



# THE MENTAL WIZARD

A Doc Savage Adventure By Kenneth Robeson

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## PROLOGUE

FACTS do not lie, the old saying goes. What follows, being in general excerpts from newspapers over the past few years may, therefore, be taken for what they are worth. The full items from the newspapers will not be reprinted here, for they have filled scores of news columns and many Sunday pages; and moreover, some of them would make uninteresting reading.

But the clippings and the story they tell, considered as a whole, are more than interesting. They are absorbing to a point where there is a hint of something incredible.

These newspaper clippings deal with one of the unexplored regions of the world, of which there are still a few. Rather, the news stories deal with men who went into the region during the past few years. Never have the news stories dealt with what happened to these men after they penetrated the region. No one knows about that. No one, that is, belonging to what is called the civilized world.

Some of the men went in by foot, with native porters. They never came back. In cases, some, but rarely all, of the natives turned up at distant points, and almost invariably they had strange stories to tell—stories so inarticulate and fantastic that they did not warrant belief from the level-headed managers of frontier

trading posts who heard them.

Some of the lost men went by air, their planes equipped with the latest radio apparatus, burdened with plenty of rifles, ammunition and spare food. They have not been heard from.

Expeditions have gone in search of these men. In no case was a substantial trace found of the lost men. In an instance or two, the searchers were not heard from again.

The American Legion organization in the Panama Canal Zone recently sponsored, it is reported, a search for one of these lost men, an aviator. This aviator's name was Redfern. Many attempts have been made to find another prominent individual who was lost, Fawcett by name.

In no case has a great deal of success greeted the searchers, for the region they had to penetrate is the terrible jungle country on certain headwater branches of the Amazon River in South America.

What is there in that particular jungle which has kept so many men from coming back?

## Chapter I. THE WEIRD GIRL

MIRACLES do not occur too often. *El Liberator* "Amber" O'Neel very nearly fell over with surprise when one happened to him. But he lost no time in taking advantage of it.

It was, incidentally, a fact that if O'Neel had known what he was letting himself in for, he would probably have crawled under the roots of the nearest mangrove and let the miracle go moaning past.

Carl O'Neel, alias Amber O'Neel, alias *El Liberator*—he was *El Liberator* Amber O'Neel just now—was a brave Yankee, too, which was bad, because he was also crooked, cruel, without morals, and all other kinds of a rascal.

Bravery and such qualities are a rare mixture, and a bad one. But O'Neel did not crawl under a mangrove. Instead, he bellowed enthusiastic orders.

"Quick!" he squawled, in Spanish. "Get out there in the clearing! Line up and wave your arms!"

*El Liberator*

Amber O'Neel had been standing at the edge of an open glade in the South American jungle, wishing that a plane would happen along. No sooner the wish, and presto! The sound of an airplane motor was approaching!

"Wave your arms, damn you!" O'Neel howled. "Get that plane down! Then see that it does not get up again!"

Amber O'Neel was in great need of a plane, because the authorities of this South American country of Colombia were looking for him to stand him against a stone wall and see if he were bulletproof. This by way of proving that it is not wise to murder and rob under the guise of being a leader of a gang of patriots trying to make Colombia a land of the free. Colombia was already enough of a land of the free to satisfy almost every one.

"Wave, damn it!" bawled O'Neel. "Wave them arms!"

If he had a plane, Amber O'Neel reflected, he could scout for groups of Colombian soldiers or police, and there would be less likelihood of his raiding a trading post when authority was too near. He

chuckled. He would claim the plane was his military air force.

"Get the pilot's attention!" O'Neel yelled. "Make him think we're in distress or something!"

The plane, thought O'Neel, would make a swell get-away vehicle when the going got too tough.

O'Neel's patriots waved their arms as if their lives depended upon it. They were all for their chief, who was as swell a general as they had ever had. Of course, he flew into a rage and shot somebody now and then. But jungle life was cheap, and *El Liberator* O'Neel was a lad who raided where the raiding was good.

The patriots were a scurvy-looking bunch. Some were natives, jungle savages who looked as if they would be more at home drying human heads. Indeed, they had dried a few.

There were a couple of bums from up Nicaragua way, a bit of scum from Panama, Colombian riffraff. But no whites. O'Neel was white, and he didn't like more of his own color. Sometimes a white man objected to some of the things O'Neel did.

But *El Liberator* Amber O'Neel's rabble patriots were better trained than they looked. Six of them, indeed, were good military aviators, trained by Colombia and other South American republics at some expense.

They all waved their arms vigorously at the plane cruising overhead.

THE plane was a model ten years old, and not a pilot in a thousand would have cared about being in it while it was over this kind of jungle. The ship had been flying north, so it must have left behind an unexplored stretch of jungle where, for all any one knew, landing grounds might be a hundred miles between. No place, certainly, for a bus as old as this one.

The pilot flew like a war-time kiwi—a kiwi being a bird with wings that can't fly. He was going to land. He wobbled down. He tried to skid air speed away, narrowly missed scraping a wing, came down hard, bounced twenty feet straight up, came down on one wing, and the plane began to fall to pieces.

O'Neel cursed wildly. "Looks like that pilot deliberately wrecked his wagon!"

The propeller tied itself into a strange knot. The plane—what was left of it—turned over on its back, and a cloud of splinters and bits of fabric settled on it, and the episode was over. That plane would never take to the air again.

Amber O'Neel produced two long-barreled, small-bore pistols from holsters next to his sides, and he handled them as if each of his hands was a right hand. In fact, that was how Amber O'Neel had gotten one of his nicknames.

He was ambidextrous, could use both hands with equal ease. He boasted about his being ambidextrous. Men who couldn't pronounce that word had taken to calling him "Amber."

Amber O'Neel ran toward the plane. He planned to shoot the occupants, if still alive, and take whatever they had. He poked his head and his guns into the interior of the ship.

For some time, he remained in exactly that position.

When he withdrew his head, he looked wide-eyed, startled. His lips made words, but not sounds.

His patriots, who had drawn near, withdrew. Amber O'Neel was fat, innocent-looking. Just a benign, chubby gentleman to the eye. To look at him, you'd trust him with your bank roll. Those who knew him didn't even want to be around him.

That look on Amber O'Neel's face scared his patriots.

Amber O'Neel showed no signs of being aware of the flurry among his lovers of liberty—and loot. His guns hung limply in his hands. His mouth kept working, and he swallowed with a great deal of effort, as if trying to down half a banana without chewing it.

"Fever!" he exploded. "That's what it is! Blast me, I've got it, and I'm delirious!"

Then he did something that would have made an onlooker laugh—but not to Amber O'Neel's face.

He hit himself on the head with the barrels of both guns simultaneously, just hard enough to convince himself he was awake. He looked somewhat childishly pained, then shoved his head into the plane's cabin again.

"At first, I figured I was seein' things," he said, sharply. "What's the idea of the regalia, lady?"

The fantastically garbed young woman said nothing,

SHE was a fabulous creature.

Her hair, perhaps, was most striking of all. It was spun gold. Not the spun gold that the poets rhyme about. They mean their girls' hair to be only like unto spun gold in color and texture. This girl's hair *was* spun gold. At least, it had been treated with some gilt process.

She had an oval face with a tendency to length, and there was something absolutely aristocratic about the chiseling of her features. She was not the kind of a beauty every man would try to flirt with. They would hold their breath when she went by.

But it was her attire which held Amber O'Neel breathless. The garments were scanty, in a sense. First was an affair to take care of the upper body, leaving arms and shoulders bare.

It was something like the halter of a modernistic bathing suit. Only halters of modernistic bathing suits are not usually made of cloth composed of chain mesh of heavy gold.

The lower part of the strange ensemble was a pair of shorts of the same rich yellow material, and tall sandals of an unusual-looking leather, which was apparently very pliable.

"Hey?" Amber O'Neel barked. "You knocked speechless or something when the plane crashed?"

The strange-looking young woman pointed with an arm instead of answering. The pointing gesture focused O'Neel's attention on a strange set of adornments on the exquisitely formed arm. Men's wrist watches. Six of them, strung in two bracelets.

All seemed to be running, and keeping only slightly different time. They were not alike, and they were styles of different years, as well as having been manufactured in different countries.

Amber O'Neel took his eyes off the watches and stared at what the young woman's arm was pointing. It was a man, the pilot of the plane, and the only other occupant.

The flier seemed to be senseless. There was a heavy copper ring—not gold, O’Neel made sure—around each ankle, and from the rings dangled a short length of chain. It looked as if the chain had once connected his legs, but he had managed to cut it so that he could run. He wore only a long leather skirt.

He looked like something out of a coffin, this pilot. There was almost seven feet of him, and in his day he had been very much a man, but now his bones might weigh a hundred pounds, the rest of him not nearly so much.

The pilot lay on his side. Amber O’Neel scowled. Obviously, the strange girl with the metallic hair wanted him helped.

O’Neel brought up his two guns. Help him? Sure! Help him keep his mouth shut!

But the gaunt pilot had not been senseless. He had been faking, as was evident when he spoke in a perfectly calm voice.

"If you’ve ever seen anybody shot with .45s , you’ll think again before you lift them things any higher," he said.

Simultaneously, he rolled a trifle. A big army automatic showed. It looked rusty, but there is nothing to guarantee a rusty gun won’t go off. O’Neel stood very still.

O’Neel had shot men in his time, and knew what happened. They didn’t always die when they were supposed to do. There was a time in Rio when a man with three bullets as nearly in his heart as O’Neel had been able to put them had gotten up and chased O’Neel a block. This flier might pull the automatic trigger even after a bullet hit his brain.

Amber O’Neel put his hands up.

"Drop the guns!" ordered the wasted flier.

O’Neel dropped them, and said nothing.

"Head inland and run!" grated the aviator. "We’re going the other way, and it’ll be tough if you follow us!"

THE flier paused. He seemed to have something else on his mind, and it did not sit pleasantly. His mouth became a grim line, and he shoved his head forward.

"I hope you go as far inland as I did!" he gritted. "And I hope you find what I found, and what a lot of others have found!"

O’Neel was wishing he had shot it out with the flier. He didn’t like the way the fellow’s gun hand shook.

"What’d they find?" he asked, trying to be sociable.

The pilot got up from the mangled floor of the plane.

"Never mind!" he barked shortly. "Forget it!"

"Who found what?" O’Neel asked, suddenly interested.

"Forget it, I said!" barked the aviator.

Amber O'Neel jerked his head toward the girl. "Did you find her inland somewhere?"

The emaciated flier said, in a disquietingly earnest tone, "I figure maybe I should shoot you because maybe I was excited a minute ago, and now you know too much!"

O'Neel had used that tone himself a time or two. He whirled, fled wildly. At every jump, he expected a shot, but none came. When he finally gained the jungle and flopped behind a tree, he caught his breath and made a resolution: More caution in the future.

That pilot must have seen him coming with his guns drawn and had faked senselessness until he had a chance to get the upper hand.

"I wonder," muttered O'Neel, "what he meant by that stuff about finding something inland?"

He crawled cautiously for a spot where he could watch the clearing unobserved.

"Probably he found the dame inland," he decided. "Some looker after her style, but I'll take mine a little more baby-faced. But I could use some of the stuff her bathing suit was made out of—if the whole thing ain't some phony set-up!"

He got a look at the clearing. His natives were cackling happily among themselves. Gloating over his ignominious flight!

The flier was fleeing with the girl.

O'Neel stared, then emitted a low, hissing noise, his way of indicating surprise. The girl was not going willingly with the aviator. He had her by one wrist, was dragging her along toward the opposite side of the clearing.

IN his emaciated condition, the flier was not equal to the girl in strength. She got her wrists free of his clutch, and swung on him. Her punching would have done credit to a pugilist with medical training. She knew just where to hit. She staggered the flier away with a blow, then whirled and ran.

O'Neel held his breath. The aviator had a gun. He'd have to use it to stop the girl. But the flier did not try to fire his automatic.

"Danged rusty thing ain't no account!" decided Amber O'Neel, and promptly charged out into the clearing, drawing a tiny, flat pistol out of each hip pocket.

The jumping at conclusions nearly cost him his life. The pilot lifted his big automatic. It banged. O'Neel shrieked, grabbed one arm and fell down.

The aviator saw he could not overtake the girl. He whirled and, traveling in a staggering lope, vanished into the jungle.

Amber O'Neel got up and ran in the opposite direction. He still held his arm, although he knew by now that the bullet from the flier's .45 had only burned it.

The patriots were also running. They had started with the shot, and were sprinting madly in all directions. Amber O'Neel began to curse them.

He was still cursing his "army" when he caught sight of the girl.

## Chapter II. LAST TESTAMENT

THE young woman with the strange golden hair and metallic cloth garments approached with a calmness which was somewhat unnerving. Amber O'Neel felt an impulse to run, and he could not explain it. There was just something about the girl. She seemed to have some power.

She came close to O'Neel and lifted an arm. He half ducked, thinking she was going to strike him. But she waved, instead, that he should pursue the fleeing aviator.

O'Neel thought of the big .45 automatic, and was not enthusiastic about the pursuit. Anyway, he had some ideas, and wanted to ask questions.

"Look!" he said. "That aviator guy found you inland somewhere, and he wants to know where you got the gold that queer cloth you're wearing is made out of. Right?"

The girl said nothing. She jerked her arm, directing O'Neel to pursue the aviator.

"What tribe are you from?" O'Neel asked.

She continued to point, to say nothing.

*"Hablah Espanol?"*

O'Neel asked, his Spanish bad.

Apparently she didn't speak Spanish. O'Neel tried Portuguese, one or two Indian dialects, and French—all the languages he knew. Results were zero.

"Aw, heck!" he exploded finally. "The cat got your tongue?"

When the girl still said nothing, he glowered at her with the idea of causing her to avert her gaze. She had been staring at him steadily. Her eyes were a most unusual shade of blue, he noted, and there was something disquieting about them.

As he watched the eyes, they seemed to radiate something like an invisible solid that gripped him and held him. He tried to move his hands, but the idea somehow didn't quite seem to get to his hands, so that they did not move.

The girl's eyes seemed to get more and more potent, until they were incredible magnets of blue. O'Neel felt the world begin to turn slowly under his feet—

He gave a violent jump, whirled, got his back to the girl, and began to beat himself in the face.

"Hell's bells!" he squawled. "Hypnotizing me! She's two thirds witch!"

He had snapped the spell. He ran to the spot where he had been forced by the aviator to drop his guns. They were still there, and he used them to menace such of his patriots as he could find.

"Grab that girl!" he yelled at them, in their native tongues. "Tie her with bark rope."

The patriots, afraid of the two guns, ran swiftly and encircled the girl, then came toward her. There was nothing subtle about them. They came in crouching, with arms open ready to grab, like so many wrestlers approaching an opponent.

They stopped. They did it as if they were one man. And all of them stared at the girl.

"Rush her!" O'Neel yelled.

They not only didn't rush her, but they acted as if they were going to sleep on their feet.

O'Neel knew a little about hypnotism. He lifted his guns, and they roared, almost together. Two patriots howled as the bullets burned grooves in their skin. It was amazing shooting.

"Grab her!" O'Neel barked, in the aboriginal tongue.

They grabbed her, four of them—and the next instant all four were flying backward.

IT was as if they had tackled the flying weights on a big engine governor. Amber O'Neel, pop-eyed, knew he had seen as blinding a bit of applied self-defense as he had ever witnessed.

He had started to rush in himself. But now he held back. One of the men had been barely touched by the strange girl, it seemed, but now he had a broken arm.

"Seize her, all of you!" O'Neel bawled, and his two guns cracked like vicious whips.

The patriots ran in. They swarmed over the girl, so many of them that she was lost to sight. Out of the pile of struggling forms came moans and screams. All of these sounds were emitted by the natives. When the mêlée moved a few yards to the right, senseless forms were left behind.

Unexpectedly, the girl broke free. She got clear. As she ran, her fleetness of foot was startling. Her bright, golden garments, unscathed by the fray, glistened in the sunlight as she crossed the clearing.

O'Neel, excited and not wanting to lose the wealth represented by the girl's golden attire, lifted his guns.

"Stop, or I'll kill you!" he shrieked.

He meant it.

The girl stopped. She stood perfectly still. O'Neel ran toward her, stopped before he was too close, and howled for the natives to seize and bind the girl.

"I'll kill you if you try to fight them!" he snarled.

He still meant it.

The remarkable young woman let herself be bound. Two patriots used cords braided out of the same tough bark strands which they used to make their clothing, and it was not likely she would break loose.

Amber O'Neel crouched beside the young woman, taking care that her eyes did not meet his. This was easy. She seemed to be watching one of the natives.

O'Neel dug into a pocket and brought out a bottle holding one of the regular acids for making a gold test. His business was platinum, but there was gold in this country. He doused some of the stuff on the upper part of the girl's garments. It was gold.

"Where'd this stuff come from?" he yelled at her.

She didn't answer, and she was still staring at the native.

"C'mon an' answer me!" O'Neel commanded angrily. "You can speak some kind of language, can't you?"

She still stared at the native.

O'Neel looked at the native. The act kept the world from losing a fellow who was doing it no good. It saved Amber O'Neel's life.

The native had slipped his machete from its sheath, raised it, and was creeping forward. He sprang, eyes glaring a desire to kill. O'Neel dodged. Quarters were too close for his guns. Yet the guns still saved his life, for he got them up before him.

The machete blade hit the steel and stopped, which was lucky, for the native had spent a lifetime chopping paths through jungles with a machete, and he had swung a blow that could have cut O'Neel in two. O'Neel grunted loudly, then clubbed a gun to the native's head.

The native fell senseless, and O'Neel was too shaken to do something he ordinarily would have done—shoot the native.

"You done that!" he yelled at the girl. He met her strange eyes, then wildly shifted his gaze away from hers.

He was panting excitedly, and not until he had wrenched off his shirt and tied it around the girl's head to cover her eyes did he breathe anywhere near normally.

"A confounded witch!" he gulped.

He tested her bonds to make sure the patriots had done a good job of tying her, muttering as he did so, "She hypnotized that native, made him jump me! But how'd she do it without tellin' him what to do?"

He stood up, satisfied she was tied.

"Come here, you fellows!" he yelled at his patriots. "We're going to catch that aviator!"

THE aviator was traveling like a fellow who would be easy to catch. He hooked the ground with his toes as he ran. At times, weaving to pass trees, he did not quite make it, and the shocks knocked him reeling. Almost any kind of a bush tripped him.

He was collecting mud and scratches. The unusual leather skirt which he wore did not protect him much. He kept the .45 automatic in his hand, as if afraid of losing it. And frequently he stopped to listen.

He, like Amber O'Neel, had a habit of talking to himself, and Ireland was now in his voice. It hadn't been so noticeable before.

"Sure, and they'll follow me!" he muttered. "The gold Z is wearin' will make that white devil greedy. And Z won't tell the scut where it came from, so he'll be followin' me ve-r-ra soon!"

He pronounced it as "Z," the last word in the English alphabet.

He smashed his face against a tree which he either didn't see or couldn't avoid, got up, then ran out.

"Or mayze Z will steer the scamp wrong long enough so that I can get away." He thought a bit, then amended: "No, she won't! She'll do anything she can to keep me from gettin' to the outside with news of

Klantic and the secret!"

A sharp stick would have disemboweled him, except that he saw it in time.

"Mother of Mercy!" he mumbled. "I've gotta get to the world with this! It's the biggest thing that's ever happened to mankind!"

He stumbled into a thorn thicket and came out a sight that was not pleasant to look at. That stopped his muttering to himself, and evidently started him thinking. Finally, he stopped.

"Sure, and I can't make it!" he told himself hollowly.

He tried to sit on the ground, but fell, utterly exhausted.

"Overwork—strain—planning to escape—got me down!" he mumbled. "Shouldn't have saved—so big share of rations—for escape food supply. Starved myself. Didn't need it when—found they hadn't destroyed plane. But how was I—know they hadn't destroyed it?"

He shook his head solemnly over that mistake.

"If was only some way—of getting diary—outside." His voice had a whine of despair.

He fumbled in a pocket cleverly contrived to strap to his leg under his leather skirt. The notebook which came out was an expensive one. Otherwise it would not have stood the wear it had stood.

Amber O'Neel came out of the jungle about the same time the notebook came out of the pocket.

THE meeting was an accident, in a sense. Amber O'Neel had not expected to meet his quarry so soon, so he walked out boldly, feet making some swishing noises in the rank jungle weeds.

The aviator looked up, saw his enemy, dropped the notebook and grabbed at the automatic. The gun banged the instant he got his hand on it.

By rights, Amber O'Neel should have died then. But the aviator was either a poor shot or very much out of practice. He missed. O'Neel yipped like a dog just missed by a rock, and flashed his two guns.

Immediately, there was a great thundering of guns in the little glade in which the men had met. Both men moved rapidly as they fired. Weeds were tall, bushes rank. Neither man was exactly sure where the other was. Both guns went empty about the same time.

Neither man made a sound. Amber O'Neel, not proud of the shooting he had been doing, lay still and strained his ears, guns ready.

The South American jungle is noted for its noisy birds. The shooting had stirred them up. Parrakeets squawked raucously. Gaudy birds made squawking, whistling and moaning noises, and there was one that sounded like a clear bell.

Amber O'Neel was so on edge that he failed to notice something that should have caught his attention. One particular uproar of bird cries was receding. When O'Neel did notice this, he sprang erect and cursed.

"The aviator guy's runnin' away!" he gritted.

He scrambled forward through the weeds and small bushes. Still uppermost in his mind was catching the flier and making him tell where the strange girl—the girl with such weird powers—had come from, and especially the source of her gold frock.

Anyway, it wouldn't help the temper of the Colombian officials if the aviator came out of the jungle with the story of the attack and the captured girl.

BUT Amber O'Neel saw the notebook. It lay where the flier had dropped it. The notebook covers were a bright red, despite being worn, an eye-catching contrast against the green of the weeds.

Because he was a greedy devil who overlooked few bets, Amber O'Neel veered over to snatch up the notebook. Naturally, he looked inside.

#### DAVID HUTTON, HIS DIARY.

Amber O'Neel spoke aloud to himself.

"That name," he said, "is damn familiar for some reason." Men alone a great deal of the time get the habit of talking to themselves.

He examined the first entry in the diary. It was dated almost ten years ago, and the first line started off:

*To-day I leave on my attempted flight from Rio de Janeiro to the United States, flying alone.*

"Hell!" O'Neel said, and stopped running. "I remember now. This guy was an aviator. He was lost. A lot of birds went hunting him, and some of them didn't—"

He stopped, as if he wanted to think over what he had been about to say.

"Some of them didn't get back," he finished.

### **Chapter III. THE REMARKABLE TOURIST**

AMBER O'NEEL stood still and let the aviator run on. O'Neel was afraid of Aviator David Hutton's rusty old automatic, and he also wanted to read that diary and see if it told what had kept the flier in the unexplored jungle interior for ten years.

O'Neel began to turn the notebook leaves. Flier David Hutton had started off the diary with painstaking care in writing the lettering; but, as things do, the care had petered out. However, it was all readable.

O'Neel's interest at first was fragmentary. He glanced up each time a bird squawked, or a jungle bush moved. It was hot. He moistened his finger to turn the notebook leaves, by wiping it in the sweat on his forehead.

O'Neel began to be more absorbed in the notebook. A gaudy parakeet with a nest near by screamed at him suddenly, and he didn't even look up.

The birds were beginning to settle back in the thick, moist carpet of green. Bursts of excitement in the jungle are frequent. Monkeys—curious as humans—drawn by the earlier uproar, arrived and began squeaking and working closer to the reading man.

One of Amber O'Neel's half-savage followers—unwilling—came out of the jungle growth and stood almost beside O'Neel, and the white man didn't seem to notice.

O'Neel made a gasping sound of unbounded, unbelieving surprise.

The monkeys came closer, behaving a little like humans. One would throw himself forward with a loud outcry, as if daring the men below to fight, but ready to turn if they wanted to. Another monkey would do the same thing.

FOUR patriots came out of the jungle carrying the strange gold-clad girl. She was still blindfolded.

O'Neel was ogling the diary. He had it open at about the middle. Across the two pages was a picture, or sketch, of a crude map, and it terminated at something marked "Klantic."

O'Neel read on.

"It's impossible!" he gasped once.

He read on. His men put down the girl and glowered at the jungle.

"Why—what—" O'Neel ogled the diary.

His patriots were eying the girl. They didn't eye her as men of their kind would ordinarily eye one of the prettiest women ever to penetrate any jungle.

They were afraid of her. They wanted to run. But two things held them: The gold of her garments, and the knowledge that *El Liberator* Amber O'Neel shot cowards sometimes.

O'Neel suddenly leveled an arm at the girl.

"You're Z!" he howled.

She made no move, no sound.

"You're mentioned in this diary!" O'Neel shouted at her. "You're Z! Then, damn it, this whole incredible thing must be true! But it *couldn't be!*"

He was so excited, he could hardly stand up.

He came over and touched the girl. The way in which he did this was strange. He did it as if she were some rare jewel, or something that might blow up.

O'Neel wrenched off her blindfold. For no more than three seconds, he stared at the girl's eyes. Then he replaced the blindfold.

"It's true!" he squawled.

He sprang erect. His eyes were wild; he jumped up and down, and he could hardly talk.

"I've got it!" he bellowed. "I've hit it at last! The biggest thing of my life!"

He brandished his arms at the natives, scaring them until they almost ran.

"Gold!" he jeered. "Who gives a damn about gold, when something like this comes along! Something that

is something! Something worth more than—well, hell! There ain't enough dollars and cents in the world to buy this!"

He ran at the natives, struck them.

"Catch that flier!" he shouted at them, in their tongue. "A new rifle and all the ammunition he can carry to the man who catches and kills him!"

The natives dashed off instantly in pursuit of the aviator. Which, after all, proved them just about as bad as their master, Amber O'Neel.

THEY did not catch the aviator, David Hutton. He got some breaks. He came to a stream, almost fell over a dugout canoe cached by some hunter, and launched it. He paddled with weak ferocity for a while, then lay down in the two inches of water sloshing on the bottom of the dugout and slept or was unconscious—he never was sure which.

The water gurgling in and out of his ears awakened him, and he found his craft aground on a mud bar on which tall birds with long, yellow legs and pouchy necks stood. He shoved the boat off the mud, got it out in the current and paddled.

Hutton watched for floating coconuts, picked them up, and finally found one that was good. Later, he landed for fruit, and killed a fat bird with a stick, and ate it raw.

That day, he slept in the canoe in the stream, and awakened conscious of water no longer around him, but with movement near. He listened. Something nudged the canoe, almost overturned it.

He looked out, and actually cried out in terror. For he was on another mud bar and there were scores of alligators around him. One had nudged the canoe. He clubbed the 'gator; luckily, it withdrew. He got the dugout afloat again.

The river was the Magdalena, and it led eventually to Cartagena. Big black natives and smaller brown natives saw him frequently and remembered, for a white man paddling a dugout alone was unusual, to say nothing of a white man who was skin and bones and who wore only a leather apron.

Amber O'Neel trailed the flier down the river by questioning the natives. O'Neel was taking chances coming into the districts of the Colombian police. He knew it, but did not hesitate. He was cautious, though. And he was raising the ante to hit natives.

"Two guns, and all the ammunition he can carry in two trips to the man who gets that flier!" he promised.

A bit later, it was three guns, and three loads of ammunition. Then he thought of throwing in an outboard motor, which was a brilliant stroke. Almost any native would trade his wife for an outboard motor.

O'Neel and his natives were not more than an hour behind David Hutton when the latter tied his canoe up to the stone wall along the Cartagena water front.

David Hutton stood on the wall and looked around. That move quite possibly changed the life course of a great many people.

A CROWD was gathered on the water front. David Hutton looked the way every one else seemed to be

looking, out into the bay. A steamer with four funnels, flying a United States flag, was anchored out in the stream.

"A tourist boat, probably." Hutton shuddered. "People out having fun. It seems strange—after what I've been through."

His second look at the crowd showed something he had overlooked. A lot of top-hatted personages. There was also a squad of soldiers, some sailors, policemen, and two different bands.

"Who is it?" Hutton asked a very brown man in very white clothes. "What's the blow-out about?"

The brown man looked a long time at the leather skirt the aviator wore.

"The Señor Doc Savage is on that steamer," the man said. "What you see is a reception to welcome and honor him. The president is here, the minister of war, and many others."

"So the day has come when they honor a doctor," Hutton remarked.

The brown man looked surprised, and said, "Is it possible you have not heard of this Doc Savage? Every one señor, knows him. Even the devils in hell."

"If you knew the kind of place I've been in for the last ten years," Hutton replied, "you wouldn't know much of what was going on in the world. Who is this guy, anyway?"

The brown man expanded his chest. The subject appeared to please him. And it was evident he took pride in telling it.

"Doc Savage is a wonderful man, señor. His muscular strength is said to be the greatest in the world. But most amazing of all, he possesses a keen brain with it. His scientific knowledge covers all fields, and he is a genius in every one. With him are five trusted aids, men who are masters of their respective trades. Yet, señor, this Doc Savage knows more than the whole five put together."

"What did you say his profession was?" Hutton was suddenly more interested than he had been.

"Helping out others, señor. Those who are misfortunate, and righting wrongs. He is very wealthy, and so are his men. Look! There comes the lighter bearing them."

"Yeah," Hutton said, thoughtfully. "Thanks. Thanks a lot."

He walked rapidly toward the spot where Doc Savage would probably land. He elbowed people aside.

He did not see Amber O'Neel, but O'Neel saw him.

AMBER O'NEEL'S discovery of Hutton so promptly was not luck. The steamer in the harbor had suggested the idea that the quarry might take flight by that route.

O'Neel had hurried to watch who embarked and disembarked, and to bribe the purser, if it were possible, for a look at the passenger list to see who had booked passage from Cartagena.

"Damn me, my lucky day!" grinned O'Neel when he saw Aviator Hutton.

O'Neel worked through the crowd. He looked like a pleasant, fat man, a bit sweaty and scratched by briars. Those who saw him couldn't know that the hands in his pocket held his two guns, which he could

handle dexterously with either hand.

He also looked like a harmless, plump man with a purpose. But no one dreamed of the incredible ideas turning over in Amber O'Neel's mind.

O'Neel passed one of his men and passed the word.

"There he is—still wearing that leather apron and not another stitch," he told his men, in their tongue. "The reward still goes. I'll even make it two outboard motors."

The lighter coming in from the cruise ship was really an old Mississippi River stern-wheeler which had seen its days on the Father of Waters and had been sailed down here no telling how.

The native boatmen bringing her in were not doing a job that could be bragged about. The natives having dugout canoes moored along the quay significantly got into them and paddled to the clear.

The dugout belonged mostly to strapping, black hunters from the jungle. They brought their snake hides, leopard skins and green parrots down to sell to the tourists. They did not wear too many clothes.

The stern-wheeler angled in sidewise, swiped the quay, backed off, tried again, parted a line, and made it on the third attempt.

Every one from the captain to the deck swiper was yelling orders about how to make fast, and the crowd surged forward howling, "*Viva Doc Savage!*" and both bands struck up tunes. Two kids tried to jump from the quay to the side-wheeler, and for a wonder, both fell in. Their mothers shrieked.

Aviator David Hutton tried to approach the place where they were landing the gangplank. He had a time keeping from being trampled. His bare feet were walked on, hide scraped off his ribs by elbows, and his ears deafened by "*Vivas!*" But he made it.

He was standing so close that only an agile jump saved his naked toes from the descending gangplank. He tried to dash aboard the stern-wheeler, but half a hundred others had the same idea. They shoved at policemen, and the policemen shoved back. The policemen won.

*"Viva*

Doc Savage!" they yelled.

DAVID HUTTON, being tall, saw a remarkable-looking apparition step from the stern-wheeler to the gangplank. The apparition had arms fully as long and as big around as his legs. It seemed a safe bet that the apparition could tie his shoestrings without stooping. The head was a nubbin, the eyes small and somewhere in pits of gristle, and the mouth astonishingly huge.

The apparition raised hands and wrists on the backs of which hair looked as coarse as rusty shingle nails. He seemed to want everybody to be quiet so he could say something.

*"Viva!"*

howled the crowd, and the bands got tangled up in their tunes.

The excitement was rattling David Hutton. He was an ill man, a physical wreck, and he had pushed himself. He uttered a wild shriek which he hoped would reach the man on the gangplank, who he supposed must be Doc Savage.

David Hutton got a look at the black face of the devil with the knife.

"Help!" Hutton squawled. "I need some one to help me! An incredible thing has happened to me! I've happened upon something that the world doesn't dream exists!"

Then he looked down and saw a sliver of stone reaching for his ribs. It was a dark-colored stone, the kind the jungle savages sometimes used for knives. The stuff was razor-sharp and worse than steel, because it sometimes broke off in the wound.

He had last seen the face in the jungle taking orders from the peaceful-looking white man who had used two guns so ambidextrously, and who had tried to kill him.

Hutton screamed and twisted, but knew he'd never dodge the knife.

## Chapter IV. AROUND THE DYING MAN

A THOUSAND other people were screaming within a hundred yards, so one more scream—David Hutton's—did not make much difference. A squad of army airplanes roared overhead. They were flying in a formation that made the letter DOC.

The hairy, nubbin-headed, long-armed man on the gangplank waved his arms and tried to yell something in Spanish. Nobody heard him, because he had a small squeaky voice which a kid would not have boasted about. A surge of the crowd pushed several people into the bay.

Everybody seemed to be having a swell time.

"Attention, señors and señoritas!" yelled the squeakyvoiced, pleasantly homely ape on the gangplank.

Over to the left, in the crowd, there was a commotion now. A woman or two shrieked.

"Listen to me, please!" shouted the fellow on the gangplank. "I've got something to say about this welcoming business!"

*"Viva*

Doc Savage!" they howled.

"I ain't Doc!" shouted the remarkable-looking specimen on the gangplank. "Gimme a chance to tell you Doc Savage ain't comin' ashore on account of he don't go so big for this publicity and hero business!"

*"Viva*

Doc Savage! *Viva!"*

The gangplanker squeaked, "Aw, shucks! Why didn't Doc shove this job off on somebody else?"

*"Viva!"*

Some of the people thought the man on the gangplank was Doc Savage. They cheered him as such. He shook his head.

"I'm Monk—I'm Lieutenant Colonel Andrew Blodgett Mayfair," he tried to tell them. "I'm the chemist of Doc's little group of five assistants. I'm trying to advise you that Doc Savage never shows himself before public gatherings if he can help it, and when he took this trip on the cruise ship, it was to get a rest in peace and quiet and live halfway like a normal human bein' for once. Only somebody recognized 'im,

and this had to happen."

He had some more, but the crowd drowned him out.

*"Mucho hombre! Mucho hombre! Doc Savage!"*

they howled.

The homely fellow on the gangplank shook his head slowly.

"Human nature is a funny thing," he grinned. "Doc ain't even been in this country recently. All he ever done was stop a war between a couple of their neighbors and in which they might have been involved.

"That was over a year ago. And here they're all ready to take the place apart and hand it to him! Just because they've read in the newspapers and heard over their radios that Doc is quite a guy."

The hairy fellow's homely face suddenly cracked a grin from ear to ear.

He chuckled, said, "What they've read may've stood 'em on their ears, but what's never been printed and what only Doc and us others know would spin 'em around and around like tops!"

AVIATOR DAVID HUTTON had a piece of stone and an awful pain in his back. The obsidian knife had broken off. He was trying to get away, endeavoring to run from the slinking jungle native who had tried to kill him—and was still trying.

Pain had David Hutton delirious. That, and the ailment that was racking him.

"Try to—tell somebody," he whispered. "Tell them—thing is too—too great to be—kept from world. Must—get it."

The stark agony and horror in his face did more to get people out of his way than his weak shoving. Another woman looked at him and almost fainted.

"Some nation—United States—could send an army for it!" he mumbled. "It would take an army—to succeed."

He fell down. People reached to help him, but jerked their hands away when they saw the blood. He got up and stared at them vacantly.

"An army could—not make—it," he told them.

He mouthed his words as if they were sticky.

"They couldn't do it with—airplanes, he said. "Look at me. I'm proof of that. I made it. Look at me!"

They were looking at him—and drawing back. His eyes were mad and his words madder, and they had no way of telling what he might do. He shook one finger solemnly at them.

"A fleet of dirigibles, of big airships like those that were used on London in the great war might make it!"

A man came snaking out of the crowd. He had another of the knives that was a lean stone splinter. A second and a third man just like him appeared. They were brown-black and half-naked; they wouldn't have looked out of place jumping around a cannibal pot.

David Hutton looked right at them and didn't see them.

A small, rotund white man appeared on the edge of the crowd, just within the circle around the jabbering aviator.

The white man looked as if he should have been behind a bakery counter selling pastries.

He would have made a good ad in a white cap and coat in any restaurant window. He was the outward picture of peace, contentment and good will toward all his fellow men.

"Don't forget the outboard motor!" he told the brown-black devils with knives. "I'll make it an outboard motor to each man! Two to the first one to do the job!"

David Hutton looked at nothing and said, "Dirigibles might make it. But it'd take more than one. It would take a lot of them, and they would have to carry a lot of men."

His voice was getting stronger. A red lake was growing around his feet. His leather skirt was slick and slopping red.

"It would take men—men—to get it!" he shouted. "And no matter how big the army and how well-trained, they'll have trouble. Plenty of trouble!"

He leaned back, as if about to fall, and stared straight at the copper heat of the sun, with his eyes wide open.

"Trouble!" he yelled. "The officers and men would find out what they were after, and your army would go to hell! They'd kill each other. The thoughts of what they were after would make them greedy. The more they thought, the madder they would get. And finally they—"

He gargled, stopped, coughed, and shot a crimson spray to the ground.

The brown-black men were close enough to get their stone splinters into their victim, almost. Their eyes were the eyes of small animals. Their faces were not the kind of faces that had expressions.

David Hutton said blindly, "Dirigibles—an army—picked men—maybe you'd fail the first time—and the second—but finally—the greatest—most fantastic—treasure ever to fall into the hands of mankind."

The nearest brown-black man got his stone sliver ready to shove, but instead of shoving it, put it down, leaning double to do so, then lying down, completely slack, on top of it.

His two companions did exactly the same thing almost immediately.

THE men who had lain down had their eyes open. One of them rolled over on his back, opened his mouth, and out came a comic opera snore. Some nitwit in the crowd laughed. He must have thought it was all some kind of show connected with the celebration.

When the nitwit had finished his laugh, he lay down, also.

Other people lay down. Four or five. Some snored, and some didn't.

Aviator David Hutton looked steadily at nothing and began to giggle. It was an awful kind of giggle. It sounded as if something inside him—some vital and necessary part of him—was tearing loose and coming out. His life's blood came out of the corners of his mouth in dribbles and spurts.

There was quite a commotion by now. A goodly number of people were lying on the ground. Hutton stood there and giggled and gargled, grotesque in his skin and bones and leather apron, made more horrible by the blood on him and around his feet.

A man broke and ran from the spot. Others immediately thought it a good idea, and a general scampering ensued. Every one seemed to want to get away from the vicinity.

One man was not fleeing. He was, in fact, jamming his way toward David Hutton.

The approaching man, when he stood up straight, was taller than the tallest man in the crowd. He was not skinny. He had a remarkably symmetrical physical development. Most big men look out of proportion somewhere.

This one didn't. Seen away from other men, with nothing near to which his size might be compared, his physical build would have seemed ordinary.

Not ordinary, though, when seen close enough to observe that the tendons on the backs of his hands were almost like wire ropes, and that his neck was cabled with sinew.

This man's skin was an unusual bronze tint. His eyes were more unusual. They were slightly eerie, and something like pools of flake gold stirred by something invisible.

The giant had a brown mustache, long, brown hair, a wide-brimmed Panama hat with the brim yanked over his eyes, a white linen suit that was baggy, plain white shirt and black tie.

The big man reached David Hutton, and laid hold of him. Hutton took a swing at him. It was a wild swing, easily caught. The bronzed big fellow grasped Hutton and held him easily.

Hutton began to cry like a baby. He seemed to be bleeding faster.

Four other men came working through the crowd. They apologized politely and shoved people out of their way.

The foremost of the four made a good entering wedge. He was lean, pale, unhealthy-looking, and almost any sixteen-year-old boy would have been willing to bet he could lick the fellow.

The pale physical wreck was followed by a man thinner than it seemed any man could be and still function, and who wore a monocle dangling from a lapel ribbon. Next was a waspish, dapper fashion plate, a man with the mobile mouth of an orator, and piercing, dark eyes.

The last man of the four was built with big bones and a lot of gristle, but his fists were what stood out. Incredible hands! Doubled, they made fists the equal of many a man's head in size. This man also wore a gloomy look on his long face. He was sourness itself.

The last man was big, and he needed his bigness, because the people the other three shoved out of their way wanted to fight by the time the big-fisted man came to them. He was big enough to push them off like flies, though.

They reached the bronze giant who was holding David Hutton.

"What've you found, Doc?" asked the small pale unhealthy-looking man.

"Wounded man," said the bronze giant. "And do not call me Doc Savage. We are trying to avoid the crowd, Long Tom."

"Sure," said pale "Long Tom." "I forgot."

David Hutton babbled, "Dirigibles—an army—they'll go through hell—find things no man ever dreamed existed—but it's worth it—all!"

THE man who was so tall, so thin, and wore a monocle, said, "I'll be superamalgamated! A metempirical, I might even say transcendentially esoteric, avouchment."

"Johnny and his big words, not even death will part," said the dapper man who wore the immaculate clothing. "Why can't you speak like ordinary white people, Johnny?"

"Let him alone, Ham," rumbled the big-fisted man, who proved to have a voice like a very big bear in a very ample cave. "You've got such a habit of pickin' on Monk, that you work on other people when he ain't around. Holy cow! I get tired of it."

"From that sour puss you wear, you look as if you were tired of living, Renny," retorted "Ham."

Doc Savage said, "Pick up these natives."

The four looked at the bronze giant. He was indicating the brown-black fellows who had been ganging up on David Hutton. They seemed to be asleep. All three of them.

The four men picked up the natives. The waspish man with the very sartorially perfect garb stood back until the three men had been picked up.

"What's the idea, Ham?" rumbled big-fisted "Renny." "Afraid of mussing them pretty clothes?"

"There wasn't enough to go around, was there?"

Doc Savage carried David Hutton away. Hutton kicked, squirmed, gibbered.

"Dirigibles!" he moaned. "Don't try it—anything else—and watch—that golden-haired girl—she's not like—the rest of the human race!"

Doc Savage made a way through the crowd. Hutton flounced, and accidentally struck the bronze man's mustache, so that the mustache was knocked askew and it became plainly evident that the mustache was false.

Suddenly, the men found themselves confronted by policemen. The officers stared at them, and promptly produced pistols, for they were a queer-looking crowd. The bronze giant's mustache being askew was plainly suspicious.

"Halt!" they ordered, in Spanish.

Doc Savage stopped.

"Now this," he said, "should make you hold your breath."

He then held his breath. So did the other four. Doc Savage grasped a coat pocket and squeezed, and a container, evidently of thin glass, broke, for the coat-pocket fabric was wet an instant, but dried almost at once as the liquid vaporized.

The squad of policemen, and almost every one else within a score of feet seemed to go to sleep on their

feet and fell down.

Ham said, "If they had known we were Doc Savage and his aids, they would have let us through."

Almost instantly after he said that, he lay down with the policemen, apparently sleeping.

Doc Savage and the others continued to hold their breath.

FINALLY, when almost a minute had elapsed, Doc Savage and the others began to breathe.

Pale Long Tom looked at sleeping Ham and said, "Monk would have enjoyed that."

"He would have laid an egg," agreed big-fisted Renny. "Ham was so cocky he got careless. He should have known that gas which Doc released by breaking the container in his pocket is odorless and colorless, but will render a man unconscious until at least a minute has elapsed, or until it has time to be rendered harmless by mixture with the air."

They went on. Once out of the crowd, they ran. Doc Savage was also carrying Ham, and when they were alone, except for the noise of their own running feet. He led them into an open-fronted building which said, "La Tropical" over the front.

Inside were small old tables on which stood beer steins and a guitar, and around and on which flies buzzed and crawled. No one was in sight.

Renny went on into the gloom in the back, found a soda fountain. Looking at the knobs he rumbled, "Which one of these does water come out of? I can't never remember."

"You thirsty?" Long Tom snorted. "I must say it's a fine time—"

"Holy cow!" boomed Renny. "I want water for that dying fellow Doc's got! It'll wash out his throat maybe so he can talk!"

Aviator Dave Hutton said, "Watch the girl—don't ever be alone with her—and don't ever look at her. She's not like an ordinary woman."

Doc Savage had stopped the flow of scarlet from Hutton's wound, and was carrying him easily.

"We will see if we can find a more private place upstairs," Doc said.

They walked upstairs. Renny, last, found which spout the fountain water came out of, and carried three beer glasses of it easily, gripping the bottoms of all three glasses in one huge palm.

Big-worded "Johnny" stood at the one window of the large, shabby and absolutely empty room at the top of the stairs.

"Monk," he said, "still maintains a prominent ensconcement upon that gangplank. He seems to be harranguing the multitude."

"You mean he's still tellin' 'em Doc won't be ashore?" Long Tom grunted.

"That," said Johnny, "would be an abundant guess."

He remained at the window, dividing his time between watching the crowd and Monk on the gangplank

of the stern-wheeler waving his arms and talking, and watching the beer place below to see that no one came in.

Doc Savage began to work on David Hutton.

THERE was obviously a great deal of skill in the bronze man's muscular fingers. He made no false moves, and with almost no instruments, except a pocketknife and a tiny metal pincers which he produced from somewhere inside his clothing, he shortly had the stone blade.

"Monk seems to be having a supereminently joyful interval," Johnny said from the window.

Ham, on the floor, snored loudly.

Renny, boomed, "Monk would have a lot better time if he could be seeing Ham now."

Doc Savage worked briskly.

"Doc," said Long Tom, "what is this thing about?"

"No way of telling yet," replied the bronze man, without interrupting what he was doing.

"How'd you get tipped off?"

"Watching Monk trying to explain to the crowd that we didn't want a public reception, and saw the white man stabbed by a native," Doc explained. "Tried to get to him. Saw more natives closing in. Threw some thin-walled glass bulbs filled with that anaesthetic gas. It got the natives. But the white man got away."

"The *who* got away?"

"White man," Doc elaborated. "He came close to the natives when they were closing in on this fellow, addressed them in their native tongue, and promised them outboard motors."

Long Tom scowled, "What'd he look like?"

"As peaceful," Doc replied, "as you can possibly imagine a man looking."

Renny put in, booming, "What I don't see is how he got away if you were close enough to hear him promise them natives outboard motors or whatever he promised 'em."

Long Tom answered that. "Lip-reading."

Aviator David Hutton continued to mumble and jabber.

Ham lay motionless on the floor where Doc had put him. He snored.

"WHAT I can't see is why Ham is unconscious and that the other fellow isn't," Renny continued.

"He *is* unconscious," Doc explained.

"But he talks!"

"Delirium," the bronze man replied. "He does not know what is going on around him."

Hutton mumbled loudly, "Z! Z! Z!" Renny leaned forward. "What's he sayin'?"

"Z! Z! Watch her!" Hutton's voice got louder. He squirmed, trying to get to his feet. "She's an incredible creature! No normal human being is her equal! She can—can—"

He got on his feet—Doc let him because letting him was less hard on him than not letting him."

"Z!" Hutton screamed. "Watch her! That little, fat devil who tried to kill us in the jungle caught her! But she'll get away from him! He don't know what he's caught! He'll think she's an ordinary woman and—"

Hutton drew himself stiffly erect.

"I've found the most incredible thing in the world," he said.

He went slack, all of a sudden, as if some one had cut the wire that supplied him with juice. Only a dead man could fall thus.

Sticking to his dead, sweating chest was a small thing of black, greasy-looking hardwood with a brightly colored feather lashed to it.

"Holy cow!" Renny roared, and dropped all three beer glasses of water, which had not been used.

"Blowgun!" Long Tom clipped. "Poison dart!"

A split second of intense silence followed. It was broken by a brief, wispy whisper.

Doc Savage, giant of bronze, fell. He went down with a slow start, then very fast, so that it seemed he would hit hard, but when he did hit the floor, it was with an unexpected lightness, no more than if a boy had fallen. He lay very still.

Also sticking to his chest—under the breast pocket of his white coat—was a bright feather, a lardy-looking piece of dark, needlelike hardwood.

"Poison darts!" Renny howled. "Where are they comin' from?"

## **Chapter V. SNAKES**

DOC SAVAGE lay very still on his back and did not look as if he were breathing. Renny, Long Tom and Johnny stared horrified in disbelief. Disaster had struck, and struck like it often does, when least expected.

Doc Savage down—dead from a poison dart—killed with no more commotion than a wispy whisper of a dart through the air of the room. It was too much for them. They couldn't credit it.

"Doc!" Renny gulped hoarsely. "You're faking!"

No answer, no movement from the bronze man. The horror of that inanimation gripped them so awfully that they scarcely knew of the danger of more darts, were unaware of everything but that giant bronze figure limp on the floor, in fact.

Then another dart came whispering, and gaunt Johnny jumped like a bony skeleton and stared pop-eyed at his coat sleeve, where a dart stuck.

"Cut the wound!" Long Tom yelled. "Suck the poison out!"

Johnny snapped the dart out of his coat sleeve.

"Didn't prick me!" He leveled an arm. "Came through the window! Roof across the street!"

They all ran out, pulling strange weapons from armpit holsters so cleverly padded that they had not been noticeable.

The weapons looked like oversized automatic pistols.

They were machine pistols with a remarkable rate of fire, and they discharged anything from so-called "mercy" bullets—which produced quick unconsciousness—to high explosives and thermit slugs which would melt steel.

They did not make much noise going down the stairs, and they went fast. They looked efficient.

And they were efficient, or they had that reputation. Renny, the man with the big fists and the bear-in-a-cave voice, was Colonel John Renwick, world-renowned engineer.

Johnny, the string of bones with the monocle, was William Harper Littlejohn, erudite archaeologist and geologist, and his monocle was really a magnifier for looking at ancient statues and strange rocks.

Long Tom, who always looked somewhat as if he were ready for a hospital, was Major Thomas J. Roberts, electrical wizard extraordinary, and actually as healthy a fellow as one could find anywhere.

Any one of them would have sacrificed his life to preserve that of the unusual bronze man. Grim and speedy was their rush in pursuit of the bronze man's slayer of slayers.

"There was two of 'em!" Johnny gulped, still using small words as he went down the steps. He invariably did this when excited. "Brown devils! Jungle Indians, I presume!"

They ran across the street and charged into the building from the roof of which the poisoned darts had been discharged by blowguns.

They were hardly out of sight when several natives ran lightly up a rear stairway and into the room where Doc Savage's prone form lay among the figures of Ham and the anaesthetic-gassed natives and dead David Hutton.

They were members of Amber O'Neel's band of self-styled patriots.

One produced a big revolver, then growled. "This will put an end to our troubles!"

SOME one grabbed his arm as he was about to shoot into David Hutton's lifeless body. "Look! One of the others has already hit him with a blowgun arrow!"

Another man pointed at Doc Savage. "The big bronze one, also."

"Who is he?" the gunman demanded.

"The famous one who was to arrive to-day—Doc Savage."

"Famous one, eh? That is not something to be happy about. His death will cause a commotion. It will stir

up the police."

"Better be joyful that the bronze one is now where he cannot be stirred up. *He* would be worse than the police!"

"*Si, si,*"

a man in the rear agreed hollowly. "Even the little men in the jungle, who dry human heads and smoke them, have heard of this Doc Savage and some of the uncanny things he has been able to do."

Two pistol shots banged outdoors. They were followed by a strange, loud roar—it was as if a bull had bellowed once. It was the sound made by one of the machine pistols, but a good ear was required to distinguish any individual reports.

"That will draw the police," growled one of O'Neel's patriots. "We had better leave."

They looked at their anaesthetic-gassed comrades on the floor.

"What is wrong with them?"

"They look as if they are dead, but they snore."

"Snoring men usually awaken, señors," said one of the men, who seemed to have some authority. "We will take them with us."

They gathered up their friends.

One pointed at Ham. "What about this one?" he said. "He snores."

"Take him. I lay claim to those wonderful clothes he is wearing."

"Kill him and leave his body, but take the clothes."

"No! Undressing him would take time, and killing him might soil the clothes anyway."

So they picked the dapper Ham up and carried him out, not because they wanted Ham, but because they wanted his clothing. That would have pleased Ham. He was Brigadier General Theodore Marley Brooks, an eminent lawyer, but his hobby and his pride was his clothing. Everything was secondary to his clothing

The men traveled rapidly down the rear stairs, trying not to make much noise.

They were not yet out of the building when Doc Savage got up off the floor where they had left him for a dead man.

WITH care, Doc Savage plucked the poison dart from his coat front. He flung it, and it stuck in the wall, where no one would be likely to step on it by accident. Using a pocketknife, the bronze man carefully cut the place where the dart had stuck out of his coat. This revealed an undershirt of a metallic mesh.

The metal mesh garment was so closely woven that it was unlikely the sharp dart point could have penetrated. Doc wiped the mesh off, anyway, and touched a match to the handkerchief he had wiped with, and the pieces out of his coat and shirt.

His actions showed that he knew just how dangerous that poison was.

He followed the O'Neel patriots. Doing so, he used a bit of strategy. The O'Neel men watched behind them for pursuit. So Doc got ahead of them, or to one side, and, kept there, doing it very successfully because his method was not orthodox.

He did not keep to the sidewalks and alleys, but took to rooftops and even leaped such alleys as he encountered.

The O'Neel band reached a shadowy sidewalk café which had no customers and looked as if it had never had any. They peered around. Obviously, they had expected some one to be waiting there.

*"El Liberator*

O'Neel told us he would meet us here when he ordered us to pursue Doc Savage, kill the aviator and rescue our comrades."

The proprietor of the place came out of some dark hole, shaking, his expression showing that he often hired his place out to these men as a rendezvous, and now regretted it.

"Where's the great, the kind, the all-beloved *El Liberator* O'Neel?" they roared at him.

"He was here, and left in a hurry," the proprietor chattered.

"In a hurry?"

*"Si, Si.*

He was scared, white and trembling, and I thought he would faint—" The proprietor stopped, realizing he was saying the wrong thing.

*"Scared—El Liberator*

scared—" One of the men shook a knife out of one sleeve.

"It is certain I was mistaken!" the proprietor gulped. "The magnificent and courageous one, *El Liberator* O'Neel, said you were to meet him where you are holding the girl."

O'Neel's patriots went on.

Half a block distant, a bronze giant dropped below a roof's edge and hastily stowed away a tiny tube of a telescope into a pocket. Doc Savage's features were expressionless, except that there was a trace of strain around his forehead. Reading lips is not easy at best. Reading them when they speak a foreign language rapidly is less easy.

O'Neel's patriots hurried, entirely unaware that they were followed.

THE place where the girl was held proved to be a scabby white house behind a scabbier, but very tall and very solid white wall. It was out toward the hill on which the ruined fortress, relic of the Spanish conquest, stood, and there were no other dwellings close.

A man sat on a box at the gate. He sat in such a position that he could fall sidewise, turn the box over, and grab the revolver he had placed under it. He grinned at the newcomers.

*"Is El Liberator*

here?" they asked him.

"No," he said.

"Where is he?" they demanded, astonished.

*"Quién sabe?"*

The look-out made a he-might-be-anywhere gesture. Then he peered at the senseless burdens which the men bore. He blinked in amazement. "What! They are asleep?"

"We do not know what happened to them."

The look-out shook his head, pointed at the remarkable clothing of Ham, and said, "I lay claim to his garments!"

He was told that was all the good it would do him, and the new arrivals went inside.

The look-out tilted back on his box, took a small billet of paper from his shirt, unwrapped it and revealed a bean. The bean lay in his palm for a bit, then gave a violent jump. The look-out grinned.

"No matter who gets those fancy clothes, I shall have them before long," he told himself.

Colombians of his type were inveterate gamblers, and they like to bet on jumping bean races. This look-out happened to know that if a jumping bean was soaked in a certain solution prior to the race, the worm inside could be made more frenzied in its efforts, and since the movement of the worm made the bean jump, the bean became a better racer.

He was looking at the bean lovingly when something that had the feel of steel without its coldness grabbed his throat. It caught him with breath out of his lungs, and he struggled madly, but without much effect. By twisting, he got a look at his captor, and if possible, his face turned purple more rapidly.

He had never before seen the giant of bronze who held him, but there was somehow something about the bronze fellow that took care of that. He looked like Nemesis himself.

The bronze giant's fingers did something expert and quick to the nerve centers along the look-out's spine, just below the cranial juncture. One great jerk, the look-out gave. After that, he was stiff. His eyes were open, but fixed, and he barely breathed.

The bronze man watched the victim closely for a moment. Administering that tricky pressure which produced a condition of spinal stricture was a delicate matter. Overdoing it might be fatal. He had never had an accident, but he was always careful.

He had perfected the method of inducing helplessness himself. It had no practical value to the osteopathic or medical world, so he kept the secret.

Satisfied the guard was all right, he calmly shouldered him and carried him through the shabby gate. It was a bold move, based on the possibility that no one would be watching from the house.

But two men, both with rifles, stood in front of the door. They lifted the guns.

DOC SAVAGE, most of his face hidden by the form of the man he was carrying, called sharply:

"No! I am here because of *El Liberator!*"

Not for nothing had Doc spent years perfecting his use of foreign languages. His Spanish was perfect. It even had the language shadings of a low-class Colombian, a vernacular as distinctly its own kind as the "dem," "dose" and "dat" of the Bowery bum.

The men with the rifles stared until it was too late. They were not as fortunate as the look-out outside the gate had been. They never knew, at the time, what hit them. When they figured it out later, they were in no position to do much about it.

Two fist blows, they eventually decided, must have felled them. But how they got hit without even seeing it was something they never did understand.

Had they been able to watch Doc Savage go through one of his two-hour routine of exercises he had taken daily since childhood, they would have understood where some of his physical ability came from.

The door was unlocked. Doc went through it into a cold cave of a reception room. There was absolutely no vestige of decoration.

Somewhere deeper in the house, men were breathing loudly, as if they were in a struggle.

Doc glided toward the sound: He came to a room on the floor of which bodies sprawled motionless. The bodies were Ham and the gassed O'Neel patriots, apparently dropped there in a hurry.

The loud breathing was farther on.

Doc whipped ahead. The breathing got louder. There seemed a strange note of terror in it. Feet rasped the floor, as if struggling against something.

A strange sight came into view. Men—seven of them—were bunched against a door, pushing against it, pushing to keep it *closed*. They gasped and strained, and the sweat poured off them.

*"Dios mio!"*

one groaned. "We cannot hold it much longer!"

One began to pray loudly, reciting his sins and asking forgiveness. They were very black sins. He sounded very scared.

DOC SAVAGE rushed the men. He used his fists. Two blows with the right, one with the left. Three men were knocked senseless. Four were left. They turned their heads and saw him. But they didn't let go the door.

Doc Savage had overcome as many as seven men before. It was all in how you went about it. But he had never whipped seven easier than he whipped these.

They were more afraid of what was behind the door than of him. He merely used his fists, weaved, ducked, took several blows that were not dangerous, and got three more foes down.

One survived. He pulled madly at the doorknob. Doc grabbed him, jerked him away from the door. The man shook like a scared rabbit in Doc's clutch, and ogled the door.

The door did not open.

"What is behind the door?" Doc demanded.

The prisoner rolled his eyes.

"Fer-de-lance!" he choked. "They are all over the floor! A thousand of them! Maybe more! The girl is pushing at the door to let them out upon us. They are all big ones. She has them trained!"

His fear was understandable. Not many men have been bitten by the fer-de-lance, a venomous jungle snake, and lived to tell how it felt.

Doc Savage put the man asleep with a blow on the jaw, dropped him, and opened the door which they had been straining to hold shut. There was no need of the caution which he used.

There was a tall, golden-haired girl garbed in what looked as if it were a beach suit of golden cloth seated in a chair in the room.

She was bound, gagged, blindfolded, and bound to the chair with ropes and wire. There was no one else and no other furniture in the room.

There were no snakes.

## Chapter VI. SPELL!

THERE was no window or other opening through which the snakes could have crawled.

Doc Savage advanced toward the girl. But, after taking no more than half a dozen steps, he stopped. A vague flicker of some expression or other passed over his metallic features which had remained immobile all throughout the recent action. His head shook. It seemed as if he were annoyed by something buzzing about, but there was nothing.

Obviously, something was happening. The bronze man shook his head again and again. Once he became rather rigid and stared, until he broke what seemed to be a spell by slapping his hands together loudly.

The bronze man was startled, spellbound by something unseen occurring in the room. For he began to make a small, weird trilling sound—a tiny, exotic and indefinable note which was as hard to classify as the thing that was happening in the room.

Doc's sound might have been wind filtering through a leafless forest, or working around the cornices of some old-fashioned skyscraper.

Doc Savage made this sound somewhere in his throat, made it without conscious effort, and it invariably came when he was surprised, or when he contemplated some unexpected course of action.

Suddenly, he spoke. He used Spanish.

"Stop that!" he said, sharply. "Or do you want to be turned loose?"

Doc Savage waited. Nothing seemed to happen. For that matter, nothing *visible* had happened previously.

He used English.

"If you wish to be freed, you will have to cease what you are trying to do!"

Doc Savage waited again. Several times, he shook his head. He was careful not to look in the girl's direction.

"All right!" he said, in a vaguely disgusted tone. "Be stubborn and stay there!"

He whirled and strode out through the door. But once outside, he paused and cast a quick glance at the

girl. Some of her bonds were so tight they must be producing infinite agony.

After a moment's hesitation, the bronze man ran back into the room, seized some of the tighter wires, and undid them. He did not free the girl entirely. He merely made her more comfortable. He worked with haste. He almost ran away from her and into the hall. There, he stood and seemed to think deeply.

Doc Savage's small, exotic trilling noise came into existence again—low and amazed—and penetrated to most of the confines of the shabby, big house. The note had an unusual quality in that it was ventriloquial in nature; it was almost impossible to tell from whence the sound emanated.

Any one knowing Doc Savage, and watching him now, would have realized that some discovery of the last few minutes had come about as near dumfounding him as anything could.

He walked in and began tying the prisoners.

Ham still snored blissfully on the floor. Some one had taken his bright necktie before Doc made his raid.

THOSE of the prisoners who had been kayoed, when they awakened, looked around them, at Doc Savage, then at the door which concealed the bound golden-haired girl, and became about as white as their very brown skins would allow.

"The snakes!" one moaned. "She was setting them upon us!"

They stared at Doc and pleaded, "Hold the door shut, señor!"

"On the contrary," Doc told them quietly, "the door will be opened unless you fellows tell some truth in a hurry."

He watched them, and from the way they ogled the door, decided they were not likely to lie.

"Where did that girl come from?" he demanded.

They didn't answer until the bronze man walked over and grasped the doorknob.

Then they explained she had been in an old plane with a seemingly mad aviator which had landed in the jungle. They even admitted decoying the plane down. They were patriots, they explained, and they wanted the plane to fight the federals.

Threatening them with the open door got the rest of the story.

They had followed the aviator, keeping the girl a prisoner. The girl had been a problem. None of them dared go near her. Even *El Liberator* O'Neel, their "president," had been scared silly of the girl. They did not say he had been scared silly, but that idea could be gathered.

O'Neel had ordered them to kill the flier. They had tried, failed when Doc intervened with his anaesthetic gas, but kept on trying.

Now they wished they had never seen the girl. There was something uncanny about her. They didn't know what. She just didn't seem human. She was fantastic.

She had never spoken a word in any language during the few opportunities they had given her.

Doc asked, "But why did you follow and try to kill the aviator?"

"Because the magnificent, powerful and brave *El Liberator* O'Neel ordered it."

"Why did O'Neel want the aviator dead?"

They shrugged, said, "*Quién sabe?*"

Doc used the door on them. They quaked and shook and whined.

There had been a book, a notebook. The aviator had dropped it. O'Neel had found it. That had really been the reason.

"What was in the book?" Doc demanded.

They didn't know, not even after the bronze man had opened the door a bit.

Doc moved into another room and closed the door on their frightened howling. The bronze man then drew from a pocket a flat case that might have held cigars, but didn't and the front of which was complex with dials and tiny switches.

He adjusted the switches, and said to the case, "Renny! Long Tom! Johnny!"

The case spoke back to him in a loud voice, after a long moment. The loud voice was guttural with disbelief.

"Holy cow! It can't—these durned micro-wave radios never have tuned in—a spirit message—we must 'a'—well, holy cow!"

"The metal cloth vest kept off the poison dart, Renny," Doc Savage said to the case. "You fellows did not think of that. Did you have any luck with your chase?"

"Holy cow!" Renny's voice's threatened to damage the tiny radio. "Doc! You're alive! I'll say we had some luck! Three of them were discharging the poisoned darts. We got all three!"

"Bring them here," Doc requested, and told them how to reach the old house where he was.

The bronze man returned the tiny micro-wave device to a pocket, and then went back to the prisoners.

Ham still snored on the floor. He would awaken eventually, when the effects of the anaesthetic gas wore off.

Doc Savage opened the door and looked at the girl. She was still tied, and there were still no snakes.

He shut the door hastily.

BONY Johnny, pale Long Tom and big-fisted Renny arrived shortly afterward. They had three prisoners. Doc explained what he had done, and they did likewise.

"Now, we'll see if your prisoners tell the same story as mine did," Doc said.

They told the same story.

Renny made and unmade big blocks out of his fists, absently watching the effect.

"I wonder what was in that notebook," he rumbled. "Whatever it was, it sure touched off something."

Long, thin Johnny said, "An amplitudinous desire to perceive this exceptional female seizes me."

He walked toward the door.

"No!" Doc Savage said, sharply. "Keep away from her!"

Johnny stopped, gazed blankly at Doc, and absently fingered his monocle magnifier.

"Care to explain why you don't want me to see her?" he asked, using small words.

"Later," Doc told him.

"I'll be superamalgamated!" Johnny murmured, but kept away from the door.

There was a knock on the front door, bold and loud. "This man they call *El Liberator*, or O'Neel, was to meet his men here," Doc said swiftly.

They arranged a reception around the door for the visitor, then opened the door.

The man who walked in was the long-armed, homely-faced anthropoidlike man who had talked to the crowd from the stern-wheeler gangplank.

"Monk!" Renny thumped.

"A fine trick!" complained small-voiced "Monk." "Some nice excitement comes along, and you lads charge off after it! Leave me there making a speech in Spanish, which everybody knows I can't hardly speak. Pals!"

No one said anything. They did not look very remorseful.

"I wouldn't 'a' found you yet, only after my speech, I kept listenin' in on my midget radio, and I heard Doc tell you where to meet him," continued Monk shrilly.

His voice got louder, more peeved.

"I'll bet it was the work of that shyster clothes horse, Ham!" he squeaked. "Always connivin' against me, he is! I don't see how he keeps from bein' poisoned by his own meanness!"

Doc Savage said, "We are waiting for the leader of the gang to show up."

"Huh!" Monk gulped. "Then I'm makin' too much noise!"

He came in hastily and closed the door.

## Chapter VII. EXPEDITION

AMBER O'NEEL, the man who called himself *El Liberator*, saw Monk close the door. He had seen Monk arrive.

"That was one of Doc Savage's men!" He gulped, and sank back, into concealment.

His knees felt watery, his arms queer, as they did when he was very scared. He had heard a great deal about this Doc Savage.

"I almost walked into a trap!" he mumbled.

With that, he lost no time leaving the vicinity.

Amber O'Neel did not look like his usual self. He had darkened his face with a nut dye, was wearing a big hat and a shabby suit. He was careful not to get too close to any policemen. His head was down, his lips moving, indicating he was doing some deep thinking.

"*Bueno!*"

he exclaimed finally, in Spanish.

More of his crew of patriots—the very bad ones who were afraid to be seen in Cartagena—were waiting, encamped up the river. He did not join them.

O'Neel went to a bar which had a bad reputation with the police, and before long was inclosed in a back room with some gentlemen who stood very little chance of dying of old age.

Sometimes these men called themselves patriots, too. More often, they admitted they were plain murderers and thieves. They did not have the imagination of *El Liberator* O'Neel.

There is probably no honor among crooks, but an ambitious crook who wants to build up a gang and a reputation, tried to give the impression of what is lugubriously known as a "square guy." Amber O'Neel had done that carefully over a period of years. He was a "square guy," or as they said it locally, *Uno caballero*.

He could tell one whopping lie, and all the crooks in Cartagena would believe it. Just once. He told his whopper now. He had it all planned.

"Listen, *hombres*," he said. "There came in to-day, on that Yankee cruise ship, a full dozen cases of narcotics. They were unloaded last night while the ship was at anchor off the river mouth, awaiting for daylight. I know where they can be taken."

This interested the listeners about as much as anything would have.

"They are in a house," continued O'Neel. "There are five or six men guarding them. It will be necessary to attack suddenly and without delay, slaying these men, and making away with the cases before the police arrive."

"Why are you not taking this plum for yourself?" a listener wanted to know, not unreasonably.

"Not enough men," replied O'Neel. "It must be done quickly. You do it. For my information, I will be satisfied with such a small share as you care to turn over to me."

It sounded good. Narcotics at the moment were bringing a high price, thanks to the activity of the rather efficient police.

The upshot of it was that they decided to make the raid immediately.

O'Neel managed to excuse himself from their company.

AMBER O'NEEL now hurried and joined his patriots who were camped up the river. He explained his bad luck. The way he told it, it did not sound as if he had done so badly himself, although his men had not been so efficient.

"I have played a trick," he finished. "Some men who are very good fighters have been led to believe there is a shipment of narcotics for the taking. They will attack, and kill Doc Savage and any of his men who are there. That means Doc Savage will not bother us."

The talk about Doc Savage did not seem to make his patriots any too happy.

"Is this thing we are after worth the danger of fighting this Doc Savage?" one asked uneasily. "Me, I would be happier to go away somewhere. The farther, the better."

"*Si, si,*"

agreed another quickly. "If I had the choice of fighting this Doc Savage to see who would be president of Colombia, me or him, I would go away."

"I bet you would run," grunted another.

"Like hell," admitted the first. "This bronze man from the United States is not what you would call 'easy pickings.'"

"Silence!" rapped O'Neel.

They gave him his silence.

"The prize which we seek is greater than anything you ever heard of!" O'Neel said emphatically.

One man offered, "The greatest prize I ever heard of was the one a pirate once took out of Cartagena. Some say it was five millions, and some ten, but that—"

"Pocket change!" snorted O'Neel, speaking English accidentally.

They gaped at him. He told them what pocket change meant in Spanish. They looked doubtful.

"You might tell us what it is," one suggested gingerly.

O'Neel shrugged.

"No," he said. "If I did that, the prize is so fabulous that you would start killing each other, each trying to be the one to reach the thing. As it is, I know, and I am taking you because I need you, and will share with you because I have always shared, as you know. If you kill me, the secret dies with me."

Diplomacy, that. Every one satisfied, every one made more greedy. And they would look sharp to see that nothing happened to him who had all knowledge, Amber O'Neel, *El Liberator*.

One thoughtful soul had a question. "What about the girl?"

"Oh, her." O'Neel wet his lips. "She may get killed in the raid the men will make after imagined narcotics. Good riddance!"

"But if she is not killed?"

O'Neel put out his round, fat jaw.

"Look," he growled. "It would be swell if she were out of the way, and we should have done it when we had her. It would be swell if Doc Savage is killed. But no matter what happens to them, we head into the jungle. We'll have the start on everybody, see! No matter what happens, we'll be first. And that means a lot."

"That girl," a man murmured. "What kind of woman was she?"

O'Neel said, "You'll understand that when we get to the secret of Klantic."

"The what?"

"The secret of Klantic," said Amber O'Neel.

HIS men had never heard of the secret of Klantic before. Their vacant stares showed that.

"It's what that aviator, David Hutton, called it in his diary," continued Amber O'Neel. "And it's as good a name as any. We'll call it that."

They eyed him and knew he would not tell them more about that. But they still had curiosity. They tried again on the girl, pumping O'Neel.

"Can the girl really do us harm?" they wanted to know.

Amber O'Neel nodded solemnly.

"Make no mistake about that golden-haired wench," he said, dropping each word like a brick. "She is probably as dangerous as Doc Savage. More, is my bet."

"Why?"

Amber O'Neel almost told them. He had his mouth open, then shut it.

"Never mind," he said. "She is. It was all in that aviator's diary. All about her and the secret of Klantic, and the whole thing."

His tone told them they had better not ask any more questions. They didn't.

"We will get ready to march into the jungle," they said. "Is it far?"

"Too far to march."

"What?"

"We will take planes," O'Neel advised.

"But we have not even a single aircraft!"

"I have a plan," said O'Neel, "for getting us a number of airplanes. We will have to have them. Without them, we might never make the trip."

He led them toward the outskirts of Cartagena. "What about our comrades, who you say Doc Savage seized?" O'Neel's patriots wanted to know.

O'Neel explained that was their own hard luck. He tried to sound as regretful as he could.

## **Chapter VIII. RAID**

DOC SAVAGE had finished questioning all of his prisoners—O'Neel's patriots—for the second time, and had gotten no further information. Doc had also decided Amber O'Neel was not going to show up. The bronze man did not know the break O'Neel had gotten when he had seen Monk arrive.

Monk, unaware he had accidentally upset plans, was around somewhere, supposedly watching for O'Neel's arrival. The others were likewise watching, except Ham, who still slept.

Monk, when last seen, had been complaining of cramps in his stomach. He indignantly denied that they had been brought on by the paroxysms of laughter into which he had gone when he had seen Ham asleep, and had been told that Ham had breathed some of the anaesthetic gas through his own carelessness. They had been forced at one point to gag Monk to stop his tittering.

Doc Savage went over to Ham. It should be about time for his recovery. Ordinarily, the anaesthetic gas produced unconsciousness only half an hour, but this particular dose had been concentrated.

A little pinching in a spot calculated to stimulate the nervous reactions, and Ham was sitting erect. He looked at Doc Savage and smiled wryly. Perhaps the most amazing thing about the anaesthetic gas was that it left virtually no after effect.

"I hope Monk hasn't learned of this!" Ham said.

"He has," Doc said. "And he nearly ruined himself laughing."

Ham took his head in his hands. "The missing link!" He felt himself over. "Who stole my necktie?"

It was typical of Ham that he would be more interested in his clothing than in what had happened to the world while he was senseless.

Renny appeared suddenly in the doorway. He looked excited. "Something's happened to Monk!"

"Hope he's broken his neck!" Ham snapped. Then he looked at Renny, saw Renny was serious, and suddenly registered anxiety. "Look here! Monk isn't injured?"

"I don't know what you'd call it," Renny boomed. "Doc, you'd better come and look at him."

The big-fisted engineer led the way; Doc followed, and they stopped at the door behind which the girl had sat bound in the chair.

Renny explained, "Monk didn't hear you advise Johnny and the rest of us to stay away from the girl."

Ham, who had trailed along, demanded, "Is there a girl behind that door?"

"She looks like a girl," said Renny, "but I'm beginning to wonder if she's human."

"If there's a girl in there, no telling what Monk has done to show off!" Ham snapped. "Nothing at all would surprise me."

"I'll bet this will," Renny rumbled, and opened the door.

Monk lay flat on his back on the floor in front of the golden-haired girl's chair. He was holding his legs and arms up straight and stiff.

HAM gulped, "What's wrong with him?"

"Search me," Renny boomed, softly. "I found him like that."

Monk's eyes were open, but fixed on the ceiling. He did not show any signs of knowing they were present.

"Poor Monk!" Ham breathed, with genuine anxiety. "He must have been seized with some kind of paralysis!"

The girl was still gagged and blindfolded. The gag and eye covering made it impossible to tell much about her classic features.

Doc Savage walked forward briskly and kicked Monk lightly. Monk awakened. He stared at his own upraised arms and legs.

"What the heck am I doin'?" he gulped, and got up hastily.

Doc bundled Monk and the others out and shut the door.

"Keep out of there," he told them.

Monk, looking dazed and sheepish, asked, "Doc, what happened to me? I opened that door, and here was that girl all tied up. She looked like a peach, and I thought it wouldn't hurt to make sure she was comfortable. So I go over."

Monk paused. Apparently he wasn't proud of the rest.

"Next thing I know, Doc has got his foot in my ribs, and there I am on the floor, holding my arms up like a ninny."

"Acting perfectly natural, you mean," Ham put in sarcastically. "Always the clown."

Monk ignored that. "Doc, what happened to me?"

"That girl," the bronze man replied quietly, "is going to prove to be a remarkable young woman. Just how remarkable, we have yet no means of knowing."

"Whatcha mean by that?" Monk asked uneasily.

"First, the girl can make men think they see and feel things which are not there."

"Hypnotism. Lot of people can do that. You're especially good at it, Doc."

"What this girl does is far beyond any of my abilities," the bronze man explained. "My hypnotism is ordinary, consisting of the usual fixation of attention, the inducing of a state of mental relaxation, and so on, all induced by concrete, visible methods that are as understandable as putting a man to sleep with a blow of your fist."

"Maybe," Monk grunted. "But you spent months in India and elsewhere learning how it was done."

"Did you look at this girl's eyes?" Doc countered.

"No."

"Did she speak?"

"No."

"Did she make a move?"

"She didn't do a blame thing," Monk said. "It was me. I laid down and put my arms and legs in the air."

Ham began to laugh, starting with an amused giggle, then a titter and finally cackling.

"You're a ladies man yourself!" Monk told him, indignantly. "I dare you to go in there and stay five minutes with her."

Ham stopped cackling. He had nothing to say.

Doc Savage stated, "This girl secures her effects by control through actual thought *telepathy*, it appears."

"What?"

Monk exploded.

"It is a bit hard to admit possible," the bronze man agreed. "But she seems to be able to make other men see or think exactly what she wants them to see or think, without even speaking to them or using any of the other tricks of hypnotism.

"Mind you, my intention is not to say for certain that she does this. But it appears, from what we have seen so far, that this girl has an intelligence infinitely beyond anything we possess."

"Infinitely beyond—" Monk squinted at Doc. "Beyond us, maybe. But not you. You've been trained scientifically since the day you were born. A brain like yours isn't easy to equal."

"No flattery," Doc requested.

"There ain't none of us kidding each other," Monk said. "You mean to tell me this girl is some kind of—of mental wizard?"

"Exactly," Doc said.

On the back door, something small and hard made a loud, rapping noise.

IT sounded as if the rear door were being opened. Voices murmured, one of them Johnny's. The other voice was whinnying.

Johnny was speaking Spanish, and sticking to his habit of using the longest words his agile mind could produce. The whinnying voice seemed to have difficulty understanding.

Doc Savage walked quickly toward the voices. Monk, Ham and Renny followed him. They came upon tall, bony Johnny and a fat, brown man who needed a bath, a barber and a tailor.

The disreputable-looking brown man had a huge wicker basket balanced on his head. The basket seemed to be full of bananas, coconuts and queer-looking loaves of bread.

"He says this stuff was bought and ordered delivered by the men who live here," Johnny said, suddenly switching to small English words.

"Bring it in," Doc Savage said, quietly.

The bronze man stepped forward, so that, as the man with the basket of groceries entered, he passed

close. The bronze man's action in getting close seemed to have no particular significance. But, an instant after the basket of fruit and bread passed, things began to happen.

Doc Savage made, for the briefest of instants, the small peculiar trilling noise which was his characteristic reaction to the unexpected.

"Wait!" Doc said sharply, in Spanish.

The bearer of the basket halted and looked vacant.

"What kind of bulky objects made of metal are you carrying?" Doc asked.

The fat, brown man didn't try to explain. He was supporting the basket on his head with one hand. He jerked this hand away, and it was evident it held a string which ran into the basket. He jerked this string. Then he hurled the basket from him, spun, and dived outdoors.

Doc Savage jumped, caught the basket before it hit the floor. He hurled the basket out of the door. It arched over the head of the fleeing brown man and hit in front of him.

The brown man saw the basket. He threw his upper torso back, his legs as far out in front as he could, and stopped. He was running backward making the motion—even before he stopped.

There hadn't been time for any expression to appear on the brown fellow's face. But it was in the man's eyes. The basket bringer suddenly dived toward the door.

Doc Savage banged the door shut.

The door came open again at once. Came apart, rather. It was paneled, and the panels jumped inward. The hinges weren't strong enough, and the whole door followed. Through the hole came bright light, noise and dust and gravel.

Plaster separated from the ceiling in big patches; pictures dropped off the walls, and there was the noise of other things falling.

The silence which followed seemed double by contrast.

"I'll be superamalgamated," Johnny said finally. "Doc, since when did you become a mind reader?"

"Nothing like that," the bronze man said, quietly.

"Then how'd you know there was something in that basket?"

"An adaption," Doc Savage said, "of the monitor device which watches the door of our headquarters in New York City."

Monk shoved his head out, squinted through the door, then ducked back.

"Blazes!" he exploded. "There's fifteen or twenty guys with guns comin'!"

GAUNT and bony Johnny hastily jerked his supermachine pistol out of its padded underarm holster. He understood, now, how Doc had accomplished the seeming magic of detecting what had evidently been a big grenade in the basket of fruit and bread.

Long ago, Doc had refined a device which was coming more and more into use in prisons and police stations. The apparatus consisted simply of a contrivance which registered, through the alteration in a magnetic field, the nearness of any iron or steel.

Doc had equipped his headquarters with it. Any visitors carrying guns could be spotted. Doc had simply reduced the contrivance to pocket size.

Doc Savage said, "Better not let them get too close!"

Johnny showed himself briefly, and his machine pistol made its huge fiddle noise. Empty cartridges fell from the ejector to the floor in almost a cloud.

Monk looked, then squeaked admiringly, "Boy, you must have been practicing with that thing! About half of 'em are down!"

"When they start going down, place your shots more carefully," Doc Savage directed. "We do not want to hit any eyes or ears."

It was a steadfast rule with the bronze man and his aids never to take a life if it could possibly be avoided. His aids tried honestly to adhere to the rule, but slip-ups were liable to happen during exciting moments.

Bullets came in through the door opening. They knocked glass out of a window. The tall hill where the old fort stood was some distance behind the house, and the gunshot echoes came jumping back from it in distinct reports, sounding like little guns.

Monk was shooting now. Long Tom and Renny joined in. They latched the machine pistols into single shot, and placed their slugs carefully, not missing often.

They were firing—had been from the first—the slugs which were but a shell with a chemical compound which, when the fragments embedded in the flesh, would be absorbed harmlessly by the body. The shells contained a chemical which produced abrupt unconsciousness lasting some hours.

These so-called "mercy" bullets were not new in theory. Big-game hunters for zoos had long since used them actually to get live specimens. But the chemical compound shells of the bullets, dissolving harmlessly in the human body, and even cauterizing their own wounds, were a product of Doc Savage's inventive genius.

The attackers began to retreat. Two of them turned tail first, and others quickly. But they did not flee the vicinity. They took shelter behind boulders and distant houses.

Doc made a suggestion, and his aids switched high-explosive bullets for the "mercy" slugs. These opened great pits in the earth, and knocked down walls sheltering riflemen.

The attackers fled. The fear of the police arriving might have had a little to do with their quick exodus.

DOC SAVAGE and his aids likewise lost no time in leaving the vicinity.

Fear of the authorities or what they might accuse him of did not promote Doc's hurried departure. There was probably not a policeman who did not admire the bronze man and his work.

But bringing in the police meant a ponderous organization working, and attendant delay. Not that the

Colombian police were inefficient. It was simply that no ordinary group of men could act as swiftly as Doc's trained crowd. They were specialists to the last degree.

Doc went ahead, taking the strange girl with the golden hair. He kept her blindfolded, gagged and bound—bound only sufficiently so that she could not snatch off the blindfold.

Monk and the others followed with the brown fellow who had tried to give them the big grenade in a basket of fruit and bread.

They left the other prisoners—*El Liberator* O'Neel's captured patriots—behind, having an idea the Colombian police would have business with them.

In a clump of jungle growth on the outskirts of the city, beyond the ruins of the old wall which Indian slaves of Spanish conquistadors had built, Doc questioned the brown basket carrier.

The man at first put out his jaw, but no information. Monk, who was good at it, made some pointed and awful threats, which the prisoner didn't know but what might be carried out. Monk's terrible Spanish probably made it sound worse.

The brown man still refused to say a word.

Doc Savage then told the man exactly what had happened. Everything. The effect was the desired one. The prisoner realized he and his fellows had been tricked by the narcotic story.

He told all about the trick.

Doc Savage selected, from a pocket case holding chemicals which Monk carried, a rather large yellow pill. He gave this to the brown man after he had finished the story.

Doc then turned the prisoner loose.

The brown fellow was bad, should at least have been in prison. But he would find his fellows and tell them they had been double-crossed by *El Liberator* O'Neel, and that would add its bit to O'Neel's troubles.

Furthermore, the yellow pill would, in a few days, make the man violently but harmlessly ill of what would seem to be appendicitis.

Doc wrote a note requesting the police to look out for a crook who might in a day or two turn up with what appeared to be appendicitis. Doc suggested watching the hospitals.

"We'll mail this to the police," he explained.

Echoing his voice, mixing with the last three words of what he had said, came the sound of shots.

## **Chapter IX. THE SECRET OF KLANTIC**

MONK said, "Somebody must be hunting rabbits, or whatever they've got down here to hunt."

There were more shots. Men shrieked.

"Rabbits don't make noises like that!" Renny rumbled.

"We might look into it," Doc said.

The thicket where they had ensconced themselves was one of considerable extent. There was a ravine with bamboo, palms elsewhere, and the ground was sandy, spotted with some small shrubs, most of them thorny.

They worked through it rapidly, Ham dancing about gingerly to keep the thorns out of his expensive suit. Doc Savage carried the young woman with the remarkable golden hair.

The shooting continued. There was also a new sound, a loud droning, which started abruptly. Another droning joined it, then another and another.

"Planes!" Renny boomed.

Sound seemed to be carrying unexpectedly well. They ran for quite a distance before they sighted the planes. They saw the first one just as it came up over the gently tossing fronds of palms. Another followed it. Another. Then a fourth plane took the air.

All four planes went away without preliminary spirals or other time-killing movements.

All four bore the yellow, blue and red markings of Colombian war planes.

The Colombian military airport, Cartagena unit, from which the planes had taken off, was in an uproar. There was some reason for it.

Seven dead men, four not quite dead, and approximately a dozen others were yelling as if they were going to die. All wore uniforms, and they were scattered over the place.

"It is war!" an officer ran around howling. "We have been invaded!"

"Nobody has declared war!" another shouted.

"They don't, anyway, these days! It's the new fashion!"

Doc Savage placed the golden-haired girl in a bamboo thicket near the edge of the airport.

"Watch her," he directed his aids. "And do not get nearer than thirty or so feet from her. That may not be a sufficient distance. There has not been time to make sure. But if you find yourself getting ideas, get farther away from her."

"What kind of ideas?" Long Tom asked.

"Queer ones," Doc told him.

Ham said dryly, "Monk will be in a predicament. That's the only kind of ideas he has."

A LOT of curious people descended on the airport before long, wanting to know what the excitement had been about, so it was not difficult for Doc Savage to mingle without getting too much individual attention. It was not even necessary to ask many questions. Everybody was telling everybody else exactly what had happened.

*El Liberator*

Amber O'Neel and his men raided the military airport to seize planes. Desperate and bloody had been

their job. And successful.

Doc Savage went back and joined his men. Met them, rather. They were charging around in the jungle, and it was a wonder they had not been discovered.

"The girl's gone!" Renny gulped.

"Yeah!" Monk exploded. "I don't see how she done it! We never took our eyes off that clump of bushes where we left her! And all of sudden, she wasn't there!"

"I hope to be superamalgamated!" gaunt Johnny added. "It *couldn't* have happened! It's simply impossible!"

"Yeah," said Long Tom. "It couldn't happen, only—"

Doc Savage walked away from them into the thicket where they had left the girl—and where the girl still lay. The bronze giant glanced briefly at her, saw that she was as comfortable as circumstances permitted, that nothing had happened to her, and went back to his men.

"She's there," he told them.

They ran, looked in the thicket, and came back.

"She's not!" they insisted.

"Go away for a few minutes," Doc directed. "Run, take some violent exercise—do something to get your minds on something else. Then come back."

They did so. When they looked into the thicket this time, it was obvious that they saw the girl.

"So you caught her while we were gone," Monk told Doc.

"She was there all of the time," Doc told him.

Monk's facial expression indicated that he thought of a great deal which could be said, but he said none of it. Finally, after he had thought it over, he began to look scared.

"Whew!" he squeaked thinly. "Whew!"

Ham tittered at him.

"You're in the same boat with us!"

Monk told him grimly. "We've all gone nuts!"

Doc Savage's voice had a reassuring quietness.

"Your minds are perfectly normal," he said. "That is one of the difficulties."

"Huh?" Monk squinted.

"The girl," Doc explained, "is a mental wizard."

MONK swelled his chest and got purple. "Mental wizard or no mental wizard, I don't savvy what she did to us. First, it was them brown O'Neel lugs, who thought they saw snakes, and which I could

explain, them not being very bright. But us, we've got highly developed minds, and—"

"The fellow who's always modest," Ham said unkindly.

Monk snarled, "Maybe you can explain it?"

"She's a mental wizard," Ham replied. "Didn't you just hear Doc say—"

"A Spanish razzberry for you!" Monk snorted.

Doc Savage said, "Come on over and we will see if the girl still wishes to be stubborn."

The young woman had shifted her position a little, so as to lean against some soft bamboo shoots. She had not succeeded in untying herself. It was, in fact, absolutely impossible for any one tied as she was to get free, unassisted.

Doc settled on one knee beside her and began removing the gag.

"What makes her hair that color?" Monk wanted to know.

Doc Savage drew some of the girl's hair through his fingers. It was very fine hair, each strand so slender that all of them together had the effect of a golden vapor rather than many individual hairs.

"Gold-plated," he said.

"Gold—" Monk swallowed twice. "Listen, I'm a chemist, and I happen to know you can't gold-plate a human hair and make it work, even by applying a base—"

"This hair," Doc said, "is something new."

Monk shook his head, then grinned doubtfully. "I'd like to have a patent on the process. If gold hair looks as swell on every woman as it does on her, I could make a million farming the idea out to beauty parlors. I'll bet Pat would kick in that much for the process."

Pat—Patricia Savage—was Doc's cousin, a very remarkable young lady who had probably the snootiest beauty establishment in New York, and who was always wanting to risk her neck in the wildest adventures which Doc Savage encountered.

Doc finished removing the golden-haired girl's gag.

"Let us hope," he said, "that you will refrain from taking advantage of us."

She replied nothing.

"Can you read minds?" Doc asked her.

The girl was quiet for so long that it seemed again that she was not going to answer.

"Not," she said, "unless I am very familiar with the other person."

Her words were like her beauty—they could now see the strange, almost too perfect nature of her beauty. Her words were as perfect as if they had been said over and over thousands of times in practice. Her voice was delicate, bell-like.

Homely Monk hung his jaw in surprise. Words, voice, they were unlike anything he had ever heard before.

She seemed to throw a spell around her. Nothing visible. But it was very real.

Doc Savage asked abruptly, "Where did you come from?"

"Telling you would do no good," she said. "You would not know of the place. No one of your—of what we call the outlanders—has ever heard of it, or learned of it and come back to tell. But wait! There is now one. The aviator, David Hutton."

JOHNNY, the gaunt geologist and archaeologist, explained what had happened.

"Thaumaturgical prodigiousness, ineluctably," he said, solemnly. "David Hutton's evanescence attained infraanagrammatic preponderation."

Even Ham, who knew a lot of big words himself, and was used to Johnny's jaw-breakers, looked slightly stunned.

The golden-haired girl asked, "What language was that?"

Johnny fingered his monocle and peered at her to see if she were kidding.

"English," he said.

"The part of it ordinary people never use," Ham elaborated for her.

"Oh," said the girl. "That explains why I did not know them. All the English I know is that which was brought to us by such white men as happened to—well, decide to spend the rest of their lives with us." She looked at Johnny. "What did he say about David Hutton."

Johnny descended into the ordinary man's vocabulary.

"David Hutton tried to make a nonstop flight from Rio de Janeiro to the United States ten years ago, when planes weren't so much. He was never heard from again."

"Until to-day," Doc Savage said, quietly.

Johnny gasped, "You mean—the tall thin guy—who was knifed and finished off with a poison arrow?"

"David Hutton, world war aviator, ace, and one of the finest airmen of his day," Doc Savage agreed. "There was, if you had your attention called to it, a resemblance between the man and his earlier pictures. He had an angular bony distinction."

Big-fisted Renny looked at the young woman and frowned. "Look here, miss, that poor flier had copper rings around his ankles. His legs had been chained. Just what had happened to him during the last ten years?"

"The same thing that has happened to a lot of others," the girl said.

WHILE her words were the words that would be spoken by one using slangily free speech, they were machine perfect.

Doc and the others did not say anything for a minute.

"You have a name?" Doc asked.

She said, "Z."

"Z?" Ham gave her a nice smile. "Name or initial?"

"A name," she said. "In our language, it is a sign. In yours, it could be spelled out. Zuee. Uhsee. Zee. Make it simple. Z."

"How did you and the aviator happen to be in that old plane?" Doc asked.

Instead of answering the bronze man, the golden-haired girl studied him. Her appraisal was interested, but somewhat along the vein of a science student confronted with a new specimen. At first, it was that way. Later, she seemed to become a bit more human.

"What a remarkable Klantic you would make," she said unexpectedly.

"What?" Doc queried.

"Klantic."

"What is that?"

Instead of answering, she said, "I can show you where that man who calls himself *El Liberator* O'Neel is heading for."

"Can you guide us by air?" Doc queried.

"Yes," she said, "because that is the way I left the spot."

## **Chapter X. A JUNGLE AND FOUR PLANES**

THE plane had six motors, working in tandem in three groups, but turning six propellers. It mounted seven machine guns, could carry several tons of bombs, but carried none now.

It could fly from New York to Cartagena and back without refueling, with a crew of four pilots, two radio operators, a captain, a mate, seven men to operate the seven machine guns, two bomb experts, and perhaps a war correspondent or two. It had cost the Colombian government almost two hundred thousand dollars.

The Colombian government had loaned it to Doc Savage, and had asked no questions about what he wanted to do with it.

"Some bus!" Renny said admiringly, handling the controls.

"It should be," bony Johnny told him. "Doc perfected the original design."

Renny glanced over one shoulder. "I wish he'd perfect some design to get information out of that golden-haired girl. Since we had the talk immediately after O'Neel stole the Colombian army's airplanes, she hasn't added another word of information."

"She makes me nervous."

"She makes Monk and Ham nervous, too. Monk, nervous because he's afraid she'll fall for Ham, and

Ham, vice versa."

The jungle was below. The swampy kind. Just how bad a jungle it was, the map makers indicated when they spread over most of the region of the legends, "Existence doubtful," or "Existence unconfirmed," to qualify rivers and lakes.

Renny, using binoculars, said, "Monk and his pet ape would sure be at home down there."

Back in the rearmost compartment of the plane—a dark room for the developing of aerial photographs—dapper Ham was telling homely Monk the same thing.

"You jungle-bred zodiac sign!" Ham was gritting. "Why didn't you leave that insect on the cruise ship? We made an agreement to leave both our pets behind this time!"

Monk sneered, "I saw you sneaking Chemistry out, so I got Habeas, too."

"I saw you getting Habeas Corpus, then I got my Chemistry!" Ham declared.

"You doubt my word?"

"Yes, you ape!"

"You fashion plate! You menace to the bar! I'll break you in two!"

"Liar!" Ham finished.

The pets under discussion—Chemistry and Habeas—were arrayed behind their respective owners. Chemistry was a remarkable member of the anthropoid family—chimpanzee, orangutan, ape, stunted gorilla, nobody knew which. Chemistry's main point was his almost unearthly resemblance to Monk. There was only a hundred or so pounds difference in their weight.

Habeas was Habeas Corpus, elephant-eared, spindlelegged, wire-bristled Arabian hog. Habeas had undergone more training from his owner, Monk, than is received by the average college student. Not all of it had been wasted.

LONG TOM, the electrical wizard, who had been talking to the girl, Z, now moved into a seat beside Doc Savage.

"Listen, Doc. There's something phony about that girl."

"Yes?" Doc's face showed no expression.

"While we were trying to locate a plane to follow O'Neel's gang, she picked up a newspaper. She could hardly read it. I showed her a telephoto picture. She thought I was kidding her when I told her it came over a wire. She didn't believe that it was possible. She was really high-and-mighty about it."

He paused and shook his head violently.

"She wanted to know how she could learn how pictures were sent over the wire, so I gave her my own new book on advanced telephoto work. Well, a minute ago, I got to talking to her again, and dang me for a dry battery if she don't know as much about telephoto as I do!"

"She read," Doc told him, "your book."

"Listen, you mean to tell me she read that book once and remembered everything in it? Why, there's words in that book, and obscure rules, that I had to do a lot of research on myself. That book is really advanced."

"And this girl's brain is something like you've never encountered before."

Long Tom sank back in the seat. "I thought I'd seen some amazing memories in my time, but she's got one that stops me."

Doc Savage had his unusual flake gold eyes fixed on the jungle below. There was a calmness about the giant bronze man, and it seemed never to leave him, no matter how fast things happened. It partook somewhat of that calmness resting upon a lion in a cage, and when he moved, the calm effect still persisted.

He went back to the girl. She was reading Long Tom's book. Some electrical engineers could have read that book and not fully understood more than the first chapter.

"Making out all right?" Doc asked her.

"Oh, yes," she said. "I am over to the part about electro-magnetically guided atomic stream scanners."

Doc happened to know that was the last chapter.

"It is very interesting," she said. "There is no such thing as electricity in—where I came from. But I do not agree with Major Roberts, or Long Tom as you call him, when he says that bending cathode scanning streams by means of—"

Doc listened. She had read the book all right, and she had remembered what she read. Moreover, she had picked out practically the only weak point in Long Tom's theories. It was amazing. Some trace of astonishment must have shown on Doc Savage's bronze features, for the girl stopped speaking suddenly.

Her finger tips settled rather tightly against the cabled muscles in one arm.

"Tell me," she requested, "am I such an unusual creature, measured by your standards?"

"Well," Doc admitted, cautiously, "you are not one that comes along every day."

"I do not mean that. Am I so strange as to be bad company? Does my—my——"

"Mental power," Doc supplied.

"Yes. I have a fabulous brain, measured by your standards. I can do things with it which you may think impossible. For instance, I can by the very intensity of thought, cause men to think what I wish them to think—within certain limits, of course. I can do other things. Does this—this ability, make me repugnant?"

"Mental development takes care of itself," Doc suggested. "You, with your intellect, will know how to *make* people like you."

She shook her head. "I mean, will they like me without my consciously and cold-bloodedly making them?"

Doc studied her beauty. "I do not see how they could help it."

Renny, who had been glancing over one shoulder from time to time, said, "Maybe that girl is halfway human, after all."

Long Tom had also been watching. He chuckled.

"Maybe Doc is, too," he said.

DOC SAVAGE had a rule. He had several rules, but this one was invariable. It was necessary for the efficient functioning of his little organization. It was essential in order that his work of fighting evil and aiding the oppressed might continue.

He never permitted himself to think of falling in love. It would only give his enemies—and they numbered legions—a means of striking at him indirectly. The life which he led was too perilous for any woman to share.

The fact that he adhered to the rule had given Doc the reputation of being lacking in certain human qualities. His aids, while not ladies' men—excepting Monk and Ham—were decidedly human, and they had waited a long time for Doc to show signs of falling in love with some one.

They invariably watched the advent of an especially pretty and intelligent girl with hopeful—or anxious, depending on the girl—expectation.

"Brains," Renny rumbled, just over the motor roar. That's the kind of female that'll trap Doc. A brainy one, and not a looker. I always said so."

"I wouldn't say this one was exactly a witch for looks," Johnny said, critically. "In fact, I should say she was eminently attractive."

"Yes," Renny agreed. "She's just about the most lovable thing I've seen in some time."

In the rear of the plane, Monk and Ham had stopped fighting.

"I think," Monk was saying, "that I could go for that girl in a big way."

"She's a sweet thing," Ham agreed.

Monk should have all but dropped dead from surprise at Ham agreeing with him on anything. But he didn't.

"Yes," he said. "She's just wonderful. Man, oh, man! I've never thought of getting married—much. But if I could get a wife like her!"

Long Tom, the pale electrical wizard who had been so critical of the golden-haired girl a bit previously, now showed strong evidences of a thaw.

"She's remarkably intelligent," he said. "And I don't think she'd hurt a fly. I know she wouldn't. Isn't she showing us how to find O'Neel and his thugs?"

"You think she's sweet?" Monk asked.

"I do."

They all gazed with mooning eyes at the girl.

Doc Savage chanced to look up. He saw the love-struck gazes. They seemed to remind him that he had been looking a bit that way himself during the last few moments.

For a fraction of a second, Doc's small trilling noise came out distinctly, and with a faintly startled quality.

Doc got up hastily, switched on the automatic plane control, smiled at the golden-haired girl, excused himself, hurried into the back of the plane, and then stood there watching his five aids. He called Long Tom.

"That girl," Doc told him, "is using the power of her incredible brain to make us all fall in love with her. You'd better tell the others to watch out. Tell them to think about other things, and not to look at her. In other words, keep their minds off her."

"Great jumping cupid!" Long Tom exploded.

He went to the others and told them what Doc had divulged. He also added an idea of his own to the information.

"I think she was turning loose her mental come-hither on Doc, and the rest of us just happened to be around," he said.

THE possibilities of the strange powers which the girl seemed to possess were not productive of a peaceful frame of mind, once they started thinking about it. Not that it was distressing to have such a ravishing young lady make you like her. Oh, no!

"Holy cow!" Renny said, trying to keep his booming voice down to a whisper. "She might get us jealous of each other and start us fighting!"

"Fat chance!" pale Long Tom sniffed. "We've been working together for years, and we've never fought among ourselves yet."

"Listen!" Monk put in. "She practically don't have to make me jealous of Ham at all, before I'll wring his neck!"

They talked it over, and it seemed funny at first, something to wisecrack about. The funny angles of it somehow exhausted themselves after a while. The thing had serious possibilities, and they began to see them.

"Where could she have come from?" Long Tom pondered.

"Wherever that lost aviator was for the last ten years," Renny pointed out. "She came from the same place."

"The way she talks, I gather she considers her home shut off completely from the outer world," Ham put in.

"Well," Renny contributed, "if her country is full of people like she is, I'll bet life there isn't monotonous."

The big-fisted engineer did some thinking, and a slightly cheerful look came over his long, puritannical face. That was a bad sign, because Renny somewhat contrarily registered gloom when he was happiest, and when he looked even moderately cheerful, it was time for ordinary peace-lovers to take to storm cellars.

"Holy cow!" he mumbled. "When we get to this place where she's from, I wonder what we'll find?"

"And I wonder how we'll know whether it's really there," Ham said, grimly. "Considering that the girl

made those other fellows see snakes where there weren't any, and made us think we weren't seeing her when we were, I wonder what's in store for us?

"Suppose there are others in her country like her—whereas we are only ordinary men—how in the name of common sense are we to know what we think we see is really what we see, and not something this girl or somebody else is making us see?"

"Eminently elucidated," said Johnny.

Monk complained, "I dunno which would be worse—Ham, if he used sentences like that all the time, or Johnny's big words, if he didn't know any little ones."

The homely chemist looked at the golden-haired girl, who smiled at him, so that he looked as happy as a small boy with a lollypop.

"Oh, me," he sighed cheerfully. "If she's a sample of whoever lives wherever she came from, I for one will struggle very hard to put up with 'em."

THE golden-haired girl could not read a map. Doc had the latest land charts, although they would not be a lot of help after the first few hundred miles, which their big plane, at its present speed, would not take long traversing.

The bronze man conferred with her over the chart. It meant nothing to her. He explained about how the distances were depicted. She caught on quickly.

"Here," she said, and placed a finger, then drew it in a circle to show an approximate number of miles away, but without indicating a definite direction.

"What direction?" Doc asked her.

"Direction?" she repeated, pronouncing it perfectly. "I do not know what that is."

It was not the first word she had heard which she had never heard before. That much it had been possible to ascertain by observing her closely. Usually, she had been able to tell, from what was being said, what the word meant.

"Direction—north, south, east and west, we call them," Doc told her. "You get them off a compass."

"I do not know what a compass is," she said frankly. "Do you have one?"

Doc took her forward and showed her the compasses—three of them on the plane, because with one or two, it is impossible to tell always which one is off.

"David Hutton had one of those in the plane which we didn't—which he flew," she said.

"Did you watch it?" Doc asked her.

"Yes. Because he did, I did, also." She pointed. "There is no mark there which showed on his compass."

Since practically all compass dials look alike, there could be only one explanation. These plane type compasses were made so that only a part of the dials showed at a time.

"Swing the plane in a slow circle," Doc requested Renny, who was flying the plane now.

Renny did so.

The girl watched the compass dial, said, "There!"

The dial had rotated, and the markings on the opposite side had come before the aperture in the instrument panel. Doc, able to box a compass instantly, directed Renny.

"Hutton flew northwest by north. We will fly the direction directly opposite, which is southeast by south."

The bronze man indicated, on Renny's chart, the distance which the girl had stated; roughly, their destination lay from their present position.

"Holy cow!" grunted Renny. "Nearly fifteen hundred miles! We haven't a chance in a million in flying that far and hitting any specific point, with only a compass course to guide us, and not knowing how the air currents ran the day Hutton flew it."

Doc Savage said, "Angle to the right, then the left, and try to cross a region which the girl will recognize."

That was successful. Two hours later, the girl saw jungle which she said she recognized, and pointed out the direction they were to take.

Monk peered at the jungle, which from the air looked remarkably monotonous and devoid of landmarks, and said, "I'd give a lot for that girl's memory." He eyed the young lady covertly and let out a rapturous sigh. "But I'd give a lot more for her herself."

"You've got, you know," Ham told him, "your pet hog."

"Habeas," Monk grinned, "ain't jealous:"

THE spot they were heading for was very nearly on a line with the equator. That meant heat. Cartagena had not been cool. It was winter, bitterly cold in New York, which meant summer and heat down here. And the equator meant even greater heat, and the jungle, humidity.

Humidity! It came up at them like steam off a boiling kettle, so damp that their clothes got clammy and they seemed filmed with perspiration. Habeas Corpus, Monk's pet pig, lay in the back, beside a crack around a door which was leaking air, and panted.

Chemistry, Ham's pet what-is-it, stood back and chucked various articles—spoons, cartridges, shoes, and they had to lock up the binoculars—at Habeas. The pets got along about as peacefully as their owners, which meant no noticeable peace.

Every one but Ham, who never shed an item of his remarkable clothing if it could possibly be helped, discarded coats and shirts. The fact that they opened the plane's windows seemed to have no effect.

The sun became hotter, and rivers steamed, and Renny flew low in order that the girl might be sure of her landmarks.

Johnny, using binoculars, watched the jungle. Then, abruptly, he put the glasses down and sat back, looking sober.

"Stomach ache?" Long Tom asked.

Johnny used much smaller words than usual when he answered.

"I saw a native village down there," he said. "They had a fire out in front of one of the huts, and were all gathered around it, drying and smoking several objects."

"What?" Long Tom wanted to know.

"Human heads."

Doc Savage had been observing the girl, and it was obvious that she knew where she was going. She was certain about her landmarks. Frequently—and absolute proof that she had been this way before—she called her landmarks before they were reached.

Doc asked her several questions. He asked her exactly what her country was like. He asked her what Klantic was, or who. He asked her what the secret of Klantic was. And he put some other queries intended to gather some general information.

To all the questions, the girl gave him a sweet smile.

But something was bothering the golden-haired lady. Something that started as nothing much, and grew more serious as she thought about it—and looked covertly at Doc Savage. It was obvious that the bronze man was having some effect on her ideas.

Doc, for his part, kept well reserved. His men, who were familiar with the bronze man's inscrutability, could tell that Doc was very much on edge, tense.

"He's scared—" Monk chuckled.

"You ape discredit!" Ham sneered, cutting in. "The tight spots you've seen Doc in, and no sign of fear, and you say—"

"Scared that the girl is gonna do her stuff on him any minute and make him fall in love with her," Monk finished. "Why don'tcha let me finish when I start to say somethin', you shyster lawyer!"

Doc Savage went to the rear of the plane, which was unoccupied and began going through his two-hour exercise routine. He had not yet had time this day for it, and he never permitted a day to pass without expending not less than two hours on the exercises which had given him the agile senses and almost incredible physical strength which he possessed.

Doc's aids, who had seen the exercise routine often, paid little attention, but the girl, Z, stared in amazement.

IT was some hours later before Z got around to what was bothering her. It could be noted that she had worried about it during Doc's exercises, and finally she got up and came to the bronze man's seat. She leaned close, that her voice might penetrate the motor roar.

"I have been misleading you," she said.

"Lying, you mean?" Doc asked.

She nodded, said precisely, "That is what it amounts to."

Doc made no comment, and after a moment, she went on.

"I am using you," she said slowly, "merely to get me back to my—to my land, I guess you would call it."

"But you are also taking us to where *El Liberator* O'Neel is going?" Doc queried.

"Yes."

"Then how have you lied?"

She was suddenly almost desperately earnest. "You do not understand! O'Neel is going to his end! Oh, he will not die! But to a man like him, what will happen to him will be a great deal worse. His punishment will be much more severe than anything you will inflict."

Doc told her, "We will go ahead, anyway."

She shook her head violently. "You mustn't!"

"O'Neel," Doc told her, "killed several men. That is enough to keep us on his trail. But this mystery has its other angles, too. Very interesting angles."

She put a hand on his arm. "You do not understand!"

"No?"

"You will receive the same thing that is going to happen to O'Neel!"

Doc said mildly, "We are not usually threatened by so charming a young lady."

SHE shook her head. "I am not threatening you. I have nothing to do with it. I could not help you if I would. It was all arranged—centuries ago."

"It sounds even more interesting."

She showed some faint signs of a temper. Her fingers dug at—not into—the corded bronze of his arm.

"Go back!" she gasped. "Land me somewhere in the jungle and I will take my chances!"

"Impossible."

"You've got to!" she gasped. "Why, even now, O'Neel's planes are down, and he and his men have met a fate which they never dreamed—"

Renny's great voice roared, "Three of O'Neel's planes! Dead ahead, and below!"

"In the air," Monk squeaked loudly. "They're coming this way."

"Holy cow, yes!" Renny added. "This steam is so thick I didn't see 'em at first."

Big-worded Johnny chimed in, "A quadrigeminous member is ensconced on terra firma."

"I guess," Monk decided, "he means that the fourth plane is on the ground. Probably it's disabled."

"That explains how we overhauled them," Renny boomed. "One plane had to make a forced landing, and the other three came down also to help make repairs."

There was, unexpectedly, a sound as if some wild man had beaten a sudden, mad flurry against the hull of the plane with his fists. It was accompanied by the sounds machine-gun bullets make going through the

things—fortunately not men—in a plane's cabin.

"I'll be superamalgamated!" Renny said. "They think they're going to kill us!"

## **Chapter XI. WHAT MONK SAW**

RENNY had flown in planes being shot at before. He rolled, sideslipped, got out of the rain of slugs from O'Neel's attacking ships. Simultaneously, Renny eased over to make room for Doc to get into the other pilot's seat.

Monk, clipping slugs into a machine pistol, squeaked, "How'd they know we were in this plane? How come they attacked us right away?"

"This is a Colombian war plane, ignuts," Ham told him. "We're out of Colombia a long ways. What would a Colombian war plane be doing here, if not hunting these birds? Naturally, they jumped us."

"I don't like that name you called me!" Monk complained.

Bullets came into the plane's cabin and stitched a neat design, geometrically semicircular, on the cabin floor and in the ceiling.

"I don't like that, either!" Monk squeaked. "Renny, you tryin' to get us shot?"

As a matter of fact, Renny was doing some very good flying. Doc Savage said so as he eased into the other pilot's seat, and Renny looked very gloomy, which meant he liked the praise. He settled back to watch some flying that was flying.

The plane was big. It had been built to carry a lot of bombs high and far, and to fight if necessary. It was one of the latest design war giants of the air. But the attacking planes were also the latest. Colombia was not so far behind with her air force.

Three against one, the odds. But one was a scientific master who had long realized the importance of airmanship, and had studied it as he had studied many things, with an absolute intensity of concentration that amazed those who saw.

Doc flew. The big plane had been banking, rolling, in an effort to escape. Under Doc's handling, it whipped straight for the opponents.

"Monk!" he called. "Among our equipment is a case numbered A311. Bring it!"

The bronze man's voice carried through over the motors' roar without being unduly loud, and Monk heard and leaped to comply. The after section of the plane was loaded with a number of cases—metal boxes, very light, which contained the innumerable scientific gadgets which Doc had occasion to use.

They had been aboard the cruise ship. Doc and his aids had sailed on the cruise ship on a vacation, but they had taken vacations before—and had them terminate in as choice mêlées as hell ever spawned.

Monk came forward with case A311.

"Open it," Doc said, "and release the contents shortly after we pass those planes."

They went past the three stolen war planes with a sobbing howl of engines, and a gnashing of lead against metal and wood as a single machine gun found them. Considering that each of the attacking planes

carried two gunners aft, who could shoot in almost any direction, it was remarkable flying.

Monk began emptying the contents of the cylinder which had been in case A311 through the plane window. Monk wore a big, expectant grin. He thought he knew the contents of that cylinder.

Doc Savage zoomed their big plane at the three attackers. Now, he continued on downward. Like pups on the trail of a big dog they think they've scared the other planes fell in behind. Their machine guns shuttled and sent out long whiskers of tracer bullets. Doc rolled his big ship, arched it a little, sank it some. Only a few of the machine-gun bullets came close.

Monk watched the other planes. Expectancy held the big chemist's ample mouth open.

"All right, Doc!" he called abruptly. "That got them!"

Doc pulled the big plane out of its dive.

Behind and above, the three pursuing planes were sliding slowly toward the jungle below, and the clearing in which stood the fourth plane which had never taken the air. The motors of all three planes had stopped.

MONK, his big grin bigger than ever, tossed the empty case A311 into the rear of the plane.

"It worked like a charm!" he told the golden-haired girl gleefully. "It always does! Me and Doc invented that stuff!"

"What is it?" the girl asked.

"A chemical vapor," Monk explained. "It works like the stuff that comes out of fire extinguishers. Forms a vapor that mixes with the air and makes it noninflammable in combination with gasoline, so that their motors stopped. Like I said, just like the fire extinguishers of the chemical type."

"What," asked the golden-haired girl, "is a fire extinguisher like?"

Monk frowned at her. "Listen, are you kidding me?"

"If you mean lying to you to entertain myself, the answer is that I am not!"

Monk squeaked, "You're the doggonedest combination of absolute genius and abysmal ignorance that I ever saw!"

He was actually somewhat piqued at the young lady, because he thought she was putting on an act. But as he frowned critically at her, he felt something distinct happen to him.

A wave of absolute good feeling toward the young lady swept over Monk. He felt the thing happen distinctly. The sensation was as plain as if he had been out in the cold and had come in where it was warm. One moment he was piqued at the golden-haired young lady; the next, he was liking her.

"Blazes!" Monk gulped, and fled.

He joined Doc.

"That gal can sure do things to you!" Monk sighed. "Boy, am I scared of her!" He peered downward, saw that they were circling back. "Doc, whatcha gonna do?"

"The vapor with which we stopped their motors settles, being heavier than air," Doc said. "We will wait until it is clear, then go back and drop anaesthetic gas bombs on *El Liberator* and his crowd."

Monk grinned, "*El Liberator* O'Neel will have the notebook he took off that aviator, David Hutton. It'll explain just what is behind this mystery." Monk glanced over one shoulder at the young woman. "It'll explain *her*—and them trick clothes she is wearing!"

"Holy cow!" Renny boomed. "This thing is about over!"

Their motors, one after another, made coughing noises and stopped.

HAD the world vanished from under them, the effect could hardly have been more startling. Renny, the engineer, who was also something approaching a wizard as a plane mechanic, was out of the co-pilot's seat instantly.

"It has to be the fuel!" Doc called. "Each engine has its individual ignition, so it can't be that."

Renny was not long finding the trouble. He crawled up into the big wing, which held the tanks, and was instantly floundering in gasoline.

"Tanks riddled!" he yelled.

Instantly, Doc Savage put the big plane down in a sharp glide.

"The original design of this type of ship," he said, quietly, "called for the new-type tanks, surrounded by sponge rubber and chemicals, which cannot be punctured by bullets. I merely glanced at the tanks in making an inspection before we took off. They looked like the prescribed tanks."

"Somebody worked a cheap graft, and put in a less costly type of tank when the ship was built." The big-fisted engineer made a rumbling noise. "Me, I'm in favor of shooting all grafters!"

Doc Savage, testing the gliding angle of the plane, found it would reach a broad, yellow river about two miles to the southward. He made no comment about the tanks.

Had he been aware they were not the bulletproof type, he would have taken more pains to see that no bullets found them. It was not often that such details slipped by him.

The jungle was an incredible green mat below. They were much too close to it for peace of mind. There did not seem room for a man to stand anywhere. Behind them, of course, was the clearing where *El Liberator* O'Neel's planes had by now landed. But if Doc's party attempted to come down there, they would get a reception at which they would be hopelessly outnumbered.

The river was better. This big plane was equipped for descending on water as well as land.

Monk, ogling the vastness of the jungle for something better than the river, gave a sudden, violent start. He leveled an arm.

"Look!" he squawled.

They all glanced instinctively back at the clearing in which O'Neel's planes stood, O'Neel and his men clustered about them, no doubt wondering what on earth had stopped the motors.

"No!" Monk howled. "This other way! Look!"

He was pointing in the opposite direction.

They all stared in the direction which he was pointing. Their expressions became slightly blank.

"You stringing us along?" Renny demanded, gruffly.

"The great chemist," Ham said, sarcastically, "has finally gone as simpleminded as he looks."

Monk had been watching them, to observe their expressions when they looked. Now he shifted his gaze back to the direction he was pointing. His jaw fell. His little eyes blinked rapidly.

He had been pointing to a vast area of jungle over which steam lay like a fog—and nothing else.

Monk began to get somewhat pale. He sank down in a chair and swallowed rapidly. In fact, he looked so flabbergasted that the pig, Habeas, ran up, sniffed of his trouser legs, and squealed.

Ham shed his sarcasm and snapped, "Just what did you see, Monk?"

Monk's throat made some word movement without words before he managed to speak.

"Wait'll we land, and I'll talk about it," he said, his voice very small. "I wanta think it over. Maybe I could have been nuts! If I really saw what I think I did, then I'm nuts!"

MONK looked appealingly at Doc Savage, who was doing something in the cockpit besides flying the plane. Monk craned his neck.

Doc was using the regulation aerial camera with which the big bombing plane was equipped. Modern bombers are expected to take pictures, for their superiors, of the damage their bombs do. This camera was operated by a trigger from the pilot's cockpit, and was automatic.

Monk ran forward, looked at the camera controls, and saw that Doc had it pointed in the same direction which the homely chemist had requested every one to look.

"So you saw it!" Monk gulped.

"Well, *apparently*," Doc agreed, quietly.

"Yeah, apparently." Monk rubbed at his eyes. "I don't believe there's such a thing, either!"

Doc Savage nursed the plane along carefully. It would just about make the ominous-looking yellow river.

Renny, Long Tom, Johnny and Ham crowded close behind Monk, and they had overheard enough to realize that Monk really *had* seen something.

"What was it?" Long Tom barked.

Doc said, "Wait a moment! This landing is going to be difficult. Stand by for accidents."

The river, they could see now, was dotted with snags. Moreover, the stream had no too great a width.

Renny rumbled, "The durn thing is a *creek!*" and ran aft where he could grab and salvage some of the equipment cases if necessary.

THE golden-haired girl, Z, got out of her seat and came forward, to stand just behind Doc Savage, and close to him. She watched the bronze man's handling of the controls tensely.

"She's scared!" Monk told Ham in an aside. "She feels encouraged just by being close to Doc. The big bronze guy has got her groggy!"

Monk was wrong about the girl's reasons for standing where she was. He knew that an instant later.

The girl fell suddenly over Doc's shoulder and grabbed the deperdussin type control wheel. She fell upon the wheel with all her strength, wrenching, twisting.

It was the most critical instant of the descent. The girl was strong, far stronger than it seemed possible in so exquisitely moulded a body.

Doc's clutch at the instant was light on the wheel, for lightness goes with skill. And there was only feet to spare at either side.

The ship veered. The right wingtip snagged a tree. Around came the heavy craft. It struck a wall of trees and vines. Propellers kept going, chewing up branches, flailing vines. One wing crumpled. A snag of dead hardwood came spearing through the hull, missing pale Long Tom only when he gave an agile leap.

The uproar subsided, and there was the moment of tense silence which usually follows disasters.

The girl broke it.

"I wrecked David Hutton's plane when he landed near *El Liberator* O'Neel's men," she said. "I did it that same way. He was not expecting it either. He did not know I had been watching what he did to the plane to make it do different things."

## Chapter XII. TOO FAR IN!

MONK, his voice plaintive and more than ever sounding as if it belonged to a small boy rather than the funny hunk that was Monk, began speaking.

"It was a man, lying on his back on some sort of couch on the ground," Monk said.

There was a brief pause. No one else said anything. Monk was somewhere back in the wreckage of the plane. They craned their necks, but no one could see him.

"This man," Monk said, "was a mile from his head to his toes."

Monk's voice sounded small and seemed to be getting smaller.

"He couldn't have been much less than a mile long," Monk continued. "And I should judge he was about two hundred yards across the shoulders."

Doc Savage was up and working through the plane's wreckage. Ham joined him. They said nothing. Monk must have been in the very rear of the plane when it crashed.

Monk went on, "I was just wondering what it would be like if the mile-high guy should swat us, when *bingo!* He must 'a' done it!"

Ham groaned, "Poor Monk! He's delirious! His head must have been bashed in!"

Ham sounded as if he were about to cry, which was remarkable, since Ham, at least a dozen times within the last twenty-four hours, had expressed the hope of seeing Monk meet a violent and early end.

They found Monk on his back staring out through a hole at the hot sky.

"You all right?" Ham demanded anxiously.

"Heck, yes!" Monk sat up. "I was just thinkin' out loud sorta, over what had happened durin' the last few minutes."

"You do the craziest things!" Ham drew back and gave Monk a violent kick in the ribs. "That's for worryin' us!"

Monk squawled, got up wanting to fight, and Doc said, "Would it interest you gentlemen to know this plane is sinking?"

It was. It had not penetrated the growth on the side of the river sufficiently to be held, and it was working back, settling, water gurgling into the hull.

There was a wild rush now. None of them had been more than skinned and bruised a bit, and they floundered about furiously, trying to get all of their equipment out before the plane sank.

They succeeded, and even got a line from the plane to the huge branches of an overhanging tree and made it fast so that the plane, once settled to the bottom, would not drift away.

"We'll be able to float the thing, I think," said big-fisted Renny. "It may take time, but we can repair the craft, I believe."

"Optimist!" said sharp-tongued Ham. "Fat lot of good it would do! We have no gasoline!"

Monk put in, "Stick to your petitions and court phenagling, you shyster! These motors can be made to burn alcohol."

Ham jeered, "And I suppose alcohol grows around here?"

"Something like that," Monk agreed. "You can distill it out of certain jungle plants."

Ham, who hated to be caught showing any ignorance, especially before Monk, looked ready to explode.

Monk stalked off triumphantly, lost some of his dignity when he fell over a vine, and joined Doc.

The bronze man was carefully inspecting, to see if it was damaged, the aerial camera which had been a part of the plane and which he had removed.

Ham came up and said peevishly, "I can't see why you went to the trouble of saving that camera, Doc."

Monk squeaked, "Simple."

"Like you, eh?"

"Doc," Monk said, with dignity, "took a picture of that mile-high guy I saw sleeping on the ground just before the plane landed and cracked up in the trees and stuff."

A NUMBER of strange things had happened since this adventure had started. But the little group had not

yet come to the point where they accepted the sighting of men a mile high as if it were an ordinary event. The stunned silence persisted until Monk broke it.

"Listen, I ain't kidding nobody," said the homely chemist. "I saw what I'm tellin' you I saw."

Still, no one said anything.

"The mile-high guy was lying on a sort of pallet, and the jungle was thick all around him," Monk went on. "The guy was naked except for a kind of a leather skirt—" He paused and looked surprised. "Say! It was a skirt that looked just like the one David Hutton was wearing!"

Monk paused and looked around at them. He got no comments.

The homely chemist continued: "This mile-high guy had a tanned face, and he was built for the rough stuff, what I mean. I'll bet the biceps muscles in his arms were fifty feet high."

Ham began to titter with laughter.

"Why the giggles, shyster?" Monk growled.

Ham cackled, "You've been hypnotized again! This girl has got you seeing things!"

Monk snorted. "Let's see what the camera shows!"

Doc Savage had been working with the camera. It was of an ultramodern type, containing its own developing compounds, which produced, instead of a negative alone, a completed picture in a very few moments. The picture was of a size sufficient to bring out plenty of detail perceptible to the naked eye.

Doc spread the picture for all to see.

"There!" Monk exploded triumphantly. "Let's hear you giggle that fellow off, Ham!"

Ham looked, and his eyes seemed about to fall out.

The big man was about as Monk had described him. Perhaps he was not a mile high. It was hard to tell. But the jungle growth—huge trees, obviously—near the long couch on which the giant lay was an indication of his size. These trees seemed no taller than lawn grass.

"You can see that he's asleep," Monk said, calmly. "He's got his eyes shut!"

The golden-haired girl came over to them—she had been standing a bit apart—and looked once at the photograph. She saw it as if she were seeing a familiar thing.

She looked steadily at Doc Savage.

"You have come too far now," she said. "You will never go back."

Doc Savage pointed at the mile-long man in the photograph.

"Who is that?"

"It is Klantic."

KLANTIC had a straight nose, a rounded but not overly obstinate chin, a high forehead, and otherwise a

fine aristocracy of feature which was effective. Contour of the body indicated a developed physique, but in general, the head was large in proportion.

Klantic was dressed in nothing but an apronlike garment which looked as if it were leather, except that it was unlikely that any leather would be stout enough to make a garment for a man a mile high. That is, a mile, if he stood up.

Renny looked at the golden-haired girl, then asked, "What color was his hair, Monk?"

"You're right," Monk said. "It was the same color as hers."

Renny, still looking at the girl, asked, "Any relation of yours, that big guy?"

"I," she said, "am the bride of Klantic."

"Holy cow!" Renny gulped, and could think of nothing else.

Ham put in, "But *what* is Klantic?"

The girl did not tell him. She put her lips together firmly, turned and walked off. When it was evident that she was going to walk away in the jungle, Ham snapped, "I'm going to take charge of her."

He ran after the young woman, who by now had disappeared. There was a sound of a brief struggle in the thick tropical growth, after which Ham came back with the young woman and the makings of a spectacular black eye.

"It's about your style, fighting with a woman," Monk told Ham unkindly.

"It wasn't a fight," Ham pointed out. "I didn't strike back."

The girl still wouldn't talk.

They began the work of examining the plane. Doc Savage, removing outer garments down to the silken shorts he wore which were designed to serve as bathing trunks, dived into the yellow river and examined the plane. The others made fast lashings which held it to the bank.

The growth was so tangled, there being practically no bank on which to stand—only a wall of roots, vines and gnarled branches—that any kind of work was very difficult.

Doc came up, caught a branch, and swung out of the water. His metallic features were expressionless.

"The ship can be salvaged," he said. "But it will take weeks of work."

"I'll be superamalgamated!" Johnny murmured. "This leaves us in a jam."

Doc said, "We have one immediate chance."

"What?"

*"El Liberator*

O'Neel and his planes," the bronze man explained. "The vapor which clogged their motors will be effective inside the cylinders until it is cleaned out and wiped off the spark plugs. That will take them some time. We may be able to reach them."

The others hastily began grabbing up equipment cases, and they were all shortly in motion toward the

clearing in which O'Neel's four planes had last been seen.

THEY started out at a run. Very shortly, they were almost at a standstill. The jungle was fabulously thick. The number of growing things which had thorns on them was remarkable.

"Blazes!" Monk complained. "Every time I move, something sticks me!"

They were by now as wet as if they had just crawled out of the river, but it was perspiration instead of river water. The salty sweat smarted their eyes. They panted, and their faces began to look queer.

Monk, who had lately acquired—from some feminine admirer, it was suspected—a wrist watch which had, among other ingenious gadgets, a barometer and thermometer incorporated into it, stopped to eye his wrist. What the tiny thermometer told him made him appear hotter if anything.

"Whew!" he exploded. "This thing says it's a hundred and twenty-five, and the humidity in here must be something awful!"

"Don't you ever spread good news?" snapped Ham, who had his sword cane out, slicing at the jungle growth.

Renny, after a bit, boomed, "It's gonna take us a couple of days to reach them planes at this rate! By that time, they'll be gone."

Doc Savage stopped them. He indicated Monk.

"Monk and myself will go ahead, since we can travel faster than the rest of you," the bronze man advised. "You others will keep on, traveling a compass course. The four planes are about north-northeast from here."

Monk grasped the bough of a tree and swung atop it.

Ham looked up at him and said, "I always did say you should stick to jungles!"

Monk ignored him. He jumped, seized another bough with his long arms, and swung to a third branch. Doc Savage followed him, and in a moment was leading. Chemistry, Ham's pet monkey, started to follow them, but a volley of expletives from Monk sent the animal back.

It was actually possible for the men to travel faster by the aërial route than on the ground. The jungle was a mat below, more open up here. But they by no means equaled the speed of a sprinter. Monk, sweating, grunting, doing his utmost, had an idea that Doc was holding back to about half the speed he could have made.

"The planes are not far ahead," Doc said finally.

"Could they have taken off without one hearing them?" Monk wanted to know.

"No chance."

They found the clearing before long. It bore a certain shape—like the head of a long-eared rabbit—which made it easy to identify. They stood for a long time and stared, and Doc Savage's small, fantastic trilling noise came out of nothingness, made an eerie melody for a time, then ebbed away as gradually as it had come.

There were neither planes nor men in the clearing.

It was the right clearing. Marks made by the planes' landing wheels could be distinctly discerned. The tracks of men, depressions in the lush tropical grass.

"They got their motors cleaned up and flew away," Monk muttered.

"Impossible," Doc told him quietly. "We would have heard them."

"But they're gone," Monk pointed out.

Doc Savage went forward. Monk started to follow, noted just how alert the bronze man was, and eased back into shelter. He glanced at his machine pistol to make sure it was not on safety.

Watching closely, Monk saw Doc Savage go over the clearing with a quick thoroughness, and finally stop at a point near the northern edge. The bronze man stood there for some time. Monk went over and joined him.

Monk was fifteen feet away when Doc said sharply, "Keep back! Come around behind me!"

Monk did as suggested, then saw the reason why.

"Huh!" grunted Monk. "What made them round places on the ground?"

What Monk referred to was a series of roughly oval depressions, more than one in a cluster, and the clusters spaced some distance apart. The weeds and brush had been mashed down and crushed in these depressions, and the earth appeared flat and packed, as if it had sustained quite a weight.

Monk stood back and surveyed the marks generally.

"Good night!" he exploded. "These things look like big tracks of some kind! But what would make tracks that size?"

Doc Savage asked, "Did you ever see a panther track?"

MONK squinted at the marks. Then, apparently without thinking about what he was doing, he backed away from them.

"Look here!" he burst out. "They're shaped like panther tracks, all right, but each one of them toes is bigger than a washtub, and each whole track is bigger than anything that would be made by the biggest elephant that ever lived!"

Monk waited, but Doc Savage made no comment.

Monk demanded, "You mean to tell me a panther made them tracks?"

Doc countered, "Do you remember your mythology?"

"You mean my ancient Greek, Roman and such? I been tryin' to forget it ever since it was crammed into me in high school, but I may still remember a little of it."

"Recall the legend of a character who went around with a panther?"

Monk squinted. "Yeah. Somebody named Nemo, or maybe Nemo was the name of the panther, or

maybe it was somebody else."

Monk waited for Doc to comment, but the bronze man said nothing.

"Well, what of it?" Monk wanted to know.

"My wish was merely to suggest the connection." Doc said.

"Huh? Well—huh! I'll be superflabbergasted, as Johnny might say! You mean this old character out of mythology has grown a mile high, along with his panther, and is walking around in this South American jungle with the panther, which has also grown? If you do, I hate to think what this world is coming to!"

Before Doc Savage could make any answer, if he had intended to, there was a rustling in the brush, and Renny, Long Tom and Johnny stepped out. Ham brought up the rear, guarding the strange golden-haired girl.

They looked around and wanted to know where O'Neel's men and the four stolen Colombian war planes had gone to.

Monk rolled his small eyes at them, a remarkable effect in itself. "You lads remember the mile-high guy I saw?"

"I have a hunch," Long Tom muttered, "that I'm going to remember him in my sleep for days to come!"

"He's got a panther, it seems, built about on his own scale." Monk pointed to the tracks.

The others stared. They said nothing for some minutes.

"Some kitty!" Long Tom said finally, in a small voice.

The girl, Z, spoke. There was something distinctly like utter fear in her voice.

"Please!" she cried out desperately. "Get away from this spot at once! It is the only thing that can save your lives!"

### **Chapter XIII. FEAR JUNGLE**

THE girl's voice started the feeling of terror. The stark look on her features continued it. But there was something else that made it grow, made it mount until the men there in the clearing by the enormous, mysterious tracks, although they were brave men—men who had been through fantastic perils in their time, and had surmounted unusual dangers—began to grow pale and dry of mouth.

This other quality that terrified them was something unseen, something as undefinable as the so-called dramatic build-up. Dramatists will take characters in a play, and by having them do certain things, build up a feeling of awful horror, although the audience is not *told* at any time that they are supposed to be horrified, or have any reason to be horrified.

It was thus here. Before long, the slightest rustle in the surrounding jungle caused violent starts and an absurd tendency to flee.

Doc Savage stepped forward, grasped the girl by both arms and said, "Stop it!"

Her strange eyes returned his hypnotic stare, and the fear did not leave her face.

"Stop it!" Doc repeated. "You are using your hypnotic powers to frighten us into leaving this spot. Stop it! If you continue to attempt to influence us with your so-called mental magnetism, we will simply give you a drug that will make you unconscious!"

Monk, understanding what had made him scared, sighed so loudly that he almost choked.

"Blazes!" he gulped. "So *she* was making me scared! Boy, I was right at the point where I was afraid to look for my shadow!"

"*Your*

shadow," Ham said shakily, "would scare anybody almost any time!"

The feeling of fear which had laid hold of them seemed to be growing less, although it by no means went away entirely.

Stark terror was still on the golden-haired girl's face.

"Young lady, you'd better stop registering so much terror!" Ham told her.

She stared at them desperately.

"I cannot help it!" she gasped. "*I am terrified!* I did attempt to *think* you into being frightened a moment ago. That was because I was scared and wanted you to take me away from here."

Doc's aids exchanged glances.

"Why are you scared?" Monk asked her.

She pointed at the tracks, the gigantic panther prints that, if by some incredible stretch of natural laws should have been made by a real beast, were the tracks of such a monster as the human mind could hardly conceive.

"I have seen," she said shrilly, "the monster that made those tracks! I know what It is—what it will do—what will happen to us if we are caught!"

Monk produced his supermachine pistol from its armpit holster, and from a pocket dug out a drum holding, not "mercy" bullets, but high-explosive slugs which, if placed carefully enough, might conceivably blow the sides out of a battleship.

"I could change the shape of Pikes Peak with this thing," he said, exaggerating. "Bring on your overgrown pussycats!"

THE girl said nothing more, although they asked questions. She seemed offended that they had not done as she wished.

"She's spoiled," said Ham.

Ham had managed to preserve the immaculate perfection of his clothing throughout the hectic of the plane wreck and the encounter with the jungle.

They went over the clearing now, searching. In several spots, they found smears of oil, and at one point the stench of spilled gasoline was strong.

There was human blood at only one spot, and not much of it there.

The giant panther tracks led to a near-by creek which was narrow, but deep, and just about arched over with thick jungle growth.

They stood there on the creek bank and listened, but there was only silence—infinite and absolute—broken at long intervals by the wind rustle of some bough. These latter sounds were scarce, because there was little breeze, and that was becoming less.

They stood on the banks of the creek and were baffled.

"The big pussy got in and swam either up or down the stream," Ham decided.

Big-fisted Renny emitted a rumbling snort that would have done credit to a hippopotamus.

"If you ask me, this whole thing is goofy!" he boomed. "The thing is ridiculous!"

No one seemed to have any comment on that. A man a mile high asleep on a pallet in the jungle! A gigantic panther's tracks! Four planes and maybe a score of O'Neel thugs, utterly vanished. Ridiculous? Of course! But that did not alter the reality of it.

Doc Savage's aids were not carrying as many boxes of equipment as they had started out with.

"What became of your packs?" Doc asked.

"That jungle got the best of us," Renny said. "We figured we could cache the stuff, and go back for it later."

Long Tom added, "It really didn't save us much time. We found some sort of game trail through the jungle, and it led us right this way. That accounts for our getting here so quickly."

Doc Savage studied the creek into which the giant tracks vanished. His trilling came very briefly.

"We had best get our packs," he said. "If we are up against what it appears we are up against, we will need all of our equipment."

As they walked back toward the clearing from which the planes had vanished, gaunt Johnny took occasion to study the layout of the huge tracks.

"The giant animal," he said, "seems to have made several trips. Anyway, manifold peregrinations are manifest."

They did not waste time in the clearing. The return through the jungle was difficult until they reached the game trail. They trotted along it without incident—until the girl wrenched to a stop with a low cry.

When they looked at her, she was pointing.

"Huh!" Monk grunted. "What's wrong with her?"

"She has just discovered the big cat's tracks are along this trail, too," Doc Savage said.

His aids looked as if they had just discovered themselves standing in cold water. They peered closely, and saw what their lesser trained eyes had missed.

The big cat's tracks were here and there along this trail.

MONK said distinctly, "I don't like to seem to be a guy who don't want to get ahead, but I suggest we do our getting in the opposite direction!"

Doc Savage vetoed that.

"We will continue," he said. "But we can be careful."

They were amply careful.

The equipment cases lay some distance off the game trail, Renny explained, and guided them in the proper direction. He stopped before a mat of vines which covered a section of the earth.

"We stuck the stuff under here," he said, and lifted the mat of vines. "Holy cow!"

There were no cases under the vines.

There were only two gigantic panther tracks.

Astonishment reacted on them variously. Johnny slowly stuck his monocle in his eye, a gesture which had persisted from the day when he actually used it as a monocle, long ago before Doc Savage's surgical mastery had returned the use of an eye injured in the great war.

When the magnifier hurt his eye, Johnny opened the eye wide and let the monocle drop to the end of its black ribbon.

"I'll be superamalgamated!" he breathed.

Big-fisted Renny—one fist filled with a machine pistol—peered all around.

"I don't see the thing," he rumbled.

"I don't *want* to!" Monk told him.

Renny waved his weapon generally. "But how did any cat as big as this one—leopard or any other kind of cat—pack off our boxes of equipment?"

"Perhaps in its teeth," Long Tom suggested.

Monk turned around and frowned critically at the girl. "I wonder if you or anybody else is making us *imagine* all this?"

For once, the young woman answered a question. "You can be sure you are seeing just what you think you see!"

"Is this big cat dangerous?" Monk wanted to know.

"You saw what happened to O'Neel and his planes," she retorted.

"We didn't *see* anything!" Monk pointed out.

"Then you can make a guess."

Monk evidently made a guess, for he was silent a moment. Then he donned a pained expression.

"I got too much imagination," he said. "When I start guessing, I durn near scare myself to death."

Doc Savage put in sharply, "It might be a good idea if we stood by what is left of our plane!"

They kept in a tight group now, and their eyes were never for long in one place. They saw and heard nothing, and the jungle was more quiet—more quiet than it should have been. All of the wind had stopped now. There were no birds, or if there were any, they kept quiet and out of sight. It was melting hot.

They came to the river bank, looked, then stood there for a long time, not speaking, not even glancing at each other. They were silent.

Finally, having stood it as long as she could—if her expression was any guide—the golden-haired girl made a long, sobbing sound and sank down and covered her eyes.

"They know we are here," she sobbed. "They are everywhere around, watching us. We cannot escape!"

That was enough to take their minds off the fact that their wrecked plane wasn't where they had left it.

THE plane was simply gone, along with the ropes that they had used to tie it to the bank—ropes hastily contrived out of vines, for the most part. The ropes had not been cut, with the ends left dangling. They had simply disappeared.

No tracks were on the bank. They looked thoroughly. They all had super-machine pistols in their hands, and each weapon was charged with the high-explosive cartridges, the most deadly they carried.

Doc Savage, however, carried no gun. He never carried one. He believed that dependence on a gun got a man in a habit, and that once the man was without his gun, he was helpless.

The girl, after her one desperate cry that "they were everywhere around us," had said nothing.

Monk, after seeing and hearing nothing said, "You're trying to kid us, young lady."

She said nothing. Her face was set, white, and there was a look on it. The look caused Monk to shiver when he glanced away. He addressed Doc Savage.

"Doc, what the heck's goin' on here?"

Instead of answering, the bronze man said, "We will head for Klantic."

"You mean the mile-high guy I saw, and the one you took a picture of?"

"Right."

Monk hesitated, sighed and said, "Well, he's the only thing I've seen around here big enough to whip that tiger or leopard or whatever was making them tracks."

Renny asked, "But how about looking around here? Whatever took the planes and our equipment left some sign, it's almost certain."

Doc Savage, without making explanations, without arguing, said, "My suggestion is that we push ahead without delay."

Renny asked no questions, offered no other suggested courses of action.

"Then that's what I'm in favor of doing," he said.

"It may save our lives," the girl said, "but if it does, it will be because we are lucky."

They all noticed that she was including herself among those endangered.

THE jungle continued its utter silence as they continued on their way. The game trail which they had followed earlier now proved to lead in an undesired direction, and they had to take to the jungle.

The stupefying heat caused them to remember something that they had overlooked in the excitement of the plane crash—the water canteen.

"Whew, I'm thirsty!" Renny complained.

"Me, too," Monk agreed. "I'm sweated out until I got no more moisture left than a dried apple."

"A dried prune would be more like it," Ham had vitality enough to add.

Doc Savage, as was natural because of his superior strength and agility, ranged ahead, seeking out the easiest routes and quicker going, covering twice and possibly three times the distance the others did, and still finding it necessary to wait for them.

It was during one of these moments when Doc was ahead that they heard the bell-voiced man.

There was some doubt at first that the bell voice belonged to a man. It had a fantastic ringing quality. Moreover, the sounds it was making were not recognizable as words, although it might have been speaking—or chanting—a tongue which none of them had ever before heard spoken.

This particular jungle was infested with an ordinary-looking bird which had a strange clanging cry, and which was called a bell bird.

"Maybe that bird has learned to talk," Monk suggested. "Maybe somebody has split one's tongue, like they do magpies', and—"

"Shut up, stupid, and let us listen!" Ham grated.

They listened, but the strange bell-like voice ended almost at once. They hurt their eardrums trying to hear it again, but it did not come.

Monk said, "My vote is that it was a bird."

Then they noticed the golden-haired girl. She had changed. Her terror was gone. She was radiant.

They asked her about it, but she refused to answer, and looked scared again, although they felt somehow that she was acting now, although she had not been acting earlier.

Going on, they kept a watch on the girl. But the heat was so intense, the going so difficult, that they did not watch her any too closely as long as she was with them.

They did not see her stoop swiftly and pick from under a distinctive scarlet leaf a three-inch length of hollow reed which was closed at each end with a wooden stopper.

They did notice the girl when she stopped suddenly and pointed.

"Water!" she said. "I want a drink!"

The water had escaped the notice of the others. It seemed to be a spring, tiny, probably fairly cool. There was some sign around to show that it had been used by animals, so it was probably all right.

The girl dashed forward, sank to her hands and knees and scooped up water. They let her go first, because they were naturally polite gentlemen.

They did not see the girl dump the contents of the hollow reed—a yellow powder which dissolved instantly and did not stain the water—into the spring.

AFTER the girl, Monk sank beside the spring and drank. He drank for a long time, and when he arose, he looked distressingly full.

"I sure took aboard enough to take the wrinkles out of my hide," he grunted.

Then he tried to have Habeas drink out of the spring ahead of Ham, and there was almost a fight. While it still raged, Doc Savage came up.

"Swell water," Monk grinned. "The young lady, here, saw it first."

"She did?" Doc said.

Something in the way the bronze man said that caused Monk to look suddenly sober. But he brightened almost at once.

"Oh, she drank out of it ahead of us," he said.

He did not know that the girl had imbibed before she dumped in the yellow powder.

Doc was last to sink beside the spring and immerse his features in the clear water.

Monk, watching the bronze giant, abruptly began to open and shut his mouth. He put his hands over his middle, pressed hard, then down heavily. Continuing the sitting movement, he lay on his back, shut his eyes, and all of his movements seemed to stop.

Ham, Johnny, Renny, Long Tom did exactly the same thing, not in succession, but all at once, with whatever difference in timing there was favoring the order in which they had drunk.

Doc Savage got up from the spring with great haste. He ran to his men with great haste. Then his haste seemed to leave him completely; he became interested in the sky, staring intently at such of it as could be seen through the trees.

He lay down like the others.

## **Chapter XIV. THE BIG MAN**

THE girl, Z, stood contemplating the motionless men, then went to them in quick succession and tested for artery pulsation in their wrists. She nodded over each man, as if satisfied.

Then she picked up one of the super-machine pistols, and stepped aside a few paces, put her back against a huge tree, and waited. The manner of her holding the pistol showed she had, by observation, learned how the weapon worked. She was very tense.

Before long, the strangely bell-like voice which had sounded earlier came again. It emanated from bushes only a few yards distant.

"Are they dead, any of them?" it asked.

The language which the voice spoke was the same one which it had spoken earlier—a tongue none of Doc Savage's men had recognized.

"They are all alive," replied the golden-haired girl, in the same language. "I did not employ too much of the drug. The spring from which they drank was quite a pool."

"I knew you would know the location of all the springs, and that they would be thirsty," said the bell-like voice. "That was why I concealed various tubes of the drug along your course, under red leaves, where you could find at least one. Were they suspicious when I called the information to you?"

"They do not understand our tongue."

The bell-voiced man now appeared. Several things were remarkable about him. First, his age, which was great. Secondly, he was a bag of bones, thinner even than gaunt Johnny, Doc's archaeologist.

Finally, he had the same golden hair as Z, and he wore a leather apron, as had David Hutton—and the fabulous giant Doc's party had located from the air. The apron, however, was more ornate than the other two.

The girl went to him and bestowed upon him a very ardent and quite Americanized kiss.

"I love you," she told him.

He eyed her slyly. "What is that? *Love*? A new word you have learned while you have been gone?"

Z's hauntingly beautiful eyes slanted the briefest glance in the direction of Doc Savage.

"No," she said, "I learned the word long ago from one of the other white men who chanced to find this place. He was fat and had a very high opinion of himself."

The bell-voiced man squinted at her. "But perhaps you have learned more clearly just what the word meant? No?"

"One never keeps anything from you, do they, Ki?"

Thin, golden-haired, bell-voiced old "Ki" smiled and changed the subject. He pointed to Doc Savage and his men. "Who is their leader?"

"Which one would be your guess?" Z countered.

Ki pointed instantly at Doc Savage. "There. He is the most remarkable physical specimen I have ever seen."

"He is their chief," Z agreed.

"Do you think he is Klantic?"

Z hesitated. "He does not seem to know what Klantic is."

"He would not necessarily know," Ki replied. "The one who is Klantic will be guided to the spot, and will crumble the statue perhaps by some power greater than we understand. A divine power. With the crumbling of the statue, which only the true Klantic will ever accomplish, all knowledge will be released to that one."

Z seemed to think deeply.

"If he is Klantic, I will be glad," she said finally. "As glad as I am that you are my father."

THE bell-voiced old man now clapped his hands loudly and rang out a sharp command.

Men began coining out of the jungle. They moved quietly, making neither noise or stirring the bushes. There was a military precision about their manner.

These men carried weapons. At first glance, they looked like the most ancient of man's means of killing at a distance—the bow and arrow. But they were a bit more than that. Bows and arrows, all right, but the arrows were tipped, not with sharp points, but with tiny bags of something that was evidently intended to be scattered when the arrows struck.

The girl noted the number of the armed men.

"I am glad you travel well-protected," she said. "Aug and his men are about."

Ki eyed her sharply. His ancient face had become suddenly worried. "How do you know?"

Instead of replying directly, the girl went back and began telling a story that started here in the jungle prior to her appearance in the vicinity of Cartagena.

"David Hutton escaped, and I discovered him before he got out of sight," she said. "I confronted him. He tricked me, and managed to knock me senseless. He carried me to one of the planes—his own—put me in it, and got the plane into the air. He must have been escaping secretly for many days and working on the plane, because it was ready for the air. We flew for a long time—"

"But why did he take you along?" Ki interrupted.

"He wanted," said Z, "proof that the story he had to tell his people and his world were not the ravings of a demented man. I was to be his proof."

"Very effective," Ki agreed. "Hutton was not a fool."

The girl went on with her recital—O'Neel, the Hutton diary, the Hutton murder, Doc Savage's intervention, the pursuit. She got around to where O'Neel's planes had been found missing.

"I WRECKED Doc Savage's plane because I knew we were almost here, and they had seen the—the big man," she said. "Then, around O'Neel's missing planes, we found what looked like the gigantic tracks of a panther. I do not think they deceived Doc Savage, but the tracks amazed his men. Doc Savage insisted on pushing direct for—the big man, so he must have guessed that the tracks were made carefully by men."

"Giant panther tracks!" Ki rang grimly. "That is Aug's old trick, when he commanded our frontier guard. He claimed the fake panther tracks terrified the natives and kept them away from the vicinity. He even had an elaborate arrangement of wooden blocks to tamp down the grass and soil and make the tracks."

"He is probably using the blocks again."

Z said pointedly, "Aug is roving the frontier again, when he was ordered not to do so. That can mean only one thing."

"Yes," said Ki. "It means he is hoping to meet men drifting in here from the outside world—men carrying those remarkable weapons which they call rifles. Aug could use a few rifles."

"Aug now probably has all the rifles he desires. And another weapon, like a rifle only worse, known as a machine gun. He may have some of them. O'Neel brought them, probably."

Ki said, sharply, "Then we will not waste time here!"

## Chapter XV. PRISONER LEGION

DOC SAVAGE and his five aids lay on a stone floor that was cold, but clean. Walls and ceiling of the room in which they lay were also stone.

The only opening was one barely large enough for a big man to crawl through, and this one aperture was closed by a method ingenious and simple—a bar of heavy stone which dropped in a slot and fastened there with a long peg which could only be reached from the outside.

Doc Savage and his aids had not stirred in the slightest after being shoved into the dungeon.

Outside, a guard, one of old Ki's men, took measured paces back and forth. It was dark, but there was a moon at intervals, when the clouds uncovered it. The guard was sleepy, and he had perfected, it appeared, a method of half dozing while still on his feet.

The fact that there was a wall at each end of the beat he paced was of some assistance; when he bumped into the wall, having become too soundly asleep, it awakened him.

But finally, at one end of the beat, he bumped into something which was not the wall and which did not awaken him. It was a round stone almost matching the guard's skull in size, and it put him asleep for the rest of eternity.

The man who had wielded the stone said to some one behind him, speaking Spanish, "One of us will be enough for this work. Doc Savage and his men are still asleep, according to what Aug's spies have learned."

"Not asleep," another voice corrected. "Senseless from the potion which the girl mixed with the spring water. It is expected that they will recover within two or three hours—"

"This will take care of their recovery," said the first.

He turned a knife blade so that it glinted in the moonlight.

*"Buenos!"*

They parted. One eased away into the night. The one with the knife—he who had murdered the

guard—scuttled forward and dragged the peg out from above the bar that closed the cell where Doc Savage and his men lay motionless.

THE second of the two stalkers had started away, but he had not gone far before he stopped. He explained his reason for stopping to himself in a mutter.

*"El Liberator*

would take the skin off us both while we still live if this venture fails," he mumbled. "And *El Liberator's* new friend, Aug, looks as if he would enjoy watching the skinning."

He waited, gaze fixed on the mouth of the dungeon. The moving clouds made the moonlight tricky, and there was enough wind to make small moaning sounds now and then. Twice, the furtive watcher heard a sound which he took to be his partner doing the executing.

One sound, there was no mistaking. It was a strangled cry, an awful sound, just the start of it. After that, there was silence.

A skulking form emerged from the dungeon opening and glided swiftly away.

Satisfied, the watcher himself departed.

As the man sidled along the remarkable strangeness of his surroundings became apparent. The moonlight had been penetrating through an opening in a great stone ceiling overhead. When he left this spot, it was very dark, and he used judicious dabs of light from a flashlight to guide himself.

It seemed that he had a charred stick, and with this he had made marks on the stone floor where passages intersected. He followed these marks.

Eventually, he was confronted with the muzzle of an automatic rifle.

"It has been done," he said, in Spanish.

*"El Liberator*

will be pleased to hear that," said the other, lowering the rifle. "But where is your partner?"

"It was he who did the real job. I stood guard. He will be here soon."

"Doc Savage and his five men are dead?"

"Not a doubt of it."

*"Bueno!"*

They were silent for a time. It was extremely dark. Once, somewhere in the distance, there was ringing-voiced conversation, and a faint, far-away glow from crude, burning torches.

"I wonder," said one man finally, "if it is wise that *El Liberator* should combine forces with this local, Aug?"

"Under the circumstances, very wise," retorted the other. "Aug had enough men to greatly outnumber us."

"This Aug, will he stick by us?" pondered the first.

"Probably. As I gather it, he is ambitious to get exactly the same thing *El Liberator* is after."

"Yes. At first, I thought Aug was a disgruntled local chief who wanted our guns to help in taking over the government. But he does not seem to care about the government. What he wants is the secret of Klantic."

There was a brief silence.

"And what I want, most of all," said one man finally, "is to know just what this secret of Klantic is. If *El Liberator* were wise, he would tell us."

"Why do you think that would be wise?"

"Men who know just what loot they are after are better fighters."

The first man laughed. "*El Liberator* is more clever than that. He knows that we know that only a big treasure would attract him. Curiosity makes for greater greed."

They stood there muttering, giving no indication of intending to go any place, or having anything on their mind.

Finally, a big figure which had been lurking in the background came upon them silently, seized them, and did something skilled and violent to the backs of their necks, around certain spinal nerve centers. The men fell senseless.

WHEN the two O'Neel patriots could move again, they found a giant bronze man crouched over them. The bronze man had appropriated their flashlights, and he used the beam of one to give them a good look at his features.

"Doc Savage!" one croaked.

"But you are dead!" the other muttered, and added several words intended to preserve him from evil spirits.

"Your friend who was to use the knife was slightly surprised to find me awake—or he will be when he awakens," the bronze man said, quietly.

Neither prisoner replied anything.

"So O'Neel and some native chief called Aug have combined forces?" Doc queried.

They held their silence.

Doc Savage said, "How would you two like to die?"

They almost didn't answer that, either; then one said, "It is well known that you never kill a man."

"Not a physical death," Doc replied calmly. "A mental one. How would you like it? A simple thing which can be done to your necks so that you will become idiots and forever remain so?"

Doc was bluffing. The operation he mentioned was possible, but it was work for an equipped operating room and plenty of time.

The two prisoners did not know. What they did know was that this bronze giant had a reputation all over the world. He was a fellow you did not fool with. They answered the question.

"O'Neel and Aug have combined," they said.

"How many men have they, altogether?"

"About two hundred," one of the prisoners estimated. "And it seems that the rest of the population will probably swing to their side. The present rulers are two persons, a father and his daughter, known as the custodians of the secret of Klantic."

"What are their names?"

"The man is called Ki, and the girl is the one we had prisoner for a time. They call her Z."

"What else do you know?"

"Very little."

Doc asked specific questions, and they really seemed to know no more than they had told.

The bronze man put them back to sleep with the skilled manipulation which produced the paralysis. The state of immobility would last a long time, perhaps days, unless it were relieved.

Doc left them lying there and went back to the dungeon where his men and the would-be murderer lay. During the return, Doc followed the same route taken by the partner of the would-be murderer.

THE would-be murderer was making sounds very like the one he had made when Doc seized him as he was about to use his knife. Doc bent over him. The man was in the paralytic state, but making the noises anyway, a condition which sometimes prevailed. Doc worked on his spinal nerve centers a bit and he became silent.

Doc next left the dungeon cell, moved carefully through the darkness to a near-by room, on the floor of which was stacked their equipment—not the larger metal cases which they had hidden, only to have vanish. This stuff was what had been on their persons.

Out of Monk's clothing, Doc unearthed a case holding an assortment of chemicals. He took this back to the dungeon, and began making tests.

Drugs are of certain types and act in certain ways. They respond, depending on their types, to various stimulants or antidotes. Tests, if skillfully enough made, will show which is which.

When Doc had learned enough to go on, he mixed the proper drugs from Monk's pocket chemical assortment. His men, since he dosed them all about together, awakened close to the same time. Monk came out of it mentally still at the disastrous spring.

"Boy, oh, boy!" he said. "That was sure good water!"

Then he looked around him, took in the situation, and was astute enough to guess instantly what had happened.

"Drugged!" he exploded. "That spring was drugged!"

"Right," Doc agreed.

"Where are we?"

"The girl's father, a very thin gentleman answering the name of Ki, came for us with his personal guard," the bronze man explained. "And it seems that birds of a feather have gotten together, in that O'Neel and a local named Aug have combined."

Big-fisted Renny rumbled, "How'd you learn all this Doc?"

"By neglecting to drink from the spring, and therefore not having been unconscious at any time," the bronze man explained.

The others were quiet a bit, digesting this.

"But what tipped you, Doc?" Long Tom wanted to know.

"About the spring? That bell-like voice which rang out a bit earlier. It was the girl's father, incidentally."

"I'll be superamalgamated!" said big-worded, skinny Johnny. "You understood it?"

"Probably because of being closer than the rest of you," Doc explained. "The tongue was ancient Egyptian."

"He could have been pretty darn close to me and I wouldn't have understood him," Monk offered.

"Egyptian—here in the Amazon jungle?" Ham murmured.

"There is no doubt of it," Doc said. "The girl, her father, and others here speak it fluently."

"Holy cow!" Renny rumbled. "Just where are we, anyhow?"

"Inside the big man we saw from the plane," Doc replied.

MONK started to inquire, "Inside the big—" and fell silent, understanding suddenly that Doc meant the mile-high man, as Monk had dubbed him.

"I don't get this," Renny said vaguely. "How can we be inside him? I certainly don't feel a bit digested."

"The big man is of stone," Doc explained. "In other words, it is Klantic, or an image of some one known as Klantic. It is not as large as it appears from the air. The pallet is really a mound which has been inclosed by a wall, making a defense against anything less than modern artillery. The huge statue lies atop that, honeycombed with passages and rooms in which these people live."

"But who is this Klantic? Who are these people? What are they doing here?" It was Ham who fired the volley of questions.

"You must think you got somebody in the witness chair," Monk told him.

"The answers to those questions," Doc said, "will have to come out later."

Monk apparently thought of something. He sprang to his feet.

"What about my pig, Habeas Corpus?" he gasped.

"And Chemistry, my monkey?" Ham echoed.

"I think the girl has them," Doc replied. "Now, it is my suggestion that we start looking around this place. It should be interesting."

They crawled out of the cell. Monk, being nearly as broad as he was long, had some difficulty negotiating the narrow opening.

"I wondered what made my shoulders so sore," he grumbled, when finally through. "They must have bruised me cramming me in there!"

They filed silently past the murdered guard.

"Just our luck to have 'em lay the blame for that onto us," Long Tom whispered. "We'd have trouble proving we didn't kill him."

Renny, trying to keep his great voice down to a whisper, but not succeeding too well, asked, "What part of this Klantic statue are we in, anyway?"

"The right arm," Doc replied. "By following passages—"

A strange, croaking voice interrupted, saying in a sepulchral and utterly strange tone, "Praise be to Jehovah, my brethren, and hold up your heads. Let not fear take your hearts, but keep Him there, and you may succeed."

DOC SAVAGE and his five aids stopped instantly. It was a long moment before the bronze man spoke.

"Who is it?" he asked.

"Glory be!" exclaimed the sepulchral voice. "Who on earth are you gentlemen?"

"Doc Savage," the bronze man said after a brief hesitation, "and five friends."

"New prisoners?"

"Until lately," Doc admitted. "Just now, we are trying to remedy that."

"May the highest success attend your efforts," said the voice. "When I first heard you, I thought you were some of our other poor unfortunates, trying a break for liberty. They had planned their attempt for to-night, and I was just offering up a prayer for their success."

"Who are you?" Doc queried.

"A missionary, Johnathan Brendel by name, come twenty long years ago to bring Christianity to the upper Amazon. Twenty years ago! I have been a prisoner since."

"Good night!" Monk breathed.

Doc asked, "How many more prisoners?"

"Nearly two score," replied the missionary. "Half of them are white men, and the others natives."

Doc requested, "Name some of them."

The missionary did so. Listening, Doc's aids let out low gasps of amazement, for what they were hearing was like the roll call of the vanished men claimed by the mysterious vastness of the upper Amazon.

Name after name had made newspaper headlines time and again when searching parties went into the jungle, and some of the names were members of the searching parties.

"They seize every one from the outer world who comes near," concluded the missionary.

"But why?" Doc asked.

"They fear all who come near are trying to steal the secret of Klantic."

"Where is the secret?"

"Sealed somewhere in the head of this gigantic infidel statue in which we find ourselves," replied the missionary. "The exact whereabouts is known only to the custodians or keepers of the secret. These number two, an elderly and, I must admit, a rather pleasant gentleman, and his daughter. They are named Ki and Z, as nearly as I can Anglicize the pronunciation."

Doc Savage seemed to be considering. "Earlier remarks of Ki and Z led me to believe the secret of Klantic is being held for some one who will some day appear and claim it. Is there something to do with crumbling a statue?"

"A heathen belief, for which Jehovah forgive them," said the missionary. "They have a stone image of this heathen god, Klantic, in their infidel idol house. They believe that some day the deity Klantic will return in person, and the stone image will crumble when he appears before it."

"A silly superstition, holding forth that the stone image is the guardian of the secret of Klantic who will be no longer needed, once Klantic appears, hence will crumble."

Doc asked, "Where is this image?"

"In the idol house, situated, rather aptly, in the head of this strange statue."

The missionary seemed to be speaking through a dungeon door very like the one which had lately given Monk a squeezing.

Doc moved close. "How many others are held near by?"

"They are all in this arm," replied the missionary.

DOC SAVAGE issued rapid orders in whispers.

"Monk, you take Long Tom and work to the left. Find the prisoners, explain that we plan a big break for liberty, and release them."

Doc shifted to Ham.

"Ham, you take Renny and Johnny and work to the right and do the same thing."

Ham chuckled dryly, "For once, I won't have to work with that Monk!"

Monk had a prompt retort. "You notice that it takes three of you to do the work me and Renny will do."

Perhaps some day a situation would happen along which would be so tense that these two would forget to pointedly insult each other at every opportunity.

The missionary interposed, "Brethren, some of my fellow unfortunates may choose not to change their lot. After all, we are not unkindly treated, except when we attempt to escape. These people here merely do not wish any word of the existence of this place to get to the outer world."

"They will be permitted to take their choice," Doc told him.

"I see you are a righteous man."

"How about you? Going with us?"

The missionary was thoughtful a moment

"I am a peace-loving man, with a nature usually as gentle as that of a lamb." He grabbed his dungeon bar and shook it. "But sometimes I have a lion in me! Let me out of here!"

Doc let him out.

"Help my men release the others," the bronze man suggested. "Then all of you wait for my return."

With that, Doc Savage eased away and was lost to the notice of the others. He carried, as he left the vicinity, the case of chemicals which belonged to Monk.

## **Chapter XVI. UPROAR**

A CONSIDERABLE group of men were gathered in the corridor when Doc Savage returned. They looked impatient, a bit anxious. They were about evenly divided, half white and half natives.

Monk served as spokesman.

"Every durn one of 'em has decided to join us, Doc," the homely chemist said. "We've got aviators, explorers, rubber scouts, traders, escaped convicts and plain soldiers of fortune. Every kind of a guy who would happen to drift into this forsaken jungle."

"Did they all join us willingly?" Doc asked.

"Sure," Monk said promptly, then took the first opportunity to get a pair of skinned knuckles out of sight.

"A few words from a purveyor of the Holy word helped," said the missionary.

Doc Savage said, "Our first need is planes. Aug and O'Neel have them. They have probably dismantled and hidden them. It is advisable, then, for us to seek out this Aug and his partner and see what we can accomplish."

"Big fellow," a man said, dryly, "You haven't seen this Aug, or you wouldn't be so free about mixing it."

Monk snorted, "And you haven't seen this Doc Savage do his stuff, my pal, or you wouldn't have any doubts."

"I never heard of Doc Savage," said the other.

"How long you been here?"

"Thirty years," said the man.

The floor was of stone, good footing except that it was pitted by feet that had trampled it in the past. The men formed into a long file and moved silently. Doc Savage had been showing a flashlight beam covertly, but now he kept it out.

"Where were you gone for so long Doc?" Monk wanted to know.

The bronze man seemed not to hear, and Monk did not press the query, knowing as he did that seeming not to hear was a small habit Doc had when he didn't want to answer a question.

But a moment later, Doc asked, "How does it happen that we have been able to do so much without being observed?"

The missionary answered that. "There is only one guard in this arm, which is devoted exclusively to prisoners. But at all of the outer exits, there are other guards."

"The one guard in this arm must've been the poor egg who was murdered," Long Tom said.

They came to the end of the arm, and Doc turned promptly to the left. There was a branch in the passage, and he took the right one.

"You seem very familiar with this place?" the missionary suggested.

Doc did not explain how he happened to know where he was going.

"Pass the word back to be very quiet," the bronze man said.

This was done. They moved slowly, but for such a large body of men, they were unusually quiet. Every one had shed all vestige of footgear.

"Where are you going?" the missionary wanted to know.

"Two of O'Neel's men are available for questioning," Doc explained. "They probably can tell us where O'Neel and Aug may be located, or how."

Then Doc stopped. His breathed command brought the entire column to a halt.

"There is some one ahead," he told them.

As the column froze in the darkness, the tramping of feet could be heard, and a moment later, a squad of marching men appeared. There were at least thirty of them, and they all wore leather aprons as their only garment, and carried bows and arrows, the arrows tipped with the little, fragile sacs.

"The outer guard changing," the missionary whispered.

A man in the column behind Doc screamed. It was shrill and penetrating, jarred the stillness of the hallway.

GUNS—Doc's superfirers were the only ones his crowd had—might as well have gone off, or a part of the ceiling fallen in. The squad of marching guards kept their heads, deployed swiftly, and started a charge.

Doc Savage had started back along the line to silence the man who had yelled. But it was too late for that to do anybody good. Doc spun back, ran to meet the attack.

Out of the Doc column popped the man who had yelled. He ran toward the guards. He was some kind of a European. His frantic cries gave the reason for his betrayal.

"I warned you!" he screamed. "I warned you! Let me go, please! Let me go back to my wife, my family!"

He reached the guards, and one of them calmly knocked him over the head with a rock.

"Maybe he be forgiven!" murmured the missionary. "He hoped to gain their favor by betrayal. I confess the same thought entered my mind, and like Satan, was put behind me only with difficulty."

The guards were closer. Each had drawn an arrow from his quiver, fixed it to bowstring. But they waited for close range.

Doc rapped, "Our machine pistols had explosive cartridges in them when they were taken from us! Shoot at the ceiling, ahead of the guards! Tear it down in front of them! Do not kill any one!"

Big-fisted Renny leveled his automaticlike weapon, set himself against the expected recoil, covered his head against the expected explosion as the bullet struck. They all braced themselves. They opened their mouths wide, as artillerymen do to relieve some of the concussion of big gun firing. Renny pulled trigger.

The gun made a noise like a small rattail file breaking.

"Holy cow!" Renny gulped.

He looked inside his gun.

"Ammo drums been emptied!" he rumbled. "Ki and Z and their gang must've done it!"

Monk, somewhere in the darkness, said in a small voice, "This reminds me of the time I went bear hunting, and Ham had playfully taken the powder out of my cartridges."

Renny asked, "What did you do?"

"Boy, I set a new footrace record!"

Doc Savage said, "A very good idea! Come on!"

They were willing to run. It was the wise thing. The guards were close, and armed, and greater in numbers. The men in Doc's little column put elbows to sides, tucked chins against chests, and ran.

The man in charge of the guards rapped an order. They halted, twanged their bowstrings, and arrows came arching. When the arrows were close, they made hissings. When they hit, there was no explosion, no shattering of steel or obsidian against the stone floor.

There was a series of sounds as if rotten eggs had been dropped.

DOC veered to the missionary's side. "What are their arrows pointed with?"

"A dust worthy of the ingenuity of the devil himself!"

"Specifically, what?"

"The powder from inside a species of jungle mushroom, or toadstool," the missionary replied. "The dust is treated in some fashion with stuff they let from certain plants, and the venom of certain snakes. Once you inhale it, you are in such instant agony that you are helpless."

"Fatal?"

"Not if you are blessed with a strong body."

The first flight of arrows did no real damage, for the reason that Doc's crowd got around a corner in the passage. The corridor, furthermore, was not adapted especially to archery, being narrow and not high. A great many of the arrows hit the walls and burst.

Two arrows alone burst in the middle of Doc's group.

"Hold your breaths!" Doc's trained voice had a crashing quality of authority that got obedience.

Only one man failed to comply successfully. He had been running; he was screaming and groveling and clawing at himself, at his face.

Doc ran to him, grabbed him, and carried him. The man was in infinite pain. He gargled and tried to push his tongue completely out of his mouth.

The arrow dust burned when it made contact with flesh, sharp, electric agony that was somehow like the touch of that hideous sea creature known as a man-of-war. They gritted their teeth and kept from breathing until they were clear of it. Even when they did breathe, it stung their lungs and set them gagging and staggering.

*"Achoo! Ow-w-w!"*

Monk squawled. "Talk about your—*achoo!* Ouch—tear gas!"

THEY sped ahead. The uproar had aroused the entire interior of the giant, fantastic statue in the jungle. Men and women were crying out. A low, undulating moan began to fill the passages and chambers inside the stone man. It was the alarm.

But the guards did not follow them.

"They have no way of passing through the irritating dust without being harmed," Doc guessed aloud.

"They will have to take another route in their pursuit."

"That is what happened," the missionary agreed. "But where, brother, now that our plan of catching Aug and O'Neel unawares has failed, are we going to betake ourselves?"

"The head section."

"Their infidel temple—the quarters of the custodians, Ki and Z?"

"Right," Doc said. "Do you know the way?"

"Very well indeed."

Doc said, "Guide my five aids and the rest of the party there!"

Then the bronze man was gone, lost abruptly in the darkness. However, Doc was back again almost

instantly, as if something had occurred to him.

"Give me your machine pistols," he requested of his men. "They are useless without ammunition."

The five aids handed over their superfirers.

"Is this every one of them?" Doc asked. "I want every single one."

They assured him that he had all of the machine pistols.

Doc Savage carried the weapons away abruptly into the darkness of the labyrinthine statue interior.

## Chapter XVII. SIEGE

WHEN he had left his aids well behind, Doc Savage did a thing which would have puzzled them, and maybe worried them a little.

Doc left the supermachine pistols lying in the most public corridor, where they were sure to be found by the enemy.

The weapons, when there was ammunition for them, were terrible things. O'Neel and Aug and their gang, having taken Doc's equipment cases, would have ammunition for the pistols.

After he had gotten rid of the guns, Doc worked toward the sounds of most excitement. The bronze man was silence itself, as elusive as a shadow.

A running inhabitant of the statue came racing up, and Doc faded into a niche. The runner did not pass; he was leaped upon, quickly rendered senseless with the spinal pressure, and relieved of his leather apron.

The apron was really somewhat of a combination trouser, an effective, efficient garment. Certainly, it was cool, which was more than could be said of the atmosphere.

The bronze man went more boldly now. His skin color somewhat resembled that of the denizens of the Klantic statue, and once he even managed to run through passages—the corridors were literally streets—with a group.

There was a great din. The strange moaning sound had not let up, but kept going steadily, like some strange calf in distress. It was probably a horn of some kind, a danger signal, an assembly summons. There was something about it to bring out goose pimples.

In a huge room—about the chest of the statue—the throng was gathering. Doc deserted the group he was running with and skirted the crowd. Firebrands were burning around the central part of the room, roughly encircling a stone rostrum on which a number of men stood. Unnoticeable vents in the ceiling carried the smoke out. Doc watched.

A SQUATTY man with a lot of chest, neck and arms stood on the rostrum. He had gold hair, but it was coarse and stood up as straight as wire. He wore a leather apron, and two cartridge belts, crossed, and two holsters holding automatic pistols.

He waved his arms and howled.

"I am Aug!" he was trying to tell them. "I am the man of iron! I am the man who should be the custodian

of the secret of Klantic! You need an iron man for that job!"

He went on to tell them more about the job being one for an iron man, and how much iron he had in his system. He gave examples. Mostly, they were hunting episodes, such as the time he had throttled a jungle leopard, and the time he had tied knots in a snake as big, he expressed it, as his own chest. It must have been a pretty big snake. He looked tough.

He could talk, too. The crowd listened, and while some of the older ones did not seem much impressed, the younger ones, the ones who still thought about their bodies a good deal, kept their mouths open and took it in.

Doc Savage had great difficulty following the monologue, for it was in ancient Egyptian, very unlike modern Egyptian, which the bronze man could speak fluently.

Doc had learned it from a famous scholar, who had assured him that scientists had puzzled it out, guessing at some of the sounds. They had, it seemed, guessed wrong, or the language as spoken here had changed sometime.

Doc kept his flake gold eyes roving, and before long discovered an O'Neel patriot. The fellow wore a leather apron, but his features gave him away. These natives were finer, more aristocratic, although not so much so as Ki and Z. The patriot looked like an idiot in comparison.

The patriot seemed to have something on his mind. He listened, or rather, watched the crowd, for it was evident that he had no idea of exactly what was being said. But he knew the effect that Aug and his chief were striving for, and he seemed satisfied.

The man left the crowd, selected a torch from a pile of the brands, and applied the end of it to a small fire which burned near by for that purpose. The firebrands were kept in piles all through the small city inside the statue.

The patriot strode along boldly, and joined two more of his fellows.

The latter two had been watching a huge pile of airplane parts—and the metal cases which held Doc Savage's stores. The material was in a room which was closed with a clumsy sort of door. They were trying to get the door, which was of stone, shut, when Doc Savage hit it.

The impact of the bronze man's charge carried him inside.

THE patriots were corkful of confidence, and so it was a minute before they got themselves organized. Before one of them got himself organized, rather. For in the space of a hasty breath, Doc Savage had used a fist, a knee, the other fist, and two of them were down, not entirely senseless, but unable to make much noise.

The survivor tried to yell and fight. He did not do a very good job at either. The yell fizzled when Doc gathered his face in one hand. His fist blows landed. But they damaged little except skin. The man looked utterly scared. The bronze man's body was like metal in more than looks.

The fellow kept the utterly scared look on his face after he became senseless. The paralysis which Doc inflicted by expert pressure sometimes did that. The victims kept the same expressions on their faces. Sometimes they kept the same thought in their mind throughout, too.

The three patriots disposed of, Doc Savage whipped to one of the equipment cases.

The case holding the ammunition supply for the machine pistols was in front, plainly marked, and open, but Doc ignored that. The case he chose bore another number, and when he opened it, it held harmless-looking tin cans labeled "coffee."

The case had been opened—the lock was broken on it as well as on the others. O'Neel and Aug must have searched everything. Probably it had been an interesting search.

Doc Savage carried an armload of the cans which said, "coffee," when he left the room. He was more careful now. Most of the population of the strange city seemed gathered in the big council room. That made it easier.

The stone walls were nowhere less than three feet thick, and in many spots, much more massive. Several times, Doc Savage paused to examine closely the construction of the place.

The stones, giant blocks, were fitted together with a surprising accuracy. Stone artisans and masons must have worked over each piece painstakingly.

The bronze man joined his companions without any great difficulty. They were waiting in the section inside the head of the great Klantic statue.

They were not exactly comfortable.

"We haven't got a single gun," Renny complained. "The first time they rush us, we're sunk."

Doc Savage said, "Wait here."

The bronze man still carried his "coffee" cans. He went back, and along the passages close to the head, he distributed the cans. He put them in spots where they were not likely to be found. And he made sure that at least one can was in each passage.

Again, he joined his aids and the rescued prisoners. They had gathered in a perfectly round stone room which was bare of any decoration, either carving or painting, of any kind.

Floating in the air in the middle of the room was a stone statue.

THE statue in the air was of some bright black stone, and it was a man, dressed in a leather apron. The man was short of stature, broad, and he had the same remarkable intelligent-looking features that the rest of the Klantic dwellers had.

"That is the original Klantic, or a statue of him," said the missionary. "When the real Klantic returns again, in the body of some mortal man, that statue will crumble to pieces."

The statue hung in the air, motionless. It was not as expressionless as statues usually are. The artisan who had made this one had been a master. The figure of the stone thing leaned forward, and it managed to wear an actual expression of intense concentration and expectancy, all focused on the door.

"Kinda looks as if the stone guy was expectin' somebody to come through the door," Monk offered.

Renny, the engineer, boomed, "What gets me is what keeps the thing hanging there in the air!"

The missionary lifted his eyes piously.

"They told me," he said, "that it was suspended there by the spiritual strength of the original Klantic. That,

of course, is an infernal lie. They never did let me close enough to have a good look."

"There's nothing to stop us now," Renny boomed, and advanced.

For a long time, he peered up at the statue. He shaded his eyes. Finally, he removed his coat and tossed it upward. The coat hit something above the statue and fell back.

"Thin metal threads, the exact color of the ceiling and walls, support it," Renny said, loudly. "Well, there's no hocus-pocus about that."

Monk squinted at the statue.

"You say, if anybody crumples that, they get this secret of Klantic?" the homely chemist asked.

"Exactly," said the missionary.

"Sort of a Gordian knot, only more so, eh?" Monk struck an attitude of a magician about to say "presto chango" and bring a rabbit out of a hat or an egg out of a bag just proven empty. "Statue, crumble!" he commanded dramatically.

There was a squealing and a squeaking and scampering and into the chamber popped the two pets, Habeas and Chemistry.

"Well," Monk grinned. "I get some results, anyway."

He looked at the statue. It had not crumbled.

Several men yelled far away through the passages. Women shrieked. A modern automatic pistol made banging noises. They could tell it was an automatic because it fired seven times very rapidly, and they knew some of O'Neel's patriots carried automatics which held seven cartridges.

"Sounds like they're comin' this way!" Monk muttered. "Somebody must've seen us in here!"

He was wrong. That became apparent when the noise of howling, angry men and shrieking equally angry women came nearer, and two running figures suddenly appeared.

The runners were the elderly Ki and golden-haired Z. Ki was taking the long strides of a distance runner, and Z short ones of a sprinter. They were making about equal time.

"Back," Doc directed. "Do not let them know we are here, or they may not come in."

They would probably have come in anyway, because the girl looked at Doc Savage, and showed distinct relief.

"Close the doors!" she ordered. "Aug talked the rest of them into turning against us! They're going to take away our jobs as keepers of the secret of Klantic!"

DOC SAVAGE closed the door because he had planned to do so anyway. There was an opening in the door, in the nature of a window, but with no glass, of course, through which they could observe what happened outside. There was a hallway of considerable size outside the door.

Renny ran about borrowing coats, and making a bundle of them. He stuffed the bundle into the window.

"That's to keep any of those tricky arrows from coming in," he explained.

Ham, who had not hit it off with Z so well from the first, was eying the young woman caustically.

"What was wrong with your custodianship that they objected to?" he asked.

"Nothing," said the girl.

Ham looked as if he didn't believe that.

The girl snapped, "You elect a president for your United States every four years, don't you?"

"Yes," said Ham, "but what—"

"Did you ever have one elected that didn't catch the devil, as you express it, before his term in office was out?"

Ham squinted at the young woman, wondering how she had learned so much about American politics.

"Oh, some of the Americans here told me," she explained. "The same thing has happened to my father and myself. They're simply tired of us. Everybody gets tired of anything. They'll get rid of us, and later on, they'll wish they hadn't done anything about it."

"Right now, it's Aug?" Ham asked.

"Yes," she said.

"We'll fix Aug," Ham told her, but as he said it, he had no idea how they would fix Aug, or even keep Aug from fixing them. Ham just felt that he should suddenly say something encouraging to the girl, because she was really quite a remarkable young woman, and he was abruptly feeling sorry for her.

They looked about for weapons. Ki and his daughter, it seemed, had half a dozen bows and several quivers of arrows, all fitted with the strange toad-stool-dust points.

"Who among you can use a bow and arrow?" Z wanted to know.

"Me," said Monk. "I'm a jack of all trades."

Ham started to make some crack about that, but there was a fresh burst of shouting outside. The inhabitants of Klantic were evidently starting a charge.

## **Chapter XVIII. THE KLANTIC**

DOC SAVAGE had been busy with Monk's pocket laboratory—really a collection of certain basic chemicals—and he had mixed, in a glass bottle, a vile-looking concoction.

"Open the door," he requested.

Long, bony Johnny opened the door. Doc threw his bottle of mixture through. He threw it very hard, so that it broke a short distance in front of the oncoming horde.

Results were gratifying. The charge stopped. Angry yells grew pained. Howls and squawls arose. Bedlam. Milling. Flight.

"I'll be superamalgamated!" said Johnny, in a mildly pleased voice. "That was a short battle. What did you throw at them, Doc?"

"Some of Monk's chemicals," Doc explained. "The fumes stung their eyes and made their skins itch. It was harmless, but something new, and they fled. They will be back."

"We can keep them off again with another dose of the stuff," Johnny suggested.

"That," Doc told him, "was all of it."

Bony Johnny, scratching his head and fiddling with his monocle, walked over to thin old Ki, and addressed him in English—small words.

Ki, it developed, could speak English. In fact, as Johnny speedily discovered, Ki was as much of a mental wizard as was the young woman, Z.

Johnny sought out Doc.

"This fellow Ki seems to have the same remarkable type of mentality possessed by that girl," he said. "I can't understand it. I wonder if these people are all as brilliant as that? If so, why haven't they advanced farther in scientific directions than they have? Why are they here?"

Doc said, "Suppose we see if the girl will answer your questions."

THEY went over to Z. The ravishing young lady had been using her spare time to admire Doc's unusual physique. She colored a little, but Doc appeared not to notice.

"You have not been very good at answering questions," the bronze man told her. "Have you reformed yet?"

"Well," she said, "you seem to be helping us. That changes things, does it not?"

It apparently did, but Doc did not comment.

"These people here are Egyptians of an ancient strain?" he asked. "They are the descendants of the picked forty men and women whom the Pharaoh Klantic took with him when he vanished out of Egypt about a hundred years preceding the dynasty of Pharaoh Tut-Ankh-Amen."

"Yes," said the girl.

"I'll be superamalgamated!" Johnny burst out. "Where did you get that information, Doc?"

"You are an archaeologist," Doc told him. "You have heard of the Egyptian Pharaoh Klantic, have you not?"

"Yes," Johnny admitted. "Very little history of Klantic is available, for some reason or other. He was apparently greatly feared or considered a hoodoo, or something. At any rate, it is known that he picked a score of the most remarkable women, and an equal number of his most perfect men, and took a number of boats, his largest Nile craft, manned them with many slaves, and sailed away. And that was the last of him.

"I have one of the few tablets in existence bearing the story of Pharaoh Klantic. It happens to be just one among a great many tablets, most of them more important historically. I am a collector of Egyptian relics,

you know. I had almost forgotten this one."

Johnny hesitated at the end of this long-winded explanation, then shook his head.

"My tablet," he said, "refers in some way to a strange power which this Klantic had. The nature of the power is not stated. I never took much stock in it. Just passed it off as a mistake in translation on my part."

"The power of Pharaoh Klantic was real," the girl said levelly. "He found a secret. It was such an incredible secret that he fled the civilized world of that day, in order that none might seize and misuse its fabulous power."

"What was it?"

"Let me tell you the rest of the story first," the girl said.

There was a rumbling and muttering of voices outside.

"I think they're gettin' ready to rush us out there," Monk called.

"Watch," Doc directed. "When it looks as if they're about to make the rush, call me."

"Righto."

THE girl said, "Klantic, his twenty strongest men and his twenty most beautiful women—" She stopped and reddened slightly again. "There were really more than twenty women, because Pharaoh Klantic brought along some extra wives—they all, together with the slaves, finally reached South America, and sailed up the Amazon. They reached this spot."

She paused. The yelling outside was getting more ominous.

"Pharaoh Klantic's slaves built this reclining likeness of their master," she continued. "Rather, the slaves and their descendants, for the work took many generations, and Pharaoh Klantic's descendants carried on."

"I see," Johnny said, dryly. "Some of those old Egyptians had great ideas. Take the pyramids. A bigger pile of uselessness, I can't think of."

The girl drew herself up.

"This statue," she said, "had its purpose. It was to receive the secret of Klantic, and keep it, until the world had progressed to such a point where the secret would be safe in the hands of the average man.

"When that day comes, Klantic is to return, his spirit occupying the body of some mortal from the outer world. When that one arrives"—she paused and pointed at the dangling statue—"the statue will crumble to dust before him. By that sign will the spirit of Klantic be known."

"We heard about that," Johnny told her. "What we want to know is what this secret is, anyhow."

"My father and myself are the custodians," the girl said. "We alone know where it is. It is hidden. When the reincarnation of the great Pharaoh Klantic comes, and crumbles the statue, we will produce the secret." She stopped, added, "We are descendants of Klantic."

Ham, who had been listening in, came over and said, "This all sounds like a pretty tall story to me!"

"If such a statue as this should be unearthed in Egypt, it would not be considered so incredible!" Johnny snapped. "This statue is not much larger than the Sphinx, and certainly smaller than any pyramids."

Ham shrugged, "All right, big words. It's all perfectly ordinary. It could have happened in Missouri."

Johnny ignored the sarcasm. He turned to the girl.

"Just what is this Secret of the Pharaoh Klantic?" he asked.

"The Pharaoh Klantic," the girl replied, "invented a method of developing the human brain until it had incredible power."

THAT was surprising enough to get a startled silence of several seconds' duration.

"You mean that any stupid man could be made brilliant?" Johnny demanded.

"That is what the secret of Klantic can do," said the girl. "Not only brilliant—mentally overwhelming. The power of the thing surpasses anything your imaginations conceive. You have seen how I make you think as I wish? How I influence your opinions? How I can even make impressionable subjects see things which are not there?"

"We saw that," Johnny admitted thoughtfully.

"All right," the girl said. "Think of what an unscrupulous person can do with that power. The human brain becomes so developed that it will register the thoughts of others, and you can make others do exactly as you wish. They will be helpless. You will not have to use force. You just *think*—and they do it!"

"Can you do all of that?"

She shook her head. "I have never taken any of the compound. My powers were inherited from my ancestors, and they are not nearly equal to those which Pharaoh Klantic gave himself with the secret."

"Compound?" Johnny interposed.

She nodded. "It is a mixture which is taken as food is taken."

"And it'll make any stupid fellow bright?"

"It will."

Ham, somewhat skeptical about the whole thing, and cynical, as he always was, called out dryly.

"Monk," he said, "We're hearing about something that may be your salvation."

Monk ignored him. The homely chemist had an eye fixed to the aperture in the door, and he was tense. Evidently the mob outside was getting ready to charge.

"We're trapped here," the girl said. "There is no escape from this room, except by the route which is blocked."

Johnny put her back on the subject of the secret of Pharaoh Klantic.

"You people have lived here for centuries?" he asked.

"Under the strict rules laid down by Pharaoh Klantic," she responded. "Always, it has been managed to keep the existence of the place from getting to the outside world."

"Where is this secret?"

She shook her head. "Only the one who crumbles the statue will ever know."

"All right," Johnny said. "But tell me more about it. Will it make any man have mental powers beyond your own?"

"Any man," said the girl. "Providing, of course, that the brain is not diseased, or the person an idiot."

"That lets Monk out," Ham decided aloud. "He'll never be helped."

Monk, who probably didn't hear that, yelled, "They're coming, Doc!"

Doc ran to the door. The charge had started.

DOC SAVAGE wrenched at the door, got it open, and sprang outside.

"Get some flashlight beams and torchlight on me!" he ordered swiftly.

The light was put on him. It brought out his remarkable physique, and emphasized particularly the unafraidness of his attitude. He lifted his arms, and so imposing was the picture that he presented that the mob stopped.

Or perhaps they knew they had him cornered, and thought it wouldn't hurt to stop and hear what he had to say.

What he had to say was short.

"For your own good, do not rush us!" he called, and the reverberations of his powerful, trained voice probably carried throughout the great statue.

These descendants of Pharaoh Klantic—and probably his slaves—were not tall people, and over their heads, Doc could spot *El Liberator* O'Neel, his men, and Aug. They were all together in a compact body, and toward the front of the crowd.

They had armed themselves with Doc's supermachine pistols.

Doc repeated his warning.

"To rush us," he called, "will mean death to many, if not all of you!"

They didn't care for that. It was not what they expected, was not an offer to dicker for a truce, or—this would have been best of all—a plea to be spared.

Doc whipped back inside the door a shade ahead of a volley of arrows with dust-bag points. The arrows made poppings as they burst against the stone door.

"Whew!" Monk gasped. "I barely got these coats jammed in the hole in the door in time!"

Old Ki yelled, "We are doomed!" in English.

"Not as long as we have life," the missionary told him.

Doc rapped, "Get down! Close to the walls!"

"What?" some one among the freed prisoners exploded.

"Crouch against the walls!" Doc called. "In a moment—"

It was sooner. The door fell in; the walls shook and pieces dropped off; the floor changed and became less level, and an enormous quantity of dust and noise came from everywhere.

The first crash did not end it. A rumbling, roaring, grinding followed. Falling stone. Shifting stone. The humans caught outside made awful noises. Groans. Cries. Sobs. These sounds went on as if they were never intended to stop.

DOC SAVAGE called, "Any one hurt?"

"One man crushed back here," Long Tom shouted. "Piece of the wall fell on his legs. He'll live!"

Monk came scuttling to Doc's side. "What on earth happened?"

"Remember, before we left New York on that cruise ship, each of you turned in his supermachine pistol at headquarters to have a new grip applied?" Doc asked.

"Sure, but what—"

"That grip was made of a composition containing a radioactive substance," Doc told him. "The original purpose was to make it easier to locate these deadly weapons if they were stolen. You know that we have detectors which can locate radioactive materials at great distances."

Monk said, "I still don't see!"

"What happens when a radioactive material is brought near a common electroscope?" Doc asked.

"The electroscope leaves fly apart, if properly charged."

"All right," the bronze man said. "If you attach one electrical wire to one leaf, and another wire to a contact which the leaf touches when it opens, the result is the closing of an electric circuit, which can be used to explode a bomb. The actual arrangement was a bit more complicated, but—"

"Blazes!" Monk said, "I remember you making up them bombs. Put them in what looked like coffee cans, didn't you?"

Renny, who had gotten to the door, taken a look out into the corridor, and was now approaching, said, "It looks as if O'Neel, Aug and their crowd were leading the charge."

"Any of them alive?" Doc asked.

"I'm going out to see."

## Chapter XIX. THE GOLDEN KNOT

RENNY could have saved his time, and spared himself a gory sight. The neck portion of the statue of Klantic had been made of extra large blocks, and they had all come down.

They found *El Liberator* O'Neel, Aug, and the others several days later, after a great deal of hard labor and engineering ability had been expended moving the stones.

"They just missed being grease spots," explained Monk, who was a bit callous at times.

The shift in attitude of the other dwellers inside the great statue of Pharaoh Klantic was remarkable. Or perhaps it was generalship on Doc Savage's part. The bronze man urged Ki and the girl, Z, to step out and assert their authority immediately.

Results had been everything desired. Those of the ringleaders who survived were even put in dungeons by the others, at the girl's command.

Doc Savage and his aids, having disposed of O'Neel and his killers—that they had died was not of Doc's choosing, for his attempt to prevent them rushing had been a genuine effort—began to have thoughts of leaving.

They asked many questions, but gave up finding the secret of Klantic when they discovered it could only be accomplished by violence.

"After all, it belongs to these people," Doc explained. "We can hardly play the part of pirates."

"Then we'll leave here soon?" Monk wanted to know.

"As soon as we can assemble the planes which Aug and O'Neel dissembled," Doc agreed.

They started work on the planes. It was promptly ordered stopped. They became aware of a complication.

They were not going to be permitted to leave!

"THAT is a hell of a note!" This from big-worded Johnny, who, while he might shatter the dictionary, rarely used profanity.

There was naturally a great deal of argument. Doc and his aids put up a very logical case why they should be permitted to leave. But they were not met with logic in return. They were met with the simple statement that they would not be permitted to leave, and that was that.

News of the existence of the secret of Pharaoh Klantic must never reach the outer world—until the reincarnation came to get it, first crumbling the statue.

Doc Savage said, "But is not every newcomer given his chance to crumble the statue?"

"Absolutely," said Z and Ki together.

"I," Doc told them, "have not had mine."

Z smiled at him sweetly. She had failed to make much headway with the bronze man thus far, and she was daily becoming more determined, it appeared.

"You think you can crumble the statue?" she asked.

"You yourself said the reincarnated one might never know his power until he confronted the statue," Doc reminded.

So they led him into the big statue room, which had been repaired somewhat. What happened next was something that the bronze man's five aids remembered for a long time.

Doc stood under the statue, after approaching it with a measured, solemn stride. He seemed to be engaged in deep thought. This mood increased, until there was a strange tensivity in the way he stood. He seemed gripped by some ethereal power.

His trilling sound came into being, and ran up and down its fantastic scale rapidly. His arms began to rise. They were stiff. The fingers were distended. The arms arose faster. The hands came together with a distinct clap over the bronze man's head. He stood there.

*The statue of Klantic began to come apart!*

A few particles fell off at first. Then they came away more rapidly. A stream of them followed. Finally, the whole remnant of the statue fell to the floor, and burst into a small pile of dark dust.

There was utter silence for a long moment. Then a great cry went up.

"The Pharaoh Klantic has returned!"

The day or two that followed was extremely hectic. They tried to set Doc up in the style of a Pharaoh, and it seemed the Pharaoh had lived very luxuriously indeed.

In the present case, one of the luxuries, it developed, was to be attractive Z. The new Pharaoh Klantic was supposed to take her for wife. Every one supposed he naturally would. Doc was conducted half through an ancient Egyptian marriage ceremony before he discovered what it was.

He got it stopped and got out of it by declaring the ceremony was not grand enough to befit the new Pharaoh Klantic.

In the meantime, Monk was the first to try out the dark-red powder which was the secret of Klantic—the compound supposed to give the one who used it a stimulated brain development.

The old man, Ki, and the girl, Z, had produced the red stuff from under the temple floor, near where the statue had hung. The powder, they said, was all that was left and which had been handed down through the centuries. There was no formula.

"Chemical analysis will show us its content," Doc said.

But Monk wanted to try it first. He took some and awaited results.

"But how could the stuff work?" Ham muttered thoughtfully, eying his arch-antagonist Monk as if he feared he might develop into too much to handle.

"It is possible," Doc said. "It may be merely a stimulant. Body glands, the thyroid for instance, are made large or small by either too much or not enough of certain substances."

They all watched Monk anxiously.

"What," Ham asked him finally, "Is it doing to you, Monk?"

"It's giving me a belly ache!" Monk grimaced.

That, it eventually developed, was all the secret of Klantic was good for.

DOC SAVAGE and his aids had no trouble, now, assembling the planes in the nearest jungle clearing.

They did not explain that the secret of Klantic had, if it was ever of any value, become worthless by being kept for centuries in such a climate. In fact, they were never sure about the secret. Chemical analysis told them nothing. The ingredients were too far deteriorated.

Doc managed to leave Z behind, after some argument.

Their plane—they all rode in one craft, and planned to send back others for such of the prisoners as desired to leave—took the air.

Only then did Doc Savage clear up something that had been puzzling his aids. He had kept it to himself thus far.

"Just how did that statue happen to crumble?" Monk wanted to know.

"Remember the Gordian knot?" Doc asked.

"Sure. It was a knot and the guy who separated the two pieces of rope which were tied together was supposed to become the ruler of the world, or something."

Doc said, "The fellow who finally separated the ropes used a trick. He cut them with his sword."

"Huh!" Monk exploded. "You don't mean to tell me you used—"

"A trick," Doc agreed. "During my first escape from the dungeon, I managed to locate your pocket chemical case. We had already heard about this statue, remember? It seemed like a good idea to have a look at it at the time."

Doc paused.

Monk said, "I begin to see a light."

"The stone was of a type which could be dissolved, or its binding structure dissolved, with certain chemicals," Doc went on. "Once it was soaked with these chemicals, it was only necessary to toss on a concentrated bit of the chemical to complete the disintegration."

"Oh!" Monk said. "You did that last when you threw your hands up in the air!"

The homely chemist sat there and thought about it for a while.

"That," he chuckled finally, "is what I call taking care of the Gordian knot."

Ham, who always disagreed with Monk whether he was right or wrong, snapped, "At least they didn't have monkeys around in those times to give them headaches with their looks!"

"You—you shyster lawyer!" piped Monk. "I'll tear you apart! I'll—"

Ham, dodging a swinging fist, proceeded to defend himself as best as he could with his sword cane.

"Monk's sure a terror when he gets going," boomed Renny. "I wonder if them two will ever stop fighting?"

THE END