



COLORS FOR MURDER

A Doc Savage Adventure by Kenneth Robeson

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Chapter I

DELLA NELSON leaned back in the plane seat, tied the fingers of both her hands together into a knot as tight as her strength, shuddery and tremulous, would manage, and stared fixedly at the window. No sense telling herself there was nothing to be upset about. There definitely was.

This feeling was different. It was not shock, excitement, alarm. She'd had all those emotions, and violently, when the men had seized Walter, her brother. When that happened, she had been shocked, more smashed by amazement than she had ever been before. Her stunned disbelief had been monumental compared to any other feelings she'd ever had.

Why should she feel this now, when she herself seemed to be safe? Bodily safe, at least. What could happen to her here on an airplane on the short hop from Boston to New York? Why this grinding reality?

She watched—it gave her a creepy sensation—the thin, nearly transparent form of a partly condensed cumulous cloud float backward as the plane passed it. The cloud had hardly the body of cigarette smoke, and, catching the afternoon sunlight, it had about the same ghostly blue-gray coloring. In its formless presence, it was like the feeling that was crawling on her nerves. Farther down, about eight thousand feet down, the earth was dark and vague and flat and, because she did not do much flying, looked completely unnatural.

“Miss Nelson?” It was the stewardess.

“Yes.”

“Miss Della Nelson?”

“Yes.” She stared up at the stewardess in amazement. They took your name when you bought an airlines ticket, of course, but she felt absurdly alarmed, and surprised.

“A call for you, Miss Nelson.”

“Call . . .”

“Radiophone,” the stewardess explained. “You can take it here.” She had a handset which she plugged into a jack beside the seat. “You just start talking as you would over the telephone,” she said, and handed over the instrument.

“Hello?”

She had never before heard the voice that now spoke to her. It came at her softly, greasily; it crawled over her nerves. “Miss Nelson?”

“Yes.”

“Miss Della Nelson?”

“Yes. Who . . .?”

“The grey suit. The red handkerchief. You remember?” the voice said.

Remember? She shuddered violently. She couldn't help it. And when she tried to make a word, the word wouldn't come, nothing would come, not sound nor anything.

The voice said: “I think I would drop the business deal you now have in mind. I think I would drop it by all means. You will be much happier if you do, and you can understand that we will be happier ourselves. We will be grateful as well, and so if you will call at the airlines reservations desk in New York, you will find a round-trip reservation in your name to Cuba, and at the Pan-Arco Hotel in Havana you will find all your expenses paid for a month. You will have a good time. You'll like it.”

She didn't say anything. Her lips felt numb, as if they had been slapped.

“Are you there, Miss Nelson?” the voice asked curiously.

She made some sort of a sound.

“Your brother is furnishing all this,” the voice said. Then it added, “Just a moment.” During the wait that followed, some fifteen seconds, she managed to breathe inward and outward once, convulsively. Walter's voice came to her, saying, “It's okay, Della. Its all right. You take the vacation, see. You take it. It's on the up and up. They—I got the reservation, the hotel's taken care of. Its better you take this vacation. You understand? You mustn't work too hard. You understand that, don't you? Goodbye, Della. You take that vacation, Della.”

That was all. After that, the only sounds that came from the receiver were the sounds air and electricity made.

PRESENTLY the stewardess took the instrument from her hand, pulled the plug out of the little hole where she had punched it, then stood looking down at her anxiously, finally to ask, “Are you ill? Would you like something, Miss Nelson?”

She said, “What?” and then, “I'm all right,” but the words were made mostly with her lips.

The stewardess, concerned, lingered to say, “If you have a headache . . . some aspirin?”

She managed to say, “I'll feel better presently.”

The stewardess went away.

Grey suit. Red handkerchief. Did she remember. Oh God, she would never forget it! He had been a man of rather medium build, a man of such ordinary shape that she could recall nothing about him except that his suit had been grey, some kind of tweed with a subdued pattern, and the red bandana handkerchief which he had worn for a mask. She remembered the mask of course, for it had covered all of his face up to the eyes, and might as well have covered the eyes, too, because she couldn't remember their color or recall having seen them at all. A terrible grey man with an awful red face and a gun. It was the first time she had ever looked into the muzzle of a gun. She knew a little about guns. No one grew up on a farm in Iowa, even the girls, without learning about guns, at least learning they were dangerous. This one had, she believed, been .38-calibre. A revolver.

There had been one other man, a larger man, who hadn't been masked, but who had simply kept his left arm crooked across his face. She remembered he'd had weather-beaten red ears. And a completely ugly voice which had said, “You want your insides shot out?” to Walter, and, “Don't make any noise, dear!” to her. Then this man had walked around behind her and used something, perhaps another gun, but she hadn't seen one, to club her on the back of the head.

Afterward she had figured out that she had been unconscious somewhere between five and ten minutes, and she still believed that was right, but she had quickly revised her idea that it was a simple mugging and holdup. It wasn't that.

Walter and the two men were gone when she sat up. She found herself lying on a lawn behind a bush where they had dragged her and left her. It was in a little park. One of Boston's small public parks. Ten o'clock in the morning. Five after ten, to be exact, and thirteen minutes after ten when she revived.

“Miss Nelson.”

It was the stewardess again, the stewardess with a tray on which there was a glass of water and two white pills.

“No, thank you,” she said to the stewardess.

“It's aspirin. If you have a headache . . .” The stewardess poised the tray invitingly.

“No, thank you.”

“If there is anything . . .”

“No, there isn't. I'll be all right. But thank you.”

The stewardess smiled, moved away with the tray, the glass of water, the two tablets.

Three seats back, a fat male passenger with a soured, pained expression said, “Stewardess! Is that something for a headache? I have a terrible headache!” He had been back in the men's room twice already, ill. “Flying always makes me feel lousy,” he complained. “Why don't they build these damned things so they don't jump around so much?”

The stewardess paused, masking dislike carefully. The fat man had been quarrelsome during the early part of the trip, for he had come aboard drunk, which was against the rules, and it was probably alcohol more than flying that was making him ill.

“That something for a headache you got there?” he demanded.

“Aspirin.”

“Gimme,” he said, and bolted the two tablets, drank the water.

He leaned back and, closing his eyes, breathed loudly and deeply for nearly five minutes. Then, suddenly and blankly, his eyes came open and he made an effort, a terrible, straining effort, to raise his head from its leaning-back position, to get the head upright on his shoulders. The attempt to accomplish this, despite the awful concentration which he put into it, was a failure. His loud breathing, which had stopped, did not resume. He was now dead.

THE two men took Walter with them, Della Nelson thought.

I was not surprised, she reflected. And I am not surprised now. Only very anxious, very unsure.

I knew that something was wrong, terribly wrong, so nothing that happened could have been a surprise. You cannot have a brother without knowing him quite well, knowing him in many respects, probably, better than he knows himself. Walter's opinions, his desires, the ways he thought, were colored and twisted by his ambitions, by the many little neurotic threads that all people have.

Walter, for instance, thought himself a good judge of character. He was not. He was, for one thing, too trustful of others, the reason for this being, she was sure, simply that nothing had yet happened to him in life to make him wary. Walter was so darned open-hearted and easy with his affections. He liked everybody.

Something should have happened to Walter in early youth to give him one of those hidden fears the psychiatrists talk about, something that would make him more cautious, less trustful. If it had, she was sure Walter would have gone farther, been more successful. As it was, at twenty-eight, Walter was a darned competent engineer, but he had been unable to advance any farther than field jobs, construction foreman—little better than common labor. His employers quite frankly thought he was dumb. A big, amiable, likable young guy who liked everybody, and who unfortunately would trust anyone. Too dumb, though, for responsibility. It was too bad that a thing like that, the right thing not happening to you when

you were a kid, could thwart your career. For the lack of a kick in the nose when you were young and tender, you were a big genial guy and they thought you were dumb.

Walter would actually have believed, and his naïveté made her shudder, that all she had to do was take that Cuba vacation, expenses paid, and nothing would happen. They must have told Walter that would fix everything. Keep the girl quiet, and everything will be all right. No more trouble, no more thorns, and roses in the sky.

Sickened, she thought: they've used Walter, involved him until now I can't do anything normal about it. Go to the police was the normal thing. But she couldn't. Walter, the big trustful mutt, had let himself be too horribly involved. She understood Walter; she knew he was not, really, a participant. But the police, she was sure, would not be very understanding about murder.

She had not, from the beginning, trusted Walter's new job, much of the apprehension springing from the effect that Arthur Pogany had on her. Pogany somehow disturbed her. He was as appetizing, mentally, as a snake. He was a long man and eccentric; Pogany wore tweeds and his hobby was whales, the kind of whales that swam in the sea; and the way he looked and what he did somehow had a bad effect on her. It was something she sensed underneath, and, when she had tried to tell Walter how she felt about Pogany, Walter naturally laughed. Walter would, because Walter never looked inside people for things.

Arthur Pogany was Walter's employer. The work Walter was doing for Pogany, construction of some kind, was a great secret; too great a secret for Della, because she doubted Walter's explanation that it was a matter which must be kept from business competitors. She didn't doubt Walter's sincerity, only believed that he had been deceived.

She had met Mr. Riis twice before he died; both times he had been with Walter, and Walter had liked him. Mr. Riis was also working for Arthur Pogany on the same hush-hush job. Try as she would, she could not remember his first name: perhaps she had not heard it. A nice little guy, somewhat like Walter because he seemed to like people readily. A man with a little, squawky voice like a papa duck.

She remembered, and it made frightened, grabbing feelings inside her, how terror had rattled like rocks in Mr. Riis' voice when he called on the phone, wanting Walter, who hadn't been there. Mr. Riis had sounded as if he had also wanted his life, wanted the comforting hand of God. His voice, the awful quality in it, had left her with the weirdest feeling after Mr. Riis had hung up.

The next morning, which was this morning, a newsboy delivering papers in a residential district had found Mr. Riis' body lying on a vacant lot, and found Mr. Riis' head lying a few feet distant.

Della stared down at her hands.

“Stewardess!” she gasped.

But the stewardess was aft somewhere. Della half arose, then remembered there was a little button beside the seat, and that you probably got the stewardess by pushing that. She pushed it. The stewardess came.

“Yes, Miss Nelson?”

“That telephone—the radiophone, I mean. How do you place a call? I want to place one.”

“Just give me the number you wish called, and I'll take care of it . . . I'll bring the instrument when the call is ready.”

“It's a man named Savage. Doc Savage. In New York. I don't know the number.”

“Very well.”

“I’m sorry, I don’t have the number. My brother . . . but Mr. Savage is quite well known.”

“I’ve heard of him. I don’t imagine a number will be necessary,” the stewardess said. She went away.

Della leaned back, feeling easier because her urgency had seized on something to do. She might, or might not, be able to reach Doc Savage. She was going to him for help, because she’d heard wonderful and amazing things about him. She did not know Savage, nor did Walter, but Walter had once worked with an engineer named Renny Renwick. Renwick was, Della understood, one of a group of five specialists associated closely with Doc Savage. Walter had raved enthusiastically about Savage and his ability, his repute, and the strange profession he followed, which consisted, as nearly as Della could gather, of investigating unusual crimes or crimes in which the police, for one reason or another, could not be involved. It was a fantastic picture Walter had painted, but effective enough to stay with Della, and make her think, in her present urgency, of Savage.

Turning her head, Della watched the stewardess coming toward her along the aisle. The stewardess had the handset that looked like a telephone. The stewardess halted suddenly, wrenched up rigidly, eyes growing round, mouth making a horrified shape.

The stewardess was looking at the fat man. She touched him. “Mr. Lubbock!” she said.

Mr. Lubbock did not respond and, presently when she shook him slightly, he tilted sidewise out of the seat, all loose, like a sack filled with balloons. He fell to the aisle floor slowly, defeating, as if he were alive, the efforts of the stewardess to do something about it, and the jolt of landing made some liquid, darkly green, spurt from between his clenched teeth.

Chapter II

THE plane passenger who had given the name of South heard a commotion forward. He stood up, went to see what it was about. Other passengers were doing the same thing.

The fuss was about the dead fat man, South saw.

He was not surprised. He didn’t feel much emotion. He had seen the fat man seize the pills and water and gulp them, so he had known the fat man was pretty sure to die. He, South, had substituted the pills, which certainly weren’t aspirin, without the stewardess’ knowledge—a very neat trick, he had thought at the time. Very neat.

“He looks,” remarked South, eyeing the body, “like a guy who deserved to die.”

A passenger overheard this and stared at him in horror, so he wished he hadn’t said it. The statement was made sincerely, because South didn’t like fat men, and he didn’t like drunks; too, he needed, and this was important, to assure himself that there was a reason for what he did. The reason did not need to be large, not anywhere near enough of a reason to justify the act before a jury of South’s peers. But if there was a reason for an act—any act, even murder—South could accept the reason as a good and sufficient one, and feel justified. He could even feel quite holy about it, as if he’d done the world a favor.

He examined the fat man dispassionately. Would the stewardess remember the bolted aspirin pills and the water? She probably would, and that would mean an autopsy, and so what?

There was nothing to worry about, probably. South shrugged vaguely, dismissing any doubts that might

be lurking about. There was even a little joker attached to the thing that would show up when they made the autopsy, for the white pills really had been about forty per cent aspirin. The coating of acetylsalicylic acid, which was plain old aspirin, was around the more lethal viscera of the pills. So the autopsy would show aspirin, and the stewardess might think she hadn't unwittingly administered the poison. That was all right with South. The stewardess was pretty.

South was not his name, but it was as good as any because for years he had not used his genuine name, nor employed any one name for very long at a time. The airline trip was in a southerly direction, so he had told them I. B. G. South. The I. B. G. part was for I Be Going. He was, in his skeleton-rattling way, a humorist.

He was a rather lean man with a sweet face and large brown eyes and sensitive lips. He dressed very carefully in a softly outdoorsy way, usually wearing autumnal hues. Of him, an average individual would probably have said that he didn't look like a murderer. But a psychiatrist would have said quite the contrary, that the man definitely had neurotic symptoms indicating he could be a murderer.

South glanced regretfully at Della Nelson. He would now have to figure out another way of killing her.

Chapter III

"MY telephone call," said Della Nelson. "What about my telephone call? What happened to it?"

The First Officer had come back from the control compartment to investigate. He said, "I'm sorry, lady," and didn't seem to hear her. He was staring in horror at the body.

"I had a telephone—radiophone—call placed. To Doc Savage."

"I'm sorry, lady," the First Officer said. Jumping forward suddenly, he supported the stewardess with an arm, demanding, "What's wrong?"

The stewardess, having suddenly remembered the aspirin incident, had lost much of her gay, healthy color and some of her ability to hold herself upright. She was a registered nurse, as stewardesses on many airlines still were, and she had realized she just possibly might be held responsible for administering the aspirin. Or *had* it been aspirin? She didn't know why a suspicion that it hadn't been should hit her, but it did, suddenly, horribly.

The First Officer said, "Take it easy, Anna," and helped the stewardess aft, stepping over the mound of fat body in the aisle. He came back presently and held the fat man's wrist, not happily, for a while. "Dead," he remarked loudly. "A heart attack, probably." Twice when he was in the air force crewmen had been killed in his bomber, and often he had helped take bodies out of other ships and so death, any longer, did not touch him vitally. He addressed the passengers: "Will one of you men give me a hand?" A man, or rather two men, did, and they took the body to the men's room, having approximately the amount of trouble they would have had moving a piano.

Della Nelson waited. No one did anything about her radiophone call, apparently.

She was frightened, horribly frightened. The death of the fat man had made a large splash in the dark pool of her fears. She did not at first realize why. Death was always shocking, but the effect of this was more than it should have been.

The First Officer, the stewardess, and, once the pilot, passed and re-passed.

"Stewardess!" she said anxiously. "My radiophone call!"

The stewardess looked at her queerly, she thought. "I'm so sorry. We did overlook your call in the excitement, didn't we, Miss Nelson? I'll see, but I doubt if we have time now. We're landing in a few minutes, you know. It would be much more economical to use the telephone at the terminal."

"I'll do that, then. Phone from the terminal."

"Very well."

"Was he . . .?"

"Dead? Yes, he was dead. It was a shock, so upsetting. Well, he had been drinking, of course. But—" The stewardess stared fixedly forward toward the control compartment and did not finish.

"A heart attack? The co-pilot, or whatever you call him, seemed to think so."

The stewardess continued to stare fixedly; her face was strange, particularly around the mouth and she didn't say anything. She moved away.

My God, Della thought, she acted *as if I was guilty!* Why should she do that? I didn't even know the fat man. I never saw him before, and I never spoke to him, and I never gave him any thought until he died. I had no contact whatever with him, except that he snatched those aspirin tablets. She became very still. Her pulse seemed to stop, her nerves to freeze, and her mind turned ringing and blank, like the interior of a room after a large firecracker had exploded in it.

The aspirin tablets!

MR. SOUTH was third man out of the airliner after it stopped at the unloading ramp at La Guardia Field. He carried a topcoat over his arm, and also had a light bag of the sort resembling a suitcase that can contain nicely an extra shirt, socks, underwear, razor, the things a man needs for a short trip. There was nothing suspicious in his baggage or on him. He had dumped the remainder of the "aspirin" pills in the men's washroom on the plane. It made no difference if they were found there, since proving he put them there would, he believed, be a hard thing to do.

Mr. South strolled, not too hastily, into the terminal.

He was hailed at once by a blue-jowled young man who cried enthusiastically, "Why, hello, Uncle John! How are you, Uncle John! I'm delighted to see you!"

"For God's sake!" said Mr. South, genuinely amazed. "How did you get down here? How the hell? Listen, I left you in Boston when I got on that plane!"

"Not exactly," the other corrected.

"Eh?"

"They run two sections of that flight. Two planes take off about the same time. We got on the second plane, and it musta passed yours enroute. Anyway, we got here first."

"I'm glad to see you," South declared. "Who else is with you?"

“Buck and Ed.”

“That's fine. We're going to need them.”

The young man glanced at South sharply, then asked, “Something making you unhappy?” He was standing so he could look beyond South and watch the passengers filing in from the plane, and presently he saw Della Nelson among the arrivals. His grunt was full of unpleasant understanding. “So you didn't get her stopped?”

“No, I didn't.”

“Hell! All she's gotta do now is grab a cab, ride downtown and sell Doc Savage a bill of goods. With those legs she's got, she'll probably get him sold fast. After that, things are liable to get a little cloudy.”

“You think it'll be that easy?” South asked.

“I hope not.”

“I do too,” South said. “You get Buck and Ed and we'll knock her off without any of this subtle stuff.”

“Right here?”

“Right here, or the first damned place that comes handy,” South said.

The younger man started to wheel away, but paused to gaze, quite surprised, at a group of four men in white coats who were engaged in removing the body of the fat man from the plane. Indicating the body more with voice tone than with eye gesture, he asked South, “Who's the guy they're packing out?”

“He,” South said, “is one of my few mistakes.”

DELLA NELSON stood in a telephone booth, feeling desperate and thwarted, and demanding, “Where is Doc Savage? . . . Hello! Why don't you answer me? What's the matter with you, anyway?”

No answer came over the wire. But she was certain that a moment before a male voice had stated this was Doc Savage's office and added something about stating her business. She hadn't understood all of it, because the air terminal lobby outside was noisy.

She used another nickel, and dialed again. A voice over the wire said: “This is Doc Savage's office, but Mr. Savage is not here. This is a recorded voice from a mechanical device, and any message you care to speak will be recorded for Mr. Savage's later attention.” This was exactly what the voice must have said before, she decided.

“Damn!” she said wildly.

She hung up—hung up violently, and with a helpless feeling of weakness that caused her to cling to the receiver for a moment, supporting part of her weight on it. It was ridiculous to feel so thwarted by encountering a silly mechanical device.

She shouldn't have been so shocked. Walter, she recalled, had told her that Savage was addicted to mechanical gadgets, according to what Renny Renwick, the engineer, had told him. But she wanted the man, not one of his gadgets.

Irritably, nervously, she flung out of the phone booth, and bumped headlong into a large young man who

was gawking at something overhead, evidently the mural paintings on the lobby ceiling.

“Oops! Beg pardon,” he said.

She said nothing. Awareness of the young man did not, actually, penetrate her distracted thinking; he was just someone she bumped into, and she went on, walking rapidly. A taxi. She would take a taxi. Or a bus, maybe a bus would be better.

When she had moved some distance, there was a delayed-action effect, and she realized that she had bumped into a large young man. Very large, in a rangy, spring-muscled, impressive way. She glanced back. She did not see him. There were several wide backs turned to her, but none of them exactly fell in with her hazy recollections of the large young man.

She went on, her footsteps the quick clicking voice of panic. But not far. Because a man got in front of her; when she stepped to the left, he stepped to the left too, then he said, “I am Mr. South, with the airline.”

“Oh!”

“You are Miss Nelson? Miss Della Nelson?”

“What do you want?” she asked tightly.

He bowed slightly. He gave her his sweet-faced smile. “I am a vice-president of the airline, Miss Nelson,” he said, telling lies with the soft sincerity of gospel truth. “There was, on the plane on which you arrived, a passenger who died. We—ah—very unfortunate. There are certain aspects of the death we feel we should investigate. So, if you will accompany me . . .?”

“Go with you? Where?”

“To the office in another building. It will only take a few moments.” His smile, like a kitten, showed again. “If you have friends meeting you—” He paused invitingly. He wanted to know whether anyone was meeting her. That was rather important, since he was preparing to kill her. But she did not answer, so he added, “Otherwise we will gladly, at no cost, furnish a limousine to take you wherever you wish.”

She released her breath suddenly, wildly.

“Oh, yes!” she gasped. “Yes, I want to talk. You must help me, you must. I want to get hold of a man named Doc Savage. Can you help me?”

“Help you? Certainly.” He took her arm. “We’ll be glad to.” He tugged gently at her arm and got her moving. “Savage, you say? I’ve heard of Mr. Savage.” Politely, he reached ahead of her and used his hand to start a revolving door turning for her. “We have a very short walk,” he said. “Your baggage? If you’ve any baggage, I should be glad to have someone take care of it. “

“No baggage,” she said.

The smile came to his lips, his eyes. This was good. No baggage. And he was getting her outside. The idea was to walk her past the parking lot, and Buck and Ed would appear to help. Buck and Ed already had rented a car; there was an agency at the air terminal which did a car rental business, so it had not been difficult. They’d already had the car rented when South’s plane arrived, they’d explained.

The immediate plan was to kill her then and there, if necessary. Or, and this would be better, get her in the car and take her somewhere else and do it.

Occupied with satisfaction, he hardly noticed two airline captains pass him, look directly at him, and fail to speak. This incident, two fairly important airline employees not speaking to him, seemed unimportant, but it instantly wrecked his scheme. Because Della Nelson saw it and it affected her fears like a lighted match dropped in an open bucket of gasoline.

SHE didn't scream. She tried. The sound that came out was only cramped breath, a shocking hiss of a sound.

She was only a few feet from the revolving door. Wheeling wildly, she dived for the door. South grabbed at her, but missed. His face was still sweet, but now in a nasty way.

What the hell had happened, South wondered in flashes. What tipped her? The airline pilots? Oh, sure! The pilots, that was it. He'd told her he was vice-president of the airline, and two pilots would certainly know and speak to the vice-president of their airline. His damned ego—what the devil difference whether he was a vice-president or not. He should have presented himself as a minor clerk.

All this was in and out of his head in flashes. He lunged and stamped down a foot in the path of the revolving door, stopping it. The girl, shoving madly and helplessly against the door, screamed again. This time she made some noise, although not an alarming amount of it.

He drove a hand into his pocket. He didn't have a gun, because they frequently put you in jail when they catch you carrying one of those. But he did have a penknife. The blade, an inch and three quarters of thin steel, was ample if inserted in the temple, the base of the skull, or between two vertebrae in the spine.

He didn't get to use the knife, though. The girl wheeled and squeezed. He didn't think there was room for that, but she made it out of the revolving door. She ran.

He said, "Here, you! Stop that!" His voice was heavy, unnatural.

He pursued her.

She could run, he discovered, with astonishing speed. She was going, moreover, in a direction opposite where Buck and Ed were waiting. They would be no help.

"Police!" he cried loudly. "Stop, thief!" He did not want any cop, but it was a good idea, if one appeared, to have laid a groundwork of innocence.

God, how she could run! The sidewalk came up and hit his feet madly. He was a soft man, disliking exercise, and he specially detested running. But he was gaining. She twisted her head, wild-eyed, gaping-mouthed, to glance at him. She hadn't thrown away her purse. That, he thought, is a silly woman for you. Hang on to her purse, when she could throw it away, and outrun me. Close now, he threw out a hand to seize her.

He had the penknife out and it was open. There was a small button which caused the blade to fly open when pressed, and the blade was very sharp. He could shave with it.

His hand fastened, claw-like, in the cloth of her sleeve. Her throat, he decided. Her throat, one stroke across it, so the blood won't get on my hand; he knew how blood spouted out of a throat.

But she used the purse on him. She hit him in the face with it. As hard, no doubt, as she could. Which was awfully hard, and made pain explode all over his face. He was momentarily blinded and, still traveling at headlong speed, was tilted off balance, and smashed headfirst into the high steel-mesh fence

beside the sidewalk.

His face hit the fence slantwise, and scraped along it. The agony, shock, was horrible. He did not stand pain well anyway. All his weight, all his plunging momentum, drove his face into the fence, scraping, tearing, lacerating. He fell to the ground.

God! I've got no face left, he thought. He made mewings and whimperings of pain. He wiped, using his fingers, at his eyes and got the torn lids apart.

The girl had gone on.

A policeman, the uniformed cop on the beat probably, was coming toward the scene, was now not quite half a block distant.

South wheeled dizzily, both hands over his face, crimson leaking in strings through his fingers, and stumbled between parked cars. The parking system at the airport was conventional, rows of cars with lanes between. He turned left, not entirely because the policeman was coming from the other direction, but because Buck and Ed were approaching in their rented machine. They had the door open for him, so that he could fall inside.

He said, "Get us away from here!" hoarsely.

"But the girl—"

"Let Andy take her," South whimpered. Andy was the blue-jowled young man, the other member of their party. He leaned forward on the seat, letting his face leak its scarlet on the floor. "This doesn't seem to be my day," he mumbled.

BUCK was driving. He swung the car toward the exit. The policeman, whose name was Calvick, ran furiously, trying to get to a spot where he could read the license plates. He did not succeed.

The cop used his right hand to lift his uniform cap and briefly scratch a spot on top of his head. He put the cap back on and trotted to the sidewalk, where his eyes searched unsuccessfully for the girl.

"What the hell?" he remarked.

He walked rapidly toward the terminal building, intending to use the callbox there. As he walked, he repeated the general description of the car, so he would have it straight. A police prowler car might be able to pick up the machine, particularly since that guy's face had been so bloody.

At the callbox, he encountered Sergeant Ellis, his superior officer.

"Why, hello, Ellis!" he said, surprised. "Sergeant, there's something going on—"

"You're damned right something's going on!" The Sergeant rattled the callbox hook. "It's got angles to it that are probably going to surprise you," he added.

"There was a girl—"

"Yeah, we know about the girl," said Sergeant Ellis impatiently.

“She got away.”

“No, she didn't, by a long shot,” the Sergeant said. “At least that's one thing that didn't happen to us.”

“You mean,” demanded the astonished patrolman, “that this was something you had fixed up?”

“I wouldn't call it fixed,” the Sergeant said bitterly, and began bellowing into the callbox a description, including license number, of the car that had departed with South, Buck and Ed. When the patrolman started to walk away, he paused to bellow, “You come back here, Calvick! Where the hell are you going?”

“I got a beat to walk—”

“You got more than that to do. You stick around here.” The Sergeant finished his telephoning to headquarters by mentioning exactly who would catch what if that car wasn't found. He hung up, flipped the callbox shut, and eyed Patrolman Calvick dubiously.

“What kinda actor are you, Calvick?” he demanded. “Never mind. You better be one, and you better be good.”

Chapter IV

DELLA NELSON looked about nervously at tool cabinets, engines on stands, men in coveralls. Having ducked through the first door she had reached, she was, she saw, in an engine overhaul shop. Somewhere a spray gun was hissing with fierce, angry spurts, and the air had the biting odor of an engine cleaning solvent. Over to the left, lurid purplish flashes of light sprang from a welding torch. She wheeled and, for frightened moments, watched the door through which she had come.

She had seen the policeman; she half expected him to appear, but he didn't. Nor did the man who had tried to trick her come through the door. She imagined he had fled. Remembering his sweet face, she shuddered violently.

She approached a mechanic. “I beg pardon.”

“Yeah?”

“Where can I find a policeman?”

He was startled. “Darned if I know. You mean a company cop?”

“I mean any policeman!”

The urgency on her face, and the greater amount of it in her voice, jolted him into pointing, saying, “You go that way, lady.”

“Will you go with me, please? And if you have something you can use as a weapon, will you bring it?”

“I'll be damned!” the mechanic said. He was not afraid, and he picked up a wrench. “Okay, lead on. What's happening?”

“I think a man was going to kill me.”

“The hell you say!” The mechanic put the wrench in his pocket and held it so that it looked as if it could be a gun. They left the shop hangar, walked in the open for a while, and reached the terminal building.

Della was looking at the large young man. She discovered him standing beside the newsstand, when the mechanic said, “There’s a cop, lady.”

“Thank you,” Della said. She wondered if she should be suspicious of the large young man. He had, she believed, shifted the position of his face so that she could not get a good look at it. She tried to recall whether he had done something suspicious the other time she had seen him, which had been immediately after leaving the telephone booth from which she had endeavored to get Doc Savage.

The policeman was large, hearty, and looked like a cop should look.

He said, “So somebody bothered you!” He sounded the way a cop should sound, too.

“Tried to kill me,” Della corrected.

The officer seemed properly impressed. “I noticed the Sergeant over yonder a minute ago. We better go talk to him,” he said. He took her arm, they approached another burly officer, also in uniform, and he said, “This is Sergeant Ellis, Miss—er—”

“Della Nelson. A man tried to kill me.”

The Sergeant, also suitably impressed, said he wanted to hear about this. “Let’s go in a private office back here where we can talk.”

Della searched for the large young man. He was still there. Impulsively, suspiciously, she pointed, and demanded, “Do you know that man?”

“He the one?” demanded the Sergeant.

“No. But I—well, I noticed him.”

“Willis, keep an eye on that guy,” he told the patrolman. To Della, he said, “We’ll get to the bottom of this, don’t you worry.”

THEY used someone’s office for the conference. Sergeant Ellis waved an arm and said, “Sit down, have a chair. You look tired.”

Della, suddenly realizing how weak her knees seemed to be, took the chair. But she leaned forward excitedly and said, “Officer, you should be hunting that man. He should be around somewhere. He is a man with the strangest, and most horrible, kind of sweet-looking face, but no! No, his face would be all bloody now. He ran into the fence.”

“Suppose you begin right at the beginning,” the Sergeant suggested. “Why did this guy try to kill you? What did you say your name is? Nelson? Della Nelson. Why would he want to kill you, Miss Nelson?”

Why? Della tried not to look as horrified as she suddenly felt. If she answered truthfully she would have to go back and explain about Walter, and his mysterious work for Mr. Pogany who was an expert on whales, and about the murder of Mr. Riis. She would have to let the police know her brother, Walter, was involved in murder and a mystery. The idea frightened her, because she didn’t know how fully Walter’s trusting nature had been taken advantage of. She became aware that Sergeant Ellis was staring at

her curiously.

“I—I’m trying to think,” she explained.

“Never mind the thinking,” Sergeant Ellis said. “Just tell it the way it happened.”

Della decided grimly that she didn’t dare place Walter’s part of the story in the hands of the police. She was afraid the police wouldn’t believe her brother had let himself get involved in a murder just because he was a big, trustful dope.

“I had left the plane, and was walking across the terminal lobby,” she said, “when this fellow came up to me. He was a rather tall man, soft-looking, with a face that was—well, sweet-looking.”

Sergeant Ellis listened as she continued the story. She was telling it exactly as it happened, and from time to time the Sergeant nodded, although his expression showed neither belief nor disbelief. When he finally interrupted, it was to speak softly.

“Why,” he inquired, “did he do that?”

“I—I don’t know.”

“Was he on the plane?”

“Yes, I think he was. But I didn’t speak to him. I had never seen him before, and I hardly noticed him.”

“Had anything at all happened previously that might explain why he did what he did?”

Della shook her head quickly. “I can’t think of a reason.”

“Has anything at all unusual happened to you recently?”

She dropped her eyes. “No, it hasn’t.”

A FEW minutes later, Sergeant Ellis stepped out of the room, closed the door behind him, and beckoned with his head for a patrolman. “Go in there and keep an eye on her,” he told the patrolman. The Sergeant then went to the terminal lobby, where he accosted the large young man Della Nelson had noticed on two occasions.

“That babe,” said Sergeant Ellis, “is telling one lie right after another.”

The large young man asked, “Hasn’t she told any truth at all?”

“Some, Mr. Savage. Just enough to make it pretty hard for me to keep from getting mad.”

“What did she tell the truth about?”

“Just what we already knew. About the guy accosting her here in the terminal, and what happened afterward.”

“What warned her to break away from him?”

“She says he told her he was an airline vice-president, then she noticed two pilots didn’t recognize their own vice-president, and that scared her.”

“It logically would.”

“Oh, I believe that part of it. The thing is, she's leaving out too much.” Sergeant Ellis repeated what Della Nelson had told him, consulting some notes as he did so. “She forgot all about Boston, about a murdered guy named Riis who worked with her brother—”

“You didn't mention those things to her?”

Sergeant Ellis shook his head. “No, you said not to. I didn't give her the least hint that we knew something about her, that the airline stewardess and pilot got kind of curious about her after the fat man popped off dead from taking two aspirin tablets she almost took, and notified you because she had started to radiophone you. She doesn't know about that. She doesn't know you are interested and on the scene.”

“She didn't recognize me as Doc Savage?” Doc asked.

“Apparently not. She asked about you, though.”

“What did she say?”

“Wanted to know if I knew you. Then she kind of shut up. I think she had just noticed you.”

Doc Savage said thoughtfully, “It would seem that the fellow with the gentle-looking face, South, tried to kill her with poison tablets on the plane, but the fat man got them through an error.”

“It looks that way. But how the hell did he trade the poison pills for the aspirin?”

“I was talking to the stewardess a moment ago about that,” Doc Savage said. “It seems she placed the aspirin and water on the tray, then occupied a few moments getting a napkin from the service locker. South must have switched the poison for the aspirin then. He could, the stewardess thinks, have guessed who the aspirin was for by watching her. She had not spoken to any passenger other than Della Nelson for several minutes, and she remembers looking sympathetic and concerned when she did speak to Della, so the fellow wasn't taking too much of a chance when he guessed the aspirin was for Della.”

“Enough of a chance that an innocent guy is dead, though.”

“That is true. Suppose you see whether anything else has come in from Boston.”

SERGEANT ELLIS used the regular telephone, one in a booth, and he saved a nickel by dialing the O-for-Operator and saying grimly, “I want a policeman.” He grinned when he saw Doc Savage had overheard. “It gets quicker service for less money,” he said. Presently he began talking and talked earnestly for about four minutes, then he hung up.

“No trace of the car with South and the other two guys in it,” he said.

“What about Boston?” Doc demanded.

“Nah, only what we got when you heard about the goings-on aboard the plane. Apparently all Boston knows is that a man named Riis got himself murdered last night. A guy named Walter Nelson had been running around with Riis. They were pals. Walter Nelson is Della Nelson's brother. The Boston cops want to ask Walter Nelson some questions about Riis. But we knew all that. They had told us.”

“The girl is holding back information, then.”

“She sure didn't tell us anything about the brother or Riis.” Sergeant Ellis eyed Doc Savage speculatively. “Maybe she'd tell you more than she told me. She was coming to New York to see you, apparently.”

“What,” Doc asked, “makes you think she'd be any more truthful with me?”

Sergeant Ellis grinned. “A big guy with your looks should have some effect on her.”

Doc frowned. “You're wrong there, Sergeant. If I have any effect on them, it's to make them want to make a fool out of me. Something gets hold of them, and they invariably want to lie to me. It's a fever they get—” he stopped, because Sergeant Ellis was laughing. “What's so funny about it?”

“You mistaking female nature and cussedness for a fever,” the Sergeant said. “But if you figure this baby is going to lie to you, what do you want to do?”

“I'm not sure she's going to lie, but let's not encourage her.”

“How do you figure we cannot encourage her?”

“Let's try the plan I outlined to you earlier,” Doc suggested.

“HmMMM. That's kinda rough. I mean if something should happen to her I wouldn't want . . . Dammit, what I mean is that this way of doing things is irregular!”

“You'd rather simply lock her up because she's lying, you mean?”

“Sure. It would be a lot simpler.”

“But it wouldn't get the truth out of her, I'm afraid. Suppose you try my system.”

“Will you,” Sergeant Ellis demanded, “take the responsibility?”

“If that's what's worrying you—certainly.”

Most of the worry left the Sergeant's face. “Okay, since it's your monkey,” he said.

RE-ENTERING the office where Della Nelson was waiting, Sergeant Ellis wore what he hoped was a doubting and puzzled expression. He enhanced this skepticism by clearing his throat.

“I don't understand it!” he declared.

Della Nelson said, “I don't believe I—what do you mean?”

“Will you come with me, Miss Nelson? I'll show you.”

“Of course.”

They moved through the terminal lobby. They were heading for the spot where Della has caused South to dive face-first into the fence.

Della asked anxiously, “Did you get hold of Doc Savage for me?”

“Mr. Savage isn't in his office.” Sergeant Ellis gave her an intent, sidewise stare. “Miss Nelson, didn't you say that fellow, the one you said had a sweet face, bled considerably after he collided with the fence?”

Alarmed, Della demanded, “Was he—was he fatally—”

“No-o-o-o,” the Sergeant said judiciously. “He wasn't, but wait, I'll show you.”

They reached the sidewalk which was bordered by the high steel-mesh fence. “Just where,” inquired Sergeant Ellis, “did it happen.”

Presently Della stopped. “Right here.” She pointed at the sidewalk, then, surprised, began peering all about. Her face showed intense amazement, and became pale. “There isn't any!” she gasped.

“Any what?”

“Bloodstains! The way his face was cut there's got to be!”

“Ahem!” Sergeant Ellis frowned. “As a matter of fact, that isn't all. You said this man left the terminal lobby with you. As a matter of fact, we questioned two people who saw you leaving the lobby, and they said you were alone.”

“Alone!”

“Exactly.”

“They're lying!” Della exclaimed excitedly. “They're lying, officer!”

“I wish I could be sure,” Sergeant Ellis said heavily. He was rather fancying his role as actor.

“You don't—” Della stared at him in horror.

Sergeant Ellis winced because of the expression on her face. But she lied to me, he justified himself quickly. She didn't tell the police all the truth, or this wouldn't have happened to her.

“Oh! There—look!” Della was pointing. “There's the patrolman who saw it! He started towards us, and that's why the man ran!” She clutched Sergeant Ellis' arm, added, “Ask him about it.”

The Sergeant agreed smugly that they would do just that.

But Patrolman Calvick only stared blankly at Della Nelson. “Lady, I never saw you before,” he said. “And I certainly didn't see anything like you say I saw. Why, things have been as quiet as a graveyard around here.”

Patrolman Calvick is an even better actor than I am, Sergeant Ellis thought enviously.

Della Nelson's eyes jerked, horrified, from one officer to the other. “But I—surely, you—” She fell silent, the words twisted in her throat.

“Lady,” said Sergeant Ellis ominously, “I don't know what you are trying to pull, but I don't like it. I tell you what, you better come back to the terminal while we think this over.”

The stark, unnatural look on the young woman's face made both policemen uncomfortable all the way back to the terminal building. “Now, you wait here and we'll investigate further,” said Sergeant Ellis, holding open the door of an office.

SERGEANT ELLIS confronted Doc Savage in the lunchroom. “Listen, that's the dirtiest trick I ever pulled on a human being,” he complained.

“How did she take it?” Doc asked.

“Like we had stuck a knife in her.” The Sergeant was displeased about his part in the affair.

“But it probably didn't jolt more truth out of her, did it?”

“Well, no. No, it didn't.”

“Which probably means she's got a very strong reason for holding back facts,” Doc remarked. “We've got to jolt her out of that frame of mind, and that's what we are doing. So wipe that I-just-stepped-on-my-little-puppy expression off your face, Sergeant.”

Sergeant Ellis grunted. “I guess she has it coming, at that. Say, how did you guys get the bloodstains off the sidewalk? Not with water. Water wouldn't have dried so fast. There would have been wet spots.”

“Oh, that. Acetone. There's always a lot of it around airports. They use it to thin aircraft dope. It evaporates very quickly. She was taken in, was she?”

“She was the most fooled girl you ever saw!”

“Where is she now?”

“Where you said to put her. In that office.”

“Are the windows unlocked?” Doc demanded.

“If they aren't, she can unlock them.” The Sergeant scratched his head. “Is this thing out of my hands now? I mean, do you want me to do anything more? Or do the police just stand back?”

“You just stand back,” Doc Savage said. “And I want to thank you for the way you've coöperated in this matter. I've rarely seen better or more efficient work under unusual circumstances.”

Sergeant Ellis coughed apologetically. “Unusual was right! I've heard a lot about you, Mr. Savage, and the extraordinary methods you use, but this is the first time I got a chance to see them first-hand. They're unusual all right. However, you don't owe me any thanks, because I received orders to coöperate with you. I guess you knew that, though.”

“The thanks,” Doc said, “were more for the spirit of your help.”

“Well, like I said, the thing was so unusual—” Sergeant Ellis broke off to stare at Patrolman Calvick, who dashed toward them.

“She lammed!” said Patrolman Calvick breathlessly. “She clumb outta the window and scrambled!”

Sergeant Ellis turned to Doc Savage.

“The egg,” he said, “is now yours to hatch.”

Chapter V

DOC SAVAGE moved with deceptive speed across the terminal lobby, flung out into the early darkness—the sun was now about five minutes down—and strode to a coupé in the parking lot. The car, while not so old as to draw attention because of its age, certainly wasn't new, and it had been selected for its unobtrusiveness. There were few outward indications that the machine was loaded with gadgets,

armor-plating, a special motor, some of which might sometime come in handy, and others which were there only because Doc liked to tinker with such things.

He tried the radio transceiver first, and presently asked the microphone: "How are you making out, Monk?" Presently a voice—it belong to Ham Brooks, not Monk Mayfair—said, "I don't think you'll raise Monk."

"Why not?"

"She's in the cab he was driving."

"That's fine."

"If the big ape doesn't give things away, it may be," Ham Brooks agreed.

"Where are they?"

"Heading east. In Flushing now."

"Then she's not going into the city to hunt me up," Doc Savage said with satisfaction. "That's fine. Apparently we have stirred her up, and are going to get some action." He started to release the mike button, which would have cut him off the air, but paused to demand, "Ham, is there anyone else following her?"

"Haven't noticed anyone."

"Keep your eyes open. I'll catch up with you as soon as I can. But watch out for anything unexpected."

Doc got the car in motion. Monk and Ham, his assistants, were efficient, but accidents could always happen.

He swung the car east, waited briefly for a traffic light to go green, then took the faster lane of traffic and drove silently, grimly.

He was, he realized, made uncomfortable by the shocking deceit he had practiced on the girl, but he still believed it had been necessary. At least he had been able to think of no other way of shaking her intention not to tell the whole truth, and it had seemed best to rattle her, confuse her as much as possible, then watch to see what she did. He did not question the need for such an elaborate and complex deceiving, murder was enough justification for that. There had been one murder, maybe two; the fat man, an accidental victim on the plane, and, probably, the man named Riis in Boston. So the whole matter was important, worth his time.

Presently from the radio speaker Ham's voice said, "Doc?"

"Yes?"

"Merritt Parkway. Still headed east."

He said, "Thanks. Keep your transmitter on so I can follow you with a homing loop."

"Monk has his on, if you would rather home on him."

"All right."

He dropped the mike back on its hook and, instantly, as if that was a signal, lightning ran a jagged hot

streak across the sky ahead of him, then thunder followed, a single heavy bump of it like an explosion. He ducked his head a little and frowned up through the windshield at the sky, rather startled that it could have become cloudy and threatening rain without his being aware of it.

THE first rain, a flurry of large drops that hit the car with a hard solid sound, was beginning when Doc Savage swung over to the side of the road, stopping behind a parked taxicab. In a moment, Ham Brooks slid out of the cab, sprinted through the rain and slid into Doc's machine. "It would have to start to rain," he complained.

"Where is she?"

"Next place on the right," Ham said. Ham Brooks was a lean dapper man with an unusual width in the shoulders, and with a large mobile mouth. He was handsome in a hawk-like way, and proud of the name he had of being one of the best-dressed men in the country. He was frankly a crank about his clothes and, being quite an eminent lawyer, got away with it. Ham added, "She told Monk to wait. I just had him on the radio. It was the first chance he'd had to make a direct contact."

"What kind of a place is it?"

"Estate. Pretty fancy, Monk said. That's all he did say, except that he's parked in the driveway and there's enough shrubbery for us to get close if we wish." Ham scowled at the rain threading across the windshield. "What do we do? Get out in the rain and eavesdrop?"

Doc said, "You drive me past the place and I'll drop off. Park down the road."

"I'm not that afraid of getting wet."

"Come on, then."

The rain rapped their faces, their shoulders, with hard, quick ferocity. The wind seized their clothing and shook it. Leaves and small sticks were driven against them, and the trees made a great sighing and shuffling in the darkness. They walked rapidly.

"What do you make of the case?" Ham asked.

"Not very much yet," Doc admitted. "The girl was coming to see me, and someone was trying to kill her, maybe to keep her from seeing me, maybe for another reason. She has a brother the Boston police want to question because he knew a man named Riis who got murdered."

"Why do you think she wouldn't talk to the police?"

"The most logical reason she could have would be to keep someone out of trouble."

"Herself? It wouldn't be the first time someone has come to you to get them out of a mess."

"Or the brother," Doc said. "Here, isn't this the driveway?"

The drive passed a stone gatekeeper's cottage, which seemed to be unoccupied, then progressed in a series of turns, through a grove of very large trees. The driveway became gravel underfoot, was noisy, and they moved to the grass, which seemed to be neatly cut, thereafter colliding frequently with bushes which dumped quantities of water on them. In the turmoil of the storm, they could hardly hear the sounds

they made.

Doc said abruptly, "Hold it!" Somewhere ahead, a car engine had started. "Better get where the headlights won't hit us. I wonder if that is Monk, or another car? Listen! Listen to that, Ham!"

He meant the way the car motor was racing. Short spurts, then long ones which were not abrupt enough to be striking, but were noticeable. The car headlights appeared, and it moved toward them. Using the rain as an excuse, it came slowly, and again the sequence—three shorts, three longs, three shorts—of motor racings was repeated.

Ham grunted softly, breathlessly. He said, "That's twice, so the first time wasn't an accident. I wonder what he means? That was the coded SOS distress signal. But what does he . . . Is that the cab coming? Can you tell?"

It was a cab. In a moment, they could see the extra lights with which taxicabs distinguish themselves in New York.

Doc said, "I'll do the stopping. Get down toward the gate, and be ready for anything."

Ham grunted agreement, then was gone into the night, moving fast toward the gate and the highway.

It was Monk's cab, Doc saw. The darkness was too intense to distinguish the machine, particularly behind the milky glare of the headlights through the rain, but the top-light, the one that said TAXI had a bluish cast other cabs did not use. Doc took a chance, moved a few yards, and dropped behind a bush at the side of the driveway.

The cab, moving very slowly, approached. He could see a hand scrubbing at the windshield from the back, evidently wiping off vapor condensation. Monk undoubtedly was using the fogged-up windshield as an excuse for the slow driving, the treading of the accelerator.

The instant the cab was past, Doc got going. He gave it everything he had, heading for the baggage rack which this cab, like practically all cabs, had at the rear. He got his hands on it. The rain and wind, buffeted him. He hoped it was shaking the cab, too, so that the downward travel of the springs as his weight went on the baggage carrier would not be noticed.

Gripping the baggage rack, lodging himself on it, was not simple. For one thing, the rack was locked in the up position, and he had to cling to it, rather than lie on it. The vertical guards on the bumper were a help; he hooked a knee around one of those.

Once in place, he got his right hand free, plucked the sodden show handkerchief out of his upper coat pocket, wadded it, then explored under the back of the cab for the exhaust pipe. He found the pipe. It was quite hot, would have burned his hand, but he was able to jam the wet handkerchief into it, hold it clamped over the exhaust outlet. He waited. A great deal depended now on whether the exhaust pipe, muffler and tailpipe were in good condition.

Presently, not as soon as he expected, but soon enough, the engine stopped. Back-pressure through the exhaust system had gagged it.

He rolled off the baggage rack, crouched, jammed the handkerchief into the pipe firmly, but not so firmly that he could not pull it out again with his fingers, and waited.

A voice, bitter with rage, said, "Blow his insides out!"

“Wait a minute. He didn't touch anything. I was watching him,” a second voice said.

Monk's voice, easily recognizable because it was squeaky and juvenile said, “Can I help it if the rain drowned out the motor?” He sounded indignantly innocent, and also frightened.

The first speaker said, “Get out and dry off the spark plugs, Buck.”

“In this rain—are you kidding?” Buck said disagreeably. “The hell with it. We better walk 'em to our car.”

“Okay, we'll do that. You watch that plug-ugly ape of a driver. He looks like a bad customer, and he ain't scared enough to suit me.”

“I'm plenty scared,” Monk said. He was, too, Doc realized.

“Well, get outa here. Buck will put holes in you if you get funny. Watch him, Buck. I'll take care of the babe.” The car door banged open. A man backed out, evidently Buck, for he came from the front seat.

Doc Savage waited. It was clear now that, somehow, Monk and the girl had been trapped by two men. No! Three men! The fact that there were two men in the back seat with the girl gave him a bad start and, actually, upset his plans. Because when the back door opened, he was already moving forward. He had a fist lifted to club the man back of the ear when the second man, the other one in the rear seat, screamed, “Watch out, Ed!” He was the sweet-faced fellow who had poisoned the fat man by mistake on the plane.

“For God's sake, Ed!” he screamed.

Ed made a half turn that was enough to get his head out of the way of the fist, which hit his shoulder. He was knocked downward and forward against the running-board and open door, but he was far from being made unconscious, which was what Doc had intended.

DOC said, “Give us some action, Monk.” Then he went into the cab, hands first, for the man with the saccharine face.

Buck had half-turned to see what was happening. His gun was swung partly away from Monk, who snatched at the gun arm, and also kicked Buck hard as he could on the shin. Buck made a high-pitched howling sound, which he seemed to be able to maintain continuously without the formality of breathing. He and Monk landed in the mud, and fought.

The sweet-faced man, South, had a pen knife in his hand. Normally, Doc would not have thought much of the tiny blade as a weapon, but the way South used it, plus the poor illumination reflected back from the headlights, suddenly filled him with horror of the weapon. South tried twice, with lightning speed, and expertly, to cut Doc's wrist sinews. It would have disabled him for life. He evaded the slashing. For a moment they played a horrible little game of handies.

The man Doc had knocked down, Ed, complicated things by clutching at Doc's legs. Doc kicked him in the face after four tries. Ed gurgled, crawled away.

South suddenly threw himself backward with great force. When he hit the other cab door, it burst open and he fell out on the other side.

The girl screamed. No words, just a scream of general terror. She was in the back seat.

“Stay there!” Doc gasped. Then he remembered to add, “This is Doc Savage!”

He kicked at Ed and missed. Ed was leaving.

Under Monk and Buck, Buck's gun went off loudly twice. The two men instantly separated. Monk said, “The damned gun blew up! Mud in the barrel—” He tried to slug Buck as the latter scrambled erect. Buck ducked, Monk missed, and momentum carried him across Buck's shoulders so that, when Buck straightened suddenly and violently, Monk was hurled into the car. He hit with quite a crash, fell back dazed.

Buck ran. He speedily overtook and passed Ed, who was also running, and had a head start.

On the other side of the car, South yelled, “It's Doc Savage! Our car! Let's get outa here!” He was also running.

Doc Savage, circling the rear of the car, discovered this was the wrong thing to do, because it lost him time. South was already thirty feet ahead of him and, once he was out of the headlight area, hard to keep track of.

Alarmed about Monk, Doc called, “Monk, are you hurt?”

“You're damned right,” Monk said. “Where's a gun? Have you got a gun?” He came splattering around to the rear of the car and crouched there. “You better get out of sight. Maybe they'll shoot—”

They did. Four bullets. All four hit the cab. Doc joined Monk. He called, “Miss Nelson! Get down! Lie flat, so that the engine—”

The taxi headlights blacked out.

Two more shots came. The bullets went past. The noise of shots was quite a bit louder than the storm, and made the storm seem rather insignificant.

Della Nelson asked, “Was it all right for me to turn out the lights?”

“It was fine,” Doc said. He was astonished.

Ahead in the darkness, there were shouts, another shot, blows, and noises made by bodies and bushes.

“Ham!” Doc said angrily. “They've got Ham!”

MONK said, “Oh, my God! The dirty rats! The stinking, dirty rats!” He ran headlong toward the struggle sounds.

Doc shouted, “Be careful, you idiot!” knowing it would do no good. Monk and Ham were very close friends in a rather peculiar fashion, for neither one ever said anything pleasant about the other if he could avoid doing so, and their normal conversation was a series of insults. But either would, if necessary, risk his life for the other.

Monk, Doc was sure, would plunge headlong into anything he found, not weighing chances. He was pretty sure to need help. So Doc followed him.

As it developed, Monk did not need help because he failed to catch up with the foe, or with Ham. The reason: South's gang had their car parked, not on the highway, but in the grounds near the gate. They

reached the machine, loaded inside.

They had Ham. They had taken Ham with them into their car. This was certain, because Doc could hear what Ham was saying, and hear a part of what Ham was doing, the latter quite violent. He heard Buck say, "Beat him over the head, dammit; beat him over the head, somebody!" The car engine was roaring, there was the labored grinding of gears and the sound made by tires skidding on wet grass.

Headlights lunged out from the machine; they were like big fat blobs of ice cream which rocked crazily in the rain and wind, made trees spring out like great greenish ghosts, then finally straightened out somewhat as the car got on the driveway. After that, the machine went fast, out between the gatehouse and a stone post, on to the highway, then away.

"Ham is in there!" Monk screamed. "They got Ham!" Rage changed his falsetto voice to an apish roaring, hoarse and maddened. He wheeled after dashing impotently a few yards after the car, collided with Doc Savage, and bellowed, "They got Ham!"

He ran back to the cab and when Doc Savage reached him, he was stamping impotently on the accelerator. He yelled, "What in the hell did you do to this thing? Oh, the exhaust pipe! Cripes!"

"Take it easy!" Doc said. He was on his knees, working with the handkerchief he had stuffed in the exhaust pipe. He got it out. "Okay," he called.

But the car engine wouldn't start. Monk ground the starter repeatedly.

Doc said, "I'll try one of our own cars," and ran toward the highway.

He knew, while he was pounding down the highway, that it was no use. The other machine had too much of a head start. But he kept going and, reaching the car he had driven to the spot, sent it west along the highway, after turning with some difficulty in the rain. But, after two intersections, having heard or seen nothing to indicate which way Ham's captors had gone, he brought the machine to a stop.

He fiddled with the radio a while, got the transmitter changed over to police frequency, and got hold of the police. He gave, as precisely as possible, a description of South, Buck, Ed and the car they were driving. It was a different one, or at least the license number was different, from the one in which they had fled the airport. "Ham Brooks is a prisoner in the machine, so use care in apprehending," he finished grimly. "Use great care in apprehending."

Chapter VI

MONK MAYFAIR shoved his homely face into the car when it stopped in the driveway, then his shoulders sagged and he said, "You didn't get Ham, eh?" After that, the spirit went out of him. He was a very short, very wide and remarkably homely man who bore almost none of the appearances of wisdom one would have expected of a man of his ability, since he was one of the world's great industrial chemists. He slouched down on the fender and remained there.

Doc found a flashlight, and turned the beam on the rear seat of the taxicab. Della Nelson, frightened and without much of her normal coloring, stared at him.

"If you're Mr. Savage," she said, "you were at the air terminal. I noticed you at least twice."

Doc studied her at close range. About all he found out was that she was more lovely than he had thought, and more frightened.

He said, "I hope you are willing to tell us more than you told the police."

She winced enough that he could see the movement of her lips, their tightening. "Was that wrong?"

"Was what wrong?"

"Not telling the police the whole truth."

"How do you know?" She became silent, depressed, for a moment. "But I don't understand how you knew I wasn't telling the truth?"

"It was fairly simple," Doc told her. "You gave Boston as your address to the airline people when you bought the ticket. After the fat man died on the plane, it looked like murder, so we got in touch with the Boston police and found out they want your brother."

"Walter—they want—" Her eyes rolled until they were two thirds whites, but she did not faint, as he thought she was going to do. Instead, she buried her face between her hands and began talking.

She told the story of Walter, his job for the man who had whales for a hobby, of Walter working with Mr. Riis, of Mr. Riis being found dead after trying to get hold of Walter last night. She finished with Walter's kidnapping. "That is every bit of the truth," she said wildly. "Anything I have left out, and I can't think of anything, is something I forgot."

Doc asked, "You say you did not go to the Boston police because you were afraid your brother was in serious trouble?"

"Yes, because Walter is such a trustful dope. I don't mean Walter would do anything wrong. He wouldn't. I'm positive he wouldn't, and I think a sister would know that about her own brother."

"Then why do you think he is in trouble?"

"Because Walter is so naïve that another man could make use of him, involve him in a terrible predicament before Walter woke up to the truth, if Walter ever woke up. You've no idea what a sap Walter is when it comes to trusting people."

"What kind of trouble?"

"I—I don't know."

"You said he was kidnapped. Isn't that trouble?"

Her head came up, and she said sharply, "That isn't the kind of trouble I mean. That is danger, pure and simple, and Walter could cope with danger. Walter may be a trustful boob, but he's no coward."

"This employer of Walter's—what about him?" Doc demanded.

"Mr. Pogany? I don't know much about him. I didn't like him, the few times I've met him." She pondered a moment. "I want to be fair, so I'll add that maybe I didn't like Mr. Pogany because he seemed a strange, eccentric sort."

"An eccentric whale-fancier?"

"Well, yes."

"Where can we get hold of this Mr. Pogany?"

She stared at him in surprise. “Why, this is his home. This estate.”

Monk Mayfair, sitting on the fender, gave a jump of amazement, and said, “Well for Cripes sake! Why didn't you say so? Now we've got something to work on.”

MR. POGANY did not appear until they had beaten their knuckles flat on all the doors, front door, back door and side door, not, in fact, until Doc Savage had picked the lock on the front door with a skill that made it seem much easier than it was, and they were standing in the hall shouting for Pogany. Then Mr. Pogany came. He had an unusual gun.

“Oh!” he said mildly. “Oh, you—ah—don't exactly look like burglars. Or do you?”

They stared at the gun. It was a whaler's gun, used for firing harpoons, a portable one. Although it was portable, it must have weighed at least fifty pounds, and he held it with difficulty, gay-knuckled because of the weight.

“Pogany?” Doc asked.

“Yes, sir.” He peered at Della Nelson. “Why, it's Miss Nelson! This *is* a surprise! It really is.”

An eccentric whaling fan, Miss Nelson had said. Doc Savage examined Pogany thoughtfully. The man had a whaling harpoon gun, all right; whether or not he was eccentric would come later.

The man was very tall, bony, Lincolnesque, and he was wearing the loudest tweed suit Doc could remember having seen. Black hair with remarkably little gray for his age, which was probably past fifty, and pale blue marbles for eyes, very bright eyes that glinted and sent diamond-like flashes when the light caught them just right. A rather leathery skin with more result from sunlight on it than on most men of his age.

He flashed both teeth and eyes at Miss Nelson in what looked like pleasure.

“This was horribly inhospitable of me!” he exclaimed. “You're soaked. You must have had an awful time getting my attention. I was in the basement, in my workshop. I didn't hear you, not until I heard someone walking in this room.”

Della Nelson took hold of herself visibly, tightly, and said, “Mr. Pogany, this is Doc Savage and Monk Mayfair.”

“How are you gentlemen.” Apparently he had never heard of Doc Savage nor Monk Mayfair.

“We've come to you about Walter,” Della said. “He's in trouble.”

“Trouble!” Mr. Pogany's eyebrows shot up. “That fine brother of yours! But wait, you must come where it is warm, where you can get dry.” He hesitated, smiled at them boyishly, added, “The basement, I believe, would be best. Really, it's the only place in the house that is decent. You see, I'm not here all of the time, and I have servant trouble the same as everyone has had the last few years, and actually I do most of my living in the basement.” He turned his smile on Doc Savage, asked, “Did you know my hobby is whales and whaling?”

Doc said, “Miss Nelson mentioned it.”

The hobby, Doc decided from the looks of the house, was the man's life. He had never seen the theme of

a man's avocation carried to such extremity; the rooms of the house were successfully replicas of cabins of whaling ships of different eras in the industry. Some of them were quite primitive, others more advanced in efficiency, space, comfort, and, although Doc did not consider himself an expert on whaling, he believed almost everything was authentic. Most of the things, apparently, had been removed bodily from whaling vessels.

"For God's sake!" Monk gasped. They had come to the doorway to the basement.

It was, literally and actually, a gigantic whale's head, mounted with gaping jaws, so that passage to the basement was had through the jaws down into the gullet.

Mr. Pogany giggled. "Jonah's cave," he said.

Doc glanced at Mr. Pogany sharply. He began to understand what Della Nelson had meant by being disturbed by Mr. Pogany. The giggle had been a little erratic. Pogany was eccentric, all right.

The basement was less startling than Doc had expected. It was, he saw, more workshop and laboratory than curio-room. A gas heater was singing softly, and the air was dry, crisp, felt pleasant after their soaking outdoors. The storm was now a faint rushing and roaring and, occasionally, a washing of water against the basement windows.

Pogany dragged three kegs near the gas heater. "Sit down, dry yourselves," he urged. "Now what did you wish to see me about? What has happened to Walter?"

Doc waited for Della Nelson to begin; when she didn't, he started to open the subject himself, changed his mind, and said instead, "Do you have a telephone?" He knew there was a telephone. It was on the stand nearby.

"Why, yes, go right ahead," Pogany urged.

DOC SAVAGE called the police, and identified himself. He gave the address and the telephone number, which was on the base of the phone, hotel fashion—and said, "If there are any developments, call me here." Receiving an assurance this would be done, he hung up.

He swung to Pogany, said, "You have a man named Riis in your employ?"

"Bill Riis? Yes, I have a Bill Riis working on my experimental project."

"Know he was dead? Murdered?"

Pogany looked about as a man should look on learning one of his employees had been murdered. He gasped, "You mean Bill is murdered? I hardly—but I don't understand."

"In Boston. Last night."

"I didn't know that."

"The Boston police," Doc added, "have been trying to contact you about it. By telephone."

Mr. Pogany looked embarrassed. "I don't answer my telephone, as a matter of fact." He started, then went over and threw a small switch on the base of the telephone stand. "It's a good thing I thought to turn the bell on. You see, I installed the switch so the bell won't ring and disturb me on incoming calls if I do not wish." He frowned judiciously, making a quick-change from his air of boyish I-almost-forgot-this.

“The Boston police want to talk to me, you say? About poor Riis, I imagine.”

“Also,” Doc added, “about Walter Nelson.”

“Eh?”

“Who has been kidnapped.”

The tall man's mouth fell open, giving his face the blankest possible in expressions. “Walter—”

“Also about a fat man who was murdered on a plane from Boston,” Doc continued, “and lastly, and far from the least I can assure you, about this seizing of my friend, Ham Brooks, a few minutes ago.”

Pogany's lips made several different shapes, but there was no sound behind them, or at least none escaped.

Monk, clearing his throat angrily, made an almost frightening noise in the stillness. He said, “I'm telling you that, if anything unpleasant happens to Ham Brooks, there is going to be plenty done about it.”

Pogany's head lifted, his neck stiffened. “Are you, by any chance, threatening me? If so, I feel very badly about it, and don't understand why.”

“I never threaten anybody. I make statements of fact,” Monk said. “What do you know about the Riis killing and the rest of this?”

“Nothing. I didn't even know Riis was dead.”

Monk said angrily, “That's not getting us anywhere.”

“Neither,” snapped Pogany, “is your attitude that I'm guilty of something.”

“Both of you,” Doc Savage said, “take it easy. Monk, you're upset and talking rashly. Mr. Pogany, I can assure you this is a serious matter and the thing for you to do is cooperate with us.”

Pogany scowled and compressed his lips. “Certainly I'll cooperate. But I don't like accusations. They irritate me, I don't mind telling you.” He jerked another keg around to face them, planted himself on it, and, staring levelly at them, said, “I'm not a wealthy man, but I'm not a fearful man, either. I was fortunate enough to inherit, as a young man, a fair fortune, enough to enable me to do the things I wanted to do and become, if you want to call it that, an eccentric individual. But I don't mind answering questions, particularly if a trusted employee of mine has been murdered.

“Bill Riis? He was a seafaring man originally, rose as high as first mate on a whaling ship. That's how I first met him. I sailed on his ship once for a vacation trip. Later, Riis became a diver, with headquarters here in New York, then in Boston. He learned something of construction work, particularly dock and bridge operations. I hired him about a year ago.”

“What kind of work did he do for you?”

“Construction work.”

“Are you a marine contractor?”

“No.”

“Just exactly what kind of work did Riis do for you?” Doc asked directly.

“He was in charge of building an experimental project for me.”

“You are,” Doc said, “being evasive.”

“And secretive,” Pogany agreed. “Perhaps I shall explain why, perhaps not.”

Monk grunted explosively, but Doc caught his eye and silenced him with a frown.

“What about Miss Nelson's brother, Walter?” Doc asked.

“A fine young man, trustworthy as you can imagine anyone being. Trustworthy to the point, I am afraid, of being easily taken advantage of. He also worked on the construction project. He was Bill Riis' assistant.”

“A good record with you?”

“Excellent.”

“Do you have any idea why he should be kidnapped?”

“None at all. No more than I have any idea of why Bill Riis should be murdered.” Pogany lifted a hand, added, “By the way, may I know more about this murder? Will you give me details?”

Doc turned to Della Nelson. “Della, can you give him the story?”

She nodded nervously. “I'll try, but I know so little.” She explained about the telephone call from Riis the previous night, when Riis had sounded frightened, and had asked for Walter. “The first we knew about the murder, we saw it in the newspapers. Walter and I were on the way to the—” She stopped suddenly, buried her face in her hands. She was sobbing; for a few moments her shoulders shook convulsively. Then she blurted, “Oh, there's no use lying about it! Walter wouldn't go to the police!”

DOC SAVAGE waited silently. His thoughts were inward—he was realizing suddenly that he wasn't surprised at the information. The girl had not previously said that her brother wouldn't go to the police, but he must have gathered as much from her manner, from, probably, her fear more than anything else.

The fact that her brother wouldn't go to the police explained clearly, it seemed to him, why Della Nelson hadn't gone to the police herself, why she had come, instead, to him for help. She had, of course, heard of him through Renny Renwick, the engineer. Renny, one of a group of five who worked with Doc a great deal, was in South America at the moment, on a private, venture of his own, laying out a processing program for a petroleum concern.

The girl's fright and grief made him uncomfortable, he discovered.

He said, in a tone that would give comfort, he hoped, “From what I've heard of your brother, Miss Nelson, he is a man to whom friendships would mean a great deal, the sort who wouldn't readily accept the fact that a friend might be doing wrong. Don't you think he might have been, or thought he was, protecting someone?”

Della Nelson nodded tearfully. “I think that was it. I think Walter was protecting someone. But that wouldn't make him any less guilty, would it?”

“Probably the police wouldn't think so,” Doc admitted.

“That's why I'm afraid to talk.”

“But you're not dealing with the police now, Miss Nelson. I assist the police, and they coöperate with me, some of the time. Not all of the time, I might add, for as a matter of fact they have had me in jail a couple of times, on occasions when they didn't approve of my methods. I do things my way. My methods are the ones I think will most quickly and thoroughly right wrongs and punish evildoers. In other words, I get justice by methods the police don't think of, or are prevented by law from using.”

“Then if Walter isn't really guilty of anything, and only stupid, you will help him?”

“Certainly. But, if he is guilty, Walter will have to take his medicine.”

She compressed her lips. “I understand that.”

“Did Walter say why he didn't want to go to the police?” Doc demanded.

“No, he wouldn't say.”

“Was he secretive?”

“I—no, he wasn't. He was stubborn. He is the sort who gets bull-headed when someone questions the sincerity of one of his friends. What he did, more than anything, was sulk.”

Doc looked at her intently. “What made *you* suspicious?” he asked.

Della seemed confused. “I—I don't know. That sounds awfully silly, doesn't it? I think, well, for one thing, it was the secrecy that surrounded Walter's work for Mr. Pogany.”

The telephone rang at this point.

Pogany, who was sitting near the telephone, scooped up the instrument and snapped, “Yes! . . . Yes, speaking. Who . . . Yes. . . .” Pogany seemed to be listening to something unpleasant, judging from the behavior of the corners of his mouth and his eyebrows. They registered astonished rage. Suddenly he yelled, “The hell you say! Listen, if you think . . . hello! hello!” He shouted “hello” a few more times, then hung up, wheeled and faced Doc Savage. “That was the damndest thing! You've been threatened!”

“Threatened?”

“That was somebody who said if you didn't take your nose out of the affair, Ham Brooks would be killed,” Pogany said grimly. “It was a man's voice, soft and with a quality that I would call greasy. A smooth, smug—”

“A man with a greasy voice!” cried Della Nelson. “A man with a voice like that called me on the plane and warned me not to go to Doc Savage! Then he let me talk to Walter. That man is one of Walter's kidnappers!”

Monk lunged to the telephone, scooped it up and, after rattling the hook angrily, said, “Operator, there was a call to this phone a moment ago. I want it traced.” He listened intently, then yelled, “I don't give a damn what the company rules are, operator. I want that call traced, and fast, or I'll have half the people in that office up before a federal court for obstructing justice. Including you, smart girl. Now get busy tracing that number.” He put down the phone and said angrily, “If there's anything that makes me tired, it's a smart-aleck!”

Doc Savage concealed some grim amusement at the idea of Monk's sudden disapproval of smart-alecks,

because, when Monk wasn't as worried about Ham's safety as he was now, Monk himself was an inveterate wise-guy.

"Did anyone," demanded Mr. Pogany suddenly, "just hear a sound upstairs?" He was staring, eyes wide with apprehension, at the ceiling.

Chapter VII

DOC SAVAGE, who had not heard a thing, said so. "It must be your imagination, Pogany," he said.

"I doubt it. I have exceptionally keen hearing." Pogany went over and picked up his harpoon gun again. The weapon, Doc Savage noted, would be a particularly horrible one to be shot with, since the harpoon shaft although it did not have a line attached, would undoubtedly be driven through a man's body at short range. Pogany said, "I'm going upstairs and investigate. There! There it was again! Did you hear that?"

There had certainly been a sound. But it could be the product of the storm, which had not yet subsided, Doc thought.

"I believe that was the storm," he remarked. "However, you are familiar enough with your own house, or should be, to recognize strange sounds in it. We'd better investigate."

Pogany leading the way, the blunderbuss of a harpoon gun cradled in his arms, they climbed stairs, moved cautiously through rooms, stopped, listened, then proceeded again with the hunt. They were somewhere in the rear, when Pogany muttered, "I think I'll look in here." He opened a door. Instantly, he emitted a yell, raced to an open window and shoved his head and shoulders through.

"Stop! You! Stop!" he bellowed into the darkness.

He shoved the harpoon gun out of the window, and it let go a terrific blast of noise.

Doc said sharply, "Get out of that window, you idiot! You make a perfect target!" He jerked shut the door into the hall so that the room would be in darkness.

"There was somebody at the window," Pogany said. "He ran."

"Did your shot hit him?"

"I'm afraid not," Pogany said regretfully. "This harpoon gun really isn't very accurate. It was developed by a New Bedford whaler named Cirrus for use from a small boat against small whales. It's one of my favorite pieces. I guess I should have used one of my rifles. There is a rack of them—"

"Are you still hanging your head out of that window?" Doc demanded.

"Yes."

"Well, get back in the room where you won't be an easy target. Did you see the prowler's face?"

"No, just his silhouette. I think he had heard us coming, and was just escaping through the window, either that or he was standing outside. I think I'll go out and see." Before Doc could restrain Pogany, the man had leaped from the window into the rain.

Doc said sharply, "Now you've spoiled any footprints!"

“Damn me for a fool! I may have done that, haven't I?” Pogany grumbled, sounding ashamed of himself. “Here give me a hand back in the window.” He grasped Doc's hand and was hauled up and inside, where he insisted on turning the light on for a moment, then off again. “I wanted to be sure the floor was wet, the way I thought it felt. That means the window was open some time. That fellow probably got into the house through the window before the storm, or during the early part of it.”

WITH a flashlight, which Pogany produced in response to Doc Savage's demand for one, they gave the estate a cautious searching for a prowler. They didn't find one, and the foot prints under the window that had been open were too tangled to give information. It was impossible to tell which prints belonged to Pogany and which to a prowler. The window sill was mud-tracked and there were mud smears on the side of the house, but these could have been made by Pogany.

“I did a dumb thing,” Pogany said gloomily.

A few feet distant a concrete sidewalk passed, so it was impossible to follow any footprints, and the rain was coming down hard enough to have already washed away mud stains.

“Whoever it was got away,” Monk said bitterly.

Pogany cleared his throat. “About all we can do now is to go inside out of the rain. Why don't we do that?”

They returned to the basement workroom. Doc, as a matter of caution, prowled through the place with an eye for spots where a prowler might be hiding. The workshop seemed to be equipped for wood-working and metal-working, and the laboratory was quite elaborate and, somewhat to his surprise, very modern. “That's a nice lab you have in there,” he remarked to Pogany.

“Thank you.” Pogany seemed pleased by the compliment. “I've put in a good deal of time on it, and I'm rather proud of it.”

“I noticed,” Doc added, “that you've been working with whale oil.”

Pogany nodded quickly. “That is exactly what I'm doing, trying to find whether whale oil and other products of the whaling industry have hitherto unknown values which can be developed.” He drew himself up proudly and added, “In other words, I'd like to see the whaling industry revived. Once it was one of the great industries of the nation. I wish I could do something to bring those days back.”

“The hell!” Monk exploded suddenly.

Monk had gone over to the telephone, picked it up and was holding the receiver to his ear. Swiftly, he looked to see whether the cut-off switch was on, and it was, but he threw it to the other side to make sure that it was.

“The hell!” he repeated violently. “The phone wire's dead as a piece of string!”

“Down in the storm,” Pogany suggested.

“Or cut!” Monk exploded. “Maybe somebody didn't want us to get the tracer on that call you got

threatening Ham's life if we didn't lay off! So maybe the wire was cut!"

Pogany looked blankly surprised when this theory first hit him, then he nodded vehemently. "You've got it. That fellow was in the house, and he heard you fellows start tracing the call, so he cut the wire. I wonder if—" Pogany threw up his hands in amazement, added, "Yes, sir, I'll bet you he did! The telephone wire comes in, I remember, near that window where we saw the prowler. Let's go look!"

They went and looked, and the telephone wire was cut near the window.

Monk Mayfair was mystified as to why Doc Savage should seem to suddenly acquire a plan of action at this point, but that was what happened. He listened to Doc with puzzled interest as Doc said, "Monk, you stick here with Miss Nelson, whom we have reason to believe is in danger, since assorted attempts were made on her life."

"Okay," Monk said. He glanced at Miss Nelson, who was quite pretty, and for a moment some of his worry about Ham Brooks lifted, but not for long, for he became grim again.

Doc went to the cab Monk had used and returned with a small two-way radio that was somewhat more compact than the military walkie-talkie. Coming and going through the night, he saw and heard nothing suspicious. The rain had slackened suddenly, and a strong, much colder wind was tumbling the tops of the trees about.

"Keep this radio turned on," Doc said. "Keep it on all the time, and stay close to it, so I can get hold of you in a hurry. If you move to other parts of the house, better carry the radio with you. Things may pop fast, and if they do, I'll want to get hold of you quick."

"I'll glue my ear to it," Monk promised. "Am I supposed to restrain my curiosity?"

Doc pretended not to hear the last question, a sure indication, to Monk, that the query was out of order.

Swinging on Pogany, Doc said sharply, "Pogany, what was the secret project Walter Nelson and Bill Riis were working on for you?"

Pogany received the question with an obstinate scowl. "It was—is—a private matter," he said bluntly.

"You won't tell us?"

"I haven't made up my mind about that yet," Pogany said.

"Right at this instant would be a darned good time to make up your mind," Doc advised sharply.

Pogany shrugged. "If, and when, I decide to tell you, I'll tell you."

"That's final?"

"Right now, it is."

Doc swung to Monk and said grimly, "You will keep Mr. Pogany in custody until he changes his mind. He's not to be put under arrest unless he gets funny, but you can arrest him any time you think it's necessary." Doc threw a grave glance at Pogany. "Don't think Monk can't arrest you, either. He has a New York police special commission, and a state commission, and if that isn't enough, he has a federal commission that entitles him to make arrests."

Pogany had stiffened. He said darkly, "I don't like this a damned bit!"

"I hope you don't," Doc said.

Doc then strode outside. They heard the cab engine start, then the cab departed.

ARTHUR POGANY displayed some signs of rage after Doc Savage had left. He delivered one of the keg seats a kick, then stamped over to a table, swept the litter on it aside to make room and planted his hips on the table top. "Who does that bird think he is?" he demanded angrily.

"Look, mister, you'd better take it easy," Monk advised. "And while you're doing that, you might think seriously about giving us some coöperation."

"Coöperation! What do you expect? I'm letting you in my house—"

"Brother we walked in, you didn't let us in," Monk said. "Better settle down. There's a couple of murders and a kidnapping, two kidnappings, if you count Miss Nelson's brother, in this thing, and that makes it serious. Somebody is going to get electrocuted. And maybe more than one somebody."

Pogany grunted. His fists were planted on the table beside his thighs, and he fell to scowling at nothing in particular. "He's a remarkable looking fellow, at that," he grunted abruptly. "Big, one of the biggest men I ever saw, but not big in a way that makes you think of him as being big. I'll bet he's pretty strong, physically."

"I don't think they come any stronger," Monk agreed. "But brawn is one of Doc's minor assets. Don't kid yourself for a minute that his thinking is ordinary in any way."

"You think any of this makes sense to him?" Pogany demanded.

"Any of what?"

"This—" Pogany spread his hands with a quick nervous all-this-crazy-stuff gesture. "The murders, kidnappings, this sinister skulking about."

Monk pretended to have an opinion already formed on this point. Actually he did not know whether Doc Savage was making much sense out of the situation; Monk himself certainly wasn't. But Monk believed, knowing Doc well, that Doc had wanted to give the impression that the thing was in the bag.

"Doc's got it in the bag," Monk said quickly.

"Huh!"

"It's like when you're hunting quail, and you've fired your shot. It just takes a moment for the quail to fall, then slightly more trouble finding the bird where it fell. That's the way this—" He paused, frowning at the radio.

The radio was making queer sounds. It was giving forth scrapings, gruntings, fierce hard noises. Suddenly Doc Savage's voice said distinctly, but some distance from the microphone: "That should hold both of you! Now, get away if you can!"

Monk snatched up the little radio and bellowed, "Doc! did you find Ham?"

"Hello, Monk. No, not Ham, but things are shaping up nicely. Are you still okay?"

"Nothing at all has happened here," Monk said hurriedly. "But what about Ham? It sounds as if you've

got two prisoners there. How come? Who are they? What—what—”

“Hold the explanations a minute, Monk,” Doc said. “There may be another one around here. I’m going to go look. In the meantime, I’ll toss these two in the cab.”

MONK cut out the microphone of his outfit, but left the receiver on, and growled an unnecessary, “Don’t make any noise!” to the other two. He crouched with his ear close to the radio and, although it wasn’t needed because Della Nelson and Pogany could also hear, he began firing a running translation of what was happening.

After various scuffling noises, a hard grunt, and a slam of the car door, Monk declared, “He’s locking them in the cab!”

“You mean,” Della gasped, “that he’ll go off and leave them there? Isn’t that—”

“Risky? Not a bit. That cab is a special job, like Doc’s own car, and once the doors are locked, it would take a welding torch to get out. The glass is armor plate half an inch—”

A heavy voice, guttural, angry, said, “You stupid damned fool!”

A second voice said, “Oh, shut up! Don’t try to lay the blame on me!”

Both voices were muffled, distorted. It sounded as if the speakers were in the back of the cab on the floor, while the radio was under the dashboard up front. It occurred to Monk that he probably wouldn’t know the pair by their voices if he should meet them. But it might not make any difference.

The two voices discussed their predicament briefly. “This is a hell of a fix,” one said.

“Just keep your mouth shut, and everything will be all right.”

“I don’t see how the hell—”

“He won’t dare do anything to us. Ham Brooks will be knocked off if he does.”

“Yeah, but what about the other?”

“What other?” the first man demanded. “We ain’t got nothing to worry about.”

“But what if that Walter Nelson guy—”

“Oh, for God’s sake!” the first man exploded. “Now I see what’s eating you! Didn’t you know Nelson had talked?”

“Huh? You say he did! By God, you don’t mean it?” The voice sounded incredulously delighted.

“Sure did.”

“When?”

“I don’t know, but not long ago. They got the word to me, and I forgot to tell you. In fact, I didn’t have time before that damned Doc Savage—”

“This puts an entirely different color on the whole thing. All we gotta do now is sit tight, let our pals clean the whole thing up.”

“But what about our own necks?”

“If Savage doesn't get his head shot off first, he'll have to let us go to save Ham Brooks. That old guy with the whales—”

“Pssst! Here comes somebody!”

The pair fell silent. Presently the car door opened, slammed; in a moment, Doc Savage's voice said, “Monk?”

“Yeah?”

“Anything with you yet?”

“No,” Monk said excitedly. “But those guys were talking while you were gone.” Briefly, but missing no essential details, Monk repeated what had been said. “That help you any?”

“Of course it does,” Doc replied. “It proves these guys know plenty. I'll work them over, and contact you later.”

The radio went off the air.

Monk suddenly began staring in amazement at Arthur Pogany. “What's the matter with *you*?” Monk demanded.

Pogany breathed inward and outwardly hoarsely several times, then blurted, “This puts a different complexion on the whole thing.” He grabbed Monk's arm. “You gotta help me!” he gasped.

Monk said, “Wait a minute,” and switched on the radio again, began trying to get Doc Savage. He was not successful. There was no response over the air from Doc. “He's not hearing me,” Monk decided. He swung briskly on Pogany, after switching off the radio, and demanded, “Now, what's the matter with you?”

DOC SAVAGE had heard Monk's call, but had not answered deliberately; now, however, when Monk switched the other set off the air, the bronze man frowned doubtfully. “Monk must be excited,” he decided. “I wish he had left his transmitter turned on.”

Police Sergeant Ellis was grinning expansively. The Sergeant was proud of himself. “I sure missed the boat when I entered the Police Academy instead of some actor's school,” he remarked.

Doc assured the Sergeant that he had done fine. Doc was disturbed about the radio being off.

There were no prisoners. There had not, at any time, been two prisoners, or any prisoners at all. There had only been Doc Savage and Sergeant Ellis, and they had, as the Sergeant was complimenting himself, done an excellent job of acting. At least Doc hoped so. He was quite sure about microphone characteristics, and he was sure that the voices of himself and Sergeant Ellis, as they had gone out over the air, had not been recognizable as definite individuals.

Doc was considerably less certain about the results. He had frankly, gambled, taken the longest of chances, basing his plan on certain intangible feelings about Mr. Pogany. One of the feelings, the most real one, was that Mr. Pogany was a liar.

Pogany had quite frankly withheld some information, making no secret about it. Hadn't Pogany said he

wasn't, right now anyway, going to tell them anything about the secret construction work on which Walter Nelson and the murdered Riis had been engaged? That was definite. It wasn't secretive. It was blunt refusal. The secret project was Pogany's business, Pogany had said, and if he didn't choose to tell them about it, they could just jump in the lake. That was a natural and understandable attitude, if an aggravating one, and it wasn't what disturbed Doc.

About Mr. Pogany, Doc wasn't so sure. The man was an eccentric, certainly. He carried his hobby, fondness for whaling relics and atmosphere, rather far, it seemed to Doc. The laboratory in the basement, though, had indicated that Mr. Pogany was no dope. That had been a very good laboratory, modern as anything, and not at all crackpot, for it was full of very good apparatus and showed common sense and planning. When one knew about laboratories, one could tell those things about another man's laboratory. Doc had one, a good one, reputedly one of the best in existence and, although it wasn't devoted to whale experiments, he knew an excellent laboratory when he saw one.

So Pogany puzzled Doc, because Pogany was a crackpot, and yet he wasn't a crackpot. And there were other things, small things, nuances really, which bothered him, and which, lumped together, had led him to decide on an experiment.

He had gotten hold of Sergeant Ellis, and they had rigged up the little radio drama between two imaginary captives. He wished Monk would get back on the air with the walkie-talkie, though.

And presently Monk did.

Monk said, "Get up here, Doc, if you can. This guy Pogany has been holding hot stuff out on us."

Chapter VIII

SUNLIGHT, brilliant but somehow without heat, fell on the cruising plane and over a bleak country below. The plane, a five-passenger cabin craft powered with a single engine, was the property of Arthur Pogany. He had insisted they use his ship. "There are guards," he had explained, "who would fire on any other ship."

Doc Savage frowned down at the bleak land beneath, reflecting that there were remarkably few passable spots for a forced landing. He noticed that Monk shared his feelings about the terrain.

"The engine seems to be all right," he told Monk dryly. "It hasn't missed a lick."

"It just has to miss one lick, and I'll go right through the top of the cabin," Monk assured him. "Why the hell we listened to Pogany, and didn't take a two-engined plane of our own . . ." He fell silent.

They both knew very well why they had listened to Pogany, there had been no other very convenient choice. They had not yet given Pogany an inkling that there weren't any two prisoners. Monk himself didn't know this yet, for Doc hadn't dared tell him, lest Monk betray so much disappointment that the scheme would be betrayed to Pogany. Monk, thinking they were hot on the trail of Ham's captors, and that two of Ham's kidnappers were already in custody, was in high spirits. It would shock him intensely to discover it was a hoax. Had anyone but Ham been involved, Doc would have taken the chance and told Monk, but in the case of Ham he didn't dare. The thing had been bothering him.

"I'm going to see how much more there is of this," Doc said. He leaned forward, tapped Pogany's shoulder and demanded, "When do we get into decent country?"

Pogany turned his head. "We don't."

“How much farther is it?”

“Two hours. There'll be a few lakes later on, in case we have a forced landing, if that's what's bothering you. “

“What is bothering me,” Doc said, “is a story out of you that makes sense.”

Pogany gave him a black look. “I'm not happy. I'm absolutely not happy, dammit, about taking you up here. I'm doing so only because if Walter Nelson told them where it is, they'll be here.”

Doc said, “What conceivable reason makes you think that, once we're there, we won't use our eyes and see what you've been up to?”

“I doubt if using your eyes will tell you much.”

“Why not?”

“You'll find out,” Pogany said evasively. “Listen, why do you keep riding me? I'm cooperating with you, ain't I?”

“All you're doing,” Doc said, “is trying to rake your own chestnuts out of the fire. And that, in case you get in trouble, won't entitle you to much consideration.”

Pogany scowled. “I know what I'm doing.”

“Brother, you'd better know,” Doc Savage said.

MONK MAYFAIR had something on his mind, Doc Savage saw when he swung back into his seat. Monk was occupying the rear seat, and he caught Doc's eye, then dropped his own glance meaningfully toward his knees. Doc saw that Monk had the portable radio between his knees, well out of sight where Arthur Pogany probably hadn't noticed it.

Doc leaned over, demanded, “What are you excited about? Some trace of Ham?”

“We're being followed.”

“Eh?”

Monk explained, “This guy Pogany isn't going to haul me off into the wilderness without leaving a trail. This radio hasn't much range, but it can be changed over to the frequency the Canadian Mounted Police use, and, when we're close enough to a police station, I can work them. I've worked three so far, the last one about a hundred miles back. The idea of doing that was twofold: to leave a trail, and to check with them as often as I could about Ham. I asked each of them to contact New York and find out whether Ham or any more of the gang had been found, and to get the news to me.”

“That was a good idea. But what about this plane?”

“Two-motored, small job, apparently a charter ship. Anyway, it's not an army nor an airline job. I asked them to check port of entries—“ Monk stopped; his radio was making small sounds. He bent over the instrument cautiously, and began speaking.

Della Nelson, apparently in on an arrangement to help him, immediately lifted an aeronautical chart she had been studying at intervals, holding it like a newspaper so that Pogany couldn't view Monk's activities.

Monk engaged in some kind of a conference by radio with the Mounted Police station, then again leaned forward to tell Doc, "They say the plane following us never checked in at a port of entry, but did land at a field to refuel, and there was some kind of a row about their papers not being in order. In fact, they didn't have any entry papers for Canada. Anyway, they got their load of gasoline, and took off again. So the airport manager reported the illegal ship. He was mad about the way he had been talked to. That led to some checking; the airport man had the NC number of the ship, and from the CAA in Washington, they got the dope on the plane. It is owned by a Carter Flying Service, Mineola, Long Island, which operates a charter service. It is licensed, a check with the Federal Communications Commission got this information, for both two-way radio and commercial radar, the last explaining why they have been able to follow us through some of the soup we've been flying in. They're doing it with radar, probably using one of the outfits that were released after the war."

Doc whispered, "It sounds like a plane that was chartered to follow us."

"But how the hell did they get a ship chartered so quick? You remember Pogany took us from his house right to the seaplane base, and we took off."

"The simplest answer," Doc suggested, "would be that they already had the plane chartered and ready."

"Ready to follow this one, you mean?"

"Why not? Pogany has obviously used this plane to come up here before. They might have known that."

Monk said that was reasonable, and why hadn't he thought of it. He wanted to know, "Are we gonna tell Pogany about this plane trailing us?"

"Does Mr. Pogany tell us everything?" Doc countered.

"I get you," Monk said, grinning.

A PECULIAR thing presently happened to the horizon ahead of the plane. It seemed to sink, slowly at first, then more rapidly, until it was actually far below where the horizon should have been. Alarmed, Della Nelson pointed out this phenomenon.

"We're approaching the seacoast," Doc Savage explained. "Haze conditions make the sea appear almost the same color as the sky, and what you think is the horizon is really the coast." He peered out thoughtfully, added, "And a very bleak one it is."

In a few moments, Pogany turned his head and yelled, "I don't suppose it would do any good to ask you fellows not to look. So go ahead, strain your eyes all you want to." He sounded unpleasant.

Monk said, "We will, you can be sure of that!"

The plane, throttled back slightly, had been losing altitude slowly, and now, at an altitude of about two thousand feet, it made a large cautious circuit which led Doc to decide they were going to approach a small inlet from a seaward direction. This proved correct. Once out over the sea, Pogany dropped the ship quite low, not more than two hundred feet, and brought it in toward the inlet. There was strain on his face.

"If you hear anything hitting the plane, anything that could be bullets, say so and we'll get away in a hurry," he said grimly.

“Who is going to shoot at us?” Doc demanded.

“The outfit who kidnapped your friend Ham Brooks, if they're here ahead of us.”

Pogany was frightened.

The inlet, Doc Savage decided suddenly, was going to be mystifying because of what wasn't there. Not that it was nakedly uninhabited; it wasn't, for in orderly procession on the south shore were three wooden buildings, the first about fifty feet by twenty, the second some thirty by ten, and the third was a shack. Across the inlet mouth, Doc saw, there was some kind of a procession of posts, apparently steel. A fence, or a net, he decided. It was about two hundred and fifty yards in length, and closed the inlet mouth completely.

The inlet itself was wider, and quite long, nearly a mile, but it was very crooked, making three dog-leg turns so that it was unsafe, except under the most favorable conditions, for a seaplane landing or take-off.

No cliffs, not even thick timber growth surrounded the inlet, the hills being instead low and rolling and covered with a scrubby growth typical of the bush country. Spruce, most of it.

They were not shot at.

Just when it began to seem there was going to be no sign of life, a man dashed out of the smallest building and threw himself prone on the ground. Astonished, Monk said, “For God's sake, why'd he do that? Was he shot, or something?”

But evidently it was a pre-arranged signal to indicate all was well, because the tight lines of fear and worry loosened out of Arthur Pogany's face.

“We beat 'em here,” Pogany said. “Now we can go on to the lake and land.”

Doc demanded, “What kind of an establishment is that down there?”

Pogany looked at him coldly. “Telling you that wasn't in the bargain.”

Doc said nothing. But he did move into the seat beside Pogany, behind the other control wheel, in order to be ready to do something if it seemed they weren't making a safe landing.

The lake, really a continuation of the stream which fed into the inlet, was not wide, but it was long and straight enough for a landing, and lay with the prevailing wind direction.

Pogany made a properly cautious approach, first flying quite low the length of the lake, dragging the surface in a wary search for floating logs or large boughs. Finding none, he did a gentle turn, a standard one hundred and eighty degree approach, and made a very good landing. He was particularly skillful at taxiing the ship after it was on the water, an operation which required some knowledge of sailing. He cut the engine and scrambled out to make the ship fast ashore.

Monk whispered, “Wonder what he'll say when he finds out a plane followed us?”

“Something interesting, probably,” Doc said.

THE lake apparently did not fluctuate much in level, because they discovered there were tie-down stakes on the beach where Pogany had grounded the plane, and, farther up the beach, a rough shelter, partly natural and partly manmade, had been rigged for the plane. It had no roof, but it would be effective.

When they had tied down the plane, Pogany climbed back in the cabin. There was a series of clanging sounds, metallic gnashings.

“Hey! Damn! Stop that!” Monk bellowed.

He was a trifle too late, because Arthur Pogany had alighted from the plane carrying Monk's portable radio, and dashed it down on a stone. The radio shattered.

“You won't,” Pogany said, “use this gadget to inform anyone else where this place is.” He ground his heel violently on the wreckage of the walkie-talkie to make sure it was demolished.

Monk yelled, “That was *my* radio!”

Pogany sneered at him. “And it was *my* idea!” he said.

Monk's small eyes got a little larger, a little more bleak, and Doc started to shout a warning to Pogany, but Monk hit the man before he could get it out. It was not a blow calculated to render Pogany senseless; it was a slap across the face, hard enough to knock the man down, and stir all the rage and indignity the man had. Monk said, “That was my hand. How did you like it?” He waited alertly for Pogany to get up.

Doc, watching Pogany's eyes, saw the man go cunning and weigh his chances against Monk, and find them slim. Pogany did not get up. He was not afraid; he had simply decided there was no sense in getting knocked down again. Doc was suddenly convinced that Pogany could think coldly and rationally in a crisis, while battered by pain and indignation. Such an ability threw a new facet of Pogany's character to the light. The man was an eccentric, but he wasn't a flighty emotionalist.

Wheeling, Doc thrust his head into the plane cabin. He saw bad news.

“Pogany put the plane transmitter out of operation, too,” Doc reported to Monk.

Monk said that Pogany was a so-and-so and mentioned specifically what grade. Monk peered into the plane himself. “I'm no hot-shot on radios,” he said, “but the guy was smart enough not to rip apart some wires we might splice together again. He jammed a screwdriver in through a knockout hole and busted the innards.” Monk reached in, grasped the radio transmitter under the dash and shook it, listening intently. Over the whining of the turn-and-bank gyroscope which had not yet coasted to a stop, he heard broken glass clatter. “He busted some of the tubes!”

Pogany got cautiously to his feet. “I wish somebody would do the same to your head!” he said viciously, and held himself ready to run for his life if necessary.

Monk's head came up. He was listening to something Doc had heard also. The other plane was coming.

Chapter IX

ARTHUR POGANY'S head went back, astonishment plucked at the corners of his mouth and shaped it into an almost rectangular hole, his breathing stopped. Fright, disbelief, amazement gathered behind his breath and drove it out explosively. “A plane!” he yelled. “My God, who . . .”

Monk said grimly, “Doc, one of us better get our own plane in the air. Tied down here, it's a sitting duck

for them.”

“No,” Doc Savage said.

Pogany shrieked, “You know who's in that plane? Who?”

“The murderers of Riis and the fat man on the plane,” Doc guessed. “And, if we're lucky, Ham Brooks and Walter Nelson may be aboard.”

“How the hell do you know that?” Fresh terror blanched Pogany's face.

Doc demanded, “Did you know they've had a plane chartered and waiting for days to follow you in case you flew up here?”

“I've suspected—” Pogany broke off and glared at them wordlessly.

Monk said urgently, “If I get our plane off I might out-maneuver them and even force them down.” He had realized he couldn't force the other plane to crash if Ham Brooks and Walter Nelson might be aboard. He finished, “Anyway, I could save our own ship!”

Doc shook his head.

“I want that gang on the ground here,” he explained. “I want them tied up in a package, where we can deal with them.”

He ran to the plane, found a pair of pliers, and opened an engine inspection port. “Get out of sight,” he urged the others. “They'll be over in a minute, and if they don't see us, maybe they won't destroy the plane. Probably they won't.” He had an arm inside the engine housing, and the pliers made grinding and clicking noises. “Monk, see that they get out of view.” He brought out his hand, holding a critical piece off the dual ignition system. “They won't fly the plane for a while, at least.” Carrying the distributor parts, he dashed for the underbrush.

Arthur Pogany was swearing bitterly.

“Keep going,” Doc said. “I'll tell you when to take shelter. It sounds as if they're flying low, and we've got to be under cover when they come. Better duck now! Under that thicket!”

The ground was soft, low, mucky in places, they crouched on their knees and their knees became damp. Suddenly, from almost underfoot a snowshoe rabbit shot out of hiding and away with wild haste, and it startled all of them. Della Nelson cried out sharply, then looked ashamed, and said, “I'm so on edge! Do you think Walter is really on the plane?”

Doc said there was no certainty. He was listening to the loud chorus of two engines in the sky somewhere, and suddenly he said, “Here they come! Don't make the slightest move, anyone. Even if you think you might be in plain view of the plane for a moment, don't move. It's movement that draws attention.”

THE plane, two-motored, all-metal, equipped with floats, came bawling overhead. In the middle of its passing, Monk, bellowing at the top of his voice, said, “That's the one. That's the one that followed us. I remember the NC number.”

Pogany jumped violently, screamed, “Shut up, fool! They'll hear.” Then he looked sickly foolish, realizing

how little chance there was of anyone in the plane hearing a voice from the ground.

The plane thundered on, and it was evident the ship was going to make a circle around and over the inlet.

“Get going,” Doc said. “Toward the inlet.”

Pogany, his face bluish-colored with rage, started to confront Monk, but decided Monk was too quick-tempered, and got in front of Doc Savage. He swore violently, said, “Dammit, if you knew that plane was following, why didn't you tell me?”

“What would you have done?”

“I wouldn't have landed, of course. I'd have led them away from here!”

“That,” Doc said, “is what we supposed. So we didn't tell you.” Doc gestured sharply. “Get going.”

They made headway with all the speed possible, and going became easier when they reached a path that, Doc saw with some surprise, had obviously been opened with a bulldozer less than, judging from the appearance, a year before. Probably during the early summer.

“This lead to the inlet?” Doc demanded.

“Of course!” Pogany snapped.

“How many men have you there?”

“Three.”

“Will they fight?”

“How the hell do I know? Yes, I suppose they'll have to. Yes, I know they will, when they find out Bill Riis was murdered and Walter Nelson kidnapped.”

“They're men who worked with young Nelson and Riis?”

“Yes—uh—yes, that's right. They worked together.”

“Why are you so hesitant?”

Pogany glared and said, “Damn you, if you think either of those three men will tell you what I've been doing up here, you're mistaken!”

“Right now,” Doc said sharply, “my interest isn't in you and your secret doings as much as it is in saving the necks of Ham Brooks and Miss Nelson's brother, and seeing that those murderers get what's coming to them.” Doc wheeled on Monk.

“Monk,” Doc continued, “you and Miss Nelson go on to the inlet with Pogany. I think that plane is coming back to land. If it does, I'm going to try to get to it and do something to it to keep it from taking off again. If I can do that, we'll have those fellows cornered.”

Pogany snorted and said, “Who will have who cornered? When you've got a lion by the tail, who's got who?”

Doc ignored him.

“You want me to watch this guy close?” Monk demanded, indicating Pogany.

“Watch him,” Doc agreed. “And keep your eyes open.”

THEY left Doc Savage crouched under a sprawling runt pine and ran openly on the path. The plane was far to the north now and low enough that the occupants would not be able to see them. They made for the inlet which had the fence across the seaward end. Pogany, long-legged and driven by worry, began to travel faster than Miss Nelson could manage, and did not, after Monk had requested him twice, slow down. Monk demanded angrily, “You want to get slammed in the back of the neck with a rock? If not, slow down!”

Della Nelson said, “You could leave me—”

“Nobody's in a hurry but this guy,” Monk told her. Pogany had decreased his pace.

Presently the path climbed sharply, mounting one of several low ridges which Monk knew lay between themselves and the inlet. The plane was now approaching from the north and, looking back, Monk discovered that, by climbing a small rocky ridge nearby, they would be able to see the lake.

“We better stop moving, or they might see us,” he said. “Let's get over there on those rocks, where we can see what goes on.”

They moved, quite cautious about showing themselves to those in the plane, and clambered up the rocky summit. As Monk had surmised, they could now see the lake, their own plane, and most of the shoreline.

The other plane, coming in quite low, made a dragging survey of the lake, came on and passed not far to the right and not very high.

“They got two of the windows open,” Monk pointed out, “and two guys have guns shoved out of them. They're our party, all right.”

“You have no idea what you let yourself in for, decoying those men up here,” Pogany said bitterly. “They're dangerous.”

“I thought you didn't know them?”

Pogany winced. “I know they're dangerous. Didn't they kill Riis?”

Monk eyed the long, bony whaling expert intently.

“I think,” Monk said, “you still know a lot more than you've told us.”

Pogany did not meet Monk's suspicious eye.

THE two-motored plane looked awkward because of the floats. One seldom saw floats on such a large plane, which made it seem more unusual. It made a swing and a careful landing pattern that brought it, nose into what wind there was, down on the lake surface. The landing was not nearly as good as Pogany's had been, for there were two bad bounces and a swerve which made Monk gasp. But the ship got straightened out. “Pilot's nervous,” Monk muttered. He was nervous himself. He intended to stay right here until they beached the ship, in an effort to learn whether Ham Brooks was aboard.

The plane taxied with considerable caution up and down in front of the spot on the beach where their own plane stood. It did this twice. Then he nosed inshore, but the pilot did not beach the floats, merely

sending the ship instead to within a few yards of shore, where he held it by using considerable skill.

The cabin door flew open. No one appeared for a few moments, and when a man did come out, he had his hands in the air.

“Oh, for God's sake! That's Ham!” Monk croaked.

Another man was getting out of the cabin also, this one with a gun which he was using to menace Ham Brooks.

Pogany said, “You're crazy! At this distance, you can't tell whether that is your friend or not!”

Monk had just had the same horrible fear himself. He swung his gaze back, strained his eyes, and decided that, even at such a distance, he could distinguish the individual as Ham. In fact the man was wearing the sort of clothes Ham had been wearing last night. That was all he decided at the moment.

A rock, wielded with vicious force, struck the back of Monk's head, and he gave one convulsive movement, an outflinging of both arms and both legs that brought him flat on the rock, and after that he was motionless.

“Oh!” Della Nelson gasped.

“Pipe down, lady,” Pogany told her. He hefted the rock with which he had struck Monk. “You take it easy and do what I tell you, or you'll get batted over the head too.”

Della stared at him wordlessly.

Pogany glanced at Monk. “If he wasn't senseless, I'd like to whack him again. I'll teach him to go around slapping people.” He touched his own face. “You saw what he did to me, didn't you?” he asked bitterly. “You think I was going to take that?”

Della made a sudden dive for Monk's prone figure. Her intention was to get Monk's gun out of his clothing, and use it to threaten Pogany. She knew where Monk carried the gun and, by moving with desperate haste, she had it in her hands before Pogany was upon her.

Pogany was much stronger than she had thought, and faster, and all her desperation was futile. She lost, presently, possession of the weapon.

Della expected to be struck over the head instantly. But she wasn't. Pogany, grunting in triumph, arose and stepped back with the gun.

“You're sharp,” he told Della grudgingly. “I like a woman who stays sharp when the going gets tough. The women back in the old whaling days used to be like that. A whaler needed that kind of a woman.”

He glanced toward the lake. Ham Brooks was now ashore, his hands in the air, the other man close behind him. It was clear that Ham was being used as a shield by the man who was scouting the shore for an ambush.

“You stick with Monk,” Pogany ordered. “And I mean, sit right there beside him, where I can watch you both.”

Della complied.

Pogany clambered down from the rocks and moved a few yards, then hesitated and glanced back, seemingly debating whether to leave Della alone with Monk, or to force her to accompany him. He

changed his mind about both alternatives, and decided to try something else.

Plucking a wide blade of grass, he stretched it between his two thumbs as the edges of the thumbs were pressed tightly together, placed the arrangement to his lips, and made, quite expertly, an imitation of a wild duck.

He got an answer. And, not more than three minutes later, two men appeared. They came along the trail from the direction of the inlet.

Pogany hailed the two newcomers with relief. "I figured you were about due," he said. He indicated Monk Mayfair's unconscious body. "I got a job for you. Don't let those guys in the plane see you, whatever you do."

Chapter X

DOC SAVAGE, lying in a grass thicket almost at the lake's edge, watched Ham Brooks being herded around and used as a shield by the man with the gun. No one else had as yet gotten out of the plane. There were two men at the windows with rifles ready, and Doc was close enough to be sure that they were two of the pair who had staged the kidnapping of Ham at Arthur Pogany's place.

The man with Ham, keeping his gun always jammed against Ham's back, was the would-be murderer of Della Nelson: South. That made three of them and Ham, but there were others. There was a younger man. Doc suddenly realized the latter was also holding his hands above the plane, but seated inside the cabin. He must be Della Nelson's brother, Walter. The young man who was too trustful. That made five. There were, Doc decided, three others and the pilot.

Nine had come in the plane, then. Counting out Ham Brooks and possibly young Walter Nelson, that left seven of the enemy. The pilot of the plane might be discounted, too, but Doc wasn't sure, and there was nothing to justify such an idea.

Doc waited patiently. He intended to get to that plane and fix it so it couldn't be flown. If he could do that, it would be hard on their morale.

South herded Ham back to the beach. He then faced the brush, lifted his voice and yelled, "You guys start anything, and we'll kill Brooks and Nelson first thing!" He listened, apparently hopeful of getting a reply, but when none came, he turned to the plane, being careful still to keep behind Ham and close to him. "Unload!" he yelled.

They brought the plane close inshore and, after conferring, decided to anchor it in very shallow water in preference to beaching it. They did this, having some trouble finding large rocks which would serve as anchors.

There was a conference over whether or not to burn the other plane. South favored it, but was out-argued by the others, and they decided to disable the plane temporarily by moving it to where the water was a couple of feet deep, and letting the floats fill. Thus the ship could not be taken off, but the floats could be emptied by considerable hand pumping so that the plane might be used later.

Getting away from the ships occupied about fifteen minutes, and two men, one evidently the pilot of the ship, were left behind. The others tramped off, quite cautiously, using Ham and Walter Nelson as shields, in the direction of the inlet.

"Keep your eyes open," South bellowed back at the two men he was leaving with the plane. "We don't

wanta get marooned up here. Remember that, Buck.”

It was that last shout from South which really decided Doc on his course of action; it gave him the idea of trying something. He changed his position, crawling cautiously, running when he dared and when the concealment was good enough, until he reached a spot near the plane, where he paused, lying in weeds, spent a few moments fixing South's voice tone and mannerisms of speech in his mind. Particularly South's shouting voice.

He even did a little practicing, using a conversational imitation, which was easier, and saying, “Hold that bush back,” and, “Here, bring him this way.” Then, limbered up, he lifted his voice to a shout:

“Buck!” he yelled. “Come here, both you guys! Give us a hand.”

Buck's surprised shout: “What's the matter?”

“We got one of them here. Come on and help us carry him. Hurry up!”

Buck, having no reason to suspect any voice that sounded so much like South's, was taken in. He could be heard ordering the pilot to accompany him, and don't stop to argue about it, an indication that they were having some difficulty with the pilot. The latter, by now, must know that he was involved with kidnapping, if they hadn't told him some cock-and-bull story; in any event he would be suspicious. Doc wondered if he knew about the murders.

Doc was now crawling to the left, trying to synchronize any sounds he made with the movements of the man Buck and the pilot. Doc watched them disappear into the shrubbery. He lost no time. Crawling as far as there was any concealment, Doc lifted his head, could not see Buck, and came to his feet and ran to the plane.

He knew what he was going to do to disable the craft. He was familiar with the construction of the floats. There was a hatch that could be removed by hand; he got that off; there was a drain-cock so that any water that had leaked into the floats could be released. He opened that, unscrewed the cap part of the thing completely and pocketed it.

Buck was yelling, “Where the hell are you guys?”

Doc waded ashore and was very careful about silence until he reached the brush. Then, lifting and deepening his voice, making it as powerful as possible, he said, “Pilot, did you know they murdered a man named Riis in Boston? Did you know they killed a man on the Boston-to-New York plane? And they kidnapped those two men they have with them?”

When Doc paused, Buck blurted, “For cripes sake!”

Doc added, “The police are here now, have a trap laid for them, and all of you are quite likely to get hung. Did you know that, pilot?”

Thereafter, Doc moved rapidly. He could hear Buck crashing through the brush at full speed, headed for the lake shore. He heard Buck, after he came out on the beach, yell, “Who the hell said that? Where'd ya go?”

Doc noted that the pilot had not returned to the beach with Buck, and listening intently, he decided that certain small sounds were made by the pilot creeping off through the bush growth. The pilot was in flight! Doc immediately altered his plans and decided, for the benefit of what information he could get, to see what he could do about cornering the pilot.

From the beach, a burst of profanity. Buck had found that the plane was sinking. Doc could hear him splashing about, heard him bellow suddenly, "Help me! Dammit, Red, hurry up! Help me! This damned plane's sinking!" A bit later he cursed some more, said, "By God, they took the lid off the drain valve!"

The pilot did not respond.

DOC SAVAGE used the simplest method for waylaying the pilot. He guessed the fellow's probable course through the brush, got ahead of him and waited. The first time it didn't work, but the second time he was able to step out suddenly, so that the pilot all but crashed into him.

"Don't start anything," he advised grimly.

The man was burly without being big, a thickly fleshed young man with a flushed skin, very blue eyes and a small trick moustache and a tangled thatch of hair, both the reddest Doc had ever seen on a man.

Doc, watching him intently, decided the pilot didn't have a gun. He had his own hand in his coat pocket, a finger outthrust menacingly. He said, "My name is Savage."

"Yes, I guess that's right," Red muttered. "Yeah, I heard them describe you." He went silent, looking uncomfortable.

"Better lift your hands, until I go over you for a gun," Doc suggested.

Red complied. He seemed eager, in a frightened uneasy way, to establish his neutral intentions. Suddenly, as if he had just thought of it, he asked, "You know a TWA pilot named Ginson?"

"Al Ginson?"

"Yeah. I know Al. He's a half-way friend of mine, and I wish to God he was here now. He could vouch that I'm not a guy who would go into a thing like this with his eyes open."

Doc made no comment. He finished a quick, but sufficiently thorough search of Red, and found no weapon other than a small pocket knife which he did not disturb. There was slightly under five hundred dollars in currency in Red's billfold, along with cards that said Red's name was Terrence John Rosoff, and that he had a commercial pilot's license with endorsements for almost all horsepower and instrument and instructor's ratings.

Red said anxiously, "You figure I'm a crook? I'm not. Al would tell you I may be dumb, but I'm not on the shady side."

"You're in a bad spot."

"I know that. You want to hear how it happened? Or maybe we'd better get away from here before that Buck finds us. That Buck is a bad baby."

"Any objections to going to the inlet?" Doc demanded.

“I'd rather go to a safer place, but whatever you say.”

“Well go to the inlet.”

RED was in good condition, and gave his story as they walked rapidly, first waiting until they were out of earshot off Buck. From Buck they heard one more explosion of bitter profanity, and after that nothing.

“I operate a charter business, see,” Red said. “A guy comes to me a week ago, that guy they're calling South, and says will I do some work for a detective agency? I say it depends on the work, and is it up and up? He says the detective agency has a rich client who has a wife who is playing around with another rich guy who takes her on plane trips to his place up in Canada. They want to use my plane to follow the couple and bring along the rich guy with the cheating wife and some witnesses.”

“You swallowed that?” Doc asked dryly.

Red winced. “They made it sound more reasonable than I'm telling it. This South bird had some cards that said private detective on them, and he laid cash on the barrelhead for the job. I guess I was a sucker, because that was good enough for me. I never did wake up to the truth until we were following you up here.”

“You have radar on the plane?”

“Sure. That's the best-equipped charter plane in the country. I was in the Air Force during the war, and got used to radar there. It's a mighty handy gadget when you can't follow the radio beams as you do in commercial work, and sometimes get all mugged up in weather and want to know what's below. At times like that—”

“Aren't you getting off the subject?” Doc asked.

Red said he guessed he was. “You wanta know what I know about these guys?” he asked.

“That's right.”

“You'll be disappointed.”

“Not,” Doc said, “if I get the truth out of you.”

“You'll get that.” Red promptly fell flat on his face. He had hooked his toe over a root. He looked alarmed at the noise he had made, and said hastily, “Them guys are dangerous. If they hear us—”

“They're more than a quarter of a mile ahead of us,” Doc said. “Stop and listen a minute. You can hear them.” After they had halted and Red caught, quite faintly, sounds ahead, he muttered, “You've got damned good ears!”

“Get on with your story. What do you know about this thing?”

“Okay. There's a guy named Pogany. Know him?”

“I know Pogany. He came up with us. That's his plane back there.”

“They got it figured that way. This Pogany knows all about whales.”

“I know that, too.”

“This Pogany has got something to sell. You know what it is?” Red looked anxiously at Doc Savage, and

rammed his face into a low-hanging limb while thus occupied.

“Do you know?”

“Naw, I don't. I wish to cripes I did. It must be valuable as hell, because it's what all the fuss is about.” Red pondered for a few moments. “I think it's something that's got to do with whales,” he said. “That cooks me. A whale is just a big fish, and why would they stir up such a muss over a fish?”

“You don't know what Pogany has to sell?”

“Naw.”

“What *do* you know?” Doc demanded.

“Just what I gathered from their talk. I gathered that Pogany approached this South and tried to sell him whatever he's got to sell. He wanted a flat million bucks. He thought South had a million, because South had been putting up a front as a rich importer of ladies' cosmetics and perfumes. South has got dough, but not a million. What he has got is a lot of tough pals, of which that Buck is a fair sample. That Buck would eat his own brother. I'm telling you, South and his pals are rough babies.”

“You said that before.” Doc was swinging the course to the right where the ground was higher, the going therefore faster, and clear of South's gang.

Red nodded. “South decided to steal what Pogany had to sell.”

“So that's what the fighting is about?” Doc asked. He had already surmised as much, he suddenly realized.

“Uh-huh. South didn't know where Pogany's plant, or whatever you call this whale business, was located. Pogany kept that secret. South had to learn the secret.” Red glanced at Doc. “You know Bill Riis and Walter Nelson?”

“Riis was murdered in Boston.”

“That's right. Murdered because he fought like hell when they grabbed him and tried to make him tell where Pogany's layout was. Riis knew where it was. He'd helped build it. He got killed in the fight. But I guess you'd call it murder anyway.”

“A jury would certainly call it murder.”

“Ummmmm. Another guy knew. Walter Nelson. He had worked at building the thing with Riis. So they gabbed him.”

“Would Walter Nelson talk?”

“Hell, no. When he found out they had done in Riis, he told them that damned if they would get a thing out of him even if they killed him. He meant it, too. He's a funny guy, and you gotta admire his bullheaded loyalty to his friends, even if you don't think he's showing good sense.”

“So they had to follow us up here to find where the place is?”

“That's right.”

Doc paused. The ground had dropped away abruptly before them, and the inlet lay ahead and slightly below. He could distinguish the rooftops of the three buildings and, a quarter of a mile beyond, the rather

mysterious fence which closed the mouth of the inlet from the sea.

“Ham Brooks,” Doc said. “He didn't look as if he had been damaged much—”

“Skinned up some, was all. That Ham Brooks is quite a guy, too. If I was in his shoes, I'd be scared stiff.”

“Ham is in danger, then?”

“You're damned right he is,” Red said vehemently. “They'll kill him sure. They're only keeping him alive to use him as a shield against you. All the way up here, they kept banking on you not shooting down their plane because Ham was aboard.”

Doc indicated the inlet. “Be careful now. Pogany and Monk Mayfair and the girl should have reached here by now. They'll be expecting trouble.”

Red nodded. “The girl is Walter Nelson's sister?”

“Yes.”

“She damned near got herself killed. They were going to do that to stop her reaching you.”

Doc said sharply, “For a man who said he didn't know anything, you seem to have a lot of information.”

“Hell, I got ears,” Red said. Then he shuddered. “I don't think they cared too much about me not overhearing them. I think they planned to knock me off, too.”

Suddenly, without warning, a short, red-faced man and a gun came out of the bush. He said, “Don't move!” and his gun, a lever-action rifle, made a loud noise cocking.

Chapter XI

THEY didn't move. Red's breathing heavy with shock and fright, was audible. Farther away, back near the inlet somewhere but not in the direction of the buildings, there was a loud crack of a limb that had been stepped on. The stocky man's eyes jerked toward the sound nervously, then back to Doc.

“Okay,” he said. “But who's this guy?” He nodded at Red.

“The pilot of their plane.”

The answer seemed satisfactory. “I'm Gilly. We been hoping to God you'd get here.”

“You work for Pogany?”

“That's right. Me, Tonky and Joe Collander.” He let his rifle off cock, tucked it under his arm. “Come on.”

He led the way, seemingly unafraid, because he walked ahead of them. He said over a shoulder, “Mind telling me what's going on? Pogany don't make sense. Him and that big ape of a guy neither, nor the babe. She's a good-looking gal. Walter Nelson's sister, could be? Seems I saw a picture Walt had of a girl looked like her. But what goes on?”

“A gang of men are trying to steal what Pogany has here,” Doc explained. “They killed Riis, and they'll kill the rest of us if they can.”

Doc watched the man's face, and saw genuine amazement appear. The fellow swore, and asked, "Steal what Pogany has here? Whatcha mean?"

Astonished, Doc demanded, "Don't you know what Pogany built here?"

The man became uncomfortable. "No, dammit, I don't know. A fence to keep whales in the inlet."

"A fence to keep whales!"

"Sure. Like you keep cows in a pasture." The man twisted his head, listened a moment, then spat. "I guess I'm cockeyed dumb not to figure it out any further than that, but I haven't. None of us have."

"Are there any whales in the inlet now?"

"Sure. Four. Pogany caught little ones and brought them here. I was on that job, and a hell of a time we had, too. Except for one. He already had that one caught and anchored, with a cable around it and an anchor, the way you would picket out a horse."

Doc was interested. "Pogany had one whale caught before he started this project?"

"Uh-huh. A sick one. If it wasn't sick when he caught it, it's sure sick now, and I think it's gonna die on his hands. He's upset about that whale. He has us doctoring it." The man spat explosively. "Doctoring a damned whale! Can you imagine that?"

"That's interesting."

"Yeah? Goofy, you mean."

"Do you doctor the other whales, too?"

The man was surprised. "How'd you know that? Yeah, we inject some kind of medicine in them, once a week."

Doc Savage, genuinely amazed at the idea of doctoring whales, asked, "How on earth do you manage to catch them? Isn't it quite a job to catch and hold them?"

"Who said we caught them? We use a gun and shoot pills into them whenever they come up to blow, or roll around on the surface the way whales like to do." He grinned sourly. "We even got them marked four different colors, so one whale don't get more than his regular dose."

The pilot, Red, said he would be eternally damned if he had ever heard of such a thing.

MONK MAYFAIR was leaning over a washbasin, allowing Della Nelson to sponge his scalp with cold water which flowed away slightly stained with crimson.

Arthur Pogany, standing nearby, wore an expression of alarm, and kept a revolver in his hands.

Monk, relieved at sight of Doc, demanded, "What about Ham?"

"They still have him. What happened to you?"

"This blank-blank"—Monk nodded at Pogany, then gasped with pain and grabbed his head—"hit me over the head with a rock."

Pogany snapped, "And a great satisfaction it was, too! I suppose it was perfectly all right for you to slap me, and I shouldn't have done anything about it!"

Doc said, "That gang is on its way here." He introduced Red, explaining, "Red is their pilot. He was involved without knowing what he was getting into, he says. He's also willing to help us."

"I ain't willing to do anything but save my own neck," Red said. "I guess it's the same thing."

Gilly, the man who had met them, came in with two other men, one short and one of average height, both heavy-faced, rather inert looking fellows, and introduced the short one as Tonky, the other as Joe Collander. "This is the size of us," Gilly explained. "How much are we outnumbered?" He looked unhappy when Doc told him, and still more unhappy when Red said, "They're the toughest yeggs I ever saw. I saw some nasty Nazis when I was in the Air Force—I was a prisoner for a while—but never any worse than these birds."

Doc became briskly active, and said, "I think I have a few minutes to look this place over. We've got to make up our minds which building we intend to defend."

Tonky, horrified, gasped, "We gotta fight, you mean?"

"If you don't want to get killed without a fight, you'll have to."

Tonky was skeptical. "I don't believe them guys are that bad."

Arthur Pogany, suddenly bitter, said, "They murdered Bill Riis in cold blood, murdered a man on a plane by mistake, and tried deliberately to kill Miss Nelson here, not once, but twice!"

Doc said, "Miss Nelson, Monk, this place is new to you two. So you'd better give it a quick look-over with me." Doc wheeled on Gilly, asked, "Do you mind showing us over the place?"

Gilly glanced at Pogany. "Okay?"

"I guess so," Pogany said bitterly.

THE large building, it developed, was simply a warehouse containing a diversity of supplies, not only canned and dehydrated foods, but tools: a small bulldozer outfit, evidently the one that had opened the trail to the lake, a pile-driver which could be mounted on a barge, various metal-working gadgets, a welding outfit, a forge, quite a supply of steel posts and heavy mesh wire of a salt water resistant type. Material, Doc saw, for keeping a crew at the inlet for a long time, and materials for the crew to make any repairs that were necessary. The contents of the warehouse were remarkably non-mysterious. Monk remarked on this. He said, "It's all so damned simple, except the reason for it. The whale angle."

The middle-sized building was a barracks and cookhouse. The construction was not solid, the walls were quite thin and there was no basement which would help shelter them from bullets.

The smallest shack, Doc found, contained a small laboratory along one wall, and, along the other wall, four refrigeration units of the ordinary home-freezer variety equipped with strong padlocks. Only one of the four units was operating, and that was the only one that was locked.

Monk, a chemist himself, was looking over the laboratory.

“This thing is set up for simple analysis,” he remarked. “There's a little research equipment, but nothing like there was at Pogany's laboratory in his home on Long Island. This is more of a field installation.” Monk rubbed the back of his head tenderly where Pogany had hit him with the rock. “It's a pretty good field outfit, though. You know what? I think that guy Pogany is a pretty slick scientist, even if he is potted on the question of whales.”

Doc said, “I think he put the two together.”

“Huh?”

“Merged whales and science,” Doc said. He was looking at the home-freezer unit to see what temperature it was set to maintain. “Very slick, and possibly profitable.” He found the temperature to be quite high, slightly above freezing. “I think we'd better get our defenses organized. Monk, you'd better go keep an eye on Pogany and the others.”

“I been thinking we hadn't oughta left them alone,” Monk said quickly.

He hurried out.

DOC SAVAGE did some more testing of the freezer units, opening each and thrusting his head down inside and using his nostrils. “Ah!” he said suddenly. He looked pleased. “Want to take a sniff?” he asked Della Nelson.

Dubiously, she thrust her head into the freezer innards. “Ugh! Fishworms!” she gasped.

Doc smiled briefly and said, “You must have been raised on a farm, to think of that. But it isn't fishworms, although it has the same earthy and slightly distasteful odor.”

Outdoors Monk screamed.

“Godalmighty!” Monk bawled. The door of the shack burst open. “Look! For God's sake, look!” Monk howled. He jabbed with both arms toward the surface of the inlet.

A small whale had surfaced in the inlet and was lying there lazily in the afternoon sunlight. The whale rocked comfortably from side to side, and blew, gracefully, a column of air and moisture upward. It was just a whale, and there was nothing unusual about it—except that it was pink.

“A pink whale!” Monk yelled.

Doc gazed at the whale. “So it seems to be,” he agreed.

“Pink!” Monk bellowed. “But godalmighty, whales are almost black. They're the color of catfish. That one's pink.”

“A boudoir pink, I'd say,” Doc agreed.

Monk glared at him. “This ain't funny to me! All I wanta know, is there a reason for that whale being

pink?"

"A good reason."

"Okay," Monk said.

He left again to join Pogany and the others.

Doc turned to Miss Nelson. "How is your self-control?"

"My what?"

"Your nerves. How are you feeling? Do you think you could help me out with a plan, one that may not be very easy, and will also be dangerous?"

"Will it help Walter?" Della Nelson asked. "If it will, I'll do it."

"Walter's a lucky guy to have such a loyal sister," Doc said. "Yes, it'll help Walter, if it works. And it will get all of us, including Ham Brooks, out of this mess. That is, if it works, it will do that."

"And if it doesn't work?" She stared at him anxiously.

"It will seem that we're much worse off than we were before, but we won't be because they've got us trapped. This place is hard to defend. They'll pick us off one at a time in a fight, I'm afraid. What we must do is pull a shenanygin on them."

"What do you want me to do?"

He told her. The telling took two or three minutes, and he had her repeat parts of it. "Do you understand perfectly?" he asked.

She nodded.

"Good," Doc Savage said. "Now we'll tell the others."

They met Monk at the door of the middle-sized shack. Monk was pointing in amazement at the inlet.

"There's another whale!" Monk blurted. "That one is yellow!" He looked as if this was more than he could take. "Pink and yellow whales!" he complained.

Chapter XII

IN the middle building, Doc Savage faced Pogany, Red, Gilly, Tonky and Joe Collander. Della Nelson was at his elbow.

"Some of us are going to get killed," Doc told them, "if we try to defend this place."

That had an effect on them, but it varied somewhat. Monk was not too believing and, anyway, the colored whales business still had him dumfounded. Gilly, Tonky, and Joe Collander were frightened somewhat more than they already were: Red, the pilot, was blank-faced and hard-eyed. But Pogany let out a yell of horror.

"We can't leave the buildings!" Pogany screamed. "We gotta stay here!"

Doc wheeled on him. "Why?"

"Because—I don't agree with you! We've got shelter here, and food! This is the best place to defend ourselves!"

"That," Doc said, "isn't your reason."

Pogany winced. "I—"

"Why don't you take it with you?" Doc demanded.

"Take what?"

"The stuff in the refrigerator."

Pogany said, "Damn you!" bitterly. "So you figured it out."

"It'll be all right out of the refrigerator for a while," Doc said. "After all, it frequently floats around in the sea for long periods of time without being much harmed."

"I'll take it," Pogany mumbled. "I'll get it now."

"Wait a minute," Doc said, lifting a hand. "I want to outline my plan first. The idea has points of danger for one person, Miss Nelson, but she has been told of the thing, and has agreed to go through with it. It's quite a simple plan. Miss Nelson is going to desert us for the enemy."

The news had a dumfounding effect. Red, the pilot, jumped and blurted, "You mean she's gonna join them guys? I wouldn't do that if I was a rattlesnake!"

"But I'm the only one who would have a reason for doing it," Miss Nelson told him.

"Reason?"

"To save my brother, don't you see?"

"I can understand that," Red said. "But I'm telling you, your brother, if he's half the guy I think he is, would rather take it straight than have you do that for him."

"But we have a plan."

"It better be good."

She nodded. "It is. I tell them you have an ambush laid for them. I will make it very convincing, and they will believe it, I'm sure. I will also tell them how they can thwart the ambush and capture all of you, and when they do that, you'll have them trapped."

"For God's sake!" said Red. "That sounds complicated."

Doc Savage took over, saying, "It isn't as mixed-up as it sounds." He outlined what he had in mind, moving to one of the windows and pointing out spots, assigning locations.

They would, he explained, have Della Nelson tell the enemy that they had taken up a stand at the end of a small rocky finger of land which thrust out into the inlet. He pointed out the point he meant. It was quite long, over a hundred and fifty yards, and not wider, at its narrowest point near the shore, than fifty feet. It was fatter farther out, then tapered rapidly and become rather high and stony. Between the peninsula of

land and the shore, there was a stretch of very low and marshy ground covered with grass about a foot high.

"They're to think we're on the end of the finger of land," Doc said.

"Where'll we really be?" Monk asked dubiously. "You know, that neck of land ain't a bad place for a stand. See that low ground? A man couldn't very well crawl across that without being seen in the daylight. Nor in the moonlight either, I'll bet, providing the moon is bright up here."

"Moon's bright as anything this time of year," said Tonky.

"Because the place looks good, it makes our plan good," Doc explained. "But we won't be out there; only one of us will be, that is. That one will have a couple of guns of different color, and do some shooting to make it seem we're all there."

"Where'll we really be?" Monk demanded. He didn't look as if he thought too much of Doc's whole idea.

"We'll be on shore, hidden in that clump of bushes south of the peninsula." Doc indicated the place he meant, and they could see it plainly. "We'll be together there, and we'll have all the five-gallon cans of aviation gasoline we can get there in a hurry." He swung on Tonky, demanded, "The gasoline you've got here is in five-gallon cans, isn't it?"

Tonky nodded. "Sure. How else do you handle gasoline when you gotta pack it around a lot?"

"The idea is to let those men crawl out on the peninsula. Then we use the gasoline to set a fire behind them. You see where the wind is? It'll sweep any fire out toward the end of the peninsula. In other words, we'll fight them with fire, burn them out."

Pogany seemed to think the idea had merit. "But they'll swim for it, won't they?"

"We can pick them off in the water with rifles," Doc said.

"Or maybe the pink whales will get 'em," Monk contributed.

It was agreed to that each should take a five-gallon can of gasoline from the warehouse, and make that do the job, since time was growing urgently short. There was, in fact, some danger that the South gang had already reached the inlet, although Doc doubted this.

"That fellow Buck is sure to have caught up with them and told them the plane float has been filled with water and Red has escaped," Doc explained. "They'll certainly investigate that, and it will delay them. But not much longer."

Pogany started for the small laboratory shack where the refrigerators were.

"You can make a second trip back for that stuff," Doc advised him.

"I'm damned if I do!" Pogany snapped.

When he appeared from the laboratory shed, he was carrying, to Monk's disappointment, an ordinary pack-sack of the type popular with travelers in the bush country. The thing didn't seem very heavily loaded.

"Get going," Doc urged those with the gasoline cans. "Take plenty of matches. And all the ammunition

and weapons you have.”

He got them organized, and Gilly, Tonky and Joe Collander moved off packing a five-gallon can apiece, together with rifles and revolvers, two of the latter. Red, remarking that he had no rifle and didn't want one—damned if he wanted to live the rest of his life knowing he had killed anybody—shouldered two of the cans and followed about fifty feet behind the others.

Doc turned to Della Nelson. “You feel up to it?”

She nodded. She was considerably paler than she had been, showing alarm, but her control was good. “Do you—” She fell silent, unsure of herself.

“I think it's going to work,” Doc said.

“Good luck.”

“The same to you. I think you'll have it,” Doc said.

Della Nelson moved away. In a few moments, she had disappeared into the bush.

Monk said, “She's got plenty of nerve.” He had two five-gallon cans of gasoline. Doc agreed that she did have, and got some gasoline himself. They moved toward the peninsula of land.

Presently, they passed the pilot. Red had stopped and seemed to be having trouble with a shoe. He looked up, asked, “The girl get gone?”

“Yeah.”

“I wouldn't want her job,” Red said.

“I don't think they'll harm her.”

“But if our scheme goes wrong—”

“It won't,” Doc interrupted firmly. “But if it did, I'm sure South's gang would try to use the girl's safety to make a bargain with us. And in that case, we would naturally accede to their demands to save Miss Nelson. We couldn't very well do anything else.”

Red released a relieved grunt. “I'm glad to hear you say that.”

“Better follow close behind us,” Doc warned.

“I will,” Red said.

Red watched Doc Savage and Monk move through the undergrowth, then suddenly he deserted his gas cans and hurried forward to overhaul them. “You said somebody was gonna be on the end of the peninsula to serve as a decoy. How about me doing that?”

“It'll be dangerous,” Doc said. “You'll have to swim for it after the fire starts. Can you swim that well?”

“I'm a damned good swimmer. Gimme a gun, and I'll crawl out there through that grass now.”

Doc glanced at Monk questioningly, and Monk agreed, “If he wants to take the job on, it's okay by me. I guess it's as safe a job as anybody'll have.”

Doc produced a revolver, which he handed to Red, and a small-calibre rifle which he was carrying slung

over his shoulders. "You understand that you're to do little shooting, just enough to convince them we're out there."

Red nodded. "I got that."

"And be danged sure you don't pot one of us," Monk warned.

"Okay."

"Take those two cans of gasoline with you. You might be able to use them to start a fire and make some smoke that will help you escape by swimming after we got them trapped."

Red said he would do that. Carrying rifle and revolver, he went back to get the gasoline tins. Doc and Monk continued onward; Red made sure of that by glancing backward. He grinned thinly, gleefully, and picked up the gasoline.

He looked about a bit, found a suitably thick clump of weeds, and deposited the gasoline tins therein.

After that, he ran in the direction taken by Della Nelson. He was in a hurry now, but he was cautious also, and made as little noise as possible.

He did not go near the out-thrust finger of land where he was supposed to go, did not even turn in that direction. Once he found Della Nelson's trail, he followed it easily, for the ground was soft, and she had made no effort to conceal her footsteps. She had taken the most direct and simple route toward where the planes were.

Later, Red saw Della ahead. She heard him coming, and whirled wildly in alarm. He grinned reassuringly. "Doc Savage sent me to tell you something he forgot," he remarked.

He approached the girl casually, and, the opportunity presenting itself almost at once, he struck her on the jaw. She dropped. He was beside her instantly. She seemed to be knocked out, but he slammed his fist against her jaw again to make sure. Following that, he debated whether or not to carry her; she would be heavy, and he didn't like hard work; on the other hand, if he left her here, she might revive and escape. He didn't have much faith in his ability to tie her so that she couldn't escape. So he carried Della.

THE member of the gang called Andy, blue-jowled and formidable, presently poked a rifle from behind a tree and said, "What the hell, Red!" in quite a surprised voice.

"Get the boss!"

"What are you—"

"Get the boss!" Red snapped. "They got a flim-flam rigged up for you guys, and we gotta bust it up!"

Andy grunted, wheeled and ran, and was back in a short time with South, who listened to Red with great interest. Red outlined the plot as Doc Savage had arranged it, and finished by demanding, "You see the out for us, don't you?"

"Sure. We can corner them where they're laying for us," South said excitedly. "Let's get going!"

Chapter XIII

IN the inlet, a whale rolled placidly. This one was a green whale, and its coloring was less shocking because they had observed by now that the whales weren't really all green, or all yellow, or all pink. The coloring was actually a patch on the back of each mammal, but a large patch so that the effect was really startling. One of Pogany's workmen, Joe Collander, had explained how the coloring, a waterproof dye, had been applied by creeping up on each whale when it was asleep on the surface, and squirting the dye on it gently as it slumbered. The green one, Joe said, had been particularly difficult, and they had thought for a time they weren't going to be able to mark him, but they had to mark each one, because Pogany had planned to catch other whales and bring them into the inlet.

Doc Savage and Monk Mayfair watched the whale when they were not watching the surrounding brush, and listened to the lazy blowing of the whale when they were not listening for sounds of approaching enemy.

Monk cleared his throat.

“Ambergris, huh?” he said. “I’ll be damned.”

Doc nodded. “You know what it is, of course?”

“Sure, but it hadn't entered my head—well, I did think of it a couple of times. But heck, you find, ambergris floating in the sea when it's found, or cast up on the seashore. And it just didn't enter my head this was what the shooting was about.”

Pogany eyed them bitterly. “Now that you know my secret, I hope you'll respect a certain amount of confidence until I get my process patented.”

Monk turned his head. “You think you got an ambergris farm here?”

“I certainly have!”

“How?”

“I make the whales produce ambergris.”

“But how?”

Pogany said indignantly, “It's very simple. Ambergris is formed inside sick whales, and it is a product of whale bile, the fluid which any mammal needs to digest its food. When the whale is ill, the ambergris is formed—I suppose you could say it is no more complicated than the process by which phlegm is formed in your throat when you have a cold, and the whale coughs it up, or spews it out in the form of a liquid which hardens on exposure to the air.”

“So you've discovered how to make a whale sick so he'll produce ambergris?” Monk demanded.

“Exactly.”

“How do you do it?”

Pogany sneered at him. “You think I'm going to give away a secret that valuable?”

Joe Collander said, “I bet that's why we shoot a pill into them whales regularly. I bet that's why he wanted them marked with color so they won't get an overdose of the stuff!”

Monk grimaced. "Such a business!"

"What surprises me," said Joe Collander, "is what is this ambergris stuff? What the hell, you'd think it was diamonds."

Doc Savage told him, "It is, almost. You see, ambergris is the most effective odor fixative that has ever been found. Perfume manufacturers will pay far more than its weight in gold for it. It's a waxy substance which when ground up finely and dissolved in alcohol, need be used in the ratio of only a few ounces to a gallon of perfume."

Joe was confused. "Whatcha mean—odor fixative?"

"Ambergris has an uncanny power to absorb and retain the fragrance to which it is exposed."

"What's it worth?"

Doc said, "Five to eight hundred dollars an ounce on the market now."

Joe mumbled. "Five to eight hundred—" He whistled softly. "Holy gee, a pound of it would be sixteen times eight hundred bucks! He was trying to compute this in his head when Doc Savage clutched his arm.

"Here they come!" Doc whispered.

Monk grunted softly. "Doc."

"Yes?"

"Before you gave Red those two guns, did you make blanks out of the shells in them?"

"Not blanks. I emptied out the powder."

"That'll help," Monk said.

DOC SAVAGE gestured for silence, then watched South's men, coming one at a time, with infinite caution, through the brush. He saw South, and Red, the man called Buck, then the others—all of them except Ham Brooks, Walter Nelson and his sister, Della. Monk had been counting too, and he breathed, "Ham and the girl and the brother aren't . . . do you suppose. . . " He didn't finish, but horror tacked a grisly question mark on his pondering. Doc said nothing. There was no way of telling whether the prisoners had been despatched. If that had been done, it would have been with a knife, because there had been no shots, or perhaps the captives had been left bound and gagged somewhere.

Suddenly Doc nudged Monk. Monk nodded. He had seen the same thing. The trap was going to work.

It was a trapping-the-trappers setup which Doc had worked out, a scheme that went beyond the one he had outlined to the others before Della left to fake her desertion. That scheme had been explained for the benefit, and the deceiving of Red. It was a trap within a trap, and it was going to work.

Doc and the others were a good hundred yards from the clump of very thick brush in which they had led Red to believe they would be lying in ambush.

South and his men, crawling now, using infinite pains, worked toward the brush clump. Doc saw that one of them had changed his course, and was working out through the marsh grass toward the finger of land. This fellow was making a little racket now and then, indicating he was serving as a decoy, as a fooler to

make it seem they thought the peninsula was the hideout.

Monk was counting carefully. "Think they're all out there?" he whispered.

"I think so," Doc breathed. "Anyway, let's get started." He lifted his head and made, very realistically, a bird call that was exactly like the calls other birds were making, except that it was repeated three times. This was the signal they had agreed upon.

The gasoline cans were already uncapped, so there wouldn't be any noise loosening the caps. They began distributing a trail of gasoline. Doc went one direction, Monk, the other. The rest, Pogany, Gilly, Joe Collander and Tonky, each had a definite route to cover. That made six of them, and the trail of gasoline needed to be only about a hundred and fifty yards long to span the angle of land at this point. Twenty-five yards apiece, seventy-five feet. It did not take long.

Doc tried the triple bird call again. He got answers immediately; they were supposed to begin at the east end and work west, but they became confused and the signals were jumbled. He believed, though, that all responded. He heard South curse in alarm. Doc whistled, a straightforward whistle, shrill and with all the volume he could put into it.

An instant later, a sheet of flame lunged up at Doc's left. Other sheets sprang upward, making, as the high-test gasoline burned, a hard, hungry shuffling and roaring. The separate flames quickly joined and became a wall of fire.

Doc lifted his voice, yelling, "Shoot them down when they come through the fire!"

That was for effect. The others began bellowing too, threats and warnings. This was the way they had agreed to handle it; as much surprise and confusion for the enemy as possible.

THERE was gunfire now. Monk started it with two shots, and got an answer from the other side, three bullets that made angry knocking sounds in the bush.

Doc retreated quickly, wishing to get a general view of the fire wall to see whether there were any gaps, and to observe, if possible, the effect on South's men. He was not sure this would work—it depended on how the bush took fire.

They were using their original plan, but they had moved back the fire wall a hundred yards to trap South's men. It seemed to be working.

Suddenly, wildly, a man came through the fire from the other side. It was Buck. He had a rifle clamped to his hip, but he had come through too early, and there was blazing gasoline on his legs. Doc saw Joe Collander aim deliberately, fire. Buck went down, shot through the legs. He screamed and beat the blaze off his clothing, then continued to scream.

Doc called, "Good shot, Joe!" He doubted that Joe Collander heard him, because the fire was making too much noise now. It was leaping, catching in the tops of the low, scrawny evergreen trees which were as inflammable, at this time of the year, as gunpowder.

He watched the fire spread, carried from treetop to treetop by the breeze. It was quite satisfactory.

He found Monk.

"This is going to burn back toward us slowly," he said. "I'll try to find Ham, the girl and her brother. You

do what you can here.”

“Can Pogany be trusted?” Monk demanded.

“Only as long as he's saving his own neck,” Doc said. “Watch him.”

By now the shooting was sporadic and almost continuous, most of it from the other side of the fire. More of them would, Doc was sure, try to come through, but they were effectively trapped because the smoke would blind them, and the fire would unnerve them.

He searched for the trail South's men had left, and presently found it. They had moved in a compact group, leaving a path easily followed. He backtracked them.

Once he threw a glance at the finger of land, and was astonished to see the bush blazing on it in several places. The wind had carried flaming twigs across the swath of grass already. He grew alarmed, for if the woods were this inflammable, the backfire might spread rapidly also. He began running.

“Ham!” he shouted suddenly.

The three of them were tied to small trees, and gagged. They had not, he was glad to see, been rendered unconscious.

He said, while he was untying them, “We've got a line of fire set behind them. It'll drive them out on a finger of land, and eventually into the inlet. There's a motorboat at the buildings. We'll use it to see they don't escape by swimming.” He asked Della Nelson, “They didn't hurt you?”

“They frightened me terribly,” she said. “That fellow Red was a spy, as you thought he was.”

WALTER NELSON said, “They framed it up with Red to desert and join you after they landed. But how the devil did you find it out?”

Doc said he hadn't been sure, really. “But Red talked too freely, knew too much without knowing anything vital. He overdid it, and I got the feeling he was telling all he dared and holding back what he thought I didn't already know. Maybe I was suspicious because I had a spy plan of my own.”

There were two quick shots. They could hear Monk bellow, but he sounded pleased.

They ran toward the buildings.

Ham threw repeated anxious glances at the smoke and flames, said, “There's a first-class forest fire started. Isn't there danger of it spreading and sweeping the whole country?”

“I hope not,” Doc told him. “There is high rocky ground behind the flames, with very little vegetation, and the wind is against the fire. I think it'll burn back to the high ground, then die out.”

“What about the buildings?”

“They're in the open.”

The launch, about twenty-five feet long, was heavy and clumsy and practical, a double-ended affair of the sort that fishermen used. Walter Nelson said, “This thing used to only start once in a blue moon. I hope it's in the humor.” It was. At the third pull of the flywheel, the large old single-cylinder engine gave a pleased bark and never missed a stroke thereafter.

Doc stopped Della Nelson from getting in the craft. "You say here," he said. "This thing isn't bulletproof and we don't need your help." She started to object, but her brother said, "Cut it out!" and she subsided.

Walter Nelson was bigger, more rangy than Doc had expected, but he had the sort of open gullible, friendly face that Doc had imagined he would have. He was not only rather dumb about judging people, but he looked it. He caught Doc's eye and said, "Pogany is trying to produce ambergris here by treating whales with chemicals. Did you know that?"

"We found it out. Has he gotten any?"

"I don't know for sure." Walter Nelson hesitated. "He has some ambergris. About forty pounds. I don't know, though." He looked uncomfortable.

Doc said, "If you think Pogany is a crook, say so. Your gullibility where crooks are concerned has gotten everybody into enough trouble."

Walter Nelson winced. "I'm not sure," he said stubbornly.

Ham began pointing and yelling. "They're giving up!" he shouted. "Look! There's two of them out in the water waving their hands!"

"Be careful," Doc warned. "It may be a trap. Well, what do you know! There's Monk!"

Monk Mayfair in some manner had circumvented the flames. It developed later that he had entered the inlet and waded around the end of them, coming in under cover of the smoke and heat. And now he was herding three men into the water, forcing them to keep their hands up.

Monk caught sight of them.

"Grab them two guys in the water!" he yelled. "I got the rest of them here!"

Doc worked the launch alongside the two who had first signalled. One of them was Red, who scowled sullenly and muttered, "I guess I was taken in." Walter Nelson hauled Red and the other man into the boat, relieving them of weapons as he did so, by the practical method of tearing all the clothes off them except trousers and shoes.

They swung the boat toward Monk.

"You sure this is all of them?" Ham demanded.

"It's all of them that give a damn," Monk assured him. "It's all over, boy. You missed out on the excitement."

Chapter XIV

THE workman named Joe Collander met them when they beached the boat near the buildings. Joe wore a worried expression. "This has got the boss down," he said.

Doc went over to frown down at Pogany. The man was sprawled on the ground, face buried in his hands, shoulders trembling.

Doc said, "Pogany!"

Pogany neither answered nor looked up.

Joe explained, "Me and Tonky and Gilly had him help us carry the two of them guys who tried to get through the fire. One of them is dead, I think, but the other is just shot through both legs. And I guess it got the boss down. Anyway, all of a sudden he went to pieces." Joe hesitated, then shuddered. "He was carrying the dead one. Maybe that's what done it."

"Pogany!" Doc said again, but the man did not respond.

The dead man was South. Doc, kneeling beside the body, decided that burns and shock had proved fatal, that and perhaps a heart difficulty. "He's dead," Doc announced.

Arthur Pogany made a sobbing sound. "My ambergris?" he mumbled. "What became of my ambergris?"

"What *did* become of it?" Doc demanded of the others.

Joe shrugged. "I guess he forgot and left it when the excitement started."

Doc watched the fire. It was, he saw, going to die out at the top of the ridge, unable to progress in the thinning vegetation and against the wind.

Pogany made his sobbing noise again.

"It was all I had," he muttered. "Forty pounds, all I ever had."

Doc stared at him. "What are you trying to say? That you weren't successful at making whales produce ambergris?"

Pogany nodded. "I never got a bit—only the first lump of it I happened to find. The first I ever found in forty years of experience with whales and whaling."

"Then if the venture wasn't successful, why was South so excited?"

Pogany shuddered. "I led him to believe the experiment was a success. I thought he seemed like a wealthy man, a perfume importer. He was the logical man to swindle."

"Oh, you tried to swindle him? And he turned on you?"

Pogany buried his face in his hands. He began shaking uncontrollably, helplessly, and he made small whimperings that were low and animal-like.

Doc Savage, looking down at him, felt a little pity, and resented the gentle emotion. Pogany and his scheming was responsible for the whole thing, for three deaths and the shootings and kidnappings and violence and fear.

Della Nelson came over, and asked softly, "Is there anything I can do to help him?"

She was, Doc realized, feeling the same emotion he felt, and, looking into her eyes, he decided that she also wished she didn't have it. It gave him a feeling of mutual harmony that surprised him, and he looked at the girl thoughtfully, then, growing embarrassed, he looked away.

He was relieved when Monk and Ham got into an argument.

"A pink whale? You're crazy!" Ham was looking at Monk in alarm. "Brother, you really *are* crazy if you think you saw a pink whale!"

THE END

METAL BOX OF MURDER

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