



# Terror And The Lonely Widow

## A Doc Savage Adventure by Kenneth Robeson

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*Additional proofing by Moe the Cat*

### Chapter I

THE man stumbled backward wildly, upsetting two chairs and a water carafe, colliding with a waiter, sending the waiter staggering, and ending up against the brick wall of the Park-Ritz. He hit the wall quite hard. He pressed against the wall tightly, as if trying to distribute himself into the joints between the bricks. His hands came up, instinctively, to his face, and remained clamped there. The color of his face changed progressively from sunburned toast-brown to hazel to fawn to buff to straw-yellow. The straw-yellow was about as near corpse-gray as his very tanned skin could turn.

Still holding his hands on his face, he looked upward. His eyes searched the tall front facade of the hotel ... Presently he began brushing his face and the front of his suit with both hands, brushing off the earth that had been in the flower box. A bit of the earth had lodged in the corner of his mouth and it dissolved and made a small taste of mud.

After the flower-box fell, for a few jolted seconds, the crowded sidewalk cafe was unbelievably silent. The waiter caught himself and froze, eyes fixed on the table.

The flower box, before it had split on impact, had been about four feet long, eighteen inches wide and twelve inches deep. Filled with earth and plants petunias, wandering-jew it had weighed about three hundred pounds. Enough to cave a skull. It had come down without the slightest warning. It had split, and in turn split the table. It had scattered earth, silverware, dish fragments, scrambled eggs, coffee indiscriminately. It had missed the man by about three feet, in fact, crashing into the table and into the breakfast he was eating.

The man he was still brushing earth off himself was about five feet ten, angular, hard-boiled. Around

forty. There was a full ridged muscularity around his mouth which had the effect from a distance of giving him very thick lips, although actually his lips were as thin as a dog's lips. There was the same muscularity around the eyes, and the eyes were very pale blue, just enough blue in them to show coloring. His blue pin-stripe suit was new and expensive, and he wore it with the air of one to whom such splendor was unaccustomed.

The waiter unhooked himself from his shocked fright. He asked, "Are you hurt, sir?"

The man did not answer. He looked up at the hotel front again. Without speaking, without troubling to pick up his hat, which still stood on the chair beside the shattered table where he had placed it before three hundred pounds of flower-box fell, the man walked away. He left the hat there, some loose dirt sprinkled on brim and crown.

He crossed the street, turned and stood looking for some time at the hotel front.

"Damn them!" he said bitterly.

He went at once to his hotel, where he packed a blond leather suitcase, also new, with the sort of belongings that men buy when they visit the city after a long absence. A new very expensive electric razor, for example. The sort an out-of-the-way place wouldn't be likely to stock. He wore a grim expression throughout his packing.

He didn't check out after all. He scowled at the telephone, and went over and scowled out of the window, and turned his displeasure again on the telephone. But he did not check out.

He seemed to have decided that the flower-box might, after all, have been an accident.

He went out to get a second breakfast. He hadn't had a chance to eat the first one.

He turned south on Seventh Avenue and walked about sixty yards and a taxicab turned in

from the street, hurdled the curbing and missed—by about a foot—plastering him against the wall of a building. The cab hit quite hard, but in a calculated sort of way hard enough to have killed him (squashing him from the waist down) but not hard enough to injure the driver so that he could not run. In fact, the driver was instantly out of the cab and running. The driver's collar was turned up, his hat was low, and apparently he had smeared grease or burned cork on his face to soil it and was holding something about the size of small potatoes in his cheeks to distort his features into unrecognizability. The driver popped around the corner.

Now there was no doubt about it.

The man didn't bother about his breakfast after all. He went back to the hotel. He got on the telephone.

"This is Mr. Worrik, in Room 1204," he explained. "I'm checking out. Will you send the porter?"

He didn't really need the porter, but he knew it was customary to have one when you checked out—the hotel, he suspected, liked to make sure you weren't packing the thing off with you. Moreover he wanted the porter to bear witness that he had taken a cab to Grand Central.

To make sure of the porter as a witness, he said, "Will you get me a taxi to Grand Central Station?"

He did not leave any more of a trail than that. He was sure it wasn't necessary. Whoever was shadowing him was doing it adeptly—he had not, at any time, seen anyone suspicious. Except, of course, the running cab driver.

He let the taxi roll several blocks south and east, then paid the driver suddenly, alighted and doubled into a subway. He rode, successively, that subway, another one uptown, a street-car, a cab, another subway, a bus. His last subway trip took him uptown to the section of middle-class hotels west of Central Park.

He registered in one of these.

He wanted to use the telephone. He debated using it for some time. Finally, he didn't. Too risky. He didn't think anyone could possibly have traced him during the last hour, but he didn't dare take the chance. He began sweating it out.

THE room was not very neat. Outwardly the hotel had a certain crispness, and certainly it did not look shabby, but the rooms were not well-kept. The best explanation was that the management didn't know the war was over. They were trying to cash in, get by on the skimpy service of wartime. The man sat on the bed for a while and contemplated the threadbare carpet. He realized he was perspiring. He washed his hands and face in the bathroom.

“Cut it out, stop being nervous,” he said to himself. “Nobody could have followed you here.”

The argument did not have much effect. He tried a drink, with no better results. Not too stiff a drink, because he was afraid of impairing his wits, every bit of which he might need.

He remembered, with horror, that he had forgotten to register under an assumed name. He had signed, Farrar Worrik. Without thinking. Not once, after taking all those elaborate precautions, had it entered his head to use a phony name. He shivered violently. The oversight frightened him.

He did not, he realized, even have the initials FW on his bag or on anything else. The error, the more he thought of it, became the source of considerable horror. He wondered how many Worriks there were in New York City, and got out the telephone directory—his room only had the Manhattan volume and the red book—to see. The Worriks were few enough to worry him...Suddenly he tried to figure out why the scant number of Worriks in the phone directory should worry him, and couldn't see any good reason.

The jitters.

“Boy, I've got them,” he grumbled.

He stood up and went to the window to stare out sourly.

The bullet came in a moment later. It hit a trifle a foot, perhaps over his head and a bit to the right. It made a considerable racket. A small teaspoonful of glass sprayed out and two tiny cuts appeared magically on his face, and two large healthy red drops of blood, like fine rubies, gathered quickly. Across the room, a little plaster trickled down the wall from the spot where the bullet had hit. A moment later, the bullet itself fell to the floor, went thud-thud-thud lightly across the carpet. It had hardly penetrated the plaster, which was remarkable.

The man had never been shot at before.

But he knew what to do. Drop.

THE rifle was a calibre .220 Swift, bolt action, with a side-mounted scope. Doc Savage kept it cradled to his cheek for some moments after he had fired, not because he expected to shoot again, but because the telescopic sight gave him a better view of the hotel room window. It was about a block distant.

Presently Monk Mayfair said, “He dropped awful quick.”

“He took his time,” Ham Brooks said. It was Ham's policy to disagree with almost anything Monk said and condemn almost anything Monk did.

Doc Savage made no comment. But he did take his eye away from the scope and lower the rifle. He moved a little back into the room, confident that this would make him unnoticeable to the man in the distant hotel room.

“Doc,” Monk said.

“Yes?”

“You think he'll make a break right away?”

“There's a chance he might, although he has been rather methodical in his other actions. Seems to take time to think out each move. However, he might make a fast break this time. You and Ham had better get on the job.”

“You think he's ripe to pick?”

“I don't know. We'll have to take him now, though. If we try to keep this up, we're sure to lose him.”

“Grab him, then?”

“Yes.”

Monk said to Ham Brooks, “Come on, you well-dressed shyster,” and went out. Ham followed him.

Doc Savage continued to watch the distant window, but cased the rifle while he was doing this. He was a very large man, but not in an obese sense; there was a fluid tenseness about his movements that fitted a much smaller man, or a quick animal. He was a remarkably impressive figure, handsome without prettiness, darkly bronzed skin, and eyes that were like pools of flake gold always stirred by tiny winds.

The rifle case was black leather, plush-lined, and had compartments for scope, cleaning tools, cartridges. He placed the rifle in the case with care. It was his favorite rifle.

He placed the case at his feet, glanced at the telephone, returned his gaze to the distant window. He had seen nothing. No movement.

His manner was sober, intent, serious. This wasn't just his manner of the moment. It was his habitual tone. Something of a sobersides.

But the power—vitality, force, a hypnotic personal magnetism—of the man was an over-whelming thing to strangers. And not only strangers; his aides, the men who had worked closely with him for some years, like Monk Mayfair and Ham Brooks, had never outgrown the same feeling of omnipotence which the big bronze man gave them. There was nothing phony about this hypnotic effect he produced. It was quite a real effect, and did not advertise anything he could not deliver. There was very little of the average about his appearance. There was very little that was average, Monk and Ham would have readily testified, about the man.

Monk and Ham considered Doc Savage a freak. It was entirely unnatural for one man to be such a combination of mental genius, physical might and scientific wizard. It was quite unreasonable. They accepted it, though, and understood it, because they knew his background, knew about the completely abnormal, but scientific, training he had undergone from the cradle to early manhood. They even suspected that Doc's father—his mother had died very early must have had a screw-loose to conceive

and execute such an up bringing. As a whole, in the opinion of his aides, the bronze man had survived his upbringing fairly well. That is, he was a human as they could reasonably expect. He was a little too moral for their comfort sometimes. He did not go in very heavily for humor, but he tolerated it. He was, they suspected, scared of women. They knew he was utterly convinced that he couldn't tell with the slightest shade of accuracy what a female mind was thinking, or what it would do next.

His aides were probably the best advertisement of his amazing ability to grip people and hold them to him. The aides, five of them, were a collection of genius themselves. They were also, to various shades, screwballs. Genius is supposed to be eccentric, and they were that. They would have driven an average intelligence mad, but no average intelligence could have held them together in the sort of association they had—devoted to the Galahadian theme of righting wrongs and punishing evildoers in the far corners of the earth. This was, really, their profession. Their other professions—lawyer, chemist, archaeologist, engineer, electrical researchist—had become sidelines long ago. This was all unorthodox, unusual. But it had a simple explanation.

Adventure.

They liked excitement. Excitement was the thread, together with Doc Savage's amazing qualities, which had tied them together in a unit which didn't always function in expected ways, but functioned well.

Doc Savage, still watching the window, was worried. There was a chance his bullet had actually hit the man. He had seen the hole in the window, exactly where he aimed to frighten the man. But there was the chance that some freak accident could have occurred. He shivered. The consequences of such an accident—the death of the man—would be blood-curdling. The least consequence of all would be the death of the man itself.

He wrenched upright when the telephone rang.

It was Monk.

“We got him,” Monk said.

“Where?”

“On the fire escape. You know them fire hoses they have rolled up in boxes in hotel hallways? He had one of the hoses and was trying to lasso a chimney on the next building so he could get away across the rooftops. He might have made it, too.”

“How scared is he?”

“I'd call his condition satisfactory.”

“Does he suspect we dropped the flowerbox?”

“He ain't said so.”

“Is Ham there?”

“Yeah.”

“With him?”

“Uh-huh.”

“Better have Ham get out of sight. He may recognize Ham as the fellow who was driving the taxi which

he thinks—we hope—almost got him.”

“Okay.”

“You think the fellow is scared?”

“If he isn't,” Monk said, “I'll never see a better imitation.”

“What floor are you on?”

“Seventh.”

“I'll be over.”

## Chapter II

THE hotel hall carpet was thin and the color of a mouse and the flooring felt hard under it. Doc Savage reached it in an elevator that whimpered like a puppy, and walked toward the silhouettes of two men, Monk and the other man, who were cut cleanly against the window at the end of the hall.

Monk grinned amiably and said, “I had him roll up the fire hose and put it back. Might hurt the hotel people's feelings if he left their hose scattered over the floor.”

The other man shuddered violently, as if the remark had terrified him. Which it probably had. Monk Mayfair was a short, wide man whose arms were somewhat longer than his legs, whose looks were baby-frightening, who was covered with reddish bristling hair, and who would not have to be encountered in a very dark spot to be mistaken for a dwarf edition of King Kong. Monk normally looked quite pleasant. But when he wished, he could put on an expression that would crack rocks.

Doc Savage addressed the prisoner. “You are Worrik?”

The man hesitated, thought it over, decided not to answer.

“Do you know who we are?” Doc asked.

No answer.

Monk said, “I don't think he knows us.”

“No, probably not,” Doc agreed. “There is no reason why he should, not having seen us before, and having had no idea, quite possibly, that we were involved in the matter.”

The man was watching Doc. The lumpy muscularity around the man's mouth had the effect of enabling him to look about twice as frightened, or twice as angry, or about twice any other emotion, as he was. He licked his lips with a quick, terrified whip of his tongue.

“I think I got you placed,” he said.

Monk asked, “Who?”

“Not you.” The man nodded at Doc Savage. “Him. I figured him out now. Name's Savage, isn't it?”

Doc admitted it was. He was studying the at man, trying to measure the degree of the fellow's fright. A great deal depended on how scared the man was; or could be made. His face, instead of being inscrutable, was too expressive. Difficult to gauge.

Monk was looking fierce. “How d you know that?” he demanded.

“Know what?”

“Who Doc is.”

The man—his name was really Farrar Worrik, as far as they knew— explained readily enough. He said, “I have a brother, Carl Worrik...Kansas City. He works for an airline. He once described to me a man—Doc Savage, here—who owns a large share of the line. I happened to remember. My brother was quite impressed.”

Monk was not satisfied. He said, “You're a smooth liar, aren't you?”

The man shrugged. “You can check on it, if you want to take the trouble.”

“We already have. The brother part, at least. You've got the brother, all right. He hasn't seen you in ten years.”

“I've got a good memory, and my brother knew about him,” Worrik said.

Doc Savage spoke quietly.

“Ten years ago, I didn't own any part of that airline,” he said.

Worrik winced.

MONK grinned with the fierce amiability of a fox about to kill a rabbit. “Now we know we got a liar on our hands.”

Doc Savage was watching Worrik's eyes. They seemed the least expressive feature in his over-expressive face, therefore the most reliable indicator. Worrik was, Doc believed, trying to figure out who they were, what their purpose was. Trying to weigh them, so as to guard himself. He must not, Doc Savage reflected, suspect our purpose. He shouldn't suspect. Our purpose should not look logical to him.

Their purpose, actually, was to throw the man into a mental turmoil —to heckle, goad, and frighten him until his orderly thought processes became confused. To get him, generally, in a state of mind in which he would betray himself—if there was anything to betray. They did not know whether he had anything to betray. They really didn't. No one seemed to know. The bright young men from Washington—the FBI, the Intelligence men of the treasury, the Army, the Navy, even the Civil Service snoopers—didn't really know. All they had were rumors and very vague rumors at that. The police didn't know. And the whole thing was so terrifying in its possibilities that quite a bit of hair was being turned gray.

Doc asked abruptly, “What are you scared of?”

“Scared?...Me? What gave you that idea?” Worrik was defensive.

Doc shrugged. “Why were you trying to lasso that chimney with a fire hose? Playing?”

“That's it,” Worrik said. “I was a little high. I was having myself some fun.”

“High? There is no liquor on your breath.”

“Who said anything about liquor? I smoked a couple of ju-jus,” Worrik said. He sneered. “There's a law against that, I suppose.”

Doc Savage said nothing. He frowned. Talk like this suddenly seemed cheap, trivial, inane, in the face of such an incredible danger. Really it was of no consequence at all whether this man had been smoking marihuana, which he hadn't been, for he had none of the physical symptoms. Of no importance at all. The man himself was of no great importance. He was a life, that was all. A life, and a life was nothing, in the face of so much. And that, Doc reflected, is a bitterly cold, and maybe a little distorted, way of thinking about it. But true.

The man Worrik was pushing his jaw out at them. "Whasa big idea?" he demanded. "You guys cops? Where's your licenses to grab a citizen like you've grabbed me?"

Doc said, "Monk."

"Yeah?"

"Watch him," Doc directed. "I'm going to report by telephone that we've got him, and see what the big shot wants to do with him."

HAM BROOKS was waiting in the hotel flower shop, from the door of which he could keep an eye on the lobby. Ham had bought a gardenia for his lapel, being quite critical so that it would take plenty of time. Then he got into an argument with the proprietor about gardenias to stretch it out. He was glad to see Doc Savage in the lobby. He made sure Doc was alone before he came out.

"I was looking for you," Doc said.

"I figured you were. How is that guy doing? Has he spilled anything yet?"

Doc shook his head. "He won't either. He isn't the type. He's made of sinews and iron, mentally and physically."

Ham frowned. "You mean we wasted our time dropping flower boxes, charging at him with taxis and sharp shooting? Can't he be scared enough to break?"

Doc said he doubted it. "But our efforts weren't wasted," he added. "The fellow is upset. He's frightened. Scared enough, I believe, to perhaps make a move without giving it too much thought...In other words, he's been very careful so far not to contact whoever he's working with—if anyone. But I think, if we hand him one more shock, he might do it."

"How you gonna jolt him any more than we have? After three—he thinks—attempts on his life, he's probably fairly calloused."

"Here's what we'll try: Make him think we've been hired to do a job on him and his group."

"That," said Ham, "might not scare him any worse than he is already. Those guys already know they're bucking the police and every agency of the government. That means they've accepted those risks."

"That isn't the point."

"Eh?"

"We'll make him think we're working for a gang of crooks, not the law."

"What gang of crooks?"

"Imaginary ones, but he won't know that."



Ham thought for a moment, nodded appreciatively, said, "That should be quite a blast at him...I see your point. That would be important. He'd want to get the news to the rest of his outfit in a hurry."

"Exactly."

"What's the plan?"

"Your part is to stage an attempt to arrest us," Doc explained. "During it, we'll see that he escapes. Then your job is to follow him. We'll help him with the last, of course...Try something like this: Plant a car near where you try the arrest, and in the car have a radio transmitter, in operation, hidden somewhere. We can keep track of the car with a loop, that way—if he takes it for flight. And, if it is planted right, he should."

"Okay," Ham said. "Who do I run in on this for help? What about the FBI? Or some of those wise I-boys?"

"Keep it in the company," Doc advised. "Get hold of Renny, Johnny and Long Tom."

"This guy Worrik may know them by sight. He may know they're your assistants."

"Tell them to change their looks as much as they can. We'll have to take the chance. The thing will happen fast, and Worrik can probably be fooled."

Ham was dubious. "If we could use some government agents—"

"That's out! Definitely out!" Doc said, frowning. He added, "I had quite a row with them about that point. They—all the federal agencies involved—started out by suggesting we work for them. We never work for anybody. When I explained that, it didn't set so well. The talk wound up being the next thing to nasty."

"What if it's too big a thing for us?" Ham wished to know.

"Then we'll get licked. But we'll know who got licked us. If we worked with those fellows and lost out, they'd pass the buck to us, claim it was our fault. I know how they perform ... Anyway, they were already licked, or they wouldn't have called us in."

Ham grimaced. "We're like an emergency hospital—we don't get the patients until they're about dead."

"Exactly."

"I'll get hold of Renny, Long Tom and Johnny," Ham said. "How much time have we got?"

"Is half an hour enough?"

"Better make it an hour."

Doc nodded. "I suppose Monk and I can spend that much time questioning Worrik."

At the end of the hour, Farrar Worrik had practiced using his sneer until it turned on automatically at each question they asked. They would start speaking. The sneer would come on. "Why doncha guys call the cops?" he demanded. "If you think I'm a crook, call a cop. Whatta matter? You afraid to?"

Monk said he felt they should kick Worrik's teeth inward. "That one in front, the gold one, looks like it might be worth five dollars," Monk said. "And he won't be needing it where he's going."

On came the sneer. "Who you guys kidding? I know all about your reputation."

"What rep?" Monk wanted to know.

"You never knock anybody off. I hear it's kinda bad luck to buck you, but nobody gets knocked off by you."

"That's fine. That's very convenient," Monk assured him. It's going to be a shock to you, the surprise you got coming."

The sneer was a little loose around the edges. "Whatcha mean by that?"

Monk said, "You'll find out." He turned to Doc, asked. "You say we were to keep him here an hour, then bring him over? The hour's about up, ain't it?"

"We might as well get going," Doc agreed.

They had been asking Mr. Worrik questions and getting unsatisfactory answers — in the man's own room in the hotel. Now they escorted him out into the hall and to the elevator.

"You raise a fuss, and I'll step on your face," Monk warned him.

The elevator came. The operator was a round-faced boy with pop-eyes like a frog.

"Help!" Worrik said to the boy loudly. "Get the police! These men—"

Monk hit him below the temple with a fist. Immediately after striking the blow, Monk acquired a look of astonishment and grabbed his fist with his other hand. "I broke a knuckle!" he gasped. He put his face close to the elevator boy's face and asked, "Son, did you hear this guy say anything?"

Frightened, the boy said, "No, sir! No, I — he's a little tight, huh?"

Monk nodded. So did Doc, who was supporting Worrik. Monk said, "That's right sonny."

The elevator let them out in the lobby. They walked across the lobby to the street door, one on each side of Worrik, supporting the man.

"That hotel's a dump," Monk decided. "You could pack a body out of here, and nobody would care."

Doc wasn't so sure. He looked over his shoulder. The elevator boy wasn't in sight, although his empty cage was standing there. "I think the boy went to call the police, maybe," Doc said.

"We better beat it," Monk said.

Monk had parked his car in front of a delicatessen halfway in the block. They had almost reached the machine when there was a strange sound. It was a violent kind of a sound, as though someone had popped a small whip close to their . Doc stopped. Monk swung half around clumsily, because they were both hauling the limp Mr. Worrik along.

Monk croaked, "Was that — what was that noise?"

Mr. Worrik was no heavier than he had been, and no more noisy. But presently they heard a pattering sound, rather soft, and looking down, saw that the noise was made by a leakage of red fluid from the center of Worrik's forehead.

They laid Worrik down and lost no time crawling under the handiest parked automobiles.

### Chapter III

THE police officer — his name was Lieutenant McGinnis — said, “That's right, I always like to know what I'm doing!” Whereupon he applied a pair of handcuffs to Monk Mayfair's wrists.

Monk had just told the Lieutenant he had better be damned sure he knew what he was doing.

The boy from the hotel, the elevator operator, pointed excitedly at the body. “That's the guy” he declared. “That's the guy they packed out of the hotel. I bet he was dead then!”

Monk asked the boy wearily, “For crip's sake, didn't you hear him talking to me?”

“That's right,” the boy said excitedly. “He said for me to call the police. You hit him. You threatened to kill me, too.”

The fatal threat was news to Monk. “I sort of wish I had, though,” he said.

“Pal, that'll come out against you in court,” a policeman warned helpfully.

Monk said, “Nuts!” bitterly.

Doc Savage had been trying to persuade the police to conduct a search of the neighborhood. “The bullet apparently came from a silenced rifle, or a rifle fired from inside a room somewhere in the neighborhood,” Doc explained for the second time. “We heard the bullet, but not the shot.” Doc faced a section on the opposite side of the street, the farther half of the block. “Somewhere there,” he said, pointing.

“Yeah,” said Lieutenant McGinnis unpleasantly, eyeing the area Doc was indicating. “I would judge you can see maybe a hundred windows from here. Shouldn't be any trouble at all,” he added sarcastically.

Nevertheless he dispatched officers to conduct a hunt. As an afterthought, he told two men to help a third cop who had been looking around the vicinity for the murder weapon.

The inevitable crowd of curious had gathered. Staring was being done in silence for the most part. An ambulance arrived, siren screaming. It was a big white ambulance. There was already a black ambulance and a green ambulance on hand. The ambulance drivers held a conference, and presently began quarreling.

Lieutenant McGinnis yelled angrily at the cops he had told to search cars. “Ed already looked in there, you dopes! Go ask Ed where to begin hunt—”

“Ed didn't look very good,” one of the cops said.

“Ed must be losing his eyesight,” the other cop agreed.

They hauled a rifle out of the automobile. It was a .22-Hornet and did not have a silencer.

Ed came running. “Cripes, how'd I overlook that?” he wanted to know. “I thought I looked in that car.”

A man who had been examining the body, probably a man from the homicide office, looked up and said, “That's what hit him, I d say. One of them Hornets. They got a lot of velocity, and that's the way this bullet acted.”

Doc Savage was looking at the crowd.

“The murderer planted the rifle in the car after the crowd gathered, he said.

No one seemed interested in this theory.

“Take 'em down and book 'em,” said Lieutenant McGinniss. And keep your eye on them. I never saw a more brazen pair of murderers.”

THE smooth-haired young man stopped speaking to let an elevated train clatter past the precinct station. He was evidently afraid the slatternly noise of the train would detract from his melodious voice. The window—this was the third floor of the police station—and a strong and rather hot wind whipped in from the street, occasionally bringing in some dust, and more often, bringing in the stink of a fish market in the neighborhood. The young man with the melodious voice finally closed the window with a bang.

He pivoted, drew himself up, demanded, “Are there any questions?”

Lieutenant McGinniss eyed Doc Savage and Monk Mayfair.

“I never caught two murderers, and lost them, quicker in my life, he said.

“You were doing your duty,” Doc assured him.

“I ain't ashamed of myself,” the Lieutenant said. “But I'm ashamed of the United States Government. He whirled on the owner of the melodious voice. “Why the hell don't you let us in on what's going on, once in a blue moon?” he demanded.

The young man ignored this. “Any questions?”

The Lieutenant shrugged. “I guess none that I would get answers to. He bent over the table again, inspecting some documents which he examined three or four times before. He picked up his hat. “You want anything more out of me?” he asked.

“Your absence,” said the smooth-haired young man testily.

The Lieutenant went out without saying anything.

There was a spring lock on the inside of the door. The young man went over and slipped this. He took a tour of the window, apparently to satisfy himself there were no eavesdroppers clinging to the wall outside.

Testily, he said, “The police certainly botched that up!”

“Botched what?” Doc Savage asked.

The young man's name was Burt Chapman, and he evidently had a great deal more on the ball than was visible. He almost had to have. Doc Savage had never had any previous dealings with Chapman, but he had heard of him. Chapman's army rank was Brigadier General, but he was working, as became his department and the sort work he did, in civilian garb.

“Botched the whole thing,” Chapman said angrily.

“How?”

“That man, Worrik, is dead, isn't he? The only contact we had with the infernal thing, and he's dead!”

“The police didn't kill him,” Doc suggested reasonably.

Chapman leveled an arm at Doc, said, “You did some botching yourself! As a matter of fact—”

“Just a minute!” Doc's tone would have stopped a truck. He added, “Just what is eating you, anyway? How do you know what is botched? You didn't know our plans, so how can you tell whether they're messed up or not?”

“Man, You're not going to stand there and tell me—”

“What's botched?” Doc demanded.

“Don't interrupt me—”

“Your plans, or ours?” Doc demanded grimly.

“Mine!” Chapman snapped. “And don't interrupt—”

Doc breathed inward deeply. His neck was getting red.

Monk Mayfair said, “Let me make the speech, Doc.” Monk wheeled on Chapman, said,

We're not in your army, sonny-boy, so you don't mean a thing to us. And we don't like being lied to. The understanding, when we took hold of this, was that everybody—you, the FBI, the Treasury agents, everybody—was going to sit back and keep hands off. Now, answer me this: are you laying off?”

“If you think—”

“Answer my question!” Monk bellowed.

Mr. Chapman seemed to thrust his jaw forward, then lean against it. “We're not crazy enough to stop all activity ourselves!” he said violently. “You guys aren't God! You're not omnipotent. You're not completely wonderful.”

Monk put his fists on his hips.

“I see we have about the same opinion of each other,” he said.

MR. CHAPMAN, striving mightily, regained the attitude of a brilliant young man who held a position of great responsibility. He added, “I am sure, though, that your intentions were good.”

This enraged Monk again and he yelled, “That's the most insulting thing anybody can say about me—his intentions were good!”

Doc Savage said abruptly, “Mr. Chapman!”

“Yes?”

“We thank you very much for getting us out of jail. We thank you because you meant well,” Doc said. “However, you played complete hob with our plan to create an impression in underworld circles that we had, for once in our life, been hired by crooked interests. If we had been able to get such an idea bruited about, I'm sure there would have been repeated attacks on us, perhaps tentative feelers from the other side about buying us off a second time—something, at least, to put us on the track of a tangible. That, I'm afraid, you've spoiled. Every cop in town knows by now that we were arrested for murder and the United States Government's bright young man split his suspenders getting us turned loose. So messed us

up. If there is no more to say, I think we'll now go separate ways. Goodbye.”

Chapman yelled, “Wait! I didn't dream—”

“You ready to go?” Doc asked Monk.

“I sure am!” Monk said.

They were the focus for some curious staring as they left the police station. As Doc had said, half the New York police force probably knew by now that the government had ordered them turned loose like a hot potato. Since a murder was involved, there was no doubt plenty of speculation. It would be a wonder, Doc thought grimly, if the thing wasn't smeared in the newspapers by evening.

“I oughta take a stroll right across the bright boy's face,” Monk said bitterly.

“We might have had a little trouble getting out of jail without his help,” Doc reminded. “Come to think of it, we'd better ask Lieutenant McGinniss if he will kindly look for whoever planted that rifle near us.

LIEUTENANT MCGINNISS was sitting at his desk talking over the telephone. He was telling his wife he probably wouldn't be home to dinner. He hung up, spit in the wastebasket and said, “There wasn't any fingerprints on the rifle. The rifle was sold, three years ago, by a midtown wholesaler to the Oceania Trading Company. The Oceania outfit, which distributes merchandise to the South Seas trading posts, has no record of who they sold the gun to. There's been a war out there in the South Pacific since that gun was sold, and the traders have scattered to hell n gone, so there's not much chance of finding who got the rifle. The shot was fired from the fifth floor of a walkup rooming house on the street. When my men got there, the door had been jimmed, and they could still smell the powder stink in the room. It was an empty apartment. A dump. There was dust on the floor, and in the dust marks where the ejected cartridge from the rifle had rolled around. But the cartridge had been carefully picked up. There wasn't anything else in the way of clues. No footprints in the dust, because they had been wiped out with an old piece of rug. The house is number 133, the room, 304. That's what you want to know, isn't it?”

Doc nodded. “You've been busy.”

“Yeah, and I ain't a young genius either,” the Lieutenant said sourly.

When they left him, he had his forefinger thrust in a cigarette package feeling for a cigarette.

THE mid-afternoon sun was filling the street full of bright heat. It made their eyes ache. Monk put on a pair of pilot's sun-glasses which gave him even more the look of a chimpanzee.

“Washington's Mr. Chapman has given Mr. McGinniss an inferiority complex,” Monk re- marked.

“What would you say he d given us?” Doc asked.

“I don't know. Something though.”

“Like it?”

“No, I don t.”

Doc said, “This thing is too important—and too dangerous—for us not to know who is doing what. There is nothing to keep us from wasting a lot of time cornering somebody who will turn out to be a government agent.”

Monk agreed. “To say nothing of maybe somebody we think is a government agent shooting our heads

off.”

Doc began looking for a store that displayed a telephone sign. He found one presently. “I’m going right to the top with this,” he said. “I’m going to telephone Washington.” He went inside, got a handful of quarters and dimes, and entered a booth. There were two booths, and Monk leaned against the other one, blocking it so that no one would be able to occupy it and possibly eavesdrop. He listened with interest to Doc’s conversation with someone important in Washington. The important one’s name was never mentioned, and neither was any reference made to the matter in which they were involved. There was, as a matter of fact, not even a reference to a mystery. But Doc was explicit in stating what he wanted, which was the field cleared of confusion. He seemed to be getting reassurances. This, Monk reflected, is the most mysterious damned thing I was ever mixed up in. Nobody says a word about what it is. He grimaced. Everybody was afraid to say anything. I’ll even include myself, Monk thought.

He was enjoying, if that was the word, a shiver of apprehension when someone started to shove past him into the telephone booth. Monk said hastily, “Hey, buddy, It’s out of order. I’m from the telephone company and we’re fixing—”

“Holy cow, when did you get promoted to telephone repairman?” a rumbling bull-in-a-barrel voice wished to know.

Monk started violently. “Renny Renwick!” he said.

Renny asked. “How would you like to know who shot Worrik?”

## Chapter IV

COLONEL JOHN RENWICK, Doc Savage aide, was a very large and gaunt man with a pair of outsized hands and the expression of first mourner at a funeral. He explained, “I saw you fellows come out of the police station. I thought I’d see whether anybody was following you before I joined you.”

Monk gasped, “Do you know who shot Worrik?”

“I got a good idea.”

Doc Savage came out of the telephone booth. It had been hot in the booth and he was using a handkerchief on his face. He said, “I saw you hanging around outside the police station.”

Monk looked injured. “You never mentioned it.”

Renny turned slowly, raking the establishment—it was a neighborhood drugstore—with his eyes. “This is as good a place as any to talk, I guess,” he said.

Renny Renwick probably came nearer than any other one of Doc Savage’s group of five associates to looking what he was—an internationally known engineer. He had designed one of New York’s largest buildings, and South America, China, Russia and Europe were spotted with his buildings, dams, railroads, air terminals, whatever civil engineer’s produce. He had a hard-fisted appearance and his rumbling voice was almost alarming. He was, through a vocal freak, unable to whisper; his efforts at a whisper were about as secretive as a B29 buzzing a farmhouse. He had one foppish habit, which was smearing his hair, his dark and uncontrollable hair, with some kind of pomade. He was touchy about this.

Renny said, “Ham got hold of me. He wanted Johnny and Long Tom, too, but they’re out of town. They left for Brazil, where Long Tom’s got some radar installation work for the South Atlantic plane routes, and Johnny has heard about a ruin somebody found in a jungle. Anyway, Ham and I were set near the hotel where you caught Worrik. Ham said you wanted Worrik given the impression a rival gang had hired

you. We had a car ready, and were going to follow you and Monk and Worrik and put on the show. We—”

“Listen, who shot Worrik?” Monk demanded.

“Keep your shirt on, shoe-face,” Renny said. “When Worrik was killed, we heard the shot. We could tell, generally, where it came from—a rooming house.”

Doc said, “That checks with the ideas the police have. They found a room where they could smell burned powder. There were marks on the floor, in the dust, where an empty cartridge had bounced around after it was ejected.”

Renny nodded quickly. “A guy did it. He came out of the place pretty quick. Not too quick, not fast, not attracting attention. He got in a car. A crowd had gathered by that time. He drove the car down and stopped and tossed the rifle in a parked car. He took his time. He even went over and took a peek at the body.”

Grimly, Doc said, “Hard, eh?”

“Plenty.”

“What did he look like?”

“Suppose I show you,” Renny said. “We’ve got him run in at a place on Eighty-first Street.”

RENNY had, he explained, left his car with Ham, who was watching the murderer. Ham might need the car. “We didn’t know whether you wanted to grab this guy, or hope he’ll lead us to somebody bigger,” Renny explained. They rode uptown in Doc’s car.

When they passed the precinct station, Mr. Chapman was standing on the steps. He did not answer Doc’s salute of a lifted hand.

Renny grunted. “What’s eating him? That’s the boy genius Washington assigned to the case, isn’t he?”

Doc nodded. “We had unkind words.”

Renny scowled. “You mean they’re not taking their hands off?”

“Apparently not. You can hardly blame them, when the thing is so important. However, telephoned Washington—that was what I was doing when you appeared.”

“Did you do any good with Washington?”

“I got more promises.”

“We already had those,” Renny said.

Doc nodded. He dropped into a contemplative, and uneasy, silence. The car turned right under an elevated, the tires made hard, bumping sounds on rough cobbled pavement and the bumpings slowed as they caught a red light. They waited out the light beside a chestnut vendor’s cart. “Red-hot chestnuts?” the peddler said hopefully. The cart had a plaintive, whimpering whistle. Doc Savage wondered who would be insane enough to buy hot chestnuts on such a blistering hot day, and while he was wondering this, two customers made purchases.

Doc drove on. He was disturbed. The talk with Washington had not been satisfying. It should have



been—he had received the assurances he wanted. But he had suddenly realized, while talking, that the man in Washington was terribly tense. The man's concern had driven Doc into anxiety himself. He had not wanted this to happen. He was convinced that, while some men might do their best when frightened, this was not true of himself.

His quarrel with Chapman was an unpleasant symptom. It was a symptom that Chapman, who was noted for his steel nerves, was distraught. It was also, Doc decided wryly, something to be alarmed about. He had never, in tackling anything, been so conscious of urgency this early in the game. It was, almost literally, the feeling that everything—much more than his life—was at stake.

He was struck, sickeningly, by the feeling he'd had when questioning Worrik—that the things he did, said, thought, were pitifully inadequate in the face of the stupendous horror that could materialize. These things—what he did, said, thought—seemed so small. They were, he thought wryly, as silly as drinking a cold bottle of soda pop to cool off before stepping into a volcano. But he was not, he was sure, underestimating the fabulous nature of the thing. It was silly to compare the importance of a thing to the ending of the world, the wiping out of a race, to horrors like that. The comparison was ridiculous. But he found himself making it, and shuddering.

HAM BROOKS, wearing coveralls with MIKE'S ELECTRIC SHOP across the back, and carrying a green metal tool box, walked past their parked car without seeming to see them. He entered a small restaurant.

“I don't like that,” Renny muttered. “He figures he's being watched, apparently.”

Doc said, “You and Monk keep an eye on the neighborhood. I'll talk to Ham.”

The restaurant, not a lunchroom, had tables covered with red-and-white checked cloths, and the same pattern was in the matching wallpaper. The effect was gaudy and carnival. Ham was the only one in sight.

“Take that chair,” Ham said. “You can see the house. It's across the street. The one with the brass doorknocker.”

Another rooming-house, Doc decided. But this one looked neat, precise, had a touch of elegance and distinction. He ran his eyes over the windows, noticing that the draperies were all of a style. Apartments would have different styling in drapes. A straight rooming house.

“Not a bad-looking place,” he said.

Ham said, “It looks better than it has sounded the last twenty minutes.”

“What do you mean?”

“Renny and I put the killer in there,” Ham explained, “about two hours ago. In other words, he came straight here after he knocked off Worrik. He's on the second floor, room 209. There's no telephone in that room.”

“How did you find that out?”

“The guy came out and bought a newspaper about an hour ago. Guess he wanted to see if the killing was in print yet. It gave me a chance to see what room he went to when he went back in. The telephone part I got from the telephone company. Only a hall phone. I put that on the fritz. I didn't have any way of tapping it right then. I don't think tapping would do any good now.”

“Why not?”

“There's been goings-on in there.” Ham scowled thoughtfully at the house across the street. People went in and out. More went in than came out. Twenty minutes ago, somebody let out a yell, and somebody did some shooting. Three shots. Out of two guns, or one shot out of one gun and two out of two more of the same, but different calibre. Shots were kind of jammed together. Ten minutes went by. No fuss, no uproar, no more yells or shots. Then some of the people who had gone in came out. None of them were the one who killed Worrik. Some of them may have been 'roomers', and some probably weren't, and I didn't know who was who and I didn't follow anybody. Last seven or eight minutes, place has been like a tomb.”

“That all?”

“That's all the facts.”

Doc looked at Ham intently. “Got any guesses to go with them?”

Ham nodded. “Civil war,” he said. “You know we heard there were two factions involved in it. Maybe we heard right. What do you want me to do?”

“Right here is as good a place as any for you,” Doc said. “Watch the place, and use your own judgment about anything that happens”

Ham lifted the green metal tool box to the chair beside him and opened it. There were two revolvers and a tear gas pistol—the big shotgun calibre one like the police use—inside. He saw a waiter coming, and dropped a napkin over the box. “How's your spaghetti?” he asked the waiter. DOC SAVAGE crossed the sidewalk to the car, eyes wary, the flesh crawling between his shoulder-blades. He asked Renny, “Know where the back door of the place is?”

“Sure.”

“Watch it. Any other ways in or out?”

“There's probably a skylight, or some way to the roof. There usually is.”

“I'm going in that way, Doc said. Any other routes?”

“Not that I know about.”

Monk wanted to know, “Am I an orphan? What do I do?”

“You stick right here in the car where you can follow anybody who looks as if he needed it.”

Four houses from the house they wanted there was a window with a sign in it that said HAIRDRESSER. The door of that house therefore should be unlocked, Doc reasoned. It was. He climbed long, narrow flights of stairs that were, after the hot outdoors, dark and cool and faintly perfumed with insect spray. He lost no time and made as little noise as possible. The hatch that gave access to the roof was not hard to find. Most of these houses had them, and in most of the houses they were in the same spot.

As he crawled across the rooftops, heat reflected up from the black tar in suffocating waves. It was as if he were on the top of a stove. The palms of his hands became as black as stovelids. The tar stuck to his hands, knees, and perspiration skittered down into his eyes, stinging. All the houses here were four stories high. Walkups. To get from one roof to another, it was only necessary to climb over a low wall. This was very simple, except that it made him a conspicuous target. But no one yelled at him or shot at him.

The roof hatch into the house he wished to visit was, as one would expect it to be, locked. But there was the skylight. Not all the houses had skylights, but this one had. The putty around the glass did not give him much trouble, but he broke the point of his knife on one of the glazier's tips. Once he reached the latch, the skylight opened almost soundlessly.

All this was carried out in hair-raising suspense. Because of the intense sunlight outdoors, he couldn't tell what was under the skylight, whereas anyone inside could see him. He would make a wonderful target. He eased inside, hung by his hands, and was about to drop when he realized with horror that the skylight was over a large circular stairway well. Had he let go, he would have fallen four floors, bouncing, probably as he fell, off stair banisters. The remedy was simple. He swung himself forward and landed in the hall.

He made a little noise enough to cause a door to whip shut down the hall. He moved back against the wall, wasting no time, watched the door that had closed, waited.

Nothing happened. Nothing seemed about to happen.

The hallway was no darker than it should have been, but it seemed so. It was cool. The air in it was still and cool, like breath in the lungs of a corpse.

The door that had closed did not open. Doc, trying to decide what to do, felt that his hair was surely going to stand on end. This was the fourth floor. Ham said the killer of Worrik was—or had been, prior to the shooting and other trouble—on the second floor. Should he go down? He did not like the idea of someone who might be dangerous, being above him.

He went to the door, stood well to one side so a bullet through the panels wouldn't be apt to find him, and tapped on it with fingertips.

Nothing happened.

“Open up!” he ordered in as low a voice as would reach through the door.

To his astonishment, the door was at once by a blue-eyed fat man who was shirtless and very frightened.

“You live here?” Doc demanded.

“Y-yes.” The fat man's chin twitched like a rabbit's nose.

“What happened around here?”

“I duh-don't know,” the fat man stuttered. “A shuh-shooting, I think. Somebody—some woman—told me to stay in here until the police came if I didn't want my head shot off. Are you a cop?”

“No, I'm not a cop,” Doc said. He looked as fierce as possible. “You better keep out of sight.”

The fat man vanished.

It was a nice rooming house. The carpet on the stairs was not threadbare. It felt as soft as grass. Light from the skylight spilled down the shaftway of the spiral stairs, and the stairway, painted white and its walnut shining, was spot lighted gaily. Doc realized with horror that, in coming through the skylight, he must have made a shadow that had reached clear to the ground floor.

He was not shot at, yelled at, nor set upon. He reached the second floor and found 209. That was the room the killer was supposed to be in.

He knocked.

“Yeah?” a voice said.

It was a woman's voice.

“Open up,” Doc requested.

“Who are you?”

“A pal,” Doc said. “A very good pal. I think a cop is going to show up here before long. Or are you interested?”

“Go away,” the voice of the woman advised, before you get your ears shot off.”

Doc Savage stepped back hastily, sank to a knee, and looked to see how much of a crack there was under the door. It was considerable of a crack. Nearly half an inch. Out of his pocket he took a flat case about the size and shape of a cigar case, which held, instead of cigars, glass phials about the size of cigars. He uncorked one of these, poured it so that the contents, as much as possible, would flow into the crack below the door. He fanned the tear gas rapidly with his hat to make more of it go under the door. Most of it did.

When the tear gas began to sting his eyes, he walked down the hall to where the air was clearer, and waited. He could hear someone coughing in the room. It sounded like only one person. The woman.

When he thought it was safe, he went back, kicked the lock out of the door, and went in. The woman, who was quite young and pretty, was not completely blinded. She saw him coming toward her, and, in endeavoring to run away, inadvertently stumbled over the body of the dead man on the floor.

## Chapter V

THE girl was carrying a revolver, and before she could get to her feet, or decide to take a shot at him, Doc secured the gun.

He opened the windows. It didn't help much. He had to go out in the hall again to relieve his smarting eyes. There seemed to be a draught of air from the hall into the room and out of the open window, so he was able to stand close to the open door, in the hall. From this point, he could see the girl.

She got to her feet and backed against a wall. She had not said anything, and did not say anything now. She twisted her fists in her eyes, decided that wasn't helping, and clenched her hands together and suffered. Doc looked at her in amazement.

She was in her twenties, probably somewhere in the middle of them—he wasn't quite sure about this; she did look younger. She would, he judged, weigh about the same as Hedy Lamarr. He had no idea what Miss Lamarr would weigh, but the comparison, considering the figure, seemed very suitable. This girl, though, was a wheaty color, somewhat of a blonde, only more golden.

“Anyone else in there with you?” he demanded.

She didn't answer.

He changed position so that he could observe the dead man...This, Doc concluded, was the murderer of Farrar who had fired the shot. Whoever had handled the shooting of the man had done a businesslike job. One in the head and two in the heart.

Doc returned his attention to the young lady. She seemed quite upset.

“The tear gas will blow out of there in a little while,” he told her helpfully. “Then I can come in.”

“Are you a policeman?” she asked.

“Would it make a difference?”

“That could be.”

“I’m not.”

“You’re not a policeman?”

“No.”

“What,” she asked, “would you consider worth your while to let me walk out of here?”

“You’re in no shape to walk anywhere, and won’t be for half an hour.”

“You could put me in a cab.”

“I would need to think it over,” he said. “And I would need to know a little more than I know get now. Quite a lot more.”

Downstairs, the front door had opened, sudden and hard. Feet came across the down stairs hall, began hitting the stair steps. At least five pairs of feet, it seemed to Doc.

He went into the room. He pulled the door shut, although that wouldn’t do much good if anyone wanted in, since he had kicked out the lock. He went over and shoved his head out of the window.

Below him, a uniformed policeman drew a bead on his head with a service revolver. Doc withdrew hurriedly, not liking the excited expression the officer wore.

The door flipped open. A voice said, “This is the police!” A patrolman came in, a plain-clothes man, another patrolman, Lieutenant McGinniss bringing up the rear.

“For God’s sake! McGinniss said when he saw Doc Savage. He looked at the body, peering at it intently with his head cocked to one side, bird-like. He pointed at Doc and told a patrolman, “Slap the handcuffs on him.” Then he advised Doc, “I’d like to see the Army, the Navy and the FBI get you out of it this time.”

DOC SAVAGE offered no comments. He did not feel that commenting would do him any good. Lieutenant McGinniss was in a bad humor.

McGinniss walked around and around the body, like a rooster circling a toad, then asked, “Anybody know the remains?”

No one admitted they did.

“What about you, sister?” McGinniss demanded.

The girl looked at him woodenly.

A patrolman had taken the revolver from Doc Savage. He handed the weapon to McGinniss, who examined it, remarked, “Three cartridges fired. That’s interesting.” He raised his voice and said, “See that

the homicide boys give Savage a paraffin test before he has a chance to wash his hands.”

“Do you think you're going to hang this killing on me?” Doc demanded.

McGinniss said he didn't know. “I'm going to have fun trying, though.” He told the homicide man, “Give the girl a paraffin test, too.”

A policeman had been going through the rooming house. Now he appeared and reported. “There seems to be only one other guy in the house—a fat guy on the top floor. He says he imagines everybody is away at work...He says he heard three shots about half an hour ago, and rushed out in the hall and a woman told him to back in the room and stay there if he knew what was good for him.”

“Bring him down here. Let's see if this is the girl,” McGinniss said.

They brought the fat man in. He exclaimed excitedly, “Yes, that's her! That's the young lady who—” He had seen the body. Presently he made a sound like liquid being poured out of a bottle and piled down on the floor. He had fainted.

“Load him in and take him to the station. McGinniss directed.

“Do you mind if I make a remark?” Doc asked.

McGinniss said he didn't see why he should mind, and Doc asked, “What about the men who ran out of the house after the shooting? Aren't you interested in them?”

McGinniss scowled. “What are you trying to do, confuse me again?”

Doc said, “Ask the girl. She'll tell us.”

The girl said, “No men—nobody—ran out of this house after the shooting.”

McGinniss eyed Doc unsmilingly. “She told us,” he said. “As I said before, I d like to see anybody, the government or anybody else, get you out of it this time.” He spit on the floor. “That's the damndest thing I ever heard of. You kill a guy, then kill another one right after we turn you loose.”

There was a noise at the front door. Someone called up, “There's a couple of newspaper guys down here. What about 'em?”

“Let 'em in,” McGinniss said.

IF Lieutenant McGinniss, during the next forty-five minutes, didn't t believe Doc Savage was guilty of two murders, he gave an excellent imitation of a man who did. He was also very industrious about pushing an investigation. He found the skylight with the missing pane of glass, and studied it thoughtfully, then had it photographed. He decided, though, that no one could have entered the house via that route. “They d have fallen down the stairs,” he said.

Doc Savage had no trouble occupying his mind during the forty-five minutes. Monk, Ham and Renny had not appeared, but this did not alarm him. He supposed they were keeping out of sight, not wanting any trouble with the police. Probably they figured—wrongly—that as long as the police were on the scene, Doc was safe. He wished they would show up, preferably with Mr. Chapman, the federal man.

His thinking turned to the mystery, which he didn't understand fully. The thing he understood least was why the girl had remained in the room with the dead man for, according to what Ham had said, more than twenty minutes. She didn't seem to be suffering greatly from shock, and she certainly didn't appear

to be a dumb girl. She must have known that eventually someone would summon the police, and she would be caught. Had she been waiting for the police? Did she want to be caught? That didn't seem very sensible.

Doc watched the police search the corpse and find a little less than nine hundred dollars in cash, but nothing to identify the fellow. They did, though, remove a vicious looking automatic pistol from the man's clothing. He had been carrying it in his hip pocket.

"I suppose it'll be a self-defense plea, now that he was armed," McGinniss complained.

Doc said, "Mind taking off his shirt?"

"Eh?"

"His shirt. Mind taking it off?"

"I heard you the first time, McGinniss said. "What the hell?"

"Just an idea."

The Lieutenant scratched his head, scowled, finally said he guessed he would bite, and started removing the corpse shirt. When Doc Savage saw that the man was deeply tanned on chest and shoulders, he said, "That's enough. I wanted to know if he were tanned. He is. Thanks."

"Yeah?" The Lieutenant was puzzled. "What does that prove?"

"That he has been out in the sun a lot," Doc said. He sounded serious. "

McGinniss was enraged. "I ask a sensible question and get a smart answer," he yelled. He said it was okay, he had asked for it. He had bitten. "Load 'em in a car and take 'em down and lock them up!" he ordered.

THEY rolled west a block, then the black police sedan turned southward. It was 5:30. The sun was now shining into the street only at the intersections, but all along the street the tar that had bubbled up between the paving stones was soft and made sucking sounds against the tires. A squat detective drove. Dark hair grew down the back of his neck and under his collar. McGinniss rode on the rear seat with the girl, and Doc and another officer sat on the drop-seats. McGinniss wore a hard-jawed, aggravated expression. Doc Savage had not seen any sign of Monk, Ham nor Renny, and he became vaguely alarmed.

At the corner of Seventy-seventh Street, a taxicab stopped suddenly ahead of them and the police sedan slammed into the taxi. There was quite a noise. More noise than damage. The taxi driver, a tall, darkly sunburned, long-faced man, came back angrily demanding, "Why don'tcha watch where ya goin'?"

"You got a left hand, haven't you?" said the squat detective driver of the police car. "I didn't see it giving any signal."

The tall sunburned man held his left hand, a fist, threateningly under the detective's nose. He said, "You mean this hand?"

While he was saying this, he slid his other hand inside his coat, brought out an automatic pistol and shot the detective between the eyes. He shot the officer beside Doc Savage a moment later.

Doc Savage was rolling sidewise, reaching for the opposite door. The door opened without any of his doing. A man outside had opened it, another man who was in no way like the first one, except that he,

too, was very heavily sunburned. He was fatter than the first man, wider, didn't seem to be the same nationality. Having opened the door, he hit Doc Savage over the head with a blackjack in his left hand. He had a gun in his right hand, and he used that to shoot Lieutenant McGinniss. The bullet only shattered the Lieutenant's shoulder, stunning him, but the man seemed satisfied with that.

He bowed elaborately to the girl.

“Right this way, tutz,” he said.

The girl stared at him in wordless horror.

The taxi driver who had shot two police officers was apprehensive.

“God bless us, hurry it up!” he urged.

“Don't you get the point, tutz?” the wide man asked. “This is all for you, baby. A reception in your honor. Get a move on.”

“You—you want me? the girl asked jerkily.

The man reached in, grasped her arm, jerked her flying out of the police car. He sent her whirling toward a second car, a family sedan, which had drawn alongside. “Climb in, baby,” he said. The driver of the family car seized the girl and hurled her into the machine.

Doc Savage, on hands and knees in the street now, was dazed. He endeavored to rise, and was hit again by the blackjack.

“Give me a hand with him,” the wide man ordered.

The three men wrestled Doc into their car. But not without difficulties. They complained about Doc's weight. “He must be made of iron,” one grumbled.

“Who is he?”

“How the hell do I know? asked the wide man. “That reporter we talked to said he and the girl were charged by the police with murdering Davey. That's all I know about him.”

STRONGLY, purposefully, the car bearing Doc Savage, who was barely conscious, the girl, and the three suntanned men, moved through streets. It made a few turns, stopped decorously for all the traffic lights. On One Hundred and Tenth Street, it drew to a stop alongside another car of a different make and color, and a transfer of everyone to this second machine was managed swiftly and without fuss.

“I'll park this one down the block,” the driver said. “It'll be hot as hell in a few minutes, soon as the cops get a description on the radio.”

He returned presently.

The party now drove northward, crossed one of the bridges into the Bronx, the men alert, anxious, concerned while they traversed the bridge. Once across, they relaxed somewhat, and the wide man said, “Okay, it'll be dark enough.”

Doc Savage aroused, stirred, started to sit up. He was instantly struck with the blackjack. He was not knocked out, but he fell back to the floorboards, feigning stupor. He was not quite sure whether he had been unconscious at any time. It was impossible to tell, his head ached so and his ears rang so intolerably. He was a battleground for doubts, wondering whether he should make a break now—he



believed, weighing the chances, that he had a fair chance of escaping—or wait. Waiting would be fine if it led him to something. If, for instance, he was taken somewhere and could get his hands on somebody high enough in the thing to be able to answer the right questions. That would, indeed, be worth taking a chance for. He decided to wait.

The car was making its way leisurely through Bronx streets. The sun was down, the air was the color of bullet lead. Kids ran and yelled in the streets. They entered a street which was roped off for a play-street, and a cop waved them out of it. All the time they were turning, tension was like glass in the car, and Doc noticed that the wide man held a cocked revolver where the girl could view its threat. They got out of the predicament all right. The driver chuckled. “That cop don’t know what a narrow escape he had,” he said.

Doc Savage went back to wondering. At least they were getting action, he reflected. That was something. It was more than Washington and all its resources had been able to do. It was not certain that there was fire as well as smoke. There was plenty of violence...Washington’s worst fears, Doc decided, were probably justified. The thought made him shiver.

The shiver got him a kick in the ribs. He pretended to be unconscious: The driver looked around, asked, “How’s he coming?”

“Fine and dandy,” the wide man said. “Who do you suppose he is?”

“I got no idea. Probably a strong arm they had hired. Tutz might tell us.” He nudged the girl. “Who’s the boy friend, tutz?”

The girl said nothing.

“She ain’t very talkative,” said the driver.

“She will be, before we get through with her,” the other prophesied.

THE car pulled into a driveway which had high concrete walls on either side and sloped down sharply to a garage under a two-and-a-half-story frame house. The house, if it were the same color as the garage doors, was grass-green. The driver got out to wrestle and curse with the garage doors. He finally hurled them open, came back and drove the car into the garage. He closed the doors behind them. He pointed at Doc Savage and said, “Somebody besides me has gotta wrestle him outa there, on accounta I think I strained something when we loaded him.” He seized the girl’s arm. “I’ll take the little lady, here.”

The men had seemed pretty relaxed in the car, Doc had thought. For that matter, they had seemed relaxed when wounding Lieutenant McGinniss. But evidently they hadn’t been as fully relaxed as they had appeared to be, because now that they were home—if home it was—they began calling each other by name.

The wide man was Mr. Moore. Whenever the others addressed him, it was as Mr. Moore, and they called him that behind his back. He seemed to be in charge.

The taxi driver, who had shot the two policemen and killed them, was Skeeter. Evidently he was called this because he was rather thin and gangling. The other man, who had driven the pickup car and, later, the car to which they had changed, was called Rice. He was evidently the Casanova of the party. He put his arm around the girl and told her, “Loosen up, tutz. You’re among friends, you know. A few moments later, she kicked him on the shin. It must have hurt because he hopped around on one foot, groaning.

They tied Doc Savage to a chair in an up-stairs bedroom. Skeeter had some doubts that the chair was strong enough. “What if he breaks loose?” he wanted to know. “I bet he could make us some trouble.”

Mr. Moore snorted. "Let him start something, he said. He sounded as if he would welcome some more action.

Rice came in with another chair. "Will this one do for the dame?" he wanted to know.

Skeeter said it would do fine, and got a clothes line and tied the girl in the chair. He hauled off and kicked the girl's shins when he had finished tying her. "That for what you handed me a minute ago," he said.

Mr. Moore told Rice and Skeeter, "Okay, now I guess I can handle them while you two go get fed. Bring something back for me."

Skeeter and Rice moved toward the door. Rice paused to ask, "Maybe we oughta call him from a different phone. In that drugstore, they—"

"Shut up!" Mr. Moore said viciously. Yeah—use a different phone if you wanta."

Skeeter and Rice went out. Mr. Moore tested the bindings on the prisoners, and told the girl, "You start yelling, nobody'll hear you. Also I'll cut your throat." Then he also went out. He did not close the door. They could hear him going down stairs. It sounded, presently, as if he were investigating the contents of an icebox. Ice clinked in a glass.

Doc Savage opened his eyes. He had been opening them surreptitiously and had seen that the room was quite uninteresting, the only furniture a bed and a dresser. He looked at the girl.

"FBI?" he asked her.

She seemed startled.

"Or Chapman's department?" he added.

Still surprised, she demanded, "Are you all right? Not hurt? I was afraid they'd fractured your skull."

"I'm fine," he said. "Answer my question. I know you've got to be some kind of federal agent."

She looked horrified and said, "Sh-h-h-h! They might overhear you! There may be a microphone hidden in here! They probably left us alone so we would talk and they could listen!"

Doc was angry.

"I don't give a whoop!" he said. "Which Washington outfit are you working for?"

"Mr. Chapman?" she asked. She added, "Sh-h-h-h!" She frowned and said, "I'm with the Office of Special Investigation...I don't believe I ever heard of Mr. Chapman."

## Chapter VI

**DOWNSTAIRS** Mr. Moore made a mouse-like squeaking noise pulling a cork out of a bottle. They could hear the liquid gurgle out of the bottle, hear another bottle being opened—this one had a cap—and more gurgling. A truck went past in the street outside the house, making so little noise that Doc understood why they had not been gagged. The house was so nearly soundproof that nobody was likely to hear them, no matter how loud they yelled. Downstairs, Mr. Moore smacked his lips loudly, and began to whistle Lullaby of Broadway. The tune, Doc reflected, was at least ten years old.

"That fellow is about as cold a customer as I ever saw," Doc said. "That goes for the other two, too.

They're not amateurs.”

The young woman shuddered. “They went after someone, didn't they? Their boss?”

“Acted as if they did,” Doc admitted.

The young woman didn't seem to think he was acting sufficiently terrified. She frowned at him. “Don't you realize what this is all about?” she demanded nervously.

Doc shook his head. “If I did, I would have better foresight than to be put in a spot like this.”

“They'll kill us! You know that!” she said sharply.

“Not,” he corrected, “if we can talk them out of it.”

“Talk them out...fat chance! A very fat chance!” She seemed to think this was ridiculous, and that it was horrible that he should be so naive. “You know why we were seized, don't you?”

“No.”

“You're awfully dumb,” she said.

He discovered that his feelings were ruffled. He said, “If you are planning to give yourself a buildup by letting it be known that you're here because you planned it that way, save your breath. I already knew it.”

She was startled. “You—how did you know that?”

“It finally soaked in,” he said. He frowned and added, “A bunch of you federal agents closed in on the man in the rooming house after he had shot Worrik, didn't you? You were going to arrest him, and he resisted arrest, and had to be shot. That was quite a calamity—your outfit had killed the only source of information. So you got the bright idea of making everybody, including the city police, think that the man—Davey, these fellows called him, so we'll call him that—had been killed by his girl friend. You took the part of the girl friend. Your fellow agents stood by while you scared the fat man, the only witness in the house, into keeping quiet. They then got out of the house, one of them tipped the police off with the false information that you had killed Davey, and you waited with the body for the police to arrive. That will make the police very happy when they find it out—particularly since it got two men killed and one wounded for them.”

She said bitterly, “You had to turn up and spoil things!”

“I?...What did I spoil?”

“Everything!” she snapped. “My fellow agents were to follow me and watch me every minute.”

Doc registered surprise. “It wasn't very nice of them to stand by and let two policemen get killed and one wounded, was it?”

“They weren't following us then, and you know it!”

“Why not?”

She hesitated, decided not to answer.

Doc shrugged. “They made a mistake in figuring they could wait and pick up your trail at the police station or wherever they were going to pick it up.”

She snapped, "They didn't think the gang would dare attack the police."

"That's exactly what I mean. They didn't think." Doc nodded as if something had been proved.

He listened to Mr. Moore downstairs. Mr. Moore was opening a can of something; presently the odor of sardines drifted up to them. A large, green housefly entered the room and began to do spirals and climbing turns around the light bulb which was suspended from the ceiling by a faded green cord. The fly sounded like a small plane with a perfectly functioning engine.

The girl said grimly, "Your guessing is good, anyway. We hoped they would think I was Davey's girlfriend, and become terrified that I might know something that would be dangerous to them, and so would try to contact me. That would put us in touch with the gang."

Doc asked, "How did you happen to track down Davey in that rooming house?"

"You led us to him."

"I?"

"Your friends did—Renny Renwick and Ham Brooks. We had agents trailing them, and when Davey killed Worrik, and they trailed Davey, we simply followed them."

Doc Savage closed his eyes. He said bitterly, "That was a fine dirty trick—I root out an important suspect, and you try to steal him from me!"

THE housefly backed away from the light bulb in a long medium climb, did a banking turn, squared off and went into a dive, steeper and steeper, buzzing louder and louder, until he had up full speed. He smacked headlong into the light bulb, making quite a loud click, as if someone had snapped a thumbnail against the bulb. The fly bounced and began falling.

"My name," said the young woman, "is Berthena Gilroy. Usually I'm called Bert. There is no need of us calling each other you. I know who you are. You're Doc Savage."

Doc Savage watched the fly sourly. The fly had regained flight control a few inches from the floor, come out of his tailspin and got his landing gear down before he hit the floor. He somersaulted several times, stopped on his back, legs up thrust and waving.

"Bert, do you want to go on fighting?" Doc asked.

She lowered her eyes. "Quarreling, you mean?"

"That's what I mean."

"No, I don't," she said. She shivered. "If you want to know the truth, I'm scared stiff."

Doc wished to know who wouldn't be. He added, "Someone is going to get his tail eaten out for putting a woman in the spot where they put you. Whose idea was that? Chapman's?"

"Who is Chapman?" she countered.

Doc Savage named Mr. Chapman's department. He remembered this from the credentials Mr. Chapman had presented at the police station. He very conveniently turned up at the police station and helped persuade the police to let us go after they'd arrested Monk and me for, they wrongly thought, killing Worrik. I say helped—I could have gotten Lieutenant McGinniss to turn us loose without Chapman's assistance. In fact, McGinniss didn't turn us loose because of Chapman. McGinniss already saw he had

made a mistake, by then. He had found the room the shot had been fired from. That let Monk and me out, and he knew it. So he used Chapman's request as an excuse to turn us loose. He wanted an excuse." Doc smiled reminiscently. The Lieutenant should have been a little more subtle. He should at least have pretended that it was important whether or not Chapman was really a G-man, and whether he had authority to go around telling New York City police to turn prisoners loose. As a matter of fact, nobody has that kind of authority."

The fly gave a sudden, violent buzz, turned a flipflop and landed on his feet.

THE young woman, Bert, followed Doc's eyes to learn what he was watching. She found out that it was the fly, and didn't seem to think this was very important. She said, "Well, I don't know Chapman. I never heard of him. But that doesn't prove anything, because I don't know everybody in Washington."

"And everybody in Washington is probably working on this case," Doc added in an aggravated tone.

"Oh, no! It's awfully secret. Awfully important, and awfully secret!"

Doc demanded, "Do you know the circumstances under which I was brought into it?"

She nodded. "The order to turn it over to you came from higher up—very much higher up," she said.

"Didn't the same order tell you to lay off, once I took hold?" he demanded.

She hesitated, looked uncomfortable. "Yes, but—"

"Shush!" Doc said. "Here comes Mr. Moore."

Mr. Moore sauntered in carrying a tall glass which contained, to Doc's surprise, a chocolate milk mixture. Mr. Moore strolled to the middle of the room. The fly, almost too late, crawled with astonishing alacrity across the floor and escaped disaster under one of Mr. Moore's feet.

"How you doing?" Mr. Moore asked, after he had checked the bindings which held them to the chairs.

They didn't answer him. He grinned. "Sorry the reception committee is a little late," he said. "But they'll be here. Just wait in peace."

He drank from his glass, and went out. He descended the stairs and they could hear him raiding the refrigerator again.

"You started to say?" Doc asked Bert.

She looked at him anxiously. "You're pretty angry, aren't you?"

"I don't see much reason to be anything else," he said.

"I think you're wrong," she said. "You're angry because other government agents are working on it, aren't you?"

"Messing it up, you mean."

"But you should see that it is so important it couldn't be turned over to one man." She sounded patient, like a school ma'am trying to point out to a blockheaded sophomore that the square of the hypotenuse was equal to the sum of the squares of the other two sides. "One man really shouldn't have such terrible responsibility. It's unthinkable. It—It's not safe."

Doc said, "When you have fifty keys to a door, but only one that will unlock it, you might as well put the other forty-nine back in your pocket."

He thought this was a convincing statement and quite intelligent. He also saw that it had no effect.

"You," she informed him, "might not be the key."

THIS comprised the conversation for a while. Mr. Moore was still busy in the kitchen, and it sounded as if he was making himself a salad. They could hear him strip the leaves off, then slice, a head of lettuce. Doc Savage lapsed into thought. He had given the bindings on his wrists some attention and had concluded that it was just possible that he could, in an emergency, break the cords with main strength. Between that probability, and the likelihood that he could tear the chair apart by force. He imagined he could free himself if an extreme emergency presented.

He was tempted to try to free himself and seize Mr. Moore, who would probably be able to give some interesting information if it could be extracted from him. He decided in favor of waiting for whomever they had gone after. Their boss, Doc imagined...But which boss? There were two factions involved—he was now sure there were two. The rumors, which up until the killing of Worrik had been merely rumors, stood as proven fact, Doc felt. The killing of Worrik proved there were two factions. Worrik was in one outfit, and the other group had killed him. That bore out the rumors. The two factions were supposed to be fighting.

Bert said, "Mr. Savage."

He glanced at her. "Yes?"

"I wonder if you have uncovered any facts we don't know?" she said.

"I have no idea how much you know, or think you know," he hedged.

He had no intention of telling her anything. He had more than one reason for this, but the big

one was that he hadn't seen any proof that she was a government agent. It still seemed rather incredible to him that anybody would allow a woman to become involved in such a grim thing.

"I can tell you what we know," she said. "That is, if you think they won't overhear. If you think there isn't a microphone."

"There may be a microphone. But it wouldn't make much difference, would it? They would already know, from the way we're bungling around, that we're feeling in the dark."

"Well, do you think it safe for me to talk?" She had put it up to him.

"Use your own judgment," he said. He really wished to hear what she knew because the amount of information she possessed would prove whether or not she was a government agent. If she knew as little as he knew, she probably was what she said she was. On the other hand, there might be an eavesdropping microphone somewhere in the room. He looked at the possible places where one might be hidden, knowing very well it was possible to hide one so that no visual inspection alone would disclose it.

The fly suddenly got up off the floor and made a short test flight to Doc's knee. After a good landing, the fly sat there doing a pre-flight check, testing legs, first one wing then the other, giving his eyes a swipe with his forelegs for better vision.

“YOU know, of course,” the girl said unexpectedly, that nothing might have been known about this—until too late—if the rascals hadn't started fighting among themselves and thus drawn attention.”

Doc nodded. He wondered if she were fishing for information .. She was a very pretty girl, but he supposed you shouldn't trust a pretty girl any quicker than you would a homely one. He supposed they were like men in that their looks didn't make a bit of difference in their honesty. He wished he knew about this.

She said, “There were eight men on the Lonely Widow. They took off on what was to be the second atomic bombing of Japan. Major Bill Burton, the navigator, reported they caught a flak burst over Osaka. They must have been hit again immediately—at least one of the two escort planes reported they were. The B29 escorts Janie and New Orleans Gal, closed in, and, by exchanging blinker signals, learned the radios were out. Both blind flight groups on the instrument panel were functioning, but the compasses, both magnetic and gyro, were out. The co-pilot had been killed. The escorting B29s started guiding the cripple back.”

Doc made no comment. He already knew this. He even knew a little more. He knew the names of the crew of the damaged—and since missing—B29. He also knew they had all been investigated from A to Izzard before the flight, and had been almost continually during the several months since.

Bert said, “Weather closed in on them. The other two B29s lost the Lonely Widow. Flying blind, the Lonely Widow passed through a terrible thunderhead, and such awful weather conditions were encountered that the two B29s even lost their radar contact with the crippled ship. They had radioed the situation to their base, of course, and the navy helped. They kept the Lonely Widow on their radar screens for quite a while. They could tell the ship was lost. They kept trace of the Lonely Widow for nearly three thousand miles—the plane was west of 150 degrees longitude and far south when they lost it. All that was left then was hope—either that the ship would be found, or that it had crashed into the sea and sunk where no one would ever be able to lay hands on the secret it carried.”

Doc said, “They may have gotten rid of the bomb.”

“Weren't you told about that? The flak hit jammed the dropping mechanism. They couldn't get rid of it. Anyway, what happened since—what is happening now—proves they didn't.”

Doc reflected that he could point out that so far there hadn't been a speck of proof that an atomic bomb was involved in these goings-on. He kept still.

MR. MOORE was frying eggs. They could hear him cracking the eggs, and heard the surprised sizzle of hot grease as each egg landed in the frying pan. The housefly launched into flight, lost altitude until he gained flying speed, then rose swiftly and began reconnoitering the light bulb once more. Mr. Moore exploded into curses; he had broken a bad egg into his pan.

The girl was looking at Doc Savage suspiciously. “You know all this, don't you?”

He shrugged, “For a federal agent, you're giving away secrets freely,” he remarked.

“It doesn't make any difference!” Bert said angrily. “Don't tell me what to do!” She eyed him with increased suspicion. “I bet this is all news to you.”

Doc decided he might as well soothe her suspicions and urge her to talk and see if she knew anything he didn't. She hadn't, so far.

He said, “Wilbur Rigg was killed in the Bronx, wasn't he?”

Her eyes flew wide. "So you do know the story. Yes, in the Bronx. He was shot. The police talked to his sister, and she said that her brother, who was an ex-convict, had talked about some men who had come from a South Seas island who had an atomic bomb for sale to the highest bidder...The police immediately notified the FBI, because nothing, nothing at all, is being overlooked in this bomb business...But the sister didn't know much more. She didn't know who the men were who had the bomb for sale, or where they could be found. She did know, though, that they hadn't brought the bomb with them. It was on the island in the Pacific. They had offered it for sale, and a fight had broken out between them and one of their prospective customers. The customer was trying to steal the thing."

Doc said, "This fellow who was killed—Rigg—seemed to be one of the gang who was trying to take the bomb away from the men from the South Seas...You aren't giving me anything new...Worrik was connected with Rigg because the sister said Rigg had mentioned Worrik as a pal, and probably a co-conspirator. So the FBI and everybody else got busy on Worrik, but could turn up nothing definite enough to act on. All they got were enough hints to alarm them. All of it was vague, and would have been dropped as improbable and unproven and silly if the atomic thing hadn't been involved."

Bert looked at him intently and, he was forced to conclude, disapprovingly. "I don't think you are properly imbued with the seriousness of this affair," she said.

"You don't," Bert continued, "seem to realize what a bunch of crooks could accomplish with one of the bombs. Over a hundred thousand people, remember, were killed in Japan by the things. Think, for instance, what the threat of releasing one on Manhattan Island would mean. Think what a threat for an extortion deal it would be."

Doc decided the girl was intensely frightened. Doc saw this suddenly, and felt quite a lot better. It cleared up the mystery of why she was being so testy.

Mr. Moore was eating his eggs. The fly made a pass close to the light bulb, backed off as if to charge against it, changed his mind and flew out of the room and down the stairs. Presently Mr. Moore banged the table loudly and swore. The fly was bedeviling him.

## Chapter VII

HE was a roundish sort of man who was rounded the way a steel ball-bearing is rounded—nothing in his roundness implied softness. He was not a very large man. About forty. Yellow-haired the way an old broom becomes yellow. He had a gold upper tooth in front and, next to it, a cavity where another tooth should have been. The missing tooth made him swish a little when he talked.

After Rice and Skeeter had arrived with him, and after Mr. Moore had greeted him heartily with, "Boss, I was afraid you weren't gonna show up!" they all came clumping up the stairs.

"I'm Cavendish," the rounded man said. "I'm—" He didn't finish.

His mouth opened, remained roundly open for a while. He was staring at Doc Savage.

Presently he turned to Mr. Moore, Skeeter and Rice. "You guys," he said, "are three smart cookies. I suppose, if you had found a man-eating tiger, you woulda brought it home with you."

Mr. Moore, Rice and Skeeter stared in astonishment. They were being chastised, but they didn't know what for.

"Don't you know who this man is?" demanded Mr. Cavendish.

"Some toughie they had hired to—"



“Oh, hell!” Cavendish cut off Mr. Moore. “This man is about as dangerous a customer as you could have laid your hands on. I don’t understand how you caught him. I can hardly believe it. Personally, I would not have come within a thousand miles of here if I’d known he was here. He’s Doc Savage.”

Doc appeared to be embarrassed by his fame, but it was not necessary. Skeeter and Rice apparently had never heard of him, and Mr. Moore had heard of him only vaguely.

“Of all the dumbbells!” said Cavendish explosively. “Of all the stupid—well, It’s too late now. You’ve got him here. We’ve gotta make the best of it.”

“Who’s the girl, then?” Mr. Moore wished to know. He had spilled egg yolk on his necktie.

“How would I know?” Cavendish demanded. “She’s probably helping Savage, or maybe she’s a federal agent. Your guess is as good as mine.”

“We thought—”

“Well, you thought wrong!” said Cavendish disgustedly. “She’s probably not one of Worrik’s outfit. I don’t think there is any Worrik outfit left. I think all there ever was to Worrik’s outfit was Worrik and Wilbur Rigg.”

“But they shot Davey!”

“They were probably trying to arrest him. Davey was always a bit quick with a gun. This time, he probably wasn’t quick enough.”

Shocked, Mr. Moore pointed at Doc and the girl and demanded, “Ya mean they’re cops?”

“No, they’re not cops,” said Cavendish testily.

“Then why was they trying to pinch—”

Cavendish said he would write a book about it sometime. “Shut up!” he yelled. “Doc Savage’s profession—and don’t tell me this sounds cockeyed, because I already know it does—is righting wrongs and punishing crooks who are too fast for the law. If that sounds like something zany, don’t blame me. This guy Savage is unusual. I don’t think you understand how unusual.” Cavendish mopped his forehead. “I hope you never find out, too,” he added.

PRESENTLY Cavendish made an attempt to bribe Doc Savage. Doc listened gravely to the offer.

“I figure,” said Cavendish, “that you know what the shooting is all about, or you wouldn’t be here. Okay, I won’t go over any history. The bomb is on the island, see. It’s still right in the bomb bay of that B29, the Lonely Widow. We got the B29 out of sight. Hidden. Took off the wings and moved just the fuselage.” He paused, grinned without humor, and added, “You understand how it is about that bomb. We don’t know nothin’ much about it. It scares the hell out of us. So we just get the fuselage hidden with the bomb inside. Nobody’ll ever find it—even if they knew the island, it would take ‘em a long time. I’ll grant you a damned close search of the island would turn up the thing but who knows what the island is?” He indicated Mr. Moore, Rice and Skeeter. “Us four. At first, there were five of us Davey was included. You know why I’m telling you this?”

“I have no idea,” Doc admitted.

“It’s a kind of a build-up for a deal we might make with you . . . You think you would be open to a deal?”

“That would depend.”

The answer seemed to satisfy Cavendish. “Sure it would,” he said. “Here's the rest of the story. Listen to it, and you'll see why I'm telling it.”

Mr. Moore and Skeeter and Rice were registering discomfort and astonishment. They seemed amazed. Whether they were amazed at the information Cavendish was giving, or amazed that Cavendish should expend time standing there talking, Doc could not be certain.

Cavendish said, “The five of us were on that island when the B29 landed, and we soon found out what we had. The crew—only two of the crew of the plane were alive, and they didn't live long. They were wounded badly. But before they died, they talked enough to show us what we had. We didn't believe it at first...You see, the island is remote as hell, and we hadn't heard about the first atomic bomb being dropped on Japan. But later we heard...So we knew what we had.”

“What's the name of the island?” Doc asked.

Cavendish laughed. “Fat chance of my telling you,” he said.

“Not even if the deal is made?”

“Oh, if we make a deal, that'd be—but let me finish. The five of us came to the States to sell our gimmick. It was ticklish business, as you can see. The war was over and the United States had won, and that kind of narrowed our customer list. The Axis, which would have paid God knows how many billions for it, didn't have any open members left. There were some prospects, though—and I don't mind telling you the names of a couple of them would surprise you.”

Doc said nothing would surprise him. “Hurry up and get to the kernel of the thing,” he requested.

“You going to turn me down?”

“I haven't said.”

“You may think you will but you might not,” Cavendish said. “You may be surprised at my deal...But to go back to when we first got to New York and Washington—we did some preliminary feeling around. For something like that, it's a hell of a job to find your customer. It ain't something you can advertise...Did you know that Wilbur Rigg was a spy?”

“No.”

“He was.”

“I hardly believe that,” Doc said. “Rigg was checked and re-checked and his sister was checked. It didn't turn up a thing except that he was acquainted with Worrik.”

Cavendish grimaced. “You under-rate Rigg. He was slick and so was Worrik. They made few deals, made them big, and kept damned few contacts with markets. Their chances of getting known were small. They were free lances. They found a piece of merchandise, then found a buyer for it.”

Bert was wide-eyed. She was terrified, but through her terror, she was thinking. She said, “It could be. There were, here and there, things—little things about Rigg and Worrik that looked strange.”

Cavendish smiled at her. “So you're a federal agent?” he said.

HE gave Bert plenty of time to reply, but she did not respond, so Cavendish smiled again. His smiles

were just smiles, as empty of warmth as a coffin.

“Yes, you under-rate Rigg and Worrik,” he said. “They were not common. And they were not, we discovered, safe to deal with. They were sharks.”

Doc said, “They tried to steal the secret from you?”

Cavendish nodded. “I don't see how the hell you found that out, though. Rigg and Worrik, it seems to me, would cover it up if they possibly could...Or was it after Rigg got his?”

“You killed Rigg?” Doc demanded.

Cavendish winced. No smile now. Nothing but coldness, and calculating. He said, “Let us say merely that he met a violent end ... Really, you know I couldn't admit being responsible for murder. It would prejudice the deal I want to make with you ...” He stopped and thought about it. “Let's put it this way: Davey killed Rigg, then Davey killed Worrik, then Davey was killed resisting arrest. Isn't that more suitable?”

Doc snorted. “Murder is never suitable.”

“Putting it that way embarrasses me less, then shall we say.”

Doc made as much of an impatient gesture as he could make, tied as he was. “What's the proposition?”

Cavendish's head came up. “Actually, I have two.”

“Two?”

“Yes. The first one is tentative, and is this: How much will you take to forget all about this? You and the young lady, if necessary.” He glanced at Bert. “Or you alone, and we will have an accident happen to the young lady.”

What little composure Bert had fell off her face. Rigid, losing color, her face, her whole body, registered all the terror the situation called for. Which was plenty.

“No,” Doc said.

“No to what?” Cavendish was poised hopeful.

“No to the whole thing.”

“A negative, you mean, only to the first proposition.” Cavendish bowed his head a little in agreement. “I am not surprised. I am, indeed, pleased. I respect you too much to expect any other answer than the one you gave. However, in justice to my future peace of mind—in order that I might not be tortured in the future with wondering whether or not you might, just possibly might, be bought—I had to make that proposition. We will call it number one. No good.”

“Shoot with number two,” Doc said impatiently.

Cavendish nodded.

“I will sell the bomb to the United States government,” he said. “The price is one million.”

Doc was really astonished ... He had not expected the offer. Yet it was reasonable. The price was reasonable and it was a logical offer.

“I’m not the United States government,” Doc said.

A new voice—new to the scene; it was Burt Chapman's voice—spoke with rounded emphasis. “I’m not the United States government either,” Chapman said. “But I’ll speak for it ... You guys grab air. The place is surrounded.”

FOR what might have been ten seconds, surprise was as real as solid glass in the room, and held everyone rigid, quiescent outwardly.

Cavendish broke the tension. He asked, “You are ...?”

“Get 'em up!” Chapman snarled.

Cavendish spoke to his three helpers. He said, “Do what you are able to do, my boys.” His tone was almost dreamy.

As by magic, a gun came into Chapman's hand. The room quickly filled with thunderous noise, spurting flame, movement. With magic not much slower, Mr. Moore, Rice and Skeeter had guns in their hands. Out of the guns, fire. In the room, yells, thunder, gasps, lead, smoke, motion.

Doc rocked head, shoulders, from side to side as much as the ropes permitted. He saw Mr. Chapman, looking quite astonished at all the bedlam, release two spurts of noise and fire from his gun. Then Chapman stepped swiftly sidewise, out of the door. Bullets knocked splinters off the edges of the door, knocked holes in the plaster walls.

Cavendish said, “Let's blow!”

The chair in which Doc was tied now rocked to a point beyond equilibrium and upset. Doc hit the floor hard. One of the men—Skeeter—jumped wildly at the noise, wheeled, aimed carefully at Doc's head, and fired. The bullet split a floorboard under Doc's nose.

Cavendish, Skeeter, Mr. Moore, Rice, all departed in haste. They used a door at the other end of the room. It led toward the front of the house.

Chapman put his head in the rear door. He shot in the direction the men had gone.

He waited until he was sure there was going to be no immediate return fire.

Chapman freed Bert first. He used a large clasp knife of the type that opened by pressing a button. He worked rapidly. He said, “Go down the steps, out the back door.” He came over and freed Doc.

Doc demanded, “How did you find us?”

“I had the damned good luck to have that Cavendish on my suspect list,” Chapman said. “I just followed him here. You take the stairs and outside, too.”

“Got an extra gun?”

“No. Hurry up and ...”

Bullets came into the room. They entered rather high, and passed overhead, but they were alarming anyway.

“You see what I mean,” Chapman said. He gave Doc a shove. The girl was already headed for the steps.

“Aren't you coming along?” Doc demanded.

“You're damned right,” Chapman said. “We gotta keep them cornered here until help comes.”

“What about your other agents?”

“What other agents?” Chapman said bitterly. He lowered his voice. “I'm by myself.”

THEY were no more than halfway down the stairs when a large object hurtled past them, hit the kitchen door, split, and liquid sloshed over the floor. It was water-colored liquid. Instantly there was the smell of 100-octane gasoline.

Doc said, “Watch out! That stuff, if it gets on your bare skin, will burn you!”

They went cautiously around the gasoline flood. A little of it got on their shoe soles. They could not help that.

Doc added, “Don't breathe the fumes. They're sometimes poisonous some people more than others.”

There was a back door, beyond that a backyard not much larger than the bed of a boxcar, and looking like one with its solid board fence.

Chapman began to curse bitterly. Why're they throwing that—” He stopped, let another five-gallon can of gasoline come flying down the steps, burst. “- throwing the gasoline?” he finished. “Why? They've got some kind of a scheme!”

“Probably they hope it'll explode if you take another shot at them,” Doc warned. “It will, too. That stuff will burn like gunpowder.”

“It's just gasoline—”

“It's 100-octane gasoline, Doc corrected. “There's quite a difference.”

Chapman swore some more. “What're they doing with the stuff stored upstairs? What've they got gasoline in the house for, anyway?”

Doc gave a possible good reason.

“They might have intended to use it to burn the house and our bodies,” he said.

“Call the cops,” Chapman ordered.

“What are you—”

“Call the cops,” Chapman interrupted. “I'm going to—” His face darkened, twisted, and some sort of emotion began shaking his hands. He blurted, “Damn them! They won't get away with this!”

He whirled, dashed across the kitchen, bounded up the stairs.

Doc said bitterly, “The fool!” He shoved Bert toward the fence. “Call the police! Hurry!” Doc then wheeled, started across the kitchen himself, wheeled again wildly when he saw a ball of fire—a pillow in flames sailing lazily down the steps, over Chapman's head. The next fraction of a second was one of the longest Doc had ever lived, but he did gain the door before the flaming pillow set off the high-octane gas vapor. Then the world seemed to go whoosh!

DOC was in the air for a while. A giant hand seemed to slap against his back, lift him and propel him forward. He ended up more than halfway across the back yard, on his feet first, then rolling over and over. He saw that Bert had been knocked down also. Every bit of glass, screen, putty, sash framing, had come out of the windows, chased by flame. The flame tongues jumped at least thirty feet outward and upward, the kitchen walls bulged slightly, the door shut violently, a moment later blew outward like a leaf in a gale. Inside the kitchen, the fire began moaning loudly.

Doc picked himself up ... Impossible, he saw, to enter the house from the back. The whole back of the house seemed suddenly ablaze.

He leaped, got the top of the fence, hauled himself up. He helped Bert over.

“Get the police,” he repeated.

“But poor Mr. Chapman—”

“The best way to help,” Doc said sharply, “is get the police. And hurry! The fire department, too. But the police first!”

She said, “All right!” and ran away.

The house, as nearly as Doc could estimate, was located in the middle of the block. It was one of a series of houses jammed wall to wall. There was no way of going between the houses to the front, to the street. No passage. No areaway, no alley.

He ran toward an adjoining house. The door was locked. He kicked at it. A shocked, frightened fat woman looked through a narrow window beside the door. The door began to give. That fat woman screamed shrilly and continued screaming on an ascending scale.

Over the screaming, like drum taps accompanying flute music, four measured shots sounded in the house which was afire. A man shrieked in agony, the shriek deeper-toned than the woman's screaming, the two comparing about the same as trombone to flute.

Another explosion, greater than any before, sounded, and many second-story windows were driven out of the house. Fire followed the falling glass. The roaring of flames grew in volume, became like a storm of wind and rain in the tropics.

The door Doc was kicking gave way. He entered the house. The screaming woman without stopping her outcry seized a kettle of stew off a gas stove and hurled it at him. He dodged, but not with entire success, for he was scalded slightly. He went on through the house. The front door was unlocked. He passed out.

A man had fallen or been thrown, from the second floor front windows of the house. His body was afire. The flames made it unrecognizable, like a wrapping of red tissue paper.

In the house, on the second floor, more explosions. More flame. A part of the house roof lifted, folded over, blazed furiously. Doc ran back into the house through which he had passed, snatched up a small rug which he had noticed, ran with the rug out the front door. He threw the rug, nap down, over the burning body of the man. The body was not dead. It was twitching, squirming.

Masking the flames as best he could, muffling them, but burning his hands somewhat in the process, Doc got the man and dragged him clear. He pulled the man into the street. He rolled the rug about the body tightly and extinguished the flames at last. Carefully, he unrolled the rug ....

The man was dead. He had at least three bullet holes in vulnerable parts of his face and chest. It would

have been hard to tell who he was, except that he wore a neat dark suit, and Chapman had worn such a neat dark suit.

The house continued to blaze. There were more explosions. Plumes of flaming gasoline squirted into the air, over the neighborhood. No one else came out of the house. If there was screaming, the fire made too much noise to allow it to be heard.

## Chapter VIII

PEACE, like a startled bird, fled the conference room in the police station. Two uniformed cops dashed outside, and in a moment could be heard giving solicitous orders to the elevator operator. Lieutenant McGinniss, tiring of this solicitude for his welfare, suddenly yelled, "Damn it, I'm not dead!" Following which, he was wheeled into the conference room amid embarrassed silence.

Doc Savage saw that the Lieutenant, although considerably bandaged and not exactly clad for action—he was wearing a hospital robe and hospital pajamas—seemed in good health.

"Curiosity bring you over?" Doc asked.

"That's right," said the Lieutenant. "You couldn't keep me away. So you finally wound the thing up?"

Doc didn't say anything.

"It is," said a business-like well-dressed young man, "wound up."

The Lieutenant eyed the speaker. "Who're you?"

The business-like well-dressed young man explained that he was Brigadier General Theodore Lowell. "From Washington," he added.

The Lieutenant's opinion of Washington evidently had not improved, because he snorted. "I seem to remember your signature on some of the credentials that bright guy, Chapman, had."

Brigadier General Lowell snapped stiffly upright. He said, "Chapman is dead. He died in the service of his country as genuinely as any man in uniform."

"Yeah, and a lot of cops get shot in the service of the public, too," the Lieutenant said. "A lot of guys died in the war. Okay, that makes them nice guys. Your department, nor the FBI, nor the Army nor the Navy, has got a corner on dying. Let's understand that. And let's not try to push each other around."

The Brigadier General did not unbend very much.

Doc Savage said, "Have you identified the fingerprints of the body I found under the window?"

"That was Chapman," the Brigadier General said.

"What about the fingerprints?" Doc persisted.

"Listen, I know Burt Chapman! I should, because he has been one of my trusted men for five years. He was also my friend."

Doc said wearily, "What about the fingerprints?"

"I haven't the report on that yet."

"That's what I asked you," Doc said.

Monk Mayfair and Ham Brooks looked at Doc Savage thoughtfully. Renny Renwick was examining his large hands, also with speculation. The three of them were collectively puzzled. Chapman was obviously Chapman and he was dead, and why was Doc Savage overdoing it about identifying the body as Chapman's. At least it seemed to them that Doc was overdoing it. They were quite sure that he had a reason. They couldn't see what it was.

Monk leaned over, punched Ham, said, "It strikes me the thing to be interested in, and concerned about, is that good-looking babe."

Miss Berthena Gilroy had disappeared. No one had seen her since Doc had sent her to summon the police.

BRIGADIER GENERAL LOWELL looked at them woodenly, said, "Burt Chapman was completely reliable." He paused as if to let that sink in, to let them see that he meant it unequivocally. He added, "Why Burt Chapman disappeared, and worked by himself, for a matter of twelve hours, I do not know, and probably may never know. But I am sure that he was doing what he thought wise."

Doc said, "But you had had no report prior to my call to Washington after the house burned?"

"Not for about twelve hours ... Why are you so interested?"

"I wanted to know," Doc said briefly.

Renny Renwick caught Monk Mayfair's eye and asked a question by wrinkling his forehead. The wrinkles asked: Why is Doc upset about Chapman not reporting to his chief for twelve hours before he was killed?...Monk pushed out his lips as if he had tasted something sour. This said: I'm damned if I know what Doc is upset about.

Everyone else seemed to think Doc was quite placid and, if not satisfied, at least resigned to the way things had come out.

Two men from the medical examiner's office entered, and one of them said, "The fire department got the ashes cooled off enough to do some poking around."

Brigadier General Lowell looked up quickly, asked, "How many bodies did you find?"

The medical examiner's man snorted. "Look, there must have been ten or twelve five-gallon cans of one-hundred-octane gasoline, not counting those they threw down the stairs before the fire started. Do you know the kind of fire that sort of gasoline makes? It makes a first-class crematorium, that's what it makes."

"Then you'll never know whether they all burned!"

"I didn't say that. We'll run tests on the ashes as soon as we can."

"Human ashes can be identified—"

"We know our business!" the medical examiner's man snapped. "But you don't just toss off a laboratory job like that. It takes time."

"Human ashes can be identified by proper laboratory analysis, and I wish to offer you the facilities of my department's laboratory," the Brigadier General continued patiently. "I'm not calling the police dopes. I'm offering full cooperation. This matter, as some of you gentlemen know by now—some of you don't seem to get it yet, though—is incredibly important. The future of many people might be involved. Indeed, the



future of nations might be involved. You can hardly imagine the full extent of the tragic consequences that might be involved.”

He struck an attitude that said: if you gentlemen would only conceive how enormous a matter it is. He had sounded like a preacher trying to convince a congregation there was a real hell, and me it was just around the corner.

Lieutenant McGinniss closed his eyes. He seemed tired and weak from his wound. “May I ask a question? he demanded.

Some one said go ahead, ask it.

“If four men died in the burning house, is this job all wrapped up and done?” the Lieutenant inquired.

“It would depend on who the four men were—” the Brigadier General began.

“I mean Cavendish, Mr. Moore, Skeeter and Rice,” McGinniss snapped. “If their bodies were burned is it finished.”

“Finished, but somewhat unsatisfactorily,” the officer admitted.

“What's unsatisfactory about it?”

“No bomb,” said Brigadier General Lowell. “We haven't got the bomb.”

“But those four had it hidden, and now they're dead, and so nobody knows where the bomb is.”

“We all know that!”

“What I'm getting at,” McGinniss said sharply, “is this: is the bomb hunt over?”

“It probably is,” the government man admitted wearily. “We'll continue, of course, the investigation. For instance, we'll have to find Miss Gilroy. I have no doubt but that there is some sensible explanation for her disappearance.” He looked at Doc Savage. “You are sure, absolutely sure, Miss Gilroy was going for the police when you last saw her?”

Doc decided that the man's tone cast some doubt on his veracity.

“Certainly,” Doc said briefly. He made an impatient gesture, added, “You fellows might be winding this thing up too quick, mightn't you? Take the girl's disappearance ... There might have been more members of the gang than just the four who were in the house. Miss Gilroy might have bumped into one of the gang on her way to the police.”

“The gang was small, by all our information,” the Washington man said. “About four members would fit it. Five, including Davey who was killed by my men resisting arrest. No ... I'm inclined to believe the gang are all dead, thanks to poor Chapman.”

“Just the same, I d like to satisfy my curiosity,” Doc said. “Have you pictures of all your agents who have been working on the case?”

“Well, I...Frankly, that's out of the question.”

“Td like to look at some pictures,” Doc said. “Maybe I've seen some people following around and thought they were agents, whereas they weren't agents.”

The Washington man was disturbed. "Showing any outsider pictures of our agents would be irregular as hell," he said. "It just isn't done."

Doc looked at him levelly.

"Look, I want to see those pictures," Doc said. "Either I see them, or there is going to be some fuss made." Doc's voice lifted slightly, and he added, "I don't mind telling you I'm getting tired of being called into this thing, then having every Tom, Dick and Harry toss obstacles in my way!" His voice got quite a lot firmer without getting louder. "I want those pictures here, and I want them here quick," he said.

WHILE they were waiting for the photographs—Brigadier General Lowell assured them they would not have to wait unduly long, after all—Doc Savage got Renny, Monk and Ham aside. He talked privately to his three aides.

"I think," Doc said, "that we've had something put over on us. And I think we're going to have to move fast, or be made awful suckers."

Renny Renwick hazarded a guess. "The babe," he rumbled, "was one of them. She double-crossed them."

Doc shook his head. "I doubt that." He added hastily, as if to avoid an argument, "Renny, I want you to get down to the hangar and get our fastest plane fueled for a long trip ... Better take it around to La Guardia Field for the fueling."

"There's gas at the hangar," Renny said. "And La Guardia is pretty prominent. What I mean, if anybody were trying to keep track of you, La Guardia would make it easy."

"Then use La Guardia by all means," Doc said.

"This isn't a secret trip, then?"

Doc nodded. "The more un-secret this flight is, the closer it will come to do what I want it to do."

"You want me to make a commotion?"

"Exactly. While you're at it, check the weather to San Francisco. And don't make any secret about that, either."

Renny scratched his jaw thoughtfully. "There's bound to be some newspaper reporters around. Most of them are pretty decent guys. But that tabloid, the Planet, has some stinkers on it. The best way to get something advertised would be to tell them guys on the Planet you didn't want it published. They don't like us. That's just an idea. Or should I go that far?"

"Too obvious," Doc said, and shook his head. "This doesn't want to be too stupidly done."

"Okay, it was just an idea," Renny said.

Doc turned to Monk and Ham. "You two," he said, "get busy and book us passage to Hawaii on the first clipper plane leaving San Francisco—the first one we can catch by flying to Frisco in the ship Renny is going to have ready, that is."

Monk was skeptical. "The way travel is, they got them planes crammed with reservations a month ahead. Grabbing four seats won't be any snap."

Doc was pleased.

“It’ll give you a chance to create a commotion and draw some attention, he said.

“Yeah, but what if we get turned down?”

“You’d better see that we don’t get turned down.”

Ham Brooks was puzzled. “Are we really going to Hawaii?”

“You bet we are.”

Monk was not so baffled. “I bet we’re going to the island to get that bomb,” he said.

“What island?” Ham wanted to know. He turned to Doc, demanded, “What island?”

“Search me,” Doc said. “But wait until I look at these pictures before you get busy.”

It developed that Brigadier General Lowell was only going to allow Doc Savage to inspect the photographs of the operatives in his department. He was very insistent, and not too graceful, about this. Doc pretended to be disgruntled, and pointed out that Renny, Monk and Ham might have seen some crooks around and mistaken them for federal agents.

“That’s ridiculous!” Lowell snapped. “You grabbed everybody you suspected, right down the line.”

“We didn’t grab Mr. Cavendish,” Doc reminded. “He grabbed me—and Miss Gilroy. And he was able to do it only because your outfit made a move that wasn’t particularly bright. It wasn’t chivalrous, either, to put a lady in the danger you put Miss Gilroy in.”

The Brigadier General spread out the photographic file, which was marked top secret. He said, “This is what I call wasting time.” He was an immaculate man, and he stepped back, struck an attitude of attention and waited. He looked remarkably young for a man with so much responsibility.

There was no sound but the shuff-shuff the leaves of the photo file made as Doc turned them. The crowd in the conference room had thinned out. A uniformed cop seemed to be asleep in a chair. Lieutenant McGinniss, looking tired and wan, watched in silence, eyes bright and a little fevered. He should not have left the hospital. An assistant District Attorney, a Mr. Gross, who was supposed to guard the public interest, seemed to have gone to sleep in a chair. There was Renny, Monk and Ham, and no one else.

“You certainly have more agents than I expected,” Doc said.

“Half enough,” Lowell snapped. “My department does very important work—jobs too secret, or too international, for the FBI, or the more direct and less trained Army and Navy agencies.”

Monk tried to sidle over and take a look at some of the photographs. Lowell leveled an arm at him and said, “None of that!”

Monk mumbled that it looked to him as if some people didn’t trust some other people around here. He was about to elaborate on this theme, but jumped instead. Doc had closed the photo file.

Doc slapped a hand down on the file.

“I’m through with this,” he said.

He swung on Renny, Monk and Ham.

“Get busy on what I told you to do,” he said. “And don't waste any time.”

The three left hastily.

Lowell stared at Doc Savage with suspicion. “What are you pulling on me?” he demanded.

“The thing for you to worry about,” Doc said, “is the shenanygin that has already been pulled on you and not by me, either.”

Doc left.

## Chapter IX

THERE was a cold front over the states of Oklahoma, Kansas, Nebraska and South Dakota, a violent one with great thunderstorms marching almost shoulder to shoulder; and, farther west, they breasted an occlusion just west of the Continental divide. Coming down the High Sierras slope, they ran into a large area of fog of the advection type. It covered the earth like a silver rug. To get down through it at San Francisco, they had to take their turn in the holding pattern while several ships ahead of them let down, but finally they picked up the runway localizer—they had been completely on instruments much of the flight, and were now—and passed the outer marker, made the glide path. Monk was handling the controls, but Doc kept a wary eye on the pointer of the glide path indicator. He had never gotten to feel at ease while coming in blind at better than a hundred miles an hour. The squawk of the tires on the runway was very welcome.

Ham Brooks lifted an arm, bent it at the elbow, wrist presented in front of his face, and inspected his watch. “Anybody want to bet we make it?” he demanded.

“I'll take five on that,” Monk said. “Let's see the color of your money.” After a brief, bitter argument, they decided neither one trusted the other, and Renny had better hold the stakes.

As the plane moved on to the taxi strip, a cab whipped alongside; the cab driver leaned out, gestured, yelled, something. Doc said, “This must be the cab I radioed ahead for.”

They stopped the plane, left the engine idling, set the handbrakes, piled out. A man in overalls got out of the cab. Doc said to him, “Are you the man who is to taxi the plane in and hangar it?”

“That's right,” the man said. He had a scrubbed, shiny, ruddy face like a tomato.

They piled their bags into the cab, climbed in and the cab got going. Ham told Monk bitterly, “You knew Doc had radioed ahead for quick transportation. You knew that when you made the bet.” Monk said, “What are you squawking about? You made the offer.” Ham replied that this did not alter his feeling that Monk was a low-grade rascal. This, he added, he had long suspected. To which Monk leered and said, “Doc radioed them to hold the Clipper, too.”

“You bug-faced missing link!” Ham yelled. “You're a crook!”

AN impatient-looking attendant was waiting at the trans-Pacific seaplane terminal. He had their reservations, and told them, “They're holding the ship for you.”

A steward met them at the gangplank, said, “Your stateroom is aft. Number fifteen.”

Monk held out a hand to Renny, rubbing thumb and forefinger together, for Ham's five-spot. Ham scowled and said, “Pay the Missing Link!”

The seaplane, which made the trans-Pacific run all the way to Shanghai, via the Philippines, was, Doc

Savage saw, one of the new type. It was a product of the war, adapted to civilian use, and impressive. More impressive, he realized, than he had expected. Doc was particularly interested because he had served in a consulting capacity during the designing of the ship, and there had been some bitter arguments about the functional feasibility of a ship of that size. His connection with the designing had ended at the blueprint stage, and he was curious about the outcome. It seemed satisfactory.

The passenger accommodations were on two decks, one above the other; the lower deck, which was farthest from the six wing-nacelled motors, was composed of sleeper compartments, these somewhat resembling the compartments on Continental railway coaches, except that there was an aisle down the center, with compartments on both sides instead of one side. Occupants slept in berths which ran crosswise of the hull, rather than lengthwise as in a pullman.

Gangplank entrance was forward for convenience, whereas most landplanes were entered aft of the wing trailing edge. Passing up the gangplank, one entered a service area where there were lockers for the passengers wraps, and for the many small things—magazines, charts, newspapers, extra pillows, blankets, writing materials, books—that the stewards used to give service.

The steward said, "This way, gentlemen." He was a slender bright-eyed young man, very neat of uniform, very exact of manner. "During take-off, will you keep your seats with safety belts buckled," he requested.

Monk flopped into a comfortable seat. "Well, we made it," he remarked. "But will somebody tell me just what we've accomplished, besides catching a trans-Pacific seaplane?"

Both Monk and Ham looked at Doc questioningly. They both wanted to know what had been accomplished.

Suddenly, without warning, the engines began starting one after another. Their power flowed through the ship. "Maybe," Doc Savage said quietly, "we've caught up with more than a seaplane."

Puzzled by that, Monk looked out through a window. He saw, with surprise, that the big plane was being driven backward by the engines, and for a moment he wondered if his mind hadn't failed. Then he remembered that airplanes now had reversible propellers, or some of them did.

JAKE LEWIS, Captain of the plane, issued orders to co-pilot and engineer in a grouchy tone. "Watch what you're doing. Let's not have any more delay, he said. Jake felt that circumstances had conspired against him to make them thirty minutes late on take-off. He was a tall, dark, saturnine man, given to long spells of simmering bad humor which usually coincided with interruptions in routine. If, for instance, weather forced them off course, he would be scowling and disgruntled until they were back on scheduled flight plan.

The seaplane ceased backing, remained loggy and motionless for a moment, then moved forward, swinging to the left and lining out into the wind for the take-off.

Jake swore, grabbed up the radio microphone. He addressed the sweep boat, a large fast motor launch which was performing its duty of making sure there was no floating object that would endanger the plane.

"Head off that tramp steamer," Jake ordered. "We got no more time to lose." He listened to an answer from the launch. "The hell with control tower," he said. "Get that steamer outa our way!"

The control tower man cut in. Jake won a brief, bitter argument, and the launch streaked off to halt the tramp steamer long enough for the plane to take off. Pleased, Jake said, "Okay, let's get baby in the air."

The co-pilot had been handling the controls while taxiing. Jake took them over for the take-off. He was an excellent pilot, which was probably why the company, and the crew, tolerated his quarrelsome disposition. The manner in which he got the plane in the air, the tone of his commands, indicated he was getting some satisfaction out of it.

Airborne, the big ship made its initial climb through the fog layer. It suddenly emerged in bright silver moonlight, and Jake permitted himself a sour grin. He got the ship on the radio beam which pointed toward Hawaii. He was stretching and yawning when the Chief Steward, Gramm, thrust his head into the control compartment.

Steward Gramm was excited. "I got a stowaway here," he said.

"Stowaway! For God's sake!" Pilot Jake Lewis was astonished. "Some danged kid musta slipped past the checker. Well, we ain't gonna turn back. Throw a scare into the kid—"

"This ain't no kid," Steward Gramm said.

THE stowaway was a man about forty years old, lean and darkly sunburned. Pilot Lewis had seen stowaways before, and the manner of this one puzzled him, because the fellow was neither frightened nor defiant, the way illegal passengers usually were. The thin dark man had a rather coldly possessed manner.

"You gotta ticket, buddy?" the Captain demanded.

The thin dark man surprised them.

"Sure, I got a ticket," he said.

Steward Gramm blurted, "But he told me—!"

"This," interrupted the dark man, "is the ticket."

He had produced two revolvers. He menaced Captain Lewis, Steward Gramm and the co-pilot, the only ones present in the control compartment at the moment.

"A nut! A lunatic!" blurted the co-pilot.

The lean man's skin was the color of plug chewing tobacco ... He shot out a hand, the hand seized the throat microphone around Captain Lewis neck, jerked it loose.

"None o' that!" he said grimly.

The Captain's face became flat-cheeked with strain, and began to lose color. He had started, by speaking with his mouth closed, to give a warning—the throat mike would probably pick up his words clearly enough—via the radio transmitter to the shore station. The stowaway had snatched the microphone too quickly ... Furthermore, the Captain was convinced that the man had seriously debated, for a moment, whether or not to shoot him. Captain Lewis had the horrible certainty that he had escaped death, just now, by the mere whim of a man's thought.

"Fold your hands neatly," the dark man said, "on the backs of your necks."

Steward Gramm cried, "Listen, you can't—"

His objection was ended by one of the guns hitting him over the left ear. He fell forward stiffly, into the controls. The plane gave a sharp lurch as Gramm's shoulder moved the control column. Captain Lewis gasped, "My God, he'll put the ship—we're going into a spin!" He became a tangle of arms and legs with

the steward. Actually, he was endeavoring to get to his own gun, for the officers of the ship were armed. The weapon, an automatic, was in a holster in a map pocket. He desisted when one of the dark man's guns gouged firmly into his ear.

"If you want your brains scattered, just keep trying," the man said.

Stunned, hardly believing what was happening could happen, the three men—Captain Lewis, Steward Gramm, and the co-pilot—permitted themselves to be searched. Steward Gramm was not unconscious, but he was dazed. The dark man, it was obvious, knew all the places to search, because he got all the guns.

"Keep right on course, and make regular position reports," he ordered.

He grinned thinly at them.

"I can read a compass, and I know what a radio is for," he continued. "Also, in a pinch, I could fly this job. So behave yourselves."

The co-pilot snapped stiffly erect. Blazing rage made his neck look as if there was a red muffler around it. "If you think you, one man, can hijack—"

"I'm more than one," the wiry dark man said.

TWO engineers, a navigation officer and another steward composed the remaining crew. One engineer was out in the starboard wing catwalk, making an inspection. The other engineer was in the little room with all the gauges—engine control instruments, pressurization and fuel dials. He lifted his head sharply, said, "Passengers aren't allowed ... What silenced him was the snout of a gun, blue, round, unpleasantly promising.

"Close your eyes," said the holder of the gun. He was an average-looking, but deeply tanned man in a new-looking blue suit.

"What the—"

"Close your eyes, pal, or get em shot out!" the man said. When the engineer shut his eyes, he calmly whipped the fellow twice over the head with a blackjack.

Presently the other engineer thrust his head inside, stared in amazement, and was brought down by the blackjack.

Another sunburned man, who had been lurking in the background as lookout, grinned at the one who had overpowered the two engineers. He indicated the battery of instruments. "You know what all the gadgets are for?"

The other scratched his head. "Some of them ... I guess I'll get by." He nudged one of the engineers with a toe. "I better keep one of these guys as a pet. You want to put the other one away?"

"Not yet. We still got one to go."

"One?"

"The other steward."

"What about the new officer?"

“He's nicely tied up. And I gave him a drink of barbitol, a big one. He'll go out like a light presently.” The man grinned. “At least, he's one guy we don't need.”

“Ain't you worried about the steward?”

“Nah. Skeeter is taking him.”

Later, Skeeter appeared in the doorway. “How you like me?” he asked. He turned, mincing like a fashion model, for their inspection. He wore the steward's uniform. “Guy wore the same size as I do,” he remarked. “Wasn't that lucky?”

That gave one of the others an idea. “Why don't we all put on the uniforms of the crew?” he demanded. “That might smooth things out with the passengers for a while ... I'm gonna suggest it to the boss.”

He moved toward the control compartment, grinning. They now had, as far as the crew was concerned, complete control of the plane.

THE co-pilot was now bound hand and foot, and a hard blow on the head had rendered him unconscious. His form was neatly stacked in a niche behind the control compartment. Captain Lewis, considerably subdued, was flying the ship, acutely conscious that he had been ordered to keep his hands out of mischief.

“Don't touch a damned thing without you first tell me what it is and why,” the lean dark man ordered.

Captain Lewis nodded glumly.

A head thrust into the compartment. “Hello, Rice,” the dark man said. “What's the word?”

“Sweet.” Rice made a gleeful business of forming a circle with thumb and middle finger. “We got them all laid out ... And I got an idea. Why don't we put on the uniforms of the crew?”

“Why do that?” the dark man demanded.

“So the passengers won't be suspicious.”

“Okay. But later. After we get rid of Savage.” The dark man reached down, grabbed the dazed steward by jacket lapels and necktie, pulled the steward's scared face within a few inches of his own, and demanded, “What compartment are Doc Savage and his men in?”

## Chapter X

DOC SAVAGE, for the third time in five minutes clamping a thumb on the call-button for the steward, complained, “I wonder if this thing is out of order?”

Monk and Ham glanced at each other, silently agreeing with lifted eyebrows that Doc Savage was not fully satisfied with the way things were going. They suspected that Doc was wondering whether he had made a big mistake somewhere.

Ham said dryly, “Right after takeoff, the steward is probably pretty busy.”

“I suppose so ... But five minutes!” Doc said impatiently.

Monk looked at Doc Savage levelly, said, “Doc, where do you think you made your mistake?”

Doc stiffened, tightened visibly for a moment. It was not his habit to show much emotion, and this—the



sharp visible bite of apprehension, the startled irritation that his unease had been noticed—was unusual. He first scowled, then grimaced, then grinned faintly and without happiness.

“With so much at stake,” he said, “I probably shouldn't have trusted a guess so completely, nor acted on it so fully.”

Monk rubbed his chin slowly. “I'll admit I don't see the point of this charging across the country and grabbing a seaplane to Hawaii. I can see what you might be trying to do give someone the idea we know where that bomb is, and are busting ourselves to get to it in a hurry.”

“You don't think much of that idea?”

“No, I don't.”

“That's too bad,” Doc said. “Because it is what I'm trying to do.”

“But nobody coulda overtook us, dang it!” Monk exclaimed. “The way we come busting across the country, nobody could have caught up with us—oh! Oh, wait a minute—you did intend for them to try to catch up with us and stop us, didn't—didn't you? So as to get a line on them. Or do you really know where that bomb is?”

“I have no more idea than you have where the bomb is.”

“Oh! Then why not give them a chance to catch—”

“We did.”

“Eh?”

“Stop and check for a minute,” Doc suggested dryly. “Remember how long Renny took getting our plane ready? First, he moved it from the waterfront hangar to La Guardia, and that took time. Then servicing took more time. And we were killing time ourselves—you and Ham didn't get reservations out of San Francisco instantly, if you'll remember. Then there was a delay while we got our stuff together ...”

“Who was watching us?”

“Eh?”

“Who,” Monk demanded, “was around to find out we headed for Hawaii? Or was anybody?”

Doc wore a dubious expression. “That's what is bothering me,” he said. “There is a chance, a bare chance, we might have covered our trail too well.” He shrugged and stood up suddenly. “Well, if we did, we can let the newspapers know that we are in Hawaii, and see that the wire services handle the story. That should make it less of a secret ... I'm going to look for the steward, and, incidentally, have a glance at the passengers.”

He went out.

MONK and Ham swapped discouraged looks after Doc had departed. “This whole thing,” Monk said, “has been feather-fighting from the first. It starts out with nobody knowing for sure what's what, and it keeps on that way. Personally, I d like to have something in front of me that I can see and strike out at. Damn this jumping around in the dark!”

“Doc's wondering if he made a mistake.”

“Sure.”

“And,” said Ham, “he’s got something up his sleeve we don’t know about.”

Monk looked disappointed. “So you noticed that, too,” he muttered.

Ham laughed. “What’s the matter, knot-head? Did you think you were going to have a chance to laugh at me?”

Monk was indignant. “Listen, you’re so bright-eyed and smart—answer me a question. What does Doc know that everybody had missed?”

“I don’t know,” Ham confessed readily.

“Ha, I figured you didn’t!”

Ham eyed him narrowly. “Do you know?”

Monk looked secretive. “I got a right fair idea. But I’m keeping it to myself, where it’ll be appreciated.”

“You have no more of an idea than I have,” Ham said.

“Yeah?” Okay, I’ll give you just a hint: You remember that file of photographs Doc looked at? Turn that over in your mind, and see what comes out.” Monk leaned back and grinned. “Nothing will, of course.”

DOC encountered a slender man wearing a steward’s uniform. Doc halted. Alert, curious, intrigued, he eyed the steward, and presently he said, “Haven’t I met you before?”

“Not formally,” the steward said.

The steward, using his left hand, grasped and lifted a towel which was draped across his right hand, the act disclosing a dark automatic pistol which his right hand gripped.

He added, “Not as formally as we now meet. And, brother, how formal it will be depends on you. If you are ready to go and sit at God’s right hand, just make one wrong move.”

Doc decided—from the fright, desperation and ferocity in the man’s voice and attitude—that almost any move at all would be wrong. He studied the man, at the same time trying not to look too self-possessed, fearing that even a self-possessed look would cause the man to shoot him.

He said, “Ah, I think I recall you now.”

“Yeah?”

The man—he was obviously no steward—seemed to have not the least idea what he should, or could, do next. He seemed to be stiffening visibly, and his color was changing from Morocco leather to toast brown to hazel to fawn to straw, at which point it shifted over to lightening shades of grey.

“Newspaper reporter,” Doc said.

The man said nothing.

Doc added, “You were at the police station, after the house burned. You were present when the press was told that the dead man, Burt Chapman, was a federal agent killed in the pursuit of duty ... I imagine you hung around after that, and overheard Monk or Ham telephoning for reservations on this plane.”

No response.

“Having heard that,” Doc continued, “you were able to move fast, board a regular passenger plane, and get out here ahead of us—in time to be on this plane.”

The man lifted a lip without much enthusiasm. “Little late figuring it out, ain't you?”

“Not necessarily,” Doc said. “But I couldn't very well tell you about it before, could I? Not until you fell into the trap.”

The man said, “Shut up and ...” He went silent, scowled. “What's that? Trap?” His lips thinned out against his teeth. “What's that crack for?”

“I don't mind telling you,” Doc said, “now that you're in it too deep to back out.”

“Eh?”

Doc said, “We went to a lot of trouble to get you fellows on this plane ... But it worked out nicely, didn't it?”

“Listen, damn you—”

Doc said, looking past the man's shoulder, “Okay, shoot him if he moves!” The man's head screwed around on his shoulder with lightning speed as he tried to see who was behind him—there was no one—in the passage. Moving fast, Doc got both his hands on the man's hands, and on the gun.

SILENT, violent, fiercely contested, the struggle was longer than it should have been. The slight man, while wiry and tough, was no match for Doc's strength, but the fellow managed to get wedged against the corridor wall, get himself forced down, so that he almost, but not quite, retained his grip on the gun. The gun did speak loudly, once, and the slide of the weapon, jacked back by the recoil, skinned and bruised Doc's hand. Inside a compartment, beyond the bulkhead against which they were struggling, in a compartment into which the bullet had gone, a man yelled, “Dammit! This seat pinched...Oh! Oh my God! I'm shot! Look at my leg!”

Doc had the gun now. He was on his feet. The wiry dark man was on the floor, and began crawling. Doc clubbed him over the head. It seemed to have no effect. The man kept crawling. Doc hit him repeatedly, following beside him, trying to step on his legs and hold him, trying to seize him and hold him, all the time striking blows with gun and fist on head, neck, shoulders, back. The man made mewling sounds of hurt and fear, kept crawling.

Forward, a man appeared. It was Mr. Moore. Doc fired once. Mr. Moore, probably unhit, slid sideways from view.

The wiry man Doc had been beating continued crawling until he reached the steps leading up into the control compartment. He crawled up the steps to the top step, where he gave a convulsive jump forward and upward, and fell back into the corridor, not moving after he hit the floor.

Two heads, two arms, two guns—Skeeter and Mr. Moore—showed in the control room door. On the faces, fierce hate, fear, desperation; and out of the guns, thunder and lead. Doc fired back. He was not a gunfighter by inclination, and always distrusted his marksmanship, which actually was very good. Skeeter and Mr. Moore withdrew. Doc did not go on toward the control compartment, feeling quite certain that to do so would be suicidal.

Doc moved backward rapidly.

Monk and Ham, crowding to get out of their compartment simultaneously, shoved angrily at each other.

“What is it?” Monk yelled.

“Our friends are aboard,” Doc said.

“What do we do?”

“Whatever you can think of,” Doc said. “There's three forward, one laid out. There will be more—”

A man put his head through an aperture. He withdrew his head quickly, replacing it with his right hand, which contained a gun. The gun barked, disappeared, did not appear again.

Monk said, “I'll be damned if that wasn't the guy called Rice.”

Ham had his back against the corridor wall, looking with disfavor at a long lead-smeared scar which the bullet had made in passing rearward. He said, “It could not be. Rice was burned up in that house.”

“He's had a resurrection, then,” Monk said. “Because if that wasn't Rice ... He became silent to permit a very handsome, but also very large middle-aged lady to thrust her head out of a compartment and demand, “Is so much noise necessary?” She stared at them fiercely, added, “If you do not wish to sleep, kindly allow someone else to do so.”

Monk told her they were awfully sorry. “Lady, we're worse upset about this than you are,” Monk said.

Mr. Rice took another shot at them. He didn't hit anything, because he didn't observe the formality of aiming. He merely shoved his hand around the corner, shot, and withdrew.

“The next time he does that,” Ham said, “I'm going to shoot his hand off.”

The very large, handsome lady had been staring at them. Suddenly she opened her mouth wide and shrieked with such volume that, involuntarily, they recoiled in fright.

ALL through the seaplane, a stirring, and excitement—tense, poised, frightened—came to. life swiftly, like a fierce animal awakening. It raced and leaped, grew wild and erratic, rampant with fright. Then suddenly the loudspeakers—there was a little radio speaker in each compartment, over each seat, for entertainment of the passengers made a soft clicking noise, then gave out an airy rushing note, following which a bitterly determined voice said, “Everybody take his or her seat. Stay there ... Your attention, please! This is an emergency. Everyone take his or her seat and stay there. It is important!”

Doc said, “Ham!”

“Yes?”

“Go aft. See whether any of them are in the stern.”

Ham went forward. He had a machine pistol in his hand. A great deal smaller than a Thompson or a Reising gun, weighing hardly more than the Army Colt Automatic, the weapon could spray a startling amount of lead. It used a .22-calibre Hornet cartridge, a special mushrooming bullet, could tear a man to pieces in a moment.

The loudspeaker addressed them angrily. “Attention!” it said. “Keep your seats, or you will be shot!”

Doc Savage shoved open the most convenient compartment door. The man and three women inside were white-faced, rigid in their seats. He said, “Keep your seats.” They stared at the gun in his hand and

obeyed.

Monk crouched in the passage.

Doc said, "Better get under cover, Monk."

Monk did not shake his head, lest his eyes lose their fixed attention on the control compartment door. "I'm gonna shoot that guy's hand off, he shoves it out again."

Placidly, as if there was nothing wrong, the big ship flew onward. From its six engines power flowed, not noisily, yet noticeably, and as strongly as the flow of a river. Like a river indeed, the feeling of power penetrating to all parts of the craft, placing everywhere a sense of vital force, of speed, strength.

"Attention!" snarled the loudspeaker. "Move, and you will be shot. This is a holdup. It is piracy. We have twenty men aboard. They are armed. They will kill. Keep your seats. Obey orders."

Monk spit on the carpet. "Twenty men nuts!" he said. "How many would you say, Doc?"

"Five. Not more than six or seven," Doc said.

"That ain't twenty, is it?"

"It's nothing to laugh at," Doc said.

"I ain't laughing," Monk said.

Ham called, "None of them in the stern. They're all forward."

Silence—not a real silence, for there was the vital surge of the engines, the hissing of the loudspeaker—fell through the ship. It was a moment of tension, of waiting, of astonished wonder, of speculation about what sort of an incredible thing could be happening.

Monk's gun swung up casually, lazily, became fixed and rigid; it vomited thunder and sprang upward. A man screamed from forward. Rice's voice. It was not a nice sound to listen to.

Monk chuckled gaily. "I told you I'd shoot his hand off, if he tried that again," he said with satisfaction. "But I don't think I got it clear off," he added regretfully.

FORWARD, there was some kind of goings-on among the pirates, but nothing gave a hint of what it was. One man thrust his head into the corridor and jerked it back again quickly, but otherwise the passengers were obeying the instructions to keep in their seats.

Doc wondered how many of them were armed, and decided not many, probably.

"Ham," he said.

"Yes?"

"See what has happened to Renny."

It developed that Renny Renwick was on the upper deck, watching and waiting. As soon as Ham reported this, Doc worked aft to a companionway, and joined Renny.

Renny said, "I was up here looking over the ship when all the bang-bang started. I jumped out to see what it was, and came face to face with one of them. It scared the hell out of both of us. He ran forward,

and I ran aft.” Renny indicated the niche where he was hiding. “I been posted here, but nothing has happened.”

Doc asked, “How well do you know the lay out of this ship?”

“I know all about it.”

“I mean the mechanical layout.”

“That's what I mean, too.”

“Can you get to a fuel line, a gasoline line, without being shot?”

Renny nodded immediately. “One of them, yes. But if we drained that tank, it won't do any good. It's an auxiliary tank, only holding a little fuel. And I don't think we can make the main wing and belly tanks. From where they are the—control compartment, the engineer's compartment and the navigator's place—they could shoot us full of holes.”

“Any gasoline line will do,” Doc said. “Here's what I want you to do: get some containers. Small ones, half a dozen at least. Fill them with gas, and get them back in the rear.”

“Will these air-sick containers do?”

“Not if they're sacks.”

“They're like the ones they sell ice cream in.”

“Good enough, as long as they have lids.”

Doc moved back to the upper deck warily. The ship had been quiet—there hadn't been any more shooting anyway but he held no confidence that this would last.

He explained his plans to Monk and Ham.

Monk was alarmed.

“My God, the whole ship might explode!” he objected.

“Probably not,” Doc said. “I don't think we have the least chance of getting them overpowered. What we need to do is scare the socks off them, make them afraid to bother ... Renny is getting the gasoline now.

Monk was not reassured. “This is too much like cutting off your head to cure a toothache,” he muttered.

## Chapter XI

THE big seaplane had finished its climb to cruising altitude and, leveled out now with props in cruising pitch and the trim tabs on elevators, ailerons, rudders, all set for straight and level flight, the ship was driving through perfectly clear, stable air. There was none of the surface turbulence, thermal updrafts and downdrafts, that would have been felt flying over land. This air, cool, crisp, stable, had a firm solidarity about it, and the plane, for all the jumping about it was doing, could have been embedded in impossibly clear glass.

Waiting for Renny to get the gasoline, Doc Savage weighed their chances of reaching the control area—cockpit, engineer's cubicle, navigator's room—without getting killed. He decided it was not worth the risk, which approximated certainty, that one or all of them would lose their lives.

The loudspeaker addressed them fiercely.

It said: "Attention! Attention! There are, among the passengers, four men, These men are Doc Savage, Renny Renwick, Monk Mayfair and Ham Brooks. Overpower them. They are armed. Take their guns away from them, overpower them, and turn them over to us. Unless you do this, everyone aboard will be killed!"

There were a few moments of silence.

"Think it over!" the loudspeaker advised.

Ham said uneasily, "That's going to make some trouble for us, I'll bet."

There were, Doc had observed, two water-proof bulkheads which roughly divided the cabin section of the plane hull into three parts. There were waterproof hatches which could be closed manually so that, if the hull sustained damage, buoyancy of the other two sections would keep the seaplane afloat.

"They're not bulletproof," Doc decided regretfully, after examining one of the bulkheads.

"None of these bulkheads are bulletproof," Ham said.

"I'm afraid not."

"What's to keep them from working their way aft, riddling each compartment with bullets, then breaking through into it, and riddling the next one?"

Doc looked at him grimly. "They won't have to take that trouble. If they have a good rifle, which they probably have, they can slaughter the passengers—and us—by merely shooting through the bulkheads."

"I hope they don't think of that."

"They probably have already," Doc said gloomily. "I imagine they'll try to get us overpowered and turned over to them before they really get rough."

A FEW minutes later, the loudspeaker verified Doc's sour prediction. The voice in the speaker was quite belligerent this time. It said: "Attention! You have two minutes to seize Doc Savage and his friends and turn them over to us!"

There was an impressed silence.

Renny rejoined them. He had five waxed cardboard containers with push-on lids, which gurgled, and he looked alarmed.

"Some of the passengers are upset," he reported.

Monk said he didn't blame them. "Who wouldn't be upset," he added.

"I mean, some little pot-bellied guy is trying to say they've got to overpower us, the way they've been instructed."

Monk was very angry with the pot-bellied man. "I'm gonna change that guy's ideas!" He started aft. "I'll make him wish—"

A bullet came aft, passing through the bulkheads successively, making a loud rip of a sound. It had been fired from forward. It was a rifle bullet, probably metal-jacketed ... Aft, a woman shrieked. A man cried,

“She's shot!” His voice fluttered with horror.

“Give me one of those containers of gasoline!” Doc said urgently.

He loosened the lid on one of the containers, put his head out in the corridor, and threw the thing toward the bow. He watched it strike—on the steps that led to the control section—and the lid came off. The gasoline sloshed out, spread.

Renny said, “That's hundred-octane stuff—the same kind of gas they used on that house in New York.”

Doc nodded. “I suppose that—the burning of the New York house—gave me the idea.”

Nothing happened for a while.

The loudspeaker said, “You understand we can shoot you down helplessly, don't you?” It sounded fierce, triumphant.

Ham moistened his lips, asked, “I wonder how they escaped from the house in New York?”

Doc said, “Probably went out on the roof of the front porch, then climbed down a trellis, and walked off up the street. There was a trellis handy, I noticed before the house burned completely.”

“But didn't you see them?”

“I was in the back yard, and couldn't see what went on in front of the house,” Doc explained.

The loudspeaker crashed out.

“Attention!” it said. “You have had a chance to seize Savage and his friends. You have not done so. Some of you will now be shot.”

“Oh, oh,” Monk said. “Here's where we'll wish we had parachutes.”

The explosions—two of them, rifle and gasoline blast—came very shortly. The rifle blast was sharp, grim, decisive. The gasoline made a longer, softer, more sinister sound. But it was quite effective. Flame actually ran back, for an instant, as far as the compartment where Doc and the others were posted.

“If the whole ship don't go now ...” Monk was terrified and not trying to hide it.

DOC SAVAGE stepped into the corridor to watch. He surmised, and correctly, that the enemy would be too busy with firemanship to take a shot at him.

He was, as a matter of fact, quite concerned. He knew the fire-extinguishing equipment aboard the plane should be ample to handle a cabin blaze. But something could always go wrong.

He said, “Monk, Ham, if there are any extinguishers around, better get them.”

Forward, they were using foam type extinguishers of a somewhat new type, which made great quantities of foamy substance which resembled soapsuds of a creamy consistency. The quantity of this stuff was enormous. In a few moments, it had coated the passage walls, lay inches deep on the passage floor, and the gasoline blaze was extinguished.

Doc dispatched Monk to close the bulkhead door on the other deck

He closed the one on this deck himself. Then he made his voice very loud and demanded, “Can you hear



me?"

Presently Mr. Moore's voice informed him that he was a blank-blank-blank and so-and-so, and continued along this vein for thirty seconds. Mr. Moore sounded very frightened. He demanded, "Don't you know this plane will blow up?"

"That was half a pint of gasoline we threw up there," Doc informed him. "Next time—the next shot that is fired we'll throw a gallon."

Mr. Moore thought this would burn everyone to a crisp, and also the plane. "Are you crazy?" he yelled.

"That is about as appealing as sitting here and let you shoot us full of holes," Doc said.

Mr. Moore cursed him.

Doc interrupted. "Another thing—head this plane back to San Francisco."

"The hell with you!" Mr. Moore said viciously.

That was the end of the conversation.

Renny said thoughtfully, "You think they'll be afraid to do any more shooting?"

"Wouldn't you, if you were in their position?"

Renny said he would. He added, "But they're not going to turn back."

Doc agreed they probably wouldn't. He and Renny were discussing their probable destination— they were sure this wasn't likely to be Hawaii when Monk Mayfair burst into their presence. Monk was excited.

"Who do you think I found in a compartment aft?" he yelled.

Doc stated that he couldn't imagine, unless it was Miss Berthena Gilroy, federal agent.

"I'll be damned!" Monk said, his eyes protruding. "How did you know that?"

## Chapter XII

THE one hundred and seventy-second meridian of longitude—east of Greenwich, not west—nearly bisects Kiska in the Aleutian island chain, from which point it drops southward some thousands of miles across almost limitless blue seas. Although it is crossed by shipping lanes to Japan and Russian Asia in this stretch, the loneliness is also almost without limit. It passes Wake island something less than five hundred miles to the east, and, dropping straight southward another few hundred miles, cuts, but does not quite bisect, the Gilbert group. On the maps after that, islands drop thick and fast, Howland Island, Phoenix Island, the Samoan group, Fiji. This is the heart of the South Seas of romance and story, and the islands stand pretty much untouched by time, white man, war, pestilence and strife. Not all the atolls are untouched, but many are. The Japs did not get this far, their occupation plans, whatever they were, having run into a snag at Guadalcanal a thousand miles or so westward. The turmoil of war had moved northward, and now, peace having come, there was not even the occasional drone of a scouting seaplane high up in the incredibly blue tropical, sky.

There are volcanic islands and coral atolls, and some that are both volcanic and coral. Existence, as well as the scenery, being less inviting on the purely coral islands, population on them is scarcer and, more frequently than romantic tales have indicated, non-existent. Contrary also to romantic story, they do not

always have the uniform shape of horseshoe reef enclosing an atoll, although there is enough uniformity in this pattern to be monotonous. Universal, though, are the popular touches of tall palm trees with fronds curtseying lazily, the rolling surf and the sea made varicolored by its changing depths over reefs. Undeniably, these small coral atolls are lovely and romantic, and they are at their best in the glow of brilliant moonlight, as rich as platinum, which seems to be the gift of no sky but a tropical sky.

It was down a slanting beam of this moonlight that the big seaplane seemed to slide, its objective an island which was unnamed on many charts but labeled Alu on some, and Dave's Folly on others. One chart, a French one, drawn twenty years ago, had optimistically designated the atoll as Oeuf a la Coque, which, unromantically, meant Boiled Egg. A Frenchman named Bovet had given it this designation. Monsieur Bovet now rested, and had rested for years, under a large coral boulder which served his grave as a marker only figuratively actually the boulder had been placed there originally to hide the signs of digging necessarily connected with burying a man.

The plane seemed tired, and it was crippled in one engine. Two other engines were bleeding oil smoke; thus, of the six engines, three only were not ailing, and for them all there was not sufficient gasoline for more than another fifteen minutes. Down through the moonlight the ship came slanting heavily, and inside the cabin the loud-speaker addressed the frightened passengers harshly, elatedly, saying, "We are landing. Anyone who shows himself, anyone who makes trouble, will be shot!"

DOC SAVAGE, glancing at the loud-speaker, compressed his lips, said, "You know what you are to do. Let's not have any slips."

There was a nodding of passengers' heads, but it was not unanimous. Some were sullen, distrustful. Two had been too outspoken and had tried to fit action to speech; they had been seized, tied, now lay in an aft compartment, sullen-faced and raging. They were not against Doc Savage. Particularly—they wanted freedom, life, as much as any of the others, but they had been gullible enough—in the opinion of the others, and of Doc, his aides—to think that the thing to do was to surrender. One woman had had hysterics. Another had fainted.

Mostly, though, they were in agreement. They understood each other and the risks involved. They'd had many a long hour to get acquainted.

Ham Brooks said, "They're going to glide right into the lagoon."

Doc said, "Monk, Renny—better get set."

Monk and Renny moved toward the rear, Renny pausing to turn, saying, "This is tricky business. It may call for some close coordination."

Doc nodded. "Just remember the signals."

Renny followed Monk. They were crawling back into the tail of the ship, as far back as it was possible to crawl, which was actually to the tangle of struts and braces where horizontal and vertical stabilizers, rudder and elevators, were attached...The other times during the flight when they had crawled back there, the passengers had carefully moved forward in a body, so that the change in center of gravity would not be noticeable enough to alarm the enemy in the control room. Now they started to repeat this, and Doc said, "It won't be necessary." The tone of the engines had changed to idling. "They'll think the difference in airspeed is changing the lift. They won't notice."

A man, a tall Australian businessman, that looked narrowly at Doc Savage, said, "This is a crazy, dangerous thing. I know planes. I have a ship of my own. I don't like this."

Doc said, "You under-rate Renny and Monk."

"They don't seem too confident themselves."

Ham, turning from the window, asked, "You want to be tied up with those other two?" He was scowling at the Australian.

"That won't be necessary," the Australian said bitterly.

"Everyone fasten safety belts," Doc said.

THE plan was quite simple, but not, as the Australian had indicated, fully safe. Renny and Monk, far in the stern-section, had access to the rudder and elevator controls. With pinch-bars, which they had fashioned carefully, they could make the plane nose up or nose down, make it skid right or left. They did not have any control over the ailerons, so they could not force a turn, only a skid, or a nose-up or nose-down position. They were by no means able to fly the plane, but they could mess up any effort to fly it from the cockpit.

Doc worked his way aft, took up a position at a window.

"Remember, relay my exact words back to Renny and Monk," he said.

In the beginning the idea had been that they could prevent the ship landing. But now they did not dare do that, because they were sure the gasoline supply was quite low. Renny was certain of this. Renny had done some engineering design work on this type of seaplane, and he was quite positive about cruising range and fuel capacity.

They were going to try to put the plane down, by force, where they would have a chance to escape. That meant on dry land. Not a landing shore, which would be a crash.

Doc said, addressing the anxious Australian, "On the lagoon, but close to the beach, will do it. The beach is not too wide. The ship can, if we're lucky, be made to ride up across it and into the jungle."

The Australian was sweating. "But you've got no instruments, no airspeed, no altimeter! You need the airspeed particularly. These big ships have no feel to speak of. How can you judge ...?" He grimaced, shook his head.

Miss Berthena Gilroy touched Doc's arm. "Anything I can do?"

"See that everyone gets their safety belts fastened," Doc said. "When we slide up on beach, if we do, it'll be a shade rough."

She nodded.

He watched the sea, the island, approach. It was always, he knew, difficult to judge altitude with the eye after a long-distance flight at high altitude. But altitude here was vitally important. They must, when the pilot attempted to set a normal glide, stretch it, make him come in too high, then, when he attempted to gun off and go around again, force the ship down and make him land just where they wanted the ship landed. It was, with Renny and Monk working with pry-bars, a job for genius and God.

He said, "Nose up—one!"

Crisply, the command was relayed back into the tail section. The number—one—was part of the signaling system agreed upon. One to ten, with ten being the elevator in full up or full down position.

“Nose up—two,” he said.

And then, in a moment, “Nose up—four.”

He could imagine the pilot now fighting the control column, trying to get the ship to nose down in a glide. There would be an argument, accusations, denials. He hoped they would not, in a suspicious rage, shoot the pilot.

The seaplane, nose up, holding about its maximum glide angle, floated toward the lagoon, now less than a mile distant ... Suddenly the engines took hold—the pilot was trying to go around again.

“Nose down—two!” Doc said. “Down, two!”

Lazily, the big ship dipped. The speed, in this nose-down position with throttles open, increased noticeably. Then it slackened. The pilot had cut his throttles back. He tried nosing down.

“Nose up, four!” Doc urged. Once more, the plane held its altitude.

Fiercely, the loudspeaker cursed them. “You’ll crash the ship!” it snarled.

Doc did not take his eyes off the lagoon. As lagoons went, it did not offer bad prospects for a landing. No snags, no reefs inside the barrier. The beach, narrow, not too steep, was a border of white sand between jungle green and lagoon blue and blue-yellow.

Doc began to smile thinly ... He believed that now, barring accidents, they had it in the bag ...

THE island itself was a conventional coral atoll. There seemed to be no volcanic structure at all. Actually, he had not given it more than casual inspection; all his thoughts, all his anxieties, were on whether or not they could smash the ship across the beach and into the jungle, but not smash it hard enough to cripple anyone. Thick, tangled, matted, as green as clover, the jungle covered most of the atoll, but that was usual too. The atoll was the shape roughly of a thin slice of quarter-moon, lying generally north and south, and at each end, swinging out in an embracing circle, there was a line of reef, tiny islands that were only white sand, naked to the gleaming moonlight.

It would be dark in the jungle, Doc hoped. That, actually, was why he had thought of putting the plane into the jungle. The darkness would give them a chance to escape, to fight.

“Down,” Doc said. “Nose down, five. Five! Four ... Two ... Nose up! Nose up, one! ... Four! Nose up, four! ...

It was not a good landing. Not a good landing in anybody’s book. Actually, they flew into the water, bounced all of twenty feet, came down, bounced again. Slam ... Bounce ... slam! Doc yelled, “Nose up, ten! Nose up, all it’ll go!” ... The bounces grew less violent ... They hit the beach. Then the jungle.

They did not lose either wing, but the wings lost their shape, leading edges caving in, ribs buckling, spars cracking, bending, drag wires snapping. But the wings stayed on ... None of this did Doc immediately know. He had—he thought with inexcusable stupidity—forgotten to do what he’d ordered everyone else to do, fasten his safety belt. As a result, he was plastered against a bulkhead, and stunned.

## Chapter XIII

SOMEONE who had a hoarse rumbling voice like a bear in a cave was saying, “Take his heels, I said! Don’t you know which end his heels are on!” Doc Savage could barely hear this voice; it seemed to come from infinite distance. But he felt that in some way the words were related to him. He tried to

concentrate, tried to figure out why. He seemed to be afloat on an exceedingly turbulent sea composed, not of water, but of gray vapor that was almost colorless, but as hard as steel or stone and very painful to lie upon.

A frog croaked. He had the feeling that it must have croaked before, maybe more than once. But this time he was quite certain that it croaked, and it was a very remarkable sound, as if it came from a bullfrog twenty feet tall, and in good voice. "Okay," somebody said. "Let him drop." Somebody else said, loudly and in fright, "Watch out—climbing that palm tree!" A gun popped, a man screamed, another man said hoarsely, "God, you got him!" but he did not sound at all sorry about it. The waves, the hard waves like stone, suddenly shifted from under Doc, and there was the awful sensation of falling through space. The shock when he hit hurt, but it was quite delicious because he was so glad to have something under him, something solid, not to be falling. Monk Mayfair's voice said, "That was graceful as hell, you shyster! I'm glad he's not conscious to see you heave him around like a sack of oats." Ham said, "Oh, shut up!"

Doc realized he was now being dragged. He rolled over and operated his legs, and presently he was running beside Monk. They flopped down behind a large palm bole.

Monk said, "You got knocked out!"

Doc remembered the safety belt he hadn't fastened. He asked, "How long—"

"Fifteen or twenty seconds," Monk said. "We've got two of them. Renny got one. That Australian potted one who was trying to shin up a palm tree just now. I think maybe—"

The bullfrog twenty feet tall talked again, and it was more impressive than before. It was one of the machine pistols.

"That's Renny," Monk said. "I think maybe—"

A man howled, "Hell, Here's one!" He was to the right in the darkness, and from the same spot came struggle sounds. Blows, grunts, profanity, at least three men doing the striking, grunting and swearing. Presently the man who had howled said, "Ugh! Blood! Oh!" In a moment, this man came staggering toward them. He was horrified. He looked at them and said, "I didn't know you could cut a man's throat with a pen-knife!" A gun whanged. The man folded down, grabbed his left leg with both hands and whimpered. Red fluid crawled out between his fingers, looking brightly cardinal in the moonlight.

Monk seized him, dragged him behind the palm trees.

"What I've been trying to say," Monk explained, "is that I think maybe some of them were killed or injured in the crash."

With three behind the palm, it was quite crowded.

DOC SAVAGE had his thinking organized by now. He decided that he had been shoved, while dazed, through the after hatch of the seaplane. Ham had done the boosting, Monk the catching. More of the passengers must be out of the plane. How many, he did not know. The Australian and Renny, at least.

"How many got out of the ship?" he asked.

"I don't know," Monk confessed. "Things have been a little confused."

There was a shot, an instant replying shot. Then one of the marksmen said sheepishly, "Sorry. Did I hit you?" And the other gunman replied, "We d better get organized!"

“Monk, I'm going to work around the south of them,” Doc said.

“Okay. Wait a minute! Which way is south?”

“To the left.”

“Oh.”

Doc crawled carefully. He was glad to get away from the palm tree. With three of them trying to hide behind it, someone was sure to be hit if there was any sniping in that direction.

He was not, he decided, damaged seriously. He felt bruised, the front of his face felt like a football, but he could function normally ... He tried to recall whether there had been signs of habitation on the island, a village, or houses, a trading station, docks. He could not remember. It was remarkable how little he had noticed, preoccupied as he was with the problem of whether or not they could get the seaplane down in the lagoon exactly where they had wanted it.

There was another shot. He stopped crawling. But nothing followed the shot sound, except that disturbed gulls set up a distressed crying somewhere far distant, on a reef probably. He could hear a soft whirring sound, decided it was the gyro in one of the flight instruments still turning. It was the nature of the things to run several minutes after a ship stopped flying.

He was lying prone. He stretched out a hand, preparatory to rising—and someone stepped on it ... His mouth went wide open, teeth bared, with pain. But he lay perfectly still, hoping whoever it was would not realize what he had stepped on.

A stiff breath, barely audible, left a man's lungs. A figure leaned down, barely distinguishable in the gloom. It was, considering how bright was the moonlight on the lagoon, remarkably dark here in the jungle ... A hand touched Doc's arm, fingers clutched. A man said, “What the—”

Doc took hold of the arm, jerked violently. There was no gun in that hand, so there would probably be one in the other, and Doc tried for it furiously. The man came down on him hard, grunting. Doc got the other arm, between elbow and wrist, not a healthy place to hold it. The gun let loose flame and an earsplitting blast in his face.

Following the shot, they fought in fierce silence. Doc, whenever he could, inched fingers up the man's arm, forearm, along his wrist, trying to get the gun. He gave all his attention to that. Suddenly the man changed hands with the gun. Doc, just as suddenly, hit him in the midriff. There was, a moment later, a thump as the gun landed several yards away. Placing both hands around the man's neck, Doc began squeezing. He was dizzy, and evidently not as fully recovered from the bump on the head, received when the seaplane crashed, as he had thought. He had difficulty concentrating, had trouble thinking at all. It seemed to take every effort he could manage to concentrate on his hands, on making them tighten. He did that, thinking of nothing else, until a flashlight blazed on him, spraying such a glare that he could see nothing at all, making his eyes feel as if thorns were sticking into them.

Somebody was trying to loosen his hands and he had no idea who it was—he tried to kick, bite, butt whoever it was—until Monk said loudly, “Ham! C'mere and help!”

Doc asked doubtfully, “Monk?”

“Sure. What's got into you? ... Hurry up, before Doc kills this guy! What're you trying to do to that guy? Don't you know who it is? It's Mr. Chapman, the federal agent.”

“Put out that light!”

“It's okay. We've got them all. Three of them were laid out when the plane crashed.”

Ham came stumbling through the brush. He stared in amazement. “That's Chapman! I thought he burned to death in that house in New York.”

Doc had some difficulty standing. He was very tired.

“Chapman did die—he was murdered—in New York,” he said. He shook his head, with the result that he nearly fell down again. He said, “I seem to be balled up on time. You say it's finished? How are the passengers?”

“The passengers are fine,” Ham explained, “if you don't count two broken arms and one bullet hole in a leg.”

## Chapter XIV

SLOWLY, cautiously, as coy as a baby peeking out of its crib, the morning sun appeared. Back in the jungle somewhere a bird squawked in alarm, and a flight of sea birds, fully a hundred of them, lifted all at once from a reef which the incoming tide had partly covered. A breeze, which had been sleeping during the night, stirred softly and crept through the jungle, moving a few very large fragile leaves, but not stirring the palm fronds at all. Out in the lagoon, a large fish arched out of the water, fell back with a loud splash and circular waves, like rings in a target, traveled lazily to the brown-sugar-colored coral beach.

The waves broke with shush-shush sounds on the sand a few yards from a small sailboat, no longer seaworthy, which lay under a palm. Beyond the derelict boat there were three buildings, two of them quite small, the larger one roofed with sheet iron after the fashion of island trading posts. Leading northward through the jungle, there was a path and, presently, along this path came Doc Savage, Monk, Miss Gilroy—Monk was solicitously helping Miss Gilroy over imaginary bad places in the path—and Mr. Moore.

“I showed you where the bomb was,” Mr. Moore said. “You oughta turn me loose.”

Monk laughed. He was really amused.

Alarmed, Mr. Moore said, “I didn't have any hand in killing the crew of the B29! That was done while I was away, trading at another island! The killing was engineered by Burrel.”

Doc said, “Burrel? You mean Chapman?”

“He wasn't Chapman,” Mr. Moore said frantically. “You know he wasn't Chapman ... I think you even knew it in New York!”

Doc said nothing. He had just seen the bomb—it was in the wreckage of the B29, Lonely Widow—and he was thinking grimly of the crew, who were dead. Mr. Moore had explained that they had been murdered, and there was no reason to doubt him ... Mr. Moore had talked freely. He was badly scared. He had explained that they—Burrel, Rice, Skeeter, Cavendish, Davey, himself, two other men named Paul and Williams—had been afraid to move the atomic bomb after they found out what it was. The crew of the Lonely Widow had not told them what it was, but seem they had heard about the atomic bombing of Japan on the radio, and they had figured it out for themselves. The murdering of the Lonely Widow's crew had followed ... Then the trip to New York, the search for a buyer, the trouble with Worrik and Wilbur Rigg, who tried to grab the thing for themselves, but didn't know where it was. Wilbur Rigg, they had killed at once, and the killing, of course, had brought every facility at the command of the United States government down on their heads.

Mr. Moore looked at them pleadingly. “Everybody else is dead ... Why can t you let me go?” he wanted to know.

“That,” Monk said, “is quite an argument.”

RENNY met them at the trading post. He said, “I can get the radio percolating. By this afternoon, I imagine.” He jerked his head at the interior of the building, said, “Ham is prowling in there. This is just a trading post. That bird Burrel was head guy. The one who pretended to be Chapman.”

Miss Gilroy shuddered. “I don't understand how we thought Burrel was Chapman.”

“He was bold,” Doc told her. “Boldness pays off, if played right.”

“But to impersonate a federal agent. How—”

“They had caught Chapman,” Doc said. “Burrel took Chapman's credentials—which, incidentally, Chapman was a fool for carrying on him.”

Defensively, Miss Gilroy said, “Mr. Chapman was head of an agency, rather than an operative. To arrange for cooperation with the city police, he had to have credentials. That's why he carried them.”

Doc nodded agreeably. “At least he had them on him when they got him. So Chapman used them—his idea being to find out how much we knew about the affair. He succeeded, too. He learned we didn't know much of anything.”

Monk grinned, said, “But we must have scared him. Or he wouldn't have rigged that burning house thing to make us think the whole gang was dead—everybody who knew where the bomb was, dead.”

Mr. Moore licked his lips. “Say, what tipped you off that was a phony?” he asked.

“The gasoline in the house,” Doc said readily. “There was no logical reason for that much gasoline in the house. Too, the way the thing was staged was phony ... You had the genuine Chapman in the house all the time, didn't you? You shot him after you started the fire, then threw his body out of the window.”

“I never shot him!” Mr. Moore said. He was terrified.

“How did you get out of the burning house?”

“The porch, then dropped to the ground.”

Monk said, “That's the way we had it figured.”

Miss Gilroy shivered. “They passed me in a car as I was going for the police. They—they seized me. They drugged me, and took me all the way to San Francisco ... I don't know how they got me on the plane.”

“We just told them she was sick,” said Mr. Moore.

Renny frowned. “I don't see why you took her along. That was a lot of trouble.”

“Believe it or not,” said Mr. Moore, “we didn't have no chance to bump her off and dispose of her body. Ain't that a good reason?”

Monk said he thought it was an excellent reason. He said that he hoped he would think of it when Mr. Moore was being hanged by the neck until dead.



Monk was quite cheerful now.

THE END