



THE GREEN MASTER

A Doc Savage Adventure by Kenneth Robeson

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Chapter I

MONK MAYFAIR stopped to buy a pack of cigarettes—he did not smoke—in one of those glittering drugstores on Fifth Avenue that seem to be made mostly of glass. Then he left the place by a side door.

Trying to be casual about it, he stopped for a while to watch the gardeners transplanting full-sized trees into Rockefeller Plaza, and he remembered that they seemed to set out fully grown trees there every year. That fact was not as important to him as another one of which he was now certain, that he was being followed.

The third one was following him now. First, it had been a girl. Then a tall honey-blond man. And now it was a taller string bean of a honey-blond man. They were doing it in relays, which wasn't a bad idea from their standpoint. As for the girl who had started off the shadowing, Monk was sorry she had dropped out; she was one he wouldn't have minded following himself.

There were a few things about the honey-blondes that puzzled Monk. Traffic lights seemed to confuse them. They showed a somewhat comical fear of cars; they crossed streets with about the same air that they would ford an alligator-infested stream. Not that it wasn't all right to be wary of New York traffic. But they overdid it.

An odd outfit, Monk thought. Strange-looking. Acted as if they didn't understand a city at all.

Monk was almost as much amused as puzzled. Deciding to toughen up the trailing job a little, he stepped suddenly into the street and whistled down a cab.

“Take it easy,” he told the driver. “Go slow. Catch the stop light at the next corner if you can.”

“Yeah?” the driver said, surprised. “You mean there's somebody in this town who isn't in a hurry?”

“Why not?” Monk said, and watched the performance of the thin honey-blond man who was following him.

It was interesting. The blonde, Monk concluded in amazement, didn't know how to hail a cab. A simple matter like getting a cab—you stood on the sidewalk or in the street, whistled, whooped, waved an arm—baffled the man.

“The silly dope!” Monk said, grinning.

The blond man had started a pursuit of Monk's cab afoot, running along the sidewalk. Now and then the thin man sprang in the air like a dog seeking a rabbit in tall grass. His purpose, of course, was to keep track of Monk's cab. Monk began to laugh.

“Something funny?” the cab driver asked. “Or you just feeling that way?”

“Search me,” Monk replied, and added, “I think this is as far as I'll go. Catch that stop light, and I'll get out.”

“What the hell!”

“Don't let it worry you,” Monk told the astonished driver, and got out.

Feigning an unawareness of being followed, Monk sauntered west on Forty-sixth Street. He used a shop window to assure himself he was still being trailed.

Monk summarized the situation. He did not know this man. He had no idea why he was being followed. He was amused, but it might be nothing to be amused about.

Monk knew he had enemies. He was an associate of Doc Savage, and, therefore, automatically included in Doc's troubles. The nature of Doc Savage's business guaranteed trouble. Doc Savage's profession—it was not as much of a Galahad affair as it sounded—was righting wrongs and punishing offenders who seemed to be untouched by the law. The profession was odd, and the results frequently unexpected. But it hardly warranted the appearance of a tail of thin, blond screwballs.

Or did it? The unusual had a way of happening to Doc Savage. The nature of the man invited it. In almost all ways, Doc Savage was remarkable; he was a more than passable combination of mental genius, physical giant and scientific wizard. He applied his abilities to other people's business, when it was the wrong kind of business. So the variety of people who had wished to kill him at one time or another was odd and surprising; frequently they were the kind who would act on such a wish.

Monk walked along. Less easy of mind, he thumbed through his mind for the enemies most likely to be on the currently active list. There were several candidates. None of them, however, fitted the present rather bizarre situation. They would know how to get a cab on a New York street.

Halfway down the block, Monk found what he considered a satisfactorily private spot. He turned into an office building doorway, waited, tightened his belt, tucked his necktie inside his shirt where it couldn't be conveniently grasped and used for choking him, and when the long blonde came trotting along, Monk reached out and got a double handful of throat.

He shook the man enough to cause some snapping together of teeth. There was less resistance than he expected. “Brother,” said Monk, pausing to peer at his victim, “don't you resent this?”

“Not at all,” answered the other mildly.

He was not only a very blond man, but he had a deep tanned cream skin that set off the blondness quite spectacularly. Not an albino. The man didn't have an albino's lack of pigmentation in the eyes, which were a pleasant enough shade of brown.

"You don't," said Monk, "seem much upset."

The other had an amiable voice and English certainly wasn't its mother tongue.

"Why should I be?" he asked.

"You were following me," Monk told him. "That interests me. It could even rile me. When I'm riled, I've been known to get rough."

The man looked Monk straight in the eye. "I was not following you," he said.

"You—" Monk's mouth came open, and remained open. Not because he had been lied to. That wasn't what surprised him. It was something else.

It was another thing, and the more Monk thought about it, the more stunned he became. Monk realized that he believed the man hadn't been following him.

Now here, Monk thought wildly, is an impossibility. This guy was trailing me. There was another one doing it before him, and a girl before that. They were teamed up, and they were trailing me. I've got eyes. I saw. But now the funny looking guy tells me a bald-faced lie and I believe it.

"This," said Monk, "is really something."

The amiable brown eyes twinkled. "It really isn't extraordinary, I'm sure."

Monk looked him in the eye. Well, it isn't so unusual at that, he thought. Wait a minute! The hell it isn't! What's this guy doing to me?

"No, I guess it's not extraordinary," Monk heard himself saying. He began to feel as if he were having a mental chill.

"However," the man went on, "now that we've encountered each other, I'd like to ask a question which I know you will be glad to answer."

Monk stood there in cold horror. He knew he would answer any question that was asked him, and be glad to do so. But why would he do a goofy thing like that?

"Sure," Monk said foolishly. "Sure, I— No, I won't do anything of the sort! No, No. I mean I'll be glad to. Yes. Sure." He swallowed terribly. "What is your question?"

For the love of mud, he thought.

"Who is the one from Keew who has been in touch with your friend Doc Savage?" asked the other.

Monk felt an odd sensation. He found himself wanting to answer the query. He wished to do it as much as he had wanted to do anything in his life. He would have given literally anything he possessed if he could have come out with a frank, friendly answer. But there was a slight hitch. He had never heard of anything called Keew, and as far as he knew Doc Savage had had no contacts from such a place.

“Gosh, I’m sorry,” Monk said. “I’m so awfully sorry. I’m so sorry that I’m deeply ashamed, but I can’t tell you a single thing because I don’t know.”

Monk realized that although he wanted to answer the man’s question the worst way, he didn’t want to tell a lie. In fact, a lie would have been repugnant, a circumstance that was not always the case with Monk. He was a man who believed a little lie at the right time did no harm.

The recipient of the information was disappointed. His feeling of sadness was intense. Monk found he was disappointed and felt badly, too.

“What,” asked the blond man, “about the small green stone?”

“Search me,” Monk replied. “I don’t know what you’re talking—” Then he remembered. “Gosh, I’m sorry again, but it slipped my mind. You mean the little rock that came in the mail from South America?”

The man felt badly over this news. Monk sympathized with him intensely. Then the man became enraged, and Monk felt enraged, too.

The rage was what did it. Monk snapped out of the spell when he became angry. Rage was an inclusive emotion. It broke the thin man’s influence over Monk, granted that “influence” was a very inadequate word to apply to Monk’s tizzy.

“What you been doin’ to me, you washed-out scoundrel?” Monk howled. This was more words than he had used in some time before a fight, and then he knocked the blond man down.

The man managed to fall expertly, bound to his feet, and start to expostulate, “Really, my good friend, you—” He evidently concluded it was not feasible to convince Monk he was a good friend, so he turned and ran.

Monk pursued the fellow. As Monk had observed earlier, he was totally unfamiliar with the city and its ways. He did not, for instance, know that some of the buildings on this street—it was Forty-fifth Street between Fifth Avenue and the Avenue of the Americas—had arcades which extended through to the next streets to the south and north, thence made very good quick avenues of flight. These were also honeycombed with niches which would make good refuge. This man ran straight and openly, making no attempt to hide.

Fast, too. Monk was no terrapin on his feet, but he found himself extending. And not gaining too much. However, full of confidence, he put his head back and stretched out.

Then the weirdness came back into it. The man he was chasing began to shout anxiously. He started telling Monk what good friends they were, and how amiably they should be getting along. His voice, while labored from the effects of the race, was plainly understandable.

When Monk found himself believing they were going to stop this and be friends, he turned around and ran about equally fast in the opposite direction. Later, when he looked back, he saw his late adversary nowhere in sight.

Chapter II

IN Doc Savage’s laboratory, one light in a bank of many lights flashed, and Ham Brooks, attorney and associate of Doc Savage, came over and plugged the scanning screen into that socket. This gave him a view of the interior of their special elevator, which was somewhere near the twentieth floor and rising.

“Just the missing link,” Ham said, and started to shut off the scanner. He took a second look. “Hey! Old Monk looks as if he had been dog-bitten.”

Doc Savage, making adjustments on a fluoroscopic analyzer, asked, “Something wrong?”

“With Monk?” Ham shrugged. “Who can tell with a guy like that. He was made wrong in the first place.”

Doc Savage made no comment. As far as he could recall, neither Monk nor Ham had spoken a pleasant word to or about each other for years, and it could get a little tiresome. Actually, they were very close friends.

Doc was one of those men who—he considered it a great handicap—looked fully as unusual as his reputation. He was a physical giant with a startlingly bronzed skin, hair a little darker bronze, and eyes that were like pools of flake gold always in motion, a rather unnerving effect. He had a handsome face, but its handsomeness was a matter of angles and strong lines, which he felt redeemed it somewhat.

Monk came in presently. Undoubtedly, there was something amiss. He sauntered past them, rather too elaborately, and disappeared back of a chemical processing rack, after answering Ham's “Hello,” with a polite “Hello,” of his own.

“He didn't have some nasty remark,” Ham said in alarm. “Something's wrong with the guy. Do you suppose he's sick?”

“Better find out,” Doc suggested.

Ham Brooks, a dapper, thin-waisted man who overdressed for all occasions and carried a thin black sword cane in the most romantic manner, sauntered back and exchanged a few words with Monk. Monk's answers were exceptionally polite. Ham became convinced Monk was in trouble, and he demanded, “What's wrong with you, stupid?”

“Nothing,” Monk answered nervously. “Nothing at all.”

Ham came back to Doc. “Monk must be dying,” he reported. “He was polite to me.”

Doc Savage approached Monk casually and asked, “Feeling O.K. this afternoon?”

“So-so,” Monk said, and didn't meet Doc's eye.

“So low down, you mean?” Doc suggested.

Monk clenched both hands. He said, “Damn!” in a strained voice. Then he turned to Ham Brooks and said, “Get out of here, Ham. Beat it!”

Ham looked relieved, but bristled. “Say now, short and homely,” he said. “You know who you're speaking to with that tone?”

Monk said he knew. He said he was speaking to what would soon be a grease-spot on the wall. He picked up a flask of foul-smelling chemical and heaved it at Ham. The latter ducked, got a whiff of the smell after the flask smashed, and departed in haste.

“I knew that would get him,” Monk said, locking the lab door behind Ham. “He prefers to go around smelling like a rose.”

MONK told Doc what had happened. "I didn't want Ham hearing that. He would never stop ribbing me," Monk explained. "That's about the way it was. They began following me, first a babe, then a tall blond guy, then another tall one just as blond, and when I collared the latter, he got me to believing everything he said. He would say something I knew damned well wasn't the truth, and there I would stand believing it and agreeing with him."

"I can see why you didn't want Ham to hear this," Doc said.

"Sure. He would think I was crazy. Maybe I am." Monk dropped into a chair, grimacing. "My God, do you reckon I could be dropping my marbles?"

"Let's get it straight," Doc said. "You didn't know these people?"

"I never saw them before."

"And they weren't familiar with the city?"

"They acted," Monk said, "as if they'd never been in any kind of city before."

"They weren't Americans?"

"No. Or the guy who ran the razzle-dazzle on me wasn't."

"What nationality?"

"That," said Monk, "would be a hard one to answer."

"Care to guess?" Doc asked.

Monk hesitated, then said, "I may be putting my neck out on this, but I would guess some South American aboriginal origin, because I caught traces of Incan inflection, the ancient Incan tongue, because of the lax consonant delivery, and the syllable stressing was on the first syllable. There wasn't much Oriental lilt, and there was quite a glottal stop such as the old Hawaiian language had. Mind you, the guy spoke English, but it was English he had learned from somebody."

Doc nodded. "If you analyzed it that close, I doubt if you are putting your neck out."

"I didn't really place the guy. But primitive South American would be my idea."

"What," Doc asked, "about the green stone?"

Monk shook his head. "I told you what he said. Asked me about it." Monk flushed uncomfortably. "And I told him one had come in the mail."

"Why did you tell him that?"

"I didn't want to, dammit," Monk said in embarrassment. "That was part of the razzle-dazzle. I tell you, this guy ran some kind of a whizzer on me."

"Hypnotism?"

"Heck, no."

Doc frowned. "You seem confident it wasn't hypnotism."

"I know a little about hypnotism," Monk replied. "I know enough about it to make it a tough job for

anybody to hypnotize me, even with a little time to devote to it. And this guy didn't use any of the standard formula." Monk eyed Doc earnestly. "There aren't many hypnotic operators more expert than you are, Doc, and I don't think even you could run me into even the first stage of hypnotic suggestion as fast as this guy did. No, I wasn't hypnotized."

"But you were something?"

"Yeah, I was sure something."

"We'd better look at that green rock," Doc said.

THE green rock seemed to be exactly that. It was not even a pleasant shade of green, and it certainly wasn't a jewel.

"Sort of heavy," Monk said. "Was there a letter with it or anything when it came?"

"Nothing at all," Doc told him.

"It was mailed from South America, as I recall," Monk said. "From Caracas. That's in Venezuela, and doesn't prove much, except that it's a South America tie-in."

Doc carried the stone to another part of the laboratory and began to run tests. The test for magnetic quality was negative, and he tried a Geiger counter on it for radioactivity, also negative.

Monk said thoughtfully, "You know, there's one odd thing about this rock. It feels warm to the touch. I don't mean hot, but about body temperature."

Doc Savage looked at Monk sharply and said, "So you noticed that, too."

"Wait a minute!" Monk began to register amazement. "Who's kidding who, here? You mean that rock felt warm to you, too?"

"Yes."

"What would explain that?" Monk demanded. "It's kind of surprising, isn't it?"

"Here's something that will surprise you still more," Doc said. "That piece of stone has been in a refrigerator for two days. I took it out several times during that interval, and each time it was warm, or felt warm."

"That's impossible. You mean that rock stays warm in a refrigerator?"

"I mean it retains its feeling of warmth."

"If it feels warm, it *is* warm, isn't it?" Monk demanded.

Doc said dryly, "I'll show you something. Get a small glass beaker just large enough to hold the rock, fill it with ice water, and bring it here, along with a thermometer."

Puzzled, Monk followed the instructions. Doc dropped the stone in the ice water and inserted the thermometer. "Watch what doesn't happen," he said.

"Oh, the rock is warm enough to raise the temperature of the water slightly," Monk said. "But what will

that prove?"

"Watch."

Monk's jaw sagged presently. "The water doesn't warm. The thermometer must be screwy."

Doc lifted the thermometer from the liquid, and immediately the column of mercury lengthened, indicating that the warmer air of the room was sufficient to raise its indication instantly. He inserted it in the water again, and it returned to about the previous level. "The thermometer is O.K.," he said. "And the warmth in that stone, enough warmth to make it comparatively pleasant to the touch, should raise the water temperature somewhat. Yet it doesn't."

"The water lowered the temperature of the stone," Monk said abruptly. "Sure. That's what happened. Why didn't I think of that before."

Doc's usually expressionless bronze features broke in a slight smile. He used a pair of tongs to lift the rock from the water, and dropped it in the palm of Monk's hand.

Monk held the stone for a moment. Then his homely face slowly blanched.

"It's still warm!" he blurted. "What kind of damned rock is it that is warm, but not with a warmth you can measure with an instrument?"

WHAT had been a routine mystery of piffling proportions now assumed some magnitude to Monk. He was a chemist, a skilled one, too, even though he did look somewhat like an ape, and he knew that here was something that shouldn't be. He made a couple of additional tests, then stepped back.

"That's the damndest rock I ever saw," he commented. "Let's give it a going-over with an analyzer." He waved at a gadget which, without the necessity of demolishing and pulverizing a sample of the stone and running it through a lot of chemical tests, would give a complete analysis of the molecular composition of the fragment.

"I have," Doc said.

"Huh?" Monk remembered Doc had been working with the fluoroscopic apparatus when he came in. "That what you were doing?"

Doc nodded. "Not," he added, "for the first time, either. I've checked the atomic structure of that rock half a dozen times, each time believing it just couldn't prove to be what it turns out to be."

"Which is what?"

"A rock," Doc said. "A common garden, middle-of-the-road, laying-on-the-beach variety of pebble. Technically, it's a type of magma of the trachyte type, considerably weathered, but not at all unusual, as far as chemical tests and inspection indicate."

"You mean it's just a rock?"

"Exactly."

"But it stays warm."

"Yes."

"It must be our imagination," Monk said. "I'll call Ham in and let's try him. He's a cold-blooded cuss and that should settle that."

Ham Brooks came in, grinning, and said, "I'm allowed back in the human race, am I?" He had been waiting in the library, evidently, for Monk to cool off.

Monk peered at him, and decided, "You had the intercom turned on. You've been eavesdropping."

"It was already turned on," Ham told him. "I merely didn't turn it off," he added virtuously.

"O.K., feel the rock anyway," Monk growled.

Ham did so, and said, "Warm. Not hot. But warm, as if someone had been holding it in his hand for quite a while." Ham eyed Monk thoughtfully, and asked, "Now what are you trying to pull on me, having me feel of a warm rock?"

"Nothing," Monk said. "Shut up."

"What," Ham asked, "did this babe look like?"

"What babe?"

"The gal who followed you before the long blond guy took over," Ham said.

"You were listening!" Monk yelled.

Doc Savage said hurriedly, "Before you two start on one of those dog fights, let's get back on the subject of the slightly warm green rock. There is one more demonstration I should like to make. I've made it before, but a recheck won't do any harm."

The big bronze man led the way out into the hall, Monk and Ham trailing him with puzzled expressions. The regular building elevators did not rise to this floor, so Doc took the stairway down to the eighty-fifth floor, rang for an elevator, and when it arrived, empty except for the attendant, he handed the operator the green stone.

"What about it, Mr. Savage?" asked the surprised operator. "Somebody lose it, or something?"

"We only want some information," Doc told him. "Does it feel warm to you?"

"Not particularly," replied the elevator man.

"Not warm, as if perhaps someone had been holding it in his hand for some time?" Doc asked.

"No. On the contrary, I'd say it feels a bit cool, and certainly no warmer than room temperature, Mr. Savage."

"Thank you," Doc said. "That is all we wanted to know."

Monk and Ham carried blank looks back upstairs. "What the devil?" Monk muttered.

"This rock," Doc said, "feels warm to us, but it doesn't feel warm to anyone else whom I've tried. And I've tried several."

"By Jove!" Ham said. "A rock which bestows its personality only on certain individuals, eh?"

"About the oddest rock," Doc told him, "that I've ever run across. I don't know what we have here, but I

think it's something quite weird.”

Chapter III

AT two o'clock, Monk Mayfair and Ham Brooks went downstairs to the restaurant in the building for a bite of lunch. It was an elaborate place with a lot of blue glass, blue leather and chrome, and a manager who wore striped trousers and cutaway. The latter looked alarmed at their appearance, and hustled them to a booth where, if they began shouting at each other in the inevitable row, the fewest customers would discreetly summon a waiter and suggest calling an officer.

“You sharp-nosed, overdressed, eavesdropping shyster,” Monk said to Ham, by way of preliminary. “You had the intercom turned up full force so you could hear what I was telling Doc, and you know you did. Some day I'm going to take me a stroll across your face.”

Ham sneered at him. “You keep tampering with me, and I'll influence you worse than your friend did.”

“What friend?”

“The long, hungry one with the pale hair. That one was a little thick even for you.”

They gave the waiter their orders, then Monk glared and asked, “You think it didn't happen?”

“To you, anything happens,” Ham replied. “Let's put it with logic, and say I would believe you were influenced if the girl had done it.”

“I only hope,” said Monk, “that it happens to you. Then—” He stopped, his mouth, which was ample in size, open as if prepared to receive a baseball. “Speaking of the long, pale devil,” he muttered.

Ham bolted up. “What? You don't mean—”

“You don't even need to turn around,” Monk advised him. “The guy is coming over here.”

“The tall blond man who—”

“*Pssst!*” Monk said. “I wonder what these chairs cost? Because I'm going to wrap one around his head.”

Monk did make the first move to do exactly that, standing and hefting a convenient chair, much to the alarm of the manager who was still hovering in the background with an eye on them. But the tall blond stranger, in what seemed to Monk the most utterly pleasant voice he had ever heard, said, “How do you do, Mr. Mayfair. I'm awfully sorry about the mixup this afternoon, and I hope you don't resent this intrusion.”

Monk, feeling a little like a man suddenly standing apart from himself, observed his rage evaporating. He realized he didn't want to swat the guy with a chair. That is, whacking the fellow with a chair was the logical thing for him to do, but he suddenly didn't want to. He saw Ham Brooks grinning, and he said bitterly to the blond man, “This is Ham Brooks, a shyster lawyer of some unearned repute. Mr. Brooks, this is—I don't know your name, do I?” Monk realized he was speaking politely, and summoned enough stamina to add bitterly, “Let's see you work some of your razzle-dazzle on Ham.”

Smiling, the blond man turned to Ham. “Mr. Brooks, I'm delighted to meet a man I have long admired, and who has contributed so handsomely to the legal profession, and even more handsomely to humanity through the medium of having served Doc Savage, that great humanitarian. It is a pleasure. A great

pleasure.”

Monk watched Ham. He could barely swallow his amazement. Because Ham, normally as cynical a fellow as could be found, was lapping it up. Ham grinned. He smirked. If he'd had a tail, he would have wagged it as hard as he could.

Holy cow, this guy can work his whammy on Ham Brooks, Monk thought.

“Why, thank you,” Ham simpered. “The meeting is a vast pleasure.”

“Ham!” Monk exploded.

“A source of delight, I assure you,” Ham assured the blond man.

Monk blurted, “Ham! You dope! This is the guy with the trick personality!”

“Sit down, shut up and stop insulting people,” Ham advised Monk bitingly.

At least, Monk thought, the brotherly love complex didn't include anyone but the blond man. The latter was turning back to Monk and saying, “Won't you sit down? I want to explain my position and mission. Also assure you I am your friend, and, like yourself, a benefactor of humanity.”

“I'm sure of that,” Monk heard himself saying. He was positive the stranger was a liar, a rascal, and had a weird effect on a man. Also he talked a ridiculous brand of English. Alarmed, Monk turned to Ham and urged, “Let's scam outa here. This guy is spooky.”

Ham ignored this, and told the blond, “Don't mind my oafish friend.”

The blond man smiled, then demonstrated a surprising inability to understand an ordinary restaurant menu, which a waiter shoved in front of him. He seemed to know what the menu was, a list of items from which he might choose. He calmly gave his order by pointing with a finger. He indicated the “Bread Extra 25 Cents,” and the “Music by Joe Packett's orchestra.” The latter was printed in impressive type. The waiter thought it was a gag, and left in a huff.

“Is this an act?” Monk demanded.

“I beg pardon?”

“Never mind,” Monk muttered.

The blond man continued to smile at them. It was a beautiful smile. He began to speak in round flowery phrases which Monk, stunned, thought must have been based on a sour Victorian novel the fellow had read somewhere.

“I understand Doc Savage's vocation is aiding people in distress in the remote corners of the earth, and I have a dire case of such people in need. I come to you with an appeal.”

“And a very corny way of putting it,” Monk commented.

“Shut up,” Ham told him.

The man looked hurt, and, somehow, Monk felt that he had wronged the fellow by being skeptical. Monk tried to analyze this feeling. He didn't like it.

The man went on, “It is not an easy story to believe. But it is a simple one. A man has disappeared. I

wish to appeal to Doc Savage to find him.”

“You and who else?” Monk asked.

“Beg pardon?”

“Let's not be coy. First, there was a girl trailing me, then another guy, then you.”

“Oh, that. Yes.”

“Yes, what?”

“We were observing you,” the man said politely. “I am sorry you disbelieve. You see, you had been pointed out as a Doc Savage aide, and we wished to contact you. But first, we preferred to observe the sort of man you were.”

Monk snorted. “You could tell the type a man is by following him down the street?”

The other nodded quickly. “Yes, if we let the man know he is being trailed, present him with a slight emergency, and observe how he handles himself.”

Ham said, “He's got something there, Monk.”

“Yeah, and he's got something else I don't get,” Monk muttered. “If I didn't know it was silly, I'd figure he was following me around to hang some sort of whammy on me.”

“What is a whammy?” the man asked.

“A jinx. A hoodoo. The old evil-eye. Sinister and unexplained influence, if you want longer words.” Monk waved an arm impatiently, added, “What about this guy who disappeared? You want Doc to find him? Who is he? Did he disappear, or was it done to him? What gives, and what makes it important?”

The blond man's smile was a stable thing that he wore like an operation scar.

“A scientist,” he said. “A Señor Calista Del Hillo, a bacteriologist. The name should mean something to you.”

Ham Brooks frowned. “I've heard of a Del Hillo. Spanish research wizard. Madrid. Recently did something or other about some virus, had an accident, I think it was, and caused the death of about a dozen people. Retired with a nervous breakdown, or something.”

“What a relief you've heard of Del Hillo!” the blond man exclaimed. “He didn't retire with a nervous breakdown. He disappeared. Not voluntarily.”

Monk felt that he shouldn't be believing any of this, although he wanted to. He didn't understand the wanting. He growled, “If the guy killed a dozen of his friends by accident with some germ, a nervous collapse looks like a logical follow-up.”

The thin man shook his head. “The virus is terrific. A thing quickly spread, killing instantly, incurable. You understand what I mean? A deadly thing. Ghastly. A war weapon of incredible cruelty.”

Ham bolted upright. “What are you trying to tell us? That this Spaniard has been spirited away by somebody who is trying to extract the secret of a new virus from him?”

“Exactly.”

“Who would do that?”

“With the international situation what it is, you need to ask?”

Monk scowled, realizing with growing alarm that he believed all this, that he was concentrating on the blond man, accepting anything the fellow said as gospel. And knowing very well he shouldn't.

“You will get Doc Savage,” the blond man continued, “and leave immediately for Spain.”

“Brother,” Monk said, “you're a little overconfident, aren't you?”

“Overconfident?”

“That last statement of yours sounded like an order. We don't take orders.”

“You will go,” the man said firmly.

“You think so?” Monk tried to sound enraged. He was upset by how mild he did sound.

“You will inform Doc Savage,” the blond man advised. “I will call later and give full details.”

He rose and left them.

MONK stared at Ham Brooks blankly. “Now that was something. He doesn't ask us to help. He tells us to help. But that's not what gets my goat.”

Ham shook his head deprecatingly. “Do you always have to be a lout?”

Monk, involved with his own feelings, growled, “That guy has a spooky effect on me. A way of making me believe him even while I don't want to do it. You notice that?” He paused, did a double take, and barked at Ham, “What do you mean, lout?”

“Your manners,” Ham informed him, “were lousy.”

Monk's jaw sagged in surprise. “You think that I— For crying out loud! The guy sold you! He put his whammy on you!”

Ham said coldly, “He had a logical story.”

“Logical? My God! Some Spanish scientist and bugs or microbes, with an international intrigue for a snapper. You call that logical?”

“Odder things have happened.”

Monk studied Ham wonderingly.

“He sold you! Holy smoke, Ham, that guy's got something I don't understand. He sold you that yarn, and you a lawyer, usually figuring an honest man hasn't been born yet.”

Ham showed no sign of doubts. “He's on the up-and-up.”

“Oh, brother!”

“We'll leave it to Doc.”

“That,” said Monk, “is a well-fed idea. And why wait?” The homely chemist displayed a small pocket radio—a transceiver, self-contained, operating on V.H.F. frequencies—and when he had tugged the contraption out of a capacious coat pocket, he said into the microphone, “I had this gadget turned on, Doc. I hope you got some of it. That’s the guy who put the whizzer on me uptown.”

Doc Savage’s voice came from the radio. “How does Ham look?”

“Look? He always looks like an overdressed scoundrel to me. Now he has a particular asinine expression.”

“Did that fellow have a chance to use any sort of drug on him?” Doc asked.

“No. I watched that— Wait a minute! Gas, maybe.” Monk hesitated, snorted, added, “Hell, I’m dropping my rocks. There’s no such thing as a gas that would make a believer out of a man.”

Ham Brooks stared indignantly. “What are you inferring?”

Doc said quietly, “I’m intrigued by the effect the fellow seemed to exert on you, Ham. And on Monk, to a slightly lesser degree.”

“Preposterous!” Ham said.

Monk demanded, “Doc, are you trailing the guy?”

“Yes.”

“Well, watch out for him. I don’t know what he has, but it’s something. He puts out some kind of spell.”

“I noticed.”

Monk asked anxiously, “Did that guy get any effect across through the radio, Doc? Did you want to believe him the way I did, as you listened?”

“No.”

Monk let out a relieved breath. “I don’t know what that proves, but I feel better.”

Ham Brooks leaned forward and said earnestly into the microphone, “Doc, I don’t understand your attitude. The man was sincere. His story was true. There is a Spanish scientist who has made an ugly discovery, and the secret may be taken from him and used to do a great deal of harm unless we stop it.”

The radio was silent for a while. “Monk.”

“Yeah?”

“I want you to try an experiment. Where are you now?”

“Still in the restaurant.”

“Go upstairs,” Doc said. “That green rock is in the reception room safe. Get it out and examine it. Handle it a while.”

Monk looked skeptical. “You say handle that rock? Hell, I’d forgotten about it.”

“Just hold it in your hands a while. Then tell me what happens. I’ll keep the radio on.”

Monk said, "O.K. I don't get it, though."

Ham looked angry. "I resent this rigamarole. I believe that man was genuine."

"Come on, believer." Monk arose.

THE reception room of Doc Savage's eighty-sixth floor headquarters was the smallest of the three rooms, being about forty by twenty feet, furnished with some old-fashioned but extremely comfortable chairs, an enormous steel safe that was strictly an antique, and an inlaid desk-table that was a work of Oriental art in ivory and rare wood inlays. Monk opened the safe—they all knew the combination—when he saw that Ham was too indignant to do so himself.

The green rock was inside. Monk took it out, turned it suspiciously—he didn't have the least idea what was supposed to happen—and got the shock of his life. Not a physical sensation. Mental.

"Hell's bells!" He handed it to Ham.

"I don't want the blasted rock," Ham snapped.

"Take it in your hand, shyster," Monk said. "It won't bite you. It'll treat you like a friend."

Grudgingly, Ham accepted the stone. He evidently experienced the same feeling Monk had undergone, but his reaction was different. Ham turned quite pale. He turned to a chair and collapsed in it.

"I'm going crazy!" he gasped. "That's the only explanation."

Monk switched on the small radio transceiver. "Doc?"

"Yes?" Doc said.

"The damndest thing happened," Monk reported. "We're upstairs. We got the rock out of the safe. As soon as we got our hands on it, there was a complete return to normalcy."

"What do you mean, normalcy?"

"We don't," Monk said, "believe a word that guy told us. The spell evaporated."

"The fragment, of green stone caused that?" Doc demanded.

"It sure seemed to." Monk shuddered. "It's an obviously impossible thing to happen. Ham thinks we're nuts. I'm inclined to agree."

"I don't think you're crazy," Doc said. "But I do think we're up against about as fantastic a thing as ever crossed our path."

"This begins to scare me," Monk declared.

"Put the stone back in the safe. You know how the trick lock in the safe works?" Doc asked. "The one that supersedes the combination, so that no one can open it but myself?"

"Yeah?"

"Fix that safe," Doc ordered, "so that nobody but myself can get the rock."

“All right. Doc, you think that guy might try to influence us into giving him the rock?”

“That,” Doc said, “would be the smartest move he could make. We don't want it to happen.”

“I'll lock it up in the safe.”

“Do that. Does the stone still feel warm?”

“Yes.”

“Lock it up,” Doc said. “I think we've got something there that may keep our goose out of the fire.”

“You think somebody sent it to us as a protection?”

“That's exactly what I think,” Doc assured him. “Lock it up. It's valuable.”

“I will.”

“Do it now,” Doc said. “Call me back. I want to know it's done.”

Monk followed the instructions, then reported, “It's back in the safe and the trick lock is on. Ham and I couldn't get it if we wanted to. Neither could anybody else, without a young army of safe experts and plenty of time.”

“Fine,” Doc said. “You two fellows stay there. Don't admit anyone, and particularly don't admit any thin, blond men or women.”

“We won't even admit any strangers.”

“Good. I'll see where our friend is going, and advise you,” Doc told him.

Chapter IV

DOC SAVAGE switched off the microphone circuit of his own small radio transceiver, but left the carrier on the air. The gadget was battery-powered, but it would put out a carrier for three or four continuous hours, and it was just possible that he might land in trouble serious enough that he would want his whereabouts known. He imagined that Monk and Ham would use a radio direction-finder to keep tabs on his general whereabouts.

The blond man was walking, so following him was not difficult. There were, Doc observed, repeated signs that the fellow had only the most vague familiarity with the city, and quite possibly with any city at all. At least, the traffic bothered him a great deal, and when the man stopped near a corner for some time, Doc concluded he was making a study of the simple matter of how to take a bus and get where he wanted to go. This must have been correct, because the fellow boarded the next bus, rode several blocks north, where he alighted hastily, evidently having been carried past where he wished to go. Next, he walked west along a street in the low forties, and turned into a hotel.

The quickest method with a bellhop was a five-dollar bill, and Doc used that.

“Them light-haired guys!” said the bellboy. “Yeah, sure. Fourth floor. They got a couple of suites. They're sure a screwball lot.”

“How many of them?” Doc asked.

"I ain't sure. They look a lot alike. I can ask."

"Ask," Doc said.

The bellhop came back and reported, "Clerk says there's six registered. Five men and one woman. He's confused by them, too. He thinks they might be brothers, although they're registered under different names."

"What sort of names?"

The boy consulted a list he'd prepared. "Crato, Manaos, Ayrao, Grosso and Barcellos. All with first names like Juan and Rico and Feliz. The girl is named Beira. Donna Beira."

"All towns in the Brazil back-country," Doc remarked.

"Huh?"

"Never mind. Why do you think they're screwballs?"

The bellhop hesitated, then grumbled, "Hell, they never use the elevator. They walk upstairs. They don't tip. It's a funny thing about that tipping. You feel crazy as hell to give them service when you're facing them, and don't think about a tip, but it wears off after a while and you wonder what's got into you."

"Do any of them have small green stones?"

"Stones? Rocks, you mean? Or jewelry?"

"Rocks."

The bellboy looked at Doc Savage as if he were inclined to class the bronze man as a screwball also. "Not that I've noticed. Say, who are you? You look familiar, somehow."

"I'm a fellow trying to get five dollars' worth of information," Doc said pleasantly.

"You've about got it."

"How long have they been registered at the hotel?"

"Three days."

"What address did they give?"

"Miami, Florida. The Rojas Hotel in Miami."

"There's no Rojas Hotel in Miami," Doc said. He gave the information for whatever side value it might have in whetting the hotel staff's interest in the guests. They might observe them that much closer, in case the information should be useful later. "Thanks a lot," Doc said. "What suites on the fifth floor do they occupy?"

The bellhop told him.

"I think I'll take a room here," Doc said.

"By God!" gasped the bellhop. "I know who you are! Doc Savage! Holy smoke, am I slow on the uptake!"

“Could you keep the information under your hat?” Doc suggested.

“Yes, sir!”

FROM his fifth-floor room, the only one the hotel had available, Doc Savage used the telephone to call a florist and order four vases of flowers. He knew the florist, and was very careful to specify the “special” arrangement. “How long?” he asked.

“Thirty minutes or sooner,” the florist told him.

“Deliver them to my room for inspection first,” he said.

The flowers came in large vases which looked thick and heavy, the durable inexpensive sort that hotels have. Doc lifted each, gave the base a twist, and revealed a cavity in which he inserted a tiny microphone and transmitter arrangement. The vases were specially built for the apparatus, and the design which looked rather top-heavy and not particularly lovely, was perfect for parabolic pickup at the point where the microphones were recessed. He called the bellboy and inquired if the fellow wanted to earn another five dollars.

“You needn't pay me anything,” said the bellhop, who was now impressed by the name Doc Savage. “I'll get a kick out of helping you. I've heard about you.”

“Deliver these,” Doc said, “to the two suites occupied by the blond people. Better get two in each suite, and place them in the rooms which are being used.”

“How'll I explain that?”

“Compliments of the hotel.”

The bellhop was dubious. “A gift of flowers from this flea-bag of a hotel? Say, they don't give the guests clean sheets twice a week, the regular ones.”

“If these fellows are so unfamiliar with hotels that they are dubious about elevators,” Doc suggested, “they won't think it too odd if the hotel makes them a present of flowers.”

“You might have something there,” said the boy. “But I don't know about spotting them in the rooms they're in.”

“Bustle in and try to get away with it,” Doc said. “Give them the notion you're giving service.”

Ten minutes later, the bellhop tapped on the door. “It's done,” he said.

THE little radiophonic pickups—they worked on the same principle as the oscillators which enable some types of record players to reproduce music through home radios without connecting wires—were on four slightly different frequencies, but Doc had equipment for monitoring them simultaneously.

From one pickup, one of those in the girl's suite, he got a rushing sound, evidently a shower bath, and then the clatter of cosmetic bottles. Two other pickups gave him nothing in particular.

The fourth eavesdropping device began paying off at once. He listened intently, frowned, and wondered at first if the apparatus was out of kilter. The language they were speaking was only about fifty per cent

understandable to him. That, to an individual less trained than Doc, might not have been extraordinary, but he had imagined he had at least a conversational familiarity with almost every spoken tongue.

This one stumped him for a while. Presently he figured it out as one of the Incan dialects. Almost pure Incan, of the original mother Quicha dialect, dating back to the legendary period when the leader, Manco, equipped with a golden rod which would sink into the ground when the predestined home of the race was found, led his people in the great migration. Doc listened in amazement.

Working hard at it, he began picking out phrases, words, enough to make a little sense.

The five men were, it developed, having a coldly bitter argument, and about a surprising point. It seemed they believed one of their number was trying to reach Doc Savage, and they didn't know which one.

From each in turn came emphatic denials that he was attempting to confer with Doc Savage. Doc got the impression that none of them believed any of the others, and that they were in a collective fright. They were, as a group, endeavoring to prevent the one of their number, whoever he or she was, from conferring privately with Doc.

Doc got the idea that was the whole purpose behind their presence in New York.

After the discussion came up against the stone wall of denials, one of them went for the girl. She had a pleasant voice over the gadget, which was no flatterer of tonal quality, and Doc wondered if she were attractive as Monk had claimed. Doc did not have much faith in Monk's ideas of good-looking females. Monk leaned toward cultivated and obvious beauty.

The girl repeated approximately the same indignant statements the others had been making, and suddenly asked someone, "Did you successfully send Doc Savage to Spain? I think not!"

"He will go." This evidently from the thin blond man who had given Monk and Ham the Spanish bacteriologist story.

"I doubt that."

The man was angry. "He will go. I have spoken with his two assistants, Monk Mayfair and Ham Brooks. Brooks will talk to Savage and have him convinced the story is true. And then I will follow up."

"What about the other one? Monk Mayfair?"

"A lout."

"You mean you didn't succeed with him?"

The man said bitterly, "How can you succeed with a man who has no intelligence. Possibly no brain."

"I hear differently concerning all of them, including Monk Mayfair. They have intelligence, all right. They, with Doc Savage, have become almost a legend." She paused, then added, "They would have to be extraordinarily well-known for word of them to have reached our world."

The man said unpleasantly, "They will go to Spain. I do not wish to haggle about it."

The girl—one of the men addressed her by the name Auca, which was the mother-Incan word for pleasure—showed no indication of being willing to drop the matter. She thought the men had done a fool thing. She insisted on saying so. Doc listened to her rather pleasant voice, having a little trouble with her accent. He heard her go into a monologue concerning himself.

“I have inquired about Savage,” she informed the others. “They have here in this city repositories of ancient knowledge which they call museums, and I spoke with an officer in one, pretending to be a student of ancient Inca, and guided the subject of discussion to Doc Savage. Make no mistake, Savage is an extraordinary one.”

“No matter how unusual, he is helpless against us,” a man snapped. “There is no one who can stand against us. We have only each other to fear.”

“Distrust,” said the girl Auca coldly, “is not good for our hopes.”

“You'll not deny that someone was coming to ask Doc Savage's help? One of our inner circle.”

The girl's voice was crisp. “I'm beginning to doubt that. We have found no trace of the person.”

“Someone sent him the green stone.”

“Did they?”

“It is possible you should know the truth of that,” the man said.

The eavesdropping ended right there. Doc did not know precisely what happened, but he got a general idea that the young lady picked up some handy object, which happened to be the vase containing the flowers and eavesdropping gadget, and hurled it at the speaker. She hit something.

Silence.

Doc settled back unhappily to wait for them to move to another room where there were other vases and gadgets.

Chapter V

THE bellboy's companion was a lean, tanned man who made one think of whipcord and bucking horses and broad-brimmed hats. He even had the drawl that went with west Texas or Arizona or some place like that. He had the bow-legged walk and the sun-squint around the eyes; he was all sagebrush and cactus except the small black gun, which was German.

He said, “Call me Swingles, Mr. Savage. I know you wear a bulletproof undershirt, so I'll shoot somewhere else. You understand? You don't need to raise your hands, but you can if you wish.”

This as he came into the room after the bellhop had knocked and identified himself and Doc had opened the door. The bellhop looked sick.

Swingles—Doc had never seen the man before—poked the boy in the same ugly way that he would nudge a rabbit that he had shot. “Son, make a little speech about it, if you'll feel better,” he said.

The bellboy sounded as if he could cry. “He came to me, this guy did, and he said he was working with you on a case and had to see you in a hurry. I brought him up here. Before God, I didn't know it was the wrong thing to do.”

“It was all right,” Doc said quietly. “I'm glad you did.”

“I hope your pleasure won't be permanent,” Swingles said.

“You're not,” Doc inquired, “curious about why I'm pleased?”

“I can guess why. You're bumfuzzled by this thing. You're glad to see any ray of light.”

“You,” Doc said, “are a ray of light.”

Swingles grinned. All his clothing seemed to be new, but it also had the look of having been carried stuffed in a suitcase for some time. “Don't get blinded,” he said.

“Aren't you going to search me?”

“No. I think I would be a damned fool to get close to you. I've heard a little about you, my friend.”

Doc asked the bellboy, “What's your name?”

“Fred,” the boy said miserably.

“Sit down, Fred,” Doc told him. “Sit down and relax. You did what I would have suggested you do. Don't worry about it.”

Swingles laughed. “It was that girl. That Auca. That's who it was. And I didn't figure it out until today. And they haven't figured it out yet, the dopes.”

Doc looked at him thoughtfully. “Is that the answer to a puzzle? Or is it the puzzle?”

“She was cute about it,” Swingles went on. “She put the idea in their heads that one of them was coming to you for help. You can see how cute that was, can't you? It got her to New York. She's been watching her chance to get in touch with you. She hasn't made it, though. They're keeping tabs on each other pretty close.”

“Where are they from?” Doc asked.

“You don't know?”

“No.”

“It's no place you've ever been, and pray God you'll never find it,” Swingles said. “I'm not woofing, either.”

“And you're not saying much,” Doc informed him.

“No? I figured I was talking a lot.” The man moved the gun suggestively. “I don't have to speak any pieces, you know.”

Doc said quietly, “You're killing time. While what happens?”

“Eh?”

“Something,” Doc said, “is happening. You're supposed to keep me detained and interested while it comes off? Right?”

It was right. The man's face, the care with which he kept it sullenly expressionless more than anything else, verified the guess.

“This,” Doc said, “can come to an end.”

“An end you won't like.” Swingles moved the gun again.

“We'll see,” Doc said.

Several seconds of silence followed.

Swingles closed his eyes. He breathed deeply in a relaxed fashion, bent over and lurched out straight on the floor.

“Hold your breath,” Doc said.

“What?” said the bellboy.

“Hold your breath.”

“I don't understand,” said the bellhop in wonder. “What happened to that guy? What dumped him like that?”

“It's too late now,” Doc told him.

He had used more of his breath than was safe in trying to warn the bellhop, so he turned swiftly and went out into the hall. He ran to an open window, and filled his lungs with air.

Doc went back to the room. The gas, an anaesthetic without odor or color, but which was quick acting—it almost instantly produced a comparatively harmless stupor that would last, at the most, a couple of hours—had the added excellent property of oxidizing on contact with the air for about fifty seconds, whereupon it became harmlessly ineffective. One merely had to hold the breath for a minute or a minute and a quarter to avoid it.

The bellboy was asleep on the floor now.

Doc left the room again, ran to the stairway and descended to the fourth floor. When he stepped out into the fourth floor hall, a man standing there asked in a hurt voice, “Didn't Swingles keep the gate latched on you?” The man then took a gun from under a soft gray hat which he was holding across his chest, and fired at Doc Savage. He should have, to get results, fired through the hat. Because Doc went backward and sidewise, and he was three feet or so from the bullet when it passed.

Doc heaved a second gas grenade. They were small glass-bulb affairs; he had broken the one for Swingles with elbow pressure against a pocket. This one would break—he snapped it hard enough for that—on contact with the corridor wall. He gave the needed thirty or so seconds, and while he was waiting, a man shouted from down the hall. “What the hell,” the man wanted to know, “has happened to Stevie?”

Doc ran down the hall, chucking another grenade ahead for luck. He heard the man still yelling, the yells going farther away through the rooms of a suite.

DOC went into the suite. It was the girl's. A living room, one closed door to the right. He tossed an ash tray against the door. Five bullets promptly came through from the other side as someone emptied all the chambers of a revolver.

Someone said, from beyond the door, “Dammit, of course the fire escape will hold you!”

Doc selected a small heavy table and, standing to one side, pitched it against the door. It was not too

successful, although part of a panel did come out of the door.

Someone in the other room began to search expertly for him with bullets. Not through the door, but through the wall, which was a plaster-and-wood affair.

Doc retreated to the window, threw it up, and looked out cautiously. The window opened into a court; below there was a concrete areaway, and the fire escape, if they were using it, was on the back of the building. He couldn't see it.

He sent two gas pellets down into the areaway for luck.

The shooting stopped in the other room. Doc took a chance, approached the door, and used a periscope gadget, a small mirror on the end of a telescoping rod—the contrivance was more compact than a dentist's search-mirror and had a great many more uses—to see an unoccupied room, an open window, and the iron rail of the fire escape.

He picked up the table, removed the rest of the door and went in.

They had gone down the fire escape. Three men. Doc got his head in before a bullet arrived from below. When he looked again, the men were gone. The anaesthetic gas, as he had expected, had done no good down there. The circulation of air was evidently wrong.

He went back into the hall. Stevie was gone. He ran upstairs to his room. Swingles was gone.

He came back and tried the suite occupied by five odd blond men and it was also empty. In addition to the emptiness, there was upset furniture, a broken lamp and general disarray. Here, too, there was an open window and a fire escape.

Doc went back to the girl's suite. He closed the outside door—that, at least, was intact—and went into the inner room. A bedroom. He approached a door that would logically be the bath. The knob was torn off and there were plenty of splinters where a jimmy had been used.

“You can come out,” Doc said to the door. “This is Savage. You can use one of the cracks in the door to make sure of that.”

He swung from the door and picked up the telephone. The operator downstairs was near enough hysteria to make it difficult to get information out of her, but he managed to draw a general idea of what had happened.

There had been several men—the telephone girl said twenty, so six or seven should be a fair guess—in the raiding party. They had entered the hotel peacefully enough, but one took over the desk at gunpoint, another man handled the bellboy, Fred, and the rest went upstairs on a blond-man hunt. Shortly five blond men came down the fire escape in flying haste. There had been no shots fired up to and including this point, but that was not the case when Doc Savage appeared. Four of the raiders had left via the elevators and stairways carrying two unconscious pals, probably Swingles and Stevie. Three had left via the fire escape. These were probably the three Doc had seen.

By the time Doc had got this information, and just as a policeman grabbed the telephone downstairs and

began shouting questions, the girl decided to come out of the bathroom.

MONK hadn't exaggerated. She was tall, tawny-eyed. Very pretty and dressed in new and fairly expensive clothes that she was not wearing the way an American girl would wear them.

Doc Savage pointed at a chair and said, "Be seated, and take it easy." He said this in the Incan language, after some difficulty thinking of the words.

She nodded and sat down. Two seconds later, she had a double-take on his use of the language, and shot to her feet.

Doc was identifying himself to the policeman downstairs. The officer, the patrolman on the beat, was confused enough to listen to advice. He had, fortunately, heard of Doc Savage.

"Listen to these descriptions," Doc told him. He gave a word picture of the raiders he had seen, lumped the men under the heading of "five blond men, all thin and tall," and finished, "Get a description of those fellows and have a pickup order put out for them."

"Thanks," the cop said. "I'm not used to these young wars."

By now, the portable radio transceiver in Doc's pocket was making squawking sounds, and he took it out. It was Monk.

"What happened?" Monk demanded. "We got the police frequency tuned in on another set, and we hear reports of riot and war from uptown, so we figure you're involved."

"I ran into more than I expected," Doc explained.

"How did you come out?"

"Not with all the bacon, by a lot," Doc told him. He glanced at the girl, who was watching him wonderingly. "But it wasn't entirely a water-haul."

"Need any help?"

"No, but you might come up to the hotel," Doc told him.

"What's it all about?"

"I'm not sure yet, but it's pretty fantastic, I'm afraid," Doc replied.

"You didn't catch that blond babe?"

"Yes."

"Part of that noise you hear downstairs," Monk said, "is us arriving."

DOC asked the girl, "Auca? Is that the name?"

She hesitated, then said, "Yes. It puzzles me how you knew."

"It is, in the ancient Incan language, an esteemed name."

She shrugged. "I suppose so. I understand it was one of the names the Incas early deified or what I imagine you would call sainted. I am not Incan. Did you think I was?"

Doc shook his head. "With that height and blondness, and those features? I hadn't imagined Incan. No. What are you?"

"My origin would mean nothing to you," she replied.

"It might."

"You wouldn't believe it."

"Enough things have happened to me," Doc said quietly, "that I'm not too quick to disbelieve."

She gave him a searching look and said, "I can understand that. I come from a very odd place, a place that does not exist, but you have been heard of there." She smiled faintly, adding, "That is more of a compliment than you can know."

"Thank you," Doc said. "Was that what moved you to come to New York to consult me?"

She jumped visibly. Then she stared at Doc while she weighed various answers. The door vibrated under the impact of knuckles at that point, and Doc rose, asking, "Would you rather not get involved with the police?"

"Police?" she said, in what seemed to be genuine bewilderment. "I am a little confused. They are the ones who enforce the rules or mode of conduct of these outer people."

"Yes," Doc said.

"I would prefer not to need to control them," she said.

Doc said dryly, "When you've controlled a New York cop, you've done a feat. Perhaps you're mixed up on the meaning of that word." He moved toward the door. "Maybe we can avoid the necessity."

THE officer at the door proved to be a sergeant named Collos. Sergeant Collos was not a Doc Savage fan, and he had no intention of being denied a full explanation of why all the shooting and racing about by blond people. "There's got to be a report made," Sergeant Collos said, pushing into the room. "You're the boy I want to get my information from, Savage. You're always mixed up in something violent." He pointed a finger at Doc and added that he, personally, was not too impressed by anybody to ask questions, then he saw Auca.

The girl came toward Sergeant Collos. She had a long, easy stride, a friendly smile. There was not in her voice, but there might have been in the intensity of her eyes, any particular thing that was unusual.

"Good afternoon, sir," she said. "There is nothing here that needs explaining, and I am sure you do not wish to waste your time."

Sergeant Collos assumed a rather catfish look of bewilderment, scratched his head as if puzzled, then grinned vacuously. "That could be right, young lady," he said.

"So you will leave us, won't you?" Auca added.

"Why, sure, young lady," Sergeant Collos said.

He backed out, smiling politely, and closed the door.

Doc Savage whistled softly. "A very slight nudge from a feather would tilt me flat on my face! The tough Sergeant Collos! The man who told a presidential candidate off for jaywalking! You tell him to leave, and he does so meekly."

"I wished him to leave," the girl said calmly.

"That wasn't hypnotism you used," Doc remarked wonderingly.

She shook her head. "I do not know what hypnotism is."

Doc studied her with some alarm.

"You have a power," he said. "I'm not sure I like it."

"I haven't used it on you," she told him.

"I'm glad you didn't."

"I could have," she added. "But it is better not. It would destroy your confidence. I need your confidence." She frowned, then asked suddenly, "Did you not receive a small green stone?"

"Yes. Did you send it?"

She nodded quickly. "Keep it. It is your safety." She fumbled for an explanation, then gave a general one. "It is like an island in a great sea. Stand on it, and you will not drown. I do not mean stand on it literally, of course. It is a tiny stone. Keep it with you, I mean."

"Carry it?"

"Close to you." She lifted her right hand, lifted the pale waterfall of blond hair from her neck and showed him an earring. The fitting was yellow gold, the craftsmanship exotic and certainly from no modern designer's pattern, but the stone was what startled him. It was, as nearly as he could tell, twin to the green stone locked in his headquarters safe. "It is better to keep it close to you," she added, dropping her hair in place again.

"That stone," Doc said, "closely resembles the one I have."

She nodded. "It should. It is twin to this one."

"I see."

"Keep it close to you," she said urgently. "I cannot stress it too much that you do so. It is utterly important. It is—well, it is your life and death and the same for others that is at stake."

"A protection?"

She nodded eagerly. "Yes. Now you understand."

Doc thought of Monk's troubles earlier in the day, and Ham's susceptibility to the influence of the blond man they'd met in the restaurant, and he said thoughtfully, "It might be a good idea if you supplied me with a few more of those, so I could equip a couple of my associates."

"That is impossible."

“Why?”

“The stone you have was my father's,” she explained. “There are in existence but twenty, the number of fingers of two hands twice. For generations, they have passed only through death. It has not always been peaceful death. Lately, the deaths have surely not been peaceful.” She came to Doc and gripped his arm, added, “I am afraid you do not understand the importance of that stone. Quite probably there is nothing in your world as you know it of more value.”

“That might be a matter of opinion,” Doc said quietly. “However, don't get the idea that I think that pebble is just an ordinary rock.”

“It is an ordinary rock,” she said. “Does that confuse you?”

“It helps.”

Someone was beating on the door.

Chapter VI

IT was Monk and Ham. Monk came in grinning, saying, “We saw a funny thing downstairs. You know that hard-nosed cop, Sergeant Collos? Well, he's downstairs trying to tell his captain that there's nothing here worth investigating.”

Ham Brooks said, “With part of the hotel full of bullet holes and the hotel staff going around with skinned heads, I think the captain was a little skeptical of Sergeant Collos' balance.”

Auca said regretfully, “I did not intend to get the poor man in trouble. Perhaps I made it too strong.”

The girl had stepped out of sight while Doc admitted Monk and Ham, but she had come back now and the pair looked at her with approval.

“You're the same one who had a whirl at trailing me earlier,” Monk said, grinning. “I hated to see you leave the job, I don't mind saying.”

“This is Auca,” Doc explained. He introduced his two aids.

Ham asked Auca, “You persuaded Sergeant Collos to call off the excitement?”

She hesitated. “Well, yes. I did it too well, perhaps.”

“You could do a swell job of influencing me any old day,” Monk told her happily.

Doc said dryly, “There's more truth in that than you know.”

“Huh?”

“She has,” Doc told him, “the same sort of weird power the blond man had.”

Monk had evidently been thinking over the matter of the blond man's influence and the counteracting effect of the green stone, and concluded it was a little too fantastic to accept. “Heck, that guy just ran a whizzer on Ham,” he declared. “He didn't have much effect on me, you noticed.”

Doc said sharply, “Don't get it in your head that what happened was any accident.”

“You mean that guy really did something to us—to Ham, I mean?”

Ham said, “He had you agreeing with him, too, stupid!”

The girl broke in impatiently, with a trace of fright. “Mr. Savage, do you have the green stone with you?”

“No.”

“Is it where you can get it?”

“Yes.”

“Then let us get it at once,” she said anxiously. “I am afraid of what may happen if you do not do so.”

Doc said soberly, “That might not be a bad idea, I'm beginning to think. It's at my place downtown. Let's go.”

“What I'd like to know,” Monk muttered, “is who is losing his mind around here.”

THEIR departure from the hotel was not without incident. They were collared downstairs by a Captain McBride, Sergeant Collos' superior officer. Captain McBride, although more civil in manner, was just as adamant as Sergeant Collos, and his attitude was not sweetened by a feeling he seemed to have that Doc Savage was responsible for his man Sergeant Collos making a fool of himself. He said so.

Auca spoke in a friendly fashion to Captain McBride, telling him, “There is nothing here that needs your attention or interest, Captain McBride. We are your friends and you will let us go without more formality.”

“Why, sure,” said McBride, although in a somewhat wondering fashion.

“Holy smoke!” Monk muttered.

When they were in Doc's car riding downtown, Auca shaped her lips in a pleased smile and remarked, “I don't think I overdid it with Captain McBride, as perhaps I did with Sergeant Collos. He is not harmed, and his thinking will return to its normal way in an hour or so.”

Monk gave Ham a look, and received one in return. With slight persuasion, both would have jumped out of the car.

Doc addressed Auca. “Brief us on the whole story,” he said.

“Brief you? You mean a short summary of the whole?”

“Exactly.”

“That,” she said, “would be impossible. One cannot speak shortly of something into which the utmost intensity of the human mind has been expended in creation. No, perhaps I can. I will try. First, there is this, you have called it power, influence, this thing you have seen at work. That is a treasure.”

“Treasure!” Doc said explosively. “It could be a great deal worse!”

“Or better,” she said.

“Depending,” Doc agreed, “on who had what.”

“Exactly,” she said. “For centuries, it has been ours. We have kept it in our world. We have—”

Doc, twisting the car expertly through the traffic, said, “Hold it there. This world stuff you’ve mentioned before in exactly those words. You don’t mean world, do you?”

She hesitated, then explained, “There is some confusion with me and the English. I do not mean another planet.”

“Then what do you mean?”

“Another place, an utterly strange place, unknown, undreamed of, unseen by any man who has ever departed over a period of many generations. Would that not be another world?”

“It might qualify,” Doc admitted.

“Intruders came,” Auca continued.

“Unwanted?”

“Very much unwanted,” she said vehemently. “It so happened that there was a young noble—I shall call him noble because he possessed one of the twenty stones—and he was a reckless young man, given to venturing into the outer regions on hunting trips and in search of thrills. It so happened that, also, he encountered a serpent, one of the large ones which squeeze and crush. His stone was no protection against the snake. He did kill the reptile, however, but not before he was badly crushed and dying. It was then that a man came upon him. This man listened to the young noble dying in delirium, and he learned facts which he had the intelligence to use.”

Doc asked, “You mean he found out the stone was a protection?”

“Exactly.”

“And?”

“He acted,” she went on. “You understand, there is much legend in the jungle and mountains around our world, and this man had listened to the legends. Now, he believed them. He took the stone, came among us, saw what we possessed, and became greedy. He returned to the outside, to New York, where he recruited helpers. They came back, and one by one, with the aid of the man who has the original stone, they have trapped and killed seven men, and they now possess seven of the stones for protection.”

“And they’re after the secret, the thing you just demonstrated on Captain McBride?” Doc guessed.

She nodded gravely.

DOC SAVAGE swung his car into the private garage in the basement of the skyscraper which housed his headquarters—he opened the door by radio control, and closed it behind them—and they got out. Doc nodded to Monk, who went over to a panel of controls and pressed a series of buttons, noting whether lights showed green or red—they were all green—as a check on conditions upstairs. Any forced doors or windows, anyone concealed in the library-laboratory-reception room suite, or prowlers in the hall outside, any of these would have shown on the warning indicators.

“Seems clear,” Monk reported.

Doc asked Auca, “You want us to help stop these fellows before they grab off the booty?”

“Yes,” she said, nodding eagerly.

Doc suggested, “You went about it indirectly enough. Why not just come directly to us?”

“I could not,” she told him, shaking her head. “I did suggest it to our council of nobles, and they discussed it, then forbade it.” She didn't meet Doc's eye, and added, “I do not think they wished to trust you.”

“I can see their point.”

Auca said urgently, “It was not that they distrusted your honesty. The contrary, I'm afraid.”

“I see.”

“Do you? Let's find out. What would you do if you were called in on a thing like this?”

Doc said instantly, “There would be two answers to that question. First move would be: Keep the wrong people from getting hold of what I'm really beginning to believe you've got.”

“And the second move?” she prompted.

“To see it properly safeguarded, put to the best use, and its benefits directed to the best interest of humanity as a whole, rather than any special group,” Doc replied.

She suggested, “You might consider my people a special group?”

“That,” Doc said, “couldn't be answered now. But it might come out that way.”

She nodded. “That's what they feared.”

“And?”

“I didn't.” She smiled wryly. “Perhaps I was wrong. I don't think so as yet. They voted me down. I didn't like being voted down. I didn't abide.”

They were in the special elevator, traveling upward quietly. The lift, an experimental model using pneumatic power rather than the conventional cable mechanism, was capable of terrific speed. Monk, showing off, gave the control a slight extra touch, and the effect of inertia took their breath.

“So you rigged a wild-goose chase, and rode in it to New York?” Doc suggested to Auca.

“Yes.”

“How?” Doc asked. “Or is it too complicated to—”

The elevator cage stopped violently. They were tossed upward from the floor. All four struck the ceiling, which fortunately was padded against such an accident, and fell back to the floor, all in a tangle.

“Something musta went wrong with the danged machinery,” Monk spluttered.

“You were running it too fast, you furry misfit,” Ham told him indignantly. “Next time, don't put on a show—” Ham's voice dissolved, became nothing against a background of explosion.

The blast—it was overhead, about three feet overhead, on the roof of the elevator cab—was terrific. It sledge-hammered air against their bodies. Yard-long sheets of flame came through cracks that were not even supposed to be there. The armor steel plates overhead buckled like a tin can that had been stepped

on.

They were on the floor again, and Doc was saying through the cordite fumes, “The safety door! I don't think they could stop this at any special floor, the speed we were traveling.” Probably no one heard him. He could hardly hear himself. He lunged to the door. It was jammed. He hauled an emergency release, and the sliding panel loosened, enabling him to yank it aside.

Facing him was a conventional hallway shaft door. What floor number, he couldn't tell; the paint had been literally stripped off the metal in odd streaks by the force of the blast. But, when he threw his strength against it, it broke loose and came open.

Monk and Ham, on their feet by now, were helping Auca up. Doc shoved the girl out through the door into the corridor, pushed Monk and Ham after her, followed himself, and was halfway out when the thing he feared happened. A second grenade came down from somewhere above. This one sheeted flame into the hallway, further deafened them, and sent one of the doors arching and twisting through the air.

Two men and three women, building occupants who had merely happened to be in the corridor, picked themselves off the floor and ran wildly. Nearly every window in the hall had been smashed.

Flame, noise, powder smell, seemed still to pack the corridor. Doc said, “At least one is above. Get downstairs and have the checking machinery put to work.” Monk and Ham could not hear him, being temporarily deafened. He caught Ham's arm, repeated the instructions with finger movements. They were all adept with the deaf-and-dumb finger shorthand.

“You'll try upstairs?” Monk demanded.

“I'll try upstairs,” Doc said. “Keep the pocket radios on, if they'll still function.”

“If you catch anybody,” Monk said grimly, “save a piece of him for me.”

DOC wheeled and ran to a cross-corridor, and took that to the other side of the building, the downtown side. There was an emergency signal which would bring any elevator immediately—most large buildings have such an arrangement, known only to the staff—and he used that. When the cage came, he didn't go up.

“Down,” he said.

The pneumatic apparatus which operated the trick elevator was located in the basement, and he was sure someone had got to it. A couple of minutes later, he reached a metal door, and saw immediately that it had been forced. There did not seem to be much point in going into the little room jammed with machinery; the marauders would be gone by now. But he took a quick look anyway. It was empty.

He ran upstairs to the lobby floor, found the outer doors already were closed, blocking the movement of all users of the building, many of whom clearly had no knowledge that anything had happened. The blasts had occurred on the sixty-second floor, and although violent, probably hadn't made much impression down here.

Doc found the head lobby guard. “Start passing them out,” Doc said. “Just get names and addresses of those coming from above the sixty-second floor.”

“Anybody can give a phony name and address,” the man warned.

“The idea is to give the effect of making an investigation,” Doc explained. “You remember the gadget we put in the doors a couple of months ago?”

“Yeah?”

“I’m turning it on,” Doc said. “The indicator is wired to the lowermost bulb in the ceiling light fixture nearest the door being monitored by that control. The bulb will go out. Get it?”

“I get it.”

“I’ll watch this side of the lobby,” Doc said. “You take the other side. If you see a bulb go out, call me at once. Instantly.”

“Shall I instruct my men at the doors to watch—”

“No, they might give the gag away by watching too closely,” Doc told him. “You do the watching. And notify me. There’ll be time. It will take a few moments for the fellow to give his name and address, or a name and address.”

“Right.” The chief of the lobby crew turned and hurried toward the other side.

Doc Savage moved to an inconspicuous spot, a telephone booth which had one-way glass in the door, and waited there where he could watch without being seen. The booth, kept perpetually unoccupied by an out-of-order sign which was never removed, had been prepared a long time ago and used a number of times.

He had no certainty that there would be immediate results. The attack, he was sure, had been well planned and prepared. There had been one or more men to break into the basement elevator control machinery room, possibly on radio signal. Another had been upstairs, to smash the shaft door and drop the explosive. The excellent coordination of the maneuver indicated small radio transceivers had been employed.

Presently, he saw Monk, Ham and the girl in the hall, and used his own radio transceiver, asking, “Monk, you read me O.K.?”

“Loud and Clear,” Monk said.

“Go to the garage and get outside in one of our cars,” Doc instructed. “Park the one that looks like a taxi at the curb near the north entrance.”

“Righto,” Monk said. “You found anybody yet?”

“Not yet,” Doc said.

Five minutes later, he did. At least, one of the chandelier lights halfway down the great cathedral-like lobby blinked out.

Chapter VII

THIS one was a short chunk of a man, darkly weatherbeaten. Doc did not know what address and name he had given the door guard, and never did find out, did not try. He was sure about the man. Once each three months for a couple of years now, workmen had been carefully repainting the inside of each door that opened into the shaft of the private elevator used by Doc Savage, without knowing that the paint,

which rubbed off readily on contact, contained enough radioactive substance to activate a detector device at a distance of several feet. There was a long chance, of course, that this stubby dark man had come in contact with the stuff by accident, or might be a worker in a laboratory handling radiant substances. But that uncertainty left Doc after he had trailed the fellow a while.

The man, after leaving the building, got into a cab, rode three blocks, changed to another, doubled to the east, then south, and finally pulled to the curb, where he picked up another man, taller but also sunburned. The two then rode north.

Doc used his radio. "Monk?"

"Yes?"

"I think I'm getting somewhere. Go back to the building. Ask the lobby guard if any more lights went out. He'll know what you mean."

A few minutes later, Monk reported, "The guy says no more lights went out."

"Good. Get upstairs to the safe, and get that green stone."

"I don't know how to open the darned safe, now that the trick lock is on," Monk reminded.

"Get a magnet out of the lab, an ordinary electromagnet, and put it against the floral design on the safe door, starting with the left red petal in the rose, and following the stem up and to the right, then down the stem. Then grasp the handle and turn. That should do it."

Another five minutes. Monk reported, "It did."

"You have the green rock?"

"Yeah. Say, the girl seems much relieved."

"She has a reason to be. Keep the stone with you. In an emergency swallow it if you have to. It's small enough for that. But don't do that unless necessary, and bring it to me."

"Where are you?"

"Going east now, toward Queensborough Bridge. I think the destination is Long Island. Keep in touch with me, and overtake me as soon as you can without using the siren."

"Right."

"Don't underestimate the importance of keeping that stone in your possession," Doc warned.

IN the residential area of Sunnyside, just beyond the industrial section of Long Island City, the cab turned off Roosevelt Avenue and stopped before a drugstore. The two sunburned men alighted, dismissed the cab, stood there until it disappeared, then walked rapidly north one block, then east a block, and turned into one of a series of identical two-family homes. They entered without knocking, and the door seemed to be unlocked.

Doc Savage parked his own cab beyond the nearest corner, alighted, found there was no alleyway, but a series of fenced-in backyards which could be negotiated without too much difficulty.

He began vaulting fences, ducking under clotheslines and avoiding outdoor fireplaces. Nearing the house which the men had entered, he decided to enter a garage which seemed the best spot from which to make a survey. He stepped warily inside.

An utterly pleasant voice greeted him. "Why, Mr. Savage, this is quite a surprise!"

He did not look around. His one idea was to get out of there, and quick.

"No, wait, do," the voice said.

It happened to him then. That quick. A thing that yesterday he would have sworn was impossible. He couldn't leave. He wanted to, but wanting seemed to have very little to do with it.

Doc turned, feeling more defeated than he could recall having felt at any time in his life, and faced the slender, blond man.

"I take it," he said thinly, "that you're the same one who met Monk Mayfair today?"

The other nodded smilingly. "It is true. I don't recall that I gave him my name. Would you like me to have a name?"

"It's probably not important."

"As a handle, it might be convenient. Shall we make it Jones?"

"All right, Jones."

"You understand," said Jones pleasantly, "that you're quite helpless."

"I'm getting that idea," Doc admitted.

"Good," Jones said. "In case you know what I am doing to you, so much the better. You will comprehend the futility of resistance. Even with the utmost resistance, you could do no more than stand there. You could not flee."

"Monk fled."

"I underestimated your friend Monk," Jones said. "I did not—what is the expression?—turn on the steam."

"But you're turning on the steam now?" Doc asked dryly.

"Don't you think so?"

Doc did think so. There wasn't any doubt of it. He had been curious about the physical sensations which would accompany the production of the influence—influence was the only lay word he was prepared to apply to it, although it was certainly an inadequate one—and he was discovering that there was very little physical commotion. The same thing couldn't be said for his mind. There was distinctly an effect. Strange, unexpected, it was hard to define; in some respects it resembled the effect of certain anaesthetics. It was, of course, intangible, in the sense that it couldn't be seen. He just felt, generally summing it up, quite helpless. He knew fully, of course, that he didn't want to be influenced. But he was quite powerless.

"Please come with me," Jones said.

THE next ten minutes were nerve-wracking ones, although Doc passed through them in the rôle of observer.

Jones walked to the house into which the two sunburned men had gone. There was a dead man on the kitchen floor. Jones stepped over the fellow—the man had been knifed to death—and passed on into a second room. Here, he opened a door abruptly, and using a gun which he whipped out, shot the two men Doc had followed from downtown. The gun was a small calibre. The shots were not loud. Jones shot both men rather expertly through the head.

“We will now leave, and you will go with me,” he said.

Doc knew one thing now. The resemblance this stuff bore to hypnotism was damned small. No one, as far as Doc knew, had been able to induce any state of hypnotic trance so definitely complete that the victim would perform any act completely against his nature. True, hypnotic operators sometimes grinned knowingly and said that, if a hypnotic subject had ever been induced to commit a robbery or murder, who would ever hear about it? The subject wouldn't know what he had done, probably. And the operator wouldn't risk getting jailed. But Doc himself, in his experiments, had found quite well-defined limitations to hypnosis.

So this wasn't hypnosis. In no state of trance, even the third stage of somnambulism, Doc was positive he could not have been induced to stand by and see two men shot down in cold murder. Whether they deserved it or not.

They walked down the street. Doc noticed the backs of his hands were quite damp with perspiration. He felt cold.

He saw then that Jones was showing strain. The man's face was drawn, the eyes prominent, the mouth holding a twist of intense concentration. There was a moment now when Doc called on his will to the utmost to resist, even a few seconds when he thought there might be a chance of escaping from this impossible situation. But he made, in the end, no effective escape from the unbelievable thing.

“You are a difficult one,” Jones said presently. “If it will give you any satisfaction, I can tell you that the labor of this will probably make me ill for weeks.”

“That helps,” Doc said bitterly.

“Those men I shot, they were murderers,” Jones said quietly. “They have killed several of my people. More cold-bloodedly than I shot them, you may believe me.”

“We have a thing called trial by jury in this country,” Doc said.

“Yes, so I understand. Justice at the hands of a group of your peers. It is a custom found in all lands and among all peoples. Where there is harmony among mankind, you will find this thing you called a trial by jury.”

“It is,” Doc reminded him, “one of the first rights of a man.”

“The men I shot had had such a trial.”

“Not here. Not in an American court.”

“Unimportant.”

“It is to me.” Doc fell silent. They had turned a corner. An automobile stood, a smashed wheel against

the curb. A second car, which had forced the other one against the curbing, was nearby, containing two smiling men. Monk, Ham and Auca were in the first machine.

Now and then, a pedestrian or a resident of the neighborhood would approach to inquire about the accident. One of the blond men would saunter over, speak a pleasant word, and the person would leave. A policeman approached, frowning, notebook already in hand. The blond man spoke to him. A look of vague stupor, inward disbelief with himself, beset the cop's face, but he also went away.

"Hello, Monk," Doc said.

Monk grimaced. "They've got the old whammy on us. Better job than they did on me this morning. Hell, I can't even run away now."

"We all," said Jones, "shall have to ride in the one car."

THE car was a rented one driven by a vaguely bewildered young man who was clearly a victim of the blond men, but did not understand what was happening to him. He drove carefully, hardly ever looking at anyone in the car. He would, Doc reflected, be likely to wonder about this afternoon for a long time to come.

Jones told Doc Savage, "There is no longer any reason for us to remain in New York, so we are leaving at once."

"You mean that you've wiped out all the gang who are trying to get hold of this whammy, as Monk calls it?"

Jones shook his head. "The three dead ones you saw are the extent of our victory against them. We knew they were using that house. We had been planning to attack them there if we could find their leader with them. Unfortunately, we waited too long, and they raided our hotel today. We escaped, however, although it was close."

Monk asked sourly, "Why didn't you just hang this whammy on 'em and tell 'em to go away?"

"They have protection," Jones told him gloomily.

Doc reminded Monk, "The green stones."

Monk thought about the thing for a while, apparently managing to back away a pace and get a comparatively impartial glance at the whole. He looked stunned. "Oh, hell! This thing is as nutty as a fruitcake. It couldn't happen. It's the stuff for nightmares, and not well-balanced nightmares at that." He glared at everyone, raised his voice and shouted, "I don't believe it could happen! You know what I'm going to do? I'm going to get out of here and go home!"

He seized the car door and prepared to throw it open. The car was not traveling at a fast pace.

"Sit down, friend," Jones said in the kindest of manners.

Monk sat down.

Ham Brooks said, "What happened to your determination, dopey?"

"Damned if I know!" Monk muttered. "I feel like a guy on an invisible leash."

Chapter VIII

THE plane, a twin-engined job, was capable of handling the nine passengers quite comfortably. It was a non-scheduled line charter plane, working mostly the New York-Florida luxury passenger trade. In addition to the pilot, there was a co-pilot and stewardess.

Doc Savage, once they were in the air and southbound, became absorbed in watching the behavior of the innocents aboard, the pilot, co-pilot and stewardess. It was amusing. But more terrifying. They were, he surmised, doing this because they had been influenced to do so, and there must be considerable confusion in their minds.

“Jones,” Doc said. “I don't know how much you know about airplanes, but it possibly isn't much. I think it might be advisable if I checked fuel supply and such details. You've probably got a good deal of force at work on the pilot and co-pilot, enough that it's possible they might take risks to comply with the compulsion you've put on them.”

Jones eyed Doc thoughtfully. “You will not attempt to interfere with our flight southward. You understand that.”

“You want to die in an airplane crash brought on by the pilot's helplessness to resist you?” Doc demanded.

Jones shrugged. “You can talk to the pilot. I will go along.”

As they went forward, Doc caught Auca's eye, and she looked away miserably. She was under no other compulsion than force, the threat of physical danger in the form of a blond man sitting behind her with a gun in his hand. Ahead of her, Monk and Ham were slouched gloomily in their seats. They hardly looked up.

The pilot, a young man with freckles, seemed not to know Doc Savage by sight. He flashed a troubled grin. The co-pilot, an older man, stared straight ahead.

Doc glanced over the instruments, saw everything seemed to be right, noted they were on course, and by that time the pilot had found some words. They were, in view of the circumstances, very much to the point. “Why am I doing this?” he wanted to know.

“Aren't you being paid for it?” Doc asked.

The pilot said blankly, “I don't recall pay being mentioned. That's odd, isn't it?”

“Very odd,” Doc agreed.

Jones touched Doc's shoulder. “You will return to your seat,” he said.

“I'm sure the pilot would like to know why—”

“You will return to your seat!” Jones' nerves were getting brittle.

Doc told the pilot, “Don't worry about it. You're really undergoing quite an experience, if you only knew it.”

Returning to the cabin, Doc dropped down in the seat immediately behind Monk. Jones let him remain there, to his relief. Doc tapped Monk on the shoulder, lowered his voice, and said, “I don't think they're

mind-readers.”

“I know damn well they're not,” Monk said, after glancing about to make sure he would not be overheard.

“Don't be too confident. We don't know much about this thing we're up against, except that it's fantastic.”

Monk chuckled bitterly. “If they're mind-readers, they'd know I got that green rock on me.”

Doc Savage hoped fervently that he did not show his surprise. Probably he did not jump more than a foot. He had taken it for granted that Monk hadn't got the stone, or had concealed it somewhere when cornered. That Monk had it was a terrific stroke of luck. “You have it?” he demanded.

Monk nodded. “My mouth. I thought I might have to swallow the darn thing, but I haven't yet. I had a wisdom tooth pulled a while back, and the stone fits the place where the tooth was.”

“Then,” Doc said, “you haven't been helpless?”

Monk shook his head. “You might have a point there for argument, Ham says. No, that rock seems to head off the whammy.”

“Good.”

“What do we do?”

“Just sit tight,” Doc said. “Unless they try to kill us. I don't know why they haven't. Probably because Auca wouldn't stand for it, and could make plenty of trouble for them when they get back home.”

“Home? If you mean their home, where's that?”

“Probably a remote section of Brazil. Back near the Andes. That's only a guess, though.”

“Holy cow!” Monk blurted. “You think we're headed for there?”

“Probably.”

“How come the rush?”

“They're scared,” Doc told him. “They've found out they were tricked into coming to New York, know they were nearly trapped there, and I doubt if they're positive they can get back home without incident.”

“You think those guys will make trouble?”

“Why not? They were well-organized, and not fools. There's an excellent chance they will try to waylay us. They have, you know, a defense against the chief and practically only weapon these blond men have, namely, the ability to make you do anything they wish if they can only get within a few feet of you.”

Monk grinned. “Few feet, eh? That's all the distance they can broadcast their personality?”

“Apparently,” Doc said. “But that doesn't mean that if a man can get a few yards from him, he can escape the effect. It doesn't work like that. It's not like a magnetic field, or an area covered by a light from one source.”

“What *is* the damned thing like?”

“That,” Doc said, “is what I hope we can find out by stringing along with them.”

Monk nodded. "You want this stone?"

"Later. Better not try to give it to me now," Doc said, and leaned back, noticing that Jones had lunged out of his seat and was approaching. Jones said, "You will hereafter have no conversations which I cannot overhear."

"Naturally not," Doc said dryly, wondering if Jones had any way of sensing the presence of the green stone on Monk. Apparently not. Which confused Doc. If the stone was a barrier, armor, protection, or whatever, it would seem logical that its presence should be detectible to the creator of the force being resisted. Again, possibly not. He did not, he realized, know much about the thing.

Except that, unlike Monk and Ham, who probably still took the view that the thing was too screwy to be genuine and, therefore, in their hearts did not believe it, Doc had worked deeply enough into the intricacies of extra-sensory mental capabilities that he was not too disbelieving. Skeptical, yes. The skepticism had pretty much evaporated by now, however, and he was inclined to believe that it was real.

Jones looked coldly at Auca. "You will not try resistance, either," he told her. "You have committed a crime against your clan. You will be returned for judging before your own kind."

She said nothing.

"What about us?" Doc asked. "My two friends and myself?"

Jones frowned. "Although it might have been simpler to have shot you, it was decided to take you with us to our people. There, a decision will be made."

"This is a landplane," Doc said. "It takes a long and solid runway for a safe landing. Have you thought of that?"

Jones sneered. "I have thought of that. There is a lake. There are planes which land on water. We will change to one."

"Oh."

"You will," Jones added dryly, "tell us a good spot to obtain such a plane, and the suitable type."

When Jones—the man was clearly in charge of the party—had gone on, Monk casually locked his hands behind his head and started a code transmission by twiddling his thumbs. "The guy is an optimist, ain't he?" Monk commented. "If you want to answer, you'll notice that you can make a finger shadow on the aisle floor as long as the sun is where it is."

Doc had noted the possibility of wig-wagging with a shadow. He used it, told Monk, "Play along with them. We want to get to where they're going. I'm curious."

"I'm curious, too," Monk said. "I don't know what kind of a way they used to run this whizzer on us, but I'd like to find it out."

"Don't you think it's genuine?"

"Of course not."

"Better think that over," Doc wig-wagged, and made a circular shadow movement to indicate the end of the transmission. Then he leaned back, not too surprised that Monk was still skeptical. Doc had felt he might be. A moment later, he caught Ham using the shadow method to get his attention. Ham had been

eavesdropping. He wanted to know if Doc was fooling about the thing being genuine.

“You'll probably never run into anything more genuine,” Doc signaled. “Just watch the way the refueling at Miami comes off.”

THE Miami stop was a masterpiece of casualness. The landing itself was without incident, but the nonscheduled airline operator who owned the plane they were flying was evidently becoming alarmed. His representative, a loud-voiced, red-faced young man in a white linen suit, dashed up and began a howling harangue at the pilot.

Doc watched with interest as Jones chimed in. Jones' manner was pleasant, his voice casual, and now Doc got the distinct feeling of unseen power being applied. The whole thing was mental. He didn't know the method. But the thing was real.

Doc noticed Monk's face was pale. “I'm gonna slip you that green rock,” Monk croaked furtively.

“Something make a believer out of you?” Doc inquired.

Monk shuddered. “The rock's in my hatband. The hat is lying on my seat,” he said.

Doc took his time going to Monk's seat, and picked up the hat with what he hoped was a great deal of innocence. He found the stone, and transferred it quickly to his person. He felt—it was so fantastic that it was preposterous—an immediate sensation. It was entirely mental, and could best be summed up as confidence.

He smiled at Auca. She tried a return smile, and shook her blond hair out and moved it back with a not-too-idle gesture, showing him that her earring with her own green stone was gone. That explained her helplessness.

Lowering his voice, Doc said, “I'm going to ask you theoretical question. If one of the small stones, the defensive device, was in the possession of someone, could they tell?”

She shivered. “Sometimes. Not always. Please do not give me any information. I might be forced to disclose it.”

The airline representative departed, perfectly happy having given his permission to continue with the plane. Doc visualized him on the telephone later, trying to explain that to his New York office. He'd need that big burly voice then.

THE tanks filled, the pilot got take-off clearance from the tower, and presently the forward lunge of the big plane was a force holding them back against their seats. When they were airborne, Jones touched Doc on the shoulder. “The pilot tells me that the island of Trinidad would be a good spot to shift to a plane capable of landing on water. He says such ships are available there. Is that your opinion also?”

“He's probably right,” Doc admitted.

Jones hesitated, scowling, and finally said, “You have a high resistance to me. I have sensed that all along.”

“Indeed?”

Jones nodded. "I suppose it is logical. You are reported to have a highly developed mind." He laid a hand on Doc's shoulder, a gesture of warning. "You will be very careful not to exercise your will power too strongly. If you become unmanageable, I shall be forced to dispense with your life. You understand?"

"When you make it that clear, the point isn't too hard to get," Doc told him.

"Good."

"Any signs of the other parties?"

"Who?"

"The outfit which scared you into leaving New York," Doc told him. "You disposed of two of them. It wasn't a complete victory, though. Others are left."

Jones glowered. "What can they do?"

"There are other airplanes," Doc said. "Some faster than this one. They know where you're heading. I'd say there could be trouble."

Jones was frightened, and did not cover it well. "We are a small group, moving rapidly, and it is a large world. The chances are they will not intercept us."

"They'll know that, too," Doc told him. "They may think up a remedy."

"Bosh!"

Doc chuckled and said dryly, "You might use a little of that magic juice on your own knees."

Jones stalked off angrily.

They made the change of planes at Trinidad, at the airline's seaplane base a few miles down the coast from Port of Spain. They simply borrowed a plane. Doc was to fly it.

It went off nicely enough to scare Doc into a prolonged silence.

CHANGING course southwestward now, they climbed steadily and crossed the Venezuelan coast, topped the ridge of coastal mountains, with Caracas and La Guaira well to the west.

Jones came into the cockpit, asking, "You understand flying a course over the jungle?"

Doc nodded, then warned, "The Orinoco River basin isn't any playground. We're going to get out of range of radio navigational aids in no time at all. After that, I'll need very definite instructions about course."

Jones unfolded an aeronautical chart, puzzled over it for a time, then consulted a map of his own, one Doc hadn't seen before. This one, Doc noted, was hand-drawn on some kind of leather that was tanned to a remarkable whiteness. Jones indicated a spot. "That is our final destination."

Doc didn't imagine it was necessary to mask his interest. He saw the place was actually in Peru, well into the headwaters of a river called, on the chart, the Trahuaca, which fed into the Jurua, which in turn tracked more than a thousand miles to the Amazon, the junction of the Amazon and Jurua still being nearly three thousand miles from the sea. He didn't know too much about the country. Probably few

people did.

Doc ran a finger over the several hundred thousand square miles of jungle and mountains. "You have a lot of backyard."

"It is to our liking."

"You say there's a lake there?"

"Yes."

"How big? You chiseled a lot of airplane when you got this one. It needs room."

"There is ample water. A clear mile."

"What altitude?"

"Around nine thousand of your feet, I think," Jones replied, after mentally translating from whatever unit of measurement his race used.

"Not enough."

"No?"

"We might land on a mile at nine thousand feet altitude," Doc told him. "But getting this duck off would be another matter."

Jones told him with curt satisfaction, "You need not worry about getting off again. You are never going to leave, you know."

"There may be a difference of opinion about that," Doc suggested.

"Unfortunate for you, if there is."

Doc did some calculation. They had left New York in the evening, refueled at Miami near midnight, and it had been near noon when they began the negotiations for the present plane at Trinidad. The deal had seemed quick and smooth, but it had taken more than three hours. It was now ten past four, in fact, and Doc did some figuring on estimated time of arrival. About eighteen hundred miles remained. The ship, a twin-engine job, was slow, cruising about a hundred and sixty, if pushed a little. Say a hundred and forty. Figuring not too many bad breaks from the weather, that meant sometime after dawn tomorrow morning would be their arrival time. He checked fuel. Enough, with about five hours reserve. Fortunately, the plane was designed for long over-water hops, and carried ample tankage.

He settled back for a long grind.

Chapter IX

BUSH flying was an uneasy thing. Particularly after fourteen hours of it. There had been two fronts with thunderstorms, both rough ones. Seven hours of it had been on top of an overcast, with nothing but the instruments and repeated celestial checks for navigation. Twice they had got bearings on Peruvian broadcast radio stations with the loop, but these were not too dependable. Monk had been flying the last two hours.

"I'll take it," Doc told him. "I think we're getting near there."

“We should be getting someplace,” Monk muttered. “That left engine runs about twenty degrees hotter than it should. It's taken just about that many years off my life.”

“Send that fellow Jones up here,” Doc said. “Let's see if he recognizes anything.”

Jones sidled into the cockpit shortly. His fears—he was now carrying a fresh one, that they wouldn't find their destination—were raw and open on his face.

Doc asked, “See any landmarks?”

“The lake,” Jones snapped. “Look for the lake.”

“Do some looking yourself,” Doc told him. “What about those mountains? They're a better guide as we get lower.”

The mountains were more than a little hair-raising. They ran up sharply for thousands of feet, there was a good deal of snow cap—this was late spring down here—and the jungle growth was still considerable for that altitude.

Jones finally nudged Doc. He pointed at a mountain. “I think I know that one. It will lie to the north and west.”

“Ever been in or out of here by plane before?” Doc asked.

The blond man shook his head. “Only on foot. It is a long journey out. Five weeks, as you measure time.”

“All right. Keep your eye open for the lake.”

Fifteen minutes later, Jones yelled, pointed. “There!” he cried. “It is yonder.”

Doc re-set the trim tabs and throttles for descent. He had seen the lake. He didn't like it. It wasn't a lake at all, but a reservoir, and it lay in a chasm which must be three thousand feet of sheer stone to the west and not a lot less on the east.

“That's man-made,” he remarked.

Jones nodded. “For irrigation. Centuries ago. It has been a source of worry to us since the advent of the airplane. It is a conspicuous landmark.”

“You won't be bothered by sightseers,” Doc told him. “All right, we've got one go at it. I think the air will be spilling down the canyon at this time of the morning. Is that right?”

“The winds always blow down the canyon,” Jones assured him.

He was right. Doc came in from the south, actually had to throttle back and dive a little to get in close above the dam. The latter, he noted, was of stone blocks, and quite an impressive thing considering the primitive means probably used to build it.

He cleared the dam fifteen feet, already stalling, and let the ship settle. There was some gustiness. He watched the wingtips, wary of one getting down on him.

The hull touched, took quite a bounce. He steadied with some throttle, tried again. The second time they stayed down. When the ship lost speed, the cliff's were not a hundred feet from either wingtip.

Doc told Jones, "You just had one of the narrowest squeaks of your life. Next time, don't lie about the size of the lake. There isn't a good half mile of clear water."

Jones opened his mouth to answer, let it hang open in shock, and pointed at a frayed tear that appeared in the windshield. The pointing wasn't necessary. The bullet had announced itself amply in arriving.

"Hell, we're being shot at!" Monk yelled from the cabin.

Doc seized Jones' arm, shouted, "Which side of the lake do we land? Quick!"

From the tall, blond man's lips came a loud sound of breath that was not words, then he sank to the floor, turning a little as he dropped. The final disappointment had been too much for him. He had fainted.

Doc jerked open the cockpit door, said "Auca! What side?"

She spoke, was excited enough to get it out first in her own language, then pointed. "West," she said.

"But they're on that side. The bullets are coming from there."

"They're between my people and the lake. If you land on the other side, and unless you cross the dam, it is a journey of hours or days to the other side."

"How about swimming—"

"No! Once you feel the coldness of the water, you will understand. No man can swim in that."

Having seen Andean lakes before, Doc was not particularly surprised that the water should be cold. Icy, probably. He lunged back to the controls, hit hard the left rudder, which wouldn't do much good, and palmed open the right throttle, which would. The good wasn't enough, though. The wind coming down the canyon and trumpeting across the lake was harsh, and the big seaplane wouldn't tail into it.

The ship went, in a kind of limping surge, across the narrow arm of the lake, and, when Doc saw that it wasn't going to make it around, he cut the engines.

"Out. Unload. Fast," he called.

He kept moving, knocking open the bow hatch, climbing outside. He understood without really having to think about it that no bullets were now striking the ship, although the dark stone canyon walls were still quaking to gunsound. The reason—the cliff sides, overhanging, projecting, were for the moment a cover and concealment. Proof of that, he glanced up and saw an angry stitching of machine-gun slugs on the water aft of the elevators. Over the uproar, he could hear someone, probably a straw-boss on the other side, cursing the way things were progressing.

Ham Brooks scrambled out beside Doc, looked at the sheer basalt walls, and misplaced his Harvard accent for a moment. "Holy cow, we'll never be able to climb out of here!" he blurted.

The blond men were popping out of the cabin. Terror was over them like red ants, and they galloped out on the fragile wing surface in a way that made Doc wince. He seized one by the hair, shook him, yelled, "Your boss is unconscious inside. Bring him along!"

Incan words came out of the man like canvas tearing. Their lives were in danger; devil take the hindermost. That was the gist of his noise, if not the text of his words.

"Bring Jones, or whatever his name is," Doc said in a tone that made the other jump and dive back into the cabin.

“He should appreciate that,” Ham said. “And, brother, they don't handle a scare too well, do they?”

“Probably they've never had to,” Doc told him. “I think we can find shelter on the cliff. It's rugged.”

“It's going to be tough.”

“Very.”

“I got a small nip of cheering news,” Monk said. “You remember when they latched onto Ham and me and the girl in our car in New York? Well, we had a couple of satchels full of our usual equipment. They brought 'em along. I think maybe, with a little assistance from one of these blond guys, I can find them.”

“Do that,” Doc said with relief.

BY assistance, Monk had not meant anything placid. He reached out as a long blond man scrambled past, wrapped his large fingers around the fellow's windpipe, did some jerking and squeezing, and yelled questions.

A grenade, thrown high into the air by someone over and beyond an outjutting stone, climbed lazily and descended past them, hit the water, sank a while, turned the lake under them to fire and foam on a minor scale. Monk swore, skidded and fell headlong back into the cabin with the man he was manhandling. Out on the wing, a blond man cartwheeled into the dark, almost black, water, shrieked, and sank.

Doc hesitated. The man in the water obviously couldn't swim. It was an inconvenient time for a rescue. Actually, though, his code gave him no choice, and he said, “Get up into the rock. Work your way higher. And keep covered.” Then he ran out on the wing himself, balancing against the wild rocking. He spotted the drowning man, calculated the fellow's depth, and hit in a shallow dive.

Whoever had said the water was cold had made a ghastly understatement. The impact was terrific. It was like liquid ice. The breath was knocked out of his body; he had the impression it wouldn't return for an hour. But he got the unlucky man by the hair, and flailed madly to shore. Fortunately, the rock was snagged enough for him to climb out of the devilishly icy water almost, but not quite, as fast as he wanted to.

A cold shudder shook him all over. He knew he must be blue already. He stuffed the blond man into a rock niche where he could spout water and recover for himself, and began climbing.

Below, Monk yelled, “Doc! Catch!” The chemist had the equipment cases.

“Get them to Ham!” Doc shouted imperatively. His fingers were so stiffened by cold that he feared he might drop something.

Monk said, “Sure, sure.” He told Ham, “You drop these, butterfingers, and there'll be a small fracas.” But Ham caught them, first one case, then the other, and Doc began trying to breathe normally again.

Doc found Auca. She was pale, but otherwise remarkably all together.

“Will they be on top of the cliff?” he asked.

“I don't know,” she said. “Maybe. It depends on how much headway they have made against the city.”

“There's a siege?”

“There was even before I left,” she replied.

“We’ll try to get to the top.”

“I think that’s best.”

It was cold. They began to realize that. The chill came into them with brittle firmness, even through the excitement. Their breathing made quick wavering plumes of steam, and the sun, not yet high enough to slice into the canyon, had a high diamondlike brightness, without warmth.

The blond men, now that their feet were on home ground, began to rattle a little less. Four of them struggled upward with Jones. Two others watched warily, and now one raised a revolver and fired, sent a quick barking of six shots at someone he saw or imagined he saw.

Another grenade came looping high, but missed the plane by a considerable distance. The plane itself, engines dead, was caught and driven by the wind, swept away from the cliffside. Now the enemy saw the plane. About fifteen shots were fired into the craft before someone’s angry orders stopped that. The plane obviously was unoccupied, they realized.

“There is a way to the top over here,” Auca said.

By a way to the top, she meant a path. A scary, grim sort of path, designed for defense from above. The going never was secure, and mostly it was hair-raising. “This is an escape route to the lake,” Auca explained. “We are lucky to reach it.”

“Will we be challenged?” Doc asked.

She nodded. “We’re sure to be.”

Above them, there was a shout. Auca said excitedly, “Good! I know that voice. It is a relative of mine!” She lifted her own voice excitedly, calling out.

Gunfire had been coming in sprinkles. Now it increased. A man climbing above them suddenly put both arms above his head and fell, body and arms rigid, outward and down, narrowly missing them. The series of sounds his body made striking below was not pleasant.

“They’re across the lake with rifles!” Doc called. “Watch it!”

The path suddenly became a tunnel through solid stone, a tunnel never intended to accommodate more than a moderate-sized man. It progressed directly into the cliff, then upward. They scrambled into it hurriedly, one at a time.

Monk’s voice, sounding frightened and hollow in the barrel of stone, said, “For cripe’s sake! Push on me, somebody! I don’t think I’m going to make it!”

There were labored sounds, grunting, and Ham complained, “Stop swelling up!” Presently, however, they got Monk through the narrow point. Auca climbed up.

Monk said from above, “You’ll never make it through that crack, Doc!”

There seemed some logic in what he said, and Doc explored the dimensions of the passage gingerly. It had, he discovered, been designed so that a man could pass with more ease if he performed a series of twistings, properly timed, as he climbed. He went into it, and joined Monk, who said, “I don’t get that.

What'd you do, shrink yourself?"

They came out abruptly into a kind of cup, on the lip of which an enormous boulder was balanced, designed to be dumped into the recess so as to close the tunnel. Nearly a dozen grim-faced, fair-haired men stood about, and one came suddenly to Auca, embraced her, and spoke Incan that was too rapid for Doc to understand. The girl answered, then turned to Doc and said, "This is Ca, my cousin. He is an apprentice noble."

She called it Tulac instead of "noble," but it meant the same thing in the original Incan tongue, one who was being prepared for greatness.

Ca stepped forward. He had the leanness they all had, a somewhat colt-like face, a manner with no foolishness.

"You are Doc Savage?" he demanded in very fair English. "You have come to help us?"

"I didn't come. I was brought," Doc said.

Ca frowned, glanced at Jones, who was reviving in the arms of the two men who, somehow, had dragged and hauled him up the cliff route, and then Ca muttered, "It is confusing. We will speak of it fully later."

He turned and led the way. The men who were poised to dump the big stone into the socket that would close the tunnel remained where they were. One shouted down into the tunnel, got no answer, listened a while, and calmly selected an odd-looking thing made of a block of hardwood into which numerous thorns had been inserted, needle-sharp points outward. He gave the thorn points a quick brushing of some sticky stuff from a jar—Doc saw Monk had noted the jar seemed to be pure silver, and his eyes were popping—and dropped the fiendish little gadget down the tunnel. Doc could hear the snickering sound as it fell, bouncing off the tunnel walls. The stuff on the thorns, of course, would be poison. It was very effective defense, and Doc doubted there would be much enthusiasm about climbing the tunnel. And he wondered if the rest of the defenses were as secure.

They were. They followed a narrow ridge, literally a bridge with high sides and stone dropping off sheer a hundred or more feet on either side. At three successive points, there was clever engineering; key stones could be knocked out, and the whole path for many yards would skid off into space.

Ham Brooks, when they were across, looked back at Doc excitedly. "You notice the engineering work? It's not what I'd call primitive."

"A good piece of field artillery," Doc reminded him, "would make such stuff pretty futile."

Ca gave them a sharp look. "This was all built centuries ago, when the arrangement was effective."

"That doesn't improve its value now."

Ca shrugged. "There are some more modern arrangements."

Doc discovered what he meant. They entered a narrow channel in the stone, and this became a tunnel, now wide and high enough for upright walking. This proved to be a false entrance, merely a way through a ridge of stone, through a great fold of flinty material that at some time long ago had dropped off the face of a much greater cliff above them, leaving an amazing overhang. Once through, they turned to the right, on a path now. The path dipped into a stream and out of it and on, but each man, coming to the stream, turned to the left walking in shallow water. The water was not cold. It had a faintly perfumed quality.

Doc had expected the route to lead into some sort of cave the stream had carved in the cliff. It proved to be nothing of the sort. It was better than that. It was a secret door in the best secret-door-in-a-cliff tradition. Really an expert job. He jumped a couple of inches when a considerable square opening yawned where a moment ago there had seemed quite solid and untouched rock.

They passed inside, into a semi-darkness that seemed weird until it became apparent the interior got its extraordinary appearance from being luminized with some not-too-efficient type of luminous paint. There was not real light, but more properly a consciousness of surroundings. The air grew more pleasant; it became filled with the heavy odor of flowers.

After perhaps two hundred yards and two turns for defensive purposes, the route brought them out into the open, where lances of sunlight stood in their eyes like fire. Presently the blindness wore away.

“Look!” Monk blurted. “What do you know! Well, take away my breath away and call me deflated!”

Chapter X

IT was the unexpectedness of finding such a place that floored them. The arrival, the stone path, the elaborate tunneling, had prepared them for something, but not for this sort of thing. Not for a little picture-book civilization with a tiny city with castellated towers, an agriculture as precise as an estate garden, and the whole thing included in an area not much greater than an average Midwest farm, if one didn't count the straight-up-down character of the place.

Doc Savage, startled at such flowering verdance in the high, cold, fierce Andean climate, looked about for what had to be the only logical answer, hot springs. He began to see them, not one or two or a half dozen, but scores, and it was evident that the hot water was conducted by canals and ducts, furnishing both warmth and irrigation. The water steamed gently in the morning sunlight. It lent a soft humid quality to the air.

“What is the population?” Doc asked.

“It is kept,” Auca explained, “rigidly at the figure of two hundred.”

Doc frowned. “But this place has been here generations, probably centuries if the character of the stonework is to be believed. You mean the population isn't greater than that?”

The girl hesitated. “It is not allowed to become greater.” Then she shook her head nervously, said, “I think we're going to have trouble.”

Four blond men were advancing, preceded by a squad of ten perfectly ordinary looking Andean natives, thick and sturdy fellows with a preponderance of cheekbone and dark hair.

The reception committee, as was almost everyone else they saw during the next half hour, was armed with very modern automatic rifles. The rifles, with cartridge pouches, were the extent of modernity. Their attire was primitive and exotic to the extreme. Incan, Doc thought, but Incan the way a Hollywood director would create it for a spectacle picture of the extravaganza type. With the difference that this was clearly genuine.

He, along with Monk and Ham, found himself confronted by the rifle muzzles. The two equipment cases were taken from them.

The fellow known as Jones, still somewhat pale, conferred in a low voice with the new arrivals.

The dark-skinned Peruvians, Doc concluded, were workers, servants, or possibly slaves. He asked Auca about that, and she confirmed it. Slaves.

“Men who, either hunting or wandering, came upon this place,” she explained. “Once here, they were reduced to the status of slaves, made happy with their lot, and convinced they could never leave.”

“How long have they been here?”

“Varying times.” She indicated a wrinkled Indian. “That one came long before I was born, and when my father was young. He has been here forty years, I suppose.”

“A prisoner all that time?”

She hesitated again, then admitted, “You could call it that. Although not held with chains.”

“This power that is the possession of your select ruling class, it can do a thing like that?”

“With ease.”

Monk shuddered. “The whammy again. I was hoping we were getting away from that stuff.”

Jones shouted an order. The rifles were leveled at them again. Jones confronted Doc. “I am told you saved my life, and also the life of one of my men. That will make your lot easier. But it will not change things too much.”

“We’re still prisoners?”

“Exactly. You will march as directed.”

THE city—village, or pueblo, was more the name for it—had been designed with care, and evidently rebuilt a number of times through the centuries in order to achieve complete comfort in living. The structures were not separated; the whole was one great involved building, about two floors in height, the rooftops a series of interconnecting gardens in which flowers and shrubs grew heavily. The whole might present an innocent appearance of a jungle to passing planes, Doc decided. If aircraft ever ventured into this hair-lifting wilderness of stone.

The mountains flung up sheer and breathless on all sides of the cuplike valley. Below, there was a small lake, not an acre in extent. The stone walls were, Doc decided, almost insurmountable on all sides, and it was likely that the entrance by which they had arrived, perhaps with another one or two similar, was the only practical means of exit and ingress.

They were within a hundred yards of the “city” when, high on the cliffs somewhere, a rifle whacked. A bullet struck, climbed away with a high violin whine. Instantly, the dark-skinned slave squad scattered, and for a few moments the pleasantly warm air shuddered with the noise of their guns.

No one seemed to have been hit in the exchange, but Doc noted that a blond man showed considerable terror.

The city was more conventional than he had expected in some ways, less so in others. The heating intrigued Doc; the warm water from the springs was evidently channeled through stone ducts in a form of radiant heating. At least, everything seemed exactly the right temperature for comfort, although there was no outward evidence of heating arrangements.

The floor mats were superbly woven. There was a more advanced art form than he had expected. These people had evidently achieved a full security, mental and physical, that gave their minds freedom for the mastery of the intricate skills that are called culture.

Monk slid pop-eyed glances at a series of yellow metal plaques and vessels, then said, "If that stuff is gold, and I've got a hunch it is, these guys aren't exactly paupers."

"They have something worth a lot more than gold," Doc reminded him.

"I guess you're right," Monk agreed. "But to a guy who is as broke as I am most of the time, that's a little hard to understand."

There was, beginning in the north end of the valley, another flurry of shots. These came almost entirely from the cliffs, however, and were only answered twice from the valley floor. One of the latter shots brought a thin distant scream of pain.

"How long has this been going on?" Doc asked Auca.

"Many weeks."

"I should think they would be getting low on ammunition in the valley," Doc said.

"They are," she replied grimly. "That is why the shots are only rarely answered."

THEY did not get bad treatment. Just firm. They were locked up, and the place of confinement was the equivalent of the local jail, although the fact was slow dawning on them, then hardly credible. Monk covered it when he said, "Calaboose, heck! This is more like a Swiss resort villa!" It was, too; they had a vista of the mountains, a bit on the wall-a-fly-couldn't-climb side, but impressive; there were gardens, flowers, close by. Still closer was a moat with water too hot to swim in, and walls too steep to climb.

"You're a prisoner, too?" Doc asked Auca.

She nodded and reminded him that nothing had changed in her status since leaving New York. She had been a prisoner throughout.

"There will be a sitting of the nobles, those who have survived," she said. "I think it will be soon."

"What will they do?"

She shrugged. "I do not know. I am uneasy. Normally, it would be simple, a sentence to perpetual slavery. But now, with all this violence, I do not know."

Ham Brooks suggested, "But Doc saved the neck of that guy Jones. I mean, if they'd left him in the plane, the way they were doing when they were frightened, it would have been the finish of him. That rates a little gratitude. Jones is a big shot here."

Auca became uncomfortable. "Gratitude does not fit in with our philosophy, I am afraid."

"The heck it doesn't! How come?"

She pondered, then said, "I do not know that I can explain it. But gratitude for a good deed performed is payment for nothing, because the doer of the deed did it, not out of any real compulsion to sacrifice, but for the satisfaction of doing a good deed. In other words, there is a payment in satisfaction to the doer of

a good deed, and that is enough.”

“That,” Doc said, “is a cold-blooded philosophy.”

“Not by the standards here.”

“The standards here, somehow, don't appeal to me,” Doc told her. “What are some others?”

“I don't know what you mean.”

“Those slaves who were doing the only real fighting I saw done,” Doc said. “They're fellows who were unlucky enough to stumble on this place, and they were forced to stay.”

“Well, yes,” Auca replied uncomfortably. “But the compulsion was not physical. There was no bodily pain.”

Doc smiled thinly. “They were kept from returning to their families, to the world they knew, weren't they? It seems to me that would cause some mental pain, which is a lot worse than a physical wound nine-tenths of the time.”

Auca winced. She did not say anything.

From the cliffs that rimmed the valley, there was another flurry of shots. This time, there was no answer from the valley floor.

Doc Savage began to question Auca quietly about the extrasensory power which her people had mastered, the thing to which Monk referred as a “whammy.” She answered freely enough, possibly feeling he would not grasp a great deal of what she told him, or not caring too much if he did.

Monk and Ham, listening, began to find the thing more believable. Particularly when Doc, for their benefit, posed the fact that the fund of human knowledge, which seems so limitless to the average man, really isn't all-inclusive. Omitted, for example, are such simple fundamentals as what makes a stone fall, why all living things grow old, what life is— Doc named half a dozen others, indicated the list was no doubt much greater than the list of the things that man had learned, and touched on the lack of real knowledge of extrasensory activity. Phenomena of the mind. Where an idea came from; the mysterious quality that makes one man an excellent salesman, and the next one a darn poor one. Nice appearance, personality, a pleasant voice? That wasn't the explanation. Many a star salesman was a gravel-voiced lout with the manners of a hippopotamus.

Now he began to ask Auca direct questions. Monk didn't understand at first why Doc went back to the origin of the “whammy,” back in the historical picture—about seven hundred years ago, apparently—when the first blond man, who was probably not a blond man, had come up with the weird ability to wield a steel-band influence over his associates. Then, abruptly, Monk understood why Doc had done that. The discovery had been an accident. A man, a primitive Incan, a profound thinker probably, had discovered the secret. He had, additionally, understood something of the process, which made it a great deal different.

Doc told Ham Brooks, “You see the difference? Many a man in history has stumbled on the secret of influence to some degree—Genghis Khan, Mohammed and many religious leaders. Most of those men gained their place by connivance and violence, but it's hard to deny they had a mysterious quality of power. But the difference is that they probably didn't know what they had, only thought they were great men, and had no idea how to develop and pass along to others the use of their accidental possession. This fellow here in the Andes, seven hundred years ago, was luckier than the others. He began to grasp

how it was done.”

Doc turned to Auca and asked her how the original discoverer had developed his discovery. By the obvious method, Auca told him; the man gathered a little band of fellow intellectuals and friends, and they took to the hills.

“The 'power' has gone through many stages of evolution,” Auca explained. “At first, it was the ambition of the holders to rule all men. They became kings of the Incan nation, of peoples as far north as Mexico and as far south as Patagonia. Their greatness existed two centuries or more, then the Spanish came. The Spanish had guns. They shot many of the nobles before the power could be made to work. You see, it had not been developed to where it is now, to make it effective required several hours, sometimes a number of days, of close association.

“The nobles retired to the higher mountains, and eventually this place was established as ideal for a sanctuary,” she explained.

“And this 'power' has been made more effective?” Doc asked.

“Oh, yes. Much more.” She smiled without much humor. “You have felt the effects.”

“How is it done?” Doc asked.

She shook her head. “I am bound not to tell you, even if it were possible, which it would not be. The matter is involved. You would have to know the old Incan tongue, not only the general meaning of the words but their finer tonings, and also many special words that apply only to the science. If you knew all that, I might not be able to transfer the power to you, but it is probable one of the nobles experienced in teaching it could do so—”

“Visitors!” Monk warned abruptly.

Dark Indian slaves came in, armed with rifles. The blond man who followed them spoke curtly to Auca, in the old Incan tongue.

“Mr. Savage understands the language,” she said coldly to the man.

The fellow swung. “Good. I am one here who does not speak several languages. I have seen no point in learning them.”

One of the old guard, Doc thought. The man was more stocky than the others had been, although he was still thin, and his elongated block of a face had all the personality of a stone.

“The council awaits,” he told Doc.

Chapter XI

FOLLOWING the unpleasant man, and trailed closely by the swarthy guards, Doc noticed—and was fully impressed for the first time—the oddness of dress here. It was not fully traditional Incan, which had made considerable use of robes woven from rare bird feathers for ceremonial occasions, but it certainly wasn't what one would find anywhere else. The footgear was a stout shoe affair rather than a sandal,

suitable to the rocky going, but clumsy looking. There were shin guards covering the knees also, worn only by the swarthy guards, and short skirt affairs of cloth, no two of which seemed to have the same color pattern. Topping this were capes, affairs which could be draped so that they were no longer than waistcoats, or worn full-length swinging to the knees. These were leather, embroidered, and decorated in some cases with exquisite spangling of what seemed to be pure gold and silver. There were a few jewels, all semi-precious, flashy but not particularly valuable in the outer world. The slaves all had crock haircuts, the hair was simply cut off at the ear level, with bangs a little above the eyebrows. The blond men all had rather modernistic crew haircuts. The effect was bizarre, and Doc felt some surprise that it had not affected him as so before.

They came presently to a long room with an arched ceiling—neither the Incans nor the Mayans in the height of their pre-Inquisition civilization had used the arch to any extent—in which the council was in session.

Doc looked over the council, and was not encouraged. There were nine. Their ages varied between twenty-five and eighty, he imagined. Jones was there, and did not meet Doc's eye.

There was more gold and silver ornamentation in this room, but Doc noticed particularly that it was not displayed with an ostentatious effect of treasure. Rather, it was used for effective artistry, in surprisingly good taste. But there was enough of it that Monk, probably thinking of his perpetually strapped financial condition, became a little pale.

An old nobleman stood immediately. He was the oldest, the patriarch, the leader. A well-preserved old man, he had a leathery tanned face, a full head of the characteristic light-colored hair, and a coldly matter-of-fact manner. And bad news.

“It was not our wish that you be involved in this,” he told Doc Savage. “However, you are here.” He scowled at Doc, added, “Is it your idea that you came here to save us from our enemy?”

“You're under a misapprehension, old one,” Doc told him. “I was brought here by force.”

“You would have come anyway.”

“That's beside the point.”

The old man shrugged. “You are here. You have a choice. You can destroy our enemy. Or you can die.”

That was all. He turned and walked out. The others of the council, after a respectful interval, followed the old man. Except Jones, who remained.

Jones looked at Doc a bit uncomfortably. “It was my word that gave you the chance to live. I am not ungrateful, without being proud of the feeling, to you for saving my life.”

Doc said, “They didn't take long to outline the deal.”

“Was there need for many words?”

“I guess not,” Doc said. “What am I supposed to do? If I go after the other outfit, which I intended to do anyway, I might add, I may need some coöperation.”

“Outline your plan,” Jones told him. “The council will pass on it.”

Doc looked directly at the man and said, “That doesn't impress me.”

“Why not?”

“Because your council, like a lot of intellectuals, hasn't the gumption of an idiot in a practical matter,” Doc advised him. “And to a man, you're scared stiff.”

Jones flushed. “Has anyone said we are not afraid?” He stalked out.

“At least,” Ham Brooks said thoughtfully, “they lay the cards on the table. How do they expect us to accomplish anything, if we are prisoners? Or are we prisoners?”

Doc said they might as well see about that. He led the way out of the council room, and immediately they were surrounded by a dozen swarthy Indians, armed. The latter did not interfere with their movements, merely followed them through every move.

Doc took a short walk, keeping under cover. Twice smatterings of gunfire came from the cliff rim, and bullets made a considerable orchestration as they ricocheted.

The basin, he concluded, was about as he had first imagined. The walls too sheer to be negotiated. He asked one of the slaves how many means of egress or entrance there were, but the swarthy man, instead of answering, sent for one of the first men.

“There are three routes,” the latter explained. “One, you saw as you entered. The other is similar, but at the other end of the valley. The third, a less practical route, is a pathway up the cliffs. It is blocked at two points, and carefully watched.”

“Do these fellows on the cliffs know about the third path?” Doc demanded.

“We are not sure. They have not tried to use it, however.”

“Thank you,” Doc said. He stretched out on the grass in the shade of a tree—it was now warm enough to do that comfortably—and added, “I'm going to stay here a while and study those cliffs. The rest of you go back to the city.”

“A guard must remain with you,” the blond man said sharply.

“Oh, all right.”

Doc did look at the cliffs for a while. They looked like the sides of the Grand Canyon would look, if the sides of the Grand Canyon were a little more straight up and down. He hadn't remained here to look at them, though. He said to the guard, “How long have you been here?”

The guard was an old Peruvian Indian with the face of a St. Bernard. “A long time,” he said, in Incan. “I am not supposed to talk to you.”

Doc thought of the little green stone. He still had it. It was fastened to his left armpit with a bit of adhesive tape. He yawned and stretched and rubbed himself, and pretty soon he had the stone palmed.

“I mean no harm,” he said. He laid his hand on the guard's arm, the hand a closed fist, the stone palmed in it. “I was just curious.”

He watched for the nearness of the green stone to change the old guard. It did change the fellow. The man relaxed, and said, “I am sorry you are here. It is unlucky for you.” Then he seemed puzzled, and added, “You make me feel different. Things are different.” He pondered about the difference, trying to

analyze it, and finally summed it up with another, "Things are different."

"You like it here?" Doc asked.

"I would like it better back in my village," the old man said longingly. "There in my village—they would have forgotten me now, it has been a long time, but I would still like it better."

"Why don't you go back?"

"That is impossible."

"Why is it impossible?" Doc asked.

That stumped the old Peruvian wanderer who had found this weird spot by chance, and been trapped there. "It is just impossible. It cannot be explained," he said.

Doc got up suddenly. He was pale.

"YOU look," said Monk Mayfair, when Doc Savage joined them in the guard-infested quarters in the city, "like you had a bad case of the jitters."

"I have," Doc said. "I think we'd better wind this thing up. But fast. I don't like any part of it."

"I'm not too delighted myself," Monk told him. "But isn't there a little drawback? Meaning how? Those guys up there on the cliffs—these Indians here seem to think there's thirty or more of them, all armed like bandits—they're no push-over."

"Then why push at them?"

"Eh?"

"Let's," Doc suggested, after glancing about to make sure that they were not overheard, "work on the source."

"You mean those guys in the valley?"

"Why not? Once we control them, we have what the others want, and I think we can handle them."

"If it means some action," Monk said. "I'm all for it."

"It will."

"When do we start?"

"Right now," Doc said, and approached one of the guards and demanded to see the council, or at least some member of the council.

The brick-headed man presently appeared, scowling, and demanded, "You have a plan of action against the enemy?"

"We sure have," Doc told him. "But before we can put it in operation, we've got to have those two equipment cases which were brought in the plane from New York. Ask what's-his-name, Jones, about them. He'll know. Bring them here."

The man seemed puzzled. "For one who is supposed to have been put under our power, you are an obstreperous fellow. Bring you the cases! What fools do you take us for?"

"Fetch them," Doc ordered, "or we can't accomplish a thing."

The man got a cunning look. "There is a weapon in the cases?"

"A very effective weapon."

"We shall examine it," the man advised with the air of a man who wondered if he hadn't found a solution for everyone's troubles. "Then we will decide whether you get it or not."

Doc assumed a mixture of indignation and apprehension. "If those cases are opened," he shouted, "I demand that it be in the presence of the entire council."

"You do not trust me? Is that it?"

"Exactly. I don't want you stealing the whole thing and grabbing the credit," Doc yelled, loudly enough that most of the neighborhood probably heard.

The stony-faced man scowled. "The council will examine the cases first," he said, and stamped out.

Monk grinned uneasily. "They open the cases, without knowing the trick way of doing it, and the whole roomful gets a load of that anaesthetic gas. But what does that buy us?" Monk indicated the swarthy guards. "These guys aren't going to let us take over."

Doc displayed the small green stone.

"Oh!" Monk said.

WHILE they were waiting—there would probably be a tell-tale uproar when the council was gassed—Doc Savage asked Auca for some information about the green stones that were a defensive mechanism against the "power" influence.

The substance of what she told them would not, back in New York, have been believable. It was quite a lump here. The gist was that Doc was making a natural error in assuming the influence power was entirely intangible. Nothing, correctly speaking, was intangible; such ethereal substances as light, radio waves, heat, were all tangible and real, if reduced to a substance, an embodiment. So was thought. Thought might be a bio-electrical-chemical performance of the human brain and nerves, but it was certainly real enough once one learned how to observe the reality. Men didn't know germs existed until science perfected microscopes and other means of detecting their presence. The same applied to thought. Germs could be grown in culture media; some germs were the enemies of other germs. The "power" could be developed in a culture medium, in this case the peculiar green stone, but in the medium, it served as a counteracting force.

"Wait a minute!" Doc explained. "Those green stones—are they peculiar to one spot? I mean, did the original discoverer of this rather grim secret happen onto it because of finding one of those stones somewhere?"

Auca nodded. "Yes, it was that way," she said. "I did not tell you the legend of the beginning. It is said that a great green flame came from the sky, and struck near the First One, and he found the green stone. It was a larger one, which in time separated into smaller pieces. And it was from this that he got his

understanding.”

“Meteor,” Monk muttered.

“Hell!” Ham said disgustedly. “Let's keep this from getting any crazier.”

From the west end of the city, an excited shout arose. “They opened one of the cases,” Doc said. “Let's get going.” He approached two of the guards, calmly presented them with the green stone, asking them to examine it. They did so. “Pass it on,” Doc said. “Let every man handle it. Do so at once.”

FIVE minutes later, they were marching through the city with a squad of vaguely confused Indians who were suddenly convinced that it wasn't impossible to leave this place after all.

They found a scene of confusion in the council hall. The nobles who had curtly sat in judgment were scattered over the premises, either where they had fallen or where they had been dragged by excited would-be rescuers. About a dozen of the latter had also succumbed. No one was actually inside the council hall now. But plenty were outside, convinced it was sure death to step through the door.

Doc got quite an effect when, knowing the gas had dissipated by now, he sauntered into the long arched hall.

“Collect the green stones wherever you can find them,” he directed. “Each of you keep one for yourself, then distribute the others among the Indians.”

Monk said, “You want me to round up the rest of the Indians?”

“As quickly as possible.”

Suddenly upset, Auca said, “Call in the guards and leave the cliffs undefended? You can't do that.”

“The cliffs don't need defending in daylight,” Doc assured her. “A mountain goat couldn't descend them, and if he could, he'd be seen immediately. These Indians look to me like fighting men. I want them collected, freed of this hold you people have had on them, and I think we'll have a gang who can lick the socks off those people on the outside.”

Auca looked injured. “My people can fight.”

“With their minds, with this power they've used for a crutch for centuries,” Doc told her. “But that stuff isn't any good against the gang outside. You told me yourself they've got a few of the green stones. What those fellows aren't expecting is two-fisted violence. That's what we're going to give them.”

“With the Indians?”

“With the Indians. We'll be in there, too,” Doc said. “Incidentally, the Indians will fight, don't make any mistake. They've got a cause. Freedom. The best cause man can have.”

Auca paled. “You are going to destroy our way of life!”

“I don't like slavery,” Doc said. “You've got something in this power you possess. It should be used to the end of righteousness, not to perpetuate a few people in an isolated and narrow-minded way of life.”

Monk was distributing the remaining green stones to the Indians. “I want them rocks back, guys,” Monk told the swarthy fellows. “But not until you've cleaned up those cookies outside, and we're ready to

disband.”

The Indians grinned.

“Monk has a way with those fellows,” Doc remarked.

“He should have,” Ham said. “He's uglier than any one of them individually.” Then Ham added grudgingly, “And he could probably lick half of the crew at once.”

Chapter XII

THE attack made by the party of Indians under Doc Savage's command was probably typical. It had a little of Doc's personal touch, but that was all.

Doc chose to try for the plane. The ship would be a great convenience getting out of here, and the lookouts had told him the craft hadn't been destroyed. Instead, it had been taken in charge when the wind carried it down near the dam, and tied up. The fuselage, the part of it that served as a hull, evidently hadn't been punctured by bullets, or had been repaired. The ship was still afloat.

Doc, lying in the darkness and examining a campfire, was amazed at the ease with which the raid had been prepared. Not that the besiegers were careless. They had simply overlooked the fact that the valley Indians knew this country perfectly, and could stage an attack with ease, once they had the enthusiasm for it, and were free of the fears of the valley rulers.

Reaching out, Doc touched the stubby dark Peruvian at his elbow. “How many are prepared?” he asked.

“There will be the call of a wild bird, twice repeated,” the Indian said. He chuckled. “It is a bird that never repeats its call immediately. The devils yonder will know that, probably.”

“No more killing than necessary,” Doc warned.

The Indian grunted. “They have been trying to murder us for weeks,” he muttered.

Doc let it ride. He lifted his head for another look at the campfire. The fire was a piece of recklessness, but the Andean cold had the bite of tiny animals, and they probably figured there would be no counter-attack from the valley. There never had been.

There were, Doc had concluded, about seven men there at the fire and near the plane. He had six Indians. The odds were fairly even.

Monk and Ham were with other parties at other spots around the valley. The Indians, it developed, had known pretty much where the enemy was camped. The latter were using caves in the rocky cliffs for warmth, and it should not be too difficult to waylay them.

From far away somewhere, a birdcall. The Peruvian touched Doc's arm, whispered, “All is ready.”

“Let's go,” Doc said.

He drew back his arm and let fly with an explosive grenade from the equipment case, heaving it over the heads of the men by the fire, so that it landed beyond them, but close enough to be uncomfortable.

The little pellet let loose a bluish sheet of flame, almost like a great electric spark. The blast seemed to move the earth downward a foot or so. Not a man around the fire kept his feet.

Following the blast sound, mixing with it, cascading into a rumbling bedlam, other grenades let loose in scattered spots. The peaks and cliffs hurled back refractions of the uproar; stones jarred loose, tumbled and knocked larger boulders into motion.

Doc, going for the fire—the blast force had been enough to scatter the charred wood and a cloud of sparks was drifting—saw the Indians rush in. Confusion, yells, shots.

Getting into it himself, he struck a man's jaw, felt it change shape slightly. He picked up the howling victim bodily, hurled him against a second man. The latter stumbled, wheeled, fired. Doc felt the hot burn of the bullet on his left arm as he came in under the gun, struck it up, twisted it away from the holder and clubbed the man down.

Wary of being shot at again, he lunged away from the firelight. He tried his left arm. It functioned, but not just right, so he knew the bullet wound was more than a scratch. A man stepped out of the night, aimed a revolver at him deliberately. Then the man leaned forward, tipped the revolver muzzle down; a little stream of crimson came out of the man's forehead and dripped from the end of his nose. He stood there, leaning, longer than he should have, before he fell. The old Peruvian came into the firelight grinning. There was no humor at all in the grin. The Indian looked about.

It was now silent around the fire.

It was not silent in the mountains. But presently it was.

THAT was Thursday night, and Saturday morning the first seaplane came in and landed on the lake. The next two ships to arrive were helicopters, and they landed in the valley.

The passengers, two bishops, a representative of the Peruvian president, a three-man committee from the United Nations, two of the best-known psychiatrists in the hemisphere, and a few others of similar stature, listened to what had happened.

They didn't quite believe it.

Doc singled out a psychiatrist, Ellenberger, who seemed most skeptical. "The eleven blond men, those comprising the council, who are the sole possessors of the secret, are confined in that room yonder," Doc said. "Care to go in and talk to them? They speak English, with one or two exceptions."

Ellenberger laughed. "You think they'll hypnotize me, too, do you?"

"It isn't hypnotism."

"Then they won't be able to do a damned thing to me!" the man snapped.

He went into the room, came out half an hour later, and tried to get the prisoners freed. He became violent about it, tried to snatch a gun, and was seized and bound. Doc gave him one of the small green stones. They watched Ellenberger throw off the effects of what had been done to him.

"My God!" Ellenberger muttered. "I'm terrified! I was never so frightened in my life! How do they do it?"

"Frankly, I don't know yet," Doc told him. "But I think we can find out. It may take a long time. Years."

"I'll give years of my life to master that thing," Ellenberger blurted. "Why, that thing could remake mankind. It's greater than atomic power. It's— Why, it's—" He was so affected he ended up by

croaking meaninglessly.

“Sit down,” Doc said. “I have a plan to outline.”

HALF an hour later, Ham Brooks found Monk sprawled on a bench, talking to Auca. The sunlight splintered brightly against the gaudy flowers and the air was soft. Monk grinned asking, “How goes the argument about dividing the spoils?”

“Doc will make his point,” Ham said. “His idea is to set up an international commission, non-political, to take charge of the thing. The commission to include representatives of all religious bodies, primarily. Doc's argument there being that religion has been the backbone of human progress through the centuries.”

“I think he's got something.”

“So do I,” Ham said.

Monk eyed him thoughtfully. “You must be rattled. You agree with me.”

Ham shook his head. “I'm not that rattled, you missing link.”

Auca studied the pair of them. She was lovely, and her smile matched the gay sunlight. “You two should be gentle with each other, as friends should be,” she said lightly. “I think I could cause that. I have the ability to use the whammy, as Mr. Mayfair keeps calling it. I could put it on you.”

“Nothing doing!” Monk said in alarm. “I've had a low opinion of Ham for years. I'd sure hate to lose it.”

Ham was about equally alarmed. “That goes for me, too.” He grinned uneasily. “Try it on Doc, or somebody. Never mind us.”

Monk laughed. “Yeah, try it on Doc,” he told Auca. “That should be interesting.”

She looked at them intently. “Did you think I hadn't thought of that?”

Monk and Ham exchanged blank looks. Then grins. They sat down and began telling Auca what a fine idea it would be to work on Doc. She didn't put up much argument.

THE END