



The Swooning Lady

A Doc Savage Adventure by Kenneth Robeson

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Chapter I

SHE used a way of walking, arms held rigidly down and a little out from her body, shoulder-blades twisted back, that made it seem she might be impaled on something. Impaled, meaning the way a butterfly would be on the point of a needle.

Nice-looking. Undeniably nice-looking, not flashily dressed and not cheaply either. A trifle over average height, generally sweet honey in coloring, and, as to figure, the very best of everything in the right places.

She walked like that for a few yards, then went a little faster and got up on tiptoes in an unsteady way, and it seemed a very fortunate thing the lamp-post stood just there, where she needed it.

Mr. Monk Mayfair's interest was, by this time, well stirred.

A fine morning for it, too. At this late June season, springtime was very full-bosomed in New York's Central Park. And this morning hour of ten o'clock was filled with splintering sunshine and the singing of birds. Mr. Mayfair's headache, a trivial affair that had resulted from absentmindedly sniffing the wrong test tube in the laboratory yesterday, was more irksome to him because it carried no pleasant memories of a night out on the town, than for any other reason.

He noted the way her fingers were biting at the shiny green metal of the lamp-post.

"Lady," he said. "Lady, may I be of assistance?"

She looked at him. Lovely eyes. Beautiful distressed eyes. His toes tried out the tips of his shoes for room.

“I’m afraid—I don’t—oh, thank you—” A special voice, too. The sound of a harp over a lake. Then she added, “Why, aren’t you Roxy?”

“Who?” Monk said. “Me? Roxy?”

She looked at him. She seemed to get stronger. “Aren’t you Mr. Roxborough?”

“Me?” said Monk. “Well, I’m afraid not—”

She got a lot stronger indeed. “You’re not?”

“Well, no—”

“Pass on, you baboon,” she said. “Take a walk. Scram. Make tracks.”

“But I—”

“Just charge it up to experience,” she said. The voice was still nice, but she was putting something in it that could be used for varnish-remover. “Get along, little missing-link. Beat it.”

“I resent the *little* part,” Monk said. “I weigh two hundred and thirteen pounds without my fountain pen. What if I am five foot five? You think it worries me?”

“Go away.”

“You,” Monk said, “made a damned quick recovery.”

“Are you leaving?”

“Not until I—hey! Ouch! Awk!” He was wearing his usual ghastly yellow necktie. She jerked this tight, flipped a knot into it—he couldn’t breathe. He was wearing his favorite hat, the one which looked as if it had been used frequently to fight bumblebees.

She yanked this down over his eyes. Presently he recovered from everything except indignation. But by that time, she was nowhere to be seen.

IN order to ease the strain on his dignity—Central Park on a ten o’clock June morning with the sun shining is invariably a populous place, so several spectators were staring, and some of them were laughing—Mr. Mayfair took himself away from there. He walked rapidly, turned left, walked rapidly a bit farther, turned off on the turf with a scowl at a KEEP OFF THE GRASS sign, and climbed up an easy slope of rocks. Here there were no gigglers, grinners or laughers. Monk sat down.

“Sir Galahad,” he said wryly, “you shoulda stood on your horse.”

He noted that by accident he had chosen a cooling-off spot from which he could look out across some shrubbery and over the path which had been the scene of his recent embarrassment. It did not seem important at the moment. The path at that point was near an entrance to the park from Central Park West, which was an avenue walled with apartment houses where the rent for two rooms was five hundred dollars a month and up.

Mr. Mayfair tried laughing. He managed, but not happily. The sound was a little chipmunkish, he decided. He swore, and this at least had fervor.

“Of all the damn things!” he remarked. And presently he tempered this with, “Not a bad-looking babe, either. Spirited, too.”

This about concluded the talking-to-himself stage of his emotional subsidence, and it was followed by a thought not related at all to the swoon-and-quick-recovery damosel. *I'm eternally damned glad Doc Savage and Ham Brooks, and in particular Ham Brooks, didn't see that little happening*, he thought fervently.

He could produce in his mind a clear picture of what Doc Savage's reaction would have been, in view of a recent warning by Doc that he, Monk, was a pushover for almost anything in skirts that was blonde and glittered, and while there might be enjoyable things to be said about being a pushover, it could be overdone. This speech, one of the sort Doc Savage did not make often, had followed an episode in which such a blonde had nearly been the finish of all of them.

Monk clearly recalled what he had said. “I've learned. I am going to be very hard to get,” he had said. “I understand that your unusual occupation, which is righting wrongs and punishing evildoers who are outside the law in the far corners of the earth, in which I am associated with you, becomes dangerous at times. I shall henceforth treat all blondes with disdain.”

“Disdain?” Doc said.

“Exactly.”

“Never mind attempting the impossible,” Doc said dryly. “And our profession sounds a little corny, the way you just stated it.”

Monk looked out across the park and shuddered. Then he stared. Disbelieving, he shaded his eyes with a hand. He was inspecting the part of the path where he had recently received discomfiture.

“For God's sake,” he muttered. “She's at it again.”

DOC SAVAGE headquartered on the eighty-sixth floor of a midtown Manhattan skyscraper. He owned the building, but inhabited only the spacious eighty-sixth floor with an arrangement of laboratory, library and reception room, and maintained also a smaller suite of two rooms on a lower floor, the latter occupied by a private detective agency which did nothing but screen would-be visitors, weeding out the cranks and curiosity-lookers. The sleuth agency was one of the lesser expenses of fame.

Monk Mayfair entered the reception room which contained comfortable chairs, an odd and wondrous inlaid Oriental table, a huge and ugly safe, and Brigadier General Theodore Marley “Ham” Brooks, an attorney.

“Good morning, stupid,” said Ham Brooks.

“How did you know, you shyster?” Monk asked sourly.

Ham laughed. “That's a nice knot you've got in your necktie.”

“This?” Monk glared and fingered the knot, which he'd been able to loosen somewhat, but not untie. “A dame tried to choke me.”

“An improvement over the knots you usually tie—” Ham paused, looking interested. “What was that? A dame tried to—”

“Never mind.”

“It looks as if you finally met an intelligent lady, I would say,” said Ham cheerfully. “Sought to strangle you, eh? Quite a worthy project.”

“Nuts to you, Blackstone. Is Doc around here?”

Ham tilted his head toward the laboratory. “How did this happen? This garroting—”

Monk walked into the laboratory. Doc Savage was working with a wire recorder, doing voice imitations, running scales, imitating sounds, then playing the exercises back and listening to them disapprovingly. Monk listened for a few moments. The range, power and flexibility of Doc's voice was still a source of astonishment to Monk, although he had been associated with the giant bronze man for several years, and was fully acquainted with the freakish background that had made Doc Savage into the package of marvels—physical, mental, and scientific—that Doc was.

Doc Savage was living proof of the argument that if you begin early enough, and train hard enough, you can do almost anything. Monk knew that Doc Savage had been placed, at cradle age, in the hands of a succession of scientists, physical culture fiends, psychologists—even a genuine Yogi or two—and had received a training which probably no other human being had ever undergone. The result was more than just a giant bronzed man with visual signs of unusual strength, a man with hair a little darker bronze than his skin, and rather hypnotic flake gold eyes—the result was Doc Savage, physical marvel, mental wizard, scientific genius, and withal not quite as freakish as he could have been.

“Doc, I had a funny thing happen to me,” Monk said. “I mean, I don't think it was so funny, so I guess it was funny.”

Doc Savage shut off the recorder. “Not another blonde already?”

“That won't pass as mind-reading, but I resent it anyway,” Monk said. He grinned. “But this is an odd one. A babe is swooning for guys in brown tweed suits up in Central Park.”

“Let's do that slowly again,” Doc suggested. “A babe is—”

“A beautiful honey-colored young lady. Gorgeous. I tell you, such a charm bundle I haven't seen in—”

“Swooning?”

“In Central Park. About Seventy-second Street where that path turns south—”

“And for . . . ?”

“Guys in brown tweed suits. Beat-up grey hats, too. Here's how I know—I watched her. She did it twice. Each time it was for a good-sized man in a brown tweed suit and a grey hat, and that's how I figured out why I got the treatment. I'm wearing a brown tweed suit and grey hat.”

Ham Brooks had come in to listen, and he remarked, “You flatter that burlap bag you're wearing by calling it a tweed suit. You say this swooner is a dish?”

“I say you can keep out of this, you disaster-to-the-law-profession,” Monk snapped.

Doc looked pained. “Let's not start that now,” he said. “Monk, what do you think this girl is trying to do?”

Monk shrugged. “Swoon for Roxy, I guess.”

“Who?”

“Roxy. Or Roxborough.” Monk frowned, and added, “The way it looked to me, she lost interest in me when she found out I wasn't named Roxborough.”

Doc looked at Monk thoughtfully. “I take it you wish to investigate this swooning lady further,” he said. “But what gets me is this: What on earth has happened to you to make you come around asking permission to get embroiled with a blonde?”

“I've reformed,” Monk explained proudly.

“And he wanted to come in and shave and fix his necktie before resuming operations,” Ham said.

“Yeah. I wanted to spruce up—why, I never said any such thing,” Monk declared indignantly.

Doc asked, “But you would like to investigate further?”

Monk nodded. “But only because of the mysterious and inexplicable behavior of this babe.”

“Oh, then blonde-chasing is farthest from your mind?” Doc inquired.

“The very farthest.”

“Good,” Doc said. “But you had better take Ham Brooks along for a chaperon.”

Monk staggered. “That,” he yelled indignantly, “is the dirtiest trick this day will see.”

Chapter II

THE balmy June day, as such June days will be, had turned into a stinker. Up out of the southwest, pushing against the soft warmth, a thunderstorm came whooping and gobbling and gnashing fangs of lightning. It fell upon Central Park with a rush of wind, flying leaves, swirling dust that was nasty in the way that only New York dust can be, and then came a pelting rain.

The swooning lady was fortunate. Rescue in the shape of a taxicab was managed, but Monk Mayfair, watching from his vantage point on top of the rocky knoll, was not as lucky. By the time he reached his car where it was parked, he was soaked. He climbed in, blew the rain off the end of his nose, switched on the radio and as soon as it was warm, demanded of the microphone, “All right, fancy-pants, did you lose her?”

There was no answer.

“Don't be coy, Ham,” Monk said. “Did you or didn't you see her hop into a cab when it began to rain?”

The radio receiver returned a hissing silence for a few seconds, and then a voice, Doc Savage's pleasantly timbrous tone, saying, “Ham probably finds it awkward to report to you just now, Monk.”

“If he lost her, I'll make him awk-ward—”

“Ham is driving the cab in which she is riding.”

“Oh!” Monk said, and presently added, “The doublecrosser!” This last was quite bitter.

“What do you mean?”

“We matched,” said Monk, “to see who would get to strike up an acquaintance with her when it came time for that, and Ham lost.” He glared at the microphone.

“She will think Ham only a cab driver. You can hardly call that an acquaintance.”

“You're talking to a guy who knows Ham Brooks. . . . And by the way, where in the heck are you, Doc.”

“Riding along about two blocks behind Ham's cab.”

“Huh? You're uptown here?” Monk was dumbfounded. “What's the idea?”

“Things were slow, and this seemed interesting,” Doc explained.

“Oh, you got a look at the babe too, did you?”

Doc said dryly, “We're turning east on Fifty-ninth Street, if you care to join the procession.

THE girl told her cab driver to drop her off at the Park Regis Hotel, and Ham Brooks thought she sounded a little angry. He also reflected that, if she was an inhabitant of the Park Regis, she was well supplied with green material. It required plenty of greeners to put up at the Park Regis. The minimum rate was around twenty a day, Ham understood. Ham, having been too busy for some time associating himself with the adventures of Doc Savage, and neglecting the law business as a consequence, was short enough of funds to be money-conscious.

“The Park Regis, Miss,” he said, swinging the cab to the curb, “is about half a block down the street.”

“Thank you. What is the fare? Wait, you say half a block—”

“Meter reads sixty-five, Miss,” Ham said, smiling apologetically. “Yes, half a block. I'm awfully sorry. I have a flat tire. Too bad, raining like it is.”

“All right, I suppose you can't help a flat tire,” she said curtly. She paid him, and added a quarter tip. She prepared to alight.

“Here, Miss, take this umbrella,” Ham said.

She hesitated. The rain was pelting down. She eyed the umbrella, a rather ample one with a heavy and ornate handle. “You're offering me an umbrella?”

“Sure, why not,” Ham said offhandedly. “Some guy left it in the hack a couple of hours ago.”

“Aren't you supposed to turn in lost property?”

“Yep, and I will, too. I'll just come by and pick it up when you're through with it. You live at the Park Regis? Okay, I'll stop in for it.”

She nodded. “Well, thanks. I'll leave it with the doorman.”

Ham found the answer not entirely satisfactory; part of this finagling was designed to learn whether she resided at the hotel, and the reply left him in doubt. Ask her again if she was a guest there? Better not.

“Huh? What's that?” he said.

It was another half-dollar for his kindness with the umbrella. He grinned foolishly and guiltily.

He did notice, though, that she glanced at the tires when she was on the sidewalk. She needn't have bothered; that was all taken care of. One tire was flat. This taxicab was part of Doc Savage's working equipment, and a very special job. You could punch a button and flatten a tire any old time—inflate it almost as quickly, if that was necessary.

Ham watched the way her legs swung. He whistled silently. Very nice. He shut off the engine, leaned back and turned up the volume on their U.H.F. radio frequency.

With interest, Ham listened to the sounds that now came from the radio, these consisting of swishings, clickings, bangings, crashings, and once a thunderous female voice saying, "Damn the rain, and damn several other things!" Ham laughed; he liked a lady with spirit. He switched on the windshield wiper and through the space that was cleared saw the young lady take a seat at one of the small tables under the awning of the Park Regis' nationally known sidewalk café. At that point, Doc Savage and Monk Mayfair climbed into the cab with him.

"Judas!" Monk said, looking at Ham.

Ham turned up the radio volume a bit more. They listened to the sounds, which were now of different quality, less violent, the scuffings and thumpings somewhat different, and presently there was a measured series of loud bumps, then a voice, clearly a waiter's voice, saying, "You wish to order, Mademoiselle?" And a girl's voice, the swooner's voice, replying, "Yes, thanks. Bring me a shrimp cocktail, the soup, the Kansas City steak, the goey dessert I like, and coffee."

"Nice appetite," Ham remarked.

"She's hungry," Monk muttered. "She's had a hard day swooning."

"She called for the dessert she likes," Doc Savage remarked. "That means she eats there regularly. Does she live there?"

"You couldn't prove it by me," Ham admitted. "I didn't put that one over."

Monk pointed at the radio. "You got the gain turned up too high on that transmitter in the umbrella handle. Don't need that much pickup."

"How did I know," Ham retorted, "that she wouldn't stand the umbrella in a corner or in a closet somewhere? And the extra pickup will do no harm."

THEY were two gentle-looking men. Brothers, it could be, except for the difference in their voices, but even that was a negative quality, the lack of something that you reasonably expected. The lack of any difference, really. They were two peas in a pod. One took the stage, spoke; the other supplanted him, and there was little to tell which was one and which was the other.

"Good afternoon," the voice of one said.

"Good afternoon," the other said. And then he added, "Miss Morgan."

"Miss Dannie Morgan," added the first.

Miss Dannie Morgan looked at them. She was well into the Kansas City steak, and she chewed and

swallowed the piece she was currently working on. She did it gracefully, and it was done along with some rage, so it was doubly graceful.

“The little Sir Echo brothers,” she said unpleasantly. “Sit down, boys. Get ready for some bad news.”

They stared at her, their polite small smiles slightly shaken.

She gestured impatiently. “Pull up chairs, Juan, Jolla. I think I'm going to tender my resignation.”

They gasped in astonishment, together. They whipped out chairs and sat down. They began to talk. Each one would take a deep breath and expend it all in a spurt of words; the other would be ready when he ran down. The gist of it was that they couldn't understand what possessed her—wasn't it congenial employment, and at good wages too, forty dollars a day, and didn't she enjoy being an actress? After they had said that three or four times in three or four different ways, Dannie Morgan broke in and told them what she thought of it. It wasn't much.

In the meantime Ham Brooks, in the taxicab with Doc Savage and Monk Mayfair, burst out laughing.

“You know what they remind me of?” Ham said. “Two brown seals balancing balls of butter on their noses. Don't ask me why.”

“Forty bucks a day,” Monk said. Monk's financial status was currently similar to that of Ham, so forty a day impressed him. “The swooning business is profitable.”

Doc Savage listened to the radio, picking up from the little transmitter in the umbrella handle. One of the polite men—he had not yet distinguished Juan from Jolla—was saying that it was of course only a joke they were preparing to perpetrate on their friend Mr. Roxborough, but they had gone this far and spent so much money, a hundred and twenty dollars including today, that it would be a shame to disappoint them now, wouldn't it?

Doc Savage frowned.

“Joke?” he said, giving his opinion. “At forty dollars a day? Three days, a hundred and twenty dollars? I doubt it.”

Miss Morgan had the same feeling.

“You boys,” she told the pair, “are a couple of suckers, but you seem to be nice boys—polite ones anyway—and I do feel a little guilty about letting you down.”

“You mustn't,” Jolla said.

“Mustn't let us down now, that is,” said Juan.

There was more argument in which she said they were wasting their money, and they assured her they should be the judge of that; it was a wonderful joke, very wonderful indeed, that they were trying to play on Mr. Roxborough.

“All right, all right,” said Miss Morgan impatiently, surrendering. “But on one condition. I'm getting tired of swooning for wrong men. Either produce a better description of Roxborough, or I do quit.”

The two men glowed. “Better than a description,” one said, and the other said, “We have a picture. Finally we have a picture.”

Doc Savage whipped up, stared in the direction of the sidewalk café, not too distinguishable through the

rain. He decided that Miss Morgan was holding the photograph, a small affair about three by four inches, and examining it.

“Get us a shot of that picture if you can, Ham,” he said quickly. He whipped open the dash compartment. “Where is the miniature camera that's supposed to be in here? I hope—here it is.”

Ham said, “I hope this works,” took the camera, and got out into the rain. He trotted toward the café.

“WHAT,” demanded Monk Mayfair, “will he use for an excuse? If he says he came back for the umbrella, that's not going to be so hot.”

Doc was bothered about that too. “Better she kept the umbrella than we get a copy of the photograph,” he agreed. “But Ham may work out a quickie.”

Ham did. He approached the table under the canopy. Because of the sound of rain on the canvas, and her interest in the picture, Miss Morgan did not immediately note his arrival.

“Oh! The nice cab driver!” She looked up, placing the photograph on the table. “You came back for your umbrella?” she asked.

“No, not for the umbrella, Miss.” Ham dangled a five-dollar bill before her. “Did you lose this, Miss? I found it in my cab.”

Miss Morgan eyed the greenback speculatively, then shook her head.

“Well, I found it and thought maybe it was yours,” Ham said. He grinned. “You seem to be an honest customer, Miss. You'd be surprised how few of them I meet . . . I keep a file of unusual or interesting customers.” Ham whipped out the camera. “Could I have your photograph?”

He had evidently pre-focused the lens by guess, because he lost very little time. There was a wink of white light as the flashbulb went.

“*Por Dios!*” gasped one polite man.

“By God!” said the other, as if the exclamation needed translating.

“Thank you, Miss. Thank you very much,” Ham said, pocketing the camera again. “Thanks for the picture. And you just keep the umbrella and use it until you are through with it.”

Ham backed away rapidly. The girl called something and it was not understandable because she was moving the umbrella around the table at the time, the resultant jarring of the microphone drowning her words. If it was an offer to return the umbrella to Ham right now, which was probable, Ham pretended not to understand. He waved. A few moments later, and he was approaching the cab.

“Thank heavens,” Monk remarked, “for New York being full of cab drivers who are characters. Any place else, it would look screwy—”

Doc lifted a hand for silence. He was listening to the radio. The two amiable men were discussing, in rapid Spanish, this precise point: a moment later they reached Monk's conclusion—there were a lot of uninhibited hack drivers in New York. Who could tell what those guys would do?

Ham climbed in with them. “If there was film in the camera, and if the usual twenty other things didn't go wrong, I got a picture.”

“What did the man in the photograph—Roxborough—look like?” Doc demanded.

“I didn't have much of a chance for a close look. Just a big rugged intelligent-looking guy.”

“But you got the photograph in the picture you took?”

“Yes.”

“What about the two polite *caballeros*?”

“Them, too,” Ham said. “They may be a little out of focus, although I had the lens stopped down as much as I dared to get depth of field.”

Doc held out a hand for the camera. “I'll develop and enlarge the shot, and see what can be done with it. Monk, you might try trailing the two men when they leave her.”

Monk nodded, but pointed at the radio speaker. Miss Morgan's nice voice, diverting for peals of laughter, was telling about her experiences swooning for men in brown tweed suits and grey hats. “But the funniest one of all,” she said presently, “was a short homely fellow who looked like the brother, or the first cousin at least, of a baboon. You should have seen his face!” Her mirth became uncontrollable.

“At least,” Monk said bitterly, “I made an impression.”

DOC SAVAGE put the film through a fine-grain development at headquarters, fixed and dried it, then clipped it into an enlarger and made a print, blowing it up to the greatest dimensions possible without too much loss of detail.

Examining the result, he found that as Ham had said, Roxborough seemed to be a burly Anglo-Saxon type. In the photograph, Roxborough was looking directly at the camera, and wore a small but distinctive one-sided smile. Taking into consideration the facial characteristics, Doc decided the man's hair was rather sandy, the eyes a dark blue, the complexion suntanned. There was one gold tooth shown by the small smile.

Making four more copies of the print and drying them, Doc dropped in at the nearest precinct police station and instituted a routine gallery check to see whether any of the four individuals shown had a police record. Since he frequently worked with the police, too many explanations were not demanded of him.

Enroute back to headquarters, he used the radio to learn what progress Monk and Ham were making.

Ham Brooks said, “The conference broke up without anything more being said that was interesting. I'd say it was this way: This girl is someone the two men hired for the swooning job. An actress, probably.”

“Is she staying at the Park Regis?”

“Yes. Registered under the name they called her, except that her first name is Daniella. Daniella Morgan.”

“That hotel,” Doc suggested, “charges stiff rates. Rather high living for an actress who would be needy enough to accept employment as queer as this.”

Ham probably winced over that. At least there was a pause before he said, “Acting is a little like cab driving—you don't have to be screwy to do the job, but it helps.”

“Well, don't enthrone the young lady too firmly until you know a little more about what goes on,” Doc

suggested.

Presently Monk Mayfair reported in. He had trailed the two men to a hotel on Seventh Avenue not far from Times Square.

“Been registered about a week,” Monk said. “Names are Juan Leon Schaefero, and—this will stop you—Jolla O'Sullivan. The Irish get into the damnedest places.”

“Where did they register as being from?”

“Miami, Florida,” Monk said. “I was coming to that. Both gave the same address. One zero zero seven Spring Street, Miami.”

“There is no such address in Miami,” Doc said instantly.

Not too surprised, Monk said, “I wouldn't argue with your memory for things like that, having seen it work. I guess they're a couple of crooks as far back as last week when they registered, eh?”

THIRTY minutes later, Doc Savage was back on the radio and in contact with Monk again. “I must have a hole in my head today,” Doc said bitterly.

“Yeah? You mean we're overlooking something?”

“The most obvious thing of all—the particular location which has been chosen for the swooning,” Doc told him.

“In the park, you mean?”

“Yes, but specially the fact that it is near the point where a path leaves the park. A footpath. That suggests that Roxborough frequently uses that path. It follows that he lives in the neighborhood, and since there are apartment houses directly across Central Park West from that point, we've been overlooking something.”

“You want,” Monk said, “me to start inquiring at the apartment houses for Roxborough?”

“Exactly.”

“That,” said Monk, “is a good job for Ham. He has a glib tongue.”

“The girl has had a good look at you, so you can't very well take over the job of trailing her,” Doc pointed out. “She would recognize you instantly.”

“I was afraid you'd think of that,” Monk said bitterly.

“Drop past here,” Doc said unfeelingly, “and pick up one of these pictures of Roxborough.”

Chapter III

“ROXBOROUGH!” exploded Ham Brooks. “Hey, fellow, isn't your name Roxborough?”

Now, at five fifteen in the afternoon, the June sky stood out a clear cyanite blue, stripped of clouds, and the air had a rain-washed freshness that it had lacked that morning. There was in fact little evidence of the

noontime rain other than the clean bite to the air, together with a few pools of rainwater standing mirrored in depressions in the blacktop footpaths and park drives. Nursemaids were abroad with their charges in carriages. Dog-walkers were plentiful, and pigeons and squirrels were getting their usual quota of peanuts and popcorn.

“Oh!” said Ham Brooks. “What the hell!”

Doc Savage was pleased. “I look a little like Roxborough's picture in this getup, do I?”

“Quite a lot,” Ham admitted. “For about two seconds, you had me fooled . . . But what's the idea? You Sherlock Holmes, or somebody?”

Doc smiled unhappily. “Of all the causes for a man making a fool of himself, impatience is probably one of the first. Let's grant that. I was impatient. In short, why not learn what is supposed to happen when Miss Morgan swoons for Roxborough.”

Ham stared at Doc Savage, then laughed heartily. “This I want to see. When do you make this test, Mr. Roxborough?”

“Is the young lady at her stand?”

“Yes.”

“Has she swooned for anyone recently?”

Ham shook his head. “The photograph of Roxborough seems to have reduced her percentage of error.”

Doc nodded. “I might as well try it now. You'd better be in the neighborhood, but out of sight. Incidentally, don't show yourself unless the situation seems desperate.”

“Fine, and I know I'm going to enjoy the bandstand seat,” Ham said cheerfully. “By the way, that's the new type of contact lens you are wearing to change the color of your eyes. How do they work? Do they have the drawback of the old ones, the pigment in the plastic cutting down vision efficiency too much?”

“They're not too much improvement,” Doc confessed. “All right, I'll give you five minutes to get set, then go around and enter the park. We'll see what happens.”

THE thing nearly fell through at the beginning because Miss Morgan had bought a nickel sack of peanuts and was making friends with two perfectly willing squirrels and a score of beady-eyed pigeons. When she glimpsed Doc Savage, she started violently and seemed uncertain about what to do. Doc cooperated by pretending not to have noticed her, and turned to the path railing, where he paused to make clucking sounds at another squirrel. He was aware that Miss Morgan was moving away hastily. He gave her time to make her pitch.

A few minutes later, when he resumed his stroll down the path, he saw that she was prepared. She did it well, too. As a doctor, which was his most specialized training, he could pick certain flaws in the performance, but as a whole she gave an excellent delineation of a young lady about to collapse.

He came in on cue, as she was collapsing against the lamp-post.

“My dear young lady,” he said anxiously. “Are you ill? Is there some way I can be of assistance?”

“I'm afraid I—I don't—Oh, thank you—” She looked at him, and her eyes widened in a very passable

imitation of recognition. “Why, aren't you Roxy?”

Doc hoped he seemed enough taken by surprise.

“Why, how did you know that?”

“You're Roxborough, aren't you?”

“How did you know? I don't believe I've met you.” He took her arm helpfully. “You seem ill. Is there something—”

She threw both her arms about him. Not fondly, he realized. And she screamed. There were no words in the scream, just sound.

Twenty feet distant, behind a bush, there was movement. One of the polite men came into view. Juan, Doc thought. He still wasn't sure which was which.

“Dannie!” screamed Juan. “My dear sister! My darling sister!”

He howled this while bounding toward Doc and the girl, which somehow kept it from being comical.

“You beast! You damned beast!” This was directed at Doc Savage, at closer range. Juan stared at the girl. “Dannie! Good God, what has he done to you?” Back went Juan's head, and he began to bawl, “Police! Help! I want a policeman!”

Doc was puzzled, though the girl looked puzzled also, and he demanded, “What's the idea? Who are you, fellow?”

“You've abducted and drugged my sister!” Juan screamed at him.

“Did I?” Doc said ominously.

“I want a policeman!” Juan screeched in a voice that made the pigeons leave in hasty clouds.

Ham Brooks, evidently thinking the whole thing was quite funny, stepped from behind a shrub about thirty feet distant and called his own idea of humor. “You first dial O-for-Operator, fellow.”

Ham later tried to explain that the remark was a display of genuine wit, recognizable as such by anyone who had been in a New York telephone booth and noted the printed instructions on how to get a policeman: *Dial O-for-Operator and say: I want a policeman.*

The point, however, was that he was felled by a blow from behind, delivered by a blackjack, before he witnessed any audience reaction to the bit of great wit. Ham pitched forward on his face.

JOLLA waved the shot-filled leather persuader with which he had dropped Ham, and yelled, “Juan! Is wrong—something! This *hombre* —I recognize heem. Is cab driver—is helper *El Hombre De Bronce* —to Doc Savage, thees guy belong.”

A little scrambled, English and Spanish and accent mixed together, but he got it out.

It meant something to Juan, too. Instantly—and right here Doc Savage began to have a low opinion of the efficiency of the contact lenses, deeply blue in coloration to disguise the spectacular gold flake of his eyes—Juan had a blackjack of his own in hand. He swung it with skill and speed. The left side of Doc's

head seemed to depart with a crash; he was vaguely aware of the hard dark feeling of the path pavement against his hands.

“He is not Roxborough,” Jolla's voice said.

“I know that, you fool,” said Juan. “I knew it all along.”

“Then why did you not stop her—”

“How was I to know he would say he was Roxborough?”

“Who is he? Hit him again,” Jolla said.

“I have hit him once,” said Juan confidently. “He is as good as dead.”

Doc, on his knees, mentally damned the new type of contact lenses which had hampered his vision. He would have to make the best of it; to remove the things, you needed the little rubber vacuum cup device.

Doc reached, got Juan's ankle, jerked—intending to go on and lay his hands on Jolla, a perfectly feasible campaign that should not have been beyond his ability. It did not, however, work out. He had made a further error in misjudging the capabilities of the pair.

The next few seconds—it might have been two seconds or fifteen—came near being as brisk an interval as he ever experienced. The two were judo men. The worst kind of judo, and wizards at it. It was his agonized impression that not one clean blow was struck; there wasn't even anything as decent as merely trying to break his arms.

“He is good!” Juan blurted.

“Too good,” agreed Jolla. “Let us leave here.”

“Take the girl?”

“Oh, sure.”

The conversation was particularly irritating to Doc Savage because it was carried on during the climax of as vicious a hand-to-hand encounter as he had ever experienced. Not that they had damaged him greatly. But it is almost impossible, as he had known, for one good big judo man to do anything with two good little ones. The whack on the side of the head was no help, either.

He knew that footsteps had left rapidly. Miss Morgan in flight.

Then Juan and Jolla took off, in the direction the girl had gone.

Doc Savage lost no time, but lunged to the right—he had, luckily, kept his sense of direction—and scrambled over the low stone wall that bordered the path at this point, then flopped into its shelter. That was a good idea, too. There were two shots, one bullet chipping stone off the wall, the other ricocheting and climbing off into the sky with the sound of a sick violin.

Now Doc removed the contact lenses. He threw them, with a rare venting of sheer impotent rage, as far as he could. Nearly trapped by one of his own gadgets, he thought bitterly. Then he crawled a few feet, got behind a tree, and took a chance on a look around.

The scene of the late fight on the path was impressive. Various bits of clothing, some of it his own, were strewn about. He was somewhat surprised to see no loose arms or legs.

Nearly two hundred feet distant, Juan and Jolla were just overtaking Miss Morgan. They seized her. She kicked, bit, screamed. Juan placed his hands on her, did a couple of things with them, her screaming changed to ghastly shrieking, and then she was loose and still. Juan then shouldered her limp figure. For a smallish man, he seemed to do it very easily. They sauntered away with the girl.

A policeman came into view, running, the usual big policeman with a red face and high-pitched shouting voice. Juan and Jolla faced the oncoming officer; they seemed to study him with deliberation. Then Jolla raised a hand; fire and noise came out of the hand, and the officer veered lazily off the path and went headlong and blindly and still running into a thicket of brush. He made a considerable thrashing sound in there and the sound remained exactly where it was.

Juan and Jolla wandered off into the shrubbery with Miss Morgan. From the first about their movements there had been, or had seemed to be, a careless ease and no hurry at all.

Ham Brooks, lying on the grass a short distance from the path, decided to get up. He seemed to make the decision very carefully, then placed both hands on his head, lifted the head with some difficulty until his face was off the turf, and with more of the same care, endeavored to rise. The downfall of the project came when he thought it necessary to release his head in order to convert the use of his hands to getting himself erect; when he did that, the weight of his head jerked him back to earth.

Doc Savage got up and set out after the two polite—and capable—men and the girl. Passing the thicket where the policeman had gone, he saw the officer sitting there, service revolver in hand.

“Hey, you!” the officer yelled. “Stop!”

Doc said, “Take it easy, Grant,” and then when the officer raised his gun, added, “Grant! Detective Squad, the Twentieth Precinct. Don't be a fool!” The gun lowered a trifle then, and a moment later Doc was out of sight.

Head back, stretching out, Doc ran, veering a little to the right, now leaving the path, guessing on the route the two men would take—it was clear they had cased this part of the park thoroughly and knew the lay of the ground—and hoping to intercept them, or at least keep track of them. He was successful in only the last part.

They were, when he saw them again, climbing over the breast-high wall that bounded the park on the west. They draped the girl on the wall like a sack, vaulted over, picked up the girl, and trotted across the wide thoroughfare, Central Park West, apparently blissfully unaware of screaming brakes, wildly dodging automobiles and angry howls from drivers. Their destination—a small grey sedan parked across the street.

They made it, too. Piled in and the car got moving.

SELF-DISGUST had now built up into quite a lump inside Doc Savage; it was unpleasantly in his face that there had been too much bad luck in the last few minutes. Tough breaks did not come that many to a package. This was the kind of thing earned you by stupidity, poor planning and over-eagerness.

He went over the park wall and into the street in a bitter mood, and spotting parked a half block to the north the taxicab that Ham Brooks had used that morning, he made for it, further disrupting the Central Park West traffic—at least a dozen car horns were hooting and farther off a policeman's whistle was twittering—and piled into the cab. The key was not in the lock. More nice breaking of luck. He leaned down, head under the dash, jerking out ignition wires and tying them together, and while he was doing

that, there was a loud whacking of a nightstick on the window—he looked up and there was an angry police face there.

“You got a moxie,” said the angry voice of officialdom. “You think you steal a cab this easy? You think that?”

Stevenson, this officer's name was. There were quite a few thousand policemen in New York, and Doc Savage did not know all of them by name by any means, phenomenally developed though his memory was, but he did know this one was Stevenson, Archie Stevenson, and the one in the park with the bullet somewhere in him had been Grant.

“Hello, Stevenson,” Doc said. “Doc Savage, remember?”

“Now that's pretty good, Johnny, but I'll tell one,” Stevenson said. He hit the window a harder rap. “You think I don't know Doc Savage? You think not?”

Doc sat up and pressed the starter and the engine began turning over. He looked at the policeman; the latter wrenched angrily at the door, which wouldn't open, then gave the window a blow that should have shattered it but didn't. Doc said wearily, “You think I got time to argue, Stevenson? You think that?”

He drove away, and Patrolman Stevenson took a gun out of his pocket and aimed carefully at the back of the cab for a while, but finally put the weapon away without firing and began to run for a callbox.

THERE was some guesswork in the first part of the chase southward, but not too much because for more than a dozen blocks there was no turn-off eastward from the street—Central Park was on that side—and Doc had watched the right-hand streets for half a dozen blocks, and seen no sign of the grey sedan. He was fairly sure the car was still headed south on Central Park West. He got in the center of the thoroughfare, pushed in the siren button and locked it, and was doing better than sixty by the end of the first block.

The men in the grey car heard him. There was no reason why they shouldn't, nor did he particularly care. It was not, normally, his practice to pile headlong into something and try to bull through in a hurry, but then nothing was going right anyway. So, when he caught sight of the grey car, he made up his mind to overtake it, crowd it, ram it, anything to stop it.

It was easy. A little noisy and rough, but easy. The two polite men could not drive a car the way they handled themselves in a hand-to-hand fight. Consequently, they were slow taking a right turn to get off the straightaway of Central Park West, which speaking in a traffic sense was about as near being wide open spaces as anything in midtown New York City. Doc Savage, actually, was not more than a hundred feet back when they took the corner; his calculation rounding the corner after them was a lot better, hence his loss of speed less. The die was cast then. They knew it. Half-way along the block, they cut their engine, threw on full brakes, and took to the sidewalk. Destination, the front of a store. They must have seen the thing done in a movie sometime; there was that unnaturally spectacular air about it.

The car struck, they had the door open, and while glass was crashing and the street full of noise, they were out and trying to remove Miss Morgan. They looked up, saw Doc, gave up the girl. Back into the store they went.

Somewhere toward the rear of the store, it occurred to them that they might as well shoot the girl. But by that time, Doc had thought of that; he had seized her ankle, was dragging her back out of view. Three bullets came, two in the car and one that took a bit more glass out of the store front.

Presently Doc got up and ran back through the store—ran as much as was possible while still keeping behind objects which he hoped would dissuade a pistol bullet. *Let there be no back door to this place*, he thought. It was one of those novelty shops with a lot of crockery, antique glassware, plaster statues, a place that would certainly show the effects of a fight. But it had a back door into an alley courtyard.

The alley-court had the typical inhabited tomb smell of such places in New York; naked brick and grime and festooned clotheslines, too much of all of it, including nearly a dozen open windows and at least three open doorways.

He never did find what door or window the two soft-voiced little men had used. Neither did the police, later.

Miss Morgan contributed nothing at this point. She was gone when Doc got back to the grey car piled against the shop door. Just stood up, brushed herself off and walked away, a bystander said.

Chapter IV

“THE police,” said Ham Brooks, “seem to feel there was an undue amount of hell raised for the results achieved.”

Doc Savage looked at the blank wall of the Twentieth Precinct Police Station. “What results?” he said bitterly.

A police captain named Scoffield came in. He wore a wryly dissatisfied look—five minutes ago when he'd left he'd been mumbling something about jailing them—and he stood in front of Doc Savage for a moment without speaking. Then he said politely, “I have instructions from the brass to turn you loose, and to present you with the keys to my precinct. That's fine.” His voice went up several notes and he added, “All but the keys! The hell with that—I don't like civil wars in my precinct!”

“We're not happy about it either,” Doc said.

Captain Scoffield held one, then two, then three fingers in front of Doc Savage's face, shouting, “A policeman shot in the shoulder, the park filled with loose bullets, the front end knocked out of a store! . . . You know what the brass downtown said? 'Scoffield,' he said, 'Scoffield, Doc Savage is one of the most effective enemies of crime and criminals in the world today, and you damn well better give him every assistance.' Okay, that's what the brass said. Now, you know what I've got personally to say?”

“Oh, skip it, copper,” Ham said disagreeably. “You weren't out there in the park being knocked over the head and shot at.” Ham stood up, put on his hat, winced violently, took off the hat, and said, “We'll see you again, I hope not.”

As they were leaving, a police lieutenant named Croll hailed them. Croll was getting out of a department car. “Hello, Savage,” he said. “They sent me up here about some pictures you asked the Department to check on earlier in the day.”

Croll produced a print of the photograph Ham had taken at the Park Regis Hotel sidewalk café and indicated the faces of the two gentlemen, which had been ringed with a pencil. “Rough boys,” he said.

“We found that out,” Doc said dryly. “You mean they have police records?”

Croll nodded. “Like reading an encyclopedia on crime,” he declared. “South Americans. Not any special republic down there—mostly Venezuela, Brazil and Argentina, though. They've splattered over into

Spain and Mexico a few times. We have nothing to show where they were born, but they first showed, eight years ago, as rival wrestling champions of South America—the rivalry was a phony, and they were jailed for going into the tank for each other. The South Americans take their wrestling more seriously than we do, I guess. They broke jail, killing a guard, and in the next three years at least seven murders were chalked up to their credit. With that practice behind them, they haven't been spotted as often, although they've sure been active.”

Croll scowled at the photograph, shaking his head. “The damnedest aspect is the variety of jobs they're suspected for. Confidence swindles, narcotics, bank jackings, jewel thefts—more jewel work than anything else—and about anything you want to name in the way of violence and deviltry.” He moved the point of the pencil over until it rested on the girl. “Who's the sugar-bun, besides using a name like Daniella Morgan? Pretty, isn't she?”

“We have no idea,” Doc admitted. “Any special reason for asking?”

“Well, we already put a phone call through to Buenos Aires,” Croll said. “They tell us there's some feeling down here two *Padres Feliz*—what the hell does that mean? In Spanish, I mean. *Padres Feliz?*”

“Happy fathers, or something like that.”

“Well, that's what they're called down there. Happy fathers, eh? . . . Well, from Buenos Aires we hear it's suspected they got a brain. A mastermind. Somebody who does their planning.” He stared at Miss Morgan's likeness. “Man, she would be quite an ornament across a breakfast table, wouldn't she? You suppose she's their spark-plug?”

Ham Brooks said, “Of course not!” He seemed to have more on the subject, but glanced at Doc Savage and flushed.

Doc said, “We don't know a thing about her, really.”

“Well, you want to be careful of those lads,” Croll said.

MONK MAYFAIR, feet on the inlaid desk at Doc Savage's headquarters, looked up from the ghastly crimson necktie he was admiring. He held the tie aloft for their approval. “Bought it just before the stores closed. Pretty sharp, eh?”

“Utilitarian, anyway,” said Ham.

“What's that mean?” Monk asked suspiciously.

“Well, if you get your throat cut, it's certain no one would notice any difference.”

Monk grinned. “You're usually funnier than that. Say, I hear there was a rumpus uptown. Maybe it had something to do with the swooning babe. Think I should investigate?”

Stunned, Ham looked at Monk. “You mean you just vaguely heard about something?”

“Yeah,” Monk admitted. “Something about a cop getting shot, some bird getting knocked cold, a car crashing into a store. Think it was around the part of the park where—” He peered at Ham Brooks. “You look kinda—you hurt somewhere?”

Ham was speechless.

Doc said, "Monk, I thought you were supposed to be working the apartment houses across the street from the park in search of Roxborough."

Monk shrugged. "That didn't take long."

Doc looked incredulous. "You mean you found him?"

"Oh, sure. Third place I asked," said Monk airily. "I tried to raise you guys on the radio to let you know, but you were off enjoying yourselves somewhere. So I came down here to give myself a little spit and polish." He leered at them. "I might meet Miss Morgan again, you know."

"You missing-link!" Ham yelled. "You sit down here smirking at a god-awful necktie like that while we're getting ourselves massacred—"

Monk was not too impressed, although interested. "Anybody who massacres you two will know he has been to a party. . . . Hey, you mean the rumpus in the park—"

When Ham ran out of words and fell to hissing and waving his arms, Doc finished the story of their doings and undoings. "This stuff you see covering us isn't exactly glory," he finished. "Now, Roxborough? Who and what?"

"Damn, I'm sorry I missed the entertainment," Monk said. He grinned at Ham. "Particularly when our law-book friend here acquired the knot on his head."

"What about Roxborough?"

"We might as well go up and ask him," Monk said.

THE apartment door was made of prima vera mahogany, not the bleached imitation stuff but the genuine Honduran mahogany cut at the right season of the year to get the exquisite coloring, and it was at the end of a sixteenth floor hall in an apartment on Central Park West a couple of blocks south of the American Museum of Natural History. Solid gold doork-nobs would have gone well with the rest of the hall fittings, without making anything look any richer.

Doc pressed a pearl button set in the edge of the door; there was no sound anywhere, but presently the door was opened, also without sound, by a man as tall as Doc Savage and somewhat thinner, a rangy man with eyes like the glass corks in the blue perfume bottles that come from France, a jaw made for breaking things against, and the most remarkable weather-beaten suntan on his face. The face had the coloring and texture, or marring, of a cordovan boot that had been worn too hard and too long over too rocky country. This was Roxborough.

He said otherwise. "Richardson. Charles Richardson. And I believe you've made a mistake, because I don't know you," he said.

"Savage. Doc Savage," Doc said. "No, we haven't met. But there is no error, either. Only a lie somewhere."

Roxborough examined them. "Indeed? I have heard of Doc Savage. . . . Do you mind my doubting your statement, however?"

Doc shook his head. "That makes us even. I doubt one of yours."

"Yes?"

"Yes, Roxborough, I do."

The man was wearing a long alpaca robe, a sheath of a robe with pockets, and his hand started for one of the pockets. Started, and made four or five inches of the journey, and Doc Savage had the wrist and had stopped it and was bending it up and back.

"Here we go again," Ham complained. "And with this headache I've got!"

Roxborough's free hand, a fist, started up and around. Doc caught it in his palm with a cap-pistol smack, and now the two men stood close together, silently. Two or three times violent shaking effort went through Roxborough's body, and sweat made a rather magical appearance on his forehead. Then he said, thickly, "There is nothing in the pocket."

Monk went over and felt of the robe pocket. "He's right." He slapped his hand over the rest of the man. "None of the usual pistols and daggers on him, apparently."

Doc released Roxborough. The man stepped back. They followed him inside.

Ham made a quick tour of the apartment and came back and said, "I don't find anything but a mighty elegant decorating job." He looked at Roxborough. "Nice taste you have—in decorations."

"Thank you."

Doc asked, "Your name is Roxborough?"

The man hesitated. "I've gone to a lot of trouble not to let it be known," he said bitterly.

"Why?"

The man turned and went to a chair and sat down. He arranged the robe over his knees. "You can go to any part of hades you choose," he said.

DOC SAVAGE asked Monk Mayfair, "How did you find his apartment?"

"Why, by showing the doorman that picture." Monk was surprised.

"The doorman know him as Roxborough?"

"No, the doorman only knew him as the tenant of Sixteen J."

"Take a look around the apartment," Doc said. "Papers, letters, or anything—"

"Search warrant?" Roxborough asked angrily.

"The police could get one here pretty quick, I imagine," Doc said. "Does that interest you?"

Roxborough grinned thinly. "I had always heard you were a man of great culture, a scientist, a mental wizard, Mr. Savage. The impression I have now is that of a common thug. Does that interest *you*?"

"Not," Doc said, "as much as your unwillingness to have the police present."

Presently Monk, from another room, called, "By golly, the guy does his bookkeeping at home." There was a silence mixed with rustling of papers, two whistles from Monk, both impressed, the second more so than the first. Then Monk said, "Our boy gets around. Mining properties. Canada, gold; Mexico, silver; Brazil, diamonds; Africa, diamonds." He rustled some more papers. "Heck, no bank statements. . . Well, he seems to be incorporated as Roxborough Associates, a Maryland corporation with offices in New York."

Doc Savage was watching Roxborough's face, and he had seen something. "New York company, eh?" Doc said. And now he was sure of it—the man didn't like being connected with New York. "Check on it," Doc told Monk.

"Check on—"

Doc glanced at the pattern of black night sprinkled with city lights beyond the window. "There will probably be no one at the company offices this time of night, but see if you can run down one of the officers by telephone."

Roxborough's face had lost color.

"Would you do me the favor of not doing that?" he asked thickly.

"Why not?" Doc asked him.

The man winced. "I would much rather you didn't."

"You'll have to give a reason, fellow," Doc said.

Roxborough was silent.

"Monk, call one of the company officials," Doc ordered.

Monk nodded. "Okay. I know a fellow named Jenkster who is up on the mining business. Maybe he knows who runs the outfit." Monk telephoned his friend, discussed some girl called Candy with him, then got the desired information. He dialed a number, presently said, "Mr. Kineberg? This is Mr. Mayfair of the Doc Savage organization calling. I believe you are an officer in a mining concern headed by a Mr. Roxborough? Can you tell me—says what? . . . The devil you say! When did that happen? . . . Three months ago? Why, yes, I remember a newspaper story about the incident. No trace, eh? . . . Oh, it was? Well, I didn't notice anything in the newspapers about that. What about the bodies? . . . Yes, that would be a disagreeable thing, and it could happen down there in the jungles. Yes, I can understand. . . . Well, I'll tell you what, Mr. Kineberg, this news puts a different angle on my proposition, so I'd better call you back later. Thank you, and goodbye."

Monk hung up, turned and looked wonderingly at Roxborough. "That was Mr. Kineberg," Monk said dryly.

Roxborough scowled.

"Kineberg," he said, "is probably a slick crook!"

"You think so?" said Monk.

"I do!"

"He didn't sound very dishonest to me," Monk said.

“I don't give a damn how Kineberg sounded,” Roxborough snapped. “You couldn't tell anyway. The man is a smoothie.”

“You're sure of that?”

“Yes—” Roxborough hesitated, glowering. “That is, I think so. I'm hoping to find out.”

“How?”

“By giving the so-and-so a chance to show his true colors,” said Roxborough bitterly.

“Then what will you do?”

“Do? Do?” Roxborough's head came up; his eyes flashed glassy rage. “I'll have the law on him, that's what I'll do.”

“Oh,” said Monk.

“What do you mean—oh?” the other man shouted.

“I thought you might haunt him?”

“Haunt him?”

“Sure. You're dead, aren't you?” said Monk.

Chapter V

WITHOUT warning, it started to rain again, and after the raindrops had washed violently against the windowpanes for a few moments, there was a whacking burst of thunder and two great winkings of lightning, then a burst of wind through a partly opened window that made the curtains spring outward and curl upward almost to the valance-boards. Monk went over and closed the window. Then he resumed his speech.

“This guy”—Monk pointed at Roxborough—“is either Roxborough, or he isn't Roxborough. But as far as the officers of the Roxborough mining corporation think, Roxborough is dead. He died on a plane that crashed in the Colombian jungle three months ago. I don't know whether the rest of you remember that plane crash, but—”

“The Carib-Caracas-Lima Airways ship?” Doc Savage asked.

Monk nodded. “That's the one. Went down in the jungle. They found the wreck three weeks later, and it was a mess. It happened in some of the nastiest jungle in the world, and the ship was torn wide open. All they found was what the jungle animals had left of the bodies.” He glanced meaningfully at Roxborough. “You—or Roxborough—was listed as a passenger on that plane,” he said.

Roxborough scowled angrily. “I'm not denying it, am I?”

Doc Savage took the stage, saying sharply, “You were on the plane when it crashed?”

“Certainly I was on it!” Roxborough snapped.

“You weren't killed?”

The man sneered. "Do I look dead?"

"You'd better," Doc said ominously, "take a more civil and coöperative attitude."

"I'll take any damned attitude I want to," Roxborough said angrily. "I was on the plane. It crashed. I wasn't killed. Those are the facts."

"How many others weren't killed?"

"None."

"You were the only survivor?"

"I was the only survivor."

"It must have been a bad crash."

Roxborough nodded. "It *was* a bad crash."

"What caused it?"

"It was caused by the plane hitting the ground in the jungle."

"That," said Doc, "doesn't answer my question, and you know it."

"I'm no aëronaut," said Roxborough violently. "How do I know what went wrong? One motor tore itself out of the plane without any warning at all, and probably messed up some of the controls doing it. The plane came down in a long dive, and it hit damned hard."

Doc Savage eyed the man narrowly. "As I recall, it was a two-engined ship?"

"So what? It crashed anyway."

"And both motors were in the wreckage, as I also recall, when the searchers located the plane remains."

"I didn't say one engine fell off. I said it tore itself out of—well, it tore itself up, but it didn't fall out."

"And there were no other survivors?"

"No."

"You got out?"

"Yes."

"Was it a tough trip?"

"You're damned right it was a tough trip," said Roxborough roughly. "You've probably seen that jungle. You know what it must have been like. I can tell you one thing—if I hadn't knocked around in jungles plenty, I wouldn't have made it. That's how tough it was. There are head-hunters in that jungle."

"You were scared?"

"I knew what I was up against."

"Did you," Doc Savage asked dryly, "have amnesia or some other loss of memory that caused you to

come to New York and forget you were Roxborough?"

The man snorted. "My memory," he said, "has never been impaired for one minute."

"Indeed?"

"I told you why I came to New York incognito," said Roxborough violently. "It was to watch my partners in the mining business. I suspected them of being a bunch of damned crooks, and I wanted to catch them robbing the company blind after they thought I was dead."

"And have you caught them?"

"Not yet, but by God I will—" He paused, stared at Doc Savage and the others, and regained control of himself. "You guys," he said, "are getting me excited, so I'll talk too much. . . . Now suppose you do some talking. Just why are you bothering me?"

"Not," Doc admitted, "an unreasonable question."

"Care to answer it?"

"I don't see why not."

ROXBOROUGH listened to Doc Savage's story of what had happened—Monk's experience with the swooning girl, the investigation they had started making for no other reason except that they were curious, and the culmination in violence—and hardly changed expression. The man had a poker face. He casually lit a cigar, and when Doc was sketching the violent latter part of the recital, Roxborough grinned. Doc finished: "The two professional South American crooks are being hunted by the police, and the girl Daniella Morgan is also being sought. But one thing is sure, the polite pair do not have the girl—unless they've caught her since." He glanced at Roxborough. "Now, does that jolt anything loose?"

"No, and why should it?" Roxborough countered.

"They were setting some kind of a trap in the park for you, whereby they were going to accuse you of abduction. That's the way it seemed, anyway," Doc said. "I thought that might jog your memory."

Roxborough sneered and waved his cigar. "You just let your feelings of self-importance get away with you, Savage. In other words, you stuck your schnozzola into something and got it soundly biffed for your pains. Let that be a lesson—" The cigar stopped in midair, hung poised. The man's mouth closed, then opened again, and he said, "Maybe—why, this story of yours might be true!"

"You're making a mistake if you don't think it is true," Doc said.

Roxborough sprang to his feet. "For crying out loud!" He hurled the cigar at the fireplace. "That's the kind of a dirty trick my partners would pull!"

"What do you mean?" Doc asked patiently.

Roxborough stamped to the window, wheeled and came back, and said, "Don't think I'm letting you bluff me into telling you anything I don't wish to tell. I'm not a man who can be bluffed. But this just came to my mind—I'm supposed to have a visitor from South America, a Señorita Lea Blanca Ramero Oristezza, and this screwy stuff may have something to do with that."

"In what way?"

“Señorita Oristezza,” said Roxborough, “cabled me that she would be in New York the day after tomorrow, and wished to see me.”

“About what?”

“I don't know that,” said Roxborough. “But I can guess it's about mining properties. The Señorita is a businesswoman, a go-getter, and she owns commercial diamond mines in Brazil and is interested in the African diamond picture, although to what extent I don't know. I do know she's aggressive, a ball of fire in a country where women are supposed to wear veils and sit on balconies and only go out with chaperons. The Señorita Oristezza doesn't comply with convention, but she's a stickler for morals. She heads a temperance drive down there, is active in demanding political reforms, and I hear she's very narrow-minded about the little pecadillos of the people she deals with.”

Monk said, “Sounds sort of stuffy to me.”

“You're damned right she's stuffy,” said Roxborough. “And you see what that means? She's a narrow-minded puritan. Suppose she came up here and found me in jail charged with kidnapping and drugging a girl? What do you think she would do with her business—not give it to me, that's sure.” He threw both hands in the air and swore violently. “That's it. It's a trick by my stinking partners to get me in dutch with this woman, who could throw a lot of business my way if she wanted to. And damn near ruin me if she wished, also.”

“You're supposed to be dead,” Doc said.

“Huh?”

“How,” Doc asked, “did Señorita Lea Blanca Ramero Oristezza learn otherwise?”

The question did not bother Roxborough as far as could be noticed. “Oh, that,” he said. “I should have brought that in. There's one man who knows about my escape from the plane crash. He's a man I trust. Bill Crater, down in Lima, Peru. Bill is my right hand down there, and not like these stinkers I've gotten mixed up with here in New York.”

“The Señorita learned of your continued existence from your friend Bill Crater in South America?”

“That's right. Bill phoned me about it.”

“Do your partners here in New York know you are alive?”

“I didn't think so,” said Roxborough bitterly. “But judging from the signs, they must.”

“Providing,” Doc pointed out, “they were responsible for the stuff that began with the swooning girl.”

“Oh, they were.”

“You're not sure, though?”

“In my own mind, I'm positive.”

“Could you prove it?”

Roxborough shrugged. “Probably not right now.”

“Just what,” Doc asked persistently, “have they been doing that leads you to suspect them?”

“Different things,” said Roxborough impatiently. “You just forget about me and my partners, Savage. I’ll take care of that. Chuck Roxborough can wash his own linen.”

“Give me an example,” Doc urged.

“An example of what?”

“Of the different things your partners have done that have aroused your suspicions.”

Roxborough scowled. “Stop pinning me down on intangibles. If I could prove anything, I wouldn’t have come up here after escaping from that crash without telling anyone I was alive.” He pondered, pocketing his hands, and looking angrily at the floor. “It’s little things, mostly. Funny business around the office. Documents disappearing. Not as much profit showing on the books as should be. Odd and unexplained trips the partners have been making to various company properties. Things like that. Nothing I can hang ‘em for, but plenty I can suspect ‘em for.”

“Nothing you can put your finger on?”

“That’s it. Nothing my finger can hit on.”

“But not imagination on your part?”

“No, sir!” Roxborough raised a fist. “I’m not a fool! I’ve been around businessmen long enough to be able to sense—” The telephone started ringing, and he held his fist aloft, looking surprised.

“YOUR telephone is ringing,” Doc said.

“I’m not deaf. . . . It couldn’t be anyone phoning me. It must be for you fellows.”

“We told no one we were coming here,” Doc said. “However, Monk, you answer the phone.”

Roxborough looked startled, yelled, “Wait a minute! I’ll answer—”

But Monk Mayfair had already scooped up the instrument, and was saying, “Hello? . . . Yes, Mr. Roxborough’s apartment. This is his serving-man speaking. . . . Very well, I will see if he is in.” Monk covered the mouthpiece, turned to them, and announced, “A lady to see Mr. Roxborough.”

“Lady!” Roxborough exploded.

“She seemed to know Mr. Roxborough lived here,” Monk said.

“I don’t see how the hell that could be!” Roxborough exclaimed angrily. “Ask her who she is, and what she wants.”

Monk grinned. “She explained that. She is Señorita Lea Blanca Ramero Oristezza, and she had a business appointment with you for day after tomorrow. She wishes to advance the time to right now.”

Roxborough gulped. “Holy smoke! Tell her to come right up.

Monk returned his attention to the telephone, and Roxborough took out a handkerchief, mopped his face, and remarked to Doc Savage, “You know, I probably owe you fellows a debt of gratitude at that. The Señorita is a very prim person from what I’ve heard, and if I had been in jail for abducting and drugging a girl, my goose would have been cooked. Much as I dislike people interfering in my affairs, I

must say thanks for—”

“The Señorita,” Monk announced, turning from the telephone, “says it is preposterous to think she will visit a gentleman's apartment unchaperoned. She will wait for you in the lobby downstairs.”

“Good God, tell her I'll be right down!” exclaimed Roxborough.

Monk conveyed the information, then hung up. “It's a deal. She'll wait.”

The handkerchief traveled over Roxborough's rugged, weather-beaten face again. “Would you like to come down and meet the Señorita?” he asked, suddenly pleasant. He saw the expression on Doc's face, laughed, shrugged, and admitted, “Oh, all right—I did realize that she must have heard of the great Doc Savage, and would be favorably impressed by finding him in my company.” Then he shrugged. “Okay, if you don't want to meet her, that's all right too.”

Monk Mayfair caught Doc's eye. “Personally, I'd love meeting a Señorita,” the homely chemist said emphatically.

“All right,” Doc said.

Roxborough's scowl became a grin. “Fine. With a dame as straight-laced and puritanical as the Señorita Oristezza, a character witness never does any harm.” He whipped off his robe, hurried into the bedroom, and reappeared presently wearing a coat and slicking down his hair. There were indications that he had given himself a squirt of perfume. He hurried over to an arrangement of flowers by the window and selected an appropriate bloom for his lapel.

Monk came close to Doc Savage. “This should be right interesting,” he whispered.

“You think so?” Doc asked, puzzled.

Monk nodded. “If my memory for voices hasn't taken a vacation,” he said, “the Señorita Oristezza is our pal, the swooning girl.”

Chapter VI

THERE were muddy footprints, the indirect result of the flurry of rain outdoors, on the elevator floor, and a porter was on his knees going after them with a damp cloth. After Roxborough had stepped into the cage, he scowled at the porter, and said, “Get out of here, fellow!” in a harsh voice. The startled porter stepped into the hall and they left him behind as the cage descended. Roxborough glanced at Doc Savage, and added curtly, “I don't want any dirty porter slopping around in here when we step out to meet the Señorita Oristezza. Call it snobbery if you want to.”

Doc Savage said nothing in a disapproving way, and the cage completed its silent trip to the lobby. The doors whispered open, and they stepped out into the impressive lobby.

The fainting-lady-Miss-Señorita-Oristezza stood well over in the discreetly lighted portion of the lobby where there were pieces of furniture in the extreme modern motif. She did not turn at the sound of the elevator. She was indifference itself.

And very agreeable to look upon. Doc Savage was forced to concede. She had changed her appearance considerably, and the theme of her personality was now high Castilian; the effect of acres of rich lace, mantilla and flashing fan was predominant without these articles of apparel actually being worn.

“Señorita Oristezza?” said Roxborough in what was by far the most polite tone any of them had heard him use to date.

The Señorita turned—languidly, still indifferently; she was getting a lot of effect into it—and got a good look at Doc Savage, then changed her mind about the whole thing. The Miss Morgan of the doings in the park had been a very self-possessed young lady who would not have screamed even one little scream at sight of a roomful of mice—the Señorita did almost as well. Just a little yelp. Then she took off for the door, her high heels making hurried whettings on the floor. She was fast. She was through the door almost immediately.

“What the devil!” Roxborough roared in astonishment.

“Stay with him and explain it to him,” Doc Savage told Monk and Ham.

The door was a revolving one, because the lobby was air-conditioned, and it had stopped turning by the time Doc Savage reached it. Stopped rather abruptly. The reason: She had wedged a high-heeled slipper into it. Doc Savage had a little trouble with the mechanism that in theory prevented the door from turning backward, but finally shook the slipper free, and got outside. The other slipper was on the sidewalk. Evidently she felt she ran best barefooted.

He saw her now. The logic of her flight was apparent; she had parked her car, a rich cream roadster with the top down, almost directly in front of the door. She was already in it, had started the engine, and was pushing at the gear-shift lever.

Doc Savage sprang forward. He saw he was not going to get to the car door in time; the machine was moving now. He changed his course, stepped on to the rear bumper, and leaning forward, seized the back of the boot which enclosed the lowered top. This act, purely by chance, was almost without noise, and she did not look around, and apparently had no idea he was there.

She drove a block, took the first street to the right, still without turning her head.

“It is doubtful,” Doc remarked, “that you could throw me off by turning again.”

She lifted, from surprise, quite visibly on the seat. And she tried an expedient instantly—stamped the brake, shifted to a lower gear, and gave full throttle so that the car leaped. Doc kept his grip. She looked back.

“Pull over to the curb,” he said.

Her response was to seize a small pistol, evidently lying on the seat beside her, and point it at his chest. “Get off,” she said. “Get off right now!”

He said, “I’m going to climb up there in the seat with you. And incidentally, would you mind watching where you are driving?”

“I’ll shoot,” she threatened.

“If you feel that’s the thing to do, go ahead,” he said. And he climbed into the front seat.

She did not shoot. She slid over far to the left, and kept the gun pointed at his midriff, however. And presently she added, “You have more nerve than good judgment.”

“Not at all,” Doc said pleasantly. “I’m simply wearing a bulletproof vest, and you’ve been very painstakingly aiming at my stomach.”

“Damn!” she said.

He noted that it was a drive-yourself car. Rental job. The small label in the lower right hand corner of the windshield told him.

“You speak a nice Yankee grade of English, Señorita,” he said.

She reached the next corner, turned, began looking for an empty curb space, found one, pulled into it and shut off the engine. “You know, I have just concluded you are Doc Savage after all,” she said. “You were the man in the park when all the trouble started, weren’t you? Dressed differently, and with something that changed the color of your eyes?”

“Yes.”

“You *are* Doc Savage?”

“That’s right.”

“I think I’ll check it, though,” she said, and he suddenly understood why she had chosen to park. Halfway down the block there was a police patrolman approaching, sauntering idly, and she leaned out and called, “Officer! Could I trouble you a moment?”

As the policeman approached, she slid her pistol under a fold of skirt. “Yes, Miss?” inquired the officer, beaming at her prettiness. “Something I can do?” He looked across, discovered Doc Savage, and touched his hat. “Good evening, Mr. Savage.”

The girl leaned back. She laughed. “I had a question, but you answered it,” she told the officer. “Thanks a lot. I won’t bother you any more.”

The policeman touched his hat and sauntered away. And Doc asked her pleasantly, “What do I call you? Señorita Oristezza? Dannie Morgan? Or what?”

SHE said, “I made up the name Dannie, and I like it. Let’s use that one. However—” She opened her purse, fished out a passport and laid it in his hands, then switched on the dash light so he could examine the document. “If you insist, it could be Señorita Oristezza, you notice,” she said presently.

He nodded. The passport identified her as Señorita Lea Blanca Ramero Oristezza. “Dannie, if you wish,” he said. “But it’s strictly a Yank name.”

“Why not? I think I’ve spent approximately half my life up here in schools.”

He looked at her, suddenly having difficulty restraining a smile, and she noticed the amusement, demanded, “Well, what is funny?”

“Roxborough,” he said, “characterized you as the puritanical severe Señorita Oristezza. Not once but several times, he emphasized your primness, straight-laced ideas and tender sensibilities.”

She hesitated, and then shrugged. “The Señorita Oristezza is somewhat of that character, and I am afraid I let the Dannie person run away with me. A vacation from myself, no?” Then she frowned. “But this Roxborough, he is not justified in outlining my character to anyone.”

“Not justified in what way?”

“In no way—the man doesn't know me personally.”

“He did not give the impression he did.”

“He does not.” The frown was still in place, and it showed no indication of leaving her forehead. “But the man knew a great deal about me, did he? That bears out the thought I've had.”

“What thought was that?” Doc Savage asked.

Her small hand made an angry gesture. “Did you know I am in the mining business—and specifically, in the diamond mining business?”

Doc Savage nodded. “Roxborough told us that. He says he is in the same business.”

“The man Roxborough,” she said, “has been recently investigating my mining interests with the intention of buying—his own intention only, I might add. I have no wish of selling, and have said nothing of selling.”

“What,” Doc asked, “is unusual about that?”

She gestured impatiently. “I am, in business, what you would call a complete operation. The diamond business I am speaking about. I have the mines where the stones are produced, then I have the cutting firms where they are prepared for market—both commercial stones which are used for cutting surfaces in machine tools, and the white and blue-white gems, which are cut for jewelry purposes—and I also have a marketing organization. You understand me? My business is finding diamonds in the earth, preparing them for market, and selling them. That is how I happened to have somewhat more than two million dollars worth of diamonds on the plane which crashed.”

Doc looked at her sharply.

“You mean,” he said, “that you had two million in stones on the plane which crashed with Roxborough the only survivor?”

“Exactly.”

“And when the plane wreckage was found later—”

“My diamonds weren't,” she said vehemently.

DOC SAVAGE looked at the Señorita Oristezza intently, then found he could concentrate better if he turned and gazed at the unprepossessing buildings along this part of Columbus Avenue. Now, he reflected, had come to light a factor that the situation had needed. “A motive, a reason for the shenanygans,” he remarked. “Two million in diamonds could do nicely. For a lot of men, that's enough to shake the world.”

“You sound,” said Señorita Oristezza, glancing at him sharply, “somewhat disappointed?”

“Somewhat,” he admitted.

“I suppose two million dollars of my money is beneath your dignity!” she snapped.

“No, don't get me wrong,” he said quickly. “It's just this: Normally, my associates and myself steer clear

of involvement in matters concerning theft of money or jewels.”

Her eyes flashed angrily. “Oh, is that so? And here I had been hearing that you were a sort of Galahad who made a career of righting wrongs and punishing evildoers whom the law can't handle.”

“That's right,” he said briefly. “The police usually handle theft nicely.” He looked at her intently and added, “When the wrong parties have the good judgment to ask the police for help, that is.”

She bristled. “Meaning I should have run to the police? Is that it?”

“Why didn't you?”

She pointed a finger at him. “Listen, you!” She poked him wrathfully with the finger. “What do you know about the diamond business? Don't tell me what to do! . . . Oh, I'll answer your question—first, the diamond shipment on the plane was a secret. For security reasons—to avoid the very thing that seems to have happened. Theft. I am not sure our police would be certain there was two millions in stones aboard just because I said there was. Secondly, I had nothing but vague suspicions. The police are not lovers of vague suspicions, I assure you, in investigating myself.”

“Nevertheless,” he said, “you should have notified the police.”

She sniffed. “I have as much right as you have,” she said, “to hunt crooks!”

He grinned. “What steps have you taken?”

“The first one was finding out that Roxborough really hadn't perished in the plane wreck,” she said rather proudly. “I did that by checking closely on a man named Bill Crater. Bill Crater lives in Lima, Peru, is honest—even if he is a friend of Roxborough's—and when I went to him and asked him if Roxborough was alive, he admitted it. . . . Well, I did give him the idea I knew Roxborough hadn't died in the plane wreck—I was only guessing there and so I said I wanted to do business with Roxborough about a mine, and I came to—”

Doc held up a hand. “Wait a minute. Why single out Roxborough for suspicion? There were eleven other people on the lost plane, as I recall.”

“Roxborough,” she said, “was the only one remotely connected with the diamond business. I figured, since my diamonds had disappeared, Roxborough was the man to investigate.”

“So you came to New York?”

“Exactly. And found two of the most notorious criminals in South America skulking around his apartment—you probably know them by now as Juan Schaefero and Jolla O'Sullivan.”

“Skulking?”

“Yes. Shadowing Roxborough. I did a little shadowing of Roxborough myself at first, and that's how I found out I had company.”

“Then what?”

“I struck up an acquaintance with Juan and Jolla,” she said calmly. “I knew they were big-time crooks. I wanted to know what was going on.”

“That,” Doc suggested, “was a little like climbing into the tiger cage to look for the wrist-watch, wasn't it?”

Her eyes flashed wrathfully. "Until you bungled it, everything went well. I pretended to be a show-girl out of work. Not too honest. I was intrigued when they hired me to swoon for Roxborough—I couldn't figure out why."

"Do you know why now?" Doc asked curiously.

"I guessed. It was to get Roxborough in trouble and disgrace him in the eyes of the Señorita Oristezza."

"They knew you were coming?"

She nodded. "I can't guess how. Roxborough obviously didn't tell them—they being his enemies."

"That makes Roxborough appear honest, doesn't it?" Doc inquired. "Juan and Jolla being his opponents."

She waved her arms.

"At this point," she confessed, "I am confused. I do not know what goes which way."

"But you are sure the diamonds are involved?"

"Two million in unset diamonds do not just walk off," she said pointedly. "Juan and Jolla, on the other hand, have assisted other jewels to walk away from their owners."

Doc looked at her thoughtfully. "You have any objections to discussing all this with Roxborough?"

"I should like to do that," she said.

He nodded. "Then we will."

THIS was a small dapper little man who, like a toy general in some imaginary army, was crisp and gaudy and spectacular in the improbable uniform of dove grey with gold trouser piping and an overdoing of gold epaulets and chest bric-a-brac. He even looked neat and imaginary lying there on the floor on his back, just inside the revolving door where Doc Savage came upon him. Doc went down on a knee, partly to take the small man's wrist and partly to get behind the large chair that was nearby, overturned.

"Get back," Doc said to Dannie. "Something has happened here."

Other than the overturned chair, and the little man in the doorman's uniform, there was gentle peace in the lobby of Roxborough's apartment building. . . . Pulse in the little doorman's wrist; he was only knocked out. . . . None of this could have happened many moments ago.

"Monk! . . . Ham!" Doc called sharply, and the soft peace in the place absorbed the rapping anxiety in his voice and gave back nothing. He could hear the girl behind him; she had not gone outside as he had ordered—at least by "back" he had meant the sidewalk outdoors. She had not gone, but probably it was all right because there might be as much danger outside as in here. He turned his head very briefly. She was behind a large urn which contained some grotesque plant, and out of the anxiety striking at all sides of his mind, he said, "If you can't follow any other instructions, at least stay there!" He said it angrily.

And now out of the rear, but seeming out of the whole lobby because of the way it tore silence apart, came a single shot. The tall urn fell apart, splitting first in the middle, the parts falling inward upon themselves with a noise like the knocking of wood blocks, and the girl stood exposed in the wreckage. Not standing, exactly—crouched back in the litter, slim-fingered hands played up in front of her face in terror, waiting for another leisurely bullet, waiting to die.

In the rear, a laugh. Jolla. Doc had tagged the two men with their proper voices now, yet so identical were the two in their ways that he could apply no special characteristic to one that would not fit the other. The laugh had a high wild contemptuous ring to it.

Doc seized the overturned chair now—he had kept low behind it—and scuttled with the chair as a shield, pushing the chair ahead of him, until he had collided with another chair, and then a third, picking them up stacked ahead of him. One chair was no real protection against a bullet, three not much more actually, and so he skidded the whole thing toward one of the ceiling pillars. In the meantime, the lobby filled twice with earsplitting sound. Both times the bullets jammed into the chairs. He looked back. She was still there. Her hands were still up in front of her in ghastly expectation. The Señorita Lea Blanca Ramero Oristezza was conceivably wishing she had followed his suggestion to go outside, he reflected without satisfaction.

HE began to hear Monk Mayfair somewhere, and had difficulty at first telling whether the sound meant rage, pain or terror. Monk's natural speaking voice was the small squeaky one of a gravel-tongued child, but the voices of Monk's emotions were tremendous and varied—foghorns, calliopes, whistles, French horns. Monk in a tizzy was apt to sound exactly like Monk in terror. But presently he classed the uproar to mean thwarted rage. It was either far off or there were many walls between the voice and where Doc crouched.

In the rear somewhere, Jolla's voice said calmly, "*Bueno.*"

Another speaker asked, "What's the gorilla upset about?"

Jolla laughed. "He is saddened. I backed the car on to the sidewalk manhole by which he intended to exit from the basement and assail our rear."

"We had better get out of here."

"I think so," Jolla said. "There is a buzzard of bad luck flying tonight."

Doc Savage listened very carefully—they could have made the speech about leaving as bait to draw him into the open. He strained ears, eyes, for a long time, maybe a minute! They had really gone. Through a back door.

He went with headlong speed to the door, but first into a corridor, naked stone and mortar and one bleak electric bulb for illumination, and then to the door. A service entrance. A steel door. Locked. It was a spring lock, and they had knocked off the knob by which it could be opened from the inside.

He saw what they had done before he reached the door; a hand dived into his clothing while he was trying the panel, and the same hand came out of his clothing with a phial—a little bottle, thin-walled, plastic, in two compartments. He crushed this against the door at the lock, smashed it hard with the heel of his hand. It split and the contents, rather goeey, stuck there like pale tar.

Counting—fifteen seconds was supposed to be the timing when the stuff was used like this—he wheeled and got away from the door. The explosive was not particularly new; only a little more developed than the similar material that had been used for sabotage and demolition during the war. The detonating medium was his own development, a chemical in the smaller compartment of the plastic container that would touch it off, taking, in the quantity used here, about fifteen seconds to do the job. . . . He got to sixteen, seventeen and eighteen—he must have hurried it a little.

The fire was deep green. It came as a sheet that covered the door almost completely. Not much of it seemed to come back through the starkly naked stone service passage; but the rush of air did, enough of it to knock Doc off balance, make him wonder about the future condition of his eardrums, although he was using the old under-shell-fire trick of a wide open mouth and feigned scream to lessen the chances of damage. Like all explosions, there was a vacuum effect after this one, and that snapped the door open, what was left of it.

He went out on to the sidewalk.

The car was going away. Four or five cars were moving on the street, none of them close. He had, at first, no idea which was the one, then dashed out into the street and was shot at from far away, near the end of the block. That identified the machine—a coach, a late model, blue. New Jersey license plates, and he got the number.

A sidewalk manhole, inlet for fuel oil into the apartment house basement, lifted, rocked, fell and clanged. Monk wedged up beside the fuel oil inlet pipes and thrust his head out.

“How many?” Doc asked.

“Four, I think,” Monk said. “No, five. One would have been in the car. They weren't laying for us in the lobby. They came in the back way, so I thought if I got into the basement and came out this way, I'd be behind them—” He went silent, had about ten seconds of paralyzed horror. “Ham! . . . Roxborough . . .?”

“I saw no sign of either one,” Doc said.

“Then they took them.”

Doc said grimly, “We'll look and make sure!” He wheeled and swung into the service hall, then into the lobby, where he met the Señorita Oristezza. She was walking toward them, one trance-like step after another, arms held rigidly down and slightly away from her body and with her shoulders twisted back as if impaled, much as she had been walking when Monk first saw her out there in Central Park this morning, preparing to swoon for him. Only this time there was not much pretense about it.

“It has temporarily let up,” Doc told her. “So turn loose and faint if you wish to.”

“I wish I could!” she said thinly.

Chapter VII

AT FIRST there seemed to be no one in the ornate small niche which held the telephone switchboard, the PBX board. But when Doc leaned over the black counter with its edging of lucite, he frowned, then asked quietly, “You called the police?”

She nodded up at him. “Yes,” she said. “Yes, I have—the police—I think they're still on the wire—” A small voice that came from somewhere else, apparently. She was at least fifty and a ghastly example of what peroxide and cosmetics will do when mixed with terror.

Doc stretched out an arm, took the headset and lifted the transmitter. “Twentieth Precinct? . . . Who? . . . Davis. Well, Davis, this is Doc Savage. There were five of them, we think, the two South Americans and three helpers. They abducted a man named Roxborough and my aide, Ham Brooks. Here is a description of the car.” He gave the general information about the machine and the license number, added

the direction of departure. He listened to questions. "No one killed, apparently. Some shooting. The doorman knocked unconscious."

He turned then and went to Dannie. "Easy, Dannie," he said quietly. "Easy, and you last longer." His words seemed not to have much effect; she looked at him with eyes too wide and hands tied desperately together. "Did they follow me here?" she gasped. "Was it because of me they trapped—"

The telephone operator made a hissing sound. They wheeled. She was trying to speak. Doc watched her, and she said with her lips only, "A call for you, Mr. Savage—one of those men—"

"Put it on the house phone," Doc said. "And plug in on another wire to telephone the police to trace the call." When she only stared at him wordlessly, he told Dannie, "She's excited. You make the call. Get Detective Davis, communications at the Twentieth Precinct, and tell him what you want—this call traced."

He reached over himself and studied the board a moment, then plugged the call into the house phone. He crossed over to the instrument.

His, "Savage speaking," got one of the voices he was expecting. Juan's.

"Need I identify myself?" Juan asked.

"It's not necessary," Doc said grimly. "And let me tell you something, fellow: If my friend Ham Brooks is harmed, you and the rest of your outfit are going to regret it right into eternity. And don't underestimate that threat just because you seem to have been rather successful in South America—"

"I'll do the talking—"

"And you'll do the paying if Ham is harmed," Doc snapped. "I make a threat very rarely, about once a year as a rule—"

Juan laughed angrily. "Really, Mr. Savage, you're more wordy than I had heard—"

"What about Ham Brooks? Is he—"

Juan swore, an anxious surprised sound. "Time to trace this call, eh? That is why you keep interrupting—Señor Savage, you molest us further and your friend Ham Brooks will circulate no more. You understand the word *morte*? That is what I mean. Goodbye."

WHEN Doc Savage turned, Monk was standing there. He had gone out to their car and returned with an electrical apparatus having vague resemblance to a serviceman's test oscilloscope. Pale-faced, dry-lipped, Monk asked, "Is Ham okay?"

"The implication seemed to be that he was," Doc said. "But I'm not too sure."

"They took him along to . . .?"

"That's right. The old thing all over again—they'll kill him if we don't leave them alone."

"They will, too," Monk said thickly.

"And will anyway, if we stand here," Doc said, and turned back to the switchboard.

Dannie shook her head at him wordlessly. "I don't think they've traced the call yet." She handed him the telephone, and he listened to the voice of the policeman named Davis shouting angry demands for haste, then to Davis saying, "Savage? . . . A booth in a drugstore on Broadway—relay me a description of the guy. We have a prowler car on the way over there now. Go ahead with the description and give me time to repeat it into the other microphone."

Doc Savage began to describe Juan in short takes, the outstanding characteristics first—not that the police didn't already have a description of the man, but freshening it wouldn't hurt—and once he turned to ask Monk exactly how Juan had been dressed. A different suit, Monk said. A hard-finished light tan cloth, a dark brown hat. Monk was by the door, tinkering with his contraption.

It continued, the describing, the waiting for the police car to reach the drug store, and Doc waited with poorly restrained impatience. He was aware that Dannie watched him woodenly, without visible signs of breathing.

Monk, scowling at his device, said something angry and discontented. He picked the thing up and went outdoors with it.

From the telephone: "Savage?"

"Yes?"

"He got out of the drugstore. Our men are there. We've got half a dozen other cars piling into the neighborhood."

"I'm going over that way," Doc said. "If there is anything more, we will listen on the police radio and answer on the same frequency."

He took Dannie's arm. "We'll find a safe place for you later. Right now, I'd like you to go along and answer questions."

"Of course," she said, nodding. "But what kind of questions?"

"Juan and Jolla. . . . You might have picked up, during your meetings with them, something that would help."

"I don't know what it would be."

"Neither do I, until we dig for it."

IN the night, hulking and silent, Monk Mayfair leaned against the hood of their car, which was the same machine, the trick taxicab, and fingered the dials of his piece of electronic apparatus.

Dannie touched Doc's arm, whispering, "What is he doing?"

Doc Savage, plagued by anxiety about Ham Brooks' welfare and the fate of Roxborough, answered almost curtly. "We've found it helpful," he said, "to provide various methods of keeping track of one another under trying conditions." He decided that sounded pedantic, a little too pat, a stuffed-shirt sort of an answer. He could not think of anything better, pointed to Monk's apparatus and added, "That is one of our devices."

Monk looked around. "I've got this thing fired up all it'll take, and don't get a thing except ourselves."

Dannie stared, not comprehending.

Doc said, "We can leave our shoes here. That might help." He took off his own shoes, Monk did the same, and Doc carried them back into the apartment building and left them with the astonished telephone operator. There were police in the lobby now, and a few spectators. Doc answered the fewest possible number of questions and returned to the car.

"A drugstore on Broadway," he told Monk, and gave the address. "Juan phoned from there. The police got on the spot in practically nothing flat, but he was gone. Let's get up there."

They climbed into the cab, Monk driving, his gadget on the front seat beside him. Doc and Dannie rode in the rear, and presently she said, "What did you mean— I might have picked up something that would help now?"

"I meant just that."

"I can't think of a thing," she said grimly. "Oh, I know where I telephoned them. Maybe that would help. It was Strickland 9-7070."

"That's the telephone number of their hotel, and the police know about that."

"I can't think of anything else."

"Let's fish around," Doc said. "Juan and Jolla are professional criminals, and their success indicates they have developed a formula for their actions. Most criminals do, and one important item in the master-plan is what we call an out. A route of escape if things go wrong. Usually they have more than one. . . . Well, Juan and Jolla have taken flight, and the way they've done it indicates an advance plan. Now what we've got to do is try to recall something you may have noticed that might give a hint."

She nodded. "I see. It wouldn't necessarily have had to seem important at the time, would it?"

"You've got the idea," Doc told her. "Suppose you start talking, and we may come across something."

Dannie shuddered. "I just can't think of a thing that might—well, I won't try. I'll just tell all the little things about them I noticed. I did observe them closely, believe me, because I was going to turn them in to the police after I found my diamonds. Let's see, they drank their coffee black. They both liked thick steaks, and usually, in fact always, they would order the same things to eat. They dressed similarly, too; not exactly alike, but if one was wearing tweeds, so would the other. And if one wore brown shoes, so would the other—no, wait. Twice I noticed Jolla wearing canvas sneakers when Juan wore regular shoes. They even kept their fingernails about the same length, and spotlessly clean. I remember how Juan, meeting us late at dinner, eyed Jolla's spotless fingernails, then began cleaning his own with a knife. They were soiled, some tarry substance under them that he dug out and raked off on a napkin, almost destroying my appetite. I don't think they went to shows. Jolla read books in English, though—I saw one in his coat pocket once, only a part of the title. *West Indies* something or other. That was all I could read—"

Doc held up a hand. "Hold it. I think we've got a pattern here."

She shook her head, puzzled. "I don't see where I've shown anything except that they're so very much alike—"

"Sneakers—tar under the fingernails—a dark blue book with the first two words of the title *West Indies*—the book *was* dark blue, wasn't it?"

Dannie gasped in surprise. "Good Lord, yes!"

"The *West Indies Pilot*," Doc said. "A handbook put out by the government for shipmasters and pilots in the Caribbean. Sneakers are worn on boats. You find tar around boats, particularly seagoing sailboats."

Monk grunted explosively. "A boat! That's it! They've got a sailboat for their get-away."

Dannie thought for a moment. "The ocean," she said, "is fairish-sized. I don't see that this helps us so much."

"It's a lot better," Doc said, "than nothing."

IN the block before they reached the drugstore, they passed two police cars in motion, and there was a third at the drugstore. A fourth arrived while they were parking, and out of that one climbed the ill-tempered Captain Scoffield. He saw Doc and advanced growling, "I told you to take your wild-west show out of my precinct, and I meant—" He saw Dannie, flushed, bent to look inside, discovered that she was very pretty and grudgingly took off his heat. "Sorry, lady. Does your insurance company know you're going around in Savage's company? It's a good way to shorten your life expectancy."

"It hasn't shortened it so far, Captain," Dannie said smilingly. "In fact, I suspect I am four or five hours older right now than I would have been except for Doc Savage."

Captain Scoffield grunted. "They catch these guys who have been running you all over town?" he asked Doc.

"We might go in and find out," Doc said.

Before they reached the interior of the drugstore, however, a patrolman arrived breathlessly with the information: "Two blocks over—they found the car."

It was a parking lot. A police car was cocked across the one entrance, and two officers, guns in hand, were carefully searching among the cars parked in the steel-wire fenced enclosure. A sergeant saluted Captain Scoffield, explaining, "I don't think it's going to get us anything. They just changed cars here. They had another machine planted for the skip."

"Get a description of it on the air!" Captain Scoffield snapped.

"We ain't got much of a one—"

"Get it from the parking lot attendant, then!"

The patrolman turned and shouted, "Come over here, you! Guglimo, or whatever your handle is!"

A dark-faced squat man brought over an insolent manner and began demanding who the hell the police thought they were, shoving taxpayers around.

"Shut up!" the patrolman interrupted him. "And tell the Captain here how come you haven't got the license number of that car on your records like you're supposed to have."

The man scowled. "They take da page from da book," he growled.

Captain Scoffield swore, shoved his angry red face close to the lot owner's dark one, and bellowed

questions. What kind of a car was it, how long had it been there, when did they take it away, and what was this about no license number? To this he got insolent answers: The car had been there a week, it was a black sedan but he didn't recall what make, the men had come for it about fifteen minutes ago and left another car, that blue one, in its place, and as for the license number, he had put that down in his book as usual, but the page was torn out of the book, as they could see if they would look, and if they could read. Now, who did these cops think they were, Dick Tracy or somebody?

Captain Scofield had an answer. "Take this guy down and book him for investigation, and if he stays snooty, lock him up as a material witness."

Mr. Guglimo was shocked.

In the meantime, Doc Savage had gone to the blue sedan in which Ham Brooks and Roxborough had been hauled away from the apartment house. In the rear seat, on the floorboards, he had found two rubber heels—actually two thick plates of a metal resembling lead, with a covering of rubber to make them resemble heels.

Doc showed the finds to Monk.

"Oh, brother!" Monk said excitedly. "Now we can go to town."

Captain Scofield came over angrily. "Picking up evidence and packing it off, are you!" He snatched the disguised heels out of Monk's hand, stared at them without comprehension, feigned a full understanding of the things, and wrapped them in his handkerchief. "Savage," he said, "I've told you to take your trouble-making out of my precinct. I'm telling you again. Beat it. You hear me?"

Monk extended a hand. "Could we have those?"

"Certainly not!" Scofield snapped. "They're evidence. A clue."

"A clue to what?" Monk asked innocently.

"You get out of here," Captain Scofield said wrathfully. "I'll figure it out."

"Want to bet?"

The Captain came over and poked Monk in the chest with a thick finger. "Do *you* want to bet that, if I hear one more remark out of you, I don't take you down and lock you up for investigation yourself?"

"Cut it out, Monk," Doc said quietly. "You're getting nowhere, and the Captain is right—we've been stirring up trouble in his bailiwick, and since we've accomplished practically nothing, he has a right to resent it."

"Nothing!" Monk blurted indignantly. "Why, hell, now we've got the lead that will take us—"

"The Captain isn't interested!" Doc said sharply. "Come on. We've been ordered away from here, you may have noticed."

Monk walked to their car, mumbling under his breath. "The Captain," he said, "could use a thirty-eight to blow the wax out of his ears, and not notice any difference afterwards."

Chapter VIII

BY TEN O'CLOCK, they had finished a circuit of Manhattan Island, first down the elevated highway on the Hudson River side, then up the waterfront street on the East River, then the boulevards, and near the Triborough Bridge. Doc Savage said, "It's picking up a little. East of us somewhere."

Monk, driving, asked, "Which side of the Sound? Long Island, or the Bronx and Connecticut?"

"Long Island," Doc said. "We can cross over at Whitestone if it seems advisable."

Monk turned to the right, taking the long swinging approach of the Triborough Bridge; there was the vague sensation of rising, the cab ran silently and hard. The lights of Manhattan spread out behind them, and ahead they could see the measured flash of the airways beacon at La Guardia Field.

"You understand how the gadget works?" Monk asked Dannie.

"Not too well," she confessed. "Like a radio direction-finder, you mean?"

"It's not the same thing at all, but the general idea is similar," Monk explained. "The bait we're hunting is in the heels of the shoes Ham Brooks is wearing. A radiant substance—merely a couple of small pieces of the proper metal that have been placed in an atomic pile and energized. Radium would have the same effect. Give off emanations. In the heels of Ham's shoes, as I said. The stuff is dangerous—the radiations, that strong, can give a severe burn if exposure is over an appreciable interval. For protection, the energized bits are enclosed in metal shields—not lead, but a more effective shielding alloy which Doc and I developed about a year ago. The rubber heels—really metal with a coating of rubber—were the caps Ham wore for safety. He'd managed to tear them off. I knew that when I found them in the car they abandoned. And that was why, earlier, I couldn't pick up anything on the machine—Ham hadn't gotten the caps off yet."

Monk drew her attention to the electronic contrivance, which Doc was now manipulating.

"We're proud of that gadget," he told Dannie. "Doc worked it out for the army. They're going to use it for detecting dangerous radiations in case of an atomic war. It's the best thing in the way of sensitivity that anyone has developed so far. The best, because it's more directional."

"Then you can find Mr. Brooks with the device?" Dannie inquired anxiously.

"We can find his shoes, anyway," Monk told her.

THEY lay beside the car, in the weeds—half-hidden so that Monk stepped on one of them and turned his ankle and gasped in pain. Then he kneeled and explored with his hands. There was not much light; no moon, the sky full of cloud formation, another spring thunderstorm thumping and winking redly in the southwest.

"Ham's shoes!" Monk's voice had a fringe of horror. "I was afraid for a minute he might be in them."

"Keep your voice down," Doc warned. He was going through the car, searching mostly with his fingertips. He found articles of clothing—everything that Ham Brooks had been wearing, apparently. "They stripped him," Doc said. "Taking no chances on stuff in his clothing."

Monk said gloomily, "They must have heard about us. . . . You suppose their boat is around here?"

"That," Doc whispered, "is what we're going to try to find out." He touched Dannie's arm, adding, "Get back in our car, Dannie. The body is armor-plate, the windows are bullet-resistant glass, so you'll be—"

“You expect me to wait in the taxicab?” she demanded.

“Yes. You should be safe—”

“Hold it!” she exclaimed. “It’s not that I don’t want to be safe, but if you think I’m going to sit here in that cab, just on your assurance they couldn’t get at me if they came back—nothing doing.”

“But you *will* be safe.”

“The safest place I can think of,” she said grimly, “is right at your elbow. And that’s where I’m staying.”

Doc gripped her arm. “Don’t be a fool, Señorita Oristezza. The way things have been going, with those fellows running over us at will—”

“You,” she said firmly, “haven’t done so bad. You started from nothing—at least with a fool girl swooning in the park—and you’ve got the two most dangerous criminals in South America, and their gang, on the run.”

“I’m not going to argue. You stay in the car, Dannie.”

“I go with you. And I’ll not argue either.”

“Listen!” Monk exploded. “Off to the left, toward the bay—”

The night possessed a damply sodden quality that blunted sounds, but they could catch faintly a thin squeaking. Short in duration, it ended in a muffled thump. Doc Savage, whose hearing was sharper, said, “The rollers on a gaff squeaking.”

“A what?” Dannie breathed.

“A gaff, one of the spars holding a sail. It slides up the mast as the sail is raised. That sound was someone hauling up a gaff a short distance, to make sure it was free-running, and letting it drop back. In other words, someone is preparing the sails of a boat for hoisting.” He moved away. “Over this direction.”

Monk told Dannie uneasily, “You’d better stay here. This is likely to get rough.”

“Frankly,” she whispered back, “I wouldn’t miss it for anything.”

THE hills swelled up to the east, stubby dark hills that must be like sleeping animals out there in the night, and the road threaded crazily where the hills dropped down into the sea, or more properly Long Island Sound. Between road and saltwater there was comparatively level ground sometimes two hundred yards wide and sometimes fifty feet. Being not too far from residential New York City, it was a popular section for middle-class yachtsmen, the fellows with the one-to-twelve-thousand-dollar boats. Their yacht clubs were scattered along the shore, and there was occasionally a small commercial dock and a struggling boatyard. Out on the water, there would be a flaking of small craft. All of it, of course, now pretty indistinguishable in the darkness.

The going would not have been bad, except that they were barefooted, which was all right for silence, but several times Doc heard the girl’s breathing stop painfully as she stepped on stones.

They made out presently the fact that they must be near the water. But the night was black, completely black, and Doc reached out and stopped Monk and Dannie. For Dannie’s benefit, he whispered, “I have a projector that uses black light. With special goggles, we can give a fair imitation of seeing in the

darkness.”

Irked, she said, “So that’s why you haven’t been stepping on rocks and bumping into things.”

He said, “We haven’t used it yet. We will now.”

He had, as a matter of fact, only one projector and one pair of the complex goggles necessary for use of the thing. The contrivance was not new; he had used it over a period of years in progressively improved forms, and this one was even more developed as to compactness and efficiency than the similar apparatus which had been used during the war.

Doc donned the goggles, switched on the projector, and made an adjustment of the scanning device—utilizing the principle of black light fluorescence on a sensitive screen, and not simple as to construction.

The contrivance, in portable form, had one drawback which Doc and other scientists had not been able to overcome—there was no depth perception. There was simply a flat picture; distance could be judged if there were enough objects of known relative size in the scene, and a man could aim and fire a rifle accurately in the blackest night, but walking around with them was another matter.

He saw the boat now. A schooner, gaff-rigged, two masts, the hull about seventy feet on the waterline, undoubtedly with an auxiliary engine that could flog the old hull along at five or six knots. A beamy craft, quite a lot of freeboard, a semi-clipper bow, and the whole thing not yachty nor not slatternly enough to attract much attention. There were boats like her all up and down the coast. She would even escape special notice in the Caribbean, being not too different in appearance from the inter-island trading schooners seen there.

They had removed the sail-covers. The sail-tops too, the short lines that were used to tie the sails in neat furls on the spars, and the sails lay loose and ready in the lazy-jacks. Forward, a pair of men were taking stops off the stays. Another man came up from below carrying oil-burning running lights, and began clipping them to the light-boards and safety-lashing them there.

“Take a look,” Doc said, and transferred the scanning device to Monk.

Monk muttered, a moment later, “That’s the outfit. I’m sure the guy tying on the light was at Roxborough’s apartment house during the excitement.” He shifted the device to Señorita Oristezza, and she gasped with surprise at the clarity of the image. “It has an awfully odd color,” she whispered. And then she asked, “What are we going to do?”

“Not to give a facetious answer,” Doc said. “The best we can.”

“Shouldn’t we telephone the police?” she demanded.

He said quietly, “I’d like you to go back to the car and do that.” He knew she was looking at his face through the scanning gadget, and grinned wryly. “If we can ask you to do it without giving you the idea we’re trying to get you out of danger.”

“Aren’t you?”

“Some,” he admitted. “But somebody should get the police. And quick, too. Those fellows are going to sail any minute.”

“All right, I’ll do it,” she agreed. “What do I do? I mean, how do you work the radio—”

“I left it switched on, and set up on the police channel. Merely pick up the microphone, press the button you'll feel on the side, and start talking. They'll come back when you release the button. You can hear them on the receiver, although the volume is low.”

“All right.”

“Be careful,” he said. “We don't know they're all on the boat.”

SHE moved away in the darkness, after returning the black-light apparatus to Doc. She took much the route by which they had come, which was a path, then the waterline highway, and made fairly good time, breathing through her teeth each time her bare feet found sharp stone or stubbed against an obstruction. Her silk hose were a ruin; they were no protection anyway.

Suddenly she saw a car coming toward her along the highway. Because she was very scared, the car seemed an odd thing, a reeling scouring blaze of white light pursued by a mechanical moaning. She debated briefly waving her arms, trying to stop the machine, then dismissed the notion in a hurry—on the schooner, they would notice a thing like that. She wondered if the *Padres Feliz*, the Happy Fathers, had a guard posted. She shuddered. The name *Padres Feliz* when applied to Juan and Jolla had an ugly macabre quality like the laughter of skeletons. She slipped off the road, wanting to fall because of the way the stones hurt her feet. She crouched there and let the car go past with a sound like a long heavy cough.

Madre Dios, I'm scared, I'm terrified, she thought. The feeling, she knew, was quite simply arrived at. She was growing more frightened proportionately as she left the neighborhood of Doc Savage. That surprised her. The man grew in stature with distance, particularly in a devilish situation like this. Doc was a giant bronze man, rather handsome—now he seemed the superlative of both these things. She had imagined herself not greatly impressed with his gadgets—now, contrarily, she saw him as a wizard, a genie of protection. She grimaced at herself; one exaggeration was as annoying as the other. But she wished she was back there at the schooner with him. *Why, I felt safer walking into possible ambush with him*, she reflected, *than I feel walking toward safety now, alone*. She hurried out on to the road again.

Presently, limping, she reached the taxicab and tugged at the door.

It was now that Jolla came softly from the darkness, softly and unheard. Without speech or other preliminary, he whipped the side of her head twice with the blackjack, which he handled adeptly.

It was a very quiet unconsciousness. Jolla kneeled beside her and took her skull between his fingers the way one would test a football for air pressure, and felt for crushed bones.

“A hard head,” he remarked, “in every sense of the word.”

DOC SAVAGE told Monk Mayfair, “I don't think it's safe to leave the goose out of the oven any longer. The Señorita Oristezza, if she should happen to get hold of a thick-headed cop, may not work this instantly. We can't afford to wait. From all signs, they're about ready to shove off, and with Ham as hostage, we don't want to risk a running fight at sea—”

“Put with fewer words,” Monk said, “you think we'd better light our match.”

“That's it.” Doc gave Monk the black light device. “Move in closer, keep your eye on things, and if you

see I need help, step in with an offering.”

Monk's voice was uneasy in the darkness. “You going to work around to their rear?”

“Going to try to.”

“You,” said Monk, “are going to need luck. I'll bow to the east.”

“Do that.”

Monk was silent for a few moments, then whispered, “I'll keep my fingers crossed, too. I think there's more than five of those guys—“ He paused, listening, said softly, “Doc . . . ?” There was no answer. The bronze man had moved away without sound. Not too surprised, Monk himself began to work toward the schooner.

Doc Savage had taken a course somewhat to the right, and for a reason. The tide at this hour would be flowing out, and he had no intention of swimming against the tide when it was unnecessary. He intended to use the water, try to board the schooner from the seaward side.

Silence was not too difficult. The spot was being used daytimes by boatmen, so there were no large weeds, not too many twigs that offered danger of snapping underfoot. His bare feet found these trouble spots easily. He found, by the sense of touch, two hauled-out dories, a pile of lumber, the greasy track of a marine railway—he followed the latter down to the water edge and, crouching there, studied the schooner.

He saw something new. They had hung hooded lanterns off bow and stern, dangling a few inches above the water, and looking more closely, he saw why. Lying in the roll of sail that was the jib, well out on the bowsprit, was a man. A watcher. There would be another at the stern, no doubt.

Seeing this, realizing they were alarmed and on guard, he had a bitterly cold sensation of moves too recklessly made. One in particular—he should not have sent the Señorita Oristezza back to the car. If these fellows were on guard so carefully . . .

He eased into the water, cautiously, a few inches at a time, not wading but crawling out on hands and knees. The tide flow began to push against him. There was five or six feet rise and fall of tide here, so the movement of water was considerable.

He had taken off no clothing—this for a reason also. His clothing was his armament, his gadgets. An example was a pencil which he now used. It was a pencil, all right, but also other things, including, when he stripped the sections out to full length, a telescoping tube. He was going to use it for breathing underwater, and proceeded to do so. It had other purposes—a mirror would clip in the end periscope-wise; it was not a bad blowgun. But now he breathed through it only.

He moved, underwater, slowly toward the schooner, letting the tide carry him.

MONK saw Jolla bring the Señorita Oristezza to the schooner. Jolla walked rapidly and easily, the girl across his shoulder. He gave from a distance the whistling call of some nightbird, and it was then that Monk turned the black light scanner in that direction. Monk stiffened and had threads of frost for nerves.

There was nothing he could do—that is, it wasn't the time for doing. He realized that only when he had stood and taken a step forward. Monk sank back behind a pile of scrap lumber, but it was a difficult thing to do. Particularly for Monk to do. Monk was no exponent of caution, of letting a plan get ripe. He

crouched there, the palms of his hands getting moist.

Not thirty feet from the schooner, Monk could hear what was said. Juan came on deck. He flashed a light briefly.

“Where did you collect her?” Juan asked softly in Spanish.

Jolla told him. “Back on the road. I thought I heard a car. It took time to find it, and then she came.”

“Savage is here?”

“I would say so.”

“That isn't good,” Juan muttered, and wheeled to one of the crew. “There is scrap iron in the bilge for ballast. Bring a good-sized piece.” To another man, he said, “Rope.”

Jolla said dryly, “Have I not heard you say you would never kill a woman, my friend?”

Juan snorted. “I did not think I would like to remember the look in the eyes of a woman when she died.” He bent over the Señorita Oristezza. “This is different. This one is unconscious. Unconscious with her eyes closed, I am glad to say.” He straightened, adding, “However, if you will loan me your handkerchief to cover the upper part of her face, I would appreciate that.”

“You will use a knife?”

“Why not? A knife is the best death.”

The man with the rope started with lashing the girl's arms, but Juan laughed at him, said, “She will be dead, you fool. Tie it around her waist. She has a slim waist.” When the man staggered up from below with a slab of ballast iron that had a hole in it through which they could lash the rope, Juan personally took over the job of binding.

“If they're around here—Savage and that baboon—they may be seeing this,” Jolla said uneasily.

“So what? If we kill them, they will not care then. If we do not, then they will take us. Savage is a man who either dies or wins. I have heard that of him. In the latter case, will we care? To be tried for one more murder. What difference?”

Juan straightened. “The handkerchief,” he said.

Monk Mayfair had not quite stood it this far. He was easing forward a step at a time. What had happened to Doc? Damn it, they couldn't stand by and let the girl be killed.

Juan spread the handkerchief over Dannie's face. She had not moved except when they jerked her limp form about. The knife came into Juan's hand. Long of blade. Juan balanced it speculatively, and remarked coldly, “There is an art to this. The art is not to make it gory. The spine, not the jugular, just a careful severance of the white cord there, a simple surgical operation—”

Monk yelled then. He always yelled when he went into a fight, and he howled now. He began it with words. “Doc! They're killing Dannie!” And after that he made sound, just sound, a frenzied roaring that was more product of the primitive than normalcy, heavy-throated like the anger of the jungle.

The noise did not dull his awareness. So he understood that three or four men were converging on him from the sides, not men from the schooner, but men who had been lying concealed in the vicinity, under innocent-looking piles of trash.

There was no shooting. Monk did not have a gun. One of the assailants was armed with a revolver, but he did not fire, merely stood back and waited, ready to use the gun if Monk managed to whip, single-handed, a half-dozen assailants.

Monk very nearly did that. He veered left, his arms opened and took in two assailants together; he fell with them, deliberately, and they began to shriek. The others piled into the struggle.

Juan, for the first time a thin whistle of terror going out with his words, said, "They were closer than I thought!" He jumped ashore and ran and stood by the mêlée, occasionally launching a kick into the ball of bodies.

Out of the fight on the ground: curses, gasps, bones breaking, dust and two hats. Then a shoe. These and hands and feet which were quickly jerked from sight again.

Juan kicked once more. Solidly. He leaned over the mêlée with a flashlight.

"We've got him," he said angrily. "Stop fighting each other."

He seized Monk by one leg and began dragging him toward the schooner.

"That is two?" Jolla called.

"Yes, two."

From the stern of the schooner, where he had lain across the rail watching the water intently all during the fracas ashore, a lookout spoke.

"Someone hand me a grenade," he said, "and I think I can make it three."

JOLLA lunged to the man's side. "In the water?" he demanded.

"Yes." The watcher's voice was ghost-thin with terror. "I think I saw a face look up at me. It rose from the water—sank again—"

"When?" Juan wheeled. "Savage is in the water! Under the boat! Use the hand-grenades, you fools! On all sides of the boat, all at once! Not too close, not close enough to smash the hull—"

"How close would that be?" someone wailed.

Juan cursed. "Never mind! Get them in the water. Let the boat sink if—"

The first hand grenade let loose underwater. Not an impressive explosion, seemingly; yet the ship jumped slightly. The others followed; spouts of water climbed violently, a few times with kernels of flame. Nine blasts in all.

"Keep throwing them in!" Juan screamed.

"That's all. There are no more."

They blazed flashlights at the water, watching and waiting, and if anyone breathed, it was not audibly. The water boiled for a while, mud came up in clouds and streaks, patching the surface with blackness. The tide carried the mud away.

A man whimpered in pain. A puppy-like sound, but loud. They all jumped. Monk had broken the man's arm. Another sat down sickly, white-faced, and began trying to get his arm back into joint at the elbow. Monk's work also.

"Dios!" Jolla pointed. "Bubbles!"

He seized a rifle, the only rifle in the crowd, and aimed at the spot. With a soft cough, another bubble broke at the surface. There were two more in quick succession. Jolla cocked the rifle deliberately.

Juan muttered, "I would not be too sure the bubbles mean anything. They could be the result of the explosions underwater—"

"A hand!" a man screamed. Simultaneously, Jolla's rifle smashed. And as the shot echoes came caving back on them from the nearby hills, Jolla shrieked almost with a madness. "I missed the hand. But it was a hand. Savage is out there."

Now all the lights centered on the spot astern. Juan swore suddenly, seized a life preserver and heaved it as far as he could astern. It floated slowly away. "To judge how fast the tide will carry a body—"

Again he did not finish, because Juan's rifle was jarring, the muzzle laying out sheets of flame. An object had rolled partially into view above the surface, a thing that could be nothing but Savage's body. It was his coat; Juan began shrieking that it was Savages coat, the same color, the same design, which was a little preposterous because the distance was too great for that. All the time Jolla was firing; he emptied the clip, and screeched for another, pumped that into the object, which now sank from sight.

Jolla continued to fire, clip after clip, until Juan seized him and shook him repeatedly.

"That is three," Juan told him. "There are no more."

Chapter IX

THE gentleness came back to the one who had used the rifle, and with it a weakness of the legs that became a complete inability to stand, so that he folded down and sat, foolishly staring at the rifle, on the deck. Alarmed, Juan demanded, "You have been hit? A piece of a grenade perhaps—"

Jolla looked up at the other man. "I am sick with the sweetest sickness I ever had. I think I have been dying all night from thinking about this Doc Savage. I think this sickness is life. Get below and see whether the explosions started the hull leaking."

Juan laughed. He swung over and dropped down the companionway, glancing forward to make sure Ham Brooks—lashed to the mainmast where it passed down through the cabin—and Roxborough—trussed up more comfortably on the floor—were there and helpless. They were. Ham gagged, could say nothing, but Roxborough demanded, "What happened?"

"A bon-voyage party," Juan told him, laughing again as he went over to peer down into the bilge. The man who had gotten the scrap iron had lifted aside a section of flooring for the purpose, and not replaced it. Juan used a flashlight; he tossed a match on to the water that is always to be found in the bilge of a sailboat, and watched it to see whether there was a flow from any direction.

He returned to the hatch, called, "She's making practically no water. Cast off and get the sails up. We'll use the engine after we're outside."

Someone pushed the girl down the hatch, saying, "Catch."

"Is it necessary?"

Jolla's voice, still faint with the sickness he had called good, replied, "Of course it is, stupid. One body floating around the harbor is enough."

Juan caught the Señorita Oristezza, carried her over and dumped her on the bunk opposite where Roxborough lay. He stepped back, looked at the girl's legs, and began to approve of the idea. "No, that body wouldn't be suitable in a harbor."

The schooner heeled as the wind caught the one sail that was up, and there was a chorus of mouse squeakings as the other sails were hoisted, fores'l and then mains'l.

On deck, forward near the forecandle hatch, a man fell heavily.

"What happened?" Jolla yelled.

"There is a wet slippery place here on the deck," the man complained.

Jolla laughed. "The grenades splashed water on deck," he said happily. "And presently we shall be at sea, and there will be waves breaking aboard. The weather forecast is for cloudiness and storms. Bad weather for any planes which might seek us." He sounded happy about it.

WHEN Monk Mayfair regained consciousness, his immediate feeling about the world was that he wanted none of it, the Indians could have it. He spent a few seconds trying to identify various portions of his body—teeth, eyes, ears, square inches of skin, in different places—a sort of mental roll call to see how much of him was still left together. The overall picture was not encouraging, although he could find nothing important missing. And now suddenly, it having taken all this time to make mental connections, he realized that he was tied and in a boat with Ham Brooks, Roxborough and the Señorita Oristezza.

Monk stared at them. They all seemed to need repairing in one spot or another. Monk opened his mouth, intending to speak loudly and clearly; after trying, he sat there rather foolishly. The voice must have been his own, but it seemed rusty and under the floor somewhere.

He was sitting against the mast. He peered at his extended ankles, noting they were roped. He tried his wrists behind him, and they were tied also, on the other side of the mast. It was a thick mast, and his arms were in an agonizing cramp.

Monk tried again. "Where's Doc?" he asked.

The others—Ham, Roxborough, Dannie—had been wordless; they remained wordless now, but in a different way. Monk peered at their speechless faces and began to wish, wish with a ghastly dull endlessness, that he had not asked that question. Unasked, his imagination would have had full wild play, but its worst could not have been like this. He did not say anything more, and they remained there each in a personalized pool of horror, until Juan and Jolla came down from deck.

Juan and Jolla came together, which was appropriate; they were polite and smiling, and gently complimenting each other in speech again; in other words, back in form.

"We have a short speech to make," Juan said.

“Short, but you should listen,” added Jolla.

There was now hardly a trace of the accent of *Espanol* in their voices. They had changed clothing and wore seagoing garb, yachtsmen's garb that enhanced their illusion of sameness, although the clothing itself was not identical.

“You understand, I believe, what caused the whole thing,” said Juan.

Jolla watched their faces. “Diamonds. Raw diamonds from the Señorita Oristezza's lease in Southwest Africa near Luderitz, and from Brazil. The value of two million dollars and a bit over in American money.”

“*Pesos del Estados Unidos*,” said Juan.

“Yes, United States dollars.”

Juan nodded. “They were on a plane which crashed and Mr. Roxborough was on the same plane and escaped. The wreckage of the plane was found and the diamonds were not there.”

“The connection between Roxborough and diamonds seemed obvious to us,” said Jolla.

“And unfortunate.”

“Unfortunate, yes. It misled us—”

“We think—”

“Yes, we think—”

Ham Brooks raised his head—there was no gag in his mouth now—and said, “Oh, for God's sake, what's the idea of the vaudeville act? Or does it have an idea?”

Juan grinned. “The idea, as well as any other ideas, will be of very brief interest to you.”

“Brief!” said Jolla.

MONK moved impatiently; he almost yelled from the cramping pain in his arms. The general idea was that Juan and Jolla had decided, or were saying they had decided, that Roxborough had not made off with the diamonds. They had come to New York to take the diamonds from Roxborough, which they had concluded was a bad move. That was what they were saying. What they meant might be almost anything else.

Monk said painfully, “If you figure Roxborough didn't get the diamonds, where'd the stones go?”

Juan smiled, pointed at himself and his associate. “Not we,” he said.

“Then who?”

“The jungle where the plane crashed is quite primitive, but not uninhabited. There are aborigines. Indians. They go naked and use blowguns, but they are not without some contact with the world—enough contact, we are afraid, that they might have recognized the diamonds for what they were.”

That was a long speech and Ham, his head cocked up, scowled at Jolla, waiting for him to attach a

statement of some sort, but Jolla was silent. Ham sneered. "That's a fine picture of innocence you draw. It would look better in a comic strip."

Juan shrugged. "It is of very temporary importance what you think."

"Then why make it?"

Juan nodded at Dannie and then at Roxborough. "The explanation is for them. They are not going to die, unless they are particular fools."

Ham looked at the man intently. He let his head back carefully on the bunk covering. "That's pretty good," he said. "That's half of a loaf. Now what's the catch?"

"No catch."

Ham's lips twisted sourly.

"No, I am sincere," Juan assured him. "What would their death gain us? Oh, they can report to the police that we are criminals and murderers?" He laughed unpleasantly. "Is that news to the police? I think not."

"What will you do with them?"

"Do? Leave them on an island someplace, I suppose. When we get south, of course, in the Caribbean."

Roxborough lifted his head and looked at Dannie. He seemed pleased at the prospect.

Juan produced his knife. "There is no foolishness this time, as there was on the deck with the girl earlier."

Monk sneered at the man from the floor, where he crouched beside the mast. "Afraid to let us go, eh?"

"Exactly," Juan agreed. "We have quite an opinion of your ability. Perhaps you are not the remarkable sort that Doc Savage was, but I don't believe we would sleep well with you free. I suspect that, if it took years, it would still be a case of you dying or ourselves. So why take a chance?"

"You've got something," Monk admitted sourly.

"You take it calmly."

"Try cutting me loose," Monk said, "and we'll revise that."

Juan looked at the homely chemist, contemptuously in the beginning, then with growing unease that he sought to throw off with a curt shoulder movement. "My ugly friend, the day of your miracles is past, now that Savage is dead."

"You think so?" Monk, a little blind with rage, a little incoherent from the pain in his bound arms, shoved his head forward and yelled, "How would you like for me to produce a little miracle, friend? How would you like that? Just watch me and—"

A man fell through the skylight.

NOTHING could have been more perfectly timed. Monk, like an angry dragon prophesying disaster, had reached threatful screaming climax—and *crash!* A shower of glass, glittering in the cabin light. The man did not fall completely through the skylight, which was in the center of the cabin roof at this point,

just forward of the mast, and crossed with a dozen brass bars. But the man hit hard, hard enough to bend the bars and break the glass. Looking up, they could see his utterly blank face and wide motionless eyes staring down at them. He was one of the crew.

“You fool!” Juan screamed. He had been badly shaken. He leaped to the galley, seized a frying-pan, and came back and smashed it up against the skylight bars, striking the man ineffectually in the face, shrieking, “Pick such a time to fall into the skylight, will you—”

He stopped. He had the frying pan drawn back for another blow; it hung in his hand, stiffly; the hand and the arm loosened and it seemed that the pan was going to haul him over backward; his eyes grew big and bug-like as he ogled the face of the man.

“He is dead!” he said.

This was an error. The man breathed. Blood filled the creases of his lips from the damage done by the frying-pan, and this became crimson bubbles.

Somewhere on deck there was a stumbling sound—like stumbling, except that no steps and no profanity followed.

“That sounded like a man stumbling,” Juan said. “Will you look? What the hell is going on up there?” He said this to one of the crew. There were three crew members below deck.

The man took the required number of steps up the companionway ladder, three, to permit him to gaze out on deck.

He said, “Someone did stumble . . .” For a three-word statement, his voice did a lot of trailing off.

“What is it?” Juan asked hollowly.

The man in the companionway said, “They seem to be sleeping.” He said it oddly, not with any particular disbelief, but contrarily as if he believed it very much and didn't understand it. “They are lying there—” He stopped, blinked. “They are lying—” His face was dulling; puzzlement, which must have been a terrific emotion within him, barely stirred the shape of his face. He said, “I feel—sleepy—” And with this classic, he laid down on the floor at the foot of the ladder.

Monk, held tightly jammed to the mainmast, felt a slight jar against his back; he heard the chug of a sound that accompanied it. They all must have heard. Monk brought his arms around in front of his face, rolled over and seized the hand-axe which had sliced the ropes and buried half an inch in the mastwood. He loosened the axe, which was sharp, slashed through his ankle bindings, stood up, lunged to Ham Brooks—Ham had his wrists over the bunk edge, ready for the operation—and chopped through Ham's wrist cords.

“Operations are underway,” Monk said. “Doc, be careful. There were eleven of them aboard, all told.”

Doc Savage came in from the forecastle. He said, “The deck has been taken care of. Get ready for it to happen here.”

Juan had been having a ghastly time trying to decide which way his knife should go; now he turned, ogling Doc Savage, and suddenly threw the knife. He used the underhand delivery best for short range; the knife did not turn over in the air, but traveled point-first and sliced through the bronze man's clothing, hit the bulletproof mesh undergarment Doc was wearing, and bounced visibly.

Monk struck Juan then. Juan rolled with the blow but went down with wiry deception, trying—and

succeeding—to give Monk the idea he was badly dazed. Monk lunged for him. Doc Savage yelled, “Look out, Monk, he’s a judo wizard—” But by that time Monk had hold of Juan, and began learning the fact for himself. It became a noisy enlightenment.

Short-lived, though. Because presently Monk looked down foolishly at Juan, who seemed to be sleeping; he peered at Juan with a sort of all-out idiocy of expression, then continued in character and bent from the waist and laid his hands on the floor, held that position briefly, then stretched out on the floor.

Doc Savage and Ham Brooks waited silently, flat-cheeked, tight-lipped. Ham, to make doubly sure, clamped a hand over his mouth and closed his nostrils with thumb and forefinger. Even then, he had difficulty not breathing, because the coming of the gas had caught him very short of breath.

In not much longer than a minute, Doc Savage and Ham were the only ones consciously able to move.

Chapter X

A SINGLE splinter of lightning arose briefly off the southern horizon and stood there quivering.

Dannie, looking forward, distinguished Doc Savage's form.

“He’s tying up the last one now, isn’t he?” she demanded nervously.

Ham Brooks took the occasion to squeeze her hand comfortingly.

“You’re all right. Everything is perfectly all right,” he assured her. “You understand about the gas, don’t you? It’s anaesthetic only, odorless, colorless, and has the unusual quality of quick oxidation when exposed to the air, the oxidation rendering it harmless. By that I mean that if one manages to hold their breath for about a minute or a minute and a half, the effects can be escaped. That is what Doc and I did. It is what Monk would have done if he had been born with any sense.”

“Yes, I understand that now.”

“It’s absolutely harmless,” said Ham. “Please be assured of that. It won’t hurt you, because I’ve been knocked out by that stuff dozens of times—”

Monk, from the companionway, said unpleasantly, “You think you’re a good example?”

“I didn’t,” Ham told him, “forget to hold my breath so the gas wouldn’t take.”

“You didn’t,” Monk told him, “have hold of the character Juan.” Monk explained to the Señorita Oristezza, “Ham is right about the anaesthetic gas producing no ill effects afterward—except that sometimes you do wonder what the dickens happened.” Monk chuckled. “If you want to see something funny, take a couple of the grenades to a dull party sometime and drop them in somebody’s pocket. They’re very thin-walled glass capsules, crush easily, and you should see the uproar when everyone goes sound asleep for about fifteen minutes, then wakes up and tries to explain it.”

Roxborough, sitting in the cockpit, growled, “That’s all very cute. I’m impressed. My neck is also saved, and I’m grateful for that. But when do we head for shore?”

“We’ll get around to that,” Monk said.

“Well, I can use a night’s sleep,” said Roxborough.

Doc Savage came back from the bow in time to hear the last remark, and agreed, "We all can. A night's sleep I mean."

Roxborough stirred impatiently. "How'd you get away from them when they thought they'd shot you underwater, and how'd you get aboard? I missed out on that."

"That was just some hard swimming underwater, plus the fact I had a tube by which I could get an occasional breath of air without surfacing," Doc explained. "When the fight broke out on shore with Monk, I tried to come in on it—and surfaced directly under the nose of a lookout. You know what happened then. The grenades weren't too bad, but they weren't good, either—I swam astern, shoved up a hand, blew a few bubbles after drawing the air through the tube, then stripped off my coat and tied it in a knot and turned it loose underwater. Monk tells me that when the coat surfaced, they shot it to pieces and figured they had finished me."

"While you were doing that," Roxborough said, "you climbed aboard?"

"That's it. By the bow—the bobstay chain and the bowsprit and then down into the forecastle. Later, someone slipped and fell on the wet spot where my clothing had dripped, bothering me for a minute."

"They were a pack of fools," Roxborough said curtly. "Almost as big fools as you fellows were to let it get this far along."

"You think so?" Monk asked belligerently.

Doc said, "Easy does it, Monk."

"I don't like this guy's manner," Monk said indignantly. "And I never have. If he's such a hot-rock—"

"Cut it out," Doc said.

"Let him shoot his mouth," said Roxborough. "I think I can handle him."

"You're getting cabin fever," Doc said impatiently. "Stop fussing. Here, Roxborough, here's a loaded revolver. Will you go forward and guard the prisoners. Someone should sit up there near the forecastle with them, in case they work their bonds loose. Here's a flashlight. You can use it occasionally."

Roxborough hesitated, then growled, "Okay. Maybe if I did something useful it would improve my temper."

Monk listened to Roxborough moving forward to the bow area, where the prisoners had been assembled on the deck, bound hand and foot. It was dark, intensely dark, and Monk leaned over and laid a hand on Doc's arm, whispered, "I found them, Doc. I guess they're diamonds—"

"My diamonds!" Dannie gasped.

"Sh-h-h-h," Monk admonished. "Yeah, I think so. I'm sure."

Dannie blurted. "But how—"

Ham whispered, "It was a collaboration job. I noticed that Juan and Jolla both seemed a little too interested in the bilge—remember when the floorboard was up so the fellow could get the slab of iron? Well, Jolla closed the floor very carefully, went out of his way to do it, when there were plenty of other things more urgent. And when one of them, I forget which one it was, looked in the bilge to see how high the water was—whether the grenades had opened leaks—he sort of reached up under the planks to

ascertain that something was still there.”

They were quite silent for a while. Dannie was evidently thinking—suddenly her breathing stopped, then she made a long gasping sound of surprise. “But they said they didn't have the diamonds. . . .”

“Shush! Quiet!” Doc urged.

“That was some kind of a trick!” she blurted. “If they had the stones, why pretend—they said they were going to turn Roxborough and me loose—”

“Will you,” said Doc bitterly, “keep it a little lower.”

She gripped his hand. “Why all this furtive quiet—”

“You,” Doc told her in a low voice, “were going to be freed—as a witness.”

“Witness of what?”

“Of Roxborough's innocence, where the diamonds were concerned.”

“Then he's not—?”

“We hope to know in a minute.”

She dragged in breath heavily. “I can hardly believe it—after all, they did hire me to play that trick on Roxborough—”

“What,” Doc asked, “could have done more to convince you Roxborough was the innocent victim?”

“You could be right . . .”

“We'll know in a minute,” Doc said again. “Monk is wearing the black light gimmick, watching Roxborough, up forward there guarding the prisoners—”

“With a loaded gun!” she breathed. “My God, you weren't fool enough to give him a loaded gun when you suspected—”

Doc chuckled reassuringly. “Loaded with blanks,” he said. “The thing we're fairly sure Roxborough will do—if he's guilty—is untie Jolla and Juan and the others and attempt a break. On the other hand, if he doesn't—”

“The other hand,” said Monk softly, “won't be needed. Roxborough is cutting Juan loose now.”

Doc stood up silently, went forward along the deck, quite soundless in the darkness until he was close behind Roxborough, and there he thumbed on a flashlight beam and splattered the glare over the two men.

“Open packages?” he inquired.

THE END

