

THE KING MAKER

A Doc Savage Adventure by Kenneth Robeson

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Chapter I. RICHES, RAGS, AND TERROR

SIXTY or seventy pedestrians probably saw the silk-hatted gentleman get out of his resplendent town car in front of New York's finest skyscraper. Out of the sixty or seventy, nobody seemed to catch the significance of the man's pale face and lips drawn so tightly that they were blue. "The lucky stiff," some onlookers possibly reflected.

Taking snap judgment on the silk hat and costly town car, most of the onlookers would have swapped places willingly with the top-hatted personage. In New York, such trappings signify an individual of importance, a somebody.

Had they known the truth, no amount of money would have inveigled an onlooker into changing places.

Maybe some of the spectators noted that the man's face was pale and grim. If so, they may have decided he was a business magnate with pressing responsibilities.

The truth was that the gentleman in the topper was scared. He was in the grip of an awful terror. This frightened, very-much-dressed-up personage stalked rapidly into the vast and ornate lobby of the cloud-piercing building.

His town car waited. On its door was the coat-of-arms of the ruling house of the kingdom of Calbia, one of the Balkan countries of Europe. Probably nobody in the crowd knew it, but the uniform of the chauffeur designated him as no less than a general in the Calbian army.

Now there is something about ragged clothing and shabby attire that seems to label the wearer, the world over, as a person of lowly station.

This was why those rubbering at the swanky car and the silk-hatted man paid little attention to the old woman who entered the building at the same time.

She was very short, broad and stooped. There were wrinkles in her face, in which one could almost hide a lead pencil. A shawl was tied over her head, knotted under her chin. A rent in the top permitted a glimpse of gray hair. Her dress looked as if she had made it herself. Her shoes were shabby.

The man and the old woman—riches and rags, as it were—entered the same elevator.

"Call your floors," said the elevator operator.

"Eighty-six," came from the man in the silk hat.

"Eighty-six," the old woman echoed, somewhat shrilly.

The two passengers looked at each other. There was nothing in their expressions to indicate that they had ever met before.

"The eighty-sixth is Doc Savage's floor," the elevator operator offered, apparently by way of information.

The cage shot upward and stopped. Both passengers stepped out into a plain, yet rich, corridor.

It was evident, from the way they looked around, that neither had ever been here before. They found their way to a door.

The door bore a name outlined in very small letters of bronze. They read:

DOC SAVAGE

Grasping the knob, the man in the silk topper tried to walk in. But the door was locked. He knocked with a brisk impatience—and the door opened.

The gentleman in the silk hat made a mistake which later cost him his life. He elbowed into the room ahead of the old lady. This act was anything but chivalrous.

So unusual was the appearance of the man who had opened the door, that both visitors jerked to a stop and stared.

The individual was little taller than a half-grown boy. He came near being as wide as he was high. His hands swung on great beams of arms well below his knees, and they were covered with hairs which resembled rusty shingle nails. This gorillalike fellow's face was phenomenally homely. He frowned at the gentleman in the silk topper, showing dislike of the way the man had shoved in ahead of the old lady.

"Doc Savage?" the silk-hatted one demanded imperiously.

"I'm Monk," grunted the apish one. "I mean—I'm Andrew Blodgett Mayfair."

His voice was tiny, childlike, a ludicrous tone for such a mountain of hair and gristle.

"Tell Doc Savage that Baron Damitru Mendl wishes to see him at once," commanded the pompous man. Monk did not seem impressed. He glanced past the silk hat, frock coat, and morning trousers to the shabby old lady.

"You wanta see Doc Savage, too?"

"Please, sir," she quavered.

She appeared to be overawed by the magnificence of the office, with its sumptuously comfortable chairs, its impressive safe, and a huge, finely inlaid table.

"Just a minute," said Monk, tiny-voiced. He crossed to a door, opened it and stepped through, closing the panel behind him.

He was in a great room, which held literally hundreds of huge bookcases. These were crammed with tomes.

Monk advanced. He stopped when he could see the bronze man.

This man of bronze occupied a chair under a reading lamp. The chair was massive, yet it seemed small, so Herculean were the proportions of the man sitting in it.

The muscular development of the bronze man was something to arrest attention. Like great cables, sinews wrapped his frame. Their size, and the way they seemed to flow like liquid metal, denoted a strength bordering on the superhuman. These sinews, in repose, were not knotty, but were more like bundled piano wires on which a thin bronze skin had been lacquered.

"Two persons to see you, Doc," said Monk. "One is a guy in a silk hat who seems to think he's somebody. He shoved in ahead of the other one, a kinda ragged-lookin' old lady."

Doc Savage glanced up. This movement emphasized the most impressive thing about him—his eyes. The orbs might have been pools of fine flake-gold. The gold flakes, appearing to be always in motion, caught little lights from the reading lamp.

"The gentleman has bad manners, eh?" The bronze man's voice was pleasant and low, but obviously capable of great volume and tonal change.

"You said it."

"Use your own Judgment, Monk."

Monk ambled back into the outer office, furry hands brushing his knees. He executed a polite bow in the direction of the shabby, elderly woman.

"Doc'll talk to you first," he said kindly.

"Thank you." She started for the door.

Baron Damitru Mendl snapped, "I am the Calbian ambassador to the United States. My business is important!"

Monk frowned. "You could be the king, and it wouldn't make any difference around here."

When she entered the ample library and saw Doc Savage, the old woman's mouth sagged open. She was more than a little impressed by the bronze giant.

"Doc Savage?" she quavered. "I've heard a great deal about you and the wonderful things you do. You help poor people who are in trouble, don't you?"

Doc Savage's nod and the tone of his reply were calculated to put her at ease. "Something like that," he said.

"My poor son," said the visitor rapidly. "He's crippled. The doctors say they can't help him. I've heard that you can do many things better than any other man. I read in the paper that you are one of the greatest chemists in the world, and that nobody knew as much about electricity as you do. But, above everything else, is your skill as a surgeon. I want you to help my boy!"

Doc Savage said nothing. The tiny lights flickered in the flake-gold of his eyes.

"I know you can help him," quavered the elderly lady. "You see, his legs—"

"It will be better to make the diagnosis myself," Doc Savage put in quietly.

"Then you'll help him!" The elderly visitor sounded as if she were about to burst into delighted tears.

"Where is he now?"

"In my room at 7832 East Fourteenth Street."

The tiny lights in the bronze man's eyes seemed to grow a bit more brilliant. A box of apparatus, replete with knobs and dials, stood on a stand at his elbow. A microphone was attached to this. Leaning over, the bronze man flicked the switch, then spoke into the microphone. The elderly woman seemed startled when she heard his words. To her, it was plain the syllables were not understandable. They were in some weird, not unmusical, guttural language.

Doc Savage switched off the apparatus, then glanced at his guest.

"The matter of your son will be looked into," he stated.

"What did you say into that box of a thing?" the old woman asked, surprisingly enough.

Doc Savage seemed not to hear the inquiry. He bowed her politely to the door.

The success of her mission seemed to have moved the elderly woman to an ecstasy of delight. Once she was in the outer office, she appeared unable to control her pleasure. She hobbled to Baron Damitru Mendl, kneading her hands together.

The baron glowered at her.

"Doc Savage is helping me!" squealed the crone.

Then she opened the hands which she had been kneading together. The homely Monk was behind her.

Doc Savage was still in the library. Hence, neither saw what the old woman's cupped palms held.

Baron Damitru Mendl saw it, however.

The object was a small red marble.

At the sight of the red marble, Baron Damitru Mendl became starkly pale. He actually trembled.

His eyes protruded.

"Doc Savage is helping me!" shrilled the old woman.

Repetition of these words had a startling effect upon Baron Damitru Mendl. He whirled, grabbed up his silk hat and fled the office. Once in the corridor, he thumbed an elevator button furiously, and when the cage arrived, literally dived inside.

The elderly woman took a second cage a moment later.

Doc Savage appeared in the door which connected outer office and library. The size of the door emphasized his giant proportions.

"Thought we had another visitor, Monk."

Monk scratched the bristles atop his bullet of a head. "We did have, Doc, but I guess the guy flew into a rage because we interviewed the old woman first. He walked out on us."

Monk was an intelligent, observing individual. He was, in fact, conceded to be one of the greatest of living chemists. His reputation in that field was world-wide.

But Monk had not seen the red marble.

Down in the lobby, the old hag was hobbling toward the street. Chuckles came from her wrinkled face.

"

Ce frumos!" she cackled. "How beautiful! That Doc Savage is not the mental wizard these Americans seem to think he is."

The words were spoken in the language of the Balkan kingdom of Calbia.

Outside the crone scampered down the street. More muttered words came.

"

Ma bucor! I am pleased. I very cleverly made Baron Mendl think I had enlisted the aid of Doc Savage. The fool! He now believes Doc Savage to be against him."

Chapter II. EXPLOSION IN THE NIGHT

BARON DAMITRU MENDL climbed into his costly town car and sank back nervously on the rich cushions.

"

Ce plictisitor!" he groaned in Calbian. "How vexing! General, look! See that old hag?"

The town car had the most modern of equipment. One could not yell at the chauffeur; there was a microphone in the rear, which actuated a loud-speaker beside the driver.

"I see her," said the chauffeur, who wore the uniform of a Calbian general.

"Follow her!"

The town car crept forward. But the trail was a short one. The crone ducked suddenly into a crowd about a subway entrance and lost herself thoroughly although Baron Damitru Mendl got out and searched.

Returning to the town car, Mendl perched on the cushions and tangled and untangled his hands nervously.

"I have heard a great deal about this man, Doc Savage," he said. "They say he is a muscular marvel and a mental wizard who devotes his life to the strange business of helping those who are in trouble."

"Doc Savage has a remarkable reputation, your highness," agreed the general, who seemed to be a confirmed "yes-man." "But who was the old wench?"

"I went to Doc Savage to enlist his aid in preserving my own life," replied Mendl. "In Savage's office, the old hag ran up to me and cried out, 'Doc Savage is helping me!' Then she exhibited a red marble."

The general in the driver's seat started violently. "A red marble."
"Exactly, general! The red marble proves that the old crone is a secret agent—one of my enemies."
The general wiped a slight dew of perspiration off his forehead. "I suggest we leave this vicinity at once, your highness."
"An excellent idea!" Baron Mendl nodded vehemently. "Drive to my hotel. I must send a radiogram, then take all possible measures to protect myself."
The long town car went into motion without a jar.

BARON DAMITRU MENDEL had a suite of rooms in the hotel which was conceded by almost every one to be New York's most fashionable hostelry.
The national flag of Calbia was displayed in front of this hotel, alongside the United States colors. The presence of the Calbian emblem had a meaning. It indicated that an important diplomatic personage was a guest of the hotel.

The flag was out in honor of Baron Mendl, Calbian ambassador to the United States.
Baron Mendl went directly to his room, secured a radiogram blank and wrote out a message. He addressed it simply to a stateroom number on a liner which was now crossing the Atlantic from Europe. The communication read:

FIRST-CLASS CABIN 36
LINER S S MONTICELLO, AT SEA
AGENT FROM CALBIA HAS ENLISTED AID OF DOC SAVAGE AGAINST US STOP HAVE OBSERVED OTHER SECRET AGENTS WATCHING ME STOP BELIEVE MY LIFE IN DANGER STOP LEAVING CITY STOP WILL ADVISE YOU MY WHEREABOUTS LATER.

BARON DAMITRU MENDEL.

As an afterthought, Baron Mendl drew a small brown code book from a pocket and converted the message into a secret cipher. He burned the first copy painstakingly, crushed the ashes, and threw them out of the window. Then he went down to the hotel wireless telegraph office and filed his coded missive.

His movements marked by an apprehensive haste, he packed his luggage. Bellboys, made unusually spry by the prospect of handsome tips, loaded his bags into the town car.

"We are going on the yacht, general," Baron Mendl informed the driver.

Along the upper shore of Manhattan Island, on the Hudson River side, are a number of swanky yacht clubs. To one of these, Baron Mendl went. The town car was left in the yacht club garage.

Baron Mendl and his chauffeur boarded a seventy-foot, Diesel-engined, seagoing palace. The boat had lines of speed, while mahogany woodwork and brass fittings lent an air of luxury to it. Native Calbians composed the crew, with one exception—the first mate, who was a freckled, red-headed New England Yankee.

"Mr. Lacy," Baron Mendl addressed the red-headed mate. "Put all hands to searching the yacht. Look for bombs, or stowaways."

Twenty minutes later, the red-headed mate made his report. "No bombs. No stowaways," he stated.

"You are positive, Mr. Lacy?" persisted Baron Mendl.

"Plumb certain. We even probed the water tanks."

Baron Mendl surveyed the sky. The sun was just dropping below the horizon. A profusion of clouds promised an extremely dark night.

"Cast off," directed the Calbian ambassador. "Head southward through the bay, and straight out to sea."

The trim vessel got under way, took the middle of the river, picked up speed, and swept past the warehouses and wharves which fringe the Hudson's banks. The sun disappeared entirely, and after a brief dusk, black night came.

The yacht was just nosing into the open sea as complete darkness fell.

"Extinguish all lights," commanded Baron Mendl.

"That's agin' the law, sir," the mate, Lacy, protested.

"Lights out!" snapped Baron Mendl. "Otherwise my enemies, using an airplane or a speedboat might spot me."

The red-headed Lacy had been holding his curiosity fairly well, but now it got the better of him.

"What's going on here, anyway?" he demanded.

"You were hired to take orders, not to ask questions," he was informed sharply.

Lacy grumbled, and departed to switch off the lights. Masthead lights, running lights—even the illumination in the cabins was turned off. A silent wraith in the thick murk, the yacht ran out to sea.

Lacy, consumed with curiosity, and still smarting from Baron Mendl's rebuke, stood in the bows with binoculars jammed to his eyes. He had appointed himself as extra lookout.

Lacy was in the bows when he heard the hissing sound. It was shrill, that hiss, and unlike anything he had ever heard before. He could not tell exactly from where it came.

He started to turn, got half around—and the whole Atlantic ocean seemed to go to pieces. There was a flash—so brilliant that its lights ran into his eyeballs as if it were molten metal.

Lacy had a split-second impression that the yacht and the surrounding sea were both going to jump

high into the sky and that the yacht had separated into many pieces for its jump. Then an explosion-hurled timber slammed against Lacy's red-thatched head, and he became unconscious.

Chapter III. DEATH TIES A TONGUE

DOC SAVAGE, in his headquarters on the eighty-sixth floor of New York's most impressive skyscraper, saw the flash which marked the destruction of Baron Damitru Mendl's yacht. The bronze man's windows faced toward the lower bay and the sea. Moreover, his flake-gold eyes missed little that transpired about him.

At the moment he observed the flash, Doc Savage was nearing the end of his daily two-hour exercise routine. It was rather late for the exercises, but the unusual man of bronze never allowed a twenty-four hour interval to elapse without taking them.

When he saw the bright flash out at sea, Doc Savage called a suggestion to Monk, the homely chemist.

"Tune in the radio, Monk, and see if you can pick up something that will tell us what that flash was."

The pleasantly ugly Monk was engaged at the moment in painting a small, crimson flag on the side of Habeas Corpus.

Habeas Corpus was as uncouth a specimen of his kind as Monk was of the human race. Their kinship extended farther than that. Both Habeas and Monk would be classed as very intelligent members of their species.

Habeas Corpus was Monk's pet pig. Habeas was lanky and razor-backed, with legs like a dog, and phenomenal ears. His ears seemed large enough to serve as wings.

Monk dropped the brush he was using into the can of crimson paint, went to a radio receiver, turned it on, and tuned.

Later, he let out a yell.

"Doc! Doc!" he barked excitedly. "That flash was a yacht blowing up! A coast guard cutter just reached the wreckage! I picked up the cutter radio report."

Doc Savage approached the radio. The flowing ease of his movements conveyed a striking impression of tremendous muscular strength. "Any survivors?" he queried.

"One—the mate of the yacht, a guy named Lacy. He's all banged up, but was able to tell 'em who was on board."

Monk paused and squinted his small eyes at the giant bronze man. "Listen, Doc—you remember the guy in the silk hat who came in here this afternoon, then walked out? He told me he was Baron Damitru Mendl."

Doc Savage said nothing, but the flake-gold in his strange eyes seemed to swirl faster.

"Baron Mendl was on that yacht, and the explosion killed him," Monk concluded.

The closest inspection of Doc Savage's lips would have showed no movement, yet a weird trilling sound came into being and permeated the vast room. It defied description, this trilling, being possessed of no tune, roving the musical scale aimlessly. It might have been the product of some wayward breeze through the array of massive bookcases, or the night song of an exotic jungle bird. Monk blinked. He knew this sound. The eerie trilling was a characteristic exclusive to Doc Savage—a tiny, unconscious thing which he did in moments of stress.

"We'd better get at the bottom of this," Doc said sharply. "Something queer is going on!"

"Wonder what's back of it?" Monk pondered.

"No telling." Doc moved for the door. "Come on."

Monk scooped Habeas up by an ear—the oversized ears served very nicely as handles, and Habeas did not seem to mind—and cried, "Where we goin'?"

"To the explosion scene."

The Hudson River lay only a few blocks to the west. It did not take them long to reach the water front.

The warehouses were great gloomy hulks in the pale light cast by street lamps. Signs were barely decipherable in the dimness. One of these read:

HIDALGO TRADING COMPANY

A door in the shoreward end of this warehouse opened to Doc Savage's signal, and it became evident that walls and roof of the structure were remarkably thick. The place, in fact, was virtually a huge vault. Darkness gorged the rear, and just what this huge building held was not immediately discernible. A hooded bulb illuminated the forward portion. This light stood on a workbench.

Affixed in a vise on the bench was a long, thin, razor-sharp blade of Damascus steel. The sheath for this, reposing near by, disclosed that the weapon was a sword cane, innocent-looking but deadly.

A man who had opened the hangar door looked at Monk and said sarcastically, "The world's homeliest man, and ugliest hog!"

Monk leered. "Hello, Ham, you shyster!"

Ham—his Alma Mater, Harvard, knew him as Brigadier General Theodore Marley Brooks, the most astute lawyer ever to pass its portals—was a slender man with a waist like a wasp, the dark,

piercing eyes of a listener, and the large, mobile mouth of an orator. Ham's dress was sartorial perfection. Good taste kept his clothes from being flashy, but he was a man who gave his physical appearance close attention.

Ham and Monk glowered at each other.

An uninformed observer would have thought fisticuffs, if not something worse, imminent. The truth was that these two were good, if quarrelsome, friends.

Doc clicked light switches, and electric radiance whitened the hangar—for that was the real purpose of the vast building. Housed inside were a number of planes. These ranged from small gyros to a gigantic tri-motored speed ship with wonderful streamlining. All were amphibians, capable of berthing on land or water.

"We'll take the big plane," Doc announced. "It is more efficient for a landing in the open sea."

THE coast guard cutter, which had been first to reach the spot where disaster had overtaken Baron Damitru Mendl's yacht, kept in more or less continuous radio communication with its base. The operation of this radio transmitter guided Doc Savage to the scene. The bronze man employed a sensitive radio direction-finder, with which his fast amphibian plane was equipped. The direction-finder amplifier fed into a loudspeaker, so that Monk and Ham could hear the cutter's transmission. This was in continental code, but both the chemist and the lawyer understood it. They were skilled operators.

"The cause of the explosion seems to be a profound mystery," Ham remarked.

"I wonder what we're gettin' mixed up in," Monk muttered. The homely chemist leaned over to scratch one of Habeas Corpus's winglike ears. "What does this thing smell like to you, Habeas?"

"Trouble!" said Habeas.

When the pleasantly unlovely pig made this intelligent reply—or seemed to make it—Ham started violently. The phenomenon gave him a shock, although he had witnessed it numerous times before, and knew very well that the pig did not have a voice.

Monk was a proficient ventriloquist, and frequently exercised his dexterity in the art on Habeas Corpus.

At an altitude of two thousand feet above the cutter, Doc Savage ran a bronze fingertip over a row of buttons on the dashboard of the plane, selected one and pressed it. Mechanism clicked, and from a wing compartment a parachute flare was launched. This was like a small sun, as it settled slowly toward the sea.

Doc Savage pointed. "Wreckage—evidently from Baron Mendl's yacht."

The flotsam consisted of deck chairs, life preservers, portions of lifeboats, and a few torn timbers.

Before the parachute flare fell into the sea, Doc Savage dropped his big amphibian on the surface and taxied alongside the cutter. The sea was rough, the landing a dangerous one, requiring great skill. The man of bronze, however, showed with no expression that he considered the descent anything but ordinary.

The cutter was a drab, businesslike vessel with a keel length of approximately a hundred feet.

Three-inch guns fore and aft had their breech mechanism swathed in weather coverings.

Doc turned the amphibian controls over to Monk, then clambered out, balanced adroitly, and ran to the tip of the wing.

Monk, an expert airman, jockeyed the wing tip close enough to the cutter to enable Doc, with a tremendous leap, to board the coast guard craft.

"This fellow Lacy," Doc demanded of the cutter skipper. "Where is he?"

"In the fo'castle," replied the officer.

"Let's see him."

Lacy was a still, slack shape on a bunk. His ordinary ruddy color had ebbed until his skin about matched the battleship-gray paintwork of the cutter. He was senseless, and barely breathing.

Doc made a quick examination. The strange bronze man was skilled at many things—he knew more chemistry than Monk, more law than Ham; but above all was his knowledge of surgery.

"There's a fracture of the squamous portion of the occipital," he stated. "In other words, a fractured skull."

The cutter skipper strained his hair with his fingers. "He must be pretty bad. He was unconscious when we found him, revived enough to talk some, then passed out again."

"Did he give any hint as to what caused the blast, or why the yacht was destroyed?" Doc asked.

"No."

"I want to take him to a hospital. That is his only chance."

The commander shrugged. "That'll have to be OK'd by my commanding officer."

The cutter captain went to the radio cabin and communicated with his headquarters. Orders to cooperate fully with Doc Savage came crackling back with a rapidity that gave the officer rather a shock. He had heard of Doc Savage, of course, but he did not know the bronze man had such influence with the coast guard.

Guardsmen transferred the seriously injured Lacy to Doc's speed plane.

The small boat, which had been lowered to pick up Lacy, still bobbed alongside the cutter.

Entering this, Doc Savage directed that he be rowed through the floating wreckage of Baron Damitru Mendl's yacht. The casual strength dominant in his unusual voice had its effect on the sailors, and they rowed about briskly.

The bronze man picked up a shattered hatch, inspected it closely, then discarded it. He did the same with a life preserver, two deck chairs, the stem of a lifeboat, and miscellaneous spars and timbers.

His examination was short, for he wanted to get Lacy to the hospital. He soon boarded the plane.

"You sized up the wreckage, Doc" Monk said. "Whatcha' make of it?"

"The manner in which those timbers are shattered indicates that the force of the explosion came, not from within the yacht, but from the top of the superstructure."

"You mean like a dropped bomb?"

"It might have been a bomb."

Doc Savage was moved to alter his surmise shortly after he reached the hospital with Lacy.

THE hospital to which Doc took Lacy was not especially large or ornate, but it was acquiring an increasing reputation for good work, and, moreover, handled an unusual number of charity cases.

Probably not more than a dozen people in New York City knew that Doc Savage had financed the construction of this institution and was furnishing the money which kept it in operation. The building stood near the river, and Doc was able to taxi his plane almost to the door.

Appearance of the bronze man with the patient created something of a flurry among the surgeons, and it was not because their salaries were paid out of Doc's pocketbook. They did not know that.

What excited the surgeons was the prospect of seeing a master of their profession perform.

The main operating room, scene of the most delicate work, was circular, with a glass ceiling, through which spectators would observe operations. Every surgeon who could find a free moment posted himself above this glass with a pair of strong binoculars, hoping to see Doc Savage's skilled fingers perform new miracles of surgery.

They were not disappointed. Exactly how Doc revived Lacy was probably understood by only those with the necessary technical knowledge. Certainly it was beyond Monk and Ham, who were present. The attention of those on hand, the rapt intensity of the observers above, told them that Doc was doing something far beyond the ordinary.

An hour later, Lacy talked a little.

"Have you any idea what caused the explosion?" Doc queried.

"Nope," said Lacy, in a fairly strong voice.

"It was apparently something in the nature of a bomb."

"You mean dropped from an airplane?"

"Yes."

"Nix. It couldn't have been that. I was on lookout. I didn't hear a plane."

"A plane motor can be efficiently silenced."

"There weren't any lights on the yacht," Lacy insisted. "I'm plumb certain of that. I tell you, it couldn't have been an aerial bomb. A plane couldn't have seen us."

"How about planted explosive?" Doc suggested.

"Nix again." Lacy managed a slight grimace. "We searched the yacht ahead of time. Baron Damitru Mendl's orders."

The lights played in the flake-gold of Doc's eyes. "What was Baron Mendl afraid of?" he asked.

"I don't know, and that's the truth," Lacy said earnestly. "I was just one of the yacht's crew. I tried to question him, but he told me I was hired to take orders and keep my mouth shut."

"You had better not talk any more now," Doc informed him. "Later, we will discuss the affair in detail. There may be some minor point which you overlooked, but which will give me a clue."

"Am I gonna pull out of this all right?" Lacy asked.

"You are," Doc told him.

Chapter IV. THE PRINCESS

DOC SAVAGE was wrong, but due to no misjudgment of his own.

The spectacular nature of Doc Savage's career had made him excellent newspaper copy. Almost any of his feats were good for a front-page story. One of the surgeons who had observed the operation forgot that there was an order standing which directed that newspapermen were to be given no information concerning Doc Savage. This specialist called a friend—a reporter on a tabloid paper—and gave praise of the extremely delicate nature of the operation which Doc had performed upon Lacy's shattered skull.

The tabloid appeared with two-inch headlines, scooping all its rival sheets.

An hour later, the hospital attendants heard a single shot. It came from the private room where Lacy lay.

They rushed to the room. Nurses are supposed to be inured to unpleasant sights, but two of them screamed when they saw Lacy.

A pistol bullet had entered Lacy's left temple, tunneled through his brain, and all but torn off the ear of the opposite side in leaving his head.

An open window and a fire escape indicated the route by which the murderer had come and gone. At the foot of the fire escape was found a copy of the tabloid newspaper which carried the story of Lacy's operation. The story had furnished the killer with both the name of the hospital and Lacy's room number.

Extremely pale, and staggering a little as he walked, the surgeon who had given the newspaper the yarn went to the phone and called Doc Savage. He told the bronze man exactly what had happened. Then he tendered his resignation.

"Your resignation will not be accepted," Doc Savage advised him.

"But the story I gave the newspaper resulted in the man's death," the surgeon groaned. "It furnished the killer with Lacy's whereabouts. I murdered that man just as surely as if I had done it with my own hands."

"It was unfortunate," Doc agreed. "But your resignation will not help matters. In you there is the making of a great surgeon. You can do more to atone by going ahead with your work."

"I-am very grateful-to you," the other said weakly, and hung up.

DOC SAVAGE had received the call in his skyscraper office. When the conversation had terminated, he advised Monk and Ham of what had occurred.

"For the love of Mike," Monk muttered, small-voiced. "Lacy was killed to shut his mouth. Somebody was afraid he might know things. Doc, there must be something infernally big back of this."

"Lacy told us all he knew, I'm sure," Doc said slowly. "But, in later questioning, he might have given us some clue. And it was to prevent us getting that clue that he was slain."

The bronze giant, of such titanic proportions that the massive furniture about him was dwarfed in comparison, swung into the library. He went to the chair in which he had been seated, reading, when the elderly hag visited him that afternoon. He switched on the apparatus which stood beside the chair—the device into which he had spoken in the weirdly unintelligible tongue when the crone was present.

"Renny—Johnny—Long Tom!" Doc called into the microphone appended to the contrivance.

When there was no answer, Doc called again.

Monk and Ham looked on, their perpetual quarrel for the moment forgotten. They knew that the apparatus was a radio transmitter and receiver. It operated on a short wave-band.

Doc Savage possessed several other transmitter-receiver outfits which operated on this same wave-length. The sets were kept turned on continuously in the spots frequented by his five aides—their apartments, their automobiles and their private planes.

"What's the idea of tryin' to raise the other three of our gang?" Monk queried.

"Remember the old woman who visited us at the same time that Baron Damitru Mendl was here?" Doc countered.

"Sure, and was she a homely old heifer!" Monk grunted.

At that, Ham snorted and eyed Monk's homely features meaningfully.

Monk ignored the dig. "What about the old woman, Doc?"

"When she was present, I spoke a few words of the Mayan language into the radio. Close watching of her face convinced me she did not understand the language. Hence, she does not know that the words directed Long Tom, Johnny and Renny to trail her."

Monk's big mouth sagged open. Ham almost dropped his sword cane.

"You mean the old lady was a phony?" Monk exploded.

"Exactly! Her story about an ailing son was a pack of lies."

Monk blinked incredulously. "But how'd you catch on?"

"The address she gave me, where her son was supposed to be, was 7832 East Fourteenth Street.

There is no such number. Moreover, her manner gave her away. She was somewhat too glib."

Doc Savage now shifted his attention to the radio. "Johnny—Long Tom—Renny!" he called again.

He secured no answer, and left the apparatus turned on.

"The three of them are trailing the crone," he said, settling back in the chair. "I directed them in Mayan to pick up her trail when she left the building. I gave them the description. They were downstairs in our secret garage."

Monk grinned. His grin was remarkable, for it puckered all of his homely face, persimmon fashion.

Ham withdrew his sword cane a few inches from its sheath and clicked it back. Both were excited.

The fact that Doc was quiet in the chair, his metallic features impassive, did not deceive them.

He was already moving to unravel this tangle of murder and mystery. If events of the past were any criterion, there would be danger ahead, plenty of action-adventure!

Monk and Ham were not mournful about the prospects. To them this sort of thing made life worth living.

A click came from the radio—a microphone being cut into the voice circuit.

"Doc Savage!" called a rather scholastic tone from the loud-speaker.

Doc leaned close to the transmitter. "Yes, Johnny," he called.

"The superannuated crone has terminated her meanderings," advised Johnny.

Johnny—William Harper Littlejohn, as the realms of geology and archaeology knew him—never used a small word where he could think of a big one.

"Where did she go?" Doc demanded.

"She promenaded the metropolis for an interval," explained the master of big words. "In her peregrinations, she tarried to indulge in three telephone calls. To our vexation, we could not overhear the telephonic discussion."

"Where is she now?"

"In a hovel. I think that term fits the habitation adequately."

"Is it on Fourteenth Street?"

"In Brooklyn—87 Mervin Street."

"All right," Doc said quietly. "Watch the place, you fellows. Monk, Ham and myself will be right out."

"You desire to interview this crone?" questioned Johnny.

"Right. We are getting mixed up in an infernally big plot. As yet, we have no idea what it is all about. But the ambassador of a Balkan nation and the crew of his yacht have been murdered entire—" The telephone rang, interrupting the conversation.

Monk clamped the receiver to an ear, blinked once, then barked, "Doc! Quick!"

"Just a minute, Johnny," Doc said into the radio set, and swung to the telephone.

"It's a girl," Monk breathed, and surrendered the phone.

"Savage speaking," Doc said.

From the telephone receiver came a series of dull thumps.

"Well?" Doc said sharply into the transmitter.

"They're breaking the door down!" The whisper was feminine, husky, hasty.

"What is this?" Doc demanded.

Apparently she did not get his words, for her whispered exclamation poured on in a frenzied rush.

"

Ajutor! Help! I got away from them and into this room, and got the door locked. They'll break in soon! They don't know this phone is here, and I'll hide it. Quick! Help me, Domnule Savage!"

"Who are you?" Doc demanded.

Again his words went unheeded, as the girl's rushing whisper continued.

"

Ce rusine! They come! Ajutor! Help!"

A clatter came from the phone receiver, as if the other instrument was being shoved into some place of concealment. Either from accident or deliberate design, the receiver had not been replaced. Listening intently, Doc Savage got an idea of what was going on. A crashing of wood might have been a door going down, and a loud rattle of feet followed—after which the girl cried out and there were gasps, blows, and some sharp ejaculating in the Calbian tongue.

"

Ma bucur!" a man exclaimed. "Good! Now we will tie her up securely." His tone was resounding, pleasantly boyish.

"

Da domnule!" another grunted, "Yes, sir! And we had better take her away from this place in a hurry!"

"Why?"

"Because her screams or the struggle may have been heard."

"

Nu!" declared the man with the exuberant voice. "No! This home is empty. No one will have heard. We will merely take her into the next room."

There was footstep clatter, muttering voices, the slam of a door—then silence.

Doc Savage swung into the next room, where there was a second telephone line, and used that instrument to summon an operator and start a trace on the connection over which the girl had called. While the call was being traced—he had no other way of learning from where the girl had phoned—the bronze man went back to the radio transmitter.

"Johnny—you and Long Tom and Renny close in on that old woman and grab her. If you get into a jam, call the office. Monk and Ham will be here."

As they heard these words, Monk and Ham blinked, then looked as if they had stepped into puddles of cold water. They did not fancy playing reserves.

"You can stay by the telephone wire over which the girl talked," Doc advised them. "But do not leave this office unless Johnny's party or myself calls."

"OK," Monk muttered, and picked up the phone.

Doc Savage got the results of the traced call a moment later. The address from which the girl had spoken was on the Upper West Side of Manhattan Island.

Monk and Ham registered gloom as they watched Doc's exit. The pig, Habeas Corpus, sat at Monk's feet, big ears waving slowly, fan fashion.

At Doc's expense, certain remodeling had been done on the skyscraper, fitting it to the bronze man's requirements. There was, for instance, an elevator of special design which operated at tremendous speed—its descent for sixty stories was almost a free fall, and the shock of its halt was quite appreciable.

The cage let Doc out in a basement garage which held his collection of cars. The machines ranged from a large limousine to roadsters, small coupés, and three trucks of assorted dimensions, none of which were especially flashy, but all fitted with engines of unusual power.

Doc selected a roadster, long and sombre, with an engine which, running at moderate speed, could hardly be heard. Tooling this car out into the street, he headed northward.

Many a pedestrian stopped and twisted his neck to stare after the remarkable-looking bronze man, for there was much that was arresting about his appearance.

Traffic cops fell over themselves to open a way for him, and this was not entirely because of the low license numeral which the roadster bore, itself a symbol of influence in New York City. Almost every cop on the force had heard of Doc Savage, and was aware that he bore a high honorary police commission.

The house from which the girl had called was on an unprepossessing side street. Doc did not drive past it, but parked around a corner a block distant. Here he left the machine.

A cigar store on the corner was lighted. Other stores were dark. At the moment, no one was in sight.

The bronze man walked to a store awning, which was rolled up. He grasped the frame and, with a lithe ease, climbed hand over hand until he reached a shelf of ornamental masonry. There were grooves between the bricks, which furnished grips for the tips of his corded fingers. The building was four stories high, and he mounted it as easily as another would climb a ladder.

No one saw him.

A ghostly silence marked Doc's passage across the roof tops. He reached the house which was his objective. These houses were in reality not houses at all in the sense in which the term is accepted outside the metropolitan centers. The block was really one long building, partitioned.

Doc tested a roof hatch, found it locked, and moved back to the rear. A thin silk line, a grappling hook attached to one end, came out of his clothing. Hooking the grapple behind a chimney, Doc dangled the cord down into the courtyard in the rear and slid down it.

He came to a window. Trying to open it, he found it locked.

A diamond-pointed glass cutter—and a suction cup to grasp the pane and keep it from falling after it was free—disposed of the window with silence and celerity.

Like some nebulous liquid of bronze hue, Doc seemed to flow inside the house.

Doc Savage lowered the cut square of glass to the floor. The feel of the floor, together with the shimmering effect of the moonlight which penetrated the window, told of varnish recently applied.

The air smelled of paint. The house had been redecorated recently. There was no furniture in it.

With quick tugs, the bronze man removed the custom-made oxfords which shod his feet and drew off silk socks. His coat pockets were spacious enough to accommodate the footgear. Then he went forward.

Included in the two-hour ritual of exercises which Doc had taken daily from childhood was a series of calisthenics intended to develop his toes. These toes were not the comparatively useless appendages of an ordinary man. They were sensitive, possessed of a prehensile strength.

Many individuals bereft of their arms earn a livelihood on the vaudeville stage and with circuses, demonstrating how they have learned to shave, drive nails, and turn the pages of a book, using only their toes. Doc Savage could do all of these things, and was master of feats which few of these armless wonders could equal. For instance, he could take a string in the toes of one foot and, using that foot exclusively, tie a knot in the cord.

This pedal facility, developed by careful exercise, was handy in searching out solid footing, as Doc now descended the none-too-substantial stairs.

He heard sound—a mutter, a grunt. They came, he decided when he had gone down farther, from the ground floor.

"

Ba gati deseama!" a man growled. "Take care! Not so much noise!"

"No one will hear us," said the boisterous young male voice which Doc had previously heard over the telephone.

The words were couched in the mother tongue of Calbia. Doc understood this language, for his mastery of worldly knowledge was particularly thorough on the matter of foreign languages.

The speakers were in a room to one side of the front door. Doc went on—rapidly, stealthily.

The corridor was itself unlighted by any bulb, but was made faintly luminous by the rays which slanted through the partially open door of a room to one side of the entrance.

From his clothing Doc produced a periscope of his own construction. The barrel of this, black in color, and scarcely larger than a match, could be telescoped out. He used the little contrivance to inspect the room, furtively.

Eight men were in sight.

Seven of the men were attired exactly alike, in the rough dungaree outfits which steamship concerns supply to their deck hands. They did not wear uniform caps, and nowhere was there a sign of the ship to which they belonged—if they were really sailors. Round faces, dark eyes, and slightly full lips—they all had these characteristics—were partial proof that they were Calbians.

They all wore gloomy expressions.

"

Rusime!" said the man with the young, hearty voice. "For shame! Cheer up, gentlemen, we are in no danger!"

"I hope you are right, Captain Flancul," mumbled one of the group.

Captain Flancul—he of the boisterous voice—resembled a movie director's idea of a European military officer. His height was near six feet, and he stood as stiffly as if there had been a ramrod strapped against his spine. He wore a neat gray business suit. His hair was close cropped and dark, his forehead high, his eyes brilliantly intelligent, his mouth thin and grim. Small scars on his features indicated to the informed that he was not a stranger to the Calbian national custom of settling minor disputes with saber duels.

Doc Savage shifted his periscope. In the portion of the room into which he could see, there was no sign of the girl.

Doc shoved a hand into a pocket and brought out several objects which, at first glance, might have been mistaken for glass marbles. These were in reality thin-walled glass containers holding a liquid. Some were marked differently than others—with a tiny colored speck.

Doc selected one which bore a green dot, and flipped it into the room. It burst with a sound not unlike that of a dropped bird egg.

Doc Savage held his breath.

The occupants of the room stared at the spot where the unusual missile had burst. Not having seen the thing, they were at a loss to understand what had occurred.

"

Bagati deseama!" rapped lusty-voiced Captain Flancul. "Take care—" Without bending his ramrod back, Captain Flancul tilted forward. He hit the floor full-length, with a resounding crash. Except for the slight rebound of his body, he did not move afterward. A long, irregular snore fluttered his lips.

He had been nearest to the glass ball when it burst.

The other men collapsed almost as suddenly. Only two of the party managed to stir so much as a step before they went down. Without exception, they seemed to sink into a deep slumber.

Doc Savage continued holding his breath.

The glass ball held a powerful anaesthetic gas, the vapor from this particular container producing an unconsciousness which lasted some ten to fifteen minutes. The other balls in Doc's pocket were charged with a stronger gas, inducing, when used, a stupor which lasted two hours or more.

The gas had a peculiar quality. It mingled with the air and became ineffective after the passage of perhaps a minute.

Doc allowed the minute to elapse, and then, breathing freely, stepped into the room.

He saw the girl.

Ordinarily, feminine beauty left the bronze man untouched, for he had schooled his tastes carefully so that they did not run in that direction. But now he stared, and his strong lips, parting a little from amazement, showed even white teeth.

Her traveling suit, trim and expensive, was obviously a Paris creation. The trim hat was small, chic. A skilled manicurist had worked recently upon her slim-fingered hands. Her feet were small—expensively shod; her ankles shapely in silken hose of an elaborate open network design. Her features might have been the work, in warm marble, of a great sculptor. Her hair was honey-blonde; her nostrils thin; her lips exquisitely molded.

Altogether, the picture she presented was entrancing.

The girl occupied a chair, to which she was strapped with several belts which the men apparently had contributed. She was sleeping from the effects of the anaesthetic gas.

Doc Savage freed her, then began a search of the house. In an adjacent room, which had been recently painted and varnished so that the floors were still covered with brown protective paper laid down by the painters, he found the telephone. It was concealed under a pile of the paper in a corner.

The receiver was off the hook. Doc lifted the instrument.

"Monk, Ham!" he called.

"We're still in the office," Monk's childlike tones replied.

"Things are going all right at this end," Doc assured him. "Has Renny, Long Tom, or Johnny called in?"

"Not a word."

Doc hung up.

BACK in the front room, Doc proceeded to search Captain Flancul and the other sleeping men. Their pockets yielded numerous small Calbian coins, but there were no identifying papers.

Doc noted that each man had close-cropped, bristling hair—the haircuts were all of the same style. Around the left wrist of each man there was a slight groove, a mark which might have been made by the band of a wrist watch, except that it was narrower. To Doc, this meant the presence of military identification wristlets, recently removed.

These men were soldiers.

With the belts which he had removed from the girl's ankles and wrists, and augmented by strips torn from the dungaree garments, Doc bound the men securely. He also wedged a gag between the jaws of each.

The next five minutes he spent in a further examination of the unconscious individuals and in a short scrutiny of the house.

The girl was the first to recover consciousness, due probably to the fact that she was farthest from the anaesthetic ball when it burst. Her eyes, which had been closed, now opened. They were dark and long-lashed, under thin, trained brows.

She did what few persons would have done—she remained perfectly quiet until she could speak coherently.

"You are Doc Savage?" she asked when she could control her voice.

Doc nodded. "And you?"

"Princess Gusta Le Galbin"

Included in Doc's fund of knowledge was an understanding of the European political layout. He knew the names of the members of each imperial household. He drew on his memory now.

"You are the daughter of King Dal Le Galbin, monarch of Calbia?" he queried.

The tall, exquisitely beautiful young woman nodded. "Da, that is right." She nodded at the door.

"Let us step into another room, where we can talk without being overheard by this riff-raff."

Politely, Doc Savage offered the young woman his arm. She took it, swaying a little, and they moved out of the room.

As they did this Princess Gusta Le Galbin, breathing rapidly as if she were short of breath, put a hand to a pocket in her frock. Her fingers explored there a moment. She eyed Doc furtively, seeking to learn whether he had noticed this action. Apparently, he was unaware of her move.

When the young woman's hand dropped to her side, there was concealed in its palm a small hypodermic needle which had been hidden in her frock.

"Listen!" she breathed sharply. "Do you hear anything?"

Doc Savage half turned on a heel, apparently to learn what his ears could detect.

The young woman struck with the hypodermic needle. Its point penetrated the bronze man's forearm. Almost at once the giant man of bronze grew unsteady on his feet, and sinking slowly, became limp upon the floor.

Princess Gusta Le Galbin eyed him.

"

Buna!" she exclaimed. "Good! He was easily deceived."

She went back to Captain Flancul and his men and began untying them, first removing the gag from the mouth of the captain himself.

"You overpowered him?" Captain Flancul demanded anxiously in Calbian. His voice was weak, for he had just revived from the gas.

Princess Gusta nodded. "It was simple."

Captain Flancul shuddered. "Not so simple, princess. He overcame us before we even knew what had happened. Suppose we had been less cunning in our arrangements to receive him here?"

"In that case he might have evaded our trap."

"It was your planning, princess—first myself and my men to attempt to capture Doc Savage when he came; then you, our pretended prisoner, to use the hypodermic needle upon him if he did overcome us."

"Let us"—Captain Flancul made a grim face—"go into the other room and attend to this Doc Savage."

Chapter V. THE "OLD WOMAN"

DOC SAVAGE'S three men who were trailing the old crone had been watching for some time the house into which she had gone.

Johnny, the big-worded archaeologist and geologist, was a very tall and an almost incredibly bony man. Monk had once described Johnny as looking like the advance agent for a famine. Due to the bony nature of his frame, Johnny's clothing never fitted him well. Attached to a lapel by a dark ribbon, was a monocle—actually a powerful magnifying glass which Johnny needed in his business and carried as a monocle for convenience.

"We are indulging in unproductive inaction," insisted Johnny.

"Keep your hair on," Long Tom rumbled. "Renny is scoutin' the place. When he gets back we'll go in."

Major Thomas J. "Long Tom" Roberts easily seemed the physical weakling of Doc Savage's group of five aides. He was not tall, and only moderately well-knit. He had the complexion of one who had lived much of his life where the sunlight could not get to him.

Long Tom's appearance was slightly deceiving for, in a fight, he could probably whip ninety-nine out of the first hundred men he would meet walking down a city street.

Long Tom's work in the field of electricity had earned him something of a reputation, his name being mentioned in connection with such terms as "wizard of the juice" and "electricity shark."

"I wonder what motivates this enigmatic procedure of ours," pondered verbose Johnny.

"You mean—what is Doc's idea?" Long Tom shrugged in the gloom of the shrubbery where they were crouched. "Search me. Doc wants this old heifer, so we'll bring her in. Ps-s-st! Here comes Renny!"

A tower of gristle and bone reared out of the darkness. Renny—Colonel John Renwick—was well over six feet tall and weighed in excess of two hundred and fifty pounds. His face was extremely long, and wore the expression of one who had just attended a funeral. This was Renny's characteristic look when he was embroiled in trouble. He loved trouble.

The outstanding thing about Renny's appearance, however, was his hands. These, when squared into fists, made somewhat less than a gallon of a gristle and bone composite which rivaled granite in hardness. It was Renny's boast that he could knock the panel out of any wooden door with either fist.

He was also one of the greatest of modern engineers, although he seldom mentioned that fact.

"It's a roomin' house." Renny's usual tone was a great roaring, and he now experienced difficulty in whispering. "The old woman seems to have a room on the second floor rear. Come around to the back here and you can see into the window."

Using all stealth possible, they wormed through the shrubbery to the back of the house. Only one window was lighted.

"Watch it!" Renny breathed hoarsely.

A telephone stood on a table near the window. Even as they watched, the old woman hobbled to this.

"Hey!" grunted Long Tom, "I'm gonna listen in on that talk."

The electrical wizard darted forward, wrenching to free a small metal case which was planted in an inside pocket. Once out and opened, this proved to hold an electrical device with dials and switches, and a small recess which contained a watch-case type receiver.

Johnny clamped the receiver to an ear, turned switches and adjusted dials. Then he walked along the rear wall of the house, holding his device close to the wooden clapboards.

"Chances are that the phone wires lead from a conduit strung down the alley underground," he whispered. "I'm tryin' to get my pickup device in the neighborhood of the lead-in."

He succeeded a moment later. Long Tom's device was one which simply utilized that troublesome inclination of old-time regenerative radio receivers to pick up the conversations on near-by telephone wires. Long Tom had designed the apparatus in the box specifically for this purpose. By crowding their ears close to the watch-case receiver, all three could hear what was being said.

The old woman had evidently called a number and was waiting for an answer. They could hear the regular buzz of the automatic ringer. Then there was a click as a distant receiver lifted.

"

Da," said a harsh voice. "Yes."

"This is Muta," came the shrilly querulous tones of the crone. "I have called three times in an effort to get further orders, but our chief was not there."

Big-fisted Renny nodded soberly. "That explains the calls the old battle-ax made while we were trailing her."

"Keep still, or we'll miss some of this," grunted Long Tom.

"Is the chief there now?" demanded the hag, Muta.

"No," said the harsh voice. "He is away—on business of his own."

"What shall I do?" queried Muta.

"What is the matter, ugly one? Are you lonesome?"

"

Cainele! Muta snapped. "Dog! Answer my question."

"You might join us and await the arrival of our chief."

"I will do that," Muta decided. "Watch for me. I will soon arrive."

Clicking denoted the severance of the telephonic hookup.

Long Tom and the other two exchanged whispered words in the darkness.

"What we heard proves that the old bag of bones is small fry," the electrical wizard pointed out.

"She gets her orders from a big shot. What do you say we trail her—and grab the big guy?"

"Not a bad idea," muttered Renny.

Johnny agreed. "Supereminent."

Renny remained at the rear, to watch. Long Tom and Johnny took the front of the house. They waited near the entrance.

The front door opened and a man came out. He was a short fellow, extremely wrinkled—a dwarf. This individual reached the corner, where there was a streetlight.

"I'll be superamalgamated!" exploded Johnny. "That is the old woman!"

"She ain't a woman at all!" snorted Long Tom. "Muta is a man—a dwarf!"

They hastily summoned Renny from the rear, then ran for their cars. The two machines they were employing in their detective work were of a type calculated to attract the least notice. One was a taxicab, its outward appearance differing little from thousands of other cabs in the city. The other conveyance was a small delivery truck, bearing the name of a prominent milk concern.

Renny drove the taxi. Long Tom and Johnny dived into the delivery truck.

Starting the engines, they went ahead and managed to catch sight of their quarry shortly before the dwarf reached the next streetlight.

Muta's actions indicated he was hunting a taxicab. Accordingly, Renny rolled forward.

Swinging to the curb, Renny called hopefully, "Hack, sir?"

Muta veered over. He was so short that it was necessary for him to lift on tiptoe to peer into the cab.

Renny got a close look at the fellow's countenance, and was unfavorably impressed. True, he had never seen a more bland, peaceful-looking bundle of wrinkles. But this in itself was an incongruity which bordered on the hideous.

Removal of the gray wig, the shawl, and the ragged dress, which had been Muta's disguise, had worked a stark change. There was something fiendish about the fellow. A barrel of a torso hinted at no small strength.

Muta showed snagged teeth in what was supposed to be a grin, but which Renny considered more of a snarl. He got into the hack, and gave an address.

Renny, endeavoring not to show his huge fists too prominently, put the machine in motion. The address he had received was near the water front.

Well to the rear, Long Tom and Johnny trailed along in the milk truck.

It was the custom of Doc Savage's men, when engaged in a mission which might be dangerous, to communicate their whereabouts to Doc's headquarters at frequent intervals, if convenient.

The milk conveyance was fitted with a portable radio receiver-transmitter. While Johnny drove, Long Tom switched this on. In a moment he was in communication with Monk and Ham in the skyscraper office.

"That old woman was really a man—a dwarf," Long Tom explained. "He's working for somebody. Name is Muta. We're trailing him, hoping to grab the boss."

The fact that Doc had directed Muta to be seized was not mentioned. They were using their own judgment, something which they did frequently. They knew this was the course that Doc would want them to follow.

The street sloped downward and the air became saturated with the faint, always-present smell of the water front—brine, fish and rotting wood. Buildings needed painting. Many of them were ramshackle.

The bay came into sight. A fleet of tugs, their whistles bleating, were conveying a departing liner toward the open sea. Somewhere a bell buoy ding-donged.

Above the bay, Manhattan skyline was an array of vertical splinters against the heavens—black, freckled with the white of windows. Overhead, clouds and moonlight made a jumble of sepia and silver.

Johnny and Long Tom observed Muta alight from Renny's hack. They swung around the next corner and stopped. A moment later Renny, having circled the block, joined them. They all hurried forward. Muta approached a small wharf. Alongside this was moored a dark, seagoing speedboat, perhaps sixty feet in length.

A small warehouse stood at the shoreward end of the pier. Affixed to the side of this was a box which evidently held a telephone.

As Muta strode on to the wharf, the phone on the side of the warehouse rang noisily.

Muta halted.

Aboard the seagoing speedboat several men appeared. It was too gloomy to make out the details of their appearance.

One of them called to Muta in the not unmusical language of Calbia—evidently directing Muta to answer the telephone, since the dwarf turned back.

Johnny and his two companions were close enough to hear what was said.

"Hello," said Muta. "Ah, it is you, chief! What orders do you wish? . . . You have what? . . . Doc Savage has been overpowered? Ma, bucur! Excellent!"

There was a pause, during which Muta listened—and Johnny and the others could not overhear what was said.

"

Da, domnule!" Muta grunted at last. "Yes, sir, I understand. I am to remain here with the others, because you can handle Doc Savage without further assistance."

Muta hung up, wheeled and strode down the wharf toward the speedboat. He clambered aboard, and with the other men disappeared below deck.

"Holy cow!" Renny muttered in the shadow of the warehouse. "Doc is in a jam!"

"I don't believe it!" grunted pallid Long Tom. "Doc never has failed to take care of himself."

Johnny wrapped his monocle carefully in his handkerchief and stuffed it in his coat pocket, as if he feared there would soon be danger of its being shattered. "I advocate precipitous action," he said. "What say you we invest yonder craft by force?"

"You mean grab this dwarf Muta and see if he knows where Doc is?" demanded Renny, whose grammar gave no hint that he was as highly educated as the big-worded Johnny.

"Right! Make 'im tell what's behind all this, too!"

"Let's go!" grated Long Tom.

By way of preparing for action, each man plucked a unique weapon from a special armpit holster. Resembling oversized automatic revolvers, these guns were supermachine pistols designed by Doc

Savage. A compact curled magazine was attached to each. They were charged, not with ordinary lead missiles, but with mercy bullets—slugs which produce quick unconsciousness instead of fatal injury. The three men advanced, crouching close to the planking to keep out of sight of the speedboat deck, which was lower than the wharf. Long Tom, loitering in the rear, dipped his hands into his pockets several times and transferred small objects to the wharf planking. Then he went on with the others. They crouched near the speedboat and prepared to leap down upon its deck. "We'll give 'em a chance to surrender," Renny rumbled grimly. "OK!" Long Tom snapped. "Let's—Hey! Look out!" A manifold clatter and running drew their eyes toward the shoreward end of the wharf. "Holy cow!" Renny thumped. Several shadowy men were rushing them, guns in hand. "They had lookouts posted on shore!" Johnny yelled, forgetting his large words for once.

Chapter VI. THE RIVER STYX

ONE of the charging group yelled, "Opriti! Stop! Get your hands up!" Renny poured a rumble out of his cavernous chest and started to swerve his supermachine gun. "Wait! Wait!" Long Tom barked. "Drop your gun! Hold your breath!" Renny and Johnny, comprehending, obeyed. All three men charged their lungs with air, and held it there. Yelling triumphantly, the rushing men came close. It was possible to see their round, dark faces and to ascertain that all looked like native Calbians. Their weapons were automatic pistols of the type supplied to the Calbian army. Unexpectedly—to the victim, at least—the foremost Calbian caved down and flopped end-over-end like a rabbit shot on the run. In rapid succession the others followed him to the wharf boards. They spread themselves out, lay motionless, and began an even, deep breathing, which here and there became a snore.

Long Tom chuckled. "I spread some of Doc's glass balls of anaesthetic on the wharf. These monkeys ran over 'em and broke 'em." "The boat!" Renny thundered. With sprawling leaps, they gained the deck of the seagoing craft. A man popped out of a hatch, an automatic in hand; his gun came up. There came a roaring sound from Renny's huge fist, as if a Gargantuan bullfrog had opened up with a short, deep croak, and the ejector mechanism of the engineer's supermachine pistol spouted empty cartridges. The gunman at the hatch melted down, rendered senseless by the mercy bullets before he could fire or cry out. Howling, Renny plunged for the hatch. Johnny, a gangling animated skeleton, dived for the cabin companion. Johnny found the cabin door locked. It resisted his slamming shoulder. Long Tom, trying another hatch, found it secured also. "Only that one hatch open," the electrical wizard rasped. "We'll go in with Renny." Renny dropped through the hatch; Long Tom and Johnny piled after him. They found a metal ladder, which led into a deep hold compartment. This was dark, but a bulkhead door in the rear made a rectangular panel of light. They flung toward this. The light panel blotted out suddenly as the door closed. "Trap!" Renny thundered, and pitched backward. He grasped the metal ladder. There was a click, and it dropped off the bulkhead. "Trick ladder!" Renny howled, dodged the descending rungs. "I'll be superamalgamated!" groaned Johnny. "What have we got into?" Renny crouched slightly, then leaped. He grasped the hatch edge and pulled himself up. A swarthy man with an automatic was just stooping to peer into the hold. Renny's huge fist drifted out of the black recess and collided with the fellow's jaw. Head and fist did not differ greatly in size. The dark man skittered across the deck, and hung like a rag over the rail, senseless. Renny chinned himself, got his elbows over the hatch edge, then rumbled to those below: "Grab my legs and climb up." Both Long Tom and Johnny were more than ordinarily agile. They proceeded to grasp Renny and climb him as though he were an oversized rope. Renny's belt snapped when Johnny seized it, but a moment later all three were on deck.

Up forward, hatches and companions had spewed armed men. Their guns began to bang and lip flame. Moreover, two more men were running down the wharf. These had evidently been among the lookout group on shore, and had remained behind to take care of an emergency.

"Down!" Renny rapped, and flattened behind the hatch coping.

Somebody threw a hand grenade, but with bad aim, so that it hit the deck, bounced and landed in the water before it exploded. The wave it kicked up washed over the deck, drenching Renny and his two companions, and the boat rolled.

Long Tom's superfirer moaned, and two Calbians went down, reeling.

Renny raised his head, lowered it as a bullet snapped past.

"They're passin' up more grenades from below!" he boomed. "Blast 'em, they'll blow us to pieces! Lets take to the water!"

With a concerted leap and dive they cleared the sea speedster's rail. Long Tom squawked painfully as he collided with a pier piling. Then, stroking rapidly, they were in the forest of vertical timbers under the wharf.

"They'll have a swell time gettin' us out of here," Renny rumbled.

Their enemies cursed and yelled in Calbian. They threw grenades, but the explosions only tore the piling—one grenade even bouncing back and opening a sizable cavity in the boat deck.

Next, the Calbians tried turning on a searchlight. Johnny shot this out, and also drilled two men in the legs with mercy bullets.

Comparative silence fell over the wharf.

"It's up to them to think fast," Renny chuckled. "This shootin' and the grenades will attract the police."

The Calbians did think fast, and efficiently. A bustling sound came from the boat. Then there was a loud hissing—and liquid sprayed through the wharf piling. A strong odor accompanied it.

"Gasoline!" Renny groaned. "They've connected a fire hose to their fuel tank. They got us! They'll burn us outa here and shoot us when we show up."

Muta's shrill, querulous voice came to them.

"You three—you have one chance!" he snarled. "Come out and surrender, and we will not put a match to the gasoline."

"Holy cow!" Renny mumbled. "We'd better take him up. We're lucky at that."

"Coming out!" Long Tom called.

The three men paddled to the speedboat, first dropping their machine pistols into the water. With no gentleness at all, they were hauled aboard.

"Where are your weapons—the strange guns which shoot so rapidly?" Muta demanded.

"We dropped 'em in the bay," Renny growled.

"Take them below decks," Muta gritted to his men. "We must get under way quickly. The police may come."

Hedged in by gun muzzles, the three captives were conveyed below.

Powerful engines were started. The moorings were cast off, and the big seagoing racer backed out into the harbor, away from the growing wail of police sirens en-route to the scene of the fight. As Renny had surmised, the uproar had drawn the officers.

The harbor night swallowed the boat. For such a large and fast craft, its engines were unusually silent. There was little but the moan of disturbed water, the slam of waves against the bows, as it streaked not toward the mouth of the harbor, but northward, up the Hudson River.

On deck there was much tramping about, clattering of mechanism, and low orders. Renny and his two companions overheard enough to tell them what was going on.

"They're putting a couple of boats overside," he muttered. "Wonder what they're gonna do?"

He found out shortly. Muta and others came below carrying chains, padlocks and wire. Using these, they fastened Renny and the other two men securely, padlocking the ends of the chains around hull braces.

Muta stood back, admiring the job. Absently, his hand drifted into a pocket and brought out a small red marble. He juggled this from one hand to another.

When Renny stared at the red marble, it was hurriedly pocketed.

Muta made an elaborate gesture of consulting his watch. "You gentlemen will have possibly five minutes in which to live, after we abandon this craft. Perhaps a little longer, but not much."

"You won't get away with it!" Long Tom snorted. "The police will grab the guys who were overcome by our gas on the wharf. They'll be made to talk."

"

Nu!" Muta corrected. "No! We brought those men along. We will take them off with us in the small boats."

Long Tom could think of no retort to that.

Muta teetered on his heels, a grotesque, misshapen gnome in the fitful light of the hold compartment.

"It is too bad that you will not be on deck to see what happens to you," he jeered. "It is my understanding that Doc Savage's assistants are men of considerable learning. You should be most interested in what will happen to you."

"Whatcha mean?" Long Tom demanded. "Say, what's back of all this?"

Muta bent forward, and in his ugly eyes the light of a zealot flamed. "Something big! The most far-flung plot of the century, my friend!"

"Yeah?"

"You will be killed by a weapon such as the world has never before seen!" Muta said shrilly. "It comes from nowhere. It cannot be avoided. Darkness, fog, smokescreens are no defense against it!" Long Tom thought that over, and only one retort occurred to him. "Doc Savage will take care of you birds," he growled.

Muta sneered. "Savage has already been seized. Very soon, he will be killed."

With that, Muta and the others clambered out on deck. The speed of the engines decreased, but they did not stop. Then there came the noise of the collapsible boats being laid overside, and loaded.

Shortly after, the seagoing speedboat, abandoned except for the three prisoners below decks, was wallowing sluggishly in the Hudson River. Its headway had stopped completely.

The engines still ran. They had been declutched from the propeller drive shaft.

Chapter VII. THE FAT RESCUER

IN the house with the newly varnished and painted rooms, on New York's Upper West Side, Princess Gusta Le Galbin, of the reigning family of Calbia, stood and tapped an impatient toe on the floor. Captain Flancul stood near by, and from time to time favored the young woman with a glance which was nothing if not admiring. Once he indicated the prone and motionless form of Doc Savage.

"You did excellent work, my dear," he remarked.

"You will please abstain from the use of affectionate terms," Princess Gusta said shortly.

"A thousand pardons, your highness!" Captain Flancul bowed. "May I suggest that your highness depart, and leave me here alone to question this man Savage?"

They were conversing in Calbian.

"

Nu," replied the young woman. "No. I will handle this myself."

"But—"

"Silence!" commanded Princess Gusta, exercising one of those imperious airs which is supposed to be the exclusive property of royalty. "You, Captain Flancul, are merely a wealthy industrialist of Calbia, who happens to be advisor to my father, the king. Please remember that, and do not be so free with your orders."

Captain Flancul clicked his heels, executed a stiff-backed courtesy, and said, "Yes, your highness. And if you will excuse me, I will see that my men are maintaining a proper lookout." Then he walked out.

Princess Gusta fell to studying Doc Savage. Some men lose their personality when they are asleep, becoming somewhat flabby and dowdy looking. But not this bronze man. Motionless there on the floor, he was as striking a personage as he would have been if he were erect and moving about the room. The extremely attractive princess of the Calbian royal family was impressed.

"

Minunat!" she exclaimed, this being a very expressive Calbian word for "wonderful!"

Shortly, Captain Flancul returned to the room with word that his men were on guard.

For lack of anything else to do while they waited for Doc Savage to regain consciousness, Princess Gusta produced a case which had held her hypodermic needle, and recharged its magazine with a drug which brought unconsciousness.

Captain Flancul nudged Doc Savage's frame with his toe. "How much longer will it be before he awakens?"

"At least half an hour," the young woman assured him. "The effect of this drug should wear off by then."

Captain Flancul paced around the room several times. His stride was marked by the spectacular goose step which was part of the Calbian army training.

Suddenly, in the next room there was a yell, then blows, a scuffle. The door opened with the force of an explosion.

A man popped through, leveled a revolver and snapped dramatically: "The hands very high, please!"

He was a man of bubbles. His stomach was a bubble, his chest another smaller bubble swelling out of it. And his head was still another bubble. His skin was olive, but at the same time ruddy, as if it had been rouged. He had a pleasant mouth and pleasantly wrinkled eyes, and there was a certain amiable jauntiness in his slightly flashy attire. He looked like a soft, cheerful man of some three hundred pounds.

There was nothing soft or cheerful about the two big spike-snouted automatics nor the rock firmness with which he held them.

"

In sus!" he rapped. "Up!"

He had a strange, laughing voice.

Captain Flancul threw his arms above his head as if he had been menaced by something of

incredible deadliness.

Princess Gusta was, at the moment of the newcomer's appearance, holding the hypodermic needle in her hand. She had had presence of mind enough to turn her hand, and the needle being small, had escaped notice. Now she palmed the needle and lifted her hands in such a fashion that its presence was not noticeable to the fat man.

"Wonderful!" beamed the fat man. He smirked in the direction of Captain Flancul. "Your men, my dear Captain Flancul, are not very efficient. I had merely to knock out the watchman in the rear, and I walked right in. A few blows laid out the dogs in the next room. You should have fighting men."

Angry-eyed, Princess Gusta faced the fat man.

"Conte Cozonac!" she snapped. "You will be shot for this outrage!"

"My dear princess, we are not in Calbia."

After saying that, plump Conte Cozonac began to laugh, his mirth pouring forth in bubbles and trills and hearty squeaks. It was strange laughter, as unusual as the man's mirthful voice. Finally, when his glee had subsided, Conte Cozonac indicated, with a slight gesture of one gun, the prone form of Doc Savage.

"What have you done to my friend?"

"So he is working with you!" Princess Gusta clipped. "That is what we wanted to question him about."

"On the contrary, he is not working with me," Conte Cozonac assured her, chuckling. "However, I have hopes of enlisting his aid."

"Liar! He's already assisting you!"

"You do not believe me, your highness?"

"I would not believe you under any circumstances, Conte Cozonac," the girl assured him.

The fat man drew himself up with a dignity he purposely made elaborately absurd. "An insult! Or perhaps, coming from one of the parasites who rule Calbia, it is a compliment."

Princess Gusta nipped her lip. "The compliment we should have paid you years ago was a firing squad at dawn."

This sent the fat man off into a fresh gale of twittering, squeaking laughter. Strangely enough, he seemed to enjoy the insult—if reference to the firing squad did anything but amuse him, he failed to show it.

When his joyful giggling had subsided, he struck an attitude. "I," he said, "am The King Maker!"

"You," the girl retorted, "are the biggest rogue Calbia has ever seen!"

At this point Captain Flancul made a slight move. Apparently, he entertained ideas of drawing a gun.

Plump Conte Cozonac jugged forward both of his long-nosed automatics menacingly. "Be careful, my good advisor to the King of Calbia!"

The words had hardly left his lips when Princess Gusta whipped an arm downward and threw the hypodermic needle. It flew accurately, needle point forward, and struck Conte Cozonac in the neck, two inches below an ear.

The fat man cried out once, then fell to the floor, squirmed a little, and relaxed. The impact as the hypo needle struck had been sufficient to inject some of its contents.

Captain Flancul sprang for the fat man.

"No!" said Princess Gusta. "He is helpless, and will remain so for more than an hour."

Drawing himself up, Captain Flancul clicked his heels, saluted. "May I tell you, princess, that you are one of the most remarkable young women I have ever known?"

Princess Gusta Le Galbin seemed not to hear.

"There has been too much fighting and shouting in this house," she said quietly. "Some of the neighbors may call the police. The purpose for which we rented this house—the seizure of Doc Savage—has been accomplished. I suggest that we depart."

"What about the prisoners?"

"We will take them."

Captain Flancul hesitated. "There is another way, your highness—the way all traitors should go." Princess Gusta nodded. "That is true."

"Then it is settled," Captain Flancul said, grim-faced. "I will leave two of my men here. They will use knives."

"No! It is not settled! They will not be executed!"

Captain Flancul became somewhat red. "But princess, these two men are—"

"No arguments, please!" the young woman said with imperial dignity. "We will simply hold them until affairs in Calbia are adjusted. I do not think the adjusting will take long, now that we have this Conte Cozonac."

Captain Flancul saluted again. "Very well."

He swung over, apparently with the intention of picking up Doc Savage and carrying him outside.

There was a blur of bronze. Captain Flancul tried to scream, but the sound ended abruptly as Doc's metallic fingers trapped his throat. The Calbian officer tried to strike blows, sought to wrench free, but in those great, corded bronze hands he experienced a feeling of helplessness such

as he had never felt before.

Loosening one hand from the man's neck, Doc searched him quickly and disarmed the fellow. Then he flung him away.

Captain Flancul sprawled out helpless, partially paralyzed by the terrific pressure which had been exerted upon his neck.

Princess Gusta ran for her hypodermic needle.

Arising, moving with a speed which the young woman found hard to credit, Doc reached the needle ahead of her and scooped it up.

"Oh!" gasped Princess Gusta, and recoiled.

"You at least were not going to allow me to be killed," Doc said dryly.

The young woman seemed bewildered. "But the drug in that needle—you should still be unconscious," she gasped.

The bronze man's features had remained inscrutable throughout.

"If it will interest you, there was no drug in that needle when you used it upon me."

Surprise caused the girl to show white teeth. "You mean—you have not been unconscious at all?"

"Correct," Doc assured her. "The hypo needle in its case came to my attention while untying you. Emptying it was merely a precaution on my part."

"But why—"

"There are two ways of securing information," Doc continued. "One—by questioning; the other—by ruse. It seemed convenient to use the latter method."

The girl shrugged, somewhat fearfully. "And I thought I was clever!"

Captain Flancul had ceased his squirming as it dawned upon him that Doc Savage had tricked them. He sat up, but did not attempt to get to his feet.

Doc eyed the two guns which he had taken from Captain Flancul, then ejected the cartridges and struck the weapons together sharply. Sparks flew from impacting steel, and the gun mechanisms were shattered, rendered useless. He snapped the point off the hypo needle, then tossed all the weapons aside.

Princess Gusta had been eyeing Doc. The ease with which he had mutilated the pistols, the tremendous strength he had displayed, caused her to grow a little pale.

"What are you going to do with us?" she queried.

"Ask you questions," Doc told her. "And let us hope that you both make truthful replies."

"Is that a threat?"

"Merely some good advice."

Unexpectedly, Captain Flancul lifted to his feet. He walked toward Doc Savage. His eyes held a queer light.

Only for a fractional moment did Doc wonder what was behind the man's actions. Then he understood.

The bronze man whipped backward, twisting and ducking as he did so. The room quaked with the roar of a shot, and a bullet, blasting through the space Doc had vacated, chopped newly painted plaster off a wall.

One of the men in the other room, knocked out by fat Conte Cozonac, had regained consciousness and had come to the door, a gun in hand. Captain Flancul, glimpsing him, had sought to hold Doc's attention.

Doc's leap carried him to one of the guns which he had broken. In scooping it up and throwing it he seemed to use but a single gesture, and that so swift that there was no time for the gunman in the door to dodge. The gun smashed against his face, tipping him over backward.

Captain Flancul and Princess Gusta moved together, leaping headlong for the room where the gunman stood. Doc's lunge had carried him some distance from them, and even his tremendous speed could not head them off. They hurtled through the door, Captain Flancul going down and grabbing the gun of the man Doc had struck.

Flinging in pursuit of them, Doc perceived that he could not get to Captain Flancul in time.

Veering over, he used the solidity of the door jamb to stop himself, drove out a hand, grasped a doorknob and wrenched the panel shut.

Captain Flancul's bullet tore a splintery hole high up in the panel.

Doc, springing back, scooped up fat Conte Cozonac, bounded to the stairs, and went upward. He carried Conte Cozonac's three hundred pounds under one arm, bending sidewise to balance the weight, and seeming not greatly hampered by the burden.

Behind him, several shots thundered. At least three guns were firing. Probably more of Captain Flancul's men had revived.

In the second-floor hall, Doc tried a door which led to a front room. It was locked, but splintered open under his tremendous shove.

In the street in front, a police whistle blared shrilly. The shooting had attracted a cop.

Doc, realizing those below would attempt to escape by the rear, backed out of the front room and broke down a door which led into a court chambers. Crossing to a window, he shoved the glass pane out with a quick pressure.

He twisted back, the ugly whack of an automatic coming simultaneously with his move. Some of

Captain Flancul's men were already in the court. They kept up steady fire. Under cover of the barrage, Captain Flancul, Princess Gusta, and the others made their escape. Those not able to run were carried. Doc Savage waited only long enough to ascertain that they were going to get away. Then, carrying huge Conte Cozonac, he mounted flights of stairs to the roof, unbarred the hatch and clambered out. He retrieved his silk line with the grapple on the end and ran to the northern extremity of the block of buildings. The street there was dark. The cord was extremely strong, and Doc, still carrying Conte Cozonac, slipped down it to the sidewalk. An expert flip freed the grapple from its lodgment on the roof coping. There was excitement in the street in front, people running. Two blocks away a car engine burst into life, and the machine roared away, until its sound was absorbed by the traffic mutter of the New York night. Doc Savage carried Conte Cozonac to his roadster, dropped the fellow into the seat, got behind the wheel and drove toward his skyscraper office.

Chapter VIII. MYSTERY EXPLOSION

IN the skyscraper headquarters, Monk and Ham were quarreling. The fact that no observers were around detracted no whit from their enjoyment of the good-natured fracas.

"You baboon!" Ham yelled, gesturing with his sword cane. "You blunder of nature! This is the last straw!"

Monk was engaged in assembling his portable chemical laboratory. This device was something he always took when accompanying Doc Savage on an expedition. It occupied little space, yet it contained an unusually complete assortment of chemicals.

The homely chemist eyed Ham and sighed. "What's in your hair now?"

For answer, Ham lunged and struck a hearty blow with his sword cane. The object of his attentions was the pig, Habeas Corpus. But Habeas was intimately acquainted with Ham. He jumped, and was a yard away when the sheathed cane landed.

"Hey!" Monk howled. "Take your spite out on me if you gotta. But let that hog alone!"

"I'll assassinate both of you!" Ham promised. He pointed at the crimson pennant which Monk had painted on Habeas. "You put that on the freak just to devil me!"

It was hardly likely the ordinarily observant Ham had failed to previously discover the scarlet pennant. More likely, he had delayed to the present moment to make a fuss about it.

"I didn't paint that flag there to pick a fuss with you," Monk disclaimed innocently. "The hog likes red flags."

"Harvard is a great university," Ham snapped. "Painting its colors on the side of that hog is an insult."

Monk grinned. "How was I to know crimson was a Harvard color?"

"You're gonna use some paint remover on that hog!" Ham promised ominously.

Monk, showing no great concern, moved to a case which held a teletype machine. This was connected with the police circuit and furnished Doc with a copy of all alarms broadcast.

Ordinarily, Monk did not pay much attention to the teletype, but just now he was somewhat worried because Renny, Long Tom and Johnny had failed to report for a time.

The pleasantly ugly chemist took one look at the copy roll and let out a yell. "Ham! Come here!" Ham peered over Monk's shoulder, and read:

ATTENTION WATER-FRONT PRECINCTS

MYSTERIOUS SHOOTING ABOARD SEAGOING SPEEDBOAT ON BROOKLYN WATER FRONT. CRAFT FLED INTO HARBOR. LONG BOAT, NARROW BEAM, PAINTED BLACK. REPORT PRESENCE OF SUCH CRAFT. TAXICAB, LICENSE S3, AND MILK DELIVERY TRUCK, LICENSE S4, FOUND ABANDONED NEAR SCENE.

"

S3 and S4!" Monk exploded. "The S on them licenser means they're Doc Savage's cars! Them's the two machines Renny, Long Tom and Johnny were using!"

Ham reached for his hat. "We'd better look into this."

They rushed for the door. Habeas Corpus, squealing, scampered after them. In the corridor they encountered Doc Savage, carrying Conte Cozonac. The fat man was still senseless.

"Doc!" Monk yelled. "Renny and the others are in a jam!"

His small voice an excited squeak, Monk told about the message over the teletype.

Doc Savage said nothing, but he went to the library with his plump burden. Conte Cozonac was planted in a chair, his wrists positioned carefully on the arm rests. At Doc's touch, steel bands flashed up, encircling the wrists and locking there. Other bands, hidden in the legs of the chair, appeared and secured the portly man's ankles.

Nothing less than a steel-cutting torch would now free Conte Cozonac.

Doc locked all doors. They were of thick steel, though they did not look it.

"We want this fellow to be here when we get back," the bronze man explained. "He can tell us a great deal."

Monk and Ham in his wake, Doc entered the speed elevator and was dropped to the basement garage.

All three piled into the roadster. The machine raced them toward the water-front hangar which masqueraded as a warehouse.

"Got any idea what this is all about, Doc?" Monk demanded.

"You've heard of Calbia?" Doc suggested.

Monk nodded. "It's a Balkan kingdom, one of the few remaining monarchies where the king actually runs things. It has a population of ten or twelve million."

Doc nodded. "One point you forgot—Calbia is now in the throes of a revolution."

Monk blinked. "Huh? I didn't know that. There ain't been much about it in the papers."

"Censorship," Doc told him. "The Calbian government prevents news of political disturbances from getting abroad. Calbia's not the only one. The others do the same thing."

"Why?"

"Any hint that the government may be unstable affects foreign credit, the value of their bonds, and that sort of thing. Naturally, no one wants to buy the bonds of a government which may be out of business tomorrow."

"This Calbian revolution is something serious?"

"It is," Doc assured him. "Long ago, I arranged with certain men, closely in touch with the political situation in each European country, to keep me informed by cable of developments. That is where my information came from."

Monk gave one of Habeas Corpus's ears a thoughtful tug. The porker was riding on his knee. "You think this business is connected with the Calbian revolution?" he asked.

Instead of answering that, Doc countered with a question. "What would you say if Princess Gusta Le Galbin, only daughter of the ruling King of Calbia, and Captain Henri Flancul, wealthy Calbian and chief advisor to the king, were here in New York, and had made an attempt to capture me?"

"Did they?"

"They did."

Monk scratched his red-bristled nubbin of a head.

"We're mixed up in somethin' big, Doc," he declared.

They reached the hangar, drove the roadster inside, and entered the big speed plane. A moment later the craft was moaning across the river surface, and quickly lifted into the air.

In the soundproof cabin, conversation in ordinary tones was possible.

"Who was the fat guy we left in the office?" Monk queried.

"He is Conte Cozonac, commander-in-chief of the revolutionary forces seeking to overthrow the King of Calbia," Doc answered.

Monk and Ham were surprised, but they did not ask the bronze man how he knew all of these facts.

Doc was a student of political affairs of all nations. It would have been no shock if Doc had told them the names of all of the obscure plotters seeking to overthrow the government of, for instance, Germany. He probably had that information. His fabulous knowledge seemed to touch on all things.

"Baron Damitru Mendl, who was murdered when the mysterious explosion demolished his yacht, was Calbian ambassador to the United States," Doc offered further. "Yes, brothers, this whole thing smacks of political intrigue for big stakes."

The bronze man now switched on the radio apparatus and tuned it to the wave-length of a police radio station. He asked for further information concerning the seagoing speedboat. He secured only one additional morsel worthy of attention.

"The speedster headed for the mouth of the bay and the open sea, according to persons who were attracted by the shooting," said the operator of the police radio station.

Doc promptly banked the big tri-motored plane around and headed it in the opposite direction.

"We're going the wrong way," Monk grunted.

"There's a chance that they doubled back and went up the Hudson," Doc pointed out. "Anyway, if they took to the sea, we would stand little chance of finding them until daylight."

The motors of the big ship were well muffled, their sound being only a powerful hiss. As the craft climbed to a thousand feet and raced northward, it was doubtful if pedestrians on the street or such sailors as happened to be on the decks of ships in the harbor heard it.

Shortly after taking off, Doc touched a lever and released a parachute flare. With Monk and Ham he used binoculars to sweep the river surface, but he discerned no sign of the boat they sought. Three miles further on, they dropped another flare.

Monk's squeak, Ham's shout, and Doc's abrupt gesture were simultaneous. They had sighted the craft.

"It's standin' still in the middle of the river," Monk offered unnecessarily.

MANHATTAN ISLAND, the Bronx, Yonkers, made a bank of lights to the right. Hoboken and the Jersey shore north toward Englewood was a patchy glow on the left. The river, whitened by the flare, was a slightly rippled ribbon of steel-blue beneath.

Doc stood the plane on its nose and bored down for the boat.

"No sign of life aboard," Monk reported, and Ham nodded agreement. Both were using binoculars.

The plane landed close alongside the black, slender speedster, and long before it lost headway, Doc dived overside, and struck out with driving strokes. He could hear Diesel engines idling in the

slim black craft.

Monk and Ham brought the plane to a quick stop—the propellers were fitted with a reversing device—then yanked a collapsible boat out of its locker.

Doc kept high in the water and was careful that his arms, in stroking, did not get before his eyes and obstruct his view. However, there was no movement, no sound from the black boat.

Doc reached the stern. There were no dangling ropes or chains, a circumstance which might have delayed a man of lesser strength and agility. To the corded bronze arms and hands, the rudder post offered a quick means of getting aboard.

Listening, Doc heard only the mutter of idling Diesels.

"Renny—Long Tom—Johnny?"

His call brought a faint rattling of chains from somewhere below. Doc darted forward, came to a hatch and descended. A flash appeared in his hands and spouted light. The flash was of a type which used no battery, current being supplied by a generator operating from a spring motor which was wound by twisting the rear portion of the barrel, the whole being waterproof.

Outside, the flare that had been dropped from the plane settled into the river, fizzed, sent up a cloud of steam and went out.

Doc found his three men, gagged, and secured by chains. Planting the flash on the hull floor, Doc wrenched out the gags, then went to work on the padlocks with a slender metal probe which came from his pocket.

"Holy cow!" rumbled Renny. "Step on it!"

"What's up, Renny?"

"They told us we'd croak in ten minutes after they left!"

"The interval has been substantially longer than ten minutes," put in big-worded Johnny.

"They wasn't kiddin'," Renny thumped.

"That dwarf, Muta, spouted a lot of stuff about a mysterious weapon that was a world-beater,"

Long Tom added.

Doc did not speak, but worked steadily upon the padlocks. He got one open, a second, then another—and Renny was free.

The big-fisted engineer swung his arms to limber them. "We got a chance to see this infernal weapon work," he said.

"I hope we don't see it at too close range," Long Tom mumbled.

"Say, strange they left the motors running. Reckon that's got somethin' to do with their murder plan?"

Doc did not comment, but continued his frenzied work upon the padlock. "Get off, Renny. Dive overboard and swim."

Renny seemed not to hear. He grasped the chains securing Johnny, wrenched at them, and succeeded in snapping one. There was amazing strength in the engineer's huge fists, strength probably exceeded only by Doc's remarkable development.

Doc got Long Tom loose, then Johnny. They ran to the hatch, vaulted out, and plunged overboard.

"I tell you Muta wasn't foolin', Doc," Long Tom declared, and raised a great splashing with his overhand stroke.

They were some fifty yards from the black speedboat when Doc abruptly stopped swimming and breathed, "Listen!"

The others, listening, could hear nothing.

"What is it, Doc?" Renny queried.

"A strange whistle, so shrill that it is probably inaudible to your ears."

"What is the thing?" demanded Renny.

Renny's question was answered in cataclysmic fashion.

The sky and the river seemed to turn suddenly to white-hot flame. It blinded them. Then the air slammed against their eardrums and the water smashed their bodies with excruciating force.

Where the black boat had been, wreckage spouted into the air. River water split apart, and a wave of foam, débris and water rushed upon the men and engulfed them.

Doc, stroking heavily, regained the surface, and soon the other three men appeared. They stared at the spot where the dark craft had been.

Nothing remained but bubbles, demolished timbers, and boiling river water.

"That's the same way Baron Damitru Mendl's yacht went, I'm bettin'!" Long Tom gulped.

"Holy cow!" Renny thumped. "What was it? I mean—it was an explosion of some kind, but where did the explosive come from? And how was it set off?"

"Possibly a time bomb," Johnny suggested.

Somewhere in the darkness the pig, Habeas Corpus, was squealing and Monk and Ham were shouting at each other.

"You danged near upset this tub!" Ham accused Monk.

"Listen, if I hadn't balanced it, it would have upset!" Monk shrilled back at him.

The pair were not far distant, judging by their voices, and apparently had put off from the seaplane in the collapsible boat. They paddled up when Doc called to them, giving his whereabouts.

"What in blazes happened?" Monk demanded, helping them aboard.

"A bomb on the boat," insisted Johnny.

He was badly mistaken—as he found out a moment later.

"Listen!" Doc said sharply. "There's that shrill hiss again, that whistle!"

This time also the others were unable to hear it. Doc's long use of the exercise device, which made sound waves above and below the audible frequency, had given him hearing more efficient than their own.

"Hang on," Doc ordered. "The thing may get us this time, or it may not—"

The white-hot flash, the ear-splitting roar, the mountainous rush of water repeated itself. The collapsible boat capsized, throwing them all into the river. Spray spattered about them.

Doc had retained a clutch on his flashlight. Regaining the surface, he played its beam about.

Monk came up beside him, stared, then exploded. "Our plane!"

The tri-motored speed ship had been demolished. Only an aileron was visible, and this bobbed about and soon sank, after which bubbles ceased to rise. The river became calm.

"No plane in the darkness could drop a missile, or rather two missiles, with such accuracy," Doc stated.

Renny paddled about with his big hands until he found the gaunt Johnny in the water.

"I ask you, gentleman of big words," he inquired, "do you still think it was a bomb?"

"I'll be superamalgamated," was the best Johnny could answer.

Chapter IX. THE MAKER OF KINGS TALKS

AN hour later, Doc Savage and his five men entered the huge building which housed their headquarters.

"It might have been a bomb," Johnny was insisting stubbornly. "Maybe a plane dropped it, a plane equipped with some new type of sight."

"There was no sound of a plane," Doc reminded him. "Just that strange, faint whistle."

"Yeah," Renny thumped gruffly. "I've been in a few wars in my time, and anything that can find and destroy a target as small as our plane or that boat on a night as dark as this—whatever the thing is, it's quite a weapon."

They entered the library with its impressive array of bookcases holding volumes of massive scientific works. Through an open door was visible the enamel, the glass, and the shiny metal glitter of the laboratory.

Conte Cozonac, a more or less shapeless mound of fat, occupied the chair into which he had been fastened. He eyed Doc Savage and the other five, alert-eyed. He had revived.

Strangely enough, one watching the portly revolutionist would have secured the impression that he considered his predicament highly humorous. There was a sort of bubbling humor in his eyes, and when he shifted, his paunch jiggled as if he were laughing. But whether the jiggling was from suppressed merriment or not, it was hard to say.

"I tried yelling," he said blithely. "The walls seem to be soundproof."

Doc Savage advanced and touched buttons inaccessible to the occupant of the chair, which released the steel wrist and leg bands which imprisoned Conte Cozonac.

The fat man did not arise.

"If you do not mind," Cozonac asked. "What happened back at that house?"

Doc told him.

"So the girl did not lay you out with her needle, after all!" Conte Cozonac ejaculated. For a moment, his laughter squeaked and twittered. "Then, Mr. Savage, my attempt to rescue you was so much superfluous effort."

Doc's flake-gold eyes fixed themselves upon the fat man. "You entered the place to rescue me?" he asked.

"Assuredly!"

"And why the great interest in me?"

"I will tell you." Conte Cozonac shed his mirth and became surprisingly dignified. "Prepare yourself for a shock."

"I fail to comprehend."

Conte Cozonac bowed stiffly.

"You, Doc Savage, are the future King of Calbia."

DOC'S five men reacted in various fashions to this statement. Monk grinned unbelievably and continued his diversion of scratching Habeas Corpus behind the ears. Ham twirled his sword cane slowly. Long Tom and Johnny exchanged glances.

"Holy cow!" Renny grunted.

"Quite a few offers come my way," Doc Savage said slowly. "Usually they are in the nature of bullets, knives, or other forms of sudden death. This is the first throne proposition."

"The offer is made in entire seriousness," Conte Cozonac announced.

"Suppose we go into details."

The fat man nodded briskly. "I presume you are sufficiently posted on the Calbian political situation to know that a revolution is now in progress—and I, Conte Cozonac, am the leader of the

rebel forces."

"I knew that," Doc stated quietly.

"And with how much more are you familiar?"

"Very little."

The bulky man eyed Doc. "How does the idea of being a king strike you?"

"Preposterous, in the first place. Furthermore, kings are out of style. A republican government is much more desirable."

Conte Cozonac shook his head slowly.

"I hardly thought it would be necessary to sell you the idea of a throne. Listen—let me tell you of some of the atrocities committed by the present regime in Calbia. Did you know that within the past year the King of Calbia has ordered many men shot by firing squads? Furthermore, there are thousands of political prisoners in Calbian jails."

"Political difficulties in the Balkans are usually bloody affairs," Doc replied.

"Especially when a tyrant like King Dal Le Galbin is on the throne," Conte Cozonac pointed out.

"The king is supported and advised by a ring of arch rogues. That fellow, Captain Flancul, is one of the worst."

"Princess Gusta applied that same designation to you," Doc pointed out dryly.

Conte Cozonac indulged in birdlike laughter for a moment. "If I had not been very careful indeed, they would have planted me in front of a firing squad long ago. You see, I am the gentleman who is going to chase those grafters out of Calbia."

"Yes?"

"Exactly. I am the King Maker," Conte Cozonac boasted.

"While we are on the king-making subject, it might be well to point out that kings are usually natives of the country over which they wield a scepter," Doc said.

"Which leads up to the fact that you are no Calbian, eh?"

"Exactly!"

"I can make a king," Conte Cozonac chuckled, "and he does not have to be a native of the country, either."

Doc Savage was silent for a time, as if considering this. Monk and Ham, their perpetual quarrel for the moment a minor matter, watched Conte Cozonac intently. Extreme quiet held the room, and the ticking of at least three watches was audible, all jumbled together.

"The Calbian people will be glad to accept you as their sovereign," Conte Cozonac told Doc earnestly. "Your reputation has penetrated even to Calbia. My mere word is sufficient to assure many thousands that you are the man for the throne. And the work which you will do in Calbia, thrashing King Dal Le Galbin and his corrupt satellites will, I am sure, mold public opinion in your favor."

"We don't just go to Calbia and take over the throne, eh?" Doc asked.

Conte Cozonac made a grim mouth, the rest of his face retaining its mirthful expression.

"Frankly, Domnule Savage, you will have to win the revolution first."

"So that's the catch!"

"I came from Calbia to do two things. The first was to enlist your aid." Conte Cozonac hesitated, then continued: "My other purpose was to have Baron Damitru Mendl draw up a new set of plans and make a working model of the devilish weapon which he invented."

Doc leaned forward slightly.

"Baron Damitru Mendl invented the device, which causes the mysterious explosions?" he asked quickly.

"Correct!" Conte Cozonac put the tips of fat fingers together over his chest. "The weapon is a terrible one. Blueprints of it have been in the Calbian war department files, Baron Damitru Mendl having surrendered them before the government became so corrupt. He understood that his device was to be used only in the event of war."

"Who is using the infernal contraption now?"

"King Dal Le Galbin and his clique. Their spies must have learned that I was coming to America to see Baron Damitru Mendl, who was in sympathy with my revolutionary efforts. So they murdered Baron Mendl. But I was fortunate enough to get on their trail and follow them to that house."

The fat man paused to give emphasis to his next words.

"They tried to murder you, Doc Savage, and there is not the slightest doubt but that they will endeavor to do so again."

"Do you have any conception of the nature of this mystery weapon?" Doc queried.

"None."

The fat man separated his fingertips, straightened slightly in his chair, and his plump face became grim, questioning, anxious.

"What is your decision, Mr. Savage? Will you help us, and accept the throne of Calbia after things are straightened out?"

Doc said nothing.

Conte Cozonac moistened his lips. "Later, of course, you can abdicate the throne in favor of some worthy person. That is entirely up to you."

"This will take some thinking over," Doc Savage told him.

Chapter X. THE "SEAWARD" TROUBLE

THE time was one week later.

The passenger ship Seaward of the Calbian-American Line, was in the Mediterranean. The Seaward's trip from New York had been uneventful, except that the craft was in a fair way of breaking its own record for the trans-Atlantic run. This did not mean that the Seaward was in a class with the fastest American, Italian, and other ocean greyhounds. She was slower, though not exactly a sluggish boat.

The sun overhead was hot, the decks almost blistering to the feet of such passengers as were using the deck swimming pool. The salt water in the pool, pumped fresh from the sea, was cool enough to offer relief.

Monk, his ungainly form sprawled in a chair in the sitting room of a suite, mopped perspiration and squinted at big bronze Doc Savage.

"Doc, for a future king, you're sure leading a secluded existence," he grumbled. "We haven't been out of this suite all the way across the Atlantic."

"No need of inviting trouble," Doc reminded him. "In tentatively accepting this king proposition, we took hold of something big. This is a Calbian ship. We may have enemies aboard."

Monk, fanning himself, got up and moved over to where Habeas Corpus dozed. He tried to aggravate the shoat with a tickling finger. Habeas opened one eye, then resumed his sleep, ignoring Monk.

The chemist ambled to the porthole and glanced out, then pointed. "There's Conte Cozonac."

The individual whom Monk indicated looked like a large, much too-well-fed Chinaman. A pigtail dangled down the fellow's back. His blouse resembled a robe, and reached to his ankles, and his feet were shod in embroidered slippers. He shuffled along with hands tucked inside his sleeves. The disguise was remarkable. A close acquaintance would scarcely have recognized Conte Cozonac.

"Doc did a good job, disguisin' him," Monk declared.

Renny, Ham, and Johnny got up and crowded around the porthole. They had been shut in long enough that any type of diversion, even observing disguised Conte Cozonac, was welcome.

Long Tom, the electric wizard, was not present. This was unusual, for Long Tom had never before deliberately passed up a chance to accompany Doc Savage.

"Think I'll stay behind in New York and work on my insect eliminating device," Long Tom had declared, some hours before sailing time.

Long Tom's interest in this device, an apparatus which would be of inestimable value to farmers, although profound, had not before exceeded his love of adventure.

Among Monk and the others, there had been considerable discussion of Long Tom's changed attitude. Doc Savage had not joined in these discussions.

Doc now joined the group watching Conte Cozonac through the porthole.

Conte Cozonac was sauntering aimlessly along the rail, seeming to watch the waves. Sternward an orchestra was playing, and the fat man began to sway his hands in accompaniment; his lips moved. A casual observer would have thought he was keeping time and repeating the words of the song to himself.

Doc Savage watched Conte Cozonac's lips intently. Among the bronze man's accomplishments was that of lip-reading.

Conte Cozonac was singing the words of no song. He was speaking sentences soundlessly.

"I have done considerable roaming around the boat," he said. "I have seen none of our enemies.

Probably there will be no trouble if you show yourself on deck. Incidentally, we land at the Calbian seaport tonight. The city of San Blazna is seventy miles inland from the port, over the mountains. There is a railroad to the capital."

Doc Savage moved a hand in front of the porthole to indicate that he understood. This act was the first intimation the others had that Conte Cozonac's lip movements had conveyed a secret message.

"I'll be superamalgamated!" Johnny gasped. "What was the subject matter of the clandestine dissertation?"

"Nothing of importance," Doc replied. "He had been able to find no enemies aboard—and we land tonight."

Johnny polished his monocle thoughtfully with a bony thumb. "This hermitageous sequestration is abominable," he said.

"Well, you can get out and walk around," Doc told him. "Of course, there's the chance that somebody may take a shot at you."

The gaunt Johnny thought this over, and evidently concluded to take the chance.

"I will promenade," he decided.

"Better let me disguise you," Doc advised.

The bronze man selected a makeup box from his luggage and proceeded to ornament Johnny with a cropped white mustache, a clipped Vandyke, and a pair of spectacles with plain glass lenses.

Ingenious shoulder and torso pads gave the geologist the appearance of a much plumper man.

Johnny tried to borrow Ham's sword cane, insisting that a stick was a necessary accoutrement for the type of individual he was playing.

Ham refused the loan. The dapper lawyer rarely let his valued sword cane out of his hands.

Leaving the suite, Johnny strolled along the deck. The Seaward was a liner large enough that the appearance of a new face did not attract attention. Enjoying the breeze, such as it was, and drawn by the hilarious shouting of bathers at the pool on the rear deck, Johnny moved sternward. He was approximately even with the after funnel when he snapped to a stop, and his protruding eyes threatened to push the spectacles off his nose.

Scuttling along the deck ahead of him was the dwarf-Muta.

Two things moved Johnny in his next act. He loved excitement. Furthermore, he had been cooped up in a suite of cabins so long that it did not take much to touch him off. Without thought of consequences, he darted forward to seize the bland-faced midget.

Muta did not hear Johnny coming. The undersized rogue had his attention fixed on something ahead—an individual who was strolling down the deck—a bulky gentleman in Chinese garments. Muta contemplated some violence toward Conte Cozonac, for the one in celestial garb was he. Or thus Johnny reasoned.

Johnny descended upon Muta, wrapping the squat fellow in his long arms.

Muta squawked in surprise, then reached up and managed to grab Johnny's hair with both hands, and yanked.

The gaunt geologist discouraged the hair pulling by casually inserting a thumb in Muta's left eye. The dwarf bit like a dog, and his teeth snapped barely an inch short of Johnny's throat. Johnny retaliated by grasping an ear and endeavoring to twist it off. Judging from Muta's squawk, he nearly succeeded.

The dwarf kicked Johnny's shins with such violence that the bony geologist's feet went from under him, and he clattered down on the deck with a sound like falling stonewood.

The fight was not uneven, although Johnny was fully twice as tall as his antagonist. The pair were probably not far apart in weight.

The two rolled on the deck. They kicked, gouged and bit, making the fray a steady parade of free-for-all brawling tactics. Muta seemed to know an endless string of foul tricks.

Johnny, scarcely resembling the tall gentleman who had once headed the natural science research department of a famous United States university, returned each vicious act of his foe, usually with a little interest.

Conte Cozonac whirled when the brawl started. He gaped, pop-eyed, and his hands untucked themselves from his sleeves to dangle limply at his sides.

"Don't mix in this mess!" Johnny yelled, using what, for him, were very small words. "I'll take care of this sawed-off squirt!"

The geologist's yell was intended to advise Conte Cozonac not to take a hand in the affair. It accomplished its purpose. Conte Cozonac merely stood and stared, as any fat, easy-going Celestial might be expected to do.

Johnny seized his chance, and landed a punch. The dwarf dropped. Another blow subdued him.

A small red marble came out of Muta's pocket and rolled on the deck.

Johnny mopped perspiration. He eyed the red marble curiously, wondering what its significance could be.

The captain of the Seaward and two other ship's officers came running from the direction of the bridge. They shouted questions in Calbian.

"This runt!" Johnny indicated Muta. "He tried to kill me in New York!"

The captain picked up the red marble. "Who does this belong to?" he asked.

Muta pointed at Johnny. "It is his!"

"Liar!" Johnny growled. "What is that marble, anyway?"

There was a commotion in a nearby doorway. Johnny turned his head.

Johnny had not previously seen Princess Gusta Le Galbin or Captain Flancul, but Doc Savage had described the two. The geologist recognized the pair now.

Princess Gusta and Captain Flancul had stepped through the door. Princess Gusta gasped, and leveled an arm at Johnny.

"Arrest that man!" she snapped. "He is an enemy of Calbia!"

Chapter XI. CASTAWAYS

THE captain of the Seaward and his officers gaped, astounded.

"

Cum!" gulped the skipper. "What?"

"This is one of Doc Savage's men!" said the girl.

Johnny jutted an angry jaw. "I'm an American citizen!" he cried.

"Seize him, captain!" Princess Gusta directed.

Johnny rapped, "Nix! Nix!"

The officer advanced.

"You pinch me, and it'll be just too bad!" Johnny threatened. "I'm an American, I tell you!"

"Small difference that makes!" the Seaward commander growled. "This is a Calbian vessel, and I am a loyal subject of King Dal Le Galbin. You are in custody."

Conte Cozonac, hands thrust into the sleeves of his oriental gown, hovered on the crowd

outskirts. There was a suspicious bulge in the sleeves, as if his hands held guns.

"I'll take care of myself," Johnny shouted—for the benefit of Conte Cozonac.

It was better for Conte Cozonac to avoid betraying himself, if possible.

Johnny started retreating. Seeing him, Muta seized his chance and scuttled away.

"Grab that bird!" Johnny yelled.

But no one paid him any attention.

Captain Flancul snapped an automatic from his clothing.

"

Cainele!" he snarled. "Dog! We will waste little time on him." He aimed deliberately at Johnny.

"

Nu!" shrilled the Princess Gusta, and grasped his arm. "No! It might cause international complications."

Johnny took advantage of this squabble to lunge suddenly and seize Captain Flancul's gun. They wrestled for a moment.

Princess Gusta swung a small, hard fist at Johnny's head, missed him when he ducked, and knocked the breath out of Captain Flancul.

This action allowed Johnny to get the automatic. With it he menaced the Seaward officers. "Get back! Elevate your hands!"

They hesitated, glaring wrathfully, then obeyed.

Retreating to the first doorway, Johnny dived through. He found himself in the foyer which gave entrance into the main lounge. He crossed the lounge in a series of ungainly leaps, raced down a passage, descended and dived into Doc's suite.

"I have managed to complicate the situation, Doc," he imparted. "In fact, I've played hell!"

In a tumbling procession of many-syllabled words, Johnny told of what had occurred, finished with, "Conceivably, I acted hastily."

"Grabbing Muta was a natural move," Doc assured him.

Renny banged his huge fists together, making a flinty sound. "They're sure to try to pinch us, Doc. And if they do, we're sunk."

"D'you think they'll use a firing squad on us?" Monk demanded.

Doc answered that. "Probably not, after we exert some influence, but their interference will cramp our style."

It became apparent that excitement was sweeping the liner. There was shouting, and much scampering about. Doc, watching the deck through the porthole, noted the appearance of numerous men with rifles, some of these being Seaward sailors, but a far greater number male members of the passenger list.

"Say how come the passengers are joinin' in this?" Monk pondered, over Doc's shoulder.

"They must be Calbians, formerly residents of the United States, going back home to help their country out of the present crisis," Doc replied.

"A fine lot of bums!" Monk snorted. "You'd think if they was livin' in the United States, they'd stay there instead of rushin' home to fight."

"If you were in Calbia," Ham put in sarcastically, "and a war broke out in the United States, what would you do?"

"Take the first boat home to get into the scrap, probably," Monk admitted grudgingly.

Doc watched preparations for a time.

"They're going to rush us," he decided.

"Imagine that tigress, Princess Gusta, and Captain Flancul being on this liner," Johnny groaned.

Monk nodded. "Yeah, it's—"

"Ultra unpropitious," Johnny supplied.

Doc deserted the porthole, whipped to their luggage heap, and began sorting the stuff over. The containers for his equipment were metal boxes, light, strong and water-proof, each bearing an identifying numeral.

He sorted out a number of these and clamped several in his arms.

"Get the rest," he directed his four men.

Then he opened the corridor door. Shots roared out, and lead planted itself noisily in the woodwork.

Lowering the cases, Doc opened one, extracted grenades holding his anaesthetic gas and flung two into the corridor, one in either direction. They detonated with mushy plunges!

The men held their breath for a minute, then went out, carrying the boxes of equipment. Those who had fired upon them—sailors and passengers of Calbian extraction—slumbered in the passage.

The five men worked downward.

"The engine room is our objective," Doc announced.

Monk, Habeas Corpus perched on a box carried under one arm, grinned widely. "Long Tom would enjoy this," he said. "Too bad he stayed behind in New York to fiddle with his coils and vacuum tubes." They reached the engine room, and a single anaesthetic grenade was ample to render engineers and firemen unconscious.

THE Seaward was an oil burner. Hurrying forward, Doc Savage adjusted the fuel valves and set several levers, so that there would be no danger of unattended boilers exploding. Then he shifted levers which caused the propellers to cease turning.

He took up a position at the speaking tubes which communicated with the bridge, and whistled in them until he attracted attention.

Strangely enough, it was Captain Henri Flancul who answered from the bridge.

"You have exactly one minute in which to leave the engine room," snarled Captain Flancul.

"We cannot afford to be carried to Calbia—" Doc began.

"You will be. Da! And for this outrage, you shall most certainly go before a firing squad. You have committed piracy."

Doc did not comment on the dire prediction. "Put the commander of the Seaward on the speaking tube," he demanded.

"You have one minute—"

"The commander of the Seaward on the tube!" Doc repeated.

There was such a crackle and snap of authority in the bronze man's tone that Captain Flancul was shocked into complying with the demand. No doubt the hollowness of Doc's voice as it came through the speaking tube helped.

"Well?" said the Seaward captain shortly afterward.

"We are willing to make terms with you," Doc told him.

"

What terms?"

"

Lower your largest launch, put plenty of fuel in the tanks, then drop a landing stage and lower the boat alongside, the engine running. We will then leave your liner undamaged."

"

Nu!" came the snapped reply. "No!"

"I am making no threat," Doc replied with brittle terseness. "But let me point out that we have control of the engine room, and in our possession are weapons other than that gas. Think it over." There ensued a wait of two or three minutes, during which Doc, an ear to the speaking tube, could hear voices in consultation. Captain Henri Flancul seemed to be doing some vehement objecting, but the master of the Seaward eventually shouted him down.

"You will leave my liner unharmed?" the commander queried.

"

Yes."

"

We accept your terms. The launch will be at the stage in a few minutes, engine running."

Doc moved away from the tube and gathered up his equipment boxes.

"But Doc," Monk protested. "When we get into the launch we'll be swell targets for those bums with rifles. I know something of these political fanatics. The captain of the Seaward may mean well, but I'll bet Habeas Corpus here against Ham's necktie, which is my idea of something no man should own, that some of those fellows will shoot at us."

Judging by his lack of response, Doc might not have heard Monk. He led them out of the engine room and down a passage which smelled of grease. They were not molested. Ascending a companion they turned left, and, after waiting a time, advanced and found a hatch in the hull had been opened and a landing stage set in place.

The launch, engine muttering, was snubbed to the stage.

Monk began again, "But, Doc, them rifles—"

The bronze man opened one of his cases. It held spheres of metal fully as large as Monk's nubbinklike head. Doc flipped levers on three of these and tossed them out into the sea. They spouted a pall of black smoke.

"For the love of Mike!" Monk chuckled. "That'll take care of the rifles."

The smoke bombs continued to pour vapor. The dark cloud grew and grew until it enveloped most of the Seaward. There was a breeze, which pulled the smoke away in a long, black serpent which rolled its sepia belly against the surface of the Mediterranean.

Concealed entirely by the smoke, and making no noise, Doc and his men entered the launch. At the loudening roar of the engine as they pulled away, numerous rifles did discharge from the Seaward. Only two bullets hit the launch, however, and these sank themselves forward on the decked-over bows. On the deck of the Seaward the commander swore and dashed about, searching for those who had used the rifles. The skipper was a man who believed in keeping his word.

Captain Henri Flancul muttered under his breath. "Clever devils! I never thought they would use a smoke screen."

Princess Gusta, at his side, gasping in the smoke, exclaimed, "You put those men up to using the rifles?"

"No!" Captain Flancul disclaimed. "But I knew what they would do."

"Sometimes," the young woman said thoughtfully, "you seem very blood-thirsty, Captain Flancul."

"I have the welfare of the ruling house of Calbia deeply at heart," Captain Flancul told her

solemnly.

"And you are a wealthy man who stands to lose much if the revolution is successful," Princess Gusta retorted.

After a time, the breeze blew the smoke away from the Seaward. But before the last of it was wafted off an unexpected thing occurred.

The sound of the launch engine was still audible, although the craft was lost in the smoke.

Whu-r-o-om!

A terrific explosion occurred, from the spot where came the sound of the launch engine. The white flash of the blast was brilliant enough to penetrate even the smoke screen. The shock caused the big Seaward to list a trifle, and water carafes danced on the dining saloon tables.

After that, the launch engine was heard no more.

The wind carried the smoke away. The black pall did not disperse, but rolled along like dark cotton upon the water.

The Seaward's engines were put in operation and the liner cruised over toward where the explosion had occurred. Lifeboats were lowered. The crews found a few splintered timbers, scarcely a one larger than a man's hand—and that was all.

"Some mysterious explosion killed Doc Savage and his men," was the verdict rendered when the lifeboats had returned.

Princess Gusta Le Galbin, remarkably enough, became quite pale when she heard the news which confirmed the destruction of the launch. She excused herself and went hastily to her cabin. Then she locked the door, and flung herself upon the ornate bed.

After a while she began to sob uncontrollably.

The Seaward resumed its course. Behind the liner, and off to one side, the smoke screen still hovered, a wide-flung fog of black. Somehow that black mass was strangely like a shroud covering a coffin.

Chapter XII. THE PLANE

THE Seaward sailed for three hours before she got out of sight of the smoke pall. On the bridge of the liner an earnest conference was held, during which the bits of the wrecked launch were displayed. The subject under discussion was what medium could have destroyed the small craft. There was, the skipper of the Seaward declared, no bomb concealed aboard the small boat. The explosion had been one of almost incalculable violence; but beyond that they could determine little. Shortly after the Seaward was lost to view, a plane appeared in the sunny Mediterranean sky. The craft spiraled slowly at an altitude of nearly twenty thousand feet, and it was to be suspected that this height was maintained for the purpose of escaping detection. It would take a sharp eye, looking up from the sea, to discern it.

The plane was a large one, tri-motored, fast, and obviously new. It was of English manufacture, a very modern type.

Upending its tail abruptly, the plane screamed downward in a long dive. When it pulled level, the sea was only a few hundred feet below, and the mass of black smoke a slight distance to one side. The ship was an amphibian. As it banked to come down on the sea, an observer interested in aëronautics would have noted that the motor exhaust stacks bore a silencer of unique design—a type not in use in Europe, although the plane itself was manifestly a British product.

The plane taxied close to the smoke pall. The pilot shoved an arm out of the cockpit window, gripping a revolver. He throttled his engine, then fired three slow shots. He counted carefully to twenty-five, then discharged three more bullets. The lead went into the sea beside the hull float. He was signaling.

A collapsible boat, driven by an outboard motor of extreme smallness, scooted out of the remnant of the smoke screen.

The boat held Doc Savage and his four men.

Monk, carrying Habeas Corpus by an ear, stood up and stared at the plane, particularly at the pilot.

"For the love of Mike!" he cried, amazement on his face.

"Holy cow!" Renny jabbed oversized hands at the plane. "Long Tom!"

Ham, turning his sword cane slowly in his hands, eyed Doc.

"You had the foresight to transfer to this collapsible boat a moment after we left the Seaward."

Then he pointed at the plane and its pilot, Long Tom. "But where'd our invalid pal, the electrical wizard, come from?"

"I thought he remained in New York to conduct his experiments," Johnny added.

"A blind," Doc explained. "Long Tom crossed to England on a fast liner, bought that plane and came south."

The bronze man paused to touch one of the metal equipment boxes. "There is a portable radio in here," he said.

"I heard you working with it a couple of hours ago," Ham admitted.

Doc nodded. "I was summoning Long Tom."

A wide grin was on Long Tom's pallid countenance as he helped them transfer their equipment, then the collapsible boat, to the plane.

"Why keep the cat in the bag, Doc?" Monk grumbled.

"Sorry," Doc told him. "But Captain Flancul and Princess Gusta are clever. They might've done some eavesdropping."

"Yeah," Monk admitted. "We would've talked it over, probably, if we'd have known. They might've overheard."

Long Tom seated himself at the control wheel, opened the trio of throttles, and maneuvered the plane off the water. He set a course east and north, toward Calbia, climbing rapidly to some twenty thousand feet.

Renny pulled thoughtfully at his long jaw. "You figured on such an emergency as this, Doc?"

"Not exactly this."

"Well, it worked out neat. Them guys on the Seaward think we're dead."

Monk chuckled. "Are they gonna get a shock!"

Westward, off in the direction of Italy and Spain, indications were that the sun would shortly descend. Already the Mediterranean had begun to change color. Ahead, over Calbia, clouds were wadded profusely in the sky.

Doc opened the portable radio and prepared it for operation.

"Whatcha gonna do?" Monk wanted to know.

"Get in contact with the revolutionary forces," Doc advised him. "They have radio equipment.

Through them, we will notify Conte Cozonac that we are safe."

"Then what?"

"We will land before we reach the coast, wait for darkness, then visit Conte Cozonac and concoct a definite plan of operation."

Chapter XIII. BAT SHIP

IT was night.

Clouds over Calbia shut out the luminance of moon and stars at a height of nine thousand feet, so that only sepia murk lay below. The cloud formation was nimbus—a dark and shapeless layer with few openings. From this type of cloud rain usually falls, but there was no downpour now, although the clouds themselves were saturated, and gave promise of a slow, steady precipitation later in the night.

Doc Savage's plane kept in the clouds. The party had landed on the sea far out of sight of any one ashore, and had waited until the night was well along before again taking off. They were fairly sure no one had observed their presence, nor was the passage of the plane likely to be detected, for the exhaust silencers—they were the type developed by Doc, which Long Tom had brought from New York—were highly efficient

Renny was navigating, and gaunt Johnny had the controls. Frequently, both looked over their shoulders into the cabin.

Doc Savage was engaged in a task which interested them all, intrigued them the more so since the bronze man was more than usually reticent about the purpose of the thing.

Doc had been working upon his contrivance for some little time before his activities had come to their notice. When they had discovered him, he was just closing one of the metal equipment boxes. What had gone into the box, they did not know.

"That thing—what is it?" asked Monk, who was always full of questions.

"That's an experiment," Doc replied, and that was all they got out of him.

Employing some steel piano wire from a large spool, Doc fashioned a secure cradle for the metal box, so that it would dangle at the end of the wire. Then he lowered the receptacle through the door and began playing out wire. The spool was large, and he unreeled all of the wire.

The metal box was now towed along at least a quarter of a mile behind the plane. Doc extinguished the flashlight which had illuminated his operations.

Monk wrinkled his flat nose in the gloom of the plane cabin. Curiosity was literally oozing from his pores, but he did not attempt to question Doc further. He knew that it would get him—nothing. The man of bronze would only exercise his habit of appearing not to hear the inquiries.

Whatever the significance of the object they were towing, Monk felt that it was important. Doc had done strange things on other occasions which had turned out to be of no small significance. Ham announced, "I'm going to eat my share of those sandwiches Long Tom brought. You fellows gobbled up yours, but I'm going to eat mine slowly. A gentleman gets some enjoyment out of his food."

The lawyer moved to his seat. An instant later, he emitted a yell.

Habeas Corpus exploded a pained grunt.

"Dang you, Ham!" Monk howled. "I told you to quit kickin' my pig around!"

"If I catch him, I'll throw him out of here and see if those big ears are really any good as wings!" Ham gritted. "And if you open that big mouth of yours, I'll let you go with him."

Monk tried to keep the glee out of his voice. "Aw, what ails you now?"

"That infernal hog," Ham snarled, "ate up my sandwiches!"

HALF an hour later, the plane lifted above the clouds.

Renny scrutinized the stars, consulted the compass, the air-speed meter, and scribbled figures on a paper pad by the light of a flash.

"We're about twenty miles north of the Calbian capital city of San Blazna," he vouchsafed.

"That's the spot you wanted, ain't it, Doc?"

Doc Savage had been making sure that the end of piano wire was securely fastened to a fuselage cross-piece. They were still towing the mysterious metal box behind.

"Twenty miles north of San Blazna is the location," the bronze man agreed. "As you fellows know, I was in communication with the revolutionary forces before we landed on the sea to kill time. They gave us the location of their headquarters. Conte Cozonac will hurry there by plane as soon as the Seaward docks. He is probably there now."

"All right," Renny told Johnny, who had the controls, "stand her on her nose, big words."

The plane upended and went down.

"Take it easy," Doc suggested. "We want to keep that box on the piano wire as far behind us as possible."

Johnny flattened the plane out slightly and their descent took the form of a great spiral, slow swings with a radius of nearly a mile.

Binoculars in hand, the other man opened the cabin window and hung outside. This was strange country below, and just how he would make a landing was puzzling Johnny.

"Want to drop a flare when the altimeters show we're close to the ground, Doc?" the gaunt geologist and archaeologist called.

"They have a landing field of sorts; they advised by radio," Doc told him. "We are to signal with a flashlight, and they will mark the field with lanterns. The signal is the letter C in the Continental Code."

"C standing for Cozonac, maybe," Monk suggested absently.

"C meaning cooked, which is what your goose is going to be, if you don't teach that hog to leave my stuff alone," Ham growled.

"Habeas is just playful," Monk explained.

"Sure, sure," Ham gritted. "But he never plays with anybody's stuff but mine. And do you know why?"

"I can't imagine," Monk disclaimed innocently.

"Because you've taught him to work on me!" Ham said angrily.

Monk opened his mouth to make some retort—instead, he grabbed wildly for the handiest support.

A crack, cataclysmic in its loudness, slammed through the roar of air about the open cabin windows. Reverberations followed, like something monstrous and hard rolling down vast steps, or thunder romping through the clouds. A scintillating light-burst made visual accompaniment to the sound salvo.

Convulsing air pummeled the plane, heaved it over on a wing tip.

Johnny, juggling the wheel, treading the rudder, nursed the ship to an even keel.

In the sky behind them, a mammoth skyrocket might have opened a ball of fire. Blazing fragments sank, swirling slowly, shedding bright sparks.

"Another explosion!" Monk gulped, his small voice almost lost in the air roar.

"It destroyed the box we were towing on the piano wire," Doc agreed.

"Holy cow!" Renny squinted at the spot which Doc occupied in the darkened cabin. "Was the box a decoy?"

"It was."

"Then, Doc, you know what is causin' the explosions!"

"What's makin' the blasts?" Monk demanded.

"You're too optimistic," Doc advised. "There is no definite proof of what the thing was. Towing that metal box behind was merely an experiment."

Monk pondered this. He knew from long experience that Doc was not in the habit of putting theories into words. The bronze man made no wild conjectures. Therefore, unless he knew the exact nature of the mystery, knew with such certainty that he could recreate the device himself, Doc would avoid any statement.

"What was in the metal box?" Monk persisted.

"Remember the alcohol stoves we brought along in case we might have to camp out?" Doc said.

"Sure. Designed 'em myself. Four of 'em, and they give off a lotta heat for their size."

"All four of the stoves were in that metal case—lighted."

"Lighted!"

"Right. If you had used binoculars on the box before it was destroyed, you might have noticed that it was almost red-hot."

The discussion was interrupted.

Two searchlights suddenly poked up white, exploring rods from the ground. Another beam appeared.

The trio swayed, crossed and uncrossed, somehow remindful of stiff, reeling white ghosts.

On the ground, an anti-aircraft gun winked a red eye. A flare shell ripened a brilliant fruit

high above the plane. Light bathed not only the plane but the earth as well.

A woods lay below, a furry carpet of trees. In the center was a clearing. It seemed comparatively level.

As the flare shell sank, the earth grew more brilliantly lighted. Remarkably enough, a casual glance could discern no living being below.

Renny, who had been in the engineering corps during the war, was familiar with camouflage.

"A lot of the trees are just green paint on tents," he declared. "There's a military force camped below us."

"How many?" Monk demanded.

"Ten or fifteen thousand men, I should judge. Man, they've got some up-to-date war machinery!"

A green hut which resembled a treetop sputtered flame—and an anti-aircraft shell opened off the left wing tip.

Johnny hurriedly changed course. Doc untied the end of the trailing piano wire and cast it overboard in order that it might not hamper their maneuvering. Then, thrusting a flashlight from a window, he blinked it rapidly.

He made a dash-dot-dash-dot combination—the letter C of the Continental Code.

"That'll tell us if they are Conte Cozonac's men."

The reply to the signal was prompt. Searchlights went out. The anti-aircraft guns did not fire again.

Shortly afterward, a string of lights appeared, evidently electric lanterns. They marked the position of the landing field.

"I ain't so sure about this," Renny rumbled pessimistically.

"Aw, you're suspicious of everything," Monk told him. "They turned out their searchlights and quit shootin', didn't they? They're Conte Cozonac's outfit."

"Yeah, but the thing that exploded—who turned it loose on us?"

"The Royalists, of course. They're usin' the darn thing."

Renny snorted. "But how'd they know we was comin'?"

"Ever hear of spies?" Monk queried sarcastically. "The Royalists may have agents in Conte Cozonac's radio station."

"OK, OK," Renny muttered.

Doc Savage now took over the controls of the plane. The others, expecting him to land immediately, received a surprise. The bronze man swung the big ship far wide of the copse of wood which harbored the military encampment.

"Monk! Ham! Come here!" he called.

Monk and Ham hurried forward. For several seconds, they consulted with Doc in the control cockpit.

Renny, Long Tom and Johnny, being in the rear, did not hear what was said.

Monk and Ham left the control compartment and hurriedly strapped on parachutes. Then they opened the cabin door. Monk scooped up Habeas Corpus and tucked the pig under an arm.

"Here goes!" he grunted, and stepped out into black space.

Ham followed him, hand on his chute ripcord ring.

The darkness below swallowed the two plummeting forms.

Renny lumbered to the control cockpit. "Holy cow, Doc! Why'd Monk and Ham go overboard with chutes?"

"Come here, all of you," Doc suggested.

All three crowded about the bronze man.

"We'll employ a somewhat different policy than usual on this Calbian job," the bronze man explained. "Each man is going to be assigned a definite job. None of you will know what the others are doing, except in the case of two of you working together."

"What's the idea?" Long Tom wanted to know.

"Nobody, in case of capture, can give information about the others."

"

Say, we wouldn't talk—"

"

Wait! Any man can be made to talk," Doc explained. "Truth serums or hypnotism will do the trick, for instance."

"Yeah. That's right, too," Long Tom agreed.

"The same thing applies to me," Doc stated.

"You mean—"

"You will not let me know where you are except when you make reports. In other words, if captured, I do not want to be able to give your whereabouts."

"Everybody works separate, eh?"

"That's it, except when two are on the same job."

Long Tom considered. "Not a bad idea, after all."

"Monk and Ham evidently landed far enough from the military encampment to escape discovery," Doc announced, after watching the ground below for a time with binoculars. "There is no excitement."

"Were they to signal a safe landing?"

"No. Too much chance of a light being seen," Doc advised.

He sent the plane back toward the encampment where the landing field was marked by electric lanterns.

Chapter XIV. THE BRONZE MAN PLANS

DOC Savage planted the big plane in the clearing without great difficulty. Use of the landing lights on the wingtips simplified the descent. Wheel brakes brought the bus to a stop. He loosened one brake, gunned the motors on that side, and turned the ship, so that it was ready for a quick take-off, should an emergency arise. He did not switch the engines off, but left them idling. Gripping the tiny supermachine guns charged with mercy bullets, the party dropped out of the cabin.

Men approached. They came in squads, walking with military precision, automatic rifles ready in front of their chests.

Johnny dashed the beam of a flashlight over them, augmenting the glow of electric lanterns which marked the landing field.

The rebel soldiers wore olive-green uniforms. The regalia was sprightly, and showed the liking of these Balkan peoples for ornate attire. Even the privates wore snappy Sam Browne belts. The officers carried swords.

On the sleeve of every soldier—the right sleeve just above the elbow—was sewed a circular piece of red cloth. Obviously these red balls were the insignia of the revolutionists.

"That's funny," Renny rumbled.

"I see nothing conducive to joviality," Johnny retorted.

"Remember the little red balls them fellers on the black ocean speedboat in New York carried?"

Renny countered. "And I believe you said when you grabbed Muta on the Seaward one of them red balls fell out of his pocket."

"True." Johnny fingered his monocle magnifier. "Hm-m-m!"

"Well, these soldiers are wearin' red balls on their sleeves. I was just wonderin', that's all."

The squads of soldiers came to a stop, at the Calbian command, of

" Otriti!"

"Cine este acolo!"

called an officer. "Who is there?"

"

Doc Savage," Doc replied.

"

Comandantul sef, Conte Cozonac is awaiting you," the officer replied gravely.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF Conte Cozonac's quarters proved to be a round tent, the outside of which was painted to resemble a fagul, a Calbian tree. Inside the tent were tables which supported numerous telephones, modern metal filing cabinets, and numerous maps in which many pins were stuck, evidently designating the position of military forces. There was also a desk.

Conte Cozonac bounded from behind the desk when Doc and his men appeared. The fat fellow had donned a resplendent uniform, the tunic of which was arrayed with glittering medals. An automatic was holstered on his right hip; a rapier, the hilt jewel-inlaid, dangled on his left. A dagger thrust into the belt completed the warlike display.

On Conte Cozonac's right arm, above the elbow, was a round, red ball insignia.

"I am delighted at your safety," he said in excellent English. "After that terrific explosion in the sky, I feared something had happened to you. What was it?"

"It was rather mysterious," Doc said dryly. "One of those devilish blasts occurred some distance behind our plane."

"You mean—they used their weapon on you and it missed you?" The fat man seemed bewildered.

"It failed to touch us, all right."

"Strange, indeed strange. Their infernal device is supposed to be infallible. How do you account for its missing you?"

If Renny and the other two expected Doc to explain about the four lighted alcohol stoves towed in the metal case behind the plane, they were disappointed.

"There are many mysterious aspects to these explosions," Doc said slowly. "Particularly this one.

For instance, how did the men who turned that weapon loose upon us know we were coming here tonight?

We figured that they thought us out of the way."

Conte Cozonac twittered sudden, squeaking laughter.

"It wasn't funny!" Renny thumped.

The fat man straightened his face. "I was laughing because they failed to get you. This is the first time, to my knowledge that their infernal contrivance has not proven effective."

"Well, how'd the Royalists know we were coming?" Renny pondered. "Maybe they've got spies in your camp."

"Perhaps they did not know," Conte Cozonac said, considering. "Perhaps they heard your plane,

knew none of their own ships were in the air, and reasoned yours was a revolutionist craft. Then they used their strange weapon, and missed. But I do not believe there are spies here. You see, I have chosen my men most carefully."

"Yeah, maybe," Renny agreed doubtfully.

Conte Cozonac surveyed his visitors, then his bulbous form shook as he started in surprise.

"Where are your other two men—Ham, the lawyer, and the chemist Monk, who has the pet pig?" he asked.

"They have been sent on a mission," Doc told him.

"What was its nature?"

Doc Savage was silent for a while. He seemed to be debating the words which would best fit the explanation he wanted to make.

"In order to guarantee the safety of my men, no one but myself is to know what work they are doing," he finally said.

Conte Cozonac reddened. "You mistrust me?"

"Not at all. I, myself, will not know where they are most of the time."

"But why?"

"In case the enemy should capture one of us, there will be no chance of betraying the others."

Conte Cozonac considered this. After some thirty seconds, he smiled widely.

"Safety first, eh?"

"Exactly."

"You do not take many chances, Savage," the other chuckled. "Of course, I will ask no questions. After all, you are the future king of Calbia."

If he was intrigued by the prospect of becoming the Regele, the King of Calbia, Doc exhibited no outward elation.

Several officers now entered the tent. Their uniforms and the flamboyance of their trappings indicated they were of high rank.

"My staff," Conte Cozonac explained.

The bony Johnny noted that the right sleeve of all the uniforms bore the red ball insignia. This moved him to put a question: "I say, what significance has the erubescence circumferentiation?"

Conte Cozonac mulled over the big words for a moment, then laughed in his strange fashion.

"That is the symbol of liberty—the insignia which my revolutionary party has adopted."

Johnny was thoughtful. "Do your men carry red marbles?"

Conte Cozonac nodded. "Our secret agents do, yes. They use them as badges."

"Badges!"

"Why do you ask?"

"Muta carried a red marble," Johnny said grimly.

The fat man sprang to his feet. "What?"

"I saw it twice."

The chief of the revolutionists sank back into his chair. Perspiration appeared upon his bulb of a forehead, and he produced a silk handkerchief and slowly blotted the moisture.

"

Intr'adevar!" he muttered. "Indeed! That is valuable information. It proves that the Royalists have tipped their men off to carry the red marble, undoubtedly for use in tricking my own followers."

"You think that's why Muta had one?"

"

Da!" The fat man's full jowls shook with the vehemence of his nod. "Yes! There is no explanation."

Doc Savage put in quietly, "Suppose we consider ways and means."

"Conte Cozonac settled back. "Well spoken! Have you a plan?"

"The present regime in Calbia is probably the nearest thing to an absolute monarchy that exists in the world today," Doc stated. "The government is entirely in the hands of three persons—King Dal Le Galbin, Princess Gusta Le Galbin, and Captain Henri Flancul. Is that right?"

Da,"

said one of the staff officers. "You are correct."

"Seizure of those three would leave the Royalist forces leaderless, would it not?"

"

Da."

"

Loss of the three chieftains should cause the Royalist army to become demoralized."

Conte Cozonac nodded vehement agreement. "It would."

"Then we will seize the trio," Doc stated.

The giant bronze man's suggestion that they kidnap the two principal members of the Calbian royal family, and their chief advisor gave the revolutionist staff officers a shock. They traded blank looks.

Having grown up under a monarchy, probably having been taught from childhood that the regele, or king, was only a little short of a sacred personage, Doc's suggestion undoubtedly struck them about

as the kidnaping of the president would strike a citizen of the United States.

Conte Cozonac also showed evidences of being stunned, but he came out of it quickly—not enough, however, to start trilling his weird laughter. His round face was solemn.

"You know, Doc Savage, that is an idea worthy of the man of bronze," he declared earnestly. "It is perfect. If you need men, I can supply them—any number up to two hundred thousand. About that number of able-bodied men have enlisted in the revolutionary cause."

"In work of that kind," Doc told him, "a very few men have a better chance of success, while a mob would be defeated by its own inability to strike with swiftness and without discovery."

Conte Cozonac indicated Johnny, Long Tom, and Renny. "You mean that only yourself and your men are to seize King Dal Le Galbin and the other two?"

"That is the idea."

There was silence in the tent, broken occasionally by the tinkle of one medal against another as the staff officers shifted, or the guttural challenge of a sentry posted nearby in the darkness. Abruptly, far off in the night, rifles crackled. The moan of machine guns joined in, then the heavy thump of artillery and the reverberations of exploding shells. Although the war sounds were miles away, the very ground under the tent seemed to tremble.

"Makes me think of old times." Renny said thoughtfully.

A phone rang. Fat Conte Cozonac went to it, listened, spoke in Calbian, then hung up.

"A Royalist raid on one of our positions," he said. "Our revolutionists are managing to hold them back."

The warlike noises subsided after a time.

Doc Savage had been waiting, no change visible upon his metallic countenance, and now that the distant raid seemed to have played out, he spoke.

"About this mystery weapon which is in the hands of the Royalists—have they been using it upon you?"

Conte Cozonac looked as grim as a man of his fatness possibly could. "They certainly have," he said firmly. "On three different occasions planes carrying my staff officers have been literally blown to smithereens, as you Yankees describe it. Motor cars have been wrecked. Once a moving train was demolished. The force of the blast centered on the locomotive."

"It is always moving machinery that suffers, eh?" Doc questioned.

"Not always, although usually a moving object. Two men who helped me organize this revolution were killed while cooking their supper over a camp fire in the woods."

"Did loss of those men cripple your force badly?"

Conte Cozonac shook his head slowly. "Not greatly. The opposition must have only a few of the mystery weapons. Once they have time to manufacture them, it will be terrible!"

Doc Savage had been occupying a folding camp chair. Now he stood erect.

"We want that infernal machine, whatever it is. It must be rendered harmless."

The fat man nodded. "Everything is in your hands."

Doc eyed his three men. "Come on. We have a lot to do before morning."

Chapter XV. THE CHINESE BUZZARD

DAWN saw the sun come up pale and red behind the clouds. Rain had started a few hours before daylight, a slow drizzle, which was little more than a fog, but produced infinite discomfort.

Renny had turned into a camouflaged barracks tent to get some sleep. The prospect of excitement did not interfere with his slumber, except for one nightmare in which he was a Brobdingnagian giant walking around in a land peopled by wee kings, princesses and Captain Flanculs. A sack was part of Renny's equipment in the dream, and into it he continuously stuffed kings, princesses, and Captain Flanculs.

Doc Savage's bronze hands shook him awake.

"Holy cow!" Renny grunted, rubbing his eyes with fists almost as large as his own far-from-small cranium. "Did I have a dream!"

He listened to the thunderlike thump and rumble of cannonading in the distance. "You know, those field guns are bound to be killin' a lot of people."

"We want to stop this thing as soon as possible," Doc agreed. "Come on, Renny. I've been working through the night, and have things ready for you."

"Didn't you sleep?"

"No. Time for that later."

"Where're Johnny and Long Tom?"

"They've already departed on their mission."

"Huh?" Renny thumped. "What's their job?"

"Remember that none of you was to know what the others are doing," Doc reminded him.

"Sure, I forgot." Renny fished about for his clothes, failed to find them, and boomed, "Hey! Where'd my duds go?"

"I took them," Doc advised. "Wrap a blanket around yourself."

The big-fisted engineer complied with the command. He followed Doc out of the tent and across the encampment to the clearing. On the edge of this, a large, camouflaged canvas cover had been rigged

over Doc's tri-motored amphibian, to keep off the rain.

Renny peered at the aircraft.

"Holy cow!" he exploded.

The amphibian was now painted an entirely different color, being a particularly garish purple. Nor was that all. Coiled around the fuselage was a flame-spouting Chinese dragon, done in practically every color of the rainbow. There were numerous characters of the Chinese alphabet emblazoned on the wings, hull and tail structure.

In large letters on each side of the hull a name was painted:

CHAMP DUGAN

THE PURPLE TERROR

Renny squirmed in his rain-sodden blanket "Say, what's this mean? Who's Champ Dugan?"

"You," Doc said.

"Huh?"

The bronze man now withdrew from a pocket a sheaf of yellow papers—cablegrams both sent and received.

"Read these over and you'll get the idea," he said.

Renny consulted the messages which had been sent and received by Doc Savage from his powerful private radio station atop the New York City skyscraper before they sailed on the Seaward. The messages had gone to men in China, India, Persia, and Turkey.

The names of most of these men were strange to Renny, but he did recognize a few of them as individuals he happened to know were deeply indebted to Doc Savage and would do anything to oblige the bronze man. Hastily, Renny went through the rest of the messages.

"The way has been paved for you, as you can see," Doc told him. "A man in China, a gentleman who is under the impression he owes me a debt of gratitude, was to radio the King of Calbia, using the name of Champ Dugan.

"According to the wire my friend sent from China, the imaginary Champ Dugan was a world-beater as a fighting airman. Several references were given, and as you will note from the wires there, the references were men who were also glad to help further our deception. The upshot of that was that King Dal Le Galbin hired the mythical Champ Dugan."

"And you thought of all this in New York," Renny muttered.

"The mythical Champ Dugan is supposed to be on his way to Calbia," Doc continued. "Radiograms have been sent from India, Persia and Turkey with his name signed to them. Champ Dugan, in fact, is due to arrive at the capital of Calbia today."

Renny rarely allowed a grin to decorate his long, sober face. However, he now permitted himself the luxury of a wide smile.

"This is the real reason you sent Long Tom via England, to buy this plane, eh?" he asked.

"Exactly. You will notice that Champ Dugan is to receive a high command in the Calbian Royalist air force. King Dal Le Galbin evidently has a good opinion of Yankee free-lance airmen. Notice the salary he's paying you."

Renny consulted the telegrams. "A thousand dollars a week! Not bad!"

"Except that you usually make that much a day at your trade of engineer," Doc added dryly. "Now as Champ Dugan, flyer extraordinary, you should be able to get close to King Dal Le Galbin and Princess Gusta."

"The idea is to grab 'em if I can?" Renny rumbled.

"Even more important, get a line on the thing causing the big explosions," Doc suggested.

"Yeah. That's the main job, after all."

"With a few suggestions as to how Champ Dugan is to act, you'll be ready to go. I'll disguise you, also."

THREE hours later the Chinese dragon plane with the name "Champ Dugan" lettered on its side dived out of eastern clouds and descended on the Calbian capital city of San Blazna. It was from the east that a plane from China would be expected to arrive.

Due to the drizzling rain, few people were in the narrow streets of San Blazna when the grotesquely decorated plane first appeared. Here and there squads of soldiers marched. Automobiles were few, far outnumbered by the mule carts of peasants.

The noise of the plane brought San Blaznites from their houses like hornets out of a disturbed nest. They stared upward. Evidently they were no strangers to air raids, and feared the weirdly colored ship might be an enemy plane.

Steam plumes spurting from locomotive whistles and power houses told Renny an alarm was being spread. He had removed Doc Savage's remarkable silencers from the plane exhaust stacks, and the ship was making a great deal of noise, completely drowning out the sound of the whistles below.

From a military airport on the edge of San Blazna, a squadron of fighting planes appeared and climbed upward. There were nine of them, holding formation triangles of three craft each.

Renny watched their flying closely. To a layman, it might have appeared that Calbians were skillful fighting buzzards, but to Renny's experienced eyes, they were doing a ragged job.

"Kiwis," opined Renny.

Renny's accomplishments did not end with the field of engineering, where he was among the greatest, but included, among other things, many hours of flying time, a portion of them under the highly efficient tutelage of Doc Savage. Doc possessed the facility that goes to make great teachers—he seemed able to convey some of his own uncanny skill to those whom he instructed. Not many fliers were more skillful than Renny, and he proceeded to give a demonstration of that fact.

The nine Calbian pursuit planes spread into a duck flight line in the drizzle and approached. Pilots craned their necks from cockpits to study Renny's weirdly bedizened chariot. Renny flew straight forward.

Probably by way of warning, two of the pursuit craft discharged machine gun bursts. The tracer lines threaded over Renny's head, and not far distant from it either. The fighting crates came on arrogantly.

Renny let them get quite close. Abruptly he stamped the rudder and wrestled the controls. One of the planes which had used a machine gun was the object of his maneuver. The big amphibian literally pounced upon this craft.

The pursuit pilot's face, glistening wet in the rain, became starkly white as the great ship cannoned toward him. He was, in fact, more stunned than Renny had expected, and the big-fisted engineer was forced to battle the controls again to prevent a collision.

The pursuit pilot dove out of his way, oozing a cold sweat. He had been scared badly.

Renny booted his big bus around and hung onto the tails of the pursuit squadron.

The Calbian flyers, not sure whether he was an enemy, sought to jockey clear. They found that impossible. Their fighting craft were smaller, much faster than Renny's lumbering amphibian, yet such was the engineer's skill and knowledge of aërobatics that he succeeded in making the Calbian army pilots look like rank amateurs.

Diving at them fiercely, keeping away from their machine guns with an uncanny facility, Renny literally chased the pursuit ships into the clouds.

Then Renny dived down and proceeded to raise the hair on the heads of the inhabitants of San Blazna.

A river snaked through the center of San Blazna. A large stream, it bore the name of River Carlos, after King Carlos Le Galbin I, the founder of the present dynasty of Calbia. At one point, two bridges spanned this stream, and nearby, on the left bank, stood the great castlelike structure which was King Dal Le Galbin's palace.

Renny flew under the arch of both bridges, apparently with but inches to spare on either side. He chased a squad of highly uniformed Royalist soldiers into the king's castle. Then he thundered around the castle, a wing tip almost scraping the masonry.

Sentries tried to shoot at him from the walls. He cranked down the landing gear of the amphibian, swooped at the riflemen, and sent them scuttling to cover.

The Calbian flag and the king's personal colors fluttered on a flagpole above the castle gate.

Renny, calculating beautifully, flew close enough to the pole to carry away both flags on his landing gear. He looped and barrel-rolled arrogantly over the castle.

Untangling both flags from his wheels, he yanked the undercarriage up, landed on the river, and beached his craft under the castle walls.

The Renny who got out of the amphibian hardly resembled the sober-faced gentleman the engineering profession knew. For one thing, Renny's hair had been dyed a particularly gaudy red. His face was freckled. Most startling change of all was the enormous grin which had displaced his usual funeral-going expression.

His garb was a Chinese blouse, with enormous sleeves which ordinarily hung down over his hands, concealing the proportions of his enormous fists with surprising effectiveness. He wore baggy Turkish trousers, soft Russian boots.

With Doc's aid, Renny had disguised himself to look the part of "Champ Dugan," the daredevil Yank buzzard from China. His arrival in San Blazna had been in Champ Dugan's style.

Once, in medieval times, the river waters had been diverted into a moat which encircled the castle. A walk along the edge of this moat now served as a promenade. Renny clambered up the river bank and strode along this esplanade.

A platoon of guardsmen, each in a high fur uniform cap, swung toward him on the double-quick.

Their uniforms were most eye-filling. Renny concluded this was a part of the castle guard.

Playing Champ Dugan to the fullest, Renny greeted the guardsmen with a wide, freckled grin. "Hi, soldiers!" he called.

"You are under arrest," he was informed in Calbian,

"Yeah?" Renny snorted. "Listen—you mugs start with me, and you'll get them pretty uniforms mussed!"

The officer in charge stepped forward and grabbed at Renny's arms, evidently with the idea of pinioning them.

There was a whack of a big fist on a jaw and the officer sprawled on his back.

"I can whip the king's guard as well as the Calbian air force," boasted the pseudo Champ Dugan.

"You palookas don't know so much about fightin'."

The arrival of a courier interrupted what might have developed into a first-class scrap. "Are you Champ Dugan, the Yankee flier from China?" asked the messenger. "So somebody in Calbia has heard of me, eh?" Renny made a big freckled grin. "King Dal Le Galbin will give you an audience at once," said the other. "An audience—oh, you mean he wants to talk to me? OK, let's go."

Chapter XVI. THE CALBIAN TOUGH GUY

KING DAL LE GALBIN had a tangled mass of snow-white hair. His eyes were blue, his jaw strong, his mouth grim. The handsome lines of his features explained where his daughter, Princess Gusta, got her exquisite beauty.

The monarch of Calbia had powerful shoulders and a lean waist, and although his age must have been near fifty, indications were that he was still very much a man.

He wore an extremely plain uniform, tailored snugly to his strapping physique. He affected no medals, gold braid, swords, or pistols.

"Give me one good pursuit plane, and I can whip your whole air force," Renny declared loudly. "They're not so hot."

The ruler of Calbia, the man who was at present the world's nearest approach to an absolute monarch, produced a plain gold case of monogrammed cigarettes, and offered it.

"Do you smoke, Champ Dugan?" he asked.

Renny shook his head. "Fightin' and braggin' is my only dissipation."

To his surprise, Renny was discovering that he rather liked King Dal Le Galbin.

King Dal permitted a court flunky to dash forward with a patent lighter and ignite his cigarette.

"You seem to be a rather unusual individual, Champ Dugan. In your opinion, what is wrong with my air force?"

"Judging from the samples I've seen, they're not fire-eaters. Too, they're a little shy on combat training. What you need is about fifty free-lance fliers, professional swashbucklers."

"My air force has not been very effective against the rebels." The king drew slowly on his cigarette.

"Who has charge?" Renny asked.

"One of my advisors is air minister—Captain Henri Flancul. I will summon him."

Renny would willingly have postponed confronting Captain Flancul. It was possible Flancul had seen him, either in New York or on the liner Seaward, and might recognize him. But a meeting was inevitable, and he might as well have it over with now.

Captain Flancul, a resplendent figure in uniform, entered.

Princess Gusta also came in to the audience chamber. The young woman's frock was plain, cut on military lines. She was, Renny reflected, one of the most ravishing beauties he could recall having seen.

The ruler of Calbia performed the introductions.

"This is, Champ Dugan, Yankee aviator who is going to see what he can do with our air force."

Captain Henri Flancul flushed. "What does that mean?" he demanded. "I thought I had control of the air force?"

"You are not being displaced," the monarch told him. "Champ Dugan is merely an advisor. But I might suggest that you take his advice."

Renny was watching Captain Flancul and Princess Gusta intently. They gave no sign of not accepting him, in his fictitious personality of Champ Dugan, buzzard from China. Doc's disguise was effective.

DURING the remainder of the day, Renny behaved in a fashion calculated to elevate himself in the graces of the king.

The most discerning eye could have observed nothing in Renny's actions to indicate that he contemplated kidnaping the King of Calbia and, if possible, the king's daughter and chief advisor as well.

Renny kept alert for some word of the mystery device which had caused the explosions. He even sounded out officers of the king's guard on the subject. They obviously knew nothing—which surprised Renny somewhat.

Renny borrowed a pursuit plane that afternoon and led a Royalist patrol into revolutionist territory.

"If we meet any rebel ships, you kiwis stay in the background," Renny directed, before the take-off. "Don't give a hoot how many there are. I'll show you guys a real sky brawl."

They met rebel planes—eleven of them. Two were bombers, and the rest pursuit jobs. Alone, Renny dropped out of the clouds upon the flight.

For a few minutes planes whirled in the rain soaked sky like leaves in a mad wind. Streams of tracer bullets raced here and there, like cobwebs invisibly spun.

The Royalist fliers circled above, obeying the command to stay out of the "dog fight." The blustering, freckled Yankee had said he would show them how it was done—and he kept his word. King

Dal's fliers saw four enemy planes go spinning down at the end of squirming smoke plumes. Just what happened to the rebel pilots they did not see, due to a fog which blanketed the ground. The presence of the fog was a fortunate circumstance. Otherwise, some one might have discovered that none of the planes actually crashed, and that the smoke was coming, not from flaming gasoline tanks but from ordinary smoke bombs hidden in cockpits.

Conte Cozonac's fliers were cooperating with Renny, helping him build up a reputation. Renny led his Royalist squadron back to San Blazna, after he had apparently, single-handedly, defeated the rebel airmen and shot down in a few minutes more revolutionist planes than King Dal's fliers had been able to bag since the outbreak of hostilities.

Renny became a hero. King Dal personally complimented him.

Princess Gusta was also extremely friendly, listening with interest to hair-raising tales of some of Champ Dugan's aerial accomplishments in China and elsewhere.

Among other things, Renny had a fertile imagination.

Later, Princess Gusta offered to ride Renny around the town in one of the royal limousines and show him points of interest. Renny was not acting when he grinned from ear to ear. He was making excellent progress, and it was only a question of time until an opportunity would present itself for the kidnaping.

Furthermore, Renny could not imagine a more charming and desirable guide than the king's daughter.

On that sight-seeing ride, there occurred an incident which wiped out some of Renny's satisfaction.

The royal limousine which they used was long and sleek, plain black in color, except for the ornate coat of arms of the Calbian ruling family, encrested on either door.

The chauffeur was a meek individual whose vocabulary seemed to be limited to, "Yes, Your Highness."

There was no escort, Princess Gusta having ignored her sire's suggestion that they take one.

In the course of their sightseeing, they visited the ancient stone house—now a museum—where the first King Le Galbin had been born, some generations ago. Renny gathered that this first Le Galbin had been born a lowly peasant, and had made himself king by using his brain and fighting ability. The street outside was deserted, except for the meek chauffeur in the limousine, when they left the old house. Secretly, Renny debated whether this might not be a good time to kidnap Princess Gusta.

A shabby-looking beggar hobbled around the nearest corner. The fellow's left leg dragged, and he used a crutch. He approached, doffed a greasy hat from tangled hair that needed combing, and offered it hopefully for alms.

Renny, feeling expansive at the moment, used both hands to fish in the pockets of his voluminous trousers for a coin.

With stunning speed, the mendicant whipped up his crutch and crashed it down on Renny's head. Stunned, the big-fisted engineer sank to his knees.

"

Grabiti-va!" shrieked the panhandler. "Make haste! Help me seize them!"

Nearby doors banged open. Shabby men poured out and rushed to the attack. They swarmed over Renny, seized Princess Gusta.

The chauffeur tried to run, but was knocked unconscious.

Princess Gusta managed to shriek once, but the sound was not loud, and brought no aid.

"Long live the revolutionists!" howled a thug.

Renny, half unconscious, and squirming under a blanket of bodies, rumbled weakly his disgust.

These men must be some obscure band of revolutionist sympathizers. Under the impression that they were doing a great thing, they were about to ruin Renny's carefully laid plans.

Renny and Princess Gusta were hauled to their feet and shoved toward the limousine.

"Wait!" cried the fellow who had wielded the crutch. "Kill the tyrants here!"

"

Da!" agreed another, and produced a knife.

There came an interruption to upset the plans of the killing. An enormous apparition of a fellow appeared around a nearby corner.

"

Plecati!" he rumbled savagely. "Go away!"

Renny caught a glimpse of the newcomer, and decided he had never seen a more fearsome individual.

The fellow towered well over six feet, and his bulk was tremendous. His skin was dark, almost black, and his straight jet hair was combed down at the sides and down over his forehead and eyes, after the fashion of the Calbian peasants of the more remote hill sections.

The dark giant wore a loose, ragged blouse, and tight breeches which came only to his knees. He was bare footed.

The big one descended upon the fight, his fists bowling two attackers over. He jumped like a fighting rooster and kicked another in the chest. The fellow went down hard.

"

Plecati!" the huge stranger bawled again. "Go away!"

One revolutionist fanatic flashed a knife, lunged at him and missed. He was sent reeling by a big scarred fist.

"Go away!" rumbled the stupid-looking giant, with an almost childish vehemence.

The gang who had seized Renny and Princess Gusta began to exhibit a great willingness to do as they were told. The swarthy giant was a tremendous fighter. He floundered around, great arms swinging, occasionally wrenching a gun out of the hands of some fanatic who sought to use it. That this monster was no stranger to physical combat was indicated by the number of scars on his rather puffy features, and the pronouncedly flaring nose which looked as if it had been broken numerous times.

Renny, his head clearing, reared up and joined the fray. Renny was no mean scrapper himself, but this individual with the hair over his eyes was a battling prodigy.

The would-be assassins finally fled.

Renny wiped perspiration out of his eyes and peered at the dark giant.

The big fellow ignored Renny. He dropped to all fours in front of Princess Gusta and planted his forehead against the damp cobbles. He remained in that position of obeisance, saying nothing.

"What is your name?" Princess Gusta asked the kneeling monster.

"Botezul," said the huge dark one.

He had a coarse, roaring voice, more boisterous even than Renny's own.

"And who are you, Botezul?" asked the young woman.

"Me mountain man, Your Highness," Botezul explained. "Me hear about revolution and come to join army of King Le Galbin. Me walk along street and see fight."

The fellow spoke the dialect of the Calbian mountaineers, and seemed to have but a limited command of words.

"Get to your feet," directed Princess Gusta.

Botezul arose, but kept his head bowed. He was so huge that Renny suddenly felt quite small.

"So you want to help the king, Botezul?" the young woman queried.

"Yes, Your Highness."

Princess Gusta considered a moment, then smiled slightly. "How would you like to be my personal guard, Botezul?"

Botezul promptly got down again and planted his forehead on the cobbles. He did not say so, but it was evident that the idea of being bodyguard to the beautiful princess suited him perfectly.

"Very well," said Gusta, "from now on you are my guard."

Renny smothered a groan. He had visions of future trouble with this stupid Botezul. Renny was a discerning individual, and he felt quite sure that Botezul could, barehanded, thrash two big-fisted engineers such as himself.

During the rest of that day and the one following, Renny's dislike of Botezul grew more acute.

The dark giant acquired a habit of scowling blackly at Renny, and expectorating in a most annoying fashion when Renny, playing the part of Champ Dugan to its utmost, began bragging about what a great fighter he was in the air and on the ground.

Renny got a heavy monkey wrench from a mechanic's kit at the military airport and tucked it inside his ample Chinese blouse. When the chance presented itself, he was determined to ascertain what effect the wrench would have on Botezul's thick skull.

Renny dispatched a number of cablegrams to professional free-lance fliers in different parts of the world, offering them good pay to fight for the Calbian government. Doc Savage had furnished a list of such fliers. Summoning them was necessary for the part Renny was playing. The aerial swashbucklers would lose nothing, since their salaries would be paid when the revolution was over. Renny continued to seek surreptitiously some trace of the weird weapon Baron Damitru Mendl had invented. He found absolutely nothing.

On his third night in the capital city of San Blazna, Renny decided he saw his opportunity to accomplish the purpose for which he was there—the seizure of King Dal Le Galbin, and possibly Princess Gusta and Captain Henri Flancul. Once captured, they could be forced to reveal the secret of Baron Mendl's invention.

It was King Dal's custom, Renny had observed, to seclude himself in a wing of the castle during the early part of each night, there to consider reports, sign official papers, and make plans. Except for the presence of the ruler, this wing was usually untenanted.

Furthermore, Renny had observed that the royal motor cars passed unchallenged through the gates. If he could seize King Dal and the other two, bind and gag them and place them in the rear of an automobile, he might leave the castle without being challenged. It was worth trying.

Accordingly, near the hour of midnight, Renny crept to the palace wing where the monarch was at work. In the big engineer's clothing were some of Doc Savage's anaesthetic grenades, small smoke bombs, and some boxes of tacks. The latter were to sprinkle behind the fleeing car, in case there should be pursuit.

Renny was in high spirits. He had seen enough of the Calbian government to feel quite sure that with King Dal, Princess Gusta, and Captain Flancul out of the way, things would go to pieces. These three were absolute dictators of both civil and military affairs. No one of less authority was

accustomed to giving important orders.

To Renny's notion, there were no others with outstanding ability, certainly none who could grasp the reins of government in a hurry.

Capture of the dominating trio would also put Baron Mendl's secret in Doc Savage's hands, Renny felt sure. Doc would find a way of making the three talk.

Without difficulty, Renny reached the king's chamber. The door hinges did not squeak when he entered furtively—he had oiled them secretly that afternoon.

The dark giant, Botezul, had not been in evidence for an hour or two. The big fellow would be on guard outside Princess Gusta's door, Renny reasoned.

Renny advanced swiftly. A slight sound—perhaps the noise of his feet on the floor—warned King Dal Le Galbin of Renny's presence.

The king wheeled quickly.

"Quiet, or you'll get hurt!" Renny growled.

"What—"

Without finishing his startled query, King Dal struck out with a fist. He was a powerful man, but Renny, with his infinitely greater strength, easily turned the blow aside. Before the ruler could cry out, Renny's tremendous fist landed on his jaw.

King Dal Le Galbin collapsed.

"We'll soon have Baron Mendl's contraption," Renny grunted to himself.

Producing cords and a gag which he had brought with him, he trussed up the monarch and rendered him incapable of making any sound. Some of the cord was left over, and Renny pocketed this.

Shouldering the white-haired sovereign, Renny strode to the door. Not believing any one was in the wing of the palace, he stepped through boldly. That was where he made his mistake.

Botezul, gigantic, darksome, had been concealed outside. He lunged, and his huge arms enveloped Renny.

The struggle was short—shorter than any fight in which Renny had ever before engaged. The big-fisted engineer discovered himself entirely helpless. He was flung to the floor. The cords were wrenched from his pocket and used to bind him. He was gagged with a sleeve plucked from his own Chinese blouse.

Chapter XVII. BOTEZUL TAKES CHARGE

THE lumbering Botezul, saying nothing, untied King Dal Le Galbin, who had already regained his senses. Then Botezul got down on all fours and put his forehead against the floor.

"I suspect this man, Your Highness," he mumbled. "I watch him."

King Dal Le Galbin bent over shakily and plucked at Botezul's shoulder, indicating that he was to get to his feet.

"You shall be amply rewarded for this, my good man," he said earnestly. "I did not have the slightest suspicion of this fellow."

"Him no good," muttered Botezul.

"So it seems. Will you please summon my daughter and Captain Henri Flancul?"

Botezul went away, but was back shortly, trailing like a big, good-natured black dog behind the excited Princess Gusta and Captain Flancul.

In a few words, King Dal explained what had happened; finishing: "This Yankee flier was obviously attempting to seize me."

Botezul lumbered forward abruptly, rumbling, "Look, Your Highness!"

The dark giant rubbed briskly at the freckles on Renny's countenance. These began to come off.

Then he secured a handkerchief and rubbed at Renny's hair. Color on the handkerchief indicated Renny's red hair was dyed.

"See?" said Botezul. "Him got makeup on."

Captain Henri Flancul cried out and darted forward. He scrubbed the rest of the freckles off Renny's face, then covered Renny's red hair. Kneading and twisting the engineer's face, he made it assume its habitual expression of unutterable gloom.

"I know this man!" Captain Flancul snarled. "He is one of Doc Savage's five assistants!"

The words had a remarkable effect on attractive Princess Gusta. At first she paled slightly, then color swam over her face; her lips parted, and she gasped, "This man was with Doc Savage—when they put off in that launch from the Seaward."

"That is right," Captain Flancul told her.

"Then Doc Savage may be—alive?"

"I hope not," Captain Flancul gritted.

This remark caused Princess Gusta to give Captain Flancul a stare of unutterable loathing.

Renny interrupted proceedings by stirring and groaning, endeavoring to sit erect. Botezul loomed over the engineer and jammed him back to the floor.

"This man, him belong to gang of men you no like?" Botezul queried, indicating Renny.

"Yes, Botezul," explained King Dal Le Galbin. "This fellow is one of a group of five men who assist an American known as Doc Savage. This Doc Savage is helping the revolutionists to fight us." Botezul pushed Renny back on the floor again as the engineer sought to arise.

"Why not make this feller tell how we can get hands on Doc Savage?" questioned the dark-skinned giant.

"

Ma bucur!" exploded Captain Henry Flancul. "Excellent! A good suggestion. We can make this spurious Champ Dugan tell us whether Doc Savage is alive, and if so, force him to reveal how we may trap the bronze man."

"I do not approve of that suggestion," Princess Gusta said abruptly.

Captain Flancul frowned. "Why not, Your Highness?"

"I do not like the idea of torturing this man. He will not talk otherwise."

"You need not concern yourself about the dog!"

"Yes, Gusta," King Dal put in. "There is too much at stake to be squeamish. The man will not die, I promise you, until he has stood trial, but we may have to use a certain amount of violence to make him talk."

"Me make him talk!" muttered Botezul.

Princess Gusta included Botezul in a glance of disapproval.

"What is the matter, Gusta?" the elder Le Galbin demanded sharply. "Don't you want this Doc Savage captured?"

The young woman flushed slightly.

"What a question!" she snapped, then pointed at Renny. "How do you propose to loosen his tongue?"

Captain Henri Flancul answered this. "The old citadel on the outskirts of the city has, in its dungeons, a number of devices which we might use."

Princess Gusta shuddered. "That horrible place! They are medieval torture chambers!"

"The citadel, Your Highness," Captain Flancul reminded her, "was built by the first Le Galbin to be a king of Calbia. I suggest that we load this man in a car, take him to the citadel, and let Botezul work upon him."

"

Da!" rumbled Botezul, eagerness in his voice.

Renny, glowering at Botezul, resolved to settle with the swarthy, ugly giant if it was his last act.

"We will go to the citadel," King Dal Le Galbin concluded finally.

"I will go along," the young woman asserted.

There was some argument about that, but Princess Gusta was adamant in her insistence and won out. Renny was carried down to the castle garage, in another wing of the building, securely bound and gagged, and placed in a large sedan. The car curtains were drawn.

Captain Flancul drove, and Botezul occupied the front seat beside him. King Dal Le Galbin and Princess Gusta stayed in the rear with Renny.

Two towing cars, filled with palace guardsmen, formed an escort.

THE night was not especially clear. The rain, which had started on Renny's first night in Calbia, had continued intermittently, and judging from the overcast condition of the sky, there would be more of it.

The headlights of the sedan slammed whitely against the houses which walled in the narrow San Blazna streets. The engine seemed unusually noisy. After numerous turns, the machine left the city limits and turned onto a rough road.

Renny lay motionless on the rear floorboards; there was nothing else he could do. He recalled having seen the citadel numerous times before.

The structure was round, of graystone, and from a distance might have been mistaken for a water tank. It was hundreds of years old, however, and the huge-fisted engineer did not doubt but that its dungeon held hideous instruments of torture. Medieval times in Calbia, if he remembered his history, had been extremely productive of such devices.

Moreover, Renny had heard a report that political prisoners were confined to the citadel, where they were subjected to treatment that was far from kind.

Perhaps Baron Mendl's invention was even kept there. That was a thought. The truth was that Renny had seen nothing during the last few days to prove that the ruling house of Calbia was in control of Baron Mendl's device.

Furthermore, it had struck Renny that King Dal Le Galbin was as well-liked as the average monarch could be. Certainly there had been no evidence of cruelty in his character.

But perhaps what was to transpire at the citadel would show the other side of the sovereign's character—a side which Conte Cozonac had insisted was existent.

Renny never did learn what treatment his captors contemplated handing him at the citadel—for, in the front seat, things suddenly happened. Huge Botezul leaned forward abruptly, switched off the engine and yanked on the emergency brake.

Captain Flancul snarled, "What are you—"

Botezul's enormous fist in Captain Flancul's mouth stopped the words. The blow not only silenced Captain Flancul, but it also rendered him senseless. He slouched over, unconscious.

The car, momentum snubbed by the brakes, slewed crosswise on the road, and stopped with the front

wheels resting in a shallow ditch.

The huge Botezul whirled, smashed the window which separated the driving compartment from the rear, and swung a fist at the king's jaw.

The ruler of Calbia ducked, got his jaw out of the way, but took the force of the blow on his forehead. He sagged back, stunned.

Princess Gusta wrenched at a hand bag which she was carrying, got it open and hurriedly put a hand in it. But Botezul, grasping, tore the bag out of her hand.

Noting that the bag held a small pistol, Botezul threw it out of a window.

The escort cars had stopped the instant they saw something was wrong. Nattily clad guardsmen piled out and, guns in hand, raced to the aid of their monarch.

Botezul leaned out of the car. He had some small objects in his right hand, but in the darkness their exact nature could not be ascertained. He flung these toward the approaching guardsmen. The latter promptly began collapsing. Once down, they lay still, showing every indication of being in a deep sleep.

Botezul watched until he was sure the last guardsman was out of commission; then he got up, hauled Renny from the rear of the car, and began untying him. The gag was removed from his mouth.

"Dang you!" Renny snarled. "I dunno what your game is, but it's gonna be too bad for you if I get any kind of a chance to fight!"

Princess Gusta, whipping out of the machine on the opposite side, tried to run away in the darkness. Botezul overhauled her with great leaping strides, gathered her up and brought her back, kicking and squealing. The young woman's strength, not inconsiderable, had no effect on the huge fellow.

With Princess Gusta clamped tightly in his arms, Botezul looked at Renny. The glow from the automobile headlight illuminated him faintly.

Renny did not look at Botezul; he was staring at the recumbent guardsmen. Being on the sedan floorboards during hostilities, he had not seen what had occurred.

Suddenly, coming from all the darkness, its source traceable to no particular spot, there drifted low trilling sound. It filtered up and down the musical scale, melodious but without tune. The quality of ventriloquism it seemed to possess was eerie.

"Doc!" Renny howled, astonished.

The big-fisted engineer knew this sound was peculiar to Doc Savage alone—the small, unconscious thing which the bronze man did at various times. Just now the strange trilling probably meant that Doc was elated.

For Botezul, the swarthy giant, was Doc Savage in disguise.

Doc waved a dark-dyed hand in the general direction of the guardsmen. "Anaesthetic balls," he explained. "The wind blew the stuff away from us and over them. They'll be unconscious for an hour, at least."

"Holy cow!" Renny got to his feet. "That brawl, in the street, when you stepped in and made a hit with Princess Gusta—"

"Was deliberately staged," Doc explained. "The beggar who hit you with the crutch and the others were agents loaned to me by Conte Cozonac. They were members of the revolutionary party"

Princess Gusta, still in the grip of Doc's corded arms, stopped struggling. Doc planted her on her feet.

"You—are Doc Savage!" she gasped.

By way of answering her Doc removed a black wig, the coarse hair of which had hung down and concealed the unchangeable flake-gold of his eyes. From either nostril he removed a metal shell which had given a flatness to the whole nose. Wax padding came out of his mouth.

"The skin dye," he told her, "has to be removed with a chemical."

"Oh!" gasped the young woman. "You are really—Doc Savage!"

Then she burst into tears, just as she had done aboard the liner Seaward upon learning of Doc's supposed untimely demise when the mystery blast destroyed the launch.

Renny rubbed his wrists where Botezul—Doc—had tied him.

"What was the idea of grabbin' me?" he asked ruefully. "I figured I was gettin' along pretty good."

"You were," Doc assured him. "But did you know that Captain Flancul had a heavy guard posted at his door?"

"Heck, no!"

"There was one. By grabbing you, I believed it possible to get the king, Princess Gusta, and Captain Flancul in a group."

"It worked out that way."

Doc nodded. "It was my idea to use anaesthetic gas on them. But Captain Flancul suggested this trip to the citadel, so I merely postponed seizing them until we had left town."

Renny sighed. "Well, we've got our three prizes, Doc. That means the trouble in Calbia is just about over."

"You may be a little optimistic," Doc told him.

"Whatcha mean?"

"Johnny and Long Tom are doing a little scouting quite a few miles from this spot," Doc explained. "You see, I've been keeping in touch with them. Their report may give you quite a shock, Renny."

"Shock! What kind?"

Doc nodded toward the sedan. The cars on his features, put there with makeup, did not seem nearly so fearsome as they had before.

"We'd better get out of here with King Le Galbin, Captain Flancul and the princess. Time for explanation later."

Princess Gusta Le Galbin climbed meekly into the machine when told to do so. With Doc at the wheel, the car moved away, leaving the vicinity of the unconscious escort of guardsmen.

Chapter XVIII. THE TERROR CACHE

LONG TOM, the electrical wizard, had a face so pale that it was inclined to show up in the darkness like the features of a ghost. To get rid of this undesirable phenomenon, he had rubbed the end of a burned cork over his lineaments, darkening them. As an added precaution, he wore dark clothing.

Johnny, the gaunt geologist and the man of big words, also wore dark attire.

The two men were picking their way furtively down a Calbian mountain road. Fir trees were thick along the way, their branches almost interlacing overhead. This, coupled with the cloudiness of the night, made it very dark.

Somewhere in the distance, a dog barked. Long Tom and Johnny both came to a prompt halt. They knew that a man, prowling through the night, is prone to stop and listen to such sounds, especially if his nocturnal mission is of a sinister nature.

The electrical wizard and the geologist were following such an individual. It was Muta they trailed.

Long Tom and Johnny had been assigned their task before Renny flew away from Conte Cozonac's camp to play the part of Champ Dugan, the daredevil Yankee air man from China. Doc Savage's instructions to them had been simple.

"Just hang around, wandering over the countryside, letting no one see you—and turn up whatever you can," the bronze man had suggested. "Do not go near the revolutionist army or Conte Cozonac."

"Look for some sign of Baron Mendl's doo-dad, eh?" asked Long Tom.

"That's it. And anything else interesting."

For two days, it had seemed to Long Tom and Johnny that they were going to unearth nothing of value. Then, only a few hours ago, they had discovered Muta. The ugly dwarf had apparently been in hiding near the camp of the revolutionists.

Muta's lurking place was in a rather substantial farm house which, among other things, was equipped with a telephone. Whether or not Muta had received orders over this phone and was now on his way to comply with them, Long Tom and Johnny did not know. But they were certain that Muta was bent on some mission which boded no good.

The dog stopped barking and the footsteps ahead resumed. The dwarf was moving onward. Doc's two men trailed him.

"My hypothesis is that yonder renegade is a spy," offered big-worded Johnny in a wispy whisper.

"Yeah," Long Tom agreed. "He's probably been scoutin' the revolutionist forces. Man, I sure favor crawlin' that sawed-off runt!"

"Doc advocated that we refrain from apprehending him," Johnny said regretfully.

Slung in a knapsack on his back, Long Tom carried a portable radio outfit. It was with this that he had informed Doc Savage—who was playing the part of Botezul, the swarthy Calbian mountaineer—that Muta had been discovered. Doc had returned instructions to follow Muta, noting every move the thick, squat rascal made.

The road which Long Tom and Johnny trod became narrower, rough, and more steep. Rocks underfoot, scattered at first, grew more plentiful.

"Wait!" Long Tom breathed. "We're liable to step on a rock and make a noise that the runt will hear."

From the back pack which held the radio set, Long Tom produced a pair of headphones and another apparatus which, when assembled, bore likeness to nothing so much as a college cheerleader's megaphone. This latter was actually a highly sensitive microphone which, connected to the audio-amplifier in the radio receiver and certain supplementary coils and tubes, was set into the headphones.

With this contrivance Long Tom could pick up faint sounds over a long distance.

The two trailers dropped back nearly a hundred yards, and followed Muta by the aid of Long Tom's electrical "listener" alone. Even if they would inadvertently turn a pebble, Muta was unlikely to hear it.

"I wonder what's become of Monk and Ham?" Long Tom pondered.

"Problematical," murmured Johnny.

"We haven't seen 'em since they jumped out of the plane with parachutes before we landed at Conte Cozonac's camp," Long Tom breathed. "Monk had the pig, Habeas Corpus, under his arm. I hope they got

down all right."

"You have my concurrence in that wish," returned Johnny.

"Blast it!" Long Tom whispered. "We don't even know what mission Doc sent 'em on. I guess it's just as well. If the Royalists should grab us, we couldn't tell 'em where Monk and Ham are. That was a good idea of Doc's—all of us workin' separate."

"What about our nefarious quarry?" Johnny queried.

"Muta? He's still goin' straight ahead."

Then they fell silent, since it was not particularly diverting to conduct a conversation in whispers. They dared speak no louder, lest they be heard.

The clouds parted overhead momentarily, allowing silver moonlight to flood down, and this illuminated the roadway which they were traveling. It was a strange sort of a thoroughfare. What they had thought merely a profusion of pebbles they saw now was actually the remains of a cobblestone pavement, which exposure through countless years had caused to separate, the mortar disintegrating. The road did not show signs of having been used much. Certainly, no wheeled vehicles had traveled this way for a long time.

There was timber about them, a thick tangle of woods. The ancient road twisted through this, mounting steadily upward.

Long Tom moved to one side, climbed atop a great boulder and strained his eyes to peer through the moonlight.

"

Pss-st!" he hissed softly, summoning Johnny. "Look up on the mountain above us. You can just make it out. Quick, before a cloud comes over the moon."

Far above them was a ragged hump, unmistakably manmade in its contours. They could tell little about it, except that the edifice was of stone.

Clouds shuttering out the moonlight allowed no further inspection.

"Wonder if that's where we're headed for?" Long Tom pondered. His guess was correct. Muta led them directly to the place.

Long Tom and Johnny had thought at first that the shapeless structure was a ruined castle or an ancient fortress. It turned out to be neither of these.

The building was a great, rambling stone house, surrounded by a high wall. This wall had been torn away in places, apparently by Calbians who wanted to use the stone in other structures, and this had given the ragged outline as viewed from below.

The house itself was not abandoned, but in a fair state of repair. The wall must have been torn away long ago, during a period when the place was untenanted.

Back of the house, Long Tom and Johnny perceived, as the shifting clouds let through more moonlight, a stretch of flat country which, in the western United States, would have been called a mesa. The lighted windows of a few farmhouses glowed on this plain.

Windows of the rambling old house were also alight. An opening door made a rectangular panel in the darkness, and Muta, entering, was silhouetted in it.

"This is where he was headed for!" Long Tom darted forward. "Come on! Let's see what's up."

They ran forward, glancing frequently upward to make sure no telltale moonlight was likely to break through the clouds. When the clouds did part, the two men dropped flat in the grass which, luckily, was knee-high.

The stone house had wide eaves, and these offered a shelter. They crouched close to the cold stone and shifted sidewise to a window. The room beyond was empty, so they tried another. Then they saw Muta.

The dwarf had sprawled in a chair. Sitting thus, he seemed almost as large as a normal man, due to his tremendous torso.

Three other men were present in the room. They wore the uniforms of Conte Cozonac's revolutionary party, complete even to the red-ball insignia on the right sleeve.

Long Tom and Johnny studied these men intently.

"Say, I've seen them before," Long Tom breathed, softly. "They were in the revolutionist camp the night we landed. Blast it, one of 'em is a member of Conte Cozonac's staff."

"Spies!" Johnny whispered.

"Sure, imagine that! Say, the fat Conte Cozonac is gonna have a spasm when he learns one of his own staff is a Royalist."

The two prepared to listen in, having acquired by now a slight understanding of the Calbian language. They did this simply by creeping to the door and clamping the mouth of Long Tom's supersensitive pickup microphone to the keyhole. The lock of this door had been made for a medieval iron key, and the keyhole was large.

Muta was speaking.

"I tell you we must find how Doc Savage caused the explosion to occur a quarter of a mile behind his plane that night," the dwarf shrilled.

"I have put many questions to different soldiers in the revolutionary army," said a voice which Long Tom and Johnny recognized as belonging to the member of Conte Cozonac's staff. "When he landed, Doc Savage would offer no explanation. No one could give any information."

Muta swore fluently, and said, "This matter is of vital importance. If Doc Savage has a defense against our weapon, we must know what it is."

"An effective defense against the device might conceivably defeat our cause," agreed the staff officer.

Long Tom put his lips close to Johnny's ear and breathed, "They're discussin' the contraption that causes the mysterious explosions—the mystery weapon that Baron Damitru Mendl invented."

"We must dispose of that bronze man," Muta grated. "He is entirely too dangerous."

"That should be simple," replied the member of the revolutionist staff. "We have merely to tip King Dal Le Galbin that Doc Savage and that engineer who has the enormous hands are both in the royal castle at San Blazna."

"True," admitted Muta. "But Doc Savage was tricked into coming from the United States to do certain work for us. We must not interfere until it is completed. He suspects nothing. It will be a simple matter to slay him when the time comes."

"I hope so," mumbled the other, "but this Doc Savage is more clever than it seems possible for any man to be."

These words were giving Long Tom and Johnny something to think about. Muta, so they had thought, was one of the men of King Dal Le Galbin, yet the fellow knew Doc Savage was in San Blazna, knew Renny was there, too—and he had not divulged the information to the Calbian monarch.

"This is gettin' me dizzy," Long Tom breathed.

"Doc tricked into coming from New York!" Johnny whispered, forgetting his large words. "I don't get it, either!"

Inside the stone house, Muta resumed speaking.

"There is another point which worries me. What has become of the rest of Doc Savage's men?—the homely chemist, Monk; that lawyer, Ham; and the other two, the geologist and the electrical expert?"

"They seem to have disappeared completely," said the staff officer.

"I do not like that!" Muta growled. "Those men are all clever individuals far above the ordinary in intelligence. Working with that bronze man who is actually a mental wizard and a muscular marvel, as the Americans claim, they form an extremely dangerous combination."

"But Doc Savage does not suspect the true situation," the staff member reminded.

"And lucky for us that he does not," Muta agreed.

There was a brief pause in the conversation. Long Tom and Johnny spent the interval wondering just exactly what it was all about. Their theories were completely upset.

Instead of Doc Savage simply coming to Calbia to remove a tyrant king from power so that he himself might assume the throne until the country was peaceable, there seemed to be more mysterious ramifications. Doc, it appeared, instead of being completely in command of the situation, had been out-guessed, was being used as a tool by the sinister dwarf and whoever was associated with him.

"Blazes!" Long Tom breathed. "I'd better try to raise Doc by radio and warn him."

"Wait," Johnny whispered back.

Voices within the house had resumed.

"How is the work progressing?" Muta inquired.

"In excellent fashion," said a voice—it was not the staff officer this time, but one of the others. "Nearly one hundred of the devices are ready for use. As you know, we were awaiting certain ingredients necessary for the mixing of the explosive. The last complete machine we wasted in a futile attempt to destroy Doc Savage's plane."

"The materials for the explosives came?" Muta demanded.

"Last night. They were brought by plane."

"Nearly a hundred of them ready, eh?" Muta laughed harshly. "They will make short work of this revolution. It is to be regretted that we will have to use them, though. They should have been held in reserve for the future war—the war which we will wage once we have control of the government of Calbia."

One of the other men made a tongue-clicking sound of sympathetic agreement, and said, "If we use them now, the countries adjacent to Calbia will learn of this terrific weapon which we have in our possession."

"That might be an advantage, after all," Muta replied. "Knowledge of the existence of this weapon will play upon the minds of the people of those countries, and perhaps make our conquest much easier."

Long Tom, whispering close to Johnny's ear, advised, "What we've heard gives us the motive behind all this. The ring is tryin' to seize the throne of Calbia. Then they plan to gobble up the surroundin' countries, using their infernal machine as the power."

"The villain at the head of it must have a Napoleonic complex," Johnny replied.

In the house, Muta grunted, "I think I'll look at the machines you have ready."

There was a scraping of chairs, a clatter of feet, then a thump, the nature of which Long Tom and Johnny failed to comprehend immediately.

Long Tom scuttled to the window and looked in.

The room was empty.

Chapter XIX. THE SHOCK

JOHNNY joined Long Tom, and together they swept the room with their eyes. They did not discern a sign of the late occupants.

"Let us invade the premises," the bony geologist breathed. Long Tom said, "We oughta get Doc on the radio an' tell him—"

"Later," said Johnny, who had spent the last few days in wearisome scouting, and who now craved action. "I'm going in."

"I'm with you, guy!"

They tried the door; it was not locked, and opened without undue effort. On tiptoe they crossed the floor, then circled, searching.

"That thump we heard—it must've been a secret door," Long Tom whispered.

The electrical wizard sank to his knees and began to scrutinize the boards of the floor. Johnny, using his monocle magnifier, inspected the thick stone walls. It was he who found the concealed door.

Cleverly made, the panel resembled the stone of the walls. He grasped rough ends of the rock, tugged, and only succeeded in breaking his finger nails.

Long Tom rapidly thrust and yanked at other flinty projections, one of these proving to be a catch. Pushing it, the panel flew open. It was perhaps two feet wide and about four high.

A man was standing on the other side of the panel—the staff officer. He had a gun in one hand, and the instant the panel opened he shot Johnny at a spot six inches above the belt buckle. Johnny grunted loudly, folded his bony frame in the middle, jackknife fashion, and fell to the floor. He rolled, kicking and squirming.

The staff officer then swerved his gun at Long Tom.

The electrical expert hurled the megaphonelike pickup mike which he was carrying. Hitting him squarely in the face, the device upset the fellow. His arms flailed out, and he fell backward down a flight of narrow, steep steps, which descended from the secret opening. He screamed once on the way down, and his gun discharged twice.

With a flying leap, Long Tom went after him. He landed on the fellow, feet-first; but there was no need of that. The officer had cracked his head on the way down, and was out cold.

Johnny appeared at the top of the steps, still doubled over. He wobbled half the way down, fell the rest of the distance, and, remarkably enough, hit on his feet.

"Oh-h-h!" he groaned, both skeleton-thin arms wrapped across his chest. "I've got on one of Doc's bullet-proof vests, but darned if it feels like it helped much."

"You should have some flesh under the vest for a pad," Long Tom snorted.

Leaning down, he cracked the staff officer over the head with the fellow's own gun to prolong unconsciousness. Then he lunged down a passage which angled away to the left.

Unbending himself a little, Johnny followed Long Tom. They ran twenty feet, turned a corner, came to a stop.

A wall of mortared stone blocked their progress. Outwardly, the place seemed a blind panel.

"There must be another hidden door somewhere!" Long Tom rapped.

While his words still echoed, the floor dropped from under their feet. With a wild spring, Johnny sought to reach solid footing. He failed. For the whole length of the passage, the floor simply folded like a dropped leaf.

They fell no more than six feet, and hit water. Down they went, well over their heads. When they came up, sputtering and splashing, it was to find themselves in intense darkness. The trap door of the passage had closed over their heads.

Soon afterwards, there was a loud splashing—a roar of incoming water near by. They could plainly feel the swirl of the current.

"They got this thing fixed so they can flood it with water!" Long Tom yelled. "Man, are we in a jam!"

"Come!" Johnny barked. "Let's get to the far end of this thing."

They stroked furiously.

"You've got—a grenade?" Long Tom puffed.

"Right," said Johnny. "Maybe we can blow the floor out of this pit."

Gaining the extremity of the rapidly filling pit, they flattened against the wall. Grasping rough edges of stone, they hauled themselves up as far as possible out of the water, reasoning that the shock of the air would be less violent than the concussion made by the water. Handkerchiefs were ripped in half and stuffed into their ears.

Then Johnny threw his grenade. The concussion from the explosion was so terrific that their ears temporarily ceased to function, despite the precaution of the handkerchief. Their bodies felt as if numberless axes, chopping simultaneously, had tried to remove their flesh.

The water shoved up over their heads. With what strength they could muster, they stroked forward. The trap door floor at the far end had been ripped open. Grasping the shattered edges, they clambered through, stumbled to the stairway, trampled over the unconscious form of the staff officer, and mounted.

"We're gonna—make it!" Long Tom gulped.

They staggered out into the upstairs room.

Two tear-gas bombs landed in front of them and opened with a sound which they barely heard, due to the effect of the grenade on their ears.

Muta had thrown the gas missiles from the door.

Long Tom and Johnny had no defense against the tear gas. Blinded, they tried to find the door. Since they were without the use of their eyes, they failed to put up much of a fight, as Muta and his companions, protected by gas masks, seized and bound them.

Thirty minutes elapsed before Long Tom and Johnny could use their eyes with any degree of success. The tear gas was not of the efficient type used by the American police, but seemed to contain ingredients other than the usual xylol bromide. It made them violently ill for a time. The staff officer had been revived. He stood with the stunted, evil Muta and the others, and scowled at the two prisoners.

Muta, puffing out his over-developed chest, jeered, "It seems that we meet again, and—"

"Dry up, you freak!" Long Tom gritted.

Muta's tone changed to a snarl as he continued where he had been interrupted: "—and I am to have one more try. I am disposing of you gentlemen. Listen, I will make you a proposition."

Long Tom blinked. "What?"

"If I fail to get rid of you this time, I will place my person in your hands, to do with as you see fit."

"Yeah," Long Tom sneered. "You'd do that!"

Muta shrugged.

Long Tom winked his still-aching eyes rapidly for a time, then for lack of anything else to say growled a threat. "It isn't lucky for yahoos like you to crack down on Doc Savage's friends."

"I am stricken with terror!" Muta laughed, and shivered dramatically.

"Which shows you don't know Doc Savage well enough yet," Long Tom told him grimly. "Furthermore, Conte Cozonac and this rebel army will also start huntin' for you if anything happens to us. You aren't liable to get away from 'em."

At this, Muta went into a gale of laughter. His mirth spread to the staff officer and the others. They all cackled like guineas.

"What's the joke?" Long Tom demanded.

"Wait," Muta suggested, and consulted a large turnip of a watch he drew from a pocket. "Yes—wait about five minutes."

No more was said during the interim. It was raining again. The drops pattered on the roof, and streams running from the eaves made sobbing and gurglings which, under the circumstances, struck Long Tom and Johnny as altogether unpleasant.

A rumble, hollow and reverberating, broke out in the distance. It was not thunder, but the noise of cannonading, as the revolutionist army and Royalists fought.

Footsteps splattered moistly outside. Muta himself opened the door.

Conte Cozonac walked in.

Long Tom and Johnny stared at the fat leader of the revolutionists with popping eyes. Conte Cozonac was probably the last person they had expected to appear.

"Look what we have here," Muta grinned, and waved a short arm at the two captives.

"What happened, Muta?" Conte Cozonac demanded.

Long Tom gazed blankly at Johnny. The skeleton-thin archaeologist returned the look.

Conte Cozonac and Muta were co-conspirators!

In staccato Calbian, Muta told Conte Cozonac what had occurred.

The bulbous rebel chief scowled blackly throughout the recital. Then he stamped over and stood, various of his bulges shaking with rage, over Long Tom and Johnny. His usual trilling and cackling laughter was markedly absent.

"I want certain questions answered," he grated. "First, where are Doc Savage's other two men, Monk and Ham?"

"Blessed if we know," Long Tom retorted—truthfully.

The fat man teetered on his heels. His face was a study in rage and villainy.

"I am not going to try any melodramatic deceit," he said grimly. "You two fellows are to be shot; but first, you are going to tell me where my men can get Monk and Ham."

Long Tom wet his lips. "So you think."

With a swift gesture for such a fat man, Conte Cozonac kicked the electrical expert in what is probably the tenderest part of the human body—the throat.

Long Tom moaned and made hacking sounds, and groveled on the floor, but could do nothing because of his bindings. He was tied with braided cotton cords.

"Take them into the underground room," Conte Cozonac commanded.

Muta and the others lifted the two prisoners and bore them to the concealed door, through it, and down the narrow steps.

Conte Cozonac, following, snarled, "They must be disposed of, but first they must answer my questions."

Chapter XX. TALE OF DECEIT

A FEW miles from the Calbian capital city of San Blazna, Doc Savage was making a statement which did not differ greatly from the latter half of Conte Cozonac's speech.

"First, you had better answer some of my questions," the bronze man was telling Princess Gusta Le Galbin. "Then I will put your mind at rest about your present position."

King Dal Le Galbin and Captain Henri Flancul had regained consciousness, although both were still slightly dizzy from the effects of Doc's blows.

"You have seized us and are going to turn us over to the revolutionists!" the Calbian ruler shouted wrathfully.

Doc Savage ignored him. "Why did you and Captain Henri Flancul come to New York, princess?" he asked.

The young woman studied the bronze man by the glow which the car dashlight diffused backward. The machine was nosing down a little-used country thoroughfare. The rain on the top made sounds like dozens of mice scampering, and the twin windshield wipers swick-swucked in concert. Water was pooled in the road, and flew away in lazy sheets from the impact of the wheels.

"Some years ago, Baron Damitru Mendl invented a fearsome weapon of warfare," the young woman stated. "The plan for that weapon—there was only one in existence—was locked in the vaults of the Calbian war department."

"Conte Cozonac told us that," big-fisted Renny put in.

"There was an understanding with Baron Mendl," continued the young woman. "This weapon was not to be used, or manufactured, except in the defense of Calbia."

"Baron Damitru Mendl had retired from the inventing business?"

Princess Gusta nodded. "He was given his title of baron as a gesture of appreciation for his scientific works. He grew interested in politics and became Calbian ambassador to the United States. He was very efficient."

"In what particular branch of science did Baron Mendl specialize?" Doc asked abruptly.

"A study of light."

"Hm-m-m. The science of light, I thought so. Well, go on with your explanation of why you went to New York."

Big-fisted Renny, listening, would rather have delved deeper into the relation of Baron Damitru Mendl's study of the physics of light to the mystery weapon which he had invented. Renny smelled the beginning of an explanation of the nature of the weird, terrible explosions which destroyed airplanes, boats, automobiles, railway engines, and even men cooking around a campfire.

"Some weeks ago the plans of Baron Damitru Mendl's invention vanished from the Calbian war department vaults," said Princess Gusta.

"Have you any idea who stole the plan?" Doc questioned.

Captain Henri Flancul took it on himself to answer that. "No idea whatever," he stated.

Doc's golden eyes, shifting briefly from the milky mixture of headlight glare and raindrops ahead, rested upon Captain Flancul.

"So you and Princess Gusta came to New York to get duplicate plans from Baron Damitru Mendl. Is that it?" he inquired.

"

Da," agreed the young woman. "Yes. We cabled him, and he said he would give us duplicate plans."

"Holy cow!" Renny rumbled abruptly. "The fat guy, Conte Cozonac, said Baron Damitru Mendl was with the revolutionists."

"Conte Cozonac," Doc said dryly, "was a remarkable liar."

"Before Captain Flancul and myself reached New York—while our liner was still at sea—we received a radiogram from Baron Mendl," Princess Gusta went on. "It informed us that you were aiding the rebels."

Doc watched the road, his metallic features immobile.

"Baron Mendl was wrong. That dwarf, Muta, visited my office disguised as an old lady. He must have deceived Baron Mendl into thinking I was an enemy."

King Dal Le Galbin kept an attentive ear upon the conversation, but was saying nothing.

Captain Henri Flancul occupied a corner of the rear seat, scowling.

"Baron Mendl was murdered before we reached New York," the young woman stated. "We did not get his secret. We determined to seize you, Doc Savage, and hold you. We did not want one of your ability aiding the rebels."

Doc wheeled the car into a side road, guided it carefully through a hundred yards of bad mud, and stopped before a dilapidated hut. The profusion of tall weeds, the lack of beaten paths, indicated that the shack had been abandoned for some time.

"We stop here," he said.

Renny had been thinking things over. Now he emitted a rumble of comprehension.

"I'm beginnin' to see how this stacks up. Holy cow! That lardy lug, Conte Cozonac, and the midget, Muta, must belong to the same gang!"

They got out of the car in a rain that beat their shoulders and ran wetly against their faces.

Doc's bronze hair—he had discarded the black wig which he had worn when disguised as the giant,

Botezul—seemed impervious to the moisture.

"But Doc," Renny continued, "what was the idea of Conte Cozonac tellin' us that string of lies about wantin', our help?"

"He had two reasons, it would seem," Doc replied. "First, by getting into our confidence and making us think that he wanted our help, he was in a position to know our every move, and therefore stood a better chance of disposing of us. Secondly, the clever rascal saw where we could actually be of assistance to him—he wanted us to seize King Dal Le Galbin here, Princess Gusta, and Captain Henri Flancul."

"That fat guy ain't no slouch as a schemer," Renny boomed. "When did you get wise to him, Doc?" "The first definite clue was the attempt to destroy us with the mystery weapon, just before we arrived at the revolutionist military camp. Only Conte Cozonac and his men knew we were coming." They moved on toward the rickety shack.

King Dal Le Galbin, the previous rage now entirely absent from his voice, put a question. "Just whose side are you on in this affair?"

"You might call it my own side," Doc said quietly. "I am here to get this mystery weapon and render it useless."

"You mean—destroy it?"

Doc ignored that. "My other purpose is to stop the bloodshed of this revolution. That can best be done by eliminating the ring-leaders."

"Conte Cozonac and Muta?" the ruler of Calbia queried.

Doc opened the door of the shack. "And possibly some others," he said in answer.

"Others?" the king insisted.

"Conte Cozonac is not a wealthy man, as an investigation of his past life shows," Doc said.

"Muta, the dwarf, is a plain criminal, and not rich."

"I fail to see what you mean."

"These revolutionists have fighting planes and other modern weapons of war. Did they capture them from your Royalist forces?"

King Dal Le Galbin's vehement headshake was visible as Doc thumbed on a flashlight. "They have captured very few weapons," he answered.

"There you are," Doc told him. "Their equipment cost money, a great deal of money. Some man, or men, of wealth are backing them. That man, or men, we must identify and seize."

"Holy cow!" Renny thumped. "Then Conte Cozonac and Muta ain't the big shots behind this!"

Although extremely ramshackle, the hut possessed a waterproof roof, and the interior was fairly dry. The woodwork had been torn out. In one end hay was stored, old and brown hay.

Doc Savage went to this, moved a portion of it aside, and exposed a portable radio outfit.

"I have been coming to this shack at certain hours each day," he advised. "At those times, Monk and Ham make their reports."

"Monk! Ham!" Renny rumbled. "I ain't seen 'em since they left our plane by parachute!"

"They have been keeping under cover."

"Doing what?" Renny asked.

"Trailing Conte Cozonac. That is, they've done it as best they could while keeping themselves out of sight."

Captain Henri Flancul stepped forward, and executed a precise military bow.

"May I," he said, "offer sincere apologies for my past attitude toward you, Mr. Savage? It would seem that in my zeal to aid Calbia I have been opposing one of her best friends."

King Dal Le Galbin drew himself up as if to follow the same procedure as had Captain Henri Flancul, but a thought moved him to pause.

"Why, in view of your knowledge of Conte Cozonac's deceit," he asked, "did you go through with the kidnaping of my daughter, Captain Flancul, and myself?"

Doc was working over the radio set. "That, you will understand later," he replied.

"You mean that the three of us are actually still your prisoners?" the king ejaculated.

"If the fact that you must remain in my company makes you prisoners—yes."

Renny's great voice vibrated in the shack. "Say, Doc, I don't see—"

The bronze man held up a hand, a gesture for silence. Then he flipped a switch which put the radio loudspeaker into circuit. Low, monotonous words came from the speaker.

"Calling Doc Savage—calling Doc Savage—calling Doc Savage."

It was Monk's childlike voice.

Doc cut the transmitter in circuit, adjusted knobs until the radiation was satisfactory, then spoke into the compact mike.

"

All right, Monk," he said.

"

Been tryin' to get you for five minutes," Monk stated excitedly over the air waves. "We been keepin' our eyes on Conte Cozonac. Tonight, he sneaked away from the rebel camp and went to an old stone house on top of a mountain. He met Muta there."

"Yes," Doc said, "but why the excitement?"

"Under that old house somewhere, there must be hidden rooms," Monk explained. "We been eavesdroppin'. This old house is the plant where them infernal machines are bein' manufactured." "Give me the location of the place," Doc directed. "You ain't heard the worst yet, Doc. They've got Long Tom and Johnny." Then Monk rapidly gave the location of the old house. Doc reached for the master switch, which controlled the radio. "Their lives in danger, Monk?" he queried. "Conte Cozonac was goin' to question 'em first—" "Monk, you and Ham do what you can," Doc directed. "Try to hold out, if it won't put Long Tom and Johnny in too tough a spot, until I get there." "You're coming out, Doc?" "Right out." Doc switched off the radio.

Chapter XXI. THE DEATH STEEPLE CHASE

RENNY, long face set, jaw out, lumbered for the door. "My plane—at the airport, Doc! We can use that!" he cried. "Fine!" Doc snapped the lid down on the radio case, then began tearing at the pile of hay in the end of the shack. "It's only a few minutes' run from here to the airport." From the hay, he withdrew one of his metal equipment cases. Renny looked for the identifying number on the case. He knew the numerals on most of them, and the contents each number signified. Number four, for instance, was gas bombs, and thirteen, fittingly enough, was the one which always held Doc's little supermachine pistols and ammunition drums—these were bad luck for any one. But the number had been painted out on this case, the case Doc now held. King Dal Le Galbin demanded, "Do you wish us to go with you?" Captain Henri Flancul said, "I prefer to tackle this thing side by side with Mr. Savage, from now on." "My sentiments also," said the ruler of Calbia. He made a fighting jaw. "It has been a long time since I had any real excitement. I believe I shall get a kick out of this." They ran toward the car, Doc Savage carrying his two boxes—the radio case, and the metal equipment container which bore no identifying numerals. "We will leave Princess Gusta in the car at the airport," he said. "Some of the Royalist army pilots will escort her back to the palace." "You will do nothing of the kind," the young woman declared. "I shall see this thing through with the rest of you." Doc slid under the car wheel, clicked on the lights, then extinguished his own flash, which had been giving illumination. Then he turned in his seat to eye the elder Le Galbin. "You had better convince her that she should remain behind," he suggested. There was argument in the back seat as the car wallowed and moaned through the mud. Rain sheeted the windshield, and the wipers raced until it seemed they would tear themselves off. The machine topped a hill, a sharp little rise, and for twenty feet beyond all four wheels were off the ground. They traveled over black asphalt pavement, which had probably come from Calbian oil wells; there being rich petroleum fields in certain sections of the little kingdom. The car alternately lunged and slackened speed, as straight stretches and curves were traversed. "You, Gusta, are a young lady, and as such have no business with us tonight," the King of Calbia was insisting in the rear. "Rats!" Gusta retorted. "Less than a month ago I heard you say in a speech that women should be allowed to do anything that men do." "That was just a speech," snapped her parent. "Furthermore, it was spoken before the Calbia National Women's Suffrage League, and was just to make them feel good." Doc applied the brakes, and tires shrieked on the wet pavement. The machine skidded, careened into the airport, and excited sentries popped out of their boxes, shouting; "Opriti! Cine este acolo? Stop! Who is there?" Renny barked half a dozen orders, assuming the character of Champ Dugan, the Yankee buzzard from China who was going to do big things with the Calbian air force. Mechanics ran to wheel his plane out of a hangar. Doc and the others got out of the car. The bronze man indicated Princess Gusta. "Is she going?" "It seems she is," her royal parent sighed. "She out-talked me." Renny's big plane, with the Chinese dragon painted upon it, was, fortunately, fueled. A horde of Calbian mechanics wheeled it out into the drizzling rain. Doc took the controls. The engines were equipped with electric starters, operated by dash buttons, and he thumbed the latter. Exhaust stacks spat sparks, then lipped blue flame as the cylinders warmed. The Calbian Royal Air Force mechanics stood around, staring and whispering, no doubt trying to tell each other what it was all about.

Princess Gusta scrambled into the plane, as if apprehensive of being left behind after all. While the engines were warming, Doc clipped the radio telephone headset over his ears, tuned the transmitter to the wave length of Monk's outfit, and sent out a call.

"Yes, Doc," came Monk's small voice through the ether.

"We're taking off in a plane and should be with you before long," Doc advised him. "How are things up there?"

"Ham is inside the house and down underground somewhere," Monk replied. "We're using Habeas Corpus to carry messages back and forth between us."

"What about Long Tom and Johnny?"

"Conte Cozonac and Muta are questionin' them tryin' to find out where Ham and I are. Long Tom and Johnny are stallin'."

Doc Savage signaled with an arm thrust through the cockpit window. Mechanics grasped short ropes tied to the wheel clocks and yanked the blocks out. Doc advanced the three throttles, and the engine clatter became a banshee howl.

The plane rolled and the tail lifted. The undercarriage jarred for a while; then that ceased. They were in the air.

The big amphibian headed directly for the mountains. The metal propellers, colliding with raindrops, made a wild note. There were no lighted windows in San Blazna, due to the fear of a rebel air raid. There was only blackness where the capital city lay.

Speaking into the radio mike, Doc queried, "Are you sure Johnny and Long Tom are to be killed eventually?"

The motor roar caused Monk's reply to sound very faint. "Sure. Conte Cozonac and Muta have said so half a dozen times, according to the notes Ham is sending me by Habeas."

"Don't let the thing get too far along before you interfere."

"We won't. I'm behind the wall near the house. Don't dare get any nearer, or they might hear me usin' this radio outfit."

Doc discerned a light in a farmhouse window below, and used it to check the side drift of the plane, after which he consulted the compass, the altimeter, and then corrected their course slightly.

"Can we land near the place, Monk?" he asked over the radio.

"Yeah," Monk replied. "The top of this mountain is flat, kind of a mesa. There's a barley field or somethin' about a quarter of a mile away. We found it when we trailed Conte Cozonac here."

"I'll show a light when we're over the spot," Doc told him. "Return the signal with your flash, indicating the direction of the field."

"Sure."

The plane pointed its baying nose at the heavens and climbed rapidly. The altimeter needle ran past seven thousand feet, ten, twelve. Doc studied the air speed, then the dash clock, calculating their progress.

"Here's something new," came Monk's wee voice. "The pig just brought another note from Ham. Long Tom and Johnny are trying to pump Conte Cozonac. They got the fat guy mad, and he admitted he's not the real brains behind this."

"Did he let slip who his boss is?"

"No."

Once more, Doc Savage eyed the air-speed indicator and instrument board clock. The markings were in luminous paint, readable with the lights off. Doc cut the ignition switches, and all three motors went silent. The plane tilted in a gentle dive.

"We'll glide down, so they won't hear us," he announced loudly, for the benefit of the others in the plane.

Leaning close to the radio mike, he called, "Monk!"

"Yeah!"

"I'm going to blink the plane lights now—the landing lights. Look up and see if you can—"

"Doc! Doc!" Monk yelled. "There was a shot in the house! Something's happened! I'm goin' in!"

After that, no more words came over the radio.

Doc stood the plane on its nose. The gentle hissing of its descent became a mad scream of air past struts and flying surfaces. The altimeter needle retreated so swiftly that its movement was plainly discernible.

"Pitch out a parachute flare, Renny!" Doc called.

Renny boomed, "But I thought—"

"We had bad luck," Doc interrupted. "The thing didn't hold. Monk heard a shot in the house and has gone in to join Ham."

"OK." Renny got a chute flare out of a rack, wrenched the sliding window back, twisted the flare igniter and tossed it out. An instant later they flew through a rain-streaked glare.

The earth was only a few hundred feet below; falling rain made it hazy, unreal. Doc let the altimeter crawl back a bit more, then flattened and swung in a tight, moaning bank.

The flare, following them down, made lustre enough to show the barley field which Monk had mentioned.

The big amphibian all but turned sidewise in the sky as Doc fish-tailed away speed. His passengers gripped the seats to prevent being thrown into the aisles, and they hardly had time to straighten themselves before the ship slammed down, bounced, settled, and, wheel brakes squeaking, slowed to a stop.

Doc cut the engine ignition.

Above the rattle of rain on the skin of fuselage and wings they could hear shots, the rappings drifting from the stone house.

"Out!" Doc commanded.

Renny was first through the cabin door. Captain Henri Flancul followed him, then Princess Gusta and her father.

Before he left the amphibian, Doc Savage scooped up the metal case which carried no telltale numerals. He opened it, worked with the contents, then closed it and took the case to the rear. He thrust the box far back in the fuselage.

It was very dark, for the flare had dropped and extinguished itself. The others had not seen what he was doing.

Renny, curious about the delay, began, "What are—"

"Let's go!" Doc ran forward.

Such was the bronze man's speed that he left the others behind almost immediately. He had his flashlight out, the beam leaping ahead, spotting obstacles. Its radiance was hazy in the rain, a nebulous elongation that might have been a will-o'-the-wisp.

Doc vaulted a fence, tore through brush, then waded through knee-high grass.

The stone house lunged up out of the darkness like an immobile monster. The windows were shapeless red blotches, the door a longer smear of brightness. Doc, aware the sounds had ceased, veered through the door.

No men were in the room. And Doc, looking, saw that all doors were closed.

The pig was reared up against one wall, squealing, sniffing and pawing like a dog. His performance was full of meaning.

Doc went to the spot in which the pig was interested. He took only a split second to locate the secret door.

When the panel was opened, Habeas grunted loudly and dived through. The impact of his feet on the stone steps was a staccato rattle which blended as almost one sound.

Doc raked his flash beam along the passage. At his feet were lumps of rent masonry. Planks had been spread over a hole in the floor—a hole opened by Long Tom and Johnny's grenade, although Doc had as yet no way of knowing that.

The bronze man stepped over the boards bridging the aperture, and went on, coming to the blank end. One glance told him what Long Tom and Johnny had failed to realize: There was no secret door in this end. The stone wall was solid.

Stooping swiftly, Doc grabbed Habeas Corpus by the handiest projection—one winglike ear. Carrying the shoat, the bronze man started back toward the steps.

Somewhere in the passage, there must be a hidden aperture, he thought. Habeas's action had shown that Monk must have gone down the stairs.

Doc eyed the plank-covered hole in the floor, intending to investigate it first. He had taken only a few steps when the hinged floor went down.

Chapter XXII. LOCKED ROOM

PRECEDING the folding of the trap-door floor, there was a faint click and grate of machinery.

Slight this was, but coupled with Doc's quick reasoning that the blind passage had some significance, it was sufficient to warn him.

The passage was narrow. Doc twisted, jumped, and planted his feet against one wall. His shoulders slammed against the other wall. The stone was rough, and he managed to wedge there.

When the trap was down, his flashlight showed the water pit beneath.

He began to work for the stairs. It would have been a slow, laborious task for ordinary muscles, but the bronze man was not in that category. He gained the solidity of the steps just as a slab of stone, ostensibly part of the passage wall, hinged back.

Conte Cozonac looked out. It was doubtful if the fat man even saw Doc, for a bronze mallet of a fist, lashing against his face, was large enough to cover mouth, nose and eyes completely. The revolutionist leader was driven backward so forcibly that his arms whipped around and stuck out straight in front of him.

He went down heavily, and momentum lifted his heels into the air. They came back to the floor with a distinct crack. Crimson seeped from Cozonac's pulped lips and unshaped nose.

The big-bodied dwarf, Muta, was standing behind Conte Cozonac, but managed to dodge with a terrier alacrity. He held a gun, fired it while still in the air. It was an unaimed bullet, and went wild. The report was ear-splitting in the confines of the narrow stone corridor which led, at a gentle slope, downward.

Muta's leap carried him forcibly against the wall, and this ruined his second shot. There was no third. The midget was scooped up, held with a steel-banded efficiency, and the gun was literally

milked from his clutch by bronze fingers.

Carrying the hideous little dwarf, Doc charged forward. He held Muta's gun ready. The bronze man rarely employed firearms in personal combat, his reason being that he considered reliance on a gun bad policy.

The passage veered and opened into a large room. A man in the uniform of a revolutionist waited there, with a pistol. He had the weapon ready, but did not fire at once for fear of hitting Muta, who was clamped in front of Doc's chest, a kicking, screeching, rather ineffective shield. The soldier shifted his pistol, endeavoring to get a bead on Doc's skull.

The gun Doc had taken from Muta whacked an earsplitting thunder. The soldier's arm folded as if it had acquired an extra joint between wrist and elbow. The pistol slipped from between his fingers. Doc, lunging on into the room, swept him aside. He glimpsed Monk, Johnny, Long Tom and Ham arrayed along the wall, each bound securely.

TWO men in the regalia of the rebel forces--the officer who belonged to Conte Cozonac's staff, and one other--were running forward. They grasped automatics which had barrels almost as long and thin as pencils.

The subterranean chamber convulsed again as Doc's captured gun drove lead. The weapon was small in his mighty hand, almost hidden, and its muzzle flame was a maroon spark that jumped out of his fist.

The foremost of the two soldiers screamed, went weak in the knees, and quite pale. Doc's bullet had mangled the fellow's hand against the grip of the automatic. The rebel's pistol hit the floor at his feet, bounced, and spun like a top. The man, interested only in his agony, and goggling at his shattered hand, made no effort to secure the firearm.

The survivor--the staff officer--lost his nerve. The beating he had taken from Long Tom earlier in the night probably helped. He dropped his gun and juttied his arms overhead. The mad desire to get his hands very high caused him to raise up on tiptoe.

"

Nu!" he shrieked. "No! Do not shoot!"

Doc Savage hurriedly searched the prisoners, relieving them of weapons.

Renny lumbered into the underground room, which was lighted from the ceiling by fairly efficient gasoline lanterns. King Dal Le Galbin, his daughter, and Captain Henri Flancul followed. Captain Flancul glanced over the scene.

"

Buna!" he exclaimed. "Good! You have captured them. I will go back outside and see if there are others."

He whirled and vanished down the passage toward the exit.

Doc and Renny hurriedly untied Monk and the others.

"Blast it!" Monk growled. "There's another exit from this place. They used it to get around behind me and Ham. That's how they grabbed us."

"Where is this other exit?" Doc demanded.

Monk pointed. "Over there."

The bronze man moved across the room. Around the walls, long work benches were arrayed. These held metal working machinery and many tools. Some boxes were stacked in a corner, a few of them empty; but some held wire, others metal in the shape of thin sheets and hollow, light tubes. This stuff, Doc decided, was part of the raw material from which the mystery weapons were being manufactured. But there was no sign of the weapons themselves.

Doc found the rear exit. This was in the form of a ladder which led up to a trap door that opened silently under his shove. He clambered out and found himself in a rear room of the old stone house. The trap was in the door.

Crouching there, Doc listened. He heard steps--one man.

"Captain Flancul," Doc called.

"Yes?" came Flancul's voice.

"Find anybody?"

"No one. I shall search outside, though."

Using his flashlight, Doc went over the house rapidly. The furniture was ancient, worn. Some of the pieces possibly possessed great value as antiques.

A cramped chamber held a thin-legged, elaborately carved desk which Doc opened.

Pigeon holes contained numerous papers and letters. More documents were weighted down by a telephone.

Doc moved the instrument aside, and scrutinized the papers. The Calbian language he read fluently. The documents were of an innocent nature, being bills and social letters, but the addresses they bore were interesting.

Every missive was addressed to Conte Cozonac. It appeared that Conte Cozonac owned this house.

Doc's scrutiny was very rapid; he seemed only to glance over the letters.

Then he lifted the receiver from the hook and listened. There was the usual wire humming sound.

Another sound, too! Low and regular, it was not unlike the note of a wind blowing past a transmitter

at the other end of the wire.

A man was listening at the other end. The hissing was his breathing.

Doc was immobile a moment. Then the tendons enwrapping his throat tensed, and he began to speak. From his lips came an exact imitation of Conte Cozonac's bubbling voice.

"Yes?" he said in Calbian, mimicking Conte Cozonac's voice.

With this trick, he had thought to get some information of value from the person on the other end of the wire. Instead, he got a gust of harsh, ugly laughter.

"Stop that!" Doc rapped, using Conte Cozonac's tones of rage. "What do you laugh at?"

The mirth died. There was silence; then the other spoke.

"A score of pardons, Domnule Cozonac. The laughter had nothing to do with you. Is everything all right?"

"All satisfactory," Doc replied. "Have you a report?"

Again, there was pause. During the wait, Doc heard, some distance from the other instrument, the faint challenge of a military sentry.

Then: "No report, Domnule Cozonac," said the voice.

Doc prepared to put more questions, but a click came over the wire. The other had hung up.

Doc hesitated, then replaced his own receiver and went back toward the underground room.

He had recognized the voice on the end of the line. It was another of Conte Cozonac's rebel staff officers. No doubt the man had spoken from the rebel encampment—the challenge of the sentry, faintly overheard, had told Doc that.

The staff officer, Doc reflected, must have been on the wire awaiting a report from his chief.

HAD Doc Savage been present at the other end of the phone line when the staff official hung up, he would have received something of a shock. The staff man was excited. He waved his arms at the others in the headquarters tent.

"The bronze man!" he barked. "Savage must have imitated Domnule Cozonac's voice!"

Outside, weapons rattled and feet tramped. A squad of men was assembling.

"Come!" snapped the staff officer.

He ran outside, the others following him. Three motor trucks rolled up, large, open affairs intended to accommodate troops.

"How do you know it was Savage's voice you heard?" demanded someone.

"It had to be Savage speaking," retorted the other. "Conte Cozonac and Muta and the others are prisoners. It is not likely they escaped."

"But how did you know—"

"No time for talk now, my friend!"

"Load!" crackled a command.

The soldiers clambered into the trucks; the staff officer and his aides followed. Truck engines moaned; wheels threw mud and water; the machines lumbered forward.

They took a road which led toward the old house on the mountain top.

"Hurry!" the staff man snarled repeatedly. "We must reach the place before Savage takes Conte Cozonac away."

The truck engines labored; the vehicles bounced over rocks.

"Can it be that Doc Savage suspects our coming?" demanded a man.

"He does not suspect," grunted the staff official. "We will take him by surprise."

WHEN Doc Savage entered the underground room in the stone house, Long Tom, the electrical wizard, asked, "Learn anything, Doc?"

"This is Conte Cozonac's house."

"Hm-m-m."

"There is a phone upstairs, a direct line, it seems, to the revolutionist camp."

Long Tom squinted. "The phone help you any?"

"No. There was a staff officer at the other end. But I didn't have much luck pumping him."

Ham was roaming among the work benches and packing cases, apparently in search of his sword cane. Usually dapperly clad, the lawyer was now something of a wreck. His coat and shirt were almost torn off; his knuckles were skinned. One eye was in the process of turning black.

"Blast it!" he growled. "What'd they do with my sword cane?"

The homely Monk called, "Come here, Habeas!"

The grotesque-looking shoat trotted up.

"Help the shyster hunt his sword cane, Habeas," Monk directed. "Savvy sword cane? The thing he's all the time tryin' to wallop you with. Go find!"

Habeas trotted off.

King Dal Le Galbin stood near by, keeping an eye on the prisoners. Attractive Princess Gusta was at his side, but her attention was not on the captives. She was watching Doc Savage—when she could do so without the bronze man noticing.

There was in Princess Gusta's eyes, when they rested upon Doc Savage, an unusual warmth. It was barely possible that this was simple gratitude. But the young woman herself was not sure. From the

moment of her first glimpse of the remarkable bronze man, she had been in something of a state of mind.

Princess Gusta Le Galbin, without being aware of it, was a pleasurable victim of the unique attraction which the big bronze man exerted upon members of the opposite sex. This magnetic charm for femininity was one quality Doc had not developed by careful exercise. It came from his personality, unusual physique, and his undeniable handsomeness. It was, in fact, a power which Doc would gladly have gotten rid of. It frequently caused him embarrassment.

There was no provision for any woman, however desirable, to play a part in his perilous career. Captain Henri Flancul came down the stone stairs and into the workroom.

"

Buna!" he said. "Good! There is no one lurking outside. I have searched thoroughly."

"Fine," rumbled big-fisted Renny. "We can look this joint over without bein' interrupted."

"The mysterious weapons are stored here somewhere," gaunt Johnny reminded them.

Captain Henri Flancul clicked off a precise military salute and a deep bow before Doc Savage.

"Conte Cozonac and Muta are prisoners. The mystery weapons are almost in our hands."

"The job is not done, by any means," Doc reminded him.

Captain Flancul saluted again. "True. The master mind must be trapped. But I have confidence that you will seize him."

Doc surveyed the workroom. The walls of stone were broken in the rear by a wooden door of ponderous timbers. A metal bar crossed this, the end being slotted and fitted over a thick steel staple. A padlock, looped through the staple, made a stout fastening for the door.

Long Tom, following Doc's gaze, stated, "I think the infernal machines are behind that door."

At his words, Doc swung to the panel.

Ham, moving to follow him, jerked to a halt and stared. "Well, that pig finally did something worth while," he said.

Habeas Corpus, the grotesque shoat, had succeeded in locating the lawyer's sword cane. Ham secured it hastily.

Doc Savage inspected the lock on the door.

"It won't be difficult to open," he decided.

Chapter XXIII. THE HUNDRED PERILS

DOC got a hammer from one of the benches and went to work on the lock. He struck rapidly; sparks flew; then the steel began to give.

The lock surrendered. Doc removed the bar and gave the door a shove.

"Who's gonna guard the prisoners!" Renny boomed.

Nobody volunteered to stand watch. They were all too desirous of seeing the mystery weapon.

"Monk, Ham," Doc said, "it's up to you."

"Aw," Monk grumbled. "OK, Doc."

He and Ham stayed behind, scowling blackly at the prisoners. The latter were all conscious by now, but had wrapped themselves in a great silence, except for an occasional frightful groan from the pair who had been hit by Doc's bullets.

Doc led the way through the opened door.

The chamber beyond was long and low of ceiling. Extensive racks had been hastily assembled with crude lumber. These were in the nature of cradles—and they held the mystery weapons.

For some seconds, Doc and the others surveyed the place in silence.

"Holy cow!" grunted Renny.

Skeleton-thin Johnny echoed his pet ejaculation, "I'll be superamalgamated!"

"Nearly a hundred of 'em!" Long Tom calculated aloud.

King Dal Le Galbin and Princess Gusta said nothing, but stared at the devices blankly, as if not fully comprehending their nature.

"

Cum—" Captain Henri Flancul began, then changed to English. "What are they?"

"They look like little airplanes," Renny offered.

"They are," Doc said.

"Huh?"

"Aërial torpedoes."

The bronze man stepped close to make an inspection. The tubular bodies of the aërial torpedoes possessed a length of several feet, and were made of some thin, light alloy metal. Attached to the rear were control fins which did not differ greatly from the conventional airplane type.

The wings were not in place, but were bound securely with cords to the torpedo-shaped fuselages.

"Partially dismantled for convenience in moving," Doc decided. "Wings can be attached in a hurry."

Renny began fumbling with one of the devices.

"Careful!" Doc warned.

"Think I want to set it off?" Renny snorted.

He got a small lid open and examined the inside. "These babies run with tiny silenced gasoline

motors," he called.

Doc bent over the aerial torpedo.

"Motors such as these were in use as far back as the World War days. Exhaust is conveyed into mufflers, from which it escapes with comparative silence. In this case there is only a shrill whistling, a sound which your ears failed to detect when the infernal things were sent against us in New York."

"But how are they directed at a target?" Renny demanded. "By radio?"

"Not radio," Doc decided. "The secret of their uncanny accuracy is Baron Damitru Mendl's invention."

His movements careful, the bronze man delved deeper into the sinister contrivance.

The explosive came to light. The stuff was in a metal container, insulated against vibration by spring suspension.

"Compressed trinitrotoluene," he decided.

"What is that?" Princess Gusta asked curiously.

"T.N.T."

"Oh!" the young woman shivered. "Is there much of it?"

"Enough to scatter this end of the mountain over a good deal of Calbia," Doc told her. "But don't worry; the stuff has to be touched off. In the case of these things, that happens when they strike a solid body. There is a simple percussion detonator arrangement."

Doc explored further into the innards of the torpedoes. Intricate apparatus came to light. The mechanism was electrical in nature, but its construction was unlike anything the bronze man had ever seen before. There were vacuum tubes, coils, batteries, amplifying transformers.

Mounted on the belly of each torpedo was a long metal tube. This faced forward and was open at one end. Wires ran from it to the apparatus.

Doc probed in the tube. "Pretty ingenious," he remarked.

"How are the things guided, Domnule Savage?" questioned Captain Henri Flancul

Doc straightened. "Well—" He went silent. Then his weird trilling note came into being, ranged the musical scale briefly, and ebbed away.

"What is it?" Renny boomed.

"Footsteps!" Doc rasped. "Sounds like forty or fifty men!"

Quickly Doc lunged for the steps.

Monk waved at the captives. "I'm gonna tie these cookies up. Then Ham and me can help in the scrap."

"Tie 'em tight."

Monk grinned fiercely. "Won't I, though?" he grated.

Doc mounted the steps, the others trailing him. They got upstairs, then came to a halt.

The night outside was ablaze with flares. Through the rain they could see nebulous, fast-moving figures.

"Got us surrounded!" Long Tom groaned.

Doc reconnoitered briefly.

"They were careful!" he said, sober voiced. "I did not hear their approach in time."

Long Tom breathed, "You mean—"

"We haven't a chance of getting out of here undiscovered," Doc told him.

"They're creeping up on all sides," Johnny imparted, after peering into the rain.

Renny, with the forethought of a man who had been in tough spots before, lunged for the nearest light, intent on extinguishing it.

"Let it burn," Doc told him.

"But it'll show us up!" Renny boomed.

"Dousing the light will tell them we know they are coming," Doc corrected. "Let them get close. We'll use some of these."

From inside his clothing, Doc Savage produced several metal bulbs not quite as large as hen eggs—gas.

"But these devils may have gas masks," Captain Flancul pointed out.

"Their masks will be no protection against this," Doc told him. "The vapor has merely to come in contact with the skin to produce an agony which will render them helpless, although it will do no really serious damage."

Chapter XXIV. THE FIRE

PRINCESS GUSTA said, "Give me a gun, someone!"

Renny passed her one of the pistols which had been taken from the captives below.

"We'd better scatter, and watch from the windows of the rooms that are dark," the big-fisted engineer boomed softly.

He and Captain Henri Flancul scuttled through a door.

Ham and Monk came up the narrow stone steps from the subterranean region.

"Quiet!" Doc warned them. "Keep out of sight."

"How'd you reckon they got tipped that we had grabbed Conte Cozonac and Muta?" Monk breathed.

"That," Doc replied grimly, "is a mystery."

Princess Gusta, standing close beside the bronze man, asked, "Is there—much danger?"

"Enough that you had better go below," Doc breathed back.

The girl shuddered.

"Nu! And get near the explosive in the torpedoes? No!"

"If the stuff should detonate, we would be no better off here. A single one would blow this house to bits."

Then, as a partially reassuring afterthought, Doc added, "But they're not going to explode—let us hope."

For a time there was nothing but the sob and gurgle of the rain. A gusty breeze carried a fine spray inside, and it was like a cold, ghostly touch on their bare skin.

From outside, a voice called in Calbian.

"We know you have discovered our arrival!" the fellow shouted. "You will surrender at once!"

The shout moved Doc to cyclone action. He flashed backward, dived into one of the darkened rooms.

Renny was at the window there. Doc went on to another chamber, and found Captain Henri Flancul.

"The devils!" Captain Flancul snarled. "Something warned them that we knew of their arrival. What was it?"

Without answering, Doc went on to the other rooms. King Dal Le Galbin occupied one, Monk and Ham another. All expressed puzzlement.

Returning to the large chamber, Doc extinguished the lights.

"This," he said quietly, "is going to be tough."

Before many moments had elapsed, the voice outside called out again.

"You have no chance! Messengers have gone back to the revolutionist camp to get field guns! We will blow that house to pieces!"

Doc answered him in Calbian. "Are you forgetting that we have your aërial torpedoes here? They will make short work of your field guns."

The other laughed harshly. "They might, if we used motor trucks or tractors to pull the guns. But we will do nothing so crude as that. The messengers have orders to bring the guns with horses."

Monk, fingering a captured pistol, hopefully inquired, "How about tryin' a shot at his voice, Doc?"

"Sounds as if he were behind the wall, and you won't hit him," Doc replied. "But go ahead.

Shooting has got to start some time."

"I also shall try my marksmanship," gritted Captain Henri Flancul.

Monk and Captain Flancul fired together. Their answer was a jeering yell from outside, then a drumming volley of rifle, machine gun, and pistol fire. The stone walls stopped many of the bullets, but others jangled the glass out of the windows, chewed at the door frame, and made dull poppings as they tore through the roof.

The fusillade gave no indication of subsiding.

"Long Tom!" Doc called.

"Over here!" answered the electrical wizard from below a window.

"Get on to that portable radio transmitter and contact the Calbian army station at San Blazna," Doc directed. "Have them send planes to chase these birds off. Your Highness—to the king—"you'd better help him. Your fliers will be more speedy if they know you are in trouble."

Captain Henri Flancul murmured, "The portable radios that are a part of the listening devices! I had forgotten them. Our position is not so bad, after all."

"Everybody else scatter to the windows," Doc suggested. "Keep under cover, and give an alarm if they try to rush us. We'll save the gas grenades as a last resort."

Several minutes dragged away, the firing continuing its mad rattle. Occasional bullets ricocheted in the room, screaming shrilly. But the defenders were well sheltered, and no one was hit. A portion of the roof, weakened by the leaden hail, caved in.

Monk fired twice through a window.

"No," Doc told him. "Let me do the shooting, unless things get too bad."

From an underarm holster, padded so that its presence was hardly noticeable, the bronze man drew one of his tiny superfiring pistols, the magazine charged with mercy bullets. He chose his time, and fired quickly through a window.

A rebel machine gun promptly went silent.

Princess Gusta, finding herself beside Monk, breathed curiously, "Why did he tell you not to shoot?"

"He doesn't want anybody killed," Monk explained.

"But he is shooting—"

"Mercy bullets," Monk finished for her. "They don't kill anybody—just lay 'em out."

"But they are trying to—"

"Massacre us?" Monk snorted. "Sure, I know. But things never get bad enough to make Doc deliberately kill. I'll say this, though—guys who mix with him kinda have a habit of windin' up as victims of their own traps."

Long Tom and King Dal Le Galbin had found a windowless cubby—a closet off the kitchen—where they

could use the radio without danger of getting shot. The pair approached Doc after a time, crawling along the floor.

"We contacted the Royalist army air station," Long Tom imparted. "A flight of bombing and pursuit planes are gonna take off right away."

"Excellent!" exclaimed Captain Henri Flancul from the darkness nearby.

Doc Savage began shifting from one room to another. Choosing moments when the barrage slackened slightly, he discharged sharp bursts from his superfirer. Almost every burst silenced a besieger. Coming upon Monk in the room where the trap door led to the subterranean rooms, Doc directed,

"Better tag me around, Monk."

"Huh?" Monk was dumbfounded. "Leave here?"

"Right"

"But the prisoners might get away."

"Monk, I have been thinking," Doc said dryly. "The result is a great suspicion. Let's try something."

Together, they worked toward the front of the house. Monk was puzzled, wondering why Doc wanted him to leave the trap-door room.

"What gets me is why they don't charge the place," he grumbled. "You'd think they knew about the gas grenades."

"They probably do."

"For the love of Mike! You ain't kiddin'?"

On the echo of Monk's words all gun fire suddenly ceased.

"What's this mean?" Monk grunted.

"Stand still!" Doc breathed. "I believe my ruse is going to work."

For once, the bronze man's tone held emotions, tension.

"You're talkin' riddles," Monk groaned. "What'd leavin' the room have to do--"

"Wait!"

They did not have long to wait, perhaps a minute.

Then Renny's great voice roared. "Conte Cozonac--Muta--the others! They've all got away!"

Doc Savage seemed to have been waiting for that. He pitched immediately for the other room. His flashlight came out and darted luminance. No one was in the big room.

Doc ran on and wrenched open the door of the chamber which held the trap door--the room which Monk had occupied a few minutes before.

Leaping flames confronted them. The whole floor was afire.

Monk howled, "Where'd they go?"

"Out the back window!" Renny shouted. "That's why the shooting stopped. Their pals were givin' 'em a chance to get away."

Monk started for the door, as if intent on pursuing Conte Cozonac and the other culprits. He changed his mind when the barrage of machine gun and rifle fire suddenly resumed.

Flat on the floor, the homely chemist snarled, "But I tied them birds myself. They couldn't get loose!"

"Well, they did," Renny thumped. "I heard 'em runnin' away."

Monk scuttled toward the secret door which led into the underground regions. "I'm gonna look for myself," he said.

Doc trod at his heels.

Behind them flames crackled and roared. Smoke billowed, and mingled with it was a distinctive odor--a tang of gasoline. The floors of the flaming room must have been drenched with the stuff. That explained the rapid spread of the blaze.

Monk and Doc reached the workroom.

"Look!" Monk gritted, pointing.

The ropes which had bound the late captives were heaped on the floor. They had not been untied.

"Cut!" Monk rumbled, excitement making his usually small voice almost as loud as Renny's roar.

"Somebody used a knife on the ropes!"

Doc Savage went on to the storeroom which held the aerial torpedoes. He moved along the racks supporting the contrivances, scrutinizing each one closely.

Then he sighed an audible relief--something he very seldom did--and said, "Was afraid they might've left a time-fuse connection on one of the things. They didn't."

Monk, gaping at the arrayed instruments of death, failed to share Doc's cheerfulness.

He pointed at an empty rack. "Hey! Wasn't there a torpedo on here?"

"There was."

Monk's jaw sagged, and his hairy hands made nervous gestures, as he asked, "The prisoners took one of the torpedoes with 'em when they escaped?"

"They did," Doc replied.

Chapter XXV. THE PLOT MASTER

MONK was in anything but a happy frame of mind, and Doc Savage's next words did nothing to cheer him.

"The chances are that they took the torpedo with the idea of sending it back at us," offered the bronze man.

Monk experienced difficulty in swallowing. Then events of the last few minutes, upstairs, took on significance.

"Doc, you got me out of the room where the fire is! You did that deliberately, so that they could escape."

"Something like that."

"But why?"

"It looked like the simplest solution of this whole mess."

The chemist groaned audibly. "You're way out of my depth. If this is a solution, well, I-hope it is a solution."

Doc studied the ceiling. It was of concrete, steel reënforced, and the storeroom being rather far underground, several feet of earth lay between themselves and the burning room above.

"The heat won't explode these," the bronze man decided, and touched one of the aerial missiles.

"Maybe not," Monk muttered. "But I know dugouts and how explosives work on 'em. This ain't deep enough to protect us from the T.N.T. in that infernal machine they took away with 'em."

Doc moved toward the stairs, ascended them, and found Renny and Ham endeavoring to extinguish the gasoline fire, but without noticeable success. The hail of lead from the besiegers was a handicap.

"No use!" Renny said hollowly. "The floor is dry, and the gasoline set the stuff off like tinder."

Doc demanded, "Where are the others?"

"Some of 'em are watching from the windows. That crew outside may try to rush us."

From the kitchen Princess Gusta Le Galbin called, "Here are pots and pans and a bucket or two. We can carry water from that trap-door pit underground."

Doc and Monk ran to get the receptacles.

"You," Doc informed the young woman, "are what Americans call a brick."

Monk tried to chuckle, produced an eerie croak instead, and put forth a second effort which was moderately hearty. The chemist was visioning imminent arrival of the missing aerial torpedo. He had seen enough of the things to know what the result would be.

"Doc doesn't pass out many compliments, Your Highness," he told Princess Gusta.

"So I have noticed," she said dryly.

Monk caught her double meaning, but did not feel like remarking upon it. Young women, especially those as attractive as this one, were usually accustomed to flattery of the sort sometimes called "sweet nothings." Doc did not go in for that sort of thing. Monk decided the princess was piqued. They filled the buckets and kettles in the water trap from which Ham had rescued his sword cane, using the aperture opened by Long Tom and Johnny's grenade for the purpose. Transferring the water to the fire was a ticklish, dangerous procedure.

In another part of the house, more of the roof, rent by machine-gun slugs, collapsed. Shot sounds were steady thunder out in the rain.

"We can keep the fire from spreading beyond the gasoline-soaked area," Doc concluded, after watching the effects of their first bucket-brigade effort.

"Wonder why they started the fire?" Monk pondered. "Trying to burn us out?"

"No," Doc told him. "They did it to furnish what you might call a magnet for their aerial bomb."

Monk dropped his kettle. "Huh?"

"The aerial bombs are attracted by heat."

Long Tom appeared in time to hear the last statement. The pallid electrical wizard strained fingers through his hair and shook his head slowly.

"But Doc, I supposed the torpedoes were guided by some radio adaptation."

Doc was silent, seemingly listening.

"Baron Damitru Mendl's invention is an eye which, in connection with the usual relays and mechanism employed in radio-directing, sends the aerial torpedoes toward objects emitting heat," he offered. "You will recall that all of the objects struck in the past were giving off heat—airplane motors, boat engines, motor cars, even a camp fire."

Monk shuddered. "We can't get this fire out. Let's clear outa here before the bomb strikes."

In the pause which followed, the clamor of machine guns and the squeal, rip and bite of striking bullets, appeared to take on a more deadly loudness.

"We couldn't make it," Doc declared quietly. "The gunners are too far away to reach with our grenades."

"Holy cow!" Renny boomed. "How can you take this so easy, Doc? When that thing hits—blooie! It's curtains!"

Doc said, "Take it easy."

"Blast it! I ain't got your nerves!"

Long Tom, his voice strained and shrill, managed a gurgle that was meant for a laugh.

"I'd like to go out knowing more about this eye that Baron Damitru Mendl invented, Doc."

The bronze man knocked shut the door of the room, from which the flames were coming, so that the light from within might not betray them.

"The secret of the eye's ability to literally see and guide the torpedoes to any hot object in darkness, fog or even a smoke screen is found in a well-known scientific principle."

King Dal Le Galbin came crawling in from one of the other rooms, shouting, "They seem to be moving back farther from the house!"

"Gettin' out of the way of the blow-up," Monk groaned silently; then aloud: "What is that scientific principle, Doc?"

"Any object that is warmer than its surroundings gives off beams of radiant heat," Doc stated.

"The heat from an ordinary radiator is an example. These rays penetrate darkness and smoke."

The ruler of Calbia snapped, "This is a fine time to be discussing scientific principles!"

"Dry up!" Monk grunted, their danger making his temper short.

Doc continued as if there had been no interruption.

"The heat rays are invisible to the naked eye, although you can detect them by other methods.

Holding your hand near the source of heat—the radiator for instance—is the simplest way."

"Hurry it up, Doc!" Long Tom groaned. "I know my hair is turning white!"

"Baron Damitru Mendl's eye for detecting these heat rays is simply a photo-electric cell of remarkable sensitivity," Doc finished. "The mechanism which causes the eye to point, like a compass needle, at the source of the rays, is too complicated to explain without illustrative drawings. But it is not new in principle. The eye, due to its astounding sensitivity, will sight a hot object from a considerable distance."

"I know why you pulled that box of lighted stoves along behind our plane," Monk grunted. "The heat was greater than that given off by our plane engines, and thus decoyed the torpedo."

Doc began, "Yes. That—"

He went silent.

Through the gunfire, the hungry bullet noises and the rain came a mutter that all recognized instantly.

A plane motor had started.

"My army fliers!" King Dal Le Galbin gasped.

"Nix," Monk discouraged him. "It's somebody takin' our plane up."

The motor sound drummed, ebbed, rolled out again as the motors were warmed; and after a while it took on a changed note, shriller, more forceful.

"They're in the air!" Renny rumbled.

The multiple bawl of exhausts went faint, then began to grow rapidly louder.

"They climbed for some altitude," Doc decided aloud. "Now they're coming back, probably to turn the aerial torpedo loose."

Renny knocked his big fists together, and that noise was audible over the other uproar.

"Run for it, eh?" he cried. "Maybe we got a chance?"

Doc's one word was an emphatic crash. "No!"

They waited. Doc was motionless, saying nothing more. His five men, having before been in peril as great as this and having seen the amazing man of bronze extricate himself with some bit of master strategy, were not entirely without hope.

But there was always a chance of a slip. Doc, for all of his fabulous ability, was no supernatural personality. This might be the one time his plans would go wrong. The five were undeniably scared.

The plane roar was a thing approaching thunder.

Princess Gusta gripped Doc's arm.

"I guess I'm not a brick, after all," she breathed thickly. "I'm-scared. Awfully scared!"

This was the psychological moment to drop an arm around the young woman's shoulder, and that was conceivably what she expected. Doc disappointed her.

"Cover your head with your arms," he directed. "The blast may knock the roof down on us."

The explosion did do exactly that, but it was a lead-shattered section of the roof which did fall, not the entire covering.

The very air itself took on the aspect of white-hot flame that blinded. There was shock against their eardrums, a slam of air that almost split the membranes. Raindrops, coming downward by the gallons, sheeted on the house and through the holes.

The part of the roof collapsed, its drop a crack and roar.

The shooting stopped as if some magic had caused every gun to run out of ammunition at the same instant.

Silence followed. Probably the flames crackled and some rain fell, but the force of the blast had rendered their ears insensitive to such minor noises.

Ten seconds, twenty, the pause lasted. Then Thump! The sound of a fall was heavy, and not far off.

"The plane motors," Doc said.

There came a crash; then lesser clatters.

"That will be the rest of the plane," surmised Doc.

After a time, the rain grew steady in its washing downpour, but the gunfire did not renew.

Habeas Corpus, the pig, grunted a few times, as if in complaint, until Monk promised audibly to

pull off his oversize ears and make Ham a present of them. Monk sounded like a man enjoying one of the happiest moments of a lifetime, or maybe the most relieved moments.

"The aërial torpedo backfired on 'em, eh, Doc?" Monk asked. "How come?"

"There was," Doc enlightened him, "a metal box in the tail portion of the plane, far back."

"The one you brought from the shack—the case without any numbers on it?" mallet-fisted Renny interjected.

"That's it. It held apparatus which emitted rays that attracted the photo-electric eye in the aërial torpedo."

"Holy cow! But wasn't it hot enough to attract attention?"

Doc shook his head. "The business of these rays is complicated. They go through solids—they're possibly a form of atomic stream. Science really doesn't know much about them. But the rays can be created and sent out without a great deal of heat."

Renny made a long face. "Too complicated for me!"

"Consider these heat rays and X-rays as having somewhat the same qualities. Does that make it simpler?"

"Sure."

"All right. The box in the plane emitted the rays in great quantities. I left it there to draw any aërial torpedo which might be launched at us."

"I getcha."

"But wasn't they afraid the plane motors would draw the torpedo after it was launched?" Monk put in.

"The fire here in the house would be the stronger attraction, especially since the eye was pointed at the fire. But the device in the box was powerful enough to turn the contrivance back." No shots had come from outside. Doc thumbed a flashlight and ranged its beam over those assembled in the room.

"Notice one of our party is missing," he said grimly.

The others stared about.

"Captain Flancul!" gasped Princess Gusta. "Where is he?"

"I didn't see him through the last half of the scrap!" Monk muttered.

"Maybe he was caught under a piece of the roof when it fell!" Renny boomed, and wheeled as if to search.

"Captain Flancul was caught—but not under the roof," Doc said quietly. "The explosion overhead got him."

Princess Gusta brought a hand up and pressed it tightly to her eyes. "Then Captain Flancul—"

"Telephoned from here tonight, while pretending to search, and summoned the party of rebels who are outside," Doc finished.

Renny rumbled rage. "Captain Flancul was the ringleader?"

"Apparently. It was he who freed the prisoners."

"But, Doc, if you suspected—"

"There was no proof against him," Doc explained. "When the rebel party came, it seemed certain that some one had summoned them. Captain Flancul was the logical one to suspect."

"But you let 'im escape!"

"Let him give himself away," Doc corrected. "We know he is guilty. Our job now is to get him."

THE task of getting Captain Henri Flancul proved to be a nearly impossible accomplishment. Nor was it any simpler to seize Conte Cozonac and Muta.

True, enough of their bodies was found to identify each. The trio had been in the death plane. There was not much more to it.

The Calbian Royal Air Force pilots arrived in a dozen pursuit planes and dispersed the revolutionist besiegers, shooting a few and chasing the others into the thick woodland.

A wounded rebel verified what Doc had surmised. Captain Henri Flancul was the instigator of the revolt. He had stolen Baron Mendl's secret from the Calbian war department archives. It was Captain Flancul's wealth which had financed the purchase of rebel arms. He had fancied himself as a modern Napoleon, this Captain Flancul. He had hoped to make himself King of Calbia, then, with Baron Mendl's weird secret as a weapon, had contemplated conquest of surrounding countries.

The injured rebel told something else, too—he explained the fact that the aërial torpedo had been used against certain members of the revolutionist force. The victims had been men who disliked Captain Flancul, men who disagreed with his Napoleonic ideas. The torpedoes had been employed to put them out of the way.

DOC SAVAGE did not become King of Calbia.

King Dal Le Galbin, with fine trustfulness, did offer the bronze man a dictatorship by way of reward. He was even insistent that Doc accept. But, since the revolution collapsed almost as soon as it was left leaderless, Doc declined with fitting ceremony.

Princess Gusta Le Galbin, especially entrancing in a creation of San Blazna's finest dressmaker, was on hand and heard Doc's decision. She went away somewhat tight-lipped, and was secluded in her

quarters the rest of the day, with not even her favorite lady-in-waiting admitted. That night, at the royal banquet tended Doc and his men, even a heavy application of mascara did not hide her red eyelids.

"Doc sure slays 'em," Monk, looking more apish than ever in evening clothes, told Ham.

"It's too bad, you ape," Ham, very natty in like regalia, retorted. "She's a swell girl."

Doc Savage did ask one boon before leaving Calbia—which was granted. A sample of the aerial torpedo was sent to the war department of every country in Europe, together with detailed information as to how objects emitting suitable heat could be used as a decoy for the devices, and thus serve as a defense.

"That gets rid of the terror of the thing," Doc declared.

Terror! The bronze man called the menace of the uncanny aerial torpedoes that, not knowing of the thing which he was next to encounter. Had he been a clairvoyant, he might conceivably have looked at what he was to meet within a few weeks, and consider the menace of the air missiles of comparative mildness.

It began in London. A man came to Doc Savage. He brought with him terror, death, awful mystery—and a story.

Several hundred years ago, there had been a great city in the jungles of Indo China, a populous city, with much wealth. One day, terror walked the streets—a thing so frightful that all the inhabitants fled in frenzy, and no single one ever returned, so that the city stood yet in the jungle, very much as on the day it was abandoned, except for the encroaching creepers and plants. The terror was still there—and something else. That was the man's story. It led Doc Savage and his five aides to the mysterious horror of The Thousand-headed Man. Monk naturally knew nothing of the unpleasantness ahead when he suggested, "Say, Doc, how about takin' sort of a vacation for a few weeks, here in Calbia?" Ham, overhearing the remark, snorted loudly. Princess Gusta, Ham had noted, had turned to the pleasantly homely Monk for comfort. Monk was doing very well as comforter. Giving up the job did not appeal to him.

THE END