



DEATH HAD YELLOW EYES

A Doc Savage Adventure by Kenneth Robeson

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Scanned and Proofed by Tom Stephens

Out of the darkness, yellow and bodiless eyes peer into the faces of Doc Savage and his crew. And when Monk vanishes inside a locked room, Doc leaps to the rescue—plunging straight into a vicious international maelstrom that could change the course of history!

Chapter I

THERE was nothing under the overstuffed chair by the window, nothing behind the sofa. The grandfather clock in the corner ran noisily with a rickety-rickety-rickety sound. Probably the uproar the old clock made was the reason that no one ever stayed in the north parlor any longer than they had to. The front of the clock was glass and offered no concealment.

Monk Mayfair continued searching.

The window was closed and locked. Both doors were shut. There was an old-fashioned brass screen in front of the fireplace, so that even a bird couldn't have gone up the chimney. The ancient, rich draperies hung gracefully at the window with nothing behind them. Into the ancient, dignified parlor came a trace of the traffic rumbling on Park Avenue. Even the traffic noise was dignified here in the room.

From a great painting in a gilt frame on the north wall, a Brooks ancestor looked down sourly. He looked down coolly enough to be standing on the North Pole, or on a mountain of gold. As a matter of fact—and this made Monk Mayfair grin—the old scamp in the picture was Colonel Blackstone Brooks, a lawyer who had never in his life rubbed much more than two dollars together in his pocket. But the old phony had had an eye for a nice ankle, from what Monk had heard.

There was nothing behind the Colonel's picture, either.

Monk sank into a chair, sat there with his eyes alert. He moved nothing but his eyes, and being a very homely man, he could look remarkably alarmed.

There was none of his usual pleasant impishness on his face now. The glee had fled. His short body and long arms—he looked like an ape out of somebody's funny-book—were normally as relaxed as an old sock. But he was tight now. Tight and uneasy. One got the impression that all of his rusty looking hair was wanting to stand on end.

The grandfather clock went rickety-rickety for some time.

Then Ham Brooks, the attorney, came in.

“Hello, nature's accident,” said Ham.

Ham Brooks had the wide mobile mouth of an orator, a thin waist, and the attire of an ambassador. Ham always dressed rigidly for the occasion and time of day. This was morning, so he had a frock coat, fawn vest and morning trousers. He carried a thin black cane which didn't quite fit with the rest.

“Cat got your tongue?” Ham asked.

Monk shook his head. His eyes were moving over the room again.

“Maybe,” said Ham, “you've decided to just say what you think. In which case you'd be permanently speechless.”

“Cut it out,” Monk muttered. “Lay off the gags.”

“What's wrong with you?”

Monk indicated the room with an uneasy movement of his hand.

“What are you keeping in here?” he demanded.

Ham frowned. “Are you kidding?”

“I never felt less funny in my life,” Monk said.

HAM BROOKS was puzzled. He glanced around the parlor, then fell to examining Monk narrowly. Ham began to suspect an elaborate gag. He and Monk were the best of friends, but they never conducted themselves as if they were. Over a period of years, Ham could not recall having exchanged a really civil word with Monk. If he had spoken amiably to Monk, it was a mistake, and he hoped it wouldn't happen again. They got a lot of boot out of their squabbling.

“If I didn't know you,” Ham said grimly, “I'd say you just had your pants scared off. But knowing you, I suspect a gag.”

“No gag.”

“Well, stop looking like that, you homely missing link!”

Monk indicated the door. “I came in there a minute ago without knocking.”

“All right, you came in the door,” Ham said sharply. “So what? You've come through that door before. This isn't the first time you've been here.”

“Stop fussing at me. I'm serious.”

“What about?”

“There was something in this room when I came in,” Monk said flatly.

Ham glanced about. “I don't see anything.”

Monk pointed at the gloomy south end of the room. “Down there.”

“Well, there's nothing there. Or did it fly out of the window?”

“The windows,” Monk said, “were closed, and so was the door, and that screen in front of the fireplace would keep anything from going up the chimney.”

Ham stared at Monk in astonishment. “Say, you sound serious.”

“I am.”

“Just exactly what did you see?”

Monk stared thoughtfully at the south end of the room. He ran the tip of his tongue over his lips. He shuddered.

“Two spots,” he said.

“Two spots?”

“Two yellow spots,” said Monk. He held a hand about shoulder high to a man. “They were about this high off the floor. They weren't bright spots, and they weren't very yellow, but they were more yellow than any other color. About the size of a dime.”

“Two dimes, you mean,” Ham said gleefully. “If there were two of them, it would be two dimes—”

“Listen, you shyster lawyer,” said Monk wearily. “I only came here because you invited me. Doc Savage didn't think he would need us today, so you said come up, and we would go down to Washington and take another crack at getting active service in the army. For once in my life, I came up here in full seriousness. Now stop boshing me. What were those yellow spots?”

“Why so serious about it?”

Monk grimaced. “I can't tell you exactly. I kind of got the creeps.”

Ham laughed heartily.

“So you saw spots in front of your eyes? Yellow, eh?” said Ham. “Probably your conscience going by with one of your blondes.”

Monk scowled. He was uneasy. Ham's levity wasn't making him feel better.

“Why do you live in a tomb like this?” he demanded.

“The place has dignity. You wouldn't understand.”

“You could have some light in here, anyway.”

“Turn on the floor lamp, then.”

MONK growled, “Don't think I won't!” and turned on the ornate old floor lamp. The next five seconds were remarkable.

Blue electric fire, quite a ball of it, came out of the lamp near where Monk had hold of it. Monk howled. He went a couple of feet in the air, spread out in midair like a frog, and to all appearances howled again while hanging there. He hit the floor again. Another spark came out of the lamp. The light hadn't come on.

Ham looked astonished, then his cheeks blew out with mirth. He couldn't hold it in, and howled with laughter.

“Blast you!” yelled Monk. “I knew it was a gag!”

“Oh, Lord!” Ham gasped. “Did you look funny spraddled out in the air like that!”

Monk waved both arms furiously.

“Doc told us to cut down on this horseplay!” Monk shouted. “And what do you do the first thing! Rig up a lamp so I get shocked!”

“I didn't rig any lamp,” gasped Ham, between bursts of mirth.

Monk seized the floor lamp indignantly, snatched off the shade and dug into the entrails of the thing. He snorted in triumph.

“What do you call this, then?” he yelled. “You stuck a paper clip up in one of the lamp sockets!”

“Paper clip!” Ham said. “I didn't put any paper clip in the lamp socket.” He came over suspiciously. “I don't believe there is one. Let me see it.”

“There!”

“That's funny!”

“Sure, funny for you,” Monk said indignantly. “I could see that.”

“I didn't—”

“Sure, sure, you never do!” Monk bellowed. “You never admitted pulling a gag on me yet. Well, let me tell you something, you overdressed legal wit! You started this!”

“Started what?”

Monk looked at him ominously. “Doc Savage kindly requested us to cut out the pranking. He said our gagging around would take our minds off our business, or take somebody else's mind off his, and somebody would make a bad mistake. Okay, that was reasonable. So I cut it out. I figured you were gentleman enough—I should have known better—to cut it out too. But you weren't. You've started it again!”

“I never—”

Monk leveled an indignant finger at Ham's nose. "From now on," he howled, "I'll see that you get plenty of jokes!"

And Monk stamped out of the apartment.

THE shop was on Broadway below Forty-second Street and it was as untidy as a cat's nest. It sold sheet music, phonograph records, souvenirs, cards with dirty verses, puzzles, magic and jokes. The jokes were the kind you used to embarrass a fellow. Itch powder, exploding matches, hot-dogs that would squawk when you bit into them, water glasses that leaked down your chin. It was a fine place to go when you wanted to lose your friends.

"I want this," said Monk Mayfair. "And this, this, and this!" He heaped joke stuff on the counter.

"All that!" gasped the proprietor.

"What else you got?"

"Brother, that's all."

"Then wrap it up. And tell me where there's another store where I can get some more."

"I've got the largest assortment in town. You won't find a different gag anywhere else, if you look all day."

"Shucks."

At this point, Monk observed the red-headed girl. Observed probably wasn't the word. Earthquake was a better one. She was a smallish dish with plenty of everything in the right places.

What really counted, she happened to be looking at Monk with some interest.

She went out of the joke shop.

"Tsk, tsks," Monk said, grabbing up his package of jokes and following.

He was making knots to overtake the young woman when the two blond young men got in Monk's path. They were lean young men with a bit of a commando look about them, even if they did wear civilian clothes.

"Wait a minute, Handsome," one growled. "You bothering Doris?"

"Not yet," said Monk, grinning. "But I had hopes. That is, if the red-headed number is Doris."

The two blond boys weren't humorously impressed. "He's a wise guy, Nat," one said to the other.

"That's right, Jay," agreed the other blond boy. "Shall we dust off his jaw?"

Monk said, "Now wait a minute—"

"Getting so a girl can't walk down the street," said Jay.

"That's right," said Nat. "A damned shame."

They looked remarkably alike without having the least bit of the similarity of twins.

“Brothers,” Monk said, “I claim I was obeying the instinctive promptings of nature, although maybe a little abruptly. What's the harm in that?”

“Let's smear the big goon, Jay.”

“Let's.”

Alarmed, Monk said, “Hey, hold on! I never even spoke to the gal!”

“You were going to.”

“Sure,” said Monk frankly.

The red-head had gone on down the street as if nothing at all had happened, as if she didn't know that anything was occurring.

“You cad!” said Jay.

Monk began to get mad. “I'll apologize to the girl, but not to you guys,” he said. “And in about ten seconds, I am going to start operations on you two birds!” He put his package down.

Nat and Jay thought this over.

“You lay off Doris,” Jay said.

He and Nat walked off.

Monk stood there, feeling he had just experienced one of the less notable experiences of his career.

Monk rubbed his jaw uncomfortably. With a gloomy expression, he picked up the package of joke stuff.

“Maybe Doc was right about us cutting down on the horseplay,” he said.

HAM BROOKS opened the apartment door for Monk Mayfair, watched Monk walk into the gloomy, dignified parlor, then closed the door slowly. Ham wasn't grinning. Monk stalked over and sat in a chair, his homely face wearing a rather sour smirk, and leaned back. His eyes traveled over the room, moving from object to object rather sulkily. He did not condescend to speak to Ham or even acknowledge his presence.

“So you got over your tizzy,” Ham said.

Monk pretended the room was empty.

Ham nibbled his lips in exasperation, apparently on the horns of a dilemma. His inclination was to follow his usual procedure, and dish out a few genial insults. But he had something else on his mind, something that was puzzling him, and also beginning to bother him, the more he thought of it.

“Paper clips,” Ham said tentatively, “are getting scarce. They're so scarce in fact, because of the war shortage, that you practically keep track of each one you have.”

Monk ignored this also.

Ham continued, “I took another look at what was left of the paper clip that was in the light socket. It had an unusual shape, and I happened to remember there should be such a clip holding together some papers

on my desk in the next room, so I went in there and looked. But that paper clip was gone.”

Monk was motionless, silent, and unresponsive.

Ham lost his temper.

“You homely gossoon!” he yelled. “I’m trying to tell you that somebody stole that paper clip off my desk and stuck it in the lamp.”

“Somebody!” Monk shouted. “The somebody was you!”

“I did not!”

“It was a kid gag. That is all I can say. A half-witted three-year-old would pull about such a trick.”

“I tell you—”

“Honk, honk, honk!” said Monk. “That’s the way you laughed, like a jackass braying.”

Ham waved his arms wildly, while six or seven insulting retorts piled up on his tongue. He got control of himself. He smoothed down his hair with his hands, then made a pleading gesture.

“Look, Monk,” Ham said. “Lord knows, I might have short-circuited that lamp to shock and startle you if I had thought of it. But it happens I didn’t. And it happens that I got a funny feeling sitting in the room here thinking about it after you left.”

“It couldn’t be *your* conscience bothering you,” Monk said. “That fellow turned up his toes a long time ago.”

Ham continued patiently, “I had the impression, sitting here in the room, that there was another presence here in the room with me.”

“Now I suppose you got a ghost gag,” Monk growled.

“Wait a minute. It wasn’t a ghostly feeling. I mean, it wasn’t imagination. You know how, when a dog or a cat or another animal or a human being is in the same room with you, you know it by the small sounds they make, the stirrings and breathings and—well—nothing that lives is still for very long, as a usual thing. It was sounds like those that I got the idea I was hearing. I wouldn’t call them ghostly sounds.”

“But the room was empty?”

“Yes.”

“Honk, honk, honk!” Monk jeered, “Laugh some more, you clothesrack.”

Ham glared. “You want me to tell you what is keeping me from kissing you gently over the head with the handiest chair?”

“A slight idea of the consequences of such an act,” said Monk grimly. “If you ever—”

“No,” Ham said. “The lights won’t go on.”

“Eh?”

“None of the lights in the apartment will light.”

MONK was not greatly impressed. He said, “The paper clip made a short-circuit in the socket and caused the fuse to blow. Just put in a new fuse—”

“I did.”

“And no lights?”

“No lights.”

“As dumb as you are about electricity, you probably stuck the fuse in the hole where the rubber plug goes in the bathtub.”

“Now you're being childish.”

“Honk, honk, honk!” Monk said.

“Oh, stop that! Somebody has tampered with the wiring in the apartment. The wires are cut. I called the building superintendent, and the current isn't off in the building. Just in this apartment.”

“Now I suppose you're getting ready to say *you* saw two yellow spots the size of dimes about five feet off the floor?”

“No, I didn't. But as a matter of fact, I sat in here thinking about what you had said all the time that I had that feeling I mentioned—the impression that I was hearing sounds that a live pet or a person would make if they were in the same room with you. I tell you, Monk, it wasn't imagination and there wasn't anything ghostly about it. There *was* something in here.”

Monk contemplated Ham suspiciously for a while. “Get a flashlight.”

“Why?”

“Let's take a look at this room.”

“But what's wrong with the light from the window? The window opens on a court, I know, but there is light enough to read a newspaper. Plenty of light to see—”

“Get a flashlight,” said Monk. “All this place needs is a coffin and a corpse to make it my idea of a tomb. And don't tell me again about dignified surroundings. Get a flashlight.”

Ham thought of some things he could say about Monk's ultra-modernistic penthouse in the Wall Street neighborhood. The penthouse was Ham's idea of a futuristic nightmare. However, he held it back.

As soon as he was in the hall, he heard the door locked behind him.

“What's the idea of locking the door?” he called.

“I'm locking both doors,” Monk said. “If there's anything in here, I'll keep it here.”

Ham frowned at the door, strangely disturbed. Then he went to find a flashlight. He caught himself—several times—twisting his head quickly to look over his shoulder, and the fact that he would be doing such a thing bothered him. It was an unconscious act, the kind of a thing a man does when the sense of danger is heavy on his mind. Now what's the matter with me? Ham thought: I shouldn't be easily jittered, because I've been around danger often enough, Heaven knows. But I'm acting genuinely scared.

The idea of his fear preyed on him as he hunted for the flashlight. He had forgotten where he had put the flash—or it wasn't where it should be, although it was ridiculous to think that the flash could have been taken. It was, when you came to that, also ridiculous to think that the light wires had been cut. The whole thing was improbable, and yet he could not push away an impression of danger which weighed heavily on his consciousness.

The sound, when he heard it, was not very loud. It was a single thudding jar. But for all the commonness of the sound, it whipped across Ham's nerves, and he raced headlong for the north parlor.

The parlor door, when he reached it, was closed and locked. He hammered the door with his fists, shouted, "Monk! Monk!" And his grim certainty was justified when he got no answer. He threw his weight against the door. It wasn't strong, and burst open.

"Monk!" he said to the empty room.

Standing there, listening, getting no answer, Ham knew that none of his sensations of fear, and none of the same feelings which Monk had admitted having, were as senseless and unmotivated as they had seemed.

The other door was locked. So was the window.

"Monk!" Ham yelled. "What happened? Where are you?"

Monk's voice, answering him, was not speech or words or even outcry. It was a sound that Ham would hear in nightmares for a long time. It was a gurgling from a throat through which life seemed to be trying to escape. It came, Ham believed, from outside, in the hall.

"Monk!" Ham shouted. "My God!"

Chapter II

DOC SAVAGE, arriving at Ham Brooks' apartment on Park Avenue, wore a pin-stripe blue suit and an inconspicuous gray hat. But the taxi driver knew him, and an autograph collector recognized him and nearly got run down in the traffic trying to reach his car.

Doc Savage pretended to take the recognition casually, politely, but he was embarrassed. It was an old story, the way he attracted attention in public, yet it still made him feel uncomfortable. Secretly, he had always considered his reputation overdone, a thing taller than he was.

His spectacular physical appearance, of course, accounted for most of the notice. He was a giant bronze man with straight hair of bronze only slightly darker than his skin, and with unusual flake gold eyes. His size was the main thing. His proportions were symmetrical enough that he did not seem large when he stood by himself, but in a taxicab, or with other people, or anywhere that his size could be compared to ordinary objects, he was an outstanding figure.

His work naturally attracted attention, too. It was work that reeked of adventure, of mystery, or strangeness, so naturally people were interested. The very idea that a man's profession was trouble-shooting other people's troubles was enough to arouse interest.

Ham Brooks' didn't have a natural color.

"I'm glad you could come right away, Doc." Ham said.

Doc studied him a moment. "You look about as bad as you sounded over the telephone."

"The thing got my goat," Ham admitted.

"Any trace of Monk?"

Ham shook his head. "Come in here. I'll show you where it happened."

The austere north parlor had a cool, rigid dignity, a gloomy unresponsiveness. Doc Savage had just come in from the bright sunlight of the street, so the place seemed especially dim.

Ham said, suddenly hating the room, "Monk kept talking about the place being a tomb. Now it seems like that to me. I'm going to brighten up the place."

"Both doors were locked?"

"Yes."

"Where were the keys?"

"On the inside. The window was fastened on the inside too."

"What about the fireplace?"

"The screen was still in place."

Doc Savage went over to the fireplace, saw that the logs and firebrick were neat, that there had never been a fire in the fireplace. So if anyone had been in the chimney, there would be no soot.

He put a hand up the chimney and rubbed, bringing down crumbles of mortar. There were no particles of mortar in the fireplace, other than those he had brought down.

"No one climbed the chimney."

"No."

"What about trick panels in the walls or floor?"

"Not a chance," Ham said.

"The light wires?"

Ham showed the bronze man where they were cut. The job had been done at the fuse-box, the cut end of the cable then jammed back into the conduit which led to the fuse-box. The fuse-box was in the kitchen which Ham, being a bachelor, didn't use much.

"It took an electrician's cutting pliers to do that," Doc said. "Whoever was here came prepared."

Ham nodded soberly. "When Monk turned on the floor lamp, earlier in the morning, there was current. That means the cable was cut between the time Monk left and came back."

"Were you here all that time?"

"Yes."

Hear anything?"

“I got the impression something was around the apartment and that it was alive.”

DOC SAVAGE put a reassuring hand on Ham's shoulder. “Ham, you know very well there is a rational explanation for this,” the bronze man said. “You will feel better about it if you keep that in mind.”

“Yes, that's true.”

“But you think there was something in the apartment?”

“I'm sure of it. Monk was sure of it, too, before he got the idea I was pulling a trick on him.”

Ham described the things which had convinced him there was a presence. There had been sounds, he was certain, of breathing and of slight movement, the sort of noises which—for example, a man—could not help making although he might be trying to maintain a stealthy silence.

Several times, Ham believed, he had caught the odor of tobacco smoke, the odor which clings to the clothes of men who smoke. Ham didn't smoke, nor did Monk, and Ham was sure no one had been in the parlor recently who smoked.

“But it gets me down! The way Monk sounded when he cried out that last time, as if—as if—well—it couldn't have been worse.”

“This last cry of Monk's came from the hall?”

“Yes.”

“You ran out there, of course. What did you find?”

“Nothing!” Ham said hollowly. “Doc, what do you suppose happened?” Ham's hands were tied together, and pale. Moisture stood on his forehead. “Doc, I'm getting more worried each minute.”

“The locked room angle is getting you, isn't it?”

“Yes. And the whole thing—”

“We will go downstairs and see how they left the apartment house.”

The apartment house doorman clucked sympathetically when he saw them, and said, “I hope Mr. Mayfair wasn't seriously ill.”

Ham was dumbfounded. Speechless.

Doc Savage asked the doorman, “What are you talking about?”

“Why, Mr. Mayfair looked pretty bad when they took him out. He was unconscious,” the doorman said. “They had to carry him.”

“When was that?”

“Nearly an hour ago.”

Ham exploded, “An hour! That would be about when Monk disappeared!”

Doc asked, “How many men were carrying Monk?”

“Two.”

“Can you describe them?”

The doorman seemed to think the description he gave was an excellent one. As a matter of fact, it would fit half the male pedestrians going past on Park Avenue. It was all about color and cut of suits, hats, shoes, shirts. It was a fine description, if the men didn't change clothes.

“Did one of them have yellow eyes?”

“I didn't—well, I don't think so, Mr. Savage.”

“Did they put Monk in a car?”

“No, a taxicab. They used Charlie Beets' cab. There's Charlie yonder. I see he's back.” The doorman pointed.

TAXI driver Charlie Beets gave them a square-faced grin and got rid of the cigarette he was smoking.

“I'm waiting for a fare,” he said. “Can't take you gentlemen.”

Ham told him, “Information is what we want. Do you know Monk Mayfair?”

“Monk—who?”

“Never mind. About an hour ago, two fellows put an unconscious man in your cab.”

“Oh, them! Sure.”

“Where did they go?”

“House down in the Village.”

“Remember the number?”

“No. But I could go there again, because it was right around the corner from the Village branch of a bank where I do business, only I keep my dough in the uptown branch.”

“That,” Ham said, “is fine. You've got to take us there.”

The taximan became quarrelsome. “Got!” he said. “Listen, brother, today in this world there's too many people telling other people they got to do things. Me, I don't got to do nothing, because this country is still ten per cent free.”

Doc Savage put in quietly, “What Mr. Brooks meant was that we need your help very badly. You see, the unconscious man was a friend of ours who is in a little trouble. We want to find him.”

“You guys cops?”

It was easier to admit being police detectives than to give long explanations. Technically it was true they were police officers, because both Doc and Ham had honorary commissions which had been given them in recognition of services in the past.

To convince the hacker they weren't deceiving him, Doc exhibited his police commission card.

“That's different.” The hack driver was satisfied. “Me, I'm with the law all the time. I'll take you down there. But what about the other guy?”

“What other guy?”

“After I unloaded my fares in the Village, they gave me five bucks extra and said to come back here and wait for another guy who would need me. They told me to wait here. Said the other fare I was to pick up would know me.”

Ham exploded, “They sent you back here to wait! That's funny!”

Doc said, “You had better take us to this place in the Village.”

“Whatever you say,” the driver agreed, obviously a little bit scared. “I didn't mean to be quick-tempered a while ago,” he apologized, “I pop off too soon, sometimes, I guess.”

DOC SAVAGE and Ham Brooks were silent as the cab moved downtown. The same thought was in both their minds. Why had Monk been carried out openly? Why had a cab from the regular stand in front of the apartment been used? Why had the cab been sent back with orders to wait?

Ham grimaced, pulling thoughtfully at his lower lip with thumb and forefinger. Suddenly, as he considered the situation, the cold feeling of danger was with him again. For a moment, when they had learned Monk had been carried out of the apartment house, Ham had been amazingly relieved. Relief had spurted up without sense. There had been nothing, actually, to be relieved about, because Monk was obviously in strange trouble. The impression of danger plagued Ham again, and again he was as worried as he had been at any time in the apartment.

Doc Savage said, “They left too plain a trail when they took Monk away.”

“That idea is bothering me, too,” Ham agreed grimly.

“Not satisfied with packing Monk out boldly and putting him in a cab with a driver the doorman knew, they sent the cab back to wait.”

“Do you think there was another man the cab was supposed to pick up at the apartment house, as they told the driver?”

“Do you?”

“No.”

The day was no longer brilliant with sunlight. Clouds, moving from the west and southwest, were coming in over the city and thickening. There had been crispness of spring in the earlier part of the day, but now the lightness had been stilled, and the air was dank, sultry, sullenly promising a storm.

“It seems a safe conclusion that they wanted us to follow Monk,” Doc said.

“Yes,” Ham said, and was silent a while before he shivered. “Yes, they left too plain a trail. They wanted to be followed. By sending the cab driver back, they practically sent a messenger for us.”

“Ham,” Doc said, “have you and Monk been dabbling around in any trouble on your own? Freelancing?”

Ham shook his head. “We cut that out a long time ago.”

“Then,” Doc said, “you two did not bring this on yourselves? It came out of a clear sky?”

“It was unexpected.” Ham groped for an illustration, said, “As unexpected as a pig with feathers.”

Doc Savage looked at him narrowly.

“Could this be one of Monk's practical jokes?” the bronze man asked.

“I'm sure it isn't,” Ham said.

He had a guilty feeling after he spoke. Could it be a gag by Monk? Ham debated the point uneasily, until finally the strangeness in the pit of his stomach told him it was no trick. Monk's horseplay was always horseplay, you never had to guess.

Suddenly Ham was worried about what they would find when they got to Monk. His fears gathered as evilly as buzzards about his mind.

“We will approach this gently,” Doc Savage said. “It looks like something that was rigged for us.”

THE bank was on the corner. The brownstone house was behind that, and it was one of a row of places, all four stories high, which took up most of the block. They just rode past the intersection, not down the street.

“You don't want to go past the front of the place?” the taxi driver asked.

“No. Two blocks down, then left, and let us out,” Doc told him.

The taxi driver was glad to be rid of them. When he found out they were through with him, his spirits shot up and he babbled a dozen times that if they needed him for anything, just anything at all, don't hesitate to call, then he left as if there was a fire under him.

“The taxi fellow seemed a little bothered.”

“He's got nothing on me,” Ham muttered.

“Want to walk right in the house and create a diversion?”

Ham jumped. He thought about it for a moment. “Think it's safe?”

“Judging from what happened at the apartment,” Doc explained, “they could have taken you as well as Monk. You were there when it happened, so they know you will be alarmed. What would be more natural than that you should find the trail they left and follow it down here?”

“That would be a natural thing for me to do, I guess,” Ham admitted.

“It may be dangerous. Maybe you'd better not.”

“No, I'll go in.”

“Got your mesh vest on?”

“Yes.”

The mesh vest was a really remarkable garment made of an alloy which Doc Savage and Monk Mayfair,

who was a noted chemist, had developed. An undershirt of the stuff, woven after the style of old-time chain mail, weighed only about four pounds and would stop almost any bullet up to a 30-06 military slug.

Doc Savage handed Ham several small grenades. "These three are anaesthetic gas, this one is demolition, and these two are smokers. They might come in handy."

Ham took the stuff. "I hope old Monk is all right."

"I will be on the roof when you go in. Give me ten minutes."

"Ten minutes. Right."

DOC SAVAGE circled the block. The house faced south, and he went around to the west side, where he entered a fruit store. Considering that part of the block as the shape of an L, he was at the top of the L, and the house was at the end of the base. But all in-between houses were four-story.

"Police." He showed the man in the fruit store the commission card. "How do I get to the roof? Just tell me. We don't want any excitement."

"Momma!" the man screamed. He was round, fat, dark, baby-lipped. "Momma, the police!"

His wife, a small and alert woman, came and gave her husband a kick where it seemed to do plenty of good. "Poppa is like a jaybird!" she said. "You want on the roof? That's easy."

The roofs of all the houses were like one roof, with the separating walls ranging from knee-high to waist-high. All the roofs were covered with black stuff, and as thick as a forest with chimneys, radio aërials, clothes-lines.

Doc Savage crawled to a spot where he could watch the house at the end of the L.

He was still watching, and eight of Ham's ten minutes had elapsed, when a man popped out from behind a chimney close to the street parapet of the house. The fellow wore a blue suit. He legged it for a roof hatch.

Doc Savage had been hoping something of the kind might happen. He waited until the blue-suited man popped down the hatch, then Doc began running, vaulting separating-walls, ducking clothes-lines. He made all the speed he could.

It was all of a hundred yards, but the separating-walls were about right for easy hurdling.

When he hit the roof of the house that was important, it was on tiptoes, for silence. He was close to the roof-hatch, which was still open, when he heard a voice.

The voice below, evidently belonging to the lookout, was shouting, "You get him? What happened?"

"Shut up, up there!" someone yelled. "Everything's all right."

"You get him?"

"Sure."

"Was Savage with him?"

“No.”

“What you suppose went wrong? Why didn't he bring Savage with him?”

“When he comes to, we'll ask him,” howled the man downstairs. “Get back up on that roof and keep a watch! That's your job!”

Feet thumped the steep ladder-like steps that led up to the hatch. The lookout was returning to the roof.

Doc searched the neighborhood with uneasy glances. The prospect was nothing to clap hands about. Nowhere within sprinting distance was there a place where he could conceal himself.

Chapter III

THE lookout was muttering as he climbed the sharp steps. What he said was his personal opinion of the man downstairs who wouldn't give a civil answer when a guy was just asking for information. He stuck his head out of the hatch, leaning an elbow against the slanting hinged lid, and glanced about. He fished a cigarette out of a shirt pocket with two fingers, lit it. He did some more muttering, this time about how, if they had the sense of cockroaches—meaning presumably whoever was downstairs—they would keep a man informed about what was going on when they were monkeying around with somebody like that Savage so-and-so.

Then he came out of the hatch, and Doc Savage came up himself from behind the hatch lid. Doc took the man by the throat to shut off his vocal noise, and lifted him so that he couldn't kick anything but the air.

A moment later, Doc's head rang and the rooftops rocked. The lookout knew where to hit with his fists. Doc held on grimly, kept him in the air, and got moving. If they fell and fought on the roof, the noise might reasonably be expected to be heard below. The idea was to get to an adjoining roof. Doc made it, and fell over the wall on top of the fellow.

The man's throat was sufficiently crushed that he couldn't yell with much success. So Doc released him, began hammering at the man's jaw.

The man buried his chin in his shoulder, protecting it. He began kicking. He could kick better than he could hit. Doc fell on him, began working on the man like a Judo wrestler applying pressure to nerve centers which paralyzed the fellow and made him limp in Doc's grasp. The man made sheep-like sounds of surprised pain. He forgot and let his chin get up where it was a target. That was his mistake.

For thirty seconds Doc gave all his attention to listening.

No signs of an alarm.

He stood up, examined his kicked shins, and concluding his legs weren't really broken, decided there was not enough left of his coat to warrant wearing it any longer. He took some stuff out of the coat pockets and put it in his trouser pockets, and used the wreck of the coat to tie and gag the lookout, finishing the job with the man's own belt and trousers.

The lookout's pockets contained four of what had been good cigars, part of a pack of cigarettes, fifty dollars in fives, a six-shooter and part of a box of cartridges.

Doc examined the six-gun. He decided to keep it because it was an old-timer, and there were seven notches cut in the gray bone stock. It looked like a gun that might have had an interesting past.

Doc went to the roof hatch, and descended the steep steps.

HE could hear the slapping sound even when he was on the top floor. The steps brought him down in a closet that smelled of mice. He stepped out of the closet. There was a hall and a series of downward stairways. He went down with suitable caution, listening to the slapping get louder, nearer.

The slapping was intermittent. Four or five whacks, then a pause. The slaps again.

“That’s no way to wake up an unconscious man,” a voice said.

“Sure it is. Don’t you think I’ve had some experience. I got my start in life in the Gestapo, remember?”

The second man spoke English that was perfect without being good. He spoke it in the manner of a man to whom English is not the mother tongue.

“Why not cold water?”

“Messy. You get your hands wet when you start working on them afterwards.”

The slapping resumed.

HAM BROOKS regained consciousness finally. He did not say anything until he could manage words coherently, whereupon he rendered an opinion of the man who had been slapping him, using words that were all to be found in the dictionary, but putting them together so that a mule-driver would have blushed. “And your brother,” Ham finished, “was a deformed goat.”

The man—the spokesman—asked one question. It seemed to floor Ham.

“Do you know how we caught you?” the man asked.

Ham made no reply.

The spokesman was the man to whom English was not a natural tongue.

“You’re a talker, I can tell by the way you told me off,” he said. “Now you sit and listen while I tell you some things.”

“Where’s Monk?” Ham countered.

“The next room.”

“Safe?”

“Enough so for the time being,” the man said. “Shut up. I’ve got some things to say.”

“Say them, then.”

“I’m going to tell you why you and Monk were grabbed,” the man said. “When you know that, you will be able to use your common sense and judgment about whether you cooperate with me. In other words, you will know whether it’s worth it to take the kind of treatment you are going to get if you don’t cooperate.”

At this point, someone, evidently from the street door, said, "There's no sign of anything wrong out in the street."

"We took Monk," the man continued, "thinking you would immediately call on Doc Savage for help. We left a plain trail, so you and Savage could follow it down here. We intended to get hold of Savage. That was our object."

"But you didn't get Savage," Ham said.

"That's right," the man said. "Now we want you to get Savage down here. Get him into our hands."

"You think I'll do that?" Ham asked with the right degree of sarcasm.

"You will when you understand we don't mean Savage any harm. We just want him to have and to hold, as it were."

AT this moment Doc Savage was caught flatfooted—something he tried not to let happen to him often—by a man coming into the hall from a back room. The room was dark, and the newcomer must have been standing there all the time, watching Doc, because he had a drawn revolver.

The newcomer did nothing melodramatic. He just moved slowly and carefully out where Doc could see him, and made sure that Doc did see him. He was a lean man, well-dressed. He could have been an executive.

He wagged the gun. Then he grinned, put a finger on his lips for silence, and indicated the room where the talking was going on. He had plenty of nerve.

The man in the room said to Ham, "We do not plan to harm Savage."

"I imagine."

"A friend of ours—he's not a friend, but we thought he was—is planning to come to Savage for help. We can't stop that, because we can't find this friend. The next best thing is to put Savage out of circulation for a while."

"How do you mean—out of circulation?" Ham asked.

"There's ways. Lock him up in a room and watch him for a couple of weeks. Shoot him full of germs so he'll be too darn sick to mess us up. Or even a mild poisoning."

"Doc wouldn't approve."

"You think he'd approve more of your dead body?"

THE lean, well-dressed, executive-looking man with the gun watched Doc Savage with twinkling amusement. He seemed to be amused at the joke on the man who was doing the talking. But his hand on the gun, brown, muscular, was as much without nervousness as death itself.

Doc Savage had not moved. He watched the gun, listened to the talk. The man holding the weapon was undeniably dangerous, with the quiet and calm of one who knew he could kill, who had no fears or doubts about it.

He stood a dozen feet away. Too far to jump and beat a bullet. There was no rug, so the old trick of upsetting him by jerking a rug was out.

Ham's voice asked, "By any chance, do you fellows have a slight idea of what you're getting into?"

"Savage, you mean?" the other said. "We knew about him before this came up. And then we investigated. We were quite impressed, and I'll add that we don't impress easily."

"Then you know you're biting into something?"

"We can chew it."

"I'd bet you on that."

"Save your money. We've handled bigger ones."

The man with the gun began laughing. His mirth was a silent paroxysm, a gleeful spasm that convulsed his face. His mirth could come from nothing except how startled the men in the other room would be when he sprang his surprise by marching Doc in under his gun.

Then his mirth dropped away. He seemed to give all his thought to the gun he held, to what it could do to the man in front of him. His thoughts were as plain as if spoken.

Twelve feet. One shot. A simple way to put a permanent stop to the interference they feared. He couldn't miss. He lifted the muzzle a trifle. A bullet in the head, in case Doc Savage was wearing a bulletproof vest. It would be so simple.

His lips rolled inward silently, and he cocked the revolver.

"You may know what you're doing," Ham said in the other room. "But the risk you're taking is worth more than marbles."

"You'd hesitate?"

"I would."

"Probably you wouldn't," the foreign-speaking man said. "For what we have at stake, you would do the same thing."

"I think you're a bunch of cheap crooks," Ham said. "Talk doesn't cost you anything."

The other laughed. He was angry, but the mirth sounded genuine.

After he laughed, he said, "For seeing that Savage doesn't molest us for two weeks, I will hand you two hundred thousand dollars in cash. What do you say to that?"

"Two hundred thousand!" Ham exclaimed.

"I hear you fellows in the Savage group usually turn over your windfalls in the way of money to some charity you select. All right, do that with this money."

"Two hundred thousand is crazy talk," Ham said.

"No, no, it is—what is your slang word—peanuts. Believe me, it is," the man said.

The man with the gun was watching Doc Savage, listening to the talk of money. The killing lust loosened

a little on his face. He licked his lips. He made the finger-on-lips motion for silence again. Then he sidled past Doc Savage to the door of the room.

He stood in the door of the room so that those inside could see him, but not his gun, which was pointed at Doc Savage. And his eyes, under his low hat brim, were watching Doc Savage although those in the room would not know that.

He said, "Money, money, money!"

"What is the matter with you, Anthony?" asked the man to whom English was not native.

"How much bonus if I take Savage single-handed?"

"Are you crazy?"

"How much?"

"Are you—"

"How much, dammit, and answer me!"

"A thousand dollars, but—"

"You were just talking two hundred thousand. Raise the ante."

"What's the matter with you, Anthony? Have you gone crazy?"

"Only a thousand?"

"Yes, but—"

"Well, anyway, it's a thousand more than I had a minute ago," Anthony said. He laughed sourly. He told Doc Savage, "Walk in and let them have a look at you."

THERE were four men in the room, although Doc had supposed there were only three—Ham, the questioner, and the other man who had spoken a time or two. But there was a fourth, who was thick and stolid, sitting on a chair with a twelve-gauge pumpgun in his hands.

The room was large, airy, shabby, almost bare of furniture, and Doc Savage walked in. The stolid man with the shotgun came to his feet and leveled the weapon.

"*Cum!*"

yelled the spokesman. "*Este possibile!*"

The man who had brought Doc in began laughing. His mirth was not loud, but it was continuous, elated and ridiculing.

"Shut up!" yelled the spokesman. "Shut up, Anthony!"

The spokesman wore a tan sports coat, the skirts of which flapped as he waved his arms. He had a tan-and-gray figured sport shirt open at the neck and tan trousers. He was tall, homely as a horse, about fifty.

"Stop laughing, you fool!" he shouted at Anthony.

"I found him in the hall," Anthony said.

"You found him—just like that!" The spokesman shook his head dazedly.

"Don't forget the thousand."

"You swindled me, Anthony."

"Call it a business deal."

"Well—uh—all right, I promised."

"Want me to shoot Savage and the other two? I'll throw that in."

The spokesman took a long cigarette holder, ivory inlaid with gold, out of one coat pocket and cigarettes out of another. He seemed to be pondering.

"We won't shoot them immediately," he said. "Just watch them. I'll be back in a few minutes."

He went out.

Doc Savage examined Ham. There was a red thread of blood down Ham's forehead.

"Ham, how did they get you?"

"I don't know. That's the truth." And when Doc's expression seemed skeptical, Ham added grimly, "It was the strangest thing. The door was unlocked, and I walked in. I was being careful. I didn't hear or see a thing. All of a sudden, a sound behind me—I guess it was the swish of a blow—and curtains. I woke up with one of them slapping—"

"I was in the hall by that time," Doc said.

The stolid man with the shotgun had not settled back on his chair. He kept his weapon leveled and watched over it with narrow, purposeful eyes. They were the eyes of a toad, with their intent ferocity. He, like the man Anthony, was one who would take a life without it bothering him too much then or later.

"These fellows aren't exactly deacons in the church," Ham said.

"Not noticeably," Doc agreed.

A man dashed through the room. Evidently he was the front door watchman, and apparently the spokesman had dispatched him to see about the man on the roof.

"I'm to see about Rico!" he shouted, and was gone up the stairs.

Doc asked Ham, "Is Monk in the next room?"

"They said so."

"Monk!" Doc called. "Can you hear me?"

"I wish I didn't," Monk's voice said. "I wish they hadn't caught you. Blast them, they used me for a bait to get you down here."

Doc asked, "How did they take you back at Ham's apartment?"

Monk didn't answer immediately. Then he cleared his throat. "I hate to give you a discouraging answer, but I don't actually know."

"Ham said he heard you cry out."

"If I didn't yell, it was not because I wasn't trying," Monk said. "That parlor in Ham's apartment—there must have been something there after all. Whatever it was must have popped me on the head. Anyway, I was hit. I think I was hit more than once. I woke up here, with the granddad of all headaches."

The man who had gone to the roof came back. He was dragging the roof lookout.

"Look what happened to Rico!" he shouted.

"Is he dead?" asked the man who had made a thousand dollars.

"Seems to be breathing."

The other went over and kicked Rico without malice. "Wake up, Rico," he said. "Wake up, you bum, and I'll thank you for letting a thousand dollars get down to me."

Then the man in the sport outfit returned. He wasn't grinning, but he looked happy. He walked straight to Doc Savage.

"I've got orders not to harm a hair on your head," he told Doc. "Stand still. I'm going to search you."

He got around behind Doc and his hand came up with a blackjack. He hit hard, taking no chances, and Doc fell. Ham began to yell and struggle, but he was tied. The man hit Ham with the blackjack and Ham went loose. Monk was howling by now, so the sport-suited man went in the other room, and in a moment Monk was also silent.

THE man came out of the other room wiping off his blackjack and wiping his hands on the same handkerchief.

"That was easy," he said.

Anthony brought out a huge pocketknife. The big blade flew open when he pressed something.

"You want to borrow this?"

"Say, that thousand has made you helpful, hasn't it. But no, thanks."

"Aren't we going to wind this up the way it should be?" asked Anthony incredulously.

"Yes, but not the way you mean."

"What the hell!"

The man in the sport outfit chuckled. "We need some expense money. I just found that out, when I reported over the telephone. So we're going to get some, and lay the blame on Savage."

Anthony swore. "You can't frame a man of Savage's reputation. It wouldn't stick."

"This will stick."

“Damn the fool we're working for anyway! Why not just use a knife and—”

“And pull all hell down on our heads!” said the sport-suited man disgustedly. “Shut up, Anthony! If Savage should be killed, it would be just like an earthquake. All the police, F. B. I., military intelligence, here in America, in England and Timbuctoo would be looking for us. That's too much of a hornet's nest. It'd be hell, no less.”

Anthony snorted.

“I still say you can't frame Savage for a robbery.”

“Just watch.”

“But his reputation—the police will know in a minute—”

“It'll be more than a robbery, Anthony.”

Chapter IV

THE teller in Cage Two of the Central Exchange Bank was Johnny Cope, a thin, dark young man who was 4F because he had once tried the big ski run at Lake Placid with a loose binding. He could walk naturally if he went slowly, but when he hurried the knee made him limp. Johnny was excitable, but he tried to keep it under control.

Johnny tried to be calm as he spoke to Kiel, the Number Four teller. “Kiel, would you come back to the vault a minute?”

“Something wrong?”

“Just come back to the vault.”

The vault was not large, it was rather gloomy because the main lights were kept switched off when no one was inside. The only illumination came from the illuminating system in the bank proper.

“You see anything, Kiel?”

“No, why?”

“Well, a minute ago, something queer happened. I came into the vault, and I thought I saw something.”

“What?”

“Well, two sort of yellowish spots of something in the air about as high as my shoulder. They looked like a couple of gold pieces hanging in midair. Then they disappeared.”

Kiel laughed heartily. “Great grief! What a story!”

“The spots weren't there after I tried to turn on the lights.”

“You'd better stick to straight gin, Johnny.”

“The lights wouldn't come on.”

Johnny Cope clicked the light switch several times.

“See,” he added. “The lights won't work in the vault.”

“Bulb burned out, probably.”

“Well, it was strange.”

Kiel laughed some more. He said it was strange enough that Johnny had better not tell old Beagle Britches about it. Old Beagle Britches was Mr. Swope, the vice president of the branch. Johnny finally grinned a little, and confessed he'd had the same thought.

“Maybe it wasn't anything but a reflection, or something,” he said.

The two tellers went back to their cages, and were there in time to see the three masked and caped men come in waving revolvers.

“ROBBERS!” a girl screamed. As if anyone needed the information.

One bandit looked very tall and wide under his cape. Another looked wide, but not tall. The third was average.

“Hands up!” one shouted. “It's a stick-up!”

Old Beagle Britches jumped up from his desk, which was only behind a railing.

One of the bandits shot Beagle Britches in the stomach.

“Damn, can't you hit 'em anywhere but in the belly?” asked the wide robber.

“Watch this.”

He shot Kiel neatly between the eyes.

The two murders—Beagle Britches later died—laid the cold fear of death on everyone in the bank. Not a soul moved. Nobody fainted. No one seemed to as much as breathe for the time being.

The three killer-bandits were completely camouflaged by their capes and masks. The capes were not alike, two being made out of different-colored blankets, the third of a blue bedspread. The masks were white, apparently torn from bed sheets. Their size was all that could be told. One very big, one very wide, one medium.

“Who else wants to be shot?” yelled the wide one. He had a squeaky voice.

There were no takers.

The three death-dealing horrors ranged the bank.

They collected currency, ignoring the heavy metal money. They worked fast.

All three of them went into the vault, at the end.

In the vault, they had a fight, apparently. It seemed, judging from what was said, that one of the bandits was caught stuffing money in his shirt. There was loud cursing. There were blows.

One bandit jumped out of the vault, and half closed the door as if trying to shut the other two inside. Then

he changed his mind, and sprang back in the vault again.

There were more blow sounds.

Then there was silence.

During the silence, Beagle Britches moaned steadily and dark fluid seeped between the fingers which he held clenched over his stomach.

Johnny Cope finally ran for the vault, clutching the revolver with which all tellers were armed. He reached the vault door, heaved it almost shut, braced himself against the heavy door.

“Come out!” he said. “I’ve got you covered. Throw your guns out first.”

He got no results.

Finally the vault door was eased back, and three prone figures, draped in capes and masks, were found inside.

“They’re all knocked out!” yelled Johnny Cope.

“Be careful, Johnny!”

“Mr. Swope is dying!” someone screamed.

“They had a fight,” Johnny shouted. “One must have knocked out the other two, then tripped and fell against the vault and knocked himself out!”

“Get a doctor for Mr. Swope!” a woman cried.

“Johnny, be careful, dammit! They may not be out!”

They were out, all right. They were unconscious, all three of them. They lay draped in their camouflage, and two of them had their guns under their fingers, and the third was lying near his weapon.

“Here come the police!” An alarm bell began ringing loudly.

Almost all the male bank employees, with guns in their hands, gathered around the vault.

“Unmask them, Johnny.”

“Careful!”

“That’s two of them.”

“Okay, unmask the big one.”

“Anybody know them?”

“My God!”

The three bandits were Doc Savage, Ham Brooks and Monk Mayfair.

LATER a lieutenant of detectives put down telephone, turned to the crowd in the bank, and announced,

“That was the hospital. Mr. Swope was dead on arrival.”

The news knifed every one of the bank employees. They suddenly realized that they had loved old Beagle Britches. He had been a kindly, serious old fellow, and his intolerance of their small shortcomings had really been his way of looking out for their welfare.

The lieutenant walked over to the grim knot of uniformed men.

“Those so-and-sos conscious yet?”

“Not yet.”

“Got their fingerprints?”

“Yes.”

“Their prints on the guns?”

“No.”

“They never are!” said the detective lieutenant angrily. “People always expect you to find fingerprints on guns. But I don’t know of a case—”

“The big one is waking up.”

“Is he really Doc Savage?”

“Yes.”

“Are you sure?”

“Listen, I’ve heard him lecture on police procedure fifty times. I’ve stood as close as I am to you. I’ve shaken hands with—”

“Sure, sure, I know. Me, too. But I just couldn’t believe it.”

THE inside of the police patrol wagon was clean and hard. Its cleanness had an antiseptic quality, and its hardness was the hardness of sheet steel, and bars, and of the law in its sure and merciless punishment. An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. A life for a life.

“How about the truth?”

“You’ve got the truth,” Doc Savage said.

The uniformed policemen on either side of Doc Savage, handcuffed to his wrists, were nervous and alert. So were the other officers to whom Monk and Ham were fastened.

Black Maria rolled fast, clanging its bell, and the police officer clinging to the rear platform was grim-faced. There was a patrol car ahead, and two squad cars of detectives behind, but no sirens were going.

“We searched that house.”

“You found it as I said?” Doc asked.

“We found it empty.”

“That was to be expected. But you found the house as I said.”

“What does that prove?”

“You talked to the fruit-store man?”

“Yes.”

“He told you I was at his place, asking how to get on to the roof?”

“What does *that* prove?”

“Nothing,” the bronze man said slowly and heavily.

THE migistrates' court was a large, gaunt room, dry with age and tired from the procession of evil that had passed through it in the past. It was a felony court with no jury box and only a platform for a witness stand.

A railing separated the place into a part for the prisoners, the judge, and attorneys, and into another part for the public. The part for the public was a madhouse. Reporters and photographers struggled with each other for good locations. Photoflash bulbs flicked. More reporters fought cops at the door for entrance. A newsreel cameraman was screaming about his sound wires. Shouts, swear-words, confusion.

The judge perspired all the while he was hearing the witnesses.

“Your name?”

“Johnny Cope.”

“You solemnly swear to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth?”

“I do.”

“Tell the story in your own words.”

Johnny Cope was suffering a reaction from what had happened at the bank. His voice kept going shrill, the way a case of nerves affects a voice, and he would go back and carefully repeat when this happened. His testimony strapped Doc Savage, Ham Brooks and Monk Mayfair in the electric chair. But the other testimony had been as bad.

“May I ask the witness a question?”

“Go ahead, Mr. Savage.”

“It is the same question I have asked the other witnesses.”

“I said go ahead.”

“Johnny Cope, at any time prior to the robbery and murders, did you see two yellow spots apparently suspended in midair?”

“I did.”

“When?”

“Just a minute or two before you—the robbers—came in.”

“And where?”

“In the vault.”

“Was the vault brightly lighted?”

“No. There was no light except what came in from the bank room.”

“Did you turn on the lights in the vault?”

“They wouldn't turn on.”

“What became of these two yellow spots?”

“They disappeared. When I looked up from trying to turn on the lights, they were gone.”

“Know anything else about the spots?”

“No.”

“Now, about the bank funds. Did you help gather up the money found in the vault and elsewhere, the money the bandits had collected, and total it?”

“I did.”

“You are aware of the sum of the money recovered?”

“Yes.”

“And you also know the amount of money the bank had on hand?”

“Yes.”

“Was there a discrepancy?”

“Yes.”

“How much money was missing?”

“Thirty-eight thousand seven hundred and twelve dollars and forty-three cents.”

“That missing money has not been found?”

“No, it hasn't.”

“That is all.”

The court indicted Doc Savage, Monk Mayfair, and Ham Brooks for murder and recommended that they be held without bail pending action by the Grand Jury.

Chapter V

THE newsreel cameraman yelled and pushed and got up on a table with his bulky camera. "I want a picture of the mob scene!" he yelled. "Get back!" He was a tall, thin, dark-skinned man with dark hair and a black moustache. He had a snapping Latin look, except for his eyes, which were sort of a vague blue.

Anyway, he was an expert head-knocker and shin-kicker and he got a table all to himself, cleared it of other photographers, and prepared to "pan" the crowd with his camera. The camera was on a tripod, and it was a bulky instrument.

The newsreel cameraman pressed a gadget on the camera and out of the camera shot a stream of spray, like water coming from a hose nozzle.

The camera had an automatic "Pan" attachment—you touched a lever, and a spring motor then moved the camera in a slow swing from one side to the other. It wasn't necessary to hold to the camera. The photographer's hands were free, and he used them to produce three shiny tan-colored balls, which he heaved toward Doc Savage, Monk and Ham.

Doc Savage, Monk and Ham caught the tan-colored balls. They weren't handcuffed, so they could catch the balls. There was a pair-of rubber bands around each ball, and when these were unsnapped, the balls fluffed out and proved to be cellophane sacks.

Doc, Monk and Ham pulled the sacks over their heads. The sacks had elastic around the bottoms, which made a snug neck fit.

The cameraman pulled a sack over his own head.

The camera was still swinging and squirting out liquid in a long stream, and the liquid was vaporizing into gas, and the gas, when it got into eyes and sinus passages, was causing plenty of uproar, temporary blindness, sneezing, tears.

The cameraman left his camera, still turning, to take care of itself. He ran toward a window.

"Doc, what do you say?" he yelled, through the sack.

Doc Savage, Monk and Ham now left the enclosure where they had been seated, vaulted a railing, and joined the tall man at the window.

The tall cameraman had thoughtfully placed two boxes at the window. One box had held the trick camera, which was still squirting gas. The other box proved to hold a sledge hammer and a knotted rope.

"Monk, you're always telling those blondes how strong you are," the cameraman said. "Suppose you demonstrate on this sledge."

"Knock the window bars off?"

"That's right."

"Nothing to it," Monk said.

They were still breathing what air was inside the cellophane sacks, and speaking with the same air, although their voices were muted, and they were running shy on oxygen.

Monk wound up with the sledge, the muscles on his back crawling under his hide like rabbits. *Crash!* And a bolt snapped and one end of a bar flew loose.

“That's one,” Monk said.

Crash!

again.

“That's enough room. Now tie the end of the rope to something, and we're on our way!”

A GIRL and two young men now came out of the crowd and reached Doc, Monk, Ham and the surprising cameraman. The girl was remarkably red-headed. The two men were handsome blonds.

The red-headed girl and the two blond boys had been sitting together. The girl had been near the north side, next to the wall aisle, and the two boys had been immediately behind her. Sitting there, they were among the last to be sprayed by the gas from the “camera,” and moreover they seemed to realize what was happening, because they started for Doc Savage.

The gas had got to them and blinded them partially before they reached Doc. But they retained enough vision to see that the bronze man's group was at the window, smashing a way out.

The girl was the first to reach Doc. Or rather, she reached Monk.

“We came to see you!” the red-headed girl cried.

So had everyone else in the courtroom, Monk thought, tossing aside the sledge.

But then Monk got a look at the red-head, and different things went *wow!* and *bang!* Golly! Here was the kind of a dish you would order for Xmas.

“What did you say?” Monk asked.

“We want to talk to you,” said the girl. “We weren't able to see you before this—”

Ham Brooks came over and whacked Monk alongside the head with his open hand, causing a report which, in the confines of the paper sack, nearly deafened Monk.

“Snap out of it, Romeo,” Ham said. “Are you coming with us, or not?”

Everyone else had clambered out of the window, squeezing between the bars which they had knocked loose, and gone down the knotted rope.

Monk said, “Excuse me, lovely,” to the girl, and went out through the window.

Ham took another look at the girl. He made a whistling mouth, took still another look. The gas had hold of her now, and she was doing some high-speed bawling, but she was still something to make you straighten your necktie.

One of Monk's feminine acquaintances? Ham found the idea very sour.

Ham put his head close to the girl's ear, and said, “Monk Mayfair has a wife and thirteen children, most of them slightly on the dum-dum side. Monk sometimes forgets to tell attractive young women this fact. I thought you might like to know.”

Having told this lie, Ham hastily scrambled out and down the rope, down to where the others were waiting for him in a side street.

“I’ll be superamalgamated—what kept you?” said the long cameraman angrily.

“Never mind. Which way do we go, Johnny?”

“This way,” said the cameraman. “And we had better run like little Indians.”

Midway in the block, from a side door of the arraignment courts building, a policeman appeared. He looked in their direction, produced a gun, shouted at them, “Halt, halt!” And his gun began going *wam! wam!* with thunderous noise in the street. The bullets chipped loose some brick particles, broke a window, and frightened up pigeons for blocks about. Then Doc, Monk, Ham and the cameraman were around a corner.

Monk said, “Somebody ought to tell that guy it’s the custom to challenge three times before you shoot.”

“Thank God nobody told him to shoot a revolver from a rest whenever you can, particularly if excited,” Ham said.

Doc asked, “Why are we running this way?”

“I left a car ahead,” the cameraman said.

They ran a half block with only a minor mishap, which came when Monk got badly out of wind, only to have it dawn on him that he had forgotten to take the cellophane hood off, as had the others. Monk removed the hood sheepishly. His face, which was purple, quickly resumed normal coloring as he breathed oxygen.

“Those sacks,” Monk said, “leave something to be desired as gas masks.”

“Well, they were the best gas masks the dime-store had to offer,” said the cameraman. “Here’s my boat.”

The car was an elderly trap with sad tires. The long cameraman flopped behind the wheel. They got going, the motor sounding like a P40, and the car shaking like a cootch dancer in a carnival.

“Good work, Johnny,” Doc said.

“Thanks,” said the cameraman.

Ham Brooks said, “When I saw you setting up the camera in the courtroom, I didn’t recognize you: That’s a good disguise.”

The “cameraman” was William Harper Littlejohn, eminently known in scholastic and educational circles as a geologist and archaeologist.

Johnny was another one of the group of five assistants who had been working for Doc Savage for a long time.

THE car went north five blocks, west two, then pulled into a closed filling-station, where they hastily changed to another machine, a sedate limousine. They drove south in this, far south into the canyons of Wall Street, where they left that car, and took a laundry truck which was parked in a narrow, smelly niche not far from Fulton Fish Market.

Here Johnny Littlejohn pulled off his black moustache and black wig, and rubbed some stuff on his face

which lightened the Latin tint he'd given his skin. There was already some padding in his clothing—Johnny was an incredibly thin man—but he inserted more. He made himself moderately fat. Then he drove the laundry truck.

“An ultraeffectuated colluctation,” Johnny announced.

Ham laughed at that.

“Good old Johnny!” Ham said, with relief. “When he goes around using small words, you know he's scared stiff as a rail. So it's a relief to hear a big one.”

Johnny grinned faintly.

He said, “First I knew you fellows were in trouble was when I heard on the radio that you were arrested. I figured right away the police would be sure to pick me up as a material witness or something, so I ducked. Renny Renwick and Long Tom Roberts are in China, and I cabled them that the Chinese government might be asked to arrest them for questioning.”

“What about Pat?” Doc asked.

Pat was Patricia Savage, a young woman who was Doc's cousin, and who took it into her head frequently to participate in one of their adventures, usually against their wishes. Pat seemed to enjoy the excitement. But no one else enjoyed her sprees of helpfulness, because, for an unusually intelligent young woman, she could get into remarkable kinds of trouble.

“What about Pat?” Doc repeated, alarmed lest they were in for another round of Pat's helpfulness.

Johnny said, “Well, I forgot to warn Pat, and the police arrested her. They're still holding her in hopes she will disclose the past life of crime that some of the police are beginning to think we have had.”

“Do you think the police will turn Pat loose?”

“Now? Not for a minute.”

Doc looked relieved. He even grinned. “Well, she will not be in our hair,” he said in a pleased tone.

Johnny said, “After I found out where your arraignment would be, I thought of the camera gag. They weren't letting anyone but newspapermen and photographers into the courtroom. I faked some credentials.”

“You did a fine job.”

“It was kind of expensive.”

“How do you mean?”

“That camera cost me seven hundred dollars. I had to use a genuine camera case because the other photographers there would catch on if I doodled together a fake. Bang, went seven hundred bucks.”

“Why didn't you buy a secondhand one?” Monk yelled.

“I did.”

Monk said sourly, “And I'll bet you stole the gas out of my laboratory?”

“Yes, I did,” Johnny admitted. “I used an xylol bromide and diphenylchlorasine concoction on which you have been experimenting for the army. Remember, you showed me the jar of the stuff a couple of days ago? I borrowed it. You had explained that it was a form of tear gas and sneezing gas, and not fatal.”

THEY fell silent. Johnny was driving the little laundry truck slowly, keeping in heavy traffic, and that meant much fitful stopping and starting. Some of the stops were sudden, unexpected. A grab of brakes, a moan from tires. Invariably Doc and the others in the rear were upset, and would start up again with alarm pulling eyes wide and tightening jaw muscles into gray ridges.

Johnny Littlejohn said over his shoulder, “In that package is a little battery radio that will get police calls. We had better listen and find out what they are doing about us.”

All of them, Doc included, glanced sharply at Johnny. The reason, of course, was that Johnny was not using his big words. Except for the one big-worded remark, his speech had been normal. And that, for Johnny, wasn't natural. Ordinary speech out of Johnny was abnormal. Usually he spoke nothing but jaw-busters. His favorite remark when surprised was, “I'll be superamalgamated!” and that was liable to be the simplest word he would speak for hours.

The only thing that would keep Johnny using small words was plain, unadulterated fright.

Doc Savage switched on the radio. He kept the volume low, and tuned the police frequency. The stuff that came out of the radio speaker wasn't soothing.

The police cars were equipped with two-way radio communication, and it was like being in a room with all the prowling police in the city. They were being ordered to stations, or reporting arrival at stations. The bridges were blocked. So were the tunnels. Police were at subway stations, bus stations, the elevated, Grand Central, Pennsylvania Station. The manhunt was on.

“Car thirty-two reporting. Searching all vehicles boarding Staten Island ferry.”

“Calling twelve, signal nine.”

“Twelve, go ahead.”

“Put plainclothesmen on each corner for three blocks around Monk Mayfair's penthouse place.”

“Okay.”

Johnny turned his head. He was pale. “Where can we go?”

Doc said slowly, “We have always worked with the police. They know where each of us lives, all our regular hangouts. The public doesn't know about our warehouse-hangar on the Hudson river waterfront, but the police know about it. Where to go is a problem. Has anyone any ideas?”

No one had any he considered worth offering.

Johnny muttered, “We can't drive around much more. They'll get us sure.”

THE feeling of being hunted grew on them coldly.

Ham tried to break the growing tension.

“Who was your little red engine?” he asked Monk.

“Huh?” said Monk.

“Back in the courtroom.”

“Oh, her,” Monk said. “I never saw her be—”

Monk's jaw fell down, stayed there, slackly astounded, for a moment.

“Blazes!” he yelled. “Wow! Zowie! Hot zing!”

“Here, here, calm down,” Ham said sourly. “She was a package of electricity, I'll admit. But after all, contain yourself.”

Monk waved his arms. “The joke shop!”

“What?”

“The joke shop!”

“You don't say. Now what do you mean?”

“I was thinking I hadn't met that red-headed girl before, but I have.”

“So I surmised when she accosted you in the courtroom.”

“No, no, wait. She was following me around before this thing started.”

“What a nauseating pastime,” said Ham, growing quite interested. “Had you snatched her purse, or something?”

“The two blond guys were with her then, too. It was right after I got shocked by the electric light in your apartment, and figured it was a gag. I got to figuring that if you wanted jokes, I'd give you jokes till the cows came home with their sides splitting, so I went to this joke shop and bought it out, practically. The red-headed girl was in there. I happened to notice her.”

“Happened!” said Ham. “I'll bet that's an understatement. I'll bet it was a raid.”

“You're just jealous.”

“The girl was following you?”

“Well, she was there in the joke shop. And she spoke to me, found out my name, and then walked off. I got the idea—or now I get it when I remember back—that she was afraid the two blond men would overhear her.”

“So you think because she appeared in the courtroom, she was following you?”

“Yeah. Boy, you sound jealous.”

“Why was she trailing you?”

“I can't imagine.”

“Neither can I,” Ham said. “I can imagine you being trailed by whatever is the equivalent of the

dog-catcher for the city zoo, but—”

Doc Savage entered the conversation quietly, but somewhat painfully.

“A few days ago,” Doc said, “wasn't there some discussion about minimizing the frequency and violence of these quarrels with which you two entertain yourselves?”

“Discussion!” barked Johnny from behind the steering wheel. “There was an unanimous agreement to tar and feather them both if they didn't cut it out!”

Monk and Ham looked uncomfortable.

Chapter VI

“YOU can't put an advertisement in a newspaper over the telephone.”

“Go away! I'm not supposed to fuss with you!”

“How you going to pay for it?”

“Pay telephone, silly. Doc says you can drop money in the telephone until the ad is paid for. It's a service they got with the newspapers.”

“I'm supposed to keep the eye open for a cop, am I?”

“Yeah. You stand here by the door.”

The drug store was a small one in a sleepy neighborhood. They entered, and Ham sidled into a telephone booth. He spread small change out on the booth shelf. They'd collected all the dimes and quarters and nickels everybody had, which should be enough.

A wife and thirteen half-wit children wants to talk to a red-head and two blonds. On the hour any hour, in front of the joke shop.

Monk overheard the text of the advertisement.

“You dog!” Monk said. “For years, you've been telling that lie on me about a wife and thirteen feeble-minded offsprings. But how would this red-head know that?”

“I told her,” Ham confessed.

“Where?”

“The courtroom.”

“With our very lives at stake, you stopped to slander me,” Monk said bitterly. “You are a true pal, all wool, fourteen carat, and smelling like a skunk.”

The proprietor of the neighborhood drug store was busy mixing sodas for school kids, and paid them no attention, as far as they could tell. But they couldn't be certain, so they zigzagged over the neighborhood for a while before they got in the laundry truck which Johnny Littlejohn was driving.

“No trouble?” Doc Savage asked.

“No trouble.”

“How many newspapers took the ad?”

“All of them.”

“Good. But do not expect too much of this.”

At four o'clock, thunder was grumbling around in the sky, as if big, sour animals were up there behind the black clouds, making threatening sounds. It had rained about one, and the street still had puddles, and it was sultry. People who got off at four o'clock came out of the office buildings looking tired and ill-tempered. The sidewalk was crowded.

At four-fifteen, Johnny Littlejohn walked around the corner and climbed in the truck. He was scared.

“I saw a newspaper headline,” he said. “The cops are looking for me. They have figured it out that it was me got you out of that courtroom.”

“Any sign of the red-headed girl?” Doc asked.

“No trace.”

“You think you would know her?”

“I got a good look at her in the courtroom.”

“What about the two blond men?”

“No blonds either.” Johnny took out a handkerchief and wiped his forehead. “I'm scared. This is an awful risk. There's only one chance in two that they'll see those ads in the newspapers.”

“We have to take that chance. The red-head and the two blonds are our only lead.”

“You think they are the people who were coming to us for help in the first place?”

“Maybe. And maybe not.”

“My picture is smeared all over the newspapers. 'Johnny Littlejohn, noted archaeologist and geologist, sought by police in bank murders,' it says. It's a miracle somebody didn't recognize me. I'm as conspicuous as a telephone pole.”

Doc Savage glanced at some stuff in the back of the truck. He picked up a small metal case. “This the makeup kit you used on yourself before you raided the courtroom?”

“Yes.”

Doc turned to Ham. “Ham, you know a few words of Hindu, don't you?”

Ham said, “I know *Apki inayat*, which is thank you. And *Salam*, which is good morning. And *Achchha knob mausim, sahiba*, which I think means you are a beautiful girl.”

Monk said, “Depend on you to know that last one.”

“We will make you into a Hindu,” Doc told Ham.

“What'll I do for a turban, a flute and a basket with a snake in it?”

“You will not be quite that kind of a Hindu.”

At five o'clock nothing happened in front of the joke shop.

Ham paraded the sidewalk without incident, except that his hair had a tendency to fly on end every time a policeman strolled past. Otherwise Ham felt fairly at ease. He wore a neat blue suit. The dye had made his skin quite dark, and horn-rimmed spectacles further altered the normal appearance of his face. The blue suit was one of a change of garments which Johnny had thoughtfully stored in the truck before he had entered the courtroom with his gas-squirting camera.

At six o'clock, there was not as much of a crowd.

At three minutes past six, a distinguished, gray-haired gentleman stopped in front of Ham.

“Hello,” he said.

Ham's immediate idea was: Oh my God, here's a cop!

The distinguished, gray-haired gentleman's face had a certain fixed, unnatural expression which indicated both grimness and strain. This, to Ham, was the expression a cop would have when he was collaring a suspect.

“*Salam!*”

said Ham hastily. “*Apki inayat.*”

“Hello there,” the man said.

“*Achchha knob mausim, sahiba,*”

said Ham sweetly. “No spickee ze Engleesh. Hindustani. *Salam!*”

The gentleman thrust a hand in a pocket. Ham's heart went into his shoes, for he thought the man was drawing a gun and probably a police badge.

But it was a picture. A photograph of Ham Brooks, the lawyer, in dapper morning dress. A photograph, not a clip from a newspaper. The man held his hand over an upper corner.

“Who you kidding?” the man asked.

Ham contemplated the photograph. “Not you, apparently,” he admitted.

“You fooled me at five o'clock.”

“Oh! You were here at five?”

“Yes. I saw you. I thought there was something familiar about you, so I went and got the photograph. Sure enough, I guessed right.”

“Police?”

“No.”

Ham's jaw fell. “For crying out loud! Who are you?”

The man uncovered the picture corner. There was a penned inscription.

“Remember that?” he said.

To Edera—With love everlasting, consuming—Ham.

Ham, his memory failing him for the moment, muttered, “Who on earth was Edera?”

“Don't you recall Edera?” the man asked.

“Well,” said Ham. “Uh—hmmm! That is—”

The man's mouth twisted with the appreciation of a joke. He did not laugh. There was no humor. There was just a joke, and his expression showed that he appreciated it.

“Edera would be very affected by the permanence of your memory,” he said. “She thought she made quite an impact on you.”

“Who was she?”

“My sister.”

“I beg your pardon!” said Ham, rather alarmed. “I'm sure I—”

“Oh, I think it is rather funny that you forgot Edera so quickly,” said the man. “She was Edera Mendl, and you met her in Bucharest, before Roumania got into the war.”

Ham's memory clicked. “Ah, Edera, to be sure. At a reception of King Carol's, to which somebody invited me by mistake, thinking I was a diplomat, I met her. A very nice dish—I mean, very charming. Very charming indeed.”

“She was very impressed by you.”

“Ah,” said Ham, pleased.

“She talked about you a great deal.”

“You must tell Monk that,” said Ham. “You really must.”

“Through Edera,” said the man, “I came to feel that I was almost acquainted with you, and with your associate, Doc Savage.”

“Naturally.”

“So that is why I decided to call on you for help when my dilemma came upon me.”

“Oh!” Ham blinked. “So *you* are the one who was coming to us for help.”

“Yes.”

“That,” said Ham, “has been the source of some difficulty.”

“Yes, I—”

“Would you mind walking around the corner?” asked Ham. “It's quieter, and there's a nice laundry truck we can lean against while we talk.”

THEY leaned against the truck. Johnny Littlejohn did a dozing act behind the wheel, not knowing what was what, hence acting as if he was asleep, and keeping enough of his face covered not to be recognizable.

“Mr. Brooks, I am sorry my enemies found out that I planned to call on you for help.”

“You know what they did?”

“I surmise they caused your present difficulty with the police.”

“That's putting it mildly.”

“I am most sorry.”

“You saw the newspaper advertisements?”

“No. It was Doris Day.”

“Who?”

“The red-headed girl. Doris Day. A remarkable young woman.”

Ham said, “Maybe we had better start at the beginning, because I have a hunch this is going to be a long and interesting story.”

The man glanced about. “I do not think it wise to stand here,” he said.

“Let's get in the truck.”

“No.”

“The truck might be a better spot than you think.”

“No, I couldn't do that.”

Ham discovered two policemen on the street corner. One was a mounted cop, the other a patrolman. This guy is a phony! Ham thought. They've got the neighborhood surrounded with police! This is a trap.

Turning slowly, Ham hunted for other police. He saw none, but he was not soothed. The New York police weren't hooligans when it came to a thing like this. Ham visualized the vicinity infested with cops who looked like paperboys, fruit peddlers, taxi drivers, and ordinary pedestrians.

“What do you expect to do?”

“I want to meet Doc Savage and talk with him.”

“You want Doc's help?”

“That's it.”

“What on?”

“On a matter,” said the man, “which you will find is truly astounding.”

“That says a lot,” Ham said, “without saying anything.”

“There is a policeman on the corner.”

“So I noticed.”

“It isn't wise to stand here and talk.” The man extended the photograph of Ham. “On the back of that is a pencil sketch of a map. A meeting place is plainly indicated. Also a time. I will meet you there.”

He started away.

“Have you got a name?” Ham demanded hastily.

“Jan Mereschal.”

Chapter VII

THERE was no excitement as Jan Mereschal walked off and left the laundry truck, although if Ham's disgust had been noise, there would have been uproar louder than the thunder which still bumped around in the darkly tormented sky.

Finally Monk's enraged voice came out of the truck, saying, “You overdressed shyster! Why didn't you grab him and hold him?”

“There are two cops at the corner, as big as mountains,” Ham said.

“What did he hand you?”

“My picture.”

“That's a great gift!” said Monk, further angered.

“It's got a map on it.”

“Well, get in here, and let's see it.”

“There's too many cops. I'll walk a few blocks. You fellows pick me up later, if everything looks all right.”

It turned out that Ham was unnecessarily alarmed about the danger from the police. No one trailed him, and none of the patrolmen whom he passed during five minutes walking paid him the least attention.

The thumping of the elements in the sky became particularly violent, rising to a climatic cacophony, with lightning unleashing great stabs, and soon a flurry of very large raindrops fled down out of the uproar. It rained like a fury for a few minutes.

“You might have picked me up before I got soaked!”

“Get in, and shut up. You were the one hollering wolf!”

“A wolf in sheik's clothing,” Monk said. “How appropriate.”

“He's a Hindu, not a sheik,” Johnny said.

“You fellows want to look at this map?”

“Ah-hah, the wolf’s map!”

“Not on my picture! The other side, you fool!”

“Ah-hah, the back of the wolf’s map. I always wondered what was behind a wolf’s puss, and now—”

“I thought this ribbing was to stop!” Ham yelled.

The elation—they were all happy because they were making progress—was a pleasant change. For hours they had ridden around in the deepest gloom. The police were looking for them. Fantastic things had happened to them, and they hadn’t the least idea why. Or how. Or who. Murder charges against them. Probably the police had orders to shoot on sight.

Now, a winner! A long shot had come in. Only a small part of the population of New York City read want-ads. At least, everybody didn’t read them. So there wasn’t too much chance that the right people would see the ads they had inserted. It hadn’t been a hopeful outlook. Now it was. Now they were getting somewhere.

“A superrejuvenated colligation of oblectation,” said Johnny Littlejohn, happily.

“Eh?” said Monk. “That one got away from me.”

“He means,” said Ham, “that he’s a starving hound who just smelled a thick steak.”

“That’s not a literal translation,” said Johnny. “But the general idea.”

Monk examined the map. “Hey, look, fellows! This is out of town!”

“Which direction?”

“South shore of Long Island, darn near out to Southampton.”

“What time?”

“Ten o’clock tonight.”

“This,” said Ham, “looks a bit strange, doesn’t it?”

THEY were stopped going over the bridge. They had expected that. Doc, Monk, Johnny, were inside large laundry sacks in the rear, and there was more sacked stuff stacked on them. Ham was driving, Doc had done a new job on his make up.

“Let’s see your draft card, Buddy.”

“What’s going on?”

“We’re looking for some guys. Carlos Spendeza, eh? What you got in there, Carlos?”

“Laundry.”

An officer opened the back, looked at the bundles, reached into the pile, hauled out one, and pinched it.

“Okay. Go ahead.”

Ham drove on. He took Grand Street, turned right on Bushwick. Later he hit the Sunrise Highway.

“Ham.”

“Yes?”

“Where'd you get that phony draft card?”

“It was a fake Johnny had fixed up. Boy, it's a good thing they didn't ask me for that other thing, your registration certificate, because that one's got your description on it.”

It began to rain again. This time there was no thunder, no lightning, and the rain came down gently, and kept coming. It fell in oyster-juice strings, steadily, monotonously, and the windshield wiper wouldn't work. Ham got out to fix the wiper, and while he was doing that, a police radio car pulled up alongside with the demand, “Something wrong?” Ham said, “Fixing the wiper,” and everyone held their breath, but the police car went on.

They followed Sunrise through towns where streetcar bells clanged and horns honked, and for long stretches where there was no sound but the boil of water underneath and beating of the rain against the top and sides.

Doc and the others rode with their heads out of the laundry sacks, ready for a quick duck and pull the sacks shut, if they were stopped.

Uneasiness was riding their minds again. They were nervous, disturbed about the future. The rain helped. It was depressing.

“Doc, this could be another trap,” Ham said.

“Naturally.”

“Why should that fellow want to meet us way out on God's lost end of Long Island? That place he's got marked on the map is about as remote as you could get around here.”

THREE times Ham stopped at roadside places and bought sandwiches which he brought out and distributed. To buy enough sandwiches for everyone at one spot might have aroused suspicion.

It was natural they should talk over what had happened. Monk did more talking than the others. He was the more nervous.

Monk told about his experience seeing the two yellow spots in Ham's apartment parlor. Monk spoke slowly, squinting his eyes and remembering little things, trying to recall a small item that might mean something. He finally had to go on past the part where he had been knocked senseless by something and carried downtown, without explaining anything they didn't already know.

He kept talking, covering the mishap in the house when Doc had been captured, and the bank affair. That part was simple. They had simply been unconscious until they had awakened in the bank, with police all around them, being accused of two murders.

“They did a perfect job on us, didn't they?”

“There were the two yellows spots the teller, Johnny Cope, saw in the vault,” Ham said.

“And the thirty-eight thousand and some dollars that were missing,” Johnny reminded.

“Oh, our tough friends—the one in the sport suit, and Anthony and Rico and the others with him—got that,” Monk said.

Doc Savage said, “They robbed the bank, of course, and tried to get us out of their way by saddling the blame on us.”

“But how the devil did they do it? Nobody saw us taken into the bank. All anyone saw was three robbers walk in wearing those capes and masks. The robbers fitted us for size. We know darn well they weren't us, because we were unconscious at the time.”

Ham said sourly, “You got something there, yes you have! Between the time we were knocked senseless in the house, and the time the bank was robbed was not much more than an hour. The house was right around the corner from the bank. But the bank was open and doing business the whole time—so how did they get us in the vault?”

“When you explain that,” said Monk, “you can tell me how the bandits got out again, after they put their capes and masks on us, and staged that fake fight in the vault.”

“You figure the fuss in the vault was fake?”

“Sure. They made the bank employees think there was a row, and all three bandits got knocked out. It accounted for us being found senseless.”

“I guess so. It was slick.”

“Yes, but how did the real bandits get out without being seen?”

“They got out with thirty-eight thousand in dough, too.”

Ham said, “Trapdoor in the vault, maybe.”

Monk snorted. “Sure. Trapdoor in your apartment, too, huh?”

“There wasn't—”

“There wasn't any in that vault, either,” Monk growled. “Banks don't furnish their vaults with trapdoors.”

THE rain fell endlessly. It didn't seem to come down fast, but water was over the road in many places. Ham, at the wheel, had to drive slowly, shoving his head out into the rain to search for the pavement.

Doc Savage said quietly, “The way it stands, we are sure to be tried and convicted of murder on circumstantial evidence.”

It was dark, had been dark for the last hour. The night was intensely black and to make things more disagreeable, one of the headlights went out, setting Ham to complaining endlessly about the difficulties of driving. The light from the one headlamp, hitting the water-sheeted pavement, was reflected back past the driver on to the ceiling of the laundry truck, making a cadaverous grayish shadow that was never still.

Ham paused and used a flashlight to examine the map on the back of Ham's photograph, then compared

it with a highway map of Long Island. He grunted, drove on, and soon took a side road that was chocked, rough, wetter than the highway.

"If there's anything I hate," Monk complained, "it's a bull without a tail."

"What are you talking about?" Johnny sounded quarrelsome.

"The reason for this happening," Monk said. "There's got to be a reason, hasn't there? What's behind it? What's going on? What's cooking?"

"I suppose you have some ideas?"

"No. And usually I have ideas, too. Here I am, with no ideas. Here we all are, with a bull by the tail and can't let go. And we can't find any bull attached to the tail."

"You started out by complaining about a bull without a tail," Johnny grumbled.

"Sure."

"It's got a tail, because we've got hold of it. What you meant was a tail without a bull."

Ham said angrily over his shoulder, "That is very brain-heavy philosophy you fellows are spouting, I must say."

"A tail without a bull," said Monk. "That's what I meant, sure."

The truck bumped along, shoving through water, at times wandering blindly off the pavement with one or two wheels. Once there was a great clap of thunder in the north, the noise seeming out of place because there had been none for a long time. And at last Ham stopped the truck.

"Place is about half a mile ahead," he said. "I vote that we get out and swim."

IT wasn't quite swim. The water was about ankle deep. Monk got into some bushes, and got gouged, then jumped around and fell into water up to his neck.

"What kind of a blank-dash place is this?"

"I forgot to tell you I pulled off the road behind some brush. We're on a creek bank."

They found the road. It was black-topped, so they could follow it by keeping their feet on something solid.

"Stay here," Doc Savage said. "But spread out. The light from the car may have been seen by somebody who wouldn't care for our company."

"You going on alone?"

"Yes."

Monk said, "I'd like to go along."

Doc Savage walked away without seeming to have heard Monk. He vanished in the darkness and the sloshing rain. Monk was neither surprised nor offended, because it was a habit of the bronze man's to seem not to hear an unwise suggestion or a dumb argument that was made when the going was tense,

dangerous. Monk and the others arranged a warning signal—the croak of a frog, which they thought quite appropriate—and scattered and settled down in the rain to wait.

Doc moved slowly, alertly. The road, he found, had an earth shoulder on either side thickly furred with brush, and beyond that a deep ditch brimming with water. The water was salty when he tasted it, indicating they were close to the sea. What lay beyond the ditches he could not tell. But the ditches made it necessary to follow the road.

He got a long and very slender stick, stiff enough to carry a sensitive warning to his fingers if it touched anything, and held it in front of him, vertically, as he advanced. If anyone was watching the road, the only sure way they could do it, in the darkness and the rain, was to have something stretched across the road.

When the feeler-stick encountered something, he stopped, stood alert and tight for a while, then explored down the stick and found a stretched cord. Fishing line, it felt like.

He followed the line to the left with his hands, very carefully, and discovered the cord tied to nothing more exciting than a small tree trunk.

But at the tree trunk was the remainder of the ball of fishing line; they had just looped the line around the tree and tied it, left the remainder.

Doc broke the ball of line free from the remainder. He carried it out to the middle of the road, tied the end to the trap-line, then carefully retreated.

There was almost no wind in the black, leaking night. The rain fell straight and heavy, making a steady frying sound as it landed on leaves, pavement and water-filled ditches.

Doc jerked the cord.

A girl's voice said, "Mr. Savage!"

MINDFUL of what a gun might do to him if he spoke—one can shoot at a sound with remarkable accuracy, particularly after a little practice—Doc was silent.

The girl let about thirty seconds pass.

"Mr. Savage!" she said. "Please! I want to talk to you before they do!"

She sounded anxious enough to be genuine.

Doc kept silent. Was she the red-headed girl? Were guns waiting to fire at his voice? It was a ticklish spot.

He took a chance. He kneaded his throat muscles for a few moments with his hands, loosening them, carefully brought a ventriloquial voice out of the depths of his throat. There is no such thing, as a ventriloquist "throwing" his voice to a definite object. The method consists of speaking with a different-sounding or a distant-sounding voice, and focusing the onlooker's attention on a likely source. All he could do now was use a distant-sounding voice.

"Who is with you?" he asked. "What is the idea?"

His ventriloquism was good. It was as good as he had ever done in practice.

“Are you Mr. Savage?”

“Yes.”

“I guess you are. I heard your voice in the courtroom.”

“Are you the red-headed girl?”

“Yes. I want to talk to you.”

“You alone?”

“Yes.”

Doc was moving toward her, a step at a time. “Have you got a gun?” he asked with his far-away voice.

“No, I’m scared to death of the things,” she said.

“Walk north,” Doc said. “And do not yell, no matter what happens.”

In a moment, he heard her move. She went past him, so close that he could hear the different sound of the rain rattling on her raincoat. There was no one else with her.

“All right,” he said, and took her by the arm.

She gasped, gave a nervous jerk to get away, but after that she was quiet, silent.

He asked, “You think it safe to use a flashlight?”

“No,” she said. “But if you want to see my face—wait.” She had a flashlight, and she first billowed her raincoat around her face, making a sort of shelter for her face, then turned the light on her features briefly.

She was the red-head. The little red engine, as Ham had called her. She had created quite a commotion with Monk and Ham, and she was worth it.

“I don’t want Jay and Nat to see the light,” she said, extinguishing the flash.

Doc tried a guess. “Jay and Nat the two blond men?”

“Yes. They’re over by the beach waiting for you, for Mr. Mereschal, and for something else that is going to happen.”

Chapter VIII

THE last part of her statement—something else going to happen—was as impressive as the crack of a whip.

“What,” Doc asked, “is going to happen?”

“Wait a minute,” she said. “I’m a detective.”

“Detective?”

“Well, maybe not a real one. I work for the Corwin-Jones Detective Agency, in the office, and now and then they actually let me do shadowing or roping work, on simple divorce cases.”

“Who is the Corwin-Jones Agency?”

“Nat and Jay. Jay Corwin and Nat Jones.”

“They're the whole Agency?”

“Yes. But don't laugh. They're good.”

“Young men, aren't they?”

“Twenty-five and twenty-eight.”

“How did the army miss them?”

“Oh, they're Swiss. Swiss citizens. They came to the United States before the war started, and hadn't taken out naturalization papers.”

Doc Savage said, “Let me have the story. And make it brief.”

“Nat and Jay,” she said, “are mixed up in something terrible. It started when this Mr. Mereschal came and hired them to be his bodyguards. They thought it was a soft job. But it has turned out to be awful.”

“Are you Swiss?”

“No, I'm from Des Moines, Iowa.”

“What did this job of bodyguarding Mereschal turn out to be?”

She was silent. Then she sounded uncertain. “I don't know if I should tell you.”

“Why not?”

“Well, it might—I would be meddling.” Now she was both uncertain and scared. “They—Nat and Jay—told me to go home and act as if nothing had happened, and come down to the office in the morning as if nothing was wrong.”

There came, from quite close in the darkness, the kind of a sobbing sound that a shoe would make being pulled out of the mud. Doc Savage faced the sound. He went to his knees in case someone came swinging.

A voice in the wet black said, “Why didn't you go home, Doris?”

“Oh, Nat!” She was genuinely surprised.

“How did you get out here?” Nat demanded.

“I—I borrowed Jay's car. It was an awful drive and I—well—Jay's car slid off in a ditch about a mile up the road. It went clear out of sight in the water.”

“Doris, you poor kid!” Nat said.

Another voice, obviously Jay, said, “Don't feel bad about my car, Doris. Those things happen.”

Doris said they were awfully sweet and patient with her, and both blond boys clucked and cooed and said it was nothing. Jay seemed actually pleased that she'd wrecked his car. It seemed to give him an excuse to be more generous than Nat.

“Weren't you talking to somebody, Doris,” asked Nat.

“Never mind, Jay,” said Nat. “I've got him located now.” He lunged and got hold of Doc Savage. “I've got him!” he yelled.

Nat had Doc's right leg. He gave a quick whirl and twist calculated to break the leg. Doc knew the trick, went down and over with it, but was plenty hurt anyway. He was fortunate enough to get a grip on one of Nat's ears. They fought in the mud and water and bushes a moment, Nat whistling with pain.

“Help me, Jay!” Nat yelled. “It's Doc Savage!”

“MERESCHAL!” Jay shouted. “Mr. Mereschal! Can you hear me?”

There was silence, except for the fight noises.

“Don't — stand — there!” gasped Nat. “Help me!”

“I thought he might have brought Mr. Mereschal with him,” said Jay.

“Oh, damn!” wailed Nat. “He's tearing me to pieces!”

Jay said confidently. “We'll see about that!” and fell into the fray. He was full of this-won't-take-but-a-minute.

It began to sound like a dog-cat fight in a rain barrel, although Doc wasn't making any of the growlings or yowlings.

Doris cried, “Mr. Savage, don't you dare hurt Nat and Jay!”

Hurting Nat and Jay was a job for a full-grown lion. The pair were the toughest commando fighters Doc had ever encountered. Worse, they functioned as a team. Everything they did was calculated to break a bone or tear a ligament.

Doc Savage, not knowing the reason for the fight, was at first inclined to be lenient. He intended to do no more than was necessary to overcome them. But his best wasn't going to leave much left over, he soon discovered.

“Mr. Mereschal!” Jay yelled.

“Mereschal!” echoed Nat.

Both of them got possession of Doc's right arm and hand, and did their best with it. Doc, aware of the importance of his fingers in doing surgery, fought them furiously.

Doris said, “I don't think Mr. Mereschal is around.”

“Maybe Savage brought him,” said Jay.

“Why would Mr. Savage do that? Didn't Mr. Mereschal plan to come out here by himself?”

“That was the plan.”

“But he didn't come,” said Nat, puffing.

“We figured Savage maybe caught him and held him by force,” said Jay. “Ouch! For God’s sake, Nat! Get him loose from my leg!”

They flopped around. They went end over end through the brush, landed in water, sank. The water was cool and brackish. It was at least eight feet deep in the ditch, which was more of a canal. Doc had plenty of breath when he went down.

Doc devoted his efforts now to keeping them on the bottom. When one would let loose, with the idea of going to the top for air, Doc would grab him, haul him back. Soon Nat and Jay were devoting all their time to trying to get away.

Finally Doc came to the top with them.

He was aware of considerable roaring sound in the night.

“You two want to behave yourselves?” he shouted, when Jay and Nat had their heads above the surface. He didn’t give them a chance to answer. He ducked them immediately, put at least one of them under while he was still trying to get air. He let them up. “How about it?”

“Don’t—drown—us!” Jay gasped. Nat was strangling.

They tried to swim for the bank. Doc jerked them back. “Let me search you!” he said.

He found an assortment of revolvers, two apiece, and let these sink. He let a blackjack go down, and something that felt like an old-fashioned coin purse of leather that was large enough, and sufficiently filled with silver, to serve as another blackjack.

The roaring sound, getting louder, became a plane.

THE plane, a multi-motored titan, had the sound of thunder and giants. It became a monstrous thing with a sound out of this world, so mighty that the earth seemed to vibrate, from the direction of the sea.

Doc Savage shoved Nat and Jay at the bank. They were two soaked, drooping crows.

“You two work for Mereschal?” Doc asked.

“Yes.”

“What are you doing out here?”

“Mereschal told us to come out here, and he would meet us.”

“Didn’t he meet you?”

“No. He was to be here an hour ago. He didn’t show up.”

“What happened to him?”

“We thought you got him?”

“Why,” asked Doc, “should I grab Mereschal?”

That confused them.

“We thought—” said Jay, and stopped.

“We didn't know what to think,” said Nat.

They sounded genuinely bated, and scared, and depressed over being defeated.

The plane boomed closer, as noisy as any devil from another universe.

And up the road, from the direction of the main highway, car headlights appeared. They came suddenly, as the car turned a bend in the road not more than two hundred yards away.

Monk and Ham and Johnny were caught running down the road. They were taken completely by surprise, outlined in the light.

The car approached. Monk and Ham and Johnny stopped in the road. They were confused. They kept shading their eyes with arms or hands, trying to keep back the glare of the car headlights. If they couldn't see anything, neither could the occupants of the car, because of the thick rain.

Then out of the car came gunfire. Against the background moan of the great plane above, the reports sounded small. *Pip, pip, pip!* as if cap pistols were going off.

Monk and Ham and Johnny stopped being confused and took to the ditch. They went in head-first, and swam underwater.

“Jay,” Nat said. “Who can it be in the car?”

“They must be the men of whom Mr. Mereschal has been so afraid,” Jay said.

The plane went on. It was not going fast for such a ship, possibly a hundred and fifty miles an hour.

Out of the plane cabin came a string of sparks which arched, blossomed a flower of colored fire. A rocket shell. A signal.

THE car had stopped. Men piled out, two on one side, three on the other. They seemed to have only small arms, pistols and revolvers. They were watching for Monk, Ham and Johnny, searching the ditch. They prowled up and down the bank, guns ready.

Doc hauled Doris, Nat and Jay down in the brush beside the road. They had not been discovered.

Doc said, “We seem to be mixed up in a general get-together.”

“Yes,” Jay agreed. “It looks that way.”

Nat said, “Mr. Mereschal just told us to come out here.”

“He say why?”

“He just said something was going to happen here, and he would need us, and to be ready for trouble.”

“That all you know?”

“Yes.”

“Do you trust me?” Doc asked.

“Not too much,” Jay admitted.

Doc said, “Those are my friends in the ditch yonder. Do you want to give me a hand helping them, or shall I rap you over the head and leave you lying here?”

The two blonds were silent for a while.

“We’ll be neutral,” Nat said.

“All right,” Doc told them. “But one move against me, and there will be no fooling. Keep out of sight. Those men in the car want to shoot somebody.”

Doris, in a squeaking voice they could hardly hear, said, “God, I’m scared!”

The plane had not gone away. It was swinging back, circling out over the sea in a long sweep.

At the car, a man began shooting. He fired rapidly from a crouch, four times, then stopped. Doc could see him, still crouched, waiting, watching. Then he cursed. He had put his lead into a piece of floating wood. His profanity was not English.

“Mr. Savage!” Jay called softly.

“Not so loud.”

“Did Mr. Mereschal ever find you and talk to you?”

“He found me. He didn’t do any talking. He told me to meet him out here.”

Jay moved over to Nat. They talked in a low voice. Doris kept close to them, not acting as if she wanted to listen, but as if she was very frightened and their closeness was a comfort.

Doc Savage lay in the water and mud and beat his brains together. He thought of a dozen ways to help Monk, Ham and Johnny. None of them would work. All of them would get him shot.

Monk and the others might be able to stay hidden under the bushes along the deep roadside ditch-canals. They weren’t under water still, if they were alive. They were under the bushes. Any moment, one of them might be located. That would mean a bullet in the head.

The plane came back. It was lower and louder, a devilish bedlam of power in the soaked sky. Its landing lights poked out a pair of fat white fingers.

Then the armed men got back into the car. From their haste, it was a good guess they had decided they didn’t have any more time to waste.

THE car approached slowly, coming down the road. Two of the men on one side had gotten into the machine. On the other side, all three were standing on the running-board. When the car passed, they had their backs to where Doc crouched, motionless, in the black bushes. Doc had his eyes on Nat, Jay and Doris. But they didn’t move. Plainly, they didn’t consider the occupants of the car their friends.

Then the plane dropped a parachute flare.

The brilliance was fabulous. It was obviously a military flare, designed to be dropped from a bomber to illuminate a whole military objective. The plane wasn’t over five hundred feet up, so the flare was low

enough to give its whole effect. It was like the glare of a giant photo-flood bulb directly in their eyes.

The car driver was blinded. He stamped on the brake and his car stopped. The three hanging to the running-board were dislodged, sent sprawling.

Doc Savage—later he realized he must have been half-crazy with the idea that Monk, Ham or Johnny might have been killed back there in the ditch—came up and rushed. It wasn't many yards to where the driver, blinded by the flare, had stopped the car until he could see where the road lay.

Doc fell on the three who had fallen off the running-board. Through his narrowed eyes, he could see enough. One had lost his gun. The other two had theirs. Doc clubbed one with a fist. It was as simple as dropping a bull with a sledge-hammer. He got the man's gun, clubbed the second and third down. There was nothing to that, either. But this was the easy part. There would be at least two more in the car.

He opened the front door, and went in after them, swinging at stomachs so as not to break his hands. He doubled one man over, but the fellow got Doc's arm, and held it. Doc wrenched. His muddy feet slipped on the pavement, and he did no good whatever for a moment.

The second man on the front seat, alarmed, tore at the opposite door. He got out.

Jay and Nat were there waiting for him. Jay wrapped arms around him, held him. Nat got around in front, stepped up on the running-board for height, and kicked the held man's jaw. The jaw changed shape and the man, when Jay took away his arms, fell slackly.

The plane was moaning away in another great circle. It was blooping its motors now, sending great throbbing peals of sound.

Doc still held the gun he had picked up. He held it ready for Jay and Nat.

“Thought you fellows were neutral?”

“We talked it over,” Nat said.

“And changed our minds,” added Jay.

Doris ran up. She grabbed Nat, clung to him for a moment, then rushed to Jay, as if undecided which was the better protector.

“I wonder if that's all of them?” asked Nat.

He jerked open the back door of the car, looked inside, squinting.

“Nothing but some junk,” he said. “We got them all.”

Doc made a mistake at this point, although he didn't realize it until later. He could have examined the rear of the sedan himself.

“DOC! Doc!” a voice yelled.

That was Ham Brooks. He was running down the road toward them. Johnny was a few paces behind him, and Monk was climbing out of the ditch, at the same time trying to unhook a thorny bush in which he had gotten tangled.

Doc dragged the five unconscious men, with the help of Nat and Jay, around to the side of the road in front of the headlights.

The parachute flare hit the water and exploded a moment later, but the prisoners were lying where the headlamps lighted them.

“You think they saw the scramble from the plane?” Nat asked.

“Not in this rain,” Doc said.

Ham, Johnny and Monk arrived.

“Brothers, those guys sure shot before they asked questions!” Monk shouted.

He ran around to the front of the car to look at the senseless men.

“Hey!” he said. “Two of these guys were at that house in town! Here's Rico, the bird Doc kayoed on the roof. And that one got the thousand dollars for catching Doc. Anthony, didn't they call him?”

“The other three are strangers,” Doc said.

Nat indicated one of the unknowns.

“That one isn't. That one was shadowing Mr. Mereschal yesterday. Isn't that the one, Jay?”

“That's the one, all right,” Jay agreed.

Monk galloped around the prisoners, giving them another disappointed inspection.

“Old sport-suit isn't here,” he complained. “Boy, I was hoping we had got old sport-suit.”

The plane was going over again. It was blooping its motors steadily, imperatively, in one anxious roar after another.

A man got out of the back seat of the car and pointed a dark weapon at them.

“There are seven of you, and only five shells in this gun,” he said. “But I think I could get five out of five.”

Doc and the others were in the headlight glare. They were hopelessly caught.

“Five from seven leaves two,” Doc said. “The two who are left would kill you.”

“That's bothering me,” the man admitted.

Chapter IX

THE man with the gun came forward. He was slender, pale, with intensely black hair and eyebrows which accentuated his paleness, and a sulky fullness around his mouth. He wore a neat black suit which was growing limp in the rain.

“He's not sport-suit,” Monk muttered.

Doc said, “Nat.”

“Yes?”

“We were under the impression you looked in the back of the car and found it empty.”

“I’m sicker about it than you are,” Nat said. “He must have been lying under that junk.”

The plane, still whooping with its motors, went off on another long arching turn that would bring it in from the direction of the sea.

The man with the gun threw an agonized glance at the plane.

He said, “I have to get that plane down. They won’t hang around here much longer. Their orders are to pull out at once if they get no answer to their signal.”

He got in the car.

“Run ahead of me,” he said. “Keep in the headlights, or I shall shoot.”

The prisoners obeyed. They ran ahead of the machine, which got into motion behind them.

Doc warned, “Watch the car. Be ready to avoid it. He may plan to get at least two of us by running us down, and have bullets left for the rest.”

Nothing of the sort happened, leaving Doc with the impression that his grim advice had sounded a little foolish.

They came very soon, within one hundred yards, to a sandy beach. The road turned sharply left there and went on somewhere else.

“Asteptati!”

their captor shouted. “Stop here!”

Monk grumbled, “He’s some kind of a foreigner. You wouldn’t think it from the way he handles the English language.”

The man got out of the car.

“Stand in the headlights,” he ordered.

They obeyed.

From the back of the car, the man took two-five gallon cans. He threw one of these on the beach, and shot a hole in it. There was gasoline odor, then a leaping flame as the man made a pass with a cigarette lighter.

“Very still!” he warned them.

With the other five-gallon container, the man moved back about a hundred feet. He seemed to have a pocket compass with which he was taking a bearing. He dropped the can, and shot a hole into it, as he had the first.

Doc said, “Setting up a pair of range-lights for the plane to use in landing.”

Doris gasped, “What will they do with us?”

The man was having trouble lighting his second beacon. He made passes with the lighter, not getting close, afraid of the explosion of the gasoline fumes. Finally he began trying to light the lighter and toss it

into the gasoline. That didn't work so well either.

"Monk."

"Yes."

"Sit down on the sand. Tear the lining out of your coat pocket, fill it with sand."

"Right."

Doc himself sank to the sandy beach. His coat pocket was ample and deep. He managed to tear it out.

Ham asked, "Shall Johnny and I do it, too?"

"No. Too much chance."

Nat said, "That's silly. It won't work!"

"Oh, Jay!" Doris gasped. "There's going to be another horrible fight!"

THERE was a *whoosh!* from the second beacon, and the small man jumped backward, slapping at his singed black eyebrows. But when he approached them, he was grinning.

"Why sit on the sand?"

"Our knees are a little shaky," Monk said.

"Get up."

Doc and Monk got to their feet.

The plane engines gave several happy bleeps, and the big craft swung into a routine landing approach. Obviously it was a seaplane.

The small dark man was amiable. "Just stand quite still. Everything is going to work out as it should."

Doc asked, "You get here late?"

"Only by three or four minutes," the man said readily. "The rain threw us off. You see, we didn't want to get here early and hang around, because the United States Coast Guard isn't noted for sleeping."

Monk said, "As some of your saboteurs found out earlier in the war."

"I'm not German," the man said. "Don't get that idea."

The plane rounded into its final approach.

Ham said, "Time is getting short."

Each of the prisoners knew what he meant. If they were going to make a break, now was the time. They didn't have more than a minute more, at the most.

Doris sobbed loudly.

"I'm scared!" she cried. "I'm—I'm not going to stay here! I'm going to run!"

The dark man faced her angrily. "You little fool! You'll be shot—"

"I'm afraid!" Doris screamed.

She began to run.

The dark man lifted his gun.

Doc and Monk hit him simultaneously with the coat-pockets filled with sand. Doc had managed to knot the top of his pocket so that it was a hard missile about the size of a baseball. It would have felled practically anything that walked, the way he threw it.

"Toss him in the car!" Doc ordered, then did it himself.

Jay and Nat fell upon the unconscious small dark man, striking him with their fists, kicking at him while he lay in the car.

Monk shoved at them. "Cut it out! You'll kill him!"

"He was going to shoot Doris!" Nat snarled.

The plane was on the water now. Its powerful landing lights were on them, brighter than the luminance from the flickering gasoline. An additional searchlight, a movable one, snapped out a lean glaring pencil which impaled them on its point, held them.

"I'll be superamalgamated!" gasped Johnny Littlejohn.

It was no trouble to see what was superamalgamating him. The plane was a big naval flying boat which was bristling with machine-guns.

Too late for flight.

The flying boat coasted in, then swung broadside as the pilot gunned the motors expertly. It was an awe-inspiring giant of a thing, made not a whit less impressive by the white-edged black swastika on its tail.

MONK popped his small eyes at the swastika. "A nasty!" he barked. "What's he doing so far from Berlin?"

"Oh my God!" said Jay in a frightened voice. "Will they shoot us down if we run?"

The seaplane pilot nosed into the wind, let the breeze sail the craft backward until it grounded on the beach.

A young blond officer, spruce in a peaked hat, threw open a hatch. The motors fell to lowest idling speed, and they could hear his shout.

"Wie geht es Ihnen?"

he roared pleasantly.

Jay gasped, "What'd he say?"

"Wants to know how we are," Ham translated.

“Tell him that—no, never mind,” Jay said. “He wouldn't want to hear it.”

“*Wir müssen eilen!*”

shouted the plane officer. “*Kommen, kommen!*”

“Eh?” asked Jay of Ham.

“He says for us to get the heck aboard, no time to waste,” Ham said.

“Oh, great grief!”

They were expected to board the plane. The ship had landed to pick up six men. There were six men standing on the beach now. A mistake was being made.

Johnny said, “We better go aboard, Doc. There's nothing else to do.”

Doc whispered, “We will try to get out of it.”

In a louder voice, using German, which was one of the languages he spoke fluently, Doc Savage shouted at the seaplane officer, “We will have to drive back up the road for a package. It will only take a minute.”

“*Nein, nein!*”

said the officer instantly. “We can not delay. On our radio, we hear American army and navy planes being directed to this spot. We have no time. Come quickly!”

“*Ich werde mit Vergnügen kommen,*”

Doc called.

Jay asked, “What's he saying?”

Ham told him, “Doc just told him we'd be very pleased to come along.”

“Oh murder!” wailed Jay. “What about Doris?”

Now Monk Mayfair came forth with a brilliant idea which was typically Monk.

He grabbed Doris, kissed her fondly, squeezed her with enthusiasm, and whispered, “I'll try to make them think you're my girl friend down to see us off. Start backing up and waving good-bye!”

They waded out to the seaplane.

“*Mein fraulein,*”

Monk told the flying officer. Monk then waved at Doris and bellowed tearfully, “*Auf wiedersehen! Auf wiedersehen!*”

Doris dashed after them.

“I'm going along,” she said. “I'm afraid to stay on shore with all those bad men!”

“They're unconscious!” Monk snarled.

“Yes, but they might wake up!”

“*Schnell!*”

shouted the officer. “Quick!”

The big engines began bellowing. They scrambled in. The hatch was slammed behind them.

THE interior of the plane cabin gave a startling impression of compact efficiency. The pilot and co-pilot were motionless, intent, in the greenhouse. A pair of gunners sat alert in the port and starboard gun hatches, situated high up at the top of the hull just aft of the wings. A sergeant-navigator was at his chart table. The radio operator, the officer who had called them aboard, and an engineer seemed to make up the crew. A crew of nine.

They got crisp, machine-like salutes from everyone, then the crew, except for the officer, became intent on the business of getting the ship off the water and up into the black, drizzling murk of the night.

The officer gestured them back in the cabin, smiling, then went ahead and opened a bulkhead door for them. Inside there was a cabin with a number of regular airline seats.

When they were in the seats, the officer bowed himself out.

A throbbing howl of at least four thousand horses pulled the seaplane up off the water. It went up smoothly, and kept climbing gradually, continuing straight out to sea.

Doc Savage looked at his group speculatively. Monk, Ham and Johnny were nervous, and no doubt scared, but they smiled thinly. Nat looked loose, weak, frightened, and was gripping a chair arm with both hands. Jay was pale, but he held up one hand, thumb and middle finger together in an okay signal. Doris was sitting silent. She looked more ashamed of herself than scared.

Doc said, "How many guns among us?"

"I've got one I picked up," Monk said. No one else had a weapon, apparently.

Monk exhibited his gun, a revolver, a .38. He flipped out the cylinder to examine the cartridges. His face seemed to cave in.

"Blazes!" he croaked.

"Empty?" Ham asked him.

"Every shell's been shot. How'd you know?"

"I just figured if your luck was running according to form, the gun would be empty," Ham said bitterly. "If you would think of some bright ideas besides kissing girls good-bye—"

"You're just itched because you didn't think of that," Monk said, but he wasn't cheerful.

Johnny squirmed uncomfortably. When he spoke, it was in very small words.

"We seem to have got out of the frying pan into the fire," Johnny said.

His words hit a discouraging note that settled upon them like a blackness.

"Aren't you going to capture the plane?" Doris asked.

No one said anything for quite a while.

"How?" Monk asked finally.

THE plane was still climbing. It was getting cooler in the cabin. The motors, the deep-throated rush of air past the ship, the metallic bumbling sound of so much metal together and in intricate motion, had settled into a symphony that was already monotonous, would grow more tedious as time went on.

There were no port holes. They could not see where they were going. It was a blindness, and disheartening, contributing to the stark strain that was picking at their nerves.

Doc Savage, watching their faces, knew that each was having about the same chilling thoughts. Actually, they had boarded the plane with the idea of capturing her, as much as from fear of what might happen to them if they didn't climb on. At least that was true of Doc himself. He liked excitement, got a biting, wine-like thrill out of taking a long chance, playing it with skill, and seeing good planning make it turn into something that came out perfectly. Monk, Ham and Johnny, he knew, felt as he did. They'd come aboard to capture the swastika-marked seaplane.

Nat and Jay and Doris might have come aboard for different reasons. Still, Jay looked like a fellow who didn't mind chasing a thrill. Nat was somehow different. Doc couldn't tell about Nat yet. Nor about Doris.

Doris wasn't a fool. She was all the time grabbing either Nat or Jay and telling how scared she was, but then anyone would be scared.

Doris, back there on the beach when they had ganged up on their captor, had deliberately walked off to draw the man's attention, to give Doc and Monk a chance to slug him with their sand-filled pockets. Doc was sure she had done that with full purpose and calculation. It had taken nerve. That women should show such astounding courage at unexpected moments, and wail in fear over trivia—twist the lion's tail, then scream at sight of a mouse—had always confused Doc. He didn't understand the opposite sex, even a little.

He would question Nat and Jay and Doris. He didn't know a thing about them, really. But that would have to wait until they knew where they stood here in the ship. Why had they been picked up? Where were they being taken? How was it that their identity wasn't known to the plane crew? All that and many other things about the mystery cried for an answer.

Their outlook, Doc knew, was frightening. They were much worse placed than when they had been arrested by the police for murder, or when they were being hunted after their escape. Infinitely worse. All the progress they had made had been deeper into a morass, farther from understanding.

They all jumped nervously when the flying officer put his head in the door.

"I would like a word with you," he told Doc Savage. "Please come."

Chapter X

THE flying officer was lean, hard, probably twenty-five and looking forty when he wasn't remembering to hold his face alert. He was looking like all the young men of the superior race who were flying swastika-marked war planes these days.

His name was Karl Jurger. There was a lot more to the name, title and rank, and he gave it all. He was Prussian.

“You are Ghiara Anthony?” he asked.

Doc said casually, “How did you know?”

“I could tell you are in charge. It is easy to recognize authority. And the others are not supposed to speak my language.”

Doc kept his face expressionless. There was a good break! The others weren't supposed to speak German. That was fine. Monk and Ham and Johnny had only a doubtful command of the guttural language. And Nat and Jay and Doris apparently didn't speak it at all. This was indeed lucky.

Officer Karl Jurger indicated a chart.

“We are here,” he said, indicating. “This is our course.”

Doc looked quickly to see where they were going.

Spain! Then on to Roumania! To Bucharest!

“What about the weather?” Doc asked. “Will it hide us from enemy patrols?”

Karl Jurger grinned. “The finest overcast you ever saw. Bad weather all the way. We will soon be above it, but we can dive down to safety if we are sighted.”

Doc nodded. He hoped they wouldn't run into an American plane equipped with radar.

The officer's next statement surprised him.

“The other plane,” said Karl Jurger, “will not rendezvous with us until we are over Spain. We thought that safer. Our eggs in different baskets.”

“Good.”

“The other plane picked up its group and got away safely.”

Doc carefully showed pleased interest. “No trouble?”

“None.”

Doc took a chance. “Is Mereschal aboard the other ship?”

“Yes, of course.”

“Who else is aboard?”

That question, Doc saw instantly, skated close to danger. Because Officer Karl Jurger frowned, hesitated, then said, “Why, the five of them, I suppose. Our radio contact was brief, because the Americans are devils with those radio direction finders.”

“Never mind, just so there were five,” Doc said quickly. “I would not advise any radio communication between the two planes.”

Karl Jurger smiled. “There will be none.”

“Good.”

It was better than good. It would probably keep them alive for a while longer!

That seemed to be the end of the conference, because Officer Jurger popped his heels, asked, "Are you comfortable? The Reich High Command directed us to pick you up, take you to Bucharest, and see that you were properly comfortable during the trip."

"I noticed an electric heater in the cabin. All right to use it? We are a bit chilly."

"Certainly. Turn it on."

"Thank you."

"Heil!"

"Heil!"

BACK in the little private cabin, Doc got his group together and explained that they were indeed in a mess. Two German seaplanes had come to America to pick up two groups, and carry them to Roumania. It was a startling thing they had waded into, and not pleasant. Once they landed in enemy Europe, they would be American military men in civilian clothes in enemy territory, hence technically spies, and subject to being shot without more ado. Nat and Jay and Doris weren't technically military people, but it was doubtful if that would make much difference to the enemy, who had his back to the wall and wasn't standing much on niceties.

"Now," Doc told Nat, Jay and Doris. "You three are private detectives?"

"Yes," Jay said.

"Tell your whole story from there."

Jay could say a great deal without using too many words. He was actually an American, born in Decatur, Illinois, of Swiss parents, both of whom had died when he was five. An Aunt in Switzerland had sent for him, and he had lived in Switzerland until seven years ago, when he returned to America.

He had known Nat in Switzerland, both having gone to the same university, attended the same classes in chemistry. They had been good friends.

Six weeks ago, when Nat appeared in New York and looked up Jay, it had been a joyful reunion. Nat had explained that he had been in America about two years, and was looking for a business. Jay already was operating a detective agency, and he had taken Nat in as partner. One of their first acts had been to hire Doris.

"That gives our background," said Jay. "Now for this Jan Mereschal thing."

Mereschal had come to them because he had known Nat in Europe. He wanted a bodyguard. He hadn't been very explicit as to why. Suspiciously vague, they had thought.

"Nat," Doc Savage interrupted. "You knew Mereschal in Europe?"

"Yes," Nat admitted gloomily. "I wish I hadn't."

"Who is he?"

Nat pondered a moment. "Well, I first met him skiing at Lauterbrunnen. He moved in financial circles, and had a job which caused him to travel all over Europe. He seemed important. He mixed freely with millionaires and bankers." Nat grinned faintly. "That's why I cultivated him. I figured it would pay to be on the good side of a man who knew so many big shots."

"Were Mereschal's contacts political?"

"What do you mean?"

"Did he mix with Goering and Hitler and Goebbels and Quisling and that clique?"

"Oh, no. The men he palled with were bankers, almost entirely."

"What else?"

"Well, he was married. Had a nice family. His wife was pleasant, and his two children, aged five and nine, were sweet tikes. Mereschal was Roumanian, I think, by birth, but he had lived more in France and Germany and Austria and Italy."

"You don't know the exact nature of his profession?"

"No. Except that it had to do with finance, and he traveled a lot."

Doc turned back to Jay. "Now, what happened after Mereschal hired your detective firm to guard him?"

JAY rubbed his jaw. He grimaced. He listened to the monotonous rumbling of the big plane, then took out a handkerchief and blotted nervous perspiration off his forehead. He looked at them again, plainly ashamed of the fear that was riding with him, growing, picking at his nerves.

"Mereschal said that he happened across our detective agency advertisement, and saw Nat's name, and that was why he came to us—because he'd known Nat in Europe. Mereschal then said that he had been in the United States about four months, having finally gotten out of Europe as a refugee. He said that he needed a bodyguard, and then said he couldn't give too many details because of what was involved."

"Said he had been in the United States four months." Doc was thoughtful. "Did he enter legally?"

"What do you mean?"

"With the war and all, foreigners do not just come to the United States."

"Oh, I see. We never thought to ask him."

Doris said, "I thought of it. You know what I think? I think that was why Mr. Mereschal didn't take his troubles to the police."

"We all wondered why he didn't go to the police," Nat admitted.

"I think he was in the United States illegally," said Doris emphatically. "That's why he didn't consult the police. He was afraid to."

Jay shrugged. "Anyway, we took the job."

"Of what did your bodyguarding work consist?"

“Mereschal would call us whenever he wanted to go out. One of us would accompany him.”

Doc asked, “Where did he go on such occasions?”

“Natural places. Restaurants, theaters, museums, or just long walks. Nothing suspicious about that.”

Nat interrupted grimly, “But there was plenty suspicious.”

Monk growled, “Now we're getting somewhere. Did any of you see two yellow spots in the air?”

Jay jumped, almost as if someone had stuck him with a pin. “How did you know that?”

“When did the yellow spots happen?”

“It was at Mr. Mereschal's apartment, day before yesterday. He called us, asking for both Nat and I. Usually, he asked for only one of us, but this time he wanted both. He sounded worried.”

Nat said, “Jay saw the spots.”

Jay nodded. He began to sound sheepish. “I felt very foolish about it. The two spots were in Mr. Mereschal's living-room. They were yellowish—not luminous, just yellowish—and about five feet off the floor.”

“Jay called Mereschal's attention to them,” said Nat.

“Yes. I said, 'Look, Mr. Mereschal, at the strange trick the reflected light is playing.' And then he fainted.”

Nat said, “Mereschal gave a great jump, got pale as a ghost, moaned, tried to get up out of his chair, then passed out.”

Doc asked, “What became of the yellow spots?”

“Of course we all looked at Mereschal when he fainted. When we looked back again, the spots, were gone.”

“It was rather dark in the living room of Mereschal's apartment at the time?”

“Why, yes.”

“Did anything else peculiar happen?”

“No.”

“Did you turn on a brighter light?”

“No.”

“The yellow spots just disappeared?”

“Yes.”

QUITE suddenly the plane entered rough air. It pitched sickeningly, great lungings and rockings that were amazing for a ship of such huge size. In the sightless little box of a cabin, knowing there was nothing but

driving storm and blackness and trackless sea about them, it was unnerving. Johnny Littlejohn muttered something about hoping German aircraft were better-constructed these days than he thought they were.

The air continued rough. They had to keep their hands on something continually to keep from being tossed about. The motors labored. Rain seemed to be slamming against the ship in great cascades.

Jay, fighting airsickness, did not continue for a moment. Doc Savage was grimly silent during the interval. The safety of the plane was a doubt in his mind, for he had no faith in the ersatz materials the Germans had to use now. And the confoundingly fantastic yellow spots plagued him. Usually he could find a sensible explanation for things. But not this. The mystery blocked the channels of his thought. When he tried to think in any direction, the inexplicable thing got in his way.

Jay looked up at them. The fear was very plain in his voice now.

“When Mr. Mereschal recovered from his faint, he said he was going to call on you for help.”

Nat said, “Mereschal immediately asked us what we knew about you, Mr. Savage. He had heard of you, of course. But he wanted to know more.”

“We told him we weren't acquainted with you personally,” Jay continued. “But we knew that you followed a rather unusual profession of righting wrongs and punishing evildoers in various corners of the earth, confining yourself to cases which the regularly constituted law and authority didn't seem able to handle. We told Mereschal that, which was about all we knew. Except, of course, that you were very famous, and that you had five assistants, one or more of whom usually worked with you.”

Nat said, “Mereschal seemed scared of you.”

“Why afraid of me?” Doc asked.

“He wouldn't say.”

Doris put in quickly, “I think it was that thing we mentioned a minute ago. He must have been in the United States illegally. He was afraid you would turn him over to the authorities.”

Jay spread his hands, palms upward.

“Then Mr. Mereschal asked us to shadow you and your men,” Jay said. “We couldn't find you. But we located Mr. Mayfair, so we trailed him around the town.”

Monk looked interested. “I saw you at that joke shop.”

“Yes. We were shadowing you then.”

“Did you see me taken away from Ham's apartment house?” Monk demanded.

“Yes. We tried to follow the men who had you, but they evaded us because we didn't have a car handy, and there was no taxicab, either.”

“Then what did you do?”

“When we heard of your arrest, we went to the courtroom. We hoped to get in to talk to you. We were going to ask you why Mr. Mereschal was afraid of you. If you didn't give a satisfactory answer, we were thinking of telling the police the whole story.”

Doris said, “But you wouldn't stop to listen to me. You were too busy escaping.”

Nat said, "That was a wonderful trick, the gas-squirting camera. I never dreamed of such a thing happening."

Jay spread his hands again.

"That brings us up to when you found us back there on the beach in the rain. Mr. Mereschal had called us, told us to be there, and to expect trouble. So we were there."

Doc said, "You were not very friendly at first."

Jay became embarrassed. "Mr. Mereschal seemed afraid of you, remember. We thought you were his enemy, because he'd told us there would be trouble on the beach."

"Sure," said Nat. "We thought you were the trouble he meant. We didn't dream those other men would show up, and that this Nazi plane would come to pick them up."

Doris smiled at Doc and the others. "Nat and Jay changed their minds and decided to be friends when they saw there was really lots of other trouble."

The flight officer, Karl Jurger, put his head through the door.

"We hope the weather will be better," he said. "Everything is all right."

He spoke in German, and Doc answered in the same language, saying, "The worse the weather, the less chance of American planes finding us."

"Yes, it is good." The officer smiled briefly, went away.

DOC SAVAGE began talking, crisply, each sentence containing a good deal of information. He described the yellow spots at Ham's apartment, the kidnapping of Monk, his and Ham's following of Monk, their mishap, their predicament in the bank—murder and robbery absolutely pinned on them—on awakening. He carried it through the arrest, the escape, the advertisement that had brought Mereschal to a short, obviously frightened meeting with them, and Mereschal's instructions that they should hurry to the beach.

Doc continued, "Now here is some guesswork, not necessarily fact because it is guessing, but probably close to fact: Someone found out Mereschal was going to ask us for help. To prevent that, we were dumped into the robbery mess, a mudhole from which they figured we couldn't escape and bother them. Mereschal sent us to the beach, planning to meet us there and tell us the story. But Mereschal did not meet us, possibly because he was kidnapped and taken on the other plane. Or possibly because he got on the other plane willingly, and in that case he sent us to the beach hoping we would be trapped and killed. But the second alternative is unlikely, because those men who arrived in the car apparently were not expecting us."

Nat, Jay and Doris looked at each other. Their minds were uneasy. Nothing that had been said had done much to clarify the mystery, and certainly nothing to extricate them from their danger.

Monk made a disgusted noise.

"Now that everybody has told all they know," he complained, "we all know practically nothing."

Ham, with a feeble attempt at an insult, said, "You should feel natural, a blank being your normal

condition.”

Monk ignored him.

Reich Naval Flying Officer Karl Jurger came back. He opened the door, smiled at them, came in. He stepped aside. Two of the crew, the two who had been sitting at the port and starboard gun hatches, came in behind him. The expression on their faces, tightness, a poor attempt to hide fury and excitement, tipped Doc Savage. But the tip came a moment too late.

Karl Jurger drew a German officer's automatic. He pointed the thin black snout at them. The two gunners produced weapons also.

“Sit very still, please,” Jurger said. “Mr. Savage, if they do not understand German, tell them they are to sit still.”

“He says sit still,” Doc said.

Jurger advanced. “We will search you for weapons.”

Doc said, “You might be making a mistake.”

Jurger showed his teeth unpleasantly.

“I think not. The very badness of the weather encouraged me to use the radio. I contacted the other plane. I was asked by them to describe you. I did so. This is the result. So the mistake, if there is one, is not mine.”

They were searched. Monk's revolver, their one weapon, was taken. Jurger laughed briefly when he found it empty.

A number of small ropes, cut off a life-raft apparently, were used to tie them to the seats.

Officer Jurger made them a little, bitter, intent speech.

“This plane will go to twenty-five thousand feet,” he said. “At that height, over the deepest part of the Atlantic, we will kick you out. It will take you several minutes to fall nearly five miles. We will watch. It will be great fun to speculate what thoughts tear at your minds as you fall.”

Chapter XI

The noise of the plane engines now became, and continued to be, of a monstrous nature in their roaring. They took on the tone of a beast. They hadn't been that way before. Actually there had been no change, of course, and the difference was in the minds of Doc and the others.

For a little while, for about thirty minutes, they were almost relieved. The danger was no longer a hanging thing. It was upon them, real, violent, threatening. It was something they could deal with, either cope with it or fail, but at any rate be doing something about it. It is always less punishing to have something happening, rather than something going to happen.

A gunner sat forward. He faced them. He didn't sit, but stood tensely, and didn't let his pistol hang, but held it pointed at them. He was as mechanical as a spraddle-legged sentry in front of the Reichchancellory, as much an automan as the ridiculous machine-soldiers who used to stand unending guard at the Brandenburg arch on Unter Den Linden. He was even mechanical in pointing his gun at

them, pointing at each one of them exactly twenty seconds.

Monk said, "If anybody wants to hear a confession, I'll state that that New York courtroom would look mighty good to me right now, murder charge and all."

"Ruhig!"

shouted the guard.

Monk glanced at Doc. "What's he mean?"

"Silence."

"Oh."

Monk looked at the guard. There was hate in Monk's eyes, complete fury, and Monk's homeliness, twisted by what he was feeling, put across his emotion thoroughly. The guard, a mere boy, actually, began to grow pale around the mouth.

"Nuts to you, notzy," Monk said. "Don't go telling me to shut up, you half-baked, misled kid!"

"Ruhig!"

repeated the guard.

"Go ahead and pop your little popgun. I don't like the idea of falling five miles, anyway."

The guard only watched them. He kept licking his lips.

"By golly, I think he's scared worse than I am," Monk said.

OFFICER KARL JURGER threw open the door. He hung his thumbs in his belt and stared at them.

"Our altitude, twenty-two thousand feet," he said, for the first time disclosing that he could speak English. He spoke it very carefully and studiously.

No one said anything.

Jurger added, "Soon there will be an opening in the storm, probably. A clear place, a good place to watch."

This got no response, either.

Jurger grinned.

He snapped off the electric heater, wheeled, and left.

"Cat and mouse stuff," Johnny Littlejohn said. "I wonder what kind of lizard blood they feed them on to make them that way."

Ham said, "Same thing they feed the Japs, apparently."

It grew cold in the cabin with desperate speed, now that the heater was off. The guard on duty was relieved, and the relief man wore a high-altitude flying suit that made him as bulky as a bear.

OFFICER KARL JURGER strode into the compartment. He had a long knife, a clasp knife, but one with a long blade.

“Take them two at a time,” he said.

“*Ja,*”

said the two men behind him.

Jurger cut Doc Savage and Nat free. They were tied so that they could be slashed loose from the chairs, but their hands and feet would still be bound together.

The moment Nat was free, he yelled, and began to fight. Doris screamed, putting back her head and shrieking repeatedly. No words. Just shrieks.

Two men fell upon Nat, and wrestled-dragged him into the forward part of the plane. Nat grabbed at metal parts of the plane with his hands, tried to hook his toes behind other objects. They tore him loose from everything he grabbed, and hauled him along. They threw him against the cabin wall and held him there.

Two more men came back for Doc Savage. Doc, knowing that struggling would accomplish nothing except the skinning of his hands, let them drag him limply.

He, too, was jammed against the cabin side near Nat. Between them was a door, a hull hatch. Both of them were near windows. They could look out and down.

“See!” Jurger pointed. “A nice clear space. Clear all the way to the sea. Five miles down.”

It was clear, all right. A canyon in the storm clouds. Rainwater was stringing off the wing in flattened, wind-harassed drops. All about were the clouds, dark and dirty looking like waste gathered up from a garage floor and wadded together. Below was the chasm to the sea, although it was so far down, and there was some haze, that it was hard to recognize the leaden bottom of the chasm as the sea.

“Open the hatch,” Jurger ordered.

While they were doing that, the plane plunged into the cloud-wall that was the other side of the rift.

Jurger cursed. He swore in German, then English.

“Turn back, you fool!” he screamed at the pilot. “Circle around in the open space!”

The pilot whipped the plane around. The storm caught the big craft, tossed it wildly, and flung the nose up so that they lost headway, then the nose dropped off and they started to spin, the pilot brought them out.

Jurger swore at the pilot.

“Go back to the clearing!” he yelled.

The pilot turned his harassed face, nodding.

After that, the plane flew about for quite a while, searching. But always there was the tormented world of the storm about them.

They did not find the opening again.

Doc Savage and Nat were taken back into the private cabin. They were re-tied to the chairs.

“There will be another clear place somewhere,” promised Jurger.

He looked at them all fiercely, contemptuously, and left them alone with a guard.

Doc Savage leaned back. His metallic features had lost none of their tension.

“They overdid it that last time,” Doc said grimly. “They are just deviling us.”

“You mean,” yelled Monk, “they're not going to pitch us out?”

“Quite probably not,” Doc said.

“Then we can relax!”

“On the contrary, the outlook is less pleasant.”

Monk shook his head. “It couldn't be. A killing is the worst thing anybody can do to me.”

“You can rest assured they plan to kill us,” Doc said gravely. “They are going to drag it out as long as they can, apparently. It won't be easy to take.”

Chapter XII

THEY landed in Spain in bright sunlight. The bay where the giant seaplane sat down was smooth, and they could hear—while the motors were shut off during the refueling—the jingle of sheep bells somewhere near. It was a placid, pastoral interval after the long Atlantic crossing.

They heard another plane come in. They could tell, from the noise of its motors, that it was a craft of the same type.

Officer Karl Jurger did some shouting.

“Guten morgen!”

he shouted at the other plane.

There was some conversation about the stormy crossing. Doc and the others could hear the voice from the other plane.

Doc asked Jay, “Is that Mereschal's voice?”

Jay said he was positive it wasn't. Doris nodded her head vehemently.

The shouting palaver between the two planes got around to the prisoners.

“Do you want them shot at once?” Jurger demanded.

“We will take care of that in Bucharest,” shouted the voice from the other plane.

Doc Savage made his own voice very loud, made it sound as much like Jurger's voice as possible, and yelled, “Do you have Jan Mereschal a prisoner on board?”

“Yes,” said the voice from the other plane. “We informed you of that by radio.”

Jurgen cursed loudly, and ran into the plane. He slapped and kicked Doc Savage in a fury. "Another smart trick like that," he shouted, "will get your tongue split and your teeth knocked out."

Doc Savage said nothing. Jurgen went outside to explain what had happened.

Half an hour later, the plane took off.

THE guard who was placed in the cabin was the young, dumb-looking one, the mechanical, spraddle-legged one, the one who let each of them in turn look for twenty seconds into the muzzle of his gun.

"Sprechen sie englisch?"

Doc asked him.

The muscles around the sentry's mouth thickened angrily. *"Nein!"*

Doc Savage studied him thoughtfully, seemed unable to make up his mind whether or not the young automan could speak English.

"Monk."

"Yes?"

"See if you can find out whether the guard speaks English," Doc said.

Monk was puzzled, but he held back whatever questions jumped up in his mind. He eyed the guard. "Savvy English, bud?" he asked.

The guard merely scowled.

"Look, pal," Monk said sourly. "It looks as if they're going to knock us off. There's a thousand dollars in good American currency sewed in the collar of my coat. You might as well have it, instead of the officer who is bossing you around."

The guard continued to scowl.

"A thousand bucks, bud," Monk said. "Come on and get it. I won't tell on you, and none of the others will."

It was obvious the guard didn't understand.

"English doesn't mean a thing to him, Doc," Monk said.

"Good," Doc Savage said. "Now I can tell you something that you should have been told before. It is this: An attempt will be made to get us out of this predicament when we land in Roumania."

Of the five listeners, all of them took it calmly except Nat, and Nat got it as a slow burn. No reaction at first, then it hit him like an explosive, and he bolted erect with a gasp.

"What—"

"Shut up and act natural!" Monk snarled. "Want me to bang some sense into you? You'll alarm the guard."

Nat then went through a business of squirming, as if something under him had stuck him. The guard came back, jerked him around, found nothing, gave him a rough shove and went back to watching.

"I'm sorry," Nat muttered.

Doc said, "I am telling you this so that you will be not unduly alarmed. So that, when it happens, you will understand what is going on."

"But who will rescue us?" Nat blurted.

Monk told him, "Doc has representatives all over the world. Now don't interrupt."

Doc Savage continued quietly.

"If the two spots appear, they will not be yellow, but brown or possibly blue. Otherwise they will be the same as the spots you have seen before. And shortly after that, one of us might vanish. If it should be me, and I would be the logical one to disappear first, do not get excited. If this happens, I will be in the hands of friends. You will be rescued yourselves very shortly."

"When will this happen?" Monk asked.

"That is difficult to say."

"But—"

"We had better not discuss it any more. The guard is getting impatient with us now."

It was nearly two hours before Nat got a chance to say, "Mr. Savage, I'm sorry I showed so much surprise at first."

"That is all right."

"No. I don't think it is all right. I think the guard understands English."

"He did not seem to."

"I think he is clever. He is young, with a face like a stone, and I think he fooled us."

"Do not worry about it."

"But if he heard, can't he stop your friends from rescuing us?"

"He could."

"If your friends—the way you said—the spots in the air—disappearances—" Nat fumbled around with his words. "That means you know the answer to this infernal mystery."

"Possibly."

"I don't think it was very nice of you," said Nat sulkily, "to pretend to have not the least idea of what was behind the affair."

Doc made no comment.

“Aren't you going to tell us now?” Nat demanded.

“No.”

“I think that's nasty,” Nat said.

Monk Mayfair overheard part of this, and he hid a sly grin. Monk was sitting across the aisle from Doc, two seats behind Nat. Monk slid down in his seat, to hide his face from all the others except Doc Savage. He faced Doc and asked, using his lips only:

“Have you really got a plan?”

Doc Savage could read lips fairly well. He got the query. Since Monk could read lips with about the ease with which he could read ancient Egyptian blindfolded, Doc had to answer aloud.

“Not one that I am particularly proud of,” Doc said.

Monk, lips only: “The rescue in Roumania was all hokum?”

“Yes.”

“What you figure it will get us?” Monk asked with his lips.

“Did you ever hear of the arrow shot into the air?”

Monk's lips: “The one that came to earth I know not where, like in the poem?”

“Yes.”

“I don't get it.”

“Let's hope the right people hear about that arrow, run for it, and get it—in the eye,” Doc said.

Doris stirred uncomfortably. “Mr. Savage,” she said, “If you are going to talk to yourself, I wish at least you would make a complete story of the conversation. It would sound more sensible.”

THERE was still sunlight, now very late evening sunlight, when the plane made two long runs, dragging the spot where it intended to land, then returned and sat down. There was some taxiing around, jockeying, after which the motors were cut entirely.

“*Bagati deseama!*”

a voice shouted. “*Aveti grija!*”

Ham looked at Doc. “Roumanian language?”

“Yes. Someone is warning others, evidently the crew handling the mooring lines, to be careful.”

The ship was snubbed up against a float of some kind. They could hear fenders being put out. After that, there was a series of crisp orders, in Roumanian and German, which had a military sound.

Doris looked at Jay and Nat, and at Doc Savage. She had to hold her lower lip pinched between her teeth to stop its trembling. She didn't say again that she was scared. But she looked as if she wanted to say it.

Officer Jurger stalked into the cabin. He was very crisp, military. He must have had a fresh uniform in a suitcase, and had put it on.

Doc asked sharply, "What about the other plane?"

"It is already here—" Jurger answered before he thought. He scowled. "You have a manner of authority, haven't you? You ask me a question, and I answer before I think."

"Then the landing was at the pre-arranged place?" Doc asked.

"Yes, it—" Jurger stared at the bronze man. Surprise turned to uneasiness, like a snake twisting, on his face. "What did you know about a pre-arranged meeting-place?"

"How could I know anything?"

Jurger thought about it. He hitched his shoulders uneasily under his uniform coat.

"It is the joke, eh?" he said finally. "The joke, getting back at me for the little joke we played with you all across the ocean, going to toss you overboard."

"Yes, lots of joking," Doc agreed.

"But we were not joking," Jurger said. His words were sharp, like something from a gun. "You will find that out."

He leveled an arm at the nearest prisoner, who happened to be Nat.

"Drag him out!" he yelled. "Take him to the back and shoot him! We will take some of the humor out of this situation!"

Snappy young Reich sailors—they'd all changed to fresh uniforms—piled into the cabin, seized Nat, and began hauling him out. Nat's cheeks filled out with terrified breath, then he began screaming with his mouth as widely open as it would go. His wrists and ankles were tied, so all he could do with his frenzied fighting was make himself very difficult to carry. That, and he snapped with his teeth like a turtle, and got an unwary Fritz's little finger with his teeth. He bit and chewed on the finger, and the howling of the Jerry added to the uproar.

Doris burst into tears and said, "Poor Nat, I love him so!"

Jay looked at her wildly and said, "I thought it was me you loved."

"I love you both," Doris said.

Which led Monk to stare at her in astonishment for some moments.

THE shooting they were expecting to hear did not happen. The certainty that there would be a shot, piled on the suspense which had been like a bed of spikes during the whole flight from Long Island, chopped away at their self-control. Jay lost his grip, and began to wrestle and snarl senselessly at his bounds. Johnny joined him. An airman came in and began clubbing them both with his fists.

The uproar finally brought Jurger back into the plane, laughing and saying, "You really thought we were going to do it that time, didn't you?"

Ham Brooks, who rarely used profanity, looked at Jurger and called Jurger several of the nastiest words that the German language contained. Where Ham had learned these words remained forever a mystery. It took the laugh off Jurger's face.

He pointed at Doc Savage.

“Bring him!”

There was a hatch-door in the side of the plane hull. The level of this was about four feet above the level of the float to which the plane was tied. The plane, held away from the float about three feet by the fenders, was connected to the float with a short gangplank.

Doc Savage, from the hatch, gave the countryside a quick look. It was the first time he'd seen the surroundings. It wasn't Bucharest. But it was Roumania, and the river—he judged this from its size and muddy water—was the Danube. That song, about the beautiful blue Danube, was misleading, since the Danube was actually about as muddy as the Missouri river where it was said even the catfish had to come to the top for air.

Not far away was a town, which Doc surmised was Oltenita, about forty miles southeast of Bucharest as the crow would fly.

A gunner prodded Doc in the back with a rifle.

“*Gehen!*”

he said, meaning walk.

Fifty yards upstream was another float, with a plane the twin of this big one tied to it. On the float were some German naval uniforms, some men in civilian clothes Doc knew. One was the sport-suiter, still sport-suited, and the other was Jan Mereschal.

Mereschal held up his hands so that Doc Savage could see they were tied.

“Mr. Savage!” he shouted. “Watch out! I have just learned that—”

What he had just learned stopped right there, for the sport-suited man gave him an awful slugging uppercut in the stomach, followed it up by kicking Mereschal, then seizing a gun and clubbing him to the float.

The sailor behind Doc jabbed with the rifle again.

“*Gehen!*”

he repeated.

In Doc's mind—it had been there for ten seconds or so—was a statement which he had heard a commando-tactics instructor make: That if a man had a gun muzzle jammed in his back, he could whirl and knock the weapon aside before the holder could pull the trigger. Ever since hearing the statement, the bronze man had wondered whether it would work when he saw anyone holding a gun against anyone else's back. Would it?

It would. He got hold of the rifle. He went off the gangplank. The sailor, making a roaring noise which was the only sound he had time to make, clung to the rifle, and was pulled off into the river with Doc. They slammed down into the muddy water.

Chapter XIII

DOC kept hold of the rifle, which was the main thing. He also got this hand over the trigger guard, to keep the sailor from firing it, because the concussion, if the man fired the gun underwater, would do nobody's eardrums any good.

The sailor soon let go. He didn't have much air in his lungs when he went under. The sailor swam to the top. Doc took the other direction.

The water was about ten feet deep, the bottom slick mud, and Doc clamped the rifle sling-strap in his teeth, freeing his arms and legs for swimming. He made all the speed he could, driven by the knowledge of what a grenade would do to him with shock if they tossed any into the river. He made sure his hands kept hitting bottom mud as he swam.

When lack of air began to trouble him, he reduced his swimming to use enough to keep on the bottom, and went to taking the rifle apart. It was a regulation Germany army rifle, but something stuck somewhere, and he had enough trouble getting it apart to alarm him considerably.

It was hard to judge his distance below the surface by the amount of light in the muddy water. All he could do was take a chance.

He pushed the rifle barrel up, blew out some of the water slowly, drank the rest of the muddy stuff, and began breathing air that tasted of gunpowder.

No hand-grenades. No rifle bullets hitting the water. He sank and swam.

Up again, more air through the rifle barrel, sink and swim. He kept repeating the operation.

After ten minutes of this submarining, Doc turned left, following the bottom up until the water was bright with the afternoon sun. He put his face out cautiously.

Overhead was the leafy branch of a tree which projected from the thickly wooded bank. Upriver, men in their underwear were jumping into the river, or climbing out again, and being sworn at in German and Roumanian for returning empty-handed from the diving.

Doc inched toward the bank, finding the water about three feet deep right up to where the bushes grew. He crawled up into the roots, then up into the bushes.

He pulled off his clothing, wrung the water out so he wouldn't leave a trail of drops, and put only the trousers back on. The other garments he rolled into a tight, wet club which would double as a blackjack.

Then he started a campaign.

The trees all about were big, enormously spreading, with lower branches sweeping close to the ground. They had been trimmed so that none of the boughs hung low enough to interfere with a man walking under them, and there was no underbrush that didn't look as if it was planted, trimmed, carefully cared for. This was obviously a park, picnic ground or something of the sort.

There was a road, on the road some parked cars, and overhanging road and parked cars a very convenient low-hung tree. Two soldiers, evidently assigned to guard the cars, stood a few yards from the machines, changing from one foot to another in their excitement and curiosity about what was going on at the river.

Doc crawled through brush, tall grass, reached the tree which overhung the cars, and went up into it. It

was marvelous for his purpose. It was a genuinely lucky break. The heavy branches of the tree hardly swayed under his weight.

His idea was to drop on the two guards, lay them out, then take a car, but his luck stopped before he got that far.

SPORT-SUIT and his men arrived with the prisoners under guard. All the prisoners—Jan Mereschal, Monk, Ham, Johnny, Doris, Jay and Nat—were now together. That seemed to be everybody who was captive, just the group who had been with Doc, and Jan Mereschal. Nobody was happy.

The sport-suit was indignant. “You didn't have them under proper guard!” he yelled at Karl Jurger.

Jurger flapped his arms angrily. “He's dead. What are you worrying about?”

“There isn't the slightest proof he is dead,” snarled the other. “He swam underwater, and got away.”

“He couldn't. He didn't come to the surface.”

“You fool, you haven't got it into that kraut-filled head that you are not dealing with an ordinary man.”

“Doc Savage — nobody — could swim so far under water.”

“I wouldn't be too sure of that. The stories they tell about Savage are extraordinary.”

Jurger said with conviction, “He drowned. I had weakened him all across the Atlantic by making him think I was going to kill him the next minute. I expected him to go crazy. He jumped in the river, and drowned.”

The sport-suited man glared at Jurger.

“What,” he asked Jurger, “about the story Savage told his friends in the plane—the story that they would be rescued when they landed?”

“Preposterous!”

“Listen, nothing Savage does is preposterous.”

“He told them his friends would cause them to disappear. Isn't that ridiculous?”

The other walked over and poked Jurger's chest angrily. “Look, Karl: By disappearing, he meant the way we make people disappear. He meant that he has the secret. *He knows about the cloth.* That's what he meant. Get it through your thick head.”

“That,” Jurger said, “is preposterous.”

“I give up!” the other said. “You damned pig-knuckles just won't credit anybody else with having extraordinary ability. Get busy helping search.”

“But Savage is drowned—”

“Search anyway!” the sport-suited man yelled. “Take all the soldiers to help! Leave two of them here to guard the prisoners. Take everybody else.”

Jurger thought it was foolish. He thought Doc Savage was dead, and what was the use of hunting for

him? He walked off with a ramrod for a spine and his jaw pushed out, the picture of the offended Prussian.

Monk and the others sat in the cars.

Monk said, "You hear that! They know what Doc told us in the plane. How'd they find out?"

Nat groaned.

"That damned soldier," he said, "must have fooled us. He understood English. The dumb guard in the cabin, remember?"

Ham said, "Cloth? What did they mean by cloth?"

There was an explosion from the river. Someone had finally thought of using grenades, which would bring Doc's body to the surface if he had drowned. The noise was violent, and came as a surprise.

Both guards faced the river, absorbed by what was going on there, not sure whether the explosion had been a grenade, or whether Doc Savage had been sighted and shot at with a rifle.

Doc Savage, hanging by his knees, swung down from a stout tree branch, clamped a hand over Nat's mouth, grabbed Nat's arm with his other hand, and brought Nat out of the car and up into the tree.

All the prisoners saw what happened.

But only Doris screamed.

FORTUNATELY, Doc and Nat were out of sight by the time the astonished guards heard Doris' scream and whirled.

Johnny, lunging against Doris, said, "Shut up!" in an utterly violent voice.

"Py scream mit you?" asked one of the guards, murdering English.

No one said anything.

The other guard, in German, said, "The girl is just scared, Jorl."

"Ja."

"Nothing is wrong."

"Ja."

Then the other guard jumped a yard, and squalled, "Jorl! Jorl! One prisoner is gone!"

"*Ach! Gott mit katzen kinder!*"

They dashed around the car. The prisoners were tied hand and foot, so they thought Nat had just toppled out on the other side of the military, open touring car. But they found no Nat on the other side. The guards began to squall like bobcats.

Doc Savage, meantime, was working higher into the tree, then across the tree to the far side, and into the interlacing branches of an adjacent forest giant. At the far side of the second tree, he was blocked as to

going any farther. But there was brush on the ground. He dropped into that.

“Quiet!” he hissed in Nat's ear.

Nat nodded. Nat was so scared that he was not pale, but greenish.

Jurger, the sport-suit, and the others boiled around the cars. The guards, half-incoherent, told what had happened.

Ham Brooks now had an idea.

He leveled an alarmed arm, or arms, for they were tied.

“There!” he shouted. “There! Two brown spots in the air!”

Monk caught on to the game. He threw himself against Ham.

“You fool!” Monk yelled. “Don't you realize they're here to save us! Don't give it away!”

Ham looked as appalled as he could.

“I didn't think!” he blurted.

“You idiot!” screamed Monk. “If I wasn't tied, I'd beat your brains out!”

“What harm did I do?” Ham demanded defensively. “They can't see them, can they?”

Sport-suit began filling the surrounding atmosphere full of lead. He fired until his gun was empty, picking out shadows.

He was a worried man.

KARL JURGER had a bright idea. He waved, bellowed, “Get the prisoners over in this tall grass! You can watch the grass, see it bend if they try to get close!”

They did that.

It now became evident that all the German airmen and sailors and soldiers were ignorant of the true facts behind what was happening. They caught the idea that something invisible was supposed to be about. It was easy to get that idea. But they took it for exactly its face value—utterly crazy.

The man in the sport-suit got rid of some of his fear and began organizing things.

“Franz, Jan, Herman!” he yelled, selecting three of the plane crewmen by name. “Go to the plane and get that big case. Bring it. Quick!”

The three Nazi airmen galloped off. Bring a box. That was something they understood.

Monk looked at Ham. “By golly, something invisible! There was really something we couldn't see, in your apartment back there in New York! Men! They bopped me over the head and carried me away.”

Ham said, “The bank, too! That's how they got out of that bank without being seen. But how the devil—”

He went silent. He had almost given away that they had no idea what was making men so they couldn't be seen.

Jurger came over. He kicked Monk in the ribs. "How did Savage find the secret? Where did he get hold of it?"

Monk sneered at him. "What do you mean, *find* it! Don't you know Doc has some slight scientific ability?"

"That's it!" said the sport-suited man, and he fell to cursing.

"What do you mean, that's it?" Jurger demanded.

Monk got kicked again. "Savage figured the thing out himself, and duplicated it?" the sport-suit demanded.

"Quit kicking me!" Monk shouted.

"Did he?"

"Yes."

The three airmen came back with the case. It was a steamer trunk, a rather large one, of plastic. One of the new "war" trunks being sold currently in the United States.

"All right," said the sport-suit. "Now, we get out of here."

"Where?" Jurger demanded.

"Mereschal's house," said the other. "It isn't more than a mile from here."

"But we weren't going to let anybody know we were headquartering—"

"Hell, if they've got the secret of the cloth, they know so much that knowing our headquarters won't make it any worse."

Prisoners and everybody were loaded in two cars. Five airmen were selected as aids. The five, who still had no idea what it was all about, were informed they would be told. The other Germans were told to search the vicinity and shoot at anything—any blade of grass or leaf—that moved.

They took the case along.

THE cars followed the main drive out of the park, swung up a sharp hill, still on the main road, and turned off at quite a pretentious home. A palace, in fact, huge and white, built a little like a pocket edition of the palace at Versailles, France, but with a few apple-shaped domes added here and there, so that the whole effect was half-breed, neither European nor Oriental, but a little of each. Monk was impressed by the marble floors over which he and the others were hauled without being untied.

They were dumped in a windowless room with a strong door.

"Lights!" the sport-suit ordered. "Lights everywhere. The very brightest!"

The prisoners, to their surprise, were locked up and left alone in the room. After, of course, the lights had been turned on and the room carefully inspected.

"It would be simpler to shoot all of them except Mereschal," Jurger said.

“We'll shoot them if we're molested,” the other said. “We will use them as hostages.”

With that, the door was locked.

Monk rolled over and looked at Jan Mereschal. “Why don't they want to shoot you?”

“It's a long story,” Mereschal muttered. “You see—”

“Let's not waste time talking about how long the story is,” Monk snapped.

“I know where most of the bank gold in Europe is stored,” Mereschal said. “They want that information from me. They won't kill me until they get it.”

“Gold?”

“That is correct.”

“I don't get it. You were in America. How did you—”

“I've been in America a few weeks,” Mereschal said. “Before that, I was—well—an unwilling collaborator with the Axis. I was connected with their office of financial coordination. I did not head this office. I merely functioned as a part of it.”

He looked at them intently.

“Here is the important point,” he continued. “My work was simply checking and inspecting monetary gold supplies in all parts of Europe. It wasn't too important a job. But it was one that happened to put me in touch with where every ounce of gold, practically, is stored in Axis-controlled Europe.”

“What were you doing in America?” Monk demanded suspiciously.

“The Axis is collapsing,” Mereschal said frankly. “I never was a willing worker in the set-up. I saw my chance, and was smuggled into America. It cost me—well—a considerable sum. But I thought it worth it.”

“It wouldn't be a case of rats and sinking ships?” Ham put in.

Mereschal flushed.

Monk said, “Shut up, Ham! You'll get the guy mad and dry up our information.”

Mereschal said, “I guess I was a rat. But if so, I was a rat in the beginning, when I didn't get out way back in 1939.”

“All right, you got to America,” Monk prompted. “Then what?”

NOW several hammers began banging in different parts of the house. Sport-suit and others were nailing the windows shut. From the way the hammers were going, they didn't seem to be losing any time.

“I got to America and thought I was rid of it all,” continued Mereschal. “I was wrong there. This gang showed up. That fellow in the flashy clothes. He had a proposition. I was to come back to Europe with them, show them where all the gold in the tottering Axis countries were, and they would steal the gold. They'd give me a share.”

Somebody somewhere in the house cursed terrifically in Roumanian. It caused a rumpus, before everyone else found out it was a mashed finger.

“At first they didn't tell me how they were going to manage the gold-stealing,” Mereschal said. “I thought it was crazy. Still, this sport-coated man was a famous Roumanian chemist who had done quite a lot of war work in Berlin, developing ersatz materials for the war. He was important. So I figured there must be some catch to it. I played along with them, without really intending to throw in with them, and finally out came the catch.”

Mereschal grimaced at them.

“You can imagine how stunned I was when I found out they had developed a cloth which makes a man invisible if the conditions of lighting are exactly right. There can't be too much light, and the background has to be neutral. That is, anyone enveloped in the cloth can't stand against a bright light and expect to be unnoticed.”

Ham said, “The cloth isn't perfect, in other words.”

“It seemed fairly perfect to me,” Monk growled.

Mereschal said, “It wasn't perfect enough for war use. You see, they developed it for that. It was a secret thing, just this sport-suited man and two others knowing anything about it. When they saw it wasn't going to win the war, and the war was lost anyway, they decided to use it and clean up all the gold lying around. They figured gold was the one really tangible, and valuable, thing they could steal. After the war, they could 'find' a gold mine somewhere, and sell their gold as coming from the mine.”

“So you decided to call on Doc for help?” Monk asked.

“Not at first. First, I called in the detective agency of Jay and Nat, here. I'd known Nat in Europe. I didn't tell them the truth—well—because I was in America illegally.”

Doris said, “What did I tell you! I guessed that!”

“It was for that reason—not being in the United States legally—that I hesitated to ask help of Doc Savage. But when more pressure was put on me, I decided to do so. I discussed it with Nat and Jay. But before I could do so, they pulled that bank thing on you to get you so involved you couldn't help me.

“I took heart when you escaped the police. I saw that advertisement in the newspaper, met you at the joke shop, and told you to be at that beach on Long Island, because I knew the plane was going to pick them up there. That date was already made, the time of the plane's arrival agreed upon to the minute. It was the same plane which had taken them to the United States in the first place.”

“The same plane,” Johnny said. “I was wondering how they got there.”

Monk asked, “How come they rate a plane service like that?”

“I told you they're important Nazis, particularly the flashy dresser.”

“Okay, you knew the time and the spot for the plane. Go from there.”

“I planned,” said Mereschal, “to meet you on the beach, and tell you the story, and help you capture the plane, or have the American military do it. But I couldn't. They caught me. They took me to another plane. I didn't know there was to be a second plane. They took me aboard it, and here I am.”

“Here we all are,” Monk agreed.

The hammers were still busy through the house.

Chapter XIV

DOC SAVAGE stood in the oncoming night and listened to the chorus of the hammers.

Nat pressed against him, shivering, and asked, “You sure this is the place where they went?”

“Of course it is. There's their cars.”

“But the hammering?”

“Nailing up the place to keep us out.”

“What are we going to do?”

The river was spread out below them. Portable searchlights had been lighted up around the planes, and were sweeping the river. Men were rowing around in boats, probing in the water with long poles, hunting Doc's body.

“We might get a bit closer,” Doc said.

“Is it safe?”

“Apparently they have no guards outside.”

They had taken about five steps when Doc Savage fell. He went down heavily, but without much noise. A moment later he made a hissing sound that was painful.

“What's the matter?” Nat asked.

“Ankle. There was a hole here.”

“Sprained?”

Doc Savage did not answer for a while. He was exploring the ankle.

“Broken,” he said.

Nat made various frantic mumblings and gruntings which added up to nothing much except he didn't care for the whole situation.

Doc said, “We can not let this interfere. While I am splinting this ankle, you go take a look at the house. See if there is any way we can help our friends.”

“Can't you move?”

“A very little—after the ankle is splinted, and if I can find something that will do as a crutch.”

“Okay, I'll look over the house,” Nat said. “But we haven't got a chance. We're fixed.”

He went away into the darkness.

Doc Savage got up and followed Nat.

There was nothing whatever wrong with his ankle, and the bronze man was a little uncomfortable over lying about it.

Nat went to the back door of the house. After he had talked to those within, they let him in.

In about five minutes, everybody—except the prisoners—came galloping out of the back door. They had flashlights and handfuls of guns. Nat was with them, pointing at the spot where he had left Doc. They all stalked away silently, headed for the spot.

As soon as the coast was clear, Doc went into the house.

IN every room of the house every light that was available was blazing. The place was full of rich, fine paintings, tapestries. Most of the stuff hadn't been fitted into the surroundings by a decorator, but just placed there by someone with a greedy eye for looking at art treasures. In the four rooms through which he passed, Doc Savage saw at least two paintings which belonged in Dutch museums, and one from the Louvre.

He found the prisoners by the noise they were making asking each other questions. The door was locked, but the key was in the lock.

Doc went in.

"I'll be superamalgamated!" Johnny said.

Doc asked, "Where is that small trunk they brought in the plane? Any of you know where they put it?"

"In a closet," Monk said. "Next room."

Doc untied Monk. "Get the rest of them loose. Quick."

Two doors in the next room proved to lead into other rooms, but the third door was the closet. The fibre trunk was locked. Doc relieved a nearby suit of armor of its broadsword and used that to open the trunk.

The trunk was neatly packed with a rather unusual looking translucent cloth, cloth which looked as if it were made of some plastic similar to cellophane. It was perfectly visible. Just glass-like cloth, not even transparent.

But when Doc lifted folds of the stuff—the trunk proved to contain a number of long cape-like garments—and unfolded parts of it, the stuff became suddenly vague, seeming to disappear.

Monk and the others were gathering around him.

"Put them on," Doc said.

"What took our friends out of the house?" Ham asked.

"I sent them a bellwether," Doc admitted.

"Huh?"

"When this thing starts," Doc said, "be sure you know who your friends are. And Nat isn't one of them."

“Nat isn’t—”

“Nat,” Doc said, “is one of them.”

“Blazes! What tipped you to that?”

“You remember way back on that beach on Long Island? Recall how Nat so carelessly 'overlooked' one of those crooks in the back seat of a car? The crook who later nearly wrecked our plans, and would have, if we hadn't walloped him with pocketfuls of sand?”

“Oh! That wasn't any accident?”

“No, but I was not sure at the time. Then we were kept alive in the plane, for no good reason, apparently. But if Nat wanted to come back to the United States and live the life of an innocent private detective, he would find it handy to have one of us kept alive to go back and testify he was a nice boy. And there were other things—the way Nat tried to plant in our minds the conviction that the soldier in the plane could understand English. Nat was going to relay the information himself, but wanted us to think the soldier did it.”

“That,” Monk said grimly, “makes it sound as if he was the guy in the mess who wore the big feathers.”

“No. Just one of the important members of the tribe.”

“Listen, the rest of you, this Nat is my private pet,” Monk said. “So let me have him.”

THERE were four suits, or robes, of the translucent cloth. Doc, Monk, Ham and Johnny put these on.

“Hey, they don't make anybody invisible,” Ham complained.

Doc Savage assigned Jay the job of taking care of Doris. They were also to search the house for ropes, cords, or anything else, adhesive tape if they could find any, for binding prisoners.

Ham said, “I'm going to take this thing off. I'm only—if I'm like the rest of you—partly hidden. I mean, you all show up as grayish figures—”

“We will waylay them outside, either in the night or in pale light from the house,” Doc said. “The results will surprise you.”

Monk picked up the broadsword Doc had used to open the trunk.

“Boy, I always wanted to swing one of these on somebody,” he said.

Ham said disgustedly, “They will see the sword when you swing it.”

“The ghost sword,” Monk said. “That ought to scare the britches off them.”

“It won't scare them half an inch, because they know all about this cloth. They invented it.”

Monk decided to throw the sword away.

They went outside, stood waiting in the semi-darkness, lighted only by reflection from the house windows, and what light a pale moon gave.

They discovered that they couldn't see each other—except, when one happened to be looking directly at

another, there were two yellowish spots where their eyes were visible through the peepholes.

MONK said, "This cloth is a phosphor compound, probably a zinc-cadmium-strontium sulphide set-up, coated on some kind of translucent plastic fibre. I can tell that much about it."

"How come our eyes look yellow?" Ham asked.

"It's the effect of the light radiated from the cloth. At such close range, it sets up a yellowish phosphorescent reflection in the human eye."

"That sounds complicated."

Monk said, "Doc, am I right? What is your idea of how this cloth is made?"

Doc Savage said that they had better wait until later.

"If we fail to get the best of that gang, there will be no more foolishness about not killing us," he added.

Johnny Littlejohn muttered, "I think I hear them coming back."

He was right. The searchers appeared, a muttering clot in the gloom, keeping close together for mutual protection. The sport-suit and Jurger were taking turns cursing Nat for not killing Doc Savage when he had the chance. Nat, swearing back at them, was reminding them they'd had a chance or two themselves.

"If it wasn't for you wanting them kept alive to alibi for you," Jurger bellowed, "they would have been tossed in the damned ocean!"

The group got fairly close.

"Poor Nat," Monk said. "Now watch me add to his worries!"

Nat heard the remark, jumped violently, peered all about in the darkness. "What was that?" he demanded.

The next instant there was a loud, meaty sound, and he began moving around like one of those toys with legs held together by strings.

Doc Savage and Johnny Littlejohn made for the men who carried flashlights. The flashlights were more dangerous as weapons than the guns. They got two men down without trouble.

There were in all nine men against them. Against four of Doc's party. This wasn't bad odds, considering the advantage they had.

"The flashlights!" Sport-suit yelled. "Use the flashlights!"

One light only was turned on, however. And Doc fell upon that man, and wrestled him to the ground. The cloth was remarkably tough. Their arms fitted into sleeve-sacks which gave them some freedom of movement.

Five down.

Ham Brooks got kicked in the stomach and put out of the running temporarily.

Monk, apparently dissatisfied with the damage fists could do, stooped and got a revolver which someone

had dropped. He drew this under his cloak, which was the only place he could hold the weapon properly.

It was one of Doc Savage's rules to do no life-taking, no matter how great the provocation. The rule had given Monk trouble in the past. In a tight brawl, he was inclined to forget about it, then come forth with interesting excuses and alibis later.

Now Monk tried to shoot one of the gang through the cloak. The cloak turned out to be highly inflammable. It burst into flame, sending Monk to howling and springing into the air, fighting fire. The gun-muzzle flare had ignited the trick cloth.

About that time, Doc and Johnny finished off the fighting.

"Help!" Monk yelled. "Put me out, somebody!"

"Help him out, Doris," Doc called. "And then everybody load in one of the cars. Take along Nat, Jurger and the sport-suit."

THEY took one of the army command cars, a large open touring model. Doc drove, Doris and Jay beside him, the others in the rear with the extinguished Monk. Doc headed down the hill toward the planes.

Monk smouldered, grumbled, and felt of scorched places. "I'm fried to a crisp," he complained.

"How did you catch afire?" Ham asked.

"Huh?"

"You weren't breaking our rule? Seems I heard a gun go off. You didn't snatch a pistol up under that cloak and try to shoot somebody?"

"Me?" said Monk indignantly. "Why you know I wouldn't think of such a thing!"

"Well, how did you catch afire?" Ham insisted.

Monk was stumped.

Doc Savage said, "We will try for one plane. Three of us still have the cloaks, so that will help. There should be fuel in the plane to reach Turkey or Egypt. We will take along Nat, sport-suit and Jurger, to explain those murders in New York."

To the general astonishment of everybody, doing this turned out to be about as easy as saying it. There were only two guards, and Ham and Johnny, in the robes, took care of them. Everybody loaded in the plane, and they left.

"Well?" Ham said.

"Well what?" Monk asked.

"How'd you catch afire?"

Monk squirmed. He hadn't been able to think of a passable lie. "Spontaneous combustion," he muttered.

*Aboard a doomed ship in the Caribbean, Doc Savage hunts the evil perpetrators of the mysterious disappearance of cargo ships. Ships abandoned under sail after a torpedo attack vanish without a trace. Don't miss *The Derelict of Skull Shoal* in the February Doc Savage Magazine on sale, Friday, Jan. 28th.*

The Invisible Cloth

HERE is the trick. The cloth is woven of an almost translucent form of fiber. In the fibers are embedded billions of minute crystals of a specially treated sulphide mixture having the property of storing light energy and releasing it at a later time. The phosphors absorb light when the intensity is high. When the phosphors are moved into the dark, the radiation continues—falling in intensity as it gradually becomes discharged. For the purpose of this cloth, a phosphor has been devised which will always radiate exactly as much light as falls on it. Thus if an object enclosed in the cloth is standing where a weak light falls on it, it matches the light because the cloth radiates at the same rate. If it is standing on a rooftop, it will not appear as a silhouette against a lighter sky, because the cloth will radiate a faint light. But if in a black shadow, the cloth gets no light, and stops radiating altogether; it's black in a black shadow. However, if there's a black background, and a bright light in front, the cloak will, in back, match the black background all right—but the front of the cloak will match the light falling on it, and it will appear luminous against a black background. This feature might be overcome. Allow that the cloak requires a weak electric current in its fibers to overcome the tendency of phosphors to radiate less than the amount of light.