

The Golden Man

A Doc Savage Adventure by Kenneth Robeson

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Chapter I. THE SUPERNATURAL

It began on the American passenger steamer, Virginia Dare, while the vessel was en route from Portugal to New York with a load of war refugees. It was at night.

Mr. Sam Gallehue, in spite of the full-bodied Irish of his name, his West Tulsa, Oklahoma, birthplace, his American passport, was really quite English. Quite.

Referring to the incidents of that night, "Disturbing," Sam Gallehue said. "Disturbing— Yes, definitely."

But disturbing was hardly a strong enough word.

Lieutenant Colonel Andrew Blodgett Monk Mayfair had a word—several words, in fact. But his words were not from Sunday school, or from any respectable dictionary, although expressive. Unfortunately, they were not printable.

Brigadier General Theodore Marley Ham Brooks had no word whatever—the thing left him speechless. Ham Brooks was a noted lawyer who could talk a jury out of its eyeteeth, and it took a lot to make him speechless. But, as everyone admitted, what happened that night was a lot.

First, there was the star.

It was a clear night and the usual number of ordinary stars were visible—the Encyclopedia Britannica states the unaided human eye can see about six thousand stars on a clear night—in the crystal dome of a tropical heavens. The sea, with no more waves than a mirror, was darkly royal-blue, except where now and then a porpoise or a shark broke surface and caused a momentary eruption of phosphorescence that was like spilling sparks.

As to who first saw the star, there was some question whether that honor fell to Ham Brooks or Monk Mayfair.

Both these men were standing on the starboard boat deck, where there was a nice breeze. It was a hot night; it had been hot since the Virginia Dare had left Portugal, and Monk and Ham—so had everyone else, too—had grumbled extensively about the heat, although there were scores of Americans on the ship who should have been overjoyed to be there instead of in Europe, dodging bombs, bullets and blitzkriegs.

The truth was: Monk and Ham were irked because they were leaving Europe by request. Not at the request of anybody in Europe; they would have ignored such urging. The request had come from Doc Savage, who was their chief, and who meant what he said.

The mess in Europe had looked enticing—Monk and Ham liked excitement the way bears like honey—and they had slipped off with the idea of getting their feet wet. Doc Savage had cabled them to come back—quick—before they got in trouble.

"Trouble!" Monk snorted. "Compared to the kind of things Doc gets mixed up in, Europe is peaceful. Hey, look!"

"Look at what?" Ham asked.

"Over there." Monk pointed out over the sea.

THEY could see the star plainly. It was not a star in the sense of being a planet or a heavenly body twinkling far off in outer space. This was an actual star; a five-cornered one.

The star was black. In the dark night—this fact was a little confusing to newspaper reporters later—the star could be readily distinguished in spite of its blackness. This black star could be seen in the black sky because, around its edges, and particularly at its five tips, it had a definitely reddish, luminous complexion. As Monk expressed it later—Monk's descriptions were

inclined to be grisly—the star looked somewhat as if it had been dipped in red blood. The star was high and far away in the night sky.

"Hey, you on the bridge!" Monk yelled. "Hey, whoever's on watch!"

Monk's speaking voice was the small, ludicrous tone of a child, but when he turned loose a yell, the seagulls got scared a mile away. An officer put his head over the bridge railing.

"What the blankety-blank goes on?" the officer asked. "Don't you know people are trying to sleep on this boat? You'll wake up the whole ship."

"Look at that star!" Monk said. "What the dickens is it?"

The officer stared, finally said he would be damned if that wasn't a funny-looking thing, and pointed a pair of strong night glasses—the night glasses being binoculars with an extraordinary amount of luminosity—at the star. He handed the glasses to Monk, then Ham. The consensus was that they didn't know what the thing might be. Something strange, though.

The steamer, Virginia Dare, was commanded by Captain Harley Kirman, a seaman of the modern school, with looks, dress and manners of a man behind a desk in an insurance office, although he loved his ship, as much as any cussing, barnacle-coated bully of the old windjammer school. Captain Kirman was summoned from a game of contract bridge. Another participant in the card game, a Mr. Sam Gallehue, accompanied the skipper when he reached the bridge.

The captain stared at the star. He unlimbered a telescope as large as a cannon—inherited from his seafaring grandfather, he explained—and peered through that. He took off his hat and scratched his bald spot. The bald spot was crossed from right front to left rear by a scar, that was a souvenir of a World War mine. Captain Kirman's bald-spot scar always itched when he got excited.

"Change course to west, quarter south," Captain Kirman ordered. "We'll have a look."

Monk propped elbows on the bridge rail and contemplated the five-pointed thing in the sky.

"What do you suppose it is?"

Ham shrugged. "Search me. Never saw anything like it before."

MONK MAYFAIR was a short man, and wide. His long arms—his hands dangled to his knees—were covered with a growth of what appeared to be rusty shingle nails. His mouth had startling size, the corners terminating against his tufted ears; his eyes were small and twinkling, and his nose was a mistreated ruin. The narrowness of his forehead conveyed the impression there was not room for a spoonful of brains, which was deceptive, since he was one of the world's leading industrial chemists. In general, his appearance was something to scare babies.

Ham Brooks has good shoulders, medium height, a wide, orator's mouth in a not unhandsome face. His clothing was sartorial perfection; in addition to being one of New York's best lawyers, he was its best-dressed man. He carried an innocent-looking dark cane which was a sword-cane, tipped with a chemical that could produce quick unconsciousness.

They watched the star.

"Blazes!" Monk said suddenly. "Look at the ocean. Right under that thing!"

Mr. Sam Gallehue hurried over to stand beside them. Gallehue was a lean man with some slight roundness in his shoulders that was either a habitual stoop or a sign of unusual muscular strength. His face was long, his jaw prominent, a combination which expressed sadness.

Mr. Sam Gallehue wore his usual ingratiating smile. He was a man who invariably agreed with anything and everything anyone said. If anyone should state the ship was sailing upside down, Mr. Gallehue would agree profusely in a phony English accent.

"That's puzzling," Monk said.

"Yes, puzzling, definitely," agreed Mr. Gallehue. "Very puzzling. You're right. Very puzzling."

They meant the sea. It had become—the phenomenon was confined to one spot directly beneath the luminous-rimmed black star—filled with a fiery brilliance that was astounding, because it could hardly be the natural phosphorescence of the sea. Phosphorescence like a multitude of sparks pouring through the water in momentary existence, was visible here and there, but this was different. It was not like sparks, but a steady luminance, quite bright.

"It covers," Ham decided aloud, "less than an acre."

"Yes, you're right," agreed Mr. Sam Gallehue. "Less than an acre. Exactly."

The steamer plowed through the dark sea, with the only sounds the faint steady rushing of water cut by the bows, and tendrils of music amidships that escaped from the first-class lounge where there was dancing. But on the bridge there was breathless quiet, expectancy, and eyes strained ahead. The luminous area was still on the sea, the black star steady in the sky.

The lookout in the crow's-nest gave a cry.

"Man swimming!" the lookout yelled. "Off the starboard bow. Middle of that glowing patch of water. Man swimming!"

Captain Kirman leveled his granddad of telescope and stared for a while. Then he scratched his bald-spot scar.

"What's wrong?" Monk asked.

Wordlessly, Captain Kirman passed the big telescope. Monk discovered that the instrument was one of the most efficient he had ever used.

The crow's-nest lookout had been wrong on one point—the man in the sea was not swimming. The man

lay perfectly still. On his back, with arms and legs outflung. He was a large, golden man. There was something unusual about him, a quality distinguishable even from that distance—something about him that was hard to define, yet definite. He was not unconscious, but merely floating there. Monk lowered the telescope.

"Well?" demanded Ham impatiently.

"It's kind of indecent," Monk explained. "He ain't got on a darned stitch!"

THE Virginia Dare lowered a lifeboat with speed which demonstrated the efficiency of modern davit machinery. Captain Kirman dashed into his cabin and came back with a blanket and a pair of trousers. "Put the pants on him before you bring him in," he said.

The modern steel lifeboat had a motor which, gobbling like a turkey, drove the craft across the sea into the luminous area, and, guided by searchlights that stuck straight white whiskers from the liner bridge, reached the floating golden man.

The bright area in the sea slowly gathered itself around the lifeboat. A phenomenon so startling that Monk and Ham stared at each other, blinked, then peered at the sea again. "D' you see what I do?" Monk demanded.

"The phosphorescence is gathering around the lifeboat," Ham said.

"Yeah. Only I don't think it's phosphorescence. The stuff glows too steadily, and the color ain't like phosphorescence."

They stared, dumfounded as the glowing patch in the sea followed the lifeboat to the steamer. When some fifty or sixty yards separated the lifeboat and ship, the luminous area rapidly left the smaller craft and surrounded the liner. The Virginia Dare was much larger, and the glowing mass spread out thinly to entirely surround the vessel.

Monk grunted suddenly. "Where's a bucket, a rope, and a jug?"

Ham said, "I know where there's a jug. I'll get it. You find the rope and the bucket."

The dapper lawyer secured from the bar a clear glass jug which had contained foundation sirup for a soft drink. He rinsed it hurriedly.

They hauled up a bucket of sea water, poured it into the jug, and inserted a cork.

"I swear I never saw water shine like that before," Monk declared. "I'm gonna analyze it."

Ham held the jug up to the light. He shook it briskly, and the water charged back and forth against the glass with bubble-filled fury.

"Kinda spooky," Ham said in an awed voice.

Monk carried the jug to a darkened part of the deck, and held a hand close to it. His palm was bathed in reflected magenta radiance.

"What is that stuff?" Ham asked.

"I'll have to analyze it," Monk said. He sounded puzzled.

HAM rubbed his jaw, his expression thoughtful. "You ever hear of ectoplasm?" he asked.

"Eh?"

"Ectoplasm," Ham said. "The stuff spiritualists and mediums talk about. When they perform, or pretend to perform, the feat known as telekinisis, or locomotion of objects at a distance—such as making a table lift, or causing rappings on a table—they claim the phenomenon is the work of ectoplasm."

"Hey, wait a minute," Monk said. "What're you talking about?"

"Ectoplasm. E-c-t-o-p-l-a-s-m, like in a ghost. It is supposed to be a material of living or protoplasmic nature, drawn either from the medium or from some other presence, which is independently manipulated after being drawn."

Monk considered this.

"Nuts!" he said finally.

Ham shrugged. "Ectoplasmic material is supposed to be manipulated or controlled through an etheric connecting link, so that a tremor or vibration in the ether, such as a light wave which normally excites the retina of the eye, is detrimental to its activity."

"Where the hell'd you get that stuff?"

"Out of an encyclopedia one time."

Monk snorted. "Oh, be reasonable. This stuff is just something in the water that happens to glow."

"Then what made it follow the lifeboat?"

"I don't know."

"The golden man was in the lifeboat. It followed him."

"Huh?"

"And, when the golden man was taken aboard the steamer, why did it surround the bigger ship?"

Monk peered at the jug of luminous water with a mixture of emotion. "I got half a notion to throw this overboard and get rid of the whole mystery."

Ham strode out on the open deck and looked upward, craning his neck.

"That black star is gone," he announced.

Chapter II. THINGS TO WONDER ABOUT

THE rescued golden man had been taken to the ship's hospital. Monk and Ham accompanied Captain Kirman to the hospital, and the agreeable Mr. Sam Gallehue brought up the rear, being stickily polite whenever they gave him a chance.

Monk carried the jug of luminous water under his arm until he passed his cabin, where he paused to deposit the jug on the table. After he had left the jug, Monk hurried forward and touched Ham's elbow.

"Hey, what got you started on that talk about ectoplasm?" he wanted to know.

"It just occurred to me," Ham said.

"But that's spook stuff."

"Sure."

"There ain't no such animals as spooks."

"You'll find a lot of people," Ham said, "that will argue there is such a thing as spiritualism."

"Yeah," Monk agreed. "And you'll find in the United States about five hundred institutions for treating insane people."

The hospital was situated in the midships section of the liner on B deck. They found the officer who had been in charge of the lifeboat standing outside the hospital door, which was closed.

Captain Kirman asked the officer, "Was he conscious when you picked him up?"

"Yes, indeed, sir."

"Was he injured in any way?"

"He did not appear to be."

"Who is he?"

The officer looked somewhat queer. "He said that he did not have a name."

Captain Kirman frowned. "That's a strange thing for him to say."

"I know, sir. And that wasn't the strangest thing he said, either. He said his name might be a problem, because parents usually named their children, but, since the sea was his mother and the night was his father, and neither parent could talk, getting him named might be a problem."

Captain Kirman scowled. "Are you drunk, mister?"

The officer smiled. "It did not make sense to me, either."

CAPTAIN KIRMAN rubbed his scar, chewed his lower lip in exasperation, and finally knocked on the hospital door, which was opened by a genial gentleman—he was looking bewildered just now—who was the ship's doctor.

"How is he, John?" Captain Kirman asked.

The doctor looked at Captain Kirman steadily for almost a minute. "What is this?" he asked finally. "A rib?"

"Eh?" Captain Kirman was surprised.

"This man your sailor just hauled out of the ocean." The doctor jerked a thumb over his shoulder at the hospital door.

"What about him?" Captain Kirman asked.

"He looked me in the eye," the doctor growled, "and he said, 'How are you, John Parson? I believe you will enjoy living in that little villa in Maderia. It is very peaceful there.'"

"Oh," said Captain Kirman. "An old friend of yours, is he?"

The surgeon swallowed.

"No."

Captain Kirman peered sharply at the doctor. "Hey, wait a minute! You don't know him?"

"Never saw him before in my life. So help me!"

"But you just said he called you by name."

"That's exactly what I did just say."

"But—"

"And that isn't the half of it," added the doctor. "You heard me say he mentioned that villa in Maderia."

"What about the villa?"

"Nobody on this green earth but myself and the man who owns the villa knows I have been dickering to buy it. And here is something else! I don't know myself whether I have bought it yet. The man had to talk to his daughter about selling, and she was going to visit him last week, and he was going to cable me in New York, and the cable would cinch the deal."

Captain Kirman's laugh was a humorless spurt of breath past his teeth. "And you never saw this man we rescued before?"

"Never."

"Somebody around here must be crazy."

Monk Mayfair had been taking in the conversation so earnestly that he had his head cocked to one side. Now he interrupted. "Dr. Parsons," he said. "I'm Mr. Mayfair—Monk Mayfair."

"Yes. I've heard of you." Dr. Parsons smiled. "But I'll confess I've heard more about the man with whom you are associated—Clark Savage, Jr. Or Doc Savage, as he's better known. I've always hoped I would some day meet him. I've seen him demonstrate surgery."

Monk said, "Let's try something, just for fun, doctor."

"What do you mean?" Dr. Parsons asked.

"Just for fun," Monk said, "let's send a radiogram to that man you were going to buy the villa from. Ask him if he really sold it to you."

The ship's physician gave Monk a queer look.

"So you've sensed it, too."

"Sensed what?"

"That this man we rescued tonight may not be—well, may be different from other men, somehow."

Monk said, "I haven't even seen the guy, except through a telescope. What do you mean—different?"

The physician examined his fingernails for a moment.

"You know, I think I'll take you up. I'll send that radiogram about the villa," he said.

Captain Kirman snorted, shoved open the hospital door, and entered. Monk was about to follow the skipper when Ham tapped the homely chemist on the shoulder. Monk turned. Ham said, "Aren't you the guy who was sneering at spiritualism a while ago? Now you want radiograms sent."

"I just want to satisfy my curiosity," Monk explained sheepishly.

"You saw the golden man through the telescope," Ham said. "Have you ever seen him before?"

"I'm sure I haven't," Monk declared.

"What if he knows all about us, too?"

"Don't be silly," Monk said, somewhat uneasily.

THEY entered the hospital, a white room with square windows, modern fluorescent lighting, and neat equipment which included a nurse who was eye-filling.

The golden man lay on the white sheets on a chrome-and-white examination table. He was not as large as Monk had somehow expected him to be—he was very little above average size, in fact. His shoulders were good, but not enormous; the rest of his muscular development, while above average, was not spectacular. His body did give the impression of perfect health and magnetic energy. Monk decided—he checked on this afterward with Ham, Mr. Sam Gallehue, Captain Kirman and others, and they agreed with him—that the golden man's face was the most outstanding of his features. It was hard to explain why it should be outstanding. The face was not a spectacularly ugly one, nor a breathlessly handsome one; it was just a face, but there was kindness about it, and strength, and power, in addition to something that could hardly be defined.

The golden man spoke in a voice which was the most completely pleasant sound Monk had ever heard.

"Good evening, Captain Kirman," he said.

Astonishment jerked Captain Kirman rigid. The golden man seemed not to notice. He turned to Monk and Ham.

"Good evening, Mr. Mayfair and Mr. Brooks," he said. He contemplated them and seemed to radiate approval. "It is too bad the human race does not produce more men like you two and like the man with whom you work, Doc Savage."

Monk became speechless. Ham, fighting down astonishment, asked, "Who are you?"

For a moment, the golden man seemed slightly disturbed; then he smiled. "I have no name, as yet."

"Where'd you come from? How did you get in the water?"

The golden man hesitated, and said finally, "The sea was my mother and the night was my father, but you will not believe that, so perhaps we should not discuss it."

Ham—he confessed later that his hair was nearer to standing on end than it had ever been—persisted. "There was a black star in the sky," he said, "and there is something that glows, a kind of radiance, that is following the ship. What are those things?"

The golden man sighed peacefully. "Do not be afraid of them," he said. "They will go away, now that I am safe, and you will not see them again."

He leaned back, closed his eyes, and, although Ham asked him more questions—Monk also tried his hand at inquiring—they got no results. The golden man simply lying, conscious and composed, seeming to care nothing about them or their questions. The nurse finally shooed them out of the hospital, saying, "After all, no telling how long he had been swimming in the sea before we found him."

In the corridor, Ham asked, "What do you think, Monk?"

Monk became indignant. "How the hell do I know what to think?" he growled.

THE sea next morning was calm, so Monk and Ham breakfasted on the private sun deck—they had one of the high-priced suites, with a private inclosed sun deck adjoining—under a sky that was the deep, cloudless, blue color of steel. They could look out over a sea of navy corduroy to the horizon. Smoke from the funnels trailed back like a black tail astern, and there was a lean, mile-long wedge of wake.

Ham had orange juice, toast, delicate marmalade, a kipper. Monk had a steak, eggs, hot biscuits, four kinds of jam. The breakfast steward was pouring coffee when Dr. John Parsons, the ship physician, arrived.

Dr. Parsons grinned wryly. "Remember that radiogram we talked about last night?"

Monk nodded.

"Well, I sent it," the physician said. "And I got an answer a few minutes ago."

"What did the answer say?" Monk asked seriously.

"I had bought the villa."

Monk peered at his coffee cup as if it was a strange animal. "Now-how do you figure this man we found in the ocean knew that?"

The physician jerked at his coat lapels impatiently. "I wish you would figure that out," he said.

After Dr. Parsons had gone, Monk and Ham drank coffee in silence. There seemed to be no words.

This verbal drought persisted while they fed their pets. The pets were a pig and a chimpanzee. The pig, named Habeas Corpus, was Monk's pet; the chimp, Chemistry, belonged to Ham. Both animals were freaks of their respective species, Habeas Corpus being mostly snout, ears, legs and an inquiring disposition. Chemistry did not look like chimp, ape, baboon, orang, or monkey—he was an anthropological freak. Chemistry did look remarkably like Monk, which was one of the reasons why Monk did not care for the animal.

Ham broke the silence. "How long did you hang your head out of the porthole after I went to bed last night?"

"Last night—you mean when I was looking at that glowing stuff in the water?" Monk asked.

"Yes. How long did the glow stay in the water around the ship?"

"Until about an hour before dawn," Monk confessed.

"It followed the ship all the time up until then?" Ham demanded.

"Yes."

"How did it disappear?"

"It just faded away."

"How fast was the ship going all that time?"

"Over twenty knots. Practically top speed."

"How do you explain that?"

"The top speed, you mean?"

"No, the luminous stuff following the ship."

Monk grimaced, and did not answer. He never liked things he could not understand.

IT was ten-o'clock-beef-tea time that morning—the Virginia Dare was a Yankee ship, but Captain Kirman liked the English custom of serving beef tea at ten in the morning, and tea and crumpets about four in the afternoon, so he had instituted the practice on his vessel—when the golden man appeared.

The golden man joined Monk, Ham and Captain Kirman, who were on the promenade deck, sprawled in deck chairs, balancing napkins and cups.

The golden man approached them with a firm, purposeful stride. Monk noted that, although the suit the man wore was a spare from somebody's supply and did not fit him, yet the fellow had a kind of majestic dignity. Monk noted also that Mr. Sam Gallehue was trailing along behind the golden man, but that was not unusual. Mr. Sam Gallehue almost invariably trailed along behind people.

None of them ever forgot what the golden man said. It was a verbal bombshell.

"This ship is going to be destroyed at about eleven o'clock this morning," he said.

Then he turned and walked away, leaving his listeners to stare at each other. Monk started to get out of his chair and follow the man. But Captain Kirman dropped a hand on his arm and halted him.

"The poor devil is crazy," Captain Kirman said.

Monk, although he nodded his head, was not so sure.

Chapter III. THE WEIRD

THE ship did not sink at eleven.

It sank at seven minutes past eleven.

The explosion took about half the bottom out of Hold 2, ripped a little less of the bottom out of Hold 3, and tore approximately eleven by twenty-eight feet of steel plates off the side of the ship above the waterline. There was no panic. Alarm bells rang throughout the vessel for a moment, then became silent. Thereafter, they rang at intervals of two minutes, short warnings. There was very little excited dashing about. Unruffled officers appeared at strategic points and began steering passengers to their boat stations.

Ham Brooks was knocked down by the explosion. He was not hurt, and he was slightly indignant when Monk solicitously helped him to his feet. He had lost his sword-cane, however, and he spent some time hunting it. After he found the cane, he and Monk went to the bridge to offer their services, but it developed that these were not needed.

Captain Kirman and his crew were almost monotonously efficient in abandoning the ship. It was necessary to abandon the ship, of course. The Virginia Dare was sinking, and fast.

"What was it?" Monk asked. "A boiler let go?"

"Torpedo," Captain Kirman replied cryptically.

"What?"

Monk ejaculated.

Ham put in, "But we're not yet at war!"

Captain Kirman shrugged. "I saw the torpedo wake. So did my officers. It was a torpedo, all

right."

"But anybody could see this is an American vessel."

The liner, as was the custom for the last year or two, had huge American flags emblazoned, two on each side of the hull, and large stationary flags painted on the deck, fore and aft.

Monk said, "I can't think a sub would be crazy enough to torpedo an American ship."

Captain Kirman shrugged. "We got torpedoed, anyhow."

An officer walked up, saluted with smartness. "Submarine has appeared off the port quarter," he reported.

They crowded to the rail and strained their eyes, then used binoculars. The submarine was there, plain for anyone to see. There was no doubt about her identity. Numerals and letters were painted on the conning tower, and the design of the craft was itself distinctive enough to answer all questions of nationality.

The sub belonged to a country presumably friendly with America.

"I'll be damned!" said Captain Kirman fiercely. "This is going to cause plenty of complications."

The sub apparently satisfied itself that a mortal blow had been struck, then submerged and did not appear again. It had not offered help.

The Virginia Dare sank.

Captain Kirman was, in the tradition of the sea, the last man to leave his vessel. In the lifeboat with him were Monk, Ham, Sam Gallehue, and the strange golden man who had predicted this disaster. Captain Kirman cried a little when the blue-green sea swallowed his ship.

MONK and Ham—they had brought their pets—were not excited. Excitement was their business, in a manner of speaking. For a number of years they had been associated with Doc Savage in his strange career, and it was an existence that had accustomed them to trouble.

They were, however, puzzled. Puzzled by the golden man, who had such a strange personality.

Circumstances under which the fellow had been found—the black star, the strange luminosity in the sea—had been startling, even weird. The fact that he had calmly predicted disaster to the ship, and the disaster had materialized, was something to wonder about. Monk stole a glance at the fellow.

The golden man lay relaxed on a thwart of the boat, his manner so completely calm that his presence seemed to have a soothing effect on those around him.

Monk moved back to the strange man.

"Mind answering a question?" Monk asked him.

The golden man smiled placidly and nodded.

"How did you know our ship was going to get torpedoed?" Monk asked bluntly.

The golden man's smile went away for a moment, then came back. "I suppose I was looking at my mother, and the knowledge came to me," he said. "I guess one would say that my mother told me."

"Your mother?"

"The sea."

This was too much for Monk; he gave it up. He went back, sat down beside Ham. "He's a goof," Monk whispered. "He says the sea told him the ship was going to be torpedoed!"

Ham absently scratched the back of his chimp, Chemistry. "I wish I had something to tell me such things," he said. "For instance, I could use some nice advance information about what the stock market is going to do."

Monk growled, "Listen, you overdressed shyster—you don't believe that guy can really foretell the future."

Ham shrugged. "If he didn't, what did he do?" he demanded.

Monk gave up, and lay back, eyelids half-closed against the noonday sun. He spent a long time furtively examining the golden man. There was something a little inhuman about the man's appearance, Monk decided.

The breeze dropped. By two o'clock, the sea was glassy, the heat was irritating. Future prospects were none too good, for the nearest land was some hundreds of miles away, and the lifeboats were hardly capable of making such a distance. To further darken the situation, the radio operator was not sure that his S O S signal had been received by anyone. The torpedo had damaged the current supply to such an extent that the radio had been able to put out only a weak signal.

Captain Kirman, his face showing a little of the strain, got out his navigational instruments, current tables, and charts, and began calculating.

The golden man looked at him. Then spoke quietly. He said, "You are preparing to plot a course to the nearest main land. It would be better not to do so. We should remain here."

"Remain here?" Captain Kirman lifted his head to stare at him.

"At six o'clock this evening," the golden man said, "a steamer will arrive at this spot. It will be the Brazilian freighter Palomino."

Captain Kirman became pale. He sat very still. Finally he put away his charts and instruments.

"Pass word to the other boats to remain here, in a close cluster," he ordered.

THE steamer Palomino—she gave the first impression of being mostly rust, but she floated, so she was welcome—arrived on the horizon a few minutes before six o'clock.

The effect the appearance of the Palomino had upon passengers and crew of the sunken Virginia Dare, adrift in lifeboats, was inspiring. There were cheers, shaking of hands, kissing. Stronger than these emotions, however, was stark amazement. The story of the golden man's predictions had gone from boat to boat during the afternoon. Of course there had been profound skepticism. More than one passenger had voiced an opinion that Captain Kirman must be touched, or he wouldn't have taken the word of a half-stupefied castaway that rescue would turn up if they waited. Most affected of all was Captain Kirman. He lost his temper, sprang to his feet, and collared the golden man. "How the hell did you know that ship was coming?" Captain Kirman yelled. "And if you say your mother, the sea, told you, damn me I'll throw you overboard for the sharks to eat!" The golden man replied nothing whatever to this outburst. His face was placid; his smile, although slight, was unconcerned. The composed confidence of the fellow, and his strangeness, further enraged Captain Kirman. The captain whirled on the radio operator. "You sure no ship acknowledged your S O S?"

"Positive, sir," declared the radio operator.

"Was this"—Captain Kirman jerked his thumb at the golden man—"fellow hanging around the radio room at the time?"

"No, sir."

"Have you seen him near the radio room?"

"No, sir."

Captain Kirman gave up, red-faced, and bellowed greetings to the steamer Palomino. The sailors on the rusty hulk bellowed back in their native language, which was Portuguese, then rigged davit falls and hoisted the lifeboats of the Virginia Dare on deck. There were blankets for everybody, food and hot wine.

IT was soon learned that the Palomino would put the rescued passengers and crew of the Virginia Dare ashore in Buenos Aires, South America, but first the vessel would have to go directly to another port, not so large, in another South American republic, to take on fuel and deliver cargo. The captain of the Palomino made this very clear in a little speech he delivered through an interpreter.

Monk asked Ham, "Do you speak Portuguese?"

"Sure," Ham said.

"How much?"

"I used to know a Portuguese girl," Ham said, "and I learned enough that we got along."

"That'll probably be a big help," Monk muttered. "But come on over anyway. Let's brace this skipper." He hauled Ham across the room. "Ask him how his ship happened to show up where we had been torpedoed. He was off his course. How come?"

Ham put this query to the Palomino commander. Monk's conjecture about Ham's ability with the Portuguese must have been approximately correct, since the palaver went on for some time, with much grimacing and shaking of heads. Finally Ham turned to Monk.

"He ees say that she very fonna business," Ham said.

"You can skip the accent," Monk growled. "What does he mean—funny?"

"It seems," Ham elaborated, "that the captain of the Palomino got a radiogram today about noon that caused him to change his course and head for this spot. The radiogram was an S O S from the Virginia Dare."

"Oh, so they heard our S O S, after all. That's fine—" Monk's jaw fell until his mouth was roundly open. "When did you say that radiogram came?"

"About noon today."

"Noon!"

"Yes."

"But the Virginia Dare sank at eleven!"

"Uh-huh."

"Hell, the ship couldn't send an S O S after it sank."

"Sure," Ham said. "Sure it did. But that isn't all."

Monk got out a handkerchief and wiped his face. "If that radiogram was sent at noon—who sent it? There was no radio in any of our lifeboats. How in the dickens—" He fell silent, pondering.

"I said that wasn't all," Ham reminded.

"Huh?"

"They have just discovered in the last half hour that the radio operator of the Palomino never received such a message," Ham explained.

Monk gaped at him. "No?"

"The message never came over the radio."

"Say, what is this?" Monk growled. "The Palomino skipper says there was a message, then he says there wasn't! Is that it?"

Ham explained patiently, "Here is what happened. The message was handed to the captain of the Palomino, on the bridge, shortly after noon. The message was brought by a man who wore a radio operator's uniform, but at the time the captain was figuring out his midday position, and didn't pay

too much attention to the man."

"When the skipper read an S O S message, he surely called the radio room to check on its authenticity," Monk said.

"Yes, he did. But there is a speaking tube that leads from the bridge to the radio room, and the skipper used that. He says a voice answered him, and it sounded like the regular radio operator. The operator—or this voice through the speaking tube—told the skipper that there was no doubt about the message being genuine, and to go ahead and steam full speed to help the ship. That satisfied the skipper. Incidentally, if it hadn't been for that radiogram, we would probably never been found. This is a mighty deserted stretch of ocean."

Bewildered, Monk asked, "Where was the radio operator when all this was going on?"

"In a trance."

"Eh?"

"The radio operator's story is queer. He says that, a little before twelve, he felt strangely drowsy. This drowsiness came on all of a sudden, and he dropped off to sleep. He claims now that it wasn't exactly like dropping off in a nap—he says it was different, kind of like a trance. And during this trance, he remembers just one thing, a black star."

Astonishment yanked at Monk's face. "Now wait a minute! What was that he remembered?"

"A black star."

"You kidding me?"

"I know it's crazy," Ham admitted. "A black star. The radio operator says it was on his mind when he came out of this so-called trance—he came out of it incidentally, about one o'clock—but he don't know whether he saw a black star, or had it impressed on his subconscious somehow, or what made him have it on his mind."

Without a word, Monk wheeled and walked out of the cabin. He strode on deck, where he leaned against the rusty rail and let the wind whip his face.

"When we found that guy swimming in the sea," he muttered, "I wonder just what we did find."

THERE was one more incident. This occurred when the golden man unexpectedly approached Captain Kirman that afternoon. About the golden man was his typical impassive calm, dignity, and power of character that seemed to give him a hypnotic influence over those with whom he came in contact. He said, "The submarine which torpedoed your vessel should be punished, Captain Kirman." Captain Kirman swore until he ran out of breath, then sucked in air and said, with careful self-control, that he wished to all that was holy that he knew some way of seeing that the job got done.

The golden man stated quietly, "The submarine will be meeting a supply ship." He named a latitude and longitude. "You can radio the American navy to send a cruiser to the spot."

Captain Kirman blinked. "Why not a British boat? There may not be an American cruiser in this part of the ocean."

"One is now less than seventy miles to the west of the spot where the submarine will meet the supply ship," the strange golden man said peacefully. He started to move away, then paused to add, "The submarine is not actually the nationality which she pretended to be."

Captain Kirman could only gape at him. Later, Captain Kirman found Monk and Ham. The captain gave the scar on the top of his head a furious massaging with his palms as he told about the conversation.

"This thing's got my goat," he confessed. "I'm not a man who believes in spooks, but I'm beginning to wonder if we didn't find one swimming in the ocean."

Monk asked, "You going to notify the American navy?"

"Would you?"

"I believe I would," Monk said.

Captain Kirman grinned. "I guess you're getting as crazy as the rest of us."

THE matter of the torpedoing of the American liner Virginia Dare became, in diplomatic parlance, what was termed an incident, which was another way of saying that it came within a shade of plunging the United States into a conflict.

The American cruiser, as a result of a radiogram which Captain Kirman sent, at sunset that evening came upon a freight steamer and a submarine holding a midsea rendezvous. The cruiser came up quietly in the dusk, and very fast. It put off a plane, and the plane dived upon the unsuspecting freighter and submarine without warning.

The observer of the plane used a good camera, getting enough pictures to tell a story—the photographs showed sailors at work with paint brushes, wrenches and welding torches, changing the appearance of the submarine back to normal. The pictures proved beyond a shadow of a doubt that the submarine belonged to one European power, but had been masquerading as belonging to another. The sub made a frantic effort to submerge when discovered. This caused a disaster. Someone forgot to close the hatch, and the U-boat never came up again. There was, of course, no actual proof that the submersible accidentally destroyed itself, but there was never any doubt in the minds of pilot and observer of the U. S. navy plane.

As for the freighter, it got away. It was not the ponderous hulk it appeared to be, and it left the vicinity at a speed which almost equaled that of the navy cruiser. It managed to escape in the extremely black night.

Washington diplomats—largely because they did not have absolute proof—decided to soft-pedal the incident somewhat. There was never any doubt, however, that a European power had made an attempt to arouse American public sentiment against another nation by trying to make the public think one of that nation's submarines had torpedoed an American liner without warning.

Chapter IV. THE UPSET PITCHER

THE steamer Palomino was a slow hooker. Days elapsed before she drew near the small South American seaport where she was to refuel before continuing to Buenos Aires. Eventually, the South American coastline did appear like a black string lying on the western horizon.

That night, Ham came upon Monk in the bow. Monk was pulling the large ears of his pet pig, Habeas Corpus, and staring at the deck.

"Ham, I been thinking," Monk muttered.

"What with?"

"Oh, cut out the sass," Monk grumbled. "You go around claiming I'm dumb, and personally, I'm convinced you're so stupid you think the eternal triangle is something babies wear. The point is, maybe we're both kind of dumb."

"How do you mean?"

"About this fellow they found in the ocean—this golden man," Monk said thoughtfully. "I've been studying him. And I can't make up my mind."

Ham nodded soberly. "I've been doing the same thing."

"Apparently," Monk said, "he has some kind of power. Apparently he knows about things that are going to happen before they happen. Apparently such things ain't possible."

Ham grimaced. "It's crazy, and we both know it," he said.

"Sure—it's impossible," Monk agreed. "But just the same, what are we going to do about the evidence that is in front of our eyes?"

Ham said abruptly, "I'll bet we've both thought of the same thing."

"Doc Savage?"

Ham nodded.

"Well, it's the smartest idea you've had recently, because it's the same as mine," Monk declared.

"If Doc Savage could talk to this golden mystery guy, and examine him, we would know for sure whether he has some kind of supernatural power."

Ham said, "There's another angle to it, too."

"How do you mean?"

"This will sound crazy."

"Well, what is it?"

"If this fellow they found in the sea does have supernatural power, he ought to be protected. It would be too bad if he had a power like that, and crooks got hold of him."

Monk pulled at one of his tufted ears. "I thought of that, too."

"A bunch of crooks, if they got something like that," Ham said, "could cause a lot of trouble. Think of what you could accomplish if you knew what was going to happen in the future."

Monk grinned. "That does sound crazy."

Ham scowled. "Well, we better take this man to Doc, anyway."

"He may not want to go."

"We can ask him."

"And if he don't say yes?"

Monk grinned. "Then," he said, "he can look into the future, and see that we'll take him whether he wants to go or not."

THE golden man had one particular trait which by now had been noticed by everyone. This was his preference for solitude. He never took part in conversation, and when spoken to about some trivial matter, did not trouble to answer. He had placed a deck chair on the top deck in a lonesome spot where the wind blew the strongest, and he spent long hours there, lying relaxed with his eyes half closed, as if in inner contemplation.

Monk and Ham found him there. They explained that they wished to converse privately.

"It's important," Monk said.

"If you wish," the golden man replied placidly.

They could not help being impressed by his calmness. Neither Monk nor Ham was easily awed, for they themselves were famous men in their professions, besides being additionally noted because of their association with Doc Savage. The feeling that the golden man was an extraordinary individual disturbed them.

For the conference, they selected deck chairs under their windows. It was rather hot to retire to a stateroom, and there was no one in view on deck.

Ham, who was more silver-tongued than Monk, took the burden of explanation. He did a good job of

it, using a normal but earnest tone, speaking simple-worded sentences that were effective. As he talked, he watched the face of his listener, distinguishable in the glow from an electric deck light nearby. He got the idea his talk was doing no good, and after he finished, he was surprised to receive a lecture in return.

"Clark Savage," said the golden man, "is, as you have just told me, a great man, and a kind one. He follows a strange career, and in being fitted for this career, he was placed in the hands of scientists at childhood, and trained by those scientists until he came to the estate of man. Because of this, many people do not understand him, and accordingly regard him as a kind of inhuman combination of scientific wizardry, muscular marvel, and mental genius. Those who are close to him know differently—they know that he has strength of character and genuine goodness. They know that he would have been a great man without the training of those scientists." The golden man sat silent for a moment, as if musing. "It is unfortunate for humanity that the world does not have many such as Doc Savage," he continued. "If ever the world needed men who combine scientific ability and moral character, it is now."

Monk took in a deep breath. "How about going with us to talk to Doc Savage?" he asked.

"Of course."

"You'll go!" Monk exclaimed, delighted.

"Yes."

"That's swell!"

Apparently feeling the matter was satisfactorily settled, the golden man got to his feet and walked away. The placidity of his going kept his departure from seeming curt.

Monk and Ham were silent for a while. Then, "He knew all about Doc," Monk ventured.

"Yes, seemed to," Ham admitted. "But that's just another of the strange things about him.

Incidentally, I sent Doc a radiogram, describing this fellow fully, and asking Doc if he had ever heard of him. Doc radioed back that he had no knowledge of such a man."

"Well, we got him to agree to see Doc," Monk remarked.

They still sat there when the noise came from behind them. A noise from their stateroom. The sound of something upsetting, breaking with a crunching shatter.

They exchanged stares.

"Stay here," Monk breathed.

The homely chemist whipped out of his deck chair, got up on tiptoes, ran to a door, veered through it, took a turn into a corridor, and reached their stateroom. The door was closed. He put an ear to it, heard no sound. He hesitated, then entered.

When he rejoined Ham a few minutes afterward, Monk was calm.

Ham was excited. "What was it?"

"The jug of water was on the floor," Monk said. "I guess it rolled off the table, or something. It broke."

"You mean that jug of glowing water?"

"Yes."

"Broke?"

"Yes."

"But the boat hasn't been rolling."

"I didn't think it had, either," Monk admitted.

They were both rather silent.

Chapter V. THE FIFTH COLUMN

THE name of the town was not La Corneja, but that was what Monk always called it. The name la Corneja was Spanish for crow, and the place was a crow among towns, far the most drab and shabby seaport on that coast of South America, so the name Monk applied was not unappropriate. La Corneja was not the principal seaport of the republic; the republic itself was one of the smaller ones in South America. Certainly the town had none of the beauty and prosperity which marks—to the astonishment of American tourists—much of South America.

Monk and Ham went ashore as soon as the steamer Palomino tied up to a dock for coaling, to stretch their legs. Later they had a surprisingly good luncheon. Then they took a stroll. The stroll accounted for two things. First, it enabled them by chance to see the thin man with the scar under his left eye. The man was talking to Captain Kirman of the Virginia Dare. The two men were conversing in a small bar. Monk and Ham placed no significance in the incidence then, although later they attached a great deal.

The second incident of the stroll was a street fight which they witnessed. This occurred later in the afternoon. The fight broke out suddenly in a market where they were standing.

One native hit another with a ripe and squashy fruit, at the same time calling the man a crawling dog, and adding colored information about his ancestors. The fight spread like flame after a match is dropped in a gasoline barrel. There was suddenly excitement all around Monk and Ham.

They were bumped into, jolted, shoved about, although no one swung any blows at them. After being jammed in a struggling group for a while, they extricated themselves. Once clear, they stood, well on the outskirts of the fight, and watched the mêlée. It was good entertainment.

Then someone yelled, "The police!" in Spanish. The fight ended more suddenly than it had started. Participants scattered in all directions. One moment, they were there; the next they were gone. Monk and Ham prudently took to their heels also.

"Wonder what they were fighting about?" Ham pondered. "Didn't seem to start over anything." Ham shrugged. "Search me. They wanted the exercise, maybe. I've seen times when I just felt like starting a scrap."

They dismissed the fight as a welcome piece of entertainment they had witnessed, and wandered along the streets, examining the shop windows.

They were on a side street when the thin man with the scar below his left eye approached them. He had a bundle under his arm. He was excessively polite, and nervous.

His English was good enough. "Señors," he said, "I saw you back yonder, looking at that fight. It later occurred to me that you kind Americans might help a poor man who is in trouble. I was the cause of that fight. A man and his relatives hate me because of . . . er . . . a matter about a woman. I have married the woman, their sister, and they do not like that. I love Carlita, and she loves me, but if we stay here, there will be much trouble. We want to leave, to go to some other place, and be happy by ourselves. But we have no money. I have only some fine silken shawls which cost me much money, but which I will sell very cheap. Could you good Americans help out a poor man by buying my shawls?" He said all this in one rush of words, tinged with frantic haste.

Monk and Ham exchanged amused glances. This was an old gag. It was an old trick for selling shoddy merchandise. Gyp artists in New York often used it. The fellow must take them for suckers. The shawls would be shoddy.

But, to their astonishment, upon examining the man's shawls, they found them of exquisite workmanship and quality. The price named was a fraction of their real value.

"Bargain!" Monk whispered.

Ham agreed. He appreciated a bargain.

They bought the shawls.

The thin man with the scar under his eyes almost sobbed as he parted with the merchandise. Then he fled down an alley with his money.

Monk and Ham, feeling proud of themselves, walked along the street.

"You know, these are darn fine shawls," Monk said. "They must be worth a hundred bucks apiece."

"Much as I hate to agree with you," Ham said, "we did get a buy."

They were arrested on the town's main street.

Nearly a dozen neatly uniformed officers—it developed that they were Federal police—closed in. Monk and Ham were handcuffed, searched. Howling protests were ignored. They were dragged off to the city hall, which also contained the jail, and stood before an officer.

"What's the meaning of this?" Ham demanded indignantly.

The officer in charge spread the shawls out on a table. He examined them, then grunted angrily. He indicated the unusual design.

"These shawls," he said in a grim voice, "are actually maps of this country's fortified zones. In other words, you two men seem to be spies. Fifth columnists, I believe is the term."

Both prisoners protested a mistake.

The officer shrugged. "The commandant will arrive shortly. He will hear your stories."

THEIR jail cell turned out to have one window, size eight-by-ten inches, a wooden frame on the floor filled with straw for a bunk, and walls over two feet thick, of stone. There were other inhabitants in the form of bugs of assorted sizes.

"No wonder that guy sold the shawls so cheap!" Monk growled.

Ham nodded. "It was a frame-up. We took the bait clear up to the pole."

They moved to the window, tested the bars. These were as thick as their wrists, of steel, and solid.

Monk said, "Say, earlier in the afternoon, I remember seeing that thin guy with the scar under his eye talking to Captain Kirman."

"I saw him, too."

"You suppose there's any connection?"

Ham scowled. "There's sure something phony about this."

The door of the cell was unlocked shortly, flung open, and policemen entered with guns and grim expressions. The officers proceeded to strip all the clothing off Monk and Ham, and take the garments away. The two prisoners were left naked.

"A fine out!" Ham yelled, almost hysterical with rage. "There'll be international complications over this!"

"Oh, shut up!" Monk grumbled. "You don't really get mad until somebody steals your clothes."

Ham had an hour in which to fume. Then the police were back again, and with them, the commandant. The commandant was an athletic man of middle age, efficient, speaking English smoothly. He had their clothing.

"You two men," he said, "became very careless."

"We're getting mad, too," Monk assured him. "Or at least one of us is."

The commandant indicated their clothing. "In the pockets of your garments, we found incriminating documents. In one was a forged passport. In another suit, there were letters which you had already decoded, that proves conclusively that you are spies of a European power."

An indignant protest from the two captives led the commandant to exhibit the evidence. It was exactly what he had said it was.

"How did your men come to arrest us?" Ham demanded, his voice ominously calm.

"We received a telephone tip."

Ham turned to Monk. "That fight we saw was part of the frame-up. Remember how they crowded against us, and shoved us around? The passport and these letters were planted on us then."

"Yes," Monk said. "And you remember last night, in our cabin—I bet somebody was eavesdropping."

The commandant smiled, but with no humor. "So you claim you were framed?"

Indignantly, Monk announced his identity, and added further that they were survivors of the torpedoed American liner, Virginia Dare.

The commandant was slightly impressed. "We will check that story," he said. "We wish to be perfectly fair."

The commandant then went away.

He was back before dark. His face was not pleasant.

"Captain Kirman," the commandant informed them grimly, "declares that he never heard of you."

Monk was stunned. "You're sure of that?"

"There is no doubt."

"You really saw Captain Kirman?"

"Yes."

"He has a scar on his head. Are you sure—"

"A scar that was the result of a mine fragment in the World War," the commandant said impatiently. "Yes, we discussed the captain's scar."

Monk and Ham had been reluctant to capitalize on the name of Doc Savage, and their association with him. But now the situation demanded that. With earnestness, they told the commandant that they were associated with Doc Savage, and that, if he would radio Doc, he would receive confirmation of the fact.

The commandant crisply agreed to send the radiogram.

The answer came the following afternoon. By that time, the Palomino finished fueling and had sailed for Buenos Aires.

The radiogram was to the point.

TWO MEN YOU HAVE IN CUSTODY ARE IMPOSTERS. MY AIDS MONK MAYFAIR AND HAM BROOKS ARE IN MY NEW YORK HEADQUARTERS NOW.

DOC SAVAGE.

Monk became pale.

THEY were court-martialed that afternoon. They were convicted. They received the traditional funny-paper sentence—but there was nothing funny about it.

They were sentenced to be stood against the stone prison wall at dawn and shot. The sentence prescribed the size of the firing squad which was to do the job—it was to contain eleven riflemen, and one rifle to be loaded with a blank, so that no member of the squad need be absolutely sure that his bullet was a deadly one.

Chapter VI. THE BROKEN FRAME

FOURTEEN weeks later, Monk and Ham were still in jail. Same jail. Same cell. Fourteen weeks was a long time, about as long as fourteen years, but that was about all they had learned. They had lost weight, had become prospective mental wrecks. They had even stopped quarreling.

It had been two weeks before they learned why they had not been shot immediately. The commandant was convinced they were Fifth Columnists and he was trying to break their nerve and get a confession that would involve associates. The commandant hoped to clean out the hotbed of foreign agents and saboteurs which had descended like a locust swarm upon South American republics with the advent of the European fracas. Since they had nothing to confess, Monk and Ham were under unearthly strain, expecting each dawn to stand in front of the firing squad.

The commandant had adopted their two pets, Habeas Corpus and Chemistry, but that was vague consolation.

They were held incommunicado, as far as the public was concerned. In fact, no word of print had appeared in the newspapers concerning their arrest.

Ham kept a calendar by scratching marks in the cell wall. "Three months and two weeks," he said one morning.

That was the day the commandant unlocked their cell, gave them their clothes, and a profuse apology.

Said the commandant, "There is something very strange about this matter. We now discover that you two men are actually the men you claimed you were—Ham Brooks and Monk Mayfair, aids of Doc Savage."

"A fine time to be finding that out!" Monk said.

The commandant was genuinely regretful, he said. He added, "Only because Doc Savage began an investigation to determine your whereabouts did we learn the truth." The commandant then exhibited a radiogram which had been exchanged between himself and Doc Savage in New York, and between himself and the American State Department.

Monk was convinced the commandant had really been fair. He controlled his rage and demanded, "But what about that radiogram you first sent to Doc? How come you got a faked answer?"

"I am sorry to say," the commandant explained, "that we have discovered an operator of the local commercial radio station was bribed to supply the fake message."

"Who did the bribing?"

"A man," said the commandant, "who told the radio operator his name was Captain Harley Kirman of the torpedoed ship, Virginia Dare."

"You met Captain Kirman," Monk said. "Was it the same man?"

"According to the description—yes."

"Then Captain Kirman got us in this mess?"

"Yes."

Monk gave his belt an angry hitch. "How soon," he asked, "can we charter a plane that will fly us to a place where we can catch a Pan-American plane north?"

"I will see that you are furnished with an army plane," the commandant volunteered.

THE taxicab which took Monk and Ham to the airport was trailed. The hack Monk and Ham took was a secondhand yellow cab imported from the north, but it was called a fotingo. All cabs in the town were called fotingos, for some reason or other.

The man who did the trailing also rode a fotingo. The man had lived for the past fourteen weeks in an apartment across the street from the jail. He and a partner had managed to keep almost continuous watch on the jail. Always close at hand, they had kept a high-powered rifle equipped with a telescopic sight. Unfortunately—or fortunately, depending on the viewpoint—Monk and Ham had not come in range of window or rifle. And a few minutes ago, when the pair had left the jail, there had been too many police around.

The shadow watched Monk and Ham depart from the airport in an army pursuit ship. Then he lost no time getting to the telephone office and putting in a long-distance call.

He called a number in New York City.

"Pollo?" he asked.

"Yes," said the New York voice.

"Juan speaking."

"Yes, Juan."

"I have bad news," said Juan. "The truth was found out about them today. They have left the prison. They have also left the city—in an army plane."

"You fool!" said Pollo. "You stupid idiot! If you think you are going to get paid for failing to do the job, you're crazy."

Juan jammed his mouth close to the transmitter and said, "Perhaps you would prefer me to sell certain information to the police? Or to the man called Doc Savage."

"Now," Pollo said hastily. "We can settle this without unpleasantness, I am sure."

"Of course, we can settle it," Juan assured him. "You have my money cabled down here by tomorrow morning. That will settle it."

Pollo was silent for a while. "Yes, I guess that is the way to do it," he surrendered reluctantly.

AT the New York end of the wire, Pollo put the telephone receiver on its hook. He was a thin man with a scar under his left eye. He took hold of his face with his left hand, and the enraged clenching grip of the fingers twisted that side of his face and made more unpleasant the scar below his eye. His thin body shook with rage. Great feeling was in the flow of profanity which he kept up for about a minute and a half.

The telephone rang, and the operator said, "The other party wishes to reverse charges on the call you just received from South America. Will you accept the charges? They are thirty-six dollars and eighty-seven cents, tax included."

"Yes," Pollo said through his teeth. "I'll pay it." The swearing he did afterward eclipsed the streak he had just finished. "Fall down on the job, will he!" he gritted. "And then it costs me thirty-six dollars and eighty-seven cents to find out about it." His face was purple.

When his rage had simmered to a point where it was only heat that whitened his face, he got up and went into another room. The place was an apartment, and large, located in the busy downtown section where comings and goings did not attract too much attention.

Four men were seated at a table, giving their attention to a bottle, a pack of cards and stacks of chips. They looked, in the tobacco smoke that was a hades-blue haze in the room, a little like four well-dressed devils. The police had fairly complete histories of three of them. The fourth had been lucky thus far.

Pollo growled at them, and they looked up.

"Things went wrong in South America," Pollo explained. "Those two men, Monk and Ham, got away in spite of that fool Juan I had hired to see that they remained there. Now Monk and Ham are probably on their way up here. I imagine they will come by plane."

The four men looked at each other. One of them, who had been about to deal, laid down his cards. "Which adds up to what?" he asked.

"When Monk and Ham get here, we will have to get rid of them." Pollo made a pistol shape with his right hand, and moved the thumb to indicate the imaginary gun was going off. "Like that."

Then the man who had put down the deck asked, "Do you know about this Doc Savage?"

"What has that to do with it?" snapped the thin man with the scarred face.

"For me personally, it has right considerable to do with it," the other man said dryly. "I have had certain parties who were friends of mine, and who went up against this Doc Savage, and I have not heard from them since. I know other parties who have had friends, and the same thing happened to the friends. Also I have heard rumors about Savage, and I have heard the rumors are not exaggerated."

"Who's afraid of this Doc Savage?"

"I am." The man got up from the table and put his hat on his head. He said, "Well, good-by. I may see you again, but I doubt it, particularly if you go up against Savage."

His three companions also got up and put on their hats. They walked to the door.

"What in the hell are you doing?" Pollo demanded angrily.

"Savage scares us, too," a man explained. "We think we'll leave with Jed, here."

"But damn you," Pollo yelled, "I'm paying you big money."

"They don't make money that big," Jed said.

He left, and the other three with him.

POLLO felt like swearing some more, but he had another feeling, a cold one in the pit of his stomach, that kept him silent. He went to a telephone, dialed, but got no answer. He sat before the telephone for something over an hour, dialing at intervals of fifteen minutes, until finally his party came in.

"Hello. Pollo speaking, chief. I thought Jed and those other three men you sent me were supposed to be tough."

A voice in the telephone assured him, "They do not come any tougher."

"When I mentioned Doc Savage, they got up and walked out. Quit cold."

There was a silence of some duration, and more meaning, at the other end of the line. "Who did you say you mentioned to them?"

"Doc Savage."

Over the wire came a sound that was not coherent.

"What did you say, chief?" Pollo asked.

"I said that I know how Jed and the other three felt," the voice responded uneasily. "Tell me, Pollo, just what has gone wrong?"

Because telephone lines are not the most private things in the world, Pollo told a story about a prize calf named Fair of May, and another one named Evening Brook, both of which escaped—so the story went—from the pasture where they were being kept down on the farm. The escape had been accomplished in spite of two keepers, one named Juan, who had been on hand. The calves when last seen were believed heading north.

"You understand?" Pollo finished.

"I do, and it does not make me happy," his boss said.

"What are we going to do about it?"

"I have some farmhands who are not scared of those calves or the bull that they run with. We will put them on the job. While these calves are heading north, we probably could not find them. So we will get them when they reach the north pasture. They will probably go straight to their home shed. Station the farmhands at the shed. We will have a barbecue. Do you understand?"

"Fully."

"Good. By the way, have you any qualms about the bull I mentioned?"

"Doc Savage?"

"Yes."

"Not a qualm."

"Have you ever seen him?"

"No."

"That would explain the lack of qualms," the leader said dryly.

Chapter VII. THE LAST MINUTE

ARRIVING in New York, Ham Brooks was neatly groomed, correct in afternoon coat and striped trousers, and far the best-dressed man who stepped from the plane at La Guardia field. He had wirelessly ahead to Miami, the stop, giving size, color, fabric, so that a tailor could furnish him with a complete outfit.

Monk wore the same suit which he had worn during the finding of the strange golden man in the

sea, the torpedoing of the Virginia Dare, their long incarceration in jail. "If this suit was good enough for all that, it's good enough for New York," Monk insisted. Actually, he knew the scarecrow garment irritated Ham.

They strode through the airport terminal, and it was warming to be back. People stared at them, at their two unusual pets, Habeas Corpus and Chemistry.

But almost at once, Monk got a shock. He was passing the center of the terminal, where there was a circular dome and windows through which the afternoon sunlight slanted. The sunlight chanced to fall across a woman's right hand, particularly across a ring the woman was wearing. Monk's eyes protruded a little.

He touched Ham's elbow, whispered, "Turn around and walk back with me."

"What ails you now?"

"Take a good look at the ring on that dame's right hand. The one in the mink coat."

They strolled back, and casually examined the ring in question. "You notice it?" Monk whispered. Ham nodded. He was startled.

There was no doubt but that the strange set in the ring the woman was wearing on the small finger of her right hand was a star. A black star. A star edged with red, which caught the light and sent it glittering.

Monk asked, "Does that star remind you of the one we saw in the sky the night the golden man got found in the sea?"

"Yes, it does," Ham whispered.

"I'm gonna brace her. Ask her about the ring."

Ham plucked at Monk's sleeve. "Better not. I happen to know who that woman is."

"Who?"

"Mrs. H. Courtney van Stigh."

"So what?"

"She has more social position than the King of England, and more dollars than Europe has soldiers."

"That's nice," Monk said. "We should get along great." He started toward the lady of social and dollar prominence.

"You'll get a coat of icicles," Ham warned. Ham had heard Mrs. van Stigh had a notable record for snobbery, so he was astonished when Monk approached the lady and said, "Beg pardon, but I'm interested in your black-star ring," and Mrs. van Stigh gave Monk a friendly smile. "Yes, that ring is my most precious possession," she said.

"Does the ring represent something?" Monk asked breezily.

"Oh, yes," she said. "The sea was his mother, and the night was his father. There was a black star edged by fire in the night, and an ectoplasmic light in the sea, and they were his guardians. The dark star is the symbol."

Then she glanced toward the clock on the wall, gasped something about missing her plane, and scampered off.

Monk was rooted to the floor.

"What the hell!" he muttered, finally. "She isn't crazy, is she?"

"Not," Ham told him, "that I ever heard of."

THEY took a taxicab. When the machine was moving, Monk said, "I remember somebody who said his mother was the sea and his father was the night."

"You and me both," Ham said.

"The man who was found in the ocean."

"Yes, I know."

"Suppose there's any connection?"

"How the heck could there be?"

Monk said thoughtfully, "Her voice got sort of strange when she started talking about the ring. She sounded kind of like a mother speaking of her new baby. And didn't you say it wasn't like the old heifer to condescend to even speak to a mere stranger."

Ham nodded. "Particularly a mere stranger who looks like a bum," he added.

"Bum? Meaning me?" Monk became indignant. "Listen, why should an old moneybags like that high-hat me? I've got plenty of culture."

"The only trouble with your culture," Ham told him, "it's all physical."

They fell to quarreling enthusiastically, and soon felt better. Their squabbling—it was so fierce that the taxi driver looked infinitely worried—served them, like it always did, as a tonic; it got rid of the rather eerie sensation which had resulted from seeing the dark star ring.

It was good to be back. The cab was now bright; the interior was clean, fawn-brown; the radio was clear. The new superhighway up and across the Triborough Bridge was smooth. The sun glowed.

They were filled with that fine getting-back-to-God's-country feeling.

In this mood of rejoicing, they came in sight of Doc Savage's headquarters, which occupied the top floor—the eighty-sixth story—of one of midtown Manhattan's most spectacular buildings. The skyscraper was like a spike of gray ice probing up at the placid cumulous clouds.

"I don't know when I've been more glad to get back," Monk said. And he added hopefully, "Now, if we can just have some excitement."

Monk said that last as he was getting out of the cab backward, so that the man who came up behind him and put the hardness of a gun muzzle where it was unmistakable against the homely chemist's back, answered by asking, "How is this for a start?"

MONK stood there—he was half in and half out of the cab—and asked, "What do you want me to do, pal?"

"Get back in the cab," the man said.

"Then what?"

"Just sit there." The man showed the gun to the cab driver. "Look, hacker," the man said. "I think the thing for you to do is take a walk."

The cab driver thought so, too. His walk was a run. He headed for the nearest corner.

The man with the gun said, "I am going to go away. You two fellows sit here. If one of you wants to make a move, he had better first consider whether he is bulletproof."

Then the man put his gun in his pocket—he had not displayed the weapon prominently enough for pedestrians moving on the sidewalk to notice it—and walked away.

Monk and Ham were puzzled by the performance. But only for a moment.

Up the street, a sedan, black and inconspicuous, moved from the curb. In the back seat of the sedan were two men and blued steel. The windows were down.

"Machine guns," Monk croaked.

He did not add that they were army caliber and could cut through the taxi as if it was paper. Ham would know that. Ham's mouth was open, his eyes stark, both hands gripping his sword-cane, which he had recovered in South America.

Ham said, "They tried to get rid of us in South America. Now they're trying the job again."

Monk's nod was hardly perceptible. "Think of something," he said hoarsely.

They could do two things. Stay in the cab, or get out. The only difference seemed to be one of getting shot while sitting, or while running. There was no protection; there was no time to reach, for instance, the entrance of the skyscraper. Monk and Ham watched the dark sedan.

There was—while they watched—suddenly blue-red flame under the front wheels of the approaching sedan. The flame came suddenly, was about ten feet across, approximately circular in shape, flat at first, but becoming tall, and with jagged petals like a monstrous red-blue rose that had blossomed. As the rose of flame grew tall, it lifted the front of the dark sedan until the car was practically standing erect on the rear wheels. Tires and tubes came off both the front wheels. One front fender detached and arose some forty feet in the air, twisting idly while it lifted, like a large black leaf.

There was a concussion that laid their ears back.

A second blast occurred sometime during the big one, but this one—it was not much more than good firecracker noise—was lost in the echoes that gobbled through the street following the greater blast. The smaller explosion took place on the sidewalk a few inches from the feet of the man with the long blue revolver. It caused smoke, about a tubful of smoke to begin, but this swelled to a roomful, and more, and more. It enveloped the man and his revolver.

In the smoke, the man screamed two or three times. His revolver popped loudly, adding blasting echoes to the discord. Then the man and his gun were silent inside the smoke, except for moaning. In the taxi, Monk clamped both hands over his ears to muffle the uproar, and put on a grin.

"Sounds like Doc was around," he said.

THE dark sedan, having balanced on its rear wheels for a moment or two, fell back with a crash to the street, and the frame bent, and all four doors flew open.

The three men in the sedan—only one of the pair in the back seat still retained his machine gun—piled onto the pavement. They put their chests out and ran. They headed north.

By running north, they got behind the cloud of black smoke—this had obviously come from a smoke grenade—which had enveloped the man with the gun.

One of the trio in the wildness of flight veered over so that he got into the edge of the smoke. There was tear gas in the smoke. The man yelled. He rubbed at his eyes. Although suddenly blinded, he had the judgment to dash to one of his companions, so that he could be guided in his flight.

The three of them reached the end of the block. They had a second car—this was the machine the man with the long blue revolver had intended to use—parked there. Two of the three men—the one who did not have the machine gun, and the one who was tear-gassed—ran on to the car.

The man with the machine gun stopped. He waited. There was wind that had blown the smoke aside.

The victim of the tear gas had dropped his long blue revolver. He was down, squirming around on the sidewalk, distraught from blindness and from not knowing which way to flee.

It was obvious that he could be captured by anyone who cared to take the trouble.

The man with the machine gun made a fish mouth and braced the rapid-firer barrel against the corner of a building. His forefinger tightened. The gun poured staccato thunder into the street and made his body shake violently from head to foot.

The tear-gas victim on the sidewalk suddenly relaxed and a red lake spread around his body. The machine gunner then ran to the car, which was already moving slowly. He climbed in. The car jumped ahead.

"You fix Ike?" the driver asked.

"I fixed Ike. He won't tell them anything!" Still wearing his fish-mouth expression, the man looked at his machine gun. "Smart thing is supposed to be to throw one of these guns away, ain't it?"

"Machine guns are hard to get these days," the driver said.

"Yeah. I guess I'll take a chance." The man kept the gun. He put it on the car floor boards. The car traveled fast and turned often.

DOC SAVAGE was a bronze giant of a man who somehow fitted in with the turmoil which had occurred—he had caused it—in the street. He appeared from the entranceway of the skyscraper, from which point he had thrown the explosive grenade and the smoke bomb.

Doc crossed the sidewalk, dived into the cab with Monk and Ham and began cranking up windows.

"Get the windows up," he said.

His tone was imperative without being loud or excited. He started the cab engine and meshed gears. He finished cranking up the front windows while spinning the steering wheel to bring the machine around in the street.

By this time the bomb smoke, with a high tear-gas content, had spread until it shrouded the entire upper end of the street. To trail the killers, they would have to try to get through the stuff.

The cab was not air-tight. Some of the gas came in, and, because it was potent stuff, even a small quantity rendered driving unsafe. Their eyes became blurred with agony and leaked tears. The bronze man twisted the cab in to the curb. He said, "They must have got away in a car. Get a description of it."

He flung out and ran into a drugstore and entered one of a battery of telephone booths. He called police headquarters, dialing the unlisted number of the radio room direct, and gave them—he first identified himself, since he held a high honorary commission on the city police force—a description of the three killers, the scene of the crime, the direction which they must have taken.

Ham came in. "Man across the street saw the car. Light-gray coach." Ham named the make of car and gave the license number.

Doc Savage relayed that information to the police, using sentences that were short, conveying clear detail.

Then he went back to the cab, started the machine and drove carefully around the block, sounding the horn frequently because his eyes were stinging wetly.

Monk asked, "How did you get wise?"

"You notice a new newsstand across the street?" Doc asked.

"Didn't have time to notice anything."

"The newsstand proprietor is an observant ex-detective who lost both legs in an accident," the bronze man said quietly. "We have him on salary."

"You mean this sleuth in the newsstand is hired to stay there and keep his eyes open for what looks like trouble around the building? It's a good idea. This ain't the first time we've been waylaid near headquarters."

Doc Savage said, "The detective telephoned that four men seemed to be watching the place. Renny, Long Tom, Johnny and myself have been taking turns keeping an eye on the four."

Monk nodded. Renny was Colonel John Renwick, noted for his big fists and his engineering knowledge. Long Tom was Major Thomas J. Roberts, electrical wizard, and not as feeble as he looked. Johnny was William Harper Littlejohn, eminent archaeologist and geologist, and a walking dictionary of the largest-sized words. These three, with Monk and Ham, made up a group of five men who were associated with Doc Savage in his unusual profession.

Doc stopped the cab near the body of the man who had carried the long blue gun. There were two policemen and a crowd.

"He was hit twenty times," one of the policemen said. "He died as quick as they ever do."

Doc said, "We would like to examine his clothes."

The policeman agreed. "I imagine it will be all right, Mr. Savage. As soon as the morgue wagon gets here, I'll have them undress him inside it, and send his clothes right up."

Doc nodded. "Tell your homicide squad that four men attempted to assassinate my associates, Monk and Ham. We do not know why. This one got some tear gas, and could not escape. One of the others shot him, probably to keep us from questioning him."

"I'll tell homicide," the officer said.

Chapter VIII. WATCH RUTH DORMAN

SOME years ago when Doc Savage began the unusual career for which he had been trained, he had started equipping the headquarters which he now occupied on the eighty-sixth floor of the midtown building. The establishment took in the eighty-sixth floor, and was divided in three sections, the

first section being a reception room, a small chamber furnished with little more than a huge safe and a rather startling inlaid table of rare woods and some comfortable chairs. A much larger room was the library, packed with scientific volumes. But the largest section of all was a laboratory which, as was well known to men in advanced science, contained some of the most advanced equipment in existence.

In the reception room, Doc Savage waved Monk and Ham to chairs. "You two fellows disappeared following the torpedoing of the Virginia Dare. When the survivors were landed at Buenos Aires, we naturally expected you to be accounted for. But when we sent a cablegram to Captain Kirman of the Virginia Dare, we received an answer saying that you two had never been on his liner."

Monk and Ham both had open mouths. "You say Captain Kirman cabled that we had never been on the Virginia Dare?" Ham muttered.

Doc Savage nodded. "That is what caused the delay in finding you. We had no idea what had become of you. We finally put a worldwide detective agency to work trying to find you. Just a few days ago, they located both of you in that South American jail." Doc Savage's metallic features were composed, his flake-gold eyes expressionless. "Suppose you tell the complete story."

Monk said, "It's some story."

Ham said, "It's a story about a golden man they found floating in the ocean. It will sound kind of goofy."

"Proceed."

Ham went back to the beginning of the story. He did not use many words. Twice, Monk interrupted to bring in facts which Ham had overlooked.

"And we had never seen those men who tried to waylay us in front of this building a while ago," the lawyer finished.

The silence that followed lasted some moments. Then Doc asked for certain repetitions of the story, as if to verify points that he considered significant. "You filled a jug with the luminous water which had surrounded the Virginia Dare, but the jug was broken and the water lost?" he asked.

"Yes. The jug rolled off the table in our stateroom and broke," Ham explained.

"But you are not sure the ship was rolling enough to really tumble the jug to the floor."

"That was what puzzled us."

DOC SAVAGE'S expression did not change. "Did this unusual golden man make any prediction which did not come true?"

Monk answered the query. "Everything the guy predicted happened. The villa in Maderia being sold to the ship's physician, the ship being torpedoed, the rescue vessel showing up—all like he said."

"And the golden man knew you two by sight, although you had never seen him before?"

"Yes."

"You barely mentioned a Mr. Sam Gallehue," Doc Savage said. "Was there anything particularly outstanding about him?"

Monk's head shook a negative. "Naw, he was just one of these sirupy clucks that was so agreeable he got in your hair. Affected a phony English accent. Liked to hang around us, and run around after Captain Kirman."

"In other words, the kind of a man who cultivated the company of important people, whenever he happened to be?" Doc suggested.

"That's right."

Ham said, "Definitely a snob, is what I would call Mr. Sam Gallehue."

"Clever man?" Doc asked.

"Oh, no. Just a fawning dope of a guy."

Doc Savage got up, moved to one of the windows and stood looking out through the thick bulletproof glass. He asked, "This unusual person—the fellow you call the golden man—did he seem entirely willing to come to New York so that we could examine him?"

"Quite willing to come," Monk agreed.

"And it was shortly after he agreed that you began having your troubles?" Doc said in a tone that was half question and half remark.

"Eh?" Monk stared. "You think maybe that was why we were framed in South America?"

Without answering, Doc Savage slightly shifted the line of inquiry by stating, "This golden man said the sea was his mother and the night was his father, you say?"

Monk made an it-seems-goofy-to-me-too face. "And here's something else, Doc. When we got off the plane a while ago, we saw a woman that Ham claims is one of the big bombs in society around here. She was wearing a funny ring with a black-star setting. I asked her about it—"

Ham interjected, "Yes, and when he asked her, I expected Mrs. van Stigh to sick a chauffeur or a secretary on him. But instead, she said something about the sea being a mother and the sky a father and something about ectoplasm. She positively beamed on Monk while she said it."

Ham's tone implied that anyone who could beam on Monk must have something drastically wrong with their mental mechanism.

The bronze man made no comment. He turned from the window slowly.

Monk continued, "But to get back to what we want to know—who got us in all that trouble in South

America? The first guy I want to see about that is Captain Kirman!"

"Captain Kirman of the Virginia Dare. You suspect him?"

"He's our bird," Monk agreed.

A buzzer whined softly, a red light flashed, and Doc Savage moved over to the inlaid table and touched a button which caused a television image to appear on a wall panel. The image showed the corridor outside, and a policeman with a bundle of clothing. Doc opened the door.

The policeman explained, "That man who was machine-gunned in the street—one of our homicide men knew him. He had a record as long as a giraffe's neck."

Doc said, "It might be a good idea if the police started picking up his known associates for questioning."

"We'll do that," the officer agreed. He put the bundle of garments on the table. "This is the stuff he was wearing when he was shot."

The officer departed, and Doc opened the bundle of redly-damp clothing.

The garments were on the cheap, flashy side. A billfold, containing four hundred and twenty-odd dollars, led Monk to remark, "A lot of green stuff for a mug like him to be packing around. Whoever he was working for must pay off."

The only written or printed document in the clothing was a slip of paper, coral-pink in tone, on which had been pen-printed in blue ink three words.

The words:

Watch Ruth Dorman.

While they were looking at the bit of paper, the buzzer whined again and the red light flashed—the gadget was a protective alarm which prevented anyone setting foot on the eighty-sixth floor without their knowing it—and three men entered.

The first of the newcomers was extremely tall and thinner than it seemed any man could be and still live. He wore, dangling from his lapel, a monocle that was obviously a magnifying glass. Staring at Monk and Ham, he said, "I'll be superamalgamated. An ultraauspicious eventuation." Monk grinned. "I see you've still got the words, Johnny."

The second arrival was small, with a complexion that would have gone well with a mushroom cellar. He was Major Thomas J. Long Tom Roberts, the electrical wizard, and his appearance of feebleness was deceptive. Not only had he never been ill, but he could whip nine out of ten football players on an average campus.

The third man had fists. Fists that would not go into quart pails. His face was long, with a habitual funeral-going expression. Physically, he looked bigger than Doc Savage, although actually he was not. He was Lieutenant Colonel John Renny Renwick the engineer.

These three, all associates of Doc Savage, shook hands heartily with Monk and Ham.

"Holy cow!" Renny jerked a large thumb in the general direction of the street below. "The cops just told us there was a Fourth of July down there a while ago."

"We can't figure it out," Monk said.

Long Tom asked, "Where have you two lugs been? Why did you disappear for three months?"

Doc said, "Tell them the story, Monk."

Monk described the affair again taking more time and using more words than Ham had employed earlier in reciting the same details to Doc Savage. The bronze man listened intently, but Monk brought out nothing that Ham had not mentioned, so he made no comment and asked no question.

Renny looked at the sheet of paper from the machine-gunned man's clothing. "Who's Ruth Dorman?" He used his normal-speaking voice, which was loud enough to make bystanders instinctively want to put fingers in their ears.

Doc Savage passed the slip of paper to Renny. "You might start tracing it," he suggested. "Johnny and Long Tom can help you."

The big-fisted engineer nodded.

Monk and Ham had gone into the laboratory, where there were equipment lockers. They returned with supermachine pistols. These weapons, resembling oversized automatics, had been developed by Doc Savage. They could discharge an astounding number of bullets in a minute—either high-explosive slugs, mercy bullets, gas pellets, or smoke slugs.

"I'm ready to hunt Captain Kirman," Monk announced. "Wonder where we'll find him?"

Doc Savage said, "We can try the steamship line which owned the Virginia Dare. They may have information."

Chapter IX. DEATH BY IMPOSSIBILITY

THE building stood on Broadway, south of Wall. There were seven steamship lines listed on the bronze plaque beside the entrance, and Intra-marine Lines, 20th Floor, was second from the top. There was dark marble and indirect lighting on the twentieth floor, and wide double doors that admitted into a large room where many clerks and stenographers were at work. They made themselves known. Not more than a minute later, Doc Savage was shaking hands with a Mr. Elezar.

"Captain Kirman?" said Mr. Elezar. "Oh, yes. One of our most efficient commanders. Had a brilliant career. Went to sea at the age of ten, won first command before he was twenty-five. We were very sorry to lose him."

"Lose him?" Doc asked.

"Yes. Didn't you know? He has quit the sea. Oh, yes, indeed. Seemed broken up over the loss of the Virginia Dare, although he did not say so. Said he was just getting old, and thought he would like to try it a spell ashore. Ridiculous idea, too. He is no older than I am." Mr. Elezar looked to be about fifty.

"Is Captain Kirman now located in the city?" Doc asked.

"Oh, yes. Yes, indeed. Hardly two blocks from here. He has rented and furnished an office suite."

"Can you tell us what kind of business he is in?" Doc asked casually.

"Rare fish."

"You mean that he has become a dealer in rare tropical fish?"

"That's right."

Doc Savage nodded. "Thank you very much," he said. He reached out and took Mr. Elezar's hand and shook it, and, still holding the man's hand, turned it over and looked at the ring he had noticed. "Unusual ring."

Mr. Elezar did not say anything. He seemed uncomfortable. Monk craned his neck and saw that the ring contained a setting which was in the shape of a black star with blood-red edging.

"An extraordinary ring," Doc Savage said thoughtfully. "Believe we have heard of another ring of this type."

Mr. Elezar pulled his hand away. He looked as if he was about to break out in perspiration.

Doc said, "Can you tell me about that ring?"

Mr. Elezar said, "I'm sorry, but Captain Kirman suggested—" He bit his lower lip. "I'm . . . er . . . I have no information about the ring. It . . . it's just a thing I picked up in a pawnshop. Yes, that's it. I got it in a pawnshop."

"Could you give me the name of the pawnshop?" Doc asked. "I would like to get myself a ring like that one."

Mr. Elezar seemed desperate as he put on an act of trying to remember, then said, "I'm sorry, but I can't seem to recall. It was one of those places on the Bowery. There are so many."

Doc Savage was silent as they rode down to the street in an elevator.

But Monk growled angrily. "Mr. Elezar and the ring," he decided, "will bear looking into."

HAM had expected Doc Savage to go directly to Captain Kirman's office, and he was surprised when the bronze man turned into a downtown telephone office.

"What now?" Ham asked.

Doc said, "When you got in trouble in South America, you say the commandant talked to Captain Kirman, and he said he did not know you?"

Ham nodded. Monk put in, "And that ain't all, Doc. Captain Kirman bribed the radio operator to fake a radio message from you that denied we were who we claimed to be."

"Are you sure it was Captain Kirman?"

"The man answered his description."

"That," Doc explained thoughtfully, "is the point."

The bronze man entered a telephone booth where he remained for some thirty minutes.

His expression was unchanged when he finally came out of the booth, but Monk and Ham got the idea he had learned something interesting.

"I was fortunate," Doc told them. "The commandant was in his office. However, the telephone connection to that part of South America could be improved."

"What on earth did you telephone South America for?" Monk demanded.

"To ask the commandant the location of the scar on Captain Kirman's head," Doc explained.

Monk's small eyes narrowed. "And where was it?"

"Under the left eye."

Monk exploded. "But Captain Kirman's scar was on top of his head"—Monk wheeled to stare at Ham.

"Say, the commandant didn't talk to Captain Kirman at all. Captain Kirman didn't bribe the radio operator. It was that other cuss, the man who sold us the Spanish shawls that got us into jail."

Ham nodded gloomily. "I remember how the case of mistaken identity occurred. One of us asked the commandant if Captain Kirman had a scar on his head, and the commandant said he did have, and that it was the result of a mine fragment in the World War. Captain Kirman's scar came from that cause, and we just took it for granted the commandant had talked to Captain Kirman."

"Dang it, now we're without a clue!" Monk complained. "Captain Kirman was my suspect!"

Doc said, "There is the matter of that star ring Mr. Elezar was wearing. Judging from Mr.

Elezar's confusion, the ring had some connection with Captain Kirman. We might still talk to Captain Kirman."

CAPTAIN KIRMAN'S office girl was a sensible-looking middleaged brunette. When she learned their business, she went away through a door, but came back shortly.

"Captain Kirman is on the telephone," she said. "He will see you soon."

Doc Savage moved over to examine some of the tanks of rare fish. Monk joined him. They peered at an array of tanks, filters, aerators.

Monk squinted at the fish. "They're kind of fancy fish to be so small," he remarked. "They worth much?"

Doc said, "Some of them probably sell for more than a hundred dollars each."

Monk gasped. "You mean that a fish an inch long will bring a hundred bucks?"

"Or more. Collector's items," Doc explained. "You take these two fish in this tank, for instance. They are *mistichthys luzonensis*, native of the Philippine Islands, where they are called Sinarapan by the natives. They are very small, rarely more than half an inch long, and they are rare because they occur in Lake Buhi, far in the interior of the islands, a place so remote that it is almost impossible to bring out any living species."

"Then they're high-priced because they're scarce?"

"Something like that. However, in the Lake Buhi district of the Philippines, they are so plentiful that the natives catch great quantities of them in nets and make them up into little cakes which they serve with their rice—"

A buzzer sounded and the office girl picked up the telephone. She was not, something about her indicated, a woman who had been an office girl all her life. There was a polish in her manner, a confident ease, that indicated she was a woman who had possessed money and social position. She put the telephone down.

She said, "You may go in now."

Captain Kirman's office was large and the windows were wide. The windows faced the bay, so there was a view of ships sailing, ferries drawing long white wakes after them, tugs working. In addition to the door through which they had entered, there were two other doors—one door on each side—which were closed.

Captain Kirman looked different. It was not the absence of his uniform—Captain Kirman seemed worried and strained. His face was not as ruddy as when Monk and Ham had seen him last. And his voice was bluff and hearty after the fashion of an actor with stage fright.

"Well, well, well!" Captain Kirman said. "Imagine seeing you fellows. Imagine! This is a pleasure."

Monk took the captain's hand, and it was cool and clammy, like holding a live frog.

Monk said, "I never expected to find you in the fish business, skipper."

"Oh, it's a very profitable business," Captain Kirman said vaguely. "By the way, what have you fellows been doing with yourselves?"

"That," Monk explained, "is what we wanted to talk to you about."

"Me?" Captain Kirman seeming puzzled, absently rubbed the scar on his bald spot.

"Yes. You see, something happened to us in South America."

Captain Kirman said vaguely, "I did wonder what had become of you and your friend, Ham Brooks. You disappeared rather suddenly. I presumed that you had decided to stay over, or something. I missed those frightful quarrels you two used to have."

"We didn't stay voluntarily," Monk said.

"The hell!" Captain Kirman's eyes flew wide. "What do you mean?"

"We were jobbed. Framed. Somebody got us thrown in jail on a fake charge. Then, today, when we got back to New York, somebody tried to kill us."

"The same one who framed you?"

"We don't know," Monk said. "But we got some very large suspicions."

Captain Kirman passed a hand through his hair. He seemed to be growing pale. "Why are you talking to me about this?"

"Remember that golden man who got found in the ocean?" Monk inquired.

"Why—of course. Naturally."

"Recollect the black star that was in the sky just before he was found?"

"I—yes. Yes, I recall."

"Well," Monk said, "we want to ask you about some rings that have black-star settings. For instance, we want to ask you about one particular ring, worn by a friend of yours—named Mr. Elezar—"

He did not finish because a man cried out in horror in an office somewhere upstairs, cried out shrilly, "Stop him! He's jumping out of the window."

Doc Savage and the others, turning instinctively toward the window, were in time to see the body fall past.

THE cry from the office above, the cry to stop someone who was jumping out of a window, was not loud, but it had arresting quality of horror. It jerked all eyes to the window, so that all of them saw the form tumble past the window.

"A suicide!" Ham gasped. The dapper lawyer jumped to the window. There was no screen, but a glass shield across the lower part kept papers from blowing out. Ham leaned across the shield and peered downward. His voice became stark. "Look!" He pointed.

About ten floors below there was a ledge that was part of the architecture of the building. The figure they had seen fall past the window was sprawled out on this. There was no retaining wall to the ledge and, although the ledge was wide enough that the body could not very well have missed landing on it, there was nothing to prevent the victim toppling over the edge of the ledge, if much

moving about was done. That would mean a fall of another ten floors to the street. While they were staring at the body, it moved. The victim doubled one arm. A leg drew up, and the contorted figure turned half over.

"He's alive!" Monk gasped.

"If he moves, he'll roll off that ledge!" Ham breathed.

Captain Kirman said sharply, "We've got to do something. You get down there and see if you can reach the ledge. I'll telephone the police."

Captain Kirman snatched up the telephone.

Doc Savage, Monk and Ham rushed out of the office. As they passed through the reception room, the office girl gave them a bewildered stare. They did not stop to explain.

Doc Savage took the stairway down; Monk and Ham waited for an elevator. However, all of them reached the floor, ten stories below, at about the same time. Evidently that entire floor of the building was unoccupied. None of the doors was labeled with firm names.

Doc tried a door. It was locked. He put force into twisting and a shoving, and wood groaned and the lock tore out. Inside there was a large room, comprising most of that floor of the building. It had been in disuse for so long that dust was a layer over the floor. The windows across the room was huge expanses of soiled, uncurtained glass.

Monk looked out of a window. And always remembered how he felt. An eerie sensation. He later tried to think of the feeling as like the time Ham put an oyster down his collar, which did not describe it exactly, however. The man was lying there on the ledge, dead now. And it was Captain Kirman.

THEY stared at Captain Kirman's body, and it was impossible to believe. They had left Captain Kirman in the office ten floors above after they had seen the body here on this ledge. They had seen a body fall past the window. It had not been Captain Kirman. It could not have been. Captain Kirman had been standing in the room with them at the moment. But Captain Kirman was lying here dead. Monk pulled in a deep breath so charged with astonishment that it whistled.

"He must have a twin brother," he said.

Ham reached for the window lock.

Doc Savage said, "Wait." The bronze man examined the window lock closely. It had not been touched recently. There was dust, and the dust had not been disturbed. No visible indication that the window had been opened for weeks. Doc scrutinized the floor, bending down so that the light slanted across the dust. There were the tracks they had made in the floor dust, but no others.

Ham said, "No one has been in or out of this place for some time." His voice was strange.

Doc opened the window. There was a layer of soot and city grime on the ledge. But there were no tracks. The only marks were a smear or two close to the body, where it had moved a little after it had fallen.

Monk, looking at the body, suddenly paled.

"What's the matter?" Ham asked.

"Remember that scar on top of Captain Kirman's head?" Monk asked.

"Yes."

"Look."

Ham stared. "The same scar on the top of this man's head."

"This is Captain Kirman!"

Doc Savage suddenly wheeled, raced back across the room, into the hallway, and took the stairs upward. He kept climbing at full speed, until he reached the floor where Captain Kirman's office was located. The climb did not greatly quicken his breathing, but his metallic features were strangely set as he entered the office.

The middle-aged, competent office girl glanced up. "Yes?" she said.

"Has Captain Kirman gone out since we left?" Doc asked.

She shook her head. "No." She made a move to rise. "Do you wish to see Captain Kirman again? Shall I announce you?"

"Never mind," the bronze man said.

Doc shoved open the door of Captain Kirman's private office and entered. The captain was not there. The window was up, the way they had left it, and nothing appeared to have been disturbed. Going to the window, Doc looked down. He could see the body lying on the ledge, and Monk, who had climbed out and was standing beside it.

Doc went back to the reception room. He asked the office girl, "You are sure Captain Kirman did not leave his office?"

She stared at him for a while. She was puzzled. "Positive," she said.

The bronze man was quite motionless for a time.

Then: "Captain Kirman," he said, "is dead."

The woman seemed to tighten all over. "How?"

"By impossibility it would seem," the bronze man said.

HAM BROOKS arrived in the office, his chest heaving and perspiration popping from the race up the stairs. He gasped, "Was Captain Kirman here?"

"Captain Kirman is the man lying dead there on that ledge."

Ham swallowed. He seemed to become stiff. He said, "That couldn't happen."

Doc turned to the office girl. "Did you hear any strange sounds from the office?"

She tried twice before she could answer. "You mean—after you men rushed out?"

"Yes."

"No."

"You heard nothing?"

"Nothing."

"And you are certain that Captain Kirman did not leave his office."

She nodded. "He was in there after you left."

"How do you know?"

The woman said, "I tried the door. It was locked. I wanted to ask Captain Kirman why you had rushed out in such a hurry. The door was locked. I knocked. He said he did not wish to be interrupted. I heard his voice distinctly."

The flake-gold of the bronze man's eyes seemed to stir with strange animation.

"The door was locked when you tried it?"

"Yes."

"It was not locked," he said, "when I came back a moment ago."

She stared at him. She continued to stare, much too fixedly. Then, rather slowly her eyes unfocused, and one turned off slightly to the right, and the other turned up, both showing whites. Her lips parted. Her breath came out slowly and steadily as if her lungs were emptying themselves to the utmost. While she was sagging, Doc caught her. He lowered her to the floor. Her eyes closed. Ham asked, "Fainted?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

The bronze man did not answer. He put the woman on a desk. He went back into Captain Kirman's office. The other two doors from the office were still closed. He opened the one to the right. It admitted to a small closet. Doc examined the plaster walls of the closet, and found them solid, undisturbed.

The other door let him into another room, larger than the closet, which had one window. There were fish tanks in the room, and fish swam in some of them.

In one of the tanks a cloud of small, brilliant orange-black-blue fish dashed out of sight among water plants the moment the bronze man appeared.

Doc Savage looked at the orange-black-blue fish. He moved over to the tanks, peering into them. A few of the tanks were labeled, but most of them bore no markings. The orange-black-blue fish fled when he came close to them. Some remained motionless in the water and watched him with popeyes. Doc looked around. Only two fish tanks seemed to be empty. Those two tanks had water and plants like the others. But no visible fish.

Ham came to the door. "What are you doing?"

Doc Savage did not answer immediately. Finally he said, "Looking at the fish."

Ham was puzzled.

"Fish can't tell us anything."

Doc pointed. "Two tanks seem to be empty."

WITHOUT commenting on this remark, Doc went back to the office where they had left Captain Kirman. Doc gave attention to the window, then put his head out and examined the walls of the skyscraper. Other windows were closed. Directly across, was the blank brick wall of a building which must be a storage warehouse, judging from complete lack of windows. The bronze man's gaze swept the vicinity, searching for staring faces at windows, but there were none. Nobody appeared to have witnessed the weird death.

Ham said, "This thing couldn't have happened!" And his voice was hoarse.

Doc went to Captain Kirman's desk. There was a long letter opener of ivory lying there. He picked up the opener and returned to the small room which held the fish tanks.

Doc went to the two tanks which seemed to hold no fish.

There proved to be fish in the tanks. When he thrust the paper knife down into the plants, tiny fish flashed into view, and fled madly around the tank, so swiftly that only close observation showed their presence until they again sought cover.

There seemed to be satisfaction on the bronze man's features as he replaced the letter opener on the desk where he had found it.

"Well?" Ham asked.

"Murder," Doc said.

"But how?" Ham demanded. "How did he get killed?"

The bronze man said, "We might call it a case of death by impossibility, for the time being."

Ham stared at him. But Doc's expression, as far as Ham could see, was one of unchanged

seriousness.

"What . . . what do you mean, Doc?"

Doc Savage seemed not to hear the question. So Ham did not repeat his query. Ham was acquainted with the habit which the bronze man had of becoming conveniently deaf when he was asked something which, for a reason, he did not wish to commit himself by answering.

The telephone rang. Doc picked up the instrument. "Yes. . . . Yes, speaking," he said.

Doc used Captain Kirman's voice.

Ham gave a violent jump, then looked sheepish, deciding his nerves must be going bad. But it was eerie to hear Captain Kirman's voice speaking in the room—or an imitation of the captain's tone and delivery that was of startling fidelity. Ham hurried over and pressed his ear close enough to hear what came over the wire.

Doc listened to a woman's voice say, "This is Elva Boone, captain."

"Yes," Doc replied.

"Listen, I've stumbled onto something," Elva Boone said. "I think it may be what we have been hunting for. I think your life may be in danger."

"That is interesting," Doc Savage said.

The girl—the feminine voice was young—asked, "Where is Ruth Dorman?"

Doc Savage—although memory must have flashed through his mind of the phrase "Watch Ruth Dorman," written on the bit of paper in the pocket of the man who had been machine-gunned—did not hesitate.

He said, "I do not know where she is just now."

"Can you find her?"

"Well—not immediately, I am afraid."

Ham was spellbound by admiration for the voice-imitating job. He had heard Captain Kirman talk a great deal while they were on the Virginia Dare, and he knew the perfect imitation of the captain's voice which Doc Savage was managing was uncanny.

Elva Boone asked, "Can you meet me right away?"

"Yes."

"Good. I will be at Ruth Dorman's apartment."

Doc Savage, without changing expression, said, "If I am in danger, it is possible I am being watched. Maybe it might be better if we did not meet at Ruth Dorman's apartment. Perhaps a place near there would be better."

"How about the drugstore on the corner two blocks down the street?"

"What corner would that be?"

"Eighty-sixth Street and Broadway," said Elva Boone.

"Oh—are you uptown now?" Doc asked.

"Yes."

"That's funny," Doc said. "I saw a woman a while ago that I thought—what are you wearing? A brown dress?"

"A gray suit," Elva Boone said.

"It wasn't you, then," Doc told her. "Well, I will be there in twenty minutes."

He hung up.

Ham said admiringly, "You used a nice trick to find out what she would be wearing."

THEY took a subway uptown. Because the subway was faster, and they happened to catch the rearmost car, whereupon they moved to the back, where there was privacy.

Ham said, "I had a last look at the office girl. She will be all right. Just fainted."

Monk muttered, "I wonder why she fainted."

"Guess it was just shock over finding out her boss had gone out of the window," Ham said.

Monk frowned at the dapper lawyer. "You think he committed suicide?"

"Captain Kirman?"

"Well—he was the dead man, wasn't he?"

Ham said, "When the body fell past the window, Captain Kirman was in the office with us."

"But the captain is dead on that ledge."

"A man can't be dead, and still stand and talk to you."

Monk rubbed his jaw, and felt of his necktie as if it was tight. It was a gaudy necktie, one he had chosen to offend Ham's taste. "Captain Kirman did talk to us, didn't he? He told us to get down there and keep the man from rolling off the ledge, while he got busy and telephoned the police. Isn't that what he said?"

"Something like that."

"Well, what happened?"

Monk looked uneasy. "Stop harping on it!"

"Well, how could a thing like that happen? A man can't be dead and still stand and talk to you," Ham said.

Monk said, "You remember that golden man they found in the ocean?"

Ham grimaced. "It will be a long time before I forget him."

"Well," Monk reminded, "there were some strange things about him. He foretold the future. He knew

things it didn't look like any man could know. He was unnatural. Spooky."

Ham stared strangely at Monk, but he did not say anything more.

There was a girl in a gray suit waiting in the drugstore at Eighty-sixth and Broadway so they decided she must be Elva Boone. She was a tall girl, and there was a curved delight about her that caused Monk to shape a whistling mouth of admiration, but no sound, and scowl sidewise at Ham.

There was actually more than prettiness about this girl. There was strength under her curves, strength of spirit and of will and of ability. She had dark hair. Her eyes were blue, like clear Christmas skies. Her mouth was a warm full-blown rose.

Monk strode forward and took the elbow of the girl in the gray suit before she was aware that he was in the neighborhood.

He asked, "You are Miss Elva Boone, I presume?"

The girl stared at them. She shook her head.

"I'm sorry," she said. "My name is Jalma Coverly. You have made a mistake—or you are crazy."

Monk looked foolish.

Ham burst out in a chuckle, Monk looked so foolish, while Monk grew red-necked and sheep-faced and peered at him malevolently. They were going to have trouble over this girl, both of them suspected.

Doc Savage turned partly away. He was good at ventriloquism, but no one is ever perfect at it, particularly when imitating an unfamiliar voice while at the same time getting a ventriloquial effect. Doc imitated Captain Kirman's voice, and made it low and excited. "Run, Elva! Run!" he said imperatively. "It's a trick!"

Fright flashed over the girl's face. She half turned in an effort to escape. Doc's hand leaped out and trapped her wrist.

"You gave yourself away," the bronze man said quietly. "You are Elva Boone."

Ham, his face getting sober, said, "We had better go somewhere and talk this over."

Elva Boone was glaring at them to cover fright. "You must be crazy!" she said.

Ham shrugged. "We might be. If we are, it would explain some of the things that have been happening."

THEY moved out of the drugstore before Doc Savage spoke, then the bronze man said, "Miss Boone, you have some information. We want it."

The girl was not impressed. "I'll tell you nothing," she said defiantly.

Doc Savage had no idea of the exact location of the apartment of the mysterious Ruth Dorman, although it must be somewhere within two blocks of this spot. The neighborhood was a section of large apartment houses. An area of two blocks radius would include thousands of apartments.

Doc addressed Elva Boone.

"We will go to Ruth Dorman's apartment and talk this over," he said confidently, as if he knew perfectly well where the place was.

The complete casual confidence in his voice worked. The girl was fooled, and she led them to Ruth Dorman's apartment.

There was one incident before they got to the apartment.

They met a policeman.

Elva Boone tried to have them arrested. "Officer, these men are kidnaping me!" she gasped.

Doc Savage drew the patrolman aside and produced from his billfold a card which identified him as a high-ranking police official. The patrolman examined the card, and in addition recognized Doc Savage, so he was satisfied. He grinned at Elva Boone and walked away.

The girl got the wrong idea of what had happened, for she had seen the billfold.

"You bribed him!" she said angrily.

Chapter XI. SISTERS

RUTH DORMAN'S apartment proved to be an eleven-room duplex that was a semipenthouse, with ceilings that were high, the furniture all period stuff, and good. On the library wall was a Persian animal rug that was typical of the apartment—it was a rug made in silk and silver, a rug which had taken decades to weave, and which was very old, and which had cost a small fortune even when first woven.

"Good taste," Ham said, glancing about appreciatively.

Doc Savage pocketed a tiny, ingenious metal probe with which he had picked the apartment lock. He moved through the rooms, searching, but found no one.

"Servants?" he asked Elva Boone.

She glared at him. "You should know. You have been watching the place for days!"

Doc asked, "We have been watching this apartment?"

"Yes!"

A trace of grimness came over the bronze man's face, and he turned to Monk.

Monk said, "Doc, if this joint is being watched, maybe Ham and I had better find out who is doing it."

But Doc Savage shook his head. "We will put Long Tom, Johnny and Renny on that job."

The bronze man found a telephone and got his headquarters on the wire. Renny, answering, said, "Holy cow! Doc, you remember that piece of paper you gave us to trace? The one with 'Watch Ruth Dorman,' written on it."

Doc asked, "Have you traced it?"

"Well, to some extent. It was a narrow piece of stationery of good quality, and we decided it was probably torn off a sheet of hotel stationery. You know hotels generally supply their stationery to the guest rooms in wide and narrow sheets. Well, we concluded this was a narrow sheet. The only trouble with the theory was that this paper was coral pink. The high quality suggested a swanky hotel, so we began calling the snazzy hotels and asking if their stationery was coral pink. It turned out to be the Royal Rex."

"How about the blue ink with which the note was written?" Doc inquired.

"The Royal Rex supplies blue ink to its guest rooms," Renny said. "Do you want us to go to the hotel? That's not the biggest hotel in town, but it comes pretty near being the most ritzy. I don't know how on earth we would find the person who wrote that note."

"Here is what I called you about," Doc said. He gave the address of Ruth Dorman's apartment. "It is possible someone may be watching this apartment," he said. "So you and Long Tom and Johnny come over here and search the neighborhood. But be careful."

"Have you found out what this is all about yet?" Renny asked.

"Not yet."

HAM came in from another room. He had been searching the apartment.

"A man lives here," he announced.

Elva Boone stared at him. There was surprise in her aquamarine-colored eyes. "And where else," she asked, "would you expect my sister's husband to live?"

Ham held his mouth open for a moment. "Your sister's husband?"

"Of course," said the girl.

"Ruth Dorman is your sister?"

"Yes."

"Go on."

She stared at him. "What do you mean-go on?"

Ham explained patiently, "We are after information. You have some that we need."

The girl compressed her lips, and did not say anything. Her manner indicated she did not intend to answer.

Doc suggested, "We might look in her handbag."

At that, the girl's lips parted, and she made a gesture of half lifting her hand, but she did not speak.

Doc found the usual woman-litter in her handbag—and one other article. The article was a pin of yellow gold with a setting in the shape of a black star that was edged with crimson. It was exactly the same kind of star that they had seen in the two rings.

Doc showed the girl the star. "What does this mean?" he inquired.

She would not answer.

An hour later, they had got nothing out of her except stubborn refusals to talk. Then the police arrived with Mrs. Ruth Dorman—alias the office girl from Captain Kirman's office. Mrs. Dorman was pale, but not hysterical. Her composure, as a whole, was good.

Doc Savage consulted the policeman in charge, asking, "What did you learn?"

The officer shrugged. "Practically nothing." He glanced sidewise at Mrs. Dorman. "I'm not sure but that this woman doesn't know more than she is telling, though. But she is an important person—or her husband is—so we can't just lock her up on suspicion."

"Important? In what way?"

"Money."

"She is wealthy?"

"Her husband is."

"Then why was she working as Captain Kirman's office girl?"

"Just to learn about fish, she says. She was interested in rare fish, and was working there to learn about them. Or so she claims." The officer frowned. "That was a little funny, too. Captain Kirman didn't know anything about rare fish."

Doc Savage was thoughtful for a moment. "You mean that Captain Kirman was not particularly interested in rare fish?"

"Matter of fact, he didn't own those fish in the office, even the fittings in the place. Another guy had financed him."

"Who was Captain Kirman's backer?"

"Old codger named Benjamin Opsall."

"Have you learned anything about Opsall?"

"We haven't talked to him. Opsall's butler said he wasn't home. But we've inquired around. He is a rare-fish dealer, all right, one of the biggest."

"How about Mrs. Dorman's husband?"

"Fred Dorman is his name."

"What is his business?"

"Broker. Big business man. As dough-heavy as they come."

"How long has Ruth Dorman been married to him?"

"Little over two years."

"Children?"

"One. It's adopted. Boy. About five years old. He's away at boarding school."

That was about all the information the policeman could give. He departed.

Chapter XII. TRAIL TO THE WIZARD

WHERE Elva Boone got her two dueling pistols was something that forever remained a mystery—but she got them, and they were loaded. It nearly cost Monk his left ear to learn about their being loaded, the bullet missing the ear by no more than an inch or so. Elva Boone had refused to talk. Mrs. Dorman likewise had refused. It had become more and more obvious that both women were scared out of their wits—not frightened of Doc Savage and his men, but afraid of something else. The mystery of where the guns came from was doubly confounding because, although Elva Boone had moved around a little, Monk and Ham had watched her. It was a pleasure to watch her. But suddenly she was pointing two dueling pistols at them, which was no pleasure. The guns were short and blue. The girl's voice was elaborately calm. She said, "You men will get down on the floor and stretch out."

Monk then had the bright idea which he later regretted. He said, "Nobody ever keeps dueling pistols loaded while they're lying around the house."

Elva Boone, her voice like fine metal, said, "You wouldn't believe me if I told you these are loaded, would you?"

"No," Monk said.

The girl then pulled the trigger of the left-hand gun, and it made such a shocking noise that a vase full of flowers upset on a side table. Monk squawked, dodged so violently that he nearly followed the vase in upsetting.

"The other one is also loaded," the girl said. She backed toward the door. "Ruth, you come with me," she ordered.

Mrs. Dorman put her fingertips against her teeth. She was pale. "But, Elva, is this wise—"

"Come on," her sister said grimly, "I have an idea."

Mrs. Dorman obeyed. The two women backed out. The door was slammed, and the lock clicked.

Ham said, "There's a back door!" and whipped through dining room, kitchen and storeroom, to get to the rear door. But as he approached it, he heard the lock clicking.

"They got here ahead of me," Ham roared angrily. "We're locked in!"

He rushed back, joined Monk and his eyes hunted for Doc Savage. "Where'd Doc go?" he demanded.

Monk pointed.

The bronze man had jacked up one of the window screens, and had swung out on the window ledge. There was hard concrete sidewalk and street more than twenty floors below. The building was not of brick, but of block-stone construction, with a space at the joints. But not much space. Hardly safe purchase for fingertips. Doc started up.

Monk moved over to the window—looking at the wall Doc was scaling, peering down onto the street—and had the feeling that his hair was standing on end. He knew Doc possessed fabulous physical strength. He had seen the bronze man do things that looked impossible. But that did not keep ice out of his veins.

The bronze man reached the roof. There was a small superstructure there which housed the elevator mechanism. The door was hasped shut, but not locked. He got inside.

The machinery of one elevator was operating. Doc stopped it.

TEN minutes later, when Elva Boone and Ruth Dorman hurried out of the apartment house—the elevator had stopped dead between two floors, and it had been necessary to send the building superintendent to the roof before it could be started again—Doc Savage, Monk and Ham were out of the building. They were at the far end of the block, waiting in a taxicab.

"That good-lookin' gal has got that pistol in her purse," Monk said grimly. "Notice how she carries the purse, her hand in it."

The two women headed in the opposite direction, walking fast.

Ham asked, "See any sign of Renny, Long Tom or Johnny? They should be here and watching this place by now."

Doc Savage pointed. "Notice the telephone lineman."

"Eh?"

"In the center of the street."

New York City telephone lines are carried in underground conduits which can be reached in most cases, through manholes in the pavement, which accounted for the fact that the "lineman" was seated on the rim of an open manhole in the center of the street. A regulation telephone company truck was parked at the curb, and a protective railing and red warning flags had been erected around the

manhole.

The "lineman" sat there with an acetylene cutting torch in his hand. He wore the kind of hood that welders wear, and he was going through the motions of welding something below the lip of the manhole.

Ham chuckled. "Long Tom, isn't it?"

Monk said, "That's a slick disguise he's thought up. I didn't even recognize him."

A cab cruised down the street, and Elva Boone hailed it quickly. The two women got in.

Doc said to the driver of their own machine, "Trail that cab—the one that the two women just got in."

The driver looked around. He was suspicious, and not afraid. He said, "What is this, pals?" in a tough voice.

"We're detectives," Monk told him, altering the truth a little.

That made it different, and the driver put the cab in motion. They proceeded to follow Elva Boone and Mrs. Ruth Dorman south and east to Central Park.

Doc Savage made no move to stop the two women. Monk and Ham did not question him as to his reasons. They had seen Doc do strange things before. They had seen him let a suspected person apparently get away, and lead him to the higher-ups.

"What about Renny, Long Tom and Johnny?" Ham asked.

Doc said, "They can stay where they are. If anyone is watching the Dorman apartment house, they may be able to spot whoever it is. Anyway, we have no means of communicating with them without attracting attention."

Monk eyed the bronze man. "What do you think is back of this, Doc? Don't it look as if it hitches up, in some way, to that golden man they found in the ocean?"

"Apparently it does," Doc admitted.

The taxi they were following moved slowly. When the machine was in the park, the two women abruptly alighted and dismissed the cab. They walked for a while, seemingly doing nothing but strolling.

Doc and his men kept out of sight.

Without having done anything except stroll, the two women took another taxi.

"What was the idea of that?" Monk pondered. "Did they just take a walk to calm their nerves?"

Doc Savage said nothing.

ELVA BOONE and Mrs. Ruth Dorman ended their trip in front of a building of distinctly startling appearance. The structure was near the swanky Murray Hill section, one of the old brownstones. But fire escapes and every hint of ornamentation had been stripped from the face of the structure, and the building was painted a somber black.

The two women talked to their cab driver for a while. The driver shook his head—some money changed hands—and there was a little more conversation. The driver nodded.

When Monk glanced at Doc Savage, the bronze man was watching the two women through a small pocket telescope which Monk happened to know was powerful for its size.

Doc said, "They told the taxi driver they are going into the black building, then through an alleyway to a side street, where the driver is to pick them up."

Startled, Monk was about to demand how Doc had found that out. Then he understood. The telescope—Doc Savage was a skilled lip reader.

"Monk, you keep an eye on the front of the place, in case we were mistaken," Doc suggested.

Monk nodded. He waited until Elva Boone and Ruth Dorman had entered the black building, then got out of the cab. Doc and Ham rode around to the opposite side of the block. Doc said, "Ham, you stay in the cab, two blocks down the street, and watch for signals." Ham nodded, moved away in the machine.

A moment later, Doc himself was in the street, crouching back of a parked car for concealment.

Elva Boone and Mrs. Dorman had stepped out of an areaway. They seemed familiar with the vicinity, and glanced about for their cab. The hack was not there. The women waited for a few moments, obviously growing more nervous. It dawned on them that their cab driver had gotten the idea there was something wrong, and had decided not to have anything more to do with them.

Elva Boone and Ruth Dorman walked to a drugstore, where they ordered soft drinks. They sat at a table.

The drugstore had a side door. Doc got through the side entrance and into a booth without being observed. From that spot, he could watch the faces of both women, and, although it was impossible to hear what they were saying, he could read their lips without difficulty.

Elva Boone was talking energetically, driving home some kind of an argument which ended, "—so that we can keep you out of this, Ruth. The fact that you were in Captain Kirman's office when he was murdered—I'm convinced he was murdered—was unlucky as the dickens. But the police don't suspect you. Or if they do, they certainly don't suspect the real facts. You can tell your husband you were merely working there to learn about fish."

"I wish," said Ruth Dorman, "that we could tell the whole evil truth."

"We couldn't prove any of it, Ruth."

"I know. Only--"

"And you don't want your husband to find out about it."

Ruth Dorman shuddered. "No, Fred mustn't even guess."

Elva Boone said, "However, if you were smart, you would tell him."

"No, no! You know Fred--the way he believes. And the way he would feel about a thing like this."

Elva Boone frowned at her sister. "You were an idiot, Ruth, to get involved in it."

Mrs. Dorman nodded dumbly.

Elva reached over impulsively and squeezed her sister's hand. "However, I think my plan will work. Doc Savage and his two friends trailed us--trailed us right up to the Dark Sanctuary. They will think we went there, so they will investigate the place. Investigate it--that's what we want them to do."

Again Mrs. Dorman nodded.

Elva added, "Let's get out of this neighborhood. We've led the bloodhounds to the rat hole where we think they should do their digging. Now we can sit back and see what happens."

"I hope you're right, Elva."

"It can't hurt anything," said the positive young woman. "From what I've heard about Doc Savage, if anyone can crack this nut, he can."

The two women left the drugstore and hailed a taxicab. While they were doing that, Doc Savage stood where the sisters could not see him and signaled Ham, semaphore style, with a handkerchief. "Follow them and RARHQ," Doc wigwagged.

Ham acknowledged that he understood. The code letters RARHQ meant, "Report to the automatic recorder at headquarters." In the bronze man's skyscraper laboratory was a gadget connected to the telephone wires which automatically recorded incoming calls together with whatever the caller said.

Chapter XIII. DARK SANCTUARY

MONK MAYFAIR was standing in front of an apartment house with a pencil and paper in hand pretending to be a newspaper reporter in search of material for a feature story about the strange things that apartment-house doormen see. Standing there, Monk could see the black building which Elva Boone and Mrs. Dorman had pretended to enter.

"Where's my pet hog?" Monk asked Doc Savage.

"With Ham in the cab," Doc explained. "Ham is trailing the two women."

Monk joined Doc, and they walked down the street. Monk said, "I asked that doorman about the black building. He says it's the Dark Sanctuary."

"The what?"

"Dark Sanctuary."

"Did he tell you what it is?"

"I asked him, but he said he didn't know. He said a lot of limousines and chauffeured town cars drive up there in the course of a day, though."

"The two women want us to investigate this Dark Sanctuary."

"That's why they led us here?"

"Yes."

"It ain't a trick, maybe? The dames didn't maybe hope to lead us into a trap?"

The bronze man remained silent on that point. As they approached the severely plain-black front of the building, a car was just pulling into an arched driveway which penetrated into one side of the building and out the other. The machine was a fifteen-thousand-dollar imported town car with chauffeur and footman in uniform.

Monk said, "Hey, they sure have the ritz around the place."

Doc headed straight for the door.

Monk was uneasy. "You figure on barging right into that joint, Doc?"

Doc Savage nodded.

By the way of preliminary precaution, Monk took his trouser belt up a couple of notches, so that he would not lose that essential garment if the action became brisk. He altered his necktie knot, tying in a knot of his own invention which was not fancy to look at, but which had the very good virtue that, if a foe grabbed hold of the necktie in a fight, the necktie would come off Monk's neck instead of choking him.

"Well, let's hope it's a keg of nails," Monk said.

The door was of some type of black wood, and the use of black coloring at the portal, together with the black coloration throughout, had achieved an effect of dignity. There was no effect of garishness about the place--nothing theatrical, nothing carnival. But it was impressive.

At the door stood a man in a black uniform, a uniform not completely black, but touched off with deep scarlet.

Monk stared at the scarlet touches on the uniform, and remembered the black star with the crimson edging.

Monk said to the doorman, "We are newspapermen. We have orders to get a story out of this place for our paper."

A forbidding expression came over the doorman's face. "Nothing doing, pal!" he snapped. He must

have touched a button, because three other men, dressed like himself, and husky, appeared. The doorman said, "You two birds clear out."

Doc Savage's voice was quiet. "Possibly," he said, "this might make some difference." He displayed credentials which proved he was a police official.

The doorman hesitated. Finally he told one of the men he had summoned, "Go get Gallehue."

"What the hell is cops doing here?" the man asked.

"Go get Gallehue."

The man went away.

Out of a mouth corner, Monk said, "You hear that, Doc? Gallehue. There was a Sam Gallehue on the Virginia Dare. Reckon it's the same bird."

Still with no expression on his metallic features, Doc Savage turned to the doorman and asked, "You are sending for Mr. Sam Gallehue?"

"Yes," the doorman said shortly. "What about it?"

Monk said, "It's lovely. We're old pals."

Mr. Sam Gallehue thought it was lovely, too; at least he told them so effusively while he pumped their hands—Monk's first—and said, "Oh, how delightful. Quite. I'm so glad to see you, really I am."

Monk returned the handshake as enthusiastically as if he had hold of a dead fish and said, "This is the chief—Doc Savage."

Mr. Sam Gallehue additionally was delighted no end, he said. He had heard of Doc Savage, he added, and now that he was meeting the bronze man, it was one of the moments of his life. Really a pleasure. Would they have some cocktails? He consulted his wrist watch. There was a swell place around the corner which was especially nice at this hour.

Monk, with not too much tact—courtesy was not Monk's long shot—said, "It's this funny black building we're interested in."

Mr. Sam Gallehue blinked. "Beg pardon?"

"What kind of a joint is it, Sammy?"

"Joint?" Mr. Gallehue was horrified. He glanced about nervously. "Suppose we go to my private office," he muttered.

The private office was not black, but it was darkly wooden in tone. Nothing was gaudy, but also nothing was very cheap. The effect was one of rich dignity.

Sam Gallehue pulled out chairs and patted the seats as if to make sure they were soft enough for his visitors. But he did not look happy.

"I hope, I sincerely hope"—Gallehue was looking at Doc Savage—"that you are not here in your official capacity."

Doc asked quietly, "What would my official capacity be?"

"Or—by that, I mean"—Mr. Sam Gallehue ran a finger around the inside of his collar—"that I have heard you are a man who, and I can say so without exaggerating, is known extensively—known in the far corners of the earth I may truthfully say—as one who devotes himself, his energies and the services of his organization to righting what are considered to be wrongs."

Monk put in, "Then we're to take it there's a wrong around here you're afraid we might try to right?"

Sam Gallehue sprang up in alarm. "Oh, my! My, no!" He popped his eyes at them. "Surely, you're kidding me! Surely!"

Monk watched the man and thinking that this was the first instance, in the time that he had known Mr. Sam Gallehue, that he had heard the man disagree with anyone.

"Just what kind of racket you got here?" Monk asked bluntly.

Sam Gallehue paced over nervously and opened the door, looked out, then closed it. There was no one listening, if that was what he had wanted to find out. He faced them and opened his mouth, but, instead of speaking, walked over and got a drink of water. Finally, "You remember the golden man found in the ocean?" he blurted.

Monk blinked. "I'll say I remember the golden man!"

"You recall also," said Sam Gallehue, "that he was an . . . ah . . . shall we say—unusual person."

"There was plenty screwy about him."

Mr. Gallehue was displeased. "That is—blasphemy!"

"Blasphemy!"

"What the heck!" Monk scowled. "Who you trying to kid?"

Mr. Gallehue's tone became dignified and firm. "The golden man," he said, "is a person with powers beyond those of mortal ken."

The manner in which the statement was made, coupled with the quietly rich atmosphere of the room, was so impressive that Monk discovered himself glancing uneasily at Doc Savage, then at the floor.

"You trying to tell us," Monk muttered, "that he's . . . he's—"

"No—not a supreme deity," Mr. Sam Gallehue said with effective dignity. "I have never put forth a flat statement on that point." He hesitated, then added solemnly, "It is my own personal conviction that such must be the case, and I did not arrive at such a conviction lightly, I assure you. In the beginning, I was a skeptic, like yourselves. But I assure you solemnly that I am no longer a

skeptic."

Monk scratched his head. "I don't get this."

Mr. Sam Gallehue said, "In the beginning, I realized that this golden man from the sea was not an ordinary mortal. I was, I think, his first follower. The first believer. And I am now his business manager and backer."

"You put up the money for this place?" Monk indicated their surroundings.

"Yes." Mr. Sam Gallehue nodded for emphasis. "And for the Mountain Sanctuary as well."

Doc Savage, who had spoken almost no words, now entered the conversation. "You handle the money?" the bronze man asked.

"Yes."

"Do you charge fees?"

"No."

"Then how do you get the money?"

"Everything," said Mr. Sam Gallehue proudly, "is voluntary donation."

"Then this is a cult?"

"I do not like that word—cult," the other replied in an injured tone.

"But if we wish to be vulgar, we might call it a cult?"

"I— Yes."

Doc Savage stood up. "In that case, I believe we would like to talk to this golden man."

Mr. Sam Gallehue shook his head hurriedly. "I am sorry, indeed I am, but you will have to make an appointment, and I must warn you that it will be several days before you can expect an audience—if you are so fortunate as to get one at all."

Doc Savage's flake-gold eyes fixed on Gallehue intently. "Take us to him. And never mind announcing us in advance."

"I—" Gallehue was perspiring.

Monk put in a growled warning. "There's several things this golden wizard of yours better clear up. There's the mystery of who got me and Ham locked up in a South American jail. There's the question of how Captain Kirman was murdered. And there's more about Ruth Dorman and Elva Boone." Monk scowled. "How would you like for us to run you and your cult into jail?"

"I—" Gallehue shuddered. "Jail! You couldn't do that. We are not guilty of anything."

"You would have a chance in court to prove that."

Gallehue wiped his face. "I— Come with me," he said finally.

They followed Gallehue. Monk, walking close to Doc, muttered, "So my friend Gallehue brought the golden man to New York and set him up as a cult leader. Smart idea. They been makin' dough, too. From that limousine trade, they must be hookin' the big-money trade."

Doc said, "Mr. Gallehue."

"Yes."

"Do the members of your cult wear black star rings or pins as insignia?"

Gallehue complained, "I wish you would not refer to it as a cult."

"Do the members wear a black star insignia?"

"Yes. That is the way our—believers—identify themselves."

DOC SAVAGE had never seen the golden man before—Doc was sure of that—but the golden man arose from where he was sitting in a darkly dignified chair in a darkly dignified room and extended his hand and said, "I am very glad to see you, Mr. Savage."

Doc, amazed, said, "You know me?"

The golden man seemed not to hear the inquiry. He studied Doc for a few moments, then said in a deeply impressive, solemn voice, "Since that stormy night when you were born on the tiny schooner Orion in the shallow cove at the north end of Andros Island, you have done much good, and many things that are great."

Doc was floored, figuratively. Not by the praise—praise did not impress him, and it was always embarrassing—but by the fact that this golden man knew the exact place of his birth. It was astounding. Doc himself had known of no living man who had those facts. His five aids did not know. It was in no written record.

The golden man added, "You will be grieved to know your friend, Baron Orrest Karl Lestzky, is dying in Vienna tonight. He will be dead in another three hours, and, as you know, it will be a great loss, and very sad. Lestzky is one of the few great surgeons who really understands your new brain-operating technique, as I know you are aware."

Doc Savage, trying not to be impressed, was impressed.

Doc asked, "You know Lestzky?"

"Only as I knew you—if he would walk into this room." The golden man seemed to be weary. He leaned forward, took his face in his hands. He sat there. Doc watched him, studying him with rigid intentness.

"It is sad," the golden man said dully. "Very sad. I am tired in my soul."

Then he got up and walked out of the room. He said no more. The door shut behind him. They could hear his footsteps, heavy, for a time, going away. Then silence.

Doc got up and moved through rooms to the street exit, saying nothing, and left the Dark Sanctuary.

Monk followed. Monk didn't know what to think.

Chapter XIV. THE FISH MAN

BENJAMIN OPSALL met Doc Savage and Monk Mayfair on the semicircular driveway that was like a tunnel in the front of the Dark Sanctuary. A limousine and chauffeur stood there, and Opsall was walking back and forth, looking completely delighted with the world and with himself.

When he saw Mr. Sam Gallehue—Gallehue had followed Doc and Monk to the exit—Opsall dashed forward, saying, "Oh, there you are, Mr. Gallehue!" Opsall thrust a slip of paper into Mr. Sam Gallehue's hands. "I want you to have this!" Opsall exclaimed. "It's a small expression of my gratitude!"

Gallehue looked at the slip of paper, which was a check. The figures for which it was made out were large. Gallehue glanced apologetically at Doc Savage, then took Opsall's elbow, and the pair moved to one side.

From the corner of his mouth, Monk whispered, "String figures on that check looked like the tail of a comet."

Doc Savage studied Benjamin Opsall. Opsall had large moist eyes and a large moist mouth, and he was wide and solid. His skin was clear with health, drowned by the sun—or sun lamp—and, even without the limousine, he would have looked prosperous. Around fifty was his age.

The Gallehue-Opsall conference broke up when Sam Gallehue pocketed the check, then shook Opsall's hands and patted Opsall on the back.

Doc Savage said, so that only Monk could hear, "Trail this Opsall."

"Eh? Why?"

"He is the man who set Captain Kirman up in the rare-fish business."

"Oh!" Monk pulled in a deep breath. "I forgot that."

Trailing Benjamin Opsall proved unexpectedly easy, for Opsall came over to Doc and Monk. He grabbed their hands. "Two more Believers, aren't you? That makes you friends of mine." He laughed delightedly. "We're all friends in a wonderful peace, aren't we?"

"Let's hope so," Doc Savage said conservatively.

Opsall smiled at them. "Are you coming? Going?" He held open the door of his limousine. "Can I give you a lift?"

Doc Savage said, "That would be very kind."

The bronze man got into the limousine, and Monk followed. There were jump seats which folded down, and the chauffeur lowered one of these for Monk. Opsall climbed in, and the big machine got in motion.

Opsall proceeded to talk a blue streak. "I've been a Believer for over a month now, and I'm more sincere now than on the day I became one."

He effused for some minutes about the wonders of the golden man, and the spiritual benefits of being a Believer. There were financial benefits, too, he imparted—and the story of what was behind his joy came out. It seemed that the golden man had informed him several days previously that a certain European nation was going to confiscate the foreign property of an American company. This had happened on schedule, and the stock of the company had naturally tobogganed. Opsall, having sold a great deal of the stock short, naturally had made money from the debacle. "A cleaning!" he declared.

"This being a Believer must be profitable," Monk said.

"Oh, enormously." Opsall leaned forward and patted Monk's shoulder. "But, mind you, I would be a Believer even if there wasn't a damned cent of profit in it. By the way, would you gentleman care to drop in at my place of business for a spot of tea?"

"What sort of business have you?" Doc asked innocently.

"I deal in rare fish."

"Tropicals?"

"Yes. Maybe you might like to see my stock. It is one of the most complete in existence."

"That would be interesting," Doc admitted.

Monk grinned.

THE Opsall rare-fish establishment was impressive, there being large showrooms with tanks containing species of aquarium fish—dwarf gouramis, betta fighting fish, and other bubble-nest builders; platys, helleri, and various types of live bearers, together with egg-layer types such as cichlasomma meeki, neon tetras and white cloud mountain fish. Opsall recited the names of the fish rapidly, leading Monk to mutter, "Sounds like Greek to me."

"Your terminology on chemistry would sound as confusing to me," Opsall assured him.

Doc Savage asked, "Mr. Opsall, are you acquainted with Captain Kirman?"

Opsall looked up quickly. "Oh, yes."

"Known Captain Kirman very long?"

"Well, only a few weeks."

"Business associate of yours?"

"Not exactly."

"But you set him up in the tropical-fish business?"

Opsall nodded slightly. "May I ask why you seem so interested?"

Monk answered that question. "Captain Kirman died today. It was no natural death."

Opsall showed distress. "Damn it, he owes me—" He hesitated, then said apologetically, "I . . . I'm sorry that the first thing I thought of was the money he owes me. I suppose I'm vulgar and mercenary."

He gestured for them to follow him, and moved away. "We will go to my private office," he explained. "I'm distressed by this news. I need a drink."

They entered the private office, Opsall opening the door and stepping inside and turning to hold the door ajar for them.

"Some place!" Monk exclaimed.

"My private greenhouse," Opsall said. "I use it to grow plants to augment our displays of rare fish."

One wall of the office was glass, and beyond was a view of a small private greenhouse filled with colorful tropical and semitropical flowers. A second wall was a huge aquarium in which fish of all colors and sizes swam among water plants that were as exotic as the fish. The other two walls were ordinary plaster.

"I'll say it's some place!" a distinctly unpleasant voice informed Monk.

Men with guns—there were four of them—had been standing, two on each side of the door, and they now fanned out quickly so that, if necessary, there would be room for bullets.

"Señors, you are slow getting back," one said. He was a thin man with a scar under his left eye. Opsall ogled them. "But I don't know you!"

"Hey, Doc!" Monk was pointing at the man with the scar. "Doc, this is that guy who framed me and Ham in South America."

Doc Savage remained silent, although he could have added another pair of the four men to the identified list. The pair had been members of the group who had tried to waylay Monk and Ham in front of the skyscraper headquarters.

The thin man with the scar went to a desk which stood in the center of the floor. When he turned, he had a tray and glasses. Water was in the glasses.

The man uncorked a bottle, poured a part of its contents into each of the glasses.

"This will only put you to sleep, Señors," he said. "Drink it. No harm. Good. Mucho bueno."

Doc and Monk had caught the odor of the stuff. They knew what it was. Poison, which would be working slow if it took more than five minutes to kill them.

Doc Savage spoke three words in a strange language. The words translated into, "Hold your breath."

THE language was ancient Mayan, a vernacular spoken by the Central American civilization of Maya centuries ago, but now a tongue so lost in the civilized world probably no one but Doc Savage and his associates understood or could speak it. Doc and his men used it for communication without being understood by others.

Doc, after he spoke, and as if afraid of the menacing guns, lifted both arms slowly so that his hands were above his head. His arms were not straight up, and the right one was doubled and tight as if it was making a muscle. The bulge of biceps sinew swelled up against his forearm until there was crunching sound as a fragile container inside his sleeve was crushed. It was a small noise, and no one noticed.

He waited. The gas released from the container he had broken was odorless, colorless, potent—it would induce harmless unconsciousness with uncanny speed. And it had an additional quality of becoming ineffective after it had mixed with the air for slightly more than a minute.

Unfortunately, the anaesthetic gas did not first bring down the thin man with the scar. It was one of the others, and he was very susceptible to the gas, because it got him before the others had breathed enough to be greatly affected. The man caved down slowly.

The scarred man yelled. He fired his gun straight at Doc Savage's chest. Then he sprang backward, fleeing wildly.

The bullet knocked Doc back, although he was wearing a bulletproof undergarment of alloy mesh. That protection was at best an emergency one, and the bullet struck a blow greater than any fist. Monk threw out a hand, clutched a chair, and hurled, all in one move. The chair hit a foe. The fellow reeled, upset, lay where he fell—either the chair had knocked him senseless, or it was the anaesthetic gas, for he had fallen where the gas should be strongest.

Doc got back his balance, then leaped forward, making for the thin man with the scar. The thin man fired his gun, but missed completely. Somehow that must have given him the idea Doc was bulletproof. He took to flight. The quickest escape route was through the glass wall into the greenhouse, so the man put his hands over his face and plunged into the glass wall. Glass broke, came down in jangling sheets.

That left only one assailant in the room. Monk made for that one. Monk's hands were big and hairy

and hungry in front of him. The intended victim saw Monk, tried to escape. He was slow. Monk's fist made a sound like a fistful of mud falling on a floor, and the man walked backward, senseless, making waving movements with his arms, into the falling glass of the greenhouse wall. The anaesthetic gas had by now become ineffective from mixing with the air. Opsall still stood rigid in the same tracks he had occupied when it all started. The anaesthetic gas had not affected him—he must have been so scared that he was holding his breath.

REINFORCEMENTS arrived. Other men—they had been hidden in the greenhouse—joined the action. These men had kept hidden behind the flowers, the luxuriant tropical plants, in the little private greenhouse.

They leaped up, three together—then two more—and a sixth.

The man with the scar screamed, "Watch out—they let loose gas!" He went flat on his face, knocking over flowerpots.

One of the six reinforcements was a dark man with a weapon peculiar to South America. A bolas. Three rawhide thongs, tied together at one end, with iron weights on the free ends. A bolas, but one that was more compact than those used by pampas cowboys to trap the legs of cattle and throw them. The man was good with his bolas. He took a slow windup, the bolas weights whistling, then let fly. Doc saw it coming, tried to leap clear. His jump was about a foot and a half too short—one of the thongs went about his arm; then with lightning suddenness, both arms were tied to his chest by layers of rawhide. His strength, developed as it was, could not break the thongs.

The impact of the bolas, coupled with the loss of his arms for balancing, caused Doc to upset. The bronze man, sprawling on the floor, rolled in a mêlée of upsetting flowerpots. A gun began crashing; its uproar was deafening. Doc rolled as best he could without use of his arms, until he was in a narrow aisle lined by crockery pots and long troughs which held plants.

There was no skylighting in the greenhouse. The flowers were cultivated entirely by fluorescent lighting, and the fluorescent tubes were glowing nests of rods in the ceiling.

Doc Savage, still on the floor, rolled over on his back, got a heavy flowerpot between his heels, and tossed it upward. He aimed at the fluorescent light tubes, at the nest of contacts at one end of a bank of them. The pot hit the target, and electric blue flame showered.

It was suddenly dark in the windowless place.

He had managed to short out the light circuit and blow fuses.

In the darkness, a man came charging across the greenhouse floor, upsetting things, groping and cursing. Pure luck led him to stumble over Doc Savage. Doc struck with a leg; the man yelled. Doc lunged, grabbed with both legs, scissors fashion, and got hold of the man. Using the enormous muscular strength of his legs, Doc hurled the fellow away, and there was noise of objects upsetting and the man howled in pain.

Bullets were going through things, making various kinds of racket. Back in the office, there was a fight, a violent fight between several men, one of whom was Monk. Doc listened to it while he struggled to get the rawhide bolas thongs loose from his body. Then Monk's angry roaring suddenly stopped.

A man puffed, "Gimme a knife or gun, somebody! The leg of the damned chair broke when I hit him." The voice of the man with the scar came out shrilly over the uproar, demanding, "Have you caught one of them?"

"Yeah. The one they call Monk."

"Do not kill him!"

"But, hell—"

"Keep him alive!" yelled the scarred man. "If we fail to get Savage, we can use this Monk."

"I'm damned if I—"

"Take Monk and get out!" yelled the leader. "If Savage does not stop bothering us, we'll kill his damned friend."

A moment later, a new voice—it must have been a lookout they'd had posted outside—began howling that police were coming.

"Clear out!" shouted the scarred man. "Run, hombres!"

Doc seized another flowerpot with his feet. He did not throw it. He put it down. The distance was too great. There were too many of them and they had too many guns for him to tackle unless his arms were free. Some of them were still shooting, driving bullets at random, while others searched for those who were casualties.

"I thought there was supposed to be gas in here," a man said.

"There was," the leader growled. "I do not know what happened to it. Get a move on. The police are close!"

"What about Opsall?"

There was a moment of brittle silence.

"Knock him senseless," the leader said finally, "and leave him. He does not mean anything to us."

Doc Savage lay prone and helpless, struggling with the tangled rawhide, while they left, taking Monk with them.

Chapter XV. DECEIT

THE police were not very patient with Benjamin Opsall. They thought it was strange that the gang had staged the ambush in Opsall's private office in such an extensive fashion. They were inclined to wonder if Opsall had led Doc Savage and Monk into a trap.

"But it wasn't my doing," Opsall assured them. "Practically the last the leader of those men said was to knock me senseless and leave me, because I had no value to them."

Disgruntled policemen made a complete search of the vicinity.

While Doc Savage was waiting around for the police-made excitement to subside, he did one peculiar thing. He happened to find a revolver lying in the greenhouse wreckage. It was an ornate gun with elaborate pearl grips and some gold-inlay work on the barrel.

The gun was the one which had been carried by the thin man with the scar under his left eye. The fellow must have dropped it during the fight.

Doc pocketed the weapon. He did not say anything to anyone about finding it.

The police failed to locate Monk. They did find an eyewitness who had seen the homely chemist tossed into a car. The car had then departed the neighborhood at high speed. Monk had been unconscious at the time, the witness believed. He was also bleeding from the mouth.

Having done all they could do, the police departed.

After they had gone, Doc Savage left Opsall's rare-fish establishment, and found a telephone. He got in touch with his headquarters and found that Ham Brooks was there.

"Anything to report?" the bronze man asked.

Ham said, "Elva Boone and Mrs. Ruth Dorman went back to their apartment and Renny, Long Tom and Johnny are watching the apartment house. So far, they have not been able to discover anyone shadowing the place."

"Anything else?"

"Yes. Remember that steamship company official who was a friend of Captain Kirman's—the one who told us where Captain Kirman's office was located? I mean the fellow who was wearing the black star ring, and wouldn't tell us anything about it."

"I know who you mean."

"I got him on the telephone," Ham said, "and when he found out Captain Kirman was dead, he jarred loose with some information. Here's how he got the ring. At Captain Kirman's request, he had joined a kind of cult that hangs out in a building uptown called the Dark Sanctuary. Black stars with red borders are the insignia of this cult. That cult sounds interesting. The cult leader is a strange golden man. And the cult business manager is none other than our friend, Mr. Sam Gallehue. That's something, isn't it?"

"You say the steamship official joined the cult at Captain Kirman's request?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"Captain Kirman wanted him to investigate the cult."

"Did Captain Kirman want it investigated secretly?"

"Yes, secretly."

"Why was Captain Kirman so interested in the cult?"

"The steamship man didn't know."

Doc Savage said, "Ham, will you come to Opsall's fish establishment? Meet me at a tobacco store a block south and a block east."

TWENTY minutes later, a dark-skinned man with curly yellow hair and a rather unhealthy cast to his skin, a lumpy left cheek and a nose with distended nostrils, approached Doc Savage at the cigar store a block south and a block east of Opsall's fish establishment.

"How do you like it?" the unusual-looking man asked.

"Good enough, Ham," Doc said.

Ham Brooks said, "I found this make-up stuff at headquarters. Not bad, eh? Wax in one cheek. Gadgets up my nose to make it flare. And skin dye."

Doc said, "You will watch Opsall."

"Where is he?"

"In his place of business. But be careful, Ham. Be careful with your trailing. But do not fail to follow him."

Something in the bronze man's tone impressed Ham.

"What are you going to do, Doc?"

The bronze man's voice took on grimness. "We are not making much progress in this thing," he said. "So it seems we will have to start some bombing operations."

Doc's first bombing operation came off without complications.

The bronze man crept into Opsall's rare-fish establishment by way of a rear window; eventually he managed to reach the semiwrecked private greenhouse without being observed. In the office, visible from the greenhouse, Opsall sat. Doc watched him. Opsall was straining his hair with his fingers and smoking a new white meerschaum pipe.

Doc tied a long string to the doorknob and kept hold of the other end of the string.

Then the bronze man got out the inlaid, pearl-decorated revolver. When Opsall's head was turned just right, Doc took careful aim, resting the gun on a flower trellis, and shot the meerschmump pipe out of Opsall's teeth. The gun report was deafening. But, if possible, Opsall's astonished howl was louder.

Doc then made some noise of his own. He fell down on the floor, out of sight of Opsall, and knocked things over. In his own voice, he shouted, "Drop that gun, you!"

In an imitation of the voice of the man who had the scar under his left eye, he yelled, "Get away, damn you!"

Doc then fired the gun twice more, kicked over a row of plant boxes, threw a flowerpot against the wall, hurled another at the ceiling. He drove a fist into a palm to make a loud blow sound. He groaned and upset a bench.

Slapping his hands against the floor, he made a fair imitation of a man taking flight. Then he jerked the string, causing the door to slam. He kept pulling the string, and it slipped off the doorknob. He hauled it in, rolled it up and thrust it in a pocket.

The whole thing had been a fair imitation of an attempt on Opsall's life which Doc had thwarted. Some moments later, Doc arose to his feet. He made himself tremble, and felt the back of his head as if he had been hit there.

Opsall approached empty-handed and frightened.

Doc demanded, "Which way did he go?"

"W-who?" Opsall gulped.

"The man was trying to kill you."

"He gup-got away through the duh-door." Opsall swallowed. "H-how did you happen to tuh-trail him?"

Doc said, "Oh, I was keeping a watch on this place. Afraid those raiders would decide you knew too much, and send somebody back to kill you."

"W-which one was it?" Opsall asked.

"Hard to tell. One of them had a scar on his face, didn't he?" Doc exhibited the gun. "This is the gun that was dropped."

Opsall's eyes were about as wide as they could get. He was speechless.

Doc handed him the ornate gun. "You better keep this for self-protection," he said.

"Thuh-thanks!"

"Do you know of any other reason why they should kill you?"

"I-no. No, of course not!"

After assuring Opsall that he did not think the raiders would be back soon, Doc Savage left the building. He re-entered secretly at once by the back door, got into the basement, and found the telephone junction box. He tore the wires out, disrupting all telephone service to the building. Then Doc Savage joined Ham.

"Follow Opsall if he goes anywhere."

"Right."

"If Opsall is mixed up in this," Doc explained, "he now has something to think about, and he will want to talk to the others about it. He can't telephone, so he will probably go to them. And wherever he goes, you follow him. Make your reports by short-wave radio."

"I'll be tied to his shoestrings," Ham said grimly.

RENNY RENWICK was sitting behind the counter of a candy store. Through the window of this store, he could watch the entrance of the apartment house where Mrs. Ruth Dorman lived, and munch chocolate cherries at the same time.

"I rented this job for the day," Renny told Doc Savage. "I have a car parked close to here, in case we need it. Johnny is around at the back of the apartment house. Holy cow, they got good candy here!"

"Is Long Tom still welding manholes in the middle of the street?" Doc asked.

"No. He has tapped the Dorman woman's telephone wires. He's listening in on that."

"Has he heard anything?"

"Nothing."

Doc Savage said, "It is time we started some action. Can you get Long Tom and Johnny?"

Renny grabbed a fistful of candy, then came around from back of the counter. "I'll fetch 'em."

Five minutes later, Renny was back with Long Tom and Johnny.

Doc gave instructions.

"Long Tom, you and Johnny watch a place called the Dark Sanctuary." He gave them the address of the establishment. "Long Tom, you tap the telephone wires as soon as possible."

"Want me to try to rig microphones in the place, so we can eavesdrop?" Long Tom asked.

"If you see a way of doing that, it would be a good idea," Doc admitted.

"Shall we watch for anybody in particular?"

"Two men. One of them is the unusual golden man who is the cult leader. I want to know what he does and where he goes. The other man is Sam Gallehue, the business manager of the cult. Report his movements, too."

"Report to the recorder at headquarters?"

"Yes."

"Where's Monk?"

"They got him."

"Who did?" Johnny gasped.

"The same scar-faced man who got Monk and Ham thrown in jail in South America."

Johnny and Long Tom departed, grimly silent, deeply concerned.

Doc Savage told Renny, "We will call on Elva Boone and Mrs. Dorman and see if we can get them to talk sense."

ELVA BOONE answered the doorbell of the Dorman apartment, then tried to slam the door, but Doc pressed inside. Renny followed.

"That was accommodating of you to lead us to the Dark Sanctuary," Doc informed the angry young woman. "Unfortunately, we did not get much information from the place."

The girl was startled. She hesitated, then shrugged. "I thought I fooled you," she said curtly.

"You knew I was leading you there. So what?"

Doc said, "How about a complete story?"

"And a true one," Renny added.

Elva Boone glanced over her shoulder at her sister. Mrs. Dorman shook her head frantically. "No, Elva! We can't tell anyone!"

Elva Boone looked at Doc Savage. "We've been discussing you," she said. "We could use the brand of help you dish out."

Her sister gasped. "Please, Elva! If my husband ever found out—"

"Ruth, you fool, you're already mixed up in Captain Kirman's murder."

"But—"

Doc said, "Let's have the story."

Elva Boone hesitated, finally nodded. "My sister was married several years ago and thought she had divorced her husband," she said. "There was one child. Later she married Mr. Dorman, but she was a fool. She never told Mr. Dorman about being married before, because her first husband was—well, a trashy kind. Mr. Dorman is a snob, but my sister happens to be in love with him. Then she found she wasn't divorced. It was kind of a problem, and it bore on her mind."

"To bring the story up to date—a little more than a month ago, Ruth got all worked up over this cult that hangs out in the Dark Sanctuary. She became what they call a Believer. She was impressed. She actually thinks this strange golden man who is head of the cult is—well, not an ordinary mortal. In justice to Ruth, I'll have to say that it's hard not to think otherwise."

"But to make the story still shorter, Ruth told the golden man about her other husband, and her divorce she didn't get. She asked advice—and she got it."

"What was the advice?" Doc asked curiously.

"To make a clean breast of it to Mr. Dorman. The golden man told her that if Mr. Dorman wasn't man enough to forgive and forget, he wasn't man enough to be a husband."

"Good advice," Doc said.

"I agree. But it would have lost my sister her husband, as sure as anything. Ruth didn't take the advice."

"Then what?"

"Blackmail. About a week later. A man delivered a note from Ruth's ex-husband, demanding money, or he would go to Mr. Dorman with the story."

"Has Ruth paid anything?"

"Yes." Elva nodded. "She decided to pay. But I talked her into trying to ferret out who was at the bottom of the blackmail, at the same time. I helped her."

"How did you do the ferreting?"

"I suspected the cult, so I watched the Dark Sanctuary. I discovered another man watching it, and one day, I accosted him, and he turned out to be Captain Kirman. He told me that he, like myself, was trying to get evidence against the cult."

"You and Captain Kirman joined forces, I presume."

"Yes." Elva nodded. "Ruth went to Captain Kirman's office to work and help in the investigation whenever she had spare time. To tell the truth, about all she did was take care of the business while Captain Kirman was out investigating. But that was a help."

"Did you get evidence against the cult?"

"Not a bit."

"Why was Captain Kirman so interested in the cult?"

Elva Boone grimaced. "That's a funny thing. He would never tell us. But he was interested. Very interested."

Doc said, "Would you care for some advice about your sister?"

"I would welcome it," Elva Boone said fervently. "We're at our wits' end."

Doc asked, "Does your sister have an out-of-town relative she can visit in a hurry?"

"Why, yes. Our Aunt Lorna, in Detroit."

"She should visit Aunt Lorna."

"You mean—get her out of the way until this is settled?"

"Yes."

Elva turned to her sister. "Ruth, I think you had better do that."

They got Ruth Dorman aboard a Detroit-bound plane which left LaGuardia field at six o'clock that evening.

THE automatic recorder which receives messages in Doc Savage's skyscraper headquarters had abilities that were almost human. If a stranger called the bronze man's establishment, a mechanical voice from the device said, "This is Doc Savage's office, but no one is here at the moment. This voice is coming from a mechanical device. If you wish to leave a message, whatever you say will be recorded automatically, and Doc Savage will receive it upon his return."

After Ruth Dorman had been shipped off to Detroit, Doc Savage returned to headquarters with Renny and Elva Boone. He turned on the recorder to see what messages had been received.

There was a report from Ham. It was, "Watching Opsall's place. Nothing has happened. No sign of Monk. That is all."

The last message was from Johnny.

Said Johnny's voice, "Johnny reporting, Doc. Mr. Sam Gallehue left the Dark Sanctuary at five-twenty. He went to a large apartment building on Park Avenue. He has an apartment there. He is now in the apartment. The building is across the street from that snazzy club Ham belongs to. Long Tom is watching the Dark Sanctuary. He has tapped the telephone. No sign of Monk. That is all." Doc Savage switched off the apparatus.

"Do you know some good actors?" he asked Renny.

"Actors?" Renny was puzzled. "Holy cow! What do you want with actors?"

"Do you know any?"

"Yes. Male or female?"

"Male. Men who will do a rather tough job if they are well paid."

"The actors I know," Renny said, "would play Daniel in a den of real lions for cash money."

"Get hold of three of them," Doc said grimly.

"What are you going to do?"

"Toss another bomb, and see what happens."

Chapter XVI. MURDER IS AN ACT

MR. SAM GALLEHUE, answering his doorbell himself, wore a long purple robe, comfortable slippers, and his fingers fondled a dollar cigar.

When he got a good look at his visitors, Gallehue nearly dropped the cigar on the expensive rug. He was not disturbed so much by the visitors as by the way they were holding their hats. They carried the hats in their hands in such a fashion that the headgear concealed shiny revolvers from the elevator operator, but allowed Gallehue a distressingly unobstructed view of the weapons.

"Invite us in, Sammy," one man said.

Gallehue went through the motions of swallowing a hard-boiled egg, then said, "Cuk-come in."

The two men entered and closed the door.

"I . . . I don't know you!" Sam Gallehue gasped.

"Sit down," said one of the men.

"But—"

"Sit down!"

Sam Gallehue sat down. His hands twisted together. He quailed involuntarily while one of the men searched him for a weapon and found none.

"What—who—"

"One more word out of you," one of the gunmen said fiercely, "and we'll knock about six of your teeth out."

Gallehue watched in silence as the men went to work. A little at a time, his expression changed. One of the gunmen kept a close watch on Gallehue.

The other gunman opened the window, shoved his head out and looked upward. It was quite dark outside.

"O. K., Gyp," the man said.

From a window above, a voice called down cautiously in the darkness. "All set?"

"Yes."

"Are you boys down below?"

"Yes."

"Did they get an apartment right under this one?"

"Two floors above that ledge, nine stories below us," said the gunman. "Go ahead and drop the wire down to them."

A moment later, a thin wire with a weight on the end sank past the window. The gunman reached out and steadied it in its descent. "All right," he said finally. "They caught the end of the wire down there. They'll make that end fast to something in the room."

From the night overhead, the voice whispered, "Now we better tie the dummy on this end of the wire, eh?"

"Go ahead."

"How is Gallehue dressed?"

The gunman turned around to look at Gallehue—the cult manager had become practically as pale as he could get—then wheeled back to the window. "He's wearing a purple dressing robe."

"We ain't got nothing like that up here to dress the dummy in."

"What kind of clothes you got?"

"A blue suit."

The gunman withdrew his head again, and prowled around the apartment until he found Gallehue's closet, from which he dragged a blue suit. "Put it on," he ordered Gallehue.

"But—"

"Put it on!"

When Gallehue had drawn on the blue garment with shaking fingers, the gunman went back to the window once more.

"All set," he called upward to his companion. "He's got on a blue suit now. Put the blue suit on the dummy, so everything'll be cocked and primed."

"O. K."

The gunman, whispering upward, gave full instructions about how the murder was to be committed.

"When you hear Doc Savage in this apartment, toss the dummy out of the window, so it will land on the ledge below. Doc Savage will see it fall past the window, and see it on the ledge. The boys downstairs will have the end of the wire, attached to the dummy, and they'll give it a jerk or two to make it look as if the dummy is about to fall off the ledge. Savage will rush down there to save the dummy. As soon as he is out of the room, we'll knock Gallehue on the head and toss him out of the window, and his body will land on the ledge. The boys downstairs will then haul the dummy back up out of sight—and Doc Savage will have another impossible death to puzzle about."

"Right."

THE gunman withdrew his head, and stepped back to eye the window appraisingly. "There should be more light outside," he remarked. "But the man upstairs will yell that somebody is about to commit suicide, and that'll get Doc Savage to look at the window, so he will see the dummy fall past." Gallehue tried two or three times to speak, and finally croaked, "Yuh-yuh—you're going to murder me?"

"Them's orders."

"W—who gave such orders?"

The gunman laughed in a way that made Sam Gallehue's hair seem to move around on his scalp. "You poor fool. You put a lot of trust in your pals, don't you?"

"I don't understand what you mean," Sam Gallehue said.

"Didn't it ever occur to you that someone else might want the split you've been getting?"

While Sam Gallehue was getting paler, the doorbell rang. The two gunmen looked at each other.

"Doc Savage," one whispered. "He's about due here."

The other gunman jammed his revolver muzzle into Sam Gallehue's ribs. "Don't let on we're here," he snarled. "If you let out one peep about us, we'll blow you to pieces."

The two gunmen then moved into an adjoining room. They left the door open a crack, so that their weapons still menaced Gallehue.

The doorbell rang again. Sam Gallehue admitted Doc Savage. Gallehue was wet with perspiration, afraid to try to make a break. Doc Savage stepped into the apartment. Big-fisted Renny followed the bronze man.

Doc eyed Gallehue. "Is something wrong?" the bronze man asked.

"I—no," Gallehue croaked. "No, nothing is . . . is—"

Doc Savage's flake-gold eyes moved over the room, then he approached a chair. He took hold of the chair, as if to change its position.

Gallehue suddenly broke.

"Two gunmen!" he shrieked. He pointed at the side door. "In there!"

Doc Savage hurled the chair at the door which concealed the two gunmen. The chair hit the door with a crash, Doc Savage following it. The gunmen, however, got the door shut before Doc reached it. They did not fire their revolvers.

"Renny!" Doc rapped. "Head them off! The hall!"

Renny raced for the hall.

The bronze man himself hit the door with his shoulder. It crackled. The third time he slammed his weight against it, the lock tore out of the door, and he plunged through.

There was the pound of running feet. Angry words.

Mr. Sam Gallehue staggered over to a chair and was a loose pile of paleness in it. He did not entirely faint, although he held both hands against his chest over his heart.

It was fully five minutes before Doc Savage and Renny returned to the room.

Both men looked disgusted.

"They got away," Doc reported.

"Thu-thank goodness!" Gallehue gasped.

"What were they doing here?" Doc asked.

"They were gug-going to murder me."

"How?"

Mr. Sam Gallehue told them how the murder was to have been committed. He told them exactly what had happened in the apartment, and what had been said, and nothing more.

DOC SAVAGE and Renny Renwick, leaving the apartment house half an hour later, were somewhat silent, as if disappointed. At the corner, three men joined them, two of these being the gunmen who had menaced Sam Gallehue, and the third man their companion who had carried on the dialogue from the window overhead.

Doc Savage said, "Renny recommended you as very good actors, and he did not exaggerate. You did an excellent job."

Doc paid them.

"Thank you, Mr. Savage. I believe we put it over, all right. Gallehue was completely fooled." The actor hesitated and looked uneasy. "But what if he reports this to the police?"

"Both Renny and myself are honorary police officials," Doc explained. "So we can explain it, if necessary. What you were doing was actually a piece of detective work."

The three actors, satisfied with themselves and the pay, entered a taxicab and drove away.

Renny said, "Doc—that business about the dummy body—are you sure that was the way Captain Kirman was murdered?"

"As positive as one could reasonably be," Doc said.

"How did you happen to solve Captain Kirman's murder? It looked like an impossible death—a body falling past a window, and the body turning into that of a man who was standing in the room with you."

Doc said, "You recall that a room adjoined Captain Kirman's office. The killers were hiding in that room while we were in the office. Captain Kirman knew they were there, but he did not know they were going to kill him, so he gave no alarm."

"How'd you figure that out?"

"The fish."

"Eh?"

"There were two tanks in the room which contained very timid fish. These fish had been recently scared. It was a reasonable surmise that they had been scared by the killers of Captain Kirman hiding in the room."

"But how did the killers get out of the small room after they threw Captain Kirman's body out of the window, and their colleagues in a downstairs office hauled the dummy off the ledge? They didn't leave through the door. Mrs. Dorman was in the outer office."

"Probably stepped to the window ledge of the adjoining office—or climbed a rope ladder. It was not difficult, probably. And no one would have seen them because the building opposite was a warehouse which had no windows."

"How come Mrs. Dorman didn't know the men were there?"

"Captain Kirman must have sent her out on some small errand to get her away. Or he brought the men in when she was out. Or they sneaked past her somehow. There are several ways."

"Holy cow!" Renny sighed and eyed his big fists. "Well, that's one dangd mystery cleared up—all but why they killed him. But we didn't get any concrete results with our gag we pulled on Gallehue, did we? You think he is guilty."

"We scared him, and we deceived him."

"But he did not act guilty."

A long, thin piece of shadow, and a small shapely one, joined them, and Johnny's voice said, "Miss Boone and I got the Gallehue telephone tapped. It's hooked onto a recording device, so that any calls Gallehue makes will go on to a record."

"Good," Doc Savage said. "Johnny, you continue watching Gallehue. If he leaves his apartment, trail him."

"Right. You want me to keep in touch with you by radio?"

"Yes."

"What do you want me to do?" Elva Boone asked. "I'm beginning to like this excitement."

"Come with me and Renny," Doc told her.

"What are we going to do?" she inquired. "Another bomb?"

"Yes, another bomb," Doc agreed. "If we keep it up, the law of averages should bring us some kind of a result."

Chapter XVII. THE EMPTY BUSHES

THE night sky was a dark path for ponderous black clouds that slunk like marauders, almost scraping bellies against the higher buildings. The air was so heavy that one was conscious of breathing it; it was like perfume without odor. Street traffic was listless and made vague

discontented murmurs, while far down in the bay a steamer embroiled in some harbor problem kept hooting long distressed blasts mingled with short excited tooting.

The Dark Sanctuary was a swarthy mass of dignified masonry. Next door, however, leaped up an apartment house with lighted windows that were many bright eyes in the murk of a depressing night. Doc Savage and Renny and Elva Boone located Long Tom Roberts in the shadows.

Long Tom asked, "Any trace of Monk yet?"

"No."

Long Tom said grimly, "The place is as quiet as a grasshopper in a hen yard. There were some lights at the windows, but they all went out about eleven o'clock, and a lot of men left. They looked like servants and attendants, because they all wore uniforms. The golden man is still in there."

Doc Savage said, "Keep an eye on the place. In about twenty minutes, you should get a radio call from me. If you do not, use your own judgment."

"You mean—if we don't hear from you, bust into the place?"

"That might be the best idea."

Doc Savage entered the lighted apartment house next door to the Dark Sanctuary. He talked awhile with the doorman, and showed his police credentials. Eventually he was conducted to an empty sixth-floor apartment.

A few minutes later, Doc Savage swung out of the window of the empty apartment and went down a thin-silk cord which was equipped with convenient handholds. The end of the cord was tied to a collapsible grapple, and the grapple was hooked around a radiator pipe.

A slowly descending shadow, he reached the roof of the Dark Sanctuary, then searched rapidly. All skylights and roof hatches were steel-barred, and locked, he found. He had hitched to his back with webbing straps a pack of some size. He shoved a hand into this, felt around, and brought out a bottle.

The contents of the bottle hissed and steamed when he poured it on the ends of half a dozen skylight bars. He waited about five minutes, then grasped the bars one at a time and broke them apart without much effort. The acid he had used was strong stuff, and he was careful in replacing the bottle in the pack, because it would eat through flesh as readily as through steel.

The glass panes in the skylight were large, and it was not much trouble to remove one near the edge. He hooked another silk-cord-and-collapsible-grapple device over the rim of the skylight, then went down into darkness.

He searched.

The Dark Sanctuary was empty except for the golden man.

The golden man was asleep in a second-floor room, sleeping placidly, snoring a little.

Doc uncorked a small bottle and held it under the sleeping man's nostrils. After a while, the snoring became more loud and relaxed. Doc reached down and shook the figure, to make sure the golden man was now unconscious.

DOC SAVAGE made another quick search of the building in order to make certain no one else was there. The most impressive part of the place, he discovered, had been shown to him on his previous visit.

From the back pack of equipment, Doc Savage removed a tiny radio of the so-called "transceiver" type which had both transmission and receiving circuits in a space little larger than that of a camera.

"Long Tom, report in," he said into the microphone.

From somewhere in the street outside, Long Tom Roberts advised, "All quiet out here, Doc. Renny and Elva Boone are here with me. What shall we do?"

"Keep a watch on the place," Doc said. "Warn me if anyone comes."

"Right."

Into the radio, Doc said, "Ham, report in."

Ham's voice, rather faint, said, "All quiet."

"You are still watching Opsall's tropical-fish place?"

"Yes."

"Opsall has not gone anywhere?"

"No, he is still there. He sent someone out, and they came back with several men in work clothes. I presume they are workmen he hired to straighten up the damage to his office and greenhouse."

"Report any developments at once."

"I will."

Doc said, "Johnny, report in."

Johnny's voice—he never used his big words when speaking directly to Doc Savage—said, "All quiet here, too. Gallehue has not stirred from his apartment. He has made no telephone calls."

"You report any developments, too."

"Right."

The bronze man left the receiving part of his radio outfit switched on and placed the instrument on a table near the head of the bed on which the unconscious golden man lay.

Opening the pack, he spread the contents out on the floor. There were chemicals, various instruments used in diagnosis, and lighting equipment.

He put up the light reflectors first. They were clamp-on style type, and when he switched them on, the fuse immediately blew. He found the box and substituted a heavier fuse. There was an enormous amount of intense white light.

There was a deceptive quality about his movements, for they seemed slow, although actually he was working at high speed. He laid out instruments and chemicals.

The portable X-ray was one of the first instruments he used. That and a fluoroscopic viewer so that it was unnecessary to take photographs. Probably fifty times, he shifted the X-ray about the golden man's head and body. He took blood samples and put those through a quick analysis; he did the same with spinal fluid. The fact that the golden man was under the influence of an anaesthetic handicapped to some extent the checking of the nervous condition.

Nearly two hours later, he finished with his diagnosis, and studied the notes he had made. He seemed to be making a complete recheck.

Finally, with the same sure and unhurried movements that had characterized his diagnosis, he mixed three different batches of chemicals. He administered these, two in quick succession, and one later, with hypodermic needles.

He went to the radio. "Long Tom," he said.

"Yes."

"Everything quiet?" Doc asked.

"It seems to be," Long Tom replied over the radio. "Some guy is throwing a masquerade party down the street, and there are a few drunks stumbling around the place."

Doc Savage got reports from Ham watching Opsall, and Johnny at Gallehue's apartment. Neither man had anything to announce.

"It is vitally important that I am not to be interrupted for the next two or three hours. If anyone tries to enter the Dark Sanctuary, stop them. Use any means you have to, but stop them."

"I take it you're about ready to toss the next bomb?"

"About."

"Nobody will get in there," Long Tom said.

During the two hours following, there was no one but Doc Savage in the room where the floodlights made intense glare, and Doc was glad of this, because what happened in the room was not pleasant to see or hear. Doc's metallic features were inscrutable in the beginning, but toward the last they changed and his neck sinews turned into tight strings of strain and his cheeks became flatly grim and perspiration crept out on his bronzed skin.

He was busy most of the time, at first being in great haste finding stout sheets and blankets and ripping them in wide strong sections which he folded into flat bands that were as strong as canvas straps. With these he tied the golden man. The bed was strong, but he made it stronger by removing a heavy door from its hinges and placing it on the bed and arranging a pad of quilts, then lashing the golden man to that.

By then the golden man had become hot, feverish, moist with perspiration. He twisted restlessly.

He made muttering noises. His condition grew rapidly more delirious. His body twitched uncontrollably and at times strained against the confining straps, the effort making knots of muscle crawl under the skin of his arms and legs like animals.

When his screaming became loud, Doc Savage applied a gag.

There were hours of that, until past midnight, when the golden man became quiet, except for some nervous shaking in his hands. Eventually he opened his eyes.

He said, so very weakly that it was hardly understandable, "It was the agent at Lisbon. No one else knew what plane I planned to use."

"All right," Doc Savage said. "Everything will be taken care of."

He gave the golden man something to make him sleep, and the man slept.

A CLOCK somewhere was finishing striking two o'clock in the very black night when Doc's radio receiver began hissing, indicating one of the short wave transmitters used by his aids had come on the air.

Ham's voice said, "Doc!" excitedly.

The bronze man leaped for his radio, but before he reached it, Ham said wildly, "Those workmen who went into Opsall's place—they weren't workmen. They've grabbed Opsall! They just carried him—" Ham's voice stopped. There was a report—it might have been a gunshot, a quick blow, or someone might have kicked the other microphone. Then there was a loud, metallic gnashing that indicated the microphone had been dropped, and other noises that were made by feet, and by the radio being kicked about.

"Now—slam him one!" a voice grunted. "But watch out for that sword-cane!"

There was a blow, then silence.

"Ham!" Doc said sharply.

He heard a voice, evidently belonging to a man who had put Ham out of commission, say, "What the hell is this box thing?"

"Must be a radio," another voice said.

That last voice, Doc Savage was positive, belonged to the thin man with the scar under his left eye.

The first speaker growled, "We'd better put the radio out of commission." There was a crashing, and the radio suddenly went off the air.

Almost instantly afterward, Long Tom Roberts was on the air demanding, "Doc, what had we better do about that? They got Ham, it sounded like."

Doc Savage asked, "Is your car close?"

"Parked about half a block away. I can get—"

Then Long Tom's voice also stopped. It ended instantaneously, with a lifting snap to the last word that indicated intense alarm. Followed fully half a minute of silence.

"Long Tom! What happened?" Doc asked.

When Long Tom's voice did come, it was a yell of warning at Renny. "Renny!" he roared. "Renny! Watch out for those guys! They're not drunks!"

Not from the radio, but from the street outside came the sound of six shots, very closely spaced. From the street in front of the Dark Sanctuary.

Doc Savage lunged for a stairway and went down in long leaps. The uproar in the street was increasing. It must be very loud, in order to penetrate to his ears in such volume. A supermachine pistol turned loose. The unusual weapon belonged to either Renny or Long Tom, of course. It made a sound that might have come from a great airplane engine.

Doc reached the front door of the Dark Sanctuary and flung the door open.

Renny dived inside almost instantly. He had Elva Boone in his arms—under one arm, rather—and he dropped her and put a fresh magazine into his supermachine pistol. He aimed into the street. The gun made its great bullfiddle roaring, the recoil shaking Renny's fist.

Doc shouted, "Where's Long Tom?"

Renny, his big voice an angry rumble, said, "They grabbed him. If it hadn't been for his warning, they would've got me, too."

"Who?"

"Remember we said there was a drunken party in progress down the street? Well, they weren't drunks."

Elva Boone said, "The drunks proved to be plenty sober, and they were watching us. They got all set—and then they closed in."

RENNY finished emptying his supermachine pistol into the street, then did something that was rare with him—he swore. "It's no use," he said.

Doc Savage looked through the door. Two trucks were in the street. Huge ones. Van bodies, with sheet steel inside, apparently, and solid-rubber tires that bullets would not ruin. And bullets could not touch the motors, because both machines were backing down the street. They came slowly, angling toward the door of the Dark Sanctuary.

Doc said, "They have prepared for this. Renny, take the girl. We may manage to get away by the back door."

Renny growled some kind of a protest—he was never anxious to retreat in a fight—and in the middle of his muttering, there was an explosion from the back of the building. Wood crashed. Then men ran and a voice said, "Get those masks on! And fill this place full of gas!"

"They've blocked the back door!" Renny rumbled.

Doc said, "Try the roof!"

Half up the first flight of stairs, Doc heard charging feet in the hall above. There was a rear stairway; men had rushed up by that route to head them off.

Doc wheeled, went back. He found the entrance switch—the master switch which controlled all current in the building; it was the type which mounted the fuses in blocks that could be pulled out—and yanked out the fuse blocks, and ground them underfoot, rendering them useless.

He started back through the darkness, and met a man.

Doc whispered, "Did Doc Savage go this way?"

"Oh," said the man. "I didn't know you were one of us—"

Doc struck him with a fist. Because it was too dark to depend on repeat blows, the bronze man hit very hard at the middle of the body. The man doubled. Doc grabbed him around the neck and used fists some more. The fellow was wearing a gas mask, and the mask came off and skittered across the floor. Upstairs, there started a great bear-bellowing which, with blows, rending clothing, cries that denoted various degrees of agony, indicated Renny had gone into action.

Along with that noise, there was a quick series of mushy explosions that were undoubtedly gas grenades.

Renny's fight noise stopped as suddenly as it had started.

"Is he dead?" a voice asked.

The voice was muffled and unreal, indicating the speaker was wearing a gas mask of a type that permitted conversation to be carried on.

"Don't think he's dead," another voice said. "I banged him over the head with a gun, that's all."

"Keep him alive. Put him in one of the trucks."

"What about the girl?"

"Put her with him."

Upstairs, there was an anxious voice shouting, "They've done something to the golden man! He's dead! There's floodlights rigged up in his bedroom, and all kinds of instruments scattered around. He's lying here on the bed, dead."

Doc saw faint ghosts reflected from flashlights and heard feet going up the stairs to the golden man's bedroom.

"Hell, he's only asleep!" They had evidently examined the golden man more closely.

"But you can't wake him up!"

"Well, he's unconscious, then. He's got a pulse. Take him out, too."

"Want him put in the trucks?"

"Yeah—put him in the trucks."

DOC SAVAGE withdrew quickly, moving back until he was beside the man he had knocked unconscious. He found the gas mask where it had fallen on the floor, and placed it beside the senseless man, then ground a foot on the mask to give the impression that it had been ruined in a fight.

By now, the gas had started penetrating to this spot. The bronze man's eyes stung; it was tear gas. Doc brought out of a pocket a transparent hood, air-tight, which he drew over his head. Elastic at the bottom held the hood tightly about his neck. It was a contrivance that served as temporary gas mask, waterproof container, or other uses, as need required.

He heard pounding feet approach, and a man calling, "Bill, what happened to you? Where are you?"

Doc Savage stepped through a nearby door and waited there, hidden.

A lunging flashlight beam appeared, and located the man senseless on the floor.

"Bill!" The man with the flashlight dropped beside the form on the floor. "Damn the luck!" he said.

Doc Savage lifted the rim of his transparent hood until only his mouth was exposed. He asked, imitating as closely as he could, one of the voices he had heard upstairs, and making the voice sound far away, "Is Bill alive?"

"Yeah. Just knocked out. Broke his gas mask."

Doc said, "Roll him in something so the gas won't hurt his eyes. Use a rug. Then get some of the men to help you carry him out to a truck. Keep him wrapped up so the gas won't get to his eyes."

"Right," the man said.

The fellow hurriedly rolled the unconscious Bill in the rug. The rug, an eight-by-ten size, made a compact covering. Then the man dashed away to get help in carrying the burden.

Doc came out of his hiding place and unrolled the rug, lifted the unconscious man and dumped him into a closet. Returning to the rug, Doc grasped one edge and rolled it about himself. Then he waited.

Very soon, men arrived and laid hold of the rug. Doc was tense all the while he was being carried—but luck was with him, and the rug did not unroll.

He heard a man join them, cursing the fact that they had found silken cords dangling from a forcibly opened skylight, and another silken cord from the roof up to a window of the apartment house.

"Savage escaped that way," the man snarled. "It looks like we shook an empty bush."

Doc, still inside the blanket, was dumped into a truck.

Sounds told him that the golden man was placed in the other truck.

There was noise of a police siren, followed by perhaps twenty pistol shots. After that, the trucks rolled rapidly and the police siren did not follow. On the truck floor, Doc bounced quite a lot.

Chapter XVIII. THE SHOCK CURE

AFTER the truck had rumbled along for ten minutes or so, a man dropped beside Doc Savage and began tugging at the rug. "You come out of it, yet, Bill?" the man asked.

Doc made his voice weak and different and muttered, "Go 'way! I'm all right. Lemme alone!"

He knew by then that it was intensely dark inside the van body of the truck. He moved impatiently, growled again, "Lemme alone! You wanna bust in the face!"

The man who had come to him growled something about an ungrateful so-and-so, and went away.

Someone shouted at the driver, "Damn it! Is that as fast as this thing will go? The town will be alive with cops looking for us in another ten minutes!"

"Keep your shirt on," the driver snapped back. "We're driving out on the wharf now."

A wharf, Doc decided, meant a boat. He hastily unwrapped the rest of the rug, but remained where he was, holding the rug about him.

The truck stopped, the rear doors were thrown open, but practically no light penetrated. The night was amazingly dark.

"Unload and get everybody on the boat," a voice ordered. "Make it snappy. Don't show any lights."

Doc Savage threw the rug down. He fished hastily in his pockets, found a pencil, and began

scribbling on the interior of the van body. He wrote by the sense of touch alone, printing at first, then using longhand because that was faster.

To further insure his message being found, he located a crack and stuck the pencil into it, leaving it there.

"Bill?" somebody demanded. "You able to move?"

"Lemme alone," Doc growled. "I'm coming."

He climbed out of the truck. There was not enough light to distinguish faces, but he could make out, faintly against the river water, the outlines of a boat. It was a power cruiser, evidently near eighty feet in length. The vague impression of it indicated speed.

Doc walked aboard and felt around until he located a lifeboat. He discovered there was a canvas cover over the boat. He unlaced that and climbed in.

He heard another conveyance drive out on the dock. The driver of this car had switched off his lights and was guided by a lighted cigarette which a man waved in a small circle. It was a passenger car.

Sam Gallehue's voice spoke from the machine. "I've got that one called Johnny," Gallehue said.

"How did it come out?"

"We got everybody and everything but Doc Savage."

"How did he get away?"

"Through the roof. The police were coming, and we had no time to follow him."

"We've got all of his men now?"

"Yes. They're all aboard."

"That ain't so bad," Sam Gallehue said. "We'll keep his damned men alive for a while and try to use them for bait in a trap that will get him."

Mr. Sam Gallehue was evidently a versatile individual; previously he had given the impression of being a rather timid man who was overanxious to agree with everyone, a man who was inclined to fawn on people. The Sam Gallehue who was talking now had snakes in his voice.

DOC SAVAGE judged that the big boat made in excess of thirty knots while it was traveling down the bay and out through the channel—the channel lights kept the bronze man posted on their whereabouts—to the open Atlantic, and thirty knots must be cruising speed, because the motors were not laboring excessively. The boat was probably fast enough to outrun a naval destroyer, if necessary.

No lights were shown.

Before things had time to settle down, Doc left his lifeboat hiding place. He moved along the deck. Twice, men passed him, but he only grunted agreeably and stepped aside to let him pass, since it was too dark for recognition.

A little rain began to fall. There was no thunder, and, best of all, no lightning. The rain was small drops, warmer than the sea spray which occasionally fell across the deck like buckshot.

Doc took a chance.

"Where'd they put the golden man?" he asked a shadowy figure on deck.

"Stern cabin," the figure said. "Who're you?"

"Bill."

"How's the head?"

"'S all right," Doc muttered.

There was no one at the door of the stern cabin, and no one in the corridor outside, although the corridor was lighted. Doc Savage took a deep breath, shoved open the door as silently as he could, and entered. He closed the door behind him, and kept going.

The one man in the cabin—he was the thin man with the scar under his left eye—stood at a bunk on which the golden man lay. He half turned. His mouth flew open, so that his jaw was loose and broke under Doc's fist, although Doc had intended only to render him senseless. The man fell across the bunk. Doc lifted him off and put him on the floor.

On the bunk, the golden man's eyes were open. He asked, "How much longer is this mess going to last?" His voice was still weak.

Doc turned one of the golden man's eyelids back to examine the eye. "How do you feel?"

The other grimaced feebly. "Terrible."

"The treatment you underwent tonight accounts for that," Doc explained. "But with your constitution, you will be all right in a few days."

The golden man shut his eyes for a while, then opened them. "Treatment?" he asked.

Doc said, "You had amnesia."

"Loss of memory, you mean?"

"Amnesia is not exclusively loss of memory," Doc Savage explained. "In your case, however, it did entail the misfortune of not being able to recall who you were, what you had been doing, or anything about yourself. But it also included a semidazed state, in which condition you could not rationalize thought processes. That sounds a little complicated. Your trouble was partly amnesia, and partly a form of insanity brought on by physical shock. Mental derangement, we can call it."

The golden man breathed deeply. "I seem to remember having an awful time earlier tonight."

Doc said, "That was the treatment. You underwent what is sometimes called the shock treatment for mental disorder."

(The method of treatment for insanity to which Doc Savage is referring is well known to mental specialists under various names and methods. One of the most widely used being the treatment of insanity by inducing high fever in the patients—a sort of kill-or-cure process which, as less stringent methods are developed, is gradually falling into disuse.)

"Could shock have brought on my trouble?"

"Yes."

"Then I guess it happened when the bomb went off in my plane."

Doc Savage asked, "You remember everything that has happened?"

The golden man nodded.

"Suppose you give me an outline of the story," Doc said. "And try to compress it in three or four minutes. We may be interrupted."

The golden man lay still, breathing deeply. "My name," he said, "is Paul Hest. I am chief of intelligence for"—he looked up slyly—"let's call it an unnamed nation, not the United States. We learned that an American liner, the Virginia Dare, bringing refugees from Europe, was to be torpedoed. The torpedoing was to be done by the U-boat of another nation, disguised as a submarine belonging to my country. The idea was to build up ill feeling in the United States against my country."

Doc nodded slightly, but said nothing.

Paul Hest continued, "We wanted to warn the Virginia Dare, and at the same time lay a trap for the submarine. We could not radio a warning to the Virginia Dare, because the message would have been picked up. So I flew out by plane to drop the warning on deck. But there was a bomb in my ship. A counter-espionage agent put it there. I think I know who it was—a man in Lisbon. But that is not important. What is important is that the bomb blew up, and the shock gave me amnesia."

Doc Savage reminded, "You were found floating in the sea, naked."

"I guess I came down by parachute and took off my clothes so I could swim."

Doc said, "I understand there was a strange black star-shape in the sky above you."

"Yes, I remember that faintly. It was just smoke from my plane, after the explosion. The star shape was—well, an accident."

Doc said, "There was also a glowing material in the water. It followed the Virginia Dare after the liner picked you up."

The golden man smiled faintly. "That happens to be a war secret of my country, so I can tell you only in general terms what it was. It was a substance which has the chemical property for glowing, like phosphorous, and which is also magnetic, in that it will cling to any metal, providing that metal is not nonmagnetic. It is a substance for trapping submarines, in other words."

"The glowing material," Doc said, "can be put in depth bombs and dropped near submarines, and it will then follow the sub and reveal its location. Is that it?"

Nodding, Paul Hest replied, "Yes, that is it. I was carrying bombs of the stuff to use on the sub that intended to torpedo the Virginia Dare. I told you we intended setting a trap for that U-boat."

Doc Savage listened intently. Someone was coming down the corridor.

Paul Hest said, "I imagine the star and the glowing stuff—and my crazy talk about being born of the sea and the night—was kind of eerie."

The footsteps stopped at the door and the door opened and a man entered.

DOC SAVAGE had moved and was standing behind the door; he pushed against the panel and shut it instantly behind the man who had come inside; then Doc put his hands on the neck of the man, all in one fast chain of motion. The struggle between the two of them made them walk across the floor in different directions for a few moments, then Doc got the man down and made the fellow senseless.

"Better finish that story in a hurry," Doc told the golden man.

Paul Hest shrugged. "What else do you want to know? After the plane explosion, I was goofy. I couldn't remember a thing about myself, although I had no difficulty recalling some information. I had heard of you and your men, of course, and I knew a great deal about you—I have a complete dossier of yourself and your men in the files at headquarters. I studied your methods, too, which accounts for the great knowledge of you which I recall having displayed."

Doc said, "Numerous times, you showed you knew things that apparently no man could have known."

Paul Hest smiled faintly. "The intelligence departments of most leading nations know things that apparently no one could know. I happen to have a prodigious memory—Or did I say that? Anyhow, that accounts for my knowing your men, knowing you, knowing about your friend who was to be killed in Vienna—that was a projected political murder of which we were aware months in advance. As for knowing the Virginia Dare was to be torpedoed, naturally I was aware of that, and I also knew what ships would be in the vicinity. We had arranged for an agent of ours on the steamer Palomino to fake a distress call from the Virginia Dare in case the ship actually was torpedoed, which accounts for my knowing the Palomino would turn up for the rescue that night. My agent used gas on the Palomino radio operator to get the fake S O S into the captain's hands. Remember?"

Doc Savage said, "Did Sam Gallehue actually think you were a—well, shall we say a wizard?"

Paul Hest nodded. "I believe he actually did. At any rate, he was quite sincere in taking me to New York and setting me up as a cult leader."

"Gallehue was sincere?"

"I believe so."

"But Gallehue has staged all this," Doc advised. "He got Monk and Ham consigned to a South American prison, so he could get hold of you. He hired men to try to kill Monk and Ham. And he has been fighting us tooth and nail."

Paul Hest grimaced. "I said he was sincere—I didn't say he was honest."

"Did Gallehue start the cult with his own money?"

"No, it was Opsall's money."

"Did Gallehue start the cult as a method of getting information which he could use to blackmail the people who became so-called Believers in the cult?"

Paul Hest considered. "I don't think so. I think Gallehue was sincere. A crook, but sincere. The cult was making a lot of money. It was a gold mine. Why should Gallehue resort to blackmail?"

Doc Savage was silent for a while.

"If anyone comes in," he said, "you act as if you are out of your mind. Make them think you knocked these fellows unconscious." Doc pointed at the pair on the floor.

Chapter XIX. THE CRASH

THE big boat was still plowing along in complete darkness. One man was at the wheel, and the binnacle inclosing the compass presented a small wedge of light in front of him.

Doc Savage, moving up to him casually, asked, "Where did they put the prisoners?" in a low, guttural voice.

"Fo'c's'le," the man said gruffly.

Doc moved around beside him, reached out as if to take the wheel, but instead took the man. The man was bony and not overly strong, and Doc crushed him against the wheel, holding the throat clamped shut against any sound, until he could locate nerve centers at the base of the skull. Pressure there, while not as quick as a knockout, produced more lasting senselessness. Doc put the limp figure on a cockpit seat, and pulled a blanket over him, so that it might appear the fellow was asleep.

Holding his watch close to the binnacle, Doc read the time. There were other instruments which flooded briefly with light when he found a panel switch. He noted the boat's speed off a log that read directly onto a dial. He did some calculating.

Later, he changed the course, veering it sharply to the left, then straightening out the craft so that it was headed toward a destination of his own.

His flake-gold eyes strained into the night, searching.

He left the wheel briefly to search the helmsman he had overpowered. Of the stuff he found, he took a gun, cartridges, two gas grenades and a pocketknife.

It took a long time, and he was showing signs of intense strain—before he picked up a light. It was a bit to the starboard far ahead. He watched the light, counting the number of seconds between its flashing.

The wheel had a locking screw which would clamp it in any position. He set the course carefully, locked the wheel, and walked forward.

A man was sitting on the forecastle hatch. He wore oilskins, judging from the slashing noise when he moved, and he was disgruntled.

"Everything quiet down below?" Doc asked.

"Hell, yes," the man snarled. "What the devil do they want to keep a guy out here for? In this rain! Everybody in the fo'c's'le is tied hand and foot, anyhow!"

Doc Savage said, "Here, let me show you something," and leaned down until he found the man's neck.

A moment later, Doc got the forecastle hatch open. He listened, then dropped the guard's unconscious body inside, and followed.

"Monk!" Doc said in a low voice.

A gurgle answered him. Monk sounded as if he was gagged.

Doc felt around until he found Monk's form. He cut the homely chemist loose. "Get circulation back into your arms," Doc ordered. "Then cut the others free." He stabbed the blade of the knife into the bunk mattress and pressed Monk's fingers against it. "Use this knife. You able to do that?"

"Sure, Doc," Monk said with great difficulty.

Doc said, "When the boat hits, jump over the bow and swim ashore—all of you."

THE boat hit the beach at a speed of about thirty knots, which was nearly thirty-four miles an hour, and the beach was sloping sand, so that the craft crawled up a long way before it stopped. In spite of that, the shock was violent enough to bring crashing down, everything that was loose, and throw Doc Savage, who was in a braced state of semiexpectation, against the wheel so hard that the spokes broke out and he was forcibly relieved of his breath.

Doc had located in advance the button which controlled the boat siren. He sent a hand to this as

soon as he could manage, but the siren remained silent; the circuit had been disrupted somewhere. Neither would the lights work.

It seemed to Doc that the first real sound after the crash was Monk's elated howl from the direction of the bow.

"We're off, Doc!" Monk bawled. "We're off the boat!"

Doc Savage was relieved, and sprang for the rail himself.

Then the searchlights came on. They blazed on as he gained the rail. They plastered upon the boat a light as white as new snow, and spread a calcimine glare over the sea. Searchlight beams came from five directions, X-ing across each other at the grounded boat.

Three of the searchlights were from State police patrols on shore, and two from coast guard boats on the sea nearby.

Doc tossed the tear-gas bombs on deck for good measure, then dived overboard. He swam ashore without trouble.

A State policeman put a flashlight on him, then asked, "You're Doc Savage?"

"Yes."

The cop said, "The New York police found a message written inside a truck in pencil. It said to plant an ambush at four places along the coast of New Jersey, Long Island, Connecticut and the Hudson River. You are supposed to have written that message."

Doc admitted having written it.

The State policeman picked up a riot gun. "Come on, gang," he said to his brother officers. "Some of them birds may try to swim ashore."

DOC SAVAGE had been standing at the window of the coast-guard station, watching Sam Gallehue and his gang being loaded into police cars.

Long Tom and Johnny came in.

"I'll be superamalgamated," Johnny declared. He dropped in a chair. "Opsall just broke down and confessed. That sure surprised me."

Doc asked, "Opsall was doing the blackmailing?"

Johnny said, "Yes, Opsall admitted the blackmailing. He worked it as a side line, and Gallehue didn't know anything about it. Opsall had a man or two working in the Dark Sanctuary, and had a microphone or so in the place. He gathered his information that way."

Long Tom interrupted, "You know what set them against each other, and caused the blowup, Doc?"

Doc suggested, "Our so-called bombs?"

Long Tom grinned faintly. "That's it. You made Opsall think Gallehue had sent a man to kill him, and that set him against Gallehue. You made Gallehue think Opsall had tried to kill him. The result was the blowup—Gallehue went wild and grabbed Opsall and everybody else he could lay hands on. He was heading for a spot up on the Maine coast where he had fixed up a summer layout for his cult, as near as we can make out."

Johnny said, "Right now, he's headed for assuetudinous statuvolism. "

"What's that?" Long Tom asked.

Renny said, "Another word for jail."

THE END