



TROUBLE ON PARADE

A Doc Savage Adventure by Kenneth Robeson

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A red-bearded giant, who packed a basket lunch to eat in the middle of the Bay of Fundy, was the start. There was the girl who liked to quarrel, the girl who wouldn't talk, and the man who threatened. They added up to a nightmare of violence and intrigue for Doc Savage—on Parade.

Chapter I

IT seems to be a fact that one of the things people most enjoy doing is approving—"pointing with pride" is the phrase—the great accomplishments of the human race, the race which has discovered radio, vitamin pills, crooners, war, airplanes, six-dollar theater seats, appendix operations, taxes etc. etc. But once upon a time a scholar, who was also a witty man, said: "Man is an emotional animal who sometimes stops to think."

Stopping to think is the profession of scholars and scientists, who get salaries for it. These gentlemen are—a surprising number of them—quite modest men, since it is mysterious and awe-inspiring to realize,

as they soon must, that it may take them and succeeding thinkers perhaps another hundred thousand years to invent a mechanism as marvelous as, for example, a common cheese-eating variety of mouse. To say nothing of an emotion, for an emotion is nebulous, being probably a sort of bio-chemical product—even the garden variety of emotions such as fear, joy, grief, hate, love, reverence.

Fear is a primary emotion. A baby, the scientists have proved, is born with only two primitive fears—the fear of loud noise, and the fear of falling. It has, at birth, no other instinctive fears. Taken from its crib, the baby will reach impartially for striped candy, cobra snakes, fire, Uncle Dan's shiny timepiece, dogs, canary birds, dynamite and strangers, which proves that the baby is born with another emotion—curiosity. His curiosity stays with him and develops as do his other emotions, but unlike the others, his curiosity usually gets him into a lot of trouble.

It was on a hot Wednesday afternoon in August that the pilot of a Boston, Mass., Halifax, Nova Scotia, passenger seaplane gave a display of what was almost phenomenal eyesight, followed by normal curiosity.

Not all August afternoons in the Bay of Fundy are hot ones, but this one was particularly so. And it was an unnaturally still afternoon. The sea below the plane, absolutely calm, resembled a great expanse of shining glass, as blue as a policeman's uniform where the water was deep, shading to various other colors such as mink brown, and dying grass green where the sea bottom came up in reefs and shoals.

The plane was flying quite low, not much higher than five hundred feet, because there was no headwind and the sea was calm enough to make a forced landing anywhere in case of mechanical failure.

Slim Stinson, the pilot of the plane, suddenly gouged his co-pilot in the ribs and pointed.

“Whoeeee!” he said.

“What was it?” the co-pilot asked.

The plane was making good about a hundred and sixty miles an hour, so that whatever the pilot had seen was now left behind.

The pilot did not answer the co-pilot's question; he was taking the radio microphone off its hook. Into the microphone he said, “Canada Union-American from Flight Seven. Have sighted man swimming in the sea, nearest land twenty miles. Asking permission to land and rescue. Sea calm. Over.”

DOC SAVAGE, a passenger on the plane, had been endeavoring to put himself to sleep with self-hypnotism. He had heard that this could be done, but he had never been able to do it, and he wasn't having any success now. He had both eyes closed tightly when the plane lifted one wing, beginning a banking turn. He stubbornly resisted opening his eyes, although he could think of no good reason for the plane making a sharp turn at this time.

Presently he did open one eye. The stewardess was standing beside him. The sign that said FASTEN YOUR SAFETY BELT was lighted.

“We are landing,” the stewardess said. “Keep your seat. Nothing is wrong.”

The stewardess passed on to reassure the other occupants, and by the time she returned Doc Savage had taken a look out of the window, and he had a question.

“If there's no trouble, why are we landing on the open sea?” he wished to know.

“The pilot has sighted a man swimming, and we are landing to rescue him.”

The stewardess lingered, willing to pass out more information. She was quite pretty, and she had been giving Doc Savage more than his share of service, overdoing it enough to embarrass him. He felt he was being pursued, suspected the other passengers were grinning slyly about it, and he couldn't think of anything he could very well do about it. He wished the stewardess hadn't been so damned pretty, then he wouldn't have been as disturbed.

The stewardess gave him a smile which, although he was trying to be as cold as a fish, made his toes vibrate. “The poor fellow must have been on a boat which sank,” she said. “The nearest land is about twenty miles away.”

“That would be a long swim.”

“Wouldn't it, though?”

She gave him another smile, this one about as soothing as an application from a blow-torch.

“I understand you are a flier yourself,” she added.

“Not by profession,” he said, wondering if he was going to hold out.

“I know what your profession is.”

“You do?”

“I read about you in a magazine.”

He damned the magazine mentally. He resolved to look before he boarded the next plane to make sure it didn't have a man-eating stewardess.

At this point the co-pilot saved his life by thrusting a head out of the control compartment and shouting for the stewardess to stand by with a life preserver.

THE pilot made only a fair landing, making the pilotage error known as “dropping her in.” Evidently he had been deceived by the glassy surface of the sea, and his error lay in not taking the accepted precaution of heaving overside some object such as a life preserver to use as a reference point. But they got on the sea safely.

The plane taxied toward the swimmer.

The swimmer ploughed through the cobalt-blue water, using an easy-looking overhand stroke, ignoring them. Doc Savage was able to watch him, and he wondered what the swimmer was doing with a red muffler tied under his throat. The fellow was paddling south, which was the direction he had been heading

all the time, but as the plane drifted close, he stopped and tread water.

The pilot opened a hatch and climbed out.

“Hello, there,” he said.

The swimmer lifted a hand in acknowledgement, but didn't say anything.

Everyone on the plane gaped in amazement. What they had mistaken for a red muffler tied over his head and knotted under his throat was a profuse and fiery red beard. The fellow was a sun-browned giant with an awe-inspiring amount of muscles. He seemed to be dressed for what he was doing, wearing nothing but swimming trunks, and around his middle was a belt to which seemed to be attached a number of waterproof pouches.

“We'll throw you a line,” the pilot called.

The swimmer appeared surprised.

“Why?” he asked.

This stumped the pilot for a moment, but he recovered himself and explained, “To haul you aboard with.”

Doc Savage was looking with fascination at the amazing red whiskers which the swimmer possessed, reflecting that they must be at least two feet long.

The swimmer was contemplating the pilot thoughtfully.

“No, thanks,” he said.

“We've got to have something to pull you aboard with,” the pilot said.

“I don't see why,” said the owner of the red whiskers.

“How do you expect to get on the plane, then?” demanded the pilot, who seemed to be becoming exasperated.

“I don't,” said the swimmer.

The pilot scratched his head, thinking this over.

The fiery-whiskered swimmer grinned pleasantly and began quoting poetry. He said:

“Hope tells a flattering tale,

“Delusive, vain, and hollow.

“Ah! let not hope prevail,

“Lest disappointment follow.”

AN astonished silence fell over the plane, lasted some moments, until the co-pilot broke it by saying softly, “Well, I'll be damned!”

The pilot said, “You mean you don't want to be rescued?”

“That's right.”

“Why not?”

“Don't need rescuing.”

“The nearest land,” said the pilot sharply, “is twenty miles away.”

“Twenty-two and five-tenths miles,” the swimmer corrected.

The pilot scratched his head some more, then said, “I don't get this.”

“How disappointment tracks the steps of hope,” the swimmer remarked.

This was obviously another quotation, and Doc Savage dug around in his memory until he recalled that it was a quote of L. E. Landon. The other one, the poetry, had been from *The Universal Songster*, by a Miss Wrother, indicating that red-whiskers was versed in lesser-known literary works. Doc frowned at the fellow, examining him for signs of insanity.

The pilot, trying a different method, made his tone conversational and asked, “Mind telling me your name?”

“Not at all,” said the swimmer. “I'm Disappointed Smith.”

“Where you headed for?”

The possessor of the crimson chin foliage shook his head.

“That's my private business,” he said.

“You'd better come aboard,” the pilot urged.

“No, thanks.”

“Are you afraid of airplanes?”

“Nope.”

“Mind waiting around a minute?” the pilot asked.

“I got plenty of time.”

The pilot re-entered the plane, came down the aisle and stopped before Doc Savage. “Mr. Savage, I just remembered that you're a doctor, and so you might be able to tell me whether or not that guy is nuts. Is he?”

Doc Savage looked at Disappointed Smith once more. “He acts and sounds sane enough. But the catch is that what he is doing and saying doesn't fit in with our ideas of what a man found swimming twenty miles from land should do and say.”

This wasn't conclusive enough for the pilot. “Is he batty?”

“It would depend on whether his reasons for being where he is are rational ones.”

“Can't you tell whether he's crazy?”

“By looking at him for five minutes from a distance of thirty feet, and looking at only his head, at that? I'm not a magician.”

The pilot took another look through the window.

“My God!” he gasped.

The flame-bearded giant had calmly unfastened one of his waterproof pouches from his belt, opened it, and was consuming a sandwich which he had removed therefrom.

A silence fell, the pilot appearing to be baffled as to what measures to take next, and no one else aboard having anything constructive to offer. The pilot was in charge of the plane, anyway, and it was his headache.

SUDDENLY the pilot growled, “I'm going to take that guy aboard whether he likes it or not.”

He scrambled outside.

He shouted, “Listen, you, cut out that foolishness and come aboard.”

As though surprised at the violent tone, the swimmer hastily swallowed the portion of sandwich he was chewing and eyed the pilot. Presently he delivered another quotation.

“Mean spirits under disappointment, like small beer in a thunderstorm, always turn sour,” he quoted.

The pilot wheeled angrily to the stewardess and said, “Grace, hand me the line off that life preserver, and I'll lasso the fool.”

The lassoing was unsuccessful, although the red-beard seemed to enjoy it. He would sink each time the rope looped toward him, to bob up a few feet away uncaptured and grinning.

The pilot turned ugly. He was armed, as are most pilots carrying the mails. He whipped out a revolver, leveled it.

“Now get aboard!” he ordered. “Or do you want to be shot?”

Doc Savage, to his disappointment, missed what immediately followed. The ugliness in the pilot's tone startled him, he thought the man sounded as if he actually might shoot the swimmer, which would be uncalled for, and Doc was trying to get a look at the pilot to see whether the man was really going to commit a murder. So he didn't see what the swimmer did. But he saw the results.

There was the sharp slam of a shot. The pilot dodged wildly, pitched inside the plane, but not before his natty uniform cap had sailed off his head.

Doc turned his gaze to the swimmer. The bearded young man—and he had to be young with that marvelously muscled body—was calmly sacking the revolver which he had used to shoot the pilot's cap off his head. He drew the sack opening tight with a waterproof zipper arrangement, hung it at his belt, and calmly dived.

It was possible to follow his progress through the water. He swam to the plane, and in a moment his fist pounded angrily on the hull. Then he was shouting:

“Get out of here and leave me alone, or I'll start shooting holes through the bottom of this airplane.”

The pilot hurriedly picked himself off the cabin floor, scrambled forward into the control compartment, and in a few moments the plane took the air.

Once in the air, the plane made a climbing turn and passed back over the swimmer, who lifted one arm and gaily waved them a farewell. He was holding some object in one hand; one of the other passengers gasped that this was the gun, but Doc Savage rather thought it was a small thermos bottle which might contain hot coffee.

The remainder of the flight as far as Yarmouth, became a sociable junket, contrasting to the dignified earlier part of the trip from Boston, when almost none of the passengers had spoken to each other. The ice was now broken; everybody wanted to talk about the herculean red-headed and red-bearded and short-tempered swimmer.

Doc Savage participated in the discussion; he couldn't very well avoid it, because his opinion was frequently being asked. He discovered that everyone aboard knew his identity, the stewardess having broadcast the information.

What did he think? Did he consider the swimmer demented? If sane, why was the flame-whiskered fellow paddling his way across the ocean? He couldn't be sane, could he?

A fat man in the fish-buying business said slyly, "This inexplicable incident couldn't be connected with your profession, could it Mr. Savage?"

Doc said he didn't suppose so, and suddenly he felt that several other passengers suspected the incident had happened because he was aboard the plane.

Discouraged, he took to his seat and avoided more talk. He no longer felt one of the crowd. He suspected the passengers regarded him as someone who went around dragging thunder and lightning, like a dog with a can tied to its tail.

He thought about his reason for going to Nova Scotia, and could see nothing about it that promised excitement.

It was quite simple. He was going to Yarmouth, Nova Scotia, to buy some boats and make a bit of change. Boat-buying was not his business, but a man named Si Hedges had telephoned him that he, Hedges, had obtained a number of first-class, small, war surplus steamships, and that he would re-sell them to Doc at a figure which would make him some money. Doc Savage was not acquainted with Si Hedges, so the offer had puzzled him until Hedges explained that Doc had once done a considerable favor for Hedges' brother-in-law, Wilbur C. Tidings, and that Hedges would like to repay the debt. Hedges wasn't, he explained, giving away anything; he was merely giving Doc an opportunity to make some money. Doc remembered Wilbur C. Tidings, the brother-in-law, recalled the favor he had done Tidings, and Hedges sounded sincere. So here Doc was.

Nothing mysterious about his coming to Yarmouth.

THE airline must have thought the story of the red-whiskered swimmer, Disappointed Smith, would make favorable publicity, because newspaper reporters were on hand when the plane reached Yarmouth. The pilot was photographed, the bullet hole in his cap was photographed—he had recovered the cap—and the photographers expressed disappointment because the stewardess hadn't been more actively involved, then photographed her anyway.

Doc Savage, pleased at not being the focus of publicity, let himself be filmed, and answered the reporters' questions, really something unusual for him to do. He was in a mellow mood, since he did not

feel himself concerned.

No, he wouldn't say definitely that the swimmer was crazy. Yes, the fellow was really a muscular giant. Yes, the man had been carrying his lunch. Indeed it had been an unique experience. Yes, indeed.

It was a fine sunlit afternoon, the reporters were intelligent and polite, and Doc was able to excuse himself after he had answered their routine questions, including the statement that he was in Yarmouth to buy boats.

Engaging a taxi, Doc Savage had himself driven to the *Central House* Hotel.

Si Hedges, the man who had the boats to sell, had made a five-o'clock appointment for a meeting at the hostelry.

"Clark Savage to see Mr. Si Hedges," Doc told the desk clerk.

The hotel desk clerk was a slender young man with pomaded hair, a weak chin and nervous blue eyes, and he jumped visibly. The jump was followed by confusion and nervousness, and the young man busied himself lighting a cigarette. Doc Savage, observing these symptoms of uneasiness, was puzzled.

"I beg pardon," Doc said. "Did you hear my question?"

"Yes, sir," the weak-looking young man said, and hurriedly struck a match, applying the flame to his cigarette. His hand trembled.

Doc Savage, looking at the slicked and pomaded fellow without much liking, reflected that the young man's weak looks might mean nothing. Doc, in his time, had met some very tough lads who looked like zoot-suiters.

"If you'll excuse me, I'll call Mr. Flinch, the manager," said the clerk nervously.

Mr. Flinch, the hotel manager, was quite a contrast. He was a man made of jaw and shoulders, and his small dark eyes were as immovable as if cast of glass.

"Mr. Flinch, this gentleman is asking about Si Hedges," the clerk said.

Mr. Flinch's jaw moved forward formidably, giving him an angry look, and he spoke in a voice which sounded as if there was gravel in his throat.

"We don't like people giving phony names around our hotel," he said. "There's a law against it. And we don't like it anyway."

"It isn't a very reputable practice," Doc Savage agreed, recalling a number of times when he himself had used a phony name.

"He'd of got away with it, too," continued Mr. Flinch. "But it just happened I knew the bloater's right name. And his right name wasn't Si Hedges."

Doc Savage frowned thoughtfully, then explained, "I came to Yarmouth with the expectation of purchasing a quantity of boats from a man who identified himself by telephone as Si Hedges, but whom I had not previously met. Naturally I would not want to be victimized in a business deal, so I would appreciate any information you can give me."

"I don't know anything about your business," said Mr. Flinch.

“Naturally not, but I am sure I can depend on your frank opinion.”

Doc's private feeling was that one might do well not to put too much trust in anything Mr. Flinch said. Mr. Flinch impressed him as a sawed-off shark.

“I just know this Si Hedges didn't give his real name when he registered here,” Mr. Flinch said.

“What,” inquired Doc Savage, “was his real name?”

“Disappointed Smith,” said Mr. Flinch emphatically.

Chapter II

FOR a time Doc Savage rested on his heels, where he had been jolted by surprise. His thinking machinery, because of the shock, failed him for a few moments.

Recovering his speech, he said, “That is quite interesting.”

“Fishy is the way it looked to me,” said Mr. Flinch, scowling. “We run a straight hotel here, no crooks and no rough stuff. And no phony names, particularly from a character like this Disappointed Smith.”

Doc Savage wondered if the Disappointed Smith who had tried to pretend to be Si Hedges was the same individual who was doing the trans-ocean swimming.

“What,” Doc inquired, “does this Disappointed Smith look like? Will you describe him?”

Mr. Flinch could describe him. “Take Tarzan of the Apes and hang two feet of fire-red whiskers on him. Take an earthquake and put pants on it. Take an encyclopedia and make it talk.”

“All of that?” Doc asked.

“Yes. And then some.”

“He must be interesting.”

“This hotel isn't interested in him,” said Mr. Flinch emphatically.

“Why not?”

“Because we don't want the place torn to pieces a brick at a time!”

“You are speaking figuratively, of course,” Doc suggested. “One man could hardly disintegrate your hotel a brick at a time.”

“I wouldn't take any bets that Disappointed Smith couldn't,” said Mr. Flinch grimly.

“You seem to know this Smith quite well,” Doc said.

Mr. Flinch shuddered. “I only seen him once before, on Parade Island, off the Maine coast. That was about a year ago. It was in a joint, and a fight started and Disappointed Smith whipped eleven men single-handed. Somebody said it was only eight, but I counted them and there were eleven. That was right after Smith was reported to have captured a German submarine single-handed, not capturing it to turn it over to the British navy, but to steal it for himself. However, the submarine sank, because he didn't know how to run the thing. He made it submerge, but he couldn't get it to come up again, so he didn't get

to steal it after all.”

“Would you call taking a submarine away from the Nazis an act of stealing?” Doc asked thoughtfully.

“That’s a technicality, and I don’t know nothing about technicalities. To me it was stealing,” said Mr. Flinch.

“I see.”

“When you take something you don’t own, it’s stealing,” insisted Mr. Flinch stubbornly.

“What else do you know about Smith?”

“That’s all. I only seem him that once.”

And quite an impression he made on you, Doc Savage reflected, concealing a smile. He did not believe a word of the fable he had just heard, but it made interesting listening.

“Did I,” Doc asked, “understand you to say that Disappointed Smith, alias Si Hedges, engaged a room in your hotel?”

“That’s right.”

“What room?”

“Two-fourteen.”

“Did he occupy the room?”

“He did until we asked him to leave.”

“He is not in the room now?” Doc asked, reflecting that it would be a miracle indeed if he were.

“No.”

“Is the room occupied by anyone now?”

“It ain’t been rented again, no. Disappointed Smith paid a night’s rent in advance, which we offered to refund, but he was mad and wouldn’t take it, so technically he still has the room. We don’t want no trouble, so we haven’t rented it to anyone else.”

“When,” Doc asked, “did you eject Disappointed Smith from the premises?”

“I wouldn’t call it eject,” said Mr. Flinch. “We just asked him to leave, and considered ourselves damned lucky when he didn’t put up an objection. It was about noon.”

“He did not object to being thrown out?”

“No.”

“Do you,” Doc asked, “have any aversion to my taking a look at Disappointed Smith’s empty room?”

Mr. Flinch scowled.

“You can’t look in his room,” he said. “We don’t want any trouble stirred up around this hotel.”

DOC SAVAGE looked at Mr. Flinch thoughtfully, and reaffirmed his earlier thought that Mr. Flinch looked like a shark, and was probably dishonest. A man who affirmed his honesty so frequently must have the subject on his mind, and it was further Doc's experience that crooks liked to discuss their own honest qualities. The same probably applied to the man's protestations about the good name of the hotel. It was probably a first-rate rat-hole.

"Excuse me a moment," Doc Savage said politely.

He moved to the telephone, consulted the directory which was lying beside the instrument, looking up the number of the local headquarters of constabulary. He called the number, asked for the official in charge, and proceeded to identify himself as Doc Savage, of New York City, holder of a special courtesy commission of Inspector on the New York metropolitan police force, and likewise holder of a courtesy commission with Scotland Yard. This over with, he got down to the purpose of the call.

He wished, he explained, to know whether the police would exert a little influence on Mr. Flinch, so Flinch would permit Doc to examine a room in the hostelry.

"Put that yegg Flinch on the wire," said the Yarmouth police official, "and I'll tell him you can search his whole thief-roost of a hotel if you want to!"

Doc passed the telephone to Mr. Flinch, who listened with mingled emotions, then hung up.

"That call will cost you a dime," said Mr. Flinch bitterly.

"Do I get to look at the room?"

"Why'n't you tell me you was a cop? You wouldn't of had to make that call."

"I'm not a cop. I'm merely a man who has a few cops for friends," Doc corrected him.

"You want us to go to the room with you?" asked Mr. Flinch sourly.

"You needn't trouble."

Mr. Flinch tossed a key on the desk. He didn't seem overjoyed.

The hotel had no elevator, and Doc Savage moved toward the stairs, but two other thoughts occurred to him, and he retraced his way to Mr. Flinch, to whom he put the question:

"Does Disappointed Smith usually travel across the Bay of Fundy by swimming?"

"Huh?" said Mr. Flinch blankly.

"Never mind," Doc said. "I am going to use your telephone again."

The telephone call he placed was to the office of the Associated Press, a news gathering agency which had access to all the news which the newspapers got.

"Are any plans being made to pick up that red-whiskered swimmer?" Doc asked.

"That crazy business is creating quite a commotion," the A. P. man said. "It's the sort of goofy thing people like to read about these days, so I imagine there'll be quite a bit of copy filed about it, and they may send up special correspondents from Boston. Sure, they're going to rescue him. A cabin cruiser is

on its way to the spot, and two private airplanes, and another airplane is on its way from Boston carrying a newsreel photographer.”

“If he is picked up, will he be brought here to Yarmouth?” Doc asked.

“That's right.”

Doc Savage thanked him, hung up, passed the scowling Mr. Flinch, noted the pomaded clerk was nervously taking a cigarette out of a package although there was a lighted one already between his lips, climbed the stairs, found two-fourteen—the room Disappointed Smith alias Si Hedges had purportedly rented—got the key out of his pocket, unlocked the door, entered, and was presented with a view of the business-end of a large revolver held by a quarrelsome-looking but lovely girl.

THE gun and the young woman's hair were about the same shade of caliginous blue, while her eyes were an electric shade of blue-green, which was also, judging from appearances, about the color of her temper.

Doc Savage managed to refrain from jumping too violently, noted the firearm, then inspected the girl hastily to see if she was going to shoot.

She shoved out her lower lip at him.

“What do you want here, you big ox?” she asked.

Doc said, “I'm sorry, I must have gotten into the wrong room.”

The girl had a pleasant Alberta peach complexion and wore tan twill slacks and a blue sweater which were effectively filled where they should be. But Doc Savage decided he had never seen a more quarrelsome-looking girl, and added the thought that there were some signs that being quarrelsome was a habit with her.

She demanded, “Whose room did you think you were getting into?”

“The room of a Mr. Si Hedges.”

“You got the right one,” she said, sounding as if she wished he would start something.

The room, Doc discovered, was a mess. There were plenty of signs of a fight in the place, indications including a broken chair, an upset table, wrinkles in the rug, and a few bloodstains, the latter not entirely dry.

“Someone have a fight?” Doc asked.

“Where'd you get the key to this room, handsome?” the young woman demanded.

“Downstairs. From the manager.”

“Flinch gave it to you, did he? Are you a friend of old brassy-jaws?”

Doc smiled slightly at the reference to Mr. Flinch as brassy-jaws. It was a good descriptive, he thought. He denied that he was a friend of Mr. Flinch. “It was not until admonished by the police that he gave me the key,” he explained.

“Oh, a bobby,” the girl said unpleasantly.

“I am not a police officer. My name is Savage. Clark Savage, of New York,” Doc explained.

“If you expect your being from New York impresses me, jump again,” the young woman said. “What are you, an actor?”

“Whatever gives you the impression I'm an actor?” Doc asked. He was surprised.

“You look like one. You're a big, handsome lug.”

“On the contrary, most of the very best actors are rather homely. That is something you'll realize as you grow older.”

The young woman decided to take offense at this. “I'm old enough to know an actor when I see one. You've got the manner, like you were walking onto a stage. That's the way you came in here, as if walking on stage.”

“You astonished me,” Doc explained.

“Well, astonish yourself right out of here again,” she directed. “I didn't invite you in here, and I don't want your company.”

He asked curiously, “Is this your customary manner?”

“What manner?”

“Glaring at people and throwing words at them as if you were using rocks.”

“If you don't like my manner, you know what you can do. The door is open,” she said.

DOC SAVAGE moved over to the bloodstain, which was on the worn and not too clean earth-colored rug, and tested the freshness of the stain with his fingertip, at the same time keeping a wary eye on the young woman and her firearm. But she was dangling the weapon idly. She seemed curious.

“It's not red ink,” Doc remarked, examining his fingertip.

She didn't say anything.

“I'm not an actor,” Doc said. “As a matter of fact, I received a telephone call from a Mr. Si Hedges, with whom I was unacquainted, offering to sell me several small ships at a nice price, and making an appointment to discuss the deal here at the hotel. Coming over from the mainland by plane, we encountered a man swimming in the ocean twenty miles from land, a man who said his name was Disappointed Smith. Mr. Flinch just assured me Si Hedges and Disappointed Smith were one and the same individual. Naturally my curiosity was aroused, which is why I'm here.”

“Curiosity,” she said, “is what kills cats.”

“So they say.”

“Disappointed Smith and Si Hedges are the same fellow, and both of him are rascals,” she said grimly.

“I gather you don't like him.”

“That's correct gathering.”

“Do you,” Doc asked, “suppose he was contemplating swindling me?”

“He couldn't be contemplating anything else, not and still be Disappointed Smith,” she said.

“I'm very grateful for that information.”

She decided to become angry about this, and demanded, “Why should I care whether or not you get hooked? You're nothing to me. I don't even trust you. I never did trust big handsome guys who seem to know too well what they're doing.”

Doc Savage found that he was rather pleased with the difference in this young woman and most young women who usually didn't say what they were thinking when they talked to him.

“Does Disappointed Smith mean something to you?” he inquired.

“I had a date with the big thatch of whiskers,” she said. “I came up here about ten o'clock this morning to tell him it was off, that I would rather date an alligator. He was upsetting the room, turning over that table and breaking the chair, and making a cut in his finger and letting the blood drip on the rug. He said he was fixing up a joke, which I think was true.”

“Why do you think he would disarrange the room and put blood on the floor as a joke?”

Angry again, she said, “Listen, I know how Smith's mind works! Something like that fits right in with his idea of a joke.”

“I see.”

“I'm glad you do!” she snapped. “And in case you're wondering what I'm doing here, I came up about five minutes ago to tell the red-whiskered barrel of snakes I wouldn't date him.”

“Hadn't you already told him that this morning?” Doc inquired.

“I was going to tell him again.”

“Oh, you wished him to understand thoroughly you did not desire his company.”

She gave Doc a look of contempt and rage and said, “I didn't wish him to understand any such thing. I was going to date him, because there's nobody I enjoy insulting more.”

“Oh!” Doc was genuinely astonished.

“When I insult most men, it's like kicking a sheep. Like insulting you. No joy to it. But when you hang a nasty remark on Disappointed Smith, he reciprocates. He hands back as much as he gets, frequently more. Quarreling with him is a pleasure.”

“Would you rather I would insult back at you?” Doc asked.

“You can try if you want to,” she said shortly. “But you wouldn't be any good at it. You weren't born to

it. You have to be a born insulter.”

“What,” Doc asked, “is your name?”

“I don't see that it's your business. But it's Mix. Mix Walden.”

“Well, Miss Walden, it has been very interesting meeting you,” Doc said heartily. “However, this blood on the floor isn't quite dry, and it seems to me that, on an oppressively hot day like this, it should be dry by now if it was spilled there before noon.”

She sniffed loudly.

“Disappointed Smith's blood would just be contrary enough not to dry,” she said.

Doc smiled. He walked slowly about the room, examining everything carefully, noticing that the evidences of a fight seemed rather genuine to be faked, but observing nothing else of value.

“Shall we leave?” he asked.

“I'll go as far as the lobby with you,” said Miss Mix Walden. “But no farther. I don't trust you, and I don't like you.”

“You can trust me not to become amorous,” he said dryly.

“If I thought you were a wolf, I'd encourage you, then get a lot of pleasure out of sticking my thumb in your eye,” she snapped. “But you're a gentleman. Gentlemen are doormats. They don't interest me.”

MR. FLINCH, the manager, and his pomaded clerk seemed to have recovered their composes, Doc Savage noticed when he and the quarrelsome Miss Walden entered the lobby. He parted from Miss Walden in the lobby, assuring her, “Meeting you has been a fresh experience.”

“Good-bye, doormat!” she said angrily, and departed.

Doc Savage looked after her with pleasure, for he had enjoyed encountering her. He had enjoyed meeting, if the plane incident could be called a meeting, Disappointed Smith. It was not often that he encountered such screwball characters, and he found it interesting.

There was a flavor of mystery that helped whet his interest, too, and he further suspected that one or more individuals had been telling him some whopping lies. He didn't know who.

He caught Mr. Flinch's piggish eye, and the eye hastily fled elsewhere, whereupon he was tempted to go over and grasp Mr. Flinch's thick throat and give an imitation of the fabulous Disappointed Smith, on the chance that this would frighten some truth out of the hotelkeeper. He wasn't positive Mr. Flinch had lied to him, but he didn't like Mr. Flinch. Mr. Flinch was someone not even a mother could like.

Doc Savage decided that he was hungry, noticed that the Central House Hotel had a dining room, but concluded that there would be less likelihood of ptomaine elsewhere, and left the hostelry. The sunlight seemed brighter, as bright as diamonds, hurting his eyes, and he noted further that the stillness of the air had increased until it was tangibly unpleasant, the tree leaves being as motionless as if painted on glass, the air having a hot dry quality of being charged with heat from a furnace.

A visit by such heat, he recalled, was unusual in Nova Scotia in August. Doc recalled the swimmer, and reflected that he, at least, would be benefitted by the heat wave. Usually, the Bay of Fundy was not

warm enough to make comfortable swimming, but this weather should warm up the surface water. He began to look for a thermometer as he walked down the street, presently discovering one in a jewelry store window. He wasn't surprised that several persons were standing looking at the thermometer.

He looked himself. It was hot. It was hot enough to surprise him.

"It's quite a surprise," remarked one of the observers, "to find the thermometer says it's hotter than you thought it was."

"Yes, it is," Doc agreed, noticing that the speaker was a lean, capable, well-dressed man with a fine-grained skin darkened to the color of walnut by the sun.

"A man," the stranger said, "could avoid this heat."

The fellow had, Doc realized, a rather hard, well-oiled voice that was somehow unpleasant.

"If he could find an air-conditioned restaurant, he could," Doc agreed.

"There's another way." The man paused meaningfully, then added, "Now would be a good time for a man to get back to Philadelphia or New York or someplace where they don't have such hot weather."

"Maybe it will cool off."

"It won't."

"I hadn't heard about the heat wave," Doc remarked. "I've been traveling and haven't seen the newspapers or listened to a radio."

"Just get here?"

"Yes."

"If you're smart," the man said, "you'll turn right around and go back. Probably be too hot for you here."

The man then turned and walked off, leaving Doc Savage gazing after him quizzically and wondering if what he had just received was a not very thinly disguised warning, or whether it had merely sounded like that because the man had a hard, oiled voice.

The man had a notch out of the top part of his right ear, Doc noted.

Chapter III

THE broiled lobster and French fries in a restaurant named the *Captain's Table* were excellent, and Doc Savage enjoyed them as well as the coffee which followed, as black as a pirate's soul and as strong as the legendary Disappointed Smith. The sum on the check was a little jarring, but he paid it and dropped one of the coins he received in change into the telephone. He got the Associated Press again.

The A. P. bureau correspondent, rather excited, said, "I was right about that red-whiskered swimmer turning out to be a hot story. You know what he did? Refused again to be rescued. The two seaplanes landed near him on the sea, but couldn't persuade him to come aboard. Then the cabin cruiser I mentioned got there, and they tried to reason with the guy, but he wouldn't be rescued. They tried to

catch him, but couldn't. The guy swims like a seal. You know what he told them? He said he was on his way to Bermuda, swimming! He said further that, after he did some sightseeing in Bermuda, he was going to swim back to New York and have a look at the night life."

"Disappointed Smith seems to be quite a kidder," Doc said.

"He's crazy as a forty-cent cuckoo clock."

"What else has happened?"

"The newsreel plane from Boston got there, circled around and took some pictures, then landed and took some more. Red-whiskers put on quite a show for them, but gave them hell because they only had a camera, and no sound-recording apparatus. He insisted he wanted to make a speech about evolution, about how man was a fish in the beginning, and how he has reverted to ancestral type. The newsreel man thought it was good stuff, and he's gone tearing back to Boston to get a sound recorder put on the plane, so whiskers can make his speech."

"They haven't rescued him, then?"

"No. He took two shots at the cabin cruiser, and they're leaving him alone."

"How did you get all this news?"

"By radio," the A. P. man said. "Both planes and the cabin cruiser have two-way radios."

"I thank you very much for your information," Doc said. "I had hoped they would bring Disappointed Smith to Yarmouth. I'm rather interested in meeting him."

"He's sure an unusual goof, all right."

"Also," Doc added, "I wonder if you could tell me where I can charter a seaplane to take me out to meet the fellow."

"By gosh, are you that interested?"

"Yes."

The news-service man pondered for a while, then explained regretfully, "I don't think there's a seaplane available here in Yarmouth now, because those other two went on to the Maine coast."

"What about the chances of hiring a fast boat?"

"You might do that. In fact, I know a party who has an express cruiser that's sea-going."

"Good. What is the name?"

"It's a woman. She just called up here and asked if we wanted to charter her boat to take newspapermen out to the swimmer, but my boss said the A. P. wouldn't cough up money for expenses, so I had to turn her down. She said, if I heard of anybody who wanted to rent a boat, to tell them about her. Name's Miss Jane. Boat is the *Zipper*. Laying at the Royal East dock. You know where that is?"

"I know where it is," Doc said. "And thanks."

"You wouldn't want to do a signed story about this for us?"

“Newspaper writing isn't my line. Sorry.”

THE Royal East dock, maintained as part of the service of one of the finest hotels in Nova Scotia, was not far distant and Doc walked, presently passing through an impressive gateway and along lovely promenades of flowers beyond which he had glimpses of the hotel itself. Shortly he came to the dock.

For some reason or other docks are usually shabby rattle-trap affairs, but this one was sturdy and neat. Four boats were lying alongside the dock, one a small Marconi-rigged racing sloop, another a schooner of the Chesapeake Bay bugeye type, the third a rather impressive houseboat, and the fourth a long, snaky express cruiser carrying more brasswork than an admiral. This last was the *Zipper*.

The resplendence of the boat was a surprise, for the hooker was unquestionably about thirty-five thousand dollars worth of lovingly cared-for teak, mahogany, chrome, super charged engines and Moroccan leather. It was the kind of a boat the capitalists used to be accused of riding around in. It was, Doc Savage reflected, not the kind of a boat one would expect to find being offered for rent. His next thought was that he probably couldn't afford to rent it himself, particularly since it appeared that some strange things were happening to his boat deal.

He went aboard.

There was no one in sight. But presently he heard sounds of movement below deck, and he called down a gleaming companionway, “Ahoy, Miss Jane!”

Flying back at him came a quarrelsome: “This is a private boat, in case you didn't know it! What do you want, stupid?”

Doc started; he felt his mouth was probably hanging open enough to catch flies. That voice was remarkably familiar, as was the quarrelsome manner.

“Miss Walden?” he inquired.

“Of course, dummy,” the quarrelsome female voice said. “If you're scuffing up that deck with your shoes, you're going to wish you hadn't. What do you want? Can't you answer a question?”

“You get around, don't you?” Doc asked.

This caused a silence below, then the peevish voice said, “What kind of talk is that? What are you, a nut?”

“I believe you referred to me as a doormat,” Doc said.

“What are you talking about?” the quarrelsome female demanded.

She thrust her head out of the companionway.

“Oh!” said Doc Savage in astonishment.

This wasn't the quarrelsome girl he had met at the hotel.

THE young woman was long and well-curved, in many places better curved than the other one had been, but whereas the other quarrelsome girl had been a gun-barrel brunette, this one was a wheat-field

blonde. A very ripe and attractive wheat field, too. She rested her elbows on the companion railing, contemplated Doc Savage much as if he were a stray tomcat, and finally suggested, "Push your eyes back in your head and say something, Handsome. Or better still, go away. I'm busy."

"I wonder," said Doc Savage, "if you're also not going to like me?"

She frowned. "Eh? Come again."

"I am," Doc explained, "Clark Savage."

She looked him up and down, then astonished him greatly by saying, "So you took the bait."

"I what?"

"Grabbed the bait, also the hook, line and sinker," she said.

"Did I?"

"Sucker!"

He found himself getting confused. "I don't believe I'm following this conversation," he said uncertainly. "If I had consumed any bait, I was unaware of it."

"You're pretty dumb," she said unkindly. "Didn't you call Petey Jones, the Associated Press man, and didn't he let you know this boat was for rent?"

"That," Doc admitted, "is what happened."

"Okay, so you took the bait. When you heard a fast boat was for rent, I knew you'd be dumb enough to rush right down here to rent it. Here you are, which proves I was right. That was the bait, and you swallowed it. Is that clear enough, or would you like it in pictures?"

"Are you," Doc inquired, "also an artist?"

"In my way, you'd be surprised what an artist I am," she said.

"And what way would that be?"

"Favors."

"Eh?"

"I do people favors, and usually get small thanks for my trouble."

"Am I to take it," Doc asked curiously, "that you wish to do me a favor?"

She nodded. "That's right. But I can see right now you won't have the gumption to appreciate it."

"On the contrary, I've been told I'm quite an appreciative person," Doc assured her.

She eyed him. He decided there was a good deal of seriousness in her gaze. The realization hit him suddenly.

"There is," she said, "a passenger airliner due in here from Boston at six o'clock. It stays here one hour, while they refuel and check things, then it goes back to Boston."

He didn't comment.

"Anyone with half his marbles," she said, "would catch that plane back to Boston."

"Is that a warning?"

She nodded grimly. "You bet it is."

THERE was a comfortable chrome and red leather chair in the cockpit and Doc Savage sank into this, feeling an abrupt need to relax and think, for he was more confused than he had expected to be. He was also bothered by the conviction that this quarrelsome girl was quite worried about him, or worried about something, at least. He decided to ask some questions that would straighten out a little of the surface confusion.

He said, "You answered to the name of Walden."

"And why not?" she asked curtly.

"Also to the name of Jane."

"I'm Jane Walden. Say, you are light on mentality, aren't you?"

He pretended not to notice this insult, and remarked, "I recently encountered a young lady who possessed certain characteristics of voice and disposition similar to yours. She gave her name as Mix Walden."

"My kid sis," said Jane.

"I see," Doc Savage said, noticing a flash of emotion, which he took to be alarm, in Jane's eyes. "That would account for the similarity between you."

"Don't," said Jane, "fool yourself about that similarity."

"Eh?"

"It's only on the surface. Under the skin, we're nothing alike."

The distress in Jane's eyes, which she was trying to conceal, disturbed Doc Savage sufficiently that he moved his gaze to the shore a few yards distant, where the thick cultivated shrubbery stood completely motionless in the abnormally bright and still air.

"I think you're worried about your sister," he said.

"That's right," Jane said bluntly.

"Why?"

"Because she's my sister, and because we're nothing alike, if you can get the difference through your head. Mix likes trouble. I don't. Mix never worries. I do. Mix is always getting involved in something violent. I never do."

"Is Mix involved in something violent now?"

"I'm afraid she is."

“What is it?”

“I don't know.”

Doc Savage frowned at her and asked, “Is that the truth?”

She pounced on this as if she had been seeking something to get angry about, and snapped, “That's enough out of you, you big bunch of muscles! I do you a favor and get called a liar, which is about the thanks I expected. But I don't like it, and I've decided I don't like you, and I'm not going to waste my time on you. Get off this boat. If you've got half sense, which I doubt, you'll catch that Boston plane. Or stay, if you want to, and get into more trouble than you can handle. Suit yourself. Either way, I wash my hands of you. So go away. Beat it!”

“I would prefer,” Doc said, “to discuss matters farther.”

“You would, would you!” she exclaimed, her anger flaring. “I'll see about that.” She drew back into the sumptuous cabin, but reappeared almost immediately grasping a broom, which she flourished, saying, “Get off this boat, or I'll whale you good!”

“You're not,” Doc said, “doing this very gracefully. I think you are so worried that it is making your style crude.”

She didn't say anything more. He immediately concluded she was going to swat him with the broom, so he stood up hastily, facing the shore with the idea of escape, a move which possibly saved his life.

He discovered a man, a darkly sun-baked small-faced man who was a complete stranger, leaning partially through a shrub to aim carefully with a revolver. Doc flopped down in the cockpit.

The gun's voice was astonishingly loud. Doc, on his side, saw frightened birds leave the trees. He didn't exactly distinguish the bullet sound from the gun roar, but he didn't ponder about that. He was convinced the shot was meant for him. He crawled into the boat cabin. Jane stood frozen, broom upraised, and he shoved her ahead of him sprawling into the cabin.

“Lie flat on the floor,” he advised. “I think the waterline will then be sufficiently above us to give protection. These express boats are heavy and sit rather deeply in the water.”

He thought, because of the extreme wordless horror she was registering, that she had not knowingly decoyed him for a bushwhacking.

Chapter IV

THERE was a rich carpet on the cabin floor, finely woven and with a deep pile, but not, as Doc Savage fervently wished were the case, possessing a nap two feet deep and made of bulletproof steel. He wondered if he were wrong about the waterline being high enough outside to form a parapet, and got no pleasure from the thought. There was not much else on his mind for a moment or so, since being shot at was an effective thought-suspender. This was not the first time in his life he had been shot at, but he was far from accustomed to it; he had heard soldiers say that it was possible to accept being shot at as a natural thing, almost, if you were exposed to enough of it, but he strongly doubted this. He could hear a frightened seagull squalling.

“Aren't you,” Jane asked, “going to do anything?”

He glanced at her, for a moment thinking she was unconcerned, but he saw she wasn't. She looked as shocked as he felt.

“I'm doing it now,” he said. “Is there a bilge in this thing big enough to crawl into?”

She shook her head, then examined him with what seemed to be surprise.

“So you're the famous Doc Savage I've been hearing about,” she remarked. “The notable Man of Bronze, the terror of crooks, righter of wrongs, punisher of evildoers.”

He was irked by her disapproval.

“I'm wary of many things, several of them being bullets,” he informed her.

He didn't like the way she said, “Obviously.”

“Was that fellow a pal of yours?” he demanded.

“I didn't see him.”

“He had a small face, brown hair, a very dark sunburn, and shoots left-handed.”

“I don't know him,” she said.

He was positive this was not true.

“Aren't you going to fight back?” she asked uneasily.

He shook his head. “This boat presents a wonderful target, and the dock is even more conspicuous. A blind man with a paddle could hit anyone who tried to go from here to shore on the dock. No, thanks.”

He imagined the sniper had already fled, since the shot had made a conspicuous amount of noise in the hotel grounds, but he did not intend to thrust any part of his person outside to test his theory.

He began wondering what would be the best method of extracting the truth, of which he was convinced she had withheld a considerable amount, from Jane.

He had the same urge he'd had toward Mr. Flinch, the hotel manager, to grasp her firmly by the throat and see what violence would fetch out. But he was restrained by an aversion to beating a female, although she might deserve it.

No one in Yarmouth, he reflected, seemed to be telling him whole truths.

EVENTUALLY there were voices on shore which he identified as belonging to hotel employees, and he ventured out on deck, whereupon the hotel people, a waiter and a clerk of some sort, approached, asking, “Did someone fire a shot?”

“It sounded like a shot,” Doc admitted. “Isn't there a law against discharging firearms in the town limits?”

The clerk said there was. “But the yachtsmen like to take potshots at fish, and there's nothing much you can do about it,” he added.

“Getting too close to someone with a gun,” Doc agreed, “is to invite being shot at.”

“The fish never seem to learn that,” the clerk said.

He and the other hotel man departed.

Jane eyed Doc Savage suspiciously and demanded, “Why didn't you tell them someone took a shot at you?”

“That,” Doc said, “might have been hard on your nerves.”

“You call that chivalry?”

“Perhaps.”

“I call it a threat,” she said grimly. “If you had told them you were shot at, you're implying, they would have arrested me as an accomplice. Isn't that what you're saying?”

“Excitement,” Doc said, “is making you forget yourself.”

“I—”

“It's making you forget to be quarrelsome.”

“I—”

“What you need,” he said, “is a cup of coffee. That's what we both need, I imagine.”

The stare she gave him, he was pleased to see, was bewildered. He thought he had her confused, and he liked that. Usually women confused him, and he appreciated the novelty of turning the tables.

Made almost gay by his satisfaction, he bustled around, finding the galley, locating the coffee pot, pumping water into it, and starting the gas burner. He remarked, “This is a very home-like boat, isn't it? So frequently these extremely fast craft have cramped accommodations.” He began measuring the coffee.

The quarrelsome young woman recovered some of her former manic with an effort and said, “That's no way to make coffee! What are you trying to do, make paint-remover? One spoonful of coffee to the cup is right, not five.”

“You brew, and I'll serve,” Doc said gallantly.

The cups he selected were, fortunately, white, which was also the approximate color of the powder which he extracted from a phial that was in a small case with other glass phials in his pocket. The powder, after he poured it into the cup he intended giving her, was not very noticeable, and he had the added good luck to be able to pour her coffee first, so that she did not notice the powder.

“This is terrible coffee,” she said. “You ruined it before I took over.”

“What you're tasting,” he suggested, “must be the acid in your own disposition.”

She seemed pleased, and drank it all while trying to think of something quarrelsome to say to him.

AT the end of half an hour Jane was not entirely asleep, but she was sufficiently knocked out from the effects of the potion he had administered that he no longer had to restrain her physically. In the interval, however, she realized she had been drugged, managed to scratch his nose, kick both of his shins, and bite the palm of the hand which he was forced to clamp over her mouth to muffle her attempt to yell. Groggy now, she stared at him with vague rage, and her resistance, what there was, was not very well coordinated.

“Young lady,” he told her, “I have plans for a conversation with you, which unfortunately, time does not permit right now. There is a character named Disappointed Smith who requires attention before it gets too dark to find him. So I'm going to put you on ice until I return.”

He doubted if she understood him.

He scouted the ship's lazaret, the one that was a wine cellar, found it well stocked, and selected a dark rum noted for its odor. He applied a couple of spoonfuls of the beverage to the young woman's frock, then replaced the bottle, satisfied that one whiff would convince anybody she was crocked.

She was heavier than he had expected, a good hundred and thirty pounds. He walked with her up the dock and toward the swanky hotel.

The entrance he made into the hotel was amorous-seeming enough to embarrass him, although he made it through a side entrance, and, with an affectation of discretion, sent a bellboy for the desk clerk.

“The young lady,” he explained, “has over-indulged slightly. I would like to obtain a room where she can sleep it off, and I would prefer to do this as discreetly as possible.”

The hotel was displeased. He surmised that he was going to be thrown out, and hastily gave his name, which was effective to a limited extent. At least he got the room. However, an assistant manager accompanied him to the room, and by frowning an unspoken reminder that young ladies were not permitted gentlemen in their rooms without benefit of a marriage certificate.

Doc made Jane comfortable.

“This is very kind of you,” he told the assistant manager, who showed no enthusiasm.

Doc Savage left the hotel, went to the *Zipper*, checked the fuel tanks and found them full, cast off the springlines, started the engines, got out the Yarmouth harbor chart and headed out to sea. The boat, he found, was capable of remarkable speed.

Later he locked the wheel for a short time and went below to find and examine the owner's certificate, whereupon he felt some alarm. The boat didn't belong to Jane Walden. It belonged to someone named Stanley K. Foreman.

Apparently he had stolen a boat. This was piracy, a serious crime.

HE thought he might be able to reach Disappointed Smith about nightfall, since this was the season when the days were long, and the utter crystal clarity of the superheated sky promised that daylight would extend its fullest.

Provided, of course, that the phenomenal red-whiskered Neptune was still swimming, and had resisted

the blandishments of would-be rescuers and newsreel photographers. Doc trusted, and rather believed, that Disappointed Smith would still be swimming.

The express cruiser, roaring like a powerful airplane, kept little more than her stern on the sea. The craft had been designed, as to hull and power plant, with nothing but unadulterated speed in mind, and the designers had done a good job, because there was probably not another seaworthy vessel which could have kept up with her. The boat was as powerful as Smith was reported to be.

Doc Savage gave the subject of Smith some thought. Discounting what he supposed to be lies which he had been told about Smith's prowess, the red-whiskered young man still stood out as physically remarkable. He was much more interesting as a subject for thought in other respects. Doc did not believe Smith was insane. He didn't believe Smith's ancestors in the primeval past had necessarily been fish, and he didn't think Smith was swimming to Bermuda. That was all cockeyed. But he didn't feel that Disappointed Smith's reasons for taking the swim would turn out to be cockeyed.

It would be safe to bet, Doc believed, that it would develop that Smith was paddling in the ocean, and at just that particular spot in the ocean, for perfectly sound and sane reasons. Doc wasn't exactly sure why he was convinced of this, the feeling having congealed as a result of untenable processes in his subconscious mind, which had not yet come to the surface in his consciousness. That was probably the way a psychiatrist would explain it.

Anyone else would say it was a hunch.

Chapter V

FINDING Disappointed Smith proved to be no more difficult than locating an Income Tax collector on March Fifteenth. He was the most conspicuous object in that part of the ocean, due to the presence of a cabin cruiser, a yawl, a staysail rigged schooner, a sloop and two Nova Scotia dinghies, all circling the spot, together with three airplanes overhead, and another seaplane resting on the water. Atop the latter, a young man, wearing his cap backwards, was taking pictures with a 35-m.m. hand movie camera. He was requesting, as Doc Savage arrived on the scene, "Do that one again, Disappointed! That's good stuff."

Disappointed Smith proceeded to dive gracefully, sink to some depth, turn, streak upward, and—Doc could hardly believe his eyes—turn a neat somersault while almost completely out of the water.

"How was that, buddy?" Disappointed Smith asked the photographer.

"Great stuff, better than Weismuller," said the young man with the camera.

"Now I'll give you my imitation of a passionate whale," said Disappointed Smith.

"Damn it, I'm getting short of film," said the newsreel man. "If the imitation isn't too long—here! Here you! Sheer off! Whatcha think you're doin', gettin' on a subway train?"

This last was directed at Doc Savage, who had sent his boat nosing into the scene of action.

"Get outa camera range!" the young man added, bellowing.

Disappointed Smith, treading water gracefully, gazed at Doc Savage, and Doc had the impression that there was a considerable emotion behind the red whiskers. He couldn't tell what it was.

Presently Disappointed Smith delivered himself of a quotation. He quoted:

“Cut off even in the blossoms of my sin,

“Unhousell'd, disappointed, unaneled,

“No reckoning made, but sent to my account,

“With all my imperfections on my head.”

Doc Savage nodded approvingly and remarked, “From Shakespeare.”

“Ah,” said Disappointed Smith. “A scholar and a gentleman, I see.”

The newsreel man was jumping about excitedly, thrusting his head inside his plane and demanding of someone in there, “Cripes, haven't you got another blank record for that recorder? Just one more record? Did you hear what he just said? That's good.”

A weary voice inside the plane replied there were no more blanks, added that the owner was seasick, and wished to know when in the hell they were leaving.

Presently the cameraman ceased his leaping about, falling to ogling Doc Savage. He had recognized Doc. He gasped, “Holy Smoke, Doc Savage!” and clamped his camera to his eye.

Disappointed Smith grinned at Doc Savage. “You come to get my autograph?” he asked.

DOC SAVAGE shut off the express cruiser's large engines, which were idling, and leaned on the rail to inspect Smith. He remarked, “You seem to be in a more talkative frame of mind than when the plane found you.”

“I remember seeing you on the passenger plane,” said Disappointed Smith. “You were looking out of the third window from the front.”

“True.”

“You,” said Disappointed Smith, “were the guy they asked if I were crazy. I could hear them.”

“Also true.”

“I also heard your answer,” continued Smith, “which seemed somewhat evasive, neither assuring them I was sane or insane, nor giving a definite opinion. It was a typical doctor's answer, nothing that could be pinned on you later.”

“Right.”

“I,” said Disappointed Smith, “seem to be doing all the talking.”

“True again.”

The swimmer expanded his chest and bristled his whiskers. “I feel like talking,” he said. “This afternoon has mellowed me, because I like publicity, and I'm getting plenty of it. They're going to put me in the newsreels. Later, I imagine, some movie company will want to make me a star. Clark Gable and Johnny Weismuller had better watch out for their laurels.”

“I doubt it,” Doc said.

“Why?” asked Smith indignantly.

“Those whiskers,” Doc assured him, “would frighten the patrons out of the theaters.”

“You're crazy. I know what effect these whiskers have on the ladies. They swoon when they see 'em. I'll make Sinatra ashamed of himself.”

Doc Savage made no comment on this, but began removing his shirt and trousers and shoes.

Gazing at him in alarm, Disappointed Smith demanded, “What are you undressing for? What are you going to do?”

“I thought I would try the swimming, too,” Doc said. “How is the water?”

“You'd better not. There's sharks,” Smith said hastily.

“The sharks aren't bothering you.”

“Only because they know me, and they're afraid to mess around with me.”

“Then you can protect me.”

“Listen, I'll feed you to them,” said Disappointed Smith, sounding rather grim, as if he meant this.

Doc gave a quotation himself.

“The best enjoyment is half disappointment to what we intend or would have in this world,” he said.

Disappointed Smith scowled, “Hey, you're stealing my stuff! I get it! You're a publicity hog yourself, and you're trying to horn in.”

Doc Savage arranged a loop of rope over the side of the express cruiser so that he could climb back aboard without too much effort; then he poised at the rail and dived into the remarkably clear and not too cold water. He came to the surface facing, and no more than two feet from, Disappointed Smith.

“Here!” said Disappointed Smith. “I don't like this!”

Doc Savage grasped a handful of red whiskers. They were real, and made an excellent hand-grip. He and Disappointed Smith proceeded to have a fight.

DOC SAVAGE had taken the precaution of filling his lungs with air, which proved fortunate because his opponent immediately adopted submarine tactics, dragging them both beneath the surface. For the first minute—and one minute under water is probably one of the longest minutes there is—Disappointed Smith did nothing, evidently being full of confidence in his own lasting ability. They rested motionless, almost, in the glass-clear depths, able to see each other perfectly, and exchanging thoughtful looks. Ten seconds more passed; twenty and thirty. Disappointed Smith suddenly endeavored to insert a thumb in Doc's left eye, but was discouraged when Doc gave the remarkable whiskers a hard yanking. The beard seemed, under water, a brilliant, woodpecker-head red.

As they neared the two-minute mark under the surface, composure began to leave Smith. He made a snaky movement with his legs, attempting to clamp a wrestler's scissor hold around Doc's chest with the idea of squeezing the supply of air out of the bronze man's chest. Doc, however, managed to grasp one of Smith's toes. It was a large toe, an excellent handhold, and Doc gave it a twisting. A large bubble of air escaped Smith's lips, probably containing a shout of discomfort.

Maintaining a firm hold on Smith's chin foliage, Doc thrust the heel of his hand under Smith's nose, shoved with that hand and pulled with the other, this forcing Smith's mouth agape. Presently there was another bubble, followed by several more, and Smith began to fight the fight of a drowning man, inflicting some damage of a minor nature. Apparently he had waited too long to stage the flurry, because his fighting changed to frantic grasping, and eventually to the weakness of a suffocated man.

Doc swam to the surface with him, rather concerned about his own need for air.

Because of the clarity of the sea, the men in the newsreel plane, the occupants of the Nova Scotia dinghies and three men on the yawl had been able to watch the fracas.

The spectators, inoculated by the excitement that invariably seems contagious around a fight, were having some little difficulties of their own. The newsreel cameraman, dancing in excitement, had unwittingly stepped on the fabric-covered part of the seaplane wing, and both legs had gone through, causing him to become wedged like a cork in a bottle. The pilot of the plane, quite angry, was climbing from the cockpit waving a fire extinguisher which he asserted he intended employing to beat out the cameraman's brains. The yawl helmsman, seeking to bring his craft closer, unfortunately jibed, knocking one of his passengers overboard; a moment later he also ran down one of the Nova Scotia clinks, capsizing the smaller craft. Another dinghy occupant caught a crab with his oars, and fell overboard himself. Everyone concerned was expressing his feelings as loudly as possible.

Doc Savage, becoming confused, at first thought all the bellowing and splashing meant the spectators were preparing to mob him. Alarmed, he swam feverishly to the *Zipper*, climbed aboard and, not over-supplied with strength, dragged Disappointed Smith out of the water. Maintaining the spirit of the moment, his foot slipped and he fell back into the sea with Smith. He got Smith aboard on the second attempt, though.

Holding Disappointed Smith upside down, Doc drained most of the surplus water from the man, then spread him on the deck and administered artificial respiration in the conventional way. Almost at once Smith began to breathe and cough. Doc relieved him of the belt from which dangled the waterproof pouches, then gave his attention to the surrounding confusion.

THE owner of the yawl was promising to pay for the dinghy which he had run down, and take the occupants home, which seemed satisfactory to those concerned. The man who had caught the crab with his oars was back in his small craft with a foolish expression. The newsreel cameraman had prudently fallen the rest of the way through the seaplane wing into the ocean, and was listening to the pilot express himself. The pilot, now at the stage where he found it necessary to pause to think of additional profanity, seemed less enraged. He finally ended by assuring the cameraman he could swim back to Boston and be damned. Doc Savage doubted that he would carry out the threat, and thought the plane was still airworthy.

“This,” Doc Savage remarked, “seems to complete the rescue of Disappointed Smith.”

Smith, staging a remarkably quick recovery, managed to lift his head enough to observe the confusion. He seemed particularly disturbed at discovering the cameraman in the water.

“Did you lose that film you shot of me?” Smith demanded in alarm.

The pilot answered this, explaining, “All he lost was his dignity.”

Doc Savage observed the fire extinguisher which the pilot was holding, whereupon he reached inside the *Zipper's* cabin and secured a small extinguisher for himself, which he waved under Disappointed Smith's nose.

“Would you,” Doc asked, “prefer to be peaceful? Or do you want me to try this on your head for fit?”

Smith sneezed out some water.

He quoted: “Man must be disappointed with the lesser things of life before he can comprehend the full value of the greater.”

Doc took this bit from the writings of Bulwer to mean that Smith preferred peace, glanced over the scene to make doubly certain no one needed help, and started the *Zipper's* powerful engines.

The express cruiser swung gracefully under the helm, responded to the opened throttles, lifted its shining bow out of the sea and proceeded to do better than forty knots with ease. Doc set the course for Yarmouth, reflecting that it would be well after dark before they reached the harbor.

He was aware that Disappointed Smith was studying him in a puzzled fashion, but he did not take the first step into conversation.

“What,” asked Smith suddenly, “did you use for air?”

“The same thing you used,” Doc said.

Smith shook his head doubtfully. “I can dive deeper and stay down longer than any man on earth. I know what happened. I had been cutting capers for that newsreel guy, and you caught me when I was out of breath.”

“The whiskers helped,” Doc said.

Smith frowned, then nodded. “I never thought of it, but that's right. Like Sampson, my beard was my undoing. When I fight on land, people get tangled in my whiskers and that keeps them close enough for me to swat 'em. But this was different. Under water, a man can't swat.”

“Sampson had hair, not whiskers, didn't he?” Doc suggested.

“Ummmmm,” Smith said. “Why'd you go to all that trouble to rescue me?”

Doc smiled slightly.

“I am starting a collection of queer people,” he said. “You are number two.”

Confused, Smith lapsed into a lengthy silence.

THE night, a night of crystalline moonlight, enveloped the charging boat, and stars like a myriad of jeweled sparks appeared by magic, seemingly, against the fountain-pen-ink-blue of the sky. Phosphorescence, the weird phenomena usually most often present in tropical seas, was pronounced

here tonight; it stretched a straight lance of fire in the water behind them.

“Don't you,” Disappointed Smith asked suddenly, “want to know why I was swimming?”

Doc Savage was leaning back comfortably, keeping the course straight by resting a foot idly on the wheel.

He said, “You were on your way to Bermuda?”

Smith snorted. The snort was an inquiry whether Doc believed that.

“No, I don't believe it,” Doc said.

“Ummmmm,” Smith said.

“You're not crazy, either,” Doc added.

Smith grunted as though he would have preferred to be thought mentally unbalanced. He seemed worried, the concern having grown considerably since Doc's remark about making a collection.

“Do you,” Doc asked abruptly, “know a ship broker named Si Hedges?”

Smith seemed relieved. “No!” he said instantly.

“Your answer,” said Doc, “indicates you are relieved at the chance to tell a lie.”

“I like to keep in practice,” Smith said uneasily.

“Si Hedges is likely to get you into trouble.”

“That little saint? Pah!”

“Maybe he isn't a saint.”

“Bosh!” said Disappointed Smith. “Si Hedges is so pure, soap won't lather on him.”

“Soap,” Doc suggested, “doesn't lather in hard water, either.”

“Si Hedges isn't hard water. He's milk and honey.”

“You might be deceived.”

“I was once,” said Smith. “But it was back in 1934.”

Doc Savage purposefully let a silence fall, and watched Disappointed Smith's reaction to the thinking he was doing. The man's red whiskers were quite expressive, and presently they began to bristle as if their owner was, in examining the thoughts that moved in his mind, finding more cause for alarm.

“What's Si Hedges done to me?” Smith demanded.

“Plenty.”

“For example?”

“He has given you a split personality.”

“What the hell!” exclaimed Disappointed Smith.

“Exactly,” Doc said. “Very distressing. And I imagine you will find it more embarrassing as time passes.”

“I don’t,” said Smith, “get what you’re driving at.”

Doc Savage explained fully, saying, “I had a business appointment with Si Hedges to buy boats, and arriving at his hotel, I found evidences of violence in his room. I was assured by a Mr. Flinch, and by a quarrelsome young lady named Mix Walden, that you and Mr. Hedges were one and the same individual, and that you had disarranged the room as a practical joke. Naturally I became obsessed with curiosity as to whether you and Si Hedges were actually one and the same. You have just straightened me out on the matter.”

“Hell!” shouted Disappointed Smith. “I’m Si Hedges! Sure I’m Si Hedges!”

“A lie should never be spoken loudly,” Doc suggested.

Disappointed Smith pulled at his whiskers gloomily. “You tricked me,” he complained. Presently he produced a quotation: “He who expects much will be often disappointed; yet disappointment seldom cures us of expectation, or has any other effect than that of producing a moral sentence or peevish exclamation.”

And that was the last sound out of him until they got to Yarmouth.

Chapter VI

THE seagulls were flying at night and cirrus cloud like wisping mare's tails was traveling very high in the sky, two signs of approaching change in the weather.

Doc eased the *Zipper* into the hotel dock in Yarmouth harbor, laid it against the fenders with a brief surge of the port engine, dropped the springline loops over the dock bollards, and looked up to find himself confronted by an angry policeman.

There were three policemen in fact—also a conservatively-dressed gentleman who looked as if he might be their superior, the assistant manager of the hotel, the latter the man who had grudgingly rented Doc the room for Jane Walden, and another man, in the welcoming committee.

Everyone seemed to blaze flashlights in Doc's eyes at once.

“All right, don't start anything,” said one of the policemen in a determined tone. “Keep your hands in view, and come ashore peaceable.”

Disappointed Smith whistled, suddenly quite cheerful. “Looks like a reception,” he remarked.

Doc Savage frowned and asked, “Do you gentlemen know what you're doing?”

The conservatively dressed man spoke grimly. “I'm Inspector Carlew of the Yarmouth constabulary. Are you Doc Savage?”

“I'm Doc Savage,” Doc admitted.

“You are hereby advised that you are under arrest, Mr. Savage,” said Inspector Carlew.

Amazed, Doc Savage demanded, “On what charges?”

The response came from successive individuals.

“Illegally administering a narcotic drug to a young woman,” advised Inspector Carlew.

“Engaging a hotel room for illegal purposes,” added the hotel assistant manager.

“Suspicion of kidnapping,” said a uniformed policeman.

“An act of piracy,” growled another man.

This apparently completed the roster of charges for the time being, because a silence fell, a waiting stillness which Disappointed Smith shortly broke with a pleased chuckle, and an offer: “Could I get my little two-bits worth of assault and battery in the kettle? He jumped in the ocean with me and tried to drown me.”

Doc Savage was craning his neck to see who had accused him of piracy, the fellow's voice having struck him as somewhat familiar. The man, it developed, was not a complete stranger.

The man, darkly tanned and well-dressed, was the fellow who had earlier in the afternoon joined Doc while he was looking at the thermometer, and dropped a couple of remarks about the weather and about the suggestion that a smart man would catch the first plane back to the States.

“Who are you?” Doc asked.

The man, wrath in his hard, oily voice, said, “I am S. K. Foreman, and it happens to be my boat you stole.”

“Borrowed,” Doc corrected. “Not stole.”

Foreman snorted violently. “I doubt if you will be able to show a judge the difference.”

Doc turned to the Inspector. “Just what started this legal excitement.”

“You are a man of considerable reputation and prestige, Mr. Savage,” said the Inspector grimly. “But it doesn't entitle you to assault hotel employees and remove a young lady violently from the premises. Not in Yarmouth, it doesn't.”

STARTLED, Doc Savage eyed the policeman, and he had the impression that he'd never seen a more unfriendly looking bunch of lawmen. The last charge, assaulting hotel employees and kidnapping young ladies, led him to think automatically of Mr. Flinch. But he hadn't laid a hand on Mr. Flinch, only considered doing so. Not that he suspected Mr. Flinch wouldn't trump up a charge if it were profitable.

“Where,” Doc asked, “did I commit this last crime?”

The response came from the assistant manager of the Royal East, who explained, “A number of men—we are not definitely sure how many—entered the Royal East by the service entrance, obtained the service elevator by force, first telling the elevator operator that Doc Savage had sent them, then, when the operator demurred, struck him several times, fracturing his jaw. Following this, they took the service lift to the upper floors, and removed the young lady whom you had registered as Miss Jane Walden.”

As the explanation ended, Doc Savage happened by chance to glance at Disappointed Smith. He was startled at the shock which Smith was registering. Smith, realizing he was under scrutiny, hurriedly composed himself.

Doc addressed the assistant manager of the hotel. "Removed the young lady, you say? You mean they kidnapped her?"

"They took her away, still unconscious," the hotel man said. "I don't know the exact legal terminology for the act."

"And they said I sent them?"

"Exactly."

"What," Doc demanded, "did they look like?"

The Inspector made a gesture with his flashlight, interrupting, "I fail to see that this is the time or place for a discussion. Mr. Savage, you understand that you are under arrest?"

"Did one of the men," Doc asked, "have a small face? Was he darkly sun-burned, and left-handed?"

"One of them answered that description," admitted Inspector Carlew.

"That man took a shot at me," Doc said.

"When?"

"Just prior to my bringing Jane Walden to the hotel."

The Inspector scowled at Doc Savage.

"Why," he demanded, "didn't you report being shot at?"

"I didn't have time."

The Inspector, still frowning, said, "You should have taken time. When a man gets shot at, someone has attempted a capital crime. And incidentally, concealing such an attempt from the authorities is also an illegal act."

"I'm telling you about it now, so how could I be concealing it," Doc pointed out.

Disappointed Smith cleared his throat and said loudly, "Savage is guilty of everything in the book. Throw him in jail, and you won't make any mistake."

Everyone looked at Smith, who presented a striking spectacle, clad only in bathing trunks and with his beard tangled and bristling.

Doc Savage indicated Smith and asked, "You gentlemen know this fellow, don't you?"

"Isn't he the one who was going to swim across the ocean?" the Inspector demanded.

Doc nodded. "He also took shots at various people who attempted, out of the goodness of their hearts, to rescue him."

"Now wait a minute!" exclaimed Disappointed Smith in alarm. "I didn't aim at—"

"A man who performs such acts," Doc added, "is not a safe person to be allowed abroad in society."

"Listen, I didn't shoot *at* anybody!" Smith gasped. "I only did a little scaring."

Inspector Carlew gave a sign to one of the constables. "Take him into custody," he said.

"You can't arrest me!" Smith yelled.

This statement proved overly optimistic, because presently there were handcuffs on his wrists.

THE jail, like most jails, had not been constructed with the thought of encouraging the occupants to make a return visit. The night was oppressively hot, and whatever inclination to sleep Doc Savage might have had was dispelled by the unrest of Disappointed Smith, who, with two pugnaciously intoxicated gentlemen, seemed to be the only other clients. The drunks were heaved in after Doc and Smith arrived. For a few minutes they were very noisy, but Smith put his face to the bars and said, "Shaddup, or I'll kick the viscera out of both of you!" Both soaks looked at Smith's hell-colored whiskers, a sight which shocked them into silence.

The jail corridor received a bright bath of light from naked electric bulbs. Doc Savage watched Smith thoughtfully while the latter endeavored to lie on a cot and relax, an attempt which failed. Then, successively, Smith stared out of the cell window, tried unsuccessfully to tear out the bars with his hands, glared at the two cowed inebriates, and finally began pacing his cell, gradually increasing his speed until he was almost trotting. Smith was as uneasy as a flea on a griddle.

"You'll get out of breath," Doc said.

Smith jerked to a stop. "You got me into this!" he growled.

"Take it easy and you'll last longer," Doc advised. "You'll wear your legs down to stumps, at that speed. You're likely to have years of it ahead of you, you know."

Smith was extremely distressed by this. "I wish I'd never met you," he said.

"You're going to wish it still more," Doc informed him, "unless you tell the whole truth about this affair."

Smith snorted. "You're not doing so well. You're in jail, too." But he didn't get much conviction into it.

The door at the end of the corridor flung open, two constables entered, unlocked the door of Doc Savage's cell, and invited him out.

Doc grinned at Disappointed Smith's discouraged look, and said, "You see. I'm already free."

One of the constables cheered Smith considerably by telling Doc, "You're only being taken to the Inspector's office to answer some questions."

INSPECTOR CARLEW exhibited a better frame of mind. He indicated a chair, and pushed cigarettes across the desk, asking, "Care to smoke?"

"Have you found that girl?" Doc demanded.

The Inspector shook his head. "As a matter of fact, I was hoping you could help us with that."

Doc Savage leaned back. "I've got a story to tell you," he said. "So listen."

For the next five minutes, Doc talked carefully, not hesitating particularly anywhere, but not hurrying, and

checking each statement with his memory for accuracy as he went along. When he finished, he had presented a complete story of events from the time he had received the telephone call about the boats for sale.

"That's the whole history," he finished. "Now you know why I can't tell you where the girl is, or who got her, or anything else."

Inspector Carlew lifted his cigarette to his lips, pulled smoke into his lungs, blew the smoke in a foaming flood across the desk top, after which he fell to examining his fingernails. Doc Savage, astonished, realized the Inspector hadn't believed the story.

"What," Doc demanded, "makes you think I'm a liar?"

Slightly irked, the Inspector said, "I haven't said I disbelieved you."

"That isn't good for Jane Walden," Doc said.

The Inspector looked up swiftly. "Why?"

"Because," Doc said, "I think she's in danger, pretty serious danger."

"What do you mean by that?"

"I mean that her life may be menaced. Or worse, she may have been murdered already."

"How do you know that?"

"I don't know it. I just think it."

Inspector Carlew placed his cigarette on an ashtray, then used the hand that had held it to level an accusing and threatening gesture at Doc Savage. He said angrily, "I demand to know why she's in danger, and where she is!"

Doc Savage revised an earlier opinion that the Inspector might be a pretty good guy, if slightly overzealous. He decided the Inspector was a pompous ignoramus.

WHILE Doc Savage and Inspector Carlew were still eyeing each other, the inspector with arrogant disbelief and Doc with newly acquired disrespect, a constable thrust his red face inside the room and announced, "Mr. Foreman and the magistrate are here."

"I'll see them now," said the Inspector. "Send them in."

Stanley K. Foreman, owner of the *Zipper*, gave Doc an unpleasant glance and addressed the Inspector. "Magistrate Spilling has been kind enough to prepare the charges against this man, together with affidavits, which I will sign now."

Doc Savage frowned. "Charges against me?" he demanded.

"That's right."

"Why all the rush?"

"I live on Parade Island," Foreman snapped. "I want to get home, away from this heat. I wish to leave

immediately, and the Magistrate was kind enough to cooperate.”

“You’re clearing out of here at once?” Doc asked.

“I’m leaving. Yes.”

“In kind of a hurry, aren’t you? You’re not, by any chance, afraid of something that might happen?”

Stanley Foreman’s face did a quick change from suave mahogany to enraged bull-red coloring. He said, “What have I got to be afraid of? You’re the one who is in trouble. You’re the pirate who took my boat.”

“I can explain that,” Doc said.

“I hope you can—to the judge. And it better be good,” Foreman said grimly.

“But you,” Doc said sharply, “had better have a story, too. Only I doubt if you can dig up a good enough one.”

He was disappointed when this had the effect of startling Foreman into making a retreat into silence. The man clamped his lips indignantly, and didn’t open them again, causing Doc to decide that the fellow had better be considered as one of the dark animals in the cave of mystery.

There were, Doc decided, some dubious points about Foreman. It was a suspicious coincidence that Foreman had happened to stand alongside him when he was looking at the thermometer, and remark that a smart man would be getting back to Boston in a hurry. Also, Foreman seemed a trifle over-vindictive in filing the piracy charge, although it was understandable that a man who owned such a fine boat wouldn’t want strangers borrowing it. But Doc mentally attached to Foreman a tag marked “suspicious.”

Inspector Carlew was glowering at Doc Savage.

“You’ve got to stop trumping up false charges against respectable people!” he snapped.

Doc’s temper slipped.

“Don’t tell me what to do, you nincompoop,” he said irately.

He knew, when it was too late to recall the words, that he had made a tactical blunder. It was not good policy, regardless of whether or not the Inspector was a nincompoop, to call him one, since it automatically insured the Inspector’s interest in keeping Doc in jail. This would have been the case whether the Inspector was a dope, or not. Visions of an extended residence in the Yarmouth jail began to assail Doc, unpleasantly.

He was still angry, and he didn’t like jails, and these two facts joined together in his mind, starting an emotional landslide which broke out in a rash of action. He decided to leave, and since peaceful departure wasn’t practical, to leave violently.

Doc grasped the Inspector’s desk and overturned it, upsetting the Inspector, and also knocking Stanley K. Foreman to his knees. The astonished constable said, “Here! Here! None of that!” The magistrate, Mr. Spilling, withdrew two paces and placed his hands on both cheeks, like an alarmed schoolgirl.

The constable attempted to intercept Doc as he made for the door, but was successfully deposited on the floor by a quick stop and an outthrust foot. Doc noted, with pleasure, that the door had a lock that could only be locked with a key; and the key was in the keyhole. He changed the key to the other side, and locked the door as he departed.

The route to the street, down a hall and through a door, was without obstacle.

He began walking rapidly. With disagreeable speed his rage evaporated, boiling out of his mind and leaving as a nasty residue the certainty that he had probably made a fool out of himself. It had been done neatly and quickly, but it hadn't been the thing to do.

Presently a female voice spoke near his shoulder.

"I've been waiting around for you to get out," it said.

Chapter VII

THE effect of having Mix Walden, the number one quarrelsome girl, accost him was somewhat like being hit by two kinds of lightning, the first bolt being amazement that anyone could have approached him unobserved, and the second just normal astonishment. He found some difficulty in recovering his breath.

"You gave me a start," he remarked.

"After the way you jumped," she said, "you'd better look and see if you're still standing in your shoes."

He saw that it was no marvel that she had approached him unobserved, because she hadn't. She had simply been waiting in a doorway which he had passed, mantled in darkness, and she had leaned out to accost him.

"I saw them yank you into their jail," Mix Walden added. "So I waited around. I don't like you, and I don't trust you, but I figured they weren't man enough to keep you in jail very long."

"Thank you," Doc said, "for the vote of confidence."

"Confidence nothing! With your reputation, I knew they wouldn't lock you up. The worse they would do was let you go with a reprimand."

"They didn't exactly let me go," Doc explained.

"Sure they did. You're out, aren't you?"

"I didn't leave with the proper ceremonies, however. I believe they will call it breaking jail."

Mix Walden sounded alarmed. "You mean you busted out?"

"Yes."

"Did you conk anybody?"

"Unfortunately, I had to do some shoving and upsetting."

Mix grabbed his arm in alarm. "Come on! We can't stand around here if you broke jail! They'll be looking for you. They'll be—" She stared at his face in fright. "Or will they? You didn't knock anybody off, did you?"

"Hardly."

"Come on," Mix ordered. "If you shoved that Inspector Carlew, he'll be as mad as a hornet. I know that pompous little fuddydudgy."

Doc Savage permitted himself to be yanked into an alley where the going was very uncomfortable on his ankles, the paving seeming to be composed entirely of round stones about the size of footballs. "Do you," he asked, "know where you're going?"

"I hope to tell you," said Mix.

"Is it a safe place?"

"You won't find a cop there," Mix said. "But I can't guarantee you won't have your pocket picked."

After some fifteen minutes of twistings and turnings, Doc found himself halted, and Mix rapping some sort of a signal on a door, in which a peephole presently flew open, permitting them a view of a villainous-looking eye.

"Open up, Clarence," Mix said.

Clarence started to unbar the door, then became cautious and returned his eye to the peephole to demand, "Who's that you got with you, Mix?"

"This is Joe Blow from Boston. He just punched Inspector Carlew in the nose, and he's on the lam," Mix said.

Clarence opened the door with pleasure. "Make yourself at home, Joe," he said happily. "Soaked prissy Carlew one, did you. By golly, that's great."

"He spit in Carlew's eye, and also broke two of his ribs," Mix added.

Doc whispered, "Don't lay it on so thick."

They were escorted to a corner table in a room so dimly lighted that Doc felt like striking matches to see where he was going. The joint, he decided, was some kind of whisper-low, although what a speak-easy was doing in Nova Scotia, he didn't know.

Mix must have read his thoughts, because she explained, "Clarence used to run a speak in New York, but they chased him out and he has to live here. He gets awful homesick for the old days, and keeps this place so he'll feel more at home."

Doc took this explanation with some salt. He thought it might be well to heed her first warning about getting his pocket picked.

CLARENCE brought them two glasses and a bottle which Doc felt, from the odor, must contain varnish remover.

"Just some hot coffee, please," Doc said.

"Hell!" Clarence said. He was insulted.

"My pal wants coffee for a chaser," Mix explained.

Clarence pointed at the bottle and said, "That's the chaser. I'm going after the stuff that it chases now." He strode off.

"If you don't drink, pour it on the floor," Mix suggested. "Clarence will feel hurt if he thinks you're not

accepting his hospitality.”

“It’ll probably eat holes in the floor,” Doc said dubiously.

Mix leaned across the table, lowered her voice, and got down to business. “Listen, you talked to my sister, didn’t you?” she demanded.

Doc admitted that he had. He didn’t add that he had fed her sister a Mickey.

“The reason I waited around the jail for you,” said Mix, “is because I’m worried about Jane.”

“I’m worried about her, too,” Doc admitted.

“You got her into a mess, didn’t you?” Mix demanded.

“I—well—not intentionally.”

“You,” said Mix, “fed her knockout drops.”

“Did I!”

“Don’t kid around with me, brother. I know you did, and so do the cops.”

“How did they find it out?” Doc asked curiously.

“The assistant manager of the hotel was suspicious, and he had the hotel physician go up to Jane’s room, and he saw she had been drugged. There wasn’t any liquor on her breath. It was on her dress. And Jane doesn’t drink, anyway.”

Doc Savage decided it would be prudent to say nothing, and he did so.

Mix gave him a grim look.

“You got Jane into it,” she said. “Now, pal, it’s up to you to get her out!”

“How?”

“By finding her, stupid!”

Clarence returned at this point with a second bottle, the contents of which accomplished what Doc had believed was impossible—smelling worse than the first bottle. Clarence had another glass; he filled it, and theirs. “Here’s to Inspector Carlew, the pussy-face,” said Clarence. “May all of his children be ant-eaters.”

They were, Doc saw with horror, going to have to partake of the beverage, or insult Clarence. At this point, Doc had a flash of wisdom, and, shoving back his chair noisily, made a grand gesture, several of them, lifted the glass to his lips, swallowed roundly, and sat it down empty. He patted his lips delicately and said, “It would be a shame to spoil such a gentlemanly potion with a chaser.”

Clarence looked startled, but drank his own glass empty, and for a moment it seemed he was going to go unscathed. Then he said, “Whoeee!” hoarsely, and began to stamp the floor and flap his hands against his middle as if trying to cool off the interior. He said, “Whoeeeee!” again, tried to say more, but the words seemed to balk at going from his lungs into the route the liquor had traversed. He walked off stamping hard on the floor, looking dazed.

Mix was wiping tears out of her eyes, although she had taken only a sip.

“My God, have you got a lead-lined throat?” she demanded.

Doc smiled and remarked, “Not a bad beverage, not at all.”

Pleased with the impression he'd made, he decided never to reveal that he'd exercised a little of what magicians call misdirection, and poured the potion on the floor instead of drinking it.

“Brother,” Mix said, “you'd better find Jane. And I mean find her before anything ugly happens to her.”

“Ugly?”

Mix made a gesture of drawing her finger across her throat. “Like this.”

Doc found the implication that Jane might have her throat cut sobering and shocking. “You think she's in that kind of danger?”

“I know she is,” Mix said, nodding violently.

“Just why,” Doc asked, “do you know it?”

“Because I know.”

“Come on, tell the whole story,” Doc directed. “If you want me to help your sister, you've got to cooperate with me.”

He watched Mix's reaction to his demand with growing amazement. Her emotions were strong ones, strong enough to leave clearly discernible paths on her face. Mix wanted, he was sure, to talk fully and at length, and he thought for a moment, when hope widened her eyes, that she was going to do so. But the hope fled, chased by a harsh animal of fear, and her eyes dropped. Presently she shook her head slowly. She was afraid to talk.

“You've got to find it out yourself,” she said.

“Afraid?”

She nodded. “You bet.”

Deciding to learn what dynamite would do to her emotions, Doc said, “By being a coward, you're going to be guilty of killing your sister, if she dies. As guilty as if you had murdered her yourself.”

This created all the effects he had expected, horror, shock, terror rising to a violence that made Mix physically ill. But, as it had a moment ago, the fear came and sealed her lips.

“I guess I'm no good,” she said in a dull voice. “I'm afraid to talk.”

That, Doc Savage felt, was the final word. He leaned back, his expectations dying a hard death while he kept his face composed. He didn't think anything less than a miracle would get the story out of Mix, which presented him with a problem: he'd have to try something else.

“You,” he said quietly, “are a sucker.”

“I love Jane, but I'm afraid,” Mix said, obviously fighting back tears.

“The whole lot of you are suckers,” Doc continued. “You see, I know about Si Hedges.”

She kept her eyes on the table. "I suppose you got it out of Disappointed Smith that he wasn't also Si Hedges."

Doc shook his head.

"Disappointed Smith is the worst sucker of all," he said. "Because the poor loud-mouth probably doesn't know what he is doing."

He was sliding on thin ice in making this statement, because it was voicing an idea almost too intangible to be a guess, but he was gratified at the startled expression on Mix's face. She stared at him in alarm.

"Say, how much do you know?" she demanded.

Doc decided this was a place where the truth would be mistaken for a lie.

"I don't know a thing," he said.

"If you know they only got Disappointed Smith to—" Mix stopped, and for a moment she fought down terror. "You're lying! You know the whole story!"

Doc gave her an inscrutable look, hoping this would help convince her he really knew his way around in the jungle of mystery.

Mix's alarm grew.

"Do you know what they did to Si Hedges?" she demanded.

"That," Doc said, "is going to be taken care of."

"You know where Hedges is!" she gasped.

Doc continued to look enigmatic, although he wondered profoundly whether she was referring to Si Hedges in reasonable health, or to his body.

He didn't learn the answer at this point, because Mix Walden suddenly gasped, "I'm afraid of you! I don't want anything more to do with you!"

She fled.

DOC SAVAGE remained seated only until Mix vanished through the door, then he sprang to his feet and hurried to the bar, where Clarence, the proprietor, was taking repeated sips of ice water and feeling experimentally of his throat, as if to ascertain whether there were any leaks.

"Clarence, is there a back door to this dump?" Doc demanded.

"Side door," Clarence said, in a voice similar to two pieces of sandpaper being rubbed together.

"Thanks," Doc said.

"Wait a minute," Clarence croaked. "Got a gift for you, because you're a friend of mine." He withdrew a flagon from under the bar and extended it. "Here's a bottle of the same you had a drink of. Minute I saw how you enjoyed it, I said to myself: My friend will want to take home a bottle. Compliments of the house."

Doc accepted the bottle of lion-killer with a little bow.

“Thank you, Clarence,” he said.

He inserted the flagon of brew in his pocket as he left the establishment, feeling he might find some good use for it; and in any event the bottle, if grasped firmly by the neck, would make an excellent skull-cracker.

Chapter VIII

DOC SAVAGE was able to pick up Mix Walden's trail and follow her. There was no particular magic about this, because the streets in that part of town had apparently been laid out by some early-day settler who had, in deciding where each street should be, turned a blind ox loose and followed its meanderings. Doc took one chance, guessing that Mix would head toward the main part of town, and this she did. By considerable sprinting and ducking and dodging, he kept her in sight until she reached the central business district, where it was easier.

Eventually Mix disappeared into a second-rate flea-trap of a hotel, an even more disreputable looking hostelry than Mr. Flinch's *Central House*.

Doc Savage proceeded nearly to make a serious error in starting to walk directly into the place. He saw, barely in time, Mix Walden coming out of the lobby with two worried and dishonest-looking men. There was nothing for Doc to do but step three paces to the left, squat behind two large ash cans, and hope for the best.

Mix and the two men paused at the stoop for a palaver.

“I don't see how the hell he found out,” one of the men said.

“Well, he did,” Mix said grimly.

“I thought we had him sewed up in jail,” said the second man.

“He's not in jail now,” Mix said.

“He didn't tell Inspector Carlew anything.” The man rubbed his jaw angrily. “If he knows so much, why didn't he spill it to Carlew?”

“Maybe because he saw Carlew is a nitwit.”

“Um-m-m-m-m.”

“I think you've got something there,” the second man told Mix. “Savage is an old hand at this sort of thing, and he probably wouldn't bother to ring in a lightweight like Carlew.”

“I wish to God,” the other man said, “that I was at the South Pole, or some other nice safe place.”

The glimpse Doc Savage had had of the pair had not been satisfactory, disclosing only that they were men of medium size, rather overdressed in a hard masculine way. The part about their being disreputable

had been a soundly-based guess. He didn't dare take a second look at them now, but from their voices he surmised they were from some mid-western city, possibly Chicago, and not from the upper social stratum.

Mix asked, "Well, what are you going to do about it?"

"If we could only move Si Hedges before Savage gets to him, it would be a help."

The second man said, "That's our only chance, as I see it."

"Let's get it done!" the first said urgently.

Fortunately they walked to their new destination, and did not look back too often.

THE house wore its history on its face. It had been built by a retired sea captain about sixty years ago, because it was a topheavy old manse of that era; and also there was a small railed porch at the highest cupola, this being an architectural horror of that period, known as a captain's bridge, which retired sea captains invariably incorporated in their homes. There was enough gnarled shrubbery in the yard to encourage Doc to try to reach a window, after Mix and her two friends made a dash inside. He surmised things were going to move fast. And they did.

Someone in the black shadow at the foot of a bush grabbed his left leg.

Doc kicked the someone in the stomach.

Whoever it was folded double like a jackknife and made goose-like hissing sounds.

Men started coming out of the front door of the house; the two who had been with Mix, two more, and all of them looking and acting quite healthy, which made it a difficult matter to say which one was Si Hedges. Mix followed them, and the group seemed intent on leaving the house, but, upon hearing the goose-hissing noises of the man Doc had kicked, they halted.

Doc made his voice loud and threatening.

He said, "The place is surrounded. Hands up, you people!"

A rifle of indecision swept the group on the porch. Then Mix lifted her hands, and the others followed the example with noticeable reluctance. One man held his hands out from his sides, apparently unable to decide to raise them, and began to tremble. He was, Doc felt sure, the small-faced man who had taken the potshot at him from the Royal East hotel grounds.

Doc was pleased.

"All right, men," he said, still more loudly. "Keep them covered, and at the first false move, fill them full of lead!"

This seemed effective. The man Doc had kicked was still hissing loudly, but by spurts now, trying to get air back behind his jolted solar plexus. Doc tried to kick him again, but missed.

"Si Hedges!" Doc called loudly. "Si, come on out of there!"

He was not completely surprised—he had begun to suspect Hedges was one of the group—when a slender, studious-looking young man separated himself from the porch cluster.

Doc ordered, "Hedges, come here!"

He had intended to have Si Hedges collect any weapons the others might have, but the fraternal air between Hedges and the others discouraged the idea.

Si Hedges stepped off the porch and came toward Doc.

The man on the ground at Doc's feet stood up suddenly and took a swing at Doc, landing a grazing blow on Doc's head. The man was Disappointed Smith, and he was still groggy, or the punch might have brained Doc. As it was his head felt for a moment as if it housed several clanging schoolbells.

Si Hedges stopped, amazed.

Disappointed Smith said, "Kick me in the belly, will you!" and tried to hit Doc again, unsuccessfully.

"Hell! They ain't cops!" This from the porch.

Pistol fire and noise, also from the porch. Doc flung himself down and rolled, changing his position. It sounded to him as though there were twenty or so shots, in about a fourth that many seconds.

Disappointed Smith went down. He wasn't hit, nor scared, either. He said, "I'll break their damned backs for this!"

The shooting stopped. Feet clattered. Doc lifted his head. The gunners had fled back into the house. Mix Walden was lying on the porch. Si Hedges was standing in the yard with his hands foolishly upraised.

Doc ran for the house.

"Wait for me!" said Disappointed Smith. "The stinkers!" he added.

Doc slowed his pace, not to acquire Disappointed as a reinforcement, but because he didn't consider it discreet to have the red-whiskered giant at his back.

Disappointed reached out and collared Si Hedges in passing. "Come on, honesty and righteousness," he said, and hauled Hedges along bodily without seeming to exert himself.

They set foot on the porch, and a bullet came through a window, bringing broken glass.

Disappointed Smith threw Si Hedges on the floor against the house and fell on top of him. Doc was a little faster in getting down. "Ouch!" said Disappointed Smith to Hedges. "What have you got in your pocket, prissy?"

Hedges didn't say anything.

Mix raised her head, asked, "What'll I do?"

"Are you hit?"

"I don't know," she admitted. "I'm so scared I probably couldn't tell."

Somebody in the house said, "Get outa the way, Mix, so we can do some shooting."

Mix promptly rolled off the porch, taking up a position flat on the ground.

Disappointed Smith gave a grunt of pleasure.

“Sweetness and Light has got a gun,” he said.

He relieved Si Hedges of the gun, and proceeded to fire it into the house.

THROUGHOUT the neighborhood windows were flying up and disturbed citizens were demanding what was happening. Two dogs began barking excitedly. Doc Savage hugged the wall, and gave part of his attention to watching Disappointed Smith and counting the bullets which Smith fired from the captured revolver. Three times, Smith had shot. Now he discharged a fourth shot, and evidently hit, or badly terrified someone, because there was a cry.

“Come outa there crawling!” Disappointed Smith shouted. “Or I’ll polish off the whole pack of you!”

Exactly the opposite happened. The defenders of the house fled out the back door. Doc Savage sprang up and raced toward the rear, arriving in time to see the men diving into a garage door. A moment later, a car burst from the other end of the garage, careened into the street, and fled.

Wham! Smith’s captured gun blew the night apart from a point near Doc’s ear.

The car proceeded unscathed, losing itself from sight and sound.

Indignantly, Disappointed Smith shook Si Hedges, whom he had dragged along. “You jiggled my arm and made me miss,” Smith declared.

The last bullet was now gone from Smith’s gun, Doc’s count told him, which was a relief. Doc wheeled and ran around to the front of the house again, searching for Mix Walden.

She was lying on the earth beside the porch.

“They’ve gone,” Doc said. “You can get up.”

Mix didn’t move.

Alarmed, Doc sank beside her. He found she was unconscious; whether from a wound or fright, he couldn’t tell. But his fingers located no traces of blood in the murk. He lifted Mix in his arms and, carrying her, rejoined Disappointed Smith.

“Is she hurt?” Smith demanded, displaying more concern than a casual interest warranted. “Damn them, if they’ve shot her—”

"I think she has only fainted," Doc said. He glanced longingly at the house, and added, "I'd like to search that place, but I doubt if there is time."

"Somebody's sure to have called the cops," declared Disappointed Smith. "They'll get here pronto. And we better be scarce."

Doc agreed it was a good idea. They got moving, Doc carrying Mix, and Smith yanking Hedges along with them. Hedges was uncommunicative. Hedges hadn't, Doc realized, spoken a word.

"Let's use alleys," Smith said. "I don't think the cops will start searching alleys until they find out what the shooting was all about, and that'll take a little time."

"You don't seem anxious to meet the police," Doc suggested.

"That's right."

"Did you break jail also?"

"Nah."

"How did you get out?"

"Bail."

Doc Savage pondered for a moment, then stated, "The act of securing release on bail requires some time. It occurs to me you didn't have time for the formalities, therefore someone must have bailed you out. Who?"

"I wish," said Smith gloomily, "It'd occur to you to keep your nose out of my business."

Doc made no response, and for some time they walked rapidly, selecting the darker places. They were not molested. Presently Smith came forth with one of his quotations:

"I've lately had two spiders

"Crawling upon my startled hopes,

"Now though thy friendly hand has brush'd 'em from me,

"Yet still they crawl offensive to my eyes:

"I would have some kind friend to tread upon 'em."

Doc Savage glanced sharply at the tall red-whiskered young man in the darkness. "That," he said, "sounded like a hint."

"Could be."

"Hinting that you would like some help, perhaps?" Doc asked.

Smith grimaced. "The word *like* doesn't exactly fit the case. Let's put it that I would be very happy if you weren't around, but that I've got a hunch I'm going to need some two-fisted help. And you're what I call two-fisted help. I liked the way you handled the situation back there at the house. You were as cool as an icicle."

Doc was modestly silent. He did not feel any kinship with an icicle, and he suspected that the excitement

had kept him from having the normal reactions of fright, so there was a good chance that, presently, when he became calm again, he would exude considerable cold perspiration.

Disappointed Smith stopped suddenly.

"I'm going to take a trip on a boat," he said. "If you're interested, you can come along."

"Lead on," Doc said.

Chapter IX

IT is a fact, however trivial, that small sailboats which are lived on and loved by their owners partake of their owners character, an efficient man's boat becoming efficient looking, a rich man's boat beginning to look like the rich man—a Rockefeller boat probably wouldn't look like a Morgan boat—and a rousing, rowdyish and eccentric young man's boat taking on the atmosphere of a demented magpie. Disappointed Smith's boat was the last type. It was a tough and lusty double-ender, built like a percheron, schooner rigged, with a one-lung diesel engine. In a bad sea, it would probably be safer than an ocean liner, but as uncomfortable as life with a jumping-bean.

Smith dampened a finger and held it up to test the wind, then remarked, "North northeast. That won't help us a lot, being no stronger than baby breath." He unscrewed the fuel tank cap, stuck his finger in, and brought it out dark with fuel oil, then looked around for somewhere to wipe it.

Doc Savage said, "I had better make a little speech before we start."

"Let's hear it," Smith said.

"I don't believe you are leading me off on a wild goose chase, but if it should develop I'm wrong and you are pulling a shenanygin, you and I are going to have some serious trouble."

"And you *do* mean serious?" Smith asked dryly.

"Exactly."

"I'm not," said Smith, "issuing any guarantees against what the other fellow will do."

"All you have to guarantee is good faith—your own."

Smith grinned. "Okay. I guarantee it unconditionally."

"You might," Doc suggested, "throw in a little conversation about causes and effects, in other words the case history of this little mystery we're playing around with."

"It ain't much of a mystery to me," Smith said, suddenly sounding angry.

"You know all the facts, then?"

"What I don't know I can guess at."

"Then you'd better talk."

Smith absentmindedly wiped his finger on his trousers leg. "I don't know about that," he said. "I don't want to make any statements that'll get me into trouble. I'll have to think it over."

Doc nodded. He helped Smith get the covers off the sails, shove off, and hoist the jib and mainsail. They ghosted out into the harbor, heading toward the sea.

Smith, Doc reflected, was a changed man. Smith was no longer the wild zany who had been swimming in the sea, cutting capers for the newsreels and giving adlepatated answers to sensible questions. Something had jolted the dithyramb out of him. Fright, Doc didn't believe to be the answer. He rather suspected that the change in Disappointed Smith was due to a severe injury to whatever Smith considered his dignity, and to anxiety over someone, possibly Mix Walden or her sister, Jane. Whatever it was, it had quieted Smith down more than a beating would have, and made him grimly determined.

The course Smith set was south and west, Doc saw.

HEARING a noise in the small cabin, where he had placed the unconscious Mix Walden, Doc dropped down the companionway and was met by a sheepish look from Mix.

“Feeling better?” Doc asked.

“I wouldn't say so,” she confessed. “Where are we? I don't hear any bullets whizzing.”

“We're on the bounding deep.”

“At sea!” She looked startled. “This is that red-whiskered grasshopper's boat, isn't it? Is he aboard?”

“Smith,” Doc admitted, “is our pilot.”

Mix registered some relief. “At least we're in good, if cuckoo, hands.”

Doc eyed her hopefully. “Have you got a story to tell, a nice detailed one composed of explanations?”

She wasn't going to talk, he could see.

Doc Savage turned to Si Hedges, who was occupying the other bunk, stretched out on his back, his hands clasped behind his head.

“So you're Hedges,” Doc said.

Hedges said nothing. He had the appearance of a divinity student, or at least a young and serious high school superintendent. A slender man, his coloring was good—there was snap in his brown eyes, his dark hair looked crisp and groomed, his face was smooth shaven—with the exception of his skin, which was rather dry. His clothing was conservative rather than expensive. He was wearing, Doc imagined, about a thirty-two dollar suit.

“I'm Savage,” Doc explained dryly. “I suppose you know that already.”

Hedges did not reply.

Doc said, “I'm the fellow you said had once done a favor for your brother-in-law, Wilbur C. Tidings, and so you wished to repay the favor by letting me in on a bargain purchase of surplus government boats.”

Hedges continued his stillness.

“What I want to know,” Doc added, “is whether Wilbur C. Tidings, who is a nice guy, is really your brother-in-law, or did you merely hear I once did Tidings a favor, and twist the fact to your needs?”

Hedges wasn't looking at Doc; instead, he was examining the cabin carlins above his head.

Doc said, "I imagine there weren't any boats for sale, either."

Silence.

Turning to Mix, Doc asked, "is he organically sound?"

"If you mean is he deaf or dumb, he isn't," Mix responded.

"Are you," Doc asked, "afraid to stay here in the cabin with him?"

Mix was astonished. "Me, afraid of that bootlicker? I've swatted mosquitoes that were better men than he is."

Turning to go back on deck, Doc reflected that he hadn't yet met anyone with a very high opinion of Si Hedges.

DISAPPOINTED SMITH was squinting at a distant lighthouse. He asked, "Get anything out of the snow-white lamb?"

"Hedges, you mean?"

"Uh-huh."

"He is about as talkative as a fence post."

"First time I ever heard of him being that way," Disappointed Smith said thoughtfully. "Did you search him?"

"No. I saw you going over him for a gun."

"I didn't rifle his pockets," Smith said. "I think I'll do that. Here, steer this hooker a while." Doc took the wheel, and Smith went below. Presently there was a commotion in the cabin, a short one. When Smith came on deck, he was sucking his wrist. "Little pipsqueak bit me," he complained.

Smith tossed an ox-choking roll of greenbacks on the cockpit seat.

"They bribed him," he added.

Doc looked at the money without comment.

"It's got to be a bribe," Smith said. "The potlicker wouldn't have that much honest money. There's five thousand in that roll if there's a dime. It's shut-mouth money, that's what it is."

"Why do you think they bought his silence?"

"He called you up here, didn't he?"

"Yes. With a story about boats for sale. I had an appointment to meet him at the *Central House* hotel."

Smith scratched in his whiskers thoughtfully, as if putting two and two together. "Probably Hedges telephoned from the hotel. If he did, they'd know about it pronto. The hotel manager, that Flinch, is their puppy-dog."

"I rather distrusted Flinch myself," Doc admitted.

"As soon as Flinch told them about the telephone call to you," said Smith, "they would bust their buttons getting hold of Hedges to shut him up."

"There were," Doc said, "signs of violence in the room."

"The angel must have put up a fight. I didn't think he had it in him."

"Then what happened?" Doc asked.

"Oh, they took him to that house and got to him with dough. Bought him. Paid him not to tell you what he was going to tell you in the first place."

"Which was?" Doc inquired.

Disappointed Smith shook his head.

"I've guessed," he said, "as far as I'm going to guess."

Doc examined him suspiciously. "For guessing, you sounded rather positive."

"That's my style of guessing," said Smith, then he peered at Doc Savage and added, "I could be wrong on a point or two, though. Let's see if I can check my prognostications." He thrust his head down the cabin companion and addressed Mix Walden, asking, "Mix, you heard what I was just saying?"

"I heard you, you big ape," Mix said, sounding quarrelsome in a friendly way.

"I get it right?" demanded the bearded young giant.

"You didn't miss far."

Smith turned to Doc. "You see," he said. He was pleased with himself. He tossed off a quotation. "Life often seems like a long shipwreck, of which the débris are friendship, glory and love. The shores of existence are strewn with them."

"The word disappointment," Doc remarked, "isn't in that one."

"I know, but I rather fancy it anyway," said Disappointed Smith, grinning.

THE heat that had characterized the day had carried over into the night, kissing the nocturn with a balmy pleasantness that was as nice as a tropical night in the Bahamas. They were now far enough from the harbor that the motor wouldn't be heard, so they started it going, and their speed was noticeably increased. They now traveled at about the same speed as a fast-walking ox. The motor seemed to fire about every fourth revolution, occasionally pausing entirely as though to get its breath.

"This little voyage is going to take some time. Probably most of the night," said Disappointed Smith. "If you need sleep, now is the time to get it."

"We can stand watches, so you can get some sleep yourself," Doc suggested.

"I'm too mad to sleep," Smith said.

"I'm rather nettled myself," Doc stated.

Actually he was dubious about what might happen to him if he went to sleep, since he did not see any

reason to trust either Smith, Si Hedges or Mix.

“They,” Doc added, “is an indefinite word.”

“Eh?”

“You speak of the enemy as 'they.' Let's be more specific. Just who is the enemy by name, occupation and residence?”

“Mrs. Smith,” said Smith, “gave birth to a zany boy, but not one foolish to call pots black unless he can prove it. They put you in jail for slander. Slander is what you can't prove. Therefore, I am silent.”

Doc did not press the point, since he felt certain that Smith wasn't going to name the culprits, possibly because doing so would tar Smith himself with guilt. Smith wasn't a fellow who would be afraid of a little slander.

“Miss Jane Walden,” Doc remarked, “contrived to meet me through a ruse, and delivered a warning for me to go back where I came from before things got unpleasant.”

Disappointed Smith grunted, apparently startled by the information. “Wait a minute, that doesn't sound like Jane! Jane is a straight kid. She wouldn't have a part in this.”

“Jane,” Doc said, “was worried about Mix getting in trouble, it later developed.”

Smith's sigh was explosive with relief. “Oh! That's more like Jane. She was trying to get you to go away before you caught the crooks, fearing Mix would be in the net when you hauled it in.”

“I drugged her and put her in the hotel to keep her on ice for later questioning,” Doc explained. “But the miscreants you refer to as 'they,' spirited her away by force.”

“It was your fault they did that,” Smith declared grimly. “They didn't want you questioning her.” He sounded alarmed and angry with Doc.

Doc made a discovery and put it in words.

He said, “You aren't worried about yourself or about Mix. It's Jane's safety which has you upset.”

“Nah,” said Smith uncomfortably. “I ain't a lad to get upset about any babe.”

Mix Walden thrust her head out of the cabin. “You big liar!” she exclaimed, addressing Smith. “You've been in love with Jane for a year, and you know it.”

Disappointed Smith maintained a dignified silence, and Doc suspected he was blushing the color of a fire engine. It was hard to tell in the moonlight about the blush.

“You big bum, why don't you tell Jane you love her?” Mix demanded. “Instead of going around showing off with foolishness, like a rooster robin in the springtime?”

Doc could see Smith's blush now. An automobile could almost have used it for a tail light.

Chapter X

THE island, while not large, was tall. It somewhat resembled the work of one of those Arctic birds which make their nests out of stones, except this was on a larger scale. The rocky speck was about a half mile

long and not quite as wide, apparently.

Disappointed Smith shut off the engine two miles at sea, with the result that they felt rather lonely without its suspense-causing *whang-huff-huff-huff-huff-whang* of a sound.

“Sneak up on the south end,” Smith said in a low voice. “That’s the ticket. There’s a cove there about big enough to hold this boat. It’s tough to get into and anybody but me would be afraid to try it.”

Doc Savage had been consulting a chart.

“The name of this place,” he said, “is Parade Island. Is that right?”

“Right,” Smith agreed.

“It’s our destination?”

“Right again. Possibly our waterloo, too.”

Doc glanced at Smith sharply, unpleasantly struck by the quantity of alarm that was getting into Smith’s voice in spite of a teeth-gritting effort to suppress the emotion. Disappointed Smith had been anxious to reach the island, but now that he was here, he seemed to be experiencing the symptoms of a young man about to kiss a strange girl for the first time; he had approached the thing with enthusiasm, but the future developments had him worried.

Presently Smith said, “Stand by with a boathook, will you. We may have to fight rocks.”

In the course of the next five minutes Doc Savage became, successively, thankful there was a calm sea, convinced they’d never make it, wishful of being back in New York, certain the cove wasn’t big enough to hold them, convinced it wasn’t a cove, but a big hole like a gigantic drill-boring in the rocky cliff-side of the island. But they made it.

Disappointed Smith threw out his chest in pride.

“The rum hustlers used to pop in here when the Coast Guard got too close,” he said. “Fine for our purpose. Nobody’ll see the boat, if they haven’t seen it already. We better wait a while and see if they have.”

“How will we know?” Doc inquired.

“If they don’t shoot at us, they didn’t see us.”

Mix, looking about dubiously, said, “That’s a pleasant prospect.” She was impressed. “You know, as much time as I’ve spent on this island, I didn’t know about this anchorage.”

Calling the place an anchorage was, in Doc’s opinion, an unwarranted charity, but if Mix was familiar with the island and hadn’t known about it, the spot had advantages.

“What,” he asked, “do we do now?”

“We become shipwrecked mariners,” said Disappointed Smith.

The suggestion, together with a certain strangeness about the way Smith gave it, surprised Doc; also he noted that Mix jumped visibly at the remark—the dawn was now a hot flush on the horizon, furnishing enough faint flamingo-colored light for them to see each other clearly.

“Shipwrecked?” Doc asked. “Why shipwrecked?”

The effect of the question convinced him that the double meaning was in the word shipwrecked, so he jumped on the word to give it a conversational ride.

“Why,” Doc inquired, “should we specifically refer to ourselves as shipwrecked mariners?”

“Just an idea,” said Smith uneasily.

“Wouldn't anything but shipwrecked do?”

Smith, noticeably pale, swallowed and didn't say anything. Mix Walden, also looking starkly concerned, cleared her throat.

She said, “I want to tell you two big dopes something right now. It's this: I don't know anything for certain about this angle you're talking about, or I would have gone to the law a long time ago.”

Much interested, Doc inquired, “You mean the shipwreck angle?”

“What gets me into trouble is my liking for excitement,” Mix said. “Now and then I've done some things that weren't exactly Sunday School, but usually it was accidentally. I didn't mean wrong. I just forgot to think. But at wholesale murder and torture, I drew the line. I want no part of it. Furthermore, if I was sure, I'd be the first one to run to the law.”

“What,” Doc demanded, “are you trying to tell me?”

“Just that I'm not as black as you may begin thinking I am, once you really dig into this devil's cake that I think, but can't prove, has been baked.”

Si Hedges spoke suddenly. It was the first speech he had made. Hedges had a rounded, sweet voice which was somehow as phony as the sugar coating on a particularly bitter pill.

“I'm innocent also,” Hedges said.

They stared at him, all of them surprised.

Hedges added, “After all, it was I who initiated Doc Savage into the matter, which proves my good and honest intentions.”

Mix Walden and Disappointed Smith laughed loudly at the same time. Their contemptuous mirth contained no belief whatever.

Hedges went into what proved to be another extended silence.

“Shall all we innocents,” Doc Savage suggested in an unfunny tone, “proceed with our pie-making?”

Smith eyed him and said, “I'm glad you're trying to be sarcastic instead of funny.” Smith indicated the bulk of the island around and above them. “Because this is liable to be a very unfunny place.”

Doc wondered what could be the nature of the thing that would induce such genuine terror into the hitherto indomitable Disappointed Smith.

THE climb upward, which Doc had been anticipating with doubts, proved to be nothing alarming,

although Doc would not have cared to try it in the dark, nor would he want to attempt the descent back to the boat in the kind of haste which would be desirable if they were pursued. Eventually they pushed out through some thorny bushes, crawling on all fours and taking evasive tactics against thorns on the ground.

Doc became aware that the climb had relieved Si Hedges of two commodities, breath and confidence. The stare Hedges gave them was wild.

He asked, "You won't tell them I talked?" and sounded as if he were going to cry.

Mix and Smith surveyed him with contempt.

"I'd love to, you holy little snake," Disappointed Smith said. "And I would, too, if it weren't for starting people thinking I knew so much that their future would be healthier with me dead."

Si Hedges blew out his lips with relief.

Doc Savage found that he resented the scholarly, smug young man's satisfaction.

"No reason why I shouldn't say you talked," Doc announced.

Hedges jumped uncomfortably. "Oh, you wouldn't!"

"Why not?"

"It would be lying."

Doc Savage's grunt was full of feeling. "Practically everyone I've met recently has been lying to me off and on. It could be contagious."

After that, Hedges looked upset enough to give him some satisfaction.

The island, like most islands off this rather hard-hearted section of the Maine coast, had few attractions for an eye that didn't like its scenery on the harsh and craggy order. There was not much tree growth, and what there was showed signs of a tough battle for survival. They picked their way among stones, and through nettles and brambles, presently coming to a footpath, and shortly afterward being presented with a sudden view of a large, many-windowed stone building that was quite pleasant looking.

"Our destination?" Doc asked.

"If we make it," Disappointed Smith agreed.

The uneasiness in the red-whiskered giant's voice, as definite as the over-drawn note of a too tightly stretched instrument string, gripped Doc's attention.

"You sound scared," he remarked.

"I wish to hell I hadn't come here," Smith said, and unquestionably meant it.

Continuing down the path, they came at length to a forking of the way, one route leading through a stone gate which bore a neat sign on one of the gate posts:

PARADE RESORT HOTEL

"Resort hotel!" Doc said, surprised. "Is that our destination?"

“Uh-huh,” Smith said nervously. “I guess we might as well walk right into the lion's mouth, and get it over with.”

“You sound alarmed, although the place looks peaceful enough,” Doc said.

“They *would* have it looking peaceful for us,” Smith muttered. “And, brother, if you see anything unusual, you better pretend not to notice it, if you want to stay healthy.”

They approached the hotel. Doc was impressed by the signs of peace. Two young men were playing tennis on a neat court. An older man was practicing driving golf balls at a net. Two men and a young lady passed in bathing suits and robes, headed for a small bay where there was a beach, and a dock at which some boats were tied. Doc found himself interested in one of the boats, a sleek expensive express cruiser.

The boat, he felt sure, was the *Zipper*, the abusive Mr. Stanley K. Foreman's craft.

The discovery of the *Zipper* suddenly got an effective exclamation point tacked on to it, when a man screamed.

DOC happened to be looking at Disappointed Smith when the man shrieked, and he thought Smith was going to faint; then he thought he had never seen anyone more faster than Smith moved getting behind a tree. Mix Walden was hardly less disturbed. She grabbed at her heart.

The howl—it was difficult to determine what emotion the cry conveyed—came from the hotel grounds nearby. Doc wheeled toward the sound. He discovered a man running toward him, a roundish fat man in a flannel suit that was too tight.

“Mr. Savage!” the man screamed. “I want to talk to you!”

This was clear information. And, when three men wearing the livery of the hotel seized the man who had yelled, Doc lunged forward, ignoring Smith's frantic, “Oh, my God! Don't start the trouble now!”

The three men wrestled the fat man around, addressing some words to him which Doc didn't catch. The plump screamer, obviously because of what had been said to him, underwent a change. He looked at Doc vacantly when the bronze man arrived.

“You wished,” Doc asked, “to speak to me?”

The plump man stared wordlessly. Doc was sure there was a brand of supreme horror in his eyes.

“This guy's one of the patients,” a hotel attendant said. “He's a nut.”

“Release him,” Doc said ominously.

The attendants exchanged indecisive glances, then shrugs, and took their hands off the howler.

“Now,” Doc told the fat man. “What did you have on your mind? Don't be afraid. Nothing is going to happen to you.”

The plump man licked his lips, and mumbled finally, “I'm sorry.”

“Didn't you have anything to say?” Doc demanded.

"I—I guess not."

"You acted as if you had."

"Uh—I—I forget what it was."

The attendants tried not to look visibly relieved. "I'm sorry about this, sir," one of them said. "This guy is improving steadily, but he blows his cork once in a while, just for a few minutes."

Doc Savage looked at them narrowly.

"You gentlemen," he said, "had better not try to pull anything."

"We're sure sorry," the attendant said rather unpleasantly, "if you don't believe us. But we can't help it."

Doc demanded, "Are you trying to tell me this hotel is an insane asylum?"

"Not exactly," the attendant said. "But we got a few guests who are a little nervous. But the sea air around here does them good."

Another attendant grinned. "It's very quieting, the sea air here. People forget their worries."

"Yeah," said the third attendant. "The guests around here get quiet, awful quiet."

The first flunky nodded. "Almost as quiet as if they were dead," he said.

The three walked away, taking the plump, terrified man with them.

Doc reflected that the attendants were three very nasty looking customers.

DISAPPOINTED SMITH came reluctantly from behind the three where he had taken refuge, and rejoined Doc Savage. There was now a dew of nervous perspiration on Smith's face where it was not covered with whiskers.

"Boy!" gasped Smith. "I thought judgment Day was here, and me not prepared!"

"That man," Doc said grimly, "had something to tell me."

Smith shivered. "It's lucky for us he changed his mind and didn't say it."

"He didn't talk," Doc said, "because they threatened him."

"Conceivably."

"Who was he?"

"I don't know. But maybe Mix does." Smith turned to Mix, who was also showing the disturbed symptoms of someone who had just stepped out of the path of a thundering railway engine. "Do you know him?"

"He's one of the boatload of shipwreck passengers," Mix said. "His name is Keeler, Sam Keeler. They thought he was dumb and so let him run around loose, but evidently he wasn't too dumb to finally catch on to what is happening around here."

“Hush!” gasped Disappointed Smith. “I’ve changed my mind. I don’t want to know who he is, and I don’t want to know anything else that will get me shot.”

Doc Savage became irritated.

“Are you two,” he demanded, “going to tell me what’s back of this?”

“Not me,” said Smith hastily.

“I don’t dare,” said Mix. “I’m afraid they would slaughter Jane if I did.”

Doc scowled at Si Hedges, who didn’t look as if he was willing to give any information either, and they continued toward the hotel entrance.

The hotel, in appearance, lived up to the impression it had given from a distance of being a pleasant, comfortable hostelry in a rather picturesque locale. Also, at close range, it became evident that the place was quite luxurious. It was the kind of an establishment millionaires travel long distances to find.

The thing that most impressed Doc Savage, however, was more intangible, an air of sinister portent, the kind of a feeling that went with screams in the night, cocked pistols, poison bottles.

He experienced no surprise when Stanley K. Foreman, owner of the *Zipper*, approached them across the lobby. Foreman’s expression was unpleasant.

Chapter XI

STANLEY K. FOREMAN planted himself in front of them, and placed his hands, which were doubled into fists, on his hips. He made a short speech: “What the hell are you doing here, you pirate? I heard you broke jail. This is a respectable hotel, and I’m not going to have things smashed up in it. What do you want here?”

“You own this establishment?” Doc asked.

“Of course I own it!”

Trying not to be too obvious about it, Doc Savage had surveyed the lobby, the conclusion he immediately reached being that Foreman was a liar, and fully expected violence in his hotel lobby. There were nearly a dozen men in the place, and none of them looked at ease. No one had any visible armament, but there could be plenty close at hand. Also it wasn’t natural, Doc reflected, for so many guests in a resort hotel to be up and about so early in the morning. The stage, Doc felt, was now set for violence. He didn’t like it.

He decided to see whether there was any possibility that the enemy wished to avoid a showdown.

“Mr. Foreman, there has been a misunderstanding,” Doc said pleasantly. “I feel, if you would listen to my explanation of how I came to make use of your boat for a short time, we could straighten this out. I do not relish being charged with piracy, so I would like very much to talk to you. I think we can reach an amicable understanding.”

Suspicion charged Foreman’s oiled voice as he demanded, “That why you came here?”

“Mr. Smith was kind enough to bring me. It was an accommodation on his part, that I was able to persuade him to fetch me,” Doc replied.

Si Hedges delivered a small surprise.

He said, "That is correct, Mr. Foreman. And I persuaded them to let me ride with them."

Foreman scowled at Hedges. "As a secretary, you're damned unreliable. Where did you disappear to? I looked all over town for you before I left for the island last night."

"I was having an unfortunate experience, sir," Hedges said. "I'm awfully sorry I discommoded you."

With a snort, Foreman wheeled back to Doc. "So you want to explain stealing my boat?"

"Yes."

"That won't get you straight with the law," Foreman snapped. "You're still charged with drugging that girl."

Doc nodded, hiding his pleasure at what he believed was the satisfactory turn events were taking.

"I know," he agreed. "But I do not think they can prove I administered a drug to Jane Walden. No one saw me. On the other hand, I was caught red-handed aboard your boat."

Foreman scowled.

"I'm too busy to talk to you now," he growled.

"Perhaps," Doc suggested, "if I became a guest at your hotel, you would find time to hear me."

There was a wintry look in Foreman's narrow-lidded eyes. "Okay," he said. "Stick around."

THEY were assigned four rooms in a row on the second floor, Doc getting the middle one. But the other three—Smith, Mix and Hedges—seemed to have acquired a violent aversion to being alone. They all crowded into Doc's room, and Disappointed Smith elaborately got down on his knees and performed a salaam to Doc.

"Allah be praised!" he said. "Without thy wisdom, oh keeper of the wits, our names would have been as mud."

"Cut it out," Doc suggested. "The atmosphere around this hotel hasn't exactly got me in a funny mood."

"I'm only half kidding," said Smith. "I think they had baked a quick cake for us down there in the lobby. But you were slick enough to give Foreman a temporary out, and that, I'm convinced, is all that kept our entrails off the floor."

Doc frowned at him.

"Want to talk?"

Smith shook his head nervously.

Doc, not pressing the point, asked, "How about some breakfast in the dining room?"

"And make it easy for them to poison us?" Smith demanded uneasily.

Mix said, "They won't be that subtle, don't worry."

THE dining room was well-occupied when they arrived, many of the diners having been seated in the lobby during the conversation with Foreman. Doc Savage ordered ham and eggs, and Mix, Smith and Hedges nervously ordered the same thing. They were, Doc Savage saw, beginning to depend on him to such an extent that they automatically let him prescribe their eating. He didn't like that. It indicated that whatever was here on the island—they knew, or suspected, what it was and Doc didn't—was definitely terrifying.

“You,” Doc told Smith, “should be ashamed of getting so scared.”

Smith wasn't impressed. “You've seen little dogs dash up to big dogs barking like they were going to eat up the big dog, then stop all of a sudden? That's me. Little dog.”

Doc observed that various diners were beginning to finish their breakfasts suddenly and depart. Some of them had eaten almost nothing.

“We,” Mix remarked, “seem to spoil appetites.”

Doc Savage pondered. Whatever this was, it wasn't small, because most of the occupants of the hotel seemed to be involved. He studied the guests as they hurriedly completed their breakfasts and departed, or departed without completing them.

Doc was puzzled by a vague impression he'd gotten at various times since arriving at the hotel, this being a feeling that something was familiar. It was the sort of sensation one gets when walking into a place one visited years ago and forgot. Doc positively hadn't been on Parade Island before. So it wasn't the island or the hotel. He'd thought it might be the hotel furnishings, but dismissed that.

Now suddenly he realized what it was. The guests. Because now he saw a guest he recognized. The guest, a tall man with a downcast in one eye and a habitual pixilated smirk like a husband who had just kissed the maid, was Mr. George Winterwall, one of the most amiable rascals in the nation. George was a confidence man with the gift of getting your shirt off your back and making you love it. George, Doc happened to recall, was being sought by the New York police that he might explain how three Wall Street tycoons had lost considerably more than their shirts.

That was it! Some of the guests, if not all of them, were crooks. Probably some of the others weren't the gentlemen George was.

Doc was suddenly filled with more alarm than he cared for.

“Mix,” he said.

She jumped nervously. “Yes?”

“How do they communicate with the mainland? Telephone? Radio?”

“Radio,” Mix said. “But they won't let you use it.”

“Where is the transmitter?”

“Top floor of the hotel,” Mix admitted. “But I wouldn't try it.”

“What room?”

“A penthouse on the roof. Have you gone crazy?”

“You three,” Doc said, “had better go to your rooms and wait there. Plead that you were up all night and need sleep.”

Mix gave him a gray-faced, frightened look.

“Don't,” she gasped, “do it!”

Doc put down his napkin and prepared to stand. “We need help here, and the police will be glad to give it. I think the police will be delighted at the idea of laying their hands on such fellows as George Winterwall and some others.”

Disappointed Smith moaned. “I was afraid you'd start recognizing the crooks.”

Mix looked as if she were going to be ill.

“They'll kill Jane if you get them stirred up!” she wailed.

Doc shook his head. “Not the way I'm going to stir them up,” he said.

DOC SAVAGE left the three at the table. He believed they were scared enough to do as he had instructed, go to their rooms. Doc himself ascended the stairway, as if going to his own room, passing a man who was carefully polishing the stair bannisters, and who was probably there to check on his movements. There was, however, no one in the hallway.

He had supposed he would have to try doors until he found one unlocked, but he got a lucky break and discovered one standing open. He entered boldly, found the room unoccupied. He jumped to the telephone.

Waiting for the operator to answer, he worked his brain overtime trying to recall exactly how Stanley K. Foreman's voice sounded. He hoped that his ability as a voice mimic, which he had spent considerable time developing, wouldn't fail him.

Using Foreman's hard, oiled voice and unpleasant tone, he said to the operator, “Where'd they take that fat so-and-so, Sam Keeler?”

He was pleased with his imitation of Foreman, particularly when the operator fell for it.

“Why, to 303, Mr. Foreman,” the operator said. “Is something wrong?”

“No more than was wrong already,” Doc growled, and hung up.

He went to the door, assured himself the hallway was still empty, and strode to his room, which was at the far end of the corridor, and near the stairway that led to the upper floors. A man was also polishing woodwork on this flight of steps. Evidently they had a lookout posted between each floor.

Doc Savage decided he wanted to talk to the fat man who'd tried to accost him earlier, the man named Sam Keeler. But room 303 would be on the next floor above, and there was the obstacle of the lookout.

Doc went to the window, and frowned when he was able to count at least three hotel guests loitering where they could watch the window. So climbing up the outer wall, which perhaps he could have managed because the hotel was constructed of such rough stone, was out.

He drew the window shade. He quietly placed a chair on its side in the middle of the room. The walls

were papered, and he found that he was able to loosen a quantity of paper with his pocket knife. This he crammed under the chair, then piled on both pillow cases, towels from the bathroom, two sheets, and distributed the feathers from the pillows over the pile.

Applying a match, he found the result was a merry blaze. The framework of the chair furnished space for a draft until the fire got going. Doc Savage stood back, and was pleased with the quantity of smoke.

Before long, he had to lie flat on the floor by the door to breathe at all without discomfort.

He flung open the door, permitting the smoke to roll into the corridor. For perhaps half a minute, there was no sound, then the man polishing woodwork exclaimed, "What the hell!"

"Help!" Doc yelled feebly. "Help! Help!"

The lookout's feet appeared a few inches from Doc's face. The rest of the man's body was embedded in the rolling smoke cloud.

"What's going on here?" the man demanded excitedly. Then he entered the room. "Where are you?"

Doc arose silently, tiptoed outside, and ascended the stairway to the third floor. The third floor hallway was exactly like the one below, rich and pleasantly decorated. Doc ran down it, found 303, and went on past it and past other doors.

"Fire!" the man downstairs was bellowing.

Doc reached the far end of the corridor, flattened himself against a door—he had hoped to find one open in this hall also, but there was no such luck—and waited. Down the corridor a short distance, a door flew open. It wasn't 303. A man came out, rushed for the stairs. Just as he was passing 303, that door flew open, and two men came out, one demanding, "What's going on?"

"Fire downstairs," said the runner.

The two from 303 promptly yanked the door shut, locked it, and followed the other man downstairs.

Doc went to 303, eyed the closed transom, then put his mouth close to the door, cupped his hands around it and called, "Keeler! Sam Keeler!"

"What is it?" Keeler's frightened voice inquired.

"Open the transom. Quick!"

The transom flopped open. Doc grasped the shelf at the bottom of the transom, chinned himself, and hung there. "Talk fast, Keeler," he ordered. "We've only got a few seconds. Give me the highlights of the story."

"Who is this?" Keeler demanded.

"Doc Savage. Are you alone in there now?"

"I'm alone."

"Talk fast, man! Your story. Let's have it."

"I was on a small steamer that hit a wartime mine near here two weeks ago. A boatload of us passengers got to this island. They won't let us leave, and my friends have been disappearing one at a time. This is a

terrible place.”

“Never mind the kind of a place it is,” Doc said urgently. “Why won't they let you leave?”

“It's a hideout for crooks. This fellow Foreman makes a business of hiding crooks from the law. He charges plenty, but guarantees results. He posts a bond of fifty thousand dollars which he guarantees to pay any crook who is caught while under his protection.”

“How did you find that out?”

“I've been eavesdropping,” Keeler said.

“You say some other people who came in the boat with you have disappeared?”

“Most of them have.”

“What happened to them?”

“They got wise to what was going on here—”

“I didn't ask *why*! I asked what?”

“I think they're prisoners somewhere. Maybe some have been murdered.”

“Prisoners where?”

“I don't know. But somewhere on the island. I don't.—”

“All right, this is all the time we have to talk,” Doc interrupted. “Don't tell anyone I talked to you. Keep your mouth shut, understand?”

“For God's sake, do something to break this up!” Keeler gasped. “I'll keep my mouth shut.”

DOC SAVAGE dropped back to the floor, ran lightly to the stairway going down, where he encountered smoke. There was confusion in the second floor hallway, men running around, shouting, and fire extinguishers hissing. Doc Savage descended the stairs, inhaled some of the smoke, began coughing copiously, and worked his way down the hallway.

He grabbed the first man he encountered and demanded, “Where's Foreman? I demand to see Foreman!”

“Who the—” The man recognized Doc, and finished, “I'll be damned!”

“Where's Foreman? I demand to see—”

“Keep your shirt on, brother,” the man said. “He's anxious to see you, too.” The man produced a

revolver which he brandished threateningly. "You come with me," he ordered.

Stanley K. Foreman was standing at the foot of the steps which led to the lobby, coughing and wiping his eyes. He stared in astonishment at Doc Savage, then rage jumped over his features.

"I demand," Doc Savage yelled, getting the first word in, "to know why someone set fire to my room."

"You—what?" Foreman growled. He was suddenly unsure of himself, thrown off balance by Doc's question and the belligerent manner of its delivery.

Doc began poking Foreman on the chest with a hard forefinger.

He shouted, "I demand protection! For almost twenty-four hours, nothing but unpleasant things have been happening to me, and I'm tired of it! This is your hotel and your island, and I demand protection."

Foreman looked ugly and undecided. He didn't say anything.

"And another thing!" Doc added angrily. "I've got some friends in New York, and I want to call them and tell them they won't need to come hunting for me." He paused for that to sink in, then added, "Provided you think you can give me some security around here!"

Doc waited, scowling at Foreman. He thought he was putting on a rather neat act, and hoped he'd given Foreman a good mouthful of confusion to gnaw on. The hinge on which the whole thing swung was the hope which Foreman, by his actions, had shown he held: that Doc Savage would go away without finding out anything or doing anything.

"Who do you want this protection from?" Foreman asked dubiously.

"Listen, brother, that dopey-looking secretary of yours telephoned me a pack of lies about boats for sale," Doc said angrily. "After that, nothing that happened to me makes sense. Maybe your secretary tried to swindle me and got cold feet. Maybe his friends are trying to scare me off before I do something about it!"

"You mean Si Hedges?"

"That's exactly who I mean," said Doc grimly.

He mentally crossed his fingers, for he believed that Foreman was nibbling at the bait suspiciously, intending to give it a yank and see whether there was a hook in it. If there was a hook, Foreman probably considered himself too big a fish to be boated.

"What," asked Foreman, "do you expect me to do?"

"I want you to pick out a good tough man who has a gun, and have him go around with me and protect me." Doc pointed at the thug he had accosted in the hall, and who was standing by, mouth open, still holding his gun. "This fellow would be fine," Doc added.

Foreman swallowed his astonishment, but not easily. "Sure, I guess I can do that," he said. "You want him to stay right with you?"

"Every minute!"

"You can be damned sure he'll do exactly that," Foreman said grimly.

Chapter XII

STANLEY K. FOREMAN put his handkerchief to his mouth, and ascended the stairs to see how the fire fighting was progressing. Doc Savage stood at the foot of the steps and listened for a moment.

“It sounds as if they've extinguished the blaze,” he remarked to his new bodyguard.

“Uh-huh,” the man said.

Doc strode to the dining room, looked inside, and observed Disappointed Smith, Mix Walden and Si Hedges still seated at their breakfast table. There was a man in the dining room, evidently a guard who had warned them to stay where they were.

Doc addressed his bodyguard, who was at his heels. “Your job, Mr.—Mr.—”

“I'm Erle Mason,” the thug muttered.

“Okay, Erle. Your job is to protect me.”

“That's right.”

“I want you to stand right here and be ready to protect me while I go talk to those people at the table,” Doc said. “Keep your eyes open. If they try to jump me, pitch in and help me. Understand?”

“I got it,” Erle said.

Giving the bodyguard no time to think of accompanying him, Doc walked quickly to the table. For the benefit of the bodyguard, he delivered himself of an angry stare. Then he sat down, putting his hands in his pockets.

“What,” Mix demanded, “has come over you?”

Si Hedges asked, “What happened upstairs? They won't let us leave here.”

Disappointed Smith closed his eyes and unlimbered a quotation: “Difficulty is a severe instructor, set over us by the Supreme guardian and legislator, who knows us better too.—He that wrestles with us strengthens our nerves and sharpens our skill.—Our antagonist is our helper.” He grimaced violently, added, “A guy named Burke wrote that. He must've had us in mind.”

Doc leaned forward, said, “Shut up and listen! In a moment I am going to pick up a napkin and roll it in a

ball as if I was nervous. When I lay the napkin down, there will be half a dozen small glass balls inside it. The balls contain a liquid. Don't drop them. They're gas. Each one of you take two, but don't let anyone see you dividing them up, or let anybody know you have them.”

Smith gulped, “Gas! What are—”

“Listen, don't ask questions! Don't use the glass capsules until I tell you to. Then throw them on the floor, and hold your breath. Hold your breath at least a minute, because if you don't, you'll fall over unconscious.”

“Falling over unconscious,” Mix said wryly, “might be a relief.”

“It won't rescue your sister,” Doc said levelly.

Mix's eyes flew wide with excitement. “You've found Jane?” she demanded eagerly.

“No. But I'm working on it.”

Mix exclaimed, “We think they must have brought her here to the island—”

Doc stopped her by lifting a hand. “Why didn't you people tell me this hotel is a refuge for high-grade crooks?”

SMITH and Mix and Hedges were all blank-faced for a moment, then Smith muttered, “So you found that out.”

“With small help from you,” Doc said sharply. “Keep your voices down. Foreman's gang isn't sure yet that I'm wise.”

“Now that you are,” Mix said, “they won't let you leave here alive.”

“We'll see about that. How long have you known about this?”

“I just got suspicious yesterday,” Mix said. “Jane suspected it before I did. That was about a week ago, but I thought her imagination was working overtime.”

Doc turned to Si Hedges. “When did you catch on?”

Hedges paled. “I've suspected it, I must admit, for some months. I—I was afraid to act. But, when I learned they intended to kill some of those poor shipwreck victims who landed here unwittingly, I was horrified into doing something about it.”

“Why,” Doc demanded, “did you think of calling on me for help?”

“Because I knew about you. I really have a brother-in-law named Wilbur Tidings, whom you once did a great favor. Yesterday, when I accompanied Mr. Foreman to the mainland to buy supplies, as was my habit, I slipped off and telephoned you. I—er—I told you the lie about the boats because I wanted to talk to you before I told my suspicions.”

“You mean,” Doc said sourly, “that you wanted to make a deal to clear yourself.”

“I—yes.”

“They must have suspected you,” Doc said. “And had a man eavesdrop on your talk with me.”

“Yes, I found out later, after they took me from my hotel room violently, that they had.”

Doc swung on Disappointed Smith and said, “So the next thing they did was hire you to put on your idiotic swimming act, thinking that was just the kind of cockeyed thing that would distract my attention from them?”

Disappointed Smith groaned audibly. “Damn them, that's exactly what they did. But I didn't catch on until—”

“Until Foreman bailed you out of jail, and told you to keep your mouth shut?” Doc suggested.

Smith nodded. “Yes, that's how I got out of jail. And then I knew I was into something that stank bad.”

Doc was keeping a wary eye on Foreman's henchmen to see that neither of them came within earshot. They were holding the conversation at the table in low voices.

“How did Jane get into it?” Doc asked.

Mix, near tears, said, “She thought I was involved, and was trying to protect me.”

“Do you and Jane work here on the island?”

“Yes. I'm a hostess and Jane was a bookkeeper.”

“And you never suspected anything for months?”

Mix shook her head slowly. “Foreman is a slick devil. And who would ever expect to find a thing like this rat's nest?”

“We've killed enough time,” Doc said. He placed the balled napkin on the table. “Here's the napkin with the gas grenades inside it. Remember what I said to do. And get this—don't be surprised at anything that happens to you!”

“We won't be,” Smith muttered. “Nothing could surprise us after this.”

DOC SAVAGE arose, walked angrily to the door, and told the bodyguard, “Good work. You kept your eye right on me.”

At that moment, Foreman approached, scowling, and demanded of the bodyguard, “What's he been doing?”

“Talking to that crackpot Smith and the other two,” the guard said.

Foreman didn't like that, and Doc headed him off by saying in a grim voice, “Mr. Foreman, do you know what I think? I think those three—Smith, Miss Walden, Hedges—aren't honest. I think they're hiding something.”

With some difficulty, Foreman pretended surprise. “You do?”

“Yes, I do!”

“HmMMMM,” said Foreman.

“And now,” Doc announced, “I’m ready to make that telephone call to my friends in New York, to tell them I’m safe, and they needn’t start a search of this place.”

Alarm turned Foreman’s eyes coldly dark. “This isn’t the mainland. You can’t telephone—”

“Radio-telephone, I mean.”

“Oh.”

“I understand you have a radio-telephone station here.”

Foreman licked his lips. “It’s busy right now. Wait about ten minutes, and I guess it’ll be all right for you to make your call.”

“Ten minutes, very well,” Doc agreed. “Mr. Foreman, I must say you’re turning out to be a very cooperative fellow, practically the first one I’ve run into in the last twenty-four hours.”

“I aim to be,” Foreman said.

AFTER the passing of precisely ten minutes, one of the hotel employees approached Doc Savage and Erle, his bodyguard, and stated, “It’s okay to use the radio now. It is on the roof. Erle, Foreman says for you to take him up.”

There did not seem much sense, since the view from everywhere on the island was equally marvelous, in the hotel having a penthouse, but the builder of the place had optimistically installed one which, probably being seldom rented, had been turned into a radio shack. This was presided over by a thin cross-eyed young man who was rather officious. He said, “You make a radiophone call about like you make a regular phone call. You just tell me the number you want and the city, and I’ll tell you when the connection is through.” He pushed an ordinary telephone toward Doc Savage.

Doc pretended to be rather confused. “You say I just talk into this?” he asked.

“That’s right,” the young man said. A flicker of relief had crossed his face.

“Thank you,” Doc said.

“Who do you want to talk to?”

“Mr. Andrew Blodgett Mayfair, at Central 0-9000, New York City,” Doc said.

The radio apparatus was in another room, which the cross-eyed young man now entered. There was a wait of about five minutes, then the young man put his head out of the door and said, “Okay, there’s your number.”

Doc picked up the telephone and said, “Hello, Monk.”

The voice which answered him was female.

“Monk ain’t here right now,” the female voice said.

It was an uncultured female, a tough-sounding one.

“Who is this speaking?” Doc asked.

“Gwen.”

“You are a friend of Monk's?”

The girl giggled. “That's right, Mister.”

That, Doc reflected, is a lie. He knew something else, as well. He knew he wasn't connected with the mainland at all, because he had made enough radio-land line calls to recognize the difference in background sounds. The girl, whoever she was, was undoubtedly on Parade Island. Doc feigned no knowledge of this.

“When will Monk return?” he inquired.

“Not right away, Mister. It'll be three or four hours, anyway. You want he should call you back?”

“No-o-o-o,” Doc said. “It might not be convenient. However, I wonder if you would take a message for Monk?”

“Sure thing.”

“Have you a pencil handy? . . . You have. Good. Take this down: Monk, the setup is what we figured. It looks like Foreman and his guests will pay plenty to have our memories lapse. They're worried. They think I'm here to turn them over to the law. I plan to scare them some more, then drive a hard bargain. They're dangerous. If you don't hear from me by evening, tip off the F.B.I., and we'll get credit for cleaning up another gang of crooks. Nobody will believe we tried to get them to pay off . . . Have you got all that down, Gwen?”

“I got it,” Gwen said. “I took it down in shorthand.”

“Monk can't read shorthand, baby.”

“I'll translate it for him.”

“Okay. Don't forget to see that Monk gets that information.”

“I won't,” Gwen promised.

“Goodbye,” Doc said.

The radio operator came out of the other room. Evidently he'd been eavesdropping, because he was trying to conceal pop-eyed amazement. “That'll be five dollars,” he said.

“Put it on my bill,” Doc ordered. “Come on, Erle,” he directed his bodyguard.

DOC went to his room, commanding Erle to take up a position outside the door and admit no one. The room smelled strongly of smoke, but the air was now clear, the window being open. Doc surveyed the damage, which was considerable, and concluded it would be in the spirit of things if he demanded another room. He was picking up the telephone when the door flew open, admitting Foreman.

Stanley K. Foreman gave Doc a pleasant scowl.

“You handed us a hell of a scare,” he said.

“What do you mean?” Doc asked innocently.

“Get out of your sheep's clothing, Savage,” Foreman said. “I've always had a suspicion you were a crook, and now I'm glad to find out I was right.”

Doc shoved out his jaw, said, “Don't you call me a crook!”

Foreman laughed. “Stop it! I'm wise. That radiophone call you just made—who do you think you talked to?”

Doc feigned astonished rage. “What did you do? If that blasted operator—”

“Gwen,” said Foreman with relish, “is the girl friend of one of my guests.”

Doc retreated a step. “You mean I didn't talk to the mainland?”

Foreman snorted. “What kind of an ass do you take me for? You talked to a girl in this hotel. That's who you talked to.”

Doc pretended to ponder, at the same time doing what he hoped was a good job of registering alarm, then anger, then wrathful aggressiveness.

“All right, deceiving me hasn't got you a thing!” he declared. “I was going to carry this farther to get you in a more responsive frame of mind, but that's off. So we'll talk money.”

Foreman nodded. “How much money?”

“A hundred thousand dollars,” Doc said. “And no haggling. Either you pay off in cash, or Monk Mayfair, my associate, will tip off the F.B.I., and your goose will be cooked.”

“That,” said Foreman bluntly, “is a deal.”

“Good.”

“I'll dig up the cash, pay you, and then you get the hell away from here. You make my guests nervous.”

Doc held up a hand. “Wait a minute, not so fast. There's more to it than that.”

Sudden rage darkened Foreman's face. “You made your own price, and if you think—”

“The price,” Doc said sharply, “is okay. But those three chiselers with me—Disappointed Smith, Mix Walden and Si Hedges—have got to be disposed of. They know too much.” He looked meaningfully at Foreman, added, “Too much, by far, to do either of us any good.”

“I see.” Foreman was relieved. “What do you want done with them?”

Doc shrugged. “Why not knock them off, like you did part of that gang who came here in the lifeboat after the shipwreck?”

Foreman, startled, exclaimed, “Hey, those people haven't been killed.”

“Well, for God's sake, you must be an amateur!” Doc exploded. “You can't have them telling what they've found out!”

Foreman smiled coldly. “They won't talk. I've got them locked up. I can keep them a year, if needed, and in a year I plan to retire anyway, closing this place up.”

“That doesn't sound like a smart idea,” Doc said doubtfully. “Where are you keeping them?”

“In the hotel basement.”

Doc scowled. “I still don't like it. They might break out of the basement.”

“They won't,” said Foreman, “break out of this basement.”

“You sound darned confident. . . . But I don't know that I'm satisfied.”

“Stop worrying. They're safe.”

Doc rubbed his jaw vigorously, as if in thought. He said, “Tell you what you do. You grab Smith, Mix and Hedges, and throw them into this basement of yours. I'll go along and see the place. If I think it's going to hold them, it's a deal.”

Foreman went to the door and spoke in low tones to Erle, who left hurriedly, presently returning with a small army of assistants. They proceeded to overpower Disappointed Smith, Mix and Si Hedges.

Chapter XIII

DOC SAVAGE stood by and watched the fracas which resulted. Disappointed Smith and Mix Walden put up a fight, but Si Hedges burst into tears. Smith, fists flailing, got two men down almost immediately. His terror wasn't simulated, as least not until he caught the reassuring drop of an eyelid which Doc gave him. Three men captured handfuls of Smith's red whiskers, and he began to howl in rage and pain. Mix peeled shins, gouged and bit; finally they got her down by force and rolled her in a blanket, which they tied.

“Take them to the basement,” Foreman said coldly.

The basement proved to be exactly like any other hotel basement, and Doc, looking about, had to fight down his alarm. He was afraid his scheme had flopped.

“What are you pulling off?” he asked Foreman angrily.

“Keep your shirt on. There was a smaller hotel here before this one was built, and it used to be a rum-running station back in prohibition days. They dug a liquor cellar under the place, and that's where I'm keeping the prisoners. Watch.”

Two men set their shoulders against a coal bin and pushed, with the result that the entire bin rolled inward slowly, then swung, revealing a considerable opening. Beyond were stone-walled passages, darkness and an unpleasant odor.

They traveled perhaps a hundred feet down a passage, following flashlight beams, and came to an iron door.

“Open up,” Foreman called.

The iron door was opened by an armed man from the other side, and Doc saw a second door beyond, this one made of crudely welded bars.

In a large cave, dimly lighted by electric bulbs, there were about a dozen prisoners. The captives had obtained some semblance of privacy by rigging partitions of blankets, and there was furniture of a sort,

wicker stuff that could not very handily be made into weapons.

Foreman took some keys from his pocket and began examining them. He found the key he wanted, and inserted it in a padlock which secured the iron-barred inner door.

Doc made sure Smith, Mix and Hedges were looking at him.

He said, "Drop the marbles."

Foreman wheeled nervously. "What did you say?"

Shouting angrily—he hoped this would distract the guards so they wouldn't observe Smith, Mix and Hedges closely—Doc bellowed, "Listen, I don't have to account for everything I say around here!"

Foreman scowled. "What the hell!"

Doc drew his lungs full of air, held it there. He saw that Smith had dropped both his liquid-filled glass balls and that they had squashed on the floor. Smith had been carrying them in his mouth. Mix had hers concealed in her hair; she shook her head violently and they fell to the floor. Hedges was carrying his in his handkerchief, which he had been using to blot his eyes.

The broken glass globules made oily-looking wet stains on the floor, and these evaporated swiftly, like liquefied butane gas which had been exposed to the air, except that the vapor was not visible.

Foreman leveled an angry arm at Doc and said, "I may be buying you off, but I don't have to take any of your back-talk!"

Doc said nothing, did not breathe. He was trying to count off the seconds—thousand and twenty, thousand and twenty-one, thousand and twenty-two. . . .

Two of the little gas grenades would have been sufficient, and he began to worry lest six of them might over-saturate the air in the passage, so that the stuff would not, as it normally did, mix with the air and, because of the reaction of the oxygen in the air upon the chemical, become impotent in about sixty seconds.

"For two bits," continued Foreman wrathfully, "I'd throw you in here too, and take my chances with your pal Mayfair and his—"

He became silent, closed his eyes, then opened them, gazing down at the floor as if seeking a soft place; before he could possibly have found a comfortable spot, he sagged down and stretched out and began a continual, but feeble, clawing at the floor, as if trying to rise again.

Doc watched him, not liking the way the man kept moving. He should have become still. The reaction of the gas, usually violent and instantaneous, was not up to what Doc considered to be par. He frowned at some of the other men, noticing that most of them moved feebly after they fell. He'd better, he thought with alarm, be more careful when he mixed the next batch of the stuff.

He saw a prisoner on the other side of the bars go down. Leaping to the bars, Doc used the breath in his lungs to shout: "Gas! Hold your breath! It'll be harmless in a minute!"

He didn't breathe in after he yelled, but held his breath again. He had, he discovered, used almost all the air in his lungs to shout. He began to suffer intolerably.

"All right," he said finally. "Start breathing. And let's finish this thing up right now."

THE key which Foreman had been about to use on the padlock had become mixed with the others on the ring. Doc began trying all the likely-looking keys in the lock.

“Smith, collect their guns,” he ordered. “Let's hope they're carrying enough of them to arm a mop-up squad.”

“Jane!” Mix Walden cried, and seized the bars in a frenzy of relief.

Doc glanced up, saw Jane Walden. She was pale, but she looked considerably less quarrelsome than when he had met her on the *Zipper*. Jane seized Mix's hands through the bars. Doc noticed that she was looking at Disappointed Smith with substantially more than admiration.

The lock jumped open with an angry snap. Doc threw back the barred door, which moved reluctantly.

“You've got to fight your way from here on,” he told the prisoners. “Get your guns from this big fellow with the whiskers.”

There was a rush for the door, and Smith bellowed indignantly, “Stop shoving! There's not enough guns to go around. There's only seven.” He looked over the group, added, “If you don't know how to shoot, don't take a gun which somebody else can use to good advantage.” He finally got his squad armed, and turned to Doc. “All right, what's the procedure?”

Doc said, “I want two men who are armed, and all the rest who have no weapons, to bring up the rear as a mop-up squad. Whenever you find a crook that has been shot or disabled, appropriate his weapons.”

A lean young sailor said, “This begins to sound like Tarawa.”

“Give that revolver to one of the men, Mix,” Doc ordered.

Mix exclaimed, “Darned if I—”

“I haven't got time to quarrel with you now,” Doc declared, then went over, took the gun away from her, and handed it to a man.

“You big bum, I don't like you again!” Mix said.

Doc announced, “We're going up against tough customers, so don't be afraid to shoot them. But try to shoot them in the legs, if possible.”

“Are we going to just fight our way out?” Disappointed Smith demanded. “Or are we going to take over this buzzard's roost?”

“We're going to take it over,” Doc said. “Let's go.”

THEY reached the basement without incident. Smith asked uneasily, “What about Foreman and the rest of those guys who got the gas? Won't they—”

“Don't worry about them,” Doc said. “That stuff will knock them out for more than an hour.”

They mounted the concrete steps to the hotel lobby, gathered in a compact group, and burst into the lobby at a signal. The lobby, to their discomfiture, was uninhabited.

In a moment, however, they grew aware of sounds of merriment from the bar.

“Oh, oh, they're celebrating our downfall in the bar,” said Disappointed Smith. “Let's go in and help them.”

Admittance to the bar was gained through two wide swinging doors of pale blue glass, and Doc shoved open the right one, Smith the left. They entered.

A round-faced man turned to face them with an upraised glass, inviting, “Come on in and join the fun.” Then his face went slack.

“We will,” Disappointed Smith assured him. Then Smith picked up a metal chair and threw it indiscriminately at the group, with remarkable success. He felled two men.

Doc suddenly realized he didn't have a gun. He made for the barkeeper's domain behind the bar, where there was plenty of ammunition in the form of bottles.

The shipwreck victims piled into the place. One of them calmly seated himself at a table, took an aiming rest with both elbows on the table, and began shooting people in the legs.

The bartender, an extremely fat man, produced a shotgun from under the bar, turned with it, but upset awkwardly from the bottle which Doc threw.

A man left the far end of the bar, got a running start, and passed through a large window, seemingly oblivious of the glass, without breaking his racing stride.

Doc shouted, “Get your hands up! Everybody!” Only one man obeyed the command, and unfortunately Si Hedges was at the moment raising a chair to club him; mistaking the lifted hands for an offensive gesture, Hedges drove the chair down on the man's head, changing the contour of his features considerably.

Another man, badly confused, mistook the reflection of a window in a large wall mirror for a real window and ran full speed into it. He went down with the breaking glass.

There were three shots, closely spaced, and four others, more scattered. Disappointed Smith joined Doc behind the bar, seized bottles, tucked them under his left arm, then leaned over the bar and began sharpshooting with the missiles.

“Those bottles,” Doc warned, “will fracture a man's skull.”

Smith's, “I hope so,” was bloodthirsty.

There was no more shooting.

Hands began going up.

Another man escaped via a window.

Disappointed Smith, a bottle poised, searched for a target. “Hell!” he said disgustedly. “They're surrendering.”

Doc discovered Mix Walden, standing just inside the door, pointing successively at different men on the floor. She was counting, apparently.

“There's only three unaccounted for,” she announced. “Not counting the pair who got out through the

windows.”

Smith began reloading his revolver.

“No more shooting, unless we have to,” Doc directed.

“What,” asked Smith, “do you plan to use on the remaining three? The evil-eye?”

“We'll see what some loud, angry talk will accomplish,” Doc said.

Chapter XIV

MR. FLINCH, the manager—now ex-manager—of the *Central House Hotel* in Yarmouth, Nova Scotia, had become rather indignant. He felt, he had stated several times, that he had coöperated with the authorities and so he didn't see why he should be thrown in jail. Didn't they appreciate what he had done to help? Hadn't he signed a statement that Stanley K. Foreman operated a refuge for criminals, and hadn't he, Mr. Flinch, stated he would so testify in court, proving his testimony by evidence that the crook clients had used his, Mr. Flinch's, hotel as a way-station enroute to Parade Island.

They carted him off to the bastille anyway.

“Poor Mr. Flinch,” said Disappointed Smith with pleasure. “His idea of innocence is overdeveloped.”

Captain McCollomb, a United States Coast Guard official, carefully folded Mr. Flinch's signed and witnessed statement. He remarked, “This is going to cost that guy Foreman plenty. It seems that he posted a bond of fifty thousand dollars which he guaranteed to pay each and every crook who was caught while under his protection. How many'd we get? Thirteen, wasn't it? What's fifty thousand dollars times thirteen?”

Doc Savage remarked that it was a good afternoon's salary.

“It's six hundred and fifty thousand smackeros,” supplied Disappointed Smith. His voice contained awe.

Smith, Doc Savage reflected, should not be occupying his time becoming awed about six hundred and fifty thousand dollars. Smith, Doc suspected, didn't really have six hundred and fifty thousand dollars on his mind at all. Smith probably had Jane Walden on his mind, and was too backward to do anything about it.

Jane Walden was on the other side of the room, with her sister, Mix. Even Doc Savage, who felt certain that reading a woman's mind was the least dependable thing he did, was sure Jane was in love with Disappointed Smith. And from Smith's actions during the trouble, Smith was in love with Jane.

“Smith,” Doc said.

“Eh?”

“You,” Doc said, “are full of poetry and quotations.”

“Well, I—”

“Which you have a facility for using at the wrong time.”

“Huh?”

“I think,” said Doc, “that I shall deliver a quotation myself. It is from Shakespeare.” Doc examined the ceiling for a moment thoughtfully, then delivered his quotation:

“I never tempted her with word too large,

“But as a brother to his sister, show'd,

“Bashful sincerity and comely love.”

Smith's mouth fell open, then closed, and his ears began to partake of fire engine coloring. He looked at Jane.

“Jane,” Smith said.

Jane smiled at him. “Well?”

“Jane,” said Smith. He swallowed.

“Yes?”

“I—uh—Jane . . .”

“You,” Jane said, “are in a rut.”

“I—”

Doc glanced at Mix and said in alarm, “His words are getting shorter!”

Mix took Doc's arm. “Come on, smart-aleck, before you stop what you started.”

They went outside.

“Maybe we'd better stick around,” Doc suggested, “in case Smith runs entirely out of words.”

“He won't,” Mix said. “Come on. Let's you and I have dinner. Maybe we can find something to quarrel about.”

Doc grinned. He imagined Smith would get along all right, even if he did lose his words.

THE END

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