



THE SCREAMING MAN

A Doc Savage Adventure by Kenneth Robeson

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Chapter I

IT was, unfortunately, not humility, nor anything remotely related to modesty, which caused Annie Flinders to call herself Annie Flinders. Her true and full name was Miss Angelica Carstair-Flinders, Rhinemoor Manor, Rhinecliff-on-the-Hudson, Dutchess County, N.Y., and modesty had little to do with the change. There were not two spoonfuls of modesty in Annie Flinders, even measuring her on one of her sweet days.

Annie's sweet days, always few, had lately become as scarce as diamonds for sale at ten cents in ten-cent stores. Unhappy, if we put it conservatively, was Annie Flinders. She had brought this sadness on herself—by wangling the credentials and transportation necessary to become a lady Economic Planning Representative in the Pacific Area.

Now the truth was that Annie was no more fitted to be an Economic Planning Representative in the Pacific Area than she was to be a ditch-digger. She was rigged for it about the way a butterfly is

equipped to shovel coal. Annie was artistic. Annie was, exactly speaking, an *artiste*. An *artiste*, says Webster, is a performer whose work shows unusual aesthetic qualities. That was Annie, and certainly she could never really have, in her heart, given a damn whether the United Household Appliance Company could sell more of its super-duper refrigerators in the Philippines, or whether it should stick to pots and pans and whisk-brooms—which was partially what an Economic Planning Representative in the Pacific Area was supposed to find out.

Actually, Annie's Uncle Jessup, her money-making uncle, was president of United Household Appliance, and Annie had hit him up for a job that would take her somewhere where there was, or lately had been, a war. She didn't at the moment have the Pacific in mind, although she had been agreeable when it was mentioned, overlooking the proportions of the Pacific Ocean, and the fact that the war had not exactly stood still. The Pacific? Oh, goody! Marines, sailors, soldiers, excitement!

In due course of time, Annie found that the Philippines, as a war theater, had become well-fizzled. This would have delighted a true Economic Planning Representative, but for Annie, it was hell.

Annie had even shortened her name from Miss Angelica Carstair-Flinders to plain Annie Flinders to make people think she was vigorous and two-fisted and entitled to get around and see a war. She could have saved this psychological touch. The war, the Philippine part of it, was a strangled duck.

This was very discouraging, because Annie had been trying since Pearl Harbor to see a war. On December 8, the day after Pearl Harbor, she joined the Red Cross. She was assigned to Iceland. She got out of Iceland finally, joined the WACS, and was assigned a desk job in St. Joseph, Missouri. It had taken her the intervening two years to persuade them the war was near enough over that they could afford to discharge her from the WAC.

All of this is by way of explaining that Annie Flinders was in the Philippines, was an *artiste*, was a thwarted excitement-lover, and hence the sort of a person who would become quite excited when she saw Clark Savage, Jr., who was also known as Doc Savage.

Also Annie was a delicious-looking package herself. Marines whistled loudly when she passed. Sometimes they stood on their hands.

WHEN Annie Flinders first saw Doc Savage—technically, it was the second time she'd seen him—she grabbed the arm of the Lieutenant, j.g., who was escorting her, and spoke with unsubdued excitement:

“Am I,” said Annie, “dreaming? Or is that Clark Savage? I'm dreaming, aren't I? Luck can't have caught up with me this late in life.”

The Lieutenant, j.g., looked at the hand she had clamped on his arm, and considered grabbing the hand's owner right then and there. The j.g. had been under the impression he was in love with a carrot-haired girl in Gillette, Wyoming, until that afternoon, when he'd met Annie.

“Forget Clark Gable,” he said, sounding a little as if he were panting.

“Not Gable. Savage. Clark Savage.” Annie sounded a bit short of normal breath herself.

“Good,” said the j.g.

“Surely,” said Annie, “I'm not mistaken.”

“Hey.”

"It is Doc Savage," said Annie.

"Hey!" said the j.g.

Annie went into a conference with herself, saying, "I am sure it must be. I saw him once before, in New York, when a friend of mine who was a surgeon took me to hear him lecture. Mr. Savage gave a wonderful lecture. I didn't understand practically one single word of what he was talking about. But it must have been super, because all the famous surgeons sat there with their mouths open."

"Hey, hey, hey!" said the j.g. urgently.

"I wonder," pondered Annie, "what Doc Savage is doing in the Philippine Islands?"

"Remember me, lady?" the j.g. asked. "I'm the guy you picked up at the canteen two hours ago."

"What? Oh, of course, Bill."

The Lieutenant became somewhat bitter. "My name's Arthur."

"Oh, of course. So nice to have met you, Arthur." Annie extended a hand, adding vaguely, "By all means do that, Arthur."

"Do what?" growled Arthur.

"Whatever we were talking about," said Annie, still more vaguely. "By all means. Goodbye, Bill."

This completed the acquaintanceship of Annie and the Lieutenant, junior grade, who at once entered a convenient bar to obtain, as he expressed it, several hookers of bourbon for a fellow who had just come unhooked.

Annie had already taken up the business of observing Doc Savage. In a serious way, and carefully.

FOR twenty-four hours thereafter, Annie Flinders kept close tab on Doc Savage. She followed Doc Savage to Alamosa, where he visited a war-prisoner camp containing Japs. She shadowed him to Los Antiniso, where Doc Savage visited a war-prisoner camp containing Nazis. And to Calmeda, where he visited one containing both Japs and Nazis.

It was not very satisfactory because Annie was unable to find out what Doc Savage was talking to the war prisoners about.

She tried. She tried to vamp a Staff Sergeant named Coons into telling her what Doc Savage wanted with the prisoners.

The Staff Sergeant had her thrown in jail.

It was not a comfortable jail, and Annie was made to realize that her first weeks at the WAC training center in Des Moines hadn't been nearly as tough as she had thought.

She occupied the calaboose forty-eight hours, long enough for a Colonel somebody to cable the F.B.I., the police chief of Rhinecliff-on-the-Hudson, Uncle Jessup, and somebody in Washington, and even then the Colonel was not entirely reassured.

"Young lady, I am going to turn you loose," said the Colonel finally. "Providing you will make me a

promise.”

“Why,” demanded Annie, “was I tossed in your bastille?”

“That,” replied the Colonel, “brings us to the promise. To wit, you are to say nothing to anyone, and are to put nothing in writing in any form, hinting or indicating in any way that you have seen Doc Savage or have any idea what he is doing.”

“But I don't know what he is doing. That's what I want to know.”

“How did you like our jail?”

“Ugh!”

“Then say nothing and write nothing.”

“I promise to say nothing and write nothing,” Annie promised, showing the Colonel she didn't have her fingers crossed.

“Good day,” said the Colonel.

“Goodbye, I hope,” said Annie.

“Oh, I almost forgot,” called the Colonel. “I have here a cablegram which came for you an hour or so ago.”

The cable message was from Annie's employer, her Uncle Jessup, and it contained four words: *You're fired. Come home.*

FREED of the tentacles of military law, Annie Flinders sped at once to the Hotel Northern, which had been destroyed by the Japs and already rebuilt by the industrious Filipinos, and where, in the course of her shadowing, she had learned Doc Savage was staying.

She was delighted to discover Doc Savage in the dining room, having fried chicken Mindoro style.

“This,” said Annie to herself, “is proving to be even better than I expected.”

Conceivably this remark, with the pleased enthusiasm the young lady put into it, would have interested a psychiatrist. Because Annie was not the victim of any sort of bobby-sox feeling toward Doc Savage, who was manly enough to have inspired it. Passion was consuming Annie, but passion of a different sort.

The psychiatrist, if there had been one, and if he had diagnosed correctly, would have said that Annie Flinders was the victim of a frustration which gradually became deeply seated in the bones of a lot of American citizens who didn't get to take a shot at a Nazi or a Jap. This yen to take a whack at the rats, meeting the obstacle of not being able to, did some unpleasant complexing to lots of people. It made perfect strangers take pokes at each other in bars, made teen-agers run wild, and did lots of other things which were blamed on bad tempers, carelessness and moral decline. Annie's complex was very strongly developed. She'd spent the war trying to get into the war, the frustration was all corked up inside her, and the cork just had to blow. Excitement would pull the cork. Ergo, she had to have some excitement.

She got it when she went to her room. She had, during her trailing activity, transferred her residence to the hotel for convenience.

There was a young man waiting in the hall outside her door. He was leaning against the wall. He had small eyes, a scar on his chin, and a strangely large knot which his hand and something else made in his coat pocket.

“Hello, Annie,” he said.

ANNIE examined him. “I don't believe I know you.”

“Good,” said the young man, unveiling the mystery of what made his hand in his pocket so large. It was a gun. “Let us step inside, baby, and converse,” he added.

Annie thought of several things, all of them different ways of yelling for help. She was scared.

“Open up,” ordered the young man.

“I—I haven't got a key!”

“Then I'll use mine, tutz.” He employed a key with which he was provided, flung open the door, assured Annie she wouldn't make a lovely corpse, and followed her inside, closing the door.

“W-what—”

“I'll make all the words necessary,” said the unpleasant young man. “Listen carefully, baby. Because if you don't hear me the first time, and abide thereby, you'll be nice and dead damned quick. There is a steamship named the *Empress Margaret* which is sailing for San Francisco tomorrow morning, which is about eighteen hours from now, giving you plenty of time to be aboard. You will find the *Empress Margaret* quite comfortable, since it is a former luxury trans-Pacific liner converted to war use, but not converted as much as you'd think. I think you will find it suitable. Much preferable, I will add, to a cold, cold grave here in the Philippines.”

“You're ordering me to leave on a boat!” Annie gasped.

“I told you to listen,” said the young man. “I will now give you rough ideas of what will transpire if you don't.”

With horrifying suddenness, he cocked his gun and jammed it against Annie's temple. While she waited, eyes closed in terror, for her brains to be blown out, he hit her on the jaw. The blow wasn't light. Things were black as road tar for a moment. When Annie's head cleared, she was on the floor, a hard braided noose of some sort was around her neck, and she was unable to obtain air. She was being strangled. The strangling continued until more blackness, shot with red flashes, came.

The thug permitted her to resume breathing.

“Just samples, tutz,” he explained. “Too bad I cannot demonstrate what would then happen to your body, but I do not have with me any deep, slimy pools of swamp mud, nor any sharks hungry for pretty human flesh, nor even any dark alleys all ready and waiting for a female corpse. However, I trust that your imagination can supply these missing ingredients.”

"It can," Annie admitted tremulously.

"We have then," said the young man, "only one more thing to discuss."

Annie didn't feel like asking questions. She waited.

"You keep your trap shut about this!" said the young man ominously. "Get me?"

"I—I—y-yes." Annie had great difficulty with words.

"Goodbye, I hope," said the young man.

He made his departure.

Chapter II

DOC SAVAGE was lingering with pleasure over the empty dish which had contained his chicken Mindoro when he observed a feminine vision enter the dining room. He was not, however, possessed of any yen to meet her. Quite the contrary. He wished nothing whatever of the sort, because he was already equipped with troubles.

None of this showed in his manner or on his person. Doc Savage was a very large young man who was, fortunately, developed in a symmetrical fashion which made him seem not so startlingly like a giant. He had deeply bronzed skin, hair a little darker shade of bronze, and flake gold eyes which were so unusual that people were always staring at them, and getting funny hypnotized feelings. Although he made genuine efforts to seem a commonplace individual, strangers always ogled him, and sensed that Savage was a physical marvel, a mental wizard, and very important. Which he frequently doubted he was.

The lovely young woman came directly to his table, seated herself, and informed him that he was an unsanitary rodent.

"You're a dirty rat," she said.

Doc Savage said nothing, in quite a startled way.

Annie Flinders added, "Having your Sergeant throw me in jail and your Colonel bulldoze me was bad enough."

This statement led Doc Savage to reflect that he might know who she was.

"But you needn't," Annie continued angrily, "have sent a thug to scare the skirts off me!"

"I beg pardon," Doc remarked politely.

"I should think you would!"

"I mean—I don't believe I know your name," Doc explained carefully.

"Annie Flinders."

"I see," Doc said, and he did. For he had recalled that Colonel Madden of Army Intelligence had advised him that a mysterious young woman had been caught asking suspicious questions, and had been instantly incarcerated pending investigation. Annie Flinders was the name this female had given.

Annie was surveying him with the expression she probably reserved for snakes.

"I should think you'd be ashamed," she said.

"I? Of what?"

"A man with your gallant, romantic reputation, behaving the way you have!" explained Annie bitterly. "You're a fraud, that's what. You're a rat."

"Thank you," Doc Savage said pleasantly.

"I'm not complimenting you, so why thank me?" demanded Annie.

"The speaking of truth should always be complimented," said Doc.

Annie frowned. "Who's complimenting who, anyway?"

"I don't know. Do you?"

Annie examined him wrathfully.

"Listen, wise-guy, you're trying to dance out of this with dizzy words," she said. "Well, you won't get away with it. You're going to listen to what I think of you. I think what you did to me was dirty. You didn't need to"—she indicated her temple where the young thug had jammed his gun muzzle—"have a loaded gun presented to my head! Nor have me hit on the jaw." She exhibited the bruise on her chin. "Nor have me choked half to death with a garrote cord." She displayed the grim mark on her neck.

Doc Savage, examining the charms of the chin and neck she had indicated, was momentarily stricken into forgetfulness. Then he jumped violently.

"I didn't have any of those things done to you!" he exploded.

DISBELIEVING, Annie eyed him for a moment, then stated, "Besides a rat, now you're a liar."

By lifting a finger at a hovering waiter, and asking for the check, Doc Savage obtained some time in which he assembled his thoughts, not too successfully. The young lady had been gun-scared, choked, then biffed, and this was not in the program.

"You," Doc said when the waiter went away with his ten-dollar bill, "were found on investigation to be a foolish but presumably harmless young woman with a wealthy Uncle Jessup. It was then decided to release you upon your promise to forgive and forget, and your Uncle Jessup was further persuaded to fire you and order you home in the hope that you would have gumption enough to obey."

"I wondered who got Uncle Jessup to fire me!" Annie said ominously. "That's another black mark after your name."

"There," Doc said, "is where I stopped."

"Oh, no you didn't!"

"But I did!"

"What," asked Annie grimly, "about the hard-as-nails young pug-ugly with the gun, fist and

throat-string?"

Doc Savage plunged into serious thought, endeavoring however to keep the full scope of his seriousness from showing in his expression.

"I wonder if that could have been something Colonel Madden could have tossed in on his own hook," he remarked presently.

"You're not kidding me for a minute," Annie said.

"I think I'd better make a telephone call."

Colonel Madden, when his ear was eventually obtained over the repaired telephone system of the city of Manila, spoke with positive certainty. The pug-ugly was not his.

Annie wasn't quite convinced.

"You probably had it fixed with the Colonel to whitewash you with innocence," she said.

Doc said thoughtfully, "The Colonel wants to arrest you again and throw you in jail where you will be safe and out of our way."

"You can't scare me, you rat!" Annie eyed him with alarm. "You mean I've *really* been threatened? Oh, great grief!"

"Where," Doc asked, "did this thug do his impressing of you?"

"Here at the hotel. My room."

Doc seized her arm and started for the elevator, then thought of another thing, and stopped to ask, "When did it happen?"

"Just a few minutes ago," Annie explained.

"First, we'll look around and see if you notice the fellow," Doc said. "He may have lingered in the neighborhood, but it's doubtful."

WHILE they were visiting the public rooms of the hotel, Doc Savage decided that he liked the way Annie walked, but didn't care for her calmness. She wasn't entirely calm by a long shot, but neither was she as terrified as he knew she was justified in being. He was, as a matter of fact, surprised that she was still breathing. He told her so. "I'm surprised that you're still alive," he said.

Annie sniffed. "I half-way think you're still trying to scare me," she said.

"Do you see any sign of the pug?"

"No. You must have told him not to hang around."

"He knew that without being told," Doc said grimly. "Let's have a look at the exact spot where he accosted you."

They went upstairs, and Annie experienced a shiver when she looked at the places where the hard young man had stood. She pointed out the different places, and said, "Here is where he choked me on the

floor.” The spot where she had been throttled was significant to Annie, but Doc Savage didn't seem interested.

“You say he had a key?” he asked.

“Yes.”

Doc examined the door lock, and remarked, “Probably nothing in that. The lock has numbers on it, and a good locksmith can make a key to fit it from the numbers if he has them. It's a system the hotels sometimes use so they won't have too much trouble when guests carry off keys.”

“There isn't a clue, really,” Annie said.

Doc was contemplating marks on the rug, noticing that there was one fairly clear masculine footprint. It might belong to a bellhop, however.

“I'm surprised,” added Annie, “that you believe there really was a pug.”

“Oh, our reports on you indicated that veracity was one of your rather scattered good qualities,” Doc told her. “So I believe you, temporarily.”

“They're not as scattered as you think.” Annie was a trifle injured. “Why do you think it happened?”

Doc noted that the baggage in the room, while expensive, was in good taste and not too bountiful. It had been his experience that personable young women usually traveled with five times as much baggage as they needed.

“It happened because you stuck your nose in where it didn't belong,” he explained.

“I mean,” Annie explained, “why did the pug toss in his two bits worth? I had already been jailed and bamboozled.”

“Evidently he, or his boss, had a low opinion of our bamboozling ability.”

A MAID appeared in the hall with a broom. Doc went out and spoke with her a while, learning that she had observed a young man in the hall about fifteen minutes ago. The fellow answered the description of Annie's pug. The maid thought she would know him if she saw him again, but she hadn't seen him before.

“Annie,” Doc said, “I think you'd better take their advice.”

“You mean leave?”

“Yes. Sail on that ship. What was its name?”

“The *Empress Margaret*.”

“That is a nice ship, a liner. You will be comfortable aboard.”

Annie examined him with marked suspicion. “You are giving me the same advice that Jack the Ripper gave me. That's funny.”

“Not funny. Sensible.” Doc moved to the door. “You had better think it over.”

“I'll think it over,” Annie promised. “Say, where are you going?”

"I'm leaving you," Doc explained. "Things to do."

Annie got in his way. "Hold on here, bub. I want to know what is happening." She put a hand on his arm and urged, "Come on, tell me. After all, I've been the whipping post for enough projects around here that I think I've earned some information."

Doc shook his head. "Sorry."

"Why not?"

"Sorry, nothing doing."

Annie did some things with her fingers on his arm and turned loose her special man-cracking smile. "Oh, come on, please," she urged.

Doc straightened out his toes with some difficulty, counted his pulse by fives for a moment, and shook his head firmly.

"Too secret. Too hush-hush," he said. "Well, goodbye now."

"You're still a rat," Annie said.

DOWNSTAIRS in the lobby, Doc Savage approached a young man in a sailor suit. The young man was long and amiable looking and gave the appearance of being about ten years younger than he was and a great deal more innocent.

"Seen anything, Carter?" Doc asked.

Carter rolled a roguish eye. "I saw you pass through here with the gorgeous sunset, the flowers that bloom in the spring, on your arm."

"That was Miss Annie Flinders."

"She should change that name," Carter said emphatically. "It doesn't rhyme."

"I want you to keep an eye on Miss Flinders," Doc said.

"That will not be too hard to do."

"And protect her."

"Excellent!" said Carter enthusiastically.

"From a distance," Doc added.

Carter winced.

"Oh, hell now, does there have to be a catch in it?" he asked. "I do my best protecting at short range. In fact, I'm known as Short-range Carter, the nonpareil, the fellow who—"

"Keep an open eye and mind," Doc advised. "Or you may be Carter, the fellow they ordered a tombstone for."

Carter sobered. Doc Savage described the young man to whom Annie had referred as the thug, and

advised Carter to keep a lookout for that one particularly.

“Do I glom on to him if I see him?” Carter asked.

“If he doesn't glom you first, you do,” Doc said, nodding.

Chapter III

DOC SAVAGE visited Colonel Madden. The latter sat in his office with his feet on his desk, drinking a malted milk to wash down a dose of milk of magnesia. He explained, “This thing is ruining my digestion.”

“I think,” Doc told him, “that we have just gotten a whiff of tiger.”

Colonel Madden yanked his feet off the desk violently and yelled, “The hell you say! What's happened?”

Doc outlined Annie's experience with the grim young man who had put a gun to her ear, banged her jaw and given her a sample of garroting. By that time the Colonel's jaw was thrust out like an angry bulldozer and he growled, “Where was that mutt of a sailor, Carter, when this was going on?”

“Mothering me, as his orders said he was to do,” Doc explained.

“Well, he should have had his eyes open!”

Doc nodded. “That goes for us, too.”

“What,” asked the Colonel sourly, “do you suppose that bird jumped the girl for?”

Doc had been thinking about this. He wasn't sure he could put a finger on the reason. There were several possibilities. “May not have wanted her around where she would get hurt,” he ventured.

Colonel Madden gave him a bitter look. “You're kidding.”

“I guess so.”

“If we're up against what we think we are, they wouldn't give a damn who got hurt, or how badly. They wouldn't, specifically, give a damn if ten million people got hurt. This they have demonstrated, I might add.”

“Provided,” Doc reminded, “we're up against what we suspect we are.”

Colonel Madden nodded. “You can surely think of better reasons why the girl was threatened.”

Doc said he could. “But I wish I knew for sure whether they are better,” he added. “The girl may not be as innocent as she has panned out so far. I wish I knew.”

“What are some of the other reasons for her being molested?”

“They might have felt that if she resumed following me around, it would cause me to become shadow-minded, with the result that I might accidentally collar one of their own men who was trailing me.”

The Colonel jumped violently. “Godamighty! Are they following you?”

“I haven't noticed anyone, so they are smooth about it, if they are.”

Blowing out his breath heavily, the Colonel said, "You gave me a scare."

"I got one myself, when she told me about the pug." Doc leaned back in his chair, hands resting on the chair arm-rests, his eyes half closed. He was not, however, relaxing. He was experiencing an attack of the nastiest kind of premonition, of danger.

"I wish," Doc added gloomily, "that we could find some trace of Johnny Littlejohn."

COLONEL MADDEN nodded, but was silent; Doc Savage was also silent; they were both thinking about Johnny Littlejohn, and worrying.

William Harper Littlejohn, the archaeologist and geologist, was a very tall and bony young man, addicted to the use of the most startling big words, who was one of Doc Savage's closest friends. Johnny and Doc had frequently worked together, although on a basis of friendship rather than a business arrangement.

Some time previously, about six months ago, Johnny Littlejohn had undertaken something which Doc Savage didn't quite understand, because he didn't have the details. He thought Johnny had been rather secretive about it, which wasn't like Johnny.

Johnny's venture had surely been important, because it had entailed his entering Japan. The Japanese homeland territory, which was being pestered by B29's, was about as healthy for an American as a hornet's nest. How the devil Johnny had gotten into Japan, and how he had kept from being discovered and shot forthwith, Doc couldn't imagine. Disguise, probably. Johnny was an infinitely capable fellow, and being one of the best archaeologists extant, he knew a lot about races and customs and languages. That would help. Anyway, Johnny had made it into Japan and out and to the Philippines—they thought.

Two weeks ago, here in Manila, Colonel Madden had received a telephone call. From Johnny Littlejohn. Not a long-distance call. A local one. Johnny was in Manila. Johnny wanted Doc Savage in Manila, and in a hurry. Would Colonel Madden see that Doc got this summons at once? There was absolutely no doubt about it being Johnny's voice.

Doc Savage had come to the Philippines without asking questions. He knew Johnny, and if Johnny said it was important, it was.

Johnny Littlejohn thereupon disappeared.

The arrangement made verbally over the telephone with Colonel Madden was that Johnny was to meet Doc at the Hotel Northern at a certain day and hour. He hadn't kept the date. He hadn't appeared later.

When his alarm became enough to move him to do so, Colonel Madden told Doc Savage what the Colonel and the United States Army Intelligence suspected—only suspected, mind—had caused Johnny Littlejohn to take the appreciable risk of entering Japan.

The Colonel further imparted something Doc hadn't known—that the U.S. Army had cooperated to the extent of taking Johnny into Japan by bomber and parachute. Hush-hush, of course.

Sitting there listening to Colonel Madden tell, with plain Anglo-Saxon words, what Johnny thought he had discovered, had been shocking to Doc. Not surprising entirely. He had toyed with the suspicion himself in the past, when allowing his thoughts to get a bit wild and hair-raising. But to hear the Colonel put it in plain American words—that was terrifying.

After the Colonel stated the facts, they didn't discuss it much. In fact they did not discuss it afterward at

all, not directly. They moved about the subject warily, as if it was something that was taboo, unmentionable, forbidden, poisonous.

Doc Savage had decided why they were so reticent about it. The reason was simple.

They were afraid to discuss it, for fear it might be true.

Doc Savage jerked his thoughts back to the present. He stood up.

"I just wanted to be sure you didn't send the pug to scare the girl," he said.

"Well, he was not my man," the Colonel said.

"I'll be leaving, then."

Colonel Madden shuddered. "I wish that silly girl were back in God's country, or at least in California. You say Carter's taking care of her? Did you warn him to be careful?"

Doc repeated what he had told Carter, omitted Carter's rather sassy reception of the advice, and added, "I'm going to take over the job of guarding her myself."

The Colonel scowled at him. "If you're neglecting this other thing to chase a skirt, I may personally cut your throat."

Doc looked at the Colonel unpleasantly, for the Colonel sounded very much as if he meant what he had said.

"I'll run this to suit myself," Doc advised.

Still wearing the scowl, the Colonel stated, "You had better be the hotshot they say you are!"

"Good afternoon!" Doc put on his hat.

"Goodbye," said the Colonel darkly.

Doc Savage returned to the Hotel Northern with a dissatisfied feeling about the interview. Being a civilian, the Army's iron-fisted methods often rather jolted him. He was slightly sensitive about the Army, probably, because they'd made him go through the war without putting on a uniform. He had been labelled as essential at what he was doing, which he was. But the trouble with wars was that they gave you all kinds of complexes. A man wasn't satisfied out of the Army; when he got in the Army, he frequently wasn't pleased either. It was disconcerting.

ANNIE FLINDERS answered her telephone with marked caution when he called her room. She said, "Mrs. Josephus Williams speaking."

"If your husband isn't around, how about dining with me?" Doc suggested, deciding that she also had something in her mouth to change her voice.

"I'm afraid to go out," Annie said. "And I don't like you anyway."

Doc explained that he had just checked with certain powers, and that they, like himself, were by no manner or means responsible for the pug-ugly. "I want to ask you questions," he added.

“All right,” Annie said eagerly, “but if anything happens to me, you’ll be responsible.”

“Okay.”

“Be down in fifteen minutes.”

Doc hung up and approached Carter, who was dapper and languid in his sailor suit. “Why aren’t you upstairs, posted outside the young lady’s door like the watchdog you’re supposed to be,” Doc demanded.

Carter grinned. “The management doesn’t allow sailors to stand aimlessly in the halls of this hostelry.”

“Who told you that?”

“The assistant manager who kicked me out of the hall.”

“You probably had an amorous look on your face,” Doc suggested.

“I probably had. Say, how would it be if I really did this job up brown by striking up an acquaintance with the babe and taking her out to dinner.”

“No good.”

“You’ve already done it, eh?” Carter frowned. “That’s fine. If shooting starts, don’t expect any protection from me.”

Doc made a mental note to ask Colonel Madden to assign another man to this watchdog job. He didn’t believe Carter was actually taking it seriously.

“You stick around,” Doc ordered sharply. “Keep us in sight and be ready to lend a hand.”

Carter shrugged. “Okay. But I’ll have to put on a disguise of some kind.”

“Don’t be silly!”

“Silly nothing—half the guests in this hotel are beginning to give me sidelong looks. I’ve been standing around here wearing this face too long.”

“You sound like a detective book!”

“I’m going to change my looks anyway,” Carter said. He sauntered off.

Doc bought a newspaper, found a comfortable chair and looked over the lobby for suspicious persons while pretending to read. I’m getting jumpy, he thought.

Presently Annie came toward him, a silver dream in the thing she wore. She didn’t look like a young lady who had lately spent twenty-four hours in jail. Except that she didn’t speak to him very lovingly.

“Why’d you want to buy me dinner?” she demanded.

“You’re lovely as two bushels of orchids,” Doc assured her.

“Come on, bulletproof, give me the truth,” Annie requested.

“I’m fascinated by you.”

"I'll try to cure that," Annie said.

HE took her to the Avion, which had good food and plenty of M.P. and S.P. around in case trouble should rear its ugly head. The Avion hadn't had an orchestra the last time he was there, which was yesterday, but tonight it had one. Presently he had to confess, "I can't dance."

"For Heaven's sake," Annie said.

Doc made some suggestions about the food. Annie was contrary, and didn't order anything he had suggested.

She asked, "Why were you visiting prisoner-of-war camps?"

He examined the orchestra and asked, "When was that?"

"You were pretty slinky about it, too," she added. "I noticed that you didn't draw attention to yourself, and that you spoke to quite a number of Japs and Nazis. You spoke privately, and to some of them you spoke quite a while."

He held silence.

"It struck me," added Annie, "that you were conducting a very secret investigation. Tell me, what were—and are—you investigating?"

He shook his head.

She persisted, "Why the great interest in prisoners-of-war?"

He shook his head again and remarked, "The fish is a wonderful creature. It has no nose to stick in other people's business."

Annie leered at him. "Come on. I'll teach you to dance."

He said no, thanks, and put down his napkin. His eye lingered on a table near the door, and passed on. He said, "Excuse me a moment." He stood up.

He had just become positive that they had been followed to the Avion. He had noticed a man seat himself behind a phony palm tree, at a table. If the man had not sneaked in there, his suspicions might not have crystallized.

"Stay right here," he said. "I've got to see a man about a palm tree."

By the time he was halfway to the palm tree, though, he wished he had kept his seat, and hadn't been so impulsive. This boilermaker way of doing things was apt to be noisy and undignified. However he kept going. He knew the lad behind the palm must have seen him.

Then the fat man got in his way. They hit with a hard bump. The fat man said, "Oops!"

Doc eyed the fat man with suspicion, finding the man to be enormous and rounded, almost as if he was made of baseballs, footballs, a sack of wool and a round Dutch cheese.

Over the rounded hillocks of the fat man, Doc saw the palm tree skulker arise and make for the door.

For no really sound reason, Doc concluded the fat man had bumped into him deliberately.

He put his face near the fat man's and said, "Brother, you're making an error. This way, you won't last!"

The fat man had small, creamed, new potatoes for eyes. He said, "Beg pardon?"

"Sit down," Doc said. "And don't try to leave here!"

He passed around the mountain.

"I don't get it!" the fat man said.

Doc continued, rapidly. He passed into a hallway, which was rather dark; from this corridor branched another, somewhat more gloomy, down which he saw the palm tree man traveling on tiptoes. Doc ran lightly and collared the fellow.

Jamming a knuckle in the man's back to represent a gun's nose, Doc said, "Get your hands up and behave!"

"Whoosh!" the palm tree man gasped. "What the hell!"

"Yes, you tell me," Doc invited grimly.

"Creepers! Don't you know me?"

"Eh?"

"Boy, I'm good," the palm tree man said. "I'm better than I thought."

"Eh?"

"I'm Carter," the palm tree man explained. "Boy, you didn't think I was going to fool around when I put on a disguise, did you?"

Chapter IV

DOC SAVAGE tasted a number of emotions, all of them savoring of damned fool. He released the palm tree man, who began to laugh. "Boy, I sucked you in, didn't I?"

"You should have gotten out in the light where I could get a good look at you," Doc said unpleasantly.

"I'm not that confident. Still, I must be pretty good to have fooled you."

Doc thought Carter was. He was awfully good. He had even made his voice guttural.

He ordered, "Continue to keep your eyes open."

"How about joining you and the dish?"

"No."

"I don't see why not."

"I don't care what you see," Doc informed him. "Did you notice a fat man who got in my way a minute ago?"

“I noticed you stumble over a diner. What makes you think he got in your way? From the wild look in your eye as you came across the dining room, I thought you were going to start jumping over tables.”

“Never mind,” Doc said bitterly.

He went back to the dining room. The extent of the relief he felt at seeing Annie safe gave him quite a surprise.

In a moment, a dirigible was barring his path. “Mister,” said the fat man, “I didn't like the way you spoke to me a moment ago.”

“That's nice,” Doc said, scowling. “What do you generally get for bumping into people?”

“You ran over me,” the fat man said.

“Okay. What are you going to do about it?” Doc asked, aware that his manners were becoming unusually bad.

“Invite you to have a drink,” the fat man said. “What do you think of that?”

Doc was surprised. “No, thanks. But I'm sorry I collided with you. I was upset.”

The fat man nodded in Annie's direction. “I understand. I can see she's an upsetter.”

“Do you know Annie?”

“Ah, no,” said the mountain. “But I'd love to meet her.”

“I'm not that mad at you,” Doc told him, and went on.

Annie waved her cigarette peevishly when Doc was seating himself. “You behave like a crazy man.”

“It was that fellow behind the palm tree,” Doc explained.

“What about him?”

He told Annie what about him. He explained that Carter was looking out for her welfare. He realized he was bragging, trying to impress Annie with what good care he was taking of her.

“Oh, he was the loitering sailor!” Annie said, wide-eyed.

“What sailor?”

“The one I saw skulking in the hall outside my room,” Annie explained. “I called the hotel management, and they removed him.”

Doc recalled that Carter had mentioned something about the assistant manager of the hotel throwing him out, and admitted, “That must have been Carter.”

“Why are you so jumpy?” Annie asked.

“Because I think I've got reasons to be.”

“Am I in danger?”

“Let's eat,” Doc said, on the theory that while food was going in, questions wouldn't be coming out.

THE floor show, which the place hadn't had yesterday either, was noisy and rather bad. Everyone seemed to enjoy it like everything, and afterward the lights were kept low and the orchestra went into wiggly music, and Doc was surprised to hear a voice addressing Annie. "Wouldst thou dance this one with me, O angel?" the voice asked.

Doc scowled at the young man who had hidden behind the palm.

"Scram," Doc said.

Obviously because she thought it would irritate Doc, Annie sprang into the young man's arms, and they twirled away.

It had all happened very suddenly, and the light wasn't any too good anyway. Doc was somewhat confused. However the confusion departed him suddenly, blown out through his eyeballs, almost literally, by the horrible discovery that the palm tree man *was not Carter!*

The guy had said he was Carter, but he wasn't Carter. He had got away with being Carter because he had kept out of places where there was enough light to read a newspaper. Doc understood perfectly how he had made the mistake. He had made it because he had been pretty dumb, hence easily outsmarted.

No wonder the fellow had dashed from behind the palm tree when he saw Doc start for him. He'd thought the jig was up.

They must think I'm a pushover, Doc thought.

He pretended great nonchalance and surveyed the situation. The fat man was moving toward the door, and there was another man with him, a tall lean young man with shell-rimmed glasses—one hardly ever saw shell-rimmed spectacles on men any more, possibly because so many Japs wore them that the fashion had become unpopular. The young man had an erudite air, an air which often meant the owner was a sap. At any rate, the blimp and his studious-looking stooge were departing.

The situation of Annie was more alarming. The young man was engaged in dancing the breath out of her, not an easy task, and was skillfully maneuvering for a veranda on which there was a potted plant jungle that might hold anything.

Doc gauged Annie's stamina, and decided it would be another couple of minutes before the phony had her out of breath. Doc rose, headed for the place marked Men, turned right, and astonished a waiter by jumping through a window. He landed on a lawn, and moved fast, his objective the veranda.

A man stepped into view on the lawn. He whistled.

Doc took to a bush wildly, thinking he was discovered, although it soon proved he wasn't.

The Avion was not like New York dinner spots, because there was an ample lawn, well-furred with shrubbery, surrounding it. A sweeping driveway passed the entrance, and the car had been parked on this drive with other cars.

The car, a yellow touring model as gay looking as a Broadway blonde, lurched over the low curbing and approached the veranda. The driver put his head out.

"Well, get started," he said.

“Any time now,” said the man who had whistled.

They both begin watching the veranda.

It was just possible, Doc reflected, that he had made a mistake coming outdoors. He hadn't expected this formidable a force outside—his darker suspicions indicated there were two or more men concealed on the veranda itself.

He decided to mark the car for future handling, so he quit the shelter of his bush with infinite care, crossed silently to the shadows behind the gaudy touring car, and crouched there. He dropped a hand inside his coat, and brought out a flat plastic case somewhat larger, but not much larger, than a five-cigar capacity cigar case.

There was a switch on the case. Desperately unable to remember whether the switch would make a noise, he spent a grim five seconds with thumb poised. But there was no noise. He wished, next, that he was sure the gadget was working. Science, particularly the science of electricity, was wonderful. But only when it worked.

He placed the case against the car. It stuck there when he took his hand away. There was a good permanent magnet in it, but that was about the only simple thing inside the case.

Colonel Madden would be surprised to know what use was being made of the thing. The case was one of Colonel Madden's ideas.

“Psssst!” said one of the men.

A head appeared from the thicket of potted plants on the veranda. “What is it?”

“How much longer?”

The question remained unanswered; the reply was an explicit statement of where the quizzer could go.

Doc waited and watched. He became nervous. It seemed to him that too much time had passed. He hoped Annie hadn't become suspicious, thus forcing them to knock her brains out there on the dance floor.

Splendor flashed among the potted vegetation. Annie. Doc heaved a sigh and set himself to cope with what seemed to be a very dark immediate future.

HE should have, he reflected later, expected the worst from the way the thing got started. Annie didn't do her part. Annie didn't stay dumb, and worse, didn't play dumb.

Without warning, she picked up a potted plant and slammed her escort over the head.

She should have screamed for help then, but she didn't. She whirled to go back into the Avion—her escort was still in the act of falling senseless—and she saw one of the men whom Doc had suspected was planted on the balcony.

Annie still didn't scream, although it wouldn't have been a bad idea. She endeavored to handle things

herself, by wheeling, giving an unladylike leap to the railing, and preparing to spring down on the lawn.

Doc now moved. He decided to take the nearest man, and made for him.

He ran into something. He knew, vaguely, what it was, but he didn't fully get this until some time later. There was a crashing report on—and in—his head, a kind of crunching crash which made him think his skull must be breaking. It was really something breaking. A flower pot, which had been heaved on his head from the balcony.

He caved down. He thought he ran for a while on his knees, and never was sure about that. He had decided to neglect Annie, being in no condition to do her good. He believed he might get into the bushes and away. A gun said *bang! bang! bang!* with ugly effect. He made the bushes.

A man jumped out of the shrubs on the balcony and gave Annie a shove. She fell off the railing. A man was below to receive her in his arms, and another man handy to rap her over the head.

They heaved her in the gay touring car.

A man on the balcony spoke in distress.

“She knocked Eli cold,” he said.

“Toss him down to us,” he was directed.

They fired some shots into the Avion to discourage attention, then hauled Eli to the rail, dropped him over, followed themselves, and became busy climbing into the car.

Each one, when he was in the car, settled down to making an earnest business of pumping bullets into the bush behind which Doc Savage had disappeared, and into any other bushes to which he might have moved. The neighborhood sounded like another Iwo Jima.

During a lull, Doc began bellowing.

“Annie!” he yelled. “Don't tell them anything! Don't tell them our plans!”

He hoped that would keep Annie alive. Being kept alive for questioning, even the kind of questioning she was likely to get, was better than being dead.

Bullets flew thickly for a while. Then someone suggested that they get out and examine Doc's corpse. This suggestion was vetoed in favor of immediate departure.

The car left in haste.

Doc Savage crawled from behind the luxuriously thick-bottomed palm tree which had sheltered him. He saw no advantage in remaining in the vicinity, so he didn't.

Chapter V

THE Hotel Northern appeared peaceful when Doc arrived. However, now that the fireworks had started, he felt the enemy could be almost anywhere, and so he went in via a window. The hallways were still, except that there was a noisy party in one of the rooms, and he had just become quite positive that nothing was wrong here when he discovered the lock had been broken out of the door to his room.

The lock-smashing was crude. Someone apparently had tossed himself against the door until the lock gave way. Doc stood very still and listened.

Presently he was sure that it was hard, deep breathing he could hear in the room. Not Annie, either. Not breathing like that.

The sensible thing to do was call a houseful of policemen. He was, however, angry enough to be reckless.

He spoke loudly, so that anyone who was in the room could hear.

“The hotel is full of policemen,” he said. “Now you can back out of there with your hands up, or we can start tossing in tear gas and bullets. Take your choice.”

“For God's sake!” said Carter's voice, nearly hysterical with relief. “It's about time you got here.”

Doc did not go in immediately. He waited. He finally said, “Come on out, Carter!”

“Hell!” Carter said. He was having difficulties, the sounds indicated. But he appeared in the door. He was a wreck.

“My arm's broken!” he croaked. Then, when he observed that Doc was more interested in what might possibly be in the room than in his problems, he swore violently, said, “Hell, there's no dragon in here.”

“Lie down on the bed,” Doc told him, “and let me work on that arm.”

Carter scowled at him. “Get a doctor.”

“I'm a doctor.”

“Oh, that's right,” Carter said. “I must be beginning to feel you are around for ornamental purposes only.” He stretched out on the bed, showing his teeth with pain, and added, “If you hurt me, I'm going to get up and kick your head off.”

“What happened to you?” Doc asked.

“I got ketched,” said Carter bitterly.

“When?”

“While I was putting on that disguise I told you about. I was in my car, parked about two blocks from here. I had some makeup stuff, and had just done what I thought was a pretty good job altering my looks—”

“Not,” Doc said, “as good a job as I thought—for a while—that you'd done.”

“Eh?”

“Why did they turn you loose?”

“They didn't. I fought my way free, against overwhelming odds, I might add. You know what they were going to do? Give me a little accident. They planned to hold me on the pavement and run over my skull a few times with an automobile. Man, when I got away, did I run!”

“They follow you?”

“No farther than I could help. I ran up and down half the alleys in town.”

“Why,” Doc asked, “didn't you call the police?”

Carter scowled at him. “This isn't a police matter, and you know it isn't.”

Doc seized a pillow and suddenly jammed it down over Carter's face. He sat on the pillow to hold it in place, forced one of Carter's arms down with one knee, used both hands to work on Carter's other arm; the man made mewling sounds under the muffling pillow. Then he released Carter.

“It was only out of joint,” he explained.

Carter, suddenly wet with cold sweat, began cursing him, swearing for perhaps two minutes without pausing, repeating himself only infrequently. Then he apologized.

“It had to hurt,” Doc told him. “So there was no point in warning you.”

“You're telling me!” Carter said bitterly. He moved the arm slightly and made a face.

“What did you find out from them?” Doc asked.

“Nothing.”

“How many were there?”

“I saw four.”

Doc described some of the group who had staged the affair at the Avion. “Familiar?”

“Two of them were in the gang that got me,” Carter decided.

DOC added a description, as an afterthought, of the fat man and his studious-looking companion, then eyed Carter expectantly. But Carter shook his head. “They weren't included in the ones I saw.”

Doc pondered. “We had better get hold of Colonel Madden.”

“What do you think I came up here for?” Carter demanded, nodding at the telephone. “I tried to get hold of him on the phone. No dice.”

“Where is he?”

“I gather that his physician sent him home, and gave positive orders that he was not to be disturbed for anything. Which means this thing finally got to him. Incipient nervous breakdown.”

Doc Savage was not surprised. There had been plenty of signs that the thing was getting Colonel Madden on the ragged edge.

“How long will Madden be out of the picture?”

“Forty-eight hours anyway, the way I get it,” Carter said gloomily. “That's a tough break for us, too.”

“Who is going to take his place?”

“I’m supposed to,” Carter said. He rubbed the back of a hand across his mouth slowly. “And that’s what I meant by it being a tough break. I’m not a very big boy tonight.”

Doc glanced at Carter approvingly. He decided Carter wasn’t as frothy as he had seemed at times; either that, or the recent bad scare had blown the bubbles off Carter.

“You get hurt anywhere other than the arm?” Doc asked.

“Not that I’ve noticed yet.”

“Then you can still function?”

“In my one-cylinder fashion.”

Doc explained about the gadget he had attached to the loudly colored automobile. “That thing was a radio transmitter. It puts out an intermittent dash on a very short wave, a dash every second or so, something like one of those electric fences the farmers use. All we need now is a radio receiver and a directional loop, and some good luck.”

He dug into a small metal case about the size of a suitcase and came up with a portable radio—a special job, not a broadcast receiver—and a directional loop.

Carter was puzzled. “What,” he demanded, “is the plaything for? You say you attached something to an automobile. What automobile and why?” He frowned and demanded, “And while we’re covering everything, what happened to the lovely Annie?”

“Annie and I,” Doc explained, “parted company at the Avion restaurant.” While he was rigging the radio direction finder, he elaborated the details of the parting.

Carter gave him a stupefied stare.

“It was my fault they got her,” he muttered, a near-illness in his voice.

“Take it easy. You weren’t even there, so it wasn’t your fault,” Doc said. He would have liked to add that he had a better opinion of Carter than he’d had at any time previously, but he couldn’t think of a way of phrasing it without letting Carter know he hadn’t been considered very highly a bit earlier. Carter’s concern was genuine, as was his feeling of guilt.

Carter hauled himself off the bed and pointed at the radio. “Does that gimmick work? What are we waiting on?”

Doc put on a headset and adjusted the frequency and volume on the receiver. He moved the loop carefully, finding the signal null.

“It’s working,” he said.

He placed the apparatus on a table, pulled up a chair and sat down. “There’s not much, really, that can be done for your arm,” he explained. “It’s going to hurt you for a few days.”

Carter was dumfounded. “Hell, are you going to just sit here?”

Doc explained about radio direction-finders. You couldn’t tell, first pop-out-of-the-box, whether the transmitting station you had spotted was in front of the loop or behind it, but if the receiver was moved an

effective distance and a second bearing taken, the point where the two bearing lines crossed would be the location of the sending station. "But we're up against the fact that the transmitter is attached to an automobile which may be moving, and that could get us snarled up. So I'm going to wait a few minutes and take a second shot. If the bearing then is different, the car is moving."

Carter nodded gloomily. "I wish you wouldn't sound so calm about it. You worry me."

"Have you a street map of the city?"

"Sure."

"Spread it out. We'll mark the first bearing on it."

They did this. Then Doc took another bearing with the loop. They drew this line on the city map, and Carter pointed excitedly. "It's different. Their car is still moving. What have we gotta do, sit until they stop?"

Doc Savage examined the bearing lines thoughtfully.

"I think," he said, "that we can now start boiling our kettle."

CARTER kept a hand pressed to his injured arm, and pain and confusion gave his face a loose-lipped expression of idiocy. He watched Doc pick up the telephone and ask for a number.

"What," he demanded, "do you think you're doing?"

"Kindling a fire. To boil a kettle, a fire is necessary."

"You mean there's something we can do?"

"We can close in on them."

Carter jumped violently. "Oh, my God! You can't use dynamite to repair a watch! This thing is so terrific that even the Army and Navy hasn't dared let its bright boys in the Intelligence know what is really going on. And grabbing the minnows isn't going to get all the fish out of the puddle. It may drive the main devil under cover, where we'll never find him."

Doc addressed the telephone mouthpiece. "Monk?" he asked.

The receiver squawked at him. It sounded impatient.

Doc said, "Get your direction finder and get me a bearing on a transmitter on number two frequency. I'll hold the wire. Is Ham there? . . . Fine. Put him on and I'll talk to him while you're getting the radio fixed."

Carter was registering astonishment. "Who the devil are you talking to?"

"Friends of mine."

"This thing was supposed to be secret as hell! You weren't supposed to tell anybody anything! You're going to get into trouble."

Doc Savage gestured at him impatiently.

"Be still," he said. He addressed the telephone. "Ham? . . . All right, listen. They took their first bite at our bait tonight. I'm going to tell you what happened, and you can tell Monk. My activity finally got them

stirred up. I don't know what it was, whether it was visiting the prison camps and asking the questions I asked, or whether it was the interest I showed in that girl, Annie Flinders, or whether it was something else. But tonight they made an open move. They grabbed Carter, the agent Colonel Madden assigned, and ran a double for him in on me—clever job that was, too—at a restaurant called the Avion. I'm not sure whether they planned to grab the girl, and nothing else, or grab the girl and use her as a bait to draw me into a trap. At any rate, they got the girl, took a few shots at me, and left. But I planted a radio gadget on their car. Monk's getting a bearing on it now.”

There was an interruption at the other end of the wire.

Presently Ham Brooks said, “Monk says the radio bearing is one hundred and ninety-five degrees.”

“Good. They're in the neighborhood of the waterfront. You and Monk jump in your car and get right down there. Keep the short-wave outfit in the car turned on and I'll contact you.”

Ham asked a question.

In response, Doc ran off a quick description of the men who had seized Annie.

“There are two other fellows,” Doc added, “who may be in it, or who may not.” He gave a quick word picture of the fat man and his studious-looking companion. “Keep your eye open for those two. And get going. I'll probably join up with you in half an hour.”

He hung up and turned to Carter.

“Feel like coming along?”

“I don't feel like it. But you couldn't keep me away,” Carter said suspiciously.

CARTER was doubly suspicious when Doc turned into an empty lot which had been cleared of bombing rubble, and entered a touring car.

“I didn't know you had this car. You've been holding out in us.”

“Get in,” Doc said. “I haven't been holding out. What gave you the idea I was supposed to tell you fellows every move I made?”

“I thought you were.”

“You thought wrong. I was called here because a friend of mine, Johnny Littlejohn, asked for me. You and Colonel Madden were supposed to be helping me, not the reverse.”

Carter pondered this while Doc got the car moving. The streets through which they passed were dark, for the lighting system had not been fully restored. But there was quite a bit of night life about. Manila, since its liberation from the Japs, had been active the clock around, for some of the reconstruction was proceeding through a full twenty-four hours every day.

“You should have told Colonel Madden you had two friends here with you.”

Doc spoke bluntly. “The trouble with you and Colonel Madden is that you've been making no headway, and are looking around for somebody to blame for it. It's not my fault you are confused.”

Carter scowled. “That's plain talk.”

Doc made no comment.

Presently Carter demanded, "This Monk and Ham you just talked to on the telephone, they're two of your assistants, aren't they?"

"That's right."

"Monk is Lieutenant Colonel Andrew Blodgett Mayfair, the chemist? And Ham is Brigadier General Theodore Marley Brooks, the attorney?"

"That's right."

"What," demanded Carter, "are they doing here?"

"Helping me."

"When did they come?"

"The same day I came."

Carter said, "I don't think they did. We checked the other passengers on your plane that day, and they weren't aboard."

"They were on a different plane," Doc said briefly. Then he glanced sidewise at Carter and said, "You and Madden seem to have spent more time investigating me than attending to business."

Rage darkened Carter's face.

"We weren't taking any chances with something this big!" he snapped.

"Are you," Doc demanded, "coming along to keep a suspicious watch on me, or to give some honest help?"

Carter controlled a mixture of wrath and embarrassment. "If you want to know why I'm here, it's because I think that girl is in danger!" he snapped.

"That's a good enough reason for me," Doc said in a tone that invited friendliness.

Chapter VI

DOC swung the car to the curb in a side street two blocks from the waterfront in the El Puerto section. A short, very wide man approached with a shambling gait. He thrust an astonishingly homely face into the car and complained, "That shyster lawyer pulled a fast one on me."

Doc didn't seem surprised. "Where is Ham now?"

"We got here right on the trail of that loud-looking car you tied the radio on to," the homely man explained. "Ham jumped out and followed the occupants. He told me to wait here and tell you what had happened, and he got away before I could do anything about it."

Carter demanded suspiciously, "Who pulled a fast one?"

“Ham Brooks. He handed me the job of waiting, while he grabbed the action. Say, who are you?”

Doc Savage performed an introduction.

“This is Carter, Colonel Madden's assistant. Carter, this is Monk Mayfair, one of my associates.”

Carter didn't offer to shake hands.

Doc added, “I don't believe Carter fully trusts us, Monk.”

“And why,” asked Monk ominously, “doesn't he trust us?”

“Ask him,” Doc said.

After a brief embarrassed silence, Carter muttered, “I guess you fellows are okay. It's just that this whole damned business is so terrific it's got me not knowing which way to turn.”

Doc got out of the car. “Monk, where is their machine?”

The gay-colored automobile which Monk pointed out was standing in the street which was near the steamship piers, most of which had been repaired of the war damage.

“That the one?”

Doc nodded. “Where did they go?”

“Toward the piers.”

“Did they have a girl with them?”

“I think so. They were carrying a figure wrapped in a blanket.”

“Ham followed them?”

“Yes.”

“How is he going to report back to us?”

“In person. That's the only way he can. He didn't take a radio along, he dashed off in such a hurry.”

Doc was not pleased.

“I do not think we can afford to wait around,” he said.

They withdrew into shadows where they would not be observed, and Doc studied the vicinity. This was the busiest section of the waterfront. Before the war, Manila had been an active port; now the activity had redoubled several times. The large government docks which had been the city's pride, lay across the thoroughfare. Some of these had been reconstructed, but the majority of them were still war casualties.

More than one large ship was lying at the docks, and Doc frowned at the vessels, recalling that Annie had told him she had been warned to take a liner back to San Francisco. The *Empress Margaret* was the name of this vessel. He wondered if this was one of the vessels in the neighborhood, and why would the gang put Annie on the ship by force?

Why was Annie such a center of interest, anyway? Was there something phony about Annie?

Monk jolted into his thoughts with: "Here comes Ham!"

HAM BROOKS said excitedly, "They took the girl aboard a ship."

He was a man of about average height, but with a very thin midsection, wide and lean shoulders, and his face, handsome in a predatory way, was made striking by a large, mobile orator's mouth.

"What ship?" Doc demanded.

"The *Empress Margaret*."

Carter exclaimed, "The hell they did!"

"Who is this chap?" asked Ham, affecting the Harvard accent which he employed on strangers of whom he didn't, at first glance, entirely approve.

"Carter," Doc said.

"Oh, the lad who balled things up tonight," Ham said.

Carter became indignantly silent.

"Ham, how did they get the girl aboard?" Doc wished to know.

"They had it rigged, and rigged slick, too," Ham explained. "You know those rope baskets they swing cargo aboard with? They just tossed her in one of those, on top of some cargo, and she was swung aboard as slick as you please."

"Didn't anyone see them?"

"Sure. But those who saw it were getting paid not to see it."

"That's a pretty serious charge," Doc warned.

"It's the way it happened."

Doc was thoughtful. "In that case, we had better be careful who sees us. No telling who has been bought—oh, oh." He was staring at the loud-colored car. "There's a man getting in their car." Then he added, a moment later, "It's one of the fellows who staged the fireworks at the restaurant."

Suddenly Monk made a grab at Carter, who had started forward. "Where *you* going?"

"To arrest that fellow." Carter jerked at Monk's hand. "Take your hand off me."

"What about it, Doc? Shall I let him go?"

"Hang on to him."

"You fools! He'll get away," Carter said gratingly.

Doc was grim, but determined. "Let him. Better all the small fry get away than lose the big thing we're after." He turned to Ham. "Ham, you trail that fellow. Use the car you and Monk were using."

Ham departed, running silently. They watched the bright-colored car, heard the motor start, and saw it

move away from the curbing. It carried only the one man. It moved away, and a moment later Ham appeared, driving after the machine.

“There's been too much doodling around,” Carter complained bitterly. “Whenever we can put our hands on a bird, I say grab him!”

Doc made no comment. He was listening to a measured cadence of many tramping feet which had come gradually out of the night. The sound got louder.

A column of men appeared, marching four abreast, keeping in the street. As the column passed under a street light, they could distinguish the identifying PW on many of the men.

“Jap war prisoners,” Monk remarked. “They're heading for the *Empress Margaret*. I guess the liner is taking a gob of them to prison camps in the States.”

Doc watched the war prisoners pass on to the dock to which the liner was tied. His expression was narrow-eyed, and not happy.

“Someone is coming,” Doc warned.

It was Ham Brooks, somewhat out of breath.

“That guy was just ditching the car,” he explained. “He drove it in an empty building and left it. He's going aboard the *Margaret*.”

“Let's get on his trail,” Doc said. “He may lead us to what we want.”

THEIR quarry—he was the man who had stepped out on the Avion lawn and whistled to bring the getaway car at the beginning of the excitement at the restaurant—strolled on to the busy dock. The dock was not small nor quiet, and the man attracted little attention in the noise and bustle of getting an ocean liner ready for sailing. Presently he drew near a group of workmen who were loading crude rubber in the form of baled sheets of straw-colored crepe rubber.

Casually, the man stepped forward, took a grip and a handhold on a cargo net, and was lifted and swung aboard the liner.

“That's how they sent the girl aboard,” Ham explained.

Doc retreated.

“Come on, fellows. They're keeping a sharp lookout, undoubtedly, and we're asking for trouble if we stand around making ourselves conspicuous.”

The main gangplank, passenger section, seemed to be the best spot to go aboard. It was busiest. But it was certain to be watched if anything was being watched.

“Carter, have you got your Army credentials?”

“The rats took them when they grabbed me.”

“We'll try mine—”

“If we walk up that gangplank, they'll spot us,” Carter objected.

“—to see about getting us aboard without being seen,” Doc finished.

Doc visited the dock office, consulting with the Army officer in charge, and with the Navy officer and the Merchant Marine man.

As a result, four stretchers were presently borne aboard the *Empress Margaret* with no fuss and feathers. Quite a few stretchers occupied by wounded soldiers had gone aboard anyway. The litters were borne to an unoccupied cabin, the blankets were removed from Doc, Monk, Ham and Carter, and they arose.

“I wouldn't have thought of this,” Carter confessed.

The medical corpsmen who had carried the stretchers took their departure.

Doc consulted his watch.

“We have about four hours before the ship sails,” he remarked. “Considering the size of the vessel, that isn't much time.”

Monk took a cautious look into the corridor. “How are we going to do this?”

“They may not know you and Ham by sight, so you two park yourselves where you can watch who comes and goes. Monk, you take the gangplank. Ham, you get your eye on the cargo loading. They may leave by the same route.”

“If they haven't left already,” Ham said gloomily. “Come on, you missing link,” he added to Monk.

Carter ran a finger around his collar, which seemed to have become uncomfortably tight. “What about us?”

“We'll wander,” Doc said, “and keep our eyes open.”

Carter nodded. He followed Doc out into the corridor, and they headed toward the midship area where the passengers were milling. “For a guy who is reported to get the results you do, your methods seem pretty commonplace to me.”

“If you have any better ideas, I'll gladly use them,” Doc told him.

“This is too risky. If I had my idea—ouch! What's the idea?”

He had been silenced by Doc's hand on his arm, hard enough to hurt.

“That fat man and his friend!” Doc exclaimed. “Quick! Duck for that door—no. No, they've seen us.”

THE fat man, now wearing a full dress suit and a purple ribbon across his chest in the grand style, had observed them. His white shirt bosom looked large enough to be a boat sail as he cruised toward them. He had his hand out.

“Well, well, it's my blind friend from the restaurant. Are you a passenger, too?”

“No, we came down to see that some friends got off before the boat sailed,” Doc told him.

The fat man, Doc reflected, sounded resoundingly hearty without at the same time seeming at all sincerely

glad to see him. That might mean the fellow was acting.

“I’m Basset,” the fat man explained. “Full name’s Van Zandt Basset. I’m Dutch. Oil business in Borneo before the war, and a refugee since. I’m going to America to see what prospects I can find in the oil business.”

“Smith,” Doc said dryly, taking the fat hand and shaking it. He indicated Carter and said, “This is Mr. Stalin.”

Van Zandt Basset shook Carter’s hand. “First name isn’t Joe, I hope. Glad to meet you, Stalin.”

Doc was watching Basset and if the man knew he was being kidded about the names, he gave no sign of it.

Basset turned back to Doc.

“Funny thing happened at the Avion tonight. Or were you there to see it?”

“You mean my bumping into you?” Doc asked innocently.

“Gosh, hadn’t you heard? There was an uproar outside the restaurant, a lot of shooting and yelling and, I heard, a young woman kidnapped.”

Doc was thinking of how the fat man and his companion had risen and left the restaurant a few moments before the excitement began.

“You don’t say!”

“Then you didn’t see it! You missed something. I got in on the tail end of it myself. Jack and I were just leaving—Jack Thomas, the friend who was with me—when the shooting began. Naturally, we’ve seen enough war to know about ducking when bullets fly, so we ducked. But it must have been interesting.”

“Yes, I imagine it was interesting.”

“By the way, how about having that drink with me now?”

“Sorry,” Doc said pleasantly. “Wish I could. But I’ve got to scout around for those friends of mine.”

“If you find them, join me in the bar, eh?”

“Be glad to,” Doc said. “Sorry I bumped into you in the restaurant.”

“Oh, forget it. I have.”

The only convenient route of escape was out on deck, and Doc took it, with Carter at his heels. They walked rapidly and did not stop until they stood at a deserted section of rail.

“I DON’T like the looks of that guy,” Carter said. “He struck me as a phony.”

“For once,” Doc agreed, “you might be right.”

“Whatcha mean—for once?”

“You don’t seem to like anyone.”

Carter snorted.

Doc stared absently at the darkened city, trying to decide whether the fat man should be filed under the heading of menace. The coincidence of his turning up aboard the *Empress Margaret* was startling. He continued to stare and ponder.

Manila at night looked much better than it did by day, for only a fraction of the war damage had been repaired; whole sections of the city, particularly the old area where the Japs had made their final stand, were still a shambles. It was terrible. But the darkness made it look all right. A little weird in places, where the toothy ruins stuck up, but not bad. He got an empty feeling, the way he did when he looked at war ruins, and remembered that he'd been kept out of it by the brass hats.

"I like that Annie," Carter said.

Doc released a long breath. "All right. Let's go on hunting."

They walked the decks, the corridors, the salons. The first-class salon, the second-class salon, the dining rooms, all the lounges. They even looked in at the swimming pool, now empty, and they found nothing interesting.

There was a difference, Doc thought, in the liner. It wasn't changed much from peacetime, but things were different. There were the uniforms. The wounded. And, in the third class section, the prisoners of war. A lot of war prisoners. Nazis as well as Japs.

"Creepy," Carter said. "Kind of creepy. You begin to feel like anything could happen on this tub, sort of. I wish we could find one of those guys."

It was creepy, Doc reflected. Creepy. Strangeness and trouble. There must be, he thought, a thousand people aboard, and probably that meant a thousand different stories of terror and disrupted lives, of hopes lost, of disappointments, dangers. War was an upsetting thing, and the agony of it got into your heart quickly.

Doc moved sidewise one pace, stepped heavily on one of Carter's toes, then when Carter yelped in pain and grabbed at him, he shoved Carter violently and the man went down out of the path of fire and lead that began coming out of a steamer robe being carried past by a squat man who was going past, pretending to be a deck steward.

The short man was nervous and made a mistake, endeavoring to stop in the middle of his attack and shake the robe off his gun to get better action. That gave time for Doc to reach him, diving, and get his hands on the robe. Doc jerked. The squat man jerked also. Doc got robe and gun, and the short man took flight, his feet rasping the deck in frantic haste.

Carter, on hands and knees, suddenly rolled over on one shoulder. His injured arm had given way.

Doc shook the robe, hoping the gun would fall out. It didn't.

Trying to get up, Carter said, "Thanks." He didn't sound particularly excited.

Doc raced after the squat man. The latter, short-legged, was made for sprinting and quick turns. Doc began having trouble making the turns the quarry made. He could hear Carter pounding behind him. He fumbled in the blanket, hoping to obtain the gun; he could feel it, but couldn't get it free. They traveled fast. People stared at them. There was some excitement, but it was behind them, after they had gone, and did them no good. The squat man, Doc reflected, seemed to know exactly where he was going. That was what made him so hard to catch.

Chapter VII

THEY were deep in the ship now. They had gone down many steps, traversed endless passages, doubled and twisted, until Doc was not exactly certain where they were. But in a part of the ship devoted to cargo and stores, probably the bow section. They plunged into a low place malodorous from bilge and ill ventilation. The small man was not more than twenty feet ahead, but he got through a door, slammed it. The bolt on the other side made a loud whacking sound as it was thrown.

Three things happened to Doc in vicious succession.

Number one was in his head. The squat man hadn't slammed doors until he got to this one. That was blasted strange, he suddenly realized, and not good.

Second, the lights went out.

The third was a conglomeration of action, a hard fist in his middle, an arm around his neck, and a squeaky-voiced promise, "I'll tear your head off!"

The fist had driven the air out of Doc's lungs, so he couldn't make any sound that was coherent. He tried to. Also, he sought to avoid his assailant, but failed. In exasperation, he began hammering back with his fists, at the same time trying to organize a speech.

Another fight broke out behind him in the darkness. This one involved Carter; he could hear Carter's wail of pain as his damaged arm suffered.

"By Jove!" said Carter's attacker in astonishment. "This sounds like Carter!"

Doc's assailant yelled, "Who you got, Ham?"

"That bird Carter, I think."

"I'm not surprised. I didn't trust that cookie anyway."

Doc Savage got his breath and made some words. He said, "Monk, I ought to beat your brains out. Let go of me, you idiot!"

Astonishment paralyzed Monk for a moment.

"Doc?"

"Who do you think? Turn me loose."

Monk muttered, "Blazes I thought something was wrong, because I was about to get knocked loose from my wits."

Ham yelled, "What's going on?"

"The guy I got was Doc."

"For God's sake. What has gone wrong?"

Doc demanded, "Who turned off the lights?"

"Ham did." Monk lifted his voice. "Ham, turn on the light."

When light blazed into the hold, Carter immediately got to his feet, looked around, picked up a small box from a cargo pile, and hurled it at Ham Brooks in a rage.

“Stop that!” Doc ordered.

Carter looked around for something else he could throw one-handed, but located nothing. His arm had been hurt and he was furious. He told Ham several things which came to his mind.

Doc tried the door through which the squat man had gone, and found it barred, and barred solidly. It was a steel door.

“MONK, how did you fellows get here?” Doc demanded.

“We spotted a guy on deck. He was to meet a pal here.”

“How do you know?”

“Heard him say so.”

“Just how,” Doc asked, “did you pick up that information?”

“Nothing to it. We saw this bird, and we were about to grab him, when he called down a passage to someone to meet him in Hold Five in ten minutes. This is Hold Five. We figured why grab one bird when we could grab two, so we came down here and waited.”

“What about the man you had spotted.”

“To tell the truth,” Monk confessed, “he gave us the slip. How the devil he did it, we don't know. But he lost us.”

“Did he know you had seen him?”

“No.”

“Would you,” Doc asked grimly, “like to make a bet on that?”

Monk didn't answer immediately. He became alarmed, and anxiety caused his voice to go up in register. “What do you mean? You think we were foxed?”

“If we weren't, some awfully prominent signs are going to turn out to be wrong.”

Ham and Carter approached. Carter, worried now, had forgotten his anger with Ham. “You mean they decoyed us down here and lost us?”

“Worse than that,” Doc said, and ran toward the bulkhead door by which they had entered. The door, he had discovered, was closed. He didn't recall closing it.

The door was locked.

“Carter, did you close this door?”

“Me? No. Of course not.” Fright suddenly made Carter's eyes round.

“We're in a mess, I think,” Doc said quietly.

“You mean they've locked us in?”

“That's part of it, yes.”

“Part—” Carter didn't finish. He moistened his lips instead.

Doc was examining the hold. It was low-ceilinged, but the floorspace was quite large. It didn't cover the entire beam of the ship, however, the beam being about eighty feet. The cargo, boxed and baled native stuff, mostly crude rubber and tin, did not nearly fill the hold. Doc searched for ventilating grills, knowing they must be located somewhere.

“Grab something and start work on those doors.”

Carter said, “The doors are heavy steel. It'll take a cutting torch to—”

Monk told him, “What's to keep somebody from hearing us and letting us out? Is everyone on the ship deaf? Let's get out of here.”

Ham was opening cargo boxes. “Here's some good hammers.” He had found bars of tin.

They began beating on the bulkheads. There was a hatch overhead, but out of reach unless cargo was stacked. Doc was eyeing it. He suspected it would be battened on the outside.

Results were surprisingly quick.

From outside, beyond the bow bulkhead, a voice yelled, “Ahoy! What's going on in there?”

“Ahoy yourself! We're trapped in here. Unfasten the door and let us out!” Monk, when he lifted his voice, could make a deafening amount of noise.

“Take it easy. Let's have a look,” advised the voice outside.

They crowded close to the bow bulkhead door. There was a clanking sound, some hammering. The door remained closed.

“You there?”

“Yes.”

“This damned thing is locked,” the voice said. “We'll have to get a hacksaw.”

“Make it quick, will you,” Monk yelled.

“Keep your shirt on. It will take at least five minutes.”

“Well, step on it,” Monk urged.

THE owner of the voice outside said that he would. He had tried to sound cheerful, which was difficult, and now he withdrew a few yards, joining two other men.

“I think I sucked them in,” he said.

He was the squat man who had served as decoy.

"I don't think they knew who I was," he added.

"If it keeps them quiet five minutes, fine," one of the others said. "Give me a hand. This thing is heavy." He bent down and began to wrestle a metal cylinder.

In shape, thickness, but not in length, the cylinder resembled those in which welders buy their oxygen and bottled-gas users the gas for their stoves. This one was not quite three feet long, and evidently designed for one man to handle with a back pack. But without the pack harness, it was awkward.

"Sh-h-h-h. Don't let them hear us."

Their objective was in a secluded spot, where they had used an electric drill to put a seven-eighths-inch hole through the steel bulkhead into the compartment where Doc, Monk, Ham and Carter were cornered.

"Where's the hose?"

"Here. Want me to screw it on?"

"Go ahead. Hans, you get the other end fastened in that hole."

Hans was a short, fierce-looking blond-headed man who carried himself with the straight-backed air of one who had stood at attention too much. The hose was about seven feet long, and he had a fastener-coupling which he attempted to screw into the hole they had bored. It broke off.

"*Ach! Gott!*" he gasped.

"Now what?"

"*Das ist zu arg!* The fitting broke off. Now I have no way of attach the fitting to the hole."

The squat man spoke excellent Japanese, although he was obviously not Japanese. "*Kore de wa idenai!*" He continued in English, and described the man Hans as the illegitimate offspring of a dog raised on worms. He sounded sincere. "You can just stand there and hold that thing in the hole."

Hans' face lost color until it was almost as pale as his very blond hair. "*Nein!*"

"Oh, yes! We haven't got time to rig up another connector."

Hans swallowed his mental sickness as much he could, and got busy, jerkily at first, then with frantic haste, forcing the hose into the hole in the bulkhead, then making a padding around it with his handkerchief. By the time he had finished that, his shirt was wet through with perspiration that terror had brought. He licked his lips nervously. "Ready."

The squat man wheeled, walked back a few yards, and said, "All right. Short the ventilating circuit."

Far down the passage, another man lifted an arm to indicate he understood, then climbed on a box and thrust a pair of pliers into an open connection box. There was a play of sparks for a moment.

The short man listened to the rushing sound of the ventilating system; when this could no longer be heard, his tension relaxed.

“Turn the gas into the hold,” he said. “There won't be enough gravity circulation of air to carry it out.”

“How much do you want to give them?”

“All of it.”

THE gassing took about five minutes, and they were interrupted at the halfway mark. There was a startled voice somewhere nearby; it asked a question. There was a blow, a falling noise. The squat man ran to the noise. The others, except for the marble-faced Hans who was holding the hose for dear life, deployed behind him. They all had guns.

They reached one of their number, who was standing spraddle-legged over a fallen man.

“Who is he?”

“One of the crew, I guess.”

“How hard did you hit him?”

“Hard enough.”

The stocky man examined the one on the floor. His outblown breath made his lips flutter. “Skull crushed. Dead as a mackerel.”

The man who had done the killing looked alarmed. “What was I to do? He comes up to me and wants to know what the hell happened to the ventilating fans? I guess he was an electrician.”

“You could,” said the short man unpleasantly, “have been satisfied with knocking him unconscious.”

“That's all I intended to do.”

The small man snorted. “Well, it was a damned poor thing to do. So now you can take the body and get rid of it.”

The man blanched. “What—what'll I do with it?”

“Get rid of it, I said,” the small man said in a conversational tone that seemed, either because of its calmness or what the other knew about the nature of the voice's owner, to reduce the second man to shaking terror.

The fellow picked up the body, not without some difficulty, and went away with it.

One of the others said, “I hope the fool doesn't get caught carrying the body around.”

“He'd better not.”

In a few minutes the killer returned, looking pleased with himself.

“What did you do with it?”

“Put it at the foot of a companionway, where it'd look as if he lost his balance and fell.”

“Good enough.”

They went back to Hans. The short man examined the gas container, listened with an ear close to its ugly zinc-chromated iron surface. He turned the shut-off valve.

“Jerk the hose out of the hole and stuff that rag in it,” he told Hans. Hans didn't move, didn't turn his head. His face was slick with sweat and his lips were parted, twisted, colorless. “Take the hose out, Hans.” The squat man moved forward. “What the hell's wrong with you?” He jerked the hose out himself and stuffed Hans' handkerchief into the aperture. Then he punched Hans. “Come on, snap out of it.”

Hans put his head back, lowered his hands to his sides, and dropped.

“Fainted,” the short man said, and flew into a rage during which he kicked Hans in the ribs, and again referred to Hans' dog ancestry, ending by adding a bitter apology to all dogs. “Pick the fool up and carry him,” he ordered.

THEIR progress to the deck—they went all the way up to the better-class A deck—was menaced only once, when a well-meaning steward asked them if he could be of service. They said no, thanks, that their friend had imbibed a bit freely in celebrating the sailing.

“By the way, when do we sail?”

“About half an hour, sir,” the steward said, and went his way.

Their cabin—Suite C, A Deck—showed signs of shabbiness, and extra bunks had been added for use during the time when the vessel had served as a troop transport. The man who admitted them was about fifty, rather hard-faced. He examined them intently before he let them in, but after that he said and did nothing. He was obviously efficient at his business, whatever it was.

The other man, for there were only the two, was probably older than he looked. He looked about seventeen, and effeminate. His voice was high-pitched and moulded in gentle tones. He looked sissified. But there was no tendency to regard him with disrespect, or take him lightly.

He regarded them pleasantly, then observed, “I think you gentlemen need a drink.”

There were no refusals.

The squat man said, “Everything went satisfactorily, Mr. Wilberforce.”

Mr. Wilberforce was pouring the drinks with effeminate care.

“All four of them?”

“Yes. All four.”

Mr. Wilberforce lifted his glass. “To four souls, may they reside in Heaven.” He touched his lips to the glass, added, “I imagine they are destined for Heaven without our bon-voyages, but it makes a nice toast.”

They had put Hans on the floor. A man was beside Hans, tilting his head back, pouring bourbon whiskey into Hans' mouth which he had opened veterinary fashion by jamming a thumb into the jaw joint. Hans coughed, spraying whiskey like a geyser. The man slapped him in a rage.

Seeing Mr. Wilberforce eyeing Hans, the squat man explained, “Hans passed out. Maybe he got a whiff of the gas. He had to hold the hose in the hole.”

“He didn't get a whiff of the gas,” Mr. Wilberforce said positively. “He wouldn't be coughing now if he did.”

“We ran the whole cylinder into the hold.”

“It should be enough.”

“We got the ventilation system shut off all right. Some guy come down to investigate that. Sean cracked his skull, then put him at the foot of a companionway where they would think he fell.”

“Sure he's dead?”

“His skull was like gravel in a sack when I felt it.”

Mr. Wilberforce winced and exclaimed, “Please!” He consumed the rest of his drink hastily.

“WHAT,” asked the small man, “about the girl?”

Mr. Wilberforce shrugged. “I imagine she can be disposed of now. She has served her purpose, which was a device to attract Doc Savage.”

The squat man registered surprise. “I thought she was supposed to be an agent of the Screaming Man.”

“Oh, we've decided that isn't likely,” Mr. Wilberforce said. Smiling slightly, he added, “You sound rather dramatic when you refer to him as the Screaming Man.”

The short man licked his lips. “That's as good a name as any for him.”

“True enough, until we learn who he is.”

“Any sign of him aboard?”

“I don't know. If the girl isn't working for him, and apparently she isn't, there hasn't been a trace of him, no.”

“Good.” The squat man was genuinely relieved. “If he's not aboard, I'll feel a lot better.”

“So,” said Mr. Wilberforce, “will we all.”

One of the others said, “For my part, I'll take this Screaming Man, as you're calling him, three times a day in preference to Doc Savage. I'll take him for breakfast, lunch and dinner, if you'll keep Savage away from me.”

“Savage,” said the squat man positively, “is a dead duck.”

“He'd better be,” said Mr. Wilberforce quietly.

“I'll stake my neck on it.”

“You probably have already.” Mr. Wilberforce put down his glass as if putting aside the matters they had been discussing. “I imagine you gentlemen had better go on deck and circulate, passing the word that Savage is no longer a factor.”

“Who,” asked the short man, “will tell Jonas Sown?”

Mr. Wilberforce underwent a change, the sort of a change which explained why none of the men, although they were obviously hard-souled fellows, had regarded his effeminacy with any ridicule. Mr. Wilberforce became completely frightening to look at.

“The name of Jonas Sown,” he said, “is not to be mentioned hereafter. Not at any time. Do you understand me?”

Chapter VIII

THE *Empress Margaret* dropped her springlines at the scheduled hour for sailing, and with an amount of whistle tooting and shouting of farewells that almost reached pre-war volume, the vessel was nursed out by the tugs and pointed to sea. It was now daylight and those passengers who remained on deck could suddenly get the full benefit of Manila's demolished condition as a result of the war. It was sobering.

Among those who weren't on deck to see anything were the war prisoners being shipped to the States. These were kept below decks; their schedule called for exercise intervals on one section of the deck at specified times. They would naturally be under guard.

There were three hundred and forty-six Japanese war prisoners who had been taken in many different actions in the Pacific. Practically all of them claimed to be Koreans instead of Japanese, but this was a standard lie which Jap prisoners usually told, and to be regarded dubiously. They were an oddly assorted lot, emotionally, which was not unusual for Japanese prisoners. The dopey ones, still corked up on Jap propaganda, were in the majority. There were a few, possibly the genuine Koreans, who were not sullen.

The Nazi war prisoners numbered a hundred and eleven, mostly sailors who had been bagged when a submarine was taken. They had the typical Nazi attitude, the superman air that was quite insulting and, considering their status, rather funny. They didn't think it was humorous. They didn't seem to think anything was humorous.

The skipper of the *Empress Margaret*, Captain Joel Stromberg, of Annapolis, Maryland, made a brief tour of the prisoner quarters with Major Sam Stevens, of Kansas City, Missouri, the Army officer in charge of the prisoner contingent.

“I don't like the idea of war prisoners on my ship,” Captain Stromberg explained. “But there's nothing I can do about that, so I'd like to see what precautions are being taken to avoid trouble.”

Major Stevens said he didn't blame the skipper.

They made an inspection of the prisoner quarters. The Japanese were segregated from the Nazis, although they were in the same section of the vessel. The quarters were clean and comfortable. Better, Captain Stromberg was thinking, than the prisoners deserved. When a Nazi *oberleutenant* confronted him haughtily, and demanded better quarters, the skipper did a poor job of controlling his rage. The Nazi officer was insulting. Major Stevens, to avoid trouble, got Captain Stromberg out on deck.

“What the hell are we doing with these Nazi prisoners?” the Captain demanded.

“Those fellows were helping the Japs.”

“They must be crazy!”

“They are,” agreed Major Stevens. “The way all the Nazis are crazy.”

THE *Empress Margaret* passed safely through the mine fields and lined out on the regular steamship lane run for San Francisco. Captain Stromberg finished his routine bridge check, and remarked with considerable pleasure on what a relief it was to finally make the Frisco run without the handicaps of being a fast ship in a convoy limited to the pace of the slowest vessel. "If it wasn't for the damned war prisoners, it would be almost like a peacetime run," he declared. "Let's have a drink."

Over gin and bitters, which they both liked, the Captain and the Major became philosophical. Now that the war was on its way to becoming a bad memory, it was good to discuss humanity and what made it get into such messes, the skipper remarked. He made a speech on the subject.

"The thing that has always struck fear into me," he said, "was the dramatic abruptness with which the identical way of thinking pervaded Germany, Italy and Japan. True, a few years were occupied in Germans becoming Nazis and the Japanese becoming whatever you'd say they became. But I still say it was sudden. And I say it was almost a machine-made thing, that sameness of thinking, like something that was deliberately created."

Major Stevens said that he was reminded of something he had heard about mass hypnotism, and the psychology of mobs. He said he believed it was a fact beyond argument that mob spirit was contagious, that it was a disease which bystanders could hardly help catching. Had any man ever witnessed a spectacular parade without feeling a strong impulse to jump in and march? There was a close resemblance between this psychology and the psychology of suggestion which was the basis of hypnotism. In fact, hypnotism *was* suggestion, and it seemed to him fairly obvious that Hitler's power had been founded on such fundamentals of hypnosis as, for example, the continued repetition of one fact. A hypnotist, of course, usually began the inducing of the hypnotic state by repeating over and over that the subject was going into a sound sleep.

Captain Stromberg shook his head dubiously.

"I am not going to try to insist there is no such thing as hypnotism, or even mass hypnotism, although I understand there is considerable doubt about the feasibility of the latter. But I do doubt its application to whole nations. Psychology, yes. But psychology is not a hypnotic force that will warp people as completely as the Axis was warped."

"But you were just saying," the Major reminded, "that the attitude of the Japanese and German people was something deliberately created."

"Exactly."

"How else could it be done, if not by psychology or hypnotism?"

"I wouldn't know. Whoever did it would have to be a master psychologist." The Captain scowled at his drink. "And perhaps more than that. The fellow might have discovered some mechanical means of doing it."

"Some sort of gadget, you mean?"

"Perhaps. It might not be as far-fetched as it sounds. As a matter of fact, it seems to me that our scientists have devoted an unfair—better say unwise—majority of their time and skill to the solving of such mysteries as how many electrons in an atom, and not enough to figuring out what makes a man mad."

“That's too simple. An insult makes a man angry.”

“It's not so simple, not when you start asking *why*. What is the actual process in the human body or nervous system, electrical or bio-chemical or whatever it is? I tell you, the great discoveries of the future will be in the fields of psychology.”

The Major grinned slightly. “You think some guy may have been ahead of his time? Some guy with a warped mind?”

Captain Stromberg snorted.

“Don't regard it too facetiously. It seems to me—” There was a knock on the cabin door. The Captain, as a matter of old-maidish precaution, ditched his drink under the bunk before he said, “Come in.”

THE sailor who entered had his hat in hand. “Sir, the Mate wishes to report the finding of a body in one of the forward holds.”

“Who was it?”

“One of the electricians, sir. Kinnick was his name.”

“A murder?”

“Why, no, sir. Nothing was said about it being murder. He fell, crushing his skull.”

“The way you said body made me think it was murder.” Captain Stromberg got up suddenly. “I'm going to take a look, anyway. Has the body been moved?”

“No, sir.”

“Want to go along, Stevens?”

The Major did. “That talk we were having got me to feeling creepy,” he confessed.

Captain Stromberg nodded gloomily and said the Major's creeps bore out what he had said about a feeling of sinister omen pervading the world, and, right at the moment, the ship.

The liner's doctor, a rotund saturnine man named Powell, was finishing an examination of the body. “Death from a crushed skull, if you want it without the technical wording.”

“Induced by a fall down these steps,” someone added.

“I didn't say that!” Powell snapped. “I said a crushed skull.”

Captain Stromberg frowned. “You don't think he fell down the steps?”

“I didn't say that either. Maybe he fell down the steps, but it looks to me as if he would have made some marks on the steps if he had, and would have had more bruises than he has.”

The Captain and the Major gave consideration to this.

“What do you think, Major?”

“I'm no detective,” Major Stevens said. “However, that companionway is steep, and a man falling would

reasonably be expected to collect bruises, although whether a bruise would show up if he was killed instantly is something the doctor—”

There was another interruption. Another sailor, an excited one, who reported, “Something is wrong on deck! The passengers are fainting!”

NEAR a ventilator on the upper deck, three bodies were stretched. They were alone, the passengers and crew having retreated from the spot.

Dr. Powell became cautious.

“Stay back, everyone.”

He approached the figures with care from upwind, sniffing the air dubiously. Suddenly, when he was near the ventilator, he turned and ran.

“Gas,” he said. “It's coming out of that ventilator.”

Captain Stromberg growled, “Will it be safe to hold our breath, and go get those people who were overcome?”

“Better be sure to hold your breath,” the doctor warned.

The victims were duly dragged to safety by Captain Stromberg, a piece of heroism which did not go unnoticed by the passengers.

“They're not dead,” the doctor reported after an examination. “Get them to the hospital, and I think they'll be all right.”

Major Stevens scowled at the ventilator. “Captain, is there poison gas in your cargo?”

“No, of course not.”

“There might be, mightn't there?”

“Not a chance. I would have been notified of any such cargo. They don't ship that stuff around in boxes like ordinary freight.”

“Where does that ventilator come from?”

“Hold Four. Come on.”

They went below, and there was some delay while gas masks were brought. The masks were a part of the ship fire fighting equipment, but many soldiers aboard also had masks, and there was some argument about which masks to use. Finally they put on the military ones.

The bulkhead door was unbarred and yanked open. The spectators, those who didn't have gas masks, took to their heels.

Captain Stromberg entered the hold. Major Stevens trailed him. Their search, which was thorough, took about fifteen minutes, and they emerged mystified.

“The gas came from there, Major. But I'm damned if I can imagine what the source was.”

Major Stevens took off his mask and mopped his face. It had been hot in the hold.

“Well, we didn’t find any bodies,” he remarked. “So I guess no one was in there.”

Chapter IX

THE first hint that something was wrong among the war prisoners came that afternoon during the exercise period for the Japanese. It was a brief thing, happening in the space of a few moments, catching the guards by surprise. The exercise pen for the prisoners was the small area of open deck between the forecastle and cabin superstructures. The prisoners were turned loose here among the ventilators, hatches, capstans and cargo booms, and guards with Tommy guns were posted on the forecastle and on the companionway leading up to the part of the superstructure below the bridge.

It was not an attack on the guards. In fact, at no time were the guards menaced.

Captain Stromberg, who happened to be looking down from the bridge at the time, described it with one word. Fear. It was the first time, he remarked later, that he had ever been able to *see* fear.

The prisoners seemed particularly sullen, or what Captain Stromberg took to be sullenness—he was not the only one who made this error of judgment—as they milled about in the well-deck area. There was almost no conversation among them, and no display of emotion, no laughter, no gags, no fraternizing of groups. The Captain observed this, but he took it to be just the nature of Japs when they were licked. He hadn’t had much previous experience with Jap prisoners, nor even with the Orient, for most of his life had been spent on the Atlantic passenger runs. Surly devils, he was thinking.

And then one of the prisoners, a rounded roly-poly Jap, shrieked.

“*Baka iu-na!*” he screeched. Apparently he addressed this at one or more men near him.

Then the round-faced Nip whirled, sprinted for the rail, made a mighty leap and shot over the rail and down toward the sea water swirling past. He howled again before he hit the sea, this time only a yell of terror.

Captain Stromberg turned his head. “Reverse engines. Pass the order to prepare a boat for lowering.”

Calmly, the Captain turned his gaze back to the section of deck where the prisoners were exercising, and his eyes flew wide with wonder. Because he was witnessing terror, a strange and completely utter terror, seizing a body of men. The degree of fear so nearly approached madness that he imagined for a moment that some kind of a break was being staged. So did one of the Army guards. He fired his Tommy gun briefly.

“Attention! Get back in line, you rats!” The guard’s gun blasted warningly again, and he remembered the Japanese words for attention. “*Ki wo tsuke!*” he roared, not doing a very good job with the pronunciation.

The warning shots, his shouting, and the yelling of the other guards, seemed to have no effect. But they presently realized it was fear they were witnessing, not mutiny.

Captain Stromberg thrust his head over the bridge rail. “What’s wrong with them?”

A guard lifted an amazed face. “Blessed if I know, sir.”

“They’re afraid.”

“There's nothing to be afraid of, is there?”

“Not that I know of, sir.”

Now one of the Japanese managed to open the door to the companion which led to their quarters below decks. Like dirty water spilling out of a hole in a bucket, the Japs went through the door. The guards dived after them, guns ready. Responding to what had evidently been a quick alarm, more armed guards appeared, and these went below deck.

The liner had lost headway.

“Have a boat lowered, Mister, and pick up that Jap who jumped.” Captain Stromberg turned and descended to learn what was happening down in the prisoner quarters.

MAJOR STEVENS overtook Captain Stromberg on the well deck. “What happened, Captain?”

The skipper shrugged, said, “You've got me. The Japs all seemed to have a fit at once, but what caused it I don't know. They were scared, it seemed to me. Funny thing.”

They clattered down companionway steps toward the war prisoner quarters, listening anxiously for sounds of fighting, but hearing none.

Major Stevens apologized, “Sorry something went wrong, Captain.”

“Who can predict what a Jap will do?”

“I know, but damn the luck, keeping them in line is my responsibility, and I'm sorry something came up to bother you.”

A figure suddenly confronted them, a gun muzzle was presented threateningly.

“Oh!” The gun was lowered. “Sorry, sir.”

They had been stopped by a guard who was somewhat nervous.

“What are those Japs trying to pull?”

“We can't imagine, sir. They aren't trying to fight, or escape, apparently.”

Captain Stromberg strode on, remarking to the Major that what had happened on deck was the damndest thing he had ever seen. He had never seen anything the equal of it. Never.

“If there wasn't god-awful terror in every man's heart, I never want to see it,” he said.

They encountered more guards. The Major spoke to them, and they replied, saying the Japs had merely fled to their quarters, where they waited in terror. “Some of them actually crawled under the bunks, and others covered their heads with the blankets, I swear it's a fact,” the guard said. “It sounds funny when you tell it, but it wasn't so funny to watch. It sort of turned your stomach.”

Turning the stomach, Captain Stromberg thought, was a good way to describe it. He realized now that he was a little sick, and didn't understand why.

He went back to the bridge. The liner was lying with all way off, rolling slightly, and starboard amidships

they had lowered a boat. The Captain went to the end of the bridge. The boat was some distance away, but he could tell what was happening. They had reached the Jap, were trying to get him into the dory. The Jap seemed to be unconscious, or dead; at any rate he was limp when they hauled him aboard.

Major Stevens appeared on the bridge. Apparently plunged in startled wonder, he stood frowning at the distant small boat, and was wordless for quite a while.

Finally he spoke. "There's something scary about the way those Japs are acting."

The Captain lit his pipe. He rarely smoked on duty. "What do you make of it?"

"I don't know." The Major shook his head. "I sure don't know, but it gives me the creeps."

THE Japanese who had jumped was named Kusumura, first name Hans. They learned this by checking his identification tag with the prisoner list, but this was all because he had followed the general behavior of Jap prisoners in refusing to say anything at all about himself. They found out nothing at the moment by questioning, because he was unconscious.

"Knocked out by the fall into the sea," the ship's physician decided. "But he'll come out of it eventually. Thing to do is leave him alone."

Captain Stromberg asked a question.

"Kinnick, that electrician who was found dead—did you find anything queer there, Dr. Powell?"

"Nothing more than I found right away."

"You think the fall killed him?"

"I think a crushed skull killed him," Doctor Powell said, picking up his bag. "What got into those Japs, anyway?"

"They seemed to go nuts all at once."

"They went nuts as a nation several years ago. But this was a peculiar whingding they threw, from what I hear. I wish I could have seen it."

They left a Corporal posted at the door of the cabin they were using as a hospital for the Jap. Major Stevens ordered, "Just keep him in here, and see that he doesn't do away with himself. We want to question him later."

"Yes, sir." The Corporal saluted, then pulled a chair to the center of the cabin when the officers had gone and seated himself. He had not seen the mass seizure which had affected the Japs, and he was not particularly interested. He had seen all of the Japs he cared for from Tarawa and points north. He frowned impersonally at the round Jap on the bed, dismissed the fellow from his thoughts, and began thinking about home.

It was hot, the door gaped open, and presently he heard voices. Three men. They were outside in the corridor.

"Well, here's the cabin," said one of the voices. "Be seeing you later."

"All right. As soon as I take a look at this Jap."

Presently a slender man put his head in the cabin, waved at the guard, glanced at the Jap, and withdrew saying, "Doesn't look as if he's awake yet."

"I'm supposed to examine him anyway."

A giant of a man wearing civilian clothes stepped into the cabin, calling over his shoulder, "In the main lounge, eh? Be about ten minutes." He turned to the guard, asked, "Captain Stromberg or Major Stevens tell you I was to examine this Nip?"

"No, sir," said the guard.

The big man looked tired. "I imagine it's okay if I go ahead anyway, eh? I won't need to move him, and you can keep an eye on me."

The guard nodded.

THE big man hauled a sheet off the Jap's torso, held the wrist a while testing for pulse, then rolled the eyelids back from the eyes.

"He's still knocked out," the guard said.

The large man's response was to slap the Jap violently, then seize the Nip's left hand and double the thumb in an extremely painful judo trick which all small boys know.

"*Urusai!*" The word came from the Jap in a painful hiss.

"You speak English?"

The guard straightened. "Hell, he was conscious!" He stood up and came to look down at the Nip. "Them birds can't act like people. They got to be a polecat sneak with everything they do."

"Do you speak English?" the big man repeated.

"Yes," the Jap admitted.

"What's your name?"

"Hans Kusumura."

"How come the Hans?"

The Japanese didn't speak.

"*Sprechen Sie Deutsch?*" the large man inquired.

"*Ja.*"

The guard grinned. "He's quite a linguist. Speaks Japanese, English and German."

Hans Kusumura rolled his eyes slightly, examining the cabin. "Where am I?"

"Back on the boat you jumped off of," the guard told him.

The big man advised the guard, "I'll do the questioning if you don't mind."

“Yes, sir.” The guard, slightly offended, returned to his chair.

The big man contemplated the Japanese intently for a while, noting the smaller signs of emotion which Kusumura, who came of a race that had for generations considered it essential to learn to hide the feelings, could not keep from showing themselves.

“You,” the giant said suddenly, “know who I am.”

“*Chigai nai.*”

“Speak English.”

“Certainly. Yes, I know you.”

“Did you know I was aboard?”

“No.”

“What do you know about that business in Hold Four?”

“Of Hold Four? Nothing.”

“It was pretty slick. It almost got us.”

“I know not of what you speak,” Kusumura hissed painfully, but positively.

THE big man drew up a chair, the only other one in the cabin, seated himself and became comfortable. “I just happened to see what happened on the exercise deck a while ago, and it was quite interesting. I think it would be even more interesting if you told me what was behind it. Why not tell me the story? Some of it I would know, or already have guessed. But there is naturally a lot that would be new.”

Kusumura showed his teeth quickly, more in fear than in unpleasantness. “And what would then happen to me?”

The big man shrugged. “Nothing more, quite possibly, than already will.”

The Jap hissed painfully. He was silent. Then, as if the silence brought him terrifying thoughts, he fled to speech. “There is no more room for thought inside me. I have used all that room. There is no door in the terror through which I can pass safely, and so I must take the other door. I am going to kill myself. I tried by leaping overboard. It was not successful. I will try again.”

The Corporal, who had fought Japs for a year, told the Jap unpleasantly, “I’ll loan you my knife for your throat, bub.”

Kusumura looked at him levelly. “Very well.”

The guard, his bluff called, scowled. “Don’t be funny!”

“Very well. I will find a way. Death is not like great wealth of honor or the respect of other human beings. Death is something any man may easily take for himself.”

“This guy,” the guard said, “is a philosopher.”

“He’s serious, too,” the big man agreed. He turned to the Japanese. “Where is Johnny Littlejohn?”

“Eh?”

“Where is Littlejohn? Is he aboard?”

Kusumura thought about the question seriously. “He is aboard, I think.”

“Where?”

“That I do not know.”

The bronzed giant was silent, silent because he felt all of a sudden that if he made any sound, it would be a hysterical giggle of relief. He leaned back, forcing calmness. He breathed inward deeply, because happiness felt in his chest as if it would explode if he wasn't careful.

“So Johnny's aboard,” he said. “That means he's alive. But you don't know exactly where he is.”

Kusumura closed his eyes. “I have brought you great pleasure. And that, I find, makes me glad. Is it not strange that I should be glad to please you?”

“You're a funny guy,” the big man said.

“Perhaps,” said Kusumura, “I am, for this one short moment, the great person that almost every man secretly thinks he is. Possibly, for a moment now, I am great. I think it is true. I think I am. It must be, for in this moment I find myself wishing that my country, my native Japan, could have had a citizen, just one, such as yourself. Or Germany. Or Italy. I think that, had this been the case, things would not have been as they now are.”

The Corporal scratched his head.

“This brownie's nuts,” he said.

THE big man was contemplating the round-faced Japanese. The big man's bronzed features were intense, the fire of interest was in his flake gold eyes, and some of the pleasure that he felt at learning Johnny Littlejohn was alive—he believed it was the truth, that Johnny was living—crowded into his voice and gave it a facetious quality he didn't intend when he spoke.

“That was a fine speech you made,” he told Kusumura. “But it would be more convincing if you would tell me something I can use . . . For instance, you might tell me about Jonas Sown.”

Kusumura jerked visibly. It was as if the name had stuck a thorn into him. And his lips moved, but he didn't make sound. What he said with his lips was, “No one is to mention that name.” But he said it in Japanese.

The big man, in English, said, “So no one is to mention Jonas Sown's name.”

Kusumura straightened out stiffly on the bed and didn't say anything.

“Hans, could you tell me much about Jonas Sown if you wished?”

“No,” Kusumura's voice was queer. “No, not much. Nothing is known of him. Only those of us who were—who did his most confidential work—only such as much as knew his name, and those who did find it out by accident, one way or another. We were not supposed to know that Jonas Sown existed, or that anyone of the sort, anyone that incredible and horrible of personality and purpose, existed. Some

of my—of my—I shall call them associates—have never believed. But I am not as gullible.”

“Is Jonas Sown aboard?”

Kusumura rolled his eyes. “I do not, and I swear this by my ancestors, know that he is aboard.”

“But you're fairly sure he is, because of what happened to you and the other Japanese a while ago.”

This statement seemed to put a second thorn into the Jap's soul. His eyes grew startled, then thoughtful.

“You know more than they think you know, do you not?”

“I couldn't answer that. I can't imagine how much they think I have found out, or how much Johnny Littlejohn found out.”

“Their opinion of you is not high.”

“That's fine.”

“They are fools. You are a clever antagonist.”

“Let's hope so.”

Kusumura closed his eyes, and this time he kept them shut. “I am going to kill myself.”

“Hari-kari, eh?”

“No. That is a death of honor. I feel no honor. It is simply that I am ashamed, and can face my own thoughts no longer. I think you understand me when I say that I, and the others who thought as I did, and helped with the doing of it as I did, are guilty of eclipsing the Japanese Empire. Our guilt is the greatest guilt possible, far greater than a death of honor can redeem. No, I shall die as a coward dies.”

“That's a fool move.”

“Nevertheless, I have decided.”

The big man changed the subject abruptly. “What about the girl?”

“The American girl?”

“Is there more than one?”

“No. I merely heard there was an American girl who became involved in Manila.”

“That's the one. Is she aboard?”

“I suppose so.”

“Alive?”

“Perhaps so. But possibly not. I heard very little of her, only that she was suspected of working with the Screaming Man—”

“Who?”

“Your friend, Littlejohn. They call him that. The Screaming Man.”

“Why did they give him that name?”

“Littlejohn is a man of many words, none small.”

The big man looked pleased. “That is Johnny, all right. No small words when he can think of big ones. I don't get the screaming angle, but we'll let that slide. You think they may kill the girl?”

“Why not?”

“Can you help me find her? Give me some information?”

“No.”

“Would you, if you could?”

“I might.”

“This about all you're going to tell me?”

“Yes.”

THE large bronze man turned to the guard. “I guess that is about all we can do with him. He didn't do badly for a Jap. “

The guard was confused. The questioning, all of which he had taken in with open-mouthed interest, had been nothing like what he had expected. It had touched on so much about which he knew nothing that he was thoroughly puzzled.

He said, “That's the first time I ever heard one of those brownies really spill himself. He talked plenty, didn't he?”

“Not enough to really help, I'm afraid.” The big man moved to the door. “Well, thanks. You've been very accommodating, and I don't think you will regret it, in the end.”

He went out

The Corporal scratched his head. He had liked the big man, had been impressed by the easy pleasant way the fellow had gone about getting information. He had spoken the truth when he had said that he had never seen a Japanese prisoner talk so freely, and he believed it was the big man's competent and confident manner which had caused the Nip to talk.

“Quite a guy,” the Corporal remarked to the Jap. “I wonder who he is?”

Kusumura kept his eyes closed. The Corporal saw that Kusumura's lips were moving slowly, forming words without sound. Alarmed, the Corporal stepped to the side of the bed and demanded, “What's the matter, Tojo? You unhappy?”

“Not at all unhappy,” Kusumura said without opening his eyes. “I am praying a prayer, a Christian prayer. Once long ago I attended the University of Southern California, and at that time I attended Christian Church services frequently out of curiosity. I imagine my prayer will be technically correct, although more than that I cannot guarantee.”

The Corporal blinked.

“You're the nuttiest Jap I ever saw,” he declared.

“You wish to know who that man was?” Kusumura asked.

“Yeah. I asked you, didn't I?”

Kusumura moved his tongue over his lips and said rather softly, “He is a very remarkable man whose name is Doc Savage.”

The Corporal rubbed his jaw. The name meant nothing to him. None of it meant anything to him, except that he was puzzled.

Shortly Captain Stromberg and Major Stevens arrived. They looked at Kusumura, and Captain Stromberg remarked, “So he's conscious now. Has he had anything to say, Corporal?”

“A lot.”

“You mean you've talked to him?” Major Stevens demanded.

“No, sir. But he talked a lot to that fellow you sent to question him.”

The skipper of the *Empress Margaret* started, then scowled; he and the Major exchanged sharply startled glances.

“You say somebody questioned this Nip?” the Major barked.

“Yes, sir.”

“Who in the hell,” yelled the Major, “was it?”

“Somebody named Doc Savage, sir.” The Corporal was apprehensive.

Captain Stromberg and Major Stevens stared at each other again, and finally the Major muttered something under his breath that Stromberg didn't catch. “What did you say?” Stromberg asked. The Major explained, “What I said, I think, was, 'God almighty!'“

“Ditto,” the Captain said.

Chapter X

DOC SAVAGE passed Ham Brooks aft of the amidships passenger elevator, and he made a slight beckoning gesture with a thumb. Ham, who was in a chair in an alcove pretending to read a newspaper, but actually keeping an eye open for anything worth noticing, arose and joined Doc.

“Haven't seen any of them,” he reported.

“You want to be careful,” Doc warned. “There are so many of them aboard that there are bound to be some we haven't seen, and don't know by sight. One of those might put a bullet or a knife into you before you knew it.”

Ham said he was being careful. “Was that Jap one of them?”

“The Jap was an unusual customer. He had been one of them, but it had turned his stomach, and he decided the thing for him to do was commit suicide and get away from it all.”

Ham shuddered. “It must be pretty bad to sicken a Jap.”

"It is pretty bad," Doc said grimly.

They entered a cabin which they had taken over by the simple expedient of moving in—they hadn't met the rightful occupants who were, judging from the suitcases in the cabin, two men. The rightful occupants had not shown up.

Monk Mayfair and Carter were waiting in the cabin, signs of strain on their faces. They were relieved when Doc and Ham came in. Monk said, "Staying parked in here is running me nuts, and getting me more scared by the minute to boot. When are we going to see some action?"

Doc shook his head warningly.

"We've got to keep them from finding us if we expect to live through this," Doc said. "I'm quite sure they know by now that our bodies weren't found in Number Four hold, which tipped them off the gas didn't get us."

"I'll bet," Monk said, "they wonder why the gas didn't function."

Carter snorted. "It won't take them long to find out there was a case of Jap gas masks in the cargo in that hold." He scowled, and added, "We should have hid that box of masks under the other cargo, then they would have really been flabbergasted. I should have thought of that."

"You did all right," Monk told Carter. "You knew enough about Army supply markings to realize that case had gas masks in it. If it hadn't been for that, we would have been in a devil of a mess."

Carter grinned slightly. "I don't deserve any credit. I was as glad to find them as anyone."

Carter and Monk were more friendly now. Carter, in fact, had had his self-respect restored by the contribution he had made when he unquestionably saved all their lives in Four Hold by quickly discovering the case of Japanese Army gas masks in the cargo. The Japanese masks, they had surmised, were being shipped back to one of the Army centers where scientific inspections were made of enemy materials. This accounted for the masks being aboard the *Empress*.

"What," Monk asked Doc, "did the Jap have to say?"

DOC SAVAGE went to the door, flung it open and searched the corridor. Satisfied, he wheeled and explained, "Johnny Littlejohn is aboard. He's hot on their trail, because they've given him a nickname. They call him the Screaming Man, probably because of the kind of words he uses."

"Where is Johnny?"

"The Jap didn't know. And that isn't the worst of it, either. Johnny may be a prisoner."

"Good God!" Monk said hoarsely. "If they've laid hands on him, he's dead. They'll kill him in a minute."

"Not," Doc said, "if they had a good use for him."

"Use? What do you mean?"

"I think finding Johnny on their trail would scare them badly. They would want to know how much danger they were actually in—whether Johnny was working alone. And Johnny is smart enough to take out life insurance by giving them the impression that he had plenty of outside help. And outside help, to those fellows, would mean you, Monk, Ham, myself and Carter here."

Monk nodded gloomily. "That would give them a motive for jumping us in Manila. They were scared. Thought we knew more than we did."

Carter had been listening, wide-eyed. Astonished, he said, "You seem to know plenty—more than anybody thought you did!"

He was ignored.

Ham Brooks asked, "What about this Jonas Sown?"

"The Jap—his name is Kusumura—seemed to think Jonas Sown was aboard."

"He know where we could lay a hand on Sown?"

"Not by a lot. He had never seen Jonas Sown. He was even a little vague, deep in his heart, I think, that Jonas Sown exists."

"What about the other?"

"What other?" Doc asked.

Ham chewed his lower lip, uneasiness gathering back in his eyes. "The whole thing," he said. "Is there anything to it? Or is it just a crazy dream?"

"It's no dream," Doc told him. "It's real enough that Kusumura, who is after all a typical Jap, is so sickened by it that he wants to kill himself. And probably he will, if they don't watch him continually."

"Then it's real?"

Doc nodded.

Carter was staring at them in horror. "For God's sake!" he said hollowly. "I've been hoping all along that the thing couldn't be true. I don't think I've ever allowed myself to believe at any time that it could be as bad as—"

A rattle of the doorknob.

The door flung open.

"Ah, I beg your pardon," said the fat man named Van Zandt Basset, looking in at them. Then, in surprise: "Why, hello there! Quite a coincidence, what?"

Doc Savage watched the fat man with the intensity of a tiger about to spring.

"Some coincidence!" he agreed.

VAN ZANDT BASSET entered, held the door wide for the man who was with him, and said, "I don't believe you have met Jack Thomas, my friend."

Jack Thomas examined Doc and the others with studious blankness. "I believe I saw this gentleman in a restaurant last night."

The fat man inspected the number on the cabin door. "Nine. Really, I thought for a moment there must be some mixup. Perhaps there is." He smiled at Doc, added, "This happens to be the cabin assigned to Jack

and myself. Do you suppose there has been a mistake?"

"There may have been a mistake," Doc agreed coldly.

"Nothing, I trust, that can't be straightened out," the fat man said.

"I hope not."

"Do you gentlemen have your cabin assignment stubs?"

Monk Mayfair answered that. He fished in his coat pocket, but what he brought out was not a cabin slip, but a bulky and extremely nasty looking machine pistol. He did not point this at anyone, but held it in a rather inclusive fashion.

Van Zandt Basset seemed not to notice the weapon. "Won't you gentlemen join me in that drink I've been trying to get Mr. Savage to have?"

Doc started slightly in spite of his effort to remain composed.

"So you know my name?" he said.

"Oh, yes, naturally. Haven't we been meeting each other off and on for the last twelve or fourteen hours?"

"I never," Doc said, "gave you my name."

"You didn't!" Basset pretended surprise. "Then it must have come to me out of a clear sky. After all, you're not a man who is totally unknown."

This isn't, Doc thought grimly, a coincidence in meeting. It isn't an accident at all, and probably Basset and Thomas are not the rightful occupants of the cabin any more than we are. Without turning his head, without taking his eyes off the fat man and the studious man, Doc told Ham Brooks, "The purser's office is on this deck. Mind dropping in on him right now and getting this matter of cabins straightened out?"

Ham nodded and went out.

The fat man smiled enigmatically.

The studious man, Jack Thomas—which Doc would have bet plenty wasn't his name—had remained completely sober and scholarly looking, which was another way of being completely expressionless. That one, Doc reflected, is probably the more dangerous of the two. Perhaps not the thinker, but the doer, when something violent and quick and deadly had to be done. He decided to give Jack Thomas first attention if violence began, and he didn't look forward to the possibility with any pleasure.

Then the fat man raised their hair.

He said, "It seems that the unusual is dogging my path today. For instance, I saw a very terrified young lady a few moments ago. Her name, I believe, was Miss Annie Flinders."

DOC SAVAGE had the absurd feeling that astonishment had lifted him off the floor and was holding him suspended in space. His voice sounded far away, and as if it didn't belong to him at all, when he spoke.

"Where is she now?" he asked.

"In A Suite, this deck," the fat man said calmly.

Doc Savage caught Carter's eye. Carter seemed completely dumbfounded.

Monk Mayfair now made no pretense of not pointing his pistol at anyone. He pointed it at the fat man and his studious friend.

"Is she okay?" he demanded.

"I don't," said Van Zandt Basset, "imagine that her health will continue, although it seemed fair when we saw her."

Doc got hold of himself. "How many Japs with her?"

"No Japs."

"Don't tell me," Doc said grimly, "that there was no one with her."

"I said no such thing. There were two men. Two fellows who look totally unlike Nazis, but are."

"More in the suite?"

"Probably."

Ham Brooks now returned from the purser's office. He reported, "These two fellows are now registered in this cabin. But they weren't when the ship sailed. They made the change after sailing, about an hour ago, paying the purser two hundred dollars to make the change. The purser's a little worried about it."

"An hour ago," Doc said, "would be after we took over the cabin. What about the original occupants?"

"Oh, they gladly gave their okay to the swap, because they got a better cabin out of it."

Doc wheeled on the fat man. "All right, let's have the truth. You made the swap because you found out we were using the cabin as a hideaway, that right?"

"That is correct," said Van Zandt Basset blandly.

Doc frowned. "Why did you do it?"

"As a service."

"Eh?"

"A slight contribution," said the fat man, "to your success."

Doc shook his head. "I don't get it. But we'll go into the matter later." He wheeled to Ham, explained, "These fellows say Annie is in Suite A, on this deck. They say at least two men are guarding her, maybe more."

Jarred by surprise, Ham couldn't speak.

Doc leveled an arm at Carter. "Carter, you stay here. Watch these two fellows. You have a gun, haven't you?"

"Who the hell *are* they?" Carter demanded, producing a revolver and using it to point at Basset and Thomas.

“I have no idea,” Doc said, and strode out into the corridor, beckoning Monk and Ham to follow.

A FEW yards down the corridor, Doc drew Monk and Ham into an unoccupied cabin, the door of which was open, for a conference. “I haven't the least notion who those two birds are. They just gave me about as complete a surprise as I ever had. I don't know what their game is. But it may not be good.”

Monk expressed a definite opinion. “I don't like that one who looks like a professor and doesn't say anything. He doesn't look as if he had a soul in him.”

“You think they're pulling something on us?” Ham demanded.

Doc nodded. “I'm sure they are. But I'm not sure whether it is going to be good or bad for us.”

“It'd have to be bad.”

“Not necessarily.”

Monk had an inspiration. “Could it be that they know where Annie is, but don't want the job of rescuing her because it is going to be tough? So they walk in on us and hand us the job?”

“That,” Doc agreed, “is a mighty good guess.”

Ham said, “Suite A is forward. It's one of the best suites of cabins aboard, if I remember the layout of these ships correctly. I had a similar suite once. It probably consists of a parlor, bedroom, bath and private sun deck. What do we do, barge in?”

Doc was uneasily eyeing the cabin they had just left. “I hope Carter can handle those fellows with that bad arm of his.”

“He'll handle them,” said Monk, whose opinion of Carter had skyrocketed since Carter had dug up the gas masks that had conveniently saved their lives. “If they get careless with him, Carter's in the frame of mind to haul off and fill them full of lead.”

“I hope he keeps that pair cornered. I want to ask them some questions.”

Monk registered sudden excitement. “Blazes! Maybe one of them is Jonas Sown!”

“Carter himself could be Jonas Sown, and no one would know the difference,” Doc said thoughtfully. “Come on. We've got something tough on our hands.”

Chapter XI

MR. WILBERFORCE, in A Suite, poured tea. He did this effeminately, as he did everything, for the sissified manner remained with him always, no matter whether he was butchering a man or pouring tea, as he was doing now. “For a knocking together of the knees, there is nothing like a spot of tea,” he remarked.

The squat man who had turned the gas into Hold Four when he had thought Doc Savage was inside—or at least had supervised the job—was present. “I don't feel like funny conversation,” he said unpleasantly. He poured half his tea in a vase and filled the cup up with a brand of rum suitable for removing hair from dogs. “Savage is not quite as dead as we thought he was, and Hans picks this time to get an attack of

appendicitis.”

There were three other men in the sitting room, and this group, a total of six, made the place seem somewhat crowded.

Hans, the fellow who had actually turned the valve on the gas cylinder during the episode at Hold Four, had been falsely accused of being squeamish when he fainted, they had since discovered. Hans's trouble was, they believed, his appendix.

They had not called a doctor. Hans lay on a couch, sweating with pain, and eyed them anxiously. He asked them again to send for a doctor as quickly as possible.

“Schicken Sie nach einem Arzt so schnell wie möglich,” he said.

Mr. Wilberforce gave him a girlish glance of disapproval. “Really, you shouldn't speak German, my friend.”

“I'm sick,” Hans complained in English. “You've got to get a doctor for me.”

“How,” asked Mr. Wilberforce, “would you explain the presence of the girl?”

Hans was frightened and angry, and his rage seized on Annie as an object. He cursed her bitterly in German and English, then wished to know how long it would be before she was dead. Mr. Wilberforce assured him it would not be until they figured out a way of getting her body out without being observed.

“She's not going to talk, that's obvious,” he said. “So we have no use for her. It was a mistake in the first place to bring her aboard.”

The squat man said, “When we grabbed her, there at that restaurant, Savage yelled at her not to tell his plans. Hell, she doesn't know his plans.”

“Savage outsharped us,” Mr. Wilberforce agreed.

He went into the bedroom to gaze malevolently at Annie, who was being guarded by another man. Annie looked back at him out of one eye in which terror and rage glittered. Her other eye was swollen and discolored with an unladylike shiner, and she was also gagged and tied hand and foot.

An imperative knock on the cabin door made Mr. Wilberforce spring to the middle of the room and snatch out a revolver.

“Lifeboat drill!” said a voice outside. “Everyone out for lifeboat drill. Take your boat stations.”

Mr. Wilberforce released a relieved breath. He had been badly startled.

Hans rolled his eyes, asked, “Hadn't somebody ought to go on drill from here?”

Mr. Wilberforce snorted.

But he looked considerably less contemptuous presently, when the door was tried, then an imperative fist hammered the panel.

“What is it now?” Mr. Wilberforce demanded angrily.

“Lifeboat drill!” a voice rapped. “All out for drill. No exceptions.”

“We're skipping it,” said Mr. Wilberforce. “So scram.”

The voice outside became angry and said, “That's what you think, buddy. Wartime regulations are still in effect on this ship, and they say everybody out on drill. So it's everybody out.”

Mr. Wilberforce, pale with rage, wheeled to the others and said, “Duck into the bedroom. I'll tell this goof Hans is sick and I've got to stay with him.” The others hurriedly disappeared into the bedroom. Mr. Wilberforce then yanked open the door and began, “My friend is sick and I've got to stay—uh, ugh, awk!” The ending of the speech was due to the difficulty of speaking around the pistol barrel which had been jammed, with grim accuracy, into his mouth.

From behind the pistol, Monk Mayfair said, “How does it taste?”

DOC SAVAGE came around Monk into the cabin, swept the place with his eyes, and went on to Hans, who was trying to get off the couch. He hit Hans a short uppercut and Hans lay back down. Ham Brooks entered the cabin, selected two chairs, carried them to the door and told Monk, “Get your friend out of the way.” Monk crowded Mr. Wilberforce farther into the cabin. Ham laid the chairs across the door, where they would impede the footwork of anyone trying to leave in haste.

The bedroom door opened a crack. Doc kicked it as hard as he could, driving the door back and ruining the face that was behind it.

Monk Mayfair grinned at Mr. Wilberforce, then hit Mr. Wilberforce under the jaw while the gun nozzle was still in Mr. Wilberforce's mouth. As a result, teeth broke and flew like gravel from Mr. Wilberforce's lips.

Several bullets came into the cabin from the bedroom, but they were fired at random and did not hit anyone.

Ham said, “I'll look in the other bedroom.” He went toward the second bedroom door, stopped at a banging noise in the bedroom. With displeasure, he eyed the splinter-edged holes bullets had made in that door. “We seem to have a houseful,” he said.

Doc Savage fished some smoke grenades out of his pockets, standard U.S. Signal Corps grenades of the type used for making colored smoke signals. He got them to functioning and tossed them on the floor. There followed a short silence while they waited for the smoke to get effective, and while the men in the bedrooms tried to get organized.

Monk had an inspiration.

He yelled, “Get your masks on, guys! Let the poison gas finish the job!”

This did not have exactly the effect he had anticipated, because men began coming out of the bedrooms like weasels out of a hollow log. They came fast, full of the idea there was poison gas in the cabin, hence anxious to get out into the corridor without pausing for any foolishness such as fighting. They seemed, in fact, to all come at once.

Ham yelled, collared someone, was knocked loose. A gun slammed deafeningly. It was the cue for everyone to start emptying his gun. The room became a pandemonium of shooting, howling and running. Ham's chairs across the door brought down the first ones, but they got up and went on, and the chairs were kicked out of the way.

In ten seconds, the noisy part of it was over.

The smoke from the grenades was green. It was the most infernally greenish green Doc believed he had ever seen, and dense. He tested its denseness with his fingers in front of his nose and barely distinguished the digits.

“Monk?” he ventured cautiously.

“I’m in one piece. We didn’t do so good, did we?” Monk muttered.

“Ham?”

“Right.”

“You and Monk see if the girl is here. I’m going to see if I can follow and collar some of those fellows.”

THE following operation did not turn out well. Doc went out into the corridor, and suddenly there were too many bullets there. He got back into A Suite in haste.

Monk called, “Doc?”

“Yes?”

“We’ve got a girl here. In this smoke, you couldn’t see a stroke of lightning on the end of your nose, but I imagine it’s Annie.”

Doc tried to remember whether the deluxe cabins had round portholes too small for a man to pass, or whether they were large window affairs. He asked Ham, “Are the portholes big enough to let us out?”

Ham reported, “One whole side of the sun porch is plate glass.”

“Break it, and let's get out of here,” Doc said. “Monk, help me look for some of the gang who may have been left behind.”

Presently the plate glass shattered loudly. Doc crawled around on all fours, seeking the man who had been on the divan, and whom he was positive he had knocked senseless. He didn't find the fellow. Someone had been quick-witted and taken the unconscious man along.

Suddenly, in horror, Monk grunted, then said, “Jeepers!”

“What's wrong?”

“Here's one. But he stopped a bullet, and I think I've got him all over my hands.”

Hastily, Doc said, “Let's go.”

Ham was on deck, clear of the green smoke that was pouring through the shattered glass. Quite a number of passengers and crew, drawn by the shooting, uproar and smoke, were gathering.

Doc endeavored to sound loud and important and told them, “Better get the fire brigade to work. Something is wrong in there.”

In the ensuing confusion, he helped Ham carry Annie—the girl was Annie—inside and to the cabin in which they had left Carter guarding Van Zandt Basset and Jack Thomas.

“Whew! It sounded like the war had broken out again!” Carter gasped. “Is she all right?”

Doc said they would see, and he untied Annie. Annie immediately earned their secret approval by announcing freely and in detail exactly what she thought of the world in general and particularly their method of rescuing her. It was not flattering. Annie felt they had shown scant consideration of her life, that they had behaved like idiots who didn't give two cents for their own necks. It was not a speech of gratitude, but somehow it fitted the circumstances exactly. It showed Annie was human.

“An appropriate speech,” said the fat man pleasantly.

THE mild speech had the effect of fixing every eye on Van Zandt Basset, all with suspicion except for the fat man's companion, Jack Thomas, who smiled slightly in approval. It was the first sign of anything like a normal emotion that Jack Thomas had exhibited.

“You,” Doc told the fat man, “are a nut that is about to be cracked. A can about to be opened. A mystery to be solved.”

"I'm perfectly agreeable," Basset said.

Doc nodded.

"Talk," he directed.

"Why, I explained that I am a Dutch oil man," Basset stated. "I lost my holdings in Borneo—"

"You're not," Doc interrupted, "fooling with the oil business now. You may be an oil man; I wouldn't know. But that isn't the story I want to hear." Doc turned to Carter, asked, "Did you search him?"

"No. I was afraid to get that close to him," Carter confessed.

"Search him, Monk."

Monk mined various documents, assorted cigars, and an impressive roll of currency out of the fat man's clothing. After consulting the documents, he reported, "They say he's a Dutchman in the oil business."

Doc pointed at Jack Thomas. "Try him."

The scholarly young man had cigarettes instead of cigars and a roll of bills which would not choke quite as large a bull as his friend's would have.

Monk examined the loot. "Ex-college professor. Specialty is Social Sciences. War refugee. Last place he taught was Chungking. Has a lot of documents entitling him to enter the United States. The last all look genuine, but I wouldn't know whether they are or not."

"No guns?"

"Not a gun."

"I'm glad you're satisfied," said the fat man triumphantly.

"We're not," Doc told him. "Not any part satisfied."

Jack Thomas made his second speech since Doc had known him. He spoke with scholarly preciseness. "What do you think you are going to do about it?"

Doc looked at him coldly. "Plenty," he said. "And you won't like it."

Jack Thomas' face darkened. "You'd better make sure you know what you're doing, my friend."

Doc leaned forward tiredly. He was angry and worried. "I hope you know what *you're* doing," he said bitterly. "Because we're not going to fool around with you. This whole filthy, fantastic mess is beginning to blow up in somebody's face, and it's not going to be our face if we can help it. We have a friend named Johnny Littlejohn who—"

He stopped. The fat man had started slightly, and the sight made the words cramp in Doc's throat. He was gripped by all the fears he had been feeling for Johnny's safety for days, and these terrors held him speechless. He could say no word, and watched Monk step forward, and, his voice terrible with intensity, address Basset.

"What about Johnny?" Monk demanded. "You know something about him, don't you?"

Basset said with thin-lipped grimness, "I know he's in a mess."

“Where is Johnny?”

“I know something else, too,” the fat man added. “I know this ship is going to become one choice corner of hell, and I don't see anything anybody can do to stop it.”

A gentle knocking sounded on the door. A quiet voice called, “This is Captain Stromberg, commander of the vessel. Will you gentlemen kindly open up and avoid trouble for everyone concerned?”

EYES fixed on the door, Doc tried to recall whether anyone had locked it from the inside. He didn't believe they had. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw Ham Brooks glide silently to the porthole, which was round and looked out on the deck. Ham looked, then turned a shocked face.

“There's half a dozen sailors out here with more guns than a Commando squad.”

“Do they seem genuine crew members?”

“As far as I can tell.”

Suddenly showing so much alarm that it startled all of them, Basset said, “For God's sake, don't take any chances!”

Doc moved to the door and called, “Who did you say this is?”

“The captain of the ship,” the quiet voice replied.

“What do you want?”

“Open up, please.”

“Not,” Doc said, “unless you give us some proof you are the skipper. And you'd better not try to come in here until you're invited, either.”

The voice added grim determination to its quietness and said, “There has been a lot of excitement and a murder in one of the deluxe cabins. Some men were seen leaving the suite through a broken window, carrying a young woman who was bound and gagged, and these gentlemen were seen to enter this cabin. If you have an explanation, admit us and we'll be glad to listen. If you want to get tough, we can get tough also. I'll give you thirty seconds.”

Jack Thomas spoke thickly.

“That's the skipper of the ship,” he said. “I know his voice.”

It was not this statement which convinced Doc Savage. Instead, it was the unbounded relief which swept the fat man's face that led Doc to decide it was really the captain of the ship outside.

“Come in, Captain,” Doc called. “The door is not locked.”

Chapter XII

TWILIGHT, the brief unreal twilight of the tropics, had laid its fleeting warm glow over the sea, and was generally giving a placid feeling to the liner that didn't belong at all. The *Empress Margaret* charged through the sea at better than twenty knots, throwing the sea aside with her bows in a sound like heavy,

uneven breathing, as if she were suffering, which was appropriate, Doc Savage reflected.

Doc was on the bridge. So was Monk, Ham, Carter, Annie, Basset and Thomas, the steersman, the deck officer and Captain Stromberg, who had paused to listen to Major Stevens, who was in charge of the armed guard for the prisoners of war.

“Something queer,” Major Stevens was telling the Captain anxiously, “is happening to the prisoners. I can't make it out, but it's beginning to frighten me. The prisoners, the Nazis as well as the Japs, are starting to boil over. That is, they've given symptoms. And I don't like it.”

“What kind of symptoms?” Captain Stromberg demanded.

“You saw how terrified those Japs acted after that fellow Kusumura jumped overboard? Well, it's getting worse. There's no sense to it, and I don't see what they're afraid of, or what's upsetting them. It's fantastic. But something is getting them worked up to the point where they're going nuts, and may do anything.”

“You had better increase the guard.”

“I know my business,” said Major Stevens briefly. “I have all my men alerted.”

As yet, Captain Stromberg had had no time to question Doc's party. He faced them, but hesitated when a sailor came on to the bridge. “Yes? What is it?”

“That Jap who jumped overboard, sir. That Kusumura.”

“What about him?”

“He just committed suicide, sir.”

“What,” demanded the Captain bitterly, “was the guard doing?”

“The Jap pulled the bed sheet over his head, sir. Then he tied his pajama coat around his throat and strangled himself, and the guard didn't notice him because he was under the sheet.”

Captain Stromberg looked at Major Stevens blankly. “There was certainly something on that Jap's mind.”

“There's something on all of their minds,” the Major said uneasily.

Stromberg suddenly leveled an arm at Doc Savage. “Some stranger got into that Jap's cabin with a ruse and questioned him. The Jap said it was you, and the description the guard gave answers your looks.”

Doc nodded grimly.

“We've got trouble on our hands,” Doc said. “It isn't going to help us a bit if half of us don't know what we are doing. We had better get the whole story of this thing told right now.”

Jack Thomas cleared his throat with scholarly dignity. “That's an eminent idea, undoubtedly.”

“How would you like to start the story off?” Doc demanded.

Jack Thomas looked about the group with studious mildness. “I have no objections.”

BEFORE Thomas had spoken a dozen sentences, Doc Savage was convinced that the young man possessed a brain far from ordinary. Doc was inclined to judge men a great deal by their speech, not basing opinion too much on any one thing, but weighing the man's pronunciation and grammatical delivery—these were usually a fair indication of background and education—and the clarity with which ideas were expressed and topics dealt with. This Jack Thomas was clever. He was, Doc felt, an intellectual giant.

Jack Thomas was giving his background—English by birth, public schools, Oxford, Heidelberg, then social sciences and travel. He had, he explained, finally settled in China because he was interested in some of the aspects of ancient Chinese philosophy—the Chinese the world over had a reputation of being versed in philosophical tenets which they had perfected coming down the centuries, and Thomas had believed that they had something to offer, in spite of the fact that in a material sense—automobiles, bathtubs and radios—the Chinese national economy was negative in position when compared to other nations such as America and England.

“You probably understand now that my special interest is the philosophy of mankind, the way men think,” he remarked. “Now I'll take up the matter at hand, which I at first greeted with about the same degree of incredulity which you will be inclined to present to it.”

From somewhere below decks, far away, there was a single report. A shot.

“Find out what that was,” Captain Stromberg ordered. A sailor departed hurriedly.

Annie had paled at the shot. Since her pointed remarks about the way they had risked her life in rescuing her, she hadn't had much to say.

Now she spoke, asking, “Is this supposed to be secret?” and nodding at the helmsman.

“Too late for secrecy to do much good,” Doc said, when it was evident no one else was going to speak. “Anyway, no one is going to really believe it, unless the proof is in front of their eyes—the way we're going to have it in front of our eyes before long.”

“God forbid,” said the fat man, Van Zandt Basset. He sounded horrified.

Jack Thomas resumed his recital.

“It was in Chungking,” he continued, “that I first heard of there being an individual who had caused the current cycle of wars. The story was told me by Wo To Sei-gei, an elderly scholar, who had received it as a rumor. However, as it developed, Sei-gei's story was remarkably accurate in the primary details, which attributed great mental genius to the fellow, together with infinite psychological ability. The machine, too, was a part of old Sei-gei's story, together with a fairly reasonable theory of how it must work. I never was able to ascertain the source of the old Chinese's rumor, but it was amazingly accurate.”

Captain Stromberg suddenly lost color, and in a moment perspiration beaded his face.

He demanded, “Am I to understand a *human mind* is responsible for these wars?”

“Exactly.”

Major Stevens cleared his throat. “You mean Hitler, Mussolini and the Tojo crowd, don't you?”

“No. Although Jonas Sown unquestionably had prominent Nazis as underlings, perhaps Hitler himself.”

“Who,” demanded Major Stevens, “is Jonas Sown?”

“Jonas Sown,” said Thomas, “is an example of how dangerous genius can be to humanity.”

“You mean this Jonas Sown is—is—”

“He caused the last ten years of war, yes.”

Major Stevens started to pull in a great breath of surprise, but when half-drawn, it exploded out of his lungs again in hysterical laughter. Not amused mirth. Disbelief, wild and incredulous and a little unhinged. The Major kept laughing, a silly expression on his face, for several moments, and toward the last he began to look as if he doubted his own sanity.

JACK THOMAS said calmly, “That is what I meant—one's mind refuses to accept the thing.”

“Go on with the story,” Doc directed.

“I work for the Chinese government now,” said Jack Thomas. “My commission is to find and destroy Jonas Sown, which in general terms means finding and destroying a creature no one believes exists. I have been three years on the assignment. I will not detail those three years, but they were heartbreaking. But in the end I found Jonas Sown does exist.”

Doc Savage interrupted, “Sown was in Japan?”

Jack Thomas nodded. “When Germany fell, he went to Japan. From Japan he fled to China, to Japanese occupied China, and from there to inside the American lines, thence to Manila. This he managed very cleverly, for he became an Axis war prisoner deliberately, and contrived to get into a group which is being sent to America. He is—and this I think, but cannot prove—one of the war prisoners now on this liner.”

Now Jack Thomas turned to the fat man, Van Zandt Basset.

“Mr. Basset,” he said, “is a secret agent of the Dutch government. His assignment is also to find and destroy Jonas Sown.”

Basset cleared his throat. “We teamed up, Thomas and I, in Manila, after we found we were both after the same fox.”

“It's obvious, from what I've told you, why we're aboard,” Thomas added.

“Just why,” Doc asked thoughtfully, “were you in the Avion restaurant last night?”

“Some of the men we know to be Jonas Sown's agents were hanging around there.”

“Why not grab one of those agents and force him to lead you to Sown?”

Thomas smiled grimly. “We've tried that. None of the agents apparently know just who he is.”

Captain Stromberg eyed Doc Savage suspiciously. “I've heard of Doc Savage, so I'm inclined to trust you,” he said. “But I'd like to know where you hitch into this, and whether you believe the whole goofy story.”

Doc said readily, “I hook into it much the same as Mr. Thomas says he did. I first heard a rumor of such

an individual as Jonas Sown. That was several months ago, and my reaction was what anyone's would be—disbelief. However, the thing stuck in my mind. The whole approach of Italy, Germany and Japan to this people has been so deliberately inhuman that it *could* be the work of an evil force personified by one man. So I assigned one of my friends, who is also my aide, to investigate. The man was Johnny Littlejohn, archaeologist and geologist. I picked Johnny because he happens to speak Japanese fluently, as well as a number of Chinese dialects, and he can impersonate an Oriental rather well.”

Doc paused. The sailor who had gone to investigate the shot had come back. He said, “The guards had to shoot one of the war prisoners. A Nazi. The fellow attempted to make a break, although he should have seen he didn't stand a chance.”

“How is the situation?” Major Stevens demanded.

“Not good, sir,” the sailor said.

THERE was very little more to his story, Doc Savage explained. Johnny Littlejohn had not been heard from on the assignment until recently, when he had despatched a hurried summons from Manila for Doc Savage.

“He had learned the identity of Jonas Sown,” Doc said.

Everyone jumped at that. Jack Thomas particularly. “How do you know he found out?” Thomas demanded.

“From the wording of Johnny's summons,” Doc explained. “We had previously agreed on a general code for communicating intelligence of a general sort. The words he used told me he had found Jonas Sown, although the text of his message contained no such information.”

Doc indicated Carter.

“The United States Army, I learned on arriving in Manila, had been coöperating with Johnny in the investigation. Mr. Carter, here, is one of the Army men assigned to assist me in finding John Littlejohn, who had disappeared after communicating with me.”

“What happened to Littlejohn?” Captain Stromberg demanded.

“He had the misfortune to be caught by Jonas Sown's men, I imagine,” Doc said. “At any rate, the Jap who jumped overboard, Kusumura, said Johnny was on the ship, and I'm inclined to believe that correct.”

Captain Stromberg scowled. “I'm half inclined not to believe a damned word of this witch's tale!”

Annie spoke an explosive word.

“Dope!” she said.

The skipper wheeled on her to demand skeptically, “Where do you come into this affair?”

“I rode into it,” Annie told him, “on my bump of curiosity. I had an attack of a disease called inquisitiveness, of which, incidentally, I'm cured. I started following Mr. Savage around to pass the time. I thought I might see some excitement. That made the U.S. Army suspicious, and they threw me in jail, investigated me, then turned me loose. That called Jonas Sown's attention to me, and he had me grabbed

and sneaked aboard this ship.”

“Sounds thin to me,” Captain Stromberg said briefly. “Why should they smuggle you aboard?”

“To ask me questions,” Annie said. “And, believe me, they asked plenty. They had more than they could ask before the boat sailed, so they brought me aboard to continue asking them.”

“What kind of questions?”

“What did Doc Savage know? Who was I? What was Doc Savage going to do? He had more questions than snakes have holes.” Annie looked bitterly at Doc and added, “You certainly got me into a fine mess.”

Captain Stromberg remarked that everything was in a mess, if anyone asked. He demanded, “Savage, what is this Jonas Sown going to do?”

“Escape, if he can,” Doc said. “That means he’ll be rough on anyone in his way. However, he’s not going to get away with it. He’s not going to get away with it because we have him in the bag.”

The effect on those in the room was what Hollywood would call a double take, with the full import of Doc’s last few words being missed; then the statement landed like a thunderbolt.

Jack Thomas sprang to his feet. He looked wildly eager. “My God, I’ve gone through three years of hell for a chance at Jonas Sown!” he cried. “I hope you know what you’re talking about.”

Monk and Ham reacted almost as strongly, as did Stromberg. Carter and the fat Van Zandt Basset, however, didn’t take it as big, and Doc thought they exchanged brief glances.

Doc turned to Captain Stromberg. “Suppose,” he said, “you get these people in a cabin where they are safe, while you and I have a talk.”

“Why can’t you talk here?”

“This talk had better be private.”

“Just you and I?”

“Exactly.”

“What about Major Stevens?”

“This talk,” Doc said, “has to be between you and me. And I want everyone else—and I mean everyone—to go to a cabin and wait.”

The skipper wheeled. “All right, I don’t know what Savage has up his sleeve, but I’m going to play ball with him. My cabin is large enough to hold everyone comfortably, so you’ll wait there.”

DOC SAVAGE and Stromberg withdrew to the first mate’s cabin, which was not particularly commodious, where Stromberg voiced his suspicions.

“I don’t know what you are trying to pull, but it had better be good,” the Captain muttered. “I don’t like the way the war prisoners are acting.” He scowled suddenly. “By the way, what are the prisoners actually trying to do?”

“Create a diversion, probably,” Doc said. “In other words, get us involved in suppressing a mutiny and so busy at the job that Jonas Sown can cover his tracks—which he can only do by killing, or having killed, those who know enough about him to be dangerous.”

“Tell me this: how are the prisoners being stirred up?”

“I can't imagine,” Doc said. “But to a man who has stirred up whole nations until they actually became inhuman, a little matter of arousing some war prisoners should be simple.”

Stromberg pondered.

“Hell, do you believe that Jonas Sown yarn?”

“I certainly do.”

“You mean the guy has some kind of a magical gadget that can make people think the way he wants them to think?”

Doc Savage smiled grimly.

“Let's be sane about this,” he said. “The way to be sane is not to attribute too much to Jonas Sown, but also not to underrate him. The fellow may be a genius.”

“You said you had him trapped. Did you mean that?”

Doc corrected quietly, “I did not say trapped. I said he was in the bag. What we've got to do now is tie the mouth of the bag shut before he gets out.”

Captain Stromberg frowned. “How?”

“Listen,” Doc said. “I want you to pick six men you can trust, and get them here quick.”

“Will two of your friends do as part—”

“I want six of the crew,” Doc said. “Six men who've been with you a long time, and have some sense, and can follow orders.”

“You'd better explain what you want them to do, so I'll know what kind of men to pick.”

“I want one of your men put on the trail of each one of the group to whom we were just talking,” Doc explained. “I want Monk trailed, and Ham, Carter, Thomas, Basset and the girl, Annie.”

“Good God, you don't think this arch-fiend could be the girl?”

“Could be. How soon can you get six sailors you can trust?”

“Mighty quick,” Captain Stromberg said. “You wait here.”

“Hold it,” Doc said. “I want a small bottle of perfume, and six pistols or revolvers, one of them loaded with blanks.”

“What kind of perfume?” Stromberg was puzzled.

“Any kind, just so it's strong.”

“I have blank cartridges for signaling—”

“Won't do,” Doc interrupted. “These must have lead in them and look natural. Useless cartridges, I should have said. They don't need to make a noise.”

“Okay to just pull the lead out of the bullets, empty the powder and put the lead back?”

“That will be fine.”

“All right, you wait here,” Captain Stromberg said.

LATER Captain Stromberg watched with interest, but without comprehension, while Doc Savage placed a small quantity of the perfume, a very small quantity, on the handgrip of each gun, and filled one of the guns with the useless cartridges.

“These the six sailors who are to follow the different people?” Doc demanded.

Stromberg introduced the sailors. He knew them by name, and it was evident that they had sailed with him on many voyages. “They're good men,” he said.

Doc began assigning the sailors the persons they were to trail, not too easy a task because he had to do the allocating by description alone. To be sure they had their respective quarry clearly in mind, he questioned them about the descriptions until satisfied.

“You're not to show yourselves,” he warned. “A great deal depends on this, and if you muff it, there'll be the devil to pay. So be careful.”

“When do we report?” a sailor asked.

“I was coming to that,” Doc said. “You let me, or Captain Stromberg, know the minute one of the persons you are following enters a cabin or a hold or a storeroom.”

“You mean *any* cabin?”

“Exactly.”

“Okay.”

“And let us know quick,” Doc said. “Now we're ready to go. You fellows hang around the Captain's cabin and keep your eyes open. As soon as you see your man or woman come out of the skipper's quarters, get on his trail.”

Doc beckoned to Captain Stromberg. “Come on. We'll set up the rest of the machinery for this scheme.”

They moved toward the skipper's cabin. “I don't see the object,” Stromberg said. “Do you think one of your gang is in with the crooks?”

“Possibly.”

Stromberg snorted. “If one of them is, he—or she—won't be fool enough to lead the way to Jonas Sown. They won't be that dumb.”

“Did you ever raise chickens?” Doc asked.

“Huh? Chickens? Not since I was a kid on the farm—”

“You'll recall that normally any old hen had sense enough not to run or fly into a chicken-wire fence, but the same old hen at the sight of a hawk would lose all judgment about fences, and plunge headlong into it.”

“Well—”

“We are going to make like a hawk,” Doc said.

DOC SAVAGE confronted the group in the Captain's Cabin, held his metallic face in an expression of grim concern, and made a speech which Captain Stromberg, who was expecting the earth to shake, did not consider alarming.

Doc said, “The increase of uneasiness among the war prisoners looks bad. We don't know who is working with Jonas Sown, which means we are hardly in a position to trust anyone but ourselves. Therefore we've got to handle this ourselves, and the thing we want first is information about the initial move the war prisoners are going to make.”

Doc paused and eyed the group thoughtfully.

“I want a full report of the situation on the ship as of right now,” he added. “So I'm going to assign each of you a section of the ship to survey.”

He spoke rapidly to each in succession, giving decks and hold sections which he wished reconnoitered.

“Report back here at once,” he said. “Then we'll make our first move.”

The fat man, Basset, blinked at Doc. “Mind telling me your first move? I mean, all this seems a bit aimless to me.”

“We're going to rescue Johnny Littlejohn,” Doc said. “That comes first. And before I do it, I want to know the distribution of the enemy, anything suspicious going on. Because after we get Johnny, he is going to be able to tell us enough to pop this thing wide open. Things are going to hum.”

Basset grinned. “You know where Littlejohn is?”

“I can lay hands on him when the time comes,” Doc said.

“Where is he?”

“That,” Doc said, “comes under the heading of restricted information.”

Basset's face darkened. “If you don't trust—”

Doc said, “If you knew where Johnny is, and something inconvenient happened to him as a result of a tip-off, I wouldn't trust you as much as I do now.”

Basset wet his lips. “I see.”

Doc extended the weapons.

“Here,” he said. “Take these guns. You may need them.”

Basset hefted the revolver he had been handed. “I like my own gun better.”

Captain Stromberg made the speech Doc had told him to make. He said, “An officer took the guns we removed from you after we arrested you, and I can't find him now and don't know where he put the weapons. These will have to do.”

“Get on the job,” Doc urged. “We haven't any time to lose.”

Chapter XIII

THE sailor, Caleb Edwards by name, was a long young man with a deep south way of saying you-uns and you-all, and he was quite certain the hatch he was pointing out was the right one.

“The party you-uns told me to follow went in hyar,” he insisted.

“How long ago?” Doc asked.

“Shucks, tain't been long. Didn't let no grass grow under my feet.”

“Captain, where does the hatch lead?” Doc asked.

“Cargo hold.” Captain Stromberg rubbed his jaw briskly, and added, “You know, down there wouldn't be a bad place to hide a man.”

Doc laid hold of the hatch fastening. “Try to block the other exits and inlets,” he ordered. “And make it quick. I'm going in.” He turned and called back, “Jerk the lights.”

In a moment, the lights—it was quite dark night outside now—were extinguished. Doc wrenched open the hatch, made sure there was no glow behind him to frame him in silhouette, and went inside. He pulled the hatch shut behind him and waited and listened.

“Carter!” he called softly. “Oh, Carter!”

He kept his voice low, and changed it as much as he could, enough that no one would recognize it, he hoped.

After silence had gripped the place for a while, he added, “Carter! They're getting close to us! Let's have some light!”

A voice, not the voice of Carter, demanded, “Who're you?”

“Turn a light on,” Doc said, then moved swiftly, ducking down and going to the right. It was intensely black and he bumped into something, some case of merchandise that upset noisily, although he got his hands on it.

The voice said, “All right, take him!”

Instead of taking his hands off the small packing case that he had upset, Doc lifted the thing and threw it toward the breath-noise of a man coming toward him. A light came on while the case was still in the air, a light that showed one of the men who had staged the seizure at the Avion restaurant in Manila. The box hit the man, then box and man bounced apart, and the man's face had changed.

Doc followed the box, got to the man, got behind him, hooked an arm around the fellow. The man held a revolver, and this landed on the floor. Doc sank, using the man for a support, reaching for the gun. He got his fingers on the weapon as another gun began making ear-splitting noises and red spurts of light

behind the flashlight. Bullets one and two, then three went into the man's body, but not through it. The shock upset Doc and the man, then Doc fired from the floor.

The flashlight moved, lazily at first, turning its long funnel of light over and over—there must have been dust on the lens to give the illusion of turning—and swinging it around the hold. The light passed over boxes, bales, casks. It was still moving when the man who had done the shooting made a loud surprised sound as if he had just discovered there was a bullet hole in him.

The light toppled off the box on which it was resting, and its beam did crazy gymnastics as the light bounced from box to bale to floor.

Doc was in darkness now. He moved fast. The man he had shot was still standing, holding both hands over his right shoulder as if the splayed fingers might stop the crimson leakage. Doc hit him above the left ear with his gun, using the cylinder rather than the barrel as a bludgeon. The man sat down foolishly and the boxes and bales supported him.

There was silence.

“Johnny!” Doc called.

A violent beating of heels against wood came from somewhere near.

JOHNNY LITTLEJOHN—William Harper Littlejohn, archaeologist and geologist—had always been a remarkably thin man as well as a tall one. His skinny build was always a subject of conversation, and it was frequently stated, in humorous reference, that undertakers seemed to become cheerful when they saw him. As a matter of fact, he was remarkably healthy. But now Doc Savage stared at him in amazement.

“You look like a concentration camp guest,” Doc said.

“How many,” Johnny demanded, “did you pot-shoot?”

“Two,” Doc said. “That is, two got shot.”

“That's all of them,” Johnny said.

Doc began untying the ropes which held Johnny, and obviously had held him for a long time. There was a crashing at the bow end of the hold, noise of a hatch being forced. To allay Johnny's alarm, Doc explained it must be Captain Stromberg and his men, which it proved to be.

Reaching them, Stromberg stared at Johnny in horror. “They've starved him to death!” he said hoarsely.

Johnny Littlejohn seemed surprised.

“A presbyopic incognitance,” he remarked.

Freed of the ropes, Johnny calmly stood up and stretched, although there seemed to be no visible reason whatever for his not falling down and becoming a pile of bones and not much else.

“How long,” Doc demanded, “since they fed you?”

“Ten days, approximately,” Johnny stated. “Although the interregnumical metaphoricality was a bit bemused.”

Monk and Ham now arrived, and Monk yelled, “Johnny! My God, we've found Johnny!” He rushed forward and seized Johnny and bellowed, “How do you feel? You okay? And don't use any of them words on me!”

“I feel fine,” Johnny declared. “The diet seemed to agree with me.”

“Diet of what?”

“It was composed,” Johnny admitted, “mostly of threats.”

Basset came lumbering up, trailed by Jack Thomas, and Annie. Thomas snarled, “Where's Carter?” Thomas had his gun in his hand.

Johnny was looking strangely at Thomas.

“You'll find him over there,” Johnny said, and pointed.

Jack Thomas cocked his revolver. “You know who Carter's got to be?” he asked them hoarsely. “He's got to be Jonas Sown.”

Then, suddenly and fiercely, he rushed the spot where Johnny had pointed. He fired as he went, shot twice; then suddenly he stopped, aimed deliberately, and fired three times more, emptying his gun.

Doc Savage, suddenly very pale, leaned against a packing case. He had, he was thinking, just received one of the great shocks of his lifetime.

JACK THOMAS lowered his gun. His face looked yellowish, slick with perspiration, and his voice was queer as he said, “He's dead.”

Johnny Littlejohn was looking fixedly, and even more strangely, at Thomas.

“He was,” Johnny said, “already dead.”

No one spoke.

Johnny added, finally, “That fellow, Carter, came in here a few minutes ago. They were laying for him, knew he was coming. They had been tipped off. It was a trap. Someone had told Carter he would find someone here who would tell him where I was.”

Johnny eyed Thomas intently.

“He was already dead,” he repeated. “They killed him.”

Thomas said hoarsely, “I didn't—I—I'm sure he was going to shoot me.”

There was silence again, and it became almost weird.

Doc Savage said at last, “Johnny.”

“Yes?”

“You know this fellow?” He pointed at Thomas.

“Yes, I know him.”

Jack Thomas moved wildly, going back and to the side, trying to find cover. At the same time he tried wildly to get a hand into his coat pocket, bring out cartridges and reload his gun.

Fat Van Zandt Basset croaked, “Damn! He's Jonas Sown!” And his gun began hurting their ears with its noise.

Jack Thomas stopped going backward, stood up very straight, aimed his empty gun at Basset, said, “*Verdamt Holländischer!*” in a queerly composed voice, and began pulling the trigger. He was still snapping the empty gun when he leaned forward and fell, and they could hear the empty gun snapping underneath his body for several moments after he was on the floor. It was the last sound he made.

Doc said, “Have Major Stevens watch the war prisoners closely for the next few hours, and I think our troubles will be over.”

THEY had breakfast in the morning sunshine, eating at a table which a steward set up on the deck. All of them, Monk and Ham and Basset and Captain Stromberg and Major Stevens, neglected their ham and eggs and listened to Johnny Littlejohn tell Doc his story. Annie looked particularly lovely this morning, and for her Johnny was using small words.

“The weird part of it is that I never really got a look at Jonas Sown, and never was absolutely positive that he was one individual,” Johnny explained. “But I think he was. I picked up his trail in Japan, where he fled after Germany fell, and I think he soon learned that I was on his trail. At any rate, I had a lot of trouble, and finally—I'm skipping a lot—trailed him down through China and Burma to the Philippines, to Manila. The only time I ever saw the man you know as Jack Thomas was in Japan, and I saw him under circumstances which led me to believe he was Jonas Sown.”

Basset growled, “He told me he'd never been in Japan. Which proves he was lying.”

“He was Jonas Sown for my money,” Johnny said. “I'm satisfied.”

Johnny helped himself to a fourth portion of ham and eggs, added two flapjacks, a pair of sausages, and poured maple syrup over the pile.

Alarmed, Annie said, "Isn't it dangerous to eat so much after going without food as long as you have?"

Johnny grinned. "So I've heard."

Captain Stromberg asked Major Stevens how the war prisoners were behaving.

"Quieting down," the Major said with relief. "I can't understand what happened to them, what stirred them up that way."

"That's easy," Stromberg said. "It was Jonas Sown's gang. There were nine of them aboard. Anyway, we've caught nine. And some of the war prisoners, like that fellow Kusumura who committed suicide, were Jonas Sown's henchmen, too."

Annie asked, "Why were they among the war prisoners, if they were Jonas Sown's employees?"

"Taking that way of getting to America," Stromberg explained. "We've got that much out of them."

Ham Brooks said, "Johnny."

"Yes?"

"How did this Jonas Sown do his dirty work? Did he have some kind of a machine to work on people's minds, or what?"

The question struck Johnny unpleasantly, and he put down his knife and fork. "I wish to God I knew for sure," he said. "There could have been a machine, because I know they dumped some stuff overboard as soon as they found Doc and the rest of you were alive. It was something in cases. I don't know what it was, but if it was a gadget, it's where we'll never find it."

Stromberg nodded with pleasure. "That's good." He turned to Doc Savage. "Say, what did you put that perfume on the guns for?"

"What?" Doc came out of deep thought. "Oh, the perfume. It was an idea that I didn't have time to use, one that might not have worked anyway. I intended to pretend to find traces of the perfume at the first spot we located where we were certain Jonas Sown had been, then give the idea each of you had a

different perfume on his gun, on the chance it would trick Thomas into giving himself away.”

Stromberg jumped visibly. “You suspected Thomas?”

Doc nodded.

“It was Thomas to whom I gave the gun with the useless cartridges in it,” he said.

“How'd you happen to suspect him?”

“I hate to admit playing hunches, but that is about all I did,” Doc admitted. “Thomas was obviously possessed of an amazing mentality. I think I caught glimpses of an almost frightening cleverness in the man. It was that, more than anything else.”

“Didn't you have any direct evidence?”

“Well, yes. He looked sick as the dickens when I made that remark about our having Jonas Sown in the bag, which was a slight exaggeration.”

Monk was frowning at Doc.

“That wasn't any empty gun he had,” Monk said.

Doc shuddered. “So I noticed. He must have found the useless cartridges and substituted real ones. And that, I want to tell you, gave me one of the worst shocks of my life. I was planning to walk up and collar him, thinking his gun was harmless.”

ANNIE picked up the percolator and asked gaily, “Does anyone want coffee? And I wish you fellows would find something pleasant to talk about. Personally, I've had enough trouble and excitement to do me.”

Doc smiled at her. “Just why did you mix yourself in it in the first place?” he asked. “It was for the excitement, wasn't it?”

Annie came back with a look that gave his ears a crisp burn.

“That,” she said, “was what I thought.”

Doc decided he shouldn't have brought up the subject.

“But sometimes,” Annie added, “a girl doesn't know her own mind—at first.”

“Uh—nice morning, isn't it?” Doc remarked.

Annie examined him thoughtfully. “I am,” she said, “known as a forthright baggage. I always give warning.”

Doc had trouble with a piece of toast. “I—you do?”

“Brother, have you ever been pursued by an amorous female?” Annie demanded.

“Well, I—”

“You can,” said Annie, “consider yourself warned.”

THE END

DOC SAVAGE RETIRES

Or does he?

It started with some counterfeit lecture tickets that were free, anyway—an exploding gasoline truck—a swathe of bandages that all but hid a face.

Then there was the private eye who was shipped off to Mexico . . .

What did it all add up to? Read MEASURES FOR A COFFIN in the January issue of

Doc Savage

At All Newsstands