



# THE MEN WHO SMILED NO MORE

A Doc Savage Adventure by Kenneth Robeson

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Scanned and Proofed by Tom Stephens

## Chapter I. TONY QUILTS LAUGHING

"

SMILING TONY" TALLIANO was the first to quit laughing. That was only about an hour before he committed the murder. A murder of cold-blooded horror. A murder which had less than one slow second of premeditation.

When Smiling Tony quit laughing, a bronze giant of a man was seated on the stone coping of a downtown Manhattan park. Smiling Tony was shining this man's shoes with an extra flourish and snap to his polishing rag.

Other shoe shiners along the row looked upon Smiling Tony with envy. The bronze man's hair was only slightly darker than his skin. It lay upon his head like a smooth, metallic mask.

The shoe shiners of the row knew the man was Doc Savage.

Doc Savage's own eyes of flaky gold were observing the artistic industry of Smiling Tony. Therefore he was first to see the change coming over the swarthy Neapolitan face.

For the famous smile of Smiling Tony had suddenly become a grin. It was a fixed and frozen expression. It gave him suddenly the appearance of a death's-head. Then it became a horrible, vacant leer.

The expert hands of Smiling Tony slowed in their task. He did not speak. He did not look up. He finished the shining of the bronze man's shoes mechanically. It was as if he had abruptly become the subject for a slow motion picture.

Doc Savage's eyes roved swiftly. He sought for some logical cause for the sudden, sinister change in Smiling Tony. There seemed to be no reasonable explanation. Of the shoe shiners in the row along the park, those not busy were watching only the bronze man himself.

No person had paused. None had spoken. The evening stream of pedestrians flowed unbroken toward the elevated stairways near by, or toward the subway entrances.

Yet the bronze man lingered a moment after he had left a quarter in Smiling Tony's hand. The leering grin was still fixed on the face of the shoe shiner. Always before this, an expansive smile had accompanied the completion of Smiling Tony's task.

Now he only mumbled, "T'anks, Mr. Savage," and stared into the springtime park with his black eyes as cold as ice.

Doc Savage was due in a few minutes at an important meeting of directors of a shipping line.

Before the bronze man there had been other customers. One had been a multi-millionaire. He had handed Smiling Tony a gilt-banded cigar from the half dozen in his pocket. This had been his almost daily habit.

The man of wealth would have been amazed to know these were not the same cigars he had purchased at his favorite stand. In a subway crush, adroit fingers had removed the original cigars. These were substitutes.

This man was due at the same directors' meeting Doc Savage was on his way to attend. Smiling Tony had immediately stuck the cigar between his white teeth. He was smiling then.

The man of bronze made a note mentally. His interest in humanity was broad. Tomorrow he would drop by and discover if the shoe shiner he had known for years had recovered the smile that had given him his name.

BUT Doc Savage was to see Smiling Tony again only after a thousand witnesses had seen the sudden murder on the elevated tracks.

More than ten thousand windows around the park square took on a pinkish, sunset glow. The air was mellow with the new season. The pockets of Smiling Tony jingled with an unusual amount of silver.

Smiling Tony should have been happy. But a well-dressed customer paused and glanced at him. This customer was an old one. He was about to take the seat on the white stone. Suddenly he seemed to have changed his mind.

"Never mind," he mumbled quickly. "There's a fella I gotta see."

As he moved on, the customer shot a look over his shoulder. The eyes of Smiling Tony followed him. The

shoe shiner expressed no particular emotion. He just stared after his departing customer.

But Smiling Tony's lips had thinned out over his teeth. His dark jaws were set and rigid. His dark eyes held something unfathomable. Except for his sleek, black hair, Smiling Tony's head might have been only the skull of a dead man.

Trade abruptly fell off at Smiling Tony's shoeshine box. Prospective customers glanced at the rigid, forbidding face and moved on. This should have aroused some outward emotion. Smiling Tony came of an expressive race. But he only stared fixedly at those who paused, changed their minds and departed.

The dusk on the ten thousand windows of the park square changed the mirroring panes to purple. Crowds surged up the stairs of the elevated railway. Trains rumbled like the rising of a slow thunderstorm. The ground shook with the rolling of subway cars. Manhattan was beginning to move homeward.

FOR more than an hour, Smiling Tony had shined no shoes. This cessation of business apparently failed to excite him. He did not so much as give one shrug of his shoulder. He only stood, staring at the slowly darkening windows.

Sam Gallivanti came along. Sam was a friend and neighbor of Tony's. Sam swung his shining box jauntily by a strap. He jingled coins in his pocket. His stand was a block from Tony's.

"Hiya, Tony!" he greeted blithely. "You ready we go home now?"

"I guess I'm-a ready," said Smiling Tony. "Yes, Sam, we go home now."

Smiling Tony was looking straight over Sam's head. His grin had become a death's-head leer. His swarthy cheeks seemed to have taken on a grayish cast.

"Wassa matt'?" said Sam. "You seek, Tony?"

"I don't feel-a seek, Sam," replied Tony. "She's what you call-a nothin'. I don't feel nothin'."

Smiling Tony gathered up his polishes and rags. He stuffed them haphazardly into the foot-rest box. Sam stared at him. Smiling Tony usually was the soul of order. He always put away his implements with the greatest of care. Now he just pushed them into the box and put the box over his shoulder.

The shoe shiners were jostled together in the crowd ascending the elevated steps. They were on the side where they would take the train to the East Side.

Sam turned with a wide grin. As they pushed through the turnstile gate where a nickel must be dropped, Sam generously supplied the extra nickel.

Smiling Tony's expressionless face failed to indicate any appreciation of his friend's gesture. Sam might have only been rubbing the sore spot of his friend's lost business of the late afternoon. It did not seem so.

One train slid its doors shut and pulled out before they could make it. But at that hour, the human stream continued flowing through the turnstiles. Several hundred persons crowded the platform.

Another train followed the departing string in less than a minute. Sam stuck close to Smiling Tony. Now and then, he glanced at Tony's face. Then he shivered in spite of himself.

"When you get-a home, maybe you call-a da doc, Tony?" Sam queried sympathetically

Smiling Tony did not reply to this. He was looking straight across the elevated tracks into an open window. This window was on the third floor of a vast building of steel and stone. The tracks of the elevated were slightly below the third-floor level.

Smiling Tony could see the head and shoulders of one man inside the window. The shoe shiner gave no evidence of recognizing the man as Doc Savage, the last man whose shoes he had shined that day.

Doc's wide shoulders filled almost all of the window space. The upright head glistened oddly in the last glow of the setting springtime sun. It much resembled the head of a golden statue.

Though Smiling Tony did not seem to know it, the man of bronze was studying him closely. Doc's flaky gold eyes had singled him out in all that black mass of humanity packed on the elevated platform near the edge.

For after the bronze giant had entered the ship line directors' room, he had seen the same death's-head grin upon the face of another man. The association of the double occurrence was of somewhat weird significance.

For the other man was the multi-millionaire whose shoes Tony had shined less than an hour before. And this man of wealth was as much noted for his jollity and his laughter in his own circles, as was Tony for his ready smile among his customers.

Doc Savage was now giving Smiling Tony's countenance a more thorough reading. Just as his keenly trained vision could read words on lips at a greater distance than other men, so he could also interpret emotion. Smiling Tony's face lacked all emotions.

And this same vacuous expression had replaced the usual hearty humor on the face of Simon Stevens, shipping line president.

THE long string of the elevated train roared closer. The motorman peered straight ahead. His eye ran along the platform and took in all of the jostling crowd. Passengers were jockeying for positions from which to rush the doors when they slid open. Perhaps the first persons in would find seats.

Sam Gallivanti kept on talking. Though his friend's face was possibly frightening to others, Sam had known him for years. Now Sam dug an elbow roughly into Smiling Tony's ribs. It was a violently delivered blow, though it was meant only as a jest.

"Snap outta da dream!" joked Sam. "You look-a like-a da funeral, Tony!"

Smiling Tony's expression did not change. His eyes only turned slowly upon Sam Gallivanti. His right hand reached to the strap attached to his heavy shoeshine box. The box was hung over his shoulder.

Smiling Tony uttered not a single word. His movement was as if he were merely acting to return in kind the poke in the ribs Sam had given him.

Sam screamed once.

"Tony! You no hit-a—you—"

The words of the scream were lost in the wilder crescendo of a shriek. The higher scream echoed and communicated itself to the tongues of a hundred women. The motorman of the elevated train jammed on the air brakes with such force he hurled passengers in the cars from their feet.

The motorman was too late.

Smiling Tony's shoeshine box flew over and downward. Its arc caught the skull of Sam Gallivanti. Probably it was merciful that the screaming of many women and the hoarse oaths and shouts of many men submerged the horrible grinding of bones and flesh under the wheels of the train.

GUARDS slapped open the doors of the train. Several hundred passengers had heard the screaming. Men and women thrust themselves onto the platform, adding to the bedlam. Those who a minute before had been eager to catch a train, now were rushing back toward the stairs.

Two men had seized Smiling Tony. The shoe shiner still held his box by the strap. Polishing rags dribbled out of it. The men dragged Smiling Tony roughly back into the crowd.

A uniformed traffic policeman from under the elevated was the first cop to lay hands on Smiling Tony. Others

were arriving. Already the elevated employees were at work trying to recover the body of Sam Gallivanti.

Of all the persons the arriving police pushed back to form a ring around Smiling Tony Talliano, none was as unexcited as Smiling Tony himself.

"What happened?" demanded a copper. "Why'd you give that other guy the works?"

"I no geeve 'im the works," said Smiling Tony calmly. "Sam, he's my friend. He push-a me in da ribs. I smack 'im with the box. It is all good-a fun maybe."

Smiling Tony was grinning at the policemen. That death's-head grin. He did not shrug his shoulders or gesture with his hands. His black eyes looked straight ahead. His lips were thinned to a leer over his white teeth.

"Holy saints!" exclaimed one of the policemen. "He knocks the guy under a train because he got a poke in the ribs! An' he calls it good fun!"

"Something's wrong," said the copper who served as traffic policeman at this intersection. "I know this fella, Tony Talliano. He ain't ever been in trouble, an' he's worked that one spot for years. Everybody likes the guy.

"Tony, listen! Why'd you smack Sam like that?"

Smiling Tony looked at the copper calmly, fixedly.

"He push-a me in da ribs," he repeated. "So I push-a 'im back!"

"Good grief!" ejaculated the traffic man. "Just like that! It looks like he's gone off his nut!"

"Smiling Tony looked at him and said, "I'm not-a crazy in the head. I know all about it. I'm all-a right!"

The shoe shiner meant every word of it. He was all right, as he felt about it. He must have been feeling no emotion whatever. The horrible death of his friend, the certainty he would be accused of murder, left him wholly unaffected.

## **Chapter II. A MILLIONAIRE QUILTS LAUGHING**

SIMON STEVENS was a hearty, roaring, rollicking man. His many millions had never made him smug or dignified. When he laughed, his big body rocked with his humor. And he nearly always was laughing.

Not that he wasn't shrewd. No man, regardless of how often or heartily he laughed, could have acquired Simon Stevens's fortune without being canny and shrewd. Nor could any man without a full supply of the keenest brains have been head of the World Waterways Shipping Corporation.

Simon Stevens had been president and controlling stockholder of the World Waterways line for more than twenty-five years.

And no matter how serious the directors' meeting, Simon Stevens could, and did, take time out to regale his associates with the latest in funny stories. The World Waterways directors could afford to listen to these stories, for the past years had not affected the shipping line's splendid profits.

Today, Simon Stevens had not told a single story. When the directors convened, their president was less hearty, less good-humored than usual. He was smoking one of the fat cigars which had been so adroitly changed in his upper pocket. One of the directors quickly noted the millionaire's apparent absent-mindedness.

Simon Stevens's deep voice had not roared once with laughter since he had entered the third floor room where the directors met. For once, the shipping line president appeared to be somewhat preoccupied.

When he entered the board room, he sat down immediately in a big chair at the side. He stared reflectively at his feet. They were, like all of Simon Stevens, ample.

And the millionaire's shoes had been newly shined. For it had been Simon Stevens who had sat on the white stone coping of the park fence. It was he who had left the generous cigar in the grimy hand of Smiling Tony Talliano.

THIS directors' meeting was more important than usual. Recently, the affairs of the World Waterways line had reached somewhat of a crisis. Some Oriental freight contracts had been cancelled because of trouble in China. European affairs had disturbed shipments to the Mediterranean.

Simon Stevens sat, rather somberly for him, looking at his newly polished shoes. It was disturbing. The eleven other directors, or at least ten of them, felt that the crisis might be more serious than they imagined. If so, why hadn't Simon Stevens roared his way into the room as customary?

The eleventh director observed the president of the board more closely than the others.

For this director was Doc Savage. The man of bronze held some stock in the World Waterways, as he did in many other enterprises. This was especially useful to the noted adventurer. For the World Waterways line owned a small group of islands in the South Pacific.

These were the Domyrn Islands. Doc Savage's interest, as usual, was humanitarian. In his many encounters with criminals, the man of bronze caused them to be treated at his sanitarium in up-State New York. Doc's vast surgical knowledge had developed a minor operation on the brain which caused criminally warped minds to heal.

After becoming good citizens, with their criminal careers forgotten, many of these former criminals were left without homes or occupations. The Domyrn Islands had become a haven of refuge for the rehabilitation of these men. There they had been given well paid employment in the nitrate mines.

DOC SAVAGE did not often attend meetings of directors. His time was nearly always engaged in some enterprise of much more excitement and danger. Yet in this apparently prosaic meeting of shipping line directors was to arise a situation of the most astounding consequences.

Doc Savage must have felt this, for he took up his position beside an open window. From this place, he could look directly down upon the tracks and platform of an elevated railway station.

One of the lesser directors coughed apologetically.

"Mr. President," he offered, "I expect we ought to get underway and have it over with. All of us know why we are here."

"Yes," replied Simon Stevens, "we know why we are here."

His voice fell oddly flat, without expression. Indeed, one might have said he was merely a curious bystander without great interest in the proceedings.

The one who had spoken prefaced his next remarks with another cough.

"The idea seems to be that we will save ourselves from heavy losses by retiring about half the ships of the freight fleets," he said. "Our dividends probably will be reduced somewhat. But we can carry on and still show a profit."

"Yes," said another director, "that's the general idea. It's much better than attempting to maintain the whole organization at a loss. We are lucky in having the Domyrn Islands. The big boost in nitrate prices brought on by national armaments ought to keep our net operations about up to the usual figures."

Simon Stevens said nothing.

A director pulled them over the embarrassing lull.

"Well, then I suppose all of us here favor the retirement of as many of the ships as necessary?" he suggested. "Then perhaps we should concentrate on the operation of the Domyne Islands. I would favor doubling our output, or employing more men there."

DOC SAVAGE spoke for the first time. He was watching Simon Stevens closely.

"I had hoped that might happen," said the man of bronze. "As usual, I would like to pass my own dividends to help place more men at work in the islands."

Simon Stevens lifted his eyes to meet the flaky gold orbs of Doc Savage. Doc noted then that the millionaire's face seemed wholly lacking in expression.

Simon Stevens spoke. His words were drawn from some deep well of effort. But his tone was colorless. His announcement was to strike into that luxurious directors' room like a bolt of lightning. He was about to blast a shipping line organization that had been foremost in its earnings over a period of three generations.

Yet his speech was calm, most casual.

"The Domyne Islands?" he said. "Oh, yes. I just now recalled. I sold the Domyne Islands yesterday."

For a full thirty seconds, Doc Savage could clearly hear the ticking of watches in the room. There was one deep, indrawn breath for ten pairs of lungs. At the end of the half minute came the released gasp of all the directors.

"Sold the islands?" spoke one, as if he couldn't believe his ears.

"Fifty per cent of all our stock is wrapped up in the islands!" ventured another. "It's never been mentioned—never even proposed. You couldn't have done anything like that! This board wouldn't stand for it!"

Simon Stevens must have heard. But he did not glance at his fellow directors. He was looking at his polished shoes. The shipping line president was entirely unaffected by the amazement of his colleagues.

Doc Savage spoke quietly.

"If the president wanted to sell the islands, it was not necessary to consult any of us," he said. "A vote by the board is no more than a matter of form. Of course, this is a time when a handsome price would be offered. Several nations would like to have control of the nitrate supply."

SIMON STEVENS looked at Doc Savage. Usually, the president's jowls were shaking with some inward mirth when he wasn't laughing aloud. But the big, rounded face now had assumed lines as stiff and hard as granite.

"Just thought of a good one," he said unexpectedly, and without referring to his own momentous announcement. "Did you ever hear the one about—"

A pointless story rambled along aimlessly for several minutes. Afterward, a director couldn't hold himself any longer.

"Well, if you sold the islands, chief, does it mean we are getting out of business temporarily?" he asked. "Our ships could only operate at a loss. There would be a melon of at least fifty millions to cut from the islands. What was the price?"

"I accepted half a million dollars for the whole outfit," said the shipping line president. "I signed the sales contract at once. We now will vote on the sale of the Domyne Islands. All in favor say, 'Aye.' Those opposed, 'No.'"

"No! No! No! No!!!" shouted ten directors.

Doc Savage was silent. He was watching Simon Stevens.

"The motion is carried," said Simon Stevens, without raising his voice. "The Dornyn Islands are sold."

TEN amazed, unbelieving minority stockholders surged from their chairs. For the minute they forgot they were only holders of minority stock in the World Waterways Shipping Corporation. Forgot they were conservative, middle-aged business men. At this instant, they were a mob of ten, cursing, bitter men.

The director nearest to Simon Stevens was a tall man. He so far forgot himself as to brandish his fist under the president's nose.

"You dirty double-crosser!" he shouted. "Nearly all I've got is wrapped up in World Waterways! You can't sell me out!"

His fist whipped out. Simon Stevens was a bigger man, if he was an older one. The tall director's knuckles rasped across the president's bulging jowls.

No emotion whatever appeared in Simon Stevens's countenance. His eyes, half hidden in rolling wrinkles of good-natured fat, remained as cold and unperturbed as those of some fish. Only his big hand went methodically to a heavy inkstand of carved silver beside him.

The hand went up with the inkstand. The thing weighed enough to have brained an ox. And the millionaire shipping line president was putting the weight of a beefy arm behind the swing. The tall director was off balance. The inkstand could not have missed his skull.

None could have told how Doc Savage had whipped across that room. The bronze giant had lifted to his toes. He was moving with incredible speed, as the inkstand went over Simon Stevens's head. One immense bronze arm became a swiftly shooting steel piston.

The inkstand descended with a crash. The tall director went off his feet. His lanky body flew half the length of the room before he collapsed. But the blow that had caught him was delivered by Doc Savage's fist. It was lucky for the director that Doc had picked out the tall man's shoulder as a target.

Taking the full straight-arm from Doc Savage would not have been much of an improvement over being brained by a carved-silver inkstand.

SIMON STEVENS sat down. Even now, he showed no emotion. Instead of hurling a murderous inkstand, he rolled the fat cigar with his teeth, chewing its end calmly.

Doc Savage was looking directly into the man's eyes. What he saw there was not pleasant.

But the bronze man said to the other directors, "Perhaps we should talk this over more calmly. I am convinced you will feel differently when we know more of the circumstances. Simon, no doubt, has not informed us of all to be told in connection with selling the Dornyn Islands. I have as much interest as any of you. We will listen."

The directors resumed their seats. Doc Savage returned to his chair beside the open window. For probably two minutes, there was the shuffling of men a bit ashamed of giving away to their emotions.

Doc was looking from the window. He saw a swarthy man with a shoe shiner's box over his shoulder. Even at that distance, the fixed, horrible, death's-head grin on the man's face was clear to Doc. His eyes, like the rest of his senses, had been trained from childhood to excel those of other men.

Doc whipped his glance back to the face of Simon Stevens. The pair of faces—that of the multi-millionaire who apparently had just accomplished his own ruin, and that of an East Side shoe shiner—were strangely similar.

One of the directors made talk.

"Then, if I might inquire," he said, with some sarcasm, "who has been lucky enough to buy the Dornyn



Islands for half a million? That's hardly bird seed!"

Simon Stevens rubbed one hand over his big round chin. His voice indicated he hadn't even an office boy's interest in the fate of the Domy Islands.

"I signed a contract of sale," he said, casually, "but it's funny I can't recall offhand who I sold the islands to."

DOC SAVAGE heard these strange words. But he was looking down upon the platform of the elevated railway. The other directors let out amazed gasps for the second time that afternoon. The bronze man was gliding from the room toward the building corridor. He gave no word of explanation.

That announced itself through the open window. Piercing screams of women came from outside. A crowd on the elevated platform was roaring. The World Waterways directors crowded each other at the open window.

One man let out a choking oath. He pulled his eyes from the scene below. He had seen a man's hand stick out from under the truck wheels of a train coach. The fingers of the hands were still writhing. They seemed to be reaching for something that might pull the victim from under the ruthless iron and steel.

### **Chapter III. WITHOUT EMOTIONS**

DOCTOR BUELOW T. MADREN pursed his small, round mouth in puzzlement. When he shook his head, the electric light shone on it as on a polished billiard ball. His hairless skull and the pudgy roundness of his face gave Doctor Madren a cherubic, angelic appearance.

But his eyes were deepset and glowed brilliantly. There was deep, probing intelligence there which belied the contour of the rest of his countenance. For half an hour, he had been asking casual and seemingly meaningless questions.

Smiling Tony Talliano showed no disposition to evade replying to any question he understood. The sudden killer of the elevated platform had been brought to the observation prisoners' ward in the psychopathic section at Bellevue Hospital.

The presence of Doctor Buelow T. Madren, eminent psychiatrist, was to be expected. He was a regular visitor to the psychopathic wards of New York's big hospital. There seemed to be few vagaries of the human brain with which Doctor Madren was not familiar. Yet now he appeared to be plainly stumped on a diagnosis.

Smiling Tony had replied normally to questioning. Yes, he understood that his friend, Sam Gallivanti, was dead. Yes, he knew Sam had fallen under a train when he had hit him with his shoe-shining box.

But what of it? This seemed to be the attitude of the swarthy man with the death's-head grin.

Doc Savage had been listening to this examination for many minutes. Three other physicians, all devoted to psychology, were in the ward. One of these spoke to Doctor Madren.

"Well, what do you make of it, doctor? I've seen some funny cases come and go, but I've got a theory of my own for this one that I'd be afraid to express."

Doctor Madren smiled at the Bellevue physician. His intense blue eyes twinkled some.

"I'm not a mind reader, doctor," he said, "but I'm willing to venture your theory agrees with my own opinion."

DOC SAVAGE also had formed his theory. In the first few minutes of the examination of Smiling Tony, he had arrived at an amazing deduction. But the man of bronze seldom expressed an opinion. And he never did, unless the proof was irrefutable. He was interested in knowing what the trained minds of these psychologists had brought out.

"We'll write down our opinions," suggested the Bellevue psychologist. "Then there won't be any thought of either of us merely deferring to suggestion of the other."

Doctor Madren produced a gold-headed pencil. He scribbled on the leaf of a notebook. The Bellevue physician followed suit.

A third physician smiled and read the results aloud. The wording was almost the same.

"It is my opinion this man is not insane," Doctor Madren had written. "Perhaps it would be better for him if he were. He is suffering from the complete loss of all emotions. In his present state, he could not have murdered in anger, because he would not become angry. Neither could he become joyous, nor sad, nor disturbed in any way by outside influence. While in this condition, he can neither laugh nor cry."

In only slightly different words, the Bellevue physician had given the same opinion. They summed up to the same thing.

Smiling Tony Talliano was held to be a sane man. And as such, without any emotion whatever, he had killed his friend. He could not now feel the emotion of grief or regret. Soon he probably would cease to remember the death.

"So, he is a sane man without emotions," announced Doctor Madren. "And as such, he is unique in the annals of psychotherapy. He could, and would, kill his best friend without feeling any reaction whatever."

The man of bronze now knew Smiling Tony was not a unique case.

Simon Stevens, multi-millionaire shipping man, a respected, trusted citizen, a man who had been filled with jollity, a love of life, had only missed by the fraction of a second becoming exactly that kind of a murderer.

Doc's analytical brain was beginning to evolve some amazing theories. The bronze giant never overlooked the smallest trifle.

THE bronze man knew what the pronouncement of the eminent Doctor Madren would mean for Smiling Tony Talliano. The emotionless shoe shiner would be declared sane. As such, he would be tried and convicted of killing Sam Gallivanti.

The case was made doubly amazing by the queer conduct of Simon Stevens. Doc Savage could not ignore the strange coincidence of the cases. He had almost immediately determined that Smiling Tony, the shoe shiner, and Simon Stevens, the World Waterways president were victims of the same dire influence.

And the bronze man felt this influence must have come from some external source. It was impossible to believe that the brains of two men so far apart in life could have been affected thus by mere chance.

Doc Savage was out of the hospital before the others realized it. He went directly to the crowded public square in which Tony worked. Well directed inquiry developed that Simon Stevens always had his shoes shined by Smiling Tony Talliano. The bronze man had no means of knowing about the cigars the millionaire and shoe shiner had smoked.

The man of bronze was given instant attention at the nearest police precinct station. There they had the unusual murder weapon. It was Smiling Tony's box of shoe-shining equipment. The inspector in charge of the homicide detail was courteous.

Doc asked for and was given samples from the polish in Smiling Tony's shoe box.

As Doc Savage was leaving the precinct station, he recalled that "Monk" was at this time carrying on a technical chemical experiment. He was isolated somewhere far out on Long Island.

Monk was Lieutenant Colonel Andrew Blodgett Mayfair. Monk didn't look as if he had a spoonful of brains. But he was one of the world's leading industrial chemists.

Doc Savage attempted to get in touch with Monk as soon as he reached his own working headquarters. This

was a set of offices occupying all of the eighty-sixth floor of the most impressive skyscraper in downtown Manhattan.

Doc failed to make immediate contact with the chemist of his group. The housekeeper at Monk's isolated cottage was difficult to understand.

Next, the man of bronze learned that Simon Stevens, the shipping line president, had gone to his summer home at Southampton. This was also far out on Long Island. The millionaire's associates on the shipping line board of directors were still angry and puzzled.

Doc learned they had confirmed the statement of the sale of the Dorn Islands, by Simon Stevens's secretary. But the identity of the purchaser was still a mystery.

DOC had taken samples of Smiling Tony's shoe polish to his laboratory. He worked far into the night analyzing samples.

At this time, not far distant in another skyscraper, Henry Hawkins, a night watchman, finished his midnight lunch. Then he recalled leaving his pipe in another room. The watchman found the pipe lying where he had left it.

As he puffed a smoke with his coffee, Henry Hawkins had no means of knowing other hands had recently tampered with that pipe.

The watchman became suddenly alarmed. Near him a bell was ringing noisily. It was the burglar alarm.

Henry Hawkins knew there was a considerable fortune in jewels and gold in the two safes of the inner office. The jewels were of several varieties. The gold was used by the watchman's employer for the finest of craftsmanship.

Henry Hawkins abandoned his midnight lunch. With his huge unwieldy revolver, the watchman made his way swiftly toward the inner office. He sucked at the stem of his pipe, tightly gripped in his teeth.

The door of the office containing the safes had been locked. Henry Hawkins tried the knob cautiously. It yielded. The door had been unlocked. There was no light inside this office. But against the square of a window, the watchman thought he saw the movement of a shadowy form.

"Put up your hands!" ordered Henry Hawkins. "Whatcha doin' in here?"

The watchman had never shot a man. Probably his hesitancy was a mistake. Something happened to Henry Hawkins. The old revolver exploded twice with a booming roar.

No other shot had been fired. But—Henry Hawkins lay down wearily on the floor. In the meantime, the same burglar alarm that had lured the watchman into a trap was ringing loudly in a Park Avenue apartment.

The alarm brought Harris Hooper Perrin from his bed. He seized the telephone and called the police.

Harris Hooper Perrin was an excitable, highly emotional man. He was nearly fifty years old. But he still chewed his finger nails.

Harris Hooper Perrin was a skilled workman. He was one of the best lapidaries in New York. He could produce more finished value from uncut diamonds and other stones than any other man.

"Thieves!" he squawked into the telephone. "Thieves in my office! Get the police there at once!" He gave the address.

POLICEMEN were already in Perrin's offices when he reached them. Perrin looked around. Henry Hawkins was sitting in a chair. The watchman bore no outward evidence of having been injured. He still nursed the huge revolver in a gnarled hand.

"What's this? What's this, Henry?" snapped Harris Hooper Perrin.

"Hello, Mr. Perrin," said Henry Hawkins. "Somebody must 'a' called the police. I haven't finished my midnight lunch."

Perrin grabbed at his lock of gray hair. He changed his mind and bit into a favorite finger nail.

"You haven't finished your lunch?" gasped Perrin. "Here, officer, what've you found?"

The door of one of the safes was open. Perrin began moaning. It seemed there had been forty diamonds of great value, among other gems, in this safe. These were uncut stones. Perrin moaned out they had been consigned to him by a customer.

"They'd have cut more'n ten hundred carats!" groaned Perrin. "Ten hundred carats, I'm tellin' you! And I'm ruined! It'll cost me everything I've got—my reputation—my—"

The lapidary pulled his tormented eyes from the interior of the looted safe. But a detective directed Perrin's gaze to the floor. In front of the safe was a drying pool of blood. It had spread on the rug. There could not have been less than a quart, perhaps more.

"If the guy was alone, he's holed up around here by this time," said the detective. "If there was a pair of 'em, the other one'll be grabbed gettin' away with the fellow that's plugged."

Perrin twisted his gray strand of hair.

"You saw 'em, Henry?" he shot at the night watchman. "What'd they look like?"

"Who did I see, Mr. Perrin?" replied Henry Hawkins. "Do you suppose I could eat my lunch now?"

The watchman's face was expressionless. He showed no visible effect of his encounter with cracksmen. Apparently Henry Hawkins was only hungry and he wanted his lunch.

The night watchman expressed no evidence of having felt fear.

PERRIN was raging with excitement. The arrival of an inspector named Ryan found the lapidary frothing.

Henry Hawkins evinced little interest in his employer's excitement. His pipe had fallen unnoticed to the floor.

"Maybe he got a bump on the bean," suggested Inspector Ryan.

He was facing Henry Hawkins, studying him. Then the inspector thought of something.

"Well, I'll be darned!" he exclaimed. "He looks like that shiner who bumped off his pal up on the el last night! Say, do you remember shooting somebody in here?"

"Maybe I did—well, I guess I did," said the watchman. "I didn't get a chance to eat my lunch and I'm hungry. I wasn't in here when the safe was opened. Mr. Perrin knows I wouldn't do it."

Henry Hawkins had not been accused. There was a possibility he might have been, if there had not been the pool of blood on the floor. One of the detectives was digging a soft chunk of lead out of the wall near the window.

"He done some shootin', all right" said the detective "But something knocked him cuckoo."

Perrin had a death grip on his lock of gray hair.

"What'll I do—what'll I do?" he moaned. "Those stones hadn't been insured! I was to make an appraisal, but I hadn't done it!"

Inspector Ryan was a very smart copper.

"We'll do all we can to get them back, Mr. Perrin," he said. "But there's something screwy about all this. I think we'll trot your watchman up to Bellevue for a once-over. There's only one man who might give you some information. I don't know why, but Doc Savage has been digging into that shoe shiner's case. If anybody can find answers, the big bronze guy can do it. I'd talk to him, Mr. Perrin, if I were you."

LESS than an hour later, the lapidary arrived at Doc's address.

Harris Hooper Perrin gave many gasps of surprise. These began with his admission to Doc Savage's headquarters. A door bore small, simple letters. These were in bronze. They read, "Clark Savage, Jr."

Doc admitted him. The first thing the lapidary noticed was the library.

The library contained thousands of volumes. Many of these dealt with precious stones and valuable minerals. Doc Savage knew more about gold craftsmanship than did Harris Hooper Perrin.

The bronze man also knew more about Harris Hooper Perrin himself than the lapidary could have imagined any one discovering.

Perrin stood in the middle of the immense laboratory. He fiddled with his lock of wiry hair.

"I don't see how you can help me much," said Perrin. "But my night watchman seems to have gone crazy. And I think maybe I'll go crazy, too! One of my safes has been cleaned out. A man was shot and my watchman don't even remember doing it. They've got him up at Bellevue, under observation."

Doc's flaky gold eyes flickered with the tiny whirlwinds in their depths. He was thinking. Smiling Tony, the shoe shiner. Simon Stevens, the shipping president. Now a humble watchman by the name of Henry Hawkins?

And Perrin was pouring out his trouble.

"First of all, you might sit down over here," directed Doc. "Are you interested in tropical fish? I have nearly a hundred varieties in this tank."

"For Heaven's sakes!" gasped Perrin. "I'm telling you I've been robbed of ten hundred carats in diamonds that aren't insured! I'm a ruined man! I'll never get any more work!"

"Yes, I understood all of that," said Doc, quietly. "You are working yourself into an extremely nervous state. If you will sit here and look at the fish, I would like to make a telephone call. I may be able to help you."

"I'll pay you anything—anything you ask!" moaned Perrin.

Doc Savage merely smiled and said nothing.

OUTSIDE in his other office, Doc made a telephone connection.

"The case is so unusual, coming immediately after the strange affair of the afternoon, I thought you might be interested in seeing this Henry Hawkins, the watchman," said the man of bronze to the party at the other end.

The man he had called from bed replied, "Yes! Yes, indeed! It was thoughtful of you, Mr. Savage! I'll go up to Bellevue and see the man at once! This queer mental condition may be only temporary, but I hope to get at its origin!"

"I'm sure you do," said Doc Savage. "And doctor—there is another strange case I believe to be the same as this one, a case in which I am greatly interested. The victim is Simon Stevens, the shipping magnate. He, too, was attacked this afternoon, but has since gone to his Southampton home. I would appreciate if you would attend him, also."

Excitement whipped into the other man's voice. Then he said, "I'll go to Bellevue, and will then leave immediately to drive to Southampton."

Doc Savage returned to the laboratory. The man he had called was Doctor Buelow T. Madren.

Having been left alone, Harris Hooper Perrin had composed his nerves somewhat. Perhaps the brilliant, flashing colors of the tropical fish swimming in the nearly transparent tank had a soothing influence.

Perrin could not know this tank of fish was in itself merely a blind for one of Doc Savage's secret exits.

## Chapter IV. ANOTHER FROZEN BRAIN

HARRIS HOOPER PERRIN hopped up when Doc Savage returned to the laboratory.

"You called somebody?" he said. "Maybe the police? What did they say? Have they found out anything?"

"I did not call the police," advised Doc. "I believe more may be found in the brain of your night watchman than elsewhere. We will have to await developments. Have you ever seen a better collection of tropical fish?"

"Good grief, man! I'm ruined—ruined! You keep on talking about fish! And some of them are poison! I want to know what I can do to get back the jewels that are uninsured?"

"Yes, some of the fish are poison," said Doc. "You can see them, those with the sharp spines, if you look closely."

A sign over the tank read, "POISON FISH."

But Perrin walked over and peered closely into the fish tank. Doc stood beside him. The fish flashed in myriad colors around what appeared to be one of those ornamental underwater castles to be found in large fish bowls.

Doc said suddenly, "We'll have to await results. However, before daylight sets in, I want to visit your watchman at Bellevue. Immediately I'll come to your office. I would like to go over the scene of the robbery."

When Perrin had departed, Doc Savage returned to his laboratory. His movements seemed as irrelevant to the matter in hand as had his apparent determination to interest the excited lapidary in his tropical fish.

Doc reached into the fish tank. The bronze hand and his forearm were magnified for a moment in the clear water. He did not seem to fear for any poison the fish might transmit. Some of the spined variety brushed the smooth bronze skin. They left no mark.

Doc lifted out the small underwater castle. It came apart in his hands. Inside was a small black box. From this Doc extracted a black plate. He slid a photographic negative into a developing bath.

A few minutes later, the man of bronze exposed a print to a dim red light. It did not look as if he had much of a picture. Something might have gone wrong. All that appeared on the plate was a pair of eyes. The rest of the face was a gray blur.

But the eyes were greatly magnified.

Doc slipped the print and the plate into a steel filing cabinet. He seemed very well satisfied with what he had accomplished.

A FEW hours later, Doc Savage's interview with Harris Hooper Perrin was a very strange one, in the light of Perrin's pronounced views a short time before in getting back his diamonds. For now, he refused Doc all information necessary about the stolen gems.

At first, Doc was puzzled, but a direct gaze into the eyes of the lapidary told Doc the secret of the change in

character. For Perrin, too, had the look of Smiling Tony, of Simon Stevens, of Henry Hawkins, the night watchman.

In the mechanical way of those afflicted with this unknown physical disability, Perrin answered a few of the questions put to him by the man of bronze. Doc gained from him the list giving descriptions of the stolen diamonds. This Doc imprinted on his mind. The stones were African diamonds, forty in number.

But the names of the owners, Doc could not get Perrin to reveal.

After this unfortunate interview, Doc left the office of the lapidary and returned to his headquarters office. By telephone, he got in touch with the estate of Simon Stevens, at Southampton, Long Island. The millionaire's son, James Stevens, replied.

Doc inquired as to the condition of the shipping magnate, then said, "I've sent the noted Doctor Madren to see your father."

## Chapter V. THREAT IN THE NIGHT

DOC SAVAGE had failed to make contact with Monk. Though it was the middle of the night when Doc had called his cottage in the Shinnecock Hills on Long Island, the homely chemist was having troubles of his own.

Rather, the troubles rightly belonged to a pig. This representative of the porcine species was an Arabian hog, but he didn't look it. No piney woods razor-back could have touched the hog, Habeas Corpus, when it came to looks.

Habeas Corpus was four long legs, two long ears and a pair of mean, but intelligent eyes. His body wasn't much of anything but a repository for food. The hog's appetite was enormous.

At the moment Doc Savage had called Monk's cottage, there was considerable disturbance in the darkness of a swampy pond at the foot of a hill. Ducks were quacking in terror. Hundreds of ducks. They were scattered over more than two acres of muddy water.

Habeas Corpus had been having the time of his life since Monk had moved to the cottage on Shinnecock Point near Ponquogue. The pig had discovered the duck farm. It contained hundreds of the birds and they were easy prey.

"Dag-gonit!" squealed a voice in the darkness of the muddy duck pond. "Dang your measly hide, Habeas! You come outta among them ducks or I'm goin' to turn you over to Ham! That's what I'll do to you!"

The squealing voice could have come only from Monk. Though he was covered with red hair as stiff as rusty finishing nails, and his weight was around two hundred and fifty pounds, Monk had the voice of a child. Also he had a low, sloping forehead, gristly eyebrows and arms that hung below his knees.

STANDING in the muddy pond up to his waist, Monk was a horrific object. His threat to turn Habeas Corpus over to "Ham" might have been understood by the pig.

Ham was Brigadier General Theodore Marley Brooks, the brilliant legal light of Doc Savage's group.

Ham's pet hate was the pig, Habeas Corpus. Ham's greatest ambition seemed to be to see the day when Habeas Corpus would be divided up into stringy pork chops.

Monk, in the pond, yelled again.

Habeas Corpus only grunted with delight. He had just snipped the head off another white duck.

A pair of long legs, without any body attached, seemed to come walking along the pond.

This was because a tall man was carrying an old-fashioned lantern. The oil light swung beside his legs and transformed them into gigantic shadows.

"Hey, you consarned thief!" he croaked harshly. "I hain't tellin' you ag'in! You git that thar hawg out'n thar, or I'm goin' to fill his hide full o' buckshot this time sure!"

"Dag-gonit!" squawked Monk, "I'm gettin' him out if I can catch him! Don't you do any shootin' if you know what's good for you! You hurt that hog an' I'll cut you up an' feed you to your own danged ducks! How much you want this time?"

The man with the lantern held it before his face. The face had the appearance of a badly drawn cartoon. It was long and it dished in toward the middle. The chin stuck out to a point. The head was small and bobbed on a neck that might have been designed for a water turtle.

"Reckon I hain't takin' no less'n a tenspot this time," drawled his twanging voice meanly. "You climb out'n there an' pay up or I'm pepperin' that blasted imitation of a pig!"

Monk slopped through the muddy pond. He grunted and fished out some money.

John Scroggins, the man who owned the ducks, got more than a tenspot. Habeas Corpus had poked his long snout closer, sticking up his ears. Monk saw his opportunity, dropped some bills and dived upon the pig. He secured the squealing shoat by one long ear and splashed back through the pond, toward his cottage.

"

DAG-GONE you, Habeas!" complained Monk. "This time he can keep his dead ducks, an' from now on you're stayin' home!"

For more than a week, Monk had been buying ducks—the ducks that Habeas Corpus had killed. The pig did not care for duck meat. Neither did Monk, much. But his housekeeper, a worthy and economical woman, had insisted the ducks must not be wasted.

Monk had quit bringing the ducks home. Some he had buried. Tonight he decided to end this duck business.

"You're bein' shut up, you dag-goned bunch of spareribs, an' you ain't gettin' out again!" he promised Habeas Corpus.

The pig grunted companionably. He didn't believe Monk. And the pig was smart. He had figured out ways of escaping from the pen Monk had contrived at this isolated cottage.

Monk ambled along awkwardly, still dragging Habeas Corpus by one ear. If the homely chemist had been informed the elusive pig had been captured by strange hands earlier in the night and later released, he would not have believed it. Yet this was true.

Habeas Corpus had been snared in the darkness. Shadowy figures had seemed to give special attention to the pig's ears. Perhaps they knew of Monk's favorite hold.

The spot Monk had selected for chemical experiments in the Shinnecock Hills was ideal. Few spots within a hundred miles of Manhattan were less populated.

The Shinnecock Hills were a series of rolling eminence covered with stunted trees. They lay on the narrow neck of land separating Great Peconic Bay from the Atlantic Ocean. The main highway of these hills passed on into Southampton, a millionaires' summer resort. From there, it went on to the famous Montauk Point.

Monk's cottage was situated on the point of land about half a mile below the duck farm. The big chemist followed a twisting, narrow path toward it. On the highest near-by hill was the only other house in that section. This was a rambling, barnlike structure. It was deserted. Its windows were closely shuttered.

The path Monk was following ascended a short distance toward the deserted house. Then it turned abruptly down the hill to the chemist's cottage. Monk reached the highest point along the path.



Here Habeas Corpus suddenly came to life. His satisfied grunts changed to quick vicious squeals. He squirmed and his ear slipped from Monk's hand.

Remarkably enough, Monk seemed to have relented in his purpose to make the pig a prisoner. The big chemist was standing still. He was staring up the hill at the deserted house. Brush crackled near by, but Monk apparently did not notice this.

Habeas Corpus rubbed his razorlike body against Monk's legs.

No more than a minute later the pig, Habeas Corpus, was rushing down the hill. The hog was fleeing as if he had seen some porcine ghost. His long, thin legs carried him at surprising speed. He did not stop until he had pushed his long snout through the screen of the kitchen door at Monk's cottage.

DURING Monk's absence, two visitors had arrived from New York. One of these was a waspish figure of a man, with a keen, narrow face. This man was wearing the latest in spring togs turned out by Fifth Avenue. He was a picture of ease and sartorial elegance.

For Theodore Marley Brooks, or Ham, was noted for being a Beau Brummell. He always stayed about two jumps ahead of all that should be worn on Park Avenue.

The bronze-haired young woman with Ham might have been a beautiful model from some exclusive gown shop. Her hair resembled that of Doc Savage himself. And it was somewhat of a family trait, for the attractive young woman was no other than Patricia Savage, Doc's cousin.

Known as Pat, she conducted an exclusive beauty salon and gymnasium on Park Avenue. Frequently she had joined with Doc and his companions in their adventure.

Pat and Ham were drawn to the screen door of the kitchen.

"You might have known it would be that cross between a polecat and a hog," said Ham. "Hey! Get away from me before I trim off your ears!"

This threat was inspired by the peculiar actions of Habeas Corpus. Usually the pig kept a safe distance from the peppery lawyer. But now he acted as if he had suddenly found a friend. He rushed between Ham's elegantly clad legs and rubbed against them.

Dried mud and duck feathers ornamented Ham's trousers.

This ludicrous scene drew a low laugh of delight from Pat Savage.

Ham backed away suddenly. He did not want to swear before Pat. But he gritted his teeth and kicked violently at Habeas Corpus. The hog might be scared, but he was an expert at protecting his ribs. He dashed to one side, squealing. His bony body caught Ham's foot. The lawyer sat down suddenly in a very undignified position.

But Pat Savage didn't laugh. She was looking at Habeas Corpus. The pig had whirled around, facing the kitchen door. The stiff hairs on the back of his neck were standing straight up.

"Ham, something has happened to Monk," announced Pat. "The pig is trying to tell us something. Be quiet! Somebody's coming up the path!"

SLOW, dragging feet were coming along the path. They sounded as if they belonged to a man who was very tired, or perhaps hurt. Ham and Pat could hear deep, whistling breaths.

Ham scrambled to his feet. Habeas Corpus backed clear over to the farthest wall. The pig's eyes blinked and he shivered on his long legs. The man outside arrived at the screen door. The light struck across his woeful, disheveled figure.

Monk was hardly a handsome object at the best. Now he was literally caked with black mud. The coarse hair that looked like red fur around his ears and face was plastered with it. The small eyes under the low forehead looked straight ahead. Apparently he had rubbed some of the mud across his mouth.

Monk fumbled the door open. He entered without speaking. Then he stopped in the middle of the floor and looked at Pat Savage and Ham.

Ham looked at Monk and saw no visible evidence of physical injury.

"We couldn't expect much more from you," said Ham in a jeering voice. "Pat and I drop in to give you a pleasant surprise, and, as usual, you're a fine mess. I always knew you were mostly ape, but I didn't expect you to revert to the primitive and begin eating raw ducks."

Monk's furry hands and huge forearms were smeared with dried blood. Duck feathers clung to his clothes and the matted hair.

"Hello, Ham," he said in his childlike voice. "Hello, Pat. I will call the housekeeper to show you to your rooms. Let me see, the housekeeper's name is—I kind of forget, but I'll call her."

"Be yourself!" snapped Ham. "Don't try to pull any crazy stuff, you big ape! Who could forget a name like Mrs. Malatkas! Whose ducks have you been stealing?"

"Yes, that's her name," repeated Monk in a cold, small voice. "Mrs. Malatkas. She keeps house for me and she wants to cook all the ducks, but I'm burying them. There are a lot more dead ones. I have to dig some holes for them."

"Stop it, you hairy insect!" rapped out Ham. "What are you trying to do—scare Pat? What's the matter with you?"

"Scare Pat?" repeated Monk. "You know I wouldn't want to scare Pat."

Ham started another sarcastic sentence. Pat interrupted him.

"Don't Ham!" she commanded. "I believe Monk is sick or something has happened to him. What is it, Monk?"

"No, I'm not sick," said Monk, without any emotion. "I think I'm hungry, but I don't want to eat any more ducks. I'll call Mrs.—Funny, I can't remember her name. She's the housekeeper."

Ham and Pat knew nothing of the weird, emotionless feelings that had come over the three men in New York, that had produced a state of utter lack of desire to do anything unless a forceful suggestion was made to them. Neither did they know that those men, because of their peculiar lack of emotions, could kill as easily as a wild animal and feel as little remorse.

Seemingly, Monk had been stricken with this same lack of feeling of emotions.

ON the surface, Ham and Monk were the bitterest of enemies. But that was only verbal. Underneath, they were the greatest of friends. Ham stepped over to the chemist's side. He ran one slender hand over Monk's hairy head.

"Perhaps you got conked out there, Monk?" he suggested. "Did somebody knock you out? I don't find any marks."

"Why, nothing happened," said Monk, without raising his voice. "I remember now. I paid for the dead ducks. Now I've got to bury them. Do you and Pat expect to stay—well—yes, I guess you wouldn't want to go back tonight? It's kind of late. I'd call the housekeeper, but somehow I can't remember her name."

Ham pulled Pat to one side.

"This looks serious," he whispered. "I don't think he's putting on a show. Something queer has happened! Monk must have had some terrible shock out there. I'm going to have a look around. Maybe you had better

call Mrs. Malatkas."

Habeas Corpus had been standing rigidly in one corner. The pig looked as if he expected something to come through the door from the darkness. If Monk did not remember seeing anything out there in the blackness, Habeas Corpus evidently had seen something.

Whatever it was, the smart pig hadn't liked it a bit.

Monk moved mechanically at Pat's suggestion. He washed the dried blood and feathers from his hands and arms. Mrs. Malatkas responded to a summons. She came in, gabbling excitedly.

Ham walked over and picked up the slender black cane he always carried. This looked like only an added affectation on the part of the sartorially perfect lawyer. But it was much more practical.

The black cane concealed a razor-sharp blade of the finest steel. The point of this sword was tipped for several inches with a dark-colored chemical. A mere prick through the skin would make another man instantly unconscious.

"I think I'll call Doc," suggested Pat. "He ought to know about this. I haven't seen him for several days. He must have been busy on something."

PAT was clicking the receiver hook of the old-fashioned telephone of the summer cottage. In a few seconds she came back into the kitchen. Her attractive features were pale and her mouth was set in a worried line.

"Ham, we're cut off!" she said excitedly. "The line hummed all right when I picked up the receiver. Then there was a man's voice. It must be a country party line. The man said, 'We've got the first one, and before we're through this smart Doc Savage will learn he can't—' Then there was a ripping sound. The wire went dead. I jiggled the receiver, but I'll bet the connection has been cut. Maybe some one heard me get on the line."

Mrs. Malatkas was wringing her fat hands.

"Dot Yon Scroggins vass a bad man!" she gabbled hysterically. "His eye vass evil! Aboutt dose ducks he vass mad some awful! He's no good, dot Yon Scroggins!"

Pat said, "But this must be something much more serious than a squabble over ducks. That voice on the phone wasn't like that of a countryman who raises ducks. It sounded more like some man from the city. Do you suppose, Ham, he means Monk is the first one?"

Monk, having washed his hands, stood braced on his short legs. Though the big chemist was one of the homeliest men alive, yet he was one of the most intelligent. But now he seemed to have little or no interest in what was transpiring.

"Are you and Ham staying here a while?" he asked Pat, as if he hadn't discussed that before. "Mrs.—well, the housekeeper here will show you to your rooms. She will get us something to eat. I'm hungry. Would you like a cold duck sandwich? I don't like ducks."

Ham said in an undertone to Pat.

"You're right, this is serious. Some one has done something to Monk. And the idea is to get at Doc. I'm not informed myself on what Doc might be doing. There must be another phone in this duck man's place. Anyway, he'll probably let me use it."

"Ham, perhaps he won't," said Pat. "It might be he's the one was talking, after all."

"Well, I'll soon find out about that," declared Ham, flourishing his cane. "You'd better take Monk's superfirer, until I get back. I'll hurry and—"

The pig, Habeas Corpus, interrupted his speech. The pig dashed between Ham's legs and through the kitchen door into the night.

## Chapter VI. HAM'S BLIND TRAIL

NIGHT over the Shinnecock Hills was of that opaque density only the lightless countryside and a fogged sky can produce. Ham could hear Habeas Corpus clattering along the path winding around the hillside. This led directly to the edge of John Scroggins's muddy duck pond.

Ham did not know he would have to follow the slippery edge of the pond to reach the duck man's shack. The still dapper lawyer swore a little under his breath. He was forced to use the pencil ray of his generator flashlight to follow the pig.

The lawyer could hear the pig. He wondered if Habeas Corpus might be leading him toward the menace that seemed to have overtaken Monk? No light showed ahead. The shack of the duck man was in darkness. Once Ham thought he saw a point of light twinkle on the high hill above him, but it might have been only an illusion.

Habeas Corpus had a strange sense of danger. But apparently the pig was too much of a pig to remember that he had been scared. For Habeas Corpus headed straight for his beloved duck pond. Suddenly, ducks started quacking loudly. One or two squawked.

"Damn that hog!" muttered Ham.

Ham's light failed to show him an impediment to his feet. He caught a toe. His hands flew up and the flashlight fell. Ham took a header over a low, steep bank. With a mighty splash, he went into the muddy duck pond.

It was well for the pig that he was built on agile lines. If Ham had caught him in the next two or three minutes, Habeas Corpus probably would have become sliced bacon.

A squawking duck escaped from the pig and flopped onto the shore. The frightened bird half ran and half flew up the hill. The duck was heading in the direction of the ominous-appearing, barnlike deserted house topping the ridge. But Ham did not know this.

Still telling the world what he would do to that pig, the dripping Ham climbed from the pond. He was using language that had never been heard in any court of law. Without his flashlight, he could only follow the sound of the pig's chase after the duck.

Suddenly, Habeas Corpus seemed to lose interest in slitting the throat of that particular bird. The hog stopped so abruptly that Ham fell over him.

"I'll make pork chops out of you for that!" grated Ham.

BUT instead of using his sword blade, Ham froze to silence and listened. Habeas Corpus did not seem to be afraid of Ham. Instead, the pig all at once appeared to be desirous of closer companionship. He stood close to Ham. The bristles on the pig's neck were rising. The pig was looking up the hill.

Small stones were rolling from under the crunching feet of a man. It looked to Ham as if a pair of long, unattached legs were coming down the hill. This was because the oncoming man was swinging an old-fashioned oil lantern.

As the light came close, the loose-jointed, ungainly figure of the man was revealed. The lantern showed a dished-in face with a long-pointed chin. The angular jaws of John Scroggins were working with rage. The light rays fell upon the stiffly rigid Habeas Corpus.

"Gol dang yuh!" whanged the duck man's voice. "You've been into them thar ducks ag'in! This time, I'm fillin' your hide so full'r shot you won't be able to git away!"

John Scroggins had been coming from the direction of the deserted house on the hill. He was carrying his shotgun.

Before Ham could emerge into view or speak, the duck man had set down his lantern. The double-barreled shotgun over one arm erupted fire from both muzzles. Fine shot slapped into the bushes.

Habeas Corpus squealed and shook his long snout. The pig's hide was well peppered with the shot. But that hide was like walrus skin. The shot did not penetrate deeply. Fortunately, all missed the pig's eyes.

Ham must have forgotten his many threats to annihilate Habeas Corpus. His waspish form reared up in front of the gaunt, big-boned duck man.

"I'll teach you to be trying to murder an inoffensive pet that never did anything to you!" rapped Ham.

"Who be yuh?" growled John Scroggins. "Hain't you smart city dudes been l'arned agin' trespassin' on private prop'ity?"

The duck man had glanced apprehensively over his shoulder. The direction of his eyes had been toward the deserted house. Rather, one eye had looked that way. The cocked orb still roamed freely.

Ham's sword blade was swishing in a circle around his head.

"Hey, consarn your hide, doncha do that!" twanged the duck man's nasal voice.

He lifted the shotgun. The fine steel of the blade rang on the coarser metal. John Scroggins parried several of Ham's thrusts with surprising skill. Ham had quit talking. The heavy gun barrel swung again at his head.

Because the duck man was not expecting it, Ham prodded him with the drugged tip of the sword. John Scroggins immediately lost interest in the strange duel. The shotgun clanged on the rocks of the hill. The duck man sighed and sat down. He rolled over and was asleep before his head touched the ground.

DESPITE the hide full of shot, Habeas Corpus was excited over something more than the encounter of the two men. The pig was moving slowly up the hill. He was following a trace of a pathway that led toward the barnlike structure above.

Ham caught the pig by one ear. This was Monk's favorite hold. Habeas Corpus apparently resented this familiarity. He tried to bite Ham. The lawyer swore and kicked at him.

The ground trembled. It might have been a single stick of dynamite far underground. Or a small cannon fired in some deep cave.

Habeas Corpus promptly began a retreat. The pig headed back in the direction of the duck pond. A second muffled explosion followed the first.

Ham got a better idea of the direction of this one. If he had not been guided by his ears, a momentary flash of light from a lower window of the stark house on the hill was unmistakable.

Concerned over Monk's queer condition, and the later voice on the telephone, Ham decided to investigate.

Having lost his flashlight, Ham picked up the oil lantern and started up the hill.

When he came close to the old house, Ham saw that its foundation of unfinished stone arose ten feet or more above the ground. In this wall were set small windows. Those openings had been covered by loose boards. The windows higher up were heavily shuttered.

Ham concealed the oil lantern in the bushes. Approaching with infinite caution, his sword blade ready for instant action, the lawyer detected the faint twinkling of a light through the cracks of one of the basement wall windows.

It must have been this light he had seen while on his way to the duck pond. After several minutes listening, Ham carefully pried a board loose. His slim body went through easily. Inside was a narrow, tunnellike passage. It had the dank, musty odor of a place long uninhabited.

But there was something else. It was a sharp acrid odor.

A faint light glowed beyond a turn in the passage. Ham cat-footed in that direction.

HAM might have been wiser if he could have seen around the bend in the tunnel passage. While he could hear no movement, this was because the small group of men in a cavern-like room were fully aware of his approach.

Yet they were listening to the slow approach of the intruder without evincing the least excitement. Nor did it seem they were prepared in any way to molest this stranger. None of the men had a weapon. But all were watching the turn in the tunnel around which Ham might appear at any second.

A voice spoke quietly. It could not have been more than a few yards away. Ham may have heard its murmur. If he did, he could not have interpreted either the words or the meaning. If he had, the lawyer would have scuttled into a retreat.

Ham did not retreat. His hand gripped the handle of the sword blade. Now for the first time since he had handled the pig, Habeas Corpus, Ham's left fingers rubbed slowly across his lower lip. It was an unconscious gesture in the tenseness of the moment.

Whatever happened, Ham did not afterward recall the exact incident.

For without realizing how he had come to be outside the strange, deserted house, Ham was plunging down the hill. And he was calling Habeas Corpus. His mind must have picked up where it had left off some time before. He came back to the recumbent figure of the unconscious duck man.

Habeas Corpus again was splashing around in the duck pond. And a couple of minutes later, Ham was wading after the pig. This time, he captured the duck killer and started for the shore. A dead duck floated near by. Its throat had been slit by the bloodthirsty Habeas Corpus.

The keen intelligence had left Ham's countenance. He acted as any child might have done, on the impulse of the moment. His face was a stony mask with a ghastly fixed smile. The dead duck floated to his hand. He seized it by the legs.

DRAGGING Habeas Corpus by one ear and holding the dead duck by the legs, Ham started along the pathway leading back to Monk's cottage. All of his elegant appearance had been lost. He was dripping with filthy water and plastered with mud.

And Ham had left his sword cane somewhere. This in itself was the strongest evidence that Ham was not himself.

Pat Savage had never been known to scream. She was too closely akin to Doc Savage to give away audibly to any terror she might feel. But Pat came as close to a scream as she ever would, when Ham appeared in the kitchen doorway of Monk's cottage.

"Oh!" she gasped. "You, too!"

Ham came in slowly. He was still dragging Habeas Corpus. The dead duck dribbled blood in Ham's other hand. Monk was sitting in a chair. He looked at Ham, and he made no comment whatever.

"Did you meet the owner of that duck farm?" Pat Savage forced herself to say. "Was there a phone and did you call Doc?"

She was merely making conversation, trying meanwhile to think what she must do.

"I met some man with a shotgun and he didn't like me much," said Ham, tonelessly. "I guess that must have been the duck man. I'll have to take a bath and put on some other clothes."

"Oh!" gasped Pat. "You met him then! And there must have been a fight? What did you do with your sword cane?"

"Well, maybe I left the sword sticking in the man with the shotgun," said Ham, without change of expression. "Sure. That was it! I ran the sword through his neck, I guess. I forgot to pull it out."

Pat Savage almost screamed then. She shivered. Mrs. Malatka was gabbling to herself and making violent gestures with her hands, as if to ward off some unseen evil.

Just then, a slow, rumbling blast shook the walls of the cottage.

## Chapter VII. MURDER ON THE HILL

PAT SAVAGE possessed one great asset. Like the others of Doc Savage's group she knew nothing of the meaning of fear. That was a quality that seemed to emanate from the bronze adventurer. Courage was the foundation of this hardy, super-intelligent group.

So it was not fear that gave speed to Pat Savage's movements. It was grave uneasiness. Something that was suddenly beyond all human understanding. She was more than ever in need of reaching Doc.

Pat whipped through the blackness of the Shinnecock Hills with the lightness of a fleet-footed deer. Behind her in the cottage, neither Ham nor Monk had seemed to give much heed to her intentions.

Pat had slipped from the cottage. She was armed with the superfirer machine pistol she had taken from Monk. This weapon was unwieldy for her delicate hands, but she had a hunch it might be required.

The thickness of the foggy wilderness night was somewhat appalling. It was not fear that made Pat hasten her steps. It was the terrible uncertainty of not knowing what this was all about, of what ghastly thing had struck both Monk and Ham, had seemingly affected their brains.

With a flashlight she had picked up in the cottage, Pat followed the pathway toward the duck pond.

Pat had hoped the duck man would have a telephone. Ham had been unable to say if he had even attempted to reach such an instrument.

The low door of the duck man's shack stood partly open. Pat shivered as she penciled the ray of the flashlight over the interior. It appeared to be the typical shack dwelling of an uncouth man.

But there was a telephone instrument on a shelf. Pat conquered her repulsion and tiptoed across the room. With a quick hand, she picked up the receiver. The wire gave forth that low humming which told it was open. Pat jiggled the receiver hook.

If she could only raise an operator and make connections with Doc's headquarters—

A voice spoke. It was a man's croaking tones. They sounded as if the man were talking from behind a wall or through a blanket.

"I got him before he reached the high—"

As on the phone in Monk's cottage, the sentence was bitten off. It ended with a little crackling snap. The wire had gone dead.

PAT felt suddenly sick and cold. She forced herself to be calm long enough to make sure the connection had been definitely broken off.

Some one on that wire must have heard her come on the line, she thought. Now the phone was dead. Perhaps they could trace her location. Pat hooked the receiver and ran from the duck man's shack.

Again she ran around the duck pond. The ducks quacked sleepily. They were quick to forget the killer that had been among them. Pat suddenly halted. From near the duck man's shack she had just left, floated a

laugh. It was a hoarse cackling note.

Had some one been spying upon her while she was at the telephone?

Then Pat thought of Ham's car in which they had come to Monk's cottage. Why hadn't that come to her before? Ham had been forced to leave the car beside the highway some distance from the cottage. The car was equipped with a short-wave radio set.

Pat knew how to operate the broadcaster. She could get hold of Doc that way, if he happened to be at his New York headquarters or somewhere in one of his cars. All of Doc's radios were operated on their own special wave length.

But it would be better to leave a message by telephone, if she failed to reach Doc. So Pat stumbled on up the hill.

When she stopped abruptly she was halfway between the duck pond and the deserted house. Her sudden halt carried her to her hands and knees. This time, Pat had the greatest difficulty repressing the scream that would have been forced from the lips of any other woman.

She had fallen over a body.

Pat's movements then were instinctive. She sprang away from the awful thing on the ground. Her hands trembled as she shot the pencil ray of the flashlight toward the corpse.

Sightless eyes were wide open. Their death glaze did not keep them from having the look of horror that would come to a man knowing death was about to strike. Pat was holding one hand tightly over her mouth. Her white teeth clenched in her own flesh until the blood trickled.

The dead man's throat was one awful gash. Blood had drained out and the face was gray and hard.

"I knew it, oh, I knew it," whispered Pat. "He didn't know what he was doing! Oh, he *did* kill him!"

For she was looking down at the slender, bright blade of a sword. This lay beside the dead man's head. Near it was the hollow black cane which Ham always carried. And Ham had said he had "run the sword through the duck man's neck."

Pat was sure now this was the owner of the ducks. The sword blade was stained with the scarlet fluid. The man's body was lying partly on the sheathing cane.

PAT SAVAGE came as near to panic as she ever had.

It was only too apparent that Ham must have killed this man. Pat picked up the sword blade. With a shudder, she pulled the black cane from under the body.

Then Pat realized she was a target for whoever might be lingering in the murky night. She turned off the flashlight.

She was none too quick about this. As darkness shrouded her and mercifully shut out the ghastly face of the corpse, heavy feet crunched on near-by rocks.

What she intended doing about Ham's sword, Pat did not then have clear enough thought to decide. She did not even know she was running away from Monk's cottage toward the main paved highway.

In a few seconds, she paused breathlessly to listen. The feet crunched again. She was being followed.

On the highway less than a hundred yards away, a motor throbbed. Headlight beams sent two stabbing rays around a curve. They swept the side of the hill, bathed Pat's slender figure briefly and passed on.

Pat was looking behind her. Her eyes were fixed on the spot where the feet had been crunching. The car's beams flashed across this spot. Pat saw the face of a man. It seemed in that uncertain light like a dead



mask, without any emotion of a living man.

Monk and Ham both looked somewhat like that.

The owner of the face was tall. He had flaming red hair. There now was no doubt but that he was pursuing Pat. He was looking directly toward her as the speeding car shot on down the highway.

Pat cried out loudly once, if the driver of the passing car could have heard her, probably he would not have paused.

The red-headed man was mumbling, but Pat could not catch his words. He was coming toward her. Pat felt he must not reach her, touch her. The man's speech became incoherent. From his hand shot the beam of a flashlight.

"Oh, there you are!" he cried, as the luminance brought out Pat's swaying figure. "I thought I'd find you!"

THE man moved with a rushing quickness of his feet toward her. Pat was still carrying Ham's stained sword cane. She must not be caught. Monk's pistol was loaded with mercy bullets. They would not kill, for they were only shells containing an anaesthetic drug. But they would stop this seemingly crazy red-headed man.

Pat aimed at the flashlight and held the superfirer with both hands. It hummed for two seconds like a giant bullfiddle.

The flashlight winked out. The red-headed man pitched forward. His body rolled over and over down the hill. The unconscious man lodged in a clump of bushes above the highway.

Pat did not regret having used the pistol. Her own automatic would have killed. She did not want to kill any one. Now she feared this red-headed man had not been alone. Thrusting Ham's sword blade into the cane, she tied it quickly under the light evening coat she was wearing.

Then Pat ran along the highway. It had become more important than ever to reach a telephone.

This stretch of highway had scanty population. Hidden here and there in the knobby Shinnecock Hills were many thrusting gables. But none of these could be seen in the darkness. None of these summer homes had been built directly on the highway.

Pat was almost sobbing with effort, after she had gone perhaps half a mile. Then she heard another car coming. It was being driven at high speed.

Pat decided she might be able to bring the driver to a stop. She was wearing a gown under her coat with a brilliant red sash. Holding a strip of the red sash over the flashlight, she flicked it on and off.

The driver of the oncoming car saw the danger light of red winking at him as he rounded a curve. His brakes took hold. Pat stood in the middle of the concrete. She did not realize the apparition she must have been to the startled chauffeur. The car was of the low-slung limousine type. It was a classy model. There was a neat gold monogram on the door. A man and woman occupied the rear seat.

PAT walked from the pathway of the headlight. The man in the rear seat switched on the car's inside lights. This revealed the flushed, attractive face of Pat close to the door.

"Sorry, but I have to ask your help," said Pat. "It is most important I reach a telephone. Our own has gone dead and a friend of mine is very ill."

"Why, I'm a doctor, but perhaps not the kind of a physician you would want," he added. "I'm Doctor Madren, Buelow T. Madren. I am hurrying on a call to a patient in Southampton. You see, I'm a psychiatrist."

"I'm afraid my friend needs a different kind of treatment," Pat stated. "Would you take me as far as a telephone?"

"Certainly; Miss—I didn't catch your name?"

"Oh, I'm sorry," said Pat hastily. "I'm—Miss Holcomb."

Pat said this because she was thinking of Ham's bloodstained sword blade under her coat. No one must get in on this. Not even the benevolent-appearing psychiatrist, until Doc had been reached.

"All right, Miss Holcomb," said Doctor Madren. "Get in. You can call from my patient's home. My chauffeur will bring you back. Oh, yes, this is Miss Clarke. She is one of my nurses."

Pat slipped into the seat beside the doctor's woman companion. Miss Clarke was gray-eyed, plain of face, but cool and competent-looking. She acknowledged the introduction. Also she was looking intently at Pat's left hand.

Pat slid her hand hastily under her coat. She shuddered a little. This was the hand marked with the murdered man's blood. She had almost forgotten it. Miss Clarke said nothing. But she continued to watch Pat from the corner of her eye.

Doctor Madren chatted about small matters, as his limousine rolled into the elm-draped avenue which forms the main street of Southampton. He was still talking when the car entered the spacious grounds of an immense summer home.

WHEN they were admitted, there were voices coming from a near-by room. A tall young man appeared. He had a worried frown.

"Yes, Doctor Madren, I was informed that you were coming," said the young man, his gaze wandering from the plain-faced Miss Clarke to the flushed and vivid Pat Savage. "I've kept dad up. Rather, he hasn't wanted to retire. He has been in the bar all evening."

Pat learned the young man was Jim Stevens. He showed the best of breeding. He did not inquire the reason for Pat's presence.

"This is—Miss Holcomb," pronounced Doctor Madren, slowly. "She wants to call the city. A friend has been taken ill. So I brought her here from the Shinnecock Hills. I will send her home when she has used the telephone."

"Glad to know Miss Holcomb," said Jim Stevens. "I was—well, I had an impression I had seen your photograph somewhere, Miss Holcomb?"

Pat shivered. Her picture had appeared in newspapers. This Jim Stevens looked like he would be difficult to deceive.

Then Pat received a more terrible shock than the mere suspicion Jim Stevens might be guessing her identity. A big man entered the room.

"Here's dad now," said Jim Stevens. "Dad, Doctor Madren has come down for some fishing. I met him in the city. He will stay for a few days."

Simon Stevens said, "I'm glad to have any friend of yours, Jim."

But his voice was flat and lifeless.

Pat controlled her emotions with difficulty. Cold, chilling horror seemed to fill her veins. For this big man, Simon Stevens, was another one. His emotionless face appeared to be covered with the same icy mask she had seen on the faces of Ham and Monk.

Pat was conducted to a telephone in a huge library. Jim Stevens courteously closed the door. In two minutes, Pat heard Doc's voice on the wire.

Pat had intended to explain the strange situation. She had desired to apprise Doc of all that had transpired.

But as she started to speak, she distinctly heard a faint *click* of a lifted receiver in some other room. Some one was listening on an extension.

Doc knew Pat's voice. So all she said was, "Ham and Monk. They need you at once. It can't wait until morning."

She knew this would be sufficient for her bronze cousin.

"I shall come by plane," Doc replied.

His own keen ears had heard the tell-tale *click* of that extra telephone receiver in the house of Simon Stevens. He knew instantly the trouble must be serious or Pat would not have called at that hour.

DOC had been considerably baffled by the events in the city. The connected and disconnected cases of lost emotions, of the murder, of Simon Stevens's action and of the Harris Hooper Perrin jewel robbery and his strange acting when Doc had gone to interview him at the office, had become somewhat confounding.

But the man of bronze already had begun to suspect a well directed menace covering all of these cases. Thus far, its source had been invisible, wholly untraceable. But Pat's tone, rather than what she had said, led Doc to believe the paralyzer of emotions had struck directly at his own group.

Pat hurried from the library. Jim Stevens was standing in the hallway outside. Doctor Madren was still talking with Simon Stevens. The conversation was one-sided. The shipping magnate replied only in cold monosyllables.

The nurse, Miss Clarke, had disappeared. Probably she had gone to her room, was Pat's instant thought. Miss Clarke had seen the blood on Pat's hand. Could the nurse have been suspicious to the extent of listening in on her conversation?

Pat stepped quickly into the living room. The bloodstained sword cane slipped from under her coat. It fell to the floor.

## Chapter VIII. BLOOD OF A DUCK

IT was only natural that both Doctor Madren and Jim Stevens should reach to restore the fallen sword cane. Doctor Madren was the nearest. His chubby hands picked up the sheath. The top twisted loose.

The psychiatrist's brilliant blue eyes glittered. Extended in his hand was a steel blade, fine and slender at the point as a stiletto. The point was covered with a sticky, dark substance.

Higher on the blade was the unmistakable scarlet stain of dried blood. Pat had made one hasty movement to recover the cane. Now she laughed with a little hollow sound.

"Well, well, well!" rolled Doctor Madren's oily voice. "I have heard that young women sometimes go armed, but this is indeed a most peculiar weapon. It takes one back to the Middle Ages. The lady is wandering along a midnight road with a bloody sword hidden under her cloak. There must be some explanation?"

"If I must explain anything," said Pat quickly, "the truth will sound very silly. A friend used the sword to cut off the heads of a couple of ducks for dinner. I picked it up when I started out to find a telephone. I'll not trouble you any further, Doctor Madren. I can call a taxicab and return to the cottage."

Pat extended her hand quickly. Doctor Madren deliberately pulled the sword cane out of her reach. Pat's coat fell back. Under one arm the holstered superfirer pistol with its clumsy magazine drum of bullets was fully exposed.

Doctor Madren clucked again. His eyes rolled. They appealed to heaven and made him look more than ever like an angel.

"Most astounding," he murmured. "If there had been a machine gun or two sticking around, probably you would have brought them along, too? You said your name was Miss Holcomb, I believe?"

Jim Stevens took the sword and its sheath firmly from Doctor Madren's hand. A light of understanding had come into his eyes. Though he was intensely worried over his father's condition, something had seemed to appeal to him as humorous. He had recalled where he had seen the picture of this Miss Holcomb. And that picture had borne the name Patricia Savage.

Also, Jim Stevens knew that Doc Savage had been responsible for the psychiatrist's visit to his father. He had no means of knowing how all this fitted together, but he had heard the man of bronze had his own methods of working.

"You were called to talk with dad," said Jim Stevens. "I shall see that Miss—Holcomb is returned safely."

He bowed and handed the cane to Pat. Doctor Madren rubbed his pudgy hands. His round mouth smiled, but his eyes were like frozen blue agates.

"Very well," he said. "I can only apologize for bringing Miss Holcomb to your house."

Jim Stevens said, "Come on, Miss Holcomb, I will take you in my car."

AS the speedy roadster swung into the driveway, Pat spoke.

"I have you to thank, Mr. Stevens, for rescuing me from an awkward position. I'm sorry I can't explain more, even to you."

Jim Stevens smiled and glanced at her. But his voice was very serious.

"You do not have to explain, Miss *Holcomb*." He put emphasis on the name. Pat let that ride. "Perhaps you should know this illness of dad's isn't all that is happening. A week ago, a new gardener nearly killed another man at our place. I had him discharged. And his mental condition was exactly the same as dad's. In the city, they are talking about two other similar cases. In one case, a shoe shiner killed a friend under an elevated train."

Pat shivered. And she had found Ham's sword alongside the man with his throat fatally slashed. She wanted to explain more to the friendly young millionaire. But she felt she must keep her secret.

Jim Stevens's next words made her glad she had so decided.

"I don't know what's happened," he said, "but Doctor Madren is one of these very respectable citizens, and most conservative. It would be no surprise if he informed the State Police as soon as possible about that sword cane. Without asking more, I would advise you to get rid of it until there can be an explanation."

"Thanks," said Pat, faintly. "You are kind. Now I shall walk into the cottage from the highway here."

She left the car against his protest and started over the dark hill. If she had not been so disturbed, she might have known Jim Stevens was following to see her safely to the cottage.

Jim Stevens was guided by Pat's flashlight. When she entered the kitchen of Monk's cottage, he was not far behind. The young man made his way cautiously to a window.

Pat had thrown off her coat. The amazing young woman then put aside the clumsy superfirer.

Pat next took a metal polish and scrubbed the blade of Ham's sword thoroughly. As she did this, she kept glancing furtively at an inner door. She had the appearance of seeking to avoid having others in the house know she had returned.

A dead duck lay on the floor. Jim Stevens let out a breathless gasp. If anything happened, now there would be no doubt but that the sword might have been used to cut off the head of a duck.

For Pat was squeezing blood from the dead duck's neck. With this, she again stained the steel blade. She restored the sword to the cane sheath and set it conspicuously in a corner. When she turned so her face

showed toward the window, Pat was wearing a rather desperate smile.

"Well, I'll be damned!" muttered Jim Stevens. "I wouldn't have thought that possible!"

THOROUGHLY puzzled, Jim Stevens waited a few seconds. The inner door opened. The waspish figure of Ham emerged. Jim Stevens had a new shock. The lawyer only stared at Pat with cold, disinterested eyes. He did not seem in the least curious as to where Pat had been.

Then Monk's ugly face came into the inner doorway. It had much less expression than any of the ape family.

"Good grief!" said Jim Stevens. "Two of Doc's men, and they've been hit by the same thing! I'm going to get in touch with Doc Savage himself! This thing will get him next!"

The young millionaire hurried back around the hill toward the highway. Coming in, he had followed Pat. Going out, he cut straight across the brush-covered ground. He stepped squarely upon a soft and yielding body. He saw a dead man with the throat cleanly slashed. It could have been done by the blade of a sword.

Now, more than ever, he felt the need of Doc Savage to investigate these mysterious happenings. And his mind might have been a bit relieved if he had known that Doc was soon to be on the scene of these odd happenings.

DOC SAVAGE was at the controls of one of his fastest mono-planes. He had cut the time of his arrival over the Shinnecock Hills to less than an hour after receiving Pat's message.

Doc rode under the rather low ceiling of fog. The monoplane motor was of the latest type. Its propeller of special alloy and the motor itself sounded scarcely a whisper more than a silenced car engine. Though the plane was circling low under the fog, its presence could hardly have been suspected by any one on the ground.

The man of bronze was acting upon a deduction of his own. Before he sought the nearest possible landing field, he was surveying the terrain in the vicinity of Monk's cottage. His monoplane carried no lights.

But Doc was wearing a clumsy arrangement of huge goggles. These projected like small condensed milk cans from his eyes. Under the fuselage of the plane an invisible beam was flooding all of the surface of the rolling hills below. It could not be seen with the naked eye.

But through Doc's goggles the infra-red ray pierced the darkness. It spread over a wide area as the plane banked and held in a tight spiral. In the infra-red beam even the smallest objects were brought out in sharpest detail.

There was no color except black and white. Because of this, each detail was even clearer. And Doc had recently improved the infra-red observing goggles with strong telescopic lenses. Through the window in the bottom of the monoplane, it seemed as if the ground were only a few yards away.

AS Doc arrived over the hills, a car had stopped on the highway. Doc was watching Pat Savage and Jim Stevens as they alighted. He saw Pat hurry to Monk's cottage. Also he was watching closely while Jim Stevens was crouched beside the window of Monk's kitchen.

Doc was close down when Jim Stevens started back over the hill. Then the man of bronze saw the young millionaire halt abruptly beside a man's body on the ground. It was impossible to detect the nature of the man's wound, but the man of bronze determined that the man was dead.

Jim Stevens looked back toward the cottage where he had spied on Pat Savage. The young man was using a small flashlight. He bent over and picked up some small object from beside the corpse. Doc could not see what this might be.

Now the man of bronze became aware of another man moving among the bushes below Jim Stevens. He was an ungainly, loose-jointed man. He was creeping up the hill with the furtiveness of a stalking cat. His hands cradled a shotgun. Doc could not be sure, but it seemed as if this man intended using the weapon.

The bronze man's eyes swept all of the surrounding territory. Though he was one of the world's most expert pilots, there appeared no possibility of setting the monoplane down in the vicinity without crashing.

Doc acted quickly. He opened the cut-out silencer of the plane motor. Instantly the staccato reverberations of the exploding cylinders filled the hills with the blasting roar like a mighty machine gun turned loose in the sky.

This had its effect. Jim Stevens sprang away from the body of the murdered man with startled suddenness. At the same time, the shotgun in the hands of the gaunt man exploded with both barrels. The charges of shot must have whistled wide of their target. Or at least Jim Stevens appeared to be unscathed.

The gaunt man broke into the open and started running back down the hill. Doc smiled grimly. He closed his motor cut-out. It was as if the monoplane had been blotted from the sky.

AT this instant, an automobile filled with men swept around a bend in the concrete highway. This car skidded to a reckless stop directly behind the roadster Jim Stevens had parked. Half a dozen men poured up the hill.

Doc noted they were wearing the tight-legged uniforms of State policemen. Two of these men leveled guns at Jim Stevens. The man of bronze moved a small switch. A round microphone attachment suspended from the roof of the plane started recording sound.

This was another of Doc's most recent devices. After considerable experimenting, working with Major Thomas J. Roberts—"Long Tom"—his electrical expert and one of his five aids, the man of bronze had succeeded in making double use of the plane's ground detector. This detector recorded distances from the earth or other solid objects by vibration of the echoes of the plane's own motor when its cut-out was open.

Now the recorder was picking up the voices of the men on the ground. It seemed to Doc that these policemen moved somewhat mechanically, as if there was a stiffness in their joints.

"Keep your hands in sight, buddy!" commanded a voice. "What the hell's been going on up here in the hills?"

Jim Stevens had put up his hands. He could not well do otherwise. The bronze man at the plane controls was watching him intently, at the same time keeping the silenced monoplane banking lightly above the group below.

Jim Stevens flicked one hand a little sidewise. It looked as if he had rid himself of something he had been holding. Doc judged this to be the small object he had picked up alongside the murdered man on the hill. He was to discover later that this was a silver buckle torn from one of Pat Savage's small slippers.

Two of the uniformed men went up to the body on the hill. Doc made note that they did not seem to do much searching. They went directly to the corpse. That was strange, he decided, if they had not been here previously. And if they had been, they would have left some one on guard.

The two men returned. A voice came from the microphone beside Doc.

"Maybe you'll tell us that guy up there bumped himself off!" grated one of the uniformed men.

Jim Stevens must have said the first thing that came to his mind.

"I've been hunting ducks," he said, sarcastically.

"Smart guy, huh?" snapped a voice. "Well, you'll maybe be able to tell it to the inspector over at Riverhead! Get in, buddy!"

DOC SAVAGE'S plane was not equipped with a machine gun. The man of bronze never carried a pistol on his own person. He believed the possessor of that kind of a weapon came to depend upon it more than upon his own wits and strength.

But there was a superfirer pistol in one of the many compartments. Doc dived toward the ground. One of the uniformed men caught a glimpse of the swooping, silent plane. It looked to him like a great silver bat coming out of the fog. He whooped loudly.

"Look out! There's a guy upstairs! Let 'im have it!"

The bronze man now was sure these were not State policemen. A fusillade of pistol shots peppered the undercarriage and the bulletproof fuselage. Doc's hand whipped from the window beside the controls.

The air became filled with the humming of a million vicious bumblebees. A couple of the men staggered and sat down. They were instantly asleep. The mercy bullets from the superfirer missed the others.

One man's fist lashed out. Its impact nearly dislocated Jim Stevens's jaw.

The two wounded men and the young millionaire were pushed into the car. It roared away down the highway. Still using the infra-red beam, Doc started to trail the auto. Then he banked abruptly.

Pat Savage had come running over the ridge of the hill near where the murdered man still lay. Apparently, she had heard the shooting and the brief roaring of Doc's motor. Doc again saw the gaunt man who had been stalking Jim Stevens, and who had shot at him. The gaunt man had regained his shotgun.

Doc set the controls and slanted the nose of the plane at a dangerous angle. Pat was running directly toward the man with the shotgun. The man appeared to be reloading the weapon.

The bronze man's superfirer stopped him with a stream of the mercy bullets.

Pat halted, staring upward at the humming sound of the machine pistol. The gaunt man had miraculously escaped the mercy bullets, though they had crackled all around him. But he started running back down the hill.

Doc turned on the plane's loudspeaker device. Through this, his voice could be heard clearly. It could have been detected if the plane had been a mile high.

"Go back to the cottage, Pat," instructed Doc's voice. "I'll be there as quickly as possible. Look out for an attack. There is a man watching you."

The monoplane hummed away into the fog. Though he followed the highway for a couple of miles, the car carrying Jim Stevens had disappeared. Doc judged it must have been concealed somewhere in the trees.

THE man of bronze circled at a low altitude, seeking the nearest possible landing space. A beach nearly two miles from Monk's cottage offered the only available space.

As Doc brought the plane down, he turned on the radio broadcaster-and-speaker. This was operated on a special short wave. Its broadcasts were scrambled. They were intelligible only to his own companions. If picked up by any other radio, they would have sounded like the meaningless jabbering of idiots.

"We are on our way!" boomed a deep voice. "We will arrive at Monk's cottage in a few minutes!"

The voice was that of Colonel John Renwick. He was known as "Renny." An engineer recognized among the world's foremost, Renny was a giant in size. Long ago, he had elected to share Doc Savage's adventures. With him now, in a car speeding from Riverhead only a few miles away, were two other lesser figures.

One was a lengthy skeleton of a man. He had a lean, scholarly face. When he spoke, he could only have been understood by some one who knew all the words in the dictionary. He was William Harper Littlejohn, geologist and archaeologist. Known as "Johnny," he, too, was one of Doc Savage's five aids.

The other man looked decidedly unhealthy. He was a pint-size man. It looked as if a violent blow would have killed him. Many had made the mistake of thinking so. For Long Tom, the electrical wizard, was tough enough for two or three average men in a fight.

These three men had been summoned by Doc immediately after he had received Pat's message. They had been attending the sessions of a group of scientists at the Museum of Early American History at the town of Riverhead, not far from Monk's cottage. This was so named because it was at the head of Great Peconic Bay. The three aids had been staying in the town overnight.

On receiving Renny's assurance, Doc instructed, "Leave your car on the highway and await my arrival before going to Monk's house. It might be best to conceal yourselves. I fear we are opposed by enemies possessed of an evil force of mysterious origin."

As the car containing the three men approached the middle of the Shinnecock Hills, Doc Savage was on his way from the beach. The man of bronze gave no attention to the highways. He was crossing the woods, fields and hills with the direct instinct of a jungle-trained mind and body.

The covering of a few miles would be only a matter of short minutes. But he was to be too late to avert the disaster already hovering over the car carrying his three companions.

## Chapter IX. THE RED-HEADED MAN

"

HERE seems to be the locale where the convolutions of the topography formulate a seriatim," drawled the voice of Johnny from the rear seat of the automobile.

"Holy cow!" boomed Renny. "I didn't hit it, did I?"

"Johnny means," said Long Tom, "we have arrived in the Shinnecock Hills. And Doc said for us to get off the highway and wait for him."

The headlight beams knifed around a sharp curve. They picked out the bushes above a ditch. Johnny seemed instantly to forget his long words.

"Hold it, Renny! I saw a man's face! Up there in the bushes!"

Renny skidded the sedan disconcertingly close to the ditch. He was disengaging himself from under the wheel.

"Where? How far back?"

"Go easy," warned Johnny. "It might be a trap. It looked as if the man was lying down."

Johnny was correct. The man was in a recumbent position. He was red-headed. The man had been sleeping peacefully for some time. He was the redhead who had gotten a dose of several mercy bullets from Pat Savage's pistol before she had gone to Southampton.

"It would be best to move him away from here into the trees and park the car without lights," suggested Long Tom. He had been examining the body. "We'll have to watch our step. This fellow has been spattered with some of Doc's bullets. That means Monk must have been in trouble."

Long Tom was pulling small objects from the red-headed man's pockets. Johnny joined him.

With Long Tom, he was inspecting the contents of the senseless man's pockets. Then the two of them picked the man up and carried him farther back into the bushes. Renny ran the sedan off the road and turned off the lights. He followed the others.

Renny said, "Maybe we should turn on the radio, so Doc can find us. I wonder why he didn't want us to go to Monk's cottage?"



Bony Johnny's multi-syllabled words seemed to have left him permanently.

"Why would Doc be looking for us?" he said, suddenly. "Is Doc somewhere out here? This is a funny place for him to be. He does get strange notions sometimes."

Long Tom was looking at the red-headed man on the ground. Before Renny could speak, Long Tom said, "I don't see any good reason to be lugging a dead man around. Nobody wants a corpse. He won't be of any use to any one."

"Holy cow!" gasped Renny. "You fellas gone nuts? Is Doc around? What do you suppose we're doing here? That man isn't dead! He's only been plastered with mercy bullets! Doc'll bring him around!"

"No one can ever bring a dead man to life," announced Johnny, solemnly. "I wish it were morning. I'd like to have a look at some of the rock formations around here. There might be something interesting."

"Well, it is kind of cold," replied Long Tom. "That's our car over there. What do you say we get back in out of this fog?"

RENNY sucked in a long deep breath.

"Sa-ay, you fellas! Cut out the monkeyin! This isn't any time for kiddin'!"

Renny pulled out his flashlight. The beam played into his companions' faces. Very few things had ever shaken the nerve of the big engineer. But he stepped back with a deep breath.

"Hey!" he rapped. "What's happened to you two?"

His voice was flat. Both Long Tom and Johnny were looking at Renny as if he didn't exist. The engineer's big body was shaking.

"Listen," said Renny. "Take this light. I'm packin' this man farther away from the road."

Long Tom took the flashlight without a word. With Johnny, he followed Renny. The engineer had shouldered the unconscious man as if he were a mere child. Renny went up the hill for a short distance.

Suddenly Renny dropped the limp body. He jumped to one side.

"Look out!" he warned. "Turn off that light!"

Long Tom did not turn off the flashlight. He stood with it in such a manner that all three were plainly revealed. A tall, gaunt man stepped out of the bushes. The mean-looking holes of a double-barreled shotgun covered the three men.

"Reckon you fellers hain't goin' no further with that thar dead man," said the man with the shotgun. "Thar's been too dang much killin' an' trespassin' on private prop'ity goin' on around here. Now git out!"

Renny was a huge man. But he was light as a cat on his feet. He sprang directly at the gaunt man. The shotgun exploded. Renny was saved, only because he was wearing the finely meshed garments of a bulletproof vest.

TWO charges of shot spattered the engineer. He was so close to the gun that the force of the blast staggered him as if he had been struck a heavy blow.

As he recovered himself and started in a long leap toward the gaunt man, Renny realized in amazement that neither Johnny nor Long Tom had moved.

But this startling lack of action by the others did not stop his huge fist swinging. That bunch of knuckles could split an inch plank. The fist was a terrific, bone-breaking weapon.

But the gaunt man's head seemed to be made of a new kind of bone. He went down under the blow, but he was not out. As he fell, the man whipped out a long, mean-looking knife. If Renny had had time to look closely, he would have seen the weapon already was stained with blood.

Renny was given no time for such an inspection. The gaunt man snapped the knife into the air from the ball of a leathery thumb. The blade sank into the flesh of Renny's forearm and the point grated on bone.

Not until then did Renny's companions get into action. By some curious reflex, Johnny seemed to get the idea he should do something. His superfiring pistol burred out a short blast. The gaunt man rolled over and lay still.

Renny groaned and pulled the knife from his arm. Johnny stood holding the superfirer as if he didn't know he had used it.

The space around them was suddenly filled with an exotic trilling sound. It vibrated across the hill. It was not a whistle. More like the clear call of some tropical bird. It was musical, but it had no special melody. It was the unconscious sound Doc Savage made in times of stress. Doc had reached the scene.

He had paused for a few seconds beside the murdered man on the hill. He had observed the slashed throat. Then he had seen the flashlight held by Johnny and heard the *whoom* of the shotgun.

The mercy bullets had taken effect on the gaunt man before Doc could reach the scene. Doc's flaky gold eyes measured everything instantly.

"You should have waited," he advised. "What has happened? Let me see the knife, Renny. Put some of this on the wound."

Doc took the knife. He gave Renny a small bottle of liquid. The big engineer made a wry grimace, but poured the chemical on the gushing wound. The blood immediately ceased to flow.

"I'll fix that up a little later," said Doc. "Here, what is this?"

He was examining the knife taken from Renny's arm. The fresh blood was wiped off. Under it, on the blade, the stain of other blood had dried. The man of bronze realized instantly the knife was such a weapon as might have slit the throat of the corpse farther up the hill.

DOC SAVAGE was deliberately pretending to devote all of his attention to the knife. But he was closely studying the faces of Long Tom and Johnny. The fishy coldness of their eyes had told him instantly of their condition.

In the few minutes he had been coming from the plane on the beach, the mysterious paralyzer of all emotions had struck again.

But how? Doc turned to Renny.

"You seem all right," he said. "How do you explain it?"

"Holy cow, Doc! I don't know! We found this red-headed man and I brought him up here. This other fellow tried to cut me in two with a shotgun! Then he threw the knife!"

Doc wasted no time. This was hardly the place to tarry. In some manner with Renny present but escaping, two more of Doc's men had been rendered emotionally inert. Johnny and Long Tom evinced no interest in either Renny's worried excitement or Doc's questioning appraisal of their appearance.

"You take the red-headed one," Doc instructed Renny. "I'll bring this other man. We must get to Monk's cottage without further delay. Perhaps these men will be ready to talk when they wake up."

Though he was carrying the heavy gaunt man, Doc paused beside the man whose throat had been cut. He quickly obtained a specimen of the dead man's dried blood. With this and the knife, it was possible to discover the killer.

FEET pattered among the rocks. Pat Savage's flushed face appeared from the bushes.

"Oh, Doc!" she gasped. "I had to get to you as soon as possible! It's Ham and Monk! They—"

Pat bit off her words with the clenching of her even teeth in her lower lip. Her golden eyes, much like those of Doc Savage, were wide with dismay. She was staring at Long Tom and Johnny. Renny was playing a flashlight which illumined the pallid faces of the electrical expert and the geologist.

"Oh!" breathed Pat, stepping close to Doc. "They're like them! What is it, Doc? I seem to feel a menace in these hills! Something unknown! But I guess I only imagine it!"

"Perhaps there is something in these hills," stated Doc. "But not in these hills alone. It seems to have been in the city before that."

"Doc, I came to tell you something else," whispered Pat. "It's about that gaunt man there. I believe he is John Scroggins, the owner of the duck farm down the hill. Monk had trouble with him. At first, I thought this dead man was him. Now I know he isn't."

"What about this duck man?" said Doc.

"Why, when you drove him off with your mercy bullets from the plane, he ran back down the hill," said Pat. "I started back, but I went past the duck pond. This John Scroggins had a lantern. He had waded into the pond, and while I watched he killed a couple of ducks by wringing off their heads."

"Stopped to kill two ducks, Pat? That's strange."

Doc was gazing at the inert, gaunt figure of the homely duck man.

"Yes," said Pat, "it seemed strange to me, so I hid and watched. Doc, he put something in those ducks after he had pulled off their feathers and cleaned them. The ducks are in a little cooling house on a brook near his house."

"I'll be back in a few minutes," said Doc, quickly. "Keep all the flashlights off. Don't move from here. Renny, you keep a close watch and don't let any one approach. Start shooting at once if you hear any one."

DOC seemed to arrive at the duckpond like a shadow drifting down the hill. He employed no flashlight here. His vision was like that of a jungle cat in the darkness.

Feeble light from an old oil lantern filtered from the open door of the duck man's rambling shack. This showed a boxlike house built in the cold water of the running brook. Doc found the door of this cooler fastened only with a rusty latch.

Inside, the bronze man played a pencil light around. The luminance sprayed over two dozen or more dressed ducks. These were suspended close above the cold water. Doc touched each of the dead birds quickly.

He came to a pair that were still warm. Their bodies had not had time to chill. Doc slit them open. In a few seconds, the interior of the cooling house was filled with the weird trilling. Six knobby bits of what might have been dirty melted glass lay in one bronze hand. These did not reflect the light very much.

A small vial of chemical came from one of Doc's innumerable pockets. His clothes were filled with small compartments. From this vial poured a liquid of an amber color. Drops of it fell upon the bits of apparent glass.

Each of the objects was the size of the ball of Doc's thumb. And the bronze man's thumbs were of more than the average size. The whirlwinds in Doc's flaky gold eyes stirred rapidly. Here was perhaps the first definite lead to the motive for the emotional inertia, the plague that had overtaken his own men and other persons and made their brains seem to lack initiative.

For these bits of seemingly melted glass were huge diamonds. They were wholly unpolished and uncut.

At this moment, there seemed no doubt but that the diamonds were some of those stolen from the safe of Harris Hooper Perrin, the lapidary.

Doc glided to the door of the duck man's shack. One glance within indicated that a thorough search of the place would require some time. Continued silence on the hillside above made it evident Pat, Renny and the others probably would be safe for considerable time, as long as they remained in darkness.

The man of bronze had placed the enormous unpolished diamonds in an inner pocket. It appeared this belligerent duck man, John Scroggins, had sufficient reason to use his ready shotgun upon any trespassers.

John Scroggins might not be as uncouth as he acted. The duck farm itself must be a blind for other operations. If this were true, then other persons must be somewhere in the vicinity.

As this thought came to him, Doc kicked off his flashlight and froze to immobile attention. There had been a furtive, scratching movement in the rear of the duck man's shack. Some person had been spying.

He now was attempting to depart unseen.

## Chapter X. STRANGE RECOVERY

TREES with reaching, gnarled limbs grew thickly above the duck pond. Under these, the blackness was of opaque quality. Moving feet were treading softly. Few men in the world could have heard them slithering along the mushy ground.

Doc Savage rounded the duck man's shack. At the rear, he did not follow the fleeing spy directly. Instead, the bronze man leaped to the overhanging branch of a tree. His big hands grasped this lightly. From this extended limb, Doc swung to another.

His progress through the trees was faster than that of the man on the ground. Doc could hear the man ahead of him pause. He must have been looking back, listening. Perhaps the spy judged he had not been heard, for he moved more slowly.

From a height of about a dozen feet, Doc dropped toward the ground. Then the man who had been slipping away let out a squawk. But he made but little resistance. Doc's weight had struck him between the shoulders. Had the bronze man not accurately measured the distance, the man would have been crushed.

As it was, the man's face was buried for a few seconds in the mushy ground. When Doc rolled him over and pulled him to his feet, the spy could hardly stand. The bronze man's pencil light probed the man's features.

The protruding eyes of Harris Hooper Perrin were bulging out at him. The lapidary no longer was cloaked by the calmness of the lack of emotions with which he had apparently been suffering when Doc had last seen him.

"

DOC SAVAGE!" gasped Perrin. "I thought it was—was some one else! I'm glad it's you!"

Doc believed the little lapidary to be lying. It was hardly possible Perrin had not seen him clearly in the light of the lantern at the door of the duck man's shack. There was no evidence now of Perrin's former abnormal condition. He was twisting violently at the abused lock of tough hair on his partly bald head.

"You will have opportunity to explain your presence here," said Doc. "Where there has been a murder, any one might be suspected."

This brought an instant agony of apprehension to the contorted face of the lapidary.

"Murder?" he gurgled. "What murder? I was only—I got a tip my jewels might be somewhere around here. There was a call on the telephone about the Shinnecock Hills, so I came straight here from Manhattan."

"The message must have been explicit as to where you were to come," stated Doc, quietly. "You are sure then you had heard nothing of the murder?"

Perrin chewed wildly at a finger nail for a few seconds.

"I guess I might as well tell the truth," he said. "The call I received told me to come to the farm owned by a John Scroggins. That's why I'm here. Then I heard some one prowling around, and I hid to see what was happening. I didn't know it was you until you dropped out of the tree on top of me."

Doc's belief was divided. So he only nodded as if this might be true and said nothing. Had the nervous lapidary been only feigning the emotionless condition previously, or had he really been affected and then recovered because of some antidote?

The man of bronze divined instantly that Perrin's nerves could not have been controlled by himself to the extent of becoming coldly calm. Perhaps he had used a drug, or some other person had put him under hypnotic influence. Perrin might become the key to a cure for the others.

As for the uncut diamonds, perhaps there would be other robberies. The force to create the frozen brain would strike again, perhaps.

But this did not explain the other cases. Or did it?

Some persons or group stood to make an enormous profit from the unexplained sale of the Dorn Islands by Simon Stevens. Still, this left unexplained the case of Smiling Tony Talliano, the humble shoe shiner.

Doc Savage revolved new theories quickly in his mind.

"You will accompany me, Perrin," he stated. "There are many things to be explained. At least, you should be informed of some of them. Of course, you have not found your stolen jewels."

"But why should I go with you?" protested Perrin. "Perhaps I should have brought some one with me, when I got the tip. But I was told to come alone. I know nothing of any murder, if there was one."

DOC was not given opportunity to reply to this. Upon the hill where he had left Renny and the others, one of the superfirers started blasting into the night. The man of bronze made a quick decision.

One hand whipped out. Perrin writhed under a grip of thumb and fingers at the back of his neck. But he did not cry out. Instead, his head drooped. He ceased being nervous. His body slumped to the ground in an inert heap.

Doc had applied pressure to one of the nerve centers at the base of the brain. Perrin should be unconscious for considerable time.

After that single blast from the superfirer, there had come no other shooting from the hill. The silence was ominous.

Doc was forced to circle the two-acre duck pond. Gliding through the bushes, he first heard the low voice of Pat. She seemed to be sobbing almost breathlessly.

Pat Savage was only partly conscious. She was attempting to extricate herself from a tangle of bushes. Doc got her to her feet. His flashlight showed Renny stretched on the ground. The giant engineer seemed for a moment to be dead, but Doc ascertained he was breathing.

The senseless bodies of John Scroggins and the red-headed man lay where they had been placed.

But Johnny and Long Tom had disappeared. Pat was first to recover her speech. She had a nasty bruise across her forehead.

"Everything was quiet," she said. "Then several men seemed to spring out of the ground. Something struck me across the head. As I fell, I heard Renny shooting. Then I must have passed out."

Doc produced a small projector box. The light ray coming from this was invisible. But as it was swung around, there was a bluish glow arising in spots. These were about as far apart as the average stride of a man.

There were two sets of these phosphorescent marks. They were from the heels of Long Tom's and Johnny's shoes. These heels were of spongy rubber. They had been impregnated with a chemical devised by Doc. It was one of several substances that fluoresced under the ultra-violet ray, or "black light."

The man of bronze trailed them swiftly through the bushes.

Suddenly the trail of fluorescing heels vanished. The reason for this was simple. Two pairs of shoes lay on the ground. Johnny and Long Tom probably had been forced to remove them.

But Doc was immediately aroused to a new and greater danger. The mysterious forces opposing them must be very familiar with many of Doc Savage's defensive devices. Otherwise, the attackers would not have known about the chemical trail.

Renny had been struck over the head. His superfirer had been knocked from his hand. He could repeat only what Pat had already told Doc.

The man of bronze for a moment could not understand why John Scroggins and the red-headed man had not been removed. Then he saw their bodies had been well concealed from the point of attack. Pat, Renny, Long Tom and Johnny had been some distance away from the unconscious men when they were overcome.

"Hide yourselves and wait!" Doc commanded. "I'll be back in a few minutes!"

WITH almost unbelievable speed, Doc returned to the place where Harris Hooper Perrin had been sleeping peacefully. The lapidary was no longer there. Several men had trampled about the spot.

Doc did not delay to attempt trailing these men. He saw they were not in the vicinity of the duck man's shack. The importance of getting direct information, and of protecting the others, became apparent.

Back on the hill, Doc Savage picked up the limp figure of John Scroggins. Renny carried the red-headed man.

As they started back to Monk's cottage, a muffled explosion shook the ground. Instantly, flames shot high into the sky at the top of the hill. The blaze revealed the stark outlines of the deserted house. It looked as if the whole side of the structure had been blasted out. All of the building seemed to be flaming.

Renny paused.

"We will go on," advised Doc. "I believe that to be a ruse to draw us up there. It is possible we may quickly learn the truth from these men."

They proceeded swiftly to Monk's cottage.

"Why, hello, Doc," was Monk's greeting. "I'll have to call my housekeeper, only I can't remember her name. I'll bet you're hungry? But all we have to eat is duck."

Ham sat in a chair and stared at the others. His keen lawyer's brain might have been groping to make sense of all this, but it was not betrayed by his cold eyes.

"That's the way they came back from the duck pond," explained Pat. "I don't want to believe it, but it looks as if Ham killed the man on the hills. A Doctor Madren took me to the house of Simon Stevens."

Doc's flaky gold eyes merely flickered.

"What happened there?"

Pat related it briefly. She told of Jim Stevens bringing her back to the cottage.

"And then I cleaned off Ham's sword and put duck blood on it," finished Pat. "It was the only thing I could think of, after Doctor Madren and Jim Stevens had seen the stained blade. Was that the right thing to do, Doc?"

"You would do what you think is right," said Doc, dryly. "And this young man, Jim Stevens, watched you do it. Then he wouldn't talk to save himself when he thought State police were arresting him for the murder. Jim Stevens seems to be a very loyal young man, Pat."

"Oh, they got him?" gasped Pat. "And he saw me clean the sword? Doc, you've just got to find Jim Stevens! If they weren't State police, how would they have known about the killing?"

"We will have to take everything in order," advised Doc. "We must find Jim Stevens, also Long Tom and Johnny. There seem to be a great many angles to be followed. First we must see if this red-headed man can talk. Running around in the darkness will get us nowhere."

THE red-headed young man opened his eyes. A hypodermic syringe in Doc's hand had almost instantly overcome the effects of the mercy bullets fired by Pat. Doc left John Scroggins temporarily senseless.

Doc's flaky gold eyes were looking into the orbs of the red-headed man in less than two minutes after their arrival at the cottage. The red-headed man seemed to be in a daze. His eyes betrayed little life.

"Here, drink this," ordered Doc.

The red-headed man made no protest. He gulped down a small glass of wine. Into this Doc placed part of the contents of a small vial. This was the bronze man's own truth serum. This serum was not wholly effective of itself.

But the chemical created lessened resistance. Those numbed by its action usually became easy subjects for Doc's hypnotic eyes. Before they recovered, they nearly always told all that the bronze man wanted to know.

Doc's was looking steadily at the redhead. The man's eyes did not waver. Undoubtedly, he could see the compelling whirlwinds that stirred in the flaky gold orbs. But if this had any effect, it was not indicated.

"You are in very great trouble," stated Doc, finally. "If you tell what you know, it may provide mitigating circumstances for you."

The red-headed man spoke without emotion. There was no anxiety in his voice.

"I know that I am here," he said, flatly. "Something must have happened, but I can't tell you any of it because I do not remember. What is the big fire outside? Is there a house burning?"

"You were shot by the young woman here," stated Doc. "You evidently were attempting to capture her. You must know about that?"

The red-headed man looked more intently at Pat.

"I would like to capture her," he said, unexpectedly. "If I was rude to her, I am glad she shot me."

The astounding calmness informed Doc that neither truth serum nor his own hypnotic powers could accomplish much. The red-headed man was clearly suffering from the mysterious malady of the emotions.

Yet Doc recognized that this man was not of the ordinary criminal type. Except for the lack of feeling, his features denoted that he must be a man of fair intelligence. He had spoken mildly and he seemed to want to understand something he could not quite grasp.

Doc had wasted less than five minutes.

"Keep a close watch, Renny," he instructed. "I still believe that burning house is for the purpose of drawing us

up there. I am going to try an experiment."

PAT had told Doc about Ham having followed Habeas Corpus. Doc pushed the Arabian pig with his foot. The animal had been standing in a funny, stiff position in a corner.

Habeas Corpus was quick to resent being pushed around. Monk was the only person who could handle him roughly. But as Doc's foot prodded him more roughly, the pig only grunted sadly and refused to move.

"Holy cow, Doc!" groaned Renny. "It's got him, too! He won't even bite!"

Doc was examining the shot punctures in Habeas Corpus's thick hide. Then he picked up John Scroggins's shotgun, which had been carried to the cottage. Could there have been something in the effect of the charges of shot?

Doc instantly discarded that idea. But all of the cases of emotionless brains here in the hills seemed to be connected closely with the presence of the gaunt duck man. And Doc was remembering the fortune in apparently stolen diamonds the duck man had hidden.

Doc had said he was about to try a new experiment. Monk became the subject of this. The apelike chemist blinked his small eyes at the bronze man.

Doc's facile fingers were massaging the back of Monk's bristly neck. The tendons played along the bronze man's cablelike wrists. He exerted tremendous pressure.

Monk's head jerked suddenly. His little eyes blinked faster.

John Scroggins, the duck man, was a man of tremendous physical vigor. Apparently the anaesthetic of the mercy bullets affected him less than normal persons. For he suddenly sat up. His odd cocked eye roved excitedly. His other eye blazed with anger.

The loose-boned man reared to his feet. His head bobbed on his long, thin neck. He was looking at Monk.

"Dang yuh!" he whanged out with a nasal twang. "I knowed you fellers wa'n't no good for nothin! You come down hyar spyin' on me, that what you done! Sent your danged hawg chasin' my ducks so's you could git over thar!"

DOC moved quickly, but the duck man had become a flying projectile of loose bones. One long, gaunt arm whipped out. The knuckled fist struck Monk under one of his small ears. The action of the duck man had been fast and unexpected.

Ordinarily, the apish chemist would have been hard to knock off his feet. Now his reflexes seemed of little service. Monk went down like a log.

John Scroggins's forward motion had carried him close to the door. As if the blow to Monk's jaw had been merely a blind, the duck man plunged through the kitchen door. Renny moved fast for his bulk, but he was not quick enough.

John Scroggins was outside and running. Renny started to barge after him.

"Let him go," Doc commanded Renny, suddenly. "I have a good reason. Watch that no other person comes close."

Doc resumed manipulating Monk's nerve centers. His experiment was partly successful.

"Dag-gonit!" squealed Monk. He was glaring at Ham. It was his first normal reaction. "I mighta knowed if that danged shyster showed up around here there'd be trouble! What's comin' off here? Why, hello, Pat! Howlin' calamities! How'd alla you get here?"



Pat had a suspicion of tears in her eyes. Doc's charming cousin sometimes displayed her emotions. She thought a lot of Monk.

"Oh, you've done it, Doc!" she exclaimed.

Monk stared at Ham.

"What's the matter, mouthpiece?" he piped. "You sick or somethin'?"

Ham looked at him without replying. The lawyer had changed into clean clothes he had brought along.

Doc wasted no time. He repeated the experiment on Ham that had seemed to succeed with Monk.

Ham's first words were, "You blasted insect, what've you been up to? How did I get into these clothes? I wasn't wearing them when I got here. Who hit me after I settled that duck man's hash for you? Is that guy still asleep?"

Doc interrupted. "We've got a strange situation on our hands. Ham, you and Monk try and recall what happened to you last?"

"Happened to me?" said Ham. "That's easy. That dumb gorilla got a bump on the head. He lost what little sense he had and I followed Habeas Corpus to see what had happened. I had a run-in with a fellow with a shotgun and I put him out with my sword."

"You didn't happen to also cut a man's throat with your sword, did you, Ham?" Doc asked.

"Cut a man's throat? No. I poked that duck man, but it only went a little under his hide. He went out and then I started up the hill. I heard some explosions. Say, that's funny. I don't seem to recall anything after going up the hill."

Monk's memory was equally faulty. Doc's hope of learning anything of what really had happened was lost. Their brains had seemed to cease functioning at a certain point. Now they were picking up from a new beginning.

THE red-headed man watched all of this with no apparent interest.

Doc Savage studied him intently. At least, if his memory could be restored to a certain point, the red-headed man might spill something of value.

The man made no objection when Doc's pliant fingers sought the base of his brain.

Monk had discovered the condition of Habeas Corpus. When he did, his anger blazed at Ham.

"Pat ought've known better than to trust you with him," Monk complained. "I'll bet you shot him yourself, you danged shyster!"

"And I'll bet when I shoot that hunk of lard it won't be with birdshot!" snapped Ham. "If I start to kill him, I'll make a job of it!"

The eyes of the redhead were flickering with a more lifelike interest. He was staring at the others as if he hadn't seen them before.

"Where am I?" he questioned. "What's all this about?"

"First, you might tell us who you are?" suggested Doc. "You have been ill. We found you and brought you here."

The bronze man was being careful not to excite him too much.

"Why," said the red-headed man, calmly, "I'm Eddie Quaylan. Yes, that's my name."

Doc applied his fingers again to the nerve centers.

The fierce blaze of the house on the hill was dying down somewhat. Renny had taken up his position beside the door. There was still light enough to see for considerable distance around the cottage.

"What is your occupation?" was Doc's next question.

"Oh, now I remember," said the red-headed man. "I'm a chemist. Yes. There were several of us got that job. We had been looking for something for a long time. Then I saw the ad, and I showed it to some of the other boys. We answered it, and he took all of us."

"He took all of you, several chemists?" said Doc, thoughtfully. "Perhaps you mean John Scroggins, or was it Perrin?"

The bronze man spoke the two names calmly, as if the redhead would expect him to be informed.

"Yes, sure," said the redhead. "He took all of us. But he was—"

The whiplike crack came from a distance. Doc's bronze hands were still gently massaging the red-headed man's neck.

The man's head jumped between his hands. The body stiffened and jerked. Over one ear appeared a round, black hole. And over the other the bone of the skull cracked outward. The blood ran down over one of Doc's hands.

The red-headed man had told all that he ever would remember. His body rolled from the chair.

"

HOLY cow!" shouted Renny. "I didn't see anybody!"

Doc Savage had not waited to reach the electric globe and turn it out in the regular manner. His body whipped upward. One fist smashed the glass and the illumination from the ceiling. The kitchen was plunged into darkness.

"Get outside, everybody!" Doc ordered. "Keep to the bushes and out of the glare from the burning house! We may find something up there now! Pat, I wish you were back in Manhattan."

"I don't want to go back to the city now," protested Pat. "I'm going with you."

"Not far," announced Doc. "I have another idea."

Whatever the bronze man's idea, Pat did not accompany the others toward the burning house. Instead, Doc's cousin followed the course of the creek from the duck pond to the beach where Doc had landed his plane.

Doc saw that she was safely away from the vicinity of the glare from the burning house.

## **Chapter XI. VANISHED KILLERS**

THE illumination from the old burning house shed a weird light over the Shinnecock Hills. This emblazoned the countless rocky knolls with their stunted firs.

The fire had attracted attention. The pump of a volunteer fire department had attempted to use some water from an old and long disused well. The stones of this had caved in and cut off the supply.

A few country people stood in groups gabbling. Some State policemen had come up and were keeping every one at a safe distance.

Doc Savage and his companions ascended the hill.

"If Habeas Corpus don't snap out of it pretty soon, I'm going to take that duck man's shotgun and give you a dose of the same medicine, you miserable shyster!" Monk was promising Ham.

Ham grinned ironically at Monk.

"That pig was too smart to associate with an ape, so maybe he is only playing down to what little brain you've got," was the lawyer's biting comment.

"Holy cow!" rumbled Renny. "Doc, there's that duck man again! He's dancin' around like he'd lost his shirt or something! Want me to grab him?"

"I suspect our friend has recently discovered the loss of much more than his shirt," commented Doc. "For the time being, I imagine it might be as well to let John Scroggins have some rope."

Doc did not mention the fortune in uncut diamonds he had taken from the dressed ducks. The bronze man was well aware why Scroggins was dancing around as if on hot coals.

Doc moved closer to the flaming house. The gaunt duck man had looked as if nothing much would ever affect him greatly. But he ceased jumping around and stood looking at the ancient structure crumbling into the flames.

And tears were running down John Scroggins's leathery cheeks. His big bony hands were twisting together. The one cocked eye roved with bewildering rapidity. Doc was not close enough to hear the words, but the duck man was talking to himself.

The fire's reflection outlined the man's thin lips. That was all Doc required to learn what John Scroggins was saying.

"All I had—all I ever had—an' they got 'em back! An' now the whole thing goes up in smoke!"

DOC SAVAGE had deliberately prevented further interference with the duck man. The uncut diamonds Doc had found represented only a small part of the fortune in gems taken from Harris Hooper Perrin. The bronze man had thought perhaps John Scroggins might lead him to the place where the rest of the jewels were cached.

Now the duck man's words would indicate he had lost everything. Perhaps there had been a division of the stolen gems. And Doc had got only what had been John Scroggins's share.

Doc glided back to his companions.

"I'm keeping Renny with me," said Doc. "It will soon be daylight. I have a mission for you two, but you will have to proceed with the utmost caution. You will go at once to the vicinity of the home of Simon Stevens. I want to know the identity of every visitor to the Stevens home. I may join you later. Be sure your car radio is in good order."

Monk and Ham departed.

A brisk, snappy voiced young man came up. He looked keenly at Doc and his men. The man wore the uniform of the State police. He was a sergeant in charge of the detail.

"Mind informing me what brought you down here, Mr. Savage?" he demanded. "This fire doesn't seem all that's been going on, by a long shot! There's a guy on the hill with his throat slit, an' a red-headed man down in that cottage with his brains blown out. A dumb woman who says she's the housekeeper doesn't seem to know what it's all about."

The sergeant had adopted a hostile tone. He was eyeing Doc with deep suspicion.

"I know as little about it as you do yourself," stated Doc, calmly. "For a thinly populated region, these hills seem to have had many queer visitors recently. Two of my own men have disappeared."

"Yeah?" snapped the sergeant. "And who killed these other two?"

"When I discover that, a rather deep mystery may be cleared up," advised Doc. "Did you know the son of Simon Stevens, the shipping magnate, was seized by men wearing State police uniforms not more than an hour or so ago?"

"Men in uniforms?" grated the sergeant. "There have been none of our men here before this fire started."

"I have been more than sure of that," commented Doc. "And we are interested in getting at the bottom of this. I shall be ready to give you what information I can, as soon as I believe you can make use of it."

"All right, Mr. Savage," he muttered. "But we must get at the bottom of this. We've questioned the owner of the burning house, but he's too excited to tell us much."

"And the owner is—" suggested Doc.

"The man who owns the duck farm down the hill," said the sergeant.

"You will stay here, Renny," directed Doc. "Do not let John Scroggins out of your sight. If he starts down the hill, follow him."

The State police sergeant gasped out a short oath.

Doc Savage was gone. One instant he had been there, and the next he had vanished in the bushes.

THE man of bronze went down the hill and skirted the muddy shore of the duck pond. He was headed for the duck man's shack. But when he was halfway around the pond, he halted abruptly.

Numerous dead ducks had floated to the shore. Doc picked up one of these. Its gullet had been ripped open. The same operation had been performed on all of nearly fifty ducks.

Doc was thus informed that other persons must know of the duck man's fortune in stolen gems. Without doubt, the birds had been killed in the hope of discovering some of the stones.

Apparently, John Scroggins had remained close to the burning house. It would seem the duck man was having tough sledding. Without doubt, he had discovered his cached diamonds had been removed. Now his house on the hill was being destroyed.

Doc whipped to the door of the duck man's shack. The interior was in great disorder. The duck brooders in which the eggs were hatched had been broken open and scattered around. Loose boards of the floor had been ripped up.

This looked as if Harris Hooper Perrin had not been alone in his search for the missing diamonds.

Doc took a couple of the uncut stones from an inner pocket. In the pencil ray of his generator flashlight, he examined these. Almost instantly, the rare trilling filled the gloomy space of the shack.

The man of bronze rapidly inspected the other stones taken from the dressed ducks in the cooling house. The clear-cut features of Doc became an inscrutable mask. He had made an amazing discovery. Whatever this might have been, he stuffed the diamonds back into his inner pocket.

Some one was splashing into the edge of the pond. Doc glided from the shack and concealed himself in the shadows. Streaky daylight was beginning to put fingers across the eastern hills of the island.

Doc heard an expressive oath. Then he grinned a little.

"Holy cow!" boomed a voice. "I didn't see the blasted mud hole until I was in it up to my waist! Hey, Doc! Here's a motor cycle guy from up the highway! He's got a telegram for you!"

The messenger was from a telegraph office at Patchogue. This was a town several miles up this historic coast of Long Island. The message had been signed with the name of "Randolph Breckens."

Before Doc Savage had left his Manhattan headquarters, he had talked into his special telephone-dictograph. There was an automatic attachment to Doc's phone, that informed any person who might call where the bronze man could be reached.

DOC knew Randolph Breckens as one of New York's largest importers and wholesalers of diamonds. Apparently Breckens had known something of the mysterious menace, even before the case of Smiling Tony had come to public light. Or so the message indicated.

This read, cryptically:

CALLED YOUR HEADQUARTERS STOP MUST SEE YOU AT ONCE STOP DISASTER THREATENS  
MANY PERSONS STOP ONE MAN OR WHOLE ORGANIZATION MAY BE RESPONSIBLE FOR  
STRANGE INSANITY STOP YOUR MEN ARE UNDER THIS MENACE

Doc Savage did not believe the peculiar mental afflictions to be insanity. But he had made an interesting, dire discovery. In restoring Ham and Monk to partly normal conditions, he had found a disturbance of nerve centers which possibly would make his own treatment ineffective if a second attack were suffered.

This message from Randolph Breckens came at a moment when it became more important than any other link in the mystery. Immediately after Doc's examination of John Scroggins's hidden diamonds. If what he suspected were true, then it was necessary to get to Breckens without delay.

Ham and Monk were on their way to the Southampton estate of Simon Stevens. Doc told the telegraph messenger there would be no reply. With his fast monoplane, he could be in Manhattan almost as quickly as any message could be sent from Patchogue and delivered to Breckens.

"You will come with me, Renny," he stated. "Probably I will need your help to gather up some loose ends in the city."

Doc did not go up the hill to the nearly burned house. Instead, he started through the thickest bushes. From the middle of this wilderness patch came a pathetic grunting.

"Holy cow!" exploded Renny. "I never knew Monk to forget that pig before. Do you suppose he wandered away? If he did, Monk will come back for him."

"Monk did as I indicated," smiled Doc. "He hid Habeas Corpus. The pig may become useful. I'll let you have the honor of carrying him."

Renny did not appreciate the honor greatly. He lugged Habeas Corpus along by one ear. It was now getting much lighter. The morning was a dirty gray. Doc's monoplane stood in the spot on the beach where it had been landed.

Doc put a hand on Renny's shoulder.

"Let us observe for a moment," he advised. "I failed to turn on the protective gas and we might have had visitors."

The monoplane, like Doc's cars, was equipped with anaesthetic gas distributors. If these had been turned on, any one approaching the plane would have been rendered unconscious. Doc's failure to turn on the gas had not been forgetfulness. Leaving the plane harmless had been intentional.

Doc knew of one visitor to the plane, because he had sent that visitor. But his elbow now poked Renny's ribs softly. A man was running along the beach. He was keeping close to the fringe of bushes above the strip of sand.

Just before reaching the plane, this man looked all around. Then he made a dash for the door of the low-winged ship. In one hand he was holding an automatic pistol. In the other was a large wrench.

"We'd better grab him, Doc!" said Renny, hoarsely. "He's planning to smash something!"

"Wait here!" commanded Doc. "Hold tightly onto the pig!"

RENNY tightened his clutch on the ear of Habeas Corpus with disgust. The engineer felt he was missing something. The man with the wrench was climbing onto the plane's wing near the door. His hand reached for the door fastening.

From the bushes to one side of Renny, a machine gun crackled with continuous explosions. The stream of slugs hammered at the door of the monoplane. They seemed like a vicious knife, for they first nearly amputated the man's arm.

Slugs tore the body to pieces.

Doc had whipped under the wing of the monoplane. The drum of machine gun bullets ran itself out. A few metallic clicks, and the gun was silent.

Renny had pulled his superfiring pistol. The superfirer shook his arm. Millions of bees seemed to be buzzing through the bushes.

Renny was sure he had been aiming directly at the machine gun. He could see its slanting blue flame as he fired. His mercy bullets covered all of the spot, as he weaved the muzzle of the superfirer. But the machine gun had not ceased exploding until there were no more bullets.

Doc had disappeared from view beside the plane. Now he called softly from near the machine gun.

"Come over here, Renny! There's none here! It was only a clever trap, and I believe it got the wrong man!"

"Meaning it was set for you, Doc?" said Renny. "Good gravy! It's one of those electric eyes! Say, Doc, didn't you send Pat down to the plane?"

Renny's voice was greatly worried.

"I sent her to the plane some time ago," stated Doc. "We have had a most fortunate break. The location of the plane was not discovered before Pat visited it. After she left, the photo-electrical ray was set up. You see, the machine gun was aimed at the door of the plane. When the man's body passed through the invisible light, it cut it off and that started the mechanism operating the gun."

"Then the man who put it there did not want to be in the vicinity when you returned, Doc," said Renny. "It would have got you."

"That is highly probable," observed Doc. "Let us see if we can discover who it did get?"

The mutilated dead man had nothing in his pockets by which to identify him. The wrench indicated clearly he had planned to damage Doc's plane.

"He was of rather an intelligent order," was Doc's quick deduction. "Also he was a chemist. Observe his hands."

The hands of the corpse were slender and the fingers were long. The fingers, especially the nails, had the indelible stains of having been employed with chemicals. These stains were of varied colors.

"But where is Pat?" questioned the curious Renny. "You said she had been here."

"I hope I have removed Pat to a place where she will keep out of danger for at least a few hours," smiled Doc.

One of the dead man's arms was almost severed by the bullets. Renny gasped. Doc had removed the arm of

the corpse. The man of bronze placed the arm in a special container in the monoplane.

The plane lifted, and was headed for the heart of Manhattan.

## Chapter XII. ELUSIVE FORTUNE

WHILE Doc Savage flew toward New York City, pondering the possible meaning of the message from Randolph Breckens, a worried gray-haired man was pacing the floor of a penthouse residence-office in Manhattan.

This man was Searles Shane, secretary to Breckens, importer of diamonds.

The series of astonishing incidents which had preceded Randolph Breckens's message to Doc Savage, had started with an extraordinary business transaction.

After years of cautious, conservative dealing in diamonds and a few other precious stones, Randolph Breckens had found himself confronted with the greatest opportunity of his career to garner a fortune quickly and easily.

Some time previous to the sending of the message to Doc Savage, Randolph Breckens had been lying awake in the room of his penthouse. That night he could not sleep.

And what man could? Hadn't he suddenly been given the chance to make a profit of several millions? And the opportunity was an honest, square business transaction, so far as Breckens could determine.

A new firm of retailers had opened up a shop in the Bronx district of New York City. This firm seemed to be doing a sudden and tremendous business with wealthy residents of Westchester County.

Randolph Breckens was unable to sleep because he had signed up a contract with this retail diamond firm. The contract had been for the unbelievable amount of more than three thousand carats of diamonds, of the largest size and purest quality.

Only a few days before this contract had been offered, Breckens could not have considered it. But by strange coincidence, as it seemed to him, only a few days before he had been also offered an unusual number of rarest diamonds at a ridiculously low figure.

The quantity of stones to be had seemed unlimited.

So when the retail firm made its offer, Breckens was quick to accept. He did not object to the stipulated delivery of the diamonds within a ten-day time limit. He had merely, as he believed, to make a telephone call and an entire stock of the finest gems would be at his disposal.

The contract Breckens signed contained the provision that he must forfeit ten thousand dollars cash daily for each day his delivery was over the ten-day limit.

In addition to his sudden available supply of diamonds, Breckens had been doing business with leading lapidaries. He knew he would have no trouble filling the huge order.

Breckens's wakefulness yielded at last to sleep. But his first dream was still pleasant. This changed abruptly. It seemed as if cold fingers had been laid across his lips.

For a half-waking moment, Breckens struggled against what may have been partly a dream and partly reality.

Then the man awoke completely. Now a cold wind was blowing upon his thinly clad body, as he raised himself to an erect position.

There should be no cold air pouring into his bedroom. At least, not from the direction this icy breath was coming. For the dampness seemed to be coming through the door into an adjoining room. That door was slowly swinging open.

SEARLES SHANE, his secretary, had retired some time before. The quiet, gray man was without doubt asleep in his own room at the rear of the penthouse.

The diamond broker thought of several thousands in diamonds he had in his private wall safe near by. Among these were some of rare value, cut and uncut. Breckens slipped an automatic pistol from under his pillow.

Having been in the darkness, he had the distinct advantage. The opening door made no sound. It was only a moving shadow in the wall. Breckens waited, pointing the pistol with a firm hand.

"Make a move, and I'll shoot!" he snapped out, suddenly. "I can see you!"

There was a reply. It was a low, cackling laugh. It had the mockery of deliberately inviting him to fire the automatic. Breckens did not especially desire to kill a man. He was not bloodthirsty. If the intruder had planned to assail him, he probably would have fired at the sound of his voice.

"I said, stay where you are!" commanded Breckens. "I have you covered, and I can't miss!"

Only the low laugh again replied. Breckens must have forgotten everything at that moment.

The automatic started jumping in his hand. It pumped its shells empty. All of the bullets slammed into the casing of the door or on through the opening into the next room. Breckens was in the middle of the floor. He was rubbing one hand across his forehead.

Apparently Searles Shane did not hear the shooting. At least, he did not leave his room. The penthouse walls deadened sound fairly well.

Then, peculiarly, Randolph Breckens acted most queerly for a man who had just pumped bullets at a burglar. Instead of arousing his secretary or the other servants, he did not even turn on the light. He placed the emptied automatic casually on a table beside the bed.

With a deep sigh of relaxation, he got between the blankets. In less than five minutes he was sleeping soundly.

SEARLES SHANE answered the call of the Japanese houseman in the morning. The Oriental jabbered, excitedly. Shane got to Breckens's room. He first saw the pistol on the table. Next he shuddered at the pool of blood in the doorway leading to the next room.

The cold morning wind blew through an opened window. Shane's eyes popped like crawling bugs. The wall safe stood open. Some of the rarest gems in New York City had been taken.

Many men would have instantly called the police. Searles Shane appeared to be a calm, judicious individual. Perhaps he was thinking of the huge contract Breckens had just signed. Certainly, the public report of a shooting and a robbery would not help in a business way.

When Randolph Breckens awoke, he yawned widely.

From that minute forward, until the message was sent with its urgent call to Doc Savage, Searles Shane was kept in a bewildered state of mind.

For Randolph Breckens had displayed no excitement over the robbery or the apparent evidence that he must have wounded an intruder. He suddenly wanted to talk about nothing but his proposed travels.

"I think I'll go first to China," he said, as Shane was insisting some report might have to be made to the police. "Yes, China is a wonderful country!"

Shane accompanied Breckens to his office. This day was to jolt the secretary out of all his usual calmness.

During the morning, the representative of another firm of retail jewelers appeared. After passing nearly an hour



in Breckens's office, he emerged into the outer room with a puzzled smile. Still he had a satisfied look, as if his conference had been satisfactory. He spoke to Searles Shane.

"Well, that fixes us up," said this retailer. "The market in diamonds seems to be suddenly picking up. Your boss sure stands to cash in. He seems to know where there is an unlimited supply of stones. I didn't know there were so many available."

Searles Shane grew suddenly cold and a little sick. But he smiled thinly and nodded.

"Yes, Mr. Breckens has always been in touch with the best sources of supply," he said. "I suppose you signed a contract?"

"Yes," said the retailer. "We have calls that mean putting out more than two thousand carats at a good profit. Your boss says he can have the diamonds within five days."

The retailer had hardly passed through the door before Shane went into Breckens's office.

"You signed another contract to deliver two thousand carats?" he questioned.

"Yes," said Breckens, coldly. "Of course! Will you look up some travel folders for me. China and the Orient. I've always wanted to take a long trip."

"But, Mr. Breckens," said Shane, "you are sure you can get that many diamonds? Why, that's a fabulous number! Now you are obligated to furnish more than five thousand carats. Where are you getting the stones?"

"Why, yes," said Breckens. "Five thousand carats. Let me see? I had the address. That lapidary. That Harris Hooper Perrin. I've done business with him before. Maybe I mislaid it. You'll get the folders on China?"

Searles Shane toyed with a studded wrist watch.

He went outside. He did not give his personal attention to obtaining travel folders. Instead, he started using the telephone. Various answers to his inquiries came over the wire.

"Haven't got any such stock."

"The size of the order is beyond us."

"Think you're kidding somebody?"

Thus the replies came to Searles Shane from lapidaries and diamond supply houses. The calls included one to Harris Hooper Perrin. This lapidary could not be reached. He seemed to be out of town.

Within an hour, Searles Shane was making a swift investigation on his own account. There was little doubt but that Randolph Breckens had signed two ruinous and impossible contracts.

Then it was that Shane recalled some of the circumstances of the Perrin diamond robbery. The secretary next got in touch with Bellevue Hospital. The strange cases of the watchman, Henry Hawkins, and of Smiling Tony, the shoe shiner, were still puzzling the best of the psychologists.

Shane felt his employer was afflicted in the same manner.

And to complicate matters, the firm of retail jewelers making the first contract, sent in a call. Immediate delivery of the first five hundred carats of diamonds was wanted.

Randolph Breckens continued to talk about going to China.

So, Searles Shane telephoned and later sent the message to Doc Savage, signing the name of Randolph Breckens.

### **Chapter XIII. PAT'S MIND IS STRICKEN**

WHEN Doc Savage had taken off the beach in his plane to go to New York, he told Renny that he had sent

Pat to a place of safety. This was true. But, in reality, he had sent her to the house of Simon Stevens in the guise of an upstairs maid.

Pat was to check the mysterious malady of Simon Stevens, and report anything out of the ordinary to Doc.

The shipping magnate's condition was the same, and Doctor Madren had seemed to make no headway toward a cure. There was also in Pat's mind a wonderment as to what had become of Jim Stevens. He had been taken away from the hill, along with Long Tom and Johnny, by the fake State police.

A movement from inside a door in the upstairs hallway halted Pat. There was a dull, thumping sound. Pat hesitated, then slowly pushed open the bedroom door.

It was Jim Stevens. The body of the tall young man was swaying at his knees. He was badly wounded. Blood covered his shoulder and arm.

And he was stricken with the same lack of emotional intensity that Pat had seen on the others here in the duck man's region.

For only the reason that she felt she should not call Doctor Madren upstairs to aid Jim, Pat hastily, but with a near professional manner, cleansed and bound the terrible shoulder wound of the shipping magnate's son.

Then in the halted emotionless manner of the others who were stricken, Pat managed to draw slowly the story of Jim's disappearance.

He had been taken on a truck with Long Tom and Johnny to an abandoned beach road. Jim had seen a way to wreck the truck in the sand, without being injured. He brought this about, but in escaping from the wrecked truck, had been shot by one of the drivers.

In his wounded and dazed condition, he had slowly made his way homeward and up the back stairway to his room.

Just as Pat was about to put more questions, the sound of shooting came from outside the grounds and the yelling of Ham and Monk, who were staying around the estate on the order of Doc Savage.

Screams and hoarse cries came from the library downstairs, where Doctor Madren, his nurse and Simon Stevens had been talking.

The roar of the superfirers of Doc's men could be heard blasting away, and then the noise died down in the distance.

Pat, Jim Stevens leaning on her shoulder, cautiously made her way downstairs just as Monk and Ham barged in the door.

"There was a bunch o' guys tried to raid the house!" Monk piped shrilly. "We beat some of 'em off, but the others managed to get into the living room, then escaped out the other side!"

"We have them scared off from another attack, I believe," Ham said. "But I'm wondering what caused it." Then he pointed into the living room, cried, "Look!"

All gazes were quickly turned that way. There were Doctor Madren, the nurse, and Simon Stevens stretched out on the floor. The sweetish odor of chloroform permeated the room and seeped into the hall.

SIMON STEVENS was the first to revive. He came back to life with a roar. Something had suddenly mended his affliction of being stupidly emotionless.

Doctor Madren pulled himself upright in the middle of the rug. Drops of perspiration were shining on his smooth bald head. He was looking from Simon Stevens to Stevens's son in a bewildered way.

Miss Clarke, the nurse, also had emerged from the drug. She looked at Doctor Madren. "I think I remembered some one coming through the window. Then a cloth of chloroform was held over my face!"

"But—but look at him!" directed Doctor Madren, pointing to the shipping magnate. "Why the shock of something has dispelled the illusion! Mr. Stevens, you seem all right again!"

"Why you're damn well right I'm all right again!" roared the millionaire. "Who in hell ever said I wasn't?" Then he became aware of his son in the hall being supported by Pat Savage.

"Jim, my boy! What is it?"

But the answer was in the same slow monotone of those afflicted with the unknown menace. And when Simon Stevens started to question Pat, she, too, could only give monosyllabic answers. In the short time she had been standing in the hallway, she had been stricken.

While Doctor Madren was explaining to Simon Stevens the condition he had been in, and the condition his son and Pat were in, Monk and Ham decided to go outside to talk over their shock at seeing Pat suddenly stricken. And to discuss the motive behind the surprise attack on the shipping magnate's mansion. They had informed those inside that Pat was not a maid, but Doc's cousin.

It was Monk who caught Ham's arm.

"Didja see him?" demanded the big chemist "Over there in them bushes. He dodged as I looked at him."

"Good grief!" muttered Ham. "Haven't we had about enough? Who did you see, in what bushes?"

"Right over there," indicated Monk. "It was that duck man, John Scroggins! He saw me and jumped back."

Ham whipped toward the spot. But when he reached it, the sword cane he had recovered flashing in his hand, there was no one near the bushes. Ham ran for a short distance, but the duck man's face seemed to have been an illusion.

But Monk was distributing a powdered chemical from a small bottle. The spot was shaded from the morning sun. Monk loped to their car and returned with a small, square box. No visible ray came from the lens at one end. The ultra-violet light did not show to the naked eye. But this black light showed a peculiar disturbance of the grass. Footprints were revealed as a curious yellow glowing. This was where the short blades had been trampled down and were slowly returning to their normal position.

"That's him, all right," declared Monk. "Nobody around here has got feet that size. I'll bet he engineered this whole thing! I'm goin' after him."

"We're talking to Doc first," Ham snapped. "He told us to keep an eye on Simon Stevens's place, in case something happened"

"Howlin' calamities!" now squeaked Monk's childlike voice. "Ain't everything happened? You dumb shyster, we've gotta get that guy! He's the fella behind all of this!"

"We'll talk to Doc first," insisted Ham. "Come on!"

STILL growling, Monk loped after him. The radio in Ham's car was switched onto inter-communicating short wave. This would pick up the radio receiver in Doc's New York headquarters.

Ham said, "This is Ham calling. All Hell's broken loose down here, Doc—"

He waited for a few seconds. He called again and repeated. But he received no reply.

"Something's happened to Doc and Renny," declared Ham. "Doc said one or the other would stick at headquarters for any call we might send in."

"Then we'd better go after that duck man," insisted Monk.

So far as contacting Doc or Renny at the moment, it was just as well that they started out to seek the mysterious John Scroggins.

## Chapter XIV. POISON FISH

TWO hours before Pat Savage had found Jim Stevens wounded in his room, Doc Savage was in his outer office. The man of bronze had been pondering deeply over the matter of the diamonds.

The visit of Harris Hooper Perrin, noted lapidary, to the duck man's shack, was one of the most mysterious angles. Little whirlwinds stirred in Doc's flaky gold eyes.

A little later, he smiled and went to the telephone.

Renny, the giant engineer, was in the library. He was not listening especially, but he could hear Doc's voice.

It might have been John Scroggins's own Yankee twang talking into the telephone. Whoever he had called, Doc was imitating the voice of the duck man of Shinnecock Hills perfectly.

After some time, Doc returned to the library.

"You probably will have visitors, Renny," the bronze man announced. "If so, be on your guard. I would suggest you remain in the outer office. Tell them to make themselves at home in the library. They probably will say they want to wait for my return. Explain that I was called out and will return in a short time. If they desire to leave, let them go."

Renny nodded gloomily.

"But, Doc, I thought maybe something would be breaking when we got back?"

Doc smiled a little.

"There possibly will be more breaking than you expect," he advised. "And there might be a radio call from Ham and Monk. That would be most important. They might get word of what happened to Johnny and Long Tom."

Doc went into the laboratory. He approached the clear glass tank containing the multicolored tropical fish. The sign over this tank informed any visitor these were: "POISON FISH."

The man of bronze took four uncut diamonds from his clothes. These he placed on the clean gravel at the bottom of the tank. All objects appear to be magnified in water. But these diamonds were unusually so. They seemed to be five times their normal size.

This was because of an arrangement of mirrors in the tank, such as are used in the performance of magical tricks. If there were poison fish in the tank, Doc did not appear to mind their brushing against the smooth bronze skin of his arms.

When he emerged, Doc said to Renny, "Be sure our visitors have access to the laboratory. This will not be unusual, for you will know one of these men, I am sure. The second man I hope he will bring, will be easily identified. And do not go near the tank of fish yourself."

Renny might have followed these instructions to the letter. He was prepared to do so. Doc Savage glided from his headquarters. His destination was the penthouse office of Randolph Breckens, diamond wholesaler.

RENNY must have known the two men who arrived about half an hour after Doc's departure. They came into the office smiling. Probably they announced they had been summoned by Doc Savage himself.

Renny, for all of his solemn face, was a friendly soul. He had no suspicion of anything about to happen, as one of the men reached his hand for a friendly grip. That grip must have been peculiar.

Renny did not direct the two men to await Doc in the library or the laboratory. He was incapable of carrying out these instructions. For the giant engineer was stretched on the floor unconscious. His breathing was

uneven and his face was strangely contorted.

Though they had not been masked when they entered, both of the visitors now donned long black masks. These were fitted with mouthpieces and oxygen tanks.

"The whole thing may be a trap," said one of the men. "Then John Scroggins may be telling the truth. Doc Savage might have got the rocks. Anyway, we'll take no chances on any of this bird's knock-out gas. They tell me he uses about a dozen kinds, and mostly you wouldn't know about it until it gets you."

From then on, the men talked with muffled voices under their masks. They breathed only the pure air with which they had come prepared. That was a great waste of good oxygen. The laboratory contained no gas trap.

"Poison fish, huh?" mumbled one of the men. "Yes, he might have poison fish at that, so we won't risk anything. But I'll have a look—Well, I'll be damned!"

The first man's eyes seemed to bug through the windows of the mask. The orbs of the other joined in the popping.

"All right, John Scroggins wasn't lying!" mumbled one of the men. "But what's happened to them rocks? Gosh-amighty! I didn't think they was any such size?"

"Don't be a fool!" muttered the other. "That's an old trick! They're the same stones, only this smart guy Savage thinks he's putting something over on us! Probably he had an idea that big guy in the other room would put us out of business and hold us here! Listen, I'm getting those stones out of there!"

Then they stepped back and one man picked up a heavy weight from a laboratory table. Glass shattered. This man seemed for a moment to go berserk. His gaze fell upon the radio instruments in the room. His hand continued to swing the weight. The delicately constructed equipment banged and clattered in pieces.

"All right," said one of the men, as they came to the outside. "We get this dumb bird out of here, and then I've got to grab the plane and work fast. By this time tomorrow, nobody would believe I could have been in Manhattan at this hour this morning."

DOC SAVAGE had been delayed longer than he had anticipated.

Without the background of the other cases of emotionless brains, the story to which he had just listened would have sounded incredible. But there could be no denying the mental condition and financial status of Randolph Breckens.

The diamond wholesaler was wholly irresponsible. He was a ruined man, unless the marts of Manhattan miraculously produced an unbelievable number of diamonds.

Searles Shane had told Doc Savage of sending the message and signing the diamond broker's name to it.

Doc's instructions to Searles Shane had been, "Inquire closely into the persons behind the retail firms making the diamond contracts, and do nothing until you hear from me."

When Doc Savage again entered his headquarters, he did not need to enter the laboratory to know a part of his trap had worked.

But there was no sign of Colonel John Renwick. Renny had vanished without a trace.

Doc viewed the wreckage in his laboratory without a sign that it was other than he had expected. His greatest concern was the smashing of the radio. The loud-speaker receiver was so adjusted that any message would have been recorded on a cylinder. If there had been a call from Ham and Monk recently, there now was no means of checking on this.

The man of bronze went to work with unbelievable speed. Within a few minutes, he had a new radio receiver rigged up. He made an effort to contact Ham's car. To this he received no response. Ham and Monk at this

time were already engaged upon other business.

Doc Savage now entered upon perhaps the deepest scientific investigation of his career. And as he did this, he was aware that the success of his experiments undoubtedly meant the lives or deaths of some of his companions. For he was thoroughly convinced that the diamonds and the brainstorm attacks were closely linked.

SCORES of his prized tropical fish had flopped to the laboratory floor. Some had gasped out their lives. Broken glass strewed the place. It was but a matter of minutes until these dead fish were in a separate tank. Into this tank Doc poured a colorless liquid.

Then was enacted a trick that savored of blackest magic. The tropical fish began wiggling their multi-colored fins. In a short time, they were swimming about as vigorously as if they had never died.

The uncut diamonds had disappeared from the tank. This loss did not disturb Doc greatly. He had expected Renny would interfere before the visitors had progressed that far. The big engineer's failure spelled sudden attack by which he had been overcome.

The man of bronze then removed the underwater castle from the broken fish tank. From inside it he took the waterproofed black box.

The photographic plate taken from the black box was placed in its developing bath. The result was brought out slowly. At first, it seemed as if the whole thing had been a failure. The black masks over the faces of the men appeared as only shadowy streaks.

But there were four enlarged spots. And these were human eyes. True, they were peering through the windows of the oxygen masks. But in the camera they had been magnified enormously.

Suddenly the laboratory was filled with Doc's exotic trilling. Either he was on the eve of a remarkable discovery, or some theory had been proved.

Only minutes had elapsed since Doc Savage had entered his headquarters. His next procedure was strange. He lifted an object from a deep jar of colorless chemicals. This was a gruesome bit of work. For this was the hand of the man who had been cut to pieces by a machine gun while trying to wreck Doc's plane on the beach.

Doc took samples of the chemicals from the deep jar. He placed a few drops of these in each of a dozen different retorts. The reagent chemicals in these retorts were some known to but few of the world's leading chemists. Each retort had its own story to tell.

Doc Savage listed chemistry among his greatest achievements. He had at hand one or two combinations that the most advanced laboratories never had employed. But the bronze man was plainly dissatisfied.

For there was one chemical property in the stains on the hand of the dead man that had failed to respond to any of his numerous tests. It seemed some baffling, hitherto unknown element.

THE pig, Habeas Corpus, was under a bench. He had made the trip back to Manhattan with Doc and Renny. His eyes were dull and cold. Usually they gleamed with vicious humor. He made no resistance when Doc seized him by an ear.

Then the attack began. There was no warning.

It crept upon him from inside his own nerve sources. And it was more difficult to detect than would have been the filling of the room with some odorless poison gas. The overpowering effect of carbon monoxide would not have been more deadly.

At the moment, Doc Savage was most concerned with devising methods of combating the plague of the dulled emotions. Only by this means, could he hope to discover and rescue Johnny, Long Tom and Renny.

He was sure these three were under the spell of the undetermined enemy. He was equally positive they were alive.

Doc Savage abruptly discovered himself moving mechanically. He had begun the filling of test tubes. His hands kept at this task in automatic fashion. But suddenly, he had a curious feeling that he was only wasting time.

Why was he doing all of this?

The magnificent bronze head shook on his shoulders. The tendons of his corded neck tightened. Then he sat down and his hands left the tubes. For perhaps two minutes he sat still, staring at the chemicals in the test tubes.

What had he been doing? And why? Oh, yes, he must work fast to save three of his men. That was it.

But why should he save them?

Let them take care of themselves. What was it he had started to do? Habeas Corpus, the pig, grunted as if he were sick.

Why had he wanted the pig?

DOC SAVAGE sat there, staring at the test tubes. His companions, with their own marvelous knowledge in various lines, had been easily overcome. Now the intricate machinery that was the amazing brain of the bronze adventurer was beginning to show an attack on the emotions.

No other person was present. Some insidious poison was creeping along the world's most highly tuned nerves. The flaky gold eyes were becoming cold. Their usual whirlwind depths were becoming quiet.

The great laboratory was very still.

Doc Savage had been fortunate in never knowing the feeling of depression. Now his senses seemed to have congealed. His big hands reached toward the row of test tubes, then they halted in mid-air. The powerful wrists and forearms, like bundles of piano wires wrapped in velvety bronze skin, were strangely inert.

Then, perhaps unconsciously, Doc Savage began his daily exercises. One set of muscles was suddenly strained against another set. The amazing brain took up an involved calculus, mental mathematics requiring the extreme of deductive analysis.

His own hands went to the back of his neck at the base of his bronze-haired skull. The great thumbs dug into the smooth flesh. He pulled his head forward and down. To an observer, it would have appeared that he was attempting to extract his own spinal cord from its protective vertebrae.

From his toes to his scalp, Doc's muscles strained. Where other men had yielded to the power of the mechanical emotions, the bronze giant was grappling with it in his own manner. Again and again, he could begin to feel an arousing of memory and interest in his companions, only to lose it again.

## **Chapter XV. VANISHING POND**

DOC SAVAGE'S lone battle against the numbing of his brain might have been more intense if he could have had a mental picture of the plight of two more of his companions. It may be that he did have this intuitive vision hammering at his subconscious mind.

For more than an hour he continued to be an appalling figure. In silence, he was fighting a mysterious invisible force. At times, he was on his feet, swaying like a drunken man. But his powerful fingers never left the back of his neck. The skin was rasped and torn. Blood oozed from his finger nails.

The picture he might have had, was that of Monk, the homely chemist, and Ham, the waspish lawyer. Disregarding the instructions Doc had given them to stay close to Simon Stevens's mansion, they had driven rapidly toward the duck farm of John Scroggins.

Hundreds of white ducks flapped and quacked in the muddy pond. Ham and Monk concealed themselves on the hill near the still-smoldering ruins of the burned house. The two-acre duck pond was a spread of dirty water. The white ducks quacked and fed in the shore mud.

"I'm stayin' right here until that duck man shows up," declared Monk, stubbornly. "You jump around so dag-goned much you don't get anything done."

"Anyway, I don't go around scaring people with an ugly face like you do," said Ham, scathingly. "And when he shows up, what are you proposing to do?"

"I'm takin' him apart one piece at a time an' seein' what he's made of. What he knows he'll be glad to spill, before I get through workin' on him!" flared Monk.

"All right, let's see you go to work," cut in Ham. "I just now saw his face at the window of his shack."

"Come on!" gritted Monk. "Now we'll get some answers!"

KEEPING under cover of scattered bushes, the pair went down the hill. Halfway to the pond, they hastened their pace. For John Scroggins suddenly emerged from the shack. He was carrying a battered old receptacle once known as a valise. Its contents caused it to bulge.

"Howlin' calamities!" squealed Monk. "The guy's beatin' it!"

John Scroggins was making his loose-jointed way toward an old car. The radiator of the car was steaming. It was apparent the duck man had driven fast.

Monk raised his superfiring machine pistol and shouted, "Hey, you! Stay where you are or I'll make a sieve outta you!"

The width of the duck pond separated them from the figure of John Scroggins. The gaunt man whipped around. His small head bobbed ridiculously on his thin, long neck. The duck man did not reply.

He threw the old valise into the car. Then he made long, awkward strides back toward the door of his shack.

When the duck man again emerged, Ham and Monk were at the edge of the two-acre pond. John Scroggins was carrying his inevitable double-barreled shotgun.

"Git back thar, you danged duck killer!" his nasal voice was whanging.

Monk did not hesitate. The superfirer whooped in his hand. His ape-like figure plopped into the shallow pond.

John Scroggins ducked agilely back into his shack. The shotgun barrels stuck out. The weapon *whoomed* with a double belching of shot.

Ham groaned and plunged into the filthy pond after Monk. The duck man apparently was slipping more shells into his shotgun. Monk let the superfirer empty itself, plastering the shack door with the mercy bullets. They did no damage.

From somewhere deep underground sounded a muffled explosion.

Ham shouted, "Look out, Monk! The pond is mined!"

It seemed as if this might be true. Muddy water geysered up into the sunlight. It fell back with a *whooshing* splash. Monk kept on, stubbornly wading across. Ham was close behind him.



A STRANGE thing was happening. The pond was disappearing. The expanse of shallow water suddenly diminished. In the middle appeared a muddy whirlpool. Caught in the suck of this, Monk and Ham slid from their feet.

Rushing water turned them over. John Scroggins came from his shack and glared at them. He stood motionless on the bank of the receding pond. All of the water was being drawn into a great hole. It was as if a mammoth well had suddenly been opened.

Ham caught ineffectively at Monk's hairy neck. Together they fell into the hole.

"Dag-gonit!" yelled Monk as they went down. "You got us into this!"

Ham could not reply to this unjust accusation. His mouth was full of water. A quacking white duck hit him in the face. Both men thudded onto a hard surface. The fall was partly broken by the swing and depths of the water.

The pond was draining rapidly under the hill. Monk and Ham were still conscious enough to put on the brakes when their feet found a footing. The water seemed to be getting shallow. It was spreading underground.

Ham managed to produce his flashlight. This revealed the walls of a tunnel leading under the hill. Around them was a bedlam of squawking ducks. The frightened birds slapped against them.

"Look, Monk!" directed Ham, sputtering mud from his mouth. "It's a passage under the hill! It goes in the direction of that house which burned! That's our best way out!"

John Scroggin's voice twanged behind them.

"Consarn your orn'ry hides! Come out'n that tunnel! You ain't goin' to find what's—"

What they might be going to find, was lost. Monk had another drum of bullets in the superfirer. He turned loose in the direction of the duck man's voice.

"I'll bet that tunnel opens under his shack," stated Ham. "He didn't come into it through the same hole we fell into."

Ham's deduction was correct. John Scroggins had entered the tunnel through his shack. Ham and Monk did not hear him again.

"It's something up under the burned house," said Ham. "We might as well go out that way as the other."

The flashlight revealed the walls of the tunnel to be smooth. Some drainage passage had taken care of the water from the shallow pond. Only a few inches of it still splashed around their feet.

"Looks as if this hole was made a long time ago," said Monk.

"Probably when that burned house was rebuilt," decided Ham. "And that place must have been there for more than a hundred years."

"Weren't you up there before you had your scrap with the duck man?" inquired Monk.

"Maybe I was and maybe I wasn't," said Ham. "Seems now as I do recall some—"

WHATEVER he might have recalled, was forgotten. Around a turn in the tunnel leaped half a dozen silent men. The flashlight showed their faces briefly before it was flicked off. These men seemed to be without weapons. They were advancing slowly, steadily.

"Howlin' calamities!" squealed Monk. "Get back, Ham! Them fellows don't look like thugs, but they don't look human either!"

It was Monk's first view of the strange crew of automatons Ham had seen in the old house, but which he

vaguely remembered. The men came at them with the cold precision of human robots.

Ham had hung to his sword. But using it in the darkness of the tunnel was difficult. Ham felt its point sink into one man's flesh. The victim made no outcry. Ham fell over his inert body, so quickly was the man put to sleep.

Monk was a few seconds trying to make sure Ham wasn't in the line of his superfler. The weapon was not discharged. Hands came from the darkness and fastened all over Monk's body. The chemist's long arms whipped out. He had the satisfaction of feeling two heads crunching together.

This was probably the last that Monk remembered. He did not know when Ham was overcome. Ham didn't know either.

IN the meantime, back at the shipping magnate's mansion Monk and Ham had departed, Miss Clarke, Doctor Madren's nurse in the big house of Simon Stevens, was being kept busy. Now that Pat and Jim Stevens were suffering with the same emotional inertia, Miss Clarke displayed sympathy.

Also, the nurse was most valuable in following the directions of the town doctor who had been summoned to attend Jim Stevens's bullet wound.

"I don't care what you make your fee. If you can bring my son out of this queer insanity, you can name your own figure," Simon Stevens pleaded with Doctor Madren. "If it takes all I have, my son is worth that to me!"

"We will not discuss the fee," said the cherubic psychiatrist. "These are most unusual cases. My only reward shall be to discover a means of restoring them to their normal minds."

Miss Clarke went into the grounds for a breath of reviving air.

The tall, plain woman with the keen, searching eyes was still pale from the effects of the chloroform. And she had something else of a disturbing nature on her mind.

Strolling with apparent casualness, Miss Clarke made her way slowly toward the lower side of the extensive grounds. Here rows of ornamental shrubbery formed hidden lanes extending to the rear of the mansionlike summer home.

Miss Clarke passed behind one of these rows. This was nearly one hundred yards from the house. Then suddenly, the woman's voice rose in screaming words.

"No! No! I'll not do that! I've done more now than I should!"

The voices of men rumbled as if in a command. Miss Clarke screamed again.

"I'll tell Doctor Madren—I've gone as far as I can with you—Oh, don't do that! No! Oh, please!"

Then curses rippled along the shrubbery.

But the strangled appeal of Miss Clarke had been her last words on earth. She was a sight that caused those who had rushed from the house to gasp and grow sick. A hideous gash started at one ear and extended to the other. In less than two minutes, the nurse's body had been drained of blood. Her neck had been sliced open.

Doctor Madren had run from the house bareheaded. His bald, polished skull reflected the sun. His round mouth came open.

"This is terrible—terrible!" he shuddered. "It must be this cursed thing is directed at Simon Stevens! Miss Clarke was my best nurse!"

Simon Stevens was staring at the body of the nurse. His face was no longer ruddy. Nearly all of the servants had run from the house. On one of the numerous side roads, a high-powered car hummed away.

"Doctor Madren," said Simon Stevens, "we must get my son away from here at once! I feel this whole attack is directed at me, but I can't imagine why?"

"Perhaps you have enemies of whom you are not aware," suggested the psychiatrist.

"I certainly know of no enemies," declared Simon Stevens.

The little scream of a woman sounded from the now nearly deserted house. One of the maids came down the stairs to the lawn and fell fainting.

Simon Stevens ran heavily toward her. Then he went on into the house. In a few seconds, the millionaire's voice shouted with alarm.

"They're gone—my son is gone—and Pat Savage!"

The fainting maid was revived and could tell little. She had only seen men carrying Jim Stevens and Pat Savage from the house. They had entered and left the house on the side opposite that where the nurse had been ruthlessly murdered.

WHOEVER these men had been, there was no doubt but they belonged to the same crowd which had overcome Ham and Monk in the tunnel. For only a few hours later, Pat Savage and Jim Stevens were in the same closed truck with the lawyer and the chemist.

Ham and Monk were tightly bound. Tape blindfolded them. They were aware they were in a truck, rumbling over a rough road. It was night again, but where they had been during the day, Ham and Monk did not know.

Their brains were in a static, numbed state. Men talked, but the words made no impression. Then a woman's voice permeated the rumbling of the truck. It was Ham who identified the voice.

"Pat has come with us," stated Ham, as if this were not unusual. "I wonder why it is necessary to tie us up like this?"

The voice of Monk complained.

"Pat, will you ask some one to give me something to eat? I'm very hungry. But I don't want any duck. I'm tired of ducks."

"Hello, Ham. Hello, Monk."

Pat's voice betrayed no excitement. Then she said, "Why are you taking me for this ride? Jim's shoulder is bleeding."

Neither Ham nor Monk at that moment recalled who Jim might be. They did not seem to care. Monk still moaned about being hungry.

Presently the truck was stopped. Ham, Monk, Pat and Jim Stevens were directed to walk out onto a rotting wharf. Only Jim Stevens had to be assisted. The others obeyed the order willingly.

For half an hour or more, the four prisoners were kept together in the narrow cockpit of an open launch. Salty spray slapped into their faces. This had no apparent reviving effect. The launch passed across the rough channel. Then it glided into smooth water.

"I see a lot of funny, dead ships," announced Pat Savage in a cheerful tone. "It looks almost like some graveyard of the sea."

Pat had not been blindfolded. What she might see or remember must have been considered unimportant.

Doc's attractive cousin had aptly described the place to which they had been brought. For the rotting hulks of many ships lay in shallow water behind a clawlike point. These ancient ships were the remains of Long Island's once great whaling industry, gone forever.

When the launch stopped, it was beside one of the largest of these ancient hulls. The four prisoners mounted a rope ladder to a slanting deck. Then they were pushed down into an evil-smelling space.

Rancid bilge water assailed their nostrils. The tape was pulled roughly from the eyes of Ham and Monk. Electric light bulbs illuminated the interior of their new prison. The gaunt ribs of an old whaling hulk jutted around them.

Pat Savage paid no attention whatever to Doc's companions. She remained close beside Jim Stevens.

The men who moved around them showed hardly more interest than their prisoners. They gave no hint of the purpose of this capture. Their actions seemed to be automatic. They were directed by voices which came through a speaking tube from the outside deck. This tube was fitted with a microphonic loud-speaker.

Ham and Monk were unbound. A new command came through the loud-speaker. Ham and Monk joined the others, working without protest.

ONE of the human robots was much larger than the others. He was a human giant, stripped to the waist. All of the men seemed engaged in the peculiar occupation of carrying filled bags through this room into another.

The gigantic figure came close to Ham and Monk. He did not even pause in his stride with the other automatic workers. He merely nodded.

The giant was Renny. The presence of Ham, Monk, Pat and the others did not impress him as out of the ordinary. Johnny and Long Tom were in the line of workers. They were also stripped to the waist. Sweat poured from their bodies, but they did not complain.

The prisoners had no means of knowing that Simon Stevens had been desperately attempting to procure aid for them.

## **Chapter XVI. THAT DUCK MAN**

THE day was far advanced when Stevens succeeded in getting a telephone call through to the heart of Manhattan. The tortured millionaire had tried the call at least fifty times. Each time, he had heard only the dictograph cylinder in Doc Savage's office requesting him to leave a message.

Each time he had said, desperately, "As soon as you get this message, Doc Savage, call me! It's life and death! They've got my son and they've got your cousin, Pat Savage! All have disappeared, including the ones you call Ham and Monk!"

Over and over, the message now was being repeated into the ear of the man of bronze. The back of Doc Savage's neck was torn and bleeding where his powerful fingers had gouged into the flesh.

But his brain was clear, after a long battle. By his sheer mental force, combined with intensive physical action, he had been the first to beat the force that attacked emotions and made automatons of men.

When Simon Stevens's excited voice had related all he could tell, after the bronze man had called him back, Doc Savage replied, "Your own case informs me there is some solution to this mystery. You will hear from me."

The situation presented its demand for immediate action. Doc knew he should at this moment be on his way to the Shinnecock Hills. But he was aware that without a potent force of his own, he might be rendered as helpless as the others. He had fought off the brain menace once, but could he do it again?

The telephone buzzed.

"Doc Savage?" said the voice of Searles Shane. "I have news for you. A great number of diamonds seem to have become available on the Manhattan market. I got a tip that many uncut stones have been turned loose;

but, thus far, every source has refused to permit any offering on Mr. Breckens's contracts. What would you advise?"

"I am as much in the dark as yourself," stated Doc. "I shall call you as soon as I have made an investigation."

When the bronze giant again replaced the telephone, his trilling that signaled a new discovery broke out. He went swiftly back to the laboratory. There he placed the remainder of the stones taken from John Scroggins's cooling house on a table.

He used up several minutes making a microscopic examination of the uncut diamonds. His flaky gold eyes were stirring whirlpools as he finished.

"Most remarkable," he murmured. "John Scroggins is a very deceptive individual. I shall have to seek an interview as soon as possible. Perhaps Harris Hooper Perrin also could tell much."

This interview with John Scroggins already was close. Doc did not know this, as he worked at highest speed. The bronze man filled a syringe with a combination of chemicals. He thrust the needle into the tough hide of Habeas Corpus.

The pig didn't even grunt. Nor did he show that he had been affected in the least, after several minutes had passed. He only eyed Doc with suspicion and crouched farther under the bench.

THROUGHOUT the big laboratory sounded a queer whining. It was like the steady thrumming of an E-string on a violin. The sound came from the wall. Here there appeared to be only a slight whorl in the grain of the wood.

An indicator quivered, then it stopped. Doc Savage was informed by this that a prowler had come onto the eighty-sixth floor. The indicator showed him to be in the corridor outside Doc's headquarters. He had not arrived by the regular elevators, apparently.

Doc released the radio locks on all of the doors without moving from the laboratory. He knew the man outside probably had been puzzled by the lack of means to open the reception room door.

Then Doc turned out the lights. Without any weapon, he emerged noiselessly into the outer room. The man of bronze plainly detected the movement of a shadowy figure, though he could not distinguish the face of the intruder.

With the soundless spring of a jungle cat, Doc crossed the room. His thought to surprise the stranger was a mistake. The man's eyes surely had been trained to seeing in the darkness.

The bronze giant was incredibly fast with his hands. Usually, he could fasten a hold on important nerve centers without another man seeing the movement. But this now failed. The intruder moved with the squirming dexterity of an eel. He slipped from Doc's grasp.

Perhaps the long struggle against the power of the brain menace had slowed Doc Savage somewhat. Whatever the cause, Doc's neck was suddenly entwined in an old wrestling grip. It was a full nelson, applied with tremendous strength.

Doc freed himself from the wrestling hold, thrust himself back with his heels. With one of his toes he hooked the ankle of the other man. It was a twisting pull. Much more than the mere tripping force upset the stranger.

Doc's toe had found the end of a nerve where it would do the most good. This time, the stranger let out a groan of pain. His feet flew from under him and he jolted onto his spine.

Doc smiled a little to himself, as his powerful fingers grasped one foot of the intruder and doubled the man's knee.

This, too, was a common wrestling hold. Doc judged his opponent would realize the futility of trying to escape it. He did.

"I give in," twanged a nasal voice. "I kinda was thinkin' mebbe you could be su'prised!"

"Yes, John Scroggins," said Doc, calmly. "You undoubtedly had reason to believe I might be incapable of resistance. So you timed your visit perfectly."

"

"IT hain't so," whanged John Scroggins, his cocked eye roving wildly while his other remained steadily fixed upon the bronze man. "I've allus been a peac'ble feller, but I've got reason to be purty dang sure you might know who robbed me of my di'mons. So I come here t' find out."

"You had some diamonds?" countered Doc. "Where did you get them? It seems strange for an owner of a duck farm to be in possession of precious stones."

"Reckon that's my own bus'ness," twanged John Scroggins. "Mebbe I've been a heap more savin' than most folks. I found out today it was your fellers prowlin' 'round my farm and tryin' to—"

The pig, Habeas Corpus, grunted and poked his long nose out from under the bench.

"I knowed it! I knowed dang well that cussed hawg had some'at to do with them di'mons bein' took!"

Doc smiled and said nothing. He was observing the pig. Habeas Corpus was still as stupid as ever. The injection had failed to work.

"I have some uncut diamonds in my laboratory," announced Doc, with a sudden idea. "Do you suppose you could identify your property?"

"Well now, I reckon I'd know them di'mons," declared John Scroggins. "All of 'em look purty much alike."

"You may be greatly mistaken about that," stated Doc. "But come into my laboratory and I'll show you some that might even turn out to be part of your missing diamonds. If they are, will you inform me where you got them?"

"P'raps I will an' p'raps I won't," whanged the duck man, stubbornly. "What's mine's mine, an' I want 'em!"

Two minutes later, John Scroggins was peering into a square box in the front of which was a pair of lenses which fitted the eyes. His cocked eye would not concentrate, but the other blinked with sudden anger.

"You're dang right them's my stones!" he asserted. "Alla them was in a couple o' ducks I'd gutted!"

The lenses brought out clearly every flaw and vein in the unpolished pebbles. Doc pointed out the difference in the fabrication of the gems. John Scroggins only grunted.

The man of bronze was sure it had not been necessary to show the duck man how diamonds might be identified.

This certainly was not the first time the supposedly ignorant duck farmer had been in a scientific laboratory. But Doc did not indicate his suspicion. Instead, he said, "You are positive these are your diamonds?"

"Reckon I said I was!" whanged the duck man.

Doc made an instant decision.

"I'm going to try and believe you," he smiled. "So, as I happen to know you really were robbed, you may take these diamonds."

John Scroggins stared at him suspiciously.

"You mean you hain't goin' to put up no fight over them?"

"Why should I?" questioned Doc. "There were diamonds brought here in such a manner as to lead me to

believe they might be your property."

"By gosh!" exploded John Scroggins. "I oughta have you arrested!"

"That might hardly be advisable," said Doc, quietly. "And you haven't informed me where you happened to discover such a valuable collection."

"That hain't none of your dang bus'ness!" whanged the duck man. "I'd thought mebbe-so you'd be able to help me, from what I'd been told, but now I hain't askin' your help!"

"That will be perfectly all right," said Doc. "You have your diamonds, and I have many other matters to occupy me."

THE man of bronze made no movement as John Scroggins hastily sidled from the laboratory. The duck man possibly believed he had accomplished a remarkable recovery of his stolen fortune. And he now really had very valuable gems in his possession. But they were not the same diamonds that had been in the dressed ducks.

Radio locks closed all doors, as John Scroggins reached the corridor outside. Doc Savage had let the man go for a direct purpose. He did not himself move toward the door of the laboratory. He turned toward the fish tank that had been shattered by previous visitors.

The swift operation of mechanism carried the tank aside. Here was revealed one of the secret exits from Doc's headquarters. The man of bronze had been one of the designers of the massive skyscraper in which his working offices were housed.

Before John Scroggins could have reached the street by the long descent of a regular elevator, Doc Savage had emerged nearly a block from the building. He watched the duck man come into the street. The gaunt fellow glanced furtively in all directions. Then he hailed a near-by taxicab.

When John Scroggins alighted from the taxicab and entered another tall building, a swarthy, tall man who might have been an Armenian rode up with him in the elevator.

John Scroggins entered an office on one of the upper floors. His business there evidently was of some importance. Nearly an hour had dragged by when he emerged. Apparently, the conference had been highly successful. The duck man's cocked eye was doing a dance. The man clucked appreciatively.

John Scroggins entered an elevator and descended. Several persons came into the upper corridor. Concealed in a niche, formed by a turn in the walls near a fire escape window, the tall Armenian remained nearly half an hour.

SEARLES SHANE, secretary to Randolph Breckens, the diamond broker, was pacing the floor of an outer office.

The outer door opened softly. Searles Shane whirled around. The man who had entered was tall and broad of shoulder. His face was swarthy. Smooth, black hair almost seemed to merge with expressionless black eyes.

"This is the place of Randolph Breckens, who trades in stones of the sun," stated the visitor, rather than asking it.

Searles Shane had been startled by the quiet entrance.

"Well, yes," he hesitated. "What may be your business?"

The secretary's eyes darted toward an inner door. This led to the office of Randolph Breckens.

The dark-skinned visitor bowed deeply. An air of humility was in all of his movements.

"I might be the servant of your master," he said, quietly. "I am Hafid Arman, of whom you have never heard. But I have learned it is required by your master that he come into possession of a great many diamonds. I have such stones to offer."

Searles Shane seemed to shiver, and his wrist watch threw out gleaming sparks. His eyes went furtively toward the inner door.

"I believe you must have been misinformed," he stated. "Your coming is perhaps well intended, Mr. Arman. But my—Mr. Breckens does not now require any diamonds."

The black eyes of Hafid Arman did not change in the slightest. But they studied the door leading to the inner office of Randolph Breckens. There was a slot in the back wall through which letters and papers might be passed.

"That is most strange," said Hafid Arman. "Surely, it was only today I learned of such large contracts your master had given his promise to fill?"

Searles Shane spoke with nervous haste.

"Well, yes," he said. "It may be that you have heard this. But the need no longer exists. Mr. Breckens is supplied with all the diamonds he needs for covering his contracts. I will have to ask you to excuse me, Mr. Arman."

Then Searles Shane did a peculiar thing. He stepped quickly to the edge of his desk. His lips were talking, whispering. His flashily adorned body was bending rapidly toward the floor, as if he were merely picking up the pencil that he had dropped from the desk.

"Please go—please go, at once!"

The whisper could not have been heard by any other than the tall Armenian.

Then came a snapping sound like a small, dry stick breaking. It might have been the pencil; but it wasn't. A blue wisp of smoke floated up the back wall.

Searles Shane's fingers grasped the pencil on the floor. He did not arise with it. Instead, he pushed the pencil before him and sighed deeply. The hair at the back of his head dampened and turned red. The fluid ran along his neck. His face pushed deep into the rug on the floor.

Hafid Arman threw himself to one side. There had been a second and a third cracking of the dry stick. The two bullets furrowed two deep scars across the secretary's polished desk. One slug slapped squarely into the white shirt bosom of the Armenian diamond purveyor.

By all natural laws, Hafid Arman should have fallen. He did get down, but he was only crouching behind the desk.

After a short space of time, the dark-skinned man edged around this bulwark against the bullets from the silenced weapon in the wall. On the bosom of his white shirt was a smeared mark, but it was of the gray of lead. No blood spread, for there had been no wound.

After the three shots, no more came.

Searles Shane had not moved. The hole in the back of his head had made certain the whispered words would be all he would ever utter.

THE door to Randolph Breckens's inside office contained no glass panel. It was of the heaviest type of wooden construction. A special lock with a heavy bolt secured it. Often the diamond broker had a fortune in stones. Perhaps he regarded the door as some security.

Now it might have been seen that the Armenian's fist was of great size. It was like a big, bronze hammer. Twice it struck the thick panel of the door. The blows were much as if they had been driven by a rigid steel



piston. The wood split around the lock. The bronzed fist went through.

Randolph Breckens was sitting back of his desk. The broker showed no surprise at his sudden visitor's novel means of entering his office. He was holding an automatic pistol in one hand. This had a clumsy blob of a silencer at the muzzle.

Before Randolph Breckens could speak, the Armenian whipped over to the wall between the inner and outer offices. His eyes sought the position of the slot through which letters might have been passed. One hand was searching along the wall.

Randolph Breckens spoke unexpectedly. His voice was dead and without either interest or emphasis.

"Under the steel engraving," he directed, as if he had been asked a question. "Press inward."

The picture was an etched drawing. The Armenian's hand pressed the wall beneath it. A section slid noiselessly to one side. Within was a passage at least three feet in width. The letter slot was only camouflage.

But this secret passageway ended abruptly in a closed metal door. This was locked and bolted from the other side. Attempting to open it hurriedly was useless. The Armenian whipped back into the room with Randolph Breckens. The man had not arisen from his desk. He still held the pistol as if he was unsure what he should do with it.

"Where does that passage lead?" demanded the Armenian. "Who was in here with you?"

"No one was in here," stated Breckens, colorlessly. "This gun fell onto the floor from the letter slot. I picked it up. It seemed to me I heard shooting, but I am not sure."

"I asked where the passage leads?" repeated the Armenian.

Randolph Breckens did not change expression.

"That is a secret I will tell no one," he said; then added, "It goes up and down, and to three different floors, and I could go through it to any one of three streets. There is no one in there. Are you the passenger agent? I requested that you bring me folders on China. I am going on a long trip around the world."

The Armenian apparently realized that attempted pursuit of the assassin of Searles Shane would lead nowhere. Randolph Breckens had spoken the cold, unbelievable truth. The silenced gun had been pushed into his office after the murder shot was fired. In his strange condition, Breckens had realized little of what was going on around him. He had seen a gun, and he had picked it up.

Doubtless Searles Shane was fully aware the weapon was pointed at his head. John Scroggins had been a visitor to the office. And Searles Shane had been instructed to announce that a supply of diamonds for Breckens's contracts had been supplied.

Yet Searles Shane had attempted to get the Armenian out of the office as quickly as possible. The secretary had made some mistake.

THREE minutes later, the body of Searles Shane was in one of the office closets. The Armenian moved a small typewriter stand to cover the bloodstain on the rug.

"I will get you those folders on China," he told Randolph Breckens. "Perhaps I had best take the pistol."

The diamond broker appeared pleased. He surrendered the weapon without protest. He now sat with a cold smile, awaiting further information on travel in the Orient. If he missed Searles Shane, he made no comment.

The Manhattan telephone directory lay open on Searles Shane's desk beside the instrument in the outer office. The Armenian's hand touched the metal of the phone. This still had the warmth of having been recently handled.

The tall Armenian gave forth a rare, exotic trilling. There was at this moment no longer need for masquerading. Doc Savage regretted greatly that his appearance in the role of a seller of diamonds had brought death to Searles Shane. And the man of bronze now was sure the keen eyes of the murdered secretary had penetrated his disguise.

Doc was now acting quickly to ascertain what might have taken place in that office during the visit of John Scroggins, and immediately thereafter.

The opened Manhattan telephone directory afforded a good lead.

Doc Savage produced a small magnifying glass. There was a finger print. Under the glass was the clear mark of a finger nail under a number. The page was among the M's. The number was the office phone of Doctor Buelow T. Madren.

Doc dialed Doctor Madren's number. A pleasant voice of a woman replied.

"Doctor Madren is responding to an emergency call," she said.

"This is Doc Savage speaking," said the bronze man.

"Oh, then that's all right," said the woman. "Doctor Madren said he wished to see you as soon as possible. He has just returned from Southampton. He has been called to the office of Randolph Breckens in the Carter Building. He should be there in a few minutes."

Doc Savage replaced the telephone. Doubtless Searles Shane had called Doctor Madren. This did not seem unusual, as the secretary had known of other cases similar to those of Randolph Breckens.

The man of bronze made a hasty inspection of the murder gun. As he expected, it bore no finger prints except those of Breckens himself. Were the police to get the case as it now lay, the bewildered, emotionless-brained diamond broker could not escape being accused of the murder of his secretary.

Doc Savage removed dark transparent shells from his flaky gold eyes. The black hair came off. Even this change in personality did not perturb Randolph Breckens.

Doc Savage escorted the broker from his offices, locking them.

## **Chapter XVII. DOC'S STRANGE ATTACK**

WHEN Doctor Buelow T. Madren stepped from the elevator into the upper floor corridor, Doc Savage was walking beside Randolph Breckens. The doctor gave a slight start of surprise.

"My office nurse said Mr. Breckens's secretary had called," said the psychiatrist, rubbing his hands. "I did not expect you, Mr. Savage, but I am indeed glad of your presence. Perhaps you did not know of the call, as you are leaving with Mr. Breckens?"

"I knew of the call, Doctor Madren," stated Doc. "I waited until I was sure you would meet us. As a mental physician, you will appreciate the importance of Mr. Breckens retiring to his living quarters for a little talk. Mr. Breckens wants some advice on going to China."

"You should have been a psychologist, Mr. Savage," approved Doctor Madren. "I always avoid conferences with any person in his place of business. It is too distracting."

Randolph Breckens heard little of this conversation. He seemed satisfied as a child. Apparently he was soon starting on his long-desired world travels. The three men walked into the living quarters of the penthouse-office. On the way Doctor Madren gave Doc Savage a sketchy review of the tragic happenings at the home of Simon Stevens.

Doc admitted he had heard some of this.

"I can only express my deepest sympathy and hope you will be able to discover what is behind all of these weird happenings," said Doctor Madren. "It is most unfortunate about your own companions. Have you any idea where they might have been taken?"

"It is fully as mysterious to me as to you," replied the man of bronze. "I had followed this John Scroggins, the duck farmer, hoping he might supply some sort of information."

"Do you know, Mr. Savage, I have had something of that same idea," stated Doctor Madren. "I heard about this John Scroggins's peculiar actions. It was mentioned he may have murdered a man near his duck farm. My poor nurse, Miss Clarke, was killed in the same manner. It was most horrible!"

RANDOLPH BRECKENS talked inanely, after he had reached his living quarters. Mostly, he wanted to discuss his hobby—a trip around the world. Doctor Madren's brilliant blue eyes gleamed with interest on his cherubic countenance. He mopped beads of sweat from his shining bald head.

He remarked aside to Doc Savage, "This, like the other cases, is completely baffling. No precedent has occurred to me for any of these cases."

Doc went into another room. He returned with a flat black box. This had two lenses set in one side.

"You believe, doctor, nothing of hereditary insanity is possible with any of the cases, from that of Smiling Tony and Simon Stevens to this of Randolph Breckens?"

"That would be nonsense," said Doctor Madren. "It is too evident the condition has been super-induced from some external source. This emotionless state is not insanity in any form. Therefore, it is curable. If we could only get at the origin—"

"Without doubt, there are certain microscopic microbes which strike at the nerve senses," said Doc. "At times, I have succeeded in isolating a few of these. I have under powerful lenses some of such bacteria. Would you care to examine them?"

"Certainly, why certainly," agreed Doctor Madren.

The great psychiatrist peered through the magnifying lenses in the side of the black box. On a smooth plate appeared what might have been hydra-headed serpents. They wiggled. They attacked and devoured each other. As each multi-headed microbe absorbed another, it added to the number of its own heads.

"You have a discovery there, Mr. Savage!" breathed Doctor Madren. He was clearly excited. "These came from the nerve ducts?"

"They were extracted directly from the substance of the nerves and brain," announced Doc Savage. "They could be responsible for these congealed minds."

"Remarkable! Most remarkable!" exulted Doctor Madren. "You will, I hope, inform me of further experiments? I feel you are on the eve of a great achievement!"

"You will be fully informed of the result of this experiment," promised Doc Savage. "For the present, I must return to my laboratory. I cannot delay longer seeking some lead to the whereabouts of my five aids."

The microbes in the black box had indeed been extracted from the brain and nerve centers. But they were the brain and nerve centers of Habeas Corpus, the much abused pig belonging to Monk.

DOCTOR MADREN had instructed Randolph Breckens's Japanese houseman to humor his master as much as possible. The psychiatrist then called for and installed one of his own special nurses. She was a pleasant young woman. She was one of several nurses Doctor Madren placed in observation of milder mental cases.

The afternoon in Manhattan had been hot and muggy. As it often does in late spring, the heat broke with a violent thunderstorm. An early pall of darkness settled over the streets.

Before rain started lashing the windows of Randolph Breckens's apartment, lights were necessary. The diamond broker was restless. Yet not once did he call for Searles Shane. This indicated more than anything else his emotionless condition.

As the storm began breaking, the nurse darkened Breckens's big library to a single, shaded light. She was a methodical young woman of routine mind. She held a theory that in any kind of illness, sleep was always an efficient restorative.

Randolph Breckens did not sleep. He sat rather numbly in his big chair. Before him were folders depicting the supposed glories any traveler might find in China.

The Japanese houseman moved on softly shod feet. His Oriental stoicism betrayed no especial interest in his master's mental disturbance. Then rain was slashing down in torrents.

The nurse stepped to a window. Her slender figure was lighted by a lurid flare of the electrical storm. She pulled down the shade and stepped back hurriedly. Like many women, she did not care for the nerve-racking display of the elements.

But it wasn't the lightning nor the cannonlike crack of thunder that caused her to scream. She screamed only once. Then a great hand silenced the outcry.

Under an apparent throttling hold, the young woman became limp. She was picked up and deposited gently on a divan. Her eyes had closed as if in normal slumber.

RANDOLPH BRECKENS watched this curious procedure. Then he turned back to his travel folders. But the Japanese houseman gabbled from the doorway. In one hand was a small black pistol.

The giant intruder seemed to occupy all of the middle of the library. He said nothing as he whipped toward the Japanese. The Oriental had every intention of discharging the weapon. But his aim appeared suddenly uncertain.

He took a few steps toward the middle of the room. His squat body weaved as if he had been drinking too much. The hand that pointed the weapon swung into a wide circle. It looked as if he might be more likely to shoot himself, than any other person.

When the pistol dropped to the floor, the Japanese houseman was sleeping very soundly. The head of Randolph Breckens likewise had drooped forward. Breckens had his arms on his desk. His forehead now was buried in his sleeves.

There had been the tinkling sound of fragile glass breaking.

The intruder had taken one deep breath before this happened. Now he whipped over to a window. He let in the slashing rain. With it came a gale of wind that lifted papers from Breckens's desk.

After a minute, the intruder breathed. The three other persons in the room would slumber peacefully for an hour or more.

The intruder was the man of bronze.

Doc Savage had not left the apartment building. He had waited in concealment in the penthouse office-apartment only until Doctor Madren had departed. Then he had acted with promptness. This attack upon Randolph Breckens, the pleasant nurse and the inoffending Japanese was mysterious.

Its purpose was quickly explained.

Baring the spine of Randolph Breckens between the shoulders, the man of bronze inserted a slender needle deeply. It must have penetrated the spinal cord between the broker's vertebrae.

Slowly, the glass cylinder of a syringe filled with a reddish-white liquid. Doc Savage carefully disinfected the slight puncture and replaced Randolph Breckens's shirt.

Two minutes later, the library of the diamond broker was in darkness. It held now only the three sleeping occupants.

In about one hour, Doc knew, the young woman nurse would be giving a frantic alarm. None would suffer any after effects from the anaesthetic chemical released from the capsule Doc had tossed at the feet of the Japanese houseman.

DOC SAVAGE never had employed any stimulant or drug except for purposes of scientific experiment. Back in his laboratory, he was working at high speed.

Some of the virus extracted from the pig, Habeas Corpus, had been mixed with other fluids. Then the man of bronze made certain tests on the Arabian hog. The animal only looked at him gloomily.

Doc took a reddish-white mixture from a syringe. Chemicals boiled and bubbled in a retort.

The phone buzzed alarmingly. Came the voice of Simon Stevens.

"Doc Savage? Doc, listen, what have you accomplished?"

"I have no time now for discussion," stated the bronze man.

"But Doc—Doc!" The voice of the millionaire was panicky. "I am really going crazy! Something tells me I'll never see my son Jim again! The police out here are helpless! You're the only man in the world who can do anything now! Haven't you heard anything?"

"You will have to be patient, Stevens," advised Doc. "Many matters have taken time and—"

"I can't wait! I won't wait!" Simon Stevens was bellowing. The heavy voice became almost a blubber of frenzy. "You're failing us, Doc! For the first time, you are failing your friends! All of your men, and Pat Savage, will be murdered along with my son, Jim, if you do not do something!"

"You are doubtless correct," stated Doc, quietly. "I have no further time now to discuss it. All of this is perhaps as baffling to me as to you. I cannot talk longer."

The man of bronze replaced the phone in its cradle. He stared at it for a few seconds.

He did not attempt to call Simon Stevens back. It was unnecessary. For while the impersonation had been almost faultless, that had not been Simon Stevens speaking. In fact, at this time the wires leading from the millionaire's Southampton estate had been cut. That was among many inexplicable circumstances puzzling the State police.

And now the prowler detector in Doc Savage's laboratory was whining like the E-string of a violin. The bronze man knew that he had been shadowed as he entered his headquarters. Some of the mysterious wielders of the force that numbed men's brains even now were closing in upon him.

The indicator needle of the detector showed some one had reached one of his secret exits. It was that concealed inside by the tank labeled: "POISON FISH." Another intruder was out near the elevators.

Doc Savage smiled grimly. He could hear the vicious slapping of the thunderstorm at the windows. The rain had changed to a fine, shotlike sleet. The telephone was buzzing again. The bronze giant did not heed it. He was closely observing Habeas Corpus.

The pig suddenly backed away from Doc. His grunts took on a different note. He *oinked-oinked* suddenly like any common variety of porker when he is hungry. The small porcine eyes took on a mean sparkle.

When Habeas Corpus was normal, he didn't care much which person he bit. He looked right now as if he would have liked a healthy bite of Doc.

The whirlwinds moved in the bronze giant's eyes.

Habeas Corpus was normal again. The pig's numbed brain had been thawed to his customary ill nature.

DOC SAVAGE suddenly turned out all of the lights. In his hand was a filled syringe. His rare trilling became a melodious note in the opaque darkness. The whining of the prowler detector continued. The bronze man could not see the indicator, but he judged enemies were now closing in upon him.

The rainy gale whooped into the laboratory through an opened window. Over the window ledge was hooked a steel grapnel. From this dangled a silk line so slender it was merely an invisible thread in the wind.

Doc Savage was at work in the darkness. He was performing weird contortions with his fingers and toes. His sense of touch was amazing. Equally amazing were the acts he was performing.

All of the experimental chemicals he had been using suddenly flared in a circular retort. They burned almost instantly, as if with the exploding flare of some highly combustible liquid.

As this was being accomplished, there was a slight grating sound. Doc whipped to the side of the laboratory. All traces had been removed of the experiments he had conducted.

From a steel cabinet, Doc Savage took several photographic negatives. He touched an apparently smooth place in the floor. Another few seconds and the bronze giant sprang through the window directly into the slashing rain.

One hand gripped an ear of Monk's Arabian hog. Habeas Corpus emitted a grunting squeal. The pig had been hungry. He had no relish for being shunted suddenly into the cold, sleety rain eighty-six stories over a street so far down it was revealed only by murky lights.

In Doc's laboratory the grating sound became a crash. The fish tank was forced back. Men leaped from the secret passage. Other men came in from the other directions. Cold rain slammed in their faces.

An attempt to turn on the lights failed at first.

"He's beat it!" growled one of the intruders. "Look! Out that window! He's somewhere on that little thread!"

The grapnel was jingling over the edge of the window. The slim cord of silk was taut and quivering.

"Couldn't be sweeter," said one of the men. "The Big Brains will like this."

He had pulled out a keen-edged knife. With a sinister grin, he drew the blade across the cord. The silken line parted with a singing snap.

ANOTHER man was still fooling around with the light switch. He made a sudden contact. It was different from what he expected. The switch turned on a current. But the high-frequency power did not illuminate the room by the medium of the usual bulbs.

Blue serpents seemed to writhe from the floor. They twisted like ghostly eels from the walls.

One man howled, "I knew it! I'm burning up!"

He was a dancing pillar of fire. But the flame was not burning. He was undergoing more like a freezing sensation. He did not complain any more. Neither did any of his companions.

All were dropping into grotesque positions on the floor of the laboratory.

Doc's rare trilling filled the laboratory. Rain drops slid from the sleek mask of his bronze hair and skin as he reentered the open window. The disgusted Arabian hog was dropped to the floor.

Doc had been clinging eighty-six floors above the street to the slightest of projections on the wall of the skyscraper of metal and stone. He had hung suspended there, with the silk line wrapped around one foot to

give it that taut effect.

The five men who were lying unconscious on the floor had every reason to believe his mangled body was in the street below.

Because Doc knew they would continue to believe him destroyed, he left them lying on the floor. In less than an hour, they would revive. Then they would get away as rapidly as possible. The blue flames they had seen were of the harmless variety. They had been knocked out by chemical gas released by the light switch.

Doc readjusted the switch. Seizing Habeas Corpus again by the ear, he descended to the street by his special, high-speed elevator. This car shot downward as if it were a dropped leaden weight.

Doc passed the street floor and continued to the basement. Here Habeas Corpus was safely stowed away in a special pen built for him at one side of the bronze man's private garage. When the men upstairs awakened, they would find nothing to tell them what Doc Savage had been doing in his laboratory.

They would find only a bit of sliced silken cord dangling from the window.

Doc Savage's next act seemed to be a direct invitation to his enemies. For he went directly to another building in uptown Manhattan.

And again he was Hafid Arman, the Armenian.

He ascended to one of the upper floors of this building. Behind one door, a light was glowing. Doc rapped softly upon this door.

When it opened, the protruding eyes of Harris Hooper Perrin, the lapidary, were looking at his swarthy face.

## **Chapter XVIII. DOC'S MISTAKE?**

HARRIS HOOPER PERRIN carried a huge revolver in his right hand. He opened his door with infinite caution. His hand jingled the weapon nervously.

"What do you want?" he mumbled, thickly. "Maybe you've made a mistake in the number?"

"Why, no," said Hafid Arman, quietly. "There could scarcely be a mistake. You are Harris Hooper Perrin, the eminent lapidary and designer of golden ornaments?"

"Yes-yes! But what do you want of me?"

"I am also of much note in my own country," said the Armenian with the dead-black eyes. "I am Hafid Arman. I have been informed you would know of a market for some rare uncut diamonds which it has become the providence of my family to possess."

"Well, come in," invited Perrin suspiciously. "I will have to see if you are armed."

The tall Armenian extended his dark-skinned hands upward.

"There is no offense in that," he said. "I understand fully the precautions you must take. I have brought with me possibly stones of as great value as you have yourself."

"Yes?" said Perrin, running his hands over the man's huge figure.

He found no evidence of any weapon, for there was none in any of the usual pockets of Doc Savage's clothing.

Then Perrin said, "Will you sit down? I might be interested in seeing any stones you may have?"

Hafid Arman displayed no reluctance at exhibiting the diamonds he carried. He produced several uncut diamonds of extraordinary size. The professional eyes of Harris Hooper Perrin bulged out more than ever. He

leaned closer, as if, somehow, these stones were familiar.

"Do you mind if—if I make a test of a couple of these?" he said. "If you will wait here?"

"Most certainly," replied Hafid Arman. "You may test any of them."

Perrin scooped up three of the rough diamonds from the table on which the Armenian had laid them. He glanced at Hafid Arman quickly as he entered a door to an inner room. The door closed.

PERHAPS no other man could have heard the whispering voices in the inner room. Only Doc Savage's remarkable auditory sense could have picked out even some of the words. For he had known from the first that Perrin was not alone in his office and workshop. Now he was sure there were several other persons in that rear room.

Also, Doc was aware that Perrin's quick suspicion would be fully verified as soon as he put those particular diamonds under a glass. For these were some of the stones that had been taken from the dressed ducks owned by John Scroggins.

Harris Hooper Perrin emerged holding the diamonds. Into his face had crept a slyness, a cunning that could only have been backed by knowing he had sufficient friends at hand to take care of any situation.

"Well, my worthy friend," he said, "do you think the stones are of great value?"

"They are valuable enough," said Perrin. "You say these have been in your family?"

"By the prophet, it is true," mumbled the Armenian. "I was first told to go to a man named Randolph Breckens, but it seems he must have been taken ill today, before I arrived."

Perrin's eyes almost left their sockets.

"Breckens?" he said. "You went there today? Then, well, you talked to his secretary, Searles Shane?"

"I had the pleasure of seeing Searles Shane," stated Hafid Arman. "He informed me that Mr. Breckens already had filled contracts for many diamonds."

Perrin was staring. His mouth was working.

"And did Searles Shane tell you where Breckens is procuring his diamonds?"

Hafid Arman hesitated before he replied. One swarthy hand had been running nervously through his black hair.

Harris Hooper Perrin had begun twisting the single lock of wiry brush in the middle of his bald spot. It looked as if the two men suddenly were putting on some kind of a contest to see whose nerves would break first.

Hafid Arman's hand pushed harder at his hair.

"Perhaps we cannot do business," he muttered. "The stones are of great value and I would want the cash."

"Oh, yes—yes!" exclaimed Perrin. "We can do—"

The words dried up in his throat. He let go of his wiry lock of hair and started chewing on a finger nail. Then he could not hold back the squawk.

"Doc Savage! Hey! It's Savage himself!"

HAFID ARMAN sprang to his feet. He pulled at his black hair. The nervous rubbing of his hand had displaced it slightly. And under the edge of the wig had appeared an expanse of slick golden bronze, the hair owned by



only one man in the world.

Doc remedied his apparent mistake. The bronze hair disappeared. He lurched forward, big hands gripping Perrin's shoulders. The lapidary let out a yell. Doc's fingers found a paralyzing nerve.

The inner door burst open. Men erupted into the room. Of the half dozen, two were carrying machine guns of the easily handled variety. The faces of none of these men had the stamp of thugs. They looked as if they might have been scientists or professional men of an intelligent order.

But there was in their faces also that crafty marking which betrays the man who lives by his wits.

"Stand where you are, Doc Savage!" ordered one who appeared to be the leader. "Keep your hands right there on Perrin's neck, so we can see them! We know all about your gas capsules and your other tricks. The time has come when your life means nothing!"

"You think then I am this Doc Savage?" said the bogus Armenian, as if he still hoped to get away with his disguise.

Perrin's eyes had closed. He was no longer capable of disclosing what he had seen.

"We'll soon see!" rapped out the leader. "And keep in mind, when you die that seals the fate of all of your men!"

Doc flung Perrin suddenly to one side. One knee lifted the table on which lay the uncut diamonds. The table flew across the room, catching two of the men off guard. They became grunting heaps under its weight.

Doc's fist traveled with the speed of light. The bronze knuckles must have dislocated the jaw of the man he hit. He groaned in a horrible manner. But before Doc could turn, it felt as if some of his ribs had been rammed loose.

The instrument with which this was accomplished was the muzzle of one of the machine guns. Held thus close to his body, the weapon could kill even though he was wearing bulletproof garments.

The black wig was torn from his head. Then a solid blow descended upon the base of his skull.

## **Chapter XIX. DOC'S FROZEN BRAIN**

DOC SAVAGE was tightly bound to a seat. This was in the cabin of a powerful amphibian plane. The speedy craft flew directly eastward from Manhattan. It had taken off from the Hudson River.

The cabin was carrying a capacity of human weight. Another similar plane was also heavily laden.

Both seemed headed straight for the wide Atlantic Ocean. From Manhattan, this course carried them directly over the more than hundred-mile length of Long Island. The planes flew high for night travelers. They were at times lost in the night fog.

Doc Savage's eyes had been stripped with tape. Some one knew a great deal about this bronze giant. For the taping had been also employed over the bronze man's ears and his nostrils. Every effort had been made to mummify his senses. Whether this had succeeded, could not be determined.

The bronze giant's great body was relaxed, powerless.

Expert hands stripped away his clothing. Every conceivable pocket was explored. His shoes and hosiery were taken off. There was a mocking laugh as the bronze scalp seemed to be lifted.

This strange denuding of Doc's head was merely removal of the metal bullet-proof cap of bronze he sometimes wore. The knock-out blow he had received when captured, was below this cap. From inside this cap were taken nearly flat metallic objects. These were powerful chemical explosives.

Doc's mouth was pried open. False caps were taken from two teeth. Great care was taken in handling the

small objects inside these teeth caps. Apparently, the captors of the bronze man were highly intelligent. They were well informed as to Doc's defensive fighting devices.

After a thorough search, only one garment was provided. This was like a pair of shorts. Otherwise, the bronze man was left a naked, awe-inspiring figure.

Now a needle penetrated the bronze skin of Doc's back over his spine.

"Perhaps he beat it once, but he cannot repeat the feat," mused a voice. "This group of famous adventurers will soon be extinct. It is necessary, if we are to carry on with our great plan."

Doc's relaxed body showed no reaction to the needled injection. His mighty hands lay inert. The powerful fingers looked as if they never again would have life. Only the mammoth breast moved with the slow, steady breathing of the bronze giant.

NOT until the amphibian planes had been landed and all of their human cargoes discharged into the old whaling ship where the automatonlike men had been gathered, was the tape removed from Doc Savage's eyes, ears and nostrils. The planes had immediately taken off. When daylight arrived, they would not be observed in this isolated bay at the outer points of Long Island.

Doc Savage's eyes slowly opened. They had an emotionless quality of seeing only in a fixed manner. Such impressions as might have been registered on the bronze giant's senses were not reflected in the rigid contour of the regular, handsome features.

Doc Savage looked all around him without apparent interest. When he spoke, his voice had lost its peculiar penetrating power.

He said, "You are here, Monk. You look funny without your clothes. Johnny, you need much more meat on your bones."

The observation was made as tonelessly as if Doc Savage had been with his companions in this strange prison from the first. Around the strange group of men danced flickering electric lights. The room was like a hardened shell with ancient, waterworn ribs of teakwood.

Monk did look funnier than usual. He was stripped and barefooted like the others. Only a garment resembling shorts was fastened at his waist. His long arms dangled. Reddish hair covered him like the thick fur of a jungle animal. His small eyes squinted under his apelike forehead.

"Doc," he said, without raising his voice, "will you have them get me something to eat? I am hungry, but I don't want ducks."

Johnny, the geologist, was a living skeleton. His exposed bones looked as if they might fall apart.

"I am strong as any of them, Doc," he said, without raising his voice in a boast. "I can carry two sacks. See, like this?"

This was their greeting to their bronze chief. The reception by Long Tom, Renny and Ham was but little different. It seemed all had been instructed to carry the laden sacks. This was their sole interest in life at the moment.

"You will join the others, Doc Savage!" commanded a voice that came from a loud-speaker device in the wall of the ancient whaling ship hulk. "Carry the sacks with them! Place the sacks as they do! All the rest of this does not interest you!"

The bronze giant moved obediently. The big sacks contained some gritty substance like sugar. They must have weighed a hundred pounds each. Doc Savage picked up four of these sacks for the first trip. He fell into line as if he carried no weight.

THERE were more than a dozen men besides Doc's five companions. They had expressionless faces. They moved like robots at the command of the loud-speaker voice. They carried sacks from this one room of the old whaling ship hulk through an arched opening into another room.

The trancelike procession moved slowly, methodically. Each man carried the sacks according to his strength. Some were weak and labored with the weight of a single sack. The great Renny saw that Doc carried four sacks, as the big engineer also carried four.

Monk made his way with three sacks each time, complaining in his childlike voice that "he was hungry, but he didn't want ducks."

The place had the evil, rancid smell of bilge water and dried whale oil. That oil must have been nearly a hundred years old.

Doc Savage saw Jim Stevens and Pat Savage. One of Jim Stevens's arms was limp and bloodsoaked. So he was not being compelled to help with carrying the weighty sacks. Pat Savage sat beside him.

Their presence aroused Doc Savage no more than had the appearance of his other companions. He nodded and said, "You should wash your face, Pat. It is very dirty."

Doc Savage deposited his first four sacks beside those of the other men. This was inside a great metallic cylinder, lying horizontal within the ship. The sacks were being piled at one end. The huge cylinder was as large as one of the giant aqueducts used to bring water to large cities. Three men could have stood on each other's shoulders inside it.

The cylinder was completely hidden within the old whaling vessel.

The walls of the cylinder were more than two feet thick. They were built with layers of insulation between curving sides. One big door swung upward. This door was in the side center of the tube; the carriers entered through it. When it would be closed, it formed a part of the smooth cylinder itself.

The end near which the sacks were being piled was closed. The opposite end, probably sixty feet away, was open. At this open end was the circle of an immense piston head which fitted tightly into the walls of the huge cylinder.

Four electrical motors were equipped with powerful gears connecting with the mechanism operating this piston. It could be seen this amplified power would drive the piston head slowly, but with irresistible force into the cylinder. When the curved entry door was closed, the imprisoned air would be compressed into unbelievable pressure upon whatever might be inside the cylinder.

HUNDREDS of times, Doc Savage had discovered amazing machinery for various purposes. Always until now, his keen understanding had immediately memorized every part. Until now, he had always understood every visible mechanical contrivance.

Yet he viewed all of this remarkable machinery with emotionless eyes. His sole interest became that of the others. On his second trip, he carried five of the filled sacks. There were many tons of these.

In the room of the cylinder were the thick cables capable of carrying high-voltage current. Two of these lay coiled beside one wall of the room. Their open copper ends had not been connected to the cylinder itself.

Ranged along the outer walls of the great metallic shells were rows of amplifying coils. It could be seen that when they would be connected and the current applied, intense heat would be communicated to the inside of the cylinder.

The intent of all this complicated machinery apparently affected none of the human robots. And Doc Savage was as much a robot as the others. His massive limbs carried him stiffly along. The flaky gold eyes were now like the dull ice on some mountain of copper.

Even the usual whirlwinds of his vision were fixed, inscrutable points. The voice in the loud-speaker gloated.

"Our most powerful enemy is no more to be feared! It is to be regretted we cannot conserve the strength of Doc Savage's men for future tasks! But our own power must never again be threatened by the incredible brain of this bronze man!"

Doc Savage must have heard these words. But on this trip he was carrying six full sacks of the gritty substance. His mighty muscles conveyed the six hundred pounds as if they were of no importance. Even Renny sweated and strained to equal this feat.

Pat Savage talked with Jim Stevens. Their words were like those of two small children interested only in simple things. They showed by their cold faces they had no emotion of any character.

The pile of filled sacks outside was diminishing. That inside the cylinder was increasing. The close air reeked with the odor of bilge water, dried whale oil and the sweat of the working robots.

The faces of all of the more than a dozen men had lines indicating they were of an intelligent order. The hands of all were stained as if they had worked with chemicals.

Now four men were applying some sticky substance to the interior walls of the big cylinder. This was being spread with brushes as radium paint might have been used. The stuff was of a bluish color, but it had no odor as paint might have possessed.

The heating units set inside the cylinder indicated everything locked within would be dissolved under intense heat and terrific pressure. These electrical units would have the destroying heat and force of leashed lightning bolts. The piston was so adjusted that only a few inches of space would remain at the cylinder's inside end when the head plunged inward.

YET none of Doc's well informed companions commented upon all of this. Ham, the astute lawyer, carried only one sack each trip, but he seemed devoted to his task. That brilliant brain, which had won many battles against legal fireworks, now had only one goal. This was the depositing of each filled sack in regular order.

Ham's waspish body, like the others, was stripped to the scant shorts. It was nearly the final trip of the robots. Doc Savage's big bronze body loomed beside the thinner torso of Ham.

Doc deposited his six sacks. Turning, the ends of one hand brushed rough across Ham's arm. One nail of the bronzed fingers sliced into the lawyer's skin. Ham snarled as if a bee had stung him.

Doc stared straight ahead. He walked back to the door of the cylinder, looking only toward the final few sacks to be carried.

Ham wavered a little on his feet. He hastened a little, coming close to Doc. Perspiration was popping from Ham's forehead. His eyes were intently fixed.

Words hissed from Ham's lips. Apparently they fell upon Doc's unheeding ears. Ham was rubbing the reddened gouge on his arm where Doc's finger nail had scratched him.

The procession moved with the monotony of convicts in a line, of dead men walking. Doc passed between Renny and Johnny. The powerful bronze hands were grasping sacks. But Renny and Johnny were jostled to one side.

The voice in the loud-speaker said, "One more trip will be all! Take the girl first! Then the son of Simon Stevens! After that, the others and Doc Savage!"

"I've got to have something to eat soon," muttered Monk with childlike impatience. "But I won't eat duck!"

The apelike chemist stared stupidly at a bloody scratch on his hairy forearm. Apparently he had injured himself slightly on his former trip into the big cylinder.

The stupid coldness of Jim Stevens's face proved he remembered little, if anything, of past events. But the curt command which took Pat Savage from his side and into the big cylinder aroused some latent fury.

With his one good arm, Jim Stevens struck at the human robots who had seized Pat. The young millionaire was weak. But a killer's anger was in his blows. One of the robots went down with a flattened nose.

Pat Savage unexpectedly scratched the face of the other with clawing finger nails. The voice in the loud-speaker laughed mockingly.

"Bind them both! Put them on the sacks!"

Renny, Ham and Monk were moving automatically toward this disturbance. The human robots jabbered at each other. The loud-speaker commands increased in volume. Some one of Doc's men, or possibly it was Doc himself, also jabbered meaningless words.

Jim Stevens's resistance was abruptly ended. None of Doc's men interfered. All shuffled about aimlessly. Even the spectacle of Pat Savage tightly bound and thrown upon the piled sacks inside the huge cylinder did not arouse them to action.

DOC SAVAGE was an apathetic figure. He leaned against the wall of the room outside the tube as if he had become very tired. His bare feet shuffled aimlessly. Coils of the unconnected electric cable touched one of his feet.

Doc straightened and recoiled as if the insulated rubber were a snake of some sort. The voice in the loud-speaker laughed harshly. Apparently the owner of that voice was enjoying himself hugely. No other person had ever seen the great Doc Savage behaving with the silly fancies of some foolish child.

Two men who did not move as the robots moved, entered the room outside the tube. They snapped out quick orders. Doc and his men remained agreeable to all suggestions. They were pushed into a small group. Only Monk had anything to say.

"I'm awfully hungry," he complained. "When do we eat?"

"You won't have long to worry about it," grated one of the newcomers. "In fact, the big feed is about to take place. All of you get inside there."

Guns appeared in the hands of the two men. Their cold snouts prodded the bared ribs of Doc and his men. They were propelled toward the door entering into the great cylinder.

The dull but pretty face of Pat Savage was turned toward the flat, shining side of the cylinder head. Already this had been moved a little. It was much like the wall of an ancient torture chamber in which the victim might watch death—horrible, crushing death, slowly closing in upon all sides.

Yet Doc and his men walked slowly into the tube, with the guns prodding them. Moved into a space where only the most terrible extinction could await them. Squeezed they would be, all of their bodies, into bare inches of space.

Then to be consumed by the heat of confined lightning bolts.

Consumed with the tons of gritty substance in the sacks. Nothing could remain of them. Perhaps the vast pressure of the cylinder head would be applied before the heat was turned on?

It seemed that was to be the purpose. For that cylinder piston rod had definitely moved. It was still moving, so slowly as to be scarcely perceptible.

Under the tremendous pressure, the bodies of Doc, of the lovely Pat, of the others would first be compressed. Then their skins would burst. Blood would fly from their veins. They would die slowly as their bones caved in.

## Chapter XX. THE CRUSHING DEATH

THE immense hinged door of the cylinder started downward.

The hard muzzle of a gun still prodded the ribs of Doc Savage. The head of the big bronze giant rolled on one shoulder, as if he were very ill. His flaky gold eyes of ice turned upon this man close to him. The gunman snarled in his face.

"And they always said you were a magician?" sneered the man. "In a few minutes, even black magic won't do you any good!"

Doc's emotionless eyes were fixed upon this mocking killer, but they also appeared to see outside of that slowly closing door. It was as if the bronze man might in this crisis be realizing a little of what was happening.

At the command of the voice through the loud-speaker, two of the human robots moved toward the coiled electric cable by the wall outside the tube.

"Outside, you two guys!" commanded the loud-speaker voice to the two gunmen. "Tell Doc Savage and the others to take it easy! They will obey!"

The two men with the guns stepped toward the narrowing space of the slowly closing door.

Doc Savage and his companions still stared at them stupidly. They did not show any fear at being left inside the cylinder, or any apparent desire to escape.

One of the robots picked up the coil of live cable. His purpose apparently was to plug it into the heating coils as soon as the big door had been snapped shut. Perhaps the victims of the deadly cylinder would be toasted before they were pressed into mere sheets of bones and flesh.

The robot pulled the cable toward him.

The interior of the tube seemed to melt into a blinding, fluid light. The blaze leaped from the ends of the electric cable. The insulated coils writhed like serpents. Their tongues were shooting green flame.

One of the men, holding the guns, screamed. The cable had coiled around his body. His face instantly turned black.

The other gunman started shooting. Bullets whizzed through the cylinder's closing door. One slug furrowed the neck of Doc Savage.

DOC was rapping out an order in the language of the ancient Mayans, which he and his men spoke when they wanted their thoughts unknown. Renny and Monk emitted wild whoops of joy. They emerged from the closing door of the cylinder like human rockets. Their fists were swinging among the robots.

The robots staggered blindly, but fought back mechanically. The dazed, emotionless men had produced guns. Commands crackled from the loudspeaker. Guns were being fired. Ham, Long Tom and Johnny were joining Renny and Monk.

Doc Savage lifted Pat Savage and Jim Stevens from the sacks of gritty substance. The mighty cylinder piston was moving faster. The mechanism operating the curved door was speeding up. Doc threw himself at the narrowing space.

Pat Savage was held under one arm. Jim Stevens was limp under the other. The bronze giant emerged from the tube, scraping off patches of skin in the narrowing aperture. Outside, a bedlam of sounds arose. The electric cable continued to jump with live, green fire.

Doc rolled to his feet. His finger ends pressed the bodies of Pat Savage and Jim Stevens. Both looked at him with slowly widening eyes.

Monk was jumping up and down like a maddened monkey.

"Get outta my way, you dag-goned shyster!" he yelled at Ham. "You ain't no good unless you've got that pig sticker of yours!"

"All right!" snapped Ham. "Kill 'em with your monkey paws, you crazy ape!"

Monk was doing his best to annihilate his enemies with his bare hands. His long arms stretched. Two heads cracked sickeningly.

Pat Savage said, "Doc, oh Doc, what is it? Jim! Jim Stevens!"

Jim Stevens spoke rationally.

"Pat Savage! Are you all right, Pat?"

Doc Savage smiled grimly. His bronze fists were lashing out. At the command of the loud-speaker voice, the human robots were shooting. Doc caught two of these men with paralyzing hands. Their heads jerked and they went down.

The finger nails of the bronze giant apparently scratched their bared backs. The gouges showed blood. These men ceased to struggle. Their actions indicated they were emerging from some strange land. They looked about, muttering.

Doc rubbed his hands. He had used all of the chemical serum he had prepared. This had been packed in tiny hypodermic needles wrapped in an added layer of bronze skin over his facile fingers.

Each time he had touched one of his companions, he had inoculated him with the antidote for the chemical that produced the numbed brain. Doc Savage himself had been immune to this force.

His enactment of the role of a human robot had possibly been the most adroit deception he had ever practiced. It had completely deceived his captors. His own companions had been restored when Doc had jostled against and scratched them inside the big cylinder. Then he had instructed them in Mayan, giving orders.

Now they were still dancing about looking for fresh enemies. The human robots were stretched in various positions. The room had been cleared by the stunning flash powder which had exploded when the coils of the electric cable were moved.

The loud-speaker voice shouted, "Turn it on them! Let them all have it!"

FROM a small hatchway of the ship rippled the explosion of a machine gun. Bodies of human robots on the floor jerked under the vicious impact of the bullets. The "Big Brain" of the organization was deliberately destroying those of his own men unfortunate enough to be trapped with Doc's outfit.

The stream of bullets sprayed across the room.

"Get back close to the cylinder," said Doc quietly. "Around the back side of that piston."

His companions obeyed. Jim Stevens, restored to his normal senses, was very weak. It was the sturdy Pat Savage who helped him to shelter.

Leadens fingers searched for the bronze giant.

"Give them the gas!" rapped the loud-speaker voice.

"Cover your eyes," said Doc quietly, to his companions.

One hand flicked down to his bare feet. He appeared to pull loose both of his great toe nails. These were false nails smoothly inserted over the others. It had been from under four such other false nails that the capsules of flash chemical had come.

THE first capsules had been deftly thrust under the coils of the electric cable. The first person to move that cable had set them off. But the objects now in Doc's hand were not capsules.

They were flat metallic objects. Each had a little lever on the side.

Around the bronze giant, the bodies of the human robots were being perforated by the machine-gun fire. The Big Brain, master of these helpless men, was sparing none in his fiendish desire to annihilate Doc Savage and his outfit.

Doc set the two small levers. He waited perhaps two seconds. Then the two metallic objects shot up through the hatchway of the ship. One must have let go as it struck the spot where the machine gun was being operated.

The ancient deck of the old whaler appeared to divide. The old hulk shook as if it would fall apart. Doc himself was hurled from his feet. The force of the explosion had been upward. But all of the air seemed to be sucked from inside the old ship.

Another quick explosion rocked the vessel. It was followed by momentary silence.

The electric cable still glowed with life. Doc Savage whipped to a position beside the huge cylinder. He jammed the cable ends into their contact sockets. Immediately, the mammoth cylinder rumbled with a muffled explosion.

The curved door was closed. It must have been airtight. The piston had plunged into the cylinder for its whole length.

"That explosion!" rapped out Ham. "That was like those I heard on the hill above the duck man's house, only they were not so heavy!"

"I am fully aware of that," said Doc, quietly. "We had best get to the upper deck, or what there may be left of it."

ON what remained of the upper deck were two figures. They were dimly outlined in the foggy darkness of the early morning hours.

"Reckon I told you there hain't no livin' man could ever beat Doc Savage!" whanged a nasal voice. "An' you got it comin' for all the dang meanness you done me an' other folks!"

Two brief explosions splattered their echoes upon the murky fog. A gurgling scream was drowned by the splashing of a body over the side of the wrecked old ship.

Pat Savage shivered and put one hand over her mouth.

"Retributive justice," stated Doc Savage. "John Scroggins is not the murderer you may think he is."

The gaunt man loomed before them. In his hands was the still-smoking double-barreled shotgun.

"I would now throw the gun into the bay, John Scroggins," advised Doc Savage. "The man who stole your secret of manufacturing synthetic diamonds and used the chemical formula for revenge and murder, has paid fully for his treachery."

John Scroggins obediently heaved the shotgun into the water. His one cocked eye jumped about rapidly.

"You knowed alla that, Doc Savage?" he twanged. "You knowed them was my di'mons, an' how they was made?"

"I now have that knowledge, John Scroggins," replied Doc. "I know also that your own chemicals affected you strangely and that was how this other man became aware of your secret. I know you desired only a modest



fortune, and this Big Brain perfected an organization to control the world's supply of diamonds. What has become of Harris Hooper Perrin, the lapidary?"

John Scroggins's head bobbed on his thin neck.

"He got so dang scared an' left here so fast, I'll bet he hain't stoppin' this side o' the Canadian border!" said the duck man.

"I suspected Perrin would fade out of the picture," stated Doc. "He was not consciously guilty at first. Doctor Madren had him put under the influence of the chemical in order to control his actions. He did this to strike at Breckens, being aware Breckens's biggest dealings were with Perrin. Then he must have judged Perrin to be of the grasping type that would be of assistance consciously, if he saw a chance for an easy fortune. Madren gave Perrin that chance."

John Scroggins's good eye expressed great admiration as he looked at Doc.

"Reckon you had me fooled plenty, Doc Savage," he said. "Them thar di'mons you gimme wa'n't none of them we'd made. But how'd you know what was behind all of this foolery?"

"Because no two pairs of human eyes are the same," remarked Doc Savage, quietly. "Eye prints are better than finger prints, for identification. The police will use them some day. Each eye has its own formation of nerves and veins. These show very well in a camera I have used in various forms."

"Eye prints?" gasped John Scroggins. "Hain't never heard o' such!"

"They gave me the identity of the Big Brain," stated Doc.

## **Chapter XXI. END OF REVENGE**

AFTER they departed the old whaling ship, Doc Savage and the others gathered at the home of Simon Stevens.

Simon Stevens said, "Then my selling the Domyne Islands means nothing? The sale does not have to be carried through?"

"That would seem to be the situation," said Doc Savage. "The brain that engineered this as revenge upon you for refusal to give a paroled ex-convict a job several years ago is no longer active."

"When we have restored the brains of Smiling Tony Talliano and Randolph Breckens, the wholesale diamond merchant, we will have completed frustration of all of this ex-convict's revenge," stated Doc. "The Breckens diamond contracts now mean nothing, with the perpetrator dead."

"Where did those two come in on all of this, Doc?" asked Simon Stevens.

Doc smiled a little.

"The whole story sounds fabulous, but I have checked every detail," he said.

"Ten years ago, a homeless wanderer was befriended by Smiling Tony, the shoe shiner. The stranger repaid Tony by stealing his savings. Smiling Tony prosecuted him and he went to prison for three years. He hated Tony for that.

"When this worst of thieves came from prison, he sought jobs of Simon Stevens and Randolph Breckens. They learned the nature of his crime and refused to trust him. Later, this man had some luck. He became a rather well known figure. It was then he decided on revenge against the shoe shiner, Simon Stevens and Breckens."

Doc paused, as in deep thought, then his explanations took another trend.

"John Scroggins, for all his surface crudeness, was a remarkable chemist. He invented a formula for

manufacturing synthetic diamonds with heat and pressure applied to a content of carbon—and with a secret chemical mixture included that nearly defies identity. But using these chemicals made a brainless, mechanical man out of Scroggins. He was in that automatonlike state we have seen in the others so afflicted. His friends saw his condition. They appealed to the man who had been a convict.

"This convict was Doctor Buelow T. Madren. Far back in his past, he had been a good physician, but had been barred from the medical profession for illicit practice. He drifted downward—and that is when Smiling Tony befriended him, with the known results.

"Doctor Madren cured Scroggins, but Scroggins remained in the power of his supposed benefactor. Against his will, he was pulled into an organization to control the world diamond market. It was through this that Madren tried revenge on Randolph Breckens—by leading him to believe he could get all the diamonds he needed to fill the contract he had made. The revenge would be when Breckens could not deliver and would have to pay ten thousand dollars a day forfeit for nondelivery. This would have ruined him.

"The diamonds were made in the deserted house on the hill above Scroggins's shack. He owned the house. The explosions heard around the Shinnecock Hills were made by the cylindrical tube in which the gems were produced. Madren and Scroggins had in their employ chemists, who mixed the chemical batches. These men, because of their work, were under the influence of the automatonlike emotions. Some of them escaped and wandered about the hill. The man with the slit throat was one; the red-headed man killed in Monk's cottage was another. They were murdered so that they would have no opportunity to talk.

"Ham stumbled upon a group of these men when he searched the deserted house and came upon a tunnel. It was the same tunnel that, later, Monk and Ham were drawn into when the duck pond was drained.

"The numbed brain state could be produced by the chemical coming into contact with the membrane of the mouth, or if applied long enough through the pores of the skin. It could have been put on cigars, a pipe, or perhaps, as seems to have been the case of Ham and Monk, on the ears of Habeas Corpus. Thus it got into the blood stream and went to the brain, causing the mechanical emotions."

"But Doc," Monk cut in, "how did you find the cure for this?"

The bronze man smiled. "Since the nervous system was affected, I surmised a shock to the system might help—as in the case of Simon Stevens. The shock he received during the attack on his home, cured him. But the others I cured—you and the rest—came from a solution I made up after testing the blood from the arm of the man cut off by machine gun fire when my plane was resting on the beach. It was in the form of an antitoxin to combat the numbed nerves. This antitoxin I scratched into your skin in the cylinder.

"In my own case, massage of the nerve cords warded off the attack."

"What caused the death of Searles Shane, Breckens's secretary?" Ham queried. "And of Nurse Clarke?"

"The nurse was murdered because Madren was afraid she would get cold feet and tell all. Shane was killed in Breckens's outer office when I was there. The shot came from a secret passage connecting the two offices. The murderers were of Doctor Madren's gang. They were afraid Shane would explain to me about the diamond contract of his employer."

Renny put in a question.

"Doc, how did you finally conclude Doctor Madren was the Big Brain?"

Doc hesitated a moment, as if bringing his thoughts together. Then he said, "I devised some traps with eye cameras. I had some of the synthetic diamonds taken from John Scroggins. I knew the Big Brain would be anxious to recover these. I made it known I had them through Perrin.

"One of my eye cameras in a fish tank trapped them both. Later, I got other photographs of the same eyes."

"Holy cow!" gasped Renny. "How did you get those prints for comparison?"

"First in the fish tank when the uncut diamonds were taken from it," said Doc Savage. "Later, when Doctor Madren became greatly interested in some microbes I had taken from Habeas Corpus's blood stream, he looked into the lenses of another camera."

"Good grief, Doc!" grunted Simon Stevens. "It's still right hard to believe that Doctor Madren was the head man!"

"He gave me the toughest moments of my whole life." Doc admitted. "The truth seemed incredible! But the eyes that looked into the fish tank were the same that inspected the microbes taken from the pig. Doctor Madren was an intellectual scoundrel, but it took the blood of a pig to betray him."

THE END