

REPEL

A Doc Savage Adventure By Kenneth Robeson

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Chapter 1. THE BLOW-UP

WHEN Ethel's Mama blew up, she shook the earth in more ways than one.

Ethel's Mama was on Fan Coral Island in the South Pacific when the lid came off. But probably the first man to discover what had happened was a professor in the laboratory of Yale University in New Haven, Connecticut, U .S. A. He happened to be watching the seismograph. What he failed to realize was that he had noted something momentous, something that was going to stand the world on its collective ear.

Ethel's Mama was a volcano. On the maps she was tagged Mount Etilusamauma, but it was easier to say Ethel's Mama. An earthquake apparently started Ethel's Mama off. That was what fooled everybody. It looked like an ordinary earthquake. The Yale seismograph registered the shake at two hours and eleven minutes and forty seconds past noon, Eastern Daylight Saving Time.

The Yale professors said there had been a central earth disturbance about ten thousand miles distant.

A few newspapers carried a paragraph or two.

Then the palm tree landed on the Fan Coral resident governor's house. It happened in the night. It was a big palm tree. Afterward the resident governor's house was not worth rebuilding. The resident governor himself was out on a rum-and-lime spree, or there would have been a vacancy on his country's political pay roll.

How a two-ton palm tree came to be sailing around in the night sky over Fan Coral Island was a question. It was not scorched, so it was not some morsel ejected by Ethel's Mama.

A newspaper reporter who had foolishly quit his job to write a book was on Fan Coral Island at the time. Otherwise the world might never have heard about the palm. The erstwhile journalist sought needed spare change by cabling, or radioing, volcano yarns to every news agency which would take the stuff collect.

The lone newshawk had unwittingly discovered a gold mine.

The uphill landslides were next. When the Fan Coral journalist radioed the story about the avalanches that slid uphill, three of his newspapers radioed right back that they wanted no more of his stuff. They thought he was a goof who was drawing on a not-too-sage imagination.

But it was just what the misjudged journalist said it was. Patches of rock and earth came loose and slid uphill. They were not very big patches. The strips were probably fifty feet wide.

The next night it rained coconuts. And there was no cyclone which could have picked them up and dropped them on Fan Coral City.

Newspapermen from various parts of the Pacific began to drift toward Fan Coral Island by airplane and boat.

A fine yacht named the Fifth Wind turned up in Fan Coral harbor. It belonged to a man named Cadwiller Olden, the crew of the craft said. No one had ever heard of Cadwiller Olden. The cables carried a color story which mentioned the yacht. No one dreamed how important that was going to be. Ethel's Mama was getting interesting.

FIVE days after Ethel's Mama started erupting, Brigadier General Theodore Marley Brooks turned up at Yale and asked for the seismograph records. He came near not getting them.

"Ham" Brooks was a Harvard product, admittedly one of the most astute lawyers Harvard had ever

turned out, and proud of his Alma Mater. He therefore had no use for Yale, and had said so publicly on occasion.

Marley Brooks, called "Ham," would have been designated as a dude thirty years ago. As it was, the newspapers called him America's best-dressed man. He always carried an innocent-looking black cane.

"But Doc Savage wants the records of the seismograph of the Mount Etilusamauma eruption," Ham explained.

Doc Savage! That made it different, admitted the Yale officials, who conceivably had heard of Clark Savage, Jr., better known as Doc Savage, the man whom the newspapers called the "Mental Marvel," the "Scientific Genius," the "Muscular Midas," the "Man of Mystery," and other things. "Doc does not wish newspaper publicity." Ham reminded the Yale officials.

Of course, of course. No newspaper publicity. But some one let the cat out, and the afternoon papers carried it.

Newspaper reporters were lying for Ham at Grand Central Station. Those who did not know Ham by sight had been told to look for a very dapper gentleman who would be accompanied by a very remarkable pet ape named Chemistry.

Ham gave them the slip. He did not have his pet ape along, anyway. Ham had suspected some one would slip. Consequently he got off at the station before Grand Central and waved down a taxi. Doc Savage was in his remarkable headquarters library and laboratory on the eighty-sixth floor of the city's most impressive skyscraper when Ham entered. Doc had been working with chemicals and wore a rubber smock which hid everything but the fact that he was a giant bronze man with amazing sinews in his hands and neck. He also had a pair of strange flake-gold eyes which had an almost compelling power.

Ham was surprised at the speed with which Doc Savage went to work on the seismograph records. The bronze man used calipers and magnifying glasses on the curves. Then he consulted various instruments of his own and did some mathematical calculations.

Ham was even more startled when he heard Doc Savage make a small, almost inaudible trilling sound, a weird, exotic note which the bronze giant made only in moments of intense mental stress, or in surprise.

"What's up, Doc?" Ham demanded.

The bronze man said absently, "The majority of scientists have always believed it impossible for such a thing to exist. Yet the behavior of that volcano shows that it does exist."

"Eh?" Ham said. "I don't understand."

"Ham," the bronze giant stated, "the world does not know about it yet, but mankind is up against something pretty terrible."

"You mean that volcano?" asked the puzzled Ham.

"Something in the heart of the earth, under that volcano," Doc Savage explained. "The thing has lain there, its presence unknown to scientists. The eruption of the volcano apparently disturbed it, and it would appear that the thing has worked up toward the crater of the volcano with the lava. In a short time it will be out of the volcano, unless my opinion is wrong."

Ham rubbed his jaw. "You talk like this was important."

The bronze man did not answer immediately. When he did, he spoke slowly and grimly.

"It is more than important," he said. "It may well be the most terrible calamity ever loosened on the human race."

Ham swallowed. "But w-what is it, Doc?"

The bronze man considered.

"We will call it Repel," he said. "My opinion is that that is what the rest of the world will call it when it becomes known."

"But that does not explain what it is," Ham reminded.

"I am going to wait until I have made a closer examination on Fan Coral Island before venturing any exact description of Repel," the bronze man said. "We will leave immediately. Get the men together, Ham. And have them take plenty of fighting equipment."

"Fighting—"

"Supermachine pistols and mercy bullets, gas and gas masks," Doc directed. "And the rest of the stuff we usually take."

Two hours later Doc Savage's huge tri-motored amphibian plane was in the air, headed for San Francisco. The ship was streamlined, and could easily hop the Pacific on one fuel load. Doc mapped the course—San Francisco to Hawaii to Tahiti to Fan Coral Island.

With Doc Savage in the plane was Ham and his other four assistants. These were Colonel John "Renny" Renwick, an engineer; Major Thomas J. "Long Tom" Roberts, electrical wizard; William Harper "Johnny" Littlejohn, archaeologist and geologist; and Lieutenant Colonel Andrew Blodgett "Monk" Mayfair, a chemist, who had his pet pig, Habeas Corpus, with him.

All five assistants were curious about the reason for their hurried flight to Fan Coral Island, and particularly curious about the reason for taking so many weapons.

Ham asked, "Are you figuring we'll have some trouble, Doc?"

"We have got to keep the thing coming out of that volcano from falling into the wrong hands," Doc

Savage said quietly.

"Is it that bad?"

"It would be almost impossible to estimate the terrible possibilities of Repel," the bronze man stated.

He ran the plane's motors with the throttles wide open.

THE next development that followed the strange eruption of Ethel's Mama occurred in Shanghai, China. Shanghai boasts of a newspaper printed in English.

A man sat in a Shanghai bar and read this newspaper. He was a lean and fit-looking fellow. And he was very interested in the accounts of Ethel's Mama. He also watched the bar.

Soon another lean and fit-looking man drifted into the bar and ordered a drink. The two men were very much alike in build and face. But the new arrival had hair which was white on top, but black at the temples. He also had a square of adhesive tape stuck over the back of his right hand and another on the palm.

The first man joined the second. They had recently met, their casual remarks revealed. After a while the first man suggested trying a second bar which he knew about. The other agreed, and they left.

The man who had been reading the paper steered the course into a deserted street. He stopped.

"Listen," he said, "you are Snowball Eagan, a newspaper writer, aren't you?"

"That's right," agreed the man with the white scalp lock and the taped right hand. "But what—"

"And you're headed for Fan Coral Island, to cover the eruption of Ethel's Mama, aren't you?" asked the second.

"That's right."

"We're about the same build."

"So what?"

"If I was to dye my hair white on top and put a piece of tape on my right hand I'd look like you."

"Listen here," snapped newspaperman "Snowball" Eagan, "what are you driving at? Who are you, anyway? You haven't told me your name, and I saw you duck when you saw a cop coming."

"I'm one of the most dangerous international criminals alive," the other man said calmly. "The Shanghai police are watching every road, steamship, railroad and airplane leaving Shanghai. I cannot get out of the city. My pal, Bert, got out. He was lucky. He is now on Fan Coral Island, and I've got to get there. The only way of getting there that I can see is to take your place. You newspapermen have a plane chartered which is leaving to-night for Fan Coral Island. The other newspapermen don't know you very well, and I could easily get by as you."

Snowball Eagan, the newshawk, exploded, "But what is there on Fan Coral Island for a crook like you?"

"If that volcano has coughed up what I think it has, it will make a guy like me just about able to run things in this world," the international criminal said grimly.

"You're crazy to tell me this," snapped Snowball Eagan, "because I'm not going to change places with you! You can't bribe me!"

"I wasn't going to bribe you," the other said.

With which he whipped up a knife and cut the unfortunate journalist's throat as neatly as could be.

The newspaper plane left Shanghai that night and carried the fake Snowball Eagan.

Counting Doc Savage's group, that made two parties interested in what Ethel's Mama was coughing up. And both were headed for the spot by plane.

The false Snowball Eagan, having the shorter distance to go, arrived first.

The world did not know when Doc Savage arrived. He brought his big plane in at night, planted it in a little cove on the opposite side of the island, and he and his five men did not make their presence known. They did not want to attract a lot of attention because Doc Savage disliked newspaper notoriety.

ON the day following the arrival of Doc Savage's plane on Fan Coral Island, a very tall and wonderfully bony man walked down the street in Fan Coral City and had a narrow escape.

A chunk of lava the size of a football came sizzling down from the sky. It exploded with a loud report on the sidewalk beside the bony gentleman. The latter jumped into the nearest door with the alacrity of a rabbit which had been shot at.

"I'll be superamalgamated!" the bony man gasped. "A comminatory indubitably exemplifying perrorative incidentation."

A newspaper writer in a near-by store overheard this and grabbed excitedly at an arm of a companion writer. "Did you hear that?"

"Yes," said the other writer. "And I could hear it again and still now know what he said."

This other writer was lean and fit-looking enough to fill the public conception of a tiger hunter. There were two other remarkable things about him: His hair was black at the temples and white on top, exactly reversing the usual order. A two-inch square of white adhesive tape was stuck

on the back of his right hand and another square on the palm. He had introduced himself as Snowball Eagan from Shanghai, and some of the other newshawks had heard of him.

The first writer said, "Nobody ever understands that tall drink of water unless they've got a late dictionary and plenty of time to look up the words."

"You know him?" asked Snowball Eagan.

"No. But there can't be any mistake. He uses the words and looks the part. He's William Harper Littlejohn."

Snowball Eagan patted the piece of adhesive tape on the back of his right hand gently. "So what?" "Good night! Don't you know? Littlejohn, or Johnny, as they call him, is one of Doc Savage's five assistants."

Snowball Eagan suddenly looked very interested.

"Savage!" he exclaimed. "You mean the American they call the man of bronze?"

"The gentleman of mystery himself. This chap Johnny is one of five aids who work with Doc Savage. Johnny is a top archaeologist and geologist, and Savage's other aids are all experts in some line. But the bronze lad himself is better than any one of them at his own profession."

"That's hokum!" sniffed Snowball Eagan.

"Don't kid yourself."

"It's just the old bushwa for publicity."

"If you ever tried to interview the bronze man you'd know about how he goes for publicity. Just like a fish goes for the Sahara Desert."

"A lot of gargle," said Snowball Eagan. "Watch me interview this assistant of Doc Savage's for a starter."

The two scribes walked up to the bony word user and Snowball Eagan said, "Greetings, Professor Littlejohn. We are newspapermen. Will you tell us what you are doing here? Is Doc Savage with you? And if so, why?"

The bony gentleman frowned. His right hand fumbled absently at a ribbon which ran from his lapel to his upper coat pocket and almost drew into view a monocle, then stuffed it back hastily. He said out of one side of his mouth, "Who yez mugs t'ink yer kiddin'? Gwan! Drag yer freight 'fore I pop yez one in de feed hole!"

With that the bony fellow shuffled off, keeping a wary eye on the black sky and its occasional lava rock hailstone.

Snowball Eagan scoffed at his companion. "An eminent archaeologist and geologist, was he?"

The other journalist grinned sheepishly.

"Well-hell, everybody can make a mistake. Buy you a drink on this."

They had a round of Fan Coral toddy, so-called. It was a local beverage. The newshawks had taken to claiming that a native had fallen down and broken a bottle of the Toddy on the side of Ethel's Mama, hence the eruption.

SNOWBALL EAGAN broke away after a time. He walked around until he was sure he was alone. Then he turned up at a bungalow by itself on a closely clipped lawn. He did not enter. He stood under a window and whistled twice, one long and one short.

A muffled, worried voice said from inside, "For the love of mud! Has your disguise flopped so quick?"

"Pipe down, Bert," Snowball Eagan said in a low tone. "Nobody is going to find me out. I used to be a newspaperman, and that makes it a cinch to put this across."

"But what if they find the real Snowball Eagan's body?"

"They won't identify it if they do. The hair and the right hand are gone. I burned them. My hair is dyed like Eagan's. And these patches on my hand are like those Eagan always wore over the bullet hole in his hand that never healed."

"I didn't like the idea of killing Eagan. These coppers here are tough babies to fool around with. You'd better watch your step!"

"What the hell! Eagan was just a newspaper bum headed over here. I had to skip Shanghai. The cops had me covered everywhere. And taking this Eagan's place was my only sure-fire chance of getting here. It's a good thing you got out of Shanghai before they got wise to us."

"We've been over that before," the voice inside said. "Have you decided how we're gonna work this?"

"That's what I came here about," said the fake Snowball Eagan. "As you know, I've been a bit doubtful. I haven't been plumb sure that volcano has coughed up what I think it has. But now I know."

"How come?"

"Because the big time has gotten interested in it."

"Big time? Whatcha mean?"

"Doc Savage. I just saw one of his helpers."

No sound came from within the bungalow for such a long interval that Snowball Eagan leaned closer and said, "Well?"

"I wonder if you've gone crazy?" asked the one inside.

"Is a crack like that necessary?"

"Something is necessary to bring you back to your right mind. Don't you know this Doc Savage's reputation?"

The rascal calling himself Snowball snorted. "Scotland Yard has a rep, too. What did it get them?"

"The Yard is different. They're just police. Doc Savage is-is-isn't quite human. He has some incredible scientific disguises, from what I've heard. And he's put in his life chasing crooks around. From what I hear, not many of them got away."

Snowball started breathing through his nose. He was angry.

"Don't give me an argument!" he gritted.

There was another long silence from inside. "All right."

There was fear in the voice inside.

Snowball said, "We're goin' to work on this Doc Savage right away. If he's down there after the same thing we're after, we'll have to do things about it."

"And what do you think you'll do?"

"I guess Doc Savage and his gang will have to wake up dead," Snowball Eagan growled.

Chapter 2. THE MAN OF MIGHT

SIX little brown tents were pitched in a row under a huge rock on one side of Mount Etilusamauma. The rock overhung and sheltered the tents. The sea was half a mile west and two thousand feet in the direction the old-time preachers claimed Hades would be found. The top of Etilusamauma was four miles east, seven thousand feet up, and it looked as if Hades were up there instead of down below.

Tongues of flame, some apparently at least a mile long, went lunging up into the sky. Dust, smoke and rocks came whizzing out. And the crater was boiling over in one place, where a great lava river flowed.

This lava made a red snake down the mountainside, passing within four hundred yards of the six little brown tents, then ran into the sea. Where it entered the sea, it was making almost as much steam as Ethel's Mama was making smoke.

Two small boats carrying motion picture cameramen were fooling around the steam. A plane was flying up and down over the lava river; another cameraman was leaning over the cockpit edge with his movie machine.

The tall man who used the big words, the long bag of bones who had been nearly brained by the lava rock in town, came out of the scorched jungle and approached the tents. Finding no one there he walked toward the lava stream.

Before long, he came in sight of what at first might have been mistaken for an ape lying on its back, holding a smoking cloth to its forehead. The bony man approached.

"Hello, Monk," he said. "Where's Doc?"

The individual on the ground sat up. He was nearly as broad as he was tall, his face was mostly mouth, and he was covered with hair which resembled rusty shingle nails. He held the smoking towel in first one hand, then the other.

"Hyah, Johnny!" he squeaked in a voice that might have belonged to a small child. "What's wrong?"

Johnny pointed a bony finger at the smoking towel. "What's that?"

"Dry ice of a new kind that I invented, and which is all that's keepin' me alive in this place.

Brother, is it hot over by that rock river! What's wrong?"

Johnny said, "What makes you think something is wrong?"

"You're usin' little words, professor. Something has to happen to make you do that."

"Two newspaper reporters recognized me in town," Johnny explained. "I think I fooled them. But later, while I was finishing up my shopping, I saw a man trailing me. He was one of these natives. I think I gave him the slip. But Doc won't like this. He wanted our visit here kept secret."

"That last has been eatin' on me," Monk announced. "Why the secrecy? Why the hurry to get here?"

What's up, anyhow?"

"Why not ask Doc?"

Monk grinned. When he did this, most of his homely face became grim.

"It wouldn't do any good," he said. "Doc has a habit of keepin' things, or suspicions, to himself until he is dead sure before he tells anybody."

Johnny said, "I'm going to ask him myself."

He walked in the direction of the lava river.

"Don't get frostbitten!" Monk squeaked.

MONK unrolled his towel to inspect his dry ice. The diminished size of the cube—smoking because it was so cold instead of so hot—caused him to groan lustily. Monk's ordinary speaking voice was small, but his groan was something like a piece being torn out of the side of a circus tent. He lay back and replaced his cooling invention on his forehead.

When the earth shook and red light washed over the ground, he raised up on his elbow to glower at the top of Ethel's Mama. Monk was just in time to see something happen.

The plane with the cameraman was flying over the upper end of the lava river, near the crater's lip. The plane lifted straight upward many scores of feet. It turned end over end as it went. There was no visible reason for this occurrence.

The aircraft fluttered about regaining equilibrium. Then it sailed around, and like a hen which had been bitten unexpectedly by a harmless-looking worm, it buzzed back cautiously to investigate. Almost the same thing as before happened to the plane. Something invisible seemed to knock it through the air. It traveled straight backward this time.

Monk scrambled erect, still holding his dry ice poultice to his head.

"Maybe Doc and the others didn't see that!" he grunted. "I better tell 'em. Come on, Habeas!"

Monk looked around, waiting.

"Habeas!" he rapped.

A remarkable-looking pig reluctantly left the shade of a rock. The shote had long thin legs and ears which a bat would have considered suitable for flying. He was Habeas Corpus, Monk's pet. If the surroundings had not been so hot, Monk would probably have been training Habeas. He spent most of his spare time educating the pet hog.

Monk started off. Habeas followed him a dozen paces and stopped.

"Habeas!" Monk squeaked. "C'mon, or I'll tie knots in your legs!"

Habeas paid no attention. He seemed interested in a clump of scrub palms.

Monk said, "Come on, Habeas, or I'll give you to Ham!"

The rusty-looking bristles on Habeas's back began to stand on end.

Monk frowned at the scrub palm cluster. "What the heck!" He started over to investigate.

A barefooted, brown man with a big revolver came out of the palm cluster.

"You fella savvy stand still!" he said fiercely.

Monk savvied. He put out his jaw. "Say, what's the big idea?"

The brown man wore denim pants, no shirt, and an ugly look. He got down to business immediately.

"You fella talk chop-chop," he said. "Why all same fella Doc Savage come 'longside Fan Coral?"

Monk squeaked, "You wanta know why Doc came here?"

"Savvy," said the other. "You bet. Me fella want know."

The man's revolver had a big barrel and a big cylinder, and the sun was just right for Monk to get a look at the round, shiny noses of the cartridges. They were impressive.

"Who sent you to ask that question?" Monk growled.

The brown man started to answer when he saw a shadow looming on the ground beside him. It was a big shadow, and it had not been there an instant before.

The shadow was all the brown man ever saw of the fate that overtook him. Fate in the shape of a giant of bronze.

THE big bronze fellow had come silently out of the jungle, and he got the gun and dropped the native with one blow, all as if it had been rehearsed a thousand times. His remarkable bronze features had not changed expression, had in no way showed that the ghostly silence with which he moved was at all unusual, or that dropping an armed native was anything out of the ordinary. Strangely, there was enough of the unusual about the big bronze man to make it seem that the incredible was rather to be expected from him.

There was more about the bronze man than bigness. The tendons on the backs of his hands resembled round files, and the rest of his sinews looked as if they were made up of cables of the wires they brace airplane wings with.

He wore nothing above the belt, and his muscular development was fabulous, yet so symmetrical that, had he been fully clothed, and seen at a little distance, he would have appeared no more Herculean than an ordinary man.

Probably the most striking thing about the bronze giant was his eyes. They were like pools of flake gold, always stirred by some tiny force. They contained a weird quality, something compelling, hypnotic.

"Doc!" Monk exploded a relieved grunt. "How'd you happen along just then?"

"Coming to warn you," the bronze man said.

"Huh?"

"Better run for it. You saw what happened to that plane a moment ago?"

The bronze man's voice was like the rest of him-remarkable. It was a trained voice, unexcited and subdued, but somehow giving the impression that it could carry for miles if necessary.

"I was comin' to tell you about the plane when this bird jumped me," Monk explained. "Say, what--"

"Run," Doc Savage interposed quietly. "If the thing comes this way, the ledge under which the tents are pitched will probably be the safest place."

"Thing!"

Monk squeaked. "What thing?"

But the bronze man had already whipped back into the jungle. He reappeared immediately, carrying a large metal case which seemed to contain a great deal of delicate apparatus. He had evidently put this down while he crept upon Monk's captor.

The bronze man raised his voice. It was a crash of volume, as if stepped up by a power amplifier.

"Long Tom, Johnny!" he called. "Renny, Ham!"

"Coming!" came a faint shout from the direction of the lava stream.

Monk scooped up the unconscious native. "Instead of this lad askin' me questions, he's gonna answer some!"

The bronze man and Monk ran through the jungle, then worked among a legion of boulders evidently deposited there by Ethel's Mama in some past eruption. There was a stretch of brush beyond, then the camp of the six little cinnamon-colored tents under the overhanging ledge.

Doc Savage put down the instrument box and Monk dropped his captive.

FOUR men appeared on one side of the campsite, running toward the tent and the ledge. One of them was the gaunt archaeologist and user of big words, Johnny. Dangling from one of his eyes was a monocle, in reality a powerful magnifying glass that had served many uses.

The second man was the dapper lawyer, Ham, the best-dressed man in America and one of the world's cleverest lawyers. In one hand he gripped a sword cane whose point was coated with a drug producing unconsciousness.

The third member of the group was a formidable tower of a fellow who would weigh in excess of two hundred and fifty pounds—but if he had been built in proportion to his hands, he would have weighed in the neighborhood of a ton. It was doubtful if he could have put either fist in a gallon pail. He had a long, naturally gloomy face which would have been excellent stock in trade for an undertaker. The big-fisted man was Colonel John Renwick—"Renny"—noted for three things: his ability as an engineer, his boasted ability to knock the panel out of almost any wooden door with either fist, and his membership in Doc Savage's little group of five aids.

Major Thomas J. Roberts, the electrical wizard, was the fourth man. He had the complexion of a mushroom and the physique, as far as outward appearance went, of a fellow who had spent his life in a wheelchair. He had collected the name of Long Tom after a ludicrous adventure with a type of ancient cannon designated by that name.

The four were carrying more complicated-appearing instruments.

"We will set the apparatus up inside the shelter of the ledge and continue to watch it," Doc Savage said.

The bronze man bent over the instruments, adjusting dials, knobs, watching indicator needles, and twice plugging in a telephone headset to get frequency hums. Long Tom, Johnny, Ham and Renny looked on curiously.

Monk looked around, saw his pet pig, Habeas, nowhere about, and hastily ambled outside. Monk's apish physique gave him a strange, short-legged gait which made him seem in no hurry even when running at full speed.

Doc Savage continued to watch the dials. The gold flakes of his eyes seemed to be moving a little faster, but there was nothing else about his expression to show he was excited.

"It is undoubtedly following the lava stream down and getting close," he said.

It was very quiet under the ledge. Ethel's Mama made a rumbling now and then. One of the instruments hummed faintly.

"It is very close," the bronze man said.

Outside, Monk's voice blared.

"Blazes!" the homely chemist squawled. "What the heck's got hold of me?"

Chapter 3. THE UNSEEN

THE tree was small, gnarled and tough, as tropical trees often are.

Monk clung to the tree trunk with both arms and his chin. The expression on his homely face showed that he was using all his strength. His legs were stretched out parallel with the ground. Something might have had hold of his ankles, pulling with great force. Some medium, certainly, was doing just that. But there was nothing visible!

"Help!" Monk squealed. "Shoot the dang thing or somethin'!"

"Holy cow!" exploded big-fisted Renny.

Johnny said, "I'll be superamalgamated!"

Long Tom and Ham looked on in astonishment.

Monk howled, "Help, blast it!"

Monk suddenly lost his grip. He was carried through the air at least twenty feet before he hit the ground. End over end he tumbled. A thorny shrub scratched him, and he squawled angrily.

"Shoot the dang thing!" he bellowed. "Make it leggo me!"

Big-fisted Renny dug into a concealed holster under an arm and brought out a weapon which had somewhat the appearance of an oversize automatic. Renny aimed. The gun made a noise like several big riveting machines going simultaneously. Renny arched his stream of bullets so they passed all around Monk.

Monk suddenly managed to stop rolling.

"Keep shootin'!" the homely chemist bellowed. "You scared the blame thing away!"

Renny started his machine pistol again, but stopped quickly. His sad eyes almost fell from his gloomy face.

"Holy cow!" he boomed hollowly. "Look!"

A tall, spindling tree between Monk and the ledge was bending over slowly, as if depressed by an invisible weight. It was leaning west. And blistered grass blades were bending as well. Great masses of gravel and earth began to slide!

"It's coming this way!" Ham yelled.

Doc Savage said, "Get the instruments into the back of the recess under the ledge. Jam them against the solid rock, then do the same with yourselves. Cling to the cracks in the rock."

The bronze man sounded totally unexcited.

The others sprang to follow the suggestion—and never made it. Something unseen, terrific, hit them. They were entirely helpless. Carried off their feet, they were driven deep into the ledge recess.

Renny's head struck rock and he fell back stunned. Tall, lean Johnny and pale Long Tom got entangled, and hit with enough force to take air out of them both. Ham hit the wall of rock feet first, and did an eerie thing—he staggered around on the vertical wall, trying to keep his balance, just as he might have done on level ground.

The next instant, all were blinded by a roaring inrush of sand, dust and sticks. There was a great grinding and rumbling. The earth trembled. Came a tremendous crash, and it grew abruptly gloomy under the ledge.

Then silence fell.

"STAY where you are for a moment," Doc Savage advised quietly. "It may come back."

The bronze man was against one wall, half buried in the sand, dust and débris which had been swept into the ledge niche. Cradled and protected in the muscular cordon of his arms was one of the cases of sensitive apparatus. It seemed to be intact.

The other cases had been smashed.

The opening under the ledge was not nearly as wide as it had been. A huge boulder had come from somewhere and rolled against the aperture. Smaller boulders were stacked against it. The tents were down.

Suspended dust started the men coughing, sneezing.

"Holy—kerchoo—

cow!" Renny exploded. "Where's that native?"

Doc Savage was already on his feet and looking around, flake-gold eyes probing everywhere.

There became audible within the little cavern under the ledge, penetrating to all its recesses, a small, strange sound. The note was predominately a trilling, but it had an eerie nature, a quality which was ethereal. It might have been the progress of a tiny wind around some cranny in the big boulder blocking the entrance.

Doc Savage's four aids stared at the bronze giant. They knew that sound, had heard it many times.

It was a characteristic of Doc Savage, a small and unconscious thing which the bronze man did when surprised, or when confronted with a new discovery or realization.

Of the brown-skinned native who had tried to seize Monk there was no sign.

Monk yelled outside, "You guys all right?"

Doc Savage moved to the boulder. There was enough room to squeeze out. The others followed him.

Monk, rubbing his eyes, spitting out dust, joined them in staring in the direction of the lava stream.

"I'll be superamalgamated!" Johnny gulped.

The patch of big boulders was directly before them. The masses of rock had been fairly evenly distributed. But there was nothing even about the way they now lay.

A path more than a score of feet in width had been swept almost clean of loose stone. The rocks had been pushed, as if by a gigantic broom, to the sides, and in the direction of the ledge.

"Blazes!" Monk breathed. "Think how big that thing must be! Some of those rocks weigh tons!"

The others were silent. What had just happened was so fantastic, so impossible, that they could not think of much to say about it.

"What gets me," Long Tom said hollowly, "is that you couldn't see anything! I can't understand that!"

"Well, it was something that was alive," Monk declared. "You saw how it turned me loose when Renny opened up with his machine pistol. Say, where's that native?"

"Gone," said Ham.

"What?"

"He's disappeared."

Monk opened and shut his big mouth several times.

"Maybe that whatchacallit came after the native," the homely chemist mumbled.

Big-fisted Renny peered about suddenly.

"Where's Doc?" he boomed wildly.

THE five men stared about them, then at each other. The bronze man was not in sight. Something pale and cold seemed to flow into the faces of each man.

"Doc!" Renny gulped. "Do you suppose—"

The rest of it stuck in his throat, and his fists made big blocks that might have been marble painted over with a brown stain.

"Doc!" Monk squawled.

"In here," the bronze man said quietly from beneath the ledge.

The five men charged for the opening, got inside, saw the bronze man over the instrument which he had saved, and looked at each other sheepishly.

"As jittery as a bunch of kids in a spooky graveyard!" Renny thumped disgustedly. "What does that contraption show, Doc?"

The bronze man took a moment before answering.

"It is a little surprising," he said. "This is a device to register and measure automatically the presence and strength of certain invisible wave lengths of light such as the so-called infra and cosmic rays, particularly those which have the property of penetrating solids. The device went completely haywire."

"You mean it didn't register?"

"It registered, but the recording lines make absolutely no sense."

Renny boomed, "Say, Doc, you got an inkling of something queer here just by reading the newspapers and looking at that Yale seismograph record. You came here in a hurry. Just what did you expect to find?"

Instead of answering that, the bronze man said, "It might be best if we did something besides talk. Renny, suppose you look around for some trace of that native who tried to make Monk tell why we were here. Johnny might help you."

Renny sighed, realizing he was not going to get any information now. "Righto." The engineer and Johnny walked off.

"Long Tom," Doc suggested, "you might look through the stuff under the tents and see if you can find our capacity field device to detect the presence of prowlers. Maybe it is intact."

The pale-looking electrical wizard delved into one of the collapsed tents and came up with a black box which had a long coil of flexible insulated copper braid attached, as well as a headset. The box had a profusion of knobs. Long Tom tested.

"It still works," he said.

"Bring it," Doc requested. "Monk and Ham might as well go with us, also."

WHEN the bronze man got into motion, it was evident his destination was the stream of flowing lava. He followed the path which had been so fantastically swept clear of boulders. Doc and his aids saw plenty to interest them.

The trail led straight to the lava stream.

"Blast me!" Monk muttered. "What kind of a gollawhoppus can live in melted rock?"

"Gollawhoppus is right!" Ham agreed.

Doc Savage turned toward the sea. The aids began to notice queer things. In several spots, molten lava was splashed high on the banks of the little valley in which the lava flowed. Fires which this liquid hot rock had started had not burned far.

"I hate to think I might be going nuts," Monk complained. "But it looks as if that thing did a lot of jumping around or something and splashed this rock out on the banks."

Ham stopped suddenly, opened his mouth and began to giggle. Finally he laughed loudly and violently.

"Somethin's goofed you!" Monk snorted.

Ham sobered with a snort.

"Nothing of the sort. This—this spirit out of the hot place, or whatever it is—tried to grab you and carry you off, didn't it? It just struck me that Old Nick must be getting so anxious for your company he couldn't wait for you to turn up your toes in the ordinary manner."

Monk glared indignantly, but the best he could think of was, "The place is probably so full of lawyers by now that there's no room!"

Doc Savage stopped.

"Long Tom," suggested the bronze man, "here is as good a place as any to set up your capacity detector alarm. Stay with it, and if any one is following us, the apparatus should register that fact."

Pale Long Tom nodded, moved back from the lava where the heat was not so intense and set up his device.

He hardly had the headset on when he shouted sharply.

"There's something moving around here!"

Doc Savage got under cover so suddenly that he seemed to vanish where he had been standing. Monk and Ham were only a shade slower.

They listened. It was hard for their ears to tell much. The flowing lava made grisly sounds.

Moreover, fires set by the splashing lava were crackling. Ethel's Mama made an occasional rumble.

"Sure you ain't hearin' the lava in that contraption?" Monk asked.

"No," Long Tom said. "Whatever it is, is coming closer."

Monk produced one of the rapid-firing pistols from an under-arm holster. The weapons had been perfected by Doc Savage, and since they fired anything from gas to demolition cartridges, could do surprising things.

"If it's our invisible friend, I'll be ready for 'im this time!" Monk said grimly.

A peculiar-looking creature came out of the jungle and ambled toward the group. It resembled a member of the ape family, although important anthropologists had disagreed on this. Very striking was the what-is-it's likeness to the homely chemist, Monk. Had Monk been relieved of two hundred pounds or so, he and the ape would not have to be seen in a very thick fog for there to be a case of mistaken identity.

"Chemistry!" Ham exploded, relieved at seeing his pet.

"I got a notion to shoot anyway!" Monk grumbled.

A moment later, Monk's pet pig, Habeas Corpus, appeared, trailing Chemistry. The two looked as if they had just had a fight. They probably had. They got along about as well as their owners.

Long Tom said, "That's what my apparatus located."

Doc Savage appeared from his hiding place and walked toward the sea, following the lava. Monk, Ham and their pets went with him.

Long Tom remained behind with the capacity detector alarm and suspended the braided, insulated aerial of his device between two small trees. It really was an aerial in substance. The whole contrivance functioned somewhat on the principle of the old-time regenerative radio receivers which howled when you brought your hand near them. Doc Savage had expended a good deal of his remarkable scientific skill on the device, however, and it was uncannily sensitive.

Long Tom donned the headset and adjusted the dials more carefully. It was very hot, even though he had a tree between himself and the flowing lava. He tried fanning himself with the tropical helmet he was wearing. But the capacity detector gave off little whines each time his hand moved. Long Tom stopped fanning.

The detector, not quite as finely refined, was already in use around New York as a burglar alarm. Rich men had a wire strung around the wall enclosing their estates, and when any one came near the wall a bell rang.

AFTER about ten minutes, Long Tom showed suddenly increased interest in his apparatus. Some one was coming. The feeble-looking electrical wizard got to his feet and loosened his machine pistol. The weapon was charged with "mercy" bullets which produced unconsciousness. They were chemical-filled capsules which did not do much actual damage.

When the new arrival popped into view, Long Tom nearly dropped his weapon. It was a girl.

A scared girl! Her eyes were big, and she breathed rapidly.

"Come quickly!" she gasped. "It may get away! That is, if it's not dead!"

The big eyes were blue, a nice shade. There was more about her that was nice, too. Her nose, the shape of her mouth. Long Tom had a weakness for slender girls, and this one was certainly slender. She wore stout leather boots, shorts, a khaki blouse and a khaki pith helmet. There was a leather case for a miniature camera and a pair of binoculars slung over her right shoulder and a canteen over her left.

"Don't stand there staring!" she snapped. "I want a witness! Somebody to prove I saw it. I took pictures of it, but they can be faked."

"Er—I don't—understand," Long Tom said uncertainly.

She grabbed his arm. "It's lying in a side canyon up above. I saw you men through the trees and ran down here as soon as I found it and took pictures."

"Who are you?" Long Tom wanted to know.

"Special writer. Don't ask questions. It may move."

Long Tom swallowed twice. "What is it?"

The young woman looked impatient enough to shake him.

"It is about fifty feet long, ten feet wide, and about the same high," she said rapidly. "It's got the most fantastic kind of arms, and a horrible body. It was sort of like a mass of clear glass when I first saw it, but it is getting darker, changing color."

"Good night!" Long Tom exclaimed. "The thing that grabbed Monk!"

"What's that?" asked the girl.

"Nothing!" Long Tom snapped. "Let's have a look at this critter!"

The electrical wizard looked in the direction which Doc Savage, Monk and Ham had taken. The trio were not in sight. Ethel's Mama was making quite a rumble at the moment, and he doubted if they could hear him shout. He decided he could call them later.

He ran up the lava stream bank with the excited young lady.

"There's a big palm tree on the bank of the side canyon where the thing is lying," the girl said.

THE big palm had lost its fronds in the heat. It was a coconut palm. The coconuts still hung in a knot at the top, charred and black, although not a frond remained. At the foot of the tree lay one of those big palm crabs, the kind which have relieved many an unwary native of a hand when he reached for a coconut. It was baked pink and had cracked wide when it hit the ground.

Long Tom looked at the crab and said, "That's just the way I feel, Miss-Miss—" She didn't take the hint, so the electrician came out with it. "What's your name?"

"Alberta. Come on."

They ran past the singed coconut, working around several large boulders, and the girl leveled an arm. The leveling gesture stretched her wrist out of her sleeve and revealed a wrist watch and a band—the band mounted with some diamonds that were nearly as big as the small wrist watch dial. Long Tom coughed some of the sulphurous volcanic air out, hooked sweat out of his eyes with crooked forefingers, and stared.

"Say, what kind of a gag is this?" he growled.

There was not much of a side canyon. And there was certainly nothing in it. Nothing unusual, at least.

The girl gripped Long Tom's arm. There was more strength in her fingers than Long Tom had thought any woman would ever have. It made his whole arm numb.

"Look!" she shrilled.

Long Tom looked.

He saw a wave of purplish black come out of the back of his brain and break over his eyeballs, and with it there was a phenomenon as if somebody had popped one of those Australian bullwhips over his ears. The ground somehow got up against the side of his face.

"Don't!" he heard the girl cry.

Then the world and everything else went off somewhere.

Chapter 4. THE SCARED GIRL

MONK and Ham were never together very long at any time without practically coming to blows. That exciting things might be happening around them made little difference with their quarrel. They had been known to lie in a frontline trench during a bombardment and pass the time by threatening to skin each other alive.

"You awful accident of nature!" Ham was telling the homely chemist. "You something to scare babies with! You've taken a file and sharpened that hog's tusks!"

"So what of it, you shyster?" Monk sneered. "Your Chemistry keeps devilin' 'im. Habeas has gotta have a defensive armament."

Ham glanced compassionately at Chemistry, who seemed to have come off on the scarred end of his last brush with Habeas.

"I'm going to take a rock and do some dental work on that hog!" he declared.

"You do and I'll use the same rock for a major skull operation on you!" Monk promised.

Doc Savage had been paying no attention to the argument. The three had approached to within a few hundreds yards of the cliff which dropped sheer to the sea. It was over this cliff that the hot lava poured and set up clouds of steam which actually extended for miles into the tropical sky.

The bronze man pointed. Monk and Ham looked, but could discern nothing that had not been happening for several days.

"Watch. It may come up again." Doc got on top of a small rocky knob.

Great sheets of the hot lava unexpectedly splashed out of the creek of molten rock. This happened about a hundred feet back from the cliff edge. There was absolutely no reason for it occurring, as far as could be seen.

"Come on, Habeas," Monk said in a small voice. "I think me and you will hunt us a hole somewhere."

"Afraid?" Ham snorted.

"Not of anything I can look at," Monk said, glancing at Ham. "But that thingamumgrabber got hold of me. I'd just as soon somebody else had the pleasure next time. If you ask me, it made that splash just now when it jumped out of the lava."

Ham scoffed, "A lot of help you are going to be in investigating!"

"Go right ahead, feller. I'll write a book and tell your posterity, which you ain't got any, thank heavens, how fearless you were."

Ham planted his sword cane on the ground, glared and gave all signs of being willing to delay for an argument. He started out by telling Monk how his ancestors had lived in trees, and probably scrubby trees at that. He was getting around to detail when they both discovered Doc Savage had gone on toward the sea.

When they followed the bronze man, Monk and Ham kept rather close together.

DOC SAVAGE was positioned in a depression on the cliff edge some distance from the spot where the lava stream emptied into the sea. The little pit where he crouched, made by the weather, was about the size of those the covered wagon immigrants used to dig up to fight redskins.

Monk and Ham strained their eyes after they joined the bronze man. The molten rock was making a tremendous boiling in the sea. The breeze was off the land, and carried most of the steam out to sea.

The boats carrying the motion picture cameramen—the craft were a yawl and a cabin cruiser—looked surprisingly tiny at the base of the gigantic mass of steam. The whole effect was that of a

leviathan nature aroused and giving an exhibition which brought home definitely the smallness and instability of the world which man is liable to accept as so great and unchanging only because it seems so to him.

"Brothers, this is quite a show." Monk's small voice had grown more tiny than usual.

Doc Savage said, "The thing has followed the lava stream down and is about to enter the sea. It may be interesting to watch what will happen."

Monk swallowed twice.

"After the thing has been livin' in that lava, the sea water may be kinda cold," was all he could think of.

They waited. The bronze man had produced a small, powerful telescope from a trousers pocket and was studying the lava flow.

The telescope was hardly necessary to see what happened. The lava where it went over the cliff-it was like a fantastic taffy being poured out of a monstrous kettle-began to squirm and fly apart. It was as if something inside it were kicking and flinging about, some behemoth thing which did not quite show itself. It fell into the sea.

Instantly there was a vastly augmented uprush of steam. A turmoil in the water. A threshing. The steam rolled and grew, spreading until it hid whatever was happening.

"There it goes!" Monk squawled.

A fast-traveling swell had appeared on the sea almost beneath them. It was such a turmoil as is made by a big fish swimming close to the surface of water.

The boil of water abruptly changed direction, veering out to sea. It left a trail of steam behind it. It altered its course again, almost doubling back.

"Hey!" Monk barked. "It's just like a fish that's been hooked!"

A cloud of water arose in the air. There must have been tons of it. They distinctly heard the roar as it fell back, loud over the express train roar of the sea boiling around the lava.

"It jumped out!" Ham gulped.

But it hadn't. It was still traveling under the sea. Back and forth, in straight lines, in snaky curves. The ridge of water which it lifted was not as high.

"It's slowin' down!" Monk exclaimed.

It was. Within five minutes-its wanderings did not take it more than half a mile from where they stood-the thing had almost stopped. It did stop twice, only to move again.

They waited.

Monk wet his lips. "Just as if the thing was dyin'!"

Doc Savage had not spoken. The remarkable bronze man rarely expended words in comment.

"There! It has stopped again." Ham pointed.

A column of water was rising from the surface of the sea about a quarter of a mile offshore. A thin column, it was not unlike the eruption of a geyser. At its topmost point, the water was flung to a height of nearly a hundred feet.

The geyser remained where it was-four minutes, eight.

Monk shook his head. "I'll be durned if I can savvy what kind of a critter that is."

Doc Savage had apparently been giving all attention to what was happening in the sea, but now he said, "Some one is coming. Running."

Monk and Ham frowned, strained their ears ahead of cupped palms. The fact that they heard nothing did not surprise them. The bronze man had an almost abnormal hearing developed by years of scientific exercise.

A girl came running down the lava stream toward them.

SHE was a slender girl in boots, the same one who had been with Johnny a few minutes before. Her blue eyes were wide with emotion, and she was winded.

Her sun helmet was dented. That side of her face was stained a little with red.

"The thing must have taken him!" she cried out.

Doc Savage whipped to meet her. "Who?"

The girl eyed the bronze giant, and for a minute seemed to go absent-minded. But for that matter, men had been known to do the same thing when they first saw Doc.

Doc repeated, "Who?"

"A pale-looking man!" the girl gasped. "I saw the thing and photographed it, then ran to get him to look at it, so people wouldn't think me a liar!"

"Pale-looking!" Monk exploded. "That's Long Tom!"

The girl shuddered. "We got to where I saw it, and something jumped us! It knocked me out. I didn't get to see what it was. When I came to, the pale man was gone. So was my camera!"

Doc Savage said, "Show us the place!"

It was quickly evident that the girl had about run herself out. She was slower even than Ham, who might have been fast, except that he invariably went around any bushes that might damage his immaculate clothing.

Doc Savage picked the young woman up. He carried her across a shoulder until she gasped, "I can't see anything!"

Doc shifted her to an erect position, which she maintained by holding his head. She looked soft, but there was a hardness about her that was almost metallic. She gave directions in a voice which, once the rasp of breathlessness was gone from it, showed culture.

She explained what the thing had looked like when she had first seen it. It was the same thing she had described to Long Tom, a mass like glass, or transparent jelly, that was slowly taking on color. A monstrosity of a shape of no known earth thing.

The small party reached, finally, the big singed palm with the pitiful cluster of blackened coconuts at its top. She pointed.

"As you can see," she said, "there is nothing here."

Doc Savage said, "Spread and look for Long Tom."

FIVE minutes later Monk found Doc Savage moving slowly back and forth through the jungle and over stretches of rock—mainly over the stretches of rock. Most of the surrounding terrain was composed of stone. It was a poor spot to find footprints.

Monk looked at the ground. "You're wasting time here, Doc. We found where this thing dragged Long Tom into the lava."

"You mean the parallel marks from where the girl said she last saw Long Tom in the neighborhood of the lava?"

"Yep. Them marks could have been made by a man's heels dragging. I looked close and found bits of brown leather scraped off on the rough rock. Long Tom was wearing brown shoes."

Doc Savage was silent for a time, his flake-gold eyes traveling over the expanses of naked rock which would retain no footprints.

"Where is the girl?" he asked at last.

"Ham is taking care of her," Monk said.

They hardly joined Ham and the girl before big-fisted Renny and long, bony Johnny arrived. The pair looked as though they had something on their minds.

"Our comicialary ambulations were ascendant!" Johnny said. "We—"

"This is no time for them words!" Renny boomed. "Doc, we found that native who tried to hold Monk up. He did not get away."

Doc Savage said, half questioningly, "He was under that huge boulder which rolled against the mouth of the ledge."

Renny blinked. Johnny swallowed. "You knew that?"

"Suspected it," Doc admitted. "He was senseless, there was no time to get him under cover, and the rock came to rest here it could have crushed him."

"He was under it," said Johnny. "We dug him out."

Renny blocked and unblocked his big fists and said, "And I suppose you know what else we learned?"

Doc Savage said, "You mean that he was not a native, but a white man who had dyed his skin and curled and dyed his hair?"

Renny and Johnny swapped blank looks.

"I'll be superamalgamated!" Johnny murmured. "How did you know that, Doc? We almost didn't find it out ourselves."

"The features, the finger nails, the coloring of the eyes, were not those of a native, even a Polynesian," the bronze man explained.

"Wonder who he is, and what he was up to?"

"We will see what we can learn about him," Doc Savage said.

Chapter 5. THE THING ON THE BOTTOM

THE dead man had lived in the bungalow that stood alone on the edge of Fan Coral City. He had rented it after landing from a steamer five weeks before, a quiet, taciturn fellow, inclined to be sullen. He had mixed not at all. No one had dreamed he was not a native with money.

Doc Savage, Monk and Ham entered the dead man's house. There was a question whether they had the legal right to do this, although Doc had a paper, a kind of commission, from the government which had a protectorate, so-called, over Fan Coral. The paper had been given Doc for a past service, and was supposed to entitle him to almost any kind of coöperation.

"The place has been ransacked!" Monk declared, staring around.

Unless the dead man had pulled out bureau drawers, ripped up the floor mattings, dug holes in the roof thatch, and emptied all the food containers in the kitchen onto the floor, Monk's deduction was good.

Doc said, "Done not more than half an hour ago." He pointed out that a puddle of syrup was still spreading, and pickles from an emptied jar were still damp.

The bronze man did not probe into corners, turn objects over, or otherwise act as if he were searching. But Monk and Ham stood back and watched, expectant. They had seen him work before. They had seen Doc walk past as many as five chessboards, crowded with men, and when the pieces were swept off, return and place each not only in its correct square, but facing just as it had been.

Doc Savage went outside abruptly. There were three palms in the yard, all big ones, laden with

coconuts. More coconuts were on the ground. A sign said:

THESE COCONUTS PRIVATE

KEEP AWAY!

There were, at a conservative estimate, a couple of million coconut trees on Fan Coral, most of them free to anybody who wanted a nut. The sign was either the work of a miserly crank or it had a purpose.

Doc Savage began picking up and shaking coconuts. He must have done that to at least two hundred before he found one that did not gurgle. He broke it open. It had been sawed in half and cleverly glued back together.

The contents was mostly money, with a few papers. Doc read the papers, principally the newspaper clippings and wanted circulars.

"The dead man was Bert Banner, alias Bert the Blood, alias a lot of things," the bronze man said.

"He is wanted for three murders in the United States, two in Australia, and one in China. The items about the Shanghai, or China, crime bear the latest date."

"He must have been hiding out here," Ham said.

Doc added, "He seems to have had a partner in most of his crimes. A man named Stage Chinkins, alias some others. Stage got his name because he was once a ham actor."

"I wonder," Monk pondered aloud, "if Stage Chinkins is around here, too?"

DOC had asked Renny and Johnny and the girl to meet him with Monk and Ham at the Fan Coral City municipal dock, and the trio were on hand. Johnny was about to burst over something he had just learned. He used small words, and whirled his monocle around a finger by its ribbon, as he did when perturbed.

"This young lady"—he whirled his monocle at the girl—"is a journalist!"

"A free-lance feature writer," the young lady corrected. "My name is Alberta Mantle, and I came here to cover the volcano for the American Journal of Geological Science."

Johnny looked startled. "The American Journal of Geological Science! Why didn't you say so? That takes you out of the class of ordinary reporters. You have to be a crack geologist to write for that."

"I am a crack geologist," the girl, announced.

"Prove it," Johnny requested. "What are some varieties of chalcedony?"

"The forms of agates and onyxes," said the girl.

"Correct."

The young woman looked at Doc Savage rather warmly. "I know your abhorrence of publicity. But I do not write stories of sensationalism for the newspapers. I am a scientific writer. I wish you would let me stay with you and work along with you until this mystery is solved."

Doc was silent, no expression on his remarkable bronze features. Homely Monk waited anxiously.

Monk was very much susceptible to femininity. Almost any one would have been susceptible to this young woman.

"I think that'd be all right, Doc," Monk ventured hopefully.

"It probably will be," Doc said. "Yes, Miss Mantle, you can stay with us."

"Thank you very much," said the young lady sweetly.

Big-fisted Renny looked somewhat dazed. It was a rare occasion when Doc Savage had ever let an outsider join them. Renny, however, was not averse to the idea.

Alberta Mantle struck him as a touch that could dress up any mystery.

Doc Savage now approached a group of uniformed men on the end of the wharf. They were officers off a cruise ship which had put in at Fan Coral during a South Sea tour to give the passengers the unusual privilege of seeing a volcano in eruption. The bronze man spoke with the captain for some time. That individual hastily put out to his ship.

When he came back shortly it was in a roomy lifeboat equipped with a Diesel motor.

"You are welcome to use this as long as you wish," the captain said.

Monk scratched his head. "How'd Doc manage to promote that so sudden?"

Ham said, "I don't know, you missing link, but I have a hunch Doc owns a slice of that steamship company."

Monk did not look surprised.

Big-fisted Renny looked at the power lifeboat. "What're we doin' with this, Doc?"

"Diving for that thing which came down into the sea in the lava," the bronze man replied.

"Holy cow! How about Long Tom? We gotta find him!"

"Diving for the mystery thing," Doc said, "is probably the quickest way of learning what did happen to Long Tom."

Renny dropped his eyes to his enormous fists soberly. Did that mean the unknown horror had taken Long Tom into the sea? He did not ask. He didn't care about hearing what the answer might be.

MONK and Ham were not very happily surprised to discover they had been delegated to remain ashore, on the rim of the cliff over which the stream of lava flowed into the sea.

"Merely watch for anything that might be interesting," Doc suggested.

Then the bronze man eyed the young woman thoughtfully. "You had best remain with Monk and Ham. No telling what will happen when we dive after that thing."

"But I want a close contact with what you do!" Alberta Mantle said.

"The boat may be destroyed, and we may be drowned. I can assure you that might readily happen. There is a great deal more danger connected with this, probably, than any of us have dreamed."

"I am not afraid," the girl declared.

"You will stay with Monk and Ham," Doc said with finality.

Monk and Ham began to look more cheerful.

Long, thin Johnny was sober. Doc Savage had intimated there was more danger than any of them thought. Johnny did not think Doc had sounded as though he were exaggerating. The bronze man had seemed serious.

Johnny, who was a student and inclined to meditate, chanced to drift off to one side by himself. The others did not particularly notice.

Nor did they notice when Johnny fell to watching Doc Savage's hands steadily.

The bronze man was standing where only Johnny could see his hands. His metallic fingers were moving swiftly, forming letters in the deaf-and-dumb alphabet. The bronze man and his aids had all mastered that method of conversation.

Johnny eventually went over to a sack of copra and sat down. He sighed a number of times, wiped his forehead, opened and shut his mouth. He got up finally and shuffled over to the others.

"I'm-sick," he said weakly.

"Huh?" Monk barked. "Maybe you been poisoned?"

Johnny shook his head, then held it with both hands. "No. To tell the truth, I made a silly mistake. There is a candy bar Monk invented, one with a chemical in it which keeps you from going to sleep. Monk will probably make a fortune selling it to truck drivers who make long hauls. I had several bars of what I thought was candy in my pocket, and ate them, but they turned out to be Monk's stuff. It's made me as sick as a dog."

"It wouldn't if you hadn't made a hog outta yourself!" Monk said indignantly. "But it won't do anything serious."

"I'm sick!" Johnny groaned. "I cannot go with you. I'm going to the hotel."

"Renny and myself can manage the diving," Doc said quietly.

DOC SAVAGE and his men had come to Fan Coral Island in one of the bronze man's giant speed planes, which was anchored out in the harbor, among a number of yachts and other airships. The didoes of Ethel's Mama had made Fan Coral Island a popular place. Doc's plane bore no distinguishing marks, and it had been mistaken for another commercial craft.

Doc and Renny drew alongside the plane in the borrowed power lifeboat to get diving gear. Doc, when he went far from his New York headquarters, took a remarkably complete equipment. Everything he would need, as nearly as possible.

The diving gear consisted of suits of light waterproof fabric backing a featherweight alloy chain mail which would discourage the teeth of any eels, barracudas or sharks that might want to test their appetites with a man.

The hoods were not metal, but globes of a transparent composition as clear as glass and almost as tough as steel. Air was taken care of by a chemical purifier. There were tiny two-way radio sets which were effective over a range of a mile or so.

Monk and Ham, watching with the girl on the cliff rim, also had portable radio sets with which they could listen to the divers, and talk to them.

For weapons, Doc and Renny carried an underwater metal-cutting torch which was Doc's invention. These might have been pistols with barrels two feet long and round metal bulbs attached to the handles. They ejected a chemical gas which combined with the elements in the water and burned with terrific heat.

The bronze man and Renny anchored the lifeboat a short distance from the spot where the strange geyser of water was still playing above the surface. Then they stepped overboard. The shoes, of a metal heavier than lead, were not bulky, and could be disengaged by a certain foot movement, making it unnecessary to use the hands, perhaps sometime when the hands might have something else to do. There was the usual phenomenon caused by increasing pressure as they sank. The suit mechanisms automatically compensated for the pressure.

The water was not clear, due to the proximity of the lava. It was distinctly warm. It was dark almost at once. The clouds of steam cut off the sunlight.

Doc switched on the cutting torch, holding it behind his back. The intense white lance from its tip showed illumination.

"I'm about fifteen feet from you, I judge," Renny's voice said.

Monk, from up on the cliff, cut in, "You fellers see any sign of Long Tom yet?"

"Give us time," Renny said.

Doc touched coral growing up from the bottom. It was like a tree, sharp, and would have cut through the fabric of an ordinary diving suit. The metallic gloves protected the bronze man's hands. He went down, and it was like sinking into a fabulous forest on another planet.

Gold was suddenly all around him. Crawling, swaying strings of aureate wonder. Some gigantic sea plant. When Renny touched the streamers they melted into a fulvescent shower, and suddenly all the water was filled, as if some Midas was pouring finest gold flake by the bushel. On the bottom, huge purple sea fans curtsied greeting, with cactus-like sea urchins clustered about their base. A blue fish, as tapered and steellike as a knife blade, flashed away, and battalions of tiny fishes with all the colors of the spectrum fled for their lives. A tiny octopus, half hidden under a sea fan, vanished in a cloud of his own ink.

"Holy cow!" Renny said wonderingly.

DOC kept his torch going for light. There was enough of a charge in the grip magazine to keep it going for more than an hour. They worked toward their objective.

A shadow cruised over them. Renny popped his torch on, gasped loudly, got it off again.

"Did you see that?" he gulped.

"Shark," Doc Savage said without emotion.

"I thought it was a submarine!" Renny muttered.

Ham, from the clifftop, said, "Sharks won't bother you if you let them alone."

"The heck they won't!" Monk sneered. "You stop puttin' out bum information like that or I'll hit you so hard on top of the head that you won't know which toe to crawl out from under!"

Ham sneered audibly. "Listen, creation's joke, if I have to slap you down, they'll—"

"Tune out, will you!" Renny complained. "Do it on another wave length!"

Renny was watching the shark. The monster cruised about in several short circles, plainly curious. The two men stood perfectly still. The shark started down. As Renny had said, he did have some of the proportions of a submarine.

Doc popped on the glaring white of his torch. The shark left for other parts with a swirl of water that shoved them about in the sea growth.

Doc said, "We had best keep close together, Renny."

The big-fisted engineer chuckled over the two-way radio. "I can stand a lot of company. This is the spookiest-lookin' ocean I ever saw."

The two men worked forward, both Herculean figures, as men go. Renny's muscles were perhaps the more spectacular from a distance, but on close examination he faded alongside the sinewy wiriness of the bronze man's development.

There were more fish, millions, almost, and several small octopuses. One stingaree passed overhead, its white underside giving it a strangely angelic aspect, trailing its long snake tail with the deadly barb. It was a big one.

It seemed to become easier and easier to move as the two men went forward.

"Hold it!" Doc said sharply.

Renny stopped walking—and found himself still going forward!

"Holy cow!" he exploded, and grabbed a sea fan. It slid through his fingers, stripping off its purple outer coating, leaving the black, tough skeleton.

WORRIED now, Renny grabbed again, this time at coral. It was loose in the sand, broke out, and he dropped it. He stabbed his feet into a big sponge. That did not hold, either. He tried a seaweed growth. No luck.

"Hey, Doc!" he thumped. "Somethin's pullin' me!"

The next instant the bronze man was alongside him. Both were being carried along. Faster than before.

"We waited too long," Doc said quietly. "And we were a bit careless."

Doc got hold of a growth resembling coral. It was some variety of millepore, and did not hold. The bronze man speared the nozzle of his torch into the sand. It did not hold.

"The thing is suckin' us to it!" Renny roared.

Doc kept his torch on. They both saw a spire of coral ahead. It leaned over the way they were being swept. But it looked solid.

Renny, struggling frantically, yelled, "I can't—make—it!"

But he did. Rather, Doc Savage got hold of the coral with one hand, and whipping out his feet, managed to contact Renny. The next instant they clung to the coral. They would have lost their torches, except for the lines that attached them to their belts.

Renny stared in horror. Bits of sea growth, fishes, sailed past, being drawn irresistibly.

Sponges, lumps of coral, sea urchins, now and then a shellfish, rolled along the bottom.

Peering upward through the transparent globe of his helmet, Renny could see an octopus clinging to the coral spire above them. It had a body about the size of one of his huge fists. The octopus somehow depicted utter terror.

"What are we gonna do, Doc?" Renny gasped.

"We probably will not have much choice."

"Huh?"

"This coral is giving."

Renny snapped his torch on, peered at the base of the coral spire.

"Oh, damn!" he groaned.

The coral was giving way. Either it had grown up out of the sand, or it was thin at the base. It was uprooting, not unlike a tree. Bending over. Not as a tree would fall. More slowly. And loosened sand curled in little rivers away from its base.

"We're going!" Renny squawled.

The coral came loose with a distinct groaning noise. It had one long root like a tree, and that scooped up a cloud of mud and sand.

THE rush of water carried the two men along. Renny thought at first that the thing was sucking the water toward it. He knew better now. It was simply throwing water up from the ocean floor—the geyser which they had seen on the surface. It was the water rushing in to be thrown upward that was drawing them.

But what incredible thing could be forcing the water upward? Renny used his flashlight. An instant later he saw it.

Black! A lump! Something as shiny as black diamond, a large chunk with no particular shape. But it had in the top of it a narrow crack, or eye, and out of this poured an incredible, indescribable something that was driving the water upward with an incalculable force.

Renny found himself completely baffled as to the nature of the thing. He had other things to think of, anyway.

He and Doc Savage were thrown helplessly toward the surface in the rush of water. Mauled, battered, temporarily unable to swim, both powerful men floated on the surface for a time. Their little radio sets had been damaged and were out of commission. And they chanced to be afloat on the opposite side of the geyser, so that Monk and Ham, on the cliff, could not see them.

Chapter 6. BAD BALDWIN

MONK and Ham waited on the cliff brink in a tension as brittle as an icicle. The little radio sets fitted on their arms, like big wrist watches. They kept their ears jammed to the tiny speakers and their eardrums hurt from listening, but there was no sound. The girl watched closely and quietly.

"Oh, blazes!" Monk croaked hoarsely. "Doc! Doc! Renny! What's happened?"

Both men's eyes strained at the sea. But the rolling clouds of steam had mushroomed, for the moment, over everything.

Ham said something hoarse under his breath. He couldn't have understood it himself.

Farther up on the slope behind the cliff, and to the south, another man also said things. But what he said could be understood. Profanity, utterly disgusted, guttery.

"I can't tell a damnblasted thing except they're goin' after somethin' in the water!" he snarled. The watcher was the man who had taken the identity of Snowball Eagan, journalist. He ground his teeth and spat on the lenses of his binoculars and wiped them off. That didn't help.

"With Bert croaked, they ain't nobody to help me!" he gritted. "Watta-ell can I do solo?"

He scowled in the direction of Fan Coral City. His face was a window to his thoughts. He was deciding to do something he had thought about doing as a last resort. Into their case he jammed the binoculars. The adhesive tape on his palm had come loose. There was no wound, no scar of any kind, under it. He pasted it back in place.

"I'll ring in help!" Eagan growled. "Lucky I know more about the owner of the Fifth Wind than anybody else around here."

He struck out for the harbor.

There were yachts in Fan Coral harbor. Fan Coral was not exactly a far corner of the world. People had been there before the eruption, small yawls and sloops and ketches. Other yachts had come since Ethel's Mama had erupted. Big ones.

The Fifth Wind stood out among the others like the Empire State building would stand out in Podunk Falls. She was two hundred feet of jewel, three masts, hollow spars, mahogany, chromium. The price of her tenders would have bought any one of half the other yachts in the harbor. She was schooner-rigged, and her sails were Egyptian silk. She was shallow enough to go where any forty-footer could; centerboards, two, one on each side; and with her new high-speed Diesels she could cruise thirty knots.

There probably wasn't a warship in the world that could overhaul her. She carried two tubby little seaplanes and a catapult. The planes were mostly engine, and they had synchronized machine guns. The owner liked to gun sharks from the air, the sailors had said.

Nobody had questioned that. The sailors didn't look like the kind of fellows one started an argument with. For no sailor of the Fifth Wind weighed less than two hundred pounds.

A bum boat sculled by a brown loafer put Snowball Eagan on the landing stage of the Fifth Wind.

SNOWBALL EAGAN got on deck, and four sailors got in his way. They didn't say anything. He looked over his shoulder and saw two more sailors in his way in case he wanted to go back. He grinned at everybody. They didn't grin back. They were giants.

"I'll talk to Cadwiller Olden," Snowball Eagan said.

"You'd better talk to me first, maybe," said a man who came from behind the stand of the plane catapult.

The fellow's ears grew up to a point, and his jaw out to a lump. His mouth was about like any mouth without lips. He was naked except for shorts. A strip of hair as wide as two fingers grew from his belt straight up to his neck. His knees were knotty, his feet big. From head to foot he was red with sunburn, and almost dripping with some oil he had put on for it. His height would not miss seven feet much.

"Kinda struck me I'd seen you before," he said. He jerked his lump of a jaw at the sailors.

"That's why the reception."

Snowball Eagan looked at the man. He looked startled. He stepped close to the man, but not too fast.

"You're Buddy Baldwin," he said, so that none of the others could hear.

"And that," grunted Buddy Baldwin, "makes you practically a dead man."

Snowball Eagan kept his grin. It didn't look as if the foundation was any too firm.

"You haven't seen me, Baldwin. You've seen my picture. I'm Stage Chinkins. But I'm Snowball Eagan now."

"Buddy" Baldwin worked his shoulders under the skin, as a man likes to do when sunburned.

"They damn near got you in Shanghai," he said.

"They damn near," Snowball Eagan agreed. "Only I turned journalist."

"What do you want?"

"A chin with Cadwiller Olden. I got something."

"Talk to me first," said Buddy Baldwin.

"The hell I will!"

"Then over the side you go."

"Maybe you think—Listen, this is big. It's not your size, Baldwin. Mind you, you're a lot bigger guy than I am, but it still ain't your size. Cadwiller Olden might handle it."

"What do you know about Cadwiller Olden?"

"Nothing," Snowball Eagan said dryly. "I never will know nothin'."

"You been hearin' some gossip?"

Snowball Eagan laughed. He laughed heartily. Then he said, "Don't make me laugh! Cadwiller Olden is a big oil man from Oklahoma."

Buddy Baldwin grinned. "Let's see if you're a false alarm."

The two went down a companionway which had teak treads and chromium handrails and tramped through a passage dark with mahogany, deep with silk pile carpets. There had been no ventilator funnels on deck. The Fifth Wind didn't need them. She was air-conditioned.

Buddy Baldwin stopped before a door. He looked at Snowball Eagan. "You pretty well muscled?"

"Pretty."

"Then take off your coat and shirt. And when we go in, suck your belly in and make your chest and arm muscles stick out. Like this." Buddy Baldwin showed a rather startling set of ligaments.

"Why?"

"Notice our sailors?"

"They're a bunch of dang giants."

"That's the idea."

Snowball Eagan snarled, "If there's an idea, I don't see it!"

"The chief," said Buddy Baldwin, "likes big men."

Snowball Eagan moistened his lips. A strange expression came on his face and stayed. "I see," he said. He swallowed again.

They went in.

THE furniture in the room was big. Every piece must have been specially made. But the creature who stood in the place made the furniture look like doll stuff. He was about the color of a bottle cork that had been in a fire. One finger was off his left hand, and part of one ear was cut from his head. Something with an edge had left a gray gristle connection between his right eye and his mouth, and the eye did not look right. His chest was big enough to make his elbows stick out when he hung his arms. His mouth was open and there was no tongue in it.

He was the biggest human thing Snowball Eagan had ever seen.

"We want to see the chief, Nero," Buddy Baldwin said.

The monster opened his mouth and made the best noise he could without a tongue. He pointed at a door.

It was a big door, large even for the dark monster, Nero. It had a big knob which Buddy Baldwin had to take with both hands to turn.

Snowball Eagan had started to sweat, and had sunk his head in his shoulders a little, as does a man who walks under something he thinks may fall. They went in.

There was a giant bed, giant chairs, a giant bookcase with the smallest book in it an encyclopedia. One waded in the rug. The bed had been slept in, but there was nobody in it now. Off to one side was a child's crib. It was an elaborate thing, with carvings and gilt inlays, and

here and there rows of pearl studding.

When Snowball Eagan was a little closer his mouth opened and shut, for he knew the gilt was real solid gold bars and the pearls genuine. Snowball, as he called himself now, was an expert on such things.

Buddy Baldwin had his stomach in and his shoulders hunched forward and his arms crooked, with all the muscles sticking out all they could. Snowball Eagan did that, too, and they stopped beside the crib.

The crib was about four feet long. The man who occupied it had plenty of room.

MOST midgets have something wrong with their appearance. Their legs are stumpy, or their bodies too long, or their faces too round, or their shoulders too broad. This one was different.

He was a little gem of a man.

Given three feet and a hundred and twenty pounds, he would have had a good chance of becoming a matinee god. His head was not too big, his shoulders not too bulky, and his legs were small, sinewy and perfect. His face had that utter handsomeness which pen-and-ink artists give their heroes in the love story magazine drawings.

He wore little bathing trunks and a little bathrobe, smoked a little cigar in a little holder, and a toy glass on a rack at the side held a toy drink in which leaned a toy swizzle stick.

Buddy Baldwin, speaking unnaturally because he was still trying to hold his muscles ridged out, said, "Chief, this bird with me is Stage Chinkins, known right now as Snowball Eagan."

The little gem of a man did not offer to shake hands. He drew on his cigar and squirted the lower part of his crib full of rich blue smoke.

"What's on your mind, Snowball Eagan?" he asked.

He had a perfect little voice.

Snowball Eagan coughed to get the fingers of awe loose from his throat. He was not tough, did not bluster. He sounded as if he were about to get down on his knees.

"I think I've got something that will interest you," he said. "You have heard of Doc Savage, the man of bronze. Wherever you find him, you usually find something big. Doc Savage is here in Fan Coral. He's investigating something mysterious that came out of that volcano."

Snowball Eagan paused. The tiny man, Cadwiller Olden, did not speak. Eagan swallowed and went on.

"Me and my buddy, Bert Banner, started to find out what Doc Savage was after," he said. "We figured it must be big stuff, because this bronze guy has a rep. But Bert got mashed under a big rock. There's somethin' queer about how that happened. I didn't see it. I only know Savage brought in Bert's body. Maybe he killed Bert, but I don't think so, on account of I've heard that Savage never kills anybody."

He hesitated again, finished, "With Bert out, I'm afraid of it. I thought I'd tip you off."

Cadwiller Olden took a sip from the drink. "Do you know just what Doc Savage is after?"

"No."

"Then why are you going to all this trouble?"

"I know Savage's rep. I needed a stake. Where Savage is monkeying around, things get big.

Anything he's after would be worth plenty of jack."

"You are evidently not fully acquainted with this Doc Savage's career," said Cadwiller Olden calmly. "Strangely enough, the size of a thing does not seem to gauge its importance to him. He once spent two weeks working on the eyes of a blind apple peddler in Chicago. He made the peddler see, then turned around and ignored an offer of a quarter of a million to do a plastic surgery job on a rich old guy who wanted a young-looking face. You cannot tell about the bronze man."

Snowball Eagan wet his lips again. "Well, I thought there might be a lot of shekels rattling around in this somewhere. I had a hunch."

"Your hunches seem good," Cadwiller Olden said quietly.

"Eh?"

"I'll tell you why we're here. Why I have my entire organization here, working under cover. We are after the same thing Doc Savage is after."

Surprise knocked Snowball Eagan's mouth open.

Cadwiller Olden said, "The thing we're after is probably worth more dollars than you or I or Rockefeller ever dreamed about."

Chapter 7. THE SECOND BAD BALDWIN

SNOWBALL EAGAN'S mouth stayed open. He was like a man who had found his pocket picked. But he did not bluster. He bowed, not very gracefully, but a bow.

"I didn't know you were already mixed in this," he said. "I've always heard you were the cleverest man alive, and this bears it out. You have Doc Savage covered, and I never got an inkling. Well, that lets me out. I won't try to horn in. I won't even ask questions. I will leave the island immediately if you prefer."

Some of the fake Snowball Eagan's crook acquaintances might have swooned if they had heard that. Snowball Eagan was as tough and chiseling a rascal as the Orient had seen in generations. That he would meekly back off the field when he found another crook after the same goal was startling. Or

perhaps not so startling.

Most of Snowball Eagan's ilk had heard of this strange, incredible creature, Cadwiller Olden.

Snowball Eagan did not leave. He asked permission.

"Can I go?" he inquired uneasily.

Cadwiller Olden shook his head. "Would you care to work for me on this?"

Unadulterated delight swept Snowball Eagan.

"D'you mean it?" he exploded. "Say, that'd really be somethin'! Man, oh, man! I've tried a dozen times to contact your organization, and never got to first base!"

"Eleven times you have tried, to be exact," said the small, gemlike man.

"You knew about it!"

"Every time. I have been watching you, studying your record. Your holdup of the Melbourne Imperial Bank was well executed, as was your looting of the pearl dealer's safe in Manila." Snowball Eagan nearly choked.

"I went solo on them jobs!" he gulped. "I didn't think a soul in the world knew I pulled 'em!"

"Knowing things is convenient," Cadwiller Olden pointed out.

Snowball Eagan had been afraid of the little man when he came in. He was plainly more frightened now. But he was overjoyed, too.

"It'll sure be swell, workin' for you," he said.

He did not say working with you, as might have been expected.

The little man got out of the crib. The dressing gown which he put on was brocaded with gold. He went to a panel, and did something to it with his hands and a safe door was abruptly revealed. He took out a mass of money, done in bundles. He separated five of those bundles, put the rest back. He handed the five bundles to Snowball Eagan.

Eagan looked at the money. His eyelids rolled back off the balls, and breath ran out of him slowly. A mark on each bundle wrapper said twenty thousand dollars.

"My organization pays off by dividend," said Cadwiller Olden. "I am declaring you in on the last dividend. It is not well for a man to be low on money, and you say you are low."

Snowball Eagan suddenly did the last thing any one who knew him would have expected. He got down on his knees and bowed his head to the man he could have thrown a score of feet with one arm.

"Chief," he said, "the ambition of my lifetime is being fulfilled."

The little gem of a man strutted slightly as he went into the other room.

CADWILLER OLDEN slipped off his clothes. All his body was perfection in miniature. He began to dress. His garments were exquisitely tailored.

He began to talk. His little voice was cultured, musical.

"Doc Savage must have done as I did, realized from the newspaper and seismograph reports what was coming out of Ethel's Mama," he said. "I did not think that any one on earth but myself would guess the truth. But they say this Doc Savage has a certain amount of ability."

He went in the other room to let the giant who had no tongue tie his tiny necktie.

Buddy Baldwin grinned at Snowball Eagan. "Buddy, you got what it takes," he whispered admiringly.

"That last touch, where you got down on your knees, was swell. The chief ate it up!"

Snowball Eagan did not grin back. He licked his lips and shivered.

"I've heard things about Cadwiller Olden," he said.

"What you heard wasn't a drop," Buddy Baldwin said, suddenly grim. "Give that little fellow another ten years and he'll control the civilized world. And I'm not kiddin'!"

Cadwiller Olden came back. He was in impeccable afternoon attire, and carried a slender black cane. He flipped the cane, admired it.

"An exact duplicate, except for size, of one a gentleman named Brigadier General Theodore Marley Brooks carries," he said. "Quite a gentleman, Ham Brooks. We have the same tailor, although he does not know it."

He looked at Buddy Baldwin and Snowball Eagan.

"I have been keeping close tab on Doc Savage in a very simple way," he said. "The bronze man is now diving for the thing which came out of the volcano, the thing which can be more valuable, in the right hands, than the crown of England."

Snowball Eagan opened his mouth, apparently about to ask just what the mysterious object was. But he thought better of it. He was deathly afraid of this handsome, tiny man's slightest whim.

Cadwiller Olden said, "I am awaiting word from one of my valued agents. As soon as the report is in, everything is set to get Doc Savage and his assistants out of the way."

The little man looked at Snowball Eagan.

"Did you know we already have one of Doc Savage's men, a fellow they call Long Tom?" he asked.

Snowball Eagan gulped. "No!"

"We have," Cadwiller Olden smiled. "One of my agents decoyed him, with a clever story, into the hands of my men, who seized him. He—"

Noise outside. The tongueless monster came in. He made a sound startlingly like an eagle screaming, and did some kind of sign talk with his hands.

"My agent is here to report on Doc Savage," Cadwiller Olden said. "It is the same agent who

trapped Long Tom."

The girl who had told Doc Savage her name was Alberta Mantle came in.

"Meet Bess Baldwin," said Buddy Baldwin, "my sister. Right now she's Alberta Mantle, a writer on scientific things."

"Geology," the girl said, and laughed.

THE girl looked at Cadwiller Olden, and her laughter stopped with a snap.

"Doc Savage is not doing so well with his diving," she said. "He and Renny went down while I stayed on the cliff with Monk and Ham and watched. Doc—"

"They do not suspect you?" the tiny man interposed.

"Absolutely not!"

"Go ahead."

"Doc and Renny got caught in the uprush of water which the thing seems to be squirting out," the girl said. "They had a very brisk few moments and were thrown high into the air."

"Not injured, I hope," Cadwiller Olden said dryly.

"They have very efficient diving equipment. Doc Savage is an inventive genius."

Cadwiller Olden said, "We will act immediately. Doc Savage will not reach the floor of the sea again."

The girl nodded. But she seemed to have something on her mind. She nipped her lower lip with even white teeth.

"You have something on your mind?" the tiny gem of a man asked.

"Yes," the girl said slowly, "I have."

"What is it?"

"I—well, darn it, I know you're not going to like this."

"Out with it." Cadwiller Olden smiled slightly.

"Well—that man—Doc Savage—listen, I never have asked a favor. My brother and myself have been on the up and up. We've been paid, of course. But neither of us has asked a special favor."

"So you want to ask one now?"

"That's it."

"What?"

"Don't kill Doc Savage!"

The girl said it slowly and earnestly, and there was no doubt but that she meant it.

Cadwiller Olden put a small smile on his little face and spun his little sword cane.

"My intention is not to kill Doc Savage," he said. "I admire that bronze man's brain. It could be put to excellent use. I will tell you now that I intend to take Doc Savage alive and use his scientific knowledge, as soon as I can bring him around to an understanding. In reaching that understanding, you might be of considerable assistance, Miss Baldwin."

"Thank you," the young woman said tremulously.

"That will be all."

She left.

Cadwiller Olden looked at Buddy Baldwin. There was no expression in the diminutive, beautiful eyes, or on the small, chiseled lips.

"Love," Cadwiller Olden said, "is a wonderful thing."

The shadow of a horror and fear seemed to come into the back of Buddy Baldwin's eyes and stay. Cadwiller Olden chuckled quietly.

"Doc Savage and Renny are preparing to descend," he said. "Monk and Ham are on the clifftop, watching. You see, I have excellent reports."

Cadwiller Olden then gave some orders to Baldwin. A little later a dozen men or so left the boat and headed for Fan Coral Island. Baldwin was with them. Strangely enough, the men headed for the spot where Monk and Ham were. But they took a roundabout way. They were taking no chances on being caught.

Chapter 8. THE CAPTIVES

MONK held his pet pig by both big ears and yelled, "You try to kick my hog again and I'll grab your head and put it in your left pants pocket!"

Ham held his ape, Chemistry. A machine-gun procession of sneezes was coming from Chemistry, and the animal's eyes were red and watering.

"You put red pepper or something in that hog's hair!" Ham howled.

"Your ape had no business looking for fleas on Habeas!" Monk snapped.

Renny's voice rumbled out of the radio speaker, "If you comics can't lay off, cut your microphones off!"

Ham said, "I'll cut Monk loose from his, right next to his chin!"

"We're ready to go down again," Renny said.

At this, both Monk and Ham looked over the cliff edge. For the moment the wind was sweeping the steam from the lava in the sea away, and they could see Doc, Renny and the lifeboat.

Doc and Renny were standing in the stern. They were holding an anchor to which was attached a

long cable with a large knot every three feet or so. Conversation was being carried on by the radios. Doc had repaired his and Renny's on landing.

"The plan is to make the anchor secure, then use the rope to keep from being swept into the rush of water," Doc Savage explained.

Monk demanded, "You say you didn't get a look at the thingamajig the last time?"

Renny answered that. "Only a glance, through the water. It was big, almost black, and approximately round, as nearly as we could tell."

"Black! You sure?"

"I said so, didn't I?" Renny demanded grouchily.

"Oh, all right, big fists. I just thought it was funny the thing was black now when it was transparent or something when it grabbed me."

Ham snapped, "The girl said it started to change color, didn't she?"

Monk looked around. "I wonder where she went? She said she'd be back soon."

"She went after another camera," Ham reminded him peevishly.

Renny, down in the boat, grumbled, "Johnny picked a heck of a time to accidentally dope himself. We need his help around here."

Monk asked, "You fellers think you'll get that thing lassoed, or whatever you're gonna do to it, this time?"

Renny thumped, "How should I know?"

Renny and Doc Savage lowered the anchor carefully. It was very heavy, and until it got overside and into the water, it needed both their combined strength. They felt it land on the bottom, then carefully strung the long rope overside, so that it would not tangle.

"Ready?" Renny asked.

"Yes," Doc said.

A tiny blue light in one end of the bronze man's portable radio glowed faintly.

"Wait," Doc said.

He held the instrument close to an ear and changed the tuning knob. The next instant, his small strange, trilling sound, the exotic note that had no tune, yet a quality definitely musical, was audible.

"Holy cow!" Renny boomed. "What is it?"

He knew that sound always presaged something startling.

"Quick!" Doc rapped. "There's—"

"Ow-w-w-w-w!"

Monk squawled.

Doc and Renny didn't need the radios to hear Monk's frenzied howl from the cliff rim.

MONK was in the grip of three men. One had each arm, a third his neck. How they had come up so quietly he couldn't imagine.

Monk howled again. A bit joyfully. Physical combat was his joy. He ducked his head, managed to turn a neat somersault, and landed on his back—with one man under him. That fellow made a noise like a stepped-on cat and relaxed.

Ham had been a bit more fortunate. At the first alarm, he took one wild leap. It put him very near the cliff rim. But it gave him time to unsheath his sword cane.

Ham was the sword cane's master. The blade seemed to vanish, defying the eye with its speed, and did not become visible again until it rested in the arm of one of three more assailants who had rushed him.

More men were coming out of the jungle. Almost a dozen, all told.

"Yeo-w-w!"

Monk howled. "There ain't enough of you to give us a workout!"

The man Ham had stabbed sighed and lay down. The drug on the tip of the dapper lawyer's sword cane worked quickly.

Monk suddenly rose to his feet with a bound like that of a released spring. He spraddled his legs, began to whirl. The men on his arms lost their footing and swung out like weights on a governor. Monk ran toward the other assailants.

Results were remarkable. In an instant, men were down, howling, cursing, Monk with them. Ham's sword cane dropped another.

Monk hit a jaw. One of the victim's teeth flew out and hit Monk in one eye. That fortune of war was probably his undoing. It is hard for a man to wink one eye when excited. Monk blinked both of his. Somebody grabbed up a fistful of grit and rubbed it in his face. He was blinded.

Some one came running with a bush. He shoved it at Ham, and the dapper lawyer's sword cane cut through some of the tough hardwood, but not all. Tropical bushes are tough. Ham went down, his sword out of commission.

Buddy Baldwin and his sister came running up.

"Don't kill them!" Bess Baldwin gasped.

Buddy Baldwin used the blackjack which he carried.

The natives of the South Sea islands have a way of carrying a pig. They tie its legs together and

swing it on a pole, and a man gets at each end of the pole. Monk didn't think much of the means of locomotion. He made noises about it through his nose; his lips were taped. He could see Ham being carried the same way. Their little radio sets were gone. The machine pistols, which there had been no time to use, were no longer under their arms. A plane droned overhead. It looked to Monk like the same plane which had been photographing the volcano and the lava stream. For the last hour, though, it had not been in evidence. The men who carried Monk and Ham pig fashion were not natives of this part of the world. One or two had an Oriental cast. But most of them were white, Americans. Jungle was all about them. Swarms of multicolored birds showered up ahead of them, and settled, squawking, behind them. Monk twisted, jiggling up and down, trying to work ahead until he could kick the man with the front end of the stick. The man behind tapped Monk's head with a revolver barrel, discouraging that. Monk started swinging from side to side, making it as tough on the fellows carrying him as he could. He stopped that abruptly. The plane noise was closer, louder. The ship must have seen something. It was coming to investigate! Monk watched, and an instant later blew a delighted snort through his nose. For the plane swept low over them, a helmeted head cocked over the fuselage. Then it arched up and went away. One of the men carrying Monk laughed harshly. "Don't get pepped up, buddy," he said. "That guy is one of us. People think there's been a hell of a rush of newspapermen and cameramen to this island, but more'n half of 'em are our men. Our pal up there went after gasoline, and now he's back." That gave Monk enough to keep him quiet. The men were trotting. Both Monk and Ham could see Buddy Baldwin ahead—and his sister. Monk all but strangled behind the tape when he saw Bess Baldwin. It was not the first time a member of the feminine sex had fooled Monk. But every blow seemed the biggest. The party filed down into a canyon. Monk noted that they were taking pains to leave a plain trail. The cavalcade stopped. Monk squirmed angrily. One of the men looked back at him. "Here's where we set the trap," the fellow said. Monk tried to say something. The other chuckled. "Don't worry," he said. "It ain't an ordinary ambush. You've heard of the new photo-electric burglar alarms, ain't you?" Monk had more than heard of them. As an electrochemist, he had done experimental work in developing them. You walked across a beam of invisible light, and that set off an alarm. The other must have read his thoughts. "We got the photo-electric rig off the trail, and there ain't nobody walked from this part of the trail to 'em," he said. "So there ain't a chance of Doc Savage bein' tipped off." There was a noise up on the canyon side. "Man up there now checkin' them over," the man said. "They're fixed to open a big gas container. The gas will roll down here in the canyon because it's heavier'n air, and it'll get Savage and your other pal." Monk gargled angrily. "You ain't the only scientist around here," said the man. Then the fellow paused to watch the plane. It had come droning back and swooped almost overhead. The pilot seemed to be using binoculars this time. Then the pilot began gesturing—his arm moved right, then left—twice to the right, once to the left. It kept moving. "That fool will tip Savage off!" snapped the girl. Buddy Baldwin swore and waved his arms angrily. The plane went away. "Maybe Savage won't barge into the canyon," some one said doubtfully. "Sure he will. We'll be farther up, on the cliff, and he can see us." The man who had examined the apparatus of the trap joined them. They went on.

MONK kept his eyes opened and reached an absolutely unpleasant conclusion. The trap was perfect. The canyon was a bleak place, and with one glance Doc could tell that no one lurked there in ambush. He would certainly walk straight into the photo-electric device beam. The captors were in a hurry now, so much so that Monk judged Doc and Renny were not far behind. They had had to climb the cliff, of course. Anxious to delay the flight, Monk started his swinging from side to side again. It was effective, causing the two who carried him to fall down. Then one of them got a rock. Each time Monk swung he got clouted with the rock. It discouraged him. The caravan reached the opposite end of the canyon. From here they started up a steep slope. There was some jungle here, but not much. They were in the open a good deal. Doc could see them from below. It would draw him on. Monk turned his head. He could see straight down to the far end of the canyon.

Doc and Renny were already in view.

The bronze man and the big-fisted engineer were running. Doc was carrying what seemed from that distance to be a box of apparatus.

What followed was over quickly. Doc and Renny did not wear the transparent hoods, so the gas got them almost immediately. It was not a visible gas—not visible from that distance, at least.

Renny went down first, but before he did so he threw back his head and a cry poured from his lips, a grisly scream which raised the hair. When he fell, it was slowly, and he twisted about.

Doc went down next, but without an outcry. Yet once the bronze giant was on the ground, he, too, squirmed slowly; his giant frame tied into a tight bundle at first, then he grew more slack, spread out, seemed to grow larger.

It was as if his giant body were unwinding after the life had left it.

Chapter 9. THE TRAPPER TRAP

THE two Baldwins cracked orders. Monk and Ham were rushed back down the hill to the canyon. They stopped just outside the gash, and the girl opened a small knapsack she was carrying and withdrew what looked like a square of blotting paper and a bottle of blue liquid. She soaked the paper with the liquid, then advanced cautiously into the canyon, watching the paper.

It turned slightly pink.

"The wind has blown most of the gas out!" Bess Baldwin called.

Monk scowled. It was some kind of litmus test for gas, a new one on him. This gang must have somebody who was no scientific slouch.

A moment later they were surrounding Doc Savage. The bronze man was slack, his eyes shut. Renny had both big hands fastened around his own throat.

"Doc!" Monk choked.

The homely chemist gave a mighty flounce. It upset his porters, and he tumbled down almost upon Doc. He hit the ground heavily, clawed to get erect, and his hands dug into a soft place in the ground.

It was only by chance that he happened to be looking at the place where his hands dug in. He saw something metallic, small and bright. It had been freshly buried.

Monk gave another mighty flounce—and covered the buried object again before anybody else saw it.

"Doc!" Monk moaned. "He's dead!"

The men who had carried Monk sprang upon him. They kicked him until they felt better.

Doc and Renny still wore the metal-over-silk diving suits, but had discarded the transparent helmets.

"Be careful with those diving suits," Bess Baldwin ordered. "The chief will be interested in them."

"Good thing they discarded the helmets," a man muttered. "It would 'a' been a heck of a note if they'd been able to walk right through the gas."

They found out how to unfasten the suits, and carefully stripped them off. They got the portable radio loose from Renny's midriff. They worked over the one around Doc's belt. Grunted, strained, and said things when their fingers lost skin and nails. The belt was metal, locked, secure.

"We're gonna have to smash it," one said.

"Don't," directed Bess Baldwin. "Let the radio stay there. It won't do him any good. And the chief will want all those radios. He hasn't anything like them."

A man went over and picked up the case which Doc and Renny had been carrying. That was locked, too. He got a rock, beat at the lock. He made smoke sparks fly, but that was all.

"Let it ride," said the girl. "We do not want to ruin any of Doc Savage's equipment. The chief wants it all. Savage is a mechanical genius."

"Let's roll," ordered Buddy Baldwin.

Monk saw a man looking over the ground for anything that might have been dropped. Instantly, Monk began to kick and flail and hoot through his nose.

They knocked him over the head with a rock, as he had expected they would. It got black.

A MAN had his foot on Monk's stomach and was working it up and down, and some unconscious reflex caused Monk's big lungs to work as a bellows, pumping air in and out. As the air went in and out it made hootings and gobblings, and all the men standing around slapped their hips and held their stomachs and laughed.

"Wake up, evolution!" the man was telling Monk between titters.

Monk opened one small eye and made it mean. The tape was off his mouth. He showed them his teeth. He was still bound hand and foot.

"He's absolutely and positively the funniest-lookin' geezer I ever saw, or I hope my mother paddles me if he ain't!" the man chortled.

The jungle glade was hot under a curtain of volcanic smoke. A fine ash was sifting down, making all the jungle gray and strange-looking. They were on the north end of the island. That end was swamp.

Doc and Renny lay near; Ham was beyond. Doc and Renny were still weirdly slack. They were not

tied yet.

Monk suddenly sat up enough to get his teeth in his tormentor's leg. Monk's mouth was big enough to accommodate a respectable portion of leg. The man who had been stamping his stomach threw back his head and honked like a goose.

"I'll kill 'im!" he screamed, and scooped up a rock.

"Lay off!" the girl said sharply.

The man gritted, "But the chief is gonna get rid of 'em anyway!"

"Wait until he gives the word!" Bess Baldwin retorted.

"Listen, sister, what's the difference if—"

The girl showed her argument. It was flat and blue and probably held seven cartridges. The man lifted his lip off his upper front teeth, but did not say anything more.

Monk squinted at the girl. That man was afraid of her.

That meant the lady must be a pretty tough egg.

Every one stood around as if waiting for something. Monk wondered what, and craned his neck. He saw a man off to one side with a portable radio outfit. It was a modern set of military type, but alongside Doc's little gadgets, as crude as an alarm clock beside a lady's wrist watch. They were waiting for something over the radio.

The girl looked at Doc. She had been doing that a lot. She punished her lower lip with small white teeth.

"Savage should have awakened by now!" she said anxiously. "I'm afraid he didn't react naturally to the gas."

"Keep your shirt on, sis," her brother said. "He's alive."

Monk let out a relieved breath. He had not been sure.

The man at the radio called, "It's coming!" and listened.

He got up, eyed the prisoners, and spat.

"The chief ain't gonna wait until he locates that other one, Johnny," the man said. "He says for us to take Monk, Ham and this one with the big fists—chief says his name is Renny—over to the lava stream. Some of the other guys will be there with that runty one, Long Tom. All four of 'em go into the lava stream."

Bess Baldwin stiffened suddenly. "What about Savage?"

"You and Buddy stick here and watch him," the man advised. "The chief says you better not let him get away."

The girl put her teeth into her lower lip, and when she took them out, little red beads appeared. She said shrilly, "I've got something to say, too, and I might as well do it now."

She ran to the radio and elbowed the operator out of her path. It was a phone outfit. She knew how it operated.

"Chief," Bess Baldwin said into the mike, "you've steered clear of killing all through your operations. You've said that nothing stirs up trouble quite as fast. Why change your ideas now?" She listened. What was said to her was not lengthy. She put the transmitter and headset down. Her face was blank.

The men picked up Monk, Ham and Renny and left.

The plane buzzed around in the sky above. Otherwise there was silence. The volcanic dust fell quietly. Doc lay motionless.

"What'd he say, sis?" Buddy Baldwin asked.

"He just—laughed," Bess Baldwin said hoarsely.

The brother dropped an arm over his sister's shoulder.

"That little toy of a man is the worst fiend who ever lived," he said. "Don't cross him."

The girl nodded. There was a sound as if something had come up fast in her throat and stopped.

Bess Baldwin still had the gun in her hand when she sank beside Doc Savage, groaning, "I can't understand what is keeping him senseless for so long."

Doc's hand had to move less than a foot to take hold of her gun.

THE girl said "Oh!"

Buddy Baldwin said "Oh-h!" got both hands over his middle and went into a squat. The gun which had hit him in the stomach hippety-hopped over the ground.

The girl looked vacantly at her hand. She did not quite realize it was her gun which had hit Buddy. Doc's throw had been something of a blur.

Buddy Baldwin had a gun somewhere in his clothing. He got his hands started toward it. Then Doc took hold of him.

Baldwin was big. He had learned self-defense in a school where men had fought for their lives. And he had no delusions about his ability. He knew he was up against it.

He got his arms around Doc, then tried to rub his bristling hair into the bronze man's face. Doc knew that one. The hair was greasy, flecked with something, some kind of powdered chemical that would blind an opponent.

Doc got his jaw around behind one of Baldwin's ears and rubbed nerve centers. Baldwin screeched in agony.

Buddy Baldwin convulsed. His shirt was silk. It tore. He got out of it, and Doc had the shirt, greasy with sunburn concoction and some of the man's red, burned hide.

The man tried to box next. He was good at that, too. They sparred. Their four fists seemed to become half a dozen fists. There came three or four small knuckle reports, then a loud one. Buddy Baldwin fell on his back.

Doc rushed. He was ordinarily more cautious. But the other had brushed his knuckles against his hair, and had put some of the chemical in Doc's eyes. Baldwin got his feet up in time.

Doc lifted, swapped his head for his feet. The kick had caught him where it should have disabled, or worse. But he landed as easily as a cat that had jumped off a porch.

Buddy Baldwin got up. He used his feet now. He knew a lot about a Scandinavian boxing game conducted only with the feet. A deadly art of defense.

Suddenly the two men were together and down. Buddy Baldwin never did know exactly what went wrong. He used his fists. And when he felt the hardness of the bronze man, a kind of unbelief came into his eyes. Sticks, dirt, leaves flew. The volcanic ash was a cloud.

The cloud settled, and Doc Savage was on Buddy Baldwin's back, with a hold that was something of a nelson, but different in a terrible way. Buddy Baldwin's skin pores began to leak.

He moaned about his mother.

The girl ran into the jungle and back. She had gotten the gun.

"Let him up!" Bess Baldwin said, and pointed the gun at Doc Savage.

Buddy Baldwin's eyes fixed on his sister.

"Don't!" he croaked. "He can kill me before he dies."

THE girl stood there. Her left arm, the one that did not support the gun, started shaking, and the shaking came across her body and down her other arm. She lowered the gun.

"Through?" Doc Savage asked. His remarkable voice was low, and there was not much hurry in his breathing.

"Through," Buddy Baldwin said hollowly.

Doc Savage released the man, but stayed a moment, considering something. Buddy Baldwin would not have died had the girl shot, not by any chance. Knowing what he had shown he did about fighting holds, there was not the slightest chance that Baldwin had not known that a shot from his sister would save him.

The Baldwins must have known what Doc was thinking. Buddy Baldwin said, very low, "She has never killed anybody."

Doc got up, walked to the girl and took her gun. She did not lift it.

Bess Baldwin looked relieved when he threw it far into the jungle without looking at it.

The bronze man knew why she looked relieved. She did not think he had noticed that there had been no bullets in the gun. She must have taken them out when she ran into the jungle after the gun.

An odd length of the line the Baldwins had used to tie the other prisoners lay where it had been cast aside. Doc got a length three feet long, tied one end to Buddy Baldwin's right wrist, ran the cord across the fellow's back and tied the other end to the other wrist. This gave enough play for Baldwin to pump his arm, necessary for fast running, but not enough for him to fight.

The two Baldwins watched the tying silently.

"Does Cadwiller Olden know what came out of that volcano?" Doc asked.

The Baldwins gaped surprise. The girl dropped a hesitant "Yes."

"Do you?"

"No."

"Keep moving," Doc said.

The quietness of the bronze man's voice alarmed the Baldwins. It was something like the purring that comes from some grenades before they explode. The Baldwins did exactly what they were told. It was slow going over the swamp ground. Vines, weeds, brush came to their necks. Mud at times nearly did the same. Birds had settled for the night and didn't want to be stirred up. They made a fuss about it. The sun had come to rest on the horizon.

Doc asked, "Why didn't Cadwiller Olden tell you what was coming out of the volcano?"

Bess Baldwin sloughed through a puddle, kicked mud at the jungle.

"It must be worth a lot. Maybe Cadwiller Olden was afraid we'd turn on him if we found out."

She ran onto what looked like a patch of sun-baked mud. Doc got her out before she sank beyond her knees.

"Cadwiller Olden knows his followers would not turn on him," Doc said. "Olden could walk the loneliest jungle with half a million in small bills, and not a man who knew his record would dare touch him."

Wonder came into Bess Baldwin's voice. "You seem to know a lot about him."

DOC did not answer that. The ground got higher, the growth less thick. The sun seemed to be gathering courage for the jump into blackness beyond the horizon. Smoke and steam over the volcano was a Gargantuan monster, often red but mostly black.

Buddy Baldwin plugged along with deep thought etched on his red face. Sweat trickled in big

jewellike drops down his oiled skin. He took long, hard breaths.

He said, finally, "Savage, how long had you been out from under the effects of that gas, back there, before you jumped us?"

"Renny and myself," Doc said, "were not gassed at all."

"Huh?"

"We plugged our nostrils and used mouth filters," the bronze man explained. "We were nearly discovered when Monk accidentally kicked dirt off one of the filters, which we had buried when the gas was gone and you had started back down the mountain. But Monk kicked dirt over it again, and no one saw."

Buddy Baldwin groaned, "I'll be damned!" with a rage more at his stupidity than anything else. He kicked savagely through brush, stamped across rocky stretches. The three could smell the lava and the volcano now.

Doc was following no trail apparently. Only making in the general direction of the lava flow.

"How do you expect to find your men this way?" Bess Baldwin asked.

Big Buddy Baldwin growled, simultaneously, "Say, how'd you know there was gonna be gas in that canyon, anyhow?"

Doc pointed at the sky ahead. "The answer to both questions."

He meant the plane. Back and forth and around and around, the craft droned, lazy as a bee that had just robbed another hive.

Buddy Baldwin snorted, "That's one of Cadwiller Olden's aviators in that crate!"

"And he will be back to see how we are getting along," Bess Baldwin added. "That will cook your goose."

Doc Savage seemed remarkably undisturbed.

Chapter 10. THE FINE HAND OF FATE

THE Fifth Wind was after the mystery thing which had come out of the volcano.

Doc Savage and his two prisoners could see that as they came nearer the lava flow. The sleek schooner was anchored almost in the geyserlike uprush of water. Sheets of the falling water at times sloshed over her decks. Her anchors were out fore and aft.

Lifelines and telephone wires were over the side. They had divers down.

Doc glanced at the girl. "You knew they would be there?"

"Yes," Bess Baldwin said. "They were headed for the spot even before we seized Monk and Ham."

The bronze man seemed puzzled about a point.

"Who advised Cadwiller Olden the nature of what came out of the volcano?" he asked.

"Cadwiller Olden is a scientific genius. I have heard him boast that he knew more than you. If he had to be a scientist to figure out what came from Ethel's Mama, he has the ability."

"He had to be more than a scientist," Doc said. "He had to have enough imagination to realize that here was something scientists have never dreamed existed."

"What is it?" Bess Baldwin asked.

Doc seemed not to hear her. She appeared about to ask again, but the inscrutability of his metallic features kept her silent.

All watched the plane, when they had time to watch anything except the ground they were traveling. The girl was gasping, weaving as she ran, about exhausted. Doc Savage picked her up, carried her as he had earlier in the day. Buddy Baldwin's tongue was showing in his mouth, and he was sweating enough to leave wet footprints.

He watched Doc Savage, fascinated by the fact that the bronze giant's breathing had not quickened much, and no perspiration had appeared.

"Damn!" Baldwin mumbled between gulps for air. "And I thought I kept in trim."

The plane continued to drone around aimlessly. But the group could see the pilot leaning over the cockpit rim. Down on the schooner, they were making flag signals, but the flier paid no attention. The flag signal was regulation marine international code. The girl could read it.

"That's strange!" Bess Baldwin gasped.

"What is?" Doc asked.

"That aviator is one of Cadwiller Olden's best men," the girl explained after hesitating. "But there he is ignoring the chief's orders."

"Under the circumstances, not so strange," Doc said.

"I don't get you?"

"The man really in control of that plane," Doc told her, "is one of my associates, Johnny."

WILLIAM HARPER LITTLEJOHN, more often termed Johnny, was in control of the plane, but there was some doubt how long the status would continue. Johnny had the muzzle of a supermachine pistol against the pilot's head.

Johnny was serious. He was using little words.

"Get on that radio and tell your boss that you're all right and that everything is fine!" he ordered.

"Tell 'im yourself, you bonebag!" the pilot snarled.

The flier was a man who looked as if he had grown in the foot half of a coffin. He had the shape and color. Some one with a sharp knife had once relieved him of the end of his nose.

"Now don't be coy," Johnny advised gently. "They'd know my voice. Why do you think I brought you along, after I grabbed you when you landed for gasoline a couple of hours ago?"

"Squirrel fodder to you!" the man sneered.

The accident to his nose gave his words a gander tone.

"You've been nice right along," Johnny reminded. "You sat still while I kept an eye on what is happening below, and particularly where Monk, Ham and Renny are being taken, so I can tell Doc. Why get stubborn all of a sudden?"

"Gr-r-r!"

said the pilot.

He was hurting his eyes looking at the machine pistol, the muzzle of which Johnny kept in his ear.

Johnny glanced over the side. The plane was low enough to furnish a ringside seat for what was happening on the ground.

The gang with Renny, Monk and Ham was standing on the side of the lava river, waiting.

Another gang dragging Long Tom were coming up from where a boat had landed them off the schooner. Johnny could not have perspired in an oven, or he would have sweat now. He could see Doc, and the bronze man would have to cover ground fast to get to the lava stream in time.

The gaunt geologist frowned at the cowl of the plane. A machine gun was mounted there, but he did not know if it was in working order. There was no ammo drum in it. He poked in a pocket in the cockpit, well forward, at the same time keeping his gun near the pilot's head.

Johnny was actually doing the flying, but the ship was a one-seater, and he sat side by side with his prisoner.

The pocket held ammo drums. Agreeably surprised, Johnny picked one out, stood erect, and reached forward to clip the drum into the breech mechanism of the synchronized machine gun. The arrangement was not the best in the world.

The captive flier gave the rudder a violent kick. The plane moved enough to throw Johnny off balance. The flier kicked the machine pistol from its position. Johnny hit him over the head, but not nearly as hard as he would have liked to. The pilot bent down and took a bite at Johnny's right leg.

"I'll be superamalgamated!" Johnny said painfully. It was the one big word he could always think of in excitement.

He hit the pilot again. The fellow squawked, twisted, and got down in the bottom of the cockpit to protect himself. Johnny thumbed at the machine pistol's safety. He hadn't wanted to kill anybody, and had kept it there. About that time the pilot kicked him with both feet.

JOHNNY went flying out of the cockpit. He did not leave the ship, but came down astride the fuselage, a yard or so aft of the cockpit rim. He reached, but before he could get .the rim he slid back toward the tail. He slithered around and nearly fell off. It was worse than riding a Tibetan yak, Johnny's worst experience in steeds up to that moment.

He was glad when the tail of the plane jabbed his spine. He had something to hold onto. He had not lost the machine pistol, but that was because it was fastened to his neck with a lanyard in the fashion affected by Northwest Mounted policemen. He grabbed it.

The pilot popped his head out of the cockpit. He had the fire extinguisher. He made a bull's-eye. Johnny rocked in pain, fell across the stabilizer, pawed madly, then got the bright idea of hitting the fabric with his fist. For a miracle, it split. He took hold of a strut.

The control wires for that side were rubbing his face. Johnny freed one hand, grabbed them, and tried to fly the plane. He had no satisfying luck, but it gave the pilot an idea. He opened the throttle, grabbed the stick, stamped the rudder, and the plane began to act as if there was a hawk after it.

Johnny saw the ground and sky and volcano at unexpected places, then rather lost track. It could not have been more than a minute later when he got flipped off in space.

About that time, he was very glad indeed that he was wearing the pilot's parachute.

Johnny grabbed his machine pistol as soon as he got back the breath which the opening parachute had shocked out of him. He fumbled in a coat pocket for a different ammo drum for the weapon, one charged with explosive bullets.

Doc had perfected the explosives; one of them might sink a battleship, if placed carefully enough, and half a dozen could do it, with practically no care at all.

Johnny tried a shot for range. It hit in the lava stream, and there was suddenly a gap in the lava that men could have gone through if they ran fast enough. Rocks rolled around on the ground for a hundred feet in every direction.

The men who held Monk, Ham and Renny picked themselves up and hunted for the palm trees with the thickest tops.

Johnny twisted around and dug a skyscraper basement ahead of the crowd which had Long Tom.

There was a sewing-machine noise. Johnny looked up. He could see a row of red dusk light across

the top of the parachute. About that time the plane whooped past. Its slipstream nudged the parachute around. The pilot reached up leeringly and patted the iron rump of his machine gun. Then he banked the plane up to come back.

Johnny gathered an armful of the 'chute shrouds on one side and hauled them down. The 'chute didn't quite turn itself inside out, although there were times when that looked probable. The ground came up, and the plane did not get close enough in two dives to put its bullets nearer than listening distance, and Johnny let the shrouds loose in time to fill the 'chute and land much harder than he had expected.

"Johnny! You all right?"

It was Doc Savage's voice. Close. Johnny had been a bit too busy to note where he was landing in relation to the bronze man. But he was pleased. He waited long enough to think up a big word for an answer.

"Appropinquity enjubilating!" he shouted.

His delight had evaporated by the time Doc arrived with the two prisoners. Johnny looked sheepish.

"What happened?" Doc asked.

"I got took like a goop, right when things were in a jam!" Johnny muttered. He rarely used slang.

"Nonsense," Doc said quietly. "You did excellent work from the instant you started to follow the young lady here."

Bess Baldwin jumped, scowled at Johnny, and yelled, "He followed me?"

"From the time you left us with the excuse of going for a camera until you got aboard the Fifth Wind," Doc told her.

"But why?" she shrilled.

"Doc's idea," Johnny told her.

Bess Baldwin stared at Doc. "But how did I give myself away?"

"With your story about the mysterious, jellylike monster you saw in the side canyon," Doc told her.

"That was a lie, of course," she said. "Cadwiller Olden made it up for me. But what was wrong with it?"

"Plenty," Doc said. "The thing which came out of the volcano is certainly no such a creature as you described."

Johnny exploded, "Doc! You know what the thing is?"

Doc's reply was, "We had better see what we can do for our friends."

Bullets began to come through the jungle. Some made clean singings, but most of them zip-zapped—that was about the sound—from tree to tree. And the plane came down with noise in its nose and one red eye that was a firing machine gun.

THERE is one thing about a cowl-fixed machine gun on a plane. After its bullets go marching past, you know you have a moment. The plane has to turn around and come back.

Doc used the interval to get every one into better cover.

Johnny told the girl, "The fact that you're with us doesn't seem to make much difference to your friend up there."

"Did you expect it to?"

Savage said briskly, "Johnny, have you any ammo drum of those smokescreen bullets for your machine pistol?"

Johnny produced the drum. It was small. The machine pistol bullets were small, not much larger than .22 cartridges, although they could not in any way be compared to ordinary ammunition of that caliber.

Johnny clipped the drum in place of the explosives, swung the gun around and let it moan. The slugs hit the ground and let loose their chemical compound which turned into black smoke. One, two, or a dozen might not have done much, but a hundred or so helped out the approaching night materially.

Doc changed their position.

The plane came down, riveted the ground full of bullets where the party had been, and went up again with the moan of a baffled spook.

"He'll play heck hitting us in this smoke," said Buddy Baldwin.

The pilot must have thought likewise. He did not come back.

"Come on," Doc said.

The group ran toward the lava stream. The gang there had stopped driving rifle lead into the jungle at random.

"They're waiting for us," Johnny hazarded.

They weren't. Both of Cadwiller Olden's gangs were heading for the sea, dragging their prisoners, who were now doing all they could to delay the flight.

"Now that's queer," muttered Buddy Baldwin. "The chief gave 'em orders to croak them prisoners.

And now they ain't. They must have gotten new ones."

THE two gangs with their prisoners must have received their new orders by radio from the schooner, for Doc and Johnny and the two Baldwins came upon radio sets of the field military type lying where the fleeing men had thrown them.

The schooner was excitement itself. The plane catapult put its nose over the side and spat off a plane with a noisy gush of smoke. It turned around, booms whirred and blocks yowled, and the other plane was on the catapult in time that would have made a navy catapult crew hide their faces. The second plane was shot into the air, too.

Both plane pilots warmed their guns. These held demolition cartridges, and they dug holes, tore up trees and made it sound like another earthquake.

When the planes went overhead, the pilots got rid of several bombs, most of them gas, but enough of them fragmentation to make the neighborhood sound as if it had a piccolo orchestra.

Doc's metallic features showed no emotion about that time, but Johnny looked as if he were glad they had turned loose plenty of smoke from the machine pistol and were off to the right, where the planes did not expect them to be.

The party raced for the cliff.

It was getting much darker, and the smoke from Johnny's special cartridges had drifted upward, helping it along.

The planes found them, and the group had to work their smoke cartridge trick again. Twice, rather. The first time the pilots were not deceived, and things would have ended there, only a ditch was handy. They were more fortunate the second try.

"Smoke about gone!" Johnny groaned.

"Even money," Buddy Baldwin said, "that by this time to-morrow the great Doc Savage and his friends are only a bunch of epitaphs on some tombstones!"

Chapter 11. THE THING THAT LEFT

ONE of the pilots upstairs thought he saw Doc's party up on the mountain. Both planes took themselves and their noise up there.

Sound like several coffee grinders working hard remained. It came from the sea below the cliff. Men were shouting and swearing at men who swore back at them.

"They've reached the cliff!" Doc said sharply. "Stay here! Johnny, watch these two!"

Johnny did not want to watch anybody. He had had enough fight to want more. But before he could object, the bronze man was gone, headed for the cliff.

The bronze man got in the open for speed, taking a chance on the planes sighting him, which was not likely, as dark as it was now.

His speed now was prodigious, and for once there was an expression on his face. Grimness. He had not been doing so well. The desire to keep the Baldwins in hand had slowed his pursuit of the gang with Monk, Ham and Renny.

Doc had planned on Johnny in the plane keeping track of them, advising their location, stepping in to scatter them if they actually tried to throw the prisoners into the lava. But fate had set in. Doc reached the cliff and looked over. It was no smooth wall of a cliff. There were plenty of places to get down.

The two gangs with their prisoners had gotten down and were already in the fast boats with engines that sounded like coffee grinders. The boats got organized and headed for the schooner. The tiny gem of a man, Cadwiller Olden, seemed to be mentally ambidextrous to the extent that he could direct two entirely different operations at the same time. More men aboard the boat had been carrying on the diving operations as if all were peaceful.

They were now lowering boxes overside in a sling. Doc Savage had eyes phenomenally developed by scientific training, perfectly ordinary eyes to start with, but remarkable now. He studied the boxes.

Suddenly, he lifted his voice.

"Ahoy, the Fifth Wind!" he called.

The words were thunder of a kind, and when the echoes went to sleep, everything was silent down on the water. The coffee-grinder motors had even been throttled to a pop now and then.

"Do not set off any explosive near that thing on the bottom!"

They heard that on the schooner, and it must have been half a mile away.

There was an interval of silence.

A voice called from the schooner. The words did not carry to Doc, and big-fisted, big-voiced Renny relayed, probably voluntarily.

"They say for you to take a big running jump from where you're standing, Doc!" Renny thundered.

"Setting off a blast near the thing may cause it to wipe us all out!"

They heard that on the schooner, too. Renny relayed the answer.

"Same thing as before!" he boomed. "And they say they're gonna separate it in pieces, as it's in too big a lump now to take aboard."

There was no need of more shouting. The men on the ship were going to set off the blast. The schooner winches were already gnashing the anchor chains, dragging them up. Breeze and tide moved the schooner slowly away from the spot where the geyser of water played steadily above the sea.

In the unholy red of volcanic twilight, the geyser looked eerie, ominous. The two planes came droning down to hunt for Doc Savage's voice. Johnny, from nearby, said, "I figured it was all right to come down here." The two Baldwins did not say anything. On the schooner, they dipped a flag. A man in a launch, with a blasting generator between his feet, bent over briskly with the generator treadle. The ocean went up.

IT was cataclysmic, that which happened. The geyser fell back and met the sea rising, and the sea continued. The sea did not reach the sky, or even the clouds, but it must have lifted all of two hundred feet. The wave, when it reached the cliff, smacked almost to the top, and tons of spray came down around Doc, Johnny and the two Baldwins.

It was impossible to see exactly what was happening. There was a torrent of spray, of water shooting high, and along with that a gurgling and roaring that might have been a score of Niagaras flowing by spurts. It continued for seconds, minutes. The big noise of the planes became small and almost lost in the watery bedlam.

A second tidal wave hit the cliff. Doc Savage grabbed Johnny as water dragged him toward the edge. Buddy Baldwin held his sister with one hand, a bush with the other. The threshing and gurgling kept on, and every one of them was struck with the likeness to a fantastic monster floundering in torment.

"I'll be superamalgamated if I don't think we'd better back away!" Johnny gulped. "Supposin' the thing gets up here, or somethin'!"

It took a major calamity to make Johnny slur his words.

Then there was a strange sound. Johnny never forgot. It was as if the cork had been pulled out of the world, and the innards had come flying out. There was a scream. Those in Paris heard such sounds when a Big Bertha turned loose.

The big moan went away, infinitely far away. It left behind echoes that came whining back from the bosom of Ethel's Mama in succeeding peals that got rapidly weaker.

The sea finally settled down. Mist drifted slowly away.

On the top of the water was floating timbers, boards and some arms that stuck up through the foam and waved.

The stern of the schooner was sticking out. The ship had capsized, and the part that showed was reminiscent of a big turtle showing its head. When it went out of sight, it was as if the turtle had seen something that demanded a cautious retreat.

Some of the coffee-grinder boat engines were still going.

THE boats—they were fast tenders off the schooner—skipped around picking up the men in the water. The planes—they were seaplanes—dipped down and tried to land and help. One of them stubbed its float on a wave and shed both its wings and the pilot. No one seemed to care about any more shooting. Johnny lay on the cliff brink. He groaned and muttered; he said words that nobody who knew him would have thought he knew, words that grew in no dictionary. He was mad at his eyes because they did not have enough catlike quality to penetrate the murk of the night.

"I can't tell!" he moaned. "I can't tell!"

He meant that he couldn't tell if Renny, Monk, Ham and Long Tom had died.

"Renny!"

Doc thundered. No answer.

"Long Tom!"

"Monk!"

"Ham!"

No answer from the boats, which had finished their looking around, and with the remaining plane headed up the shore for Fan Coral City.

"We can head them off!" Johnny gasped.

He had spoken without enough thought. The jungle was tough going. The boats beat them.

Two big planes were missing from Fan Coral Harbor when they got there. Everybody had thought those planes had brought newspaper correspondents and motion picture photographers. They had borne the names of a world-wide news agency and a big Hollywood concern. But sign painters can be hired almost anywhere, and the planes had left in too great a hurry.

Doc Savage found the remaining small plane used by Cadwiler Olden's fliers, but nobody was around.

The bronze man went to the radio station.

The world began to keep its eyes open for two sea-air giants—each could lift forty passengers and a pay load—which bore the name of a world-wide news agency and a great motion picture concern.

The pig, Habeas, and the ape, Chemistry, came wandering furtively into Fan Coral City that night.

The two animals were behaving queerly. Every one noticed it. The beasts kept looking at the eastern sky.

It was into the eastern sky that the roaring thing from the volcano had gone.

Chapter 12. STRANGE STORIES

ETHEL'S MAMA had been in the eyes of the world rather prominently, and what had finally happened was somewhat in the nature of a blinding flash which caused the newspaper-reading and radio-listening public of all nations to sit back, blink its eyes—and wonder who was crazy. Any number of persons on Fan Coral Island had seen the commotion that had resulted in the sinking of the schooner. The uproar of fighting could not fail to draw attention, although just what it was all about, practically no one could figure.

Doc Savage was on the island, almost every one heard, and the remarkable man of bronze was involved in the affray on the edge of the cliff. Doc Savage's reputation had reached almost every ear on Fan Coral Island in the past, and people knew the things he was involved in were likely to be big and exciting.

But when newspapermen—the legitimate ones—went looking for Doc Savage, they found he had disappeared, and along with him his gaunt geologist aid, Johnny, as well as two other persons, a big sunburned man and a pretty and capable-looking girl, neither of whom any one recognized by name. With them had gone the two pets.

Since nobody found Doc, and no one was absolutely certain there really had been a fight, the fray did not appear in print except the statement that, "reports of an affray of some kind prior to the strange disturbance which wiped out the schooner have not been corroborated."

The phenomenon of something coming out of the sea and whistling away through the sky was something that did get a lot of publicity. It was very mysterious, and enough persons had heard it to assure that there really had been such a happening.

A number of additional scientists came to Fan Coral Island to investigate.

They made a surprising discovery. Ethel's Mama had stopped erupting. The lava no longer flowed, decreasing amounts of smoke and steam appeared, and all was getting serene.

Several scientists mentioned that the object which had whistled through the sky might have had a connection with the cessation of the eruption. But when they were pressed for a definite reason why, they had none.

Divers found a disturbed place on the bottom of the sea, where explosive might have gone off, but nothing else.

The divers did bring up several bodies, and the crabs and fish had left enough of some of them to allow identification. There was some surprise when it was learned the victims had been most noted criminals.

What the world did not know or discuss was that the naval forces and land police of a number of nations had been keeping a sharp lookout for two big seaplanes, one bearing the name of a news agency, the other that of a cinema concern.

What even the naval and civil authorities did not know was that probably one of the greatest collaborations in history had been effected between private detective agencies all over the globe. The private sleuths were also looking for the planes, for Cadwiler Olden, the amazing midget, for a fake Snowball Eagan, and for four aids of Doc Savage nicknamed Monk, Ham, Renny, and Long Tom. The man in charge of this collaboration of private detective agencies knocked on the door of an eighty-sixth floor suite in a New York skyscraper two weeks later.

The door bore the name, "Clark Savage, Jr.," in small letters. Clark Savage, Jr., was Doc Savage.

WHEN he was seated in a large reception room furnished with expensive leather chairs, a remarkable inlaid table and an enormous safe, the chief of the private detective organization spoke. "I received your word that you had reached New York, and I am here to report," he said.

"Go ahead," Doc Savage directed.

"Every airport and every possible landing point has been covered as well as we could," the man said. "I get daily, and often hourly, reports from the Orient, Australia, Africa, Mexico, and almost everywhere else. We have watched the trains, the airways, the automobile highways, steamships and transoceanic dirigibles. This has cost you approximately half a million dollars already. It is probably the most thorough and expensive detective job ever attempted. And it hasn't accomplished a damn thing!"

"Nothing?"

"Absolutely nothing!"

"Keep at it," Doc Savage said.

The fellow who had organized the private detective collaboration swallowed twice. He looked incredulous.

"It's going to cost almost a hundred thousand dollars a day," he said.

"The lives of four of my friends may be at stake," Doc Savage said quietly. "And if that fellow Cadwiler Olden is not stopped, it is going to cost the world a good deal more than a hundred thousand a day."

The man nodded and got to his feet. "And what about the other thing?"

"You wish to know if the private detectives are to keep on watching for some trace of the thing

which flew out of the sea at Fan Coral Island?"

"Exactly," Doc replied.

The head of detectives nodded again. "There has been only one report on that, and it was nothing but a rumor. A sheepherder says he and his sheep were knocked every which way by something that went past a mountain with a roaring noise. The thing seemed to come down, then go up again."

"That was in Wyoming," Doc said.

"It was."

"Keep looking," Doc directed quietly.

The visitor stumbled out, somewhat dazed by the presence of an individual who could spend that much money looking for four friends, a midget, and something in the sky that made a moaning noise and knocked things around.

JOHNNY came into the reception room after the visitor had gone. Johnny, who had always looked as if he couldn't possibly lose any weight, had nevertheless lost some. And he had not used a big word since they had left Fan Coral Island secretly in Doc's big private seaplane which had been lying in a remote cove on the island.

He carried a large looseleaf notebook.

"Look here," he said wonderingly. "I've been going through this notebook you handed me. It's full of dope on Cadwiller Olden."

"We try to keep a file on all the leading crooks," Doc reminded.

"I know, but this was started all of two years ago. And it shows how, step by step, and with remarkable genius, Cadwiller Olden has progressed until to-day he is probably the most dangerous criminal alive. It gives lists of his known followers, and their pictures, some of them. And look at this!"

Johnny held the book open, disclosing a pair of pictures.

"Bess Baldwin and her brother!" the gaunt geologist exclaimed. "You knew from the very instant that she appeared just who she was and what she was probably up to!"

Doc's silence admitted that fact.

"Another thing"--Johnny blew his nose--"since we've been back, you sent the Baldwins away somewhere. Why, I don't know. What's the idea?"

"Cadwiller Olden," said Doc Savage, "is a clever man. I wouldn't put it beyond him to make an attempt to rescue the Baldwins. For the present I have had them removed somewhere where even Olden cannot find them. You will soon see them again."

Johnny, curious, attempted some more questions, but the bronze man shut up like a clam. So Johnny went back to the book. He shook it. "There's a picture and description of the Fifth Wind here. There's even a plan of her furnished by the shipyard which made her over to suit Cadwiller Olden's ideas. So you knew she was the midget's boat."

"For a year," Doc said.

"Now I begin to see why we went to Fan Coral Island so secretly. Now I see. Sure! You were going after Cadwiller Olden. You saw in the newspapers that his ship had turned up in the harbor at Fan Coral. You figured he was up to something."

"Not up to something," Doc corrected. "The seismograph records of the initial eruption of Ethel's Mama show--"

"I never could see anything strange about those records," Johnny interposed.

"The earthquake record was perfectly normal," Doc said. "But there was no earthquake on Fan Coral Island of any great violence. An earthquake of the strength of the one registered in Harvard would have shook things up briskly on Fan Coral Island. It was the Fan Coral shock which was registered. The time proves that.

"We had, therefore, a shock which was not violent, but which registered as a violent one. That is easily explained. An ordinary earthquake is usually a slippage of subterranean strata. You stand on a platform and if it is jerked up and down, you still keep your feet, but if it is jerked sidewise, you upset. Therefore the disturbance was a thrusting of forces rather than a slippage disturbance."

"Now we're getting some place," Johnny said. "But I still don't see why the fact that the earth jumped up and down instead of slipped was remarkable enough to send us flying halfway around the world to Fan--"

The singing of the telephone annunciator cut in. The telephone was connected to a loud-speaker and microphone instead of the conventional instrument. Doc clicked the switch, said, "Savage," and a voice came out of the speaker.

"This is important," it said.

"Go ahead," Doc directed.

"This is a private detective stationed to watch the news dispatches handled by the bureau office of the Associated Press in St. Louis," said the voice, sounding as if it were coming over a long-distance telephone wire. "I think we have something here that you should be informed about."

"Let's have it."

"It is a dispatch from the small town of Bagnell, in the Missouri Ozarks, near the Lake of the Ozarks," said the informant. "The story is about a hillbilly they had to put in jail down there."

"Get to the point," Doc requested.

There was a brief pause, during which the telephone loudspeaker seemed to be reproducing the crackling of paper.

"I'm reading the item again," the detective said. "It seems that this hillbilly was named Snig Johnson, and he was put in jail because he went around claiming he was a reincarnation of Moses." "Moses?"

"That's what it says here in the story. It says this Snig Johnson went down the main street of Bagnell yelling, 'I stretched out my right hand and the waters were divided, a wall unto my right hand and unto my left, and I could lead the children of Israel into the midst of the water upon the dry ground.' The story goes on to say he was looking for an Israelite to lead, only they caught him before he found one and put him in the hoosegow."

"Thank you," Doc said.

The bronze man broke the connection, and immediately had the long-distance operator get him the marshal at Bagnell. But it seemed "Snig" Johnson was in the county jail at a town called Tuscumbia. Doc got Tuscumbia. There was some argument, and he got Snig Johnson on the phone.

Snig Johnson did not sound as if he thought himself another Moses.

"Listen, mister, they got me all wrong," he complained. "I had maybe had a nip or two of this Ozark panther sweat. I remember I was feelin' right good. You know how it is. I figured I'd sorta tell 'em about it, an' maybe kid 'em a little. But hell! They got me all wrong. They think I'm bats. An' now they got me in the calaboose, an' this dang sheriff has ordered a strait-jacket from Jeff City."

"What gave you the idea of the water like unto a wall on your left hand and on your right?" Doc asked.

"It's a fact, dang it!"

"Tell me about it."

"You joshin' me, mister?"

"Not a bit. This is very important."

"All right. I've heard about you, Doc Savage. I'm a farmer. Leastways, I raise me a tomato now an' then, when them dang red oak hills ain't too dry or too wet. Mostly I do a business in redbone foxhounds. I train pups for fellers all over Missouri. An' I got the best durn dogs in Missouri or Arkansas, and—"

"We were talking about divided waters," Doc reminded.

"Who said we wasn't? Day 'fore yesterday, mister, I had Old Blow—he's my best dog—out with some green pups. Old Blow is dang good, because he'll pile right onto them pups for runnin' rabbits an' barkin' at skunks an' things. Anyhow, we come to a neck of the lake—"

"What lake?"

"Quit interruptin' me. Lake of the Ozarks. We come to this neck of the lake, an' I hope my foxhounds run rabbits forever if there wasn't the waters, divided as you please. I didn't divide 'em. They was already divided, an' Moses couldn't 'a' done a better job.

"They're still divided, or was the next mornin' when I went down there to see if I was crazy. The dang lake has just got a path in it where there ain't no water, an' no reason for there not bein' any, except maybe the heck of a wind that's blowin' around there."

"What is the exact location?"

"One mile north of my farm."

"Thank you," Doc said.

"Wait a minute, mister! I read somewhere that you go around helpin' fellers out of trouble. You talkin' to one right now that's in some trouble."

"We'll see what we can do," Doc said.

He hung up. Johnny looked excited. "We'll head for Lake of the Ozarks at once!" he exclaimed. Then he wheeled.

THE instant he turned, Johnny's eyes popped, and he seemed to be having inner trouble. He choked explosively.

The bad Baldwins, Buddy and his sister Bess, were standing just inside the door.

Johnny yelled, "How come you're running around loose? How much of that did you hear?"

Buddy Baldwin said, "We were shoved in here a minute ago by the men you have had guardin' us, the private detectives. We ain't heard nothin'."

Doc Savage said, "Put out your hands."

The two Baldwins—Johnny had discovered they were known as the "Bad Baldwins" when he read the record book—extended their wrists. Doc clicked on handcuffs.

That was another puzzler. Doc rarely used handcuffs. He had chemical concoctions which kept prisoners helpless without harming them. The potions had the advantage that only Doc could erase their effects with another chemical mixture, so that if the captives' pals rescued them, they were still nothing better than living mummies.

"Stay here," Doc suggested to Johnny. "You might entertain yourself by getting more familiar with Cadwiller Olden's record."

Johnny nodded. But it would not be entertainment. What he had already read about Cadwiller Olden's methods had almost curled Johnny's hair.

Doc Savage and the two Bad Baldwins went outside, the Baldwins handcuffed. Johnny held the door open until he heard the elevator depart with the trio, then went back and picked up the record book. Johnny had ceased being surprised at the fact that Doc had secured, long before the present trouble started, a complete line on Cadwiller Olden. Doc had been battling evildoers for some time, his methods phenomenally successful, and not because of luck.

Doc overlooked no possible angle of preparation. He had arranged access to the fingerprint and picture files of police departments all over the world, and he employed detective agencies continually.

A shot interrupted Johnny's musings. He leaped to the window. One glance out and he made a croaking sound of horror.

Doc maintained a private speed elevator. It took Johnny down to the street level almost as fast as a stone would have fallen. He dived out to the street.

Doc Savage lay on his back on the sidewalk. A pool of scarlet leakage was growing under the bronze man's head.

The two Bad Baldwins were nowhere in view.

Chapter 13. THE TRAIL AGAIN

TWO fat men crawled out from under an automobile where they had dived for refuge. They looked like brothers.

"A man and a woman!" one gasped.

"Handcuffed!" bleated the other.

"The man drew a gun!"

"The woman, too!"

"They shot that man!"

"It's Doc Savage! Doc Savage is dead!"

Johnny had seen crowds gather in a hurry, but this time it was a record. They could not have arrived more swiftly if they had been shot out of a shotgun. There was a radio police car, two patrolmen, an ambulance, another police car, and a taxicab driver got excited and ran into a lamp post.

Officials and excited persons ran up and tried to seize Doc Savage and help move him. One souvenir-hunting maniac whipped out a penknife and would have cut a piece off the end of Doc's necktie if Johnny had not kicked him where it would discourage him the most.

Police ran around madly, grabbing people at random and handcuffing them, not because they thought they were guilty, but because they wanted witnesses. Johnny shouted descriptions of the Baldwins, howled orders to take Doc up to the skyscraper headquarters instead of the hospital, and squawled at the mob to get back and give the bronze man air.

Six persons tried to carry Doc when two could have done the job better. A procession of fire apparatus began to arrive for no apparent reason, shaking the streets and deafening every one. In the midst of the excitement, Doc Savage said, "If no one minds, I'll get up under my own power." His voice was weak.

Twenty minutes later, when Johnny had chased the last newspaper reporter out of the skyscraper reception room with a chair, he slammed the door shut, panting, and eyed Doc reproachfully.

"You shouldn't have let those newshounds have the story!" he said.

"But the Baldwins escaped from me," Doc said. "Broadcasting their pictures and descriptions will help in apprehending them."

Johnny groaned. "It'll give all the crooks the idea that you aren't so hot, after all. You know very well we scare a lot of weak-kneed bad actors into turning as straight as a string, just with our reputation."

Doc said nothing.

Johnny took a prowl around the place as a matter of course. The establishment consisted of a library of enormous size stocked exclusively with ponderous scientific works, and a laboratory which was probably one of the most fully equipped for advanced research.

As Johnny had expected, he found a reporter who had hidden in the laboratory to get pictures and some exclusive angle on the story. The scribe made the door just ahead of Johnny's toe. Johnny was getting crochety.

"You're not hurt bad, you're sure, Doc?" he demanded anxiously.

"I can navigate," the bronze man said.

"Does this change things? Are we still heading for the Ozarks?"

"We are."

THERE was a police dragnet out for the Bad Baldwins. Every cop in town was looking for a slender, blue-eyed girl and a big man who was sunburned.

Two colored people, a man and a woman, attracted no attention strolling down a Harlem street. The lady was bent and white-haired, and the old fellow with her was also stooped, and as bald as an

elephant's tusk. Both carried canes. The man had a white cloth wrapped around his face in the manner of one who has a toothache.

They shuffled up to the policeman on a corner and asked him to recommend a good dentist. There was a sign in the middle of the block:

SAM

SPECIALIST OF TEETH

"I guess he's all right," the cop said.

The two old darkeys mounted a stairway and found themselves in a prosperous-looking office. They seemed a little confused, and the old man uneasy. A neat colored girl asked them what could be done for them.

"Pap's got hisself an ache, missy," the old lady said.

The dentist saw them in his private room. He was a lean, bald colored fellow who looked as if he might have a little wolf in his ancestry.

"What can I do for you?" he asked crisply.

The old colored lady held the palm of one hand out, opened and closed the fingers three times, then crossed the two longest fingers.

The dentist got up and closed the door.

"All right," he said. "I half expected you would show up here."

"You know us?" the old lady asked.

"Yeah, but not if I hadn't been expecting you. You're the Bad Baldwins."

The Bad Baldwins nodded. "This disguise won't serve forever," Buddy said. "We want to contact Cadwiller Olden."

"Suppose Olden should prefer your keeping under cover?" the other suggested.

"We have important information for him."

The dentist seemed to be only an intermediary, a cog in the machine of crime which had been built by the tiny, evil genius, Cadwiller Olden.

Removing his white smock, the dentist got his street coat and donned it, and said, "Come with me."

His destination was a rooming house which did not seem to do much business. He led the way to a room on the top floor. Four large trunks stood around the wall. They were empty. What they had held was assembled in the middle of the room. It was a compact beam wave radio transmitter of considerable power.

THE dentist worked with the control knobs a while, getting the wave length.

"We move the station occasionally," he said. "Even if there is practically no chance of locating it with a direction finder such as the Department of Commerce Inspectors use."

Finally, after giving some of the passwords, Cadwiller Olden's small voice said, "Well?"

"We got away from Doc Savage," Buddy Baldwin said.

"I know," Cadwiller Olden chuckled. "I just heard it broadcast in a news report. You're sure it's not a trick? Maybe Savage let you escape."

"Hell, no! I think we killed him."

"You didn't. The news broadcast said he was still alive."

"Damn the luck!" Buddy Baldwin snarled. "Well, anyway, we got hot stuff for you."

"Yes?"

"Doc Savage knows the location of Repel."

"Of what?"

"Of Repel!" Buddy Baldwin laughed grimly. "The thing that came out of the volcano."

"So do I."

"You what?"

"The location. I know it. I have known it since yesterday."

"I'll be damned!"

"Furthermore, I have almost succeeded in securing it. It is a matter of hours."

Buddy Baldwin exploded, "It's in the Lake of the Ozarks in Missouri!"

"That is right."

"Can you get it before Doc Savage arrives?"

"Possibly. And when Savage does arrive, he will find some elaborate arrangements to receive him,"

Cadwiller Olden said grimly.

There was a brief and uncomfortable pause.

"What do you want us to do?" Buddy Baldwin asked.

"My agent will explain how you may secure a plane," replied Cadwiller Olden. "You will fly immediately to my base at Lake of the Ozarks. The agent will mark the location of the base."

"We're off," grunted Buddy Baldwin. "Oh, say! What about Doc Savage's four friends?"

"I have them here in the Ozarks," said Cadwiller Olden. "I should have gotten rid of them. I have not thought it advisable to use them as bait for a trap for Savage, which was my first idea."

"That would be dangerous," Buddy Baldwin agreed. "Doc Savage has been hoping for that. Others have tried the trick before, with the result that the bronze man used the contact to trail down his

friends and effect a rescue."

Cadwiller Olden snapped, "We are already preparing to dispose of the prisoners!"

Chapter 14. THE MASTER CROOK'S TOUCH

TUSCUMBIA was a Missouri county seat town, built to live in rather than to get rich in. The jail evidently didn't do much business.

The sheriff was in his office, talking to himself and looking at the new strait-jacket.

"You won't get a heck of a lot more out of Snig Johnson," he said.

"Why?" Doc inquired.

"Him and a bootlegger got together through the jail window."

Doc went in to see Snig Johnson. Johnson was long and hard as rails and as brown as the spots on one of his redbone foxhounds.

"Yipee!" he said. "Hell wish everything! I'm a bird, jush a bird in a gildesh cage!"

"I can give him some stuff that will sober him up so quick he will think lightning struck him," Doc said.

"Don't wanna get shruck by nothin'," Snig Johnson yelled amiably. "Wanna live in their shail. Like the durn place. Swell shail-sha-shail-hell-calaboose."

The sheriff said, "I think he is afraid he is going crazy."

"If you sheen shome waters divided, what'd you shink?" Snig Johnson asked, not without some logic.

"Let him alone," Doc said. "Do you know the location of his farm?"

"Sure. It's down in the next county, Camden. You stop at Linn Creek, and they can tell you."

Doc Savage thanked the sheriff. The bronze man and Johnny went back to their plane, which was the center of a group of small boys in a cow pasture not far from town.

The small boys had evidently had experience with an aviator of temper, because four of them ran when they saw Doc and Johnny returning. The others stuck around and popped their eyes at the giant bronze man.

"How many of you are going to be aviators when you grow up?" Doc asked them pleasantly.

Naturally, they all were. They found their tongues.

"Pete was climbin' all over your plane, mister," one announced. "We told him he'd better not do that, but he said he wasn't afraid of you."

"Who is Pete?" Doc asked idly.

"He ran away."

Doc got into the plane with Johnny and took his seat in the control compartment. Modern airliners have a multitude of controls, but the instrument panels on this ship made them seem as simple as those on an automobile dashboard. There were dials overhead, on the sides, the floor, and in front where there were no windows.

Doc's flake-gold eyes drifted over them, watching needles crawl and jiggle as the big motors warmed. Suddenly he whipped into motion.

Doc seized Johnny, lunged backward, and dived out of the plane.

"Run!" he thundered.

There was something in his voice that made every one run.

DOC SAVAGE separated from Johnny, heading for a patch of red oak brush on the far side of the pasture. He hauled out from under his coat a sack of tan stuff which, when he pulled it over his head, fitted snugly, with unexpectedly thick goggle lenses at the eyes, and skirts long enough to hang down over the chest. It was a bulletproof hood, with an arrangement of plates that protected the skull.

There was an odd noise, a big sound as if a giant fruit had burst. The fleeing kids began to yell excitedly. Doc switched a glance back. The plane had grown a hairy red coat of flames and shed some of it onto the ground. The parts of the wings where the gas tanks had been were split wide.

A three-strand barbed-wire fence shut the red oak patch off from the pasture. Doc took it with hurdling stride. The brush did not furnish very effective cover above shoulder height. He kept down. A motor cleared its iron throat noisily on the other side of the red oaks. It settled down to business, sinking its power into gears with a clash, and taking itself away with the velocity and violence of a scared coyote. A motor cycle going away.

Doc reached a road through the brush, a road ground into hazel brush by the weight of wheels alone, and never graded. But it was a road, and the motor cycle had taken everything but its noise away. There was no other conveyance in sight.

Doc stood on the edge of the road while a disturbed jaybird got rid of opinions on the top branch of an adjacent hickory tree. His flake-gold eyes were busy.

"All right," the bronze man said without excitement, "come on out."

Three small boys came sidling out of the brush. They had the look of fellows who had unexpectedly found themselves in a melon patch with the owner, without in the least wanting to be there.

"It was Pete," one said.

"Pete had a motor cycle," volunteered another hesitantly.

Doc Savage smiled to quiet them, to loosen up their conversation.

"Who is Pete?" he asked.

They shook their heads.

"A new kid," one said. "He come up while we was lookin' at the plane, and said his name was Pete."

Doc Savage went back to the plane. Johnny was throwing dust on the burning plane when he was not chasing away the small boys, who now wanted to help. Dust would not help much.

"The equipment cases are fireproof," Johnny grumbled, "so not much of the stuff is liable to be harmed. But say, what caused that?"

"Chemicals which resulted in spontaneous combustion," Doc replied. "The vibration of the motors, as soon as they were started, caused an agitation which mixed the chemicals. The idea was for a few minutes of this to be necessary before the gasoline would be exploded, so that the plane would be in the air."

"But how'd you get wise in time?"

"We have had experience with stuff in the gas tanks before. Monk installed a device to register any foreign matter in the fuel. It has the added advantage of showing when unscrupulous airport gasoline filling stations try to slip us low-grade fuel."

"Oh! The device showed it!"

Doc nodded and looked at the plane. He said, "As soon as we can get the equipment boxes out, we will head for Snig Johnson's farm. It is plain that we have a tough job ahead of us. Our enemies are already here."

"Huh?" Johnny exploded.

"The boy, Pete, was the midget, Cadwiller Olden," Doc said.

SNIG JOHNSON'S farm consisted of a house that was about to fall down and a barn that had. Doc and Johnny heard the place long before the taxicab driver from Tuscumbia put them out at the foot of the lane which was rain-gullied so badly that he refused to drive his car up to the house.

"Sounds like Snig's hound dawgs is gettin' hungry," the taxi driver said after he pulled under an elm tree and parked to wait. The driver had a face Monk would have called a pickle-puss.

It sounded as if all the dogs were howling steadily.

Johnny had picked up the St. Louis newspapers in Tuscumbia. He carried one along, and shook it in front of Doc in a puzzled way as they got out of the car.

"Look here," he said, indicating an item. "That private detective didn't notice the story until a day late. It was first published yesterday. Cadwiller Olden must have seen it before we did."

"That would explain how he beat us here," Doc admitted.

The taxi driver got out.

"If you fellers is goin' fishin', you might need somebody to take the fish off your hooks, or somethin'," he suggested.

"No, thanks," Doc told him. "You stay here."

The driver shrugged. "I can run that there boat that the power company keeps in a boathouse t'other side of Snig Johnson's place."

Doc said nothing.

"I notice you stopped at the power company an' picked up the keys to the boat," the driver insinuated. "So I guess you're goin' out in it. I can run it."

Doc said, "We'll manage."

Doc and Johnny walked up to Snig Johnson's house.

The dogs were in a pen, jumping, barking, chasing around with their noses to the ground, and sneezing. There were two sorrel mules, some chickens and guineas, more guineas than chickens. The tomato patch on the rocky hill did not look so good. There was no one around.

"Snig Johnson said the spot where the lake was divided is a mile north. We will get this power boat and go up there," Doc said.

"It's lucky we managed to locate a power boat in this part of the lake," Johnny said.

They set out through the red oaks, following a trail that slanted down toward the lake.

"Those dogs were acting queer," Johnny said. "They didn't look gaunt, as if they were hungry."

"Pepper," Doc said.

"What?"

"Pepper. Some one did not want them following a trail. They are foxhounds, but they might be made to trail a man."

Chapter 15. DEATH UNDERFOOT

LAKE OF THE OZARKS is not a natural lake. It is the result of a gigantic hydroelectric project, the damming of the Osage River in Missouri. The dam is high. It has caused mountain valleys to fill with water for many miles, creating a scenically entrancing body of water with a shore line of considerably more than a thousand miles. Yet at no point is the lake so wide that a good rifle would not send a bullet from shore to shore.

As Doc and Johnny had come in the plane earlier, the lake from the air had resembled some squat,

Gargantuan leafless tree of deep blue lying flattened out on the undulating verdant vastness of the Ozark Mountains.

The power company owning the dam makes an effort to keep the lake clear of floating snags, for this driftwood might be carried past the protective booms at the dam, get into the turbines, and cause trouble. For this clearing work, the concern maintains power boats at various points. It was one of these which Doc and Johnny had received permission to use.

The keys Doc had gotten at the powerhouse fitted the padlock on the boathouse. The structure was unpainted, heavy, built on a float which was in turn moored to piling, to take care of the rise and fall of the water. The boathouse was reached by a narrow catwalk of planks nailed to logs. The boat was a bit over thirty feet, a cabin cruiser, not newly painted, but in good shape. Johnny switched on a flashlight. There were cobwebs entwined back and forth across the boathouse and over the boat.

"That's a relief," Johnny said. "Nobody has been around the boat for a few days. The spider webs prove that."

Doc said nothing. They got aboard.

"Tank's full," Johnny remarked. "I'll check her over, then we'll go."

THE driver of their taxicab was using the hood of his machine as a writing desk while he penciled a note:

I've gone up the hill to pick blackberries.

"That oughta do it if they come back," he chuckled.

He did not go up the hill. He went down it. And a hundred yards put him on the bank of a creek full of water that was green with depth. He scrambled down the bank.

"I'd pipe out next time if I was you, palsy-walsy," a voice said apparently from a large bush.

"You don't know how near you come to gettin' a gob of lead."

"You'd gotten a gob right back," said the other. "Take me to Cadwiller Olden."

The bush moved aside, becoming boughs laid carefully over a small highspeed outboard racing shell to which was attached an enormous outboard motor. The rig was probably good for better than sixty miles an hour.

"Chief," the taxi driver grunted. "Get me to 'im."

The man produced two stubby canoe paddles, wrapped with rags for two feet above the blades for silencing purposes. He was not a particularly good paddler.

"Take this," he directed, and handed the taxi driver a straw hat, a casting rod and a creel.

"Hell!" said the driver. "I can't use one of these things."

"Make a stab at it. We gotta look like fishermen."

They went across the lake trying to look like fishermen.

"The chief's in here," the boatman said and rowed into a crack of a bay.

The crack was about thirty feet wide, and the walls almost as high. Twenty feet in, it seemed to terminate in a wall of vines. That is, if one were a little distance out in the lake, it would look like vines.

The wall was really a curtain of green fresh stuff. It hung from a rope stretched across the inlet. Rocks were tied along the bottom of the curtain at intervals. If the supporting rope were cut, the rocks would pull the curtain under the water immediately and leave the way clear for the plane.

The plane was not much more than a flying motor. A big, grim pilot sat ready in the control cockpit.

Cadwiller Olden was taking a constitutional up and down the plane wing. His feet were sockless in dark-blue strap sandals which showed his tiny toenails were painted. He wore dark-blue trousers of some woolly stuff, a lighter blue checkered sport coat, a very dark-blue sport shirt with extremely long points on the collars. His throat and head were bare. He wore a gold locket.

He looked like a beautiful toy.

"Well?" he demanded.

"Doc Savage is headed for the boat," the taxi driver said. "I worked it slick."

"You were not suspected?" Cadwiller Olden demanded anxiously.

"Not me. I did my bit to make 'em think the boat was all right, too."

Cadwiller Olden turned purple. He showed his teeth. He had suddenly become a vicious little blue mink of a creature.

"You incredible fool!" he snarled. "Don't you realize this Doc Savage is clever? How he managed to discover the solution in the plane tank is incredible! I can't understand how he did it."

The driver looked uneasy. "I can savvy it. I heard him and that skinny guy with him talkin'.

There was a gadget on the instrument board that showed the specific gravity and any foreign substance in the gasoline. The gasoline ran through a gadget on the dashboard that had some litmus papers of different kinds in it and—"

"I know how it would work!" the midget gritted. "What did you say about that boat?"

"I just asked 'em if they needed a guy to go along to run it for 'em."

"Idiot! Suppose they had taken you up?"

The driver squirmed. "I figured they wouldn't."

"I almost wish they had!" Cadwiller Olden told him furiously. "That boat had a torpedo type bomb fastened to the keel. There is a small propeller on the nose of the bomb, and when the forward motion of the boat causes this to turn over a certain number of times, the device will explode." The driver, anxious to get the midget's thoughts off his own bad playing of his part, gulped, "But what if Savage gets wise that the boat has been tampered with?" "He won't," Cadwiller Olden said. "We got cobwebs out of the woods and placed them carefully so that it would appear no one had been in the boathouse for days."

THE driver grinned widely. He was a politician of sorts. He knew it always helped to cheer the gags which the boss thought up.

"Reckon they'll hear the propeller on the bomb?" he asked.

"Not a chance. The motor of the boat will cover that."

A muttering sound came across the water.

"They've started the boat's motor," a voice called softly.

Cadwiller Olden took a running jump off the plane wing and made the shore. He had the agility of a monkey. The others followed him.

Several men were deployed along the bank, well concealed in the brush. Their steel war-time helmets, automatic rifles, gas masks, and chest bullet protectors made them resemble soldiers.

"Ha!" said the taxi driver. "You'd think this Doc Savage and his pal was an army."

The look that came over Cadwiller Olden at that made the driver wish he'd kept his mouth shut. One of the others noted it also, and an instant later got the driver aside.

"The chief is jittery, buddy," he said. "Better watch your tongue."

"You mean he's scared of Savage?" the driver whispered.

"Yeah, but don't mention it to his face, if you want to raise any grandchildren."

The driver snorted. "I ain't afraid of this bronze guy."

"That's a sample of the reason why you're not runnin' this outfit," said the other.

The driver looked indignant. At least, he knew when he had been called a dumb cluck.

Cadwiller Olden had a pair of binoculars, tiny glasses, but powerful, custom-made for himself, gold-trimmed. He adjusted them on the boathouse.

The structure was in the shadow of one bank of the lake, and the sun was blindingly brilliant on the water, which made it difficult to distinguish a great deal of detail. But the boathouse doors were opening, it could be seen.

"Sh-h-h!"

said Cadwiller Olden. "Don't anybody move! This is the critical minute. Savage will look around when he comes out of the boathouse."

Every one froze.

The sound of the boat's motor got louder, then took on a labored note, which indicated the clutch had been thrown in. The boat came out, stern first. The bow cleared. The clutch went into forward speed, and the propeller threw up a boil of water.

"They aboard?" a man breathed.

"Yes!" hissed Cadwiller Olden. "Sh-h-h!"

The boat gathered speed. It scudded along close under one bank. Its motor noise came thumping off the rocky bank with the hollowness of a drum beat.

Cadwiller Olden's small lips moved. He seemed to be counting. He got to fifty, and began to look expectant.

He was not disappointed.

There was a flash, hotter than the sunlight. The lake split, the boat went up. It came to pieces in the air. The pieces fell back. They were not very big pieces. The lake surged in to gobble them. Crows and blackbirds and jays flew over the woods in flocks, their startled outcries a plaintive bedlam.

Cadwiller Olden strained his eyes through the binoculars. He cursed, rubbed sweat off the lenses. His front teeth began to show, ratlike, then slowly all of them. He suddenly hurled the binoculars into the lake, jumped up and down and screeched gleefully.

"Damned if we didn't get 'im at last!" he squawled.

THE men stood around. They didn't exactly look happy. They were relieved of an enemy who had struck genuine terror into the hearts of every one of them. But they had also just helped kill one of the best known of living men, and that was something to think about.

Cadwiller Olden evidently knew how they felt. He ran to the plane, leaped aboard, and came back with a gallon jug which had evidently been filled at some Ozark hillman's private distillery. The men coughed and sputtered over the white mule.

"Snap out of it!" Cadwiller Olden chortled. "Think of the future!"

"Yeah," muttered a man. "But between you and me, I'd as soon have assassinated some one else."

The midget master snorted.

"We've got the Repel!" he reminded. "With that in our hands, nobody can touch us! Battleships,

planes, not a thing!"

His men cheered a bit, heartened more by the invisible wine of greed than by the liquid result of a mingling of mash, heat and a copper worm.

Cadwiller Olden began to give orders.

"All but four of you will come—"

He stopped. Some one was approaching. The state of the men's nerves was shown by the alacrity with which they sought shelter behind trees and got their rifles ready.

It was only more of the gang.

Buddy Baldwin and his sister were with them, as well as Snowball Eagan. The latter had changed his hair back to its normal black color, and had taken the tape off his hand.

"We heard the explosion!" Buddy Baldwin barked. "Did it go off without a hitch?"

"It did," Cadwiller Olden told him, with satisfaction.

Bess Baldwin said, "Well, he wasn't invulnerable after all."

Cadwiller Olden looked at her intently.

"You seemed to have had a crush on him. Aren't you sorry?"

If the girl had any emotion, it did not show.

"I did all my crying over spilled milk when I was a baby," she said.

Cadwiller Olden looked very pleased. Then he took up the issuing of orders where he had been interrupted.

"All but four of you will come with me," he said. "We will get Repel out of the water. Our men have succeeded in putting an alloy steel band around it so that the tragedy of Fan Coral Island will not be duplicated."

He designated four men who were not to accompany this party.

"You four," he said, "will go to the spot where Doc Savage's men are held. You will shoot them, tie rocks to them, and drop them into the lake."

The pilot of the plane was one of the four designated for this task.

"It'll be a pleasure!" he gritted. "I'll get the silencer for my pistol out of the plane."

He whirled, ran toward the plane.

At best the most careful plan of mortal man is a structure which leans on a prop that is held in place by a single pin. Should this pin drop out, and it can be easily jarred, the whole structure crashes to earth.

This flier dislodged the pin. He jumped into a patch of brush which any one would have expected him to go around. But the man was in a hurry, or excited, or didn't notice, and into the brush he went. But not far.

He stopped. His eyes popped. He cried out as if eternity had cracked open and let him have a look at what future life held for him.

No words, that scream. Just a gargling bleat.

But Buddy Baldwin jumped forward and looked. He had words.

"Doc Savage!" he bawled.

Chapter 16. CHOICE

THE next instant Buddy Baldwin was flying head over heels, unexpectedly wrapped up with gaunt Johnny's incredibly bony arms and legs.

The pilot had fallen down in his fright. He was tangled up with the brush.

A man who had leaned his automatic rifle against a tree sprang for it. The tree seemed, by some phantasmagoria, to turn into a giant of bronze. Before the man's brain quite accommodated the fact that Doc Savage had whipped around the tree, something awful hit him in the stomach, doubled him, and something more merciful on his jaw put him to sleep.

Before that fellow was on the ground, Doc had reached a second man. That one had a revolver somewhere. In his excitement he had forgotten just which pocket. He went out without learning which one.

Surprise evaporated. Three men dived in. Two were barehanded, one had a knife. Doc watched the knife. The blades-man lunged like a fencer. Doc went sidewise ten inches, crooked an elbow akimbo. Knife and hand went between side and elbow.

Doc tightened down. He pivoted. The arm got an extra joint, and the sound was as if three glass marbles had been crushed together in a palm.

A fist hit Doc's jaw. Another hit an ear. A man ran and jumped against the small of his back with both feet. Doc went down.

"Kill 'em!" Cadwiller Olden squeaked.

Buddy Baldwin got hold of Johnny's string of a neck, gritted, "That's the very idea!"

He tightened down. Immediately he got two long fingers in his eyes. He snarled, let go, popped Johnny in the nose. Johnny hit Baldwin's Adam's apple. The man gurgled and hacked and got green.

Baldwin tried to stamp on Johnny's head. Johnny got his leg, twisted. It was good jujutsu. Johnny had both legs ready when Baldwin fell. He kicked the man into the top of a scrub oak tree. Baldwin emitted panther howls as the branches gored him.

"Kill 'em!" Cadwiller Olden pleaded.

Men were over Doc like hounds over a caught fox. Arms and legs got into all positions. Every second or two somebody got his clothes ripped. The fight moved about, literally a rolling ball of men. Snowball Eagan was trying to get at Doc with another knife. He stuck a pal by accident. The pal reached around, got a fistful of hair and pulled it out before he saw who it was. Where the hair came out it left a completely bald spot almost as large as a palm. It was an excellent job of plucking.

"Your head must be rotten!" the hairpuller exploded.

"I'll rot you!" Snowball snarled, and shifted the knife.

A bronze hand came out of the mêlée and got Snowball's right ear. He was pulled into the pile. Then somebody tried to stand on his face. A gun went off in the pile. It had a muffled sound. Cadwiller Olden ran around and screamed, "Where are those grenades? Where are those grenades?" Buddy Baldwin hit the ground under a tree and groaned, "I should 'a' stayed on the farm!" He looked as if he were too dazed to know where he was, much less what he should have done.

WILLIAM HARPER LITTLEJOHN'S eminent associates of his college professoring days would have been agog, at the very least, to see their staid and big-word-using fellow tutor just now. Johnny was emitting an elephant-trumpeting noise, racing about, striking and kicking. His long arms and fists made a rock-on-a-string combination. Rarely did he have to hit a man a second time. Johnny had been shot twice already. Once in chest, once in stomach. The men didn't seem to understand he had on a bulletproof undergarment. At least, they didn't shoot him in the face or neck, where they would have gotten results. Johnny dropped a man, walked the length of him to discourage his getting up, and ran to aid Doc. Doc needed aid then. A moment later he didn't. A remarkable sequence of events occurred. Snowball Eagan came flying out of the pile of men. He had lost consciousness somehow. Then Doc got upon his feet, by the simple expedient of grabbing a small tree trunk and climbing up hand over hand. Men clung to him. Doc knocked one off. He got another by the face with one hand and twisted. The victim was glad to run backward out of the mêlée. Doc got a little higher. He kicked another man off. His two knees came together, trap fashion, got a head. The tongue came out of the head farther than it seemed possible. The owner got down on hands and knees when he was released. Doc leaped away from the tree. Two men, calm souls who had kept their heads, stood to one side with rifles, waiting for a clear target. Cadwiller Olden saw Doc Savage jump clear. The midget made a whimpering noise and slashed his gaze over the ground all around. There was no hole. Doc started toward him. Bess Baldwin ran forward with a rock and struck at Doc's head. It was a heavy enough rock to shatter a tub. Doc seemed not to see the girl. But he doubled, going almost to all fours. The girl fell over his back. The weight of the rock carried her on over. She smacked the ground hard. Both rifles banged. The bullets passed where Doc had been. Johnny saw the riflemen for the first time. He dipped a bony hand in his clothing, brought out a fistful of metal things the size of eggs, began doing something to them and slamming them against the ground. They squirted out an unbelievable quantity of black smoke.

BY the count of fifteen, the woods for yards around was gorged with cuttlefish black. The riflemen let fly a few bullets. Then they turned and ran from the approaching smoke. They thought it might be gas. The brush was thick, and the smoke caught them. It was not gas. Men ran around in the smoke, cursing and swinging at trees, bushes or other men—anything they touched. The smoke was the blackest stuff they had ever seen. It had a queer odor, too. It smelled like perfume. They thought it was some strange gas, and that didn't help their peace of mind. They dashed about more madly. They were not too busy to have been vastly surprised had they been able to observe what Doc Savage and Johnny were doing. Doc was lying flat on the ground, where there was less chance of being shot accidentally. He drew an aluminum case out of a pocket. It was about the size of the cases used to carry the little sports binoculars which are worn in the fashion of spectacles. In fact, it was such a case. The goggles, highly complicated ocular-mechanical gadgets, converted the invisible infra light into a visible form. Doc put them on. The men were for the most part groping about helplessly. The pilot of the plane was not in sight. Neither was Cadwiller Olden. But Olden's voice rang out an instant later. "Bat!" he yelled. "Bat!" "Over here, chief!" yelled "Bat." Bat was the flier. He was on the opposite side of the smoke pall. "You out of that stuff?" the midget yelled.

"Yeah. I ran for it."

"Get to them men of Doc Savage's! Get rid of them! Shoot them!"

"Right!" yelled Bat.

Johnny had his goggles on by now. He got up, face anxious, and started for the pilot, Bat.

"Johnny!" Doc called.

Johnny stopped. "Yes?"

"Get the midget!" Doc directed.

Johnny whirled and leaped for the spot from which Cadwiler Olden had yelled.

Doc ran in the direction taken by the flier.

Several bullets searched the spot from which Doc had called shortly after he left.

BAT, the flier, was losing no time. An agile physical specimen, like all the sinister midget's men, he was fast. Too, he had the good sense to make as little noise as possible, with the result that Doc found it impossible to trail him by sound alone.

The rest of the gang was making a great racket. Two of them were fighting each other by mistake, both yelling bloody murder.

Doc encountered thick brush. It delayed him. He finally took to a tree, whipping aloft with smooth speed, and from the top boughs saw Bat. The man was making for the plane, had almost reached it. Doc had not expected that.

The bronze man took long drops to the ground and longer leaps for the plane. He heard a watery sighing, and knew the concealing curtain of vines had gone down. The plane's motor cleared its exhaust stacks with a noisy backfire. The inertia starter moaned again. The engine began turning over.

Doc wrenched off the goggles. They were no great help now that he was out of the smoke. The plane was moving, its propellers driving a vast wind through the red oaks. It had to travel only a few yards before it was clear out on the lake. Doc changed his course.

Blue of the lake appeared through the trees. Then the gliding yellow of the plane wings. The craft moved fast. Even a fish would hardly catch it in the water now.

Taking the only chance, the bronze man kept his speed. He did not have any more. He was using it all now. He reached the brink of the rocky creek bank and went out into space.

It was a prodigious leap, and he almost didn't make it. Doc's leap fell short, but he had seen it would, and doubled forward, arms bent and stiffened. His chest and arms smashed down on the plane wing, and his metallic fists went through the fabric.

THE plane builders had done a good job, and the struts held. The man of bronze hung to the wing, although his feet sloughed through the water.

The pilot glared, but he could do nothing. He had to fight to keep the plane from crashing. The craft roared out on the lake.

The flier cut the gas, intending to let the plane slow down while he finished the bronze man with a gun. Doc swung up on the wing, started along it, doubled over. The pilot changed his mind about slowing. He fed the big cylinders gas.

Fire, noise, came out of the stacks. The ship rocked. Struggling, doing a good job, the flier held the wing up under Doc's weight. The bronze man had to drop prone to keep on the wing. He was clinging there when Bat got the ship off the water.

Bat knew his plane. The way he climbed it would have tickled the designer. The laboring motor left a vague snake of smoke behind.

A slip, and a vertical bank, Bat tried next. Doc managed to hold on. Bat looped, an inside loop. That was not as hard on the bronze man. The centrifugal force helped.

Bat got set for an outside loop. It was a deadly instant. Doc could never have held on through the maneuver. But the flier took a look at the torn fabric where the bronze man's fists had plunged through the wing—and changed his mind about going outside. More of the fabric was tearing off.

Bat stood up in the cockpit. He had a revolver, and wore a confident look.

Chapter 17. THE LOST REPEL

DOC was set for that move. He had driven in the top fabric of the plane wing and had his hand inside, a firm grip on the control which ran to the aileron on the wingtip. He gave it a yank. As a good plane should, the craft went over.

Bat went back into the cockpit to fight the controls again, too busy to do any shooting. Doc got his own wing down. Bat, contrary, tried to get it up. Doc let him. Then the bronze man slid down the wing to the fuselage.

Out of habit, Bat had his eye on the bank indicator. He didn't see the bronze man's maneuver. And when he missed Doc he thought he had lost him overboard. He raised up, a happy expression on his visage, to look down and watch his enemy hit the lake. The next instant Doc was in the cockpit with him.

The cockpit was not large enough for much action with both of them in it. Bat concentrated on getting Doc out. He paid no attention to his feet, and none at all to the control stick. The stick

got jammed forward. The rudder was at center. The throttle was wide open. The plane went into its outside loop.

When it pulled over at the bottom, the fabric popped, came off the left wing like the skin off a banana. The plane started for its end at three hundred, three fifty, then four hundred miles an hour. And it did not have far to go.

Bat, by that time, was in a condition where he had only a hazy idea about what was happening. He had lost his gun to Doc Savage. He was almost limp; his parachute pack, which he had not had time to strap on, was screwed around over one ear.

Doc got the parachute pack just before the roar of air swept it overboard. He did not look out. Sound had told him what had happened. He twisted into the 'chute. The pack harness was tight. He held Bat with both arms and both legs and managed to roll out of the cockpit. The tail assemblage walloped them, then they were clear.

It is a fact surprising to a layman that a plane can dive much faster than a human body will fall. The plane, its bad wing giving it a twist, left them behind.

Doc got hold of the ripcord and yanked. Bat screamed when the pilot came out of the 'chute pack. He would probably never scream again like that as long as he lived, for he had revived enough to be sure that the bronze giant would not be able to hold him.

He was wrong.

When they were swinging, with the shore of the lake—they could land on earth or water, as they chose, by slipping air from one side of the 'chute—Doc reached up with his right hand and grasped all Bat's hair that the hand would accommodate. Bat wore his hair conveniently long. Doc tested. Bat shrieked. The hair held.

Doc tilted forward, swinging his legs and body back where Bat could not grab them. Then he let the man hang, supporting him by the fistful of hair. Bat's scalp rose with rubbery elasticity, and he screamed so hard in terror that his shrieks became only a snarl of air out of his throat.

"Quiet!" Doc said.

Bat shut up. He probably couldn't have told why.

"The hair starts coming out after a while," Doc told him grimly. "After about so much of it is gone, you are going to be somewhat embarrassed."

This was truth, except for the matter of time, which Doc had no intention of mentioning. As strongly as Bat's hair was rooted, it would probably stay with him to a ripe age.

But Bat had no brave ideas on the subject. He did what any other normal rogue would have done.

"Please!" he croaked. "I'll do anything you say!"

"WHERE are my four men?" Doc asked.

Bat leveled an arm eagerly. "There!"

The plane made a big splash in the lake. When the water ran back there was not a vestige of the craft afloat. It was almost a minute before oil came to the top.

"There!" Bat croaked.

The spot seemed to be a log cabin about a quarter of a mile from the lake shore. As a protective caution against fires, a clearing had been opened up around the cabin.

Three men were standing in the clearing, ogling the descending parachute. They had rifles, and were holding them as if they wanted to shoot, but didn't think the moment quite right.

"My men are in that cabin?" Doc asked.

"They are!" Bat croaked.

He wasn't lying. No man would be likely to, in his position.

What happened next puzzled Bat vastly. He was hauled up. Naturally, he grabbed the bronze man with all his strength. They whirled around and around.

Bat found a gun in his hand—his and the bronze man's hand, rather. The gun began to explode. It was Bat's weapon, which Doc had taken in the plane. It went off six times. It only held six cartridges.

Doc became as limp as death in the parachute harness. His arms and legs hung down, dangling.

"You've just shot me," the bronze man said. "And if you act as if you haven't, you are certainly going to wish you had wings."

They swung slowly downward, while Bat thought that over, trying to figure it out.

Doc's eyes were open—the men around the cabin could not see open eyes from that distance.

The bronze man could see the spot where the Repel lay. Only the water was not parted. Two boats, power cruisers, were anchored at the spot, and divers were over the side. They seemed to be hauling something to the surface.

Two huge planes were anchored near by. They were giant craft that could fly the seas.

"Huh!" Bat exploded.

He had figured it out. Doc had pulled a trick to make the men around the cabin think that he, Bat, had shot the bronze man.

Bat was glad enough to let it go at that. He even put the empty gun, which he still held, into Doc's pocket, being very careful that the act was not visible from the cabin.

They landed painfully in a blackberry patch.

THE men in the clearing at the cabin were in a dilemma.

"Bat shot Savage!" one explained needlessly. "We better go help him. He may be hurt."

"Chief said stay here with them prisoners," another warned.

"But Bat—"

"Hell with Bat!"

They remained.

Before long the men heard noise in the brush, and remarked that here Bat came. But when the necessary amount of time had elapsed, Bat did not walk out. Instead, there was silence. Then his voice.

"A little help, you guys!"

It was Bat's voice, but queer and croaking, as if something had happened to him.

The men ran into the brush to help their comrade.

Doc Savage whipped into the clearing from the opposite side. He had spent a good many hundreds of hours over the course of life from childhood perfecting his command of voice imitation and ventriloquism. He angled into the cabin.

It had two rooms, one big, one small. The prisoners were in the small room. Doc Savage stopped in the door, and instead of looking joyful, he registered stark shock, disappointment.

There were only two prisoners.

Monk and Ham. Ropes bound them, sponges were taped in their mouths, and each had a big rock tied to his feet. A rock that would sink a body deep in the lake.

Doc wrenched out the sponges. His cabled bronze fingers went to work on the ropes, and the strands began to snap, those that were not easily untied.

"Where are the other two?" he asked quietly.

"Renny and Long Tom?" Monk had been gagged so long that his voice sounded queer. "They are at the other place."

"What other place?"

"I don't know where it is," Monk groaned. "Judging from the amount of flying the planes did to get here, the hide-out is between two and three thousand miles away."

"You are sure Renny and Long Tom are not here?"

"Positive." Monk groaned. "They brought me and Ham along in case they might need us for a dicker, or for bait. They kept Renny and Long Tom in reserve." Then he added, as an afterthought: "Is Habeas all right?"

Doc assured both Ham and Monk that their respective pets were at his headquarters building, being taken care of by one of the elevator boys. Monk appeared greatly relieved. He was about to say something else when Ham broke in with, "The guards are coming back!"

THE guards stood outside and grumbled for a while. The fact that they had not found Bat seemed to bother them, and to be puzzling as well.

Doc gave Monk and Ham time to windmill their arms and do squatting exercise, then whispered, "Ready?" inquiringly.

"Boy, am I!" Monk gritted in anticipation.

Doc tensed his vocal cords and made Bat's voice ring through the house.

"Where in blazes are you guys?" Bat's voice said.

With profanity, and perfectly natural curiosity, the men outside came charging in. They were not ready for anything, and the odds were even, anyway. There was a great deal of noise for a very brief period. And then it was all over.

Monk and Ham found rope enough to tie their prisoners. Doc went for Bat; he had left the flier, knocked unconscious, near a tree. When two of the captives came to, Monk made an elaborate business of tying the big rocks to their feet, and so ferocious was the homely chemist's expression that the pair became satisfyingly convinced they were to be consigned to the lake without more ado.

"You just can't repress the beast in you, can you?" Ham sneered at Monk.

"Right now I'm gonna let the beast prowl," Monk grinned.

Doc rapped, "There is a lot to do. Find Johnny. And try to get that Repel away from them."

"Have they got it?" Ham exploded.

"By now, yes."

The bronze man set a fast pace through the woods, the other two having trouble keeping up until the stiffness shook out of their joints.

Droning of plane motors started out on the lake. Two ships, but more than two motors. The big craft. They were coming down the lake. Over their symphony, men shouted.

"Listen," Doc requested.

The group halted, listened—and heard Cadwiller Olden's small, piping yells. The sound set them off like a starting gun.

Doc left Monk and Ham behind, and when they caught up with him, the bronze man was poised on the shore of the lake. Monk stared.

"Of all the breaks!" he groaned.

Many heads were in the water, far down the lake, and well out, moving toward the planes, which had slowed. One head was huge, bullet-shaped, and dark.

"That's the big dummy, Nero," Monk said. "He's a holy terror. Every man in the gang is afraid of him. They say he used to be a cannibal, and ain't reformed. He worships that little devil." The little devil was swimming abreast of the huge creature who had no tongue. Buddy Baldwin and his sister were along.

The planes picked them up, ignoring the bullets which Monk and Ham were dropping around the craft with rifles which they had picked up in the cabin. With a great bellowing of huge motors, the ships took the air.

One seemed much heavier than the other. It ran almost a mile before it got off loggily.

"The Repel is aboard that ship," Doc Savage said quietly.

Not until the two big planes had gone some distance did Doc speak again.

"We had better find Johnny," he said.

JOHNNY looked as if he had been through a great deal. He still wore part of his pants, and one shoe. It would be months before his bruises went away.

He was guarding several prisoners.

"It was that big black dummy," he said sheepishly. "I caught Cadwiler Olden and was carrying him back when the dummy jumped me."

He stopped, and thought about what had happened.

"I never saw anything like that mute," he said finally, and shivered.

Ham snapped, "What happened?"

Johnny looked at the ground, the sky, and felt of his hurts, and did not wince.

"I'd like to lie about it," he said. "I ran."

Ham had a sharp tongue. He opened his mouth to use it. Then he must have thought of something, undoubtedly the giant black fiend.

"I'd have done the same thing," Ham said.

Monk grinned, and for one of the rare times in his life agreed with a statement which Ham had made.

"Me, too," he said.

Johnny, relieved and wanting to change the subject, said, "It's tough the nifty we pulled on them at the start of this didn't finish the whole thing up. You see, they had planted taxi drivers in the little towns around here, and we hired one. Doc inquired around town before we hired the driver, and learned he was a stranger. So that gave us a hunch he was one of the gang."

Johnny sighed.

"We pretended to leave the driver and walk to the boathouse," he said. "Then we ducked back, and watched the driver go across the lake with another fellow, very furtively. We knew, then, that he was one of the gang. So we went back and looked the boat over very thoroughly.

"Doc found the bomb under the hull. He backed the boat out, headed it down the lake, and dived into the water through a hole we had chopped in the hull on the side where they couldn't see it. When the boat blew up, we weren't aboard."

The gaunt geologist shook his head. "We had a time crossing that lake, swimming. I thought sure they'd see us, even if we did run up to where it was narrower. But they didn't, and we ran back, and were nicely set to overhear them when we had bad luck and they found us. That set off the fireworks."

MONK had fallen to staring at Johnny. The homely chemist's mouth was wide open, a remarkable cavity.

Doc Savage said quietly, "They got away with Repel."

Ham started, and an expression of grimness came over his features.

"That is going to be bad," he said after a time.

Doc nodded. "It is."

Something in the bronze man's tone, the seriousness of it, made Johnny shiver involuntarily.

"Maybe," he ventured hesitantly, "the heavily laden plane will crash with it."

Then, at homely Monk, who was still favoring him with an agog stare, "What's the matter with you?"

"You," Monk breathed.

"What's the matter with me?"

"You're using small words!" Monk gasped wonderingly. "You've finally turned human!"

"A prepollency of eventuation," Johnny explained.

"Aw, heck!" Monk said.

Chapter 18. TERROR

THE time—two weeks later. The place—the lofty headquarters of Doc Savage in New York City. The state of the public's peace of mind—tranquil. The masses did not yet have a suspicion of what was coming.

Perhaps a score of men did know. They were scientists, men from Europe as well as the United States. An eminent aggregation, they had assembled hastily in New York at a call from a man they all knew, Doc Savage.

A number of them had been instrumental in fashioning the remarkable individual which the man of bronze had become. They had helped teach him, imparting their own knowledge until his trained brain had absorbed all that they knew, and had gone on into the realms of new research.

They had just finished a number of days of intense discussion, these men, and they had gathered in the skyscraper reception room to report to the man who had asked their help.

A renowned specialist in electrochemistry as applied to astronomy, from Vienna, served as spokesman.

"In you alone hope lies," he said without preliminary oratory. "You have studied with us, and we know the extent of your ability and knowledge; or, rather, we know that it is beyond ours. We appreciate the fact that you appealed to us, and are touched by it, and warmed, for it shows that you have not become overconfident of your own ability, in spite of what we know to be true, that you are infinitely more advanced than any of us, your old teachers."

Doc remained expressionless, but kept his gaze on the inlaid table. He was touched deeply, for these elderly men were masters, scientists whose names and work would be known to posterity for centuries. And they were men who did not—he would have been less embarrassed if they did—use what in street lingo is designated as the old "soft soap."

"Then you believe there is no immediate protection against Repel?" he asked.

The spokesman shrugged. "Have we anything in science that is not affected by gravity?"

"No substance," Doc agreed.

"Gravity is a force which draws substance toward the earth," said the other. "As yet the nature of gravity is not definitely settled by science."

Doc nodded. "True."

"The force thrown out by Repel is undoubtedly the direct opposite of gravity," the elderly scientist continued. "It is a force hitherto unknown to science. Instead of attracting, as does gravity, Repel forces away."

THERE was silence in the lofty room. Traffic noise came faintly, from the street.

"What the source of the force of Repel is, we do not know," the scholar went on. "We designate the substance by the name assigned to it by those unscrupulous men who now have it in their possession. They call it Repel. That is as good a name as any."

"Repel is, undoubtedly, some new substance. I, personally, lean to the belief that it is a concentration of electrons, or of the composites of electrons, so acting upon each other that the hitherto known laws of electricity and force are unbalanced."

"That is my own conclusion," Doc agreed quietly.

The old scientist leaned back and seemed to delve into his memory.

"A theory was once advanced that gravity is the pulling force of a deposit of some substance in the approximate center of the earth," he said. "The scientist who advanced that idea was no fool. He performed a great number of experiments which tended to prove his theory."

Doc said, "If my recollection is correct, the scientist you mentioned ventured that concentrations of these electron composites occurring in the universe had drawn, each one for itself, the masses of atoms which go to make up the planets. In other words, the sun, the moon and the stars exist because such concentrations occurred, and that accounts for the pull of gravity. On planets where gravity is less, it is simply because there is less of what we might call the gravity metal."

"Exactly. Repel might possibly be another such substance, or element, having an effect exactly opposite of gravity, forcing things away instead of drawing them."

Another scientist spoke up.

"It is my understanding as you explained it," he told Doc, "that this Repel seemed to be encased in a shell of metallic stone impervious to it?"

"Exactly," Doc replied. "The case had cracked open over a tiny strip, and the force was escaping through this crack. Myself and my associate, Major Renwick, got close enough to observe this crack. It was hardly wider than a pencil. Yet an incredible amount of force was escaping. Imagine what this power, unbridled in unscrupulous hands, will do."

The grave countenances of the listeners indicated they had thought about that point.

There was more discussion, growing more technical in nature, but it all added up to the same thing. Repel had them baffled.

Eventually they departed, to pool their knowledge in study and experiments.

"Any day," Doc warned them, "this fantastic midget may start his work. And it will not be pleasant to witness."

DOC SAVAGE, when the scientists had gone, started for the laboratory where he himself was experimenting. Ham and Johnny were in the library which lay between the reception room and the laboratory. Monk had his homely face in a huge dictionary.

"A propellency of eventuation," he muttered. "A propellency—"

"P-r-e-p-o-l-l-e-n-c-y," Johnny corrected absentmindedly.

"Huh?" Monk shuffled leaves. "Well, heck! Why couldn't you have just said, 'the force of circumstances'?"

Johnny looked up, puzzled. "When?"

"When you tried to explain why you used little words for once!"

Doc paused at the mail desk. There were approximately twenty cables, twice as many telegrams. He opened them. Negative reports, all. No trace of Cadwiler Olden and his men—and Renny and Long Tom. There was a telegram from the chief of a private detective agency in St. Louis. A crooked dick who had furnished Cadwiler Olden with the report of the presence of Repel in the Lake of the Ozarks had been found. He was being spirited to New York, for Doc to deal with himself.

There was a report from Doc's upstate "criminal curing" institution, which said:

THE RAW MATERIAL RECEIVED HAS GONE THROUGH THE PROCESS OF MANUFACTURE VERY SATISFACTORILY

The crooked detective from St. Louis would probably go through the institution.

Doc went on into the laboratory and began to work.

It was not more than three or four minutes later when the laboratory's high windows darkened slowly, and the bronze man, glancing out, noted black clouds crawling in from the sea.

He stood at the window for a while. It was almost like an omen, the coming of those clouds.

And when he turned on the lights, he did it several times, slowly and thoughtfully, switching them on and off.

It was not often that he became so meditative.

At almost the same time that the man of bronze was meditating, trouble was occurring on Long Island Sound. Trouble the bronze man had known would come. And when it came, it struck with a force that was appalling.

Chapter 19. THE COMING OF REPEL

THE liner went aground on Montauk Point, Long Island, On Monday. It was due to dock in New York that evening. A horror-stricken, incoherent passenger appeared at a farmhouse with the first word. Not as many had died as might have. The captain was raving, unbalanced temporarily. But the first mate explained that the ship had been shoved off her course by something invisible. She had been carried along on a great tidal wave, and finally deposited, high and dry, on the sandy, uninhabited marshland of outer Long Island.

Then the men with the guns had come aboard. With the fantastic guns. They were not shaped as ordinary guns, although they had somewhat the shape. And they did not send bullets.

The guns shot force! Men had been knocked down, carried backward, thrown high into the air.

The raiders had gone away, satisfied, with the two million in earmarked gold in the strongroom.

Doc Savage and his men were at the spot an hour after the frightened passenger reached the telephone. There was not much they could do but look—and pick up one idle remark that explained a lot.

"There wasn't a thing in sight," explained the shaky first mate, "except a little plane flying off on the seaward side."

The bronze man's little group conferred on the way back to New York.

"That's the first," Monk said. "There'll be plenty more."

"The plane carried the larger Repel 'gun,'" Doc decided aloud.

He was flying. He had secured a new speedplane, one which carried more bombs and machine guns, and was faster than anything he had ever designed.

"Them guys used the stuff in guns of some kind," Monk muttered. "I savvy how they would do that.

The trigger pulls a gate open and lets the force out. But one thing buffaloes me."

"What?" Doc queried.

"Why ain't there no recoil? For every force operating in one direction there must be an equal and opposite force."

"That," Doc explained, "is the accepted law of forces. But Repel is force, or the source of force of a new kind. That problem can best be answered with a question."

"What question?"

"Did you ever think of an equal and opposing force for the force of gravity?"

Monk sat and thought about that until the bronze man put the plane down in front of the big hangar—it was disguised as a warehouse—which he maintained on the Hudson water front, and which connected with his skyscraper headquarters by an underground pneumatic tube with cars in it which men could ride.

"I'm getting a headache," Monk summarized his thinking.

THE Bank of the People was robbed the next morning, just after opening for business. There was nothing to it—from the robbers' point of view. They simply drove up in a car and turned their Repel cannon on the bank.

Desks fell across the rooms. Tellers and customers fell after them. One of the guards tried to walk around to the end of the room and managed, unfortunately, to walk up near the ceiling. About

that time the bandits turned off the Repel. The guard fell and fractured his skull, dying that same day.

The raiders did not get much, comparatively. A little under a hundred thousand.

The Security was next, then the Universal Trust, the Drivers and Workers, and the House of Goldberg.

A police patrol car chased the bandits as they left the House of Goldberg with forty-odd thousand dollars. But the car suddenly stopped and began to fall backward up the street. It hit a building with about the same force as if it had dropped from the top of a skyscraper.

Every banking house in the city closed down, locked its money in the vaults, and stationed guards with machine guns.

They could have saved themselves the effort. That was the end of the bank robbing for the day.

The raiders went to work on the jewelry stores. They got four stores before the jewelry establishments all closed up.

An armored truck, a department store, and the stock vaults of a company which stamped gold watch cases followed.

The raiders were seen. Plenty of times. But their cars were armored. Once they came to a barricade of sandbags which had been placed conveniently across a street. The cops behind the barricade thought they had them. Then the cops and their barricade fell almost a quarter of a mile down the street.

Doc Savage no longer went to the scenes of the crimes. There were too many, and nothing to be accomplished, anyway.

The bronze man went to the management of the skyscraper in which he had his headquarters. He owned enough of the concern's assets to get what he wanted done. Attendants began to make the rounds of the offices, and tenants started moving out.

"We go, too," Doc told his aids.

"But danged if I'm gonna let a little guy no bigger than a peanut run me outta here!" Monk yelled.

"Let the missing link stay," Ham suggested.

Acting as if he did it because he never complied with any of Ham's suggestions, Monk left the building with them.

The dirigible mooring mast on top of the skyscraper fell off two hours later. The whole building leaned and groaned, and blocks of masonry dropped—went sailing across town, rather.

"I'll be superamalgamated!" Johnny gulped.

"Cadwiller Olden tried to destroy the building, hoping we would be in it," Doc said. "The structure is probably the strongest of its size in existence, or it would have gone down." Monk pointed. "There's where the Repel came from!"

He was indicating a plane. A large, fast craft, it droned about, unafraid. Doc and the others watched it. They could hear the plane's motor.

They noticed something abruptly. Monk remarked upon it.

"They're signaling," he said.

The others heard it. Three short bursts from the plane's motor. Then a longer one.

Doc Savage said nothing. But, strangely, his small, fantastic noise which he made in moments of mental stress, but which the others had not heard in days, came into existence. It ran heartily through its exotic scale which was definitely musical, yet without a tune.

The men stared, wondering what had caused the sound. The bronze man did not explain.

THE newspapers carried the next development on their front pages.

SURRENDER OF DOC SAVAGE

DEMANDED BY REPEL MASTERS!

MAYOR SAYS WILL REFUSE!

All the journals had it. The letter had come to each through the mail. Directions to Doc had been included:

The man of bronze will understand the power of Repel, and what it can do to the buildings in the large cities of the United States if he refuses.

Doc Savage will appear alone in an open power boat in the Atlantic Ocean five miles south of Long Beach, Long Island, one half hour before dusk to-night.

When Savage surrenders, we guarantee to destroy no more buildings and take no more lives.

"They didn't say anything about taking no more money," Monk growled, reading this.

"It's ridiculous, of course!" Johnny snapped.

They separated, a bit later, each to assigned tasks, Monk to consult with military officials about planting antiaircraft guns about the city, Ham to meet with the police officials to afford what help he could, and Johnny to make a talk over a radio network—using small words—to explain what Repel was, to allay the horror which the mystery of the thing had created. This talk was supposed to decrease public fear. He doubted if it would.

They were to meet in Monk's penthouse laboratory down near Wall Street, Doc with them.

Doc Savage, however, did not appear.

Chapter 20. SURRENDER

THE small boat had one quality: It was fast. But the designer had not put enough flare at the bow, with the result that spray came aboard by the bucketful, and it was necessary to keep a canvas cover over the motor. The boat had never been intended for the open sea, anyway.

Doc Savage was wet from head to foot, and because it was more comfortable thus, had stripped to trousers. He consulted the tachometer, and judged the location of the boat by the distance to the hazy shore.

He was about five miles off Long Beach, Long Island, and it was about an hour until the time which the nautical almanac gave as the sunset hour.

He waited. The boat had no covering. His wet trousers clung to him. All told, the most cursory glance would show that he carried no weapon on his person or in the boat. Clouds were overhead.

A plane came dropping out of them, motors idling. It had the silence of a ghost. Not until it was less than five hundred feet from the sea did the motors pick up, and the plane made a large, cautious circle. The sea was clear. The plane came in for a landing.

It taxied close alongside. Men climbed out on its wings. Buddy Baldwin was one of them. They looked into the boat and at Doc Savage. Then they climbed back into the plane's cabin.

"You may have a big bomb under that boat!" Buddy Baldwin yelled. "Jump overboard and swim to the plane!"

Doc jumped overboard and swam. He reached the plane, climbed aboard while scared men stood back from him behind pistols. When they had overcome some of their fear they searched him. They found nothing.

"I can't understand this," Cadwiller Olden said.

He came out from the rear of the cabin, where he had been concealed, watching. He scowled at Doc Savage, a tiny statuesque figure, immaculately dressed as ever.

"What's the catch?" he demanded.

"No catch," Doc said quietly.

"You're not kidding me!" the midget snarled. "You didn't give yourself up so quickly without a reason. I expected it to take weeks!"

"And many lives!" Doc added grimly. "Did it not occur to you that it might be my desire to save as many lives as possible?"

"A lot of things occur to me!" Cadwiller Olden grated.

The little man said nothing more until the plane was in the air. He stood back, and his big bodyguard, Nero, came and stood behind him, eyeing Doc Savage with a strange, fierce intentness. Once, the bestial Nero made his strange croaking noise and formed characters with his fingers. It must have been a deaf-and-dumb sign language of his own, for Doc had never seen it before.

"He'll tear you limb from limb, Nero," Cadwiller Olden told the big dummy—not a dummy entirely, evidently, for he could hear.

Nero made savage motions with his fingers.

Cadwiller Olden shrugged. "All right, Nero. You can have him first, when we get ready. It will be something to watch, you two together."

Then the midget glared fiercely at the man of bronze.

"I still think there's a trick!" he barked. "Do you want to see your two men whom I still hold before you die?"

Doc Savage showed no expression. It was not exactly easy; for this was the first time he had been sure that Renny and Long Tom were still alive—if they were.

"No," Doc said.

"In that case," Cadwiller Olden leered, "I'll let them see you. They'll get a kick out of watching you and Nero together."

Huge Nero made a crowlike sound.

THE plane flew out over the Atlantic Ocean for some hours and alighted alongside a rusty old steamer which had CABLE LAYER emblazoned on its hull. The craft, which looked perfectly legitimate, was anchored over the route taken by an ocean cable.

A boom hoisted the plane aboard. The wings were removed. They seemed to be of a quick demountable type. Big, special hatches opened in the decks, and within twenty minutes the plane was out of sight.

Cadwiller Olden, Nero, and a dozen men with guns in their hands escorted Doc Savage to the living quarters of the ship. There was a large crew aboard.

Bess Baldwin met them. She was made up, wore a modish evening gown, and looked more entrancing than usual.

"You have more lives than a cat," she told Doc Savage quietly.

The bronze man looked at her and seemed not to see her.

The midget chuckled.

"We'll get this over with as soon as possible," he said. "Nero, what'll it be? Knives?"

The monster made croakings and finger movements.

"You're a fool," Cadwiler Olden said. "But you can take him on bare-handed, if you wish."

Buddy Baldwin chuckled, then interposed, "Chief, if I might make a suggestion. The boys would like this. Why not wait until some of the planes get in? They had to fly a roundabout course in case some one tried to follow them."

Cadwiler Olden considered that. It seemed to please him.

"All right," he agreed.

The men held Doc Savage in a cabin that was as palatially furnished as anything the finest ocean liner had to offer—but for the fact that the furniture was all of tiny size, to fit Cadwiler Olden. The midget himself seemed nervous. He walked up and down, and frequently drew out the blade of his little sword cane to inspect it. He held it where Doc Savage could get a glimpse of it.

"An exact duplicate of the one carried by Brigadier General Theodore Marley Brooks, is it not?" he asked.

It was. Doc said so.

The midget chuckled grimly. "If Nero is not the man he thinks he is, I do think I shall try this out on you."

Doc said nothing.

"There is one difference between this cane and Ham's," Cadwiler Olden remarked. "This one is coated with a fer-de-lance extract that is usually pretty fatal."

PLANES arrived, one at a time, and were hauled aboard and stowed below decks. The amount of shouting in greeting was about in proportion to the amount of loot each ship brought. It must have been considerable.

Cadwiler Olden reminded grimly, "Only the beginning. Only the beginning."

The midget was becoming more impatient, and when some twenty minutes elapsed and no more planes came, he gave it up.

"The fools should have made better time!" he snapped. "Let them miss it. Get moving, you!"

"Where?" Doc asked.

"We are going below to get your two men."

So his aids were still alive! The bronze man's face was a mask as he was led down a corridor, down a companionway, and stopped deep in the hold before an iron door with a barred aperture. Renny's huge fists were fastened around the bars. He had bent them a little, an incredible feat of strength.

"You two will get shot at once if you make a false move!" Cadwiler Olden warned.

Renny and Long Tom came out when the door was unlocked and opened. They were herded in the procession. They were thin, haggard, but alive enough. They looked around, and the same expression came over both their faces. They were ready to fight for it now.

"Take it easy," Doc said quietly. "These men are armed, all of them."

The procession went back the way it had come. On the upper deck, the course veered to what was apparently the crew's dining room. Tables and chairs had been cleared out.

Nero, huge and ugly, tramped closed behind Doc Savage, as if hungry. Doc was not bound, had not been bound at any time.

Buddy Baldwin was beside the men who had guns. He lined them up, telling each exactly where to stand. They were in a line, close together, not unlike a firing squad. There was no need of men at the other end of the room. The door was barred.

"You can cover the door from here," Buddy Baldwin warned. "Stay right where you are."

"Good work, Baldwin," Cadwiler Olden chuckled.

Bess Baldwin stood near the door.

"What are the rules?" she asked gayly.

Doc Savage said, "I do not think there are any rules," and turned and broke Nero's jaw with his right fist. Simultaneously, Renny and Long Tom went into action.

Buddy Baldwin threw himself at one end of the men he had lined up so carefully.

Bess Baldwin turned off the lights.

Chapter 21. THE END OF TRICKERY TRAIL

HAD lightning hit in the cabin at that instant, results would hardly have been as satisfying. Nero fell down. The rifleman whom Buddy Baldwin hit did likewise. And it was suddenly so dark, foe could not tell foe.

Doc reached the door an instant later. Men were trying to come in. He got under them, upset some, trampled others.

"This way!" he said sharply.

He touched Bess Baldwin as she whipped past him.

"Good work!" he said.

Long Tom got out, then Buddy Baldwin. There was no Renny, but there was a procession of loud reports such as big fists might make.

"Renny!" Doc rapped imperatively.

"Holy cow!" Renny boomed, surging out the door. "I'd kinda like to stay in there in the dark with them guys. I was sure enjoying myself!"

"Fists won't do this job," Doc advised.

The bronze man contacted one of the gang in the darkness, found a gun, and ran down the passage. He used the weapon to shoot out the lights farther on. They left plenty of excitement behind, and it was spreading.

"This way!" The bronze man made a turn. "The radio shack!"

The radio operator on duty heard them coming. But he only saw Buddy Baldwin, and while he was demanding to know what was wrong, Doc came up behind him, took his neck, and he never did learn what was wrong.

The radio installation was very good. Few liners had its equal. Doc worked with knobs, switches. He put the carrier wave on a certain wave length, switched to CW, and weighted the sending key down. The set now sent a steady howl into the ether waves.

A bullet or two came along the deck.

"They're coming closer," Long Tom announced.

"We only have the ammunition in my gun and the one sis has!" Buddy Baldwin groaned. "Savage, I thought you were going to bring weapons with you when you came?"

Doc answered that with a question.

"Where are the gold bars they took out of the vaults of the Bank of the People?"

"We can reach them," Baldwin grunted, "but I don't see what good gold bars will do us now."

A flurry of lead arrived. Renny howled loudly, then more softly, "Leg! Can walk!"

"Show us those gold bars," Doc directed.

They were not hard to locate. The loot was stacked on the second deck, aft, in a bare room. There was a surprising quantity of the stuff. The bullion was piled out, each bar separately, where it made the best show. Most of the gold was marked with the sign of the bank. Doc located the Bank of the People loot.

He picked up a heavy bar, ran to the door, saw the corridor was empty, and waited. A man appeared at the far end of the hall. He saw Doc, lifted a rifle.

The bronze man did something with pressure on three sides of the heavy bar simultaneously. Then he threw it down the corridor and jumped back.

The rifleman's bullet came into the gold room. It was followed immediately by much of the corridor, in pieces of various sizes.

The noise was so loud that Doc and his group almost stopped hearing things.

THE others probably shouted, but Renny's howling voice alone had power to register on stunned eardrums.

"Holy cow!" the big-fisted engineer bawled. "I've heard gold was power, but that's the first demonstration!"

Doc, working swiftly, got the others over to the side.

"Going to open a hole in the hull," he explained.

It was quite a hole the gold bar made in that part of the ship. They picked themselves up.

"But we never dreamed them wasn't gold bars!" Buddy Baldwin yelled.

"They are carefully made," Doc told him. "The cases are thick, and the explosive itself heavy."

"When did you plant them?" Long Tom asked.

"More than a week ago," Doc told him. "Almost every large bank in the city substituted them for their bullion. It was just a chance. Banks were logical game when the looting started. These bombs are arranged to blow up after twenty-four hours, by themselves. That was not my idea, incidentally, but the police insisted upon it. Come on."

The sea, black with night, squirmed below the opening in the hull.

"Is the launch moored astern?" Doc asked. "The one they use for a crash boat in case one of the planes has an accident in landing?"

"Yes," said Buddy Baldwin. "That seems to be my one useful contribution thus far."

"The information you have furnished me from time to time while pretending to be a member of the gang still, has helped a lot," Doc assured him. "Especially the plane signal, the three short blasts and the long one from the plane motor over New York—the signal agreed upon to indicate it was safe for me to become a hostage, in case they tried that. The signal indicated they did not intend to kill me immediately."

Long Tom asked, "Can everybody swim?"

Everybody apparently could, for they all jumped, Doc pausing, however, to hurl another of the gold brick bombs down the corridor. It fell through the floor, and exploded deep in the ship somewhere.

The excitement was enough to occupy the gang until Doc and his party reached the launch. It was not large enough to be welcomed joyfully as a vessel some hundreds of miles offshore. But it was handy enough at the moment. Renny had a knife and cut the painter.

They had drifted a hundred yards before bullets started arriving. Buddy Baldwin started the motor. Those on the ship turned a searchlight on them. The launch had a powerful searchlight of its

own for locating crashed planes at night, and they turned this back at the ship. The shooting as a whole was not very effective. The bronze man's band would not have been hit, even if they had not all crowded down behind the motor.

"They'll follow us!" Bess Baldwin cried.

She was wrong, and they were all quite astounded when they were not followed, and when they finally lost all trace of the lights of the ship.

Four hours later a plane could be heard overhead. The pilot was flying low and giving a series of short signals by racing his motor. Doc turned on the launch searchlight and blinked it. The plane landed.

Monk, Ham and Johnny were aboard.

"I sent them a note at Monk's laboratory," Doc explained. "They were to get the plane and fly to the first steady CW radio signal using the direction finder."

MONK, Ham and Johnny cleared up the puzzle of the ship which had not followed the escaping prisoners.

"Blazes, didn't you know?" Monk yelled. "The hooker sank. They sent out an S O S."

"That last bomb you threw," Buddy Baldwin told Doc.

Renny emitted a rumble.

"I don't believe it," he decided. "It's some trick."

He came nearer believing it the next morning, when they saw the floating wreckage and picked up a few men who were clinging to it.

Cadwiller Olden, the terribly remarkable little man, had gone silently to his roomful of doll furniture, they said, and no one had seen him thereafter. Undoubtedly he had perished with Nero, his huge bodyguard.

Monk pondered for several days before he figured something out.

"I've got it," he did say finally. "Cadwiller Olden was a psychological case. He was so small he got sensitive as heck about it, so he got himself all fired up with the idea of becoming a very big shot over ordinary-sized people. He took the quickest way of getting power: robbery. It turned out to be the worst."

"It usually does," Buddy Baldwin agreed thoughtfully.

Doc and his party got some of the Repel, but the larger quantity had gone down with the ship.

From what they did get—from the Repel weapons of men they captured, largely—Doc Savage learned a great deal.

His theory as to its nature, and that of the other scientists, had been approximately correct, as nearly as he could tell.

Doc never was sure—because Repel lost its strength! It simply dissipated itself, gave up its force, and was through in the course of time.

The criminals who had been rescued from a watery grave were consigned to Doc's unique "college" for remaking. Monk and Ham took them up, and evidently had a roughhouse on the way back, judging from their appearance.

They refused to discuss the newest difference, but it was noted that Monk dated up entrancing Bess Baldwin that evening, and Ham did not try to cut in, which was unusual for Ham. They had evidently settled that on the way back.

Monk thus got around to asking the young lady something that had been bothering him. Bess herself broke the ice.

"When I think that myself and my brother belonged to that gang I am utterly horrified," she said earnestly.

Monk was no diplomat.

"Listen, when did you get around to changing your mind?" he asked.

"Didn't you know?" Bess Baldwin showed surprise. "When Doc Savage got us the first time, he put myself and my brother through his college."

"Oh!" said Monk.

The "Oh!" explained a lot. It had suddenly come to Monk that the "escape" of the Baldwins from Doc Savage had been a piece of clever faking.

THE END