



ROCK SINISTER

A Doc Savage Adventure by Kenneth Robeson

This page copyright © 2003 Blackmask Online.

<http://www.blackmask.com>

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

*Scanned and Proofed
by Tom Stephens*

Chapter I

HER name was Abril Trujilla, and she hoped she acted, looked and sounded natural as she called, “Yoo hoo! Kathy, darling, will you neglect that handsome pilot for a moment? I want to talk to you.”

“Only for a moment, dear,” said Kathy Doyle. “Are you getting air-sick, angel, I hope?”

Both girls were red-headed. And they were too pretty to be friends. Their dears, honeys and darlings weren't really nasty—just a slight I-hope-you-fall-on-your-pretty-face note.

“I want to whisper. Do you mind?” Abril beckoned.

Abril Trujilla actually looked like an Irish colleen. Her grandfather had been named Patrick Kelly, and he had gone to South America, to a republic we'll call Blanca Grande—Blanca Grande isn't its name, but it must be called that—when he was a strap of a lad. He made fifty million or so pesos in the cattle business and married a señorita. His daughter, who became Abril's mother, married Juan Trujilla, son of Blanca Grande's other cow baron. A desirable merger. So Abril was a quarter Irish by blood, ninety-nine per cent Irish in looks.

Kathy Doyle took the plane seat beside Abril. Kathy's name was Irish, but she wasn't. The Doyle in Kathy's family tree had been a miser of a penny-grabbing Scotchman who had once nearly succeeded in getting hold of all the money in Blanca Grande. “What is it, sweet?” Kathy asked.

Abril leaned forward. Her whisper was considerably less hair-raising in tone than her words. She said, “I have located the man who is going to kill us.”

Kathy became rigid. The fear began, almost visibly, in her brain and crawled outward. “Oh, God,” she said.

The plane was booming over the Caribbean at six thousand feet. Northbound. It was one of Pan America's new ones, very comfortable, very large. There was a Captain, a Mate, a Stewardess, Engineer and Radioman. And by now the Captain was very much Kathy's puppy. Kathy had been showing her teeth to him, and the delighted Captain had made the Mate slide out of the co-pilot's seat so Kathy could sit there and learn how it felt to fly thirty-five thousand roaring pounds of passenger seaplane. Incidentally, the Captain was supposed to pay no attention whatever to any eye-shining by lady passengers.

The two girls looked at each other, while terror crawled around on their nerves.

“Where is he?” Kathy asked. Her nerves had suddenly become so knotted that she had to clear her throat to speak.

“He—” Abril paled. “Oh! The aisle! Coming this way!”

THE man was little. He had a cocky walk. The cockiness of a weasel just out of a hen coop, proud of having cut the throats of all the hens. He was barely five feet tall.

He smiled at the two girls as he walked past. Impersonally. The smile was startling because of the size of his teeth. His face turned to teeth.

“Ugh!” Abril gasped, when he had gone past.

“The better to eat us with, grandma,” Kathy said, pale and shaky.

Abril nodded. “Yes, his teeth. They gave him away. They're why I kept noticing him. He's following us.”

“Oh, gosh! Are you sure?”

“Certain enough to be awfully upset. Kathy, I saw him talking to another man who had been on the plane that brought us to Rio. I began to realize then he was on our trail.”

Kathy shivered. “So they swapped bloodhounds in Rio,” she said. “They're liable to do it again.”

Abril nodded grimly. “They've got us spotted, and they have had, all along.”

Kathy said brightly, “Well, we'll give them the slip when we get to the United States.”

Abril shook her head. “I'm afraid, Doyle. I'm afraid they'll have a reception committee ready for us. I think that's why we were delayed in Rio.”

The terror blazed up in Kathy's eyes for a moment. She was remembering what had happened in Rio.

The Rio incident had seemed innocent enough. A mixup at the airlines office, with their reservations cancelled. The airline people had been very sorry, so very sorry, and they had done the best they could with seats on a plane leaving the following day.

The airline people had assumed the blame for the trouble. Kathy wished now that they hadn't, because they were just being polite—the-customer-is-never-wrong stuff—in order not to offend a personage as important as Kathy was. Or rather, two personages as important as Kathy and Abril were.

The two girls looked at each other. They didn't like each other, but at this moment they came near to being friends. Their common terror formed a strong elastic between them.

The little man passed. He was going back to his seat.

He flashed them his big teeth again.

It is the custom in most South American countries for the gentlemen to show appreciation of the ladies in some noticeable fashion. Hence a big grin, a whistle, or an appropriate remark, is considered *de rigueur*. Something that would get a guy's face slapped on the corner of Tenth and Main Streets in Kansas City is considered a justified tribute to the lady's beauty. This was the case in Blanca Grande, at any rate.

The small man obviously expected them to think that was all he was doing. He could hardly pass without acknowledging the beauty of the two red-headed señoritas. Therefore the big smile. He was merely being inconspicuous.

Kathy felt as if he had showed her a skeleton, instead of big yellow-white teeth.

The small man went on to his seat.

"What'll we do?" Kathy gasped. "Sic Square on to him?"

"It's a pleasant thought," Abril said. "But I don't think it would be diplomatic."

Square was a skull-cracking gentleman who was supposed to be their bodyguard.

"I think," Kathy said, "that we should warn him about the little man, at least."

BLANCA GRANDE had been the center of Inca civilization a thousand years before the day of the first Conquistador. On her mountain peaks were ponderous Inca ruins constructed of blocks of stone. The stone blocks were extraordinarily huge and of a type of rock not to be found anywhere else in Blanca Grande. There was a legend to the effect that the Incas had developed an extraordinary race of bull-like men for the job of packing these stone blocks the thousand or so miles which they must have been transported.

There was another report that Square Jones was the direct descendant of these bull-men.

Square maintained otherwise. He insisted he had been born in Paducah, Kentucky, home of good bourbon and Irvin S. Cobb, and to have attended—and graduated from—Kentucky State University. He claimed he could produce his college diploma. He also insisted he was in South America because he was a gold mining engineer, and in Blanca Grande because there was less gold being mined, but with better prospects, in Blanca Grande than anywhere else.

He had never quite got around to mining gold, though. He was too good a man with his fists and muscles. The truth was that he had arrived in Blanca Grande as a wrestler.

Square had not been a very good wrestler. He had reached the status referred to, in carnival slang, as a musclehead.

In Blanca Grande, he had simply transferred his wrestling talents. Instead of squeezing heads in the ring, he squeezed them out of it.

He was a blue-eyed, black-haired young man. He looked as fierce as a bullfight bull hot on the heels of

the toreador. He was big enough to scare a tank.

He was employed by Francisco Doyle, Blanca Grande's most affluent financier. Square was Francisco Doyle's official poker-in-the-noser.

Square listened quietly to Kathy Doyle's story about the small man, then said, "I'm a son of a gun!"

He started to get up.

"Where are you going?" Kathy asked Square.

"Fix him," said Square.

"Oh, no, no," Kathy said hastily. "Sit down!"

"But—"

"You," said Kathy, "will get us tangled up in a murder, and that will mean complications. We can't have that. This is a very important affair. We can't have any monkey wrenches falling in the works."

"Fix him gently," said Square hopefully.

"How do you mean, gently?"

"Fall on him," said Square. He illustrated how he intended to stumble. "Fall on little guy. Mash him."

"Don't be silly," said Kathy. "You wouldn't mash him that easily."

Square looked at her placidly. "I would if I happened to get my hands on him when I fell. I would break his back. It would be a very simple accident."

Kathy shuddered. "Stop such talk!"

She wasn't quite sure whether Square meant what he was saying or not. There were some remarkable stories about Square to be picked up around Mercado, the capital city of Blanca Grande. Kathy hoped they weren't true.

"It would be the most simple kind of an accident," said Square hopefully.

"No."

"I would be a complete stranger to you and this Abril babe. I would tell the police that," Square said.

"They would be likely to believe that, since we bought your ticket," Kathy said. "No, stop such talk."

"What am I to do, then?" Square asked resignedly.

"Keep your eyes open."

"Okay."

Kathy went back to her seat.

Abril Trujilla was waiting at the seat, and she was excited. "I have an idea, dear," she said.

"What is it, honey?" Kathy asked.

TALKING to Square had cheered Kathy somewhat. Anyway it had lifted her spirits to the point where she was being catty to Abril again.

Getting an idea had evidently revived Abril, too, because she smiled sweetly and said, "It's a beautiful idea. You'll love it."

"I will?"

"Yes. You can make use of your man-eating talents."

Kathy frowned. "Look here, sister. If you're planning for me and the little man—"

"Now, why didn't I think of that!" Abril said sweetly. "No, darling, it's the pilot."

"The pilot?"

"The big hunk of man you've been rolling your eyes at and dragging your fingers over. The one who's flying this airplane."

"What about him?"

"How much," asked Abril, "could you do with him?"

"Plenty," said Kathy.

"I hope your confidence isn't misplaced, sugar," Abril said. "Because how does this sound? The pilot makes an unscheduled landing at some point. He lets one of us leave the plane there. The other one of us flies on with Square. In other words, one of us gives the slip to this little man, and any of his friends who may be waiting at Miami, Havana or any other point."

Kathy bit her lower lip. She was thinking it over.

Abril said, "It's really very simple. They won't have people waiting for us where the plane isn't expected to land. So all you have to do is have the pilot set one of us loose before we get to Miami."

"The pilot," said Kathy, "wouldn't do it."

"Darling, where's your maidenly magnetism? Of course he'll do it. He has to. Go up there and wave your eyelashes at him."

Kathy swallowed her doubts.

"I'll try," she agreed.

She was right. The pilot was stunned at the idea. "My God, there's regulations against that," he told her. "National and international regulations, to say nothing of company regulations."

Kathy got down to business with him.

"DARLING, it's over," Kathy reported to Abril. "We land at Key West. It's not a scheduled stop. You get off there. I continue with Square."

"I get off?"

"Yes, you. How far do you think I'd have gotten persuading him to stop to let me off, my dear?" Kathy said sweetly.

Abril put a hand on her arm. "You really do all right, don't you? In your barracudaish way."

The girls sat there for a while. They became sober. The grimness of the thing in which they were involved took hold of their nerves. The terrible mystery that had surrounded them, and it *was* a mystery and it *was* terrible, depressed them.

"Kathy," Abril said, "I wish you luck. And I mean it."

"Sure, Abril. Thanks and the same to you."

"There's probably no danger," Abril said hopefully.

"Don't kid yourself," Kathy told her.

"You've got the dangerous part, I'm afraid."

"I have Square to help me. Square is a one-man army."

"Yes, he is."

"Don't let anything happen to you, Abril. Charter a plane as soon as you get off in Key West. Head for New York, but take an out-of-the-way course. So they can't catch you."

Abril nodded. "Don't sound so worried, Kathy. We'll make it to New York."

"All right," Kathy told her. "Of course we will. I'll see you in Doc Savage's office in New York, then."

"Doc Savages office. Right." They shook hands gravely.

Chapter II

THE big plane landed in Key West harbor, and Abril Trujilla went ashore. She stood on the concrete seawall and waved as the ship taxied away.

Kathy Doyle managed to watch the small man during most of the time the other girl was going ashore. He didn't look particularly happy. But he did give Kathy another of his smiles as the plane took the air.

The smile made Kathy shiver. She went back and sat on the arm of Square's seat. "That's that," she said. "We've thrown our curve. I hope they don't catch it."

Square smiled amiably. "How'd our little man take it?"

"He seemed slightly unhappy. But he gave me that smile again."

"You want me to bust him one for mashing?" Square asked hopefully.

"Never mind."

Square sighed. "You better let me fall on him," he said. "I could tell people it was an accident."

Kathy shook her head. "We're practically in the United States now. They don't like that kind of accident up here."

Square glanced up at her. "You know something?"

"Eh?"

"We been having accidents in Blanca Grande, ain't we?" he said.

There was double meaning in his words, but he meant exactly what he said. There had been an epidemic of *that* kind of accident in Blanca Grande over a period of about a year.

Kathy moistened her lips uneasily. "So you've noticed it, too."

"Uh-huh."

"Square."

"Yeah?"

"What do you know about those 'accidents,' as you call them?" Kathy demanded.

Square bristled. "Listen, don't you accuse me—"

"Oh, Square!" She put a hand on his shoulder. "Don't be silly. I know you haven't had a hand in such things." Square's shoulder felt like a box of pig iron. "What I meant is, what do you hear about the accidents?"

"I'm glad you made it clear what you meant," Square said dryly. He was thoughtful for a moment. "You want to know what I've heard about the things you mention, eh? Well, I'll tell you this: I've heard it ain't safe to hear too much."

"Ever hear any names mentioned?"

Square glanced at her sharply. "Honey, ain't you been told the facts of life?"

"Meaning just what fact?"

Square hesitated. "The name of the fact," he said, "is Lanza."

"Señor Andros Lanza?"

"The word Señor," said Square with a snort, "is Spanish for gentleman or equivalent. You insult the word."

"Andros Lanza, then?"

Square nodded. "That's right. And don't ask me anything more, because I don't know it."

Square closed his eyes and pretended to go to sleep. He'd said all he was going to say.

AT Miami, their little man left them. When they were going through customs, Square deliberately sauntered over to eavesdrop on the little mans story.

“Says he's a rubber manufacturer,” Square told Kathy. “Bet he never saw a rubber tree.”

The little man strutted off to a taxicab when he was through the customs grind. But not before he had flashed Kathy his startling toothy smile as a parting gift.

“That means,” said Kathy, “that new bloodhounds are on our trail.”

“You're probably right,” Square agreed, placidly munching a candy bar.

“Darn you!” Kathy said. “Aren't you worried?”

“Scared pink,” Square confessed. “Let's do things about this.”

“For instance?”

“Dodging,” Square said.

They dodged until they were dizzy. They rode in taxicabs, street cars, busses. They walked and they ran, and they didn't do any of it in a straight line. They topped it off with a speedboat ride across the harbor to Miami Beach, where they had the good luck to charter a rattletrap of a seaplane to take them as far as Tallahassee, where they could charter a better ship.

“Maybe,” Kathy said, “the little man isn't going to be the one who kills us.”

“I wish you'd quit talking like that!” said Square uncomfortably.

“Why not? You know they're going to kill us, don't you?”

Square snorted. “Over my dead body, they're going to kill us!” he said.

“Anyway,” said Kathy, “I don't think we're followed right at the moment. So we've postponed it for a while.”

At Tallahassee, they made a deal for a four-place cabin job which was nearly as fast as an airliner. They headed for New York in that.

Air travel, after the novelty wears off, is the most monotonous travel there is. It was certainly no novelty for Kathy, so she had time on her hands. Time to think.

She did her thinking mostly about Señor Andros Lanza. She knew Andy quite well. She had spent a good deal of time sitting on his knee, permitting him to chuck her under the chin. At the time, she had been between the ages of six months and one year.

She knew Andy Lanza quite well indeed. He was an old family friend. He had known her father, Kathy supposed, most of his life. Andy was the current president of Blanca Grande.

Kathy frowned. Señor Andros Lanza, president, was not the Andy Lanza of old. He had changed. He had changed from wearing tweed suits to wearing uniforms. Zippy uniforms, too. Andy used to raise orchids, and liked to walk around looking at them. Today he liked to stand in a reviewing box and look at his troops parading past.

Maybe that was all right. Kathy was one of those who hoped it was. The world was full of war, and the war spirit was as catching as the measles. Maybe Andy's martial interests were all right. A lot of people hoped so.

“Square,” Kathy said.

“Yes'm, angel?”

“Just what have you heard about Andy Lanza?” Kathy asked.

Square evidently had been thinking things over. He closed his eyes firmly.

“You forget what I said,” he ordered flatly.

WHEN the skyscrapers of Manhattan Island jumped up like a fantastic forest on the horizon, Kathy punched Square in the ribs. It was like punching a box car. “Square, I've got another idea.”

“Good sign. Let's hear it.”

“They may know,” Kathy said, “that we're going to see a man named Doc Savage.”

Square looked alarmed.

“That,” he said, “is supposed to be a secret.”

“Secrets have the loudest voices, sometimes,” Kathy said.

“Sister, you spoke it.”

“My idea,” said Kathy, “is that a panther will go looking for its own kitten.”

“Been known to happen.”

Kathy asked Square, “Just how much do you know about this Doc Savage character?”

Square contemplated the impressive airline view of Manhattan, rapidly drawing closer. “Just chaff-chaff. Just talk,” he said.

“What kind of talk?”

“Big, wild and woolly talk,” Square said. “The kind of stuff you don't believe because it's too far-fetched.”

“In this case, maybe you should have believed it,” Kathy said.

Square eyed her sharply. He was skeptical. “You joshing?”

“He's a scientist. He's a mental marvel. He's a physical Samson. He's a Galahad. He helps people out of trouble, if the trouble is interesting.”

“That,” said Square, “sounds like the stuff I've heard about this Doc Savage.”

“Exactly.”

Square sighed doubtfully. “We'll see. We'll see. What was this talk about panther cubs?”

“Doc Savage has five assistants. Five specialists who help him. We will go to one of them first, instead of approaching Doc Savage directly.” Kathy was pleased with her idea.

“Why go in the back door when the front door's closer?” asked Square.

Kathy shivered. “The front door may have a bulldog watching it.”

“Bulldogs,” said Square, “are nice people. Don't go insulting bulldogs. Skunk is a better word.”

Kathy glanced at him sharply. “Would you still say the animal looks like Andy Lanza?”

“There ain't a thing happened to change my mind,” Square assured her grimly.

LIEUTENANT COLONEL ANDREW BLODGETT MAYFAIR was a short man with extremely wide shoulders and long arms and face made for scaring babies. His arms were nearly long enough to enable him to scratch his ankles without stooping, and all the exposed parts of him were covered with a furry growth resembling rusty shingle nails. He had a wide mouth, small twinkling eyes and not more than an inch of forehead. He was one of the world's eminent chemists.

Mayfair was likely to do anything, provided it was unexpected and struck him as interesting at the time.

Kathy Doyle liked him immediately.

This was mutual.

“Let's get off on the right foot,” Mayfair told her. “You call me Monk, so I'll know who you're talking to. I never get called anything but that. And when I get to making passes, and get too troublesome, just gently insert a thumb in my left eye and twist. The left one, remember.”

Kathy laughed. “You don't look like one of the world's great industrial chemists.”

“That was all an accident, I think,” Monk said.

“This is my friend, Square,” Kathy introduced.

Square didn't think too much of Monk.

This was mutual.

The two gentlemen shook hands. They were about the same height, but Square was fifty pounds or more heavier, and Monk was considerably more homely. They proceeded to try to crush the bones in each other's hands. Having failed in this, they separated and each put his hand in his pocket, wondering how many bones were broken.

“We're from Blanca Grande,” Kathy told Monk Mayfair.

“I know where it is,” said Monk.

“Some people don't,” Kathy smiled. “How do you like to talk? Do you like to start right in with the meat course?”

“As long,” Monk said, “as you don't skip the dessert course.”

“I hope you can find a dessert course in this affair,” Kathy told him. “I haven't.”

“You will do until one comes along,” Monk said gallantly. “What do you want to talk to me about?”

“Doc Savage is really the one,” Kathy said. “I want to talk to him, and I want you to take me to him.”

Monk was crestfallen. “You could go right to Doc yourself. He's not exclusive.”

“And get my head shot off, maybe,” Kathy said grimly.

“Maybe I don't get it,” Monk was puzzled. “What do you want?”

“A bodyguard.”

“You came to the right guy,” said Monk expansively.

MONK MAYFAIR had received Kathy and Square in a laboratory-penthouse-home establishment which he maintained far downtown in Manhattan, in the Wall Street section. The place was extreme. Its decorative scheme tended to be that of a circus. It was modernistic, so modernistic that there was hardly any of the furniture you could sit on.

“We gotta go uptown,” Monk explained. “Doc's office is uptown.”

“Okay,” said Kathy. “As long as we really get there.”

“We will.”

Square snorted. “You talk tall.”

“I'm a tall guy,” Monk assured him.

Kathy, afraid the pair were going to get into a fuss, asked hastily, “Where's your pig?”

“Huh?”

“Your pig. I hear you keep a pig for a pet.”

This caused Square to snort more loudly.

Monk scowled at Square. “That's right,” he told Kathy. “Habeas Corpus, my pet hog. You want to see him?”

“I'd love it,” said Kathy, catching Square's eye and shaking her head for Square not to start squabbling with Monk.

“This way,” said Monk with a flourish. He escorted them to a room with special sun glass in the walls, a parquet floor, a sunken mud pool in which the mud was perfumed, and various other foolish regalia for a pig.

In the middle of this luxury was a godawful looking undersized hog with ears like wings and rabbit legs.

Square made a choking noise. “All this”—he waved at the emperor-like luxury—“for a hog!”

“That's right.” Monk bristled. “A special hog. This hog has saved my life. He's saved Doc Savage's life. He's quite a hog!”

“Square,” said Kathy. “Sew a button on your lip.”

Square rolled his eyes. His expression asked what kind of a goof was this Monk Mayfair, but he didn't put it in words.

Monk examined Square intently and seemed to be debating how easily one of Square's arms would come off if he should grasp it firmly. Monk finally shrugged.

"Let's make progress," he said. "Uptown."

THE little man joined them in the lobby of the skyscraper.

Kathy screamed when she saw the little man. She couldn't help it. The scream just tore out of her lungs.

"Plees don' do that!" said the little man, unhappily.

Monk examined the small fellow. "You know this tiny particle?" he asked Kathy.

Kathy was so terrified she could hardly form words. Finally she managed to say, "He followed us from Blanca Grande!"

"What does atom want?" Monk asked.

"To kill us, I'm sure," Kathy cried.

Monk laughed. "This embryo-size? He looks to me as if he would have to train for a bout with a housefly."

The small man smirked. "You ees don' scare?" he asked.

"Not worth a nickel," Monk said.

"Son of my gun." The little man looked concerned. "You ees take a look around, no?" He gestured. "She ees scare hell out of me, no?"

Monk looked around and the skin on his neck crawled together in a bunch. The lobby wasn't exactly full of violent-looking men with guns, but it was full enough to be impressive. Six men, he counted. They shared nine guns among them.

All the lightness had gone out of the situation suddenly. Monk's homely face was sober. This was bad. He didn't know what it was all about, either. He wished he had asked before tripping off gaily to take Kathy and Square to Doc Savage.

Square, in a low voice, asked, "Listen, homely, what would you call our chances?"

"Zero," Monk said.

"My idea too," Square agreed. "We stand and take it, eh?"

"Yeah, we take it."

The small man smirked. "You won't like it," he promised them.

Chapter III

ABRIL TRUJILLA finally reached New York, having chartered a plane in Key West which brought her to Philadelphia. It was a slow lightplane, so the trip had taken what seemed an interminable time. But now she was down at Boulevard Field, Philadelphia.

She caught a train into New York, rather proud of her acumen. Looking about at all the people who crowded the train, she felt that she was in the safest plane in the world. They couldn't have followed her. They couldn't possibly have followed her. The little man couldn't have gotten word to his friends in time to enable them to pick up the trail.

The train arrived in New York, Pennsylvania Station. Abril Trujilla alighted happily, carrying her own small bag, and climbed the steps to the station with the crowd.

In Pennsylvania Station you come out, when arriving by train, in a low-ceilinged sort of a cavern which is plentifully studded with large supporting columns. It is, to the stranger, a puzzle of passages, alcoves, chambers, mysterious doors and general confusion.

Abril Trujilla had never been there before, so she was thoroughly bewildered. Confused as to just where the street exit was, she stopped, her back against one of the numerous pillars, to look around.

There was a roar. There was a crash close to Abril's ear. Her face got a blow.

A bullet had hit the pillar beside her face.

Abril made a natural mistake, and presumed the bullet had actually hit her. What had happened was that it had knocked loose chips of stone, and these had cut her cheek slightly.

She lit out running.

She screamed, "Doc Savage! Help!"

Just why she yelled that was something she wondered about later. Probably because she was on her way to see Doc Savage. He was on her mind.

The floor was tiled, and slippery. Trying to run, trying so very hard to sprint, her feet slipped and she fell and banged her head against one of the stone columns.

Things got black.

When they got light again, there were several rather puzzled looking men, most of them middle-aged, around her.

Abril looked about, and saw that she was in a large rather plain room that was obviously in the railway station.

"She's awake now," one of the men said.

Another man came over to look down at Abril. "What's your name, sister?" Abril was lying on a white cot, she discovered.

She didn't answer.

"Come on, come on," the man said sharply. "What's your name and what were you pulling?"

"Who are you?" Abril asked uneasily.

“Cops,” the man said.

Abril didn't believe this. Policemen, she knew, wore uniforms. She told them so. “You're not uniformed,” she said.

“Sister, we're railroad dicks,” the man told her. He was a large man, who ran to rounded edges. He looked somewhat like a well-stuffed gunnysack.

Abril wasn't convinced.

Another of the men had been digging at the lock of Abril's suitcase with a pin.

“The key is in my purse,” Abril told him wearily.

“Yeah? Thanks.” The man got the key and unlocked the suitcase and opened it. “Good God!” he yelled. “She's a commando troop!”

THE collection of pistols and ammunition, plus a bulletproof vest in Abril's suitcase was no surprise to her.

“I was expecting a little trouble,” she said wearily.

“This collection is really yours?” the man asked, amazed.

“It sure is.”

“Did you plan to use it?”

“If necessary,” Abril said.

There was a stir at the door. A man went to see what it was. He came back. “Doc Savage is here,” he said. “He's coming down the hall.”

Abril was startled. “Doc Savage!”

The man told her, “You yelled for him before you bumped your head. So we sent for him.”

“I'll bet you did!” Abril said grimly.

She was convinced the man who was coming wouldn't be Doc Savage. She was suspicious. She didn't know who these men were.

“Listen,” Abril said. “If you're railroad detectives, show me your credentials!”

The men glanced at each other, and there was a general laugh. Abril froze. They were *not* railroad detectives! She was sure of it. Otherwise, why wouldn't they show her proof of who they were?

Abril was making a mistake. She was accustomed to being important. In Blanca Grande, she was a personage. Her father was one of the two wealthiest and most influential men in the country, and one of the best-loved. In Blanca Grande, Abril was somebody. Right now, here in the New York railway station, she was just a frightened girl who had been mixed up in a mysterious shooting. For all the railroad detectives knew, she was a little tramp. True, she had the manners of a princess, but that didn't always mean anything. They just didn't consider it necessary to prove who they were. After all, it was up to her

to show *them* who *she* was.

The result was that Abril was in no frame of mind to believe the man who now arrived was Doc Savage.

She had an attack of doubt when she saw him. Because the newcomer was an impressive man. He was a physical giant, a mighty bronzed figure of a man, not particularly handsome, yet not bad-looking either. His skin looked as if it had been so bronzed by tropical suns that it would never bleach out again.

His eyes were remarkable. Probably the eyes were the man's most unusual feature. They were strange gold-colored eyes, and there was an impression of something flowing deep within them. Probably the impression that they contained flake gold in motion was an illusion, but it was certainly strong.

The railroad detectives seemed impressed. They were hardboiled New Yorkers, and it was something out of the way for them to be impressed by anybody.

The giant bronze man had a deep, modulated, controlled voice.

Probably some ham actor they've hired, Abril thought.

"HERE'S the girl, Mr. Savage," one of the railroad detectives explained. "Know her?"

Doc Savage examined Abril. "Never saw her before," he admitted.

"I was afraid of that. The only reason we called you, there was a shooting downstairs. One shot. And it was a shot, too, because we found where it hit. We found the lead marks. And this girl ran. She screamed for you. She cried something about wanting help, and mentioned your name. Then she slipped. That floor down there is slick. She skidded into a post, bumped her head, and knocked herself out. We brought her up here and called you. She just woke up a few minutes before you got here. She won't talk."

Doc Savage listened to the recital without much change of expression. "Who fired the shot?"

"We don't know for sure."

Doc nodded at Abril. "Did she?"

"Probably."

"Liars!" Abril gasped.

"And she hasn't talked?" Doc asked.

"Nope."

The bronze man indicated Abril's suitcase, which was open. "That hers?"

"Yeah. It was full of guns. She must be a regular gun moll for some outfit." The railroad detective sounded as if he was in favor of throwing Abril in jail.

Doc looked levelly at Abril. "You want to talk to me?" he asked.

She put out her lower lip at him. This was a bad habit which she had acquired as a little girl, and she could make it convey the most complete kind of contempt.

She didn't say anything.

Doc was startled. He started to smile, then caught himself.

This girl was scared. Terror swam back of her defiance. He thought he could glimpse, at times, the utmost fear.

He didn't trust his judgment about this too far. He had learned that he could not read women. Long ago he had learned that when they seemed most like an open book to him, they probably were practicing their greatest deceit.

Doc went over and looked at the armament which had been in Abril's suitcase. He picked up one of the weapons, noting that it was a very fine piece, handmade for the most part and exquisitely balanced. He hefted it.

This was no ordinary gun. It was not a weapon a trollop would be packing for her tough boy friend.

This pistol was from a fine collection. It had probably cost, specially made for the hand span and other physical characteristics of the owner, at least a thousand dollars.

He made sure it was not loaded, then tossed it at Abril. He watched her catch it, handle it. She knew the gun. It was made for her hand.

"I'll bet," he said, "that you're a regular Annie Oakley."

She sniffed. "Annie Oakley was an amateur."

"Who's Annie Oakley?" a railroad cop asked one of his fellows.

"A free ticket to a show. Shut up."

Abril turned to give him a disgusted look. "Annie Oakley was one of the greatest marks-women who ever lived. She could trim a gnat's whiskers. And I can shoot circles around any record she ever made."

That, Doc Savage thought dryly, wasn't a very smart admission to make before the railroad detectives. However, he was fairly sure the girl was on the up and up.

"Mr. Savage," one of the railroad men asked, "what do you want to do about this?"

"I'll take the young lady to the office and talk with her some more," Doc said. He glanced at Abril. "Providing she'll go."

Abril thought this was sarcasm.

"Why not?" she snapped.

DOC SAVAGE'S headquarters was his laboratory layout on the eighty-sixth floor of a midtown building. The three rooms—laboratory, library and reception room—took up the whole eighty-sixth floor. This was not as much space as it sounded, for the building at this height had tapered considerably.

Doc indicated a chair in the reception room. "Won't you sit down?"

Abril dropped into a chair. She was beginning to wonder if her judgment was right.

The reception room furniture consisted of a very large steel safe, a great inlaid table of oriental character,

rugs and some ordinary, but extremely comfortable looking, leather chairs. There was nothing particularly lordly about the place. It had somewhat the air of a midtown club frequented by old gentlemen who worry about their hearts and their surtaxes.

“Scared of me?” Doc asked unexpectedly.

“I don't know,” Abril said. “I can't quite make you out.”

“Meaning—you're not sure I'm Doc Savage?”

“That's right.”

“You must have something pretty important to tell Doc Savage?”

She hesitated, then shook her head. “What I've got to tell him isn't so important. But the next thing is that I've got to trust him, and that *is* important.”

“At least that makes sense,” Doc admitted.

She glanced about the place. It was impressive. It was quiet. It had dignity. It had the charm of a place which had just grown. No decorator had ever had a hand in here. The things that were here had just landed here, and remained because they were useful.

This, she thought, is the sort of a place Doc Savage would have.

“Kathy,” Abril said.

“Who?”

“Kathy Doyle.”

“What about her?”

“Where is she?” Abril stared at the bronze man. “She had plenty of time to get to you before I did. What became of her?”

Doc Savage shook his head. “Suppose you build a house of facts. I'll see if I can put doors and windows in it,” he said.

“How would I know I wasn't building a jail for myself?” Abril countered.

“Jail?”

“Or a coffin, more likely.”

Doc wondered how he was going to convert her, get her to talking. There were fifty things in the room and the adjoining library that would prove he was Doc Savage. But he couldn't prove that they weren't faked.

The telephone rang. Doc picked it up. “Yes? . . . Oh, yes, Ham. . . . Yes? . . . When? . . . All right, I am going to be right down there.” He glanced at Abril Trujilla. “I'll probably have company.”

He slammed the receiver on the hook and came to his feet. “We're going downtown.” He made for the door. “You're coming along.”

“Do I have any choice?” Abril snapped.

“Not a bit.”

HAM BROOKS had picked up his nickname of Ham because he had once, in a fit of temper and because he could not find anything else to fuss about, howled that he did not like pork in any form. Ham was Brigadier General Theodore Marley Brooks, and his statement about his tastes had been made in a mess hall he was inspecting, so ever after he had been “Ham” Brooks to his outfit. He didn't like the nickname, but there was nothing he could do about it.

He was a well-dressed hornet of a man, thin at the middle and wide at the shoulders, with intent eyes and a large mobile orator's mouth. Particularly, he was well-dressed. He was the best-dressed thing in New York, was the way his crony Monk Mayfair liked to put it, which was true, but not a way of expressing it that particularly soothed Ham. Monk and Ham were great pals after a rather cockeyed fashion. Neither of them had ever been heard to speak a civil word to, or about, the other one, if they could think of something derogatory instead.

Ham was a lawyer. He was a Doc Savage aide.

In the lobby of Monk's downtown laboratory building he was sweating hailstones.

“Doc, something happened to Monk,” he said. “They laid for him in the lobby and—”

“Who?”

“Maybe the janitor can tell us. They bopped him over the head, but he's coming out of it.”

“Where is the janitor?”

“His office.”

The janitor was a long-legged Brooklynite who knew plenty of swear-words. He used some of them. He said, “The stinking blankety-blanks—”

“Cut that out,” Doc Savage said. “There's a lady present.”

“I know worse words than that,” Abril said. “Want me to help you out?”

The janitor grinned. “Okay, sis. Here's what happened: it was late, and about everybody had gone, and I was looking over the marble wains-cotting in the lobby to see will it need washing down this week. In walk some guys. They don't say much. They just wham me over the peanut with something hard. It's like I put my head in a black barrel with a couple of sparks flying around in it.”

Ham said, “But you woke up shortly.”

“Did I wake up! What a head!” The janitor groaned. “I'm tied, see. I'm a regular package. I'm over behind the cigar counter yonder, and guys are all over the place, and the guys are all over guns.”

“Ambush,” Ham said.

“That's the other word for it.”

“Okay. What happened?”

“It's a surprise party they're having, see. And who do you think the guest of honor is? My old pal, Monk

Mayfair, and some tootsie he has with him, and another guy who is wider than most men are tall.”

Abril started. She turned as pale as an overworked ghost. “Tootsie? Does that translate to girl?”

“Girl. Queen. Angel. Lovely.” The janitor rolled his eyes. “This tootsie is something to behold, sister.” He took a second look at Abril. “Not that you couldn’t run her a close race.”

“I’d run fifty yards ahead of her, I should hope!” Abril snapped.

“Maybe.”

“You say the man with them was wide?”

“He should be as tall as he was wide. What a guy!”

“Square!” Abril gasped.

“Oblong,” said the janitor, “but lying on its side.”

Abril clenched her hands. She turned to Doc Savage.

“I think I’ve made a mistake,” she said. “I think I’ve been hoarding words when I should have been spending them.”

“Meaning?” Doc asked.

“That I’ve got a story to tell,” Abril said vehemently.

Chapter IV

BEFORE Doc listened to Abril Trujilla’s story, he heard Ham explain that what had happened to Monk, Kathy Doyle and Square Jones was a mystery. The mysterious raiders had obviously carried them away as captives. But what had happened next was anybody’s guess.

They went upstairs to Monk’s elaborate penthouse laboratory and heard Abril’s recital.

She began: “Mr. Savage, do you know what Blanca Grande is?” Her tone implied she doubted he knew.

“South American country, isn’t it?”

“Did you ever hear of the Kichua?”

“Another term for the Incas, ancient race which inhabited Blanca Grande and a number of other South American districts, if that is what you mean.”

“Have you any idea of the degree of civilization—”

Ham Brooks said, “Look, my dear, let’s not wander in the darkness. If I may enlighten you, Clark Savage, Jr., who is also Doc Savage, is one of the eminent authorities on Mayan, Aztec, Incan and some other ancient peoples.”

Abril frowned at Doc. “Is that true?”

“Tectatan,” Doc said, and smiled slightly.

“What's that?”

“An Inca dialect word meaning that I don't understand this thing,” Doc said.

“Maybe,” said Abril, “you'd better tell *me* about the Kichua, alias the Incas.”

“What do you want to know?” Doc asked dryly. Then he added, “I'm not trying to show off. Mayan and Incan lore just happens to have been one of my hobbies for a long time.”

“What do you know about the Kichua Book?” Abril demanded. “Ever hear of it?”

Doc nodded. “Located at Runa, in Blanca Grande. The Runa ruin, the old city of seven circles, which was supposed to be the center of ancient learning of the Incas during the fourteenth dynasty. But pardon me for not getting excited.”

“That's it,” Abril agreed. “But what do you mean—pardon your lack of excitement?”

“The Kichua Book is old stuff,” Doc said.

“Old?”

“Certainly. It was translated a long time before I heard of it. And it was a piece of tripe. Just a piece of bragging, cut into stone, by a second-rate Incan emperor who lived a couple of thousand years ago.”

“You don't think,” said Abril, “that there was anything worthwhile in this Kichua Book?”

“I know there wasn't. I read it. I translated it myself. It's as worthless to posterity as a soap advertisement. It wasn't even interesting.”

Abril shook her head.

“What,” she asked, “Would you say if I told you the Kichua Book had been destroyed?”

Doc frowned. “I'd say somebody wasted his time.”

“My father,” said Abril, “has some photographs of the Kichua Book.”

Doc wasn't impressed.

“So have I,” he said. “So has every half-baked book on Incan lore. The pictures are in the books because the carvings look impressive, not because they're worth a hoot to archaeological knowledge.”

Abril nodded. “I know there are lots of pictures of the book extant.” She frowned. “Which makes it all the more strange that my father's photographs should be regarded as special.”

“Special?”

Abril looked at them dramatically.

“Somebody,” she said, “is after the photographs, and they have already killed two people trying to get them.”

A SILENCE followed. Ham Brooks was finding himself left a little behind by the discussion. He didn't know much about Incan lore, and he had never heard of any Kichua Book. It was so much abracadabra

to him.

Ham used the pause to ask, "Just what the heck is this Kichua Book, anyway?"

Abril stood up, and held one hand approximately five feet off the floor. "It's about so high," she said. "And it's round. It weighs, I should say, about twelve tons. Or did weigh that before it was destroyed."

"Good Lord, twelve tons! How heavy are the pages?"

Abril sighed wearily. "It's a fat cylinder of stone with some carvings on it."

"Oh, I see," said Ham. Then Ham blinked. "That big! And of stone! How was it destroyed?"

"Explosive charge. Several of them, apparently."

"When?"

"About a month ago."

"Who did it?"

"Nobody," said Abril, "seems to have any idea."

Ham gave it some thought. Doc Savage was not saying anything. His expression was not telling much. Ham wondered if this thing was supposed to make sense. He said, "This chunk of rock which the Incas had carved on centuries ago was blown to bits. Your father had a set of photographs taken of it, and now somebody wants them."

"Very badly."

Doc Savage spoke. He said, "How did your father happen to have these photographs?"

"My father has a private museum."

"A museum of photographs?" Doc asked dryly.

"The photographs," Abril snapped, "are on the walls. They decorate the place. They're photographs of the great Mayan, Aztec and Incan archaeological objects. The kind of photographs you'd expect on the walls of a private museum."

"This museum is private?"

"Yes."

"Does that mean," Doc asked, "that no one is admitted?"

"Is the public excluded, you mean?"

"Yes."

"Anyone," said Abril, "can get in on Wednesdays, if they call up and make an appointment. The public is not admitted other days of the week."

"But on Wednesdays almost anyone could get in?"

"That's right."

“And look at the photographs?”

“Yes.”

“More particularly, look at the photographs of the Kichua Book?”

“Not,” said Abril, “since last week. After the demand for the photographs was made, dad took them down and put them in a safe hiding place.”

Doc Savage moved about the room slowly. It was late in the evening. The windows gave a view of the shaded East River, of Brooklyn Bridge, of soiled uneasy water and aggressive little tugboats and lazy looking freight steamers. Not much traffic noise came up from the street. Doc turned and asked, “Why?”

Abril Trujilla frowned over the question. “Why?” she said. “That question can be asked about almost anything in this affair. Why what?”

Doc said, “Why was a demand made for the photographs when anyone could walk into the museum on Wednesdays and look at the pictures?”

Ham put in, “Or maybe steal the photographs off the wall.”

“They wouldn’t,” said Abril, “steal them so easily. Dad naturally has a watchman in the museum when it is open.”

Doc asked, “But the demand for the photographs was made while they could still be seen hanging on the museum walls? While anyone could walk in and look at them.”

“Yes.”

“Tell us about the demand,” Doc said.

“It was made by telephone,” Abril explained grimly “A man’s voice. The voice was unfamiliar to father, who took the call. The voice told father to wrap all the photographs of the Kichua Book and have them ready and tied in a package. A later phone call would tell him where to deliver the photographs. Father laughed at the order. When the second call came, giving him directions, he refused. The voice said father had better do as ordered at once, or Pino, our chauffeur, would be killed as a lesson to father. Father refused, and Pino was killed.”

HAM Brooks jumped violently. “Killed! Your chauffeur was murdered?”

“That very day.”

“How?”

“By a very simple and direct method—shooting,” Abril explained. “The shot came from a hill near our home, although the police didn’t find the exact spot. It is very hilly around our home. Evidently a rifle with a telescopic sight was used.”

Ham’s face had taken on a leaden hue. “They killed your chauffeur offhand like that! And they’ve got Monk! I don’t feel so good about this.”

Abril compressed her lips. “They’ve got Kathy Doyle and Square Jones, too! How do you think I feel!” She jumped up angrily. “Aren’t you going to do anything about it?”

There was a small noise at the door. A tapping. Abril cried, "Oh! What's that!"

Ham wheeled nervously. He saw a cluster of ears and legs. He relaxed. "Habeas Corpus," he said.

"My God, what *is* it?" Abril was staring at the pig.

"It's Monk Mayfair's pet pig," Ham said gloomily.

Abril looked at him curiously. She was evidently turning over ideas in her mind.

"Okay, okay, Monk's got a pet pig," Ham said. "Don't let it throw you. After all, I've known people who kept pet snakes."

"But a pig! And I thought this Monk Mayfair was an eminent chemist!"

"He is. He's also eminent at almost anything you don't expect." Ham indicated the pig. "Habeas seems to know something has happened to Monk. He acts uneasy."

"That's ridiculous," Abril snapped.

Doc Savage said quietly, "Need we get sidetracked on the mental merits of the pig? Was the murderer of your chauffeur ever caught, Miss Trujilla?"

"No."

"Are you sure," Doc asked, "that he was murdered to fulfill the threat by the man who wanted the Kichua Book photographs delivered to him?"

"We're positive."

"Why?"

"Because, the voice called over the telephone again, and demanded the photos once more. And the caller told us that the chauffeur was dead, although *the man's body had not yet been found!*"

"That made it pretty certain," Doc agreed.

"I'll hurry through the rest of the story, if you don't mind," Abril said. "The next part is how Kathy Doyle happened to be involved. Or rather, her father, Francisco Doyle. I had better tell you about him—"

Doc put in, "I've heard of Francisco Doyle, if he is the *Realmente-Europa-Americano*-banking-cartel Francisco Doyle. He is a pretty influential man in Blanca Grande."

Abril nodded vehemently.

"All over South America," she said, "there is no betterloved nor more influential man than Francisco Doyle. I don't mean only in Blanca Grande. I mean all over. In Blanca Grande he is loved. All over, he is loved. He is a great man, even if he is a moneybags."

"All right," Doc said. "How did he get involved?"

Abril frowned.

"The telephone voice," she said, "called him and ordered him to get the Kichua Book photographs from father."

“The same voice which had called your father?”

“Yes.”

“How can you be sure it was the same voice?”

“We're positive,” said Abril grimly. “As soon as he got the call, Francisco Doyle naturally called on father and told him all about him. The two men agreed to work together. That is, they agreed that they weren't going to be bulldozed.”

“Wouldn't it have been simpler,” Doc asked, “to have merely given up the photographs?”

Abril clenched her fists. “My father,” she said, “is the biggest cattle baron in all Blanca Grande. To be a great cattle baron in Blanca Grande, you have to be *mucho hombre*. *Eso no es sorprendente*.”

“Quite a guy, eh? A man who can't be scared into doing anything.”

“That,” said Abril with satisfaction, “is my father.”

Doc Savage looked at her thoughtfully. He had been trying to make up his mind about her. He had reached one conclusion—that she was a capable girl. A very capable girl. If she were trying to put something over on him, he'd better watch out.

She was lovely to look at. She was disturbing. He wished there was some way of telling whether a booby trap could come in such a lovely package.

He had been picking at what seemed to be the weak points in her story. Each time, he had to admit, she presented a logical explanation. Or she frankly admitted the point concerned was as mystifying to her as to anyone.

He listened to her concluding speech: “To finish the story, threats were made against the lives of Kathy Doyle and myself unless the photographs were given up. So our fathers put their heads together, and Mr. Doyle hit on the idea of sending to you for help. So he sent Kathy and myself, and sent along his pet bodyguard, Square Jones, to watch out after us. I think we were trailed all the way. I don't think they had a chance to close in on us enroute, and so they laid a trap here for Kathy and Square.”

Doc frowned. “Let's go back a minute,” he said, “to the voice which was telephoning the threats.”

“And demands,” Abril reminded. “Don't forget he demanded the Kichua Book photographs every time he called.”

“A man?”

“Every time.”

“The same man?”

“Yes.”

“How,” Doc asked, “do you know? And don't avoid answering this time, the way you did a minute ago.”

“I didn't avoid!” Abril snapped. “We're sure it was the same voice.”

“Why?”

“Things about the voice. It was the same. *Credo que si. Que dice V eso?*”

Doc said, “*Hable V siempre castellano conmigo.*”

“Speak Spanish with you?” She shook her head. “Oh, I'd rather not. I believe I can actually think better in English.”

Ham Brooks showed sharp interest. He had been wondering how it was that she spoke English with the zing of a college girl from Iowa. He decided to ask her about that.

“Where did you learn English like that?” he inquired.

“I went to school in Missouri,” she told him. “And I have American friends in Blanca Grande.”

“Oh.”

“You fellows who live in the United States,” Abril told him smugly, “are about the only people on earth who think they only need to know one language.”

Ham subsided. He was fascinated by her red hair. He wondered why it was that red-headed girls always seemed to like to fight.

Doc Savage was still interested in the telephone voice.

“That voice,” he said. “Your father and Francisco Doyle discussed the voice, and agreed the caller was one and the same person?”

“Yes.”

“Why couldn't they have been mistaken?”

“He lisped.”

“Who lisped?”

“The man over the telephone—” She stopped speaking. She was staring at Doc Savage.

Doc Savage's face had changed. It had suddenly acquired shock, sickness, horror. All the emotions, all the ones that are painful, suddenly seemed to hit the bronze man's face.

Ham had seen it, too. And Ham was dumfounded, because he knew that Doc was normally about as poker-faced as they came. So this change, this splattering of horrified feeling over Doc's countenance, was startling.

“What the devil, Doc?” Ham blurted.

Doc Savage seemed unable to answer. His lips looked pale. His eyes were fixed, his jaw muscles tight knots under his ears.

Doc wheeled suddenly, He faced Ham. “We're going to South America, Ham. As fast as we can. Get on the telephone to Washington and get what clearances we'll need.”

Ham's mouth remained open.

“Hurry up!” Doc said.

“But what about Monk?” Ham objected. “Monk is here in New York, and he's in trouble. We can't leave him.”

“We won't be leaving him,” Doc said.

“Eh?”

“They'll be taking Monk to South America,” Doc said with terrifying certainty.

Chapter V

THE small man had been trying to explain a point to Monk Mayfair. The small man's English vocabulary was not so good. After he had snorted and stumbled around with English and Spanish for a while, he gave it up. He called another man. “*Hableme V en ingles weeth thees mono!*” he snapped.

The other man was a loose-faced fellow of about thirty with one very bloodshot eye. He said to Monk, “Okay, gorgeous. The boss man wants me to explain to you that you're going to South America.”

“South America? Why?” Monk was amazed.

“Yours not to ask why; you will know by and by,” the man with the bloodshot eye said.

“What'd he call me?”

“*Mono?* That what you mean?”

“What's *mono* mean in Spanish?” Monk demanded.

The man chuckled. “Roses are red, secrets are sweet; violets are blue, and damned if I tell you.”

Monk groaned. “If you are compelled to be a poet, do you have to louse it up?” he asked.

The poet was indignant.

“Bubber, you antagonize me,” he said. He stalked off indignantly.

They were in a plain windowless room, about twenty feet square. The room, Monk felt fairly certain, was somewhere in New York City. No other city had quite the sound of New York. For example there was no other city where you could hear subway rumble and hear ocean liners whistling at the same time. The center of the city. He felt sure he was near the center of the city.

Monk turned over. He was lying on the floor, with his ankles and wrists tied. Having turned over, he could look at Kathy Doyle.

He wished he could look at Kathy Doyle without having his hands and ankles tied.

“Kathy,” he asked. “What's a *mono* in Spanish?”

He had quickly progressed to calling her Kathy.

Kathy smiled at him. “Don't you worry about what they call you.” The smile took courage, because she was tied hand and foot, too. “They're rats.”

“They're double rats,” Monk agreed.

“They're triple rats,” said Kathy.

Monk looked at the loose-faced man with the bloodshot eye and said, “I would only call this one a double rat. He doesn't rate any higher than that.”

The bloodshot eye glared at Monk. “You better be nice to me,” the man said. “Otherwise I might tie knots in your fingers.”

Monk sneered at him. “Take hold of me, buddy. Just take hold of me once, even if I am tied hand and foot.”

The bloodshot eye sneered.

Square Jones also sneered. Square was in a corner, where they had propped him. They had used extra size rope to tie Square. They had done everything but put a log chain on him. The captors didn't have too much respect for Monk's terrible qualities, but they had shown that they were plenty afraid of Square.

“You make a lot of noise,” Square told Monk unpleasantly. “If you acted as loud as you talk, it would be something to see.”

“Stick around,” Monk said. “You may see something yet.”

A PERIOD of waiting seemed to be ahead of them. They had been whisked from the spot where they had been captured—the lobby of the Wall Street building which housed Monk's laboratory—and placed in automobiles. Forced to lie on the floor so they couldn't see anything, they had been hauled quite a distance, then blindfolded and brought into this room.

Kathy Doyle began talking.

She told Monk the story of the photographs of the Kichua Book. How the photographs had been in the private museum of Juan Trujilla, beef baron of Blanca Grande, and how mysterious persons had started a campaign to get the photographs.

When she came to the part about her father being yanked into the affair, Monk stopped her.

“Why'd they haul your pop into it?” Monk asked.

“That one we haven't figured out,” Kathy told him.

“Is your dad an authority on Incan archaeology?”

Kathy smiled slightly. “What my pop cares about Incan archaeology you could put in gnat's eye and have room left over.”

“Your pop and me both,” Monk said. “Didn't your dad have any idea about it?”

Kathy frowned. “I'm not sure.”

“What do you mean, not sure?”

“I heard him say something once that sort of stuck in my mind, even if it didn't make much sense. I think I remembered it because of the way my father said it—as if he considered it important.”

Monk was interested. "What did he say?"

"He said that he and Juan Trujilla were the two most prominent men in Blanca Grande. He said that this probably was behind the matter."

Monk frowned. "What did he mean by that?"

"I don't know."

"Are those the exact words he used?"

"Yes."

"And is it true? About Juan Trujilla and Francisco Doyle being the most prominent men in the country?"

Kathy shook her head. "Not quite. Dad is an egoist. He probably thinks he's more important than he is. I should say that neither of them is any more influential than Andros Lanza."

"Who's he?"

"The current president," Kathy explained, "who has aspirations to make it permanent."

Monk nodded. "I've heard of Lanza. He and our state department have knocked sparks off each other a time or two."

Kathy finished her story. The two fathers had decided to send the two daughters to New York to enlist the aid of Doc Savage, who had an international reputation as a troubleshooter in affairs of this sort.

"Of course both dads figured they were sending us off where we would be safe," Kathy said. "But they didn't fool us for a minute. They sent Square along as a protector."

"Don't you," asked Monk, "know anything about these mugs who've kidnapped us?"

"Nothing. Except, of course, the little man followed us from South America. He must have hired them."

Monk said, "He didn't hire them that quick. He either shipped them up by airplane, or had someone already in New York who had the gang of thugs ready for work."

"But no one knew we were coming to New York until the day before we started," Kathy said.

"And when was that?"

"Yesterday. I mean, we started yesterday. We knew we were coming the day before."

"That doesn't give anybody time to send a representative to New York to have a gang of crooks ready to operate," Monk said.

Square grunted skeptically. "They had the crooks ready a long time ago."

"How do you figure that?"

Square said, "You can see the bums know each other. They didn't just start functioning a few hours ago. These lugs are organized."

Monk was impressed by the logic of this. It was true, he believed.

“What else have you figured out, mastermind?” he asked Square.

“Nothing,” said Square briefly.

Monk scowled at Square. He had the feeling there was more on Square's mind. But Square had shut up.

Monk squirmed and flopped, working his way nearer Kathy. He wanted to ask Kathy if Square could be fully trusted, and he wanted to be close enough to whisper it, so that Square couldn't overhear.

But before he reached Kathy, an idea had hit Monk. The idea was a very simple one. He would get the hell out of here.

What put this happy thought in his head was the discovery that the ropes had come off one of his wrists. They hadn't tied them tightly enough, or something.

MONK kept his face straight. He tried not to look triumphant. When they were tying him, he'd certainly tried to arrange it so the ropes would be loose later. He had sought to accomplish this by making his muscles as tight as possible. It must have worked better than he had really dared hope.

“Kathy,” he whispered.

“Yes?”

“Keep your face straight,” Monk said, “while I tell you something. Don't act surprised. I've got one hand loose. The ropes slipped off.”

Kathy was doubtful. “Will that be much help?”

“It will,” Monk said, “if I have ten cents worth of luck with it.”

“What do you want me to do?” Kathy asked.

“I'll take you out of here with me,” Monk said.

Kathy glanced at the man with the bloodshot eye, who was standing across the room scowling at them. There were two other men in the room, and both of them possessed guns. Kathy had seen them holding revolvers earlier. The pair didn't hold guns now, but they had merely put them in their pockets.

“You're an optimist,” Kathy whispered to Monk. “The odds are three against one.”

Monk snorted.

“That's not even fair odds,” he said. “They ought to have at least half a dozen.”

“You,” said Kathy, “sound like Square in his more violent moments. Incidentally, you want Square to help you in this, don't you?”

“You suppose he'd be any assistance?”

“I should hope so.”

“The big clunk probably can't bend a blade of grass in a pinch,” Monk said. “That's the way these big talkers generally turn out.”

Kathy was astonished that Monk would accuse anyone else of being a big talker. The pot was blacking the kettle.

The man with the bloodshot eye came over. "Hey, what's all the talk about?" He stood over Monk. "Tell me about it, beautiful." When Monk didn't answer, the owner of the enflamed eye kicked Monk in the ribs.

Monk grabbed the man's ankle. Monk had decided to start his campaign.

He used both hands, one hand around the man's ankle, the other on the toes of the foot attached to the ankle. Monk proceeded to wind up the man's leg until it came unjointed.

When the leg came unjointed, the man gave a cry that sounded as if a rusty nail was being pulled out of an oak board.

The man fell down. He wasn't interested in drawing a gun or taking further part in a fight.

Monk started tearing the pockets out of the man's clothing. He clutched the pockets and yanked. Cloth tore.

It had been Monk's experience that most fellows who are tough, or who think they are tough, carry a pocket knife, usually a large one. The bloodshot eye was no exception. He had a knife. Monk opened it. He sawed at his ankle bindings. The knife wasn't any too sharp.

THE other two kidnappers now reached Monk. Evidently their plan was to seize Monk and re-tie him, because only one of them had drawn his gun.

Monk had his ankles free. He started to get up. The one of the two men who did not hold a revolver sprang upon Monk. He grabbed Monk confidently.

"Lie down there, you blank-blank!" he told Monk.

The other man was more wary.

"Joe, be careful!" he gasped.

Monk permitted himself to be wrestled out flat on the floor by the man who had grabbed him. Monk kept his eye on the man with the gun. He was afraid the man might shoot him.

But the man didn't shoot. Instead he decided that Monk was a soft touch. That Monk could be over-powered easily without the use of weapons.

The man shoved his gun in a pocket and fell upon Monk with his bare hands.

This was what Monk had been hoping for. He had been holding back, hoping he could entice them into tackling him empty-handed.

Now this will be good, Monk thought. He caught Kathy Doyle's eye.

Kathy wasn't showing much confidence in him.

Square Jones wasn't confident either. Square was flopping about like a fish. It must have been from pure excitement, because he couldn't hope to get loose.

“You fool!” Square yelled. “You haven't got a chance!”

Just watch me, brother, Monk thought. And he went to work on the two men who were trying to flatten him out and re-tie him.

He inserted a thumb in an eye. When the man drew back hastily, Monk slammed him on the jaw. The blow was short, but it pushed the man's jaw considerably off center, and the man collapsed.

The other one was tougher. Monk grasped him by the throat, endeavoring to hold the fellow's neck with one hand while locating a vulnerable spot for a blow with his free fist. He speedily discovered he needed both hands to hold the man.

The upshot of it was that he had to bang the man's head on the floor. It took considerable bumping to get the fellow limp.

Monk arose, surveyed the three limp bodies.

“Cold as turkeys,” he remarked. He picked up the pocket knife and freed Kathy Doyle and Square Jones.

SQUARE was puzzled by Monk's success with the three opponents. “You were sure lucky,” Square said.

“Sure, I was lucky,” Monk said indignantly.

Other sounds could be heard in the building. Evidently Monk's battle had drawn attention. Other members of the gang seemed to be coming to investigate.

“We're trapped!” said Square, alarmed.

“You just hold onto my hand, and I'll get you out,” Monk told him.

Square sneered. “That's very funny,” he said.

Monk tore the pockets out of the suits of the men he had overpowered. He collected four guns, two revolvers and two automatics, which they contained, together with a fat roll of greenbacks which each victim possessed. He pocketed this loot. He picked up a small table suitable for throwing.

“There seems to be the one door out of this place,” he said. “Let's go. Keep close behind me, and you won't get hurt.” This last to Square, who grew more indignant.

The door was not locked. Monk threw it open. He expected another room or a hall. It was intensely dark and he couldn't see anything. He stepped through. There was a flight of stairs, leading downward.

Monk proceeded to fall down the stairs. His fall had fortunate developments, because in an effort to catch himself, he slammed the table down in front of him, then unintentionally pitched forward upon it.

He rode the table down the flight of steps as if it was a sled. He went fast. Two thirds of the way to the bottom, he hit the first of several men who were creeping up the steps.

An avalanche poured down the last of the steps. It was composed of Monk, the table, and at least five men. There was one shot, howling, swearing, grunts and scrambling. A moment later there was a ball of struggling men.

The seed in the fruit of strife was Monk Mayfair. He was the object of all attention.

It was a man who broke a leg off the table and used it on Monk's head who finally reduced Monk to inactivity.

"Como dice!" somebody puffed. "Did we get them all?"

Most of the men had a tight hold on Monk now, lest he be playing 'possum on them. "There was just one guy," one of the holders said.

"En verdad!" the other muttered, disbelieving. "You are crazy. One man couldn't make that much trouble.

Two or three of the others muttered assurances that there had only been one. It was Square Jones, somebody said.

"Not Square. It's that hairy one," a man argued.

The point was settled by Square Jones himself when he yelled from the top of the steps. "Hey, Mayfair, what happened?"

There was a brief silence.

"Shoot!" gasped the man who seemed to be in charge. "Shoot him dead."

Square heard this. He withdrew hastily from the top of the stairs.

Shortly a flock of bullets came up and gouged considerable plaster out of the ceiling. The litter rained down on Kathy and Square. "I suggest," said Square, "that we make some tracks."

"We've got to help Mr. Mayfair," Kathy said.

"The homely ape got himself into it," Square grumbled. "And he's really in it. They've probably cracked his skull. Let's go."

He seized Kathy's wrist. He led her back down the corridor that extended toward the rear of the building. Their eyes were getting more accustomed to the murk, and they were able to distinguish what seemed to be a boarded-over window at the far end.

Square came to a stop. "Dammit!" he said. "Dammit, Kathy. You go on and be prying boards off that window."

"Where are you going?"

"Back and help that Monk Mayfair," Square said bitterly. "I can't leave the pot-headed ape lying there."

More bullets came up the steps. The men below seemed to have a submachine gun of the Thompson or Reising variety, judging from the uproar. Kathy gripped Square's arm. "No, Square, you wouldn't have a chance."

Square spat to clear his mouth of loose plaster. The corridor was swirling with dust. "I reckon not," he muttered.

He ran to the end of the passage and began wrenching at the boards nailed across the window. They came loose readily enough.

“The dumb dope!” Square complained. “Why'd he charge down the steps? He didn't show any sense at all.”

Outside the window was an alley. It was a one-story drop to the ground. Square straddled the sill. “I'll hang down. You slide down me like I was a rope, and drop,” he said.

Kathy followed instructions. “This isn't ladylike.”

Another hail of bullets came up the steps and rattled around in the hallway. “Them guy's aren't gentlemen, either,” Square said.

Kathy dropped into the alley. A moment later Square smacked down beside her, then jumped around in a little dance to ease his stinging feet. “I oughta gone back,” he muttered.

“They'd have shot you.”

“Yeah, I guess. I suppose they knocked off that Monk lug.” Square cleared his throat. “He was quite a guy, even if he had no sense.”

“He was an eminent scientist,” Kathy said. “Come on.

THE alley was not actually an alley. There are very few alleys in New York City, and practically none on Manhattan Island. This was technically a narrow court which extended from one end of the block to the other at the rear of the buildings. It might as well have been an alley.

They ran until they reached the street at the far end of the court. They were not shot at.

“That's mysterious,” said Square. “Why didn't they shoot at us?”

“I imagine,” said Kathy, “that someone might notice it if they began shooting at us outdoors in the middle of Manhattan Island.”

Square nodded. “Somebody might, at that.”

Kathy said, “The street looks busiest toward the north. Let's run that direction.”

Square shook his head. “Let's run around the corner.”

“Why?”

“To see what we can see.” Square scowled darkly. “We might be able to follow them.” He glanced at Kathy. “I'll tell you what you do, Kathy. You go find us a taxicab to follow them with.”

Kathy shook her head. “Nothing doing. You're trying to get rid of me, get me out of the way so I'll be safe.”

Square sighed. “Okay, then. Let's take a look.”

They went to the corner, moving cautiously, surmising that their late kidnappers would be leaving the building by way of the front door and the street. This proved an accurate guess.

“Look!” Square pointed. “The eminent scientist!”

The abductors were removing Monk from the building. Monk had regained consciousness, and was

fighting. The whole group, Monk and four men, fell down on the sidewalk twice. There was much cursing and striking of blows.

They finally threw Monk in a waiting automobile. The men Monk had disabled in the room were brought out of the house and tumbled into the automobile also. Then the car departed. Judging from the sight and sound, Monk was still fighting in the back of the machine.

“The eminent scientist,” said Square admiringly, “must have muscles where his brains should be.”

“Do you suppose they're taking him to South America?” Kathy asked anxiously.

“That's what they said they'd do,” Square said.

Chapter VI

It was early night. About nine o'clock. Kathy Doyle and Square Jones entered the midtown building where Doc Savage's headquarters were located. The battery of elevators confused them, so they asked an elevator operator which lift would take them to Doc Savage's office.

“The one on the end,” the operator told them. “Just ring for it.”

They rang, then had to wait for a considerable time, close to five minutes. While they were standing there, a lean-bellied handsome young man with a large mouth got out of another elevator, and hustled around a corner as if he was full of business. He came back shortly, and stood beside Kathy and Square. He had a black cane.

The elevator came. The lean-middled man got in with Kathy and Square. By now, Kathy had concluded that he was looking them over closely.

Square had the same suspicion about being inspected, because he made, without the least warning, a grab for the thin-waisted stranger.

“Oof!” Square said, not completing his grab. What had discouraged him was the lean young man's cane, which had become a sword cane. The point of the sword was hair-raisingly impressive, and menacing Square's middle.

Square muttered, “I picked the wrong time to take you, didn't I?”

The man with the blade said, “There wasn't any right time. I've been looking you over.”

“Like what you see?” Square asked sourly.

“Only half of it.” The sword wielder smiled warmly at Kathy. “Half of your delegation is about the loveliest I have seen.”

Kathy had been examining him. She had been thinking.

“Would you,” she asked, “be named Ham Brooks?”

The lean, wide-shouldered man with the large mouth nodded. “Brigadier General Theodore Marley Brooks,” he said, as if he felt plain Ham Brooks was not as impressive as it might have been.

Square asked Kathy, “How'd you know who he was?”

“My father,” said Kathy, “told me that Doc Savage had five assistants, and he named them. One of them was named Ham Brooks and answered this man's description.”

“This fashion-plate works for Doc Savage?”

“Yes. He's Ham Brooks, the lawyer.”

Square turned to Ham.

“Look, mouthpiece, we wanta see Doc Savage right now,” Square said.

“You'll see him,” Ham said briefly. “And I'm a lawyer, not a mouthpiece.”

“I can see I've made another friend,” Square said.

DOC SAVAGE and Abril Trujilla were in the eighty-sixth floor reception room. Abril cried when she saw Kathy, and the two girls embraced.

Tearfully, Abril told about her frightening experience when she had arrived in Pennsylvania Station, when someone had shot at her, and the railroad detectives had taken her into custody and she'd thought they were the mysterious men who had been following them. When Abril finished, Kathy told her own troubles, how she and Square had reached Monk Mayfair, only to be kidnapped along with Monk.

For the moment, the two red-haired young women were very close. As soon as the elastic which was drawing them together—danger—disappeared, they would probably fly apart again. They were temperamentally unfit to get along placidly together, or to treat each other with any degree of sweetness.

There were several reasons for natural friction. For one thing they were social rivals in Blanca Grande, each being the prettiest girl in rival families which had about the same influence and power. This alone would have kept them from being friendly. Furthermore, over a period of years they had formed a personal spirit of competition which hadn't encouraged any love between them.

They weren't bitter. They wouldn't have favored any violence. But they would gladly—and often had—participated in a little ladylike hair-pulling. They did it with words, preferably honey-coated words.

Doc Savage listened to their recital of woes, wondering whether he was listening to truth or a clever act.

He glanced inquiringly at Ham.

He and Ham were ready to leave for South America. Their stuff was packed, the plane ready, and they had obtained the pocketful of official papers and clearances necessary to make the flight.

Ham grinned from ear to ear. “Would you ladies,” he asked, “care to return to South America with us?”

Doc closed his eyes and suffered. “We are leaving in ten minutes,” he said. “It would be asking too much for the girls to get away on such short notice.”

“Oh, no, it wouldn't,” Kathy said brightly. She had been studying Doc Savage.

“No, it wouldn't,” said Abril, noting where Kathy had been focusing her attention.

DOC didn't want to take the two young women along. He had a good reason. They were too pretty. They were distractions.

Square wiped this trouble out of his mind by asking, "What about Monk Mayfair?"

"What about him?" Doc suddenly felt grim.

"Them guys got him. You going off and leave them have him?"

"Yes."

"If I had some friends," said Square darkly, "I wouldn't want them to go chasing off to South America without giving me no thought."

"We'll give it plenty of thought," Doc said.

"But you won't hunt for Monk in New York?"

"No. It would be a waste of time."

"Oh," said Square. "You mean because they said they were going to take Monk to South America?" Square shook his head. "They probably didn't mean it."

"I think they did," Doc said.

"I give up," Square said.

The plane Doc was going to use was in a large brick building on the Hudson river. The building was supposed to be a warehouse, and had been at one time. Doc had equipped it with large doors on the river end, doors which opened with electric motors.

Square looked at the airplane. "Boy, I'll bet it cost plenty," he said, impressed.

The girls squealed with pleasure when they got inside and saw the accommodations. "Why, it's luxurious!" Kathy said. "Darling," Abril agreed.

Doc was embarrassed and disgusted. The plane cabin was luxurious, all right. It was a lulu. It should be, because he had sweat blood designing it. He owned a slice of an airline that wasn't making any money, and he was trying to work out something in the way of interior accommodations that would make business pick up. He had been experimenting with the interior of his personal plane.

The plane could operate from land or water. Doc worked it out into the open river, preparatory to taking off.

Square Jones tapped him on the shoulder. "You're leaving Monk Mayfair," Square said.

"To his fate," Doc agreed.

"You think it's funny?" Square shoved out his jaw.

"Go back and sit down," Doc said.

Square said, "I'm glad you're not among my friends."

DOC got the plane off. He put the ship in a long climb, and checked over the instruments.

Ham Brooks picked up the microphone. He talked over the radio for a while, then scribbled on a sheet of paper and passed Doc the paper. The winds aloft were written on the paper.

Doc decided the most favorable breeze would be found at about six thousand feet. There was a front between Charleston and Savannah, a cold front. It would probably be rough.

“What,” Ham asked, “is Square champing his teeth about?”

“He figures we’re deserting Monk when Monk is in trouble.”

“Are we?” Ham asked.

“No.”

“Well, it’s been bothering me,” Ham said. “It would not make me exactly happy if we were.”

“We’re not,” Doc assured him. “The men who grabbed Monk are going to rush him to South America, and more particularly to Blanca Grande just as fast as they possibly can.”

Ham looked sharply at Doc. “You sound positive.”

“I am. I could be wrong. I don’t think so.”

“The trouble with me,” Ham said, “is that I can’t see things. Or should I see why you know they’re taking Monk to South America?”

“You already saw it,” Doc said. “Or heard it, rather.”

“Me?”

“The mysterious voice which did the telephoning to Francisco Doyle and Juan Trujilla, the fathers of our two lovely passengers, in Blanca Grande.”

“I don’t get it. What about the voice?”

“It lisped.”

“Did it?”

“I see it doesn’t mean anything to you,” Doc said wearily. “You had better go away. Go back and keep those two red-headed girls away from me.”

“With pleasure,” Ham said. “Although I still don’t get this.”

The lawyer went back and engaged Kathy Doyle in conversation. As soon as he could work around to it, he brought up the subject of the telephone calls to her father.

“Was there,” Ham wanted to know, “anything particular about the mysterious voice that identified it?”

“Yes indeed.”

“It lisped,” Kathy said.

“I was afraid it would,” Ham muttered. “Let’s talk about something else. Pick a subject.”

“Let's talk about Doc Savage,” said Kathy.

“Pick another one. I'm supposed to keep you two girls away from him.”

“You can keep Abril away,” Kathy said. “Tell me about him. I find him interesting. He's so very handsome, with such a touch of firmness. Something like the cornerstone from a bank.”

TELLING Kathy about Doc Savage was as good a way as any of keeping her away from Doc. So Ham got busy. He didn't draw on his imagination. Only when he thought it might scare her away from Doc.

He told her about Doc's peculiar youth. This was usually alarming to the fair sex, because a man who had lived such a youth wasn't very likely to be normal. Doc had been put in the hands of scientists for training when he was a baby. These scientist know-it-alls had tried to raise a superman.

“Did they?” Kathy asked.

“Sometimes it scares you,” Ham confessed. “No, they didn't get the job done in all respects. In one or two they did.”

“Name the one or two,” Kathy suggested.

“No. I'll let you be surprised,” Ham said. “Now, let's discuss Ham Brooks. He—”

“Whatever got Doc Savage started in this peculiar profession?” Kathy asked.

“What profession?”

“Righting wrongs and punishing evildoers in the far corners of the earth.”

“That's a laugh,” Ham said. “Who ever heard of something like that for a profession?”

“Doesn't he?”

“I've often wondered,” Ham said. “Do you want a simpler explanation? Excitement chasing. Doc likes troubleshooting. So do I. So does Monk. So do the other three of our gang—”

“Where are the other three?” Kathy asked curiously.

“Slightly scattered. Long Tom Roberts, electrician, is in France. Johnny Littlejohn, archaeologist and geologist, is in Alaska. Renny Renwick, engineer, is in China. Monk Mayfair is, we hope, being escorted to Blanca Grande, South America. And that leaves Ham Brooks, whom we were going to discuss—”

Kathy said brightly, “Mr. Savage has a world-wide reputation, hasn't he?”

“So has Ham Brooks. Look, are you going to let me talk about myself?”

Kathy examined him.

“You're not too worried about your friend, Monk Mayfair, are you?” she said.

Ham fell silent. He contemplated the New Jersey countryside which was flowing under the plane. There was a cold lump inside him. It was composed of fear for Monk's welfare.

Kathy put a hand on his sleeve. “I'm sorry.”

“Go away,” Ham said bitterly.

THEY refueled in Miami, Florida; Port of Spain, Trinidad; Para, Brazil; and Rio De Janeiro, Brazil. These were long jumps. The flight was very tiresome. The two girls got over being sweet to each other. Square Jones developed a mania for quarreling with Ham at the drop of a hat. Doc developed a lack of patience.

“We’re getting to be a happy family,” Ham said wryly. “I’m glad we’re about there.”

“What’re we going to do when we get there?” Square wanted to know.

“Search me,” Ham said.

“We’re going to see my father,” said Kathy.

“We’ll see *my* father,” said Abril. “After all, it’s he who got into this trouble first. It is he who has the photographs which are in demand.”

They had a conference about it. Doc decided the girls didn’t really care which father was interviewed first. They were just exercising feminine jealousy in arguing about it.

“I don’t care one way or the other,” Square Jones said, entering the argument gingerly. “But Francisco Doyle, my boss, is a banker and a city man. On the other hand, Juan Trujilla, Abril’s father, is a cow baron. On the cow ranches are landing fields. Why don’t we use one of the landing fields, a remote one, and keep our arrival in Blanca Grande more or less a secret?”

“That is a good idea,” Doc agreed.

“Very loyal of you to think of it, Square,” Kathy said bitinglly.

Square snorted. “Why,” he asked, “don’t you two gals just pull hair? Have it over with.”

It developed that Square had done some flying over the plains country of Blanca Grande. He could read an air map, and he pointed out a field which he suggested. “Nice and remote,” he said. “But not too remote.”

Ham moved up into the cockpit beside Doc Savage. Doc looked at him. “Got something on your mind, haven’t you?” Doc said.

“Square,” Ham admitted, frowning.

“How does he fit into your thoughts?”

“Like a cactus leaf, sort of.” Ham glanced around to make sure he wouldn’t be overheard. “When Abril and Kathy and Square went to New York, they were followed. A remarkable job of following, I’d say. Almost too remarkable.”

“Meaning,” Doc said, “that Square might have been leaving a trail?”

“Or reporting their route to somebody.”

“Possible.”

"I'm guessing, high, wide and handsome," Ham admitted. "But you take what happened to Monk. Their story was that they were kidnapped with Monk, and they escaped but Monk didn't. The other side of the story could be that they led Monk into the hands of their friends, and the friends kept Monk and let them get away."

"A serious charge."

"You bet it is."

"It needs more proving."

"I plan to keep an eye open," Ham said. "Specially when we land at this field Square suggested."

IT was a country like Nebraska, Rolling hills, rich with grass, and naked of trees except by the rivers and streams which were thickly bordered. There was a little brush, green, thick and no doubt thorny.

Square pointed out a road. It was certainly no highway, and difficult to distinguish. "Goes to the ranch," he said.

The ranch looked somewhat like a modern dude ranch plant in Montana or Wyoming. The buildings were white-walled, low, tile-roofed, the corrals were large and plentiful.

"Where do we land?" Ham asked.

"North about three miles," said Abril.

"Oh, you have been there before?"

"Of a certainty," said Abril. "It is my father's ranch. Why shouldn't I have been here?"

Ham grinned at her. "My error." He went forward and took the co-pilot's seat. It was his job during the landing to check whether the wheels were down, and the numerous other details that had to be watched in a plane this size.

They had been slanting down in a long glide. Doc pointed. "Wind sock," he said. "That's probably the field."

Ham nodded. "Going to drag it?"

"Safest," Doc decided. "Yes, we'll drag it."

The dragging consisted of flying a rectangular course around the field a couple of times, then making two standard approaches and let-downs, but not quite touching the wheels. "Seems clear," Ham said.

Doc said they would try it. He climbed to the regulation four hundred feet and turned. A turn at less than four hundred wasn't the safest thing in the world. He did four ninety-degree turns, leveled out, and began asking for landing check-off procedure.

The runway wasn't paved. It wasn't even mown. The grass, Doc had judged, was about twelve inches high, which wouldn't give them any trouble. The runway looked smooth, level. There was nearly a mile of it, which was more than enough for a B29. They needed less than a half-mile themselves.

He did a standard let-down. The wheels touched. There was a rumbling, and a slight rocking until he got

the nose wheel on the ground.

The plane rolled a few hundred feet and had almost stopped.

“Good enough,” Ham said, grinning.

Then he pitched forward, slamming against the instrument board and smashing an airspeed and an artificial horizon. The plane cabin filled with smoke and terrific noise in a single ear-splitting crash.

Doc was slammed forward and up against the windshield. He was not thrown entirely through the glass, although the windshield broke and bulged.

He twisted and looked toward the stern of the plane. As nearly as he could tell, the entire tail assembly was no longer with the ship.

Chapter VII

AN emergency hatch release, painted red, was within reach. He hauled on it. The cockpit emergency hatch cover popped off.

The whole plane, although motionless, was making small sounds, grindings and creakings. The hot exhaust stacks were crackling. And soaking into the air was the smell of high-test gasoline.

“Get out,” Doc said. “Get out quick. There may be a fire.”

Square said, “One of you take Kathy.”

Kathy was limp. Doc seized her, worked his way through the hatch with her.

The plane, during the last few yards before it had stopped, had nosed over and ploughed a not inconsiderable furrow in the turf. Enough of a ditch to make a first rate slit trench. Doc piled into it. He held Kathy's wrist.

Ham and Abril and Square landed in the ditch.

Square looked at Kathy anxiously. “She bad hurt?”

“Pulse is strong enough.” Doc examined her head. “No fracture, apparently. She seems to have gotten a rap on the head, though.”

“She didn't have her safety belt fastened,” Square said. “I told her to fasten it, but she didn't. When the tail came off, she piled into a bulkhead.”

“Keep down,” Doc warned.

They lay there for a while. Doc spread Kathy out in the ditch. “Don't let her sit up,” he told Ham, “in case she revives.”

Doc crawled back a few feet to get a better look at the mangled tail of the plane. The ship had almost stopped moving, but not quite, before the blast had come.

It had been an explosion. What interested him was the fact that the ground wasn't much disturbed. The explosive hadn't been buried on the ground. Nor lying on the surface. “Square.”

“Yeah?”

“You see what hit us?”

“Huh-uh. But you know what I think it was?”

“Bazooka rocket?”

“Yeah. That's what I figure. Crazy idea, ain't it?”

Doc said, “It won't be crazy if they lob another one at us. It might be disastrous.”

“They can't get us in this ditch.”

“They can hit the plane, and fragmentation can be bad.”

Square swore uneasily. “Now you got me worried.” He began digging with his hands, deepening his portion of the ditch.

“Quiet a minute,” Doc said.

“Eh?”

“Listen.”

None of the others could hear anything for a while. Nothing except the small noises the plane was still making. Fuel dripping, an electric motor whirring somewhere.

When they did hear the sound, it was rumbling and yipping. Distant. But coming closer.

Suddenly there was a fresh rumble. No yelling. Just the rumble. Hoof-beats.

Doc lifted his head. Whatever was happening was hidden behind the low hills, or in the deep arroyos which surrounded the level stretch of ground that was the landing field.

The first uproar, which was larger, swept past somewhere in the hills. The second and smaller uproar was being chased by the first one. They went away rapidly.

Ham rubbed his jaw. “Sounded like Indians.”

Abril laughed. “Gauchos.”

“Eh?”

“Gauchos,” Abril said. “Cowboys.”

THE chase receded in the distance. Doc got out of the ditch cautiously. “You stay there in the ditch with the girls,” he said to Ham and Square.

“You don't mean me,” Square said. He got out of the makeshift slit trench. “I'm going along. You got a gun you'd loan?”

Doc said he didn't have a gun. This was true. He did not, as a usual thing, carry one, although there were times, this being one, when he wished he did.

“In that case, I hope that noise we heard was what I think it was,” Square muttered.

“You think it was a gaucho party from the Trujilla ranch chasing away our assailants?” Doc asked.

“That's my guess.”

It was Doc's surmise, also. The smaller group of riders apparently had flushed up directly west of where the disabled plane lay. They headed in that direction.

Standing on top of the first low hill, they could see the riders a couple of miles to the north. They were traveling fast. About three quarters of a mile ahead of this group was another small cluster of four horsemen.

Square grinned. “What I figured. Gauchos from the ranch after our pals.”

“If they catch them,” Doc said, “we might get some interesting information.”

“Likely they will, too. Trujilla gauchos have the best horses in Blanca Grande, as a rule,” Square said.

Doc moved back and forth, examining the ground. The grass was tall, lush. This was good cattle country. The earth wasn't sun-baked; evidently there had been a period of rain recently. He found hoofprints, where horses had been picketed in a small gully.

The horses, it was plain, had been there quite a while. Two days at least. And there was evidence that the men had spread out their blankets and slept at least one night. But there were no blankets, nothing abandoned.

“They took everything with them,” Doc remarked.

“Every speck,” Square agreed.

“Unusual, wouldn't you say?”

Square thought about it for a moment. “You mean it would seem maybe they shouldn't have had time to pick up everything? It is funny, at that.”

“Not funny,” Doc said, “if they didn't plan to do anything but scare us, then leave in a hurry.”

Square frowned. “That don't make sense.”

“No, but it's interesting,” Doc said.

A moment later, he found the bazooka. It wasn't the American Army model, not an early model nor any of the late ones. It had been abandoned where it lay, for it was fairly heavy. With it was a small handcase containing three rockets.

Square spelled out, “G-a-l-v-a-n-i-s-c-h-e z-e-l-l-e—” He looked up, astonished. “Hey, this is a German deal.”

Doc nodded. “The Blanca Grande army is equipped with German weapons, isn't it?”

Square nodded suspiciously. “You think that means something?”

“It gives an idea where the thing came from.”

Square thought that over for a while. He did some jaw rubbing. “Could have been stolen from the army,”

he said.

“Oh, of course,” Doc said.

THE gauchos came back. They arrived in a whooping, wild-riding horde which understandably could have alarmed anyone who did not know gauchos, the finest horsemen and the loudest show-offs in the world. Ham Brooks was alarmed, and said so.

“Don't be silly,” Abril told him. “They're as peaceful as lambs.”

Doc Savage conferred with the gaucho foreman. “The four men escaped,” the latter explained in Spanish. “They had an automobile truck waiting. They simply rode their horses into the truck, and left faster than we could follow.”

“Did you know them?”

The gaucho admitted he hadn't gotten close enough to the men to tell whether he knew them or not. He was apologetic when Doc told him that the assailants must have been in ambush at the flying field for at least two days. “No one would notice them,” the gaucho explained. “No one rides this way, except on business.”

“You came because you heard the explosion?”

“And saw the plane.” The Blanca Grande version of a cowboy was tall and leathery, with a great deal of flash in eyes and grin. “If they had not had the truck, we would have caught them.”

Doc asked, “Is there a telephone at the ranch?”

“No.” The gaucho shook his head. “There is a radio, however.”

Ham yelled excitedly. The cause of his excitement, it developed was Kathy Doyle. She had revived.

THE name of the ranch was *Una Escuela*, which meant a school. They sat in a wide patio, and a gaucho named Tinta told them how the place got its name. It was a long story about a *sillero* who in the olden days had used his saddle shop here on the pampas as a blind for another occupation, that of training cow rustlers. It was a long and, it seemed to Ham, a rather pointless story. Ham did not understand pampas Spanish any too well, anyway. And he was wondering what Doc was doing.

Doc was using the ranch radio. The bronze man had seemed intent, and he hadn't explained what he was doing. Doc, Ham gathered, was getting worried.

Ham put his thoughts back to their departure from New York. They had left New York for Blanca Grande in a hurry because someone lisped. That, Ham reflected, was the somewhat senseless truth.

He was worried about Monk's welfare. That, when everything was summarized, was Ham's biggest concern. What had actually happened to Monk?

Doc had seemed to think they were doing the right thing in coming to South America. But Ham didn't see sense in it.

Abril and Kathy were lovely companions. Square was a competent fellow. It was interesting and

mystifying why someone should want the photographs of an old Inca ruin relic called the Kichua Book.

But what concerned Ham was Monk's welfare. That was first. Monk was Ham's closest friend, in spite of the quarrel they had carried on for years about one thing or another.

Doc joined them. His bronze face was grim. "They had quite a reception for us," he said.

Ham asked, "How do you mean?"

"I just finished contacting all the Trujilla ranches," Doc explained. "All of them which have landing fields for planes. There was a reception committee at each of the fields. The same sort of a one which fired that rocket at our ship. In fact, at least two of the committees had bazookas."

Ham was astonished. "Boy, they had the welcome out for us."

Square Jones suddenly hit his fist with his knee. "Eureka!" he said.

"What's the matter with you?" Ham asked.

"I'm relieved," Square said. "I recommended this field to you, remember?"

"What relieves you?"

"Hell, if they were laying for us at all the fields, that sort of takes the toad off my doorstep," Square said.

Ham became amazed. "Doc, if they had men at the other fields, all of them—holy smoke! They really had an aggregation. How many people are we going up against, anyway?"

Doc said he didn't know. He said that what he needed, and the same probably wouldn't hurt the others, was a square meal and some sleep.

"I have an idea," Kathy Doyle said.

"Have you, dear?" said Abril.

"Why don't we get hold of our fathers and have them meet us here?" Kathy suggested.

Doc was interested in the idea. "Have your father bring along those photographs that all the shooting seems to be about," he suggested.

THE rancho had a French cook. He was good. He produced a meal there in the middle of the pampas grazing country that would have caused excitement on the Champs Elysee. It was so good that Ham acquired the mortal conviction that they were going to be poisoned. He imparted this certainty to the others, and was laughed at.

The chief gaucho, Capas by name, assured them that guards would be put out for the night. He seemed to think the enemy might come back. "*Eso no me sorprenderia,*" he said, explaining that he wouldn't be surprised.

Both girls got hold of their fathers. And it was arranged for both parents to come to the ranch.

"And Mr. Savage," said Kathy.

"Yes?"

“My father, Francisco Doyle, owns banks. Banks have ways of finding out things about people. It is necessary. I have asked my father to use this resource to learn whether other airfields in Blanca Grande were watched—or whether it was only the airfields of the Trujilla ranches.”

“A very good idea,” Doc agreed.

Ham overheard this, and something about the way Doc spoke caused Ham to look at the bronze man curiously. Ham knew Doc as well as anyone knew him.

They walked toward their room. “Doc,” Ham said. “Don't you figure it'll help to know whether the other airfields were watched?”

“It won't do any harm.”

“By golly, it would seem kind of important to me.” Ham was alarmed. “If they've got enough men to watch *all* the airfields, I'm going to get damned scared.”

“Prepare,” Doc said, “to get scared.”

“Huh? What the devil you trying to tell me?”

“That they have enough men to watch all the airfields in Blanca Grande. And probably did.”

Ham stared at Doc unbelievably. “You kidding?”

“No.”

“Good Lord! What other ideas have you got about this thing?”

Doc asked wearily, “You want to sleep tonight, don't you?”

“Yes, I—”

“Then you don't want to hear the rest of my ideas,” Doc said.

He wouldn't say anything more.

Chapter VIII

A ROARING in the sky awakened Doc Savage. The rumble, as of iron locusts, was distant. For a moment he was confused with the idea that he was back in the war and that there was an air raid.

He punched Ham Brooks. “Wake up.”

Ham was sound asleep. But when he was punched, he sprang completely out of bed, landing on his hands and knees on the floor. At the same time, he gave an ear-splitting yell.

Amazed, Doc said, “What's wrong with you? You couldn't jump that high when you were awake.”

Ham shook his head dazedly. “I was having the damnedest dream. A whole tribe of these wild South American cowboys were crawling up on me and Monk. We were tied to stakes. We were trying to pull loose from the stakes. I was just about to make it when you punched me.” He went silent for a moment.

“What's that noise?”

“We'd better look and see,” Doc said.

They met Square Jones in the hall. Square had two enormous pearl-handled six-shooters. “I heard somebody let out a squall,” he said. “What's that roaring noise?”

“The yell was me. Nightmare,” Ham said. “Where'd you get the popguns?”

Square said he had borrowed the six-guns from the *ganado* foreman.

They ran outdoors. It was early morning. The sun was probably an hour high. The air was crisp, almost chilly, and frost lay whitely in the valleys. They stared at the sky.

“For the love of mud!” Ham was frightened. “What can we use for an air raid shelter?”

Square Jones looked at Ham. Square laughed. “Are you nuts?”

“Listen, you muscle-head, stand here and get yourself blown to pieces if you want to,” Ham said. Ham then ran back into the ranch house yelling, “Abril! Kathy! Miss Doyle! Air raid!”

Square asked Doc, “What's the matter with him, anyway? Air raid, my foot!”

“What do *you* think it is,” Doc asked doubtfully.

Doc was watching the planes. There were eighteen of them, flying elements of three, three flights of two elements each. Using standard squadron stagger formation. The ships were pursuit jobs. Not the very latest, but fairly hot jobs. About half of them were P40s, and the rest Messerschmitts or Junkers. The P40s were the old type, the 81-A of pre-war vintage.

“What does an air raid look like?” Square asked uneasily.

“Think it might be one?”

“I don't know. Why the hell should there be?”

Doc frowned at the planes. “It would be rather spectacular, wouldn't it? However, I doubt if there will be a raid.”

Square squinted upward. “They're Blanca Grande Air Force planes,” he gasped. He sounded relieved.

THE pursuit jobs did some formation flying. Then they peeled off, one at a time, and came down in power dives. The pilots weren't bad. The power diving sent Ham and the two girls racing for a handy ditch. But the planes weren't going to give trouble. They were just showing off.

They did loops, wing-overs, slow rolls and snap rolls. They buzzed the ranch house, going over as noisy as cannonballs not more than fifty feet above the roof. Then they howled up in the sky and did more formation work.

More planes came out of the morning sun. A large ship, and more pursuits. The large ship was a two-motored American C47. It was painted a shiny black, with a fierce-looking Incan thunderbird on the sides. It was too far away to distinguish the insignia accurately, but Doc knew it must be an Incan thunderbird. Sort of a pot-bellied, spraddle-legged eagle with sparks coming out of his head was the thunderbird. It was the new insignia of Blanca Grande nationalism.

"I get it," Square said. "Hell, I should have known!"

Doc asked, "Mind dividing up your ideas?"

"I'll give you a slice of this one. That's Andros Lanza."

"Does he always come in such a blaze of glory?"

"The blaze," said Square, "gets higher and higher." Square didn't sound happy.

The planes arched over the ranch. Their thunder filled the air. They did formations. The big two-engine plane swept around and around majestically.

Ham crawled out of his ditch. "What's going on up there?"

"The great Andros Lanza is making a subdued entrance," Square said dryly.

"Who?"

Doc explained. "President Andros Lanza, of the republic of Blanca Grande."

Ham was astonished. "My God, you mean that's the president of the country up there? We sure rate, don't we?" Ham stared at the sky. "Not a bad air show. They've got some pretty hot pilots."

Abril Trujilla frowned at the aerial display. "Andy is getting to be a fool in his old age," she said.

"Who's Andy?" Ham asked.

"Andros Lanza."

"Oh." Ham was impressed. "You know him well enough to call him Andy, then?"

"Oh, he's been a family acquaintance for many years," Abril explained. "He bounced me on his knee when I was a baby."

Kathy Doyle grimaced. "You're not the only one who got bounced, sister. He bounced me, too."

"But he was a close friend of ours," Abril said.

"Not," said Kathy, "as close as he was of ours."

While the two girls were looking as if they were going to fight about it, Square Jones said, "He bounced you both, no doubt. You both had papas with umpteen million pesos in the bank. Why shouldn't he bounce you?"

"That kind of a guy, eh?" Ham said.

Square agreed sourly, "That kind of a guy." He turned to Doc Savage. "This show is all for you, no doubt. Do you want to ride over to the landing field and meet the master of it all?"

Doc said, "It begins to look as if it might be interesting."

THE big C47 plane landed. As Square Jones muttered under his breath, the only thing they had forgotten was the purple carpet. That, and the heralds with trumpets.

The pair of black-uniformed soldiers who popped out of the plane and stood at attention were nearly as impressive as heralds would have been.

Andros Lanza appeared in the plane door. He struck a pose.

“Hot ziggety,” Ham said. “Just like the opera.”

Square Jones frowned at Ham. “You got an idea or two that's going to be changed,” he said.

Andros Lanza was a long, lean man who looked a little like Abraham Lincoln would have looked if Lincoln had had snow-white hair. A rugged frame of bones, topped with a homely face and a white hay shock of hair. That was Lanza, the man.

Lanza the man was encased in a plain forest green uniform which was cut along the lines of a civilian suit of clothes. The effect, instead of subduing the uniform-like nature of his dress, was to emphasize it. The man could hardly have worn a more spectacular uniform, was the impression that grew on you.

“This,” said Ham, “reminds me of something that has happened before.”

“It should,” Square Jones muttered, “remind you of rathskellers and things.”

“You don't like Lanza,” Ham said.

“Do you?”

“I haven't met him,” Ham said with dignity.

Having struck his pose at the door of the plane, like a ham actor making an entrance, Andros Lanza put aside formality. He became as completely informal as he had been formal. He strode forward.

“My dears!” he cried to Abril and Kathy. “My little angels, I'm delighted.”

“He's delighted,” Square muttered out of the corner of his mouth. “Their old men own half the country, so he's delighted.”

“Lovely Abril and lovely Kathy,” said Andros Lanza effusively. “I'm so relieved to see you safe. So incredibly relieved.”

Square rolled his eyes skyward, and otherwise showed that he was unfavorably impressed.

“And where,” Andros Lanza was asking, “is Doc Savage?”

The two girls escorted the President of Blanca Grande toward Doc Savage.

The greeting Doc got in many ways resembled the reception a bone would get in a kennel of hungry dogs. He was practically gobbled up with pleasure.

The President of Blanca Grande was so glad to see the famous Doc Savage. Overjoyed. Particularly glad that the famous man from the United States was safe.

He, Andros Lanza, was stupefied that such a thing could have happened. The wrecking of Doc Savage's plane could have happened in Blanca Grande was unbelievable. It was incredible. It was hideous. The leading secret police men of Blanca Grande were here. The *Oscura Aguila* were here. They would get at the bottom of it in no time. In the meanwhile, welcome to Blanca Grande. A thousand welcomes.

Doc was reminded of an old-fashioned insurance salesman after a hot prospect.

They retired to *Rancho Una Escuela* for breakfast.

STRIPPED of the firecrackers, the fact seemed to be this: the President of Blanca Grande had heard about the attack on their plane and had come to offer his personal regrets that such a thing had happened. Also to assure them that the secret police of the state, the *Oscura Aguila*, would run down the culprits responsible.

All of this in an air of wild enthusiasm. Doc hoped Andros Lanza would be silent long enough to eat breakfast. He was. He shut off his talk as if closing a faucet.

The rancho's French cook dashed around in a half-wild condition, impressed by the dignitary he was serving breakfast.

"How come we rate this?" Ham Brooks asked Doc.

Doc said he was darned if he knew.

Square said, "While we're wondering, how's this for a morsel to toss into the pot: how'd his nibs find out Doc Savage was in that plane?"

Ham scratched his head over that one and came up with, "Oh, no doubt Doc identified himself while making those radiotelephone calls to the other ranches about the airports being watched."

Doc overheard. He hadn't mentioned his name during any of the radiophone calls. He became curious.

"Kathy," he asked when he had a chance to do so in private. "Did you mention my name when you got in touch with your father by radio?"

"Why, no," Kathy said. "I just said we had brought home the goods. And could dad come to the ranch here to see it."

Doc put the same query to Abril Trujilla.

Abril hadn't mentioned that Doc Savage was in Blanca Grande, either.

The main piece of the breakfast was an omelet, a very fine light omelet. The coffee was good and black enough to float a dollar and strong enough nearly to dissolve one.

They ate on the patio. The air was crisp enough to make the sunlight golden and pleasant. The linen was snowy, the silver spotless, the service impeccable, and Doc's thoughts became intent and wary.

"*Señor Presidente*," Doc asked, "may we inquire how you learned we were here so quickly?"

Andros Lanza gave them a Lincolnesque smile. "My *Oscura Aguila* were so lucky as to learn it."

Square was eating next to Doc. Square leaned over and said, "In other words, he had one of his secret police planted on the ranch."

"You mean for our benefit?" Doc asked.

"Hell, no. Or I don't suppose so. His secret police are under almost any log you turn over."

Andros Lanza was looking at them intently. He leaned forward himself, asked, “You are surprised that my *Oscura Aguila* learn of your arrival?”

“Only a natural amount of surprise,” Doc said.

“Think nothing of it.” Lanza beamed at them. “We do things somewhat differently here in Blanca Grande.”

“All South America is beginning to realize that,” Kathy said quietly.

The President was startled. “What do you mean? My dear girl, I do not understand.” He frowned at Kathy.

Kathy began to look tense. Evidently her tongue had slipped.

Square Jones went into the breach like a life preserver.

“*Señor Presidente*, all South America is realizing the great good fortune of Blanca Grande in having you for its leader,” Square said.

The way he said it was as phony as a ten-cent-store diamond. It was an insult, the way he said it.

Andros Lanza's smile remained untarnished. “A lovely sentiment you express,” he said.

HAM BROOKS had more than halfway expected the spectacular President of Blanca Grande to give Square Jones a poke in the nose. But nothing of the sort happened. This Lanza can't be that dumb, Ham thought. He must know Square was insulting him.

Ham examined Square with new respect. He wondered just who Square was to get away with being nasty to the President. Ham had supposed Square was just a bodyguard.

Ham was somewhat dazed. The situation—this thing of having breakfast with the President—was unreal. It was too unexpected. There didn't seem to be any reason for it.

There had to be a reason. A darned good one. A big one. Ham poked thoughtfully at his omelet.

The obvious answer was that Doc Savage was an important man. Doc was an international figure. Particularly had Doc come into prominence during the turmoil as Axis nations involved in the war had started collapsing.

Ham realized that he hadn't given it much thought before—but Doc Savage was probably as important a non-politician as there was currently on the international scene.

Which meant what? Ham wondered.

He listened to Andros Lanza talk. The man spoke poor English, and what was worse, he spoke it as if he thought it was good.

Lanza, Ham decided, was bragging. The long, bony, homely politician wasn't exactly chest-beating. But he was talking about himself. I this. I that. Telling them his background and how he'd made a great success.

Ham listened skeptically. Ham was a lawyer and inclined to look inside all sugar-coated pills with the

pre-fixed conviction that they were going to be bitter.

Lanza was a poor boy born of peasant parents, one gathered. He had gone to school in the capital, Mercado, in Buenos Aires, in Boston, in Paris. Ham wondered how the devil poor peasant parents had been able to afford that much schooling for him.

It was early in life that Lanza had acquired his principles, his philosophy of life. He was emphatic about his philosophy. He explained it to them. Discipline was its keyword. Regulation. Order and direct action. Firmness. Firmness with self and with the multitude.

President Lanza made his oration solemnly. Discipline and firmness were the keynotes of progress, of success, of accomplishment.

He's leaving out one little thing, Ham thought. Happiness. He's forgotten that.

Come to think of it, he's forgotten another little thing. Maybe the next guy wanted to live his life a little differently. Lanza was overlooking that.

Just why President Andros Lanza had visited them, had breakfast with them, and preached a lecture about himself, Ham didn't understand.

Chapter IX

HAM BROOKS had temporarily forgotten the mystery about the photographs of an old Incan carving. He was more curious about why they were getting so much attention. He wanted to talk to Doc about it, but he could not get Doc cornered alone. He cornered Square Jones instead.

Square was standing at a window, scowling. He was smoking a particularly foul black cigar.

Ham asked him, "Do you make it a rule to go around insulting presidents?"

Square grinned sourly. "You mean my crack about the country being lucky to have him for its president?"

"You didn't exactly kiss him with that."

"I didn't intend to." Square's cigar smoke smelled like an accident in a bride's oven.

"Just what did you mean?" Ham asked curiously.

Square considered the question. "Skip it," he said.

"Oh, come now. It seemed to me you opened up your heart there for a minute."

"I did. It'll probably get me some lost teeth. I hear he's getting some pretty rough boys in his *Oscura Aguila*." Square grinned suddenly, wolfishly. "The last time they tied into me, they had to have some replacements in the ranks."

"Just what is this *Oscura Aguila*?"

"The Dark Eagle National Central Guard is its full name. Everyone calls it the *Oscura Aguila*, which is Spanish for dark eagle."

"Now just what is it?" Ham asked. "You got an extra one of those cigars?"

“They'd lay you out cold. The *Oscura Aguila* is what you would refer to as the Gestapo, if you were across the oceans in a certain other country.”

“I don't intend to smoke it. Is he a dictator?”

“Dictator!” Square snorted. “If he isn't, he'll do until a reasonable facsimile comes along.” Square felt in his pockets. “You don't intend to smoke it?”

“No.”

“What are you going to do with it?”

“Experiment,” Ham said. “This is an interesting conversation. I thought dictator presidents were very unpopular in South America.”

Square grinned. “They are. This one has been outsmarted though.”

“Who outsmarted him?”

“The United States State Department. What the hell do you mean, experiment?”

“How did they do it?”

“Propaganda job,” Square said. “And very cute, too. This bird Lanza caught the dictator fever about the same time as did some others I can mention. He got the idea he would like to be a great big chest-beating fascist. He lit out to do it, too. You know what your American State Department did?”

Ham said, “I don't recall them blacklisting firms, declaring embargoes, stopping imports, and calling home ambassadors. Not here in Blanca Grande.”

“Nope. They didn't do any of that.”

“But they did take action?”

“They sure did. They put out a propaganda job that would make your old maid aunt forget to look under the bed. They sold the common people of Blanca Grande on democracy. They did the damnedest, finest job you ever saw. They sold the people on God and democracy, the two finest things that have come along. What kind of an experiment have you got in mind?”

“With the cigar?”

“Yes.”

“Is Lanza happy?”

“No, and ain't that sad. But what can he do? He doesn't have anybody to use for a scapegoat. Hitler had the Jews. Mussolini had the Communists. What does Andros Lanza have? Nothing. He's in a hell of a shape.”

“I think it'll do the job,” Ham said.

“What will?”

“The cigar.”

“What the hell!”

“It's a secret,” Ham said. He sauntered away.

A STRANGE, dark feeling had crawled into the more vague regions of Ham Brooks' mind. After he had thought about the sensation a little, he realized it was fear. And that scared him.

It wasn't just plain fear, the kind of fear he'd been having for Monk Mayfair's safety. This went more into the blackness of things he didn't understand. It was a weird, unholy, threatening forest which was suddenly growing up around him. Unlovely, horrible things growing where he hadn't supposed there was anything that would offer a threat. That was the way it was.

He had the same feelings as a boy who had wandered into a graveyard at midnight by mistake.

He couldn't put his finger on the exact reasons for his having such a feeling.

But he was afraid it was all related, the troubles in New York, the ambush at the ranch landing field, the ambushade at all the other flying fields, the arrival of President Lanza and his impressive air escort. Ham had the grisly impression that it might all be one package.

Ham looked around until he located Doc Savage. “Doc, I've got a feeling about this,” he said.

Doc examined him. “Not pleasant, apparently.”

“I'll say it isn't. What are we getting into, anyway?”

Doc was checking over their equipment and baggage. The gauchos had brought the bags and cases in from the wrecked plane. “Kathy heard from her father,” he said.

“Is he going to come to the ranch?”

“Yes. This morning. But that isn't all she heard.”

“Oh, yes, Kathy was going to have her father use his bank service detectives to find out whether all the air fields had reception committees waiting for us with bazookas.”

“They had.”

“Well, I didn't think—*they had!* You say they had? Lord help us, you don't mean that!”

Doc shrugged. “The bank sleuths weren't able to check nearly all of the landing fields, but they found enough to make it look as if there was a big set-up waiting for us.”

“Great grief! Now I *am* scared.”

Doc Savage said thoughtfully. “The two fathers, Juan Trujilla and Francisco Doyle, are supposed to get here this morning. They are coming by plane.”

“Will they bring the pictures?”

“Yes.”

“I hope,” Ham said, “that we can learn something by looking at the pictures.”

JUAN TRUJILLA arrived first. He was a compact man who had Abril's red hair. He didn't look like a rancher. They discovered later that all the horseback riding he had ever done had been on polo ponies.

Trujilla had a red single-motored cabin plane which had seats for four passengers and the pilot. He was wearing a neat pin-stripe blue business suit, and a worried expression. He embraced Kathy with extreme relief.

When he put his arms around Abril, they saw that the tan leather document case which he carried was chained to his wrist.

The photographs must be in there, Ham reflected.

Juan Trujilla shook hands with Doc Savage, saying, "I am very glad indeed to see you, and grateful that you came."

When Trujilla saw Andros Lanza, he looked like a man who had been handed a pickle.

Doc didn't like the impression Lanza gave as he grabbed Trujilla's hand and pumped it.

"Mr. Savage and I welcome you," Lanza said. "We hope and trust we can settle this nastiness with the greatest of speed."

Square Jones caught Doc's eye. He had overheard. Square winked deliberately. Without any humor, though.

Shortly Doc and Trujilla were able to speak privately. Doc noticed that Trujilla had become reserved. More than that, Trujilla looked scared.

Square Jones had noticed Trujilla's feeling. "Look, Juan," Square said. "You don't like me, do you?"

Juan Trujilla scowled. "That puts the truth briefly."

"You figure I'm a tough cookie," Square said.

"*A mucho duro hombre,*" Juan Trujilla agreed. "You are too tough for your own good. You will never die of old age."

"You trusted me to look out for your daughter on the way to New York," Square reminded.

"You are loyal and honest," Trujilla said. "I can't think of anything else I can say of you."

Square grinned.

"That," he said, "is the point I started out to make. I am Square Jones, as truthful as the day is long. So now I'm going to tell you something."

"*Si?*"

"*El Presidente,*" said Square, "is trying to ride a coat-tail."

"What do you mean?"

"Lanza is trying to horn into this."

"Oh!"

“He and Doc Savage haven't a thing in common, except that they shook hands a couple of hours ago,” Square said.

Trujilla smiled wryly. “I hope it was not a meeting of the minds, only the hands.”

“The hands only,” said Square. “I'm telling you it's so. A minute ago, Lanza gave the impression he and Doc Savage are working together, but it didn't mean a thing. Lanza was just trying to ride into it on Doc's coat-tail.”

Trujilla looked very pleased. He glanced up at the sky from which the sound of another plane was coming.

“That must be Doyle,” he said.

FRANCISCO DOYLE was also red-headed. His hair was a fiery red, like flames from oak, and he had an Irishman's jaw and the coldly suspicious eye of an old-school banker. The strange part was that he looked, not like a banker, but like a rancher. He looked more the cowman than did Juan Trujilla. He even wore a cowman's expensive pants and fancy sash, marks of the high-class gaucho.

He was quite an old fire-eater.

He kissed his daughter. “I'm going to fan your stern later,” he told her, “for balling this up.”

“But, dad—”

“Sure you balled it up. Nobody was supposed to know you were going to New York for Doc Savage.”

“We didn't—”

“Dammit!” he yelled. “The whole world knows it!”

He shook Doc Savage's hand. He had a handclasp like an iron man.

“You,” he told Doc, “apparently aren't the hot-shot I thought you were.”

He grinned at Ham. “Pretty, aren't you?” he said. Ham's neck got red.

To Square Jones, he said, “I think I may fire you.”

Square said, “Yes, sir.” He didn't look worried.

The general effect was fast, amiable and pleasant. He was a rough, tough old guy who seemed to be doing his best to act like a shanty Irishman instead of an upper class Castilian caballero. He was likeable.

His gaudy manner stubbed its toe when he saw Andros Lanza. His face straightened out. He didn't say anything loud or insulting.

“*Buenos dias,*” he said, quietly.

Lanza was more effusive. “Juan, my friend, my dear childhood friend!” he shouted. “I am so sorry about this danger to your daughter. The guilty shall be punished. I assure you.”

There was more of this. The President and protector of Blanca Grande was going to see that the culprits were caught, no fooling. He told them so six or eight times.

He headed for his big private plane, saying that he was going to build some fires under people, by radio.

See that things got done.

Ham was puzzled.

“When they're as loud as that guy,” Ham said, “they're usually hollow inside.”

“That one isn't hollow,” Square assured them. “Never get that idea in your head.”

Francisco Doyle still had a dark look on his face. “Where can we have a private talk?” he muttered.

THEY used a room in the big ranch house. Square stood outside the closed door, on guard.

Juan Trujilla unlocked the document case he was carrying around locked to his wrist. “These are the photographs of the Kichua Book,” he said.

They were technically good photographs. Not extraordinary, but good.

Ham crowded up to look at them with Doc. It was the first time Ham had seen the likeness of the Kichua Book. He found that it was an undistinguished block of stone with some average-looking carvings on it. What the carvings meant, he didn't know. But Doc had said the carvings were bragging by some unimportant Incan ruler in the early days. Doc should know.

“These pictures,” said Ham, “are what the voice over the telephone wanted? And when they weren't handed over, threats were made and carried out? Your chauffeur was murdered after the telephoning voice said he would be?”

“That,” said Juan Trujilla gloomily, “is correct.”

“You refused to give them up?”

Trujilla's jaw went out, fiercely. “I do not push about.”

“So you sent for Doc?”

“*Si.*”

“Why,” asked Ham, “didn't you ask for Doc's assistance by cable or long-distance telephone?”

Trujilla nodded at his daughter. “I wanted her safe for awhile.”

“You mean you figured she would be safe for the length of time it took her to go to New York and get Doc Savage interested?”

“*Si.* She would be out of Blanca Grande that long, which I presumed would be the same as safe.”

Ham frowned at the photographs. They didn't mean a thing. He glanced at Doc, and was somewhat surprised to find that the bronze man wasn't even looking at the pictures.

Doc said, “Señor Doyle, you talked to this man personally, this unidentified caller who demanded the photographs?”

“*Si.*”

“Did he lisp?” Doc asked.

“He did.”

“You are positive?”

“*Si*. I am.”

“And you, Señor Trujilla?” Doc asked.

“He lisped, all right,” said Trujilla.

Ham thought what the hell, what if he did lisp? What is so important about that?

LOOKING at the photographs had spread a wet blanket on everyone's spirits. Trujilla and Doyle had apparently rather hoped that Doc Savage would take a look at the prints, then make some dramatic announcement that would clear up everything.

Doc Savage was not showing much interest in the photographs. This was additionally disappointing to everybody. It also puzzled Ham. The photos were supposed to be important, and he didn't see why Doc was nearly ignoring them.

Doc went over and sat in a chair.

“I want to hold a private conference with my aide, Ham Brooks.” Doc indicated the door. “Would you mind?”

Trujilla and Doyle and their daughters left. The two wealthiest men in Blanca Grande looked somewhat startled at having practically been thrown out.

Ham closed the door.

Doc beckoned. “We want to keep this private.” He leaped up from the chair suddenly. “Maybe we had better look around. There might be a microphone hidden in here.”

They hunted, but did not find a microphone.

“All right,” Doc said. “Somebody is going to try to kill Juan Trujilla.”

“Somebody kill Trujilla!”

“It's your job to keep Trujilla alive,” Doc said. “And keep what I'm telling you under your hat.”

Chapter X

THE murder took place two hours later.

Ham and Juan Trujilla had gone upstairs. Terror was crawling on Ham's nerves, and he hated to lose sight of Trujilla for a minute. But he couldn't very well follow Trujilla into his private bedroom.

Trujilla was going to go over the ranch accounts. He had said, as long as he was at rancho Una Escuela, he might as well check the books. Ham suspected the ranch baron was confused, and wanted to sit in the privacy of his bedroom and think.

Ham heard him lock the bedroom door on the inside.

The hall was high-ceilinged, wide, and ran the full length of the second floor of the ranch house. It was something like the inside of a narrow cathedral. There was a suit of armor at each end of the hall, tapestries on the wall, a couple of tables, big straight-back chairs.

Ham sat in the chair. He intended to stay there.

The ranch wasn't particularly quiet. He could hear an airplane motor running by spurts in the distance. Evidently the Blanca Grande army was having trouble with one of their ships.

Cows were bawling somewhere. And a tractor was running. The voices of men sounded loudly now and then.

Ham squirmed. He wished he could get rid of the dry-mouthed fear. He wished he could be sure that Trujilla was safe.

He scowled at the door. Was there one room in there? Two? A suite? He didn't know the makeup of the upstairs part of the great rambling ranch house.

Where was everybody? Where was Square? Doc? Francisco Doyle? The girls? Andros Lanza?

Im getting nuts, Ham thought.

The yell, when he heard it, lifted him straight up. He actually jumped so violently that he upset the heavy old hall chair. The crash of the upsetting chair joined the wailing gurgle that followed the first yell.

The yell had been wordless. A noise. An outdriven blast of terror. The wail that followed was different, a going-going-gone cry.

Ham, in jumping and upsetting the chair, had fallen to a knee. He got to his feet. The ranch house was seized with a sudden silence.

Then Ham ran for the door. Trujilla's door. Feet hammered up the stairs.

"Señor Trujilla!" Ham beat the door. "Trujilla!"

Servants came up the stairs. Square Jones. The two girls.

Ham tried to force the door. Locked. Solid. "Trujilla, what's wrong?"

Abril Trujilla seemed to go up on tiptoes, her face whitening. She put both hands tightly against her cheeks and swayed. Square gripped her shoulders, awkwardly, bashfully. He said, "It's nothing." To Kathy Doyle, he said, "Here, put your arm around Abril."

Ham turned his head. "Square, help me get this door open."

Andros Lanza, president of Blanca Grande, came up the stairs. He looked confused. He had two of his black-garbed *Oscura Aguila* troopers with him, tall, sleek hard fellows with drawn guns.

Ham and Square faced the door. "We better bust it down," Square said.

Wood splintered. The lock didn't break out, but the whole center panel let loose. They stumbled in.

Ham looked around. "It's a suite."

“Yeah,” Square growled. “Where’d the yell come from?”

“I don’t—”

Ham didn’t finish. It wasn’t necessary. He could see the answer.

THE body lay in the next room, which was a private office. It lay face down. The coat had been yanked down and partly off—it was down around the victim’s waist, exposing the shoulders—during some kind of a struggle. They could see the knife hilt.

The rooms were part of a suite. This room, the largest, was a parlor. To the left was a bedroom. To the right the small office, and there was another door which led somewhere beyond the office.

Along the outside, accessible from all the rooms, ran a balcony.

Ham started for the balcony.

“*Que lastima!*” Andros Lanza gasped. “What a pity!” He said something in a low voice to the two black *Oscura Aguila* men.

The black-uniformed troopers suddenly got in front of Ham. “Keep back,” one of them said.

Ham was excited. “Maybe Trujilla’s murderer used the balcony. Let’s look—”

“Stay where you are!” the trooper said. He spoke excellent English.

With drawn gun, he stepped to the balcony door. He flung it open, strode out on the balcony, gun held dramatically. The other *Oscura Aguila* man got in front of Ham, restraining him, when Ham moved toward the balcony.

“Listen, what are you trying to do?” Ham snapped. Andros Lanza strode forward. He was straight-backed, hard-jawed. “*Eso es muy desagradable,*” he said.

“Of course it’s disagreeable!” Ham snapped. “We’ve got to catch the murderer. What are your storm troopers pushing me around for?”

“*Lo siento,* I am so sorry.” Lanza stood firmly planted. “I am in charge. My men, the *Oscura Aguila*, will take over. You will leave this room. All of you!”

“What the hell—”

The black-uniformed trooper seized Ham’s arm. He was propelling Ham toward the door when Doc Savage appeared in the door. Doc had come up from downstairs.

“Doc!” Ham yelled. “Somebody killed Juan Trujilla!”

Doc moved swiftly. The trooper tried to get in his way, but wasn’t quick enough.

The bronze man went to a knee beside the body. He tested the pulse. “Nothing to do here,” he said.

Ham had thought that. He could see where the knife was sticking.

He said, “Poor Trujilla—” And then he nearly yelled.

Because Doc Savage had turned the body over and it wasn't Trujilla lying there on the floor. It was Francisco Doyle.

Chapter XI

HAM blurted, "My God, where is Trujilla!" He whirled, intending to race into the other rooms. A grip on his arm brought him up sharply. The black-garbed *Oscura Aguila* man had hold of him.

"*Lo siento*," the trooper said.

"Sorry, hell! Let go of my arm!" Ham blurted.

The black-uniformed man was larger than Ham. And tougher, apparently. He said, "You stay here!"

Ham put his face against the trooper's and said, "Listen, you little edition of Himmler, take your hand off my arm!"

The way Ham spoke was impressive. His tone would have made scale drop off a chunk of iron. The trooper released his grip.

Ham wheeled on President Andros Lanza, shouted, "Tell your pups to keep away from me! Stay out of my way, or I'll smear somebody, what I mean!"

Ham didn't wait for an answer. He stalked out into the hall. He went hunting for Juan Trujilla. Square Jones followed him.

Square drew abreast. "Maybe you didn't know it a minute ago, but you were talking to the president of the land."

"The so-and-so had better keep his black dogs out of my way!" Ham said.

Square dropped a hand on Ham's shoulder. "Listen, what about just now?"

"When?"

"Who killed Doyle?"

"How do I know?"

"Listen, give me sense." Square's voice was hoarse. "Doyle was my boss, you know."

Square's face was a green-gray color. He looked like a man who wanted to be violently sick, and couldn't.

"I'm sorry, Square." Ham shook his head slowly. "I was in the hall. I heard the yell. I thought nobody but Trujilla was in the room. I had followed Trujilla up there."

"Why?"

"Why what?"

"Why did you follow Trujilla to his room?"

Ham thought rapidly. "I was just keeping an eye open. As a matter of fact, I was sitting in the hall beating

my brains together when I heard the cry.” Doc had said not to mention the fact that he thought Trujilla might be killed. Doc must have made a terrible error somewhere.

“You don't know anything, then?” Square demanded grimly.

“Not a thing. I'm sorry.” Ham was sympathetic.

“Okay.” Square swallowed. His grief had brought him near tears. “Let me know if you get anything you think I should know.”

“I will that,” Ham said sincerely.

Ham went on. He hunted for Juan Trujilla. The man was not upstairs. At the end of the hall, there was a rear stairway. It was around an angle, and Trujilla could have left that way without Ham being able to see him.

And that, it developed, was what Trujilla must have done.

Ham found Trujilla on the patio. The cattle baron was disturbed.

“What happened a moment ago?” Trujilla demanded. “I heard someone yell, I thought.”

“Where were you at the time?” Ham asked.

“Why, talking to the rancho foreman and two of his gauchos.” Trujilla chuckled. “Do I need an alibi? Three of the black-uniformed presidential guard were near. I'm sure they saw me.”

Ham said, “Doyle was just murdered.”

Trujilla's smile faded.

THEY had thrown a sheet over the body on the floor. President Lanza was explaining, “Señor Savage examined Señor Doyle, and feels sure there is nothing to be done. You will clear the room, please. Everyone downstairs.”

The hall door was locked. A black-uniformed man took a stance in front of it, spread-legged, grim.

“By radio I am summoning the best criminologists of my *Oscura Aguila*,” Lanza said. “We shall keep the room as it is. All clues undisturbed.”

Kathy Doyle had taken it strangely so far. She had not lost much color, and her voice had been normal.

Now suddenly she went. She began to sob. Her knees gave way, and she swayed. Abril Trujilla went to her. So did Trujilla himself. The three of them moved into the patio with their grief.

Square Jones slouched down on a chair. He sat apart. He looked like a lonely, whipped bulldog.

Doc Savage disappeared almost immediately, which somewhat disturbed Ham. He looked around for Doc, but did not find him.

Andros Lanza offered Ham a cigarette. “Will you smoke? I have been looking for Mr. Savage.”

Ham said, “So have I.” The cigarettes were monogrammed in gold. “No, I don't smoke.”

“Where is he?”

“I don't know.” The cigarettes were also black. The first black cigarettes Ham believed he had ever seen.

“I wish,” said Lanza, “that I might talk with him. I would like to discuss this. It seems to me there is a mystery here somewhere. Doesn't it seem that way to you, Mr. Brooks?”

Ham was cautious. “Murder always looks mysterious, until the killer is caught.”

Lanza nodded. “I'm sure there must be a mystery. Your plane was attacked when you landed. That is very strange. And now Doyle is killed. Yes, I sense a mystery.”

Lanza was speaking quietly. His English was excellent. He was not being crisp and dictatorial now. He sounded intensely sympathetic.

“This has shocked me deeply. Most deeply. I am not a man who feels emotions readily.” Lanza stared at the floor. He moistened his lips. “Francisco Doyle I have known many years.”

Ham studied the president of Blanca Grande furtively. There was indeed a great deal of power in the man's personality. Now the power seemed gentle, Lincolnesque.

Lanza was greatly shocked by Doyle's murder. Or he was a damned good actor.

HAM remembered that Francisco Doyle hadn't seemed to like Lanza any too well. He wondered why that was. He wished he could think of a way of asking about it.

Fortunately Lanza brought it up himself. “I met Doyle only after I had started my political career.” Lanza smiled gently. “We saw eye to eye politically the first time we met. I was the young untamed stallion fresh from the pampas. Francisco Doyle was the gentle hand of wisdom at my bridle rein, guiding me.”

The President went silent. His lips moved. Ham saw that he was repeating to himself the part about the young untamed stallion and the gentle hand of wisdom at his bridle guiding him. He liked it. I'll bet, Ham thought, he uses that in his next speech.

Ham said, “Doyle was one of your backers, then?”

“Back? Oh, no! I am self-made.” The President's feelings had been hurt. “Doyle was my friend and advisor.”

“You always took his advice, I imagine,” said Ham, fishing with a big hook.

“As my own wisdom grew with the years, we frequently disagreed on minor points,” Lanza admitted frankly. “You are curious, aren't you?”

“I noticed he seemed a little mad at you.”

Lanza was hurt. “Not really. We were of a minor disagreement for the moment.”

“What about?”

“Political matters.” Lanza shrugged. “The size of the army. Taxes. An army takes taxes, as you Yankees know by now. And Doyle was a rich man, so taxes vitally concerned him.”

“I see.”

Lanza examined Ham thoughtfully. “Are your suspicions laid at rest?”

“What suspicions?” said Ham hurriedly. “I didn't have any suspicions.”

Lanza said, “It would be good if you didn't.” He walked away leaving Ham in doubt as to just how much was meant by that last remark. It could have contained the sharp teeth of a threat, Ham reflected.

THROUGH the rest of the morning, the ranch was about as cheerful as the inside of a casket. The snappy black-clad *Aguila* stood around, spraddle-legged, rocky expressions on their faces.

They were having lunch when a plane zoomed the ranch. Ham arose and looked out of the window. So did Lanza. “The *Aguila* criminologists from the capital,” Lanza said.

Ham heard Square Jones exclaim, “Well, where have you been?” He whirled.

Doc Savage had appeared. Doc, looking somewhat disheveled, sauntered inside. He said, “I have been scouting the neighborhood of the ranch.”

“Why?” Lanza asked sharply.

“On the theory that the gang who waylaid us when we arrived might have come back and done in Doyle.”

“Did you find this true?”

“No. At least I located no one.”

Lanza became half approving. “It was a very good idea. But you should have let my *Oscura Aguila* handle it. They are experienced.”

Ham Brooks blinked. “Experienced? I wonder what he thinks Doc is?” Ham wondered.

A hard-jaw delegation, all in the spectacular black uniforms of the *Oscura Aguila*, arrived shortly. They had come in the plane. They were burdened down with brief cases, the contents of some of which they dumped on a table in the main lounge, or big parlor, of the ranch house. This was the room Andros Lanza had taken over for his office. Lanza had let it be known that the ranch was going to be his headquarters until the murderer of his good friend, Francisco Doyle, was caught.

It was newspapers they dumped on the table.

Ham got a look at them. At the headlines. He got cold chills.

Ham found Doc Savage hurriedly. “That last gang brought copies of leading Blanca Grande newspapers, Doc. This morning's papers.”

Doc was worried. “Not good, eh?”

“I don't see anything so bad right offhand. But the headlines are queer.”

“In what way?”

“How,” demanded Ham, “did they know we were arriving in Blanca Grande? I mean, how'd they know

it in time to get it in this morning's newspapers.

"The news is there?"

"Yes."

"The news," Doc said, "didn't have time to get printed."

"But it's in the headlines—"

"Unless they knew we were coming," Doc added.

"That's it." Ham scowled. "But how the devil—"

"It could be done. Their agents in New York. They probably saw us leave. They would know about the speed of the plane. It wouldn't be hard to check on where we refueled. There aren't too many air routes from New York to Blanca Grande. They probably watched all of them. They knew when we'd get here. Anyway it wouldn't have mattered if the news was a little premature. Their plans wouldn't have been changed."

"What plans?" Ham was becoming more scared. "Doc, don't you think it's about time I know what is going on?"

Doc said, "That wouldn't be a bad idea, and I'll tell you if there's time—"

He stopped. There was shouting from the house. From the upstairs corridor. They could distinguish the words.

It was one of the black-uniformed troopers. He was bellowing that the body of Francisco Doyle was gone. It had disappeared.

DOC SAVAGE and Ham Brooks ran indoors. The *Oscura Aguila* men were milling around in the upstairs hall, like a flock of ravens into which a shot had been fired.

"It's impossible! You fools, it couldn't happen!" Andros Lanza bellowed. Lanza was in a rage. He was nearly hysterical.

Doc demanded, "Is Doyle's body really gone?"

Lanza clutched at his temper. "Yes. Gone. The room was locked on the inside, every door but one. And that one had a guard on the outside."

Doc looked into the room where Doyle had lain. There was no body there.

"Strange," Doc commented.

"Weird!" Lanza snapped. Lanza seemed considerably more upset than the occasion called for.

A racket broke out on the stairs. Men in black uniforms were holding Square Jones' arms. Square was cursing and struggling. "Your damned — black troopers — took Doyle's body!" Square yelled.

Doc rushed Ham Brooks into the dining room, which was deserted.

"Ham, the thing has started to break," Doc said rapidly. "For the next few hours, everybody is going to

be busier than turkeys in a Kansas windstorm.”

“I like the comparison,” Ham said.

“Can you ride one of those gaucho ponies?”

“Can I—what the dickens?”

“I had to pick four horses out of the corral at random,” Doc explained. “I didn't know the individual horses, so I can't guarantee how gentle they are. But they're saddled and waiting.”

Ham eyed Doc intently. “You've been missing the last couple of hours. So that's what you were doing. Stealing horses.”

Doc nodded. “The horses are in the arroyo north of the ranch house. Juan Trujilla, Abril and Kathy Doyle are waiting for you there. You sneak out there and join them. Ride up the arroyo, and when you are clear of the ranch, ride for the hills to the west.”

Ham was confused. “The Trujillas and Kathy Doyle are with the horses now?”

“Yes.”

“How does that happen?”

“I talked to them,” Doc said, “about an hour ago. I explained the situation, and they agreed that it was best to flee the ranch.”

“I wish,” Ham said, “somebody would do some explaining to me.”

“Trujilla and the two girls can give you the story. We haven't time right now.”

“We're running away?” Ham demanded.

“Yes.”

“Why?”

Doc made an impatient gesture. “Because the thing is under control.”

“What,” asked Ham, “controlled it?”

“The death of Francisco Doyle, followed by the disappearance of his body,” Doc said. “But you'd better get going.”

Chapter XII

THE *Oscura Aguila* trooper was nearly seven feet tall. He stood arrogantly in front of Doc Savage and said, “You will come with me.”

Doc had been listening for any sound of a fight outside. A fight would mean Ham had been apprehended. There had been none. Evidently Ham had gotten clear.

“*Si*,” Doc said. He went with the tough looking *Aguila* trooper.

They went upstairs. President Andros Lanza was in the large private living-room where the body of Francisco Doyle had lain before it disappeared. "I imagine you will want to hear this," Lanza said. He sounded unfriendly.

"Hear what?" Doc asked.

"The summary of evidence."

"What evidence?"

"We have identified the killer of Doyle," Lanza said. "Much evidence we have. My *Oscura Aguila* have enough evidence, I might add, to convict the murderer."

Doc examined Lanza narrowly.

"When," Doc asked, "did they get all this evidence?"

"They have been very busy."

"In a most inconspicuous fashion, evidently," Doc said dryly.

Lanza didn't reply. His long bony jaw was shoved out and his hard lips were unfriendly.

What followed was something like a court trial, minus defense. Lanza was judge. A black-clad *Oscura Aguila* man named Sentarse was prosecuting attorney. Sentarse, judging from the extra snap and fit of his uniform, the added hardness of manner, was someone important in the *Aguila*.

"Jones Ruede, Sergeant Trooper First Grade," Sentarse said. "Will you tell us what you saw?"

"I saw Francisco Doyle standing on the balcony with a short, wide, hairy man." Sergeant Trooper Ruede had a scar from the left corner of his mouth straight back to his ear. As if someone had once tried to extend his mouth with a knife.

"When was this?" Sentarse asked.

"About ten minutes before Doyle was found stabbed to death."

"What did Doyle and this short, hairy man do on the balcony?"

"They argued violently."

"Could you hear their words?"

"Not all of them," said Sergeant Trooper Ruede.

"But," said Sentarse, "you heard some."

"Yes."

"What did you hear?"

"They were arguing about politics."

"What do you mean, politics?"

"They were arguing," said Sergeant Trooper Ruede, "about whether the United States had a right to

interfere in the affairs of self-respecting South American nations.”

“What side did Francisco Doyle argue on?”

“He said it was a filthy crime the way the United States was ordering South American countries around, sticking their noses in where they didn't belong.”

“Doyle was angry?”

“He was very angry.”

“He opposed interference in Blanca Grande by the United States?”

“He certainly did.”

“Did Doyle accuse the other man of anything?”

“He did.”

“Of what?”

“He accused the short, hairy man of coming to Blanca Grande to interfere with the present government of the country.”

“Francisco Doyle favored the present government?”

“He certainly did.”

Doc Savage interrupted. He asked, “Is all this necessary?” His tone and manner were angry.

SENTARSE, the examiner, glared at Doc Savage. So did Andros Lanza. It was the president of Blanca Grande who said sharply, “You are interfering.”

“No, I'm trying to speed up things,” Doc said.

“In what way?”

“By suggesting you kill the cat,” Doc said, “and get it over with.”

“You will,” said Lanza, “desist your interference with this giving of testimony.”

Doc snorted. “Producing imaginary rats seems a better name for it.”

Lanza jumped up. “Mr. Savage, you will be silent. Later, we will hear you.”

“Oh, I'll get my chance later, will I?” Doc asked.

Lanza smiled grimly. “You certainly will. Your status with the government of the United States is internationally known. It is, in fact, quite well known here in Blanca Grande.”

“I'll bet,” Doc said, “that your newspapers have carried stories making my status, as you call it, very plain.”

Lanza's face hardened. “Our newspapers print the news, naturally.”

“The news that you give them, don't you mean? Isn't it a fact that one of the first things you did when you got control of the government was to abolish a free press?”

Lanza said, “Sit down.”

“Would it be an accurate guess to say the stories about my so-called status began appearing about the time the mysterious man who lisped began trying to get the photographs of the Kichua Book?” Doc asked.

Lanza smiled again, more grimly. “You are finally jumping at conclusions, aren't you?”

“Finally,” Doc said, “isn't the word.”

“No?”

“I jumped at most of my conclusions in New York,” Doc said. “And it was probably fortunate I did.”

Andros Lanza lost his grin. He looked uncertain, and for a moment, frightened. “You will be silent,” he ordered.

“Just what,” Doc demanded, ignoring the order, “is this status of mine? I'm curious.”

Lanza seized the question triumphantly.

“You are a trouble-shooter for the United States government!” he shouted.

“I am?” Doc said, in a tone of surprise.

Lanza levelled an arm. “Don't deny it! You have gone to Japan, representing the U. S. State Department and meddled with Japanese affairs. You have meddled with internal affairs in Germany, in the Mediterranean, and elsewhere. Always doing the dirty work of the overbearing United States government. You are their trouble-shooter. You are a one-man reign of terror in the name of Washington, that's what you are.” Lanza was bellowing.

Doc Savage laughed.

“That's news to me,” he said. “But it's nice to learn I have a reputation I didn't know I had.”

Lanza shouted, “You're not fooling me, Savage, not for a minute.”

“Do you,” Doc asked, “have to put on an act?” Doc waved at the black-uniformed *Oscura Aguila* troopers. “After all, we, or at least you are, among friends.”

The fear was back in Lanza's face for a moment. He yelled, “We are straying from the business at hand. I was taking evidence—”

“Faked evidence. Lies.”

Lanza shoved his jaw out. “You'll have a hell of a time proving it's faked.”

“Want to bet?”

Lanza strode forward. He stood in front of Doc, a tower of rage. “This man we are questioning is not the only witness who saw the murderer. We have others. Five. Five, you hear! Five men who saw the killer.”

Doc said, “Five liars.”

“Five witnesses,” Lanza screamed, “who can identify him as Monk Mayfair, your assistant.”

“Monk Mayfair,” Doc said, “was last seen in New York. He was being kidnapped.”

“That,” said Lanza triumphantly, “isn't the last time he was seen!”

“No?”

Lanza stepped back. His triumph grew. He addressed his men. “Bring in the murderer!” He wheeled back to Doc Savage. “You see, we caught the murderer!” he roared.

There was some noise outside. Four *Oscura Aguila* men entered. They had Monk Mayfair with them.

Monk seemed to be in good health and great rage. He was unshaven. He was very angry indeed, angry enough to look controlled and calm, except for the look in his eyes, as if snakes were burning there.

“Hello, Doc,” Monk said. His voice was squeaky, another sign of how mad he was.

Doc said, “Hello. Did they treat you all right?”

“Sure. They wouldn't want me to fail in health,” Monk said. “You know what they're doing?”

“I have a faint picture of what they're trying to do,” Doc said.

Monk talked. No one tried to stop him. Andros Lanza stood, spraddle-legged like his black-clad storm troopers, listening. He had sprung his trap. He was enjoying triumph.

Monk asked, “Is your picture like this: Lanza wants to be a hell-bent dictator like Hitler was. Big army and capture and enslave the republics bordering Blanca Grande and finally gobble up all of South America. That's what Lanza wants to do. In his way, opposing him, stand the two most influential private citizens in the country—Francisco Doyle and Juan Trujilla. Also the influence of the United States government. That your picture, Doc?”

“That's part of the picture.”

Monk nodded. “Is this the other part: Lanza wants to get rid of Doyle and Trujilla and discredit the United States to the people of Blanca Grande. So he has his agents start creating a fake mystery about photographs of the Kichua Book. He doesn't want the photographs. What he does want is to get Doyle and Trujilla excited enough to call on Doc Savage for help. Doc Savage will come to Blanca Grande to investigate, and Doyle and Trujilla will promptly be killed and the blame framed on Doc Savage. So presto: Doyle and Trujilla are dead, and Doc Savage accused of murdering them, thus playing hell with the good name of the United States government's good neighbor policy.”

Doc said, “That's the picture, roughly sketched. With Doyle and Trujilla out of the way, Lanza would be free—”

Andros Lanza slammed his fist down on a table.

He said, “Mr. Savage, you are under arrest for murder.”

THE black-uniformed *Oscura Aguila* stirred uneasily. They were nervous. Obviously they were the more brainy of Lanza's private force of strong-arm men. Smart enough to know what was going on, and its consequences. Smart enough also to be afraid of Doc Savage.

Doc looked at Lanza intently. "Who did I murder?"

"You had your man Monk Mayfair do in Doyle. That makes you guilty," Lanza grinned unpleasantly. "And that is exactly what we can prove."

Doc shook his head. "I think not."

This unconcern made Lanza stiffen visibly. "You are crazy if you think not," Lanza said.

"The point you're overlooking is that there wasn't a murder," Doc explained.

There was no question about Lanza stiffening this time. His eyes protruded slightly. "Doyle wasn't—"

"Doyle wasn't dead," Doc said. "If you hadn't been so infernally over-eager, you would have discovered that. As it was, you thought one of your black-shirts must have killed him, but you hadn't found out what one. Worried about that, weren't you?"

Lanza was wordless. His lips were slowly peeling back from his teeth, as if something was hurting him terribly.

Doc Savage asked, "How do you think the body got out of a room that had all the doors locked on the inside? The answer: It walked out by itself. It wasn't a body. It was alive."

Doc Savage took a step forward. He leveled an arm.

"Doyle is well on his way to a safe place," he continued loudly. "And he isn't going to lose any time getting word to all his influential friends, and to every citizen of Blanca Grande, what kind of a toy Hitler they've got for a president."

In the silence that followed, Monk said cheerfully, "Your goose is cooked, brother Andy."

Chapter XIII

IT must have been Monk's cheerfulness that did something to Andros Lanza's mind. Monk sounded so gleeful. So completely pleased. His cheer probably was a ton of bricks on Lanza's stunned mind. At any rate and from some cause, Lanza broke. He blew the cork.

Doc saw the signs, saw that Lanza was going to break. He was moving. As Lanza yelled, hoarsely and without sanity, and snatched at a black trooper's gun, Doc was on him.

Doc got the gun. With part of the same motion of getting the heavy spike-nosed automatic, he rapped Lanza on the head, stunning him. He hooked an arm around Lanza, held the man in front of him.

It wasn't a good trick, this grabbing an important man and using him for a shield. It is impossible efficiently to hold another man so that he makes a shield. And it was particularly poor now, with the black-uniformed troopers excited.

So Doc yelled out in an imitation of Lanza's roaring voice.

"Don't shoot! Don't shoot! You'll hit me!" he screamed.

His imitation of Lanza's voice wasn't bad. It shouldn't have been bad, either, because Doc was supposed to be good at voice mimicry.

Doc was moving also. First, to get a wall to his back. Second, to get Monk loose.

Monk really got himself loose. Two of the black-uniformed men were holding him, using the type of wrist manacles known as "twists". The chain twists were devilishly painful things, but they weren't fastened to the troopers, as handcuffs possibly would have been. A trooper on each side of Monk merely held the end of a twist.

Monk simply kicked them on the shins, first the trooper on the right, then on the left. Each kick would have taken the bark off a tree. The trooper on the left let go in pain. Monk used his freed left hand to dislocate the jaw of the man on the right, who then let go also.

Monk scooped an automatic out of one of the *Aguila's* shiny black holster.

"The door," Doc said. "And take it easy."

They backed toward the door.

Monk had the safety off the pistol. "One of you stinkers make a move!" he invited.

He may have impressed them. But it was probably the danger of hitting Andros Lanza if bullets began flying which deterred the troopers.

Then Lanza revived. He came out of it suddenly, perhaps so abruptly because his mind was disordered. He fought. He fought so furiously that Doc realized the man was going to get away. Doc tried to slug Lanza. At least twice he thought he should have stunned the man. But Lanza twisted away from him.

Monk had the hall door open.

They backed through it, yanked the door shut. There was no chance to change the key from the inside and lock it. All they could do was slam the door.

"Holy Joe!" they heard Square Jones' voice say, and they whirled. Square Jones, with two black-clad troopers hanging to his wrists, was in the hall. A couple of yards away. The troopers let go Square and dug for their guns.

DOC didn't shoot. He threw his automatic, which was quicker. The gun smashed into one trooper's face, causing the man to throw both arms upward and outward.

They had been holding Square with twists, much as Monk had been held. The moment Square was released, he wheeled.

Square's fist went out of sight, nearly, in the belly of the other *Oscura Aguila* man. The fellow folded. Square hit him on the back of the neck. The rabbit punch was a killing blow. Square did it deliberately, cold-bloodedly. Then Square picked up the guns the two troopers had dropped. He tore the cartridge belts off them.

"Anybody we like in there?" Square pointed at the door Doc and Monk had slammed.

"No," Monk said.

Square said, "That's good." He emptied one automatic into the door at chest height. The vicious-looking gun held ten shots. He put them all into the door, walking down the hall, sending the bullets at different angles to rake the room on the other side.

Square listened. "Pigs in a poke," he said. More than one man was making hurt sounds beyond the splintered door.

Monk said, "What about the roof?"

"They might throw grenades up there," Doc said.

Square gave his pants a hitch. "We've got something on our plates." He sounded as if he would like to spit on his hands. "How many *Aguila* would you say are around here?"

"Not over fifteen." Doc was backing down the hall. "That doesn't count the army pilots."

"Probably another fifty pilots and air force crewmen," Square said.

"Three against sixty-five," Monk said.

"Sure." Square loaded the gun he had emptied. "What are we waiting for?"

The bullet-holed door to the upstairs parlor flew open. Square and Monk gasped together. They levelled their guns at the opening.

Andros Lanza came through the door. In his right hand was a grenade.

Lanza held the grenade down at his side. Evidently he had gotten the grenade from one of the black-uniformed troopers. The pin was out. He was holding the lever down, but when he let it go, it would explode.

Lanza walked toward them.

Doc shouted, "Lanza! Don't throw that grenade! It will kill you too!"

That was true. If Lanza let go the grenade, they were all as good as dead. Fragmentation was sure to get them.

Lanza walked toward them, arms straight down at his sides, body erect, one foot ahead of the other mechanically. He looked straight ahead from eyes which seemed to be seeing nothing.

He came straight to them.

Doc said, "For God's sake, stand still!" He said it hoarsely, tightly.

And then he got hold of Lanza's grenade-gripping hand with both his hands. He held to it tightly, so the grenade lever would not be let loose.

"Hold it!" Square gasped.

Square got down on his knees. He worked to free the grenade, worked as if he was a surgeon, performing an operation. He got his own finger over the firing lever. Finally he got the grenade.

Square looked at the open parlor door. He laughed.

He threw the grenade through the door.

The exploding grenade was an unbelievable noise. An ear-splitting loudness. The walls confined and resonated the blast, and made it terrific.

Plaster came off the ceiling, steel grenade fragments came through the wall, and dust arose chokingly from everything.

Andros Lanza whimpered. He was on his knees. He seemed to have no conception of what was happening.

Monk said, "Maybe that grenade didn't do the whole job!"

He went into the living-room, Square followed. They were not inside long. There was one shot. Then they came out. Monk looked ill. Square was grinning.

Monk looked at Square. "That was cold-blooded as hell."

"That's right," Square said. He didn't seem concerned.

Monk told Doc, "It's an awful mess in there. Square shot the only one who was able to move."

"Listen!" Doc said.

There was noise outdoors. Whooping and thunder of hoofs. Shots and yells.

Doc said, "That's not the air force!" He began hunting for a window.

What they saw was a little like the finale of an old-time movie. The cavalry arriving at the last minute. Only this wasn't the cavalry. It was a charging band of cowboys, gauchos. And they really didn't do much saving. There was probably a half dozen pilots around the ranch, and they were disposed of rapidly. One got shot. The others got their arms up.

But it sounded, for possibly five minutes, like a battle.

"Ham!" Monk howled suddenly. "There's old Ham Brooks!"

Doc shouted at Ham. "What the dickens is happening?"

"Trujilla got his gauchos together and came back to clean up on Andros Lanza," Ham said.

"I told you to take to the hills," Doc said violently.

"I know. But Trujilla was mad. He said the hell with you, he would use his own system. And he got hold of his head gaucho, and got the other gauchos, and here we are."

Doc thought about it for a moment.

"There are still the planes," he warned.

"Their officers are all here. They're the six we just cleaned out. Without orders, the fliers won't do anything."

"Who said so?" Doc demanded.

"Trujilla."

Doc became silent. Trujilla should know.

Chapter XIV

THE morning sunlight awakened Doc Savage. He lay there for a while, tempted to go back to sleep. He turned over and squinted at his wrist watch. He said, "Holy cow!" and hastily got out of bed and dressed.

He found no one outdoors. He had slept in a guest bungalow which was apart from the ranch house. A pleasant stillness lay over everything.

They were gathered at breakfast in the ranch house. Juan Trujilla was there. So was Abril, Monk and Ham, Square Jones. Kathy Doyle was sitting beside her father.

Doc shook hands with Francisco Doyle. "When did you get here?"

"Shortly after daylight. By plane," Doyle said. He was grinning. "You oversleep?"

Doc admitted he had. "Did I miss anything?"

Doyle chuckled. "I'll say you did. Trujilla and I worked like beavers yesterday afternoon and most of the night. We got hold of our friends, and those who weren't our friends were persuaded to see it our way. In short, Blanca Grande has a new government."

Doc raised his eyebrows. "Already?"

"Yes. A very quiet change. Andros Lanza, the late president of Blanca Grande, has resigned because of ill health. I am the new provisional president. An election will be held at once, and Trujilla will be candidate for president. He'll be elected, too."

Juan Trujilla smiled sheepishly. "We are not politicians, Francisco and I, but there comes a time when level heads and men of judgment must do their part in their government."

Doc nodded. He was pleased. "How is Lanza?"

"In the hospital," Doyle shrugged. "He's better this morning, but not a well man. He had a first-class nervous breakdown."

"And Blanca Grande lost her fascist government?" Doc said.

"Fully."

"You must have been busy," Doc said.

Doyle laughed. "And small help you were, sleeping the whole night through! You were supposed to have been sent down here by Washington to meddle."

Doc nodded. "I'll probably get fired." Then, seriously, he asked, "Would that scheme of Lanza's have worked? His plan of making the people think Washington sent me down here to meddle?"

Doyle nodded instantly.

"It would," Doyle said. "Particularly if he had made it seem that you or your men had murdered Trujilla and myself."

Monk hastily swallowed some eggs. "Doc, you're sure that nobody really wanted those photographs of the Kichua Book?"

“Positive,” Doc agreed. “That was bait. It was an intriguing mystery they stirred up, knowing such things fascinate me. This idea was that I would rush down here to solve the interesting mystery of why an unknown man who lisped was wildly anxious to get photographs of a piece of carved rock.”

Ham Brooks said, “When you got here, Trujilla and Doyle were to be killed. The blame laid on you.”

“That's right. Lanza would get rid of the two men who were blocking his plans to become a South American Hitler and conqueror. He would create a lot of anti-United States feeling, which he also needed.”

“Monk was kidnaped in New York and brought down here to have guilt framed on to him?”

Monk answered that himself. “They got my fingerprints on knives and guns. Sure, they brought me down here to frame me.” He grinned. “You should have been along on the trip down. They had me tied up in the baggage compartment of a plane.”

Ham Brooks thought about it for a while. He became puzzled.

“Who,” he demanded, “was the man who lisped?”

“Some Lanza thug playing the part of the telephone extortioner,” Doc said.

Ham wasn't satisfied. “Now wait a minute! He lisped! The fact that he lisped tipped you off to the whole plot. How come?”

Doc glanced at Monk.

Monk Mayfair was looking extremely alarmed. Doc winked solemnly at Monk.

“It must have been inspiration,” Doc said.

LATER, in the patio, Doc collared Monk. “Monk,” he said.

“Huh?”

“So Ham doesn't know you've got some false teeth, and that without them, you lisp?” Doc demanded.

Monk groaned. “Oh, great grief, do you have to tell him? I have enough trouble with him as it is. I just got the false choppers a couple of months ago, and I didn't tell him.”

“Why didn't you tell him?”

“Tell him! The way he ribs me! Listen, he'd run me nuts about it. I know what would happen. The first time I had a date with a pretty girl, for example, he would sure as hell steal my teeth. That's the kind of a low-down sense of humor he's got.”

“Oh, Lord!”

“You won't tell him?” Monk asked anxiously.

“I guess not,” Doc said wearily. “But how on earth did Lanza's agents manage to find out you lisped, so they could have their actor lisp over the telephone?”

Monk winced. “I had a girl-friend named Carlita for a while. They musta got it out of her.”

Doc snorted. "Women are going to be your end some day."

Monk agreed hastily. "It could be. And I'm turning over a new leaf. Raising the quality of my babes. For example, I've got a date to go horseback riding with Kathy and Abril this morning."

Kathy and Abril rode off with a man about ten o'clock, Doc noticed. But the man wasn't Monk. It was Ham Brooks.

Doc bumped into Monk. Monk was prowling on the patio. He was unhappy.

"What happened to the horseback ride?" Doc asked.

"That thinker," Monk explained bitterly, "thtole my teeth."

THE END