

COLD DEATH

A Doc Savage Adventure By Kenneth Robeson

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Chapter 1. HAND IN A CROWD

DOC SAVAGE knew a hand had touched his pocket. There was a swift, wraith-like movement of fingers. Then the hand was gone.

The touch was fleeting enough, but Doc Savage knew it had not been for the purpose of robbery.

The fingers had not been explorative. They had merely deposited something in Doc's pocket.

Doc Savage did not pause. Nor did he make any effort to apprehend the man who had touched him. It would have been simple to have laid hands upon him, corded bronze hands; to have trapped him.

Doc knew the man was not a thief. He was aware nothing had been removed. Doc pressed the back of a hand on the outside of the pocket and felt a square white card.

The man who had placed it there had slipped aside in the crowd. No doubt, he believed he had succeeded in delivering his message without being detected. If he had known Doc Savage better he would have known this to be an impossible feat.

It was Doc's principle to avoid public encounter unless the circumstance was compelling. He contented himself with a second's glimpse of the man who had touched him. He saw the back of a head. The hair was scraggly, unshorn. This strung from under the frayed brim of a disreputable hat. The neck was scrawny. Little more than a bony upper spine with skin wrapped around it.

Doc Savage removed the card from his pocket. He did not slacken his speed. He had been moving through the Wall Street crowd with the easy movement of a jungle animal. Though there was a press on the sidewalk, it being five o'clock, it was amazing how this bronze-skinned man avoided contact with others.

Doc was careful to hold the card by its edges. The hands of the scraggly man had been bare. There should be fingerprints.

Doc cupped the card. His eyes flicked across it. Doc's eyes were like flaky gold with stirring whirlwinds in their depths. The whirlwinds seemed to move more rapidly now.

For a few seconds there was a haunting, trilling note. Those who might have been watching the smooth, bronze face of Doc would have detected no movement of his lips. There were many thus watching, for the man of bronze was a marked figure.

The trilling seemed to emanate from all of his huge, symmetrical body. It was a sound of which Doc himself was hardly conscious. It might presage danger, or that the man of bronze was upon the eve of a discovery.

The message on the card in his hand was brief, but explicit:

TO CLARK SAVAGE, JR:—IF YOU WOULD PREVENT DEATH, DANGER TO THOUSANDS, CALL UNION 0-1214 TO-NIGHT AT EIGHT.

The words had been printed with a leaky pen. There was no signature. But the back of a man's head was all the signature Doc would need. Intuitively, he knew he would see the man again. Perhaps many times.

DOC SAVAGE continued through the Wall Street crowd. Now he moved with greater speed, but still he touched no one.

The man of bronze had an errand in Wall Street. He completed his brief business before returning to his headquarters. But his mind was busy with the problem the card in his pocket might represent. Because of his amazing adventures, his world-wide assistance to those in trouble and his punishment of crooks, Doc Savage was always besieged with appeals. A few merited his attention. And he was likewise a target for many who feared him. Even this small card in his pocket might be the bait for a trap.

When he had returned to his laboratory, Doc set about reading what he considered vastly more important than the mere printed words on the white card. This laboratory, on the eighty-sixth floor of Manhattan's most impressive skyscraper, was most amazing in its equipment.

Not even the latest equipment of the police or the Federal department of justice equaled the means here for scientific investigation. In addition, as the man of bronze had entered, the doors of smooth, chrome steel closed him in. No locks appeared on these doors. But their electroscopic fastenings made them possible of opening only to Doc and his five companions in adventure.

Doc first dusted the card bearing the mysterious message. The distinct imprints of a thumb and forefinger appeared. The card was a trifle grimy. The hand delivering it had been that of a man who worked. The soiled spots had a brownish tinge.

The bronze man dropped a colorless liquid upon these spots. The reagent brought out a definite greenish color.

For the time, Doc made no further tests. He had arrived at one conclusion which was significant. The hands placing the card in his pocket had been those of a working chemist.

THE bronze man placed the card carefully in a glass case. The voice of a man was speaking from the library adjoining the laboratory. It was fretful and complaining.

"You danged shyster! I waited where you said, but you didn't show up! Dag-gonit, you won't get the chance to stand me up again!"

The speaker was Lieutenant Colonel Andrew Blodgett Mayfair. His voice was shrill and childlike. But his appearance was that of an ungainly ape covered with reddish-brown hair. Because of this, he was known as "Monk." He was one of the world's leading industrial chemists.

Monk had been speaking into the telephone. The man he had called a shyster was Brigadier General Theodore Marley Brooks, otherwise known as "Ham." He was the legal luminary of Doc Savage's group. Hearing Monk's voice, Doc Savage removed the card from the glass case. He came into the library and laid the card on the table before Monk.

"I received this about three hours ago," Doc stated. "Those greenish spots were brown."

Monk touched the edge of the card.

"The No. 7 reagent brought out the green."

Then he named a little-known chemical which had an acid reaction.

"That is correct, Monk," the bronze man approved. "The card was placed in my pocket."

A huge man with a melancholy face peered at the card and frowned solemnly. He was Colonel John Renwick, the engineer of the group. The hand "Renny" extended toward the card lacked little being the size of a ham. He read the words gloomily.

"Union Exchange, huh?"

The third man in the library said, "That's over in Jersey. And every time we have business with Jersey there is trouble."

This man had an unhealthy pallor. He was small, compared to the others. But many larger men had been sharply surprised by his strength and fighting ability.

He was Major Thomas J. Roberts, electrical wizard. His appearance had given him the name of "Long Tom."

AS Long Tom finished speaking, a clock started chiming with musical notes.

Doc Savage crossed to the desk and picked up the telephone. The clock chimes touched the final stroke of eight o'clock with a harmonious lingering.

"Union 0-1214," said Doc, when he had the New Jersey connection.

A voice started to speak from the other end.

Without preliminaries, the voice said. "You're Doc Sav—"

Then it seemed as if the receiver had exploded. The voice was sliced off. No reverberation followed. There was no lingering roll of sound, such as could have been expected if the instrument had remained even for a few seconds in service.

"That was a powerful blast," Doc said. "The phone was torn out. The man who tried to talk was an old man."

Doc didn't explain further. He didn't waste more time in speech. He had thumbed the receiver bar. Two minutes later, he was given a trace-back on the Jersey call.

"Blind number," he said to the others. "It's off the Newark-Trenton highway in a marshy strip."

Doc moved ahead through the outer door. His three companions paused only to make a swift collection of a few special devices they might need. The bronze man did not seem hurried, but the

others were compelled to move fast.

Doc's special elevator dropped with the speed of a rocket. It slowed with a cushiony rebound, when it reached the bronze man's private garage in the basement. Doc's long low car, with its extra-powerful motor under the long hood and its windows of bulletproof glass set in armor steel, glided toward the Holland Tunnel.

Chapter 2. THE HOUSE IN THE MARSH

SHORTLY before the eight o'clock telephone call made by Doc Savage, a battered old roadster turned off a paved New Jersey highway. Headlight beams laid ghostly fingers across a foggy strip of marshland.

When he was perhaps a mile and a half from the main highway, the driver abruptly switched off the lights. He parked the little car in concealment of bushes beside a crooked lane.

Climbing from the car, the driver walked cautiously ahead. Dim lights made a blur in the fog. They indicated some habitation.

Close up, this might have been seen to be an old log house. It appeared to squat gloomily in the murky depths of the Jersey marsh. The bulk of its presence was marked only by faint illumination from an upper window and one slanting finger of dancing, vary-colored light emanating from what seemed a mere slit at ground level.

From the basement, or some underground chamber, came a low throbbing. A trained observer would have said delicate machinery of some sort was being operated. Apparently, there was but one outside watcher. And his figure was only a furtive shadow among other sinister shadows cast by this strange, penetrating light.

At times, the escaping light gave forth a rainbow glow.

A rutty, obscure road that was little more than a twisting trail through overgrowths of waving swamp grass apparently was the only traffic communication between the old house and the highway of civilization, some two miles distant.

Across the swamp a pair of telephone wires had been strung along available trees, most of them gaunt-limbed and dead.

In the upper story of the old house there was no movement. Except for the faint light at the one window, there was no evidence the structure was then occupied by a living person.

THE man from the roadster apparently feared something or some one within the old log house. As he walked, it might have been observed he was a vague, catlike figure. He kept to the tall marsh grass beside the road, pausing every few yards to listen intently.

In the swamp at a point off the road, some considerable distance from the old house, was a single glowing eye of fire. The man hissed an oath under his breath. He crossed the soggy, yielding ground with such quick lightness his feet seemed to leave no imprints.

Before he reached the spot, the red eye of fire winked out.

"Hunter maybe," the man murmured. "Well, he's picked a poor spot for a camp."

As if the possible presence of another human no longer interested him, the luminous-eyed man retraced his steps. He glanced at the radium hands of a wrist watch.

"The time is near," he mumbled, "if old Jackson hasn't been having hallucinations."

Picking out a slightly higher, dry spot some two hundred yards to one side of the house, the thin figure became a motionless part of the deeper marsh shadows. His thin lips continued to emit whispered words.

"The great Doc Savage will be calling at eight o'clock, or old Jackson has guessed him wrong."

Again he glanced at his watch. It lacked five minutes to eight o'clock. There was no doubt but he had some objective which was closely related with the phone call Doc Savage had been requested to make from Manhattan.

"It won't work out," he muttered suddenly through gritted teeth. "And Doc Savage saw me. I could feel him looking at the back of my head. I never really touched him, but somehow I believe he knew I was there."

The radium hands of the wrist watch showed two minutes to eight o'clock. To the watcher's apparently raw-nerved senses, the lonely marsh had become alive with voices. His teeth chewed nervously at his lower lip.

He glanced at a dead-armed tree. It seemed almost as if he were waiting to read the message that might go out over the wires he knew were strung there. The thin threads of communication between this eerie desolation and the teeming modern heart of Manhattan.

One minute to eight o'clock. The spear of multi-colored light piercing the slit of the underground window of the squatting old house winked out. The wind moaned a little, as if the withdrawal of the rainbow gleam were a signal.

The catlike man became rigid. He glanced over his shoulder. The red eyes of fire deeper in the marsh had not reappeared. Perhaps this unexpected camper was no longer in the swamp.

Eight o'clock.

From the heart of the marsh, from no definite direction, came a low whirring sound, vicious as the warning of a poisonous rattler.

The cat-eyed watcher had reared to his feet. He had turned and was running away. The soggy ground of the swamp rocked and swayed. The earth heaved with a convulsive, shuddering blast.

THE explosion started at the place of the old house. A knife of giant flame shot upward and moved with ripping effect across the marsh.

The fleeing man was twice hurled from his feet. Each time, his face and clothing were befouled by the ooze in which he fell.

The man staggered at last to the side road. The slicing destruction that had seemed almost to be racing with him, had died as swiftly as it had come. The blast had been accompanied by an expanding phosphorescent glowing of steely blue light.

As the fugitive from his own apparent terror reached the spot where he had concealed his roadster, darkness again had enwrapped the silence that was of itself, by contrast, terrific. Over all of the marsh, the air had taken on an icy chill.

The dank, sulphuric odor of death permeated the country for many miles. Shuddering, the man leaped into the roadster. He glanced only once at the place where the old log house had squatted evilly in the marsh.

Only blackness, emptiness was there. There was no light of any sort. Not even the deeper, bulking shadow that had been the house.

Something like hatred twisted the man's thin face. His lips slavered and his eyes burned. Then he turned the old roadster and sent it leaping away over the ruddy side road toward the main highway.

Chapter 3. THE CANAL OF DEATH

THE mysterious watcher had ample time to get far from the scene of the explosion before State police were aroused to investigate. The narrow lane to the old log house was some ten miles from the city of Newark.

Some time, therefore, elapsed before the tearing jolt of the blast had been definitely traced.

But cars of the State police were blocking the marsh side road when Doc Savage drove into it.

"Holy cow! What a job!" growled Renny. "Look, Doc! It's a canal, straight as if it was laid out with instruments and this was intended for a feed reservoir!"

Renny saw everything from an engineer's point of view.

"It does seem to have remarkable symmetry," replied the man of bronze. "It's the first explosion I ever came upon that seemed to have been done to a geometrical pattern."

"Howlin' calamities!" muttered squat Monk, his homely, apelike features showing puzzlement. "It's about the completest mess I ever bumped into!"

"Complete's the word, all right," assented Long Tom. "And it looks as if it wiped out some high-class electrical machinery. Look here, Doc!"

They were then beside a deep, rounded crater. It could be seen from a few remaining foundation stones imbedded in the earth that this had been the site of a house. But underneath it the ground had been scooped out as if by the swing of a giant shovel.

On three sides of the cavernous hole in the spot where the house had stood, the explosive force had apparently lifted directly upward. An ordinary powder blast, if of sufficient strength and buried deeply, could have done this.

But Doc was coming to some startling conclusions, as he glanced along the fourth side of the explosion crater. Instead of spreading in a mushroom burst, the blast had been definitely directional.

Passing up, for the moment, the smashed electrical equipment Long Tom had pointed out, Doc led the others away from the blast's place of origin. They saw the explosive force had moved laterally along the ground, cutting through the marsh by reason of the road having curved in a wide bend more than two miles in extent.

The great ditch that had been cut was as evenly grooved along its sagging banks as if a steam shovel had heaved out the soggy mud. Where the house had been, this canal was its exact width. As Doc and his companions made their way along the sucking marshland, the cut gradually narrowed.

They had proceeded about a fourth of a mile, when Renny grunted, "Doc, would you look at this!"

A man lay at the edge of the knifed-out ditch. The torso, head and arms were there. The legs were missing. The man had been sliced in half. It was as if a giant cleaver had suddenly descended.

A shotgun and a pack showed the victim had been a hunter. Doubtless, he had made his lonely camp, waiting for dawn and the first flight of fowl. Ashes of a dead fire were near by.

Doc examined the explosion cut more closely under his generator flashlight. The character of the clean incision in the soft earth and the phenomenon of the hunter's body having been neatly severed in the middle were supplying him with information.

LONG TOM said, "There's a busted electrical machine back there. Something must have gone up accidentally. But that would mean tremendous voltage. Giant generators would be needed to create the energy for a lightning blast like that. Unless—"

"Unless," said Doc, "the secret of cracking the atom has been coupled up with transmitted electromagnetic force, or something similar to that."

A short distance from the dead man, possibly a mile from the annihilated house, the canal cut petered out. It terminated in a rising indentation only a few inches wide and an inch or two deep. Doc had placed the warning message card in his pocket. Now he led the others rapidly toward the site of the greater explosion. In all that mass of scattered wreckage, the State police had passed up the thought of discovering fingerprints.

Doc produced his own outfit. He had noticed every detail of the wrecked electrical machine indicated by Long Tom. A polished copper ball had fallen to one side. With State police watching curiously, Doc dusted the gleaming surface.

The lines of a forefinger, then of a thumb, took form. Under a powerful glass, Doc studied the grimy message card, then the convolutions and whorls of the lines on the copper ball.

Returning the card to his pocket, he said, "One and the same man, a scraggly little fellow with the prehensile type fingers."

A State police sergeant stared at him.

"You're Doc Savage, aren't you?" he inquired.

"Yes."

"Wouldn't worry any more about those prints then," said the sergeant. "If he was in there, he isn't much use to anybody now. Come over here, Mr. Savage."

The man who had been in the house would neither be a menace nor a help to any one again. Only one foot remained, the leg severed roughly at the top of a high-laced boot such as a man might be wearing in the marshy ground.

Doc only glanced at it.

"No," he said, "this wasn't the man. It's some other person. I think this may be the one who was on the phone."

DOC'S final words were addressed in a low tone for his own companions only to hear. Doc was piecing together the scanty material he had.

Some one in the house in the marsh must have known he was under a sentence of death. At least he was aware of some menace hovering over him. This other man, he of the scraggly person, had been sent with a message.

That might be it, but Doc was not thoroughly satisfied. Perhaps the person, or persons, responsible for the gruesome tragedy might have a reason for bringing him to the scene. This thought stuck with him strongly.

He pondered the possibility of this having been a demonstration. The messenger might have intended to have him on the telephone when the blast was set off. He would be sure Doc Savage would go directly to the scene. Then his purpose had been fulfilled.

No more likely evidence appeared in the wide-flung jangle of house wreckage. The booted foot was all that told a man had been in the house. Doc led his men to his car.

DURING the investigation of the explosion, an automobile had been playing hide and seek with State police and other cars arriving at the scene of the great explosion. Several times, the automobile was swung into side roads as sirens screamed warnings that forces of the law were arriving.

At last, the police having passed, the elusive car came into the main highway and sped northward toward Newark.

A motorcycle patrolman who had remained watching the highway was hidden around a curve as the speeding auto flashed by. He immediately swung onto the concrete and gave chase.

The motorcycle forged abreast of the auto's rear fender. The driver of the car jammed his foot suddenly on his brakes. The auto swayed and rubber squealed. When it skidded, the motorcycle patrolman hadn't a chance.

The motorcycle catapulted into the air. It turned over three times. The policeman became only a limp bundle in the ditch.

The driver of the car glanced along the highway. No other lights were showing. The man talked rapidly for perhaps a minute. It was peculiar behavior, for he seemed making some sort of a speech. Then he climbed from the car. He kicked around in the loose soil a few yards from where the motor cop lay motionless. The driver then got back under the wheel and the car sped toward Newark.

By this time, some of the State police were returning from the scene of the explosion.

When Doc Savage and his men reached this spot, a State police car had just discovered the policeman in the ditch. The motor cop was beginning to revive. He had only been knocked out.

He was able to say it was a car of well-known make, that had wrecked him. The license plate had been smeared with mud.

Doc eased from his car.

Two other police cars stopped. Passing motorists halted their machines. Soon there was a small crowd around the motor cop. The man's face was badly slashed.

From the last of the civilian cars to stop, three men got out. None noticed the driver of this car turn off into a near-by side road. At this moment, the small group around the injured patrolman had frozen to silence.

From the wall of foggy darkness over the marsh beside the highway, floated a high-pitched voice. "Doc Savage beware! Do not seek more information! I cannot be overcome! I control the world's most terrible force of destruction! I will not brook interference! For I am-Var!" The mysterious voice ceased abruptly. "Holy cow!" grunted Renny. "What is it, Doc?"

DOC had scanned every foot of the near-by ground. It had been much trampled. The flashlight produced nothing. "We'll have a look along the edges of the marsh," advised Doc. "You might try kicking around a bit in the loose grass." Monk's short body with his gorilla arms trailing vanished in the fog. The chemist peered closely from the eyes deep-set in rolls of bristly gristle. "Dag-gone it!" he growled. "I did hear it!" He was not referring to the sepulchral tones coming from nowhere on the highway. Monk had heard another faint voice. It had sounded like a man's hoarse cry for help. Where any one needed help, there might be a fight. Monk pushed forward hopefully. Separated from his companions, Monk decided he would rather handle this alone than wait and miss it. Pushing deeper into the marsh, he saw a man waist-deep in the sucking mud of a bog. The man was sinking deeper with each second. "Keep your chin up, fella!" Monk called, and started to wade into the mire. From the tall grass, figures sprang upon him. There were three of the men. They had Monk at a disadvantage. He was already knee-deep in the bog. One man hurtled through the air and landed on Monk's back. It was his mistake. Monk's long arms snapped up and back. His clasped hands hooked behind the other man's head. Monk's shoulders barely twisted and the man turned over twice in mid-air before he splashed face down in the mud. Unable to release his mired feet, Monk whipped a fist into another man's face. The man sat down with a whoosh! The third man had been more wary. He had held back. When he moved, a thick, heavy club swished down upon Monk's unprotected skull. Monk fell as if he had suddenly sunk in the quagmire. Oozing mud and water choked his mouth and nostrils.

AFTER several minutes of fruitless searching for the origin of the spoken warning, Doc, Renny and Long Tom came back to the highway. They waited ten minutes, but Monk did not appear. A big car, with a rear trunk compartment opening under the wide seat, came from the side road a hundred yards away. Unnoticed, it wheeled into line with the parade of cars now returning to the city from the scene of the explosion. Doc and the others combed the marsh for more than an hour. Then Doc summoned Renny and Long Tom. "They've got Monk," he said. "I found the place in the swamp where they fought it out." Doc had retrieved Monk's muddy hat.

Chapter 4. GHOST VOICE AGAIN

"FURTHER search here would be useless," announced Doc Savage. "Monk's captors undoubtedly have returned directly to the city. I judge that, for the present, he will be unharmed. We are confronted by an organization in control of a hitherto unknown force." In a remarkably brief space of time, Doc's car was piloted down the ramp of his special garage under the skyscraper headquarters. When they had ascended, the bronze man apparently had arrived at some definite conclusion. For some time, he said nothing. His smoothly corded hands were assembling some small, but powerful, electrical amplifying coils. His knowledge of explosive forces, especially of electromagnetic energy and powerful rays and waves surpassed that of any other living man. When he spoke, Doc's words had little connection with what his hands were doing. "There is a woman in the strange happenings of the night," he said, calmly. "Holy cow!" exploded Renny. "I didn't see any evidence of one!" "Yes, there is a woman in it," stated Doc. "She was speaking, only a murmur, but perhaps arguing with this man who calls himself Var. All of us heard a ghostly voice in speech. I was listening to two voices." Renny exhibited no further surprise. Doc's auditory perception was maintained by his daily two-hour exercises on a specially devised scale of vibrations. His hearing was selective. "You're planning some form of new electrical detector," Long Tom remarked, watching Doc's skillful bronze hands assembling some wound copper coils and a series of tiny, but powerful, generators to be combined in a single power unit. "Hardly that," stated Doc. "The explosion was brought about most likely by the accidental unleashing of tremendous electrical force. A hitherto undiscovered means of producing high voltage seems to have been involved. The day is close when we shall find vast explosive energy confined in small, compact machines."

THE special device established in the elevator corridor of Doc's headquarters gave a warning buzz. In the square of glass at one side of the laboratory a figure appeared, walking from the elevator toward Doc Savage's door.

He was a youthful, smiling-faced telegraph messenger. His expression seemed proof he was somewhat awed, but much pleased, at this opportunity to visit the headquarters of the famed Doc Savage. The messenger stood by as Doc signed the book and opened the yellow envelope. The message read: HAVE UNEARTHED BONES OF PREHISTORIC PLATYPUS WHICH PRE-DATES PALEOZOIC MAMMALS STOP WILL BE DOMICILED AT CASPER FOR FORTHCOMING FORTNIGHT IF YOU SHOULD DESIRE TO COMMUNICATE

JOHNNY

"Johnny" was William Harper Littlejohn. He was the archaeologist and geologist of the Doc Savage group. For several weeks, he had been in Wyoming investigating a new discovery of prehistoric bones. When the book was signed, the messenger reddened a little and stammered, "M-Mr. Savage-c-could I just have one look into your laboratory-p-please?"

Absorbing the telegram, Doc said, "Certainly. Stand here by the door."

The youthful messenger gasped as he gazed upon the hundreds of glittering devices of polished metal and glass within the big room.

"Gee!" he exclaimed. "Gee!"

He turned and walked toward the outer door, crossing the office as if he were a little dizzy from what he had seen. At this instant, the ghost voice came again, thin but strident.

"Doc Savage-I am too strong even for you! I have your man Monk! Keep out of this or he will be destroyed without a trace! One by one, your other companions will be taken! You, too, must die if you persist! Nothing can stop me before my purpose has been accomplished, for I am-Var!"

The messenger boy stopped an instant, eyes widening. He looked at Doc and his two companions. None of the three had spoken. The messenger turned and fled toward the elevators.

"Holy cow!" growled Renny. "They've planted something here while we were out! Come on, Long Tom!" Long Tom joined him in the beginning of a search. They were pulling out desk drawers. Long Tom started to lift a corner of a rug.

Doc picked up the telephone. He gave the number of the nearest telegraph office. In a few seconds he replaced the instrument.

"We won't tear up the place," the bronze man announced, calmly. "The voice walked out with our smiling messenger boy. I could have stopped him, but just now, perhaps, it is better to permit this Var to play his hand a bit farther. There has been no telegram sent from Johnny."

"No message?" grunted Long Tom. "Then this fellow who calls himself Var must know all about us and what we're doing."

"That's it," Doc said, grimly. "Var not only has remarkable scientific knowledge, but he is clever-brained in other directions. Brothers, we are opposed to perhaps the most dangerous mind of our experience!"

A BUZZ of the desk phone interrupted further speech. Doc picked up the instrument.

"This is the police commissioner. Doc Savage? . . . Well, there's Hades popping! You're probably the only man who can be of help. This is something too big for my men to grapple with."

Doc said, "What is it?"

"It looks as if that explosion over in Jersey wasn't any accident," said the commissioner.

Doc said nothing, waiting.

"And we're up against something else," continued the commissioner. "The next blast is scheduled for Long Island. It's due to happen any time! You know J. Afton Carberry, the fellow who made millions lending money in South America and Europe?"

"I know him," said Doc. "Retired after the depression trimmed many other financiers dealing in foreign stuff. Disappeared for a year. Announced he was writing a book on cellular origin of the human species. Quite a smart chap."

"You know everybody," grunted the commissioner. "But Carberry isn't so smart, right now. He's scared green! Called in a few minutes ago. Had a crazy warning, he said, from some sort of a voice where there wasn't anybody. Carberry's lost his head!"

"What was the message?" interposed Doc. "Did it fix a time?"

"Nearly as he could repeat it, the message said: 'You have forty-eight hours to accede to my demand and place your fortune at my service. Other financiers will be quickly forced to follow your lead. I have a force none can oppose. Before dawn, you will see a demonstration of it. You can't combat me, for I am-Var.'"

"I shall be awaiting you at Carberry's home," stated Doc.

The bronze man delayed only to direct Long Tom to carry out the electrical experiment he had begun. The electrical wizard returned reluctantly to the laboratory.

"You'll accompany me, Renny," Doc instructed.

Renny, who had gathered part of the phone conversation, already was inside a special bulletproof vest of Doc's invention.

The bronze man flowed toward the rocket elevator. They dropped with the speed of a falling

plummet to the basement garage. Doc's powerful, armored car threaded through the thinned traffic of the darkened streets.

While he drove, Doc was considering the possibilities of the threat against J. Afton Carberry. Doc's amazing, many-sided brain also was recalling all known forces which might be employed to give explosive energy a definite path of destruction.

Chapter 5. MONK IS SILENCED

AT the moment Doc Savage and Renny were speeding to the home of J. Afton Carberry, Monk awoke in a coffin-like space. His long arms and short body were folded and cramped. A hard metal wall jammed his head down upon his thick neck. His feet were drawn up.

For once, Monk was thankful his legs were shorter than his arms.

"Dag-goned if I ain't dead an' buried!" he grunted, trying to wedge himself into an easier position. "Nope, I ain't dead. My head must've been busted wide open."

Monk breathed with laboring lungs. His mighty chest heaved with the effort to extract a supply of ozone from the foul air in the confined space. Strength flowed back into his body.

"Anyway, I ain't in the graveyard yet," he muttered, "or I'd 'a' been smothered. An' by the calamities, I ain't staying here!"

Monk's body, housing the strength of half a dozen ordinary men, began to swell. He filled his lungs to capacity and his iron chest heaved. Elbows levered against the walls of his metal prison. The maker of the trunk under the rear seat of the automobile had not designed it to withstand any such concentrated dynamite. The metal clasp and the brass tongue of the lock snapped. The curved upright lid of the under seat trunk flapped open with a bang.

Monk's landing was in keeping with his apelike contours. He hit on his feet. Low growls of warning, amazement, impinged on his hairy ears. A man uttered a low curse and hurtled toward him. Other figures converged in a rush.

THEY were in a dimly lighted concrete garage. Monk saw it was apparently in the basement of some larger building. Heavy iron doors were closed and barred. Monk lithely evaded the first rushing figure. With an incredibly fast sweep of one arm, he gripped the man's thick neck. His assailant was heavy, but Monk's iron muscles contracted with the force of an immense rubber slingshot.

His attacker was lifted from his feet. His body traveled a short arc through the air. The man's head deeply dented the metal back of the car above the flapping lid of the trunk. He collapsed to the floor without a groan. The human skull was never designed for withstanding such an impact.

A jungle bellow issued from Monk's throat.

"C'mon, you yella rats!" he growled. "Come an' get it!"

Three men, relying on strength of numbers, accepted the invitation.

Both of Monk's fists made definite, sickening contact with flesh and bone. One of his feet twisted between the third man's legs. He sprawled on top of his two companions. Others were coming at him, but Monk glimpsed one man standing back.

This man was short of body, broad of shoulders and face. His small eyes glittered pig like in rolls of eye-rimming fat. In his moon face the mouth was a small aperture. Set above a double chin that was adding a third roll of lard above his collar, the tiny mouth gave him a grotesque appearance.

Monk saw he was badly outnumbered. Leaping clear of the floor on his short legs, he projected his body between two more men. The backs of their heads cracked the floor. Another man hit Monk a dizzying blow behind the ear with some blunt weapon.

Monk staggered. He was facing the moon-faced fellow with the little rat-hole for a mouth. The man had a polished piece of metal in one hand. It was shaped like the round box for holding steel tape. From this box a slender stream of sizzling vapor shot into Monk's face.

Monk gritted his teeth against the pain. It was an ammonia gun. Blinded, scarcely able to breathe, Monk went to his hands and knees under a rush of bodies. A minute later he was firmly bound about the arms and was being propelled up a stairway.

MONK'S captors placed him in an elevator operated automatically. Eyes smarting from the burning fumes of the ammonia gun, Monk could only guess at the number of floors they ascended. Then he was led along a hallway.

One of the men swore and muttered, "Where's that button, Wheeze?"

Though he was only beginning to see dimly, Monk knew it was the moon-faced man who was called "Wheeze."

"Right under-siss-that little picture-siss-by the molding, dumb head!" came the reply in the wheezing voice. Wheeze talked like a chronic case of asthma.

Monk could see enough now to know they were in the room of an elaborately furnished apartment. A panel in the wall swung open. It revealed a spiral stairway. The mean snout of an automatic was pushed into Monk's back.

At the top of the stairway they emerged into a vaulted room of lavishly rich fittings. The walls of the room were odd. They were covered with paintings in oil. All of these represented some of the

lower forms of marine life. In spite of his ticklish position, Monk was intrigued by this unusual display of art.

"Nobody but a nut'd ever lived in this dump," he muttered.

He heard one of the men address Wheeze by another name. It was McGovern, apparently his last name.

"Soft pedal the titles, Smoke," rapped Wheeze. "Stick to the handles the chief tacked on."

By that, Monk judged the chief of this gang was not among those present.

Monk was pushed into a chair. Wheeze came and stood before him.

"So you're the big ape Doc Savage uses for some of his chemical tricks!" he stated.

"Well--siss--there's one or two little tricks we want to find out. Also, mister, you're going to tell us something about Doc Savage's set-up. There are several things we need to know."

"Try an' make me!" gritted Monk.

Wheeze's little mouth puckered and his small eyes gleamed wickedly.

"I gather from all those misfit words, you imagine you're not going to talk, eh?" he sissed at Monk. "Well, we'll see. Smoke, is the convincer all set?"

The man called "Smoke" smiled genially.

"The convincer's always ready," he put forth. "Right this way."

A single wide glass door was opened at the side of the room.

MONK was pulled to his feet and propelled into the adjoining space. This was a bare, small room with enameled walls and no furnishings. The single man occupying it required no chair. He was of shining armor metal and he stood erect in the middle of the floor.

The binding cords suddenly fell from Monk's arm. But two men with automatics poked the snouts into his ribs.

"We try to avoid shedding the blood of any person," Wheeze sissed in a sanctimonious voice.

"Every man's blood must be on his own head. So we--"

Monk was shoved close to the armored figure. He saw the contraption was some sort of robot. It appeared to be hollow, and large enough to admit the person of a very large man.

Monk's still-smarting eyes blinked at the robot's half-bent arms. For in the metal fingers were clutched two long-pointed knives. These were directed inward toward the robot's gleaming breast. It looked as if the metal man was thinking of taking his own life.

In one enameled wall was a black switchboard. It contained a complicated array of electrical switches, coils and other gadgets. In its center was what seemed to be the circle of an enlarged microphone.

"Everybody quiet!" ordered Wheeze. His companions instantly became silent. None even moved. "Now watch, you wise ape!"

One man stepped to the switchboard and turned a button. When he stepped back, Wheeze spoke in a low tone.

"Do your stuff, big boy," he said.

Slowly, the metal arms of the robot moved inward. The pointed knives approached two slits in the armored breast. The movement was so slow as to be almost imperceptible.

Slowly, chillingly, even though the shining figure was but cold metal, the arms continued to bend. The points of the knives disappeared into the shell-like cavity of the robot's chest. A minute, two minutes passed. Monk growled in his throat.

Both knives at last were buried to their hilts. The mechanism ceased to whirr.

"Just one little word will do it," murmured Wheeze. "One little whisper, or a sneeze--and the mike picks up the sound and starts the robot. We're going to leave you with the convincer. After I've attended to some special business, we'll come back. If you've kept that big yap of yours quiet that long, maybe you'll be about ripe to loosen up with some conversation!"

"That's what you think!" barked Monk. "You'll get nothin' outta me!"

"That'll be just too bad--for you," sissed Wheeze, softly.

THE automatics crowded Monk's spine, then his stomach, as the metal robot opened on oiled hinges. Helpless to resist, he was shoved inside. His long arms were forced into the bent hollow of the robot's arms. The torturing device was swung shut.

The speech control button on the switchboard was off while this took place. Wheeze looked up into Monk's orbs blinking through the armored eye-holes of the robot.

"Now you can talk your head off--or your heart out," grinned Wheeze. "Ready, Smoke! Everybody out! Click 'er on!"

Wheeze followed his men through the single door of glass. It closed silently. Monk could see the men outside talking, gesturing. He could not hear their voices. He was alone with the robot and his thoughts in the soundproof room.

Monk glanced over at the round disk of the big microphone. He could see the long knives inverted directly toward his heart. Many things came to Monk that he would have liked to have said.

But he took it out in thinking.

Chapter 6. COLD LIGHT STRIKES

MONK was confident Doc Savage would pick up his trail quickly. He would have been much more downcast had he known that Doc and Renny were at this moment rushing along a Long Island road. The man of bronze was even now scrutinizing a lowering sky over Little Neck. This exclusive residence section just within the boundary line of New York City, was sleeping. Great elms spread protective arms over the homes of millionaires.

At the terminus of a scattered row of ornate dwellings, was set the colonial-style mansion of J. Afton Carberry. Unlike the others, the Carberry pile of architecture was ablaze with lights. When they were half a mile from the place, Doc and Renny could see this glaring illumination against the trees. The light was reflected with a dull glow upon the low-flying clouds.

"Holy cow!" grunted Renny. "You'd think a smart guy like this Carberry would have more brains than to light his house up like a Christmas tree! Suppose this Var fellow happened to be flying around upstairs? What a swell target that would make!"

"Good guess, Renny," approved Doc. "That's the way it may come this time. We'll see what we can do about it."

Police were thickly spotted in the Carberry grounds. The white gravel of the driveway showed like a winding serpent among the trees. It was perhaps two hundred yards from the entrance gate to the illuminated mansion.

Doc drove about fifty yards along the gravel. His own powerful motor was only a whispering song under the car's long hood. The humming drone that swiftly increased to a drumming throb among the scudding clouds, was distinctly audible.

"And there you are—" Renny began to say.

A NARROW band of blue-steel light shot from the murky sky. Like a long silvery knife, it stood out against the night. Its point touched the driveway only a few yards ahead of Doc's car. But it was moving swiftly, swinging directly toward the car itself.

Doc pulled the steering wheel around, swerving the car into the trees. With a swift movement, he pushed Renny to the outside.

Renny's big body was through the door. Doc slid from under the wheel. His heels crunched in the gravel. With gliding speed, he moved to one side. His direction was toward the house.

"The thing can't miss it!" Renny yelled. "All those lights would—"

It was one of the few times in his life that Doc Savage failed to hear distinctly. The drums of his ears suddenly thundered. It was as if a gigantic knife of ice had been thrust all the way through his body from his brain to his toes.

Doc's arms and legs were instantly numbed. His motor nerves refused to respond to the bidding of his brain. His keen sight was dimmed by a frost that seemed to rim his eyes. He felt himself falling forward.

"Cold Light," was Doc's instant thought. Like the illumination created by the inhabitants of The Land of Always-Night. Only their light was cold and harmless. This was deadly, more like a bath in liquid air.

Doc was temporarily paralyzed. He tried to warn Renny to keep away, but no words issued from his constricted throat. He felt consciousness fading. Then he was suffused with a vast warm wave. By comparison, it was like a fire that set his skin prickling and brought waves of jerking pain to his muscles.

Slowly, Doc got to his feet. Overhead, the airplane was flying low. It carried no riding lights, but the descending spike of cold light revealed it as a small dark object.

RENNY had whipped out his super-machine pistol and was shooting into the air. His fire was futile. The plane was beyond the reach of the mercy bullets. Renny was beside Doc again. Police surged toward the house.

"Get back, all of you!" warned Doc. He hadn't raised his voice. He never did. The peculiar quality of Doc's calmest words always carried to those listening.

The rare, mellow whistle filled the space around him. The sound may have come from his lips. But it seemed an aura of vibration that always thrilled its hearers with the imminence of deadly danger. Doc guessed what was coming.

The air sucked away. Renny and the nearest coppers felt as if they were standing in a vast vacuum. Their mouths opened and their chests heaved as they gulped for breath. The air seemed to have been snatched from the depths of their lungs.

Doc's eyes were fixed upon the Carberry mansion. He expected to see the million-dollar mass of architecture disintegrate. But the residence remained intact.

From the thicker woods well back in the wide estate came the roar as of a rushing wind. The sound was of cyclonic intensity. In the hurricane hiss of displaced air came the crackling report of great trees being snapped off.

The long spike of blue-steel flashed off. It was as if a switch had been thrown in the midst of chaos. The rolling reverberation of the long explosion abruptly died. Only the trembling ground, the hissing, sighing echoes across the countryside, the heavy bumping and plopping of falling trees and

shorn branches remained as an aftermath of the blast.

POLICEMEN were climbing to their feet, dusting off their clothes. For a minute, no one moved, either toward or away from the scene of the bursting Cold Light. That is, none but Doc Savage. Instead of heading for the spot where the blast had taken place, he was moving toward the Carberry mansion. Doc's stride was unhurried; but Renny, who immediately followed, was forced to shuffle into a trot to keep up with him.

The drumming of the plane was dying away. It was flying out over Long Island Sound. With the stoppage of the Cold Light, the pyramid of blue flame had suddenly disappeared. It had seemed to ascend for half a mile or more. Doc wondered if the Cold Light had remained on, would the flame have reached the plane.

Renny was at Doc's shoulder. They passed the policemen guarding the Carberry doors. Inside, Doc instantly identified the financier, though he had seen only his photographs in the news. Carberry's face was the color of gray chalk. The area of color denoting his terror extended up his high, narrow forehead into the baldness between strangely thick tufts of graying hair. The man was so tall, he was compelled to bend and droop his narrow shoulders to hold a shivering, sobbing woman in his arms. Doc, for the moment, believed this woman to be the financier's daughter. She appeared to be only about half the age of the retired capitalist.

The woman was wearing a lacy negligee. Her skin was smooth, velvety. Renny paused admiringly. The woman's face was white as polished ivory. All color had been drained from it. Apparently, she had just come into the room, aroused by the explosion.

"Darling! Oh, what is it? What is it?"

The hand of the financier on the woman's shoulder was blue-veined and thin. It trembled as he gently patted the woman's alluring, rounded arm.

"It's—it's nothing much—dear," the man quavered, hoarsely.

Doc walked toward them. Carberry stared at him an instant, then his lips parted in a half fearful smile.

"You're—Doc Savage," he said, controlling his voice with an effort. "The commissioner said he would call you. I've never met you, sir."

"And you are Mr. Carberry," Doc stated.

"Yes; and this is Mrs. Carberry, Doc Savage."

The woman gave him a tremulous smile. Her slight body shivered.

BEFORE Doc could acknowledge the introduction, another voice interrupted. At its first note, Carberry stiffened, and his arm fell away from his wife's shoulders. His slightly protruding eyes of a light-bluish shade roved quickly, desperately about the room. Doc was reminded of some scared animal in a trap.

"Holy cow!" ejaculated Renny. "It's coming from—"

The bulky figure of the engineer barged across the room in the direction of the wide chimney. Doc laid a hand on Renny's arm.

The voice had addressed itself to J. Afton Carberry. Now it spoke with a sibilant, ghostly cadence:

"Carberry—now you have seen a demonstration of my power! You have forty-eight hours! I shall communicate with you at the expiration of that time! I shall find you wherever you are! I need your millions! I know the police have appealed to Doc Savage! This time, he will fail. For I am—Var!" Renny's keen instinct for direction had been correct. The voice was coming from the fireplace, from the chimney. A log blazed between the tiled sides.

Heedless of the blaze, Doc thrust his body into the chimney opening. Looking upward, he had the glimpse of a head silhouetted against the sky, a shadowy, shaggy head.

Showering ashes and fire as he emerged into the room, Doc was at the outside door in a flowing stride. The policeman at the door gaped after him. He had hardly seemed to move, but he was already at the corner of the house nearest the chimney.

From there, Doc seemed almost to float up the wall of the house. The residence, with its many slight projections, was like a smooth road to the bronze man.

Doc bounded onto the roof. As he came erect, lead pounded the overlapping slates at his feet. An automatic was spitting fire from the opposite end of the mansion center gable. But fast as the attacker had been, Doc was far to one side as the remaining slugs came higher in a searching stream. Then Doc pivoted. The ground was thirty feet below. He poised only an instant, then sprang outward. He alighted with the cushioned ease of a body set on coiled springs.

Gliding toward the corner of the house, Doc encountered two city coppers in uniform. One was holding an automatic that still smoked. He was saying, "I think I got the guy! He fell off the roof!"

Doc halted the two men. "You just shot at a man on the roof?"

"Sure!" said the cop. "I al—good gosh! It's Doc Savage! Was that you up there?"

"I was on the roof," observed Doc. "Did you see another man come down, or running away?"

"I heard a noise up there," said the cop, "but it must have been you I shot at. I didn't see any

other man."

RENNY was inside investigating the chimney. The log fire had been drowned. No marks appeared to show that anybody or anything had been in the chimney aperture.

Carberry was sitting on a couch. His wife still clung close to him.

"What would you advise us to do, Mr. Savage?" Carberry asked.

"I'd take Mrs. Carberry and go away as secretly as possible," Doc advised. "Make it a point not to inform even your servants of your destination. I hope within forty-eight hours we may have something more definite on this man who calls himself Var."

Doc and Renny departed from the house. Doc slipped under the wheel of his car. His intended destination was the nearest airport. He had little hope of tracing the Cold Light plane, but believed communication with some of the airports might give him a lead.

Renny exclaimed, "Look at this, Doc!"

The engineer had noticed the leather flap of the side pocket was open and lifted as if to attract attention. Renny held two square white cards. One was small, the other large. The larger card showed a printed message under the pencil ray of Doc's flashlight.

The small card bore words plainly written with bright blue ink. There was no attempt to disguise the hand of the man who had written it:

Admit bearer with password to inner circle. I am-Var.

"What do you make of it?" said Renny.

"Read this," replied Doc, passing over the larger card.

Go at once to Washington. Yellow house in 14th block on K Street. Third from corner. Do not delay. Var will be there at 4 a.m. this morning. He has tricked Ham into meeting you there. They will not kill Monk until he has talked with you. The password for the card is "Rav Rules." Var's name reversed.

The card was unsigned. Under the pencil ray it showed stains of a brownish tinge. Doc was sure the fingerprints would be the same he had encountered twice before. The man whose fingerprints were on the polished copper ball at the death house in the marsh, had escaped the explosion.

Chapter 7. MONK SNEEZES

MONK, at this moment, would have been relieved if he could have known of the new cards in Doc Savage's possession. But no hint had been given he was not to die before he talked with Doc. The enlarged microphone on the black switchboard seemed to wink at him ominously. Monk could almost hear it speaking with its own diaphragm.

"Talk, go on and talk! Why don't you say something?"

The thing seemed to be mocking him. Monk not only had no desire to talk now. He was fairly sure he never would talk again. He had no especial fear, but he couldn't avoid looking at the two pointed knives. He kept recalling how slowly they had been pushed into the slits that now faced his own gorilla like breast.

Monk could see the movements of the men in the larger room with its unique oil paintings. Wheeze McGovern had been giving orders for nearly half an hour. Monk was sweating, wondering how long this phase of the little game was to be continued?

Like Doc and his other companions, Monk could read the lips of others. When the men were facing him, he could understand what they were saying as well as if they had been beside him. So, he understood when Wheeze picked out six of his men and ordered them to Washington.

WHEEZE picked up the telephone. He was facing the glass door of the soundproof room.

Monk read Wheeze's lips. The moon-faced boss of this group of men was calling a telegraph office. Monk saw that he called himself Doc Savage. Wheeze was giving a message. It was addressed to Theodore Marley Brooks.

Wheeze recited the message slowly. Monk quickly realized a trap was being set for his bickering lawyer companion, Ham. The message, as it was being given, was telling Ham to go at once to Washington. There he was to meet Doc Savage in a yellow house on K Street. The house was designated as the third house from the corner in the fourteenth block.

Even as rage fairly sizzled through his veins, Monk made a mental note of the address. He was amazed at the knowledge possessed by this Wheeze. It struck Monk that Doc and his friends must have been under some malevolent eye, or rather many such eyes, for considerable time before to-night's flashing events.

For Wheeze had the name of the hotel in Manhattan where Ham was attending a gathering of noted legal personages. Monk knew it, because Ham had ditched him on a theater date to go to this distinguished affair.

Monk came then to the brink of apoplexy. It was more than the big chemist could endure, trying to maintain silence and keep his hide unpunctured.

The surge of blood to his head brought a sudden, fierce desire to sneeze. His huge arms were tightly locked in the robot's terrible, hollowed sheets of armor.

Monk's sneeze exploded loudly in the soundproof room. The robot's armor instantly vibrated.

Somewhere close beside him, a motor had started.

The fearful knives began their cruelly slow descent toward the slits over Monk's heart. Their needlelike points gleamed with wicked menace.

MONK felt the arms of the metal man slowly drawing inward. Silence being no longer of consequence, he released a flood of choice language.

Slowly, slowly, the knives pushed inward toward the slits over his heart. The motor, pulling the inexorable arms with torturing delay, kept up a steady whirring. In the other room, Wheeze was standing with the gloating smile of some vile beast of prey.

Two men remained with Wheeze. Because of the soundproof doors, Monk's unfortunate sneeze and his following outburst had been unnoticed.

At that instant, the inwardly moving knives entered the slits. Their needle points touched Monk's shrinking skin. They became painfully penetrating agony which he could no longer evade. Two or three minutes would be required before the slicing edges touched a vital spot. When they did, they would release a scarlet flood which could never be stopped by human agency.

But the knife points were never destined to reach Monk's heart. The first touch freed all the electrifying rage so long pent up in the big chemist's huge body. His sudden bellow might have come from the snarling throat of some trapped jungle beast.

Monk drew gallons of air into his capacious lungs. His body swelled. The mammoth shoulders were bowed and braced. The long arms contracted and then expanded.

The slender rods of universal jointage necessary to operation of the robot's arms were of strongest steel. But, after all, they were, by the requirements of space, very slim. Monk's giant arms, driven by his released fury, were gigantic in their expansion.

"Hold 'er, Ham!" he bellowed. "Dag-gone it, shyster! I'm comin'!"

He voiced the truth. The rods of slender steel were snapping. They made cracking sounds, as if a man's finger joints had been bent backward. The ribbed fastenings of the metal man snapped asunder.

MONK did not heed the rake of the knife points across his hard-muscled breast. He did not even pause to regret the absence of his special bullet-proof vest, because he did not feel the slicing of his flesh. The trickling of blood also went unnoticed.

For Monk had torn loose the robot's jointed arms. He swung one in each ponderous hand.

Wheeze and his men had been turned from the glass door of the soundproof room at the instant catastrophe overtook their torturing metal man. They wheeled on their toes only when the ape-like shape of Monk crashed through the thick transparent plate.

One of the men whipped out an automatic and fired pointblank. Steel-pointed slugs played jangling sparks of fire from one of the swinging metal arms in Monk's hands. Chewed lead stung one of the enraged chemist's hairy ears.

A shot from the blazing automatic flew across the room and scarred one of the oil paintings. It completely erased a fantastic conception of nonexistent marine life. The thing was a slimy creature on oils, half human, half crab.

Monk did not observe this despoilation of weird art. One of his armored weapons had cracked the forearm bones of the man who had been shooting. He was a giant of a fellow, but he howled in agony and fell writhing to the floor.

Wheeze's other companion hurled a heavy vase off a table. The improvised weapon shattered to bits across Monk's iron-hard forehead. A little blood trickled into the chemist's eyes. His other armored weapon struck this man's thigh bone. He joined his broken-armed partner in howling on the rich Oriental rug.

Wheeze had slipped through the smashed glass door. Something on the switchboard crackled with lurid blue flame. Short-circuited wires blanked out. The rooms were plunged into Stygian darkness. Monk found his special generator flashlight. The beam was pointed as a pencil. He sent it roving about. There was no sound. Then in the distance somewhere, was a wheezing laugh. A door slammed shut.

Wheeze had escaped.

Realizing the tricky affair of the concealed stairway they had used in bringing him in the house, Monk at once decided pursuit would be useless. Besides, more important business confronted him. He must get a warning to Doc. Perhaps he could head off Ham from starting for Washington.

Vainly, Monk jiggled the receiver bar of the phone. The wire was dead. Wheeze had thoughtfully removed this means of communication. His flight had been solely in the interest of saving his own hide.

APPARENTLY the battle in the penthouse—Monk had discovered his prison quarters to be such—had been unheard by the residents of apartments in the twelve-story building. The apartment directly underneath was vacant, though its furnishing were rich. The shorted wires from above had also plunged this place in darkness.

Monk found and employed the concealed stairway. He buzzed for an elevator. The car was automatic. Monk made the street with a blank-faced doorman staring after him.

Monk noted the apartment building was a block west of Central Park. Covering blocks with his rapid, ungainly stride, Monk reached Columbus Circle.

Though it was well after the hour for the Broadway deluge of humanity at theater closing time, Monk found himself caught in a flowing river of men and women. He marked this was not the usual after-theater crowd of dressy individuals.

It was a crowd with a distinct disharmony of apprehension, of fear, in some their voices approaching terror.

A husky-voiced newspaper vendor threaded through the human stream.

"Read all about it!" he bawled. "Big explosion in Manhattan! Var will blow up whole city block! Read it!"

Monk plowed his way to the man. He snatched a paper.

"Howlin' calamities!" he squealed. "I've gotta get to Doc!"

Monk headed for a public phone booth. He dialed the number of Doc's headquarters.

Long Tom's voice came impatiently. A call had instructed him to stand by for another message from Doc. The bronze man had said he would have some plans for Long Tom to work out in connection with a new machine he called an "ex-neutralizer."

If it could be made to work, Doc wanted it to combat the Cold Light ray. Long Tom saw a night of work ahead. He wished the bronze chief were here to direct him, instead of sending his instructions by phone.

He was relieved, however, to hear Monk's voice.

"WHERE'VE you been?" demanded Long Tom. "What happened?"

"Let it ride," said Monk. "Where's Doc?"

"Headed for Washington," replied Long Tom. "But here's Renny. He'll talk. I've got a job to do."

"Where in time have you—" Renny began.

"Dag-gone it!" interrupted Monk. "Tell me something! What's going on, anyway?"

"This fellow who calls himself Var has turned all Hades loose," obliged Renny. "The latest is his announcement with that ghost voice of his that he's blowing up a whole city block in uptown Manhattan at nine o'clock in the morning. That's to-day. Turned the voice loose in one of the newspaper editorial rooms. The big town's gone batty over it!"

"You tellin' me!" grunted Monk. "Where's this blow-up comin' off?"

"Over in the upper East Side," said Renny, giving an address only two blocks from the East River.

"This Var warned the police to clear the whole block of those who wanted to keep on living. He said the blast would rock the town and destroy everything directly in its path. Said he doesn't want any loss of life."

"Dag-gone it, Renny!" rapped Monk. "What are we—"

"Coming to that, Monk. Doc's in a Red Arrow transport plane. Called in by radiophone. Said if I found you, we're to get into that block Var is planning to shoot off and see what we can find. I don't know what we're to look for. But it'll take me an hour to fight my way over there and—"

"See you when you get there," cut in Monk. "I'm on my way."

MONK reached a taxicab by the simple expedient of hulking his ponderous body directly into the crowd.

News bulletins were running in the lights around a building near Times Square:

VAR ANNOUNCES THE EXPLOSION IN MANHATTAN WILL TAKE PLACE AT 9 A.M. HE SAYS IT WILL BE CUT LOOSE FIVE MINUTES AFTER THE PASSING OVER MANHATTAN OF THE WASHINGTON-NEW YORK PASSENGER-AND-MAIL PLANE. Monk's cab pulled away.

Chapter 8. TRAIL OF A SHADOW

WHILE Monk was on his way to the menaced block in Manhattan, following Doc Savage's instructions to his headquarters, the man of bronze had taken up another trail. Rather, Doc had put himself directly in the way of a shadow he believed was watching his movements closely.

Word of the new threat of the Cold Light over Manhattan had caused the bronze giant to send Renny to join Long Tom at headquarters. At this time, Doc knew nothing of Monk's escape.

The ray of Cold Light causing the explosion at the home of J. Afton Carberry had given the bronze man something definite with which to grapple. Doc's intricate knowledge of all forms of electrical energy had taught him that some of the most potent electromagnetic forces could be lessened, or neutralized altogether, by the setting up of other similar but opposing rays or waves.

He had left Long Tom working upon an electrical experiment. It came to him how a possible neutralizing force could be created to combat the mysterious Cold Light. As ex-neutralizer. That would be it.

As Doc worked out this idea, he was speeding toward the Red Arrow passenger airport. He had instantly decided to follow the bidding of his mysterious messenger and go to the yellow house in Washington. Ordinarily, the bronze man would have used one of his own fast planes for the trip. But he judged he was being closely shadowed. By going directly to the passenger port of the Red Arrow, he would be followed. Doubtless the emissary or enemy of Var, whichever he might be, also

would become a passenger on the plane.

From a concealed vantage, after booking his seat, the bronze man waited. He saw all other passengers go aboard. He smiled grimly as he watched the last man to take his seat. Then Doc himself vanished into the wash room. In a few seconds, the plane would be taking off. When it took the air, no person remotely resembling Doc Savage was aboard.

IN Seat No. 7, on the right-hand side of the Red Arrow passenger plane, sat an ugly specimen of humanity. Nature had been unkind, apparently, in the beginning of the man's career. He had been endowed with ropy, tow-colored hair and washed-out, pale-blue eyes.

In size, the man was of magnificent proportions, except for the hunching of one shoulder and a malformation of his neck. Added to these marring features, the man's nose had been broken and badly set. His cheeks were puffed and had an unhealthy pallor.

In the No. 2 seat, on the left-hand side of the plane, a little man sat hunched into the big collar of an overcoat. Only the peak of his slouch hat was visible. For more than half an hour, this passenger had not moved.

The bucking of the plane in many of the air pockets was trying even to some of the veteran passengers. Suddenly, in the recovery of a level keel, something of minor importance happened in the pilots' cabin. A service wire in the passenger cabin was short-circuited for the fraction of a second.

The mishap was sufficient to blow out a fuse. Gasps came from women passengers.

"Never mind," came the calm voice of the trim stewardess. "It's only a fuse. The co-pilot will fix it."

The co-pilot, pushed his way along the aisle. In Seat No. 2, the collar-concealed head of the little man slowly turned. The movement brought a little scream from one of the women who had been chewing gum.

The homely mug in Seat No. 7 was watching with interest.

The shock to the timid woman was amply justified. For the eyes of the man in Seat No. 2 glowed in the darkness with the luminous fire of a predatory cat prowling the night. In them, one other man in the plane read hatred colored by fear. Such as might cause the beady eyes of a rat to shine with desperation when cornered.

When the fuse was replaced and the lights came on, the ugly mug from Seat No. 7 got up and followed the co-pilot toward the control room.

"What do you want?" growled the co-pilot. "Passengers have got to stay in their seats! Hey! Nobody's allowed up in—"

The ugly mug calmly disregarded the admonition. Pushing past, he went through the little door. Inside, concealed from the passengers, he murmured a few words directly into the ear of the pilot at the controls.

"Never mind! Skip it!" barked the pilot at his scowling partner. "Take a seat in back a few minutes! It's O. K.!"

The puzzled co-pilot went back and slipped into Seat No. 7. The pale-eyed, broken-nosed passenger had slipped into the co-pilot's seat and pulled on the radio earphones.

FOR the space of some eight or ten minutes, this strange substitute for the regular man at the secondary controls seemed very much at home. As he talked into the phone, his gloved hands played automatically on the control wheel.

Any person would have supposed he was a flier. The veteran Red Arrow pilot was not even supposing. He knew well enough the man with the broken nose was a better flier than he would be if he lived a couple of centuries. His conversation to the ground finished, the ugly mug relinquished his place.

"Thanks," he said to the pilot. "I'll remember the favor."

The co-pilot still scowled, as he came up to swap places with the extraordinary passenger who could so readily make hash of all the rules. But the passenger did not notice this. He was, without seeming to do so, absorbing every visible detail of the little man in Seat No. 2.

From this position, it could be seen that the man whose eyes had been luminous in the darkness was rather an inconsequential personality. Every article of clothing appeared to have been worn to the point of dissolution. His hat brim was soiled and frayed. His overcoat collar was faded and threaded out. The man's collar looked saw-edged.

This scraggly appearance was continued to the man's person. His hair was stringy and uneven. His face was hatchet-thin, with an oddly turned-up nose. The chin was long-pointed and stubbly with beard. The man's Adam's apple rambled up and down.

He displayed no interest in what was transpiring in the plane. In his now normal eyes was a disappointed look. The man he had come aboard to find had not appeared.

The scrambled-faced passenger returned to Seat No. 7. When the cabin radio started staccato bulletins of the menace hovering over Manhattan, the man seemed to have dropped into a doze.

THE scraggly little man in Seat No. 2 was the last person to alight from the plane at the

Washington airport. He scrutinized each of his fellow passengers hopefully, as they passed him. With a grunt of disappointed resignation, he climbed from the plane.

Walking over to the information desk, he inquired, "Has any other passenger plane or private crate from New York landed in the past hour?"

"Yes, a White Liner came in, half an hour ago," the girl said.

The little man's face brightened some. He went toward the taxicab stand with short, hopping steps. Entering a taxi, he rode only to the first darkly shadowed avenue.

Leaning forward, he handed the driver a dollar, and said, "Keep moving. I'm leaving you here."

He was back among the trees when another taxicab came from the direction of the airport and turned the corner, following the first car. The luminous eyes shone more brightly as this cab passed.

"Had me fooled, all right," he muttered. "But I guess this puts me one up on him."

When the first of the taxicabs stopped and turned after proceeding a couple of blocks, the broken-nosed man in the second cab observed that it was empty.

"Expected he would do that," the man remarked to himself. "All right, driver. Take me to Dupont Circle. I'll walk the rest of the way."

The open radius known as Dupont Circle was not far distant from a yellow house in the fourteenth block on K Street.

THIS yellow house in Washington was, before the day was very old, to become a rendezvous for several mysterious figures. With Doc Savage already near this house in a guise which had passed him on the Red Arrow plane, Ham summoned by a faked telegram and Monk aware of the trick, the identity and intentions of the scraggly little man remained an enigma.

And while Monk was delaying a possible effort to assist Ham in order to investigate the threat of a new explosion in Manhattan, still another puzzling figure was planning a trip to Washington. This last man had been pacing the floor of a palatial apartment during the greater part of the night. He was walking restlessly up and down at the time the blast shook the home of J. Afton Carberry.

This apartment was near the west side of Central Park.

The man was known as Charles Arthur Vonier, noted explorer.

Vonier had heard radio announcements of the Carberry explosion. There had been a police report saying that even the redoubtable Doc Savage was baffled; that the police commissioner believed the blasts were planned by some scientist who was remarkably sane.

Vonier had switched off this report impatiently.

"And I'd counted on Doc Savage to—" He broke off the muttered phrase.

Vonier was an emaciated, seemingly bloodless man. His thin, sensitive nose was a single arching bone with tautly drawn skin covering it. His eyes were set under projecting caverns of his bony skull. But they were intensely blue, and coldly direct. Even now, under apparent stress that made his bony hands fumble, the eyes were unflickering.

A spread newspaper on the table headlined the New Jersey log cabin explosion. Vonier opened a library table drawer and drew out a sheet of paper. On it were scrawled words in bright blue ink. The explorer sucked his lips between teeth protruding from his skeleton-hard jaws. He folded the paper and placed it in his pocket.

Picking up the desk tray of pens and ink, he selected a bottle. The tray was of old, soft gold done in finely wrought hand carvings. It was reminiscent of the workmanship of one of the lost, though highly civilized, mountain folk of Indochina.

VONIER let a single drop of the ink fall from the bottle on a square of white paper. The color was brightest blue.

"The strange trick of circumstance sometimes will involve the most innocent," he murmured. "Doc Savage's microscopic eyes never would overlook a detail like that."

He replaced the bottle, with his smile becoming whimsical. Apparently, a vein of humor lay under the explorer's unappealing exterior.

A woman's dress rustled. Vonier arose to greet his wife.

"I'm glad you came in, my dear," he said. "I can delay no longer. It is necessary that I make personal contact with Doc Savage, at once."

The woman's voice was throaty but calm.

"Do you think it's best?" she said. "I can't quite understand why you must see him."

Mrs. Vonier was slender of figure, as revealed by the silken gown of scarlet. Her features were clear-cut and regular.

"I've discovered it is always best to strike the first blow, to meet an enemy before he gets himself set," stated the explorer. "I have been busy. Doc Savage will be on his way to Washington. I shall see him there."

"You will be careful?" the woman pleaded. "After all the dangers you have—"

"Bosh!" interrupted Vonier. "Doc Savage must have the message. The news will have it that the bronze wizard is baffled by these strange explosions. As usual, the news is undependable!"

Vonier called a private air field. It was apparent he was ordering one of his own planes tuned up for a quick takeoff to Washington. As he was preparing to depart, the phone buzzed. The call was long distance. It was from Washington. From Vonier's words, some special emergency had arisen in his affairs. Before he replaced the receiver, he said, "I shall take care of that. I am just preparing to leave for Washington."

Chapter 9. MONK'S SWEET TOOTH

ABOUT the time the plane of Charles Arthur Vonier was being prepared for a quick flight to Washington, Monk was impatiently pursuing his investigation on the East Side. He had discovered the warning of the threatened explosion had created pandemonium.

There was the block where the fiendish Var had announced the Cold Light would strike at nine o'clock of the following morning.

A few policemen were being overrun in their effort to keep order without resorting to the use of their sticks. Occupants of many surrounding blocks were joining the general exodus.

There were perhaps some two hundred families living in this six-story block. The street level housed small shops. All of the several hundred persons involved seemed determined to be the first out with their various belongings.

Monk, to gain entry, kept close to the police. The squad had discovered nothing that savored of a planted explosive. Monk aroused the policemen's interest when he produced his pocket chemical laboratory.

With a colorless liquid, an instantaneous reagent chemical, Monk made a quick analysis of each spot on the walls or elsewhere, when it seemed the stain had been recently made. He was aware that some of the most deadly explosive could be employed in liquid form. Perhaps even in the character of some powerful chemical that could be dried and still continue to send forth some vaporous element for many hours.

After several efforts, however, Monk wondered if all the scores of families in the block threw cups of coffee at each other.

A BOOMING voice announced Renny had arrived on the trail of Monk. When the big engineer swung his many pounds of brawn through a door, Monk was preparing to depart. He had been through all the block.

"Doc's worked out an idea to stop that Cold Light ray," Renny told Monk. "Doc explained it to Long Tom by radio-phone from a Red Arrow plane on the way to Washington."

"Now why would Doc go by one of the passenger planes?" wondered Monk.

"Don't know, but it's my guess he's laying a trap for somebody," said Renny. "Anyway, this thing he calls an ex-neutralizer may stop the explosions, if Long Tom can get the right gadgets together." Long Tom, at the moment, was attempting to step up an electrical current to sufficient power for creation of an electromagnetic ex-neutralizer on the principal of the Hertzian wave. Long Tom was familiar with the practical application of the Hertzian wave, or ray. It had been employed for the killing of airplane motors at a distance.

No place remained where it seemed likely the smallest sort of bomb could have been hidden. Renny and Monk agreed the explosive force of Var was carried in his mysterious, terrible Cold Light.

"I'll stick here an' see if the cops give it another going over," said Renny. "You've got me worrying about Ham. All he ever carries is that trick sword cane, an' if they stick him in some robot like you say you were in, he wouldn't have much use for a cane."

Monk chewed thoughtfully on a gumdrop. Some child had left a paper bag of the candy on a sink drain board in the hasty exodus. The thought of Ham in the hands of Var's ruthless agents turned the candy suddenly bitter in Monk's mouth.

"Dag-gone it! Nothin' even tastes right!" complained Monk, and he spat out the gumdrop.

MONK stopped on his way to the Hudson River warehouse hangar where Doc's private planes were kept, to phone Long Tom again. Long Tom replied impatiently.

"No, nothing new," he said.

Monk took off from the Hudson River in one of Doc's fastest amphibian planes. The cabin craft shot across the murky night sky at a speed of nearly three hundred miles an hour.

Monk felt somewhat ill. He attributed this to apprehension for the safety of Ham. He had a bitter taste in his mouth. It had been there since he had left Renny with the police on the East Side.

The big chemist had the feeling he had overlooked something vitally important in the block threatened by the Cold Light. He felt it was something he should have recognized. Anyway, the sooner he got to Doc, the quicker the thing might appear.

Doc's uncanny power to read the thoughts and reactions of his five companions had been the salvation of Monk on many occasions. It was much the same with the giant fist-slinging Renny. Doc had extricated Renny and Monk from many hazardous spots.

IN the East, slight streamers of light were telling of an early dawn. The dawn over Manhattan that was the beginning of a chaotic day.

Monk had planned to leave Doc's plane at a Washington airport and there take a taxicab to the vicinity of the address he had heard Wheeze McGovern give in the telegram sent to Ham. Over the suburbs of the capital city, Monk angled to a lower altitude. On half throttle, the small plane skimmed along a couple of hundred feet above the tops of the trees. Suddenly, Monk angled even lower. A blotch of bright yellow had appeared among the greenery. Monk took one of Doc's own inventions, an electronic glass, or, rather, powerful binoculars created by Doc on the electronic principle. The lenses of this telescopic device not only brought distant scenes close to the eyes, but they also amplified them in the vision much the same as radio tones are amplified for the listener by the loud-speaker. One look through the glasses, as he held the little plane in a tight spiral and Monk growled in his throat. "Howlin' calamities!" he barked. "I got here just in time! Hold 'em, you dag-goned shyster! I'm comin'!" Monk shoved the plane into a dive. The staccato thunder of its direct drop awakened hundreds of Washingtonians before their usual hour of arising.

Chapter 10. HAM'S IN A JAM

BRIGADIER GENERAL THEODORE MARLEY BROOKS'S arrival in Washington somewhat preceded the coming there of Doc Savage, and of Monk. If Ham had called Doc's headquarters after receiving the bogus telegram from Wheeze McGovern, the outcome might have been different.

Ham was a natty figure, as he yawned his way from a passenger plane. He was wearing a spiffy topcoat, with a light hat pulled with jaunty effect over one eye. He swung what appeared to be a light walking stick.

In reality, it was the sheath for a sword blade of the finest steel. Several inches of the sword tip covered with an anesthetic drug. The smallest prick with the point was sufficient to render an opponent temporarily insensible.

Ham, at this moment, knew little of the Var explosions. Only the radio report of the Carberry blast and the warnings of the expected attack upon Manhattan had reached him.

Though uninformed of his companions' connection with the rapidly developing menace, Ham suspected this sudden call in the night might have some connection with it.

Ham left the airport in a taxicab. He gave Dupont Circle as an address close to the residence where he had been instructed to appear.

It was somewhat puzzling why Doc should have commanded a meeting at the unearthly hour of four o'clock in the morning. Ham alighted at Dupont Circle and made his way toward K Street. The yellow house was anything but modest. Its golden-yellow bulk affronted its more decorous neighbors. Heavy curtains were drawn at the windows, but knifelike lines of brilliant light appeared at the edges. A dim light burned in the entrance hall. The front door was set in a deep alcove approached by a wide porch.

Ham's step was light as he crossed the porch. His fingers twiddled the cane in a flourishing circle.

IT was the mistake of an unseen man, that he growled a command to others instead of attacking silently. Ham's reaction to the menacing voice was instant. His heavy cane was traveling in a vicious arc before he had seen any person or any movement.

The swinging cane rapped the man flatly across one ear. The man grunted once and slipped to his knees.

Ham bounced the cane from the fallen one to a spot above a white face that loomed up from the alcove. A ringing rap of metal on hard bone and a howl of pain was the response.

If all of his unexpected assailants had been on the one side, Ham might have disposed of the four who had been in ambush. But two others were behind him. Ham heard their rush and attempted to draw the rapier blade from its sheath.

A hard-knuckled fist struck his spine a paralyzing blow at the base of his skull. A sinuous arm enwrapped his throat, snapping his head backward. The dim light in the entrance hallway danced, then it went out completely.

THE light came back, but now it was a painful glare against Ham's aching eyes. The lawyer was seated in an old-fashioned chair of the Victorian period. Before he looked into the faces of his captors, he noted the big room was furnished with articles antique collectors like to call "Early American."

Ham guessed shrewdly this old Washington home had either been leased or purchased furnished, for whatever purpose the gang surrounding him intended using it. Glancing at the nearest men, he quickly revised the thought of a "gang."

Ham counted eleven men. Voices of others sounded from another room in the rear.

"Quite a reception committee," Ham drawled.

One man, with mild blue eyes, blinked behind thick lenses.

"I can't say exactly what the chief may want," he volunteered. "You will be given a message

later. You are to be informed that you are at the mercy of Var. Your friend—the chemist you call Monk—has been in Var's hands for several hours. The chief instructed you were to be told that Monk will be destroyed by the armored robot in which he is now imprisoned, if you refuse to do exactly as you are told. Your leader, Doc Savage, has been rendered helpless."

Ham's keen face sobered at the reference to Monk. The man's words were too sincerely spoken to have been an invention. But at the statement Doc had been rendered helpless, Ham grinned.

The speaker withdrew and the men swung into small groups. They talked in low tones. Ham's eyes had been busy every minute he had been speaking.

His sword cane, still intact, he noted was only a few feet away in a corner. Two buttons controlling the lights were plainly in view on the wall, a little to one side of the cane.

MORE than Ham's eyes had been at work for him.

On the middle finger of his right hand was what appeared to be a gold ring of heavy pattern. Concealed by his back, Ham had crossed his pliant fingers.

One crossed finger pressed a spot in the head of the ring. Ham suppressed a grimace. A sharp, tiny blade had darted along his palm and the wrist above it.

But the blade, operated on the spring forming the inside of the gold ring, had darted inside the cord tying his wrists together and, in turn, his body to the heavy chair. The deft finger worked rapidly. The spring recoiled and the blade dropped back. Again, it was sent darting along his palm. Ham knew blood was oozing from the cut in his hand. He maneuvered to keep its dripping from being noticed by pulling his hands well upon the chair's cushion. The cord parted. There were still several wrappings to be sliced.

The front door buzzer burred viciously. Ham risked severing an artery with his swift play of the blade of the ring. He was still tightly held as four men moved in a group toward the door.

"It will be Var's messenger, but take no chances," warned one of the men.

"I wouldn't know if it were Var himself," growled another. "I've never seen him."

"None of us have, except Wheeze," the first man replied. "But make sure of the password and the card."

The four men were in the hallway. The eyes of all the others were fixed in that direction. Ham's hands were slippery with blood, but he was free. He waited tensely until he heard the outer door's bolt being drawn. Now or never, he decided.

Heaving his body forward, he kicked the heavy chair sidewise. It caught the nearest man in the stomach. Ham's lithe figure reached the wall. One hand was clicking the light buttons as the other grasped the sword cane.

THE room was plunged into darkness. One of the buttons had also switched off the dim light in the entrance hallway. The outer door had opened and a heavy voice had muttered, "Rav rules!"

For three or four seconds no one moved, except the man who had got the chair in his stomach. Ham grinned to himself over his temporary advantage. Though dawn was breaking outside, the heavy draperies over the windows excluded all light.

Ham played his sword blade, sharp as a razor, in experimental thrusts. The point contacted a yielding body. A man grunted with pain. He thumped to the floor on his face. This terminated the breathless suspense.

Ham could hear the rush of bodies. His sword blade became a darting tongue. It barely pinked two more men. A couple of others fell over this pair as they went down.

"Look out!" cried a voice. "He's got the sword out of that cane!"

One man started dragging back a curtain to let in light. Another man knocked him aside.

"Keep 'em closed, you fool!" he commanded. "Get him quick!"

The order was easily given. Laying hands upon the waspish, elusive figure of the fencing lawyer was much more difficult. One man had filled his hand with a silenced automatic. A yellowish-blue tongue of fire licked across the room.

At that instant, one man became distinctly visible to Ham. Or, rather, his eyes could be seen. They seemed to float into the room without a body. They glowed with the luminosity of a cat's eyes on the prowl at night.

"Put up that gun!" said a high-pitched, strident voice. "He isn't to be hurt, understand?"

The gun ceased to flame. The eyes came directly toward Ham, as if their owner could see the lawyer plainly in the darkness. A door opened toward the rear of the house. Faint light from somewhere above revealed a narrow stairway. Ham shifted sidewise and pinked another man. Two of the gang rushed, and collided with each other.

Ham was backing toward the narrow stairway. He figured if he could reach it he could stand off an army, as long as the order held against shooting him. The room he was leaving was filled with milling men, seeking him in the darkness.

The luminous eyes floated to one side. Apparently this man was withdrawing. The eyes vanished.

Ham had his feet on the bottom stair. Here, he could be plainly seen. He started backing slowly upward.

From the gloom of the space Ham had just vacated came an eerie, mellow sound. It was like the low

piping note of some rare tropical bird. The softly whistled cadence filled all the rooms for an interval of a few seconds.

"Who did that?" rasped a voice.

The short puzzled oaths following, filled Ham with elation. Doc Savage was among the men in that room. None had ever before heard the peculiar emanation of sound that came from the bronze man. The realization of Doc's presence strengthened Ham. Whirling the sword point, he retreated up the stairs. A dozen men crowded after him, but carefully maintained a discreet distance. Ham found two more flights and backed up these.

One of the men below him laughed.

"Let him go!" he ordered. "He can't get off the roof! We'll have him! Where's the little persuader?"

HAM had determined to make a stand in the narrow stairway below the skylight leading to the roof. Only one man at a time could reach him. He had hoped he would be safe. Nothing but bullets would ever get past the shimmering sword blade.

Something did get past it. This was the "little persuader" the man had mentioned.

Ham was smiling. He was really enjoying his position, especially since he was aware Doc was at hand. At any instant, he expected a tornado to break loose. He waited hopefully, prepared to launch himself downward as soon as Doc went into action.

Ham could picture the amazement when the bronze man exploded in the midst of these men. Not even the gigantic Renny, or the apelike Monk, was half the equal of Doc when he started using his mighty fists. But the group clustered at the foot of the stairs remained intact.

Suddenly, there was a sizzling stream ascending. It was being shot from a small, circular affair; such as would hold a steel tape line. Ham gasped. He was compelled to use his left arm to shield his face and eyes.

Ammonia fumes were clogging his nostrils. He couldn't breathe. Then he heaved himself upward and his shoulder carried away the window sash of the skylight. Inhaling a long breath, Ham bounded to the roof.

As other feet pounded on the stairs, Ham sprang to one side. He was confident he would discover a near-by tree or some other means of descending from the four-story roof. He realized his mistake too late. He should have held his opponents at the top of the narrow stairway.

Now some ten men were in the open on the roof. They were grimly determined on recapturing their prisoner. Half the men carried short clubs and other improvised weapons. Ham spotted a chimney and backed up to it.

His enemies ringed him closely. In the dawning light, they were able to keep clear of his flying sword. Ham was deliberately refraining from taking the offensive.

Doc was there somewhere. He wished he knew Doc's plans. The bronze adventurer always had carefully calculated reasons for his every action. That Doc had done no more than apprise Ham of his presence was proof he had some definite goal.

Ham wished he knew more to guide his own play. He scrutinized the faces around him. He was fairly sure two persons were missing from the ring of men now closing in.

From the stairs came a high-pitched voice. There was a scuffling sound. A body bumped in the hallway below the roof. Almost at once, an ugly, malformed face appeared in the skylight.

A deep voice complained, "Some guy down there made a mistake! He swung for me, but when I tried to grab him, he got away!"

"It's all right, Gobo!" ejaculated one of the men, quickly.

"That probably was Scraggs! I was taking you to him when this sword slinger broke loose! Come here and help grab this fellow!"

THE hulking man who came onto the roof had puffed, unhealthy cheeks. His tow-colored hair was matted and his nose was broken. Of all the men Ham had seen, this was the only one who had the marks of being a bruiser. Ham smiled inwardly. He knew this man to be Doc Savage. Ham knew now whence the whistle had come.

It had been this man's voice at the entrance giving the password, "Rav rules."

Without glancing at Ham, the new arrival said, "Circle the chimney and get him from behind! The chief said he didn't want him injured. He wants to use him!"

Ham judged he should make a final pretense of fighting his way out, then permit himself to be overwhelmed. The bronze man had not looked at him directly. In fact, Doc was warily closing in on him from behind.

Ham deliberately pinked another man. Then a club was flung at him. His sword arm took the blow and Ham staggered.

Low overhead, a small airplane suddenly roared in a dive.

It was Monk, coming in from New York.

AFTER sighting the vividly yellow house, Monk pulled Doc's small amphibian into a tight spiral. Two maple trees grew beside the four-story house. They were spaced so near each other, their

leafy branches seemed to be interlaced. Monk drew in one long breath, shifted the plane elevators and dived.

He clicked off the ignition as the trees, the house and the lawn leaped up to meet the hurtling plane. With wind screaming in the wires, the diving ship thrust between the trees. The silvery wings stripped off. The speed of the cabinet fuselage was slightly checked.

The next instant, Monk was being carried through the wall of the yellow house with the speed of a stone thrown from a catapult. The forward part of the cabin was crushed. Through this aperture, the body of Monk continued onward.

Monk's rebound to his feet was fast. It was as if his ungainly body were made of rubber. He was in an upper room of the house. Dashing through the first doorway, Monk glimpsed two men dropping down the stairway from the roof.

Each carried a short club.

The big chemist's cry was one of delight. One man threw his club. He was not quick enough. Monk's long arms had reached. The men were of average size. Both were taller than Monk. But their heads took the impact of the hallway wall at the same instant.

Monk had heaved one over each shoulder. Plaster and laths scattered under the blows from their skulls. Monk's broad shoulders filled the narrow stairway and the skylight. He gained the roof. Two other men were quick enough, one with his fists and another with the flat side of an automatic pistol. They hammered at Monk's head as he came up. The chemist's breath hissed through his teeth. He caught an ankle and twisted once. The owner squealed with pain and dropped the gun.

BACK in Manhattan, Monk had been given no chance to replace the super-machine pistol Wheeze's men had taken from him. Now he caught up the automatic from the roof. He was about to shoot at another man rushing toward him, but he refrained.

There now were only six men on the roof around Ham. Monk contented himself with rushing into the attackers, the automatic swinging as a club.

To Monk's disgusted amazement, Ham had dropped the point of his sword.

"You would bust in on a gentlemen's party!" came sharply from Ham. "Can't that ape brain of yours understand when one is just practicing!"

Monk's short legs pivoted him to a stop. His homely face went blank with amazement.

"Well, I'll be flabbergasted!" he jerked out. "You tricky low-down shyster, now what are you—"

Ham's surprising words pulled his eyes away from his closest enemy. One of the short clubs smacked him viciously behind the ear. Monk folded to his knees and fell forward. His hard skull had barely resisted the impact. His senses had faded out.

Ham groaned. He hadn't meant that to happen. He had hoped to see Monk seized. But it was too late for regret, now. The broken-nosed man with the washed-out blue eyes had glided swiftly between Monk and the man with the club.

"Don't hit him again!" he commanded in a guttural threat that got instant respect. "The chief doesn't want these fellows hurt!"

It had been Doc's unspoken order that had caused Ham to prevent Monk from finishing the job of cleaning up the roof.

Ham had seen the lips of the broken-nosed man moving just as Monk sprang into the encounter. He had read the brief message. All of Doc's men were expert lip readers. Doc had said:

"Hold it, Ham—stop Monk—let them take you—escape police—we want Var."

Doc believed he was on a trail that would lead quickly to the Cold Light murderer. Perhaps they could discover Var in time to avert the menace over Manhattan.

Chapter 11. VAR BLINDS HIS TRAIL

HAM and Monk, securely bound, were shoved into two closed cars. There were three cars in waiting. These leaped away along an alley.

Ham and Monk were unloaded at the rear of an isolated, tumble-down house at the northern edge of Washington. Nine men, with Doc, had accompanied the cars. Behind these cars, trailing them until the prisoners had been taken inside, was a small, battered roadster.

The driver of this car was the little man with the scraggly face and clothes. He halted his small car a block away and made his way cautiously forward. Unseen, he slipped through a window into the basement of the old house. In the darkness of the cellar, his eyes took on the luminous propensities of a prowling cat.

Keeping to his role, Doc Savage saw Monk and Ham deposited temporarily in a small room with boarded windows. The other men assembled in a larger room with cheap, rough furnishings. High, narrow windows gave forth a little light.

As Ham was dumped unceremoniously on the floor, Doc made an excellent pretense of handling him roughly. At the same time, he was whispering:

"Follow all instructions. These men mean nothing. They seem expecting this Var himself."

Ham was astute enough to play his part.

Though Doc's role of the broken-nosed thug had been a surprise, his actions had been cleverly carried out. The men of the Var ring apparently were unsuspecting. Doc's swift analysis of their

character led him to believe that several were far more intelligent than the average type of criminal.

The bronze man was confronted with the problem of being almost sure two or three had never before engaged in a crooked enterprise. It made their association with Var all the more puzzling.

ALL had the air of expectant waiting. This was suddenly rewarded by the tones of a high-pitched voice. This came from a ventilator leading up from the basement.

"Brothers of the ring! Our action here has been deferred! The chief has decided to wait until after the Cold Light has fallen upon New York! Then Doc Savage's man will receive the message he is to deliver to the White House! The Manhattan explosion will make certain a commission will be formed as Var wishes! Coming from Doc Savage, the word to the White House will be impressive enough to gain attention! Bring in this man Ham!"

Ham's legs were now tightly bound, as well as his arms. He was carried in and placed in a chair. Doc unostentatiously shifted his position closer to a door he had marked as leading to the cellar of the old house. He was convinced he knew the owner of that voice. His character study brought before him a skinny neck in which a nervous Adam's apple would be jumping up and down.

Doc knew these men never had seen their chief, the man called Var. The strangely delivered message was the first direct link that seemed to connect with the perpetrator of the Cold Light explosions. The voice spoke again briefly:

"Five of you will remain here to guard the prisoners! The others will go at once to the place designated! We will then—"

The speech was cut off abruptly by a smash of Doc's mighty fist. A panel of the locked basement door was shattered to splinters. The door was of ancient, flimsy construction. The lock was torn loose and went flying down the basement stairway.

Though the bronze man apparently made no leap, his feet were on the damp concrete floor of the cellar when the lock banged with a ringing sound. His surprising movement and his quickness converted the room he had just left into roaring confusion.

In the basement's gloom, Doc flashed the searching ray of his generator flashlight. His other hand held a stupefying capsule no larger than a small glass pill. He located the cold-air shaft leading from the dead furnace.

Doc had expected to see the figure of the scraggy little man crouched somewhere close by. He was surprised to see no one. Swinging the light around, he discovered the small basement room seemed to be empty.

One more glance was sufficient to reveal the clever trick performed by this elusive emissary of the man Var. The cold-air pipe had been dislodged close to the outer wall of the foundation. One stone had been removed. The aperture led into the ventilator located in the room above. Var's messenger had apparently been crouched on the ground outside the house.

THE man had ceased speaking when the basement door crashed. He had vanished so swiftly Doc could not hear his running feet. Before Doc could reach the stairs, the men above were descending upon him.

Doc flipped a gas capsule and it fell at the feet of the foremost man. But the rush carried the men over the gas before it could become effective. The bronze man was holding his own breath. Then an automatic pistol slashed its blaze into the gloomy basement. And a sizzling stream of ammonia searched for Doc's eyes and nostrils.

With his eyes tightly closed, Doc charged directly into the members of Var's ring. Though he was not breathing, the ammonia was pungent in his nostrils. Two men crashed into opposite walls under fists so fast and so effective they had no chance to use their weapons against them.

But one man had fallen, locking his arms around Doc's legs. The bronze man staggered. He was free in an instant, and the other man had rolled over limply. Doc's thumb had simply pressed into a clotted nerve group in the ringster's neck. The man would be paralyzed for several minutes. Five men in all cluttered the basement floor, as the bronze man reached the top of the short stairway.

In a determined effort to free himself and go to Doc's aid, Ham had succeeded only in upsetting the chair. He was squirming on the floor.

As Doc reached him, a car roared away outside. Doc sprang to a window. In the space of seconds, he was back and had sliced the cords from Ham's arms and legs.

"The other room, Doc!" gasped Ham. "They've done something to Monk! If they've put him out, I'll run them to the end of the world!"

But apparently the men who had escaped had not put Monk out. They had taken him with them. The room was empty.

Doc and Ham got to the outside. Two of the three closed cars were still there. But the hoods of both motors were thrown open. The ignition wires had been ripped loose from the instrument boards. The fleeing car was just disappearing on a side road, headed in the direction of the city.

DOC'S deduction was almost instant.

"Wherever they had Monk a prisoner, he saw too much," he stated. "Var needs your legal experience for some purpose, Ham. But this probably upsets his idea. He'll go ahead now with that explosion in Manhattan. We must return at once!"

"But how about Monk, Doc? I could make a try at--"

Doc looked thoughtfully into the sky to the eastward.

"I'm very sure Monk right now is on his way back to New York," he stated.

He did not explain his reason for believing this.

Before they had reached a corner where a taxicab could be summoned, the thin glass shells had been removed from over the eyes of flaky gold. Their hypnotic pools again stirred with little whirlwinds.

Doc was thinking the luring of Ham and then himself to Washington had been for the purpose of making sure they would not be in Manhattan at nine o'clock this morning.

The taxicab was rushing toward the airport. Doc saw he would have just time to catch the plane that would arrive in New York at the time set by Var for the explosion of the city block.

He said to Ham, "You'll wait and take the White Liner back. It arrives an hour after the Red Arrow. If there is a little man on board with a ragged haircut and a loose Adam's apple, we want to know where he goes. His clothes are as ragged as his hair; and if you happen to hear him speak, it will likely be the voice that came through the ventilator."

"Would that be the one I heard them call Scraggs?" Ham suggested.

"The name would fit, and you couldn't miss him," said Doc. "He'll be on one or the other of the planes."

Doc's conjecture was partly correct. The scraggly little man at that moment was preparing to board a plane. But it was neither the Red Arrow nor the White Liner.

VONIER, the explorer, was in the waiting room at the Red Arrow airport. His intense blue eyes lighted a little when his gaze automatically followed the turning of all faces toward the big man who came unhurriedly through the wide doors.

"I can well believe all the adventures credited to him," murmured the explorer. "He looks like a bad one to get in anybody's soup."

Ten seconds later, Vonier added, again to himself, "It's almost unbelievable, but I'd bet my last dollar Doc Savage knows I've been waiting here in the hope of catching him. And he hasn't even seemed to glance this way."

This was true. The smooth, bronzed face had not once turned in the explorer's direction. The eyes of flaky gold had not appeared to have observed any person in particular. Then Doc walked across the big room and stopped before Vonier.

"A man I've always wanted to meet," the bronze man stated, as if introductions already had been effected. "Your paper on your last trip into the Arctic afforded me great pleasure. I'm glad to meet you here, Vonier. You came here to meet me, did you not?"

Vonier fixed him with a steady gaze. Then he glanced down his thin nose and shook his head.

"That savors of the occult, Savage," he smiled. "No other person on earth, except my wife, knew I had it in mind to find you in Washington. Are you a mind reader?"

"Not at all, Vonier," Doc smiled in return. "By this time, all Manhattan is stirred by something of which it never before heard. That is Cold Light. You are one of perhaps only seven men in New York who has seen Cold Light, even though it is of a far different variety. The other six men are my five closest companions and myself."

"Yes," assented Vonier. "That is true, but how would that give you such absolute certainty?"

"You knew we had visited, months ago, the caverns of the strange race in the Arctic ice field," added Doc. "You had learned that we have been drawn into the mystery of the man called Var. Perhaps you have learned something you believe I should know."

VONIER laughed shortly, a note of uneasiness. He glanced around as if making certain they could not be overheard.

"It may sound simple enough to you, Doc Savage, but the average man would suspect you of being linked up with the supernatural. However, it is something more vital to me than you think. Something that impelled me to reach you as quickly as possible."

"Then you've had a message from this Var," Doc stated. "It is perhaps his idea that he can use your vast knowledge."

Vonier spread his thin, bony bands.

"I give it up," he said. "Probably you know all that is in the message."

"Hardly that," the bronze man smiled. "But we've only two minutes. I must be in New York at nine."

"I knew that, and it was why I was waiting here," Vonier said. "As soon as we are aboard the plane, I'll show you the note that has kept me awake and which seemed unbelievable until last night. I am threatened with death if I do not join Var's organization."

The pilot grinned down at Doc Savage as he climbed aboard. Because of an emergency, the same flier was taking the early morning Red Arrow plane back to the Newark Airport.

Vonier had maneuvered a seat next to the one Doc had thoughtfully reserved on his arrival in Washington. The seat just ahead of Doc was vacant. He thought the passenger had missed the plane, if it had been engaged, for the door was being closed. Then the door reopened and a breathless man came in. The pulsing blood had reddened the bald spot between tufts of white hair. Doc recalled that only a few hours before that same bald spot had been the color of gray chalk. The man was Carberry, the retired financier.

CARBERRY'S pale-bluish eyes, slightly protruding, seemed to jump with recognition at the sight of Doc Savage. He extended one thin, blue-veined hand.

"I wish I'd have known you were in Washington, Doc Savage!" he exclaimed. "I'd have asked you to go with me to the Federal agents! Even with all that has happened, the government agents don't want to take this thing seriously!"

J. Afton Carberry was shaking. His hands jerked continuously. He had apparently not noticed the explorer, Vonier, until the latter had spoken.

"I believe we've met, Carberry," he remarked. "You may recall I had occasion to congratulate you on your book dealing with the origin of species."

"Yes—oh, yes!" admitted Carberry. "That is right. We were on the same program at the museum. However, Vonier, I've never taken my own theories seriously. I've made a hobby of many curious things. After a man's made his money, that's about all he has left."

Doc apparently was watching the preparation for the takeoff. He was studying both men. They were the direct opposites of each other.

Vonier might perish in any one of countless ways, but his nerve never would be shaken.

Carberry was of a volatile disposition. The menace over him had apparently unnerved him to the point of physical discomfort. His blue-veined hands continued shaking.

"I thought you had planned to take Mrs. Carberry away," suggested Doc.

"Yes—oh, yes—I have," the financier replied. "She is perfectly safe where she is. I'll admit, though, I'm gravely concerned over this thing. This man Var's a dangerous maniac!"

"That's not my idea," disagreed Vonier. "So far as I've learned it, his scheme of destruction is too perfectly planned in detail to be the work of a lunatic."

Carberry seemed to be fumbling for a reply. The Red Arrow plane had taken off and circled with the wind on its tail. It was already making up the lost time of departure in the direction of Manhattan. Then came the voice. Thin, but stridently clear, it filled the space of the passenger cabin:

"Doc Savage—Carberry—Vonier——"

Eyes of those in the seats leaped from one to another. All had heard of Var's mystic warnings. Vonier looked steadily at Doc Savage, a slight smile on his lips. There had been a pause in the voice.

"Yes, Doc Savage," he said, calmly. "I think this Var is dangerously sane."

Chapter 12. DEATH OVER MANHATTAN

IN the passenger cabin, the first excited murmuring of the inmates hushed. Only the steady beat of the motors could be heard.

Then the voice again:

"This is my final warning! Doc Savage, you will forget what you have learned! One of your men is in my hands! Vonier and Carberry—you will do as already instructed! This is my final word! For I am—Var!"

The voice seemed everywhere. It had the elusive quality of direction which a good ventriloquist imparts. Doc's hypnotic eyes had observed Vonier and Carberry in turn.

Carberry was shaking as if with palsy. Vonier was calmly rubbing one finger along his thinly arching nose.

Then Doc was on his feet. Swiftly he directed the stewardess, "Go through every article of the women's baggage." There were four women aboard. "I'll take the men myself."

The stewardess hesitated. The broad-faced pilot had given the controls over to the co-pilot. His mirror had shown the excited movement in the cabin, though he had not heard the voice.

Taking a cue from the attitude of the stewardess, a male passenger started to say, "By what right have you—"

"You'll do as Doc Savage directs!" snapped the pilot "He has full police authority on the Red Arrow lines!"

The bronze man's hunt was quick but thorough. The stewardess aided as best she could.

DOC and the others missed seeing a hand steal through a two-inch opening of a window ventilator. A small object started on a mile drop to the gliding earth below.

Vonier suddenly exclaimed, glancing at his wrist watch, "We're a little late, aren't we, pilot? It's two minutes to nine o'clock."

The pilot, moving back toward his cabin, sighted through a window. The sky needles of Manhattan

were shining in the brilliant sun only a few miles ahead.

"Ten minutes or so off schedule," the pilot grinned. "We've been held up a little. Figured maybe you folks would appreciate a grand-stand seat in the sky for the big blow-off down there—if there is one."

Clearly, the pilot was doubtful of the reason for all the madness in Manhattan.

"For Heaven's sake, man!" gasped Carberry. "You mean we'll be over Manhattan at nine o'clock?"

"Correct, brother!" The pilot's grin broadened. "It oughta be worth an extra fare!"

"I'd say we are in the safest possible spot," stated Vonier, calmly.

"Perhaps," said Doc Savage.

Vonier leaned closer to him.

"When we get down, Savage," he said in a low tone, "I believe I have something new on the formula for Cold Light. I'd like you to see it."

The explorer's lips were drawn back from his skeleton hard jaws. Even with his coolness, the smile was gruesomely reminiscent of a bony death's-head.

"I'll appreciate that greatly," Doc replied.

DOC SAVAGE, during the flight to Washington, had worked out and transmitted to Long Tom the formula for creating the ex-neutralizer with which he planned to combat the destructive Cold Light. While in the role of the broken-nosed man, he had employed the plane's radiophone to good advantage. His instructions to Long Tom had been detailed and explicit.

Doc had brought an advanced theory into practical working form with less than an hour of thinking.

Back in Manhattan, Long Tom was at work in the creation of a machine that would build a wall. Doc had enlarged upon an idea of a ray to meet a ray. He had so analyzed the explosion at the home of J. Afton Carberry as to become positive it had a double origin.

From some inexplicable source, perhaps from the magnetized earth itself, a gigantic destructive force had leaped to meet the ray of Cold Light. Therefore, a neutralizing ray to clash with that other ray in its death-dealing path would hardly be sufficient.

Doc judged the force must be something more like a wall. That would be the answer. An electromagnetic wall which the Cold Light ray could neither penetrate nor cross.

Just now, with the Red Arrow plane flying toward the sky line of Manhattan at a speed of more than two miles a minute, Doc was hoping Long Tom might have the new machine ready for its first test.

And the explorer, Vonier, was calmly telling him he had something new to offer on the formula of Cold Light. The bronze man studied the intensely blue eyes of the man. Vonier's eyes were the exact shade of the bright blue ink on the passport card that had admitted him to Var's inner organization. An aquamarine blue. The kind of a blue that only the occasional artistic genius can capture in oils on a canvas.

The financier, Carberry, his thin lips twitching, also was observing Vonier closely. Though Vonier's words regarding the formula had been directed at Doc only, Carberry's straining ears had caught them. The financier apparently was in that state of extreme fear which led him to suspect any person who might be familiar with such mysterious elements as Cold Light.

AS the island of Manhattan swam closer, with the broad Hudson widening into the harbor below, the Red Arrow plane was between five and ten minutes behind its schedule. The good-humored pilot angled the plane lower.

It was exactly nine o'clock.

Around the Red Arrow passenger plane the sky was empty. Plainly, other pilots were not interested in occupying grandstand seats for the explosion. The police commissioner, taking every precaution, had issued an explicit order grounding all aircraft in the Manhattan area.

But that order had failed to reach the Red Arrow pilot. Apparently, another pilot also had disregarded it. But this second plane was at so great an altitude as to be indistinguishable against the sun from the ground level. If it was seen at all, it appeared as only a possible tiny black speck in the observer's eye.

It was a small plane and it was flying at an altitude of more than four miles high.

As Carberry announced the time as nine o'clock, a steely-blue ray knifed downward from the higher heavens. Though the daylight was clear, this spikelike band could be plainly seen. It struck instantly all the way to the earth below.

Crowds back of police lines blocks from the heart of the threatened area gasped. To these hundreds of thousands of spectators, it seemed as if the fiendish hand of the destroyer above had directed the Cold Light ray directly upon the Red Arrow passenger plane.

The hushed crowds saw this. Simultaneously, a chilling blast of air swept across all of the central Manhattan area. The normal breathing of the terror-ridden, but curious, multitude of citizens was sharply interrupted. The air was sucked upward in a mighty cyclonic whirlwind.

Then the air came slapping back with the force of some tangible substance. Thousands of those closest to the explosion area would have been blown from their feet, had not the packed mass of the

crowd kept them erect. The whole sea of upturned faces seemed to rock in a slow, rippling wave as individuals fought to maintain their balance.

THE six-story block designated by Var instantly ceased to exist. In its place arose an intense blue cloud. This was seen by those at a distance as a gigantic pyramid with a pointed apex reaching toward the sky. The blueness of the sky seemed dim in comparison to the color of the geometrically formed blast of vapor.

From this leaping, single tongue, wreckage spewed over many surrounding blocks.

The island of Manhattan swayed. New York was given a brief demonstration of what it feels like to be caught in an earthquake.

In the Red Arrow plane, Doc Savage has seen the first flash of the Cold Light. So highly keyed were the reactions of the bronze man's senses, he had seen something so clearly that he had arrived at a new conclusion in the infinitesimal part of a second.

Some force more definite than the magnetic response of the earth itself was leaping to meet the chilling ray of deadly Cold Light.

From below, the strange blue vapor of the blast was rushing upward. All of the sustaining air had been instantly sucked away from the propellers and wings of the Red Arrow plane. Débris was riding into the sky on the aquamarine pyramid.

All the air seemed to return upon the passenger plane with cyclonic assault. The Red Arrow ship was whirled over and over. It became a mere helpless leaf blown by a hurricane.

Chapter 13. MONK BAILS OUT

AT the moment the Red Arrow plane plunged into a seemingly fatal spin, Monk was awakening to aching consciousness. Though his skull was hard as granite, the battering of the past hours had been such as to have given a stone monument a headache.

Monk's first impression was that he had been carried away in a boat. Then he quickly realized the jerking lurches of the floor on which he was lying could mean only one thing. He was traveling in an airplane.

Monk flexed the muscles of his long arms and short legs. All of his bones were intact. Moreover, his feet and hands were free. Clearly, some one among his recent enemies must be foolhardy.

Then Monk became aware his freedom of body did not afford all the opportunity he had believed. He was breathing with difficulty. All his body was cold. When he moved his arms, he discovered they were numbed.

This was no phenomenon. For the huge, apelike chemist was slowly being frozen. The temperature about him was several degrees below zero. The plane was riding at a high altitude. The rarefied atmosphere did not provide oxygen enough for his unaccustomed lungs. This and the frigid bath prevented his greatly abnormal strength from returning quickly.

Twisting his head, Monk peered through narrowed eyes under his gristly, jutting brows. He was in a small cabin plane. The ship had twin control seats. A man occupied each of these.

MONK could see their faces in a cabin-view mirror above the instrument board. The man then handling the plane was smoothly sleek and dark-skinned. He had not been among either of the groups Monk had encountered.

The pilot was stamped mostly by a gold-toothed smile—a fixed smile of evil, as it showed in the strip of mirror.

The man in the other seat was scraggly of person and clothing. Monk did not know this, but it was the mysteriously moving Scraggs. Doc had guessed Scraggs might be returning to New York on either the Red Arrow or the White Liner plane. For this, Ham's departure from Washington had been delayed in the hope of picking up the trail of the elusive messenger for Var.

Monk lay quite still, watching the two men. The plane was still taking on more altitude. The chemist gritted his teeth to prevent their chattering. He was gathering strength for an attack.

His big hands cautiously explored his clothing. Not a weapon or device had been left upon his person. He must depend upon his bare hands alone. Monk grinned to himself. There were only two men.

The luminous dial on the instrument board showed a few seconds to nine o'clock. The gold-toothed man muttered, but his words were snatched away by the thundering beat of the propeller.

Scraggs's long, wraithlike hands took over control. Monk saw the other man was bringing forth a flat instrument. This was somewhat the shape and size of a large-calibered automatic pistol.

But the metal was of steely blue. Monk judged it was some new alloy of which he did not know.

The gold-toothed man pressed one side of a series of buttons appearing on one side. From the device came a vicious whirring, much the same vibrant sibilancy as that of a rattlesnake about to strike.

Monk identified the sound as coming from some tiny, but powerful, generator. The gold-toothed man pressed another button.

The scraggly little man drew Monk's gaze. He had cried out sharply, as if in warning. The plane's motor had missed. It was coughing in the midst of what had been a smooth rhythm of power.

Monk crouched. His chance was at hand.

THE little plane was staggering with a slowing propeller. An oath ripped from the gold-toothed man. His thumb pressed a trigger on the side of the steely blue instrument.

Monk could not have told if the air in the small cabin suddenly took on more frigidity. The cold about him already was under the zero mark.

But his skin suffered, a tingling, prickly sensation. Thousands of tiny needles seemed to be thrusting into him.

Monk saw an edged ray of light directed at the floor of the plane's cabin. Though knifelike, it had an weird, intangible quality. For it was passing directly through the metal that formed the plane's fuselage. The gold-toothed man was pointing it downward.

One second or five, Monk could not have told.

Some tremendous, invisible force was lifting the whole body of the small ship. It was as if the blue Cold Light itself was a motive force impelling the plane upward.

At that instant, the motor died.

Monk was in the act of springing at the two men. But he was held back. The support whirled from under his feet.

The scraggly little man at the controls dived into the metal frame of the windshield glass. His thin body collapsed between the seats.

The gold-toothed man had shut off the cold-producing beam. This was a convulsive, automatic act, rather than one of intent. The sender of the explosive ray into the heart of Manhattan was hurled into the roof of the plane.

MONK felt as if he were in the exact center of a whirlpool. His body shuttled this way and that, twice banging his hard head. But he kept his senses.

The plane did a complete wing-over and went into a tail spin.

Monk, fighting against being knocked out, could tell the convulsions of the ship were due to something far different from ordinary air current. The plane seemed to be plunging into a vortex, a vacuum of the sky.

This was in reality the vaporous burst shooting upward from the heart of Manhattan. Even in that flashing instant, the Cold Light having been flicked off, the cloud began to recede.

Below, bricks and metal were raining upon the city. Thousands of skyscraper windows were being smashed. For blocks around the center of the blast the windows and many walls of older buildings had buckled.

Monk got a grip on one of the control seats. His mighty muscles held him until he could get into position. The bucking, whirling plane at first resisted every effort to throw the ailerons and elevator into neutral.

Without much hope, Monk pressed the inertia starter. To his immense surprise, the propeller whirled and the motor caught. He battled the ship to a level keel.

Monk then had time to notice his battered, unconscious airmates. The scraggly man had a deep cut across his forehead. His sunken cheeks looked bloodless. But one long-fingered hand moved at random over his skinny breast.

The other man could no longer indulge in a gold-toothed smile. Nose, mouth and chin had been flatly smashed. Blood seeped over his chin. But he was still breathing heavily.

From one of the wings came a crackling, tearing sound. The plane staggered and fell off. It was temporarily out of control with a flapping aileron. Monk shifted the side sticks to compensate for the drag.

Monk saw the plane had dropped nearly two miles in its dive into the turmoil of the explosion. All possibility of gliding to a landing field was removed.

Ten thousand feet below loomed the green expanse of Central Park. But now, only the greenery of the trees was showing. Monk had hoped there might be space enough on one of the lawns to land the plane. All these areas were black, packed with terrified humanity.

Monk could mark the sea of white, upturned faces. To attempt a landing would kill and injure many persons.

AS packed mobs sometimes will, the thousands now in Central Park saw doom rushing downward and remained motionless. It was the individual thought, also as crowd madness, that death would hit only the other fellow.

Monk set the stabilizer device on the controls. This could not compensate for the damaged wing. The plane started a slow, circling drop.

The two unconscious men were wearing seat-pack parachutes. In a cabin rack were two other 'chutes.

Monk did not hesitate. Before he slipped into the harness of the air life preserver, he lifted the limp form of the gold-toothed man. Pushing him through the door, Monk ripped the man's 'chute as he sent him hurtling into space.

Five seconds later, Monk muttered, "I done all I could—"

The parachute of the monster whose hand had rocked Manhattan had only halfway blossomed. Some of

its cords had tangled. The small umbrella only partly checked the descent of the body, then it was torn apart by the rushing wind.

Var's aide, probably his chief lieutenant, fell nearly two miles. The body struck the cornice of a skyscraper. Dismembered, every possible identifying feature of the man was lost.

Nor was there about his clothing any mark or papers by which he might have been traced.

The plane continued its crazy circling, as Monk pulled back beside the slight figure of the scraggly little man.

"Dag-gone it!" muttered the big chemist. "I wouldn't wanta see that happen again!"

Once more, he tried the controls. The whirling motion had disrupted the plane's tail assembly. The elevator was tightly stuck.

The packed vista of Central Park was rushing upward. Monk made a quick, determined effort. He let go of the controls when he had made sure the plane would crash among some of the trees, well away from the densely packed crowds.

With a growl, he caught up the light figure of the scraggly man. The ground was still nearly a mile below. A strong wind had whipped up following the explosion.

Monk stepped off into space. The light little man was in his huge arms. Their bodies cleared the gyrating plane by only scant inches.

MONK was somersaulting, but his head was clear. One thick finger hooked into the little man's parachute ring. He ripped the pack. The 'chute spread. As it checked their momentum, Monk let go his hold. He feared their combined weight might tear the umbrella apart.

He pulled his own ring when he was still two thousand feet up. The 'chute billowed and danced under his weight. Caught by the wind, it drifted rapidly south.

With some satisfaction, Monk saw he would fall below Central Park. He was dropping toward the Seventh Avenue hotel section around Fiftieth Street. Just before a flat roof offered the best chance of landing safely, Monk could see small, blue-coated figures rushing along the avenue.

Then it came to him that he was falling from the plane that had brought madness, destruction and death to Manhattan.

"Dag-gone it!" he mumbled. "Now I'm in for it!"

His feet struck the roof of a hotel some three blocks from Central Park only a few seconds after the Cold Light plane tore itself to fragments in a treetop. As Monk regained his balance and struggled out of the 'chute harness, all of the hundreds who could reach the spot were tearing away the loose parts of the Cold Light plane.

When police arrived on the scene, the Cold Light-ray gun had disappeared.

Monk made for the nearest skylight and pried it open. It had been locked, but lock, bolt and all the fastenings came loose in his ponderous grasp. They might as well have been made of papier-mâché. Monk was in a hurry.

He slid down the steep stairs leading to the roof. Numerous brawny arms of the law were waiting to receive him.

Regardless of Monk's protests of innocence, they took him to headquarters on suspicion of being connected with the Cold Light.

Chapter 14. A GIRL SEEKS SCRAGGS

AS the Red Arrow passenger plane winged over in the first mad hurricane of the explosion, the dozen passengers were pitched from their seats. All except the seemingly cool and imperturbable man of bronze.

Doc Savage had set his cablelike tendons for the shock. His fingers were locked in the back of his seat.

Doc saw the pilot had been conked. The co-pilot was a limp bundle under his own wheel in the control room.

The motors threatened to tear themselves loose from their mountings.

The pilot had been flying low. That is, rather low over the sky-piercing masses of Manhattan. Doc had a glimpse of thrusting towers. The superb heights of the Radio City buildings glittered near. They were dangerously close.

Even under this stress, the bronze man's eyes of flaky gold got camera flashes. He was seeking reactions of those closest to him.

His bony legs thrust out as braces, Vonier, the explorer, was calmly seeking to prevent himself from being tossed about with the other passengers. And across his skeleton-hard mouth lay a faint smile.

The financier, Carberry, was jammed between another man and the roof of the cabin. The roof was now under their feet. Blood oozed from a cut in Carberry's forehead.

The man's countenance looked as if every drop of life fluid already had drained through that single gash over one eye. The scared chalky pallor had been replaced by the grayness usually seen only on the face of a corpse.

Carberry did not seem to be breathing.

THE man lying beside Carberry was evidently a traveling salesman. For he still clutched a sample case by its handle. He was very much alive. His free hand clawed for some new support, as the plane winged completely over for the second time.

With this new somersault, Doc saw the towers of Radio City rushing upward. A bare thousand feet more and the Red Arrow ship would be split into fragments over one of the edges of the cornices. The bronze man's movement toward the control cabin was neither a leap nor a hurried swinging of his body. Everything within the big plane was topsy-turvy. The stricken passengers were huddled lumps either of inert flesh and clothing, or squirming bodies seeking some relief from the pain of many hurts.

The man of golden bronze glided through and over all of these. The motors were threatening to shake the fuselage to bits. Upside down though it was, Doc performed the feat of getting into the pilot's seat.

Gripping the control wheel with one hand, he got the safety belt around him. The pilot had not been using it. His copilot had been hooked into his own. His raglike body still clung there. Now the earth, or the tangled, menacing part of it that was Manhattan, was for the moment the bronze man's sky. As he took the controls, the air of the explosion rushed back. The propellers bit into the atmosphere as if it were a swiftly flowing stream.

Looping a passenger plane, even with the combined power of its motors, is among the unrecorded feats of the world's greatest pilots. But the Red Arrow ship had succeeded in winging over on its back.

Doc played the controls with hands as strong and sensitive as those of some master pianist. The motors had more than full power now. The ship was a leaf apparently in the rushing wind from the Cold Light blast.

DOC started the nose climbing into that turbulent river of air. The wings screamed. It almost seemed as if no human agency could have constructed materials capable of resisting the tearing strain.

But the bronze man put the plane up and over. Bumps and groans rolled from the passenger cabin. Those still conscious suddenly found their positions reversed. The floor once more was under their feet.

With the plane upright, Doc was forced to throw the ship into a bank that almost stalled its motors. Even Vonier's eyes flickered then. One wing tip had come so close it appeared to brush the sharp corner of the tallest Radio City tower.

Doc leveled off. The plane was shooting directly toward another clifflike skyscraper. The distance was only a matter of yards. Similar masses of gleaming granite and glass hedged the ship in on two other sides.

Doc saw he was trapped. No human hand could ever pilot a plane over these heights. There was no space in which to circle in even the sharpest stalling bank.

Only parts of seconds separated the Red Arrow craft and all in it from crashing head-on into one or the other of the buildings. The speed was terrific. There could be but one answer to that. Doc's golden eyes flashed downward. This was well within the area that had been deserted. Some scattered débris from wrecked buildings had fallen to the streets.

Doc was thankful this was Manhattan. In almost any other city there would have been interlacing wires, phone and power poles. Here there were none.

The spread of the big plane was so nearly the width of the Street that the wing tips grazed the buildings on either side. Doc, without apparent anxiety, without a tremor of those bronzed, sure hands, was coolly flying the Red Arrow ship along a street.

Doc had no time to think about what street it might be. The signs flew past in a blur. He saw only that a wider space loomed ahead.

The nearest open space was the widening triangle of Broadway and Seventh Avenue between Forty-third and Forty-seventh Streets.

Doc depressed the elevators suddenly. The nose whipped up. The big plane seemed almost to hang suspended by only the power of its motors. The wide wings were flat against a vertical wall of air.

THE Red Arrow ship dropped. Its landing wheels were in the exact middle of Broadway. One wing tip was over a sidewalk. The plane shot forward. A deserted bus had been left standing in the middle of the street, just before the explosion.

On one side reared the curved, cave-like entrance to a subway station. Between the bus and this obstacle, the wings were trapped. One wing struck the bus and half of it was sheered off. The cabined fuselage skidded on one side.

Those of the nearest crowds behind the police lines were breaking through. Ambulances and police squad cars that had been held in readiness before the explosion racketed into a combined screaming of sirens.

Doc was out of the control room of the plane. Lifting a woman in his arms, he carried her to the door. The metal frame had jammed. Two men were frantically trying to pry it loose. The door was unyielding.

Without releasing the burden of the woman, Doc's cabled hand closed on a metal part where the glass was broken out. The tendons of the arms stood out like whipcords. Metal crunched and ground. The two men gasped as the door twisted out of its frame.

Vonier was just behind Doc. He was carrying the limp figure of Carberry. The financier's eyes opened. He moaned and tried to stand. Supported by the explorer, he succeeded.

Vonier was looking directly at Doc. The bronze man was making his third trip from inside the plane. Two police doctors were working over the victims.

"It's a miracle!" said one of the medical men. "Nothing but shock, concussion, three with minor fractures and bruises."

Some ten minutes elapsed before all were out and the medical men were ready to start three patients to the hospital. Doc stood flexing his muscles. Not a mark, bruise or scratch marred the smooth bronze skin. He was glancing around the circle of faces of those who had been in the plane. Suddenly, the voice that had startled all in the plane, that had put a whole city in terror, spoke:

"Doc Savage—my power has been proved! The world is in my hands! Stop before it is too late! You and your friends will be the next to go! One of my own aides is close beside you! I am—Var!"

The financier, Carberry, gave a great convulsive gasp. Vonier uttered a low, short oath. He and Carberry were darting sharp glances at the others who had been in the plane.

THE man who had been carrying a salesman's kit grew suddenly pale. His eyes were widening upon Doc. The bronze man's lips had not moved. His flaky, golden eyes now were turned upon this man. They were hypnotic orbs, that seemed for an instant to hold the man.

Then Doc moved slowly toward him.

Doc had simply applied his ventriloquistic talent. So adept was he in this especial ability that none would ever have known the latest voice of Var had issued from his own motionless lips.

The voice had been thin, strident, but clear. It might have come from any spot within a fifty-foot radius. But upon that one man who knew of only one source from which the real voice of Var might be summoned, there was the immediate palsy of fear.

Doc was beginning to believe that the voice also fell with dire significance upon the startled ears of another man within the passenger group. Because of this second theory, he permitted the salesman passenger to recover enough to begin edging back through the crowd.

The bronze man's eyes again were upon Vonier. The explorer was smiling, but his lips were drawn back from the skeleton teeth.

"Pretty good," he murmured. "In fact, almost perfect, Doc Savage. I wonder if the doctors have finished with the others, if one would have a look at my arm? I think it's broken in two places."

Doc was forced to admire the man's stoical calm. His left arm was not only broken, but in one place a sharp splinter of bone had been pushed through the skin.

Doc shifted his eyes back to the salesman. He saw only his back. The man was getting away. Doc took one step.

A girl's anxious voice inquired suddenly, "I'm looking for a passenger named Scraggs? He was to have arrived on the Red Arrow plane at nine o'clock. Have any of you seen him? He is a little man, wearing very old clothes. His hair is long and kind of ragged."

DOC pivoted slowly. He was instantly struck by the woman's clear-cut beauty. Her face was as perfect as an etching, as a carved cameo. Perhaps it was her apprehension for the safety of the man she sought. Her voice was edged by a sharp, metallic quality.

The pilot had recovered consciousness.

"We had such a man booked, miss," he said. "He went down with us on the Washington flight, but I guess he missed the plane coming back. He had his seat reserved, but at the last minute another man came with a note and took it. Maybe he knows; he's that—"

The pilot to whom Doc Savage had amply repaid the favor extended to him on the Washington flight, gave a quick look at his grounded passengers.

"Why, I guess he's gone," added the pilot. "He looked like a salesman. He was here a minute ago."

This clicked with Doc. He was sure the pseudo salesman had been the medium of bringing Var's voice into the plane. Now it was indicated he had been in the seat reserved by the man called Scraggs.

The bronze man pondered deeply. Who, then, really was Var? And who was the woman whose voice had murmured in accompaniment to the first manifestation of Var's ghostly tones on the New Jersey highway?

"Oh, then he must still be in Washington!" the girl breathed. Then, unexpectedly, she looked at the bronze man and said, "You're the famous Doc Savage, aren't you?"

Did the girl's wide-spaced eyes express fear or were they merely widened in wondering awe at being brought in contact with the world famed adventurer? It was difficult to judge.

Doc quickly decided she was a rare combination. The girl had unusual beauty. Her quick glance was one of keen discernment. Not often had the bronze man been thus studied and measured by a woman. In the brief space of seconds, this girl had weighed him. Her brows contracted in a little frown.

The bronze man read in her clear eyes what might have been either a great grief or a lurking fear. Doc inclined his head and replied, "I am Doc Savage."

At that, the young woman turned, as if she had lingered too long. Her slender figure, cloaked in a coat of light blue seemed to melt into the crowd. Vonier and Carberry, watching Doc, scarcely detected the movement which took him from their view.

One second, the girl and Doc were there. The next, both had vanished.

DOC had suddenly determined the loose and puzzling end of the Var mystery lay with the little man Scraggs. He did not think the strange girl believed Scraggs still to be in Washington. She would know where to seek him next.

The girl's forward progress seemed impeded by the pressing of the crowd. The bronze man suffered no such impediment. His lithe body passed through the river of humanity without the touching of any other person.

The girl disappeared around a corner. Doc stepped aside to the curb to evade a packed group of chattering bystanders.

"You have something to explain, Mr. Savage!" rapped a commanding voice. "One of your men was in the plane of that blasting devil up there! We've got him! The commissioner wants to talk to you!" Several hundred policemen in uniform, and others in plain clothes, were in Broadway and adjoining streets. They had been called in from outside precincts to serve as explosion guards. Four of these blocked Doc's progress.

The force held Doc Savage and his men in the greatest respect. These men were respectful. But their manner showed firm intention to carry out the order they said they had been given.

Doc considered quickly. Had it been Ham recaptured, or had it been Monk in the Cold Light plane? Before he had time to question, the four policemen, guns pressed to his sides, were indicating he should get into a closed squad car standing near by. Doc made no protest.

The bronze man was quick to sense a deception. These men were not policemen. But he decided the command to attempt the trick must have come directly from the controller of the Cold Light. Being taken to Var would be much more important than following a will-o'-the-wisp trail of the girl in blue.

The bogus squad car jerked ahead. Then quick hands closed the curtains. Revolvers were jammed viciously into Doc's sides.

"Step on it, Smoke!" one of the men snarled.

Chapter 15. THE MAGNETIC WALL

A SHORT time before the crash, Long Tom had been working at headquarters, as directed by Doc. Multiple coils, amplifiers, condensers, compact generators and other electrical appliances were scattered about.

Before the Cold Light blast had struck, Long Tom had believed Doc's experiment was on the verge of success. At this time, Renny had been with the electrical wizard.

Long Tom grinned up at him. His face was jubilant.

"We've got it!" he exclaimed. "Doc's ideas always work! Now why couldn't I have thought out this one myself?"

Renny grunted. He knew all about his own profession—engineering. But Long Tom's gadgets always filled him with suspicion, until he saw them in operation.

"Now watch this!" Long Tom directed.

THE box the electrical expert had created was covered with a variety of indicator needles. It was about one foot square, but barely three inches thick. It was packed with amplifying coils and Long Tom's own special generators of diminutive size.

When he threw a switch, there was a whirring sound. But there was no visible ray.

"Holy cow!" grunted Renny. "How would I know anything about something I can't see?"

It was true. The ray or emanation from one side of the box was invisible.

But Long Tom knew the electromagnetic ray had been created. It was more than a mere ray. It spread invisibly in the shape of a mammoth fan. At the distance of a few yards, it became a wall extending from floor to ceiling of the laboratory.

Renny grunted several times in the following few minutes. It was his way of displaying appreciation. For he saw the ex-neutralizer cut off in turn the violet ray, the X ray and a dozen other such electrical manifestations.

The interruption of a high-frequency current was disastrous. A polished globe exploded and rained fragments among the retorts and tubes of fragile glass. A fuse went out, and for a few seconds the laboratory was in darkness.

"Take it easy, Long Tom," advised Renny. "Maybe this thing will kick back on you."

"It's absolutely harmless!" insisted Long Tom. "Wouldn't hurt a fly!"

With the lights on, he again turned on the ex-neutralizer. He directed it as a dividing wall across the laboratory.

There were two rats in a cage. On these Monk had been testing the effectiveness of certain

anaesthetic, but non-injurious, chemicals.

The invisible electromagnetic wall was projected toward the cage. Without special intent, Long Tom shifted the box.

"Holy cow!" grunted Renny. "Now you've done it! Wouldn't hurt a fly, huh?"

The rats didn't even squeal. Both dropped as if bullets had been imbedded in their scanty brains. When Renny reached the cage, they were still and dead.

"Don't let that thing touch me!" cautioned Renny, hastily. "The rats went out like a light!"

"Now what could have done that?" muttered Long Tom.

His homely face registered deep gloom. His tone indicated he would have liked to put responsibility elsewhere. But it was his job. In some uncanny fashion, the ex-neutralizer had become a death ray.

Long Tom set to work with frantic haste. He wished heartily that Doc were here to advise him. In a few minutes, he believed he had found the flaw, and remedied it. But just then, he had no further opportunity for proving his theory.

Renny was glancing at his watch. He went through the door to the window of the outer office.

"Nine o'clock, Long Tom!" he called. "If there's to be fireworks, they're due right now! Holy cow--"

His words were snatched away by the reverberating blast.

"Good gosh!" exclaimed Long Tom. "There's the Red Arrow plane! Doc was coming back on it!"

The pair saw the Cold Light ray, steely-blue in color, seeming to cut through the big passenger plane. Renny seized a pair of the electronic binoculars. His breath hissed from his big chest, as the Red Arrow ship winged over and over like a leaf in a cyclone.

Immediately after the crash of the plane, Renny and Long Tom had sought to trace Doc Savage.

Contact with the police proved to them the bronze man had apparently been duped and taken prisoner.

They also learned that Monk had been aboard the Cold Light plane and had been taken by the police. In the meantime, another man also was trailing Doc's captors.

THE little man known as Scraggs, who had escaped with Monk, was running along a street on the East Side.

Scraggs's progress was much like that of a fleeing rat. His thin body slithered through holes where there didn't seem room for a man to pass. His frayed hat was pulled low.

Scraggs was abruptly halted. It was the girl in the bright blue cloak.

"Oh, it's you!" she exclaimed. "I was at the plane that fell! You weren't there! I started for the old houseboat hangar! You said you'd meet me and that--"

Her words tumbled out. Scraggs pushed off her detaining hand.

"Go back to the house in the woods!" his thin voice commanded stridently. "I haven't time to explain! You'll have to wait for me there!"

"But, Scraggs, I saw Doc Savage!" the girl insisted. "We've got to do something quick! We've--" Scraggs interrupted impatiently, already moving away.

"I know more about that than you do!" his thin voice rasped. "And that's what I'm on my way to do!"

The girl remained motionless for a long minute after Scraggs had disappeared. Her perfectly chiseled features were as set as a marble mask. The paleness of either deep despair or implacable purpose only enhanced the cameolike beauty of her face.

DOC SAVAGE had hoped the police trick, on the part of the crooks, would lead him straight to the man known as Var. Even after the car curtains were drawn, Doc permitted his captors to think he had been tricked.

Doc knew nothing of the man Scraggs having witnessed his departure from the wrecked Red Arrow plane. Nor did he know of Scraggs having been in the Cold Light plane and having been saved by Monk. From Scraggs's dash toward East River, the little man evidently knew more of Doc's destination than the bronze man himself could have guessed.

But the bronze man's thought was that this was the quickest and surest way to come face to face with the Cold Light destroyer.

Doc's conjecture was roughly shattered. The car was jouncing along a water-front street on East River. Without any warning, one of the guns was whipped from his side.

The weapon crashed on his skull with stunning effect. Fighting back a swimming black cloud, Doc felt his arms gripped to his sides. A hoodlike affair was pulled swiftly over his head.

Under ordinary conditions, the bronze man had defeated the purpose of assailants who sought to administer an anaesthetic. His ability to hold his breath was that of the longest-winded pearl diver of the South Seas. Some of these divers had been known to remain under water for periods of three to four minutes.

Only half conscious, suffocated by the sack over his head as well as by the etherizing vapor clouding his throat and nostrils, Doc lost all knowledge of what was transpiring.

AS he slowly recovered, the bronze man had no means of knowing how many hours had elapsed. He was

only sure the day had passed. The pall of night was relieved by twinkling stars he could see through a slitted window.

Under Doc, the floor quivered, jerked. Thunder beat upon his ears. His first effort to move convinced him a thorough job of tying had been done.

Rawhide thongs had been expertly bound, not only around his arms and legs, but another had been passed around his throat. This had been secured by spikes or staples to the floor, or to a wooden crosspiece.

The long, coffinlike space in which he lay was moving. Up and down. Speeding ahead. The dipping motion was sickening.

Doc knew instantly he was in an airplane.

There was no pilot at the controls. Twisting his head with great effort, Doc could see no other person in the cabin. He was alone. A side roll of the plane revealed rows of long white wave tops not so far below.

The bronze man was hurtling out to sea on a one-man flight. But no other man controlled the plane and Doc had been rendered powerless.

Chapter 16. THE DIVE OF DEATH

DOC attempted to roll over. The rawhide thong around his neck cut off his breath. So rigidly were his arms and legs bound with many wrappings, the bronze man could obtain no leverage against the choking cord.

He tensed his throat muscles and put his weight against the rawhide. This prevented the cord choking him, but his weight was insufficient.

Now he could see the lights of the plane's instrument board. He saw that his fate had been made cleverly, fiendishly sure. The plane was controlled by an automatic radio device. But in this plane the alternative hand controls had been removed. Only the special mechanism which operated the small cabin ship on waves of sound, was flying it.

The monster Var had taken no chances. Even were Doc Savage by some of his almost supernatural powers able to free himself, no means had been left for controlling the ultimate destiny of the plane now far out over the ocean.

The plane suddenly dipped in a breath-taking dive. But it only swooped down close to the surface and then zoomed for altitude. Doc put all the strength of his neck against the binding thong. It would not yield.

Even in this terrible predicament, Doc was thinking back. There was this Scraggs. Furtive, elusive, ratlike Scraggs. Afraid of being identified with his own efforts. Scraggs had acted at first as if he was trying to avert the explosions of the Cold Light, to stop the evil workings of the mysterious Var.

Doc pondered another item. Who was this girl seeking Scraggs? When Var's voice had first been heard, a feminine voice had murmured with it. Circumstances, as yet, had led to no definite conclusion.

Doc could almost feel the landing gear of the plane slapped by the tops of the ocean swells, as the little ship dived again. The rawhide thong was slowly lessening his freedom to breathe. Up again. Higher this time. Doc had been awaiting the moment when the plane would be sent farther up. He could almost see the brain reasoning out the finish. For the last dive, the Var operator, perhaps Var himself, would cause the plane to take on more altitude.

This would make certain the disrupting effect of the final drop. If Doc's throat muscles had not been held as rigidly as a bar of iron, the drying rawhide would have throttled him before this time. The plane was still climbing. Doc's super-sense put every nerve on the alert. Slowly, he forced his head over. The bronze skin rasped from his neck as he turned. He was looking into the shadowed space at the rear of the coffin-like cabin.

From the darkness a voice spoke. It was thin and strident.

"I guess you've had enough to know Var is ruthless! He will stop at nothing--"

What seemed to be a bundle of disreputable, unkempt clothing rolled into view and stretched into a skinny, little man.

IT was Scraggs. In the semidarkness of the plane's cabin, his eyes glowed like a cat's.

Doc eyed him closely. Scraggs had a pointed knife in his hand. It moved toward Doc's throat. The bronze man was helpless.

But the furtive, elusive Scraggs had only good intent in this movement. The edged knife slit the tightening rawhide thong at Doc's throat. The plane still was climbing.

The knife slid down along the other bindings. Doc stretched his cramped arms and legs, got to his feet.

"Thanks," he said. "That's a good turn I'll not forget. But how did you happen to be here?"

Scraggs's tongue licked along his bloodless lips.

"I overheard what had been planned when you returned to Manhattan. There were too many for me to try to rescue you. I beat them to the plane and hid in the cabin. I thought I could get you out before it was sent off, but now--well, now there ain't anything we can do."

Scraggs's explanation sounded sincere. Anyway, it was clear the furtive little man was in the same tight spot as Doc.

The nose of the plane suddenly dipped. The struts screamed in a full-powered dive. Doc pushed Scraggs ahead of him. He forced open the door of the plane against the terrific pressure of the wind.

"Jump from the door!" commanded Doc. "You will have to hurry!"

"But I can't! We'll be killed! No! No!"

Scraggs pulled away. Plainly, he feared the plunge into the open sea. Doc's strong hand gripped his shoulder and the little man winced. He was powerless to resist the viselike hold.

Then the plane suddenly leveled off. The swells were again so close, the white teeth of the combers could be seen plainly.

Doc let go of Scraggs and sprang to the radio mechanism. His corded hands fastened on the machinery. With one wrench, he had ripped the controls loose. Wires snapped under his super-human strength. Ailerons flapped. The tail assembly jerked loose, erratic weaving.

With crumpling, devastating force, the ripping propeller smashed into the sea. The plane's tail, went up and the little ship went far under the surface in its final dive of death.

Chapter 17. SCRAGGS JOINS DOC

Doc could easily have freed himself. His enormous lung capacity made him as nearly an amphibian as it is possible for any man to be. As the plane cracked up and sank, Doc had absorbed enough air to keep him alive for several minutes.

Instead of pulling himself out he let go his supporting hold. Scraggs's first scream died in a gasping gurgle. Doc groped his way to the confined space where the little man was trapped. Gripping fingers fastened on a bony ankle.

Fortunately, the amount of air in Doc's lungs increased his own buoyancy. Pulling Scraggs's shoulders into a scissors hold of his locked legs, the bronze man used his hands to drive them toward the surface.

Even Doc's tremendous lung capacity was tested. When his head emerged, the first long breath pierced him like many tiny knives. He rolled, treading. Scraggs was shifted over one arm.

From the bronze man's clothing came a special restorative chemical. Doc's trained hands forced the water from Scraggs's lungs. A tiny needle pierced the little man's muscles near his spine. With briny water slapping and stinging his eyes and nostrils, the little man gasped and started kicking. Doc turned him on his back. Perhaps one man in a million could have fixed direction as the bronze man accomplished it.

Lying too low in the sea to glimpse the lights of shore, Doc simply made a quick study of the stars. He fixed the position of the Great Dipper. This lined with the North Star. Doc rolled and commenced swimming shoreward with the moaning Scraggs.

One hand held the little man. The other arm and his legs beat the swells with churning impact. Doc's progress was much like that of the porpoise. To gain speed, his mighty body plunged under some of the swells.

The distance may have been two miles or five. Doc's tireless limbs moved with the speed of motor-driven pistons. Even so, nearly an hour elapsed before he was pulling Scraggs from the frothing wash onto a landing of flat rocks.

Scraggs's thin body was draped with clinging kelp. The weeds gave the little man the appearance of some drowned sea animal. Doc worked him back to consciousness again.

STRANGE combinations were forming theories. Scraggs's appearance. The Cold Light of the explosion and the blast itself, with the queer coloring of aquamarine. The few words, in the plane, of the explorer, Vonier, and the financier, Carberry, over some of their theories.

All of these seemed to trend to the sea. They touched upon the mysteries of the vast, little-known life of the oceans themselves. In the analytical brain of Doc Savage, they became a directly separable quantity.

The greatest source of life lay in the sea. Therefore, why not the most terrible forces of destruction?

Scraggs began talking in a hoarse, strained voice:

"Who—who saved us?" he stammered. "Who—who got us out?"

"We had luck," Doc stated. "The tide was with us."

Scraggs sat up, staring at him. The man's eyes glowed with a hint of phosphorescent light. It was this made him resemble a cat in the darkness.

Doc's own flaky eyes also were glowing. He shot a question.

"You're safe now. Who is Var?"

Scraggs cringed as if he had been struck a blow. His thin lips trembled.

"I—I can't tell you that," he mumbled. "Because I don't know. I've never seen him. Yes, you believe I've been working for him. I have, but never directly."

The little man clearly was on guard. There was something he did not intend to reveal. The bronze man's hypnotic eyes held the sunken orbs of the other.

"No!" the little man almost shouted. "You're trying to make me tell something I don't know! I never saw Var, I tell you! But he murdered my best friend—the scientist, Jackson—and I was his helper!"

There now was sincere grief in Scraggs's voice.

"Jackson was the man killed in the first explosion?" the bronze man suggested. "Before he could talk over the telephone? You put a message in my pocket, then I conjecture you went back to the house in the marsh."

Scraggs stared at Doc.

"No—yes, I did go back," he said. "I saw Jackson killed. I couldn't stand it. I ran away. I didn't dare be found there. Jackson was the best and kindest and smartest man that ever lived! He was inventing this explosive for the man who called himself Var."

"DIDN'T Var come to the house in the marsh?" questioned Doc.

"Yes; but only at night, and I was never permitted to see him," insisted Scraggs. "I knew some experiments were planned. Jackson told me where one test was to be made. That was one in the woods near Carberry's home in Little Neck. That's how I happened to be out there."

"The message indicated Jackson was afraid," Doc said.

Doc knew part of what Scraggs was telling must be the truth, but only part of it.

"Yes," said Scraggs. "At the last, Jackson was afraid. The chief kept him a prisoner in the house. There was no way out, except by the one road and it was guarded."

"Var seems to have many men," said Doc. "They are not ordinary criminals."

"No—I don't know—well, yes, you are right," stammered the little man. "Var has a big organization. All of his men are smart. Jackson told me Var had first planned to use his explosive for establishment of a new social justice."

"Jackson told you all of this?"

"Yes, yes, he told me!" exclaimed Scraggs. "I'm being honest with you. Jackson sent me with the message to find you. It was too late. Var's plans were complete. He had no more use for Jackson."

"You want to avenge the death of your friend and employer, is that it?" said Doc.

"Yes, that's it," replied Scraggs. "I've tried to help you all I could. Can't you see—I even hid in the plane to try and rescue you; then we were both trapped and you saved me—"

"Are you sure there wasn't some way to have controlled that plane without the radio, some way that you knew?" Doc quizzed.

"No; I expected to get you out before the plane was sent off East River."

DOC pondered this quickly. Had Scraggs a reason of his own for wanting to appear as the bronze man's rescuer? It might be a part of Var's plan to establish a closer contact with Doc's movements. Scraggs suddenly interrupted his flow of thought.

"But I want to have your help," Scraggs said. "I'll go with you and your men. I know much I can tell you. There are several places you would never find alone. I'll help you, if you'll let me stay with you."

Doc considered this a moment, without speaking. Then Scraggs seemed to recall something important.

"Doc Savage!" he cried. "While you have been here, some of your own men may have been wiped out! I've heard of a new plan of Var's. He intends to get your men in your headquarters, maybe blow up the building!"

Scraggs was trembling. There was evidence of desperate sincerity in his warning.

"You can come with me," the bronze man decided. "We will find an automobile."

At about this time, Ham was arriving by a White Liner plane at the Newark Airport.

Chapter 18. HAM GETS POISON

HE was his usually natty-appearing self, as he alighted from the passenger plane. The waspish, well-clothed figure took on a hasty stride. He pushed impatiently into the crowd awaiting arrival of other planes.

"I might have known I wouldn't have any luck!" he muttered.

Scraggs had not been aboard the White Liner. Ham believed the man he wanted would be on the Red Arrow.

The excited comment of those around him and screaming headlines informed Ham the Manhattan explosion had taken place on schedule. Ham seized a paper as he entered the limousine used by the air transport company to carry passengers back and forth between Manhattan and the airport.

Reading avidly, he groaned.

"Good heavens!" he grunted. "It can't be possible! Not Doc!"

The edition of the newspaper he had bought had been issued within a few minutes after the Manhattan blast. This story had it the Red Arrow plane had crashed against a building in Radio City. Ham felt for his handkerchief. A small box was in the pocket. The box had been slipped into his coat either on the plane or in the airport terminal buildings.

Across the box were printed a few words:

I TAKE THIS MEANS OF GETTING THIS STRANGE POISON GAS TO DOC SAVAGE. WHEN PLACED IN WATER, THESE PILLS FREE ENOUGH POISON VAPOR TO KILL HUNDREDS. I BELIEVE ONLY DOC SAVAGE CAN ANALYZE AND DISCOVER THEIR FORMULA. WHEN HE HAS DONE THIS, HE CAN COMMUNICATE WITH ME AT BOX 1131, QUEENS POST OFFICE. A FRIEND

Ham opened the box. It contained four round pills, about the size of small marbles. These were of jellylike substance.

Ham carefully replaced the poison gas pills.

But more recent editions of the newspapers in Manhattan caused Ham to forget the pills of poison gas. He read that Doc had saved the Red Arrow plane. But his jubilation was short-lived. For the papers had reported the manner of Doc's disappearance. The police were futilely searching for four phony coppers in a bogus squad car. Monk had been freed by the police and had joined his companions at Doc's headquarters. Ham hastened directly there.

MONK and Ham might have been expected to congratulate each other on their separate escapes from Var's clutches.

Ham's mouth twisted into a sneering grin, as he looked at the big chemist.

"So they got one look at that classic profile of yours in the explosion plane," said Ham, "and then they jumped out. Well, that mug must have been a shock!"

"Howlin' calamities!" squealed out Monk's high-pitched voice. "An' it takes a smart shyster like you to get me conked when all I'm doin' is tryin' to save your worthless skin! Tellin' me to quit on that roof! Sayin' you're just practicin'!"

Monk referred to the encounter on the Washington roof where Ham had heeded Doc's instructions and stopped the battle with Var's men.

"What's the latest news of Doc?" inquired Ham, anxiously, of Long Tom and Renny.

"That's just our trouble," grunted the worried Renny. "There isn't any. Nothin' to start on or get a hold on. Do you suppose we'd be coolin' our heels here, if we had a lead? We've been hoping every minute the police would report something to start us off."

"So the fake police car went up in thin air?" mused Ham, aloud. "Went toward East River?"

"Yeah," said Long Tom, "but the river patrol hasn't reported a thing."

The day's shadows lengthened. Toward night, a much subdued and unusually timid Broadway was flashing its first lights.

"I've got it! I've found it!" Long Tom suddenly proclaimed.

"Found what?" groaned Renny. "A way to discover where Doc's gone? That's all I want to know right now!"

"Well, no," admitted Long Tom gloomily. "Nothing like that. But his electromagnetic wall is O. K. I've fixed it so it wouldn't harm a fly."

"You said that before," complained Renny. "An' look what happened to Monk's rats."

"Aw, rats!" muttered Long Tom. Then he brightened visibly. "That's the idea," he added. "Monk, how about getting us some more rats?"

Grumbling that something might happen, Monk finally agreed and departed.

THE three companions left in the laboratory made a concerted spring for the front office when the phone buzzed. Ham picked up the instrument.

Thinly, stridently, a voice started speaking:

"We have Doc Savage! You will never see him again! To-morrow, the afternoon Washington-New York express train will be next to feel the power

of Var! Tell Ham, the lawyer, he must go back to Washington! If Ham goes to Washington and follows instructions, the train will be saved! I am-Var!"

With a bitter invective, Ham jiggled the receiver bar. A half minute later, he replaced the instrument.

"The operator says it's a dial phone in a public booth somewhere and can't be traced," he informed the others. "Brothers, we're faced by a situation that seems to be beyond our control. Only one thing: the voice didn't say Doc had been killed. And if he hasn't, we'll see him again and it won't be long."

Monk came back, bringing two rats in a wire cage. They were common, gray rodents.

Monk set the cage at one end of the long, spacious laboratory. He joined Renny and Ham at one side, watching Long Tom.

"Now," said Long Tom, "the Hertzian ray already has been perfected to the point where it will kill electrical force at a great distance. It can be used to stop airplanes in the air. But this is the first electromagnetic force to neutralize any other electrical ray."

Long Tom moved a switch. Generators whirred in the square, flat box. The ex-neutralizer wall formed an invisible partition across the laboratory.

"Dag-gone it!" squeaked Monk. "Even if they was rats, y' needn't've murdered 'em! I was wantin' 'em to try out a new kind of poison gas!"

Long Tom stared mournfully at the wire cage upon which the ex-neutralizer was directed.

The pair of gray sewer rats had rolled on their backs. Their legs were rigid. They hadn't even

kicked.

"Holy cow!" barked Renny. "See that you keep that thing turned off the rest of us!"

LONG TOM'S hand was moving to switch off the ex-neutralizer. Monk started over to examine the rats. The apelike chemist jumped back as if he had been stung.

"Howlin' calamities!" he ejaculated. "Wouldja look at that! Keep that death machine on, Long Tom! Keep it on!"

A mysterious, deadly ray of Cold Light sliced through the thick stone and steel of the Manhattan skyscraper as a knife might have passed through soft cheese. It penetrated half of the laboratory. Seen close up, it was like an edged, flat band of bright blue steel. Long Tom backed hastily toward the open office door. Thus the box in his hand cast a fanlike ray that covered every inch of the test room from floor to ceiling.

"It works! By heavens, it works!" he shouted.

The skins of every one prickled with the sensation of cold.

But the deadly, explosive Cold Light did not reach its objective, whatever it might have been.

Its frigid band reached Long Tom's invisible electromagnetic wall. There it was abruptly cut off.

The magnetic insulation converted half the laboratory into an impregnable refuge. Ham, Monk and Renny were within this haven.

For a long minute, the Cold Light remained fixed into the room. In the streets below thousands of persons saw it shining across the night.

Crowds scurried for shelter.

Then the Cold Light disappeared. A traffic policeman had fixed its origin in a near-by skyscraper. Within ten minutes squads of policemen were scouring this building. But they found nothing.

The Cold Light then was being reported from farther uptown. In reality, it had come from several miles. Its penetrating ray had pierced scores of office buildings, mostly emptied for the night. Nothing had interfered with its progress until it had encountered Doc's electromagnetic wall. The four men felt as if they were freezing. The Cold Light had vanished, but the temperature of the room rose slowly.

Monk found chattering speech. The ex-neutralizer had been switched off.

"Lookit!" he shouted. "The rats! They've come back to life!"

WITH Long Tom's ex-neutralizer turned off, the gray rats were frisking about as if they had never been laid cold.

"Dag-gone it!" squeaked Monk. "That's nothin' but a hypnotizin' machine! Long Tom, you try it on me! Betcha it won't knock me out!"

Ham laughed derisively.

"Hypnotism takes effect on the brain, Monk. That wouldn't be much use as a test," he suggested.

"Rats have got some brains."

"Howlin' calamities!" squeaked out Monk. "Maybe you think that shyster brain of yours would help!"

"I suggest we test it together," remarked Ham. "Suppose we both walk through it?"

Long Tom demurred. But the rats apparently were wholly unharmed. He figured he could switch the electromagnetic wall off, if the two bickering friends showed any evidence of succumbing.

Again, the invisible wall partitioned the laboratory. Long Tom directed it deliberately upon the rats' cage. The rodents blinked their beady eyes and promptly curled up their toes.

Side by side, Ham and Monk walked around the long table filled with globes, retorts and a variety of tubes. Monk edged a little ahead. Part of his great bulk was in the invisible wall.

Ham's own waspish body was touching it.

"Don't feel a thing," asserted Monk, and moved across. "C'mon, shyster. You scared?"

Renny and Long Tom had their eyes fixed on Ham and Monk. The latter two were looking at each other, keeping up a fire of sarcastic conversation. Thus none of them saw the Cold Light ray suddenly reappear.

The blue-steel band knifed through the skyscraper wall. Monk's big hands went to his face. He was almost blinded by chilling cold. Ham, seeing something was wrong, reached for him. His own body had not yet crossed the protective ex-neutralizer.

The door opening into the outer office burst open.

From the doorway came the weird, mellow warning of Doc Savage.

THE bronze man was standing there. His wet hair and skin were smooth and sleek. Just back of him stood the sodden figure of Scraggs.

"Stay where you are, all of you!" Doc commanded.

His flaky gold eyes caught and followed the shifting Cold Light. He saw it dissolve in the electromagnetic wall.

Long Tom moved to flick off the ex-neutralizer switch. Doc seized Long Tom's wrist.

"Leave it on," he directed. "Wait until the Cold Light stops. It would get all of us!"

Monk staggered back to the safe side of the electromagnetic wall. His huge body shook as with an ague. He felt as if he were freezing.

Monk's bulk struck Ham and sent the slighter figure of the lawyer to his knees.

"You big, blundering ape!" sputtered Ham. "Look where you're going!"

"I think Monk just saved our lives," Doc said, calmly.

Scraggs's mouth twitched, as he stared at the Cold Light ray.

"It didn't explode," he muttered, amazedly. "But I was right, Doc Savage. You see, I was telling you the truth."

Ham walked toward him. "You were in that house in Washington. You know what all this is about."

"I'm not so sure Scraggs does know all about the Cold Light ray," said the bronze man. "Perhaps he helped to save your life. If you had crossed the ex-neutralizer, all of us would have been annihilated."

Chapter 19. PLOTTED POISONING

AGAIN, the Cold Light had been withdrawn. For the second time during the evening, the police were unsuccessfully seeking its source. It had been directed upon Doc Savage's stronghold from a new direction.

Doc directed Long Tom to set about duplicating the ex-neutralizer at once. Scraggs watched silently. The bronze man apparently ignored him, but he was studying the little man's reactions closely.

"We'll probably need as many machines as we can get together," he advised. "At least, we'll need two to try and save the express train you've told me about."

Ham had told Doc of the threat against the train, but had made it a point to keep Scraggs from hearing. Now Scraggs looked up with quickened interest.

"You know about the train?" he exclaimed.

Ham looked intently at Scraggs.

"Perhaps, Doc, if Scraggs stays with us there won't be any need to save the express," he said, significantly.

"It wouldn't make any difference," Scraggs muttered. "But if you could prevent an explosion here, you could do it there."

"That's what we hope to do," Doc stated.

Doc produced a thin book from inside his shirt. Fingers flicked through the pages.

Monk could see the riffled pages. The little book was illustrated by brightly colored plates.

Monk grunted and peered more closely.

"Dag-gone it!" he exclaimed. "I've seen somethin' like that picture there!"

Doc glanced at him quickly.

"Sure of that, Monk? When did you see it?"

"Can't seem to remember where or when I saw it, Doc, but I know I did."

The book's illustration was a picture of marine life. It was done in intense blue. The figure shown was apparently half human, half crab. Gold letters gave the name of the author.

The writer was Vonier, the explorer.

Clearly, Vonier had had good reason for his admiration for and his disagreement with Carberry, the financier, over a treatise Carberry had written. For Carberry's one plunge into science had dealt with the cellular origin of the human species.

Such a study must necessarily lead to the established origin of all life; that of the sea.

THE phone rang. It was Vonier, calling from a booth in the building lobby. Doc invited him to come up at once. If Vonier recognized Scraggs, his impassive face gave no hint. But Doc marked Scraggs staring intently at the explorer.

Vonier's arm was neatly bandaged in a sling. His bony face was as calm as ever. He announced he believed an attempt had been made on his life.

"When I reached my home and went into my office," he explained, quickly, "I found these in my desk top. I couldn't have missed them."

He produced two jellylike globules, no larger than marbles.

"A note was with them," Vonier said. "It was signed just, 'A Friend.' It directed me to analyze them for a mysterious poison, and said the pills possessed a rare form of germs that could be employed to pollute the whole water supply of a great city."

Ham was staring at the man. Scraggs arose and walked nervously about the laboratory.

"The note said they contained germs to be released in water?" Ham questioned. "Then the first thing you probably would do would be to put one of the balls in water to see what would happen. Then why didn't you?"

Doc said, "Perhaps that was what was wanted, Vonier. To have you place them in water."

"I thought of that," remarked Vonier, dryly. "That's why I came to you. You are reported to be a wizard on the safe analysis of any form of poison."

Ham took his own "poison pills" from his pocket. He laid them on the desk. Then he produced the note he had received. Doc read it at a glance.

Vonier's lips were drawn in a smile over his skeleton teeth.

"I would say the whole thing's the work of our good friend Var," he stated. "I've heard the Cold Light ray has been jumping about again to-night. Something has gone wrong. There has been no explosion. So Var seems out to get us by a more devious device."

Doc said, "I'll analyze these pills." He glanced at the nervous Scraggs. "In the meantime, I'll place them in the laboratory safe where I keep my radium. Even poison gas can't escape from that." This safe, heavily insulated with lead and a special rubberlike composition, contained Doc's radium. It was one of the largest amounts in the world in the possession of a single individual.

SCRAGGS watched the pills being locked away. His eyes glowed as if a sudden idea had struck him. "I'm going out for a while," he said. "When I return, I may have something important to tell you, Doc Savage."

Doc merely nodded. Ham's face was dark with suspicion, as Scraggs sidled toward the elevators. Doc apparently gave the matter no further attention. He turned to Vonier.

"Did any one of your household observe any suspicious person?"

"No," said Vonier. "Only the Japanese houseman was there. Mrs. Vonier has gone to our house on the shore. I'm convinced this Var means business. You are more of a threat to him than I am, Savage, but I haven't the slightest intention of complying with his demand that I join his organization." Another phone call came from the skyscraper lobby. It was the hoarse, strained voice of Carberry, the financier.

"In heaven's name, let me come up and stay with you to-night!" came the excited voice. "I don't believe Var intends to wait forty-eight hours. He has learned I was in Washington. Now there has been an attempt to poison me!"

Doc's flaky golden eyes glinted strangely.

"Come right up, Carberry," he invited.

He told the others what Carberry had said. Vonier seemed about to impart something more of importance, then he merely said, "I think perhaps when you get to the bottom of this Cold Light thing, you'll find yourself mixed up with some of the mysteries of our little known marine life." Monk gulped, started to speak, and changed his mind. It had come to him where he had seen the picture of the half-crab and half-human creature. It had been one of those done in oil on the walls of the room where he had fought Wheeze McGovern's men!

Doc had slipped Vonier's book on marine life into a drawer of his desk.

CARBERRY was a shaking figure when he entered. His protruding eyes appeared ready to jump from their sockets. The bald spot between his white tufts of hair had a ghastly hue.

"What? You here, too, Vonier?" were his first words. "I'm glad to see you're safe! I was afraid to stay out at my home, and I don't dare risk being trailed to where my wife is hidden!"

"You said an attempt was made to poison you?" suggested Doc. "It would be some sort of pill?"

"How in heaven's name did you know that?" exclaimed Carberry, producing a little box.

"Holy cow!" grunted Renny. "They're different! Look like sugar cubes!"

"Yes-yes-that's it-and that's where they were!" stammered the financier. "In the sugar! A houseboy got hold of one. The butler found him dead. He had turned purple. After the butler went through the sugar and found these, I thought you could find out more quickly, Savage, what they are."

There were two square cubes. Though they were white and shaped like sugar, a close inspection proved them to be less granular. There was a smooth crust hardened over a jellylike substance. In a few seconds, the new poison pills were behind the thick, insulated door of the laboratory safe.

Long Tom came in, announcing he had the second ex-neutralizer ready. Doc invited Vonier and Carberry to witness a demonstration on several different electrical rays.

"Could one of them be made for me, Savage?" questioned Carberry. "I'll let you name your own price if--"

Doc interrupted. "We never accept pay for what we do, Carberry. But you're welcome to any safeguard we can devise. I would suggest both you and Vonier remain here to-night. You shall sleep between invisible walls of the ex-neutralizer."

DURING the night, Doc Savage perfected a plan for saving the Washington-New York express from the Cold Light threat. In the early morning, Long Tom and Renny left the headquarters. They were carrying the ex-neutralizer boxes. Their destination was the Hudson River hangar where Doc's planes were kept.

Ham and Monk were on their way to the warehouse hangar by a different route. Doc Savage followed another direction.

Carberry had left with Vonier, saying he would stay with the explorer during the day.

"Daylight braces me up," the financier announced. "But when night comes, I begin to get the jitters. And my forty-eight hours are up to-night," he added.

"We'll be back late this afternoon," said Doc. "Meet us here again to-night."

Though Carberry seemed to have some doubt as to Vonier, it was apparent he did not want to be alone.

Doc had not informed either the explorer or the financier of their destination. After communicating with the railroad offices, Doc had advised that the Washington-New York express be allowed to come through on schedule. He had suggested, however, that a regular train for passengers be run as a second section.

Only the necessary crew was to be carried on the first section.

Doc was at the controls of the plane. Long Tom was making sure the ex-neutralizers were in perfect order. If the warning from Var had been genuine, and none thus far had failed, the Washington-New York express would have one invisible passenger.

The name would be Death!

ABOUT the moment Doc's special cabin plane was taking off from the Hudson River, a window was softly raised high in the tower of Manhattan's tallest cloud-piercer.

The afternoon had seen the advent of a slow, drizzling rain. It had misted over the city with the usual smoky fog. No person in the street below could have seen the slender rope swaying from the high window.

Nor did any person observe the slim, shadowy figure coming down. The man was light, his body almost wraithlike. Though supported only by his hands, he swung out over space with a confidence of movement which proved he was accustomed to great heights.

The man's feet poised lightly on the ledge of an eighty-sixth floor window. A blunt instrument appeared in one hand. The glass crashed inward to the rug without much sound.

An instant later, the intruder had raised the sash and admitted himself.

In the office, he produced a case of small instruments. The locked laboratory door yielded to a control electroscope like that used by Doc Savage and his men.

From his clothing came a flat, metal case. A button was pressed and a tongue of purple flame was reflected. This flame increased in intensity.

The insulated laboratory safe was not burglarproof. The insulating composition and the lead were relatively soft materials. After two minutes, a square opening appeared under the flame.

The intruder chuckled. Again the purple flame licked out. But this time, it did not seem to be of a destructive nature. Rather, the cut square of the safe door had been replaced.

The flame curled over the surface. The figure emitted another ironic chuckle. The square was being "healed" into place.

Afterward, an observing eye might have noted the rewelding of the crevices, but the average person, would not have known the wall of the vault had been tampered with.

Shortly thereafter, the outside door of Doc's headquarters opened. A man came out and took the stairway upward. From the window a few floors above, the thin rope was drawn in. The window was closed.

The "poison pills" were no longer in the vault. They were close to a water faucet in the laboratory. Perhaps it was only by chance that a faulty valve caused dropping water to dampen the surface of the metal on which the "poison pills" had been laid.

Chapter 20. THE WALLS OF LIFE

EVEN while the mysterious visitor was in his laboratory, Doc Savage was piloting a cabin plane over the eastern Pennsylvania hills. He was following a train to set the plane down. He selected a flat field where a paved highway paralleled the railroad track.

Apparently a worried engineer had been expecting them, for the air brakes started steel grating on steel as Doc and his four companions appeared on the track ahead. The youthful fireman's eyes rolled as Doc's bronze figure swung up on the grabiron into the cab.

"You get up front," Doc told Long Tom and Monk. "One on each side of the pilot. It's a ticklish spot for riding, but we'll want every possible inch of the train covered by the ex-neutralizers. Turn on the machines and keep the rays playing. They're effective for at least a thousand yards; perhaps more. Renny and Ham and I will take the rear end."

Monk growled and grunted as he clung to a pilot standard with one arm and worked the ex-neutralizer wall.

"I'll betcha," he squealed above the rush of the wind and the pounding of piston heads, "that fashion-plate shyster has found himself a soft seat on the cushions!"

"You keep that box working!" shouted Long Tom. "And slant it straight back!"

The invisible walls formed two magnetic shields, as the Washington-New York Express gathered speed.

Instructing Ham to continue a patrol through the coaches, Doc took Renny with him to the observation platform on the rear car. He had judged the Cold Light, if and when it came, would have to be directed from an airplane or from some automobile on the highway.

In case the danger came from above, Long Tom had been instructed to swing to the locomotive stack and cover the top of the train. This feat Long Tom was ready to perform.

By Doc's instructions, the engineer kept the train to the low speed of around thirty miles per

hour. Renny and Doc on the observation platform were scanning every passing auto and every distant plane in the sky.

The cars of the express poured into a shallow grade cut. It roared out onto a long straightaway. Half a dozen cars were in view on the highway.

Making sure his own special grenades—a powerful chemical explosive—were at hand, Doc scanned each of these cars in turn. Nothing out of the ordinary showed for some time.

WHEN the Cold Light ray flashed on, it came from a distance. The edged band, blue-steel in color, was striking across the country from a wooded spot nearly two miles away.

The knifelike emanation played along the sides of the speeding cars. Doc breathed with relief. For when the ray struck the invisible wall of the ex-neutralizer on that side, it seemed to waver, then dissolve.

But a big closed car between the train and the wooded spot was not so fortunate. The driver of this automobile was speeding. His car was passing the train.

The Cold Light played upon the driver. It seemed to jump along with the automobile. Doc saw the driver stiffen in his seat.

Then the man reared up, took his hands from the steering wheel and clawed blindly at his face. He pitched forward, his head striking the windshield.

The automobile left the highway. Careening down the bank, it somersaulted twice and came to rest on flattened wheels. Two men were hurled out.

The first person to reach the scene of the crash reported, to the unbelief of others, that the driver and his companions seemed to have been frozen stiff. Three were dead. The other was seriously hurt.

The bronze man waited neither for the slowing of the train or for inspection of the wrecked car. Dropping to the ground, Doc's feet seemed to glide along the gravel. He was upright when he let go, and landed on his feet with a single bound over the right-of-way ditch.

Renny followed. His huge body lacked the springy resiliency of the bronze man's.

Renny failed to compensate for the speed of the train. His big feet tangled. With an enraged bellow, he started rolling. It was well his muscles were iron-hard and his neck was thick-sinewed.

After the third somersault, Renny managed to stagger to his feet. He was close behind Doc.

Following orders, the train proceeded on its way. Ham, Monk and Long Tom stuck by it. Monk saw Doc and Renny speeding across the near-by field over the highway.

There seemed to be no side road leading from the wooded spot to the main highway. Doc noted the square mile or so of bushy expanse appeared to have no visible outlet. Renny was forced to give all he had to keep up with the bronze man.

Doc did not seem to run. His speed was evolved from a gliding, sinuous movement in which all of his trained muscles coordinated. In even the crisis of this seeking of the maker of Cold Light, Doc's brain was working on other angles of the problem.

Monk had informed him of his recognition of the illustration in the Vonier book on marine species. In Vonier's well-done treatise on little known elements of the deeper oceans were many direct references to as yet undiscovered atomic energy greater than anything the world's leading scientists had revealed.

Doc could readily understand how Vonier might be valuable indeed to Var. The man who, according to Scraggs, had started out with the idea of reforming world society and now wanted world domination, might well find an individual of Vonier's erudition immensely valuable to his further schemes.

Var also might fear Vonier possessed a knowledge that would enable him to solve the mystery of the Cold Light force.

Doc considered this point. How much did Vonier really know of the elements that might have gone into the creation of Cold Light as a destroying agency?

The bronze man also pondered the actions of the mysterious Scraggs. The presence of Vonier, or something connected with the failure of the Cold Light to explode in the laboratory, had caused the little man to invent an excuse to get away. Doc was sure of this.

Then there was the girl in blue who had been seeking Scraggs at the wrecked Red Arrow plane.

There had been a woman close to Var, as he had uttered his message after the first of his explosions.

Each of the suspects had a woman closely related to him or his activities.

THE bronze man and Renny arrived at the fringe of woodland.

They paused a moment, listening. Birds trilled in the brush as if nothing had been there to disturb them.

The strip of woods was about a quarter of a mile in width. Its extent in the other direction could only be guessed.

"You take the other side," directed Doc. "Keep under cover of the trees and move quietly. If you run onto anything, fire the pistol."

Doc was gone, slithering through the bushes. His progress was that of a jungle cat or a deer.

Renny's woodcraft was not nearly so skillful. Doc heard the huge engineer crashing into the brush.

Doc weaved from side to side. His swiftness covered half the wooded strip thoroughly. Under the trees the ground was damp and mossy.

Only a keen eye would have detected the dull coppery shining of a bit of metal at the bottom of a shallow pond. Doc scooped up the small object.

It was a narrow cylinder of brass. It much resembled some form of cartridge, open at one end. It seemed to have contained a sort of explosive powder and had been recently fired.

The empty shell bore no imprint of hammer pin. If it had been exploded, the force had been other than by impact. He instantly decided the cartridge had contained some element employed in the Cold Light machine.

The mystery of this was heightened by the absence of any footprints or marks around the edges of the little pond.

Doc's gaze roved upward. A freshly broken leaf dangled on its stem. Bark had been slightly scraped on a branch. The stunted trees here were close together.

It was plain enough some acrobatic individual had swung along from tree to tree. A second later, Doc was in the branches.

A few yards above the ground, he followed a trail in the trees that led toward the other side of the woods. Pausing, he listened for Renny. There was only silence.

Renny must be near. He called cautiously. He received no reply.

WHEN Renny parted from Doc, he proceeded to the opposite side of the wooded strip. The air was balmy. The whole scene was peaceful. Renny plunged into the trees. Underbrush impeded his progress. He had covered perhaps two hundred yards. Birds hushed into silence close around him, but when he paused the distant ones resumed their trilling. Apparently, nothing had disturbed them.

Suddenly this was changed. Renny came upon a robin on the ground. The red-breasted bird was hopping about aimlessly. Sometimes it fell over.

When Renny pursued, the robin seemed not to see or hear him.

A half-grown rabbit lay on its back kicking. The little creature appeared to be recovering from a blow. Renny picked it up. The body felt icy.

The rabbit had been almost frozen.

Recalling the effect of the Cold Light in the laboratory, Renny was instantly on guard. Still no sound or movement disturbed the bush. Renny pushed through a tangle of berry bushes.

Directly in his face, an icy wall sprung up. The Cold Light ray filtered through trees as if they did not exist. Renny was bathed in an icy chill. The effect was much the same as liquid air.

The engineer had seen no one. He had heard no movement. Instinctively, he attempted to draw his supermachine pistol. His fingers clawed stiffly. His arms were almost instantly numbed.

Renny tried to shout. His throat was constricted. His tongue was powerless to utter a sound. The engineer was the first person upon whom the Cold Light had been directly played.

Renny felt as if his whole body were being frozen. But he tried to struggle onward. He went to his hands and knees. He crawled slowly.

Blurred figures came from the bush around him. Tape was slapped over his mouth and eyes. Thongs enwrapped his arms and legs. His stiff form was lifted and carried to an automobile.

Warmth returned to Renny. This was a warm wave. Renewed circulation brought tingling pain all over his body. Much the same as when frostbite is being relieved too quickly.

The automobile jounced and jumped over the rough road.

"Why didn't we wait and grab Doc Savage himself?" growled one harsh voice. "With him at liberty, anything might happen!"

A hoarse voice, strangely familiar, replied curtly.

"Keep your advice, Smoke! He's being saved for the big blow-off! The world may suspect, but none will ever be able to prove what became of this so-called invincible bronze man!"

Renny strained at his bindings. The effort availed nothing.

PERHAPS five minutes later, Doc Savage came upon the spot where Renny had been seized. Tracks of the auto ran out to the highway. By this time, there were many cars moving.

The man of bronze whipped back to the spot where he and his men had landed their plane before boarding the train. Trailing the car in which Renny was a prisoner was impossible. But Doc was convinced he could quickly gain a lead to the place where Renny would be taken.

Chapter 21. THE WOMAN IN IT

DOC SAVAGE had instructed Monk, Ham and Long Tom to join him at the Hudson River hangar, when they arrived back in New York. The man of bronze planned to visit the penthouse apartment where Monk had first been held prisoner.

He had his own reason for delaying this visit until nightfall. Likewise, the bronze man wished his companions to remain away from the skyscraper headquarters. For this, he offered no explanation. Vonier and Carberry had said they would not return until darkness. Vonier had not yet imparted

his own theory of the Cold Light.

Leaving his companions at the Hudson River hangar, the bronze man vanished. During the late afternoon, he was engaged in visiting various real estate offices handling properties on Manhattan's East Side.

He was especially interested in the block destroyed by the Cold Light explosion. Darkness was falling over the city when Doc returned to the hangar.

And the coming of night was bringing another moving angle of the mysterious Cold Light.

THIS new angle revolved around an isolated house, buried deep in a wooded section of Long Island. The furnishing of this obscure house was exotic. A raftered room with a high ceiling had heavy window drapes tightly drawn.

A woman sat in this room. Her features were flawless, of chiseled perfection. But the face lacked any warmth. Grayish-green eyes were like bright agate. A mask of a face. It might have been cast of plaster of Paris. The mouth was a pallid curve of bitterness. When she spoke, the name was hissed. "Doc Savage! The luck of the devil's with him! The luck of Satan's own imps! I should have used a knife in a crowd, as I suggested!"

She drew a thin, stiletto blade from a silver sheath in the bosom of her dress. The blade was needle-pointed.

Somewhere in the back of the house was the tinkle of silver and dishes. A soft-footed servant was moving about.

The woman walked with a sinuous movement to one of the heavily draped windows. She pulled aside the corded cloth.

Overhead, the sky was speckled with coldly winking stars. The calm peace of the night apparently stirred her to tigerish fury.

"The fool!" she said, venomously. "We're not safe until this Doc Savage is put out of the way!" She moved back to one of the chairs.

"He had the greatest power in the world and he can't get one man," she said in a low, brittle tone. "And now what is he doing? Since the first night, I haven't been in on any of it!"

She crossed the room and pulled a silken cord. Two dark-skinned men appeared from a rear room.

"Tako," the woman said, commandingly, "I want you and Scov to find your master at once! Try the river place, and if he isn't there he may be in the uptown apartment. You are to bring him here to me. Understand?"

"I understand," said the man addressed. "And if he doesn't want to come?"

The woman smiled, but it only made her mouth harder.

"You will bring him to me," she repeated, softly. "I will wait no longer!"

The two men withdrew.

Sparks glinted in the woman's grayish-green eyes.

"After all," she mused aloud, "the creator of the killing ray is dead. He can never come back. Our supply is almost inexhaustible. The secret of its origin is lost forever."

A GLASS clinked in another room. The woman arose and closed a pair of heavy double doors. She turned a key in the great brass lock.

Crossing the room, she came to an alcove containing a case of books. It appeared to have been built solidly into the structure of the house.

The woman glanced at the draped window. She touched a light switch and all but a single, dim eye faded out.

The woman moved one book. The bookcase swung silently outward. Back of it appeared a solid steel door. She whirled the knob of a combination.

A little light showed in the vaulted space behind the door. This was high enough to admit the woman's figure.

There were a dozen piled cases. Each was about a foot long, and possibly four inches in width and depth. They were like small caskets of a dull, lusterless metal. Each casket was fastened with screwed steel clamps.

The woman's long fingers sought one of the clamps. She swiftly unscrewed the casket fastening.

The lid lifted. Under the raised top she could see the contents of the little casket. She lifted it. The weight did not appear to be great. Not as if the queerly devised boxes contained jewels or other treasure.

Yet the movement of the woman's hands was almost caressing.

For perhaps two minutes, the woman stood motionless. Her lips moved without sound. Whatever her ruthless purpose, it no doubt involved the contents of the dull metal caskets.

As she stood thus, she could not see the key in the ponderous brass lock of the double doors.

This key was turning slowly. In the room at the rear of the house had sounded a muffled blow. It had been followed by a sighing moan.

The key was being turned so slowly from the other side of the door, its movement was almost imperceptible. But, as it caught the tumblers of the brass lock, there was a sharp click.

Without waiting to screw down the clamp of the small casket, the woman sprang back into the room.

The double doors were swinging back on silent hinges.

In the aperture appeared a moonlike face. The small mouth was merely a hole above a thick, double chin.

"You!" gasped the woman. "What's happened? What are you doing here?"

WHEEZE MCGOVERN leered at the woman. His darting eyes had confirmed his belief. She was alone. His gaze fell upon the open door of the steel vault.

"Perfect! Better--siss--than I'd hoped for!" he wheezed. "Now just don't move!"

The woman was transfixed for an instant.

"Where--where is Var?" she stammered. "Why--"

"Sent me to get 'em!" cut in Wheeze. "An' I see--siss--you were expectin' me!"

"No! No!" The woman gave a little gasp. "You're lying! Var--"

Her slim hand pushed at the vault door. It was heavy. Two other men crowded the door behind Wheeze. He rolled his fat body across the room with incredible speed.

One of the woman's hands was caught and squeezed in the door she fought to close. Wheeze McGovern's pudgy fist struck her under one shell-like ear. The blow staggered her.

But with a furious hissing breath, she flung herself upon the stout figure of Var's aide. Curved fingers clawed at his face. The nails welted a bloody track across its moon-shaped surface.

"I know what you're after!" the woman screamed. "I'd been expecting it to happen! Others have brains, if Var hasn't! But you'll never get them!"

Wheeze snarled, and caught the woman's neck in a twist of his heavy arm. Disregarding her clawing fingers, he forced her body to the floor.

"You listen to me--siss--an' maybe we can get together on this!" he wheezed. "With the stuff we've got, we can have millions!"

The woman was breathing rapidly. Her eyes widened.

"Yes! I'd thought of that!" she said.

One hand was sneaking to the bosom of her dress.

"What would you do with them?" she added. "What do you think could be done?"

Wheeze McGovern laughed softly.

"What? Collect millions!" he gloated. "Why, I'd make the big boys pay plenty! The time's ripe to collect!"

He had relaxed his hold on the woman. She came to her feet with the quickness of a cat. There was a silvery, flashing glitter in her hand.

For all of his apparently clumsy weight, Wheeze leaped aside with agile speed. He ripped out an oath as the stiletto pierced the cloth of his coat and ripped a furrow along the flesh of his arm.

"Why, you--siss--hellcat!" he grunted. "If you'd been only halfway reasonable--well--"

He was chopping out the words, even as his fingers closed on the woman's throat. His strength bent her downward and backward. He twisted the stiletto from her hand with a brutal force that cracked a bone in the woman's slender wrist.

She tried to scream, but the grip on her throat was inexorable. The face of chiseled marble turned slowly a greenish hue. Wheeze threw her limp body to one side.

"Take her, Smoke!" ordered Wheeze. "An' tie her up plenty!"

He pushed into the vault. He rapped out a command to another man. Wheeze's hands trembled a little, as he started passing out the small caskets. Then he came to the last one.

This was the dull metal box the woman had partly opened. The lid was up a few inches in the screw clamp. Wheeze gazed at the contents of the casket.

"Not a bad idea," he muttered. "Might as well leave it like it is."

WHEN all the caskets were in the car standing in the driveway outside, Wheeze reentered. The woman's slim body lay in the cool, green depths of a seaweed rug.

With her hands tightly secured and her ankles lashed to a heavy, shell-like chair, the woman was powerless to move. Across her mouth tape had been fixed.

"Not that it matters," grunted Wheeze. "Won't anybody be comin' along this forsaken road. Nobody but Var would have the idea, and that won't mean anything."

The woman's bosom was heaving convulsively. Her eyelids fluttered open. In the gray-green depths of her orbs glowed killing hate. Wheeze shivered and looked away.

Then he smiled a little. He went into the big vault. When he came out, he had made sure the lid of the one casket remained open. He left the heavy steel door slightly ajar. As he went out, he pushed a button.

The oddly furnished room was plunged in darkness.

In the darkness, the bound woman was staring at the partly open door of the vault. None could see the terror that had replaced all other emotion.

WHEEZE MCGOVERN'S closely curtained sedan swung onto the main, paved highway about a mile from the house hidden in the woods. For persons leaving the scene of a crime, the occupants of the car seemed in no great haste.

Once the car speeded up, Wheeze laid his hand on the driver's arm.

"There isn't any grand rush," he cautioned. "Nobody's chasin' us, and this is one of the times--siss--we don't want to be picked up by any speed cop. Take it easy."

The car proceeded at a sedate pace. It was a mile up the concrete from the side road to the house in the woods. Two or three cars had passed in the opposite direction. A couple had sped by toward the city, where myriad lights were reflected in the sky.

Another car, with weak headlights, appeared, meeting the sedan. The face of this driver was white and strained. The car was a roadster, old and almost paintless. The man was driving fast.

In the darkness, Wheeze and his men could not distinguish the face. If they had, their controlled speed toward the city might have been altered.

The driver of the roadster was the furtive, mysterious Scraggs.

Though Wheeze McGovern had not guessed the identity of the man in the roadster, it was apparent Scraggs had recognized the other car. A short distance down the road the little car squealed to a stop.

Turning, Scraggs was perhaps half a mile from the sedan. His foot pressed the gas and he sped toward it.

It being early evening, traffic from the city showed a dozen dancing headlights at the same time.

Three other cars passed Wheeze while Scraggs's car was creeping up behind the sedan.

The driver of one of these cars also slowed down. Only a minute later, a big car whizzed by both Scraggs and the sedan, coming from the rear.

Out of the night, from the midst of the blazing headlights, another light suddenly appeared. It was blue and cold; The Cold Light. The happenings of the succeeding moments were so fast, an observer would have had no time to fix details in mind.

Only it seemed the Cold Light had been directed at Wheeze McGovern's big car. The blue-steel ray must have missed, for the sedan abruptly spurted ahead.

The long beam of the Cold Light shifted from the highway. The sender undoubtedly was seeking to pick out Wheeze. The knifelike ray laid a silver pathway that could have been seen for miles. But for only a second. Perhaps only a fraction of that.

The Cold Light picked out the wooded area from which Wheeze and his men had lately emerged.

The following roaring explosion had the might of an unleashed volcanic crater. Vivid blue flame rushed through the trees toward the highway. An excavation the width of the East River was being ripped across the formerly peaceful countryside.

For miles, the earth rocked and trembled.

THE suction of the tremendous blast was so great that a dozen cars were caught in the fury of the air stream. They slid from the highway, catapulting into the ditches. Two automobiles were deposited up in the edge of the field through which the lurid blue blaze had rushed.

The Cold Light was flicked off. Instantly, the tumult and fury of the main explosion died. Only the reverberations and echoes remained.

At the scene of the apparent origin of the tearing explosion, when the first State police arrived, was only an immense crater. Here the woods and all the surrounding territory had been gouged out to great depths. An area of more than ten acres was a deep excavation.

Not a stick or even the splinter of a tree remained. It was as if the house, with its exotically furnished living room, had never existed.

Though the Cold Light had deliberately sought out the sedan of Wheeze McGovern, the car had escaped its direct force. Other cars near by had hurtled from the highway.

Even before the tearing chaos of the explosion had begun to die down, globules of sweat were popping from Wheeze McGovern's forehead. His double chin trembled and shook.

"It--siss--got her! Step--siss--on it! No, wait!"

Ahead of the sedan, a closed car had turned over in the ditch. A woman was crawling from a window. She was screaming. Blood ran from a cut on her forehead. One arm dangled.

Wheeze sprang from the car. The woman moaned.

"Oh, my son! Please, my son's down in there!"

Wheeze got down and pulled the inert figure of a boy from the crashed auto. The youth was undoubtedly past all human aid. Wheeze opened the rear door of the sedan and got the body inside. Then he helped the woman get in. He followed.

"Now you can--siss--step on it plenty!" he wheezed.

The sedan whirled cityward. The speed crept up past seventy miles an hour. Two motor cycle cops flagged the car down.

"All hell's busted loose back there!" rapped Wheeze. "Maybe a dozen people killed! We're getting this woman and the boy to a hospital!"

The coppers saw five respectable-looking citizens. The woman with the bloody face was an argument.

"Right!" assented one of the cops. "Hope you make it in time!"

The motor cycles sped on toward the scene of the explosion.

The policemen did not know when they passed a furtive figure behind the fence over in a field.

They did see a paint-less roadster upended on its nose. The little man known as Scraggs crouched close to the yawning gash of the Cold Light explosion. His luminous eyes glowed with hatred. His tongue licked his thin lips with seeming satisfaction, as he looked toward the place where the house had been.

Chapter 22. SHADOW OF DEATH

DOC SAVAGE used a plane to arrive at the scene of the latest Cold Light explosion. He instructed his companions to be on their guard and await his return to the hangar, before going to headquarters.

Havoc wrought by the new blast was such as to have destroyed any further lead to the mysterious Var. A Long Islander divulged the information that a woman with a number of servants had occupied the house.

The woman had been there only a short time. The house had been privately built. Several hours' check-up would be necessary to discover its owner.

Doc judged the Cold Light ray had been projected from an automobile. The word of frightened witnesses bore out this theory.

The bronze man spent no more time here. He was convinced that a woman had died.

Returning to the Hudson River hangar, Doc announced, "We'll go first to headquarters, then have a look at that penthouse west of Central Park where Monk was imprisoned. Var's men might not use it again, but there are some things there I should examine. We will take the ex-neutralizers with us." Reaching the skyscraper headquarters, the four men ascended in the private, high-speed elevator. In the foggy street behind them, a tall shadow moved from a doorway. The man's hat was pulled low. His eyes burned in the darkness.

Waiting until Doc and his companions had vanished, the man drew out a cigarette case. Gently, he tapped the smoke on the silver box. He was watching the window of a tall building only a block away. Other windows in the row on that floor were lighted. This one was distinguishable by its darkness. But in its square, back space glowed for an instant a tiny light. It was as if a man had just lighted a cigarette.

The man in the street was computing the time required for one of the regular skyscraper elevators to reach the eighty-sixth floor. Unfamiliar with Doc's own speedy, private cage, the man had loitered in the building lobby for some time previously. He had made a careful check on the elevator indicators. He was sure he had the lifts timed to the second.

A full minute passed, then seven seconds more. The man flicked on his cigarette lighter. He swung it in three small circles past his face. Then he stepped back into a doorway and applied the flame to his own smoke.

His next movement was fast. With a bound, he crossed the pavement and entered a low-slung car. The gears screamed protest. The driver took the first corner recklessly. The car gathered speed. A red traffic light loomed ahead.

The driver disregarded the signal, shooting across between a car and a truck. He heard a policeman's whistle, but he only smiled. For he had timed everything to make sure he would be at a sufficient distance. By the time the angered traffic cop overtook him, if he did, he was sure the policeman would have something else to take his attention.

DOC and his men were a good three minutes ahead of the furtive man's carefully plotted schedule when they reached the eighty-sixth floor.

The outer door leading into the reception room opened. Doc stepped inside. The bronze man's eyes went to the broken window. His calculation and reaction was lightning fast.

Doc glided to the inner door leading to the laboratory. The door opened.

Doc was carrying one of the ex-neutralizers. His hands moved with incredible speed. The electromagnetic ray laid its wall across one side of the big room.

"Cover the other side, Long Tom," he directed. "We are about to entertain the Cold Light ray again."

Before he had finished speaking, the Cold Light had sliced the laboratory. The blue-steel ray cut through the thick wall of the building as if it were a fog bank.

"Howlin' calamities!" grunted Monk. "That fella Var don't seem to know when to quit!"

But the Cold Light was effectively blocked by the ex-neutralizer wall spreading its invisible fan from Doc's hands. Against this strange electromagnetic force it wavered and dissolved. It played with weird effects across the retorts and polished spheres of the chemical and electrical equipment. "Hold it," said Doc, calmly. "Here, Monk, take the box. We've had a visitor while we were gone. If he had been able to replace that broken window, I fear, brothers, we now would have joined the long list of Var's victims."

While the Cold Light still played futilely against the invisible wall, Doc strode across the laboratory. His eyes searched among the clutter of tubes and glasses on the laboratory tables. "Not anywhere here," he stated. "Keep the ex-neutralizers at work, even after the Cold Light leaves. He might think to surprise us and flash it back."

Doc's surmise was correct. The Cold Light vanished. It was gone for a minute. The bronze man

continued his search. Finally he shook his head.

"We've had a visitor," he said slowly. "But he doesn't seem to have left a calling card."

The Cold Light came back for a second visit. Its play was briefer this time. Then it was switched off. Doc directed the ex-neutralizers be set to protect the laboratory while they armed themselves.

HAM walked over to the laboratory sink. Immediately, he called out to the others.

"Quick! Get out before the water hits these things!"

He was scooping up the four globular "poison pills" and the two cubelike ones. The dampened area from the dropping water was within an inch of touching the first of these. Ham had no doubt but that a trap of deadly gas had been set for all of them.

"Our visitor had it figured too closely," said Ham. "In another few minutes, the place would have been full of the gas, if that's what these things are intended to do. We arrived just a little ahead of the killer's schedule. Say! Scraggs knew where you put the poison pills!"

Doc looked at the white pellets lying in Ham's palm.

"Yes," said Doc. "Vonier and Carberry also knew. The Cold Light might have been a diversion to keep our minds elsewhere. I'll take those pills, Ham. We must find Renny."

Doc's assured manner informed his men he had arrived at some definite conclusion which he was not yet ready to divulge.

Long Tom was bending in front of the leaden safe. His nervous, long fingers were rubbing across the door.

"Used the torch on this to get them out," he remarked. "Neat a job as I ever saw."

Doc wrapped the pills in a silk handkerchief and placed them in his pocket.

DOC SAVAGE'S Intention to investigate the penthouse where Monk had whipped a robot might have been a great relief to Renny, if he could have known of it. For Renny was conscious when he was carried up a stairway. His eyes and mouth were taped, but sound and his sense of direction informed him he was near Central Park.

Renny had counted floors while on an elevator.

"Holy cow!" he grunted. "You wouldn't think the boobs would be that dumb! It's the same place they had Monk, or I'm no judge of descriptions! This will be the first place Doc will make for!" Renny's elation at the apparent dumbness of his captors was only short-lived. He was dumped roughly into a room. This was so small it seemed to be little more than a narrow closet. Renny's huge body required considerable room.

The tape was suddenly and roughly torn from his eyes. Renny mumbled a bellow of rage through his sealed lips.

"Go on and howl, big fellow!" said a hard voice. "You'll be glad in a minute we're letting you look everything over!"

The man stepped back. Renny was amazed to discover he was looking through a doorway where there was no door. The sides of the frame were of gleaming copper strips. Renny had been placed far back in the little room. He was perhaps ten feet from this metal-sided entrance.

The man who had spoken was standing with several others on the rug of a curiously painted room. The walls were of aquamarine. Renny stared at the opposite side.

Monk's story of the metal man he had ripped apart was proved. A glass door had been shattered. An armless, broken robot stood in the room back of the smashed entrance.

Renny stared at one of the weird oil paintings. It was that of the half-crab, half-human figure depicted as arising from the coral-strewn bottom of the sea.

So this was the picture on one of the colored plates in Vonier's little book? Renny wondered how Doc had come upon that angle of Vonier's activities.

RENNY was sitting now, with his back propped against the back wall of the closetlike room. He looked sharply at the men outside. He judged that Var was not among those present.

One of the men said, "And right now, big fellow, you're figuring how you might roll yourself outta that nice, little cell. Well, just in case you try it, I'll give you something to think about!"

The man was at least six or seven feet distant from the copper-plated entrance. He walked over to the far wall, threw an electric switch and returned. In his hand he held an ordinary walking stick with a thick, rubber tip.

He reached with the cane and pressed on the rug several feet from the copper doorway. Instantly, there came a wicked crackling. An electrical current of high voltage leaped across the space of the entrance. It played with vivid flashes.

"You'll notice it's the works," said the man with the cane. "And if my foot or your foot were where this cane is, there'd be nothing left but to bring on the lilies. Now, big fellow, it's about six feet from where you are to the doorway. The plate on your side starts only a few inches from where you're sitting."

Renny could see he was hopelessly trapped. His mind leaped to another angle of the ingenious death trap. Had Var's monstrous crew thought of that? He wasn't left long in doubt.

"And now," continued his tormentor, "we will leave you. No doubt, your brainy chief will think of this penthouse. He'll figure we wouldn't be dumb enough to come back here after your ape-faced partner escaped. But he'll want to have a look, anyway."

Renny tried his muscles against the multiple cords.

"So, Doc Savage will be along presently," the man went on. "We won't be visible, but we'll be close by. Naturally, he'll make a hunt for you. Probably won't believe you're here until he sees you in this closet. That will be pretty.

"There you are. You can't talk or move. You can only use your eyes. We'll leave a light on, so you can't be missed. No doubt, the smart Doc Savage will immediately suspect the copper doorway is a trap. But he can't know how far the plates reach under the rug.

"So your chief will walk up close enough to inspect the device." The man used the cane again—"Like this!"

The walking stick was sheathed with metal. The rubber tip had been worn thinner than the man using it had noticed. A blue electrical spark suddenly played along the cane. It writhed and twisted around the man's hand.

With an oath frozen on his lips, the victim succeeded in heaving himself free. He rolled to the floor, cursing wildly. Renny detected the odor of scorched skin and flesh.

The man got to his feet, his body shaking. He rubbed his burned hand. His face was white.

Chapter 23. DEATH THREATENS DOC

RENNY could only stare at the fiendish trap. His tormentor had presented only facts. Even Doc could have no reason to suspect other than that the doorway itself was highly charged. Renny groaned under the gagging tape. He hoped Doc and the others would believe it useless to visit the penthouse where Monk had been held.

But at this moment, four figures were emerging from the skylight of a roof less than half a block from the penthouse.

"So up here's where you chewed up an armored robot?" grinned Ham maliciously at Monk. "And it didn't seem to make even a dent in that prognathous jaw."

"Dag-gone it!" squeaked Monk. "I'll bet that's an insult!"

Doc cautioned silence. Long Tom was following him closely, as they kept near the coping walls along the street side of the roofs. Long Tom was carrying one of the ex-neutralizers and Monk was burdened with the other.

Doc expected to find the penthouse deserted. He reached the shelter of a chimney where he could see the structure rearing above the apartment house roof. To his surprise, the windows of the penthouse glowed with mellow light.

Directing the others to keep back in the shelter of the shadows, the bronze man glided forward. In the vague light his movement could hardly be detected, so swiftly he moved from one shadow to another.

Doc flattened himself beside one of the windows. He was looking into the room with vivid blue paintings. He saw the illustration about which Monk had exclaimed in Vonier's book.

He saw another painting. The same figures had been in Vonier's book. It looked as if the author had caused the room to be created. The bronze man considered the relation of this room to the emotionless explorer.

Doc was using one thumb against the window casing. With only the pressure of this, he was slowly raising the sash.

The room was in confusion. The drawers of a desk had been pulled out. A few papers were strewn on the floor. There was other evidence that several persons had taken a hasty departure. A door which apparently led to a stairway was partly open. A man's hat and one glove lay on the floor near this exit.

A bottle of ink had been spilled on the expensive rug. It was logical the Var men might have fled hastily after Monk's escape.

Though a night had passed, if no person had visited the penthouse, it was not unreasonable to suppose the lights might have burned all day. Doc's instinctive senses put him on guard.

One bronzed hand gestured his companions to stay back. He eased himself into the room.

DOC'S figure was fully revealed. He judged if this were a trap, the time had come for it to be sprung. Nothing happened.

The bronze man studied the marine paintings intently. From an inner pocket, he brought out Vonier's thin book. After a brief comparison, he nodded. From another pocket came another book. This second volume was not illustrated. It was a leather-bound volume. But its text was printed in bright blue ink.

Looking at the picture of the half-crab, half-human figure, Doc started reading the accompanying text, when, from across the room, came a muffled, guttural sound as if some one were strangling. Doc sought its source. He saw the closet-like room into which Renny had been crowded.

His keen eyes saw the engineer's hunched figure. Though bound hand and foot, his mouth taped, Renny was going through queer contortions. Doc strode across the larger room.

Now he could see Renny's position more clearly. The big man's eyes were blinking rapidly. His head shook violently. He was trying to warn Doc of something.

The bronze man moved closer. He was only about eight feet from the doorway. Renny moaned under the tape. He reared to his heels. He lunged forward, heaving his big body directly toward the concealed death plates.

In his loyalty to the bronze man, the giant engineer counted his own life a slight sacrifice. If he could only strike the hidden peril in such manner as to prevent Doc Savage being electrocuted, Renny felt it would be much more than worth the price.

Instinct developed in many situations of extreme danger, brought instant understanding to Doc. As Renny hurled himself toward the doorway, Doc's own springy body left the floor.

The almost simultaneous action of the two men carried their leaping bodies clear of the floor.

They were, for the moment, as agile and fast as two great apes of the jungle. Two bodies cannot remain suspended for more than the fraction of a second. Renny, knowing the truth, groaned deeply in mid-air. He had accomplished nothing. Doc would die along with him. The striking of their weight would make the fatal contact.

MONK, as ever venturing beyond where he had been instructed to go, had reached the window opened by Doc. He had watched the bronze man as he paused in the face of danger to read a book, examine the paintings.

Now he witnessed the inexplicable action of his chief. Monk could not possibly reach either of the flying figures. To his awe-struck senses it seemed as if the bronze man and Renny were bent upon annihilating each other. The purpose of this, Monk could not fathom.

His own instinct told him this was his cue to do something. It was not within human possibility to reach either of the men. Monk did the next possible thing. He had no conception of what it would accomplish.

The ex-neutralizer box was in his hands. Monk flicked the switch. The focusing slot of the invisible wall was pointed directly at the copper-lined doorway.

Renny and Doc collided in mid-air. Big as he was, the breath hissed from Renny's lungs. He strove to make his weight hurl Doc backward.

They dropped together upon the rug between the deadly copper plates. There was a lurid, blinding flash of high-frequency current. Like the bursting of a freakish floating ball of lightning, the side of the room where the switch was concealed exploded in blue smoke and yellow flame.

Renny and Doc rolled over together. Renny's breath was gone. His ankles and his wrists were still tightly bound. He had leaped with the propelling force of his corded leg muscles. Doc's quick hand pulled the tape from the engineer's mouth.

"Holy cow, Doc!" Renny gasped, as darkness enfolded them. "Are we dead?"

"I'm all right," replied Doc, bounding to his feet. "We'll remove these cords. We're due to have visitors."

Monk stood for a moment in petrified silence. As yet, he hardly realized what he had done. Then he heard Renny and Doc speaking, and the apelike engineer exhaled a mighty breath of relief.

"Howlin' calamities!" he grunted. "Somethin' sure busted somethin'!"

The something had been the invisible wall of the ex-neutralizer. Before either Doc or Renny had hit the concealed plates intended for the bronze man's electrocution, the electromagnetic ray had flashed through the closet doorway.

The invisible wall had the effect of interposing an insulating, non-conducting element in the space across which the high-voltage current would have jumped. This intangible, yet powerful, force had cut the circuit in such a manner as to short circuit the high-powered wires at the hidden switchboard.

Fuses and a part of the board had gone out. With these went the house lights. The strange room with its aquamarine paintings was instantly a dark cavern.

EVEN as Doc's fast hands were slitting the cords off Renny, men were pouring into the room.

"It didn't get 'em!" snarled a voice. "I heard them speak! We can't take chances now! Let 'em have it!"

The bronze man's shoulder struck Renny and heaved him far to one side. They rolled to the far wall on the deep rug.

Half a dozen flashes mingled with the vicious, whiplike crackling of silenced pistols. Lead slugs were ripping into the copper-sheathed door frame.

The bronze man was holding one of the anaesthetic gas capsules.

The gas capsule would have rendered any number of men helpless. But Var's force was strong. Doc divined that not all were in the room. Before Renny and he could make their way out, Renny might be hit by the gas. The engineer was not capable of holding his breath half as long as Doc.

More bullets were being poured across the room. Doc felt the searing touch of one across his neck. Renny grunted. A slug was buried in his shoulder. The bronze man caught Renny and made another gliding change of base.

There came the sound of crashing blows. Monk was shouting.

"I'll pulverize y' for that!"

"Look out!" warned one of Var's men. "There's another one here--"

The speech was sliced off with the cracking, splintering impact of a blow. A box was shattered. Monk had swung the ex-neutralizer box as a weapon. The man who had spoken, and another man, crashed down in the darkness. The unexpected landing of the apelike chemist into their midst was the beginning of a frenzied battle.

Var's men were striking each other in an effort to put their unseen foe out of business. Monk's long arms reached out and enfolded victim after victim. When he drove them together, some heads were irreparably damaged. Others were merely knocked senseless.

Var's men had ceased shooting. They were so tangled and scattered by Monk's steam roller attack as to lose all sense of direction. Those still on their feet could see only the dim square of light coming from below. It marked the secret stairway from the penthouse.

A few of Monk's victims were breathing heavily from the floor. Then Renny let out a bellow.

"Stop it, Monk! You wanta break my neck!"

Renny heaved once. He was more than a match for the apelike Monk. The chemist smashed into one of the oil paintings. There was momentary silence.

THE whole battle had taken up less than two minutes. Doc's pencil of light from his generator flash picked out eight men huddled on the floor. The bronze man gave several faces a brief study. "The only way, brothers, we can help these men is to remove the temptation that drew them into this," Doc stated. "They're men of brains. Surgical treatment would do them no good. Remove the power of Var and they'll return to their professions."

The sound of the retreating survivors of the encounter was dying out.

"There's only one thing here we want," Doc stated. Using the flashlight, he slit one of the oil paintings free from the wall with swift strokes of a knife. It was the picture of the half-crab, half-human form. The oil work was on canvas, secured by its edges to the wall of the room. Then Doc said, "It's strange, Long Tom and Ham aren't here. They must have heard the shooting." The three men hurried through the open window to the roof. Doc called out. Neither Ham nor Long Tom replied.

The bronze man led the way, gliding over a roof coping. Three bodies were lying near an open skylight. It was quickly revealed that none of the three was Ham or Long Tom.

Bending over one of the bodies, Doc pointed out, "Ham's sword got him!"

The unconscious man's cheek had been pierced by the keen point of Ham's cane sword blade. The anaesthetic drug had done its work. The same treatment had been parceled out to the other two. Examination showed the skylight of this roof had been smashed. There was a small pool of blood near by.

Excited voices were coming up from the floor below. Doc led Monk and Renny in a swift descent. Panicky residents of the apartment house were pouring into the hallways.

Doc quickly learned a number of men had tramped through the upper corridor. They had pushed their way to the roof. One man had heard the scuffling noises of a fight.

"Then they came tumbling back down!" this man said. "They were carrying one man! He had a camera box in his hands! They had handcuffs on another man! He looked like a gentleman! Funny! Come to think of it, all of them looked like gentlemen!"

"The other ex-neutralizer!" groaned Renny. "That lays us wide open to the Cold Light ray, doesn't it, Doc?—since Monk smashed our other ex-neutralizer in the fight."

"We'll not worry too much about that," said Doc, quietly. "We've first got to find Ham and Long Tom. Come on, brothers. I have a feeling we shall have visitors very soon at headquarters."

Chapter 24. THREE VISITORS

THE visitors to Doc Savage's headquarters numbered three. The explorer, Vonier, was the first. Doc noted that throughout all of the crowded events of the past forty-eight hours, the explorer's fixed expression of cold detachment had not varied.

Vonier drew the bronze man quickly to one side.

"Just in case something happens we can't control, I'd like you to know one or two facts that might help you," he offered. "This Cold Light, or the destructive force it represents, contains one element to be found only at the greatest depths to which man has ever descended in the ocean." The explorer's smile gave him a derisive, cynical look.

"I'd guessed that," Doc replied, quietly. "I got the hint of it directly from a book."

Vonier started perceptibly. His intense blue eyes became like sword thrusts.

"Yes?" he said. "From a book? You've known then that I knew?"

"Could hardly avoid that," said Doc, "seeing you wrote the book."

"Marvelous!" murmured Vonier. "For the past two days and nights, you haven't slept. You've been threatened by death from many directions. Yet during that time you've read a book."

"Two books, to be exact," smiled the bronze man. "They are oddly alike in many parts, though others are dissimilar. By the way, Vonier, do you count artistic conception among your other varied accomplishments?"

Vonier's reply was surprisingly direct, defiant.

"No," he said. "I'm not an artist. I didn't paint the pictures in the penthouse, if that's what you mean? Now you'll be asking—"

"Well, yes," interrupted Doc. "Where have you been during the day, and thus far to-night?"

"Many places. And alone mostly. I've been very busy."

"I judged you had," said Doc. "So you haven't been much comfort to Carberry. I imagined he would stick by you."

"Carberry had several phone calls," Vonier stated. "He went away to attend to some important business. He was still greatly scared, but he said he would meet me here to-night." Just then, the headquarters had a visitor. It was the financier, Carberry.

CARBERRY'S first words were, "I hear there's been another big explosion. I'm almost afraid to walk in the streets. I've called the police commissioner and asked for a special police bodyguard. I think he'll be sending them up here."

"We will give you all the protection possible," Doc stated. "We employ our own methods, and call upon the police only when some matter should be brought to their attention."

"Indeed—well—you see—Savage, I'm terribly sorry," stammered Carberry. "I'll call the commissioner at once. I feel safer with you than I would with a squad of coppers. Let me have—"

"Never mind," interjected Doc. "I've been in touch with the commissioner. He told me of your request. I've already instructed him not to send his men. The commissioner himself is paying us a visit in a few minutes."

"Oh, that's all right then," mumbled the financier. "I suppose then you've turned those poison pills over to him?"

"No," stated Doc. "I shall analyze them myself. Some one tried releasing the poison gas to trap us, so I'm carrying the pills with me."

Carberry gasped.

"Carrying them with you, Savage?" His protruding eyes rolled. "Don't you fear—well, mightn't something happen?"

The immediate entrance of the police commissioner interrupted Doc from giving an answer.

The police commissioner was a stocky, red-faced man. For good reasons, involving countless past services, his faith in Doc Savage was boundless.

He had met both Vonier and Carberry. While he did not ignore the importance of the financier or the cause of his fear of death, the commissioner's attitude was abrupt.

After all, though he was a world figure, Carberry was but one individual. The safety of millions had now been in the balance for two days and two nights.

"We've got those men from the penthouse," the commissioner announced. "We've been checking. Not one has ever been mugged. We find they are doctors, professors and the like of that. Only two have any kind of records. We believe they have been international spies in Europe."

Doc nodded. This confirmed his quick analysis in the penthouse. None of these men had the kind of brains requiring the usual treatment for the reformation of crooks.

Carberry arose. His terror seemed to be returning in force.

"I just remembered," he said. "I think I should go out and put in a call to Mrs. Carberry. I want to know she is still safe."

"You could call from here," suggested Doc.

"Wait a minute," interrupted the commissioner. "I think Mr. Carberry should stay with us. In fact, all of us have something we ought to do at once. I've a dozen carloads of men on the way, but I came directly because I have to admit I'm afraid they can't stop this one."

"Holy cow!" muttered Renny. "Aren't things never goin' to quiet down?"

"We haven't any clue to your two men, Mr. Savage," the commissioner went on. "But we have a phoned report that the Hudson River warehouse where you keep your planes is to be the next spot visited by the Cold Light."

"WE must proceed to the hangar at once," Doc stated. "We'll have to do what we can to get the employees to safety. Some of the workers are too loyal to flee from any danger."

"I know," said the commissioner. "We tried warning them by phone."

"Get out the extra bulletproof vests," Doc instructed. "Commissioner, you and the others need the protection. I believe this is much more involved than a mere threat to destroy the hangar. It is a deliberate scheme to have us go out there."

"If you think it is a trap—" began the commissioner.

"We shall go," said Doc, quietly. "Perhaps Vonier and Carberry would rather remain here."

"Wouldn't miss it for a million," Vonier said, promptly.

"I wouldn't feel safe anywhere but with you, Doc Savage," declared Carberry.

Doc was holding an extra bulletproof vest in his hands.

"We've all got our vests, Doc," said Monk. "Why are you taking that one?"

A thin voice interrupted from the doorway of the outer office.

"Your Hudson River hangar is the next place Var intends to hit, Doc Savage."

Scraggs was standing there. His thin face was gray.

"I have been expecting you," replied Doc. "This vest is too big for you, but you will be wise to put it on."

Scraggs's sunken eyes were staring now at Carberry, much the same as he had looked at Vonier a few hours previously.

With Ham and Long Tom missing, there was ample room for the four extra men in Doc's armored car. The bronze man sent the motor at high speed across town.

ALL streets in the vicinity of the hangar were deserted. The commissioner had caused police lines to be drawn several blocks from the innocent-appearing old warehouse.

This building housed Doc Savage's latest in planes, his dirigible and two types of submarines. As they passed the final police line, Doc glanced at Vonier, Carberry and Scraggs.

"I would suggest you leave us here. I will go ahead with my men and have the watchman and the other men get out."

"I'd prefer to be in at the finish," remarked Vonier, crisply. "I've a funny hunch this will be some sort of a showdown."

"I-I-wouldn't want to stay here alone," Carberry quavered. "I mean with the police. I'd like to go along."

"I'm seeing this through," came the positive voice of Scraggs.

Doc never wasted words in argument. The strangely matched pair, the explorer and the financier, had made their own choice. If they could have seen Doc's flaky-gold eyes at the moment, they would have guessed the bronze man was not ignoring their safety as much as it seemed.

For Doc Savage had arrived at a direct conclusion with regard to the Cold Light ray and its explosive effect. By simple elimination of certain facts, he had reached the point of knowing much more than the men accompanying him would have believed.

Doc was convinced there would be an explosion.

But right now, he was equally sure he had discovered the means of controlling the blast and its effect. And he had no intention of seeing the hangar destroyed.

The police lines took in a half circle about a half mile distant from the warehouse hangar. More than five hundred coppers, all heavily armed and instructed to permit no one to pass, formed the guarding ring. Police patrol launches guarded the river side.

The coppers looked apprehensively at the dark canyons of near-by deserted streets close to the hangar. The round-up had been made.

But this had not included buildings which seemed vacant. In the lower part of another old warehouse were four automobiles. Each of these cars carried eight or ten men.

Doc swung the car in front of the hangar. He regularly employed a crew of a dozen mechanics and others.

Entering the hangar, Doc ordered all his employees to depart from what he considered the danger zone surrounding the hangar. All excepting one mechanic.

"The rest of you wait here," Doc instructed his companions. "I'm sending up a plane. It's just an idea that came to me."

"You mean, you're going up?" queried Carberry.

"Rather a big chance to take, isn't it, Savage?" came from Vonier. "Remember what happened to the Red Arrow ship, or would have if it hadn't been for you?"

"No, I won't be going up," said Doc. "Just the plane."

Accompanied by the mechanic, the bronze man quickly moved one of the amphibian planes. The little ship was equipped with a radio-controlling robot. But unlike the plane in which Doc had been sent out over the ocean, this ship had alternative hand controls.

The radio-robot could be cut off at any time by a pilot in the ship. He then could handle the plane in the usual manner.

THE police commissioner went back with the departing hangar employees to issue further instructions to his police lines.

Renny and Monk started an immediate prowl of the building. Apparently, no one remained. Vonier and Carberry were left standing together. Carberry, especially, seemed to prefer being where the light was brightest.

Scraggs glanced furtively around. Then he vanished with the quick movement of a scuttling small animal.

Carberry remarked to Vonier, "Savage seems invincible.

Nothing gets by him. But I'm afraid this time he hasn't much of an idea what makes the Cold Light."

Vonier smiled thinly at the financier.

He said, "To put Doc Savage out of the running, you'd have to get inside his mind. For example, right in the middle of this turmoil and threats, he stops to read a book."

Carberry's eyes protruded more than ever.

"Read a book?" he queried. "What book?"

"Oh, the little thing I did on marine energy," replied Vonier, lightly. "Perhaps he thought he had something there."

From the near-by warehouse, men were moving. They were keeping in deep shadows. Doc Savage had ordered roof and river landing lights of his hangar on at their brightest. Carberry and Vonier remained near the open street door.

IN a nearer shadow inside the hangar, Scraggs was moving to concealment. He watched intently as Doc Savage and the mechanic got the small plane into its dockage ready for a take-off from the broad river. Scraggs watched until he saw the man of bronze climb into the plane's cabin.

The mechanic wound up the inertia starter. Apparently, it was Doc's hand on the throttle. The bronze man revved the motor with a warming burst. He remained in the cabin several minutes. Then he idled the motor and emerged.

"We'll leave it idle," the bronze man stated. "I'll give it the gun with the radio controls when I'm ready."

With the mechanic beside him, Doc started back across the hangar. Sudden shouts, harsh oaths and the sound of blows broke from the vicinity of the street door of the warehouse.

Doc glided into a run. The mechanic was close at his heels.

Half a dozen men swooped into the light where Carberry and Vonier were standing. A blow sent the explorer to his knees. Two men had seized his arms. He was being propelled toward the shadows. Carberry was putting up a stiff fight.

Though a man of slight weight, the financier was surprisingly effective. Nor, now that he was in physical combat, did he seem afraid.

With catlike movements, Carberry had disposed of two of his attackers before Doc and the mechanic could make it halfway across the floor. Another man seized the financier, only to go somersaulting over Carberry's head.

But more men were pouring into the building. Carberry saw them coming. Suddenly, his nerve seemed to desert him. The financier turned and darted across the inside of the warehouse.

Vonier had shaken off his two attackers. To Doc's amazement, the explorer also took to his heels. He ran after Carberry.

Renny and Monk came bursting from behind a plane. There were now more than a score of men. They had started to pursue Carberry and Vonier.

RENNY'S sledge-hammer fists disposed of four men in quick order. Monk whooped shrilly and his long arms flailed a disconcerting broadside of knuckles and elbows into the leaders of the rush to grab Carberry.

Then a pistol flashed, and another.

"Let 'em have it!" wheezed a high voice. "Look out! Here's Doc Savage himself!"

Over the arm of the moon-faced man with the rathole in the middle of his countenance for a mouth appeared the snout of a machine gun. He turned it directly upon the bronze man.

Any one looking on would have sworn Doc merely sidestepped the stream of slugs without great effort. The fact was, Doc's reactions under a pointed weapon were a split-second ahead of the gunman's trigger finger.

Wheeze McGovern cursed, and sought to bring the machine gun directly upon the slithering figure of the bronze man. The mechanic groaned with pain and sank to the ground. Some of the bullets had got him in the stomach.

Doc became a moving streak, hurtling himself straight upon Wheeze and his crackling gun. With all his massive weight, he dived under the tearing streak of death. One shoulder struck Wheeze's stubby legs.

There was a sharp crack. Doc rammed his head upward. With one leg broken and all the breath gone from his body, Wheeze dropped his weapon.

As Doc came to his feet, he saw that Renny and Monk were being overwhelmed by numbers. Renny was handicapped already by having a bullet in one shoulder as the result of the penthouse battle. Now he had a furrow across one temple and he was staggering groggily.

Monk cracked the heads of two men together, his favorite pastime. Then he sprang to Renny's assistance. A pistol butt crashed down on the chemist's head and sent him to his knees.

DOC SAVAGE exploded suddenly in the midst of the attackers. His arrival had about the same effect as a cyclone ripping through a field of dry corn.

Doc's iron knuckles played at the ends of his corded arms with a speed too fast for the human eye to follow. When his knuckles landed, one man stayed down.

Though there had been some shooting, the invaders of the warehouse were now too closely packed to use their pistols. Nor did Doc or his men attempt the use of weapons. In the bright light it was mêlée for fists and muscles.

A group of six men remained on their feet. Seeing their leader, Wheeze McGovern, was out, they started a retreat. As they withdrew, two men drew their pistols. They now had a free play at Doc and his two companions.

They snarled hard laughs as they aimed the guns.

Two figures came lithely from the street outside. They were disheveled objects. Cords still trailed from the legs of one. Handcuffs held the wrists of both men. The mistake of Wheeze McGovern had been that he had not manacled the men's hands behind them.

Long Tom was a slight specimen of manhood. He looked frail compared to any other of Doc's men.

But he could make the average man very sick indeed in a fistic encounter.

This time, Long Tom had an advantage. He swung the heavy handcuffs in sweeping arcs. Two men were mowed down with bleeding heads.

Ham, the lawyer, was quick as light. His favorite weapon was his trusty sword blade. Lacking this, the steel handcuffs seemed to serve very well. The manacles crashed on three heads before the men could get themselves set.

Almost abruptly, there were only four or five men left of the gang, and these were running toward the street.

"They won't find the cars they're looking for!" panted Ham. "Long Tom tore out their ignition wire!"

Doc was starting toward the door of the lighted radio control room.

"Keep an eye on all of these men," he instructed. "You needn't trouble about the one with the machine gun. He has serious trouble with his legs."

Doc was in the door of the control room. A slim figure ran past the edge of the lighted area. The running man was Scraggs. He vanished in the direction Carberry and Vonier had taken. Neither the explorer nor the financier had reappeared, although all pursuit was definitely ended.

Doc stood before the radio controls. He closed a switch. In its take-off dock, the motor of his small plane roared on fuller throttle.

The bronze man's hand moved over to the impulse that would control the take-off. His hand never reached it.

The little ship suddenly lifted its tail and moved out upon the river. Gathering speed, its nose lifted under an expert hand.

Some one was in the radio-controlled plane. It was being zoomed into the air in the direction of the ocean by a human hand.

Doc's eyes held little golden whirlwinds of light.

He knew the mystery pilot of the zooming plane believed him still to be carrying the "poison pills" in his pocket.

Chapter 25. THE RUNAWAY PLANE

THE police commissioner was in the doorway of the radio control room. He stared at Doc Savage. Doc's feet were braced wide apart. He was looking up at the sky through the observation window. "You're sending up a plane with the radio robot?" questioned the commissioner. "What's the idea, Mr. Savage?"

"It was my idea to send up a plane with the radio," stated Doc, tersely. "Now, it's another idea altogether, and I don't know but it's a good one."

Renny appeared beside the commissioner. He was mopping blood from his long, solemn face.

"Holy cow, Doc!" he exclaimed. "I thought all the time that skull-faced explorer would bear watching. He's in that plane! I saw him run over that way."

Ham pushed his way in.

"You're wrong, Renny, this time," he interposed. "It's that ratty little fellow Scraggs. I was watching him making for the plane when Doc came in here. He's making a get-away!"

Doc smiled a little.

"Time will tell us that, and it won't be such a long time either," he said. "Has Carberry returned?"

"Not him!" supplied Monk. "The last I saw of him he was high tailin' for the police lines!"

Doc was watching the riding lights of the small plane. The ship had been sent steadily upward. It was nearly two miles high and its lights had faded in the fog. Only the thin drone of its motor could be heard.

"Hope he stays that far up," said Doc, crisply. "Just the same, I'd advise all of you to get back toward the police lines. I could switch off the hangar lights, but I'd rather have him come back over the river than try landing some other place."

"Why? Do you think he'll come back?" said the commissioner, doubtfully. "I think whoever it is, he's making his get-away. He'll probably land somewhere up or down the coast. I'll get to one of the cars and send in a radio warning to be on the lookout for him."

"That will hardly be necessary," smiled Doc.

THE others obeyed the suggestion. They listened. They heard nothing. Only Doc's keenly tuned auditory nerves had detected the thrumming of the plane's motor growing steadily louder.

In fact, Doc was the only one among them who had not lost the vibration altogether. Even at its farthest point away, the bronze man had judged the plane to be nearly two miles high and still climbing.

The enigmatic smile deepened across Doc's bronze jaws. He alone knew that the mysterious pilot of the runaway plane was expecting to hurl destruction upon the warehouse hangar. That the man at the controls was Var himself. Var, at this instant, was sure he had the means of striking one mighty blow. A blow that would not only wipe out Doc's hangar, but end the lives of all of Doc's men and the police commissioner. Moreover, Doc was now sure that Var's own men had turned upon him. He could read only one answer to the attack of Wheeze McGovern.

McGovern, Var's chief aide, had made an effort to steal the Cold Light gun. He lacked only this to complete the combination that would make him the master of the shattering annihilator. Once in possession of the gun, Wheeze McGovern had planned to embark on a career of crime with his own selected companions. They had seen the chance to extort millions from fear-crazed millionaires.

Doc was sure Wheeze McGovern never would obtain that gun. Its owner was flying high, high in the sky over the man he most feared and hated—Doc Savage and his four valiant companions.

By a change of wind, the others now could hear the increasing beat of the plane's propeller.

"Making for some inland field," said the commissioner. "He's taking on altitude, thinking we'll have planes after him."

"He's taking on altitude," replied Doc, "but not through fear of any other plane. He believes he's putting himself far enough up to be beyond the danger of his own deviltry."

"I don't understand—" the commissioner began.

His words were lost in a shattering explosion. Only Doc had seen that instantaneous flash of the Cold Light ray. It was no more than the thousandth part of a second. For the Cold Light had no distance to travel to reach its objective.

A lurid cloud of blue flame spread across the heavens. Its weird illumination made all faces in the group seem pockmarked and gray. Indeed, the face of the commissioner was a chalky gray. The blue cloud was only a momentary flash that lighted the sky from horizon to horizon. The blast was like the impact of a battleship broadside.

The air about the group in the warehouse chilled. All of the hangar lights went out as if a master switch had been pulled.

Then the silence was so complete each man thought his eardrums had been hopelessly shattered. Doc's radio plane had totally dissolved, as if it had never been. From the lack of any tiny bit of falling wreckage, it was conceivable that the terrible, close-up force of the Cold Light explosion had disintegrated the ship into all of its component atoms.

And with the ship, the man whose ghostly voice had announced, "I AM—VAR!"

RENNY was the first to find speech.

"Blazes!" he muttered, hoarsely. "So that's the last of our friend, Vonier!"

Ham found his voice and spoke in the darkness.

"That rat Scraggs, you mean!" he rapped out.

Two voices murmured close by. Footsteps approached slowly.

"Who is speaking of us?" inquired the calm voice of the explorer. "We're here to talk for ourselves."

The eyes of Vonier were like bits of shiny blue glass against the light. Beside him was the thin, shambling figure of the little man, Scraggs.

"I rather thought you would be around somewhere," said Doc Savage, quietly. "I admit I was quite a bit mixed up for a while. But after I discovered Carberry had written his book on the cellular origin of the human species from oil paintings he had copied from your book, Vonier, I made some other inquiries."

"Howlin' calamities!" squeaked out Monk. "And he was with us most of the time!"

"Some of the time," corrected Doc. "But at no time when he was trying to explode the Cold Light bombs."

"What do you mean, Doc, Cold Light bombs?" questioned Ham. "I've never seen anything but the Cold Light itself."

"You carried some of them in your pocket for quite a while, Ham," said Doc. "I seem to recall you rescued all of us from being poisoned by gas. You thought the intention was to kill all of us in the laboratory by having them dampened."

"Good gosh!" exploded Monk. "And that shyster tries to pulverize all of us with that weak brain of his!"

"I wonder," mused Renny, who had just thought of something. "Say, Monk. Maybe Ham didn't do so bad. Come to think of it, you tried eating one of the bombs in that Manhattan tenement. You thought it was only a gumdrop."

Long Tom broke in.

"Listen, Doc!" he exclaimed, excitedly. "You had six of the things in your pocket!"

"That's what Carberry thought," said Doc, calmly. "In fact, I had them when we came here. It was my idea to send them up in that plane and dive it into the ocean. I had hidden them in the plane. And Carberry thought it was his chance to destroy his enemies."

"You see, some of his own men were double-crossing him. If I'd had the Cold Light bombs in my pocket, it would have wiped them out as well as us. In a way, he was driven to it, for this Wheeze McGovern had turned on him."

THE little man, Scraggs, was muttering.

"And I discovered who Var was just too late," he complained. "I was almost sure, and I learned where his wife was hiding. I was on my way out there to-night, when Carberry met Wheeze McGovern's car on the highway. I guess Carberry suspected Wheeze and tried to stop him with the Cold Light." "You knew there was something more, some element other than the Cold Light ray that caused the explosions?" Doc suggested.

"Yes, I knew there was some sort of combination, for Jackson had told me that," admitted Scraggs.

"But it was only after I saw in your laboratory those pills you thought were poison that I got a real idea what the bombs might be. That's why I started out to find Mrs. Carberry. I had a hunch the supply of bombs would be wherever she was hiding. McGovern must have grabbed the bombs from the woman."

Scraggs shook his head sadly.

"That was a terrible thing!" he went on. "The Cold Light missed McGovern's car. McGovern had the rest of the Cold Light bombs, thousands of them, in insulated boxes. But the ray would have exploded one of the uninsulated bombs if it came within a ten-mile radius. That's why Carberry's wife never knew what happened. I imagine McGovern had left some of the bombs open with that purpose."

"But," interposed the police commissioner, "how about the explosion at Carberry's mansion? The voice he heard, that every one heard?"

"Among other things, I learned Carberry had been an actor, a character man before he became wealthy," Doc stated. "He married a young actress. After the murder of Jackson, the old chemist, they had it all fixed to put on a show, a red herring across any trail the police might pick up." "That's right," said Scraggs, eagerly. "Only they had me fooled. Jackson had told me there was to be a test in the woods at the Carberry place, to frighten the millionaire."

A FLUTTERING figure came running from the street door. It was the same lovely girl who had appeared at the smashed Red Arrow plane, looking for Scraggs. All were amazed when she threw her arms around the disreputable-appearing little man.

"Scraggs, honey!" she exclaimed. "Are you all right?"

Scraggs looked at the others sheepishly, but his thin arms went around the girl.

"Meet Muriel Jackson, gentlemen," he said in a thin, proud voice. "You see, it was her father--well, I had to get his murderer."

The girl's face was bathed in tears. She hugged the scraggly head to her bosom.

"Well, I'll be dag-goned!" sputtered Monk.

The homely chemist had a weakness for beautiful women.

Doc turned to Vonier.

"You suspected Carberry from the first, didn't you?" the bronze man questioned. "But you weren't sure?"

"Right again, as usual, Savage," said the explorer. "Old Jackson read my book and came to me to explain his experiments with an element I had mentioned found in the depths of the sea. I told him it would be best to let it alone. He said he wanted the army and navy to have it. I wasn't sure he had gone to Carberry, but he mentioned having read the man's book and how like my own it seemed to be. So I suspected he went to Carberry."

"Strange what angles a normally intelligent brain will take," Doc said, slowly. "Carberry had a rich man's traditional respect for property rights. He owned that Manhattan block he blew up. He was one of the biggest stockholders in the railroad and he tried to blast the express. In trying to cover up his trail, he laid the broadest possible one for his own detection."

"He was especially good at laying false trails," added Vonier. "He used a special bright blue ink in writing warning notes. It happens I had used that same sort of ink. I have a bottle of it in my study. Carberry adopted it."

"That clears that up," Doc stated. "I have seen the ink on your desk, Vonier."

"Saw it? On my desk?"

"Yes," replied the bronze man, "when I visited your study to confirm a few deductions arising from your rather remarkable book."

"Is there anything on land or sea or in the sky you overlook, Savage?"

Doc's quiet bronze smile was his only reply.

THE END