



Three Times A Corpse

A Doc Savage Adventure by Kenneth Robeson

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Chapter I

SAM CLARK was crawling on the floor looking for a paper clip when—without a knock, without a warning—the hotel room door burst open. Sam was frightened until he had to jam both fists hard on the floor to keep his arms from trembling.

“Petey!” he gulped, identifying the arrival.

Petey cam in saying, “You know what—I saw the best-looking blonde babe just now —” He stopped and stared. “What's the matter, Sam? Did you lay an egg?”

Sam cursed him bitterly and in detail, his deep and rather hard tones knocking together like rocks. He touched on most of the intimate details of Petey's ancestry. Then he cautiously lifted one arm to see if it was still shaking, and it wasn't. He said, “Why didn't you telephone the room, or knock?”

“Why, you told me not to telephone—it might set off the rifle,” said Petey.

“Yeah, that's right,” Sam muttered, and, embarrassed by having been so frightened, went to looking for the paper clip again.

Sam had a headlong, athletic look about him, and this air—alert, active, devilish—gave him an appearance of being larger than he was, which was two inches under six feet and twenty pounds lighter than the two hundred he seemed. A collegiate way of dressing helped out this sprightliness. He was twenty-five and looked thirty-five or even forty, due to the kind of treatment his face had received as a result of pushing it into the kind of places where he had pushed it. He looked—and was—the kind of guy who was living in a century that was too peaceable, a fellow who should have lived back when there were more new frontiers to explore, and kingdoms to be won, fair damsels in distress, and buccaneers sailing the seas.

“You told me,” said Petey again, “not to telephone the room on account of it might set off the gun.”

Sam grunted and hunted the paper clip.

Pete was a wiry little man of uncertain nationality—he was Polynesian, he claimed frequently, supposedly from an island called Oh Hah, in the group north of Tahiti. On the other hand, he sometimes said he was a Limehouse boy from London, a Sands Street boy from Brooklyn, or assorted other places—he could, rather remarkably, look and act each of these nationalities. He, like Sam, was an adventurer at heart, and he adored Sam, took Sam's word as law, and seemed very grateful to Sam for tolerating him. He was outspoken with Sam, which seemed to bother Sam not at all.

Petey went over and examined the rifle.

“This is a hell of a contraption,” he said. “You think it's gonna work?”

“Sure it'll work,” Sam said.

“What if it shoots the wrong guy?”

THE rifle, a 30-06 U. S. Army issue weapon which they had bought that afternoon at a sporting goods house, had been lashed in a substantial manner on top of the hotel dresser which was in turn wired securely to the radiator below the window. Two telephone directories, the classified and the Manhattan directory, had been used for wedging purposes.

Petey sighted down the barrel. There was a restaurant in the building across the street, on the second floor, and there was one table in a sort of windowed alcove which offered a view of the street and made an excellent target. The table was quite large. The rifle was sighted directly in the center of it, at an elaborate centerpiece of floral design.

“You sure this gun is sighted in?”

“Yeah,” Sam Clark said.

“How you know?”

“Dammit, we just bought the gun new this afternoon.”

“You gonna take the word of the guy sold us the thing?”

“Help me find this paper clip!”

“I wouldn't take the word—”

“I drove out in the country and shot it,” Sam said patiently. “It targets in good enough to suit me.”

“Whatcha want the paper clip for?”

He got no answer, so he scrambled around on his hands and knees helping Sam, and presently they found the paper clip.

Petey then watched with interest as Sam arranged a trigger-tripping gadget that was rather elaborate. A string ran from the clapper of the telephone bell—Sam had removed the cover from the ringer—to the tongue of a trip, home-made, of the sort boys call a figure-4 trap and set for rabbits. Ringing of the telephone would trip the figure-4 gimmick, a book would then fall off the table, a string tied to the book would yank the rifle trigger.

“That gonna work?”

“Sure it'll work.”

Petey looked at the name of the book that was going to pull the rifle trigger. It was a copy of *How To Win Friends And Influence People*. Petey thought this was funny.

“Did you think that up yourself, or was it an accident?” He indicated the book.

Sam said modestly that he had thought it up himself. “A touch of the unique,” he explained.

“Yeah, a touch that is gonna make him think you're touched,” Petey said. “You know this is a smart guy you're fooling with. He is liable to look at the place where you stood and read your mind. What if something like that book should tip him it was a shenanygin?”

“What time does this come off?”

“What time is it now?”

“Six thirty-eight,” Petey said without looking at his watch. He had, and was proud of, a rather uncanny facility for telling the exact time at any given moment.

“He eats at seven,” Sam Clark said.

Petey scratched his head and wished to know how the hell Sam had found out that Doc Savage dined at seven. “I phoned the restaurant,” Sam explained. “I said I was supposed to join Savage for a business conference at dinner, and what time did he eat, and did he have a regular time. They said as regular as clockwork, and it was seven o'clock.”

“What if he don't?”

“Well, what if he don't?” Sam snapped.

“And what if he doesn't take that table?”

“The guy in the restaurant says he always uses that table, because it's private.”

“What if the telephone here rings at the wrong time?”

“Listen, I'm gonna ask some questions,” Sam said sharply. “First, did you buy the ticket?”

“No. I had the guy downstairs, the porter, buy the ticket for me. It's on the eight o'clock train to St. Louis.”

“The ticket read only St. Louis?”

“Nah. To Butte, Montana. That's where you said, wasn't it?”

“I said any place in Montana. Butte is as good as anywhere — You sure the porter will remember you buying the ticket and what train it was on?”

“He oughta, after the argument we had.”

“What kind of an argument? We don't want this too obvious.”

“It wasn't exactly an argument. I just recited him a poem. 'There was a young lady from Butte, Who went

on a terrible toot—”

“Never mind your poem,” Sam said hastily. “The thing we want is a clear trail leading to the eight o'clock train out of Miami, and I hope that'll do it. But you be sure to get on that train or at least go through the gate. Make some kind of commotion when you get aboard, so the guy at the gate will remember you. Not too obvious. Something like misplacing your ticket and looking scared and having a little argument.”

“Sure. I got that all figured out.”

“But don't get on the train, actually.”

“Not me.”

Sam did some pondering, then announced, “You might do it like this—walk through the gate and down the ramp with the rest of the passengers, but instead—”

“They got a long platform, not a ramp. This ain't New York—”

“Down the platform, dope! But don't get on any of the coaches. Keep going, and walk around the front of the engine, acting like you were on business, maybe a guy working for the railroad. Anyway, keep out of the conductor's sight, and let the train get out of town without you.”

“Okay.”

“What time is it now?”

“Six forty-seven.”

“Better light out for the railway station. I don't want you around here when the shot goes off.”

“When Savage gets to the table, I'll be in the restaurant, and I'll use the telephone there to call this room, and discharge the rifle.” Sam grinned. “Pretty slick, don't you think.”

“Very slippery,” Petey agreed. “I hope our feet don't slide out from under us on this deal, is all.”

SAM CLARK had not previously seen Doc Savage, but had heard vaguely of Savage on a number of different occasions and—and this had surprised him—in widely separate parts of the world, so evidently Savage, who was called the bronze man, or the man of bronze, had a rather widespread reputation. Sam did not believe what he had heard about Doc Savage, because it did not seem quite logical, particularly the part about the bronze man's reputation, which was supposed to be righting wrongs which were, for one reason or another, outside the ability of the regular law enforcement mediums. This sounded too much like Galahad stuff to Sam, and he could not see where there would be any profit in it, other than satisfaction, and it was difficult to make a meal from satisfaction. He had heard that Doc Savage had considerable financial means which Sam figured further disproved the Galahad theory, which had gone out of style along with tin pants, and going to a blacksmith when you wanted your coat patched. But he was quite interested in seeing what sort Doc Savage really was.

He was not disappointed.

He said, “Whoeeee!” softly.

Any doubts about his being able to recognize Savage vanished, for the man was physically as noticeable as a neon sign. He was a man with a remarkable personality that did not come entirely from the deeply sun-bronzed hue of his skin and the slightly darker bronze of his hair and a somewhat unusual flake gold

coloration of his eyes—not brown, and not citrine either. They were striking eyes. Savage's size was also striking, Sam suddenly realized, when he noticed the comparison between the bronze man and the headwaiter in the restaurant, who was not a midget.

Impressed, alarmed, Sam Clark watched Doc Savage being conducted to the table in the windowed alcove, where the bronze man seated himself and began inspecting a menu. Quite a number of thoughts dashed through Sam's mind, most of them having to do with whether or not he might have made a mistake somewhere. It was not Sam's nature to become alarmed readily—the fact that sudden unexpected events could startle him and make him shaky as the devil for a few moments had nothing to do with a state of protracted alarm; he was of a jumpy nature, that was all—but he was concerned now. Maybe, he thought this is once I should have looked more closely before I took a bite.

Bosh! What was there to be afraid of? His plan was nicely laid. The shot would arouse in Savage a wish to catch whoever had fired upon him, and the trail that had been laid was a plain one. The rifle bullet, for instance, would smash the hotel room window through which it passed, which would be clue enough as to the source. The railway ticket Petey had bought would lead straight to the St. Louis train, and even a slight inquiry would indicate Petey had boarded the train. Petey was supposed to be the only one occupying the hotel room, so actually he, Sam, was in the clear.

Having re-assured himself, he touched his lips with his napkin—he had ordered pompano, had taken a few hearty bites before Doc Savage had appeared and impaired his appetite—and arose. The telephone was convenient; he had made sure of that. He dropped in his nickel, got the operator.

“Adair Hotel,” he asked. He turned his head, made sure that the rifle bullet, if it hit where aimed, would not strike Doc Savage. “Room 308,” he said.

The rifle bullet came into the restaurant and made all the commotion he had hoped for.

Chapter II

VIOLENTLY, *crash-jangle*, the vase in which the table centerpiece was arranged sprang to bits and scattered over the room, or at least over the alcove and the area immediately adjacent, along with the window, all the glass of which—a pane about four by seven feet—seemed to split into a thousand bits and fall into the room. The table top—it was modernistic black glass, something Sam Clark hadn't noted previously—also burst into sections when the bullet passed through; afterward the bullet, hitting the floor, which was of reinforced concrete covered with some sort of tiling, got under the tiling and came across the room leaving a track, under the tiling, that might have been made by a small speedy mole.

Then silence. It was almost as brittle as the breaking glass.

Doc Savage had hardly moved. Sam Clark, at this point, made a rather shocking discovery—he realized that Doc Savage, in seating himself at the table, had occupied such a position that a part of the building, brick several inches thick had shielded him from the hotel window across the street. There was not much time for this to more than come to Sam's attention.

Arising, Doc Savage crossed the restaurant, not seeming in any particular hurry. It appeared to Sam that Savage was heading for the exit, which proved to be a wide error of judgment on Sam's part.

Suddenly Sam found himself seized.

He said, “Here! Dammit! What's the idea?” He did not sound as innocently indignant as he sought to sound.

“The idea,” Doc Savage said, “is purely your own. Or is it?”

He had a powerful voice with qualities of tone and training and power.

“Leggo me!” Sam said.

Doc Savage did not say anything and did not let go, and Sam, whose idea of a fight was to get it over with quick, and anything would go, made an ambitious attempt to kick Doc in the stomach. Doc moved just enough so that the kick missed. He hooked an arm under Sam's leg and jerked, and Sam came down on the floor, hard. He was fortunate enough to keep his head from cracking the floor more than enough to daze him momentarily. Doc leaned down and planted a fist on Sam's third vest button, not appearing to hit very hard. But the result stopped Sam's breathing, and most of his other functions, for a few moments.

Sam was dragged toward the door.

The restaurant proprietor, who was also the head-waiter, bounced nervously alongside, wishing to know, “Is there anything—anything at all—”

“No. No, we'll take it from here.” Doc Savage's voice, manner, were friendly. He added, “I want to tell you again that I appreciate your telling me there had been someone telephoning and showing curiosity about exactly what time I ate here, and what table I used.”

“Glade to do it,” said the restaurant owner. He was pleased.

“Well, you did us a great favor, and we appreciate it. If we could make some kind of financial remuneration—”

The restaurant man wouldn't hear of that; hell, don't be ridiculous, he said; after all, his brother, Frederick, wouldn't be the successful surgeon he now was if it hadn't been for the study foundation which Doc Savage had established so that fellows like Frederick, who had talent but not money, could take specialized study.

Sam Clark revived enough to swear bitterly.

“So this restaurant monkey tipped you off?” he complained.

DOC SAVAGE took Sam Clark across the street to the Adair Hotel.

“So you got them!” said the pleased manager of the hotel.

“That's one of them,” said the hotel porter, looking at Sam.

“The other'n is upstairs,” said the elevator operator.

Sam asked bitterly, “Is there anybody in Miami who doesn't know all about this?”

Petey was waiting, or being detained, in their room. Petey, skinned and bruised in several places, eyed Sam gloomily and said, “I thought you had such a slick plan!”

Sam, in no mood for conversation, inspected Petey's captors. There were two of these and they looked nothing alike, seemed to have nothing in common, not even much fondness for each other. He recognized them, after a moment's thought, as being Monk Mayfair and Ham Brooks, two of a group of five specialists who were supposed to be associated with Doc Savage in most of his activities.

Monk Mayfair was a squat four-by-fourish sort of an individual with a startlingly homely face, a considerable growth of wiry red hair that was as thick elsewhere on him, namely his forearms, as it was on his bullet head. Apparently he had gone to considerable trouble to dress as sloppily, and also as loudly, as possible. Sam, remembering Monk Mayfair was reputedly one of the world's great industrial chemists, was startled.

Ham Brooks looked somewhat more the part. He was a wide-mouthed, wide-shoulder, rather handsome man with the wiry air of a fox-terrier, and the cultured and unconsciously projected voice of an orator of the spellbinder school. His clothing was expensive, immaculate, and a compromise between Bond Street and Hollywood, impressive without being loud. Brooks, Sam reflected, at least *looked* like the noted attorney he was reputed to be.

Petey cleared his throat.

"They musta been smarter than somebody figured," he ventured.

"So was the restaurant guy," Sam agreed gloomily.

DOC SAVAGE examined the rifle, mentioned that it showed a certain ingenuity, then began going over the room, finding nothing in the way of baggage except a cheap new suitcase, thoughtfully loaded with bricks so the bellhop wouldn't think it contained no baggage. In a wastebasket was heavy wrapping paper, grease-stained, which had obviously been around the rifle.

"Nothing to identify them," Doc announced. "Let's see what they have on them."

Sam objected indignantly to being searched. "This is illegal!" he yelled.

"As illegal as anything," agreed Ham Brooks, the lawyer. "Stand still, brother, or some more illegalities will happen to you!"

Petey said hopefully, "Sam, I think you can lick them. Are you gonna stand for this?"

Sam snorted. He was still not breathing normally as a result of the punch Doc Savage had given him in the midsection.

Monk and Ham tossed the contents of Sam and Petey's pockets on the bedspread as they unearthed them, and Doc Savage, sitting on the edge of the bed, went through the stuff. Petey's pockets contained two dozen slot machine slugs and another dozen slugs for illegal use in pay telephones, four dog-track bet ticket stubs, several more pari-mutuel bet tickets from Hialeah track, a half-eaten candy bar, and a total of eighty-seven cents.

From Sam's pockets came a pair of brass knucks, a roll of nickels that would also serve well in a fight, a receipt for a fine paid in court, ten dollars, a short newspaper item about the fight—the same one, evidently which had drawn the fine—which said that one Sam Clark, a vagrant, had badly beaten a night club bouncer and two socialites in a fracas over a blonde. There was also a brand-new billfold in the two-dollar price range which contained two hundred dollars, in fives and tens, neatly fastened together with a paper clip.

Doc Savage fanned through Sam's two hundred.

"All of the pay-off, or part of it?" he asked Sam.

"You ain't gonna take that dough?" Sam demanded, alarmed.

The greenbacks made a fluttering sound as Doc fanned through them again. "You work cheap."

"Huh?"

"Not enough."

Sam said indignantly, "Two hundred is a lotta dough."

"You think so?"

"Why not?"

"I think I know some individuals who would go a little higher, say around fifty thousand dollars, for somebody to take a shot at me," Doc said dryly. "They would expect a somewhat more skillful job, though."

Petey showed interest. "Would you mind giving me the names of them guys?" he asked.

"Shut up!" Sam snapped.

Monk Mayfair gave his slacks, which seemed in perpetual danger of sliding off his hips, a hitch. "So you guys were hired."

"Mind-readers!" Petey said.

"Shut up!" Sam ordered Petey.

Doc Savage scraped the belongings together on the bed, and remarked, "No weapons. That speaks a word in your behalf." He leaned back, relaxed and not seeming upset—alarmingly calm, in Sam's opinion—and examined the two prisoners speculatively. He selected Petey for his next questions, asking, "Who hired you two fellows to put that on me and why?"

Petey registered blankness. "Sam told me to shut up," he explained.

THAT, after five minutes, was the sum total of information that Petey and Sam were willing to divulge.

The questioning was interrupted—not as permanently as Sam hoped; he was beginning to be quite alarmed by Doc Savage—by the ringing of the telephone, and the information from downstairs, that the police were there to see what had happened.

"Send the officers up," Doc directed.

Sam was upset by this. "You ain't got nothing on me!" he said hastily.

"Only enough to get you about twenty years for attempted homicide," Ham Brooks, the attorney, informed him.

"It was a gag!"

"What was?"

"The whole thing!"

"How do you know?"

"That's what the guy told me."

“What guy?”

Sam considered this. “I guess I can't say. I told the guy I wouldn't,” he muttered.

There were two policemen, a lieutenant named Avery and a patrolman in uniform named, or called, Gilly. Lieutenant Avery had a long mule-shaped face which, when he saw Doc Savage, lighted up in a grin as if he were preparing to bray. “Well, for God's sake, it's Mr. Savage!” he said explosively. “Say, maybe you don't remember me—Avery, Theodore Avery—but I was in the FBI police school a couple of years ago when you lectured on the Keeler polygraph for recording psychogalvanic reflexes.”

Doc Savage said that of course he remembered the lieutenant, and added, “Have you still got the party fishing boat for a side-line?”

“Sure, I still got the boat. I want to take you out in the Gulf Stream for a day's fishing while you're here,” said the lieutenant. “Uh—this is Patrolman Gilly. Gilly put in a call; said there was a shooting.”

“There was,” Doc indicated Sam Clark and Petey. “A gag, they say. Someone paid them two hundred—the two hundred may have been a down payment only—to fire a shot into the restaurant table where I was eating. I was then supposed to investigate, find a trail which they'd arranged for me, and follow the trail to Butte, Montana, I think it was. The deal stubbed its toe when the owner of the restaurant across the street, Mr. Domani, became suspicious of a telephone caller who wished exact details about when I ate dinner, and what table I used. Mr. Domani notified me, and Monk and Ham here did some investigating—with a pair of binoculars, they discovered a man rigging a rifle behind the window in this room, and so we took measures to apprehend this pair”—he nodded at Sam, Petey—“and I was careful not to show myself within range of the rifle, in case it was an attempt on my life. Apparently it wasn't such an attempt, because Sam Clark, in the restaurant, where I seized him a few moments later, did not seem surprised when the bullet only went through the table.”

Sam Clark's jaw had loosened, his expression had become blankly foolish; he swallowed twice, with difficulty, and blurted, “How, by God, did you figure that all out?”

Lieutenant Avery said, “Restaurant man tipped you, eh? Sure he wasn't in on it?”

“Mr. Domani!” Doc seemed surprised.

“Oh, Domani—sure, he's all right. I know Domani. Nice guy.” The lieutenant scowled at Sam and Petey. “You want us to fan these guys into the bastille for you?”

“I'd like to look a bit further into it.”

“Yeah, that wouldn't be a bad idea. You want us to help?”

“If it's not breaking any rules, we'd like to tackle it ourselves,” Doc explained.

Lieutenant Avery grinned. “It's breaking rules, all right, but that's what rules are for. If you need any little service we can give, holler.”

“We will.”

TO Sam Clark's horror, and Petey's confessed disbelief, the two policemen now departed. Petey, after his eyes had protruded, demanded of Sam, “What's got into them cops? They go off and leave civilians to investigate their own shooting scrape! Who ever hearda sucha thing!”

“We got influence,” Monk Mayfair told him grimly.

Doc Savage, having accompanied the two policemen to the elevator, returned and closed and locked the door, then went over and looked Sam coldly in the eye.

“Just before the officers arrived,” Doc said, “you started to tell a story. You got as far as saying it was all a gag, and someone had told you it was a gag. Do you want to go on from there?”

“Go on?”

“The rest of the story.”

Sam was impressed, but not sufficiently impressed to talk.

“I got nothin' to say.” He put his jaw out.

“Why not?”

“I choose not to discuss it,” Sam said.

Monk suggested, “Maybe he chooses to lose his teeth instead.” Monk went over and showed Sam a block of fist which appeared capable of smashing bricks and looked, from the scars on it as if it might have been employed for some similar purpose in the past. “You think your nose is harder than this?” Monk wagged the fist.

Doc Savage made a restraining gesture. “I think there is a less messy way.” The remark gave him Sam's alarmed attention, and Doc added, “Sam—if that is your name—have you ever heard of hyoscine?”

Sam batted his eyes. “Which?”

“It is,” Doc explained, “nearly identical with scopolamine in its effects. It is administered hypodermically in repeated doses until a stage of mild delirium is induced, and at a certain stage the victim is afflicted with a peculiar forgetfulness which seems to cover any alibi he may have figured out for himself as security against being accused of a crime, and likewise he usually forgets that he does not want to tell the truth. In such a state, he implicates himself readily if guilty.”

“Hah!” said Sam explosively. Just what he meant by the exclamation, the tone did not say. Mostly it was alarmed.

“Unfortunately,” added Doc Savage, “there is a large element of danger connected with the stuff. It is so dangerous, in fact, that its use in connection with twilight sleep for childbirth in hospitals has been discontinued — Death indications, in the course of an autopsy are generally the same as those of asphyxiation, which is equivalent to drowning or choking to death, and is probably not a very pleasant way to die.”

Monk, realizing what Doc Savage was trying to do—induce a state of alarm—pretended some concern of his own. “Doc, not that I give a damn about this guy, but I feel I should, as a chemist, point out that the hyoscine manufactured under these post-war conditions isn't too reliable. If you want to murder this guy, I'd say go ahead and use it. Otherwise, I think he would be better off if we beat it out of him.”

Having offered this he, Monk, looked as solemn as possible.

Sam Clark felt he was being kidded, but he wasn't too sure. He fitted two or three expressions on his face—sneer, scowl, bravado, a second scowl that was thoughtful, a what-the-hell look of resignation—which apparently mirrored the state of his mind. “Okay, but there's one thing you gotta let me do,” he said.

Doc waited questioningly.

Clark said, "Put that money in an envelope—one of the hotel envelopes will do—and stamp it. Then write a name and address on it that I'll give you, and drop it in the mailbox."

"What's the idea?"

"Simple. I didn't deliver on the job. So the guy gets back his cash."

Monk, astonished, examined Sam Clark, concluded Sam was being honest and said, "Danged if I don't think you mean it!"

"Why not?"

THE name Sam Clark wrote on the envelope was *Mr. Parker Snelling*. The address was *1766 Riviera Point, Miami Beach*. He showed it to them.

"A pal of yours, you see," he said.

Doc Savage had never heard of a Mr. Parker Snelling, and he glanced questioningly at Monk.

"Not me," Monk said hastily.

"Nor me," Ham said.

Sam Clark scowled. "What are you giving me? Don't you know the guy?"

"No," Doc said. "Mail that money to him, and then let's talk it over." Doc had a book of three-cent stamps in his billfold, and they guessed the weight of the envelope containing the currency, added an extra three-cent stamp for luck, and consigned it to the mail chute at the end of the hall, Clark not looking too happy when the money disappeared. "Maybe I'm a sucker," he muttered.

"You won't be the first of the species," Doc advised.

They returned to the room. Petey was disgusted and told Clark so. "All that dough, us broke, and you mail it back to the guy!" Petey complained. "Godamighty, now we can't even hire a lawyer. You're a fine so-and-so. I got a notion to find me another friend."

Sam Clark took a chair. He was dejected. He indicated the clipping about the fight, asked, "You saw that? Our last ten bucks goes on that fine. I don't tell the law it's our last ten, or we would have been run out of town as vagrants—which is what we are. We're broke, see." He indicated Petey. "Petey runs on to this guy, or the guy runs on to Petey, I don't know which. He's a nice-looking guy who seems to be in the chips. He's plenty good-humored, see. Laughs a lot. And he has a proposition." He paused and scowled at Petey. "Tell 'em how you met the guy, Petey."

"You're doing the talking," Petey said.

"Tell 'em!"

"I don't want no part—"

"Tell 'em!" Sam said grimly. "Tell 'em, or I'll take you by the ears, put a foot in your mouth and pull you on like a boot." He did not sound as if he was fooling.

THIS guy Snelling, Petey said, was a racing bloke see, a lad with right fancy clobber, a real bonzer. Not

a bit mangy, but no mark either. A democratic sort, no end. He's shouted Petey a drink right off.

Petey paused to see how his Australian dialect was getting over, seemed disappointed that they weren't impressed, and continued, "We drop into a pub for a cupper, and the lad's no larrikin. He's wacko, acts like a cobbler—"

"Just a minute," Ham interrupted. "Does a translation go with this?"

Petey was injured. "I'm telling you—"

"You spoke Brooklynese a minute ago," Ham said. "Go back to it."

Petey said he was telling this, damned if he wasn't, and Monk inquired how he liked his teeth, the way they were, or on the floor. Petey considered this, and decided to give them a translation.

He had met Parker Snelling at the race track, and Snelling was a fancy dresser, a great guy, not a bit stingy, and they had had a drink, although Snelling certainly wasn't a roughneck although he had been quite friendly, almost a pal.

Petey interpolated at this point, in Brooklynese English: "I'm not wise right off, but I figure the guy has heard about me from somebody, and about Sammy, here, too. But I don't catch on to that until later."

The upshot of the good fellowship was that Parker Snelling had come around to stating that he had a little job, a kind of practical joke of a rather unusual sort which he wished perpetrated, and he had outlined the matter, explaining that it might be better for two men to handle it.

"So I introduce him to Sammy," Petey said.

Sam Clark cleared his throat. "Parker Snelling is about six feet, not heavy, and, as Petey says a nice dresser and nice mannered. He plays the races, not heavily, but carefully. He is, I gathered from his talk, taking an extended vacation after having served in the Merchant Marine during the war, in the course of which he was on a torpedoed ship and was marooned on an island for some time — You mean to tell me you don't know him?"

"Never heard of him," Doc Savage said.

"What about Lucky?"

"Lucky who?"

"You don't know *her* either!"

"No."

"Well, for cryin' out loud!"

"Somebody has been told some lies," Petey said. "I think it was us."

"What about Lucky? A woman, you say?"

"Uh-huh. Very delicious, I heard — And you don't know her?"

"No."

"That's damned strange," Sam Clark said. "Because this Snelling told us he wanted you decoyed off to

Montana to keep you out of her clutches. That was the words he used—out of her clutches. But I gathered he figured you were beating his time with her — But you don't know her! I'll be damned!"

Monk showed considerable interest. "If we're going to conduct further investigation," he suggested, "it would be my idea to start with this Miss Lucky."

Chapter III

THE clerk of the Silver Beech grinned at them and said, "Miss Jones? Ah — Miss Jones!" He acted and sounded as if they had rung sleigh-bells.

The Silver Beech was one of the better small residential hotels on Miami Beach, probably not having more than thirty rooms or suites, and probably none of these renting for less than fifteen dollars a day.

"What's so amazing about that?" Ham asked the desk clerk sharply.

"Ah, Miss Jones, yes indeed — Are you from the police, by any chance?"

Doc Savage looked interested. "Why the police?"

Doc had not particularly favored beginning their further investigation with Lucky—who seemed also to be Miss Jones—but he had acceded to the obvious wishes of Monk and Ham to begin with the young lady, not because he wanted them to start making fools out of themselves, which was what he expected, but because the Silver Beech, where Miss Jones lived, according to Sam Clark, was on their route out to 1766 Riviera Point, where Parker Snelling lived, and it was about five miles nearer than Snelling's home.

"Why the police?" Doc repeated.

The clerk studied them. "You don't look like the constabulary, I must say."

"Come on, out with it."

The expression that now came to the clerk's face indicated he was going to tell them to go to hell, either in those words, or more politely.

"Don't say it," Monk advised him. He had evidently sized up the clerk's character better than Doc had supposed because he added, "And how would you like for a nice noisy ambulance to pull up in front of this hostelry and take you off to a hospital to get an arm put back on you?"

The result, probably from Monk's I'd-as-soon-mangle-you-as-not appearance rather than the words, were satisfactory.

"Miss Lucky," he explained "had had a bit of difficulty with a betting gentleman. I am not fully familiar with the details, but it seems he was either unable or would not, pay off a bet he lost to her on a horse race. Miss Lucky took his Cadillac, striking him, in the process, a rather painful blow with a"—the clerk indicated several extremely modernistic goldfish bowls which were part of the lobby's decorations—"with one of those. The gentleman left issuing threats of arrest."

"Is she in?"

"I can find out."

"Do that."

"Whom shall I announce?"

“Tell her,” Doc said, “that the delegation is here about Mr. Parker Snelling's practical joke.”

Presently, having spoken into the house phone, the clerk informed them, “Miss Lucky said—in slightly more pointed language—to send the bums up.”

On the stairs—the place was a bit too elegant for an elevator—Monk grinned appreciatively. “An impulsive gamblin' beauty with a Cadillac!” He raked his fingers through his hair to make it stand up straight, and adjusted his necktie.

MISS LUCKY Jones seemed surprised, but not nonplussed, when she saw them.

“What kind of delegation are you, anyway?” she demanded.

Ham managed to kick Monk's shin as Monk was on the point of wolf-whistling, thereby turning the whistle into a twitter of agony.

Doc Savage had the feeling that the others, like himself, were getting what they expected, only more so. She wasn't a blonde. He thought immediately of her hair as being Pompeiian red, probably because Pompeii was a volcano, and it was no mystery why Monk had tried to whistle; it was probably fortunate the whistle hadn't come off, Doc reflected, because Miss Lucky would probably have made Monk sorry. She wore as spectacular, and as skimpy a sun outfit as he recalled having seen, and fitted it the way the designer probably had dreamed.

She pointed a finger at Petey, at Sam.

“You two,” she said in a voice that was deep and musical, “I have seen. Around the tracks.” She indicated Petey a second time. “You're a two-bit gambler.”

Petey disclaimed this. “To be a gambler, you gotta win sometimes.”

Miss Lucky inspected all of them as a group, then demanded, “Can you think of a reason why I should invite you in?”

They were somewhat confused. Entirely aside from her appearance, Miss Lucky had qualities of a firecracker sort which were a menace to any sort of dignity. Ham Brooks endeavored to solve the situation by explaining, “This is Doc Savage,” and indicating Doc.

Lucky examined Doc.

“If I needed a doctor, I might be interested,” she stated. Then, with eyes narrowed, she added, “Listen, if that welching cheapskate bookie sent you around to pull some kind of razzle-dazzle on me, you can just scam while you're able to do it under your own power. And tell him that next time, I'll feed him to those goldfish!”

Ham's mouth remained open, as if he were startled at finding someone who had not heard of Doc Savage, but more probably because looking at Miss Lucky made his mouth want to stay open.

Doc cleared his throat self-consciously. “Are you acquainted with a Mr. Parker Snelling?”

“That stuffy goat!”

“You know him, then?”

Miss Lucky made a lazy movement with one hand, which immediately held a small .25-calibre automatic that was either solid gold or gold-plated and had, unless appearances were very deceiving, several

fair-sized diamonds set in the grip. The gun lay flat on her hand for a moment, so they could see what it was, then her fingers wrapped around it with impressive skill. She slipped the safety off.

“If you've got something to sell, show the merchandise,” she said.

“It seems that Snelling claims you are a menace to me, and he felt he should save me,” Doc explained. “The method he took was to hire a man to shoot at me, so I could chase the man off to Montana, thereby removing myself from your sphere of influence.”

Lucky considered this. “Either you're crazy, or you've got something entertaining.” She stepped back. “Come on in.”

THE apartment was probably the best one in the hotel, but it did not surprise them at all. Sam Clark, apparently not accustomed to such flash, was diverted from his own troubles long enough to stare at the chocolate walls with touches of cream in picture frames and shelves—his eye lingered appreciatively on one large painting that was unusually indecent—and the milky carpeting, the heavy functional modern furniture in yellows and grass greens, and a cream and chrome trick bar in a corner.

Lucky indicated the bar. “Would you call yourselves friends? I usually offer my friends a drink.”

“We should be able to find that out in a hurry,” Doc said.

“Right down to business, eh?”

“Do you mind?”

“Not at all.” Lucky frowned at Monk, who had become quite interested in her long, well-shaped legs and Monk hastily averted his gaze.

“It's a wild story,” Doc explained.

“It is! I like wild stories,” Lucky said. “Is there any truth in this one?”

“I haven't figured that out yet,” Doc admitted. He gestured at Sam Clark, explaining, “Most of it came from him, and part of it is his doing, and how much is lies and how much is not is what we're here to find out — I take it that you know a man named Parker Snelling.”

“I know one who calls himself that,” Lucky admitted.

“You think it might be a phony name?”

Lucky perched on a table near where Ham had take a seat, swung her long legs for a moment, then used a toe to nudge Ham's knee. “You look like a bartender, handsome-and-well-dressed,” she said. “How about mixing us a drink.” Ham flushed with rage, and Monk laughed.

“Want to answer that?” Doc asked.

“You're making noises like cops,” Lucky announced. “What's the score? What is this, anyway?”

“Here's the whole story. Listen.” He gave her the entire picture, skipping details where they were not pertinent, putting them in where they were necessary to paint essential actions and motives, managing to get, without much conscious effort, apparently, a story that was complete and sounded, in the telling, considerably more concise and logical and clear than the events themselves had been. When he finished, he had managed to leave, poised before them like a huge question mark, the mystery of: why had Parker Snelling tried an elaborate, unorthodox scheme to save Doc from the wiles of Miss Lucky Jones when

Doc was not personally acquainted with either Snelling or Lucky.

“Mix that drink, well-dressed,” Lucky told Ham.

SAM CLARK and Petey said they would take bourbon and they sounded as if they needed it; Doc declined, and Ham said he would prefer a glass of sherry. Monk came up with a gallant, “Just having you around is intoxicating enough for me.” Lucky was pleased, or put enough amiability on top of her worry to seem pleased, and asked him, “What's your name and racket, big-and-primitive?”

“Monk Mayfair—Lieutenant Colonel Andrew Blodgett Mayfair,” Monk explained. “I'm a chemist.”

Lucky gave a visible jump. “Oh, for crying out loud!” She seemed astonished. “I've just figured out who you fellows must be!”

She slid off the table, went into another room, and Doc moved hastily until he could see that it was a bedroom, and that she was at the dressing table, evidently getting a jar of cosmetic. Presently she returned and tossed the cosmetic to Doc.

“Right?” she demanded.

The preparation was one that had been developed and marketed by Doc's cousin, Patricia Savage, who operated an extremely ritzy beautician's establishment in New York, charging, in Doc's opinion, about twenty times as much as the products and the service were worth.

“Right,” he agreed.

“Somebody,” said Lucky, “has pulled something on you.”

“You know anything about it?”

“It's all news to me.”

“Any ideas?”

“I wouldn't,” said Lucky instantly, “care to make any guesses I wouldn't lay a bet on.”

“Any ideas you might have would be guesses?”

“That's right.”

“What sort is Parker Snelling?”

Her head inclined toward Sam Clark. “Didn't the bouncing ball here give you a description of him?”

Doc nodded. “But the feminine viewpoint on him might be helpful.”

“The feminine viewpoint is a good way to get into trouble,” Lucky said dryly.

“Ham was serving as bartender, doing a rather officious job of rattling glasses and inspecting labels, measuring and sniffing, and otherwise trying to cover up the fact that he didn't know what he was doing.

Doc watched Lucky intently. “I rather gather that you feel there is some trouble coming up and would so state?”

“If I could so state without stating, you might have something,” Lucky said. “Listen, I think I was just roped into something by a guy I hardly know—Snelling—merely because I happened to be handy and

ornamental. I hate to disappoint you, but I have lived twenty-six rather uneventful years and for fully twenty of them I have known enough to keep my nose out of the other fellow's monkey-business.”

Monk reflected that he would bet Miss Lucky Jones' years had been eventful, all right.

Ham, at the bar, grunted loudly. The grunt had a sick sound.

“Doc, will you come here!” Ham said.

THE bottle, which contained, if the label was telling the truth, a bonded bourbon of nationally known make and, if the advertising in the magazines could be believed, of utterly ambrosial qualities that would create genteel good-fellowship between jungle tigers, was more than half full. Doc spread a drop of the contents on a fingertip, tasted, wiped his tongue with a handkerchief.

“Monk,” he said.

Ham said, “I don't know what made me think of trying it, just a general suspicious nature.”

Monk tasted. He said, “For God's sake!” He added, “If we had some kind of a frog, we could be sure in a hurry.”

Doc swung on Lucky. “What did you want to drink?”

“Bourbon.” She gazed at them blankly. “What's got into you? What's the stuff about a frog's skin.”

Monk explained to her. “Just a dry frog. When a few drops of a solution containing that stuff is applied to it, very marked titanic convulsions will follow it. It was just something silly that popped in my mind.” Monk looked, and sounded, horrified.

“You don't sound as if it were so silly,” Lucky said quickly. “What—what are you talking about?”

“Strychnine in the bourbon.”

Lucky paled. “That—that stuff kills you, don't it?”

“Usually, with a fair dosage, in fifteen minutes or so.”

“In my bourbon?”

“Yes.”

“Oh, my God!” Lucky said. She seemed horrified, and went quickly to the bar, picked up another bottle—gin—started to pour, then looked still more horrified, and slammed the bottle down hastily. “Somebody tried to kill me!” she screamed.

Chapter IV

LUCKY JONES found a chair and flopped into it. She had lost some of her peaches-and-cream coloring, but she did not seem much less alert, and did not look any less alluring. She got out a cigarette, a long black one. Monk lighted it for her, and she smoked in rapid puffs. The smoke was faintly perfumed.

Doc asked, “Who had the last drink out of that bottle?”

She shuddered. “Me.”

“When?”

“Just before dinner. I ate early. About six.”

“No ill effects?”

“No — Godamighty! Maybe I'm poisoned!” She bolted upright in the chair. “Do you suppose —?”

Doc Savage said that it was very unlikely that as a usual thing one who had taken strychnine could be considered fairly safe if they had survived two hours or so.

“Whooooee! It was more than two hours ago that I had the drink!”

“Did you lock your door when you went out to dinner?”

“I didn't go out.”

“No?”

“I had dinner served here. I was tired. I had been out to the track and I intended to go to the fights later tonight—I have a little bet down on Kid Wilson in the main go.”

“Did the regular waiter serve you?”

“Yes. Tony.”

Doc Savage frowned thoughtfully.

Monk asked, “If it was the waiter, wouldn't he have put the stuff in the food?”

“Not necessarily, because that certainly would have drawn suspicion to himself. Strychnine in the food would call police attention to those who prepared and served it. The liquor would have been a better bet. But you'd better talk to this Tony.”

Lucky waved her cigarette impatiently. “Wait a minute—Tony is a nice little guy with two kids. I'd hate to see him lose his job. I don't think it was Tony — If you ask me, the guy that delivered the tip sheets would be a better bet — Say! Wait a minute! I got an idea!”

She went to the telephone, dialed a number rapidly—Doc tried to tell what number it was from the dial-travel, and failed—and presently she said, “Hello—Hutch? — Lucky. Thanks for the tip sheets. Why, the ones the skinny fellow brought about six-thirty — Oh, you didn't? Well, he said you did — Oh, about fifty, gray hair, real skinny, and with sort of a genteel air about him, as if he might be a broken-down actor — You don't know him, eh? Well thanks, Hutch — Glad Eye in the third, you think? I'll take a G on the nose. Thanks again.”

She hung up.

“The skinny man was a phony!” she exclaimed.

THE man had been of medium height, drawing his thin appearance from a near-skeletal emaciation rather than extraordinary height. He was blue-eyed, had a rather large mouth, a dark gray tropical worsted suit—mud-colored, Lucy called the suit—and black-and-white shoes of obvious quality, but rather worn. His voice was either naturally deep and timbrous, or he had made it so; she was inclined to believe it was naturally so.

“Oh, yes, he called 'first' feers, and 'excuse' he called askoos. He had some kind of dialect, not much but a little. What would that be?”

“Possibly Spanish.”

“He didn't look Spanish.”

“Which wouldn't necessarily mean he wasn't.”

“Well, he's my bet for the strychnine. He said Hutch had sent him over with the tip sheets, and Hutch didn't. So there you are.”

“You still have the tip sheets?”

“Sure. I haven't looked at them.”

“Was he wearing gloves?”

“Gloves—say, I remember now, he was!”

Doc said there probably wouldn't be any of the man's fingerprints on the tip sheets, but they would look at them anyway and, by trying to trace them from their source, possibly get a line on something.

“Who,” Doc added, “would be in a position to know you were in the habit of receiving tip sheets from Hutch?”

“I haven't.”

“Haven't what?”

“Gotten any tips from him. But it was logical. I know Hutch—he's a betting commissioner over on Biscayne Boulevard and a sharp one at that—and he's a nice guy who would pass along a tip.”

“Who knew that you were acquainted with Hutch?”

“For God's sake!” said Miss Lucky. “The army and navy and the marines as far as I know. All my friends, I supposed, and that could easily include somebody who wasn't a pal.”

Doc said, “Monk, why don't you do a little checking downstairs.”

While Monk was gone, Doc went over the room casually, as to manner, but with pretty sharp attention to details that might or might not mean anything. It was difficult in the beginning to accept the gambling-lady picture Lucky Jones painted herself, but he was beginning to believe that it was genuine. He was fairly sure of it after she showed him the contents of the room safe. It was a surprisingly serviceable safe, a part of the service of the hotel; it was even concealed behind a picture in the traditional way. “Goldilocks, the manager downstairs, told me they change the combination for each tenant,” Lucky explained. “I hope he wasn't woofin'!”

Doc could see why she would hope that. There was a least fifty thousand dollars in many forms of value—cash, war bonds, industrial bonds, stock certificates, liquor warehouse receipts, were a few he noticed.

“Would Snelling know Hutch might send you the tip sheets?” Doc demanded suddenly.

“Sure.”

“Mind going with us to talk to him?”

Miss Lucky headed for the bedroom and her hat. “Try and keep me away! And if you want to see a first-class job of eating a guy out, watch me work on him.”

MONK came upstairs and reported, “The waiter seems all right, and the desk clerk and the doorman both remember the thin guy, who seems to have been around here before, or at least they think tonight wasn't the first time they saw him.”

“Tonight was the first time I ever saw him,” Lucky declared.

Doc had been sitting at the writing desk, penning words on paper with a room pen which he realized, to his astonishment, was of solid gold.

He said, “How would you two like to do a service for Miss Jones?”

Monk and Ham were amenable to the idea.

“That's awfully sweet of you,” said Lucky. She had come out of the bedroom, having added a wrap-around skirt affair to her scandalous play suit, and tossed a white camel-hair topcoat over her shoulders.

Doc told Monk and Ham, “An attempt was made to murder Miss Jones, and that's bad business. I want you two to investigate things around her while I go have a talk with Snelling. I'll take Sam Clark, Petey and Miss Jones with me, since they're all involved in the Snelling episode.”

He handed Monk the paper he had been writing on.

“Here is a list of things you might check,” he said.

Monk glanced at the list, Ham examined it also, and Monk said, “What the—” and Ham interrupted, “How are we going to take fingerprints without a fingerprint kit? You want us to call that cop, Lieutenant Avery, and have his department give it a going over?”

“That would be the easiest way.”

Lucky said uneasily, “Cops? Do cops have to be rung in on this?”

“Why not?” Doc asked her.

“Oh, I guess it's okay. I pay enough taxes to be entitled to some service, I suppose.”

Mention of the police had alarmed Sam Clark, and he displayed a sudden eagerness to get going. He offered Lucky his arm, and said gallantly, “You certainly add an ornamental touch to our little procession, Miss Jones.”

This got him a scowl from both Monk and Ham, and Monk said loudly, “You better keep an eye on that cheap crook, Doc!”

Petey became angry and yelled, “I'm the cheap crook, wise-guy! Sam has morals!”

Doc said, “Let us take our morals to Mr. Snelling.”

It was now quite dark. The air smelled faintly of semi-tropical flowers and sea-water, and seemed to have the effect of greasing and smoothing their progress over the boulevards. Doc Savage was driving a

rented car, and, for the first time in the evening, was rather pleased with the world.

Doc had been in Miami, actually, for a vacation, and for no other reason; he was quite sure he needed a rest and he had resented having plans upset by the restaurant incident and the mystery that had followed. He had, when the thing began, no wish whatever for excitement, which was a rather unusual state of mind for him; he had been thinking about it, and bothered somewhat, wondering if he might not be losing a zest for excitement which had keyed most of his existence. So it was pleasant to decide now that he was interested in what was happening, what might happen, and in Miss Jones, although he rather suspected he would be better off not to get interested in Miss Jones.

The vacation, he suddenly decided, had been a bust, and it was not the first one that had bored him. For some reason, he seemed constitutionally unable to take a vacation and enjoy it the way, he imagined, other people did. Monk and Ham were not affected; they could drop the serious side of life at any given instant and start quarreling over a female or some other object and be perfectly relaxed. But not Doc.

Doc frowned. He supposed the cock-eyed kind of youth he had lived was responsible for some things he found in himself that he didn't particularly like, and which certainly kept him from having a normal life. He had been placed, by his father, in the hands of specialists for training from cradle age, and all his recollections were of dead-pan, too-serious mental marvels trying to cram what they knew into his head by one method or another. The result had been to give him remarkable abilities—he appreciated this, but felt people over-estimated him most of the time—but had also rendered him psychologically unable to be just plain susceptible.

He wondered what effect Lucky would have on his psychosis. Something explosive, he'd bet.

Petey grunted impatiently. "Say, aincha takin' a long way about to get out there to Snelling's place?"

"You know where it is, then?"

"I know where Riviera Point is and I know how far out that number would be," Petey said. "And this ain't the direct — hey! Listen!" He wheeled his head about suddenly, stared and demanded, "What's going on behind us?"

Doc said, "We'd better look into this."

He turned the car, by swinging into a side street then backing out in a quick arc, and drove three blocks rapidly, then slowed pace to approach two cars, one of them resting across the curbing with its nose against a palm tree. The other car, which had edged the first one into the tree, was comparatively undamaged.

The racket of the collision—it was this sound which Petey had heard—had aroused the neighborhood, and, since the hour was as yet not very late at night, a curious crowd was beginning to collect.

"There's Monk Mayfair!" Sam Clark gasped.

Monk was telling the curiosity-mongers: "Just a little accident. The chap sideswiped us. He's unconscious. But I don't think he's hurt bad."

Monk came over to Doc Savage's car, pretended not to know Doc, and said loudly "Mister, we got a fellow here who is hurt. Could we persuade you to haul him to the hospital for us?"

"Certainly," Doc said.

Monk and Ham Brooks, who had been bending over the victim, now approached carrying a long thin

man. They put him, not overly gently, in the car.

Lucky became pop-eyed. “The—that’s the guy who brought me the tip-sheets!” she exclaimed.

Chapter V

HE answered in every detail the description given previously by Lucky, and in addition his pockets yielded up stuff that said his name was Lon Sun Mesana, that he was forty-nine years old and a member in good standing of the merchant seaman’s union. This, if he had his way, seemed to be all they were going to get out of him.

“Any doubt but what he is the one who brought you the tip sheets?” Doc asked.

“He’s the one,” Lucky said positively.

“You admit that?” Doc asked the man.

He said he would admit nothing because there was nothing to admit and they had made a mistake. He called ‘mistake’ *meestheck*, and otherwise had a Spanish accent, which was the accent Lucky had described him as having.

Lucky demanded, “How on earth did you catch him?”

“Monk and Ham did some investigating to see whether anyone followed us when we left the hotel, and I guess this fellow did,” Doc explained.

“When did you cook up that idea?”

Monk grinned and asked, “You remember the list of things to do that Doc handed us?”

He showed her what was written on the paper, which was: *Stick with me but keep out of sight and see if we are followed.*

Sam Clark looked over her shoulder, read this, and told his partner indignantly, “Petey, they think we’re crooks! They weren’t willing to tell us they thought we might be trailed. They think we’re goldanged crooks.”

“Why not?” Peter was not much worried.

“I don’t care what you think I am,” Miss Lucky Jones said. “But I’m sure glad you caught the gift-bearer here. What are you going to do with him?”

“Get some words out of him,” Ham said.

“What if he doesn’t want to give up any?”

Monk nudged the prisoner, Mesana, with his elbow, asked, “What about that, Senor?”

The man grunted loudly. “I am as innocent as the dew that falls by accident on the poison-ivy flower,” he declared.

“Can you prove that?” Monk demanded.

The purity of innocence was its own proof, the man said.

Monk thought this was funny. “Brother, you’re a character,” he said. “You try to give the lady strychnine,

and you're as innocent as the falling dew. That is very interesting and it will be particularly interesting to the judge and jury who hang you.”

Doc Savage applied the brakes. His head was out of the window, and he was inspecting such house numbers as were illuminated.

“I think this is where Snelling lives,” he said. “It's the address, anyway.”

THE car followed a wide coral drive that took them in a lazy curve to the porte-cochere of a coral mansion. They got out in an orderly thicket of flame vines, palms, hibiscus and bougainvilleas, and Monk hammered his fist on a carved door. “Betcha the butler wears striped pants,” he said.

A tall man, rangy with a weather-beaten look that did not quite go with his silk sport shirt, pongee suit, jeweled wrist-watch, bracelet, two rings, one of them a diamond of at least two carats. He was quite shocked to see them. There was no doubt about that.

“Hello, Snelling,” Lucky said.

His mouth fell open. He said, “I—” and, “Uh—” vaguely and bogged down on that.

“This,” announced Lucky, “is the enigmatic Mr. Parker Snelling, who had you shot at in order to save you from me.”

Snelling seemed pained.

Doc, intending to startle and upset Snelling if it was possible, thrust the would-be poisoner, Mesana, in front of the man and said, “Here's a friend of yours!”

Snelling either did not know Mesana or did not take the bait.

He looked straight at Mesana. “I don't know you.”

Mesana didn't say anything.

Doc asked, “Snelling?”

“Yes?”

“Do you know me?”

A wooden expression settled on Snelling's face and he said, “I have never met you before — I know who you are—from descriptions.” He kept his eyes on an imaginary point a foot above Doc's head and watched it with a fixed intentness.

Doc asked Mesana, “This man hire you to plant the strychnine.”

Mesana said a wooden nothing.

Snelling seemed to become more stunned; his lips parted, forming the first syllable of the word strychnine, but he did not finish the word, and his lips remained motionless holding the “strych” shape.

Sam Clark said noisily, with a lot of rumble, “Well, he's the bird who hired me!”

Snelling stared at Clark.

“I never saw you before in my life,” he said.

Ham Brooks said disgustedly, "We're making a lot of progress. Nobody knows anything until it's tramped out of him!"

Doc swung on Monk. "Monk, I think I noticed a drugstore about four blocks south. Will you drive down there and get the chemicals necessary to make the Richards-Neville dermal strychnine test. The chemicals necessary for the reagent that will show where anyone has handled strychnine during the past several hours are common enough that the drugstore should carry them in stock. Get them, will you? And better mix them at the drugstore."

With a straight face, Monk said, "Sure." He left.

Doc remarked casually, "He won't be gone long." His tone, manner, were casual; he gave no sign nor indication whatever that there was no such dermal test for strychnine so far as anybody knew.

Ham helped the deceit along. Ham said, "You've all heard of the paraffin test, the dermal nitrate test, it's called, where paraffin is applied to the hand to collect residues from discharged firearms, then applying a reagent to show whether there are nitrate or burned powder stains present. You all know about that? It's common police practice. Well, this Richards-Neville test is similar in results, although somewhat different in execution."

Mesana began turning a little green.

DOC SAVAGE remarked that, while Monk was gone, he would examine Snelling's house. The declaration upset Snelling. He said, "I'm damned if you do—without a search warrant!"

Ham laughed without humor. "Brother, you put us to the trouble of getting a warrant and we can get one, all right and we'll swear out a complaint of attempted homicide!"

"You can't," Snelling grated, "make that stick."

"Want to bet?"

"Sam Clark was specifically ordered not to fire at you!"

"Thought you didn't know Clark?"

Snelling showed his teeth angrily. "You know what you know, and I know what I know!" he snarled.

"How about putting the two together?"

"Not," Snelling snapped, "while I'm in my right mind."

DOC SAVAGE, in going over the house, reached several conclusions—that the mansion was rented, that Snelling had occupied it no more than two months, that Snelling had paid one month's rental in advance and paid none since, and that he hadn't been paying the trades people. There were bills, and in some cases threatening letters from collection attorneys, from grocers, tailor, garage, two liquor stores, various establishments handing things a man might give a woman—perfume shops, florists, hat shops and one bill for a fur coat.

Monk returned and made a quick impressive show of trapping Mesana.

"First I spray on this chemical." Monk exhibited a dime store atomizer. "Then I spray a little of this on, and if there is any strychnine present, there will be purple tints produced."

He indicated a second atomizer, added, for effect, that, "This test is something like the original one of

dissolving strychnine in sulphuric acid, which causes no change, but, on the addition of a bit of potassium dichromate, tints variously blue, violet, and even red are produced. The test is very effective." He announced all this with a straight face.

Mesana watched—not willingly—as his hands and wrists were sprayed, then sprayed again.

When bluish stains appeared here and there, he became almost the same cyanosed blue color himself.

"There!" said Monk. "You can see the evidence right in front of your eyes."

Sam Clark was impressed. "You mean to tell me that the staining shows he handled strychnine?"

Monk said, "What's so mysterious about it? Strychnine is an alkaloid, and can you name me anything easier than an alkaloid to track down?"

Sam, who evidently was not sure whether he knew an alkaloid from a rabbit, made no comment, but looked enough impressed to help along the deception. He told Mesana, "Brother, they got you quicker than they got me. If you can sell out cheap, you better do it."

Mesana's eyes had grown moist and shiny with terror, and he mumbled, "Sell out!" and then made a sucking noise of air indrawn through his teeth. He said, "Sell out? What the hell have I got to sell out?"

Sam looked surprised; Petey said hastily, "Look, Mesana, or whatever the name—you got information to trade, see. These guys don't know from nothing. You make a deal, see—Sam and me, here, and you—we all get a clean slate, see. We walk out. In return, you give them all the dope you know."

"Well, for God's sake!" Monk Mayfair exclaimed. He came over and clouted Petey on the head. "You got a nerve, trying to talk *him* into buying you out of the mess."

Petey yelled, clutched his bruised head.

Mesana wheeled on Doc Savage and said loudly, angrily, "You're being taken for a sucker! The thing for you to do's stop barking at stumps and find Barnes."

Doc, without blinking, demanded, "Who is Barnes?"

"Chandler Barnes or Warner & Barnes."

"Where is he?"

"He oughta be easy to find," Mesana said, "because he's hunting for you."

"Eh?"

Mesana said, "He's hunt—" and didn't finish it. He said, instead, hoarsely, "This—this—" and looked fixedly at the cigarette he had been smoking. Then he pitched forward loosely on the floor.

Parker Snelling broke the brittle silence that followed bellowing loudly, "He's shot! Someone shot him!"

Chapter VI

SNELLING'S intimation that Mesana was shot produced assorted effects. Sam Clark snorted and said, "Hell, there wasn't any shot!"

Snelling lunging forward, reached Mesana. The man's body was squirming in agony, the lips becoming bluish and tight.

“Look!” Snelling had driven a hand under Mesana, bringing into view a small object which he exhibited. “Look at this! Don't tell me he wasn't shot!” The object in his palm somewhat resembled half a darning needle, the point of which was coated with a chemical. To the other end of the steel dart a bit of yarn, a streamer about an inch and a half long, was attached, evidently with glue.

“Where did that come from?” Monk yelled.

“Window, I think!” Snelling said.

Mesana was unquestionably dying. His hands were clenched, the feet were inverting, the toes drawing visibly inside the man's shoes, the abdomen distending and arching with the spasmodic effort.

The cigarette the man had been smoking was smoldering on the rug. Doc laid it on a smoking stand without removing his gaze from the dying man.

“A dart!” Snelling bawled. “My God, a poison dart!” He lunged to his feet, pounded across the room to the light switch, and plunged the room into darkness. The resulting blackness was astonishing.

“Get those lights on!” Doc Savage said sharply.

“I'm damned if I do!” Snelling was obstinate. “That dart came from outside. We're all targets if—if—” He swore at someone and began struggling. The other party in the scuffle proved to be Ham Brooks; in a moment, the lights came on, but Snelling, enraged, ran to a floor lamp, drew his pocket knife, and proceeded to saw into the cord, got a hellish display of electric fire, and renewed darkness, after he blew a fuse. “Maybe you want to stand in here and let somebody potshoot at you with a blowgun! I don't!” Snelling yelled.

It was intensely dark in the room. There seemed to be quite a lot of moving around.

Doc heard the door open, moved over there hurriedly, and discovered it was Monk. Monk explained, “I'm going out and look.”

“Take Ham with you, and be careful,” Doc said.

WHEN Monk and Ham had gone out, Doc withdrew into the room, closed the door and asked, “Is everyone here? You had better call off. Snelling, what about you?”

Snelling said, “Here over in the corner, on the floor. And I'd advise the rest of you to get out of range of that window.”

Sam Clark and Petey admitted presence.

Lucky Jones said, “I'm here. This is getting a little wild for my buttons. Did somebody really shoot that fellow with a poisoned dart?”

Doc said, “We'll try to find out. Everyone stay where they are.”

Presently he heard Monk and Ham moving around outside. They said they'd found nothing, and wanted to know about a flashlight. “I'll get them a flashlight,” Snelling explained hastily. He had two, both of them five-cell affairs which gave almost as much light as an automobile headlamp.

While Monk and Ham poked around cautiously outdoors, Snelling found the fuse-box, and they re-set the circuit breaker which served in lieu of a fuse. A moment after the lights came on, Miss Lucky screamed in the other part of the house. “He's dead!” she shrieked.

She meant the man named Mesana. He was now quite rigid and lifeless.

Doc Savage, suddenly grim-faced—inwardly he was a great deal more shocked than he was showing—began working on the body. He was under the impression that the man could not yet be dead. There had not, it seemed to him, been time for death to occur. But Mesana was dead, too far gone for any attempt at revival.

Monk, calling from outside the window, said, “Don't find anybody, Doc. But take a look at these!”

He held up for display several steel needles which were daubed with chemical and equipped with cemented-on bits of yarn. “More darts. They were lying here on the sidewalk and in the grass.”

Ham Brooks was on his knees searching; he said, “Here's one more.” He straightened. “I think that's about all of them.”

The spot where they had found the things was in front of, and about ten feet from the window of the room where Mesana had died.

“Come on inside,” Doc said grimly. He swung on Snelling to demand, “When did you notice the first dart?”

Snelling jumped nervously. “Notice—Oh, the dart! Why, when Mesana started collapsing. I thought I caught a flash of a bit of metal.”

“You see it in the air?”

“I—no, I'm afraid I didn't. I just—well—the flash of it.”

“Where?”

“Where? I don't believe I—”

“Where did you see it strike him?”

“His chest. But I didn't see it strike him, actually. And as a matter of fact, I don't think it penetrated his skin.”

“Then,” Doc said, “the dart didn't kill him?”

Snelling scowled. “How would I know?”

“The way you were shouting right after it happened, you seemed positive about it.”

Snelling shrugged. “I can show you where I found the dart clinging to his clothing—if there is a wound at that point, it would mean the dart killed him, wouldn't it?”

“We could look,” Doc said.

There was a wound there, but Doc did not seem very impressed.

LATER, Doc drew Monk and Ham aside. Lucky, Snelling, Sam Clark and Petey were in another room, visible through a French door, but unable to overhear. “Keep your voices down,” Doc said. “I want to know if you noticed anything when the lights went out?”

“There was a lot of gallivanting around in the dark,” Monk said.

“You do any of it?”

“Some.”

“Did Snelling?”

“Probably.”

“Did he go to the dying man?”

Monk said he couldn't tell about that.

“What about Lucky? Did she go to him?” Doc asked.

“Hell—I don't know!” Monk exclaimed. “Why would she do that? Did she?” Monk was alarmed. “What are you implying?” Monk sounded as if a mortal crime had been committed—a doubt cast at Miss Jones.

“All I need now,” Doc said bitterly, “is for you to go gallant on me. You and Ham.”

“Me?”

“The trouble is, he could have died three times.” Doc sounded disgusted.

“Three—what are you talking about?”

Doc said, “Mesana was smoking a cigarette when he dropped. If you'll check the end of the cigarette, the end that was in his mouth, you'll find an almond odor, and, if you care to taste, which I didn't, probably an acrid taste. It is possible to get enough cyanide off the end of a cigarette to kill, although it is not a very practical matter. Probably the stuff was in the salt form, although I didn't check on that.”

Monk spoke. He sounded horrified, and also physically shocked, as if he had been hit on the head with a hammer. “He borrowed that cigarette from Lucky,” Monk said.

“My God, that's right!” Ham Brooks said softly. “I remember now. He borrowed the cigarette from her a few minutes before he went down.”

“Don't get too alarmed about it,” Doc suggested, dryly. “After all, neither of you smoke — And that isn't what killed him. It might have, but it didn't. If it had, it would have taken several minutes, whereas he died in less than a minute as it was—probably in a matter of ten seconds or so after the needle was put into his brain.”

“Needle?”

“One of the darts,” Doc explained. “It went into the back of his head—whether forced in, or fired from some sort of an airgun, would be difficult to tell.”

Ham said, “Whoeeee! They wanted that guy dead and they weren't taking any chances on it!”

MISS LUCKY JONES' voice reached them, saying, “Why don't you call off that conference or whatever? I think friend Snelling is about to pop with words.”

They went into the other room hastily. Snelling scowled at them uncomfortably.

“Go on,” Lucky urged Snelling. “Get it off your chest.”

Snelling squirmed, pulled at his jaw, rubbed his hands together and otherwise registered uncertainty.

"I guess he's off the next again," Lucky said disgustedly. "A minute ago, he blurted out that he was going to spill everything."

Presently Snelling went through the motions of a man swallowing a large, distasteful lump, then turned his hands palms-up and said, "Murder makes it too much—I didn't plan on murder, and nobody said there would be such a thing involved. So that lets me out, the way I look at it."

"I wouldn't say murder let anybody out of anything," Lucky said.

Snelling scowled at her. "It's all your fault!"

Lucky's eyes widened incredulously. "What? What's that? What do you mean?"

"I don't know what you did to Chan Barnes, but it must have been plenty!" Snelling's voice lifted with excitement. "I must say that you look the part he ascribed to you, too!" Snelling's voice lifted with excitement. "I must say that you look the part he ascribed to you, too!"

"What part was that?"

"A siren and a harpy without any principles at all!"

Miss Jones was not impressed. "Well, what do you know? Somebody who doesn't even know me knows all about me!"

Doc asked, "You're not acquainted with a Chandler Barnes?"

"Not by that name," Lucky said. She swung on Snelling and demanded, "What does this character reference of mine look like?"

Snelling scowled, hesitated, nibbled his lower lip, then described a prosperous-looking fat man of about fifty, somewhat red-faced and partly bald, a man who had—and looked it—spent his youth and early manhood on hard physical labor and later struck it rich, or at least become modestly wealthy, but too late in life to get rid of certain crudities of speech and manner. But a fine gentleman. "A very fine gentleman," Snelling insisted.

Lucky shook her head. "I don't know him. Now, what am I supposed to do?"

"Permit me to finish!" Snelling urged. "The statement I am trying to make is this: I have known Mr. Barnes well for a number of years. He is, by profession, a metal salesman and we have, from time to time, done a slight amount of business together. Our mutual respect for each other has always been rather great, with perhaps more of it on my part than on his, the point being that, two days ago, when he asked me to do him a rather odd favor, I was glad to agree." Snelling hesitated, eyed them sheepishly, then continued. "I confess the oddness of the favor floored me, although the explanation did seem logical enough since"—He glanced at Lucky—"I had a slight acquaintance with Miss Jones."

Sam Clark snorted loudly. "You mean you hired me to pull that decoy-him-to-Montana stuff on Doc Savage because an old guy named Barnes asked you to do so?"

"Yes."

Sam spit on the floor. "The cat has got a new tail. When do we twist it?"

Doc asked Snelling, "You willing to take us to Barnes?"

"I'm not eager. I will."

LIEUTENANT AVERY was embarrassed. "A body, eh?" he said. "That was what I was afraid there would be, a body. I had that feeling downtown, after they took that potshot at you in the restaurant. A body, I thought, will make this very complicated and embarrassing for Lieutenant Avery."

Doc Savage explained that he had called the lieutenant as a matter of friendship and cooperation, and also in full confidence that the lieutenant would not, being a stable man, get to feeling that the police should become the exclusive proprietors of the trouble.

"That sounds as if you're asking me to extend my neck a bit farther," the lieutenant said gloomily.

"Exactly."

The lieutenant said he hadn't made up his mind yet. He leaned down to look at Mesana again. "I think this guy is a sailor. He's got the look of a sailor about him. The salt water and the sun does something to their hair, and further than that he's wearing a marine union ring. What else do you know about him?"

Doc gave the complete story—how and why they had visited Miss Lucky Jones because she was supposed to be the menace which Sam Clark and Petey had been preserving Doc Savage against. "I was under the impression I didn't know Miss Jones, and this proved to be correct," Doc explained. "While we were there, we found strychnine in one of Miss Jones' whisky bottles, and she felt that a fellow of Mesana's description could have been the one who put the strychnine in the liquor." Nodding, the lieutenant listened to the story of the discovery of Mesana trailing Doc's party, Mesana's capture, and his subsequent death.

"That's fine." The lieutenant nodded soberly. "Now, did he plant the strychnine?"

"I would say that he did—and was killed so he couldn't tell who engaged him to do it."

"That's fine, too." The lieutenant didn't look as if he thought anything was fine. "There's God knows how many of you in the room"—he paused and counted them with a pointing finger—"or, let's say, seven of you in here with him, and he dies in the midst of you, and you don't know who did it."

"There was some confusion," Doc said.

"There must have been. There still is. Personally, I'm quite confused. Do you mind if I just call a few more cops, and see what they think?"

DOC SAVAGE did not think much of the idea of more policemen, but he did not feel an argument would have a pleasant effect on Lieutenant Avery, who was being something more than mildly sarcastic. The advent of a murder had warped Lieutenant Avery's admiration for Doc Savage, and Doc was wishing they had neglected to call the lieutenant about the murder. At this point, Lieutenant Avery herded them into a room which had one door that he could watch from the telephone.

"That cop," Monk complained, "is losing his girlish friendship."

"There's nothing like a nice murder to remove the blush from a cop's friendship," said Miss Jones. She consulted a jeweled wristwatch and wondered if there was any law against a murder suspect using the telephone. "I want to call a newspaper," she told the lieutenant.

"Newspaper reporters are all I need and I'll have fits," the lieutenant advised. He had used the telephone himself and told someone, evidently homicide, to get out here, "with all your bells on."

Lucky explained, "All I want to know is what round the champ won in at Chicago tonight. It should be over by now."

Lieutenant Avery adjusted his necktie knot thoughtfully with two fingers, then picked up the phone, gave a number and asked, "News? — How'd the fight come out? — What round? Thanks!" He hung up and asked "What round did you have, baby?"

"Sixth."

The lieutenant whistled. "It was the sixth. Are you always that good at guessing?"

Lucky shrugged. "Who said anything about guessing? It's done with science."

PRESENTLY, the homicide men arrived, disturbing the neighborhood with their sirens, then filling the house with heavy-footed confusion, most of which was very purposeful and scientific. Doc and his party were pushed off to one side where they wouldn't interfere with the measuring and fingerprinting and photographing. Lieutenant Avery watched a little man blow through a rubber tube he held in his mouth and send iodine vapor hissing out the other end of a glass contraption of double containers; another man followed this one, pouncing on fingerprints with silver transfer sheets to lift them before they faded. Iodine vapor began to give the air a stinging sharpness.

"Lieutenant Avery," Doc said. "We should like to continue our investigation."

"Alone, you mean? Without my kindly eye?" Avery asked dubiously.

"With only your blessings."

The lieutenant was doubtful. "I am no longer stud duck in this thing. I'll consult the powers and see what they say."

He held a consultation with two men, one of them an Acting Chief of Police named Driscoll, the other an Assistant District Attorney, Walter Bridges, and the conference concluded with a shaking of heads.

Avery reported sadly, "They feel the cops should take charge. It's not my idea, you understand. Mostly it's that pup of a D. A., Bridges. You know what he said? He said, 'The duly elected officials of the city should have complete supervision in all situations constituted of violence.' That's what he said."

Ham Brooks said, "He read that in a law book somewhere."

Assistant District Attorney Bridges was a straight-backed young man who seemed to devote much of his unoccupied time to practicing holding his jaw just so, lips with just the right portrayal of firmness. Mr. Bridges came over to them, the jaw out and squared. He said, "Lieutenant Avery informs me you wish to conduct your own personal investigation. That is preposterous! You will confine all your activities to cooperation with the police!"

"There! See!" said Avery.

"Are we arrested?" Doc demanded.

"Not technically, but it might be arranged," said Mr. Bridges.

Doc Savage called Ham Brooks over. "Ham is our legal blade," he advised Bridges. "Ham, will you see if you can give Mr. Bridges food for thought, preferably the sort that will give him indigestion."

Ham said he damned well would, and did Bridges know that Doc Savage held certain commissions with the federal government authorizing him as an investigator, and should they go into the matter of the relationship of local and federal government in such cases. Mr. Bridges adjusted his jaw and said they

goddamned well would, that he, Bridges, had worked in Washington himself and he wasn't even a little bit scared of Washington.

Doc Savage unobtrusively maneuvered Lucky and Parker Snelling into the front hall.

“Get your hat,” he told Snelling.

“But—”

“Get your hat. We're going to have a talk with Barnes. Can you find him for us?”

“I—uh—can take you to Barnes' boat,” Snelling admitted.

Chapter VII

DOC SAVAGE escorted Lucky and Snelling out of the house without being hailed by any policeman, and they climbed, all three of them, into the front seat of Doc's car. Doc got the engine going with as little fuss as possible and, with only the parking lights on, pulled out on to the palm-lined pavement. When they had traveled two blocks, he released his breath. “I never expected to walk out on them that easily,” he said.

“That Bridges,” Lucky predicted, “is going to scream like a panther.”

Doc didn't think so. He thought Ham Brooks would probably wrap Mr. Bridges up in legal phrases until he resembled a package of confused silence. He pulled on the switch, brightening the headlight. “Boat? You say Barnes is on a boat?”

Snelling nodded. “A yacht.”

“Where?”

“In the Miami River, near that place they call or used to call the Royal Palm dock.” Snelling pondered. “It's a schooner, two masted. The *Virginia Dare*. About sixty feet on the waterline.”

Doc decided that Snelling was familiar with small boats—it was possible to tell something like that from a few words of a man's conversation about boats, more from the tone and the ease of the words themselves than from anything else.

“What's your profession?” Doc asked Snelling suddenly.

“Me? I'm an engineer, specializing in metals. A metallurgist.”

“Research?”

“No. Sales.” Snelling didn't seem to anxious to discuss his business. “My business is supplying metal to industrial plants. If an aircraft plant, for instance needed a quantity of beryllium, I might be approached to find and purchase it on a commission or a flat sum basis.”

“Where is your office?”

Snelling hesitated. “To tell the truth, I haven't re-established one yet. I was in the Merchant Marine during the war, and was torpedoed and made a prisoner. As a result, it was several months following the end of the war before I got back to the states. I have been back, as a matter of fact, about two months, and haven't really started operations again, other than that I have made some contacts.”

“Was Warner and Barnes such a contact?”

“Yes. I have known them—Barnes, at least, for a number of years. I knew Barnes before he became associated with Warner. He was a nice old guy who began as a puddler in a steel mill, and worked up. I don't think he even really made much money until the war came along, although he may have done better than I thought he did.”

“You don't know why he wanted me saved from Miss Jones, here?”

“He said he was a friend of yours.”

“I'm sure I don't know him,” Doc said. He glanced at Lucky. “How about you?”

“I never heard of the old gaffer before,” Lucky said vehemently.

DOC drove past the bayfront park, turned right off Biscayne Boulevard, then swung left again and parked on a side street not far from the river. Twenty yards or so away there was an all-night lunch stand with a battery of slot machines, two clerks and half a dozen customers, two of them taxi drivers.

Snelling pointed beyond the hamburger stand. “Boat's yonder. You can see the masts.”

Doc knocked open the car door. “Let's loaf around a few minuets and look over the place.”

“That,” said Lucky, “is an idea. Every time we've gone to a new place poison and violence has been a little too prevalent.”

They had coffee at the stand, and Lucky and Doc matched for the check, and Doc lost. Lucky had used a silver quarter for the matching. She chucked the coin into a slot machine, yanked the handle and said, before any of the fruit, bells or bars stopped moving, “Hold your hat under the thing.” Snelling snorted, said, “Nobody ever beats those things. They re gaffed so that—” He stopped and held his mouth open while three bars lined up, the machine gave a distressed cough, and silver quarters cascaded out of the cup and rolled around over the sidewalk. The customers were amazed. A fat man remarked, “For God's sake, I been feeding that thing all evening!”

A slender man with a dark hard face gazed at Lucky and said, “So you're back again?”

Lucky frowned. “Where do you get that 'back' stuff.” She was piling quarters on the counter for the clerk to change into currency.

“I've seen you around before,” the man said.

“Not me,” Lucky said sharply.

The clerk counted the quarters. “Fourteen dollars and fifty cents,” he announced admiringly. “That's the first time I ever saw anyone nick that machine.”

Doc inclined his head, indicating they might as well go aboard the Barnes schooner. He had seen nothing alarming.

“I think that contraption gypped me,” Lucky complained. “Who ever heard of only a fourteen-dollar jackpot from a quarter machine!”

“Are you always that lucky?”

“Lucky! The gadget gypped me, didn't it? —Say, did you hear that little dark guy try to say I had been

around here? I wonder what was his idea?"

"He was wrong?"

"Certainly he was wrong!"

"Well, he might have been mistaken."

"It was a funny kind of mistake to make."

There were clumps of tropical shrubs about, and Doc turned aside into the shadow of one of these. "Lucky, you and Mr. Snelling wait here. I'm going to take a closer look at the schooner, and some other things around here. It shouldn't take long.

It did not take long. Long enough for Doc Savage to circle back to the lunch stand, observe that the dark hard-looking man was still loitering there—he was now standing where he could watch the portion of the schooner *Virginia Dare* that was visible above dock level—and approach the man and take his elbow. The man said, "What the hell!" and seemed to lift off the ground. Doc said, "I don't know who gave you your orders, but somebody has things balled up." The man did not say anything, but he walked when Doc tugged at his elbow. The fellow was several shades paler before they were out of the large sponge of yellow light that surrounded the lunch stand.

"How long will it take you to get this straightened out?" Doc demanded.

"*Por que? Como se dice eso?*" the man said in Spanish, then added, "What straightened out?"

"That thing you pulled on the girl wasn't so good. Didn't he tell you about that?"

The man's expression remained woodenly fixed. His, "Hell, are you crazy?" could have come out of a stump.

He took his elbow out of Doc's finger grip with a twisting motion. He walked away, taking long steps but not hurried ones, and throwing alarmed glances back over first one shoulder then the other.

Doc moved himself—back a few yards to a path—and followed the man. The fellow was on a path that trailed the edge of the park, and it was a simple matter, by running hard and silently, to presently get ahead of him and beside a bush near the path.

When the man was quite close, Doc used Sam Clark's voice—as near an imitation of it as he could manage—and said, "Pssst! You know who that was?"

The man stopped. "Huh?"

"That was Doc Savage."

"Yeah," the man said. "I thought you was gonna get him outa the country, Sam?" The fellow's voice now had very little of its previous Spanish accent.

Doc Savage tried Sam Clark's voice again and demanded, "Where did the boss go?"

The man considered this and reached an unfavorable conclusion. He growled, "What're you trying to pull?" and started into the bush to investigate. Doc came through the shrub to meet him, saying pleasantly, "Take it easy until you know what—" At which point the man endeavored to get a knife into his body. The knife had a blade about eight inches long, and they fought over it vigorously, the fight ending when they had fallen to the ground and the blade was broken off against the sidewalk. Doc hit the man; he

intended to strike the fellow's jaw, but the blow slid off and landed on the man's shoulder, and the fellow croaked, "Don't! Oh my God, don't—" Doc landed a second blow to his jaw, and the man went silent. Doc listened for a moment, decided they had not made enough rumpus to draw attention, and shouldered the man and carried him to Lucky and Parker Snelling, who displayed suitable surprise.

"What's the idea of collecting him?" Lucky demanded.

Doc imitated Sam Clark's voice and said, "Can you guess who I am?"

"You're pretty good. Did he?" Lucky was puzzled.

"Yes, he did. He made two guesses, first that I was Sam Clark, whom he addressed as a pal, and a second guess that was more accurate. Right after that, he endeavored to put a knife in me."

"That was a mistake," Lucky decided.

THE schooner *Virginia Dare* looked a little larger than Snelling had said it would be. Doc recalled that Snelling had said it was about fifty or sixty feet; it was actually nearer eighty on the waterline, which made it quite a lot of boat. It was not as yachty as he had been led to believe, either, although it wasn't a workboat entirely—about half workboat and half yacht, which was rather puzzling. The design was the one called Chesapeake Bay bugeye, which meant that she had a flat bottom, a centerboard, a rakish clipper bow, and the masts slanted back at a dashing angle. They were excellent shoal water boats, and the design had been developed originally for the oyster business in the Chesapeake Bay section.

"That's right pretty," Lucky said. "It *looks* like a sailboat should look."

"They're fair sea boats, but they have a tendency to go hog-backed under abuse." Doc put the unconscious man on the dock and walked the length of the dock, looking for lighted portholes, listening for signs of life. "Ahoy the *Virginia Dare*!" he called.

There was no answer.

Lucky demanded, "Are we going to stand on formality? Or do we go aboard?"

"We go aboard." Doc put a foot on a springline, settled enough weight on it to haul the stern of the bugeye in close to the dock. He swung aboard, went to a hatch, did some hammering, and demanded, 'Anybody aboard?' He slid back the hatch cover, explored, found a switch which brought a flood of light into a cabin. "Ever been aboard the boat?"

he asked Snelling.

"Only in the cabin," Snelling said. In addition to his long weather-beaten look, he was beginning to seem dry-skinned and gaunt, as if the events of the night were dehydrating him. "Only in the cabin — What do we do with this—this chap you collected?"

Doc said they would bring him below, and they did, hauling the man down the companion steps. There was, about the large mainmast, a stout circular table, and Doc spread the unconscious man on this for a search. He was amazed at the number of weapons produced—three revolvers, a flat pistol and two knives. There was in addition about a hundred dollars in cash, a maritime union membership card made out to Gus Slocico, a package of Mexican cigarettes, and a small whetstone, probably for the knives.

"Gus Slocico?" Doc glanced at Lucky.

"I don't know him," she said. "I never saw him before." She eyed Mr. Slocico with dislike. "I know the

big bum put on an act that he had seen me around here before. He hadn't."

Doc found a ball of Italian marlin, and used the very tough tarry thread to tie Mr. Slocico's ankles and wrists.

"Hah!" said Snelling violently. "Now we'll look over the boat."

He yanked open a door in a bulkhead and walked through. He backed out a moment later, looking foolish. "A lazaret," he explained.

Lucky said, "I'll try one." She opened a door and stepped through it—and was back in the cabin again considerably quicker than Snelling had made it. Her face lost color. Her lips, throat, formed words, but the words had no sound.

"What did you find?" Doc demanded.

She turned horror-glazed eyes. "The jackpot," she said, and took two backward steps and sank into a chair. Her hands fastened tightly to the chair arms.

HE had been a prosperous-looking fat man of about fifty, partly bald and possibly with a red face—the face was congested now—and there was about him an air, evident even in his present condition, that he had been a man who had spent most of his early life in hard physical labor, toil that had given his shoulders and hands and arms a gnarled quality that they had never lost, and had not even lost now that he was dead. The rope around his neck and up to a cabin carling, the equivalent of a ceiling joist, had evidently been cut from a topsail halyard, because it was that size of line.

"Barnes!" Snelling said.

He said this loudly and suddenly, with great feeling, after which he wheeled and ran and they could hear him yanking open doors until he found the head, where he made ill sounds.

Doc made quick tests—the eyeballs lacked luster and had a dull appearance because of the evaporation of their moisture; the pupils differed in size and were not round. These were the best signs of death. He examined wrists, lifted the trouser legs to inspect ankles, and found quite a bit of post-mortem lividity, caused by settling of the blood by gravity. Rigor mortis, which develops first in the head area, had not progressed fully.

More than six, and probably less than ten hours, he reflected.

He went back into the other room. "Want to see if you know him?" he asked Lucky.

"No, thanks." She shuddered. "I saw him anyway. I don't know him." Her eyes rolled, showed some whites, and she added, "I don't feel good."

Neither did Snelling feel good, judging from the sounds. "Snelling said he was Barnes, one of the two partners," Doc remarked.

"He could be," Lucky said weakly. "For God's sake—this makes two murders." She showed alarm. "Let's get out of here!"

"Murder? How do you know?" He eyed Lucky.

She shuddered more violently than before. "Listen, I don't know a thing about him except he looked dead, and don't try any third degree methods on me, or you know what I'll do? I'll faint, that's what —

Aren't you going to cut him down?"

Parker Snelling reappeared. His face was the color of dough and sweating profusely. He wanted to know the same thing. "You—you're not letting him hang there?"

"The police," Doc explained, "are going to be very unhappy about our finding the body, but not as displeased as they would be if we moved it. The first rule for winning a homicide detective's favor is: Don't move the body."

Snelling made an ill gesture. "It's Barnes."

THEY found Sam Clark's photograph in the forward starboard stateroom, which was evidently the owner's cabin. There were really three photographs there, the other two being of Barnes and a lady of about his own age, Barnes and a younger woman. Barnes was also in the photograph of Sam Clark—Barnes and Clark in the picture together.

"For crying out loud!" Snelling seemed completely dumfounded. "Clark knew Barnes!" Snelling's voice was queerly inflected, and his face changed from perspiring pallid to perspiring flushed. "Sam Clark was acquainted with Barnes," he repeated. "I'll be damned!"

"Wasn't that supposed to be?" Lucky asked.

"Apparently not," Doc said.

"You know something? I mean—want to hear a guess?"

"Go ahead."

"That Sam Clark," Lucky said, "had been acting like a dope."

"True."

"He isn't."

"What," Doc asked, "makes you think not?"

"The light in the guy's eye, and I'm not trying to be a crystal-gazer. I've seen guys using the stick at crooked dice tables, and they got a look like I'm talking about. Sam Clark's look."

Doc indicated the picture. "Well, at least he has done some lying to us. He said he didn't know Barnes, and there is his picture in Barnes' private collection."

"Didn't this Barnes have a partner?" Lucky demanded.

"Did he?"

"Stop trying to trip me. Isn't that what Snelling said? What about it, Snelling?"

Parker Snelling said, "I was certainly under the impression he had a partner, yes."

"What'd he look like?"

Snelling looked uncomfortable. "I—well—don't know. I never saw him."

Lucky made a skeptical noise. "You didn't see the partner—but you and Barnes were old pals?"

“They—well, they were never together when I was around,” Snelling said briefly. “However, I once saw a photograph of the partner, Warner.”

“What was Warner's first name?”

“John — John Warner.” Parker Snelling suddenly began going through drawers, peering into boxes and recesses. “Maybe I can find a picture of the fellow he said was John Warner.”

Doc suggested, “We had better see how many more bodies are aboard, then call the police.” The remark caused Lucky to jump violently. Before she could comment, Snelling called, “Look here!” excitedly. He had found a cigar box containing a number of snapshots. “Here's a bunch of pictures — Yeah, here's John Warner.”

They looked at a photograph of a long-legged, barrel-bodied elderly man with a large mouth and large eyes, a man who looked like no one they had seen before.

Chapter VIII

THE *Virginia Dare* had a Diesel engine of somewhat more power than Doc Savage had expected in a schooner her size. There were also two smaller Diesels operating generators of greater KW capacity than seemed necessary.

“This boat,” Parker Snelling remarked, “seems to be a little more than a yacht.”

That was the understatement of the evening, because forward of the main cabin the schooner was no yacht at all below decks. There was an amidships hold, accessible by large deck hatches, which contained as efficient a looking small collection of deep-water diving gear as Doc Savage recalled having seen. There were four complete diving suits and a small diving bell capable of operating at great depth. There were numerous compressors, hose lines, oxygen apparatus, cutting torches.

Doc glanced at Snelling. “Barnes and Warner were in the metal supply business, eh?”

Snelling scratched his head. “The diving business, too, it looks as if.”

“Recently, maybe?”

“Eh?”

“Notice that most of this stuff is new? Very little of it has ever been used.”

“What would that mean?”

“That they had just entered, or were about to enter, the diving business,” Doc said dryly. “Which might also mean —”

A sound had come from aft. Somebody had moved.

“Our guest,” said Lucky, “must have awakened.”

Doc said, “Stay here!” He wheeled and went aft, toward the sound — If their guest—Gus Slocico, if that was his name—had made the sound, he was loose, and that didn't seem likely, the way they had tied him. This noise had been made by someone executing a considerable movement, a little jump and tow or three steps, it had appeared to be. Doc intended to slow his pace and be very careful when he was near the

cabin—which was a good idea, but he put it into operation a little too late. Or did not put it in operation at all, actually, before—six or eight feet in front of him—a flashlight beam blazed and impaled him.

The light held him, blinded him.

A voice back of it said, “Damn!” explosively.

Doc went down loosely, arms out-thrown, colliding with the man who had fired and with the floorboards at about the same time. The man with the gun was knocked off his feet, came down also, and floundered around, but did not fire again. Instead he got hold of Doc Savage with one hand and held on tightly, rigidly, waiting.

Someone farther aft called, “Bill!”

“Yeah?” The man gripping Doc Savage seemed to be trying to hold his breath and listen.

“Who was it?”

“Savage.”

“You hit him?”

“I hit him, all right,” Bill said. “I put two in his heart. He ain’t moved since he went down.”

MORE men came from the cabin, four or five of them, apparently, although it was difficult to tell about that in the darkness. The man who had spoken to Bill had a heavy, urgent voice, and he used it to order, “Get going toward the bow. Get the other two! And don’t do any shooting out on deck. Too noisy.”

Bill began, “You want me to—”

“Stay with him. You’re sure it’s Savage?”

“Look.” Bill thumbed on his flashlight beam again. Doc Savage was lying face-down on the floor, head twisted slightly. “That’s him, ain’t it?”

The other man muttered, “God almighty!” hoarsely, deep in his throat. Then he added, “Get a weight, something heavy, and tie it to his legs. Get the body over the side.”

“Okay,” Bill said.

Toward the bow, there was a shot. A single report, no more, and it had been fired inside the schooner. There were running sounds, excited voices, but more running sounds than words.

Bill had propped his flashlight on a box so that the beam sprayed across Doc Savage’s body.

A rather small man in a sand-colored linen suit came running from the bow. He said, “That damned girl got out on deck!”

“What about Snelling?”

“We got him, all right.” The man ran on aft, through the cabin, and climbed out on deck. He was breathing hard.

Bill found a chunk of ballast—a rusty length of steel machine axle. He used a length of line to tie this to Doc Savage’s feet.

“Somebody gimme a hand!” he yelled.

Two men came below to help him. “The girl got on shore,” one of them explained. “Man, she moved like a streak!”

Bill cursed violently. “If she gets a cop —”

“Yeah, we thought of that.” They worked frantically, seizing Doc Savage by arms and legs and dragging him across the cabin and up the companionway to the deck. Someone said, “The coast is clear?”

“Where's the girl?”

“She got in the park. They're looking for her. Here, I'll give you a hand.”

They lugged Doc Savage's heavy body across the deck to the rail.

Bill demanded, “What about the other body? Barnes?”

“We'll get rid of it the same way.”

They swung Doc Savage's legs over the rail, and, grunting instructions to each other, held his arms and lowered him toward the water. They let him go. There was not much splash as he disappeared.

THE water was not cold, but it was moving rapidly, for the tide was going out, and Doc had the feeling he was being turned as he sank. That wasn't good, for it befuddled his sense of direction. Too, when he hit the bottom—the depth was about fifteen feet—the heavy steel axle at once embedded in the bottom, and the water leaned him over threw him out flat on the bottom, complicating the business of getting loose.

They had not searched him, so he still had his pocket knife. Nor had they tied his hands. He got the knife out and went to work on the ropes.

Later, when they happened to notice there were no bloodstains, there might be some curiosity about just what effects the two bullets had on him. He had, as Bill had said, been shot twice in the heart area. Or the bullets had headed for the heart area, and been stopped by a very good bulletproof vest he was wearing.

He had put on the bulletproof vest early that day, as soon as the restaurant proprietor had warned him that suspicious inquiries were being made. He would not, as a matter of fact have ventured to wait in the restaurant, or go near the place, without the insurance of the alloy mesh undergarment.

Desperately, he sawed at the ankle ropes with the knife. He had anticipated less difficulty getting loose than he was having. There was not enough air in his lungs, and he had, furthermore a grim suspicion that one or more ribs might have been cracked by the impact of the bullets against the vest. The vest was supposed to give protection against such an eventuality, but the blows of the two slugs had been tremendous; he had, for a few seconds, been practically knocked out, in much the same condition as a boxer who had taken a hard blow over the heart. That was one of the reasons he had not continued the fight. Other reasons were: he might have been shot in the head if he had continued; he was outnumbered; he wanted information. There were plenty of good reasons for taking this out.

He got free of the weighting steel after what seemed years. The vest had enough ballast to keep him on the river bottom, and the tide proceeded to tumble him end over end. He let nature take its course for awhile, not fighting back, concentrating on keeping air in his lungs, waiting to be carried clear of the schooner.

He had, blackly, dizzily, the awful feeling of being completely lost underwater. Then it occurred to him how simple it was to tell directions—the river flowed west at this point, the tide was flowing out, therefore he was being carried west. He faced the current, which was all right as long as his feet were dragging the bottom and he could tell which way the current moved. He stroked for the surface, swimming diagonally to the right. The idea was to come up close to the concrete bulkhead that confined the river here.

Presently he was against a hard surface coated with barnacles that felt like broken glass, and would cut flesh as easily. With great care, he swam up, broke the surface, and saw he had not drifted nearly as far as he had supposed. He was in the triangle of black shadow between the schooner bow and the river retaining wall. The heavy chain bobstay of the schooner was close enough to reach. He laid hold of it.

BREATHING—breathing silently—was suddenly extremely difficult. He fought an overpowering urge to cough and make gagging sounds. Forward somewhere, which would be toward the stern of the schooner, he heard a splash. There was no other sound for a while, then a voice demanded, “You get Barnes overboard?”

Bill's voice responded, “Yeah — Where's the girl?”

“She scrambled.”

Horror came into Bill's throat. “What are we gonna do?”

“Cast off the springlines. Get the motor going.”

“Hell, we gonna take the boat?”

“Sure. We gotta.”

“The cops will pick us up!” Bill remonstrated.

“Not if we get outside before the girl gets them stirred up—if she does — Hey, Jake, get the others aboard.” Jake grunted, and sprang ashore. Other men were loosening the springlines which held the schooner to the shore.

Bill demanded, “Whatcha mean—if she does?”

“That girl,” the other told him, “has run into plenty of hell tonight. She's a gal who takes care of herself. There's a good chance she may just say the hell with it, and take a little trip to Cuba or somewhere for things to cool off.”

That struck Bill as logical, and he said so. It didn't hit Doc Savage as logical. He was examining the bank, calculating his chances of getting ashore without being discovered. The chances did not seem inviting.

The bobstay chain, running from a point at the end of the bowsprit down to the bow, terminated about two feet above the waterline. Very carefully, Doc hooked a leg over the chain and, gripping the chain with his right hand, the stempiece with his left hand, he sat on the bobstay chain. He let both legs dangle in the water, so the wetness from his clothing would drain off silently.

Jake came back from the park. With him were three or four other men—Doc was not exactly sure how many. He could not see them, and there was confusion on the bank.

Bill, sounding hollow, as if he had his head down the hatch, asked someone, “What the hell's holding you up?” For reply, the Diesel engine coughed three times, then stopped. It sounded angry.

Doc shifted his position slightly, and flattened close to the bow, straddling the stem. Overhead, he could see the neat criss-crossed pattern of footropes and jib nettings under the long wooden finger of the bowsprit. He weighed, with considerable concern, his chances of being discovered.

The Diesel barked some more, hesitated, then resumed activity. It was going to run.

“Cast off!”

He heard lines land on deck with slatting sounds, heard men jump aboard. Lazily, the schooner swung away from the embankment; it took on a definite feeling of life as the prop began turning.

“Get up in the bow,” somebody ordered, “and light the running lights. We’ll douse them after we get past the breakwater.”

Doc concluded, from the breakwater being mentioned, that they were going outside through the ship channel. It was the quickest route, although it would carry them along parallel with the causeway for almost a mile. The other channel, southward through Biscayne Bay and around Cape Florida, was longer and, if one was in a hurry at night, dangerous for a boat this size.

There was some tramping around in the bow. “Running lights are burning,” someone reported.

“Okay, get back here to the cockpit,” Bill ordered.

THE schooner was fast under power, and Doc was not surprised. Bugeyes, because of the flat bottoms and the use of a center-board instead of a keel to kill leeway, were usually fairly fast under power.

Doc shifted a little, reached up, gripped the basket, and changed his position so that his feet were out of the water. On the left now were the lights of the City Yacht Basin piers, music from a juke box, from an orchestra on a moonlight cruise party boat. These slipped rapidly past.

Swinging sharply to starboard, the boat lined out down the steamer channel. On the left, automobile headlights moved rapidly on the Miami Beach causeway.

Doc reach up, seized the jib basket lines. He hauled himself up, very carefully, until his eyes were above the level of the deck. There seemed to be no one in the bow, and he lifted himself a bit more, rolled over into the basket of lines. He lay there listening, watching — He decided that someone had opened the forecandle hatch; he could see the upended shape of the hatch cover.

With infinite care, he crawled over the bow, wriggled past the large iron hump of the hand anchor winch, and thrust his head down the forecandle hatch. There was no sound. They would be on deck, aft around the cockpit, and tensely watching the shore. The deck-house, the lumpish shapes of furled sails, of two dinks lashed on deck, concealed him from them.

He eased down into the forecandle. He began exploring with his hands. There seemed to be a bank of four bunks on each side. The sail lockers were what he wanted. They would be forward here. They always were. And presently he found them—not lockers actually, but open basketwork bins in which the sails could be stored with the least likelihood of mildewing.

He kept searching until he found the bin which contained the light sails—the fisherman’s staysail, the balloon jib. These were light sails which they would not be likely to use outside tonight, because there was too much wind blowing. The breeze, while not a gale by any means, was too brisk for the use of the big, gossamer balloon jib.

He crawled into the jib bin, worked well into the back and down behind the sail, then pulled the folds of canvas over him. He was, he believed, in the spot least likely to be disturbed.

Later he could hear them stumbling around on deck, taking the stops off the working sails, preparatory to hoisting them. The schooner began to climb long swells, groaning a little. They were outside in the open sea.

Chapter IX

THE doorman of the Silver Beech Hotel, an Irishman named—he claimed Israel MacIsaac, crossed the sidewalk to a cab that had just pulled up before the marquee and, when he saw who was in the cab, hastily seized the door handle to prevent the door opening. He leaned down and told Lucky Jones, who was in the cab, “You got company, Miss.”

“Cops?” Lucky demanded.

“Sure. Two of them, one in the lobby and one in your room.”

Lucky frowned. “I wonder what's the idea?”

“I wouldn't know. They say a guy named Bridges put them on the job.”

Lucky had difficulty thinking who Bridges could be, then remembered that he must be the officious Assistant District Attorney who had appeared in the case. The driver of the taxi put his head out of the window and said, “Hello, Ikey — Am I getting into anything, hauling the little lady around?”

“That's a crazy question,” the doorman told him. “Since when did my friends get you in trouble?”

He returned his attention to Lucky and explained, “If it wasn't for one cop being in the lobby, we could fix you up with another room. But the way it is—well—this is a kind of a wide-eyed john in the lobby.”

“Is he a friend of yours?” Lucky demanded. “Could you get some information out of him?”

The doorman was doubtful. “Might depend on the information.”

“You remember the gang who was here earlier in the evening? Doc Savage and four other men?”

“Uh-huh.”

“I want,” Lucky explained, “to find the men who were with Doc Savage. Specifically, I want to find Ham Brooks and Monk Mayfair, and in a hurry.”

“Think this cop would know?”

“He might. His boss, Bridges, would be sure to know. I don't know how you would get the information out of him without an excuse.”

The doorman rubbed his jaw. Ill try to think of something. You want to wait around the corner? The cop might come gawking around out here.”

“Are they really looking for me?” Lucky demanded.

“Said they were.” The doorman sauntered off into the hotel.

The taxi driver scratched the back of his neck for a while, glanced around dubiously at Lucky, and said flatly, “If it wasn't for Ikey's okay, lady, I'd throw you out of here on your ear!” He started the engine,

drove around corner and parked. "Who'd you flim-flam, lady?" he wished to know.

"It's a matter of a couple of people I murdered," Lucky said dryly.

The driver thought she was kidding and looked quite relieved. He opened a tabloid paper, flipped to the racing section—and emitted an astonished grunt. Amazed, he compared Lucky's face with a photograph in the newspaper. "For cripes sake!" he blurted. "It says here: 'Lucky Jones wins daily double third time in season.'"

"It's a poor picture," Lucky decided, after glancing over his shoulder.

"You mean that's really you, lady?"

The doorman returned at this point. He looked pleased with himself. "This cop proves to be very gullible. I find that when I tell him a lie about Monk Mayfair and Ham Brooks wishing to reserve rooms here earlier tonight, and what does he know about their characters that the hotel ought to know, he informs me that a Lieutenant Avery and some other cops consider them very high grade magnets for trouble, but that an Assistant District Attorney Walter Bridges feels they are crooks of dark color. So then I tell him the hotel will get hold of Ham Brooks and Monk Mayfair and be very sorry there is no room available, he says they are at Mr. Bridges office in the county building, probably catching hell."

"Thank you," Lucky said. "If you want to make a couple of dollars for yourself, drop in at the C-Club after you get off and play the same numbers on the wheel that a white-haired oil man named Grabow will play. They're going to let him win tonight, and clean him tomorrow night."

"I don't get off until two. That too late?"

"It should be about right."

THE revolving beacon on top of the county building was a tapering blade like an ice pick sweeping through thick fog when Lucky's taxi came to a stop at the curb. There was no fog on the street level as yet but, where there were no streetlights, it was very dark. Lucky thought how dark it would be out at sea. She shuddered. She paid off the taxi driver and said, "You keep away from the C-Club. Or if you can't do that, give Ikey twenty dollars and see what he can do for you."

The driver was pleased. "I was thinking about that," he said.

Lucky went into the building. The lobby was full of white light and the odor of scrub-water. She found Assistant District Attorney Walter Bridges on the directory. She had to wait for the elevator.

Going down the tenth floor corridor, she heard a loud angry voice. It was Bridges. He was saying, "I'm telling you, either pick them up or get ready to sweat. They're material witnesses in a murder case, and they walk out on us, and if you think I'll stand for that, you're crazy." He was saying this into a telephone. He looked over the telephone at Lucky, then bellowed, "Wait a minute!" into the instrument. At Lucky, he yelled, "Where's the other two? Where's Savage and Snelling?"

Lucky went to Monk and Ham. "We went to Barnes' schooner. Snelling knew where it was. Barnes was hanging in a stateroom. He was dead. While we were looking around, some men came aboard. They shot and killed Doc Savage, and maybe Snelling."

Assistant District Attorney Bridges said, "Never mind!" into the telephone. He hung up.

Lieutenant Avery asked, "How long ago was this?"

“Half an hour, about.”

“Half an hour!” Bridges yelled. “Where in the hell have you been in the meantime?”

“Looking for you, you dope,” Lucky said sharply. “And listen, don't start using my nerves for a race-track! I'm not in the mood.”

Lieutenant Avery had his hat. “How quick can you show us where that boat is?”

“As fast as you can get there.”

Avery indicated Monk, Ham, Sam Clark and Petey. “You guys come on. You're all in this, and I want your company.”

“Stop!” Bridges struck an attitude with jaw and chest. “What idiocy is this? What do you plan to do with these prisoners?”

“Prisoners, hell!” the lieutenant said. He spoke bitterly. He flung the door open. “Outside, everybody!”

When they reached the street, Bridges was with them and spluttering rage. Avery ran to a police department car, got behind the wheel, and while the others were climbing aboard, thrust his face at Bridges and yelled, “If anybody told you you were a cop, I'd like to know who the hell it was? I was getting along fine until you showed up and got Doc Savage out of the notion of cooperating with the police! Now look at the mess things are in. Sit down and shut up!”

Bridges blew out his cheeks, worked his jaw in and out, blurted, “I'll be damned!” His tone intimated they would settle this later.

The police car made a short, hard run to the riverfront, using the siren only the first three blocks.

“It's gone!” Lucky gasped. “The boat is gone.”

Mr. Bridges said, “Hah!” explosively. “The boat probably was never here!”

THEY listened with satisfaction to what Lucky thought of to say to Mr. Bridges at this point. She used words from the dictionary, but she made them do things that Webster never expected of them. A complete silence followed, and Mr. Bridges used it to get out and walk meekly to the hamburger stand—following one of a number of suggestions Lucky had made to him—and inquire whether a schooner named the *Virginia Dare* had lately been tied in the river nearby. He was informed it had been, and had cast off about half an hour ago, heading out toward the harbor. Bridges brought the information back to the car.

“We must get the harbor police boat hunting them,” he said.

“Yeah, and the coast guard,” Lieutenant Avery growled.

Sam Clark gave a bitter grunt. It was practically the only noise he had made for an hour.

“Harbor police, coast guard, army, navy, marines!” he said sourly. “All the king's men won't put humpty-dumpty together again. Does anybody want to know what I think?”

Mr. Bridges said no one did.

Lucky frowned. “Wait a minute.” She eyed Sam Clark narrowly. “I think you might have some interesting thoughts, Mr —Mr — What is your name supposed to be?”

“Sam Clark.” Sam Clark looked startled.

“All right, Mr. Sam Clark, I'm interested in what you think.”

“Okay,” Sam Clark said. “What I think is this: I think you better let ol massa Sam rake the chestnuts out of the fire.”

“Meaning?”

“I can take you to where they re going.”

Monk had been holding his feelings tightly. Now a little of the control collapsed. He gripped Clark's arm tightly, said, “Brother, if you're pulling something —”

“I'm pulling something, and I know what I'm doing,” Sam Clark said. “Let's get rolling. We haven't much time. It's across the cause-way to Miami Beach, and fast.”

THE boat was a cabin cruiser about forty-eight feet on the waterline. It made no pretense at being anything except a yacht. Comfortable, powerful, it was seaworthy enough for outside cruising, and probably quite fast.

“But that's not the *Virginia Dare*!” Lucky said suspiciously.

“Who said it was?” Sam Clark gestured. “Come on. Let's get a move on.”

Monk and Ham exchanged glances. Sam Clark had undergone a transformation. Instead of being sloppy and treating everything with a who-the-hell-cares manner, he had turned crisp and aggressive. Even his speech had altered.

“That guy Clark,” Monk whispered, “has taken off his lamb's clothing.”

Ham Brooks nodded. “Or the other way around. He's been sucking us in.”

When they were approaching the power boat, Monk jabbed Petey in the ribs. “Could be you would turn out to be a college professor?”

“Coeeeee!” Petey said. “Don't be a mark.”

Monk dropped back and had Ham translate that for him. “He said don't be a dope,” Ham explained.

Sam Clark seized a springline, heaved, and drew the cabin cruiser near enough the dock for them to step aboard. “Deckhouse is unlocked,” he said. “Go right aboard.”

Assistant District Attorney Bridges stared about at the deckhouse interior when the lights were switched on. He was impressed. “I trust,” he said ominously, “that we are not trespassing?”

“I invited you, didn't I?” Sam Clark demanded.

“You mean this craft is yours?”

“Yep.”

Lucky whispered to Monk, “I've got a rough idea of what these boats cost, because I've been pricing them. You can't lay a hand on one like this for less than fifty thousand dollars. They're not playthings for bums”—she indicated Sam Clark—“who are so hard up they have to take jobs shooting at people to

decoy them into wild goose chases to Montana.”

Monk nodded. “Friend Clark isn't what he has seemed.”

Lucky said she could contribute another piece of information. “On the Barnes schooner, the *Virginia Dare*, Doc Savage and I found a photograph of Clark standing with Barnes — Haven't I heard Clark say he didn't know Barnes?”

“I heard him say that,” Monk said grimly. “I'm going to consult with him about it.” He swung on Sam Clark, and his voice was loud. “Clark! I thought you didn't know Barnes!”

“Sam Clark scowled. “Sure I knew Barnes!”

“Then what —?”

“You can forget most of what I've said in the past,” Sam Clark informed him. “But pay close attention to what I say from now on.”

“This guy,” Monk told Ham, “is making different noises. What are we going to do about it?”

Lieutenant Avery swore violently. “I'll do the doing!” He swung on Clark. “But, you're in the fold. You're arrested. If you can talk your way out of it, fine. But—”

“No talk”. Sam Clark lifted his voice. “Okay, boys. Come on out and argue with them!”

There were two doors leading out of the deckhouse into bow and stern of the cabin cruiser. Both these doors opened simultaneously. A man and a gun came out of each one. The guns were light machine guns. The men were large amiable fellows who weren't looking amiable at the moment.

“I think all of you,” Sam Clark said, “can reach the ceiling with your hands. It isn't very high. Those little rafters that go across are called carlings. Let's see each of you grab one.”

Assistant District Attorney Bridges' jaw went forward. “Is this a holdup?”

Sam Clark grinned. “Petey, do you see that jaw?”

Petey said the jaw was not only visible, but interesting. He used a Cockney dialect. He came over, and with blinding suddenness, hit the end of Mr. Bridges jaw with his fist.

Bridges fell down.

LIEUTENANT AVERY tried to look indignant over what had happened to Assistant District Attorney Bridges, but did not succeed very well.

“Petey, frisk them,” Sam Clark ordered. “And don't clown around with that Monk and Ham, or they'll make a mess out of you.”

Petey was careful. He collected what weapons he could find and stuffed them into different parts of their clothing. “Bulletproof jackets,” he reported. “Monk and Ham are wearing them under their shirts.”

“I'm sorry about this.” Sam Clark sounded as if he was more angry and determined than sorry. “But I couldn't think of any other quick way.” He swung on one of the men with the light machine guns. “Get the rest of the boys, cast off, and put out to sea. You got plenty of fuel aboard?”

“Plenty of fuel.”

“What about grub?”

“Enough for a week for this crowd, I guess.”

“That's plenty.” Clark raised his voice. “Dick, Bob, Carlos! Let's get going.”

Monk discovered there were other men outside, some of them with rifles, some with pistols. He had no idea where they had come from. They must have been posted in the neighborhood.

They cast off the lines. A man stepped to the controls, twisted the fuel shut-off valve, threw switches and poked a starter button. The result was an astonishing rumbling below decks, a series of explosions from exhaust stacks, and eventually about the same deep-throated sound that a four-engine bomber makes.

The boat hiked up its stern, backed away from the pier, went into forward speed before it could bang into the other bank of the canal and began moving forward.

The fog, Monk saw, was settling. It was now like a ceiling a few dozen feet off the surface, dark gray and weirdly like the underbelly of a monster when the beam of the cabin cruiser searchlight touched its shaggy mass in prowling from one side of the canal to another.

Sam Clark, talking rapidly, told his men who were in earshot what had happened. He used few words. He said, “They killed Mr. Barnes, the dirty so-and-sos.” He did not say so-and-sos, and glanced guiltily at Lucky afterward. She shrugged. He added to his men, They took the *Virginia Dare* and went to sea after they had killed Doc Savage. He eyed them thinly, added, “They got Snelling aboard, probably took him along.”

The men, Monk realized, were extremely shocked by news of Barnes' death.

Sam Clark confronted Monk and Ham, included Lieutenant Avery in his scowl, and said, “In this fog, you can guess what chances we got of finding the schooner. Pretty slim.”

Avery said, “Pretty damn slim—if you really want to catch them.”

“Don't let your wrong ideas get so big you can't see over them, copper.” Sam Clark jerked his head toward the bow. The boat was turning into the steamship channel that led to the open sea. “We know something they don't know—we know—we know where they're going. So we're gonna be there when they get there, if we can.”

“Then what?” Avery demanded.

“Then it's likely to get rough.”

Chapter X

THE Gulf Stream, where it passed between the Bahamas Islands and the Florida coast, was about fifty miles wide, a mile deep and, under the right conditions, could be as nasty a stretch of water as there was in the world. The right condition was a northerly wind meeting the stream which in turn flowed north, in places faster than a man could conveniently walk. The chop that resulted, short, vicious, was enough to loosen the teeth of the occupants of small boats.

Doc Savage, lying in the sail locker on the port side, was far enough forward to be over the overhang. The result, every time the *Virginia Dare* hit a wave, which was at twenty-second intervals, was something like having a bull crash into the planks beside him. The sea was rough, the wind strong enough to make violin noises in the rigging, and the boat was being driven hard.

It was cold, too. He had not expected it to get cold, but it was. They had closed the fore-castle hatch, but not before a half dozen barrellfuls of water had poured inside and soaked the sail locker, the sails and Doc. He was hungry, his nerves were far from being at rest, and his ribs where the two bullets had struck the bulletproof vest were hurting. He had made several examinations of the ribs, and believed one of them was cracked. A cracked rib was not supposed to be a vital injury, but it wasn't pleasant.

It was dark. The schooner pitched and rolled. It climbed for a long time up long swells and all the time it was pounded by the short waves, then it would plunge downward for a long time, pounded harder.

They were under sail, and the Diesel was still running. They were, he was sure, making good time. He judged roughly that about five hours had passed when the boat changed course. In a moment, the mainsail jibed, swinging from starboard to port with a wrench that nearly took the mast out. He could hear profanity, could feel the boat changing course again. When the commotion subsided, they were lined out on a slightly different course, and the water had changed—the waves were steeper, more violent, but there was no longer a long mountainous deep-sea swell. They had crossed the Gulf Stream, passed through the reefs that edged the great Bahama Bank, and were now headed—south, he believed, but possibly still east, for there might have been a wind shift—across the Banks, an area of hundreds of square miles of shoal water which was hardly more than three or four fathoms in depth anywhere —

He became rigid, stopped breathing. Two men had come into the fore-castle from aft.

“Hell, where'd all this water come from?” one of them complained.

A flashlight beam, jumping about, made the thin sailcloth glow cream-white before Doc's eyes.

“Hatch was open a while,” the other man said.

“Oh — You see anything looks like grub around here?”

“Nah — Unless it's under some of these sails.” The man began to jerk the sails about in the lockers, punch them with his hands. A moment later, he gave Doc Savage a hard blow in the stomach with his fist and, immediately afterward, a second blow on the broken ribs.

DOC was sure he yelled in agony. He could not, he felt, have repressed an outcry. He was also quite certain he blacked out for a few moments from the effects of the blow. But when reality—sounds, the clammy feel of sail-cloth against his face—took tangible being again, nothing more had happened. The schooner must have been pounding into a wave when he was punched, and the puncher must have mistaken his body for a bundled sail.

“No grub!” the man said disgustedly. “You know, we haven't any too much food aboard.”

“It oughta be enough. What does he expect to do—spend a couple of months diving?”

“He's not sure how long it will take to open up the steamer's hold and get at the shipment.”

“If the ship's lying in water as shallow as he says, one day might do it. Ten fathoms, he says. So shallow she wouldn't be covered if she wasn't on her side. If that's right, five or six days should see enough of the cargo out to load us down.”

“This is a damned small boat for a salvage job.”

“I guess that stuff he's after isn't so bulky — And he figures on making more than one trip, didn't he say?”

“Uh-huh.”

“Should be a pretty good job for us before it's over with. The speaker didn't sound as if he was so sure it was a good job.

“Yeah, if it paid anything,” the other man said. He didn't sound satisfied either. “What do you think about what we were talking about this morning?”

“Bouncing him for more dough, you mean?”

“Yeah.”

“I'm kinda in favor of it, to tell the truth.”

“The job is worth more now than it was this morning. That killing business sort of raised its price as far as I am concerned — Thing is, though, I'm not sure it would be safe to bounce him for more dough now. He's a guy that's kinda quick with the dead stuff.”

“Afraid of him?”

“You're damned right I'm afraid of him!”

The other man laughed, and it was an unamused sound. “I don't think he'd knock off his two divers, but you never can tell about guys like him. I think he's a crackpot.”

“He's smart as a whip.”

“That's the way you can tell crackpots sometimes.”

“We'll wait until he's in a better humor, then bring up the money thing. How's that?”

Doc Savage did not hear how it struck the other man, because the two left the forecabin — So there was a sunken steamer, a cargo to be salvaged, the two men were divers, and the schooner was to be used for the salvaging — Doc frowned, irritated by the intrusion of what struck him as a very simple explanation for things happening. His second thought that it wasn't any too simple, when questions were asked. What was the cargo? How come it was there? How and why were Sam Clark, Petey, Lucky, Snelling, involved? There were at least ten men on the schooner, he suspected, and why were they involved? Why had Barnes and the man named Mesana been murdered, and who had done it?

There were plenty of questions. He lay back and considered them, and hoped that the wind would not lay to a point where they would be tempted to put light sails on the schooner, which would include the balloon jib under which he was lying. He was, he reflected, probably very close to death.

SHORTLY after daylight, they passed through an opening in a reef into a lagoon. There was no doubt about what they were doing, because a man on the mainmast cross-trees coned them in through the foul water, twice nearly piling them on coral heads, and being cursed as a dunce and a striped ape each time.

Bill—the one who probably still thought he had killed Doc Savage—did most of the cursing. He yelled, “You see that mangrove creek?”

And the man on the mast shouted, “Yeah, a little to starboard and straight ahead.”

“Okay. Watch out for shoals.”

They evidently had no difficulty working the schooner into the mangrove creek, because presently, after some jumping around and more shouting, the boat seemed to be tied to the mangroves with lines.

“You guys in the first watch get busy collecting palm fronds to cover the deck,” Bill ordered. “Use the leaves of them little runty palmettos. Cover the sails and deck and everything.”

There was more scuffling around.

“The second watch,” Bill yelled, “will break out the paint brushes and that paint. Paint the hull white. Never mind a fancy job. Do it quick.”

Doc Savage listened with alarm. Evidently they were going to change the color of the vessel for purposes of disguise. But a paint job wouldn't make a very effective change in a boat of such distinctive shape as a bugeye. His concern was presently justified when Bill, standing in the bow, said, “I don't know what the hell we'll do about this clipper bow. Shortening the bowsprit will help. And we'll have to change the mast-stepping so that the masts stand up straight. Have to make the foremast into the mainmast, and cut the main down until it will pass for a jigger. That'll turn her into a ketch.”

Somebody said, “Damned if I want to sail back into Miami on her, no matter how much she's changed.”

“Who said anything about Miami? We'll try Neuvitas or some other Cuban port.”

“There's an American consul at Neuvitas, ain't there?”

“We'll sweat that out later.” Bill sounded angry. “Let's get the paint —” He was silent a moment, then raised his voice, bellowed, “What's that? Where?”

One of the crew, some distance away, called, “Just north of the island.”

Bill swore. “Everybody outa sight!” he yelled.

Doc decided that he then went up the ratline ladder to the mainmast hounds. The mast squeaked slightly in its step because of Bill's weight.

For ten minutes, there was the most complete and alarming kind of a silence.

WHEN Bill came down the ratlines, he was swearing bitterly. Somebody asked him a question Doc did not get. “I don't know, damn it!” Bill snarled. “She was a cabin cruiser, and the same type that John Warner owns. The Warner boat has been laying at a hotel dock in Miami Beach.”

“If it was Warner's boat, why'd they go on? Why didn't they turn in?”

“Would they come in if they saw us?”

“Hell, they couldn't have seen us. We're hull down behind the mangroves, and those palm trees in the background would have hidden the masts. Anyway, the sun was in their eyes.”

Bill was not satisfied. “As soon as they're out of sight, I'm gonna put a dink in the water and run out there where they were and see if it's likely they spotted us.”

Somebody said, “Through the binoculars, it looked like they were fishing. The outriggers were out. Would they be fishing if it was Warner's boat?”

“If it was Warner's boat, anything could happen,” Bill said bitterly. “You guys all keep your guns handy.”

Somebody made the suggestion that they might pursue the cabin cruiser they'd seen and catch it. He was sworn at. “That cruiser would do thirty knots to our ten,” Bill advised him angrily.

Later, Bill departed in the dinghy, to which they had attached an outboard motor. It was now getting hot in the forecandle, and Doc waited uncomfortably. He could hear paint brushes making licking sounds against the hull, and hear palm fronds being arranged to cover the deck. He was plagued by grim thoughts about the likelihood that they would take the sails out of the forecandle to dry them, which would mean his certain discovery — In which case there would be almost no chance of his escaping alive, the water in these mangrove creeks in the islands usually being nearly as clear as glass, and the mangroves offering little protection from bullet.

Bill returned in a better humor. From some distance away, he called, "Boss, I don't think they saw the masts. They're not as tall as the palms in the background and the sun gives your eyes hell. A plane might spot us, but I don't see how they could have."

Doc tried to identify the voice that answered. But it was hard to get anything out of a grunt.

It was, Doc believed, close to four o'clock in the afternoon when they dumped the deck covering of palm fronds on the shore, cast off the mooring lines and backed out of the mangrove creek, going aground once, but getting off immediately. The tide, he surmised, was close to low slack, which was evidently what they had been waiting for. The wait for slack tide indicated the steamer they were going to try to reach by diving must lie in or near the gap in the reef where, during the incoming and outgoing tide, there would be strong currents.

They began getting diving equipment on deck. A man came into the forecandle and gave him a grisly five minutes or so poking about in search of a coil of light line. The fellow did not, however, bother the light sail locker, although he shouted to someone on deck, "The sails in here are soaking wet. Won't they mildew if we don't dry 'em?"

"Let 'em rot," someone said. They were excited about the diving.

It was evident from the yelling that at least two men had been left ashore to sight bearings and direct the schooner by arm gestures. In all, about twenty minutes had elapsed before the anchor chain poured out of the locker, located almost against Doc's head, with a frightening roar.

After that, he lay in the stifling heat and listened to the diving operation. One man was evidently going down. Two other men, one in the foremast hounds, the other in the main-mast hounds, were placed, one with instructions to watch for sharks, the other to scan the horizon for approaching vessels.

The compressor engine started. The diver complained that, by God, they would have to rig a diving stage if they expected him to do this day after day. Presently he was lowered over the side, but was hoisted up again when the telephone wouldn't work. They repaired that. He went down again.

Doc Savage, badly gnawed by curiosity, his nerves on edge, dragged the sail back cautiously from his eyes, and considered taking a chance on a look outside. The forecandle hatch was now invitingly open. He moved his head somewhat and froze. A man had leaned down, thrust his head into the forecandle, and looked directly at him!

There followed ten or twelve of the longest seconds Doc Savage had ever experienced. Then the man, still looking directly at him, bellowed, "It's wetter than a dishpan down here. If anybody expects me to bunk in here, they're crazy. I'll sleep on deck, first. I think that's what I'll do anyway." The man withdrew his head and went away. Due to the intense sunlight outside, the shadow in the forecandle, he had not seen Doc.

THE diver was down about two hours, and it seemed longer. There was, toward the end, quite a bit of excited yelling when he called for a line to be sent down. Somebody said they were messing up the wet

paint on the hull. He was laughed at for being concerned about the hull paint.

They hauled the diver out. He did not, when they uncapped him, sound tired.

“This isn't any snap,” he announced loudly. “The tide gives you hell. I ran across three moray eels in there, and they're big ones, big enough to bite through a man's diving suit. They're deadly poison.”

Bill snorted, said, “Don't kid me about eels—they're infectious is all. Place where they bite gets sore as hell — How much progress did you make?”

“Progress? The diver sounded a little reluctant. “Well, not bad. But it'll be rougher later on — As a matter of fact, the hatch is blown off the main hold. The air pressure must have done that when she went down.”

“Cripes, you got into the hold?”

“Yeah.”

“What about the cargo?”

“Haul away on the line,” the diver said. “Let's see what I got.”

There was some brisk heaving, shouted orders, the sounds that went with raising some kind of a burden, not too heavy, and hoisting it aboard. When the thing came down on deck, it was obviously metal. Someone said, “Let's have a knife and scrape away some of the mess — Will salt water hurt the stuff?”

“What I want to know,” another demanded, “is whether there's enough to pay off.”

The diver snorted. “The hold is half full of it. Several hundred tons.”

“Oh, for crying out loud! Several hundred—by God! That's more than a half million bucks worth!”

“Even at market prices now,” Bill said. “It was worth more than that when the ship sank.”

This seemed to end the work on the anchor. The anchor, it developed, had stuck, evidently lodged on the sunken steamer. In the course of the commotion, a man fell down the fore-castle hatch, alarming Doc Savage intensely—he thought the man who had looked into the fore-castle earlier had actually seen him, and they were springing a trap.

To the tune of unconcerned swearing—they were in high spirits—they decided to cut the anchor loose, using the anchor chain to hold a marker buoy, which they proceeded to fashion out of half a dozen life preservers lashed together and wrapped in a sail. This done, they headed back into the lagoon, maneuvered into the mangrove creek again, and put out mooring lines.

They were, apparently, going to settle down for the night. Aft, some sort of an argument broke out over sleeping accommodations, complicated by the fact that it was cloudy in the south and might rain during the night. There was not enough bunk space aft; somebody would have to take the fore-castle, wet or not.

Doc became alarmed.

PRESENTLY, two men stumbled into the fore-castle, coming through the bulkhead door from the amidships hold where the diving equipment was stored. They made loud angry noises back in the hold, but once in the fore-castle, one of them broke into giggling. “Shut up, dope!” his companion urged. “They'll get wise!”

“Wise, hell! Nobody had spotted it, had they? Here, give me a hand with it.”

“Where will we put it?”

“What's the matter with under the sails?”

“Sails are wet. We gotta toss them out anyway. Let's get the wet sails out now.”

Doc Savage had barely time to get set—mentally; there was not much he could do physically—for trouble when the balloon jib was yanked out of the locker, exposing him.

Chapter XI

SURPRISE was on his side. He was glad of that. He had wondered if it would be. His feet were free first, and he used the right one to kick the nearest man, having marvelous luck and hitting the man on the point of the jaw. The fellow walked backward against the second man, who was facing the other direction, doubled over, wedging something in a box under the berths.

The second man said, “Watch where you're—” and saw Doc Savage. His eyes were rounded like portholes, he made two or three clucking sounds, like a turkey tom getting ready to gobble. Before he could make any noise that was coherent, or very loud, Doc hit him. The blow, a fine hook to the jaw, seemed to have absolutely no effect. Doc put a left in his stomach, came up with a right as the man folded over, and got results.

At this point, the first man hit the floor, making the loudest sound that had been made. Doc caught the second man and eased him down.

Since he did not have a gun, his hands made a quick search and came up with three, two revolvers and an automatic. He did not, as a usual thing, carry a gun, nor did he like to employ one. Long ago, he had formed a conviction that if a man started packing a gun, he would just naturally put more and more dependence in the thing, and, caught in a jam without it sometime, be absolutely helpless.

In the meantime, he listened for a noise, or lack of it, from aft that would indicate an alarm. There was none. Life, as nearly as he could tell, was going on as usual.

Two unconscious men, he reflected, are going to be hard to dispose of. His immediate plan was to get off the boat, which he thought he might be able to do, taking advantage of the darkness. But he couldn't leave two unconscious men behind—they would revive eventually. He did not have the necessary amount of cold blood to fix them so they wouldn't revive.

The island—if he got on it—would be a small one, he surmised. Probably no more than a cay, a handful of sand, coral, mangroves and a few palm trees, and obviously uninhabited. He had not seen the island, but it did not take much guesswork to decide what kind of place it was. The men had shown no apprehension at all about anyone on the island discovering them, therefore the island was not inhabited.

He had no liking for being chased about on a small cay by ten or a dozen armed men who had already killed two, which was what would happen once the two prisoners awakened and gave an alarm.

The problem solved itself quite nicely. He leaned down to see what kind of box the men had brought into the forecabin. He was so relieved he all but fell on his face. Whiskey! A case of whiskey. *Old Jug Bourbon Whiskey* was stenciled on the case.

CARRYING through on the good luck, the bottles were screw-capped instead of corked. He ran a fingernail around the seal, unscrewed a cap, adjusted one of the unconscious men's head so that it was in

the best funnel position, and began forcing whiskey down the fellow's throat. He spilled very little. His training as a doctor helped out.

How much whiskey at once would kill a man was a complicated question, including the factors of tolerance, or ability of the victim's body to oxidize it, the victim's size, the amount of food in his stomach. He decided to go heavy, and gave each man something less than a quart. There was a definite possibility that a full quart would be fatal.

He slammed each man on the jaw again to give the liquor time to take effect, then rolled the victims in the bunks. He collected another gun and two boxes of cartridges.

One at a time, he dropped the cartridges from one box into an empty bottle which he shook as nearly dry as possible. Then he put the screw cap on the bottle and shoved it in his trouser pocket. It made a very tight fit, but he did not care to take chances on ammunition getting wet. The effect of immersing shells in water was always doubtful.

Very carefully, he raised his head through the hatch. It was rather dark, the island looked about as he had expected it to look—low, coral and sand, mangroves and lignum-vitae and a very few tall palms on slightly higher ground nearby. A cloud bank in the east and south was nearer than he had expected, and lightning occasionally crawled about high up in the clouds. There was no audible thunder.

Withdrawing his head, he listened to the sounds aft. Apparently, they were cooking, part of them lounging in the cockpit where there were cushions.

He had already worked out a plan for putting the schooner at a disadvantage, and he concluded to go ahead with it. He would need line, probably fifty feet of it. There was always plenty of rope around a sailing vessel, and he located the line locker, port side, ahead of the bunks, and selected a length. He coiled it very carefully, shaking out the kinks, then swung it over his shoulder and head, under one arm.

Going out on deck, he moved casually, but kept low, the way he had come aboard. He went down into the water the same way, hanging to the jib basket, then the bobstay, then lowering himself an inch at a time. The water was warm, and there was a slight current into the mangrove creek, which meant he would have to go against the current in swimming aft.

He took a deep breath, sank, and swam toward the stern. Presently he bumped into the centerboard, which was down, but not hard enough, he hoped, to be heard on the schooner. He went on, began to need air, finally coming up under the stern overhang. He listened for a while. So far, it seemed to be working.

Removing the hank of line, he uncoiled it carefully, letting the current carry the rope away, stringing it out so that it would not tangle. Then he sank, found the propeller, and began making repeated turns around propeller and shaft. The shaft, he discovered, ran through a bearing strut after it left the shaft log. He took fifteen or twenty turns around propeller and strut in the course of three submersions.

There was some line left. He decided to jam the rudder, which would prevent them using sail until they had unfouled it. The rudder was centered, and he dared not try to move it, because that would—if he did manage to move it—spin the steering wheel in the cockpit. He made three loops from the rudder, wedging the line in between gudgeons and pins, and carried it over to the propeller and lashing the end.

A man underwater with a sharp knife could eventually remove the impediment, but, once the propeller had further fouled itself by endeavoring to turn, it would be a brisk half hour job. He hoped.

He swam back underwater to the bow of the schooner. The ticklish job, getting away from the schooner,

was ahead of him. He watched the water, disturbed about phosphorescence. There were fish in the creek, he knew, and there should be phosphorescence when they moved—if this was one of the nights when there was a lot of the sea fire. There was more of the stuff some nights than others. He decided finally that it was safe enough.

He drew in a deep breath, sank, and swam with the current. The guns, the bottle filled with cartridges, helped keep him down. He veered a little to the right, intent on coming to the surface under the overhanging mangroves when he ran out of breath.

Thunder was whooping discontentedly in the distance when he crawled out among the mangroves.

HE did not linger around the creek and the schooner, because he wanted a general idea of the shape of the island, and the lightning that was jabbing white-tongues out of the front and base of the oncoming thundersquall was the best source of light he would have, probably, for several hours.

The palm trees, some of them probably close to a hundred feet in height, would give a good vantage point—if he could climb them without being discovered. But he watched the palm trees, boles silver-white, standing out in each distant lightning flash, and decided it was too risky. The palm trunks were too conspicuous.

He moved instead in a wide circle to the beach. Coral islands usually had a beach, although it wasn't necessarily of sand, nor smooth. This one in particular was not smooth: it was of honeycomb coral, about as easy walking, if he had not been wise enough not to remove his shoes, as so much broken glass. He kept close to the jungle until he had rounded a point and was where lightning flashes would not reveal him to a lookout if there was one near the schooner.

The cay was about one half a mile in length, a couple of hundred yards wide at the broadest part, and there was shoal water on the west side, which was the side opposite the lagoon. He could not tell much about the reef formation, but if it ran according to pattern, there would be a pocket of deep water inside a reef that would not necessarily be exposed even at low tide, but which would be effective protection.

He kept going. He was thinking of the cabin cruiser they'd sighted earlier in the day — If the cruiser was going to approach the island, the logical time to do it would be in the wake of the thunderstorm—far enough back to be out of the line squall that would precede the storm, but also close enough to take advantage of the uproar of the storm.

The squall was approaching, he decided, at about twenty miles an hour, which was a good speed, but one which a capable ocean-going express cruiser could handle.

He kept going until he reached the eastern side of the island, then, on a smooth stretch of sand, lay down to wait, to watch the play of lightning, gauge the storm and try, in particular, to learn whether the cabin cruiser was running along on the outskirts of the squall. He did not see it.

The air became hot, still, for a few moments. Then he began to hear the hissing of the squall line between the licking of lightning, the crash and rumble of thunder. Quickly, then, the wind came.

HARD coral sand hit his hands and face, feeling, when there was darkness, like hard raindrops. There wasn't much darkness now; the lightning was an almost continuous blaze. There was not more than a minute and a half of wind, then the rain came marching in a tortured wall, and hit him solidly, like a living, angry animal. It was not a large nor violent rain squall as tropical squalls went, but for a few moments it seemed utterly fierce and violent.

The rain, after three or four minutes of rushing fury, slackened to an even downpour which would, he

surmised, last another fifteen minutes or so. He gave his attention to the sea now —

The dinghy came in rapidly, without lights. He heard the motor, and the motor stopped, long before he saw the small boat. But presently he knew from what direction it was coming.

He waited for a lightning flash to come, blaze, die. Then he sprinted across the beach, went into the water as silently as possible, and, when the surf was considerably less than knee deep, went flat. After that, he crawled—so that other lightning flashes would not silhouette him—out into neck deep water.

It was more difficult now to keep track of the incoming small boat. He spotted it twice more by sound, then by sight as lightning flickered distantly. He heard someone curse the lightning softly.

Sam Clark's voice said, "Never mind the lightning. If they see us, it might be just as well."

There was surf coming in, but it was not high. The waves, even close in and breaking, were not more than three feet. The squall had been too fast-moving and brief to kick up much of a surf.

Doc, moving without splashing, got directly in front of the dinghy. He did most of his breathing in the wave troughs, let the crests pass over his head by diving through them.

When the boat was quite close, he sank, let it pass overhead, located it with his hands, came up swiftly behind it and hooked a hand over the stern. He swung a revolver over the stern with his right hand.

"Don't start shooting," he said.

The oars—two men were rowing—stopped.

"Clark," Doc said. "Better tell them not to start shooting — You'll want to know what you're getting into."

The silence continued. Doc didn't like it. They were, he surmised, armed like commandos.

Petey said, "God bless us a ghost!" For once he did not use Cockney, Australian, Brooklyn or any other dialect. He sounded like a Boston gentleman in church.

Clark said, "Savage — Doc Savage?"

"We're going to turn a light on you."

"Wait for a lightning flash."

"Well ... okay ... Anybody with you?"

"No."

The lightning took its time about coming, and when a long spark of it did race across the streaming rump of the thunderstorm, it showed five men and the muzzles of five guns intently interested and waiting.

DOC moved hastily when darkness came. He got to one side of the dinghy stern and as far from it as he could get and still keep one hand on it.

Sam Clark said, "I thought you never used a gun."

"I don't like to." He hoped the location of his voice would not be too definite.

"This could get messy."

“It could.”

Clark said finally, “Hold it, boys. It's Savage, all right.”

“He's supposed to be dead,” Petey said.

“Well, he's not.”

“Yeah, and it's kinda funny, ain't it? Kinda mysterious. Maybe somebody didn't want him dead after all.”

Sam Clark made a vague noise. “Shut up,” he said.

Doc asked, “How are we going to work this out?”

“You mean—who's going to get shot?”

“We can start with that.”

“I always hate to think in a hurry,” Sam Clark sounded worried. “Make a lot of mistakes that way.”

Doc, sounding as ominous and threatening as he could, said, “Let's begin by putting those guns down. We're getting nowhere this way.”

There was a silence.

“Put 'em down boys,” Sam Clark said.

Petey swore bitterly. “Are we gonna give up?”

“You're probably not giving up anything, Petey. Put them down. I don't know how the hell he got here alive—unless that girl lied to us—but he's probably got some interesting words for us.”

Doc said, “That should go both ways.”

In a moment, when the lightning came again, he saw that their hands no longer held guns. Whether they had pocketed them, or put them in the bottom of the boat, he had no idea.

“Where are Monk Mayfair and Ham Brooks?” Doc demanded.

“On the cruiser.”

“Very far out?”

“Half a mile.”

“Two of you row back out there and get them,” Doc said. “The rest of us will wait on shore.”

Sam Clark took a long time—probably a minute, but it seemed longer—to think that over.

“You heard the pronouncement, boys,” he said.

Chapter XII

THE dinghy swung about after all but the two oarsmen had unloaded, and headed back out to sea. Because it was still raining, the small boat was quickly lost to sight and hearing.

Sam Clark cleared his throat quietly. “If this is a trick to get us ashore into the hands of them guys—”

“It's not,” Doc said.

Clark hesitated. “Damned good thing I kinda got acquainted with you,” he said finally. “All right, boys, wade ashore.”

Doc followed behind them. He knew that they half suspected they were walking into an ambush. He made no comment, except to say, “Keep down and crawl. And when you reach the beach, don't be too prominent strolling across it. Nor too slow.”

Each man crossed the beach in sprinting haste. There was no incident, except that Petey ran headlong into some kind of a tropical cactus, and expressed his feelings in a hoarsely agonized whisper.

Sam Clark cleared his throat. “Miss Jones said you were dead. Shot.”

“Bulletproof vest,” Doc explained. “They heaved me overboard in too much of a hurry afterward. The one who shot me—they call him Bill—was sure two bullets where he had put those had killed me. Which was logical.”

“Which shows how logic can foul up a situation,” Sam Clark muttered. “Bill ... That must be Bill Lonnie. He's second boy to the stud duck. He's the right hand that does the work. I hope I get a shot at him, I sure do. What about Barnes?”

“Barnes was dead when Lucky and I came aboard with Snelling. They hanged him.”

“What did they do with Barnes body?” Sam Clark was suddenly hoarse with emotion. He added, “The dirty so-and-sos.”

“I think,” Doc said, “that they dumped Barnes' body in the river after mine. There was some talk about it before they threw me in. I'm not sure that's what happened, but it probably did.”

“The dirty so-and-sos,” Sam Clark said. He used the words so-and-sos, giving them a meaning, with his tone and delivery, that was agonized, bitter, completely malevolent.

Doc added, “They tied a weight to my feet. I got it loose, swam to the bow, climbed up the bobstay and jib basket, got into the forecabin, got under a light sail because I figured there was enough wind they wouldn't use the light sails. It was a balloon jib. It proved to be lucky figuring. They didn't bother the sail.”

“Brainy thinking, not luck,” Sam Clark said. “You've got more damned guts than I have, and I'm not supposed to be exactly empty.”

Doc said, “They sailed her hard and put in the lagoon about daylight. They were lying up the mangrove creek when you passed this morning. Did you see them?”

“We saw the topmast. We've got damned good binoculars aboard.”

“They were suspicious, but not too suspicious.”

“That's a damned bad mistake they made.” Sam Clark sounded guttural, tense. Presently he added, “That, and killing poor old Barnes, the dirty so-and-sos.”

THE rain, slackening suddenly, fell only in a thin mist. To the south and west, the direction from which the thunderstorm had come, the sea took on a pale silver tint which was evidently from moonlight. The sky, following the storm, was going to clear.

From the sea in the direction the dinghy had gone, there was silence and darkness.

Doc said, "I got off the schooner less than an hour ago. Two of them jerked the sail off me, but I managed to lay them out. They had sneaked a case of bourbon whiskey, into forecandle. I poured nearly a quart down each one."

"You used more restraint than I would," Petey said suddenly. Petey still had a Bostonian sound.

Doc asked, "What are you, an actor?"

"Me?" Petey sounded surprised. "How'd you know?"

"He's no actor," Sam Clark said. "He's my private secretary — I'm not kidding."

"I don't think you're kidding," Doc said.

"When did you figure it out?" Sam Clark asked suddenly.

"When that fellow Mesana was murdered, some of it," Doc said. "I figured out who killed him, and then I made a bad mistake—I let it go on cooking to see what would boil to the surface. That was an error."

Sam Clark grunted. "Maybe it wasn't. Not a mistake, I mean."

"No?"

"I was in a little different frame of mind then," Clark said grimly. "I was pretty greedy right then. I was greedy up to the point where I found out from Lucky Jones that Barnes had been knocked off — That girl's unusual. She's got more nerve than a politician."

Doc was silent. He watched the sea. Usually he could keep fairly close track of time, but now he was confused, and could not tell whether the dinghy had had time to go half a mile and return. It was important.

"You got the rest of it doped out?" Sam Clark demanded suddenly.

"Most of it, probably — I don't know what kind of cargo the steamer had, for one thing. Metal. But what kind?"

"It's metal, all right."

"What kind?"

Sam Clark sighed. "Beryllium. It's no wonder metal, but they worked out a way of refining it and alloying it with aluminum, and using it in aircraft. It's pretty good, that alloy. On a B19 plane, for instance, using the alloy saves enough weight to let the ship carry about nine tons extra load."

Doc said, "A shipment from South America, eh?"

"You hear them say that?"

"No. But lots of it comes from South America. The Nazis got about two thousand tons out of South America in 1941, before we got into the war and put a stop to it. They had, incidentally, worked out ways of alloying it with other metals to make machine parts—principally springs that never get tired."

"Hell, you must be a metallurgist!"

“Not especially.” Doc turned his attention to the sea again. “I think the dinghy is coming,” he said.

THE dinghy came in cautiously. It was a presence, only faintly heard, for the lightning had almost ceased.

“That cop and that assistant district attorney are aboard, and the girl,” Sam Clark said. “I forgot to tell you that.”

“They come along willingly?”

“Not exactly.”

Doc did not press for details. “We'd better drag the dinghy, or carry it, rather, across the beach and hide it.”

They walked across the beach, entered the surf, and crouched there, lest there be another lightning flash that might disclose their ghostly presence.

“What about Snelling?” Sam Clark demanded suddenly.

“I don't know.”

“Hell—isn't he on the schooner?”

“I didn't see him or hear his voice.”

“That's queer.”

“I thought so.”

Clark swore softly. “He's gotta be aboard—if they didn't tie a rock to his feet and drop him overboard too. I wouldn't put it past them.”

Doc said nothing.

Out in the surf, someone called uneasily, “Is it okay?”

“Come on in, Monk,” Doc said.

Monk gasped, “It's true! You're alive, Doc! Ham and I—we've been worried sick—we thought—” He choked down, too affected by relief to make words fit together.

The dinghy came in, and the occupants climbed out in knee-deep water. They identified themselves as Ham, Police Lieutenant Avery and Assistant District Attorney Bridges. Lucky was the last one out.

Doc said, “You shouldn't have brought the girl. There is going to be shooting and—”

“If you think I was going to stay on that boat alone, you're crazy!” Lucky declared.

“Alone! Isn't there anyone on the boat?”

Lieutenant Avery said, “Sure, there's one guy on the boat. She's just contrary. She wanted to get her head shot off.”

They carried the dinghy across the sand and planted it in some brush, then whittled some fronds off palmetto shrubs and covered it.

“DOES everyone understand what is going on here?” Doc asked.

“We've got some ideas,” Ham said.

“Sam Clark will give us a brief review,” Doc said. “I think we have time for that.”

Clark hesitated, then said gloomily, “There was a steamer loaded with beryllium, a metal that's used in airplanes and alloys. It was bound from South America to Norfolk. It got a torpedo about a hundred miles from here—this was during the war—and started to sink. The crew abandoned ship in a hell of a hurry, but they left one guy aboard. He was knocked out by the explosion and they didn't happen to notice him. Well, it was a rough night, dark and stormy, and the torpedoed steamer got separated from the lifeboats. It didn't sink. The guy who was knocked out wakes up, and he was able to get a little way on the ship. He was one of the engineers, so he could do that. He saw this little island, and tried to put in here, but the steamer didn't make it. It sank just outside the channel into the lagoon. The guy got ashore. A few days later, he was picked up. He didn't tell anybody that he knew where the steamer sank, and that it was in shoal water. He kept his mouth shut until the war was over. Then he approached Barnes and Warner. His proposition was that they finance him to salvage the beryllium, and he would sell it to them at a sacrifice — Well, Barnes and Warner, I'm sorry to say, got some crooked ideas of their own.”

Doc said, “Why don't you call a spade a spade?”

“Eh?”

“You're Warner.”

Sam Clark breathed inward and outward deeply. “Yeah, I'm John Warner. How'd you figure it out?”

Lucky said, “I figured it out, too. The photographs on the *Virginia Dare*, a picture of you and Barnes together, old pals stuff. I decided you were Warner right then.”

“I'm Warner,” Clark admitted. “Here's what happened: This guy approached Barnes, my partner. He had never seen me, so we—”

In the distance, two shots sounded. They came from the direction of the *Virginia Dare*, lying in the mangrove creek. Another shot followed. A pause. A yell. Three more shots.

Petey blurted, “My God, they didn't wait!”

“Who didn't wait?” Doc demanded.

“The rest of my crew,” Sam Clark gasped. “They were in the other dinghy. They were to circle the island and come in on the schooner from the other direction.”

Doc said, “Come on.”

THEY ran, keeping in a compact group, and following the beach. Doc, from time to time, gave instructions about where the easy going would lie.

“How many in the other dinghy?”

“Five,” Sam Clark said. “There are eleven of us, all told. One on the cruiser, five here, five in the other dinghy.”

“Didn't you have a signal?”

“Yes. A shot. One of the guys on the schooner must have fired on them, and set things off.”

“Look!” Lieutenant Avery barked.

They had rounded a headland, the mangrove creek in which the schooner lay was not more than two hundred yards distant, and they could see that the schooner was on fire. Flames, orange-colored, bundled most of the cockpit area, and dark smoke was crawling upward.

“How did that happen?” Doc demanded.

“I would be surprised as anything if it hadn't happened,” Sam Clark said. “We spent all day making up home-made incendiary bombs. Burn them out, we figured, was the best way to upset them.”

Petey said, “Give us a little light for shooting, too.”

The shooting commenced again. This time it was a light machine gun, and it loosened long bursts. Rifles joined in.

“Doc said, “If they are using that machine gun—”

“We're the ones with the machine gun,” Sam Clark said.

They drew near the burning schooner. Figures were moving in the firelight, both on the schooner and on the shore. The guns continued whacking. The sub-machine gun emptied one drum of ammunition, and started spitting a second. Petey unlimbered a revolver, aimed at a man swimming in the mangrove creek, and fired. The bullet dug up a gout of water in front of the swimmer's face, and the fellow reversed and swam the other direction. Petey aimed at him again.

Doc knocked the gun up, and said, “That's cold blooded murder. Stop it!”

Petey said, “Sure, they treated Mr. Barnes with great courtesy, didn't they!” But he didn't fire again, and the swimmer, reaching shallow water, stood with both arms upraised.

Doc, lifting his voice, roared, “Let them surrender! Give them a chance to surrender!”

The result of his warning was not good. Two men were promptly shot down on the schooner deck.

“Clark, they know your voice—tell them to take prisoners!”

Sam Clark or Warner said, “This breaks my heart, but okay.” He raised his own voice and bellowed, “Doc Savage is with us. He says take prisoners. Better do it, or we'll get mixed up in a murder trial! If they want to surrender, let them. Take prisoners.”

The shooting stopped while he was bellowing. The fire still burned noisily; it reached the fuel tanks of the schooner, and there was a hollow explosion, a fountain-like climbing of flames, burning fragments, sparks above the schooner.

Someone on the opposite side of the creek asked loudly, “What prisoners?”

“Blazes!” Monk was horrified. “Have they killed them all?”

NOT all, it developed. Only four. Three more were badly wounded, two were standing with their hands up, one was swimming in the creek, and one, it seemed, was still in ambush in the burning schooner.

Doc Savage said hoarsely, “The two in the forecandle—” He ran to the mooring line, went out hand over

hand, and reached the forecastle deck. Shouting down the hatch, he said, “Snelling—Snelling, are you safe? I was worried.”

Snelling's voice—after the man had time to think—said, “Is that—what are you—”

“I came aboard to save you. Come on! Hurry, man! The boat is going to pieces in a minute!”

Coughing, gasping, Snelling came out of the smoke-filled after section of the boat. He said, “I don't—they've had me prisoner—what has happened!”

“We caught up with them. Give me a hand. Let's get these two unconscious men ashore.”

Getting the two intoxicated men, alive but quite helpless, out of the forecastle bunks and on deck was a muscle-wrenching job. Smoke and heat did not make it easier. Doc, on deck, managed to heave them as far as shallow water, where Lieutenant Avery and Monk could get hold of them and drag them to safety.

Doc hauled Snelling out of the forecastle.

“Come on!”

Snelling discovered the men on shore. “Who—there's Sam Clark!” His voice was strained, wild. Snelling plunged into the water, paddled ashore, crawled out on dry land. He stumbled toward Sam Clark, wailed, “Sam! Oh, thank God, Sam, you could come—”

Sam Clark hit him a terrific blow in the face with his fist. Snelling fell loosely, and Clark, suddenly over him, lifted a foot to stamp on Snelling's face. Doc, reaching them, shoved Clark aside.

“Let the law do it,” Doc said.

Sam Clark seemed dazed. “Why the devil did he come at me like that, whining and fawning?”

Doc shrugged. “He thought we didn't know he was the sailor who was left on the steamer after it was torpedoed. I suppose I gave him that idea. It seemed the best way of getting him out of the boat without more shooting make him think we didn't know he was their leader.”

Petey swore. “He didn't know you were John Warner, Sam. Can you beat that?”

THEY herded the surviving prisoners on to the beach and searched them. Monk and Ham tried without success to build a fire from the soaked jungle wood, gave it up when they discovered some of the prisoners carried flashlights which were serviceable.

Lieutenant Avery searched Snelling. “So this bird was the dark horse?”

“He was the sailor left on the torpedoed steamer,” Sam Clark explained. “Like I told you, he got the steamer this far and it sank outside the lagoon, and he was picked up and kept his mouth shut about the whereabouts of the ship. After the war, he approached us, and we decided to doublecross him.”

“He didn't know you were Warner, of the two partners, Barnes and Warner?”

“Never.”

“How come?”

“He just never saw me. I struck up an acquaintance with him as Sam Clark. Petey helped me. We gave him the idea we were a pair of no-goods. The idea was that he might hire us for his salvage gang, and we

would find out where the steamer lay then take it over on a regular salvage deal that would have given us fifty per cent of the cargo, a better deal than we were getting from him.”

“Hell!” Lieutenant Avery said. “That wasn't a crooked deal on your part!” He sounded disappointed. “You mean you were going to notify the regular owners and insurance company and collect salvage?”

“Yeah.”

Doc Savage said, “Let's have the rest of the background.”

Sam Clark nodded. “Not much to it. Snelling became suspicious of Barnes, and Barnes, for his own protection, told Snelling he was going to ask you for help if Snelling got funny. So Snelling cooked up that crackpot idea of having Petey and me shoot at you, then decoy you off to Montana. That way, Barnes couldn't appeal to you for help — I guess Snelling had Mesana try to kill Lucky because she knew Snelling and might point a bit of suspicion at him, and then, after you caught Mesana, Snelling killed him there in the hotel room. I don't know how.”

“Cyanide in a cigarette,” Doc said. “Then Snelling pulled fake stuff with the darts, which he must have had ready to use if necessary or he got a chance—he had probably been experimenting with them and found out they wouldn't really kill a man effectively. Part of the fakery was claiming someone was outside, and had fired the darts.”

“I guess so,” Clark said gloomily. “Then Snelling had his men kill Barnes, because they were so stirred up by then that Barnes had to be killed before he could talk to you. After they had killed you—they thought—they knew they had better clear out, so they took Barnes boat, and did so.”

“How,” Doc demanded, “did you know where the island was?”

“Oh, I had found that out from talking with the divers Snelling had hired. You see, they had made another trip over here to look over the lay of the ship and decide how much the salvage job would take — That was so they could talk business with Barnes. Barnes demanded exact figures and an estimate from an experienced diver. It was the diver I pumped.”

Lieutenant Avery was looking around curiously. “Where the devil,” he demanded, “is our bright young legal light, Assistant District Attorney Bridges?”

No one, it developed, could recall having seen Mr. Bridges since the fighting started.

Lucky made an offer. “Does anyone want to bet me,” she suggested, “that we don't find Mr. Bridges well hidden in the top of a palm tree?”

Avery laughed. “With your gambling luck—no.”

THAT was where they found him.

THE END