lord now."

Mr. Lively did not answer for a moment. His thoughts seemed to be an upheaval in his mind, and he was trying to straighten them into a semblance of order, to pick a path of level-headed reason.

"I am many things," Mr. Lively said finally. "Some of which will probably surprise you."

Sincerity had come into the man's voice. He had settled back lazily in his seat, and was relaxed, languid, the way he had been on the *Osprey*. Apparently he knew definitely what he had to do.

"Mr. Savage," he added, "can you tell when a man is being entirely truthful?"

"You mean that you are going to be truthful?"

"Exactly."

"Go ahead."

"You won't believe me?"

Doc Savage did not reply for a while. "On the contrary," he said at last.

Small beads of perspiration had come onto Mr. Lively's forehead. "I am glad," he said. "Very glad. You see, I have bungled one of the most important things in my life."

"You mean that you bungled tonight?"

"Exactly." Mr. Lively nodded soberly. "I was never trusted with a more vital, a more important mission, and I succeeded in messing it up thoroughly. You see, I should have told you the truth, then asked your help."

"Why didn't you?"

"Secrecy." Mr. Lively's voice was tight and earnest. "I was warned above all else to preserve secrecy, no matter what the cost. There was to be no publicity whatever because—well—" He went silent, the words apparently tied up in his throat.

"No publicity? Why?" Doc asked.

The man stared up at Doc. "Can you imagine what it would be like if . . . if terror should seize forty million people? Or what might be worse, if these forty millions, when they should be terrified, should get the idea that their government was crazy, entirely mad—at a time when faith in their government is more important than it has ever been in history?"

Doc Savage studied the man's face, seeking signs upon which to base a decision of truth or falsehood. In the end, when the bronze man knew that Mr. Lively was speaking truth, and moreover realized just how important the matter must be, an unusual thing happened. The bronze man made a small trilling sound, a tiny unconscious thing which he did in moments of mental excitement, without being aware always that he was making the sound. The trilling meant, as it always did, that the bronze man was deeply impressed.

"You make it sound serious," he said.

"I do not know which would be worse," Mr. Lively said. "The terror, or the contempt of those people for a government they would think was insane."

"You had better go into detail," Doc said.

"I guess so." Mr. Lively moistened his lips. "But first, I would like to have your promise that this whole matter will get no publicity. I know, of course, that the shooting in the hotel this afternoon was in the newspapers. But I mean publicity beyond that."

"In what way?"

"You must never tell the newspapers, or even your government, about this thing."

Doc Savage shook his head. "I will make no such promise. I will promise this: According to what in my judgment is best, that will I do."

Mr. Lively looked away. The sea was far below now, a bluish vastness in the moonlight, and there were small, vague clouds around them like cotton batting that had been picked apart by invisible fingers. Mr. Lively took a deep breath and fixed his eyes on Doc.

"That is good enough for me," he said. "We will go back into the cabin and talk." After they had moved away from the control compartment, Mr. Lively nodded in the pilot's direction and said, "Even he does not know what I am going to tell you. He is merely following orders, as good navy men do."

"I see," Doc said.

"It is difficult to start telling about this thing," Mr. Lively muttered. "It is so fantastic." He rubbed the side of his face slowly with a hand. "Would you believe that the homes, the careers, the family ties, the very lives of forty million people could be menaced by one single thing?"

"It seems a bit far-fetched," Doc admitted.

"Yes, it does. But my government is perfectly sure the menace is genuine. That sounds as if my government might be crazy, doesn't it?"

"There are many people who would think so."

Mr. Lively nodded. "I believe you see my point about the necessity of avoiding publicity. This is no time to have my government looking foolish to its people. If we ever needed confidence, we need it now."

"That is true."

"Well, I might as well start the story," Mr. Lively said. "I will begin by asking you if you remember Ingento Island, in the Pacific Ocean?"

"Which Ingento Island?"

"Ingento Island—the one south of the Japanese-mandated group."

"The island that last summer—" The bronze man was silent for a moment. He made, very briefly, his strange trilling sound. He was intensely disturbed. "What are you getting at?"

"What do you remember about Ingento?" Mr. Lively asked grimly.

"Last summer, the island disappeared."

"Ingento Island vanished. That is what I mean, exactly."

Doc Savage studied the other. He could see that Mr. Lively's earnestness was complete. He said, "The disappearance of Ingento, which was a tiny island, got practically no attention in the newspapers, due to the political uproar the world was in at the time. But scientists attributed the disappearance to a natural disturbance of the earth's crust."

"There was nothing natural about it," said Mr. Lively.

"What makes you so certain?"

"Suppose I was to tell you," Mr. Lively said, "that my government was notified three weeks in advance that Ingento Island would vanish at a certain hour on a specified day."

"It would seem fantastic."

Mr. Lively showed his teeth fiercely.

"It was fantastic, quite," he assured the bronze man. "The crews of two English destroyers who saw the island vanish thought it was quite fantastic. You see, my government thought the thing was a wild scheme to decoy one of our country's merchant vessels to the vicinity so that an enemy raider could sink it. So we sent two well-armed destroyers instead. But it turned out that the island actually disappeared, and on schedule."

Doc's flake-gold eyes were fixed. "You seem completely serious about this."

"I am. I can assure you quite truthfully that the fate of many people is at stake."

"Just a moment," Doc Savage said. "Does this plane have a radio?"

"A very good one," Mr. Lively replied.

"That is fortunate," Doc Savage said. "I will need it to get in touch with my associates and start them out trailing us."

CHAPTER VIII. HESTER

THREE of Doc Savage's associates—Ham, Renny and Long Tom—had not spent a particularly pleasant balance of the night. Long Tom had returned and told them of the fact that Johnny seemed to be a prisoner, and that Doc had stowed away in a naval plane carrying Mr. Lively and an English naval pilot.

They sat in their hotel suite and kept the radio turned on. In order to make sure of not missing any call that Doc might send over the air, Long Tom telephoned the coastguard stations nearby and asked their operators to monitor the wave bands Doc was most likely to use. But Doc Savage had not radioed.

Another irritation was the fact that they had not been able to locate Monk. The homely chemist, with his hog, had gone out earlier in the evening to meet Hester. Having met Hester, Monk seemed to be doing the town. They had telephoned several night spots, but it seemed the homely chemist had already made his visit.

Bearing down on their spirits particularly was concern over Johnny. What actually had happened to the thin, long-worded geologist? Where was he now? Was he in danger? Alive? It was not a pleasant subject, and thinking about it did no good, as well they knew, but they could not keep it out of their minds.

Discussing the situation did no good, either. They had talked over Mr. Lively, Miss Wilson and Smith-Stanhope, without arriving at anything satisfactory. Long Tom had told them about the picture which Doc Savage had lifted from Smith-Stanhope's family album, the photograph of Miss Wilson.

"I don't see why Doc considered that picture important," Long Tom said. "But he did. And if you ask me, that looks as if it might involve Smith-Stanhope, in some way."

The telephone rang. Renny went to it, answered, spoke for a moment, said, "Sure, come on up," and put the receiver down.

"Speaking of the devil," Renny remarked.

"Smith-Stanhope?"

"Downstairs." Renny nodded. "He is coming right up."

"Why?"

"I don't know. He seemed to have ants on his shirt tail."

The concern which Renny had detected in Smith-Stanhope's voice was apparent on his face. He was not pompous. He was grimly determined, worried. He held his hat in his hands, entering.

"Good evening," he said. "Or rather, good morning. I hope you won't consider this an unwarranted intrusion." He took three quick steps into the room, and turned slowly until he had faced each of them in turn. "You see," he said, "I want to work with you."

Renny's long jaw fell. "Which—you which?"

"It dawned on me that I owe something to my poor sister," said Smith-Stanhope. "My sister—Miss Wilson's mother, you know. I do not want her to suffer disgrace. Therefore I want to find Miss Wilson and make her behave herself properly. That is the best way of avoiding disgrace."

Long Tom and Ham were favorably impressed. They seemed to think Smith-Stanhope's motives were sound. To Renny, who had never had any family ties worth mentioning, it appeared a bit thin.

Renny's idea was to tell Smith-Stanhope to go roll his hoop. Ham and Long Tom argued with him, gradually bringing him around to a point where Renny at least admitted that they might as well leave it up to Doc Savage, should the bronze man ever communicate with them.

Deeply grateful even for that concession, Smith-Stanhope showed his good faith by telling them a great deal about Miss Wilson, the things she liked—tennis, swimming, boating—and the things which she excelled at, one of these being marksmanship. She was an excellent pistol shot.

"Monk hasn't come back yet," Ham muttered. "Maybe Hester is an expert pistol shot, too."

IT was a scandalously late hour when Monk put in an appearance. The pig, Habeas Corpus, was wearing a pink ribbon. The homely chemist himself was grinning from ear to ear.

"Oh, boy!" he said.

"Lipstick and flypaper," said Ham sourly, "are a lot alike. They both catch anything that fools around with 'em."

Monk, still wearing his grin, got out a handkerchief and wiped his cheek. He looked at the handkerchief. "Hm-m-m," he said cheerfully.

Ham jerked the handkerchief out of Monk's hand and looked at it.

"You four-flusher!" Ham said. "This isn't lipstick. It's red ink out of that trick two-color fountain pen you carry"

"That's a lie!" Monk yelled. "That ink looks just like lipstick—I mean, you can't tell—"

Everyone burst into laughter. Even Smith-Stanhope permitted himself a reserved smile.

Monk sank sheepishly into a chair. "On you guys, foey!" he said.

"What happened when you met Hester?" Ham asked.

"Nothing," Monk said.

"Come on, now. What happened?"

"Nothin'. I don't wanna talk about it."

"You're so low you could read dice from the bottom," Ham told Monk. "What went wrong?"

Monk was stubbornly silent.

"How did Hester look? Was she one of those cute little things that ring bells?" Ham demanded.

"You'll never know the half of it, I hope," Monk said gloomily.

"Did you make the big conquest you were going to?" Ham persisted.

For some reason or other, this last remark agitated Monk exceedingly. He jumped up, yelled, "Listen, you overdressed shyster lawyer, you lay off me, see! Lay off, or I'll smack you so flat you could wear a silk hat and still walk under a duck."

Monk was in a bad humor, obviously. Ham was so pleased at what had gone wrong—whatever it was—that he had no intention of relenting.

Long Tom's excited bark—the electrical expert was riding the radio receiver—was undoubtedly all that prevented a major quarrel.

"Doc!" Long Tom shouted. "He's on the radio."

THE bronze man spoke in Mayan, using the radiotelephone. His words were concise.

Mr. Lively, said Doc Savage, had told him that Johnny Littlejohn had undoubtedly been taken to a tiny coral atoll on the Bahama Bank not far from Bimini.

Doc Savage and Mr. Lively were bound for an atoll about fifteen miles away, from which point they intended to attempt a rescue.

Doc said, "There is a great deal more to this thing than we probably imagined in our wildest dreams."

The bronze man's next suggestion surprised them. They were to go at once to the bugeye *Osprey* and find Smith-Stanhope. They were to prevail upon him to take them on the boat to the island, where Doc would meet them. "If Smith-Stanhope does not want to take you," Doc said, "I suggest—"

"Wait a minute, Doc," Long Tom put in. "Smith-Stanhope is here now. He just came. He wants us to help him find Miss Wilson, so he can get her back on the straight and narrow path."

They were still speaking in Mayan, so Smith-Stanhope had no idea that he was being discussed.

"Ask him," Doc said, "if he will bring you over on his bugeye."

Long Tom put the question to Smith-Stanhope. The man nodded.

"And ask him," Doc added, "if he minds getting rid of his regular crew. Only you fellows and Smith-Stanhope come over on the boat."

When Long Tom asked Smith-Stanhope about that, the man licked his lips. Then he said, "Yes, of course. My crew are all away on vacation, or leave, as seafaring men call it, at the present time. The matter will be simple."

"Yes, Doc, he says he will do it," Long Tom told the bronze man.

"Good. Get going at once. Do not tell Smith-Stanhope the location of the island. Do not tell anyone. And do not sail a direct course."

"I get you," said Long Tom. "Make it look like we're going somewhere else."

"Right."

"In this boat, it will take a couple of days to get down there," Long Tom said. "Sailboats are slow. Do you think Johnny will be safe?"

"Johnny," said Doc Savage, "will be safer as a prisoner than you fellows will be during your trip."

"Why?"

"Because Johnny happens to be the expert geologist he is," Doc said.

"Can you give me some idea what this is all about?"

"It would be better if we did not discuss it over the air, even in Mayan," explained the bronze man. "We might be overheard by someone who understands the tongue, and, slender as that possibility is, we do not dare take that chance."

That ended the radio communication.

AN edged tension had been built up by the bronze man's tone and words. They knew Doc quite well, so that they were sure the mystery in which they were involved was a big and vital thing.

The tension got a comedy break as they were leaving the hotel.

She was blonde. She came running to Monk, threw her arms around the chemist's neck with a glad giggle. "Oh, honey-doodle!" she cried.

Ham's eyes popped.

Not only was this a blonde; she was a cute blonde. Small and trim, like something to go on a watch charm. A bit rounded, it was true, but in the right places.

Like a bug's ear, Ham thought. And Monk, the big dope, doesn't seem to like it.

Monk, in fact, was turning rainbow colors. He was also struggling to get the blonde's arms loose. Not succeeding in that, he began steering her away.

Casting a tortured glance over his shoulder, Monk said, "Wait for me outside, you fellows."

Monk managed to steer the blonde into one of the parlors opening off the hotel lobby.

The others went outside and got in their parked cars. All except Ham were amazed. Ham was stupefied. A girl as pretty as that one, and Monk trying to escape! It was strange. It was downright impossible, in fact.

When Monk joined them, he was running. This was about five minutes later. Monk looked as if the wolves were after him.

He jumped into the car. "Get going!" he gulped.

Ham, who was at the wheel, made no move to start the car. "What's the hurry, honey-doodle?" he screamed.

"Get moving!" Monk screamed.

The homely chemist sounded like potential murder, so Ham hastily meshed the gears. The car moved down the street. Traces of dawn were streaking the sky.

"Monk, who was that?" Ham asked.

"Hester," Monk mumbled.

"Oh," said Ham. "Then that *was* lipstick on your face."

"No, it wasn't," Monk said.

"But I don't understand," Ham told him. "How you did it, I don't know, but you obviously made progress with the young lady."

"The progress you saw was what I made the first half-hour," Monk said. "The rest of the time, I was trying to escape."

"What did you do with Hester?"

"I locked her in that parlor," Monk confessed, "and ran."

"Why honey-doodle, you old meanie!"

"How would you like a wrung neck?" Monk yelled.

THEY boarded the bugeye *Osprey*. No one said anything to Monk, because it was plain that he was in a humor where conversation with him was not safe.

A quick examination disclosed that ample stores were aboard the bugeye. And the fuel tanks were full on the starboard side. It did not take long to rout out a marine attendant and get the other fuel tank brimming. They freshened the water supply. Renny, the engineer, took over management of the engines. There were two of them, both big Diesels, so that the boat was overpowered for a craft of her type.

After they cast off from the dark dock, and headed down the channel, it developed that the *Osprey* was surprisingly fast, even without her sails. The tide was going out, and it bore them along as smoothly as if they were on a magic carpet of velvet.

Long Tom and Ham took the covers off the sails. Monk sulked for a while, then joined in the work. But he did not say anything.

"Honey-doodle," Ham could not resist saying.

There was a sharp sound in the darkness. Ham bellowed out angrily.

"He hit me!" Ham howled.

"And next time I'll walk on you, too," Monk advised fiercely.

"Now, now, holy cow!" said Renny placatingly. "This is nothing to get in such a stew about."

"A lot you know about it," Monk said grimly. "That girl has decided to marry me."

"How come she decided that?"

"Well," Monk confessed, "I proposed."

"Why'd you do that, you fool?"

"I always propose to 'em at least once the first half-hour," Monk admitted. "It's part of my technique. Only I never got took up before."

Ham thought it was so funny that he had to go aft to keep from being heard laughing. He sat there on the railing and shook with mirth.

They reached the sea. It was like climbing on the back of a green monster, for there was quite a swell running, and a whistling wind. The wind came down from the north and met the Gulf Stream which was traveling to the north, and the result was a seaway of proportions.

Mr. Smith-Stanhope took it on himself to explain about the Gulf Stream.

"You see," he said, "the tropical climate of the Gulf of Mexico warms this water, and there is a great

current which carries it north. Passing the Florida coast, the Gulf Stream travels in a channel no more than fifty miles wide, but a mile deep. It travels at amazing speed, almost as fast as a man can run in spots. That great stream of warm water flows north and across the Atlantic and warms the European coast and the islands of Ireland and England. Without the current, it is believed that the climate of those countries would be as severe as that of Nova Scotia, or even southern Greenland."

Long Tom got the idea the man was talking to keep from asking questions. Smith-Stanhope was puzzled. Long Tom had taken over the steering and navigating.

"You might as well get some sleep," Long Tom suggested.

"I will not be needed, you think?"

"Not likely," Long Tom said. "You see, Doc Savage has trailed Mr. Lively to the north, to a place near Pamlico Sound, and we're going up there to meet him. We will sail north, and follow the Gulf Stream."

There was not a particle of truth in this, but Long Tom thought the prevarication was justified under the circumstances.

"Very well," Smith-Stanhope said. "I will retire for the balance of the night. Or morning, I should say."

He went below decks.

The sun was coming up. The boat climbed over big swells, and spray flew up from the bows with a jeweled display in the new sunlight, fell along the decks with the sounds of small animals running. Long Tom prepared to give the order to set the sails and change course. It was his plan to follow the edge of the Gulf Stream southward, keeping close inshore so that the current would not be so strong against them.

But Smith-Stanhope came rushing out on deck.

"My stateroom!" he exploded. "She's there!"

"Who is in your stateroom?" Long Tom demanded.

"That . . . that blonde person."

"You mean Hester?"

"Yes," Smith-Stanhope gasped. "She is down there in my cabin. A stowaway!"

Long Tom turned to Ham. "Ham," he said, "you better go tell honey-doodle that his fiancée is aboard."

"Not me," Ham said flatly. "Send him a telegram."

CHAPTER IX. THE PILOT

DOC SAVAGE had selected wood which burned to a white ash, and he had collected the ashes carefully. Now he spread the cover of the plane's life raft out on the island sand. It was a dark khaki color. Doc rubbed ashes on the cloth of the life-raft cover, after first dampening it, until he had changed the color to a dingy gray approximately the hue of the weathered coral sand. He spread this cover over the dark metal of the engine exhaust stacks and the shining aluminum of the propeller.

The bronze man went back to the fire. He extinguished it. He had burned the fire carefully, so that its flame would not be visible for more than a few yards.

Returning to the plane again, Doc made sure beach sand had been sprinkled on top of the plane wing thickly enough to make it blend, even from a height of a few hundred feet, with the surrounding beach.

The plane had been backed up against the jungle. They had gotten tail assembly, fuselage and one wing under cover of the shrubbery. A few branches cut and placed over it had completed the concealment. Other branches thrust into the sand in front of the craft concealed it very thoroughly from discovery by any passing boat.

"I believe that will do the job," the bronze man said.

"It should," agreed Mr. Lively lazily.

Mr. Lively had gone back to his lethargic manner. As he frankly expressed it, his dislike for activity was intense, and that was no affectation.

The naval pilot stood nearby. He had asked no questions. He had followed all orders with crisp alacrity. He was a lean, dark young fellow with a cockney accent. His reticence, the way he kept to himself, was almost unnatural.

Morning sun slanted glare and increasing heat across the island, flashed from the waves that crawled in and burst with grunts on the sloping beach. Gulls circled lazily. Two pelicans sat offshore a short distance, in the lagoon, and watched proceedings. During the early morning hours, large fish had done considerable jumping in the lagoon, but they were quiet now.

The island was low. There were a few palm trees on the low ridge, tough undergrowth of *lignum vitae* and other intensely hard wood, and elsewhere, particularly on the easterly and lowest side of the island, there was mangrove thicket.

"I'm hungry," the pilot said unexpectedly.

Doc Savage nodded. "We cannot get far on empty stomachs. What do you think of broiled crawfish for breakfast?"

"Good," the pilot said.

"Sounds good to me," said the lazy Mr. Lively, "if you fellows catch them."

So Doc and the pilot went crawfishing on the reef. The crawfish here—like lobsters of the North, except that they had no large pincer-claws—grew to surprising size, sometimes as heavy as fifteen pounds.

Catching the crawfish was simple. You waded out on a reef, watching holes in the coral for the antennae, or whiskers, of the crawfish, which were yellowish in color. Discovering a set of whiskers, you leaned over and grasped one gently, holding it, but not pulling. The crawfish thereupon made buzzing noises, and it was a simple matter to reach under and grasp the shelled body.

Broiled, they were delicious, tasting almost exactly like lobster.

Mr. Lively showed no scruples about eating twice his share, and smacking his lips.

THE pilot stretched out on the sand, explaining that he had been without sleep for almost two days.

Mr. Lively gestured imperceptibly at Doc Savage. They arose, moved some distance through the undergrowth, and stopped beneath some palms. Mr. Lively picked up one of the fallen coconuts and shook it. "We can pretend to be gathering nuts," he said. "They tell me if a fallen nut gurgles, it is no good. You would think it would be just the other way around."

"What did you want to tell me?" Doc asked.

"Anything you would care to know?"

Doc considered.

"Where does Miss Wilson come into this case?" he asked.

"Miss Wilson," said Mr. Lively, "is a two-faced double-crosser. She was supposed to be a secret agent, assigned to work for me. Miss Wilson has been a faithful secret agent for my government for a number of years—that is, we supposed she was faithful."

"But now you think Miss Wilson is one of them?"

"A green elephant could hardly be more obvious, could it?"

Doc said, "Suppose you give me the logical procession of events up to this point."

"Well, before Ingento Island vanished—"

"You told me about Ingento Island, and its vanishing," Doc said. "Go on from there."

"The crews of the two destroyers saw Ingento Island disappear, and naturally they reported, and just as naturally, the government was flabbergasted. There was a great deal of discussion. It looked like this master mind, this evil genius, could do what he said he could. He set his price—"

"What was his price?"

"Enough millions of dollars that it was ridiculous—until one got to thinking about what might happen if the sum wasn't paid."

"So it was decided to pay?"

"Not exactly," said Mr. Lively, after hesitating. "I was sent here to carry on negotiations. Actually, I was also to investigate. That was why Miss Wilson was assigned to work with me. She was to help investigate."

"And you think they bought Miss Wilson off?"

"Either that, or she went to them and sold out."

"Just how far did your investigation get?" Doc asked.

"Not far," said Mr. Lively. "First, I learned that they needed a geologist of William Harper Littlejohn's ability, and that they intended to kidnap Johnny and make him work for them. I think they even"—Mr. Lively smiled grimly—"intended to kidnap me at first, but they discovered that my ability as a geologist was not equal to Johnny's."

Doc said, "Am I right in supposing you were assigned to this job because of your attainments in geology?"

"Correct."

"And it was your plan at first to take Johnny and hold him in a safe place?"

"Exactly. That would have prevented the successful completion of their scheme." He shrugged. "But they saw through that. They got Johnny."

"You also learned the location of the island where they have their headquarters?" Doc asked.

"I . . . I do not guarantee that," said Mr. Lively. "I believe the island is south of here not many miles. If I am right, that is where they took Johnny Littlejohn. If I am wrong"—the lazy man shrugged, and his beard jerked with his resigned smile—"we are not much worse than we were before. We had nothing to go on, to begin with."

Doc Savage was silent for a while. The tiny winds that stirred his flake-gold eyes seemed to be almost still, as if he was calmly assembling facts, seeking points that were unclear.

He said, "How did you and Miss Wilson happen to go to the bugeye schooner, the *Osprey*?"

"I lied to you about that, of course," Mr. Lively said.

"I know."

"We actually went down there to meet the master mind and discuss details."

"You mean that you were going to meet the man behind the plot on the bugeye?"

"Yes," said Mr. Lively. "He owns the boat."

"The fellow we're trying to catch owns the *Osprey*?"

"Right."

"What is his name?"

"The devil's name," said Mr. Lively, "is Smith-Stanhope."

DOC SAVAGE'S excellent control of his emotions prevailed to such an extent that he gave no indication of surprise. He began tearing the shuck off a coconut. The husk made a ripping noise as it came loose.

Doc said, "Do you think this incredible scheme is possible?"

"I know it is," Mr. Lively said flatly.

"Why so sure?"

"There was Ingento Island. Don't forget that."

"That could be accounted for by a natural explanation," Doc said. "A clever geologist, for instance, could have told in advance what was to occur, if conditions happened to be just right for such a prediction. I will admit that circumstances would have to be very fortunate, and the geologist highly skilled. But such an explanation is possible."

"Impossible."

"Perhaps. I think not."

Mr. Lively said, "Listen, I am going to tell you what I have managed to learn about exactly how Ingento Island vanished. Then you will not doubt the possibility. It was like this: Ingento Island was—"

He fell silent. Sound of footsteps in the nearby jungle had stopped his voice. He waited. The pilot appeared, and stared at them.

"Oh," the pilot said. "Picking up coconuts, eh?"

"Couldn't you sleep?" asked Mr. Lively.

"No. I get that way when I'm on edge." The pilot shrugged. "You wouldn't by any chance have some sleeping pills? I don't like to take them, but this once might not hurt."

"I have no pills," said Mr. Lively.

"You will have, if you don't watch out." The pilot took a revolver from his pocket. "They'll be made of lead. Understand?"

"What . . . what—" gasped Mr. Lively.

"Get your hands up!"

Mr. Lively's arms flew up.

"You, too," the flier told Doc.

The bronze man obeyed, his metallic features expressionless.

"I'm sorry, gentlemen," said the pilot dryly. "I thought I would hold off for a while, until you got nearer the island. But I am not man enough to keep up the strain. It seemed that you did not trust me."

"It's a good thing, too!" snarled Mr. Lively.

"Oh, I'm a very capable fellow," said the pilot. "You could do worse."

"You rat!"

"That is a strange name for ambition." The pilot moved his gun warningly. "You fellows stand still. I am going to search you gentlemen."

He conducted the search without incident, keeping his gun on cock and ready. They saw the small, tense shaking in his hands, and they did not make any moves that might excite him.

Mr. Lively said, "Answer me one question."

"Yes?" said the pilot.

"Are you working with Miss Wilson?"

"Yes, of course." The pilot showed his teeth briefly, and added, "With a gentleman named Smith-Stanhope, too. Did you ever hear of him?"

Mr. Lively turned pale and swallowed. He looked completely horrified. His fingers twitched.

"I . . . I think I'm going to faint," he said.

And he piled up on the earth close to a bush.

The pilot kept his gun cocked and aimed at Mr. Lively while he went over and gave Mr. Lively's temple a kick with his toe, a kick hard enough to induce unconsciousness.

"Now let's see him work that fainting gag again," the flier said.

Doc Savage said nothing. He was making no effort to escape, although there had been a momentary opportunity while the pilot was engaged in kicking Mr. Lively.

The flier said, "Mr. Savage, how do you feel about death?"

Doc said nothing.

"About the same as the rest of us, I imagine," the pilot remarked. "We would prefer to postpone it. He lifted the gun and looked across the sights deliberately. It seemed to be aimed at a spot between the bronze man's eyes. "I want to know where your men are, your five associates. Where are they?"

"One of them was kidnapped," Doc reminded him.

"The other four, then. Where are they?"

"You are wasting your time," Doc said.

"You will not tell me?"

The bronze man said nothing.

"You prefer to be shot, then?" the flier asked. "I assure you that my humor isn't good."

Doc's silence held.

The flier shrugged cold-bloodedly. "I don't feel like wasting time." His gun sights moved back to the spot between Doc's eyes. "I can give you about ten seconds," he said. "You can use the time to think, or to pray."

CHAPTER X. TROUBLE SAILS WITH A WOMAN

SAID Colonel Renny Renwick in an exasperated tone, "Holy Cow! If you can't think of anything else, you might try praying."

"I tried that," Monk said, "and look what happened. Hester!"

"You must have asked for your just desserts," Ham suggested.

Monk watched the waves roll through the tropical sunlight toward the bugeye schooner *Osprey*, and his mood was not improved. The waves were short and fierce, they carried foam on their crests like teeth, and they lunged forward and seized the bugeye and shook it from stem to stern, although it was a sizable craft. The waves were like Monk's mood.

"I gotta hide," Monk said desperately. "You guys gotta tell Hester I fell overboard, and the sharks ate me."

Ham said, "It would be better if it was true. Why don't you jump in? And take that hog with you."

Monk eyed Habeas. The pig grunted.

"The heck of it is," Monk said, "I think Habeas is what fascinated her. Darn the luck!"

Renny rubbed his jaw. "Monk, maybe I've got an idea."

"Gosh, what is it?"

"We're not using the mainsail in this wind. Why don't you climb into the furls and stay there? She will never think of looking for you there. And that sail is big and baggy, so that there is plenty of room for you."

Monk thought this was a first-class suggestion. He followed it. After making sure Hester was not in sight, he climbed into the furled sail with his pig, and made himself comfortable, to a certain extent. "As snug as a bug in a rug," he advised them.

"More like a toad in somebody's pocket," Ham said.

"I don't like you," Monk said.

The homely chemist began to think as he lay in the sail. He was disgusted with himself, as well as troubled. His natural impulse under such conditions was to try to figure out a way to throw the monkey on Ham's back, although Hester could hardly be called a monkey.

After about twenty minutes of cogitation, Monk rolled out of the sail. He wiped the grin off his face.

"Long Tom," he said, "you remember about a month ago when I went to that experimental laboratory and talked them out of the special metal you needed for some electrical experiments? You said then that if I ever needed a favor, just call on you. Well, I'm calling on you."

"Now, wait a minute!" Long Tom said. "If you're trying to use me as a red herring to drag across your trail for Hester's benefit—"

"No, no, that ain't it," Monk said. "Listen."

Monk spoke earnestly and to the point for some time.

"Oh, that's different," Long Tom admitted.

The electrical wizard then turned the wheel over to Monk, and went below decks.

Monk had not been steering the boat long when Hester found him.

"Oh, honey-doodle!" Hester cried joyfully.

Monk bore up bravely. He even managed to smile slightly. "Have you got any money, Hester?" he asked.

"Why, no, lambie," Hester said. "You have plenty for both of us. Er—why do you ask?"

"Uh—nothing," Monk said. "But it's too bad you ain't rich."

This remark was a groundwork for what followed a bit later. Long Tom came up from below decks.

"Hello, radio operator," Hester said to Long Tom, which indicated that Long Tom had taken pains to lead the young lady to think that he was a person of no financial consequences.

Long Tom handed Monk a paper. "Radio message," he said. "Hope it's no bad news."

"Hm-m-m," Monk said. He unfolded the paper and read. "Oh, this is awful!" he gasped.

Hester read the message, which Monk just happened to hold in such a way that she could do it easily.

"Gee!" she said in horror. "You've lost all your money! Worse than that, you owe fifty thousand dollars."

Monk nodded sadly. "Yes. I will have to starve myself for no telling how many years to pay it back."

The homely chemist went through the motions expected of a man who had just lost all his worldly goods. He did get a chance to wink furtively at Long Tom, to indicate that Long Tom had faked a good message.

"Where's Ham?" Monk demanded feverishly. "If he will loan me several hundred thousand, I might be all right. Ham ought to loan it to me; he's got plenty."

"Ham is in the main cabin, I think," said Long Tom.

"I'll have to hit him up," Monk muttered. "Oh, my, this is awful. My poor wife and thirteen children will—" He caught himself as if in guilt, looked at Hester, then got up and fled.

"His wife and—" Hester clenched her fists. "Did I hear him right?"

"Hadn't you heard about his wife and thirteen children?" Long Tom asked innocently.

There was no wife and thirteen offspring, actually. It was a gag. It was a lie which Monk or Ham, whichever one got to do it first, usually told on the other when there was a pretty girl concerned. They had been telling attractive young ladies the falsehood about each other for years.

"Oh, the bum!" Hester exclaimed. "The low-down bum!"

"Tsk, ts!" said Long Tom sympathetically.

"Is Mr. Ham Brooks so *very* rich?" asked Hester thoughtfully.

"*Very,*"

Long Tom said.

"Well, well!" said Hester, and a gleam came into her eye.

BY the middle of the afternoon, they were getting worried. Over them still hung the cloud of anxiety over Johnny's whereabouts and fate, and time was darkening this apprehension.

To their concern now had been added the lack of any word from Doc Savage. They had expected some form of communication from the bronze man. None had come. Long Tom was riding the radio. He was even calling in Mayan, using false call letters, in an effort to raise Doc, but to no avail.

Even Monk barely managed to smile when he told Long Tom, "Nice work with Hester. And thanks. Call on me sometime."

Ham Brooks had spent some time questioning Smith-Stanhope about Miss Wilson. Ham was showing considerable interest in Miss Wilson.

"It might develop, you know," he told Smith-Stanhope, "that she is not guilty, after all."

Which was probably wishful thinking on Ham's part. Ham liked a girl with spirit. Miss Wilson was one of those.

Smith-Stanhope said sadly, "She was always a rather unusual girl. I am afraid her high spirits got her into bad company, and now she is in serious trouble. There is no doubt in my mind but that she is one of our enemies." Then Smith-Stanhope gave Ham a thoughtful look. "Didn't you say you were going to sail north?" he asked.

"North?" Ham looked uncomfortable. "Oh, yes, I did tell you we would sail north—or rather, someone else did."

"I notice, though, that you are sailing south."

"Well, yes," Ham confessed. "We got a message from Doc Savage."

"I see. At the speed this boat will travel—and I notice you have been going full speed—you must be somewhere near the Bahama Islands."

"Somewhere near," Ham admitted. There was no need of lying. The man knew about where they were.

"Why are you heading for the Bahamas?"

"We hope to find our missing friend, Johnny Littlejohn," Ham said. He figured that was telling little enough.

Ham ended the conversation as soon as he conveniently could. He moved forward in the bug-eye to the radio room. The craft carried a good equipment, both C. W. and phone, and it was housed in a room of its own. Long Tom was bending over the instruments, calling monotonously into the microphone, now and then changing the wave length of the receiver.

"Any news of Doc?" Ham asked.

"Not yet."

"It just occurred to me," said Ham, "that it was kind of strange Doc should want Smith-Stanhope brought along. We could have made this trip a lot quicker by plane."

"I thought of that, too," Long Tom agreed.

Ham frowned. "Be careful. If I were you, I wouldn't tell him anything. He was just trying to pump me, it seemed."

"O. K.," Long Tom said. "I'll keep an eye on Smith-Stanhope. I'm suspicious of him, too."

MONK steered the vessel during the afternoon watch. Life was now quite blissful for Monk. Hester had deserted him. The sun was warm, but not excessively hot, although earlier the heat had been excessive, and the Gulf Stream was intensely blue, so strangely clear, as it always was. A school of porpoise snorted along near the bows.

Before long, the bliss of Monk's life was increased.

Ham dashed on deck. The dapper lawyer had a wild expression.

"You polecat!" he snarled at Monk.

"Me?" Monk put on a look of innocence.

"Hester," grated Ham, "is on my neck now."

Monk did his best to look sympathetic. "Why, I'm not surprised. You are a very handsome gentleman. Those fine clothes you wear. Yes, you are handsome, indeed."

"I was trying to help you," Ham said desperately. "I was telling her I was sure you wanted to marry—I mean—that is, all I said was that she was such a pretty girl I would marry her in a minute myself." Ham lifted his voice. "I ask you," he yelled, "was that a proposal?"

"Sounds like one to me," Monk said.

"You liar!"

"Did Hester think it was?"

"She said she did," Ham said bitterly. "What am I going to do?"

"There is a nice place in the mainsail where you can hide," Monk informed him.

"If I thought you engineered this," snarled Ham, "I would skin you alive."

After Ham left, Monk doubled over the wheel and laughed so hard that he forgot all about steering, and the boat wore off and the foresail jibed, nearly tearing the chain plates out of the hull. Renny dashed on deck and said a number of things pertinent to Monk's ancestry, and the idea of such blasted foolishness when the situation was so serious.

"You better not call me such things," Monk warned him, "or me and Ham will sick Hester onto you."

Then Monk straightened. Renny's expression was serious.

"What's wrong?" Monk demanded.

"It's Long Tom."

"What about him?"

"We just found him unconscious in the radio room," Renny said angrily. "And the radio apparatus was smashed!"

WHEN Monk went below, after laying the boat to—pointing its nose into the wind and adjusting sheet ropes and rudder so it would stay there without anyone attending the wheel—he found them working over Long Tom. The electrical expert's clothing was not deranged, so evidently there had been no fight. But there was a dripping cut on Long Tom's head, on the side above and slightly in front of his right ear, as if he had been from struck behind. Renny worked on this cut for a time.

"Look here," Renny said, indicating the wound. "What do you make of this?"

Monk stared. "Strange shape."

"Did you ever see a sailor's palm?"

"I'm no palm reader—" Monk's jaw fell. "Oh, you mean one of those thing sailors use to sew sails with. Made out of rawhide, with a lead inset for the needle to push against." He bent over and inspected the wound more closely. "Someone used a sailor's palm for a blackjack."

"It looks like it," Renny said. "Whoever hit Long Tom simply slipped the palm over his fist with the lead-filled protuberance on the outside, and slugged him with it. Not quite as effective as a pair of brass knucks. But it did the job."

"The weapon could have been something else."

"Yes, but I don't think so."

Monk examined the radio apparatus. He was no great electrician, but he could see that the radio was entirely wrecked. A fire ax had been used for the job. Fire axes were kept at various points on board the vessel. This one had come from outside the door.

"How is he?" Monk asked.

"Coming out of it finally," Renny said. "He got quite a belt."

Twenty minutes later Long Tom was not as good as new, but he could hold his head, discuss his own stupidity bitterly, and explain that he had not seen who hit him. The blow had come from behind. Long Tom had been operating the radio, and what had happened had been like lightning striking him. He had remembered nothing.

"Then you don't know who it was?" Monk asked.

"No, I don't," Long Tom said grimly. "But do you think I need more than one guess?"

He meant Smith-Stanhope, obviously.

Ham beckoned with his head, indicating he had something to impart. He got them aside. "I don't see how it could have been Smith-Stanhope," he said. "To tell the truth, I have been suspicious of the fellow, and watching him. I've had my eyes on him practically the whole time, up until Hester got on my trail. And even while she was working on me, we were in the main cabin. Smith-Stanhope was aft in his stateroom. To reach this radio room in the bows, he would either have to come through the cabin, or go out on deck." Ham glanced at Monk, "Did he come on deck?"

"I would swear he didn't," Monk said.

"Then how could he have got to Long Tom?"

Renny rumbled. "You fellows are overlooking the point that nobody but Smith-Stanhope is aboard, so he had to do it."

"That's right," Ham admitted.

"Monk, you get up and put the boat under way again," Renny directed. "We'll take care of Smith-Stanhope. I think we have some truth serum with us. That may do some good."

Monk went on deck. Because he hated to miss out on the questioning of Smith-Stanhope, and a fight, if

the man put up one, the homely chemist ascended the companionway reluctantly and slowly. Quietly also, by accident.

When he saw Hester, the blonde was in the act of throwing something overboard.

Monk rushed to her side.

"What was that?"

"N-nothing," Hester said.

"What was it?"

"A . . . a chewing-gum wrapper."

It hadn't looked like a chewing-gum wrapper to Monk. In fact, he was sure it wasn't. He picked up Hester, threw her overboard. He jumped into the sea after her.

Without waiting to see if Hester could swim, Monk dived for the object Hester had pitched overside. Because of the clarity of the water—it was possible to see a half dollar for some seventy or eighty feet at almost any point in the Gulf Stream—he had little trouble reaching the article.

It was a sailor's palm.

CHAPTER XI. THE SEA TRAP

THE bugeye schooner *Osprey*, lying hove to with its bow only a few points off the wind, was not exactly stationary upon the sea. There was some drift in the direction of the wind, but not enough that even an average swimmer could not overtake it.

Hester was better than an average swimmer, and she was stroking along, keeping pace with the craft, and moving toward the bow, where the bobstay chain, extending from the end of the bowsprit to the waterline, gave a means of getting aboard.

Monk lifted the sailor's palm up before his eyes, as soon as he reached the surface. Bloodstained, all right. The water had not had time to wash away the stains.

Monk swam toward Hester. His idea in tossing Hester overboard was to keep her from getting the bugeye under way, in which case Monk might well have been lost. The waves were so high that, even in broad daylight, it would be difficult to find a man overboard.

"So you slugged Long Tom!" Monk said.

"I didn't!" Hester denied angrily.

Monk swam rapidly to the bow, dragging Hester by the arm, and grasped the bobstay chain before he spoke again.

"Then how come you were throwing this away?" he demanded.

"I found the nasty thing in my cabin," Hester said. "It was all bloody, so I was getting rid of it."

"Why didn't you throw it through the porthole of your cabin?"

"Why shouldn't I," asked Hester, "if I was guilty?"

That was one to think about.

And now it came to Monk's attention that this was no spot to conduct an argument or a third degree, dangling in the warm north-flowing water of the Gulf Stream. It dawned on Monk violently. For he saw a thing like a black thumb, only narrow and more pointed, cutting the surface of the water in their direction.

"Shark!" he gasped.

Hurriedly, he boosted Hester up the bobstay until she could grasp the basketwork of roping designed to keep a sailor from going into the sea in case he lost his balance while working with sails on the bowsprit.

The shark cruised under them.

"As big as a submarine," Monk said, in awe.

"Was that thing—what you called it—used to strike Mr. Long Tom?" asked Hester.

"It's a sailor's palm," Monk said. "And yes, it was. And you should know."

"I didn't do it. Someone planted the thing in my room."

Monk was watching the shark. The shark was not quite the proportions of a submarine. That impression was an illusion. But it was big enough. The thing rolled and looked up at them, and it occurred to Monk that the shark seemed hungry, and had half a notion to try jumping for them.

Monk whirled to climb higher. He narrowly missed impaling his eye on Hester's knife. It was a long knife. Such a long one that Monk wondered in amazement where she had been keeping it.

"Jump," ordered Hester.

Monk tried twice before he whispered, "*What?*" in horror.

"I think the shark is hungry," said Hester. "Jump."

It was a completely different Hester. This one was no silly blond dope. This one was as heartless as a female tiger. She made a pass with the knife. Monk got his hands out of the way. The knife shaved paint and wood off the bowsprit. It was razor-sharp. Hester hacked again. Once more, Monk got clear. Hester resorted to lunging tactics, and shoved the deadly blade out like a spear. Monk was too busy to yell, probably too perturbed to make a noise if he had tried. Ordinarily Monk's fights were noisy things, but he was not accustomed to fighting a woman, nor did he like knives. Hester again tried to needle him. Monk lost his balance. He fell toward the water. It seemed to him that the shark had its mouth open before he hit the water. He could see the monster's teeth, ivory blades that were completely hideous, capable of masticating a man without any difficulty whatsoever.

WHEN they hauled him out of the sea, Monk was shaking uncontrollably. They sat him on the deck, and he still shook. His teeth knocked together, and even his fingers twitched.

"Monk, Monk!" Renny said anxiously. "The shark went away. You scared it."

"I skuk-skuk-skuk—" Monk swallowed, tried again. "I scared the shark!" he said. "What do you think the shark did to *me*?"

"Get some brandy for Monk," Renny said over his shoulder. "I never saw him like this before. Monk, you are safe. You fell in the water, and the splash scared the shark away. You yelled as you fell, and we heard you. You're safe."

Monk clenched his jaws to stop the clattering of his teeth. He stared at his fingers. They were twitching as if trying to get hold of invisible ladder rungs. He managed to make them still. "Oh, me!" he said.

Ham came dashing on deck.

"What turned your hair white?" he asked Monk. "And you're all wet!"

Monk shut his eyes tightly and was silent.

They had not yet captured Hester. But Long Tom had her cornered near the stern. Hester was backed against the rail, still with her knife. "Keep away from me!" she snarled.

Long Tom called, "There is one of those circular cast nets they use for catching mullet—I think it's in the forecastle. I saw it there. Bring it here, will you?"

With the net, they managed to enmesh the blonde. The net was circular in shape, and closed with a draw-string system, so that it was quite suitable for the purpose. With a boat hook, Renny managed to pin the young woman's hand to the deck, and they got her knife.

"So you slugged Long Tom," Renny said grimly.

Hester surprised him by answering, "Yes, I did. And what are you going to do about it?"

To all of them it was now obvious that Hester had been playing a part. She was a competent person, without fear. And not without some cleverness, as well. As he watched her, Renny went back over the circumstances of her presence aboard. His big fists clenched.

"Now I know something," Renny said. "I know who tipped that gang off that we were using that barking-dog device to locate them. You were the telephone operator at the hotel, and Monk made all his calls, offering twenty-dollar rewards, through you. You listened in."

Hester shrugged. "Why do you think I was planted at the hotel?" she asked.

"Oh, so you were posted at the hotel!"

"We paid the regular operator a hundred dollars to get sick and send me, as her sister, to work her job," Hester said frankly. "It was all part of getting a line on you fellows. You know by now that you were being watched for two days before this thing broke, don't you?"

Renny said, "We have a faint idea."

Ham said, "I see now how she got to this boat. She didn't have to follow us. She knew where it was."

Renny found a ball of marlin, tough treated cord that was used for whippings on lines, and which was immensely strong for its size. With this, he fashioned a pair of wrist bindings for Hester, and another for her ankles. "If you weren't a woman," Renny said, "we wouldn't have any scruples to hold us back. We would know how to deal with you."

"If you just knew it," Hester said, "it wouldn't make any difference. You haven't got time to do much."

"What do you mean?"

Hester's smile was grim. "Do you think," she said, "that I was sucker enough not to make use of that radio, before I smashed it? I called—" She lifted her head, listened. "Well, you can see for yourself," she said.

She did not mean see. She meant hear. The sound of a plane. It was distant, so far away that the ship itself was not visible against the polished dome of the afternoon sky, but it came closer.

NOISE of the plane engine came, borne on the breeze, and it was distorted, at times fading out, at other times louder than it seemed possible for it to be without their seeing the ship. Then it appeared. It was hard to see because it was a shiny all-metal, low-wing plane equipped with retractable landing gear so that there was no chance of its alighting on the water. Like a seagull made of steel, it came out of the sky, floated down, drifted slowly over the bugeye schooner.

Over the side of the plane came an arm, holding a piece of life-preserver cork. The cork block fell, twisting and dancing in the air currents. It fell near the bugeye. Renny brought the boat about, and they fished for the cork. They could see there was a message tied to it.

The message said:

You will heave to and throw your weapons over the side. Hester will take command. Hester will signal when you have complied.

There was no signature, nor any necessity for one. Renny asked, "Hester, can you signal them—give them a message?"

"I can, sure," she said.

Renny rumbled, "You better signal them that we are going to throw you overboard, then."

This was a grim kind of a gag, the only thing Renny could think of doing at the moment, but Hester did not know that. Her face tightened, and she became somewhat pale. But her nerve did not slip.

The bugeye went back on its course and sailed along, climbing over the tall seas and occasionally dipping the bows beneath the crest of a wave, so that water came pouring in softly hissing floods down the scuppers. There seemed to be nothing to do but keep sailing and see what would happen. They got weapons out on deck, of course.

The plane followed them. It did not drop any more notes. Instead, after a while, it lifted overhead, and came boring down in a V-shaped dive. At the point of the V, directly over the schooner, something came over the side of the plane. It was evidently a steel keg. A fuse was attached, and trailed thin white smoke.

When the keg exploded, the effect was worthwhile. A sheet of water leaped over the bugeye, together with an impact that knocked all of them flat, and split the foresail from throat to outhaul cringle. The keg had missed by what they had thought was a safe margin. But now that it exploded, it was like a direct hit.

And then the foam went away, and water ran off the decks, and the boat got back in such a position that they could stand on the decks without hanging to lines and cleats.

There must have been two or three minutes of silence. Through the ringing in their ears, they could hear the beelike drone of the plane above.

Renny put his head out of the companionway. "Leaking," he said. "Not bad. I started the pumps."

Smith-Stanhope took two pillows off a deck chair and placed them on deck. He lay down between the pillows, one pillow on each side of him, so as to keep from rolling. He had a rifle, a .30-06 sporting gun with a two-and-a-half-power telescopic sight. He aimed deliberately. The rifle made a ripping report, and jarred his shoulder. He reloaded carefully.

Hester said, "The cockpit of that plane is armored. Fat chance you have of doing any harm."

Smith-Stanhope showed by no sign that he had heard her. He was aiming deliberately, firing, reloading, firing again, with intense care.

Renny said, "You better let me try it."

"Can you put nine out of ten bullets in a standard bull's-eye at a thousand yards?" asked Smith-Stanhope.

"Not quite," Renny admitted.

"Well, I can," said Smith-Stanhope, and he kept on shooting, as painstakingly as if he had been on a target range.

The plane flew a little higher. It did not drop any more bombs. Smith-Stanhope emptied his rifle magazine three times, then shook his head and stopped shooting. Hester said, "I told you the cockpit of that bird is armored."

In a tense voice, Renny said, "Over to the east. Boat coming."

The boat was low and long, and it came with a great white bone of spray in its teeth. Not as large as the torpedo-carrying so-called mosquito boats used by the navy, it was probably faster. As it swept around the *Osprey*, they saw that it was not flying a flag, and a plank had been spiked across the department-of-commerce identification numbers.

It arched in close. The great tone of its motors softened. A voice came to them. They could not see the speaker, but his words were understood without difficulty. "Ahoy the *Osprey!*" he said.

"Ahoy you, whoever you are," Renny boomed back.

"The plane informs us by radio that you haven't thrown your arms overboard," the voice said. "You will do so at once."

Renny did not answer. He said to Smith-Stanhope, "See what your rifle will do to that boat."

Smith-Stanhope emptied a magazine. They could hear the bullets strike armor steel on the speedboat and travel off into space, sounding like plucked fiddle strings. Someone on the speedboat laughed very loudly, to let them know how futile the shooting had been.

The small, lean craft picked up its bows and ran away across the sea, leaving a boil of wake and a plume of exhaust smoke crawling in blue curls up out of the turbulent water.

Overhead, the plane dipped down in another one of its V-shaped dives. They could see a man braced in the open cabin door, holding another keg.

"There's nothing to keep them from hitting us this time," Renny said grimly. "I wish Doc Savage was here. Me, I don't know what we can do about this."

CHAPTER XII. MUDDY WATER

MR. LIVELY had turned somewhat near the color of a lobster in the late stages of boiling. The sun had been blazing down on him all day. He was staked out on the beach, arms and legs being fastened to four stout pegs driven down into cracks in the coral. The other stakes, one on each side of his head, made it impossible for him to turn his face to get away from the sun.

Doc Savage was nearby, in the same condition—except that the sun had not bothered his bronze skin greatly.

The pilot sat in the shade nearby, leaning back against a palm tree, revolver lying on his stomach. For nearly two hours, he had not moved. His eyes had hardly as much as blinked.

Mr. Lively groaned. "I can't stand this much longer," he said desperately. "In fact, I had enough of it hours ago."

Doc said, "It will probably be harder tomorrow. Through the cool of the night, we will have time to think about how bad the day was."

Mr. Lively shuddered.

"I almost wish he had shot you," he said.

Doc said, "You remember when he pointed his gun at me and said he was giving me ten seconds for prayer, or thinking? A man who is going to kill you never does a thing like that. Not a sane man, at least, and this pilot is perfectly sane."

"Yes, I remember," Mr. Lively muttered. "But don't underestimate that fellow. He's a cruel beast."

The pilot said, "You guys heard the one about sticks and stones won't break my bones, ain't you? Go ahead and discuss and cuss all you want to." He got up and came to Doc Savage. "I don't see why you won't talk. You worry me." He frowned down at the bronze man. "In fact, you've been too easy all along. I can't get rid of a hunch that you're working some kind of a game on me."

Doc had scarcely changed expression during the day. But now he smiled. A wide smile, it was full of confidence. And it startled the pilot like an unexpected blow.

"Hey?" the flier exploded. "What're you so gay about?"

"Did it occur to you," Doc asked him, "that my four associates might be headed for this island, and due to arrive about now?"

That hadn't occurred to the pilot, apparently. He jumped back. His eyes moved in the direction of the opposite side of the island, which lay beyond some hundreds of yards of swamp muck and mangrove thicket. Suddenly he began running that way. Then he stopped. He came back.

"Maybe you figured on getting me away from here so you could escape," he said. "Well, I'll fix that."

He came close to Doc and leaned down with his gun held as a club.

Doc Savage brought up his right fist and clubbed the man beside the temple. The flier dropped.

Mr. Lively gave the frayed rope on the bronze man's wrist a pop-eyed stare. "You raked it in two on a sharp edge of coral," he said. "How long ago did you do that?"

"Nearly two hours," the bronze man said.

Doc rolled over, loosened his other wrist, then his ankles. He got to his feet, worked some of the stiffness out of his muscles, then searched the flier. The man had two guns—the one he had been holding, and another, a hideaway, a small and dark automatic, which had been thrust in the top of his left sock and held there by a rubber band.

Doc freed Mr. Lively.

The bronze man then went back to the pilot, and struck him again, a jaw blow calculated to prolong his period of senselessness.

"Watch this fellow," Doc said.

"Where are you going?" Mr. Lively demanded.

"I'll be back," Doc said.

He went into the jungle.

HE traveled rapidly for a while, until he had reached higher ground, where palm trees were the tallest. Then he climbed a palm. The bole was at least eighty feet, only a little less smooth than glass. The bronze man went up it with bare feet and hands, using the somewhat grotesque method, like a spider, that was favored by South Sea natives. He made it seem easy.

But from the top he saw nothing. The Gulf Stream was an empty expanse of intense blue corduroy. No sail. Not even a steamer's smoke. And to the east, on the banks, the water was amber-colored and vacant except for a few sea birds, and the dark stains of weed beds here and there.

Doc glanced at the sun, calculated the time. His head shook slightly and his trilling sound came into existence, but only briefly, and with a disappointed quality. He backed down the palm tree carefully.

Now his manner was different. He seemed to be searching, but for no definite thing. He moved into the more swampy part of the little island.

He came to a long pool of water, spanned by a log. The water was very muddy, he noticed. And when he started across on the log, an alligator lifted its head at him, then sank.

The bronze man moved quickly, finding a heavy, solid club, returning cautiously to the muddy pool. The reason for mud in the water, of course, was the alligator. Doc watched carefully. And then sprang, struck with the club. He stunned the alligator.

When he dragged the alligator out on the bank, it proved to be not large, a bit over seven feet.

With his belt, and with strong vines, Doc lashed the jaws, fastening them firmly together.

He used a long stick to sound the pool carefully, watching the water closely. It became apparent there was no other alligator in the pool.

Next, he found some red berries. But they were not satisfactory for his purpose. He returned to the alligator. It was bleeding slightly from one nostril, and the bronze man used that instead of the red berries, which had very little juice. He plugged the base end of the revolver barrel carefully with paper. He filled the barrel with the red fluid. Then he plugged the muzzle end, pushing the plug down enough so that it

would not be too noticeable.

Converting the revolver cartridges into blanks was next. This was a little more difficult than simply twisting out the lead bullets, a task which his metallic fingers managed readily. The powder was exposed. He inserted wads, crimping them in carefully. Finally the blanks went back into the gun.

He cleaned the weapon thoroughly, gave the alligator another rap with the club, tossed the alligator into the pool directly beneath the log, and left.

By the time he came back to the beach, the pilot had regained consciousness. He glared.

"See anything of help?" asked Mr. Lively.

Doc said, "You stay here, Lively. You can see the plane from this point. Keep an eye on it."

"What—"

"I have something to show the pilot," Doc said.

Mr. Lively had tied the pilot. Doc freed the fellow. "Get up and walk ahead of me," the bronze man said. "We are going to the other side of the island."

The flier hesitated, then heaved to his feet. He stumbled around, dizzy, then got himself organized, and headed into the jungle.

They penetrated about fifty feet, and Doc said, "Hold on there. I want to tell Mr. Lively something."

Turning to go back, the revolver slipped out of the bronze man's pocket. His hands were nowhere near the gun when it fell, and it looked perfectly natural.

Doc could tell by faint sounds that the pilot hurriedly seized the gun. He did not try to fire it immediately—a move which was possible, but not probable because Doc was carrying the other gun, the small one.

When Doc turned his head, the pilot was standing there. The gun was out of sight.

"Mr. Lively," Doc called, "don't hesitate to shout if you see a suspicious craft. But do not be alarmed at whatever you may hear from the direction I take."

"I wish I knew what was going on!" Mr. Lively snapped.

"You will," Doc said. He turned back to the pilot. "Get going," he ordered. "Straight across the island."

THE scheme worked well, considering how intricate it was. Doc would have preferred something simpler. Too many things could go wrong. The pilot might try to use the gun ahead of time, the blanks in the weapon might not make a noise loud enough to convince the flier of their genuineness—any one of a dozen malfunctions might occur. But there were no means immediately available of pulling a simpler trick.

It came off nicely. They reached the pool. It was still muddy. The alligator, in the stages of coming out of its stunned condition, was lying on the surface, only its eyes showing, immediately under the log which crossed the pool.

The pilot started across the log.

Doc said, "Turn and face me, when you get on the other side."

The flier obeyed.

Doc eyed the alligator, then let himself show signs of nervousness. He put one foot on the log, teetered there, then backed away. He put the smaller gun in his pocket, then picked up a long stick to use as a balancing medium, and again moved out on the log.

He was almost across before the pilot shot him.

The flier took no chances. He shot the bronze man in the chest. Doc teetered wildly on the log—long enough for the man to see the red smear on his chest, but not long enough for the fellow to realize it had come out of the gun barrel. Then Doc fell into the muddy water. He added a scream, amply realistic, for good measure.

He dragged the alligator down with him as he went under. The creature came to life and thrashed furiously. To the best of his ability, the bronze man made sure the 'gator's armored tail would appear above the surface several times.

He released the alligator. The creature immediately sounded, took refuge on the bottom of the pool. Doc left it there. There was no question but that the alligator would soon free itself of the belt and vines which held its jaw; water would soak the belt leather, so that it would stretch, and the vines would chafe in pieces. Being scared, the animal would remain on the bottom of the pool for a time.

Doc himself followed the bottom of the pool. Lack of air in his lungs was the problem now. He had, under ideal conditions, and using the methods of the pearl divers in the South Seas, managed to hold his breath as long as several minutes. But the present circumstances made it more difficult.

One thing was in his favor—to the man on the bank, each minute would seem like an age. The pilot, no doubt, thought that the bronze man's associates had landed on the other side of the island. The shot had been loud; the fellow would suppose it would spread an alarm. He would not tarry overlong.

And apparently he did not linger, either, because he was gone when Doc came to the surface.

The bronze man moved with tremendous speed. He headed for the plane. Only once did he divert his course, and then only for a moment, to sink into a mangrove creek of clear water, where brightly colored fish scurried from his presence, to wash himself. The mud did not come out of his shirt and trousers readily. He stripped them off, left them.

He had, he discovered, lost the small pistol somewhere.

Going on toward the plane, clad only in shorts, he put all his strength into speed. He came out in the undergrowth close to the plane.

From where he crouched, Doc watched Mr. Lively. The man had forgotten all about the plane; he was facing the jungle. After a few moments, Mr. Lively took two or three tentative steps into the undergrowth. He was out of sight.

Doc got aboard the plane without being seen.

THE hot sand had dried the bronze man's feet, so that they did not leave moist prints. Doc made sure of that. Then he crouched below a window, and watched cautiously through it.

Soon Mr. Lively backed out of the jungle. The pilot followed, the gun a dark menace in his fist.

Mr. Lively evidently tried to say something. His words were not audible. But the actions of the pilot were quite visible. He struck Mr. Lively on the head, dropping him.

Pocketing the gun, the flier heaved Mr. Lively over his shoulder and carried him to the plane. He dumped his burden into the cabin. Doc was already back in the small compartment in which he had stowed away earlier.

The wildest of haste marked the scampering about of the pilot as he removed the camouflage from the plane. He knocked the bushes off the fuselage, kicked them away from in front of the ship, and tore the ash-colored life-raft fabric off the motor and propeller.

Afterward, when he climbed into the cabin, his breath was a whistling in his nostrils, plainly audible to Doc. The starter made its preliminary noise, then took hold, and the plane trembled to the rumble of the motor.

They were in the air a little more quickly than was safe for that type of plane.

Doc Savage lay motionless, concentrating on keeping track of the plane's route. Simplicity was hardly a word that could be applied to this. He had no means of seeing earth or sea or sky; there were no windows in the cubicle. His sense of direction served somewhat, aided by the careful track which he kept of the banking of the plane, its turns.

Evidently the pilot flew straight, a climbing course, for some time, until his nervousness subsided, and he got his breath. Then he must have looked back at the island, and discovering no trace of a boat, became curious. For he banked back, and flew circles, each one lower than the preceding. He kept that up for several minutes.

Finally satisfied that there was no boat, and probably puzzled about it, the flier turned the craft southward.

Doc settled back to wait. The pilot thought he was dead, probably a meal for an alligator by now. And the flier was taking Mr. Lively somewhere. The headquarters of the gang would be a good guess as to the somewhere.

THE bronze man's thoughts moved back to Ingento Island, the bit of land that had vanished, far out in the Pacific Ocean. He remembered clearly the details which had been printed, recalled them not only because of the filing-system thoroughness of his trained mind, but because the incident had vaguely interested him at the time. The newspaper accounts, of course, had been sketchy and without much detail, merely emphasizing the fact that an island had vanished. The items had been on inside pages, because they hardly compared in sensationalism with the war news.

Two technical journals catering to geologists had carried more detailed material about Ingento island, and its disappearance, to Doc's certain knowledge. There might have been more printed material than that. But he had read those two.

One of the technical articles had been authored by a geologist who had visited Ingento, and this man had professed to be frankly amazed. Islands had disappeared before. In fact, there was nothing startling about an island vanishing beneath the sea. Plenty of such cases were on record. But the vanishing of an island like Ingento was a different matter.

Ingento Island was not volcanic, nor situated in volcanic territory. Islands which vanished were always those situated in an area of earth-crust disturbance, either volcanic or earthquake in nature. Always, that was, before. But Ingento was not like that. Ingento had just been an island, too small and barren to be inhabitable, but, nevertheless, peaceful.

Taken altogether, the vanishing of Ingento was a strange thing.

CHAPTER XIII. DARK ISLAND

THE plane tilted downward, the sound of its motor became lazy, and the hull smacked the tops of several waves quite hard. There was a rending noise. The plane began to jerk about as if a huge hand had hold of it. Then it jumped up in the air, and came down on the water with a terrific jar, so that at least one of the wings was torn off, and the fuselage was split open by the force of the water. The sea poured in. It deluged Doc Savage in his hiding place. He had barely time to get his lungs full of air, and he was inundated. The motor was still attached to the nose of the ship, and its weight pulled the craft down. Planes usually remain on the surface for some time after a crash, but this one did not. It took no more than two hundred seconds to sink. A bit over three minutes.

As the plane went down, Doc Savage wrenched at the rip in the fuselage with his hands, fighting the metal and the inrushing water in an effort to widen the hole enough to permit him to escape. There was no air now, even in the high corners of the niche.

He got the hole large enough. Half out of it, he felt something coming downward toward him. It was the damaged wing of the plane, folding back. It crushed against him, before he could get back into the cubicle, and for horrible seconds there was squeezing death. Then the wing moved away, and he got out.

Either there was oil in the water, or it was night. There was no taste of oil.

Doc swam. He was weak, bruised. Air was gone from his lungs, thanks to the crushing force of the wing. It took awful effort not to charge his lungs with water. Slanting upward, he reached the surface.

It was as dark as his fondest hopes.

Quite near, the pilot yelled, "Help! Hey, you guys! Get a move on!"

"Coming!" a voice bellowed.

Doc Savage swam away from there, careful not to lift his arms out of the water, making no splash. He kept his head low.

He was in some kind of a lagoon, judging from what he could see. There was sound of breaking surf to the left. To the right, possibly two hundred yards away, there was a furry line of palm fronds.

A boat came from the line of palms, driven by an outboard motor that sounded like someone dragging a stick along a picket fence. Doc Savage, well clear of the spot where the plane had gone down, stopped swimming.

"Hurry up!" howled the pilot.

The small boat arrived. "Here, grab this rope," a man said. But the pilot shouted, "No, no, give us a hand. This guy got a rap on the head. I can hardly hold him up."

"Who have you got there?"

"A secret agent," said the pilot. "An English secret agent. Lively is his name." He swore at someone. "Don't grab me by the hair, you fool!"

After some splashing, Mr. Lively was hauled into the boat. He lay on the floor boards where they dropped him. Then they dragged the pilot into the craft.

"What happened to the plane?" a voice asked. "What went wrong?"

"I forgot to haul up the landing wheels."

"*What?*"

"The retractable landing gear. I took off from an island, using the beach. I forgot to crank up the retractable wheels. I wasn't expecting them to hit the water, and they tipped the plane over at high speed."

"You fool! You lost us a plane."

"I couldn't help—"

"Couldn't help—hell! There was an indicator light on the dashboard, wasn't there? What ailed you? You go blind, or something?"

"I killed Doc Savage," the pilot said.

Silence followed. An iced stillness. The outboard motor had stopped; the operator must have accidentally jabbed the cut-off button. Against the sky overhead, dark clouds crawled like dark animals with silver-edged fur, hiding the moon beyond.

"That," said the pilot, "is why I was nervous."

DOC SAVAGE began swimming. His eyes had distinguished, off to the left, the bulk of a powerboat of fair size. That meant there was a navigable channel into the lagoon, and such a channel would admit sharks. The bronze man, completely unarmed, had no intention of staging a shark fight if it could be helped.

The beach was not sand. It was coral, stuff that looked like cow tracks which had dried in gumbo mud. The edges were as sharp as broken glass. Doc worked over it carefully. Except that the stuff cut his hands and feet slightly, it was an advantage, because its dark surface offered a blending background for his bronzed body.

Once in the jungle, he moved to a spot close to where the outboard boat was landing.

"You sure about that?" a voice was asking harshly.

"I tell you, I shot him through the heart," the pilot said grimly. "Savage was on a log at the time, and he fell off into the water, landing on an alligator that was lying there. The alligator grabbed his body. I could tell by the way the 'gator thrashed around that it was tearing up Savage's body."

"Why did you bring this Lively with you?"

"Because I didn't have any orders to do otherwise. I had orders to kill Savage the first chance that offered, if I couldn't find out where his other men were. I had my chance, to tell the truth, but I delayed

and tried to torture him into talking. As a result, he got the upper hand of me. It was only through a freak accident that I was able to kill him."

"But you brought this Lively."

"I can shoot him now," the pilot said.

"No, no," the other man said hastily. "As a matter of fact, it's about the luckiest thing in your life that you didn't kill Lively."

"Why?"

"You'll find out."

"Lively is an English agent, isn't he?"

"Sure, sure, he's exactly that."

They moved away into the darkness, one man going ahead with a flashlight and picking a trail. The vegetation on this island differed little from the type common to the Bahamas. Palm trees with tall silver boles were few in number; there were more short, spreading palms. There were tough, scrawny trees. And there was a great deal of cactus, as much cactus as could be found on an Arizona desert.

The men stopped.

The leader demanded of the pilot, "You haven't got any dynamite caps on you? The electric kind. Or have you?"

"No," the pilot answered. "Why?"

"In a minute, we'll go under a high-frequency line," the leader explained. "The field around the line is strong enough to explode caps, the electric ones. I think they're testing the line tonight, and it might be charged at any minute. But as long as you haven't got any—"

A loud crashing noise interrupted the man. Actually, there was a grinding of metal, then the crash.

"What's that?" gasped the pilot.

"Just a drill tower they're dismantling."

"Drill? What do you mean—drill?"

"It looks like an oil drill," the other said, "only it ain't. Don't worry about it. Come on."

"What—"

"Come on! Come on!" the leader said impatiently.

Doc Savage stopped, then moved into the jungle. High-frequency lines and drill towers interested him. As silently as he could manage, he moved toward the source of the crashing. Voices now came from the spot.

The voices proved to be only one man, who was alternately cursing and praising four other men who were wrestling with a long spider of a steel beam. They had the drill tower about two thirds dismantled. Light for the job came from gasoline lanterns.

The man who was straw-bossing the job stopped swearing and turned a flashlight on his watch.

"All right, get back," he said. "In two minutes, they're going to run a five-minute test on the line."

The workmen hastily dropped their tools and dashed into the jungle. They came toward Doc Savage, but stopped before reaching him, so the bronze man judged he was safe enough. He crouched down, waited.

Suddenly a fuzzy electric-blue snake appeared in the darkness. It extended parallel to, about twenty feet above, the earth. A fuzzy kind of a snake, like a thousand-legged worm, and very hairy. Some of the hairs were ten and twenty feet long, and they appeared and disappeared.

The appearance of the thing was accompanied by a singing noise, as if one had put an ear to a big bee-hive which was in trouble.

Ahead of Doc Savage, one of the men who had been working on the drill suddenly became scared, leaped to his feet, and fled past the bronze man, shouting, "Maybe them dang sparks can jump this far!"

Doc doubted it. The high-frequency current was not being carried on a wire, but on copper tubing that was at least six inches in diameter. At intervals, the tubing was supported by strands of insulating material.

As the bronze man watched, the beehive buzzing increased, and the snake seemed to thicken. They were increasing the charge on the line. They kept increasing it until here and there breakdowns appeared in the shape of big balls of squirming green light which bounced down to the earth, or soared to nearby trees.

Doc frowned. Outside of certain huge experimental laboratories, he had not known of equipment such as this being in existence.

The test ended. The electric-blue snake disappeared. In the air hung the odor of ozone, the same scent that pervades the vicinity where lightning has just struck. A bird, electrocuted partially by the high-frequency field, was fluttering helplessly somewhere in the jungle.

The straw boss again turned his flashlight on his watch.

"Five minutes is up," he said. "Another hour before the next test. We can go back to work." He walked toward the drill tower. "Get a crowbar, one of you guys. Let's see if we can't pry this beam over so you can get at the bolt."

Doc Savage left the vicinity.

CHAPTER XIV. LOSER'S CHOICE

THE radio shack was made of sheet tin nailed over a two-by-four framework, and there was no door, two sheets of tin forming an awning instead. Probably to avoid interference from the high-frequency electrical apparatus on the central and northern portions of the island, the radio equipment was located at the far southern end. The apparatus itself was not particularly powerful, and portable as well. It stood on a bench made of boards.

A gasoline lantern showed the operator what he was doing. He sat on a camp chair, headphones clamped over his ears, while he idly read the comic section of a Sunday paper. He was a lean young man, thin and hard, with carrot hair.

Doc Savage went in and got him by the neck. One hand closed the fellow's windpipe against an outcry. The bronze man's other hand began working on the nerve centers of the fellow's neck.

By combining his knowledge of anatomy and nervous structure, the bronze man had developed a method of inducing, without lasting harm to the subject, a temporary paralysis. The victim of his system was like a paralytic case, eyes open, breathing, organs functioning normally, except that through the early stages the brain was incapable of comprehending what went on, so that the coma was almost complete unconsciousness. Usually a few hours returned the victim to normalcy.

Having induced the state of paralysis, the bronze man released the radio operator.

In a box under the table, Doc found a hammer. With this, not too noisily, he demolished the radio apparatus, not stopping until he was certain all the transmitters were out of commission.

Some of the broken glass from the tubes and the meter faces, Doc sprinkled on the radio operator's clothing.

He put the hammer in the man's fist and closed his fingers over it. Then he stepped outside.

After Doc had left the radio hut, and was moving back toward the central part of the island, where he had noted several tents and at least two buildings of sheet metal, he heard men approaching. He stepped off the trail.

There were two men. They passed him rapidly, headed toward the radio hut. Doc followed them.

Reaching the shack, "Hey, Sparks," one of the men called. "Chief says to get hold of the *Osprey*. Have them shoot those four Doc Savage men at once. Savage is dead. No need of keeping the four alive to make them tell where Savage is."

There was a natural lack of an answer from inside the hut. The man shoved forward.

"What the blazes! Look here, Eddie!"

They dived into the place. Doc, from a position outside, could see them bending over the operator. Their words came to him clearly, "Somebody's busted the radio!" one yelled.

"Wait a minute," said the other, "Sparks did it himself! Look, he's still got hold of the hammer."

"What the hell is the matter with the crazy fool?"

"Look at him. A fit! He had a fit of some kind. Heck, the guy has gone nuts!"

Which was the opinion Doc Savage had hoped they would form. The bronze man left the vicinity. But his metallic features were strained now, and there was a tense heaviness about his movements.

Luck, this thing he had just done. Pure luck. He had put the radio out of commission to hamper the gang in communicating with such units as might not be on the island. Unwittingly, he had served another purpose—saved the lives of his four aides. Saved them for the time being only, however. They were prisoners. It was the first he had known of that.

THE bronze man dodged—suddenly and wildly, throwing every effort into the frantic motion. He reached the shelter of a bush. Then he took a deep breath and stood there, very angry with himself.

It was only the high-frequency current in the tubular conductors. The buzzing green snake with the whiskers again. Juice had been cut into the conductors.

The fact that the phenomenon had startled him out of his wits irritated him. Usually he had better control of his nerves.

Now he could see that the high-frequency conductor extended in both directions from the center of the island. The line was not straight, but curved—the angle of turn was very slight—so that it was like a segment of a half-moon facing the Gulf Stream. He watched the tremendous voltage spread a bluish field about the copper tubing. It was on the conductor for a longer interval than before, and this time it was not stepped up until a breakdown occurred. Apparently they had found the highest current which could be applied, and they set the juice at that point and ran a time test.

It was an eerie thing. Like a curved bar of almost noiseless lightning that lay close to the ground for minutes.

Doc stopped watching it and moved toward the buildings at the center of the island. The blue snake disappeared. He paid no attention, except to go more slowly. His near-nakedness was a help in avoiding the bushes that plucked at him, and might have made noise if disturbed.

The two men from the radio shack, carrying the paralyzed operator, reached the buildings a moment after Doc arrived in the vicinity.

"Sparks had some kind of a spasm and busted up his radio," they explained. "Look at him! What ails him?"

The swearing that followed was violent. But evidently there was no skilled physician on the island, for no one came near the truth in diagnosing the operators condition. A fit, they decided.

Doc Savage prowled the vicinity. He did not override his luck by trying to get too close. Through the gaping holes in the two buildings that served as doors, he could see—these structures were lighted by electricity—a quantity of ponderous electrical machinery. Some of it was simple—generators and step-up transformers. Other pieces were large-sized laboratory equipment—for instance, the huge contrivances for raising frequency, and vacuum tubes that were immense.

Circling around to the back, the bronze man did manage to get fairly close to the one opening in the buildings which was closed with a glass window. He could look into what was evidently an office, judging from the tables covered with blueprints. The window, the lower half, was lifted.

Miss Wilson was leaning over a table. She wore tan slacks, and she was tall enough to wear them well. She was watching an ordinary wineglass.

Beside her, a young man was sawing steadily on the string of a violin with a bow, at the same time adjusting the tension peg of the violin string on which he was scraping the bow. He was a dark young man, tall, with sideburns, slick hair and the general manner of a lad who fancied himself with the opposite sex.

"Your boss may not like this demonstration," Miss Wilson said, and Doc heard her voice distinctly.

"S all right," the young man said. "I'm his right hand. I'll get this thing to—listen! Hear it!"

Miss Wilson leaned close to the wineglass and listened. "Why, it is making a singing sound."

"Vibrating in synchronism with the violin string," the young man assured her. "Some people can do it with the sound of their voice. Remember the story about how Caruso, the singer, used to bust wineglasses with his voice. Now watch this one break."

The singing of the wineglass began to reach Doc's ears above the whine of the violin.

The bronze man was not particularly interested. He could do the trick with his voice. He knew the wineglass would break shortly, shattered by the violence of its own vibration. And it did.

MISS WILSON straightened. "That was a very effective demonstration," she said. "But electricity and sound are two different things."

"I'm getting to that," said the demonstrator. "You see how sound can smash a substance. Or rather, vibration. Vibration is what does the job."

"Yes, you just showed an example."

The young man grew more enthusiastic. "I'll show you another example. He picked up a gadget. He must have gotten it together for the purpose, for it was a common electrical shocker—battery, spark coil, and hand electrodes—such as almost every boy assembles at one time or another to shock his friends. "This is harmless," he said. "Here, hold the electrodes."

Miss Wilson held them. He turned on the current. Miss Wilson's arms twitched, and she let go the electrodes.

"You see," said the young man.

"See what?"

"How your arm muscles jerked when the high-frequency current was going through them."

"Yes, they did, didn't they?"

"The muscles contracted when the current hit them."

"I'll take your word for it."

"I'll admit it is not a perfect illustration of what our apparatus here on the island will do," said the young man, "but for the purpose of explanation, it will do."

"Are you telling me," demanded Miss Wilson, "that the earth will really do the same thing?"

"Contract and expand? Not the earth. Not dirt, although the individual particles could be made to do so in a laboratory. But strata of stone will, when subjected to our method, contract and expand. In fact, they will do exactly as that glass did."

"Fly to pieces?"

"Well, not that. Disintegrate would be a better word. Or better still, let us say that the rock strata can be caused to shatter for a depth of many miles, so that it loses most of its ordinary strength."

In the other building, a buzzer sounded.

"Sorry, another test," said the young man. "We'll have to get out of here. I'll complete the demonstration later."

He moved away.

Miss Wilson left the building. Doc kept track of her. She entered one of the tents. Soon afterward, when the big conductors again became alive with current, Miss Wilson came to the door of her tent to stare at the display of weird electric blue.

Doc crawled under the rear wall of Miss Wilson's tent and stood erect. He waited until the faint blue light cast by the electrical display subsided, which it shortly did.

"Miss Wilson," Doc said in a whisper. "This is Doc Savage."

Miss Wilson moved very fast. She had the muzzle of a revolver against his chest—it seemed to him—before he stopped speaking.

"Get your hands up," she said.

He lifted his arms.

There was an electric light in the top of the tent. She fumbled for it, located it, and turned it on. She switched it off instantly.

"For a dead man," she said, "you're almost indecently undressed."

And she lowered the revolver.

THE young woman's calm self-grip that enabled her to make a humorous remark under such conditions was—not surprising, because Doc had already judged her character fairly well—a relief. It was like finding something dependably solid when it was badly needed.

She said, "Here is something you may not know. Your four men and Smith-Stanhope are prisoners on that bugeye schooner, which is due to arrive here in an hour or so. They were keeping your men alive in hopes of making them tell where you could be found. They want to get rid of all of you, but you most of all. Now that they think you are dead, you had better think fast to save your friends."

Doc said, "I put the radio out of commission."

"Oh, was that you? It was a nice job. They don't suspect. But as soon as the boat gets here, you'll have to do something more."

"Johnny?"

"The geologist of your crew," said Miss Wilson, "is getting the works. No, they're not beating him up. They are more subtle than that. They are going to send a man back in an effort to find your body, hoping to have a few of your fingers they can show Johnny, one at a time, to persuade him to do what they want him to do. If they do not find your body, which I'm betting they won't, they may use your other four men for that purpose. They have not thought of that, and moreover, they may not want to risk leaving your men alive, so I don't think your four aids are any too safe."

Doc asked, "Can we get to Johnny?"

"Not without rousing the whole island," she advised him. "There are four men with him. But as I told you, he is not being harmed physically. He is too valuable for them to damage him."

"Valuable for his geological ability?" Doc suggested.

"That's right." Miss Wilson nodded. "Have you noticed those big drills?"

"I noticed them dismantling one of the towers."

Miss Wilson moved to the tent door, listened cautiously to make sure they were not being overheard. "They are finished with the drilling," she whispered, coming back. "They put down holes that were nearly thirty inches in diameter, and sank them thousands of feet into the earth. They have been at it for months."

Doc said, "The holes are for the purpose of planting electrodes deep in the earth?"

She stared at him. "You know all about this?"

"Not everything," he said. "But something."

"How did you know I was not one of them? That I was actually an English agent?"

Doc said, "Smith-Stanhope had a photograph. It was of you, but he told us it had been taken ten years ago, which was not true. The clothes you were wearing did not have the style of ten years ago. They were up-to-date."

"Smith-Stanhope was given that picture in order to have something with which to identify me."

"I surmised so."

"Did Smith-Stanhope tell you any of the truth?"

"Not a word. He told a story about being your uncle, and interested in your welfare."

Miss Wilson smiled. "Smith-Stanhope is a nice old goose. A bit stodgy, but determined. The British government thinks very well of him."

"And Mr. Lively?"

"Also well thought of," said Miss Wilson. "Mr. Lively is a bit strange. So very lazy at times. Then again, completely animated."

"But Mr. Lively is a reliable English agent?"

"Oh, yes."

"Then," said Doc Savage, "the English government has three agents working on this mystery—yourself, Mr. Lively and Smith-Stanhope?"

"Four."

"Who is the fourth?"

"The pilot who shot you, or thought he did. He was an agent, I mean. He sold out on us."

"Now there are only three we can depend on."

"Right."

Outside, a shout drifted through the night. It came from the top of a palm tree—Miss Wilson whispered this information to Doc—where there was a lookout posted.

"Sail ho!" shouted the lookout. "It's the bugeye. Coming around the south end of the island."

Another voice ordered crisply, "You men with red lanterns, get in a position to mark the channel so the boat can come in. And be careful! That channel is narrow."

Miss Wilson whispered, "That channel is only about a hundred feet wide, and not far offshore. If we could only—"

"Come on," Doc said.

CHAPTER XV. THE RAIDERS

THE undergrowth—almost entirely mangroves—extended to the water, even overhung the surface in many places. There was a shelf of shallow water, then the deep tidal rip of the channel, somber in the night. On the opposite side of the channel, a man stood with a red lantern. There was another lantern at the far end of the lagoon, to serve as a bearing point. The two red lanterns in line, pass the first one to port side; these were evidently the bearings for entrance.

Doc said, "Miss Wilson, you will stay here until this is over. You will be safe here."

"I don't like that idea," Miss Wilson said.

Doc made no comment. He left the young woman standing among the mangroves, then moved out cautiously into the water, sank to keep out of sight, and moved forward. There was a thick growth of sea fans and seaweed on the shelf. He reached deep water.

And then he knew Miss Wilson was beside him. She stroked up to his shoulder.

He whispered, "I told you—"

"And I told you I didn't like it," she whispered back. "Taking that schooner may be more than a one-man job."

"Sharks—"

"Oh, sure. I thought of them."

Doc moved on. There was nothing much he could do. And time was short. The schooner had rounded the end of the island, blinked a signal, and was setting into the channel.

The bugeye came slowly, pushing against an outgoing tide. The Diesel motors made a steady, monotonous noise.

The moments when the boat came close were tense ones. There was only one point where they could get aboard—the bowsprit and the bobstay chain. If they missed that, they would be out of luck. The boat, although it did not seem to be moving fast, was probably shoving against the tide somewhat faster than a man could swim.

When the bronze man's hand closed over the bobstay chain, he reached out and seized Miss Wilson. Otherwise, she could not have made it. He hauled her close, and she grasped the chain. "Thanks," she said. Their bodies dragged through the water. Doc whispered, "We might as well go up together."

They clung to the chain, climbed carefully. Rushing water made enough noise to cover drippage from

them, and moreover the tide around the schooner was not silent.

A man said, "A bit to the starboard, Harry."

He was leaning against the mast. He had a pair of binoculars in his hands, keeping them glued to his eyes, no doubt holding the bearing marker in line with the forestay that came down from the top of the mast to the end of the bowsprit. The man's binoculars prevented his seeing them.

Doc flung against the man. One arm he used to band the fellow tightly against the mast. The other hand he employed to dig into the man's throat, fingertips searching for the nerve centers that would produce unconsciousness.

Afterward, Doc lowered the man to the deck.

"That's one," said Miss Wilson. She had caught the binoculars.

THERE appeared to have been only two men on deck. The other one was handling the wheel.

Doc imitated the voice of the man he had just overcome. He said, "Hey, what's that astern?"

"Where?" called the man at the wheel. "I don't see anything."

Doc said, "I'll show you," in the lookout's voice.

With the ruse, he managed to get close enough to seize the helmsman. The fellow kicked the binnacle once, very hard. But that was all the noise he made. That, and the sound of Doc's fist, which was not as loud as it was violent. The steersman became still.

Doc asked, "You know this channel?"

"I don't need to," said Miss Wilson. "You just steer toward that red light."

"Do it, will you?" Doc said. He cut the speed somewhat by closing the throttle controls.

Going to the companionway, the bronze man lifted his voice boldly. Again, he put his trust in his ability to mimic other voices.

He said, "How's it go down there?"

"Are we almost in?" a man demanded. "I'm getting tired of this job."

"How are the prisoners?"

"Hell! How could they be, tied up like they are?"

Doc said, "I'll take a look." He descended the companionway, and there was a lighted corridor. It was all of twenty feet to where the guard stood, and there was nothing for Doc to do but cover all of that distance before the man could lift the rifle which he was holding.

The bronze man pulled his shoulders together and drove out with his legs. Fortunately, bare feet had enabled him to descend the companionway without much noise, an advantage. He reached the man with his hands, got hold of the gun, twisted it from the other. The man yelled. There was no preventing the sound. But Doc hit him before he could shout again. The fellow went back against the wall, then tilted

forward stiffly.

"Monk," Doc said.

"Blazes!" exploded the homely chemist's voice. "Where'd you come from?"

Doc asked, "How many men aboard?"

"Three men," Monk said, "and a woman."

"Woman?"

"Hester," Monk said gloomily. "She'll be taking care of the motors, I think. And Doc—watch out for Hester. She's a ring-twisted tiger, that girl is!"

They were locked in the cabin. Doc tried the door, drew back, set himself, and put a foot and all his weight against the panel near the lock. It came open. He said, "Do not show yourselves on deck."

The engine room was aft, almost under the wheel. Hester was leaning through a porthole, watching the progress of the boat. Doc came up silently behind her, picking a large handful of clean waste out of a box as he passed it.

Doc had bad luck then. Hester got her chin hooked over the porthole rim in some fashion when he grabbed her. She hung there long enough to scream. And it was a remarkably loud shriek for such a small girl.

Then Doc got her inside and gagged her.

From the shore, a man yelled, "What's wrong on board there?"

From on deck, Miss Wilson answered. "That was me—Hester," she said. "I just yelled because I feel good. How are things?"

"Things are O. K.," the man said.

TEN minutes later, Miss Wilson said, "This is as far in as we can go with the bugeye. The water shoals up from here."

Doc Savage went forward, dropped the anchor. The chain rattled out with the grumbling sound of a big animal. The bronze man went back aft.

Monk and Ham had finished tying and gagging Hester. They ordinarily failed to work together peacefully, did Monk and Ham, but this time they collaborated with enthusiasm.

Another voice came from the shore.

"Take a gun," it ordered, "and get rid of Doc Savage's four men."

Doc again used the voice of the man who had been lookout near the bow. He said, "You mean bump 'em off?"

"Sure."

"What about Smith-Stanhope?"

"Don't hurt him. But make sure he sees you shoot Savage's men."

"Right," Doc said.

"Then come on deck," the voice ordered.

"Right."

They went below. Smith-Stanhope, when he came into the cabin light, was pale. He also trembled a little, kneaded his hands together. "I . . . I assure you that . . . well . . . I—"

"Assure us what?" Doc asked.

"I am not one of them," Smith-Stanhope said wildly. "I am afraid because they did not order me killed you will think—"

"Nonsense," Doc said. "They are trying to scare you. That is why they wanted you to witness the murders."

The bronze man had collected guns belonging to the men they had overpowered. He used one of these, fired it deliberately, giving plenty of time between shots, and doing some extemporaneous screaming that was impressive. For good measure, he fired twice more.

He went on deck.

"Well?" yelled the voice from shore. "Did you get the job done?"

Doc made his assumed tone horrified. "It . . . it was pretty bad," he said.

"Hell! Take a drink or something," ordered the shore voice. "Then bring Smith-Stanhope ashore."

"Fetch Smith-Stanhope ashore?" Doc demanded.

"Yes."

"All right," Doc replied. "But it'll take a minute or two. He ain't in very good shape right now."

"Hurry it up."

"Right."

The plane was still circling overhead, but dropping lower. Now, answering a blinked flashlight signal, it slanted down on the lagoon. The pilot beached it at a spot perhaps two hundred yards distant.

Doc asked, "Miss Wilson, how many planes have they?"

"That one," she said, "and another big one, a transport seaplane."

"Are they both close together now?"

"They keep them both down there where that one just landed," she answered.

Doc turned to his men. "There are two lifeboats on board. Monk, you and Ham and Renny take one of them, and get it into the water. I am going ashore with Smith-Stanhope."

THE bronze man made only one preparation. He changed clothes with the first man he had overcome, the fellow whose voice he was imitating. That man had worn a broad-brimmed hat, a brightly checkered sports coat of distinctive pattern. Moreover, he was a man of some size, so that Doc managed to squeeze into the garments.

"Boat ready," Monk reported.

"Good," Doc said. "Did you fellows bring any equipment cases aboard?"

"Sure."

"Have they been thrown overboard, or destroyed?"

"They're in the main cabin," Monk said.

The bronze man called the others around him. "Here is the situation," he said. "There are at least twenty men on shore. They think Miss Wilson is an English secret agent who sold out to them. They have Mr. Lively, and they have Johnny. They know that Smith-Stanhope, here, is an English agent—"

"I am the chief of the English delegation which was to handle these fellows," Smith-Stanhope interrupted. Even under the circumstances, he managed to sound a bit pompous with that.

"All right," Doc said. "As soon as I shove off, the rest of you, with the exception of Miss Wilson, will get into the water and swim for the opposite shore. As soon as you reach it, you will get to those planes, then put them out of commission."

"And after that?"

Doc noted a small promontory which stuck a dark thumb into the lesser blackness of the lagoon. "There," he said. "I will meet you there. Have plenty of fighting equipment with you."

"What about me?" demanded Miss Wilson.

"Someone has to watch the boat."

"And it has to be me?"

"Yes. We don't want these prisoners waking up and spoiling things."

Miss Wilson took a belaying pin out of the pinrail. "They won't be waking up for a while," she said.

Doc Savage helped Smith-Stanhope, who was trembling again, into the boat. The others lowered away on the falls, and the boat touched the water.

"You get up in the bow," Doc said. He took the oars, and rowed toward the man who had done the shouting from on shore.

This was ticklish business, as the bronze man knew. But he saw no way of avoiding it. He was banking on the formation of the lagoon—very shallow near the shore, but quite deep in the central portion. If the rowboat would only ground before it reached the beach—

The grating of sharp coral against the hull planking was the most welcome sound he had heard that night.

"Get out and wade," he told Smith-Stanhope loudly in the assumed voice.

"What's the matter?" growled the voice on shore.

"Here's your Smith-Stanhope," Doc said. "This water is too shallow. I gotta go back to the boat."

"What you gotta go back to the boat for?"

"To take care of those bodies. I better make sure they're dead."

"Oh, sure," grunted the other. He turned on a flashlight. Fortunately, Doc had his head tipped forward, the wide hat brim partially hiding his face. And the loudly checkered coat was enough false identification to save him. "Come on, Smith-Stanhope," ordered the man with the flashlight.

Doc then rowed away. He gave the oars all the force they would safely take until he reached the bugeye. The lifeboat had a long painter, and he tossed this up to Miss Wilson.

"Good luck," she called softly.

"Thanks," Doc said. He slid over the side of the lifeboat and swam for shore.

CHAPTER XVI. SCHEME

THEY had Smith-Stanhope in the small section of the building which was windowed and served as an office. Half a dozen other men were there, waiting, so Doc Savage reached a point outside where he could watch.

Finally, the foppish young man entered, the fellow who had given Miss Wilson the demonstration.

"The chief says for me to do the talking," he said.

For some reason, he winked at his men, and two of them laughed.

"What . . . what is there to say?" asked Smith-Stanhope nervously.

"Just this—we're through killing time," said the young man grimly. "The English government has had its chance to pay off. Instead of that, you tried to throw a monkey wrench in the works."

"We only wanted to make sure—"

"Make sure we could stop the flow of the Gulf Stream—like hell that was what you wanted!" The young man snorted. "You were trying to wreck us, and you know it. So do we."

"But—"

The young man took a grim step forward. "Your government was told, right at the beginning, that there were others who would pay plenty to have the Gulf Stream shut off."

Smith-Stanhope said suddenly, "The whole idea is utterly fantastic!"

"It was when other men talked about it," the other said dryly. "But this time it is different. You see, we've got a system of combining high-frequency sonic vibrations caused by the contraction and expansion of rock strata under electrical current, combining these with high-frequency current itself, so as to create a weakness in the earth strata over a large section. The result"—the young man smiled grimly—"will be, and you will have to take my word for this, a major earthquake and upheaval of the earth crust. We are quite sure that it will lift the sea floor under the Gulf Stream sufficiently that the Stream will no longer

follow its present course. In other words, the Gulf Stream will no longer affect the climate of England."

"Ridiculous!"

"I hope you still think so after we do it."

Smith-Stanhope was perspiring slightly. "You really believe this mad thing, don't you?"

"Perhaps you have forgotten Ingento Island, and what we did there."

"You only *said* you created an earth disturbance which wiped out Ingento."

"Of course. I'm only saying that we can shut off the Gulf Stream, and turn England into a country with a climate as bleak as Nova Scotia, or even Alaska. Possibly not as bad as interior Alaska. But not exactly balmy."

Smith-Stanhope swallowed. "What do you devils want?"

"Pay-off."

"But how—"

That was all Doc Savage waited to hear. It cleared up the mystery, as far as motives were concerned. Much of it the bronze man had already surmised—the fact that they needed a geologist had been his first tip-off. Johnny, one of the most skilled of living geologists had been necessary to check the drilling cores, to assure them that the strata under the Gulf Stream was of such a nature as to respond with contraction and expansion to a high-frequency electrical field which they intended to project into the earth.

The bronze man moved away.

HE found his men assembled on the promontory which thrust out into the lagoon.

"We fixed the planes," Monk said. "There were three guys watching them. We fixed those birds, too."

Doc asked, "Have you got bullet-proof vests?"

"Yes. Here's an extra for you."

Doc took the garment. It was of an alloy material, chain-mesh construction, and would stop anything up to and including an army rifle bullet—although being hit by the latter with one of the vests on was no joke. The bronze man donned the vest.

He said, "We have them cornered, to some extent. Their planes are out of commission. We have the boat. The speedboat is still out to sea somewhere—"

Renny said, "I heard them say the speedboat was going to prowl up and down the shore several miles out in the Gulf Stream, to make sure no fishing boat happened to put in here. They do that every night."

"Good," Doc said. "Wait ten minutes. That is, wait that long unless a fight starts. After ten minutes, go into action."

"Any particular plan of action?" Monk asked.

"Just use your judgment."

"That," said Monk, "is the kind of a fight I like."

Renny rumbled gleefully. "This should be good. They think we're all dead. All right, ten minutes, unless we hear you get in trouble, Doc. We've got it."

The bronze man moved away silently into the night. He followed the beach, then turned inshore, and approached the vicinity of the two buildings.

He got close enough to look inside one of the structures, but had to retreat. Half a dozen men were working there, too many to overpower.

Trying the other building, he found it the same there. But he did manage to see enough of the interior of this one to know that it was here that his interest should center.

For one thing, they had Johnny Littlejohn inside the place. They had a noose around Johnny's neck—not a hangman's knot, but a simple nonchoking bowline—and the other end of the rope was tied to a ceiling beam. Johnny could do nothing but stand on tiptoes. It was not a particularly vicious form of torture—for the first five minutes one had to undergo it. Then it became rather horrible. To go down flat-footed meant that it became impossible to breathe, and it was impossible to stand indefinitely on tiptoes.

When he saw how purple Johnny's face had become, Doc had to restrain himself.

TEN minutes.

Big-voiced Renny Renwick let out a series of howled orders that echoed from end to end of the island. "All right, sailors," Renny bellowed. "Landing parties close in! Let's go! Radio operator—give the destroyer a signal to start shelling the buildings!"

A quick grin of appreciation, a rare thing, crossed Doc's metallic features. Renny and the others were trying to make the foe think a naval attacking force had landed. It was good strategy.

There was a whistle. It sounded very much like an artillery shell coming. The explosion followed, and it was satisfactorily violent. It was, Doc knew, nothing but a hand grenade which one of his aids had tossed.

Renny roared, "Radio operator! Tell them to correct their range about two hundred feet to the north! Same distance!"

By that time, the building had about emptied. And the lights had gone out. From the blacked-out place, men poured in an excited covey.

Doc immediately went into the structure. There was a pocketknife in the suit he was wearing, and he used it to cut Johnny down.

"You all right, Johnny?" he demanded in a whisper.

Johnny stumbled about, trying to remain on his feet. "I'm a fuh-fuh-foot longer than I was," he gasped.

"Get outside," Doc said. "Take it easy. Keep under cover. Get to the lagoon. Try to get in shape to swim to the bugeye schooner you will find anchored in the lagoon—if we lose this fight."

Johnny said, "I'll be superaglam—super—" He gave it up and stumbled outside.

Doc Savage remained in the building. He could not do what he wished without light, and to turn on the ceiling lamps would invite trouble. But he remembered a work bench at the far side, and a mechanic's lamp with a long cord lying there. He located it, wrapped the bulb in his coat, and switched it on. The cord was long enough.

Because of his intensive training in electricity, he had a general idea of the make-up of this apparatus. Much of it was a mystery to him, and would probably take weeks of study to understand completely. The mind that had designed this had been a genius of sorts, both in geology and electricity.

But his sketchy understanding of the machinery was ample for his purpose. There were wrenches, pliers, on the bench. With these, he climbed boldly into the apparatus, and began changing connections.

Outside, the fight had turned into a guerilla thing. His aids had scattered, and were firing desultory bursts from their machine pistols. The weapons made an awesome sound in the night.

Renny was still shouting orders to his imaginary marines, or whatever fighting force he was bringing off the imaginary destroyer.

Monk was doing the imitation of a cannon shelling the place. He would whistle, then toss a grenade. Someone over to the east of the camp, doubtless Long Tom, was coöperating to the extent of firing his machine pistol after each explosion, so that the absence of a booming report from seaward would not be noticed.

Doc Savage finished his job on the apparatus.

THE moment he was outside in the night, the bronze man realized that the attack was not making much progress. Their foes, after the first wild uproar, had settled down. They were assembling compactly, following orders shouted by the voice of the sleek young man who had demonstrated their system of creating earth disturbances to Miss Wilson.

Doc circled them, got between them and the beach.

He made a great crashing, as if he was charging up from the beach. He used the voice which he had assumed earlier.

"The whole English navy!" he roared. "They've captured the bugeye! There's a million of 'em!"

The terror he managed to get in his voice had an effect. Someone bellowed out in anger. "I'm through!" the man shouted. "You kill some of those sailors, and they'll hang us!"

Doc called, "Come on, men! Close in on them!"

He used his own voice. His aids heard. Probably they would have known it was the psychological moment, anyway. They came in quickly, firing short bursts from the machine pistols. One of the rapid-firers, charged with explosive slugs, created a deafening uproar.

Doc roared, "You fellows! You've got one chance to surrender. And frankly, we don't care whether you take it or not."

Two men took advantage of the offer. They broke away from the others, rushed forward, howling, "*Var forsigtig!*" in a Scandinavian tongue, in their excitement. "We are surrendering," one yelled.

It was the moment for them to break.

But an angry, determined voice rallied them. It was a new voice, mad with rage.

"Keep your heads, you idiots!" the new voice rapped. "The machinery is ready! We'll turn it on. That destroyer offshore will have plenty to do once the earth starts heaving up!"

Surprisingly, it was Miss Wilson's admirer who squalled an objection. "Wait!" he screeched. "We don't know what it'll do to this island! Wait, boss!"

The other cursed him. There was a shot. Agony-stricken now, the sleek young man wailed. "Boss! Boss, please—"

Doc Savage lifted his head. He could not see much; it was too dark. But he could hear footsteps pounding toward the sheet-iron buildings.

The bronze man lifted his voice.

"Keep away from those buildings!" he shouted. "It's dangerous!"

His words had no effect—except on his associates. Doc's aides had learned to take the bronze man's words at their worth, and ask questions later. They promptly retreated. Doc followed their example.

Light came on inside the building in which Doc had done his tampering. Machinery started operating. Big motors at first, their exhausts banging and spitting sparks; then, as their speed grew, generator whine became the loudest sound.

The ensuing holocaust took, at the most, a minute and a half. The variety of what happened, and its violence, made the interval seem longer. Green-white flame at first. Turning blue. Not large, but like a welding torch. Just one at first. Then two, three, four, and dozens of them. The crashing reports began then, great snapping concussions that were like lightning, made by terrific electrical current breaking down air resistance and arcing. For a moment, it was almost cannon fire. In the middle of the sound, a man began screaming, his shrieks very loud, but decreasing in volume, and ending suddenly, so that they could no longer be heard for some time before the uproar subsided and darkness came. Not complete darkness, for in scores of places the electrical wiring was flaming or smoldering, and even in the jungle nearby, a few trees were afire. The ozone created by electrical discharges drifted and spread, a weird perfume.

A man's voice said, "The boss was in there."

CHAPTER XVII. THE QUESTION

THE morning sunlight was warm and cheerful. Monk basked in it. He raked his fingers through his hair, flexed his big muscles, and said, "I'm gonna get me a sun tan," to Miss Wilson. Miss Wilson did not need a tan herself, being already nicely that way. In fact, seen in the bright glory of the morning, Miss Wilson did not need much of anything. She came close to perfection as she was.

She pointed. "There he comes."

A lifeboat from the bugeye—they now stood on the deck of the *Osprey*—was coming in through the channel from the sea. Doc Savage occupied the craft. He had found an out board motor in the bugeye's equipment, and this was propelling the small boat.

He came alongside.

"Any luck?" Monk asked.

"No, the big speedboat fled," the bronze man advised. "If they have enough gasoline, they will get down in the islands, and we will never catch them."

Monk chuckled. "We got enough prisoners as it is."

"Where are they?"

"We've got them all locked up below decks," Monk explained. "Ham and Long Tom are keeping an eye on them." The homely chemist laughed. "You know, some of them guys still think the English navy has got them."

Smith-Stanhope came to the railing. He said, "Miss Wilson and I would like very much to go ashore. We want to look at those buildings."

Doc said, "The main building is practically destroyed. The apparatus inside it is—well, completely demolished. Those short-circuits burned up everything, almost. And the other building contains nothing but the generators and motors."

Smith-Stanhope shook his head.

"We are interested in something else," he said.

"Get in the boat," Doc said.

Johnny appeared. "Mind if I go along? Ham and Renny and Long Tom can handle these prisoners."

"Get in," Doc said. "We will not be gone long."

As the boat moved toward the beach, Johnny said, "I'll be superamalgamated! I'm just getting so I can think straight about this crazy thing."

Smith-Stanhope looked at him. "Was the thing possible? Could they have forced an earthquake, or similar disturbance, which would have lifted the ocean floor enough to dam off the Gulf Stream?"

Johnny hesitated. "Their theory was all right. They had the right apparatus. As to what would have happened—we'll never know that. Their machinery is ruined."

Miss Wilson shuddered. "I'm damned glad the dirty buzzards didn't get to try it," she said. Then she flushed. "I've got to quit swearing," she said.

"I think I can help you," Monk volunteered.

Monk had no doubt but that it would be a very pleasant task.

They landed and walked up to the buildings. Smith-Stanhope stopped. "You know what I want to see," he said. "I . . . I know who he is."

"Their leader, you mean?"

"Yes." Smith-Stanhope got out a handkerchief and wiped his face. "I—this is a blemish on my government. I feel it as deeply as if it was on my own family."

Doc said, "Every country has men like that."

"I guess so," Smith-Stanhope admitted. "Oh, well, he came to a just end."

The Englishman walked into the ruins of the building, moving gingerly. After a while, he found Mr. Lively. Considering the violent fashion of Mr. Lively's death, his face was placid.

"It gets me," muttered Smith-Stanhope, "that no one suspected Mr. Lively of being the brains behind this thing."

THEY rowed back to the bugeye in silence. Looking at a body was not exactly a push into conversation. But finally Smith-Stanhope said, "Mr. Savage, when did you first suspect the fellow? Or did you know it was Mr. Lively before last night?"

The bronze man said, "Suspicion and certainty are two different things. Mr. Lively made several breaks that indicated his guilt. For instance, on an island north of here, Mr. Lively made a remark about remembering when the pilot was going to shoot me, when at the time Mr. Lively was supposed to be unconscious. The remark indicated he was faking unconsciousness, which proved he was in cahoots with the pilot, who was obviously one of the gang, as proven later. And there were other small things."

"I see."

Monk asked, "What are we gonna do with these prisoners?"

"This is English territory," Doc said, "and Smith-Stanhope has claimed the captives. They will be turned over to the English navy."

Monk grinned ruefully.

"When they get Hester," said Monk, "the English navy better watch out."

THE END