



# Terror Wears No Shoes

## 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](#)

Originally published in *Doc Savage Magazine* June 1948

“Our job is to find Long Tom Roberts”—and that’s the beginning of a weird, wonderful adventure that involved characters like The Honest Pole and a glamour-puss named Canto, who was a legend before she was twenty-five.

Here it is—Doc Savage and his aides at their best!

### Chapter I

HE met her finally. He arranged it through the aid of a man called but obviously not named the Honest Pole. The Honest Pole was short, near-sighted, and he over-filled a Ceylon silk suit. He was only half Polish, and the other half was anybody’s guess as long as the guess was amber skin and slant eyes. He was called the Honest Pole for the same reason that fat men are called Slim.

He paid the Honest Pole some money—half the price of the job, but it looked like a lot in Chungking dollars—and he explained to the Honest Pole what he wished. Where, when and how.

“Four men,” he said. “Don’t you think four men will be enough? I don’t want it to look fishy.”

“Four men. Excellent,” said the Honest Pole in his English that would have been superb if he hadn’t spoken it through his nose.

“It will be done, then?”

The Honest Pole examined him thoughtfully. "More than four men, if you wish. You are very big. Very powerful, obviously."

"But I walk with a cane."

"True also. Maybe four will be enough."

"My leg is not reliable. If it should collapse during the proceedings, it would be embarrassing."

"I will warn the four men about your leg. Not to kick or strike it. But I would like more than this as a down payment."

"It's enough. I'm no fool."

"She is quite a woman. Such a one as few have ever known. To tinker with her is worth more money in advance."

"That's the bottom cent now."

"I would like more advance money."

"You won't get it."

"All right, you are plainly a fine man, and I will trust you more than my custom," said the Honest Pole, at the same time wondering in the back of his head who this big man had killed, robbed or swindled in the past and how profitable it had been.

She was called Canta. If she had another name it was not public property.

The Honest Pole went to her at once. He told her about it.

"A great bumbling fool," he said. "He paid me ten times what was needed, and half that in advance."

"He sounds like a fool."

"He is."

"And you are going to take what he paid you, deliver no services, and be seen by him no more?"

"That will be as you say," said the Honest Pole, grinning.

He'd had some trouble getting to see her. He was surprised he had. She was rather legendary, and he'd wanted to meet her for a long time, and better still, do her a service. He'd like to be one of those who worked for her. She was generous. She was always finding the means that enabled her to be generous. She was clever. Not yet twenty-five, certainly, the Honest Pole thought, looking at her but not staring, and already a legend.

She had sat at a teak desk while listening to him. The desk was a masterpiece of femininity, inlaid with ivory and tufted with pastel silk. Some of the stuff on the desk was gold and her cigarette holder was platinum.

She arose now and went to the window, the great expanse of window, a whole wall of glass, that overlooked the packed matted thickness of the city. From this height and magnificence, the city seemed colorful and beautiful and the sampans on the river and the steamers lying in the stream or at the docks made an intriguing combination of the stuff that looks well on travel folders. It was the height and the

magnificence that did it.

The Honest Pole thought: I wish I had for income what she pays for this hotel penthouse. That I do wish.

She said, "Do what he wishes."

The Honest Pole jumped a little, not having expected this.

"Indeed?" he gasped.

She nodded. "Things are a little dull with me. This is simple-minded diversion, and if it isn't entertaining, I can do something about that."

"You wish me to proceed as agreed with him?"

"Yes. . . . With slight alterations."

"Alterations?"

"Yes. Have the four men you hired rough him up a little."

The Honest Pole hesitated. He thought of the things he had heard of this unusual woman. He preferred to do his murdering with a little more discretion. "How much do you wish him roughed?" he asked.

"Enough so he'll earn it."

"That would be very rough indeed, to pay for the privilege of meeting you," said the Pole gallantly.

"Don't overdo it. Not a hospital case. Just teach him a little lesson."

"I see. A payment for folly?"

"A payment," she said, "for thinking up an asinine, childish, soft-headed gag like the one he's trying to pull."

So he was roughed. It took place that evening, while she walked alone in the Crown Regal garden, one of the few places in the city where it was ten percent safe for a woman to walk alone at that time of night. Not, however, that she wasn't an exception and could have gone alone and untouched, unspoken to, in any part of the city at any hour, excepting the rare chance that she might meet some dunce who hadn't heard of her. Somebody who wouldn't have heard of Stalin, or Chiang, or Truman or Clark Gable.

The four men came at her. He was soon to the rescue. He bounded from the spot where he had been waiting, a great figure of a man who hop-skipped favoring his right leg and who waved his cane. That was the idea.

Not a new idea. Just about as new with mankind as the act of breathing. He had hired them to molest her, and he was going to save her from them. Be a hero. Lady in distress; gallantry to the rescue. Whiskers down to here.

He didn't know, of course, that the four men had orders to whale the tar out of him. But his ignorance didn't long persist. They tied into him. The Honest Pole had been choosy, and he had hired men who knew how to hurt a man. Scum who had been strained through the sieves of Hongkong, Canton, Shanghai, men whom the Shanghai Municipal Police, said to be the toughest in the world, would have gone at with care. They had orders to take him apart, but leave the pieces hanging together, and that was also soon evident.

She watched. She instantly saw how bad they were going to be. She was shocked. She knew violence, and she could see, and she didn't want it that nasty. Not nasty enough that she would be bothered with anything like pity.

She spoke shrilly, angrily, in Kwangtungese. A branch of the Chinese language full of snake-tongues. A small automatic pistol, gold and jewels where it didn't need to be excellent steel, was in her hand.

They didn't hear her. They didn't see the gun. They were busy. The air, about eighty cubic feet of it, was full of manpower. The general effect was that of a dark ball out of which came barks, yelps, grunts, hisses, and in the course of a few moments, men in various degrees of injury. Those who could, ran. The other two crawled away into the bushes.

He picked up his cane. His hat. He didn't have any shirt and his trousers had one leg more or less intact. He leaned on the cane and looked at her.

"How long did it take?" he asked.

She wanted to giggle. She had an overwhelming impulse to do so. She had wondered what speech he planned to make when he had established himself as Galahad, the hero, the savior. She wondered if it was this one. If so, he might be somewhat original after all.

His next statement was a bit more in form: He said, "You shouldn't walk alone around here at night."

She gave him a bromide herself. "You saved my life!" she said. She got proper drama into it.

He grinned slightly. "I didn't know it was going to be that rough."

You probably didn't, she thought. But you did all right. In fact, you did about as good as I've seen done.

"You were wonderful!" she exclaimed.

"You think so?" he said. "I do best with odd numbers, really. Fives, sevens, nines."

"You needn't joke."

"I'm not."

She said, a little more thoughtfully than she intended, "I can almost believe that."

He was indeed a big man, and his features were not bad, not bad at all, and his eyes had a cast of copper in them that caught the small lights from the lanterns on the *hsiao lu*. She detested handsome men, and they always reminded her of two things, either throat-slitting weasels or knives with brown bone handles. This one wasn't too handsome. And he was remarkably big for one without any fat at all.

He said, "If you will care to walk to the safety of the *fan-dien*, I will walk well behind you to see that you get there."

"Why well behind?"

"Obvious reasons. No shirt, for one thing."

She said, "Don't be silly. I'll get you a shirt. I owe you that much, surely." She was thinking that he'd taken a big chance, offering to step out of the picture that way. Or maybe he hadn't—because wasn't she inviting him along?

She was equally uncertain about him an hour later, when he left her. It had taken that long to have him brought a shirt, a finer one than he'd had torn off him, undoubtedly. Because he wasn't expensively dressed. Not at all.

He'd used the interval waiting for the shirt to show her his obvious traits, which he seemed to think, or gave the impression that he thought, were good ones. He was a braggart. He made bum jokes. Not dirty ones; just naïve and not clever. He boasted incessantly without bragging of specific deeds, but giving the impression that he was a killer-diller.

It didn't soak into her until later, but the only specific things she learned about him was that he was using the name of Jonas and he lived at the Shan Loo Hotel.

Adding it up, watching him hitch-step his way down the hotel corridor, she didn't get it. He hadn't made a pass. He hadn't asked for a job. He hadn't offered to let her in on any big deal. Why, then, all this finagling?

Maybe he was a slow and cunning worker.

He walked a few hundred feet through the grimy winding and slightly dangerous tunnels of the native streets, then hailed a *mache* pulled by a knock-kneed horse, giving the address of his hotel, the Shan Loo.

The Shan Loo was no dump. The Nip officers had favored it with their patronage during the occupation, but it had been refurbished, was back under old management, and full of the better-heeled foreigners and more successful local black-marketeers. There were a few Generals of the type that used to be called War Lords, a scattering of diplomats, and quite a foundation of American businessmen out to squeeze a dollar.

He was well into the lobby when he met one of these businessmen, a Mr. Wesley T. Goltinger. Mr. Goltinger traveled on an expense account of a hundred dollars a day. Oil.

The meeting with Goltinger was a loud encounter.

“Doc Savage!” Goltinger yelled. “Good God! Imagine meeting you here!”

He stopped—he had to; Goltinger was in front of him like an autograph hound that had just discovered Jimmy Stewart—and looked through and beyond Goltinger.

“Some mistake,” he said.

“Mistake nothing!” howled Goltinger. “I'd know Doc Savage anywhere. Why, I met you at an oil chemist's meeting, remember? You gave a technical talk for thirty minutes, and I didn't understand one word.”

“Mistaken,” he said.

He stepped around Goltinger and went on and vanished somewhere.

“That's a hell of a way to treat a fellow American citizen!” Goltinger complained.

## Chapter II

THE thing that now occurred to Goltinger shouldn't have happened to a dog. He said so himself just before he received a punch in the stomach.

Goltinger headed for the bar. He felt that he'd been insulted, and that the condition would be abetted by a drink, which would also be company for several he'd had already.

A strange voice at his elbow suggested, "Let's have a little detour, pal."

Goltinger looked down at a short, wide, homely man who wore a considerable crop of shingle-nail hair of rusted color. The stranger was so homely that he seemed a little ridiculous.

"Go away, beautiful," said Goltinger.

"Never mind my looks," said the other. "You and me are going into conference."

"Go find a baby to frighten," suggested Goltinger.

The short one laid a hand on Goltinger's arm and said, "Let's not debate it here in public."

"Debate hell!" said Goltinger. "I been insulted. I been ignored by Doc Savage, a fellow American. By God, the first good New York face I've seen in days, and he snotted me. It shouldn't happen to a dog, the way he—"

The fist made some sound, but not much. Not enough for anyone to notice. Goltinger's mouth opened, stayed open, and his knees buckled as his legs turned to spaghetti. But he stayed on his feet, held there by the stocky man who was wearing the same amiable grin he'd worn all along. Goltinger was in fact walked outdoors with his feet skating along the floor, and he was heaved into a waiting car. The homely man got in also, forced Goltinger's mouth open, and popped a capsule into his mouth. Then he whacked Goltinger's Adam's apple smartly so that Goltinger had to swallow.

Twelve hours and an odd number of minutes later, when Goltinger awakened, he made the difficult-to-explain discovery that he was on a plane. A clipper. He looked out of a window. He saw more water than he liked.

"Where the hell am I?" he blurted at his seat-mate.

The seat-mate, a slender young man with the air of a professional diplomat—dignity, a ready smile that wasn't to be too much believed—touched Goltinger's arm and suggested, "Sit down and take it easy, Mr. Goltinger. I'm your escort."

"Escort! What the hell is this?" Goltinger gasped.

"A quick voyage home for you, Mr. Goltinger."

"By God, nobody can do this to me!" said Goltinger feelingly. "I'll talk to our diplomats about this!"

"Then you can spill it to me," said the seat-mate. "I'm one of your diplomats."

Two hotel servants had been near enough to hear Goltinger hail the big man as Doc Savage. One of these was from Yu San, and by now he was home in Yu San, not a little confused. He'd received a month's vacation with pay, something that had never before happened to a servant in that hotel. The other lackey was in jail in Canton, which was also quite a few miles from the hotel lobby where Goltinger had hailed the big man. He could have had a paid vacation as well, except that it happened he was wanted by the Canton police for a little matter of skull-thumping an Englishman a few months previously.

Having made these arrangements, the short homely man who had all the rusty hair got around to tapping on the door of the big man who had given the woman Canta the name of Jonas.

“Who is it?”

“It's me.”

The man using the name of Jonas opened the door, and said clearly in a pleasant voice, “Thank you for returning the suit so well-mended, Mr. Wang. Thank you very much. I shall call at your shop and take care of the bill.”

The homely man, who hadn't brought a suit, and couldn't have mended one either, said, “Thank you, Sir.” He winked elaborately. “It is a pleasure to have your business.” Then he went away.

He went to a rather expensive room in a hotel patronized by many foreigners, Americans plentiful among them, and which had the not inconsiderable virtue of exits opening on four different streets.

There was another man in the room, a slender and very dapper one who wore afternoon clothes because it was afternoon, and who carried a slim cane of dark wood. The homely one addressed the overly-dressed one as Ham, and was in turn addressed as Monk. That was the extent of their civility. They began quarrelling, not as men who really had a deep-seated grudge, but more as a matter of habit. They spent the next forty minutes thinking up insults, and the dapper one unjointed his cane, which proved to be a sword cane, and while continuing the squabble, freshened an application of some sticky drug which was applied to the tip of the sword blade. He made no comment about the cane, and Monk did not seem to think it was extraordinary, hardly noted the operation.

Jonas came finally.

Monk looked at him. “Doc, you think your place may be wired?”

“No point in taking a chance,” Doc Savage said. “How about Goltinger and the two hotel employees?”

Monk, rather pleased with himself, explained about that. “No fuss. No feathers. They're gone with the wind and won't be missed.”

“The two servants—they have a chance to spill anything where it might not be good?”

“Nope. And I don't think they even overheard Goltinger call you Doc Savage.”

“We can't take a chance.”

“We didn't.”

Doc Savage swung to the window. The hot morning sunlight came through the panes in long pale blades and out before him the city was coated with groundfog that the sun would soon burn away. He stood straight, with no suggestion of stoop nor limp, and the absence of either gave him a completely different appearance.

Presently he moved a little, shaping up his reflection in the windowglass, and frowned at it, comparing it with his normal appearance, which was quite a bit different yet. He ended that by shaking his head.

“Disguises,” he said, “are always uncertain. . . . But not that uncertain.” He swung around suddenly. “Take a look at me! What's wrong?”

Ham Brooks jointed the cane together with a soft whisper and flash of steel. “Nothing is wrong, Doc.

You don't look any more like yourself than Pike's Peak looks like the Empire State. Less."

"But Goltinger, half-drunk, recognized me at a glance."

"He was eleven-twelfths drunk," Monk said.

"Shut up, dopey," Ham told Monk. Then he told Doc Savage, "That puzzled me, and I did some checking on this Goltinger. The guy is a face-remembering freak. You've heard of those mental oddities who can glance at a newspaper page and a year later tell you everything that was on the page? Well, Goltinger does it with people. I got on the trans-Pacific telephone and dug up that information. So it's nothing to worry about. It was just one of those unfortunate things that happen."

"It's covered up now?" Doc asked.

"Thoroughly."

"Good enough."

Monk scratched an ear. "How did your pick-up with the tiger lady come out?"

Doc Savage frowned. "That rascal, the Honest Pole, doublecrossed me. He told the four men to beat me up. To stop it, I'm almost afraid I had to appear a little too good in a brawl."

Monk grinned. "I'd like to have seen that."

"See if you can't arrange for something mildly unpleasant to happen to the Honest Pole," Doc directed.

Monk nodded. "Can do."

Doc eyed him doubtfully. "Better let Ham handle it. The last time you arranged a mild unpleasantness for me, the victim came near never leaving the hospital."

Monk wasn't hurt. He said, "But you and the tiger lady got along all right?"

"It went as planned."

"I'd like to make some plans with that babe," Monk said longingly. "Couldn't we arrange that? After all, I might be a handy gadget to have around."

Ham Brooks snorted.

Doc Savage frowned at Monk, and said quietly, "Our job here is to find Long Tom Roberts, if he is alive, or learn what happened to him if he is dead."

### Chapter III

"I HADN'T intended to," said Canta when he called her about four. "But I will."

They went to the Chung Restaurant—the proprietor was not named Chung; the place was called after the Chinese word *chung*, which meant any insect—and had a private dining room with a little stage all of its own on which a succession of performers appeared with their acts. She ordered an exquisite *seng-tsai*, and *gao-yang ruh* specially killed for them and served with a *gidi-moh* sauce, topped by a particular

rose petal coffee and a *nui-nai bing* of rare species from Sze Chwan province.

"I can see this is going to cost me," he said.

"I hope so," she said.

"Why did you change your mind?" he asked.

"When was that?"

"About not going out with me."

"Oh, that was before you called," she said.

"Really?"

She nodded. "It was when I heard that our friend the Honest Pole had met with an accident."

"Accident?" His face was as enigmatic as hers, but he was wondering what Ham Brooks had done to the Honest Pole, and whether it wouldn't have been just as pleasant for the Pole to have let Monk do it.

"Accident," she said, "spelled b-l-a-c-k-j-a-c-k. According to my information, the Pole will not look the same again."

"Let's hope not."

She frowned sharply. "You're cold-blooded."

"Me?" He feigned astonishment. "Matter of fact, I don't even know the gentleman, do I?"

She smiled at that. Deliberately, and with intent to stir him, one way or another. He had no intention of really being stirred, but he wanted to act as if he was, and he put on a show of being so. Such a good show that it was too good, and he wondered which was acting and which was actuality.

She was lovely. No question about that. Her smile was an electric light or a warm bath, whichever you wished. And just looking at her was about the same thing. He made the latter discovery, and promptly unhooked from the business at hand, stared into space, and gave himself six or seven warnings in quick succession.

A waiter brought rare Burmese wine in which the candied eyes of larks floated and glistened, together with an array of early dynasty crockery that made him have visions of what it would cost him if she dropped a cup. Museum stuff, strictly.

"Do you like hamburgers?" he asked.

"You've been to the States?"

"On and off."

"What do you mean?"

"On the lam, and off again when it got warmish."

She laughed a sound of bells tinkling, and he began telling her a whale of a lie about an episode in San Francisco of which he was the hero. He followed that with another adventure in Cairo of which he was an even greater hero. She was not impressed.

"I don't understand you," she said.

"That's what I'm taking care of now. I'm explaining myself. I'm quite a guy, in case you're missing the point."

She shook her head. "I had a check run on you by some friends of mine," she said. "You're a cheap crook."

He blinked at her. "Is that nice?"

"You're not even a good crook, either," she continued. "You smuggled in two Java political refugees, and they both got caught by the police, so you won't get any more business from that source. You hi-jacked a shipment of opium from a ring, and the police got it away from you and nearly got you, and you're in bad all around. The hi-jack victims love you not, and neither do the police, who strongly suspect you. You've been rushing around organizing a gang of crooks. If you're going to organize, that's no way to do it—by rushing around. You're a big sap with tinhorn ideas."

"By God!" he said. "Is that any way to talk to the saviour of your life?"

"That's a point," she agreed, "that I intend to mention."

He tasted the *gao-yang ruh*. "So you know about it?" he asked ruefully.

"Did you think for a minute I wouldn't?"

"Well, they shoot people for hoping, I hear. But I thought I'd take the chance."

She looked at him disagreeably. "I think it was dumb. I think it was typical of a stumblebum, and quite in character."

"I figured the dumbness made it good," he said. "You used to read about that gag in books years ago so it must have had something."

"The Honest Pole told me about your little trick."

He grinned at his plate. "He who serves two masters is bound to get a leg caught."

"Is that why you had him hospitalized?"

"Frankly," he said, "it was because he let you talk him into having his four hired boys give me a wallop. That shows a weakness of character."

"So you had his character reenforced with a blackjack?"

"That sometimes helps."

She put down her fork and told him again that he was a cheap crook, a scamp, a small-time chiseler and not half smart. She had more than that, and the words to deliver it with, and she did so. He listened approvingly.

"That's exactly the opinion a young lady should have of a guy like me," he said. "Very commendable. Why are you sitting here delivering it, though?"

"I don't know," she said angrily.

When he stepped out of the elevator in his hotel later, Monk Mayfair detached himself from the shadows and remarked, "I see your research is keeping you up late."

"Come in and have a good cry," Doc suggested amiably. "I should have let you attend to the Honest Pole. I hear Ham neglected to take off his gloves there."

"You do any good?"

"I've got her puzzled."

"Will that buy?"

"I'm also magnetizing her," Doc said. "When she has the proper charge, I think it might get us what we want."

Monk moved around the room, lifting a few pictures and looking behind them. He unscrewed a couple of light bulbs and inspected them closely to see whether they were microphones in disguise—he knew that trick could be done, and the light bulbs would still give the proper amount of light and everything. He looked at Doc, and Doc shook his head warningly, so Monk spoke in Mayan, the ancient dialect of Mayan which they had learned long ago at considerable pains, and which as far as they knew no one but themselves in so-called civilization was likely to be able to speak.

Monk said, in Mayan, "We exhausted the last possible clue as to the identity of Washington Smith today."

Doc frowned. "No results?" He spoke Mayan also.

"Absolutely none. Whoever Washington Smith is, was, or where, is a complete blank mystery. And believe me, we've done some pretty subtle combing on the matter."

"The name's pretty obviously a pseudonym."

"Just a name somebody used for that one act of tipping you off to this business, you mean?"

"Yes."

"That doesn't help much."

"No, it doesn't. But I can understand the use of an assumed name, and the extreme care to conceal identity."

"Sure, Washington Smith's life wouldn't be worth two bits," Monk agreed, still in Mayan. "But I'll lay you a little bet that when we find Washington Smith, if we do, the party turns out to be somebody with a knowing way in dark places. No amateur could cut off a trail so completely."

Doc Savage dropped the Mayan and said in English, "Well, we've got to find some trace of Long Tom Roberts somehow." He said this as if it was the matter they had been discussing.

Monk had sprawled in a chair. He got up. "I think we've about got that one drilled out," he said.

Doc Savage looked at Monk sharply, and made a soft sound that meant considerable excitement. "You don't mean Makaroff?"

"That's right."

“What about him?”

“He got in from the north,” Monk said. “He's at her hotel. Suite seven-zero-nine.”

“Alone?”

Monk snorted. “Practically—for him. Three bodyguards who never seem to sleep. Maybe their non-slumber ability is why he felt able to cut it down to three.”

Doc Savage said with a kind of violent pleasure, “This *is* a break!”

“You going to talk to Makaroff?” Monk asked thoughtfully.

“I doubt if it would be feasible to just walk in and have a chat with him.”

“I doubt it too,” Monk said. “Unless we took along a company of marines.”

“Has he contacted her yet?”

“Who knows.” Monk shrugged. “That babe seems to have more secret life around here than a ghost. Nobody knows when she goes and whither she comes, half the time.”

“But she works with Makaroff.”

Monk hesitated, said, “That word work is susceptible to various meanings. She does business with him, I hear. Profitable chunks of it.”

“Shady business?”

Monk shrugged. “She has been go-betweening for Moslems who are anxious to ease out of Hindu territory with their property intact, so it would depend on whether you were a Hindu or not, how shady it looked.”

Doc Savage dismissed the character of the woman Canta with a wry grin, and said more grimly, “This fellow Makaroff is our last link to Long Tom Roberts. In his final report, Long Tom indicated he was going to contact Makaroff.”

“I don't like the way you say *final*,” Monk muttered. And there was a silence for a time, during which neither man looked at the other, nor looked at any other object with any pleasure. Then Monk blurted, “By God! I wish we knew what Long Tom was working on!”

“That would be a help,” Doc admitted grimly. “Perhaps we can pry it out of Makaroff.”

“He'll deny anything.”

“Possibly not.”

“No, the guy was born with his head in the sand, like an ostrich. He hears nothing, sees nothing, says nothing. It's chronic with him.”

“We might cure him of that ailment.”

“You'd better have a spare along when you try that,” Monk said dryly.

Monk left then, and Doc Savage watched him go uneasily, and was not relaxed at all until, some twenty minutes later, the electric clock buzzed twice. Then he went over and, leaning above the clock, said,

“Well, we might as well get some sleep.” And the clock buzzed again, briefly in acknowledgment.

He stood for a while looking absently at the clock, wondering if anyone who had searched his room had been clever enough to discover that the clock was a wired-radio transceiver—capable of communication with any similar gadget plugged into the lighting system anywhere in the city. It might not, he reflected, make much difference whether the gadget was solved. They wouldn't be able to tap the circuit, because eavesdropping on it was no mere matter of hooking on a wire or tuning another set to a given frequency. The circuit had a scrambler arrangement, and it was a technician's research job to set up data for a duplication.

The buzzings meant Monk had gotten to his hotel safely.

Doc Savage changed to pajamas and lay on the bed. He did not sleep—did not try, because he had sufficient control of his nerves to sleep when he wished.

He thought of Long Tom Roberts. His associate. One of the small group of five specialists who had worked with him for a long time. Long Tom Roberts was an electrical engineer—and that was merely a statement of Long Tom's profession, not his ability. The man was an electrical wizard. So fantastic as to ability in fact, that he had been one of those few dozen men who had vanished mysteriously early in 1942, been heard of not at all during the whole course of the war, and only reappeared a few weeks ago. In short, he had been top secret like the big bomb and a few other things.

The war had been tough on Long Tom Roberts. Spending more than five years in assorted laboratories tinkering with cathodes and making electrons say Uncle must have been hard on the skinny electrical wizard. Because Long Tom liked excitement, the pursuit of high physical adventure, and it was this yen that had associated him with Doc Savage and the other four. They all had it. They were all thrill-chasers. They didn't admit it, but their avocation of going about the far corners of the earth righting wrongs and punishing evildoers outside the effective clutch of the law had no credible excuse other than the pursuit of excitement.

Doc's work during the war had been much the same as usual; in Washington they thwarted his efforts to get into uniform and mollified him, not fully, by handing him devilish jobs that they professed to feel were impossible of solution. He solved them. Not prettily, always. But they seemed to think it was stupendous in Washington, and put out a lot of pap about his contribution to history with which he didn't agree.

But Long Tom Roberts had missed even that. Long Tom had gone into top-drawer seclusion looking his normal anemic, thin, sickly, probably-fall-over-in-the-next-breeze appearance. He had come to the light of day again twenty pounds heavier, tanned, looking as if he might whip a fourteen-year-old kid—quite robust for Long Tom—and declaring he'd never felt worse in his life. Which was probably true, because he'd developed a stomach ulcer. His anemic system wouldn't have supported an ulcer before.

Doc prized Long Tom highly. He hoped the rail-thin electrical expert was doing all right. . . . The possibilities to the contrary had, Doc discovered, turned him damp with perspiration. And he had no mood for sleep.

What was that old cliché about the tide of human resistance being lowest about four o'clock in the morning? . . . Well, why not? He couldn't sleep anyway.

## Chapter IV

HE had an argument with her three-hundred-pound Mongolian houseman, and in the course of it he

learned that there is a defense for the judo grip known variously as the *kami-yui*, the Hairdresser's Delight, and the *kenson*. Then he laid the Mongolian respectfully on the saffron yellow rug and went to a chair and used a leverage on it to get his wrist back in joint. When he turned, she was standing just inside another door giving him a completely grim three-eyed inspection with the aid of the little jeweled gun.

"You made some noise," she said.

"I know it," he admitted. "But it's all right. I intended to announce myself."

"I can imagine. At four o'clock in the morning?"

He looked at her, feeling he shouldn't show appreciation, but suspecting he was. He was supposed to be the strong silent man of few words, impervious to temptation, the fellow who succeeded where others failed.

"You should wear more than that," he said finally. "Or less. I don't know which."

She indicated the Mongolian. "Is Tham hurt?"

He shook his head. "Not now. But he will be when he wakes up, if he tries what he tried again. I know how he does it now."

She whistled softly. Surprise, the way a man shows surprise. It was the first thing deviating even slightly from the softly feminine that he had seen her do, in spite of the fact that she was as completely a casual hard-boiled case as he had ever met. She said, "Tham was almost judo champion of Japan at one time. The only thing that kept him from being was the fact that he isn't Japanese, and their national pride couldn't stand that a few years ago."

"I'm glad to know I was partly disjointed by an expert."

"You look all together."

"When my wrist gets done swelling, I can probably use it for a balloon and float around."

"I trust you're not depending on waiting for that means of transportation out of here?"

"No. We'll leave as soon as you can get decently dressed."

She frowned. "What's the idea?"

He walked past her and the gun—not with too much confidence, because the only thing of which he was certain about women was that they were uncertain—and dropped into a chair. Casually, he hoped. He waved vaguely at another chair.

"I had hoped to continue my subtle winning of your confidence, Miss Canta," he explained. "But the schemes of mice and men—you know how it is." He spread his hands eloquently, added, "I got hurried."

She approached, took the chair he had indicated, and advised, "If you think you've been building up my confidence, you're haywire."

"Oh, you suspected me of motives?"

"That's a very small word for it."

He nodded amiably. "Almost as good. . . . Let me tell you about a certain man I know. Chotwilder is his

name. An Australian. A very stout lad, except for a certain weakness of character where a bit of pound sterling is concerned. It so happened that a few weeks ago Chotwilder came to your city on a spot of business concerning a matter which we will pass over lightly here—”

“Incoherence,” she said sharply, “is all right in its place. But does it belong here?”

He looked injured. “Chotwilder was never incoherent without justification. I never said he was.”

She examined him speculatively, and presently asked, “Is this going to make sense?” When he nodded, she leaned back. “Since you broke up a sound sleep, I might as well listen.”

“Chotwilder,” said Doc, “was collared by a man named Long Tom Roberts, who is the representative of another man named Doc Savage. . . . Is that better?”

She was staring at him fixedly. She didn't say anything.

“Why did you jump?” he asked.

“Did I?”

“Just partly out of your skin. . . . But so did some others, evidently. . . . To continue with my story: Long Tom Roberts grabbed Chotwilder and asked him questions using first a lie detector and then truth serum. Do you know how truth serums operate? They induce a drugged mental state in which the victim is unable to remember lies to tell. Unfortunately, afterward the victim is apt as not to be uncertain about what he said while under the effects of the stuff.”

She was sitting rigidly. He could tell nothing from her expression, except that she was profoundly shocked, and not in the least disinterested in his recital.

He continued: “Let us say that Chotwilder could be connected with a certain business organization with which I am also affiliated, and that we were no little concerned about Chotwilder's experience. This man Long Tom Roberts is an associate of Doc Savage, an advance agent for Savage.”

He paused and pretended to examine his wrist, but actually trying to see how his tissue of falsehood was getting across. He had been listening to himself, and didn't believe he sounded like a liar. She wouldn't know there was nobody named Chotwilder, and no organization for him to be affiliated with. The Orient these days was small-poxed with thieving groups, and even the phenomenal adventuress Canta could not be expected to know about all of them. He hoped she didn't, anyway.

He toyed with his cane, wondering additionally if she'd noticed that he hadn't felt so much need of it while distracted by what the Mongolian had done to his wrist.

She asked suddenly, “You were sent here to get Long Tom Roberts out of the way before he learns something that might be troublesome?”

“Exactly.”

She shook her head. “I doubt that. You've been going around the city making like a cheap crook. If you're a man of sufficient skill to be trusted with dealing with one of Doc Savage's associates, I don't believe you would practice petty stuff.”

“I was making duck-calls.”

“What?”

“Each petty criminal activity in which I engaged was connected in some way—we won't go into the ways either—with a bit of greater activity in which we have reason to think Long Tom Roberts would be interested. In other words, I was quacking like a duck and he was duck-hunting.”

She put the gun away. She said angrily, “I wish you would stop being funny! This is serious! Doc Savage is phenomenally dangerous.”

“Oh, I wouldn't say that,” he said modestly.

“Then you're a fool!”

“An unsuccessful one, too,” he agreed blandly. “I didn't draw the duck-hunter.”

“And lucky for you that you didn't!” she snapped. “You wouldn't have lasted ten seconds!”

“Is that the voice of experience?”

Shaking her head, frowning at clenched hands, she said, “I don't know Savage except by reputation—and I feel myself very fortunate to be able to say that.” She lifted her eyes suddenly. “What are you doing here? Why are you yanking me into this?”

“I need help.”

“Against Savage? You must think I'm crazy.”

“Savage probably has his ordinary points,” he suggested hopefully.

“If he has, I haven't heard of anyone noticing them. You haven't answered my question. Why are you trying to hang me, too?” She stared angrily at the ceiling. “Oh God, why was I dope enough to fall for that phony rescue when I knew it was phony! That's what curiosity gets me!”

“Oh, curiosity was the one?”

“Exactly, I was curious to see a fellow dumb enough to pull an oldie like that. . . . I should have known that guy doesn't live here any more—not in a city like this.” She glared at him. “You made a fool out of me!”

“It was about fifty-fifty, wasn't it?”

“What do you want?”

He leaned forward, suddenly serious, and said, “we have reason to know Long Tom Roberts was in touch with a man named Makaroff. I want a word with Makaroff. I want to know from Makaroff where to lay my hands on Long Tom Roberts, and quick, before the kettle boils.”

She threw up her hands a little too desperately. “If you wish to talk to what's-his-name—Makaroff then why on earth bother me?”

He shook his head wonderingly at her.

“Didst expect better in the way of deceit, fair lady.”

She jumped up, stamped a foot, and cried, “Now I know I've been suckered! You're no fool!”

“Thank you. But don't jump to any hasty conclusions.”

“I suppose you know Makaroff got back into the city tonight?”

“I hear so.”

“How? How, for crying out loud?”

“Oh, I have a good ear for the ground.”

“You must have. Makaroff moves from place to place more quietly than diphtheria. It'll be interesting to see how he reacts to hearing he might as well have arrived with a brass band.”

“Good. I knew you'd wish to see it.”

“See it? Me!”

He bent his head firmly and advised, “Yes, you're going to introduce me to Makaroff and be my character reference. At least I hope you are.”

He didn't go for the kind of a smile she gave him. “And what,” she inquired, “leads you to feel I will sponsor you?”

He grinned what he hoped was a pixyish grin and said, “To tell the truth, I've begun to wonder. Oh well, you can pass along to Makaroff the job of making chowder out of me, and be around to watch it. Isn't that any inducement?”

She stamped the foot again. “I'll say it is.” She threw an angry glance at the clock. “You be here at nine o'clock sharp, and I'll take you to him.”

“Why not now?”

“He's not in the hotel. He'll be back at nine, though.”

## Chapter V

HAM BROOKS broke a lump of sugar precisely in half, added one half to his coffee, stirred, drank, put the cup down, tapped his lips foppishly with the napkin, and said, “She told the truth about Makaroff being away from the hotel. He is.”

Doc did not show too much confidence. “I wish somebody would build me a contraption that would show a red light when a woman is lying to me.”

“I could use one of those, too,” Ham agreed.

“What is Makaroff up to?”

“Business. Diamonds, I think it is. Anyway, he came in from Madras, and there have been several big jewel lootings around there lately, and the people he's visiting are dealers in that sort of thing.”

“It wouldn't hurt to turn the police loose on him for that, after we're through with him,” Doc suggested.

“We'll have pictures and a full set of notes of his itinerary tonight.”

“That'll help.”

“But the thing—the only thing that is important—is to find out what has happened to Long Tom Roberts,” Doc stated flatly.

“We’ll get up to that eventually.”

“We may crack that mystery when we get hold of Makaroff.”

“Either that, or crack Makaroff,” Ham agreed.

They fell silent as the waiter arrived, scuffling about, filling the water glasses, snapping some crumbs from the tablecloth. He was an old man with a seamed face, a waiter grown old at his trade, and he presented the bill for payment with just the right deference, face-down on a tray which he placed unobtrusively beside the large bowl that contained several varieties of large-sized tropical fruit.

Doc placed a banknote in Hongkong dollars on the bill, and the waiter began making change. Ham sighed, examined the fruit in the bowl, selected one. It was an enormous citrus fruit that he chose, and it had quite a rotten spot on the bottom. He grimaced and, irritated, pointed out the unsound spot to the waiter. The latter started to replace it in the bowl, cackling apologies. But Ham said angrily, “Take that rotten thing away! You want to ruin my breakfast!”

The waiter gabbled some more apologies, left with the questionable piece of fruit. He carried it into the kitchen, on through the kitchen and out a side door, and told a man waiting there, speaking Mandarin of a better class with the Kwangtung accent, “He forced me to take it away.”

The man he addressed was young, smoothed-faced and possibly an eighth part Oriental. He was also cold-eyed, short-worded and as subtle as a hammer.

“What?” he said. “What are you telling me, you fool?”

“The one who wears the clothing of a peacock, Ham Brooks, forced me to take it away from the table.”

“Why?”

“The rotten spot. The rotten spot turned his stomach.”

“Oh, it was just the decayed spot in the fruit?”

“Yes.”

“His stomach would have been more turned if he had known the truth.”

“No doubt. . . . The rotten spot was there so he would not make the embarrassing move of selecting the fruit for consumption and begin peeling it. I could think of no way other than a spot of rot to discourage them from selecting this particular fruit.”

“It was all right. It was a good idea.”

“But he sent the fruit away. It is useless now.”

“Maybe not. Did they discuss anything of importance?”

“I do not know. They are dry of words when I am near.”

“Then they were talking business.”

“It may be.”

The young smooth-faced man now took the piece of fruit, held it a few inches from his chin, and addressed it in a somewhat embarrassed fashion. “The project seems to be at an end,” he said. “I am sorry. It is not the fault of our man Loff, the waiter. It is the fault of an accident.”

He handed the fruit to the waiter. “Take the radio set out carefully when you have time,” he said. “There will be other uses for it.”

The little transmitter, which operated at a frequency of better than three hundred megacycles, was good for only line-of-sight transmission, and hardly that since it was of extremely modest power. But it was sufficient to reach a hotel room several blocks away, where the man Makaroff was listening to a receiver tuned to the frequency of the trick transmitter.

Makaroff sat very still, scowling at the radio receiver. The latter now gave nothing but the hard-breathing sound of very high frequency receivers, with, occasionally, a terrific clattering as the distant transmitter in the piece of fruit was jiggled in being carried. A violent thump ended this. The fruit had been placed aside somewhere for attention—removal of the transmitter—later. Makaroff deliberately took a sip of a brandy-coffee mixture. The coffee was terrific black stuff; the cup would be half-full of grounds when he put it aside.

Another man, thin-bodied with clipped blond hair and the bleached blue eyes of a snake that had spent its life in overbright sunlight, arose and turned off the radio receiver.

“Too bad,” he said. “But we heard enough.”

Makaroff swallowed his coffee a quarter-spoonful at a time.

“So that is the voice of Doc Savage,” he remarked. “I can't say I'm glad I heard it. It is a remarkable voice, one of the very few I've ever heard which bespeaks the strong character of its author.” He lifted his eyes. “Didn't it frighten you, Karl?”

“I don't frighten,” Karl said, but not boasting about it.

“Yes, I have heard that of you. . . . I don't consider it quite healthy, but we will not go into that. The point is that you should have felt some emotion.”

Karl smiled and struck a slight attitude. “I recognized the voice of an enemy of the people. I shall remember it.”

“You could easily find an argument on that, Karl.”

“On what?”

“That enemy of the people stuff. Savage is hailed in many quarters as something quite the contrary. In fact, the man has a worldwide influence. I know that. His power touches very high places. He is not to be underestimated.”

Karl held his attitude, which was that of man before a firing-squad—the fellow who was going to give the order to shoot, not the one being executed.

“He is an enemy. We are not underestimating him.”

Makaroff indicated the radio receiver. “According to that, he is coming to see me.”

“To question you. Yes, sir.”

“About Long Tom Roberts, his associate.”

“Exactly.”

“You sound as if you considered it simple.”

“Isn't it?”

“Long Tom Roberts is dead.”

Karl nodded curtly. “But Savage will visit you. He will be convinced Long Tom Roberts went suddenly to India and is there now. Once sold on that idea, Savage will go to India.” Karl shrugged elaborately. “This is not a bad situation. There is a Chinese saying for it: *Sheeah sheeow yeu*. 'It is raining a little.'”

Makaroff looked at his henchman unpleasantly. “You think that is so?”

“Yes.”

“I don't.”

Blankness came to Karl's face, did not leave it, and he did not say anything.

Makaroff said, “I will feed Savage the false stew we have prepared concerning Long Tom Roberts being in India. But I shall watch him closely, and if I am convinced he is not deceived—and mind you, deceiving such a man is asking for a miracle—the instant I believe he doubts, I shall end everything.”

Karl started. “End! But you cannot! Too much is at stake! The whole success of our purpose, the future trend of political and social thought—”

“You misunderstand, Karl. I meant finish it for Savage.”

“Oh!”

“And his henchmen, Monk Mayfair and Ham Brooks.”

Karl brightened. “That isn't a bad idea either.” Then he examined Makaroff speculatively. “So it is soon to come?” he asked. “You have heard? It is soon to take place?”

Makaroff nodded. “Sooner than that. Tomorrow night.”

“What!”

“The liner *Crosby Square*.”

Karl's face got a blankness and this increased, and he mumbled, “Then the material is aboard the ship already?” He sounded downcast. “I did not know.”

“It's aboard.”

Karl's stoicism had broken completely. He lost color and his right hand, when he lifted it and pointed it at Makaroff, shook a little. “Then this Savage is an incredible menace.”

“Since when wasn't he?” Makaroff asked dryly.

“But now! This very instant! He is a ghastly danger to our whole purpose.”

“Take it easy, Karl.”

“But I didn't know the plan was this far along,” Karl wailed. “I thought there was time for adeptness, for conniving to get rid of Savage in our good time and with safety.”

Makaroff put down the coffee cup and stood. He was upset himself now.

“I imagine we'll have to kill Savage and his two men without delay,” he said.

## Chapter VI

HAM BROOKS was doing the character of an Englishman, a traveling gentleman from Birmingham—country home in Warwick, and all that—who was huckstering cotton-mill machinery. Doc had already regretted the choice of camouflage, because Ham was silly-awssing the English accent all over the place. Ham had opened a temporary office in *Poo Tow Shoo* Street, and Doc rode there with him in Ham's rented limousine.

Ham spent most of the ride holding his jaw with a hand, then said suddenly, “You know what I think? That fruit with the decayed place—a snitzy restaurant like that wouldn't have a decayed fruit in the bowl.”

“It was there,” Doc said.

“Uh-huh. So we wouldn't peel it and find something inside. You reckon?”

Doc nodded. “They did a pretty clever job replacing the part of the peeling they had to remove.”

“Oh my God! Then I'm right! And you noticed it?”

“It had a trinket in it, all right,” Doc said.

Ham had become a little pale. He leaned back. “My nerves must be going bad, the way little discoveries like that scare the spats off me.” He looked down at his feet. “My feet are even cold! What do you know about that! Do a man's feet really get cold when he's frightened?”

“To tell the truth, I never stopped to notice,” Doc confessed.

“They heard what we said at the table, then?”

“I wouldn't bet they didn't.”

“Whoosh! Holy cow, as the fellow would say! Did we bandy any words we shouldn't have?”

“I think not.”

Ham got out a handkerchief and gave his face and the nape of his neck a quick go-over. “Kind of startling to find they're looking us right in the eye. Kind of like discovering you're bewitched.”

“I think we're doing all right,” Doc said. “I hope so.” Doc reached for the door handle. “Her hotel is a block over. I think I'll get out here.”

Ham stopped the car. “You think this who's-got-the-button will go on much longer before it all breaks out in the open?”

Doc got out. "Hard to say. But this go-around with Makaroff should tell the story. Either we fool him, or else we'll have our hands full."

"For God's sake, be careful!" Ham gasped. "This thing is international. There was nothing as dirty as this took place before the other war. I wish we had the army and navy with us."

Doc said dryly, "Settle down in your office and have a good shake. You'll feel better. I'll call you later on the pocket radio."

"Keep us posted as you go to Makaroff."

"Right. I'll have to use code, though."

"Right. We'll be tuned in."

Doc watched Ham Brooks drive on. Ham, he reflected, was probably scared. If so, it was one of the rare occasions when this had happened. For that matter, Doc reflected, he was far from easy of mind himself. It was all pretty complex scheming, and would be wonderful if it all worked out, though.

He walked to Canta's hotel, and the Mongolian greeted him with a marvelously polite bow and a statement in the native tongue. The statement was to the effect that he, the Mongolian, hoped to see Doc in four well-scattered fragments in the not distant future. Doc pretended not to comprehend the Mongol's language, and took Canta's extended hand.

"You are like sunlight on a mountain of lotus blossoms," he told her.

That was about the general effect, too, although she wore European slacks and blouse. Paris tailored probably, and in one of the Paix shops not too far from the Place Vendome. Many women could be well-dressed for a year on what they had cost. But she couldn't do without a garish touch, and this time it was a dragon brooch of enamels and jewels that was about as inconspicuous as a screaming parrot.

"I have trapped Makaroff for you," she said.

"Good."

"You want me to go along?"

"Without your company, the sun would set this instant," he told her.

She seemed a little angry about that. "Judging by the lie-percentage you've been running, that means you'd rather bury me," she said. "Well, I'm going along anyway."

"You needn't, if you'd rather not."

"Oh, I like to watch Makaroff work."

"You like the way he pulls the wings off flies?"

"Don't be ugly when you're specific," she said. "Too much truth can be in bad taste."

Makaroff was in the same hotel, so they walked down two flights. Doc was surprised, but not relieved, when they were not looked over by anyone with guns. He kept his hand in his coat pocket, not because he had a gun there himself, but because he had a portable radio there and was tapping out Continental code on it, giving his location. The radio, he imagined, was vaguely similar to the one that had been in the fruit. Except that this one was disguised as a folding camera, tourist variety.

Makaroff proved to be a man who should have been fat and wasn't. All his lines were round bulging ones, but the surface of him had a plane hard shine so that all of him, all of his body that they could see, and probably the rest of it as well, was like the surface of a wrestler's bald head. He had a wire-brush moustache and black mice for eyebrows.

Makaroff greeted Cantu enthusiastically enough for Doc to envy him his gift of flowery flattery.

"This is Jonas," she told Makaroff. "He finagled me into meeting you."

Makaroff popped his heels and looked at Doc, but didn't do anything else, except ask, "Jonas is your name?"

"For the time being," Doc said.

"I see. You think you have business with me?" Makaroff asked.

Here, Doc thought, is a man with the mind of a snake and the power of an old-time Hitler henchman. He tried to keep the notion off his face.

"I have questions," Doc said.

"I don't answer questions."

"I don't either," Doc told him. "So that's fine. But I'm interested in a man named Long Tom Roberts."

Makaroff's face gave no more expression than scraped bone, but he showed he was interested by suddenly switching from hardness and becoming the affable host. He poured them vodka, with beer chaser. Doc didn't touch his. He waited until they were settled in comfortable chairs, then began talking.

"This story will be shorter than you may think at first," he opened.

Cantu listened, a slight paleness mixed with her casual loveliness, and she seemed rather surprised that he told Makaroff much the same tale that he had told her earlier when explaining why he desired to meet Makaroff.

For Doc, the telling was different this time. He was more careful. He was as painstaking as if doing a delicate brain operation. The whole thing was a tissue of lies and imagination, and he knew he was dealing with a man who was an expert liar himself and accustomed to being lied to. It was so vitally important to get this across. He began to feel perspiration along his backbone.

In giving the story of representing a syndicate which feared that Long Tom Roberts was investigating it, he dropped in some touches that he had omitted with Cantu earlier. These bits were names of people and places and incidents with which he surmised that Makaroff was familiar, or might familiarize himself if he checked the story.

"So," Doc ended, "I've come to you because we heard Long Tom Roberts was going to contact you."

Makaroff shook the beer glass to make foam rise. "And you wish?"

"Long Tom Roberts."

"For what purpose?"

Doc snorted. "You guess."

“I want nothing to do with a thing of that sort,” Makaroff said.

“Who said anything about you having something to do with it? You just tell me where I can find Long Tom Roberts.”

“Why did you come to me?”

“Need we be naïve?”

“What do you mean by that?”

Doc said nothing. Makaroff drank all of the vodka, all of the beer, and lighted a brown cigarette that presently made the room smell as if a fire had been started in the fireplace with old shoes.

“You think you have something there, do you?” Makaroff asked finally.

“Haven't I?”

“I answer no questions. . . . But this Doc Savage—you have stated that Long Tom Roberts is his hunting dog, one of five of them rather, and I'll admit you have something there. It doesn't concern me, though. I am a peaceable, home-loving, honest man with nothing to hide.”

“Oh, I understand that,” Doc said. “And it's not you who is bothered about the possible appearance of Doc Savage. It's me and my associates. So how about a bit of help, for the good of the cause?”

Makaroff thought. Whether he was thinking about the advisability of giving aid was questionable. Doc wished he knew, and found himself reviewing some of the things they knew about Makaroff in Washington, and some of the things Doc had personally learned that weren't in the Washington files. Nothing came to Doc's mind that would ease anybody's anxiety.

“Your cause,” Makaroff said, “is hardly mine.”

Doc, still reviewing Makaroff, said nothing. Makaroff had been twice a murderer before he was sixteen years old, but they were political murders and he had done well by himself as a result of them. They had established him as true party material. That was rather ghastly, but true; ghastly to think that the leaders of a nation regarded a thing like that as proof of ability. But they did. They were slave-masters, not leaders, in Makaroff's land, and the altars at which they worshipped were built of dishonesty, strife, deceit, conniving and bloody-handed force. It was too bad that the last war had not smashed them, as it had smashed so many tyrants, and the rest of the world was beginning to realize this rather sickly. It hadn't seemed important during the last war. But now it was.

Makaroff grunted explosively. “I'll have to go with you.”

Doc came forward in the chair, showing excitement. “Then you know where Long Tom Roberts is?”

Scowling, Makaroff replied, “The man never contacted me. He intended to. You can imagine how I felt when I learned of that—the man a representative of Doc Savage. So I took some measures.”

“You had him killed?”

“Why, you silly fool. Do you think I would in any remote way connect myself with the death of a Doc Savage man? I would as soon assassinate the president of their country.”

“Then what did you do?”

“Nothing. But certain friends thought of misdirecting his attention to India. And he went there.”

Doc Savage sat very still for a ten-count. Then he sprang to his feet, roaring. He made nothing but rage sounds for a while, then for a bit longer vilified Makaroff, his character, his ancestors, all men who might remotely resemble Makaroff.

“You dirty whelp!” he yelled. “It was you who put Long Tom Roberts on our trail—to get him off yours! Our operations are in India! You put him on our backs!”

There were no operations in India—the whole thing was imaginary—but Makaroff grinned as if it was a fact, and as if he was pleased with himself. “An accident, purely, that he got on your backs,” he said.

“Well, by God, he wouldn't have, if you hadn't put him there!”

“Oh, shut up!” Makaroff was tired of the discussion. “I'll take you to a man who knows where Long Tom Roberts went.”

“You do that, damn you!”

Canta was frowning and shaking her head, half frightened, and half in admiration, the latter reluctant. She tried, with her expressive eyes, to give Doc warning: Makaroff was not a safe man to curse. Doc swore at him anyway. He called Makaroff a particularly nasty variety of jackal. He was on his feet, and waving fisted hands. He was acting, wondering if he was overdoing it.

Makaroff was on his feet, and Makaroff's face was a little blue but still shiny.

“We'll go,” Makaroff said. “But drink your drink.”

“I don't drink.”

Makaroff stood very still. He was about ten feet distant. “Drink your drink,” he repeated.

“Why? Did you poison it?”

“Yes,” Makaroff said.

Doc went silent. He didn't get this. He wasn't sure that Makaroff meant it. If Makaroff did mean it . . .

“You think I didn't poison it?” Makaroff demanded.

“I don't know.”

“Well, you know now. It was one way at you. One of about twenty ways that are all set for you. You haven't a chance.”

“I haven't?”

Makaroff showed teeth that were long and spade-shaped and looked as if they had been honed to a geometrical pattern of evenness.

“I could have made you think he went to India,” Makaroff said. “I really could have. Hell, the trail was perfect and would have fooled anyone.”

“Who?”

“Long Tom Roberts, your henchman.”

“He isn't in India?”

“He's dead.”

Doc didn't move, although a few sinews in his neck did, barring out rigidly. He seemed completely stunned, thwarted, at a loss for a move.

Canta, confused, began taking slow steps backward. Her eyes were wide, her mouth also, with genuine surprise. She was puzzled. Confused. She looked at Doc Savage and made, considering the circumstances, an excellent job of arriving at a fact.

“You're Doc Savage!” she said.

Doc and Makaroff stared at each other. She might as well not have been there.

Makaroff said, his voice different now, higher: “You want to know why I didn't go through with my little plan to send you off unharmed to India? I'll tell you this much: It's your fault! You scared me into not doing it. You were too damned good. Your acting was too perfect. You frightened the hell out of me, and I just couldn't pass up this chance to take you in.”

“Let's be at it,” Doc said.

“You haven't a chance.”

“No?”

“No,” Makaroff said, and swung up a hand, bringing odd gun-sounds into the rooms. It was a silenced gun, small calibre and Doc, already moving—he had changed the position of his head first because sudden attacks nearly always go for the head—felt a bullet, or perhaps only knew that a bullet passed close above his head. Then his head was down; he knew the source of the fire. Behind him. Behind him, where there was only a blank wall, a few pictures on the wall. He was wondering what picture as he went forward and down.

Makaroff hadn't fired. Doc even had a little trouble straightening that out. The way the man had moved his hand, he had for an instant suspected legerdemain, a flesh-colored freak gun of some sort. He'd never heard of a flesh-colored gun, but he thought of it now.

Then small-calibre bullets were hitting his body. He could feel the hammering of them through the chain mesh undergarment that he wore. It was not bad. They did not break any ribs. And the marksman was very good, carefully placing each bullet on the body, where naturally the armor mesh was thickest.

Doc was making for Makaroff. He had taken two steps already and was taking a third, and things had the illusion of being in slow motion. Every movement, noise, bit of business was clearly etched and seemed to register its significance. Desperation was like that to Doc. A couple of seconds seemed to stretch into a couple of careful minutes.

Makaroff had a little of it also. All men who know and actually like violence probably have a little of it. Most pugilists have it. A three-minute round is hardly three minutes for a pugilist; it's more like three hours in the ring.

Makaroff was going away. Head back, mouth gaping with strain; his feet whetted at the rug, and tore the rug getting traction. Then he was off, and Doc, groping for him, missed. It wasn't as slow now. Makaroff was bothered too; he'd depended more than he should have on the gun.

Makaroff went across the room in straightaway flight, going—crazily, it seemed to Doc—direct at a wall. But the man knew what he was doing. He came against the wall with hands and then shoulder, and used it to turn his course. He was away, going, and Doc came against the wall himself and used the same device, although it seemed silly and he decided he wouldn't again, decided he could turn quicker on foot.

He was gaining on Makaroff. He wanted his hands on the man. Once he had them there, he wasn't going to fool around. He came closer, cutting the space between himself and Makaroff. Makaroff was making straight for another wall.

Now Canta had gotten to the door. She was trying to open the door, jerking, her hands slipping off the knob helplessly. Without turning her head, she began to scream that the door was locked. It was the door into the hallway.

Doc watched Makaroff go for the wall as he had before, hands out and shoulder muscle-lumped for the shock. Doc thought: I'll get him on the rebound. Any man can move more accurately on his feet than bouncing off a wall like a billiard ball, logic said.

He was probably right, but never knew, because there was a panel in the wall. Makaroff went through it. The panel slammed shut an instant before Doc, having changed course, hit it himself. He felt it give a little, but not enough to be encouraging.

He wasted no time, came around—he was keeping his head low as much as possible, because there was where they could shoot him effectively—and got a table. It was a large table, heavier than he had thought, not as heavy as he had hoped. He lifted it, got it between his head and the spot the bullets had been coming from, and lumbered for the hall door.

“Get clear,” he told Canta. And then, catching the odor of bitter almonds, he added, “And don't breathe. They're putting cyanic in here.”

She stepped back, and he came against the door with the table. He gave it all he could. If he didn't break the door down, he would probably die in here. It was that important.

The door was steel. But the table was an incredible thing; it must have weighted close to four hundred pounds. He ached all over from carrying it fifteen feet. And the door came open. The lock didn't give. The hinges did, which was as good, and he pushed Canta through and followed.

He saw no one in the hall. Monk and Ham should have been there. He had directed them there on the pocket radio, tapping it out in code. He could hear the small-calibre rifle whacking foolishly in the room he had left.

He yelled, “Monk!”

No answer, and a door down the hall opened and a baseball of iron came sailing at him, hit the floor, skittered and bounced and he was on it like a soccer player, kicking. He sent it on down the hall, lifting into the air; it hit a window, the glass broke; there was presently a blast outdoors as the grenade let loose, and the glass, every vestige of it, vanished from the window.

He said, “Stairway!” But Canta was already going in that direction. She knew where it was, which was a help. The steps were hard mouse-color concrete, not too clean. Their feet going down made the sounds of dice in a twenty-one girl's cup.

Monk and Ham were not on the stairs either.

He called, “Monk! Ham! Be careful! They've gone rough and open on us!”

No more answer than there had been before. It gave him a cold ugly feeling, heavy with shock, and he clamped a hand to the pocket that held the radio, wondering if the thing had gone on the fritz.

Three floors down, he said, "You want to go to your apartment?"

"If you think I'd be safe there, you're crazy," she said. Woman-like, she was angry at him and blaming him for everything. Which wasn't out of line, at that.

"You didn't know who I was," he said. "Makaroff probably understands that."

"And I understand Makaroff," she said. "He will kill me. He's been thinking about it, anyway."

He let that go for later—he'd supposed she and Makaroff were fairly amiable. He was worried about Monk and Ham. He got out the trick radio, and when he pressed the keying gadget, the little window where the film exposure number was supposed to show glowed a faint red. It was a neon test light to show antennae radiation. So the thing was putting out. Then why no Monk and Ham?

"I've got a notion to go back up there," he said grimly. "I think maybe they've got two friends of mine."

She told him, "Makaroff hasn't got anything but a white rage. I know the man. If he had two friends of yours, he would have used them to force you to do what he wanted."

"They may be dead."

"He would use them anyway. Why, even Makaroff's government practices that kind of terrorism. Haven't you heard? And why go back if they're dead?"

Doc said, "We'll see what the police can do, then."

"They won't try."

"In this case, they will."

She was not convinced and said, "Don't you know who Makaroff is? He's the second in line to head his government, that's all. The lists the newspaper correspondents make up place him sixth or seventh down. They're crazy. He's next in line. Do you think the police of this poor impoverished revolution-torn nation are going to jail a man like that?"

"They will if they get him."

"Well, they won't get him either."

Doc made a telephone call, but not to the city police. He phoned the United States consulate, asked for a specific individual, and was even more specific about what he wanted. "Get the police on Makaroff, and get our own agents on him too," Doc said grimly. "And see that everybody sweats a little."

The man he was talking to was named Gilpatrick, a quick-voiced, harried man of many anxieties, most of the latter justified. He said, "So you dropped the egg?"

"It was dropped, but I didn't drop it," Doc told him. "And it isn't scrambled—yet. So strike some sparks around there."

Canta had overheard and she was looking at Doc thoughtfully. "You weren't out here for your health," she said.

“Something like that.”

## Chapter VII

THE small ugly cyclone that had gone through Ham Brooks' cotton-mill machinery office on *Poo Tow Shoo* Street had left a narrow path. One smashed chair, an upset inkwell, a crushed bag of native candied *bo lo mee* of the type which Ham liked to nibble between meals, and one dead body. The latter wasn't Ham.

The deceased was a thin wiry man with a mop of wavy yellow hair, and his demise was due to a bullet put into him after he had been made unconscious by the stuff that Ham Brooks used on the tip of his sword cane. Doc made a deduction that he trusted was logical: They hadn't wanted to bother with hauling an unconscious man around with them. That made it seem that they had wanted to walk somewhere in a normal-looking fashion, which meant walking with Ham Brooks. Because Ham hadn't escaped. They had him. Ham would have been at Makaroff's hotel if otherwise.

Feeling that his face must be quite white, he said to Canta, “You say that Makaroff likes to use a victim to force someone to come to terms?”

“You should know.” She was still angry. “You're Doc Savage. You're supposed to know everything.”

“I just wanted to be reassured. . . . Do you know this fellow they didn't want to carry along?”

She said gloomily, “I should apologize for being nasty, I suppose. Makaroff has your friend, if you had a friend using my office.”

“Yes, it was Ham Brooks, one of my associates.”

“That isn't good, but I don't need to tell you so. . . . Yes, I've seen that fellow on the floor. With Makaroff. He was a General or something like that in the intelligence division of their army.”

“Rather an important one to just shoot because excess baggage would be inconvenient.”

“Not when you consider the importance of what they're doing.”

“What do you mean by that?”

“I don't know,” she said without changing expression. “But this is a business with a lion and not a mouse. I hope I've got eyes enough to see that.”

Doc made some inquiries, and managed to set the time of Ham's misfortune exactly. A clerk in a silk firm had heard the shot, and knew the exact minute: Nineteen and one half minutes past nine. He'd been looking at the clock, and he had the kind of a mind—he was a bookkeeper—that retained such items. Doc checked it carefully. He looked at his watch and did some figuring.

“This happened while I was chasing Makaroff through walls and breaking down doors,” he said thoughtfully.

Canta nodded. “He had it all set up, in case he decided to do it.”

“That was awfully fast work, getting word to his men to grab Ham.”

“From Makaroff, that's nothing. You haven't got a corner on that kind of magic, I think you'll find out.”

“You're mad at me again, aren't you?”

She didn't say anything.

They used Doc's car to where Monk had been stationed. His hotel. The cyclone there had left a somewhat broader path and no bodies. Nearly all of the furniture that would break in the kind of a fight that Monk would make had been broken. It was hard to tell how much blood had been scattered on the premises, but it looked like a gallon or two.

The matter of timing here was simpler to ascertain, although not as exact. A fight like this one couldn't escape notice, and the hotel people were in the room, sputtering with indignation. Nine-twenty-five. A little later than Ham's downfall. And they had walked out with Monk, although Monk wasn't walking, being tied and gagged. They had been seen doing that.

The police were there too, and being anxious for an arrest, were short-sighted enough to take Doc into custody. That lasted about four minutes. Long enough for a telephone call to Central Station on *Beh Tow Park*. Apologies followed.

“What will you do now?” Canta asked. “Makaroff is all set for you. If you make a move, he'll kill your two men. He was rigged for you going and coming. In case you got away from him in his hotel, which you did, he still had you hooked.”

“True. But he's had experience, so that may help.”

“What do you mean?”

“Makaroff doubtless knows that no cat is really skinned until its hide is tanned and on the market as Tibetan Mink.”

“I still don't get it.”

“I don't think Makaroff will kill either one of my friends until his back is against the last wall. He's not against any wall at all now. In fact, he is doing quite well.”

She said, “You talk a cold-blooded morning's work.”

“I'm not cold-blooded at all,” he said. “We'll go somewhere where we can talk—you'd better pick the place; you should know of one—and I'll talk you into a rough idea of just how scared I am.”

She frowned. “You want me to pick a hideout for us?”

“Yes.”

“You're sort of trusting, aren't you?”

“No. I'll explain that, too.”

She took him deviously, very deviously, to a *geow-lee'en-dee* on Fung Street, and he was a little embarrassed. It was a hairdresser's place that catered to wealthy native and Eurasian ladies, and he didn't feel at ease there. The parlor where they were closeted was too effeminate in the cloying Oriental fashion for his taste, and he said so.

“We're perfectly safe here,” Canta assured him. “For a couple of hours, possibly.”

He nodded and, distrusting any of the delicate furniture, sat crosslegged on the floor. He looked up at her

thoughtfully. "Don't let this seeming delay get on your nerves," he said. "We have a little time to lose, and it has to be lost. Later, things will be looking up."

"I'm sorry you don't like it here," she said, but didn't sound as if she was sorry.

"You know a lot of unusual places, don't you?" he commented.

"Some."

"And unusual people, too," he added.

"Makaroff?"

He shook his head slowly, "Not him especially. . . . You lead an unusual life for a woman, and a very pretty woman at that. You don't make your living with your looks, although you could, and they probably help. . . . You're a legend through this neck of the woods, but you know that."

She was silent.

He asked, "Mind telling me how you happened to become the Orient's mystery lady?"

"Is it necessary?"

"Well, our friendship isn't getting along too well, and I think it needs a foundation. That might be one. If I knew your background, it would at least be one less mystery on my mind."

Canta shrugged, looked away, and finally said, "Oh, well, if you're going to keep prying at it. . . . Where do you think I was born?"

"Centerville, Iowa."

She jumped, brought her eyes to him sharply. "You've dug deeper than I thought."

"Pretty deep," he admitted. "You were a missionary's daughter, weren't you? And your parents lost their lives when the Japanese came. Is that what set you off on this rather brazen career?"

She nodded freely enough. "If you have to have a reason, I imagine that one will do. . . . I kept out of the hands of the Japs, but didn't leave the city. In the beginning, I suppose I stayed because I couldn't get away, then I became involved with the Chinese underground—became sort of a leader. I had lived in Japan several years. My parents were on mission service there. So I knew how the Jap mind worked, and knew the people here too, and I became sort of a leader. Not deliberately. I don't think I had any ideas of destiny, but I did have a grudge at the Japs, and so I just gravitated into heading an underground cell."

"And that is how you built your organization?"

"Yes. After the war, I found I had a first-rate set of confederates who could be trusted. . . . And I suppose the war dulled certain ideas of right and wrong, or at least changed them somewhat." She lifted her eyes abruptly, frowning, and added, "But get this: I haven't dealt in drugs, women, or a few other things. . . . Since you know as much as you do about me, you probably know some of my business angles. Some black market. Some racketeering. Mostly arranging property transfers that the local politicians, and the politicians elsewhere, don't like to see arranged. The whole Orient has been a mess since the war. There's plenty of money to be made if you use some nerve and cunning."

"Yes, I knew that about you," he admitted.

She gestured impatiently. “Well why are we talking about me? Haven't you anything more important to do?”

“I told you I wanted a foundation.”

“For what?”

He settled himself. “For this: Makaroff's country is planning an aggressive war. They've tried by propaganda and cells of political agents all over the world, but that is being pretty well thwarted and even stamped out. So the only thing that remains is war—or that's the way they look at it. They're worse than the Hitler clique in many respects.”

She was watching him intently. “You've understated it, probably.”

“Probably.”

“You make it sound like nothing.”

Doc Savage, his face somewhat wooden, said, “It doesn't sound anything of the sort, and you know it. Plunging the world into another bloody world war is ghastly madness, because the next one won't be fought like any before. The last one hit the civilian populations worse than the armed forces—and the next one will be more so. Armies won't be wiped out. Civilians will be. . . . And the ugliest part of it is that Makaroff's government is a dictatorship, regardless of what it calls itself, and the whole thing is merely the hunger of a few beastly minds to be the first rulers of the entire world.”

“Why bother telling me that? I know it. Is there anyone who doesn't?” she asked grimly.

“Quite a few don't seem to, although they're coming around to seeing the light.”

“Well, why repeat it anyway?”

“Four or five weeks ago,” Doc said, “my associate Long Tom Roberts was in Shanghai on an electrical project. He's an electrical engineer. . . . He received a tip from someone using the name of Washington Smith. Washington Smith was anonymous.”

Canta, looking fixedly at the wall now, said coldly, “Tips from people who give no names are usually worthless.”

“This one wasn't.”

“No?”

“Washington Smith,” Doc Savage said quietly, “is very likely to go down in history as an unsung hero or heroine—we received no indication of whether Washington Smith was man or woman.”

“There are no unsung heroes. Only heroes—being one is not a state of mind.”

“It might be a state of mind, and if it is, Washington Smith should be very proud.”

“Why?”

“Because the tip to Long Tom Roberts might—more than just possibly might—be the instrument that saved millions of lives, and stopped cold as ghastly a horror as has been contemplated by any of the would-be world-kings.”

She did not say anything. He had returned from taking a look through the window, and she was there now. He sat crosslegged on the floor again. He watched her light a cigarette, and shook his head when she extended the package.

“Are you trying to scare me?” she asked.

“Not particularly. Only that being scared goes with this story I'm telling you.”

She looked down at her cigarette, watched the thin blue yarns of smoke curl. She shuddered. “Well, it's taking effect.”

“You don't think I'm over-stating?”

She shook her head. “You're Doc Savage. . . . They don't understate anything you're involved in, I've heard.”

“That's not as good reason as the truth,” he said. “The truth is so bad that when you put the words to it, it sounds silly and overdone. . . . I'm not a carnival barker standing in front of a tent of wonders and extolling each as the onliest, greatest, stupendous that there is or will be.”

“You don't need to draw it out in big letters,” she said. Her voice wasn't quite right. “I get the point—you don't like what you're up against.”

She came away from the window. He got up and went there instead. He did not look nor act particularly nervous; but in going to the window, he had shown he was. Very nervous.

He said: “Well, here it is; It's their answer to the atom bomb—they hope. It's bacteriological warfare. It's a germ. They developed it. We developed the atom bomb, along with some help. And they fixed up this germ, all by themselves. It's a germ that will kill anyone, kill him or her in a week, and there's no cure for it, no immunization, no treatment, no refuge, no hope.”

He had spoken softly, bitterly, to the window. She did not say anything.

He added, “They're ready. They're going to try it out. They're ready for a Pearl Harbor. They're shipping it to their agents in the United States, and the agents are going to give it a try. They'll hit our key cities first, just a few—Long Island and Tennessee and Washington where the atom bomb plants are, and Detroit and Wichita and the other plane manufacturing cities. And a few key seaport cities, of course.”

He still spoke softly and like a minister at a funeral, earnestly trying to preach a deceased sinner out of hell, and not quite confident that it could be done.

He continued: “You see how cunning they are? At the worst, for them, the Americans will find a cure or preventative for the stuff after a few hundred thousands or a few millions have died. If we find the cure, they may not attack with their army and navy—or may, depending on how much damage their bacteriological attack has done. But in any event, they've done the deed secretly and it can't be pinned on them. They can deny.”

“But you know what they're doing!” she said sharply.

He shrugged. “You'd be astonished how little proof I have. . . . The word of a nonentity named Washington Smith. A person who doesn't exist, except as a fake name, and the memory of a tip.”

She asked, “You sent Long Tom Roberts to investigate?”

He nodded. "And you can see the results of that. . . . I came here as soon as possible. I have plenty of backing—the whole resource of the American government, if I can find a place to use it."

"What is this germ?" she asked.

"I don't know. It's a form of virus, so Washington Smith said."

"You're depending a lot on this Washington Smith."

He nodded. "But I believe the tip was straight. So do our diplomats and agents. And we're grateful. I'll tell you something—there's nothing we wouldn't do for Washington Smith to repay this favor."

"But you'll find a cure for the virus, won't you?"

"How do I know? . . . We can't cure a common cold. We can't cure cancer. You'd be astonished how many man-killers we can't deal with at all. . . . Yes, we might find a cure—in ten, fifteen, twenty years. Research is slow. There isn't any fast way to do it. It's just slow."

"Do you think they're taking the virus into the United States?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"I think darn quick now. . . . I've had agents all over the place. Not just Monk and Ham, my two friends—we've used all the secret agencies our government can command, and what we've dug up amounts to very little—except that we think they're about to do it. Just about. I think the shipment is here in this city now."

"Then if you could find it . . . ?"

"Fine. Find it how?"

She frowned. "Is it going to be hard?"

"I don't know whether you've thought of this, but you will," he said. "The virus can be in many forms. It can be a batch of mail destined for various cities in America. It can be a shipment of almost any product that is distributed in the States. It can be almost anything. . . . A virus is something you don't see with the naked eye, and not always with a microscope."

She stubbed out the cigarette. She was remarkably pale.

"I don't see why you contacted me," she said.

"You're angry about that, you mean?"

"No. No, I mean—why the specific interest in me?"

"To get you to lead me to Makaroff, or rather to present me to Makaroff as an acquaintance and more or less an adventurer of your own—well, your own profession."

"Ilk. You almost said ilk," she said. "So you think I'm pretty bad, don't you?"

"You haven't exactly been qualifying for a halo the last few years."

"All right. . . . But that's not why you contacted me," she said.

“No?”

“There must be another reason.”

He shrugged, said, “If you are hunting something to guess at, that will serve as well as anything. Hop to it.”

He consulted his watch, pocketed his hands, turned from the window and moved about the room. His manner was tight with restraint, waiting, poorly subdued impatience.

“What are you waiting for now?” she asked.

“A break that just possibly might come.”

“For instance.”

“Makaroff is going to keep Ham Brooks and Monk Mayfair in the very safest place. Isn't that reasonable?”

“Yes. To keep you from rescuing them.”

“All right. The very safest place would be where the shipment of virus is also stored, wouldn't you imagine?”

“It could be.”

“Well, there are various scientific methods of locating a man, or two men, when you have carefully prepared for it in advance. There are radiant substances that leave clear trails for a Geiger counter, or for the several radiant-detecting gadgets that are so sensitive they make the Geiger look like a blind man feeling his way.”

“Oh!”

He took a chair. “So we'll wait.”

She frowned at him. “You might tell me why you did contact me.”

“I have.”

“One tenth of it, I think.”

He stretched out his legs very carefully, placed his hands with as much care on the chair armrests. He was taking pains to relax, to force himself to ease off, and the fight was so strong that it was clearly apparent what he was doing. Looking at the ceiling, not seeing anything there, he verged off again to a relevant point, but one they had not been developing.

“Washington Smith,” he said, “should be very proud. I said that before, didn't I?”

“Yes.”

He nodded soberly several times. “Yes, I can't imagine anything short of being an angel fully accredited in Heaven that would make anyone feel better than Washington Smith should feel.”

“That would depend on the kind of a person Washington Smith is. Whether just a cheap tipster, or someone who did this as a result of sober thought and the urgings of character.”

“Yes, we wondered about that. We wanted to know. You see, we—and the whole world—owe this Washington Smith a great deal.”

“There's no pay-off for something like that, is there?”

“Of course there is. Eulogy. In the history books, name and picture. Savior of humanity.”

“If Washington Smith values that, it might do.”

“Well, there are other things, too. For instance, Washington Smith might be a criminal of sorts, and I'm sure a full pardon could be arranged without trouble for past rashness in dealing with the law.”

“That might not be interesting.”

“I think it would be.”

She came up straight, more than a little rigid, and eyed him. “So that's what you're leading up to?”

He nodded.

“Well,” she said, “you took an indirect way.”

“Yes,” he agreed, “but you didn't make it too obvious that you were Washington Smith. But you are, of course.”

## Chapter VIII

THE liner *Crosby Square* was no war child. She would not be with that name, because the name Crosby Square to those who know what Crosby Square was had a fine old dignity that went with ships by fine old individualists with the care and pains that came of knowledge they were sinking their own money and not the taxpayers' and would have to get a profit back. She had been built to compete with the *Queen Mary* and the *Normandie* and the *Rex* when those governments were subsidizing their shipping concerns. She'd been built for stiff competition. She was a fine passenger liner. She had been when she was built; she was still.

Doc Savage moved carefully in the night and found the place he wanted.

“This is supposed to be it,” he whispered to Canta.

She was silent. The moonlight did not cross their faces, because they were in shadows, but out before them was spread the river and the harbor with its sampans like waterbugs. The moon made the noisome harbor look almost sanitary; it cleaned up the flotsam by subduing it, and the wind had a god-given direction, not from river nor from city, so that it too was clean, and came with the fragrance of flowers and the pear trees and the peach that were in bloom in the country. It was the hour of *ban ye*, and the city was nice.

“How did you know you were to come here?” she asked.

He said, “Don't worry about it. I think it was the thing to do.”

She was silent again. Not because he wouldn't tell her anything she believed—he'd told her he had received a message, and she knew better. At least he hadn't received any message in the hairdresser's place. Maybe before. But not there.

She was silent because of another thing he'd told her that she didn't believe. He'd said he'd known she was Washington Smith after taking a look at her character. She hadn't liked that.

"Is it that ship?" she asked. She pointed at the *Crosby Square*.

The liner was an easy thing to point at. It was a giant beside them—they were at a spot in the wilderness of trucks, wagons, bales, boxes that always seems to litter an Oriental waterfront.

"I hope so," he said. "Yes, I hope so."

"All right," she said. "Now tell me how you learned I gave that tip—how you know I was Washington Smith."

"It's sort of a professional secret."

"I don't care," she said grimly. "I want to know. If you found it out, Makaroff can. And if he knows, can learn, I want to be warned."

He was watching the ship, listening to the darkness, frowning at the moonlight that might reach them if they had to wait here too much longer. "I didn't think of that," he admitted. "All right, here is how it led to you: We felt the tip was too detailed to have come from a chance eavesdropper. An eavesdropper wouldn't be permitted to hear information of that sort anyway. No money was demanded. That meant Washington Smith was operating out of patriotic or humanitarian reasons, and that Washington Smith didn't need money, or wouldn't take money for a thing like that, which adds up to the same thing—someone important in his own right. One of Makaroff's countrymen would have asked money—they're built that way. So that narrowed it down to a wealthy humanitarian or patriot not of Makaroff's nationality, and someone important enough to have been told the secret and not overheard it. We looked over the list of people Makaroff dealt with, and about a dozen names came up. Yours, believe it or not, was one of the dozen, and no more than that, in the beginning—until, in fact, you admitted it back there in the hairdresser's."

"You mean that if I'd have denied it then, you still wouldn't have known?"

"Probably."

"I was taken," she said. She sounded relieved. "Well, Makaroff won't figure that one out. . . . I'd better tell you how I learned of the infernal thing myself."

"Yes. I wish you would."

"He tried to hire me to get it into the states and distribute it."

"What!"

She gave Doc Savage a look that must have been glassy in the darkness. "I had never wanted to kill anyone before—not personally, with my own hands, to watch their blood flow or their brains splatter in the dirt. . . . But I did then, and would have if it would have been practical."

"Makaroff wanted to employ an outside agency to test their new weapon?"

"Yes. He phrased it something like that, too."

"That wasn't too dumb. Makaroff is known, and his best agents are known. He was trying to get rid of that risk percentage."

“Well, that's how I learned.”

“He told you that much?”

“Not at first. I've never bought pigs in pokes. He finally came around to telling me about what you've just told me—or told me back there in the hairdresser's. But not any more than that.”

“Did Long Tom Roberts ever interview you?”

“No.”

“I don't think he ever had the least idea who Washington Smith was.”

“I wonder what Makaroff did to Long Tom—” She went suddenly silent, not quite gasping, but sounding as if she wished to do so. She sent out a hand and fastened it on Doc's arm. “Oh my God!” she breathed, and pointed. “Do you see that man?”

“The thin and very brown one with no hair?”

“Yes.”

The man had walked through the splatter of light from an automobile's headlamps, and had stopped where the forward cargo gangway lights outlined him. He stood there, a thin dour figure who contemplated the activity without expression.

“That's Karl Sundwi,” she breathed. “He works with Makaroff. I think he's a special observer of their security police who was sent to watch how Makaroff handled this. And he isn't bald. He has blonde hair, clipped very close so that he looks bald.”

“Makaroff is too big a man to be watched.”

She shook her head. “No. Their security police watch everybody, and the head of it is not a friend of Makaroff's. No, this Karl Sundwi came ostensibly to be of service to Makaroff. His credentials show him under Makaroff's orders. But Makaroff thinks he is secret police. And Makaroff is afraid of him.”

“That would make this Karl a bad one.”

“Very bad.”

They watched the man. He lit a long dark cigarette, hardly smoked it, kept changing it from lips to hands to lips again, one side of his mouth and then the other, the red coal of its lighted end moving endlessly.

Doc said, “He seems nervous.”

“He's like that all the time. A cat on a hot stove.”

Presently the man Karl Sundwi shot his cigarette at the cobblestones, stepped on it, shrugged and went toward the passenger gangplanks. They watched him board the liner.

Canta whispered excitedly, “I don't know what brought you here, but it was a good idea.”

Doc asked, “How'd you like to sail for San Francisco on that ship?”

“What?”

He hesitated, then said, “I have an extra ticket, bought with that in mind.”

She said sharply, "You're damned confident! . . . No, wait! Do you think the shipment is on the *Crosby Square*?"

"Yes. I'm fairly sure."

She seemed to be looking up at him in the murk. He supposed she was frowning. "Would I be any help?"

"Yes, I think so."

"Name one way," she asked suspiciously.

"That's easy. You know Makaroff's men better than I do. You can point them out to me."

"Don't tell me you're going at this alone?"

"Yes."

She gasped audibly now. Her voice was a little odd as she said, "That I suppose I should see. All right, but I'm going to get darned tired of these clothes I'm wearing. They'll be watching all the places where I could pick up things."

"The *Crosby Square* isn't a tanker. You can get what you need in the shops aboard."

He said, "Come on, then," and led the way—not very far, a few yards—and stopped beside a large wicker hamper. He raised the lid. "You won't find this too uncomfortable. There's a kind of safety belt inside. Better fasten it in case you get turned upside down."

She touched the basket wonderingly. "This is pat. It's almost too pat planning."

"Wait until you see the awakening, the big finale."

She was silent for a moment. "Yes, I'm beginning to think it might be something to see." She got into the hamper quickly and easily, like a boy.

He fastened the lid, received her assurance that she had found the safety belt, and secured it. Then he went to a ship's officer and arranged for the hamper to be taken aboard. "It's labeled for the stateroom," he said. "I want it there."

It was not his stateroom. It was the one he had reserved in the name of Mme. Colnete Florai, which he hadn't thought, when he made the reservation, sounded at all like Canta's personality. Now he wasn't so sure about her personality, though, and he wondered about that idly while checking with the passport people and the purser, and while a steward was showing him to his own cabin, where he remained until the ship sailed, at four o'clock in the morning with the ebb tide, noisy little tugs huffing and churning to keep the sea giant in the stream.

He left his cabin then. It was still dark, and the ship had quieted considerably. It started to rain just as he came on deck, and he walked what seemed hundreds of yards in the rain, which came down listlessly in large drops.

The *Crosby Square* was nearly nine hundred feet at the waterline, a hundred and thirty-five feet from keel to boat-deck. She was a floating city. She was so big that probably no passenger on an ocean crossing had ever seen the entire vessel. Searching her would be an impossible task, when he didn't know for what he would be hunting. The virus shipment might be in any of hundreds of disguises; he

hadn't told Canta anything amiss when he said the stuff could be a shipment of mail, or any other product for distribution. That was in his mind, and heavy there, as he went to the stateroom he'd reserved nearly a week ago in the name of Mme. Coltene Florai.

The hamper was there. He tapped on it, after closing the stateroom door. "All right," he said. "You can come out."

"I already have," she said, appearing from the dressing-room. She had the small jeweled gun in her hand, dangling. "You didn't think I was going to stay in there all night."

He frowned. "You took a chance. Makaroff may have paid the stewards to make a check of the staterooms."

She shook her head. "Nobody has been in there but a stewardess."

"Well, it's too late anyway."

She wasn't contrite. "Don't think you're going to order me around."

He looked at her speculatively. "Beginning to regret your move, are you?"

"What do you think? . . . The last thing I expected this time yesterday was that I would be starting an ocean voyage I had no intention of taking, and no desire to take, and starting it in a basket. It's silly."

He went to the door. "Maybe sleep will improve your temper. I'll see you about noon."

"Now who's mad?" she asked.

He said, "I wouldn't know," dryly, and backed out, pulling the door shut.

She was motionless after he left, looking a little startled. Twice she made gestures, angry surprised ones, with a hand. Then she said, "Who does he think he is?" and went to the berth and flung herself upon it. She was wearing a slacks and shirt combination she'd had the stateroom stewardess purchase for her in the shop just after sailing-time, and she thought now: Maybe I shouldn't have had the stewardess buy those things. I guess I shouldn't have. I've been having one of my dumb nights. Even my being on this ship is dumb—it wouldn't be dumb at all if I knew Makaroff was taking his country's planting of virus on the vessel. But I don't know that. Doc Savage said so. But he could be mistaken. I think even he could make a mistake.

"If he wanted me to stay parked in that silly basket, why didn't he say so two or three times!" she complained. And looked up, for there was a knock on her stateroom door. She hesitated, not violently alarmed, but not easy of mind either, and then changed her voice somewhat, to ask, "What is it?"

"Breakfast. Madam." It was a male voice. Nothing unusual about it.

"I didn't order breakfast.

"I'm sorry, Madam. A gentleman, a very large gentleman with a cane, ordered it for you. Do you wish me to return the tray?"

Peace offering, she thought. And was relieved. Once a man made a peace offering, he had as much as admitted he was in the wrong, and therefore she could browbeat him some more if she wished.

Happy about it, she jumped up, opened the stateroom door, and looked into the scowling face of Karl Sundwi, the Makaroff henchman—the man of whom Makaroff was deathly afraid. Karl Sundwi held no

tray of breakfast, but held instead about what she would have expected him to be holding. She had seen them a few times. The underground had used them sometimes because, once you knew what they were, the menace of them was more terrible than a knife or gun.

The thing was a water pistol. There was a tiny blob of soft wax over the spray tube to keep it sealed until the triggering mechanism was given a hard pull. That was to prevent leakage of the contents, which could vary. Liquefied varieties of cyanic were quick, and there were other preparations. Sometimes the victim managed to scream once. Sometimes not.

“The stewardess deserves a little bonus,” Karl Sundwi said dryly in excellent English. “Wouldn't you say so?”

Canta was wordless. She came out of the stateroom when he beckoned with the gun. He closed the door, and they moved silently along the deck, faces against the bloody sunlight that was trying to get through the soft rain.

## Chapter IX

KARL SUNDWI was traveling well. He had a suite, and they waited there twenty minutes, Cantá suspended on the edge of a chair, Karl Sundwi draped alertly on the edge of a bed-lounge, and a block-bodied man who was faceless as to expression and whom Cantá had never seen before guarding the door in military fashion, spread-legged like an old-time Nazi. Then Makaroff came.

Makaroff carried his jaw prominently. There was rainwater on his hat and he snapped it off angrily.

He said, “What do you mean, sending for me? Who do you think you are?”

That was before he saw Cantá, and then his jaw went down and he put the hat back on his head, forgetting to set it straight.

Karl Sundwi showed his teeth, not pleasantly. “What were you saying?”

Makaroff swallowed vaguely. “It doesn't matter.”

“Yes, it does,” Karl Sundwi said, shaking his head gravely. “It is a point we had better straighten out, a dog we should kill now. You came in here raving about your dignity being injured by my sending for you, didn't you?”

“It's not important.”

“I think so.”

Makaroff swung slowly on the man, and already he was getting a glazed look that meant fears and rages and doubts were crawling together in him. “I didn't know that it was the girl you had here,” he said. “But since you're making a point of it, suppose we clear it up. Suppose we do that.”

Karl Sundwi smiled thinly. “That's what I mean. Suppose we do that. And here's what I mean: From now on, you work closely with me. You do nothing, make no move, without discussing it fully with me. And I may, it is needless to add, have certain advice which you will heed.”

Makaroff stood stiffly, raised his eyes to the ceiling, and called a curse on himself. “I will be damned,” he added, “if I am going to tolerate talk like that, even from a fellow who did catch this girl—”

Karl Sundwi's hand was up. "Just a minute, Makaroff. You have bungled this. You have booped it thoroughly. And so you won't start howling at me, I'll tell you how and why—Doc Savage is aboard."

Makaroff stood winded. His eyes became twice as large, and then half as small, as they had been a moment before. "On this ship?"

"The girl came aboard with him."

"How do you know?"

"Let's go back a bit, Makaroff. You were advised by the central cell that I was being assigned to help you some ten days ago. I don't think you liked it, did you?"

Makaroff managed to scowl. "Have I made a secret of that?"

"No. You figured I was from security police, didn't you?"

"Aren't you?"

"That's right," Karl Sundwi said. "Assigned to keep an eye on this deal, Makaroff. You're a good man, Makaroff, but you're more of a politician and throat-cutter than you are a mechanical planner. I imagine some day you'll be my superior. You are now, technically, but you can't give me an order I do not wish to perform. Let's get that straight."

"Have you credentials to that effect?"

"Certainly not, and you know it, and you know how to check up on the matter," Karl Sundwi said. "Let's not be juvenile. But let me finish what I was saying: You will doubtless some day be my superior, and it will be due in part to me. To Karl Sundwi, who watched over you, had my personal agents keep track of Doc Savage and this girl and learn they had boarded the ship."

Makaroff's jaw was down again. "You have agents of your own?"

"Certainly. And don't ask about them. No one knows them. No one will."

That seemed to make sense to Makaroff, and he had weighed the situation sufficiently in his cunning mind to see that nothing was to be lost, and perhaps a lot gained, by being coöperative. He made a mental note, though, to see that Karl Sundwi was purged at some future time.

"I take it," he said coldly, "that you have some advice to offer."

"Exactly. First, the girl is not to be killed."

"That needs a reason."

"She's going to lead us to Doc Savage."

"If she does, that won't be bad."

"Secondly," said Karl Sundwi, "you're not going to get excited and kill the two Savage aids, Monk Mayfair and Ham Brooks."

"For the same reason?"

"Not exactly. For the reason you've been holding them—to insure Savage's coöperation."

“If he's aboard the ship,” Makaroff said angrily. “I call that cooperation! Yes, I do! They've been of no use to us and getting them aboard the liner secretly was the devil's own job and furthermore—”

“Wait.” Karl Sundwi had a thin hand up. “We're going to use Savage in this, since he has involved himself. Savage is a doctor and research scientist, and has done bacteriological work of outstanding character. He is a national figure in America, at least in informed quarters. Suppose like this: Suppose it got around that Savage developed this virus, and then let it escape and is responsible. How is that for a smoke screen? We want a smoke screen, don't we, to last until we see how effective the stuff is going to be? And by effective, I mean eight or ten millions dying from it. Until we know it will make their atom bomb look futile. How would Savage do for the smoke screen?”

“My God! Is that a plan that came from over my head, or did you just think it up?”

Karl Sundwi looked at the guard speculatively. He said, “Well, it is your idea, developed a little.”

Makaroff glanced at the guard also. The man wasn't important enough to matter, and could be taken care of if he did begin talking. “So it's my idea,” he said thoughtfully.

“I'm not in a position to have ideas,” Karl Sundwi said dryly.

Now Makaroff's face became foxy with approval, and he said, “You may be all right, Sundwi. But have you thought of a way to arrange this thing?”

The other shook his thin-skulled cropped blond head. “First, catch our bird.”

“You've got something there.” Makaroff looked at Canta. “What do you think of the idea of putting Savage in our hands?” he asked her.

Canta told him how little she thought of it. She left no doubts.

“What about that?” Makaroff asked Karl Sundwi.

Sundwi told the guard, “I don't like her answers. Gag her.” And when that was done, Sundwi took off his coat, tossed it on a chair, and asked, “Are you touchy about seeing unpleasantness happen to a woman?”

Makaroff smiled uncertainly. “No.”

“I didn't think you would be,” Sundwi said.

Makaroff was not unfamiliar with secret police methods, and there had been a time when he had made a study of them himself, when thinking of organizing a security police, so-called, of his own, actually as a spying force for his own information and for the liquidation of an occasional rival. He had abandoned that project, finding it simpler to control the man who controlled the security police, and he had managed to do that most of the time, except on special occasions when the Leader gave specific orders. No one double-crossed the Leader. He was not a safe man to irritate. The Leader had, in the course of his long dark career, assassinated two of his own brothers for political reasons.

But Makaroff, watching Sundwi's technique, found that he was seeing something new in the psychological. Makaroff didn't think much of it at first. *Why, the man is being silly*, he thought. Because Karl Sundwi was merely talking, rather convincingly it was true, giving a general talk on the background of torture, its history and origin and general evolution. Not particularly dry stuff Makaroff would have admitted. But not terrifying. . . . Or was it? Makaroff, listening, began to feel a little sick around the diaphragm. He presently had an overpowering desire to get up and leave the room to stop hearing

Sundwi talk.

Makaroff stood up abruptly. "I'll be back later," he said, and went out on deck and used a handkerchief on the back of his bone-colored neck. He had changed his mind about Sundwi. The man was a genius. The man could administer terror hypnotically.

*Why haven't I heard more of this Sundwi?* Makaroff wondered. The man, as far as he knew, was rated a minor figure who had been assigned continually to the hinterlands, to handling certain unpleasant features of administration in the territories that had fallen under the "protection" of their government during the other war. Makaroff had never met Sundwi before. That, he reflected, had been an oversight.

He grew bitterly philosophical about men like Sundwi. They came up, unnoticed, and suddenly they were terrible fellows and you had difficulty coping with them, and one day you might meet one who had developed too far to be handled, and in that case you were a dead duck. Makaroff had no illusions about politics in his country. The thing to do about men like Sundwi was use them if they could be kept down, and if they couldn't be kept down, take no chance and get rid of them. Makaroff grinned thinly, with no humor at all, and gave Sundwi three months to live. Then he went back into the stateroom.

Canta, white-faced, looking as if she had been terribly beaten, although there was not a mark on her, crouched on a chair. Her eyes were sick, her face colorless, and she wouldn't take her eyes from the floor.

Sundwi was back on the edge of the bed, casually draped there. He told Makaroff, "She wants a little money. Enough to get her clear of Doc Savage's friends."

"Cheap enough," Makaroff said.

"Not too cheap, though," Sundwi said dryly. "Ten thousand dollars. Cash. Now. She thinks that might get her away from Savage's friends."

"It's too much."

"She'll have to go pretty far."

The nape of Makaroff's neck became a little more bone-colored. He didn't like taking suggestions from Sundwi when they were given that way. He already knew that Sundwi hated him intensely. But he shrugged, said, "I have it available. I'll get it."

"I was wondering about that much. Good. Get it," Sundwi said.

Makaroff left the stateroom. Sundwi sat silently, no expression on his long and rather unhealthy looking face. He had a deeply tanned skin, apparently a deliberately tanned skin, but otherwise he had an almost tubercular gauntness and fragility that was belied by his cold actions.

Canta was neither rigid nor relaxed. She seemed loose, defeated. She did not look up.

When Makaroff returned in five minutes, he carried a raincoat and from the pocket of this he produced a sheaf of U.S. currency about half an inch thick and wrapped in a pliable transparent substance resembling cellophane. He handed the money to Cant.

"You will not need to count it," he said. "I will guarantee the sum to be exact."

She took the money listlessly.

“How will she give Savage to us?” Makaroff demanded.

“Simply done. She will come to us again and show us where he is.”

“Good enough.”

Sundwi stood up, took Canta to the door, said, “I trust your memory isn't too short, my dear.” He bowed her out and closed the door.

Sundwi and Makaroff now looked at each other, and both seemed self-satisfied in a cold-blooded calculating fashion.

“She is not a weak character, that one,” Sundwi said.

“No one has ever said she was. . . . Suppose she doesn't go through with it?”

“She will. If not, we've lost nothing much. Savage knew we were aboard anyway, and that is all she can tell him. And if she does cross us, I will personally make restitution of the money, and see that she doesn't enjoy her future.”

Makaroff couldn't keep a triumphant grin away. “I already took care of that.”

Sundwi's too-blond eyebrows went up. “Yes? I take it you've acted without consulting me. Wasn't something said about that?”

Makaroff kept his grin. “She won't enjoy that money long in any case.”

“No?” Sundwi stared woodenly. And then he said, “I think I see. So that's the method of distributing the virus?”

“Exactly.”

Sundwi whistled softly. “I did not know . . . It's one I hadn't thought of.”

Makaroff struck, just a little, the attitude he used when he made his browbeating speeches before the U. N. and the Preparations Commission. “An entirely appropriate weapon for war on certain interests.”

“True.”

“I have,” said Makaroff, “a little over four hundred thousand dollars in U.S. currency. It will be brought in under diplomatic immunity when we reach San Francisco. That is all arranged. As a diplomatic official, I can do that, and the Ambassador is also aboard.”

Sundwi was clearly awed. “How will the distribution be arranged?”

“The money,” said Makaroff easily, “will be paid through the usual channels to our cells of workers and fellow-travelers in the States. Such payments have been regularly made in the past. The American F. B. I. is aware of this, knows most of the agents to whom it is distributed, and will happily watch them as it has before, believing that a full check is being kept on our American operations.”

“Our workers in the States will distribute the money—”

“They won't know. They'll just spend it. They spend it like water anyway.”

“Then they'll die also!”

“Why not! Of what real use are they? They've failed in their work of converting the United States to our way of government and our philosophy of human economy. Why shouldn't they be punished.”

Sundwi, except for his amazement, did not seem particularly affected. “This might hook in very well with my thought of laying the blame for spreading the virus on Doc Savage.”

“Yes, I thought of that. If the word that Savage launched a private war on our agents, and it got out of control and began wiping out the nation itself—that is the sort of thing you mean?”

“That is the sort of thing.”

## Chapter X

CANTA faced Doc Savage. She stood with both hands gripping a chair, and speaking in a low voice that was without rise or fall, told him what had happened to her. She said that Sundwi had terrified her. “I have never met anything like him,” she said. “He has twice the brains that Makaroff has, and I couldn't tell you with words how he built terror. It's something you'd have to experience.”

Doc Savage had listened patiently. “So you agreed to turn me over to them?”

“To tell them where they could get at you. . . . And I didn't agree not to tell you I had sold out. They didn't ask anything about that.”

He said absently, “Well, that keeps your honesty intact, anyway.”

“It means something to me, whether you think it does or not.”

“Maybe we can arrange for you to go all the way.”

“Show them where you are, you mean?” She looked shocked.

“Maybe. We'll have to see. . . . The point is that this hasn't gotten us far. We've got to find that virus shipment. We could have grabbed Makaroff and his men at any time, but unless we get their poison, we've done no good. Makaroff, as important as he is back home, would be a small sacrifice in their opinion for the success of this thing.”

She shook her head. “I didn't learn a thing.”

“Nothing? No intimation whatever as to how the virus is being taken into the States?”

“None.”

“Well, that's not good.”

“I didn't accomplish anything.” She was getting angry again. She took out the sheaf of money, still with the transparent film covering around it, and eyed it. “I don't see how they found me so quick. When they don't know where you were.”

“The stewardess, didn't you say? You should have stayed in the basket.”

“Oh, don't start telling me how right you are!” she snapped. She hurled the money at the table and it hit and bounced and went across the floor hopping over and over.

“What's that?”

“My bribe.”

He said, “There's no reason to treat ten thousand dollars so disrespectfully.” He went over and picked up the money. He looked at it for a while. His bronze features seemed to become more metallic than usual. He said, “Who gave you this?”

“Sundwi made the deal.”

“Sundwi gave you the money?”

“No. Makaroff did that.” She came forward. “I might as well count it. Makaroff probably short-changed me, or the bills are counterfeit or something. It's against his principles to make an honest move when a crooked one could be managed.”

He did not hand her the money. In fact, he held it out of her reach.

“Now what?” she asked coldly. “You going to hold out on me?”

“I don't think you want it.”

“Not want ten thousand dollars. Don't be silly.”

“The packaging is too unusual.”

“You mean the cellophane or whatever it's wrapped in?”

“Not cellophane. . . . I don't think ordinary cellophane would filter out the virus.”

“What?”

“I think,” Doc Savage said, “that this wrapping is on the money because the virus is on money, and they don't want it released until the packages of money are distributed and opened.”

“Good God!”

“Mind you, I'm not sure.”

“How will you check it?”

Doc frowned at the currency packet. “If the ship hospital has rabbits or guinea pigs, and I don't know of any reason why they should have, the check might be simpler. As it is, and if the virus is outside the range of a microscope—frankly, I'm not sure how we can check it in a hurry.”

“This is pretty wild.” Canta stared fixedly at the money. “No. . . . No, it isn't either. Makaroff would like something of that sort. And money would be easy to scatter widely, wouldn't it?”

“Money,” Doc agreed, “probably distributes itself faster and without attracting undue attention, than any medium they could have chosen.”

“And Makaroff would want to kill me!” Canta gasped. “That is the kind of a trick he would—” She did not finish and her eyes went wide and round, glassy with shock in a moment, and she tried to speak, but only made a series of sounds like hard-driven breathing.

Doc had his back to the door, and the direction of the door had produced the glazed effect on her. He asked, “Is it safe to turn around?”

Karl Sundwi, stepping into the cabin quickly, said, "Probably the only completely safe move you'll make for some little time."

Doc swung. Sundwi closed the door, leaned against it, and his eyes went over the room like hunting animals until they located the bundle of greenbacks, where they became fixed.

"You opened that money yet?" he demanded.

"No."

"Don't."

Doc blew out breath quickly. "So that is how they're taking the virus into the States."

"That's right," Karl Sundwi said. "God knows, I was long enough finding it out. But Makaroff just told me. He got cute with himself, and told me. I think I sort of led him to wanting to exhibit his mental superiority. I should have thought of that approach before—I didn't know it would work with Makaroff."

Doc said, "Then we're ready to crack this."

"We're ready to try, you mean."

## Chapter XI

DOC SAVAGE told Canta, "His real name is Long Tom Roberts."

Canta still looked at Long Tom with glassy terror; she was unable to accept, so suddenly, the concept that he was a Doc Savage associate. Surprise had piled against surprise, and the impact was nothing coherent.

Long Tom looked at her—his face was pleasant enough now, although she couldn't register that either—and explained, "I guess I was pretty realistic with you. But there didn't seem to be any other choice."

She said something then, probably thought she spoke more than she did, but the first was just lip movements and the last pretty much incohesive until two or three words began to hang together at a time. There was something about, "—was murdered by Makaroff several days ago—"

"Oh, that," said Long Tom Roberts. "Well, that would worry Makaroff also, if he knew about it. You see, they did murder a man. They went to a very great deal of trouble to do it, and they were sure it was me. But it wasn't. I did a little switcheroo on them, and it was Karl Sundwi they knifed and put in an acid bath. Sundwi had come down alone to watch Makaroff, and he had a briefcase full of the most wonderful credentials. It happened I'd known Sundwi from the past, and he was a man of about my build. All I had to do was dye my hair and eyebrows, give myself a coat of suntan lotion, and be a little reckless."

Doc Savage was looking at Long Tom Roberts, and he shuddered. Not too perceptibly but a shudder anyway. He could imagine how simple it had been. And he knew one thing that Long Tom hadn't mentioned; the death of Sundwi hadn't been deliberate on Long Tom's part; it had been an accident of sorts, and Long Tom felt oddly about it.

Doc asked, "Know where the money is?"

“I’ve got a good idea. In Makaroff’s baggage, no doubt. In the diplomatic pouches that are marked official business—those things that go through without a customs inspection.”

“What about Monk and Ham?”

“They’re alive but not very happy,” Long Tom explained. “They have been all set a couple of times to make a break. But I managed to get to them and warn them to hold off until we had some idea where the virus was located.”

“Where are they?”

Long Tom named a stateroom suite. “They’re there, but they may be drugged. I’m not sure. They were drugged when they were brought aboard, and hauled on as invalids.”

“How’d they get them past the health officials with that?”

“Papers they already had fixed up. This Makaroff seems to be able to do about anything he wishes to do.”

Doc Savage had seemed to be giving full attention to Long Tom’s story, but now he moved abruptly, went to the door in silence, yanked it open. In an instant, the panel of the door opening was a pantomime of shadow and sick rain-filtered sunlight as Doc Savage struggled with the man who had been there.

The fracas did not last long, but during it they could hear another man’s feet going away frantically along the deck. Long Tom, lunging forward, tried to get at the runner, but came against Doc and the other, and the tangle was more involved for a few moments. Then they were down, the three of them, but only the one, the eavesdropper, unconscious.

Doc asked grimly, “One of Makaroff’s?”

“That’s right. One of his bodyguards.” Long Tom dived through the cabin door and looked after the one who had run away. “That’s another one of them.”

“We’ve got to start operating.”

“I’ll say.”

“Let’s get Monk and Ham out of it first.”

They ran then, heads back and already breathing hard, along the deck. And Canta, shaking the shock out of her muscles, followed them wildly. She tried to scream at them, twice, that she wanted a gun. Where was there a gun for her? But they did not understand—she hardly understood the words herself—and they went on.

They knew where they were going, or Long Tom did. But they didn’t seem to know what to do when they got there. They reached a cabin door. It was in the second-class section, in a long cream-colored corridor of innumerable other doors identical except for the gold-leaf numerals.

“How many will be in there?” Doc asked.

“Four, probably,” Long Tom said.

“That’s enough to make it active, but let’s go in.”

“Very active,” Long Tom agreed. “I’ll try my Sundwi personality on them.”

He whanged on the door with a fist and got from inside a growled order not to disturb, which he answered with a password. The door lock clattered. He followed the opening door inside, pushing hard. He saw something then that Doc could not see, and doubled down, diving forward, and in a moment two men were on him, one with a clubbed gun, the other with a knife.

Doc Savage lunged at the door, and met it as one of the men tried to kick it shut. He forced his way in, and Canta, trying to follow, was struck by the door as it again came shut. This time it closed, and spring-locked.

Canta, wildly alarmed, wrenched at the door until a bullet came through, making a hole, a tuft of splintered steel, a few inches from her eyes. She shrank back then, appalled by violence, the proximity of death.

Sounds that came from inside were neither subdued nor reassuring. There was only one more shot, then a succession of mixed cries, thumps, blows, the bone-breaking noise of things being smashed, of men in violent physical contact. Finally it ended, and the door came open again.

Long Tom put his head out, looked both ways along the corridor, and said casually enough, "We were expected. You'd better get in here. They'll be coming back in a hurry."

She entered, and saw the two guards—only two—in shapes of violent unconsciousness on the floor.

She saw also a wide-bodied, hairy, remarkably homely man who presumably was Monk Mayfair. He had been bound with bandages from the shoulders down, and Doc Savage was slitting the bindings.

Long Tom told Canta additionally, "They were faster than we thought. They—two of the guards and a fellow who came giving the alarm—took Ham Brooks away. They were coming back for Monk."

Doc now freed Monk. And Monk, trying to spring to his feet, rolled helplessly on the floor. His legs, the circulation hampered for hours by the bandage bindings, wouldn't take orders.

Doc said, "Rub some circulation back, Monk. Then try to get to the bridge. The Captain has orders to supply help."

Monk wailed, "Dammit, they've got Ham! I'm not going to be any messenger boy while they're probably slitting Ham's throat!"

But Doc was not listening. He was back at the door, and, probably knowing Monk, said, "Do you know where they'd take Ham, Long Tom?"

"I've no idea. Probably not Makaroff's suite, though. They've got half a dozen suites aboard. One is good a bet as another." Long Tom's voice had a wild sound, as if his throat was unable to do anything with the words.

Canta had backed into the corridor, and now she shrieked, pointing. A man had come into the passage at the far end; whether it was one of Makaroff's men she didn't know; she merely shrieked on the principle that the way that things were going, nothing that happened could be good.

The man turned, ran. He was out of view in an instant, but Doc had seen him. Doc went down the passage with sprinting haste that was as fast, Canta thought, as she had ever seen a man travel on two feet. Long Tom was back of him, losing ground.

At the end of the corridor, Long Tom whirled, screamed, "What color coat was he wearing?"

“Brown!” Canta screamed back. Presumably Doc had not seen the man after all, and had come in sight of two or more men and was confused.

Now Monk Mayfair came out of the cabin. He was moving as if he had wooden legs with the joints rusted, and making ghastly grimaces. He yelled, “Where'd they go?”

“You're supposed to go to the bridge and get help—”

“Where did they go?” Monk screeched at her. “Goddam it, they were going to kill Ham Brooks!”

She was upset herself, and she put her face against Monk's homely one, almost, and yelled, “Don't tell me stuff I already know! Let me have your arm. I'll help you.”

The helping was not too successful and they had two falls, Monk going down alone the first time, then both of them getting tangled together, before they reached the end of the corridor. But they made it in good time in spite of that, and Monk was working the stiffness out of his legs.

They could hear a man screaming somewhere ahead. Monk said of the sound, “That's one of them! I've heard them sound like that before when Doc got them.”

Canta hadn't noticed the quality of the scream particularly, but now she gave it attention. It had a stark all-out intensity and the emotion in it was as raw as a small skinned animal.

They passed cross-ship and into another corridor, and she saw why the man was screaming like that. Doc Savage had him—it was the man she'd seen take flight in the passage, the brown-coated one—and Doc was doing something to the man's body with his hands. Between convulsive kicks and screeches, the man presently began to try to point to another section of the ship. Doc struck him and dropped him then, and went on, Long Tom Roberts with him.

Canta and Monk reached the dropped man. The latter was still conscious. Monk leaned down and took care of that with a fist blow that shaped the man's jaw differently. “That guy,” Monk said with satisfaction, “had been trying to elect himself as my executioner when the time came. After he wakes up I'll be back and give him another treatment.”

*I hope you're not optimistic,* Canta thought wildly.

She said, “You're supposed to get help from the ship's officers.”

“That would take too long to organize,” Monk gasped. He was taking great frog-like hops on his stiff legs now, and didn't need propping up.

They went on. Doc and Long Tom were far ahead now. Out of the Second Class section. There was an ornate rail with a politely worded request for Second Class passengers to keep out of Cabin First domains. They vaulted that gate, and a moment later, Monk tried to vault it the same way and took another fall. He didn't mind, apparently. The falls seemed to be loosening him up. At least he was on his feet again without apparently pausing.

*It will be Makaroff's suite,* Canta thought. Makaroff was hard-pressed, or he wouldn't have let it happen there. Even the great Makaroff, No. 2 ruffian of the poor world's bad-boy nation, would have difficulty smoothing out the murder of Ham Brooks in his suite. Makaroff must be a little hysterical. She had wondered if he wouldn't become that way if pushed really hard.

She screamed, “It will be Makaroff's suite! Watch out!”

But they didn't look back, so they already knew it. Long Tom would know, of course. Long Tom was Sundwi, or rather had pretended to be Sundwi, after Sundwi had died. She felt foolish, and did not cry out any more.

They came to a door, and it seemed to be locked. She saw from a distance down the corridor Doc Savage lay a hand against the door and the panel came out, and Doc went in, Long Tom after him.

The sounds that came out of the room were like those that had come from the other cabin a bit ago, but there were more of them. And their quality was touched up somewhat.

Monk Mayfair began to swear. He swore terribly. He said, "For a month I been sweating on this! And by God, I lose out on the windup! I'm a lame duck when the cork gets pulled!"

This time the door was not closed. The suite was large. First a main cabin, sixteen by twenty feet; there were bedrooms, solarium, private dining room, a solid glass bath opening off that. Ample room for the festivities.

Canta found trouble picking exact facts out of the mêlée, but she guessed at approximately seven men in the suite at the beginning, not including Ham Brooks, whom they had been engaged in sewing in a stout bedspread, including a typewriter at his feet for ballast. Ham was still alive, but bandaged and taped until he could only participate in the affair with glares.

One man was down and out already. He must have been in the way of the door. Another was crawling across the floor in a dazed fashion when Cantata saw him.

The other five, with Doc Savage and Long Tom Roberts, were making all the noise. There was less shooting than in the preliminary scrap. One shot only this time. A lean moustached patriot endeavored to shoot Long Tom Roberts in the stomach, and somehow the bullet got into Makaroff's leg, high up and in the fleshy part. The things Makaroff then said stopped any more shooting. They used fists, teeth, knives, feet and the furniture on each other.

Monk, passing Cantata into the cabin, remarked, "What do you know! I made it after all." He was then knocked down with a chair and, as unaffected by that as by his falls, took the chair away from the wielder and threw it aside, and broke the man's nose and caved in half his teeth with an unaided fist.

Canta, coming inside herself, ducked a large glass vase which was thrown at her. When the vase bounced back at her feet, she picked it up, broke it over a table, and used the jagged end to menace a man who came at her. He backed away.

It didn't last long. It couldn't. It was too violent. Cantata thought wildly: *They should watch Makaroff. He'll try to keep the money from them. It must be in his suite.*

That notion sent her skirting the fracas, running intently, making for the bedroom, which seemed a logical place for the virus-laden currency to be concealed. How right the notion was became plain when Makaroff broke away from the fight.

She wished then that she hadn't acted on the idea, because Makaroff came at her, head back, short legs plunging. She tried to slam the bedroom door in his face, screaming as she did so. She failed, and Makaroff was upon her, struck her, went past her. She had, for an instant, the impression of foul breath and more foul words. He was gibbering in his frenzy.

After striking her once, dropping her, he slammed the door and went on and dived on hands and knees for the underside of the bed. The treated money seemed to be in the most homely place of all, under

Makaroff's bed. A suitcase. He snatched it out.

Dazed, Canta tried to get at Makaroff. She shoved a chair at him. He only cursed. His swearing was quite coherent—he was going to scatter the virus-laden money; he was going to throw it in their faces. If they wanted it, they'd get it.

But he had trouble with the suitcase. It was locked. He couldn't seem to remember where he had put the key, in which pocket. He got a hand stuck in a pocket in hunting, and tore that pocket out, and then tore out another pocket, fell on the contents that scattered on the floor, and got his key. He unlocked the suitcase.

Canta pushed the chair at him again. He kicked it away. He had the suitcase open. He scooped out currency, a dozen of the membrane-wrapped packets, and hurled them in Canta's face. She screamed then again, the most genuine scream she would ever give.

But it seemed that the membrane was a protective wrapping. Because Makaroff began trying to open the packages. He picked at it ineffectively with his fingernails. He started to try his teeth, changed his mind about that, and again fell on the floor, pawing in the litter from his pocket, seeking his pocket-knife.

He was doing that when Savage came in and took him by the throat.

## Chapter XII

HAM BROOKS had been laughing for ten minutes. Not continually—the mirth would come from him in spurts of two or three seconds, spaced variously from a minute to two or three minutes apart. He used the time in between to rub his legs—he was in worse shape than Monk had been from being bound tightly in bandages for several hours, and they had beaten him some also—and to make pain shapes with his mouth.

Monk Mayfair, having decided finally that Ham was going to survive, was displaying a studied lack of sympathy.

“What's so funny?” Monk asked.

After he had asked that three times, Ham Brooks looked up and said, “All of the preparations we made, all of the gadgets we used, all of the schemes that were planted—and it ended in an old-fashioned run-after-'em-and-knock-'em-on-the-head!”

“Is that funny?”

“I think so,” Ham said. “Maybe I'm a little dizzy.”

“It was pretty satisfactory, too,” Monk told him. “And you're no more dizzy than usual.”

Long Tom Roberts finished lining up the prisoners, tying those who seemed to need it, and prolonging the unconsciousness of those who showed signs of reviving, using for the latter purpose the leg of a chair. There was no fully intact chair in the cabin, and no other piece of furniture that was quite like it had been before.

The Captain of the ship had come in, received the story, whistled at the damage, and was outside assuring passengers that it was just a brawl and that he regretted it greatly. Canta listened to him, and thought he did an excellent job of lying.

Canta went back into the bedroom.

Doc Savage had replaced the virus charged money packets in the suitcase, and was inspecting them carefully with a magnifying glass.

He turned his head, said, "You'd better tell them to quarantine this suite and all the prisoners. Have them shut off the air conditioning so air from this place won't be circulated through the ship."

Canta, shocked by how pale his face was, asked, "Do you think any of the packets broke open?"

"I don't think so. But we'll take do chances."

"You mean we have to remain in here for the rest of the voyage?"

"That's right. And then we'll have to be segregated for several weeks afterward. That won't be so bad—we'll be in the mountains somewhere, at a laboratory that we'll set up to find out what this virus is and dig up a vaccine or treatment."

"Can that be done?"

"It can be tried," he said. "Go on, tell them to keep everyone out of here, and keep the prisoners in the suite."

She frowned at him. He seemed detached, absorbed in the matter of solving the virus that lay ahead. There was no visible elation about him, and certainly no noticeable interest in her as a woman, and a very pretty one.

Canta felt an odd, helpless sort of rage.

She turned and went out and stood by the suite door, listening to the Captain of the *Crosby Square* tell expert lies to his curious passengers.

THE END