

THE AWFUL EGG

A Doc Savage Adventure By Kenneth Robeson

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Chapter I. MEN FLEEING

THE thing that ailed the doctor was not a fainting spell.

It was around ten o'clock when Dr. Samuel Harmony alighted from his limousine and instructed his chauffeur to return at twelve with the car. Doctor Samuel Harmony entered his office, spoke cheerfully to the receptionist, after noticing there were no patients waiting. He entered his private office and sat down at his desk, where the morning newspaper was spread out for his perusal. Ten minutes or so later, the receptionist entered to say there was a patient, and saw Dr. Samuel Harmony sitting there at his desk, practically as white as a sheet of typewriter paper.

"Doctor!" gasped the receptionist. "What's wrong?"

For a while Dr. Harmony's mouth acted like that of a fish out of water.

"I . . . I had a fainting spell," he finally managed to say.

The receptionist fluttered around, not knowing what to do. She wasn't very experienced.

"Do . . . do you want a drink of water, doctor?" she asked excitedly. "Shall I call a doctor?" Dr. Harmony, very pale, clenched his fists on the top of his desk. He called the girl an ugly name.

"Get out of here!" he ordered.

"But, doctor—"

"Dammit, I'll be all right," Dr. Harmony croaked. "Get out of here!"

The girl reached the door, then remembered.

"There . . . there's a patient here," she said. "A man who can't sleep at night."

"Tell him to come back later," muttered Dr. Harmony. Then he held up a hand. "No, I have a better idea. Tell him to go find another doctor."

The receptionist fluttered into the outer office, a trifle puzzled. Dr. Harmony got up and shuffled over and locked the door so she could not get back again. His movements were not normal, but at the same time they were not that of a man who'd had a fainting spell. If anything, they were the motions of a man who had his mind occupied with something else. He went back and sat down at the desk.

He sat there, scraping his fingers through his hair, rubbing his face, and showing other signs of nervous, intense concentration.

Once he made a gesture for the telephone, but changed his mind and jerked his hand away from the instrument.

"The damned line may be tapped," he muttered.

His distraught eyes kept going back to the newspaper. It was open to the page of pictures, approximately half of which was devoted to the wars in various places. The other half of the photographs were local happenings, and naturally there was the usual photo of prominent citizens landing from a steamship.

Dr. Harmony glared at a picture that had been taken on the gangplank of a steamer.

Suddenly, in a moment when his rage reached an insane peak, he snatched up a pen and struck at the picture, using the pen as if it was a dagger. The utter fury on the man's face kept the gesture from being childish. The pen broke. The newspaper was knocked onto the floor. A deep scar remained in the desk top.

Dr. Harmony got up and went to the door.

"You!" he said to the receptionist. "Cancel all my appointments. Prepare to close the office."

"You—"

"I'm taking a long vacation," snapped Dr. Harmony.

The receptionist looked as if she was about to bawl.

"Will I be out . . . out . . . of a job?"

"Well, hell, you won't be the first one who ever lost a job!"

Returning to his private office—he again locked the door to keep the receptionist out—Dr. Samuel Harmony used the telephone and tried to get his chauffeur. He failed.

After he realized he wouldn't be able to contact the chauffeur, Dr. Samuel Harmony sat there contemplating the instrument. Obviously, he would have liked to use it. But he shook his head uneasily.

"May be tapped," he muttered again.

An idea occurred to him. He pulled a prescription pad to him, wrote a message on it, tore off the sheet, put it in an envelope, which he addressed. He repeated the operation, the message being exactly the same in each case. They read:

Calico Parks in town to see Doc Savage. This may mean they are investigating the South Orion thing. Suggest scam out of town for two months at least.

Sam

With the writing of those messages, Dr. Samuel Harmony seemed to consciously lose his character as a physician with an office in a swanky part of town. His manner as a physician had been suave and dignified, somewhat on the snob side, but now he was only a scared man.

It had been fright, actually, which had turned him so pale a bit earlier, when he had told the girl he'd had a fainting spell. It wasn't any fainting spell. It was an attack of compounded terror. He sealed the envelopes containing the messages, and carried them in to his receptionist.

She was sitting there, tear-eyed, wondering where she would get another job.

"Will you mail these?" said Sam Harmony. He made his voice sharp and harsh. "And don't fail to do it," he added.

The girl gave such a start of astonishment, because of the harshness of his tone, that he hurriedly made his voice less snarling, so the girl would not be suspicious, and explained.

"Those are rather important," he said.

The girl looked at the envelopes, said nothing.

"They are prescriptions for several people," Sam Harmony said. "The prescriptions are vital to their health."

"I see," the girl said, and went out to find a mailbox.

Sam Harmony looked after her, grinned thinly and reflected that she didn't see at all; she didn't suspect anything. She was a nervous, excitable, timid kind of girl, and if she had suspected anything near the truth, he reflected, she probably would have had hysterics and spasms.

He would be glad to get out of this damned office and this infernal town, he decided. He hated, though, to be driven out involuntarily.

However, it's a wise crow that takes to tall timber when he sees a shotgun, Sam Harmony reflected.

He got his hat and coat and was standing in the door when the receptionist came back.

He paid her salary up to date—but that was all.

"You attend to locking up the office, having the light, water and telephone shut off, and such things," he ordered.

"What will I do with the key?" the girl inquired.

"Leave it with the building superintendent," Sam Harmony said, and departed.

THE receptionist stared after her boss, very, very puzzled. Then she busied herself with the task of cleaning the suite before locking up and leaving the place.

The girl might have been nervous and excitable, but she was no knot head. She was curious about those prescriptions which Sam Harmony had mailed. Her curiosity sprang from one very good reason—she had never heard of the boss having patients with the names she had read on the envelopes.

Picking up the prescription pad, the girl held it so that the light fell across it in just the correct fashion to make pencil indentations stand out so that they were readable.

She read the message which Sam Harmony had written. She was thoughtful for a moment.

"A prescription, all right," she remarked. "But not the kind he was trying to make me think." Which was a logical statement.

It was also logical that the girl should find the gash in the desk top which the pen had made when Sam Harmony struck with it, dagger fashion, at the news photograph—It was a matter of less than a minute until she was looking at the newspaper picture itself.

The caption below the picture said:

MYSTERY MAN CAUGHT BY

CANDID CAMERA

Doc Savage, rarely-photographed man of mystery, was caught by the camera today as he met Edward Ellston Parks, the mysterious international archaeologist as the latter landed from the S. S. Vancanic, which docked in the Hudson this morning.

The girl noted that the pen had been driven directly through the photographic chest of the man named Doc Savage. She sat there looking at Doc Savage. She rather approved of him. In fact, he was a very good-looking guy, and if he rated his picture in the newspaper in such a fashion, he must be an important fellow. Important fellows were usually rich. The feminine guile was at work.

The girl had a boy friend named Clarence, but called Hickey—Hickey Older. She picked up the phone

and gave him a buzz.

"This is Nancy," she said.

"Hello, sugar," Hickey said.

"Hello, hon," responded Nancy. After some more syrup-coated preliminaries of the same vein, Nancy got down to business. "Do you know a man named Doc Savage?" she asked.

"Has some guy been makin' passes at you?" Hickey yelled. "I'll knock his block off!"

"Oh, don't be silly! Have you ever heard of him? His name is Doc Savage, and the newspapers call him the man of mystery."

"Oh," said Hickey. "That one!"

"Well, do you know him?"

"Oh, sure. I have breakfast with him every morning, lunch with President Roosevelt, dinner with J. P. Morgan, although sometimes I have to go out with John D. Rockefeller, too, so he won't feel slighted."

"Cut out the wisecracks, Hickey. Do you know him?"

"Hell, no."

"Do you know anything about him?"

Genuine admiration came into Hickey's voice.

"Say, he's quite a guy, from what I've heard. You used to read stuff in the newspapers about him, but I guess he's stopped giving out interviews. Still, they publish pictures of him now and then. He's a big bronze man, a mighty striking-looking guy. Come to think of it, his picture is in this morning's Press."

Nancy asked patiently, "What does he do, Hickey, hon?"

"Well, the first time I heard what he does for a profession, I thought he was nuts," Hickey replied. "You know what I mean—it didn't make sense. Back in them days when knighthood was in flower and you went to a tinsmith to get your pants made— Hah, hah, pretty good. Eh, Nancy. Tinsmith to get your pants made. A hot one, eh?"

"They must have gone to a carpenter for that head of yours," Nancy said.

In a sobered voice, Hickey continued:

"Well, Doc Savage makes a business of helping people who are in trouble, aiding the oppressed, and punishing evildoers. That's what I read somewhere that the guy does. Only I don't see where there would be any profit in that. It sounds goofy to me. Like I said, back in the days when a knight went to a tinsmith for his—"

"Where can I find him, Hickey?"

Hickey became suspicious.

"Say, why are you so dangd interested?" he demanded.

"Don't ask so many questions," Nancy retorted. "Just tell me where he can be found."

"Come on, honeybunch. Quit stalling," Hickey ordered. "Tell papakins what you got on your mind."

"Well—" said Nancy, hesitantly. She told him about Dr. Harmony's sudden vacation and the peculiar circumstances attached thereto. "And so I thought," she finished, "that I ought to see Doc Savage—" There was a loud report. Nancy felt something jerk at her hair. Broken glass sprayed across the floor. There was a thump, and plaster fell from the opposite wall.

Nancy put one hand to her head and felt of her hair. When she brought the hand away, a tuft of hair came away also. She finally realized what had happened.

"Hickey!" she screamed into the telephone. "Somebody shot at me!"

Chapter II. THE ARCHAEOLOGIST

DOC SAVAGE maintained a headquarters on the eighty-sixth floor, which was the top floor, of one of the city's most prominent skyscrapers. The building served two desirable purposes: First, it was so prominent that it was a landmark which made it easy for people who needed help to locate Doc easily. Second, the internal arrangement—private elevators, secret private garage, another secret exit that led to the bronze man's boat-and-plane hangar that masqueraded as a warehouse on the Hudson—was such as to afford privacy. There was also a filtering system whereby people with real business were separated from the autograph-hunters and curiosity-lookers.

Nancy and her boy friend, Hickey Older, got out of a bus in front of the skyscraper. There was a little coolness between them.

"Hickey, I'm perfectly capable of doing this myself," Nancy protested.

Nancy was a rather ambitious piece of baggage. If she was going to meet a very handsome man who was also famous and wealthy, she didn't want any boy friend hanging around to perhaps throw a monkey wrench in the processes of nature.

The hope of meeting such a man, on the chance she could snare him with her charms—her charms were not bad at all—had been her initial motive for deciding to come to see Doc Savage.

After the shot, Hickey had added firmness to her intentions.

"This Doc Harmony fired you without notice," Hickey said angrily. "You don't owe him anything. Heck! He didn't even give you two weeks' advance pay! And—well, somebody did shoot at you. I wish I'd been there to protect you."

"Hickey, I can handle this myself," Nancy said.

"Nothing doing," Hickey retorted. "You need a man's protection. Anyhow, I wouldn't mind seeing

this Doc Savage myself."

Nancy resisted an impulse to kick his shins, and they entered the skyscraper, were directed to an elevator in the back, entered it, and were soon deposited in a quietly furnished hallway—not on the top floor, but on the twentieth.

Hickey nudged Nancy.

"Hey," he whispered. "They musta let us out in the wrong place. This looks like the training ground for a circus."

Hickey was referring to two rather remarkable-looking men, and two animals.

One of the men was extremely short, wide, homely and hairy. His appearance was strikingly like that of an ape, although his homeliness had a pleasant quality. It might have been pleasant because he was so extremely ugly.

The other man lean-waisted, dapperly dressed—attired in the height of sartorial perfection, in fact—with the wide, mobile mouth of an orator. He held a black cane across his knees.

These two men were glaring at each other. If appearances were any indication, they were on the verge of a fight.

"Listen, Ham, you overdressed shyster lawyer," said the apish man grimly. "I didn't ask you to eat breakfast at my apartment. Anyway, I been cooking them breakfasts for years, and nobody has complained before."

"Probably," said the dapper man, "because dead men tell no tales."

"Oh, yeah?"

"Well, something gave me a bellyache right after that breakfast."

"It was one of the blasted cigars of yours," said the homely man.

The other scowled. "Listen," he said. "Those cigars are all right. I only smoke quarter cigars."

"After somebody else has smoked the other three quarters, I bet," the homely man suggested.

Hickey Older stood there grinning, hoping the fight would commence.

It was hard for Hickey to decide which was the more remarkable, the intense disgust with which the two men were glaring at each other, or the two animals which reposed sleepily on the desks.

One of the animals was a pig, a small-bodied animal with long legs and large, wing like ears.

The other animal was some species of chimpanzee or baboon, its principal claim for fame being that it looked almost exactly like the homely man.

The homely man's small twinkling eyes suddenly discovered Nancy. He forgot all about his quarrel, sprang to his feet, and approached.

"I'm Lieutenant Colonel Andrew Blodgett Mayfair," he announced. "Call me Monk. Everybody does."

The dapper Ham said, "He's got a wife and thirteen half-witted children who call him pappy, in case he forgets to mention it."

Monk looked injured. As a matter of fact, this was precisely the lie he had been getting ready to tell about his companion, Ham Brooks. Or Brigadier General Theodore Marley Brooks, one of the most eminent lawyers—when he took time out from adventuring to work at it—who had ever been graduated from Harvard.

Ham finished the introductions. The pig was Habeas Corpus, Monk's pet. The chimp was Chemistry, Ham's own pet.

"We're looking for Doc Savage," said Hickey Older.

"You're on the right track," Monk said. "All you got to do is convince us it's something worth bothering Doc about. We're the filtering committee."

"Yes," Ham said. "Monk questions the men, and I interrogate the ladies."

"He's got it backward," Monk said indignantly.

Hickey Older put his fists on his hips.

"Now listen, pals," he said. "Let's come down to earth and talk sense. I've heard of both of you, and you're big shots at your professions." He pointed at Monk. "You're one of the greatest living industrial chemists." He pointed at Ham. "You're a big lawyer." Hickey pointed at both of them. "Now we come up here on business, so let's stop kidding around and get down to brass tacks."

"He sounds tough," Monk remarked.

Ham looked at Hickey Older's wide shoulders, beamy arms, sturdy wrists, thick neck, square young jaw and confident eyes.

"He is tough," Ham said. "You shut up, Monk, before you get hurt."

"Nancy, here," said Hickey Older, "has got something to tell you that looks kind of mysterious. She figured Doc Savage should know about it."

DOC SAVAGE was a giant of a man, yet so symmetrically proportioned that one had to stand close to realize just how powerful he was. His skin had a deep bronze tint that had been given by tropical suns, his hair was a bronze hue only slightly darker, and his eyes were like pools of flake-gold, always stirred by tiny winds. Remarkably penetrating eyes, magnetic. He spoke with a low, well-modulated voice that gave the impression of capacity for intense power and flexibility.

"Gosh!" said Nancy.

Hickey Older frowned at her. He'd heard Nancy say gosh that way before, usually when she saw a male movie star.

Monk said, "Their story sounded as if it might have something, Doc. So I brought them up."

The bronze man nodded, asked a few questions in a quiet, friendly voice. He found out the occupations of the two young people. Hickey Older was a supervisor of some kind of a big laundry, a position to which he had advanced from driving a truck.

Nancy produced the pad of prescription blanks from Dr. Samuel Harmony's office. She also had brought the newspaper with the stabbed-through picture.

Doc held the pad to the light, read what had been written on it. He glanced at the picture. He listened to Nancy tell about Dr. Samuel Harmony's "fainting" spell and his sudden determination to take a vacation.

"I don't think he fainted at all," said Nancy. "And I think he closed up his office and went away because he was scared."

Hickey Older cleared his throat to get attention, and carefully extracted from one pocket some small object which was wrapped in paper. He unrolled the paper, dropped a blob of lead in the bronze man's palm.

"Here's the bullet," he said. "I dug it out of the wall of the office."

"The bullet which was fired at Nancy when she was talking to you?" Doc Savage inquired.

"Yep."

"Just what had you said prior to the bullet being fired?" Doc asked.

Nancy put a finger on her lower lip while she remembered.

"Well, I guess I had told Hickey about just everything," she said. "And I was just saying that I thought I would go see Doc Savage. Then— bang! The bullet come through the window." She opened her purse and showed some strands of hair. "It came so close that it cut some of my hair," she added.

"Look."

The homely Monk was not looking at the hair; he was gazing approvingly at the girl.

"Looks as if," said Monk, "somebody tried to pot-shoot her to keep her from coming to see us."

Doc nodded thoughtfully.

"Where did the bullet come from?" he asked.

"I figured that out," volunteered Hickey Older. "It came from a window across the street. You see, this Harmony guy had big, airy offices with a lot of windows in each room. It would have been easy for somebody across the street to spot Nancy as she was talking on the telephone to me."

"But," wailed Nancy, "how did the watcher know what I was talking about?"

Doc Savage said, "Well, we can only surmise the answer to that. But Dr. Samuel Harmony wrote warnings to his friends, instead of telephoning them. That indicates that perhaps he had the suspicion that his telephone wire was tapped. If so, and the eavesdropper on the tapped wire was located in a room across the street, it would naturally explain what happened."

The bronze man's voice was low, reassuring, and conveyed an impression of kindly appreciation. Hickey Older put his fists on his hips.

"What you going to do about this?" he asked.

"Investigate it," Doc said.

"What do you figure is behind it?"

The bronze man made a slight negative gesture.

"Don't you think it is a little early to form definite conclusions?" he asked.

"I don't see nothin' to form conclusions from," admitted Hickey. "This guy gets scared, tells his friends to scram out of town, and leaves himself. Nancy gets interested and calls me up, and some guy takes a pot shot at her. It don't make sense to me. Does it to you?"

Doc said, "Does the name South Orion mean anything to anybody?"

"South Orion,"

said Hickey Older, "don't mean nothing to me."

"Nor to me," Nancy said.

Hickey sighed. "I'm kinda disappointed in you," he told Doc. "I always heard you just had to snap your fingers a couple of times, and everything was all fixed up."

Doc Savage made no comment, but moved to the window, where he stood in thought. Spread before the window was a remarkable panorama of Manhattan buildings, the bay and, far in the distance, the sea. Turning, Doc beckoned Hickey Older to his side.

"We have reason to suspect that Nancy might be in danger," Doc said. "I believe we should assign one of my men to guard her."

"What's the matter with me?" Hickey asked. "You ain't seen me do no guardin'. I'm pretty hot stuff, no kidding."

"I'm going to assign a man to work with you," Doc said. "Which one would you prefer, Monk or Ham?"

Hickey Older looked at Monk and Ham. He wasn't thinking which one would make the best guard. He was wondering which one of those two clucks would be the least likely to try to steal his girl.

"Monk," he said. "Monk looks the strongest."

He neglected to add that, if any girl of his was dope enough to fall for a fellow as homely as Monk, he might as well know about it now.

As a matter of fact, Hickey had made an error in his choice, and picked the one of the pair who usually had the most success with femininity.

Monk was called over and given his assignment as guard for Nancy. The homely chemist, looking pleased, grinned and winked at Ham, who did not return the grin. It was agreed that both Monk and Hickey Older were to accompany Nancy while she made the rounds of the employment agencies in search of a new job.

Monk, Hickey Older and Nancy left the eighty-sixth-floor headquarters.

DOC SAVAGE'S headquarters layout consisted of three great rooms. The first chamber, and the smallest one, was a reception room furnished with little except some comfortable chairs, a huge safe and a remarkable inlaid table. The next room was a library containing thousands of scientific tomes, one of the most complete technical libraries on certain subjects in existence. The third room, by far the largest, was the experimental laboratory where Doc Savage spent most of his spare time. The bronze man entered the laboratory, weighed the bullet which had been fired at Nancy, then put it under a microscope for a few minutes.

"A .25-20 rifle bullet," the bronze man remarked.

"Rifle?" Ham looked puzzled.

"Yes, the smart crooks have started carrying rifles instead of revolvers whenever it is convenient. You see, a man caught carrying a revolver is obviously under suspicion, and subject to the State antirearms law. Where the man with the rifle might be merely going deer hunting."

Ham suggested, "The bullet hit the glass and was deflected just enough to miss the girl. Is that your guess?"

"Yes."

He seemed to have something else on his mind, judging from his thoughtful expression. He rubbed his jaw, scratched his head, hesitating. Finally he blurted it out.

"Look," he exclaimed. "Here, wait a minute." He went over to the desk and picked up the newspaper, brought it back and pointed with his finger. "Who is this Edward Ellston Parks?"

Doc Savage said, "The man standing beside me there in that picture?"

Ham nodded.

"Yes, that's the man I mean," the dapper lawyer explained. "It says here that you came down to meet him when he landed on the S. S. Vancanic."

Doc Savage nodded, said nothing.

"Who is he?" Ham asked.

"What does the picture caption say his profession is?"

Ham consulted the paper. "It says," he remarked, "that he is a mysterious international archaeologist. That's a funny one. I've heard of plenty of archaeologists—we've even got one in our organization here, Johnny Littlejohn. But I didn't know there was any such thing as an international archaeologist, and particularly, a mysterious one."

Doc Savage smiled slightly. "You seem to think I have some connection with this?"

"Well, this scared physician, in his notes telling his friends to scram, mentions a Calico Parks who had come to see you," Ham pointed out. "You know any Calico Parks?"

Doc Savage nodded.

"Edward Ellston Parks," the bronze man said, "is sometimes called Calico Parks."

"There you are," Ham said. "That's what I meant."

Before he replied directly, the giant bronze man entered the library, going to a large glass case, one of the few in the room which did not contain books. He unlocked the door of this case, slid the panel back, and removed a box which, when opened, proved to be filled with cotton padding. Doc lifted a part of the padding and disclosed a peculiar, rather hideous, grayish-colored thing. Ham peered at it. "What an ugly booger!" he exclaimed. "What is that thing, anyway?"

"An almost perfect ossified specimen of a young pterodactyl," Doc explained. "It is a rare thing. Edward Ellston Parks, or Calico Parks—whichever you want to call him—gave it to me to classify, then turn over to a museum."

"You met him at the boat to get that thing?" Ham asked.

The bronze man nodded. "Yes."

"Do you know anything else about him?"

Doc Savage shook his head. "Nothing," he said, "except that he has been in the field of archaeology for a number of years, and is quite famous."

Ham opened his mouth to make some comment, but he closed it. His eyes grew round and startled.

"Listen!" he shouted. "Ain't that shooting? Sounds like it was down on the street!"

Chapter III. FLIGHT FROM HATE

HAM dived for a window. The window was heavy, of bulletproof construction, and the dapper lawyer had trouble getting the sash to swing open. He grabbed the sill and leaned far over, staring downward. Then he made an angry sound—the distance was too great and the perpendicular angle too difficult, for him to distinguish much—and whirling, he ran to the laboratory, to return in a moment carrying a pair of strong binoculars. He focused the glasses downward.

Doc Savage was also leaning from the window. The bronze man's eyes were far sharper than those of Ham, due to the rather unusual scientific training which had been exercised in the bronze man's upbringing.

Far below, things were a little confused.

The sidewalk was practically bare of pedestrians. Those who still remained in view were dashing madly for cover.

A car, a coach of a middle-priced make, was careening down the street. A man leaned from the windows of this, trying to manipulate a revolver. The gun banged loudly, twice, but the bullets apparently hit no one.

In the middle of the street, nearly a block behind the car, two men were racing madly after the machine and shaking their fists.

"Monk," said Ham, "and that Hickey Older. Say, that boy has got nerve, hasn't he?"

Doc Savage said nothing; he was watching the fleeing car, noting the details about the machine.

He reached over suddenly, grabbed the binoculars from Ham's fingers, and placed them on the car and held them, committing the license number to memory.

"You get the license?" Ham asked.

Doc nodded.

Ham said, "Well, I couldn't see the darned thing."

Down in the street, Monk and Hickey Older had given up their futile pursuit of the machine. They ran to two taxicabs in succession. The driver apparently had fled from the first one, taking the keys, but Monk and Hickey climbed into the second machine and it left, volleying down the street in pursuit of the coach.

"It's going to get away from them," Ham said pessimistically.

IT was nearly an hour before Monk and Hickey Older returned. They came back wearing gloomy expressions which told more plainly than words what their success had been. In addition, Monk's stub of a nose was bruised and Hickey Older was rubbing one shoulder painfully.

"We finally ran into a telephone pole," Monk explained, "and had to stop."

"What happened?" Ham demanded.

Hickey Older answered the inquiry. Jamming his fists into his pocket, the young man growled, "You guys were sure right when you said Nancy might need a bodyguard. She needed the army and the navy." The young man sank in a chair, and covered his face with his hands. He spoke through his fingers, groaningly. "We no more than got out on the sidewalk downstairs," he said, "and a bunch of guys jumped us. They had guns, and they had them pointed at us before we knew what was what. We couldn't do a thing. They grabbed Nancy; one of them slammed her over the head with a blackjack"—he suddenly clenched his fists against his jaw—"and if I ever get that guy, I'll tear his head off. Anyway, they threw her in that coach, and away they went."

Monk said, "They were sure efficient, all right." The homely chemist added that he had done one thing at least; he had secured the license number of the machine. He gave the license numerals and they checked with those which Doc Savage had secured through the binoculars. The bronze man informed them that he had already advised the police to be on the lookout for the machine, and that the broadcast had gone out to all patrol cars, but without results. Monk nodded gloomily.

"I guess they got away," Hickey Older muttered.

Monk stalked to the window, then back again. "You know, there's one strange thing about this," the homely chemist said.

"What's that?" Ham demanded.

"Why should they kidnap the girl this time?" Monk asked. "The first time they shot at her, and tried to kill her. The second time, when they could have shot her—and don't you think for a minute they couldn't have killed her down there on the street—they made no offer to do anything except grab her. Now, what puzzles me is: Why did they seize her?"

Doc glanced at Hickey Older. "Do you have any idea?"

Hickey Older shook his head. "Unless," he said, "they are afraid Nancy, while she was working in this Dr. Samuel Harmony's office, learned something that would look dangerous to them."

"In that case, why didn't they shoot her?" Doc asked.

"You've got me," Hickey Older said.

"People are usually silenced when they know too much," Doc reminded, "by killing them."

Hickey Older jumped up. His fists were strained.

"Stop talking like that!" he shouted. "I'm damn near crazy now, without you harpin' on maybe they killed her! Hell, ain't there somethin' we can do?"

"Keep your shirt on," Ham advised.

Doc Savage said nothing more, but went into the reception room and got his coat and hat.

Ordinarily the bronze man preferred not to wear a hat, but to go without one meant that he was recognized too frequently on the street. He pulled the hat down low and turned up his coat collar.

Monk asked, "Where you goin' now, Doc?"

"To have a conference with Edward Ellston Parks," the bronze man replied.

"Now you're talkin'," said Hickey Older.

THE Ritz-Central Hotel was one of the most subdued hostelries in the most expensive part of the city, a region where it was considered déclassé to be the least bit flamboyant, and Edward Ellston Parks occupied a discreet three-room suite on the twelfth floor.

A butler in uniform admitted Doc Savage to the suite, took the bronze man's hat, and said he would see if Mr. Parks was in. Almost instantly, Parks entered the room.

"Why, I'm delighted to see you again," he said effusively.

Edward Ellston Parks was a large, burly man with the body of a bear, the benign face of a man who might have spent his life taking care of little children. His hair was almost white, his mouth ample and full-lipped, his eyes large and humorous. He had strong, muscular-looking hands on the backs of which grew an unusual amount of white hair.

The two men shook hands, exchanged amenities, then Doc got down to business.

"I hope," said the bronze man, "that you won't mind if I ask you a few questions."

"Of course not," said Parks.

"Do you know a man named Harmony?" Doc asked.

Edward Ellston Parks started and showed a visible amount of surprise.

"Dr. Samuel Harmony?" he inquired.

"Yes."

"Of course I know him," Parks said. He hesitated, finally shrugged and smiled. "As a matter of fact, the man at one time was very interested in archaeology and served as one of my assistants." Doc Savage nodded. "I hope," he said smoothly, "that you won't find anything offensive in this next query. The question is this: Have you ever had any difficulty or trouble of any sort with Samuel Harmony?"

"Trouble?" Edward Ellston Parks hesitated again. "Well, as a matter of fact, we did. But that was two or three years ago."

Doc Savage said, "Would you mind giving me the circumstances of the quarrel?"

Edward Ellston Parks went over to a table, picked up a cigar and lighted it. He puffed smoke thoughtfully for a few moments before he answered.

"It was hardly a quarrel, I would say," he stated. "The truth is that the man suddenly deserted my expedition. Shortly after his departure, I made the unpleasant discovery that a substantial portion of our funds was missing."

Doc asked, "Did Samuel Harmony rob you of the expedition money?"

"I . . . er . . . don't believe I care to answer that," said Parks. "I have a great reluctance for making statements I can't prove."

Doc Savage's metallic features remained expressionless, although there was stirring life in the depths of his flake-gold eyes.

"Do you," inquired the bronze man, "know of any reason why Samuel Harmony should suddenly flee the city upon learning you had arrived in the United States?"

Edward Ellston Parks laughed rather grimly. "If he did that," he said, "I should be inclined to take it as an indication of guilt."

"By guilt, you mean the matter of the theft of the expedition funds two years ago?"

"Exactly."

Doc Savage's face became even more expressionless, and his eyes turned cold as he stared speculatively out the window.

"A girl who has been working as a receptionist in Samuel Harmony's office was shot at," the bronze man said. "Then she was seized as she left my office." Doc shifted his gaze, made it steady upon the benign face of Parks, and said abruptly, "Do you have any idea why something like that should happen?"

Parks shook his head. "None," he said.

EDWARD ELLSTON PARKS overflowed politeness and willingness to cooperate while he was conducting Doc Savage to the door. He even accompanied the bronze man out in the hall to wait for the elevators to arrive. "I am very mystified," said Parks. "Very. I do not understand what has happened, and I want you to know that I am very desirous of cooperating. Really, I was hoping that we should some day get a chance to work together, because I should like very much to know you better."

"Thank you," Doc Savage said, and stepped into the elevator.

Parks stood there, rubbing his hands together and smiling, until the cage went down. Then he stopped rubbing his hands, and the fingers of each hand distended and tensed, becoming something like talons. His lips peeled off his teeth, and his teeth ground together.

He whirled and ran into his suite.

"Leo!" he yelled.

Leo, who proved to be the butler, came running. "What is it, chief?" he demanded.

"Doc Savage," said Parks, "has smelled something."

"Damn, that's tough," said Leo.

"Get me the boys on the phone," Parks ordered.

Leo picked up a telephone, dialed for a few moments, spoke in a low voice, then turned and held out the instrument. Parks took the phone.

"Nick?" he asked. . . . "Oh, it's you, Ben. So much the better. . . . You say Nick left for Miami to check that end? . . . O. K."

Parks pursed his lips while considering his words, then spoke rapidly.

"Somebody has turned a hog loose in our parlor," he said grimly. "Here is what happened: Sam Harmony saw a picture of me landing from the boat, and meeting Doc Savage. The picture scared the hell out of Sam, for he must have thought that I had gotten Doc Savage to work with me." Parks

laughed harshly. "Evidently Sam didn't know much about this Doc Savage, or he would have known that Savage was the last man in the world I'd have gone to.

"Yeah, Ben," Parks continued, "Sam Harmony got scared, all right. He turned as white as a sheet, and took off like a duck that had been shot at. You know how Sam always was when he got scared. He didn't stop to think. In this case, I'll admit it's probably just as well he didn't stop, because it might have given us time to get our hands on him."

Parks listened to the receiver make noises for a minute.

"I'm explaining it, Ben," he said sharply. "Shut up and listen. Sam Harmony had a receptionist, a girl named Nancy. She got wise that something was wrong and she figured out what had scared Sam. She was mad at Sam because he'd let her out of a job on short notice. She decided to tell Doc Savage about it, but she called up her boy friend first to consult him about it. While she was talking to her boy friend, somebody took a shot at her. . . .

"Hell, no, Ben! It wasn't just some guy that had it in for the girl. Or at least it don't look that way. Savage thinks the telephone line into Sam's office was tapped, and the guy doing the eavesdropping heard the girl saying she was going to Doc Savage, and tried to knock her off before she could do it."

The receiver made some more noises.

"Shut up," Parks interrupted. "The girl went to Savage, Ben. She told him her story. It wasn't a story that incriminated us, as far as I can tell. As the girl was leaving Savage's place, some tough guys grabbed her, threw her in a coupe and got away with her."

The man called Ben interjected an exclamation, followed by a question which excitement made almost inarticulate.

"What?" Parks asked. "Oh. . . . How do I know this? Why Doc Savage was just up here. He left a minute ago."

There was a pause while Ben said something forceful and lengthy.

"Listen, Ben," said Parks. "You can't tell me anything I don't know about this Doc Savage. He is poison. He will amble along and you'll think he isn't doing anything or learning anything, and then—bang! bang! bang!—like a machine gun, he's got everybody's goose and cooked it. Before you know what happened. That's the way he is."

Ben asked a question.

"Yes," Parks answered. "Work fast and try to find Sam Harmony before he gets out of town. If you find him, you know what to do."

Ben asked, "Was the South Orion mentioned?"

"Yes. But Savage doesn't know what the name means."

Ben put another query, an uneasy one, to which Parks responded, "Well, if Savage catches you, tell him enough of the truth to make it seem reasonable. Tell him I suddenly became suspicious that Sam Harmony really had stolen that expedition money, and put you to trying to find Sam."

Parks paused to consider for a few moments. "It looks," he finished, "as if two groups are after old Sammy Harmony. We're one. But who the hell you suppose the other outfit could be?"

He hung up without waiting for a response.

DOWNSTAIRS—in the basement of the hotel, to be exact—Doc Savage listened to the clicking noise which indicated Edward Ellston Parks, in his twelfth-floor suite, had replaced the telephone receiver on the hook. Doc heard this through the medium of a headset, a small amplifying device, and a little coil-shaped antennae which he was holding within a fraction of an inch of the lug on the connector panel through which came the wire from Parks' room.

It had been simple, the work of a very few moments, to locate the wire, since, for the sake of efficiency, the telephone lineman used more or less the same system in handling telephone connections in all large hotels.

Less simple was the eavesdropping device which the bronze man was using. This, since it had no actual metallic connection with the wire, was impossible to detect.

Doc Savage stood there and contemplated the device thoughtfully. He had heard all of Parks' conversation with the man named Ben.

A strange sound came into existence. It was low, eerie, as if it might have been made by rushing air in one of the ventilating shafts, or by some fantastic piece of electrical mechanism. It was a trilling without definite tune, although with marked musical quality, traveling up and down the scale, but adhering to no fixed arrangement of notes. This trilling was a small unconscious sound which Doc Savage made in moments of mental stress.

Leaving the hotel the bronze man entered a cab and gave the address of Samuel Harmony's apartment.

Chapter IV. THE RED ROAD

SAMUEL HARMONY leaned back in his limousine, closed his eyes and concentrated, trying to remember whether he had left anything at all in his apartment, or in his office, for that matter, which would furnish a clue to where he was going. He thought intensely for some minutes, then drew in a deep breath and let it pass through his teeth. He hardly believed there were any clues behind.

When the limousine reached Grand Central Railway Station, Samuel Harmony turned his bag over to a porter, told his chauffeur to return the car to a garage and put it in dead storage, and then

consider that his term of employment was finished. The chauffeur scowled and wanted to know what about some pay in lieu of advance notice which he hadn't received, and Sam Harmony scowled back and told the chauffeur to shut up and get out of there, if he didn't want his face caved in. The chauffeur became meek. He had never heard Samuel Harmony use exactly that tone.

Sam Harmony didn't board a train. He had the porter carry his bag to the ticket window, then pretended to have forgotten some important papers.

"I'll have to catch a later train," he said. "Please take my bag to a taxi."

By keeping a sharp lookout, Sam Harmony convinced himself that no one was following him.

"The new airport," he said.

At the airport, he bought a ticket on the next plane leaving for Chicago. It was nearly two hours until plane time. He sat in a recess in the waiting room, but remained there only a short while, for he was seized by an idea.

He got a telephone book, a telephone, and began calling detective agencies. He asked each agency if they had an operative who would closely answer to a certain description, which he furnished. The description was that of himself—a sturdy, middle-aged man, thick-bodied, who looked like a professional man. Dark hair, smeared slightly with gray, a rather healthy skin. Straight nose, wide and rather businesslike mouth.

Finally he found an agency that had such a man available for immediate duty. Sam Harmony had the detective appear at the airport immediately.

Confronting the detective, Sam Harmony did some expert lying.

"My name is Alexander Dickson," Sam Harmony told the private detective. "I want you in Chicago for a job. You will take a plane immediately, go to the Lakeview Hotel and register under the name of . . . of . . . well, Samuel Harmony would be a good name. Yes, use that one. I have the airplane tickets made out in that name." He brought an envelope out of his pocket. "Here is the plane ticket, and some expense money."

"What's this about?" the detective demanded.

"I'll give you the details in Chicago," Sam Harmony said. "Don't forget—use the name Sam Harmony, and register at the Lakeview Hotel. You got it?"

The detective hesitated. He was in a profession where all kinds of screwy things could be expected to happen, and he had seen clients who were not as sensible as this one. Moreover, there was a plane ticket and what seemed to be an ample wad of cash in his hand.

"I got it," he said.

Sam Harmony watched to make sure the sleuth took off in the plane, after which he felt better, so much better that he chuckled.

"When they check the airlines," he said grimly, "they'll think I've gone to Chicago."

He took a bus, under an assumed name, to Philadelphia. He wandered around Philadelphia streets for a while, thinking about his plans, and trying to relax. Finally he bought another plane ticket, this one to Miami, Florida.

Before going out to the Philadelphia airport, he made several small purchases, some of which were wearing apparel. One of the objects he bought was a large folding-blade hunting knife which he hung up his right sleeve by means of a long rubber band. Two other of his purchases were books—the latest books on archaeology.

The flight to Miami, Florida, was uneventful.

Shortly after Sam Harmony got off the plane at the Miami airport—it was now night, and the spot where the incident occurred was rather dark—a man walked up to him.

"Hello, Sammy," the man said.

Samuel Harmony lowered his eyes and noticed that the man was holding a blue revolver in one hand. NOTHING was said between the two for some moments, then the stranger jerked his head, indicating that they had better walk to a spot where they could talk privately. The man was short, wide, almost as darkly browned as an alligator, and he looked about as pleasant as an alligator. Sam Harmony nodded almost imperceptibly and obeyed the command.

"Hello, Nick," he said.

"I already said hello to you," Nick remarked.

Sam Harmony bit his lower lip. "How did Calico Parks get the idea of sending you down here?"

Nick grinned unpleasantly. "Why, hell, it was an obvious guess. We just supposed you would head for South America, and if you took a plane, this is one spot you would naturally pass."

"It was just a guess, then?"

"Yeah. Good one, too, wasn't it?"

"Parks isn't down here?"

"No. He's at the Ritz-Central Hotel, back in New York."

"You didn't," persisted Sam Harmony, "find out that I had hired a private detective who looked like me, had him use my name, and put him on a plane for Chicago?"

Nick looked surprised. "Hell, no. Did you do that, Sammy? Say, that one would have fooled us. You're getting slick, ain't you?"

Sam Harmony said nothing, but his mind was racing, leaping about in search of an escape, like a dog hunting a rabbit in tall grass.

Nick said, "Sammy."

"Yes?"

"Who is this other gang that's after you?"

"What other gang?" Sam Harmony was astonished. "I don't know what you're talking about."

"Somebody took a shot at your office girl, then put the snatch on her a while later," Nick explained. "It wasn't us. We were wondering who it was."

Sam Harmony shook his head. He was genuinely puzzled by the other's words. But not too puzzled to forget to start coughing. He coughed hard for a moment, then sneezed.

"Damned cold," he said.

Nick scowled. "Come on, Sammy," he ordered. "Give us the low-down on who the other outfit is. Did you let some information slip, so that some other gang of chiselers got wise and are trying to intrude? Heh, heh! 'Intrude' would be the word for it, wouldn't you say?"

Sam Harmony shook his head.

"Have you got any new boys in your outfit, Sammy?" Nick asked.

"No."

"But you've still got the boys organized, haven't you?"

Sam Harmony did not answer.

"We figure you have," Nick said. "Because before you skipped New York, you mailed some warnings, written on prescription pads, to some guys out of town." Nick showed his teeth. "Doc Savage found that out, and told Calico Parks about it."

Sam Harmony shuddered.

"So Doc Savage and Parks are working together?" he asked hoarsely.

Nick nodded without changing expression.

"Sure," he lied.

Sam Harmony had another fit of coughing, and sneezed. He made an angry gesture with his arm.

"Must be the damned flu," he said.

Instantly, he sneezed once more. This time, he whipped his right arm, and the sheath knife on the rubber band came down into his hand. It had a button which, when pressed, caused the blade to fly open. The blade was very sharp, for Sam Harmony had spent some of his time honing it during the flight down from Philadelphia.

Sam Harmony made a quick, skilled gesture with the knife.

Then he jumped back to get out of the way of a red flood spouting.

AFTER Nick had died, making some rather unpleasant noises in the process, noises which Sam Harmony managed to muffle to some extent by pulling Nick's coat over his head and standing on the dying man's neck, a problem presented itself. What to do with the body. There was too much of a red lake on the floor to move the body itself and expect the deed to go unnoticed. And nothing at hand to use as a mop.

The killing had occurred in a little anteroom of the airport, a chamber which was darkened because of the lateness of the night hour.

Sam Harmony solved the problem by searching the body carefully. He removed everything which might have identified Nick.

Then Sam Harmony put his own billfold and a few personal letters in Nick's clothing. The billfold contained a picture of Sam, and he left the photograph there. So that it would not be used to undo his plan, he took the razor-sharp knife and did a butchering job on his victim's face. He cut long slices in the body, slashing through clothes, skin and flesh. He was careful to cut one gash that passed partially through the billfold. That would certainly make it seem that the billfold had been on the body when the knifing was done. He wallowed the remains around in the red lake so that it would appear that the gashes had run crimson.

He managed to clean up, without attracting attention, in a washroom.

Going to a Miami telegraph office, he dispatched a message to Edward Ellston Parks, care of the Ritz-Central Hotel, New York City, the missive reading:

IN FOLLOWING YOUR ORDERS I HAD TO DO POOR SAM HARMONY WRONG. AM GOING PLACES FOR MY HEALTH, SO YOU WON'T HEAR FROM ME FOR SOME TIME.

NICK

"My full name," Sam Harmony told the telegraph-office clerk, "is Nick Hostelli, and you can get in touch with me through my employer, Edward Ellston Parks, the man to whom this telegram is going. You had better put that information down on the message, in case you should forget."

"Yes, Sir," said the clerk.

Sam Harmony was smiling grimly as he left the telegraph office. That was doing it. That was throwing the skunk back in the lap of the fellow who had sent it out. The police would identify the body of Nick as Sam Harmony, following which they were fairly sure to check back on Parks for some information. They might even accuse Calico Parks of instigating a murder.

The idea made Sam Harmony laugh.

Chapter V. DINOSAUR COUNTRY

RIDING a plane westbound from Florida, Sam Harmony was unable to sleep, so he spent his time browsing through the books on archaeology which he had purchased. He liked archaeology, probably

knowing more about it than about any other subject—certainly more than he knew about the practice of medicine—although he had never worked at the profession extensively. It was, more than anything else, his hobby, and so he specialized in one particular phase of it—the matter of fossilized dinosaurs. He was rather an authority on dinosaurs.

At New Orleans, he was a great deal more careful than he had been in Miami. But he saw no one who showed any interest in him. He took a train, engaging a bedroom, and managed to get some sleep. Twelve hours later, he changed to a plane, followed that with a bus, and the ensuing day purchased a small car in a Colorado town under an assumed name.

For two days, he drove idly, trading cars each day, buying small low-priced machines which would not be objects of attention, and changing clothing and thoroughly altering his appearance. Confident now that he had thrown off any possibility of pursuit, he turned his mind to the subject of what he should do to occupy his time for the next few weeks.

Sam Harmony's choice of a spot in which to spend his enforced vacation was a perfectly natural one into which two factors entered, the first being his liking for fossils, particularly dinosaurs, and the second factor being the nearness of the Bad Lands which lay in the Dakotas just east of the Black Hills. The Bad Lands, Sam Harmony happened to know, were an abundant source of fossilized dinosaurs.

Turning up at the town of Kadoka, he made the rounds of the stores and fitted himself up with a good outfit for roughing it, then decided he would buy a cow pony to ride and a burro to carry the pack.

"You figure on goin' into them Bad Lands?" a local citizen asked him.

"Yep."

"You mind hearin' some advice, or you want me to keep my mouth shut?"

"I like advice," said Sam Harmony.

"Well, if I was you, bein' a stranger to the Bad Lands," said the local man, "I would take me a guide. Now, mind you, there isn't anybody that really knows the country. Matter of fact, a lot of the Bad Lands have never been seen by any human being, except maybe in kind of a general way from an airplane. And seein' 'em from an airplane don't help you a lot, once you're on foot in them. Weren't goin' in to hunt fossils, were you?"

"How did you know that?" Sam Harmony asked.

"Just figured you was. Heard you were buyin' some diggin' tools, dynamite, and so on. That generally means fossil diggin'."

"Yes, I thought I would spend some time hunting fossils."

"Not a better place in the world for it," said the other. "Biggest fossil beds anywhere are right here in the Bad Lands."

"Yes, I know that."

"Better take my advice about a guide. Won't cost you much. May save you a passel of trouble."

"Thanks," said Sam Harmony. "Believe I will."

"Mind if I recommend a good feller? You'll find he knows a lot about fossilin' himself."

"Nope, don't mind."

"Wanta go meet him now? His name's Shorty."

SAM HARMONY had never been into the Bad Lands before, but he had heard a great deal about them. They were even more than he expected. He came upon them suddenly, sitting in the front seat with the driver of the truck which he had hired to bring himself, his rented horses and his guide, Shorty, out to the farthest point to which a wheeled vehicle could penetrate.

The view made Sam Harmony wrench up in his seat and stare. His mouth and eyes were both round.

"Strange-lookin' place, eh?" suggested the driver.

"Weird!"

Before him, extending until lost in the haze of distance, were pinnacles, knifelike ridges, fantastically shaped peaks, all crowded against each other until there was room for nothing but the slash-shaped canyons which separated them. It was like the upper reaches of the Grand Canyon with a blend of the Painted Desert. Almost impossible to accept was the conception that rain and weather erosion had wrought such a fantastic conglomeration. Nowhere, as far as the eye could discern, was there any sign of vegetation.

Sam Harmony felt, as had doubtless many another man before him, a jerking qualm at the thought of entering such a ripped, trackless maze.

Shorty, the guide, who was riding in the back of the small truck, spoke.

"Dad burn my boots, but that's the best durn fossilin' country they've found," he said. "Them canyons and cuts has been washed down to where the fossils is exposed and all you have to do is walk along, find a likely spot and dig 'em out."

The truck labored and groaned for a while, the driver nursing it along the bottom of a canyon. Then the vehicle stopped. They began unloading.

Shorty was, as might be expected from the Western habit of nicknaming men their exact opposite, an extremely long, and unbelievably bony man. The first time Sam Harmony had seen Shorty, he had been moved to wonder how a man who was so thin could possibly keep alive.

In addition to being very much alive, Shorty had turned out to have a surprising fund of

knowledge concerning dinosaur-fossil beds. The data in Shorty's elongated head was amazing. The man, Sam Harmony realized, would be a gem in the membership of any fossil-hunting expedition. Moreover, his manner was tractable, his price extremely reasonable, and his efficiency, as demonstrated so far, of a high nature.

After the equipment was unloaded, Shorty stepped back and looked over the stuff.

"Dad burn my boots," he said. "We've made our first mistake."

"What's that?" Sam Harmony demanded.

"Water bags," explained Shorty. "Hell, we ain't got a one here! And we can't go into them Bad Lands without no water bags. I had four. I wonder how the hell they got left behind?"

The truck driver said, "It's my fault. I forgot and left the things hanging by the pump when we loaded up. I had 'em full of water so they would tighten up."

Shorty turned to Sam Harmony. "You mind if I ride back in with him to get 'em?" he asked. "Fact is, I think I'll pick up some cartridges for my .30-30." He winked. "We might accidentally pot a deer in there, seein' as how there ain't no game wardens likely to be around."

"Go ahead," Sam said.

"We'll be right back," Shorty promised. "Dad burn my boots if we ain't!"

Leaving Sam Harmony to start packing the horses—Sam knew enough about packing to tie diamond-hitches with his eyes closed, he explained—Shorty and the truck driver returned to Kadoka. Hardly a word was said during the trip.

Shorty found the water bags where the truck driver had said they would be, and hung them on the side of the truck. He noticed the truck driver watching him.

"How'm I doin'?" he asked.

"All right," the truck driver said. "You musta growed up in these parts."

Shorty grinned. "I'm gonna make a phone call," he said. "Afraid to make it before. Feller callin' New York from here might get the telephone operator to talkin'."

Entering the telephone office, Shorty placed a person-to-person call for Doc Savage, in New York City. Eventually, Monk's rather squeaky voice answered.

"I'LL be superamalgamated," remarked Shorty. "Is Doc there?"

"Johnny?" Monk demanded.

"Yes, this is Johnny. But call me Shorty."

"How you making it, Shorty?" Monk inquired.

"All right, I've been told," Shorty replied. "Put Doc on the wire."

"Doc ain't here," Monk explained. "He's out keepin' an eye on Calico Parks."

"Have you learned anything yet by watching Calico Parks?" Shorty asked.

"Not a thing."

"Have you found that girl, Nancy?"

"No," Monk said. "And we'd better be findin' her before long, too, or this Hickey Older is gonna bust loose and tear the town to pieces. He's been ranting around for two days, calling us a bunch of false alarms."

Shorty considered for a moment.

"Here is a report for Doc Savage," he said. "Give it to him when he shows up. Tell him that I trailed Samuel Harmony to the New York airport, then to Philadelphia, then by plane to Miami, Florida. In Miami, Sam Harmony killed a man named Nick Hostelli, who had a gun pointed at Harmony. Harmony sent a telegram, signed with the name of the man he murdered, which will probably get Calico Parks into trouble, if it hasn't already. After murdering the man, Harmony ducked around over the country, and finally turned up here in the Bad Lands of the Dakotas, where he's going fossil hunting."

"Fossil hunting? What the—"

"Shut up and listen. Are you taking this down?"

"It's being recorded," Monk said.

"All right," Shorty continued. "As soon as I found out that Harmony was going into the Bad Lands fossil hunting, I got hold of one of the local boys, slipped him a few dollars for his trouble, and had him talk Harmony into hiring a guide, and recommend me. Well, I got the guiding job. I'm going into the Bad Lands fossil hunting with Sam Harmony. We're shoving off today. That means you might not hear from me for some time. But I'll be sticking right with Harmony, and trying to find out what this is all about by following and watching him."

"Have you found out anything?" Monk demanded.

"No. He says he's going in on a vacation. Of course that's a lie. I don't know how much of what he says is lies."

"Humph!"

"Now," said Shorty, "what have you learned about this thing?"

"Nothing more, practically."

"But something should begin to make sense. What is behind it? Why was Harmony scared of Calico Parks? Why was Parks trying to catch Harmony? Why was Nancy shot at? Why was Nancy seized and spirited away?"

"Those," said Monk, "are some of the questions we don't know the answers to."

"Have you learned what South Orion is?"

"Nope. Ham is workin' on that."

"Well," said Shorty, "I gotta be blowin' along, podner."

Monk made a surprise noise at the other end of the telephone wire. "For a fellow who is on record as using the longest words there is," he said, "You've sure changed your speech. How come?"

"I've been using short words for days," Shorty explained. "I don't dare make a slip and use a long word."

"Bad as that, eh?"

"Sam Harmony," said Shorty, "cut the throat of that man in Miami as if he was using a razor."

"Well, you be careful."

"Don't be a fool. I know when to be careful."

"Right. G'bye."

"G'bye, you ultratrichogenous anthropologicality."

Monk laughed. "I'll look that up," he chuckled, "and if it means what I think, I'll push your ears down."

SHORTY was thoughtful after he finished the telephone conversation. What he was doing was dangerous, and he knew it, although he was hardly a stranger to peril.

He was William Harper Johnny Littlejohn, member of Doc Savage's group of five assistants. If his knowledge of archaeology, particularly with reference to dinosaur-fossil beds, had surprised Sam Harmony, the answer to that was simply given—Johnny Littlejohn, now masquerading as Shorty, was one of the most eminent living archaeologists and geologists, and what he did not know about the subject of prehistoric dinosaurs, those monstrous things that roamed the world millions of years ago, had not been discovered or written.

Danger, there might well be. Johnny made a decision. He went to his modest room at a local rooming house, and got a gallon can of peaches.

At least, the gallon can was labeled as containing peaches. Actually, it held an extremely compact short-wave radio transmitter-receiver.

Johnny added two smaller cans of pears. Those contained spare batteries for the radio.

He had debated about taking the radio along and had first decided not to do so, but now he was changing his mind. There was no telling what might turn up, and the set, while not powerful enough to contact Doc Savage directly in New York City, would reach either an amateur or some airway station within a radius of a few hundred miles, if operated after dark.

He got in the truck and they drove back and joined Sam Harmony.

"You get the water bags, Shorty?" asked Sam Harmony.

"Yep," said Johnny. "Got us a treat, too." He exhibited the can labeled peaches, and the two smaller ones labeled pears. "If we find somethin' special, we can celebrate," he said. "I've took peaches along before, as kind of a good-luck charm. Almost always it works. If we open 'em before we make a big discovery, it's bad luck. So don't go expectin' peaches until we find somethin' really important."

Sam Harmony nodded indifferently.

"Look over the packs," he said. "And if you're satisfied, let's get moving."

Johnny examined the packs which the man had put on the horses. They were very good. Harmony had been right when he said he knew packing.

"Danged if I could've done as well myself, podner," Johnny said. "Well, giddap, broncs."

They left the truck, moving along a canyon bed, climbing abruptly over a small hogback that was so steep that the horses slipped and slid, grunted and groaned with the effort, and loose rocks and sun-baked earth broke loose and cascaded down in little rivulets.

The nakedness of everything around them was complete. Rocks capped most of the spikes and ridges, and the sun-baked walls of the fabulous maze of pinnacles and canyons were either stone, or gumbo earth that was baked almost as hard as building brick, although the color, in many places, was more that of concrete blocks.

The complete lack of any color was a noticeable effect of the place, and it added to a kind of depressingly macabre monotony which was the general air of the Bad Lands, now that they were first entering them. Now and then, however, particularly when sunbeams chanced to slant at just the right angle, they were treated to an unexpected display of colorful stone strata that rivaled, usually only for a moment or two, the spectroscopic display of the Painted Desert.

"You know where you're going, Shorty?" asked Sam Harmony.

Johnny got out a compass and an aerial-photographic survey map of the Bad Lands.

"There are two methods of guiding," he said. "One is the Indian system, the other is the map-and-compass method. Me, I mix the two."

FOR four days, they laboriously penetrated the Bad Lands. During the entire period they did not cover as much distance as could have been traversed by an automobile in an hour, yet they traveled as hard as their physical condition would permit. Johnny, the gaunt Doc Savage aid who was masquerading as a guide named Shorty, proved to be practically tireless. Sam Harmony, to his surprise, was also in good physical condition, so they made good time considering the almost impossible nature of the terrain.

The afternoon of the second day, there was a violent rainstorm, and they were forced to flee to a ridge to avoid roaring floods which raced like angry yellow snakes through the canyons. Thereafter they did not have to worry about water.

On the evening of the fourth day, they made a more-or-less permanent camp.

"This looks like fair fossil country," Johnny remarked.

Sam Harmony nodded breathlessly. He thought fair was an understatement; it looked like the best fossil ground he had ever seen, and he'd had some experience along those lines. He found himself suffused with the excitement of a man who was confronted with his favorite hobby in unrestricted quantity.

While Johnny got dinner, Sam Harmony moved away from camp with a pickax, a trowel and a coarse wire brush, implements for doing the preliminary work of uncovering any fossils he might find. Hardly half an hour later, he came rushing back. He was excited.

"Whew!" he ejaculated. "How in the hell did you manage to find such a place as this?"

"Any good?" Johnny asked.

"Listen, it's better than that asphalt pit they found in California," Sam Harmony declared.

"How'd you locate such a spot?"

Johnny masked his own excitement with difficulty. He was more susceptible to fossils than the other man, for such things were his profession.

"Well, here's how I done it," he said. "I got this aerial survey map of the region, and I studied the parts where no expeditions had been able to penetrate, as yet. I noticed somethin'. It was a ridge of stone with a peculiar shape. It was kind of V-shaped, with the open end of the V pointing north. At the narrow part of the V, there was a kind of a cup-shaped circle. The whole thing was like a trap, open to the northward."

Johnny stopped speaking and pointed. Sam Harmony followed his indicating hand, then nodded excitedly. "That's the ridge." He craned his neck. "Why, it runs around us, except for an opening to the north. We must be inside that circle you mentioned—in the center of the trap!"

"Yep. Notice anything else about that stone ridge?"

Sam Harmony left the camp, examined the stone, and came back.

"It's not sedimentary rock deposited during the last few million years," he said. "It's old. Much older. It's hundreds of millions of years old, and it was probably standing here when these dinosaurs were roaming

"Yes," said Johnny. "That's what made it into a trap."

Chapter VI. AN EGG IN A CAVE

JOHNNY went ahead getting supper. He had not told the entire truth about how he had happened to find this rich fossil country. Part of it, the portion about studying the map, was true. But there was more to it than that—the map, for instance, was not exactly an accident. Johnny had hired an aerial surveyor to make that map himself, several months ago, and he had found the ridge of prehistoric rock and had been intending for some time to venture into the Bad Lands, the first chance he got, and see what would result from his deductions.

"The trap was open to the north," he remarked. "The ice sheet that moved down from the north in the ice age naturally drove the dinosaurs south, and I had a hunch that perhaps a lot of them wandered into this trap, couldn't climb the ridge, and remained here to die. Most dinosaurs had practically no brains, so they wouldn't have sense enough to leave the same way they entered." Sam Harmony nodded.

"Good reasoning," he said.

He moved away from the camp and returned carrying several fossils which he had found. He examined them in the light of a campfire which Johnny had kindled from fragments of sagebrush which he had found growing along the bed of the canyon.

"Here's a brontosaurus jawbone," he remarked, "in almost perfect condition." He exhibited another object. "Here's the entire head of a small herbivorous creature which was evidently an ancestor of the common horse, although it seems to have some of the characteristics of the camel." He showed a third fossil. "One of the toe bones," he said proudly, "of a tyrannosaurus. One of the fiercest things that ever roamed the face of the earth."

Johnny grinned. "I wonder," he said, "if the reputation of the tyrannosaurus may not be overblown."

"They attained a height of forty feet or more, could travel with great leaps on their rear legs, kangaroo fashion," Sam Harmony pointed out. "Their disposition seems to have been one of maniacal fury. Their incredible assortment of teeth, which would have enabled them to chew up a modern automobile without any trouble, probably, coupled with the enormous claws on their front feet are supposed to have made them one of the most formidable things that existed on this earth."

Johnny ladled out bacon, beans, tomatoes and sourdough biscuits, and they began eating.

"Just the same," remarked the bony Johnny, "very little is actually known of these dinosaurs. We find their fossil remains, their bones and parts of their bodies that have turned to stone, and we scientists—I mean these scientists—look at them and draw a lot of conclusions. Me, I ain't a scientist. I'm half convinced that we know very danged little about what the prehistoric world was actually like, and what it contained."

Sam Harmony considered the point, then nodded. He had a flashlight, and he turned the beam of this onto the fossils he had picked up.

"You may be right," he agreed. "We know that fantastic, almost unbelievable, animals, roamed the earth hundreds of millions of years ago. Right on this spot, if we could go back to that day, we doubtless would see some astounding creatures." He closed his eyes and evidently used his imagination for a few moments. "We might even see some of the prehistoric ancestors of mankind," he continued. "According to evolution, man at one time was really a form of a fish, from that state he gradually evolved into something resembling an ape, and finally a human form."

Johnny made a grunting noise. "You know something?"

"What?"

"One thing about this evolution puzzles me," Johnny explained.

"What part of it bothers you?"

"The mind that a man's got, and his ability to think," Johnny explained. "These series of evolution mostly concern the body. It's easy to say, and to prove to some extent, that man was once a fish, then lost his tail, grew some legs, crawled out on shore and finally got to walking upright."

"Well, man developed his brain at the same time," Sam Harmony said.

"Then how come," Johnny countered, "that nothing else develops a brain?"

Sam Harmony shrugged. "Brains aren't like bones and bodies," he said. "Maybe there were things with amazing brains developed in the prehistoric past—we don't know."

"Yeah, maybe," Johnny agreed.

The two men turned in and slept.

They found the egg the next day.

ACTUALLY, it was not the egg they found first, but the cave. The ice cave. It was Johnny who found the cave, and he located it in the same fashion that a number of other famous caverns—Carlsbad Cavern being one of these—in the West have been spotted. He saw the nightly flight of bats returning.

Having risen very early, and climbed to the tip of a small ridge nearby, Johnny was standing there with a camera into which he had loaded color film. He was waiting for the sunrise, intending to get a color photo of the sunrise over this particular part of the Bad Lands. Johnny was an inveterate writer of articles for the scientific magazines, and he knew the value of photographs in illustrating these.

The bats—he mistook them at first for a cloud of dust, produced by a whirlwind, perhaps—caught his eye. He lifted a pair of binoculars, saw that it was not dust.

"I'll be superamalgamated!" he exclaimed, then looked around quickly to make sure that Sam Harmony had not overheard his slip.

Johnny, being possessed of an alert mind, immediately realized the significance of the bats. A cave!

Sam Harmony was prowling somewhere nearby with his pickax and brush, so Johnny went alone to investigate. The cavern entrance was not a very prepossessing thing. There was one thing peculiar about it, however—the cold air. A chilly draft exuded from the cave mouth, so that standing there was much like being in front of a refrigerator door. Since the dawn in the Bad Lands was itself chilly, this frigidty interested Johnny.

Upon entering the cave, he discovered that the bats, instead of penetrating deep into the interior in their usual fashion, were all roosting close to the mouth of the place.

Johnny went back to the camp, found Sam Harmony, and described what he had found.

"I think," said Johnny, "that the bats are roosting around the mouth because it's too cold for 'em farther inside."

"An ice cave, you mean?" Sam Harmony inquired.

"Well, it's possible," Johnny admitted.

"We can soon find out."

The two men got their flashlights, pickaxes, a rope, and entered the cave. After traversing two or three hundred feet down a steep slope, they turned quickly, went back to camp and got all their spare clothing.

"It's an ice cave, all right," Sam Harmony remarked.

"If we're going in that, we ought to have some way of telling if there's poison gas," Johnny reminded. "I think we'd better take off and see if we can't catch a field mouse or two. Mice are more susceptible to gas, and we can use them to detect the stuff."

Sam Harmony stared at the surrounding Bad Lands. "Find mice here?" he asked unbelievably.

"It won't be very difficult," Johnny said.

This proved to be an understatement, for the operation of finding and capturing two mice occupied fully an hour. Johnny fashioned a makeshift cage out of a tomato can which he punched full of holes, and they proceeded with their cave exploration.

Their first act, upon entering an appreciable distance was to ascertain whether the cavern was a modern one, say as young as two or three million years, or whether it was as prehistoric as the fossils which they had been finding in the vicinity. This was determined by an examination of the

stone walls, coupled with scrutiny of an enormous stalactite, or stone icicle, dangling from the ceiling, which they managed to break off so that they could notice internal formations.

It was Johnny who delivered the verdict. "If you ask me," he said, "this cave was here a long time before the dinosaurs left their fossilized skeletons layin' around outside."

It was an ice cave. This did not mean that the cavern simply blew full of snow and ice during the winter time, and that this frigid deposit failed to melt. The ice was a natural phenomenon, no more remarkable than the geysers which spout hundreds of thousands of gallons of boiling water from the depths of the earth in Yellowstone Park, Iceland, and other parts of the earth.

The heat which causes boiling water to hurtle from the depths of the earth is attributed to natural causes, either due to chemical heat generation, or heat created by pressure. The frigidity of the depths of this cave, Johnny concluded, was due to the chemical nature of the underlying strata. The place, in one sense of the word, was a natural refrigerator. He knew of other instances where ice caves existed, so the phenomenon was neither astounding nor unusual.

(Author's Note: The phenomenon of ice caves is not unusual. Near Vesoul, France, for instance, there is a cave containing a stream which is frozen throughout the summer. Other noted ice caves are in the steppes of the Kirghis, south of Orinburg, in Asia. There is the Surtshcllir cave of Iceland, and the Schafloch near Thun, Switzerland. There are others. Some of these ice caves depend upon the natural refrigeration caused by evaporation—the same basic theory which is responsible for the efficiency of modern electrical refrigerators—for their low temperatures. It is a peculiar fact about most ice caves that they are colder in the summer than in the winter.)

Because the cave was, in effect, a big refrigerator, there was the ever-present danger from gas exuding from the depths of the earth, the gas which was responsible for the formation of the ice. The ice was everywhere about them now, great masses of it, sheets that coated the floor, walls, ceiling.

As protection against the gas, one or the other of them would go well ahead with the tin can containing the mice and leave the small animals for a few moments, then return to inspect them. Since the mice showed no distress, they continued their investigation.

The temperature was well below freezing.

"Do you reckon," Johnny remarked suddenly, "that it's been this cold for—well—"

A strangeness in the long, bony man's tone caused Sam Harmony to stare at him suddenly.

"What do you mean?" Sam Harmony demanded.

Johnny pointed at the nearby ice. "Shine your light just right," he said, "and I think you'll see something."

Sam Harmony maneuvered his flashlight and stared.

"Damn!" he exploded.

HALF an hour later, Sam Harmony dragged a fragment of what they had found to the outer sunlight. He was almost hysterically excited. His attempts at speech were stuttering.

"Imagine this!" he exploded. "Just imagine!"

Johnny, little less wrought up himself, contemplated the object they had so carefully hauled out for inspection. It resembled nothing so much as a large and overripe hunk of beef, except that the meat was a great deal more coarse, possessing less texture.

"Is it . . . is it—" Sam Harmony stared, speechless, at Johnny.

Johnny nodded.

"A part of a leg of a dinosaur," he agreed. "But . . . but . . . dinosaurs became extinct millions of years ago!"

"I know." Johnny grinned suddenly, rather hysterically. "That's what makes this good. Boy, I never dreamed I'd be lugging around a piece of dinosaur meat! I knew they found a mammoth one time that was fit to eat, but—"

"Mammoth?" he asked. "What do you mean—mammoth?"

"You've heard of that mammoth they found in Siberia back in 1901," Johnny said. "It fell off a cliff and was frozen in a glacier, or something."

(Author's Note: Johnny's reference was to the incident which came to the attention of the Imperial Academy of Sciences in the middle of April, 1901, when tidings were received of a mammoth, apparently in a satisfactory state of preservation, which had been discovered in a frozen condition when the River Bresovka sliced a new channel through the frozen tundra. The Bresovka is a tributary of the Kolynaa, which is less than nine hundred miles west of Bering Strait, and less than three hundred miles north and east of Sredne-Kolymsk. The spot is in one of the coldest parts of Siberia. The finding of the mammoth created a great deal of excitement among the natives, and it was understood that the dogs of the entire village were fed the meat. This meant that the meat was in an excellent state of preservation. Obviously, this mammoth sank into the tundra thousands of years ago and injured itself, since its right foreleg and pelvic bones were broken. Being frozen in the morass, its meat was kept in a natural state of preservation through the centuries.)

Sam Harmony nodded slowly. "Yeah," he said. "I remember that now. It was a well-authenticated instance, but the mammoth had only been dead a few hundred years."

"If it will keep a few hundred, it ought to keep a few million," Johnny said, rather unreasonably.

Sam Harmony got down on hands and knees and made several gouging passes at the piece of dinosaur, using his very sharp knife—the same knife which he had employed on the throat of Nick Hostelli, in Miami.

"This lacks a hell of a lot of being fresh meat," he declared. "It's more like a mummy. We won't feed any of this thing to dogs." He looked up sharply. "Not that I would be tempted to. You understand what this means? It's big."

"Yes," Johnny said. "It's one of the biggest scientific discoveries that has ever been made." Johnny was watching himself carefully, because he was inclined to use big words when he was excited. And to use the big words now, speech not in keeping with his character of a guide who happened to know a great deal about dinosaur fossils, would probably betray him. He decided that it might not be a bad idea to exhibit some ignorance.

"What do you think the thing is?" he asked.

"It's not a mammoth, that's a cinch," Sam Harmony remarked. He poked at the part they had dissected from the thing. "You know, this isn't even like flesh. It's something—well, it's different. Say, did you ever see an insect under a microscope?"

"You mean a grasshopper, or something like that?"

"Yes."

Johnny shook his head. "Well, yes and no. What do you mean?"

"I was wondering," Sam Harmony said, "if that stuff is anything like insect flesh. Like—you know—like insect flesh would be if it was magnified."

They carried the portion back into the cave, so that the preservation would continue.

"To see what this thing looks like, what do you say we take a pickax and clear the ice away?" Sam Harmony suggested.

That seemed like a good idea, so they began chipping away the ice with pickaxes.

And that was how they came upon the egg.

Chapter VII. DAMNED THING HATCHING

THE egg was large, and it was more long than circular. Its shape was not entirely spherical, although the irregularities might have been caused by the pressure of the ice, instead of being inherent in the thing originally. It was very dark, almost black in color.

"Wait a minute!" Johnny exclaimed. "Say, is that an egg in there?"

"Egg!"

"Well, it looks like it."

Sam Harmony laughed heartily at the idea. "It's ridiculous," he said, and laughed some more.

"I don't see anything so darned funny about it," Johnny declared.

"Yes, but don't you see that in order to get in here and get froze, this dinosaur must have run in here when it was scared or something," Sam Harmony pointed out. "I don't know whether dinosaurs made their nests in caves. But I'd be willing to bet they didn't make them in ice caves." He scowled and pulled at his lower lip. "However," he added, "I'll admit the flesh of this danged thing looks awful funny. But still, flesh might get that way after it had laid in ice for a few hundred million years, or however long this has been here."

Johnny snapped. "Well, there's nothing strange about the egg being here even if the dinosaur did run inside when it was scared."

"Why not?"

"Haven't you ever seen an old hen lay an egg when she was scared?"

"Do they do that?" Sam Harmony demanded, and started laughing again.

Johnny sniffed, and began carefully chipping toward the large, dark, elongated object which he had discovered under the ice, but which he hardly believed could be an egg. Johnny was level-headed and this whole thing was already impressing him as fantastic. A dinosaur preserved in a natural icebox! That was goofy, wasn't it?

"Damn it, be careful!" urged Sam Harmony. "If that thing's an egg, we don't want to break it."

"If it's an egg, I'll eat it," Johnny said suddenly. "And I don't believe this thing's a dinosaur. I'll bet you a buck it's somebody's old horse that wandered in here and died."

However—it was well past noon when they completed the task—an egg was the object which they finally managed to bring to the outer sunlight. They placed it back in the shade, just inside the cavern mouth, and stood there gazing at it. An egg, undoubtedly.

"How big do you suppose the thing was?" Sam Harmony asked. "A man might be able to judge from the different size eggs things hatch out of."

"How big is an ostrich egg?" Johnny inquired.

"I've been trying to think." The other scowled. "Dammit, I saw an ostrich egg one time, but I can't remember how big it was. Big as your hat, maybe. No, I don't guess it was that big, either."

"Maybe we had better put it back in there where it will stay frozen," Johnny suggested.

Sam Harmony shook his head and remarked that it wouldn't do any harm to leave the egg outside until it warmed up sufficiently for the ice to melt off, after which they might be able to secure some idea of what the shell was like. So they stopped there watching, and even shifted the egg out into the sunlight so that it would warm a little faster. Finally, Johnny got down on all fours, brushed the melting ice from the shell, and peered at the thing.

"I'll be superamalgamated!" he ejaculated.

Johnny made the big-worded exclamation because the perfect condition of the shell astounded him. An abrupt, tight silence fell. It was broken explosively.

"Damn you!" Sam Harmony snarled.

Johnny stared at him blankly. "What on earth ails you?"

"I remember that a Doc Savage aid uses that exclamation—I'll be superamalgamated." Sam Harmony got slowly to his feet. His face was ugly. "Brother, you been pullin' somethin' on me!"

Johnny knew what was good for his health. He made a dive, got hold of Sam Harmony's knife, and straightened with it. Sam Harmony made a yelling, inarticulate sound of rage. He whirled, dashed away.

Johnny was a little slow realizing that Sam Harmony was racing for his rifle.

When the understanding did dawn, Johnny knew it was too late to catch the fellow. The long, bony archaeologist and geologist made a running leap and pitched his body over a small ridge. A bullet hit a moment after he disappeared, knocking up a spray of dirt and rock particles.

JOHNNY was capable of remarkable agility when necessity demanded, and it demanded now. He kept going, hit the bottom of a gully, put his head down and churned his long legs. He could hear, in that moment of running on the comparative level floor of the gully, Sam Harmony making cursing and snarling sounds.

Rounding an angle, Johnny got out of sight before Sam Harmony had the opportunity to take another shot at him. He kept going. In running, he was trying to do more than escape; he was endeavoring to reach the camp. He made it, too—he dashed into their tent while it was unoccupied.

It was Johnny's intention to take all the food he could carry, and the ammunition, and destroy the other stuff, as well as make off with the horses. But Sam Harmony's mental alertness defeated him. The man guessed Johnny's intentions, and he came toward the camp cursing at the top of his voice. Johnny peered about in search of a weapon, intending to fight off Harmony, but there was no gun to be found. It dawned on Johnny that his companion was either a naturally cautious fellow, or he had been suspicious for some time.

Johnny got together some food, a very slight amount, and scooped up the big can of peaches which contained the radio and the smaller cans which held the batteries. That was all he had a chance to secure. Carrying the stuff in his arms, he ran for cover.

Rifle sound lashed out, and the bullet was loud, ugly and very close; echoes cackled back in a remarkable conglomeration of sound from the surrounding wilderness of stone. As the echoes trailed off, Sam Harmony screamed like an Indian.

The guy is crazy, Johnny thought.

There ensued, for the next five minutes or so, a cautious and deadly game of hide and seek. Sam Harmony, reaching the horses first—the animals were hobbled and grazing on the scrawny vegetation to be found along the coulee bottom—and rounding up the animals, herded them back toward the camp.

Twice, he fired at Johnny. The second bullet came so very close that Johnny abruptly decided to change his mind. He would not hang around the camp. Instead, he would retreat into the maze of Bad Lands, and try to build up some kind of campaign.

Sam Harmony himself took cover. The ice cave seemed to be a good spot from which to make a fight, so he retreated in that direction, taking all the supplies along. He unloaded the supplies near the cave mouth, then picketed the horses in the canyon immediately below, where they could be watched. Fear did not appear in Sam Harmony's manner at all, because he was certain that Johnny had no firearms. At first, he had been dubious on the point, but since Johnny had not returned any of the gunfire, he had become increasingly positive that Johnny was unarmed. The only thing that Johnny had in his possession, Sam Harmony felt certain, was the food which he had managed to take from the camp. A quick search of the equipment showed that the map—the aerial photographic survey chart—and all the compasses were there. That meant Johnny had no map, no compass, and from what Sam Harmony had seen of the country through which they passed, he felt practically certain that Johnny stood no chance of getting outside alive.

It was late in the evening when Sam Harmony realized there was something peculiar about the egg. BECAUSE of the excitement, the egg had laid there in the warm sun throughout the afternoon. It had, of course, thawed. Not only was the ice gone from its surface, but the sun had even evaporated and dried the water.

Having seen no sign of Johnny for some time, Sam Harmony's thoughts turned to the egg, and he walked over to the thing and examined it again. The cover was smooth, dark, had a waxed feeling—it felt something like a phonograph record that had been oiled. Finally, he put an ear against the thing and listened.

"What the hell!" he exclaimed.

He listened again, holding his ear against the egg and shaking the thing. Then he sat back and rubbed his jaw, looking as amazed as he felt.

Something stirred inside the egg, something that seemed to be alive. When the egg lay perfectly still, there was only an occasional shifting, but when Sam Harmony shook the thing, there was more noticeable motion. The natural assumption, the only one at all reasonable, was that there was a dinosaur chick—or whatever one would call a dinosaur before it hatched—inside the egg.

The thing was not in the embryonic stage, either, but evidently developed to a point where it was capable of movement.

And that, of course, was impossible. Impossible? That was rather a definite word, and Sam Harmony had dabbled enough with science to know that it should be applied cautiously. He sat there rubbing his jaw, staring at the oval sepia mass of the egg, and pondering. The egg, if the environment in which they had found it was any indication, had been subjected to intense cold since the day it was laid. Sam Harmony knew a little of the reaction of embryonic creatures to intense cold. He knew that insects in the preparatory stages of egg, larva, and the pupa seemed to be completely unaffected, as far as life's continuation was concerned, by the cold. This was possibly because they were unequipped to generate internal heat to counteract changes of external temperature.

He knew that insect larvae, and even young insects themselves, could be subjected to extremely low temperatures—dipped in liquid air, at hundreds of degrees below zero—and reduced to a condition where legs, wings and bodies could be snapped off, yet when subjected to exposure at normal temperature for a time, their activity and vital functions became thoroughly restored.

He wondered if this was the egg of a dinosaur, or some form of insect. He remembered the thing they had found frozen inside the cave. The fragment they had cut off it had not resembled ordinary flesh. Nor had they been able, in the brief investigation, to ascertain the shape of the monster. The situation—that of finding an egg which had come into existence millions of years ago, but which now had something alive in it—was not as fantastic as it first seemed perhaps, although Sam Harmony found it difficult to persuade his mind, accustomed to the facts and normality's of a casual human existence, to accept what apparently had happened.

Suddenly he sprang to his feet.

"Hell's bells!" he exploded.

Would the egg hatch? That thought had just occurred to him. He stared at the egg for a moment, then burst out laughing. The idea, of course, was ridiculous.

He built a fire, prudently lighting it inside the cave mouth where he would be sheltered, and cooked his supper. He was plagued by the bats which, as sundown and dusk approached, began their usual evening flight to the outside world to search for food. There was no sign of Johnny, but every few minutes Sam Harmony moved to the entrance and made a careful survey of the vicinity.

Glancing at the sky, he saw that it would be a moonlight night. That was some help, at least. If he could not get a chance to shoot Johnny, he must at least keep the long, bony archaeologist and geologist from getting a horse. That might be difficult. Johnny Littlejohn had a reputation for intelligence and ingenuity. Sam Harmony was recalling a great deal which he had heard about the elongated Doc Savage aid.

"No wonder that cuss knew so much about archaeology," Harmony muttered. "Hell, he's one of the greatest living archaeologists!"

Sam Harmony decided to stay awake as long as he could and keep a lookout. He kept his fire going, remained close to the mouth of the cave. As an afterthought—he was curious about what would really happen if the egg was exposed to a normal heat over a period of time—he rolled the egg fairly close to the fire.

It must have been the heat which cracked the shell of the egg. At any rate, there was a dull noise, and Sam Harmony suddenly discovered a crack in the shell of the thing. He went to the egg, tried to peer into the crack. He grasped the edges of the aperture, tugged, and the shell suddenly burst open.

Sam Harmony took one look at the thing which appeared and omitted a squawk of terror. A moment later he was running madly from the vicinity.

But, after he thought it over—the unpleasant idea of being alone on the Bad Lands with Johnny Littlejohn played no small part in his cogitation—he returned to the cave mouth.

Moreover, he had an idea, an idea as incredible as anything that had happened, and one which, if it worked, would make a number of people die, and stand the hair on end on the heads of some others.

Chapter VIII. THE MYSTERIOUS CHICK

WILLIAM HARPER JOHNNY LITTLEJOHN was something of a psychologist, as well as being a noted geologist and archaeologist and an eminent user of big words. His psychology led him to suspect that Sam Harmony would keep a gimlet-eyed watch throughout the first night, and so therefore any attempt to sneak up on the fellow could readily result in someone getting shot. Since Harmony had all the guns, probably it would not be he who got shot.

So Johnny stretched out in a remote spot and prepared to get an excellent night's sleep. He lay on his face, so that he wouldn't start snoring. He didn't know whether he snored or not, but he understood that the chances of nasal bugling were smaller if one kept off the back when slumbering, and he was taking no chances.

He failed to sleep, however. There had been too much excitement.

"A discommodious pervigilium," he remarked.

It gave him a great deal of satisfaction to be able to wrap his tongue around a big word, after being forced to refrain from the use of them over a period. Big words were his vice, his hobby and his source of secret amusement. Early in his career, when he was very young, he had realized that a man should have something to tag himself, something that others will remember, and he had started

using big words to draw attention to himself. Later, when he had become the recognized greatest in his line, he had retained the habit for purposes of amusement.

The result of Johnny's wakefulness was that he decided to contact Doc Savage. He unlimbered his little radio outfit.

He got a break. It proved to be a phenomenally good night for radio transmission, and it was not necessary to have his message relayed to Doc Savage. He contacted the bronze man direct.

Johnny told Doc exactly what had happened.

Doc considered the matter.

"I will fly out there immediately myself," the bronze man said. "Monk and Ham and Long Tom and Renny can handle things at this end. There seems to be nothing to do but watch Calico Parks and his men on the chance that something will break."

That decision did not surprise Johnny. He knew that Doc was archaeologist enough to be intrigued by the part about the ice cave.

"What have you learned about the situation between Parks and Sam Harmony?" Johnny asked.

"Nothing more."

"No idea why the two hate each other so completely, and why Parks is trying to catch Harmony?"

"No."

"Any sign of the girl, Nancy?"

"None," Doc said. "Is it possible for a plane to land in that place?"

"Not a chance."

"A gyroplane?"

"That," said Johnny, "might be different."

Doc Savage directed, "Give me about twelve hours, because a gyro is slow, then switch on your radio and send some kind of a signal at fifteen-minute intervals, so that a radio compass can be used to locate you."

"Right," Johnny agreed, and after that he slept very soundly, awakening only once, when he thought he heard it thunder.

THE following afternoon, Johnny stood on a flat patch of ground—it was the only level spot he had been able to find in half a day of hunting—and waved his coat.

Overhead, Doc Savage made a brief gesture from the cockpit of the gyro. The plane—it was a small one—differed from the conventional type of ship in that it was equipped with a very large six-bladed rotor instead of wings. The rotors, mechanically driven and equipped with an arrangement of vanes which was the bronze man's design, enabled the craft to arise and descend almost vertically. The ship, as far as vertical ascension and descension were concerned, was several steps more efficient than the autogyro type of plane.

The rotors turned slowly, the gyro came down and eventually landed with a grunting sound. Doc cut the motor. The bronze man, Johnny saw, had come alone.

"Where is Sam Harmony?" Doc asked quietly.

"I haven't seen him," Johnny explained, "since he sent me fogging off into the canyons with a rifle. I didn't feel like fooling around where he could see me and take a pot shot. The guy isn't a bad marksman. I saw him hit a jackrabbit at a hundred yards one day."

Doc Savage nodded. The bronze man wore light but strong grayish clothing of outdoors type and hobnailed climbing shoes. Johnny had wished a number of times that he had shoes of that type.

"What is the heaviest caliber rifle he has?" Doc asked.

"A thirty-thirty."

Doc nodded again, and indicated the plane. "There is armor-plating on the bottom and sides of the cockpit. It's alloy stuff, and it's supposed to stop anything up to a thirty-nought-six, or army rifle bullet."

"Then it should stop a thirty-thirty."

"Get in," Doc said, "and we will look over the situation from the air."

They climbed into the plane. The motor labored, and the whirling rotors made the sounds of great beating wings, after which the ship lifted slowly. It skittered unsteadily from side to side as the vagrant air currents glanced off surrounding pinnacles and ridges and struck it, then straightened out and moved forward.

Johnny got his bearings and pointed. "Over there," he said. "The cave is in that circular ridge of very old formation."

The plane circled several times cautiously. Johnny peered downward.

"Where is the camp?" Doc asked.

"Well, I'll be superamalgamated!" Johnny said.

"What?"

"It's gone!"

"Gone?"

"Hide, hair, tooth and nail, guts and feathers," Johnny said grimly. "Gone. Sam Harmony broke camp, took everything and disappeared. Wait a minute! Maybe he moved the stuff to the cave. That's a logical thing for him to do."

Doc Savage shifted the gyro over cautiously toward the camp, and Johnny used binoculars on the

spot where the cave mouth had been. Had been—that was exactly right.

Johnny made excited noises and jabbed a pointing arm.

"Gone!" he howled.

Doc Savage's flake-gold eyes steadied upon him. "Now, wait a minute," the bronze man said. "If the camp and the cave are both gone, there must be some mistake. Maybe you have your directions—"

"Gone!" Johnny yelled. "I mean it's been blown up. The whole thing was destroyed!" He fell silent. He was thinking back to last night, remembering something.

"What have you got on your mind?" Doc inquired.

"I guess I know when the thing was blown up," Johnny said grimly. "Last night sometime, something awakened me, and I thought it was thunder."

Doc Savage took the binoculars and carefully scanned the surrounding Bad Lands, after which he flew two slow circles of wide radius, giving the terrain another scrutiny, but detecting no sign of Sam Harmony.

"We will land," Doc decided.

THE job of destroying the cavern entrance—Sam Harmony obviously had used the dynamite which they had packed along for use in blasting should they do any extensive excavating for fossils—was thoroughly complete. It had removed every chance of getting into the cave without the expending of thousands of hours of labor. The force of the blast had tossed the stone upward; then it had collapsed, and the whole outward portion of the ridge, splitting loose, had slipped down and effectively sealed the cavity for many yards back from its outer opening.

Johnny said, "It would take a big crew of men working for weeks to get into the cave. The only feasible way would be to drive a shaft, like a mine."

Doc Savage nodded, but made no other comment. Johnny's statement was true. It would be impossible to gain access to the cavern. The thing that puzzled him, however, was the reason for blowing up the cavern mouth.

They moved about, searching the vicinity.

Johnny was rubbing his long jaw and staring glumly at the mass of tumbled stone when he heard a trilling sound—the low, fantastic note which had a pervading quality that was close to ventriloquism, the strange sound which was the small unconscious thing that Doc Savage did in moments of mental excitement.

"Doc!" Johnny barked. "What is it?"

"Over here," the bronze man said.

Doc was standing, looking down at the split fragments, black in color that was like huge coconut shells. He glanced at Johnny questioningly.

"Must be the shell of that egg," Johnny said.

The bronze man stared at Johnny so strangely that the gaunt archaeologist and geologist became red-faced.

"I tell you there was a dinosaur egg!" Johnny exclaimed.

"You're sure it was a dinosaur egg?"

"Well, it was the egg of some big prehistoric thing," Johnny said. "When something happens that is as crazy as finding a fresh dinosaur egg that has been in cold storage, I don't guarantee any of my deductions."

Doc Savage sank to his knees and examined the egg fragments. He paid particular attention to the sun-dried traces on the internal sections of the shell, to the edges where the shell had broken.

"It seems to have hatched," he said.

Johnny gave a start. "Now, wait a minute, Doc! There's things that are reasonable, and other things that aren't."

"Meaning?"

"I have every respect for your ability," Johnny said, "but if you tell me a dinosaur hatched out of that egg, I'm going to have a hard time believing it."

"Something hatched out," Doc said.

"Uh—well—"

"But just what you could call it—whether you would name it a dinosaur or not—" The bronze man did not finish his statement, but began to search in circles in the vicinity.

He pointed out quietly that the sand had been carefully smoothed over, apparently by dragging a saddle, then a saddle-blanket, around the vicinity, in order to wipe out any traces of tracks.

"The horses were led to the spot where the shell fragments lie," he pointed out. "Then they were led away."

Johnny said, "We can follow the trail, at least."

This was obvious. Horses and a man could not travel through the Bad Lands, where the earth was as dry and packed as a country road, without leaving prints.

Doc Savage said, "You can fly the gyro."

"But—"

"Stay with the ship," the bronze man directed Johnny. "I have a signal pistol in the plane, one which fires either a smoke or a light signal into the air. Keep a lookout and when you see my signal, take off in the gyro and fly to the spot. Use your own discretion about what to do."

Johnny nodded. A few minutes later, he watched Doc Savage disappear into the waste of eroded stone and earth. Johnny examined the gyroplane, making sure it was ready for the air, then clambered to the top of a pinnacle which gave the best view in the vicinity, and settled down to wait and watch.

He understood the logic of Doc Savage following Sam Harmony. Doc was skilled at tracking, and moreover he possessed a reserve of strength and agility that far exceeded anything Johnny would have been able to muster.

Some hours passed. During the interval, Johnny gave no inconsiderable thought to the mystery of why Sam Harmony had blasted the mouth of the cavern. And the puzzling fact that they had found the shell of the dinosaur egg. Johnny was inclined to believe that the logical conclusion they should have reached was that Sam Harmony had broken open the egg and found the remains of an embryonic dinosaur inside, which he had taken along as a specimen. But—and this was something that would have puzzled any archaeologist—why had he left the eggshell? The eggshell, as far as being a part of the specimen went, was definitely a part of the specimen. But the man hadn't taken the shell.

The sun sank, dropping into a rather ominous bank of black clouds which were piling up on the horizon, so that the darkness which followed was blood-colored and unpleasant.

Johnny was very much relieved when he saw a flare climb into the air, then float downward, several miles distant.

He took off in the gyro, flew to the spot, and, following signaled directions given by a blinking flashlight, put a parachute flare over the side in order to get light. He landed.

As he shut off the motor, lightning stabbed up out of the west and thunder sound came bumping across the Bad Lands, bursting into an incredible syncopation of echoes.

There was plenty of room where he landed. He sprang out of the gyro.

"Doc!" he called.

"Come over here," the bronze man called. "I want you to see this horse."

Chapter IX. TERROR GROWING UP

DOC SAVAGE materialized, a tower of darker shadow in the night, as Johnny ran forward.

Johnny demanded, "Sam Harmony! Did you find him?"

"Not yet," Doc said. "Come over here and look at the horse."

"Horse?" Johnny was puzzled.

"Was one of the animals Sam Harmony took with him a blaze-faced sorrel gelding?" Doc asked.

"Yes. "

The bronze man said nothing more, but led the way. They scrambled forward—on their hands and knees a good part of the time because the terrain was so fantastically rough. Finally Doc stopped, and his flashlight spouted a fan of white luminance.

Johnny stared. It was several moments before—his voice was strange—he said, "I'll be superamalgamated!"

The carcass of the horse was there, but it had been cut up in fragments. Cut up, apparently, for no other purpose than to make the animal small enough that it could be buried under the sand of a nearby gully bed.

"But why did he bury the animal?" Johnny demanded. "And what killed it?"

Instead of responding immediately, Doc Savage indicated various parts of the animal's body.

"Notice anything unusual?" he asked finally.

Johnny nodded. "Certain parts of the animal have been chopped into very small pieces, for some reason or other."

"Yes. Does that suggest anything?"

"Heck, no," Johnny said. "There was plenty of food in camp, and Sam Harmony apparently took all of it." The long geologist and archaeologist stared at Doc Savage. "Say, what d'you mean, anyway?" Doc Savage, instead of answering, seemed not to hear the question. Which did not exactly surprise Johnny, although it did make him realize suddenly that there was something very important, some significance which he was missing, about the condition of the horse carcass.

Further than that, Doc Savage made, after a few moments, the low trilling sound which was his peculiarity in moments of preoccupation. The sound lasted only a short time, then it was wiped out, eliminated by a terrific crash of thunder which raced like a gobbling monster after a lance of lightning that spaded across the sky. It was followed by another blinding flash, and more thunder. Johnny, glancing at the sky, saw that it had darkened rapidly. In addition, the air, which he had hardly realized had been almost completely still, was now moving in hotly from the west. He listened. In the distance, he could hear the moan of a gale of wind.

Doc said, "Storm coming. No time to get the gyro staked down. We had better take off and get enough altitude to be safe."

Johnny nodded, and they raced back to the gyro plane, climbed in, started the motor, and took off. Doc Savage, handling the controls, climbed the ship as rapidly as possible. The wind, a cyclonic volley of air, forerunner of the storm, was upon them now, driving the ship along, twisting and tossing it, sometimes wrenching it downward hundreds of feet with terrific down-currents. Johnny spread out a map, marked their position on it, and then spent his time grimly scrutinizing the Bad Lands, trying to ascertain their drift so as to keep track of their whereabouts.

Suddenly the storm was upon them. Lightning bolts leaped past and they stood there shaking for moments at a time. The interior of the plane cabin alternated between blinding illumination and intense darkness, as if a big electric light was being switched on and off rapidly.

Rain came, moaning against the ship, filling the world full of leaning strings of water and squirming, whipping clouds of spray.

Johnny leaned back, looking gloomy. They were in no particular danger, unless something went wrong with the plane's mechanism, which was hardly likely.

"This thing is a cloudburst," Johnny complained. "It'll wipe out any chance we got of following Sam Harmony's trail. It'll wash away his footprints."

COLONEL JOHN RENNY RENWICK and Major Thomas J. Long Tom Roberts, alighted from a long arrow of a speed plane the following morning in a wheat field near Kadoka. They did not look what they were—two of the most enthusiastic excitement-chasers in the little group of five aids who had associated themselves with Doc Savage.

"Holy cow!" remarked Renny, the big-fisted one. "We had a dickens of a rough trip out last night. Storms all the way after we left New York State."

Long Tom Roberts examined Doc Savage and Johnny and said, "I suppose you'll want the late developments from New York?"

Doc said, "Yes. What are the developments in New York?"

"Practically nil," Long Tom announced. "We're—at least Monk and Ham are still doing it, we hope—keeping a close watch on Calico Parks."

"Is Calico Parks doing anything suspicious?"

"Plenty, but nothing different than usual," Long Tom replied. "He has a large group of men working for him, apparently. They are doing nothing but look frantically for Sam Harmony. And they're trying to find out who kidnapped the girl, Nancy."

"Have you found out who got Nancy?" Doc asked.

"No."

"What about Hickey Older?"

"Nancy's boy friend, you mean?" Long Tom smiled slightly. "He practically has a fight with Monk and Ham every day. But Hickey keeps right in there pitching, trying to help us find Nancy."

"What about his job in the laundry?" Doc asked.

"Oh, he either quit that or got a leave of absence," Long Tom explained. "He's making a twenty-four-hour-a-day job out of hunting Nancy."

"Holy cow, the poor kid is dang near frantic!" Renny offered.

Doc Savage nodded. "Anything on that South Orion name?"

"Ham is still on that. Nothing yet."

In a casual voice, using terse sentences that omitted nothing of importance, the bronze man told the story of Johnny and Sam Harmony and the ice cave they had found, and of Johnny's identity being discovered. He told what they knew about the egg.

"It would appear," the bronze man finished, "that Sam Harmony took whatever was in the egg and started for the outside. As for what happened to the horse—well, we won't go into that at this time."

Renny said, "I gathered from the radio you sent us that you wanted us to help find Sam Harmony."

"Yes," Doc agreed. "The rain last night was very heavy and lasted for some time, so there is small chance of trailing Sam Harmony."

"Any ideas about how we'd better go about finding him?"

"Get men on every highway, railway and airport," Doc directed. "Johnny has some photographs of the fellow which he took, and of the pack outfit. A photographer here in Kadoka is making several hundred copies, and you can use those."

"Right."

Doc added, "Johnny and I will continue searching the Bad Lands."

FOUR days later, Doc Savage received a hurry-up call by short-wave radio from Renny Renwick. The bronze man flew to a small town in Nebraska and met the big-fisted engineer. Renny was driving a rented car, and it was a hot afternoon, filled with the glare of sunlight, as they left the pasture where Doc had landed and rolled toward town.

"Holy cow," said Renny disgustedly. "I think our man gave us the slip."

"What have you found?"

"I'll show you," Renny said.

What he had to show was inside the local undertaking establishment, and it was not a pleasant sight. It had been—there was little outward evidence of the fact, however—a man. Not a very prosperous man, judging from the condition of the few rags of clothing which the coroner was holding. The clothing was ripped and torn to an incredible extent, but they could tell that the garments had been cheap and badly worn.

Renny was a little greenish when he came out of the mortuary.

"Good thing they didn't try to make an undertaker out of me," he muttered.

They walked in silence for a few minutes.

Doc asked, "Where was it found?"

"Alongside the railroad tracks," Renny replied. "Apparently the body had been thrown off a train."

"Identified?"

"Yes, there was no attempt to remove identifying marks." Renny was thoughtful for a moment. "The poor devil was a tramp named Happy Stevens. He hopped a freight train."

"What was the coroner's verdict about his death?"

"That he fell under the train and was run over. Accidental death."

"But you do not agree?" Doc asked.

"No, I don't," Renny said. "And here's why: Two large boxes were put on a freight train at a town west of here by a rancher. The freight train, as near as I can figure, was the same one that the tramp took."

Excitement came into Doc Savage's flake-gold eyes. "What about the rancher?"

"Long Tom," announced Renny, "is investigating that."

Long Tom reported later that afternoon. The rather anemic-looking electrical expert was disgusted and worried.

"Sam Harmony gave us the slip," he said. "That rancher furnished two big boxes. Sam Harmony got in one. He put something in the other and—"

"What did he put in the other box?" Doc interrupted.

Long Tom frowned and bit his lower lip. "The rancher didn't know. But—well, I know how goofy it sounds to say so, but I've got a hunch it was the chick that hatched out of the egg from the ice cave."

The bronze man nodded slowly, asked, "What leads you to think that?"

"Well, Sam Harmony brought something mysterious and horrible out of the Bad Lands, according to the rancher," Long Tom explained. "One night, something killed a calf of the rancher. The calf was terribly mangled and crushed. Sam Harmony refused to explain what killed the calf, but he paid for the animal."

"The rancher put Sam Harmony, and something you think was this chick, on a freight train?" Doc asked.

"Yes, that's what I started to tell you," Long Tom replied. "The rancher was hired to do it. He got some money, and he was given the horses which Sam Harmony had. Fact is, that rancher isn't too honest. But he'll think twice before he gets into something of the sort again. I got the sheriff on the job, and explained that the horses didn't belong to Sam Harmony—they were only rented from that fellow up at Kadoka. Now they've got this rancher in jail for horse-stealing."

Renny knotted his big fists, rubbed them together and made a disgusted noise.

"In the meantime," he said, "Sam Harmony is on a freight train eastbound with the thing he hatched out of that egg."

Renny had a remarkable voice; it sounded like the angry complaining of a very large bear in a deep cave.

"I'm afraid so," Long Tom admitted.

Doc Savage got on the radio, contacted Johnny, and directed him to take the fast plane and head off the freight train and make an investigation.

THE following morning, Johnny telephoned them from Omaha. His news was all bad—he said he'd be superamalgamated, then he announced his results.

"I found the freight train," Johnny said, "and I located the boxes."

"Well?" Doc asked.

"The boxes were empty."

"Then Sam Harmony left the train," Doc said grimly.

"Yes, and I know what he did next," Johnny continued. "He got off at a town about forty miles from Omaha, I should judge. Here's what makes me think he did: There's a little private airport at the town, where a pilot keeps a plane. The flier uses the ship to barnstorm and to haul passengers, and it's a large cabin job, a pretty good one, from what I was able to learn. Well, this pilot was found dead this morning, and his plane was gone. It looks like Sam Harmony turned the infernal chick loose on the pilot."

"What makes you think something from that egg killed the pilot?" Doc asked.

"His body was mangled. I thought of that tramp, and of the calf and the horse," Johnny explained.

"If you ask me, Sam Harmony is up to something pretty devilish."

"What would be your guess as to what he is doing, Johnny?"

"I'd say he was carrying this thing out of the egg along with him, and letting it kill things. Maybe teaching it to kill."

Doc Savage said nothing to that, said nothing for so long that Johnny spoke again.

"Sam Harmony stole this plane," Johnny finished. "And he took off. According to reports, the plane flew east."

Doc Savage maintained his silence for a while longer.

"Flying," he asked, "toward New York?"

"Yes."

"Have you got the police checking all airports to the east?"

"Yes. I did that first thing. The police are plenty hot to get Sam Harmony now. There's that murder in Florida, the killing of the tramp, and now the slaughtering of this flier."

Renny made an explosive remark.

"Holy cow! The fellow must have gone crazy," he rumbled.

Doc Savage nodded slowly.

"In view of everything," the bronze man said thoughtfully, "it might be a good idea if we got back to New York in a hurry."

Chapter X. REASONS FOR HATE

MORNING sunlight was bright over New York City, sunbeams glancing off the thin spikes of brick and steel that were the skyscrapers, flashing in jeweled brilliance from windows, and, down in the streets, lifted the temperature to a degree that was uncomfortable.

Sunshine sprayed in through the windows of Doc Savage's headquarters—the three big rooms had outward walls that were composed almost entirely of glass—and sprang in bright blades of luminance from polished equipment in the laboratory, fell across the long cases of scientific volumes in the library, and brightened the interior of the smaller reception room, bringing out the remarkable color inlay and carving on the huge table which was one of the principal pieces of furniture. Monk and Ham—their pets, Habeas Corpus and Chemistry, dozed, in temporary harmony, in a patch of sunshine on the floor beside the big table—were quarreling.

"It's too blamed bad," Monk said gloomily, "that Nancy got snatched when she did. I think that girl was beginning to like me."

Ham snorted. "She had better sense than that," he said.

"Listen," Monk said angrily, "a girl could do a lot worse than fall in love with me."

"Yeah, she might marry you," Ham admitted.

Monk scowled, then leaned back and closed his eyes. "Shut up," he requested. "You give me a headache."

"I must say," Ham told him, "that you're no aspirin tablet yourself. Why the dickens don't you do something about finding that girl?"

Monk made no response. Both of them had been doing everything they could, and the subject had ceased to be a matter of squabbling. It was a bitter subject.

Doc Savage, seated at the big inlaid table, was going through telegraph reports from various parts of the country, hoping to find one that would indicate some trace had been found of Sam Harmony.

Renny, Johnny and Long Tom sprawled in the comfortable chairs about the office. They were tired—gloomy because of the general lack of progress.

Doc asked, "Where is Older—Hickey Older?"

Monk made a face, as if he had tasted something bitter.

"That lug," said the homely chemist. "He'll be showing up soon—I'm afraid."

The bronze man completed his inspection of the reports. He found nothing. He bundled all the papers together, snapped a rubber band around them and tossed them into a drawer. Then the telephone rang.

Renny picked up the telephone. "Yeah," he said. "What you want? Oh, it's you!" Renny looked over the others and made an I-tasted-a-pickle face. "The boy tornado," he remarked. "Hickey Older." Renny listened for some time. "Yeah," he said. "All right, if it makes you happy, it pleases me, too. Yeah, I'll tell them. And listen, you better keep a civil tongue in your head, or you and me will go around and around."

Renny hung up the instrument.

"Hickey Older," said the big-fisted engineer. "And he's got his nose in another rat hole. He thinks he's spotted the car that Nancy was hauled away in, that day she was seized. He wants me and Long Tom to come up and help him trace it. He says he don't want to associate with Monk and Ham."

Doc Savage asked sharply, "Do you think he has anything?"

Monk put in, "No, he's probably barking at the moon again." Monk sighed and shook his head. "That Hickey guy has been driving us nuts. Do you know how many false leads he's been finding a day, on an average?" Monk pulled in a breath and snorted it out. "Five! We kept count. Five!"

Renny and Long Tom put on their hats and prepared to leave.

"We can't overlook any bets," Renny grumbled. "Hickey Older said he would meet us in a brush patch in the northeast corner of Central Park." Renny snorted. "Shows how silly the guy is. Brush patch in the park. What the hell!"

Renny and Long Tom departed.

THERE was silence after Renny and Long Tom had gone. Doc Savage, Monk, Ham, and Johnny sat there lost in thought. A wind made low-pitched, deep-throated violin noises around the windows.

Doc said, "There is one angle we had better concentrate on."

"What is that?" Monk asked.

"The nature of the association between Calico Parks and Sam Harmony before this started," Doc said. "The two hated each other. Apparently Sam Harmony was here in New York hiding out so that Parks could not find him. If we can learn why the two hated each other, it may help."

Ham said, "It would help me understand the situation, at least."

Johnny had something else on his mind. Twice, he opened his mouth to speak, but remained silent. It was not the mystery of what might have made Sam Harmony and Calico Parks hate each other so thoroughly. Neither did the thing that puzzled Johnny have anything to do with the apparent existence of a third group, the gang which had seized Nancy, or what this third group was trying to do. The chick was bothering Johnny—the mysterious thing which he was convinced had hatched out of the egg which they had found in the ice cave in the Dakota Bad Lands. A horse, a calf and two men had been killed and horribly mutilated, and Johnny felt sure the thing out of the egg was responsible. Whenever he thought of it, he wanted to shudder.

Doc said, "Ham."

"Yes."

"You have been working on that name South Orion, haven't you?"

"Yes, I have."

"What have you learned?"

"Well, the only thing—"

There was pounding at the door. It sounded angry. Monk looked up, said, "Say, that sounds like Hickey Older. He's got a habit of trying to kick the door down every morning." The homely chemist got up and opened the door.

Hickey Older walked in.

"Hello, you clown," he said unpleasantly to Monk. Scowling at Ham, he added, "I see you've got another new suit on this morning. I'd think you would feel silly."

Monk and Ham stared at him with no approval.

Doc said, "Was there some reason for your not keeping your appointment?"

"What appointment?" Hickey Older asked.

Suddenly the bronze man was on his feet. "Did you telephone a few minutes ago and ask Renny and Long Tom to meet you in the northeast corner of Central Park?"

Hickey Older stared. He shook his head.

"I don't know what you're talkin' about," he said.

Monk caught the significance of the thing. The homely chemist shot to his feet, gripped Hickey Older's arms. "Didn't you telephone here a while ago?" he yelled.

Hickey Older jerked his arm loose. "I didn't telephone anybody," he shouted. "What the hell is this, anyway?"

Monk drew back a fist menacingly.

"Listen, Renny recognized your voice!" he snarled.

"Yeah?" Hickey Older put out his jaw. "Well, I'm tellin' you somebody is a liar, chum. I never called. Maybe somebody imitated my voice."

Monk sniffed. "Imitated your voice. Bugs!"

The muscles in Hickey Older's arms and shoulders began swelling. "Bud, I been lookin' forward to smackin' you down. Now looks like the time."

"Stop it," Doc Savage said.

The bronze man was moving toward the door, gesturing at Ham and the others.

"This looks bad," Doc added. "We may have just a chance of heading off Renny and Long Tom before something happens."

SIX men rode out of the brush with guns and surrounded Long Tom and Renny. The guns were short, dark ones which came out of pockets. The men wore riding costumes, and their horses were obviously animals rented from one of the numerous riding academies in the neighborhood of the park. The fact that there was a bridle path nearby explained the reason for their disguise as park riders. Not only would they not attract suspicion among the many other riders who were using the paths this morning, but the horses would give them a fast method of escape should anything go wrong.

Renny and Long Tom put their arms up.

"Get 'em down!" one of the men snarled. "Somebody might see you acting like you're being held up."

The men alighted from their horses. They were young men, but there was nothing pleasant about them. They looked like very tough young gentlemen who knew their way around in dark places. "When we get these guys in the car, you can turn the horses loose and join us."

The man nodded.

There proved to be two cars, neither of which was new or gaudy enough to attract attention. Renny was shoved into one machine, Long Tom into the other. A gesture caused the man who was holding the horses to drop the reins, and come running toward them. He climbed into one of the cars, and the machine moved. "Got that bicycle tape?" the leader asked.

A black disk of tape was produced, and Renny's eyes were covered completely with the stuff. Then they covered his ears, so that he was not only unable to see anything, but could hear very little. One of the captors laughed and said, "Covering their ears is a smart move. A man can tell pretty near as much by what he hears as by what he sees, sometimes."

The cars traveled with traffic. Renny was jammed down on the floor, and he supposed Long Tom was in the same predicament. Because he had an intense desire to thwart his captors, Renny strained his ears to catch what sounds penetrated the muffler of tape over his ears, but he had very little

success. They did not, as far as he could tell, leave the city. And eventually the cars seemed to drive into a double garage which connected with the living quarters of a house.

WHEN Renny's blindfold was removed, he was in a poorly lighted room, apparently a closed-off part of a basement—an empty coal bin, he concluded after staring at the grimy walls. He turned his head. Long Tom was lying nearby.

"That Hickey Older," Renny rumbled, "has been putting one over on us."

A man kicked Renny in the side, said, "Shut up!"

The leader of the captors laughed unpleasantly. "Let him think whatever he wants to," he suggested. "If he thinks Hickey Older engineered this, that's all right."

Renny said, "It sounded like Hickey Older's voice on the telephone."

The leader snorted. "Did it sound like this?" He bowed his neck, deepened his voice, and gave a fairly credible imitation of Hickey Older's speech, saying, "Don't bring them clucks Monk and Ham along, because I don't want nothin' to do with 'em."

Renny scowled. "So it was you made that telephone call!"

Instead of answering, the other took from a pocket an object wrapped in a handkerchief. When the handkerchief was removed, the object proved to be a bottle. The man let Renny and Long Tom look at the label. The bottle contained a powerful acid.

"You know what this will do if I drop it in your eyes?" the man asked.

Renny knew. The thought started his eyes watering.

"All right," the man said. "What we want is some information. You spill it, and we'll turn you loose—not right away, but you'll get turned loose. You got my word for it."

"I wouldn't take your word for the time of day," Renny said.

"Well, that's too bad." The man knelt down and poked Renny with his fist. "Listen, bud," he said. "We might as well understand each other. Do you know who we work for?"

"I thought it might be Hickey Older," Renny said.

The other's jaw fell for a moment, then he grinned and shook his head.

"Hell, I thought you was wise," he said. "We're working with Sam Harmony. You've heard of Sam, eh? You should have, because you've been chasing him all over the United States."

Renny was suddenly much more interested in the conversation.

"You're with Sam Harmony?" he said. "I don't believe it."

"Well, who do you think we are, then?"

Renny made no answer to that.

The other man showed his teeth and remarked, "Suppose I tell you some things that'll prove it. Suppose I tell you that there's a lot of money, maybe a million, involved in this thing. Just as if you didn't know it already."

Renny carefully made his face expressionless. This was important. Money! Money might explain why Calico Parks had been trying to catch Sam Harmony.

"Go ahead and prove something," Renny said.

The man poked an angry finger at Renny. "I'm tellin' you this because you already know it," he said. "You're actin' damn innocent, but you don't fool me. I bet you'll even claim you never heard of the South Orion."

"The South Orion?" Renny said, puzzled.

"Hell, don't act so innocent. I suppose you'll try to tell me you don't know anything about Sam Harmony and Calico Parks getting out that night when everybody else was locked up. And their agreement to come back and get the stuff, and share alike. Don't know anything about it, do you?"

"No," said Renny. "I don't."

"You liar! You'll probably deny that Calico Parks beat Sam Harmony back there and cleaned everything out. And then he came back and went down with Sam, as innocent as a lamb in a tomato patch, and pretended to go into a hell of a rage when he saw everything was gone. I guess you'll claim Parks has been hunting Harmony since then for revenge, and not to shut his mouth so the whole story would never come out." The man made a snarling noise and clenched his fist. "Well, we know better, my friend! We know Calico Parks has been hunting Sam Harmony and the rest of Sam's pals so he could shut us up."

Renny shook his head slowly. "I didn't know any of this."

"Hell! When Calico Parks hired Doc Savage to help him get rid of Sam Harmony! And you say you don't know anything about it? What do you think I am?"

"You've got Doc Savage wrong," Renny said. "Parks never hired Doc. The first thing Doc knew of this was when the girl came to him with the story that Sam Harmony had gotten scared, and that someone had tried to kill her."

"Oh, damn!"

"That's a fact," Renny said earnestly.

"Yeah, sure," the other said unbelievably. "By the way, why did Doc Savage have the girl snatched? So she couldn't talk too much?"

Renny stared at the man blankly. "You've sure got this balled up."

"You going to talk?" the other demanded.

Renny made a gesture. "Listen, you've told me more in the last four or five minutes than we knew

about the whole mystery."

The other snorted.

He uncorked the bottle of acid.

"Hold 'im," he ordered two of his men.

Renny, staring wide-eyed at the bottle, asked, "Say, is this all about that expedition money Sam Harmony is supposed to have stolen?"

"Expedition money?"

"Yes."

"Now you're talking crazy," the man said. "I never heard of no expedition money." He gestured at his two men. "Hold 'im tight. He may squall and kick when this stuff starts burning him."

"You gonna put it in his eyes first?" a man demanded.

"I may," the leader said. "And again, I may put some on his hide and let it burn him, while he thinks it over."

Chapter XI. THREAT

MONK came striding through the park bushes, leading a saddle horse, and joined Doc Savage and Ham-Hickey Older and Johnny had remained at headquarters, in case Renny and Long Tom should try to make contact—in the corner of Central Park.

"This seems to be all the loose horses," Monk announced grimly. "Six of them. I guess there were six guys in the gang that got Renny and Long Tom."

Doc Savage nodded. His metallic features, normally without expression, were now grim.

"Ham has been calling the stables which rent horses to park riders," he said. "We found one which rented six horses this morning." The bronze man gave Monk the address of the stable. "You take the horses over there. Ham and I will meet you at the place."

Monk nodded.

Doc and Ham ran to their car. The bronze man drove, saying nothing.

The stable was a somber brick building wedged between garages on the west side of the park. There were long rows of stalls in the back, many of them holding sleek animals. In the front there was a small office, with a rather intelligent attendant in charge.

"Police?" the attendant asked.

"A private investigation," Doc said. "But we can get the police if you wish."

The attendant frowned at the big bronze man, and finally said, "You're Doc Savage, aren't you? I guess we won't need the cops. What do you want to know?"

"We want a description of the six men who rented the horses," Doc told him.

The attendant leaned back, closed his eyes for a moment, then began describing the six men. His memory and his descriptive ability were both excellent, but when he finished, Doc Savage and Ham could only glance at each other, puzzled.

"Seen any of them before?" Doc asked.

Ham shook his head. "No, I don't think. Wait a minute! Yes, I believe I've seen two of them. They were eating in a restaurant yesterday where Monk and I had dinner."

"Did you think they were following you at the time?" Doc inquired.

Ham looked disgusted.

"No," he said. "Of course not. But they must have been."

Monk arrived with the horses. The homely chemist listened to the descriptions of the six men.

"One of them guys," he said, "was walking up the street behind Hickey Older day before yesterday. It didn't look as if he was following Hickey, though."

Ham said, "We've been outsmarted."

There seemed to be nothing to do but return to headquarters. They did so—and met Hickey Older in the hallway outside the reception room. Hickey Older put a warning finger to his lips.

"Psst!" he said. "We got a scared visitor."

"Who?" Doc asked sharply.

Hickey Older grimaced.

"Calico Parks," he said. "And boy, has he got the willies!"

CALICO PARKS was crouching in one of the deep upholstered reception-room chairs, acting as if he was trying to retreat to the farthest corner of the chair. His hair looked more white; all the humor was gone from his large eyes. His big hands shook as they blotted a handkerchief over his benign face—which wasn't at all benign now, but a mirror for fright.

He sprang up and grabbed Doc Savage's hand.

"You've got to help me!" he gasped. "You've got to!"

"Sit down," Doc Savage said without emotion, "and tell us about it."

Parks retreated reluctantly to the chair. "You . . . you will recall that, several days ago, you asked me a number of questions about Dr. Samuel Harmony," Parks muttered. He peered at his hands, and knotted them nervously. "To tell the truth, I suddenly decided, after my talk with you, to see if I couldn't find Sam Harmony. I had . . . er . . . decided to accuse him of stealing the expedition funds which mysteriously vanished. I dispatched one of my assistants, Nick Hostelli by name, to Miami, Florida, to apprehend Sam Harmony should he flee in the direction of South America, which seemed a likely thing for Harmony to do because he had lived in South America for some time."

The man stopped speaking and knotted and unknotted his hands.

"Well?" Doc prompted.

"Sam Harmony killed Nick Hostelli in Miami, apparently," Parks said. "Then he framed a telegram to me which caused me much . . . er . . . difficulty with the police. I was almost arrested."

"Yes?"

Calico Parks' hands fastened to the arms of the chair, and he half arose.

"This morning," he wailed, "Sam Harmony called me on the telephone. He said he was going to kill me. He . . . he told me an incredible story."

Doc asked, "What kind of a story?"

It sounded unreal, the way Calico Parks told it—fantastic. And yet he had, fundamentally, the truth—he repeated to them almost the entire story of Sam Harmony's flight to the Bad Lands of Dakota, and of the ice cave, the dinosaur egg therein. He said that Sam Harmony had told him a monstrous thing had hatched out of that egg.

Calico Parks perspired and his hands shook.

"He . . . he said he would use that monster to murder me and all my men," Parks croaked. "That's what Harmony said. I . . . I laughed at him. It was natural, because who would believe such a story? And then . . . then—"

Parks got to his feet and stared at them.

"I bought the newspapers," he blurted. "And I saw where two men had been killed in Dakota and Nebraska—killed by something that had mangled them horribly. That . . . that was just what Sam Harmony had said I would find. It was the . . . the proof of what he said."

Parks sank back in the chair again.

"You've got to help me," he said. "You've got to protect me from Sam Harmony. And you've got to trap the maniac and that—whatever it is—that he's going to kill me with."

Doc Savage asked quietly, "Is everything you have told us the truth?"

Calico Parks shuddered "It is."

"I am going to ask you a question," Doc said. "I want a truthful answer."

"What is the question? I'll answer it."

"What do you know about the South Orion?"

"I never heard of it," Parks said quickly.

OBEYING a slight gesture from Doc Savage, Ham arose and followed the bronze man into the library. Doc closed the door so that they would not be overheard.

"That guy," Ham said, "is a liar."

"On which point?" Doc inquired.

"The South Orion," Ham explained. "He knows what the name means, all right, but he isn't telling."

"He seems to be scared," Doc suggested.

"I'll tell the world!"

Doc Savage studied the dapper lawyer. "Ham, you were investigating that South Orion, and just before we found out that Renny and Long Tom had been led into a trap, you started to say you had found out something. What was it?"

Ham made a helpless gesture.

"It didn't amount to much, Doc," he said. "The only South Orion I could find was the name of a steamship. The vessel was of German registry, and it was one of the first ships sunk in the war. It went down months ago."

"Where was it sunk?"

"In the Atlantic, off the Bahama islands. There was a stink at the time because a British cruiser sent the ship down, and the sinking is supposed to have occurred within the neutral zone set up by the American government."

"Where," Doc asked, "had the vessel sailed from?"

"South America."

"What was its destination?"

"Germany."

The bronze man made, very briefly, the low trilling sound which was his peculiarity. Ham, hearing the muted, exotic note, glanced at the bronze man sharply. Then the dapper lawyer shook his head.

"I don't see how that steamship could have anything to do with this," Ham remarked.

"Did the passengers get off safely?"

"Yes. They were landed in Cuba by a neutral ship. That is, the Americans were. And the Germans were taken off by the British cruiser and landed, I suppose, in England."

"Did you get a passenger list of the South Orion?" Doc asked.

Ham jumped, then looked uncomfortable. "No, I didn't," he confessed. "Want me to do that? I will probably have to telephone to South America to get the job done."

"Go ahead," Doc directed.

The bronze man now went on into the laboratory, and from one of the cases of chemicals, he made several selections. He worked for a short time, mixing the chemicals, and when he finished, he had a vial of truth serum—the most efficient type of truth serum which he had been able to develop, which

did not mean that it was any too efficient.

The truth serum, in fact, was unreliable. The bronze man's chemical genius, as great as it was, had not been able to discover any mixture that had the magical effect of removing the conversational brakes from the consciousness of the person to whom it was administered. The best it could do was somewhat stupefy and lower the ability to consciously resist. It helped a great deal, Doc had discovered, if the truth serum could be administered without the victim having any suspicion that the stuff was being used.

Stowing the serum in a pocket, Doc rejoined Monk, Johnny, Hickey Older and Calico Parks.

Hickey Older glared at the bronze man.

"Where's Nancy?" the young man yelled. "That's what I want to know. You damned guys have been stalling around for days, and haven't accomplished anything! I want action."

Monk said, "If you don't shut up, I'll give you some action."

"Any time you're ready, you hairy baby-frightener!"

Doc addressed Calico Parks. "Since your life is obviously in danger, we had better guard you," he said.

Hickey Older shouted, "That's another thing! You spend your time guarding this cluck! What the hell do we care about him? It's Nancy who was kidnapped!"

Doc Savage paid no attention, but asked Parks, "Do you mind if Monk, Johnny and myself stay with you steadily?"

"Not at all," Parks said hurriedly. "I would be delighted."

"What about me?" Hickey Older demanded.

"You can go with us, if you wish," Doc advised.

Hickey Older scowled. "All right," he said. He jerked his thumb at Parks. "But it ain't no skin off my back if that goblin, or whatever it was that hatched out of the egg, gets him. It's Nancy I'm worried about."

CALICO PARKS, he explained, had opened his home on Long Island. He said that he had remained at the Ritz-Central Hotel for only two days, while his house was being prepared for his occupancy. Doc Savage listened to this information gravely, did not give an inkling that he had known it, that his men had kept close watch on Parks day and night since trouble had developed.

They rode out to the Parks home in two cars. Parks, Ham and Hickey Older rode in the Parks limousine driven by a liveried chauffeur. Doc Savage and Monk followed in one of the bronze man's machines. Johnny Littlejohn remained behind at headquarters to serve as contact man, and to push a police search for Renny and Long Tom, as well as Nancy.

The bronze man drove silently. He showed few signs of worry, or of any other emotion, but Monk, who knew him very well, decided he was greatly concerned.

"This is quite a place that Parks has," Monk volunteered. "He's been sticking right there for several days. We've had private detectives watching the house, and shadowing everybody who came and went." The homely chemist gestured at an innocent-looking roadster which was crawling along behind the Parks limousine. "There's one of our private detectives now, still trailing Parks."

Doc asked "What about the telephone line into Parks' place?"

"Long Tom tapped that and put a recorder on it," Monk explained.

The Parks home proved to be an impressive mansion of dark stone planted in the middle of a forest of shrubbery. It was, on the whole, something like an ancient castle, except that there was no moat or drawbridge, but instead a wide, graveled drive which swung up to the entrance, stopping before a stone marquee, from beneath which sprang butlers and footmen.

Hickey Older seemed impressed by the place.

"Gee whizz!" he said.

Doc Savage spoke quietly to Ham. "Get on the telephone," he said, "and see if the South American office of the steamship line has the passenger list of the South Orion on its last voyage."

Ham nodded. "O. K. You told me to do that earlier, but I didn't have time."

Doc Savage signaled to Monk, and the two of them left the Parks mansion. They moved through brush and down a hill, following the road, until, turning sharply to the right, Monk dug into a pile of leaves and uncovered a concealed box of apparatus.

"The recorder attached to Parks' telephone line," Monk explained. "We can soon tell whether Parks got that threatening phone call."

The apparatus was so constructed that it began recording whenever a call was made over the wire, shut itself off when the call ended. The time of each call was also recorded by a series of clicking noises which, when counted, gave the hour and the minute.

They listened to the threatening call.

The voice sounded very much like Sam Harmony's, as Johnny had described it. The text of the malevolent threat was very much as Calico Parks had said it had been. The voice told about the egg from the ice cave, conveyed the idea that something hideous had hatched out of it, without exactly describing the thing itself.

Monk rubbed his jaw.

"It looks like Parks told the truth about the threat," he said.

HAM met them when they returned. "I got it," he said.

"The passenger list of the South Orion?" Doc asked.

"Yes." The dapper lawyer looked elated. "Both of them were aboard."

"Calico Parks and Sam Harmony were on the South Orion on her last trip?"

"Both of 'em," Ham nodded. "That fellow, Nick Hostelli, who got killed in Miami, was on board, too. The whole gang of them seems to have been aboard. There was this butler of Parks'—the one called Leo. There was another man whose first name was Ben. You remember that Parks talked to a guy named Ben, when this thing first developed, and told him to try to find Sam Harmony?"

"I remember," Monk said. "I'll bet the whole crowd was on that steamship. But what in the dickens has that got to do with it?"

Doc Savage said, "We will give Parks the truth serum, first chance we get."

Ham looked grim. "That should help," he said.

They had an excellent dinner that evening—Monk, who was always a suspicious soul, remained in the kitchen during its preparation to make sure nothing was put in the food that shouldn't have been—and there was no opportunity to administer the truth serum to Parks.

Shortly after dinner, Doc Savage drew Monk aside, and issued a few low-voiced directions. Monk nodded, then he went to their car, opened a compartment in which they kept equipment and located several metal boxes.

The boxes were an unobtrusive black hue, slightly smaller than shoe boxes, and were fitted with clamps which could be tightened with wing nuts, then locked.

Monk attached those boxes to the underside of every car on the place.

The opportunity to administer truth serum to Calico Parks came about ten o'clock that night when they were in the library, and Parks was having a liqueur. Doc got the serum into Parks' drink, and the man consumed it at a gulp, apparently noticing nothing wrong.

Doc, Ham, and Monk—Hickey Older knew nothing about the truth serum—exchanged glances, then sat back to wait.

Chapter XII. AN OGRE PROWLING

WHEN the man screamed, the sound was so sudden, so like a knife stabbing, that Monk lifted inches out of his chair without appearing to use either his arms or legs for propulsion. Calico Parks was holding another small glass of liqueur; he dropped it, and the amber liquid splashed over his trousers, the glass thumping to the floor and tumbling end over end. It rolled under Doc Savage's feet as the bronze man whipped for the door.

The yell had come from the west wing somewhere. Doc lunged for the sound. Monk, Ham and Hickey Older raced after him.

"Ham," Doc called without turning, "get back in there and watch Calico Parks. You too, Older." Hickey Older swore, then he and Ham whirled and rushed back to remain with Parks.

Doc and Monk ran to the end of a hall. The bronze man hit a door, which was unlocked and flew open. Beyond was another hallway, a larger one, and at the far end, a door.

A man—Leo, the butler—was leaning against the door with both hands, pushing madly. The door was not secured by the lock, but by a safety chain which allowed it to swing open a few inches.

The expression on Leo's face was completely one of horror.

Suddenly there was a terrific blow against the outer side of the door. The panel smashed back against the safety chain. Leo, straining and trying to hold the door, emitted a squalling sound that was not words, but entirely fear.

Monk made a scooping gesture at his own armpit, his hand coming out with a weapon which resembled an oversize automatic pistol—one of the unusual machine pistols which Doc Savage had developed, and which could pour out an incredible number of shots in a short space of time.

Monk pointed the gun at the door.

"Let 'im in," he said.

Leo turned his head. Fright had made saliva come out of his mouth and his chin was wet.

"It's twenty feet tall!" he croaked.

Doc Savage reached the door, gripped Leo's arm and pulled him back. The bronze man produced a flashlight, prepared to send the beam.

"It's some kind of a monster!" Leo howled.

Doc thumbed the flash button and white brilliance spouted through the door aperture. He fanned the beam, moving it over bushes, a small tree, a graveled path, lawn.

"Nothing in sight," the bronze man said quietly. "I'll open the door. Have your machine pistol ready, Monk."

"Wait a minute," Monk said.

He removed the ammo drum—it contained mercy bullets, slugs which produced harmless unconsciousness—and substituted one which held high-explosive pellets. The little explosive slugs were powerful; and one of them could demolish a small automobile.

"Now," Monk said fiercely. "I'll blow his ears off!"

Doc Savage flung the door open. He went out. Monk followed. Leo, his teeth knocking together with the sound of pebbles being shaken in a fist, reluctantly thrust his head out.

THE blackness of the night was like peaceful ink, and a slight breeze, coming in from Long Island Sound, barely moved the bushes and touched their faces with cool fingers. The only sound was, far in

the distance, traffic on the highway, and, still farther away, a steamer whistle which gave a lazy whoop out on the Sound.

Leo stopped the chattering of his teeth long enough to say, "I was out here gettin' some air. The thing came hoppin' out of the bushes. It . . . it almost got me before I could get under cover."

"What did it look like?" Doc asked.

Leo's teeth rattled for a moment.

"Jug . . . jug . . . just big," he gasped. "And it . . . I didn't stop to look close. Oh, damn! I never saw anything like that before!"

Monk frowned at the lawn. He doubled over, produced a flashlight of his own and slanted its beam across the grass.

"Look!" he exploded.

There was dew on the grass, and they could see the tracks plainly. It was perhaps more of a trail than distinct tracks.

Doc dropped on a knee, examined the marks. The grass was bent down, but not crushed as it would have been by any great weight.

"The thing doesn't seem to have been heavy," he said.

Leo cleared his throat tremulously.

"It kind of had wings," Leo muttered. "At least, it had things that it flapped around in the air."

Doc Savage nodded. "Come on," he told Monk. The bronze man and the chemist moved forward.

Behind them, Leo emitted a bleating sound of desperation, finally managed to bark, "Are you guys goin' to trail that thing?"

"Why not?" Monk asked. Monk's voice did not sound too hearty.

Leo said, "If you'd seen the thing, like I did, you'd know why not."

Doc Savage and Monk, paying no attention to Leo's croaking, kept advancing. The bronze man's flashlight, darting over the lawn, followed the prints. Monk—he wasn't scared, exactly, but he felt like being cautious—kept his flashlight beam diving through the air.

Leo, after standing in the door quaking for a time, decided to go with them. He made a dash from the door to their side, as if racing from one haven of safety to another.

"I mug . . . mug . . . must be a fool," he gasped.

They had followed the tracks perhaps fifty yards when Monk emitted his own yell. Monk's howl was loud enough to put any of Leo's efforts to shame.

"Look up there!" Monk squalled, pointing.

His flashlight had picked up a shape that was lifting above the treetops some distance away. It was a grotesque thing—perhaps not twenty feet tall, as Leo had said, although Monk, at the moment, would have been willing to bet that its height was not twenty feet, but forty.

It was so far away that its shape was not very definite in the flashing beam.

"Lug . . . lug . . . look!" Leo bleated.

Doc asked, "Monk, what is the matter with your machine pistol?"

Monk grunted, lifted his weapon.

"Better give some warning," Doc suggested.

"Warn that thing?" Monk muttered tensely. "Not me!"

The homely chemist's finger came down on the firing lever. The pistol made an ear-splitting roar of sound that was like the note of a bull fiddle, magnified a thousand fold.

The blasting of the explosive bullets followed and merged with the gobble of the machine pistol. The air over the woods was suddenly full of rending flame. Their eardrums were pounded by concussion.

"Yeo-o-ow!" Monk howled. "Got 'im!"

The hideous thing they had seen above the trees was going through convulsions. It sank from view.

Doc said, "Monk!" sharply.

"Yeah?"

"Go get that thing,"

Doc said. "But be careful. There are probably men with it."

Monk waved his machine pistol.

"I ain't afraid of the army and the navy," he yelled, "now that I've licked that thing."

Leo, the butler, started to follow Monk. But Doc caught Leo's arm and stopped him.

"You better go with me," the bronze man told Leo.

The butler was meek enough. He walked ahead of Doc into the house, and to the room where Ham and Hickey Older had been left, guarding Calico Parks.

Ham and Calico Parks were no longer in the room—it was a library—and Hickey Older apparently was not in a condition to do much about the situation.

THE window of the library, a large one, was smashed. The smashing was complete, for every particle of sashing had been dashed out of the opening. The glass was spread over the floor, some of it in large fragments, other particles small and glistening like jewels in the light.

A huge sideboard of a thing which stood at one end of the library had been upset, and a pair of

feet and one hand were sticking out from under this—Hickey Older's feet and hand.

Doc ran to the sideboard. It took most of his great strength to lift the thing and jam a chair under it. He sank to his knees.

Hickey Older's eyes were closed, but he seemed to be breathing.

"Hickey," Doc said.

Hickey Older did not answer.

Outdoors, from the direction which Monk had taken in search of the thing he had shot down from above the trees, there came shot noises. More than one gun—three, Doc believed, although it was hard to tell because the shooting was such a sudden bedlam. Then there was the bull fiddle moan of Monk's pistol, followed by a volley of thunder-noises as the explosive bullets erupted.

Monk yelled. His yell was something angry. Monk liked to whoop and howl during his fights.

When there was a momentary lull, Doc Savage lifted his own voice to a vibrant shout that undoubtedly reached Monk's ears.

"Be careful, Monk!" the bronze man warned.

Doc then gave his attention to the room.

"Ham!" he called sharply.

There was no answer, nothing to indicate what had become of Ham or Calico Parks. Doc Savage moved to the wall switch, extinguished the lights, then went to the window. For the moment, there was still darkness. He stepped outside.

Back in the library, he heard Leo, the butler, moving. He listened for an instant, then whirled and ran back inside.

"Leo!" he said sharply. "Stop!"

Leo did not halt. He was running away. Without calling out again, the bronze man lunged in pursuit. The glass on the library floor, grinding noisily under his feet, gave the butler warning, and the fellow increased his speed. He got to a door, slammed it.

Doc hit the door. It was of heavy wood, very strong, bolted on the other side. Smashing through by physical strength was out of the question.

The bronze man drove a hand into a pocket, brought out a small marble-sized thing of metal which had a suction cup of rubber attached. He pressed the cup against the varnished wood and the thing stuck there; he flipped a small lever on the metallic marble, then retreated quickly, got under cover. It was a grenade, and when it exploded, the blast shook the house, ripped the door apart. Doc went through. Leo had a few moments' headway. Doc listened.

The car engine, when it started, was a mad sound of haste from the rear of the house. Doc ran for the sound, but the machine, before he reached it, went away along the drive, engine moaning and tires throwing gravel.

Leo got away.

Monk loosened another string of high-explosive slugs, and thunder noise rolled over the countryside, came tumbling back from nearby hills.

"Monk!" Doc called.

"Over here!" Monk yelled.

There were shots, few and scattered. Then another car engine started. Doc, running toward Monk, could hear the homely chemist making angry noises and crashing through the brush.

Monk was standing in the road, very disgusted. He had latched his machine pistol into single-shot position, and was firing experimental shots, trying to drop an explosive on the distant car, which was out of sight along the winding road.

Doc said, "Better not do that. They probably have Ham and Calico Parks in the car."

Monk whirled.

"Huh?" he exploded.

Doc Savage told him about what had happened back in the library—where Ham and Parks had disappeared, where Hickey Older was lying under the upset sideboard, and where the window was so completely smashed—and ended the brief recital with the fact that Leo had taken flight.

"Damn the luck!" Monk said. "All that whoopla, and we came out the little end of the horn." The homely chemist thought for a moment. "Well," he said, "at least I'll bet I find the carcass of that monster lyin' in the brush."

THE homely chemist thumbed on his flashlight and started a cautious search.

"You were right about guys bein' with that thing," he said. "As soon as they heard me comin' to investigate, they started to take pot shots at me."

Doc asked, "Where did the first shots come from?"

"From right where the thing dropped after I cut down on it," Monk replied.

The homely chemist—he had charged around in the unfamiliar brush until he was practically lost—went back to the lawn and got his bearings. He found where he had stood to shoot at the thing above the trees, the spot being marked by a cluster of empty cartridges which his machine pistol had ejected.

Monk leveled an arm.

"It'll be over there," he said confidently.

But it wasn't. They found a spot where the brush was crushed down, where there were many marks,

some of them human footprints. But there was no sign of the thing that Monk had seen above the trees.

Monk was astounded.

"Listen, I put enough explosive slugs into that thing to blow an office building apart," the homely chemist growled. "It's dead. I know it's dead. But where did it go?"

Doc Savage made no verbal response, but began searching the vicinity carefully. The ground was damp, and he located a number of footprints, all made by men's shoes; these he measured with his eyes, fixing their characteristics in his memory.

He found only one thing which seemed to interest him particularly.

The object of interest was a doughnut-shaped piece of agate, bound with a shiny metal ring. It was no more than half an inch in diameter. On each side of the metal binding, there clung tiny bits of solder.

"What's that?" Monk asked.

Doc Savage put the object in his pocket.

"I think we have a good idea of what this is all about," the bronze man said grimly. "And we can start cleaning up the mess."

"You mean you understand the whole thing?" Monk demanded.

The bronze man did not seem to hear. He walked to the house and entered the library.

Chapter XIII. DECEIT FOR BAIT

HICKEY OLDER still lay under the sideboard. His fingers, however, were opening and shutting, and his legs were squirming slightly.

"Who put the chair under this thing?" he asked weakly.

"You can come out," Doc said. "Or do you need help?"

"I don't know," Hickey Older muttered. "I've been afraid to move. Maybe you better help me. I don't know how many bones are broke, if any."

Monk grasped the sideboard, and straining and making faces, managed to set the thing upright, after which the homely chemist leaned against the wall, panting, and muttered, "Boy, it took some strong guys to dump that thing on you!"

"It wasn't guys," Hickey Older said.

"Eh?"

"It was a thing."

"A what?"

"I don't know what else you'd call it. The thing was big and kind of black, and had the ungodliness shape. It was kind of an insect, and still it wasn't." Hickey Older stopped speaking, stared at the window and shuddered. "It came in through the window. Just kind of pushed its way in, smashing the sash and everything out of the way. We . . . we didn't have a chance."

"Was Ham hurt?" Monk demanded.

Considering that no one had ever heard Monk speak a civil word to Ham—a favor Ham unhesitatingly returned—the intense concern in the homely chemist's voice was somewhat incongruous.

Hickey Older said, "The thing maybe ate him. I don't know. It was big enough to eat him."

Monk turned white, seemed unable to say anything more.

Doc asked, "Then what happened?"

"I don't know." Hickey Older shook his head. "I tried to get away from the thing. It made a pass at me and knocked the sideboard over on me. That's the last I remember."

Suddenly Hickey Older drew back in a feeble rage and kicked the sideboard.

"That thing must weigh a ton," he snarled. He whirled on Monk, shook his fists weakly and yelled, "Why don't you do something? What in the devil is finally going to happen? You haven't learned anything yet and you've been working on this for days."

Monk winced. Monk was very worried about Ham, or he would never have put up a defensive argument.

"Oh, we know quite a lot," he said. "More than you think we know."

"Yeah," sneered Hickey Older. He grimaced and tried to think of a word to express his feelings, and finally he said, "Nuts!"

Monk said, "We know that everybody concerned was on the German steamship South Orion, which was chased and sunk by an English cruiser near the outbreak of the war. We know that's behind the affair."

Hickey Older's mouth fell open. "You . . . uh," he said, and closed his mouth.

Doc said, "Leo, the butler, was working for Sam Harmony in this thing."

Again Hickey Older's mouth fell open. "I thought . . . thought he was one of Calico Park's men," he muttered.

"We will probably find," Doc said, "that each of the three gangs who are fighting have spies in each other's organization."

"Three

gangs!" Hickey Older blurted.

Doc Savage did not elaborate on the point, or explain what reasons had led him to the conviction that there were three gangs involved.

Monk rubbed the side of his homely face gloomily. "You know," he said, "it was a hell of a coincidence, wasn't it?"

"What was?" Doc asked.

"That raid," Monk said. "It came just as we were about to get Parks under the influence of the truth serum, so he would talk."

"Maybe," Doc said dryly, "that might have had something to do with the raid."

LEAVING a puzzled Monk and a worried Hickey Older in the library, Doc Savage went out to quiet the servants. The majority of the Parks' retinue, he imagined, were honest. He got the servants together—those who had retired for the night had naturally been routed out of bed by the uproar—and studied them for a moment. None of them struck him as obviously being crooks.

He suggested quietly that those who had been on the South Orion should step forward. But nothing happened. None of the servants, it seemed, had been on the steamship.

Doc explained that the servants should remain together until the arrival of the police. He gave them a rough summary of what had happened, directed that the story should be told to the police when they arrived.

Then the bronze man went back to the library.

Monk was describing the monster to Hickey Older, and laying it on rather thick. According to Monk, the thing had done everything but sprout fire.

"I tell you it ain't nothin' like has been on the earth for many a million years," Monk insisted.

"I shot enough explosive into it to sink a steamship, and all I did was knock it back on the ground.

The thing must have galloped away while all them guys was shooting at me."

"The men who shot at you brought the monster?" Hickey Older asked.

"Sure."

"And you think it's the same monster that hatched out of the egg they found in the ice cave?"

"It's obvious, ain't it?" Monk asked.

"Well," said Hickey Older, "it was quite a thing, whatever it was. It probably ate your friend, Ham."

Monk paled.

"Will you stop sayin' that!" he yelled.

Hickey Older stated at him. "Say, you like that overdressed shyster lawyer, don't you?"

"Ah—" Monk scowled. "You call him a shyster again, and I'll push your teeth in."

Doc Savage spoke in a low voice, motioned, and the two followed him outside. The bronze man led the way to his car, the one which had been driven out from headquarters when they came to guard Parks. The machine stood in a side driveway in front of the garages, and it had not been disturbed. The bronze man unlocked it, got in, and gestured for the other two to do likewise. Habeas Corpus, the pet pig, and Chemistry, Ham's pet chimp, had been locked in the car, and the two animals made noises.

Hickey Older said, "Say, we ain't skippin' out, are we?"

Doc said, "We are leaving."

"But will the cops like that?"

"The servants know the story, and they can tell it to the police."

Hickey Older shook his head and settled back. Apparently he didn't approve of the idea, but did not think it worth objecting. He did mutter, "Next thing, we'll probably all be in the Bastille. Then a fine chance we'll have of finding Nancy!"

Doc Savage drove the car out of the grounds, and the machine crawled along a road, following the white flare of its headlights. After a moment, the bronze man asked Monk if he would drive; the homely chemist nodded, and the two men changed places. Doc switched on the radio—all of the cars used by himself and his men were equipped with transmitting-and-receiving apparatus.

Picking up the microphone, Doc said, "Johnny."

Almost instantly, the voice of the gaunt archaeologist and geologist responded from the skyscraper headquarters. "I'll be superamalgamated!" Johnny said. "I was wondering what had happened to you!"

"Any word from Renny and Long Tom?"

"No," Johnny reported gloomily.

Hickey Older, who was riding in the back seat, made a snorting sound of disgust. "Nothing," he said. "That's all the progress we ever make."

Doc Savage, ignoring him, said, "Keep the radio tuned in, Johnny. We are on our way to try to contact Ham and Calico Parks, who have been carried off."

The bronze man continued, speaking quietly, and told about the raid on the Parks estate.

"There is a chance," he said, "that Ham and Parks were carried off by the same gang who got Renny and Long Tom."

"What about Nancy?" Johnny asked. "Did the same outfit get her?"

Doc Savage hesitated. "Well—maybe," he said. His voice, however, held a strange quality, and no conviction.

"I'll keep tuned in," Johnny said. "Holler if there's anything I can do."

As soon as Doc replaced the microphone, Hickey Older leaned forward and clutched the bronze man's

shoulder.

"Listen!" Hickey barked. "I heard you say you might be able to find them guys. How the hell you gonna do it?"

"Monk, do you want to explain it to him?" Doc asked. "I am going to be busy."

Monk watched the dials on the radio apparatus which the bronze man was manipulating, then nodded.

"Listen close, you knot-headed bag of noise," Monk said over his shoulder to Hickey Older, "and I'll try to get it through that skull of yours."

AN hour later, Monk brought the car to a stop—Doc Savage had been directing his course—in a side street near the ocean front on City Island. The smell of the sea was in their nostrils and they could hear, very faintly, the whispering of surf.

Monk turned to look back at Hickey Older. "You got it all clear?"

Hickey Older nodded. "One of the first things you done when you got to Calico Parks' place," he said, "was attach a little radio transmitter to the underside of every car on the Parks estate. The radio gives out a steady signal. You have been using a direction-finder to track down that signal. That right?"

"It's an old gag," Monk said. "We use it regular."

"Where are they at?" demanded Hickey Older.

Doc pointed. "In that direction, apparently."

He was indicating one of two objects, the first being a house, large, rather ancient, like the majority of dwellings on City Island, which—the place was not properly an island, being connected to the mainland by a bridge—was a popular rendezvous for yachtsmen, and the site of numerous shipyards specializing in the construction of small pleasure craft. They had passed a number of docks where boat masts stuck up thickly.

Beyond the house which Doc Savage indicated was a dock to which was anchored an elderly hulk of a boat, a schooner. The boat, as far as they could tell—it was quite dark, so they had very little light for an inspection—was an old one, not being used, not even fitted with sails.

"The house or the boat," Hickey said. "I get it."

Doc Savage directed, "You two stay here. I'm going to look around."

"Be careful of the thing that hatched out of that egg," Monk warned uneasily.

The bronze man moved a few yards, and suddenly seemed to blend with the darkness. He had stepped into a patch of shadow, and Hickey Older made the mistake of thinking he had remained there. Hickey finally muttered, "Why don't the guy go on and do his looking?" and walked over to the dark clump of shadow. He came back muttering under his breath. "He wasn't there," he said.

Doc, by that time, was close to the house. He circled it once cautiously, and located a garage in the rear. He listened outside the garage, then opened it and went in. The Parks car was there, the one with the radio transmitter attached to the underside of the chassis. The machine was empty. Returning to the house, Doc watched the windows for a while. There was no light. He attached a small device which he had brought along from his car—a supersensitive microphone, amplifier and headset—to the door. The contrivance picked up such sounds as were in the house and magnified them several thousand fold. The only noise was an intermittent grinding, and Doc concluded it was a rat gnawing on wood.

He turned his attention to the old hulk of a boat. There was, he saw after a time, a light aboard. He did not go close to the craft, which was probably fortunate, because a match unexpectedly flared alight on deck, as a man ignited a cigarette. The smoker was Leo, the Parks butler who had fled so precipitously.

Doc went back to his car.

Monk sat on the running board, alone.

"Where is Hickey Older?" Doc demanded.

Monk made a disgusted sound. "That cluck? He wasn't satisfied. He had to sneak off to look the place over himself. He said that if Nancy was there, he wanted to be sure what he was doing. Said he'd be back."

"That gives us a chance to make some arrangements," Doc said. "Hickey might get nervous if he knew what we are really doing."

THE bronze man—Monk was staring at him, astonished—got in the car, switched on the radio transmitter and picked up the microphone.

"Johnny," he said.

"Yes, Doc," Johnny answered promptly.

The bronze man explained where they were, added the information that the quarry seemed to be aboard the old boat. "Can you find the place?" he asked.

"Sure," Johnny said. "I know City Island like a book."

Doc said, "Listen closely, Johnny."

"I'm listening."

"We are going aboard this boat, and we should be able to take the thing over, if we have decent luck. Now, that will be only part of it. If my calculations are correct, Sam Harmony and his men are on board the boat. Once we have them, it will mean we've got one of the three gangs who are involved in this thing—"

"If you ask me," Johnny interrupted, "there's only two gangs involved in this. Sam Harmony, and Calico Parks."

Doc said, "No. If that proves to be the case, all my calculations are off. I am banking on the third gang showing up and taking all of us prisoner."

"You're what?"

"The third gang," Doc said, "should be showing up soon, in order to grab Sam Harmony. If we can contrive to be taken prisoner, it is logical to suppose that they will carry us off to their hide-out, where they are keeping Renny and Long Tom, as well as Ham and Calico Parks, whom they captured tonight."

Johnny was silent for a moment. "I'm dizzy," he said. "This is too involved for me."

"My plan," Doc explained patiently, "is to be taken prisoner by the third gang and carried to their hide-out."

"What do you want me to do?"

"Trail along. Be ready to help us make the big break, once we find Renny, Long Tom and Ham."

Johnny said, "I come out there and stand by. Is that it?"

"Yes."

"Right."

Doc Savage dropped the microphone on its fork and clicked off transmitter and receiver switches. Monk had his head thrust into the car. "Doc," he said, "did I hear that right? You think that Sam Harmony didn't seize either Renny or Long Tom or Ham or Calico Parks."

"I think not."

"But Sam Harmony made a raid on the Parks place with his-monster-or whatever it is."

"And you drove him off with your machine pistol," Doc pointed out.

Monk snorted.

"Yeah," he agreed. "But while that was going on, the monster got around to the house, somehow, busted in and nabbed Parks and Ham, after knocking Hickey Older cuckoo. How do you explain that? There ain't two monsters, is there? That one that got into the library wasn't directed by this third gang, was it?"

Doc didn't answer. He listened for a moment. Then he said, "Hickey Older is coming back. Don't alarm him with our theories. He's already distraught over not being able to find Nancy."

Chapter XIV. RAIDERS

HICKEY OLDER loomed up in the darkness, stopped beside the car and volunteered no explanation until Doc asked where he had been, after which he growled, "I been lookin' around."

"You were told to wait here," Doc said.

"I been told a lot of things, and I been taking your orders," Hickey retorted. "Where's it got me?"

Monk said, "Before this is over, you'll probably get half smart and learn that it's a good thing to do exactly what Doc says to do."

"Let it go," Doc Savage said quietly. "Hickey is worried about Nancy, which is reasonable. What did you find, Hickey? Where do you think they are?"

"In the house, or on the boat," Hickey said. "I ain't sure."

"You learned a lot, I see," Monk told him.

Doc Savage gave instructions in a low voice. Monk and Hickey Older were to wait on shore, near the end of the rickety dock—and not to stir from there under any conditions until the bronze man signaled them. The pair nodded understanding.

At the edge of the water, some distance from the wharf, Doc Savage stripped off his clothing down to shorts, which would serve as swimming trunks. Invariably when working upon a case, Doc Savage wore a vest of his own design which contained numerous pockets in which he could carry gadgets without the presence of the things being conspicuous. The bronze man removed a few devices from this, and left it on the shore with his clothing.

He waded in, making scarcely a ripple, and swam silently. He kept below the surface most of the time, until he reached the side of the schooner, near the stern.

One of the devices from the vest was a folding grapple-iron to which was attached silken cord, looped at intervals so that it could be climbed. He unfolded the grapple, made sure the rubber coverings—bits of rubber tubing—were in place over the hook like tips so as to muffle sound. He made one toss, a cautious one, and hooked the grapple over the railing with practically no sound. On the chance that it might have been heard, he waited for a while. Then he climbed on board the boat. The deck planking was old, rough, under his bare feet; the calking had worked partially out of the cracks and it was like walking on parallel lines of quarter-inch rope. Doc could hear voices below, the words being indistinguishable, but with an angry tone.

Leo sat on the old anchor winch in the bow. He was humped forward, palms cupping his chin, evidently with nothing much on his mind, and his faculties not particularly alert.

Doc Savage got his neck and mouth before the man knew trouble was near. Simultaneously, Doc lifted the fellow upward, so that he would not be able to kick against the deck and make noise. They stood and strained that way for a few moments, the bronze man holding Leo aloft like a child, then Leo became limp.

The bronze man lowered him, tested his pulse for a moment. He had made Leo senseless by exerting pressure on certain spinal centers, and, while the method was effective, it might be dangerous if Leo happened to have a defective heart or some other constitutional weakness.

(Author's Note: The detailed methods by which Doc Savage gets many of his effects, particularly upon the human body, are omitted deliberately. The reason: Many of the processes are exceedingly dangerous in the hands of the unskilled; others might be converted to criminal use.)

Doc stepped onto the dock, signaled Monk and Hickey Older, and the two approached. They had removed their shoes.

"There is some talking going on below decks," Doc said, his voice so low as to be scarcely audible. "We might as well listen a bit before we go to work on them."

THEY found a skylight from which one pane was missing, through which they could see and hear what went on in the cabin below.

Sam Harmony was down there, and there were four men with him. The four men sat there, red-faced, listening to Harmony swear at them.

"You bungling dupes," Sam Harmony said bitterly. "You muffed the chance of getting hold of Calico Parks."

One of the men squirmed uncomfortably. "I tell you," he complained, "that guy Monk had some kind of a gun that fired shells like a coast-defense cannon. Why, hell, the bullets from that thing would explode thirty feet from you, and the blast would knock you down!"

"Why didn't you shoot him?" Harmony snarled.

"It was dark."

"And he ain't so easy to shoot," added another man. "The way he moved around—"

Harmony pounded the table fiercely. "Shut up! You muffed it. Our one chance to get Parks, and you blew it as high as a kite."

"Maybe we wouldn't be any better off if we'd got Parks," suggested one of those who was on the carpet.

"The hell! The hell you say!" Harmony showed his teeth and struck the desk again. "We would have made that guy tell where he cached that million-dollar cargo of gold off the South Orion." The men looked at each other.

One said, "Leo don't seem to think Parks got that gold—"

"Of course he got it!" Sam Harmony yelled. "Didn't Parks and I have a hunch what was going to happen the night the passengers of the South Orion were all locked in their cabins? Didn't we sneak out? And didn't we watch a lifeboat put off from the South Orion with the gold? Didn't we watch them bury it on a deserted coral island northeast of Cuba?"

Harmony stopped speaking, then jammed his fists on his hips and contemplated them sourly.

"The German captain of the South Orion buried that gold because he knew a British destroyer was following his ship. The Germans wanted to keep that gold out of the hands of the British."

"Nobody denies that part of the story," said the other. "But Leo—"

"Parks and I came back to the States after we were landed from the German ship which the British destroyer sank," said Parks. "We got our gangs together, and we lined out for that island. Well, you know what happened. The gold was gone. Parks had double-crossed me, skipped off ahead of me and got it. I figured out exactly when he did it. He did it when he was pretending to be hunting a boat and men. There was four or five days we were separated, and that's when he did it. He must have used a plane."

"Leo says—"

"Oh, the hell with Leo!" said Harmony. "If we can get Parks and make him tell—"

The man said sharply, "Leo says Parks really thinks you got the gold."

"He's a damned liar. He's lying to cover up for himself."

"Leo," persisted the other man, "insists that Parks was carried off from his house tonight. Parks and that Doc Savage assistant named Ham."

Sam Harmony snorted.

"Another slick one Parks is trying to pull," he said. "He decided to disappear and make it look funny. Why, hell, he tried to make it look like that monster carried him off. And we know that didn't happen."

"Leo thinks some third gang is working on this thing."

"Well, I don't think so."

AT this point, Hickey Older had an accident. He had been leaning on the skylight, and he was a large young man; suddenly the skylight collapsed and Hickey took a header into the cabin. He let out a yelp as he fell.

Doc Savage, thinking fast, dropped through the skylight after Hickey Older. They lit on the table almost together, and the table, a rickety piece of furniture, collapsed under them with a loud crashing. The source of light, a gasoline lantern, flew off the table and tumbled across the floor, but only one of the delicate mantles broke, miraculously enough, so that it continued to make the cabin brilliant.

Doc lunged, struck with a fist, managed to make contact with the point of a man's jaw. The man jerked up straight and went back until he hit the wall, bounced off that, and fell on his face.

Hickey Older, making noises as he tried to get back breath which had been knocked out of him by the fall, clamped his long legs around one man, and got another with his hands. He went over and over on the floor, taking more punishment than he was dishing, but not seeming to mind. Up in the skylight, Monk had tried to jump down to join the fight, but he'd had a slight accident—his coat tail had caught on a projecting spike, and he was hanging there, making strangling noises of rage and trying vainly to free himself.

Sam Harmony had rolled clear of the table—the men had been sitting around the table when the fracas started, and they had been scattered by the abruptness of the onslaught—and he was trying to get a gun out of his clothing. Doc leaped for Harmony. The man got his gun clear, but had no time to lift it. Doc struck; the gun left the man's hand and skated across the cabin floor.

Sam Harmony was quick. He reared up—not entirely erect, but sufficiently so that he could use his feet, and went backward, trying to get away. Doc followed him. Harmony's right hand flashed out of sight, came into view with his knife, and the blade jumped open with a snicking sound.

Harmony stopped going backward, now that he had the knife in his hand. He set himself, advanced warily. Then he made a pass with the knife. He missed. His eyes flew wide. Doc Savage had moved faster than it seemed possible for human nerves and muscle to co-ordinate.

Then Sam Harmony's eyes clenched shut. His lips jerked back, exposing his teeth in a grimace of agony. His knife hand made feeble gestures. Doc hit him again, on the jaw this time—the other blow had been to the midriff—and the man upset. He made quite a noise hitting the floor, not moving afterward.

Hickey Older was still going over and over and around and around on the floor. He could have whipped either of his foes singly, but he refused to do that, or was afraid to turn one of them loose.

There was one man on his feet, and Doc lunged for that one. The fellow tried to flee. Doc caught him, and a moment later the man was on the floor, motionless.

Returning to Hickey Older, the bronze man watched his chances, and struck twice, ending that fight. Hickey Older got to his feet.

"Listen!" Doc Savage said sharply. "There might be some others aboard."

They stood there, straining their ears. Monk, still hanging from the nail in purple-faced indignity, also remained silent. They heard nothing to indicate any more men on the boat. Monk made a gurgling sound.

Hickey Older walked over, grabbed Monk's legs, jerked, and the homely chemist's coat tore free, and he landed on the floor.

"You been tellin' me for days," said Hickey Older unkindly, "what you was gonna do to these guys when we tangled with 'em. And what did you do? You hung from a nail!"

Monk was utterly disgusted.

"Accidents will happen to anybody," he muttered.

"The first accident happened to your parents when you were born," Hickey Older announced.

Monk, too glum to quarrel, spread his hands and shrugged.

"This once you're right," he said bitterly. "Imagine that! The only fight where I've really had a chance to put my hands on somebody, and I have to hang on a nail!"

DOC SAVAGE began searching the men. They were not armed, except for those who had flashed weapons, and this was not surprising, the New York State law against carrying firearms being as strict as it was. Doc found the guns concealed in a small chest in an adjacent cabin—the chest sat close to a porthole, where it could be pitched overboard in a hurry.

Monk got his mind off his own ignominious part in the fight sufficiently to think of other things.

"Well," he said, "at least we know what this mess is all about."

Hickey Older said, "It sounded like there was some gold on the South Orion, and it was hidden in a coral cave on an island, and these guys tried to steal it, but one of them got it ahead of the other one."

Doc said, "Or rather, someone got it ahead of both of them. And they've been wasting time fighting each other, instead of hunting the third party."

"I don't think there's any third party," Hickey Older said.

Monk glanced at Doc Savage.

"Neither do I," said the homely chemist.

Monk then got out his machine pistol and changed the ammo drums. It had been charged with mercy slugs, but he replaced these with more of the explosive bullets.

"What you gonna do?" Hickey Older asked.

Monk said, "I'm gonna start lookin' for that monster." The homely chemist put out his jaw. "This time, I bet it don't get up and run off after I'm done."

Hickey Older stared at him. "You think it's a kind of a prehistoric critter that hatched out, and Sam Harmony has been using it for murder?"

"Well, it's obvious, ain't it?"

"By blowing it to pieces," said Hickey Older, "you may destroy a valuable museum specimen."

"Oh, I'll leave a leg, or a tooth or something," Monk said. "The museum fellers can reconstruct

it from that, if they want the thing. Me—I don't hanker to collect the thing, because I saw it!" Monk thrust the machine pistol in his belt where he could get at it handily.

A man spoke from the companionway.

"Under your belt is a good place to leave that gun," he said.

His voice was unpleasant, and the automatic shotgun which he held was not exactly cheering.

Chapter XV. OTHER EGGS HATCHING

MONK'S arms went up instinctively. All his life, it had been a private horror that some day someone might shoot him with a shotgun. He had seen what a shotgun could do at close range. Suddenly Hickey Older made a snarling sound. He took half a step forward, all his muscles tense, his face tight with emotion.

"Easy! Easy!" warned the man with the shotgun.

Doc said, "Be careful, Hickey!"

Hickey Older turned his face. It was grim. "You know who this guy is?" he demanded.

"One of the men who seized Nancy?" Doc suggested.

Hickey's jaw fell. "How-how'd you know?"

The bronze man did not answer. The man with the shotgun was coming down into the cabin. Other men followed—six of them. All carried guns.

Evidently one or more men remained on guard outside, because they called down that it was all right, that no one was coming.

Hickey Older was staring at Doc Savage. "Who are these guys?" he demanded.

"That third gang we were talking about," Doc said.

"You mean—"

"Yes," Doc said. "These are the men who carried off Ham and Calico Parks tonight."

Hickey Older asked blankly, "Say, you don't think they got Renny and Long Tom too, do you?"

Doc nodded.

The first man to enter, the one who carried the shotgun, came over and struck at Doc Savage's face with the barrel of the weapon. Doc rolled with the blow, so that it was not much harder than a normal punch from a fist, but he made it seem more damaging by falling to the floor. He sat there, acting dazed.

"Search them," ordered the man with the shotgun.

Hickey Older, Doc Savage and Monk were gone over thoroughly. The man searching Monk made a grunting noise of surprise, and tore open the homely chemist's shirt. "Look," he said. "This guy is wearing a kind of chain-mail armor under his shirt!"

"Get that armor off," ordered their leader.

Monk stared at Doc, said, "Listen, if Johnny—"

Doc Savage glanced at the homely chemist sharply, and the look caused Monk to fall silent.

The boss of their captors scowled. "We got all you guys except that one—Johnny," he said.

"Where's he?"

Doc said nothing. Neither did Monk.

Their captor glowered at them, said finally, "I know you guys are tough." He turned to Hickey Older. "But maybe this one is softer." He struck Hickey Older, who fell to the floor.

"Come on," the man said. "Where's this guy Johnny? You've been working with Savage, so you know where he is."

"You," said Hickey Older, "can go to hell!"

The man kicked Hickey Older twice in the side, then got down and put his knee on Hickey Older's stomach. Hickey struck at him. The man got up quickly, resumed his kicking.

"Just a minute," Doc Savage said.

They stared at the bronze man.

Doc continued, "Tell them where Johnny is, Hickey. There is no need of getting beaten to death."

Hickey eyed Doc. "You really want me to tell?"

"Yes," Doc said.

Hickey said, "I can hold out. The guy don't live who can beat anything out of me."

"No, tell him."

Hickey Older pulled in a deep breath.

"Johnny," he said, "is waiting at Doc Savage's headquarters on the top floor of that midtown skyscraper."

The man with the shotgun nodded. He lifted his weapon, said, "All of you better start shooting at once. We'll want to get this over with and scam out of here fast."

A man said, "What about that monster? The thing that hatched out of the egg?"

"Let the police take care of it. They'll find it. The thing is probably on this boat somewhere."

Monk, remembering how they had prowled around over the deck of the boat, and recollecting the proportions of the monstrosity he had seen floating above the trees at the Parks estate, felt that his hair was standing on end.

"I'd like to see that thing," a man said.

The leader shook his head. "The hell with it. The thing might get loose, then we'd be in a jam."

"Yeah, but Sam Harmony may have a man guarding it. We wanta be sure we clean up Harmony and all

his men when we finish this thing."

That apparently seemed logical to the leader, because he hesitated. Then he shrugged.

"No," he said. "We go ahead and get these guys. Then we go back to the hide-out and do the same thing for Renny, Long Tom, Ham, Calico Parks and that girl. That way, everybody who knows anything about the mess is dead."

Hickey Older suddenly blanched. "Wait a minute," he yelled. "You guys mean you're gonna shoot all of us?"

The other showed his teeth. "Why not? And quit that damned yelling!"

Doc Savage's flake-gold eyes, resting on the man with the shotgun, were incredulous. "That will mean eight or ten murders," the bronze man said.

The man was not affected at all. "So what?" he said.

"Do you think it's worth that?"

"Listen," said the man, "everybody thought there was about a million in that shipment of gold. There was more than that. It's nearer two."

Doc Savage nodded quietly.

"Yes," he said. "One million, seven hundred and twenty-three thousand and some odd dollars, providing it can be sold here in the United States at the regulation government price for gold."

The man stared. "How . . . how'd you know that?"

"Perhaps," Doc Savage said steadily, "you had better be sure you have the gold."

"Sure, we got it. We got the bars stacked right in the . . . well, where we got 'em. I was lookin' at 'em this morning."

"Yellow metal bars?"

"Yeah."

"Brass," Doc Savage said, "when it is alloyed properly, has an appearance which is hard to distinguish from gold."

The man took a step forward with his shotgun. "What the hell you talkin' about?"

"I mean," Doc said, "that it might be a good idea to be sure you really have the gold before you take foolish measures to cover up your possession of the stuff." The bronze man made his voice more emphatic. "You might," he added, "kill your chances of finding where it really is."

The other thought that over. His face was getting damp with perspiration.

"Ah, hell!" he said suddenly. He lifted his shotgun. "Come on, you guys. Turn loose!"

DOC SAVAGE'S voice became stronger, took on an urgent quality that caused the men with the guns to hesitate.

"Sam Harmony and Calico Parks saw that gold taken off the German steamer and hidden that night," the bronze man said. "But there were others who saw it—you fellows, or at least one of you. It was you who beat Parks and Harmony to the cache and rifled it. Parks and Harmony suspected each other, and they have been fighting ever since. You fellows have been standing by, doing nothing but watching—"

"Where the devil did you get all your information?" the man demanded.

"—have been standing by and watching," Doc continued, ignoring the interruption. "You were merely playing safe, making sure no one suspected you. You had the telephone line to Sam Harmony's office tapped. When you heard the girl, Nancy, saying that she was going to call on me with the story, you immediately tried to kill Nancy. Then you kidnapped her, so as to keep her out of the mess."

"Nuts," said the man with the shotgun.

Monk—he had caught onto what Doc was doing—put in a disgusted growl.

"Doc, why don't you go ahead and tell 'em you've got the gold, and that if they kill us, they're doing away with any chances they have of recovering the stuff?" the homely chemist demanded.

The man ogled them. He licked his lips. "What the—" He whirled on Doc Savage. "You couldn't have got that stuff!" he yelled.

Monk asked, "You think we've been standing around like dopes while this thing was going on? You think you deceived Renny and Long Tom and trapped 'em? Why, you fool! We let you get Renny and Long Tom deliberately, and then followed you to your hide-out. After that, it wasn't much trouble to find where you had the gold, and get it."

Monk lay back on the floor. He was satisfied with himself. Very well satisfied. He thought he was an excellent liar.

Their captors were anything but confident. They withdrew to the cabin companionway, held a consultation. Doc and Monk lay perfectly still, but Hickey Older stirred impatiently on the floor, causing one of the men to whirl and point a gun at him.

The leader of the group reached a decision.

"Three of you go to the hide-out," he ordered. "Get those prisoners and a bar of gold and bring 'em here."

"All the prisoners?"

"Sure. Ham, Renny, Long Tom, Calico Parks, the girl—the whole gang." The man waved his arms. "Get a move on."

Three of the men departed hurriedly.

Monk rolled over until he was close to Doc Savage and said, in a voice which only Doc could hear,

"We're doin' all right, ain't we? But what'll happen when they get the other prisoners here? How we gonna tip Johnny off to help us? And can he help us? Heck, there must be a dozen guys in this third gang." The homely chemist closed his eyes a moment. "And to think—I didn't believe there was a third gang!"

The man with the shotgun said, "Speed."

"Yeah, boss," replied one of his men.

"You've got an army rifle there. Let me have it, and you take this shotgun."

"What you gonna do, boss?"

"While they're gone, I'm going to look around for this monster thing."

The man walked out.

Sam Harmony and his men—Doc Savage, Monk and Hickey Older had tied them before they were themselves captured—were now reviving. Harmony was the last one to regain consciousness. He tried several times, finally managed to sit up with his back against a cabin bulkhead. He frowned around at them. He seemed particularly interested in the faces of some of the captors.

"Hey!" he exploded. "Some of you guys were on the South Orion!"

One of the men laughed. "You never saw all of us who were aboard." The man then doubled over with mirth, as if his remark was a very good joke, in his opinion.

Doc Savage's attention seemed to sharpen on the man and the tiny stirring phenomenon in his flake-gold eyes grew more active. But he said nothing.

When the man in charge of the captors came back into the cabin, he was laughing. He fell into a chair, held his sides and cackled in mirth.

"What's the matter?" one of his helpers asked him uneasily.

"That monster!" The man doubled over and beat his chest, then realizing his laughter was very loud, he tried to muffle it with his fingers, the result being a series of explosive sounds somewhat like those made by a one-lung engine when not firing properly.

"Well, what's funny about it?" demanded his helper.

"It's so . . . damned . . . horrible!" the other said, and went off into laughter again.

SAM HARMONY rolled his eyes and looked at Doc Savage. Evidently the sight of the bronze man did not appeal to him, for he shuddered, and looked back at his captors.

"How about makin' a trade?" he asked.

The man laughed again, got up, came over and kicked Sam Harmony in the face, not very hard. "What have you got to trade?" he asked. "Not that monster, I hope?"

The man then ambled over to Doc Savage and stood scowling down at the bronze man.

"As for you," he said, "you had better have something to trade, what I mean."

Doc Savage kicked suddenly at the man. As he expected, he was promptly kicked in the midriff for his pains.

Doc reacted strangely to the kick. He doubled over, acted as if something had been smashed inside him by the blow. He made sounds, unintelligible sounds which lifted to a screech. The volume of the bronze man's voice became such that it must have carried for some distance, at least a block or two. Then Doc fell silent.

Monk used great care to keep his face expressionless. Because Monk had recognized the hoax which Doc had perpetrated. Doc's yelling had not been the unintelligible gibberish which it had seemed. It was words—words spoken in the ancient Mayan tongue, a language which the bronze man and his aids understood, a tongue which, because few people in the civilized world understood it other than themselves, they used for personal communication, when they did not wish to be understood.

Doc had yelled at Johnny:

"After the other prisoners are brought here, wait five minutes, then come in and start fighting. Use anesthetic gas."

That made Monk feel somewhat better, although it did not eradicate his worry. Johnny was one man, although a competent one. There were a dozen of their foes, all heavily armed. Monk did not consider the prospects particularly bright.

The man with the shotgun was laughing again. He looked at his companions, said finally, "Oh, hell, I'll let you guys in on the joke."

He went out. Later he came back dragging a steamer trunk. He opened this, said, "There's your monster."

Monk hastily craned his neck—and felt foolish. There was, he saw, two cylinders inside the trunk, which evidently contained compressed hydrogen or some similar lighter-than-air gas.

Also, there was a torn collection of thin rubber, stuff out of which a balloon might have been made. There was a reel, a large fishing reel which had a multiplying spool and contained a considerable length of stout line. There was a short, blunt fishing rod of the type used for catching the very largest big-game fish, a rod that was equipped with a shoulder harness and cup arrangement so that the thing could be manipulated with great force.

Monk groaned.

"That monster was a balloon of a thing!" he muttered.

Doc Savage turned to Sam Harmony.

"Was

there a monster?" the bronze man demanded.

Sam Harmony winced. "What do you think?"

"There wasn't?"

Sam Harmony shook his head. "There was—but it was never alive. There was an embryonic thing, almost completely formed, in that awful egg," he said. "I thought, for a minute when the egg first burst open, that the thing was alive. It scared me."

Doc said, "You deliberately built up the idea that there was a monster chick of the dinosaur age?"

"Yes." Sam Harmony seemed a little proud of his deceit. "I . . . er . . . killed a horse, and later a calf," he admitted. "That was to make it seem like there was some kind of awful thing from the egg. I blew up the cave to make the scheme look better, to add mystery to it. The chick from the egg—I threw that back in the cave before I blew it up. I left the shell outside."

"What about the two murdered men?"

"I had to kill them," Sam admitted. "I . . . the tramp on the train tried to rob me. I . . . er . . . knifed him in self-defense. Then I thought of making the body look as if a—something horrible—had killed the man. It was the same way with the man at the airport. He tried to shoot me. The fellow must have been crazy, or something. Without warning, he tried to kill me, and I had to knife him, also in self-defense."

Monk, listening to the recital, got rid of an opinion.

"You're probably a liar," the homely chemist said. "You killed both those guys deliberately."

Sam Harmony shook his head. He was shaking his head when there was noise on the wharf, then louder noise on the deck, and the prisoners began filing down into the cabin, menaced by guns. RENNY came first. He stared at Doc Savage and made a noise around his gag, and in spite of the gag, it sounded as if he said, "Holy cow!"

Nancy came next. She did not appear greatly harmed, except emotionally. She looked as if she had been about as scared as a girl could get for a number of days.

Long Tom and Ham were more emotionless. Their eyes sharpened when they saw Doc Savage; then when they discovered that the bronze man was obviously a prisoner, they seemed more downcast.

Calico Parks glared at Sam Harmony, tried to get at him, swearing.

"Parks!" Harmony said wildly. "Don't you know the truth yet! These fellows are the ones who got that gold. They beat us to it. They were on the South Orion, too."

Two men bearing a bar of metal came next. They had rigged a sling out of a pole, a rope and blankets, in order to carry the thing more easily.

The man with the shotgun—he had exchanged the army rifle back for his shotgun—gave an order.

"Line the prisoners up," he said.

This was done, the captives being aligned against the bulkhead of the cabin.

"Now," said the man, moving his shotgun briefly, "unwrap that gold bar, and put some of this on it." He drew a vial of acid from his pocket, handed it to one of the men.

Renny, watching the bottle of acid, felt of his chest and winced painfully. He glanced at Doc.

"Doc, we had a hell of a time for a while," the big-fisted engineer rumbled. "They was gonna put that acid in our eyes if we didn't talk. They did put some of it on me, and it burned like hell. But they finally decided we didn't know anything."

"Why did they keep you alive?" Doc asked.

"So as to use us for hostages if you happened to get too clever and catch one of their gang."

Doc nodded. He asked a question.

"Can you find the place where they have the gold hidden?" he inquired.

"Holy cow, sure," Renny rumbled. "It's in a house on Sands Street in Brooklyn. I could go right to the place. They didn't trouble to blindfold us when they brought us away. They kept us in the basement."

The man with the shotgun swore at Renny. "Knowin' that won't do you any good," he said. "If this proves—wait a minute!" The fellow swore again, explosively. He stared at Doc Savage. "You said where we have the gold hidden!" he yelled. "That means you know very well it is gold! You haven't stolen the stuff!"

Doc Savage said, "I never came out and said I stole it."

"You gave that idea!"

"There is a slight difference between giving the idea, and actually making the statement," the bronze man suggested.

The man whirled. "All right! Give it to 'em! Save the girl until the last!"

Doc spoke suddenly, urgently.

"We've made some mistakes in this," the bronze man said, "but we're not completely uninformed.

For instance, we know who your boss is."

"My boss?" The man with the shotgun snorted. "I'm the boss!"

Doc shook his head. "Your boss," he said, "is a very good actor. When he called Renny and Long Tom into that trap, he managed to cover it up, and he did it so brazenly that he had me fooled for a time. It was hard for me to believe that, if he was guilty, he would dare pull such a trick. Then, later, when he manipulated the capture of Ham and Parks in the Parks home, and pretended that he had

been knocked out, it was a little too obvious."

"What you talkin' about?" demanded the man with the shotgun.

"Your boss," Doc said. "A short while ago, he made another slip. That was just after he slipped away to the telephone to call you and tell you to get over here and seize us. Your boss said that the gold was buried in a coral cave on the island. No one had mentioned the fact, so it seemed a little strange he should know it."

Hickey Older came to life.

Hickey held out his bound wrists.

"Untie me, Speedy," he ordered.

Everyone stared at Hickey.

"I guess the jig is up," Hickey said dryly. "I thought I would carry this thing all the way through, and nobody would be the wiser."

Nancy made a bleating sound of anguish and astonishment. "Hickey!" she cried. "You're not . . . not—"

Doc Savage answered her with a question. "How long have you known Hickey?"

"Suh—several weeks," said Nancy.

"He probably got acquainted with you because you were Sam Harmony's office girl, as a part of the job of watching Harmony," the bronze man said. "Then it seems he got to liking you."

Hickey Older showed his teeth unpleasantly.

"I didn't get to liking her too much," he said. He reached out and jerked a rifle from the hands of one of the men. "Gimme that gun," he said. He scowled at Monk. "You homely lug, I'm gonna shoot you myself, personal. You been riding me all along."

Monk gathered himself. The homely chemist's intentions were obvious. He was going to go down fighting.

"Johnny!" Monk bellowed. "What the hell are you waiting for?"

Johnny's voice answered from the skylight.

"An eviscerated imponderability," he remarked. Later, Monk got a dictionary, looked that up and found out that Johnny had taken a long-winded way of explaining that he had been waiting on nothing. Which was wrong, Johnny confessed. He had been intrigued by the facts, as revealed by the excitement inside the cabin.

Johnny had no small anesthetic grenades, so he dropped a dozen large ones instead. These broke like overripe eggs on the cabin floor—the grenades were thin glass globules which contained a liquid which, with remarkable speed, vaporized into a gas that produced unconsciousness.

The anesthetic gas had one peculiar quality—after being mixed with the air for perhaps a minute, the oxygen and other ingredients in the air combined with the chemical components of the gas itself, rendering the stuff quite harmless. It was merely necessary to hold the breath for a minute period, in order to avoid the effects of the stuff.

Hickey Older had worked with Doc Savage's men, and someone had explained the nature of the anesthetic to him. He knew enough to hold his breath.

Springing back, Hickey Older lifted his gun. He shot the first man handy, who happened to be Johnny, at the skylight. The weapon was a shotgun, and the charge hit Johnny in the stomach, which was fortunate, because the chain mesh undergarment which he wore—the type which all of Doc's aids wore habitually—stopped the shot without difficulty. But Johnny was knocked back from the skylight, and stumbled around in agony—the wind out of him—until he accidentally fell overboard. He splashed around in the water, howling large words.

Hickey Older never got to shoot Monk, because the homely chemist picked up Sam Harmony and charged. Monk had no qualms about using a man like Sam Harmony for a shield, and he made a very good shield indeed. The blast of pellets from Hickey Older's shotgun broke his spine and played havoc with his insides, but Monk was not harmed.

Monk hit Hickey Older once, and the blow did something so drastic to Hickey's spine that, five months later when they tried Hickey for murdering Sam Harmony and sentenced him to the chair, the defendant had to wear his back in a plaster cast and steel brace. It was Monk's contention that the blow broke Hickey Older's back, although this was probably an exaggeration. Monk's contention might have been an untruth, but at least it was unusual justice that Hickey should go to the chair for killing Sam Harmony, who was two times or more a murderer himself. Hickey announced from the witness stand that it was a hell of a kind of a law this country had, but that didn't seem to help. All of which happened, of course, after Doc Savage and his aids had tied up the men who had been made unconscious by the anesthetic, and started to cart them off.

The arrival of the police, who seized the prisoners, was not a part of Doc's plan. The bronze man had an institution for curing criminals—the cure was rather unusual—in up-State New York, where he had planned to send Hickey Older and all the others.

Unfortunately, the existence of the institution was a secret, so there was nothing to do but let the police have their prisoners.

(Doc Savage's unique "college" for curing criminals has been made use of many times previously. It is located in a remote section of up-State New York, and patients taken to it first undergo a delicate brain operation which wipes out all memory of the past. Following this, they receive

training which equips them to earn a living. Accordingly, criminals who are graduated from the unusual "college" have no knowledge of their shady past, and no desire to return to crime.)

Nancy stood it very well, possibly because of the enthusiastic efforts of Monk and Ham to see that she didn't have time to remember.

They got plenty of co-operation from Nancy, who seemed to have the idea that they had split nearly two million—they found the gold without much trouble—among themselves, instead of turning it over to war relief hospital funds, which they really did.

However, they soon lost their interest in Nancy. She was several things, a gold digger and nitwit being among them.

Monk, hoping to discourage her, took Nancy to a restaurant noted for the birdlike size of its meals.

"That Monk," remarked Ham to Nancy that evening, "is quite a lady-killer."

"Yes," Nancy agreed grimly. "He starves them to death."

She neglected to add that Monk had told her that Ham had received the lion's share of the two millions—stealing it, lawyer fashion, Monk had added, in embellishing his lie.

"We gotta get rid of that girl," Ham complained to Monk a few days later. "Why, she's—she seems to think she's got me sewed up. She's even trying to make me stop smoking."

"Good idea," Monk said.

"I won't," said Ham indignantly, "stop smoking until I die."

"What," inquired Monk, "makes you think you'll stop then?"

THE END