



THE DEATH LADY

A Doc Savage Adventure by Kenneth Robeson

This page formatted 2004 Blackmask Online.

<http://www.blackmask.com>

- ? [Chapter I](#)
- ? [Chapter II](#)
- ? [Chapter III](#)
- ? [Chapter IV](#)
- ? [Chapter V](#)
- ? [Chapter VI](#)
- ? [Chapter VII](#)
- ? [Chapter VIII](#)
- ? [Chapter IX](#)
- ? [Chapter X](#)
- ? [Chapter XI](#)
- ? [Chapter XII](#)
- ? [Chapter XIII](#)
- ? [Chapter XIV](#)

Chapter I

The ship did not dock at the North River pier until after eleven o'clock that night. She was a big liner, and she had to be brought in at high tide. Passengers would soon be coming ashore. . . .

The two men were seated in the parked coupe a short distance away from the entrance to the long pier shed. It was dark and little traffic moved along the wide street. Across the way wholesale produce markets and warehouses stood in darkness. It would be hours yet before the early-morning trading started.

A very tall, large figure moved out of the shadows and appeared suddenly beside the driver's side of the coupe. The man's features were concealed by the darkness.

He spoke quietly and briefly. "Now, you're sure you have everything straight, Ham?"

The man behind the wheel of the coupe nodded.

The arrival said, "If anyone starts any kind of commotion whatsoever, you are to move in fast. Overlook nothing. Keep your eyes open."

"Check!"

"And Monk?" said the man outside the car. It was necessary for him to bend over slightly in order to look inside the car.

"Yeah, Doc?"

"Even if there is trouble, try not to start a private war of your own. We do not want to draw any undue

attention.”

“Okay, Doc.”

The big man moved off. There was a long, dark-colored sedan parked near the pier entrance, somewhat apart from a long line of taxicabs that had drawn up, awaiting customers. A single patrolman, assigned to direct traffic, stood in the oasis of light cast by an arc light just outside the long pier entrance.

The big man slipped behind the wheel of the sedan and waited.

Ham said, “Perhaps we'd better move up a bit.”

“Good idea,” said the stocky man seated beside him.

Glow from a dashboard light revealed the two occupants of the coupe as the driver moved the car forward.

Ham, the driver, was a well-dressed, dark-featured man with a large mobile mouth and sharply alert features. He had wide, straight shoulders, yet gave an appearance of slimness.

His name really was Brigadier General Theodore Marley Brooks. He was one of the most astute lawyers Harvard Law School had ever turned out.

The stocky, thickset man seated beside him was Lieutenant Colonel Andrew Blodgett Mayfair. Intimates never called him anything else except “Monk.” He was a chemist, quite renowned, yet he looked like a tank-town fighter who had seen better days.

Monk's face was scarred. His small, bright eyes peered from a homely face. His entire appearance was somewhat disheveled.

He was saying, “Just what is Long Tom bringing with him from South America that has Doc so interested?”

“An Indian,” said his partner Ham. “A live one?”

“Doc forgot to mention,” said Ham. “Long Tom just contacted him before the liner reached New York. There's something secretive about the entire thing . . . at least, Long Tom is mighty cautious about it. All I know is, we're here and we're to keep our eyes open for Long Tom and the Indian and see that nothing happens to them.”

Monk grinned. “I'll bet it's a gag. Every time Long Tom returns from a long trip like this, he tries to put one over on us.”

He sat thoughtfully rubbing his jaw, watching the pier entrance: “I don't know,” he mused. “Doc seemed quite disturbed by Long Tom's urgent message.”

Cab drivers had been standing around talking. Now they were back behind their wheels. Engines started. The line of cabs started inching forward. Abruptly the first passengers who had been cleared by the customs started emerging. The quiet of the night was stirred by activity. Porters followed with luggage. Hand trucks rumbled. Horns honked. The cop was blowing his whistle.

Monk and Ham scrutinized each passenger as he came through the gates. Both men had stopped talking. They were alert, following Doc Savage's orders.

Fifteen minutes passed. More cabs arrived. The unloading would consume time.

Then Monk sat forward. "I thought—" he started.

"I see him," said Ham quickly.

A car had managed to force its way into the steadily moving line of taxicabs. The machine came to a stop before a figure that stood out sharply in the crowd that was awaiting transportation.

The man was an Indian!

HE wore trousers, some kind of sandals, a black shirt. He was hatless, and his straight, jet-black hair fell almost to his shoulders. He was a tall, scrawny beanpole of a man. He carried a modern cowhide suitcase.

"Hey!" exclaimed Monk. "I told you I saw him," Ham reminded sharply. And both men watched.

Probably none of the passengers noticed it. Each was too intent on his own problem of locating a vacant cab.

Three men had jumped out of the car that had forced itself into line. They crowded around the tall Indian. There was a considerable amount of back-slapping, hand-shaking and boy-it's-good-to-see-you business.

At the same time the Indian was being hurried into the rear seat.

"Hey!" Monk repeated. "That looks funny to me. They're *forcing* that guy into their car!"

Ham said, "I wonder where Doc disappeared to?"

Monk was opening the door. "We haven't time to find Doc. He told us to keep our eyes open, didn't he? Well, there's an Indian, and something fishy is going on. Come on!"

"Wait!" said Ham.

Monk had one foot on the running board. He saw the rear door of the limousine slam shut. The car cut abruptly out of line, scraping a car fender. It started going away from there fast.

Monk was thrown back into the seat as Ham sent the coupe forward.

"I think," the lawyer was saying, "trouble is rearing its nasty head."

The car ahead made a U-turn in the wide waterfront street, left the main north-south thoroughfare and shot into a side street.

Ham managed to trail it to Hudson Street, where it swung uptown. There was no traffic at this hour of the night. Those in the limousine ignored traffic lights and drove at high speed.

Ham did likewise.

Nevertheless, Monk complained. "You'd think this was a hearse," he grumbled.

"We're doing seventy," said Ham. "And they're pulling away from us!" Monk was right. The limousine was two blocks ahead of them.

Then, suddenly, the big car's tail-lamps glowed more brightly as brakes were applied and the machine swung into another cross street.

“Now!” Monk urged.

And he had to admit to himself that his partner's driving was good. They slid into the side street with the expertness of a race driver taking the turn on a half-mile dirt track.

A wild series of zigzagging turnoffs into other narrow streets followed. Ham clung to the other car like a hound dog trailing a coon. The chase continued to lead uptown, but kept off the main thoroughfares.

There was one particularly long, dimly lighted street. Halfway down its long length, the limousine headlights went out. For a moment Monk could scarcely see the car ahead.

Then he yelled, “Watch out. They're stopping. Trick!”

He spun around and fumbled on the seat shelf behind him. A heavy wrench appeared in his hairy fist.

“Cut in ahead of them,” he ordered. His little eyes danced. Monk liked nothing better than a fight.

Ham, on the other hand, believed in the adroit move, cleverness, subtlety. His scrappy partner's unhesitancy at meeting violence oftentimes worried him.

The other car *had* slowed. It came to a stop with a squeal of rubber. Ham was on top of it before he could help himself. He barely managed to avoid a crash. He found himself stopped parallel to the other car, and he didn't like the situation one bit.

For neither of them carried a gun. Doc Savage always maintained that a man was apt to shoot another man without due cause if he made it a habit to carry a weapon.

As Ham brought the coupe to a jarring stop, Monk flung open the door nearest the limousine.

“Thought they'd fool us!” he exploded, and he looked as if he were going to start cracking skulls with the heavy wrench.

The limousine was suddenly backing up, the driver cutting the wheels. He was trying a fast turn-around in the street. He had already backed wildly to the opposite curb.

Monk's powerful arm was upraised. He was taking aim. . . .

Just then a rear door of the sedan whipped open. The tall, beanpole figure of the Indian came out. Fast. Monk had never seen anyone move so fast. And in the Indian's hand was a six-shooter that looked like a long-barrelled target pistol.

The Indian went down on one knee and started to aim the deadly-looking weapon. Rear door still hanging open, the limousine leaped down the dark street like a frightened jack rabbit.

The gun roared.

Ham was busy turning the coupe around.

“Yow!” Monk yelled with pleasure as the gun blasted again.

Ham had now parked and was running to join them. Monk was continuing to watch the Indian shoot at the car. He was waiting, obviously with a great deal of anticipation, to hear a rear tire explode on the disappearing car. He was excited.

But in the darkness, running without lights, weaving, the car was a vague target. Even as Monk watched,

the dark blur of the car disappeared around the corner some distance away.

Monk motioned to the Indian. "Let's go!" he suggested. "We'll catch them—

The tall, thin, lean fellow turned. He slid the longbarrelled gun inside his belt. He said quietly and calmly:

"You'll never overtake them now. Another thing. Let's get away from here before the entire neighborhood is down on our necks. Let's don't get Doc's name involved in this."

Monk stared, blinking.

Ham said in astonishment: "*Long Tom!*"

Long Tom said, "Doc certainly figures things in advance. He suggested the duplication." He was urging them toward the coupe as he spoke.

"You mean," said Monk, "the real Indian is—

"He is probably safe with Doc," said Long Tom.

IN the library of Doc Savage's eighty- sixth floor skyscraper headquarters, Long Tom finished telling them about it. The huge room was lined from floor to ceiling with bookcases containing huge volumes on every branch of science. It was here that people were interviewed when they came to Doc Savage with many unusual and desperate requests for help.

Long Tom, who was one of the Doc Savage associates, was rubbing the final traces of dark skin stain from his face. He had changed to more customary dress. He was the electrical expert of Doc's organization.

He was a tall, scrawny man who looked almost unhealthy when his features were truly revealed. His skin was the color of yesterday's leftover oatmeal. Yet he had never known a sick day in his life. He was hard as a rail fence post.

He told them, "I met Beaverbrook in South America."

"Beaverbrook!" asked Monk. "He's the Indian. That's about what his name sounds like when he rattles it off. So I call him that. He belongs to a little-known tribe of Indians from deep in the interior of Brazil. He's had a little education. He can speak some English and Spanish."

Ham asked, "What did you do . . . adopt him?"

Skinny Long Tom shook his head. "He knows about Gloria Halliday." Long Tom made the statement and then waited, as if he expected something to happen.

"So?" Ham prompted. "Don't tell me you've forgotten?" Both Ham and Monk frowned.

"Look," said Long Tom. He was inclined to be a little impatient at times. "John Halliday's daughter. Remember, they went on that expedition six years ago. He was the millionaire who used to go on those jaunts all over the world. Gloria was fifteen at the time—

"Gloria Halliday!" cried Monk, and understanding lit up his homely features.

"Yes—her," said Long Tom. "Sure, I remember it now," said the chemist. "Gloria Halliday's pictures were in the newspapers for months. She and her wealthy father disappeared somewhere in the interior of Brazil, and they've never been heard from since!"

Long Tom nodded.

Ham added: "Every once in a while the newspapers dig it up again. The public is always interested in a mystery like that one. It's the same as Amelia Earhart's strange disappearance from the face of the earth."

"Exactly," said Long Tom.

Then, watching their faces, he announced, "Well, I think I've found Gloria Halliday."

THE effect was as though Long Tom had stated that he knew the entire secret of the atomic bomb.

"You mean," asked Ham, "Gloria Halliday is *alive*?"

"Yes."

"Where?"

"Somewhere deep in the interior of Brazil. I should put it this way . . . I know where she is. Beaverbrook, the Indian, told me. But the journey into that unexplored area will take weeks. That's why I need Doc's help. Yours, too. Besides, there's my old friend Happy Halliday."

Ham's head moved up and down slowly as understanding came to him. "I remember," he said. "You've often spoken of him. Old Happy Halliday was quite an adventurer himself in the past. You knew him, didn't you?"

Long Tom said, "We met in various parts of the world. That restlessness for adventure ran through the Halliday family. The old fellow and I were close friends. He's retired now. He lives on the old Halliday estate up in Westchester, outside New York City."

"Have you let him know?" Monk asked. "We're to see him immediately," explained Long Tom. "I cabled him. I could only give him a little of it, because I'm still not absolutely *positive*."

"Everyone thinks the girl and her father are dead," put in Ham.

"That's what I mean. And yet, ever since I started the trip back to the states with the Indian, I've had the feeling that someone was watching us. That's why Doc told me to impersonate the Indian when we docked here in New York. I had talked with Doc on a ship-to-shore telephone call. I had an idea something might happen."

"But why?" demanded Ham.

Long Tom shrugged. "You see what took place tonight? Can you explain it?"

Ham shook his head. "That's what I mean."

Monk looked worried about something. "I wonder what's keeping Doc?" he said abruptly.

"I think," said Long Tom, "we've led the trail away from Doc. That's the way I planned it."

"But where's the Indian?" Monk was curious.

"The arrangement was for Doc to go directly aboard ship and to my stateroom.

That's where I left Beaverbrook. Doc is probably with him now."

The telephone rang.

Ham answered it. Apparently it was the bronze man, and the lawyer listened attentively to some instructions that Doc was giving.

Finally Ham said, "We'll leave right away, Doc . . . Yes, Long Tom's here."

He hung up.

Ham turned and explained, "Doc's with him. He's got the guy. We're to start for the Halliday estate right away. Doc's going directly there."

Long Tom looked pleased. "Good!" he said. "That keeps any trouble away from headquarters, here. I suggested that to Doc."

Ham asked, "You think there's going to be more trouble?"

Long Tom shook his head slowly. "I don't know. I haven't any idea what's behind this business tonight. Perhaps we'll learn the answer when we see old Happy Halliday himself."

Ham added, "We're to meet Doc at the entrance to the estate. He gave me directions."

They left. Outside, they found that it had started to rain. The night had been humid and sultry, but now there was a threat of a storm blowing up.

A half hour later, as New York fell behind them and they followed the winding Saw Mill River Parkway through the Westchester hills, they were positive that no one had trailed them.

Chapter II

TOWNS dropped behind them as they followed the Saw Mill River Parkway through more wooded country. The rain kept coming down. By the time they reached Hawthorne Circle, far north of New York, the storm had cut loose with ferocity. Rain swept across the highway in curving sheets.

The "Circle" was a junction of several routes that branched out to various areas of Westchester. Ham peered through the wind- shield as Monk drove slowly around the traffic hub. The chemist directed a spotlight that could be operated from inside the car. The three men were crowded into the front seat of the coupe.

"There!" said Ham, nodding. "Take that Peekskill turnoff."

Monk had seen the signpost. He sent the coupe along the branch highway.

He said, "Anybody follows us in this storm, they'd have to be a porpoise."

Ham watched closely for signs. Finally he told Monk, "Doc said it's the next traffic light ahead. Take the road that goes up the hill."

Shortly afterward they were climbing. The road was paved and led through deeper woods. It abruptly dropped downhill again. Rain slammed against the sides of the car like splattering buckshot. Monk was forced to drive with the window open on his side, in order to see a little better.

All of them heard the roaring sound. It grew louder as the road dropped into a hollow.

"What's that?" asked Long Tom. Monk was directing the spotlight beam ahead. He said, "It sounds like water." Then he saw the bridge. "There's a creek down here. Probably flooded by the rain."

“Take it easy,” warned Ham, trying to peer through the windshield. “That bridge doesn't look so good.”

Monk drew up and climbed out, ignoring the driving rain. He went forward and saw that the bridge was a wooden affair, old, but of solid planking. The creek beneath it came down out of the hills. Water boiled and foamed beneath the structure, but it was several feet below the planking.

He returned to the car and climbed beneath the wheel.

“It's okay,” he said.

They reached the other side of the sturdy little bridge.

Ham said, “Doc told me the entrance to the Halliday place was just beyond here.”

The main road curved left. They saw the other, narrower road that swerved off to the right, leading uphill again. There were square brick posts, and attached to one was a white sign, “Halliday Manor.”

“That's it,” Ham said.

Monk turned right and followed the winding, uphill road. Almost immediately he came upon the car parked directly ahead, its tail-lamps two warning, crimson spots in the night. His own headlights revealed the license plate.

“Doc!” he announced.

He stopped again. They saw Doc's bronze features peer from the driver's window of the car ahead. Then Doc waved his arm in a motion that indicated they were to follow. The big sedan started up.

The house, a huge, square block-stone affair, perched on a wide lawn atop the hill. Both cars drew up beneath the porte-cochere entranceway. A light came on overhead and they saw a colored man standing in the doorway.

The houseman's eyes went directly to Doc Savage's big figure as it emerged from the first car. The whites of the colored man's eyes showed with some astonishment as he saw the size of the bronze man, the unusual features that appeared to have been burnt bronze by the sun. His hair was of similar color.

“You're Doc Savage, aren't you?” the houseman called.

Doc nodded. “Mistuh Halliday is waiting for you, suh.”

The others joined Doc. With them standing near him, his size became even more apparent. His entire build was one of physical perfection. The eyes were the most amazing things about him. Of an unusual flake-gold coloring, restless lights seemed to stir continually in their depths.

It was skinny Long Tom who hurried up to Doc and asked worriedly, “He's all right?”

Doc nodded. “Scared to death at first. I had a time driving him through the city. The skyscrapers . . . traffic . . . everything frightened him.” Doc motioned toward the front seat. “Perhaps you'd better take over.”

Long Tom opened the door, leaned inside and talked quietly for a moment.

The Indian climbed out. The house- man, standing on the steps nearby, stared out of round, blinking

white eyes.

THE Indian was tall. He was taller than skinny Long Tom. His straight black hair, hanging to his shoulders, made him seem even taller. And he was thin. His eyes, nervous and moving from one person to another, appeared to be coal black.

"It's all right, fella," said Long Tom re-assuringly. "The journey's over. This is her home. This is where her uncle lives. You can tell him the story."

"No being trouble?" asked the Indian.

"No being trouble," Long Tom said. He motioned to the others. "These are friends. We all work together. They will return with us to South America."

"Being all right," said the Indian, and he looked relieved.

They followed the curious houseman into the mansion. The Negro kept his eyes on the tall Indian, and he looked doubtful.

"This way, suh," he said, addressing Doc Savage.

The hall was wide. Curios from various parts of the world were on the walls and tables. There was a broad staircase at the rear, but the houseman paused before he reached this. He motioned toward a door on the right. "Mistuh Halliday said I was to bring you all right in . . ."

Before he had finished, a small, wiry, bushy gray-haired man bounced from the doorway the houseman was indicating. He came out to greet them with all the vitality of a teenager. His age was probably close to seventy.

"Hell's afire!" he cried enthusiastically, and hurried to grab Long Tom's bony hand. He pumped it up and down, slapped Long Tom on the back, exclaimed, "I'm sure glad to see you!"

"You old coot," said Long Tom, and he said it in such a way that you knew he thought a great deal of the elderly man.

"This," Long Tom said, turning to the others, "is my good friend Happy Halliday." He introduced his associates.

Happy Halliday's name well suited him. He never stopped talking. He was alert and friendly and active. He pushed them all toward the big study beyond the hallway. And only when they were seated did his manner become serious.

He was looking at the Indian, seated there as if he were going to bounce up and start running any moment.

"So this," said Happy Halliday, "is the fellow who has located Gloria, my niece?"

Long Tom nodded. He removed two old newspaper clippings from his pocket, unfolded them. Photographs of a young girl were revealed. She was tall, athletic-looking, though somewhat on the scrawny side.

"I dug up these old photographs of Gloria, your niece," explained Long Tom. "Beaverbrook, here, says it is the same girl."

"Wait . . ." said Happy Halliday. He yanked open the drawer of the huge carved desk, behind which he

sat, and his hand reappeared with several photographs. He selected one.

“Here's a picture of her that was tinted. It will give you a better idea.” He passed it to the Indian. “What do you say?”

Beaverbrook, the Indian, looked at the photograph. The tinting showed that Gloria, at fifteen, was blond, not unattractive, blue-eyed.

Slowly the Indian's head started to move up and down. He looked at the gray-haired small man.

“Is being the same,” he said. “You've seen her . . . alive?” demanded Happy Halliday.

Again the Indian nodded. “At the hidden temple.”

Happy Halliday looked quickly at Long Tom. “What temple? What is he talking about?”

Long Tom said, “From what I can gather, your brother John was never found. We can assume that he is dead. But Gloria was picked up by a tribe of Indians who live deep in the interior of Brazil. They've raised her. They've set her up as a sort of goddess in a temple that is their religious headquarters. Beaverbrook, here—as I've named him—is the only member of that tribe who ever ventured into the world outside the home of his lost tribe. He was with a circus in Brazil for awhile. He learned some English.”

Happy Halliday was standing up behind the desk. His hands trembled.

He said with emotion, “I've waited six years for word that Gloria or her father were alive. I've left no stone unturned. I've spent thousands of dollars directing searches for them.” He came around the desk and seized Long Tom's arms. “I hope this is true!” He moved across the study and peered down at the dark-skinned Indian.

“You really saw her? You *really* did?”

“Girl being alive,” repeated the Indian. The wiry, gray-haired man swung toward the hall doorway and bellowed: “Sam!”

The houseman appeared. He cast one furtive glance toward the Indian, then looked at his employer. “Yassuh?”

Both Ham and Monk glanced at Doc and Long Tom. But they, too, seemed puzzled. Happy Halliday saw their expressions and explained.

“Few people know about this,” he said quickly. “Two years ago I employed one of Doc's gaze went to the tall woman. “I take it you are pretty well acquainted with this case?”

Mary English nodded. “I've spent two years working with Mr. Halliday. I feel that I know Gloria as I would my own child. I know everything about her. Our investigation led us close to that area of Brazil once, then the trail faded.” She turned to Long Tom. “I'd even figured that it was some little-known tribe of natives that were holding her. But there was no trace of them.” Her gray eyes quickened with interest. “Mr. Halliday told me everything that was in your message to him. What else have I missed?”

Long Tom explained what information had been given to Happy Halliday since their arrival here at the mansion.

He shrugged, added, “That's about all. Of course, I have directions from our Indian friend here. I have

detailed maps made and preparations all started for the trek into the interior of that wild country. And I have his assurance that she *is* alive.”

MARY ENGLISH said nothing for a moment. She turned around and studied this strange fellow that Long Tom had nicknamed Beaverbrook. You could tell that her eyes missed no single detail about him.

She continued to scrutinize the Indian even though she spoke to Long Tom.

“Can you trust him? Absolutely?”

“Absolutely,” said Long Tom quietly. “Then,” said efficient Mary English, “we should get started immediately. I know what this means to Mr. Halliday . . .”

“I’ll tell you what it means,” interjected the wiry, gray-haired man. “Gloria is the only one of the Hallidays left. Everything is hers when she returns. After all, an old rascal like me can’t live too many more years. Bring her back. Spend a fortune . . . do anything you want, but bring her back. *That’s* what it means to me!”

Long Tom started to say, “There’s one other thing I wanted to tell you. I think you ought to know about . . .”

The sudden shift in the storm outside the house interrupted him. The wind seemed to have reached gale intensity. They could hear the rain slash against the windows as though it were directed by the nozzle of a fire hose. But there was no lightning, no crash of thunder.

the best-known detective agencies in the country. They have world-wide connections. Working directly with me, on the job night and day, has been one of their most clever operatives. A woman.” He swung toward the doorway again as he heard someone enter the room. He finished with, “I’d like you all to meet Mary English!”

Chapter III

MARY ENGLISH was tall, and she was attractive. She had lively, direct gray eyes. Her hair was a rich dark brown. Her straight mouth showed the determination that must be a part of her. Ham thought the lips a little too thin. Lipstick would have corrected that. In fact, Ham thought she would have looked perfectly at home in a dinner gown playing hostess at a smart cocktail party.

But you could tell she was a woman who accomplished things. Her quick eyes went briefly to each person as she was introduced, came to rest on Doc Savage. She smiled.

“I’m quite honored,” she said.

Doc, by nature, was inclined to be shy in the presence of women. His training, his entire life—he had been raised by a group of influential and brilliant men—had been planned along scientific lines. He had the reputation of being a mental and physical giant. Women had played little part in his life; that is, in a romantic or emotional way. And so he was always a little puzzled by the unfathomable, intricate workings of a woman’s mind. A man wore his inner thoughts on his face. A woman was far too subtle for that.

Doc said, eyes questioning, “But,

why?”

“Honored that I am to work with you, Mr. Savage,” said Mary English. “I had never hoped for such an opportunity.”

The bronze's man's eyes went to Happy Halliday, who appeared to be bubbling over with something.

The retired millionaire said, "When Long Tom contacted me . . . when I realized you folks were going to help, I told Mary English! It'll be the greatest combination in the world." He quickly rattled off some of the woman operative's accomplishments. "With what *she* knows, and now with Long Tom's discovery, I feel positive I'm going to see that child Gloria again—alive!"

"This one," commented Monk, "is a doozy. Sounds like a hurricane."

"Look," suggested Happy Halliday, "why don't you spend the night here? We've got bedrooms all over the place. No reason why you should—"

Doc said, "I think we'd better get back to New York. There are preparations to be made. From what Long Tom says, every moment is important."

The statement reminded the millionaire that Long Tom had been about to say something. He turned his attention to the thin beanpole of a man.

"Long Tom, you were saying—"

"I . . ." He hesitated, looking at Halliday. "I feel I should tell you this just in case anything does . . . go wrong."

"What, for instance?"

Long Tom nodded toward the Indian, seated quietly like a man who did not understand a word they said, yet understanding them perfectly. He appeared to be in a world apart.

"He told me about the ceremony of his people. Each year they made a sacrifice to their pagan gods. Each year they select a maiden who is twenty-one."

Halliday's blue eyes were as sharp as glass. "What *kind* of sacrifice?"

Long Tom moved his hands uneasily. "Who knows? You never can tell what an uncivilized tribe like that will do . . ."

Happy Halliday nodded quickly, comprehending. "I get what you mean," he said. "Two months from today Gloria will be twenty-one. That's what you're thinking, isn't it?"

"Yes," admitted Long Tom.

The elderly man's lips set grimly. Mary English said, looking at Doc again, "I see what you mean about getting started as fast as possible."

"With the equipment and supplies we'll need," Doc pointed out, "I doubt if we can fly. It will be necessary to go by ship."

"I . . ." Halliday began, then looked up at the lights as they dimmed momentarily.

They could hear the great old elms outside the house creaking beneath the fury of the storm.

The telephone started ringing. Halliday scooped it up off the massive desk.

"Hello?"

Then he listened. Once he said, "Well!" A moment later he said, "Thanks, Jim," and hung up.

HE looked at those in the room and said, "That does it! Jim Reilly, a trooper friend of mine, calling. Said he saw a couple of cars come up here tonight and figured I had guests. Wanted to let us know the bridge is washed out down here at the foot of the hill."

"Isn't there any other way out of here?" asked Doc.

Halliday shook his head. "That road which passes by my entrance runs dead-end up at Jake Benson's stock farm, a couple miles north of here. Jim says the creek's right up over the banks."

Next he bellowed in the direction of the hallway.

"Sam!"

The Negro servant appeared as though he'd been hiding just around the corner all the time.

"Yassuh?"

"Open up some bedrooms for these people. They're spending the night."

"Yassuh."

And the houseman's eyes, the whites shining like agates, slid once again across the Indian sitting there, as he stepped back toward the hall. He was frankly puzzled—and worried—by this strange person who was almost as dark-skinned as himself. He couldn't seem to figure the fellow out.

Soon they were being shown to their rooms. The second floor contained numerous bedrooms. Monk and Ham were directed to one at the front end of the hall.

When they were alone, Monk asked, "Well, what do you think about her?"

"Mary English?" Ham sat on the edge of a twin bed.

Monk nodded. "She's very attractive."

"I didn't mean that," said the chemist. "She's very attractive, intelligent *and* capable."

"That's what I meant," Monk said. "I think she's got a lot on the ball. If we do find that girl, we'll need a woman like Mary English to take over. But I don't think Doc likes the idea of taking her there into that wild country."

Ham thought a moment. Then he said:

"Mary English has probably dealt with some pretty rough characters in her day. Women have more cool nerve than men, when you come right down to it. I imagine she'll do all right."

He gave his homely partner a quizzical look. "You must be slipping. Ordinarily you'd like the idea of a smooth-looking female being somewhere around."

"This is different." Monk was serious. "This isn't going to be any Sunday School picnic."

Ham, without saying so in words, agreed. He was impressed by his partner's seriousness. Monk, by nature, was a carefree sort of person, and there were times when he liked nothing better than to needle his partner Ham about his romantic accomplishments. He'd argue just for the fun of it, and there had been

occasions when the two of them had not spoken a civil word to one another for days on end.

This, apparently, was not one of those times. Monk acted disturbed and thoughtful. He sat on the other twin bed, powerful hands resting on his knees, staring at nothing in particular. And he said, "How do you explain that attempt to grab our Indian friend when Long Tom landed in New York tonight?"

"I've been thinking about that, too."

"What does Doc say?"

"He's puzzled also, I guess."

Monk got up and walked over to the front windows. He tried to peer outside, but there was only total blackness everywhere. Rain pounded against the windows, and the wind still screamed through the old trees.

Through the blackness and the driving rain, Monk saw two lights moving faintly. He continued to watch. Then he turned around and said, "There's a car coming up the drive."

He started toward the hallway. "I'll tell Doc. It's probably a servant or someone who had the night off, but it won't hurt to let Doc know."

Ham had started to prepare for bed.

MONK found Long Tom talking to Mary English out in the hallway. The woman had the front room directly across from them, the chemist learned. Long Tom was apparently telling her a few additional facts about his discovery of Gloria Halliday's whereabouts.

Long Tom and Doc had the next room down the hall, next to the woman's. Beaver-brook, the Indian, had already disappeared in a room assigned to him at the rear of the hallway. Across from him, Monk also learned, was Happy Halliday's room.

"Where's Doc?" Monk asked. "Downstairs. He hasn't come up yet," Long Tom told him.

The woman smiled as Monk started toward the broad staircase. "Good-night."

"Good-night," said Monk, returning the smile. And he decided that the voyage at least would not be dull. She looked like an interesting person.

Downstairs, he saw the short, bushy gray-haired millionaire talking to someone in the entranceway that led in from the driveway. It was a big man wearing a smart State trooper's uniform. Above the wind and rain, Monk heard a car motor running beyond the open door.

Happy Halliday turned, said, "This is Jim Reilly. He's stranded on this side of the bridge. That's why he called and warned us about the bridge being out."

Monk nodded as the trooper looked at him. Then he asked, "When do you think it will be fixed?"

"The storm's starting to let up now. I've called the barracks from a friend's place up the road. They'll have a highway repair gang down here sometime before morning. A mild hurricane hit the east coast tonight. It's moving on toward Boston."

"You want to spend the night here?" Halliday asked the trooper.

The big man shook his head. "Thanks. I'm staying at the Thompson place up the road. I'll let you know

just as soon as they have new planking across the bridge. They can't do a thing until the water goes down a bit."

He left.

Monk asked, "Where's Doc?"

"In the study. Calling New York, I believe. He's starting preparations for the journey to South America." The small man looked pleased. "Doc sure moves in on things fast, doesn't he?"

Monk nodded.

Halliday was locking the big door. "Sam's scooted off to bed," he said grinning. "Scared to death of that Indian!"

They returned upstairs. Passing the half-open study door, Monk heard the murmur of Doc's voice talking over the telephone. He guessed Doc might be busy for some time. He might as well go to bed.

He left Happy Halliday at his room, found Ham snoring when he entered his own. Monk wasn't the least bit sleepy. He had half a mind to wake Ham up and suggest some gin rummy. He decided Ham would hardly be agreeable to the idea at this hour of the night.

He went to bed.

Monk lay there listening to the small sounds as the others settled down for the night. The sounds came faintly through the old thick walls of the house. The wind was letting up now. He got up and went over to the window. It was still raining, but not very hard, and there was not enough wind to drive the rain into the big bedroom.

Later, he heard Doc come upstairs and go to the room that he was occupying with Long Tom.

After awhile the silence of night became complete. Monk could not sleep, however. He felt strangely restless. Any other time he could have slept like a log. What was making him uneasy, he asked himself. Perhaps it was just being in this strange house and bed. Sure, that was it.

He turned over and got himself arranged comfortably for the night . . .

And still he did not sleep. The minutes dragged on. The rain stopped. He heard water dripping from the eaves. *Tap . . . tap . . . tap . . .*

Or was it water dripping?

He listened. It seemed that he heard soft footsteps padding along the carpeted hallway outside the room. He sat up, listening, then got out of bed and moved toward the closed door. He heard nothing.

"Blast it!" Monk grumbled to himself and went back to bed.

A little later he heard it again. He knew absolutely that it was not the sound of water falling from the roof. Someone was prowling around out there. What the hell!

Perhaps he'd better . . .

The scream went up and down the hallway, flung itself off the solid walls, managed to claw its way right into the bedroom where Monk heard it. It was about the most ungodly cry of horror that he'd ever heard.

He hurtled out of bed, fumbling around seeking the robe and slippers that had been placed at his disposal.

Ham sat up with a jerk as Monk whipped toward the hall door.

“What was that?” his partner asked. “That’s what I intend to find out,” Monk said tensely.

He flicked the bedroom light switch as he yanked the door open. Light from the room went out into the wide hallway and dispelled the gloom out there.

Monk did not see the person, but he heard him running . . . pounding down the stairs just as the chemist reached the hallway. Then the steps were running along the lower hall. A door banged open. It sounded like the door there by the driveway, downstairs.

Monk was already moving in the same direction. Other bedroom doors opened as he raced down the stairs.

It was dark in the lower hall, but he remembered seeing the light switches near the door that led in from the driveway. He found the switch and flicked on the light, but knew even before he did so that the door was open. He felt the draft of fresh, damp night air.

The door hung wide open, left that way by the person who had just escaped!

DARKNESS smashed down around Monk again as he reached the driveway. He moved quickly toward the bulking outline of the coupe, opened the door, found a flashlight in the glove compartment of the car. He thought he could hear the sodden *slap-slap- slap* of running feet against the wet ground.

Turning on the bright beam of the flashlight, he sent the ray searching for source of that sound.

Monk thought he saw an object move far across the lawn. The thing escaped him, then was caught in the cone of light again near the edge of heavy woods beyond the lawn.

The figure, trapped by the light, turned excitedly to stare back at his pursuer.

Monk drew up short, staring in return. Then he had to laugh.

“I might have known!” he remarked to himself.

It was Sam, the Negro houseman, fully clothed, running for his life. He dived into the woods even as Monk watched.

The poor fellow had been scared ever since he had laid eyes on the mysterious Indian, Monk knew. Sam, no doubt, had waited up there in his room—it was at the top of the house on the third floor—then bolted at the first opportunity. Maybe the superstitious fellow had overheard some of that talk about South American natives and sacrifices to a pagan god. No wonder he was taking off at high speed!

Monk went back into the house. Water squished in his bedroom slippers as he plodded up the stairs. He could hear everyone up there talking. They must have realized it was only Sam. . . .

He saw that everyone was gathered in the room of the Indian. His thoughts quickened. Something, obviously, was wrong!

Monk saw Doc and slender Mary English beside the bed, the others—Long Tom, Ham and Happy Halliday—just behind them. Monk hurried into the room.

Then he saw the Indian on his back. The knife had been plunged into his throat.

It was a wooden-handled kitchen boning knife, and around the hilt the murderer had wrapped a wet dishcloth. Monk heard Mary English saying:

“I doubt if it was Sam, even though he was frightened to death of this man. Sam wouldn't have thought of using a wet cloth in order to avoid leaving any fingerprints.”

Doc was nodding. “No, I don't think it was Sam,” he agreed.

Later, they found a window open in the kitchen at the rear of the house. Apparently the murderer had made his entrance and exit that way.

Sam did not return.

Chapter IV

DOC himself searched the grounds surrounding the old stone mansion.

The kitchen window was within easy reach of the ground. It was wide and lopsided. Beneath it there was a gravel walk that led around from the driveway. The walk, the grounds, everything was soaked by the storm which had swept through so recently. There was not a chance of finding a footprint.

The knife, as Doc had figured, came from one of several in a rack in the kitchen. It would have been an easy weapon for the killer to locate, and it was the perfect instrument for silent, swift death.

Doc was inclined to agree with Monk's theory about Sam, the houseman. Uneasy about the Indian's presence in the house, Sam had not retired. Later, when everyone was asleep, Sam had crept down to the second floor and peered in on the strange man who worried him. He had wanted to be certain that the fellow was not prowling about. Then he had seen the knife in the Indian's throat and cried out in terror. The cry of fear had aroused everyone in the house.

Until Sam was found, Doc would have to assume Monk's theory was correct. Ham, Long Tom and Monk were searching for the houseman now. The State police would be called in just as soon as the bridge was repaired in the morning.

Doc found nothing that would help him. He returned inside the house. Mary English was in the study with the wealthy old man.

Halliday said, “We've called Jim Reilly, that trooper friend of mine, at the Thompson place. He's on his way down. Isn't much he can do, though, until morning. But I'd like to get that blasted corpse out of here!”

Mary English glanced at Doc. “I've locked the bedroom door. Jim Reilly asked us not to disturb anything.” She turned toward Halliday. “The poor fellow can't harm anyone.”

“I don't like a corpse around,” said Halliday. His quick, bright eyes jumped on Doc. “You find anything outside?”

Doc shook his head. “But,” he asked, “could a man get across that flooded creek tonight?”

“Hell, no! He'd drown sure. It's deep.”

“Is it possible to return to the main road any other way?”

“Not by car. A man walking, though, could hike over the ridge through the woods. About two miles.” His lively eyes narrowed as he watched Doc Savage. “You mean . . . the murderer?”

Doc nodded.

Halliday opened a drawer of his big desk and brought out a pistol. He hefted it, dropped it in his bathrobe pocket. “Don’t think I don’t know how to use this thing!” he remarked. “If that guy *is* around—

Mary English said, “I doubt it.” She turned to Doc again. “How do you explain this . . . this horrible killing?”

Doc looked at her. She was wearing a silky dressing gown of some sort over her pale yellow pajamas. She had a tall, supple, distinctly appealing figure. It made him acutely aware of her presence, an uneasy awareness, for he was not accustomed to being near women as they roamed around in the middle of the night in their filmy dressing gowns.

He said, “Someone has learned that Gloria Halliday has been found. Also, they do not want her to return here. That seems obvious.” He swung his attention to Halliday again. “Are you positive there are no relatives . . . *anyone* you can think of . . . who are going to benefit if Gloria is never found?”

“Nobody!” said Halliday. “My will leaves every nickel to her. There’s not another person mentioned in it. She’s got her own money coming when she’s twenty-one, and mine when I die.” He patted the gun in his robe pocket. “And I’m not going to kick off yet!”

Doc said, “And so we’re left with no motive for this crime. Strange.”

“I wish Sam hadn’t run off. What am I going to do now?” Halliday was annoyed.

Doc asked, “Is Sam your only servant?”

“Yes. I wouldn’t have the house cluttered up with a lot of help. They get on my nerves. But Sam is different. He’s all right.”

Just then the trooper, Jim Reilly, arrived.

He told them, “They’ll have the bridge open in another hour. Then we’ll take charge of that corpse. Where is it?”

Doc left Mary English and Halliday in the study and took Reilly upstairs. The trooper was saying, “I bumped into those friends of yours. They haven’t found Sam yet.”

“How long has Sam been employed here?” asked Doc.

“Years and years. A good man, too. Nothing will ever convince me that he killed anybody.”

“I don’t think he did,” agreed Doc. Doc and Jim Reilly were still upstairs in the murder room when the other State police arrived.

THERE was a plain-clothes man with the regular troopers, a specialist from the criminal investigation bureau of the State. He took charge.

No fingerprints were found, no clues. The body was loaded into a car to be taken to the county morgue. The official told Doc:

“The State police are spreading a dragnet for that houseman—Sam. He might be able to tell us

something, even though he probably didn't do it.”

Doc said, “We're all leaving for New York as soon as the bridge is repaired. You can contact me at my headquarters.”

The man nodded. “I'm afraid, though, we won't have much to give you. I think we're dealing with a mighty clever guy.”

“I think so,” admitted Doc.

Monk, Ham and Long Tom returned at dawn. Sam, they reported, had vanished. Doc found the study momentarily deserted and took Long Tom there. The bronze man closed the door, looked at his thin, lean associate and said:

“I went through the Indian's luggage. I made certain that no information we might need was left behind.”

“There wasn't anything, was there?” Doc shook his head.

“I was positive about that,” said Long Tom. He opened his shirt, unstrapped a wide belt-like arrangement that he wore around his waist. It was like a money belt, only larger. He removed the belt.

“Everything is here,” he explained. “Maps, notes, all the information I could obtain from him. I had a feeling all along that something might happen to that poor fellow.”

Doc said, “You realize the situation, now that he's dead, don't you?”

Long Tom's lips formed a brief, grim smile.

“Sure. I'm the guy they'll go after next. They know I have all the information about Gloria Halliday.”

“Exactly,” said Doc. “That's why I think I'd better carry that stuff from now on.”

Long Tom handed the belt over. He did it with some reluctance, for he held a great admiration for Doc Savage. He would rather face death himself than expose the bronze man to that menace. This feeling was held by each of Doc's associates.

“I'm putting you on a spot,” he said. “The murderer will probably surmise that I turned the information over to you.”

“I'm positive he will,” said Doc. He strapped on the belt beneath his own shirt. “To get this now, he'll have to come out into the open. And that's exactly what I want. I hope he does.”

Long Tom shook his head. “Now,” continued Doc, “there's one other thing. Your friend Happy Halliday can be a stubborn old cuss, I imagine, can't he?”

Long Tom smiled. “He's tough. He made his fortune the hard way. He's been a prospector, explorer and Lord knows what else. He's got more fight than a barrel full of wildcats.”

“Then I'll give you the job of talking to him.”

“About what?”

“I've called a New York hotel. I've arranged to have him stay there while we're in South America. Two plainclothes detectives will be constantly on duty, to see that nothing happens to him. We can't leave him up here, alone.”

“You really think *he's* in danger, too?”

“Very much so!”

“I don't get it. Why—” Long Tom started.

“You'd laugh at my theory if I told you,” said Doc Savage. “Let's not go into it right now. Later, perhaps. Think you can handle the old boy?”

“I think so,” said Long Tom. “I'll take charge of having the house locked up for awhile. Jim Reilly, the trooper, can keep his eye on the place. We'll get started for New York as soon as possible.”

Nodding, Long Tom hurried off to find Halliday.

HAPPY HALLIDAY proved easier to handle than Doc had figured. His only reluctance was in leaving without Sam, his valued servant. And so he turned over a sizable amount of money to Jim Reilly, with the instructions that his man Sam was to be safely delivered to the New York hotel when he was found.

The trooper pointed out: “Sam will have to be held for questioning, however.”

“I'm not worried about that,” said Halliday. “He'll be able to prove his innocence!”

“I trust so,” said Reilly.

They were ready to depart a little before ten o'clock that morning. Mary English was to ride in the coupe with Monk and Ham, much to the excitement of the two.

Long Tom, Doc and the millionaire would ride in the bronze man's sedan. Long Tom spoke to Doc shortly before they got started. “I arranged it this way because I have something to tell you. I had to make a deal in order to get Happy Halliday to agree to your suggestion about staying at the hotel.”

“Deal?” asked Doc. “I'll tell you when we get under way.” They were heading down the Saw Mill River Parkway when Long Tom explained further. He and Doc Savage rode in the front seat, the bronze man driving. Happy Halliday was half buried in luggage in the rear.

“You see,” began Long Tom, “Mr. Halliday's worried about Mary English. That's why he insists on this arrangement.”

Doc waited. He wondered what was coming.

Halliday said from the rear seat, “Yessir, she's a fine, splendid woman. I'd like to marry that gal if I was younger. She'd make a man a good wife. That's why I don't want anything to happen to her.”

“About this arrangement . . .” prompted Doc.

“Well,” Long Tom said slowly, “I think Mr. Halliday has a good idea. If the newspapers hear that both you and Mary English are joining forces, in this search for Gloria, there's going to be a hell of a lot of publicity. Mary English has somewhat of a reputation all her own. The papers will play it up big.”

Long Tom was reminding Doc Savage of the publicity angle that could be attached to this search for the girl. The news would be spread across the nation. And he knew Doc's aversion to publicity. The bronze man shunned exploitation of the work to which he had devoted his entire career: that of punishing evildoers and righting wrongs in many parts of the world.

“So?” prodded Doc, waiting. “Mr. Halliday has an excellent suggestion. You and Mary English will travel

to South America incognito. The rest of us will board the ship under assumed names also, and we will each take separate cabins.”

Doc said, “I’ve already arranged it that way.”

“Good!” said Long Tom. “The only other detail will be your posing as Mary English’s husband.”

“*What!*” exploded Doc. “Look at it this way,” explained Long Tom quickly. “A woman can’t travel on shipboard with a man constantly around without starting some eyebrow-raising. But if the two of you are simply “Mr. and Mrs. Jasper Jones” or something, no one will ask questions. Don’t you see?”

“Now, look—” Doc tried to protest.

Happy Halliday put in, “Listen, Doc, it was my idea. You want me to stay in that confounded New York hotel. I hate hotels. Feel like I’m in prison! So I told Long Tom I’d go only if you agreed to my suggestion. Mary English is too attractive a person to be making that trip as a single woman. A husband around, and no one will pester her, see. You just *pose* as man and wife. What the hell! She won’t bite you!”

Doc argued with the two of them all the way to the city. Finally, he had to concede to the plan.

In the coupe behind them—Monk was driving and he had seen Doc’s arm making motions from time to time—Mary English was telling the two aids of Halliday’s suggestion.

Monk was grinning. “Look at Doc, will you? He’s putting up an argument.”

He turned to Mary English, seated between himself and well-dressed Ham. “Doc shies away from women like a race horse startled by a flying piece of paper!” He winked. “Now, me, I don’t scare easy . . .”

Ham said, “Watch him, Mary. He’s a wolf.”

Monk said, “I bet *you* wouldn’t mind posing as her husband, shyster!”

Mary English threw back her head and laughed gayly.

“Perhaps, she said, “I’d better carry a shotgun on that voyage!”

Chapter V

GUNS were a part of the equipment that went aboard the *S. S. International* twenty-four hours later, but they were not shotguns. They were long-range .30-30’s with telescopic sights, and small arms ranging from Bankers’ Specials to heavy .45 automatics. Long Tom had even insisted on including some machine guns.

“That’s wild country,” he pointed out. “You’ll find things far more dangerous than humans in the interior.”

Long Tom took personal charge of seeing that all supplies were loaded aboard, after a conference with Doc. Each crate was to be held for pickup at Rio de Janeiro, and each was consigned to a different name. None contained the name of Clark Savage, Jr., which was the bronze man’s proper name.

With the exception of Doc and Mary English, each member of the party went aboard separately. Long Tom had disappeared early that morning, stating that he would contact them aboard ship.

Monk and Ham slipped up the gang- way unnoticed and went directly to their separate cabins.

Doc and Mary English boarded the liner at the very last instant. Society reporters and photographers had already finished taking interviews and pictures. The newspaper-men hurried ashore just before the gangplank was pulled up. Doc had timed his move to the very second. He and Mary English reached their suite unnoticed.

It was unlikely that the bronze man would have been recognized anyway.

Doc was using special contact lenses to conceal the color of his eyes. The lenses fitted directly over the eyeballs and changed the usual flake-gold coloring to a pale gray.

His skin, too, had a grayish, pallid appearance: Though the day was fairly warm, he wore a topcoat and cap, and he looked like an unhealthy business man sorely in need of a restful ocean voyage. His hair was tinged with gray, the part of it that showed from beneath the sport cap.

Mary English merely wore a pair of large-size sunglasses that surprisingly changed her appearance.

As she told Doc just before they went aboard, "I'm not the famous personality you are. Most of my work as an agency operative has been done quietly and undercover. Nothing really adventurous has ever happened to me. Do you wonder I'm so excited?"

Doc said, "I'd feel better if you were a homely woman with buck teeth."

"I don't believe that."

"Well . . ."

She held his arm. "Darling, it's time to go aboard. Hurry!" She gave him the smile of a thoughtful dutiful wife.

Doc grunted something.

A steward met them and showed them to their suite on A deck. The man fussed around the rooms, making certain that everything was in order. There were two bedrooms, a connecting bath, a sitting room and a dressing room.

The steward said, "Will you be using both bedrooms, or should I close one off, sir?"

Doc started to say, "Of course we'll be using both—"

Mary English interrupted, "Possibly, steward. If we change our minds we'll let you know."

The man left.

Doc said, "I'll take the bedroom in there." He picked up two of his handbags. He discovered that it was necessary to walk through the second bedroom and the connecting bath before he could reach his own room. He hoped it wasn't going to be too complicated.

He found himself perspiring, flung the topcoat and cap on the bed in his own room. He removed a partial wig that had given his hair the appearance of being gray. He examined the connecting door to the bath and found that it could be locked from either side. He stood in the doorway and called:

"This door to my room can be locked from your side."

Mary English appeared in the doorway of her own bedroom. She had removed her hat and was straightening her hair. She smiled at Doc.

"I'm not worried, silly," she said. "I just thought—"

"Stop acting like a squirrel trapped in a cage," chided Mary English.

He felt color mounting into his face, and was glad that the skin stain he had used to change his appearance concealed his self-consciousness.

He hurried back into his own room, put the gray wig and cap on again, then came through Mary English's bedroom as though he were running the gauntlet.

"I . . . I'll take a walk on deck," said Doc.

She watched him cross the stateroom. There was a mischievous twinkle in her gray eyes.

"We'll have dinner together, darling?" Doc swallowed. He turned, stared at the top of her head. "Yes," he blurted. "Yes, of course!"

He whipped open the door. Her soft, musical laughter floated after him as he hurried out.

Doc had once escaped a band of Tibetan tribesmen with less mental uneasiness.

ON deck, he strolled along near the rail. The big liner was already out in midstream, busy little tugboats prodding it around to start it down-river toward lower New York Bay. People were beginning to settle down in deck chairs. It was late afternoon.

Doc had moved only a few yards when he spotted the fellow leaning on the rail. The man wore dark glasses to protect his eyes from the sun. The man was Long Tom.

Long Tom moved his head slightly, indicating that Doc was to follow him. Long Tom headed directly toward a passage. He led the way to a stateroom aft, made certain that no one was in the passageway before he unlocked a door and motioned to Doc. They disappeared inside.

It was Long Tom's stateroom. "Everything went smooth as silk," Long Tom reported.

"All the equipment is aboard?" Long Tom nodded. "No questions were asked, either."

"Anyone recognize you?"

"No. I'm positive."

"You better keep to your cabin as much as possible," advised Doc.

"Don't worry, I'm going to. What I need is some sleep!" Then he remembered there was a question he wanted to ask. "Any word from the State police before you left?"

"They found Sam, the houseman." Long Tom showed interest.

"Did he—"

Doc had anticipated the question. "They gave him a lie-detector test. They're quite convinced he's innocent. Someone's bringing him down to New York so that he can stay with Halliday."

Doc was restless. He started toward the door. The journey by boat, naturally much slower than air travel, annoyed him. He owned several fast planes of his own, but there was a definite reason why he had decided to journey by ship.

Whoever was interested in blocking the search for Gloria Halliday—and that person more than likely knew Doc Savage had taken over—would also figure that Doc and his aids would travel by air. Airports were easier to check than railroad terminals or docks. Airplane movements out of New York were no doubt being watched closely. Also, if they had gone by plane, it would have been necessary for all of them to be together.

And so Doc had chosen the ocean liner, in an attempt to outmaneuver his foe. He wondered how successful his plan would be.

Doc left Long Tom's room and continued to B deck. He knew the staterooms that Monk and Ham were using. He went directly to Monk's room.

He found Ham there also.

Ham looked relieved. "We didn't see you come aboard, Doc. We thought something went wrong!"

Monk asked, "How's the missus?" Doc attempted a strained smile.

"She sure is a honey," added Monk. "I wouldn't mind being married to something like her."

Doc growled, "But nobody's married!"

"I'll bet she *would* marry you, though," said Monk. "She'd jump at the chance."

"I'll tell her you're a prospect." Ham put in, "How about me? I'd be more her type."

Doc was giving dapper Ham a thoughtful look. "That gives me an idea," he said musingly.

"What do you mean?" Ham's eyes sharpened warily.

Monk caught Doc's swift wink. "I think you've given me a solution to this dilemma. I'll tell you about it—later."

Then the bronze man's expression became sober. "Ham, I want you to watch all the passengers closely. If you recognize anyone, I want to know about it immediately." He turned his attention to Monk. "Check regularly to see that no one becomes curious about the packing cases of ours. I believe they're in No. 3 hold."

Monk said, "I've already struck up an acquaintance with a deck hand down there."

"Good," said Doc. He thought a moment. "Let's arrange to meet in my suite for dinner. That will save me appearing in the dining room with Mary English. We can also discuss further plans."

He started out, then turned back a moment and said, "If you want me between now and dinner-time, I'll be on the bridge with the captain."

Both Monk and Ham looked surprised.

DOC loitered near the ladder sign that said, "No Admittance To Bridge." He waited until no one was in the vicinity, then hurried up the ladder. A first mate stopped him.

"Captain Dennis is expecting me," Doc said.

"Your name, sir?"

“George Baker,” said Doc. The officer disappeared a moment. He went to a stateroom just beyond the bridge. When he returned, he said, “This way, sir.”

A moment later Doc was alone with the liner's skipper. “I'd never recognize you, Doc Savage,” said the solidly built, rugged-looking man who was almost bald. “I'd know your voice, though. How long has it been . . . four years?”

Doc nodded. The cabin was fitted up as an office. Doc had last met Captain Dennis during the war, when the man had been in charge of convoys to Casablanca.

Doc said, “You got my message yesterday?”

The skipper nodded. “I don't think a soul knows you're aboard. *I* was even watching for you myself near the gangplank. I never recognized you.” He smiled. “You certainly look like a man badly in need of some good sea air.”

He turned toward his desk, sensing Doc's impatience to start immediately to work, said, “I have the complete passenger list here for your perusal, just as you requested.” He placed the sheets before the bronze man. “Take your time, Doc. I'll be on the bridge.”

He went out.

Alone in the big cabin, Doc studied each name carefully. Each name was checked against any that might have been filed away in his amazing memory. He had met people in all parts of the world. He wanted to be certain there was none here with whom he might have had dealings.

The job took well over an hour. He found no name that he recalled.

He met Captain Dennis on the hurricane bridge. The vessel was well out to sea now, making full speed. Wind whipped around them. The sun had almost set.

“Okay?” asked the stocky skipper. “I don't think there's anyone aboard who knows me.”

“Swell. If you want anything else, just ask for it.”

“All right.”

Doc disappeared down the ladder.

The thing that bothered him was Mary English. He wasn't used to having a wife on his hands!

Chapter VI

IT was ten o'clock that night when Monk, Ham and Long Tom arose from the dinner table which earlier had been cleared so that all could study the maps and notes placed there by Doc Savage.

It was Long Tom who had carefully explained each detail, pointing out markings on the maps, warning them of obstacles that would have to be overcome enroute, once they started into the wild interior of Brazil.

Mary English exclaimed, “And to think that child Gloria is a prisoner in that horrible country!”

“There's one thing we must remember,” warned Long Tom. “She's no longer a child. She was fifteen when she disappeared. But six years will have changed her greatly” especially in that uncivilized interior. The photographs we have of her will probably mean nothing. She will have acquired many of the traits of

the natives.”

“But she was old enough to remember,” said Mary English. “Imagine, all these years she must have spent hoping, waiting for someone to find her!”

Doc stood up. “It's the most unusual thing we've ever tackled,” he said quietly. He started gathering up maps and papers. “Well, at least each of you is familiar with the probable location . . . trail's end, as it were. If anything should happen to these maps, or to any one of us, the others can carry on.”

Mary English gave a little shudder. “It sounds scary. Hardly like attempting to get the goods on a wife who has fed her husband arsenic, is it?”

“Hardly,” said Doc.

WHEN they started leaving, Doc felt that uneasiness taking hold of him again. Long Tom suggested they depart one at a time, so they would not be associated together as a group. He took his departure first.

Monk smiled at attractive Mary English. “The dinner was swell,” he said.

The woman's gray eyes twinkled. “I couldn't have done better myself.”

“I always said,” Monk said seriously, “Doc needed a wife around. Of course, you'll find him a little hard to manage at times . . .”

The book flew across the room and barely missed the homely chemist's head.

“Out with you!” Doc rapped. Ham shoved his partner toward the door. “You heard what the man said,” he ordered.

Monk chuckled as he ducked out. Ham said, “Happy dreams,” and left a moment later.

Mary English laughed softly. “They're a splendid group of men,” she told Doc.

He said, “They'll keep this up for days. They'll rub it in.”

“Do you think they like me?”

“Of course they do.”

“Do you?”

Doc said, “I . . .” and then felt his ears burning. “I think I'll take a couple of turns around the deck,” he said quickly.

He looked around for the gray wig and cap, which he had placed aside. The sitting room of the suite had been used for the dinner and conference. Mary English's bedroom was just beyond. He'd have to pass through there in order to reach his own bedroom. But if he had taken the first bedroom, she would have had to pass through *his* room. Either way, it was a confounded predicament.

She wore a dinner gown that revealed her splendid figure. She had also used an expensive perfume that lent an elusive fragrance to the room. Dammit, Doc thought, why doesn't she look more like a plain, stolid, undercover policewoman than a disturbingly attractive female?

He made it across the chasm that separated him from the door. “Well . . . ah . . . good-night,” he said.

“Good-night, Doc Savage.”

“I . . . I have a key,” he added. “I won't disturb you.”

She merely stood there smiling as he went out.

Whew! he thought.

HE walked the decks until midnight. The sea was calm, and the sky was clear. But one by one the passengers disappeared toward their staterooms. Doc felt that if he stayed on deck any longer he would make himself conspicuous. He started back toward the suite.

Surely she had retired by now. If he came in very quietly he could slip through to his own room without waking her. And he'd have to get up early in the morning and get out of there before she was awake.

He wished, suddenly, that he knew more about women. He appreciated Happy Halliday's concern for Mary English. She, too, would be in real danger on this journey. The old man had wanted someone near her every moment. But hang it all. . . .

Doc reached his doorway. He looked around. Thank heavens no one was about. He fitted the key into the lock very gently, turned the knob noiselessly as though he were a housebreaker, and stepped inside. The key grated slightly in the door as he relocked it, and he shivered.

He found a chair in the darkness and sat down to remove his shoes. The chair squeaked and again he winced.

Doc was picking up his shoes when he heard the movement in the bedroom. It came from beyond the closed door of Mary English's room.

She was still up! He wondered what he should . . .

The bedroom door opened. There was no light in her room and he couldn't see her. He started to say quietly, “I thought . . .”

The sharp intake of breath reached his ears. It was a woman's gasp. It didn't sound the least bit like the kind of sound Mary English would have made.

Doc stood stiffly in the dark. “Are you all right?” he called out. The door slammed. In the quiet of the suite it was like a gunshot. Doc's senses were suddenly very alert. Even as he moved across the room he heard movements from beyond the door. A chair fell over. There was a woman's sharp cry, that cut across his nerves like broken glass.

He flung himself fast toward the bedroom door. He was reaching for the doorknob in the darkness when the door opened again.

The woman was in his arms. She clung to him madly, and she was trembling, and he was aware of that elusive smell of rare perfume. . . .

“Doc!” she cried. “Oh, Doc!” Mary English held to him, her straight, slender figure taut as a ramrod.

And he was saying, “What is it? Are you all right?”

“I . . .” She seemed to have trouble talking. “Someone tried to . . . to *strangle* me.”

Supporting her tall figure with one arm, he leaned sideways, found the bedroom light switch beside the

door. His eyes were sweeping the room the instant the bright light came on. He saw no one. He looked at Mary English, at her white face, and realized he was still holding her though she appeared capable of standing on her own two feet.

“There!” She pointed, indicating one of the two stateroom windows which faced on A deck.

But the window she indicated was closed. It was the other one which was open. She was confused. He lunged across the room, remembering how the bedroom door had opened, the quick, startled intake of breath. He swung across the sill and reached the deck.

The long sweep of the deserted deck was revealed in the clear night. Far down its barren length he saw a figure running. It was a blur of movement, and it dodged into a cross passage just as Doc spotted it.

He took out after it. He guessed seventy-five yards must have separated him from his quarry. He cut down that intervening distance with blinding speed.

But when he swerved into the cross passage it was deserted. A dim stanchion light glowed feebly. Doc went through the narrow passage to the far deck, peered right and left, saw no one.

He quickly returned to where a doorway led to a wide inside stairway midway in the passage. He pushed open the swinging door, found himself near the head of the carpeted stairway that connected with a lounge on the deck below. He listened.

There was no sound except the deep, pulsing throb of the ship's engines. He swung back to the deck—and crashed into the officer just turning into the passage. He had to seize the fellow's arms to keep him from falling.

“Sorry,” murmured Doc. He tried to act casual. The last thing he wanted was a curious ship's officer poking around.

“I . . . ah . . . was just taking a little constitutional,” said Doc smoothly. He breathed deeply of the night air. “Wonderful, isn't it?”

The man looked down at Doc's shoeless feet.

“Without shoes?”

“Best exercise in the world to walk barefooted!” he said. He moved off, glanced back, said cheerfully, “Well . . . goodnight.”

The officer put his hands on his hips and watched Doc disappear down-deck. He was frowning.

MARY ENGLISH stood there in the bedroom holding the gun. Doc had returned via the window, slipping inside quickly, closing the window and tilting the blinds against the night.

She was composed now, he thought. She stood quietly with the small automatic in her right hand and her left hand touching her throat. She had regained some of her color.

She said, “I was ready to shoot anyone else if they came through that window.”

“Are you all right?”

“Yes.” She gave a little sigh, as though displeased with the way she had acted. “I'm sorry I behaved like a jittery female. But I was awakened from sound sleep. It isn't like going into something with your eyes open, is it?” She moved her splendid shoulders uneasily, indicated a silk stocking lying on the bed. “I felt

it slip around my neck,” she said. “They were going to strangle me with that.”

Doc said, “Did you know it was a woman?”

Mary English stared.

He told her about the bedroom door opening just after he had entered the room beyond, and of a woman's surprised, startled gasp.

“Also,” Doc went on, “I saw her running along the deck.”

“You're positive it *was* a woman?” Doc nodded. “I saw her clearly.”

“You mean, you'd know her if you saw her again?”

“No, I mean I know it was a woman who was here. I only saw her at some distance, and not her face.”

Mary English went to the bed and slid the automatic beneath the pillow. “I should have put it there in the first place,” she said. “It was in one of my bags.”

She straightened, facing him again, and he saw how her rich brown hair fell to her shoulders and framed the sharp, fine lines of her face. The dressing gown had fallen open well below her throat, but she had not noticed this, and Doc became ill at ease suddenly. He moved toward the doorway of the sitting room, remembering his shoes.

But her next words stopped him. “It means,” she was saying, “someone knows I'm aboard this ship . . . someone who knows I've been connected with the Gloria Halliday case. They *know!*”

Her gray eyes looked down, up again, and were troubled. “I've dragged you into it also. They also know about you, probably.”

Doc shrugged. “As long as nothing serious happened to you—” he started to say cheerfully.

She came up to him. Her hand touched his arm lightly. “I'm afraid I'm making myself a nuisance . . .”

“Nonsense,” he said. “Just the same . . .” Doc said, “Oftentimes it takes a woman to trap a woman. Perhaps you'll be more help than you realize.”

“Do you really mean that?”

“Of course!”

Her fingers squeezed his arm. “Thank you . . .”

He guessed it was time he got his shoes. He hurried into the sitting room, came back, said briefly, “Don't worry about anything further tonight. I'm a light sleeper.”

“I won't,” the woman said.

Doc disappeared through the connecting bath toward his own room. He closed the doors, but later, when he was certain she must be asleep, he returned and opened them a crack.

He did not go to bed. He took off his coat and loosened his collar. He sat in an armchair. Doc's senses were keener and sharper than most men's. Long physical conditioning accounted for this. He was able to rest throughout the night, yet the barest sound brought him fully awake and keyed for instant action.

The mystery woman did not reappear.

Chapter VII

MONK said, "I think Doc's becoming henpecked."

Ham laid down his cards. They'd been playing all afternoon, in Monk's cabin, and now he was bored with the game.

"Why?" demanded Ham.

"He hasn't budged out of that suite."

"Look," said Ham patiently, "Doc doesn't want to go out in the daytime for fear he'll be recognized. And at night he's sticking close in case that mystery woman appears again. He'd like to get a line on her. That's why he has us taking turns patrolling the deck at night, watching for any dame that acts suspicious."

"Just the same," said Monk. "Just the same *what?*"

"She's got everything. Mary English, I mean. Maybe Doc's falling for her." The announcement even startled him. "Say, maybe he is! Wouldn't it be a hell of a thing if Doc up and married her?"

"Well," said Ham, "she isn't a zombie, you know. She's pretty nice . . ."

"Of course she's nice," said Monk. "She's lovely and she's intelligent."

"Plenty smart." Monk kept nodding his head.

"I could go for her myself."

"Me, too," said Monk seriously. "As a matter of fact . . ." Ham began, then he looked surprised. He jumped to his feet. "Say! What if Doc *did* marry her?"

Monk sighed. "Look, shyster, that's what I've been trying to point out to you. Can you imagine Doc tied down like that? Where would *we* be?"

Ham nodded. He thought. "We'd better do something," he said after a moment.

"What?"

"Figure out an angle."

"Suppose I try making a play for her," suggested the homely chemist.

Ham groaned. "Listen," he said, "she's no Judy from a telephone switchboard or a waitress in a one-arm hash joint. She . . ."

"I did all right with that blonde back in New York," reminded Monk.

"That's *just* what I mean!" snapped Ham. "Mary English is strictly high class. It will take some finesse to work this thing." He started toward the door. "Let's talk it over with Long Tom."

They headed toward A deck.

THEY found Long Tom packing his luggage. They told him their fears.

Monk said, "There's no place for a woman in Doc's life. It wouldn't be fair to *her*, either. Just think of the dangerous missions in which Doc is always involved.

Goshamighty . . ."

"After all," Long Tom pointed out, "Doc's only human. Maybe he *has* fallen for her."

Ham snorted with disgust. "A fine help *you* are!" His eyes became thoughtful. "I'm going back there and have a talk with Doc . . ."

"There isn't time now," said Long Tom. "The ship's running two hours ahead of schedule. We dock at Miami in an hour. Doc and Mary English are going ashore with the pilot who will meet this boat. They've already checked out of their suite."

"Why are they going on ahead?" asked Monk.

"Precaution . . . just in case anyone should be watching at the dock when this ship puts in. No one would be expecting them on the pilot boat. We're to meet at that hotel he mentioned on Biscayne Boulevard."

Long Tom snapped the second bag shut. "There's things to do. Doc's switching to a Pan American Clipper for the rest of the trip to Rio. We take off late tonight. Come on! We've got to see about getting all that equipment transferred to an air cargo plane to South America."

It was several hours later before Monk and Ham were free to have a serious talk with the bronze man. They were gathered at the hotel far out on Biscayne Boulevard. Doc's statement rocked Ham back on his heels.

"How would you like to get married?" Doc asked, a flicker in his eyes.

It appeared Doc had rented a room for himself at the hotel, under the name he'd been using—George Baker." The three of them—Doc, Ham and Monk—were in the room now.

The dapper lawyer said, "What's the gag?"

Doc became serious. "I made a grave mistake in agreeing to Halliday's suggestion of posing as Mary English's husband. I've tempted danger her way in doing so. Someone has spotted me, I feel. Therefore it places *her* in danger. From now on—while you wait here at the hotel until the Clipper departs later tonight, and during the remainder of the journey—you will pose as her husband. I have some things to take care of. I'll be gone most of the evening. I want you to stay with her constantly."

"But what has *she* got to say about the arrangement?" Ham asked.

"It's all fixed."

"Did she go for the idea?" asked Ham vainly.

"Why don't you ask her?"

Suave Ham Brooks stepped before a mirror, made certain that his necktie was straight, patted his already neatly combed hair.

Monk watched him with an expression of envy.

“I think,” Ham remarked, “I’ll call Mary and ask her to join me for dinner downstairs in the dining room.”

The chemist's small, bright eyes took on a thoughtful look.

Doc was telling them, “Long Tom and I will use this room. He won't be here until later, but he knows about it.” He indicated a closed, locked door at the side of the big room. “That's her room just adjoining. Beyond it is the one you two will use.”

He handed them their room key. “Don't leave her out of your sight for a minute. And be ready to leave for the airport at eleven- thirty tonight. The Clipper takes off at twelve- thirty.”

“Where will you be?” Ham asked. “I have a couple of things to do. I'll return in time.” Doc left.

Ham picked up the phone, called Mary English's room. They could hear the phone ring in the room adjoining.

Monk said, “Why don't you just pound on the door, shyster, and call through?”

“That's no way to invite a lady to dinner.”

“The hell, she has to eat, doesn't she?” Ham was talking. He had a line, Monk had to admit. He heard his partner say, “Swell. In fifteen minutes, then.” Ham hung up.

Looking disgusted, Monk went out.

THE large dining room of the hotel was crowded. They had the cord up at the foyer. A string orchestra played near the long, wide windows that overlooked the water.

“A table for two, please,” Ham told the headwaiter.

“I only have one for three, sir.”

Ham looked at Mary English, shrugged, said, “I guess we'll have to take it.”

They followed the man through the big room.

Monk stood up as they reached the table. His somewhat battered features wore a wide grin.

“This *is* a surprise,” he said warmly. He held a chair for the woman.

“Monk!” said Mary English. “This is so nice!”

The expression on Ham's face said his thoughts were unprintable.

The woman said, “Did you hear the news?” She was looking at Monk. His stomach fluttered as he met her lovely gray eyes. “My first husband walked out on me.”

“Yeah,” Monk said. “Where'd you pick up this one?” He jerked his blocky chin in the direction of Ham.

“Now, Monk, I think I'm lucky . . .”

“Wait'll you get *me*,” said the chemist. It wasn't until near the end of the meal that Monk stopped needling his well-dressed partner. Then he abruptly turned serious.

“Has Doc got some lead to that mystery woman from the boat?”

“He hasn't mentioned it.” Mary English put down her coffee cup slowly. “Do you really think he has?”

“I'm wondering why he went out tonight.”

Ham said, “He told us why. A few more things to attend to before the plane leaves.”

But Monk shook his head. “Long Tom has taken care of everything. The equipment is already on its way aboard an air cargo transport. We've got our tickets. Long Tom himself told me everything was covered.”

They fell to discussing the mystery woman who had tried to murder Mary English. She said, “But certainly Doc would have said something . . .”

The chemist shook his head. “He doesn't always reveal his thoughts when he's working on a lead. He keeps the whole thing to himself until he's absolutely sure.”

Ham said, “People sometimes think they know all about Doc, then discover he has facets they never dreamed of.”

“He's an unusual person, isn't he?” Ham nodded.

“The longer you know Doc, the more you'll admire him. Wait till he rips into this thing. He's moving cautiously right now.”

A little later, Mary English said to them. “I wonder if you'd excuse me? I thought perhaps I could get a couple hours sleep before the plane leaves. I was under such tension on the boat—after that incident—I hardly slept at all.”

Each man jumped to his feet. Ham said, “We've been very thoughtless, haven't we?”

“Not at all!”

Monk stuck with them as Ham accompanied Mary English to the door of her room upstairs. But the moment the door had closed, Ham swung on his stocky partner and said softly: “Don't go making any passes, little man!”

“Who's making any passes?”

“I mean when I'm not around.”

“Can I help it if I'm the romantic type?” They were moving down the hall toward their own room. A bellhop was approaching them with a telegram in his hand. Ham watched, for the boy paused near their room, glancing at the door number. Then he moved on, past them, and stopped before the woman's room.

He was just raising his hand to knock when Ham called to him quietly. “Just a minute, son.”

The boy turned and looked at them. Ham went up to him. “Is that a telegram for Mary English?”

The bellhop looked at the window envelope of the message. “That's right, sir.”

Ham said, “I'm her husband. She's resting. I'll take it.”

The boy hesitated, until Ham put the dollar bill in his hand, then he beamed, handed over the wire and disappeared down the long hall.

Monk said, "You've got a hell of a nerve."

"It's funny," Ham mused. He stood looking at the envelope in his hand.

"What are you driving at?"

"We only checked into this place an hour or so ago. Doc's planned our movements carefully. Who would know that she had planned to stop here for a few hours?"

"Say, that's right. You don't suppose . . ." Monk looked down at the envelope in his partner's hand. "You don't think it could be a trick? Mary's been on the Gloria Halliday case for a long while. Whoever murdered the Indian probably knows that. And there's that woman who tried to strangle her on the ship . . ."

Ham said slowly, "Yes . . . it could be a ruse."

They decided, for the woman's own protection, to open the wire.

The message said:

YOU CAN REACH ME IN ROOM 215 AT THE HOTEL ELITE AT NINE O'CLOCK TONIGHT.
VERY URGENT I SEE YOU.

YOUR HUSBAND . . . RALPH

Ham exclaimed softly, "My God, she's married!"

And Monk could not help grinning. "Brother, it's a damned good thing he didn't come here in person."

"Wait a minute . . ." Ham frowned. "She never said anything about being married."

"That's right."

"I think this is a pitch of some kind. The guy figures she'll go to that hotel to investigate. Maybe she was married once, and this guy who sent the message knows it, and it's some kind of come-on."

Monk took the telegram, shoved it in his pocket. He motioned toward Mary English's door. "One of us has to stay here to make sure nothing happens. I'll take a run down there. I know the place. It's a third-rate hotel in town."

"I wish Doc was here," said Ham. He warned Monk, "Don't stick your neck out. Watch your step."

Monk said with confidence, "Don't ever fret about me, chum," and strode off down the hallway.

A LITTLE later he climbed out of the cab in a section of second-hand clothing stores and pawnshops. The hotel was squeezed between two dilapidated buildings and you had to climb a flight of wooden stairs to reach the lobby.

Plain, uncovered light bulbs glowed weakly at the landings. The lobby was a small room at the front of the second-floor hall. The huge fat man behind the desk was playing solitaire with a worn deck of cards. He glanced up. His eyes were like small lemon drops in his flabby, round face.

"Room two-fifteen," said Monk. "Will you call them, please?"

"He's out," said the fat man. "Had a phone call for him a little while ago. Nobody answered."

“Mind if I go up and see anyway,” Monk said determinedly.

The big man shrugged, picked up a card, studied his game. “Do what you want,” he said without interest. “Upstairs . . . front.”

Monk climbed the wooden stairs to the third floor. Later, he remembered that it was just about eight-thirty.

He moved along the third-floor hall. He heard several men talking behind a room door. Their conversation indicated they were playing cards. From behind another doorway came a woman's harsh, raucous laughter.

Room 215 was all the way to the front. Monk knocked on the door.

There was no answer.

Trying the knob, he found the door unlocked. Without further preamble he opened the door and walked into the room.

Lights were turned on. He saw the drawn shades at the front windows which faced on the street. He saw the long, thin man lying on the bed. The fellow was quite dead.

AGAIN, someone had used a knife. But this time they had not left the weapon behind.

The thin man—Monk judged he must have been about forty—had been stabbed in the throat, right at the jugular, and the knife had been removed. Then, it was quite evident, the murderer had coolly searched the man's pockets.

For Monk saw that each pocket of the dead man's clothing was turned inside out. And bureau drawers were open, the few belongings scattered helter-skelter.

Bending over the corpse, the reek of alcohol hit Monk in the face. He saw a square gin bottle, almost empty, standing on a small table alongside the bed. There was also an ice pitcher. He felt the water. Warm. The ice had long since melted.

The guy, he imagined, must have been stabbed to death while sleeping off a beautiful jag.

Quickly, yet methodically, Monk searched the cheap, scabby room. There were no letters or papers that might identify the fellow. It looked like the murderer had cleaned out the place.

The only thing he found was some crumpled newspaper in a metal waste basket. The knife had been wiped off with the newspaper.

He carefully tore away the parts of the newspaper around the red smear, folded the pieces of paper, placed them in an envelope which he removed from his pocket. You could get fingerprints off a newspaper. Monk knew the process. He didn't think it would be wise to stop at the desk again and ask questions there.

Monk looked around once more, closed the door and departed. The woman down the hall somewhere was laughing coarsely again. A man's deep belly laugh joined in. The sounds jarred against Monk's senses. He hurried down both flights of stairs and reached the street.

Looking around for a cab, Monk saw a woman cross the sidewalk a little distance up the street and get into a car. The incident meant nothing at the moment; later, he was to remember it clearly.

A cab cruised down the street just then. Monk hailed it. He named the hotel out on Biscayne Boulevard. He climbed in the rear seat and as the cab rolled north he thought about the dead man up there in the room.

It was some distance to the hotel. They left the business district behind them and passed long parks lined with tall palms. The air was cool and pleasant. There was a breeze from the water.

Along a particularly deserted stretch of highway bordering one of the parks, the car rolled up beside them and cut them off sharply. The cab driver was forced into the curb.

He yelled, "Why don't you learn how to drive a—

Then he stopped saying that. The two men had appeared out of the other car before it had hardly stopped. One yanked open the door beside the taxi driver; the other jerked open the door to the rear seat. Each arrival held a gun.

"Out!" said the big fellow covering Monk.

The cab driver was complaining again. "Now, look. I got a fare coming . . ."

"Shove off!" said the one who was covering him.

"I . . ."

"Scram!"

The driver put the car in gear and went away from there like a longshot passing up an odds-on favorite.

Monk was standing in the street. Both men covered him now. Each had grasped an arm, and Monk was quickly led across the sidewalk toward the wide, shadowy park.

Someone still remained in the car that had cut them off. The machine instantly swung in and parked at the curb. The driver did not get out. The engine was kept running.

This impressed Monk. They were going to let him have it and make a quick getaway, before the cab driver could reach a cop and send back help.

But the other thing impressed him more.

A woman was at the wheel of the car!

Chapter VIII

HE was barely able to get a quick glimpse of her before he was hustled toward the dark park. She wore a veil that shielded her features. And he had an idea that she was fairly young.

As a matter of fact, now that he remembered it, he had thought the same thing when he had noticed the woman get into the car near the Hotel Elite.

It was the same person.

A gal who got around! On the ship. A dead man back there in the rundown hotel. And now . . .

Monk's stomach tightened up. Death lady!

The two men holding him were steering him toward a heavy clump of bushes. It struck Monk that a

corpse could lie there in the bushes for weeks and not be discovered. He guessed maybe he didn't want to be a corpse.

Monk's short, squat figure could deceive a person. He did not look unusually strong.

Yet arms, shoulders, chest, legs were powerful. He was tough and he was fast and he was a deadly fighter. A half dozen feet from the bushes he went into action.

He clamped down hard on the arms that held his own. He did this merely by pulling his own arms down against his sides. At the same time he jerked backwards. It was as though a powerful coiled spring had been released.

The two gunmen, one on either side of him, were lifted off their feet. They were whipped toward each other as Monk's body moved from between them. Their heads cracked.

At the same time the chemist brought up his right knee. It crashed against one man's jaw, beneath the chin, in the Adam's apple.

The fellow gagged, coughed, tried to get his breath. The weapon dropped from his fist.

The other fellow's right arm—his right hand also held the gun—was pinioned beneath Monk's clamped left arm. Monk threw his solid weight to the left, still clamping the arm, twisting his left wrist so that his hand grasped the weapon and pointed it away from him. Meanwhile his right arm shot out and the heel of his hand caught the man beneath the chin.

The man's head snapped back as Monk deftly tripped him with his right foot. He was falling. Monk twisted the gun from his grasp as he went down. The chemist used the butt of the heavy gun to bring it down on the man's head.

The fellow was unconscious before he even hit the ground.

Monk whirled. The other one was crawling on his hands and knees looking for his gun in the darkness. Monk hit him also, not being very gentle about it, not caring much whether he cracked a skull or not. The man flattened out and dug his chin and nose into the earth.

Monk's whirlwind movements had consumed perhaps ten seconds.

He heard a car door close. Monk looked toward the street. It was a cab—he saw the familiar, fancy array of little colored lights—and a big figure had jumped out and was running across the grass.

Doc Savage!

MONK leaped toward him. He had already seen the other car start to move away from the curb. It was leaving there in an awful rush.

Monk intercepted the bronze man. "Never mind them," he called out, jerking a hand over his shoulder. "They're out cold." He motioned. "The woman's in that car. The babe you want! She's more important than these two gunsels she hired to fog me!"

Apparently Doc thought so also, for he turned and ran back toward the waiting cab. The other car was already far down the boulevard. Doc pointed as he and Monk swung into the rear seat.

"Catch that machine," he ordered the driver.

And as the car jumped away from the curb, he turned to Monk and said, "I wish you hadn't gone there.

I was trailing her and just about ready to close in. Then she spotted you and left.”

Monk said, “You mean, you were there near the hotel?”

Doc nodded. “The woman was, also. She was waiting in a doorway across the street. I was in another doorway nearby.”

“Did you know there is a dead guy up there in Room 215?”

Doc took his eyes from the road ahead. There was some traffic moving steadily along the boulevard, and he was watching to see that their driver kept the other car in sight. They were moving fast. He looked at Monk.

“He's dead?”

“Somebody did a swift job with a knife.” Then he told the bronze man about the telegram, and a man named Ralph who said he was Mary English's husband. “We didn't tell her about it,” explained the chemist. “I came down here to have a look while Ham stayed near her.”

Doc was silent a moment.

Finally he said grimly, “This upsets the applecart. I thought I had something.” He added, “That fellow's death, however, changes the entire picture.”

“Who was the guy?” queried Monk. “He tried to make believe he was her husband . . .”

“It was her husband,” said Doc. “You sure?”

Doc nodded. “But they were divorced years ago. I guess he didn't amount to much. She had nothing to do with him.”

“Then why . . .”

Doc said, “I told you, that man's murder scrambles the entire picture. I'll have to start from scratch again. I wonder . . .”

He leaned forward suddenly, tense, as the cab shot by an intersection.

“Just a minute, driver!” ordered Doc. “Eh?”

“That car turned off back there. Go back, hurry.”

The driver said, “Ain't it that sedan ahead?” He pointed.

“No!”

The man slowed in order to turn the cab around in the street. Traffic delayed him a moment. Finally they reached the cross street and swung right.

Doc watched intently. They traveled three or four squares. Then the bronze man stated, “Try the side streets.”

They cruised around for a while. There was no trace of the other car.

Finally Doc instructed, “Drive back toward the city.”

But a few moments later he told their driver, "We'll get off here."

Doc paid the man and watched the cab roll off. Then he motioned toward a cab stand at the last corner they'd just passed. "It might be a good idea to switch cabs before we return to the park."

Soon they were nearing the spot where the two men had seized the chemist. They saw police cars drawn up at the curb. Luckily, Monk thought, Doc had not told their driver to stop.

Doc said quietly, "We haven't time now to get involved with the police."

They let their driver continue on toward the business section. Doc named the street on which the Hotel Elite was located.

Turning the corner, they saw more police cars. There was a small knot of people standing around the stairway entrance to the rundown hotel. Monk guessed the fat clerk must have become curious about his not returning to the desk. He had probably gone up there to Room 215 and discovered the dead man.

Doc let the driver continue past. A little later he leaned forward and said to the driver, "The store I wanted is closed, I see." He named their hotel. "Please drive back there."

He looked at his watch. "There isn't much time left before our plane leaves," he said.

Then he lapsed into thoughtfulness during the ride back. Monk made several comments, but the bronze man did not answer.

He guessed Doc was puzzled about something.

Chapter IX

MORE than fifty hours later the huge Clipper—it was one of the new Douglas DC-4s—came down and gently touched the runway strip at Santos Dumont Airport in Rio de Janeiro. Thousands and thousands of miles lay behind them. Half the Atlantic seaboard of South America had been covered.

Doc told them, "I'll meet you at the hotel. These taxicabs go directly there. They don't have limousine service down here. You'll find arrangements all made for you."

Long Tom said, "I'd better see about the equipment. It left hours ahead of us. Maybe it's here."

"Okay," Doc said.

Ham, Monk and Mary English, along with the luggage they'd carried on the plane, piled into a taxicab.

"Why is Doc staying at the field?" Mary English wanted to know.

"I think he wants to see about a chartered plane to take us to the interior tomorrow," Ham said.

"I thought he seemed disturbed about something."

"Shucks," commented Monk, "he's just anxious to get started." He grinned. "Honey, from now on you're going to see some action, if I know Doc."

He reached out and squeezed her hand. "You're going to be glad you've got a real man around. Old fancy clothes, over there, isn't going to like getting his pants mussed."

Ham, seated on the other side of the attractive woman, said acidly, "Long airplane flights always make

him lightheaded.”

Mary English laughed softly. “They make *me* hungry,” she said. “I’m starved.” She glanced at her watch. “I wonder where we can eat in the middle of the night?”

It was three a. m.

Ham said, “Rio’s a real wide-awake town. You’ll find everything here we have in New York, and even better, I’d say.”

Monk said, “Yeah, let’s eat!” It was a short ride to their hotel. They noticed that the streets were tremendously wide and beautifully landscaped. There were modern apartment buildings, shops, and everywhere there was a bright, fresh, invigorating cleanliness about the great city.

At the hotel, as Ham checked on their rooms—he found that Doc had arranged everything by cable—Mary English said, “Give me a moment to freshen up and I’ll meet you. Find some unusual place, hum?”

“Swell,” said Ham. He watched her follow a bellhop toward the elevators. There was a brightness in his eyes, an admiration for her. He wondered if it was admiration that made him watch her gorgeous figure cross the lobby. He told himself this was a purely platonic feeling of admiration he had for her. She had a good mind. She was very intelligent. Yes, she was intelligent . . . but her figure was elegant. The hell with admiration.

HE swung on Monk. “Why the devil don’t you go up to your room and go to bed?”

Monk said, “It’s my job to look after her.”

“What the devil do you think I’m doing?” demanded Ham.

“I’ve also got to watch you. I don’t trust you, shyster. I’m going to stick around.”

Ham wondered if he could think of some way for his partner to break an arm or leg. He handed the bellhop a tip and told the fellow to take their bags up to their room. “Bring the key back here,” he added.

He decided he was stuck with Monk. They inquired about a good eating place. He learned that several excellent eating places were still open. In fact, the night club of the hotel had not yet closed. They could hear a band playing a lively rhumba.

They waited. Fifteen minutes passed. A bellhop came over to them. “There is a message for you at the desk, sir,” he said to Ham.

Ham turned, saw the desk clerk looking toward him. He went over there.

The clerk said, “A gentleman just called, sir. He said you and your friend—he nodded toward Monk—would be just checking in. I’m very sorry . . . I thought you were upstairs in the room. I didn’t see you in the lobby until after I had taken the call and . . .”

“Yes?” prodded Ham. He wished the clerk wouldn’t be so long-winded.

“Well, he said he wanted you gentlemen to meet him right away. You are not to bring the lady, the message said.” He named a hotel. “It’s just down the avenue about two blocks.”

“*Who* called?” put in Monk. “They said the message was from Mr. Clark Savage, Jr.”

"Thank you," murmured Ham quickly, and as he turned away from the desk to look at Monk, the chemist said under his breath, "Doc! I wonder if something is wrong?"

Ham was frowning. "I'm thinking about Mary," said the lawyer.

"That's right. We're not supposed to leave her alone for any length of time, are we?"

Ham shook his head.

Monk said, "But, she'll be all right here for a little while, a big place like this."

"We'd better see Doc," Ham nodded. Two minutes later Mary English appeared from the elevator. Ham told her what had happened. He motioned across the room toward a broad archway that led, apparently, to the night club. They could still hear the music.

"Go ahead and eat," suggested Ham. "It won't take us long. We'll get back as soon as possible."

The woman touched his hand lightly. "I *thought* Doc looked upset about something. What do you imagine . . ."

Ham said, "We'll find out." They left her. They walked hurriedly down the wide avenue outside the hotel, in the direction the clerk had indicated.

Monk said, "Doc was up in the cockpit a couple of times an hour or so before we landed here tonight. He was using the radio- phone. I wonder why?"

"I'll tell you why," said Ham. "Long Tom mentioned it to me while you were busy pounding Mary's ear on the plane. Doc learned that a special charter flight left Miami a couple hours after we did. It was a Constellation, and those babies are faster than a DC-4. The destination was right here, Rio, and Doc's been trying to learn who chartered that plane. It got in hours ahead of us and he has an idea our mystery lady was aboard!"

They were walking fast.

Monk asked, "Did Doc ever decide to tell Mary English about the dead guy in Miami . . . the dipso who was once her husband?"

"No! He thinks that guy had heard of her connection with the case, and being up against it was trying to chisel in, figuring there might be some reward money or something. Doc figures this mystery woman, whoever *she* is, found out and had the guy bumped off."

"Why?"

Ham snapped. "How do *I* know?"

"Well, I'll tell you something. I had time enough before our plane left Miami the other night to check that newspaper for fingerprints. . . the newspaper I found in that dead guy's room. And I found some woman's fingerprints on the paper. Maybe it doesn't mean a thing. Maybe it does. Whoever this mystery woman is, she's plenty dangerous."

"Did you tell Doc?"

"Naturally. That's why he's so anxious to learn who chartered that plane, I guess."

They had reached the hotel.

IT was a fashionable place. Some people were just coming out, and they wore evening clothes. The women were smartly dressed and beautiful. Monk looked over their slim, seductive ankles.

“Humn,” he said quietly to Ham, “some country, eh?”

Ham said, “There's more money down here than you'd find in a mint.”

The chemist's head was still turned as he ogled the people. Ham said sharply, “Don't go getting ideas!”

He hurriedly led the way into the lobby of the hotel. They looked around for Doc, or even Long Tom, who Ham figured might have been sent to meet them.

They saw neither man.

Ham went to the desk and made inquiries. No, there was no message from a Clark Savage, Jr., he was told.

Ham was visibly disturbed. “I'm going to call the airport and see if Doc is still there.”

He located the phone booths. Monk waited, watching for any sign of the bronze man. Ham was in the booth about five minutes.

When he came out he nodded quickly toward the street and said, “Let's get moving!”

“What's up?”

“Doc didn't call and leave that message at all. He's still at the airport with some Pan American officials. He doesn't know anything about the message. Says it might be a ruse to get us away from Mary English.”

“You mean—”

“Let's hope nothing's happened to her!” Ham said.

THEY were nearing their own hotel. A group of people were just coming down the wide steps, apparently from the night club. There was gay laughter and conversation in Spanish which floated on the soft, warm night air. Ham and Monk moved around the party and started up the steps to the hotel.

A woman, alone, passed them as she came down the same steps. She wore a veil. She swung left when she reached the sidewalk and started down the street. Her sharp heels made urgent tapping sounds in the quiet night.

Monk took one more step upward, then stopped abruptly and swung around. He gripped Ham's arm.

“Wait a minute!”

“Good God!” Ham commented, following the chemist's gaze. “Can't you . . .”

Monk was watching intently. A bright boulevard light caught the woman's figure as she moved along. She was fairly young, you could tell that. Monk's sharp eyes traveled from her feet upward. His eyes were wide.

“I never forget a pair of legs!” he said. “So what?” said Ham.

“*Her legs!* I've seen them before. *The woman in Miami!*”

“You're sure?”

“Hell, yes!”

Ham looked from the hotel entrance to the figure disappearing down the wide street. He said tensely, “We can't leave Mary English . . .”

Monk nodded in agreement. He said, “Stay here. I'm going to follow that babe. I've got a little score to settle.”

And he was down the steps before Ham could stop him.

Chapter X

MONK, a tense exhilaration flowing through his veins, started quickly down the street. Yes, he himself had a score to settle with this woman. He'd had a close brush with death back there in the Miami park. And it was she who had directed the murder attempt. A nice gal! “Come up and see me some time, mister. Shake hands with death!”

Perhaps he could solve this thing for Doc. Nothing would give him greater pleasure. He set his jaw grimly and followed the vague figure some distance ahead. He heard, faintly, the quick *tap-tap-tap* of her heels.

“Monk,” the voice said.

So intent was he on the woman that he had not noticed the car parked at the curb. He jerked to a stop, looked that way.

It was Doc Savage.

The car was a small business coupe, and on the door was the Pan American Airways emblem—a globe with a wing attached to one side of it, with the letters PAA on the streamlined wing. Doc must have borrowed the car.

Monk glanced watchfully down the street, then hurried over to the car. He was amazed when Doc said briefly:

“I see her.”

“You mean that you . . .”

“She arrived here ahead of us. She is the one who chartered the Constellation for the flight from Miami.” Doc motioned the chemist into the car. When Monk was seated beside him, he asked, “Is Ham with Mary English?”

“Yes.”

Doc didn't start the car. He merely sat there in the darkness.

“It's the babe from Miami,” said Monk. Then, puzzled, “But how did you know her?”

“I found one of the pilots who helped fly that Constellation down here. He described her.”

Monk was watching uneasily from the car. He couldn't see the woman anymore. “Don't you think you'd better follow. . .”

Doc said, “I know where she's going.” Monk's eyes widened. “You certainly haven't been losing any time!”

"I located the cab driver who drove her into town. He gave me the address. She's been down here before. She's rented a small place out the boulevard a little ways."

"Who else was with her?"

"Three or four men. They've vanished completely. No trace of them."

Doc finally started the car. They drove down the wide boulevard. Monk said, nodding, "There she is!"

The lone figure of the woman hurried through the quiet night.

Doc said, "Don't look at her. We'll wait near her place and see if anything happens. I was there before, but she was out."

Soon he drew up on the far side of the street, in the shadows between boulevard lights, killed the motor and shut off the car lights. They waited.

It was only a few moments until the woman appeared on the far side of the street. Some distance separated them, and it was doubtful whether she'd notice the car parked there.

She went to the doorway of a small, narrow, two-story white house that was built right up against the sidewalk. Apparently she was fitting a key into the door. She went inside, the door closed, and shortly a light showed behind drawn curtains on the second floor.

"We'll wait a bit," advised Doc. Monk wondered what the bronze man's plan was.

The chemist commented, "There was only her and those three or four men on the Constellation?"

Doc nodded. "It must have cost them plenty to charter that plane."

"The rate," said Doc Savage, "is roughly seven cents per mile per plane seat. And there are fifty-two seats. Multiply all that by the numbers of miles down here—and back."

Monk whistled softly. "A small fortune!"

"They're spending money, and there seems to be plenty more available for their purpose . . . whatever it is."

"I don't get it," admitted Monk, frowning.

Doc did not answer.

They sat there. Fifteen or twenty minutes passed. Doc explained, "I just wanted to be certain no one else is joining her out here." He removed the ignition key from the car. "I think we can go over there now. I think we're going to find out who this mysterious person is." He said it with determination.

Monk had noted that lights had been turned on in various rooms of the small house. But just as they started across the wide boulevard he saw the lights start to go out, a room at a time.

Doc's pace suddenly quickened. "She can't be going to bed that quick!" he said. He was moving very fast now. Monk almost had to run to keep up with him. The bronze man's manner was urgent.

"What do you think's up?"

"Hurry!"

They reached the small white house. It was completely in darkness again. On either side, along the street, high stone walls closed the place off. The single street door was the only entrance.

Doc pressed the bell button located in the heavy door frame. There was only quiet from within the house. No lights came on again.

He took a large ring of keys from his pocket and started trying various keys in the lock. They were master keys for just about every type of lock imaginable. Finally one worked.

They found themselves in a small hallway with a white stairway leading above.

“She was upstairs,” Monk whispered. Doc nodded. Some night light came through a small window near the stairway. They went up the stairs.

And still they heard no sound! But at the top of the stairs, Doc paused, turned his head, said, “Listen!”

Softly, from somewhere behind the house, they both heard the car motor.

Doc leaped back down the stairs. Monk followed. A short hall passed through to a kitchen in the rear. Doc found his way across the shadowy room, located the rear door, opened it quietly.

They saw a long stone walk that led back through the high-walled yard. At the rear there was a garage. Even as they spotted the garage they saw the headlights of the car just starting out through the narrow street behind the property. The car disappeared almost instantly.

Monk said, “I’ll get your car . . .” Doc shook his head. “Wait.”

“But—”

“She probably spotted us coming here. She knows the city well enough to lose us if we follow.” He motioned inside the house. “Perhaps we’ll learn more here.”

They returned inside and locked the kitchen door.

THE house was small, plainly furnished, and did not have much of a “lived-in” appearance. There was a living room, dining room and the kitchen downstairs. Upstairs they found two bedrooms, a bath and a sitting room.

Doc said, “She rented it furnished. I found that out.”

“Did the airline people know who she was?”

Doc shrugged. “Naturally she had a name, and an address back in the States, but you can rest assured everything she told them is fictitious.”

They went from room to room. It was one of the upstairs bedrooms that told them the story.

Bureau drawers were open. They were empty. A pair of discarded stockings hung across one drawer. The clothes closet also had been stripped. Several hangers had been dropped on the floor.

“She sure left here in a hurry,” Monk observed.

Doc was busy looking through a small desk. There was some stationery, taken from a local hotel. Nothing else.

It was clear that the house had not been lived in for some time. It had been cleaned and left in order, probably awaiting the occupant's return. And a little while ago that occupant had come here . . . only to leave on short notice.

Doc finally said, "I doubt if she'll be back."

"You want me to hang around awhile?"

"You'd better catch a little sleep. I've got to go back to the airport and pick up Long Tom. We're leaving the moment everything is ready in the morning. We managed to pick up a plane."

"Was our other equipment here?" Doc nodded. "Long Tom has been getting it loaded aboard the plane."

They drove back to the hotel, where Doc dropped Monk off.

He found Ham in their room, in bed, reading a magazine.

"Well?" asked Ham.

Monk told him what had occurred. Then he asked, "Mary all right?"

"I put her to bed," said Ham casually. "She's all tucked in for the night."

"Don't give me that stuff, shyster!"

"I can dream, can't I?"

"Yeah, but don't walk in your sleep. It might lead to complications."

Monk remembered that he had not eaten. He said, "Let's go out and get a steak."

"I ate with Mary."

Monk eyed his partner thoughtfully. Ham seemed perfectly relaxed. He didn't seem to have a care in the world.

"What are you going to do about her?" demanded the chemist. "Aren't you watching out for her?"

Ham said, "I paid a bellhop ten bucks. He was off duty. He's going to sit outside her door all night. He'll call if there are any suspicious prowlers."

Monk cried, "What a fine husband *you* are!"

He stalked out.

Chapter XI

THE lake was hundreds of miles within the deep, practically impenetrable interior of the vast country. Around it was the jungle, dark, silent, endless. The sticky heat of mid-morning hung everywhere, and on the heavy air was the sweet smell of orchids. The wild orchids grew high atop the forest trees, forming a blanket that screened out the hot rays of the tropical sun.

The plane—it was equipped for landing on either land or water—floated lazily on its pontoons, drawn up in shallow water a few feet from shore. It was a big twin-engined ship, containing a cabin large enough for six people and plenty of cargo space.

Monk, eyes squinting against the glare of bright sunlight on water, sat out on a plane wing. His shirt was open, revealing his massive chest, and he needed a shave, and sweat stood out on his forehead.

He listened. He waited for any sound from the plane's radio. He listened for any sound from the jungle itself, which had swallowed up his friends two days ago. He softly cursed the heat.

Mary English appeared in the cabin door. She wore knickers and heavy boots, and a shirt open at her smooth throat.

"Did you say something?" she asked. Monk managed a grin. "I guess I was talking to myself." His eyes questioned. "Anything come in on the radio yet?"

The woman shook her head. "Are you sure we can pick up those walky-talky things they're using, if they try to contact us?"

"Sure. Long Tom juiced up the equipment so we can pick up a whisper. He's pretty good at fooling around electrical gadgets like that."

She knew it was a vast understatement. She had heard that skinny Long Tom was an electrical wizard. As with each of the Doc Savage men, he was a specialist in his own particular line.

"Well," she said, "I wish we'd hear something. They've been gone almost forty- eight hours. Do you think they're all right?"

She referred to Doc Savage, Long Tom and Ham.

"They can't all be in trouble," pointed out Monk. "That's why Doc suggested that they each work independently in the search for the lost temple. They can keep in contact with each other with the walkie-talkies. And then, if they are attacked, they won't be in a single group."

"I wish they'd contact *us*," said the woman.

Monk was as restless as she. He hated this waiting, but someone had to stay with Mary English, and they had drawn straws and the assignment had fallen to him. Not that he didn't think she was pretty swell. But Monk preferred action and activity. Doc had insisted that the trek into the jungle was too dangerous for Mary English.

Abruptly Monk slid off the plane wing and stood in the knee-deep water. "I'm going to take a little walk," he said. "I won't be long."

"Where in heaven's name can you walk to around *here*, Monk?"

"Just curious, is all. I'm going to walk around the shore of the lake. I'd like to see for certain that no one has ever been here."

The woman said, "Doc said this lake had probably never been seen by white men, except maybe from the air, the way we discovered it."

He nodded. "Well, it won't hurt looking." He asked, "Will you be all right?"

"Of course. I have that rifle in the cabin."

Monk said, "Fire a shot if you want me. I'll be able to hear it anywhere around the lake shore."

"All right."

HE made his way to shore. He, too, was wearing heavy leather boots. They were hot and sticky against his legs, but in this tropical country you didn't go around without the protection of the high boots.

Monk disappeared beneath the heavy, overhanging branches of the trees lining the shore line of the inland lake.

An hour passed. Two . . . Monk slowly made his circuit, studying the earth, searching for the slightest trace of human footprints. He found nothing.

It was almost three hours before he circled the lake and reached the plane again.

Mary English sat there in the cockpit section of the plane, earphones on her head, a rifle across her knees. She was instantly awake when the plane rocked slightly as Monk came aboard.

With uncanny instinct, she had started to level her rifle in her capable hands.

"Oh!" she said with relief. "This heat gets you," said Monk. "I don't wonder you were sleepy. Any message from them?"

She shook her head. She looked upset. "I'm terribly worried. We should have heard from them by now."

Monk spent some time trying to pick up Doc Savage, Long Tom or Ham by radio. He had no success.

"We'll just have to sweat it out," he said finally.

"Did you discover anything going around the lake?"

He shook his head. "The only signs of human existence in this God-forsaken place is the trail left by Doc and the others when they started out."

"Long Tom thought he spotted the location of that temple, or whatever it is where the Indians live, from the air. Remember, he pointed it out to us? It didn't seem to be so far from this lake or that other one we saw."

"That's right," said Monk. "But Doc had an idea this lake might be closer to the spot. Going through that jungle is like no other kind of travel. It takes hours to make your way only a few miles."

"Poor Ham," said Mary English. Monk looked at her quickly.

He said, "Don't ever fool yourself about Ham. He dresses like a dandy, and most of the time you'd imagine he's afraid to soil his fingers. But you get him started, and he's a tough cookie."

"Really?"

Monk thought, she's getting *too* interested in Ham. He decided maybe he was talking too much.

"Let's play rummy," he suggested. And when darkness started to cloak the wild, forlorn region late that day, they still waited, and played cards, and tried to contact the others from time to time on the radio. Mary English was visibly worried.

Monk was uneasy, too, but he said nothing.

THE same darkness, that came swiftly with evening, was even far more impenetrable in the jungle itself. But it brought welcome relief from the heat, which compensated for not being able to see your hand in front of your face.

The three men lay very quietly in the grass that bordered the edge of the small plain. The three were Long Tom, Ham and Doc Savage. They had lain motionless until the darkness was complete, and now they were able to move a bit in order to relieve aching muscles.

Ham said, "What do you think, Doc? I haven't seen a sign of life. Surely, you'd think they'd be lighting fires or something. After all, they have to cook and have some light."

"Keep your voice lower," the bronze man warned softly. Then he spoke to Long Tom. "What's your opinion?"

The electrical wizard had been using powerful binoculars until darkness descended and closed them in.

He said with assurance, "I don't think we've made a mistake. The temple should be just beyond this short, open plain. You saw yourself what looked like grass huts over there before it got dark."

"There was something," agreed Doc. "But there should be activity now."

They had reached the spot just before dusk that evening. Long Tom's figuring had proven accurate. It had been done with mathematical exactness. The first day they had separated, to make certain that they were not trailed. Then, keeping in touch with each other with the portable radios, they had converged again in order to complete the trek as a single unit.

Now, as Long Tom told them, they had reached trail's end. This was it. This was where the lost heiress should be waiting.

And so they had awaited complete darkness, deciding that it would be easier to stalk the hidden "temple" in the night.

Long Tom explained. "The tribe is small. The Indian told me that. They might not give us any trouble at all. But we can't afford to take any chances."

They watched a while longer. It was Ham who said sharply, "Look. Isn't that some kind of light?"

Doc watched.

Then he said, "It's a very small fire of sorts. Yes, it's a fire." He stood up. "I think we can get started."

They left heavier equipment behind them, but each man carried a rifle and small arms. Doc Savage led the way, picking his path quietly and surely. His senses, unusually keen, seemed to warn him of any obstacles that might be in their path.

It was farther than Ham had realized. No wonder they had not been able to see much. He guessed maybe a whole flock of natives might be waiting for them! His spine tingled a little.

They all caught the smell of wood smoke, and knew they were close. Ham couldn't see a thing. He wondered how close they were.

Next, Doc's hand was restraining him. "Careful," the bronze man whispered softly. "Right there . . . ahead. See?"

Ham strained his eyes. The blacker outlines of the huts took shape in the night. They were ominous-looking, he thought. What danger was waiting within them? Had they been spotted?

Doc started moving again, noiselessly, his steps as certain as a stalking panther's.

The fire must have died out. They no longer saw it. There was only the lingering smell of the wood smoke.

The first grass hut was very close to them now. Motioning the others to wait, Doc went on ahead alone. His big figure blended with the darkness all around them. They had thought he was moving toward the first shack, and then they were not sure. They could not see him.

There was no sound. Ham and Long Tom waited tensely, expecting the night to be suddenly shattered by explosive action. But there was only stark silence.

Doc returned as silently as he had gone.

He told them, "The huts are deserted."

"But the fire we saw—" Long Tom started to say.

Doc said quietly, "It's the one hut I haven't examined. You'll find it on the far side of this clearing. It's larger than the others. Outside, there are strange native decorations hanging from above the entrance."

"Their temple!" said Long Tom breathlessly.

They could see Doc nod his head. "If anything at all is going to happen," he warned, "it will take place there. That's why I returned. Ready?"

Ham and Long Tom nodded. Ham gripped his automatic harder. He realized that his hand was sweaty from holding the weapon so tight all the time. The lawyer liked to *see* an opponent. He liked to fight out in the open where he knew what was going on. This taut, motionless silence got under his skin.

They started across the small clearing of the tiny colony. The wood smoke was strong in their nostrils. They saw the huts in a circle around them.

Ham finally saw the larger hut. It was sturdily built, its roof heavily grass matted. He saw the weird decorations to which Doc had referred. They hung above the door and along the roof edge. He imagined they were painted with various colors, and in the darkness they looked almost like small-size heads.

Doc was now in the doorway, a gun in his steady fist. He slipped inside. Long Tom and Ham quickly followed.

They drew up and stared. The primitive fireplace was built at one end of the long, simple room. It was raised, giving a sort of altar effect. The fire had burned down, and now there was only the red glow of the embers. It was the glow, brightening the room with weird, reddish light, that revealed the sleeping figure.

The tall, well-formed, half nude figure of the girl!

SHE was lying on heavy matting. Her blonde hair was tumbled about her face. She was young.

As the three men paused silently, each held motionless with some awe, the girl came awake. She did so in the manner a wild animal reacts.

Her eyes flew wide open. Every part of her was sharply alert. Then she leaped to her feet. A cry escaped her lips and she cringed back.

Doc started talking. "It's all right," he said reassuringly. "We are white men. We are your people. We have come to help you, Gloria."

At mention of the name, the girl's attitude changed. Fear changed to one of curiousness. Doc, watching closely, noted this.

"You are Gloria, aren't you?" It was more of a statement than a question.

She jerked her head. She took a hesitant step forward, then another. She reached out a tentative hand and touched the bronze man's hand, the skin, looking at the skin and frowning. She turned to Ham and Long Tom.

"You are white," she said. "You are . . ." Doc sensed the soft whisper of movement behind him. He spun. And he yelled the order:

"Watch out!"

The attack came without any further warning.

Chapter XII

HAM and Long Tom had no inkling of the attack until they heard Doc's yell. They had been too intent on the girl. By the time they whirled around, Doc had disappeared outside.

They leaped after him. The night blackness, following the glow of the fire, left them half blinded.

Ham, however, vaguely made out several figures moving, swaying, struggling. He knew one of the figures was that of Doc, because of its size. A fist thudded against flesh. There was a grunt. There was the sound of hard, strained breathing. It was all uncanny.

And Doc's voice, warning them, "No shooting!"

Ham and Long Tom guessed he was afraid of danger to the girl, so near by.

They dropped their weapons and plunged into the boiling mass.

Fists cracked out. Bodies thudded together. Someone fell in the total darkness and Ham almost went headlong over the figure. There was considerable confusion.

Someone's elbow caught Ham in the face. It stung more than a fist. It jarred his teeth and sent pain shooting through his skull. Right then he started fighting like a demon.

He managed to hang onto one tall, lean fellow long enough to get him down on the ground. He had an idea that Doc didn't want anyone killed. Just shake them up a bit to let them know who was boss. There didn't seem to be too many, either. Ham felt confident. No more than five or six, he would guess.

He went to work on the fellow beneath him. He grabbed the man by the ears and started thumping his head up and down on the ground.

Long Tom bellowed, "Hey!" Ham gave a start. He stopped trying to knock out the man's brains and yanked him to his feet. He exclaimed, "I thought you were one of them!"

And Long Tom said, "I thought *you* were one!"

They stared around. They seemed to be alone. There was some sound off to their right, as though feet were swiftly padding in the night. Then that stopped and there was nothing.

Doc Savage came out of the darkness and joined them.

“They ran off,” he stated. “You mean—” Ham was amazed. “Scared, I guess. They’ve taken to the forests.”

They hurried to see that the girl was all right. She was safe. Doc said, “Let me talk to her for a few moments. You might make certain that none of those fellows return. We’ll start back to the plane just as quickly as possible.”

“Tonight? In the dark?” asked Ham.

“The sooner the better,” said Doc Savage.

It was not yet dawn, and the deep tropical forest was an enclosing wall all around them. The three men and the girl followed the trail which Doc had blazed on the way in from the isolated lake. Ham carried a flashlight. He walked beside the girl.

Some distance ahead of them was Long Tom, picking the way.

Doc Savage had brought up the rear, his ears alert for any sound behind them. They had walked for hours now; he guessed they were safe from further attack. Dawn would be breaking shortly.

He closed in and called a brief halt. “You three will continue on to the plane,” he instructed. “I’m going back.”

Everyone was amazed. “You might get killed!” exclaimed Gloria Halliday. She rushed up to Doc, gripping his arm, her eyes wide with fear. “You can never tell what they will do. There were only a few men there last night. The rest of the tribe was away hunting. Perhaps they will return, or maybe those few went to tell them!”

Doc smiled a little. He appeared confident. “Don’t worry about me.”

There was something in the way he said it that reassured Ham. The bronze man had some kind of plan, what, he did not know. And apparently this was not the time to ask questions.

Doc directed the remainder of his instructions to Long Tom.

“You will return to the plane and take off immediately. There’s a ship leaving Rio late tomorrow night for the States.” He glanced momentarily at the girl. “The quicker you get out of this country, the better it will be.” Then, to Long Tom again, “Fly them to Rio and return for me. We can follow on the next boat for the States. How soon can you be back at the lake?”

Long Tom figured quickly. “I ought to be able to make it by tonight if the plane doesn’t crack up.”

The girl gasped. “I don’t want to walk back,” said Doc with a half smile. “So be careful.”

He turned over most of the equipment to the three. He kept only a rifle and a little food, and some shells. “I want to travel light,” he said. “It will save time.”

A few moments later, they separated, Doc Savage disappearing back along the trail, the others proceeding toward the lake.

Ham said, puzzled, “Why does he want to go back?”

“Don’t ask me,” said Long Tom. The girl said, “He might get killed!” Ham tried to quiet her fears. He started talking to her. He changed the subject, asking questions about herself. He listened to the amazing story of her experience.

“Dad was flying,” she told Ham and Long Tom. “I remember we were over a jungle forest the same as this. Something went wrong with the engines and we had to make a forced landing. We crashed through the trees and . . . and . . .”

“He was killed, wasn't he?” She nodded her head. “It all seems like a vague dream today. I was only fifteen then. Father was . . . killed.”

“We figured that,” said Ham. He kept the flashlight directed ahead, watching for the blaze marks Doc had left on trees, listening to the girl as she talked.

“I remember how Dad killed the engines just before we hit. The trees cushioned the crash of the plane. I wasn't even scratched. But Dad . . . a sapling ripped through the cockpit and crushed his chest. He died almost instantly.”

She was silent a moment. Ham wondered if she was crying.

After a bit she said, “The Indian tribe found me. They were always amazed at my color. They thought I was some kind of goddess. They never harmed me. They treated me with *too* much care at times. They watched over me constantly and it almost drove me frantic. The first year I thought I might be able to find my way out of that country. They wouldn't let me out of their sight. Finally, I gave up hope.”

Suddenly she seemed anxious to forget the past. Her eyes were bright with excitement. “Tell me about home,” she said breathlessly. “Tell me all about my uncle. Is he all right? Is he waiting for me?”

And Ham thought, just before he spoke, Honey, you don't realize all that *is* waiting for you. A fortune! The world at your feet!

She held his arm. He wished she were wearing more clothes. He wished she weren't so pretty!

Behind them, bringing up the rear, Long Tom watched the girl and had much the same thoughts. But skinny Long Tom had never been one to reveal much of his feelings.

He sometimes wondered if perhaps it won't be better to give up this life of adventure and complete freedom, and settle down in marriage. He had debated the subject for a long time. He watched the girl's bare trim legs ahead of him and wondered what he'd been debating about.

DAWN was scarcely an hour old when the two men and the girl emerged from the forest and neared the plane, moored near shore.

And instantly there was a bellow of sound that greeted them.

It was Monk.

Monk, several moments before they had appeared, had heard a sound from the jungle undergrowth and had been concealed behind a tree, a rifle held ready in his big fists. Then he had seen them and now the rifle lay on the ground. He rushed forward.

The girl, Gloria, immediately jumped behind Ham and clung to him. She seemed awed by this squat, burly, homely-looking man who created such a din.

Monk was yelling, “Mary! Hey, Mary. They're here! *They've found her!*”

Ham put his arm around the scantily clad girl's shoulders and said reassuringly, “It's all right. This is Monk. You'll have to put up with him.”

They had already told her about the chemist and Mary English. She let out her breath and attempted a smile. She let Monk pump her hand up and down.

“Honey,” the homely chemist was saying, “we sure are glad to see you!”

Mary English had appeared in the cabin doorway of the plane. She had been awakened by the noise Monk was making.

Ham called, “Never mind coming ashore. We're taking off right away.”

He said to his partners, “I think it might be a good idea if we leave them alone a moment anyway.” Ham had dropped the equipment he'd been carrying on the ground. “After all, Gloria hasn't seen another woman in five years.”

Long Tom nodded. He had noticed the girl staring toward Mary English's slim, tall figure, now out on a wing of the big plane.

Ham lifted the blonde-haired girl into his arms and strode out through the knee-deep water. He placed her up on the wing step near the cabin. Immediately Mary English's arms went around the girl. “You poor child!” she said feelingly.

Then she looked over the girl's shoulder, catching Ham's eyes. Her own were troubled.

“But where's Doc?”

Ham told her, “He'll join us later.”

“I don't understand?”

Ham said, “We're kind of puzzled too, but you know Doc.”

“You mean, he went *back* there?” Ham nodded.

He could hear Long Tom trying to explain the same thing to inquisitive Monk. Ham guessed that all of them, himself included, would have to remain puzzled by the bronze man's actions.

TWO hours later, from the air, Ham looked down at the vast, endless green of the jungle and gave a little shiver. He turned to Long Tom, who was at the controls, and said, “Can you imagine getting out of that place *without* a plane?”

“You wouldn't have a chance,” said Long Tom.

“Maybe one of us ought to go back with you?”

Long Tom shook his head. “You heard Doc's instructions. You and Monk are to get started back to the States at once.” He indicated the chart, tacked to a board that was strapped to his knees. “I know the route now. Don't worry about me. The thing is I've got to hurry and return there before dark tonight.”

Ham was uneasy. “I wish Doc had stayed with us.” Long Tom was busy checking his course.

Sometime later he picked up the first small village, an outpost that would have meant a month more of travel had they gone overland. He checked the bearing, set his course for the seacoast.

“Right on the beam,” was his only comment.

The others, in the cabin directly behind them, were staring down at the world below. They had thought the girl might be frightened of flying again, but she was not. Excitement filled her. She flung her arm happily around Mary English's shoulder.

"It . . . it's all so wonderful!" she cried. At two that afternoon they picked up the coastline and Rio de Janeiro. Soon Long Tom was losing altitude, lining up for the airport. Monk had crowded into the cockpit, and he listened to the skinny electrical wizard's words.

"I won't have a minute to lose after we land. We'll have to refuel. I'll just about make it about there to the lake before dusk. Otherwise, I'm sunk."

Ham and Monk understood what he meant. All were thinking of Doc. They were intensely worried about the bronze man.

"We'll give you a hand the moment we're down. The ship doesn't sail until late tonight."

A few moments later they were earthbound once again. Monk and Ham rushed to unload the plane. Long Tom took charge of refueling. He also checked with the weather bureau about flight conditions. No storms were reported along the return route. The weather was expected to remain clear. Luck was holding with him.

And then they were watching Long Tom take off, alone. They watched until the big plane disappeared in the bright skies, and only then did they turn away.

Ham caught Mary English's expression, as she watched also. Her face was somber and somewhat taut. She turned and looked at him.

Ham shook his head. "I hope everything will be all right."

"I wonder," she said quietly.

Chapter XIII

THE ocean liner was two hours out of Rio. It was late—the ship had not sailed until almost midnight—and now the decks were empty of passengers. The night was warm, clear, the sea as smooth as a mill pond.

Monk had not retired. He and Ham had decided that they should take turns staying up at night, so that one of them could always be in the vicinity of the stateroom occupied by Mary English and the girl. Their own state-room was nearby.

Monk stood against the rail, his shoulders against it, surveying the empty deck. At three a. m. he was to awaken Ham. The chemist maintained his vigil.

He was aware, suddenly, that he was listening to a foreign sound. It was not the throb of ship's engines, far below. It was not the sound of water rushing along the hull. It was something else.

Turning, his eyes scanned the water. Then his gaze travelled upward. It was a plane. He saw its wing lights—red and green—blinking on and off, on and off.

And as the airplane came closer it began to lose altitude. The pilot brought it gliding down. Then, strangely, it went into a bank and circled the moving liner.

Monk became uneasy. Odd that the pilot should do that. The plane made a complete circle around the liner. Next he was aware that the ship's engines had stopped. There was a silence that followed, a taut

calmness broken only by the sound of the plane up there above them.

Monk, on a sudden impulse, hurried to their own cabin. He awakened Ham.

“Something's fishy,” he said, explaining the actions of the plane, and the liner stopping.

Ham dressed swiftly. He followed Monk to the deck.

And both men saw that the plane—an amphibious craft—was riding on the water now. The pilot was taxiing up alongside the liner. Monk leaned across the rail and looked down. A dark opening yawned down there below. They had opened the heavy steel doors to one of the hatches.

Ham saw this also. He looked at Monk. “Someone's coming aboard,” he said. Behind them, the voice said, “Is there something wrong?”

It was Mary English.

She explained, “I wasn't asleep. I was fixing some dresses that Gloria could wear. That horrible, long raincoat of mine which she wore aboard is frightful.” She leaned over the rail. “What in the world . . .” she started to exclaim.

And then the girl was there with them. Monk turned, seeing her face, white and sharply attractive in the night light. He saw the dress she was wearing and said, “Say!”

“Like it?” The girl smiled at him. “Slick chick!” said Monk.

The girl frowned, not understanding. Mary English explained, “He means you look nice, darling,” she said.

They all watched over the side. And they made out a figure leaving the plane. A rope ladder had been lowered from the cargo doorway and the figure moved out across a plane wing, reaching for the swaying ladder. Crew members with hooks held the plane steady.

Two other figures followed the first from the plane. The darkness made it difficult to see the figures clearly.

Yet Monk suddenly tensed. “Doc!” he exclaimed. “The first one is Doc!”

Mary English tried to see. “You're *sure*?” She looked at Ham for confirmation.

Ham said, “I . . . I think it is! Doc and Long Tom!”

“What the blazes,” said Monk. “I wonder who that *other* person is?”

“We'll find out,” suggested Ham. He turned, spoke quickly to Mary English and the girl. “You'd better get back to your cabin. Stay there until we return.”

She nodded. She took the girl's arm. Monk watched them across the deck. Two or three other passengers had been awakened by the sound of the plane. They had come on deck. But the chemist was watching the two women to be certain that they reached their stateroom all right, and abruptly he murmured, “That's funny . . .”

Ham was ready to start below decks. He paused, looked inquiringly at his partner.

“What did you say?”

Monk joined him. But Ham saw the slight shake of his partner's head. "I . . . I don't know," Monk was saying, and that was all he said.

Ham guessed maybe Monk was somewhat punch-drunk from lack of sleep. None of them had rested more than a few hours at a time for several days.

THE ship was under way again by the time they reached the lower deck where the three people had come aboard. They found an officer.

Ham said, "Wasn't that Doc Savage who just came aboard?"

The officer gave them a blank stare. "I'm sorry," he said.

Monk glared at the fellow. "Listen," he rapped, "we asked—

"I cannot answer questions," said the officer.

They went in search of other persons of authority. They got the brushoff from everyone. There was, apparently, a great secretiveness about arrival of the persons from the plane. They were told nothing whatsoever. They spent almost half an hour arguing and threatening, and finally they returned above decks.

"I don't get it," said Monk. "Maybe it wasn't Doc."

"Then," stormed the chemist, "I want to know who it *is!* We've got that girl to think about . . ."

He paused, letting his words trail off, and there was that curious expression on his face again.

"What's wrong with you?" demanded Ham.

"I guess it's just coincidence," murmured Monk, half to himself.

They had reached their stateroom. Ham paused to stare at his stocky partner again. He was on the verge of asking another question when their stateroom door opened and the bronze man stood there.

"DOC," began Monk.

And Doc stopped him. He held up a warning hand. The entrance to their state-room was in a short cross passage between the outside decks, and it was here where they stood. The bronze man kept glancing right and left, as though watching for someone. He spoke quietly.

"You left the door unlatched, so I was able to enter." His eyes stirred restlessly. "One of you was supposed to stay with the two women constantly . . ."

Ham said, "We saw you leaving the plane. That is, we thought it was you. We went below to meet you."

"Long Tom's down there arranging about the cabins," said Doc quickly. "You and Monk will have to switch to a different one. It might be safer that way until morning, until I can work out a better arrangement. First, though, I want to be absolutely positive. Tonight should tell the story. They'll have to make their move soon, and then we'll know. We'll have the evidence we need."

"What in the world are you talking about?" asked Ham, staring at the bronze man as though Doc, too, were lightheaded from lack of sleep.

Doc said, "She's in there. I have her in your stateroom."

And before they could start asking further questions, he was urging them on. "Stay with Mary English and the girl. Get back there to their stateroom immediately. I wish you hadn't left them out of your sight."

Moving along the quiet, dark, deserted decks, Ham was puzzled. He looked at Monk. "What do you figure is up?" he asked.

Monk was thoughtful. He did not reply for a moment. There seemed to be a grimness about him.

Then he said, "Maybe I *was* right. I *must* have been right . . ."

They were nearing the stateroom occupied by Mary English and the girl.

Ham stopped. "No, look," he said sharply. "One thing at a time. You saw something a while ago that's made you act like a guy on a reefer jag. Out with it, pal! Just what . . ."

Monk seized his arm, drew him swiftly back close to a bulkhead. He motioned silently.

Ham saw the figure.

It was a woman moving down-deck. There was something furtive about the way she slipped through the quiet night. She kept close to the inside of the deck, as though ready to duck somewhere out of sight if necessary.

Monk was staring. His fingers dug into Ham's arm. "Her legs!" he said quietly.

"What do you mean?"

"Her legs are the same!" Without further explanation, prodding Ham, he started trailing the girl. She was some distance away now. Monk's manner was tense and wary.

With sudden impact, it came to Ham. He realized now what Monk had been driving at. The legs! He guessed Monk was pretty sure about a thing like that. Monk would not quickly forget!

The figure ahead disappeared. Monk drew up, frowning. He had thought the woman had been protected by shadows momentarily, but now he saw that she was not there at all. She was gone!

"The window!" he gasped. "She must have entered through the open window. It was open earlier!"

"You mean . . . *our* stateroom?" Monk's head jerked.

Then, a split second later, they both heard the shot. The sound was not loud. Probably no one else on shipboard heard it. It was muffled.

But it came from their stateroom!

Chapter XIV

DOC SAVAGE, using a judo hold that took little pressure but which was mighty effective, held the woman with his right arm and fired the shot into the pillow with his left hand. His right hand was clamped across her lips, so that she could not cry out. Neither could she struggle, for she found herself helpless.

He fired the shot against the pillow of the bed in which no one was sleeping. It seemed a peculiar thing to do.

Then he dropped the gun into his pocket and held the woman securely with both arms. He moved with her across the room, in the complete darkness, until his back touched a bulkhead wall and they were in

the far corner away from the door.

He said very quietly, "Now, we'll see!" Doc waited, his right hand still clamped across the woman's mouth.

The stateroom door crashed open. A blocky figure came fast into the darkness . . .

Doc ripped the words out, "Monk! Ham! No lights. Get into a corner over there and keep quiet."

He heard Monk's gasp. Then heard them finding their way across the room.

"Wait!" Doc warned quietly. Silence followed.

A moment passed. Another. Three . . . A footstep sounded. It came from outside the stateroom, which Ham had closed when he recognized the bronze man's voice.

Nothing happened. Another tense moment passed.

Then all heard the doorknob click. The door was opening. A figure slipped into the room. The door closed almost silently.

"Sis?" the arrival asked softly. It was the cool, steady voice of Mary English.

There was a click. Light flooded the room. Doc, still holding his captive, had worked his way around to the light switch.

Mary English's tall, shapely form was wrapped there in the light glare, near the doorway. Her gray eyes held amazement, and then a cold, deadly stare.

"*You!*" she said, looking at Doc Savage, and the word dropped from her lips like a crystal glass shattering.

THE gun was in Doc's left hand. He released the woman he had been holding, moved aside, motioned her toward the middle of the large stateroom.

The woman he released was the blonde girl who had been brought out of the wilderness. Hate was in her flashing eyes. Her expression was no longer that of an amazed or bewildered girl. Lips were set in a grim, thin line. Her features were harsh and strained.

Strangely, Ham thought, the expression made her look like Mary English!

And Monk's wide eyes had gone from the blonde's face to her legs, to the part of them revealed beneath the hem of her skirt.

He said, "When you turned away from the ship's rail a little while ago, returning to your stateroom! It was the first time I'd seen you in a dress. It was just the same." He glanced at Ham. "The same legs. The woman in Miami . . . then coming out of the hotel in Rio . . . and now . . . here! Death lady!"

Mary English whirled on him. "Damn you . . ."

Doc moved the gun slightly. "Watch her, Monk," he said quietly. "They're sisters. They're sharp as foxes!"

And then Long Tom was there, followed by two of the ship's officers and the captain himself. The two of them, Mary English and the blonde, were taken away. Doc took full responsibility for the arrest. He

looked at the younger one, the blonde, as she was led out, and he told Monk and Ham:

“You'll understand now why I wanted to get her on shipboard in such a hurry . . . both of them. Once they knew the case was going to blow up in their faces, they would have fought extradition. We would have been delayed indefinitely.”

He stepped across the room, opened the door to the connecting bathroom.

“All right, Gloria,” Doc said. She came out. She was a tall girl, very slender, and her skin was as bronze as Doc's own. Her hair was blonde, almost ash colored, and would be beautiful once it was properly trained. She moved with the quick, smooth alertness of a creature who has been very close to nature for a long, long time. Her eyes, as blue as the sea, darted quickly between Monk and Ham. There was a wariness about her.

Doc put his arm gently around the slim, straight girl's shoulders.

“Everything's all right,” he said. “These are two of my friends. You have nothing to fear now. The shot you heard was perfectly harmless. I fired it myself.” He motioned toward the bed. “Into that pillow over there. I had to trick them, the two women I told you about.”

He looked at Monk and Ham. “This,” Doc said, “is the real Gloria Halliday.”

DOC sat down on the edge of the bed, the girl beside him. He held her hand as he talked, and she seemed to feel the strength of him, and she was calm.

He told Monk and Ham, “I wondered about Mary English the very first night when the Indian was killed in Halliday's home. Then, on shipboard, when the *second* woman appeared, it eliminated Mary English as the suspect. I tried to get a line on this second woman while we were in Rio, but there wasn't much time. I sent cables to the States, however. Replies to them were waiting in Rio tonight.”

Ham said, “You found out the second woman was Mary English's sister?”

“Yes. I had wondered, and so I asked questions of the agency with which Mary used to be connected. I discovered there was a sister and they checked her movements. And her movements checked with those of our mystery woman. They had again contacted each other shortly after we arrived at the hotel in Rio. That explains the faked message asking you two to meet me. It drew you away from the hotel for a little while. That's why you saw her leaving when you returned to the hotel.”

Monk nodded. “I remembered her legs were the same as the woman's in Miami.”

Ham asked, “But when did Mary make her first false move? Something tipped you off there at the jungle lake or at the hidden temple. That's why you returned, isn't it?”

“Yes,” said Doc. He looked at Monk. “You were wondering why I didn't contact you while you waited on the plane with her, at the lake. While you were away from the plane the second afternoon, Mary used the radio to contact her accomplices. I intercepted her message on the walkie-talkie. She told them you were away from the plane temporarily. She also told them that Ham, Long Tom and I were coming. That's why I couldn't answer. I would have revealed our exact whereabouts. You see, they were there ahead of us.”

Monk was amazed.

But Ham began to understand. “Those fellows at the temple . . .” he started.

“They were not natives,” said Doc. He removed a wallet from his shirt pocket, tossed it to them. “This fell from one of their pockets that night in the dark at the jungle village. It identified the owner as a white man. There was enough information in the wallet to identify the man. He and his partners will be picked up the moment they return to Rio. The police have the information.”

“But what about the real tribe?” asked Monk.

Doc said grimly, “They were machine-gunned . . . by the six white men who got there ahead of us, following Mary English’s instructions over the plane radio. It was a small tribe. Gloria, here—he looked at the girl—hid in terror. The killers figured she’d never find her way out of that country. They substituted Mary English’s sister. That’s why that fake fight with us last night at the temple made it easy for us to rescue the girl they had planted there. They *wanted* us to rescue her and get away from there in a hurry. They, themselves, ducked out.”

Ham was nodding. “I see,” he said quickly. “They were both blonde. That’s about all that would have been needed to ring the fake Gloria Halliday in for that fortune which awaited her. A girl who is lost when she is only fifteen is going to look far different at twenty-one, especially after living in the wilds like that.”

“Naturally,” said Doc. He patted the girl’s hand. “You can see for yourself. You’ve seen her photographs showing her when she was fifteen.”

The girl was listening intently, more relaxed now, hearing about this weird thing that had involved her.

Doc said, “Yes, Mary English left that detective agency well over a year ago. She came to live with Halliday, pretending she could operate better that way. He never knew she was no longer connected with the agency. He turned all funds directly over to her.”

“No wonder the sister could charter a Constellation!” Monk exclaimed.

“But that was peanuts,” pointed out Doc. “Gloria’s own fortune was waiting, which would have been split between Mary English and her sister. And later, that of Halliday.”

“Sure!” cried Monk. “They would have bumped him, too . . .”

Doc made a quick warning gesture with his head.

Monk took up another part of the story. “What about the telegram that Mary’s former husband sent to her in Miami? It *was* her ex-husband, wasn’t it?”

Doc nodded. “He had learned she was up to something. He figured he’d cut himself in for a share. I learned just tonight, from the steamship line in Rio, that she had received a message from him while we were coming down on the boat, the first afternoon while I was away from the stateroom. So she cabled the sister to get the troublesome ex-husband out of the way.”

“And *how* she did!” said Monk. His eyes flashed. “She tried to have me eliminated, too.” He turned to Ham, and a grin replaced the expression on his homely face. “Boy, am I glad I remember a pair of legs when I see them. I’ve always told you . . .”

“I . . . ah . . . Monk,” said Doc, glancing again at the girl beside him. He stood up. “I’ve arranged with one of the ship’s matrons to stay with Gloria here. I’d better go find her.”

The girl looked quickly from Doc to the others. She wasn’t frightened now. She merely seemed to look to the bronze man for assurance.

“What do you think of them?” he asked her, smiling.

For the first time the girl smiled. “I . . . I like Monk,” she said. Monk beamed.

But Ham groaned.

He gasped, “She's learning fast!” Doc started out. He guessed maybe Ham was right.

THE END