

THE STONE MAN

A Doc Savage Adventure by Kenneth Robeson

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Chapter I. BAD MAN FLEEING

SPAD AMES was a man who was an authority on certain subjects, and concerning the matters on which he was posted, he knew just about everything that was to be known, which was undoubtedly fortunate, because otherwise they would have hanged Mr. Spad Ames a long time ago.

His specialty was avoiding the law.

His specialty certainly was not stone men. Not only was he not posted on stone men; he would not have believed such stuff. Spad was a realist.

He would have looked at you with those cold lobster eyes of his and said, doubtless:

"Stone men—ah, get t'hell away from me! That's crazy talk."

The phenomena—the word phenomena was a mild description of it too—came to Spad Ames' attention in a round-about way, and when he was not expecting anything like men of stone. As for the additional developments, which were hair-raising enough to make the stone-man business seem believable by comparison, Spad wasn't expecting those, either.

In keeping with his habit of knowing much about certain subjects, Spad Ames had calculated that the United States Border Patrol plane for that part of the Arizona-Mexico border would be safely grounded in El Paso on Friday. This was not entirely guesswork on Spad Ames' part; he had taken a precaution of pouring acid into the gasoline tank of the Border Patrol plane, so that engine valves and pistons would be eaten into a useless state.

But the Border Patrol dealt unkindly with Spad Ames, and double-crossed him by transferring another plane, a new and fast craft equipped with two machine guns, to that portion of the Mexican Border Patrol.

It was two o'clock in the afternoon when this new type Patrol craft sighted Spad Ames' plane.

"The dirty blankety-blank sons of black-eyed toads," was the mildest thing that Spad Ames said during the next few minutes.

Waldo Berlitz was less voluble, not being a fellow who talked a great deal. Waldo was a thick man and a wide one, and extraordinarily handsome, except that one of his ears was missing. A Mexican gentleman had removed the ear with a sharp knife a year or two ago, during the natural trend of a discussion about the Mexican's missus. A man less of a gentleman than the Mexican would have inserted the blade between Waldo's third and fourth ribs.

Waldo Berlitz was the other half of the smuggling combination of Spad Ames and Waldo Berlitz.

"How fast will this thing fly?" was all Waldo had to say.

Not fast enough, it developed. The Border Patrol craft was a late job, and it began overhauling them.

"There is a cloud over west," Waldo said, pointing. "We better get in it and unload."

Spad Ames nodded grimly. He was scared.

PART of their cargo—two cases of narcotics—would not have been such a problem. The narcotics were in powder form, and they would have spilled the incriminating stuff overboard, thus ridding themselves of the evidence.

The refugee—the, other part of their cargo—was a different proposition. They needed a cloud to get rid of him. The refugee was a poor fellow from Austria who hadn't been able to obtain a visa to enter the United States, so he had paid Spad Ames a thousand dollars to be smuggled in. The refugee crouched in the cabin, pale and somewhat airsick.

The cloud was not large. White and fleecy, it hung all alone in the hot vastness of the Arizona sky. It was somewhat like a lost sheep.

Spad Ames dived his ship into the cloud.

"Work fast," he yelled at Waldo.

Waldo said to the refugee: "Get down on the cabin floor." As the refugee obeyed, Waldo struck him with a monkey wrench, hitting several times so that some of the contents of the upper part of the refugee's head stuck to the wrench.

With great speed, Waldo then rolled the refugee's body through a trapdoor in the floor of the plane. The trapdoor had been put there for the specific purpose of jettisoning cargo according to the old Number One rule of smuggling—first get rid of the evidence. Waldo also hurled the wrench overboard.

There was good reason for Waldo's speed. They needed to get the job done while their plane and the pursuing ship were hidden in the cloud.

The cloud was even smaller than it had seemed, and with sickening unexpectedness, the two planes popped out of the other side.

The pursuing Border Patrol got an excellent view of the body falling from Spad Ames' craft.

An officer even leaned from a window of the Border Patrol ship and took pictures of the scene with a miniature camera. The photograph would show the falling body, and the identification numbers of Spad Ames' ship.

Spad Ames opened and shut his mouth. For suddenly he was sick with terror. Trapped, not for smuggling, but for murder!

Waldo came back and sat down and asked: "Do they use a gas chamber, the electric chair or the rope in Arizona? I've forgotten."

If Waldo was trying to be funny, it was a raw time for a gag, Spad thought.

Spad Ames was a long man who slouched when he walked and frequently glanced back. He had a weather-beaten red face, an unusually high forehead—sign of receding hair, not brains, although he had brains, too—and in addition to the cold lobster eyes, he had a mouth so lipless that, when seen from a distance of a few yards, he appeared to have no mouth. Spad was a bad actor himself, but sometimes he was afraid of Waldo Berlitz, who gave the impression of never seeming to think the way a normal man should. Nothing Waldo planned to do ever seemed to worry him, and he never appeared concerned after he did it.

Spad Ames banked around and sent their plane back into the clouds. The Border Patrol ship fired on them, its machine guns thrusting out long whiskerlike processions of tracer bullets which came disturbingly close.

A cloud game of hide-and-seek then lasted about half an hour.

Spad Ames would have liked to flee toward Mexico; he got no chance. And finally when a faint bank of clouds appeared, far to the north, he made for that refuge in desperation. Luck, which distributes favors evenly to saint and devil, gave them a long start on the Border Patrol plane; their pursuer wandered around in the cloud for some time after they left before sighting them and taking chase.

Spad Ames peered backward, then batted his throttle open to the last notch.

"How many horsepower is this motor?" Waldo asked.

"Six hundred and sixty horses," said Spad. His face was the color of a concrete road.

"Come on, horses!" said Waldo.

The clouds got closer, and so did the Patrol ship. The latter climbed slowly, then suddenly dived, and its machine guns shook their iron rumps and cackled.

The storm of lead caused some of the instrument panel to jump out in Spad's lap. But the plane kept flying. It got into the clouds.

These clouds were thin, and the Border Patrol ship managed to follow them for all of three hours, part of which time they flew back and forth and up and down, and the rest of the time flying straight ahead at full speed.

Finally, they lost the Border Patrol plane.

"Where are we now?" Waldo asked.

"How would I know?" Spad Ames snarled. "The compass was shot to pieces."

SPAD AMES was in a bad temper in spite of their escape from the Border Patrol officers who had photographed them committing a murder. For a few moments, he had been elated. Then he had noticed that the needle of the fuel gauge was knocking against the pin on the empty side.

Waldo tried placidly to light a cigarette, but the bullet holes in their ship let in such a draft that he could not make a match function.

"Oh, well," he said, and discarded the cigarette.

The engine faltered in its roaring. For a few seconds, it sounded like a motorcycle. Then it stopped.

"What goes on?" Waldo asked.

"Get the parachutes!" Spad Ames barked. "We're out of gas."

The plane went whistling down out of the clouds in a long glide while Waldo ambled back to get the parachutes. Waldo returned empty-handed.

"Full of holes," he reported.

"What?" screamed Spad.

"I said," explained Waldo, "that our parachutes were hit by a burst of machine-gun bullets from

that Border Patrol plane, and they're full of holes. You can use one of them if you want to. I don't think I will."

Spad Ames' mouth worked, but he was too sick with terror to get out words. He could only level an arm, indicating the terrain below.

An aviator's nightmare. At first glance, there did not appear to be a spot where a hawk could have landed, much less a plane. Everything was straight up and down, and came to points. There did not, from this height—the height was rapidly growing less—appear to be a shred of vegetation anywhere.

"We're over the Grand Canyon badlands somewhere, it seems to me," Waldo said.

The colors of the earth were mostly yellow, pale orange and chocolate.

Spad Ames banked clear of the spiked tip of the first peak. He avoided other peaks. There seemed to be miles of canyon space below him, although undoubtedly it was no more than two or three thousand feet. There seemed to be fog down here, and compared to the fairly bright late afternoon sunlight on the peaks, the gloom was that of night, or of an infinite cavern. At least, it was an unpleasant place—and a strange place for fog.

It was horrible. The human body is so constituted that it does not actually sweat blood, which was probably a good thing for Spad Ames. He would have perspired himself dry of the vital fluid.

"Spad—" Waldo said.

Spad Ames was surging up in the bucket seat and straining against the safety belt like a man being electrocuted. He couldn't say anything.

"—pick a soft spot," Waldo requested.

Waldo scrambled back in the cabin and scooped up cushions and the ruined parachute packs and fashioned a crash pad in front of himself, a preparation which he had barely completed when the plane began knocking itself to pieces on the rocks.

SPAD AMES had been knocked senseless a number of times during his hell-colored past, and on each of these occasions his period of blankness had been made hideous by nightmares of being shoved into a gas chamber of type used in some states to execute criminals. He had once witnessed such an execution, and apparently it had given him a permanent case of the subconscious creeps.

Now, when Spad Ames regained his senses and realized that his mind had been a blank, and not haunted by gas-chamber nightmares, his first frightened conclusion was that he had died. The fact that his eyes were seeing only complete darkness heightened the possibility that he was now a disembodied soul.

"Hell and damnation!" he snarled.

Sound of his own robust profanity made the situation more real. He reached out, and found twisted metal with his fingers. He seemed to be lying under a portion of the mangled plane.

There was sand underneath. He dug with his hands, made room to use his arms, then heaved. Metal grunted, whined and shifted a little. He kept trying. Some time later, he managed to crawl out.

There were matches in his pockets, so he struck them and searched, but did not find any trace of Waldo Berlitz. However, part of the plane was buried deep in the sand.

"Waldo must be mashed under there," Spad muttered. "Serves the dirty buzzard right."

Spad Ames had never liked Waldo Berlitz, and he'd held a suspicion that the feeling was mutual.

Spad wandered away for a few rods, trying to ascertain in exactly what surroundings the plane had crashed. He could see stars overhead, but apparently there were great sheer walls everywhere else. The air was dry, and rather hot. Nothing whatever seemed to grow in the vicinity; at least, Spad Ames did not stumble over anything in the darkness that resembled a growing plant.

When he came back to the plane, he saw Waldo Berlitz at once. Waldo was sitting on a rock, examining a black arrowhead by the light of a match.

There was something strange about Waldo's manner.

Chapter II. STONE MAN BURNING

THE sand was soft—the plane had fallen in the bed of a canyon—and Spad Ames managed to approach without making any particular sound until he could look at the arrowhead which Waldo was inspecting.

The arrowhead, about the length of Waldo's longest finger, was thin and streamlined. It had striking perfection of line. Its color was black, a peculiar polished kind of black.

Spad had intended to speak up and ask why the infernal blazes Waldo had gone off and left him, Spad, pinned under the wrecked plane. But he held his words. Waldo, unaware that Spad stood behind him, was showing a distinctly peculiar curiosity in the arrowhead.

The match went out, and Waldo struck another with almost frantic eagerness. Indian arrowheads were plentiful through the West, and Spad had seen Waldo kick a number of them contemptuously with a boot toe in the past. So Waldo's absorption in this particular arrowhead seemed strange.

"It stopped the river," he muttered.

This remark did nothing to enlighten Spad Ames. He stood there, puzzled, watching Waldo turn the arrowhead over and over in his hands and peer at it as if the thing were some kind of a puzzle.

"It stopped the river," Waldo repeated to himself.

Then he began to swear. Waldo was cursing his inability to understand why the arrowhead had stopped a river, Spad Ames realized, and this did not contribute much toward clarifying the growing mystery.

Spad Ames decided to ask questions; he stepped around boldly into the match light. Waldo yelped in astonishment and the nervous jerk of his fingers sent the match arching in the darkness.

"You're kind of jumpy, ain't you?" Spad suggested.

"I-uh-" Waldo said, swallowing.

It was the first time Spad had ever seen Waldo speechless.

"By the way," Spad continued, "what is that thing you were looking at? Arrowhead, isn't it?"

"Oh-just a piece of rock," Waldo said, far too quickly.

"You generally do a better job than that of lying, Waldo."

"It was only a rock."

"Let's see."

"I-dropped it somewhere."

Spad Ames was tempted to hand Waldo a couple of hard rights to the jaw, because the fellow was obviously lying.

"Incidentally," growled Spad, "what was the idea of going off and leaving me fast under the wrecked plane?"

"Did I do that?" Waldo asked queerly.

Strangeness in Waldo's voice caused Spad to strike a match for himself. Waldo's eyes were too wide and there was a foolish expression on his face.

Spad Ames thereupon made a slight error, and concluded that Waldo had suffered a bump on the head in the plane crash, and that this had addled his wits.

"Sit there and rest, Waldo," Spad advised. "I'll see if I can find the seat cushion and make a fire out of it. By that light, I'll examine your head."

While Spad Ames was feeling around for the seat cushions, Waldo silently removed one of his shoes and took off a sock. He filled the sock with sand. Then Waldo crept over and brought the sand-filled sock down on Spad Ames' head with a roundhouse swing.

THIS time, Spad Ames held no doubts about merely having been unconscious because he had his usual nightmare of being thrust into a lethal gas chamber. On this occasion, in the beast-dream, they got him as far as jamming his head in the chamber door, and he was fighting them wildly when he awakened with a splitting headache. He lay for a minute, getting it all clear in his mind.

Spad got to his feet, but his legs shook and bent and let him collapse on the sand again. He ground his teeth.

"I'll kill him for that!" he snarled, dragging a revolver out of his clothing. "I'll blow him apart!"

Once when the plane crashed he had been knocked out, and again by the sand-filled sock, and his head did not feel so good, nor did his gangling body seem to want to co-operate with his pain-seared brain. He struggled to get himself organized.

"I'll blow him to pieces," he said grindingly.

Rage jacked him onto his feet, and he staggered a few yards through the darkness, then came to a stop, snarling with futile wrath. He had no idea which way Waldo had gone, did not know where to search. He stood there, pointing his gun this way and that, so inflamed with rage that he wanted to hear a sound, and shoot at it.

When sound did come, he failed to shoot. Instead, he jumped a foot, and would have jumped higher, had his strength permitted. Weakened as he was, he fell to his knees, where he remained, wincing while the shrieking noise ripped again at his eardrums.

Spad Ames was experienced. Once he had held a man close to his chest with his left arm and with his right hand had thrust a knife again and again into the victim's back while the fellow screamed his life out in Spad's ear. These present sounds had somewhat the same rip to them.

Waldo's voice. No doubt of that, because Waldo had a whanging tone that was as distinctive as a police whistle.

Waldo screeched his lungs out for fully a minute, which was a long time to keep screaming steadily, then silence fell.

Spad Ames crept toward the source of the shriek to investigate; he took his time, because he had no desire to rescue Waldo, but rather wished to satisfy an intense curiosity as to what had led Waldo to emit such a banshee squall. Spad listened, but heard nothing. Finally, he lighted matches, and discovered that the sand was grooved and gouged as though a struggle had taken place. Spad, down on his knees, tried to ascertain what had made the tracks, and found the arrowhead.

It was the same arrowhead, black, polished, exquisitely made, which Waldo Berlitz had been examining with peculiar interest.

"I'll be darned," Spad grunted.

The unexpected weight of the arrowhead caused him to emit the exclamation.

"Gold!" he chortled excitedly, and scratched the arrowhead with the sharp metal sight of his gun. But it was not gold, as its weight had led him to hope. He couldn't tell what it was. Heavy, though.

A few moments later, he found Waldo's body, although he did not immediately touch it and get burned.

AT first, Spad was almost relieved to find Waldo's body. Lurid explanations for the scream had

been galloping through his mind—possibly a bear had grabbed Waldo; maybe the bear was still around—so it was a relief to find the body, apparently unmarked.

The smoke arising from the body was something that Spad Ames noticed at once, but he thought it was merely a small breeze blowing dust.

Spad Ames summarized the whole situation aloud, as he saw it.

"The guy got bopped on the head when the plane fell," Spad muttered, "and was knocked nuts. Then he had a screaming fit and fell over dead." He rubbed his jaw and grinned. He had an idea. "I'll put Waldo's body in the plane wreckage," he chuckled, "and make it look like there never was more than one man in the ship. I'll fix myself an alibi somewhere, and get out of that murder the Border Patrol saw us pull." While he was being happy over that, he got another good thought. Waldo usually carried a large roll of money on his person.

Spad Ames, getting down on his knees to search Waldo for money, touched the body. Instantly, he squawked and snatched his hands back. Then, because there was a terrible burning sensation in his hands, he jabbed them repeatedly into the sand.

His next thought: something had bitten him. He found his matches—his fingers stung so that he could hardly hold a match—and made light. There was no rattler or scorpion on or around the body. There was just the smoke.

Smoke! Not dust swirled by the night wind, as he had thought at first, but something else. It was like—well, smoke was the word that most closely described it.

Rage jumped through Spad Ames. He did not like things he could not understand. He held the burning match in his left hand, seized his gun in his right and struck the body of Waldo Berlitz. It was purely a gesture of rage. But the effects were horrifying.

Spad Ames shrieked, sprang up and ran wildly. He took no particular direction; he just wanted to get away from there. He crashed into the canyon wall, bruising his face. But even that agony could not wipe from his mind the impossible thing that had happened when he struck the body of Waldo Berlitz.

For the body—the clothing, too—had broken, as if turned to glass, or brittle stone.

SPAD AMES was a badly battered specimen. He found he could not readily rise. His fingers, where they had touched Waldo Berlitz's strange body, were still full of stinging sensation, and he kept wiping them on the sand.

After a while, he was aware of the sound of water running.

The running water was weird, too. He had noticed no sound of a stream earlier, but now there was no doubt about it. The flow of water seemed to start gradually, then increase, until there was a sizable stream gurgling and splashing.

"I must be going crazy," Spad mumbled, believing it.

But when he got the strength, and struck a match, he saw that the river was no phantasm. It poured out from the base of the cliff—steep canyon side into which Spad had dived in his flight. Spad said: "Well, that ain't so damn mysterious. Just an underground river."

When his match burned out, he struck another to continue his examination. A few yards from the foot of the cliff, the stream was fully twenty feet wide and two or three feet deep, and had worn a considerable channel in the stone.

Out of a hole at the cliff base the water spouted with geyser force, boiling, throwing up foam. The escaping water filled every inch of the opening.

"At least," Spad mumbled, "I won't die of thirst."

He had been afraid of that.

Then he noticed the second arrowhead. This one was black, also, but much larger—more than a foot in length—and seemed to be inlaid in the cliff face. Or was it carved and painted on the cliff? Spad stepped closer to see. Inlaid, he decided.

The striking resemblance of this large arrowhead to the small black one intrigued him. Spad fished the smaller arrowhead from his pocket, held it close to the inlay on the cliff for comparison.

"What the devil!" Spad exploded.

The water had stopped running. The roaring, splashing flow had ceased with weird unexpectedness. Swiftly, the water flowed away and the gaping hole out of which it had been coming was left exposed.

Spad stood there, too startled to swear, until curiosity got the best of him. He crouched with a match beside the hole, and leaned to peer into it.

He made a mewling sound, and in his first spasm of effort to get up and flee, he skidded on the water-slick rocks and went over and over. Spad Ames knew, now, what had made Waldo Berlitz scream in such a horrible way. He felt like screeching himself, and did try, but could only emit awful mewling noises.

What he had found in the hole came out and overpowered him.

"Oh, mother!" Spad Ames croaked, just before he became unconscious.

Which was as near as Spad Ames had come to a prayer in many years.

Chapter III. THE ADMIRABLE MR. LOCATELLA

WHEN the United States government assigned several billion dollars for the building of roads, one

of the things it accomplished was to make the Navaho Indian trading post of Cameron, Arizona, more accessible. Hitherto there had only been a wagon track across the Painted Desert to Cameron; this was improved, and during the season, a stream of tourists began to flow. A sparse stream, it was true; three or four cars a day was a fair average.

The trading post, a picturesque structure, perched on the edge of a crack in the desert, a crack that seemed a couple of thousand feet deep and so narrow at the top that a man could throw a rock across, and in the bottom flowed the Little Colorado River. There was a suspension bridge, the crossing of which was nothing for nervous old ladies.

In all directions to the horizon was heat and the disappointing baldness of the Painted Desert. To make the speeding tourists say, "Oh!" and "Ah!" there was now and then a herd of grazing sheep, tended by a Navaho squaw and one papoose or more, and sometimes the beehive-shaped hodags in which the Navahos wintered.

Seven weeks and three days after the United States Border Patrol plane chased Spad Ames and Waldo Berlitz northward, there was something else to interest one tourist, however. The unusual article was a man lying on the road. Apparently the man was unconscious or dead. His hair was slightly white.

The tourist stopped his car and alighted to examine the poor unfortunate.

The man lying on the road lunged up and smacked the tourist on the head with a rock. The tourist collapsed. The man with the rock then ran to the car, but the tourist's wife and daughter got out and fled. They were long, lean women and they were scared. The would-be assailant with the rock failed to catch them, although he swore terribly and hurled his stone after them.

The man then entered the car, turned it around and drove toward Flagstaff. He did a good deal of cursing because he had to leave the tourists behind where they would be picked up by the next passing car.

There was a lunch basket in the tourists' car, and the man wolfed the contents of this. After eating, he stared grimly ahead, looking a little sick. He was thinking of his diet for the past three weeks. It had consisted of pack rats, gophers, rattlesnakes, and once, a jackrabbit. Principal item had been the rattlesnakes, which were easy to catch.

At Flagstaff, the man got a break. An eastbound freight train was pulling out; he swung into a box car.

There were two hobos in the box car, and that night, he bludgeoned them in their sleep, and got a dollar and eighty-three cents and a better pair of shoes. In Marceline, Missouri, a division point on the railroad, he robbed a plumber, and to his astonishment, got over two hundred dollars in cash. When he got to Chicago, he took a plane on to Newark airport, and a taxicab from there into New York City, to the office of Herman Locatella.

"Hello, Herman, you slimy bat," he said, and sank into a comfortable chair.

Herman Locatella stared at the man and said, "I don't know you!" indignantly.

HERMAN LOCATELLA was a man who took pains not to know a great many people. Socially, in particular, there seemed to be very few persons whom he considered worth knowing. He was a prize snob, but there were plenty of snobs in New York who liked that sort of thing, so Locatella did a remunerative law business.

Herman Locatella dressed the part; his attire was correct for every occasion. That morning, he had worn the correct striped trousers, morning coat, lap-over fawn vest and ascot tie. Just now, however, he was planning to attend the horse races with one of his snob clients, so he had changed to sports attire consisting of woolly brown trousers, checkered sports coat, and scarf knotted at the throat. He maintained a dressing room off his sumptuous office for making these changes.

On the desk rested a folded newspaper which contained an article on the society page, stating that Herman Locatella, society lawyer, was beginning to be mentioned as the best-dressed man in America.

"So you don't know me," growled the visitor disgustedly.

"I never saw you before." Herman Locatella fingered the telephone. "Will you get out of here, or shall I call the police?"

"Why not call the Kansas City police?" the visitor asked dryly.

Locatella jerked his hand away from the telephone; he also became noticeably pale.

"Sure, telephone the K.C. district attorney, too," continued the visitor. "And the F.B.I. in Washington would be another good one to call."

Herman Locatella licked his lips and did not find anything satisfactory to say.

The grim-faced invader continued: "All of them would like to hear from you, wouldn't they, Locatella? Of course, you might have to tell them you were known, until a few years ago, as Nate Spix, or Spix the Mouth. You are only charged with being the brains behind about three murders and half a dozen bank robberies."

Herman Locatella got up and opened the door to make sure no one in the outer office was listening. He locked the door and strode back to his desk.

"Damn you!" he snarled. "Somebody might have heard you!"

"So now you know me?"

"Spad Ames—of course I know you." Locatella clenched his fists. "And I'm not worried about you

yelling copper. Two months ago there was a newspaper story about the Border Patrol looking for you. Murdered a refugee you were smuggling in, didn't you? You're crazy to come walking in here. You should be in South America, or some place that doesn't have extradition."

Spad Ames showed his teeth in what was not exactly a grin. "Do I look like I used to?" he asked. "You've changed," Locatella admitted. "Your hair is white."

"What I've been through," Spad Ames said grimly, "would change anybody."

THE two men knew each other well, from dealings in the past. There was silence while Locatella, looking almost comically suave in his fancy clothing, poured drinks.

"What changed you?" he asked. "You look as if you had been through something tough."

"I lived on rattlesnakes for almost a month," Spad Ames said sourly.

"That almost makes you a cannibal, doesn't it?"

"That's not funny to me." Spad Ames eyed his drink, then poured it in the metal wastebasket. "I don't trust you. We might as well understand each other about that. Whether you trust me or not, I don't give a damn. You're going to help me, anyway."

Locatella made a regretful clucking sound.

"That is too bad," he said, "but I have given up criminal practice. I would not touch—"

"I want about twenty men," Ames interrupted. "They have got to be strictly tough ones. They have got to know machine guns and bombs and gas."

Locatella still wore a pure-as-pure expression, but his interest sharpened.

"Where would I get twenty such men?" he asked.

"You could get them without trouble, I haven't the slightest doubt."

"Hm-m-m."

"I will want two large planes, and pilots. I want the planes equipped with bomb racks, and I'll have to have expert bombers. Preferably men who had experience in Spain or China."

"How much are you willing to pay for this?"

"That's also where you come in."

"I come in?"

"You pay for it. In return, you get cut in for twenty-five percent."

Herman Locatella leaned back and opened his mouth; it was obvious that he was going to rip out a derisive laugh. But he changed his mind. He leaned forward and stared at Spad Ames intently.

"You know, Spad, I never liked you, but I did have respect for your judgment. You always had a good sense of values. So I'm not going to laugh. Instead, I'm going to ask what in the hell you plan on doing?"

"You said you read about the Border Patrol plane chasing me a couple of months ago."

"Yes."

"Well, it chased me out over the Grand Canyon badlands before we got away, then we ran out of fuel and crashed. We cracked up in . . . What do you know about that Grand Canyon country?"

"It's pretty wild, I've heard," Locatella admitted. "Personally, I wouldn't know, because I don't go in for roughing it."

"Some of that country," Spad Ames said, "is practically unexplored. Oh, I know that a boat or two has floated through the Grand Canyon, and planes have flown over some of the country. But there is a hell of a lot of it that white man never set eyes on. We landed in some of that unexplored country and we found—well, it's what I'm going back after that we found."

"You found—"

"For two reasons, I wouldn't tell you."

"Why not?"

"Too fantastic," Spad Ames said levelly. "I'm not crazy, but you might think so if I told you what I located. I'm the only white man who ever got in there, and out again. And I'm going back—with planes, at least twenty men, and the most modern bombs and poison gas."

"Twenty men," Locatella muttered, "is practically an army."

"We'll need an army. That black arrowhead may help—" He stopped the sentence in the middle.

"Black arrowhead?" prompted Locatella curiously. "What black arrowhead?"

SPAD AMES made no answer, and the two men sat looking at each other. They understood each other. Spad was not going to reveal more information, and Locatella knew it. Locatella also knew that he was being offered something big here. Spad Ames had a bad record with the law, but he had never been one to go off half-cocked. If anything, his fault was underestimating and using too much caution.

"Fifty percent," Locatella said suddenly.

"Twenty-five."

"You're crazy. Since when did bankrolls start taking twenty-five percent cuts?"

Spad Ames stood up and pounded the desk with his fist and began yelling. "The hell with you, then!" he shouted. "I'll go out and knock off an armored truck or a bank messenger and get the dough myself."

Herman Locatella knew now that he was being offered a good thing. He was being presented with a pig in a poke, but he knew other men who had accepted blind propositions from Spad Ames, and they had found it profitable.

"Sit down," he said. "How soon do you have to have the men and planes and stuff?"

"Quicker the better."

"Tomorrow morning be soon enough?" Locatella asked, and grinned.

He was proud of his ability to get such things as this done; he was even more proud of having kept underworld connections while pretending to be a Park Avenue barrister whose main love was fancy clothes.

Spad Ames nodded, and they shook hands. "Could you get some of the men together tonight?" Spad asked.

"Tonight?"

"I've got to snatch two—well—students."

"Kidnap them, you mean?"

"You might call it that. But don't get excited. They're not ordinary students, exactly."

"You mean that they're Indians?" Locatella asked, guessing.

Spad Ames shook his head queerly.

"I'm not going to launch into a lot of explaining about two—ah—strange people." Spad growled.

"The whole thing is fantastic. I told you that."

"Do these two have names?"

"Mark Colorado, and his sister, Ruth—that is what they call themselves."

"Are they Americans?"

Again, Spad shook his head queerly. "I don't think," he said thoughtfully, "that you could say they had any nationality. They're from—well, never mind."

Locatella chuckled. "You're not hinting around that they're from Mars, or the moon or somewhere?"

"You'd be damn surprised if you knew," Spad Ames advised grimly. "That's all I can say."

Locatella was consumed by curiosity, but he restrained himself.

"Let's go out and see people," Locatella suggested. "We'll collect some of the right people if we can, then come back here to talk over details. This room is soundproof."

Spad Ames looked around approvingly. "No chance of anybody hearing us in here, eh?"

"Not a chance," Locatella assured him.

Chapter IV. HANDS OUT OF DARKNESS

HERMAN LOCATELLA was in slight error concerning the privacy of conversations in his sanctum. It was true that the room was of soundproof construction, as well as being, with its wood-paneled walls, sufficiently expensive looking to impress the Park Avenue set.

However, a good electric drill, working from the adjoining suite, had chewed away the wall without penetrating the wood paneling. And to the paneling, a sensitive contact type of microphone had been attached, so as to pick up all the conversation in Locatella's office.

Wires from the mike led to an amplifier, the output of which fed into a phonographic recorder which was of unusually ingenious design, being equipped with a record changer. As soon as one record was full, it was automatically removed and another blank substituted. The records were of the large fifteen-minute type, hence four of them were used per hour.

The man who had installed this complicated eavesdropping device happened to be in the adjacent offices at the moment. He had plugged in a telephone headset, and had listened. He now removed the headset.

"By Jove!" he remarked. "The peacock did finally turn out to be a buzzard."

He seemed much pleased. He was a broad-shouldered man with a waspish waist and the wide, flexible mouth of an orator. Most striking thing about him was the impeccable correctness of his clothing; he was somewhat more perfectly garbed than Herman Locatella, which was saying a great deal. There was no other comparison between the two, however, except that they were both lawyers.

This man was Major General Theodore Marley Brooks, eminent product of the Harvard Law School, and unquestioned leader of male fashions in America—leader, that is, until of late, when his position had been menaced by an upstart named Locatella. Major General Theodore Marley Brooks was called Ham by those who were his very good friends, or who could outrun him.

Ham Brooks picked up an innocent-looking black cane.

"Come on, Chemistry," he called. "We have tidings to bear."

Chemistry was Ham's pet chimpanzee; or it was Ham's contention that Chemistry was a pure-blooded chimp, although anthropologists were inclined to call the animal a what-is-it.

Ham and Chemistry departed a back way; they simply stepped out of the window onto a roof which could not be seen from Herman Locatella's office suite, and descending through a roof hatch, finally came out on a side street where Ham had a car parked.

Ham rode to one of the impressive skyscrapers in the midtown business district, took an elevator to the eighty-sixth floor of this building, and passed through a door. Small letters on the door said:

Clark Savage, Jr.

Ham struck an attitude.

"Bark, gentlemen!" he ordered. "Bark!"

The two occupants of the reception room scowled at him.

One of them was remarkably wide, remarkably short, and even more remarkably homely. He had small eyes, a very wide mouth, features that had been mistreated by other men's fists, and a hide covered

with bristles which resembled rusting shingle nails.

He was Lieutenant Colonel Andrew Blodgett "Monk" Mayfair. Without in any way looking the part, Monk was one of the greatest living industrial chemists.

The second man who scowled at Ham was a huge framework of bones and gristle who had two outstanding features, the first of which was a sad, funeral-going expression, and the second a pair of fists so large they could hardly be inserted in gallon pails.

He was Colonel John "Renny" Renwick, eminent engineer, and noted for his habit of knocking wooden panels out of doors when he felt playful.

Monk and Renny, along with Ham, belonged to a group of five who were assistants to Doc Savage.

"COME on and bark!" Ham ordered impatiently.

Monk and Renny glared at him, their necks getting red.

"Arf!" Monk said.

"Bowwow," said Renny unwillingly.

"You didn't get down on your hands and knees when you barked," Ham said. "Do it the way we agreed. When you lost the bet, the understanding was that you were to get down on your hands and knees and bark whenever you saw me for the next week."

Monk, losing his temper, shook a fist wildly. He had a small childlike voice ordinarily, but rage caused it to lift and take on the stridence of a steamboat siren.

"You been overdoin' it!" he squalled. "You been goin' out of your way to meet us on the street and places."

Renny, who had a voice like the roar of a pained bear in a deep cave, put in his bit. "You turn up in restaurants where we're eating, and expect us to bark."

Monk howled: "And last night, you turned up at that lecture I was giving before the Chemical Institute, and I had to get down and bark, with all them dignified big shots watching. A fine shyster trick!"

Renny roared: "Let's dress him down with a chair."

"Let's," Monk agreed.

Ham made a wild jump, got across the reception room and through a door, which he slammed and locked before the pair of irate wager losers could reach him.

"At least," he remarked cheerfully, "they're not welshers."

Ham had fled into the library, a great vaulted room filled with the bluish glow of light from fluorescent bulbs, and packed with bookcases containing, for the most part, scientific tomes.

"Doc," Ham called.

"In here," came a voice from the adjoining laboratory. The voice had a deep, controlled quality that made it striking.

Ham entered Doc Savage's laboratory, the lair of scientific magic where Doc Savage concocted many inventions and devices, some of them bordering on the fantastic, which he used in his strange career. It was a vast room; the sunlight slanted in through the great windows—three walls were composed almost entirely of glass—and sprang in glittering reflections from the array of retorts, chemical glassware, microscopes, and electrical mechanisms. A great deal of the stuff was so complicated that Ham had no idea of its nature.

"What was all the noise?" Doc Savage asked.

Ham grinned. "Oh, Monk and Renny and the bet they lost. They bet me Harvard wouldn't win last Saturday. Now they're squawking."

DOC SAVAGE—Clark Savage, Jr., although he was rarely called that—was wearing a transparent plioflim garment which covered him from head to foot, so evidently he had been working in the test chamber which stood in the center of the great laboratory. He was, Ham happened to know, endeavoring to perfect a selective germicidal disinfecting agent which would be effective in epithelial tissue, where a certain type of cancer was its inception.

Ham, looking at Doc Savage, felt a little awe. He had never lost that feeling when he came into Doc's presence, although they had been associated for a number of years. The feeling possibly came in part from Doc's appearance. Doc Savage was a giant of a man, and possessed of even more physical strength than his size indicated: the great sinews which occasionally sprang out on the backs of his hands, or the cables that stirred in his neck, hinted slightly at his fabulous muscular ability. An ability, incidentally, that was carefully developed and maintained by a daily two-hour routine of exercises.

Doc Savage was unusual. His eyes, like pools of flake gold, seemed to have magnetic power. His skin had been burned by tropical suns until it had acquired a permanent bronzed hue that was striking. His features were regular, the cheek and jaw muscles having that lithe appearance which is noticeable about the faces of character actors. His hair, of a bronze slightly darker than his skin, lay as smoothly as a metal skull-cap.

A man of mystery, almost a legend as far as the world was concerned, this big bronze fellow.

He was most famous, probably, as the man who had given his life to the strange career of righting wrongs and punishing evildoers, frequently traveling to the far corners of the earth to do so. These feats, being spectacular, got public attention. Less well known, but more likely to go down in history, were the bronze man's unusual contributions to science and medicine, some of them possibly

a century ahead of his time.

Ham Brooks, who was capable of making a young fortune each year practicing law, had become associated himself with Doc Savage for the same reason as had the other five aids. Ham liked excitement and adventure and his association with Doc Savage was abundantly productive to both. "I've got something important, Doc," Ham said. "You remember a lawyer I once told you about—name of Herman Locatella."

"The one upon whom you have been eavesdropping?"

Ham nodded, then he shoved his jaw indignantly in the direction of the reception room. "Monk has been going around saying I got a mad up on this Locatella because he was mentioned in the newspapers as likely to—er—displace me as the best-dressed man. But that's a low-life lie! I'm not that vain." Which was possibly a slight exaggeration on Ham's part; where clothes were concerned, if he was not vain, then the word had no meaning. Also, any libel on homely Monk's character which Ham spoke could be disregarded. No one had ever heard either of them give a courteous word to the other, except by accident. They squabbled perpetually, and spent their spare time thinking up gags to pull on each other. All of which meant they were actually the best of friends.

HAM stood looking self-righteous and hoping he was deceiving Doc Savage—but doubting it. This big bronze man, who rarely showed emotion, was exceptionally hard to deceive; misleading Doc Savage was so difficult that Ham at times suspected Doc might be able to read minds.

"This Herman Locatella," said Ham, "pulled a crooked deal on one of my legal clients. So I put a microphone in his private office and attached a recorder to it. That way, I began checking up on the rascal."

Ham now told what he had overheard as a result of his eavesdropping.

"Mysterious business, seems to me," Ham finished. "And this Herman Locatella, bird of fine feather, turned into a buzzard."

Doc Savage's metallic features had shown no particular emotion during the recital—which meant nothing, since he had a carefully developed ability to keep his feelings where they belonged, in his mind.

"Planes, bombs, gas," Doc Savage said quietly. "And a black arrowhead."

"The black arrowhead puzzles me particularly."

"Does it make sense to you?"

"No," Ham admitted. "But it interests me. It looks like the kind of a thing we usually investigate."

"What would you suggest?"

"If we get a move on," the dapper lawyer said, "we may reach Locatella's office in time to overhear the plans they make to seize these two—er—strange people, as Spad Ames called them. Mark and Ruth Colorado, he said their names were."

"We will take Monk and Renny along," Doc said quietly.

But Monk and Renny were missing from the reception room.

"I wonder where they went?" Ham grumbled. "They'll hate to miss this—and I'll hate not having them there. Monk knows I've been watching Herman Locatella's office, and he's made cracks about it. I'd like to see him eat the cracks. Boy, have I been getting revenge on Monk lately!"

Ham chuckled over his bet while a private elevator lowered them to the garage which Doc Savage maintained in the basement of the huge building. They selected a taxicab which seemed as ordinary as the thousands of other cabs on New York streets, the armor-plate body and the oversized engine being cleverly constructed to give an uninteresting effect.

It was getting dark.

THE night had become completely dark by the time they climbed through the hatch onto the roof which adjoined the building housing Locatella's office.

"Over this way," Ham breathed. "You cross the roof to the window of a room where I've got my recording apparatus."

The roof had a covering of thick asphalt compound in which gravel was embedded, and the gravel crunched slightly under their feet. Dark clouds rolling out of the west had packed overhead, and there was chill fog which absorbed the city lights.

Ham stopped suddenly. "What was that?"

It had been a small squashing sound.

"Probably a pigeon egg rolled out of a nest up in the eaves," Ham decided. "That's what it sounded like."

Then Ham grasped his throat and made a strangled noise.

"Gas!" he exploded.

He realized ponderous figures were suddenly rushing upon them.

"Locatella must have found out about me!" Ham barked, and tried to bring his sword—the innocent-looking dark cane which he carried was a sword cane—into action.

The assailants, instead of rushing directly upon them, raced around them. The circling maneuver puzzled Ham until he discovered the reason. The attackers had some kind of a net, probably an ordinary fishing seine of strong twine, and they enveloped Ham and Doc with this. They fought the cords, broke a few, but were jerked from their feet.

They lay there and struggled with the net until they had to breathe and take the gas into their lungs and become unconscious. Ham, trying to yell for help, managed to emit a shrill and eerie wail, and always afterward it seemed to him that he passed out while still making the sound.

Chapter V. THE MYSTERIOUS COLORADOS

THE wail of a noise that Ham made carried to the ears of Spad Ames, and Spad looked puzzled.

"What was that?" he growled.

"A tomcat," Herman Locatella said. "Or maybe a drunk."

Herman Locatella was feeling proud of himself as he sat behind his desk, tipped back in a chair, cigar tilted up in an amber holder, and adjusted his bow tie. He had just changed to full evening garb in the little dressing room adjoining his office.

Spad Ames dismissed the wailing sound out of the night and went back to studying his new gang—or the seven members whom Locatella, to Spad's astonishment, had managed to assemble within two hours. Spad was a judge of certain types of character, and he approved of the seven. They did not look too obviously like thugs, not sufficiently so to alarm a policeman. Not that they resembled honest businessmen. They might have been a group of perfectly honest and dressed-up truck drivers or water-front roustabouts.

They had arrived one at a time, and Spad had been listening to Locatella state their qualifications, which consisted mainly of a string of penitentiary records.

"You'll do," Spad said. "The pay is one hundred bucks a day, payable at six o'clock each day.

Locatella, here, is the bankroll. He pays you. I give the orders."

They watched him. They were not afraid of him. He was glad of that; he could make them afraid later, if necessary. There was only one of them about whom he had doubts.

That one seemed a little young, and he was going out of his way to act tough. He had sneered at Spad when he came in.

"Any of you got a gun?" Spad asked.

"I have," said the young one insolently. "What about it?"

"Give me the gun," Spad Ames requested quietly.

The youngster drew the weapon with a flourish and tossed it over. It was a nickel-plated pistol of the \$8.98 variety, with practically all the barrel sawed off.

Spad Ames hit the young man. He struck open-handed. The young fellow upset. He was quick, seemed to land on his feet, instantly lashed back at Spad Ames. Spad dodged. He gave the youngster a knee in the midriff; when the fellow doubled and gasped in agony, Spad grabbed the front of the coat and slammed him into a chair.

"In New York, don't pack a rod except when you need it," Spad said grimly. "Once the cops find a heater on you, they can hold you in the can until you rot."

The young man cradled his middle, said nothing.

"Give him a hundred bucks, Locatella," Spad ordered.

Locatella removed five twenties from his billfold and passed them over, without objecting.

"Now," Spad told the youngster, "you can take that dough and do a scam. Or you can stay, take orders and stick that lip out at somebody besides me."

The young man folded the money, doing so slowly, and by the time he pocketed it, had thought over the matter.

"I'll stick," he said.

Spad handed back the nickeled gun, said: "Throw that thing in the first river you come to. It's only good for noise."

Now Spad strode back and forth a few times. He had put on a good show, and he knew it. He'd had experience at handling men like these. Because he was going to use them immediately, he had to impress them—convince them that he knew what he was doing, that he was tough, but also fair, according to their standard. He had done so, he believed.

He made a little speech.

"We're going up against something pretty fantastic," he said, "so if you see something you don't understand, keep your shirts on."

He pulled the strange black arrowhead out of his pocket and showed it to them.

"Whenever you see anybody with one of these"—he shook the black arrowhead—"grab them right away. If you can't take them alive, kill them. And be careful. Anybody who has one of these black arrowheads isn't—well—they're not what you think they are."

They looked at him blankly.

"There are two people attending Phenix Academy," Spad Ames said. "They are named Mark and Ruth Colorado. We are going to get them tonight, and hold them as prisoners."

He gestured, and they all filed out of the office.

"You know where the Phenix Academy is?" Spad asked Locatella.

"Sure," Locatella said. "Uptown."

PHENIX ACADEMY was not widely known, for the good reason that it did not need to advertise itself—it did not use such devices as, for instance, a high-powered football team to make headlines in order to get students. Athletics were not even included in the curriculum; there was no gymnasium. There were not even any classrooms of the conventional type. Instead, there were

laboratories.

Phenix was a modern venture in specialized higher education. Diplomas were not necessarily tickets of admission. Instead, one examining board ascertained how much the applicant actually knew, and another board, composed of psychologists, weeded out those who only wanted to learn a lot, and use the knowledge to get rich. Phenix Academy was trying not to turn out fortune-makers. There were students in Phenix who had never been in a high school, much less a college. And Phenix had turned down stellar graduates of Yale, Harvard and Heidelberg. So the institution had a strange bunch in attendance.

Strangest of all Phenix students were Mark and Ruth Colorado. They had arrived quietly one day some months before, plainly dressed, and wearing something suspended on thin steel hairs around their necks.

"What previous education have you had?" they were asked.

"We understood one merely had to take an examination here," Mark Colorado said.

The examining officer had been a little irritated. These two were too confident.

"You'll get tested, all right," he snapped.

Results of the tests were peculiar.

"Amazing minds," reported the general science examining board. "Both brother and sister have an astounding fund of scientific knowledge which has come from books, apparently. And almost no workaday knowledge."

Reported the board of psychologists: "We are somewhat puzzled. Both applicants seem to know practically nothing about civilized customs. They might almost be persons not of this world at all. They refuse to tell anything of their past. In spite of strange circumstances, we suggest acceptance, because they unquestionably have the most brilliant minds of any Phenix applicants to date. We recommend observation, however."

Mark and Ruth Colorado puzzled the examining boards, and they became an enigma to professors and students.

Both Colorados were perfect physical specimens. Both had entirely white hair. They were also of extremely fair complexion. They were not, as some at first supposed, albinos; for the term albino is applied to individuals whose features lack coloring pigment, and usually includes colorless eyes. The Colorados had deep-blue eyes of striking alertness and—it was often remarked—of eaglelike ability.

Ruth Colorado was breathtakingly beautiful. As was expected, none of the male students learned anything whatever when she first appeared in classes. But the girl had nothing to do with men. None succeeded in dating her, although practically all tried.

Particularly noticeable was the way that both Mark and Ruth Colorado kept to themselves; and they rarely ventured off the campus.

Once a professor of languages heard them conversing in a strange tongue. The professor went home and got a headache trying to identify the lingo—he'd thought he had a smattering of every language being spoken, enough knowledge to identify the tongue, at least, but this one defeated him. When he asked the Colorados about it, all he received was a strange blank smile. And he got the idea they were worried because he had overheard them.

On another occasion, Mark Colorado went downtown for dinner with some of the men students. They discovered that Mark Colorado seemed a little shy on previous experience.

The dessert course came.

"What is this?" asked Mark Colorado.

"Ice cream," someone explained, staring at him curiously.

"Oh."

They took in a movie, and the strange white-haired fellow stared with rapt attention.

"Like the show?" one of the others asked.

"I never saw one before," said Mark Colorado.

They did some wondering about Mark and Ruth Colorado at Phenix Academy. "We recommend close observation," the board of psychologists had said. But the observers couldn't quite make up their minds.

Both Colorados still wore the thin steel chains around their necks, and one evening Mark and Ruth Colorado went swimming and onlookers got a chance to see what was suspended on the chains. Two black arrowheads.

It was noticed that both Colorados seemed to like to walk alone about the campus grounds at night.

Ruth Colorado was taking one of these nocturnal strolls, alone, when Spad Ames lunged out of the darkness and trapped her with his arms.

SPAD barked, "Help me, guys!" and the rest of his men rushed to his aid. If it struck any of them as foolish that a long wolf of a man like Spad Ames should need help to seize one girl, they were disillusioned, for Ruth Colorado got hold of one man's arm and twisted it out of joint, practically yanked an ear off another, and did a quantity of lesser damage before they threw her, gagged her, and hauled her into thick bushes.

A man folded a handkerchief over a flashlight lens and put a glow on the girl.

"I never saw white hair like that before," he muttered. "Except it's maybe a little like Spad's." "Give me a hand!" croaked the man whose arm the girl had twisted. "She got my arm out of joint." Spad Ames yanked strong cords out of his pockets and tied the girl, taking care with the knots, testing each binding carefully.

He seized the thin stainless steel chain around the girl's neck and dragged the black arrowhead into view. Snatching the arrowhead quickly, he pocketed it.

During the fight, Herman Locatella had remained in the background where he would not be seen and identified, but his curiosity had overcome prudent caution, and he had stepped close enough to glimpse the article on the steel chain.

"Hey," he said. "What was that you grabbed?"

Spad Ames scowled at him. "You afraid of getting that monkey suit mussed? Why didn't you help us?"

"I'm doing my helping with dollars. Remember?" Locatella tapped Spad Ames on the chest with a stiff forefinger when the latter stood up. "Don't try to shove me around, Spad. What'd you find? Another arrowhead, wasn't it?"

Spad Ames ignored the question. He leaned over the girl, produced his own arrowhead, and let her see it. Her eyes widened. She was impressed.

"Where is your brother?" Spad Ames asked.

"Why should I tell you?" The girl spoke slowly, as if English was not her natural language.

Spad shook the arrowhead to draw her attention to it.

"I carry this talisman," he said. "And I have come out of the mists, as did you and your brother. I am a messenger. Now talk. Where is your brother?"

Moved by these magic words, in a low voice the girl described the exact location of her brother's room.

Spad Ames selected three men. "You guys come with me. Locatella, you keep the girl. We'll come back to this spot."

He vanished in the darkness with his men.

Locatella, who was as intrigued as a Fiji Islander who had just been shown a firecracker, got down beside the girl. He gave her his biggest smile, the one he gave his client just before he charged an outrageous fee.

"I'm your friend," he whispered to the girl. "That fellow who just left is a liar and a crook."

"Yes," the girl whispered back, calmly enough. "He is very bad."

"I want to help you, but I'm puzzled," Locatella said. "You tell me the truth, and I'll see what I can do. What did the stuff about coming out of the mists mean? And what are the black arrowheads?"

"You are puzzled?"

"I'll tell the cross-eyed world. I can't make heads or tails out of this thing."

"Swell."

"Huh?"

"You are as big a crook as your friend," said the strange white-haired girl. "And when your friend reaches my brother, he will die, and the secret will die with him. We had suspected your friend would come, my brother and I, and we have prepared."

"Spad Ames will be killed?"

"He will become as a rock which gives off mists, and any who touch him will suffer great pain."

HERMAN LOCATELLA straightened and did some fast thinking which led him to a conclusion. He couldn't understand the mystery, but he was convinced there was a great deal of profit involved somewhere. Spad Ames seemed to be the man with all the information. It wouldn't do to have Spad killed at present, although ordinarily the demise of Spad Ames would not have been much mourned by Locatella.

As a matter of fact, Locatella had made up his mind to double-cross Spad Ames at the first opportunity. He suspected Spad had the same idea.

"Watch her!" Locatella snapped. "I'm going to warn Spad."

Locatella galloped away. He had heard Ruth Colorado direct Spad to Mark Colorado's room, so he knew where to find his compatriot. Spad and his three helpers were creeping down a hallway when Locatella overhauled them.

"What the hell!" Spad Ames said unpleasantly. "You trying to watch every move I make?"

Whispering, Locatella told Spad what he had learned from the girl. The whisper was to prevent the three hired strong-arm men from overhearing.

Locatella finished his low-voiced information by suggesting: "Why don't we send one of the dopes in first? If anything happens to him—well, it'll be him it happens to."

"Remind me to keep an eye on you," Spad Ames said dryly. "You are becoming very smart."

They selected the most burly of the strong-arm men for their goat. They stood close to him and both of them patted his back.

"This Mark Colorado knows me by sight," Spad Ames said. "You barge in there and grab him, on account of if I went in, I wouldn't get to first base because he'd know me." Spad passed the man a stout sock filled with sand. A stout sock full of sand was Spad's favorite blackjack; in an emergency, the sand could be emptied, and a policeman could hardly call a sock in a man's pocket a

deadly weapon. "Bop him one with this," Spad advised. "Tell him you are the electrician inspecting the lights."

The man walked to Mark Colorado's door, knocked, and was admitted when he mumbled that he was the electrician.

He did not come back.

"That don't look so good," Spad muttered, after about five minutes.

"Does this Mark Colorado really know you by sight?" Locatella asked in a low voice.

"Not that I know of."

"Why don't we all barge in, then? One man can't lick all of us."

Waiting had made Spad Ames impatient. "Let's do that," he growled.

THEY walked to Mark Colorado's door and knocked. There was no response.

"It's the night watchman," Locatella called in a loud hearty voice intended to inspire confidence. "Have you seen anything of a man pretending to be an electrician?"

"That was a good lie," Spad whispered admiringly.

It got no answer from beyond the door, however. Spad then tried the door, which proved to be unlocked. It swung open easily.

It was quite dark within, so Spad and Locatella—they were taking no chances themselves—had one of their hired helpers reach in and turn on the lights. Nothing happened, so they entered.

They found themselves in a large, pleasant room with a carpet on the floor and comfortable furniture. There were books on the table, a radio near the window. The window, Locatella noted, was locked on the inside, and there was only the one.

"Where is everybody?" a man muttered.

"Try the bathroom," Spad suggested.

The bathroom was in darkness also, so a man reached inside and snapped on the lights, after which there was some hesitancy about entering. Finally, Spad Ames got a hand mirror off the table where the books lay, and held it inside the bathroom, periscope fashion.

"Empty!" he said.

They examined the bathroom thoroughly. They examined the room. The one closet was empty, too, and there were no more doors. Locatella raked startled fingers through his hair.

"Nobody in here, and no place they could have gone," he said, and stared at Spad Ames.

"Don't look at me," Spad muttered. "I can't explain—"

At this point, the corridor door slammed. All of them jumped wildly, then rushed for the door, the same one by which they had entered. They found it locked.

"We're fastened in here!" Spad barked.

Locatella whirled, ran to the window, flung it up, and put a leg through it, preparatory to jumping. He drew the leg back hastily.

"We're four floors up," he gasped. "I forgot that."

The lights went out suddenly, and he finished the statement in the dark. They stood there, surrounded by complete blackness, until one of the men, his lungs irritated by holding his breath too long, began coughing. Spad Ames swore at him.

"Kick the door down!" Locatella snarled. "Why did I ever get messed up in this thing in the first place?"

"We make a racket, and they'll call the cops," Spad warned. "We'll all wind up in the can."

In the blackness of the room, someone began shrieking as if trying to get his lungs out of his chest. It was a cry such as Spad Ames had heard before: on that night weeks ago, after the plane crash in the canyon, Waldo Berlitz had made such sounds as these.

Chapter VI. BLACKJACK FIGHT

LIEUTENANT COLONEL ANDREW BLODGETT "MONK" MAYFAIR, the chemist who was a member of Doc Savage's group, was thinking of a great many things to say, and saying them as fast as his tongue could manage.

"It was all a gag, I tell you," he repeated at five-second intervals.

Big-fisted Renny Renwick, the engineer, was looking speechless and sheepish.

"All a gag," Monk insisted.

Doc Savage and the dapper Ham Brooks had finally revived. The gas that had overcome them was a type producing no harmless effects, although their period of unconsciousness had extended more than an hour.

"You two hooligans," Ham told Monk and Renny scathingly, "could walk under a caterpillar and not touch fuzz."

Monk wailed: "How was we to know Doc would be with you? It was a gag, I tell you. Renny and me got tired of that hands-and-knees-and-bark business. We knew you had been eavesdropping on this Locatella, so we laid for you here on the roof. We didn't know Doc would be along."

"What were you clowns figuring on doing with me?"

Monk and Renny hesitated, then both suddenly burst into laughter.

"We were going to take your clothes and leave you to wake up on top of that statue of Columbus at the corner of Central Park," Monk chuckled.

"Take my clothes?" Ham yelled. "Leave me naked in that conspicuous spot!"

"Except for a fig leaf," Monk explained. "I had the fig leaf. Brother, if you think finding a fig leaf in this town is easy, you can guess again. Renny had the ladder—snagged it from a fire house." Renny let out a pleased rumble. "Can you imagine what the newspapers would have said? America's best-dressed man introduces fig leaf as latest style! Or something like that."

"That was a low-down trick!" Ham snapped.

"It was no lower down than the way you crooked us on that Harvard bet," Renny rumbled.

Ham started. "You—er—found out about that?"

"Yes," Renny thumped, "we did. And I don't mind your roping Monk with your gags, but you don't need to include me."

Ham had been afraid they would find out the truth. Some days before, he had rigged a microphone onto a radio over which Monk and Ham had been listening to a broadcast of the Harvard game; cutting the mike into circuit, Ham had described a different and entirely imaginary game wherein Harvard lost. Then he had walked in innocently, pretending not to know the game was over, and deliberately irritating Monk and Renny, had offered to bet Harvard would win. To his glee, they had taken him up—and had to pay off by kneeling and barking whenever they saw Ham.

"Well, it was good barking while it lasted," Ham said cheerfully.

They went on and climbed into the office in which Ham kept his eavesdropping apparatus. Ham put on the telephone headsets and listened.

"Locatella's office seems to be empty." Ham frowned accusingly at Monk and Renny. "You've ruined our plans. You delayed us, and the crooks got away."

Monk snorted. "Your recording device was working, wasn't it? All we've got to do is play it back."

THIRTY minutes or so later, as a result of listening to the conversation from Locatella's office which the recorder had repeated mechanically, Doc Savage brought his car to a halt at the edge of Phenix Academy campus. They had made very fast time, and the abruptness of their stop made the tires whistle. They listened.

"Sounds like a war," Renny rumbled.

From around the Phenix Academy buildings were coming loud voices, a few shouts, and a series of irregularly spaced shots. Two searchlights, so powerful that they threw beams which were like white rods, were fanning slowly over the buildings.

"Something goes on," Monk agreed.

Before they could get out of the machine, a man came dashing through the darkness to their car.

"Are you cops?" the man asked.

"No," Monk said. "We're just curious—"

"Not cops—that's nice." The man showed them a viciously wagging blackjack made of a sand-filled sock, and put the blinding beam of a flashlight in their eyes. "Unload, you yaps! Get out of there—quick!"

"Hey!" Monk exploded. "What's goin' on?"

"Out with you! We need this car."

Monk blurted: "He's only got a blackjack—"

"Easy does it," Doc Savage said quietly.

Doc opened the door and got out, and his three men followed him, Monk banging the car door angrily.

The bandit with the blackjack lifted his voice. "Come on, guys!" he barked. "Here's a heap we can use for a scam."

Spad Ames and Locatella scrambled out of the campus shrubbery. They were followed by one man carrying Ruth Colorado. Four more brought up the rear, holding the corners of a stout blanket in which lay the final member of the raiding party.

The man they carried was in a peculiar condition. He was doubled, as if in agony. His body—it was obvious no life remained in him—was as rigid as stone. Also, it seemed to be steaming from head to foot.

The taxi headlights, helping out the fog-discouraged glow of a nearby street light, furnished fair illumination.

Doc Savage and his men gazed at the body, astounded by its strange condition.

The four who carried the form in the blanket did not seem very happy about it, either. In fact, they were sweating profusely, and their faces were lead-colored. They looked as if someone had taken the lid off things and let them see the works.

Over by the Phenix Academy buildings, there was another spattering burst of shots, and the searchlight beams waggled around like the antennae of fantastically enlarged insects.

Spad Ames laughed.

"They still think we're on the roof, where we went after we broke out of the room," he said.

"We'd be there, too, if I hadn't found a freight elevator," reminded a man who evidently wanted to call attention to his own merits.

"You're so damn perfect," Spad Ames said unkindly, "you should have found Mark Colorado for us."

At this point, Herman Locatella emitted a horrified squawk. Locatella carried a flashlight, and it had occurred to him to turn the beam on Doc Savage and his men, who were standing with their arms

lifted. The others had not recognized Doc Savage, but Locatella knew Doc instantly, and let out the noise, a wordless kind of squawk.

The four sweating pallbearers hanging to the blanket corners, shocked by Locatella's noise, let go the blanket. It dropped. The body it contained hit the sidewalk, making a sound exactly as if a stone statue had been dropped, and one of the doubled-up legs broke off cleanly.

Locatella got words coming.

"This guy you've held up is Doc Savage!" he screeched.

SPAD AMES wheeled, his mouth becoming perfectly round with astonishment. "What-what--"

"Doc Savage!" Locatella jabbed both arms at Doc. "The Man of Bronze--"

Spad understood, and must have remembered some of the things he had heard about Doc Savage. His blackjack was in his coat pocket. He drove a hand for it.

"Watch out there!" Ham yelled. He lunged for Spad Ames, but someone whacked him over the head with a blackjack, and Ham sank and began crawling around foolishly on the ground.

Fortunately, Doc Savage pitched for Spad also. Spad, who was fast on his feet, twisted to get clear. He didn't quite succeed. Doc got hold of his coat, wrenched, and the coat came to pieces. Doc got the part of the coat containing the blackjack.

Monk had been ogling the body in the blanket, and his small eyes had been almost hanging out since he had seen the leg break off when the body was dropped. Monk came out of his trance and plunged into the fight.

Herman Locatella drew a small automatic; he shot Doc Savage six times in the chest and stomach--the bullets seemed to have no effect--before he realized Doc must be wearing some kind of bullet-proof undergarment. His gun--the only gun in the crowd, incidentally--was now empty. Locatella whirled and ran to the car, dived in behind the wheel, and stamped the starter pedal in a frenzy.

Doc Savage, whose movement always had method, worked straight to the bound figure of Ruth Colorado. He scooped up the white-haired girl, carried her into the nearest shrubbery, left her there, and raced back to the fight.

Monk had two men down. He was thumping them and howling. Monk liked his fights noisy.

The mêlée so far had been as confused as the first seconds of a cat-and-dog fight. Now it straightened out.

Locatella got the car engine started. Spad Ames lunged clear of the scrap, and grasping the blanket, he gathered it up, body and all, and jammed it into the car.

While Spad Ames was working with the body, big-fisted Renny had snatched up the part of Spad Ames' coat which had been torn off earlier in the fight. He had felt in the pockets, and found no arrowhead. Renny was very interested in the black arrowhead. Rushing up behind Spad Ames, Renny seized his trousers pockets and tore them bodily out of Spad Ames' pants.

Spad howled and began fighting Renny.

Four of the hired thugs, suddenly deserting the fray, jumped for the car. Two of them struck Renny on the head with sand-filled socks, and Renny folded down. Spad Ames tried to get the arrowhead out of Renny's hand, but the engineer's big fist refused to open.

"Gimme a hand!" Spad rapped, and they heaved the dazed Renny bodily into the car, where two men sat upon him and clubbed him methodically.

Spad Ames grasped the blanket, gathered it up and jammed blanket and body into the car.

The cab rolled.

Monk roared: "They're all getting away!" and raced vainly after the fleeing cab.

But Spad Ames, Locatella, the four hired thugs, and the fantastically rock-hard body of their companion, all vanished into the fog and darkness with the taxicab. They took Renny with them.

MONK stopped and stamped his feet and shook both fists to express his feelings.

"Just like a rusty ape," Ham said unkindly.

Monk came back, found a flashlight in his clothing, and switched the beam over the surroundings.

It was darker, now that the headlights of the taxicab were gone. Monk discovered that two members of the Spad Ames-Locatella gang were spread out, senseless.

"Well, we bagged a couple, anyway," Monk said.

"Whew!" groaned Ham. "Did we get away from them?"

"Yes, we got away--wait a minute!" Monk turned his flashlight on Ham. "Ain't you a little mixed up, shyster? They got away from us."

"Was there a fight?"

"Was there--say, where have you been?"

Ham felt of his head. "Somebody kissed me. I think he used a blackjack."

"They got Renny."

"Great grief!" Ham gasped.

Doc Savage went into the shrubbery, then came out again carrying Ruth Colorado over his shoulder. There was enough noise in the campus shrubbery to indicate the police were approaching to investigate.

"Here, take the girl," Doc Savage said quickly. "Also pick up the two men on the ground. Get them away from here before the police come."

"I'll carry the girl," Ham said, beating Monk to that job by a small margin.

Monk asked disgustedly: "Where'll we meet you, Doc?"

"At your laboratory," Doc said.

Ham carried the girl. Monk gathered up the two senseless Spad Ames' men easily. They vanished into the night fog.

Within a few moments, several policemen arrived on the spot. They recognized Doc Savage at one, possibly because he happened to hold a high honorary commission in the department; or more probably because he had addressed a mass meeting of police the week before on crime-prevention methods, and his big bronze figure was easily remembered.

"What happened?" an officer asked. "We heard a young riot over this way."

"Some strangers seized the car in which I was riding and also seized Renny Renwick, one of my-ah-associates." He described Spad Ames, Locatella and the others, explained that the car was a cab, gave its license number, and finished, "They had the body of a man with them."

He started to say that the body of the man seemed to be smoking, and when dropped, had made a sound as if it was rock and one of the limbs had broken off. He changed his mind. They wouldn't believe him.

Not that he would have blamed them for not believing.

"What is going on?" he asked.

"There you've got us," said the policeman. "About half an hour ago, an uproar broke out in the room of a student named Mark Colorado. The night watchman came to investigate, and got slugged on the head for his pains. There was a bunch of men in the room, and they rushed out. The watchman could use his gun, and he drove them onto the roof. The cops were called. We thought the gang was still on the roof. I guess they got off."

"They used a freight elevator," Doc advised, repeating what he had heard one of the raiders say. The policeman's expression became peculiar. "I don't believe this, but here's what somebody said," he muttered. "They said these guys were carrying a life-sized statue in a blanket, and the statue was giving off smoke. I guess it was only the body they saw."

"Possibly," Doc said.

"What gave them the idea the body was smoking, though?" pondered the officer, puzzled.

Doc asked: "What about Mark Colorado?"

"Someone saw him during the hoopla, but now we can't find him."

"Suppose," Doc suggested, "we take a look at the room where all this started."

Chapter VII. DANGEROUS KNOWLEDGE

ANOTHER of the strange things about the mysterious Colorados was the fact that they had seemed to have plenty of money, and one of the Phenix faculty mentioned this to explain the rather pleasant room which Mark Colorado occupied. Doc Savage said, "Thank you," and looked around.

The radio had been knocked to the floor and stepped on, two chairs were upset and the bedclothing had been scattered, doubtless when Spad Ames seized the blanket in which to carry away his unlucky hired thug. Struggling feet had goosed the rug out of shape.

Doc paused and tested the air noticeably with his nostrils.

"You're right--there was a queer odor in here," a policeman said. "It was stronger, but the window has been open." The officer hesitated. "There was something else, too."

"What?"

"When I first came into the room, the place seemed--er--well, like a tomb. It was chilly in here, it seemed to me. The cold and that odor sort of gave me the creeps. Ah--I hope you don't think I'm being silly. But I distinctly got a creepy feeling."

Doc Savage's flake-gold eyes roved. He had trained his faculties of observation with exercises included in the daily two-hour routine which he took. Having gone over the room, bath and closet, he did something which Spad Ames and Locatella, in their hurried dash into the room, had not thought--he examined the ceiling.

Doc slid the table into the center of the room and climbed upon it. The ceiling, instead of being plastered, was paneled with a sound absorbent material in areas about two feet square. Doc shoved against one of these which was somewhat soiled along one edge--the soiled edge had drawn his attention to the thing.

The panel hinged upward, leaving an opening sufficiently large to permit the passage of a man.

"What is on the floor above?" Doc asked.

"The student labs," a faculty member explained. "Each Phenix student is encouraged to rent and equip a private laboratory if he is sufficiently scientifically inclined. The labs are small rooms on the top floor, and are completely private. We have had instances of students using them to--ah--distill their own gin. But usually they do worthwhile work."

"Who used this?" he asked.

"Mark Colorado. I remember, now, that he was insistent on having this laboratory."

In one corner of the lab was a pile of excelsior and the remains of a wooden packing case. The case had been sent to Mark Colorado by express. Doc made particular note of where it had come from. The case had been shipped from Flagstaff, Arizona.

Neither case nor packing gave any indication of what its contents might have been.

Doc Savage completed a thorough investigation of the lab, and another inspection of Mark

Colorado's living quarters below, in the course of which he brought out a number of fingerprints, using print powder borrowed from a police identification bureau man who had arrived. He studied the prints closely, fixing their primary type in his mind sufficiently that he could, by calling upon his remarkably developed memory, probably recognize them if he saw them again.

Meantime, no trace had been found of Mark Colorado.

"What do you make of this thing?" a policeman asked.

"It seems rather mysterious so far," Doc Savage admitted, and leaving the college, took a cab to Monk's laboratory. He would have preferred the subway, which was faster, but he was continually being recognized and embarrassed by stares and autograph hunters.

Then, too, he had noticed another cab following him, and he did not want to make the trailing too difficult.

MONK MAYFAIR maintained a penthouse atop one of the giant needle-thin buildings in the Wall Street district, where he had a breathtaking view of the lower city and the harbor. Monk liked to lean on the penthouse balcony railing for hours at a time, and watch the patterns of steamship lights on the harbor water, for Monk, himself as pleasantly homely as a Texas horned toad, was a great admirer of beauty. The type of beauty he admired most was in pretty girls.

In addition to a laboratory which was almost as complete as Doc Savage's amazing establishment at headquarters, Monk maintained rather fantastic modernistic living quarters in this penthouse. One of the features was a suite he had rigged up for his pet pig, an animal he had named Habeas Corpus in order to irritate Ham. There was a mud bath for Habeas' exclusive use, and the mud was special radio-active mud imported from Claremore, Oklahoma, and delicately perfumed.

Doc Savage alighted from his taxicab, and entered the building, then angled over to a corner of the lobby, taking up a position behind, a pillar to wait.

Mark Colorado came in almost at once. Doc had not seen him before, but he recognized the young man, although Mark Colorado wore a dark hat yanked down over his white hair. Mark Colorado, then, must have been the occupant of the trailing taxicab.

Mark Colorado was being cautious. He glanced about, then went directly to the elevator, the only one in operation at this time of night, and rang. The elevator arrived.

"This the only elevator running?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Where did you let Doc Savage off?"

"I haven't, seen Doc Savage," the operator said.

Mark Colorado did not argue about it. He took the fellow by the throat with his left hand and hit the man's jaw with his right hand, then placed the limp operator in a corner. He closed the door and ran the elevator up himself.

Doc Savage raced to the elevator bank. The remaining cages stood at the lobby level, but the sliding doors were closed. They could be opened by key, and Doc knew where an emergency key was kept hanging on an obscure hook. He got it, piloted a cage upward, and was careful about stepping out into the penthouse vestibule, which was dark, and moving to an open door.

Mark Colorado was flourishing a large hand grenade. He had plucked the key out of this, and was holding the lever down with his thumb.

"You can put your hands up or keep them down," he said. "But if one of you jumps me, I'll let go this thing."

Monk and Ham gave the grenade wide-eyed looks. If Mark Colorado took his thumb off the firing lever, nothing on earth would prevent that grenade exploding within five seconds or so, and it would probably demolish most of the penthouse, for it was a large grenade.

Ruth Colorado, freed of the cords with which Spad Ames had bound her, was sitting in a chair.

There was a radiant pleasure on her face as she looked at her brother, although she was not smiling. She seemed to approve of what he was doing with the grenade.

The two Spad Ames followers who had been unconscious had now revived. They occupied two other chairs, and were tied hand and foot. They ogled the grenade and looked as if they wanted to faint. The pig, Habeas Corpus, was investigating the ankles of the two prisoners. Habeas had abnormally long legs, a lean body, a long snout built for inquiring into things, and two ears so enormous that they might have been mistaken for misplaced wings.

Chemistry, Ham's pet, sat nearby.

"Where is Doc Savage?" asked Mark Colorado.

Monk frowned. "You had better find out who your friends are around here," the homely chemist advised. "We rescued your sister."

"I watched you do that," Mark Colorado said.

"You—" Monk frowned. "Why didn't you pitch in and help?"

"And let you make me a prisoner, too?"

"Nobody," disclaimed Monk, "is a prisoner around here."

Mark Colorado glanced at his sister and asked: "What about that?"

"They were asking me questions," the girl said. "And they were beginning to talk about using truth serum."

"That," said Mark Colorado grimly, "is what I was afraid of."

MARK COLORADO moved a little and stood under a light, so that Doc Savage, watching from the darkened vestibule, was able to inspect the thing thoroughly enough to be positive that it was genuine.

Both Monk and Ham were perspiring from the strain.

"One of you call Doc Savage in here," ordered Mark Colorado.

"He isn't here," Ham said.

"I know better. I saw you go off and leave him, and I hung around in a cab until he left Phenix Academy. I followed him. While waiting, I asked someone who he was. They told me he was Doc Savage, of whom I have heard and read. It is unfortunate that it had to be Doc Savage."

"Unfortunate?" Ham squinted at him. "What kind of talk is that?"

"You have learned something--"

"Brother, are you mistaken!" Ham interrupted. "We haven't learned anything!"

Mark Colorado said: "You know that Spad Ames is getting a gang together to go back after something he found somewhere in Africa--"

"Africa!" Ham barked. "Who said anything about Africa? It was in the Grand Canyon badlands somewhere."

Mark Colorado showed his teeth grimly. "You see? You do know a great deal."

Monk told Ham disgustedly: "What you better do is shut up before you talk him into letting go of that grenade."

"The fellow is crazy," Ham said. "Anyone who does what he's doing with a grenade is crazy."

"Well, shut up and stop irritating him," Monk yelled, "before he drops that egg!"

Mark Colorado spoke to his sister. He used a dialect which, while not unmusical, was completely unintelligible to Monk and Ham.

Out in the darkened vestibule, perplexed wrinkles appeared on Doc Savage's forehead. The lingo was completely unknown to him, although he could make himself understood in almost any language or dialect, and could speak many of them with native fluency.

Ruth Colorado arose from her chair and picked up the cords with which she had been tied. She went to Monk and Ham in turn and searched them. Then she threw loops over their wrists and began tying them.

"What you think you're doin' with us?" Monk asked uneasily.

"Unfortunately," Mark Colorado said, "you have got to disappear, and not be seen again."

Monk said: "You mean--you're gonna try to kill us?"

"No. You will be taken to the spot which Spad Ames happened to find. You will remain there the rest of your lives."

DOC SAVAGE eased back from the open door, wheeled and entered the section of the penthouse containing Monk's chemical laboratory. Monk and Ham were having their troubles with the Colorados in the residential portion. The laboratory was a series of large rooms done in white, with the apparatus arrayed in spectacular fashion, for while Monk was unquestionably a great industrial chemist, he also loved a show, and one of his proud boasts was that a motion picture producer had recently taken still photographs of the lab to use as a model in constructing a set for some pseudo-scientific picture that was in production.

Chemicals were contained in an array of long metal cabinets in the storeroom. Doc Savage went to the cabinet, and covering his flashlight lens with his palm, except for a small crack of light, he searched. He had worked with Monk here, so he knew the particular container which he wanted. The bottle which he selected, gallon-sized, held a liquid concoction of chemicals which Doc had recently perfected, but which as yet he had not given a practical test.

Ruth Colorado had finished tying Monk and Ham when Doc returned to the vestibule door with the container of chemical.

Mark Colorado, taking a small pillbox from one of his pockets with his hand which did not hold the grenade, said: "You are going to eat some of these. They are sleeping pills, so don't get worried. Ruth, take the pills and make each one swallow about four."

Doc Savage came into the room then. He uncorked the bottle. He dashed the contents over the back of Mark Colorado's head. When Mark Colorado whirled, Doc sloshed more of the chemical liquid into his face.

Ruth Colorado started to leap forward. Doc thrust the gallon bottle at her, and the chemical splashed over her face. She gasped loudly, and clamped her hands to her eyes.

Mark Colorado dropped the grenade. The lever clicked, and inside the thing the timing mechanism began to race off the four or five seconds before it would explode. Doc hurled the bottle of chemical against Mark Colorado; the bottle broke and saturated the man.

With a continuation of the hurling gesture, the bronze man lunged forward and down and got the grenade while it was still rolling.

He threw it through the window, hurled it very hard, so that it would continue outward and upward.

His rush had carried him almost to the window, so he went flat on the floor below the sill, where the masonry would furnish a parapet. Monk and Ham, flopping like fish out of water, had already progressed through a door into a darkened room; they continued their flip-flop progress, their idea

to get as far away as fast as possible.

There was white flash, crash; the entire window jumped inward over Doc's head. Glass landed on his body, jangled on the floor beside him. Grenade fragments, as dangerous as bullets, chopped at the walls. Habeas Corpus, the pig, and Chemistry, the chimp, dashed for cover.

Mark and Ruth Colorado had raced out into the vestibule, the chemical obviously not having blinded them. Clanging of the elevator door indicated they had entered the lift.

Doc Savage made no effort to stop them.

Chapter VIII. RADIO CLUE

WHEN Monk and Ham were untied, they had trouble making their voices function. "Blast me, I didn't think I could get so scared!" Monk managed finally.

"You red-headed ape," Ham said unkindly, "if you hadn't been busy big-eyeing that girl, Mark Colorado couldn't have walked in on us like he did."

"Well, there's no danger of you having red hair."

"Why not?"

"Nobody ever heard of ivory rusting."

Monk and Ham scowled at each other. After a narrow escape, it seemed that they could quiet their nerves by insulting each other.

When they had gotten rid of some of the scare, Ham said: "Both of those Colorados are nuts, or something. He wasn't fooling with that grenade, and the girl seemed just as calm as he was about it."

"It wasn't quite human, the way they acted," Monk admitted.

"I'll say it wasn't human," Ham agreed. Then Ham realized he was forgetting himself and agreeing with Monk, so he scowled, and snapped, "The girl is all right. She's just got a lot of nerve."

"She had a lot more than nerve," Monk said, and made a shape with his hands. "Boy, what a form!"

"Monk's heart," Ham explained, "sounded like a string of firecrackers."

Monk grinned. "I didn't hear yours making any sound, particularly after her big brother walked in with that iron apple."

Doc Savage had gone outside to the balcony, and by leaning over the cold stone parapet, he could look downward into the lifeless fog that packed the canyon of street that was sixty-odd floors deep. He thought he saw a pale spot that might have been a taxicab headlight move away. He was not sure. The bronze man went back to Monk and Ham.

"Did you learn anything from the girl before her brother arrived?" he asked.

Ham said: "She thanked us for rescuing her. We told her who we were, and she said she was very, very sorry that we had gotten mixed up in this, because it meant that we would have to be taken into the mists."

"Into the mists?" The bronze man's flake-gold eyes seemed to become more animated.

"Into the mists—it sounds silly," Monk interposed. "But that's what she said."

"Was that all?"

"Yes. Of course, we gathered that we were to be taken into the mists, as she put it, because we had found out just a little bit about some tremendous secret. That was the general idea."

"She give information on the black arrowheads?"

"Heck, no! She just told us it was too bad we knew anything at all about black arrowheads."

Monk got up and stamped about the room. "The Colorados got away. Spad Ames got away. So did Locatella. Unless we can get something out of the two prisoners we've got left, we're sunk."

"Which means we may have trouble finding Renny," Ham added.

Doc Savage went into the adjacent room and studied the two hired men of Spad Ames whom they had captured. Some glass had been sprayed over the pair by the grenade explosion outside, and one of them was staring in fascinated horror at a gouge which a grenade fragment had made in the floor near his head.

"Have you any truth serum?" Doc asked.

"Heck, no!" Monk said. "We told the girl we had some, trying to scare her. But we're out of it."

"Long Tom has a new lie detector," Doc said. "Get hold of him."

LONG TOM was Major Thomas J. Roberts, another of Doc Savage's coterie of five associates. The fifth member, the long-bodied and long-worded William Harper Johnny Littlejohn, was at present in Mongolia following his occupation of archaeology; he was trying to prove or disprove somebody's claim that the human race had first appeared in that part of the world.

In the interval before Long Tom arrived, the police came, but departed when Doc Savage explained that he would rather handle this matter himself, and when Monk promised to pay for all the grenade damage in the vicinity. After the officers left, it occurred to Monk that he had better ascertain just how much damage he had rashly promised to pay for, and he went out to look.

Doc telephoned the central city police station, and the headquarters of the state police but no trace had been found of his taxicab or of Spad Ames and Locatella.

Monk came back in, muttering. "I must be losing my mind, promising to pay for that damage! I'm financially ruined! Ham, you'll have to loan me some dough."

"You broke again?" Ham demanded.

"Listen, when I was a baby they paid a nurse to push me around in a buggy, and I been pushed for

money ever since."

Long Tom Roberts walked in. He was a rather wan-looking fellow with the kind of a complexion that made it seem he must have grown up in a mushroom cave. Long Tom's general physical appearance frequently convinced strangers that he had either just left, or was headed for, a hospital bed. As a matter of fact, no one remembered Long Tom ever having been ill, and he frequently whipped much healthier-looking men than himself, two and three at a time.

"I brought it," he announced triumphantly.

He meant his lie detector. Long Tom was the electrical wizard of their group, and his latest brain child was his lie detector, a supersensitive device which measured tiny electrical currents set up in the body as a part of nerve reaction when an individual told a lie. The device was about the size of a portable radio, and somewhat resembled one, except that there was a large dial and a needle, and electrodes which connected to the victim's wrists.

Monk sniffed and said: "Probably that thing won't work."

"You can ride Ham all you want to," Long Tom told him levelly. "But you mess with me and you'll end up like a postage stamp."

"How do you mean—postage stamp?"

"Licked."

Monk fell silent. The truth was that he was afraid of the aemic-looking Long Tom, who occasionally flew off the handle without warning and performed somewhat after the fashion of a wild cat.

They questioned the two prisoners, Doc Savage putting the queries.

"What do you know about the black arrowheads?"

"Nothing," both answered.

"What does the talk about going into the mists, and coming out of the mists, mean?"

"We have no idea."

"Where can we find Spad Ames and Locatella?"

"Don't know."

"To what race of people do the Colorados belong?"

"Can't imagine."

Long Tom's device indicated answers to all four of these questions to be the truth.

"Do you have criminal records?" Doc asked.

"No."

They were both liars there, however, according to the detector.

"We'll take them downstairs," Doc said, "and take a cab to headquarters."

THE trip uptown was uneventful, and so was the ride up in the private elevator to the eighty-sixth floor; but when they approached the door, they saw an envelope that had been stuck to the panel with a bit of chewing gum.

"Now what's this?" Monk grumbled, and opened the envelope. Printed lettering on the one sheet inside said:

HOW DOES THIS STRIKE YOU FOR A TRADE? YOUR FRIEND RENNY IN EXCHANGE FOR MARK AND RUTH COLORADO.
WE TRIED TO BORROW YOUR CAR. REMEMBER?

"Spad Ames wants the two Colorados mighty bad," Monk muttered. "I wonder why?"

No one told him why. Doc Savage went into the laboratory, returned with a hypodermic needle, and used the contents to put both of their captives to sleep.

"Bring them along," the bronze man said.

They used another car from the private garage, this machine a dark sedan that had size, power and the impregnability of a battleship turret without being conspicuous, and drove to a small private hospital on the West Side, where they unloaded the two sleeping prisoners.

The hospital, although no one but the managing director knew the fact, was maintained by Doc Savage as a completely charitable institution for the nearby slum sections. The two captives would be held there until called for.

"These will go to college," Doc told the hospital director, indicating the two senseless ex-members of Spad Ames' gang.

These cryptic instructions would result in an ambulance calling for the pair before many hours had passed, and taking them to a unique institution for curing criminals which Doc Savage maintained in a remote, mountainous and almost uninhabited section of up-state New York. At this institution, surgeons trained by Doc Savage would perform delicate brain operations which would wipe out all memory of the past. The pair would receive training in some trade, would be taught to hate crime and criminals, after which they would be released to become citizens of some value. No crook—once having matriculated in this unusual "college"—ever returned to crime.

Existence of this "college" was kept from the public for various reasons, one being that the place was a little unorthodox; and this method of curing criminals, while it was one that Doc felt would eventually be used widely, was somewhat too fantastic for public acceptance.

"Now," Monk said grimly, "if we just had a way of locating Renny."

"We have," Doc said.

"Huh?"

The bronze man switched on the radio which, instead of being located under the dash, was clamped against the car top, just back of the windshield. It was a compact set, both transmitter and receiver, as well as convertible into a direction finder. Doc made the conversion by throwing switches, and stopping the car and fitting a small collapsible loop aerial into the weatherproof socket on top.

Monk suddenly remembered the perfectly obvious fact that all of Doc Savage's private machines were equipped with two-way radio apparatus.

"Doc!" he exploded. "In that taxicab Spad Ames took from us—you didn't leave the radio, on, by any chance?"

"I left the transmitter switched on," Doc admitted.

Monk emitted a pleased whoop. "Then it's probably still on, because the transmitter don't make any noise, so they wouldn't notice it."

Long Tom said: "Then we can locate the car simply by taking bearings on the transmitter carrier wave with our finder."

Doc nodded; he was busy with the direction-finder.

Chapter IX. TRAILS WEST

BY three o'clock in the morning, the fog had turned to thin rain that poured down in long strings and made sheets on the windshield wherever it was not knocked away by the wipers. The big car ran silently, the tires making, as they threw water, more noise than the engine of the machine.

The road was rough—it was well north of the city—and the car bucked enough to keep them hanging to the support straps. Monk, Ham and Long Tom would have been uneasy had any one of them been driving at such speed, but their confidence in Doc's tooling of the machine was complete, so they were relaxing as much as they could.

"Naturally, they would go north," Ham said grimly. "That way, they would not have to use bridges, ferries or tunnels over the East River or Hudson that are easily watched."

Long Tom emitted a sharp noise.

"Hep!" said Long Tom. "We've passed it up."

He had been manipulating the direction finder steadily; the loop had swung around sharply, following the signal, until it was at right angles to the car.

"We just passed a side road," Ham said.

Doc continued driving. "We will go on a bit, in case they should be watching the road," he explained.

Half a mile beyond, after they had rounded a curve, the bronze man wheeled their machine off the rough blacktop pavement and stopped.

Ham opened the door, grumbled: "Have we got to get out and swim in this?"

"Too bad about them clothes of yours," Monk said.

Doc took the radio along. It could be made portable by loosening thumb screws, an emergency set of batteries being self-contained.

The rain poured down, brush beat their faces and their feet sank in a lot of wet leaves. Trees thickened, and the branches lacked a canopy that shut out any light there might have been.

There was a thump, and Monk croaked, "Oaf! I mashed my face flat against a tree!"

"Probably improved it," Ham said cheerfully.

Doc Savage suggested: "Use the scanners."

The "scanner" was a device perfected by Doc Savage, and so complicated that only Monk and the missing Renny had any accurate idea of how it functioned. There was a projector that put out "black" light, or light with a wavelength near the infrared spectrum, and which was called "black" because it was invisible to the unaided human eye. The goggles which enabled the wearer to see by "black" light had lenses resembling condensed-milk cans, and functioned through the medium of rotating screens coated with a substance which briefly retained a "picture" formed by the infrared light. They donned the scanner. Seen through the devices, their surroundings were a vague, unreal panorama of bone-colored objects and intensely black shadows. But it was literally seeing in the dark; no one unequipped with the scanners would realize there was any light at all. Doc Savage had used the devices before; they gave a tremendous advantage in any fight in darkness.

They made good time for twenty minutes through the rain.

"This looks like it," Monk said, and they had been walking in such an unreal world, as seen through the scanner goggles, that his voice caused all the others to jump.

THE cabin was not constructed of genuine logs, but of sawed imitations nailed on over a framework of ordinary lumber, although in spite of that it would be an attractive place seen in better weather. There was a wide porch, and on this stood two men with shotguns.

The taxicab containing the radio they had trailed stood nearby.

"We could walk up," Monk whispered, "and cold-crack them two lookouts as easy as falling off a log."

"Careful does it," Doc warned. "We have had enough fighting and charging around for one night. It is about time we made some progress."

No trace of light whatever came from the cabin itself.

They had been standing there some moments when two automobiles, both sedans, came laboring up in

the mud and the rain. The cabin door opened and spilled a great blade of light into the night—it was instantly evident that they had the cabin windows blanketed—and Spad Ames came out.

Locatella alighted from one of the cars.

"Here's the rest of your men, Spad," he called. "Sixteen of them. Sixteen was the best I could do."

Spad Ames swore admiringly. "How you got sixteen together so quick beats me."

"Oh, I have my contacts," Locatella said smugly. "In fact, I keep quite an organization together for little jobs which bob up now and then."

The men dashed into the cabin, and Spad Ames and Locatella switched off the car lights, so that the resulting darkness and the noise of the drizzling rain made it perfectly safe for Doc Savage to approach close enough to overhear.

Spad Ames asked: "What about the machine guns, the bombs and the gas?"

"Already on its way west," Locatella said. "The pilot was willing to take off in this weather, which gives you some idea of the kind of a pilot he is."

"You sent the stuff ahead by plane?" Spad said admiringly.

"Yes."

"And that fellow Renny Renwick? We don't want him dead yet."

"On the plane with our weapons. I figured we should get him out of Doc Savage's reach until we made a trade—or got hold of the Colorados ourselves, after which we can drop him out of a plane or something."

Spad Ames nodded, asked: "What about ourselves? Where do we get planes?"

"We've got them," Locatella said, and laughed. "This cabin is one of my places. It's not held in my name, you understand. It's—well, I've got two or three of them scattered around in case of emergencies."

Spad Ames said admiringly: "You don't overlook many bets, do you? But what about planes for ourselves?"

"Come on," Locatella requested.

"Hey, in this rain—"

"It's not far."

Spad Ames and Locatella moved away, entering a narrow path walled thickly with shrubbery and overhung by leafage. They dashed the beams of flashlights ahead of them as they walked, so Doc Savage used care, not only to keep out of range of the lights, but to keep from being silhouetted between the lights and one of the guards on the cabin porch.

Suddenly they came out on the edge of a level meadow across which wind drove the rain in slanting, twisting wisps.

The hangar on the meadow edge was large without being conspicuous. Locatella worked briefly with a key and the padlock on the hangar door, then rolled the door back.

"Nice, eh?" he asked.

The two lean silver planes inside appeared, at first glance, smaller than they actually were, being streamlined to an extreme degree. They were dual-motored, the engine being the water-cooled type which lends itself to more effective streamlining.

"My personal ships," Locatella explained. "Two honeys—and they ought to be. They cost enough. I've only had them about three months."

"What about machine-gun mounts?"

"Already drilled. All you have to do is clamp the guns in. I have the guns, too, incidentally."

"Then we can take off for the west as soon as we get Mark and Ruth Colorado."

"Nothing to prevent."

Spad Ames rubbed his hands together. "This is swell. Perfect. When I came to the well-dressed Mr. Locatella, I sure didn't make a mistake, did I?"

Locatella gave his companion in crime a big confidential smile. "I'm glad you're satisfied, Spad, old pal." Locatella clapped Spad on the shoulder. "You know by now that you can trust me. So suppose you be a good fellow and tell me what you're after. Yes, indeed, tell me. What about the black arrowheads, and what about this going into the mists? It sounds very interesting."

"The hell with you, my genial friend!" Spad Ames said. "The hell with you!"

AFTER Spad Ames and Locatella—a drought of words had fallen between them—had gone back to the cabin, Doc Savage joined his men, who had been waiting in the brush. Long Tom was holding the two-way car radio in his arms, and Monk was carrying the loop aerial for the device.

"You heard what they said?" Monk asked grimly. "Renny isn't here. He's on a plane that they've sent west with a load of weapons."

The homely chemist was gloomy, feeling let down because they had not found Renny, their companion, who was a hostage, at this spot. Ham was unusually quiet, not even trying to think up remarks that would irritate Monk. Long Tom muttered: "This is a fine break. I thought we had Renny spotted."

Doc whispered: "There are two ways of helping Renny. One of them is to catch the Colorados before Spad Ames can find them. The second is to trail these fellows to the spot where they meet their arms cargo plane, and affect a direct rescue, if we can."

"Kind of puts us up a tree," Monk muttered. "We ain't got no idea where to find the Colorados. And you don't trail airplanes so easy."

"In this case, we might manage," Doc Savage said slowly.

"You mean—somebody stow away aboard?"

"No." The bronze man indicated the radio. "Use that. It is a transmitter as well as a receiver, and the emergency batteries will operate it steadily for almost forty-eight hours. We can trail that transmitter by using another direction-finder."

They concealed the radio far back in the fuselage of one of the planes. Long Tom, who was thinner than any of the others, crawled into the cramped space and planted the apparatus.

On second thought, Doc Savage concluded to put a radio in each of Locatella's ships, so he went back to the taxicab, and worked with the radio that was in the machine. Transmitter and receiver were separate units, although mounted in the same case. He removed the transmitter unit with its compact assemblage of batteries, and replaced the receiver and the case. It now appeared that the taxi radio had not been tampered with. But Doc carried the transmitter unit back, and they installed it in the other plane.

They put this one inside the right wing. Doc carefully unlaced an inspection port, and placed the set far back where it was not likely to be noticed, then replaced the inspection port cover.

"Now," announced Long Tom, "we're ready for them to take off for the west."

"The trouble is," Monk muttered, "they may stick around here for days, trying to catch the Colorados."

Doc Savage had been considering that angle, and it was one he did not like. He wanted to get Renny out of the hands of the Spad Ames' crew as soon as possible. He much preferred immediate action.

"We will hurry them a little," the bronze man said.

Doc went back to the cabin, placed his men behind trees, gave instructions, then drew a small high-explosive grenade, not much larger than a bantam egg, from a pocket, and hurled it. The earth quaked, the big cabin slid a foot on its foundations, and smashed boards climbed up in the air. A great gobble of echoes came back from surrounding woods and hills.

Doc Savage lifted his voice.

"You're under arrest, all of you!" His words were a great crashing that everyone in the cabin must have heard. "Come out with your hands up!"

He did not expect them to obey, and they didn't. An automatic shotgun ripped out a three-shell burst, and tore bark off the tree behind which Doc Savage had flattened.

The bronze man threw another grenade, a smaller one, tossing it so it would drop on the roof. In the flash, a cloud of swirling shingles was visible.

Men piled out of the cabin. They were armed, mostly with automatic rifles, and they turned loose a deafening roar of fire.

Spad Ames shouted: "Get to the planes, you fools!"

He got his gang organized, and they retreated rapidly through the woods.

Doc, altering his voice until it did not sound like his own, called: "Be careful, men! There are more of them than we thought."

Monk, fooled by the changed voice, growled: "Hey, somebody else is helpin' us!"

"That's Doc, you homely dope!" Ham enlightened him.

The engines of Locatella's big planes began roaring, and both craft shortly moaned up into the black leaking night sky.

"I hope," Monk said cheerfully, "that we scared 'em so bad they'll head straight for the west."

IN addition to the establishment on the eighty-sixth floor of the midtown building, and the basement garage which housed their collection of cars, Doc Savage maintained a hangar and boathouse on the Hudson River water front, only a few blocks distant. This structure was ostensibly an ancient warehouse that was not being used; the painted sign across the front had peeled in the weather until its legend, "Hidalgo Trading Company," could hardly be read, and the walls gave little outward sign of being as thick as those of an ancient fortress.

Inside was an assortment of fast planes, a true gyroplane which could arise and descend vertically, and various experimental craft. There was also a small yacht, very fast, a schooner which Doc Savage was storing there for his cousin, pretty Patricia Savage. Pat joined the bronze man sometimes in adventuring, when he did not manage to stop her, for she loved adventure. Other craft included speedboats and a highly advanced experimental submarine which Doc had constructed for subseas exploration and a trip under the polar ice cap.

They selected their fastest plane, a craft that could pound out of its two huge motors more speed than any military pursuit craft, and which was equipped for landing upon earth or water.

Doc had lately installed a large vault which held an assortment of the scientific devices which he used, these being packed in cases ready for quick transportation. The cases were numbered, and Doc, who knew their contents, checked off more than a dozen, which were loaded aboard.

Early daylight was whitening the skull-colored strings of rain as they taxied out on the Hudson.

Because visibility was no more than a hundred yards, even with the powerful floods spouting white light, Doc taxied downriver with the wind, then turned the plane—simply cranking up the landing gear

converted it into a seaplane—and took the air.

"I'll get on the radio," Long Tom said. He adjusted the dials, worked with the direction finder, then grinned. "They're heading west, all right."

The two pets, Habeas and Chemistry, were aboard; Monk and Ham never left them behind, possibly because, when no other excuse for wrangling could be found, they could squabble over the animals. Monk said: "How about catching the morning news? I'd like to know who is laying down an ultimatum to whom in Europe this morning."

There was no object in operating the direction finder steadily, so Long Tom tuned in a news broadcast. They learned about the state of affairs in Europe and in China, heard of another politician being kicked out of Kansas City, a murder in Texas, a bank robbery in Florida, after which they got a shock.

"When a man bites a dog, it's news, and when a man steals an airplane, it should be something or other,"

the radio commentator said. "But in this case, a man and a woman stole the plane. Both of them had snow-white hair, the snowy-white hair being news because the pilot whose airplane was stolen said both thieves could hardly have been more than twenty years old. The plane was stolen in Newark, and the thieves took off in the face of weather conditions that had grounded all regular passenger planes. It is believed they flew west."

The news commentator was followed by an asininely cheerful fellow who wanted all the little early birds to look in the mirror and smile, smile, smile.

"Did you hear that news item?" Monk yelled.

"White-haired girl and boy sound like Ruth and Mark Colorado," Ham said.

"The Colorados seem to be heading west, too," Long Tom suggested.

Chapter X. CAPTURE

THEY flew out of the rain into bright sunlight two hours later. In a place or two over the mountains in Pennsylvania, they saw traces of snow, so it was probably cold outside. The cabin was heated.

Monk dropped into the extra seat in the pilot's compartment. Doc was handling the controls.

"I been trying to figure something, Doc," the homely chemist said. "Back there last night, when you jumped the Colorados in my place you had something in a bottle. You splashed the stuff over them. I thought at first it was acid or gas or something, but it didn't seem to have any effect on them."

"It would not harm them," Doc said.

"What was it?"

"You remember the experiments we were making with a method that banks and armored trucks could use on bandits?"

"Oh!" Monk grinned. "So that's what it was!"

Monk went back into the cabin, and Ham, who was interested in knowing what he had learned, asked:

"What was the liquid?"

"It's sure hell, ain't it?" Monk muttered.

"What?"

"The place where the bad people go."

"I hope you don't think that was funny," Ham said sourly, and added several choice opinions of the Mayfair ancestry, including the variety of trees they had probably swung in.

Monk was irritating Ham deliberately, and Ham was entirely willing, so the quarrel lasted across Ohio, Illinois and Missouri.

Over Kansas, Monk ran dry, and sat peering glumly at the vast expanse of flat wheat fields until he was moved to remark: "Brothers, there is sure a lot of land down there."

"And just think," Ham said dryly, "you can only see what is on top."

"I think that was some kind of an insult!" Monk yelled. "Some day, I'm going to—"

Whatever he was going to do to Ham remained untold, because Doc Savage called a sharp summons from the cockpit. The bronze man thought they would be interested in what the radio was saying.

"This is a general message to all planes in the air," Doc said. "A broadcast in co-operation with the police."

"A plane stolen by a young man and a young woman, both of whom had remarkable white hair, has landed on a field at Millard, Missouri,"

the radio voice said. "The occupants of the plane forced a tank-wagon driver to refuel the craft, then took off again. All pilots are requested to report any trace of the plane, a yellow Airpex monoplane, Department of Commerce Number NC973-645. A yellow Airpex monoplane, number N-as-in-Norma, C-as-in-Charles, nine hundred seventy three thousand, six hundred forty-five."

Long Tom said: "Mark and Ruth Colorado again. They aren't making such good time."

Doc Savage flattened a chart out on the map board, and noted the line which they had flown, trailing the radio transmitters concealed in Spad Ames' two ships. The line was almost straight. He extended it and noted that it passed over a part of the Grand Canyon country that he happened to know was virtually unexplored.

"The Millard, Missouri, airport," Doc Savage said slowly, "is located only a few miles from the

Santa Fe Railway. The railway, running in a fairly direct line to California, and passing near the Grand Canyon, is a logical trail for planes to follow."

Doc swung southward fifty miles or so, and landed on a remote piece of prairie near the Santa Fe Railway.

"We can afford to waste an hour or two," the bronze man said, "on the chance the Colorados will fly overhead."

IT was near noon when Doc Savage, using strong binoculars, discovered a yellow monoplane approaching. Immediately, he boarded his own ship with Monk, Ham and Long Tom, and they climbed up in the sky. They got close enough to the other plane to identify the numbers.

"That's it," Monk said.

Mark Colorado was flying the stolen craft. He banked away, tried flight. But he lacked the speed—his plane was nearly a hundred miles slower—to escape.

Doc flew alongside, gestured orders to land. He was ignored.

Yanking the control wheel, Doc brought his plane up to a point where it flew directly ahead of the Colorado ship, and perhaps two hundred feet distant. He flew in that position, and jerked a lever on the control panel.

The gas which poured out of tanks mounted in the fuselage of Doc's ship was one of the secrets which would probably save America from foreign air raids, if the war need ever arose. It was colorless. It spread quickly. It retained its effectiveness. And when a plane motor sucked the stuff into its carburetor, the gas made fuel vapor noninflammable. The gas would instantly stop any airplane motor of internal combustion type—and no plane today has a motor of any other type. They saw both Mark and Ruth Colorado start up in alarm as the engine of the plane died.

Mark Colorado managed a safe landing in a wheat field. He climbed out with a rifle; his sister also was armed. They raced to a small ditch nearby.

Doc dived his big ship at them. Rifle slugs smacked against the fuselage, but did not penetrate the double layer of alloy metal skin armor.

"Gas them," Doc directed. "Use anaesthetic."

Monk dropped the anaesthetic gas containers, and these burst around the ditch in which the Colorados crouched. Instantly, both Colorados tried to return to their plane. Mark covered about thirty feet; the girl almost made it.

Doc landed near their unconscious forms.

"Load them aboard," he directed, and climbed into the plane the Colorados had stolen. He did not find any trace of a chart with a destination marked upon it; in fact, there was no chart at all in the craft.

"No wonder they were following the railroad," Monk remarked.

Doc Savage took his own plane off, the slipstream stirring up a cloud of dust that swirled over the yellow craft the Colorados had been flying. Using the radio, he advised the nearest government airways station where the stolen plane could be found.

"Will you take the controls?" Doc requested of Monk, and the homely chemist nodded.

Doc searched the Colorados, Mark in particular. He found a notebook containing notations probably made during lectures at Phenix Academy, a pocket knife, cartridges for the rifle, some silver coins and nearly a thousand dollars in currency.

"With that roll, I would think he'd have hired a plane," Long Tom said, after he had counted the money and whistled.

He removed the thin stainless steel chain from Mark Colorado's neck, and examined the black arrowhead on the end. The arrowhead had not been drilled; it was fastened to the chain by a band which encircled the part that was ordinarily bound to the arrow.

"Is it like the one the girl carried?" Ham inquired.

"Not identical. But apparently made of the same material."

The bronze man stood for some time studying the faces of Mark and Ruth Colorado. Once, he moved Mark Colorado's head in order to get a better view of the man's facial contour.

Ham said: "Their faces look strange, don't they? I can't guess their nationality."

A BIT later, "Locate a wireless station that has a radio compass," Doc Savage suggested to Long Tom. "Preferably one along the Mexican border. We need a cross bearing on the Spad Ames' crowd, which will show us how far ahead they are."

Long Tom worked over the radio controls. What he wanted done was a little complicated when it came to explaining it to distant operators, but finally he had copied compass bearings, and drawn on his own chart the bearing line taken by the distant direction finder—he had located one in El Paso, Texas—so that this line, where it intersected the projected line of their own bearing, gave a fairly accurate guide to the location of Spad Ames' planes.

"About a hundred miles ahead," Long Tom said. "Less than half an hour's flying time."

"We should overhaul them about the time they reach the Grand Canyon country," Doc decided.

Ham lashed the ankles of Mark and Ruth Colorado.

Normal interval of unconsciousness produced by the anaesthetic gas was forty-five minutes. Mark and Ruth Colorado revived somewhat quicker than that. They were very stoical. They merely looked around, then the girl smiled slightly without humor.

"You had plenty of money," Doc said. "Why did you steal a plane instead of hiring one?"
"We wanted Spad Ames to know we were going west," the girl answered immediately. "We did not know where to find him. So we stole the plane to get ourselves in the newspapers."
Doc was impressed again with the strange accent which rather pleasantly fuzzed her words.
"What nationality are you?" he asked.

She only smiled.

Doc said: "By any chance, did you, too, come out of the mists?"

She nodded, but said nothing.

"What does that mean?"

She gave him a rather strange answer.

"A few white men have learned the truth," she said. "But only one has carried his knowledge back to the world—that one being Spad Ames."

Her lips became thin and compressed, and after that she did nothing but watch the two pets, Habeas Corpus and Chemistry.

Monk raised his voice in a yell. He had been peering through binoculars while he flew. Now he lifted his freak voice.

"Three planes dead ahead," he shouted. "Think they're Spad Ames' ships."

"Three?"

Doc Savage said sharply.

"Yeah. The third one just flew in from the south. Guess it's the plane carrying Spad Ames' guns and bombs and stuff. Probably they arranged a meeting by radio."

Doc Savage went forward grimly.

"This is what we wanted—to find Renny," he said grimly. "We'll bring those planes down as fast as we can."

Monk glanced downward and shuddered.

"They won't like that very well," he surmised.

IF a great multitude of needles, made of stone and of lengths ranging from five hundred to four or five thousand feet in length, had been placed together in a great bundle with the points uppermost, the result would have been a fair imitation of what was below. Directly ahead, one of the great cracks seemed half filled with fog, which was a little queer. Fog was unusual in this desert. Ham looked a little queer, and without a word, got a parachute and put it on.

"Good idea," Doc Savage said, and they all strapped 'chute harness to themselves, and upon the two prisoners.

The bronze man took over the controls, pulled the big ship into a climb. The three planes ahead had slowed, for the plane bearing Renny and the weapons was obviously a slow craft.

A few minutes later, the three Spad Ames' planes began circling.

"Looks like they're fixin' to land," Monk said.

Doc nodded. He put his own ship into a long dive, came in a long moaning comet-rush out of the afternoon haze. If there was a landing spot down there below, he intended to disable the other planes with the gas that would stop their motors, and follow down the one which carried Renny. They saw Doc's ship. He had expected that. He had expected the ships to bank sharply, trying to get into positions for men in the cabins to use machine guns. He kept diving. There was not much chance that they would do damage, for both windows and fuselage of his plane would stop ordinary rifle and machine-gun slugs.

What he had not expected was Ham's sudden howl from back in the plane cabin.

"Ham! Watch out!"

Doc twisted. He was in time to see Mark Colorado heave up, and with his bound feet, kick the dapper Ham head over heels. Monk was already on the floor, where he had been knocked.

It was impossible for Doc to leave the controls. They were screaming toward the other three planes; there was every chance of collision.

Long Tom was on his knees at the rear, working over the engine-stopping gas containers.

Mark Colorado dived for the plane door. He had freed his hands somehow, but his ankles were still bound. The door, a siding type, could be opened when the craft was in flight. Mark Colorado wrenched it back, fell out.

He was desperate, he had a parachute, and he took a big chance. He managed to fall onto the wing—the door was directly over the wing—so that he hooked his hands over the leading edge.

He clung there until, with his free hand, he worked his parachute loose and hurled it into the propeller. Twisting at terrific speed, the propeller knocked itself into a complex knot.

Mark Colorado lay on the wing. Doc Savage, from the cockpit, could see the man's strangely blue eyes looking at him steadily.

The three Spad Ames' ships were above now. Monk—he had both arms wrapped about his midriff where he had been kicked—staggered to the cockpit.

"Fine stuff!" he gasped. "Those guys can fly rings around us now."

That was true. With only one motor, any one of the three planes above was faster. Men were wrenching the windows open and leaning out, braced against the rip of passing air, holding high-explosive grenades ready for use.

Ruth Colorado came forward, dragging herself by her arms, for her ankles were bound.

"You see that canyon?" She pointed.

"It's narrow," Doc said grimly.

"Very narrow. But you may be able to land in the bottom. It is sand, fairly smooth."

Doc glanced at the great crack in the needled wilderness of stone. He nodded, said: "We will try it."

"That is where Spad Ames crashed when he first came," Ruth Colorado said. "So be careful."

Chapter XI. STRANGE CANYON

THE sand was not level. It was bumpy. The plane made sounds somewhat like a big drum after the wheels touched; then it stopped.

Monk dived through the open door of the ship, landed upon Mark Colorado, and yelled: "I'm gonna turn this guy inside out! Ruin our propeller, will he!"

There was a ripping explosion, a geyser of sand a few yards distant. They were dropping grenades from above. Three more exploded close together on the canyon side, and a shower of rock came jumping down, the larger fragments out-distancing the smaller. Several of them were the size of automobiles. Monk scooped up Mark Colorado and rushed with him to safety.

"I oughta leave you there for rocks to roll on," Monk declared unreasonably.

Doc Savage shouldered the girl, and ran. Ham and Long Tom tried to get an equipment case out of the plane, looked at the descending landslide of stone, and changed their minds. They raced clear. The stone struck, knocking the plane about a little, bending it out of shape.

"Blast it!" Monk yelled. "We gotta get our equipment out of that ship!"

Doc Savage stared upward. He thought of the bombs which Spad Ames had told Locatella he would need. They were probably in the munitions ship, which was slanting slowly down toward the canyon.

"Run!" Doc said, and set an example.

The bomb must have been one of the new horrors of military science, a compressed oxygen-demolition bomb. Its concussion knocked them flat. They were deafened for moments, got up with nostrils leaking crimson.

In a hundred places, the blast had loosened the sheer canyon walls. Stone fell, pulling great comet trails of dust after it. Above the ringing in their ears, they could hear the rumbling grind of the slides. Under their feet, sand trembled so violently that dust began to arise from it. They ran.

Monk, whose short legs handicapped him, began to yelp with each jump. But he did not drop Mark Colorado.

A few big boulders leaped across their path. Smaller fragments showered them. Echoes began coming through the din, sounding like battery after battery of big cannon being fired in succession.

Doc halted, and the others stopped also. Monk ceased yelping.

"You sounded like a coyote after a rabbit," Ham told Monk.

Monk let it pass. He was looking back at the spot where their plane had been standing.

The dust blew away after a while.

"How deep would you say the rock is over our plane?" Long Tom asked dryly.

"Fifty feet," Monk said.

It was a conservative estimate.

MONK opened his mouth, then closed it without saying anything. Their predicament was clear enough without comment. The plane was gone. Spad Ames still prowled around overhead. They could hear his three planes moaning.

"Here's an overhang where they can't see us," Doc said.

They stood in the niche which water had worn in the side of the canyon and waited. One of the planes, flying very carefully, ventured down some distance into the canyon, searching. It climbed out again, apparently satisfied.

Doc Savage looked down at Mark Colorado. The white-haired man's face was placid, and he smiled slightly.

"You seem satisfied," Doc said.

"I am."

"Spad Ames is not your friend."

"Of course not."

"But you helped him by disabling our plane."

Mark Colorado shook his head. "You have the wrong slant on that. I have seen a little of your methods. Enough to know you will be far harder to stop than Spad Ames."

"But why should you try to stop us?"

"You have learned that Spad Ames is after something mysterious," Mark Colorado said slowly. "The mystery has intrigued you. If you had managed to rescue your friend, Renny, up there a few minutes ago, you would not have been satisfied. You would have gone on. You are an adventurer. And because you have an amazing amount of ability, you might have—well, you might have gone through the mists, and learned about the destiny that no man shall know."

Doc Savage deliberately kept his metallic features expressionless. He was very puzzled.

"That sounds like—just words," he said. "Going through the mists. And destiny that no man shall

solve the mystery. Words. Just words."

"That is because you do not understand."

Doc Savage glanced upward, listening. "You may be right, at that."

"He may be a little nuts, too," Monk said. "This thing has had a screwy twist from the first."

The planes had not gone away. They were out of sight, but all three motors were droning.

"They seem to be getting ready to land," Doc said.

Mark Colorado nodded. "They will descend farther down this canyon—probably a mile away. There is a spot at that point which is wider."

"You're helping us when you tell that," Doc said. "A few minutes ago, you were fighting us."

"I am not helping you—I am fighting Spad Ames." Mark Colorado smiled again.

Doc turned to Ruth Colorado suddenly. "What do you think about this attitude of your brother's?"

She had evidently been thinking about that, because her answer was prompt.

"The truth about my brother and myself is fantastic," she said. "And it is better for no one to ever know it."

DOC took off his coat, a dark gabardine garment. He ripped it into strips. With the strips, he bound both Colorados.

"Watch them," he said. "Watch them very closely."

"Where you goin'?" Monk called.

"To see about Renny."

High overhead, the eroded pinnacles of stone were tipped with the fire of afternoon sunlight, but here in the depths there was shadow. Not particularly dark shadow, once eyes had become accustomed to it, but murky enough to make the sunlight above seem blinding. Everywhere were the walls of stone, sheer and towering and causing a feeling of breathless awe.

Doc began running. He had been comparatively inactive for hours in the plane, and the exercise was welcome. The air was utterly dry and a little cold.

Noise of running water reached his ears, and soon he saw the stream that caused the sound. A small river, it poured out of the base of the canyon wall with rushing violence and a squirming cloud of spray.

It was on the opposite side of the canyon. He did not cross to investigate.

Judging from the sound, two of the planes appeared to have landed; Doc believed there was only one engine still running, although the multitude of echoes made it hard to be sure. He continued running until the canyon widened abruptly, when he slackened his pace, going very slowly, listening frequently.

Two of the planes had landed. The third was coming in, motor throttled, the pilot banking carefully between the walls of stone. The tricky air currents made balancing difficult. The plane seemed no larger than a house fly buzzing down into a rut that a big truck had made in soft yellow earth.

When the ship was down safely, it taxied over to the other two craft. A camp was apparently going to be set up. A mass of boulders lay on the canyon floor at that point, and the stream was nearby. Guards scattered quickly, took up positions some distance from the camp, where they could cover the surroundings. They carried automatic rifles.

As soon as he saw Renny being hauled out of the last plane to land, Doc moved. He flattened in a small gully and crawled to the creek. On the way, he gathered rocks until he had his pockets filled. He had a number of scientific gadgets on his person, devices which were compact, and which he usually carried when fooling around with trouble. He had a gas mask which doubled as a diving "lung." He inserted this between his teeth and applied the clamp to his nostrils.

The creek water was bitterly cold. Rocks in Doc's pocket held him on the bottom. He crawled along. The current, while it did not have the bounding rush of a mountain stream, was fast. Keeping his eyes open, Doc remained in the deepest shadows as much as possible.

The first time he crawled out of the water, he discovered he'd overshot his goal somewhat.

Entering the stream again, he crawled back, with extreme difficulty, against the current. Then he lay on the bank, exercising rapidly to get the blue cold stiffness out of his muscles.

Spad Ames was giving loud orders.

"Rig the plane floodlights so they cover the whole floor of the canyon," he ordered. "And step on it. It's gonna be dark before long."

A man said: "Here is that ball of string you wanted."

"After it gets dark," Spad ordered, "stretch that string between you when you stand guard. If anybody should try to crawl past you, there's a good chance of them hitting the string."

"Right."

"Now get that fellow Renny out here."

There was a scuffling sound, and Renny said, "Holy cow!" twice, and a man yelped in agony. Doc took a chance and looked. Renny was tied hand and foot, but it was taking four of them to hold him. Spad Ames drew a revolver and cocked it.

"I don't know whether Doc Savage is dead or not," he said, "but in any case, I don't think we're going to need you."

DOC SAVAGE lifted up and threw a smoke grenade. Then he threw a gas grenade, another smoke, and

kept pitching them. The grenades were waterproof. The gas grenades weren't noisy. The smoke ones were. They sounded louder than shotguns. Violence of their hatching hurled the black smoke yards in every direction. Each resembled, an instant after it exploded, a large black octopus; this soon turned into a cloud.

Doc went into the smoke. A revolver smashed out deafeningly—Spad Ames' gun, probably.

"Renny!" the bronze man called.

Renny answered in Mayan, a language almost unknown to the civilized world, which Doc and his men used when they did not wish to be understood. Renny was safe, lying to the right.

Doc had a pocket knife out when he reached Renny. He slashed ropes, got the big-fisted engineer free. "Can you run?" he asked.

"I hope to tell you!" Renny boomed.

Doc Savage spoke in Mayan. "Go up the canyon. Follow the river. And now—hold your breath! There's gas in this smoke."

Renny went away.

The smoke had spread. Wind would soon sweep it away. Doc tossed more smoke grenades, into the wind where the sepia pall would be carried over them.

There was some shooting. Three or four men were coughing. Others cursed. Doc felt about for the planes.

When he found one of the ships, he felt in his pocket and brought out one of the rocks which had a sharp edge. He struck it against the undersurface of one of the wings. Wing skin split. So did the fuel tank. Gasoline flooded down his arm.

There was a small waterproof lighter in one of his pockets, and he got it with the hand which was not gasoline-drenched. The high-test aviation gas caught with a sound that might have been a giant coughing.

Doc had fixed the position of all three planes in his mind. He made for another one. Spad Ames had become silent—gassed, probably. There were plenty of men left for yelling and shooting, however. Firing the second plane was managed without incident, but when he ignited the third craft, flames seized his arm, made it a bundle of red pain. He ran a few yards, pitched into the sand, and smothered the fire before it did more than scorch his skin.

Suddenly, it was lighter. Wind was sweeping the smoke away. He had no more of the grenades, so there was nothing to do but run for it. He wanted to locate Spad Ames, if possible. He did try, but failed, and had to run for it.

He made the creek safely, and a few minutes later he joined Renny.

Chapter XII. THE KEY

LONG TOM was standing watch, some distance from Monk, Ham and the Colorados. They startled Long Tom, and after he had apparently tried to jump out of the canyon, he grinned at Renny and said: "This was once I never expected to see you again, you big lug."

Renny rubbed his jaw, pondered, then said: "Holy cow!"

That was the extent of their reunion greetings. They moved on toward the spot where Monk and Ham were keeping the Colorados.

Soon they could hear Monk and Ham. The pair were not speaking in loud voices, but they were saying unusually violent things to each other, until they saw Renny and greeted him.

The joyful reunion was soon over. Habeas Corpus and Chemistry bounced around in glee.

Renny walked over to Ruth and Mark Colorado. It was getting dark fast; even the reflection of the sunlight on the canyon rim was dying. Renny stared at the prisoners.

"Spad Ames and Locatella know you got these two," he said. "Saw them in the plane. They're not happy about it."

"What have you learned about this mystery, Renny?" Monk asked.

"Well, practically nothing. I know why Spad Ames was so anxious to get hold of the Colorados."

"Why?"

"Hostages. He was going to use them as human shields for himself. Mark and Ruth Colorado—and I got the idea that is just a name they took for themselves—seem to be very important personages in this place that we've heard mentioned as behind the mists."

"You don't know what they mean by that silly business—behind the mists?"

"No. Your guess would be as good as mine."

"Spad Ames is plenty anxious to get back into the place."

"Yes. I gather that. It is something pretty tremendous that he is after."

MONK was not too enthusiastic about leaving the watching of pretty Ruth Colorado to the others, but he accompanied Doc, at the bronze man's suggestion.

They went to a point below the source of the river several hundred feet, where the canyon was very narrow.

"Good place to make a stand, if Spad Ames should try to reach us," Monk said.

"They are too heavily armed for us," Doc assured him.

"Then what're we here for?"

He found out. Doc produced a metal tube which was filled with round dark objects which somewhat resembled shotgun shot. He sprinkled these over the sand carefully.

"I get it," Monk said. The stuff was an explosive which was not affected by moisture, and detonated from pressure—an improved variation of the ordinary Fourth of July spit-devil. An intruder could hardly pass this point without stepping on the stuff; immediately there would be a loud, if not very damaging, explosion. Enough noise to give a vociferous alarm.

This, Monk gathered, was to be their precaution for the night. They could get some sleep. Personally, he needed it.

It was dark when they got back. Intensely black. Doc Savage bent over the Colorados, as if testing the ropes that tied them.

He deliberately let his pocket knife drop against Mark Colorado's leg—as though it might have been an accident.

Five minutes later, casually, as if he had just found it out, he said: "My knife seems to be missing."

"You used it to cut my ropes," Renny reminded.

"I might have dropped it there," Doc remarked, as if dismissing the matter.

For the next few minutes, Doc listened carefully. He decided that Mark Colorado had found the knife, was using it to slyly cut himself loose.

"Let's get over here a minute, where the Colorados cannot hear," Doc said, "and discuss the campaign plan."

They assembled fifty yards away, and the bronze man said: "Don't get excited. The Colorados are escaping right now, probably."

"What!"

Monk howled, so loud that fifty echoes came back from the surrounding stone pinnacles.

"Sh-h-h, stupid!" Ham admonished.

"Holy cow!" Renny said, trying to whisper. "What's the idea?"

"We will trail the Colorados," Doc explained.

"How?"

"Back in Monk's laboratory in New York, I splashed some chemical over both Mark and Ruth Colorado. At the time, I intended to use the stuff to locate the Colorados in the city, but as it developed, we didn't have a chance to do that. We can use it now."

"What kind of chemical is it?" Renny demanded. "And how—"

"Phosphorescent," Doc told him. "That is, it gives off light, but not visible light. It is infrared phosphorescent."

"Not visible light?"

"Unless you view it through a fluoroscopic eyepiece," Doc elaborated. "You cannot see X rays ordinarily, you know. But a fluoroscope makes them visible through the fluorescing characteristic of certain materials."

The description was a little too general for Long Tom, who liked his explanations to be specific.

"As far back as 1883, a man named Becquerel studied the invisible region of the solar spectrum, with reference to the quenching of phosphorescence by red and infrared light, and he discovered—"

"Kindly spare us, if you don't mind," Renny interrupted. "Right now, I don't feel like hearing a scientific discussion of how and why it works. If it works, swell."

Doc Savage produced a pair of spectacles from a pocket. He broke them at the bridge, kept one lens himself and handed the other to Renny. "Hold that in front of your eyes, and you should be able to distinguish the faces of both Colorados, as a pale spot of light. That is, if they are visible from here."

Renny peered and squinted. "Holy cow!"

"But it has been hours and hours since that chemical was dumped on the Colorados," Ham muttered.

"It does not wash off readily," Doc advised.

Renny took another squint through the small fluoroscopic eyepiece. "If you fellows think the Colorados are escaping," he said, "you're wrong."

They went back. Mark and Ruth Colorado had not moved. Apparently the ropes which held them had not been tampered with.

Doc said nothing. He thumbed on a flashlight, took one of the black arrowheads from a pocket, looked at it thoughtfully, then put it back. He knew both Colorados watched him.

IT was near ten o'clock when Mark Colorado threw the ropes off his wrists and ankles, and approached Doc Savage. The bronze man grew tense, thinking of the knife. The blade was short, but it did not take a long blade to cut a throat. He set himself for defense.

Mark Colorado felt very cautiously, located the pocket in which Doc had put the arrowhead. He took the arrowhead, nothing else.

Both Colorados then crept away in the darkness.

Doc breathed: "You fellows awake?"

They were. "I been layin' here with a rock in each hand," Monk whispered.

"Come on," Doc said.

They trailed Mark and Ruth Colorado. The infrared phosphorescent chemical was so pale that they could hardly distinguish it.

"We're gonna have to improve that stuff," Monk whispered. "How did you figure on using it in New

York, Doc?"

"By equipping watchers with fluoroscopic spectacles sensitive to the stuff, and planting them at all train gates, bus stations and airports," Doc explained. "That way, they could spot the Colorados, even if they did dye their hair and alter their clothing."

The Colorados went straight to the spot where the river poured out of the aperture in the base of the cliff.

"Holy cow!" Renny breathed a moment later.

The river had stopped flowing.

Doc Savage went forward suddenly. The others followed. They stood, a moment later, at the mouth of an aperture which was perhaps two and a half feet high and seven or eight feet wide—the hole out of which water had stopped pouring. They learned that much by exploring with their hands.

They listened. Sounds came out of the hole. Noises that would be made by two people climbing.

Monk whispered: "I'm goin' in there! It's a secret entrance, or something!"

With Monk, to get a violent idea was to act upon it. He dropped to all fours and scuttled into the hole. He did not get far.

Came a gurgling roar of water. Also a louder howl from Monk. The river again spouted out of the hole.

Ham unlimbered a flashlight, fanned the beam, then yelled: "There goes Monk!"

The homely chemist was going head over heels. He squawked each time he bounced off a rock, flailed his arms and howled: "Grab me, somebody!" The water had carried him out of the hole with terrific speed; it rushed him fifty yards before he practically bounced out on the bank.

Monk glared at Ham and said: "You laugh, and I'll take that sword cane of yours and ram it down your throat!"

"What happened?" Ham asked innocently.

"You know as well as I do—the water just started coming out of the hole again."

"You see anything?"

"Nothing but dark."

Doc Savage went back to the aperture in the base of the cliff from which the river spouted. He used his flashlight, which was waterproof.

"Holy cow!" Renny ejaculated, and pointed with one of his big fists.

Doc had seen it. An arrowhead, black, more than a foot in length, and inlaid or carved into the face of the cliff.

"That's queer," Monk muttered. "That thing is like the smaller black arrowheads. Why don't we compare 'em?"

Doc Savage still carried the second of the two arrowheads which had been taken from the Colorados. He produced it and held it close to the black arrowhead on the face of the cliff. A moment later, the river stopped flowing.

DOC SAVAGE'S bronze features remained expressionless in the reflected glow from their flashlights, but the others looked startled.

"That—that arrowhead—stops the water," Long Tom said, putting amazement between his words.

"But—but how?"

"Have you a pocket knife?" Doc asked.

"Yes. But what—"

"Hold it against this arrowhead," Doc suggested.

Long Tom stared as the knife blade picked up the arrowhead. "Magnetic!"

"The small arrowhead is made of lodestone, which is naturally magnetic," the bronze man explained quietly. "Behind the large arrowhead on the cliff face is doubtless some kind of a trip which is operated magnetically by the smaller arrowhead, and that in turn shuts off the water by a mechanical arrangement."

"But what—"

The river began flowing again, like a great fire hydrant that had suddenly been turned on.

"Which answers my question," Long Tom said. "The thing shuts off for only so long at a time—just long enough to permit a person to enter or leave."

Monk emitted an angry rumble.

"Shut her off again!" he said. "I'm willing to give that hole another whirl."

They shut off the water, then raced to the hole, sank to all fours, and began climbing.

"Come on, Habeas!" Monk called, and Ham said: "Chemistry, step on it!"

Chapter XIII. THROUGH THE MISTS

THE walls were dark, smooth, and shone with wetness which threw back the white spray of their flashlights in jeweled glitter. The slant was about the same as a stairway, although the steps were higher, about two feet, and of nearly the same depth. The steps and the tunnel wall were not of the same stone as the cliff, but of harder flintlike stone blocks joined together so that the cracks were hardly noticeable. It was perhaps forty feet up to a platform of stone onto which they could climb clear of the water channel.

The platform was wet with spray, slick, and Long Tom fell down. He said several words which the others were not aware he knew.

"Tsk, tsk," Monk said. "Such language!"

Monk then made an involuntary dash for the far side of the platform, for water fell down the shaft with a deafening roar.

There were steps leading upward.

They put their heads together and screamed at each other. "We will go up," Doc Savage said. The stairway followed above the roaring stream for some distance, then veered sharply to the left, and they were in a tunnel. The walls were not lined; they were natural stone.

Habeas Corpus, the pig, made tapping sounds as he walked. Chemistry was noiseless, although he chattered fearfully once.

Their flashlights poked out cones that seemed made of thin cotton, an effect due to the presence of something like fog. The vapor puzzled Monk, particularly after they got farther along the passage.

"I thought this stuff was spray from the water," Monk grumbled. "It don't seem to be. I wonder—" He went silent, for Ruth Colorado was coming toward them. Her form was vague in this mist; she was within three arm lengths before they saw her. It was eerie. She seemed to materialize before them like a supernatural body.

"Go back," she said. "There is a black arrowhead on the wall at the head of the water tunnel, so that you can stop the flow of the water."

She spoke in a low voice. There was tense earnestness in her manner. And when she looked at Doc Savage, there was a warm light in her eyes.

Ham, in the background, kicked Monk on the shin, breathed, "She likes him!" And Monk, because the girl was very pretty and he had been harboring some ideas, turned around and returned the kick to Ham's shin, with interest. Ham's yip of pain echoed faintly.

"Where is your brother?" Doc asked gently.

"He has gone on, and will return with—with the others," the girl said rapidly. "He left me to watch and give an alarm if you followed. I—well—I know you are not our enemy, so here I— Please go. Please!"

Doc Savage was uncomfortable. "As a matter of fact, it had not occurred to us to turn back."

"Why? Surely you came here for no reason except curiosity. It is curiosity, isn't it?"

"Partially—"

"Go away and forget all this—mystery," Ruth Colorado urged. She reached out and gripped both the bronze man's arms. "The price you'll pay for learning the secret is too great. So great that I—I don't want it to happen to you."

There was a pounding earnestness in her voice that caused Long Tom to moisten his lips, and Renny to open and close his big fists nervously.

Doc said: "Curiosity isn't the only reason we are here. We are fighting Spad Ames. We can fight him more effectively if we know what he is after—if we know what is behind all this mystery."

Ruth Colorado searched the bronze man's face, said finally: "I am trying to help you."

"We know that," Doc Savage said gently. "And that is why we are going back."

"Going back!" Renny barked. "But Doc—"

The big-fisted engineer never got his argument finished. For suddenly, like smoke from a campfire, the mists thickened.

And it began to get cold.

Ruth Colorado put back her head and shrieked: "Don't kill us! I am with them!" Then, apparently realizing she had cried out in English, she shifted to the language which Doc had never heard before, and called out shrilly.

It was getting colder with incredible swiftness.

"For the love of Eskimos!" Monk yelled. "What kind of a place is this?"

Doc whirled, rapped: "Back toward the river! We may be able to make—"

"Wait!" The girl was gripping his arm again. "Stay here! They will not—I am with you. You are safe as long—as long as you do not let me go."

Out of the mists came her brother's voice. He spoke English.

"You are a fool, my sister," Mark Colorado said. "You are saving their lives. We will have them on our hands, a perpetual source of trouble."

The girl put her chin up, said nothing.

It stopped getting colder. The fog thinned a little. There was movement in the mists, beyond range of their flashlights.

"Do not resist them," the girl said.

Monk took two large rocks out of his pockets, said: "This won't be resistance. It'll be a massacre!"

It wasn't exactly a massacre, but it was brisk while it lasted. The mists suddenly thickened, and forms came flying out of them, long and grotesque forms that hardly seemed human in the strange vapor. Monk whooped, dived to meet the first one. He drove a fist. The attacker dodged expertly, took Monk around the waist, slammed him to the tunnel floor.

Two figures charged upon Doc Savage. The bronze man side-stepped. He made no effort to strike out, being interested in hearing what kind of weapons they had, and in what the assailants looked

like.

The attackers were naked, except for short trousers that fitted as snugly as tights. All had remarkably white hair. And their bodies, lithe and corded with rippling strength, were greased. Doc laid hold of one of them. The fellow was as slick as a catfish. Doc grabbed again, this time for the white-haired assailant's hand. He got it. The hand was covered with sand, so that it would hold a grip. Clutching the fellow by the hand, Doc swung him, knocked another down.

Monk had gotten up, was chasing a man, grabbing him again and again, only to have the greased body slide out of his angry fingers.

Ham was probably being most sensible of all. He danced back, managed to unlimber his sword cane, and began pricking each attacker to rush him. He made no effort to cut off heads or arms or run victims through—he merely broke skin with the tip of the blade, which was coated with a chemical that would cause quick unconsciousness.

Mark Colorado called out loudly, speaking the strange dialect. He must have called for help, because there was an overwhelming rush of seminaked, white-haired men.

As Monk explained it later, he got along all right until he was fighting at least thirty men at once, and he might have been all right then, except that he kicked a greasy foe, got grease on his foot, then slipped and fell when he tried to stand on the foot.

This was probably a slight exaggeration. They were only fighting about forty opponents, all told, when they were overcome.

Chapter XIV. MIST MEN

AFTER he had opened his eyes, Doc Savage lay for some time without moving, although all his sensations were of motion—turning over and over and around and around with slow dizzy speed, and in space—while actually he was lying still. The dizziness went partly away. He moved, first his arms and then his legs, and learned he was not tied. After that, he was quiet again, shifting his eyes and listening.

He got the impression he was in a very small place.

It was dark. The darkness had a blue-black quality. Once, the bronze man thought there were small lights swimming overhead, but he touched his eyes with his fingers and discovered it was only the result of being struck on the head—the same visual phenomena occurring when a fingertip is pressed to the side of the eyeball. He did not know exactly what he had been struck with. Seven or eight semi-naked assailants had been holding him at the time. A rock, probably.

There was breathing near him; then some one cleared a throat. Unconscious people do not clear throats; they only cough.

"Monk," Doc said.

"How long you been conscious?" Monk asked.

"A few moments. And you?"

"Longer. I think they beat on your head a while after they got you down. I seem to remember that."

"Any idea where we are?"

"Some place I'll bet we'll wish we weren't," Monk said. "No. Last I remember, we are going around and around with those guys in the tunnel."

Monk thought of something, called, "Habeas! Habeas Corpus!"

Somewhere near, but not in their tiny inclosure, the pig began squealing. Chemistry, the chimp, emitted some forceful opinions in his own language.

Doc Savage lifted up. His head bumped the top. He explored with his hands, found stout wooden poles. He also located Ham, Long Tom and Renny.

"They hurt?" Monk asked.

"Not bad, apparently. They haven't revived yet."

The pig and the chimp continued to make a noise, and this drew attention. Footsteps approached, and there were low, guttural voices. Yellow light suddenly flooded Doc and the others.

They were in a cage made of tough wooden bars—the bars were ocotillo, the desert cactus shrub also called coach whip and devil's walking stick—that were almost as tough as iron. A curtain covered the thing, and this had been lifted.

The men outside were seminaked, white-haired; and they carried a few torches which gave off gory red light and strings of smoke which mixed with the darkness and the smoky-looking air.

Mark Colorado had removed his civilized clothing. He wore, like the others, nothing except an article that resembled bathing trunks.

Mark Colorado leaned against the bars, holding a rock so its red light flickered over them.

"I am really sorry about this," he said. "I wish you had taken my warning—and not attempted to find the answer to this mystery."

Monk grabbed the bars and shook them. He yelled: "Somebody is gonna be a danged sight sorrier before we're through!" and continued to shake the bars until someone gave his knuckles a whack with one of the lighted torches, after which the homely chemist bounced around among the sparks and yelled so loud that the surroundings gobbled with echoes. "What's the idea of puttin' us in cages?" he squalled. "We're not apes!"

"There might be a difference of opinion on that point," Ham suggested.

Monk, too angry to think of a response, sank back and snarled: "I wonder what they done with our clothes?"

It was a little embarrassing, too, because all of them were as naked as the day they were born. THE cages had wheels. But the region over which they were to travel, they discovered, had no roads. Strange white-haired men got behind and pushed until they came to the top of a steep hill, after which they gave the cage a shove. The careening ride down the hill was something to remember. The cage jumped, bounced, did everything but swap ends. At one point, it must have been coasting fifty miles an hour; it seemed like five hundred.

The captors galloped after them, and after the cage stopped rolling, surrounded them and scowled malevolently.

"They don't seem to like us," Long Tom decided.

"The sentiments are mutual," Long Tom announced.

One of the white-haired men put his hands to his mouth and emitted a low, weird caterwauling cry. A summons of some kind, evidently, because a crowd suddenly surrounded the cage.

The newcomers were attired in long capes of something that resembled suede leather. They wore tall conical headgear of the same material. Both capes and headgear were deep crimson in color; hence the effect was somewhat astounding.

Monk yelled: "How about giving us some clothes, you guys!"

They made no answer, but gathered around the cage to stare. There was, it became increasingly evident, nothing friendly in their manner. One made an expressive gesture, drawing a finger across his throat. Two others spat.

Mark Colorado stepped close to the cage and spoke in a whisper.

"Do not do anything to anger them," he warned.

"If I get out of here," Renny promised, "I'll do more than anger them."

"You idiot!" Mark Colorado yelled. "I'm trying to save your lives."

"Oh, sure," Renny said skeptically.

"Don't worry. If it wasn't that I promised my sister, I would wash my hands of you. I didn't ask you to follow us here."

The remark, being true, was something to think about.

Laying hold of the cage, the crowd shoved it along. A score of torches shed crimson light that enhanced the bright scarlet of the robes. And abruptly a cobbled pavement was underfoot; then buildings shoved up around them in the mist.

Every building, every part about each building, was square or rectangular. They were like boxes piled one atop the other, large boxes on the bottom, smaller ones on top. The colors were brilliant and varied; greens and yellows and blues were plentiful, but nowhere was there a red structure. Not all of the people here were garbed in red. Twenty of them, at a rough estimate, wore scarlet, Doc Savage decided.

"The guys in red seem to be the big shots," Monk remarked. He raised his voice: "Hey, you funny-looking clowns! How about some clothes? I'm getting cold."

Someone hurled a torch at the cage, and hot sparks showered them plentifully.

The crowd seemed to approve; it howled in glee.

"Say, maybe the guy was right about behaving ourselves," Monk muttered.

They came abruptly to a red building, larger than the others, a great perfectly square box of a structure.

"The jail house, I guess," Renny hazarded.

He was not exactly correct. There was a pit in front of the red building. Ropes were attached to their cage, and it was rolled over the pit rim, with no regard whatever for their comfort. The cage bottom was evidently hinged so it could be yanked open with a rope, for they suddenly tumbled out on hard stone, and the cage was yanked upward again.

It was incredibly dark in the pit.

Something thudded near them. Doc investigated. "Seems to be a bundle of skins," he reported.

"Probably what we are supposed to wear."

THERE were five of the skins, each barely large enough for a man to wrap around his waist. Having donned these makeshifts, they looked up, and decided that the pit was circular, since the thing was edged by burning torches. The mists seemed to be thinner here, although the air still had a befogged appearance.

"Holy cow!" Renny rumbled, peering up at the torches. "What kind of a place have we gotten into, anyway?"

"Kind of a lost valley, or something," Long Tom hazarded.

"Sure, sure, but what are these people? They look a little like Indians, only their skins are too light. And who ever heard of Indians having white hair?"

An interruption arrived in the form of a hurled torch. The missile apparently had been pitched at the sound of their voices. It came close enough that the splash of the sparks showed their figures. Instantly, a dozen torches were hurled.

They scattered hurriedly.

Monk growled: "I'm gonna play their game with 'em."

The homely chemist seized one of the torches, wound up like a baseball pitcher, and knocked a tall red cone of a hat off of a tormentor's head.

An entirely new voice addressed them.

"Hey, pardns," the voice said. "You're just stirrin' up a mess. If they can devil you, they'll stay there and throw things all night."

"Who the blazes are you?" Monk exploded. He tried to fan a torch into flames for light, but only succeeded in making himself a target which drew a shower of sticks and small stones. He threw the torch away.

"You hombres kinda mosey over this way," the strange voice suggested, "and maybe we'll get us some peace around here after a while."

They felt their way toward the voice, until they encountered the stone pit wall, along the base of which was a stone shelf slightly under a yard in width.

"You rannies might as well make yourselves at home," the voice advised. "This here bench is gonna be your bed, table and home for a while."

The voice was that of a robust old man.

"Prospector?" Doc asked.

"Yep. Easy for you to guess, wasn't it? Reckon I should've knowed this was a heck of a country to hunt gold in, before I started in. What're you fellers? Surveyin' crew, maybe?"

"We were just curious, you might say," Doc explained.

"Curiosity kills cats, don't it? It's gonna get you gents a long and peaceful life. 'Tain't bad here, though. Kinda monotonous, at times."

"They keep you in this pit all the time?"

"Nope. Unless you do somethin' you ain't supposed. I tried to climb out of the valley. Near as I can figure, that was about a month ago. Blast the luck!"

"They caught you, eh?"

"Wouldn't've, only I used some bad judgment. Took me a partner, see. Should've knowed better. We made us a rope, and lassoed a pinnacle. My partner climbed up first. Then he untied the rope, and let me fall back."

Doc said: "The partner was not Spad Ames, by any chance?"

"Why, heck! How'd you know?"

THEY were startled enough to remain silent for some moments. The old prospector must have done some thinking in the interval, because he made a disgusted noise.

"That darn coyote! I was years figgerin' out the path to escape, and I only took this Spad Ames because I'm gettin' old and about as active as a terrapin."

Doc suggested: "What about this Spad Ames?"

"Hain't much to tell about that jasper. Him an' another scallawag like 'im fell near here in their airplane. Partner was named Waldo Berlitz if I remember right. He found one of these hermit Indians, an' up an' killed him. So the Indian's friends turned Waldo Berlitz into a stone man—"

"Into a stone man!" Monk ejaculated.

"Yep," said the old-timer matter-of-factly. "Then they ketched Spad Ames an' brought 'im here.

Spad Ames was a slick one. He learned a lot by playin' up to 'em. I think he was goin' to come back, if he ever got away. Won't—if he knows what's good for 'im."

Doc asked: "How long have you been here?"

"Since fall of 1916."

"Holy cow!" Renny exploded.

"Yep. Voted for Woodrow Wilson for second term as president, then headed into the badlands.

Woodrow said he'd keep us out of war. Heard afterward they had the War anyway."

"Wait a minute!" Monk exploded. "We're getting sidetracked. What about that stone-man business?"

"Nothin' about it. They just made him into a stone man."

"You don't really mean stone?"

"Drop 'em and they break. I calls 'em stone. Use your own judgment."

Monk scratched his head and scowled up at the pit rim. They were still flourishing lighted torches up there, but could distinguish no targets at which to hurl them. Monk snorted.

"Now look, old-timer—just two things can explain what you're telling us."

"Eh?"

"You're kiddin' us—"

"I ain't kiddin'—"

"Or you're nuts."

"Figure I'm locoed, eh?" The old-timer sighed without concern. "That's what they always figure when they first land here. Later, they found out they're wrong. You'll find it out too, my squeak-voiced friend."

Doc asked: "How do they manage this—ah—turning a man to stone?"

"Wouldn't know. Ain't ever seen 'em do the job."

The bronze man abandoned that line of inquiry for another, asking: "You say there are others here?"

"Half a dozen. Two of 'em are Hopi Indians who strayed too far from their home-huntin' ground."

There's another prospector, two Mormons who were runnin' away from their wives, an' one old geezer who was an arky-arky-whatcha call it?"

"Archaeologist?"

"That sounds like what he call hisself."

"Where are they?"

"Oh, they got houses to themselves. Do a little more work than the regular inhabitants. Ain't an uncomfortable way to live, though. My mistake was in tryin' to escape. What I shoulda done is married an' settled down. Only I ain't never trusted women."

"Married? You mean that they let their captives intermarry?"

"Sure. The prospector an' the arky-arky-what you call him-is married. So are the two Mormons, with one wife apiece, an' always arguin' they're entitled to more'n that."

Monk snorted again.

"This place may not be so bad at that," he said thoughtfully.

"Don't forget Spad Ames," Ham reminded him.

Chapter XV. THE HERMIT INDIANS

THE old prospector, possibly irritated by the aspersion Monk had cast on his sanity, suddenly refused to talk further until they had given him the latest news from the outside world. He sat there and listened to the troubles in Europe, the latest crooked politicians to go to jail, the difficulties in China and the baseball situation.

Suddenly, he demanded what they meant by the reference to Spad Ames.

Doc told him.

"That's bad," the old-timer muttered. "That Spad Ames was a rattlesnake in rabbit fur. He was a new kind of ranny for these hermit Indians. That's how come he learned so much, then got away."

"What is Spad Ames after?" Doc asked.

"You mean-why did he come back?"

"Yes."

"You got me, partner. The south end of this valley, I never been in. They don't let us mosey around there none. They got somethin' down there that's kinda mysterious. I know that's where they turn a man into stone, though. But that's 'bout all."

"And you have no idea how that stone-man business is managed?"

"Nary a idea."

The old-timer was cantakerous. He decided he needed some sleep, and sleep he did, curling up on the hard stone; and before long he was emitting snores that had the resonant volume, if not the musical quality, of a saxophone.

Doc Savage said: "We might as well get some sleep ourselves."

So they stretched out on the stone shelf, and were wide awake until dawn. The circumstances in which they were involved were such that sleep seemed unimportant.

As Long Tom muttered once: "When a man's got something as startling as this to think about, he'd be a sucker to sleep."

It was all unreal, as if they had stepped in a theater and were seeing a thundering musical comedy, full of strange happenings. There was no feeling that anything was natural, or as it should be. Everything was fantastic, difficult to accept.

The would-be tormentors with the torches loitered around the pit rim for an hour or two, then grew disgusted and wandered away.

Dawn came, and they got a closer look at their pit. The sides were sheer, as smooth as glass, and about twenty feet in height. The pit was, roughly, sixty feet in diameter.

They got nothing to eat that morning.

The absence of food piqued the old-timer.

"Why, dag nab it!" he complained. "You hombres is fetchin' me bad luck. First mornin' in my life they never fed me vittles."

"You mean," Doc said, "that we are getting worse treatment than their prisoners usually get?"

"You sure as heck be."

"That's queer," Ham said thoughtfully. "Why should they have it in for us in particular?"

SUNLIGHT eventually came down into the valley, turning the mists to cream; then everything lightened and took on a glowing that was reminiscent of a blue neon light. The mists did not seem quite as thick by day. They had thought it would be impossible to see through them a distance of more than fifty feet, whereas vision could actually penetrate twice that distance.

There was a breeze, and the mists swept along overhead, blowing like fog, long streamers squirming over the pit edge. The stuff was partially fog, but it had a vague and not unpleasant odor.

The faint scent of the mists was one which Doc had caught before—in Mark Colorado's room at Phenix Academy, that first time Spad Ames had attempted to seize him.

"Where does this fog come from?" Doc asked.

"Tain't fog. Leastways, not entirely," the old-timer advised. "Fog goes away. This don't, never."

"Where does it come from?"

"South end of the valley. Part I was tellin' you about—where I never been."

"Same part of the valley where they turn men to stone, as you put it?"

"Yes."

Monk put in: "You know, if some of this ain't explained to me before long, I'm gonna get a headache. There in New York, Mark Colorado apparently turned one of Spad Ames' men to stone. If I hadn't seen the fellow with my own eyes, I would think this stone-man talk was crazy."

The day dragged on, and from time to time, white-haired people appeared at the pit rim and stood staring. Now and then, someone flung a rock.

The white-haired girls, as Monk particularly noted, were not at all hard on the eyes.

"I wonder what gives them their white hair?" the homely chemist pondered.

"Take a look at me," the old-timer suggested.

The prospector was as ancient as they had expected, with a face as wrinkled as a discouraged prune and a rather gnarled body. His hair was snow-white.

"You ain't no collar ad," Monk said. "Whatcha mean—take a look at you?"

"My hair."

"It's white. But white hair on an old goat your age ain't so unusual."

"I ain't so danged old!" yelled the prospector indignantly. "And my hair was as black as a pole kitty when I come here. Three months after I got here, it turned white!"

Doc said: "You mean that the mists turn the hair white?"

"Yep. Figure so."

"Probably some chemical in this mist," Monk hazarded, "that whitens the hair. Might be the chemical that gives the odor to the vapor."

Long Tom, who liked his food, had been brooding about the lack of a breakfast. "How do they eat around here?" he wanted to know.

"They farm. They make me and the other prisoners work in the fields, durn 'em. Course, they work themselves."

"This country is as dry as the Sahara," Long Tom reminded. "They must irrigate."

"Plenty of rain."

"What?"

"They have a shower nearly every day," the old-timer explained. "Long in the afternoon, usually."

"Holy cow!" Renny interjected incredulously. "But it hardly ever rains in the surrounding desert!"

"I ain't lyin' to you jaspers," the prospector insisted. "It rains. And it's right cool in the valley in the summertime, when it's hotter'n the hinges of Hades outside."

"That doesn't sound reasonable," said the big-fisted engineer.

"I ain't explainin' it. I'm just tellin' you."

It was past midafternoon when they heard shooting in the distance.

IT was a machine gun. The weapon gobbled like a ten-ton turkey, short bursts frequently repeated. There were shorter, more vicious smacks of high-powered rifles.

The explosions came then. Four of them; they were great, deep-throated roars that trembled the ground.

"Spad Ames," Doc said in a low voice.

Height of the surrounding canyon walls made darkness approach slowly. And soon after shadows came creeping, a grim cluster of the white-haired Indians gathered around the pit rim.

They did not throw things this time. Their manner was more grim than that. They shouted a few words.

The old-timer made a silent whistling mouth.

"Bad," he said. "They're talkin' about killin' you fellers."

"Why?" Doc asked.

"You're from the outside. They've never liked outsiders. And now this Spad Ames is attacking the valley, and they're workin' up a big hate for all outsiders. That includes you fellers."

An uncomfortable silence fell. They set on the stone shelf, and watched the faces on the pit rim until increasing darkness blanketed the place.

"Their language," Doc Savage said thoughtfully, "must be an extremely ancient dialect."

"Yep," the old-timer agreed. "I talk some Injun myself, but I never heard this lingo until I got here. You know what I think?"

"What?"

"You've seen them cliff dwellin's scattered around over this part of the country, ain't you?"

"Yes."

"Well, think these people are descendants of them cliff dwellers. Ain't sure, of course. But they've been in this valley for hundreds of years. They've got everything in here they need, and the place is easy to defend. Only that one entrance, closed by the river when they want it to be."

"They're not ignorant people," Doc said.

"Course not. They send a young brave and a squaw out now and then to be educated. Them two you call Mark and Ruth Colorado were the last pair—they're son and daughter of the chief."

"If Mark and Ruth Colorado have the chief for a father," Monk put in hopefully, "they might be

able to help us."

"I gather they're all that's keepin' you alive." The old-timer jerked a thumb up at the rim of the pit. "I've learned their language, you know. They ain't talkin' so favorable about you fellers." When it was very dark, Doc said: "Let's make a pyramid, fellows. It's time we were looking over this place."

Monk grunted, got close to the wall, doubled over and braced his hands against his knees. Renny climbed atop his shoulders. Using great care, Ham topped them.

There was a clattering sound, and something fell into the pit. They hastily unmade their pyramid, lest they be discovered. Monk felt around in the darkness to ascertain what had fallen into the pit. "Blazes!" the homely chemist said. "Is somebody up there a mind reader?"

He had found a rope ladder which someone had dropped so that it dangled into the pit.

Ruth Colorado's voice addressed them from above.

"You can climb out," she said. "We have a proposition for you."

Chapter XVI. THE POOR PROPOSITION

CRIMSON seemed to be the regal color in the valley. The room had walls and ceiling and floors of exactly the same shade of crimson. It was a large room, forty feet or so in each dimension, except the ceiling, which was about fifteen feet.

In addition to Mark and Ruth Colorado, there were fourteen others present. Doc counted them while he listened to the chief talk.

The chief, a tall, lean fellow, healthy and active, bore considerable resemblance to the Colorados. Obviously he had been educated outside the valley, because he spoke fairly understandable English.

He had made a long talk without saying much. Evidently they had plenty of time in the valley for long-winded conversation. At the end, he got down to the point.

"The council voted to end your lives," he said, "but my son and daughter have persuaded them to reconsider. We will make a deal. If you will capture this Spad Ames and Locatella and all their men, you will be permitted to live as prisoners here the rest of your lives."

When the proposal soaked into big-fisted Renny, he emitted a disgusted rumble.

"Generous, ain't you?" he boomed.

Doc Savage asked: "Just what was the idea of voting to kill us in the first place?"

"We do not wish any more outsiders here," the chief said grimly. "We get along very well by ourselves, and have for a long time."

"Killing us will hardly prevent others coming, will it?"

"If we had killed Spad Ames, we would have avoided a good deal of trouble," the chief pointed out logically.

"But we are your friends, whether you think so or not,"

"That is what Spad Ames said. We believed him."

"We're wastin' our breath arguin' with these geezers," Monk muttered.

Doc said: "What you hope we will do is get rid of all your enemies, then meekly be prisoners the rest of our lives!"

"What is wrong with that?" countered the chief. "It seems very generous to me."

"Not to us," Doc said. "However, we might make counter proposals and reach a more fair--"

The old chief shoved up his chin arrogantly.

"We are not interested in bargaining," he said. "You will do as we say."

The bronze man's flake-gold eyes got small fires in them, but his voice remained steady enough.

"Do you know just what you are going up against in this Spad Ames?"

"We do not fear him."

"Being brave and using good sense are two different things. Spad Ames has plenty of men with him, and he is armed with modern bombs and probably poison gas."

"You mean that you cannot overcome him?"

"I did not say that. We can try. Have you got the clothing you took from us, and the stuff that was in the pockets?"

"Of course."

"On the weapons that we had with us will depend our chances of overcoming Spad Ames."

The chief said something in the dialect. Two of the red-garbed men went away, came back bearing a basket containing the clothes of Doc and his men.

Slyly, the chief sorted through the stuff and removed machine pistols which Monk, Ham and Long Tom had been carrying. He kept these.

"We're not taking chances with you fellows," he remarked.

Doc Savage decided none of the stuff was missing. He went through it, poking with one finger, noting high-explosive grenades, various chemical and small devices. He touched a number of the things, but always with a fingertip.

"All right," he said.

A man picked up the basket and started away. He covered four or five yards, made a mumbling noise, and put the basket down. Then he fell loosely beside it.

The men jumped up excitedly. They were very animated for a few moments, then they began

collapsing two and three and four at a time.

DOC had been holding his breath; his men were doing likewise. They had seen one of the objects he had touched—a small cylindrical bomb of anaesthetic gas which had a timing mechanism which caused it to open several moments after the lever was flicked.

Monk upended the basket, began sorting their clothing. They donned some, discarded other of the garments as unnecessary.

"This is a fine mess," Renny grumbled. "We've got to fight all these guys, beside Spad Ames and his crew. Either outfit would be a handful."

"What next?" Long Tom wanted to know.

"Holy cow," rumbled Renny. "I'm interested in this south end of the valley."

"We'll go there," Doc said. "But first, we'll go back to the pit."

"The pit—why there?"

"The old-timer," the bronze man explained. "We need a guide."

There were none of the white-haired Indians around the pit rim. Doc found the rope ladder, coiled on the rim, and dropped it down.

The old-timer was not glad to see them.

"You hombres is a tarnation source of trouble," he complained. "I didn't wish you no bad luck, but I wasn't hankerin' to see you again."

"Want to guide us around this place?" Doc asked.

The old-timer chuckled. "Sure. Might as well."

They set off through the darkness, the old-timer leading and making fast time. Evidently he had exaggerated somewhat about being no more active than a terrapin.

When they reached the steep hill down which the cage had rolled with such jouncing violence the night before, their guide stopped.

"I ain't useful from here on," he said.

His voice did not hold a great deal of enthusiasm about venturing farther toward the south end of the valley.

"Would you help us by waiting here, and giving an alarm in case we're followed?" Doc asked.

"Sure as tootin'."

They left him there. The hill was smooth, slippery and difficult climbing. "Wonder we didn't get killed in that cage," Ham said grimly.

Doc said: "That shooting and bombing this afternoon was down in this end of the valley. Evidently Spad Ames was trying to force an entrance."

The bronze man made the remark because of dull thumping sounds which he could hear occasionally.

The noises were irregularly spaced. He went toward them, moving ahead of the others, using extreme caution.

The thumping noises became audible to the less intensively trained hearing of the others.

"Sounds like shooting," Monk muttered.

"Wait here," Doc said in a low voice.

He found the mouth of the tunnel five minutes after he had left the others. The thumping noises guided him. As nearly as he could ascertain with his hands, it was a great gaping aperture.

Extremely cold air blew out of the opening.

Doc went back to the others.

"You wait outside," he directed. "No need of all of us getting trapped in there." Then he added sharply: "Wait! There are torches coming!"

ABOUT a dozen natives came from the direction of the village of box-shaped stone houses. There were three torch bearers in the group. They were hardly excited enough to be pursuers.

They strode into the tunnel, and Doc followed.

The bronze man kept close enough on their heels to get some benefit of the torchlight. That was probably fortunate, because there were points where the passage worked along the edge of great pits. This was a natural cave for the most part, eroded by underground water in the course of innumerable centuries.

The sounds he had been hearing were shooting.

Suddenly, there were many men ahead. They were gathered about a steeply sloping tunnel, behind a barricade of huge boulders. There were other boulders behind the barricade—ammunition, it appeared; for at intervals, men would seize one of the stones and pitch it over the barricade, where it went thumping down the steep shaft beyond. Sometimes one of the missiles caused pained howls; more often, there were answering shots.

The Spad Ames gang must have blasted open the secret entrance closed by the river flowing out of the cliff. They had penetrated this far, and were being stood off by the primitive device of rolled boulders.

None of the white-haired Indians carried weapons. For that matter, the old-timer had explained that for generations there had been no need of weapons in the valley.

The ineffectiveness of gas—Spad Ames undoubtedly had gas—puzzled Doc Savage for a moment. Then he noticed the strong current of chill air, concluded this wind was blowing the poisonous fumes out as fast as they were released.

Suddenly, Doc whipped back and sought cover.

A file of white-haired men was approaching. They had clambered down out of a shaft which led upward. Each carried a burden. As they passed, Doc paid particular attention to the peculiar substance which they were carrying.

The stuff had a greenish-yellow hue, resembling sulphur somewhat. It was in sizable blocks, as if the lumps had been mined from a great mass.

Each of the carriers was very careful to keep his hands wrapped in many folds of coarse cloth. As they approached, Doc hurriedly delved into his clothing for an article he always carried—a long, stout silk cord, to one end of which a collapsible grapple was fixed. Ordinarily he used the device for surmounting walls.

He flipped the silk line out from the niche in which he had hidden himself, made it fall in a loop on the cavern floor. Waiting, he held the two ends.

He began to think that none of the burden bearers were going to step in the loop he had made. But finally one put his foot down in the proper spot. Doc jerked. The bearer upset. Doc hurriedly hauled in the silk line, got it out of sight before they discovered it.

The man who had fallen said a great many words in his native language, all of it forceful. Then he got up and scowled at his lump of greenish-yellow material, which he had dropped. It lay in two large pieces, and some smaller ones.

He gathered the two lumps together, left the smaller ones, and went on with the others.

Doc glided out of the niche, used his flashlight—it had been recovered along with his clothing and gadgets—and made the beam very small, dashed it only momentarily.

Spreading his handkerchief, the bronze man raked some of the greenish-yellow substance onto the fabric, not using a finger for the raking, but the flashlight.

He returned to his men.

"WE were beginning not to like waiting," Long Tom informed him.

There was more shooting back in the cavern, continuous but irregular, as if a child might be playing aimlessly with a drum in the depths.

"Sounds like a nice little war going on in there," Monk suggested. Wars always interested Monk.

Doc Savage spread his handkerchief on the ground and put a flashlight beam on the yellow-green particles.

"About the same color as sulphur," Ham suggested.

"Or the color your face is gonna be after I choke you one of these days, providin' you keep messin' with me," Monk told him.

Doc scrutinized the material intently. He had no pocket magnifier, something he would have liked to use. He smelled the stuff.

It had an odor, but not particularly strong.

Very carefully, he rolled a small particle of the stuff onto the palm of his hand—and suddenly dropped it.

With furious haste, and some slight trace of pain on his metallic face, the bronze man scrubbed his hand in the sand. He rubbed it against his trousers leg, scrubbed it again.

"Holy cow! The stuff bite you?" Renny peered with great interest.

Doc Savage snapped the fingers of the hand several times, then put a light on the palm so the others could see.

An unpleasantly large blister was already rising.

"Should have known better," he said thoughtfully. "Already had a pretty good idea of what the stuff was."

"You had— Wait a minute!" Monk forgot to whisper, and gave a squawk of excitement. "You know what it is?"

"Not the exact chemical composition," Doc said. "A chemical analysis will show that."

"But I don't get it!"

Instead of explaining, Doc said: "Listen!"

They held their breaths, instinctively extinguishing their flashlights in alarm, and it was very still; except for two deep thumping noises from inside the cave, and also very dark, although they could hear the night breeze moving through nearby crags, and the odor of the mists was a faintly pleasant redolence.

"I don't hear nothin'," Monk said.

Doc, who had trained his hearing with years of scientific exercise, caught a faintly cautious voice some distance away calling: "Doc Savage! Hey, where the heck are you?"

"Old-timer!" Doc called.

The old prospector scrambled up to them. "They found out you got away," he said. "And they've got a war party on your trail."

"Fat chance they've got of findin' us," Monk said.

"That's where you're wrong, good-lookin' feller," the old-timer told homely Monk. "They've got bloodhounds."

"Bloodhounds?"

"Well, these dogs ain't the long-eared kind of pot licker, but they can trail a man. Listen."

The night stillness was broken abruptly by the long kiyoodling howl of a dog taking up a trail. "They can't trail so good in the mists, and they had lost the trail," the old-timer explained. "They've got it again now. We better be doing something."

Doc wheeled toward the tunnel mouth, and the others followed him, for greater convenience each man holding to the belt of the man ahead of him. They entered the tunnel.

"Dag nab it!" the old-timer exclaimed delightedly. "Did you find a way out of the valley?"

"With the best of luck," Doc said, "it may be sort of an indirect route."

Chapter XVII. THE STRANGE CAVERN

DOC did not go directly to the barricade where the natives were holding Spad Ames' men back. Instead, he turned off into the shaft down which he had seen the file of men come bearing the strange greenish-yellow chemical.

The shaft was narrow, crooked, the work of some prehistoric trickle of water. Once, when Monk happened to splash his flashlight beam upward, he stopped and pointed.

"Look up in there, Doc," he suggested.

High in a cranny overhead was a small vein of the greenish-yellow chemical.

Doc said: "There were probably veins of the stuff all through this peak to begin with, and water washed it away, leaving this cavern. That underground river which comes out at the base of the cliff—you remember how cold the water was?"

"What has cold water got to do with it?"

"Come on. I may be able to show you."

The vague odor grew more noticeable as they progressed, and it dawned on the others why Doc Savage had come in this direction.

"That smell is getting strong enough that the dogs won't be able to trail us," big-fisted Renny rumbled cheerfully.

They came to a larger chamber, a place so vast that its length dimension was lost in the mists, although its width appeared to be at least two hundred feet, Doc found upon scouting.

The left wall of the chamber was composed for the most part of the greenish-yellow chemical. Several of the white-haired Indians were working with long sticks, digging holes, then prying loose lumps of the chemical. Their torches threw pale-red light.

"Come on," Doc whispered.

They moved very cautiously and, not using their flashlights, passed the workers. The floor of the chamber slanted upward shortly, and they began to hear sounds of running water. Then they were climbing stones laid in masonry.

The dam reached nearly to the ceiling—there was, in fact, only a narrow aperture at the top, and that could be closed by a great pivoted stone slab of a door.

A small underground river was rushing down, beating against the dam, and glancing off into another channel.

"This must be the stream they used to close the secret entrance," Monk decided.

Doc voiced his own opinion. "At one time, the stream flowed into the cavern through which we just passed. The natives managed to dam it and divert it into another arm of the network of caves, and made their secret entrance."

The bronze man was thoughtful a moment.

"That gave them access to the chemical deposit," he added. "And lately, they must have considered making arrangements with the outside world to market the chemical commercially."

Renny said: "Holy cow! What is the stuff, Doc?"

INSTEAD of explaining directly, the bronze man cleared up details that had been puzzling the others.

"Mark Colorado had some of the chemical at the Phenix Academy," the bronze man said. "There was a packing case in his room, so probably the stuff was shipped to him in that. He evidently planned to market it, as I said. It was an excellent idea, because no natural deposit of the stuff has been found anywhere else. A commercial mixture probably somewhat similar has recently been marketed, however."

"Wait a minute!" Renny exploded. "You say something similar to this stuff is on the market?"

Doc Savage nodded. The others were staring at his bronze features, lined in flashlight glow.

"It has long been the dream of chemists to discover a refrigerant which could be safely handled,"

Doc said. "You are all familiar with dry ice, or solidified carbon dioxide, which has a temperature of one hundred and nine degrees below zero."

"What has dry ice got to do—" Renny paused, swallowed, said: "I begin to get this."

"The recently marketed material," Doc continued, "is a combination of bicarbonate of soda and other substances, which the formula owner is keeping secret, which forms a powder. When water is added to this powder, it becomes violently cold. One pound of it is claimed to have the cooling power of at least fifty pounds of ice."

They thought this over. A great deal was becoming clear.

"This greenish-yellow stuff," Monk said, "becomes cold when you add water to it."

"Very cold," Doc agreed. "As cold, apparently, as liquid air, the temperature of which is extremely low. As you know, a piece of beefsteak, for instance, when dipped in liquid air, instantly

becomes so cold that it is as hard as stone and may be broken like glass."

Monk gave a bark of astonishment. "That explains the so-called stone men! They were simply frozen with this stuff!"

"Exactly," Doc agreed grimly. "Water was added to the greenish-yellow chemical to put it in operation, then the stuff was poured over the men. As soon as it exhausts itself, the stuff doubtless evaporates, just as do liquid air and dry ice. Dry ice doesn't melt, as you know; it evaporates."

"That smoking effect around the bodies that everybody thought had been turned to stone," Monk suggested, "was simply the intensely cold chemical still evaporating from the body and clothing. Right?"

Doc nodded.

Then the bronze man gave his idea of the explanation for the unusual climate of the valley.

"The deposit of this chemical must be enormous," he said. "Water seepage reaches it continually, and the intense cold escapes through cracks in the stone, in the form of the mists which we noticed."

"And the rain the old-timer, here, said they had so often—"

"Is simply due to the cold valley air condensing what moisture there is in the atmosphere. The normal process by which rain is formed, accelerated somewhat by the cold seepage from this deposit." They heard shouting, then, and screaming. The cries, garbled by the fantastic acoustics of the cavern, were as weird as the howling of a coyote pack on a moonlight night. There were explosions. Shots. More cries.

"Sounds as if Spad Ames had broken through," Doc said.

With the others, he raced back toward the tunnel intersection. As they passed through the great chamber where the natives had been mining the cold chemical, they saw that the miners had deserted their tasks and raced away.

Doc knew, of course, that they had been planning to use the chemical to freeze Spad Ames and his men, if they tried to rush the barricade.

Apparently they had not been very successful.

THE fighting was furious in the main tunnel leading to the barricade. And the natives were retreating.

"Back!" Doc warned.

The bronze man had a few high-explosive grenades left. He ran down the subterranean passage a short distance—not toward the fighting, but in the direction of the valley. He covered fifty yards, selected his spot, put one of the grenades in a crack in the wall, then whirled and ran back.

"Get down!" he rapped at the others.

The explosion ripped out, followed by a sound as if broken glass was being ground together, and the roof came down at that point. Rock dust boiled in the glare of their flashlights, mixing darkly with the lighter foglike vapor that came from the cold chemical.

Monk didn't approve. "Blazes!" he howled. "Now we're blocked off from the valley!"

"So is Spad Ames," Doc said grimly.

The first cluster of retreating white-haired Indians raced past. Doc and the others, extinguishing their flashlights and flattening against the side wall, escaped notice. The fleeing group reached the point where the roof had collapsed, instantly set up a terrified bedlam of howling.

"They seem a little disturbed," Monk said.

"Sh-h-h, you homely missing link!" Ham warned. "They find us, and we'll be disturbed, too!"

The fugitives came racing back, dived into the tunnel which led to the huge chamber and the chemical deposit. Other natives in flight appeared, and followed them. The word had evidently gone down the line, in the strange gobbling language, that the other tunnel was blocked.

Doc watched them flee past. Except for running sounds the defenders made, comparative silence had fallen.

The last man in flight, it developed, was Mark Colorado. He must have recovered from the anaesthetic, followed the dogs as they trailed Doc and the others to the subterranean passages, and joined the defenders.

Doc stepped out, grasped Mark Colorado's arm. The bronze man put a flash on his own face so the other would recognize him.

"Oh—we knew you must be in here somewhere!" Mark Colorado gasped. "We—you've got to help us!"

"What happened?"

"They had poison gas. We were holding them back at a long shaft by rolling stones, until we could get ready to use the freezing stone upon them. The shaft was crooked, and they could not shoot the grenades to the top. But they caught a badger."

"Badger?"

"Yes. Tied a poison gas bomb to the badger, then turned the animal loose, and the scared creature climbed up the shaft. It was among us before we knew it. Half-half of our men are dead."

Doc said: "Come on. We can't hold them off here."

They followed the natives who had fled toward the great chamber, one side of which was composed

of the vast deposit of cold chemical.

"We can get out into the valley by this route?" Doc asked.

"How-how did you know that?"

"The breeze. There is a strong draft through here. There has to be an opening somewhere beyond."

"Yes," Mark Colorado explained. "There is a dam across the river, and we can follow the river for a short distance, then there is another opening which leads into the valley."

They could hear the Spad Ames crowd behind them.

WHEN they were half across the great room, they were shot at. One of Spad Ames' men did the firing, using an automatic rifle. The bullets shrieked very close, and clamor of the weapon in the cavern was ear-splitting. They extinguished their lights, scattered.

"Get to the dam as quick as you can!" Doc shouted.

They raced forward. Renny became confused in the intense darkness, and ran against the chemical deposit with one hand, and there was enough perspiration on his skin to cause the stuff to induce terrific cold that felt as if a white-hot iron had touched his fingers. He howled in pain.

Doc showed a light briefly. Renny joined them. They scrambled up the steep stone backslope of the dam, found the narrow opening, and crowded through.

There was a native with a torch and a club on the other side. He snarled, lifted the club. Mark Colorado knocked him down, then barked at the man in their lingo.

"I told him," Mark Colorado explained, "to get the others out of here. Or do you want them to stay and help fight?"

"Tell them to get out," Doc directed. "You can stay and act as guide, if you don't mind."

Mark Colorado shouted directions, and the native retreated, joining the others. The sounds they made grew fainter.

There were other noises, however, on the other side of the dam.

"Spad Ames and Locatella are coming!" Monk barked.

"Get back," Doc directed. "Get off this dam."

Then the bronze man sent a loud shout back into the great cavern.

"Ames!" he shouted. "Spad Ames!"

Spad Ames answered profanely, said: "Damn us! We've been wonderin' what happened to you!"

Doc yelled: "Get back! Don't try to rush us! We'll give you that one chance."

Spad Ames swore. Then he laughed. And he drove the beam of a powerful searchlight against the dam.

He made a mistake about the nature of the dam proving that he had apparently never been in this part of the underground labyrinth before.

"They got a barricade!" he yelled. "Blow it down, guys!"

Doc moved. He moved at least as fast as ever before in his life, and retreated from the dam. He splashed into the river, crossed it, joined the others, shouted: "Run! They're going to blast the dam!"

The others were already running.

Spad Ames' bomb, evidently a big grenade thrown by hand, let loose a ripping crash. They had pitched it through the aperture in what they thought was a barricade, not a dam, and the thing had landed in the water. Spray flew over Doc and the others. The dam came apart.

For a few minutes, there was only rushing water.

Then the shrieks began coming. And the vapor. The cold. The incredibly agonizing cold. The yells grew more horrible.

The bitter cold kept increasing.

"Run!" Doc warned. "There is a tremendous deposit of that chemical. We might be frozen if we stay here."

They raced, falling frequently, through the cavern passage.

After a while there were no more shrieks behind them.

And later they came out into the misty pleasant darkness of the valley.

Chapter XVIII. TO HERMIT OR NOT TO HERMIT

THREE days later, the last searching party of white-haired people came in from the desert, climbing the long ropes which had been lowered over the cliff. They were not particularly cheerful. Three of Spad Ames' men, fellows left behind as lookouts, had escaped through the desert, it seemed. These three were all that survived. Spad Ames, Locatella, the others, had died of cold in the great cavern, or in the passages beyond.

Doc Savage listened to a translation of the report. He had picked up a few words of the language, but not enough to more than catch the gist of what was said.

Mark Colorado did not seem disappointed. "That should remove the last objection to your leaving here," he said. "The older men seemed to think we should go on trying to keep the existence of this valley a secret."

Pretty Ruth Colorado was not so enthusiastic. She nipped her lips, said finally: "We will hate very much to see you go."

Ham nudged Monk, whispered: "What she means is that she hates to see Doc go."

If the bronze man was aware of any particular feeling on the young woman's part, or if he had any thoughts of his own in that direction, he carefully refrained from showing them. His life work was

dangerous; it allowed no feminine entanglements, for enemies would strike at him through anyone who became close to him. He stuck always to his determination: no women. It was not always easy, and not always was he entirely successful. The remarkable training which he had received from childhood at the hands of scientists had gone a long way toward making him a superb physical machine, but it had not succeeded in relieving him of human emotions.

Renny had a report: "We can rebuild that dam, but going in with electrically heated suits that will protect us against the cold. Or we can wait for a very dry season, when the river stops flowing, and build the dam again. That was the way it was constructed in the first place." Doc had consulted at some length with the chief of the valley Indians. As he had suspected, they had planned to market the chemical commercially—that was the real reason for the presence of Mark and Ruth Colorado in Phenix Academy. It had been hoped the Colorados could develop suitable containers for the stuff, using Phenix laboratory facilities, and later arrange marketing facilities.

After some argument, Doc's proposition was accepted. The chemical product would be marketed through an organization which the bronze man could arrange. If possible, no outsiders would be allowed to enter the valley, as long as the inhabitants so wished.

Part of the preparations which Doc and his aids made before leaving consisted of another argument—this one about whether the prisoners in the valley should be permitted to leave. Doc finally won out.

Then they learned that the prisoners did not care about leaving.

The old-timer expressed it the most coherently.

"I don't see where I'd be any better off outside," he said. "Dag nab it, they got right tolerable-lookin' squaws here, you gotta admit. And I got me one picked out."

"You want to stay?" Monk asked.

"Thanks, gents, but figger I will."

Monk had been looking over the native femininity rather intensively, and he understood how the old-timer felt.

"You know," Monk said, "I think you got somethin' there."

THE END