



THE MAN WHO SHOOK THE EARTH

A Doc Savage Adventure by Kenneth Robeson

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Chapter I. THE FAKE NEWSPAPERMAN

THE man looked as tough as sin. But he was crying. He whimpered. He bubbled at the mouth like a child half crazed with horror and fear. He perspired, although the night was cold.

"Hear it?" he moaned.

A rumbling was coming out of the innards of the earth. The sidewalk vibrated feebly. There was steady, hollow uproar.

"It's comin'!" the man whined. "Listen, Velvet! It's gettin' closer an' closer—"

His ears were tufts of gristle. They looked as if they had been chewed upon in the past. A groove a quarter of an inch deep slanted across his face. It explained itself. Some one had once tried to cut his throat, but he had ducked. The knife that had made the groove had sheared off the end of his nose. His nostrils were two fuzz-rimmed holes opening straight out in his face.

He gibbered: "We ain't got time to get clear before—"

Velvet hit the fellow squarely on the blubbering mouth that was bisected by the knife scar.

"Maybe you'll pipe down!" he snarled.

Velvet was dressed in evening clothes, but he had tied a large black handkerchief around his neck, so that it hung down and concealed his white collar and white dress-shirt front. He carried himself with the studied squareness of a man proud of his physical strength and looks.

The big man, knocked back against the building wall by the blow, dragged finger tips over his crushed mouth. He sobbed: "Can't you hear the noise it's makin' as it comes?"

The rumble underground grew louder and louder. Metal gratings on near-by windows jingled in their sockets. Warm, ill-smelling air gushed up through a grille in the sidewalk.

Suddenly the innards of the earth seemed to suck the uproar away. It vanished, leaving only sounds of traffic and moan of a cold wind.

"A subway train, you dope!" sneered Velvet, and tucked the black handkerchief more securely in his collar.

It was night. Enough light reached them from the corner street lamp, however, to show the expression on the big man's scarred, stupid face. It was utterly blank.

He gulped: "The subway!"

Velvet laughed harshly. "Even if you ain't been in New York before, Biff, you should have read of subways. Oh, that's right, too. You can't read."

"Biff" rolled his eyes, and they grew sullen, ugly. Crouching there, he seemed to become as dangerous and savage as a beast. He hated to be reminded that he could not read.

"Some day I'm goin' to get fed up with you," he told Velvet fiercely.

Velvet laughed again. An animal-like ferocity had come into his tone, also. "Any time you feel lucky, cull!"

They glared at each other. It was Biff who first twitched his gaze aside.

"Never mind," he mumbled. "Let's talk about Doc Savage."

WITH a bestial savagery, the two had snarled at each other. Now, with the swiftness characteristic of animals, they dropped their belligerency. Shoulder to shoulder, they moved over into the gloomy lee of a parked truck.

Biff made impatient grumbling noises.

"What are we waitin' on?" he demanded. "It's on the eighty-sixth floor. Ain't that what the back-number newspaper you was readin' said?"

"That's what it said." Velvet scowled in the gloom. "Say, how do you think we're going to do this?"

"Go up and bust in and—"

"And get busted!" Velvet finished disgustedly.

Biff seemed to have recovered completely from the somewhat uncanny fear which the underground rumbling had caused. He drew a revolver from inside his clothes. The gun was so blue as to be almost invisible in the darkness. He spun the cylinder. It clicked like a clock being wound.

A rather gaudy bunch of handkerchief protruded from the breast pocket of Biff's coat. He picked this out. It proved to be tied around the hilt of a knife which had a blade more than a foot long. It was carried in a concealed holster in his coat lining. He could get it quickly by grabbing the handkerchief.

"I won't bust so easy," he said in a soft tone.

Velvet shook his head slowly. His voice was not ugly now. "If you could read, you might not be so sure."

Biff replaced gun and knife. "What's readin' got to do with it?"

"The newspapers," Velvet said, "seem to think this Doc Savage is quite a guy. And I think you can rest assured that he is quite a guy. The boss didn't send us no five thousand miles to watch a second-rater."

An automobile passed. Its headlights flashed briefly on Biff's face. Shadows on the bottom of the scar across his face gave it the aspect of a short black snake.

He growled: "I ain't afraid of any damn man—"

"Them has been the last words of more than one cluck," Velvet assured him. "I'm running this show. You stay here, see? Stand around and think what a tough guy you are. Do anything. Just keep away from that skyscraper, and give a man with brains a chance to work."

Biff thought that over, then rumbled: "I don't like your lip!"

Velvet ignored the remark and passed out a second dig. "Don't run when you hear the next subway train."

Biff made an ugly sound deep in his chest. "You know what I thought it was! I had reason to be scared!"

Velvet reached out and gave him a not unfriendly shove.

"Sure, big boy, I know," he said. "If I hadn't have known what it was, I'd have been more scared than you were."

The street gloom swallowed him.

THERE are two skyscraper sections in the city of New York. One is on the lower end of Manhattan Island, centering around Wall Street. The other is a few miles to the north, in the midtown district. In the latter area was a structure which was probably the finest in the city.

This building was a spike of steel and brick which jutted up nearly a hundred stories. Its exterior was smooth stone and bright metal. Its architecture was modernistic, plain, dignified. It gleamed richly in lights reflected from the Great White Way, not very many blocks distant.

The lobby of this skyscraper was impressive. The elevators which served the upper floors numbered in the scores. The lobby itself was remindful of the interior of a cathedral.

Velvet, walking across the gigantic vestibule, felt as insignificant as a fly on the floor of an ordinary room. He shrugged off the sensation and threw out his chest. At this hour of the night only a few elevators were operating. Velvet stepped into a cage as large as a living room in an ordinary home.

"Eighty-six," he said,

He had, of course, removed the black handkerchief from his collar. The somber cloth had merely been in place to make himself less conspicuous while he conferred with Biff in the side street. It reposed in his pocket, however, handy for possible future use.

The elevator emptied Velvet into the eighty-sixth-floor corridor. He glanced about. The builders of the skyscraper had not scrimped on space. The corridor was high, wide; luxurious carpet covered the floor. Its nap felt an inch deep when Velvet walked across it.

The man, appraising his surroundings, made a silent whistle of slight amazement.

"This Doc Savage seems to be a big shot," he told himself quietly. "He has to be, to afford to hang out here. It's a good thing I didn't let Biff try his strong-arm stuff."

Velvet waded the carpet down the corridor. His gaze roved over door numbers. He reached the one he

desired. Somewhat blankly, he stared at the panel.

The door was very plain, and of heavy bronze. The bronze was what interested Velvet. It was the first time he had ever seen that metal look nearly as rich as gold.

In tiny letters of a bronze color, slightly darker than that of the door, there was a name:

CLARK SAVAGE, JR

"

That's the gentleman," said Velvet. His tone was ugly.

He looked for a bell, found none, and tried the knob. The door was locked. He made a face, then knocked.

The door promptly sprang wide open.

Velvet leaped backward as wildly as if he had been confronted by a flame-spouting dragon.

It was an astounding personage who had opened the door. He was fully a head shorter than Velvet, but would weigh almost twice as much. His enormous, hairy hands dangled well below his knees. His eyes were tiny, and sunk in deep pits. They resembled twinkling stars set deep in gristle. Every exposed inch of his skin was covered with a crop of hair only slightly less coarse than barbed wire. One of his ears was punctured as if for an earring, except that the perforation was about the size of a rifle-bullet hole.

The man would not have to be in a very dark alley for a spectator to mistake him for a gorilla.

"Something I can do for you, buddy?" he asked.

Velvet blinked. From that apish, ferocious-looking giant he had expected a voice that was a whooping roar. But the homely fellow's voice was tiny and mild.

"I'm looking for Doc Savage," Said Velvet.

"He ain't here," replied the pleasantly ugly monster in the door.

VELVET considered this. He adjusted his black bow tie. "That's tough," he said. "Maybe you can help me out. What's your name?"

"They generally call me Monk," said the homely fellow.

Velvet's lip curled. "You can't blame 'em for that. You're the janitor here, aren't you, Monk?"

"Did somebody tell you?" "Monk" asked, in his small voice.

"I'm a good guesser." Velvet showed all of his white teeth in a somewhat wolfish grin. "Listen, Monk, do you want to make two hundred dollars?"

Monk snorted. "What a question to ask!"

"O.K., then," Velvet said rapidly. "Now listen: I'm a newspaper reporter. I've been trying to interview this Doc Savage, but I haven't had any luck. I can't even see him. I want you to let me stay here in the office after you lock up. In that way, I can see him. I've got to get a story for my paper, the *Times-Flash*."

Monk pulled thoughtfully at the ear which had the bullet hole in it. "Well, I don't know—"

"Two hundred dollars," Velvet reminded. "And I promise you—I won't tell Doc Savage how I got in."

"Five hundred," Monk said.

Velvet's face turned fierce. He gritted, "Why, you chiseler—" then thought better of it. He shrugged his neatly

tailored shoulders, spread his hands. "You win," he said.

Producing a wallet, Velvet counted out a sheaf of greenbacks. "It's lucky the *Times-Flash* pays for this."

Monk smacked his lips loudly in satisfaction, took the bills, and pocketed them. "Thanks, mister," he said. "I'll leave you now."

"Sure," Velvet agreed. "You don't want to be here when Doc Savage comes."

Monk squinted. His tiny eyes were almost lost in their gristle pits. "Do you know Doc Savage by sight, Mr.—er—"

"Velvet, John Velvet," said Velvet, then grimaced. He had been caught off guard a little. He had not intended to give his name. "Well, no, I'm not exactly sure that I can recognize Doc Savage."

"Good night!" Monk exclaimed. "You're about the only person here in New York who wouldn't know him by sight!"

Velvet dropped his lids to hide the sudden, ugly hardness in his eyes. "I'm a new reporter—from the West."

"You'll know Doc Savage easy enough when you see him," Monk said. "He's a great bronze giant of a figure. In appearance alone, he's about the most remarkable man you've ever seen. His eyes will strike you, too. They're a strange color, like pools of flake gold that are being stirred around all the time. When a man looks at 'em, something just kind of happens to him. It's hard to explain—"

"You'd better explain it some other time," Velvet said hastily. "Clear out, Monk. Savage might show up and find out you had let somebody into his office."

Without a word, Monk walked into the corridor. He shut the door behind him.

Velvet made a face after the retreating gorilla of a man. He chuckled. "That guy is even dumber than Biff."

Then Velvet glanced about the office.

This was apparently the outer room of a suite. There was an expensive rug on the floor. Chairs were big, and made for comfort. Near the two great windows stood a table, the top of which was completely inlaid and looked costly. At one side, near a door, stood a large locker. On the other side of the room was an enormous safe.

Velvet went to the locker and gave its handle a twist. He failed to open it. He tried the door alongside. That, too, resisted him.

Velvet swung over to the gigantic safe, and learned it was shut securely. It would be about as easy to enter as a bank vault. Velvet shrugged and turned away. He lit a cigarette.

"Well, what if they are locked," he grumbled. "I didn't come up here to steal anything. My game is bigger stuff."

He seated himself beside the telephone stand, which was near the great inlaid table, remained there, smoking, staring steadily at the phone. He was waiting for something. The expression on his face was eager, and utterly villainous.

MONK was grinning with all of his homely face as he left an elevator in the lobby of the skyscraper. His expression was one of smug satisfaction, as he swaggered across the lobby, heading for the street door.

Two elevator operators, standing at attention in front of their idle cages, bowed from the waist as Monk passed. Their manner showed respect and possibly a little awe.

Had Velvet been a witness, he would have thought it more than passing strange for a janitor to rate such deference.

Out on the street, Monk walked rapidly. The fact that his arms were some inches longer than his legs gave him a comical aspect. Several pedestrians turned around and stared wonderingly after him.

Monk ignored this. He kept going as if he had some place which he wished to reach in a hurry.

The night air was rather chilly. It was getting colder. Overhead, clouds were matted. Indications were that it would be a bitter night, with a probability of snow before long.

Monk came to a park a few blocks from the skyscraper. In the chilly, windswept center of the park, a long wooden shack had been erected. The brightly lighted interior of this gave off the aroma of coffee, doughnuts, and sandwiches. From the shack a long line of men stretched.

Monk calculated the length of the line. There must be about four hundred men in it. There were very few of them who were not shivering with the night's chill.

Monk continued on past the line, to an all-night bank. When he came out of the bank, he was carrying five hundred one-dollar bills. He had exchanged Velvet's bribe money for them.

Monk went to the man who was ladling out food to the breadline. A few words, and the money exchanged hands.

Five minutes later, each down-and-outer who passed in the breadline was getting a crisp dollar bill. To most of them, a dollar was a young fortune. It meant a bed for the night, a meal or two tomorrow.

A close observer might have detected salty drops of gratitude in a number of eyes. Other skeptical souls walked off wondering loudly, but happily, if the dollar bills were genuine.

The grin on Monk's simian features was even wider as he went to a near-by drug store and entered a phone booth.

Consulting the phone directory, Monk got the number of the *Times-Flash*. Velvet had said he worked for this sheet. Monk called the newspaper, and got the city editor on the wire.

"I'd like to talk to Mr. Velvet." Monk was merely checking up on Velvet's story.

"Who?" growled the city editor.

"Your reporter named Velvet."

"There's nobody by that name working on this paper," the city editor said shortly. "Furthermore, there never has been."

Monk lost his smile. "Have you got a reporter trying to interview Doc Savage? Give me the truth about it. This is important."

"We sent no reporter to see Doc Savage," the city editor said firmly.

Chapter II. THE MYSTERIOUS JOHN ACRE

MONK broke his connection. His anthropoid features were a study. He scratched among the reddish bristles which stuck up straight on top of his head.

Outside, a newsboy passed. He was piping in a cold-shrilled voice. "Earthquake! All about the big earthquake! Read about it!"

Monk called the number of a hospital which was noted all over the world for the remarkable surgical feats which were performed there.

"Is Doc Savage there?" Monk asked. "I'm a friend of his."

The man at the hospital hesitated, then said: "I do not believe that Doc Savage is free to answer the telephone at the moment."

"Why not?"

"Doctor Savage is conducting one of his demonstration operations. There are more than two score of famous surgeons watching."

Monk showed no surprise at this. Doc Savage, famous man of bronze, was considered by those in the profession to be the greatest living surgeon. Doc did not practice professionally, but frequently performed his surgical magic while other surgeons looked on. He did this to demonstrate new technique, to teach others to do what he himself had learned through intensive study and research.

"What kind of an operation is Doc doing this time?" Monk asked the hospital attendant casually.

"An extremely delicate piece of work to remove a paralytic condition from the nerve center of a man's left eye," explained the fellow at the hospital.

Monk started slightly. "What?"

"Doc Savage is operating on a left eye," the hospital attendant reported. Apparently he felt loquacious. "This will be a remarkable feat, if successful. Sight has been lost to this eye since an injury was suffered in the Great War."

Varied expressions were convulsing Monk's homely features. Astonishment, anxiety, and delight struggled for possession of his pleasantly ugly lineaments. He seemed too overcome to speak.

"

The successful completion of this eye operation will be one of the greatest feats of its kind ever performed," continued the man at the hospital. There was awe in his tone.

Monk found his voice. "Is the guy being operated on tall and bony?"

"Right," the other replied. "He is a remarkable physical specimen, but in excellent condition. The nerves of his eye, it seems, have been allowed to strengthen for years since his injury in the War, in order that the operation might be feasible."

"That the operation was not performed earlier was due to Doc Savage's realization that to do so would result in permanent loss of vision in the eye. He has waited until the time was ripe."

"What's the name of the man with the bad eye?" Monk demanded thickly, his voice strained.

"William Harper Littlejohn. He is a famous archaeologist and geologist."

Monk leaned against the booth side. He was perspiring. The hospital attendant's words had obviously put him under a great strain.

"Listen," he pleaded. "Go see how that operation is coming along, will you? This guy Littlejohn is a pal of mine. I didn't know he was being operated on tonight."

The man at the hospital left the phone. He was gone a few minutes, then reported:

"The operation is over. Doc Savage will be here to speak with you as soon as he removes his working robes."

"Was it successful?" Monk yelled anxiously.

"It was."

MONK emitted a tremendous bawling howl of delight, and did his best to jump up and down in the cramped

confines of the phone booth. The booth was too small to permit successful dancing, however.

In a blissful silence, following his outburst, Monk waited for Doc Savage to reach the hospital phone.

Outside the drug store, the newsboy was still howling.

"Paper!" he cried. "Read about the great earthquake!"

From the phone receiver pressed to Monk's ear came a voice. It was a remarkable voice, for it seemed peculiarly able to adapt itself to the limitations of telephone transmission. It came from the metal diaphragm with the clarity of a bell.

"Doc Savage speaking," said the voice.

"Listen, Doc!" Monk howled. "Why didn't you tell us you were gonna work on Johnny's eye tonight?"

"You fellows would only have stood around and moped," Doc replied. "I was just saving you the worry."

Monk snorted. He knew there was logic in what Doc said, but he hardly appreciated the kindness. He would have preferred to stand outside the operating room and sweat and worry throughout the critical period.

"Johnny" was a very close friend indeed.

"Did it turn out all right—the operation, I mean?" Monk asked, as if he wanted to be reassured that Johnny was all right.

"It did," Doc replied. "Johnny will be walking around tomorrow, and in a few days, will be reading papers with that bad eye."

"So soon!" Monk ejaculated.

"The operation was largely one of adjustment," Doc explained. "It's too technical to go into over the phone. What's on your mind?"

Monk had been so concerned over Johnny's prospects that he had temporarily overlooked the thing which had first moved him to call.

"I guess I pulled a boner, Doc," he said.

He told of the appearance of Velvet at the skyscraper office, of the five-hundred-dollar bribe which he had taken, and finally, of the disposal of the bribe at the breadline.

"I nearly keeled over when the guy coughed up five hundred, Doc," he finished. "I didn't like him a bit. But I decided to take his money. He couldn't steal anything around the office. Everything was locked up. And I knew you did not plan to show up there again tonight."

MONK, waiting for Doc's reaction to the information, started violently, and glanced around inside the phone booth. Then he pressed the receiver more tightly to his ear and grinned.

A strange sound was coming from the receiver. It was low, mellow, and trilling, like the song of some strange feathered creature of the jungle, or the sound of a wind filtering through a denuded forest.

It was melodious, this eerie note, although without tune. It came from the telephone receiver with such astounding clarity that Monk had been startled into glancing about, thinking it was made by some one in the booth with him.

Monk had heard this sound before. It was part of Doc Savage, a small thing which he did in moments of concentration. To his friends, it was possessed of many meanings.

Sometimes, it was Doc's cry of battle; again, it was his song of triumph. Occasionally, it precoursed some plan of action. Often it came when Doc was surprised.

Just now, Monk concluded the sound must indicate that Doc was puzzled.

"Everything around the office was locked up?" Doc queried.

"Sure! Everything. This guy couldn't do any harm. That's why I relieved him of his mazuma."

"Since the man lied about working for a newspaper," Doc said, "we'd better look into this, Monk. Something is up."

"So I figured," said Monk.

"I'll meet you in the lobby of our office building in about fifteen minutes from now."

"Quarter of an hour it is," said Monk, and hung up. He waddled out of the booth.

VELVET had been quite sincere in addressing Monk as the Janitor. The homely, apish fellow looked the part; his garb was shabby enough. His hair needed cutting badly, and he could have stood a shave to advantage.

No doubt the thing which had misled Velvet most of all was the fact that there did not seem room enough for a thimbleful of brains behind Monk's low forehead.

Monk's looks were deceptive. He was not a janitor; he was a chemist of world-wide repute. His most jealous colleague admitted that Monk was a magician of the test tubes.

Monk's short legs pumped like pistons as he headed for Doc Savage's skyscraper office. The grin was back on his homely face.

So Johnny would be able to use his left eye now! That was swell!

Johnny and Monk were both members of a group of six remarkable men. Just as Monk was a great chemist, and Johnny a world-renowned geologist, so were three of the others experts in their lines. One was a lawyer, another an electrical wizard, and the third an engineer.

The other member of this group of six—Doc Savage—was the leader. Incredibly enough, Doc was a greater chemist, a greater engineer, a greater lawyer, a more learned geologist, and a more skilled electrical expert than any of the other five.

Doc Savage's forte was not surgery alone. His fund of learning covered almost all things. Sometimes those associated with him were inclined to wonder if this amazing man had not in some miraculous fashion attained that supreme goal of students—an infinite knowledge of all things.

Fabulous as Doc Savage's accomplishments seemed, there were actually nothing of the supernatural about them. They were things which could be duplicated by another, simply by going through the years of preparation to which Doc had submitted himself. From the cradle, Doc had been trained for a definite purpose in life.

Doc's life work was to go here and there, to the ends of the earth if necessary, striving to help those in need of help, and punishing those who justly deserved it.

The love of excitement and adventure, together with an unbounded admiration for Doc Savage, and the pleasure they got out of associating with him, held Doc's live aids in a group.

Monk, just before he reached the skyscraper, stepped aside to avoid a newsboy. The lad was howling: "Earthquake! Read about the earthquake in South America!"

Monk was not at all interested in earthquakes.

Monk entered the skyscraper lobby. He walked past the phalanx of elevators. Of each operator, he asked a question.

"Have you brought down a guy from eighty-six within the last few minutes—a bird in evening clothes, who walked like he thought a lot of himself?"

"That gentleman just left," reported the third attendant.

Monk made a clicking sound of regret with his tongue and the roof of his mouth.

"Here comes Doc Savage!" an elevator operator said dramatically.

THE exclamation was a bit breathless, and filled with awe. It was as if the operator were seeing a famous personage for the first time. Yet it was certain that this attendant saw Doc Savage many times daily.

Monk turned. He understood how they felt. He had himself been closely associated with Doc Savage for years, yet he still got something of a wallop each time he saw the metallic giant that was Doc.

Doc Savage, crossing the cavernous lobby, did not look the giant that he was. Tendons and vast muscles bundled his body like cables, yet they were developed in such universal fashion that they blended in a strikingly symmetrical whole.

It was only when Doc came close to other men that his huge size became apparent.

Bronze was the color motif on Doc Savage's skin. Due to the corded hardness of his muscles, he resembled a statue of the metal. His eyes were weird—flaky golden pools which seemed always astir, always alive.

Doc lifted a hand in a gesture of greeting to Monk. The hand was muscled until it looked as if it had been wrapped with steel wire, then painted with bronze. However, the fingers were long, regardless of their obviously incredible strength.

"Let's go up," Doc said. His voice was as remarkable as it had been when Monk heard it over the phone. Not loud, it nevertheless carried to the recesses of the lobby.

An express elevator, its progress a hiss of speed, rushed them to the eighty-sixth floor.

"The guy is gone," Monk explained. "I got that from an elevator operator."

Saying nothing, Doc approached the office door. An uncanny thing happened—the door opened at his approach.

There was no living thing near it.

MONK hastily peered into the office. He was completely at a loss to understand the business of the door opening. The room beyond was as he had left it. Apparently, nothing was disturbed.

Monk squinted at the outer door, seeking to figure out what made it swing ajar when Doc had approached it. He shook his head. Then he walked around the office, trying the safe door, the locker, and the doors into the inner rooms. All were locked.

"It don't look like the guy bothered anything," he said in his small voice. "That's funny. Why should he pay me five hundred dollars, just to get into the office?"

Doc walked toward the door into the inner chambers.

Monk's hair threatened to stand on end at what happened. The solidly locked door—Monk was mortally certain it was locked—quickly opened itself as Doc came near. After the bronze man had passed through, the door closed.

Rushing over, Monk grasped the knob. He exerted all his strength. Monk could take a horseshoe in his big hairy hands and bend it into the shape of a pretzel. This door, however, resisted him.

With a sheepish grin on his homely face, Monk absently fitted the end of his little finger into the hole in his earlobe. Monk was highly intelligent in spite of his apish look. He was trying to figure out what made the doors open when Doc came near them. Doc had perfected many remarkable devices, but this was a new one. For all of Monk's canniness, he was stumped.

The door opened in the same magic fashion as before, and Doc Savage reappeared. He carried a black composition tube which resembled a cylindrical phonograph record.

Monk grinned. He knew what the record was. It was part of a device which was hooked to the telephone and recorded all conversations. This apparatus monitored Doc's phone wire continuously. When one record became filled, another one shifted automatically into place.

"Nothing but the telephone seems to have been touched," Doc said.

Monk peered at the telephone. He considered himself a detective of fair ability. He was certain the instrument was placed exactly as it had always been. He did not doubt that it had been used, though. Doc rarely made a mistake.

Going to the telephone, Monk peered at it from several angles. He sniffed. Then he got it. There was a faint tang of smoker's breath about the mouthpiece. Neither Doc nor any of his five men smoked; and no one else used this instrument.

Monk had missed the smoke scent on his first round of the room. Doc, however, had caught it. Doc's nostrils had been trained to an animal sensitivity in smell perception.

Doc switched on the mechanism which played back the record. The pick-up was amplified and reproduced through a loud-speaker. It was like listening to a bit of drama from a radio.

"Hello," said a voice from the loudspeaker. "Doc Savage speaking."

"Huh!" Monk gulped. "Why, the liar! That's the guy who told me his name was Velvet!"

Doc Savage requested silence with a lifted hand.

"This is John Acre," said a slow, wheezing voice from the reproducing instrument. "I sent you several radiograms from the boat. I wonder if you have received any of them."

"Yes," said Velvet. "They referred to various mysterious earthquakes."

"Good!" exclaimed John Acre. "Then you know how important it is that I see you. I just landed from the steamer *Junio*."

"You wish to see me at once?" asked Velvet.

"Immediately, Mr. Savage. May I come to your office?"

"Not to my office," said Velvet. "Come to the Midas Club, on Park Avenue."

"Very well, Mr. Savage," agreed John Acre.

A sharp click ended the conversation. The recording had stopped automatically as soon as the receivers were hung up.

"For the love of mud!" Monk ejaculated. "Did you hear that, Doc—the Midas Club! That's Ham's hang-out."

THERE was a good reason for Monk's surprise. The Midas Club was the residence of one member of Doc's group of five remarkable aids. The man who lived there was Brigadier General Theodore Marley Brooks. He was the law expert of Doc's squad.

"Why should Velvet decoy this John Acre to Ham's place?" Monk pondered.

Doc made no reply. His bronze features showed no excitement. That did not mean he was unconcerned. For years, Doc had schooled himself in self-control. Now, it was only on the rarest of occasions that he showed any emotion.

"John Acre said he had sent you some messages," Monk continued, eyeing Doc. "Did you get any?"

"No," Doc said. "And I have never heard of John Acre, either."

"The meeting being arranged at Ham's apartment is the strangest part of the whole thing," Monk grumbled. "Do you reckon that shyster lawyer is mixed up in something that he ain't letting us in on?"

When Monk mentioned "Ham," he used the same tone he would have used to speak of a horned devil. It gave the idea that Monk would cheerfully have cut Ham's throat. Monk and Ham's association was one long quarrel. Rarely did an hour pass but that one offered a biting remark to the other. They seemed continually on the point of slaughtering one another.

But this was only good-natured horseplay. If necessary, one would cheerfully give his life for the other.

"We'll go up to Ham's place and look into this strange meeting," Doc decided.

They walked toward the door—and again Monk's little eyes threatened to shoot out of their pits of gristle.

Doc had made no gesture. He had not touched his clothing. The door, however, had jumped wide open as they drew near.

"How do you do that, Doc?" Monk demanded.

"It's trained," Doc said.

Monk snorted. He looked back as they went down the corridor. The door closed itself when they were a few feet distant. Monk snorted again. The thing had him baffled.

Doc Savage went to the last panel in the long row of elevator doors. To Monk's bafflement, this door also opened at Doc's approach. They stepped into a cage. The door closed. The floor seemed to drop from under their feet.

The mechanism of this particular elevator had been designed by Doc himself. It operated at a speed far too uncomfortable for ordinary passenger traffic. For almost sixty stories, Monk and Doc barely had their feet on the floor. Then the cage slowed so abruptly that Monk was forced to all fours. Doc, thanks to tremendous leg muscles, kept his feet.

Monk grinned widely. He always got a kick out of riding this super-speed lift.

They did not step out into the lobby of the skyscraper, but into a narrow, concrete-walled tunnel. They strode down this. It admitted them to Doc Savage's garage in the skyscraper basement.

Half a dozen cars were housed there. These ranged from a thin, underslung speedster, to a great limousine. All the cars had one point in common—none were painted with flashy colors.

Doc selected a roadster. It was a long, somber machine, which would attract no attention out on the street. Monk happened to know the car could do in the neighborhood of a hundred and fifty miles an hour. The motor was wonderfully silent. Only by the sudden life in ammeter and oil-pressure gauge, could Monk tell that it had started.

The exit doors were at the head of an incline. They opened in an eerie way as Doc drove up to them.

Park Avenue is the swankiest street in the city of New York. The Midas Club was situated on the most fashionable corner of the avenue. It was not a tall building, lifting less than twenty stories; but for its size it had undoubtedly cost more than any other structure in town.

New York City is rumored to have two or three clubs which require that the candidates for membership possess a bank roll of at least a million dollars. The Midas Club had raised the ante. To get on its roster, you

had to have five million. In addition, you must have made the money yourself. If you had inherited the five million, you were out of luck.

Ham was reported to have the most sumptuous and luxurious suite in the Midas Club.

"Gosh!" Monk ejaculated. "Look!"

At least a dozen policemen were dashing about outside of the clubhouse.

There was a great crowd milling around. Every one seemed excited.

"What has happened?" Doc asked a policeman.

"A man who said his name was John Acre tried to get into the club," the officer explained. "While he was doing that, and shouting his name, several other men came up with guns. They grabbed him and carried him off."

A newsboy ran up to the roadster.

"Buy a paper, fellers!" he cried. "Read about the earthquake in South America!"

"Scat!" said the cop. "You got a nerve, tryin' to peddle your earthquakes right here where there's just been a snatchin'!"

Chapter III. THE GIRL AFRAID OF EARTHQUAKES

MONK looked at Doc, then at the policeman. Speaking rapidly, Monk described Velvet. He could not have given a better word picture of Velvet had he been looking at the fellow's photograph as he spoke.

"Was that guy with the gang that grabbed John Acre?" he finished.

"Yep," said the cop. "That guy was bossing the snatch."

"The man seized was named John Acre?" Doc questioned.

"That's right," replied the policeman. "He got mad when they wouldn't let him in the club to see somebody. He started yelling his name, claiming he had an appointment."

"Which way did they go?" Doc asked.

The bluecoat waved a vague arm. "Down one of these streets. I ain't sure which one. They fired some shots, and everybody seems to have ducked."

Doc thanked the officer, then rolled the roadster to the Midas Club. He parked directly in front of the door. A large sign said the space along the curb was reserved. That meant it was intended exclusively for use of the gentlemen who had five million dollars in the bank.

A doorman came out, scowling blackly. His expression intimated that he intended to rout Doc in very brusque fashion. However, when he got a look at the bronze man and the roadster, he underwent a striking change. His scowl altered to the politest of smiles. He bowed so low that his gaudy uniform cap fell off. He caught it and flushed in embarrassment.

Instead of ordering Doc away, he almost broke a leg in his haste to open the roadster door and usher the two men from the car.

Doc and Monk entered the Midas Club.

Monk noted that the door of the club did not open at Doc's approach.

"There's one you haven't got trained," he grinned.

They rode an elevator to the top floor, strode down a corridor carpeted as richly as Doc's own office, and

punched a doorbell.

The door opened.

Monk took one look inside. He emitted a resounding groan, and covered his eyes dramatically with his hands.

"Take it away!" He wailed in mock agony. "It's so flashy it's hurting my eyes. It's going to blind me!"

Through the door swung the end of a slender black cane. Monk ceased his dramatics and dodged. The cane barely missed connecting with his head.

The man with the cane stepped out as if to take a fresh swing. He was a slender man, thin-waisted as a wasp. He had a sharp nose and a pair of intent eyes. They were the eyes of a quick thinker.

The outstanding thing about the fellow was his clothing. His garb was the absolute ultra in sartorial perfection. Ham was famous for his clothes, wearing them with a grace that could hardly be duplicated.

Monk retreated, chuckling. The fact that there was a mystery underfoot, and that a man had just been kidnaped downstairs, had not kept him from flinging a dig at Ham. Even the stress of trouble could not stop his good-natured baiting of Ham.

Ham's black cane looked innocent enough. Actually, it housed a blade of fine steel. It was a very efficient sword cane.

Doc explained what had occurred—the visit of Velvet to the office, the decoying of John Acre to the Midas Club, and the kidnaping. He ended with: "Know anything about it, Ham?"

"Not a thing," Ham declared.

"But why did they use this address?" Monk demanded.

"It was clever on the fake newspaper reporter's part," Doc decided aloud. "He gave Ham's address, in case the man he was deceiving might check up. I often visit Ham here. It was logical to suppose I might wish to meet him here."

Monk scratched his jaw, his head, and ended up by putting the tip of his little finger through the bullet hole in his ear.

"How in blazes are we going to find out what this is all about?"

"There's the steamship *Junio*," Doc said. "John Acre arrived on it tonight. Apparently he sent the messages from on board."

Doc went to the telephone and dialed a number. He spoke into the instrument for some seconds. His voice was so low that Monk and Ham did not catch the words. Then he hung up.

"I got in touch with the captain of the *Junio*," he explained. "Here's a strange one: The *Junio's* radio operator is a fellow named Coils. He disappeared a few minutes after the steamer docked. They can't find him anywhere."

"Where is the *Junio* from?" Ham inquired.

"From ports on the west coast of South America," Doc explained.

Ham twirled his sword cane absently. His eyes roved. They came to a rest on the door. It gaped open a crack.

"Who left that door open?" he growled.

He started forward as if to close the panel. The door was ajar hardly more than an inch, but the crack widened suddenly. A businesslike pistol muzzle shoved through.

"I'd hate to muss up that pretty suit," a woman's voice said

HAM wrenched to a stop, his sword cane extended rigidly. He turtled his head forward as if to see who was behind the door.

"Don't strain your eyes!" said the woman's voice. "I'm coming in."

She stepped across the threshold.

Monk emitted a great gasp. Monk appreciated a pretty girl. This one made his head swim.

From the waist upward her slender body looked as if it were fitted in a tight skin of gold; below the waist the gold cloth fitted almost as snugly. Her hair was evidently boyish-bobbed. It bulged hardly at all under a plain gold-colored helmet. Her small feet were shod in golden-hued slippers. The whole was a wonderful evening ensemble. The effect was amazing.

Her face had an entrancing beauty which seemed to fit in perfectly with her exotic evening attire.

Monk drew in the breath which his sigh had expelled. He seemed to realize for the first time that the astounding young woman held a gun. It was a big, blue .45-caliber army automatic.

From the gun, Monk looked to the girl's clinging gown. The exotic golden garment exposed just about every ravishing curve. She carried a costly looking fur evening wrap over her left arm.

No doubt she had entered the Midas Club with the gun concealed under the wrap.

"You gentlemen," said the girl, "will put your hands up."

Her voice was like the ringing of a small bell in the distance. It was pleasant to hear.

"Are you sure you're not in the wrong pew?" Ham asked her. "We never saw you before."

The young woman in the stunning, golden evening gown did not answer. She was eyeing Doc.

She seemed fascinated by him. That was understandable. Men, when they saw the astounding physique of the bronze giant, noticed only that. Women, however, were apt to observe that Doc was extremely handsome.

The girl in gold was discovering the latter fact.

A minute passed, then another. The striking young woman was still staring at Doc.

Doc Savage slowly lifted an arm. He leveled it, rigid as a metal bar, at the young woman's pert nose. The arm remained fixed, unmoving, pointing.

Monk and Ham exchanged glances in a knowing way. They had been associated with Doc Savage long enough to become acquainted with some of the many arts which the bronze man commanded. They knew he was a master of hypnotism, so they understood what Doc's arm-leveling gesture meant.

Doc was hypnotizing the girl in gold.

For the most successful functioning of hypnotism, it is necessary that the subject's attention be fixed on something. It is also very difficult to hypnotize an unwilling patient.

The young woman suddenly awakened to what Doc was doing. She wrenched her eyes from the bronze man's strange golden orbs, and sprang backward. She slapped herself violently in the face.

Monk started forward with the idea of seizing her gun while she was occupied with breaking Doc's spell. But the girl jabbed her weapon at him.

"You come a step closer, and I'll blow a hole in that ugly face!" she declared.

"Go ahead," the sharp-tongued Ham invited her. "Any thing, even a hole, would be an improvement over the face as it is."

Monk ignored the insult.

"Where have you taken John Acre?" demanded the girl. Monk and Ham started slightly.

"Don't ask me," Ham ejaculated.

"Huh?" Monk grunted.

"It seems the young lady is in the right pew after all," Doc offered.

The beauty in gold eyed them coldly over the gun.

"Then you do admit having him!"

"You're mistaken," Doc told her.

The young woman plainly did not wish to chance looking at Doc again. She was afraid of his hypnotic powers, yet his mighty bronze figure drew repeatedly her unwilling gaze.

"John Acre called me and told me he was coming here!" she snapped.

"Did he ask you to meet him here?" Doc questioned.

The girl hesitated. "No—but I came anyway. There were some things I wanted to ask him."

"We do not know where John Acre is," Doc told her.

"Liar!" rapped the girl.

DOC fell silent. There was one subject about which he did not possess universal knowledge. Personally, he believed it was impossible to ever learn much about the topic. The subject of his deficiency was—women.

Doc did know enough about the fair sex to realize there was no use in arguing. She thought he was a liar, and that was that.

"Where is John Acre?" demanded the girl, putting a grim emphasis on each word.

Doc said nothing. Monk and Ham said nothing. Monk frankly stared. At the moment, the homely chemist could not remember having seen a more gorgeous bit of femininity.

The young woman rolled her eyes to keep them away from Doc. Her gaze touched upon various objects of furniture, returning frequently to the men to make sure they made no overt move.

A wastebasket stood near a comfortable chair and a reading lamp. A folded, discarded newspaper projected from the basket.

Two words of a headline were visible:

EARTHQUAKE IN—

The sight of the two words in the headline had a strange effect on the girl. Horror came upon her face. Her throat tightened visibly.

Doc, Monk, and Ham exchanged glances. The headline had stricken the girl with terror. It had to be the headline—from where she stood, only the larger type was readable.

The girl sank by the wastebasket. She seemed to have forgotten Doc and the other two. She wrenched the newspaper from the basket, and spread it open.

"In Chile!" she gasped. "And it got another of them!"

"Another of who?" Doc demanded.

The girl made no answer.

Doc glanced at Monk. "Remember the telephone conversation recorded on the wax record?" he asked.

"Sure," Monk grunted. "There was something said about mysterious earthquakes."

"What's behind this?" Doc asked the young woman in gold.

The girl arose. Although they had made no effort to seize her while she was so interested in the newspaper headline about earthquakes, she again pointed her big automatic at them.

"You're wasting your time trying to make me think you do not know what it is all about," she declared.

Monk shrugged impatiently. He waved a furry hand in Doc's direction. "Do you know who this bronze fellow is, young lady?"

"He's the notorious Doc Savage," the girl snapped.

Monk bristled with indignation. "Listen, goldie! Doc has done more good in this world than any fifty other men you can name. His life work is to go all over the world—"

"Save it!" said the girl in gold. "I've heard of him. He's always in trouble. Well, if you don't tell me where John Acre is, you're going to have trouble!"

Monk subsided. He had supposed there were people in New York who were not acquainted with the true nature of Doc Savage's work—his career of righting wrong, of punishing evildoers—but this was the first such person he had met in some time.

"What is your name?" Doc asked the girl unexpectedly.

"Tip Galligan." She did not hesitate about giving it. "Helen Tipperary Galligan, to be exact."

Ham began: "Well, Helen—"

"I don't like gigolos," snapped the girl unkindly, eyeing Ham's sartorially perfect attire. "Anyway, the name is Tip."

"Why does that earthquake headline scare you, Tip?" Doc asked her.

She did not answer that. Instead she thrust out her small jaw fiercely.

"I've heard that you have five men who help you," she said angrily. "I guess this pair here are two of them. I'm going to tell you something: Either you release John Acre, or I'll grab your other three friends and hold them until you do cough up!"

MONK was grinning from ear to ear. For some reason he could not have explained, he was delighted that the young lady in gold did not like the dapper Ham.

"She sounds violent," Monk said cheerfully.

"I *am* violent, too!" "Tip" assured him.

"I think we would all get along better if you put your gun away," Doc suggested.

"I don't," said Tip, and waved her gun carelessly.

Doc Savage looked at the ceiling. His lips moved. Strange words came forth. They were guttural words and rather musical, but absolutely unintelligible to Tip.

Monk and Ham made no reply, but it was plain that they understood the weird vernacular. Both men did an unusual thing. They began to hold their breaths.

"Listen, you three," Tip hissed. "You can't pull anything on me. Don't try—"

The young woman seemed to go to sleep on her feet. Her eyelids, with lashes more than a half an inch long, drooped. She swayed on her feet. Had Monk not leaped and caught her, she would have fallen.

Even in the act of springing to catch her, Monk did not release his breath. He still held it. Cheeks distended, face a little purple, he carried the young woman over and draped her in a deep chair.

Doc Savage, a close observer might have noticed, was also holding his breath. In not quite a minute he gave a small signal. They all began breathing normally again.

Doc now removed his coat. He pulled out the left sleeve, so that the lining showed. It held a small pocket. From this Doc dumped a broken fragment of a thin-walled glass bulb. He had broken this by expanding his enormous biceps muscle.

The bulb had held a powerful anaesthetic gas. This was a substance Doc himself had perfected. It was remarkable in that it spread through the air almost instantly, producing sudden and complete unconsciousness.

After having been in the air for something less than a minute, the gas became harmless. Doc and his two friends had simply held their breaths during the time the stuff was dangerous.

Doc had spoken in the Mayan language, to give warning of what he intended to do. It was an ancient dialect of the Mayans. No more than a dozen men in the so-called civilized world understood it. Doc and his five friends spoke it fluently.

Back of their knowledge of the ancient Mayan tongue was a fantastic story. It was a tale which in itself explained something that was a mystery to the rest of the world—the source of Doc Savage's seemingly limitless wealth.

It was common knowledge that Doc spent millions. He built great hospitals. He financed industrial concerns, in order that they would not close down and throw their employees out of work. He had countless expensive philanthropies.

The fabulous gold hoard of a lost Mayan race in a remote mountain valley in Central America was Doc's source of wealth. The Mayans, pure descendants of the ancients, had been lost to the world for centuries. In the valley was a great cavern, which held an almost limitless supply of gold, much of it as yet unmined.

To pay a debt of gratitude, the Mayans were furnishing this gold to Doc—but only on the condition that he should use it to do good in the world.

On each seventh day, should Doc be short of money, he had but to go to a powerful radio station at high noon, tune into a certain wave-length, and broadcast a few words in the Mayan dialect.

His message was picked up in the lost valley—on a radio set which Doc himself had left there. Several days later, a burro train invariably arrived at the capital of the mountainous Central American republic. Seldom were these caravans laden with less than four or five million in bullion.

"A young lady who met her match," Monk chuckled, eyeing the sleeping girl in gold. "It'll take an hour or so to wake up, won't it, Doc?"

Doc did not answer. Instead he drew a flat metal case from his pocket. He extracted two small vials. The contents of these Doc poured down the sleeping girl's throat.

Scooping her up, he carried her into the bedroom.

HAM'S expensive suite in the Midas Club occupied half a dozen rooms. Some of these had private entrances on the corridor. It was to one of the latter that Doc carried the girl. He placed her on the bed.

Moving swiftly, Doc went to the hallway door.

Monk and Ham, watching him, thought he had tested to see if the door were locked.

Doc came forward quickly, grasped his two friends by the arms, and guided them into an adjoining room. Monk was plainly reluctant to lose sight of the entrancingly pretty girl in gold.

"She's my idea of a lalaloosa," he said. "Brothers, she sure is pretty!" He leered at Ham. "She can spot a gigolo, too."

Ham gritted his teeth, gripped his sword cane. The young woman's crack about his being a gigolo had hurt.

"Quiet, you fellows!" Doc directed.

The bronze man went to the telephone, picked it up, and gave a number. Ham and Monk knew instantly who was being called. They were very familiar with this number.

It was that of a hotel near the skyscraper which housed Doc's office. This hostelry was the dwelling of the other three members of Doc's group of five aids.

"Johnny?" Doc queried.

Monk and Ham traded somewhat startled expressions.

"Johnny" was William Harper Littlejohn, a geologist and archaeologist who had few superiors in ability. In the Great War Johnny had lost the use of his left eye.

It was to return the use of that eye that Doc had tonight performed a great surgical operation. Some individuals wondered why Doc, with his tremendous ability of a surgeon, had not earlier operated on that eye.

The fact was that Doc had been waiting for years in order that certain delicate muscles and nerves might strengthen sufficiently to withstand the operation.

Ham and Monk were astounded to realize that Johnny had quit the hospital so soon after his operation. The fact that he had, was no mean tribute to Doc's fabulous skill.

"How's the eye feel, Johnny?" Doc asked.

"Great!" Johnny said.

"O.K.," Doc told him. "Go to bed. Put Long Tom or Renny on the wire."

"Listen, Doc, if there's some excitement afoot, I ain't agoin' to miss—"

"Hit the hay!" Doc ordered. "It's a few days' rest for you, and no argument."

"Well, all right," Johnny grumbled. "Here's Renny."

A moment later the receiver in Doc's fist seemed about to fly to pieces under the impact of a great, roaring voice. It was as if a small lion had awakened in the receiver.

The tremendous tone belonged to Colonel John Renwick. "Renny" was famed for two things: He was a great engineer, and he had two incredibly huge and hard fists, with which, he boasted, he could knock the panel out of any wooden door.

"Renny, you and Long Tom drop over by my garage and pile into one of the cars," Doc directed. "Then drive on up here to this shack Ham calls home."

"Something up?" Renny thundered.

"There is," Doc told him.

Doc had been speaking in a loud, distinct voice. Now, he suddenly switched to a low tone which hardly vibrated the transmitter—and he spoke in the strange-sounding Mayan language.

"You men may be kidnaped on the way up," Doc said in Mayan. "Let yourselves be snatched, and try to pump your captors. I'd like very much to know what's on their minds."

DOC SAVAGE hung up the receiver. He stood beside the phone for several seconds. The cold winter wind howled faintly outside. Occasionally there were faint, clicking sounds against the window glass. These were made by wind-driven snowflakes.

As if he had been waiting for a certain length of time to pass, Doc came to life. He walked to the bedroom door, threw it open. He said nothing.

But not so Monk, who was at his elbow.

"Hey!" Monk bawled. "She's gone!"

The girl in gold was nowhere in evidence. The gaping corridor door advertised her parting route.

Monk started forward, as if in pursuit.

Doc stopped him. "Wait. Let her go."

A great understanding dawned on Monk. He gulped: "You gave her something which brought her out of that unconsciousness in a hurry. You figured she would overhear your phone conversation and then make a break."

Ham grinned, flourishing his sword cane. "You even unlocked the door for her."

"But what was the idea?" Monk demanded.

"You will recall," Doc explained, "that she made a statement about seizing our friends."

"And you made the way easy for her," Monk chuckled.

Chapter IV. MISS MAN-SNATCHER

"

LONG TOM," the electrical wizard, looked as if he had grown up in a cellar with the mushrooms. He was pale of hair and eye, and had an unhealthy-looking complexion. He was not tall, nor was he very fleshy.

Strangers who saw Long Tom probably said to themselves: "There's a guy who will be lucky if he lives through the winter."

With Long Tom, appearance was an awful liar. He had never been ill a day in his life. As a fighting man he was a customer whom even huge, gorilla-like Monk would have hesitated to tackle.

Long Tom was spoken of as a wizard of the juice. His knowledge of electricity was profound. He had whole sheafs of electrical patents in Washington.

Long Tom was driving Doc's limousine.

"I wonder what we're mixed in?" he said. "It sounds kind of dizzy to me. We're going to be kidnaped, and we're supposed to learn all we can from our captors. Learn all we can about what?"

"Holy cow!" rumbled Renny. "How should I know?"

Renny, seated beside Long Tom, looked something like a bull alongside a sheep. Renny weighed two hundred and fifty pounds. He was all bone and gristle. Yet his fists were so huge that it made the rest of him seem small in proportion. Each was composed of something more than a quart of rusty-looking knuckles.

Renny had a long, puritanical face. When he was happiest he wore the expression of a man going to a funeral. He had on his funeral look now.

"From what Doc said, I guess our captor is to be a girl," Long Tom demanded. "Maybe she's good-looking."

"You can't tell about a woman," Renny informed him solemnly. "They're liable to up and shoot you when you least expect it."

Long Tom laughed and changed the subject. "Johnny sure was mad about being left behind."

"Yeah, the bag of bones," Renny rumbled dourly. "He figures we're headed for some excitement. He'd rather lose his eye than miss it."

The electrical wizard guided the big sedan into Park Avenue. The policeman controlling traffic at the corner glimpsed the license plate on the machine. He blew his whistle loudly, stopped all other cars, and motioned the sedan through.

In New York, license plates are magic. The important people have the small numbers. The numerals carried on the plates of this sedan of Doc's were very small indeed.

The sedan engine made little noise. It could not be heard at all by the two men riding inside. They were riding with the windows up. The windows were bullet-proof; the sedan body was armor-plate steel.

The interior of the car was replete with the ingenious mechanical and electrical devices which Doc Savage often found invaluable. Doc's career as a one-man Nemesis to all evildoers had made him many enemies. Some of these were men of diabolic cleverness.

Only by utilizing the latest discoveries in science and a few ultra-advanced devices which Doc himself had perfected, did the bronze man manage to combat his foes.

The sedan slowed down to make a turn, and swung in front of the Midas Club.

A young woman darted from the concealment of one of the bushes which decorate the center of Park Avenue. She wore a startling gold evening gown which fitted her like a skin, and a great expensive fur wrap. In one hand she held a black pistol.

She leaped on the running board and tried to open the door. It would not budge. She jammed the muzzle of her gun against the glass.

"Open up!" she commanded.

The car glass would have stopped a high-powered rifle bullet. But Doc had advised the two men that they let themselves be kidnaped.

Reaching over with an enormous hand, Renny unlocked the door.

THE young woman scrambled into the rear seat.

"Drive away!" she directed sharply. "Quick!"

Long Tom complied with her order. At the same time he craned his neck to watch the young lady in the

rear-vision mirror. He considered her the most stunning beauty he had ever seen.

"What's the idea?" Renny rumbled grouchyly. "We don't know you."

"Maybe not," said the girl in gold. "But I know you. I've seen your pictures in the newspapers. You're such a freaky looking pair that I had no trouble recognizing you."

Renny and Long Tom squirmed uncomfortably. The girl had a sharp tongue.

Whether the young woman knew it or not, she had caught a pair of Tartars when she seized Long Tom and Renny.

"If you were my daughter," Renny boomed, "I'd make you put on some decent clothes!"

"If I were your daughter, I'd take poison!" the girl retorted.

Renny's ears became red.

"Where do you want us to go, young lady?" Long Tom demanded angrily.

"Head north, toward Westchester County," their passenger directed. "I know of a vacant house up there. It's just the place to keep you two funny-looking fellows in."

"Yeah?" muttered Long Tom.

"I'm going to hold you until Doc Savage releases John Acre," said the girl in gold.

"Who is John Acre?" Long Tom questioned.

"The man who just landed from South America."

"And you think Doc Savage got him?" Long Tom persisted.

"Somebody grabbed him," said the girl. "Who else could it have been? John Acre called me and said that no one but Doc Savage knew he was in New York. He asked me not to tell anybody. I didn't. John Acre was seized in front of the Midas Club. If Doc Savage didn't get him, who did?"

Long Tom permitted himself a slight smile. Doc had wanted them to get information from this girl.

"But why should Doc want John Acre?" he questioned.

Tip perched on the edge of the rear seat cushion. Long Tom, watching in the rear-vision mirror, marveled that her tight gown permitted her to be seated at all.

"Doc Savage would seize John Acre for the Little White Brother," the girl said bitterly.

Long Tom's somewhat unhealthy face acquired a puzzled expression. Renny peered absently at his huge fists.

"Little White Brother?" Long Tom ejaculated.

"You're not fooling me by acting surprised," said the young woman with the gun. "Doc Savage kidnaped John Acre. Only one person would have hired him to do so—the Little White Brother."

"Listen," Long Tom said angrily.

" Nobody ever hires Doc"

The gilded girl seemed about to make a sarcastic retort. Instead, she jerked up rigidly on the seat. Horror overspread her attractive features.

She crouched there like a gorgeous, golden bird which had suddenly seen a hungry snake.

ONLY one thing could have caused the girl's fright—a great hollow salvo of sound which had coughed out over to the right of the sedan.

It made the earth tremble, this sound; it rumbled and thumped. Its ramifications seemed to gorge the night with dull thunder. Then the rumbling died away, as it had arisen, with swiftness.

Both Long Tom and Renny turned their heads to eye the girl. Both distinctly caught the stifled words which came from her lips. "That shaking—the Little White Brother—" Her voice trailed off.

Long Tom and Renny shook their heads solemnly at each other. The girl's behavior had them baffled.

"Why did that sound of blasting scare you so?" Renny boomed.

"Blasting?" the girl gulped.

Renny waved a hand nearly large enough to envelop a football. He indicated a cluster of lights off to their right. It was now snowing briskly. The lights were barely discernible through the maze of falling flakes.

"They're doing some excavating over there," he said. "They do their blasting late at night when there's no spectators around to get hurt."

The sigh of relief which the girl in gold heaved was audible to both men.

"Am I relieved!" she exclaimed.

"You haven't answered my question," Renny reminded her. "Why did the sound frighten you?"

The young woman stared at him intently. Obviously, she was considering an answer to the question. She decided not to give it.

"I'm through talking," she said shortly.

She seemed to mean it, too. Long Tom and Renny both tried to question her. All they got were caustic retorts.

"Shut up and keep driving!" the girl directed.

By now, snowflakes were spread like whitewash. Strangely, although snow literally poured against the windshield of the sedan, none of it stuck there. The glass was covered by a preparation perfected by the chemist, Monk. This concoction alone had made Monk a fortune.

It was biting cold outside. In the sedan the temperature was comfortable, due to a combination air-conditioner and heater.

A great assortment of knobs and meters decorated the instrument board. Long Tom reached up and adjusted some of these.

"What are you doing?" rapped the young woman.

"I don't need to be told how to drive this car," Long Tom replied brusquely.

The sedan rolled northward. By now they had left the limits of New York City. Snow fell faster. A strengthening wind shoveled the flakes about.

"Turn left at the next corner," the gilded girl advised.

Long Tom obeyed. A few rods farther on, in compliance with a second order, he wheeled the sedan into a large yard.

The headlights picked out a house. It was a frame building. Missing patches of shingles made the roof look

like a mangy dog. Windows were boarded up. Numerous evergreen shrubs were blackish humps in the blizzard.

Long Tom stopped the sedan.

"Get out," said the girl, "and open the door. We are— *Oh! Oh!*"

The adjacent evergreen bushes seemed to hatch the leaping figures of men. An ominous ring, they converged on the car. They were heavily armed.

"The Little White Brother!" shrilled the girl.

TWO men, widely different in appearance, led the gang. One of these was natty in evening garb, and handsome in an evil way. The second man was big, slovenly. His nostrils were a pair of fuzz-rimmed holes. A deep scar slanting across his face gave him an appearance utterly villainous.

Long Tom and Renny were not acquainted with these two unsavory gentlemen. They did not know the pair were Velvet and Biff.

Velvet took charge of the affair.

"Drop your gun!" he snapped at the girl.

The young woman had been taken by surprise. At the moment, her weapon was pointed at Long Tom and Renny. She tried to swing it toward Velvet.

Velvet leaped. He was carrying an automatic in his hand. He threw it. The heavy weapon struck the girl's arm, knocked it aside.

Velvet, diving like a football tackler, wrapped his arms around the girl in gold. The momentum of his leap carried both him and the girl to the sedan floor boards. His legs, however, still projected outside.

Renny, sitting in the front seat, tried to close the bulletproof doors of the sedan. Velvet's legs prevented that. Renny reached down to jerk Velvet inside.

Two revolver snouts were thrust through the door.

"One jump and you'll get croaked!" two harsh voices chorused.

Renny looked at the lowering visages behind the weapon. On other occasions he had seen the will to do murder on men's faces. He saw it again now.

With an abrupt meekness, Renny lifted his tremendous hands.

"Go easy," he advised Long Tom from the side of his grim mouth. "These palookas look like poison."

Long Tom jutted his own arms above his head.

The gunmen converged on the sedan. Long Tom and Renny were searched. Their captors seemed surprised when no weapons came to life. They did not search the girl in gold. They merely looked her over.

"She isn't hiding anything under that gown," Velvet decided.

The young woman seemed stunned by this new development. When she glanced at Long Tom and Renny, a great doubt was discernible in her eyes.

"I hope you realize what you've done," Renny told her. He was still smarting from the crack she had made about taking poison if she were his daughter.

"Get out and go into the house!" Velvet commanded. He frowned darkly at the young woman. "We been

watching you for weeks, Miss Tip Galligan. We know you own this old ruin of a house. We saw you hold up these two men in front of the Midas Club. It was easy to guess that you'd bring 'em here."

Renny glowered, and knocked his enormous fists together. The sound this made was a good imitation of two concrete blocks colliding.

"What's behind all this foolishness?" he demanded.

"Take a cork!" Velvet snapped.

"What?"

"Pipe down! Go mum!" Velvet grated. "We only wanted the girl. But now that we've got you two guys, we'll keep you. Then, in case this Doc Savage gets funny with us, we'll do things to you."

Renny considered this. A change flickered across his puritanical face.

"Do you work for the Little White Brother?" he rumbled.

Velvet started violently, then glared.

"No more out of you, big-fist!" he barked.

Renny subsided. The man's manner had showed plainly that he was a minion of the mysterious Little White Brother.

Chapter V. THE EARTH-SHAKER'S TRAIL

THE homely Monk was saying in a loud, astonished voice: "Well, I'm a son of a gun!"

"You're worse than that," the dapper Ham informed him waspishly. "But I'm not going to lapse into profanity to explain just what you are."

Doc Savage said nothing. His eyes were on what he was doing. The strange flake-gold of them seemed more alive than usual.

They were no longer in the Midas Club. They had repaired to Doc's skyscraper headquarters.

Had they glanced through the window, it would have seemed they were immersed in a sea of milk. Snow was falling so thickly as to shut off the view of near-by buildings, even those which had lighted windows this late at night. Outside the window, eighty-six stories above the street, the wind was howling like cold-tortured wolves.

The three men were paying no attention to the storm, however. Their attention was focused on a large black box which had a square window in the top. At first glance, this window might have been mistaken for a framed picture. Actually it was the scanning screen of a television receiver.

The picture on the screen was the interior of Doc's sedan from which Long Tom and Renny had just been seized. Concealed in the sedan was an amazingly powerful and compact television projector.

This apparatus owed its remarkable efficiency to the fact that it did not utilize the old-fashioned mechanical scanning disk. Its heart was a cathode-ray tube which functioned in a fashion very similar to the retina of a human eye. A ponderous scientific treatise could be written on how the tube functioned. Doc had perfected the thing.

From his office, Doc could not only witness the kidnaping, but had heard Long Tom and Renny question the girl in gold, since the microphone also concealed in the sedan worked in conjunction with the televisor.

Monk and Ham were almost dancing in impatience. Their eyes sought the door.

"What are we waiting on?" Ham demanded.

Fully a minute elapsed before Doc shut off the apparatus, however. He had waited in hope of garnering further threats of information. He saw that nothing more would be forthcoming.

The room which held the television receiver was a vast one. In it stood scores of stands laden with scientific apparatus. There were machines as ponderous as trucks, but with mechanisms as fine as those of a watch. This was Doc Savage's experimental laboratory.

Scientists had come from foreign countries for the sole purpose of seeing this laboratory. They went away, saying it was the most complete on earth.

Doc, however, knew otherwise. There was another laboratory even more perfect. Doc Savage alone knew its whereabouts.

The laboratory was at a remote spot in the arctic regions—at a place which Doc called his Fortress of Solitude.

At intervals, Doc Savage became mysteriously lost to the world. During such periods no one could find him or get in touch with him—not even his five aids.

At these times Doc Savage repaired to his Fortress of Solitude. There he concentrated on study and experiment. The existence of this Fortress of Solitude, with its highly developed equipment, was to a great degree responsible for Doc Savage's remarkable mental powers.

Next to the skyscraper laboratory was a vast library. It contained thousands of bulky scientific tomes. Doc and his men crossed it swiftly, went out into the corridor, and took the superspeed elevator downward.

Doc used the roadster for their journey.

DOC did not raise the roadster top. He seemed impervious to the bitter nip of the blizzard as he raced the car northward.

Monk and Ham sat beside the bronze man and shivered. They had donned overcoats. They turned the collars up around their ears. Their teeth clicked like a Spanish dancer's castanets.

They did not suggest that Doc put up the roadster top. They knew why it was down. Doc preferred it thus, that he might more readily detect any danger which threatened. When using taxicabs, Doc usually rode the running board for the same reason that he was now keeping the roadster top down.

Between shivers, Monk and Ham wondered how Doc was going to locate Renny and Long Tom. Ordinarily, the television apparatus would have shown such landmarks as the sedan had passed. But the blizzard had hidden the marks.

Doc solved the problem in simple fashion.

The tiny television transmitter in the sedan was still operating. From a compartment in the rear of the roadster, Doc produced a directional radio receiver. By manipulating the loop aerial of this, it was possible to get a line on the whereabouts of the sedan.

"You take the radio bearings," Doc directed Ham.

"It's almost due north and south," Ham reported.

"That means the car is to the north," Doc decided. "A line to the south would run into the ocean. The girl told him to drive toward Westchester, anyway."

The roadster made only a great sucking sound as it whirled through the night. Monk and Ham crouched behind the windshield, avoiding snowflakes that stung like shot.

"My golly," Monk said in a tiny, shivery voice, "winter has sure come with a bang."

Ham gave Monk a black scowl.

"Any one could tell, you would be more at home in a tropical jungle!" he snapped.

Monk glared at him. He knew the statement was Ham's subtle way of saying he looked like a jungle monkey. But it was too cold for an argument.

They crossed one of the many bridges which connect Manhattan Island with the New York mainland. The roadster swooped on to the northward.

With cold-blued fingers, Ham took frequent radio bearings. Doc changed the course of the roadster as the bearings altered. Eventually they rolled upon a country road.

Cold snow had heaped into the roadster seat and was inches deep on the floor boards. Their breaths became wind-torn plumes of steam.

Much to the discomfort of Ham, Monk bounced violently up and down in the seat at frequent intervals, claiming he had to do so to keep from freezing to death.

"The sedan is right around here somewhere," Ham reported. "The signal is very loud."

They passed a large yard. In it stood evergreen trees and a ramshackle house. Doc seemed to pay the place no particular attention. But driving on no more than a hundred yards, he skidded the roadster to a stop at the side of the thoroughfare.

His sharp eyes had noticed the sedan standing among the evergreens in the yard.

THE house was extremely old. It must have been constructed long before Civil War days. Not only were shingles off the roof and paint weathered from the sides, but great cracks gaped in it. Through these the blizzard whistled like steam calliopes.

Inside, there was ruin. Plaster had fallen from the walls. Pilferers had torn boards from the floor, no doubt to use as firewood. The wind, coming in through the cracks, scooped up gray plaster dust and mingled it with the white of the snow.

The cold was biting.

Renny's big fists were tied cruelly together with many turns of wire. To shake one he had to shake them both. He did this now.

"You're lettin' us freeze!" he thundered angrily.

"T' hell with you!" growled the man. "And if you don't stop squawking, I'm going to warm you up with some lead!"

Long Tom sat in the opposite corner. The unhealthy-looking electrical wizard seemed to be a man who would suffer greatly from the cold. The chill was not bothering him, however. Long Tom was keeping warm with his own rage. His usually pale face was ruddy.

"What's the idea of holding us?" he demanded.

"Have we got to go over that again?" growled one of the captors. "We're keeping you here in case Doc Savage tries to get funny. If he makes a pass at us we might cut off your ears and mail 'em to him. That should make him stop and think."

Long Tom and Renny traded sober looks. Their captor was not joking with them.

The girl in the marvelous golden evening gown was nowhere about. Nor were Velvet and Biff present. The two men had departed some time ago, taking the girl with them. As to where they had gone, Long Tom and Renny had no idea.

"Are you fellows from South America?" Renny boomed at one of their hosts.

"No," said the man, "we're hometown boys. Velvet and Biff are from South America, though. They just hired us—"

"Gonna blab your head off, eh?" interrupted another man.

The fellow who had started to give information fell silent, much to Renny's disgust.

"Who is The Little White Brother?" Renny asked.

No one answered. The men slouched about in attitudes of unconcern. But it was noticeable that their eyes rolled uneasily.

Renny tried a random stab. "I betcha we have an earthquake before long."

Again no one replied, but the words had a marked effect. The men looked somewhat uncomfortable.

"You know quite a bit, don't you?" sneered one.

"Not as much as we'll know before we're done," said an entirely new voice. The tone was shrill, quarrelsome.

The men looked about wildly. They could see no new arrival.

"Over this way, boys," said the voice. "In the window!"

Every eye leveled upon the window. Jaws fell. Bewildered gasps caused plumes of steam to dribble through their teeth.

This was a second-floor room. Outside the window was only a swirling maelstrom of snow.

AT the first note of the strange voice, Long Tom and Renny had glanced at the window. They had thought it was coming from there. But they had seen nothing. Then they had realized the truth. They waited, faces suddenly eager, expectant.

The door into the ramshackle hallway was partially ajar. The figure of a giant man appeared in the aperture. He might have been a cloud of bronze-hued smoke for all the sound he made. He hurtled across the floor.

The men staring at the window did not yet realize it was the voice of a master ventriloquist which they had heard. Not one in the group was aware of Doc's presence.

Doc reached the first of the gang. One of his hands drifted out and up. He seemed merely to caress the back of the man's neck. The ligaments on the hands of the bronze man stood out like drawn steel.

The man Doc had touched gave a violent twitch. Then he fell to the floor. Something unearthly and horrible seemed to have happened to him. His body was in the grip of a strange paralysis. His arms and legs projected stiffly.

He hit the floor like a wooden man. His limbs remained rigid, sticking up at grotesque angles.

The noise of his fall aroused the other men. They whirled. Then they yelled, and grabbed for their guns.

Two of them were either more brave or less wise than their companions. They tried to seize Doc with their bare hands. Headlong, they pitched at him.

Doc Savage crouched as if to anchor himself more firmly on the floor. His hands grasped with a blinding speed—one hand for the head of each man. The thewed bronze fingers found their mark.

With apparent ease, Doc knocked their heads together. He exerted just sufficient force to produce unconsciousness. The men dropped.

Things were happening with a blinding speed. The other men had not yet succeeded in drawing their revolvers. They leaped wildly aside as Doc charged. This caused them to collide with each other.

After that, a tornado seemed to seize upon the gang. They slugged, kicked. Yells and groans flew out of the vortex.

Doc Savage was a kernel in that human maelstrom.

Monk's apish figure appeared abruptly in the door. He emitted a blood-curdling howl, and sprang into the fray. The homely chemist's voice was ordinarily mild, childlike. But he liked lots of noise with his fights.

"Ye-o-ow!" he howled. "Save some of 'em for me, Doc!"

Ham came through the door behind Monk, rapping: "Get out of the way, you missing link! Let somebody fight that wants to fight!"

Ham was flourishing his sword cane. The blade no longer looked innocent—it was a bared, glittering thorn of steel. On the needlelike tip was a mysterious, sticky substance.

Ham made a pass at the nearest enemy. He made no effort to run the fellow through with his sword cane. Instead, he barely pricked the man.

The man Ham had pricked seemed to go to sleep on his feet. He fell over backward.

Ham's sword cane was tipped with a drug which produced instant unconsciousness—a sleep which would last an hour or more.

Possibly a minute of thundering action followed. When it ended, Doc and his men were blowing on their knuckles. Draped on the floor were all of their foes—seven rather evil-looking gentry.

DOC bent over Renny. The wire which secured the engineer's enormous fists was thick. It had been tightened with pincers. Doc's powerful fingers tore it away easily.

Moving to Long Tom, Doc freed him likewise.

"I overheard some of the talk here," he said. "It told me why they were holding you. But where is the girl in the gold dress?"

"Velvet and Biff took her away," Renny explained.

"Where to?" Doc questioned.

"I haven't the slightest idea," Renny replied.

"And what about John Acre?" Doc persisted.

Renny shook his head. "I heard Velvet and Biff tell the girl that they had seized John Acre, but we never saw a sign of him."

The men on the floor began to stir with returning consciousness. Doc's men began searching them rapidly, removing such weapons as they could find. Ham's victim, of course, still slept.

Doc himself went to the man who had become so rigid at the touch of his fingers. The peculiar stiffness had been brought about by an unusual ability which Doc had perfected.

In the course of his surgical research, Doc had learned how to apply pressure upon certain nerve centers so as to induce a paralysis. By readjusting the same nerve centers he could banish the paralysis.

He did this now. At the touch of the metallic fingers, the victim recovered use of his limbs.

Doc lined the prisoners up along the wall.

"They look like a cop's nightmare," he remarked.

Monk blew on his hairy fists, and made ferocious faces. "Do we make 'em talk, Doc?" he asked.

Doc turned slowly, as if eyeing the walls of the room. Only his four friends caught the slight flicker which one of his eyelids gave. He wheeled back.

"We'll have to waste a lot of time to make 'em talk," he said. "They're not worth that."

From inside his clothing, Doc produced a small case. This disgorged a hypodermic needle. He walked to one of the prisoners and jabbed the needle into the fellow.

The man fell heavily to the floor.

Doc gave another jab. Another one also toppled.

"What are you doing?" yelled one of the survivors in a frightened voice.

Doc pointed his hypodermic needle dramatically at the two men he had dropped.

"Those two will never know what happened to them," he declared.

An uneasy stir swept the other captives. They changed feet. Their foreheads began to smoke in the cold air as sweat came out.

"Listen, can't we make a deal?" one mumbled hopefully.

"No," Doc told him. "But it might help if you talked freely."

THE terrified men looked at the two motionless forms on the floor. The faces of the two were steaming in the frigid air, but the pair looked entirely lifeless.

"We'll spill whatever you want!" one man groaned.

"Who's your boss?" Doc demanded.

"Velvet and Biff," the man replied uneasily.

"But who gives Velvet and Biff their orders?"

"We don't know—honest we don't!" wailed the man. "Listen, here's how it is. Velvet and Biff showed up in New York. They had a deal on. They wanted some boys to help 'em out, and they hired us."

"Hired you to do what?"

"Well, we been watchin' all the incomin' steamships from South America," the man explained. "We always got the passenger list. We hunted for one certain man—John Acre. Tonight we found out he had come in on the *Junio*."

"And you decoyed John Acre to the front of the Midas club, where you seized him," Doc elaborated.

"That's right, boss!"

The man was talking freely, although in a scared voice.

"Where is John Acre now?" Doc questioned.

"We don't know. Velvet and Biff took him off somewhere."

"Where did Velvet and Biff take the girl?"

"To the same place they're holdin' John Acre, wherever that is."

"This information is not very helpful," Doc said grimly. "You birds had better cough up something worth while."

"We don't know much, and that's the truth, boss," the crook whimpered. "Velvet and Biff are from some place in South America. They're workin' for somethin' they call the Little White Brother."

"You mean a man called the Little White Brother?"

The scared crook shivered. "I don't know if it's a man or not. Sometimes they talk like the thing ain't—ain't human."

Doc's flaky golden eyes dominated the fellow. "Don't try to kid me."

"It's the truth, mister. The Little White Brother may not be human. It's somethin' that shakes the earth!"

It was rarely that Doc showed any emotion whatever, but now he frowned.

"What?" he demanded.

"That's all we know, boss," the other whined. "The Little White Brother has got somethin' to do with the earth shakin'. I dunno what the thing is, but I've seen Velvet and Biff get as white as if they was about to be killed when they heard the rumble of a subway train, or the shock of blastin', or somethin' like that."

Doc Savage asked a few more questions, but he learned nothing of value. He kept at it until he was convinced that the prisoners had told all they really knew. They were merely hirelings.

Doc Savage produced his hypodermic needle again. He went to each of the captives in quick succession, and jabbed the needle into every man. The last two screamed and tried to flee. Monk and Renny caught them. The men all sank to the floor and became motionless.

They were only sleeping, however. The drug in Doc's needle merely produced unconsciousness.

The prisoners were now carried out and placed in the sedan. To get all seven in the rear seat, it was necessary to pack them sardine fashion.

NONE of Doc's aids asked what disposition was to be made of the unconscious prisoners. They knew.

Crooks who fell into the hands of Doc Savage were handled in a peculiar fashion. They were taken to an institution Doc maintained in the up-State section of New York. Here they underwent a delicate brain operation, which completely wiped out all knowledge of their past.

Then they received training in the ideals of upright citizenry, and were taught a trade.

Monk and Ham took charge of the sedan. Doc, Long Tom, and Renny trailed them in the roadster. The trip back into New York City was made in quick time.

The prisoners were left in a small room in a shabby section of the city. The windows of the room were barred, and there was a rear door which opened upon an obscure alley.

The captives would sleep for many hours yet. Long before they awakened, an ambulance would appear. Silent, grim attendants would load them aboard. They would be whisked away into the blizzard.

Months later, seven honest citizens would walk away from the grim walls in up-state New York.

Doc Savage placed a long-distance telephone call from the room. The call was to summon the ambulance which would carry the men away.

That task done, Doc and his men drove directly to the skyscraper which housed the bronze man's headquarters.

As Doc drove up to the garage door, it opened mysteriously.

Monk, noting this, scratched his head vigorously. He still did not understand why those doors swung ajar at Doc's approach.

The doors of the high-speed elevator also slid back as Doc approached. The cage lifted them. It started off with a shock that jerked every one except Doc to their knees. It raced up at an incredible speed. Its stop was so abrupt that it seemed certain that they would go sailing on up through the ceiling.

The door of Doc's office opened itself for him.

The panel, swinging ajar, revealed the sprawled body of a man. There was not much doubt that the fellow was dead. His head was nearly severed from his body.

Chapter VI. THE MAN WHO COULDN'T TALK

MEN less trained than Doc's aids would have become excited at the discovery of the man's body, and dashed forward. Such action might have destroyed clues left by the murderer. Doc's men came to a stop where they were.

Doc himself did not advance immediately. His keen eyes appraised the scene.

"Notice the door lock," he suggested.

"Yep," said Monk. "It's torn out. The door was forced by somebody."

"It was forced by the man dead on the floor," Doc said.

The others showed surprise. They could see nothing to indicate that the slain man had opened the door.

"How come?" Monk asked.

"Notice that the dead man wears a yellowish overcoat. The coat is wet from melted snow. Now, about shoulder-high on the door, you can see faint yellowish marks. These are stains of dye squeezed from the coat as the man shoved hard against the door."

The other four eyed the door. Now that they knew what to look for, they could see the vague stains.

Doc Savage stepped into the room. Near the murdered man, he discerned two objects. He picked these things up, inspected them.

One was a large screw driver. It had the type of handle preferred by electricians—of black insulating compound. In the proper hands, this could become a really vicious stabbing weapon. On the handle was a stamped name:

S.S. JUNIO

The second object was a radio-message envelope. It was empty. It did not appear to have been sealed, and was creased as if it had been carried in a coat pocket.

Rapidly, Doc searched the slain man. He found the usual stuff men carry in their pockets—coins, bill fold, cigarettes, matches. Only the bill fold yielded information of value. In it was an identification card. The name on this read:

S. E. COILS

"

We've heard that name once before tonight," Doc said slowly.

"Sure," said Monk. "That's the name of the radio operator on the steamer *Junio* – the fellow who disappeared right after the ship docked."

Doc Savage finished his inspection with a scrutiny of the slain man's vest pockets. One contained a bit of paper. Names and numbers which it bore proved it had been torn from the page of a telephone directory.

Written in pencil on the fragment of paper was the address of Doc's office laboratory.

"He seems to have looked up my address here in town," Doc announced. The bronze man fingered the radiogram envelope. "He evidently carried something which he had in this envelope. Whoever killed him took it."

"This John Acre was supposed to have sent you radiograms, Doc," said Monk. "Do you reckon maybe this radio operator didn't send them?"

"That would explain our not getting them," Doc replied. "But why should he hold them up? And why should he come here to the office with them? Was he slain to get them?"

"And who killed him?" Ham finished the mystery, giving his sword cane a flourish.

Renny was standing near the open door.

"Holy cow!" he boomed unexpectedly. "Come here and look at this!"

Renny was not in the habit of showing excitement without reason. He was certainly excited now. The men sprang to his side and stared through the open door.

Astonishment pulled their eyes wide. They were men hardened to horror, but as they stared there was not one who did not feel as if there were invisible ants crawling on his flesh.

ONE of the elevators had stopped at the eighty-sixth floor. The operator was helping a man out.

It was the condition of this man which caused little pricks of horror to tingle the skin of Doc's aids.

The newcomer was a wiry man. He had a tremendous beak of a nose, the tip of which hooked down well over his mouth.

He had fingers that were very long, and so flexible as to be unpleasantly remindful of dangling strings. His clothing was expensive. It was torn in several places. His knees, elbows, and hands were muddy. His garments were damp with melted snow.

What riveted attention, however, was the man's condition. He seemed alive, and yet dead. His jaw, sagging down, held his mouth roundly open. His tongue dangled out.

He seemed powerless to make any motion of his own volition.

When the elevator attendant released him, the man began to fall. The attendant caught him.

"He was able to walk into the elevator and ask to be brought to your office," the attendant said excitedly. "But he seems to be getting worse."

The living-dead man's eyes did not look at Doc. Apparently he did not move them. But from his lips words came.

"Doc Savage?" His question was a barely audible gulp.

"Yes," Doc said.

The man seemed to try to say something. Failing, he slumped forward. Doc caught him, carried him into the

room.

Reluctantly, the elevator attendant went back to his duties. He would have liked to remain and watch Doc Savage work. He had heard of some of the bronze man's amazing feats.

While Doc investigated to see what ailed the man who seemed to be dead, and yet alive, Ham went through the fellow's pockets.

A plain, richly engraved card came to life. The name on it read:

JOHN ACRE

"

The guy who was kidnaped!" Ham ejaculated. "He must have got away from them. But what ails him?"

Doc was giving the examination of John Acre all the benefit of his knowledge of surgery and medicine. He completed a first scrutiny without finding what was wrong. He began a second examination.

"He is under the influence of some kind of stupefying drug," Doc decided. "But that doesn't entirely explain his condition. I never saw anything quite like it."

John Acre's eyes remained fixed in their sockets. It was as if every muscle in his body had been despoiled of its ability to move.

Very slowly, as if it cost an infinite effort, John Acre's eyelids dropped, then lifted.

"Good," Doc said. "Now I'm going to ask you some questions. If the answer is yes, blink once; if no, don't blink."

Doc launched into his catechizing.

"You are John Acre, and you were kidnaped by Velvet and Biff?" he asked.

One agonizingly slow blink conveyed an answer in the affirmative.

"Did you manage to escape from them?"

One blink.

"Are Velvet and Biff holding the girl, Tip Galligan?" Doc questioned.

"Yes," John Acre conveyed.

"Do you know where they are holding her?"

"Yes," again.

"Will you guide us there?"

One blink.

"Is the hide-out north of here?" Doc asked.

The staring eyes remained fixed, conveying a negative.

"Is it south?"

John Acre's lids did not move.

"Is it west?"

"Yes," transmitted the inert one.

Doc Savage addressed his men. "All right, brothers, away we go!"

WHILE the others carried John Acre to the high-speed elevator, Doc got a medical case from his great laboratory. As near as he could tell, John Acre seemed to be getting no worse. Whatever affliction the man had, it was unlike anything Doc had ever experienced in other patients.

In the basement garage, all but Doc loaded into the large sedan. With Monk at the wheel, the big machine moaned out into the street. It hurled westward through deserted streets where snow scurried along like scooped sugar.

Doc rode outside on the running board—this, despite the bitter cold. His mighty bronze body seemed unaffected by the needling chill. No severity of weather was great enough to keep him from riding outside, as he always did when danger threatened.

The sedan neared the water-front section.

Inside the car, questions having to do with their route, were being shot at John Acre in rapid succession. By blinking "yes" or "no" to queries as to whether they should turn at a certain corner, he was guiding them.

Renny thrust his puritanical face from a window.

"The place we're headed for seems to be a warehouse, Doc," he explained. "It's not many blocks from where we keep our planes."

"Have you placed the location accurately enough so that you can find it without John Acre's help?" Doc asked.

"I believe so," Renny replied.

"Then we'll drop him at the airplane hangars," Doc decided. "We'll leave Monk and Ham there to guard him." Monk and Ham emitted a concerted squawk at this. They did not like the idea of being left out of prospective action, and they said so.

Doc pretended he didn't hear their complaints, because of the rush of the blizzard outside the sedan. Their objections did not mean mutiny. They would follow his smallest wish.

The structure which housed Doc's airplanes was almost as remarkable in its way as the bronze man's skyscraper headquarters. Outwardly, the building seemed only a warehouse. A sign on the front said:

HIDALGO TRADING COMPANY

Had any one investigated, they would have found the Hidalgo Trading Co. was one man—Doc Savage.

As the sedan approached the front of the warehouse, Monk, inside the machine, had an expectant expression on his homely face. Would this door open mysteriously as Doc drew near, as the others had?

It did. Noiselessly, in mystifying fashion, the big panel slid ajar. The entrance was large enough to permit the sedan to roll inside.

With a good deal of speed, John Acre's limp form was unloaded. Monk and Ham, grumbling, their usual quarrel forgotten in their mutual chagrin at missing out on a fight, were left behind.

Renny had the wheel now. Something like four minutes later, he swerved the sedan in noiselessly to the curb.

"The joint is over a block," he said.

DOC SAVAGE opened the dash compartment in the sedan. From this he took two weapons which

resembled overgrown automatics. Circular magazines were prominent on them.

These were machine guns which Doc had himself perfected. They fired at terrific speed.

These superfiring little machine, guns discharged what big-game hunters call mercy bullets. The slugs were of a type that did not penetrate deeply, and which bore a chemical which produced sudden unconsciousness.

Doc handed the weapons to Renny and Long Tom. The bronze man himself never carried a gun. He had other fighting methods which exceeded in effectiveness any firearm.

They advanced through the whooping storm. The wind flapped trouser cuffs against their legs. It blew open their pockets, and snow poured in.

Renny shivered, kneaded his big fists together, and mumbled: "A nice tropical country would sure look good to me!"

"How about South America?" Doc asked him. "It's summer down there now, you know."

Long Tom, squinting through the blizzard, said: "I think it's this shabby dump right ahead."

The warehouse was big. It looked as if it had been greased thoroughly, then exposed to a cloud of soot. The result was a coat of unwholesome grime. Bars over the windows were half an inch thick and two inches wide.

"Kind of makes you think of a jail," Renny declared.

"You fellows better wait here a minute," Doc suggested.

A phantom of bronze, Doc whisked away in the storm.

Renny and Long Tom waited impatiently. They knew Doc had gone ahead to reconnoiter.

"He always goes ahead like that," Long Tom grumbled.

"Yeah, and lucky for us that he does," Renny replied. "I can think of several times when he's saved us from death traps by doing just that."

"Sure," Long Tom agreed wryly. "But it causes us to miss out on a lot of stuff."

Doc Savage, far ahead, had stopped against the wall of the warehouse. His keen eyes probed; his sensitive ears absorbed the minutest sounds. He heard nothing, saw nothing. There were no lighted windows.

Doc studied the door. It could be covered from two windows—an excellent lurking place for possible enemies inside the warehouse. Bars over the windows prevented entrance by that route—at least an entrance without noise.

What happened next would have astounded an onlooker. Doc seemed to permit the terrific wind to flatten him against the brick wall. Then he glided upward on the sheer face of the wall.

The bricks had been rather carelessly laid. Here and there one projected a fraction of an inch beyond its neighbors. There was an occasional window ledge. Once there was a step-like procession of ornamental projections. These, scant handholds though they were, explained Doc's seemingly impossible feat of surmounting the wall. To his fabulous strength and agility the wall offered no great problem.

The structure was four stories in height. At several points Doc dug packed snow out of cracks in the brick in order to make certain that prospective handholds were safe.

He finally pulled himself over on the roof.

There was only one roof hatch, and that was locked securely from the under side.

Doc went back to the roof edge, sure-footed, leaning a little against the tearing blizzard. He had hoped to enter the warehouse from the roof—silently. But he could not gain admission without noise.

Doc was showing no outward effects of the intense cold, but that was simply because of the wonderful control he had over his muscles. Doc could refrain from shivering fully as easily as another man could keep from smiling.

The bronze man, however, was not inhuman. He was susceptible to the stiffening effects of the cold, especially in his hands. So, before descending, he thrust his hands into his pockets. Each pocket held a small bag. These were filled with a chemical which gave off warmth.

When Doc's hands were pliable again, he descended the sheer wall.

ONCE in the street again, Doc still did not go near the door. Instead, he retreated, heading straight into the teeth of the wind for a number of yards. From one of his pockets he produced an object resembling a metal egg.

Doc flung this into the wind. It landed, bounced, and opened with a percussive sound which was hardly audible in the gale. It poured out a pall of dark smoke. The wind whipped this toward the warehouse.

The smoke was without odor. Any one inside the warehouse might be led to believe that the night had merely become blacker.

Hidden completely by this artificial murk, Doc raced for the warehouse door. He was on the point of testing to see whether or not the door was locked when his hand seemed to freeze in mid-air.

His next move was executed with blinding speed. He whirled and sped away from the door. Doc was holding his breath. Both hands were kept extended well out to his sides.

Still running at terrific speed, he reached the spot where Long Tom and Renny waited.

"What's wrong, Doc?" Long Tom shouted.

Doc ignored the fragile-looking electrical wizard. He went on. He was still holding his breath, and his hands were still held out from his sides.

Doc reached the sedan. The medical case which he had brought against the possibility of having to treat John Acre was in the machine. Doc dug it out. His hands raced through the assortment of bottles and powders.

He swallowed three different concoctions. Then he inhaled the fumes of others, and spread stuff thickly upon his hands, his face—upon every exposed inch of his skin.

Long Tom and Renny dashed up. They were puzzled at Doc's actions.

"What happened?" Renny rumbled.

Doc Savage extended his hands. He turned them slowly in order that the two men might inspect them.

"You have seen that stuff work before," he said.

"Holy cow!" Renny thumped. "Did it get into your lungs, Doc?"

"Only the tiniest bit," Doc told him. "I took antidotes and inhaled chemicals to nullify the effects. The actual damage doesn't amount to much. But I never came closer to death."

Long Tom was slower to comprehend what had happened to Doc. He stared at the bronze hands. In two or three spots, villainous little blisters had appeared.

"Gas," said Long Tom understandingly.

"Exactly," Doc told him. "It's a form of vesicant, similar to mustard gas; but the action, instead of being delayed, is instantaneous."

"How did they come to get you, Doc?"

"That," Doc said, "stumps me!"

Chapter VII. MURDER TRICK

DIGGING into a large trunk on the rear of the sedan, Doc extracted a gas mask of a type intended to cope with just such an emergency as the present one. The mask was actually in the nature of a suit. It left no part of the wearer exposed.

Donning the suit, Doc advanced upon the warehouse. He released another of the smoke bombs as he drew near. Covered by its smudge, he strode boldly to the door and gave it a shove. It was unlocked, and swung open.

Doc waited, ears straining through the blizzard. He hoped for some sound from within, but heard nothing. A flashlight came out of a pocket of his gas-proof suit. It raced a beam which was hardly bigger than a pencil, but which looked white enough to scorch.

After he had surveyed the interior, Doc stepped across the threshold. He was gone perhaps three minutes; then he reappeared in front of the structure.

Down the street excited feet were pounding. The storm carried along the sound. Doc picked out the thunderous footfalls of Renny, and Long Tom's light patter. He frowned; he was able to recognize the footsteps of all of his men.

The other two runners approaching were Monk and Ham. They all came out of the night, the wind, and the snow.

"What are you fellows doing here?" Doc demanded.

"John Acre recovered enough to talk some!" Ham barked. "He told us there was a death trap here. He couldn't let us know of it before, since he could only signal yes and no by batting his eyes. We came to warn you!"

"You came near being a little late," Doc advised.

"How'd they set off the trap, Doc?" Renny questioned.

"Come on, and I'll show you," Doc told him. "Monk, you're going to be interested in this."

He led them inside the door. The storm had dispersed the gas which had been released. Doc pointed his hand. Metal gas drums lay on the floor; hoses extended from these to cracks in the walls.

The release valves of the gas containers were connected to a strange-looking contraption.

Stooping, Doc showed Monk how to turn the valves off.

"I'm going out and walk across the street," Doc said. "When I get over there, turn off the valves. Then let me know. I'll walk toward the warehouse. Watch what happens."

This was done.

As Doc approached the warehouse, a weird thing happened. The strange mechanism turned the valves on!

"Just like the doors have been opening when you come near them," Monk yelled excitedly.

"

It works from exactly the same thing which causes the doors to open," Doc admitted.

"How is it done?" Monk questioned.

From his vest pocket Doc extracted a small metal case.

"The explanation of this concerns certain scientific phenomena which are rather vague," said the bronze man. "For instance, you know that radium gives off emanations which cause the leaves of an electroscope to fly apart when brought near."

"Sure," said Long Tom, "that's elementary."

"Right, Sherlock," Doc said dryly. "But it's not quite so generally known that other substances give out emanations. The exact nature of some of these radiations is not understood, but their effects are known. Take cosmic rays, for instance. I have been doing some experimenting along those lines."

Doc replaced the tiny case in his watch pocket.

"As part of the experiment, I rigged up the device to open doors," he went on. "It consists simply of a bit of radiating substance in my pocket. The emanations travel through cloth, and even through metal. The receiver is a screen sensitive to the emanations in the same way that a photo-electric cell is sensitive to light.

"Whenever the emanation strikes the screen, it causes a relay to close. This actuates the electrical and mechanical device that opens the door."

"So that was how it was done," Monk grunted.

"Holy cow!" exclaimed Renny. "That device was highly complicated, yet it was on this gas trap. That shows the fellow who set it is smart."

"To be candid," Doc said, "it shows he is among the most learned scientific men in the world. I'm telling you, brothers, it would take a genius to solve the riddle of those opening doors. It must have been done by watching me. The apparatus shows signs of having been thrown together very hastily—perhaps in the last two or three hours."

"The girl in the gold dress!" Monk exclaimed suddenly. "She's not here?"

"No," said Doc. "But she has been here. On the floor upstairs, I found several tiny gold scales from her gown."

Monk started for the stairs, as if to see the golden scales himself.

"Hold on!" Doc called. "You fellows ran off and left John Acre. You'd better gallop back and watch him—all four of you."

Reluctantly, Monk returned from the stairs. "What are you going to do, Doc?"

"Merely look the place over more thoroughly," Doc replied. "I have a hunch that it'll be a waste of time. Those fellows were too clever to leave tracks—if they were smart enough to see through my door-opening device. But I'm going to look anyway."

The four men nodded in concert and started for the door.

"Question John Acre," Doc called after them. "There's a recording device in one of the planes. Use that to get a record of all he says. Later, I'll play it back."

Again the bronze man's aids signified understanding. They stepped out into the raging storm.

RENNY and the others exchanged little conversation during the walk back to Doc's airplane hangar. Each time they opened their mouths, the bitter wind seemed like a frozen hand that grabbed the words and pushed them far back into their chests.

John Acre was sitting on a box when they entered the warehouse.

"Feeling better?" Renny boomed.

John Acre made no answer.

Monk and Ham sprang forward.

"Blazes!" Monk groaned. "The guy's had a setback! He's worse than he has ever been."

The interior proportions of the warehouse were vast. For half its length, the structure was built out over the Hudson River. Its concrete floor slanted down into the waters of the river.

Arrayed inside was a striking assortment of planes. These ships ranged from a gigantic tri-motored ship, with exquisite stream-lining, to a grotesque little true-gyro, which, if necessary, could descend and take off from the top of a kitchen table.

Long Tom went to one of the planes. He withdrew the recording device which Doc had mentioned. This was similar to the one which monitored the phone wires in Doc's office. It consisted of a supersensitive parabolic microphone, amplifier, and a needle device which recorded the voice lines on a wax cylinder.

Working speedily, Long Tom set up the contrivance. He placed the microphone close to the weirdly inanimate John Acre.

Long Tom had barely started the apparatus recording when there was an ugly interruption. A stuttering roar burst loose outside. It was echoed by a loud sputtering and ripping from the walls of the warehouse-hangar—a noise made by bullets trying to get in.

A machine gun! Doc's men had heard the staccato syncopation of such weapons too often not to recognize them.

"Blazes!" Monk howled. "They're gettin' reckless!"

The homely chemist sprinted for the door. The other three followed him. John Acre was forgotten.

Long Tom doused all lights inside the hangar. Monk stood well clear as he wrenched the door open. It was well that he did. A storm of machine-gun lead ripped through the aperture.

Two gigantic bullfiddles seemed to cut loose with a great moan inside the hangar. Renny and Long Tom had unlimbered Doc's remarkable little superfiring machine guns. The mercy bullets poured out in almost solid lead-and-chemical rods.

The clatter of rapid fire outside promptly ceased. Then a lone shot sounded. A moment later there was a second shot. The last one was more distant.

"They can't take it!" Renny thundered. "They're beating it!"

All four men charged out in pursuit of their enemies. Three or four times, bullets snapped at them. In the murk and the blizzard, accurate shooting was impossible. The bullets did nothing but chip bricks and knock out windows in the storage and factory district.

Renny and the others put on speed, trying to catch the gun flashes. It was like chasing a will-o'-the-wisp. Their foes were diving into alleys, legging it up side streets. They faded away.

"Let's get back to the warehouse," Renny said. "I don't like this. That attack was a little too reckless. Maybe they're up to some trick."

They returned to the warehouse-hangar. Entering, they came to a halt.

John Acre was gone!

IN front of the box upon which he had been seated was an ugly scarlet pool. From the pool a trail of red drops led out through the door.

The four men followed the scattering red. It was an ominous ending to which it led. Outdoors, it was not alone the ruby drops which guided them. They found footprints—prints of many men dragging another. The procession ended at the water.

"They threw him in!" Renny muttered.

Ham held his sword cane far behind so as to balance himself, and leaned over to look down into the water. There was a concrete wall here. The tide was moving the water. The blizzard was dashing the waves high.

"It may takes weeks to recover his body," Ham said slowly.

They turned their attention again to the footprints. The evidence was plain, the tracks indicating that the men had dragged John Acre to the river and flung him in.

It was a glum-faced group of four which confronted Doc when he arrived some minutes later.

Renny recited what had happened. His great voice was considerably less booming than usual.

"What burns me up is this—they decoyed us away to get at John Acre," he finished.

Doc spoke no word of condemnation. His aids, in their haste to mix in a fight, had committed an indiscretion in leaving John Acre alone; but there was no use in lecturing them now. They would not make the same mistake again.

"Well, let's look at the tracks," Doc suggested.

He went outdoors. The fast-falling snow had obliterated many of the signs. The scarlet drops had frozen, and were covered by the white flakes.

Renny, accompanying Doc, boomed: "I guess there ain't no doubt about him bein' dead."

Doc replied nothing. He returned to the hangar interior, and indicated the sound-recording apparatus.

"Was that going when you were decoyed outside?" he asked.

Long Tom looked at the contrivance. He nodded. "Sure. It was running then, and it's been running every since."

Doc went to the device, removed the wax cylinders, and began playing them back.

There was no amplifier on the playback apparatus here at the warehouse-hangar. Because of that, the others could not hear what had been recorded. They watched Doc's face. But the bronze lineaments told them nothing.

When Doc had finished listening, he gathered the records carefully together, padded them with paper, and made a package of them. This he handed to Monk.

"Don't drop them and break them," he said. "Lock them up in the office safe. They're valuable evidence of what occurred."

Monk nodded, took the records, and eyed Doc curiously.

"What did you find back at the place where they set the death trap?" he asked.

"A newspaper," Doc said.

"Huh?"

"A newspaper from Antofagasta, Chile," Doc elaborated.

He allowed time for this to sink in, then added more information.

"I found a telephone in the building," he continued. "I called the purser of the steamer *Junio*, and found out there John Acre got aboard."

"Where did he?" Monk demanded.

"At Antofagasta, Chile."

Shortly afterward, the group repaired to the gigantic building which housed Doc's headquarters. A night-hawk newsboy had taken shelter from the blizzard in the lobby. He looked up hopefully when Doc and his men entered.

"Buy a paper, fellers?" he pleaded. "Read about the earthquake close to Antofagasta, Chile."

Chapter VIII. IN TERROR'S SHADOW

NEWSPAPERS, in widely separated parts of the globe differ somewhat from each other. They are printed in various languages. Some are made up largely of pictures. Others are read backward. Reporters for the New York papers telephone their news to the city desk; in Japan they quite often use carrier pigeons.

However, nearly all the papers have one thing in common. They have to go out and compete for circulation. Putting noisy newsboys on the street is one way of doing this.

At about the moment the newsboy in New York was accosting Doc Savage, another newsboy in far-off Antofagasta, Chile, was trying to make a sale.

"

Un papel, caballero?" he asked hopefully.

This was the Spanish equivalent of: "A paper, sir?"

His prospect was a wiry man. The fellow had a great sharp nose, which came down over his chin like a beak. His fingers were notable, also; they were so long and supple as to be remindful of strings dangling from his knuckles.

South Americans use the same word for "No," that Americans use. However, they say it several times in rapid succession.

"

No, no, no, no, no!" said the hook-nosed man emphatically.

"All about the earthquake which killed Señor Lapiz, the multimillionaire nitrate man!" persisted the newsboy in Spanish.

The customer scowled and walked on. He looked like an ill-tempered hawk.

The vender of newspapers started to follow him. A friend, however, grasped his arm and stopped him.

"Idiot!" said the friend. "Do not bother that man. He is a bad one to molest."

"Who is he?" asked the newsboy.

"Don't you know? That is General John Acre, head of the government secret police."

The pair stared after John Acre until he was lost in the darkness.

The hawk-nosed man walked rapidly, as if he had urgent business. He kept wary eyes on each dark alley

that he passed, however. His manner was that of a man who had many enemies.

Such pedestrians as were encountered stepped hastily aside after one glance at that grim, beaked countenance.

In New York, it was winter. Here, in Chile, it was summer. The night was quite hot. Almost every one abroad at this late hour wore white garments.

John Acre, however, wore only dull black. His hat was black, also. He was clad thus in order to offer as inconspicuous a target as possible in the night.

Men who would cheerfully have killed John Acre were legion. The head of the government police had sent many plotters to prison. He was the terror of radicals and political schemers.

Half a dozen times, John Acre twisted and turned in his progress. He glanced back often, making certain no one was following him.

He turned at last into a narrow street which was as black as the interior of a mine. Entirely by the sense of touch, he found a low door. He stepped through.

Once inside, John Acre demonstrated that he was in familiar surroundings. He did not strike a light. Instead, he felt his way through intense blackness.

He found a row of nails driven in the wall. On each nail hung a bundle of cloth. John Acre lifted off the handiest of these.

South American Indians and cowboys have a garment which they call a poncho. It resembles a blanket, with a hole in the middle for the head. The object which John Acre lifted off the nail was a poncho, but it also had an additional hood of cloth sewn in the middle. This was perforated with eye holes.

John Acre donned the garment. It concealed him from head to foot. Then he entered an adjacent room, struck a match, and applied it to a native candle made of llama tallow.

The room in which he stood was rather large. John Acre was not tall, but his head almost touched the ceiling. Walls were windowless. There was only the one door, and it was heavy.

A bench of rough boards ran entirely around the room. John Acre sat down on the bench and waited. He was a grotesque figure in his hooded poncho.

Two men came in. They both looked at John Acre's swathed figure and smiled derisively.

"Regular Hallowe'en stuff," chuckled one.

The speaker was an ordinary-looking fellow, being of average size, with a plain but not unpleasant face. One thing about his attire made him stand out, however. This was the profusion in which yellow gold appeared upon his person.

Each button on his suit was gold—at least gold-colored. His watch chain, rings and stickpin were gold. He seemed to have a mania for the metal.

The second man was short and fat. He had a face which resembled that of a rabbit, minus the long ears. He was whistling softly as they entered the room. The whistling appeared to be an unconscious habit.

He whistled almost continuously, except when talking or eating. His tunes were always pitched so low as to be inaudible at a distance of more than a few feet.

Both men were Americans. Neither wore a mask.

"What is this Hallowe'en?" asked John Acre.

"An old American custom," smiled the man who liked gold.

John Acre shrugged. "This is no joking matter. You two men reported that you narrowly escaped a landslide caused by a strange earthquake. That was six weeks ago."

"Sure—and it damned near finished Missus Galligan's boy, Dido," said the man who affected gold ornamentation.

"You and Whistler Wheeler saw two men flee the vicinity of the weird quake—two men named Velvet and Biff? That right?"

"Whistler" Wheeler nodded, still whistling.

John Acre eyed the two men. He knew them very well. He supposed they knew his identity also, although they had not called his name. They should have recognized his voice.

"Dido" Galligan and Whistler Wheeler were two American engineers in charge of one of the greatest nitrate plants in South America.

"How are things going at your workings?" John Acre asked them. "Anything suspicious?"

"Nothing to report," said Dido Galligan, polishing one of his gold buttons. "I been keeping a close lookout for them two birds, Velvet and Biff. No sign of 'em."

John Acre considered this in silence.

"Velvet and Biff are the only men we have spotted as belonging to the Little White Brother's organization," he said. "Now they have vanished. You men had better put on the poncho masks. The others will soon be coming."

"T' hell with the masks!" snorted Dido Galligan. "We don't care who knows we're attending this meeting."

John Acre nodded slowly as if in approval. "You are brave men. I wish I could make the same statement about the others to come."

"They are scared of the Little White Brother?" questioned Dido Galligan.

"Very scared," John Acre agreed. "They are even afraid to let it be known that they oppose his sinister power."

WITHIN the course of the next half hour, something over a dozen men entered the room. Each fellow wore one of the poncho masks. They kept apart from each other. None spoke to his neighbor.

The manner of each man showed that he feared his fellows.

John Acre had been keeping a count. His attitude as he stood up indicated that the expected number was now present. He spoke in excellent Spanish, his choice of words showing that he was a man of no little education.

"You gentlemen know why we are here," he declared.

One of the cowed assemblage stood erect.

"I have been away to Europe on a business trip," he explained. "I am somewhat out of touch with the situation. In fact, I do not know the exact purpose of this meeting."

"You are present to hear my report on certain secret investigations," John Acre said. "As you all know, in recent weeks there has been an epidemic of earthquakes in Chile. These quakes all have one very strange thing in common. Each has resulted in the death of a wealthy owner of nitrate property."

"It is this which I have been investigating. Now, here is my report."

He paused dramatically. The silence in the room was that of something about to explode. Through it, Whistler Wheeler's low whistling was audible.

"I am convinced some hideous power is behind these quakes," said John Acre.

A stir swept the room. Whistler Wheeler's tune came to an abrupt end.

"But no man can cause earthquakes," some one objected.

"I didn't say the Little White Brother was a man," John Acre answered.

"Then what is the devil?"

John Acre shrugged. His arms made a bewildered gesture under the all-enveloping poncho.

"I have been unable to learn," he declared. "The fiendish thing is only a rumor, but it is too wide-flung a rumor not to have a grain of truth. They say that the Little White Brother is behind the quakes."

Again a buzz of surprise swept the gathering.

"You need not act so astonished," John Acre said shortly. "You have heard of this Little White Brother—be it man or some other incredible thing. You have heard that the quakes are killing men at the Little White Brother's behest."

"Some of you own nitrate plants—it is only such men who are dying in the quakes. Others are government officials. You have asked me to investigate the mystery."

The head of the secret police paused, then continued: "I actually know only two men connected with the quake mystery—a pair named Velvet and Biff. Velvet is slender, handsome in an evil way. Biff is big, with a scarred and ugly face."

Again, John Acre paused. "I can find neither man. They have disappeared. I wish to report that I am stumped on this case. I give up."

One of the men on the bench sprang erect, yelling: "We told you to send for the famous Yankee trouble-buster! Did you?"

John Acre scowled. "Sit down! I am handling this!"

"You are getting nowhere with it!" shouted the heckler. "We want Doc Savage down here! If you won't send for him, we will!"

During the ten seconds which followed the query, some half a dozen shrouded heads nodded assent.

"I have sent for him!" John Acre snapped. "I have been in touch with him for days."

Whistler Wheeler stopped whistling. Dido Galligan leaned forward, that he might hear better. Both men, it was plain, were now intensely interested.

"I am in communication with this Yankee trouble-smasher by radio," John Acre announced. "Only tonight, I received a message from him. He is now on his way to Chile."

"

THAT is excellent!" some one declared.

"I am highly pleased myself," John Acre replied. "My own attempts to investigate the Little White Brother have been pitifully futile. I cannot even secure the faintest hint as to what the monster is trying to do. The earthquakes and the deaths they have caused might possibly be coincidences, but I do not think so."

He paused to shake his fist dramatically. "It will take some one of Doc Savage's ability to find out what is behind this."

This seemed to conclude the general business of the meeting. The men filed outside. They departed one at a time, each giving the one ahead of him an interval in which to remove the poncho hood and get out of sight.

Eventually, only John Acre, Dido Galligan, and Whistler Wheeler remained.

Dido Galligan stared levelly at John Acre. He growled: "Unmask!"

John Acre hesitated. It seemed, for a moment, that he was not going to comply. Then he snapped, "Very well," and snatched off his poncho.

"O.K.," said Dido Galligan. "I was pretty sure from your voice that it was you, but I wanted to be positive."

"You have something of a personal nature to discuss?" queried hook-nosed John Acre.

"Yes," said Dido Galligan. "I have been taking measures of my own to combat this mysterious Little White Brother."

"What kind of measures, may I ask?"

"I have a sister in New York," Dido Galligan explained. "She is a remarkable girl. She has made espionage her career."

"You mean she's a professional spy?" John Acre asked.

"Correct," Dido Galligan agreed. "She is one of the best in the game. For months she has been working in a certain foreign country. Recently she completed that job. I have asked her to go to work on this Little White Brother thing, and she has agreed."

"I do not approve of this," John Acre said shortly.

Dido Galligan bristled. "Why not?"

"It is no work for a woman."

"She is going to work upon it anyway," Dido Galligan said stubbornly. "I have already given her all the details. Today she radioed me that she plans to sail for Chile on the next steamer."

"How have you been communicating with her?" John Acre asked curiously.

"By radio."

"I have no power to forbid your sister coming here," John Acre said resignedly. "But I do not approve of it."

Whistler changed the subject.

"I wonder what devilish power is actually causing those earthquakes."

John Acre shook his head. "That I cannot tell. There is only one clew."

"What's that?"

"In each case, a few moments before the quake starts, electric lights all over the affected district go dim," said John Acre.

"That's strange," muttered Whistler Wheeler.

The three men left the room together. John Acre returned his poncho to one of the nails in the outer room. Then they all quitted the house and started down the street.

They had not covered fifty feet when Whistler Wheeler emitted a loud yell.

"Look at the street lights in the main part of town!" he howled.

The lights were going strangely dim.

JOHN ACRE and his two companions moved with great speed. A tiny open square lay at the end of the street in which they stood. They sprinted for it. Their wild rush down the street did not stop until they stood in the small plaza.

Here, falling walls of buildings would not endanger them.

There was a sound like thunder in the far distance. The uncouth mumbling became louder. It drew closer, as though a howling mob were approaching far in the depths of the earth.

The ground began to tremble. Near by, a chimney upset. Bricks and unsound masonry tumbled off houses. Everywhere windows were splintering and breaking.

It was as if the earth had been seized with a chill.

The shaking was not excessively violent, however. John Acre and his companions were able to keep their feet.

"It is not a big shake," said John Acre. "The main force seems to be centralized well to our left."

Hardly were the words off his lips when the pulsations ceased.

"Let's see who got it this time," Whistler Wheeler rasped.

The three men plunged to the right.

Because of the lateness of the hour the streets had been deserted, and silent. Now they were a-swarm with people. Excited mothers were shoving their children through narrow spaces between window bars. One man with a mustache like bicycle handlebars had his head caught, and was screaming lustily.

A hill jutted up in front of the running men. It was a very steep hill, its sides in places almost clifflike. A road curled around its base. The heart of the quake had been at the hill. Great masses of stone had been shaken across the road. Men were already tearing at this débris at one point.

It became apparent that an automobile had been caught in the rock slide.

John Acre, Dido Galligan, and Whistler Wheeler added their help. One man was in the trapped car. Extricating him required fully five minutes. The fellow was dead. His features were barely recognizable.

Dios, mia!"

John Acre gritted in Spanish. "This is one of the men from our meeting."

Dido Galligan peered at the corpse. "I recognize him now. He was the owner of one of the largest nitrate plants in the country."

John Acre nodded slowly. "It is very strange. Each man to die has been the owner of a nitrate property."

A few minutes after he had drawn attention to this fact, John Acre slipped away from the vicinity. His going was furtive. Few noted his departure.

John Acre made his way to the radio station. The radio corporation had offices uptown, from which communications were ordinarily filed and delivered.

John Acre, however, never sent his radiograms through the usual channels. Too many eyes saw them.

He habitually gave his messages to the operator at the radio station itself. To deliver such a missive was the object of his present visit.

The structure which housed the radio apparatus was not an imposing building. A light glowed behind its one window. Voices came from within.

John Acre was a cautious soul. Had he not been, he would have come to a violent end long ago. He approached the radio shack quietly, his ears sharpened. He heard something which gave him a shock.

"John Acre thinks his messages have been going out," said the operator within the radio house. "He would have thirteen kinds of a fit if he knew what has actually happened."

Chapter IX. MOVER OF MOUNTAINS

INSTEAD of entering as he had intended, John Acre lurked outside the radio house, and did some very close listening.

"You are taking a great chance in holding up old Hawk Nose's messages," said the radio operator's companion.

John Acre could not remember having heard this voice.

"I'm getting well paid for what I'm doing," answered the radio man.

The other laughed softly. "I do not know that I blame you for merely failing to send messages which are handed you—that is an easy way of earning money."

"I do slightly more than that," corrected the key tapper. "I also make up fake messages which are given to John Acre."

"Who pays you?"

"That, my friend, I dare not tell you."

John Acre made a snarling mouth under his hooked nose. His hand whipped inside his coat, and came out with a revolver. This weapon had been altered to what firearm experts call a belly-buster. The barrel had been cut off until there was hardly a barrel at all. Because of this, the slugs were as likely as not to strike sidewise.

Belly-buster guns are noted for the frightful wounds they inflict.

On the point of entering, John Acre heard more words. He waited. These were choice morsels which he was overhearing.

"Do not get the idea I have not earned this money," the radio operator was saying. "I have held up messages from John Acre. But that is not all. I make a copy of every message which passes through this station. These copies are turned over to the one who hires me."

The second man in the radio shack laughed softly. "You do not need to tell me the name of your employer, my dear friend," he said. "I know it already."

"Yeah?" The operator sounded surprised.

"Exactly," laughed the other. "You are paid by a follower of the Little White Brother. We both serve the same master."

This was all John Acre could stand listening to. His sawed-off gun in his fist, he shouldered into the office.

"Lift your hands!" he snapped.

The radio operator and his visitor stared at John Acre. The radio man's friend, he saw, was one of the town's chief crooks.

The two men recognized John Acre's beaked, ominous features. Terror seized them. They knew the reputation of this man. He was a frightful foe.

Both men reached the same decision simultaneously. They concluded to fight their way out of the mess. Both dived hands for concealed weapons.

John Acre's gun roared! A second explosion seemed to blend in the crash of the first!

The radio operator and his visitor slammed down on the floor. One of them had succeeded in drawing his gun. It discharged as he fell. The bullet dug into an apparatus panel, causing a short-circuit, which flashed a blinding blue, and showered sparks.

John Acre leaped forward to examine the pair. He had hoped to seize them alive.

Both men were dead. The belly-buster slugs had torn tremendous wounds.

JOHN ACRE began to swear in Spanish. In a low, guttural voice he poured out profanity. He called himself every choice name that came to his agile tongue.

The head of the secret police was not condemning himself for killing the two men. He had taken lives before. The fact that he had let himself become excited enough to kill the two before he could ask questions, was what angered him.

John Acre searched the pair. On each body he found a considerable sum of money. He grinned sourly and pocketed these bank rolls.

There was no clew to the identity of the mysterious employer of whom the two had been speaking a moment before their death.

John Acre scowled at the powerful radio apparatus. He was not an operator himself. If he got a message through to Doc Savage now, it would have to be via the land-telegraph wires. This was slower and less reliable than the ether.

The telegraph office was downtown. Quitting the radio station, John Acre headed for it. He walked swiftly.

As was his habit, John Acre kept a close watch on the darkness about him. This was a custom which he was careful never to neglect. He was a wily man, and he led a dangerous life.

Within two hundred yards, John Acre realized he was being followed. Nothing so simple as a careless footstep or a crackling twig told him this. Whenever he went about at night, John Acre carried a bag of popcorn. He did not eat popcorn. He detested the stuff.

The popcorn, however, was very crisp. When spread upon the ground, it would crunch if stepped on. The crunch was not loud enough to excite the stepper, but it was sufficient to warn John Acre.

It was with this popcorn that John Acre learned he was being followed by some one.

Drawing his belly-buster, John Acre stepped into a murky recess and waited. His lips were tight and fierce under his beak of a nose.

Two men came creeping down the street. They were peering ahead anxiously.

"He has disappeared somewhere," growled one.

"Danged if he ain't," agreed the other. "He's slicked us."

"Yes, gentlemen, he did," said John Acre, and stepped out of hiding.

The men who were following him were Dido Galligan and Whistler Wheeler. Both American nitrate superintendents made gestures toward their hip pockets.

"Careful!" warned John Acre. "This gun of mine does not shoot beans!"

"We know what it shoots," said Dido Galligan grimly. His gold buttons flickered faintly in the luminance of a distant street light.

"So you saw what happened at the radio station?" John Acre snapped.

WHISTLER WHEELER had not been whistling as he followed John Acre. He resumed his tiny tuneful habit now. For a moment his whistle trilled softly.

"We saw it," he said. "Looked to us kinda like murder!"

"Did you hear the conversation between the operator and the other man, which prefaced the killing?" John Acre demanded.

"We weren't close enough." Wheeler seemed hardly to pause in his whistling as he answered.

John Acre scowled blackly. "Why were you following me?"

Both Dido Galligan and Whistler Wheeler had just seen the hawk-nosed man before them kill two men. Yet they showed no fear at his display of anger.

"We were just checking up," Dido Galligan said. He started to finger one of his gold coat buttons, but desisted when he sensed that John Acre might think he was reaching for a weapon.

"Checking on me?" rapped the head of the secret police. "And why, might I ask?"

"We got to thinkin' about that guy who was killed in the earthquake after the meetin'," Dido Galligan said frankly. "You, John Acre, are the only man who knew he was to be present at that meeting. Yet the fellow the quake got was obviously spotted there."

"You are presuming, of course, that the quake was made by human hands?" John Acre asked.

"Sure!" said Dido Galligan. "And we were wondering if it could be that you tipped the fellow who made it to the fact that the victim would be at the meeting."

As he thought this over, John Acre seemed to grow an inch in stature. His features were not as dark as those of the usual man of his country. Rage, however, blackened them. He shoved his belly-buster out.

For a moment, he seemed on the point of killing both his accusers. Instead, he smiled fiercely and made an angry gnashing sound with his teeth. He holstered his gun with an irate force.

"You gentlemen can think what you damn please," he said. "It is immaterial to me. But I tell you one thing in all frankness—you will get your heads blown off if you keep on following me."

The two Americans held their ground.

"Now, don't get up on your high horse, Acre," Dido Galligan growled. "We were just trying to find out what devilish thing is going on in this country. The owners of nitrate concerns are being murdered. That concerns

us. We're nitrate men."

"You said it," echoed Whistler Wheeler. "We were checking up on you, Acre, and we'll keep on checking on you till we're satisfied. If it comes to making threats, we may blow a head off ourselves."

John Acre suddenly showed his teeth in a smile which looked genuine.

"I always did appreciate Yankee nerve," he said.

This brought something resembling a truce. Together, the three men moved on toward the center of town.

"I am going to cable Doc Savage the latest developments," John Acre offered.

"And I am going to get in touch with Tip," said Dido Galligan.

"Who is Tip?"

"My sister."

NEWSPAPERS delivered in the morning are of necessity printed the night before. A number of editions are run off during the course of the night, each carrying the latest news to come in. In towns large enough to boast all-night news stands, such stands are kept supplied with the latest editions.

John Acre and his party passed such a stand. Dido Galligan stopped to pick up a paper. He wanted to read about the earthquake, from the débris of which they had helped extract a victim.

"Hey!" he barked. "Look at this—"

John Acre peered at the indicated headline. His jaw dropped from under the end of his beaked nose. He looked like a man who had just discovered half of a worm in an apple he was eating.

"Impossible!" he exploded.

"At least slightly exaggerated," Dido Galligan agreed.

The headline they were inspecting read:

JOHN ACRE MURDERED IN NEW YORK

CHIEF OF SECRET POLICE SLAIN BODY THROWN IN HUDSON RIVER

"

But I am not even in New York," John Acre said in an amazed voice as he stared at the paper.

Dido Galligan scrutinized the paper more closely. Suddenly he became deathly pale. Farther down he had discovered another, smaller headline. This one said:

TIP GALLIGAN SEIZED BY

JOHN ACRE'S SLAYERS

YOUNG WOMAN IS FAMOUS SPY

"

Tip!" Dido Galligan choked. "Tip has been kidnaped!"

Whistler Wheeler made a bewildered gesture. "But how did they—the Little White Brother—learn Tip was coming down here?"

"That is simple," said John Acre. "Through his agents, the Little White Brother has secured copies of all outgoing and incoming radiograms. He got your messages to her."

"I guess that's what happened," Dido Galligan muttered. "I've got to do something about this!"

John Acre finished skimming through the account of his own death. He reread the description of this other John Acre who had been slain, according to the papers.

"Strange," he said wonderingly. "They have described me most accurately. This fellow must be my twin."

"Have you got a twin brother?" Dido Galligan demanded.

"No," said John Acre. "I have no brothers at all."

Dido Galligan strained his hair through his fingers. He was perspiring, and not entirely from the heat of the night. "What am I going to do about Tip?" he groaned. He was very upset at his sister's fate.

"I am leaving at once for New York City to see Doc Savage!" rapped John Acre. "Perhaps that may ease your mind somewhat."

"It does—some," Dido Galligan murmured.

JOHN ACRE strode away swiftly. When the first taxicab passed, he hailed it and got in. He rode it only a few blocks, alighted, and doubled erratically through the narrow streets.

Convinced no one was on his trail, John Acre entered a telegraph office. Seizing a blank, he carefully printed a message. The communication was in a secret code, the key to which John Acre kept in his head.

The head of the secret police stood at the operator's elbow while the message was being sent. Then, heedless of the telegrapher's protest, he seized the message original, applied a match to it, and ground the ashes to powder under his heel.

John Acre was feeling fairly satisfied with himself as he left the telegraph office. This was one of his messages which would not find its way into the hands of the Little White Brother! He knew the telegrapher could not possibly remember its text.

"It's in the government code, anyway," John Acre told himself. "If they did get it, I doubt that they could decipher it."

His satisfaction would not have been so smug had he been able to witness what was occurring at a spot along the telegraph lines a few miles from town. Here, the wires passed through a patch of cactus. In the thick thorns a man crouched.

The fellow had several long bamboo poles. To the ends of these, hooks were fastened. Wire ran from the hooks to portable telegraph instruments below.

The man skulking in the cactus growth had merely to reach up and hook onto the wires to tap them. He was now packing his paraphernalia. That done, he crept furtively away from the spot.

The man was an expert telegrapher. In his pocket reposed a letter-perfect copy of John Acre's communication.

Reaching a road a few hundred yards distant, the man mounted a motor cycle. He sped away into the night.

"The message was in code," he chuckled. "But the Little White Brother's men have a copy of the code key."

Heedless of this bit of drama in the distant night, John Acre hurried to the town's most pretentious hostelry. This inn bore the name of Taberna Frio.

Translated literally, the name meant the hotel where it was cool. The interior was anything but that. The clerk

was asleep with his head on the desk. Perspiration dripping off his face had formed a puddle on the desk top.

John Acre wiped at his forehead, as if the sight made him feel hotter. He went up to his room, stripped entirely naked, and stretched out on the bed, which had an insect-proof canopy. He perspired prodigiously, but he slept.

JOHN ACRE did not sleep the night through, however. Well before dawn he was awakened by a caller. This gentleman wore the uniform of a naval officer. John Acre dressed swiftly and went with the man.

"Is everything in readiness" he asked his companion.

"Yes, sir," said the naval officer. "I have received explicit orders from the head of the navy department."

"I sent a message earlier tonight, asking that those orders be issued," John Acre explained.

The naval man bowed slightly. He had heard of John Acre, but this was his first actual contact with the head of the secret police.

A destroyer lay at anchor in the bay, just inside the costly breakwater. It was a comparatively new craft, a lean tiger of the sea. Activity aboard denoted that steam was up.

The destroyer hauled anchor the instant John Acre was on her deck. The craft swooped out around the end of the breakwater, and headed northward.

John Acre repaired to the radio cabin and wrote out a message. It was not in code, and was addressed to Doc Savage in New York City.

COMING TO NEW YORK BY WARSHIP AND PLANE TO ASK YOU FOR AID AND EXPLAIN SITUATION IN CHILE STOP WISH TO WARN YOU WATCH OUT FOR MYSTERIOUS MENACE KNOWN TO ME ONLY AS LITTLE WHITE BROTHER STOP

JOHN ACRE

The destroyer was fitted with modern radio equipment. John Acre watched his message being sent to a station far to the north, from whence it would be relayed to New York.

"That is one message Doc Savage will get," he told himself grimly.

John Acre was thoughtful as he left the radio cubicle. As a matter of fact, he had, during the past two days, received several radiograms which purported to be from Doc Savage. From what he had overheard the unlucky radio operator in Antofagasta say, he knew these messages were fakes.

The communications had said Doc Savage was en route to Chile. John Acre now doubted that Doc Savage had ever received a single message from Chile.

For a short time, the head of the secret police stood at the destroyer's stern. He watched the ribbon of wake unreeling behind. This ribbon was speedily lost in the night.

Although dawn was not far off, it was still quite dark. It was very hot and sultry. The smoke pouring from the destroyer funnels, instead of climbing upward, sank to the sea behind, where it rolled and squirmed like a great serpent with stomach pains.

"They are very clever; these devils I am up against," John Acre told himself thoughtfully. "Not only must I take no chances, but I must make some move aimed at outsmarting them."

The man suddenly waved his arms with great violence. An onlooker would have thought he had been shot; but John Acre was of the South American temperament which likes to express feeling by arm-waving.

He had been smitten with an idea.

"I am clever," he told himself with scant modesty. "This move should insure my reaching New York."

He went in search of the destroyer commander. They spoke together for a time. After that, there was a bustle of activity on the destroyer decks.

The lean steel craft turned unexpectedly and slackened speed. For a time it cruised slowly. During this interval, all of the crew were ordered below decks. None of them saw what occurred outside.

Then the destroyer resumed its speed.

DAWN came up like a forest fire on the towering crest of the Andes. The sun, very big and red when it first appeared, seemed to shrink in size and grow hotter as it traveled upward. A thermometer on the destroyer bridge mounted in amazing fashion. An observer might almost have seen the red line climbing.

The day was going to be a scorcher. The sky was as clean of clouds as the scoured interior of an inverted crock. The sea was an expanse of blue which looked as brittle as glass.

The destroyer was traveling fast, and close inshore. Like a long gray string pulled by the craft, the wake stretched for miles behind.

The sun mounted. The mercury in the thermometer seemed to be trying to get out of the top of the tube. The deck plates were so hot that spray landing upon them dried almost instantly.

Sailors and officers fanned themselves and mopped perspiration. They looked at the frowning walls of the shoreline. The cliff seemed close enough to touch.

"Our passenger, John Acre, has not appeared on deck," said an officer.

"He is sleeping," another replied. "There are strict orders given that no one shall go near his cabin."

"How a man can sleep in this heat is beyond me," the first speaker groaned.

The men fell silent. Three or four minutes later, however, they both looked shoreward. Their eyes ranged the jutting bleak cliffs.

"Did you hear something?" one muttered.

No answer was needed. By now, every one aboard the destroyer could hear the sound.

From the frowning rock heights off to the right, a great rumbling and grumbling was coming. It was as if an underground monster were aroused to an insane fury.

The hideous clamor increased. A weird change came over the waves about the destroyer. All around it blue humps of water raised. These were like boils, and they broke with a great upheaving of spray.

The destroyer itself shook as if palsied; loose objects rattled.

"A quake!" shouted one of the sailors.

The shuddering grew in volume. It became cataclysmic. Men could not stand upon the destroyer decks. So great was the thunderous roaring that they could hardly hear each other shout.

Along the sheer cliff great clouds of dust suddenly arose. These came from landslides started by the quake. The slides gathered in size and violence.

"The whole land is coming into the sea!" shrieked a sailor. It was hardly as tremendous as that, but millions of tons of rocks came plunging into the water. These shoved up a great tidal wave, which rolled for the destroyer.

The warship lifted, lifted—but the strain was too much. Her plates sheared apart in the middle. Foam seemed

to boil up around her and cover her in a mist.

Smaller waves followed the first great upheaval. These subsided. The roaring and trembling of the earth abated. A great cloud of dust caused by the rock slide eventually drifted away.

No sign of the destroyer could be discerned on the sea. It had gone down, carrying to death every man aboard the vessel.

The sun beat upon the scene, creating a near-furnace heat.

Chapter X. CUT WIRES CLEW

IN Doc Savage's skyscraper headquarters in New York stood the man who came near holding two world records—that of being the homeliest human and the greatest chemist. This was Monk. He stared from the eighty-sixth-floor window.

"Golly, but it's cold this morning!" he complained.

The blizzard of the night before had subsided. In the street, snow lay more than a foot deep. In places were drifts a dozen feet deep. Men were loading it into trucks. Snowplows grunted and snorted.

Ham said biting: "You should never have left your native tropical jungle."

"Can't you think up a fresh joke?" Monk growled.

Monk had recently hit upon a scheme to plague Ham afresh. He had adopted a pet pig named Habeas Corpus.

Habeas now came from under the richly inlaid table. Habeas was as remarkable a specimen of the porker family as Monk was of the human race. He had legs like a dog, and ears big enough to be wings.

A remarkable thing happened. The pig eyed Ham—then seemed to speak aloud!

"Shyster lawyers always did give me a pain!" An onlooker would have sworn the voice came from Habeas.

This was Monk's latest. He had learned ventriloquism. Using it to put remarks in the pig's mouth, he was able to drive Ham into a howling rage.

"Who gave the newspapers the story?" Long Tom asked.

"A rookie policeman," boomed Renny. "Guess there was no harm done. Doc told the cops not to mention his connection with the kidnaping and murder. They didn't."

DOC SAVAGE was in the laboratory. He was taking the remarkable two-hour routine of exercises which was responsible for his fabulous physical strength and the alertness of his faculties.

They were unlike anything else in the world. Doc had taken them daily from the cradle. He made his muscles work against each other, straining until perspiration filmed his mighty bronze body. He juggled a number of a dozen figures in his head, multiplying, dividing, extracting square and cube roots.

He had an apparatus for creating sound waves of frequencies so high and low the ordinary ear could not detect them. Through a lifetime of practice, Doc had perfected his ears to a point where the sounds registered. He named several score of different odors after a quick olfactory test of small vials racked in a case which held his exercising apparatus.

He read pages of Braille printing, the writing for the blind conveyed by upraised dots, to attune his sense of touch.

He had many other varied parts to the routine. They filled the two hours with feverish effort. It was doubtful if a man of average ability could have withstood more than five minutes of the grueling process.

THE door from the outer corridor opened. The four men in the anteroom stared at the individual who strode in the room.

"The bag of bones himself!" Renny boomed.

"The old one-eyed Cyclops!" Monk grinned.

"He's got both his eyes now, though," said Ham. "Bet he's seeing double."

Had some of the learned colleagues of the man in the door heard the greetings he was receiving, they would probably have frowned, considering them below the dignity of William Harper Littlejohn.

For he was a widely known expert on archaeology and geology, and recognized as such by the leaders of his profession.

Johnny was nearly six feet tall, and as thin as he could safely be. Until today, he had habitually worn spectacles, in the left lens of which was a magnifying glass. Johnny had lost the use of his left eye in the War, and needing a magnifier in his business, had carried it over the worthless optic.

Doc Savage, with the magic of his surgery, had restored use of the eye.

Johnny had a newspaper tucked under one arm.

"I thought you had orders to stay in bed for a few days?" Long Tom said.

Johnny grinned. "For why?"

"That eye operation—"

"It's O.K.! I feel swell! The operation was delicate, but there wasn't a lot of cuts and stuff. There's not much to heal up. It's largely a matter of nerves. You see, the retina had lost the functioning of the rod-and-cone structure, and—"

Ham held up his sword cane in horror.

"Brothers, it's awful! We're going to have to listen to him tell about his operation for years."

The bony Johnny snorted, ignored the sharp-tongued lawyer, and popped open the newspaper under his arm.

"What really got me out of bed was something I read in this paper," he said. "I wanted to show it to Doc."

"What is it?" Monk asked.

"An earthquake on a certain part of the South American coast," Johnny explained.

"Yeah?" Monk grunted, suddenly interested.

"It is very strange that a quake should occur there," Johnny announced. "That particular stretch of coast is not considered earthquake country. I happen to be acquainted with the subterranean rock formations. I consider an earthquake there an impossibility."

Renny was shuffling through his own paper. "I don't see nothing about the quake in here."

"It's in only the very latest editions," Johnny explained. "The quake occurred hardly more than two hours ago. The news has just reached New York."

Doc Savage, towering man of bronze, came out of the laboratory. He glanced at Johnny's eye, seemed

satisfied with what he saw, and inspected the newspaper Johnny offered. He spread it on the inlaid table. He had read only a few sentences when he pointed to a paragraph well down in the story. It read:

At the height of the mysterious earthquake, a Chilean destroyer sank with all hands. Aboard the warship, according to a report issued by the Chilean government, was John Acre, head of the Federal secret police.

"

John Acre!" Renny thumped. "But that guy was murdered right here in New York, last night!"

Doc's five aids exchanged puzzled looks.

"What do you think about this, Doc?" Renny asked.

"I think we had better get in touch with Chile," Doc told

DOC SAVAGE led the way into his laboratory. In the cold, brilliant winter sunlight, the room took on vast proportions. Apparatus glittered. There was equipment for research in chemistry, electricity, bacteriology—all branches of science, in fact.

Along one outer wall, several small chambers were in-closed in glass. Doc went to one of these. It held extremely powerful radio equipment.

The radio transmitter, scientifically designed, probably had as great a range as any in the country. The receiver was superbly sensitive.

Within a few minutes Doc was in communication with a short-wave radio station at Santiago, capital of Chile. He sent a brief message, requesting that some one in touch with late events should come to the station.

There ensued a wait of perhaps five minutes, evidently while they did telephoning down in Chile.

"The presidential secretary will be out to the station very shortly," Doc was informed through some thousands of miles of space.

Doc Savage remained at the powerful radio outfit. He addressed Ham.

"Newspapers usually keep pictures and short biographies of high officials of foreign countries in their files," Doc said. "The information is then handy when the individuals turn up in the news. Will you scout around and dig up a picture of this John Acre, and some of his life history."

"Righto," said Ham, and departed.

Doc Savage waited. Despite the bitter cold outside, it was comfortably warm in the laboratory. The interior of the vast room, in fact, was air-conditioned—the same temperature being maintained night and day. This was necessary in order that heat and cold should not affect the delicate experiments which Doc continually had under way.

"The presidential secretary is here," reported the far-away Chilean radio station.

"Why was John Acre aboard the destroyer which perished in the earthquake?" Doc questioned through the medium of the ether.

"There is no longer a need of keeping that secret," came the reply through the ether. "John Acre was going to New York to employ you, Doc Savage. No one was supposed to know he was aboard the destroyer."

"For what purpose was I to be employed?" Doc Savage questioned.

"There has been a mysterious procession of earthquakes down here," the other replied. "In each quake, some prominent nitrate man has been killed."

"Are you sure the man aboard the destroyer was the real John Acre?" Doc questioned.

"Yes."

"What makes you certain?"

"When he asked that the destroyer be placed at his disposal, he did so in a message couched in a secret government code."

"Code books have been stolen," Doc transmitted.

Several seconds elapsed before a reply came through the coils and vacuum tubes. The Chilean radio operator, of course, was transmitting the replies of the presidential secretary.

"It might have been a false John Acre on the destroyer," the distant man admitted.

DOC SAVAGE soon ended his radio hookup. He had no more than done so when Ham returned. Ham executed a triumphant gesture with his sword cane.

"More mystery, Doc," he said.

From a pocket he drew a sheaf of newspaper clippings and pictures. He spread these on a glass-topped apparatus table. The men crowded around. Their attention was closely centered on the photographs.

"Holy cow!" Renny ejaculated. "That is the same guy who was croaked here in New York last night!"

"These pictures are of the genuine John Acre," Ham reminded. "That one was supposed to have perished when the tidal wave sank the destroyer."

The pictures were not actual portrait photos, but clippings of published pictures. For that reason, they were not as clear as was desirable.

"These are very good likenesses of the first John Acre," Doc said.

"By the first John Acre you mean the man who came to New York on the *Junio*?" Ham asked.

"That's it," Doc told him. "We'll designate the one on the destroyer as the second John Acre—until we secure proof otherwise."

Doc now gave his attention to the clippings which accompanied the pictures. His five aids also read them through.

"Golly," said Monk. "John Acre was a tough hombre. In the course of his career as head of the secret police, he has killed any number of men!"

"I don't think I'd like that guy very well," Renny offered in his great voice.

"Which guy don't you like?" Monk demanded. "The first or the second John Acre?"

"The *real* John Acre, whichever one that is," Renny retorted. "The guy with the record of kills."

At one side of the room a red light appeared. It glowed for a moment, then went out. It glowed again.

"Telephone," Doc said, and took up an extension instrument.

"Long distance calling by radio and land-line telephone from Antofagasta, Chile," said a phone girl's voice. "The call is for Doc Savage."

"Let's go," Doc said.

From the receiver came clickings, humming, and a sound like some one falling down a stairway with an armload of tin cans. Then the wire noises cleared up.

"Doc Savage?" asked a voice which could hardly have been fainter had it been coming from Mars. "This is Dido Galligan, speaking from Antofagasta, Chile."

"Are you any relation to Tip Galligan?" Doc demanded.

"I'm her brother! What do you know about Tip! Talk fast! This is costing me fifteen dollars a minute."

Doc used about ten dollars' worth of time in giving the distant Dido a sketchy idea of what had happened in New York.

"My sister is a famous spy and a clever detective," said Galligan. "These devils were afraid she would get the goods on them. That's why they seized her."

"Do you know John Acre?" Doc asked.

Dido Galligan either did not hear the question or ignored it.

"Will you hunt my sister?" he asked over the thousands of miles of radio and land line. "I've heard you don't work for money, but if you'll find Tip I'll contribute every cent I've got to any charity you name."

"We are already hunting her," Doc said.

"By George, that's great! What I said about giving to charity still goes."

"Do you know John Acre?" Doc repeated.

"Yes," replied Dido Galligan's faint voice. "I saw him and talked to him here in Antofagasta last night."

"Are you sure he was the real John Acre?"

"I'm going to tell you something in confidence," Dido Galligan declared. "A friend of mine, Whistler Wheeler, and myself followed John Acre last night. We were suspicious of him. We learned—"

Ping!

went the telephone receiver. A complete silence followed.

Doc Savage slapped the lifeless telephone on its stand.

"Wires have been cut," he rapped. "It was done in this building!"

A BRONZE flash, Doc whipped to a large chest, and threw it open. It held numerous cylinders. These were as thick as tomato cans, and perhaps two feet long. The coverings resembled cardboard. From each protruded a length of fuse.

Working rapidly, Doc passed an armload of these to each of his men.

"How do you know the wires were cut in this building?" asked Monk as Doc worked.

"From the sound," Doc said. "There was absolutely no noise after the cut. This building has an individual exchange, and if the circuit had been broken beyond the exchange, I could have raised the operator. I couldn't, so they were cut in the building."

Doc passed out the last of the cylinders.

"Get to the windows on all four sides of the building," he directed. "Light the fuse on these things, and toss them out."

The order was hardly issued when Doc was gone.

His five men lost no time finding windows on four sides of the skyscraper. They touched matches to the

fuses. Then they flung them out into the cold winter air.

After he had hurled all of his burden, big-fisted Renny leaned out to see what would happen.

He had gotten rid of the cylinders with great speed. The first of them had not yet hit the street, eighty-six stories below.

"Holy cow!" Renny muttered. "I hope they don't smack anybody on the skull. They're pretty heavy."

Renny's apprehensions were needless. Some distance above the street, the first cylinder turned into a ball of grayish vapor. In swift succession the same thing happened to the others. Each composition container was consumed completely in a small flash of greenish flame.

There was nothing left to fall on the heads of pedestrians. The gray vapor billowed and swelled. It was much heavier than the air. It sank rapidly.

Within a few seconds, the stuff lay in the street like a fog. Office employees and business executives on their way to work stopped shivering in the cold, and gaped at the mysterious vapor.

They sniffed. The strange haze had a very slight odor, not unpleasant.

"A funny kind of smoke," a stenographer commented aloud.

New Yorkers are people who like to stand around and gawk at anything unusual. Ordinarily the sidewalks would have been jammed with rubbernecks eyeing the vapor. But this morning was too cold. Pedestrians resumed their way; most of them ran in their haste to get out of the chill.

Some of those who entered the great skyscraper were witnesses to a bit of drama.

On one side of the lobby was a stairway which led to the basement regions. Two men dashed up this.

One fellow was handsome in a vaguely evil way, and he wore evening clothes. The evening garb was enough to attract attention, since it was now daylight. The other man was big, with a scar across his face, and a nose which was two fuzz-rimmed holes.

The doorman saw the pair. Their running gait aroused his suspicions.

"Hey!" he yelled. "What's the idea?"

Scarcely pausing in his stride, the burly man with the hideous face swung a fist. The doorman went down, knocked senseless.

The two runners sprinted outside. They dived across the walk, raced down the middle of the street, and bounded into a car.

If they noted that a fantastic gray vapor filled the street, they ignored the fact in their excitement.

The automobile into which the pair leaped was a touring car. The side curtains were up. The engine of this machine was running. The man in evening clothes took the wheel, and the touring car leaped away.

THE car was pointed in such a direction that it had to pass in front of the skyscraper. Excited yells went up from the walk. Several persons had seen the doorman knocked unconscious, and had rushed outside to shout for a policeman.

There seemed to be no cop in the neighborhood. The crowd could only stand helpless and watch the machine bearing Velvet and Biff go thundering past.

They were not silent, however. They yelled lustily, trying to give an alarm.

Three shots roared from the touring car. The sound was brittle thunder in the cold morning air. One bullet

broke a window; another pitted a brick wall; the third knocked a snow shovel out of the hands of a man two blocks distant.

Biff was doing the shooting.

"You scar-faced fool!" Velvet screamed, and knocked Biff's gun down. "You dope! You dumb-bell!"

"Aw, I thought I'd scare 'em," snarled Biff. "Make 'em forget what we look like."

"Forget!" gritted Velvet. "You made 'em remember us. Haven't you any brains at all? Why'd you cut that phone wire?"

"Dido Galligan was fixin' to spill somethin' about John Acre," said Biff. "I wanted to stop that."

"You goop!" groaned Velvet. "Doc Savage will merely get another phone connection. You didn't do any good by cuttin' the wire. All you done was show Savage that we were listenin' in the conversation!"

"Aw—"

"Shut up!"

Velvet smashed the car angrily through a small snowdrift. White flakes hit the windshield like a flood of milk.

The car wheeled right, left; it ran for a time toward the water front, then northward. Eventually, Velvet parked near a drug store. He left Biff in the machine, went in and used the telephone.

He spoke for some time.

"I just talked to the boss," he told Biff when he came back. "He gave me our orders. We're leaving town."

"Leaving town—what for?" Biff demanded.

"This Doc Savage," Velvet explained. "The boss has decided we don't want no part of him. We're blowing."

"What about the Galligan girl?"

"We're takin' her along."

"Aw!" grunted Biff. "Why?"

"Don't ask so many questions," said Velvet, and put the touring car in motion.

Chapter XI. SOUTHWARD DASH

"

So they got away in a curtained touring car?" Doc Savage asked of the crowd in front of the skyscraper.

At least six persons tried to answer at once. There was a magnetism about Doc Savage's giant bronze figure which fascinated spectators. Moreover, many of those present knew Doc by sight. Their manner showed that they considered the bronze man a noted personage.

"The car went north," volunteered a man. "It was a touring, all right. There's not many touring cars out on a cold morning like this. That should make it easier to locate."

"The ugly man with the scarred face fired three shots," vouchsafed another bystander.

"Exactly what make of car was it?" Doc asked.

Several replied to this. There was some uncertainty. But all of the answers varied between two moderate-priced makes which closely resembled each other.

"Thank you, very much, gentlemen," Doc said. He wheeled back into the great building.

Doc rode to the eighty-sixth floor in his high-speed private elevator. His five aids were still in the laboratory. They were watching the grayish cloud in the street below.

They had not as yet managed to figure out what the cloud was.

"Velvet and Biff cut the phone wires," Doc said. "At least the two who did it answer their description. They fled in a touring car before I could reach the street."

"There ain't many touring cars out on a cold morning like this," Monk muttered. "That'll help us locate 'em!"

"It was one of two different makes," Doc added. He gave the trade names of the cars. "Those who saw it were somewhat uncertain. The average individual is not very observant."

Monk groaned loudly. "Then we ain't got such a hot chance of findin' 'em."

Doc did not reply to this. Instead, he gestured toward the door.

"We won't find them standing here," he advised.

Slightly more than a minute later, they were in the basement garage. Four minutes after that they were pulling up before Doc's airplane hangar, which masqueraded as the Hidalgo Trading Co. warehouse. They were riding the big sedan.

Once inside the hangar, they unloaded as if the sedan were on fire.

Doc waved an arm. He included all of the planes in the gesture.

"Each of you men will grab a separate bus," he directed. "Get into the air as quickly as you can. There's an ordinance against flying low over the city, but I guess this emergency justifies us breaking it. Get down as low as you can. Scrape the tops of the buildings."

"What's the idea?" Renny boomed.

"You be looking for touring cars," Doc replied. "There won't be many of 'em this cold day."

Renny blinked incredulously, his big hands making vacant gestures.

"Holy cow, Doc" he muttered. "You don't expect us to spot those two guys, do you? We can't fly down in the streets and look inside every touring car."

Instead of replying, Doc reached into a coat pocket. He drew out an object which might have been a very compact magic lantern. His bronze fingers stroked a switch on the side of this.

Nothing seemed to happen to the little lantern. Certainly, it gave forth no visible light.

Ham suddenly burst into a roar of laughter. He pointed his sword cane at Monk.

"Haw, haw, haw!" he squawled. "Did you ever see anything that looked more like a big green bullfrog?"

Monk scowled at Ham. His little eyes brightened in their gristle pits. He also burst into laughter.

"And you look like a little green devil!" he chortled.

A startling thing had happened to Doc Savage's men. When Doc switched on his strange, tiny lantern, each man seemed to turn an unholy green color.

Doc's big sedan had also assumed a grassy hue.

"

ULTRA-VIOLET light," said Long Tom, the electrical wizard.

The homely Monk stopped laughing to wave an arm.

"The planes and the rest of the hangar look all right," he said. "It's just us and the sedan that's green. Why is that?"

"It's because you walked through the grayish fog, that came from those cylinders you threw out of the window," Doc explained. "The car was driven through the fog, too."

"Velvet and Biff also drove through it," Monk ejaculated.

"Which should make it simple for us to find them," Doc said dryly. "Touring cars are scarce this cold day. The chances that more than one drove past that skyscraper while the fog was in the street, are very slim indeed. Look for a touring car which shows green under the ultra-violet light."

It was not necessary for Doc Savage to go into a detailed recitation concerning ultra-violet light. His men had seen it in operation before. Doc used it a great deal.

Ultra-violet light, being outside the visible spectrum, does not register on the retina of the eye; for that reason it is sometimes called "black light."

Certain substances, however, behave strangely when exposed to ultra-violet light. They fluoresce, or glow, in unearthly hues. Ordinary vaseline and aspirin are two substances which behave thus.

The chemicals which composed Doc's strange fog were another. He had developed the stuff by careful experimenting. Its propensity for this glowing phenomena was extremely pronounced.

The tiny quantities of the grayish vapor, deposited on bodies moving through it—such as walking men and moving automobiles—was sufficient to glow in a very brilliant fashion.

Doc Savage pressed a button. This set an electric motor in operation, and opened the vast rear doors. The hangar floor sloped down into the river. There was a small film of ice on the water. The first plane to enter—the great tri-motored high-speed amphibian, with Renny at the controls—broke the ice.

In rapid succession the planes took the air. There was a craft for each man.

Every ship was fitted with a powerful ultra-violet light projector. These had been installed for a long time. This was not the first time Doc had used ultra-violet light. It was, however, his initial experiment in tracing men who had merely walked through a fog of Doc's own making. The six planes scattered to the northward—Velvet and Biff had driven north.

The projectors of ultra-violet light were turned on. These were of Doc's own design, and extremely powerful.

The ships flew low. At times they literally banked around skyscrapers, spires.

Monk, spotting a car which glowed green below, all but collided with a high building. He flew down into the canyon of a street, frightening stenographers and the inevitable clouds of pigeons which swarmed around the rooftops.

"Blast it!" Monk grumbled, and zoomed upward again.

The car he had discovered was a convertible. No doubt it had chanced to drive through the vapors surrounding Doc's skyscraper headquarters.

The hunt worked steadily northward.

EACH of Doc's five men was flying a different plane. Doc himself, however, had taken up the strangest crate of the lot. At first glance this seemed merely an auto-gyro.

An airman would have immediately noticed something unusual about the craft, however. For one thing, the tail

assembly had no control surfaces. There was merely a fishtail effect. The two stubby wings usually supplied on auto-gyros were missing.

Doc's craft was a true-gyro. In the hands of a pilot sufficiently skilled, it could land on a table top, and take off from the same point.

Doc Savage sent his unusual ship ahead of the others. He selected one of the main arterial streets, and traced it. If Velvet and Biff had parked their car downtown, one of Doc's men would probably locate it. Doc himself hoped to overhaul the pair if they had kept driving.

Doc saw no sign of a touring which showed a weird color under the powerful ultra-violet light. He widened the sphere of his search. Touring cars were very scarce.

For fully an hour they hunted.

The planes were fitted with radio-telephone transmitters and receivers. These sets were supplied with Doc's version of what is popularly known as "voice-scramblers." These contrivances distorted voice sounds at the transmitting end, and straightened them out at the receiver.

Any one tuning in on Doc's interplane conversation would not have been able to understand a word of it.

By radio, Doc ascertained his men had found nothing.

"Biff and Velvet have done one of two things," Doc decided. "Either they drove their car into a garage, or they hurried straight out of town."

"They sure don't seem to be on the streets below," Monk agreed. He spoke as if they were in the same room, instead of being widely separated in the frosty sky.

"Let's look the airports over," Doc suggested.

"Maybe they lit out along some country highway," Renny's thunderous voice offered.

"In that case, they will be easy to catch," Doc told him. "The storm last night blocked the roads with snow. They have not yet been cleared."

The six planes whipped away in various directions, each seeking an airport.

It was Doc who sighted the curtained touring car. He discovered it near a big airport in New Jersey. It was headed toward town, not away from it.

Doc swung his gyro along above the car, matching the car's speed. At the same time he descended swiftly. The gyro motor was efficiently muffled. It was unlikely that those in the car would hear it.

Something over which Doc had no control betrayed his presence. The men in the coach saw the shadow which his plane cast on the snow.

The rapid approach of the shadow alarmed them. They thrust heads out, looked upward, and saw Doc.

Gun muzzles sprouted from the car curtains. They lipped flame.

DOC jerked his head inside the gyro. Bullets snapped at the spinning wing-vanes. Slugs drummed fiercely against the underside of the fuselage. They hammered staccato thunder. The concussions were so regular that Doc knew one of the weapons below was a machine gun.

The gyro cabin was fitted with a thin, very tough alloy armor. A high-powered rifle bullet, hitting squarely, would have penetrated it. The armor was effective against the weapons below, however.

Doc shifted the lever which controlled his forward speed. He shot ahead of the touring car. Then he touched another lever. This caused a mechanism to click.

Hollow tubes projected from the gyro hull. These spat slender aëro bombs. Striking the snow-covered pavement ahead of the touring car, the bombs turned into great mushrooms of bilious-colored smoke.

The car plunged into the vapor. The driver had locked the brakes, and the car slewed from side to side.

The automobile skidded off the pavement, plowing up snow. It came to a stop, half buried in the flake-filled ditch.

Doc dropped his gyro near the machine. The snow was over his knees. He plunged through it, got a look inside the touring car, and his haste evaporated.

The girl, Tip Galligan, was not in the machine. Nor were Velvet and Biff present.

It was a villainous-looking crew which the touring car bore. They numbered seven. Small-time crook was stamped on the face of every man.

They were all unconscious from the effects of the gas, loosened by Doc's aërial bomb.

Returning to the gyro Doc switched on the radio transmitter. "I bagged the car," he reported. "The big game wasn't in it, though. Come on over."

He gave his location before he switched off the transmitter. Then he returned to the ditched car.

Looking the unconscious men over, Doc selected the one with the weakest mouth. He produced a hypodermic needle from a black case, and used it on the man he had selected.

Almost at once, the fellow began to stir with returning wakefulness. The stuff which Doc had injected was a stimulant, and also neutralized the effects of the gas itself.

The man opened his eyes, took one look at Doc, and closed them again, as if he had seen a spike-tailed devil.

"I didn't do it!" he moaned weakly.

"Do what?" Doc demanded.

What followed was weird—the man talked freely, if thickly, and in a tone hardly understandable. This was due to the stupefying effects of Doc's gas. At first it was doubtful if the man quite realized what he was saying. Afterward, when he did comprehend, he saw he was in too deeply, and kept on talking.

"Didn't murder John Acre," whined the man.

"You were in the hangar raid?" Doc demanded.

"Uh-huh," mumbled the fellow.

"Where is the girl, Tip Galligan? Where are Velvet and Biff?"

"They lit out," said the man thickly. "Boss gave 'em orders."

"Who is the boss?"

The man rolled his eyes. It was just dawning on him that he was talking too freely. "Mister, I'm tellin' you these things because I'm an innocent guy who just happened to get in with the wrong crowd. Them fellers didn't tell me anything. I don't know who the big shot is."

"Was he here in New York?"

"Maybe. I ain't sure. Velvet and Biff got their orders from him by telephone. Maybe they used long distance. I ain't sure."

"How many left in the plane?" Doc asked.

His source of information batted eyes. "Gosh, how'd you know they went in a plane?"

"The fact that you fellows were on the airport road could hardly mean anything else," Doc replied. "How many took off in the plane?"

"The girl, Velvet, and Biff were all we saw. We had been holdin' the dame, and we took her to the airport. Velvet and Biff carried her to the plane. There might have been somebody else in the ship. We couldn't tell. We didn't go very close."

"What kind of a plane?"

"A yellow bus. It looked fast."

"Where were they heading for?"

"I dunno," said the man. "Me and me pals here are just some guys Velvet and Biff hired to kinda help out."

Doc's bronze features remained expressionless. He was reasonably sure the man was telling the truth. Velvet and Biff and their mysterious chief were too clever to trust a weak-kneed specimen like this with important secrets.

IT was noon. The great inlaid table in Doc's outer office was littered with maps. Various pieces of scientific equipment were stacked on the floor.

Monk and Long Tom were making this stuff ready for transportation. Their movements were grim and swift. Monk rarely went long without a wisecrack, but he had attempted no verbal snapper for more than an hour.

Doc Savage was assembling information and issuing orders. Just now he was in telephone communication with Ham.

"I'm at the airport," explained the lawyer whose addiction was natty clothing. "That little thug told the truth about the yellow plane when he said it was fast. It's a new crate, and extremely speedy. A guy here at the field sold it to Velvet early this morning."

"Did the airport attendants see how many were aboard when it took off?" Doc asked.

"No. It was cold. They were all gathered around the office stove. They did not notice the yellow plane until they heard the motor start. It was across the field, and they could not tell how many were in the cabin. They didn't look close, anyway."

"Which way did it go? Any one remember that?"

"South."

Ham now gave a more detailed description of the yellow plane. This included the wingspread, the type of motor, the nature of the streamlining, and other details. Then Ham hung up.

Johnny, the tall and bony geologist, came in from the library. Johnny apparently did not know what to do with his eye-glasses which had the magnifying left lens, now that his vision was normal. He had them cocked upon his forehead.

"I've checked over the geologic data on the section of the South American coast where that quake sank the destroyer," he announced. "I am more than ever convinced that a quake is an impossibility in that vicinity."

"There's no doubt that they had one," Doc said dryly.

"It could not have been a natural quake," Johnny declared.

The phone rang. It was the thunderous voice of Renny.

"I spread a general alarm for that yellow plane as you suggested," he told Doc. "It seems we were just a bit too late. The crate took on a full load of gas at a flying field near Philadelphia. You know what that means."

"It means they can just about make it to Panama, nonstop," Doc said.

"Yeah," Renny agreed. "And they seem to be headed in that direction."

Immediately following his conversation with Renny, Doc juggled the phone hook. He asked for a long-distance operator.

"Anything to report on my call to Antofagasta, Chile?" he questioned.

"Nothing yet, Mr. Savage," was the reply.

Monk and Long Tom scurried about, finishing their packing.

"We just about got it all ready to go, Doc," Monk reported.

The phone rang once more. This time it was a man who said in an expressionless voice: "This is to advise you that the ambulances have picked up their load."

"Very well," Doc told him. "Follow the usual procedure."

Monk, overhearing this, grinned widely. He knew what it meant. The gang who had been in the touring car were en route to Doc's criminal-curing institution up-state.

Doc now began to show some impatience. He again got in touch with the long-distance operator.

"We are very sorry, Mr. Savage," the telephone employee reported after a time. "We are unable to locate Dido Galligan in Antofagasta, Chile. He seems to have left town by airplane, our office there advises."

"Thank you," Doc said, and hung up.

Monk made a hand-flipping gesture of a bird flying away. "There went our chances of learning what Dido Galligan started to tell you about John Acre when the phone wires were cut."

Doc nodded. He began gathering equipment.

"We aren't, by chance, going to a warm climate?" Monk hazarded hopefully. "It might be a good idea, as well as a comfortable one. Sounds like they're takin' the girl toward Chile."

"It *is* a good idea," Doc agreed.

"Then we're lightin' out after 'em?"

Doc nodded. "We're rolling south, brothers."

Chapter XII. DEATH UNMIXED

COLON, Isthmus of Panama, is something near two thousand miles airline from New York.

Doc Savage, with no stops for gasoline, averaged a little under two hundred miles an hour over the route.

His low-wing plane, from floats to exhaust stacks, was ultra-streamlined. It had wheels; these cranked up.

It was past midnight when Doc dropped the plane on Colon Bay. The floats pushed up sheets of spray. Phosphorescent wake stretched behind like a sparky skyrocket trail.

"Whew!" Monk mopped his forehead. "The plane on fire or somethin'?"

"Never satisfied!" Ham sneered. "New York was too cold. Now it's too hot!"

The pig, Habeas Corpus, grunted under Monk's chair, and staggered out. Habeas was airsick.

Renny folded his maps; he had been navigating, assisted by Long Tom's radio bearings.

Johnny, the bony geologist, was still trying to figure how a quake could occur in quake proof country.

Doc Savage, at the controls, ruddered inshore.

"Look—coming ahead of us!" Ham pointed with his sword cane. A shabby motor launch was crawling out. In it were scores of metal drums.

A thin brown man guided the craft. Trousers and a voluminous white turban comprised his garb.

"A Hindu!" Monk grunted.

The Hindu sheered his launch in close.

"Gasoline!" he called. "Good, high-test gasoline for sale, *sahibs!*"

"

The guy must be a mind reader," Monk muttered. Then, loudly: "How'd you know we had stopped for gas?"

"I did not know, *sahib*. *Affoff!* Alas! In Colon one has to work day and night to live. I meet all planes. Sometimes make a sale. Sometimes, no."

"It'll save time to let him fill us," Renny said.

"

Kya dam?" asked Doc. "What price?"

The moonlight was brilliant. Surprise was discernible on the boatman's face as he heard Doc speak Hindustani with liquid perfection.

"Sixty cents the gallon, *sahib*."

"

Robber!" Monk grunted.

"See if his gas is O.K., Monk," Doc directed.

With a monkeylike agility, the homely chemist sprang to the launch, filled a bottle with gasoline, came back, and entered the plane. For a few moments he analyzed.

"It's good gas," he declared at last.

"O. K. We'll load up."

The Hindu boatman had a large-capacity hand pump on his launch.

"How much farther to Antofagasta?" Monk asked as the loading went forward.

"Antofagasta!" exclaimed the boatman, and ceased pumping.

" *Sach bat!* Yours is the second plane I have fueled tonight bound for Antofagasta."

MONK was atop the cabin; at the words, he almost fell off.

"Was it a yellow plane?" he yelled.

"

Han, sahib!" said the Hindu. "Yes, sir!"

Monk jumped up and down like an overjoyed ape. "What a break, Doc! We're right on their trail!"

"Did you get a look at the occupants of the plane?" Doc asked the boatman.

"

Han! Yes! I saw a man who was most hideous from a great scar across his face. Another was a girl—a girl whose gown was gold."

"Holy cowl!" ejaculated Renny. "She's still wearing that rag!"

"There were others," said the Hindu. "I could not see their faces."

With the plane tanks filled, the Hindu cast off. The instant he had his money, he headed for shore.

Doc Savage noted the haste. His bronze features remained inscrutable, but the gold flakes of his eyes seemed to swirl more rapidly.

"The gang we want can't be far ahead!" Renny thundered. "Let's get this crate in the air, Doc!"

"Wait!" Doc rapped. "There was something suspicious about the way that turbaned bird lit out."

Doc leaped to Monk's portable laboratory. Monk never went on an expedition without this. Doc got a syringe and a glass vial from the compact array of equipment.

Working swiftly, he drew samples from the fuel tanks. To these he added certain testing chemicals. He watched the reaction.

What he found caused him to flip the sample overboard.

"Drain the tanks!" he rapped.

"What's wrong?" Renny demanded.

"That Hindu managed to dope the gas with two chemicals," Doc explained grimly. "The chemicals, separated, are harmless. Mingled, however, they form a powerful explosive, which the vibration of our motors would cause to detonate!"

Renny emitted a roar which probably carried for miles. "That turbaned coot!" He jerked the dump valves. Gasoline sheeted out.

Doc Savage dived over the side of the plane.

DOC SAVAGE'S physical exercises were fully as intensive as those by which he trained his mental faculties. And Doc had mastered the tricks by which strong men do seemingly impossible things.

One trick, he had garnered from the masters of it—the South Sea pearl divers. This was the ability to remain a prodigious time under water. It was made easier by charging the lungs with deep breaths, then diving with only a normal breath in the lungs.

Doc came up many yards from the floating plane. A few silent strokes brought him to land. He crawled through mangroves and under tall palms.

The treacherous gasoline peddler had beached his launch down the shore. With the silence of a bronze ghost, Doc made for the spot. He soon found the launch.

The Hindu was not around.

Doc's flashlight was waterproof. He popped its beam along the earth. The Hindu, taking no chances, had fled the vicinity. Imprints of his bare feet pointed inland.

Doc followed the trail.

The path entered the jungle. The going became crooked and tortuous. Vegetation was matted solidly on either side, overhead.

Doc kicked off his shoes and discarded his socks. His eyes, searching overhead, selected a bough. He crouched, sprang, caught the limb. Easily, he swung atop it. The footing swayed and bent. A great leap put him in another tree.

He mounted higher. Here, where creepers were less entangling, the going was easier. A man accustomed to city sidewalks, though, would have taken one look and said progress was impossible.

Guided by uncannily sharp eyes, Doc negotiated tremendous flights through space. Often he was three-score feet above the earth.

Soon the lights of Colon came into view.

Doc dropped downward, landed lightly on the ground, and waited. The bronze giant was sure he had distanced the Hindu. The fellow would soon step from the entangling jungle foliage, he hoped.

Slight sounds advised Doc that he was right. The Hindu was tramping a jungle path without caution; he could hardly know his peril was now ahead.

Doc glided for the spot where the man would leave the vegetation. He moved soundlessly as a jungle cat.

Before he reached the path, there came a burst of blows and grunts. Sounds of a mad scuffle followed.

"

Doha'!" shrieked the Hindu. "Help! Mercy!"

The sounds ended a moment after that, and there was deep silence.

DOC SAVAGE whipped forward. The noises and the cry could have but one meaning—some one had beaten him to his prey!

The bronze man neared the scene of the fight. He could hear men breathing. Two of them! The breath of one was rasped and labored.

Doc decided one man was choking the other. Aiming his flashlight, he jammed a white glare upon the scene of the battle.

The Hindu was flat on his back. His tongue protruded—because choking fingers were at his throat.

The man doing the choking looked around. He had a tremendous beak of a nose which hooked down over his chin. He came to his feet with cat speed, his hand diving at his coat pocket.

But he never drew the gun. Bronze fingers, the grip of them bringing blind agony, trapped his wrists. The gun

was torn from his pocket.

It was a revolver with almost no barrel—a belly-buster.

The Hindu squirmed, gulping air.

Doc's golden eyes gazed intently. The moonlight was faint, yet he could tell that this man bore a startling resemblance to the man who had appeared in New York under the name of John Acre.

"John Acre?" Doc asked.

The man glared.

" *Si, si!* Who are you?"

"Clark Savage," Doc told him.

"

Bueno!" grunted the man. He kneaded the wrist Doc had grasped.

"A John Acre perished when an earthquake sank a destroyer," Doc said sharply.

The man smiled without humor. "I was not aboard—I left her during the night. A trick, señor, to fool my enemies."

"Why are you in Colon?" Doc asked.

John Acre spoke rapidly, precisely. He told of the series of mysterious murders by quakes in Chile. He described the attempt to summon Doc. His manner was surly, but his voice frank.

"The servants of this devilish Little White Brother are everywhere!" he finished. "I decided to go to New York in person to get you."

"You came north by plane?" Doc guessed. "You had to, to reach Colon so soon. Antofagasta is as far south as New York is north."

"

Si, si!"

Speaking rapidly, Doc gave an outline of what had happened in New York.

"Can you clear the mystery about this other John Acre?" he ended.

"No, señor, I cannot understand it. You say he is dead?"

Doc Savage had a small habit of ignoring questions put by others. It asserted itself now. Instead of answering, Doc indicated the moaning Hindu.

"What about him?" he asked.

John Acre said shortly: "I saw him talking to one of my enemies—a big man with a great scar across his face, and two round holes for nostrils. I followed him. And I was merely choking him to induce a frame of mind favorable to questions."

Doc trickled his flash beam over John Acre from head to foot, then clicked it out.

"I am the genuine John Acre!" asserted the hawk-nosed man. "You may doubt me. I saw in an Antofagasta newspaper where a John Acre was slain in New York. I know nothing of that man. As head

of the secret police, I have agents here in Colon. It was one of them who put me on the trail of the scar-faced man, Biff by name. Biff is clever. He evaded me. So I trailed the Hindu."

THE Hindu got up at that instant and tried to run. He was in mid-air on his first jump, when steel bars seemed to enwrap his neck. He was jerked backward. He thought he saw a chance to hit the bronze giant who held him a terrific blow in the midriff. He did so.

"

Ha'e!" moaned the Hindu, and wrung his aching fist. It had been like hitting a stone.

John Acre leveled an arm at the brown fellow. "This snake can lead us to our enemy!"

Doc shook the Hindu. "How about it?"

"

Doha'e! Mercy!"

"Return my gun!" snarled John Acre. "I'll give him mercy!"

The frightened Hindu eyed Doc pleadingly in the flash glare. "*Aye chahte ho!* What do you want? Save me from this hawk of a man, and I will talk freely, *sahib.*"

"

Who hired you?" Doc demanded.

"A man with a scar across his face, *sahib.* He gave me two chemicals which I was to put in your gas tanks. They would mix and cause—"

"Can you find the man who hired you?"

"

Han, sahib! Yes! I will take you to the man with the scarred face."

"That is Biff," said John Acre. "His pard is named Velvet."

Without delay, the three men moved away. A few minutes later, they trod gloomy streets which reeked with fruity smells of the tropics.

"Return my gun, please," requested John Acre.

Doc seemed not to hear him.

The Hindu stopped suddenly. "*Ahiste chalo!*" He pointed. "Go slowly. Our destination is yonder."

Doc Savage drew John Acre into the shadow of a wall. "You'll guard the Hindu."

The hawk-nosed man demanded: "Return my gun!"

"

You can handle him without a gun."

The next instant, the night seemed to suck the great bronze man away. He made no noise; he traveled with the swiftness of a bat on the wing.

THE house which the Hindu had indicated was a one-story structure of stone. It had two windows; both were

illuminated from lights behind.

Doc advanced. Where a man with faculties less keen would have found it necessary to stop and listen intently for possible danger, Doc made sure there was no guard about without pausing in his stride. He peered through a window.

Two men stood inside. One was of average size, but distinguished by the fact that the buttons on his suit were gold. He wore a gold ring, a gold stickpin. He seemed to have a great fondness for gold.

The second man was stocky. His head resembled that of a rabbit, minus the long ears. He was whistling—the tune was so low that even Doc's keen ears barely caught it.

Doc Savage walked to the door. It was open. He strode in.

The two men stared, jaws adroop. Their hands drifted for hip pockets. But they did not quite draw their guns.

"Who the hell are you?" asked the one who liked gold.

Doc had heard this man's voice before—over thousands of miles of telephone circuit from Chile.

"You are Dido Galligan," the bronze man offered.

It was Dido Galligan's turn to recognize a voice from the phone talk. He grinned from ear to ear.

"Doc Savage!" he chortled. "Feller, you're the first guy I ever saw who looked bigger'n his reputation. What're you doin' down here?"

"Trailing the men who have your sister—Velvet and Biff," Doc explained.

With clipped rapidity, the bronze man gave a synopsis of what had happened in New York. He ended with a description of the attempt by the Hindu to put explosives in the plane.

He did not mention John Acre, finishing: "The Hindu said the man who hired him was in this house."

Whistler Wheeler stopped whistling. "Biff was here, all right. We saw 'im on the streets an' trailed 'im. But he slipped away from here, somehow. Guess he got wise we was shaggin' 'im."

"

My sister is somewhere near Colon!" Dido barked. "Biff being here proves that!"

Doc Savage did not change expression. Whatever his thoughts were, they remained behind the bronze mask of his features. In a town of Colon's size, the hideous Biff could hardly walk the streets unnoticed. He stood out like a wolf in a sheep herd.

John Acre appeared in the door. He propelled the Hindu at the end of a bony arm.

Dido Galligan and Whistler Wheeler stared at the hawk-faced newcomer, pop-eyed with surprise.

"I thought you were dead!" Whistler Wheeler gulped.

"I slipped away from the ill-fated destroyer during the night," John Acre explained, speaking precise English.

Dido eyed Doc. "How did you happen to come to this house?"

With no emotion showing on his bronze features, Doc explained about the attempt to put explosives in his plane.

The Hindu heard this through; he seemed to be in a brown study. Suddenly he waved his arms.

"

Suno!" he shouted. "Listen! You wanted me to show you the man who hired me. There he is!"

A brown arm was leveled at Whistler Wheeler. "That is the man!"

"What?" gulped Wheeler.

"

You hired me!" accused the Hindu.

Whistler Wheeler's rabbitlike face had first shown indignation. Now, as the portent of the Hindu's accusation dawned on him, scarlet rage ignited like gasoline.

Whistler Wheeler was a man of short temper, given to near-maniacal rages. One of his tantrums came on him now. A moment before he had seemed a mild man, with a tiny habit of whistling. Now he was glowering, ferocious—in the grip of a killing rage.

His hand flashed for his hip pocket.

Doc Savage sprang forward—but even his great speed was not sufficient.

Whistler Wheeler was very fast on the draw. He got his gun out. It roared!

The Hindu stood perfectly rigid for several seconds. There was a round hole in the middle of his forehead. When he collapsed, it was as if a string holding him up had been cut.

"He was lyin', the louse!" Whistler Wheeler snarled. "He must've thought Biff or Velvet would pay him for layin' the blame where it didn't belong."

Without the slightest hesitation, Whistler Wheeler surrendered his still-smoking gun to Doc Savage.

"I'm sorry," he muttered. "I go kinda crazy mad that way, sometimes."

Chapter XIII. A SUSPECT KILLED

Two planes whooped through the red light of dusk. One, scudding close to the sea, was a somewhat shabby all-metal craft. Apparently it had good engines. It was reeling off nearly a hundred and fifty miles an hour.

The second plane loafed along under pinched throttles, several thousand feet above. This was Doc's giant speed craft.

"In three minutes," rumbled big-fisted Renny, "we should sight Antofagasta, Chile." He sounded positive.

"I hope the place is the hang-out of this Little White Brother," gaunt Johnny said gloomily. "I'm getting tired of this airplane traveling."

Johnny seemed loath to shed his spectacles with the magnifying left lens. He wore them perched on his forehead.

Homely Monk squinted at the plane flying below. This was a chartered craft. In it were an owner-pilot, John Acre, Dido Galligan, and Whistler Wheeler. Monk frowned with all of his homely face.

"If you ask me," he said, "I don't think we would have to go as far as Antofagasta for us to find where our villain is."

"Meaning Whistler Wheeler, eh?" asked the dapper Ham, who was engaged at the moment in polishing the rich black of his sword cane.

"Sure," said Monk. "Bet he killed that Hindu to shut his mouth."

"I don't think so," Ham said.

"You didn't even see it," Monk snorted.

"I know," Ham agreed. "But the shooting was obviously the result of a mad rage. If Whistler Wheeler had been using his head—granting that he is the villain—he would have known that shooting the Hindu would throw suspicion on himself in the worst possible way."

"I don't like the guy's rabbit face," Monk grumbled. "And I don't like the way he sits around and whistles all the time, either."

"There it is!" Renny's great voice called suddenly.

Gleaming brilliantly in the rubious light of dusk were the colored walls and tiled roofs of Antofagasta. The steel ribbon of a railway running to Oruro, Bolivia, stretched away into the mountains. Near the town were discernible the big silver smelters.

Stringing over the mountains were modern-looking high-voltage electric transmission lines. Underbrush was cut from beneath these lines for a distance on either side, making great swathes through the growth—where there was any growth at all.

"Kind of a bleak-looking country," offered Long Tom, the electrical wizard.

Doc Savage was handling the plane controls. When he entirely ignored the calm surface behind the harbor breakwater, his five men looked very much surprised.

"We're not going to land in the harbor," Doc told them. "This is not the best harbor in the world. If a blow should come up, our plane would stand a good chance of getting smashed."

"Then where are we going to land?"

"John Acre will show us a place, he said in Colon."

"John Acre is another guy I don't think a whole lot of," Monk muttered.

BOTH planes landed on a bleak and only moderately level field perhaps four miles from town. The cabin of Doc's large plane was soundproof and air-tight. The air inside was not only purified mechanically, and the oxygen renewed, but also artificially cooled. The temperature in the cabin was always comfortable.

"Holy cow!" said Renny when he stepped outside. "This country is plenty hot!"

John Acre came striding over, trailed by Dido Galligan and Whistler Wheeler.

Dido Galligan made a disgusted gesture and said: "We haven't seen a sign of them guys with my sister. Sometimes I wonder if they even left New York at all."

Doc Savage made no reply to this.

John Acre frowned at Doc. "I shall call a meeting of the prominent nitrate plant owners tonight. They will want to know that you are on the job." He hesitated, seemed to swallow his reluctance, and added: "Will you attend the meeting, Mr. Savage? I think it would make those men feel better. The series of murders has them worried."

"I'll be there," Doc promised.

John Acre now gave a description of the meeting place, advising Doc how to reach it. He told of the poncho disguises which were placed in the outer room.

"I will hold the meeting at ten o'clock tonight," he finished.

"In that case, you had better go spread the summonses," Doc suggested to him.

John Acre colored indignantly. Evidently he thought this was a somewhat too pointed invitation to depart. He walked off, heading in the direction of the town.

Whistler Wheeler promptly started walking in the opposite direction.

"Where you going?" Monk called, suspicion in his mild voice.

"I have a friend living up here on the hill," Whistler Wheeler said shortly. "I'm going to spend the night there."

Monk rumbled, and made a move to leap after the departing man.

"Let him go," Doc advised.

Dido Galligan shrugged in the gathering darkness.

"Whistler Wheeler and I were good friends, up until that shooting in Colon," he said. "Since then, he hasn't been so friendly."

"Any particular reason for his unfriendliness?" Doc asked.

"Only that I think he was crazy to lose his temper and shoot the Hindu," said Dido Galligan. "I told him what I thought. Guess it made him mad."

"It happened that the Hindu needed killing," Doc said slowly. "Otherwise, we should have been forced to take steps to punish Whistler Wheeler."

"I told him you were being damn white to him," Dido Galligan said. "He told me to shut up."

Doc Savage happened to be watching the distant lights of Antofagasta at the moment. He saw them grow perceptibly dimmer.

It was as if a sudden, enormous drain had been placed upon the current supply.

Far under their feet, the earth began to grumble. The sound increased. It became a monstrous trembling that was like cataclysmic coughing convulsions.

The men found it impossible to keep their feet; they were flung to all fours. Near them, small rocks actually jumped off the ground, so great were the shocks.

Doc's big plane was dancing as if it were an insect which had landed on something hot. The other ship rocked from side to side. The pilot who had flown it here leaped out, yelling in his excitement. A moment later, the plane tilted over, and one wing collapsed half its length.

Suddenly, the holocaust ceased.

"

HOLY cow!" muttered Renny, and began picking up objects which had been shaken from his pockets.

Long Tom scowled at the bony Johnny and said: "Don't start telling us it's impossible to have an earthquake here!"

Johnny said nothing.

The homely Monk yelled: "Where's my pig? Where's Habeas Corpus!"

A loud squealing from the plane interior answered that question.

Doc Savage whipped to the plane. He clambered aboard. It was dark enough now that he had to use a

flashlight. He pressed the light on and stabbed its white beam over the stored luggage. Seizing a stout-looking black steel case, he dragged it out. It was locked. He fitted a key in it.

Opening the case, Doc delved into its contents. His manner indicated anxiety to learn how these had fared in the shake.

Monk, clambering into the cabin after his pig, popped the flash beam on the case which Doc was inspecting.

"Huh!" he ejaculated. "Why so anxious about those?"

"I was afraid the shake had broken them," Doc said. "But it didn't."

The objects in the case were the round wax cylinders which had been on the recorder during the time of the first John Acre's murder in Doc's warehouse hangar in New York City.

Doc replaced them in the case.

All five of Doc's men looked surprised when the bronze giant carried the case out of the plane.

"I don't want to lose this," Doc told them.

Clouds of dust, raised by the quake, were sweeping over the clearing. These had made the night suddenly black. In the surrounding darkness, an occasional rock, loosened by the shake, toppled noisily.

Dido Galligan sneezed from the dust. "Didn't you fellows think the center of that quake was over in the direction which Whistler Wheeler took?"

Monk rumbled deep in his chest. "I knew that guy was phony. I bet he made the quake."

"Let's take a look," Doc suggested.

Glaring white flash beams illuminating the way, they set out. Over his shoulders Doc had slung the case holding the wax cylinders. It was obvious that the bronze man placed a good deal of stock in the records.

Great cracks gaped in the ground underfoot. In spots, boulders were wind-rowed together, like gravel on a shaken sieve. Each step put them amid signs of greater violence.

"The quake centered over here, all right," Renny's big voice announced.

They came to a narrow valley. On each side hills slanted upward. Until a few minutes ago, the slopes had been covered with large boulders. Now most of this rock was down in the little valley, whence it had been shaken.

"Holy cow!" muttered Renny. "Look!"

He pointed—pointed at Whistler Wheeler. The body of the man who always whistled was strangely flattened. A rock nearly as large as a railroad locomotive had rolled over him.

"

I'LL take back what I said about him," Monk announced gently. "I thought the guy was one of the crooks. This proves he wasn't."

Doc handed Monk the metal case which held the wax recording cylinders.

"You fellows take this and go to the hotel," he directed. "We're going to put up at the Taberna Frio, where John Acre has quarters. And guard that case!"

Monk looked curiously at the case. "It's valuable?" he asked.

"It is very, very important," Doc said. "Lock it in the hotel safe—providing the safe looks solid."

Doc Savage now moved away into the night. His flashlight was not blazing. He was lost to view almost as abruptly as if he had stepped behind a curtain.

Doc's five men and Dido Galligan returned to the plane, carrying the crushed, lifeless form of Whistler Wheeler. They unloaded their paraphernalia from the plane's cabin, then placed the body inside. They would send an undertaker out for it later.

Securing their scientific equipment into great packs, the men headed for town.

"Where d'you reckon Doc went?" Renny pondered.

Long Tom, carrying a burden of electrical equipment somewhat larger than his own unhealthy-looking frame, grunted: "Guess he's scouting around to see what made that earthquake."

Doc was doing just that. He was working his way in great circles around the spot which seemed to be the focus point of violence. His flashlight was dark, he was employing his ears.

Doc was searching for a possible human agency behind the weird quake. He prowled fully fifteen minutes, but found no one. Dust raised by the quake had settled so thickly as to cover any tracks, handicapping his ferreting.

Doc returned to the quake center. Using his flashlight now, he searched intensively. He was trying to ascertain the exact nature of the earth spasm.

Doc's closest scrutiny yielded no clues. The cause of the fantastic shake, whatever it was, seemed to be situated deep in the earth's innards.

When he was convinced, there was nothing to be found, he stood in the darkness for a time.

Then he did something which denoted he was greatly puzzled. His small, unconscious trilling note came into being. So low as to be scarcely audible, it rippled up and down the musical scale without adhering to any specific tune. It was as fantastic, this strangely melodious note, as the quakes which seemed a-thirst for human life.

The trilling ebbed. Doc headed for town.

The bronze man had only one tangible clew to the mystery of the shakes—the fact that lights in town had dimmed as the earth began to tremble.

DOC SAVAGE found his five men assembled at the Taberna Frio.

"What did you do with the wax cylinders?" Doc asked Monk.

"They're in the hotel safe."

"Is it a strong safe?"

"I'll tell a man!"

John Acre spoke up: "I have advised all leading nitrate men of the meeting at ten o'clock, Mr. Savage."

"How did you spread word so quickly?"

"By telephone and messenger. That is the usual method."

The statement seemed to give Doc food for thought. He was silent several seconds. He did not, however, express an opinion about the summoning system.

"We might as well get organized, brothers," he said finally.

"The shake was prefaced by a dimming of the electric lights here in Antofagasta," offered Long Tom, the electrical wizard.

"You'll work on that angle," Doc told him. "Attach recording voltmeters and ammeters to the power lines. Better light out at once on the job. No telling when the next shake will come. You brought the necessary devices, didn't you?"

Long Tom grinned. "Sure. I brought 'em because you suggested it, Doc."

Doc Savage now addressed Johnny, the gaunt geologist. "You have seismograph recording apparatus to register earth tremors, haven't you?" he asked.

The bony geologist fumbled his spectacles with the magnifying left lens. He put them on, made a face, and perched them on his forehead. He admitted: "I have such apparatus."

"You will plant the mechanisms at different points," Doc directed. "We might learn something of value."

"O. K.," Johnny agreed. "I'll do that immediately."

"Monk," said Doc, "your job is to visit the earthquake scene, gather rock samples, and make chemical analyses. Furthermore, I want you to secure a core drill, if possible, and take samples from several hundred feet down."

"Some of these mining firms should have a core drill I can borrow," Monk declared.

"What about me?" demanded big-fisted Renny.

"You've done engineering work in the nitrate business, haven't you?"

A faint smile warped Renny's puritanical face. "I superintended the installation of a plant down here one time."

Doc nodded. He had known this. Renny had handled engineering jobs in many parts of the world before joining Doc's crew of trouble-busters.

"You will visit nitrate plants in the arid interior," the bronze man advised. "You better use our plane for the purpose. That will be quicker. Leave in the morning."

"What am I to look for?" Renny asked.

"Something which might indicate what is behind these earthquake murders," Doc suggested. "Check the plants for operating efficiency. Keep your eyes open for signs of sabotage. But what I want particularly is to know the type of man who is taking charge of these plants when the original owners and managers are murdered. You might make inquiries in Antofagasta tonight."

"I get you," said Renny.

Ham, the lawyer, twirled his sword cane and looked expectant.

"You will snoop in the legal end," Doc told Ham. "We have two big mysteries to solve. The first is: What causes the shakes; the second is: The motive behind all this! You're going after the latter. The legal papers of these nitrate companies—the articles of ownership, contracts, and so on—may hold the explanation."

John Acre had listened to all this with great interest. His hawk face had brightened visibly. He nodded as if thoroughly satisfied with the way Doc was going into action.

"I think I owe you an apology," he told Doc.

"For what?"

"The fact that my manners for a time were slightly uncivil," John Acre explained. "After the incident in Panama, I thought that you suspected me of being connected with the Little White Brother's organization. It got under my skin."

Doc Savage bowed with a proper amount of politeness. But if John Acre expected to receive assurance that he was no longer under suspicion, he was disappointed.

Doc Savage went to the case containing Monk's numerous chemicals. From these he extracted several bottles. A moment later he left the room.

To the men whom he left behind he said nothing of his destination.

Chapter XIV. MASKS THAT DISSOLVED

AN elderly lady whose ancestors had been at least fifty per cent Indian owned the house where John Acre had been holding his nocturnal conclaves.

She was something over eighty years old, and stone deaf. Her honesty was as reliable as her hearing was bad. She was also nearsighted.

Informed by a messenger, whom John Acre had dispatched, that there was to be a meeting that night, she immediately prepared to take her departure. She had been in the habit of making herself scarce at meeting times. This was John Acre's suggestion.

Opening a wooden chest, the crone removed the assortment of poncholike hoods. These had been supplied by John Acre. She was taking care of them. She hung them on the array of nails in the outer room.

Then the old lady tottered outdoors. The night swallowed her.

Her footsteps had hardly died when a shadow beside the door took on life. This murk assumed a bronze color, and whipped into the room where the hoods dangled. There was no sound. The only indication that the bronze apparition was flesh and blood was the fact that several hungry mosquitoes trailed it inside.

Ignoring the insects, Doc Savage busied himself about the ponchos. He examined one, noting the attached hood. He gave attention particularly to the cloth.

Seemingly satisfied with what he had found, Doc Savage produced the chemicals which he had brought from the Taberna Frio. A foray into the kitchen regions resulted in the acquisition of a large earthenware crock. Into this, Doc poured chemicals. The process took many minutes. He watched the color of the mixture closely. Time after time he tested it with hydrometers and narrow strips of litmus paper. At last he was satisfied with his brew.

In quick succession he dipped the poncho mantles in the solution. After each had been soaked, he wrung it out and hung it back on its nail.

The ponchos dried almost instantly. The immersion seemed to have had no effect on them.

When he had treated all the ponchos, Doc flung the rest of his chemical concoction outdoors. The stuff evaporated almost instantly after it had fallen. The bronze man washed the crock and replaced it.

For a time he stood in the door. He seemed to be listening. Then he faded into the outer darkness.

Doc had not used all the chemicals brought from the Taberna Frio. He was still carrying various vials and flasks.

Silence enwrapped the house for some ten minutes.

Then John Acre and Dido Galligan appeared.

THE two men entered the house, went to the room which was encircled by the wooden bench, and waited. They did not don the poncho cowls. There seemed to be a slight friction between the two men.

"I notice that you are not cooperating fully with Doc Savage, now that he is on the scene," Dido Galligan said pointedly.

John Acre's slit of a mouth warped angrily under his hooked nose. He pointed out: "It was my idea—sending for Doc Savage."

"You were very enthusiastic," Dido Galligan agreed. "In view of your present reticence, that seems strange. It was as if you were at first making a great show, not expecting Doc Savage and his men to arrive on the scene at all."

The hawk-faced man made a hissing sound of rage.

"Careful, Yankee! Do not insinuate anything you can't prove."

"You can't bluff me!" Dido Galligan told him shortly. "I'll say what I damn please! Furthermore, it strikes me as strange that you were absent tonight at the exact time Whistler Wheeler was killed in that quake."

John Acre ignored this, but his irate breathing was a series of noisy rushing sounds in the darkness.

"I wonder if that Hindu in Colon could have been telling the truth," he said after a time.

"Damn you!" Dido Galligan snarled. "You're hinting that Whistler Wheeler and I hired him to slip the explosive into Doc Savage's plane."

For a few seconds it seemed there would be violence between the two men. They crouched on the benches, muscles tense.

"We had better keep our accusations to ourselves," Dido Galligan said at last, seemingly having decided on peace.

The pair relaxed slowly. Both maintained an injured silence. Mosquitoes hummed in the hot room. A lizard scampering somewhere made scratchy sounds. Dogs barked in the distance.

Footsteps approached, entered the outer room, and paused there for a time.

John Acre got up from the bench, struck a match, and lighted a llama-tallow candle.

The newcomer came in from the outer room. He was enveloped in the all-concealing folds of the poncho, a shapeless figure in the candlelight.

After peering uneasily at John Acre and Dido Galligan, he took a seat.

Other men arrived soon. They came one at a time. On the occasion of their last gathering here they had exhibited disquiet. Their mien was even more restless now.

One shrouded fellow could not contain himself until the meeting opened.

"We have received threats!" he said in Spanish. He fumbled excitedly under his poncho, brought out a rather unclean scrap of paper, and handed it to John Acre. "Here, look!"

John Acre scrutinized the scrap. It was written in Spanish. Translated, it stated simply that something violent would happen to any one who opposed the Little White Brother.

"I received one of those, also!" said another masked man.

Further questioning elicited information that the warnings seemed to have been distributed generally.

John Acre waited impatiently for all to appear. In his fidgeting, he counted the assembled figures repeatedly.

"Only one more is to arrive," he said at last.

Five minutes passed. Twice, John Acre got up and went to the outer door to stare into the darkness and listen. Then he heard approaching footsteps, sighed, and joined the others. He heard the newcomer enter the outer room, don one of the ponchos. Then the fellow came in and took his place on the bench. The last arrival was breathing heavily, as if he had been running.

ONCE more that night, the shadows at the side of the house seemed to take on life. A murky patch assumed the shape of a man, a giant of bronze.

Doc Savage made no effort to enter the house. Instead, he followed the back trail of the last man to arrive. This was a simple matter—the houses along the street were constructed one against the other, which gave only two directions for a trail to take, up or down the street. It would take a very agile man indeed to surmount the roof tops.

Doc's ears had told him the direction from which the last arrival had come. When he had covered a few rods, Doc switched his flashlight on. This street was little more than an unpaved alley. Dust underfoot was inches deep in some places.

As in most arid, bleak regions of intense heat, there was a breeze in Antofagasta at night. This wind, sweeping along the narrow alley, caused tracks in the dust to fill rapidly.

The tracks which Doc followed, being as yet unfilled with dust, were easily discerned.

Possibly two hundred yards from the meeting house, the trail turned suddenly to the right. It entered the murk of a recessed doorway. Doc advanced and made an examination.

Two men lay there. Both were dead, stabbed to death—in each heart a steel blade was still embedded.

Doc raced fingers through the pockets of the unfortunate ones. There was plenty of identification—letters, cards, business papers. Doc played his flash beam on these, reading the names.

The dead men were both wealthy individuals high in the nitrate industry of Chile.

In the course of his trip southward from Colon, Doc had secured much information from John Acre, Dido Galligan, and Whistler Wheeler. One of the items had been the names of persons prominent in the nitrate business.

These murdered men had stood well up on the list.

Naturally, they were men summoned to John Acre's meeting. The bodies were still warm. Death had struck only a few minutes ago.

Leaving the lifeless forms where they lay, Doc ran back to the house where the conclave was in progress. The speed with which he was now moving would have amazed an observer.

Out of Doc's pockets came the flasks and vials of chemicals which he had brought from the Taberna Frio, and had not used in mixing the bath for the ponchos.

He entered the house silently. His hands became busy, opening the bottles, mixing the contents.

Voices murmured in the inner room. John Acre's was explaining that Doc Savage was now in Chile.

"Savage was to attend this meeting tonight," said John Acre. "He has not yet appeared. I do not think he will disappoint us, however. No doubt he will arrive before we adjourn."

John Acre paused to cough violently. While he was speaking, a strong odor had crept into the room. This caused a stuffy feeling when breathed, but was not otherwise unpleasant.

Peering about, John Acre became aware that a yellowish haze had filled the room. This, being almost the

color of the light from the llama-tallow candle, had escaped his notice.

"What is this stuff?" he demanded sharply.

His manner, the excitement in his voice, caused alarm. One of the assembled men sprang up from the bench—and an astounding thing happened.

With the man's movement, his poncho cowl literally dissolved into a coarse powder. It behaved like the charred ashes of cloth. In a dusty shower, the poncho fragments fell around his feet.

The man's face was revealed.

This caused further excitement. All around the room men leaped off their benches.

In each case, the folds of cloth swathing their faces and bodies dissolved. They stood with features disclosed.

The men stared at each other.

John Acre emitted a shrill yell. He pointed with both his arms, screaming: "Look! Look!"

Standing there, revealed because their masks had turned to powder, were Velvet and Biff.

DOC SAVAGE, mighty man of bronze, materializing in the doorway at that moment, added to the general consternation. Had some one emptied a basket of poisonous snakes in the room, there could not have been greater excitement.

John Acre stopped squawling, and dived a hand for his gun.

Velvet and Biff were not idle. Velvet had evidently used foresight and located the nearest exit beforehand, for use in case the door was blocked. This happened to be a ladder sloping to a hole in the roof. He leaped for the rungs.

Biff, with the stupidity of a man who had depended on bull strength all his life, made a fatal mistake—he sprang for John Acre. Probably he hoped to land a blow before the hook-nosed man could get his gun into action. His plan failed.

John Acre's belly-buster spouted a plume of flame fully two feet long. Its roar was ear-splitting!

Considering his haste, the shot was remarkably accurate. A rectangular cavity appeared above the two fuzzy holes which were Biff's nostrils. The slug from the belly-buster, untwirled by rifling, had struck sidewise. A major alteration took place in the shape of the top of Biff's head.

There was not the slightest doubt but that Biff died instantly. But he came plunging on. One of his fists aimed a great wild blow. John Acre, leaping to one side, evaded it.

Biff hurled on, slammed into the wall, and slipped down to the floor. He did not move again.

Slanting his stubby gun upward, John Acre fired at Velvet. The wiry crook, however, had been too quick. He jerked himself out on the rooftop, and the bullet only knocked splinters from the ladder.

John Acre wheeled for the door. A moment before, he had seen Doc Savage there. He intended to tell the bronze man to watch the outside. But Doc was gone.

In mad haste John Acre mounted the ladder. He scrambled out on the mud roof; then he listened.

To the left, footsteps pattered. John Acre fired recklessly at the sound. The powder blazes from his belly-buster lighted the surrounding roof like red lightning. The bulldog gun, terrible implement though it might be at close quarters, was no weapon for target shooting. At fifty feet, it was doubtful if the most expert marksman could hit a man-sized objective except by accident.

Cursing vitriolically, John Acre leaped for the roof edge. The moonlight was tricky. He miscalculated his distance, and as a result plunged to the hard earth below. He lay there for a few seconds, stunned, gagging in the dust which his fall had raised.

By the time he regained his feet, the night had entirely hidden Velvet.

VELVET, had John Acre but known, had heard the fall from the roof. The sound was highly satisfactory to the fleeing masquerader.

"I hope he busted his neck," Velvet gritted.

Although the scene of his operations for the last few years had largely been in South America, Velvet was a product of the New York underworld.

Biff had been spawned by a swamp district in a Southern State, an environment almost as conducive to crime as Velvet's. Biff had also ranged South America for some time.

They were birds of a feather, Velvet and Biff. They had been working together for weeks.

"Biff was a dumb cluck!" Velvet told himself callously. "It's a wonder he didn't get his before this."

Velvet kept running. Speed was more important than caution, so he took no pains to go furtively. When he had covered nearly a quarter of a mile, however, he slowed up and progressed more warily.

His route led to the edge of the town, then to the right. This latter course took him directly into the bleak hills. The going became very rough. Producing a flashlight, he used it frequently to avoid cactus.

The surrounding terrain was indescribably barren. Should the average individual be asked to name the spot on the earth which receives the least rain fall according to official records, he would probably designate the Sahara Desert. Told that he was wrong, he might fall back on Death Valley or the Gobi Desert.

Possibly some one well informed might bring forth the correct answer—that the northern portion of Chile is quite the driest region of which there is any record. Over a twenty-one-year period, the annual average of rainfall at a certain point in northern Chile was only six tenths of an inch.

The way which Velvet traveled showed the effects of the scant rainfall. The rocks were very rough to the touch; although it had been dark for hours, the heat of day still lingered. Famished night insects pursued the wiry crook.

Velvet's manner showed that he had a definite destination, and was in a hurry to get there. He entered a narrow canyon. Stony heights shot up sheer on either side.

"

Que es eso?" rapped a voice from the darkness ahead. "What is that?"

Had Velvet been thoughtless enough to call his name, it would have been his finish. The query from the guard required a certain answer—a password.

"I am a black man," said Velvet. "But my brother is little and white."

"

Bueno!" said the guard. "What do you know, comrade?"

Velvet advanced until he recognized the fellow.

"

Buenas tardes, Pedro," he said. "Good evening. It is important that I talk to our chief, the First Little White Brother."

"

Muy bien," said Pedro. "Very well. But I had better accompany you. Some of those other fools might shoot you by mistake."

THE two men came shortly to a stone house, a structure of considerable size. A low stone wall encircled it. This was blocked off in the rear to form a corral, which held several saddle horses. The animals were all saddled, as if for a quick get-away.

Half a dozen men came out of the house as Velvet and his escort approached. Sounds indicated there were others inside.

"The First Little White Brother," Velvet said impatiently. "Take me to him."

"Did not Pedro tell you?" growled one of the men. "The First Little White Brother is not here."

"I did not know," Pedro said. "I am sorry."

"Will he be back?" Velvet demanded.

"No. But you can get him on the telephone if it is important."

"It's plenty important." Velvet glanced up. A telephone wire slanted from the house up the precipitous canyon walls. It led in the direction of town.

Velvet entered the house hastily, and went to the telephone. It was a somewhat old-fashioned instrument, resembling a type used in the United States twenty years ago. Turning a crank on the side summoned the central operator.

Velvet gave this crank a twirl. He placed his lips close, to the mouthpiece when he asked for his number.

Apparently he received an answer. He spoke for some seconds, still in a near-whisper, got a reply, grimaced, and hung up.

"The First White Brother is not there," he told the men around him.

"Where is Biff?" one of the men asked.

"That's why I wanted to report," Velvet replied. "Biff got his. We got into that meeting all right by croaking two of the guys that were to attend it. We didn't have no trouble with that. We just waylaid both of 'em a couple hundred yards from the meeting place."

"You were discovered in the meeting?"

"And how!" Velvet grumbled. "The damndest thing happened. We were sitting there with our guns in our pockets, waiting for Savage to appear. We were gonna fill him full of lead. All of a sudden—presto! Our masks turned to powder!"

The listeners exchanged glances, extremely doubtful glances as they digested the explanation.

"I know it sounds goofy," Velvet grumbled. "But that's what happened. The cloth just simply turned to powder and fell off of us. There we were. That slug-simple Biff jumped at the wrong guy. He got a bullet just over the nose for his pains. By scratching gravel, I got away."

One of the men who had heard the story laughed softly. Of the group, it was he who presented the most intelligent appearance. His forehead was high. His eyes and mouth, however, were cruel.

"The cloth turning to powder is not such a mystery," he said.

"Yeah?" Velvet eyed him. "You're pretty smart, being one of the First Little White Brother's main assistants. Maybe you can explain how it was done."

"Did a rather strong vapor appear in the room just before the cloth turned to dust?" the man asked.

Velvet nodded.

"The masks had evidently been treated with some chemical beforehand," said Velvet's informant. "I can tell you the name of the chemical, but it would be only a technical jumble. The vapor was that of a second chemical mixture. This penetrated the cloth, resulting in a reaction which dissolved the fabric. In other words, the two chemicals formed a mixture which worked upon the cloth like an acid, literally eating it up."

A powerful, vibrant voice rumbled from the doorway.

"You seem to be something of a chemist," it said.

Those in the room turned eyes upon the door, to goggle at the giant bronze man who had suddenly appeared there.

ONE second—two—and the shocked suspense snapped. As if an electric switch had been thrown, the men came to life. They reacted different, according to their opinions of Doc Savage's fighting abilities.

Velvet emitted a squawk of horror and dived for the nearest window.

The other men dragged out their favorite weapons—guns, knives, ugly little bludgeons of lead. Two of them produced weapons which were peculiar to South America. These were bolas—leather thongs with blobs of metal affixed to one end, and with the other ends tied together in a turkey-foot design. Using these, an expert thrower could tie a victim up helplessly.

A fiercely belligerent horde, the men plunged for Doc Savage.

What occurred then was probably the last thing they would have dreamed of in their wildest nightmare. Doc Savage whipped backward into the night. He did this so swiftly that one of the men, aiming at the moment, pulled the trigger, under the impression that the bronze giant was still in front of his gun.

The bullet split thin air, went through the door, crossed the canyon, and angled off a face of rock with a shrill moan.

The man who had fired was leading the charge. Immediately following his shot, his legs seemed to become bogged in invisible mud. They ceased to move. The man plunged forward on his face. An instant after he hit the floor, he began to snore loudly.

The same weird thing happened to each of the other men in succession.

Scattered about their prone forms, a close observer might have noted many pieces of thin glass—fragments of small bulbs. These had contained an odorless, quick-acting gas, which had dropped the men. The glass of the containers was extremely thin—none of the men had heard it breaking as Doc tossed the bulbs inside a moment before appearing in the door.

Outside, Doc Savage sped in pursuit of Velvet. The house had long wings jutting out on either side of the main room. Velvet had leaped through a rear window. Doc was forced to circle the structure.

Rounding the end of one wing, he heard the staccato rattle of hoofs. Velvet had reached one of the saddled horses.

Wood broke with a crash and ripping. The man had ridden down the gate, not taking time to open it.

Doc, around the corner of the house, vaulted the corral fence. Horses were plunging in the inclosure, wildly excited. Velvet, it seemed, had slashed the reins with a knife, in the hope that the animals would stampede.

Capturing a stock dun bronc, Doc started to swing aboard. He never completed the mount.

From behind him in the house a feminine cry pealed out. Doc had last heard that voice in New York, but it

was one not hard to recognize again.

It was Tip Galligan.

"Don't leave me here!" she was shrilling.

Chapter XV. PRISONERS FOUR

DOC SAVAGE, halfway into the saddle, dropped back to the ground. He quitted the corral as hastily as he had entered. The saddled horses, milling and wheeling, flashed out through the gate broken down by Velvet.

"Miss Galligan!" Doc called sharply.

"Over here," said the young woman's voice from the left wing of the house.

The room behind the window was dark. Doc approached warily. The gas with which he had vanquished the other men evidently had not spread this far. No doubt the night wind had swept it back.

The gas was Doc's anaesthetic concoction which spread quickly and became harmless after being diffused with the air for perhaps a minute.

"Is there a guard inside?" he called.

"No," said the young woman. "Something seems to have happened to him."

From the amount of caution Doc used, an observer would have thought the girl had told him the place was heavily sentineled.

He entered the house. The air was heavy with old cooking and perspiration odors.

The girl's statement had been accurate. There were no other guards about. Doc found the door of her prison. There was no lock on it. It was secured by a ponderous, weighty metal bar on the outside. Doc operated the bar, pushed the door open.

Tip Galligan stumbled out. She still wore her striking evening gown of gold cloth. She had ripped off several inches at the bottom in order to make it less hampering. She had donned a gaudy poncho. Her boyish-bobbed head was bare.

"You didn't know I was here?" she demanded.

"No."

"I thought so. From the window, I saw you leaving. That's why I yelled," Doc guided her toward the exit.

"How long have you been here in Chile?" Doc asked.

"Only a few hours. They must have had a fast plane. They kept me blindfolded, and I couldn't see them or their plane. But I heard them brag that no other craft could overhaul them. Later, when they found your ship had a greater speed, they had long faces."

Doc Savage had been listening intently. Suddenly he seized the girl; his corded arms lifted her as easily as if she had been without weight.

"Why—you—" She struck angrily at him. The blows did nothing but make her fists ache.

The very earth on which the house stood seemed to have awakened to a hideous life. A vast grumbling and roaring filled the air.

TIP GALLIGAN realized why Doc had scooped her up. She ceased resisting.

"One of the quakes!" she cried.

Doc replied nothing. He had started back for the large central room. It was his idea to endeavor to carry one or more of the unconscious men to safety, as well as the girl.

The ancient and infirm construction of the house thwarted Doc's intention. A portion of the roof came down in his path. A wall keeled over.

Dodging débris, Doc veered through the aperture made by the toppling wall. The girl was carried easily atop his shoulder.

The earth convulsions increased in violence. Great boulders were beginning to loosen and come jumping down the canyon slopes.

Doc made one more attempt to reach the men asleep in the large room. The roof of the chamber collapsed as he was on the point of entering. He spun away.

The men were doomed, despite anything he could do.

The saddle horses had all escaped the corral at the rear of the house, and fled the vicinity. That was probably just as well. Considering the uproarious shudders which were now racking the earth, it was doubtful if a horse could have made respectable progress.

"Hang on!" Doc demonstrated to Tip the best method of clinging to his back, so as to leave his arms free.

Twisting the lens of his flashlight, Doc caused the beam to widen to a great fan. This illuminated the way. The surface of the earth was an eerie sight.

The trembling was causing rocks to jump up and down. Dust was pouring upward like brown steam.

Time after time Doc was shaken from his feet, despite his enormous agility. To save himself from going down, he doubled and traveled for the most part on all fours, animal fashion.

A rolling boulder, a number of times as large as an automobile, plunged toward them from the side. Doc spattered his light upon it. The girl looked, made a choking sound of horror.

A leap of singular length took the giant bronze man and his burden clear. Fresh boulders almost as large threatened them. The huge rocks came down the canyon sides with the speed of diving airplanes. Some of them bounced high in the air, so that the heavens seemed to rain them.

The minutes which followed were things of horror to Tip Galligan. The earth shook itself more and more violently. Great sections of the canyon side detached and slid down; flying gravel pelted; dust choked them.

Just how Doc Savage managed to go through the demolishing inferno, Tip Galligan never quite understood. At least a score of times she gritted her teeth, thinking death was upon them. But always the herculean man of metal who carried her evaded the impending peril.

The pandemonium abruptly took itself away. It was as if an ethereal colossus which had been shaking the earth and snorting thunder had given it up and was scampering away.

THE ground was still quivering slightly when Doc planted the young woman on her feet.

"Stay here!" he commanded. "I'm going to look around."

The canyon was like a ditch which was filled with gravel, some pieces of which were so large that an ocean liner would have had difficulty floating them.

Doc's fabulous strength served him to good advantage as he worked through the maze. He made good time.

The house with the unconscious gas victims inside was buried to a depth of many feet. Doc did not try to dig down to it. It would take hours.

The men in the house were certainly dead, their lives ruthlessly wiped out in what Doc was quite sure was an attempt on his own life, directed by human hands.

Mounting the canyon sides—they were far less steep now—Doc circled widely. If a human agency had caused the cataclysmic shake, he hoped to find some trace of it.

He did not use his flashlight; the electric glow would not have been very effective. A choking pall of dust still squirmed over the scene.

Doc depended on his ears in his hunt, until, near the edge of the shake zone, where the dust was less thick, his light could penetrate. It was there that he found the only thing of interest—a high-tension electric line.

Doc Savage eyed the line curiously. No doubt it carried thousands of volts down from some mountain hydro-electric plant to the smelters and other industrial concerns in Antofagasta.

Retracing his steps, Doc found Tip Galligan exactly where he had left her. His slight nod denoted great approval; the young woman could take orders. Like other men, Doc disliked having his commands disobeyed.

"Did you find any trace of the shakemaker?" the girl asked.

"Then it *is* a human being which causes the quake?" Doc questioned.

"The shakes are made by some agency called the Little White Brother," explained the girl in the gold evening frock. "I know nothing more than that."

"In the course of your captivity, did you overhear anything that might be a clew?" Doc asked.

Tip Galligan considered deeply, finally said: "No."

Doc nodded. "Let's get away from here."

"Where are we going?"

"Back to town."

THE streets of Antofagasta were swarming with people when Doc and his attractive companion entered town. The quake in the canyon had been heard plainly. Indeed, its quivering had penetrated the metropolis with sufficient strength to dance glasses on tables.

Fearing the town itself might be the recipient of some later convulsion, every one was getting outdoors. The citizens were under the impression that the quakes were of natural origin. Many individuals were moving their beds to the streets.

Doc, sighting an establishment which was the equivalent of a corner drug store in the United States, entered it. Using a telephone, he called the number of the Taberna Frio.

Renny's great voice roared out of the receiver.

"Holy cow, Doc" rumbled Renny. "That shake had us worried! We thought it might have gotten you!"

"I'm O. K.," Doc replied. "Have you learned anything?"

"I went out and made a few inquiries," Renny rumbled. "My end of the job, you said, was to learn something of the men who are taking charge of the nitrate plants in the places of those who were murdered."

"

Did you get hold of anything peculiar?" Doc asked.

"

The men are all foreigners!" Renny exclaimed.

"So are most of the men in charge of the nitrate industry down here," the bronze man reminded.

"These all come from one particular country, Doc," Renny boomed grimly. "The country in question is a certain European one which is considered a possible instigator of a future war."

"That throws light on the mystery," Doc said thoughtfully. "It gives us a clew to the motivation."

"Yep," Renny agreed. "These fellows taking charge of nitrate plants are all newcomers to South America, too."

"Have Long Tom and Johnny reported in?" Doc asked.

"Just got here. They've got a lot of papers with inky lines and figures on 'em—their instrument readings while that shake was in progress."

"Tell them to put the stuff in the safe," Doc directed.

Renny snorted. "Nobody is going to take it away—"

"I'm not saying anybody will take it away from you," Doc told him. "But put it into the safe, anyway."

"O. K.," Renny agreed.

"Is Dido Galligan there?"

"Sure, everybody's here! Even Monk's pig."

"Inform that I have found Tip," Doc said.

Doc heard Renny convey this information in an aside from the mouthpiece. Dido Galligan's shout of delight was audible. An instant later, Dido's excited voice crackled in the telephone receiver.

"Where is Tip, Mr. Savage?" he demanded.

"She'll be at the Taberna Frio in a very few minutes," Doc told him. "The whole gang of you stick around there."

The bronze man hung up.

THE Taberna Frio was somewhat agog, and not because of the earthquake which had led some guests to move their beds to the street. It was something else.

"Like wild men, they dashed out!" exclaimed a man in Spanish.

"Who can understand the ways of Yankees?" muttered another.

Doc Savage and Tip Galligan, overhearing these remarks, stopped and exchanged glances.

"Your men!" gasped Tip.

They raced to the suite which Doc had taken for his party, opened the door, and shoved in.

The chambers were empty, except for one man—John Acre.

At sight of Doc and the girl, John Acre's eyes protruded a bit. He looked like a startled hawk. Judging from his expression, he had never seen Tip Galligan before.

"This is the genuine John Acre," Doc told the young woman.

Tip Galligan bowed. "I never did get to see the mysterious man who gave that name and was seized in New York."

"And murdered," John Acre added. "We resembled each other quite a bit, it seems."

"Where are the others?" Doc asked.

"Didn't you phone them?" John Acre asked.

"Yes, I did," Doc replied, "to tell them I was bringing Miss Galligan here."

"But didn't you call a second time?" John Acre insisted.

"No."

"They got a phone call only a minute ago," said the hawk-faced man. "It was from some one who said you told him to call. According to the fellow who phoned, you and the girl had been attacked, and you wanted help."

There was nothing in Doc's metallic features to hint at the ugly shock the words gave him.

The hawk-nosed man shrugged. "They told me to stay here and tell Dido Galligan what had happened—if they didn't see Galligan downstairs."

"Dido was not here when the second phone call came?"

"No." The hard mouth made a fierce, small smile under the beak of a nose. "He left a few minutes before that."

"Why?"

John Acre hesitated meaningly, then said: "He gave no reason."

Tip Galligan vented a hissing sound of angry disgust.

"You're trying to insinuate that my brother had something to do with that fake call!" she snapped.

The chief of the secret police spread his hands. "Señorita, I am merely telling the truth."

"Tell it, then!" Tip gritted. "And let others draw their own conclusions!"

After this outburst, the young woman looked around. Apparently her intention was to assure Doc that her brother could not be guilty of any spurious phone calls. Instead, she stared in surprise.

Unnoticed, the bronze man had quitted the hotel room.

Chapter XVI. A GATHERING SINISTER

IN the street in front of the Taberna Frio, a Chilean gentleman started slightly when a metallic Hercules of a man materialized before him with a suddenness that made him think of striking lightning.

"The running Yankees," asked this giant, "which way'd they go?"

The Chilean pointed. He opened his mouth to give directions, then closed it. His gesture had been enough—the mighty man of metal was gone; already he was a score of yards distant.

Doc Savage traveled swiftly for a hundred paces before he asked another Antofagastan the course taken by five excited Yankees. In this fashion, Doc trailed his five aids the equivalent of half a dozen blocks. Then the

trail came to its ugly end.

"

Dios mio!" exclaimed a questioned man. "They ran no farther than this point."

"Ran no farther?" Doc echoed.

"

Si, si! A large covered truck pulled up to them and kindly gave them a lift. The Yankees did not seem very grateful, but they got in."

A tiny storm seemed to hit the flake-gold pools that were the bronze giant's eyes. He asked: "Is it not possible that men pointed guns at them from inside the truck and forced them in?"

"

En verdad!" gasped the informant. "Perhaps that is why the five Yankees were so reluctant to accept the truck ride!"

For twenty minutes, Doc tried to trace the truck. It was a hopeless task. In the excitement of the night, no one had noticed it.

Returning to the Taberna Frio, the bronze man located the desk clerk. "Did the five Yankees who left so hastily leave papers in your safe just before they departed?"

The clerk nodded, went to the safe, and came back with a bulky envelope.

"This is it, señor."

The envelope bore no name.

"Do you deliver articles from your safe to whoever calls for them?" Doc asked sharply.

"No," said the clerk. "This envelope was left here for you. I was told specifically to hand it only to you."

Doc's golden eyes remained fixed on the clerk. "You still have that other package of mine in the safe, haven't you?"

The parcel to which Doc referred was the one containing the wax cylinders which bore the recordings taken in the New York warehouse-hangar—at the supposed murder of the *first* John Acre.

"It is still there," the clerk declared.

"Be very sure to surrender that to no one but me," Doc ordered.

"Si, si."

The bronze man now opened the envelope, spilling out the contents. There were several graphs on which were wavy inked lines, and half a dozen sheets bearing columns of meter readings. Some of these were records from instruments planted in the earth by Johnny, the gaunt geologist. Most of these were seismographic devices.

A man who had proper training along such lines could study the records and secure an accurate idea of what had happened far beneath the earth during the quake.

The other papers were records of meters which Long Tom, the electrical wizard, had attached to the local electric-lighting circuits and high-tension lines. These registered not only volt and current pull, but

also such fine details as alterations in the magnetic fields surrounding the conveyors.

Just how satisfactory Doc found these results of work done by his assistants was shown, not on the bronze features, but by another sign—one peculiar to this remarkable bronze man of metal.

For a brief moment, Doc's low, mellow, trilling note was audible. The hotel clerk was looking directly at Doc's lips as the sound came. Yet the fellow, not realizing from whence it emanated, peered about curiously.

Doc slipped the papers back in the bulky envelope. He gave them to the clerk.

"Lock these with the package," he said. "And watch them closely. They are very, very important."

Pretty Tip Galligan, a strange figure in her gold evening gown, with the bottom torn off, and with the gaudily colored poncho about her shoulders, appeared at the head of the lobby stairway.

"Mr. Savage!" she cried excitedly. "John Acre has disappeared."

DOC SAVAGE raced to the young woman's side.

"When?" he demanded.

"At least five minutes ago," she explained. "He stepped into the other room. I thought he had a strange expression on his face. I waited a couple of minutes, then I looked. He was gone! Since then, I've been waiting for you to come back."

Grasping the young woman's elbow, Doc hurried her up toward the suite of rooms.

"You stay here," he commanded. "Some one should be here as a medium of contact between my men and myself."

"Do you think your five friends are safe?"

"No," Doc said. "It is obvious they were decoyed away from the hotel. That means a trap!"

"My brother!" Tip Galligan gasped. "It's strange that he hasn't returned."

"Something is happening," Doc told her. "You will remain here. I'm going out and scout around."

Tip made angry fists of her small hands. "I don't like John Acre!"

Doc went to a bag, opened it, and extracted a tiny superfiring machine gun hardly larger than an automatic pistol. He clipped a drum of a magazine in the feed jaws.

"Take this," he said, and handed it to the girl. He showed her how it functioned. Then he directed: "Lock the doors after I leave. Don't open them for any one except myself or my five friends."

"Or my brother," Tip amended.

Doc hesitated. "Or your brother."

"John Acre?"

"Don't open for John Acre!" Doc said sharply.

The young woman pushed her lips together in a grim mouth.

"I thought so!" she exclaimed. "There's something phony about the John Acre business! Listen, Mr.

Savage—was the man murdered in New York the *real* John Acre?"

The bronze man, very busy locking the windows and the other suite doors, appeared not to hear. He left the room, still without replying. He heard the key rattle in the lock—the girl was following his instructions.

The Taberna Frio was not a building of sufficient height to warrant elevators. Doc descended the stairs swiftly, entered the lobby, and made for the street door.

"Señor Savage!" called the clerk.

Doc stopped. "Yes."

"A man just left a note here for you." The clerk produced a crisp, new-looking envelope and extended it.

The envelope bore Doc Savage's name, typewritten. His long, tendon-wrapped fingers opened it deftly. There was a single sheet of paper in the envelope. It bore typewritten words. Across the bottom of the sheet in black ink were five distinct finger prints.

Doc eyed the prints first of all. Two of them were huge. They had been made by the thumbs of Monk and Renny; the other three by Long Tom, Johnny, and Ham, were smaller.

Doc Savage had seen the finger prints of his five men countless times. He could recognize them instantly.

The note was rather long-winded, and not exactly what he had expected. He read it.

Your five companions evidently think highly of you. Believing you in danger, they rushed headlong into the hands of my men. Their finger prints are appended hereto by way of evidence that they are now my prisoners.

No doubt you will be interested in the next earthquake—or rather what it will bury.

FIRST LITTLE WHITE BROTHER

The name which signified such terror and violence, looked a bit silly at the bottom of the note.

Doc turned slowly toward the door.

ACROSS the street from the Taberna Frio stood a building which housed one of Antofagasta's banks. This structure had a roof which extended out over the sidewalk, and was supported by large columns.

As Doc Savage started for the door of the Taberna Frio, a man sauntered hastily away from the shelter of one of these columns.

This man was barefooted, stooped, and had an extremely brown face. He wore a bright-colored poncho, and a panama hat with an extremely high crown. He looked like a human down from the Andes to see the sights of the city.

It would have taken a close observer indeed to discern in the figure of this stooped brown man the normally rather neatly clad Velvet. Having stained his skin and donned Indian garb, Velvet was walking with a stooped posture.

He quitted the vicinity at a good speed. He did not look back too often, knowing very well that this was one way of attracting attention to himself.

Nor did he haunt the shadows. Many persons, fearing an earthquake which might shake the roofs down on their heads, had spread pallets in these shadows for the night.

Velvet was not the only prowler of furtive manner afoot in the streets.

Behind him trailed another man; and behind this one a third. Both these latter wore dark ponchos. They had

hat brims snapped low over their eyes. This combination, coupled with the fitful nature of Antofagasta's street lights, offered an excellent disguise.

The little cavalcade wended its grim way to the outskirts of town.

They entered a swanky residential district. Most of the mansions had two, and even three floors. The central courts or patios, instead of being cramped breathing spaces, were almost small parks.

Velvet entered one of these near-palaces.

The first of the two figures which trailed Velvet turned off cautiously a few yards from the house, and entered the shrubbery. Such bushes as were about the place were extremely scrawny. Only because the night was rather dark did they offer concealment.

The man stopped there, waiting. It was Dido Galligan. From an armpit holster, he drew a serviceable automatic. Making sure the cartridge clip was full and securely in place, he jacked the slide back to cock the weapon, then holstered it. He let the safety off.

At that moment, the other fellow who had come in the wake of Velvet approached. Dido Galligan shifted his position slightly, so that he was in greater concealment. He peered out at the new arrival. Obviously, he had not known of the man's presence.

"John Acre!" he breathed.

DIDO GALLIGAN was here because of a determination to see the kidnapers of his sister punished. Immediately after Doc Savage had telephoned the Taberna Frio that he had rescued Tip Galligan, Dido had gone downstairs that he might see his sister a bit sooner. He had chanced to see Velvet prowling around. He had been trailing him since.

Dido Galligan crept toward John Acre, only to discover the hawk-nosed man had moved. Indeed, he had disappeared.

With increasing haste, Dido searched. He concluded John Acre must have gone inside the mansion.

Feeling along a wall, Dido located a window, heavily barred. The bars offered handholds by which a window above could be reached. This one was not grilled, nor was the sash of the window locked.

Without much effort, Dido Galligan got it open. A moment later he was inside.

The room in which he found himself was very dark. He got down on all fours and felt his way ahead in order not to upset any furniture.

He soon found himself able to look down into the patio. This consisted of shrubbery, flowering vines, a fountain, and numerous statues. It was like a hole in the middle of a square doughnut.

More than a dozen men were in the patio. All were richly dressed. One thing was noticeable about these men—their eyes had a certain glitter; their manner a certain grimness. An experienced psychologist would have realized they were fanatics, men who gave their whole souls to some cause.

The men seemed to be waiting for something. Velvet appeared among them. The patio was dimly lighted by shaded electric bulbs. Velvet, Dido Galligan could see, was grinning widely.

"I left the note at Doc Savage's hotel," Velvet announced.

"Good!" some one told him. "The First Little White Brother is to arrive soon. He will be pleased."

Dido studied the men below. A surprising fact dawned on him. All of the men were prominent in the Chilean nitrate industry! Some owned plants. Others were managers.

Dido fingered a gold coat button thoughtfully. He knew the nitrate industry, being engaged in it. He knew that

the dozen men in the patio practically controlled the nitrate industry of South America—since the recent series of deaths. Each of these men had stepped into shoes which death had emptied.

Equally surprising was the fact that none were Chileans. Nor were they Yankees.

Dido stared more closely. He was sure that they all came from the same European country.

There was a stir in the patio. Eyes sought a doorway directly beneath Dido.

"The First Little White Brother!" some one breathed in awed tones.

"

YOUR attention, gentlemen," said a powerful voice. "I am the First of you—the First Little White Brother."

Dido Galligan, straining his ears, could not decide whether or not there was anything familiar about the voice. He remained perfectly motionless and listened.

"For a time, I thought it might be necessary to postpone our meeting," continued the newcomer. "This man Savage was pressing us. However, we had good fortune. We seized all five of Savage's men. And I have a scheme for the finish of Savage himself."

Dido grimaced. If what he had seen of Doc Savage was any criterion, the fellow below was slightly optimistic.

"But enough of Savage," said the First Little White Brother. "We must perfect details of our organization."

The speaker hesitated and moved about. Dido hoped he would step out into view, but it was a vain hope.

"Only three or four men remain to be eliminated," continued the sinister one. "Then we will have an unbreakable hold on the nitrate industry. After that, we will begin disposing of Chilean government officials who might be unfriendly to our cause."

Dido wet his lips uneasily. The plot of the Little White Brothers, it seemed, was tremendous in scope.

He understood now that the Little White Brothers were an organization, a secret society of a European nation. A secret society which had some sinister purpose. If he could just find out what their objective was!

He learned very soon.

"In another month we will be ready to eliminate the leaders in our country who do not desire war," continued the speaker. "Then will come the war to give us our rightful place in the world."

The excitement that rippled over the patio did more than anything going before to convince Dido Galligan that he was observing a gang of political maniacs. He gripped his automatic tightly.

"When the supreme war comes," the man below announced loudly, "it is important that we have nitrates, so essential to the manufacture of explosives."

Nitrates! Dido understood fully now. He was a nitrate man. Very well did he know that glycerin was treated with sulphuric and nitric acids to get nitroglycerin, the explosive. A chemical product known as toluene, treated with nitrates, gave TNT, super-explosive famous in the World War. And there were others.

"Financed by certain munitions manufacturers of our country, we have almost reached our objective of controlling this great nitrate center of the world," proclaimed the First Little White Brother.

With that, the man stepped out into the patio.

For the first time, Dido actually saw the fellow. In his astonishment, Dido almost fell into the patio. He could hardly credit his eyes.

"That guy is John Acre!" he gasped.

THE hawk-nosed man beat his chest in the dim light of the patio.

"I, the First Little White Brother, will be elevated to dictator of my country when the great war comes," he declared. "Perhaps I shall be dictator of all nations in the world. Mussolini—Hitler—they will be nothing as compared to me!"

In the rear of the patio a man sprang atop the head of a stone ornamental lion. He waved his arms in a zealous frenzy.

"Cheer, comrades!" he howled. "Cheer the man who created the device which made possible our power—the machine which makes the earth tremble! Cheers for the First Little White Brother— *the earth shaker!*"

"

Silence, fool!" rapped hawk-face. "You may be overheard."

Dido Galligan saw the hook-nosed personage whom he believed to be John Acre summon three men from the assembled zealots.

"We must discuss in a more private fashion the next eliminations of nitrate owners," said the hawk-faced man.

The men disappeared into the house.

His automatic gripped tightly, Dido Galligan left his observation point. He had determined to find John Acre and capture him if possible—shoot him down if necessary.

Finding a stairway, he descended. The carpet was thick, muffling. The rooms for the most part were unlighted, but from the patio windows a few light rays slanted.

Ahead of Dido, a man crept in front of a window. Dido froze. The man ahead was John Acre! And only a double arm-length away!

Automatic jutted out, Dido Galligan leaped. He found the capture ridiculously easy.

John Acre's attention seemed to be riveted on something ahead. His first intimation of peril was the automatic snout jammed in the small of his back.

"Quiet!" Dido Galligan whispered.

John Acre was a cautious soul. He lifted his hands very slowly, then turned his head.

"

Dios mio!" he grunted.

"You are one of those devils!" Dido Galligan gritted.

John Acre rammed his beaked features out. " *Que!* What? You trying to accuse me of what you are yourself guilty of?"

"Quiet, you snow-plow-nosed tramp! What're you talkin' about?"

"Simply that I trailed you here, hombre!" grated John Acre. "From a window in a suite in the Taberna Frio I saw you creeping about. I went down and followed you here."

"Liar!" snarled Dido. "I just saw you in the patio—"

Lights came on, washing the room with scalding whiteness.

FROM a door across the room, a voice bawled in Spanish. "There they are! I knew I'd heard voices!"

Dido Galligan cursed. In his excitement he had allowed himself to speak too loudly. He had been heard. He slanted his automatic at the nearest man and fired. He was not an expert shot. His bullet chiseled plaster off a wall.

John Acre now surprised Dido. The hawk-faced man's hand darted into his clothing, came out with his terrible little belly-buster. The gun blatted an ear-splitting roar—and one Little White Brother collapsed.

A thrown knife glinted as it whistled through the air. Dido Galligan ducked wildly, and shot at the knifeman. The fellow toppled over.

John Acre's belly-buster emitted another whooping roar!—and a second Little White Brother dropped. At this range, the sawed-off gun was death itself.

Then the lights went out.

The foes charged in the darkness. In the avalanche, Dido was flattened. He lost his gun.

Terrific struggling beside him denoted John Acre was also fighting.

Dido's arms were pinned, his wrists looped by leather thongs.

The lights came on.

Dido stared at John Acre, hardly able to believe his eyes. The hawk-faced man was also bound. Dido and John Acre were carried into the patio.

Then some one squawked in horrified surprise, and leveled an arm.

Dido Galligan followed the gesture. His eyes grew wide, his pulse leaped.

"Doc Savage!" he howled.

Doc had trailed Dido and John Acre here. He had, unfortunately, been on top of the house—an excellent observation point—when the fight started.

Doc, Nemesis of bronze, was hurtling across the patio. In the fitful light, he seemed a giant several times the size of any normal human.

The Little White Brothers howled. They had their guns, began shooting. They fired wildly, and as swiftly as possible.

Doc Savage might be able to do many things of a virtually incredible nature, but he could not turn bullets. He dived to the side—down—got behind a fountain.

Dido Galligan and John Acre were whisked from the patio in response to a low command. Doors opened, then slammed behind them. They were tossed into a large touring car.

A man, leaning over, crashed the barrel of a revolver against their heads. Pain-shot blackness clapped down on them.

A shadowy figure entered the touring car.

"Go back and dispose of that bronze devil!" the newcomer grated.

His men obeyed. The car hurtled away into the night.

Back in the patio, shooting suddenly ceased. Men stood perfectly still; strange expressions overspread their faces. Then they began toppling into flower beds. Once down, they snored loudly.

Doc had released his anesthetic gas. At numerous points in the patio, fragments of the tiny glass bulbs glistened in the feeble light.

Not one of Doc's foes retained his feet.

Doc released his breath—he had been holding it until the gas should become ineffective—and plunged into the outer darkness. He stood there, motionless as a creation of the metal which he resembled.

The First Little White Brother had made good his escape with Dido Galligan and John Acre.

Chapter XVII. THE DEATH SHAKE

"

IF you ask me," Tip Galligan clipped, "they should have been hung!"

The young woman no longer wore her gold evening gown. During the last two days, she had visited Antofagasta shops. The frock she wore was cut along military lines—imitation epaulets, on the shoulders, and the belt buckle were of gold. She seemed to share her brother's love for the yellow metal.

Tip was giving her personal opinion of what should have been done with the Little White Brothers whom Doc had captured—from the most prominent nitrate man, down to Velvet.

A steamer had sailed that morning for New York City. In a cabin aboard were the Little White Brothers. Their faces were bandaged—nobody had been given a chance to recognize them as prominent nitrate men. They were asleep from a drug, and would remain so until given an antidote by men from Doc's criminal-curing institution in up-state New York.

Doc was working. He seemed not to hear Tip.

"What have you learned?" the young woman questioned him.

"Don't ask so many questions," Doc said shortly.

Tip looked indignant. She was a very attractive bit of femininity, and obviously unused to mere males giving her short answers. During the past two days, she had seen a great deal of Doc. Her admiration for the bronze man had increased to a marked degree.

Doc Savage had noticed this with no delight at all. He could read signs. The young woman was falling in love with him, and there were no provisions for feminine entanglements in Doc's perilous career.

"You don't need to be snippy about it!" Tip told him peevishly.

"This work is highly technical," Doc said patiently. "As you know, I've been going over the recordings of instruments planted by Long Tom and Johnny. Furthermore, you'd need a lengthy course in electricity and geology before you'd understand any detailed explanation."

"Oh, all right!" said Tip, and flounced from the room.

Doc went on with his work.

He had received no word about the fate of his five men. No threat had come from the First Little White Brother. This in itself was an ominous portent.

Search as he might, Doc had been unable to get a trace of where his friends were held—if they were still alive.

The door flew open suddenly. Tip Galligan appeared, crying: "Look what just came in!" In both her shapely hands she held Monk's homely pig, Habeas Corpus. Around the shoat's neck was a leather thong. To this was tied a tiny bundle of cloth.

Doc Savage whipped forward. Habeas Corpus had disappeared at the time Monk and the others were seized. Habeas, the world's homeliest pig, had no doubt been captured along with his owner.

Doc plucked the little bundle of cloth out of the thong. He unwound it. There was paper inside—a note.

"

YOUR friends!" pretty Tip Galligan gasped. "They sent the pig to you with a note!"

Doc spread the missive out. It read:

We are being held in the Canyon of the Red Llama. A map will show you its location. We are locked in an abandoned mine located where the canyon narrows to a gash—a place called the Red Llama's Throat.

Most of the time, there is no guard around. But we can't get out without help. Please rush aid.

MONK

Carrying the message, Doc strode to an inner room. He had fitted this chamber as a temporary laboratory. From a bag, he produced a small ultra-violet lantern.

He bathed Monk's missive with the invisible "black light" beams. On the paper, hitherto unseen lettering sprang out with a weird electric blue glow.

Tip, watching, gasped. She knew what had occurred—from her experience as an espionage agent.

"Invisible chalk," she exclaimed. "A compound which fluoresces when exposed to ultra-violet light!"

"Right," Doc told her. "Each of my men carries a tiny bit of it glued on his scalp, close to the hair roots."

They read the second hidden message:

Ignore this note, Doc. The masked guy who is holding us is making me write it. He was going to shoot Renny if I didn't, so I had to give in. If it had only been Ham, I'd have held out.

MONK

"

Did he mean that—about Ham?" Tip asked, somewhat aghast.

"Either one of those fellows would die to save the other one," Doc told her.

Tip sighed. "It takes nerve to wisecrack in a note of that kind. Undoubtedly, they are in deadly peril. It is obvious they are being held alive merely on a chance that their safety can be used to sway you."

"They are being used as live bait," Doc agreed.

Tip eyed him curiously. "What are you going to do about it?"

"Go after them, of course."

"But that's really what the First Little White Brother expected! It's a trap!"

Doc nodded. "And I've got to go into it."

"Why have you got to?"

"Because the Little White Brother chieftain, if he figures his live bait is no good, will—get rid of it. You know what that means."

Tip shuddered. "They'll kill your friends."

"Can you fly a plane?" Doc asked.

"Yes."

"Good! Go downstairs, or to your room, and wait for me. It may be hours; but wait. I'll call you."

"But—"

"Scat!" said Doc.

Tip scatted.

EXACTLY six hours later, Doc Savage called pretty Tip Galligan. The bronze man had a touring car in front of the Taberna Frio. It was one of the largest and sturdiest touring cars he had been able to find in Antofagasta. Monk's pig, Habeas Corpus, was in the front seat.

In the rear of the car was a huge box, smaller packages, and a powerful motor-generator set. Doc had borrowed the latter from a mine.

Twenty minutes later, they were pulling up beside Doc's speedy plane. Doc loaded the paraphernalia from the touring car into the plane cabin. For nearly an hour he made painstaking adjustments.

They took off—the pig, Habeas Corpus, grunting beside the motor-generator.

An hour after that, the plane was moaning over the Canyon of the Red Llama. This was a crack in the earth of no mean proportions. Indeed, it had stretches where it rivaled the Grand Canyon of the Colorado. It was just as bare of vegetation as the Grand Canyon, or more so.

At one point, the canyon narrowed to a cramped throat. At this spot, on the crack floor, was situated an abandoned mine. From the air, the tunnel mouth was discernible through binoculars.

Doc Savage studied the tunnel. If some one cared to watch the mine from a distance, there was only one point where this could be done handily—from a rock peak a mile up the canyon.

This peak thrust up like a finger in the middle of the great cut. It bore a tall, spidery tower of steel—a support for a high-tension power line that crossed the Canyon of the Red Llama at this point.

The peak tip was knotty with boulders. A man could hide there—indeed, the rocks were big and profuse enough to conceal a herd of cattle.

Twice, Doc spiraled the big plane over the spot. He saw no one, could see no signs of recent tenancy.

He pointed the moaning nose of the ship upward until he had gathered several thousand feet of altitude. He touched a lever. Black smoke popped from a delivery pipe aft of the cabin. It strung out behind like a black rope.

The dark smoke became a line which spelled words in the Andean sky.

Tip Galligan, crouched beside the giant of bronze in the plane cabin, held her breath. She had seen skywriting; she was a flyer, hence knew what it took to be skilled at this most difficult aërial art.

She was seeing skywriting executed with an uncanny facility which she would hardly have believed possible. The great plane seemed to turn into the point of a titanic, invisible pen. These words were compact, yet so perfectly executed that nowhere did they blur together.

The words read:

**TO SPRING THAT TRAP WILL MEAN
YOUR OWN DEATH**

It was a very long message, as skywriting goes. Yet it was executed so swiftly that the first letters were still decipherable as the last were finished.

"You're warning him!" Tip Galligan said wonderingly.

Doc Savage replied nothing. He seldom explained his peculiar code, his set policy of never taking human life with his own hands. Nor did he make a habit of mentioning an interesting fact—that his enemies had a way of coming to untimely ends in traps of their own setting, and that oftentimes Doc had warned them against the very fate which seized them.

Doc flicked another lever on the control panel. This turned the big speed ship over to a mechanical pilot. Doc gestured Tip back in the cabin, and followed her. He started the big motor-generator.

"Here's how this thing works," he began. With clarity, terseness, he explained what Tip should do.

There was a device not unlike an overgrown searchlight, its innards a maze of wires, bulbs, and screens. It operated on a swivel.

"Keep it pointed at that finger of rock sticking up out of the valley," Doc directed. "The rock spire with the high-line tower atop it—that's the one!"

THE plane motors quieted like tired animals which had found a place to rest. The ship curled over on a wing tip, went down in a whistling dive; like a rock dropped into a crack, it sank into the throat of the Canyon of the Red Llama.

Doc flattened the bus out half a mile below the mine mouth. The canyon floor was level, smoothed by many cloudbursts. He picked a spot—it was directly in front of the abandoned tunnel—and landed.

"Keep it aimed at the rocky point!" Doc rapped.

Tip nodded. She was holding the weird device in the plane aligned upon the stony peak, using the high-line tower as a bull's-eye. Behind her, the motor-generator set was shrieking.

Doc ran to the tunnel entrance, and called: "Hey, brothers!"

Out of the black depths came Renny's great howl. "Doc!"

Monk's voice echoed: "Beat it, Doc! Didn't you get my warning in invisible chalk?"

Doc Savage entered the tunnel. His flashlight came out when he was beyond the zone to which sun's glow penetrated. He soon found his men.

An iron grille, the bars thicker than the wrist of a man, had been erected across the tunnel. The bar ends were bedded deep in pits drilled in the stone. There was a heavy gate in the grille. It was merely barred and padlocked, the padlock in such a position that the men inside could not reach it.

The lock delayed Doc's skill only a few seconds. A tiny metal probe did the opening work.

The prisoners crowded out. They all but trampled each other in their haste to get to sunlight. Halfway outside, Monk emitted a roar. "Git outa my way, you overdressed shyster!"

Ham said angrily: "I'll get in your hair if you don't shut up, you accident of nature!"

Monk, lumbering outdoors, started to retort, but withheld it to stare at the plane.

"Habeas!" he yelled. The pig was peering through the plane window.

Dido Galligan spied his sister.

"Tip!" he cried delightedly, and started forward.

Doc seized him and held him back. "Wait! She's got a device trained on that hill yonder. Don't bother her—it

might mean our finish."

Dido gulped. "But I don't understand what—"

A metallic, ugly voice came from the tunnel behind them.

"You have no chance of taking off in that plane before the canyon walls will be shaken down on you," it said.

"That's the guy who's been holdin' us!" thundered big-fisted Renny. He dived for the tunnel.

Twenty seconds later, he came out.

"Holy cow!" he rumbled. "That voice is comin' from a little radio in there!"

"It may be some satisfaction to know that you almost succeeded in thwarting our great purpose," said the voice from the radio. "Savage, you have wiped out all of my aids. Only I alone remain. But I—the First Little White Brother—am sufficient."

Monk opened his mouth. Apparently he intended to yell something.

"Save your breath," Renny advised. "It's a radio receiving set. There's no transmitter. You can't talk back to him."

"But where's he located?" Monk demanded. "Apparently, he can see us."

"On the rocky finger up yonder, where you see the high-line tower," Doc said. "He must have a portable radio transmitter."

Doc's five men, Dido Galligan, hawk-faced John Acre—all stared at the rocky spire.

Long Tom chuckled suddenly. "So the light dimming was the right trail, eh? He takes the power for his quake-maker from the high-line. The heavy voltage pull was what caused the lights to dim."

"Right," Doc agreed.

"How does he make the earth shake?"

"When you throw electric current through certain types of quartz, what happens?" Doc asked.

"The quartz expands and contracts," said Long Tom. "Scientists use this tendency of quartz to expand and contract to create ultra-violet sound waves. They do it by sending high-frequency current through the quartz."

"That is as good an explanation as any of how these quakes have been made," Doc announced. "Peculiar strata of rock, silica, and other quartz formations, underlying the western coast of South America, are susceptible to a projector of high-frequency current which this First Little White Brother has developed."

Long Tom chuckled again, apparently at nothing at all.

"What're you so happy about?" Monk grumbled.

"Why," said Long Tom, "to defeat this guy, Doc had merely to have the current shut off the high-line."

"I didn't do that," Doc said.

"Huh?"

"The high-line is carrying its usual load of current."

THE voice from the radio in the mine tunnel said: "You Yankees will now have the privilege of seeing another earthquake."

Silence—five seconds of it. Then, far beneath their feet, there was faint rumbling.

John Acre covered his hawk face in sudden, overpowering terror.

"Use it, Tip!" Doc yelled at the girl in the plane.

"I am!"

Strangely, the grumbling underfoot was not getting louder. It kept on, however. The earth trembled slightly, as if cattle were stampeding in the distance.

Suddenly things happened at the rocky spire that thrust up fingerlike from the canyon floor. A moaning came from it, a monstrous throbbing. Boulders began rolling its sheer sides, bouncing like thrown marbles. Rock dust arose in clouds, as if the peak were strangely afire.

The high-line tower on the rocky cone lurched from side to side. The multiple cables of the transmission system whipped like strings. They gnashed together; electric fire played—it was plainly visible to the men at the mine.

Then came the spectacular climax. The entire top of the rock spike uncapped and slid. The high-line tower collapsed entirely. Then dust and flying rock enveloped the scene like a mantle of dirty cotton.

"Was the First Little White Brother on that hill, Doc?" demanded gaunt Johnny, who still had his spectacles perched on his forehead.

"He had to be," Doc declared. "It was the only point from which he could see that I was in his trap."

John Acre's hawk face was losing its fear.

"But what happened to the rock peak?" he demanded.

"The First Little White Brother's projector of high-frequency waves for starting expansion and contraction of quartz formations is—or was—really in two parts, hurling two beams," Doc explained. "Where the beams intersected, they caused a heterodyning effect which in reality set the quartz pulsating at its greatest violence."

"I am no scientist," said John Acre. "All this is incomprehensible to me!"

"It's possible," Long Tom said.

"Very possible," Johnny agreed.

"Holy cow!" snorted Renny. "Do you have to tell him? Ain't he seen some concrete examples?"

"What I did was to create a high-frequency wave-beam projector, and put it in the plane," Doc said. "Tip trained it on the hill. It intersected the First Little White Brother's projector-beam, and set up contractions and expansions in the rock underlying the pinnacle. It was not a task which required the voltage of a high-line."

Dido Galligan eyed John Acre. "Savage simply tossed this guy's earthquake back at him. Savvy?"

John Acre grinned under his hooked nose.

"I believe Mr. Savage is a man capable of catching and tossing back anything," he said. "Even an earthquake!"

"

COME on," Doc suggested. He set out toward the wreck of the rock spire. "You men will want to see this First Little White Brother. He's some one you know."

Dido Galligan hesitated, then said: "But my sister?"

"Stay with her," Doc told him. "Tell her to shut off the projector. It's no longer needed."

Dido ran for his pretty sister. This, as a matter of fact, was their first actual meeting.

The others pegged after the bronze man. They strung out in a line that progressed rapidly for the scene of the First Little White Brother's finish.

"Who is this guy, Doc?" Monk called.

"Remember the radio operator from the steamer *Junio*, who was murdered in my office in New York?" Doc asked.

"Sure!"

"The radioman was killed because he was trying to bring me messages which a passenger on the *Junio* had filed. The radio operator probably held them up, realizing they meant peril to me."

"The messages were addressed to you?"

"No. They must have been for Velvet and Biff, telling them their boss was on his way to New York. Velvet and Biff didn't get the messages, so they kidnaped their boss by mistake. They, of course, thought he was really seeking my help, instead of coming to kill me."

"You mean—"

"The whole thing is proved by a few words on those wax cylinders which were recorded at the warehouse-hangar in New York," Doc interposed. "The men who spoke didn't know what the recording device was—possibly they didn't think it was operating, if they did know what it was."

"So that's why you took such pains to keep the wax cylinders!" Renny boomed.

They were nearing the spire of rock, or what was left of it. Finding the First Little White Brother's body, it became apparent, was going to be something of a job. The peak had all but leveled itself.

That the maker of quakes was dead was certain. No man could have lived through the cataclysmic destruction of the rocky peak.

Doc's men scattered, hunting the earthly remnant of the strange foe who had sought to control a continent's nitrate industry, that his nation might have the nitrates so necessary in manufacturing explosives vital to a war of conquest.

It was Renny who found the body. He flagged a huge hand above the rocks; his great voice rumbled.

"Holy cow!" he thundered. "This guy had me plumb fooled! Is my face red!"

"He was smooth," Doc agreed. "He came to New York to wipe us out before we learned men here in Chile were seeking our aid. When he saw he had bitten off quite a job, he faked his own murder in hopes of throwing us off the trail."

They stared at the body of the First Little White Brother. It was twisted, broken, and crushed, long since devoid of life.

He had come to an earned end in his own trap, this man who had sought to seize the nitrate industry of Chile. His had been a fiendish purpose, an aim more sinister than desire for worldly goods. The war which he had hoped to foster would have meant, as wars always do, the death of thousands, and the suffering of many others.

His death signified much more than the worldly demise of one man. It meant that the Little White Brothers, an organization made dangerous to the whole world because of its fanatical nature, was smashed. With its head no longer living and its chief members destined for Doc Savage's "college" for renovating criminals, it was unlikely that the world would again hear of the Little White Brothers.

The czar sinister and his menace were ended.

Rather like John Acre's was the hook-nosed, hawkish face of the lifeless First Little White Brother.

The genuine John Acre, chief of secret police, stared at the man who had been almost, if not quite, his double.

"The fellow who used my name in New York!" he guessed.

"The same bird," Monk agreed.

SIX hours after the lifeless remains of the First Little White Brother had been unearthed, Doc Savage sank his big speed plane in a deft three-point landing on the field outside Antofagasta.

"I shall call a meeting of nitrate-plant owners," John Acre announced.

"There has been no mention of payment for your services, Mr. Savage. But remuneration will be ample, I assure you."

"We do not work it that way," Doc told him.

"What?"

"We take no payment for our services," Doc explained. "The usual procedure is, for those who have benefited by anything myself and my men have done, to erect a hospital and establish a trust fund for operating it, so that treatment may be given by the best surgeons and medical men, free of charge."

John Acre considered this.

"

Bueno!" he ejaculated. "And we will have a great celebration when the hospital is dedicated, with you as the guest of honor. All of Chile will want to see the man who has smashed the maker of earthquakes."

"Cut out the celebration part," Doc told him. "Don't depend on me being there."

THE END