

# **THE PIRATE ISLE**

A Doc Savage Adventure by Kenneth Robeson

# Table of Contents

<b><u>THE PIRATE ISLE</u></b> .....	<b>1</b>
<u>A Doc Savage Adventure by Kenneth Robeson</u> .....	1
<u>Chapter I</u> .....	1
<u>Chapter II. THE SHAPING OF SOMETHING</u> .....	10
<u>Chapter III. THE BRONZE MAN</u> .....	16
<u>Chapter IV. PARACHUTE SNIPERS</u> .....	20
<u>Chapter V. DISTRESSED LADY</u> .....	27
<u>Chapter VI. LORD LONDON</u> .....	33
<u>Chapter VII. SHIP TO NOWHERE</u> .....	42
<u>Chapter VIII. PLANE DOWN!</u> .....	48
<u>Chapter IX. JINX!</u> .....	54
<u>Chapter X. NEAPED</u> .....	58
<u>Chapter XI. HALF A LOAF</u> .....	63
<u>Chapter XII. PUZZLE ON JINX</u> .....	70
<u>Chapter XIII. THE LAGOON</u> .....	73
<u>Chapter XIV. JOHNNY HAS A STORY</u> .....	78
<u>Chapter XV. A PARROT NAMED THEM</u> .....	82

# THE PIRATE ISLE

## A Doc Savage Adventure by Kenneth Robeson

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- Chapter I
- Chapter II. THE SHAPING OF SOMETHING
- Chapter III. THE BRONZE MAN
- Chapter IV. PARACHUTE SNIPERS
- Chapter V. DISTRESSED LADY
- Chapter VI. LORD LONDON
- Chapter VII. SHIP TO NOWHERE
- Chapter VIII. PLANE DOWN!
- Chapter IX. JINX!
- Chapter X. NEAPED
- Chapter XI. HALF A LOAF
- Chapter XII. PUZZLE ON JINX
- Chapter XIII. THE LAGOON
- Chapter XIV. JOHNNY HAS A STORY
- Chapter XV. A PARROT NAMED THEM

### Chapter I

THE first officer of the *City of Tulsa* sprinted across the deck. He climbed the steps to the boat deck with pounding haste. He stumbled on the top step, lost his uniform cap. He was a cheerful-looking man; that is, he was cheerful-looking when he was not wearing the kind of expression that was on his face, now. He swore, recovered his cap and galloped for the bridge.

"Captain Hardgrove!" he squalled.

There was plenty of blue Pacific ocean around the *City of Tulsa*. About half of the Pacific was ahead of her bow, between it and San Francisco. The other half was behind, between the stern and Brisbane, Australia, the port of Mbau, Viti Levu Island of the Fiji group, and other points of call. The old hooker was about half of her long way home.

"Captain Hardgrove!" yelled the officer.

Captain Hardgrove was chewing up a two-months-old Los Angeles newspaper and shooting the paper wads thus obtained at his parrot. He did not like being disturbed on so warm a day.

"Yes, yes, Mr. Weed!" he snapped at the officer.

"For the love of Bess! You won't believe this!" panted First Officer Weed, stumbling onto the bridge.

## THE PIRATE ISLE

"Won't believe what?" asked Captain Hardgrove bitterly.

"It's the man up the mast," puffed Mr. Weed.

The paper wad Captain Hardgrove was about to launch at his parrot slipped out of the rubber band and was propelled back into his own face, smacking him on the nose.

"Ouch! Damn!" he said. "What was that?"

"What was what?" asked the rattled Mr. Weed.

"What is up the mast, Mr. Weed?" the skipper inquired patiently.

"A man."

"A four-legged man?"

"Yes, sir. I mean no, sir. He has two legs." Mr. Weed put his hat on his head absent-mindedly backward. "He is throwing snowballs at the crew!"

"Snowballs?"

"Yes, sir."

Captain Hardgrove of the *City of Tulsa* was an unshakable man. He always thought twice and counted ten. He never let a snap judgment push him into anything.

He put the rubber wad-shooting band carefully around two brass buttons on his uniform-coat cuff. He swallowed. He went over and looked at the thermometer. The thermometer said a hundred and two. A hundred and two was probably an understatement. Captain Hardgrove closed his eyes and counted ten.

"Mr. Weed," he said. "It says a hundred and two, fahrenheit. Hell is two degrees less hot."

"Yes, sir."

Captain Hardgrove pulled in a deep breath.

"Snowballs?" he said, inquisitively.

"Yes, sir."

"Snowballs?" asked Captain Hardgrove gently.

"Yes, sir"

Captain Hardgrove's voice made just a shade less noise than an earthquake. "Damn it to hell and blazes, Mr. Weed! You're drunk, mad, crazy! I'm in no mood for jokes!" He threw the copy of the newspaper in a corner. "If this ark has driven you crazy, it is understandable; but please don't inflict it on *me!*"

Mr. Weed wiped off sweat.

## THE PIRATE ISLE

"Yes, sir," he said. "Would you care to look for yourself."

Captain Hardgrove stared at him. His face got flat with surprise.

"Well, love a little goose!" he said. "I believe you mean that, Mr. Weed."

He grabbed absently for his own uniform cap, missed it, then started for the foredeck without it. His parrot squawked warningly and said a fairly understandable, "Mabel loves you, big boy!"

THERE was glazed heat and a motly assortment of commercial sailors on the foredeck of the ship. They stood around trying to get their eyes in the shade of the cargo booms while they peered upward.

There was no activity visible in the crow's nest at which they looked. The nest was just a barrel-wart, up above the signal crosstree, a somewhat cramped place for a man to be. It was slightly in need of paint.

The deck was wet, the scuppers running water. The wetness was the result of washing down the deck. Evidently, a sailor had been engaged in this task when interrupted by the snowballing, because a hose was lying on deck where it had been dropped, its valve-equipped nozzle spewing a small stream of water.

"Did this have a beginning, Mr. Weed?" asked Captain Hardgrove.

"That one " Mr. Weed pointed at a sailor, then looked more closely at the man, changed his mind, and indicated another sailor. "No, it was that one." To the sailor: "Wasn't it you who started up to paint the mast?"

"Aye, sir," said the sailor.

"He started up the mast," explained Mr. Weed. "It is a calm day. I gave orders to smear a little paint on the mast. So he got his bucket " To the sailor: "You had your bucket of paint, didn't you?"

"And my brush," said the sailor.

"And he started climbing up the mast," finished Mr. Weed. "On the inside, of course. There is a ladder, a steel one, up the inside of the hollow steel mast, and "

"Damn it, Mr. Weed, I am vaguely familiar with my own boat," said Captain Hardgrove. "I know it has a hollow mast. I wonder if the same thing applies to some of the heads around here." He looked upward. "When did the snowballs start falling?"

"After I climbed about twenty feet," said the sailor.

"What did you do?"

"I climbed right down again."

"What did you think about the snowballs?" asked Captain Hardgrove.

"I didn't know what to think," said the sailor.

"You and I," said Captain Hardgrove, "have the same reactions. What did you say?"

## THE PIRATE ISLE

"Say?"

"Did you," asked Captain Hardgrove patiently, "have anything at all to say on the occasion? Any comment at all?"

The sailor nodded. "I asked what in the blank–blank name of blankety blank was going on up there in that blank–blank crow's nest."

Captain Hardgrove smiled. "You actually supplied the blanks?" he inquired.

The sailor told what he had actually supplied. The real words.

"It's a wonder the paint didn't all peel off the mast right after that," said Captain Hardgrove admiringly. He began looking around underfoot and shaking his head.

"What are you looking for, sir?" asked Mr. Weed.

"The snowballs, Mr. Weed. The snowballs."

"It is a very hot day "

"And they melted?" snapped Captain Hardgrove. "Is that what you are telling me in your modest way?"

Mr. Weed's neck got red.

"Yes, sir," he said. "I agree with you that it is a bit wacky, sir."

CAPTAIN HARDGROVE peered upward, shading his eye with a hard brown hand. "Climb up there and bring down this Eskimo and his snowballs," he ordered.

The three sailors included in the order hastily pretended they had not heard and picked up deck mops and buckets.

"Get up there," said Captain Hardgrove, "before I put my boot to the parts of you that get the most use."

With manifest reluctance, the three entered the little hatch in the side of the hollow steel mast and began the long climb up the ladder.

"Their lack of enthusiasm for that job," remarked Captain Hardgrove, "is somewhat noticeable. To what do you attribute it, Mr. Weed?"

"Conceivably it might be the excellent pitching arm of the fellow up there," suggested Mr. Weed.

"What manner of looking gentleman is he?"

"He has a long arm and a more than fair eye. A bit of baseball in his past, I would say."

"Does he have four eyes or two mouths or any other peculiarities, Mr. Weed?"

## THE PIRATE ISLE

"No, he is just a white man. Rather an elongated one, from what I saw. It was hard to tell, since I just saw the parts of him that stuck out of the crow's nest when he threw."

Captain Hardgrove inspected Mr. Weed very thoughtfully. At length, he asked, "You still insist, Mr. Weed, that there were snowballs?"

"Yes, I do!" snapped the officer.

"All right, Mr. Weed, I merely wished to be certain." Captain Hardgrove gestured with one hand. "Could you tell me where they went, please?"

"They melted." Mr. Weed added pointedly, "It is a hot day, sir."

"To be sure." Captain Hardgrove smiled faintly. "Can you as glibly explain where they came from?"

Mr. Weed's neck became encrimsoned once more.

"Snowballs," he said, "are an impossibility. And you know it, sir. On a day like this, I mean. A day this hot."

A commotion came out of the hollow mast. It was muffled because it came all the way down from the crow's nest. But then it clarified, for it began coming through the air. Captain Hardgrove and Mr. Weed stepped back, so the bend in their necks would not be so sharp to look upward. They saw a hat sail out of the crow's nest. It belonged to a sailor.

"Good mercy!" gasped Mr. Weed.

A sailor seemed about to follow the hat. The sailor fought furiously to avoid doing this. He hung to the crow's-nest rim with his left arm and used his right arm to club at someone.

"Ahoy up there! Ahoy! Avast and belay that!" bellowed Captain Hardgrove in the voice he could employ to stand on the bridge and make a sailor jump a foot on the taffrail deck. "Stop it! Stop whatever's going on up there!"

The fight up in the crow's nest pursued its uninterrupted course to a conclusion. After it ended, a sailor thrust his head over the rim.

"We got the swab," shouted the sailor. "He seems to be a bit ting-a-ling."

"A bit what?" roared Captain Hardgrove.

"Crazy, sir."

"Naturally, he would be," commented Captain Hardgrove. "Are there any snowballs left?"

"No, sir. No snowballs."

"Any ice machine or snow-making machine?"

"No, sir. Nothing of any kind."

"Search him," snapped Captain Hardgrove, "and see what you find."

## THE PIRATE ISLE

"Not necessary to frisk him," the sailor called down. "The bird is wearing what I've heard called a birthday suit."

THEY brought the man down from the crow's nest, lowering him in a sling after trussing him up in a blanket. The transfer from crow's nest to deck was easily managed without tumult, since the man had been knocked out by one of the sailors.

"Take him to the hospital," ordered Captain Hardgrove. "By the way, what's that?"

"This?" one of the sailors said. "Oh, it was up there in the crow's nest with him."

The skipper extended a brown slab of hand. "Let me see."

The object that had aroused Captain Hardgrove's curiosity was not quite three feet square.

"Know what it is?" the skipper asked.

"Handkerchief, sir," decided the sailor. "Probably belonged to the poor nut."

A muscle twitched at the corner of Captain Hardgrove's left eye, but his face showed no other expression. "I will keep this," he said, "if you don't mind."

The sailor didn't mind. One formed the habit of not minding many things when one sailed with Captain Hardgrove for a while.

Captain Hardgrove watched the sailor walk away, then turned to the first officer. "Mr. Weed, do you think it is a handkerchief?"

"No, I don't," said Mr. Weed. "But I wouldn't exactly know what it is."

The skipper flourished the square of material he had taken from the sailor.

"The laws of Manu," he said, "ordained that a Brahman purposing to end his life in religious meditation in the forests should clothe himself in this material."

Mr. Weed scratched his head. "I don't believe I get you."

"Ficus

cloth."

"Eh?"

"Made from the banyan or the so-called sacred fig tree."

"Oh," said Mr. Weed, suddenly comprehending. "Bark cloth, you mean."

"Exactly. Bark cloth."



## THE PIRATE ISLE

"Why take such a long way around to say so?" inquired Mr. Weed, quarrelsomely. "Or does the laws of Manu, meditation and sacred fig trees have something to do with it?"

"I doubt if they do," admitted Captain Hardgrove. "However, those little stray facts just happened into my mind. This is bark cloth, all right. The art of making it is not as much practiced through the South Sea Islands as it once was."

"Meaning?"

Captain Hardgrove shrugged. "Just aroused my interest, is all. Only worldly possession of the man in the crow's nest a scrap of bark cloth. Rather unique, wouldn't you say?"

The first officer leered maliciously.

"Don't," he said, "forget the snowballs."

The skipper's eye narrowed. He folded the panel of bark cloth carefully and thrust it into his jacket pocket. He jerked his head slightly, then wheeled on his heel. Mr. Weed took the movements to mean that he was to follow. So he trailed Captain Hardgrove, whose destination proved to be the hospital.

The hospital was a cabin so poorly located and ventilated that the company had not been able to sell it to a passenger. It was not an advantageous surrounding for an illness, so the percentage of patients who made a quick recovery was large. The hole was unwillingly presided over by Dr. Cunico.

"Get out of here!" directed Dr. Cunico, as soon as the captain and Mr. Weed entered the hospital. "Either that, or grab this stomach pump and work it for me."

"How is he?" asked the skipper.

"Fine," said Dr. Cunico. "A fine example of how skinny a man can be and still live." He whipped back the sheet which was spread over the patient. "Look at him."

The man from the crow's nest was extraordinarily long and unbelievably thin. His bones were coming through. Not, however, from starvation. A perambulating skeleton seemed to be the shape which nature had planned for him.

"Mercy!" said Mr. Weed.

"Hell's fire, he's not one of my passengers," said Captain Hardgrove, vastly astonished. "I never saw him before. I wouldn't forget a beanpole form like that. I thought he was one of my silly tourists. But he isn't. I wonder who in the blasted rap-rap he is."

"Stowaway?" suggested the first officer.

The skipper scratched his nose. "Obviously, Mr. Weed. Obviously."

"With snowballs," added Mr. Weed wearily. "I am beginning not to understand this at all."

Dr. Cunico looked up with a frown. "Snowballs? What the hell! It's only a hundred and twenty around here today."

## THE PIRATE ISLE

"A hundred and two, the thermometer says," corrected Captain Hardgrove vaguely.

Dr. Cunico considered the point, then rendered an opinion. "You sound as crazy as the patient. What is it, an epidemic? I've always expected one of such a nature on this twentieth-century Noah's Ark."

"You think he *is* nuts, then?" asked the skipper judiciously.

"You think there were snowballs?" countered Dr. Cunico.

The skipper rubbed his jaw. "He thinks we are touched, Mr. Weed. Shall I tell him you were the one who saw the snowballs?"

Dr. Cunico made an impatient gesture. "Will you take this bag of tricks and get out of here. I think this man had some ribs broken by your sailors. I want to take some X rays."

The captain and the first officer stepped outside, having learned the state of the man from the crow's nest, which was what they had come to learn. The fellow probably had broken ribs.

"One thing we didn't find out," said Mr. Weed as they walked toward the bridge. "Did Dr. Cunico think he was crazy?"

The skipper grunted. "I don't know what he thinks. I know what *I* think."

HALF an hour later, Dr. Cunico appeared on the bridge with a request. "I would like to use the ship-to-shore radio and charge it to the company. What about it?"

Captain Hardgrove shook his head. "The company would scream its damn head off. You know that."

Dr. Cunico looked at the captain steadily. "I got the fellow's stomach in one of those X-ray pictures," he said. "I think I had better use the ship-to-shore radio."

The captain grimaced. "You want to ask a better doctor than yourself what to do, eh? I always did think you were incompetent."

"I'm incompetent in this case," said Dr. Cunico, and there was a strangeness in his voice that did not miss the skipper.

"Go ahead and use the radio," Captain Hardgrove said narrowly. "Then report back here."

Dr. Cunico was gone a full hour. Then he came back.

"You been on the radio all this time?" the skipper demanded.

"Practically," admitted Dr. Cunico.

"The company will cough up its gallstones when it gets the bill," said Captain Hardgrove bitterly.

Dr. Cunico's face was serious. He said, "That X ray showed a metallic object in the man's stomach. I extracted it. This is what it was."

## THE PIRATE ISLE

He exhibited a wrist identification tag, a small one, designed to be fastened about a wrist with a slender chain.

The inscription read:

The Explorers League, New York

No. 341

"I called the Explorers League, ship-to-shore," Dr. Cunico explained. "The man from the crow's nest is named William Harper Littlejohn. He is a great archaeologist and geologist."

"That explains it," said Captain Hardgrove.

"Explains what?"

"Anyone with those two words for a business well, you would expect to find him in a crow's nest."

Dr. Cunico shook his head. "The man is known all over the world."

"He is, eh?"

"Furthermore," said Dr. Cunico, "he is a close friend and associate of a man named Clark Savage, Jr., better known as Doc Savage."

CAPTAIN HARDGROVE walked over and hung an oilskin over the cage of his parrot. The expression mixed startled interest, greed was gone from his face when he turned.

"So?" he asked.

"Haven't you ever heard of him?"

"Who? The fellow you mentioned Savage? No, don't recall the name."

"He is an amazing man in many ways, I've heard," said Dr. Cunico. "I happen to know that no living surgeon claims to be able to touch him in ability. I understand he is equally good in other lines. His avocation, if not his main business, is trouble. Strange trouble. In strange parts of the world."

Captain Hardgrove considered that. "Would you call this a strange part of the world, my good doctor?"

Dr. Cunico looked steadily at Captain Hardgrove. Cunico had never quite made out Captain Hardgrove. He did not like the man. He sometimes suspected that everything inside Captain Hardgrove, everything that did not show on the surface, was completely evil.

"I would call snowballs on the hottest day of summer a trifle strange," he said.

With no expression, Captain Hardgrove asked, "Did you try to get hold of this what is his name Savage?"

"I did. I failed. He was not in New York, where he has his headquarters."

## THE PIRATE ISLE

"Dr. Cunico."

"Yes?"

"Don't you think this matter was one that actually fell within the realm of duties of the master of this misbegotten tub?" asked Captain Hardgrove.

"Possibly."

Captain Hardgrove still had no expression.

"The correct answer is *certainly!*" he said. "Dr. Cunico, will you kindly remember that, in the future."

Dr. Cunico knew then that the skipper was as evil a man as he had thought he was. It came upon him as a mortal certainty, and it made him feel cold, standing there in the heat.

## Chapter II. THE SHAPING OF SOMETHING

THE radio operator was found dead that evening.

Captain Hardgrove was on the bridge. The ship's clock was striking two bells at the time nine o'clock. The skipper was deviling his parrot. Or rather, getting even with the parrot.

The parrot had just said, "Mabel loves Charlie, you dope!" Charlie was not the skipper's name. So by way of revenge, Hardgrove removed the rubber band from his sleeve buttons, began chewing up pieces of newspaper and popping the parrot. The parrot took it unpleasantly.

Mr. Weed came on to the bridge and said, "Sparks is not in his shack."

"Sparks" was the nickname given to most marine radio operators.

"Then send a man to hunt him!" snapped Captain Hardgrove.

"I did."

"Then don't bother me about it!" Captain Hardgrove drew a deliberate bead on the parrot, and the bird cursed in a deep-throated voice.

"I noticed," remarked Mr. Weed, "that you engaged some of the crew in conversation."

The skipper grunted. "Your eyes are too big."

"I heard the word 'snowballs' mentioned."

"Your ears are too big."

Mr. Weed went over and closed and locked the exit door from the bridge. Then he bit the end off a cigar and lighted it. Smoking while on duty on the bridge was against the rules.

## THE PIRATE ISLE

"I looked up this fellow from the crow's nest, William Harper Littlejohn, in 'Who's Who,'" Mr. Weed said. "He has a write-up as long as your arm. But this Clark Savage, Jr. has a write-up as long as your leg."

Captain Hardgrove missed with a paper wad.

Mr. Weed added coyly, "I noticed you also got the copy of 'Who's Who' from the library."

"Your mouth is too big, Mr. Weed."

Weed chuckled. "We shouldn't kid each other, you and I. We have sailed together too much."

"You forget yourself, Mr. Weed," Captain Hardgrove said in a low voice.

"No, Joe. I haven't forgotten the *Western Star* and that bank shipment from Shanghai "

"Shut up!"

"I was just "

"Shut up! Don't call me Joe! Joe isn't my name any more!" Captain Hardgrove sounded as if cloth were tearing deep inside his chest.

They were silent. The moon was a hot thing in a warm night sky. The *City of Tulsa* plowed through a sea that was utterly a black mirror for the platoons of stars overhead. From the aft lounge came the dance music of the vessel's small orchestra.

"I won't remember again," said Mr. Weed.

"O. K." Captain Hardgrove breathed inward deeply. "Don't!"

Mr. Weed rolled his cigar across his lips.

"By the way," he said, "you didn't by chance take a pair of binoculars and look at the crow's nest before the sun went down?"

The skipper whirled suddenly. "Why should I?"

"The paint is gone from the steel barrel of the crow's nest in many spots."

"So what? You were going to send a man aloft to paint it, weren't you?"

"Uh-huh. But I took another look, with a pair of good glasses. I think I know what made the paint peel off. "

"What?"

"Bullets," said Mr. Weed. His eyes were small and bright and cunning. "Bullets hitting the crow's nest removed the spots of paint. Small-caliber bullets, I would say. Probably fired from aft on the boat deck. Probably a .22-caliber rifle with a silencer. You can get fair results with a silencer on a .22 rifle."

Captain Hardgrove put down the newspaper, snapped the rubber band back on his cuff buttons. He placed the oilskin over the parrot's cage.

## THE PIRATE ISLE

He said, not hiding his hot interest, "You think someone was keeping William Harper Littlejohn up there by shooting at him with a rifle?"

Mr. Weed nodded. "It would take two of them. One to shoot with the rifle, the other to watch the hatch at the bottom of the hollow mast, so the fellow could not escape by that route."

"Do you have two in mind?"

"No."

"I suggest," said Captain Hardgrove slyly, "that it would be foresighted of us to find the pair."

Mr. Weed laughed. "As the fellow says, Joe, now you're cooking with gas."

An excited sailor came then and told Captain Hardgrove that the radio operator was lying dead on the boat deck. Captain Hardgrove and Mr. Weed went to see.

The radioman was young and boyish and innocent and he lay on his back, very clean and spic in his tropical whites, in a sticky pool that was turning black and which had drawn flies. There were flies on the *City of Tulsa*, although it was several hundred miles to the mainland.

Dr. Cunico stood up, wiping his hands and grimacing.

"Practically instant," he said. "The bullet came in low and hit him in the throat, ranged upward and backward and snapped the spinal cord. It stopped just under the skin at the hairline on the back of the neck."

Captain Hardgrove thought for a moment. "Get the bullet," he ordered.

"Here it is." Dr. Cunico extended a cupped palm. "I already removed it."

The bullet rolled, a tiny thing of death, back and forth in the skipper's hard mahogany palm.

Mr. Weed bent over to look, holding a flashlight.

".22 caliber!" he exclaimed.

Dr. Cunico dropped his soiled handkerchief into his bag. "I did not know you were a ballistics expert, Mr. Weed."

Mr. Weed looked for a moment as if he had accidentally taken hold of a red-hot iron. "I'm not," he said too hastily. He pointed at a patch of dark shadow under a davited lifeboat. "I'll bet," he said, "that the killer was lying there."

Captain Hardgrove took up the thread of the killer to cover Mr. Weed's rather too-uncanny deduction that it was a .22-caliber bullet.

"Yes, the radio operator goes this way to dinner," said the skipper. "I imagine the killer saw him go, then waited. When Sparks came back, the killer shot him. The bullet entered Sparks' throat and head on an upward course, as you can see."

Dr. Cunico put his instruments in his bag.

## THE PIRATE ISLE

"I wonder why?" he remarked thoughtfully.

Captain Hardgrove took off his uniform cap and stretched slowly and lazily. He was a man long of body and long of arm, a little gnarled by bad posture. A little like a rheumatic octopus, it occurred to Dr. Cunico.

"Dr Cunico," the skipper said, "did Sparks overhear your ship-to-shore conversations, this afternoon?"

"You mean the ones about the man from the crow's nest?"

"I do."

"Yes, he overheard. The radio operator always monitors the talk on this boat to keep the calls from fading out. Anyway, I used the operator's microphone."

By now, Dr. Cunico was looking strange. "You think that was the motive?" he added.

Captain Hardgrove placed his cap on his head, gave it a pat on top.

"That would be a ridiculous idea, don't you think?" he asked.

CAPTAIN HARDGROVE and Mr. Weed then took their departure and walked through the darkness toward the bridge. As they were walking in the blackness beside the forward funnel the skipper gave Mr. Weed a hard kick from behind. "You headless oaf!" he said.

"It slipped off my tongue about the bullet being a .22-caliber," gasped Mr. Weed, clutching his kicked part.

"Yes, and made Doc Cunico suspicious," snarled Captain Hardgrove. "Hereafter, Mr. Weed, count to at least two before you speak."

The skipper maintained a rankled silence, and Mr. Weed a dignifiedly pained one, until they reached the bridge. All was well there, and Captain Hardgrove gave a few orders concerning Sparks' body. Then he and Mr. Weed went to his cabin. The skipper closed and locked the door.

"I don't think we were wrong about this, Mr. Weed," he said grimly.

Mr. Weed frowned. "I'm sure of it myself. But I don't see what makes you so certain."

"What convinced *you*, Mr. Weed?"

"I know enough about this Doc Savage know by hearsay, not personally, mind you to be sure that anything in which he is involved is bound to be big. 'Big,' in his language, usually means that a tremendous fortune is involved, in one way or another. Frankly, tremendous fortunes interest me." The first officer leered. "One can always cut one's self a piece of cake, Joe."

Captain Hardgrove grunted. "You should be more practical, Mr. Weed."

"Yeah?"

## THE PIRATE ISLE

"You should never act on the words 'probably' and 'usually.' They are uncertain. Fooling with uncertainties, you often burn your fingers. Never buy pigs in pokes. Especially, never buy one with what might be your life for payment."

Mr. Weed walked over and poked the skipper's chest with a stiff forefinger. "Joe, give out," he said. "What do you know? What are you holding out?"

Captain Hardgrove chuckled. In a way that showed he knew the delay would irritate Mr. Weed, he walked over and got a cigar and killed time lighting it.

"I thought of not telling you this, Mr. Weed," he said. "But I guess I will. In Mbau, Viti Levu Island, a certain well-known character came aboard. You have heard of him. He is Faustin Archibald Montclan Herford, more often known as Lord London."

Mr. Weed's eyes flew wide. "Bless Bess! How many throats did he cut?"

"None. He never does it himself, anyway. He has a few dozen who do it for him. Artists, no less." Captain Hardgrove laughed without mirth. "Know what Lord London wanted? He wanted to search my ship, wanted to pay me a thousand to do it and two thousand if he found what he was hunting. What he was hunting was a man. He didn't find him. The man was long and skinny."

"Lord London was after our man in the crow's nest?"

"Yes."

"Did he say anything about snowballs? Lord London, I mean."

The skipper swore. "Don't mention snowballs to me again. It's getting monotonous."

"Yes, but puzzling," said Mr. Weed. "Did you hide the man in the crow's nest from Lord London?"

"With two thousand dollars at stake? Hell, no! You know me better than that."

Mr. Weed shook his head and clucked, "*Tsk-tsk!*" He said, "I think it was unbrotherly of you not to mention the thousand dollars of Lord London's to me."

"That was just a financial precaution. What entitled you to a cut, you chiseler? Forget it! Concentrate on this other thing this bird in hand."

Mr. Weed passed over the matter of Lord London's thousand. "You think there is something going on that might show us a profit?"

"If Lord London was willing to pay two thousand for this fellow William Harper Littlejohn, I'll bet my right arm that Littlejohn would be worth two million to us."

Mr. Weed nodded. "Yes, knowing Lord London, I would agree. What do we do?"

Captain Hardgrove became all business.

"Sparks was killed because he heard Dr. Cunico trying to contact Doc Savage."



## THE PIRATE ISLE

"Yes?"

"The next one to be killed will be Dr. Cunico. That's logic, isn't it?"

"Maybe."

"Therefore, we will watch Dr. Cunico and grab the killer when the attempt is made," finished Captain Hardgrove triumphantly.

"What," asked Mr. Weed, "about William Harper Littlejohn?"

"Oh, I'm going to transfer him to my cabin here. I'm going to do that right now."

CAPTAIN HARDGROVE left to bring the man from the crow's nest, William Harper Littlejohn, to the cabin. And Mr. Weed made a search of Captain Hardgrove's cabin.

It had occurred to Mr. Weed that Captain Hardgrove was the owner of a .22-caliber automatic pistol, with a long snout like a lead pencil. The pockmarks in the side of the crow's nest had been made by .22 bullets, and, likewise, Sparks had been slain by a .22. The combination interested Mr. Weed.

The motive behind what was happening was not clear to Mr. Weed. This did not worry him. He felt in his bones that it would become clear later on, and that it would be a good one. Probably a very rich one. Mr. Weed had a feeling for such things. So had Captain Hardgrove, alias Joe Gatter, alias Elmer Stone, alias John Doe and other aliases.

The thing that Mr. Weed wanted to know, now, was about the .22-caliber pistol, so he searched the skipper's quarters.

He got caught! The first he knew, he got another kick where he had received the other one. This was harder. It made him ache from stern to bowsprit.

"You snake in the grass!" said Captain Hardgrove. He picked up a chair.

Mr. Weed squared off. He shook himself, and there was a knife in his hand. "Wicked" was the word for the knife!

Captain Hardgrove became white and put down the chair. "Now, now, Weedsy. Put it away."

Mr. Weed had a queer look, with the whites of his eyes and the whites of his upper teeth showing. But the look went away. He shook himself again, and the knife was gone.

"Don't do that to me any more," he said. "I don't like it."

"I won't." Captain Hardgrove wet his lips with a shaking tongue.

"Where is that .22-caliber pistol of yours?" asked Mr. Weed.

"I thought you would wonder about that," the skipper muttered. "I traded it to a Jap in Tahiti, two months ago."

Mr. Weed's left eye narrowed. "You honestly didn't kill Sparks or shoot at the crow's nest?"

## THE PIRATE ISLE

"I absolutely and positively did not!" said Captain Hardgrove with sincerity from the bottoms of his boots, and the knowledge of what that knife of Mr. Weed's could do.

"Get the man from the crow's nest," ordered Mr. Weed, "and bring him here."

"All right."

"By the way, did Lord London happen to stay aboard our ship? Is he aboard now?"

"No," said Captain Hardgrove. "For which we can be very thankful."

"Amen," agreed Mr. Weed.

### Chapter III. THE BRONZE MAN

THE *City of Tulsa* carried two radio operators, complying with the maritime law for ships of her size. The man who had been killed his name was Frederick Atlan was one, and the junior operator was a young fellow named Victor Offitt.

Victor Offitt disappeared the next night!

He disappeared. That described it, and there was no other word for it. He went to deliver a message about some stock to a stock broker, who was one of the passengers, and never reached there with the message. He never returned to his cabin.

It was a logical in fact, the only logical conclusion that he had gone overboard at sea.

That left the *City of Tulsa* without a radio man. Captain Hardgrove did not like it.

"Do you suppose," he asked Mr. Weed, "that both operators knew about Dr. Cunico's using the radio and identifying the man in the crow's nest as the Doc Savage aid, William Harper Littlejohn?"

"Might be," said Mr. Weed. Then he pointed out: "But no one has tried to kill Dr. Cunico."

The skipper cursed from the heart. "Do you suppose we could have wrongly guessed the motive for the radio man's murder?"

"Maybe. Two murders, now."

"Could Dr. Cunico be a dastardly villain, do you think? He isn't the type. Or is he?"

"Villains," said Mr. Weed, "do not wear black suits at least, not always."

"Do you know anything about radio, Mr. Weed?"

"Some. Once I built a regenerative receiver with a vacuum tube and a variometer and some stuff."

"Then you're elected," said the skipper. "I've canvassed the crew and had the chief steward make an

## THE PIRATE ISLE

announcement in the movie in the main lounge last night. It seems there are no other radio operators aboard."

Mr. Weed shrugged. "Sure, I'll try turning operator."

HE did not do so well. The *City of Tulsa's* radio apparatus was a little different from a 1921–vintage regenerative receiver made with a variometer. Mr. Weed played with knobs and dials. He made tubes light up and caused meter needles to jitter. Eventually, he got hold of a conductor bar and began to yell bloody murder. They got a dry stick and knocked him loose from the hot bar, only partially electrocuted. After that, Mr. Weed refused to have anything to do with the radio.

The *City of Tulsa* went ahead without a radio.

"We don't need it anyway," said Captain Hardgrove. "I can use a sextant, chronometer and compass and hit a tack in the middle of the Golden Gate."

Meantime, they got no information out of William Harper Littlejohn. The man recovered consciousness, but his conversation was gibberish of the first order.

"Mr. Littlejohn," said Captain Hardgrove, trying to open a conversation. "Your name is Mr. Littlejohn, is it not? You are an associate of Doc Savage?"

"Little fishes play in lard barrels," said Mr. Littlejohn. "Cedric and Joe and Little Mary. Little Mary has steel rails and a nice red dog with wings."

He finished that up with a screaming laugh that was really something.

"Nuts, huh?" said the skipper to Dr. Cunico.

"I'm no neurologist."

"What's that?"

"One who can tell about such things."

Captain Hardgrove snorted. "He's utsnay, brother. He's dizzier than a whirlwind. Watch him, or he'll eat a chair leg for breakfast."

Dr. Cunico kept his eyes down, while lighting a cigarette. "Ever figure out the snowballs, captain?"

"Very funny, doctor, very funny," said the skipper, not smiling.

"Not," said Dr. Cunico, "as funny as our suddenly being without radio operators. Or had you thought?"

"I've been thinking a hell of a lot," said Captain Hardgrove with sincerity. "It's getting me goose pimples."

"It's getting me the same thing," said Dr. Cunico abruptly. He wheeled and left.

Captain Hardgrove stood there motionless for some ten minutes, by which time he had concluded that Dr. Cunico might be a clever fellow after all. Probably he Captain Hardgrove had made a mistake in jumping to

## THE PIRATE ISLE

the conclusion that the radio men had been killed because they knew William Harper Littlejohn's identity.

There could just possibly be another and more unpleasant reason for the two murders.

ANOTHER thing occurred to worry Captain Hargrove. His navigation. He shot the sun at high noon the next day. He did quite a bit of jaw rubbing and head scratching over his figures.

"Must be something wrong with the damned chronometer," he decided.

"Why?" asked Mr. Weed.

"The blasted boat isn't running backward, is it? Then the chronometer has to be off. This shot I just took shows the ship hundreds of miles south and west of where she should be."

Mr. Weed laughed heartily. "You made a mistake. Maybe the two murders have distracted you."

Mr. Weed laughed again, very heartily, at the idea that murders could distract Captain Hardgrove. He knew about how much a murder would concern Hardgrove.

That afternoon it was very foggy, and that night was as dark as a bat's nightmare. Captain Hardgrove remained on the bridge for a while, then wandered to his cabin to ask William Harper Littlejohn questions. He knew he would not get sensible answers.

Shortly after the skipper tramped off the bridge, a gentleman in tropical evening dress it was a hot night walked on to the bridge. The gentleman was one of the passengers. He had a large expanse of stiff white shirt front. In fact, in the poor light, he seemed composed mostly of shirt front.

"Getting away with it?" he asked.

The sailor at the wheel, a furtive fellow, said, "Think so."

The gentleman walked over to the compass binnacle. He studied the dial, smiled and went to a drawer in the chart desk nearby. He moved a permanent magnet in the drawer a few inches.

"That's better," he said.

The sailor at the wheel pulled in a long breath that, toward the end, guttered a little with fright.

"What if the old man gets wise?" he asked.

"Hardgrove? He won't."

"He's got a telltale compass in his cabin. Suppose he looks at it."

"We have that pulled off with a magnet, too."

"Just the same, his eyes almost fell out when he ran up his noon shot of the sun. He's no dope. He won't stay in the bushes long on this thing."

## THE PIRATE ISLE

"Hell, we got the gyro compass doctored, too," said the man in evening dress. "You leave this to people with brains, and you will wind up pretty."

"That's what I'm afraid of," muttered the sailor. "Pretty in a pine box."

The man in evening dress showed him a black gun, then put the weapon away. He did not make any remarks. He just walked away afterward. But the sailor at the wheel understood and was not cheered.

IT was daylight early the following morning. About four thirty. The fog was still there, but thinner. Visibility was about three miles toward the horizon, but not as much overhead. The fog was thicker above.

The plane appeared about six o'clock.

It was a big plane, impressive. It came down out of the sky in a steep dive. There is something about a big plane slanting down in the sky straight at you that makes your hair seem to stand on end. This one also had a siren, a big siren that had everyone on the ship everyone who was dressed that early hour piling out on deck with eyes bugging.

Captain Hardgrove sprinted from his cabin, fell over his shoes and hung his mouth open at the sky.

The plane pulled out of its dive, arched upward, came around in what was almost a wingover and dropped down again.

This time an object dropped from the plane when it was scraping the mast of the *City of Tulsa*. The object was obviously a message. A sailor pounced on it.

"Bring that here!" yelled Captain Hardgrove.

The message was printed in characters of meticulous perfection, as if a machine had made them:

Heave to and put over a boat. We wish to come aboard.

Doc Savage

Captain Hardgrove was still cursing when Mr. Weed joined him. "What goes on?" demanded the first officer.

The skipper showed him the note from the plane. "What do you know about that? Damn that Dr. Cunico! Damn him up the creek, anyhow!"

"News of Dr. Cunico's ship-to-shore message about William Harper Littlejohn reached Doc Savage," guessed Mr. Weed. "Now, Savage has flown out here to investigate."

"Yes," said Captain Hardgrove. "I do hope Dr. Cunico dies from the worms or something."

Mr. Weed smiled thinly. "It proves one thing. It proves this affair is distinctly worth attention. Otherwise, Doc Savage would not rush out here to the middle of the Pacific in a plane."

Captain Hardgrove was enraged.

## THE PIRATE ISLE

"Fine!" he snarled. "Now all we have to do is lick Doc Savage, if we want a piece of this cake."

"Seems likely."

"Savage!" The skipper cursed. "Might as well declared war on an earthquake."

"I thought," said Mr. Weed, "that you had never heard of Doc Savage."

Captain Hardgrove realized he was in his underwear shorts. He went back in his cabin, took his bathrobe off the parrot's cage and put it on.

"I was kidding when I said that," he growled. "I've heard about Savage. I've also seen him. I had a couple of friends who went up against him."

"What happened to them?" Mr. Weed asked curiously.

"Search me. Nobody ever heard of them again."

Mr. Weed frowned. "But I understood that Savage had never killed a man."

Captain Hardgrove swore. "All I know is that they were never heard from again."

The parrot, in a simpering female voice, said, "Of course Mabel loves you, Freddie." Captain Hardgrove grabbed parrot and cage and threw them under the bunk, to the squawking objections of the bird. He said bitterly, "Take my advice and leave a parrot in home port with your wife some time. You hear what that so-and-so bird just said? There was a Freddie, too. So far there's been a Bill, a Maurice, two Johns and a Charlie. And now, Freddie."

Mr. Weed was listening to the drone of the airplane circling overhead.

"The plane found us," he said, "so we're not off our course. You must have made a mistake in shooting the sun yesterday. We're on our course, or the plane couldn't have located us."

"Sure, we're on our course," snapped Captain Hardgrove.

## Chapter IV. PARACHUTE SNIPERS

DOC SAVAGE said, "That ship is hundreds of miles off her course. She is heading back for the South Seas, when she is supposed to be bound for San Francisco."

His voice, powered with timber and quality, carried over the mutter of the plane engine.

One of the two men in the plane with him said, "Holy cow! It's about time they were heaving to, so we can get aboard."

He had big fists, tremendous fists, and a face that looked incredibly sad at the moment because he actually felt rather pleased with what was happening. He liked excitement.

## THE PIRATE ISLE

The remaining man in the plane was fooling with the radio apparatus. He used the radio receiver as a master uses a violin, which was understandable because he was Major Thomas J. "Long Tom" Roberts, about as near an electrical wizard as any man had yet come to be.

He was using the sensitive radio direction finder.

"The radio transmitter of that steamship," he said, "has been in continuous operation for a long time. The dials are not set properly. It sounds as if someone who did not know anything about it had tinkered with the set. Then, for some reason or other, he let it alone, switch on, on the air."

Somehow, just the sound of the transmitter had managed to tell him all that.

The big-fisted man said, "Holy cow!" again, and scowled down through the plane window. The ship below had not slackened speed.

"They don't want us," he added.

The electrical expert, Long Tom Roberts, said, "Maybe they didn't get that note. Maybe they don't understand that we want them to stop."

The man with the fists snorted. "I saw them pick up the note."

Doc Savage threw a switch which turned control over to an automatic pilot. He adjusted the piloting device so that it carried the plane in slow circles. Then he moved out of the cockpit.

Doc Savage was a big man. How remarkably large, and how amazingly muscled, was apparent when he came back into the cabin.

"Two of us will go down with parachutes," he said.

He made the announcement as quietly as he would have mentioned stepping out of a concert at intermission for cocktails. Probably more casually, because he did not drink.

Long Tom Roberts scowled at the proprietor of the fists. "Renny, it's your job to stick with the plane."

Renny shook his head. "Brother, you are blowing into the wrong jug, now. You're the one who stays."

They stared at each other for a while. Possibly there was excitement down below. They had reason to believe so. Neither one cared to take a chance of missing it. They liked excitement and adventure. The liking probably was the strongest thing that kept them tied to Doc Savage and to their strange, and frequently thankless, task of righting wrongs and punishing evildoers.

They were not Doc least of all crusading fanatics who thought their mission was to make over the world. They were entirely sane, fully adult. They liked the thing they were doing. They had equipped themselves for it. It gave them what they wanted out of life. So they did it with zest and often in unexpected ways.

Renny and Long Tom kept staring at each other.

Finally Long Tom grumbled, "All right, you chiseler, I'll give you a whack at it. I'll make a word with you to see who goes."

## THE PIRATE ISLE

(In playing word games, the object is for each player to add a letter to preceding letters without completing a word. If a player adds a letter making a word, he loses the game. Also, if a player disbelieves that the person preceding him had no actual word in mind when adding a letter, he may challenge him. If the player so challenged proves an actual word can be formed with the letters used, the challenger loses the game.)

"All right," Renny rumbled. "Y."

"Y-U," Long Tom said.

"Y-U-Z," said Renny.

Long Tom opened his mouth, closed it, scowled. "Look here, you big-fisted lug, Y-U-Z is not part of a word."

"You lose," said Renny promptly. "The word is yuzluk. It is a Turkish coin worth two and a half piasters."

Still grinning, Renny strapped on a parachute.

LONG TOM ROBERTS made a disgruntled job of flying the plane and looking through a pocket dictionary to see if there was such a word as yuzluk.

When the position of the plane was right, Doc Savage went out through the sliding cabin door. He did not hurry about opening his parachute, but studied his fall, made sure he was going to land on the deck of the *City of Tulsa*.

He got hold of the steel bail of the ripcord, gave the hard little cable a firm yank. The silk came out of its folds with a cough, and a yank that set the wide web straps firmly across his body. He had hold of the shrouds immediately, spilling air to guide the mushroom.

He came down in a tennis court, and the wind immediately flattened the 'chute fabric against the high woven-steel mesh that inclosed the court. He had picked the spot deliberately for that reason. A strong ocean wind could easily drag a man attached to a parachute overboard.

It was a 'chute harness of his own design, with one buckle for fast operation. He freed himself, looked up.

Renny was floating downward. Renny was supposed to control his parachute and also head for the tennis court. There had been no verbal agreement above, but in the past they had discussed procedure such as this and had worked out a definite method. The method was to land on a tennis court when there was one on a ship. Both Doc Savage and Renny had, in fact, taught an officers' class in military parachuting technique, in which the tennis-court procedure had been emphasized. Renny would not have overlooked it at this point.

But Renny was not going to land on the tennis court.

He did not even land on the ship! He came down something like fifty feet off the lee rail. There was a shooting splash, and he sank from sight.

His parachute, full of wind, hauled him up again, then dragged him along the surface. The 'chute rolled slowly as the wind worried it, then it gradually collapsed. Renny sank again. He did not seem to be trying to help himself.



## THE PIRATE ISLE

Doc Savage hit the gate of the tennis court, knocked it open, went on toward the bridge. He arrived on the bridge with all the peace of a tornado looking for a haystack.

He slammed the engine-room telegraph over to stop and added full speed astern to hasten the operation.

"Here!" yelled a blocky man. "What's the idea?"

"Captain?" Doc demanded.

"Sure. What "

Doc got him by the arm. "Put a small boat over the side. Quick!"

Captain Hardgrove slowly turned pale and clenched his teeth. He was being hurt. The hand on his arm had a grip like an ironworking machine. Finally he moaned, "Ouch!"

Doc seemed to realize he had been crushing the man's arm. "Sorry," he said. "Get a boat in the water."

Captain Hardgrove said, "Yes, of course. Immediately."

Which surprised Captain Hardgrove. He was not a man easily told what to do. He did not stampede readily. But there was something in this remarkably big bronze man's voice that was completely formidable.

Also, he had no doubts about who this bronze man was.

CAPTAIN HARDGROVE bellowed orders to get a boat into the water. He ran to personally see that the job was done without delay. He could not have explained why he did that.

The skipper did recover his control while the boat was being swung out. He stepped back to wonder at himself, at his being ordered around. It happened that his move brought him beside Mr. Weed.

"That Doc Savage?" whispered Mr. Weed.

"Nothing less," said the skipper out of the corner of his mouth.

"All lion and a yard wide, isn't he?" whispered Mr. Weed.

Doc Savage then astonished and again unnerved Captain Hardgrove by fastening that grip on his arm again.

"You will go with me in the small boat," Doc Savage said.

The skipper got in the boat. Ten minutes ago, nobody could have told him he would be told to get in a small boat to pick up a man in the sea and do it. But he did it. For some reason or other, he was very glad to do so.

The boat went swaying downward to the tune of whining fall blocks and was suddenly perching on a wave. The sailors dug in oars, and they got clear of the *City of Tulsa's* hull before they were smashed against it. The waves were not high, for the Pacific is alleged by sailors to be one of the most placid of seas, but the swell seemed unexpectedly large after the stable deck above.

## THE PIRATE ISLE

"Pull!" Doc Savage said. "Bend those oars!"

The result he got out of the sailors was remarkable, considering that he did not point a gun at them to get action, or even yell and wave his arms. There was something about his voice that made men obey it. Captain Hardgrove was impressed. He knew that kind of power in a voice. He had a little of it himself and wished he had more. It was the thing that made a man a leader.

They came up to the sodden folds of the parachute in which Renny Renwick had descended, not to the ship, but into the sea. Renny was floating, now. He wore an automatic life jacket. When it got wet, a solidified chemical became gaseous, filling a float constructed in the jacket. This was keeping him afloat. A wave lifted him high above the boat, and they could see that he was unconscious, for his arms and his head were like loose attachments to his body.

Doc said, "Put her into the wind and backwater, hard to starboard."

He reached over then and hauled Renny half over the rail, unsnapped the parachute harness and pulled him the rest of the way. He bent over the unconscious man. "Renny!" he said, a timber of anxiety in his voice. "Renny, what went wrong?"

Renny did not answer. After a moment, a red patch spread on his hair and drops fell and crimsoned the spray-wet thwart of the boat. Doc searched quickly in Renny's hair.

Captain Hardgrove's eyes flew wide, and he leaned forward.

"Bullet?" he asked.

Doc nodded. "Get us back to the ship."

They returned to the *City of Tulsa* with Captain Hardgrove sitting tense in the stern. He realized his arm and leg muscles, and the muscles across his stomach, were tight. He wondered if he was scared. Probably he was. He had been afraid before, but fear was no barrier to him.

Certainly, the presence of this giant bronze man, this Doc Savage, was unnerving him, Captain Hardgrove decided. There was something about the bronze man. Being around him was something like being around a very vital lion, to use a rather ridiculous, but somehow apt, comparison.

DOC SAVAGE worked over Renny Renwick in Dr. Cunico's bat's nest of a hospital room. Captain Hardgrove stood by the door, beside Mr. Weed, and watched Renny Renwick's fists. He was fascinated by the size of the fists.

"Psst!"

said Mr. Weed softly. "Joe, who shot the fellow?"

"How do I know!" whispered the skipper furiously.

Doc Savage was working on Renny's head. Finally, he straightened and turned. "The bullet," the bronze man said, "passed through the fleshy part of his upper arm. It then hit his head, inflicted shock and some concussion, was deflected by the bone and lodged in the scalp above the left temple."

## THE PIRATE ISLE

"He is going to live?" asked Captain Hardgrove.

"Yes. Barring complications, he will be as good as ever in a few hours or sooner."

Captain Hardgrove watched with widening eyes as the bronze man put a pellet of lead on a white tray. It was the bullet.

".22 caliber," Doc Savage said.

Mr. Weed whispered, "Now we know who shot him!"

Doc Savage buttoned his coat. His voice had a kind of seriousness, a new kind, that Captain Hardgrove did not like. "Captain," said the bronze man, "why did you fail to heave to when you got the note we dropped from the plane?"

Captain Hardgrove had thought up an answer for that one.

"There wasn't a word of explanation in that note," he said. "Naturally, we are not going to stop on the whim of any Tom, Dick or Harry who happens to come along."

"That was your reason for not stopping?"

"Certainly," said the skipper. "And by the way, you might tell me just why you are carrying on this fantastic thing of boarding my ship by parachute."

Doc Savage turned to Dr. Cunico. "I believe I heard you called Dr. Cunico."

"Right."

"You are the Dr. Cunico who telephoned my New York headquarters concerning a man named William Harper Littlejohn?" asked Doc Savage.

"Yes."

Doc said, "You left word to call back. But it has been impossible to reach this ship by radio."

Captain Hardgrove put in, "The radio has been out of order."

Doc shook his head. "The radio," he corrected, "has been on the air continuously with a carrier wave for more than two days."

"You don't say!" exploded Captain Hardgrove. He scowled at Mr. Weed. "Mr. Weed, in tinkering with the set, you must have left the transmitter switched on."

Mr. Weed grunted. "I got the hell shocked out of me fooling with it. I wouldn't know."

"Where are your radio operators?" Doc asked.

Dr. Cunico answered that maliciously.

## THE PIRATE ISLE

"Dead from a .22 bullet, one of them," he said. "The other just disappeared without the formality of being shot."

Doc Savage wheeled on Captain Hardgrove. "Have you an explanation for that?"

The skipper's face was as fixed as that of a stone man. "I wish I did have," he said. "It worried me. But nothing else out of the way has happened on this ship, so I can not explain it. Possibly the operators had something between themselves, and one made away with the other, then became remorseful and took his own life."

"You say," Doc Savage said, "that nothing else out of the way has happened to your ship?"

"That's right."

There was briefly audible in the room a small trilling noise. It was a strange sound. It had an exotic quality, vague, indefinable. The sound as a whole was hard to pin down definitely as even being a sound. It was gone in a moment. It was the sound of Doc Savage, the thing he did unconsciously when surprised.

Without any more show of astonishment, Doc Savage whipped back to the subject of Johnny Littlejohn, asking for the circumstances which had caused Dr. Cunico to telephone New York about him.

"It was the way he was found and his condition," said Dr. Cunico. "He was found in the crow's nest, almost naked, wearing only a piece of bark cloth, throwing snowballs at members of the crew who had started up the mast."

Any astonishment Doc Savage felt at this did not show on his face.

"What are the explanations for that rather unusual combination?" he asked.

Dr. Cunico shrugged. "I wouldn't know."

Captain Hardgrove snapped, "It is very simple. The man Littlejohn is insane."

Dr. Cunico looked narrowly at the skipper. "On the contrary, he is quite sane. He is faking insanity."

Captain Hardgrove turned purple with rage. "Why didn't you tell me that?"

"It slipped my mind," said Dr. Cunico blandly.

Captain Hardgrove was confused. He was being outsmarted on all sides, or he had that feeling. He saw now that Dr. Cunico suspected something. He hadn't believed that of the doctor. He had underestimated the fellow, something he was disgusted with himself for doing.

Almost plaintively, Captain Hardgrove turned to Doc Savage and asked, "What is going on? What has happened that caused you to fly out here in the Pacific to board my ship when you heard William Harper Littlejohn is aboard?"

"Johnny Littlejohn," Doc Savage said, "is a close associate of mine."

"Oh, I understand that," said the skipper. "You have five associates, as you call them. I've heard all about you from Mr. Weed, here. He is a great admirer of yours. But what I want to know is what is behind this mystery."

## THE PIRATE ISLE

Doc Savage obviously considered the point and decided to speak the truth.

"Johnny Littlejohn," said the bronze man, "vanished mysteriously several weeks ago. He was on an important mission, which he did not complete. The fact that he did not appear at his destination convinced us that something drastic had happened to him."

Captain Hardgrove did some considering himself.

"Then you don't understand it, either?" he muttered.

"One or two points seem a bit puzzling," Doc Savage admitted. "The snowballs, for instance."

"Don't mention snowballs to me!" The skipper grimaced. "It all might make sense, except the snowballs."

Doc Savage's eyes were like pools of flake gold with tiny excited lights in the depths of them.

"Does the fact that your ship is some hundreds of miles off its course make sense to you, too?" he asked.

"What? What did you say?" Captain Hardgrove stood stiffly, looking as if he had lost power of speech, hearing and comprehension. Then he wheeled and dashed blindly out of the cabin.

## Chapter V. DISTRESSED LADY

RENNY RENWICK felt gingerly of his bandaged head after he sat up on the hospital bed.

"Holy cow!" he said. "The captain sure cleared out of here in a hurry after you told him his ship was off course. He didn't seem to know it."

Doc said dryly, "You were conscious during our conversation?"

"During part of it," Renny admitted. "What goes on, do you suppose? What has old Johnny got himself in this time?"

Doc Savage turned. "Dr. Cunico, can you give us any idea along that line?"

Dr. Cunico looked uncomfortable. Cunico had shown from the beginning that he was much impressed by Doc Savage, and the amount of his awe was making him stiff, inclined to be too afraid of making a mistake.

"From the beginning, I placed myself in an uncomfortable position in this thing," he said. "Purely on a hunch, I made that radio-telephone call about Mr. Littlejohn." He grimaced. "The skipper suggested I had overstepped my authority on that."

"Has Johnny Littlejohn talked to you?"

"No. He seemed afraid of me, too."

"Fear?" Doc Savage's face seemed to become a little bleak. "He is afraid?"

## THE PIRATE ISLE

"I think so. I'm sure of it."

Big-fisted Renny Renwick made a whistling mouth but no whistle. He was surprised. The idea of Johnny Littlejohn being scared would surprise anyone who knew Johnny. Six tons of dynamite and a bonfire would not scare Johnny. If he was frightened, now, there was evidently something to be frightened about.

"I don't get a picture of Johnny being afraid," Renny said, "any more than I get one of Captain Hardgrove sporting a set of wings and halo."

Dr. Cunico's eyes narrowed. "The skipper," he said, "is more or less an enigma to me."

"Enigma," said Renny, "being a bottle of what looks like sweet perfume, but which might be skunk-stink?"

"Something like that."

Doc Savage asked, "Dr. Cunico, can you shed any light on this?"

The medico shook his head. "I am afraid not, and I am very sorry I can't." He scratched his head wryly. "Is this ship really so far off its course?"

"Yes. What about the radio operators?"

"One was shot with a .22-caliber bullet. The other came up missing. That is what you've already been told, and I can't add to it."

"The radio operator was shot with a .22?"

"Yes."

"That," Doc said, "is evidently what Mr. Weed meant when he told the skipper, 'Now we know who shot him!' Meaning Renny, when he spoke."

Dr. Cunico's jaw fell. "Mr. Weed said that?"

"Yes. I saw him quite distinctly."

"Saw him?"

"Lip reading," the bronze man explained absently. "Mr. Weed evidently meant that the person who shot Renny was the same one who had shot the radio operator."

Dr. Cunico snapped his fingers excitedly. "I almost forgot something. There are bullet marks on the crow's nest where Mr. Littlejohn was found. They are small, evidently made by .22-caliber bullets. I think the skipper and Mr. Weed know this, also. They are not aware I happened to notice it."

Doc Savage said quietly, "You might forget to mention that detail to anyone else, Dr. Cunico."

The ship's doctor nodded. "I can see your object. An old proverb covers the point, I believe. One about a roaring tiger always being a hungry tiger. That the gist?"

## THE PIRATE ISLE

"That is the gist," Doc admitted. "Suppose you take us to Johnny Littlejohn. He should be able to explain the mystery."

IN a corridor aft of the bridge, they came upon Captain Hardgrove sitting on the floor with his back against a wall. His head was tipped forward, his legs spread apart and his hands were hanging down and resting, one palm up and the other palm down, on the floor between his knees.

It was still in the corridor except for the small sounds of the ship's engine, and the louder conversation of passengers who were puzzled and excited by the presence of the big plane, the dropping of two parachutists, and the consequent hurried putting overside of a boat to pick up one of the parachutists. The sound of the plane itself was, for the moment, not audible, the craft being on a long leg downwind so that the fresh breeze was keeping away its exhaust and propeller noises.

Dr. Cunico spoke to the sitting skipper.

"Captain Hardgrove!" he said. "Why are you sitting there?"

One of the skipper's hands, the right one which was palm up, slowly clenched and turned over, but he gave no other response.

"He's been hurt!" shouted Cunico. He dropped beside the captain of the *City of Tulsa*. He made a brief examination, with Captain Hardgrove pushing weakly at his hands. "Not heart trouble," he said.

The skipper made a few mumbling noises, then got his words organized.

".22 caliber," he said. "But big."

"What's that?" demanded Cunico.

"The pistol he hit me with," said the skipper, more coherently. "The damn thing is as big as an army automatic. But from the bore, it was .22 caliber. He hit me twice. Ouch! My head!"

"You were attacked?"

Captain Hardgrove essayed to get to his feet, but did not quite manage it. "That is one word for what happened," he said. "I met them in the hall here. There were two men. One had the gun. The other just had a mean look."

He stared at them for a moment.

"Both of them," he finished, "had Johnny Littlejohn."

Dr. Cunico wore a dazed expression. "You mean, someone was walking with Littlejohn?"

"Littlejohn wasn't walking," Captain Hardgrove said grimly. "I don't know whether he was even in walking condition. They were dragging him."

Doc Savage and Renny Renwick made no comment, although Dr. Cunico's face was blank.

## THE PIRATE ISLE

Captain Hardgrove tried again and this time made it to his feet. He scowled at Doc Savage. "They've got Littlejohn!" he snapped. "Doesn't that mean anything to you? You came all the way from New York to find him, didn't you? Well, they've got him! Two men!"

Renny Renwick's long, sober face darkened. The fact that something had happened to Johnny Littlejohn meant plenty to them. He disliked being reminded that they should show more emotion. Emotion did not help a thing like this.

Doc Savage said, "Johnny Littlejohn has one very bitter enemy. A man with a rather reddish complexion and very noticeably pointed ears. I wonder if " He trailed off.

Captain Hardgrove stared. He snapped a finger weakly. "That's him!" he exploded. "That's the guy who had the gun the one who swallowed me!"

"Good," Doc Savage said. "That gives us some idea of who to look for."

CAPTAIN HARDGROVE went forward to see why his ship happened to be several hundred miles from where he had supposed it was, and Doc Savage and Renny Renwick turned back toward the passenger cabins with the announced intention of hunting for Johnny Littlejohn. Captain Hardgrove called over his shoulder that he would join them with a searching party as soon as possible. He advised them to be careful, because the red-complexioned man with the pointed ears had looked dangerous.

Doc and Renny got out of the captain's earshot, and Renny stopped.

"That," said Renny, "is tolerably strange. About as queer as the Grand Canyon turning itself inside out. It's funny I never heard of this red-complexioned man with the pointed ears."

"You have heard a great deal of him," Doc said.

"Huh? I have?"

"Almost every day."

"Yeah?"

Doc Savage said, "His name is Deil, Belial, Lucifer, Satan. Better known as 'the devil.'"

"I don't " Renny's long gloomy face cracked in a slight grin. "The devil does have a red complexion and pointed ears, at that."

"And he would be an enemy of Johnny Littlejohn's, do you not think?" Doc asked dryly. "Johnny is the enemy of all evil. He has never said so in as many words, but his actions have shown it."

Renny took a deep breath.

"What," he demanded, "was the idea of that gag?"

"A passing whim," said Doc Savage, "to test Captain Hardgrove's story that two men had seized Littlejohn."



## THE PIRATE ISLE

Renny's big fists blocked. "Holy cow! The skipper was lying. You think maybe *he* got away with Johnny?"

"The man would not hit himself on the head that hard," Doc pointed out. He added, "Suppose you take the port side of this deck. I will take the starboard. Watch the bridge. If Captain Hardgrove leaves it, let me know."

Renny nodded. "He might have lied to save somebody for himself, at that."

CAPTAIN HARDGROVE and Mr. Weed dragged a ten-inch magnetic compass out on the boat deck, well away from any adjacent metal, and checked its direction. What they saw gave them narrow eyes and tight mouths.

They held a short conference.

Doc Savage watched them with a pair of fairly strong binoculars. Renny asked him, "What they say? You able to see their lips?"

"Something about letting the ship stay off her course so as not to dump the cat out of the sack," Doc told him. "The compasses have been skillfully deflected for some time. The skipper and Mr. Weed do not want to alarm whoever did that."

Renny said, "It looks as if they're headed somewhere."

The skipper and Mr. Weed went down the deck. Obviously, they were two men with a purpose. They practically ran. They went to the part of the ship allotted to cabins of the best class.

Mr. Weed knocked on a cabin door.

Captain Hardgrove flattened against the wall a few feet from the door. He had located himself so that whoever opened the door might not notice him.

A voice inside the cabin asked who it was. Mr. Weed told her it was the steward. The voice told him to come back later. Mr. Weed told her it was the steward with a message from the captain.

A girl opened the cabin door. Mr. Weed showed her a revolver and a grim face and went in. He went in fast, left the door open, and was gone a minute or two.

After Mr. Weed had evidently searched the girl's cabin, he came back and cursed Captain Hardgrove, who had not entered. "Suppose I had been ambushed in here?" Mr. Weed snarled. "You didn't follow me in to help."

"A touch of my usual good judgment," Captain Hardgrove told him cold-bloodedly.

The girl was backed against a bulkhead. She was a tall girl with tanned skin, and a very pretty girl indeed to look that attractive while so scared. She was well molded in a tweed for deck wear, a dress that looked expensive.

"Not a bleat out of you, sister," Mr. Weed told her.

"On the contrary," said Captain Hardgrove, "a bleat is what we want. Several of them."

## THE PIRATE ISLE

The girl stared at them wordlessly.

"Bleat," ordered the skipper, "what this is about. Bleat it right out. Where does Lord London hook into it. What is behind the thing. How much money is at stake?"

The girl remained without words.

Captain Hardgrove gestured impatiently. "Come, come, loosen that tongue. You are indeed a pretty bird, but we are not snakes." His grin had no humor. "Although snakes we may become, if you do not start that bleating."

Mr. Weed snorted. He did not like the way the skipper was approaching this. The girl was too pretty. He snorted again. Then, without any more snorting, he sank down on his knees, wearing a completely blank and peaceful expression.

Mr. Weed was behind Captain Hardgrove, and the skipper saw the girl's round-eyed look of astonishment but did not get its meaning. He told her, "Spill it, bright-eyes."

"Spill what?" asked the girl.

"Oh, now, now no innocence, please," said Captain Hardgrove. "I know who bopped me. It was you."

"I?"

"Yeah, you, ladybird. You swallowed me with a .22-caliber pistol when I caught you taking William Harper Littlejohn out of my cabin."

Having made this statement, Captain Hardgrove closed his eyes, sighed deeply and fell down. He fell beginning with his knees, which buckled; then he bent at the hips and spine and elbows, everywhere completely loose. He lay still. Mr. Weed now was also lying still.

The girl dashed out of the cabin.

THE girl left the cabin a trifle more quickly than Renny Renwick had expected, with the result that Renny got a black eye. The doorknob gave him the black eye, along with a few stars, which were more temporary.

Renny was not keyholing. It was just a freak of the moment that the doorknob hit him in the eye. He was engaged in carefully pouring more anaesthetic gas under the bottom of the door, using a paper which he had slanted, so that the liquid gas would shoot under the door before it vaporized. He was holding his breath. As long as he held his breath, the gas would not affect him. The gas was one of Doc Savage's numerous inventions, and the group had been using it for a long time.

The situation was further complicated when Renny, surprised at being batted in the eye, took in a gulp of air. He had been holding his breath because there was gas in the air. Shortly, he fell over on his side, asleep from the stuff.

The girl took four or five long running strides; then the gas got her. It affected different people variously, and it had not stricken her at once. She went down loosely and rolled over once.

## THE PIRATE ISLE

Doc Savage turned and walked away from the forms of Renny and the girl. The corridor was full of gas, and he needed air; so he went rapidly, noticed a cabin door standing open, and entered. The cabin was unoccupied, apparently, and used for the storage of linens, stewards' trays and odds and ends. Doc put his head out of the porthole and waited for the gas to dissipate. This did not require long. It was the nature of the stuff to become impotent after about two minutes.

Doc went back and got Renny and the girl. He put them in the empty cabin, on the floor in a corner, and tossed a sheet over them so that they looked somewhat like a pile of linen that had been dumped there. He left them and went to the girl's cabin again.

Mr. Weed and Captain Hardgrove were asleep on the floor of the young woman's stateroom. Doc did not disturb them, except to give their pockets a going over. He found nothing that should not be carried by a captain and a first officer of an ocean liner, unless it was a little too much money, and a gun each. In view of their having just learned their ship was far off its course, the guns were understandable although the holsters looked as if they had been worn a lot.

Doc searched the girl's cabin.

Her name seemed to be Nesta Reynolds, judging from the landing card for the port of Tahiti in her purse. In the purse, also, was six hundred dollars in travelers checks, three lipsticks of assorted shades, compact, six pennies, six nickels, a poker chip, a loaded .22-caliber pistol on a .38-caliber frame.

Nesta Reynolds had boarded the *City of Tulsa* at the port of Mbau, Vita Levu Island, in the South Seas. Her passport was American, her birthplace by a coincidence Tulsa, Oklahoma. The passport was over a year old and had been stamped by immigration authorities in Australia, China, Siam, Manila, Tahiti and other South Sea Islands.

In her bag were some good clothes, two years out of date, and what seemed to be a shopping list of food and essentials. The quantity of supplies an interminable list would amount to at least a carload. It was for use, the absence of fruits and fish and similar island products so indicated, in the South Seas.

In another of her bags there were two was a man's tweed suit, a shirt with a frayed collar, a pair of shoes to fit a foot of extraordinary length, necktie and socks. There was a disk of glass attached to a ribbon a monocle, except that it was a magnifier.

William Harper Littlejohn's clothing!

## Chapter VI. LORD LONDON

A HAND grabbed the doorknob suddenly and threw the door open. Because no friend would enter a cabin like that, like a hound after a rabbit, Doc Savage moved fast. He jumped through the most convenient door. It put him in a bathroom. Before he slammed the bathroom door, he saw enough to decide that at least two men were entering the cabin. Piling into the cabin, more exactly.

Doc moved fast so that the men had not seen enough of him to realize he was not the girl. They came to the bathroom door. One man hit the door with an object that sounded as if it was made of steel, but small.

"Mademoiselle," he said, "she ees what they call ze joke on you."

## THE PIRATE ISLE

He sounded like a very bad ham actor trying to imitate a Frenchman, but it was probably his genuine accent. He did not sound as if he were trying to put on an act.

Doc Savage turned on the hot water in the tub. He ran it in a strong, but not loud, steam.

"Open ze door," said the man.

There was a cold seriousness with the clown accent that made him not funny.

Doc Savage tried to imitate Nesta Reynolds' voice. He made a flop of it. He had developed a skill at mimicry that could have earned him a living of sorts on the stage, but it failed him now, probably because he was very tired. He had been without sleep since leaving New York, and he had left as soon as he got the news of the call from Dr. Cunico which had indicated Johnny Littlejohn's whereabouts. He had been very concerned about Johnny's disappearance almost three months ago. To drop out of sight in such a fashion was not like Johnny.

Doc managed a few rather unfeminine squeaks and gave the imitation up as a bad job. He hoped the men outside would be charitable enough to think the sounds were made by a scared girl.

The hot water poured strongly out of the faucet.

There was a crash. Six inches of knife blade appeared on Doc's side of the door. One of the men had driven it through the panel for an effect. It was quite an effect.

"Open," said the man. "Open queek."

Doc tried whispering loudly. "Why?" he whispered.

The man laughed, "She ees from her voice scared," he told someone. To the door, he snarled, "Come on, open thees t'ing. We want zis Littlejohnny fellair."

"Johnny Littlejohn is not in here," Doc whispered.

"You take heem from cabin of ze skeeper," advised the comic French accent grimly. "Sailor ees tell us *oui*. Same sailor ees tell skeeper. So skeeper will come here. He ees worse mans than us, mademoiselle. Much worse!"

Doc Savage picked up the wastebasket.

The man outside started using French, and very good French indeed after a guttersnipe fashion, proving that his comic accent was genuine. He went on urging that they avoid any unpleasantness by the "girl's" opening the door and having this foolishness over with.

The wastebasket, like the wastebaskets on most ocean passenger boats, was made of solid sheet metal. Doc ran the basket full of hot water. The water was very warm for shipboard water, a little less than boiling.

He whispered, "If I open up, you won't hurt me?"

"Non, mademoiselle,"

said the voice outside. "We will treat you gentle as peach."

## THE PIRATE ISLE

Doc said, "Here I come," in a distinct whisper. Then he put back his head and yelled very loudly in a most masculine voice. The last was just for the temporary paralyzing effect of surprise.

He opened the door. There were three of them. He tried to divide the hot water equally among them, and succeeded fairly well. At least they all started yelling. The water was hot enough to give plenty of surprise and a few blisters.

There was a period when he had them by surprise; when he could do with them whatever he was able to do. It was about a five-count long. He used the interval to select a spot carefully on each man's jaw and use his fist.

Two of them he left where they fell. The third he took along. The third, the one he took, was the one he figured might know the most about what was going on. If there were a spoonful of brains between the three, this one was most likely to have it. A spoonful probably was giving them too much credit. The trio looked as much alike as three sharks.

Doc walked the man backward out of the door and down the hall to the stateroom where he had left Renny Renwick and the girl. They were on the floor. They were still asleep from the anaesthetic gas. They would wake up in about five minutes, or maybe ten depending on how strongly they had gotten the stuff feeling no worse than if they had been asleep.

Doc put his prisoner on the floor with them. He slapped their faces lightly, and their lack of response indicated they were not close to reviving.

He went back to the girl's cabin. The four men unconscious on the floor made the place look disheveled, although none of the furniture was particularly disturbed.

Doc contemplated Captain Hardgrove and Mr. Weed, endeavoring to decide which would scare the easier. The probability was that neither had very much rabbit in his make-up.

He finally selected Mr. Weed. The mere fact that Hardgrove was skipper indicated he was a stronger personality, therefore a less desirable prospect for information.

The bronze man, before taking Mr. Weed out of the cabin, searched all four men. He had already gone over Mr. Weed and Captain Hardgrove, but he did it again. He found nothing that he had not found before.

The other two had empty pockets and no labels in their clothing. They had prepared for their job, except for one thing. They had their passports. These were French.

One was Julio Chandiste, the other Paul Froid, according to their passports. The names meant nothing to Doc Savage.

Doc got out a pencil and paper.

He wrote on the paper, printing the letters:

Captain Hardgrove:

Will send Julio and Paul to the girl's cabin. Gives you chance to dispose of them.

He did not sign it, for the reason that he had no idea who was boss of Julio and Paul. It was not likely that either was his own boss.

## THE PIRATE ISLE

There was grim humor in Doc's metallic eyes as he left the cabin. The note might give someone something to think about. Or it might not.

RENNY RENWICK sat up finally and looked foolish. "Did I get some of that gas?" He felt of the eye which the doorknob had hit. "Holy cow! I'm damaged!"

The girl rolled over slowly so that her eyes were toward them. Her eyes focused, fixed on Doc Savage, then Renny, then on Mr. Weed. Her gaze remained on Mr. Weed for a while. Then she closed her eyes.

"Feeling all right?" Doc asked her.

She did not answer.

Renny got up slowly, went over and touched her shoulder. "Come on, 'possum," he said. "We know how that stuff works. You feel all right as soon as you wake up."

She was silent, eyes closed.

Renny grasped her shoulders, lifted her. "I'll put her in the bathtub and turn on the water," he announced.

The girl said, "I guess we can dispense with that," in a very clear voice that was also very angry.

Renny put her down. "Figured that wouldn't appeal." She got to her feet, trying to be dignified. "How about some words?" asked Renny.

She shook her head. "This goes a little fast for me. When in doubt, make no noise that's me."

She looked at them, at Renny first, then at Doc Savage, at the men unconscious on the floor Mr. Weed and the prisoner and finally at Doc. "Say!" she exclaimed. "You're not Oh, for the love of mud!"

"Eh?" Renny said.

"Mud, mud, mud!" the girl repeated disgustedly. "That's what I've got for a brain."

Renny frowned.

"Are you," the girl asked Doc, "Doc Savage?"

Doc nodded slightly.

"That tears it," the girl said. She stared at them. She was trying to brass it out. But tears came to her eyes, slowly filled and spilled over. "What a clown I made of myself," she said finally.

"One thing you aren't making yourself is clear," Renny complained.

"Look, I was helping Johnny Littlejohn," she said.

"We gathered the idea you took Johnny out of Captain Hardgrove's cabin," said Renny dryly. "You call that helping him? Or have you got him in some nice safe place? Pushed through a porthole, maybe?"

## THE PIRATE ISLE

She shook her head.

"Back, way back, to begin it," she said. "Littlejohn and I came aboard this boat together."

Renny snorted. "An elopement, I presume. So Johnny spent his honeymoon up the mast in his birthday suit."

The girl knuckled her damp eyes angrily. "Don't forget the snowballs!" she snapped. "He had snowballs along, too."

Renny's mouth stood roundly open for a moment. "Yeah," he muttered. "Yeah, now you're talking our language. What about the snowballs? Where were they?"

"If they weren't snowballs," the girl said, "I don't know what they were."

"Trifle warm that day for snow, wasn't it?"

"It was hot," the girl admitted.

"But you're sure there were snowballs?"

"I'm not sure of anything about them. I didn't see them."

"Do you *think* they were snowballs?"

"I don't know what to think. I'm not making any random guesses."

"Now," said Renny, "we're getting nowhere fast."

THE young woman had hold of herself, now. She took a chair, forcing calmness, and looked at Doc Savage and Renny. There seemed to be no cupidity on her face, although Doc was not certain; he did not trust his own ability to read what was on a woman's face.

She said, "My name is Reynolds Nesta Reynolds."

She waited for them to comment. It was not as if she seemed to think the name should mean anything to them, she was just waiting for a comment. They made none.

She added, "My father was in the dyewood business on Batan Island, in the Philippines, when I was born. After that, he was a carabao dealer in Mindoro, in the coconut business in the Malay States, mined manganese in Pangasinan. He sailed a schooner for copra in the Tongas and went silver prospecting on big Apia in the Solomon Islands. I was with him all that time. So you see, I grew up in the islands. If there is anything I know, it is the islands. The language, the customs I know them all. I can talk to a Solomon Islander who probably is a secret headhunter, talk to him in his own language and know exactly what he is thinking. He doesn't always say what he thinks."

She paused and looked at them earnestly. "That," she said, "is why Borzoi hired me."

"Borzoi?"

## THE PIRATE ISLE

She nodded. "John Mike Borzoi, as fine an old Irishman as ever came from County Kerry by way of Brooklyn. Don't let his name fool you."

Renny stopped thinking about snowballs enough to tell her that, "Now we seem to be getting somewhere. Who is this John Mike Borzoi?"

"John Michael Borzoi," she said, "is the funny little old man of the islands. At least, that's what they call him. Not to his face, though. John Mike would as soon spit in your eye as look at you. He claims to be seventy years old. I suspect it is nearer eighty."

"Now that we know John Mike Borzoi," Renny said, "where does that get us?"

Across suddenly tight lips, the girl said, "Tongue like a buzz saw, haven't you? No brain attached to it."

Renny snorted. "Where does Borzoi hook in?"

"My boss," the girl said. "I went to work for John Mike Borzoi a month ago. At least, I tried to go to work for him a month ago. That was in Brisbane, where I was when he hired me." She looked at Renny. "Brisbane is in Australia."

"I know where Brisbane is," Renny said sourly. "It is in Moreton province, on Moreton Bay."

"Right. I never have learned what Borzoi hired me for."

"Huh?" Renny stared at her. "He hires people without telling them what for? Or do you work for people, no questions asked?"

"For old John Mike Borzoi, I would cut off an arm, no questions asked," the girl said sharply. "I got a telegram from old Mike. It asked me to come to Jinx Island. It offered me good pay. So I sent a radiogram back that I was coming."

Renny said nothing.

Doc Savage said nothing.

The girl frowned at Doc and demanded, "What part do you play in this? Are you in charge, or this big pair of fists here? Who do I tell this to?"

DOC SAVAGE looked slightly uncomfortable. It was his habit to let one of his aids do the questioning, while he sat back, listened and studied the victim of the questions. With that system, he could get more satisfaction out of an interview. Facial expression and reaction often told him more than words. Right now, he could see that the girl was scared under her coat of bravery which she was holding tight about herself. She was also genuinely glad to meet Renny and himself, the bronze man believed. Whether the gladness was a symptom of relief or not, he could not be sure. But she was pleased to be here with them.

He said, "What happened to this job of yours?"

"Old Mike hired me with a radiogram and asked me to report on Jinx Island," she said. "I boarded a passenger boat to Numea, then took an island schooner up through the Loyalty Islands to Jinx. Matter of fact, I hired the



## THE PIRATE ISLE

island boat to take me to Jinx."

She spread her hands, palms up.

"As we neared Jinx, a small boat put offshore in a great hurry. It approached the schooner. There was a man in it. The man was William Harper Littlejohn. He said something terrible had happened on the island, and the thing for us to do was to get away if we could."

Renny took up the inquiry again.

"Terrible?" he said. "What did he mean by terrible?"

"That," said Nesta Reynolds, "is something Mr. Littlejohn did not explain."

"Didn't explain?"

"I don't think Mr. Littlejohn ever got around to trusting me," Nesta said. "I do not think Mr. Littlejohn is a man who rushes forward to trust women. Much the contrary. I would say he had been disillusioned in the past."

Renny heard two or three small sounds that came from somewhere in the boat, and which seemed foreign to the normal noises of a small liner steaming forward. His face took on a puzzled expression, and he opened the cabin door, stood listening for a while. Not hearing any more suspicious noises, he turned, closing the door. "Continue this remarkable tale of yours," he suggested.

She seemed to expect his skepticism.

"As a matter of fact, Mr. Littlejohn took over the island schooner by force," she said. "He is very forceful for such a long, skinny fellow, I found. He went to Mbau, Viti Levu Island, where we boarded this ship."

She looked at them and grimaced.

"All that wasn't as simple as I tell it," she said. "Have you ever heard of Lord London?"

Doc Savage started. For once, he showed astonishment. His eyes flew wide enough with surprise to show the full flake-gold of their color. There was briefly audible the small trilling sound, exotic and ventriloquial in quality, which was the thing he did in moments of mental surprise. He said, "The individual who is also known as Faustin Archibald Montclan Herford?"

"That's right," the girl said. "But he has a lot of names. And a lot of people have met him."

Doc Savage looked at her strangely for a moment.

"I have met Lord London twice," Doc said.

"Yes?"

"And he was a different man each time," Doc added.

Nesta Reynolds smiled grimly. "That is one of the strange things about Lord London. People have met him, but he never seems to be the same man twice."

## THE PIRATE ISLE

"Where," Doc Savage asked, "does Lord London come into this?"

"He pursued Mr. Littlejohn from Jinx Island," said the girl. "Frankly, Mr. Littlejohn was fleeing from Lord London."

"Why?" Doc Savage inquired.

"I don't know why."

They were silent for a while. The girl seemed to resent what she apparently believed was a rather complete disbelief of what she had been telling them.

"We haven't got Johnny up the mast with the snowballs, yet," Renny said finally. "Can we do that?"

"Personally," Nesta Reynolds said, "I do not know how he got up there, but I would presume it struck him as a good hiding place from Lord London."

"Without any clothes?"

"The absence of his clothing is easy to explain," Nesta said sharply. "He swam out to this ship in Mbau Harbor. It was a long swim. Naturally, he left his clothing ashore."

RENNY heard another set of noises foreign to the mechanical routine of the ship. He glanced at Doc Savage, and knew from the bronze man's expression that Doc also had heard the sounds and considered them important, but not as important as it was that they hear to the end what the girl might have to tell them. Renny could understand his reasons for that.

After all, and despite the monotonousness of what the girl was telling them, they were getting a rather complete story out of her. It made sense. It was wild, of course, but believable if you allowed for the mental quirks of human beings who lived in far places and in dangerous domains.

There was one thing about those sounds he was hearing, Renny knew. They meant trouble. And if what he thought was actually happening, it was fantastic.

Renny said, "To summarize this in what they call the nutshell, what would you say?"

"Old Mike Borzoi hired me because I know a lot about the islands," the girl said instantly. "Then something happened on the island before I got there. Johnny Littlejohn grabbed my schooner, before I could land, and fled. He was heading for New York to get help from Doc Savage "

"First time you've said Johnny was after help from Doc," Renny put in.

"He never told me he was. But I guessed it. Johnny was scared."

"Go ahead with the nutshell."

"Lord London caught us at Mbau," said Nesta. "That was the first time I knew Lord London was mixed up in it. The first time Lord London knew about me, too, I think. But I didn't know that. I didn't know it until a few minutes ago, when they took Mr. Littlejohn away from me."

## THE PIRATE ISLE

Renny studied her. "They took Littlejohn away from you?"

She nodded. "After I got him out of the skipper's cabin, I was moving him down to my cabin when two men appeared and grabbed him. They tried to get me, too, but I stuck a hatpin in one of them and escaped."

"Where did they take Johnny?"

"I don't know." She stared at them with what seemed to be almost wet-eyed sincerity. "I really do not know. I have no idea."

Renny considered what had been said. He glanced at Doc Savage, and was relieved when the bronze man said, "It makes a complete story, after a fashion. Johnny was on his way to China months ago, and he must have got wind of something. He went to Jinx Island, and the situation became too big for him."

"Too big for Johnny would make it pretty big," Renny remarked.

"Yes, we might bear that in mind," the bronze man agreed with a peculiar lack of emotion. "Johnny fled the island, got aboard this ship and was forced to hide in the crow's nest. He was discovered. The ship has been decoyed off its course for some reason or other."

He paused a moment for effect. "And, judging from these sounds we have been hearing the last few minutes, the ship is being taken over by force!"

DOC SAVAGE crossed to the door, stood there a moment listening. There were feet outside, hurrying, and he waited until they went away. Then he opened the door and went out.

No one saw him, and there was nothing exciting until he stepped out of a doorway on to the deck a little forward of amidships. Then he was shot at! It was a shotgun, and the shot peppered the deck. At least two pellets stung his legs. He leaped back quickly, slammed the door.

A passenger put his head out of a cabin door close by. The passenger was an elderly man with a long gentle face that was worried.

"What happened?" he asked.

"They shot at me," Doc explained.

"Someone should have told you," said the passenger. "They have given orders that no one be seen on deck."

"Who gave such orders?"

The passenger shrugged. "They have guns, so it does not matter much who they are." He ran a tongue over his lips. "They shot a man in front of me because he tried to argue. They are very bad men." Then he closed his cabin door, and shot its bolt noisily.

Doc Savage moved to the upper-deck level cautiously. He found some passengers there and a white-faced steward who was ordering them to go to the main lounge. He was also telling them that none of them would be in danger if they did what they were told, but he sounded too frightened himself for anyone to believe him.

## THE PIRATE ISLE

Doc went back the way he had come.

The ship was being taken over. It was an audacious crime, but one that could be made to work, if enough men were pulling it.

What was happening did not shed light on the mystery. But it did prove that the affair was of enough magnitude to warrant extreme measures.

The *City of Tulsa* was far off its course. But there was no land of any kind, no smallest island, within some hundreds of miles. That probably would mean there was some time to plan and conduct a campaign.

The immediate need was a safe place of concealment, a spot where they could question Mr. Weed and the other prisoner. One or the other of these should be able to explain matters, including, possibly, the bizarre touch of the snowballs.

Thinking of these things, Doc was absent-minded enough to make one of his rare mistakes. He all but walked into the arms of two grim gentlemen with rifles. The grim pair were conducting Renny Renwick and Nesta Reynolds!

### Chapter VII. SHIP TO NOWHERE

THE man who looked as if he had a barrel inside his coat had the best wits of the two. While his companion, a lean string of a man, had his mouth open its widest, he whipped his rifle barrel around. He did not try to fire. He sought to use the gun barrel as a club.

Doc Savage doubled under the weapon. He came in turning, a fist going out. The fist put a right hook into the man's middle, and the fellow snapped double. The blow did not make much noise, and the man was silent until he hit the floor; then he made a loud whoop of noise, like a delayed-action bomb that had fizzled.

The string bean of a man tried to walk backward to get room. Renny flung against him. Renny's wrists were tied. He jammed the man against the wall, butted him. The man wriggled partially clear, but Renny held his gun pinned. Then Doc hit the long fellow! The man fell back against the bulkhead and went down slowly to the floor. He kept hold of his short rifle with one hand for a while after he was on the floor, and his eyes were shut. Renny pulled at the gun; he had to twist it to get it out of the man's unconscious clutch.

Renny said, "Let's take this one. He's tough. He wanted to kill us on the spot. I'd enjoy making him talk."

There was a shot that went between them violently. Noise of the gun that had sent the bullet came to them like something solid.

"Maybe," Doc said, "we had best not take anyone."

His calmness did more than anything could have done to get them moving fast. It was like a powerful spring. It hurled them to the nearest door. They tumbled through.

The cabins on this deck it was A Deck had doors which opened out on the deck. The cabin had a frightened woman in pajamas, who stood beside a dressing table with her hands jammed against her cheeks. There was a manicuring set open in the table, and Doc scooped the tiny scissors out of the set. The scissors were very

## THE PIRATE ISLE

small, but the cords which held Renny's wrists were not large.

Doc said, "Hold it, Renny," and cut the cords while the big-fisted engineer waited impatiently.

They went out on deck. Someone forward yelled, "Get back to the main lounge!"

Doc said, "They think we are passengers."

"Walk, don't run, to the nearest exit," Nesta Reynolds said in a voice that was low and tight with excitement.

They put their hands in the air and walked as frightened passengers would be expected to travel, toward the stern.

Off to the south, Long Tom was circling the plane. He was flying low, and jerking the ship around in the air in a way that conveyed the impatience he was probably beginning to feel.

Renny nodded at the plane and muttered, "He has no idea what he's missing."

Doc asked, "What happened back there where I left you?"

"Nothing," Renny growled.

Nesta Reynolds said, "They just walked in on us. Those two men with guns. I think they found us by accident. They were going through the cabins ordering the occupants back to the main lounge and found us."

Renny enlarged her explanation slightly. "I pushed Mr. Weed and that other guy in the bath and got in with them. We figured they wouldn't recognize Nesta, here. But they did."

"Which shows," said Nesta, "that the whole gang knows me by sight. They must have been keeping me under surveillance since I've been on the boat."

Doc Savage asked abruptly, "Are there any colored stewards on board?"

"Several," Nesta said. "Why?"

"Could you," Doc asked her, "get into the drugstore on the first-class-cabin deck presumably there is one on a boat this size and get several bottle corks, some matches and a small bottle of glycerine?"

"There's nothing to keep me from trying," Nesta said.

BETTER than two hundred passengers assembled in the first-class main lounge. The room was full of tension, for no one exactly understood what was happening. In addition to the passengers, all members of the crew and service personnel, including waiters, stewards, cooks, stewardesses and some of the officers, were with the passengers.

The afternoon sunlight slanted through the few portholes to make one end of the lounge fairly bright. Doc Savage and Renny kept away from that end, with Nesta Reynolds. They were in shadows and with the members of the crew. They had tied white towels around their waists to give themselves an appearance of belonging in the status of servants. The burned cork and glycerine mixture on their faces the basis of minstrel

## THE PIRATE ISLE

grease paint had been carefully applied.

Doc Savage said to Nesta, "If you speak Singhalese or some other Indian dialect, it might be wise to use it or the accent. We actually look more like Indians than Negroes."

"Bohoma hondayi,"

Nesta agreed in rather good Singhalese.

With a violently impatient roaring, Long Tom's plane swooped overhead, sounded as if it barely grazed the masts and went climbing angrily into the sky.

"He's beginning to stew," Renny whispered. "I wish he would get away from here. Flying as close as he just flew, they could knock him off with a bow and arrow."

More and more passengers crowded into the lounge. It was an encouraging thing to watch them. They had no idea what was to happen to them. They had seen a few persons shot down on the ship's deck, or had heard that persons had been shot, so they had every excuse to be scared. But there was very little obvious fear of the noisy kind. There was, however, a kind of forced calm that was completely artificial. A feeling of brains held tense as if they were muscles.

Nesta Reynolds touched Doc Savage's arm. "I have an idea."

The bronze man glanced down at her questioningly.

"We can't make ourselves conspicuous asking questions. If anybody takes a second look at these paint jobs we're wearing, they won't be fooled."

Doc nodded agreement. "What would you suggest?"

"A helper. A man Friday."

Doc studied her a moment. "You have one in mind?"

"Yes. Young fellow named Charlie Custis."

"Friend?"

She flashed fine white teeth. "A candidate for my hand, he admitted several times." She touched Doc's arm again. "I think he's safe enough to take a chance on. He is an Iowa boy who has been working on a newspaper in Brisbane."

Doc said finally, "Try to find him. A stooge might be handy."

Nesta nodded. She nudged Renny. "Hey, cheer up that face of yours. Whoever saw a sad-looking Negro?"

Doc said, "Renny has made a lifetime practice of looking saddest when he is most pleased."

"I don't," said Nesta, "see anything right now to be pleased about."

"He likes excitement."

## THE PIRATE ISLE

"I," said Nesta, "like my neck. I think it's in danger right now. I'll go find Charlie Custis."

CHARLIE CUSTIS proved to be a tanned young man with blue eyes that squinted a little as if they were in the habit of looking at far places. His handshake was pleasantly hard and warm, his manner charged with excitement.

"So you are Doc Savage!" he said. "Boy, I must have been living right."

Nesta explained, "I told him the story."

Charlie Custis nodded. "And some yarn! You mean your friend Littlejohn got something off an island, and these guys are stealing the ship in order to get it?"

"That," said Doc Savage, "is making a very high jump at some conclusions. We do not know whether Johnny Littlejohn got anything off Jinx Island. We do not know why the ship is being taken over."

Charlie Custis stared at them. His grin was from ear to ear. "You could've pushed me over with a battleship when Nesta told me this thing. You want me to help you, that it?"

Doc nodded.

"That's great," Custis said, "providing I get an exclusive on the story."

Doc Savage, who rarely showed emotion, now tightened visibly. A story meant a newspaper story. Custis was a newspaperman. It was not to Doc's liking. He had no taste for publicity. Notoriety had always been trouble in the past, for when it did not embarrass him, it at least gave enemies a line on his activities. The less known about himself, the more a man of mystery he could appear, the less chance of failure.

Renny Renwick stepped forward quickly. He knew what Doc Savage was thinking; realized what he was on the point of saying. "They've got Johnny, Doc," he reminded grimly. "We may not have much time to find him."

Doc compressed his lips. "Within reasonable limits," he said, "you can publish a story."

Charlie Custis grinned. "We'll save that word reasonable to fuss over later," he said. "What do you want to know?"

"Anything," Doc told him, "that will lead us to Johnny Littlejohn."

"Of course you aren't interested in what's behind it?"

"Yes, naturally. Nothing is as important as Johnny, or won't be."

"I see. Not even the snowballs?"

Doc Savage's eyes narrowed slightly. "Miss Reynolds told you about the so-called snowballs?"

"No," said Charlie Custis, "she didn't. But there has been a story going around among the passengers about a man who was found in the crow's nest, on one of the hottest days of the year, throwing snowballs at the crew."

## THE PIRATE ISLE

It's quite a joke. Nobody believes it, of course."

Nesta Reynolds put in, "Charlie, you have a long and flexible nose. Suppose you put it to work for us."

Charlie Custis chuckled her under the chin.

"Darling," he said, "you make a lovely Negress, did you know?"

Doc Savage and Renny watched Charlie Custis move away and join the passengers. Renny shook his head and muttered, "I hope that was a wise move. Taking in outsiders is always risky."

Nesta asked, "Don't you like him?"

"Sure," Renny admitted. "He sounds like a swell guy."

THE passengers had been called together to be told what was to happen to them, it developed.

Suddenly, someone blew a hand foghorn it looked like a toy tin horn, somewhat at the far end of the lounge where there was a stage which the orchestra used. Simultaneously, half a dozen grim-looking men leaped upon chairs in plain sight of the crowd and exhibited rifles. It was impressive.

Silence came slowly and completely.

A man appeared on the orchestra dais.

Renny's jaw tried to fall off. "Holy cow!" he croaked.

The man on the dais had a paper. Evidently, it was his written speech, for he looked around, then dragged a music stand over and spread the paper out on top of this. Then he began reading.

"Ladies and gentlemen of the passengers and crew of the good ship, *City of Tulsa*," he said, "I am here to explain some things to you. Listen carefully, because you will then understand what is going to happen to you, what you are to do and what will happen to you if you don't do it."

He waited then. The silence in the big lounge was remarkable.

In the sky outside, Long Tom's plane was coming back like an angry hornet. Long Tom had opened the muffler cut-outs so that noise of the engine exhausts was like a pursuit ship with all eight machine guns gobbling.

Continued the man on the platform:

"I am Faustin Archibald Montclan Herford," he said. "More often called 'Lord London.'"

He let that soak in.

"Lord London," he repeated. "I am in charge of these gentlemen you see around with rifles. I have personally given them orders to shoot to kill. As you have noticed, they have already done so a time or two."



## THE PIRATE ISLE

Doc Savage's mouth was slightly open. He dampened his lips, closed them, and his eyes went so narrow that their flake-gold was barely noticeable.

"For the next few days," said the man loudly, "you will be my guests. I shall call you 'guests.' As a matter of fact, if one of you gets out of hand, he will be shot. Behave yourselves, and all will be merry."

He paused dramatically.

"Don't concern yourselves over what this is about," he said. "You won't find out. We aren't pirates, and we aren't navy or army men for any nation. Some of you may have heard of me Lord London. Those who have will not know any more than they did before, or than the rest of you know. But they, at least, will be sure I mean what I am telling you."

He looked up for a moment.

"That is all and thank you," he said.

He did not get down off the platform immediately. He stood there and naturally held everyone's attention just by his presence. He lifted an arm.

"Just in parting, to show you how lightly we regard your most valuable possession, your lives, watch!" he said.

He leveled an arm, moved it to indicate one of the riflemen.

The rifleman lifted his gun without flair or show, selected a man at random in the crowd and shot him between the eyes.

Charlie Custis, who had said he was Lord London, then stepped down from the platform!

RENNY RENWICK whispered to Nesta Reynolds, "Nice kind of viper you took to our bosoms."

"I didn't know." Nesta's words were almost inaudible off stiff lips. "I didn't know he was Lord London."

Following the shot, there had been a jarred silence, with probably no breathing by half the crowd in the lounge. Then, after the few seconds that it took for understanding to come, there was a low roar. It was a roar with an animal quality, of disgust and fierceness and revulsion, and a tinge of fear but not much. Two women screamed, and others talked very loud about what a horrible thing it was.

Overhead, the plane came bawling down at the masts with its motors backfiring and crashing out of the exhaust stacks.

"Charlie Custis, our pal, is Lord London," Renny muttered, as if he couldn't believe it. "Brother and sister, we had better do something."

Doc Savage showed no inclination to take flight. They stood there. Renny felt himself getting pale under his coating of black grease paint. At least, he knew he must be getting pale. "Holy cow!" he gasped finally. "Doc, what're you going to do?"

## THE PIRATE ISLE

"If Charlie Custis gave our identity away," the bronze man said, "there are men watching us by now."

Renny shuddered violently. "It's a wonder that guy with the rifle didn't pick us out for his demonstration."

They stood there, each of them feeling pretty much as if he were alone at the North Pole in a wolf pack.

Nesta said, "Shooting that poor man that was the most horrible thing I ever saw." She began to sway slightly.

Renny took her arm. "Here," he said, "don't pass out. Feet in the stirrups. This mess is just starting."

The girl shut her eyes slowly, her knees buckled, and she pointed weakly at a chair. Renny placed her in the chair. She did not faint, but neither did she have much life for the next few minutes.

There was another development that was something to think about.

Men went through the crowd men with rifles searching, alert, inspecting faces. Doc and Renny made themselves as inconspicuous as possible, and Renny kept his big fists out of sight.

They were not molested.

"Holy cow!" Renny mumbled. "I guess they weren't hunting us after all."

One of the men got on a chair. He fired his rifle into the ceiling like a drunken cowhand celebrating a Saturday night of the Old West. Silence was what he wanted, and he got it.

"We are looking for the man known as Doc Savage," he shouted.

Every face in the room stared at him.

"We also want a man named Renny Renwick," the man added.

He let that soak in.

"They are responsible for your present trouble," he added. "Find them for us, and you will be all right. If you don't find them, all of you will probably lose your lives."

He waited some more.

"Thank you," he said.

He got down off the chair.

## Chapter VIII. PLANE DOWN!

DOC SAVAGE, Renny and Nesta Reynolds got out of the lounge by the simple, if nerve-trying expedient, of joining a group of stewards who were ordered to bring tea and serve it to the jittery passengers of the *City of Tulsa* as a kind of demitasse for events. They were lucky. They dropped out of the group of stewards and hurried down a companionway.

## THE PIRATE ISLE

They took refuge in a cabin.

"That man," said Nesta grimly, "made an impressive talk, didn't you think? Impressive like a skull!"

"He built a nice fire under us," Renny admitted sourly. "Got all those passengers looking for us."

Nesta, puzzled, said, "But it's all out of tune, somehow. Charlie Custis knew our identity. Why didn't he what do you call it put the finger on us?"

Renny shrugged. "Don't ask me. This seems to be my day to be baffled." He cocked his head upward, listening to the impatient noise of the plane. "I'm not happy about Long Tom, either."

Doc Savage dug into a pocket and produced one of the portable radio outfits they used. The contraption was quite effective for communication within horizon distance, functioning on a wave band of around a hundred megacycles. It was not a particularly remarkable set not much smaller than so-called "personal" radios on the market except for its efficiency.

Doc switched on the set and said, "Long Tom, here is what happened. Renny was shot, but he is able to be with us "

Immediately a terrific din, like static only a thousand times magnified, came out of the radio speaker. The bronze man frowned, moved the tuning dial several times but did not get rid of the racket. He moved the set slowly in a circle, noting that the interference was louder from one direction.

"Deliberate?" Renny asked.

"They have rigged up a spark coil and battery," Doc announced, "to keep us off the air."

Renny grunted. "That's quick thinking. Whoever is bossing this outfit hasn't got a box for a head." The big-fisted engineer sank in a chair. He absently pressed a hand to his head. He had fashioned a white cloth into a passable duplicate of a chef's cap with pins which Nesta had bought when she purchased the corks and glycerine for their grease paint.

Nesta said, "You feel terrible, don't you?"

"I feel fine," Renny said. His voice was thick. He sat there for a moment. He showed them his teeth in something that was not a smile. He leaned forward then, and would have hit the floor had Doc Savage not caught him.

"Fainted," Doc said.

Nesta fluttered about anxiously as Doc put the big-fisted engineer on a berth. "I almost forgot he had been shot," she said in an amazed voice. "What courage he has!"

"Insanity would be a better word for it," Doc told her gravely. "He should have taken it easy. Probably it's my fault for not putting him in a bed and making him stay here."

He worked over the engineer for a while, then told Nesta that the small-caliber bullet wound had produced more shock than actual damage and that Renny was not in bad shape. He had simply passed out as an aftermath of the concussion, aggravated by the excitement and the fact that he had tried to stay on his feet and barge around as if nothing had happened.

## THE PIRATE ISLE

"Until he's able to barge around again," Nesta said, "we had better lie low."

The bronze man did not object. He said, "You stay with him. I am going to look around. Do not open the cabin door for anyone else."

Nesta nodded. She was frightened. "Do you think they'll make a more thorough search of the ship?"

"Yes," Doc said. "Probably. But searching a ship this size is a large job. We can safely decide that they will let that go until they are sure they have the ship under control."

DOC watched them get Long Tom Roberts. There was not much he could do but watch.

Long Tom was not the most impulsive of Doc Savage's group of five assistants, but he was hardly a paragon of caution. He liked excitement and trouble, as did the others, for it was probably adventure more than any one thing that bound the strange group together. Doc Savage was probably more of a crusader, a Sir Galahad, than the others, because he had been trained from childhood by selected scientists a startling upbringing for which his father was responsible to follow a career of righting wrongs and punishing evildoers.

Long Tom's impulsiveness was his undoing; yet, of Doc and the five, he was probably the most conservative. The two wild men of the group, the pair named Monk and Ham the two who were always clowning with their pet pig and pet chimpanzee were not involved in this affair. They knew nothing about it. They were in the Tierra del Fuego country of South America, the bleak southern-most tip of the South American continent, working for a whaling company. Ham was straightening out some legal tangles in his capacity of lawyer; Monk was serving as consulting chemist in the matter of processing whale by-products.

(Next month's issue of Doc Savage magazine contains "The Speaking Stone," the tale of the eerie affair that befell Monk and Ham, who got in a whale of a mess that was not about whales.)

Long Tom's impulsiveness was in coming barging down to the ship to investigate a man who had stepped out on the forward deck with a pair of flags.

It was the same thing as a raccoon investigating the tin fish bait on the pan of a trap. Doc Savage did not realize at once what was happening; then he saw from the way the plane was circling that Long Tom was watching something on deck, and watching it closely.

Doc moved about and located the signalman. He saw also a big man who had made up his face for the occasion and put on clothing which closely resembled how closely was startling the garments which Doc Savage was wearing. From the plane, the man would be mistaken for Doc. Long Tom probably thought Doc Savage was standing there telling the semaphore operator what to signal.

The orders transmitted to Long Tom by semaphore flags were to land on the sea and take a chance of risking the plane. Long Tom did that. He got down without trouble, thanks to a skillful job at the controls.

The rest of it was a little stupid on Long Tom's part. He sat in the plane and let them get close enough in a power lifeboat to put a line on his right wingtip.

A man stood up suddenly in the boat and expertly lassoed the tip of the wing. Long Tom came to his senses, then, and fed the motors gas. But the plane simply went skidding in circles, with a great roaring commotion, around the lifeboat. The roughness of the sea did not simplify matters to any extent, either.

## THE PIRATE ISLE

Meantime, the men poured rifle and revolver lead into the plane. The cabin was armored against anything that could come out of a rifle or pistol, but the fuel tanks were more vulnerable. Since the plane was of a military design, the fuel tanks were of sponge-rubber construction which closed after the passage of a bullet. But passage of fifty or so bullets through the same spot was too much for even sponge-rubber construction. Gasoline began pouring out.

One of the men in the boat soaked his hat in gasoline from the launch's fuel tanks. He applied a match to the hat, then tossed it up at the opportune moment and let the breeze carry it into the fuel that was streaming from the plane.

Results were spectacular, and Long Tom took to the sea. Later, he was hauled into the small boat. The plane was still burning at the foot of a big black worm of smoke, climbing into the sky, when the men came aboard the *City of Tulsa* with Long Tom.

It was hard, one of the hardest things Doc Savage had ever done, to stand by and watch Long Tom forced roughly on deck, then out of sight somewhere.

Nesta Reynolds stood unexpectedly beside the bronze man. She had appeared silently. She said, "Renny is all right. I heard enough to know they had trapped the plane. I came out to see what was happening."

After that, she watched Doc Savage. She saw plainly the struggle the bronze man was making to stand there and make no move to help Long Tom. She touched his arm anxiously. "You can't, now," she warned. "Later, maybe we can get to him."

He stood there with a tight body. Perspiration came out slowly on his forehead. He muttered, "We cannot just stand here and do nothing." He was silent a moment. Then it was plain that he had decided to try to help Long Tom, regardless of risk.

"Please!" gasped Nesta, and held to his arm as if to restrain him.

He said, "Go back and take care of Renny," and moved away.

DOC'S method of assisting Long Tom Roberts was devious.

He went to the vicinity of the radio shack on a scouting expedition. He found that there was a radio operator on duty, now. One of the pirates. Doc had expected there would be an operator there, because the interference which had earlier kept him from warning Long Tom on the radio was the devilment of someone who knew enough about radio to do things in a hurry with apparatus. Finding an operator on duty, the bronze man proceeded with saving Long Tom.

He used his small radio. He opened the case first, however, and tinkered with it. The tinkering was not an instantaneous operation. He spent several minutes about it, although he was in a life-and-death hurry. There were several wires to be changed, and a test or two to be made.

Finally, though, he got the little set on a long commercial wave length. Its signal at that wave length was so weak that it was a joke. But a weak signal was what he wanted.

He set the frequency to that used by the navy.

## THE PIRATE ISLE

He said into the microphone, "Calling MCX. Calling MCX. Calling the Doc Savage plane, MCX. This is the United States navy destroyer, *Greyhound*, calling Long Tom Roberts in the Doc Savage plane, MCX. Come in, please."

He moved around, then, until he could see the radio operator. The fellow was sitting placidly at the instruments, fooling with a marine-band receiver.

Doc changed the frequency of his set to the marine band. He repeated what he had said before, almost word for word. The operator showed no interest.

Doc changed his call to "Calling WSOY, the ship, *City of Tulsa*. Calling *City of Tulsa*. This is the U. S. naval vessel, *Greyhound*, calling. Come in, please."

That got action out of the radio operator. He jerked erect in his seat. Not trusting his loud-speaker, he snapped a telephone headset to his ears.

Doc gave him the works.

"Calling MCX, calling MCX," he said. "United States naval vessel, *Greyhound*, calling the Doc Savage plane, MCX. Or calling the *City of Tulsa*. What is wrong, Long Tom? Do you want us to change our course and overtake the *City of Tulsa* at the spot you gave as her position?"

The radio operator showed the expected emotions as Doc Savage watched him. He glanced in the direction of the bridge, his lips making cursing movements; then he slammed the desk with his fist. But he did not desert his instruments. He thought he was listening to a naval vessel, obviously. The weakness of the signal accounted for the deception. It doubtlessly sounded as if it were coming from an infinite distance.

Doc Savage said, "Calling Long Tom Roberts. Unless we hear from you within half an hour, we shall head for the *City of Tulsa* at position you gave us. We shall also put a scouting plane aloft to locate the ship. If everything is all right, come in please. Come in please. We do not want a wild-goose chase. Come on in, Long Tom."

The operator yanked off his headset and dashed out of the radio shack. He ran in the direction of the bridge. "Hell's to pay!" he yelled. "Don't knock off Doc Savage's friend. The guy has got a navy ship that is gonna start lookin' for us if it don't hear from him! You gotta make him talk on the radio."

SATISFIED that Long Tom would not be shot immediately, Doc Savage left his place of concealment and went back toward the cabin where he had left Nesta Reynolds and Renny.

As he approached the cabin, he saw that the door was open. A man, standing half in and half out of the cabin, was holding his hands in the air. It was Charlie Custis.

Doc Savage put a finger against Charlie Custis' back thereby turning the young man as white as the general conception of a ghost and pushed him into the cabin. Doc glanced past Custis at the pistol which Nesta Reynolds was holding. It was a machine pistol of Doc's development, a gun which bore only enough resemblance to a large automatic to make it obvious that it was something for turning out bullets. It could turn them out at the rate of several hundred a minute, which was faster than anybody with fewer arms than an octopus could feed it ammo clips.

## THE PIRATE ISLE

"He wanted in," Nesta said. "The two-headed shark! He has the nerve to say he can explain things."

There was one thing about Charlie Custis. He could grin engagingly with a gun looking at him. That might be to his credit, or it might not.

"I can," he said, "explain everything. That is, within reason. I can explain what I know."

"I suppose you know why you got up, announced yourself as Lord London, who is as legendary in the South Seas as the devil, and legendary for much the same reasons, and made that speech," said Nesta in one long breath.

"Right. Can do." Charlie Custis showed his patiently engaging grin to Doc Savage. "I think *you* will listen to me, won't you? She has been standing there saying she'll shoot me if I open my mouth. I never saw such a girl. One minute she loves you. The next, she's got a gun pointing at you. I presume that thing is a gun."

"If I said I love you," said Nesta, "I hope I turn into a worm."

"A very attractive worm you'd make." Charlie Custis turned back to Doc Savage again. "Look how does this sound? I walk away from you. Having agreed to help you "

Nesta said, "You'll walk out of here over our corpses, you will! You double-crossing "

Charlie Custis held up a hand.

"Previous example," he said. "Previous, see? Right after you asked me to help you, I walked away from you. Two guys grab me. They take me to more guys. They show me a gun. Several guns, in fact. They show me some bodies that are being sewn up in canvas for burial at sea. It was most impressive. I threw up every meal I had for the last six days."

Doc waited, finally said, "And "

"And so I was a good boy," Charlie Custis announced. "I did what they wanted me to do. I got up on that platform, and I read that speech. I didn't know what was in it when I started reading, but they assured me that if I left any out, they would ballast me appropriately with lead that was the way one of the humorists put it and drop me down on the bottom of the sea. So " He shrugged. "Well, you see how it was."

"That," Nesta said, "sounds tall."

"Like a skyscraper I'll admit."

"You said you were Lord London."

"It was in the script. I always follow a script. One like that, anyway."

Nesta pondered that. "Why do you suppose they picked on you to make the speech?"

"Probably because I'm a fascinating fellow," said Charlie Custis grimly. "You can cut off my ears, if you wish. Anything to make me less fascinating."

Nesta sank down on the edge of a berth. Charlie Custis was showing nerve, if he was telling the truth, to make wisecracks under the circumstances. But his courage did not raise her spirits. She could not make her mind

## THE PIRATE ISLE

face anything but terrible danger.

"They are sure to search the ship again," she said. "And what is going to keep them from finding us?"

### Chapter IX. JINX!

THE liner *City of Tulsa* changed course and steamed a south-and-west course at full speed.

Long Tom Roberts was not executed. He did a nice piece of work in saving himself.

When they ordered him to call the naval vessel by radio and explain that everything was all right, Long Tom was mentally alert enough not to give anything away. He acted just the proper degree of surprise, then pretended ignorance, so that he would be in the clear if it was a trick and safe if it was not a trick. He soon saw that it was not a trick or so his captors thought.

They took him to the radio shack, and the operator tuned in the receiving apparatus. They sat round for quite a while with nothing coming out of the ether. Then a voice said, "Calling the *City of Tulsa*. Naval vessel calling the liner, *City of Tulsa*. Or calling Doc Savage plane, MCX. Come in, Long Tom Roberts."

Long Tom played it out as fitted a Doc Savage associate. He recognized Doc's voice, although the bronze man was disguising it somewhat. He knew that the call was coming from a tiny transmitter on the ship, instead of from a distance.

"Get 'em off our trail!" snarled the radio operator, handing Long Tom a microphone.

With a perfectly bland expression, Long Tom took the mike.

He said, "Long Tom Roberts coming back at you. Hello, Commander Spitmil. If I don't call you every twelve hours, investigate the *City of Tulsa*."

He leaned back triumphantly.

There was a silence. A revolver cocked with an ominous click. A man held up his hand warningly. For more moments, they thought it over.

The voice they thought came from a naval boat said, "All right, Long Tom. We're out here in this part of the ocean, so we will keep an ear peeled for you. If we don't hear from you every twelve hours, we'll get after the *City of Tulsa*. We'll put our scouting plane in the air and locate you. But this is highly irregular, you know. May mean complications in Washington. However, anything for an old pal."

Long Tom looked at his captors. Deliberately winked at them.

He leaned forward to the mike, said, "That's great, William. Great! There won't be any complications in Washington, let's hope. Doc has got a lot of pull down there." He grinned thinly. "Again, thanks, William. I'm signing off, now."

The radio operator stood up and cursed Long Tom.



## THE PIRATE ISLE

"You think so fast you're liable to think yourself in front of a bullet!" he snarled. His eyes glittered, and he turned to the others. "You heard him, you guys. You've got twelve hours to find Doc Savage and get this ship so far away the navy can't find her."

"Sparks," said one of the men ominously, "are you giving orders?"

"I'm giving advice," said the operator.

"Just so it ain't orders," the other said. "You're working for Lord London, you know. Funny things happen to guys who get too big for their breeches."

The operator showed his teeth contemptuously. But after they left, he wiped perspiration off his forehead.

THAT night it was calm, black and raining. It was a night of the tropics, flat and hot and wet. The clouds were very low and as thick as wool, and water came out of them in black strings without lightning or thunder. The sea was a smooth plate that caught the rain with a gentle frying noise. The *City of Tulsa* steamed through the black void, drawing a bubbling comet tail of wake behind her, and there was glee on the bridge, because this was the kind of a night that a naval plane would have difficulty finding a ship.

Lord London's men with rifles, and a carelessness for human life, searched the *City of Tulsa*. They were very thorough. They began at the very stern, and they looked into and under everything. They left, literally, no stone unturned.

The searchers used the practical, if hair-raising expedient, of enlisting aid of regular stewards and crew members, after giving them a lecture and a demonstration. The demonstration consisted of guns. The lecture comprised the information that if they did not find Doc Savage or Renny Renwick, all the searchers those belonging to the regular crew would be shot.

There was no doubt in anybody's mind but that the lecture contained whole truth a yard wide.

So the search was thorough, indeed, and no fooling. It brought no results, except to dig out a Marquesan-boy stowaway who was scared out of his wits, and who was innocent of any connection with what was happening.

The searchers the members of the *City of Tulsa's* crew so obviously had done their best that they were not shot, although they were promised it later if Lord London got the whim.

Lord London did not appear in person. Everyone not in the know took it for granted that Charlie Custis was Lord London, and accordingly ostracized him, or fawned on him, or cursed him under their breaths, according to their degree of courage and moral outrage.

Word of the repute of Lord London was beginning to get around the ship, by now. The man was a black-hearted, black-souled, vicious legend through the South Seas. He had the qualities of genius along with those of Satan, according to the tales. He was, or should be, considering the men he had ruined and the loot he had, very wealthy. His followers were large in number and without scruples.

A fat, half-Chinese merchant from Li-ping in Kwei-Chow Province via Brisbane, Australia, to avoid unfriendly Japanese stated the avowed conviction that Lord London was a Chinese mongrel warlord who had fled united China. China had united against a common enemy during the Japanese trouble; and in the strong body of the new struggling nation, there was no room for the rot of local gangsters who passed as war lords.

## THE PIRATE ISLE

Lord London was one of these who had fled. Hence, the title of lord. Or so the half-Chinese said. But he was a little vague as to just why his information was correct. And he certainly could make no guess as to what was behind the present fantastic situation.

Speaking of the Oriental touch, someone pointed out, the men of Lord London had worked like the Chinese coastal pirates who once made Bias Bay such a spot.

Yes, said the half-Chinese, that proved his point, didn't it?

Charlie Custis overheard this, and snorted to himself. It didn't prove anything more than a bat proved that all mice had wings. The logic of some people.

Being ostracised, feared, cursed at, and wondering when somebody was going to try to kill him, was making Charlie Custis nervous. At times, in the past he had rather yearned to be a celebrity. He was one now. He was a sensation. He was not caring for it.

Charlie Custis went on about his current business, which was keeping an eye on a spot on the forward boat deck.

There was a lifeboat missing at that point.

DISCOVERY of the missing lifeboat created an uproar. Doc Savage and his friends had gotten away.

"Get below!" bellowed a man. "See if he got that Long Tom Roberts and William Harper Littlejohn! See if they're still aboard!"

That was one thing Charlie Custis had been waiting for. He raced along in the wake of the pair of men who ran to see if Long Tom and Johnny were still aboard.

Charlie Custis was very glad to find that Long Tom and Johnny were in a cabin amidships, both apparently alive but under heavy guard.

Custis sauntered back to the upper deck, to the neighborhood of the missing lifeboat.

The man who was strawbossing the search was still at the spot, standing with fists on his hips, occasionally remembering a new cussword and spitting it out. Apparently, he had exhausted his mind of everything in the way of foul epithets except these morsels which were crawling out at intervals like forgotten worms.

A man arrived and reported. He reported in Kwangtungese, which Charlie Custis understood.

"We have searched all the rails, all the bitts and every spot on the decks to which a line could be tied to tow the boat," the man reported. "We found none."

"You idiot!" said the straw boss. "Didn't you turn a searchlight on the stern water?"

"Briefly," the other replied. "Briefly, remembering the warship and the plane that might be searching. There was nothing."

## THE PIRATE ISLE

"Good," said the other. "They skipped the ship. That's fine. I hope the sharks eat them. Head for Jinx Island at full speed. We'll get this thing over with."

Remembering that the other did not understand English too well, the man repeated it in Kwangtungese.

"Tell them on the bridge to head for Jinx Island," he ordered. "Full speed, chop-shop, Sammy-up-a-tree! Savvy?"

"Sway nee dee bee'en,"

the man said, which meant that he understood.

IN the missing lifeboat, which was not missing, but whizzing along at the end of a long line off the stern of the *City of Tulsa*, Nesta Reynolds made a comment about Charlie Custis.

"I don't trust him," she said. "If anybody cuts this rope, I'll know who did it."

Renny rumbled, "First you say he'll make a good man Friday; now you say, 'Beware the wolf!'"

Nesta coughed angrily. "Wolf is right!"

She coughed some more because of the smoke, which really was quite bad. The lifeboat was riding like an aquaplane, and not smoothly either, but the smoke was worse. Because the air was heavy and the rain poured down, the smoke was driven from the ship funnels immediately to the water, blanketing them, coating them with soot, lining their lungs with something that felt like dirty cotton and cinders.

"How is he going to get us back aboard?" Nesta added. "He can't just haul this boat in. And if they hear him using a donkey engine, or whatever they call those things that pull lines, they will not be happy about it."

"I'm in no hurry to get back aboard," Renny boomed. "It isn't so long ago that they were poking a searchlight over the stern. Wonder they didn't see that rope."

Renny was back in a physical condition where he could boom somewhat. His normal speaking voice was something like a subway train going under the East River.

"It was out of a porthole in the stern locker," Nesta told him.

Meaning that the tow rope for their boat was tied at that point, which accounted for its not being discovered. It was not actually tied to the porthole but to an eyebolt for a chain, fastened into the hull a few inches outside the porthole. The search had not uncovered it.

After a while, the rope gave a series of jerking vibrations. These were regularly spaced.

Doc Savage said, "Charlie Custis is beating on the rope with an oar to signal us."

"Fine," said Nesta. "Now, how do we get back aboard?"

Doc Savage picked up a light line and tied one end to his waist. He said, "Tie the other end to the girl when I signal, Renny."

## THE PIRATE ISLE

The bronze man started out along the tow rope, and Nesta Reynolds said, "You can't do that! You can't make it! Nobody could!" Doc Savage paid no attention to her and disappeared into the drizzling night.

Nesta sank back on a thwart and sobbed. There was nothing restrained about her sobbing. It was not hysterical. It was just defeated and helpless.

"Close the faucets," Renny told her.

"But he can't get back along that rope!"

Renny was silent for a while. Then he asked, "Didn't you take a close look at Doc Savage?"

"Oh, he's a strong man, I could see that," the girl said. "But that rope is being dragged through the water at twenty knots. That's like being dragged over the ground at about twenty-five miles an hour and trying to climb against it. And he might be pulled into the propeller."

Renny was silent. She was making him uneasy. Then he remembered what he knew about Doc Savage the two hours of intense exercise that the bronze man had taken every day for most of his life and the big-fisted engineer grunted. "Forget it. He'll make it."

WHEN they stood on the *City of Tulsa*, Charlie Custis gripped Nesta's hand intensely. "Gosh, having you safe is like seeing the sun shine on roses," he said.

"The guy must be Irish, with a tongue for blarney like that," Nesta said. But she let him hold her hand for a little while, because she was back on the ship and she had thought she would never be.

Doc Savage asked, "They satisfied with their search?"

"As pleased as pigs in a mud puddle," Charlie Custis said. "They think you abandoned them in the lifeboat. They are so happy."

They all co-operated in pulling Renny Renwick aboard. Renny was big.

"Like a whale!" panted Charlie Custis.

Renny was full of water and good spirits. He got rid of the water as silently as possible. "Where to now?" he asked.

"Jinx Island, I suspect," Charlie Custis told them.

## Chapter X. NEAPED

THEY were three days and four nights reaching Jinx Island. The run was made at full speed, so the ship must have gone wide of shipping lanes because the direct run to Jinx was not that far.

Jinx was a green toad on the horizon.

## THE PIRATE ISLE

Doc Savage, Nesta Reynolds, Renny Renwick and Charlie Custis watched it from a porthole of the cabin where all of them but Charlie had been hiding. Charlie was their food supply.

"Volcanic," Nesta said.

"Describes your temper exactly," Charlie Custis told her. "That, and elephantine, which would refer to your memory. When are you going to forget about that speech they made me make?"

"Not," said Nesta, "until you smell like an honest man. Get thee to windward, Satan."

Doc Savage used a pair of binoculars which Charlie Custis had filched from the bridge. He studied Jinx Island. He tried to place the island in his memory but could not. The unfamiliarity of the place was aggravating. Doc had spent a lifetime acquiring a memory that was one of his most remarkable facilities, and it was letting him down. Jinx Island was a complete puzzle as far as he was concerned. He could not place it at all.

"A toad," Renny remarked, giving the obvious description of the island.

Nesta shook her head. "It's beautiful, probably. I was never on Jinx, but all these islands are delightful. It seems to be typical of this section of the ocean, so it will be like the others." She touched the bronze man. "Let me have the binoculars a moment."

He handed the glasses to her, and she stared through them, finally nodding with satisfaction. "You see the three palm trees on the ridge?" She handed the glasses back to Doc. "The opening of the reef is in line with the palms. There is a narrow passage and shallow water, enough to admit this ship, but it's treacherous yellow bottom. The tide rip keeps the water muddy in the inlet, so that you can't tell how it is running as to depth. But there is good anchorage inside, plenty of water."

Doc asked, "Did you get as far as the anchorage on your visit to the island?"

She shook her head. "I came in from the north. Johnny Littlejohn met me when we were about as far offshore as we are, now. He was in a dink a small boat."

Renny put in, "Then you've never been on Jinx?"

"No," she admitted.

Doc Savage contemplated the island again. "Is this place on the charts?" he asked.

"Of course," said the girl. "It's called Gleason's Island on the charts. A navy man named Gleason made the survey for the French, and gave the place his own name. But it was called Jinx Island before that, and the name stuck."

Doc Savage was relieved. He had a little information about Gleason's Island stored in his memory. It was rather general data, stuff that might come handy in an emergency if he should want to use the place as an emergency stop in a plane. Data similar to that which his mind held about a thousand other such islands. There was no suitable landing field for a strictly land plane. But the harbor inside the reef was good for a seaplane, sufficiently sheltered to be dependably smooth in almost all weather.

Renny was peering at Jinx. He said, "No snow."

## THE PIRATE ISLE

"Eh?" Nesta stared at him.

"No snow for snowballs," Renny explained.

"Oh!" She frowned. "You're still harping on those snowballs which Johnny Littlejohn threw at the crew."

Renny said agreeably, "They're a puzzle I'd like explained."

DOC SAVAGE absently returned his binoculars to their case. His expression was fixed in distance. For a moment, there was a suspicion of his trilling sound in the room, but it was very low, practically inaudible, as if he had not made the sound in actuality. It seemed to be, instead, a faint echo of his facial expression.

"The ship is not going to reach the island in time to enter the harbor by daylight," he said. "That means they will wait until morning. They would hardly risk a ship this size in an unmarked channel, where there is quite a tide rip, at night."

Charlie Custis looked at Doc Savage. He had learned something of the man of bronze during their period of association. He said, "You've hatched an idea?"

"A request only, for the moment," Doc Savage corrected.

"Yeah?"

"Can you get hold of a tide table?"

"A what?"

The bronze man was patient. "A tide table is a publication for mariners' use, giving the time of high and low tide at various points on the earth's surface."

Charlie Custis grinned sheepishly. "Ignorance is wonderful, isn't it? You want it, now? I presume I'll find it in the bridge locker, which may be hard to get into."

Doc said, "Try Captain Hardgrove's cabin."

Charlie Custis nodded. "Right. They've got the captain locked up in the cabin next to Johnny and Long Tom, I heard, so his cabin will be unoccupied." He hesitated, shrugged, said, "Here goes!" and went out.

Renny grinned. "Funny guy, that Custis. Nothing seems to scare him."

"Nothing, I've heard, scares Lord London!" Nesta Reynolds remarked meaningly.

Doc Savage glanced at her curiously, but made no comment. He went to the mirror and touched up his grease paint they were still using the black-face disguise on the rare occasions when they moved about the ship and walked to the door. He said, "Stay here, will you?" He went out.

Renny muttered, "Doc is hatching something. I don't see exactly what it could be."

Nesta Reynolds had something else on her mind. "Look," she said, "just how much of a fox is he?"

## THE PIRATE ISLE

"Who?"

"Doc. Could it be that he is 'taking in' our friend Charlie?"

"You mean Doc may think Custis is Lord London after all and is playing along?"

"That's it." She nodded. "I notice Doc never tells Custis what he is going to do."

Renny snorted. "You'll find out that Doc rarely tells anybody his plans. He's got an old rule for that. It's this: 'What you don't know won't hurt somebody else.'"

Nesta stared through the porthole at Jinx Island. "I wonder if John Mike Borzoi is still alive on that island? I wonder why he hired me and what the job was. I wonder why Johnny Littlejohn fled the island. And I wonder why Lord London's men are going to all the trouble of grabbing this ship and bringing it and Johnny Littlejohn back here."

"That," said Renny dryly, "is a nice set of questions."

"Dang it!" Nesta said.

IN the bow of the *City of Tulsa*, a sailor with a lead line was taking soundings. "By the mark, ten," he was bellowing. "By the mark, nine and two. By the mark, nine and one." He kept that up until he came down to, "By the mark, seven."

They dropped anchor, then, confirming Doc Savage's judgment that they would not attempt to get into the unlighted harbor by night.

Doc listened to the anchor chain clamoring out of the locker. It was quite dark, now. He moved closer to the sailor who had been taking the sounding.

The sailor coiled the sounding line, carried it to the locker, and put it away. He departed, whistling.

There were lead lines in the locker. Doc examined them, but did not tamper with them.

He went back to the cabin. Charlie Custis was there with the tide table. He handed it to Doc, asked, "This what you wanted?"

It was, and the bronze man nodded. He examined the table for a while, nodded again and handed it back to Custis.

Custis was puzzled. "Good or bad?" he asked. But the bronze man made no comment.

Later, however, he remarked that he would be gone for a few moments, and left them.

Doc went back to the lead-line locker, and removed three fathoms from each line. It was a lengthy operation, because it necessitated changing the fathom indicators on the lines.

Each lead line was marked in regulation fashion piece of leather with two ends for two fathoms, leather with three ends for three fathoms, bit of white calico for five fathoms, red bunting for seven fathoms, leather with a

## THE PIRATE ISLE

hole in it for ten fathoms, and so on.

Doc made the changes and replaced the lines in the locker.

When he returned to the cabin, he was eyed suspiciously by Nesta Reynolds. "You put a hen on?" she inquired.

"Don't let it keep you awake," he told her. "In fact, a good night's sleep is what everyone needs."

Nesta said disgustedly that what she needed was some sensible explanation of the whole affair, including snowballs on the hottest day of summer. She retired, however, behind the curtain which they had rigged across one end of the cabin to make her a boudoir.

THE *City of Tulsa* ran aground at five minutes past six the following morning. The shortened sounding lines were responsible. The ship was moving slowly, and it stopped with a barely noticeable jar and with no sound at all. After that, it was still, perhaps half a mile from the island shore, with water rushing past. The water was muddied by the tide rip and was fairly smooth, because the outer protecting reef was behind the ship.

Renny Renwick listened admiringly to the burst of profanity from the bridge, then looked at Doc Savage. "Your fine hand shows in this," he said.

"A matter of three fathoms off the sounding line," Doc admitted. "They put the ship aground."

"But," said Renny, "they will back her off. Maybe they won't get the job done this tide. But they can wait twelve hours and catch the next high tide."

Doc Savage shook his head slightly. "The ship is neaped."

"Is what?"

"Neaped. Aground at high spring tide. The tide, right now, is higher than it will be at any time for a year."

"Holy cow!" Renny rumbled. "So that's why you wanted the tide table. Does that mean the vessel is lost? It will not lay here safely for a year? Or will it? We are inside the reef protection, at that."

"That is one of our smaller worries," Doc told him.

Renny's face became long. "What do we do, now? Start cleaning house?"

"In a way," Doc admitted. "We will get Long Tom and Johnny and get ashore if we can."

Nesta Reynolds brightened. "Now, you're talking. What I want to see is that island. I want to know what's on it that made them come back here."

There was a tapped signal on the door. Charlie Custis, obviously, because he was the only one not present. He entered a moment later.

"The merry-go-round broke down," he said cheerfully. "We're fast aground. That's nice, with the nearest thing called civilization about seven hundred miles away. Or is there anything closer than Viti Levu Island?"



## THE PIRATE ISLE

He examined their faces. "Hey, I see intrigue on your maps. So you got this ark on the mud! How'd you do it?"

Nesta told Doc Savage, "We didn't have anything to do with it, did we?" Her voice was meaningful.

Doc told Charlie Custis what they had done, outlined their plans. Nesta Reynolds looked disgusted. She did not approve of taking Custis into their confidence.

Charlie Custis seemed enthusiastic.

"I've been itching to turn my little dog loose," he said. "Let's go get this wheel rolling."

### Chapter XI. HALF A LOAF

THE plan which Doc Savage outlined was simple, he explained. He proceeded to give them details. They would get hold of Johnny Littlejohn and Long Tom Roberts, and escape to the island, where they would have a chance to get at the bottom of the mystery.

"A simple plan," Nesta agreed dryly. "Just like it's simple to explain gravity."

"I know what cabin they're holding Long Tom and Johnny in," said Charlie Custis. "Same one they've been in all along."

There was rather aimless commotion through the ship. The pirates the word fully described Lord London and his men were finding out that the ship was hopelessly aground but had not decided what to do about it. The engines were pounding, and great masses of muddy water were boiling past as they tried vainly to back off.

Renny, Charlie Custis and Nesta Reynolds followed Doc Savage down to C Deck, where the bronze man stopped and outlined the campaign.

"Renny," he said, "do you understand the machinery layout of this ship?"

The big-fisted engineer nodded. "If I don't, I'll guarantee to walk back to San Francisco. I've designed a dozen of these things, then superintended construction."

Doc said, "Can you set a fire which will cause a lot of smoke, but no danger?"

Renny was silent a moment, thinking. "Sure."

"Go ahead and do it."

"How soon?"

"Immediately!"

"Right." Renny started to leave.

"Just a moment," Doc told him. "When you have the fire set, go to the aft boat deck, to a spot next to the

## THE PIRATE ISLE

lifeboat we used the other night. We will try to use the adjoining lifeboat this time."

"Right," Renny said, and departed.

Doc turned to Charlie Custis, said, "You go up and get the lifeboat ready. Think you can do that?"

Charlie Custis nodded. He pointed at Nesta. "What about the little object of unrequited love, here. I feel a sort of proprietary interest in her safety. She's the first dame I've loved and was not loved by in return."

"Oh, my foot!" Nesta said.

"She will be with me," Doc explained.

Charlie Custis sighed. "If you say, it will have to be. Only I wish she was in less handsome hands. Not less capable, you understand. Less handsome." He chuckled. "I wonder if that is why I am getting nowhere."

"Hit him," Nesta urged Doc.

Charlie Custis laughed and waved a hand, left them.

"He irks me," Nesta said.

THE bronze man moved ahead cautiously to the cabin where Johnny and Long Tom were being held. Nesta followed him.

Doc gave her an object which looked like an iron marble with a small lever, telling her, "Go ahead past the cabin, and be ready to throw this at anyone who bothers you." He gave her four small objects which appeared to be globules of glass filled with a bilious-looking liquid. "Tap on the cabin door," he said, "then drop these and get away. And hold your breath."

She eyed the pellets. "That gas I heard about? The kind that you don't see or smell before it K. O.'s you?"

He nodded. "But hold your breath."

"I'll save out one of these for Charlie," she said.

She walked down the corridor. Doc Savage followed a few feet behind. The idea was for the knock to draw the occupant to the cabin door, or at least near it, where the gas would overcome him.

It was probably a very sensible and feasible plan, but it developed that a monkey wrench got into the works in the form of a large purposeful fellow who came out of the cabin suddenly. He pinned Nesta to the opposite corridor wall with a pistol and the statement: "You drop one of those things, and there'll be six bullets through your beautiful interior before they hit the carpet."

Simultaneously, more men came into the corridor, and they came armed and in the way of men attacking, so there was not much doubt but that it was a trap.

Four of them, and the man who had grabbed Nesta. Five in all. Only one, Nesta's captor, had a gun. The others had knives and plenty of confidence. They came in. One of them whistled once loudly, evidently a signal.

## THE PIRATE ISLE

They had done this before. There was a deadly training about the way they did it. They spread one right, one left. One of the pair in the center went down until his face was almost against the floor, and came forward, slashing!

Instead of jumping back, Doc went up and forward. He came down, with nice timing, and his heel smashed the crouching man's knife hand. Something broke in the man's arm, and the fellow put out his tongue in agony but made no sound.

Another man drove in with a knife. Because the blade was aimed at his chest, Doc took it squarely. The steel broke against the chain-mesh undergarment he wore, an armored garment that would stop a bullet.

Doc got hold of the bladeless knife hilt. Because there seemed no sense in fighting for it, the man let it go. Doc came around, leaped backward and threw the hilt very hard.

The knife hilt hit the temple of the man who was holding Nesta. He let her go, moved back on rubber legs, nearly out on his feet. The girl had judgment enough to lunge and grasp his gun, push it aside just as the weapon started exploding.

Noise of the gun drew one of the two remaining knifemen's attention long enough for Doc to hit him. The man sank. There was complete looseness in his body.

The survivor changed his mind about the whole thing. He dropped his knife, started going back as fast as possible. He dug at a coat pocket for a gun.

To reach him in time, Doc had to pitch forward. The bronze man simply clutched the man's coat, came down hard and tore the garment off his shoulders. A foolish expression came over the man's face as he lost the garment. He kept going back. He turned and ran.

A kicking and banging started against the door to the left.

"Who is it?" bellowed Captain Hardgrove. "Let me out of here!"

The cabin to the right was supposed to hold Johnny and Long Tom. Doc hit the door of this cabin, took the lock out of the wood with his weight and went in.

Long Tom Roberts was on the floor, fighting ropes.

Doc demanded, "Where is Johnny?"

"They're taking him ashore," Long Tom gasped. "They figure you must have grounded the ship. They don't want you to talk to him, so they're rushing him to the island."

Nesta Reynolds appeared in the door. She was pale, and her words came out with difficulty.

"Someone warned them we were coming," she said. "I told you Charlie Custis was somebody to watch."

CAPTAIN HARDGROVE was beating on the door across the corridor. His parrot the bird seemed to be in the cabin was squawking angrily, bellowing for Henry and John and Charlie. The uproar was impressive.

## THE PIRATE ISLE

Doc tried Captain Hardgrove's door. It was locked. He said, "Stand back, captain." He hit the door and went through. The panel hit Captain Hardgrove as it flew open, for the skipper had not stepped back. The skipper staggered and clutched his nose.

He glared at Doc Savage. "Hey, who're you black-faced " He stopped, then a grin crackled all across his face. "Doc Savage!" he shouted. "They thought you had abandoned the ship, days ago!"

"Where is Mr. Weed?" Doc asked.

"That rat!" Captain Hardgrove sneered "He joined up with them, blast him. Or, at least, he turned into a collaborator."

Doc said, "We are going ashore. Care to try it with us?"

The skipper gave his belt a hitch. "I'll try anything. Come on!"

They turned back, heading for the boat deck, climbing companionways.

Nesta Reynolds eyed Captain Hardgrove suspiciously and told Doc Savage, "You take recruits freely, don't you?"

"Everyone helps," Doc said.

"You might," said Nesta, "take a viper to your bosom, you know."

Doc made no answer. Long Tom overheard the girl's remark which she had taken care not to let Captain Hardgrove overhear and asked, "What goes on? You sound dissatisfied."

Nesta grimaced. "The trouble with me is that I'm beginning to suspect everybody."

Long Tom said, "If you're wondering how they caught you when you came to the cabin back there, that was just a good guess on their part. A man came rushing in and assigned five guards on the chance you might try to raid the cabin."

"They have some brains anyway."

"They've got a lot of brains," Long Tom told her. "At least one of them has. They're snake brains, but they're brains. His name is Lord London?"

"Did you meet him?"

"He seems to be a guy you don't meet," Long Tom said, shaking his head. "No, I didn't."

There was a new uproar below decks, and when they came out into the morning sunlight, smoke was pouring from deck ventilators. Renny had evidently set his fire successfully.

They came in sight of the lifeboat they wanted, and Doc made a sharp gesture indicating that they should walk at an ordinary pace.

A sailor was behaving suspiciously with Charlie Custis. Charlie was telling him, "Go ask the big shot if you don't believe me, you square-headed rope-wadder. They told me to take the cover off this lifeboat and swing

## THE PIRATE ISLE

it out in case we had to abandon ship. There's a fire aboard. Or wouldn't you know?"

Charlie saw Doc Savage approaching and became more indignant. He told the sailor angrily, "Listen, for two cents I'd flatten your nose! Come up here butting in "

This held the sailor's attention thoroughly enough for Doc to hit him. The man fell.

Captain Hardgrove leaned over the sailor and hit him again, unnecessarily. "I wish he was conscious. I'd butter his nubbins for him. "

Charlie Custis said, "Come on, get this boat in the water, or we'll all be in the butter."

Captain Hardgrove kicked the unconscious sailor. "This scraping off the keel of a garbage barge," he said, "shipped aboard me in Australia. I remember him. Told me he was fresh from County Cork. I'll County Cork him."

The others had climbed into the lifeboat.

Renny Renwick came pounding down the deck with long strides and a particularly sad expression, which meant he was quite pleased with the situation. He piled into the lifeboat. Nesta Reynolds asked the skipper, "You coming? Or you want to stay and play angel to that sailor."

Captain Hardgrove climbed into the lifeboat, grinning, a grin without pleasure or enjoyment. He helped Renny handle one fall. Doc handled the other. They twisted the boat out and down to the calm sea, planting it on the water with a gentle slosh of noise.

"Break out oars," Doc Savage said.

THERE was a *whisk-whisk-whisk* noise overhead, a flurry of bright-green and orange feathers, and Captain Hardgrove's parrot settled in the boat. Captain Hardgrove looked at the bird with no taste. "Get the hell out of here," he told the bird, "or I'll scald and pick you and fry you for supper."

The parrot, unconcerned, said, "You'll always love me, won't you, Clarence?"

Nesta asked Captain Hardgrove, "Is Clarence your name?"

The burly skipper's neck got red with emotion. "Not," he said, "that I ever heard of."

"Then who *is* Clarence?"

The wave of red on the skipper's neck turned to a shade of tense gray. "I left this damned parrot at home with my wife when I went to sea," he said grimly. "I don't know who Clarence is. I don't know who Homer is, or a dozen other guys he knows the names of."

Nesta started to laugh, then saw that the skipper meant it. She swallowed and said nothing. They were pulling away from the side of the ship. So far, they had not been seen, and the byplay about the parrot was helping keep their minds off what might, and probably would, happen if they were seen.

## THE PIRATE ISLE

They were fortunate, very fortunate, because they were not seen until they were fully two hundred yards away. Not all of it might have been good fortune; some could have been due to the bronze man's judgment in selecting a boat on the seaward, not the island, side of the ship for escape. The pirates were watching the island side, probably.

But finally, a hail drifted from the *City of Tulsa*. The voice demanded who they were.

Doc Savage stood up boldly in the boat, cupped hands to his lips and sent a yell ringing back.

"Go ask your boss!" he shouted. "He's responsible for our being here."

The man, who evidently did not recognize them, shouted, "You mean you got orders to go ashore?"

"If you don't like it," Doc bellowed back, "you can come out here and row this blasted boat!"

The boldness of the answers fooled the man who had discovered them and allayed his suspicions for a while, long enough for them to cover another hundred yards. Then they were shot at. The shooting was not good.

"Revolvers," said Captain Hardgrove. "We better bend these oars. They'll get somebody who's good with a rifle, and it won't be so nice."

His advice was good. On the boat, the pirates did get someone with a rifle, and a bullet took their collective breath with its ugly sound, singing not more than inches above their heads. Captain Hardgrove emitted a bellow that could have been heard in a dream and sprang up in the boat. He waved his arms, howled again. Another bullet came across, not as close. He sat down.

"Guess I can't shout them down," he said sheepishly. "Only it gripes me, having men on my ship shoot at me."

THE small boat lunged ahead. There was not much swell close to the beach, and they hit sharp coral with a rumbling grind and stopped. Renny bounded out, gasped, and sank to a knee.

"Holy cow, watch it!" he warned. "This coral is like teeth." He had cut his foot slightly.

They ran, slashing, and gained the beach. The sand was hard and white and hot and a huge *tupa* crab, two feet wide, fled wildly from them. They overtook the crab. Rifle-shot echoes were bouncing off the wall of jungle ahead.

Nesta stumbled in a *pahue*, a long lovely vine that wandered across the beach, and Doc caught her, steadied her. They went on and piled into the shelter of the jungle. Cockatoos fled with crowlike outcries.

They sank down to catch their breath.

Captain Hardgrove looked around. "Nice spot. Very nice."

"Like the fine dinner they give you before they electrocute you," suggested Nesta.

Renny stared at the fronds of a *petavii*, a kind of banana, which curved high in the air. He was thoughtful. "Skipper," he said.

## THE PIRATE ISLE

"Yes?" asked Captain Hardgrove.

"How much do you know about this thing?"

"Well," said Captain Hardgrove instantly, "it is the most outrageous thing I ever heard tell of. Making a man prisoner on his own ship "

Doc Savage put in sharply, "Suppose we do not waste time, captain, on small talk."

Captain Hardgrove looked for a moment as if his stomach hurt him. He looked at Doc, then contemplated the ground. He picked up a handful of white coral sand and flipped it over the green and glossy flowers of a *pandanus*.

"I guess some of the things I have heard about you are true," he said. "All right, here's the level: I began this thing with crooked ideas. I thought: 'Here is this Johnny Littlejohn, one of Doc Savage's men, mixed up in something. Whatever Doc Savage's men are mixed in is usually big. Big things interest me. Particularly big money. I would like to cut myself a slice of big money.' So" Hardgrove looked up sidewise "you see the dirty groove my mind got into."

Nesta asked, "You sure it still isn't in the groove?"

Captain Hardgrove grimaced. "I hope I've reformed," he said. "Still they say, 'Once a crook, always a crook.'"

"What," Doc Savage asked Captain Hardgrove, "do you know about the situation?"

"Mr. Weed, my first officer, said there was a man up the foremast, in the crow's nest, throwing snowballs at the crew," the skipper said grimly. "I did not see the snowballs, but the crew did; so there must have been snowballs. A damned hot day, too. Anyway, we got the man down. He was obviously crazy. Dr. Cunico learned his name was William Harper Littlejohn. Dr. Cunico did that on his own hook, and I fried him a little for it."

The skipper was silent a while. He sighed. "Yeah, I put Dr. Cunico on the griddle about that. I already had ideas. I knew who Johnny Littlejohn was as soon as I saw him, of course. This bug about big money had gotten in my craw by then, too. So well, I was off for the ride." He grimaced, eyed Doc Savage. "Hell bent for jail, I guess it'll end."

Doc said, "Would they have trouble proving anything they could put you in jail for?"

Captain Hardgrove shuddered. "No," he admitted doubtfully. "Well, they won't have any trouble tying a stink on me that'll ruin me for good in the shipping business. I've seen that kind of thing done before."

"Maybe not," Doc said. "That all you know?"

A completely new voice addressed them from the adjacent bushes.

"You fella savvy alongside rock," it said.

Renny rumbled, "Holy cow!" and started to get to his feet.

Nesta stopped him, said, "He means we had better imitate a rock. Stand still, in other words."

"Who is he?" Renny boomed.

"Me fella with gun, no patience," the voice said.

## Chapter XII. PUZZLE ON JINX

AND hardly any clothes, he might have added, except a bit of a sarong made of bark cloth. And the gun, of course. A very modern gun made in the Mauser plant within the last year or two.

He was a very handsome native. An Apollo of the bushes. But with some education, obviously. Renny Renwick, who knew South Sea fauna and flora, noted that the man came from behind a *mako-mako* shrub, which had yellow flowers. The other name for *mako-mako* was snake plant, and the coincidence seemed very appropriate.

"What name friend?" he asked.

He did not mean what were their names. He was speaking the pidgin English of the South Seas. In pidgin, the words "what name" almost invariably preceded a question. He wanted to know if they were friends.

"Sure," said Renny promptly.

"You fella talk long tongue alongside crook on end," the marvelous-looking native said, pointing to Captain Hardgrove.

He dangled a length of *parau* bark, a bark that could be used for tying up various things, including individuals.

"You fella on ground," he added.

"Now look here," said Nesta argumentatively. "We might be your friends, you know. Savvy friends? Savvy you fella come alongside good fella your friend? Mucho pals, savvy?"

The native, not impressed, showed them the argumentative end of his gun and said, "Savvy come alongside *pao-pao*?"

"What's *pao-pao* mean?" Renny asked.

"Dead," Nesta translated. "Very dead!"

"Come alongside dead, eh?" Renny muttered. "Sounds embarrassing."

Renny's rather gay comment on the business of "coming alongside dead" did not detract from the seriousness of the situation. They got down on their faces, and their wrists were lashed with the *parau* bark. The native did the tying with sure, quick turns and loops. Having finished the job, he grunted loudly and added a few words in his native tongue, addressing them to the adjacent jungle.

Fully a dozen natives, all with new guns, came out of the jungle as if by magic.



## THE PIRATE ISLE

Nesta looked at their captor, said, "You weren't taking any chances, were you, chum?"

The native scowled.

"Chum isn't much of a humorist," Renny decided aloud.

Doc Savage said, "You had best play down the humorist efforts. The fellow does not think it is funny."

The handsome native scowled to confirm this and walked toward the beach. He was gone a few minutes. Then he could be heard clapping his hands together loudly to get hurried attention from his men.

Doc Savage and the others listened in amazement to the orders which he gave.

"Holy cow!" Renny said. "He is giving orders to seize everybody who comes from the boat. He must not be one of Lord London's men after all."

The stalwart specimen of South Seas manhood evidently heard and understood the remark. He came back to them. He stood in front of them and beat his chest. He was much like a handsome, extremely excited ape.

"Me fella name Toad Face," he said.

"Your name is Toad Face," Renny agreed without smiling. "And "

"Me fella decide not work alongside Lord London no more," the native said, getting to the point. "Me fella take over. Take shebang. Take business. Take works. Savvy?"

They savvied. He said it in a way that they could not help but savvy. Here was revolution in the ranks. Here was an underdog a capable-looking one, too out to seize power.

THEY were tossed, tied hand and foot, into a thicket where *kounas* waved their fabulously irregular leaves and *pandanus* was colorful about them, with thousands of orchids hanging like butterflies. They were left to lie there while the rest of their captors, save one determined guard, retired to the beach for a reception party.

A flock of *koi* birds came over, as black as crows and in a dense cloud, many dozens together. They were followed by the skipper's parrot, who seemed to be awed into silence.

Captain Hardgrove watched his parrot fly away as if a friend was leaving. "The way I figure it," he said, "these are Lord London's men. They were left here, while Lord London and the rest of them chased Johnny Littlejohn. Those left here have decided to rebel. That probably means they have found out what is here. Whatever is here must be worth a lot. Lord London's men wouldn't double-cross him for anything less than a lot of dollars."

Doc Savage said, "You seem impressed by Lord London."

"The man has a reputation," said Captain Hardgrove dryly. He eyed Doc Savage sharply. "A reputation in excess of your own, in this part of the world, I might add."

Doc Savage seemed neither impressed nor disbelieving. He turned to Long Tom.

## THE PIRATE ISLE

"Long Tom," he said, "you haven't said a word about what you learned from Johnny during your captivity on the ship."

Long Tom shrugged. "We weren't allowed to talk."

"Is Johnny crazy?"

"Of course not!" Long Tom said. "He's faking it."

"Why?"

"So they can't get information out of him, would be my guess," Long Tom replied. The electrical expert scowled. "Say, has anybody ever found out what those snowballs were about?"

Doc shook his head. While he was shaking it, there were glad shouts on the beach. Pleased cries. Yells of greeting and joy. Their captors were giving a boatload of individuals from the ship a most cordial reception.

"Holy cow!" Renny rumbled. "And that Toad Face was going to take over the shebang!"

The ultra-handsome native, Toad Face, soon appeared. He was trailed by his colleagues, by several sailors from the *City of Tulsa*, and by Dr. Cunico.

Captain Hardgrove looked at Dr. Cunico, his mouth wide open.

"What the devil!" he ejaculated. "So the forces of law and order have taken over!"

Dr. Cunico eyed the skipper.

"Law and order?" he said.

"Why, sure," said Captain Hardgrove. "Pure of heart and peace at soul, that's you, Cunico. For once, I'm glad to see your saintly face. Turn us loose."

"So I'm a saint," said Dr. Cunico dryly.

"Complete with halo," the skipper declared. "Come on, guy; cut us loose."

Dr. Cunico laughed heartily. "As an actor, I seem to surprise myself," he said.

Captain Hardgrove began turning pale. He paled very suddenly, as if his throat had been cut and no blood could get its color into this face.

Dr. Cunico leered. "That's right." He kicked the skipper on the chin. The kick was hard enough to make one of Captain Hardgrove's lips split. He had false teeth, and the kick broke them. The teeth fragments came out of his gagging mouth like pieces of flesh-colored gravel and pearls.

"That's right," repeated Dr. Cunico. "You see, *I'm* Lord London!"

Captain Hardgrove made helpless, horrified, troubled noises over the ruin in his mouth that had been his teeth.

## THE PIRATE ISLE

Charlie Custis, who had not had a word to say for some time, let out his breath in a startled whistle, then looked embarrassed. He did not speak.

Dr. Cunico gestured sharply. "Take them over to the lagoon," he ordered. "I want to talk to John Mike Borzoi."

Nesta Reynolds gasped aloud.

"Is he alive?" she asked.

"Who?" asked Cunico.

"Old John Mike."

Dr. Cunico's eyes narrowed. "Why did *you* think he would be dead?"

Nesta Reynolds did not answer that. Renny and Charlie Custis and Long Tom Roberts looked at her suspiciously. Even Doc Savage's flake gold eyes were fixed upon her. But she did not answer.

Dr. Cunico came over to her.

He said, "Pretty sister, you behave. Behave and keep that trap shut."

After Nesta had said nothing to that, they were picked up and carried bodily up a serrated slope toward a ridge, through going that was made bad by increasing growths of *keoho*, a thorn shrub which tore clothes and fanged at their bodies.

### Chapter XIII. THE LAGOON

THE very fact that there was a lagoon on Jinx Island or Gleason's Island, as it was indicated on the charts was a surprise. The charts would not have shown a lagoon anyway, because the scale was too small. There was no large-scale chart of the island available, indicating a survey had never been made.

The "Pacific Pilot," the bible of seafarers in the South Pacific, stated there was no lagoon. As Nesta Reynolds had pointed out earlier, the island was of volcanic formation, and such formations do not ordinarily have lagoons. A lagoon is a body of water surrounded to a large extent by a ring of land, like a doughnut with a bite taken out of it. They are peculiar to coral atolls.

But Jinx Island had a lagoon. The mouth was narrow and crooked, and a nest of reefs offshore had kept any ship from venturing close enough to find it from the sea. Doc Savage's companions saw the lagoon when they topped the ridge.

"Holy cow!" exploded Renny.

Doc Savage made the small trilling sound which was his unconscious habit in moments of mental excitement.

Nesta Reynolds' eyes got round, and Charlie Custis leaned forward to stare, while Long Tom Roberts gave his lower lip an absent-minded chewing. Captain Hardgrove swore, lisping because he now had no teeth. His

## THE PIRATE ISLE

parrot was so surprised by the change in his master's voice, or so it seemed, that the bird emitted a shrill scream.

The structure had not taken so much labor, really, to create.

Forty or fifty natives had worked two or three months, perhaps, to do it.

They had built a system of dikes and headgates which, at first, was mistakable for a plant used to evaporate the salt from sea water. But a second glance showed it was no salt plant if one knew anything about salt plants even if anyone would be fool enough to think there would be a salt plant in this remote part of the South Seas, with hundreds of square miles of raw salt ready for the taking on Great Salt Lake Desert in Utah and in other places in the world.

This arrangement was more mechanical. It had been designed for some specific purpose, and the purpose was *not* getting salt. It was more complicated. It was, as a whole, puzzling.

Dr. Cunico suddenly had hold of Doc Savage's arm.

"You see!" he hissed. "Man's dream for the last forty years!"

Something occurred to Doc Savage. "Gold?" he asked.

Dr. Cunico nodded and his breath hissed. "Yes. Yes, that's it!"

"Gold out of sea water?"

"That's right." Excitement was making Dr. Cunico's breathing almost a steady noise. "For a long time, they've known about gold in sea water. Scientists have, I mean. There's a percentage of gold dissolved in the sea water. A small percentage, but still it is there. The trick is to get it out."

Doc Savage indicated the intricate diking—and–heagate affair. "That is to take it out?"

Dr. Cunico rubbed his hands together. "Old John Mike Borzoi figured it out. Isn't that wonderful?" He kept rubbing his hands together. "All for my benefit, too. An ambitious guy sure gets ahead in this world, doesn't he?"

Doc Savage was careful to make no comment.

He caught Renny's eye, though. And Renny closed the eye slowly, with amazement.

So Renny knew it, too. And Renny was probably as puzzled as Doc Savage, as puzzled as anyone would be at this talk about gold from sea water. For Renny was an engineer, a good one, good enough that he knew what basic principles would be involved in removing gold from sea water.

None of the basic principles of getting gold out of the sea were noticeable in that structure down there in the lagoon. So, whatever Old John Mike Borzoi had been doing here, he had *not* been taking gold out of the sea. Not with that gadget!

## THE PIRATE ISLE

THEY went down to the lagoon, to a house. This was no conventional native house made on a platform of basalt stones called a *pae-pae*, no spindling thing of matings and framework tied together with cordage of the *faufee*, or lacebark tree.

This house was built like the men of the Nile built the pyramids, except not on such a scale. It was constructed to stand in fire and tornado, quake and typhoon. "Come hell or high water," as Renny muttered under his breath.

"You see!" gloated Dr. Cunico. "He built it strong. A vault for all that gold."

There was a little old man in the house. A little old man of the sea, or of the mountains, or of time without time and suffering without an end. He had about him an ethereal quality, a thing that was hard to define. It could have been called a power, whatever it was that hung about him.

The quality the thing about little old John Mike Borzoi that was as distinctive as a serpent in a rain barrel was beneath the surface. It was the same quality owned by the little man of India who wears the sheet, the bag of bones named Gandhi, who could upset an empire with a word, although he had nothing and owned nothing as material richness is measured.

Brains and intelligence, it might have been. At any rate, it was with him like a magic cloak, bright and strong, although he sat there in a chair with a chain fastened to one of his ankles then to the floor, and with bowls of food and water around him, as if someone were feeding a dog.

"Good morning," he said. "It is morning, isn't it?"

No one said anything, because they were looking at him, and pity had their tongues.

His eyes were or where his eyes had been; it was hard to be sure hideous. If there was a square inch of his skin that was not cut and welted, it did not show.

The man had been tortured, tortured for a long time in horrible, fiendish fashion. For days and weeks he had been maltreated, if appearance was any indication.

The bowls on the floor held salt water. Water so salty that the stuff crusted the edge of the vessel. And there was a small sluggish snake in one of the bowls of food, and another had at least two handfuls of worms of a long and revolting variety.

"Good morning," repeated John Mike Borzoi. "It is not particularly nice to have company. But, at least, it is a change."

Captain Hardgrove spoke out.

"This is Doc Savage with me," said the skipper. "He is a prisoner."

The words did a terrible thing to old John Mike Borzoi. Hope had been in him, until now. Hope, they suddenly saw, sustained by nothing but the belief that Doc Savage would come. Hope had held his poor wrenched body together. Nothing else. Now, he had been told that Doc Savage had come but that Doc was a prisoner.

Old John Mike Borzoi folded down on the floor as if the bones had gone out of his body.

## THE PIRATE ISLE

The native man called Toad Face sprang forward.

"Epo! Epo!"

he exploded. "The first time he has faint." He looked over his shoulder at them. "The very first time."

Captain Hardgrove said, "It sure looks as if I cut off his water when I said that."

Renny Renwick then did something which was typical of Renny but for which he was instantly sorry. He hung one on Captain Hardgrove's jaw with his foot. He hung it hard, so that it was quite a kicking contortion to get up to the level of the skipper's jaw. But he made it. His hands were tied, not his feet. Captain Hardgrove fell, and hard.

Dr. Cunico stalked over and stared down at Captain Hardgrove. "What a wallop!" he said. "Or I should say what a boot!"

"Haie!"

said the native called Toad Face. "What name this time good as any?"

He walked over to Dr. Cunico, and because Cunico had no suspicion of what was going to happen, he let himself get hit a wallop on the jaw. The blow came up from below, like a duck taking off from the ground, and hit like a bucketful of mud. Dr. Cunico raised on his tiptoes, and a little higher, and put his hands out as if he was going to do a dance of the May; then he fell on his side, completely loose of body.

"Haie!"

said Toad Face, proud of himself.

AFTER that, they were in the dark solemn room of the house, all by themselves, with one guard who did not speak English or pidgin, or Marquesan, either, as far as they could learn but who could grunt with the same effect as a bull rhinoceros. He did not seem to object to anything they did, as long as it was not motion. The slightest move from any one of them caused him to explode like a steam engine with a loose pressure valve and cock and uncock his gun. He also cocked and uncocked his gun at intervals when they were not talking, but that was somehow less effective than when connected with his grunt.

They said nothing much until old Borzoi had regained his senses. There was something about the thing that had obviously happened to John Mike that was so unpleasant it discouraged words.

But when John Mike Borzoi did manifest some slight signs of life, Doc Savage spoke.

"What have they been doing to you, Mr. Borzoi?" Doc asked.

John Mike stirred slightly, but that was all.

Doc said, "There is one native here. Marquesan. You can talk English, and tell us what has happened. Probably he does not understand English. It might not make any difference if he does. You would be the judge of that."

## THE PIRATE ISLE

Nothing from old, persecuted John Mike Borzoi.

Nesta Reynolds took it up.

"This is Nesta Reynolds, John Mike," she said. "You knew my father, Bill Reynolds. You hired me, Mr. Borzoi, to come here. You remember that, don't you?"

John Mike took his time about answering.

"I can't see you," he said. "I don't know who you are. You may be who you say. I don't know. I ain't saying nothing."

"They've treated you terribly, haven't they?" Nesta said.

"They can't do much they haven't already done," said John Mike.

Nesta asked, "Why did you hire me?"

John Mike Borzoi answered that readily enough. "I heard you could be trusted," he said. "I needed you to boss my native boys. I'm an old man. I had no time for such stuff as bossing natives. I heard you could be trusted. So I hired you."

"What are you doing here, Mr. Borzoi?" Nesta asked.

Old John Mike was silent for a while.

"Taking gold out of the sea water," he said, without conviction.

Doc Savage said, "Mr. Borzoi, can you understand Latin?"

"Yes."

Doc Savage said, in Latin, "It is obvious to anyone who would know much science that you are not taking gold out of the sea."

Captain Hardgrove seemed to understand that, because he made a strange strangled noise of astonishment. Then there was silence. Old John Mike Borzoi made no comment.

After a while, Captain Hardgrove's parrot made a noise outside the window. "Joseph, I love you," it said. "I think you are a wonderful man. So much hair on your chest."

Old John Mike Borzoi made a low strange noise. Captain Hardgrove cursed the parrot with words that should have made the bird's feathers stand on end. "That wife of mine!" he said.

After that, sailors off the *City of Tulsa* arrived with Johnny Littlejohn, and Doc Savage came off the floor, with no ropes on his ankles or wrists, where there had been ropes a moment before. He came up fast, moving hard. He lunged for the native guard! Because the native was gaping at the door and the new arrivals, Doc took the man by surprise.

Renny and Long Tom were taken a little by surprise, too, but not much. They came to their feet. Like Doc Savage, they also carried in their shoe laces the little flexible serrated blade of steel that, with proper

## THE PIRATE ISLE

manipulation of the feet, would saw through the cloth that covered it and through such stuff as the *parau* bark with which they were tied.

Surprise had Long Tom and Renny for a moment because they could not see why Doc Savage had picked this moment which was a very bad time, it seemed to them to start his fight for life, probably, and freedom.

### Chapter XIV. JOHNNY HAS A STORY

IT was not often that Doc Savage started a fight against overwhelming odds. Often, it looked as if the bronze man did just that. But, usually, looks were deceptive. Invariably, he had something planted, some gadget or some trick, that actually gave him assurance of victory. But this time, as far as they could see, he had exploded the thing at the wrong point.

The native named Toad Face barked something wild and dragged at a knife, apparently forgetting all about having a gun. Doc lunged toward him, hit him a fist blow that was ordinary, except that it sounded as if a sack of sand had been dumped on a floor. Toad Face went through a kind of convulsion, fell and stuck the knife in his own leg in going down.

Doc got the blade loose from the native's flesh and used the red-edged steel to slice Renny's bonds. The *parau* bark did not cut easily.

Doc said, "Get the rest of them loose, Renny."

The big bronze man then made for Johnny Littlejohn. But the sailors who had Johnny were alert, or possibly nervous. They went back out of the house, and the last one out slammed the door.

Doc hit the door; more out of desperation than any other emotion. The panel was made of candlenut wood and bamboo lashed with rattan. Not as strong as steel, but as far as Doc was concerned, as impregnable.

He turned back.

Captain Hardgrove was still on the floor where Renny had dropped him with the foot blow after the skipper had made the remark about Doc's being a prisoner, the statement which had been cruel enough to make old John Mike Borzoi faint.

Renny was on his feet and had freed Long Tom and Nesta. Toad Face was senseless. The other natives were in the process of getting organized. Disorganized by loss of Toad Face as a leader, their co-operation was not jelling well.

Dr. Cunico was still loose-bodied on the floor where he had fallen after Toad Face hit him.

Doc Savage had one gas grenade left. He said, "Hold your breath, everybody," and used it. While the anaesthetic gas was spreading through the room, he went to a window and got it open.

He gestured at the window. Renny nodded, and he and Long Tom hustled old John Mike Borzoi off the floor and got him outside. Nesta followed them.

"The jungle," Doc Savage said, which probably was needless advice.



## THE PIRATE ISLE

A native appeared. A big, homely, confused fellow, who bellowed, "*Okorahay?*"

Renny hit him. The man fell. They went on.

Renny said grimly, "It sounded like he yelled O. K., which didn't fit the situation."

Nesta said, "He was a Solomon Islander. He was asking us where we were going, in his native tongue."

They raced through umbrella ferns, which grew thickly, and small bushes with crimson pears called *noni enata*. Mulberry trees were thick with yellow blossoms among the cottony, round leaves.

"It was an apt question," Renny remarked grimly. "Holy cow! Where *are* we going?"

"Stay here," Doc said.

The bronze man had kept track of the sailors who had Johnny Littlejohn. They were making considerable noise in flight. Doc cut through the jungle in an effort to head them off.

The chase led the bronze man near the lagoon, and he passed close by the dikes and headgates and apparatus which stood around and in the lagoon.

Doc looked at the gadgets. It was his first close examination. He saw enough to surprise him, and to absorb his interest fully until he was shot at!

The shot came from the sailors who had Johnny Littlejohn. It drove Doc flat on his face for shelter. More bullets began hunting for him, and he crawled with care to the left until he reached the jungle.

His chase did one thing. It headed off Johnny Littlejohn's captors, and these started back toward the other side of the island.

Renny must have moved fast, because, in the jungle, he howled out wrathfully in his best voice. His best voice was something to inspire respect. It caused the sailors to race to the cabin. They disappeared inside with Johnny Littlejohn.

Since the house was practically a fort and the sailors barricaded themselves inside and used the windows for portholes, the situation came temporarily to a standstill.

RENNY, Long Tom, Nesta and John Mike Borzoi whom they had to carry joined Doc.

Long Tom said, "Too bad we left Captain Hardgrove in that house."

Renny had something else on his mind. "Doc," he said.

"Yes?"

"I saw you looking over that stuff in the lagoon. What is it?"

"Plankton," Doc Savage said.

## THE PIRATE ISLE

"Plankton?"

"Yes."

"I don't," said Renny, "get it."

"Mr. Borzoi," Doc explained, "has not been taking gold from the sea water. He has been taking plankton."

They had put old John Mike on the soft jungle earth. Lying there, he made a faint and rather grisly cackling that was a heartfelt chuckle.

"I told them it was plankton," he said. "They had never heard of the stuff, so they did not believe me. Gold was all they could think about. So they thought it was gold. So what could I do? I just shut up and let them go."

Doc Savage was watching the cabin intently. He saw Captain Hardgrove's parrot fly to the building and perch on an eave. The shooting had disturbed the bird.

Human excitement seemed to disturb Captain Hardgrove's parrot. They had noticed this before. It was very pronounced, now. The bird was in a dither. The things it said, the words it mixed in with its own personal squawkings, were colored with sulphur.

"What a vocabulary," Nesta said, embarrassed.

Doc Savage made a remark that astounded all of them. He said, "That parrot saved our lives, undoubtedly."

Renny stared at the bronze man. "Huh? Holy cow, I don't see how."

Doc did not elaborate. He said, "I think two of those sailors dropped their rifles. They threw them down so they could get around faster carrying Johnny."

He crawled through the undergrowth, following footprints made by the sailors, and found the rifles. He jacked at the levers they were lever-action weapons rapidly until he had all the cartridges out. Both guns were fully loaded. He stuffed the shells back in the magazines.

Doc handed one rifle to Renny, the other to Long Tom.

"You two patrol the beach and keep help from coming from the ship," he said. "Miss Reynolds, you go with them, and take care of Mr. Borzoi."

Doc helped Renny and Long Tom get established in a spot where they were hidden, but where they could also watch the *City of Tulsa*.

"So you really are Doc Savage," said John Mike Borzoi weakly.

Doc Savage then went away. He went quickly, so that Renny and the others had no chance to ask more about plankton. Renny was puzzled. He had never heard of the stuff called plankton.

## THE PIRATE ISLE

AFTER Doc had disappeared into the jungle, they watched the ship for a while. They expected a small boat to put off and row toward the island to investigate the shooting, which was sure to have been heard.

"Holy cow!" Renny exploded suddenly. "What became of Charlie Custis?"

"I think he climbed out of the cabin behind us," Long Tom said.

"That anaesthetic gas didn't get him?"

"No, I don't think so. He knew how the stuff worked, I guess."

"Why didn't he join us?"

Long Tom looked grim. "I wonder if Nesta could have been right about Charlie Custis all along?"

They sat there silently. The inactivity on the *City of Tulsa* grew increasingly puzzling.

"Plankton!" Renny exploded finally.

"Eh?" said Long Tom.

"What is the danged stuff? Do you know?"

"Don't you?"

"No."

"Whale food."

Renny digested that. He became sour "Listen, I'm in no mood for cowboy stuff. Don't try to ride me."

"No, I'm serious," Long Tom told him. "It's an organism in the sea. There's a lot of it in some spots. It's one of the principal articles of diet for whales."

"What makes it valuable?" Renny demanded suspiciously. "Who wants to raise a crop of food for whales?"

The answer to that apparently hadn't occurred to Long Tom, because he made no response.

Finally, old John Mike Borzoi said weakly, "It can also be used for human diet."

They looked at him. None of them thought of anything to say.

Borzoi added, "Plankton is found in great quantities in the sea off Scotland and northern England."

Suddenly seeing light, Long Tom said, "Oh!"

"The English government hired me to work out a method of taking plankton from the sea in quantities large enough for human consumption," Borzoi added finally. "I have succeeded to some extent. You saw my plant in the lagoon. Or have they destroyed it?"

## THE PIRATE ISLE

"The plant is still there," Renny told him. "Hey, let me get this straight. The English want plankton food. They can take it from the sea, by your method. They hired you to work out the method. What went wrong?"

"That fool, Lord London, thought I was taking gold out of the sea," Borzoi told him weakly. "So he raided the place. He kept all of us prisoners and tortured us. He wanted to know the secret of getting the gold and wanted to know where the gold was. Naturally, we couldn't tell him, because there was no gold. He never believed that."

Renny pondered. "Where did Johnny Littlejohn get hooked into it?"

"Oh, I hired Mr. Littlejohn to work with me in my experiments some months ago," said Borzoi. "He had conducted some experiments with basic life forms which included plankton."

"Then Johnny was just here, assisting you?"

"Right. Lord London came. Johnny escaped with some of the plankton. Johnny was going to get Doc Savage to help."

Renny's eyes began to get wide.

"Is plankton white, like snow?" he demanded.

"In my preserved form, it is," Borzoi muttered and closed his eyes.

NESTA REYNOLDS gasped, clutched Renny Renwick's arm and pointed. "Charlie Custis!" she exclaimed. "See?"

Renny stared intently at the fringe of jungle which the girl seemed to be indicating. "Where?" he demanded.

"Beyond the two tall palms," Nesta told him, and Renny located Custis.

Charlie Custis had made wigwag signal flags out of two bamboo poles and two halves of his shirt. He was signaling slowly, carefully, after the fashion of a man who was not too familiar with the wigwag system. But, obviously, he was talking to someone on the *City of Tulsa*.

"The polecat!" said Nesta Reynolds. "I knew he was a crook all along. He is telling someone on the ship to be careful; that we're here with rifles."

But there were tears in her eyes, tears that showed she had thought nothing that drastic about Charlie Custis.

## Chapter XV. A PARROT NAMED THEM

DOC SAVAGE waited until Charlie Custis finished signaling. The bronze man stood in the jungle behind Custis, and the young man did not know he was there.

Custis completed his signaling, and Doc said, "That was nice work."

## THE PIRATE ISLE

Charlie Custis looked as if he could have jumped into the top of the nearest palm, then got control of himself. "You read my signals?" he demanded.

"You seem to be organizing a revolt on the *City of Tulsa*," Doc said.

Custis grinned tightly and nodded. "I've been cooking this up for days. I got together some of the men passengers, and we arranged to try to take over the ship, under your leadership, when the chance presented."

"You just told them it had presented, the way I read your signals," Doc told him.

"That's it. They're going to give it a whirl. Lord London left only a few men on the ship."

Doc was silent a moment. "Your aid on the ship signaled that Mr. Weed has been murdered, did he not?"

Custis nodded. "Dr. Cunico killed Weed. Dr. Cunico thought Mr. Weed was Lord London, so he killed him and tried to take over. Cunico figured that no one would be sure he himself was not Lord London. He thought he would kill Weed and take his place."

Again Doc Savage was rather peculiarly silent. Then, abruptly, he said, "Mr. Weed was not Lord London."

Charlie Custis showed no surprise. "I had it figured he wasn't."

"You have it figured who London is?"

"Sure," said Custis. He eyed Doc intently. "So have you, I saw that. That's why you started the fracas back there, the way you did."

Doc Savage's metallic features were expressionless. He asked, "You want to help me try to get Johnny away from them?"

Custis nodded.

It was short, simple and rather terrible. Except for the horrible part of it and the horror was the meaning of what the parrot was saying, and what the parrot had said in the past the thing was a rather flat ending for such a chain of danger.

Doc Savage and Charlie Custis came close to the house without being shot at. It was a rather fantastic, but not pleasant, surprise.

The parrot was talking. It was not cursing. It was speaking only now and then, excitedly.

The man was speaking also. His voice had a rather mad sound.

"You're a honey, Johnny," the man said. "You've been everything to me in this mess."

A silence.

The bird said, "You're a honey, Johnny."

The man said, "I love you. I love you to death."

## THE PIRATE ISLE

Charlie Custis began turning white. He gripped Doc's arm. "That is Lord London," he whispered. "The fellow must be nuts when he gets ready to kill a man. Notice how he talks love and that stuff."

The bird said, "I love you Johnny."

Doc Savage got to his feet. He did not speak, but it was plain what he was going to do. He was going in.

They found the door open, so it was really quite simple. That was actually where the whole thing had an unreal cast, because it ended with a simple fight.

The natives and the sailors, all of them, were lined up in a corner, terrified, with their hands in the air. They were afraid of the gun in Lord London's hand, because now they knew who Lord London actually was. Doubtlessly, he had told them, leaving no room for doubt in the telling.

Lord London was telling Johnny Littlejohn how he loved him, and he was getting ready to kill Johnny.

The house door was not actually open, only unlocked and unfastened on the inside. So Doc went in without trouble. He entered fast.

Lord London was somewhat unbalanced, because he shot Johnny! A man with an alert mind would have tried to get Doc, but Captain Hardgrove pumped a bullet into Johnny. It went into Johnny's left arm and eventually into the floor.

Doc Savage got hold of Captain Hardgrove's throat. Doc said nothing and made almost no sound. But the fixed thing on his face was not like him. Captain Hardgrove began thrashing in Doc's fingers, helplessly, like a rabbit being strangled.

Johnny Littlejohn was tied. He fought his bonds. "Stop him!" he yelled at Charlie Custis. "Don't let that happen get them apart!"

Charlie Custis gripped the bronze man, tried to loosen his grip. Johnny managed to heave off the floor after a fashion, and between them they got Doc loose from Captain Hardgrove before Hardgrove was more than thoroughly choked senseless.

Doc Savage stepped back. The weird expression of fury was very slow in leaving his face.

Charlie Custis scowled at Johnny Littlejohn.

"Captain Hardgrove is Lord London," he said. "Why the hell did you stop Savage?"

Johnny said, "Yes, but Doc has never killed a man."

THAT night, Doc Savage and Renny managed to get a dozen rifles out to the *City of Tulsa*, putting them in the hands of the passengers who had been organized by Charlie Custis.

They took the ship before morning. There was not much more to it than that. One shot was fired only, and that as a warning.

"Holy cow!" Renny muttered. "Strictly an anticlimax to the whole thing."

## THE PIRATE ISLE

Long Tom Roberts got the radio working. Five days later, seagoing tugs arrived, towing a big barge on which was a set of motor pumps and hydraulic equipment for jetting mud and coral sand out from under the *City of Tulsa*, a method by which the ship could be easily refloated.

"This winds it up," Charlie Custis remarked.

"All," said Nesta, "but the snowballs."

"The snowballs were plankton samples. Johnny just threw them at the sailors, thinking and he was largely right that the sailors were Lord London's men."

"But they melted!" Nesta reminded him.

Charlie Custis grinned. "Don't you remember hearing that the dock was being flushed down with a hose when it happened? The plankton samples dissolved."

"You mean dissolved in the water washing over the deck, so that everybody thought they had melted?"

"That's it."

"You're wonderful," Nesta assured Charlie Custis, "the way you explain things."

"You're wonderful," Charlie told her, "and it isn't the way you explain things. It's the way well, it'll take me days to explain the ways. Years, maybe."

Big-fisted Renny Renwick watched them walk away along the deck.

"Matrimony contemplated," he muttered, "or I'm no judge of human foolishness."

The aftermath came when the plane filled with newspapermen arrived from Tahiti. It was a big seaplane, chartered by the newsmen who were flush with visions of getting rich off this story. It was a great yarn. The unpleasant ogre of the South Seas, Lord London, had proved to be Captain Hardgrove, rather well-known ship captain, and that gave it an amazing touch. True, it was pointed out that numerous leaves of absence from his duties taken by Captain Hardgrove during recent years were now explained in a way no one had suspected. But it was still a good story, and the newsmen were avid.

Most avid man on the news plane was the little man with the red vest. Everyone had noticed him because of his vest, and because of the way he kept to himself.

The little man with the vest came with the others to meet Doc Savage, Renny, Johnny and Long Tom.

He looked at Renny, and took something out of his pocket. They did not notice the object then, except that it was pale-blue and round.

The little man looked at Renny. Then he screamed. There was the quality of ripped-out lungs in his shriek.

He whirled and ran.

Renny was open-mouthed with surprise. Then he began laughing. "Holy cow!" he said. "What do you think of that?"

## THE PIRATE ISLE

There was not much talk about it, not sensibly, when the little man with the vest fell dead. There was no mark on his body.

Renny picked up the object that had been in the fellow's hand. It was a stone. Small and hard and blue.

Renny started violently. "Hey!" he said. "I've seen this before! It's Monk Mayfair's pocket piece. He's carried it for months."

Then Renny did a strange thing he put the stone to his ear, as if he had heard something. His face became slowly empty of color.

"Monk's voice!" he croaked. "Monk's voice in this rock. *You can hear it!*"

Long Tom jumped to his side. "You must be insane."

Doc Savage came over and examined the stone, listened to it.

"He isn't insane," the bronze man said in a low voice.

We hope you do not resent our giving you the above sample of how the next great Doc Savage novel, "The Speaking Stone," starts off. It is the tale of the eerie affair that befell Monk and Ham, the two Doc Savage aids who had gone to South America on what they thought was an innocent business venture. "The Speaking Stone" is on sale next month. Every Doc Savage novel is complete, of course, but each is but one episode in the thrill-packed lives of Doc and his men.

THE END