THE DAGGER IN THE SKY
A Doc Savage Adventure by Kenneth Robeson

Chapter I. THE DAGGER
THE street should be very clean. The long-faced man had been sweeping it since daylight.
He had appeared at dawn with a broom and a cart—and his curiosity—and he had been cleaning the street since, up and down and back and forth, doing all his sweeping in the one block.
Twice he had been nearly run over. First a truck almost got him; the next time it was a taxicab, the driver of which leaned out and swore for a minute and ten seconds without once repeating himself, after which the long-faced street sweeper walked over to the cab driver and they had words in voices low enough for nobody to overhear. The taxi driver pulled his head back inside and drove off meekly.
If onlookers were interested, they probably thought the street sweeper had said something like, "Beat it, or I'll take this broom and knock your ugly head off!"
As a matter of fact, the conversation was slightly different.
"Doc Savage has not appeared," said the street sweeper.
"Any sign of the one from South America?"
"None."
"Well, you know the orders."
"You bet."
The long-faced man went back to sweeping streets; he continued to sweep back and forth, up and down, on the same block.
The hours passed, and it got to be four o'clock in the afternoon. Now and then during the day a pedestrian had paused and stared up curiously at the top of the huge building which filled one side of the block. In a number of instances, pedestrians had also turned into the lobby of the skyscraper and stood for a time gawking at the directory listing the firms which occupied office space in the building.
Two of these curiosity seekers came out and stopped, purely by chance, so that the street sweeper overheard them.
"Joe, you're as crazy as a bedbug!" said one. "His name wasn't even listed in the lobby."
"Don't care. He has his headquarters on the eighty-sixth floor. I know a guy who knows him, I tell you."
"Then why ain't he listed?"
"How would I know? Because of guys like you and me, maybe—mugs who are just curious. Would you want guys barging in on you just to see what you looked like? It must be hell to be a celebrity."
The other gave his jaw a thoughtful rub.
"It would be more hell," he said, "to do the kind of work that big bronze guy does."
The pair ambled away.
Soon after four o'clock a taxicab nearly ran over the long-faced street sweeper again. It was the same cab. They went through the same display of tempers in order to exchange a few low-voiced words.
"Hey, Sid, any sign yet?" asked the cab driver.
"Nope." The long-faced man scowled disagreeably. "Say, I didn't know this Doc Savage—or the Man of Bronze, as they call him—had quite so much reputation. You know something? Half the people who pass here gawk up at that eighty-sixth floor. I thought you said the public didn't know much about him?"
"They don't."
"Then why do they gawk?"
"They're curious, Sid. It's what they don't know that makes them gawk, don't you see? They've just read wild stuff in the newspapers. A lot of guess-writing by the reporters. Stuff about Doc

Savage being one of the greatest scientists of this century, and—well—a physical marvel and mental wizard—those are the words they use. And the other things they tell about him—the things he is supposed to have done."
"And that stuff isn't true?"
"He's overrated. Hell, every celebrity is overrated!"
"This one had better not be half what they seem to think he is," said the street sweeper grimly, "or I'm personally heading for tall timber."

THE long-faced man had endeavored at the beginning of his day to give the idea that he was stoop-shouldered and afflicted with a limp, but now he was getting tired, and he frequently forgot to affect both stoop and limp. He was not a tall man, in spite of the lean length of his face. He had dark eyes and hair; his face, once the make-up was removed, would probably be more healthy-looking, but not exactly confidence-inspiring.
He did not seem overly happy about his present job.
Suddenly—it was exactly six o'clock—the man stopped sweeping, chucked his broom in the cart, shoved the cart against the curb, and climbed into the most convenient taxicab. It happened—not by accident, either—that the cab was the one driven by the man with whom he had talked twice that day.
"Savage leaving?" asked the hackman.
"Yes. Just pulled out of that drive from his private garage in the basement."
"Which car?"
"That black one yonder."
"Hell, that little jalopy? If I had his reputation, I would have me a limousine a block long, with a Jap to drive and two Russian dukes to open the doors."
"Sure. And attract so much attention you'd get your head shot out from between your ears inside of twenty four hours!"
The cab followed the small black car. It was not a difficult pursuit, the pace being slow and traffic not too thick, particularly after they reached the vicinity of the Hudson River water front.
The cab driver had been thinking.
"If I had that bronze guy's reputation, I would also have me a harem of chorus babes," he said cheerfully. Then he made a clucking noise of disapproval. "I hear he never has anything to do with women. What do you think of that?"
The small black car halted before a large, unimpressive looking brick warehouse which was built so that it extended out into the river, and bore a sign reading: Hidalgo Trading Company. The car remained stationary a moment, then big doors in the end of the structure rolled mysteriously open.
"Radio-controlled doors," the long-faced man muttered.
"Yeah. Say, Sid, I hear he uses more different kinds of gadgets—"
"Drive to the plane. Quick!"
The taxicab swung right, gathered speed for half a dozen blocks, then careened out onto a ramshackle pier to which a seaplane was moored. There was nothing ramshackle about the plane; it was as fast a thing as money could buy.
The pilot was a wide man with a gloomy expression and a habit of frequently looking all around him.
"Hello, Sid," he said. "What goes on?"
"Savage just went to his warehouse hangar," the long-faced man barked. He scrambled into the plane. "Come on! Let's get this thing in the air!"
"What if he don't leave by plane? Hadn't we better wait and watch?"
"And make him suspicious by having us take off directly behind him? Don't be a dope! He ain't as likely to suspect a plane already in the air."
They untied the plane and started the motor, propeller slipstream flattened the water, and the ship soon climbed up into the afternoon sky.
"There he comes," called the pilot, looking down.
Far below, a lean, bronze-colored seaplane moved out of the huge old structure that pretended to be a warehouse. It nosed into the wind, suddenly gathered speed, then slanted up into the sky.
It flew south.
"Going south, Sid," said the pilot grimly.
The other man settled back, and his long face became longer and slowly twisted under the grease-paint, street-sweeper disguise, so that his manner and his expression both were almost completely frightened.
"This is exactly what we were afraid of!" he groaned.
The pilot snorted.
"Why worry, Sid?" he said. "He'll be dead inside of three hours!"

THE day was cold, but not as cold as it might have been, for the weather was not seasonal. This was a late fall day. It had been pleasantly warm, even a little sultry, although radio predictions indicated a blizzard boiling down from the north and the sun was wrapped in a cold, purplish haze. There was something unnatural about the day.

Doc Savage flew the plane alone, relaxed in the comfortable seat. The air was sultry, the whole aspect of the world was unpleasant, and he was glad to be heading south on his first real vacation. It was his intention that nothing should happen to him—except eating and sleeping and fishing—for at least a month.

Recently it had occurred to him that he might be turning into too much of a machine—becoming, in fact, as superhuman as many persons thought he was. He did not like that idea. He had always been apprehensive lest something of the kind occur. The scientists who had trained him during his childhood had been afraid of his losing human qualities; they had guarded him against this as much as possible. When a man's entire life is fantastic, he must guard against his own personality becoming strange.

Doc Savage's existence had been fantastic from the cradle. In childhood he was turned over to science for training, and scores of the leading scientists of the world had contributed to building his body and mind. The whole weird project—the scientific endeavor to build a superman—had been successful to an uncanny degree, possibly because nature had already equipped Doc Savage with a strong body and an unhampered brain.

The training was no experiment, no scientist's crack-brained dream. There had been a deliberate purpose, and the purpose was to fit Doc Savage for a strange career, the one he followed now. The career was the unusual and always trouble-earning one of righting wrongs and punishing evildoers who seemed to be outside the law, traveling to the far corners of the earth, if necessary, to do so.

He had five assistants in this unusual work. Each of the five was a specialist in some particular science. They had associated themselves with Doc Savage because of a liking for adventure, and probably admiration for the rather amazing fellow who was Doc Savage.

Outwardly, even, Doc Savage was unusual. His size was startling, although he was proportioned so symmetrically that when he stood apart from other men, and from objects to which his magnitude could be compared, he seemed of average build. His skin had a perpetual deep-bronze tint given by tropical suns, his hair was a slightly darker bronze, very straight. But his eyes were undeniably the most striking aspect of him; they were a strange golden tint, like pools of flake gold, and full of alert life, as if always stirred by tiny winds. His unusual eyes gave him the most trouble whenever he donned a disguise.

He had made scientific discoveries in a dozen fields that were half a century ahead of the times; mention of his name was enough to give the jitters to criminals in any part of the world; he could be instantly received into the presence of any president, king or dictator in the world.

But he was getting worried lest he not feel the same things, like the same things, as an ordinary guy. He hoped that a month of complete change would fix that up. It would be his first real vacation.

He landed at the big transatlantic seaplane base in Baltimore and watched the plane refueled, then entered the comfortable restaurant. For dinner he deliberately ordered one or two dishes which scientists claimed people would be better off if they never ate. On this vacation he wasn't going to live scientifically if he could help it. He spent two hours over dinner.

Sid, the long-faced man, watched Doc Savage come out of the restaurant. The pilot of Sid's plane—the craft had followed Doc's ship carefully to Baltimore—stood nearby.

"There he goes," Sid muttered.

"Take a good look," the pilot suggested. "It's probably the last anybody will ever see of him."

They kept their eyes on Doc Savage while he climbed into his plane—a group of airport attendants and fliers had gathered to admire the advanced design of the ship—and taxied out into the bay. The breeze was offshore at this point, so it was necessary to taxi far out in the bay in order to take off into the wind, the proper way.

It was very dark out where the plane stopped and turned.

Sid made an uneasy growling noise. "We had better follow him."

"Why?" asked the pilot.

"Just to be sure we haven't guessed wrong."

The pilot did not favor the idea, but Sid was evidently in charge, so they returned to their own fast plane, which they had moored nearby, and climbed in.

A moaning comet passed them in the darkness, climbing skyward.

"There he goes," Sid said. "Keep track of his lights."

They whipped over the water, went on step with waves rattling against the pontoons, then arched up and lined out after the Doc Savage plane, the white taillight of which was barely discernible. Their own lights they kept extinguished.

Clouds dropped behind, and darkness gave way to remarkably bright moonlight.

"He may see us," Sid warned.

"What if he does? It's too late for him to do anything about it."

Sid did nothing but look apprehensive and frightened. He watched tensely.

"Look!"

he squalled.

Intense white light had flooded the cabin interior of the Doc Savage ship. It was flame. Peculiar

flame, like the blaze that comes from old-fashioned photo flashlight powder. But there was no smoke. The flash was momentary, then gone.
The plane rolled over slowly, as if tired, and began falling. It tumbled for the first few hundred feet, then went into the madly erratic falling horror known as a tailspin. No smoke came from the ship, no flames.
It did not hit the earth squarely. It struck at a slant, nose first, scooping up a long cloud of dust that got fatter. Out of this dust the plane came hopping, what was left of it. The carcass rolled possibly a hundred yards, then stopped.
The black dagger then appeared in the sky.

Chapter II. SID HAS A STORY

THE blade, at a conservative estimate, was two hundred feet long. The hilt was less, perhaps fifty feet, while the cross guard was twenty feet or so in length. It was black, intensely black, even in moonlight, which tends to make all things seem gray.
The resemblance the thing bore to a dagger was instantly noticeable. The long blade came to a needle point; the whole thing lying, roughly, in a north-and-south direction across the sky, the tip pointing to the south.
Sid, his body full of tense muscles, stared at the phenomenon. His long face was jammed against the plane window.
The dagger remained in the sky—it was a few hundred feet directly above the spot where Doc Savage's plane had crashed—for a long time. The interval during which the black dagger was in existence seemed an age. Probably it was at least a minute.
Then the thing faded, vanishing rather quickly and appearing to turn into a dark haze, then into nothing, so that the ugly black aspect was evident to the last.
Sid made a rattling noise when he tried to speak, cleared his throat.
"We bub-better go down and look," he said, stuttering a little.
Doc Savage's plane had hit in a field which had been fall-plowed and harrowed, which accounted for the dust when the craft struck. The soft ground was a poor spot for a landing, but a level meadow lay adjacent, and Sid's pilot landed there.
"You
go look," the pilot directed.
"But—"
"I'll stay here," the pilot said, "and watch our plane."
His voice was harsh, determined.
Sid cursed him, said, "Damn you! You're not taking any chances!"
"The hell with you! I was hired to fly, and that's all."
Sid approached the plane warily. He carried a flashlight, used it. The fuselage of the Doc Savage ship had shed wings, undercarriage, part of the tail, and was almost a ball of metal. He worked for a while before he got the door open; it came off entirely, and he fell sprawling with it.
He got up, looked inside the cabin, said, "Ugh!" in a sick voice, and backed away.
The cabin interior was charred, blackened. Paint had curled, hung to the metal in scabs; leather of the seats was darkly scorched. There could have been no living thing in the cabin, for it was as if a tongue of white-hot flame had licked the place.
Sid tried to force himself to crawl into the plane. He wedged half in, put his hand on a seat; the metal was still hot to touch, and the leather crumpled and broke and springs and stuffing jumped out, making a slight chugging sound. The seat stuffing struck Sid in the face, and he cried out and staggered backward.
Suddenly his nerve collapsed.
He snarled, "I didn't like this in the first place," and whirled and ran for his own plane.
He had covered about half the distance back to his plane—he was climbing through the brush-tangled fence which separated the meadow from the plowed field—when Doc Savage tripped him, fell upon him and clapped his hand over his mouth to prevent an outcry.

UNFORTUNATELY Sid had made noise in falling.
The plane pilot yelled, "Hey, Sid! What the devil's wrong?"
Doc Savage called, "Nothing. I just stumbled." In a much lower tone, a whisper, Doc said, "Monk! Get that man at the plane."
"Boy, watch me get 'im!" replied a voice that might have belonged to a child.
The owner of the small voice—he was nearly as wide as he was tall—jumped out of the brush and ran toward the plane. He traveled with a gangling lope that was something like the gait of an ape in a hurry.
The pilot took alarm, jumped back in his plane, and batted the throttle with a palm. The engine was turning over. It whooped; slipstream scooped up a cloud of dry grass. The plane rolled. The apish fellow, Monk, chased it. Once he almost closed large, hairy hands over the rudder edge, but didn't quite make it. The plane picked up its tail and fled aloft into the night.
Monk stopped and went through a remarkable performance of jumping up and down and squalling.

He went back to Doc Savage and reported: "He got away."
Sid had been staring with both his mouth and his eyes open as wide as they could possibly get. Now he came around to believing the fact that Doc Savage was still alive.
"But you . . . you died in that plane!" he muttered.
Monk snorted, asked, "Should we disillusion him, Doc?"
"It would do no harm," the bronze man said.
Monk got a great deal of pleasure out of enlightening their prisoner. "Whoever you are, you ain't as wise as you figured. Doc saw that a plane was following him as soon as he left New York, and when he landed in Baltimore for dinner he saw you were watching him. So he went to a telephone and called me and Ham, and we came down in our fastest plane and staged a little circus for you."
"Circus?"
"Well, it'll be a circus before we're done with you. Did you ever hear of radio-controlled aerial torpedoes? You should have. They were invented as far back as the World War."
"But you took off in the plane from Baltimore," Sid mumbled.
"There's where you're wrong. I'm explaining it. Doc just taxied down to the end of the bay where it was dark, connected the radio-control robot on his plane to the controls—all of our planes are equipped with the robots, incidentally, because we've used this stunt before—and then Doc jumped overboard and swam to my plane. We simply sent the other plane off the water, controlled it by radio, like you control an aerial torpedo, waited until we saw you take off in pursuit, and followed along to see what would happen."
Sid shuddered, remembering some of the things he had heard about Doc Savage, and realizing that more of it was true than he had supposed.
"Where is your plane now?" he asked.
Monk stuck a thumb at the sky. "Up there."
"But how did you get down?"
"Parachutes," said Monk, "while you two were landing your plane. You were too busy to notice."
Monk got down and took hold of Sid's neck. "There's just one thing," he added, "that will keep you from losing your ears."
Sid took a deep breath.
"You've got me all wrong," he insisted. "I'm perfectly willing to tell you everything I know about this fantastic affair."

"YOU can start off," Monk said, "with what happened to Doc's plane."
Sid groaned. "I don't know."
"What was that white flash of light inside the plane? What burned the interior of the cabin like it is?"
"I haven't a vestige of an idea," Sid said. "I wish I did have."
Monk opened and closed his hands—the hands were sprinkled with hairs resembling rusty shingle nails—and asked, "Do you know who I am?"
"You are Lieutenant Colonel Andrew Blodgett Mayfair, better known as Monk," Sid answered. "You're a famous chemist, and you're also one of Doc Savage's five assistants."
"You're just half-right," Monk advised him. "I'm also the guy who is gonna tie a knot in your neck if you don't tell a better story."
"I'm doing my best."
"What was that black thing in the sky that looked like a dagger? What made it?"
"I wish I knew," Sid said. "I was following you in hopes of finding out."
The homely Monk was not a patient soul.
"That dagger-shaped thing was crazy, and I want it explained!" he shouted.
Sid spread his hands helplessly. "I'm trying to tell you that the thing is also going to kill me."
Monk stared at him. "Kill you?"
"It's a long story," Sid explained. He looked at Doc Savage forlornly. "I'll tell you how you became involved in this. You probably don't know. When I first found out that my life was in danger—when I first realized that, fantastic as it was, the peril was very real—I decided at once to go to you for help. You help people who are in strange trouble, I've heard. Almost immediately I was told that you would be killed, and the exact time was set." Sid held his wrist close to his eyes and squinted at a watch in the moonlight. "The time set was exactly the moment your plane crashed."
Monk said, "You haven't explained how you happened to be following Doc."
"I can clear that up easily. I wanted to see this fantastic thing if I could. I wasn't sure—well, it was hard for me to believe such an unbelievable thing could exist."
"Who was the pilot who got away?"
"Merely a man I hired. There was another man I hired in New York to help me trail Doc Savage—a taxi driver."
Monk snorted.
"Now suppose you tell us," he suggested skeptically, "what this black dagger is."
Sid's long face grew longer. "Do you believe what I have already told you?"

"Oh, sure!"
"That's what I was afraid—you're skeptical. So there's practically no need of me telling you the rest."
"Why not?"
"You certainly won't believe the rest."

THERE was silence for a while. Doc Savage listened. Noise of the plane in which the long-faced man had come was gone from the moon-whitened sky. Nor was there any sound of his own ship, the one in which Monk and Ham, his two associates, had picked him up in Baltimore.
Ham was supposed to be following Sid's plane.
Monk said, "What's your name?"
"Sid. Sid Morrison."
"All right, Sid Morrison—let's have the part of your story you think we won't believe."
Sid tugged at his long jaw and squirmed.
"The black stone was probably in existence hundreds of years ago," he said. "At least, it is mentioned in the legend history of the ancient Incas of Peru. It is variously referred to, one mention designating it as the black soul of Kukulkan, the part that was evil and cast out by Kukulkan, who was the supreme deity of the Mayans and some of the Incas. Another legend is that Kukulkan had an evil rival, who was defeated and turned into a stone that was as black as the evil one's sins. It was an accursed stone, then. It has been accursed all down through history. All who touched the stone, or had anything to do with it, met a violent demise. And always their death was signaled by the appearance of a black dagger."
Sid frowned and stared at them. His voice was low, his manner intense.
"Legend accounts for the black dagger by saying that it was with a dagger of black obsidian stone that Kukulkan laid low the evil one."
Monk stood there and thought about the story for a few moments.
"Does the legend," he asked sourly, "account for your standing here and telling us such a mess of nonsense?"
Sid said, "A man named Juan Don MacNamara sold the black stone to me. Juan Don MacNamara is the son of President Gatun MacNamara, of the South American republic of Cristobal."
(Author's note: The name of the republic, Cristobal, is a fictitious one, for obvious reasons.)
"Where is this rock?"
"Juan Don MacNamara was to deliver it to me. He was going to fly it up. I presume he has already left Cristobal with the stone."
"You a stone buyer by profession?" Monk asked skeptically.
"I am a collector of Incan relics," the long-faced man said. He became indignant. "And furthermore, I'm through talking to you! You don't believe what I'm telling you. If you're fools enough to think I'm lying, that's your hard luck!"
Doc Savage made no answer. Instead, the bronze man went over to the crashed plane, used a flashlight which gave a long thin beam of light and functioned off a spring-operated generator instead of a battery, and examined the cabin interior. He did not crawl into the plane immediately; instead, he took a small bottle from a pocket case, removed a flat disk of a faintly bluish hue, and tossed it into the cabin. He watched the disk; it did not change color. That was good. The tablet was a chemical test for lethal gas, functioning somewhat in the same fashion as the litmus-paper test used in detecting acids. There seemed to be no dangerous gas in the ship.
He climbed into the cabin and went over the mangled, scorched interior carefully. He made several chemical tests, but vouchsafed no opinion of the results when he climbed out of the craft.
"Well, what made the white flash?" Monk asked.
Doc Savage looked at Sid thoughtfully for a moment, then answered, "It is puzzling."

Chapter III. DARK DEATH

LATER, Ham returned. His plane came slanting down, then long funnels of light jumped out of the wingtip floods, and he executed a skillful landing. All of Doc's associates were experienced fliers.
"No dice," Ham reported.
"The plane got away?"
"Yes, blast the luck. It flew north. Got into those clouds before I could force it down, and I lost it."
Monk said, "A fine lot of help you are!"
Ham—he was Brigadier General Theodore Marley Brooks on formal occasions—got out of the plane. He was a lean-waisted man with good shoulders, a rather handsome face (Monk always Insisted Ham was fox-faced, but then Monk was biased) and the wide, mobile mouth of an orator, possibly developed by the amount of talking Ham had done in courtrooms. Ham's clothing was sartorial perfection; it was a common saying that tailors frequently followed Ham down the Street to see clothes being worn as they should be worn. He carried a black cane. He was one of the nation's leading lawyers. His main interest in life was his clothes.
Ham eyed their long-faced prisoner. "What's his name?"

"Sid," Monk said.
"That his full name?"
"Full or sober, his name would still be Sid, wouldn't it?" Monk said.
Ham scowled. "Listen, you dopey missing link, this is no time for those remarks you think are gags."
Doc Savage sketched briefly for Ham's enlightenment what they had learned from Sid, Ham listening to the end of the recital without a word.
Then Ham said, "I don't believe it any more than you do."
"You saw that black dagger in the sky, didn't you?
"Yes, but—well, blast it! Such stuff isn't reasonable."
They entered the plane, and Doc lashed Sid to one of the seats, so that he could not interfere with the operation of the controls should he attempt resistance. The bronze man himself rolled the plane across the meadow, lifted it off, and pointed its baying nose at the stars.
"New York?" Monk asked.
"Yes."

THE seven hundred and sixty thousand lights—latest estimate—of New York City came into view, and they were not particularly bright, for the blizzard had arrived. There were low angry clouds, traveling fast, and the Hudson was crawling with white-capped waves.
The plane bounced, pitched, all but turned handsprings as they landed. Hard particles of snow hissed against the windows when the motors were throttled. They held to their seats and taxied to the hangar, the doors of which could be opened by tapping out a combination on the short-wave radio in the plane, this door opener being a gadget similar to those long used in telegraph-relay offices.
The hangar was a huge cavern of dank warmth into which whirled the increasing outdoors cold, and a little snow.
Doc Savage drew Monk and Ham out of earshot of their captive.
The bronze man said, "You two take the flea run to headquarters, and be posted in the street outside the building."
The "flea run" was Monk's term for an underground tunnel in which a small car traveled, driven by pneumatic pressure, passing from the water-front hangar to the eighty-sixth-floor skyscraper headquarters in a few moments.
"In front of the building I will let this fellow Sid Morrison escape," Doc added. "Monk, you and Ham trail him. We may learn something about this mystery by following him."
Monk and Ham nodded, walked away. Monk, who was an enthusiastic liar at times, announced loudly, "O. K., Doc. We'll stay here and guard the plane. We'll meet you after daylight."
Doc told Sid Morrison, "You will go with me," and they left the warehouse hangar in the plain dark car in which Doc had driven to the place that afternoon.
It was dark, the streets were unusually deserted, and the swirling snow made the ball of light around every street lamp resemble a squirming white animal. The hard snow pelted the car; the cold wind flattened the clothing of pedestrians against their bodies.
"Bitter night," Sid Morrison muttered.
Doc glanced at him. The man seemed genuinely afraid. But what he feared it was hard to say.
They reached the towering midtown building, the eighty-sixth floor of which Doc Savage occupied. The bronze man parked in front of the building, and they got out. Wind tore at their clothing, pellets of snow pecked at their skin. A newspaper, wind-tortured, went scudding past on the sidewalk like a gray ghost, and vanished in the darkness.
"Walk ahead of me," Doc directed.
He pushed Sid Morrison into the revolving door, then followed. With casual deliberation, so that it seemed an accident, he let a hand drag behind him, where it was caught as the revolving door whirled, and imprisoned. It was not painful; the rubber wiper formed a cushion.
He went through the motions of being trapped and struggling.
"Don't you run!" he yelled, making his voice so anxious that it was literally a command for flight.
Sid Morrison fled. There were several revolving doors in the bank. The man dashed for the handiest, his long face determined, whirled through it and was gone, feet pounding into the night.
Doc Savage waited an appropriate interval, then extricated himself and, registering proper vexation and alarm, sprang out onto the sidewalk. He ran up and down the street a sufficient number of times to make it look good, seeing nothing, hearing only the hissing of the blizzard snow that was like driven salt.

"HE'S dead!" Monk gasped.
Doc Savage's metallic features became somewhat blank.
"Dead?"
"Come on. I'll show you."
The elevator in which Monk had come up to the eighty-sixth floor was waiting. It sank with them, making a faint sighing sound.

Monk said, "We were trailing him. He ducked into a doorway down the street. We waited to see if he would come out, and he didn't, so we went in. We found him."
Doc Savage looked at Monk with steady curiosity. "You have seen dead men before. It never affected you this way."
Monk cleared his throat as if there was tightness in it.
"The others," he said, "weren't killed with a black dagger."
The elevator doors opened with a choking noise, their heels clicked on the lobby tiles and they pushed out into the night, with the wind beating at them.
"Ham's watching the body," Monk said thickly.
The doorway was unlighted, and there was a Space For Rent sign on the windows to either side. Inside was a hallway, long and dark, high-ceilinged. Halfway down the hall, another corridor branched off like the leg of a T.
Ham stood at the junction, a flashlight in one hand, a supermachine pistol in the other. The weapon, one of Doc Savage's inventions, had the size of an automatic and the bullet-emitting capacity of a Lewis machine gun.
"Anybody show?" Monk asked.
"Nobody," Ham said. He looked at Doc. "This gets my goat. There's a black dagger sticking in his chest."
"It's back here," Monk explained, and led the way down the branching hallway.
There was a row of doors, all closed, on either side.
Monk said, "Here's what stood our hair on end. You see this dust?"
The homely chemist cast a flashlight beam across the floor, fanned it slowly.
Dust lay thick, for obviously the hallway had been closed and unvisited for a long time. There were footprints. Doc studied the tracks intently.
"You see," Monk said hollowly. "The only footprints are those made by Sid Morrison, and our own. There are no murderer's tracks."
Doc asked, "How about the doors?"
"No tracks. The man went down the middle of the hall, and hardly moved after he dropped. There were no other tracks. We looked."
Doc Savage went forward, stood looking down at Sid Morrison. The bronze man's face became tight and grim. He glanced at Monk and Ham. They were pale.
He stated an obvious fact.
"I don't," he said, "see any dagger."

WHOEVER—or whatever—placed the dagger had known enough of anatomy to sink it in Sid Morrison's heart. There was a single stab wound, and when they turned the body, it was evident the blade had gone all the way through. There had been very little red leakage.
Doc asked, "Between the time he came into the building and you found his body . . . how long?"
"Well . . . five minutes," Ham hazarded.
"You saw a black dagger?"
"It wasn't imagination," Monk said stubbornly. "It was sticking out of his chest."
"Who got it?"
Ham swore, something he rarely did.
"Nobody," he insisted. "I stood right here at the head of the hall. Nobody came in. Nobody went out. I didn't hear anything. And believe me, I was listening all the time."
Doc Savage went over the hall floor again with a flashlight, giving it a minute scrutiny this time. When he had finished, the stubborn fact still confronted him—there were no alien footprints.
Doc Savage said finally, "We'll do some telephoning."
The bronze man occupied the entire eighty-sixth, the topmost floor of the skyscraper. The place was divided into three rooms, one of them being small and furnished with a huge inlaid table, an equally huge safe, and a number of comfortable chairs. Adjacent was the library, containing one of the most complete collections of scientific tomes extant, and beyond that the laboratory, a scientific wonder in itself.
Doc picked up a telephone.
"Long Distance operator . . . I want to get hold of Juan Don MacNamara, son of the president of Cristobal, a South American republic. You might try Cristobal City, the capital."
While he was waiting, the bronze man cut the telephone line in on an amplifier which made the other half of the telephone conversation audible to Monk and Ham. There had been other occasions when several of them had wished to hear both sides of a telephone call.
The operator said, "There may be some difficulty in routing your call. Cristobal is at war with the neighboring republic of Hispanola."
(Author's note: As in the case of Cristobal, the name of Hispanola is also a fictitious one for reasons which later in this story become quite obvious.)
"It is important."
"We will do our best," the operator said.
Monk, whose newspaper reading rarely got beyond the comic strips, asked, "When did this war

start? I thought all of the wars were in Europe and China."
"This one began about a week ago," Doc Savage explained. "There has been a boundary dispute between the two countries. Hispanola seems to be the aggressor, and suddenly sent troops into Cristobal, although President Gatun MacNamara of Cristobal had made a number of concessions in an effort to assure peace. There is violent fighting, I understand."
Nearly an hour later, Doc's call got through to Cristobal City, and a heavily accented voice said, "This is President Gatun MacNamara's secretary speaking. I am sorry, but the President's son, Juan Don MacNamara, is not available."
"Where is he?" Doc asked.
"He left yesterday afternoon, flying his own plane, for New York City. No word has been received from him since."
"Why was he coming to New York?"
"I believe the telephone operator said you are Doc Savage—is that right?"
"Yes."
"Juan Don MacNamara announced publicly that he was flying to New York to see you."
"You sure of that?"
"Yes. He made a public announcement."
"Why was he coming to see me?" Doc Savage asked.
"He did not state his reasons."
More to himself than anyone else, Doc mused, "That is queer."
"We thought so too," the distant voice remarked.
"Have you ever heard of a man named Sid Morrison?" Doc inquired.
There was a pause, evidently for memory-fishing, at the other end of the wire.
"Never."
Doc, after hesitating, asked, "What about black daggers? Ever heard of them?"
The man at the other end of the thousands of miles of telephone wire did a rather baffling thing. He made a strangled sound and hung up.

Chapter IV. BLADE OVER JUNGLE

THERE is a saying that when you visit the most Godforsaken outlands of the world, you will invariably find two inhabitants, one of them a Chinese storekeeper, the other a Scotchman operating a bank. Which may or may not be gospel, but at least illustrates a nomadic proclivity of the Scotch race; incidentally, one that is not exclusively modern.
The first MacNamara—meaning the first to reach Cristobal; the MacNamara clan went as far back as Scotch history, one of them helping slay MacBeth at Lumphanan in Aberdeenshire in 1057—came to Cristobal in 1650. He was old Angus MacNamara, whom Cromwell ran out of the forcibly united commonwealth of England, Scotland and Ireland. Old Angus was the first Scotchman in Cristobal. He started a bank, naturally.
By 1930, the MacNamaras had owned most of Cristobal, and lost it, several times. In 1930, they staged the revolution which made old Gatun MacNamara president, and he had been doing fairly well since. Not too well. Just fair. For the MacNamaras had become, in somewhat less than three hundred years, as native as any inhabitant of Cristobal. And the inhabitants of Cristobal were inclined to take more pride in the beauty of their women than in the business efficiency of their government or the business efficiency of anything else.
Sanda MacNamara was a girl worth anybody's pride. She was long and well-shaped—well-shaped was putting it very mildly indeed—and past generations of Castilian mothers had given her marvelous honey-blond hair, and the pleasant sun of Cristobal had contributed a delightful sun-tanned complexion. The finest schools in Massachusetts, London, Paris and Vienna had given her manners and a rounded knowledge of the world. The best modistes on the Rue de la Paix furnished her with frocks that contributed to her beauty, which did not need any contributions.
Being the daughter of old Gatun MacNamara had given her poise, because when you are the daughter of a president, you just naturally have poise. She had learned riding at the Spanish Riding School in Vienna, had learned tennis from Lenglen, had been taught to fly a plane by one-eyed old Prop Jackson who, if the records had been straight, had shot down more planes than Rickenbacker and possibly more than von Richthofen, in the World War.
She was flying now, in her private plane. It was a little low-wing job, honey-colored like her hair, a neat and fairly fast little ship that could cover long distances and descend, as necessity required, upon land or water—or on the leafy mat of a jungle if it came to that—with some chance of safety, since its landing speed was low.
Sanda flew alone, mostly watching the jungle which stretched to the horizons, almost like a sea, except that it was a darker and more ugly green.
She used, every so often, binoculars. The glasses were to enable her to see her brother's plane, which was flying directly ahead. She was, in fact, following her brother.
She was not particularly tired, although they had left Cristobal City, the capital, yesterday afternoon. They had not flown through the night; that was too tiresome. The night had been spent in a good-sized city which had two airports; she had landed at one field, her brother at the other.

That morning, they had taken off at a predetermined time.
While flying, Sanda MacNamara had had time for a good deal of thinking.
She was still almost completely baffled.

SHE switched on the little radio transmitter in her plane, held the microphone close to her lips, said, "Hello, Profile . . . are you listening?"
She hoped this—calling her brother "Profile"—would get a rise out of him. It had always been a fighting word between them. Juan Don, like all MacNamaras of Cristobal, was more handsome than any male had a right to be. He resented it bitterly. Once, when he was young, his sister was sure he had picked a fight deliberately to get his nose broken, only to have a plastic surgeon do a repair job that was an improvement on the original.
Her brother's voice crackled angrily in her receiver diaphragms.
"Stop trying to talk to me!" he snapped. "We can be located with a radio direction finder, you know."
"By whom?"
"I don't know," her bother snapped.
They began to follow a thin string of water far below in the jungle, and it grew larger, became a sizable river that was yellowish in the sunlight. Heat waves made the horizons deceptive, but it seemed to Sanda that she could distinguish the sea, far ahead. She consulted her chart. They should be reaching the coast before long, so the vague difference in the horizon ahead must be the sea.
She was thinking about switching on the ratio transmitter and asking her brother if it was really the sea, when his voice clattered in her ear with abrupt violence.
"Go back, Sanda! Quick!"
His voice was full of ripping excitement
"What's wrong?" Sanda cried, then realized her transmitter was off, and switched it on and waited frantically for the tubes to warm so that the set would radiate.
She stared ahead, and her eyes widened with horror.
"Don!" she screamed. "Oh, Don! What happened?"
She got no answer except the one her eyes gave her. That was ugly. Puzzling. For her brother's plane was going down now, spinning slowly around and around, and turning over. Its descent looked slow, but that was due to the distance. Actually, it must be falling at terrific pace.
The black dagger appeared in the sky while the plane was still falling. The girl was watching, saw it come into existence, could not explain how it got there. The interval of its coming—it wasn't there; then a finger-snap later, it was—occupied an incredibly short time.
The dagger stood in the superheated tropical air near the falling plane. The length of the thing was perhaps two hundred feet, the span of the hilt a fourth of that, and its color was deepest jet. It faded, and was gone, before the girl's plane reached the spot. By then, her brother's ship had hit.

SANDA always believed that she kept her eyes on her brother's plane while it was falling, and while it crashed. She saw—and she was biting her tongue and screaming by then—the ship wobble out of its spin, enough for it to hit the river on its pontoons, as it should. There was a splash. Water flashed out and glistened in the sun like sheets of tin.
The plane bounced, hit, bounced; each time, less water flew. Its speed dropped to a hundred, eighty, sixty, forty miles an hour. Later it hit the sand bar. It was a steep bar. The floats stubbed into the sand, and the plane flipped over on its back.
It lay there, the floats sticking up, like a dead bird.
Sanda MacNamara's lips moved but no words came from them, and she jammed the control stick forward, sent her plane shrieking down toward the river. Her apprehension was a pounding frenzy inside, and she had to force herself to level the plane out and land on the river. After the ship was on the water, she kept it riding fast, on the rear of the floats. Long wake spread out behind her, a rolling wave that climbed onto the bank and broke into suds among the tangled mangrove roots. The fact that mangroves were on the banks told her she must be near the sea, because mangroves grow in salt water. Strange that she should think of such a thing as what the man-groves meant, she decided.
Her plane beached on the sand bar. She sprang out. There was no movement around the plane. Her eyes swept the sand bar. There were no human footprints on the sand.
She ran to the plane, looked inside.
The plane was empty.
"He's safe!" she thought. Wild delight bounded through her.
She looked around for tracks, and there were none. At first that was a little hard for her to realize. She breathed, "But . . . but there has to be!"
She stood very still and stared at the sand until she was finally convinced that there was no trace of anyone having left the plane. Nor could anyone have quitted the ship without leaving prints.
She took a small automatic out of her jacket pocket. There was nothing to be seen. Nothing to be

heard. Except the jungle and its sounds.
The ship had not been damaged noticeably. If righted and put afloat, it would probably fly again. The cabin door was closed, she noticed. It opened readily. She climbed in. And when she climbed out again, she was puzzled more than ever.
There was nothing, absolutely nothing wrong inside the ship as far as she had been able to find. Even the ignition of the motor seemed to be intact. There were no bloodstains in the cockpit, no trace of violence.
For a moment, while inside the ship, she had thought that some kind of robot or radio-directed control might have been attached to the craft, but she had looked and found no such gadget. She knew enough about such things to be sure that the plane did not contain one.
She stood on the edge of the sand bar.
"Don!" she called. Then, "Don! Don!" louder and louder until her throat was raw with the effort. A few tropical birds were frightened away by the terrified incredulity of her voice, but there was no trace of her brother.
She ran to her plane, very scared. It had beached hard on the sand, and she had to take her hands and scoop the wet grains out from under the floats, then rock the craft and shove before she got it out in the river. There were a few alligators in the river, and she hit one while the plane was gathering speed, but it did no more than jar the craft and give Sanda another bad moment.

Chapter V. MYSTERY COMES NORTH

A SHABBY-LOOKING old woman walked into the Riviera Towers Hotel on upper Park Avenue. Her clothing was cheap and ragged and she wore a veil; she went directly to one of the assistant managers at a desk in the richly subdued lobby. You didn’t meet anything so hackneyed as a room clerk in the Riviera Towers.
"I’m sorry," said the assistant manager, "but we’re full up."
"I doubt it," said the woman. "You happen to know me, Mr. Risetti. I usually stay here. I am Sanda MacNamara, daughter of—" she added this for the effect rather than because she thought it really so important, "President Gatun MacNamara of the Republic of Cristobal."
The assistant manager swallowed several times, made a sound like a frog, and gasped, "But . . . but—"
"Incognito," Sanda explained.
The assistant manager remembered; he had been reading his newspapers. There was a war in Cristobal.
"Oh, yes. Yes, indeed. Incognito, to be sure."
Sanda MacNamara was shown to a room, and the assistant manager smiled and rubbed his hands together and reached for a telephone. He had a private dodge of his own for picking up an odd penny now and then, serving as stooge for the town’s most snooping and unscrupulous columnist.
So two hours later, Gotham’s yellowiest newspaper broke a headline that said:
CRISTOBAL PRESIDENT’S
FAMILY FLEES
Daughter Reaches New York
This was hardly the truth, of course. But it made good reading.
By the time the newspaper hit the street, Doc Savage, Monk and Ham had arrived at the Riviera Towers. They rode up to Sanda MacNamara’s suite.
"I am very glad you came," the girl said.
Monk gazed at Sanda and said, "So am I," after he got his breath.
Sanda had sent out to the Fifty-seventh Street shops where she bought some of her clothes, and had ordered dresses sent up from stock. Except for a certain fatigue about her eyes and mouth, she did not look like a girl who had just flown several thousand miles from South America, riding with terror all the way.
She had told them over the telephone who she was. That was why they had come so promptly.
"I’m afraid," Sanda said, "that you’re going to be a little incredulous—particularly about my brother, Don."
They took chairs and were sitting on the edge of them by the time she finished telling about what had happened to Juan Don MacNamara over the jungle.
"He just vanished," she finished. "I am sure he was in the plane, because I talked to him a number of times. Once, he commented on our location, if he had not been in the plane he could not have done that, could he? And after the plane crashed, he had vanished. Vanished—and it wasn’t possible for him to vanish."
Monk said, "And you saw a black dagger?"
"In the sky."
"How big?"
"Two hundred feet long, maybe. About fifty feet across the hilt."
"You haven’t any idea what the dagger was, how it got there, or where it went?"
"Not unless the black stone had something to do with it," Sanda said.
"Black stone?"

"A black stone that is supposed to be an evil deity which was turned into stone by the supreme Inca deity called Kukulkan."
Monk leaned back and closed his eyes.
"Blazes!" he said. "And we were figuring there wasn't any truth to the story about a black stone!"
The girl looked at them with such a bewildered manner that Ham took it upon himself to explain about the long-faced man, Sid Morrison. Ham carried that story through to the mysterious death of Sid Morrison in the hallway, and the far more mysterious vanishing of the black dagger which had been the murder weapon.
Ham finished and stared out of the window. "That happened three days ago, when this blizzard was just starting."
It was still snowing. The rooftops of Manhattan were thick with white, and snow was piled in great mounds in the main streets, while many side thoroughfares were impassable. "I didn't know plane traffic was coming through," Ham added.
"It isn't—not the regular planes," Sanda said. "I was lucky—and we have mountains and blizzards in Cristobal."
Doc Savage said, "Let us go back to the beginning of your story, Miss MacNamara."
Sanda had been studying the bronze man. She was impressed.
"Beginning?"
"About this black rock. I don't mean the legendary history of the thing. The modern part—why did you say it might have something to do with the black dagger you saw in the sky after your brother's plane started falling?"
The girl looked strange.
"The whole thing is wildly unbelievable, isn't it?" she said. "I didn't realize how foolish it sounded until I listened to you put it in words just then."
"What about the black rock?" Doc persisted.
"During the last six months," Sanda explained, "at least fifty people have died in various parts of Cristobal, and always they have died with a black dagger that has vanished, or a dark dagger-shaped object has appeared in the sky at about the moment of their death. We have a large Indian population in Cristobal, descendants of the Incas, and they are becoming upset to the extent that it is a government problem."
The girl shivered and went over and turned more steam into the radiators.
"You see," she added, "a rumor has gone around that my brother had secured possession of the black stone, and as a result, death was striking the natives."
Monk put in, "You mean that your brother never had the stone?"
"Never. I'm positive."
Monk persisted. "He didn't have it, then sell it to this Sid Morrison? Your brother wasn't flying north to deliver the stone to Sid Morrison?"
"I'm sure not."
"Ever hear of Sid Morrison?"
"No."
"Then just why," Monk asked, "were your brother and you flying to New York?"
"My brother," Sanda explained to Doc, "became convinced that you were the one man who could break the power of this black stone, if there is such a thing. My brother was convinced that he would have trouble reaching New York. He asked me to follow him, and try to get through to you if he failed."
Doc Savage said, "Then you are in New York to ask us to investigate this thing?"
"Unusual mystery and people in fantastic trouble are your specialty, aren't they?"
"In a way."
There was a discreet tap at the door. When it was opened, a man in a white coat stood there saying, "Mr. Risetti, the assistant manager, sent up refreshments with the compliments of the management." He wheeled in a chromium cart, covered with a white cloth, then turned and walked out.
Doc Savage said, suddenly and loudly, "It's a trap!"
He was not definitely suspicious of the waiter, just making a test.
The "waiter" gave himself away. He jumped wildly for the door.

DOC SAVAGE drove a hand into one of his pockets, brought out a thin-walled glass bottle, hurled this at the waiter. The bottle hit the man's back, broke. The contents, a somewhat colorless liquid, splashed over the man—and nothing happened.
Monk and Ham clawed at their clothing to get out gas-proof hoods—envelopes of transparent, airtight material, fitting over their heads—which would serve as temporary masks. They thought the stuff in the bottle was gas.
Doc ignored the fleeing waiter. The bronze man ran, scooped up the cart, contents and all. The room had big double windows, and outside there was a small balcony. Doc opened the double doors, and snow tumbled inside. Snow was two feet deep on the balcony. He planted the table in the stuff and closed the doors.
"Get clear!" he rapped.

They ran into the corridor. There was no sign of the waiter; he had already fled.
Ham yelled, "We can telephone downstairs and stop that fellow!" He raced for the floor receptionist. This hotel had a reception hostess at a desk on every floor.
Doc caught him, said, "Let him go."
"Let him go?"
The explosion came then, a ripping shock, followed by the jangle of breaking glass, the loud thumping of things rolling.
Doc pulled a gas hood over his head, opened the door of the suite they had just left. The double doors to the balcony had been blown in, furniture upset; the carpet was split and scooped away from the bare floor near the door. The balcony itself was clean of snow, and some of the railing was missing. Across the street, snow that had been disturbed by the shock was still cascading off roof parapets and window ledges.
Walls of the room were pitted, and jagged fragments of steel were embedded. Some of the fragments had bounced off and lay on the floor.
Doc used his handkerchief, picked up one of the metal bits, saw that it was coated with a sticky substance.
Vile, greenish-looking vapor was boiling in from the window.
Doc closed the door hurriedly.
"Poisoned shrapnel and gas," the bronze man said.
"Then they were trying to kill us!" Sanda gasped.
Monk and Ham, instead of being nervous, seemed somewhat relieved, if anything. As Monk expressed it later, there was something creepy about black daggers that vanished, but a bomb explosion was a thing you could grasp.
Doc Savage carefully wrapped his handkerchief around the shrapnel fragment which he had picked up—there was no doubt but that the sticky substance on the piece was poison—and put it in a pocket.
The corridor was filling with people, all of them excited. An officious-looking man who knew nothing about what had happened, or why, was shouting that no one should leave the building.
"There is poison gas in that room," Doc told the house detective when he came. "Keep everyone out for at least an hour."
Doc entered an elevator. Sanda, Monk and Ham followed. The operator did not want to take them down, and eventually Monk grasped him by the elbows, set him out of the elevator, and ran the cage down himself.
"It strikes me," Monk said glumly, "that we’re startin’ out kinda late to follow the bomber."
Doc Savage said nothing, did not seem disturbed. He left the Riviera Towers and walked down the street to a spot where a car stood, front wheels cocked upon a packed snowdrift.
The car door opened and a pair of fists came out.

THE man who followed the pair of startling fists was notable for the sadness of his facial expression. The rest of him was big, although hardly in proportion to the hands, which could hardly have been incased in quart pails. He gave them a look of unutterable gloom.
"Holy cow," he remarked in a rumbling voice of astounding power. "What went on upstairs?"
"A guy served us refreshments, Renny," Monk explained. "Say, how do you happen to be here?"
The man with the fists and the gloom was Colonel John "Renny" Renwick, who liked to knock things about with his fists—his boast was that he could smash the panel of any wooden door with either set of knuckles—and who was noted from Patagonia to Cape Chelyuskin for his engineering feats. He was another of Doc’s group of five aides.
Renny looked up at the higher floors of the hotel.
"Refreshments?" he rumbled.
Monk explained what he meant by the term. Renny snorted.
"Was the waiter a little, wiry-looking guy in a white coat?" the big-fisted engineer asked.
"Yes."
"Well, he came out of the hotel as if the dogs were after him."
"Which way did he go?"
"He had a car waiting," Renny explained. "A blue sedan. And did they take off for the south! Holy cow!"
Monk made disgusted noises and gestures, wailed, "If we could just have followed that guy."
Renny looked surprised. "Well, what do you think Long Tom and Johnny are doing? That’s why we were here."
"What?"
Monk’s eyes popped.
Doc Savage explained, "Renny and Long Tom and Johnny were to follow us and watch the hotel, in case anything unexpected happened. In particular, they were to trail anyone who seemed to be acting suspicious."
Monk opened his mouth, then shut it. He was astonished, but you rather became accustomed to being astonished when associating with Doc Savage. The bronze man’s plans had an uncanny facility of popping up at the most opportune and unexpected times. Monk hadn’t any idea that the others had

followed them to the hotel; Doc hadn’t told him. Monk wasn’t surprised—he rather suspected that he was aware of only about one-hundredth of the plans and precautions of the bronze man, judging from the fact that one seemed to crop up exactly when it was needed. It was this facility for taking precautions that accounted for Doc’s success, as well as for his having managed to live as long as he had.

It occurred to Monk to glance at Sanda MacNamara. She was staring at Doc Savage in about the fashion Monk had expected. He had seen many persons look at the bronze man in that fashion—with the sudden dawning of the realization of just how amazing a fellow he really was.

Snow was stinging their faces, wind was shaking their clothing. Renny had closed the car door when he got out; he reopened it now, and they climbed inside. The heater fan purred faintly, and it was warmer than the blizzard chill outside, yet not warm enough for comfort.

"Johnny and Long Tom trailed the bomber in a car?" Doc asked.

"Yes," Renny said.

Early in their unusual career, Doc and the others had discovered the convenience of having a quick and private means of communication always at hand. Radio served this purpose. So they had installed short-wave radio transmitter-receiver sets in their cars, boats, apartments, planes and offices. They had formed the habit of remaining, whenever possible, within hearing of one of the radio receivers which was switched on and tuned to the very short wavelength they habitually used.

Doc switched on the radio in the car, said, "Johnny . . . Long Tom."

"I’ll be superamalgamated," remarked a scholastic voice, "if this isn’t an ultrarefrigerated avocation!"

Chapter VI. THE FRIGHTENED RICH MAN

"THAT," Monk explained, "is William Harper Littlejohn, better known as Johnny. He’s an eminent archaeologist and geologist, and user of big words."

Doc Savage said into the microphone, "You still trailing that fellow, Johnny?"

Johnny answered, using small words. Johnny habitually used his many-syllabled jaw breakers, but to Doc Savage, who probably could come nearer understanding them than anyone else, Johnny was always careful to use ordinary words.

"The man has driven to upper Fifth Avenue, and has gotten out of the cab in front of an extremely swanky private mansion. He talked with the butler who opened the door, and he is just entering."

"You’re sure he is the man?"

"Yes."

"What address?"

Johnny gave the address, and Doc Savage wheeled their car in that direction.

Sanda MacNamara contemplated the bronze man thoughtfully. She was puzzled. Her curiosity got the best of her, and she asked a question.

"Back at the hotel," she said, "just how did your men know this fellow was the right one to follow? You can’t tell me they just looked at him and saw that he was excited. Hundreds of people go in and out of that hotel every hour, and your men couldn’t have just stood there and picked out the right one."

The car became stuck in the snow, and the bronze man backed up, flung the machine into the drift, and plowed through in a cloud of leaping white flakes.

"You remember the bottle I threw at the waiter as he took flight?" Doc asked.

"Yes," Sanda admitted.

"The bottle burst and the liquid smeared the man," Doc explained. "The liquid was a chemical preparation. When examined with the aid of infrared light and special filtering eyeglasses, the stuff becomes a noticeable purplish hue. In other words, the man was branded without being aware of it. Johnny and Long Tom and Renny simply watched the exits of the hotel, using infrared projectors and filter spectacles. The equipment was not conspicuous."

"I see." The girl settled back on the cushions. "I’m beginning to understand something that always puzzled me."

"What do you mean?"

"It has nothing to do with this matter. It happened about two years ago. Our newspapers in Cristobal City published the story that you were to appear in the city—I think it was in connection with some convention of medical-science experts on tropical diseases, which was later canceled. But for six months there was hardly a crime of importance in Cristobal City. Our chief of police told me the rumor of your coming was responsible. I didn’t believe him."

Doc said, "He was probably mistaken. Some other factor must have cut down the amount of crime."

THE house was of hard gray stone, and you looked at it and instinctively thought of a bank. The windows were small, those on the ground floor heavily barred, and the entrance was austere. There were three floors. The lot on which it stood was probably worth a million dollars, even at post-depression prices.

"Looks," Monk said, "as if it had been built to bury somebody in."

Johnny joined them. He was a remarkably long bag of bones who affected a monocle dangling from a

ribbon, a monocle he never used. He was thinner than it seemed any man could be and still remain healthy. He had been standing in a doorway down the street, snow swirling around him.
He began, "Even peripatetic ratiocination—"
"Haven't you," Monk interrupted, "got some little words?"
"Little one-syllable ones for Monk," Ham explained.
Johnny said, "What I started to say was that ordinary reasoning wouldn't lead one to expect the man coming to a place like this. Do you know who lives here?"
Ham—he could be depended upon to know where all the aristocrats lived—eyed the house. "The residence of Peter van Jelk," he remarked.
"Never heard of him," Monk grunted.
"I suppose you've never heard of J. P. Morgan, John D. Rockefeller, Jr., or Henry Doherty."
"You mean this Van Jelk is in a class with them?"
"Not exactly," Ham told him. "Van Jelk could probably buy and sell any two of them."
"Did he inherit it?"
"He did not."
"That," Monk said, "makes him quite a guy."
"Where is Long Tom?" Doc asked.
"Watching the back of the place."
"Long Tom" was Major Thomas J. Roberts, who was a rather feeble-looking fellow with the general complexion of an inhabitant of a mushroom cave. He was remarkably healthy, however. His specialty was electricity. His nickname, Long Tom, had come to him long ago, as the result of a slight mishap with an ancient cannon of the type called a long tom.
They looked in vain for him until a crumpled newspaper, apparently a discarded one, fell off the face of a snowdrift; Long Tom had worked into the snow, covered himself except for his face, which he had concealed by the newspaper perforated with a peephole.
"Nobody has come out," he reported.
Doc said, "The rest of you spread out. Monk, you might come with me."
Ham said, "I'll take care of Miss MacNamara," and Monk looked disgusted.
The butler who opened the front door of the mansion was thick-shouldered, had a face which appeared to have been beaten upon in the past.
"Sorry, but you really cawn't be admitted," he said.
"We're lookin' for a guy, so don't get us riled," Monk advised.
"Listen, pal, take a walk or I'll bop your teeth loose!" advised the butler.
He had lost his accent.
Monk said, "Start bopping, then!" and feinted with his left. The man ducked—into Monk's right. Monk had arm muscles which could straighten out a horseshoe—the butler's heels came perhaps two inches off the floor. Doc caught the man.
"You watch him," Doc said.
"O. K., but he won't take no watchin' for some time," Monk said, grinning.
Doc Savage walked down a hall that had a towering ceiling and walls arrayed with spears and suits of armor, all genuine and none costing less than several hundred dollars. The next room had a Joshaghan rug tied with Ghiordes knots, richly colored and with a silky, lustrous pile. It was a museum piece. Very much of a museum piece. So was the man who said, "I am Peter van Jelk."

HE spoke the name—Peter van Jelk—as if that ordinarily settled matters. He said nothing more, but his tone implied that having come into the presence of the Untouchable Highest, they were expected to remedy the impertinence and leave immediately.
There was nothing artificial about his regal manner. He was aristocracy. He was perhaps fifty, his hair being smeared with gray at the temples. He had good shoulders, and either dieted and trained his waistline, or wore a girdle. He wore pince-nez glasses, rimless. His face, as a whole, was somehow as coldly indomitable as the great stone house in which he lived.
"Clark Savage, Jr.," Doc said.
Van Jelk's face showed some respect, no approval.
"I have heard of you," he said. "I believe an associate of yours, Brigadier General Theodore Marley Brooks, managed to become a member of one of my clubs."
Monk, who had come to stand in the door, muttered, "—managed to become a member—" and emitted a strangled sound of mirth.
Doc said, "We are here looking into a serious matter."
"Serious matter?"
"About black daggers that have killed some people," Doc said.
Van Jelk's hands gave a noticeable jerk, his lips parted, and he took one step backward. Then he got control of himself, began coughing and brought a hand to his mouth. After coughing several times, he spoke in an almost ordinary tone.
"I don't believe I understood you."
Van Jelk put up his chin, frowned through his rimless eyeglasses.
"Morgan!" he said loudly. "What do you mean, admitting these bounders. Throw them out!"

"Morgan must be that funny-face butler," Monk said.
"Morgan!" Van Jelk called. "Come here at once!"
Monk asked, "What do you expect him to do?"
Van Jelk looked at Monk coldly and said, "Throw you out."
Monk, who detested obvious aristocrats, took off his rather sloppy old hat and made the gesture of slapping it angrily against his leg, but released the hat so that it rolled across the floor and stopped near Van Jelk's expensive handmade shoes. Monk then went over to pick up his hat, but instead, grasped Van Jelk's ankles and jerked. The man fell, and Monk crawled on. For a while, there was the noise of their heels and elbows and fists knocking the floor. Van Jelk wore an expensive suit, and Monk proceeded to tear most of the pockets out of it without finding a weapon.
A complete stranger to the truth when he wanted to be, Monk made a loud and convincing accusation.
"Two of them have confessed," said Monk grimly, "and we've got proof besides. You're guilty as hell, Van Jelk."
The man became very pale.
"You . . . mean . . . about the black rock?" he asked, his words hardly loud enough to understand.
"Sure."
Van Jelk's eyes closed and his body became loose.

OUTSIDE in the cold and blowing snow there was the sound of five shots fired close together, and mixed in with their noise a roaring of a laboring automobile motor. Someone shouted in a surprised, futile way. Very briefly, one of the supermachine pistols which Doc's aids carried made its discharge noise, a deep-throated note that might have been made by a huge bullfiddle. The automobile seemed to keep going.
Doc Savage went into the hallway past the unconscious form of the butler, Morgan. They had left the street door open, and chill wind had brought in a little snow. Doc stood in the door a while, then Ham and the girl, Sanda, came up.
"One just got away," Ham explained. "He was the fellow who left the bomb at the hotel. Emptied his gun at us."
"No chance to follow him?"
"None. Garage opens on the side street. Car came out like a bullet. Big sedan with chains. Got away."
"Renny and Long Tom and Johnny?"
"They've gone back to watching the rear. They're mad enough to fly."
Doc said, "You might as well come in out of the cold." And after Ham and the girl had entered, the bronze man glanced at the young woman and asked, "Do you know this Van Jelk?"
Sanda shook her head. "Never heard of him."
They carried Morgan, the butler, into the room where Monk was waiting with Van Jelk, and planted him on the floor. Doc walked through various rooms of the house, discovering that only those on the ground floor were furnished. The upper floors, both second and third story, were completely bare. Nor were there any other servants.
Van Jelk had revived and sat in a chair. He had been talking. Monk's face was blank with amazement.
"Listen to this, Doc!" Monk exploded.
Van Jelk stared at Doc Savage, his face still pale.
"I thought of coming to you for help," he said, "but I was afraid."
"Van Jelk, here, was one of the partners of Sid Morrison, the man who got stabbed with a vanishing dagger," Monk explained.
Van Jelk took out a handkerchief and mopped his face, his hands trembling noticeably.
"Make a short story out of it," Doc suggested.
"I'll do that," Van Jelk said. "Six months ago, a group of wealthy men including myself and Sid Morrison, all interested in collecting ancient Incan relics, got together and bought a sacred black stone which legend said was the solidified soul of the evil one who had been the strongest foe of Kukulkan, the Incan-Mayan."
Monk said, "You see, Doc. This checks with what Sid Morrison told us."
Van Jelk nodded, continued, "We naturally placed no stock in the legend about this stone—the legend that death would overtake anyone connected with it. That is, until—well, all kinds of disasters began befalling us. Personally, I was badly hurt in an automobile accident. My butler, an old and trusted servant, was found at the foot of a stairway with his head crushed. I . . . I do not believe he fell down the stairs, because I was in a room close by and I heard no sound."
"What gave you the idea the stone was connected with this bad luck?" Monk asked.
"I saw black knives—and they disappeared." Van Jelk looked distressed, like a man telling a small-boy ghost story. "I feel deuced silly, saying such a thing. It's not believable, you know."
Morgan, the butler, revived and got to his feet—awakening with the same idea which he had held when he went to sleep, for he squared off and made for Monk with his fists. Monk rolled a chair,

upset Morgan, then sat on him while Van Jelk said, "Morgan! Morgan—these men are our friends! They are fighting the same evil thing as ourselves."
The butler finally stopped struggling, said, "You big brute!" almost tearfully.
"I hired Morgan," Van Jelk explained, "as a bodyguard. He is an ex-pugilist who once was almost heavyweight champion."
In a voice that was not particularly excited, Doc Savage stated that there had been an attempt to kill them at Sanda MacNamara's hotel, and that they had trailed the would-be murderer here to Van Jelk's house.
Van Jelk said, "Will you describe the man?"
Doc did so.
Morgan, on the floor, made a rumbling. "That's Moxie, the other bodyguard you hired," the disgruntled butler told Van Jelk. "I never did trust that fellow."
Sanda MacNamara had been listening, and now she shook her head violently.
"My brother never had any black stone to sell!" she snapped. "That makes somebody a liar, doesn't it?"
Van Jelk gave her a squelching stare, consulted his watch, then said, "We were to hold a meeting—myself, and the men who bought this amazing stone from her brother. We were to meet at Henry's house in—" he glanced at his watch again, "just twenty minutes. You can ask the rest of them who we bought the stone from."
"We had best go to Henry's house then," Doc Savage decided.

Chapter VII. THE FEAR

HENRY'S house was a thousand feet in the air. Being situated on top of one of the tower buildings in lower Wall Street, the place had two advantages very convenient for an exceptionally rich man—it was close to the biggest money mart in the world, and it was located in a section almost deserted nights and evenings and on holidays, there being no more lonesome sector in the city than Wall Street at such periods.
If any wood had been used in Henry's house, it was not immediately noticeable. Construction materials were glass, chrome, steel. Decorative material was almost exclusively bright-colored paint. It was a modernistic place to end all modernistic places.
There were seven men gathered in one of the rooms.
Van Jelk said, "I will introduce you."
He did so, and it was almost as though he had started at the head of the list of top income-tax payers. "This," said Van Jelk, "is Burton Allsworth Arthur, of the Arthur banking interests."
B. A. Arthur was not only Arthur banking interests—he was Arthur steamship lines, railroads, aerial transport, assorted factories; mansion in Palm Beach, duplex on Park Avenue, estate at Newport, hunting lodge in Scotland, chateau on the Riviera, chalet in Switzerland, yacht at City Island, polo ponies on Long Island, private planes everywhere. One of those men who could become slightly ill with a cold, and the stock market would take a general drop.
The startling thing about this group, they realized as introductions progressed, was that B. A. Arthur was probably the pauper of the assemblage. Some of the others, who had been more agile at dodging publicity, were several times as wealthy. Doc Savage and his associates had engaged in enough financial manipulation themselves to have a good general idea of the money situation internationally, as well as in the United States.
Ahmet Ben Khali, for instance, was an unknown figure in America, but all through the Middle East—his specialty was oil—his name was uttered with either bated breath, or with wildest ravings of profanity. He was a very, very long, studious-appearing brown man, until one looked at his face. Looking Ben Khali in the eye at close range was somewhat like exchanging stares with a hungry hawk.
There was Lord Dusterman, the arms magnate whose munition-factory holdings, although this was not generally known, had been somewhat abbreviated when Germany absorbed Czechoslovakia. He was merely a big man.
There were seven of them. In appearance alone, none of them stood out particularly, or had salient characteristics. They were not men who profited from being noticed; rather the contrary. Certain qualities they all had in common: their complete self-possession—fabulous wealth gives a man that; their obvious alertness of senses and their probable sharpness of mind, these being two facilities naturally ingrained in men having money. And all of them, it seemed, held varying degrees of contempt for others of less worldly station. Not that they were overbearing; these men had too much cleverness and polish for that. Their condescension took the form of a calm acceptance of their own importance. When they entered a conversation among lesser lights, they naturally monopolized it. They were excessively polite to each other.
There was one exception, and Doc Savage thereafter gave him more attention than any of the others, without seeming to do so.
"I am Henry Lee," said the man who was an exception. "And if you gentlemen will excuse me, I must leave. I have an important appointment. You are welcome, however, to use my home."
Doc Savage noticed that a visible air of coldness settled over the group.
"You better stay, Lee," said Ahmet Ben Khali, after a long pause.

Lee obeyed the order. So would have half the potentates in the Orient.

VAN JELK advanced and made a rather calm speech. His aristocratic manner did not seem out of place here, for all these men had it.

"You gentlemen know Doc Savage, either by personal acquaintance or by repute." Van Jelk smiled at Doc. "Tonight I had the fortune to discover that Doc Savage is interested in encountering and defeating the same power—the thing we have variously referred to as a curse, a fiend, ogre or damned impossibility—which we have come to realize holds infinite danger for us."

Lord Dusterman, in a voice that barked like one of the machine guns his factories turned out, said, "You mean the black dagger?"

"And the black stone."

B. A. Arthur, chairman of the board of some dozen corporations, asked, "And Doc Savage believed it?"

"He did."

"I didn't," B. A. Arthur said. "Not I when I first heard of the thing."

Van Jelk waved an arm to include the seven men assembled in the weirdly modernistic room. "We are a syndicate engaged in the purchase of museum material," he explained. "All of us together purchased this black stone, which was a sacred relic of the ancient Incan nation. Our representative who did the actual purchasing was Sid Morrison, an expert at such things. The purchase was made from Juan Don MacNamara, son of President Gatun MacNamara of Cristobal. Young MacNamara was to deliver the stone to New York by plane yester—"

"That," said Sanda MacNamara, "is a pack of fibs."

Van Jelk drew himself up and said with some dignity, "I am not in the habit of having my veracity questioned."

Sanda had said very little since arriving; evidently words had been gathering inside her like steam.

"It's being questioned now!" she snapped. "I know my brother, and I know he never had any black stone."

"Perhaps your brother did not tell you."

"He'd have told me."

"You insinuate we are liars?"

"Not insinuating—telling you it's a black-faced fact."

"I see."

"Furthermore," said Sanda, "no one can tell me there is such a thing as a black rock that gives off a curse consisting of black daggers that stab people, or whatever this curse is supposed to consist of." The young woman stamped a foot in her vexation. "What kind of a roomful of idiots are you to believe such nonsense?" She turned on Doc Savage. "You're as bad as the rest of them."

"You're forgetting, Sanda," Monk pointed out earnestly, "that we saw the daggers. Two of them. One in the air. One sticking in a man."

"I saw it too!" Sanda said sharply. "Just as my brother's plane fell."

"You saw it—you still don't believe it?"

"I hope I'm not insane."

"This discussion," said Ahmet Ben Khali, the Oriental oil magnate, "is not doing us much good."

Doc Savage had seated himself in a chair; he got to his feet.

"I should like," he said, "to question Henry Lee in private."

A SLIGHT stir of surprise—it was not pleasant—went around the room. The stir was slight, which meant a good deal. These were men of infinite wealth, therefore they were tremendous gamblers, self-trained not to show emotion.

Henry Lee got up suddenly. He sat down again. He did not say anything. His face, however, was not a pleasant thing to watch.

Doc said, "If you will go into a private room, Mr. Lee."

Lord Dusterman said, exploding like a gun, "No!"

"Which are my sentiments exactly," said Ahmet Ben Khali.

Doc Savage said nothing. Henry Lee was far more nervous than the rest, and if there was a weak-willed man in the room, Lee was the individual. Young Lee controlled one of the largest fortunes in the United States, but unlike these other men, he had not made the money himself, but had inherited it. His life had been a procession of scandals of the sort typical to a young man with money and leisure and a character not as strong as it might be.

Henry Lee took out a silk handkerchief and mopped his forehead. Undeniably, he was in the grip of terror.

B. A. Arthur, the titan of American big business, furnished an explanation.

"Sid Morrison was marked for death," he said grimly.

"And Henry, here—"

"Marked—how do you mean?" Doc interrupted.

B. A. Arthur hesitated, looked uncomfortable, finally growled, "This is more unbelievable than

any of the rest. But the fact is that a black dagger appeared mysteriously in thin air and scratched a warning on Sid Morrison’s desk, then vanished." B. A. Arthur showed his teeth in an uncheerful kind of a smile-grimace. "Sound like a crazy man when I say that, don’t I?"
"I’ll say!" Sanda interrupted dryly.
"The warning came to Henry Lee in the same way, except that the dagger scratched the warning on a wall. Isn’t that right, Henry?"
"Y-yes," Henry Lee managed.
"This is Henry’s house," continued B. A. Arthur. "So we can readily show you the warning."
They moved, all of them, to an adjacent room, a chamber with walls done in royal blue, ceiling in faint cherry, with a carpet as yellow as any canary. The scratches were plainly discernible, and spelled:
When comes the day
Named the Sea Animal,
A visitor to you,
The one called Ahpuch.
Homely Monk snorted, said, "Listen, brothers, that doesn’t make sense. It ain’t even poetry."
"Ahpuch," said B. A. Arthur, "was the ancient Aztec lord of death."
Monk pointed. "What’s the first part mean—a day named the Sea Animal?"
Doc Savage said, "The Mayans and some of the Incas named their days Small Bird, Monkey, Rain, and so on. Their calendar was divided into a cycle of fifty-two years, each year having three hundred sixty-five days, with five very unlucky intercalary days when they gave human sacrifices. Each year had eighteen months, each month twenty days, and there were four weeks of five days each in a month. However, that is beside the point. Authorities generally agree that the day called Sea Animal was the second day of the week."
"Second day of the week would be Monday," Monk said. "That’s today."
B. A. Arthur nodded grimly.
"That," he stated, "is why we don’t want Henry Lee, here, out of our sight. Not even for a minute."
"Don’t want him out of your sight?"
"If you must know," snapped B. A. Arthur, "we’re protecting his life!"

IT developed that the gathering of the seven men at Henry Lee’s house was nothing more nor less than a watch party to see that nothing happened to the one of their number whom they declared had been marked for next death. They were, they insisted, going to keep close watch on Henry. They were not going to let him out of sight, not even for Doc Savage to question him. There was nothing to be learned from Henry Lee that the others could not explain, and he was nervous enough now, because of the threat against himself, without being made more distraught by having Doc single him out for questioning.
All of this was made clear, and Doc’s party retired to the anteroom for a conference.
If Doc Savage had any definite opinions, or if he intended to voice them—unlikely at this point, since the bronze man had the habit of keeping conjectures to himself until they were proven facts—was a point that remained unsettled, since a loud and horrified yell brought them charging into the room where seven of the wealthiest men on earth were watching one of their number who had been threatened with death.
Henry Lee was sitting in a chair. The chair was entirely of metal except for the cushion made of brilliant red leather. Henry Lee sat in the chair as though he had decided to relax completely and had leaned back and slid down until the back of his head had hooked and held onto the rear of the chair. His arms hung loosely, one on either side of the chair, with one of his hands by chance half cupped so that the slow string of red fluid—red as the chair cushion—that oozed out around the black knife that was sticking in his chest, trickled into the cupped hand and leaked through the fingers to the floor!

Chapter VIII. MILLIONS ON A BOAT

IT was Monk, the skeptic, who emitted an astounded, unbelieving noise that resembled a bark, then sprang toward the man in the chair. Reaching the figure, Monk put out a hand, hesitated as if half fearful, then touched the black handle of the black knife protruding from the body. Monk felt the hilt with his fingertips, squeezed it.
"It’s real!" he barked. He turned around and looked at Doc Savage and pointed at the knife. "You see! There’s the black dagger—just like we found it stickin’ in Sid Morrison’s body."
No one in the room said anything, and no one moved except Doc Savage, who took a flashlight from his pocket, went to the chair, and blazed the white beam of the light into Henry Lee’s eyes. The pupils of the eyes did not contract to cope with the bright light.
"Who did it?" Doc asked.
"Nothing," Van Jelk said.
"Nothing?"
Van Jelk braced himself visibly. His skin had taken on the hue of lead.

"The black knife simply appeared in the air," he said. "Then it buried itself in poor Henry's chest."
"The knife simply appeared?"
"Insane as it sounds—that's what happened. We all saw it." He looked around at the others and they nodded wordlessly.
"How close were you to him?"
"Me? About fifteen feet, I imagine. None of us was much closer than that."
Doc Savage said nothing, looked at the men—the wealthy men—assembled in the room. The bronze man's flake-gold eyes were more strangely alive than usual, and there was something in them that vaguely disturbed everyone upon whom they rested.
Lord Dusterman, the munitions magnate, said suddenly, "I've never been able to stand the sight of a body!" He walked out of the room, but came back almost immediately bearing a sheet. He handed the sheet to Monk. "You cover it, please," he requested.
Monk carried the sheet to the body, spread it over the figure, then stepped back. The sheet molded the form, showing in particular the hump where the black dagger protruded.
Monk said, "I'd like to see that dagger disappear this time."
B. A. Arthur went to the telephone and picked it up.
"Wait," Doc said quietly.
"But we'll be in trouble if we don't call the police," Arthur said.
Monk put in, "We're the police. All of us have commissions on the force."
In the moments that followed, they could hear an electric clock running somewhere, and the cold, intense sounds of the blizzard outside. Wind whined occasionally, and flurries of hard snowflakes beat against the great windows. A radiator started clanking, then stopped. Either a little of the bitter cold outdoors had crept into the room, or nerves were making them feel cool, for there was a noticeable chill in the place. One of the group, a sleek, wiry mink of a man named Costervelt, who had twice been sued by the government for income taxes, seemed to have a cold, for he took out a handkerchief and blew his nose.
Then Monk howled a howl that made all his previous howls seem mouselike by comparison, and pointed at the sheet-covered body.
"That dagger!" he squalled. "You can't see the outline of that dagger!"
The homely chemist then sprang forward and whipped the sheet off the body, and all of could see that the black dagger was no longer there!

EMOTIONS of the men as they viewed the impossible phenomenon were as varied as the colors in a rainbow, and their reactions almost as assorted. There was, however, on the part of the seven wealthy men—they had been eight at the beginning, counting Van Jelk, but now Henry Lee was dead—less shock and excitement than was shown by Doc Savage's aides. The bronze man observed that, made a mental note of it. He said suddenly, "I am going to search this place, if no one has objections."
"No one has objections," said Ahmet Ben Khali.
Doc Savage nodded and walked out, but did not search the place. Instead, the bronze man rode an elevator down to the street. He had not put on his coat, and the cold stabbed at him with needled violence, and the wind got under his coattails and piled them up on his shoulders.
There were compartments in his car which held numerous chemicals and gadgets of the type which he frequently found of use, and from one of these niches he removed a small cardboard box, which he pocketed.
With the box in his possession, he waded back through snow that was almost deep enough to get into his trouser pockets, reached the building lobby and spent a little time stamping snow out of his trouser legs, shaking it out of trouser cuffs, before he returned to the penthouse.
He found in the penthouse many pale faces, much silence, and no new developments.
Doc said, "My friends and I didn't get to finish that conference we were holding when Henry Lee was killed. We will go ahead with it now."
He gestured. Monk, Renny, Long Tom, Johnny, Ham and Sanda MacNamara all filed into the vestibule. Just before Doc left the room, he fumbled in his coat pocket where he had put the cardboard box, then took off his coat and dropped it over a chair.
"Going to leave my coat here," he said. "Getting a little warm."
He went out into the vestibule with the others, closing the door.

IT was quiet in the vestibule. Even moaning of the blizzard wind and pecking of the hard snowflakes against windows were shut out.
To the obvious surprise of the others, Doc Savage said nothing and gave no indication that he had anything to say, or that they were going to hold a conference at all. Finally, Monk, consumed with curiosity about the death in the other room, and wanting to keep in close touch with what was going on there, reached for the door knob, his intention being to rejoin Van Jelk and the others.
Doc spoke one word quietly.
"Wait," he said.
"What in blazes?" Monk asked.

"Give it about ten minutes," Doc suggested.
"Give what?"
Doc Savage did not answer. He seemed to be listening.
Ham looked at Sanda and said, "What do you think about this black-dagger stuff now?"
The girl shuddered. "I can't believe such a thing."
"You saw it."
"I know."
Monk muttered, "If you ask me, I think we're all going to be in the market for a nice strong insane asylum, if this stuff keeps up."
Minutes dragged. Finally, Doc consulted his watch, said, "We might as well go in now."
Renny, first to reach the door, opened it, then let out a startled roar. "Holy cow! They're all dead!"
He corrected his first impression after making an inspection. They were all unconscious. Van Jelk lay in a chair, but all the others were on the floor, their forms piled in assorted positions. Renny was running from one to the other when his knees became weak and he stumbled, put his hands to his head.
Doc said quickly, "Get outside again. There is still some of the gas in the room! We'll give it more time."
They hurried out into the vestibule and closed the door again.
"Gas? What gas?" Long Tom, the electrical expert, looked completely puzzled.
"I went down to the car and got a cardboard box containing a bottle of strong anaesthetic gas," Doc explained. "Pulled the cork of the bottle while it was in my coat pocket, then left the coat in there. The gas vaporizes quickly, loses its strength after a short time—five minutes or so."
Long Tom asked, "The same kind of gas we've been using for a long time in those little glass anaesthetic bombs?"
"Yes."
After they could comfortably return to the room, Doc said, "Renny, you and Johnny drive up to the Broadway district. On Sixth Avenue you will find a number of trunk stores which are open at this time of night, and which cater to the theatrical trade. Get seven trunks, each large enough to hold a man. Preferably, buy trunks already used by theater companies."
Renny said, "I don't get this."
"These seven men wanted us to protect them," Doc explained.
"Yeah, but will putting them in trunks protect them?"
"They will only be in the trunks until we get them aboard a steamship."
"Steamship?"
"One bound for South America," Doc said. "It sails at midnight. At this season of the year, we can probably get short-notice accommodations. Johnny will remain in New York—well—keep an eye on things."

THE steamship Rocket was not an American boat, but she was hauling American goods, since it happened that the merchandise was of a type that ships of American registry could not haul. The Congress of the United States was responsible for this. Congress had ruled that the United States was strictly on the neutral side of current or future war, and that any materials sold to a nation engaged in war would have to be sold on a strictly cash-and-carry basis. The warring nation must pay cash, and carry the goods in some ship other than an American one.
The Rocket had been built in Sweden, which made her a good craft, although she was no longer of Swedish registry. She was in excess of four hundred feet long, but she was not new and she needed paint. She did not carry a large passenger list, since passengers preferred the more pretentious cruise liners which made the South American ports at this season of the year. Additionally, there was the fact that the old Rocket was cargoed with supplies for a warring country, Hispanola, and the consular service did what they could to discourage use of the vessel by southbound Yankees.
Sanda MacNamara took three excited turns around one of the Rocket passenger cabins, then planted herself in front of Doc Savage and said, "I don't get the sense of this. I don't get it!"
"Suppose you sit down," the bronze man suggested, "and tell us about this war between Hispanola and Cristobal."
The girl sank down in a chair and clamped her hands together. She suddenly looked very tired.
"Like all wars, it's ugly and horrible," she said.
Doc Savage explained, "What I am interested in is the background of this war between Hispanola and your country—the factors which led to it."
The girl was thoughtful for a moment
"I may not be able to give a sensible explanation," she said.
"Why not?"
"There was nothing to cause this war that we could see. No particular grievance with Hispanola. The last war with Hispanola was more than sixty years ago, and we lost, but there was no grudge on our part. There had been a border dispute, but that was settled two years ago; amicably, everyone thought. We had certainly done nothing to arouse the antagonism of Hispanola." She looked at Doc

Savage sharply. "I believe what I am telling you is the truth. I am not trying to lay the blame on the other side."
Doc asked, "Just how did this ever get started?"
"Like most of them—propaganda. Suddenly, and for no reason that we could understand, our neighbor Hispanola was flooded with propaganda against Cristobal. My father—our government—were painted as overbearing and belligerent. The Hispanola newspapers twisted every incident to build up hate against us." She grimaced. "I'll wager you that there has not been a murder or crime in Hispanola during the last two years in which the culprit was not indicated as being from Cristobal. Lies!" She clenched her hands. "They printed reams of lies!"
"And the actual declaration of war?"
"There was none. Nations have stopped declaring war lately, you know."
"There must have been some excuse."
"There was—a fight on the border. It was claimed also that Hispanolans were being mistreated in Cristobal territory, and that Hispanola had the right to protect these people."
"That idea," Doc Savage said dryly, "was used fairly successfully in Europe."
Sanda shook her head wearily. "My father doesn't understand why there should be a war. I've heard him say that time and again." She put a hand on the bronze man's arm. "I hope you believe me, because it's true."
Monk and Ham came into the cabin.
"Well, we got aboard—with our trunks," Monk said, and grinned. "All but Johnny. You said he stays in New York, didn't you?"
"Our seven guests all right?" Doc asked.
"They're a little peeved," Monk admitted cheerfully.

Chapter IX. JUNGLE QUEST

FOR four days and five nights things were rather monotonous. The seven prisoners gave no trouble whatever, which did not mean they didn't want to—nor that they couldn't have given trouble. They could. Plenty. They were not only intelligent men; they were clever and calculating, able to take advantage of every point in their favor.
So Doc Savage kept them under the influence of a drug concoction which was harmless, but maintained a condition closely resembling normal sleep. They arranged the dosage so that each man revived at twenty-four-hour intervals, and was given some exercise and food. Close guard was kept at such times.
Monk and Ham managed to quarrel fairly consistently. They had brought along their pets, two animals that furnished ammunition for dissension. Monk's pet was a pig he had named Habeas Corpus after the law profession in order to irritate Ham, who had no use for pigs in any form. Habeas Corpus had long legs, a snout of prodigious length, and ears that were almost wings. Ham's pet was a small chimpanzee—remarkable because of the astounding resemblance the animal bore to homely Monk—which he had dubbed Chemistry, a name intended to aggravate Monk.
On the morning of the fifth day, the Rocket engines stopped and the anchor went down with a great deal of hoarse, grinding noise.
"Trinidad," Monk announced. "This old ark is plenty fast."
They had anchored out where the big cruise liners usually dropped hook, and lighters were swinging alongside weighted with wooden cases which were to be loaded in the Rocket hold.
Doc Savage gathered his aides together. "You will watch the prisoners closely," he said.
He turned to Sanda MacNamara, who had been the object of an abundance of attention from Monk and Ham during the trip. This morning she was efficient in slacks. Not hard to look at either.
"Miss MacNamara," Doc said, "will you show me the spot in the jungle where your brother disappeared?"
"We'll need a plane."
Doc nodded, told Monk and the others: "The captain says the ship will be here all day loading. We should be back before night."
Doc Savage produced grease paint and darkened Sanda's hands and face, then his own. He brought out a rowdyish cotton frock, such as the natives affected, for the girl, and a tattered pair of duck trousers and rugged shirt for himself.
"This is hardly necessary, is it?" the girl asked.
"Impossible to be sure," Doc told her. "For almost five days now, nothing has happened, and that in itself is a little suspicious."
Fresh fruit was being brought aboard the ship through a hull hatch which opened slightly above the waterline. Doc and Sanda passed out through this, descended a short stairway to a wet, tossing float, and the bronze man hailed one of the black bumboatmen who sculled a rickety old dinghy. Doc spoke the fellow's native tongue—the black was out of the mainland jungles—and they dickered for a few moments over the cost of being sculled ashore before money changed hands.
The black sent his old boat past the swarm of half-naked stevedores busy strong-arming cargo up a long gangplank, or jacking heavier boxes into cargo nets that were like fish nets made of inch-rope. Doc studied the stevedores, paid particular attention to the faces of passengers lined along the

rail. He did not seem particularly pleased.
"Lots of Hispanolans on board," he remarked.
"I wouldn't know," Sanda said.
She was a little peeved. The bronze man had enforced a suggestion that she remain in her cabin; that had been easy enough the first day or two while the ship was in cold northern waters, but once it had entered the Gulf Stream and lambent sunlight, the cabin interiors had not been attractive.
"You are the daughter of the president of a country that is at war with Hispanola," Doc pointed out. "And this ship is headed for a Hispanola seaport."
"It was your idea for me to get on the boat!" Sanda snapped.
"It is also my idea for you to keep your identity unknown."
They hired a very large and very old touring car piloted by a brown-skinned maniac; they headed for the airport as fast as the ancient collection of rattles would travel, pedestrians and bicyclists scattering into the roadside bamboo patches. There were fifty bicycles to every car.
They received quite a ceremonious greeting at the big Pan-American seaplane base. There was even a reception committee of local officialdom.
"I thought," Doc Savage told the manager of an aerial taxi service which rented seaplanes, "that my radio messages said this was to be a secret."
The man grinned carefully, said: "Oh, I knew you'd be broadminded about that. Fact you're renting one of my planes is a boost. I need the advertising."
Doc said nothing more.
They used a small seaplane, not as new as it might have been. Doc tested it carefully, borrowed parachutes from the operations office before he took off.
Sanda made a dot on the map of the South American jungle.
"There," she said, "is where—whatever it was—happened to my brother."

THE sun filled the sky with such glare that lifting the eyes was like looking at the stabbing blue flash of a welding torch, while jungle green spread to the horizon, the hue of boiled spinach, except for a muddy-looking worm that lay twisted and wrinkled below, a worm of a river that gave the illusion of fattening as the plane sank toward it.
"That the sand bar?"
"Yes."
"The plane is still there," Doc pointed out, rather needlessly.
Tufted jungle arose above the wings, then the floats hammered the waves, knocking out spray, and rather slowly their plane bogged down in the water as it lost speed. Doc did not beach the craft on the sand bar. Instead, he put out a small anchor and paid line until they could jump from the floats to the bar; then he snubbed the craft.
The girl craned her neck and stared at the sand. Her face was strange when she turned it to the bronze man. "You can see yourself. There were no footprints except my own."
Doc said nothing, but climbed to the sand bar and studied the thing thoughtfully, noting the footprints which Sanda had made several days before.
Jungle water birds had tracked the bar somewhat; there were marks where alligators had crawled. But there was no trace of human feet except those left by the girl on her previous visit.
Sanda shuddered.
"You can see how impossible it was!" she gasped. "As weird as that black knife killing Henry Lee, then vanishing."
Doc said, "You sure there were no alligator tracks close to the plane when you were here?"
The girl glanced about. Something occurred to her, some realization that caused her mouth to open, but no sound to come, and her right hand to lift to her throat, fingers closing slowly in a clutching way. "Tracks!" she said. "Tracks!" Her voice climbed. "But that's weird, too!"
"Weird?"
"There wasn't a mark here the first time. Not a track."

DOC SAVAGE ran along the wing of the overturned plane, leaped, and landed on the pontoon of their own plane, which had swung on the anchor tether until it was close to the sand bar.
"We might as well leave," he said.
Sanda stared at him.
"What about my brother?"
Doc Savage's voice was confident. "I wouldn't worry particularly about him."
She studied his face, trying to tell whether there was any falseness, any acting, behind the confidence with which he spoke.
"You are sure he is alive?"
"Not sure. You want the truth from me—I think he is alive."
"Can't we find him now? Maybe he is somewhere close."
"He is probably a long way from here now."
She thought that over. She was puzzled. "But he was here? He was in the plane when it fell, wasn't he?"

"Your brother was in the plane when it struck this sand bar."
The bronze man then grasped the line and began pulling up the other line they had dropped. He stowed it in the pontoon where it belonged, then took the controls. Sanda climbed in. She had many questions but decided to hold them until they were in the air.
The plane plowed forward, vaulted up on step and raced thumping across the river waves, slid up sluggishly into the hot air.
It flew for slightly more than fifteen minutes, climbing most of the time, before the wing came off.
There was no warning—the only sound was a sharp twang of a noise—before the wing was suddenly whirling around in the air behind them like a big yellow feather. The plane sank, wounded side down, began to turn as it fell, around and around, slowly at first, then faster until the spin became dizzying, and the noise of its fall, a whistling rush of air at the beginning, became a great funereal moan as the craft hurtled at the tufted green of the jungle.

Chapter X. THE QUEER NAVY

IT had fallen upon Ham to drug, exercise and feed Lord Dusterman, the munitions magnate. Lord Dusterman's title was quite real, incidentally, and his position was at the top of the social vortex in London's Mayfair, the Riviera and Palm Beach. Naturally, Monk had accused Ham of giving Lord Dusterman special privileges as a prisoner, and for the sake of the squabble involved, Ham had not denied it.
Privately, Ham detested Lord Dusterman—his opinion of all seven prisoners was not too high, if it came to that. It would be next to an impossibility to lump off seven richer men at one whack, but wealth alone had long ago ceased to impress Ham. He was no pauper himself.
Lord Dusterman awakened at the end of a regular twenty-four-hour interval of drug-induced sleep, and Ham waggled the end of a blackjack under his nose and advised, "You know by now that the thing to do is keep quiet and follow orders. Take some exercises. Then eat. After that, you get another shot of bye-bye."
"Thank you," Lord Dusterman said, not cheerfully. "Where are we? The boat seems to have stopped."
"Trinidad."
"The island off the north coast of South America—the one where they have the asphalt lake?"
"Yes."
"Just what in the devil," asked Lord Dusterman, "are you keeping us prisoner for?"
He had asked that question before.
"We're protecting you," Ham explained.
"Oh—hell!"
"Well, you'll notice that there have not been any more attempts to kill you since we took over. No more black daggers."
"Humph!" Lord Dusterman suddenly made a pass at Ham with his fist. The blow missed. "This is costing me millions of dollars!" the man screamed, hysterical with rage.
Ham grinned. "Why do rich men always think the world can't get along without them?"
Lord Dusterman, looking blankly furious, subsided, and ate in silence. Without Ham noticing, he managed to stow the napkin inside his shirt. Finishing his meal, he stood up, walked into the private bathroom which was a part of the cabin.
As soon as he was out of sight of Ham, he tied the napkin around his arm, tourniquet fashion, just above the elbow. Then he went stamping back into the cabin.
"Gimme the shot," he snarled.
The drug was administered with a hypodermic needle in the forearm. Ham administered it—failing to discover the napkin tied tightly around the man's arm above the elbow.
Lord Dusterman flung himself into the bed and yanked the sheets over his head.
Ham laughed, said, "Go ahead and pout."

LORD DUSTERMAN smiled fiercely under the sheets, then deliberately sank his teeth into his arm where the hypo needle had planted its chemical. He began sucking the wound. He was giving himself the conventional treatment for snakebite, shutting off circulation above the wound and sucking out the poison, which in this case was the chemical-inducing sleep.
He managed to stave off the effects of the stuff; stretching out, he breathed deeply as if asleep.
Ham was satisfied that the man was again under the influence of the drug, which meant that he would sleep blissfully for another twenty-four hours. "Come on, Chemistry," Ham told his pet chimp. "Let's go quarrel with that funny-looking Monk."
They left the stateroom.
Lord Dusterman rolled out of the bunk, but folded down on the floor when he tried to stand. The chemical had taken effect to some extent, he realized. He crawled to the bathroom, doused his face with cold water, and after several attempts could walk in a wobbling fashion as far as the cabin door, where he began working upon the lock with the tine of a fork, a fork that he had stolen two days ago, for he'd had this plan in mind for some time.

He had been a mechanic in arms plants in his youth, and his fingers still retained much of their skill; he prided himself on that. He got the door open. The corridor was empty.
He did not go to the captain of the Rocket, because he was not sure that money could buy the captain’s help against Doc Savage. At best, such an arrangement would take time to consummate. What he wanted was men whom money could buy, body and soul. He moved along the rail, saw the workmen on the lighters. Five minutes later he joined them, singled out one of the most likely-looking for his purpose.
He used the opening that he knew would be most effective. Doc had not taken his money from him. He flashed a roll of greenbacks.
"Can you get ten good men?" he asked.
The stevedore eyed the money, reached out and thumbed up the edges of the bills to see the denominations.
"How good?" he asked, a little hoarsely.
"I won’t fool you. Some of them may get killed."
"That’s bad."
"The pay will be five hundred dollars a day. Twice that to you!"
The stevedore licked his lips; his hands opened and closed spasmodically. "How soon?"
"Twenty minutes."
Once more the man dampened his lips. He looked out over the sweating stevedores, selecting individuals with his eyes.
"Can do," he said abruptly. "If that’s not stage money."
"It’s not."
"How do I know?"
Lord Dusterman handed him a hundred-dollar bill, said, "Suppose you take it up to the purser and see."
The man went away, came back satisfied, and grinned widely when Lord Dusterman said, "Keep that"—The munitions king leafed out four more bills of the same denomination. "And these—for expenses."
The two drew aside and spoke in low voices for some time, Lord Dusterman making all of the long speeches.

HAM BROOKS looked into Lord Dusterman’s cabin about two o’clock, and even went over and took Dusterman’s pulse, finding it satisfactory. Astonishment was a mild word to apply to his feelings when the supposedly unconscious man suddenly got him by the throat.
Two hard blows with his fists freed Ham. He staggered backward—into the arms of three men who had been standing sweating in the heat of the little bath. The trio must have had experience with their fists, because they had Ham senseless a moment later.
"Tie him," Dusterman said. "Gag him too."
One of the hired stevedores exhibited a knife, said: "We can put him in the bathtub and use this on him and he won’t be as likely to give us any trouble later."
Lord Dusterman shook his head quickly. "No. He’s very important alive."
"Ransom?"
"No—well, not cash ransom anyway. His safety should be a potent argument to keep Doc Savage from molesting us further."
The other frowned. "You said Doc Savage?"
"Yes." Lord Dusterman watched the man closely, anxious to see what effect the bronze man’s name would have. He had not advised these men who they were going up against when he hired them, for the good reason that men who have already jumped in the water are more likely to go swimming.
The spokesman of the hired rescuers swore.
"All right—we know why you didn’t tell us who it was," he said. "But we’re in it now. We’ll go ahead."
Lord Dusterman put his chin up, said: "You are working for a combination of men more powerful than Doc Savage ever was or ever will be."
"I hope we don’t find out you’re mistaken," the stevedore said.
The door knob rattled—one of them had locked it on the inside, fortunately—and Dusterman made a quick gesture, sending his men to either side of the door, after which he unlatched the door.
Monk walked in and never saw what hit him, although the weapon happened to be a length of lead pipe wrapped in cloth.
Later, much later, when Monk awakened, he had the idea that Ham had conked him.
Ham was lying on the bunk, only his eyes showing.
Ham then lifted his head, and Monk perceived that he was also gagged.
"W-h-a-t g-o-e-s o-n?" Monk signaled.
"L-o-o-k b-e-h-i-n-d y-o-u," Ham suggested with his fingers.
Monk turned over and discovered that he had company. Renny and Long Tom reposed on the floor. All were festooned with ropes and thoroughly muffled, and not one was in a pleasant humor. Furthermore, each man was tethered to some object which made it impossible to get together to unfasten each

other’s bonds; Monk found that he was lashed to the footpost of the bunk.
Later, the rolling motion of the floor convinced him that he was not dizzy, as he had supposed, but that the steamer was moving in a seaway.

HISPANOLA was not a large nation, and not a prosperous one, even by Central and South American measurements. The climate was tropical for the most part, and the products were the typical ones: coffee, chicle, rubber. The natives of the lowlands were an indolent lot, as often as not scorning other garb for xanaps, sandals made of tapir hide held on with coarse henequin rope, and long sleeveless jackets called huipils. On the tierra fria, the higher plateau country inland, the populace had a little more life and wore conventional shoes, pants and shirts, although the peasant women pounded their meal in the stone metate and brazo. It was naturally a lazy country, this Hispanola; the streams swarmed with tuber, machaca and other varieties of fish which could be caught quite simply by gathering a berry called pixbicabam, tossing it in the most convenient river, whereupon the fish were stupefied and rose to the surface. It was hardly to be expected that the government of Hispanola would be any shining example of efficiency; the natives apparently had never expected it, and they had never been disappointed. Taxes were never absent, and nothing ever showed for them, except a war now and then, such as the current one with Cristobal.
The captain of the steamship Rocket was astounded when a trim, yachty-looking craft came charging over the horizon, swung alongside and hailed him.
"You will heave to!" shouted an authoritative voice from this vessel. "By order of the Hispanola navy."
The Rocket skipper hadn’t been aware that Hispanola possessed a navy, but here was a sample. A hundred-and-fifty-foot sample, neat and shining, with a three-inch gun on the forward deck, another aft, and a torpedo tube forward. The colors of Hispanola danced on the flagstaff.
The Rocket skipper had a vocabulary.
"What the blankety-blanked swizzle-tailed blue blank blazes blank-blank do you think you are?" he inquired through a megaphone. "The hell with you! I’m not stopping!"
No words came from the yachty-looking Hispanola boat. Instead, both three-inch guns turned around on their carriages and gaped at the vitals of the Rocket.
"Stop engines!" the captain of the Rocket howled into the engine-room tubes. Then, while his vessel was stopping, he leaned over the bridge weather cloth and recited all the profanity he knew.
A boarding party arrived in charge of a spick-and-span officer who said, "Sorry. We must search your vessel for spies."
"Spies?"
"Exactly." The neat officer gestured at his men. "Proceed with the search."
The captain of the Rocket was an old hand at his business, and he’d had experience running arms into Spain during the revolution, so he concluded that silence was the better course. Nothing concerned him but his cargo, and that was bound for Hispanola anyway. If there were any spies aboard, they could look out for themselves.
The captain watched, swearing and puzzled, as four figures wrapped in sheets were carried into the small boat.
"Who are they?" he yelled. "If you’re carrying off my passengers, I’ve got a right to know which ones."
The neat Hispanolan officer showed him the end of a long-snouted automatic, said, "We have the guns—so you have no rights."
Seven more men walked off the Rocket. The captain stared at them, for he hadn’t seen them before, and he should have, because his passenger list was not large. He had no means of knowing that the seven were the wealthy men whom Doc Savage had seized in New York.
The boarding party returned to the yachty-looking vessel on which the three-inch guns were mounted, and the propellers of the craft kicked a boil of water out astern, and it soon vanished over the horizon.
Stewards reported that Doc Savage’s four aides were missing. That explained the identity of the four figures swathed in sheets.
The Rocket skipper stamped into the radio room and began raising international hell. He sent radio messages to the premier and the parliament of his country, to London, to Washington, to the League of Nations, to the president of Hispanola, and to everyone else he knew who had any influence.
From the president of Hispanola came a radio answer that gave him something to wonder about:
Captain S.S. Rocket,
Enroute Hispanola.
No such vessel as you say stopped you belongs to the Hispanola navy. Craft is unknown to us.
The Hon. Miguel Lenares,
President, Republic of Hispanola.
The captain of the Rocket deliberated over this for a while and eventually voiced his conclusions aloud by muttering, "Now that’s a hell of a funny thing to happen!"

Chapter XI. A MAN ALONE

THE piam-piam is a tropical bird that was probably named after its cry, a monotonous piam-piam noise which the bird emits as it flies from tree to tree, or conducts its eternal squabbling. The birds travel in flocks, are not particularly difficult to capture, but make a very tough menu item, eating one of them being rather like making a meal off slightly boiled binder twine.

Sanda MacNamara said, "I hope they're nourishing."

Doc Savage said nothing, having a hunch that the young woman's remark was a reflection on his jungle cooking. The previous evening they had dined on wacho parrot, which was tender when young.

"Two days," remarked Sanda, "have passed since you so thoughtfully had parachutes aboard when the wing came off our plane. How much longer do you think it will take us to get somewhere?"

"We should reach an oil-prospecting camp on the river this afternoon." Doc extended a zapote nut about the size of a baseball, brown, with a custard-flavored meat that was cool and mealy.

Overhead there was superheated tropical sunlight, but where they crouched it was comparatively gloomy. The jungle was thicker than Sanda had believed any natural growth could be. The mat of bushes interlaced inextricably with lianas was almost impenetrable to anything larger than a small monkey, averaged between twenty-five and forty feet, and above it towered the upper lanes of the jungle, great trees standing so close together that their branches interlocked, festooned with thick vines and lianas.

"When," asked Sanda grimly, "do you think that acid was put on the wing fastenings of the plane?"

"Probably the night before we arrived," Doc said. "The stuff would eat into the metal slowly."

"But that was before our steamship reached Trinidad."

"Yes."

"But that—that's supernatural! How did they know we were on the ship and would rent a plane? Or is it a they? Could this thing we're fighting be something supernatural after all?"

Doc said: "The man I rented the plane from advertised the fact, remember. The news was possibly cabled by a news agency. And Trinidad is on the main South American line of Pan-American Airways, remember. A reception party could have gotten there ahead of us by plane."

Sanda MacNamara cupped her undeniably nice chin in a palm and contemplated the unpleasant wall of jungle.

"There haven't been any black daggers for some time," she said.

Sanda added: "And I still don't believe that story about there being a black stone with a curse."

Doc got up and stretched, but did not offer, any comment.

"There's something mysterious behind this," Sanda continued, "and you know what I think? I'll bet you one Cristobal peso, which is about thirty cents American, that this black-dagger mystery and the war between Cristobal and Hispanola are all tied in together."

Doc looked at her sharply. "What do you base that idea on?"

"Because neither one makes sense," Sanda said. "There's no apparent reason for Hispanola declaring war on Cristobal either."

"You seem to have some clairvoyant powers," the bronze man said.

Doc Savage did not explain his remark about clairvoyance. They took to the jungle instead. Sanda placed herself on the bronze man's back. She had not yet become accustomed to that means of locomotion, so she shut her eyes tightly. She had always hoped she possessed more than an average share of courage, but she had been doubting it. Because this bronze man, when traveling through the jungle, was something unbelievable.

The bronze man climbed to the upper jungle lanes, then proceeded to travel in a fashion that Sanda had considered possible only in comic strips and motion pictures. Time after time, the bronze giant ran along swaying boughs so high in the air that Sanda felt faint when she looked down. He covered, with easy leaps, dizzy spaces.

For almost two days now they had traveled in his fantastic fashion, traversing, as Sanda well knew, a distance that would have taken weeks had they resorted to hacking their way through the jungle mat with machetes in the conventional fashion.

The two days had worked a noticeable effect upon Sanda. It was not the fact that she had lost a great deal of her terror while traversing the dizzy heights clinging to the bronze man's back—and yet gripped the branches in tight desperation the moment he left her and went scouting for food. She could understand that.

The thing that concerned her was not her admiration for the bronze man's physical strength, which had become tremendous. She was beginning to realize how that had been developed.

What she did not understand was inside her, and it was new, and it bothered her, and of late, just the last hour or so, it had set her to remembering . . . remembering that, really, she had never been in love before—

They came abruptly to a growth of uamil, low bush a dozen feet or more high which had grown up where the good timber of the jungle had been cut off. Beyond this was the river, and following that, they came shortly to the oil-prospecting camp.

"How did you know just where to find these oil prospectors?" Sanda asked.

"Johnny happened to be talking about it," Doc explained. "Johnny is a geologist, and he keeps track of all oil and mineral prospecting expeditions."

Because there were Indians in this jungle who used poisoned blowpipe arrows on any strangers they could reach, the oil surveyors were camped on rafts and boats which were anchored in midstream, out of arrow range of the shore. The bunk "tents" were made of galvanized iron, which would deflect a spent arrow. They were erected on rafts, and there were speedboats for use up and down the rivers.
Doc borrowed an all-steel launch powered with a converted sixteen-cylinder automobile motor, and driven by a young oil man who seemed to consider any speed less than forty miles an hour a reflection on himself.
They reached the base camp of the oil-exploration mission, which was equipped with a radio. Doc Savage got on the radio, and in the name of the oil prospectors, ordered down a fast combination land-and-sea plane. Playing safe, he did not mention his own name at all.
While waiting for the plane to arrive, the bronze man sent a radio message to Renny—and got an answer back which disclosed what had happened to the steamship Rocket.
During the next several hours, Doc Savage sent and received more than two dozen radio messages. By that time, the facts were unpleasantly clear.
The steamship Rocket had been stopped by a mysterious yachty-looking vessel, which had removed Doc Savage's four aides and the seven extremely wealthy men whom Doc's assistants had been "protecting." The yacht-like vessel then had disappeared, and no trace of it had been found, and no one had been located who knew anything about it.

THEY flew toward the coast of Hispanola. The plane was a high-wing job, not as streamlined as it might have been, but making up in engine horsepower for other shortcomings. However, it did use gasoline, Sanda declared, as fast as a circus elephant could drink water. The engine made a great deal of noise; flying at five thousand feet, they could use binoculars and see gaudy splashes of color that were jungle birds frightened by the plane bawling.
They came to the seacoast some fifty miles south of the Hispanola border. Doc began following the coastline.
"If we're forced down, they'll either shoot me or lock me up for so long it won't be funny," Sanda pointed out. "I forgot to tell you—down here, we have a custom that is either very convenient, or just too bad, depending on the outlook. As soon as we declare a war, we issue a proclamation that all the leaders on the other side are criminals. In this case, that would include me. And I'll bet they would make it include you."
Doc Savage offered no comment, but flew steadily along the Hispanola coastline, using the binoculars almost continuously.
The Hispanola coastline was swampy, with small mangrove-matted islands offshore, and deep tidal creeks, usually full of rushing current, threading for miles inland. Some of the creeks had navigable channels, and the bronze man gave attention to these in particular.
The steamship must have been driven inshore by some hurricane in the past, or possibly it had been nosing along the tidal river when a viento, one of those sudden, terrific storms of the locality, had grounded it so hopelessly that no attempt had been made to salvage anything that was not immediately portable. It lay there, half-buried in the festering jungle, turning to rust.
They flew on, passed over two small cities, one the principal seaport, crowded with munitions shipping. Doc Savage had visited the place on previous occasions, in the course of travel, and the difference was striking. Whereas one steamer was a normal quota for the harbor, there were now at least fifty vessels unloading.
Then a pair of military planes climbed up after them. Very modern craft, Doc saw without pleasure. Fortunately, there were clouds to the northward, and after a race and some dodging, he lost the inquisitive pursuers.
Having covered the remainder of the Hispanola coastline, the bronze man turned back and seemed to be cruising up and down aimlessly, far out to sea.
"What's the sense of this?" Sanda asked. "You're not doing anything, that I can see."
"Waiting for the afternoon rain."
At this season of the year, a short rainstorm arrived dependably each day at about four o'clock, a brief affair with black clouds, snorting gusts of wind and rain that came down as if washtubs were being emptied.
In the middle of this gully-washer, Doc Savage landed on a tidal creek not far from the rusting hulk of the wrecked steamship. They could not see a hundred yards. Cascading thunder was so loud and continuous that at times they hardly heard the motor of their own plane.
The wind caught their plane, swept it against the mangroves. Doc worked furiously, kept it from being damaged, and finally the wind subsided and the rain came down, in such profusion that it seemed at times that they had sunk.
"Where are we?" Sanda asked.
Doc told her.
"That's a great place to be!" the girl said, rather disgustedly.

SANDA MACNAMARA had worked up a quantity of confidence in Doc Savage during the past week that surprised herself. In the last two days particularly, she had started wondering at the magnitude of

her own trust. She was not, she hoped, normally a suspicious soul, but neither was she inclined to believe implicitly in others; there was a certain element of frailty in every human, she had learned.

As they worked through the dripping jungle, Sanda mentally warned herself against this. She was clinging to the bronze giant's back, and she could feel the ripple and snap of his unbelievable muscles as he traveled simian fashion through the interlacing treetops.

They dropped down from the upper jungle lanes into thick shrubbery. The bronze man admonished silence, and they crept forward. There was no more rain, the sun had come out brilliantly.

"See!" Doc Savage pointed.

They could look across the tidal creek into the stern of the rusting wreck of the steamship. The stern had been cut away, and bulkheads and interior decks of the huge craft removed, leaving a vast hangar-like interior which had been converted into a boathouse.

A gleaming yacht of a craft, more than a hundred feet long, narrow of beam and speedy, lay inside. They could see that a three-inch gun was mounted on her stern. A number of folding chairs were scattered on her afterdeck, occupied by men, some of whom wore neat naval-looking uniforms.

Sanda looked at Doc strangely.

"Are you a magician?" she asked.

"What's magic about this?"

"That boat is the one which took your friends and the seven wealthy men off the steamship Rocket."

"Yes. That's what I expected."

"And that's what gets me—how did you expect it? What kind of crystal gazing did you do to learn they were here?"

The bronze man's answer was slow; it was always a little embarrassing to him to explain motives and processes. He said finally, "The yachty-looking vessel had to disappear somewhere, since it had not been sighted. And the Hispanola coast seemed the most likely spot, due to the number of inlets, many of which lead into uninhabited jungle, such as this. So it was a logical idea to go along the coast looking for hideouts."

"How came this old wreck to strike you as a possible one?"

"Some years ago, a steamship was wrecked on the reefs off the Florida Keys," Doc said, "and the interior of the craft was ripped out and serves as a shelter for fishing boats during minor storms. It lies there today, and any tourist driving over the Key West highway can observe it by looking out to sea."

Sanda looked at the bronze man strangely.

"Say," she said, "you've figured out a lot more about this mystery than you're telling, haven't you?"

Doc Savage seemed not to hear her. He crawled through the jungle, heading inland parallel to the banks of the wide and deep tidal creek. Sanda stared after him, wondering why he hadn't heard her; she knew his hearing was as extraordinary as the rest of him, because yesterday, while traversing the jungle, he had heard a party of Indians and told her exactly how many of them there were—a fact she had later verified by counting from a distance—and she had been able to detect no sound whatever. He hadn't wanted to hear her, she concluded.

Three-quarters of a mile upstream, after the tidal creek turned, Doc Savage entered the water and swam across, trailed by Sanda, who swam excellently. They took to the jungle again, and went back downstream toward the wreck.

Eventually, Doc halted.

"You wait here," he said.

"You're going to have a look alone?"

"Yes."

"If you don't come back?"

"Then," Doc said, "you had better return to our plane and see if you can make your home, Cristobal, in one hop."

Chapter XII. JUNGLE DERELICT

THE bow of the wrecked ship had been driven up on shore in the same way that a beached rowboat is drawn up on the bank, and the hulk obviously had been there for years because the tropical jungle had matted up around it and long vines had crawled up the scaling sides and across the decrepit decks, so that the whole aspect of the thing was unpleasantly depressive. A small doorway had been opened with a cutting torch in the bow plates close to the ground, but Doc Savage avoided the aperture, surmising a guard would be present.

Instead, the bronze man found a long-jointed piece of bamboo, worked on it with a knife until he had a tube through which he could breathe, after which he submerged himself in the water and worked along the bottom until he found the hull of the wrecked steamer, and without coming above the surface, located the stern hole and entered. Finally, when he had found the yacht hull, he lifted to the surface. He was close to the yacht rudder post; overhang of the stern hid him.

The craft was a yacht, converted to this strange use. The bronze man was already sure of that.

The close confines of the hull of the wrecked ship made the casual conversation of the men loafing on deck audible to Doc, where he lay under the stern with his head barely out of water.
"My guess," said one of the men on deck, "is that we'll have a nice long loafing spell."
"Nice? What's nice about it? This is a hell of a place to loaf!"
Another voice, one that spoke with a Hispanolan accent, said, "There are worse spots. The trenches, for instance."
"There hasn't been much trench fighting, so far," someone reminded him.
The Hispanolan sighed. "I hope there will not be. I have a brother with a machine-gun company."
"Well, he'll be safe enough. This war is going to be over soon."
The other snorted. "If so, why is this yacht being kept in readiness?"
"Yes," another man put in. "I would like to know why too. You know and I know what this boat is. We all know. It was given to old Miguel Lenares, president of Hispanola, to use if things went wrong and he had to escape. If they are so sure Hispanola will conquer Cristobal immediately, why do they keep this yacht at hand?"
"Maybe because old Miguel Lenares is a cautious one."
A man laughed. "Cautious, yes. Not a bad liar, either. Did you hear about the radio messages he sent when they asked him if we belonged to the Hispanola navy? He said he had never heard of us."
There was a little general mirth at that.
"There's one thing I feel like singing and dancing about," a man remarked. "We're not running a prison."
"You mean you're glad those five Doc Savage associates are not here?"
"Yes. I didn't like that."
"I didn't like it either. But what are you going to do in a case like that?"
"Forget it, I guess. They're gone now. Everybody is gone."
"Except the blasted mosquitoes," a man said, and swore and slapped himself.

DOC SAVAGE eased farther back into the dark interior of the strangely improvised boathouse, found a dangling line, grasped it and went up the side, being careful to hang for some time with his feet touching the surface to permit water to drain off his body.
He began searching the yacht.
There seemed to be only a skeleton crew aboard; all of these were gathered on the aft deck, where it was cool.
The bronze man was interested particularly in the registry papers of the boat, the documents which would show who owned the craft. These should be in the bridge cabin; that was where he found them.
The yacht belonged, according to the documents, to Doc Savage, which was somewhat of a surprise, the bronze man never having seen the craft before.
There was no trace of any of the seven wealthy men aboard.
After he had used caution for some time, Doc rejoined Sanda MacNamara, who was rapidly being consumed by mosquitoes and impatience.
She asked, "What did you find?"
"My own boat."
"Your—"
"According to the registry documents on board."
"You mean that they registered the boat in your name to embarrass you in case of trouble?" Sanda said after thinking it over. "How could they manage that?"
"By merely swearing to false affidavits."
"What else did you learn?"
"That my friends, and the seven wealthy men, are no longer here. They were taken away—by land."
"By land?" Her tone was questioning.
"Show you," Doc said, and led her through the jungle until they came to a trail cut with machetes a long time ago, and lately trimmed to make it passable again. Where the ground was soft, there were footprints, but they were so trampled as not to be very recognizable.
"I don't see how you know," Sanda said.
"Did you happen to notice Monk's shoes?"
Sanda pondered. "Didn't he wear sport shoes with crepe rubber soles? I don't see what that has to do with it."
"The soles weren't crepe rubber. They were a chemical composition which slowly wears away, and in doing so, leaves a footprint which can be made visible by chemical treatment. Monk perfected those shoe soles himself, uses them all the time, is very proud of them, and wears out a pair of them every two weeks on the average."
Doc Savage had long since shed his coat, and had torn off his trousers at the knees, but he still wore a rather clever vest, fashioned of chain mail of an alloy metal which was strong enough to stop ordinary bullets, and also aërated so that it was not excessively hot. This vest contained a number of exterior pockets which held metal capsules of varying size that contained a quantity of his more essential gadgets.

From the vest he removed a metal tube; this had a button on the top and a tiny aperture, and when he pressed upon the button, there was a hissing sound and vapor flew out of the aperture.
"Have to use this sparingly," he explained, and went over the trail with the stuff, moving the vaporizer back and forth as though applying paint with an air gun.
One set of the footprints on the trail took on a faintly yellowish hue. "Monk's chemical shoe soles," Doc said.
After that, they followed the trail rapidly. When it branched and both branches seemed equally used, Doc used the chemical test again, finding that the yellowish footprints took the right-hand branch.
They followed that trail rapidly until there was a loud crashing noise behind them, a sound that brought them whirling about in alarm, to discover that what had seemed an innocent section of matted vines had fallen like a gate across the trail.
From some spot nearby, a voice said dryly. "This happens to be the end of the trail!"

SANDA, having given a wild start of flight, started to plunge into the undergrowth beside the trail, but Doc flung out a quick arm and stopped her. He held her while his flake-gold eyes probed intently. The surrounding wall of jungle was too suspiciously solid. And his eyes began picking out the thorns, the ends of which were black-tipped.
The voice said: "You might get through the thorns, you know. I think we managed to poison the tips of all of them, but of course there is a chance we missed some, in which case you might get through. Granting that we failed to shoot you in the meantime."
Sanda said grimly, "We walked right into it!"
The voice laughed.
"Yes," it added. "But the error was natural. You had no way of knowing we had discovered the clever composition of those shoe soles which the one called Monk wore. Neither could you surmise that we would set this trap just on the long chance that you would find this spot and follow that trail."
Doc said, "You weren't overlooking chances, were you?"
"Not many. To tell the truth, we thought it was silly excess precaution when we were ordered to rig this reception."
Doc said nothing more. He was not, at the moment, enthusiastic about his own intelligence. He had walked headlong into this mess; he had hardly given the surrounding jungle a glance while following the trail, which made it difficult to blame anyone but himself. Ordinarily, he managed to avoid such predicaments as this through the exercise of alertness. He had not been alert.
He glanced at Sanda MacNamara, then looked away and made a mental resolution. He would have to stop letting his mind wander to the item of femininity, even to as exquisitely put-together a sample as this one. In his profession, he had long ago concluded that women were synonymous with trouble, and here was an example to illustrate how right he had been. He had been thinking girl, and he would have to stop that, even if it might be a hell of a job.
The man who had spoken, said, "If you have guns and ideas of using them—don't," and came into view, walking out on a limb some twenty feet overhead. "Drop any weapons you may have," he ordered.
Doc Savage removed a pocketknife and let it fall; Sanda discarded her small automatic.
The man spoke in a dialect used by Indian natives of Hispanola, and more men, almost black ones, appeared in the trees. They had ropes, the ends of which they fastened to branches, afterward sliding down carefully to avoid the thorns.
More white men had appeared in the trees. They wore gas masks, and held fully-automatic rifles of the new military type.
Sanda looked at Doc, asked, "Shall we try to do something?"
"If you can think of anything."
"She'd better not!" one of the men said.

AFTER the thorny trap gate—the thorns were poisoned, they were informed—had been lifted, they were carried bodily back along the trail, ankles and wrists bound, elbows lashed to their sides, and knees roped together, with a dark-skinned aborigine trailing behind them holding a knife made from the poisonous barb of a sting ray and looking as if he wanted to use it.
They had hardly started when the black dagger appeared in the sky.
Doc Savage might not have noticed the thing had one of the natives not stared upward and suddenly cried out, and the bronze man followed the fellow's superstitiously horrified stare and saw the dagger.
The dark knife was about the size of the others he had seen, approximately two hundred feet overall in length—it was hard to be sure, because he could see the thing only partially through the roofing of the jungle leafage—and the hilt span somewhere near fifty feet. The entire party stopped at once, giving Doc a chance to examine the sepia thing more closely. It was quite high in the sky, between five hundred and a thousand feet, as nearly as he could estimate, and the blade pointed, whether by coincidence or not, in the direction of the rusting wreck of the ship.
Perhaps a minute, the black dagger stood in the sky, then it disappeared, its departure an

uncannily abrupt fading, so that it seemed magically to vanish.
No one said anything for a moment, and then Sanda MacNamara screamed. There was ripping hysteria in her shriek. She cried out shrilly for her brother, Juan Don, and after that the noises she made were incoherent.
A man muttered, "She’s got the screaming-meemies."
"And who wouldn’t?" another growled.
They glanced upward at the spot where the black dagger had appeared.
Sanda continued to shriek as they carried her on through the jungle, then later her sounds became more a series of pitiful whimperings, with now and then a burst of hair-raising laughter.
Doc said: "You had better let me help her. I’m a physician."
"You’re more than a physician—you’re more hell than a cyclone when you’re loose," a man advised him. "You stay tied up."
"But she’s snapped under the strain."
"If you got away, we’d do some snapping ourselves."
They reached the rusting derelict steamship inside which the yacht lay, and there was a warm exchange of profanity and denials, the crew of the yacht insisting Doc Savage had not been in that vicinity, and the bronze man, in order to warm the argument, repeating bits of their conversation which he had overheard in order to convince them that he had been there.
Doc, who had expected to be taken aboard the concealed yacht, got a surprise. He and Sanda were loaded into a launch, which began following a tortuous course through the mangrove creeks, then put out to sea and raced along the coast. The craft, for a small one, was remarkably seaworthy. Later, they put in at the same Hispanolan seaport city from which the military planes had climbed into the sky that afternoon to chase Doc Savage’s ship.
A squad of soldiers met them on the dock.
"You are under military arrest," an officer advised grimly. "The charge is treason."

Chapter XIII. PAN AND FIRE

MANY men had taken chisels and sledges and other stone-working tools, and had fashioned hewn rock into geometrical blocks approximately four feet square; then they had piled these stones together, sealing the joints with a mortar that had become as obdurate as the stone itself, and had fashioned stone cells roughly four feet by eight. Doors had been constructed which were barely wide enough to admit a man, the portals being iron bars scarcely less thick than a man’s leg. All of this construction work had been done about four hundred years ago, and seemed to have suffered very little from age.
"I never saw a more solid place," remarked Sanda, after trying ineffectually to rattle the bars of her prison cell.
"Better be careful," Doc warned. "A guard might overhear us, and learn that your mind hasn’t snapped."
"Wasn’t my acting good?"
"Very good. But you weren’t the type to snap in that fashion."
"I thought," Sanda said, explaining the reason for her hysterics in the jungle, "that they might turn you loose to take care of me, and you would get a chance to make a break."
"It was a nice attempt."
Sanda pondered for a moment. "What did you make of that black dagger? Any more than before? Is it still such a mystery?"
"It’s unusual."
Sanda made a sound that was more angry than hopeless. "If I just had some idea of what became of my brother! I’ll never forget the incredible way he vanished. And that . . . that . . . black thing in the sky!"
Doc said, "This will turn out all right," putting pleasant conviction into his voice.
"You’re an actor," the girl said. "You don’t feel hopeful at all. You’re just sounding that way for my benefit. I wish you wouldn’t do that."
Doc was devising an argument that would lift her spirits, when military boots stamped down the corridor, rifle bolts rattled, then keys ground in the rusty locks and the doors were hauled open, screaming a rusty protest.
"It doesn’t look as if they’re going to wait until dawn to shoot us," Sanda said dryly.
"Come out!" a voice ordered.
Since nothing seemed to be gained by objecting, they stepped out into a ring of bayoneted, cocked rifles, and were escorted along an unappealing grayish stone passage, up stairs that seemed to rise interminably, and into a room.
The room was furnished with a long table, chairs, and more than a dozen much-uniformed officers, one of whom stood up and began speaking.
"You are before a board of the military duly and legally assembled for conducting trial by court-martial," the man stated. "Hispanola being in a state of war, military courts have superseded civilian judiciary. You will receive a fair and legal trial, and all evidence will be weighed carefully."

THE officer spoke an excellent brand of English, except that it was as expressionless as a 1907 phonograph.
Doc interrupted, "What about my four friends?"
"Friends?"
"Monk Mayfair, Renny Renwick, Ham Brooks, and Long Tom Roberts."
The officer wore such a blank expression that Doc Savage was suddenly convinced that the man had no idea of the whereabouts of Monk and the others.
Doc said, "Where are Peter van Jelk, Ahmet Ben Khali, Lord Dusterman, B. A. Arthur, Mark Costervelt, Josh Sneed and Jacques Coquine?" naming off the seven wealthy men who had explained that they were in danger because they had bought a black stone.
Reaction of the officer to that was different. He got up, came around the table, struck Doc Savage in the mouth.
"You will not mention those men again!" he said. He scowled, added, "Incidentally, we do not know them."
The officer then began picking up papers, reading charges from them.
Doc Savage listened with growing wonder. Less than eight hours had elapsed since he had been captured, so someone must have worked at top speed to assemble so many charges.
Sanda and Doc, it developed, were jointly accused of being foreign espionage agents in Hispanola territory when apprehended, a crime punishable with the death penalty.
Doc was accused of piracy in commanding a yacht registered in his own name which had stopped a neutral ship on the high seas and removed therefrom various passengers, the crime of piracy under international law and the Hispanolan statutes being punishable by hanging from the neck until life was extinct.
There was an assortment of other offenses ranging down to entry into Hispanola without passing through the proper immigration channels.
Sanda was identified as daughter of the president of Cristobal, therefore a criminal under the military regulations of Hispanola and subject to a mandatory death penalty.
Finally the officer put down all the papers, faced them, and began reciting an impressive charge which he obviously manufactured as he went along.
"Furthermore," he announced, "you are charged with the unlawful acquisition of a sacred black stone, traditional property of the descendants of ancient Incan tribes living within Hispanolan borders, and this crime, according to the law of the land, is punishable with a mandatory death penalty."
Doc said: "There is no such law on Hispanola statute books. You made that one up, just as those charges were manufactured."
Sanda nodded, snapped, "This whole thing is a farce!"
"You may present your defense," the officer said peremptorily.
Sanda said coldly, "I think we'll save our breath."

THE thick-walled cells looked more forbidding than before when they were returned to them. There was a layer of gritty dust over the floor; the air had a stagnant quality that made it almost unbreathable. Sanda occupied the cell adjacent to the one wherein the bronze man was incarcerated, and they could converse without seeing each other.
"Did you expect anything else?" Sanda asked.
"You mean—shooting us at dawn?"
"Yes."
"Under the circumstances, they're behaving logically."
"They might at least have been original."
It was very dark. Somewhere near, drops of water were falling with monotonous sounds that were made almost metallic by the acoustics of the underground labyrinth of dungeons. Once, far away in the darkness, a sentry must have spoken, and his voice reached them as a distorted conglomeration of grumbling, as though several idiots had tried to say something simultaneously.
Sanda called, "You there?"
"Yes."
"What gets me," the young woman remarked, "is the death sentence they passed on you. Suppose they do shoot you—won't that poke the international hornet's nest? You're a famous man. Shooting you may become a little complicated."
"Not," Doc said, "if it doesn't become known for several months—perhaps not at all."
"Yes, but why? I mean—why should they shoot you? Me, I can understand me. I'm from Cristobal, and my father happens to be president, and there's a war. But I don't understand their including you. They know who you are. They know that shooting you will set off the international firecrackers, if anything will. But they went ahead and railroaded you."
Doc reminded, "We started out in New York to investigate a mystery."
"Yes—the mystery of a black stone, black daggers, and just what kind of funny business is connected with them."

Doc nodded.
"That mystery," he said, "is connected directly with the so-called republic of Hispanola."
"It is?"
"And with the war between Hispanola and Cristobal," Doc added.
The significance of that statement gripped Sanda's mind and held her speechless for a while. She said finally: "The black stone, black dagger, this war—all tied in together?"
Doc breathed, "Sh-h-h! Someone is coming."
Sanda listened intently, breathed at length, "I don't hear anyone."
That was because their visitor came stealthily, and was pressed against the bars of Doc Savage's cell before he spoke in a low and strained whisper.
"This is Peter van Jelk," he said. "Don't make any noise."

VAN JELK had spoken so low that Sanda, in the next cell, had not heard. She asked, "Say, is there somebody, or isn't there?" and Van Jelk responded with a quick, imperative, "Sh-h-h!"
Doc said, "It's Van Jelk."
"Who?
I don't believe it!"
Van Jelk made small panting noises of excitement. "Be still! Please, please, be still! This is very serious for me. They were going to shoot me. They have already condemned me to death."
"Condemned you—what for?"
"Having a part in the acquisition of a sacred black stone which belonged to the descendants of the Incans residing within Hispanola, I think they said. That is as near as I can remember the charge. They didn't give me a chance. They never even listened to my denials. They . . . they—" he groped for a word— "gave me the works."
Doc said, "We have lots of questions to ask you. But first, how did you get free?"
"I was locked in a cell," Van Jelk explained. "They thought they took all my money, but they didn't. I had a hundred-dollar bill that I folded flat and put under the plate of my false teeth. I bribed the guard with that, and he gave me the key to my cell."
"Then you can get us out of here?"
"I can try."
The key made gritting and scraping noises against the rusty iron bars; finally the lock opened.
"I'll unlock the girl's cell now," Van Jelk breathed.
Doc warned: "Careful! These hinges howl like a wolf when you open the door."
Having exercised three or four minutes of infinite care, they stood in the India-ink blackness of the passage. There had been almost no sound except the grinding of the sandy dust under their feet when they moved, and because of this, Doc said, "We better take off our shoes."
While they were doing this, the bronze man whispered,
"How did they get you here, Van Jelk?"
"A yacht took us off the steamship at sea," Van Jelk explained. "Your four friends were taken off as well. We were all prisoners. The yacht had two guns mounted on it, and claimed to be a ship of the Hispanola navy. This was a lie, it developed."
"And then?"
"We were blindfolded. For some reason or other, I was singled out and separated from the others and turned over to Hispanola soldiers. I was brought here, given that farce of a court-martial, and condemned to death."
Sanda asked: "Have you any idea why you got all that special attention?"
"Not the least," Van Jelk said.
Doc put a question. "What became of my men?"
"Monk and the others, you mean?"
"Yes."
"I haven't a wisp of an idea."
"What about the other wealthy men who were . . . ah . . . associated with you in the purchase of the black stone?"
"I do not know where they were taken either."
"All he seems to know," said Sanda rather disgustedly, "is that he is in jail and wants out."
Van Jelk turned rather peevish, said: "I've told you more than you've told me! Suppose you do as much for me as I've done for you—tell me what you've found out. What is behind this fantastic mystery anyway? Why should the government of Hispanola condemn me to death? I was never anywhere near Hispanola before."
Doc asked, "The whole thing has you puzzled?"
"Yes. It's incredible. A group of my friends and I buy a black mystic stone as a normal purchase in the course of our collecting Incan relics, and all sorts of impossible things begin happening. Our friend, Sid Morrison, the man who directly purchased the stone, is murdered by a black dagger that vanishes. All of our lives are threatened. You appear and . . . ah . . . protect us, in a somewhat bizarre fashion, by putting us aboard a boat bound for South America, against our will. Incidentally, I fail to understand why you did that. Then the steamer is stopped by a mysterious

yacht, and we are taken off, and I am turned over to the Hispanola military, who condemn me to a firing squad. I wish you would make some sense of that. What are the reasons for it?"
"You want the whole thing explained?" Doc asked.
"Yes. But can you do it?"
Doc Savage had been carefully locating Van Jelk's voice in the darkness, and he had decided about where the man's jaw was situated; he sent out a fist so that the knuckles came against Van Jelk's chin with enough force to jar consciousness out of the man's brain.

Chapter XIV. RECEPTION IN CRISTOBAL

VAN JELK collapsed against Sanda, who did not realize what had happened, and gasped, "What is wrong?"
"Maybe he fainted," Doc said.
"But—but he sounded perfectly—well, healthy."
Doc Savage avoided discussion on the point by gathering up Van Jelk and moving down the passage, feeling his way with one hand. Sanda fastened to his shirt sleeve and followed.
Doc whispered, "Be careful about noise."
"You think I want to stand in front of that firing squad?"
They came quite suddenly upon a guard who was standing in a niche in the stone corridor, and who said grimly in atrocious English: "Who ees eet? Spik quick, or these machine gun go zip-zip!"
Intensive practice in voice imitation—it was a facility of no small value, he had long ago discovered—had given the bronze man more than average skill at mimicry. He used Van Jelk's voice, as nearly as he could manage it.
"Be quiet, you fool," he said. "This is Van Jelk."
"Lo siento!"
the man grunted the local equivalent of begging your pardon.
Doc then reached out in the darkness, got the man's neck, throttled off an attempted squeal for help, and worked on the nerve centers at the back of the sentry's neck until he had the fellow unconscious. They had made a little noise, but there seemed to be no one else close enough to have heard. At least, there was no uproar.
"He must have been the sentry Van Jelk bribed," Sanda whispered. "He knew Van Jelk. Lucky break for us."
There was a tobacco odor about the guard, an indication he would have matches, so Doc searched. The matches were the atrocious little "fosforos" with sticks of paraffin-saturated paper; one of them fizzed, gave off a sulphur smell and enough light to show the locked steel panel of a door. Keys had rattled on the sentry's belt when Doc searched him. One of them tripped the lock.
Outside, there were low clouds, barely enough reflection from street lights to show a barracks courtyard.
Doc shouldered Van Jelk, and they walked rapidly. They got out of the barracks yard, went down a narrow street, at the end of which a sentry hailed them with a sharp, "Quien es?"
"Where does the colonel want this body put?" Doc asked in the same tongue.
"Body?" The sentry was puzzled.
The man took a step forward, and Doc reached him with a fist.
Sanda said, "I'm going to take his rifle."
"We had better take his uniform instead," Doc advised. "You go down the street and wait."
Darkness absorbed the girl, and the bronze man hurriedly stripped the senseless sentry of shoes, trousers, coat and cap, carried the garments to the girl. She moved away and came back soon wearing the clothing.
She was slender enough, Doc noticed as they passed near the next street light, to wear trousers well.

THE airport was probably the best one in Hispanola, because it had been built by an American aviation company, and the local government had confiscated it "for the duration of hostilities." The field had been given a spraying with chemicals to kill off the eager growth of tropical weeds and shrubs, so that the tarmac was fairly smooth. There were two old hangars, and four extremely new ones, and a line of very modern pursuit and bombing planes had been wheeled out for an early dawn patrol; the motors of these turned over slowly, warming up.
Sanda whispered: "You must have lived in this town. You seemed to find every back alley on your way here."
Doc did not explain that he had, before leaving New York, taken the trouble of familiarizing himself with detailed maps of the principal towns in both Hispanola and Cristobal.
"This is the most risky part," he warned.
They walked boldly toward the line of planes which stood ready, motors grumbling and coughing, exhaust stacks drooling blue flames. Doc carried Van Jelk with an arm around the man's chest, so that it was not too noticeable that the fellow was unconscious.
Fortunately, the field floodlights had not been switched on; the murk concealed them until they reached one of the planes. To avoid suspicion further, Doc chose one with an armorer astraddle the

cowling, tinkering with one of the prop-synchronized machine guns.
"Que dice, caballero?"
the man said idly, and Doc Savage got him by the leg, jerked the astounded fellow to the ground and used his fist.
"Into the plane!" Doc rapped.
It was a two-place job, cockpits for pilot and gunner-bomber. Sanda landed in the bucket seat and Doc literally piled Van Jelk atop her, said, "Hang onto him!" swung behind the controls, and gave the throttle a bat with his palm.
The engine stacks poured out cascading thunder; the plane crawled up on the wheel chocks, jumped them, seemed to spring into the air from a standstill.
Men poured out of hangars and barracks. Great searchlights stabbed out white rods. Several innocent-looking shacks around the field collapsed and disclosed highly modern rapid-firing anti-aircraft guns which began sticking out angry red-flame tongues. The archie shells ripened with woof noises around the plane. Doc dived, barely scraped housetops, changed course, went arching up into the night sky, continuously swinging right and left, climbing and diving to avoid the rigid white fingers of light that were feeling for them.
They fled toward Cristobal.
"This is an extremely modern warplane," Sanda said.
She had to scream. She had come forward from the gunner's cockpit, grimacing a little because of the deafening noise of the motor.
"Very modern," Doc agreed.
"In Cristobal we haven't any planes like these," Sanda added.
Doc looked at her, said nothing. She had something on her mind.
"Hispanola didn't have them either, a year ago," the girl continued. "Also, Hispanola was broke. They had no international credit. The Hispanola government couldn't sell its own bonds. Did you see those anti-aircraft guns?"
"The archies," Doc admitted, "were latest type."
"How did Hispanola buy such planes and guns? Where did they get the money? Answer me that."
"Doesn't your Cristobal government have an espionage service?"
"Spies—yes, we have some. They have learned that enormous stores of the best war materials are pouring into Hispanola. That's all. How they're paid for, we can't find out."
"The spies haven't learned much about the black rock either, I believe you said."
"Oh—you mean what I told you in New York?"
"Yes. The fact that the Indians of Incan ancestry in Cristobal have been led to believe that your brother acquired the sacred black stone, and therefore a curse has fallen upon the government."
Sanda made an angry face. "I don't believe there is any curse!"
"You're hard to convince."
"Oh, I've seen the black daggers all right. But there is a sensible explanation somewhere."
"What makes you think so?"
"Because there is supposed to be an explanation for everything, isn't there?"
The bronze man turned his attention back to his flying.
"That theory," he said dryly, "is one I've always had faith in."
Van Jelk stirred, opened his mouth—he probably groaned, but the noise of the plane engine made the sound inaudible—and finally got his wits together enough to yell, "What happened?"
"A man crept up on you and hit you in the darkness," Doc shouted back. "We managed to get out without raising an alarm, and stole a plane from the military airport."
"Where are we going now?"
"Taking Miss MacNamara to Cristobal, where she'll be safe," Doc said.
Sanda said grimly, "I would much rather know my brother was safe."

CRISTOBAL was composed about half of tierra fria—higher country than Hispanola. This portion bordering Hispanola, this extensive plateau, lay like a table in front of great mountains and fertile valleys, a section in which high altitude and kindness of nature created an almost perfect climate. Not widely known, hardly accessible enough to become popular with tourists, this mountainous portion of Cristobal was one of the spots on earth that came closest to being paradise, probably excelling in loveliness the famed vale of Kashmir.
Efficient Americans invariably swore at the stupidity of the natives in not developing the land. It seemed silly that the natives should exist in huts, raising only a milpa, or small patch of corn cleared in the native jungle, and giving that no more cultivation than it required, and rarely doing anything else in the line of work except gather a few thick maguey leaves to repair a hut after wind blew the thatching away.
The Indians, however, had a standard word for American efficiency. It was "tectatan." It meant, "I don't understand."
In justice, it should be added that after Americans had been there a while, they did not understand either. There was no necessity for working, since nature provided sufficiently. So why work? There were Yankees in Cristobal who had managed to become even lazier than any of the natives.

However, between this mountainous Eden and the Hispanolan border—or what had been the Hispanolan border, for that had changed a lot in a few days—lay the plateau land, the tierra fria.
On this plateau, the war was being waged.
Sanda had found binoculars; she kept them pointed over the side of the plane. The sun had, risen, throwing white glare through rapidly thinning cumulus clouds.
Sanda said something explosive, frightened.
"The fighting!" she gasped. "They are beating us terribly!"
Doc Savage had been studying the terrain. He had noted numerous caterpillar-type motor lorries moving up to the front, doubtless loaded with supplies and munitions. There had been tanks, not traveling in groups so that a number of them might be bombed at once, but rolling along a single tank at a time. Motorized artillery moved in the same fashion. Whosoever was conducting this side of the war knew how it should be done.
The war lines, it suddenly developed, were back almost against the mountains.
"Are the mountains fortified?" Doc asked.
"No." Sanda shook her head. "We never dreamed that Hispanola would attack us. There was no reason for this war, I tell you!"
"It looks bad."
Sanda nodded. "There is no use being patriotic. We have lost. We've lost the war, unless a miracle happens along."
"Lines of communication with the sea are cut, aren't they?"
"Yes. In the other direction, beyond the mountains, there are no roads at all. The country is impassable, at least as far as bringing in supplies. We'll run out of ammunition within a week. Even if we didn't, we would soon starve out."
A white mushroom appeared over to the left and the plane jumped slightly. Doc stood the plane on its nose to keep from being boxed by the anti-aircraft guns.
"The fools!" Sanda said grimly. "Those are our own guns!"
"This is a Hispanolan plane," Doc reminded her.

THEY bounced around on air currents inside one of the mountain passes. The big engine settled down to a monotonous moan of labor as it climbed. Below was a railroad, construction of which had been an engineering feat years ago. They passed bridge after bridge that had been bombed out. At one point, a fantastic bomb-loosened landslide had dammed the canyon, making a large lake.
"Look." Sanda pointed.
A group of men were retreating slowly up a mountain slope, crawling from boulder to boulder, skulking among trees, firing at other men who were pursuing them.
Doc said: "This is far inside the front line. We'll drop down and see what kind of a skirmish it is."
"The men higher up the mountainside are my people, Cristobal soldiers," Sanda said. "I can tell from their uniforms."
The plane leaned in toward the mountainside, went moaning downward, changing course rapidly when the Cristobal soldiers began pointing rifles at it.
The guerilla force fighting the Cristobal military waved their arms and their weapons, snatched off enormous palm-straw hats and flourished them. They were a miscellaneous-looking rabble, very dark faces being about the only thing they had in common.
"Indians," Sanda said suddenly. "They belong to a tribe that descended from the Incans."
Doc asked: "You think this means the trouble over the black stone has flared into open rebellion?"
"It can't mean anything else."
Doc lifted the plane higher, flew on. Cristobal City came into view, a thing of picture beauty with its multi-colored rooftops, and every house with neat white walls. Lanes of palm trees lined the streets, curtsying in the breeze, a startling contrast against the not very distant background of perpetually snow-crowned mountains.
"It's a little like Switzerland, isn't it?" Sanda said. There were tears in her eyes.
Doc nodded, located the airport at the edge of the city, beyond the small hilltop which was crested with the magnificent white presidential palace.
Van Jelk, who had said nothing and done nothing up to this point, suddenly came to life, shouting: "Are you crazy? You can't land here! This is an enemy plane we're flying! They'll riddle us!"
An anti-aircraft gun or two woofed at them. Doc put the plane nose down, dived until he was close to housetops, went thundering over narrow streets so low that the ship could not be ranged effectively. He managed to reach the airport. Sanda stood up, waved as they flew close to the hangars, and made herself recognized.
It was that simple.
Doc arched around, set the wing flaps to lower the otherwise dangerous landing speed of the plane, and settled on the tarmac.
Cristobal soldiers ran toward them, rifles ready. Around the field, a score of machine guns were

trained on them.
Sanda got out.
An officer advanced and saluted Sanda, said, "Seize these men," and pointed at Doc Savage and Van Jelk.
"Wait a minute—they’re my friends!" Sanda snapped.
The officer smiled, explained: "My orders were to hold them."
"I’ll see about this!" Sanda said. "I’ll telephone my father." She stamped away angrily.
Doc Savage and Van Jelk waited, the bronze man studying the airport, noting that the equipment was scarce and of a not too efficient vintage, although apparently well maintained. A breeze came down from the mountains, pleasantly cool; brilliantly-hued tropical birds fluttered among the palms and flowering bushes that bordered the field. It was a picture spot—no place for the ugly hate of a war.
The officer had followed Sanda. Now he came back, clicked his heels, saluted.
"So sorry, Señor Savage," he said. "My orders are to put you under military arrest."
Van Jelk glared at Doc. "See what you got us into!" he yelled.

Chapter XV. PRESSURE

GATUN MACNAMARA, president of Cristobal by right of having conducted one of the most thorough revolutions in years, should have been of Irish descent, a generation or two removed. He was more the conventional picture of the two-fisted Irishman who roared his own arguments, and refused to listen to the other fellow’s. He had little Scotch canniness. When he wanted something, he said so, preferably beating a table at the same time.
He had been over six feet tall before the years bent him. His hair had been a black thatch that stood up; now it was a snow-white thatch that stood up. His eyebrows were a pair of black gophers that traveled around on his forehead, according to the mood he was in.
Just now, the presidential eyebrows were up near his hairline, indicating profound surprise that anybody could be such a dope.
"Have I been misinformed?" he asked, speaking better English than most Yanks. "Is what I have read, what I have heard, a lot of—what you call him—bologna? Or maybe you are just—what they say—kidding me."
"I’m not kidding you," Doc said. "The answer is no."
"Pah!" Gatun MacNamara could say "Pah!" and make everyone within earshot jump.
They were in the reception room of the presidential mansion which, being the most impressive room in the place, was impressive indeed. It had most of the pretentiousness of the Hall of Mirrors of Versailles Palace, except that some of these mirrors had genuine gold-plated frames instead of gilt. The Gatun MacNamara desk, hewn in one piece from a marvelous Cristobal mahogany log, occupied the far end of the room, farthest from the door through which visitors came. Like Mussolini, old Gatun knew the value of letting a business caller have a long walk before reaching his desk.
"Pah!"
said Gatun MacNamara again. "I understood that you were a man who helped the oppressed and punished wrongdoers, traveling wherever it might be necessary to do so."
Doc said, "Something like that."
"Well—"
"But we don’t hire out to fight wars," Doc interrupted, "which is what your proposition amounts to. You want to hire whatever scientific knowledge I may have for use against your enemy, Hispanola."
Gatun MacNamara nodded cheerfully over his own idea. "I thought," he explained, "that you might have a germ or something on tap. If we could start a nice rip-tearing epidemic of something among those damn-blasted Hispanolans, we might slow them up. We could cure them after they surrendered to us, of course."
"No."
"It against your principles, or something?"
"Exactly."
Gatun MacNamara pounded his desk and looked threatening, roared, "We may find methods of making you comply with our wishes."
"If this is why you had me arrested," Doc said, "you’re wasting time for both of us."
Old Gatun MacNamara turned around and roared at a lackey: "This bronze fellow has five assistants, hasn’t he? Send to New York and have them kidnapped! Use them as hostages to make him listen to reason!"
Doc said dryly: "Someone thought of that before you did."
"Eh?"
"Four of my assistants," Doc said, "are prisoners somewhere."
"Where?"
"That’s the question."
Gatun MacNamara lost his temper and roared: "Lock this man up again and let him think it over!"

VAN JELK had shared the audience with Cristobal’s stormy petrel, and after he had tried to speak on three different occasions and been shouted down, he had maintained a dignified silence. Dignity was Van Jelk’s strongest point, and he had gotten back a great deal of it.

The cell to which they were taken was modern, made of concrete, electrically lighted, and equipped with a steel door which had a lock completely sheathed in steel and controlled from some distant point. After the door was slammed behind them, the lock buzzed, then clicked in place. There was finality in the sound.

"You’re an idealistic fool!" Van Jelk said. "We’ll stay here until we rot."

Doc looked about, ventured: "It’s a more comfortable cell than our last one."

"You could have promised to help them—then escaped at the first opportunity."

"A man’s promise," Doc said dryly, "is something like a dog. If a dog bites you once, it gets a permanent reputation as a biting dog."

"Oh—hell! Don’t be childish!"

Van Jelk walked over and slammed down on his bunk and lay there for a while. He groaned: "I wish we had never called on you for help! A fine lot of help you’ve been!" He turned his face to the wall.

Doc Savage, not seeming particularly disturbed by the disapproval of his cellmate, examined the door and the remainder of the cell, finding it solid. Even files would have done no good against the type of steel of which the cell bars were composed, and it was doubtful if a cutting torch would have been very effective.

Ten minutes later, the cell-door lock buzzed, the door swung open, and Sanda MacNamara stepped into view and beckoned.

"I didn’t see any sense in waiting," she said. "We better move fast, though."

Van Jelk had scrambled out of his bunk with great haste. He jumped through the cell door, barked: "Which way? How do we get out of here?"

"Take it easy, millionaire," Sanda advised. "The coast is clear. I sent the guard away . . . ah . . . with enough money to pay him for his trouble."

She led them along a passage, through rooms, then toward afternoon sunlight, the girl walking rapidly and both men trailing her closely. But when they had almost reached the sunlight, old Gatun MacNamara stepped out before them—the automatic he held was big and black, his fist was white and steady—and he spoke in an unexcited voice, saying, "I should have something to say about this, don’t you think?"

MACNAMARA stood scowling at them, upper lip lifted enough to show teeth, the black gopher eyebrows crouched close together above the bridge of his nose, the gun absolutely still in his hand. Then he put the gun away.

"Sorry about flashing the gun on you," he said. "I was afraid you would jump me and maybe do something drastic before I had time to explain."

"Explain what?" Doc studied him.

"There is a microphone in your cell," old Gatun MacNamara said, "and I overheard what you said to this fellow,"—he looked at Van Jelk, and his eyebrows gave an uncomplimentary jump—"about a man and his promises. I liked that."

Sanda began smiling. She said: "Dad, no wonder most of your political enemies eventually go to insane asylums. Nobody can predict what you’ll do."

"Hell, I’m perfectly transparent," Gatun said, and grinned.

Doc asked: "What about us? Do we get locked up again?"

Gatun MacNamara shook his head. "You’re as free as a bird, although I never could see anything free about a bird, the way he has to scratch for a living—which is beside the point. The point is—you can go."

He produced a pen and paper, turned and plastered the paper against the wall and wrote rapidly for a few minutes, ending by signing his name with a flourish.

"Here,"—he extended the paper—"is a pass that will get you the plane in which you came, fully refueled. And this pass, as long as it is in your possession, will keep any Cristobal soldier from bothering you. And it’ll probably cause any Hispanolan soldier to shoot you, if he gets a look at it."

Doc took the pass, thanked him quietly.

Old Gatun MacNamara suddenly extended his hand. "I want to apologize," he said gruffly, "for insulting you with threats. I had heard of you, hoped what I had heard was true—and I wanted you on our side in this war. The situation is getting pretty desperate."

"How long can Cristobal hold out against Hispanola?" Doc asked.

"Not very damned long." Gatun MacNamara pounded his fists together and swore. "And that’s a crying shame. A year ago, I wouldn’t have believed it. A year ago, ten Hispanolas couldn’t have licked Cristobal. But now they’ve got the most modern war materials. Planes, guns, tanks, gas—they’ve even got imported soldiers, men who are the best military scientists in the world, unless I miss my guess, directing their operations. They’ve whipped us to a standstill."

"Help from outside?"

"Of course. Scads of it."
"Why?"
"I don’t know," old Gatun MacNamara said. "It doesn’t make sense. Cristobal hasn’t any mineral resources to speak of, at least no more than some of our neighbors."
"You have a climate," Doc said.
"Eh? What the hell would a climate have to do with it? You don’t fight a war to conquer a climate."
"There is probably not a more pleasant place in the world to live."
"Well, we’re going to lose it, barring a miracle. But that’s our hard luck." The old president of Cristobal extended his hand again. "Good-by. Good luck. If you change your mind, let me know."
"About helping you, you mean?"
"Yes."
Doc said, "As a matter of fact, I wouldn’t be surprised if we are both fighting the same enemy."

FIVE minutes later, when Doc Savage had not clarified his statement about a common foe, old Gatun MacNamara had reached a condition best described as peeved, and stood with fists jammed on his hips and watched them walk away, rumbling: "That’s a fine hell of a note! You make a remark like that, and you don’t explain it. By dirt, I ought to lock you up again!"
Sanda said: "You should hear him swear when he’s really in the notion. I’ll never forget the time a bull chased him out of the presidential box during a bullfight. He swears in American. He says it is the best swearing language there is. I’ll go with you to the airport."
They walked through streets, occasionally showing their pass to sentries, until they were some distance away from the presidential mansion, after which there were no more sentries.
Sanda touched Doc’s arm.
"Yes?" He looked at her.
"You noticed that he didn’t mention my brother, Juan Don? He didn’t even ask about him. You know why?"
"Why?"
"He was afraid he would break down," Sanda said quietly. "He told me so. He is very proud of being a rip-roaring old hardshell. He was afraid to talk about Don. I . . . I told him what we knew."
They approached the airport, and once again had to use the pass. It was effective.
The plane which they had seized in Hispanola was wheeled out, and the snout of a gasoline hose put into the filler vent.
"Where are you going?" Sanda asked.
"To look for your brother, my four friends, and the others," Doc told her.
She nodded gratefully. "That was what I hoped."
"Won’t we need weapons?" Van Jelk asked.
Doc said, "I’ll promote some," and went away. He came back carrying two automatics hanging to belts that were brassy with cartridges. "These should help," he said, and gave one of the weapons to Van Jelk.
The refueling crew finished work, the long hose was coiled back in its pit, then men laid hold of the plane and wheeled it out to the line, after which a mechanic got into the cockpit and started the motor. The field attendants then saluted and withdrew.
Sanda, standing close to the plane, extended her hand. "I hope you have luck, but I don’t see how you can. You haven’t a clue."
Van Jelk had belted on one of the automatic pistols; now he drew the pistol, and holding it close to his body so that the weapon was out of sight of the flying-field officers, pointed the dark snout at Doc and Sanda.
"Get in the plane," he said, "if you know what’s good for you. Both of you!"
His voice had turned completely ugly.

Chapter XVI. HACIENDA

THEY flew for three hours.
Doc handled the controls, Sanda occupied the co-pilot’s seat beside him, and Van Jelk kept his gun pointed at them and gave directions.
Once, Doc Savage leaned over and said, so that only Sanda could hear. "You want to go through with this?"
"What else can I do?"
"His gun is loaded with duds," Doc explained. "I took the powder out of the cartridges in his gun before giving it to him. He hasn’t discovered the fact."
Sanda sat very still, staring at the mountains, the jungle that furred the valleys far below. She did not move, except for the involuntary bobbing of her head as the fast-moving plane hit air bumps.
"You already suspected Van Jelk?" she asked.
"Yes. As far back as New York."
"What gave him away?"

"Several things. A man tried to kill us with a bomb in a New York hotel, you recall, and we trailed him to Van Jelk's home. That was suspicious. Van Jelk's home, except for the ground floor, was empty, indicating he was getting ready to leave the country. And I found Van Jelk's fingerprints in your brother's plane—he was with your brother when he disappeared."
"What?"
"Van Jelk," Doc repeated, "was in your brother's plane when he vanished—his fingerprints were there."
"I . . . why—"
"Suspecting him," Doc said, "I slugged him back there in that Hispanolan jail. He was lying—he hadn't been a prisoner and escaped. He had come to pretend and to pump us to find out how much we had learned. If he hadn't been knocked senseless, he would have prevented our escaping."
There was a loud rapping from the back; Van Jelk was pounding angrily on a fuselage strut.
"Stop that talking!" he yelled.
Doc settled back at the controls as if intimidated, but from the corner of his eye watched the girl's lips. She guessed he was a lip reader.
She asked, "There a chance of finding my brother alive?"
Doc nodded.
"Then I want to go through with this," Sanda said. "Where is he taking us?"
"Their headquarters, probably."
Sanda settled back. Her face was composed and not particularly devoid of color, the only signs of unusual emotion being a compressed expression at the corners of her eyes and the ends of her mouth. One of her hands was gripped tightly upon the arm-rest of the seat, but the other hand was loose-fingered and relaxed.
She has courage and balance, Doc thought. There is a lot of her Scotch ancestry in her. Better think of such things rather than of how attractive she is, how nice she would be inside a man's arms, what her lips would be like.

THE hacienda might have been a medieval castle but for one or two things—the hill on which it stood would have had to be a little higher, and the white walls equipped with turrets and surrounded by moats spanned by drawbridges. The plane came closer and the castle aspect was a little less pronounced.
The hill crest was as flat and green as the top of a billiard table, edged around with a white fence behind which machine guns were mounted, and sentries paced. At the foot of the hill was a river; it snaked away toward the swampy coastline, and Doc had memorized the Hispanolan map sufficiently to conclude that the stream must be the same one on the banks of which lay the wrecked steamship that had been converted into a boathouse for the yacht.
"Land on the lawn!" Van Jelk called harshly.
Doc looked at Sanda, asked, "What is this place?"
"It's the summer mansion of the president of Hispanola," she explained.
It was a smooth lawn, kept close-mowed; only when the plane was very low could Doc distinguish wheel marks where other planes had landed and taken off frequently.
After the bronze man had his ship down, he let it roll until it was close to the white walls of the hacienda. An order came from Van Jelk. "Cut the motor," he said. "Then climb out, one at a time."
The men who surrounded them were Hispanolan officers—not soldiers, but officers, high-ranking ones, Doc noted from their uniform insignia. Not without manners, either. Sanda got many a snappy salute and low bow.
Van Jelk grinned at them, asked: "You have a couple of extra guest rooms here, haven't you?"
The rooms were not adjoining. They were comfortable guest chambers—until the furniture was packed out, when they became rather formidable. The windows were wide and offered a pleasant view, but they were equipped with shutters which were as effective as jail bars.
Doc walked around the place, kicked the shutters, threw his weight against the door.
Outside, Van Jelk said, "To tell the truth, we have been more fortunate than I expected. I didn't think we would get you all rounded up."
Doc said nothing, and after a while Van Jelk went away.
"Monk!"
Doc called, making his voice very loud. "Renny! Long Tom! Any of you here?"
Monk's rather childlike voice answered from somewhere, "We're all here."

THEN the bronze man lapsed into Nahuatl, the basic tongue of the ancient Mayan language, which was spoken fluently by himself and his men, understood by few others. They used it for conversation they wanted kept private.
"Did you manage to bring any equipment with you?" Doc asked.
"Not a bit," Monk answered. "They searched us on that yacht. They even gave us baths and pared our fingernails and toenails."
Renny said: "They tore the crowns off two of my teeth, looking for chemicals."

Doc called, "Miss MacNamara!"
"Yes," the girl answered.
Down the hallway somewhere, there was an excited cry. A boyish voice, shouting wildly with mixed joy and worry.
"Sanda!" the voice cried. "Sanda! How did they get you?"
It was her brother, Juan Don, and they shouted somewhat incoherently at each other, the girl saying, "Don! Don! Don!" over and over.
When she had straightened out her emotions, Sanda asked: "Don, how did they get you?"
"One of them—the man named Van Jelk, who is the executive of the gang—hid himself in my plane," her brother said. "Over the jungle, he simply crept out of the baggage compartment, struck me over the head, then landed my plane on the river. He struck a sand bar, and turned over. You saw that, didn't you?"
"But how did he get you out of the plane? There were no tracks on the sand bar."
"I don't know. I was unconscious. I never knew there was anything mysterious about that."
Doc Savage put in: "You remember when we visited that sand bar, Miss MacNamara?"
"Yes."
"I jumped from the wing of your brother's plane to the pontoon of our own ship, which was floating on the river, you will recall," Doc pointed out. "It would have been simple for Van Jelk to throw your brother into the river, jump in after him, and swim to the shore. It was not far."
"But there were no animal or bird footprints on the bar."
"The river must have been up, and gone down just that morning. There were only a few tracks when we were there, several days later."
Sanda said, with evident satisfaction: "I knew the whole thing wasn't as incredible as it seemed. I've said so all along, haven't I? Now—what about the black dagger? What was that?"
There was the clatter of dress swords in the hall, tramping of feet, and eventually a key in the lock of Doc Savage's door. Van Jelk looked in. He was scowling.
"This isn't my idea," he said coldly. "But the others are in favor of it. So I guess it won't hurt to talk to you."

THE table was of mahogany, very long. B. A. Arthur sat at the head of it, presiding over the meeting with the businesslike aplomb that he probably exercised over his board meetings in New York, Philadelphia and Chicago. Lord Dusterman, the munitions magnate, was on his right, Ahmet Ben Khali, oil tycoon of the Orient, to the left. The other members of the coterie of seven of the world's wealthiest men—Mark Costervelt, Josh Sneed and Jacques Coquine—occupied chairs. Van Jelk took a seat at the other end of the table.
"B. A. will talk," he said, indicating B. A. Arthur. "He's chairman. I'm in charge of actual operations."
There was a short silence. Doc watched them. He had marveled before at their self-possession, and he did so again. They were a cold, efficient organization. As a combine, they could go after and wreck almost anything in the civilized world, including nations. The bronze man had no delusions; he knew the power of money in such quantities.
B. A. Arthur stood up.
"I wonder," he asked, "how much we will have to tell you to make you understand what this is all about?"
Doc said at once, "You might listen to my guesses. That would tell you."
B. A. Arthur glanced at the others. They nodded. "Go ahead and guess," Arthur said.
"You have formed a syndicate—seven of you who are very wealthy—for the purpose of seizing Cristobal," Doc Savage said quietly. "You have financed this war. You probably began the plan more than a year ago, by approaching the president of Hispanola. You persuaded or bought him, and part of the agreement was that you were to put a yacht at his disposal in a secret hiding place, for a getaway should things go wrong."
They said nothing. They were watching him.
"Then you began shipping munitions into Hispanola, along with hired military experts. When war was declared, Cristobal didn't have a chance."
Van Jelk was smiling thinly, but not pleasantly.
"Your plan was complete, and it included internal strife in Cristobal, also. You managed that by working on the superstitions of the natives—you resurrected that ancient legend of a black stone that carried a curse. Your agents spread a story that Juan Don MacNamara, son of the president of Cristobal, had the stone. Your agents probably committed a series of murders as well, using a black dagger each time, or seeing that a mysterious black dagger appeared in the sky."
B. A. Arthur's mouth was open. He said: "I'll be damned! You knew all that!"
"The black daggers which appear in the sky," Doc Savage continued, "are simply specially constructed Very pistol, or signal pistol, cartridges. Such shells are usually made to explode in balls of smoke, or different colored lights. You use a shell which explodes in four different directions, in the shape of a cross with one arm much longer, which forms the recognizable likeness of a dagger."

B. A. ARTHUR shut his mouth, opened it, asked: "You saw through the daggers, too?"
Doc Savage named a chemical.
(Author's note—The names of chemicals and chemical concoctions which might be converted to criminal use are purposefully omitted from this book.)
"That substance," he said, "when kept sealed from the air, is almost as solid as metal. However, after it is exposed to the air for a period of time, it evaporates—just as, for instance, does the material called 'dry ice.' The daggers were made of that chemical, kept sealed until used, and shortly evaporated, thus disappearing very mysteriously."
"How did you find that out?"
"The appearance of the daggers themselves. Anyway, it was the only possible explanation."
"Then we didn't have you deceived at all?" B. A. Arthur growled.
"Oh, yes. Completely, at times. However, there were many incidents easily explained. The first attack on me, for instance, when a flame enveloped the inside of my plane near Baltimore. The flame was simply a magnesium bomb which Sid Morrison placed inside my plane in Baltimore—a time bomb."
The bronze man looked around at them; on his face was an expression that was not pleasant.
"You killed Sid Morrison because we were on his trail," Doc said. "Van Jelk did not do it. He was down here at the time. So it must have been one of the others."
B. A. Arthur said quite calmly: "It was Henry Lee. Unfortunately, the murder he had committed got on Henry's nerves until he wasn't accountable for himself."
"So you killed Henry Lee," Doc said. "One of you stabbed him in that New York penthouse while we were in the hall talking. You used one of the black daggers. Probably you threw the container which had held the dagger out of one of the windows, and it was lost in the snow."
The bronze man drew a deep breath.
"To sum up," he finished, "there probably is no black stone, and never was. That was just a story to confuse us."
Van Jelk suddenly began swearing. He swore profanely and at some length. "What we should do with this fellow," he yelled, "is shoot him immediately!" He whipped an automatic pistol out of his belt.
"Hold it!" B. A. Arthur snapped. "We called this man in to make a proposition, and we might as well make it."
Doc said: "Oh, yes—something else. How I happened to get involved in this in the first place. You knew that Juan Don MacNamara suspected what was really behind the war, and that he was coming to me for help for his country. You didn't want that. Sid Morrison was watching my office. When I flew south to start a vacation, he thought I was headed for Cristobal, hence the attempt to kill me."

B. A. ARTHUR stood up—possibly from habit acquired in addressing corporation meetings—to do his speaking.
"Possibly," he said thoughtfully, "we should have gone to you in the first place. Our motives in doing this, you may or may not know, are—well, they are idealistic."
"Idealistic?"
B. A. Arthur cleared his throat. "The world today is a turbulent, unpredictable, war-ridden place. In no country, no nation on the face of the earth, are property rights unhampered by taxation. I am an American citizen, for instance, and when I die, the United States government plans to take over half my fortune in inheritance taxes—which means they will take some seven hundred million dollars, in spite of all my lawyers can do to the contrary. Granting, of course, that taxation had not made me a pauper before then."
B. A. Arthur scowled before he continued.
"Government meddling—you find it everywhere. Take the New York Stock Exchange, for example—what do you find? Government regulation everywhere you turn. The banks? Deposit insurance—eating up the banker's legitimate profit. Utilities? Government competition forcing rates down until return on capital is cut to a measly seven or eight per cent."
Doc Savage looked around the table and said: "The point is that you fellows—you very wealthy men—don't like the way the world is today. That it?"
"Exactly."
"And you propose?"
"To take over the mountainous portion of Cristobal—a perfect place to live, if there is one on the face of this earth. We tried, two years ago, to buy old Gatun MacNamara, but he wouldn't listen. But now Hispanola is going to win this war, turn the part of Cristobal which we want over to us."
"And then?"
"We will create a sanctuary for wealth," B. A. Arthur said grimly. "There will be no income tax, no inheritance tax, no tax on any business enterprise of any size. There will be no regulations. Operating from such a country, we will soon make it the financial center of the world."
"What about the natives of Cristobal?"
"Oh, them? They will be shown their place." B. A. Arthur suddenly pounded the table. "There will be none of this damned rights-of-labor stuff! No unions. The first time the fools go on strike, we'll have them shot down. That'll teach them!"

Doc Savage remained emotionless, asked, "And where do I come in?"
"We need brains. We might hire yours."
"What makes you think I would work for you?"
"You're one of those idiots who spends his time trying to make a better world, aren't you? Well, we're offering you the chance of your lifetime."
Doc shook his head.
"You won't do it?" B. A. Arthur exploded. "But we've kept your friends alive solely in hopes of getting your good will in the end."
"No."
"And why not, you idiot?"
Doc said, no noticeable excitement in his voice: "This whole setup is rather hideous. It's selfish and ugly. It is simply a case of rich men—men more wealthy than anyone has a right to be—trying to keep their money and get more."
Van Jelk suddenly swore. "I told you the thing to do was shoot him. Now I'm going to do it!"
He pointed the automatic at Doc Savage and pulled the trigger at about the same moment that the bronze man, lunging suddenly, got both hands on the weapon. The gun made a harmless cap-pistol sound—only the fulminate percussion cap exploding, since there was no powder in the gun—as they struggled for the weapon, and after a moment Doc backed away with the automatic in his hand.
Only one man at the table had moved.
Ahmet Ben Khali sprang to his feet. There was alarm in all his very, very long brown figure.
"I'll be superamalgamated, Doc!" he exploded. "I thought he would shoot you!"
"It's all right, Johnny," Doc told the long brown man. "Just search them for guns."

Chapter XVII. GOLD POOL

THE wealthy men stared in dumbstricken stupefaction. Van Jelk was probably the most affected; he put a hand to his chest, made croaking sounds and subsided into a chair, not unconscious, but paralyzed with astonishment.
B. A. Arthur pointed a tremulous hand at Ahmet Ben Khali.
"This man—is Johnny Littlejohn—your associate!" Arthur croaked.
Doc Savage nodded.
"But . . . but—" Arthur failed to make words.
"We didn't seize you back in New York to protect you," Doc explained dryly. "The seizure was to give us a chance to substitute one of our men for one of your group—well disguised. Johnny was the only man who closely resembled any of your outfit. He happened to be as tall as Ahmet Ben Khali, and he also knew Khali's native language."
Johnny was walking behind the men, searching them. He found two automatics, a revolver, a tear-gas pistol made to imitate a pencil.
"Did you have any trouble getting by, Johnny?" Doc asked.
"Not much," Johnny said. "I just kept my mouth shut and agreed with the others."
They were alone in the room; the doors were closed. Probably sentries outside, but the doors were heavy and soundproof.
Johnny explained, "I couldn't get word to you, Doc. Everything seemed to go wrong. I did find out they had you in a Hispanolan prison for a while, but before I could get there without arousing suspicion, you had escaped."
Van Jelk suddenly buried his face in his hands. He began swearing in a low monotonous voice that was almost tearful.
"He's bad." Johnny indicated Van Jelk. "You want to watch him. He did all their killing. He's their brains, really."
Doc said: "Can you get Monk and Ham and the others in here?"
Johnny said grimly, "I hope so."
He went to the door, opened it, called sharply to a guard in the Hispanolan language. Johnny's work with archaeology had given him a familiarity with a number of languages.
"Bring the prisoners here—all of them," Johnny ordered the sentry. "The MacNamara girl, her brother—everyone."
After that, there was a wait of perhaps five minutes.
Long Tom entered first. The others trailed him, Sanda and Don MacNamara entering last.
"Line up along the wall with your hands in the air!" Johnny rapped. To the guards, he said, "All right. Leave the room. We can handle this alone."
The armed escort left.
Monk and the others immediately dropped their arms and greeted Doc Savage in low voices. Sanda and her brother stared, flabbergasted.
"What is this?" Sanda gasped.
"Ahmet Ben Khali," Doc explained, "is really Johnny Littlejohn, my associate."
"For the love of little fishes!" Sanda said. "Where is the real Khali?"
"Held by friends of ours in New York."
Doc glanced at Johnny. "The whole war campaign is directed from here, isn't it?"

Johnny nodded. "By radio."
"Where are the radio rooms?"
"In this wing of the house. We can get to them all right." Johnny grinned. "By the way, their staff officers are holding a meeting, which means most of them will be in one room. If we work it right, and get them, we can wipe out the brains of this war with one lick."
"If Hispanola loses all its hired military skill, can Cristobal lick them?"
"Maybe."
"If we use the radio," Doc said, "and mess up the campaign with conflicting orders, would that help?"
"It sure would."
"Before we start," Monk said, "I got a little speech." He stood in front of the wealthy men and looked ugly. When Monk wanted to look ugly, he could manage a rather horrendous effect. "You six guys have got just one chance of going on living, and that's by seeing that we get out of this mess."
They left the conference room by a door on the far side. In the corridor, they found a guard armed with a submachine gun. Johnny rapped the fellow's jaw, got the gun as the man dropped. They continued on to a door.
"Staff headquarters," Johnny whispered.
He went in, pointed the submachine gun at the eight or ten men in the room, said: "All of you—you're under arrest!"
These were professional fighting men—eight or ten of them in the room—so it was a little too much to expect the blanket command to be effective. One of the experts whipped out an automatic, leveled it and pulled the trigger.

ROARING lead from Johnny's gun cut the man's arm between wrist and elbow at about the same instant that he shot, so that it looked as if the pistol recoil might have broken his arm. The wounded man—his bullet had missed—did not scream, did not make a sound, but dived at one of his companions and with his unhurt hand began trying to get that man's gun.
Van Jelk suddenly slugged Monk. He put everything he had into the roundhouse uppercut. Monk managed to get his jaw out of the way; the blow took him on the cheek and sent him skip-dancing crazily backward.
Ham said, "Why, you—" and knocked Van Jelk down.
And suddenly fighting spread throughout the vast room. There were yells, a few shots. The table upset. Chairs climbed into the air, glanced off walls and ceiling.
Doc spoke in the Mayan tongue, saying: "Johnny, have you got anaesthetic bombs?"
"Plenty of them," rapped the gaunt archaeologist and geologist.
Still using Mayan, Doc called: "Hold your breath! Johnny is going to use anaesthetic grenades!"
His five men understood, and immediately got their lungs as full of air as possible and held it there. Johnny produced the grenades—they were thin-walled glass balls, filled with liquid—and hurled them at the floor, at men, at anything which would break them. The things burst, made splashes of wetness which evaporated instantly, turning into a vapor that produced an abrupt unconsciousness when breathed—but which had the unusual property of becoming impotent after being mixed with the air for approximately a minute.
Men began folding down—which meant the fight in that room was over.
Doc ran to a door, flung it open. He was searching for the radio rooms. The others—Monk, Ham, Renny, Johnny, Long Tom—followed him. Monk scooped up Sanda, and Renny got her brother, Juan Don. Neither MacNamara had known about the anaesthetic gas and holding breath, so they had fallen victim to the stuff.
"Where are the radio rooms?" Doc asked.
"In there." Johnny pointed.
In other parts of the great house, there were sounds of growing excitement.
"Any boats on that river?" Doc asked.
"Yes. One. Very fast, too."
"Get all seven of those wealthy men to the boat. Wait there."
"What about the military experts?"
"Let them go. If we get their source of pay stopped, that part will take care of itself."
They separated, Doc Savage heading for the radio rooms. He found two operators on duty, both bumped over their keys, wearing headsets and grimacing as they strained to read messages through the tropical static. Doc got one with his fists. He had to use a chair on the other, and because he did not want to kill the man, did not strike hard enough, so that the fellow could crawl rapidly after he fell, until he reached a gallon-sized bottle labeled Sulphuric Acid—acid evidently used in storage batteries that were kept for emergency operations. The man hurled the bottle at Doc, who ducked. The bottle smashed on the instrument board. The acid, which could blind and burn horribly, sprayed over the power panels.
Doc caught the man, used his fist on the fellow.
Then the bronze man bent over the transmitter table, studying the dispatch sheets, transmitted

messages and other data. After a while, he began sending messages—the same message in every case: Government of Hispanola has failed. All army units retreat from Cristobal at once.
He signed the name of the officer who had signed the other army orders in the file.
He kept sending until the sulphuric acid ate through the insulation and shorted out wires, putting the apparatus out of commission, after which he left the radio room and ran, doubling low and zigzagging, down a sloping lawn, close-cropped so that it was as green and soft as a carpet, to a neat steel dock to which the speedboat was moored. He was shot at only once, although after he got on the boat, a machine gun gobbled from the vast hacienda. But that was not important, the speedboat was armor-plated.
They went down the river, the speedboat motors sounding like several unmuffled airplanes.

THE Hispanolan coastline was out of sight astern—they had passed the length of the river without being molested—when Long Tom Roberts, the electrical expert, came up from belowdecks. The speedboat was of the large express-cruiser type, which meant that it had enclosed cabins; small cabins, it was true, because of the space given over to engines and gasoline storage.
"That's a good short-wave radio," Long Tom said. "I got hold of Tropical Radio in New Orleans, and they relayed a message to Pat in New York."
"Will she get one of our big planes and fly down and pick us up?" Doc asked.
"Pat said she would."
Sanda MacNamara had been listening. She frowned. "Is this Pat a girl?"
"She's Patricia Savage, who is Doc's cousin," Long Tom explained. "She helps us out from time to time. Dickens of a nuisance, Pat is at times. Always wanting to get mixed up in excitement."
"Pretty?" Sanda asked.
"A honey! And I don't mean maybe."
Sanda looked rather unpleasant about it.
Doc Savage went into the aft cabin and resumed what was proving to be a useless argument with the seven rich men.
"You have a distorted idea if you think we are going to let you go unpunished," the bronze man told them. "You are guilty of plain and fancy murder, to say nothing of fomenting a war."
"You try doing anything to us," B. A. Arthur threatened, "and you will find yourself in plenty of trouble. You can't touch us!"
Monk heard that, and he grinned thinly. Later, the homely chemist followed Doc Savage out on deck.
"We can't do anything to 'em, eh?" Monk said.
Doc Savage said, "They need a little changing."
Monk grinned. "College?"
"Yes. The college."
Sanda, who was standing nearby with her brother, looked puzzled. The cryptic talk about a college had her puzzled. Monk, noting her expression, sauntered off to warn the others not to mention the "college" again.
The "college" was a unique institution, existence of which was a secret to the general public. The institution was situated in a remote section of upstate New York, a mountainous area seldom visited by outsiders. To this spot Doc Savage sent such criminals as he captured, to become "students" in the strange place.
Patients in the institution first underwent delicate brain operations at the hands of specialists trained by Doc Savage, operations which wiped out all memory of the past. The "students" were then given an intensive course of training, the principal feature of which was the ingraining of a hate for crime. They were also taught a trade. No graduate of the place had ever turned back to crime for a livelihood.
Monk got Doc Savage aside. Something was bothering the homely chemist.
"Look, Doc," he said. "All that dough them guys have got—it's a shame to let them shekels go to relatives and lawyers. That money could do a lot of good, or at least undo some of the harm it's done."
Doc explained: "We might train them to be philanthropists."
"Eh?"
"Our men at the college have had plenty of experience training men to hate crime," Doc pointed out. "It should be no more difficult to train men to want to do good with money."

THE lapse of a few weeks proved Monk's conjecture substantially correct. The seven wealthy men—they had secured Ahmet Ben Khali and added him to the "student" roll—were far enough along in the upstate institution to prove Doc's theory correct.
Another pleasant thing was the visit Sanda MacNamara and her brother paid them. The war between Hispanola and Cristobal had collapsed satisfactorily. There had even been a revolution in Hispanola, Sanda advised, and the president was now occupying a jail cell.
Just why Sanda had to come all the way to New York to tell them that was a little puzzling.
The truth finally dawned on Monk. The next morning, Monk appeared wearing—for the first time in

anybody’s memory—a new suit that was halfway respectable. He was generally spruced up.
"What ails you?" Ham asked wonderingly.
"I’m a rescue party."
"A what?"
"Haven’t you noticed the way this Sanda girl looks at Doc? A girl as pretty as she is—he’s liable to fall. Somebody has got to save him."
"I think that saving is my job," Ham said with dignity.
Monk grumbled disgustedly, "I was afraid we would have trouble over that."

THE END