



# THE MINDLESS MONSTERS

## A Doc Savage Adventure By Kenneth Robeson

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*Scanned and Proofed  
by Tom Stephens*

### Chapter I. THE SKINNY STRANGER

THE man was a good eight inches under six feet. He was so gaunt his bones seemed trying to poke through his skin. But there was something about him that made the noonday crowd split, leaving a path in which none touched him.

The scrawny one moved with machinelike precision. He gave the impression that he had been wound up by some gigantic mechanical spring. That in itself was somewhat queer. But it was the eyes that made people shudder as they stepped from his path.

They were pale, colorless. They did not seem to focus on any given point, but looked through other pedestrians, rather than at them. Across the street from the bank, he turned methodically, as if some unseen hand guided his steps. His own skinny hands clenched and unclenched as if some Herculean task lay before them.

The bank was a modest one. It was on a busy street of Long Island City, which is in Queens, one of the five boroughs of New York City. In front of it a barrel-chested Irishman held a small audience of street urchins entranced. The man wore the uniform of a bank guard.

"'Tis no lie that me ancestors helped the good St. Patrick chase the snakes out of Ireland," he boasted. "The O'Hallahans have been a great race of men."

It was true that Flatfoot O'Hallahan could whip any man he'd met who was not more than half again his own weight. Thus, the skinny man with the flat, lusterless eyes seemed to present no problem at all. O'Hallahan thought that perhaps he was ill from the appearance of him. He seemed to stagger slightly as he stepped to the curb. O'Hallahan moved toward him, placed a hand on his arm.

"Is it you're drunk, man?" he inquired.

What happened then made newspaper headlines in big type. It also started a weird chain of events that brought gray hairs to quite a few people and death to some more.

The skinny stranger gripped the O'Hallahan windpipe with one hand. There was no expression whatever on his face. He did not seem angry with the bank guard. O'Hallahan merely impeded his progress. The barrel-chested Irishman found himself suspended in the air by one hand of a man six inches shorter than himself!

O'Hallahan's tongue protruded from his mouth. His face turned first red and then purple. His body went limp. The scrawny man let him fall to the sidewalk. Then he swung slowly toward the children who made up O'Hallahan's audience. Fear rooted the youngsters to the sidewalk. Perhaps it was just as well that they did not scream or try to run. The lusterless eyes of the man did not seem to see them at all.

Like a mechanical robot, he swiveled, plodded up the marble steps into the bank.

The teller in the first cage looked up at the pinched face through the bars. The light in the bank was dim. The teller couldn't see the strange, dead lack of expression in the skinny man's eyes. But he could see the terrible strength displayed by hands that were merely emaciated talons of flesh.

Thin fingers gripped the marble slabs that made up the lower half of the cage. They peeled off hunks of the stuff as if it were cheese. Then the stout bars above the marble parted like splinters of some rubbery wood.

The teller began to yell. He jammed his foot on an alarm button, sent a siren wailing from the alarm box outside. With one fist, he whipped up a gun, began to blast lead at the unbelievable figure crowding in upon him.

Slugs tore through the shoulders and arms of the skinny monster. The teller's lips trembled. His hand shook slightly. None of his bullets struck a vital spot on the thin man's body. But the impact of the slugs that did plow through his flesh seemed to cause him no pain whatever. Nor did it seem to diminish his terrible strength. The talonlike hands seized the now frantic teller by the shoulders. With incredible force, the fingers twisted the shoulders back until the vertebrae cracked with a dull, snapping sound. The teller screamed once, then fell limp to the floor.

The bank was in a turmoil. Customers milled about, got in the way of other bank employees who were trying to shoot down the intruder. As calmly as if it were all part of a day's work, the skinny man scooped up the entire cash contents of the teller's cage, stuffed it into a leather pouch that he carried. Then he turned and walked out of the bank.

It had all happened so quickly, so completely without warning, that the undersized Sampson reached the street before anyone moved to apprehend him. Dripping a trail of blood, he padded to the curb. A sleek black coupé glided to a stop beside him. Without a word, the skinny one opened a door and climbed in. The coupé roared around the corner and out of sight.

FLATFOOT O'HALLAHAN was struggling back to his feet as the car turned the corner. He was almost knocked down again by the jumble of depositors and employees that poured out of the bank. O'Hallahan was immediately on the defensive.

"The man was as big as a house. He was ten times as strong as Doc Savage," he yelled.

One of the depositors had more practical things in mind than O'Hallahan's public opinions. The depositor was a blond giant of a man wearing a gray suit, gray fedora and black shoes. The bank book he shoved hurriedly into his pocket bore the name, "Merwin Malo, developer of Rex Superol, to banish headaches." The young man's sharp blue eyes rested briefly on O'Hallahan.

"That's impossible. No one could be ten times as strong as Doc Savage. Which way did the man go?"

O'Hallahan jerked one thumb toward the corner. Police sirens were beginning to wail in the distance. But to await their arrival would mean much delay. The blond depositor moved toward the curb.

"My car!" he rasped. "Let's go after him."

He crowded into the machine, a light, fast sedan. O'Hallahan got in with him. So did a portly, thin-haired man with shell-rimmed nose glasses. This was the president of the bank. His name was Jacob Ringle. He mumbled vaguely as the car jolted into motion. What he had seen had set his mind whirling.

"We may need Doc Savage at that," Ringle observed. "Nothing like this ever happened before."

O'Hallahan wailed his agreement.

"'Tis my oath that only the likes o' the man of bronze could help us against this fellow."

The full truth of his words was then unknown to the bank guard. He did know that Doc Savage was credited with the strength of the bull of Bashan; that his amazing brain was more fitted to deal with criminals than any other mind that was known. He knew that Doc devoted all his amazing physical and mental energies toward righting wrongs and the punishment of evildoers.

He did not know that the undersized monster of incredible strength was but one of many to follow. Nor could he have known the strange manner in which Doc ultimately became connected with the case.

The blond driver, whose name was apparently Merwin Malo, uttered words of surprise. Ahead of them, in a side street that was almost deserted, a sleek, black coupé began to slow. O'Hallahan brightened.

"Sure, that's the wan!" he exclaimed. "The man's getting out."

The coupé was still half a block ahead. It pulled to the curb beside a vacant lot. The only pedestrian there was a wisp of a man who looked like a tramp. He glanced at the slowing sedan with little interest.

Then he suddenly hurled himself flat on the ground. The skinny robot of a man climbed out of the sedan. Another larger figure followed him. A strange tableau took place. The skinny one handed over the pouch containing the money. Then, with a gesture as natural and smooth as shaking hands in bidding good-by to a friend, the larger man raised a revolver. There was a bellowing report as a bullet tore into the skinny man's skull, removing most of the face as it did.

O'Hallahan began to yell. That brought the big murderer swiveling around. Before the bank guard and his two companions had a chance to get much of a look at him, the gun began to talk again. Lead smashed the right-hand side of the windshield, narrowly missing O'Hallahan. A second shot crumpled a front tire. The sedan wobbled, warped into the curb. Then the big gunman stepped calmly into his machine and

once more roared away out of sight.

THE blond driver of the sedan clambered out. He rushed over to the vacant lot, leaned over the skinny corpse. There wasn't enough face left to identify him. The wisp of a man who lay on the ground near the corpse began to moan. The blond depositor from the sedan turned to him.

"Are you hurt, Ding Ding?" he asked.

The tramplike figure stopped shivering and looked up. He had a pointed nose, a small round mouth and not enough chin to be worth mentioning. Also, it seemed, he stuttered.

"N-n-n-no, Mr. Malo," he squeaked in a voice that sounded as if it needed oiling. I-I-I-I g-g-guess not."

O'Hallahan and Jacob Ringle, the bank president, stood behind Malo. The portly bank executive pointed a well-manicured finger at the trembling man on the ground. "Who's he?"

"Name's Corvestan," Malo told him. "They call him Ding Ding because he was once a trolley-car motorman. Hangs around my store quite a bit."

Ding Ding Corvestan struggled to his feet. His small mouth worked strangely. Tiny, snapping black eyes darted glances of fear about him.

"T-t-terrible!" he groaned. "It w-w-was awful!"

Ding Ding was unable to give any adequate description of the big man who had escaped in the coupé. He reported only two peculiar items concerning the killer.

"H-he had a kind of a big snake ring with red eyes on his left hand," Ding Ding offered. "B-b-but his f-f-face was funny. It didn't seem to have any expression at all."

The bank president paled. The skinny corpse had displayed that same curious lack of expression. O'Hallahan had mentioned it.

"Golly, I need an aspirin," Ringle muttered. "There must be a gang of them." Then he smacked his hands together. "I *am* going to call Doc Savage."

Merwin Malo brightened at that suggestion. He jerked a thumb toward a decrepit building across the street.

"Phone in my store," he suggested.

The sign above the store said, "Merwin Malo. Apothecary Shop. It was an ancient, dingy affair that apparently belonged to a generation gone by. It still had the old fashioned red-and-blue liquid-filled globes in the window. There wasn't even a soda fountain.

Malo escorted the bank president into the store. Then he returned to the other two men who were gaping at the faceless corpse. At that moment, the police arrived at the scene. A burly headquarters detective leaped from a prowl car. He thrust himself past Malo, O'Hallahan and Ding Ding Corvestan. Shifting an unlighted cigar from one side of his mouth to the other, he glared belligerently at the three men.

"Who's the stiff?" he demanded.

The three explained, of course, that they didn't have any idea. The detective turned to other cops who

had come up behind him.

"Fingerprints," he snapped. "Check 'em right away. The guy probably has a record."

Then he turned back to Merwin Malo.

"Where's Ringle, the bank president? I understand he went off with you."

Malo gulped. His face got a bit red. Apparently he didn't feel he deserved such blunt questioning. He pointed toward his drugstore.

"He's phoning Doc Savage. In my store."

The detective's eyes hardened.

"Interfering with police business," he growled. "That won't get him anywhere. Come on."

The big cop plodded across the street with the others in his wake. He thrust open the door and stepped into the dimly lighted apothecary shop. The single phone booth was empty. Jacob Ringle was nowhere to be seen.

Merwin Malo's mouth dropped open. An expression of incredulity spread over his face.

"W-w-what—" he began.

A youthful clerk bobbed up from behind the counter.

"Funniest thing," he said. "The guy went into the phone booth and dialed a number. Then, without even saying a word, he hung up and went out the back door."

The big detective's eyes narrowed. He chewed hard on his cigar.

"All you guys stay where I can get you," he rasped. "I'm going back to headquarters and find out whose fingerprints we get off that corpse."

But, in that, the detective was decidedly mistaken. If it had not been for an enterprising newspaper reporter, the scrawny monster might never have been identified.

## **Chapter II. TALE OF A PIG**

LATER investigation proved that an uncompleted phone call had been made to the office of Doc Savage at the time Merwin Malo's clerk had indicated. The offices occupied the entire eighty-sixth floor of New York's tallest skyscraper.

The man who lifted the French-type phone from the cradle in the outer reception room was a tall, immaculately clad individual. At the moment, he wore gray spats, striped morning trousers, a cutaway coat and winged collar. A silk topper rested on the big desk.

"Theodore Brooks speaking," he said into the phone. Then he frowned slightly. There was a click, followed only by the dial hum. Brigadier General Theodore Marley Brooks—to give his full name—cradled the phone.

"Must have been a mistake," he muttered. Then he sighed, apparently resumed a conversation that had been interrupted. "Now, if you take a full-grown pig and apply the proper pressure in the proper

manner—"

Howls that might have come from a pack of enraged wolves issued from another part of the room. There was a pounding and a thumping, as if half a dozen heavyweights were engaged in a last-man-on-his-feet-wins free-for-all.

"Daggonit, Ham!" a shrill, childish voice threatened. "If you touch a bristle on Habeas' back, I'll compress you into a single volume book on what ought to happen to all lawyers!"

The tall, sartorially perfect man was a lawyer. In fact, it was generally conceded that he was one of the most brilliant attorneys ever to have been graduated from Harvard. He was also called Ham by persons who knew him extremely well, could outrun him, or were not afraid to tackle him. Not many persons called him Ham.

At the moment, he ignored the shrill protests. He leaned toward a complicated panel of switches, dials and multicolored lights. Then he extended slender fingers toward one of the most unlovely-looking porkers that ever rooted in a garbage heap.

The shoat had a long nose made for digging, ears as long as a good-sized donkey, legs like a tall dog and a skinny body. His name was Habeas Corpus, and he had been so named to irritate Ham. His owner, who had named him, was responsible for the rumpus that filled the big reception room. As Ham picked up the pig by his long ears, the howls and thumping noises reached a new crescendo.

Both the man who made the noises and his antics were worthy of note. An anthropologist would probably have been interested in the individual, and anyone would have stopped to look twice at what he was doing.

He had a nubbin of a head, a homely face, long arms and a chest like a gorilla.

Monk—as the simian fellow was aptly called by his friends—crouched in the center of the room. Again and again he rushed toward Ham and the porker. Each time he fetched up against some invisible barrier and was hurled to the floor. Actually, Ham had set up a polarized electrical field which Doc Savage had installed. Actuated by a tremendously high-frequency current, the field created an almost impenetrable invisible wall that halted impromptu visitors who had lethal designs.

Ham shoved Habeas Corpus into a small trap in the elaborate cabinet that sported the dials and gadgets.

"Stop it, you shyster," Monk yelled, "or I'll put you in that gadget and you'll come out a size to match your brains!"

Ham appeared to be completely engrossed in his "experiment." He had assured Monk that his "reducer," as he called it, would compress any living thing to a fourth its normal size. He twisted dials and turned knobs. There was a swishing sound as compressed gases of some type rushed through high-pressure nozzles. A pressure-indicator dial shot up to the top calibration and shattered.

Squealing grunts came from inside of the tanklike cabinet. Monk leaned wearily against the high-frequency field and groaned. Then he about went berserk as the tall lawyer shut off the machine and took out the pig. Habeas Corpus, as nearly as Monk could tell from where he was, emerged just about one fourth of the size he had been when he went into the compressor.

Monk plunged again into the electrical field as Doc Savage entered the reception room from a private door behind him. Ham was facing Doc as the bronze man entered. Instantly, the dapper lawyer moved toward a switch, shut off the high-frequency field. Doc's smooth features almost never showed worry.

But a slight frown of concentration told Ham that something was wrong.

He forgot to warn Monk. And Monk—whose full handle was Lieutenant Colonel Andrew Blodgett Mayfair, one of the world's greatest industrial chemists—plunged again at the barrier he thought was still there. It wasn't. Monk fell flat on his face with a grunt of surprise.

"What's the matter, Doc?" Ham managed.

Doc Savage did not answer immediately. He loomed for a moment in the doorway, a giant of bronze. As he left the door and stepped out into the room, he seemed to grow smaller in stature. This was because of the symmetry of his development; his size was only fully realized by comparison with other known objects. Doc's corded muscles meshed under his skin in a manner which made their tremendous size scarcely noticeable. His hair was like a bronze metallic cap, just a shade darker than his skin.

But the most compelling thing about the bronze man was his eyes. They were strange eyes, flake-gold whirlpools that might have been wind-shifting desert sands under the sunlight. The weird life of the eyes had a compellingly hypnotic quality.

Doc carried a late-edition afternoon paper. He spread it out on the big flat-topped desk while he made some quick preparations. He removed a device that looked somewhat like an old-fashioned stereopticon from a cabinet, set it up on a pedestal base.

"Newsprint is not a perfect medium for the recording of fingerprints," Doc Savage said.

Monk and Ham rushed to the big desk, stared at the newspaper. The headlines were in exceptionally big type. The story was quite sensational. The reporter had capitalized on the lack of reason and emotion displayed by the man who had killed the Long island bank teller:

MINDLESS MONSTER

KILLS BANK TELLER

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Uses Only Bare Hands—

Slain by Confederate

After Robbery

The story told of the incidents of the skinny man of super strength pretty much as O'Hallahan, Malo and Ding Ding Corvestan had seen them. Jacob Ringle's opinions that the two killers had been members of a larger gang were mentioned, even though Ringle had not been contacted. Ringle's disappearance was not overemphasized. There was no clear indication that he might have been kidnaped. And his standing in the community was such that it was not wise to point suspicion at the bank president.

One curious angle was that the fingerprints of the corpse of the skinny man indicated that he had never been arrested. At least his prints were not on file. A reproduction of the prints appeared as an illustration with the story. The caption said, "If any reader of the *Classic* should be able to recognize these fingerprints, this paper will offer a suitable reward for identification."

The editor had felt pretty safe, of course, in making such an offer. If the fingerprints were not listed in New York headquarters, or Washington, it was most unlikely that they would be recorded anywhere.

Or at least the editor thought.

DOC SAVAGE tore the illustration from the paper, inserted it into the stereopticon, which was somewhat like the postcard projecting type popular a few years ago. The fingerprints sprang to life with enlarged brilliance, projected against the smooth white wall of the office. The bronze man walked close to the wall, studied the whorls closely.

Doc Savage had trained his remarkable memory in the matter of fingerprints. The bronze man could study a set of prints and remember their convolutions years later. And it happened that he had particular reason to remember these prints.

"Those are the prints of Rocky Emben," Doc said simply.

Ham gasped. "Why, Emben was graduated from the college last year."

The "college" was a remarkable curative and surgical institution that Doc Savage maintained in upstate New York. Doc seldom took a life, even of criminal opponents, when it could possibly be avoided. Criminals who were captured were usually sent to the college. There, delicate brain operations erased all memory of their criminal pasts. They also erased any tendency toward crime. As mentally new-born citizens, they were returned to jobs and useful lives. Rocky Ember had fallen afoul of Doc before his criminal career had advanced enough for him to have been convicted and fingerprinted.

Monk Mayfair scratched his bullet head. His eyes, sunk in deep pits of gristle, were troubled. Monk was remembering everything he could about Rocky Emben.

"But, Doc," he protested. "Emben's cure was a complete success. I remember it. He wouldn't have gone back to crime. Besides, he didn't have enough strength to bust up a watermelon!"

Tiny whirlpools stirred weird life in Doc's gold-flaked eyes as he sat on the edge of the desk. Certain details in the newspaper story had aroused peculiar interest in Doc's agile brain. They were details indicating that a master criminal, so far a bit unsure of himself, was preparing a tremendous onslaught of violence. The criminal probably had not known Rocky Emben's background. None of Doc's "graduates" knew of their own backgrounds.

Doc picked up the phone, put in a call for the institution. As he did, Monk's eyes strayed toward the diminutive hog. It was scratching its back on Ham's elaborate "reducer." Monk grunted and started toward Ham. There was both mayhem and murder in his glare. No high-frequency field separated him from the dapper lawyer now.

"Bring that hog back to his natural size, shyster," he growled. "Or we'll find out how many paragraphs the editors think your obituary is worth."

Ham moved nervously, reached one hand behind him. It came up with a shiny cane. Ham unsheathed it, revealing the case to be a mere cover for a slender sword. The tip of the sword was covered with a sticky chemical. Monk knew that the sticky chemical was one that brought instant unconsciousness to anyone who was stabbed by it.

"Come on, you hairy mistake," Ham snapped. "I'll make a jack o' lantern of your head and a red fur rug out of the rest of you."

He flicked the sword-cane at the hairy chemist. Monk grinned and kept boring in like an avenging juggernaut.



"I figured out an antidote for that danged poison of yours, shyster," he rumbled. "And now, I'm going to take you apart, piece by piece."

Ham kept jabbing with the sword-cane and Monk kept coming in. Just how it might have turned out is a matter of conjecture. The running quarrel between these two aids of Doc had been going on for years. And Habeas Corpus, the pig, was one of two influences that caused the greatest amount of turmoil in their relationship.

The squeals of the pig now halted what looked like the permanent finish of a beautiful friendship. The squeals distracted Monk. They also set Ham to laughing. The long snout of Monk's pet protruded from a hole in the "reducer." The porker nosed up a sliding door and ran out into the room.

The smaller pig still scratched his back on the other side of the machine. Monk knew instantly that he'd been taken; that the smaller pig was a pygmy hog that looked just like a miniature Habeas. Monk was all mixed up. He was immensely relieved to discover that Ham's "reducer" was a fake. He was incensed to realize he'd fallen for such a fraud.

He rushed to Habeas and glared at Ham at the same time. He tried to tell the pig how glad he was to find he was all right and give Ham a verbal opinion of the dapper lawyer in the same breath.

It was difficult. It also made it difficult for Doc Savage to carry on a conversation over the phone. Doc motioned for silence and got it. He talked for quite a few moments. Then he cradled the phone.

"Rocky Emben's last probationary report was ten days ago," he informed his aids. "At that time he was quite normal mentally and no stronger than usual. He displayed neither recollection of the past nor any tendency toward crime."

"You mean a guy can grow from an innocent weakling to a criminal monster that can tear up slabs of marble like paper in ten days?" Monk asked.

Doc Savage stood erect.

"I am afraid that is the inescapable conclusion. However, you will note three significant aspects to the news story. The vacant, glassy stare of both Emben and the other killer whom we do not yet know; the fact that Emben was killed immediately after the crime was committed and the relatively small amount of cash taken in the robbery of the bank. There was only about two thousand dollars in the cage at the time."

Monk scratched his head. He didn't get it.

"Emben had apparently become a mindless automaton controlled by some other force," Doc explained. "The master mind was not sure how Emben's mind would react when the force was removed, so he had him killed. And Emben's crime was an experimental beginning. Had it been an end in itself, a more lucrative job would have been performed."

Monk gasped.

"You two will remain here," Doc directed. "Long Tom is on his way in. I am going to check up on the neighborhood in Queens."

Doc Savage left the office.

MONK and Ham were silent for a moment after Doc went out. Monk spoke first.

"Golly, if a guy as skinny as Rocky Emben can be made to bust up marble slabs an' steel bars with his hands, a flock of guys like that could—"

A red warning light began flashing on and off in the ceiling. It indicated that someone was approaching the office by the route from the regular service elevators of the building.

"Long Tom," Ham suggested. "Probably came in from the street instead of through the garage."

A strident, buzzing sound brought Monk erect. Both men whirled to a flat, rectangular screen against one wall. A greenish fluorescent light wavered there for a moment. Then the outline of an automatic pistol could be seen. The device was an automatic X-ray televisior which rang the buzzer and flashed the reproduction of any metal object larger than a small suit button that a visitor might carry. When Doc and his aids passed the device, they used a hidden button to turn it off momentarily.

Monk and Ham each reached into a cabinet and removed queer, oversized pistols. The weapons were fitted with drum magazines, and the mechanism looked somewhat intricate. These were superfiring machine pistols perfected by Doc. Their rate of fire was so rapid that their roar was like the hoarse song of a gigantic bass fiddle. The slugs in the drums at present were "mercy bullets," which scarcely broke the skin, but produced instant unconsciousness.

The hairy chemist and the lawyer were all set for trouble when the outer door was thrust open. Monk's mouth dropped open so wide it is doubtful if the visitor could see anything of his head except the ears.

There was nothing sinister about the visitor's appearance. She was only two or three inches over five feet. Her curves did things to a fall tweed suit that would have filled the manufacturer's heart with joy. Her hair was a tawny blond, with red glints. It reminded one of a lion, a golden field of grain and a sunset, all at the same time.

The twin expressions of astonishment on the faces of the two men seemed to puzzle her. Her deep-blue eyes clouded in a frown.

"I am Ingrid Nordstrom," she said in a rich contralto. Apparently she expected that her self-identification should explain something.

Monk gave her a wide smile and tried to hide the superfiring machine pistol behind his back. He hadn't any idea who Ingrid Nordstrom might be. But he was quite willing to find out. Monk could scarcely be called a woman hater.

Ham bowed deeply and got in front of Monk. Ham was no woman hater, either, and Monk's competition annoyed him.

"Ahem," he began in his best courtroom manner.

Ingrid Nordstrom looked uncertainly from one man to the other. Once, her hand seemed to stray toward the large handbag she carried. The automatic revealed by the X-ray televisior was probably in that. But the girl changed her mind.

"I came about the mindless monsters," she said simply.

Ham shut his mouth with a snap. He was instantly all business. He seated the girl on a chair beside the desk. Monk rushed out to an anteroom and came back with a glass of water for Ingrid Nordstrom. She hadn't asked for any. But Monk hoped Ham would make himself so obnoxious asking questions that

Monk would be able to set himself in solid with the girl.

Neither of them noticed the slight mist that seemed to drift through the office. The vapor didn't have any color or any odor. Monk let out a big sigh. It seemed at first that he was merely registering a romantic interest in Ingrid Nordstrom. Then Monk lay down on the floor and went to sleep. Ham lay down beside him. In another instant, the two men snored softly.

### **Chapter III. THE AGED CORPSE**

THE man who shook Monk back to consciousness looked as though he had been double-crossing an undertaker for years. He had the complexion of a mushroom and looked thin enough to be a pushover for any well-set-up young man.

But the appearance was deceiving. Major Thomas J. Long Tom Roberts had convinced many men who weighed twice what he did of that. Long Tom had a tremendous, bulging forehead. And back of that was the brain that made him one of the leading electrical engineers in the country. Long Tom was also one of the five aids of Doc Savage.

He methodically slapped Monk's hairy face with open palms, stimulating circulation to revive him. Monk opened his tiny eyes. The effect of the gas was still upon him. He seized one of Long Tom's hands, patted it fondly.

"Fly with me, Ingrid," he pleaded. "We will start life together."

Then sanity returned. Monk sat erect. Ham was still sleeping beside him.

"Jehoshaphat! What happened?" Monk demanded.

"You apparently fell for some dame named Ingrid," Long Tom said dryly.

Monk grunted and struggled to his feet.

"Golly!" he muttered. "I wonder what happened to her."

There was no trace of the girl any place in the office. The only thing that Monk could determine was missing was the copy of the newspaper report Doc had had of the bank robbery and murder of Rocky Emben. Monk recalled that Doc had circled certain angles of the story as a memorandum for study by his aids.

Doc Savage's interest in the case of the mindless monsters would probably be known now to the criminals behind it. So also would be the particular angles of it that had attracted him. Monk groaned.

"We ought to be kicked in the pants," he grunted.

Ham, who had regained consciousness and staggered to his feet, tried to oblige him. The lawyer was still unsteady, though. He fell down again. Monk picked up the Manhattan phone directory, thumbed through it. There were lots of Nordstroms. But none of them was Ingrid. He tried the Brooklyn book, the Bronx, Queens, and Staten Island. The result was the same.

"Hell!" he muttered. "She might live in Jersey, for that matter. She might even have given us a phony name."

Long Tom was busy with an automatic camera that catalogued the features of anyone who agitated the

X-ray televisor warning by carrying a gun or a knife. The electrical genius used a quick developer and took out a still-wet print. He whistled, handed it to Monk.

"Boy, oh, boy! I don't blame you."

Ingrid Nordstrom, or whatever her name really was, certainly was a looker.

"Any other negatives in the camera?" Monk wanted to know.

Long Tom told him there were not. Monk scratched his head.

"If anyone came in behind her to dope us with gas, he might not have had any metal objects with him," the chemist suggested. "Or he could have come in so close behind her that the automatic camera reloader mightn't have had time to work."

Ham looked at the picture over his shoulder.

"We ought to find out who she is."

Monk smacked one palm down on the desk.

"I got an idea. I know a man on a tabloid newspaper who'll recognize this picture, if the dame has ever been photographed for publication."

Long Tom thought the idea was worth trying.

"A gal as good-looking as that should have been in the rotogravure sections at some time or other."

Monk carried the picture proudly out the door.

"I'll call you," he promised.

MONK had scarcely gone out of the door when the muted phone bell throbbed softly. Ham scooped it up and identified himself. As he listened, he made rapid motions to Long Tom with the fingers of one hand. He used a deaf-and-dumb sign language improved by Doc for complete expression with one hand.

"Doc Savage is not here right now," Ham informed the caller. "But I will be glad to take any message. Just a moment, until I get a pencil."

Ham made motions for Long Tom to hurry. The electrical wizard had leaped to another phone, was trying to trace the call. Ham did not dare stay away from his phone too long. The caller would undoubtedly get suspicious and hang up.

"Go ahead," he said into the mouthpiece. "I have a pencil."

"If you're trying to trace this, you're out of luck," the voice said. It sounded as if a man were speaking into a mailing tube or something like it, to disguise his voice. It was that obvious disguise which had made Ham suspicious when he first heard it.

"Tell Doc to stay away from this mindless monster business, or we'll bump off the bunch of you," the voice said. There was a click on the line as he hung up.

Long Tom grunted disgustedly a moment later, cradled the phone he was using.

"Dial phone," he muttered. "Can't trace it at all after the circuit is broken. What did he say?"

Ham told him. He also told him Doc's theory that the skinny monster who snapped a bank teller's backbone was merely an experimental victim; that it was strictly an accident that Rocky Emben had been picked for the experiment.

"This call certainly bears out Doc's theory," Ham offered.

Long Tom agreed.

"It also looks as though we're going to tackle something pretty tough."

The phone rang again. It was Monk. His shrill voice was triumphant.

"I got her!" he yelled. "She was in the roto section a month ago. Her name's Ingrid Nordstrom, all right. She's secretary to Romley Rutledge, the utilities king."

"We'll meet you on West Street, near the Rutledge Building," Ham said. "We'll contact Doc now and get his O. K. If we aren't there in half an hour, call back here."

Long Tom was operating a small compact short-wave transmitter while Ham was talking. Ham wrote out Monk's message as he completed his conversation. The electrical genius contacted Doc through the short-wave receiver in his car, told him both of the threatening phone call and about Ingrid Nordstrom.

"Check up on the girl and Romley Rutledge, her employer," Doc instructed. "Then contact me again."

AS Doc Savage completed his conversation with Long Tom, he braked his long sedan to a halt in front of the vacant lot in which Rocky Emben had been murdered. There was nothing flashy about Doc's machine. There was little to indicate that it was made of bulletproof armor, with bulletproof glass; nor was there anything to hint that the powerful custom-built motor could whirl it over the highways at upward of a hundred miles an hour.

Doc had just come from the bank where he had talked to the remaining tellers and to O'Hallahan, who had returned to duty. Jacob Ringle, the bank president, was still missing. The other officials were somewhat nervous about it. They didn't seem to be able to make up their minds whether Ringle had gone away voluntarily or not. There had been no communication from possible kidnapers.

Doc looked the vacant lot over carefully. There was no one in sight, except four workmen who were busy repairing a patch of asphalt street pavement. Doc crossed the street to the drugstore of Merwin Malo. The big blond proprietor was behind the counter when Doc came in. He was talking to the youthful clerk. Neither of them saw Doc when the bronze man padded softly through the doorway.

"Didn't Mr. Ringle say *anything* when he went out of the back door?" Malo asked.

The young clerk shook his head. Obviously, he was baffled.

"Honest to gosh!" he protested. "He just said, 'Gimme a glass of water,' which I did. Then he went into the phone booth, dialed his number and came out again."

Doc's well modulated voice made the two men jump as if a bomb had been dropped.

"Just where did you get that water?" the bronze man asked.

Malo and his clerk stared bug-eyed at Doc Savage. A cold sweat broke out on the clerk's forehead. If he was lying, he made the great Bernhardt look like a chorus girl. It was distinctly not probable.

"Th-this tap," he stammered. "Th-the only one we've got. It's city water."

Doc Savage took a corked test tube from a pocket. He removed the cork and took a sample of the water. It was entirely likely that the clerk was telling the truth. But the bronze man was not in the habit of taking anything for granted.

A squeaky voice that sounded as though it needed oiling stammered behind Doc.

"G-g-gimme a shot of that S-s-s-superol stuff," Ding Ding Corvestan stuttered. "Th-th-this screwy b-b-business gives me a headache."

The ex-motorman had come in from the street. His pointed nose twitched. Merwin Malo smiled in a pleased fashion.

"Best headache remedy on the market," he said.

"I'll have one, too," Doc told him.

Malo shot a surprised look at the bronze man. No one had ever heard of Doc having a headache. And it was surprising to see him taking a patented nostrum to cure one.

Merwin Malo dusted powders into two glasses. He handed one to Ding Ding Corvestan, who gulped it down hastily. Doc uncorked another test tube. Most of his glass of Rex Superol disappeared into that. The bronze man let his gaze rest on Merwin Malo for a moment.

"I understand you were recently threatened," Doc said.

Malo gulped, nodded his head.

"Jealousy," he said. "Some of my competitors threatened to charge me with practicing medicine without a license when I invented Rex Superol."

He grinned affably. "It didn't take, though. The stuff turned out to be a good headache powder, and it's perfectly legal."

Doc Savage did not comment. His gaze flickered from the druggist to Ding Ding Corvestan and the young clerk. Then he drifted toward the door.

He paused for a moment in the doorway. His gaze was fixed on the four laborers who had been repairing the cracked patch of asphalt near the bronze man's sedan. Three of the workmen continued with their tasks.

The fourth fellow seemed to have grown restless. He had let his pickax fall to the ground. He stood erect, looking around. His eyes were weirdly lusterless, completely without expression. He looked through, rather than at, Doc Savage. Then he began to shuffle forward with a heavy, mechanical gait.

THE workman was a well-set-up young fellow. When Doc had left his sedan and crossed the street to the drugstore, the young laborer's features had been pleasant and friendly. The expression now was scarcely human at all.

Doc Savage did not falter. He met the workman in the center of the street. Inasmuch as events had led up to this meeting, it was as good a time as any for Doc to learn at first hand the strength of the mindless monsters.

Newspapers had often stated flatly that no man had ever been developed who could match the strength of Doc Savage. Such statements had never been contradicted. The bronze man performed a series of exercises every day that kept his muscles in peak condition.

When the other three workmen saw their companion grapple Doc Savage in the center of the street, they gasped with horror. They recognized Doc, of course, from newspaper pictures.

The glassy-eyed workman seized Doc Savage with both hands. The fingers bit deeply into the flesh. Doc's cabled hands closed on the other's wrists. Mighty biceps bulged. A sheen of perspiration spread over the bronze man's features.

Slowly, the fingers of the young laborer bit more deeply into Doc's flesh. It was apparent that in a contest of strength alone, even Doc Savage was no match for the mindless monster!

THE bronze man doubled sharply and twisted. The maneuver threw the young man off balance. Doc's fingers tightened about the workman's ankles, surged upward powerfully. The workman's body shot over the bronze man's back. The glassy-eyed man landed sitting down. His back was toward Doc Savage.

Moving as though responding to previously given instructions, the robot of a man moved mechanically toward Doc's heavy sedan. The special armor of that sedan brought its weight up to nearly two tons. The mindless automaton seized one of the running boards. With no more effort than a child with a toy, he lifted the running board, sent the machine crashing onto its side!

Doc struck swiftly then. He was convinced that this mindless monster was not responsible for his own acts. Doc's intent was to capture him without injury and attempt to bring him out of the weird spell that held him. For one fraction of a second, as the young man stepped back from the car, his wrists were close together.

In that instant, Doc Savage slipped a noose of silk and wire cord over his hands, whipped the noose tight and tied quick, skillful knots. The automaton merely looked at Doc with a foolish expression. He pulled once at the bonds, found them too great for even his tremendous strength. So he sat down calmly in the middle of the street.

Doc Savage walked around his sedan. He braced himself and thrust his shoulder against the corner of the top. Doc's corded muscles bulged in raising one side of the sedan; a feat that the mindless automaton had accomplished with no apparent effort at all. When the sedan again rested on its four tires, Doc turned back to his captive.

The laborer had not escaped. He lay in a heap in the roadway. Doc leaned quickly over him. The man was dead without question. There was no mark of any kind to indicate a cause of death.

But the condition of the corpse was what had really brought the involuntary expression of amazement from Doc Savage. The flesh was withered and old. The body seemed to have shrunk. Skin that had been young and robust a few moments ago, was now wrinkled and gray!

Of course, it did not seem possible. But there it was. Doc gently raised one of the corpse's eyelids,

peered at the pupil. The structure of an eye pupil is as completely identifying as a fingerprint. Doc had stared closely into the automaton's eyes a few moments before.

When the bronze man let the lid fall again, he knew that there had been no substitution of a corpse during the few seconds that he had been on the other side of the car. The robust young giant of strength had withered and died, an old and gnarled ancient—all in the space of half a dozen minutes!

Doc Savage's flake-gold eyes stirred with strange life as he picked up the withered corpse and placed it in the back of his sedan. Doc dropped his short-wave transmitter to the police band and asked to have word sent to the medical examiner.

He arranged to meet the city official at Doc's office to perform a joint post-mortem on the newest victim of the mindless monsters.

## **Chapter IV. INGRID ON GUARD**

THE small mouth of Ding Ding Corvestan was opened as far as it would go. Stark fear showed in his little black eyes. Ding Ding leaned weakly against one of Merwin Malo's ancient store windows. The tramplike ex-motorman had witnessed Doc's struggle with the mindless monster. He had also seen the withered and ancient corpse Doc had placed in his sedan. Croaking sounds issued from Ding Ding's thin lips.

"Water!" he begged. "Water! Malo, for Pete's sake, get me some water!"

Ding Ding Corvestan slumped to the sidewalk. Big, blond Merwin Malo rushed out of the store, a glass of water in his hand. He started to force it down Ding Ding's mouth. Then he changed his mind and threw it in the wispy man's face. That brought him around.

"What's all the fuss?" Malo wanted to know.

Ding Ding described the tussle in the middle of the street.

"The guy aged fifty years, shriveled up and died of old age while I was watching him!" Ding Ding insisted.

Malo leaned over and put one hand on his forehead.

"You don't seem to have any fever," he said.

Ding Ding pounded the sidewalk with a skinny fist.

"I saw it, I tell you! I was right here all the time."

Malo frowned. "It isn't possible."

Ding Ding pulled himself to his feet. His gaze strayed to the other three street workmen. They had seen what had happened to their co-worker. They were leaning on pick handles now, buzzing conversation. Everything had happened so quickly that they seemed undecided what to do. Ding Ding scratched his pointed nose as he watched them.

"I wonder—" he muttered. He started to walk cautiously toward them. Curiosity seemed to be getting the better of Ding Ding's common sense. Merwin Malo shook his head in perplexity. He started back into his store. Then he changed his mind, turned to watch Corvestan and the three street workers.



The laborers' actions indicated that they were going to quit work. They threw their picks in a heap, passed the water pail among them. Each drank gustily. Then the buzz of conversation continued. Ding Ding Corvestan was close to them then. His inquisitive nose was pointed in their direction.

Suddenly, Ding Ding Corvestan began to scream. The scream carried a note of mortal terror. Merwin Malo snapped erect, peered closely at the three remaining laborers. Malo shook his head. His features drew taut.

The three laborers halted in their buzz of conversation. They looked blankly at each other. Then one of them reached down at the three-inch-thick asphalt they had been tearing up with their pickaxes. He twisted off a piece of it with his bare fingers as if it had been a chocolate-layer cake. The other two watched him with foolish expressions. Then they began doing the same thing.

It was this exhibition that made Ding Ding Corvestan scream. Apparently, the interruption of the scream gave them other ideas. One of them reached out and picked Ding Ding up as if he had been a toy. The wispy ex-motorman screamed more loudly. Merwin Malo seemed to gulp courage down from his vantage point across the street. The big druggist tore after the laborers, yelling orders for them to put Ding Ding down.

Instead, the three trudged mechanically toward the next corner. A light truck was parked there. As if they were acting under instructions they didn't understand themselves, the laborers opened the double doors of a truck body that was parked around the corner. They shoved Ding Ding Corvestan inside and climbed in themselves.

The driver of the truck sat well back in his seat. His face was in shadow. But his left hand hung over the side of the truck. On the third finger of that hand there was an ornate snake ring with red ruby eyes.

It was the kind of a ring that Ding Ding Corvestan had described on the finger of the blank-faced killer who had sent a leaden slug crashing into the skull of Rocky Emben.

THE truck roared across the street, into an alley and out of sight. Merwin Malo stared blankly at the spot where it had been. The big druggist seemed dazed by what had happened. He didn't see the girl until she spoke.

When she did address Malo, she was standing right beside him. There was a shrewd quality in her deep-blue eyes.

"What happened? What did the truck driver look like?"

Merwin Malo swung around. His first appraisal of Ingrid Nordstrom left him about as speechless as Monk had been when he encountered the girl. Malo blinked a couple of times.

"Damned if I know what happened!" he offered. "And I didn't see the driver at all."

Malo paused. He obviously did not like to leave the pretty blond.

"I guess I'd better report it, though," he said.

Ingrid's eyes were still shrewd and calculating. "I guess you had."

She watched Malo as he disappeared into his store. A low whistle escaped her lips.

"Whew!" she breathed. "That was too close."

Ingrid Nordstrom ran lightly down the street to a cigar store half a block away. She darted into a phone booth there and dialed a number. A male voice answered on the other end. Ingrid didn't identify herself by name. Apparently it was not necessary. She briefly described the encounter of Doc Savage, the capture of Ding Ding Corvestan and the reactions of Merwin Malo.

"Apparently, he doesn't know," she said in her husky contralto. "If I thought he did—"

Her voice trailed off. The sound of masculine conversation came from the receiver. Ingrid listened. Then she spoke again.

"He went east, toward Queens Boulevard, I think. Probably out on the Island."

Ingrid paused, listening.

"O. K.," she said. "I'll meet you."

The girl hung up.

SEVERAL minutes prior to that conversation, Long Tom and Ham left the eighty-sixth floor offices of Doc Savage. As Ham was going out of the main reception room door, he felt a sharp stab in his right ankle.

Ham said "Ouch" and saw Habeas Corpus, Monk's pet pig, barring his way. Ham drew one foot back for a well-aimed kick. He didn't have any idea that the kick would land on the porker. Habeas was far too well trained for that.

"Go away," Ham snapped.

"Better take him," Long Tom advised. "Or we won't get any peace out of Monk."

Ham looked undecided for a moment. Then a gleam of hope crept into his eyes.

"Did you fix up that low-frequency shocker?" he asked.

Long Tom nodded.

"Come on, Habeas," Ham said pleasantly. "I think you can be of some use."

The two men and the pig stepped out into the corridor. They walked past the regular express-service elevator. Ham held both hands before him as if he were trying to warm them on a blank piece of wall. The blank spot immediately swung inward, revealing a short passage that terminated in a sliding private elevator door. The piece of wall was actuated by a body capacity induction relay. If Doc or his aids switched it on before they left the laboratory office, the electrical capacity of their own bodies set up a field that automatically opened the door when they approached it.

Descending in Doc's private high-speed elevator gave one the sensation of hanging in midair. The elevator plummeted down with such terrific speed that it would have been fatal if it were not for the intricate checking device that brought the cage to a rough, but perfectly safe, stop.

The lower end of the shaft gave onto Doc's private garage beneath the skyscraper. There was a variety of vehicles there. They ranged from one that looked like an ancient and decrepit laundry truck, which

could do a hundred and twenty-five miles an hour, to the sleek convertible that Long Tom and Ham selected.

Long Tom drove. Ham put Habeas Corpus on his lap, which was quite unusual. The dapper lawyer usually made considerable fuss when Habeas even brushed against his clothing. He attached a device with a round brass button, about an inch in diameter, to the hog's nose. Habeas didn't object. He was accustomed to having his head shoved into gas masks and other safety devices upon occasion.

Ham began to whistle a popular tune as Long Tom drove into the congested lower West Side, toward the shipping and market district of West Street. He scratched Habeas' ear.

"You'll be glad to see that hairy mistake who owns you," he suggested.

The pig grunted contentedly.

"There he is," Ham said presently. "Better park here, so we won't be too easily noticed."

Long Tom parked the convertible half a block away from the big building that housed the electrical and power empire of Romley Rutledge & Associates. Ham opened the door and shoved the pig out. He pointed down the street.

"Go to him, Habeas."

The porker squealed in recognition, raced toward the apelike figure that lounged on the other side of a light pole. Ham grinned and walked after the pig.

The meeting of the pig and the lounger was fraught with excitement, considerable noise and surprise for Ham. The low-frequency shocker he had asked Long Tom about was a gadget that made the recipient of the shock feel as though he'd been through the electric chair.

But as the apelike figure went up in the air with a barking chatter of rage and indignation, Ham's jaw dropped. As has been said, there were two principal causes of dissension between Monk and Ham. One of them was Habeas. The other was the creature who had just leaped, howling, into the air.

Some scientists had maintained that the thing was an ape. Others had leaned more to the chimpanzee or baboon theory. Some said it was a mixture. Ham took out a pet license for him. He called him a what's-it. The animal's name was Chemistry, and he looked enough like Monk to have been his brother. Ham insisted that they did have common ancestors not too far back.

Chemistry reached out and grabbed Habeas with a long, hairy arm. The pig's snout butted him again. Chemistry got the shock. But his hand transferred it back to the pig. Both animals squealed. Then they turned toward the lawyer.

Animals somehow communicate thoughts to each other. Chemistry apparently doubted that Ham would have done such a thing to him. Ham was devoted to his pet. The animal rushed up to Ham, held him by one arm. He peered questioningly into Ham's eyes.

While he did that, Habeas began butting Ham in the ankle with the shocker. Ham howled in pain.

Monk lounged around the corner, a grin nearly splitting his face laterally.

"Bite him, Habeas," he advised.

"All right," the pig seemed to reply. He took a nip out of Ham's pants leg. Ham twisted free from

Chemistry's grasp.

"Cut out your ventriloquism, you missing link. We've got serious business to do."

Monk sobered. But he still seemed pleased.

"We might find the girl here," he suggested.

"If we don't, I'm going to ask Romley Rutledge a lot of questions," Ham promised.

## **Chapter V. RUTLEDGE DISAPPEARS**

ROMLEY RUTLEDGE was quite the fair-haired boy of the power industries. Literally and figuratively. Rutledge was a youngish man. His success had been of the skyrocket variety. He'd had white hair since he was a baby; a kind of platinum-white.

Romley boasted that he never crossed his bridges until he came to them. Then he crossed them all. The competitors usually found themselves swimming in the water under the bridge.

Efficiency was the keynote around the big administration building. A porter with a broom and dustpan followed right behind them as they strode over the shiny corridor. It made Monk nervous.

"That guy must think he's working in a zoo," he muttered.

Ham looked sidewise at his hairy companion.

"After all," he offered. "You can hardly blame him. Now, you take those—"

Monk got red.

"Shut up. Here we are."

And indeed they were. Double doors led into a huge room occupied by half a hundred desks. The receptionist who asked them to state their mission was an eye-stopper. She was a brunette.

"This guy ought to be a musical comedy producer," Monk complained.

"We would like to speak to Miss Ingrid Nordstrom," Ham told the brunette.

The receptionist frowned slightly.

"I am sorry," she told them. "But Miss Nordstrom is no longer employed here. She left here about ten days ago."

Monk goggled.

"Ten days ago," he exploded. "It was ten days ago that Rocky Em—"

Ham cut him off.

"Lots of things seem to have been happening since ten days ago."

Ham took a professional card from his pocket. There were few industrialists who would be unwilling to have the lawyer visit them. Most of them would have been quite glad to pay a high price to merely retain

him. The girl's eyebrows raised slightly. She disappeared through a tiny door. In a moment she was back.

"Mr. Rutledge will see you," she said.

There was some objection raised about Chemistry and Habeas. Monk refused to go along unless the pets came. Ham wouldn't go without Monk and Rutledge had already told the girl that Ham should come in. It was something of a dilemma for the girl. The upshot was that the pets went.

"It is the last door on the right," she told Ham.

Ham thanked her and the girl returned to her post. As the three men neared the last door on the right, Long Tom took an object out of his pocket that looked like a stethoscope. There were wires attached to it. The electrical genius applied the listening end of the gadget to the wall.

"Just a hunch," he said. "But I wanted to test this thing anyhow."

All three of them could hear the telephone conversation that the listener picked up. It was an induction-coil eavesdropper that could pick up messages from phone wires that were several feet away.

"Keep right on the job, Ingrid. We'll get what we're after," a man's voice said. "Savage's men are on their way here now. I'll stall them."

There was a click as the phone was hung up.

"Stall us, will he?" Monk growled. "I'll spread him—"

Ham checked him. "Let him talk," he advised. "If there's going to be any violence, wait until someone else starts it."

A deep roar of a voice answered Ham's knock on the last door on the right. The voice told him to come in.

Ham opened the door and went in, followed by Monk, Long Tom and the two pets. The man who greeted them was a heavy, red-faced young man. His platinumlike hair gave him a look of maturity. He rose from his desk, strode toward Ham, his hand extended. Ham shook hands with the utilities executive.

"I'm glad to be of service to you if I can," Rutledge said in a high falsetto. His voice made Monk look around for the bass-voiced individual who had told them to come in.

"I presume you are Colonel Mayfair, the eminent chemist," Rutledge said. Monk blinked. The voice was bass again. Nodding toward Long Tom, Rutledge went again from bass to falsetto. It was a habit of speech that he could not avoid, due to some affliction of the vocal cords.

"Major Roberts, I have, naturally, met in the course of my business. Sit down, gentlemen, and tell me what I can do for you."

Ham's eyes were cold. Romley Rutledge was a smooth article, he knew. He decided upon a frontal attack.

"What job is Ingrid Nordstrom doing for you?" he shot at Rutledge. The utilities head dabbed at his brow with a handkerchief. The voice this time was falsetto.

"I don't know what you mean—"

"Tsk," Ham chided him. "I'll refresh your memory. The one you were talking to her about on the phone two minutes ago."

Romley Rutledge roared in bass then.

"You've got no business eavesdropping on me. If there's a leak in my office, I'll fire someone. Get out of here, you . . . you—"

Then he sat down wearily in a chair, ran one finger around inside of his collar.

"It really isn't any of your business," he said in a plaintive falsetto. He perked up and looked belligerently at Ham. At that moment a tumult sounded from the main office where the receptionist had taken Ham's card into Rutledge.

The sound of a general uproar was punctuated by the more staccato noise of shooting. Monk, Ham and Long Tom darted toward the door into the corridor.

The three men who emerged from the reception room were clad in laborer's clothes. None of Doc's three aids had any way of knowing that they were the same three men who had seized Ding Ding Corvestan on the Queens street a short time before.

The three were still glassy-eyed. One of them carried the pretty brunette receptionist. He carried her with one hand by the material of a fall suit that she wore. A second of the mindless monsters dripped blood from wounds in his side and shoulder. Back against the wall slumped an armed guard, of which Rutledge had several in the building.

The third one of them headed for Romley Rutledge. The utilities executive began to scream. His voice made several round trips from falsetto to bass and back again. Monk let out a roar and plunged toward the nearest of the blank-eyed men.

There was nothing that Monk liked to do better than fight. And the noisier the battle could be, the happier the hairy chemist was. He slammed out with his fists, grappled with the first of the monsters. Monk landed against the wall twenty feet away.

"Jehoshaphat!" Monk grunted when he got his breath. "It ain't possible."

He breathed gustily and waded back in. Ham was dancing in and out, jabbing with his anaesthetic-tipped sword-cane. The drug seemed to have no effect on the men at all. Long Tom was proving that his appearance was deceptive. He rocked one of the men with a powerful one-two to the solar plexus and jaw. But the man tossed him aside as if he had been a mere chip in the wind.

More armed guards showed up then. Tommy-guns racketed. Acrid tear-gas fumes whooshed through the corridor. Window glass crashed somewhere behind. Doc's three aids flattened themselves on the floor. There was no point in interrupting machine-gun slugs intended for somebody else. Monk barked orders for the two pets to scramble back into Romley Rutledge's office.

There was silence for a few moments. An electric blower was turned on somewhere. Gradually, the tear gas left the corridor. Monk, Ham and Long Tom sat erect.

Only one of the automaton giants of strength was still there. That one was dead. An inspection of the corpse brought gasps of amazement from the three men. The man had been shot. But none of the wounds had been fatal. Death had been caused by something else; something that had made the body wrinkled, dried up like a lemon shriveled in the hot sun.

Monk straightened, looked around. "Where's Rutledge?" he demanded.

One of the armed guards came prowling from the utility king's office. An expression of perplexity was on his face.

"He ain't in there," the guard said.

Monk exploded. "This is a put-up job," he shrilled. "These guys weren't after Rutledge. They were after us."

Ham and Long Tom were inclined to agree with him. There was only one thing to be done right then. Doc must be contacted. So they went back to the parked sedan. The pets trailed along behind.

Wherever Doc was, he would have a short-wave set tuned to the private wave length they used for communication.

## **Chapter VI. DOC IS ATTACKED**

DOC SAVAGE was in the laboratory behind the reception room of the skyscraper offices. The bronze man heard Monk's report over the short-wave set on a shelf. Doc did not reply. He merely snapped a button which closed an automatic signal directing his aids to come back to headquarters.

The laboratory in which Doc worked boasted equipment that many a wealthy hospital would have been glad to possess. Doc was not alone in the laboratory. Beside him was a spade-bearded man with snapping black eyes. This was the chief medical examiner of the city of New York. Both men were covered with surgical gowns. Gauze covered their nostrils.

The medical examiner shook his head in bafflement. He pulled a sheet over the corpse on which he had been helping Doc conduct a post-mortem. The medico's voice was muffled.

"I'll have to make my official report on what my eyes and experience tell me," he informed Doc.

Doc Savage did not answer. Chill wind seemed to stir his gold-flaked eyes. He watched the steady hand of the medical examiner set down vital statistics that would become part of the records of the city:

Cause of death: Arteriosclerosis with a similar cardiac condition.

Condition of body: Run-down deterioration caused by improper feeding and years of dissipation of bodily energies.

Age of victim: About seventy.

Doc's unconscious trilling sound welled up into the room, a vibrant challenge to facts that seemed indisputable. This man, aged and infirm, had died of a fibrous overgrowth on the inner coat of the arteries and inside the heart itself. It was a condition indicating senility and old age.

But less than two hours before, this man had been young, vibrant, apparently healthy, and possessed of strength beside which even Doc Savage was puny!

Doc thanked the medical examiner for his co-operation. He signed a paper stating the conditions under which he had found the body. The medical examiner would make arrangement for it to go to the city morgue to await claim by friends or relatives. All that was in accordance with legal requirements. The medical examiner picked up his bag then. He shook hands in perfunctory farewell, turned to go out of the

laboratory and offices.

He did not for a moment believe the truth of the report he had made out. He asked no questions. But he knew privately that Doc Savage alone must grapple with a problem that organized medicine could not officially admit existed.

That was the reason that Doc did not show the honest medico the typewritten, unsigned letter he had found when he had come back to headquarters. As the doctor went out, Doc once more looked at it.

It was simply addressed "Doc Savage," and read:

You have seen that your strength is nothing compared to that of the mindless monsters. Forget them, or you and your aids will be crushed. We do not fear you, nor do we intend to permit you to become a nuisance.

Doc was considering that challenge when the muted phone bell throbbed. The bronze man picked up the phone. The voice that came over the wire sounded somewhat like a lion bellowing in a deep cavern. It was a hollow, reverberating roar.

"Holy cow, Doc! Something screwy has happened that I thought you ought to know about."

"Go ahead, Renny," Doc Savage said quietly. The speaker was Colonel John Renwick, one of the country's foremost civil engineers. Renny was a puritanical-looking giant of a man with two-quart fists and a voice that was always a hollow roar. He had recently been inspecting some intricate highway engineering jobs that were eliminating grade crossings on Long Island.

"There were six guys on a washout job that was my last stop for the day," Renny told him. "I was just going to tell them they could go home when they all went blank, sort of. The foreman tried to give them some orders and one of the guys busted him in two as if he'd been a toothpick."

Doc thought for a moment. "What happened to them?" he asked Renny.

"They raced toward the south at an unbelievable speed, Doc," Renny said. "By the time I got back to where I'd parked my car, they'd disappeared."

Doc Savage asked only one more question.

"Is there anything of importance that you know of in the direction they took?"

Renny seemed to be concentrating heavily.

"Not a danged thing that I know of, Doc. The only building within five miles that I've seen is a power relay station of Romley Rutledge & Associates, the utilities combine."

"Stay in the neighborhood," Doc instructed. "I will contact you."

Doc Savage was silent for a moment. The name of Romley Rutledge, the dynamic young utilities executive, had again popped into the mystery of the mindless monsters. That seemed to deserve plenty of consideration. But another angle also seemed to concern the bronze man.

Doc had told Monk and Ham that the murder by bullet of Rocky Emben had been an indication that the controller of the mindless monsters was unsure of the final reaction of the mysterious force upon its victims. But since then, none had died by a bullet. Two of them had withered and died weirdly.

Doc dictated rapidly into a dictograph that would leave a message for Monk, Ham and Long Tom, who



were on their way into headquarters. He gave the exact location of Renny out on Long Island and instructed that Monk, Ham and Long Tom should take the autogyro and go immediately to that spot. They were to remain there until Doc contacted them.

Doc Savage pulled a printed announcement from his pocket then. It was an invitation to an annual dinner that night of an association of bankers in Queens County. It indicated that a speaker well known to the members would be announced at the last moment.

Doc may have been acting on what is known to many persons as a hunch. If the culmination of an acute reasoning power plus a minute memory of events can be called a hunch, such a conclusion might conceivably be correct. Doc Savage knew that a bank president had vanished that day after a robbery, that no kidnap demands had been made and that the banker's body had not been found.

Doc phoned the secretary of the banker's association, which was a listed organization.

"We have just learned," the secretary told Doc, "that our guest speaker tonight will be Jacob Ringle. He was originally scheduled to talk. But we were afraid for a while today. He has just phoned."

The secretary of the association undoubtedly thought there was something wrong with his phone. A weird, enveloping trilling sound welled up from the receiver.

Jacob Ringle, the bank president who had mysteriously walked out of the rear door of Merwin Malo's drugstore, had turned up again. He was scheduled to make a public address within twenty minutes! Doc Savage consulted his watch. A slight frown was discernible on his features. Any one of Doc's five aids who had seen that slight frown would have realized that the bronze man was expecting the terror of the mindless monsters to strike a new blow.

Doc moved rapidly from the inner laboratory. He thrust out into a corridor which was apparently of new construction. The paint gleamed brightly and the metal door frames were of the most modern construction.

As the bronze man strode forward, two things happened almost simultaneously. The X-ray television alarm began flashing and a door at the end of the room burst open. The figure who walked mechanically into the room was one of the three street workers Doc had seen in Queens, and, though he had no way of knowing it, one of the two who escaped from the offices of Romley Rutledge.

Dead-eyed, as emotionless as a machine, the human robot drew a small automatic from one pocket as he marched toward Doc Savage. Doc moved imperceptibly. One hand flicked a hidden switch in the wall. The switch set up a polarized electric field similar to the one that Ham had used to stop Monk in the outer office.

Doc backed slowly, then stopped. His gold-flaked eyes whirled as he watched the mindless monster encounter the high-frequency field. The man displayed no emotional reaction. Muscles bulged. Tremendous concentration forced wrinkles into his face. Somewhat like a powerful swimmer battling his way against a swift-moving stream, the automaton pressed through the electrical field!

Doc Savage did not move. He watched the man move forward. Slowly, the robot raised the gun. His instructions had apparently been given by someone who knew the bronze man's habits. He did not aim for the body. Doc Savage and his aids wore bulletproof garments that resembled long union suits. The human robot aimed for Doc's head.

It seemed that the muzzle of the gun almost touched the bronze man. Flame and lead belched from the weapon. Doc Savage slumped wearily to the floor. The robot paused only a moment. He turned then,

padded toward the door. The portal burst open in that instant.

"Gosh!" Monk bellowed. "The guy's killed Doc!"

MEANWHILE, the secretary of the bankers' association in Queens was feeling quite important. He had understood from Doc's conversation over the phone that the bronze man would attend the annual dinner.

The dinner was an early affair. The eating started around five o'clock in the afternoon. That was arranged so that the speaking could be gotten quickly out of the way. The group had made arrangements to attend a new Broadway hit play in the early evening. They did not want to be late.

The secretary of the association buzzed about amid the clatter of dishes and silverware. He was full of importance, but seemed a bit worried. Two persons whom he now expected had not yet arrived. One of them was Jacob Ringle, the speaker. The other was Doc Savage.

Coffee was being passed and cigar smoke began to drift above the table when Jacob Ringle came in. The smoke made the room a bit dim. That and Ringle's pince-nez sort of hid the blank expression about his eyes. The bank president, who had not been seen since he walked out of the back door of Merwin Malo's drugstore, walked to the vacant seat of the guest of honor.

He cleared his throat loudly as he reached it.

"Gentlemen," he began. "There is little time."

There was an ominous note to his voice. It gained for him instant attention. The buzz of small conversations ceased. The bankers all looked at their speaker. Ringle's gaze swept over the room mechanically.

"There has come to us a terror known as the mindless monsters," Ringle intoned in a hollow voice. "I am here to serve upon you a warning. Many of you will encounter the mindless monsters. Those of you who are so chosen must do exactly as you are told. If you do not, you will meet the same fate as—"

Ringle jerked spasmodically. His words came faster, as if he feared he would not have time to complete what he had to say. Men were on their feet throughout the hall now. Muttered words of protest came from the lips of association members. These were stilled suddenly.

"There is little time," Ringle repeated jerkily. He gasped for breath, rolled his eyes strangely. Absently, as if to steady himself, he clutched the back of the chair behind which he stood. The chair was of heavy mahogany. Ringle's absentminded grip shattered it as if it had been of papier-mâché.

A groan ran down the table. Faces went pale. Ringle's voice raced into an unintelligible gibberish of words run one into the other. He became an aged mummy of a man as these friends of his watched him. His features turned gray. Weight seemed to drop from his portly frame. Then he stumbled, fell flat across the table. One hand touched a heavy water carafe, clutched it. The heavy carafe burst as if it had been a paper-thin light bulb.

Then Jacob Ringle was still. No breath came from his body. The hand that had crushed the heavy water carafe was limp. One of Ringle's friends in the group mustered enough courage to approach the withered, now-scrawny form. He felt for Jacob Ringle's pulse. Then he shook his head as if he refused to believe what he had seen.

"He is dead," the man told the other members. "And his death is supposed to be a warning to the rest of

us."

One banker struggled to his feet, headed toward the door. "Supposed to be—hell!" he muttered. "As far as I'm concerned, it is one."

The secretary of the group leaned weakly against the table. He groaned.

"If Doc Savage had gotten here, perhaps it could have been avoided," he whispered.

BUT in that he was quite wrong. There was nothing that Doc had learned that would have aided him in preventing the weird death that came over the mindless monsters. At the moment, Doc lay prone in the room with the automaton killer who wore workman's clothing.

Monk howled with rage. He had just come in with Ham, Long Tom and the two pets. The hairy chemist plunged toward the automaton with the now empty gun. Monk again fetched up against the high-frequency field.

Ham and Long Tom started to rush forward. Then they halted. The room seemed to undergo a transformation. They had seen Doc Savage, apparently not four feet from the automaton when the shots were fired at his head. Suddenly, Doc seemed to fade into the background. At the same time, the bronze man came quickly to his feet. The room, which had seemed approximately square at first, became a long, narrow corridor.

"Doc said he was experimenting with a new haze gas," Long Tom told Ham. "It distorts distance tremendously. The automaton thought he was right on top of Doc when he shot. But he wasn't."

Long Tom's analysis was quite correct. The mindless monster had used a short-barrelled, light-caliber gun. Though Doc appeared to have been right under its muzzle, he had actually been many yards down the long corridorlike room. The leaden slugs had fallen harmlessly on the floor.

Doc spoke a few short words in Mayan. They instructed his aids to say nothing. Doc was going to attempt to rescue this mindless monster from the weird force that gave strength but stole reason. The dead-eyed workman again started to force his way through the electrical field. Doc Savage pushed a lever on one wall. A section of pliant, composition floor began to move like a treadmill. The automaton kept moving. But he did not make any progress.

Doc Savage looked quickly at his watch. He asked questions of the automaton, tried to wrench his mind from the set path that held it, somewhat like post-hypnotic suggestion, to a given course. The mindless one paid no attention. Doc whipped to one wall, flicked three different switches.

Instantly, a moving panorama loomed on the farther wall of the room. The occupants of the room were seeing a three-dimensional movie formed by spaced, synchronized cameras. They underwent all the sensations of leaving the bronze man's office, taking an elevator down to the main floor of the skyscraper.

Doc had developed this machine to ascertain what reactions certain visitors would have when they believed themselves out of the building. Usually a drug was administered that dulled certain brain centers in performing the experiment.

This time, Doc used a slightly different procedure with the high-frequency field and the treadmill. He spoke a couple of words in Mayan as the synchronized cameras projected the moving image of the building's lower lobby. Their eyes told them that they were now out in the street. Cars were parked at

the curbs.

Doc pulled two switches. One cut the high-frequency ray. The other stopped the treadmill. Without hesitation, the automaton of a man turned left, headed for a car-picture that seemed to be parked two hundred feet up the street!

"Monk! Ham! Get down in a hurry to see if there is a car parked in that spot."

Doc gave those instructions in Mayan. Then, just as the mindless monster apparently tried to step into the car that was not really there, Doc spoke in a soft, though penetrating voice.

"Well done," he said. "You may relax, now."

The mindless one relaxed. Every muscle in his body seemed to go limp. Doc had deduced that the mindless monsters acted on specific instructions from the mind that controlled them. It seemed to Doc that they either returned to the controlling force by instruction, or were killed by some weird, unbelievable force.

The spell seemed to be broken now. The vacant-eyed man permitted himself to be pushed into a chair. The reactions were somewhat the same as those of a brain under the influence of scopolamine, the truth-serum drug. There was no volition, merely an inability to resist suggestion.

"What were your orders?" Doc asked the robot of a man.

Eyes looked at Doc, did not seem to see him.

"I was to kill Doc Savage."

"Did you succeed?"

"Yes. Doc Savage fell when I fired."

"Whom do you obey?" Doc shot at him.

The human automaton seemed to grow confused. A troubled look clouded his eyes. He stammered, "Y-y-you, master."

The man convulsed then. His head wobbled. An expression of confusion and fright came into his eyes. Then the eyes closed. A great drowsiness gripped him. He slept. Doc carried the unconscious form into his laboratory. He stretched the man out on a cot, took a hypodermic needle from a glass cabinet.

Long Tom moved swiftly and silently beside the bronze man. He gathered together various pieces of equipment he thought Doc might want to use. He stood across from Doc, unstated questions showing in his eyes. Doc injected restorative drugs into the sleeping man's veins.

"It appears that not all of the mindless men die from the effects of their treatment," Doc observed. "This one apparently was destined to return to his master. Perhaps, if we can revive him, we can learn something of what is behind this."

While he waited for the restorative drugs to take some effect, Doc walked to a laboratory bench that was littered with test tubes, beakers and other apparatus. He picked up two test tubes. One was labeled *Water. Malo*, the other *Rex Superol*. They were the two samples Doc had taken from the Queens drugstore. Both were marked *negative test*.

A groan from the man on the cot caused Doc to turn around. The eyelids of the man flickered. He

groaned again, passed a hand across his forehead. Then he sat erect, looked about him.

The eyes were tired-looking. But they had lost the blank, lack-luster staring of the mindless monsters. A look of bafflement came into them.

"W-w-where am I?" he stuttered. Then he saw Doc. He gulped, patently astonished.

"Y-you're Doc Savage." It was half question, half statement. "W-what happened to me? How did I get here?"

Doc questioned the man patiently, gave him answers to his own questions. One thing became immediately apparent. This man had no memory of anything that had happened to him after he left the pavement-patching job on the Queens street!

Two things forestalled further questions right then. Monk and Ham plunged into the room, both talking at once. There had been a car parked at the spot indicated on the three-dimensional movie screen. There had been no one in the machine. Apparently, the driver who was waiting for the return of the human robot sent on a murder mission, had watched from a safe distance. A quick call to police headquarters revealed that the machine had been stolen some hours before.

The other item that interrupted Doc was the purring of the muted phone bell. Doc answered. It was the terrified secretary of the association of bankers in Queens. He blurted out to Doc everything that had happened. Doc cradled the phone and faced his aids.

"The master mind behind this is learning rapidly," he said. "He has now learned how to control the aftereffects of his treatment. And he is apparently preparing to launch a reign of terror."

Doc paused. One phrase used by the dying Jacob Ringle had impressed the secretary. He had repeated it to the bronze man. Doc told his aids about it now.

Twice, Ringle had said, "There is little time."

"And that, I think, holds good for us as well," Doc said softly. He told them about Renny's call from Long Island.

"I had intended for you three to go out there in the gyro," Doc said. "But now it seems that we all may be needed out there. I believe the mindless monsters will next be heard from in that vicinity."

"Yeah," Monk grunted. "And we'll find that guy Romley Rutledge up to his ears in it, too."

Long Tom had told Doc about the fragment of telephone conversation his induction eavesdropper had picked up. Rutledge had told Ingrid Nordstrom that he would stall Doc's men. And now, the mindless monsters Renny had contacted on Long Island were headed in the direction of a power-relay station owned by Rutledge's firm.

Ham unsheathed his sword-cane, inspected the chemical on the tip.

"Let's get going," he suggested.

A visitor pressed a bell button in the hallway outside. Long Tom opened the door. The man who came in was tall, blond Merwin Malo.

"Gosh!" he exclaimed. "I could hardly believe what I saw! B-but I've just got to tell you."

Then he saw the street workman Doc had just revived. Malo began to scream. He sounded as if he

thought the devil himself was right on his tail. He started to race out of the room, but Doc Savage held him by one arm.

## Chapter VII. RUTLEDGE REAPPEARS

THERE was still an hour and a half of daylight left when Renny phoned Doc Savage. The big engineer opened the phone-booth door in the rural candy store with one hand. It was an enormous hand—fully a quart of bone and gristle incased in a skin which resembled rhinoceros hide.

"Holy cow! I really ought to follow those guys!" he said. "I'll keep in touch with Doc by short wave."

Renny climbed into his car and returned to the spot from which the six workmen had escaped after killing the foreman. Renny covered the broken body of the straw boss with a spare raincoat he had. He had phoned the legal authorities that the body was there. He hadn't told them any more than that. The big engineer had been quite certain Doc would be interested in this thing, and he knew that the bronze man did not like to have other investigating agencies clouding the trail.

Renny followed the footsteps of the workmen for several hundred yards. A light drizzle had been falling for the past half-hour. The footsteps were not difficult to trace. But they ended on the concrete highway, a quarter of a mile away.

Fortunately, the drizzle had been just heavy enough to make the concrete sticky-wet. It had not been enough to wash away any tracks. Renny noted that a truck with a peculiar tire-tread had stopped at this point. There were smudged marks where the wheels had braked. Then it had gone on. Apparently, the six men who had gone so strangely berserk had climbed onto the truck.

Renny got back to his car and followed the truck tracks. They led him directly to the small square brick building that was a power relay station for Romley Rutledge & Associates. He stopped the car two hundred yards from the power station. Before he left the car, the big engineer took one of the queer-looking superfiring machine pistols from a side pocket. He changed the ammunition drum. Every fifth bullet of the new drum was slightly different in appearance from the others. All were mercy bullets that would bring only unconsciousness. But every fifth one had an added chemical ingredient.

Renny moved slowly toward the power relay station. Darkness was beginning to descend now. The place was utterly quiet. Renny could hear only the soft sighing of the early fall wind. He could see the blunt nose of a truck protruding from the other side of the building. He circled warily.

Suddenly there was a crashing sound from the rear of the truck. Workmen piled out of the covered body, rumbled toward the engineer. They were apparently led by a more fashionably-dressed individual whose face was as blank and expressionless as were those of the workmen.

Renny recognized the workers as those who had broken the foreman in two as if he had been a toy. The automaton who seemed to be leading the others, Renny had never seen before. He noticed only one peculiar thing about him—on one finger of his left hand he wore an odd snake ring with two tiny red eyes.

The workmen clenched and unclenched their fists as they came toward Renny. A small tree with a trunk four inches or so in diameter impeded the progress of one of them. He plucked it from the ground as if it had been a small weed.

"Holy cow!" Renny rumbled in his foghorn of a voice. He adjusted his superfirer. To tackle these monsters with his bare hands would be a quick form of suicide. The leader with the red-eyed snake ring

was in the lead. Renny brought down the muzzle of the machine pistol. It moaned like a giant bull fiddle.

It was usual for men to lie down and start sleeping when mercy bullets struck them. But the strength and resistance of the mindless monsters again proved to be amazing. The blank-faced giant of strength kept right on coming toward Renny. The drugs of the mercy bullets slowed him down somewhat. They seemed to sap a little of his terrible strength. But the man kept on coming.

This one seemed somewhat different from the others. He gave orders to the other mindless men. He was either not so greatly under the influence of the terrible force; or perhaps he was merely a necessary part of it. At any rate, his strength decreased materially under the influence of the mercy drug.

Renny grappled with him. He was still no match for the man. But at least he was able to defend his own life. The two men rocked back and forth on the uneven ground. Suddenly, the leader twisted away. Renny was gripping his coat. One whole side of it ripped away.

Renny whipped up the gun then. He sprayed both the leader and the six automatons. For some unexplained reason, all of them had abandoned their apparent plan to destroy Renny. They filed mechanically into the truck. Renny did a strange thing then.

He stopped trying to mow down the automatons with the mercy bullets. He concentrated on the steel sides and top of the truck. He sprayed them methodically. Renny was intent upon what he was doing. He did not hear footsteps behind him. A heavy bludgeon whizzed through the air, struck his skull with a vicious *thwack*.

Renny fell to his knees. He fought vainly to keep his whirling brain going. He couldn't quite do it.

CONSCIOUSNESS came back to Renny painfully. He struggled to his feet, looked around him. A pounding noise came from inside the small relay power station. A muffled voice yelled for help. Renny instinctively drove toward the building. To give aid to persons in trouble was a basic principle of Doc Savage and his aids.

But another basic principle was to watch out for traps. Often an innocent-sounding cry for help had been a baited trap of death for Doc and his assistants. They had many times barely escaped.

Renny went back to his car, took out a powerful flashlight. With this, he approached the little brick building warily. The pounding seemed to be coming from a door in the other side. It sounded as though someone were tied up and kicking the door with his shoes.

The big engineer thrust the flashlight through the glass of a window. The glass shattered, and Renny looked inside. What he saw was just what it had sounded like. The pointed nose and black eyes of Ding Ding Corvestan were pointed up at Renny. The little mouth and inconsequential chin were hidden by a big gag.

Renny grunted and went around to the main door of the building. It was locked. One huge fist smashed into the panel, and the door splintered. Renny reached through, unlocked it. Then he came in and untied Ding Ding Corvestan.

Renny had never seen the tramp-like little man before. Doc had not had time to tell him about Ding Ding. The little wisp of a fellow supplied Renny with the information. He told him how he had seen the murder of the first mindless monster. He did not know that the man had been Rocky Emben. No one but Doc and his aids knew of that. Even Renny had not yet been told.

"I was just going past three guys working in the street," Ding Ding said in his shrill voice. "Th-th-they started to go batty. I g-g-guess they grabbed me because I'd seen too much."

"Just what did you see?" Renny wanted to know.

"Th-there was a guy driving a truck that these birds got into," Ding Ding said. "H-he had on the same red-eyed snake ring as the guy who'd shot the first one of them things."

Renny gulped. "That must have been the guy I was scrapping with out there."

Ding Ding nodded. "He let the three street laborers out of the truck somewhere in the city. Then he took me out here. I guess they forgot me this time, in the scramble of getting away."

Renny turned on his heel, motioned Ding Ding Corvestan to follow. The big-fisted engineer recalled the side of the coat he had torn from the man with the red-eyed snake ring. He found the piece of coat. And it contained the inside breast pocket of the garment. In the pocket was a wallet.

The wallet contained sixty dollars in bills, a few newspaper clippings of no apparent importance and a holder of business cards. The name on all of the cards was "Rolf Nordstrom, Electric Power Consultant."

Renny repeated the name aloud, wondered who Rolf Nordstrom might be. Ding Ding Corvestan let out a yowl that sounded like amazement.

"Rolf Nordstrom—hell! He must have done something to his face. I didn't recognize him." He paused. "Of course," he said lamely, "I didn't get a good look at his face either time that I saw him."

Renny's eyes narrowed. "Never mind the details," he said. "Who is Rolf Nordstrom?"

Ding Ding's little black eyes snapped.

"No wonder they grabbed me!" he blurted. "They must have figured that I'd recognized him. Rolf Nordstrom is the business partner of Romley Rutledge."

"Go on," Renny urged. There was something in Ding Ding's voice that told him there was more to the story.

"Rutledge stole a business from me," Ding Ding explained. "And after he did, he practically haunted me. I tried twice to make a comeback. Each time he stopped me. I've been nothing but a bum now for two years. Now it seems he won't even let me alone that way."

Ding Ding explained that he had started out life as a trolley motorman on a small suburban line. He had become an officer in the firm then, finally controlled it. Then Rutledge & Associates began merging small, unimportant lines into one big one. Corvestan said he found himself on the outside of that deal with scarcely a shirt left to his name.

Renny made no comment for a moment. He knew nothing of the strange conversation between Romley Rutledge and Ingrid Nordstrom over the phone. He didn't even know Ingrid Nordstrom existed.

But that last regrettable bit of ignorance was quickly adjusted. A high-powered car roared down the concrete roadway and into the power-station clearing. Tires screamed on the wet pavement as the car twisted to a stop. Renny recognized the red-faced, platinum-haired features of Romley Rutledge. He only knew that the girl beside the youngish utilities king was blond and beautiful.

Romley Rutledge took one hand from the wheel of his fast sedan. The snub nose of an automatic pistol



poked over the car window and began to belch redly. Lead whistled through the air, ripped through the sleeve of Ding Ding Corvestan's coat!

DING DING scampered off through the scrub pine that is prevalent in that part of Long Island. Romley Rutledge swung the snub-nosed automatic toward Renny. The big engineer was too far from the utilities executive to reach him with his hands. Renny cut loose with his superfirer. Rutledge sank to his knees. He toppled, began to snore.

Ingrid Nordstrom got out of the sedan. She held her hands palm outward, to show Renny that they concealed no weapon. Renny ordered her to turn around. He took a stout silken cord from one pocket and tied her wrists. Then he bent over Romley Rutledge, administered a hypodermic antidote for the mercy-bullet drug.

Rutledge regained consciousness belligerently. He glared at big Renny.

"I recognize you now!" he yelled in an excited falsetto. "You're one of Doc Savage's men."

Renny nodded. "Why did you start shooting?" he demanded.

Rutledge's voice dropped to a deep bass. "None of your damned business!"

Renny shrugged. He turned to his automobile, switched on his short-wave transmitter. Presently, Doc Savage's voice sounded pleasantly in his receiver. Renny told him what had happened.

"I used fluorescent bullets on the truck, Doc," Renny said.

"Good," the bronze man answered. "Stay where you are and we will pick you up. We are leaving now."

Renny switched off the two-way radio. He turned to survey his captives. He groaned. Apparently, the girl had been able to get at a blade of some sort to cut the silk cords that held her wrists. Renny had not tied them particularly tight. Ingrid Nordstrom had untied Romley Rutledge. The two were racing toward their own automobile as Renny turned.

The big engineer leaped back to his own car. Rutledge took time to drop to one knee, take careful aim with his automatic. Red flame belched and the right front tire of Renny's machine blew out with a report like a cannon.

Romley Rutledge and the girl leaped into their machine and raced off into the night.

## **Chapter VIII. UNDER THE BAY**

DOC SAVAGE turned from the short-wave set to Merwin Malo. The tall blond druggist stared with eyes popping at the street worker whom Doc had revived. Malo's tongue seemed to get all twisted up in his mouth. He pointed at the man.

"It . . . it's about him that I came here," he stammered. "This one and two others picked up Ding Ding Corvestan and kidnaped him."

Doc nodded. "So I have heard," he said easily. "We will investigate that matter thoroughly."

Doc instructed Monk and Ham to get the autogyro ready for flight. Then he turned to the laborer. Sleep

again appeared to press relentlessly down on the man. Great mental and physical strain seemed to be taking a toll. Doc Savage administered a sleep-inducing drug by hypodermic. He wished the man to sleep for several hours.

Monk and Ham headed out.

They entered what Monk called the "flea run," a pneumatic-tube cage large enough to hold four men. It whizzed underground at a tremendous rate of speed, checking suddenly at the other end with a series of spring drags.

The building in which they emerged was a fantastic place. Outside, it presented the appearance of a drab brick-and-concrete warehouse pier. The name on it was Hidalgo Trading Co. The place was actually a private fortress that would have withstood anything but a heavy-artillery siege.

The "flea-run" terminal was inside the main building. Fluorescent lighting that came from flat sheets instead of tubes, created a shadowless illumination in the building. Half a dozen planes ranging from a single-seat speed plane that was mostly all motor to a huge four-motor transport were housed on one side of the great floor. Near them was the autogyro, one of the few true gyros in existence.

Across from the planes there was a small yacht basin. In it were speedboats, a sleek yacht and a small submarine. In a great bay at one end, a dirigible was moored. These craft all belonged to Doc Savage. He had used them in solving mysteries and punishing evil in the four corners of the earth.

Monk ambled to a lever on the wall, jerked it down. A huge section of the roof, constructed like two cantilever wings, rolled back on noiseless rollers. The murk of late afternoon sifted in through the great hole. Monk then climbed to the gyro, started up her motors. He let them run idle, warming up for the vertical take-off of which the gyro was capable.

At that moment, Doc Savage was preparing to enter the pneumatic transportation tube that Monk called the "flea run." The bronze man had not left the inner laboratory. He was busy packing various pieces of apparatus and equipment into a small, compact chest. The items he put into the chest were all pre-wrapped. One could not tell by looking what they might be.

Merwin Malo looked apprehensively at the sleeping form of the laborer who had just been a mindless monster. Malo had done that half a dozen times. Plainly, he feared that the mysterious power might come surging back into the veins of the man and make him again a weird and terrible engine of destruction.

"W-what do you think this is all about?" Malo asked Doc.

Doc Savage did not answer.

"I am convinced we can learn a good deal on Long Island," the bronze man said. He finished packing his equipment case, closed it and locked it. Merwin Malo thought to be helpful and carry it for Doc. He tugged at the handle. Amazement came into his eyes. He couldn't budge it.

Doc nodded to Long Tom, leaned over and picked up the case in one hand as if it were an ordinary suitcase. Merwin Malo gasped.

"Was the mindless monster really stronger than you, Mr. Savage?" he asked incredulously.

Doc nodded and led the way to the "flea run." Malo stepped in behind Doc. Then Long Tom. Doc closed the sliding door and the machine whooshed down at a dive-bombing speed. Merwin Malo's face

went white. He opened his mouth as if gasping for breath that wasn't there.

On the floor of the Hidalgo Trading Co. pier, Doc gave their visitor little time to gape. Doc apparently had a definite idea of their course of action. The gyro took off almost immediately. The great sliding roof panels closed again, actuated by invisible photo-electric cells. Doc set a robot course for a point somewhat east of Lake Ronkonkoma. It was in that area that the power relay station of Rutledge & Associates was located.

Then Doc switched on a radio that was kept on police waveband. Any call that came on his own lower private band would automatically flick on a light in the instrument panel. There was not much on the police band at first. Then a call of considerable importance flashed on:

*"Signal 21! All cars in Queens. Signal 21! All cars in Queens. Call your precincts for co-operation with Nassau police in an emergency!"*

That was all there was to it. Signal 21 was an identification of robbery, murder or riot. Doc immediately called the New York broadcaster for details. As an honorary deputy police commissioner, Doc was entitled to that courtesy. The police operator's report was brief and terse.

The mindless monsters had struck a Long Island bank that had been held open late for the month-end clearing of accounts. Four of the automaton figures had descended upon the bank, escaped with twenty thousand dollars, killed two men and carried off the president, whose name was Henry Cadwallader Smith.

That was all. Doc shifted to the news-broadcast band. The newscaster was nearly hysterical. He told of shot after shot that had been fired into the bodies of the monsters of strength, described the weird and terrible power, the indifference to pain. He reminded his listeners of the warning that Jacob Ringle had given to the association of bankers before he died. As a result, the broadcaster said, several banking heads in the city had started vacations in the South, far earlier than was usual.

"It has been reliably reported that one of these monsters has met Doc Savage in personal encounter," the newscaster said. "Our information is that one of them alone was more than a match for the bronze man in a contest of strength. If this is true, it is alarming to consider what effect a large number of these things could have if turned loose with criminal purpose."

Monk snorted in indignation. He did not know of Doc Savage's encounter with the monster who had died a withered and wrinkled mummy in Queens.

"That's a fine thing to tell the public!" he shrilled. "It—"

Doc interrupted him. "It is quite true," he said.

Monk blinked in disbelief. "Let's go to that bank and pick up the trail," he suggested.

"We will pick up Renny," Doc said. "It is probable that we can move faster from that vantage point."

WEST of Lake Ronkonkoma the autogyro swung low over the flat land. It made little noise as it came down from six thousand feet, hovered only a few hundred feet over the scrub pine that covered the sandy ground. Doc blinked signals with an infrared beam that could be seen only with blacklight glasses, which each of his aids habitually carried. Presently, using similar glasses himself, he picked up an answering signal. The gyro came down to a vertical landing.

Renny stepped out from behind his car and climbed into the gyro cabin. He gave a terse account of what had occurred. Doc furnished him with the girl's identity. Ham snickered slightly.

"Every time Monk falls for a girl she turns out like that," he said smugly. "He just doesn't have good judgment."

"Aw, that tailor's dummy is just jealous," Monk complained. Then he was serious. "I wonder just what her angle really is, anyway."

"She was Romley Rutledge's secretary," Doc reminded him. "Her brother, Rolf Nordstrom, was Rutledge's partner in some ventures. Rolf killed Rocky Emben."

While Monk tried to make something of that jumble, Doc busied himself with a peculiar-looking searchlight that seemed to cast no visible beam. Merwin Malo wanted to know what it was.

"Renny sprayed the truck with certain chemicals," Doc told him. "When exposed to ultraviolet light, such as is projected by this searchlight, they will fluoresce. If it were entirely dark now, that fluorescence would be discernible to the naked eye. But as it is not yet quite dark, these fluoroscopic eyeglasses will help."

Doc put on a pair of spectacles with lenses that looked somewhat like condensed-milk cans made of obsidian. At the same time, the bronze man set the gyro on an automatic control which swept it back and forth in the sky like a great broom looking for cobwebs among the stars. After several wide, sweeping trips, something like a sailboat tacking against the wind, Doc's fluoroscopic spectacles showed him what looked like a small, bright cluster of stars that were for some reason huddled together. Those were the splashes of the one-bullet-in-five of Renny's superfirer that were of fluorescent material.

Doc whipped the glasses from his eyes and looked below him. He saw the truck, a nondescript vehicle, parked beside an ancient and rotting dock on Great South Bay. Doc checked other landmarks known to him, deduced that the dock was somewhere between Patchogue and Bayport, in Suffolk County.

Gently, Doc let the gyro down until the landing gear touched the rotting planks of the dock. A powerful flashlight played over the truck. The double doors in the back were open. The truck was quite empty. There was no building of any size within several hundred yards. Doc opened the throttle of the gyro and swept again into the sky.

The bronze man swept Great South Bay with a powerful glass then. While not late in the fall, there was little bay traffic. The summer residents had long since put their boats up in winter storage. The now-darkening bay was a white-capped expanse of grayish water, almost unmarked by boats.

Two or three cabin cruisers hurried toward various Long Island ports. Only one craft seemed to be outbound. That was an ancient scow about forty feet long. Its deck was empty. Ahead of it, a small power tug, apparently a low-powered Diesel, chugged lazily along. Doc could see one figure in the pilot-house of the tug, a lounging deckhand aft by the towing post.

Doc delved into the heavy equipment case he had brought from the office. He unpacked a device that had a peculiar loud-speaker and a series of sensitive parabolic pickup microphones suspended by long supporting wires. He pushed the microphones through an aperture in the floor of the autogyro's cabin, let them dangle far enough below the ship so that the muted sound of the motors did not interfere with their function. Then he turned on the power.

A small boat whistled two miles back of them in Bayport. The whistle hooted through the loud-speaker in a great bawl. Then a queer jumble of faint sounds guttered through the device. Doc was maneuvering

small guide lines leading to the microphones that turned them, caused them to have directional sensitivity in their operation. They were now pointed toward the small Diesel tugboat and the scow.

The deckhand on the stern of the scow stretched and yawned.

"Ye-e-e-ough!" It came through the loud speaker. Habeas Corpus leaped up and bit Ham on the leg.

"Do it again, Doc," Monk implored. "It has a good effect."

Doc held up his hand for silence. A low jumble of sound came from the loud-speaker. It was like eavesdropping through a thick wall. Conversation was definitely present. But it was too muffled to be understood. Doc began hauling things out of the equipment chest.

"Long Tom will come with me," he said. "The rest of you will proceed to Ocean Beach. You will have plenty of time, so remain aloft for a while and keep your eyes open. It is important, however, to give the impression that we have lost interest in this tug and the scow it is towing."

As Doc spoke, he pulled a lever that looked like a secondary gas throttle on the gyro. The loud-speaker of the parabolic pickup microphone device he thrust out of one of the cabin windows. The sound of an air diaphone fog signal emitted from the loud-speaker. At the same time a heavy, whitish mist began to envelop the gyro. It lowered slowly and silently.

Doc took from the equipment case two objects that might have been oversized fish bowls. He handed one to Long Tom and put the other one over his own head. These were diving hoods of transparent composition infinitely stronger than glass, and had the advantage of permitting vision on all sides. They were a product of Doc's inventive genius, the composition being somewhat similar in texture to the new non-shatterable single-piece glass.

Doc and Long Tom went over the side then. Their descent was checked with transparent parachutes of a substance that would dissolve instantly upon contact with salt water. This prevented the no-longer-useful chutes from impeding their progress once they were in the bay. The manufactured fog hid their jump from the helmsman and deckhand aboard the Diesel tug.

Merwin Malo looked over the side until the two were lost in the whitish mist.

"Boy, they've got nerve!" he said in an awed tone of voice.

## **Chapter IX. DOC IS CAPTURED**

WHEN Doc Savage and Long Tom landed in the approximate center of Great South Bay, which separates Fire Island from Long Island proper, they found themselves in water that was just about waist-deep. Great South Bay is about twenty miles long and about six wide at its most-spread-out point. It is a great spot for fishing in the right seasons.

But much of it consists of bucket-deep water on top of sandbars. Doc Savage knew that, which was one reason he had put down his artificial fog. He wanted time to get into water deep enough to hide himself and Long Tom. Doc surged ahead in the direction of the small Diesel tug and the scow.

The tug and scow were making perhaps three miles an hour. They were going with the tide. But the tide moved more swiftly in the bottom of the narrow ship channel. Doc and Long Tom reached the channel a couple of yards behind the tug and scow. It was easy to follow them by the sound of the thumping Diesel of the tug.

Doc and his aid went from water that was waist-deep into twenty feet of channel water. When they were directly below the scow, Doc tapped lightly on Long Tom's helmet in international code. He instructed Long Tom to come up behind the barge and hang on until Doc joined him.

Then the bronze man swam swiftly upward to the stern of the Diesel tug. He wanted to learn as much as he could from what casual conversation he might overhear. As Doc's head broke the surface of the water, he removed the glassite helmet, hung it to a cleat that protruded from the tug's rail.

"Funny fog," he heard the man in the wheelhouse say. "Seems to me it was only 'bout half a mile around."

"Ummmmgh," the deckhand replied sleepily.

"Wake up, stupid!" the helmsman snapped. "We got to cut that thing loose, soon as the tide changes."

"O. K.," the deckhand grunted. "It can drift out through the inlet, for all of me."

The helmsman ignored him for a few moments. The deckhand was not exactly an affable conversationalist. He was a longish, narrow-faced lout. He stretched full length against a frayed coil of rope. He'd been trying to ignore the helmsman's conversational attempts sufficiently to get in some sleep. Suddenly he succeeded. Cabled fingers gripped his neck. The deckhand didn't cry out. He didn't even feel the pressure of those fingers. He simply went to sleep from the gentle grip Doc held on the flesh above certain nerve centers.

Doc picked up the conversation in the nasal voice of the deckhand.

"I'll be glad to cut this thing loose an' get back to shore," he commented.

The helmsman's voice was uneasy.

"Yeah," he muttered. "I don't know what's in that danged barge, but I don't like it. Somethin' in there keeps muttering, like a bunch of animals."

"Cut loose when tide changes, she ought to fetch up along the beach somewhere," Doc said.

The "beach," as baymen refer to Fire Island, stretches some thirty-odd miles at that point from the inlet to Bellport Bay. The helmsman grunted.

"Somewhere this side of Point o' Woods, I'd say. But what the hell good she'll be there is more than I can figure."

Doc Savage slid back into the water then. He'd probably found out all that the tugmen knew. And the bronze man's knowledge of tide tables told him that the barge would shortly be cut loose. Doc swam with his head above water, carrying the diving helmet with him. Behind him he heard a lively altercation that developed when the helmsman discovered the deckhand asleep.

DOC swam silently to Long Tom's side. He communicated with the electrical wizard by pressing his fingers against one wrist and tapping out code. The two climbed to the deck of the barge.

Darkness was almost complete now. Doc lay flat on the deck and edged along the side. The center section of the deck consisted of a hatch combing about twelve feet by twenty. Doc and Long Tom pressed against that, scarcely visible in the deepening night.

Presently the Diesel engine of the tug stopped its rhythmic pounding, dropped into a soft, idling whisper. Muffled words passed between the helmsman and the deckhand. There was the faint scrape of a hawser against the wooden towing post.

Then the barge swung around, rode free in the shifting tide of the bay. The Diesel resumed its rhythmic chugging and churned off into the night. The barge rode, lightless and without power, before tide and wind toward the low lying shore of Fire Island.

A scraping sound came from one corner of the hatch. A figure that was only a dim, shapeless blob in the gloom, crept from the hold, paused on the deck. Then it shuffled to the other end of the scow.

Doc Savage nudged Long Tom. The two separated, moved silently toward the same end of the scow on opposite sides. The figure stood erect at the end of the scow. It seemed to be waiting for something. Suddenly, a rotten piece of planking cracked beneath Doc Savage's foot.

The dim figure swung, moved with silent, mechanical gait toward the bronze man. Long Tom sprang then. He misjudged the distance in the gloom, struck the man lower in the legs than he had intended. The man went down with a grunt. His skull smashed heavily against a cast-iron cleat in the hatch combing. His mouth opened foolishly and he stared sightlessly at Long Tom. Doc leaned quickly over the man. It was Rolf Nordstrom, brother of Ingrid and automaton killer of Rocky Emben.

"Those washout workers must be here, Doc," Long Tom suggested. "This is the guy they left the power station with."

Doc Savage moved swiftly along the deck toward the opened hatch through which Rolf Nordstrom had come. The bronze man leaped down the aperture. Long Tom followed him. The interior of the old scow presented a weird spectacle. A small, portable lighting plant operated greenish, fluorescent tubes.

There were eleven persons in the rough, oil-smelling hold of the scow. Six of them Long Tom identified quickly. They were the washout workers who had killed the foreman when they left the job Long Tom had been inspecting.

One of the other five, Doc Savage had seen before. He was the fourth of the street workers who had been turned into vacant-eyed robots in Queens. Two of those men had died the horrible withering death. One was still in a drugged sleep in Doc's skyscraper office. This was the fourth. Beside him were three mindless-appearing men whom Doc had not seen before. The other figure there was that of a well-dressed, gray-haired man who was bound and gagged.

Doc moved toward the man who was bound and gagged. But, he paused. There was an odd quality about these mindless monsters. They appeared to be the same as the other terror-bringing robots who had brought death before. But in one respect they were different. They seemed to have no volition of their own. They also appeared not to have been given any specific instructions to cover the situation that confronted them.

This bore out one theory held by the bronze man. Doc spoke to one of them. He selected the street worker from Queens. That one was a husky young man. He sat dejectedly in a corner, his eyes staring vacantly ahead of him.

"Untie that one," Doc snapped.

Like a well-trained animal, the robot of a man got up and moved toward the prisoner who was tied. Doc Savage followed him closely. In one hand, Doc held a hypodermic needle with an opiate powerful enough to put any of the monsters to sleep. This was to prevent the mindless one from doing any harm to

the prisoner who was tied.

But, as Doc had deduced, the mindless monsters, in the absence of specific suggestions from their masters, would follow the suggestion of any other person. Without question, the mindless robot untied the gray-haired, well-dressed man.

The prisoner came up sputtering. He was scared. He was very mad. He was also indignant. He mentioned all of those things as he identified himself.

H. Cadwallader Smith, the banker who had been carried off when the mindless monsters robbed the last Long Island bank, was of old New England stock. He was not one to submit to such a thing as this without expressing himself fluently. He did so now.

"I demand that I be returned to my home immediately," he shrieked. "The governor shall hear of this!"

"We will do all we can," Doc told him. "But first, suppose you tell me just what happened."

H. Cadwallader Smith talked then. He gave the distinct impression that he was doing Doc Savage a tremendous favor in complying. He gave details of the robbery that checked with the news broadcast Doc and his aids had heard from the autogyro radio. He said that he had been blindfolded, brought to the shore of Great South Bay in a fast car and dumped onto the scow. More than that he did not know.

But there was one peculiar angle that H. Cadwallader Smith detailed for Doc. At no time had he been subjected to actual physical violence. Two or more of the mindless men of strength were always with him. They informed him constantly that just because they might feel like it they were apt to tear him to pieces. But they kept telling him that he was not being kidnaped; that he was going along of his own volition—which was true if one considered that any other desires probably meant a very messy death.

H. Cadwallader Smith was gasping for breath as he finished his tale. Beads of perspiration stood out on his forehead. He forgot to be pompous for a moment and asked Doc if there wasn't something he could do about it all.

"I do not yet understand the force that controls these men," Doc told him. "But it seems apparent that for the present, at least, they will react to our suggestions."

Long Tom came back from a prow of the scow at that moment. The thin electrical wizard showed signs of agitation.

"Rolf Nordstrom has disappeared, Doc," he said. "He isn't anyplace on the scow."

Doc Savage frowned slightly.

"I believe he has gone for reinforcements," he said. "We had better move rapidly."

Doc spoke quickly to H. Cadwallader Smith.

"I believe it may be possible to learn something more from these men with the proper scientific apparatus at hand. We must get them to Ocean Beach, where we can find a phone. We can then obtain sufficient aid to get these men to my laboratory."

The banker agreed, even though he did not see how it could be done. Doc Savage had already ascertained the fact that each of the mindless men could swim. He ordered them all from the scow. The squarish vessel was a scant half mile from the Fire Island shore by that time. Doc's purpose quite apparently was to get the men off the barge before assistance could come to them from the master mind.



The bronze man utilized the peculiarity of the mindless monsters that he had discovered. He was certain now that they would obey any specific suggestion from him.

"Swim to shore," Doc told each of the robot men.

One by one, the men dived from the scow, struck out for the sandy beach with powerful strokes. Doc knew that no power could deter them from completing that order. But he had no way of realizing that the very mental quirk he was using would shortly send the monsters against him en masse.

DOC, Long Tom and H. Cadwallader Smith were the last ones to leave the barge. Doc surged ahead of the other two. He tried to keep up with the mindless monsters. But even Doc's powerful stroke was no match for the weird strength that was in their bodies.

The mindless ones reached the shore before Doc and the other two men were much more than halfway in. Then Doc saw the dim figure hopping along the beach. Doc called to the mindless ones, told them to return. But they had not yet completed the last order he had given them. They continued, undisturbed, to the sandy shore. A small flashlight blinked. Doc saw that the new arrival on the beach carried a big tin pail. He whipped up a dipper, gave each of the mindless monsters a drink as they stepped ashore. There was a small buzz of conversation.

Then like some gigantic marionettes, six of the mindless ones turned about, waded back into the water. They spread out like a fan. Doc spoke quickly to Long Tom and H. Cadwallader Smith.

"Swim west, toward Ocean Beach," he rapped. "You may be able to avoid them. They are after me, principally."

"But Doc," Long Tom protested, "two of us might be able to fight them off."

Doc shook his head.

"A dozen of us wouldn't be able to cope with these things. Our only chance is for someone to escape and bring reinforcements. I think you will find a headquarters of this gang in the sunken forest."

Long Tom gulped. "The what?" he demanded.

But Doc Savage was gone. The mindless automatons were coming closer. Doc struck out into the bay with a powerful stroke. He swam splashily, to attract as much attention as possible to himself. Six bobbing heads soon began to close in on him. Doc threw all of his tremendous energy into a powerful overhand stroke.

One of the mindless men caught up to him, reached out one hand. Doc Savage grappled. Together, they sank beneath the surface of Great South Bay. The bronze man was noted for the amazing length of time that he could hold his breath. Doc had bettered the records of South Sea pearl divers who had spent their entire lives in a profession that depended upon that ability.

But Doc soon learned that whatever it was that gave these giants of strength their amazing vitality and resistance affected their breathing apparatus as well. The bronze man's lungs proved to be no match for those of his adversary.

Doc was limp and unconscious when the mindless one brought him to the surface of the bay.

MEANWHILE, Long Tom and the banker stroked quietly in the darkness toward the Fire Island town of Ocean Beach. They heard a great splashing behind them when Doc strove to keep all attention centered on himself.

As long as the rumpus went on, Long Tom kept silent. But when the splashing stopped and quiet fell over the bay, the electrical genius could hold his tongue no longer.

"They've got Doc," he said. "Let's head for shore. We can make better time on foot."

The two men swam into the sandy beach. They sloshed, wet and dripping, out of the water. Long Tom paused again to listen. No sound came from the part of the bay where the mindless ones had cornered the bronze man.

"Th-they may have killed Doc," Long Tom said.

Figures suddenly loomed out of the darkness. H. Cadwallader Smith screamed. Fingers of unbelievable strength seized both men. A flat, emotionless voice cut into the night.

"They will not kill the bronze man," it said. "The master has other plans for Doc Savage."

Long Tom gulped.

"Y-you again!"

The speaker was Rolf Nordstrom. The brother of the beautiful Ingrid stared with unwinking eyes at Long Tom. He seemed neither pleased nor displeased. Four silent men were with him. They were the other four monsters from the scow. Long Tom and the banker were whirled around, headed back in the direction from which they had come. Apparently, their pursuers had followed along the beach, listening to the sound of their swimming.

## **Chapter X. THE SUNKEN FOREST**

DOC SAVAGE was still unconscious when the mindless monsters brought him to shore. The men moved silently, apparently having been given complete instructions beforehand. Two figures moved along behind the mindless ones as they carried Doc's limp body into the beach grass and underbrush common on that part of Fire Island. The figures were queerly garbed in strips of some kind of cloth. The strips were wound loosely so that they gave no indication of the shape or stature of the wearer. Odd-looking plastic masks covered their faces. One of them spoke. The voice was disguised.

"You can readily see, my dear, that my little playmates can conquer anybody. The great Doc Savage was scarcely any trouble at all."

A shudder seemed to run through the other figure. The rich, contralto voice could have been identified as Ingrid Nordstrom's.

"It . . . it doesn't seem possible," she gasped. "Why, no one who hadn't seen it would believe the thing!"

A rasping cackle of a laugh came from the man.

"When the world next sees Doc Savage, it will believe anything that I want it to believe."

The girl stumbled as she walked. One hand clutched at the plastic mask covering her face.

"This mask," she protested. "I can scarcely see through the eyeholes."

The rasping voice of her companion was sharp, harsh.

"The mask must stay on," the man rapped. "It is not my wish that any but those already identified in this thing be known. It was perhaps carelessness that permitted Rolf to be known. But it is obvious that Savage's group, at least, has recognized him."

The man laughed nastily. A small light flashed ahead of him. He answered it with a tiny pencil flash. Cleverly concealed under a bush, there was a quite military machinegun nest. The gun was presided over by a rat-faced thug of a man with small, furtive eyes. The masked man addressed him as Soapy.

"We go out tonight about midnight, Soapy," he snapped. "Some of my babies will remain behind us. Any that attempt to move after I have left must be shot immediately. The brain or the heart, my boy. Don't miss."

"Gotcha, boss," Soapy wheezed. The little gangster at the machine gun was not under the influence of any mysterious force. Everything about him said "murder for hire." The masked man chuckled as he and his companion walked on.

"Smart of me to have four machine-gun nests surrounding our headquarters," he observed. "The control of the mindless ones is not too perfect when I am not present."

The two swathed figures seemed to melt into the ground. From a little distance, it seemed that they vanished into the earth itself. Ingrid's contralto voice rose once into the night.

"How about the rest of Doc Savage's crew?" she inquired. "They are still at large."

The rasping chuckle came again.

"They will not be at large very long. Come, my dear, we will watch the awakening of the mighty man of bronze."

The rasping voice dripped with sarcasm.

THE place in which Doc Savage regained consciousness did not look like part of Fire Island. It didn't look like Long island or any part of the northern seaboard. Doc was confined in a rough cage made of some tough green wood. The cage appeared to be in a primeval forest.

There were great ferns, trailing moss, gnarled cypress and hemlock trees. The only touch that lent any of the north coastal feeling was the presence of some scrub pine and spruce. In the center of what appeared to be a clearing, a campfire flickered. The smoke spiraled into air that was devoid of any semblance of breeze. Fifty feet in the air, the smoke mushroomed out flat, as if it had struck an invisible roof. Actually, the trees, growing close together, touched branch to branch up there.

There were other cages near the one in which Doc was confined. They were arranged in a sort of semicircle thirty or so feet from the campfire. In the one nearest to Doc, Long Tom huddled against the bars. Doc could only see the occupant of one of the other cages. It was H. Cadwallader Smith, the Long Island banker. Smith was mumbling to himself in terror.

In front of the cages, men padded back and forth with mechanical precision. There seemed to be about a dozen of the mindless monsters in all. Two of them added fuel to the fire, made it blaze with a bright

flame. Others began clearing away brush. A bench was brought out and set down near the fire. It appeared that some official ceremony was about to begin in the weird clearing.

The two strangely wrapped figures wearing the plastic masks stepped into the fire light. They seated themselves on the bench. As if by an unspoken command, automaton men lined up on either side of them. One of them opened the cage in which H. Cadwallader Smith cringed, hauled the banker out into the light. H. Cadwallader dropped to his knees, begged for his life.

The man in the plastic mask sneered in contempt.

"Your life is safe," he said. "For a while."

Then he turned toward a commotion at the farther end of the clearing. Rolf Nordstrom appeared there. Behind him slouched another of the mindless men. Nordstrom placed him against a tree.

"This one has displeased me," the masked master mind snarled. "So it is fitting that he be the basis of the message I wish you to take back to the world with you."

H. Cadwallader Smith brightened. But the masked one grated new threats.

"Do not think that you can double-cross me, moneylender! This man is being given a chance to live. You will not be given that much unless you obey every instruction to the letter."

He whipped around to Nordstrom.

"Proceed."

Rolf Nordstrom picked up a rifle. It looked to be about .30-30 caliber, a fairly heavy hunting gun. Rolf raised the gun to his shoulders mechanically. A sharp report rapped out. The automaton who stood against the tree, jerked. Blood poured from a hole in his shoulder. He stared at Rolf and the gun. He appeared to feel neither pain nor resentment. The gun spoke again and another slug smacked into his flesh. This time it was the other shoulder. More blood gushed to the ground. The masked man held up one hand. Rolf lowered the gun.

"Shock and blood loss should have materially reduced this man's strength," the masked man observed. "We shall see."

He clapped his hands, somewhat in the manner of a stage hypnotist bringing a subject out of a cataleptic state. The mindless man seemed to straighten. Then the masked leader gave him step-by-step instructions. The man with two .30-30 bullet holes through his shoulders walked to a tree with a three-inch bole. He wrapped his arms around it, strained against the bark. The tree uprooted, came free of the ground.

At another command, the robot dropped the tree, stalked ploddingly to where H. Cadwallader Smith crouched on the ground. The banker began to scream. At that, the masked leader laughed gratingly.

"You are to be taken back to your home town, Smith. You will describe the terror of the mindless men and explain that it is folly to oppose them. You will be accompanied every moment by one of my babies. And he will have specific instructions. If you utter one word aside from the actual message that I shall give you, your companion will break you in two."

Sweat poured down the face of the banker. His jaw clattered with fear that shook his body.

"A-a-anything! I . . . I'll d-d-do anything," he moaned.

The masked one leaned over confidentially.

"You've seen what terrible strength can come from the bodies of ordinary men? That is but nothing."

He paused for what an instructor of histrionics would have called dramatic emphasis.

"My next mindless monster is going to be the pride of them all. Just think of magnifying twenty times the mighty muscles of Doc Savage!"

NO one had thought of Doc Savage during the exhibition of the mindless one with two bullet holes in his body. Now, the mastermind turned toward the cage of the bronze man. H. Cadwallader Smith looked in that direction, too.

The cage was empty.

The masked leader leaped to his feet, began barking orders. Automaton men spread out quickly. They beat through the bush like beaters in an African Congo lion hunt.

Had Doc Savage been granted a few more seconds, it is quite possible that he would have escaped. Doc had managed to loosen two of the green wooden bars of his cage while the leader was thoroughly terrorizing H. Cadwallader Smith. But that had taken time. Right now, Doc was surrounded by the converging mindless monsters.

Doc executed a peculiar move then. He straightened, came out in the open. The monsters drew closer, in a tight circle. Then one of the bronze man's hands moved swiftly. He reached into a secret equipment vest he carried, flicked out a small silver capsule. He tossed it into the air. Instantly, a blinding sheet of white light roared into the air. It was dazzling, eyeball-searing in intensity. The masked leader screamed, dabbed at his eyes. Ingrid Nordstrom did likewise. As the brilliant flare subsided, both found that they were temporarily blind.

The tiny bomb was a magnesium flare of concentrated power known only to Doc. When it exploded, Doc closed his own eyes tightly so they would be unaffected. Others, taken by surprise, were almost always blinded.

Doc whirled then, sought a hole in the circle of the monsters. He had decoyed them close to him before releasing the flare, so that the magnesium might have a maximum effect.

As Doc moved ahead, orders to seize him screamed from the throat of the masked one. And in that instant, Doc knew that the eye-blinding flare for once was inadequate for the task set before it.

With half articulate grunts, the monsters moved in, seized the bronze man. The muscles of their eyes were as amazingly strong as the other muscles of their bodies, it seemed. The flare had scarcely dimmed their vision at all!

Doc Savage became a whirlwind of action. He pitted every bit of strength he had against the monsters. But it was not enough. These were not men that Doc was fighting. They were machines of strength concentrated in some weird, unbelievable manner.

The mindless ones did not hurt Doc. They merely considered him blankly as they bore him to the earth. Slowly, they spread-eagled the bronze man to stout stakes in the ground. When he was securely tied, they stood back at an order from their master. But they remained sufficiently close to attack again if they were needed.

A snarl of hate burst from the masked one then. He moved snakelike toward the helpless bronze man. From one fold in his enveloping garment, he took a large hypodermic needle. His snarl ended in a chuckling sneer.

"One prick of this needle, Doc Savage, and a press of the plunger is all that is needed. You will then be entirely in my power. You will be possessed of tremendous strength, and it will be used exactly as I will it."

Doc struggled mightily as the masked one leaned over his body. Corded bronze muscles twisted in mighty effort. Then Doc Savage went limp. All life seemed to go out of his body.

In that instant, the needle struck home. The masked criminal buried it to the hilt in the nerves at the base of the bronze man's neck. He chuckled again.

"You will sleep for a while, Doc Savage. Then you will arise at my command."

## **Chapter XI. THE BRONZE MONSTER**

MONK had taken over the controls of the gyro when Doc and Long Tom had gone down into the bay. The hairy chemist was amusing himself by putting the craft through various maneuvers, most of which were designed to annoy Ham.

Big-fisted Renny was leaning out of one of the windows, Merwin Malo huddled behind him, shivering slightly in the breeze that streamed past Renny.

"Holy cow!" the big engineer rumbled suddenly. "Doc!"

Ham leaped to the window. He didn't see Doc. But all of them saw the brilliant white flare that mushroomed up from the center of Fire Island.

"It's one of our flares, all right," Monk shrilled. "It's got just the right shade and brilliance."

Ham whipped an instrument out of one pocket that looked somewhat like a miniature spark coil from an old Model T flivver. It was a pocket-sized short-wave transmitter that Doc had developed for emergency use. Weighing less than a pound, it was quite effective over a short distance. Doc and his aids each carried one.

Ham tried to contact Doc Savage. He inserted a tiny microphone into one ear. It looked like a popular aid to the deaf. It was connected to the coil-transmitter by wires that were almost invisible.

The first effort to contact the bronze man brought no result. Ham tried again and drew a second failure. He turned to the others.

"Doc is either tied up or unconscious," he said. "Otherwise he would acknowledge the message. He could send dots and dashes without removing the transmitter from his pocket."

"Maybe it got wet when he swam in," Monk offered.

Ham shook his head.

"You know they're waterproof, you ape. You developed the stuff that makes them that way."

Monk had to admit that. He didn't like to admit that Doc might be in trouble.

"Let's go and take a look," he said.

Renny rumbled an objection.

"We were told to go to Ocean Beach," he pointed out.

There was silence for a moment. Renny was quite correct. And unless there was valid reason for changing plans, it was their custom to follow Doc's instructions to the letter. But Ham, after all, was a lawyer.

"He said for us to take our time," he reminded them. "We can still go to Ocean Beach by way of that part of the island."

Ham pointed in the direction from which the flare had showed. Without any further argument, Monk swung the gyro around. Within half a dozen seconds, they were over the area. Renny had the big infrared projector over the side. All of them were using the heavy obsidian-milk-can glasses. The world spread out below them in an eerie monotone.

The gyro moved almost noiselessly eastward over Point o' Woods. A scattering of deserted houses drifted beneath them. There was sand and lots of beach grass and scrub pine. Then the gyro hovered over a large expanse that looked like a forest of treetops. Monk grunted.

"Treetops, huh? Anyone knows that Fire Island's so low you could spit over it. I've sailed around here lots of times. I didn't see any trees."

Ham agreed with him. But Renny took another view.

"Holy cow!" he rumbled. "They must have Doc in the sunken forest!"

Monk looked at him blankly.

"All right, Robinson Crusoe, now you can explain it."

"There's a regular forest down there," Renny insisted. "You can't see it from the water, because it is way below sea level."

Monk snorted. Then he looked again.

What he saw was a phenomenal stretch of terrain. The sunken forest is there. Not many persons know of it, because Fire Island is not a place that can be reached by automobile. It is presumed that once upon a time the sunken forest was a normal stand of trees. One theory is that the part of Fire island where the forest is was once connected with the main body of Long island, that some peculiar subterranean disturbance created the Great South Bay. If so, it was many hundreds of years ago.

The sunken forest now is a tangle of trees and junglelike undergrowth almost impassable in spots. Well below sea level, the tops of the trees mushroom out nearly flat at the level of the sand dunes that make Fire island famous. Wind and sand whip over above the sunken forest, leaving it to rot in the still, dead air of its own vegetation.

"We could get in there with the gyro," Monk hazarded. "Maybe it's lucky we brought it along."

"Maybe Doc suspected something like this when he picked the gyro," Ham snapped.

The great rotor blades swung slowly. Monk let the gyro slowly down toward the verdure of the hidden treetops. It occurred to him that this sunken forest would make a perfect hide-out for criminals. With the

summer season well behind, there weren't half a dozen residents on Fire Island within a dozen miles. And no normal business of theirs would bring them near the sunken forest.

"Let's go down," Monk shrilled.

Big Renny demurred.

"I'm not sure—" he began.

Ham interrupted him with a yell.

"Long Tom!" he barked. "He's using his emergency short wave. Wait—"

Ham held up one hand. He had left the nearly invisible receiver in his ear, hoping to hear from Doc Savage. Now he began to translate the dot-and-dash message he was receiving.

"They got Doc and Long Tom," Ham said. "Long Tom says he doesn't know where they took Doc, but that they've already given him the stuff that makes mindless monsters."

There was no further discussion as to the direction the gyro should take. Monk shot it downward in a steep glide. He held that glide—until the machine guns began to whip bullets through the rotor blades.

Ham and Renny yelled, whipped out their superfirers. They leaned out of windows, aimed at the red flashes bursting from the ground below them.

Apparently the machine guns were so mounted that they could be swung for vertical fire. Slugs ripped through the big rotor blades, shredded strips of the light metal alloy from blades and fuselage. Ham paused in his fire, peered through the blacklight goggles.

"They've got steel shields," he snapped. "These mercy bullets won't touch them."

"Use thermite compound," Renny bellowed. "That'll melt the shields, force 'em out into the open."

Renny and Ham started to switch magazines for the metal-melting inflammable slugs. But before they could make the switch, the gyro went into a sudden, fatal lurch. One of the rotor blades was cut in half by bullets.

Monk fought with the controls, tried to keep the ship from crashing. None of the occupants of the machine were wearing 'chutes at the moment. The gyro wobbled down to a crazy, crashing landing. Everyone was shaken up. But no one was injured.

"Come on," Monk bellowed. "Let's get going before they grab us."

The sound of crashing in the underbrush came from the east. The four men and the two pets piled out of the wrecked gyro and leaped through the tangle of bushes and briars. Monk was in the lead. Suddenly he encountered what looked something like a ghost. He began to yell.

"Looks like a ghost trying to turn itself into a mummy," he grunted. He seized the figure by one shoulder, drew one hairy fist back to plunge it into the face that was covered by a plastic mask.

"Oh, I'm so glad you men got here!" Ingrid Nordstrom husked. "Maybe you can save Doc Savage."

Monk almost fell flat on his face checking the blow he had aimed at the masked chin.

Ham strode up beside Monk. He reached out and pulled at the rubber-like mask. It came off, revealed



the pleasing features of the blond girl.

"What are you doing here?" Ham snapped.

The girl seemed to want to speak. She opened her mouth once. Then she shut it again in apparent indecision.

"They're having some trouble with Doc Savage," she said, evading the direct question. "Maybe you can stop them from making a mindless monster of him."

Monk danced up and down in rage.

"Howlin' calamities!" he shrilled. "They can't do that to Doc. They can't—"

But there was a plaintive note in the hairy chemist's voice indicating that he thought perhaps they *could* do just that to the bronze man.

"Which way is it?" Ham shot at the girl.

Ingrid Nordstrom pointed. There was a dim path through the tangled underbrush. Monk, Ham and Renny set off down the path without further question. Had their problem simply been one of their own protection, the three would undoubtedly have acted differently. They were normally men of caution, ready for any emergency that might arise. But with a threat such as this against Doc, there was no time to think of safety or the possibility of traps.

The horrible ramifications of what the master villain could and undoubtedly would do with Doc under his power as a mindless monster were all too clear to the bronze man's aids.

Merwin Malo and the girl panted to keep up with the three men. Big-fisted Renny was in the lead. He tore up junglelike growth as the path led them deeper into the mire that was the floor of the sunken forest. Suddenly, there was a commotion in the trees at one side of the path. Vacant-eyed men crowded out at them. There were only five of them in that group. But each had the strength of a dozen men. One of them leaped upon Merwin Malo. Another whipped up Ingrid Nordstrom in his arms, carried her away. Monk, Long Tom and Renny used their superfirers. Monk also hurled a smoke bomb. There was a queer sort of luminescence in the air that gave them some visibility. The smoke bomb ended that.

Monk yelled in Mayan.

"Back," he shrilled. "We'll have a better chance to help Doc if we get clear of these birds."

The three backed—right into a bramble-covered pit. It was similar to the pits used in elephant hunts in the African jungle. They landed in a heap on the bottom. The edge of the ground was nearly a dozen feet above the floor of the trap.

For some reason, the mindless men above did not pursue them further. Apparently, their instructions had nothing in them concerning enemies trapped in a pit. Monk, Ham and Renny had simply disappeared. The mindless ones turned, trudged back into the vastness of the sunken forest.

It took Doc's three aids some time to get out of the pit. They had to form a pyramid first. Ham climbed to Renny's shoulders; then to the shoulders of Monk, who was standing on Renny. Once up, Ham wedged himself, became the top link in a human chain.

When they were all back on the ground, they moved cautiously into the thicker part of the forest. Ham was pretty mad.

"That danged girl!" he snapped. "She led us into that trap. You can have my share of blondes in general, and that one in particular."

Monk bristled. "Aw, she was scared."

"Undoubtedly. She was probably afraid that she wouldn't be able to draw us into the trap as she was supposed to."

Renny finally got tired of it.

"Let's skip the girl," he boomed. "What happened to Malo? He was sort of under our protection, you know."

Monk frowned.

"Criminy, that's right, Renny! All I saw was one of those mindless guys jump him like a hawk grabs a chicken."

Monk suddenly squealed. They had been so busy getting out of the pit that they had forgotten about the two pets.

"Where's Habeas and Chemistry?" he yelled. "Jehoshaphat! If those birds have got Habeas, I'll—"

A grunting snort from the underbrush identified Habeas Corpus. The pig scrambled up, closely followed by Chemistry. The two pets had been taught to make themselves scarce when bullets were flying. They were in no position to defend themselves against bullets. There were times, however, when both had proved valuable aids in times of trouble.

Renny paid little attention to the return of the pets. His puritanical face was grim. For the second time he changed the ammo drum on his machine pistol. He used demolition slugs. They were tiny. But the charge was a nitrate concentrate with three times the explosive power of TNT.

"Doc wouldn't ordinarily approve of using these on human beings," Renny said. "But we're up against something this time that doesn't even pause when we use mercy bullets."

"Yeah," Monk agreed. "And they're goin' to make one of them things out of Doc, if we don't get moving."

Ham was the last one of the three to finish changing his ammo drum.

"The next one of those things that I see is going to be blasted from here to there," he announced.

But Ham was wrong. The situation did not work out quite that way.

THE weird, fluorescent effect that illumined the forest suddenly increased intensity. The narrow path that they followed widened out into a sort of clearing. The queer light was explained then. Bluish fluorescent tubes powered by some hidden plant cast a weird and unreal glow over the clearing.

From the other side of the clearing came a mechanically moving row of men. Their eyes were vacant, staring. No emotion showed on their faces. Ham raised his superfirer. It was loaded with demolition slugs, each of which was capable of blowing a man to bits. He aimed it at the column.

Monk suddenly let out a yell. He leaped to Ham, smashed down the superfirer. The gun went off with a

bull-fiddle roar. The ground near their feet geysered into the air, showered dirt and moss around the area.

"Doc!" Monk blurted. "It's Doc in the lead!"

The bronze figure in the lead of the mindless monsters was as lacking in expression as any of the other automatons. It was impossible for any of the three men to shoot at the column without destroying their leader. Sweat dripped from Monk's face.

"I g-guess we'll have to surrender!" he moaned.

"Run for it!" Ham snapped. "We may be able to figure out something."

The tremendous strength of the mindless monsters came into play then. Headed by the bronze man, they leaped across the clearing.

"Barrage!" Renny yelled. "Let's try it."

The three men whirled, blasted explosive shells into the center of the clearing before the advancing monsters. Dirt, débris, moss and bark leaped into the air in great clouds. Monk, Ham and Renny backed slowly as they kept the barrage of explosives between the monsters and themselves.

Then they were attacked from behind. The shock troops apparently landed on their backs. Bludgeons whizzed through the air, smashed against their clubs.

Habeas Corpus and Chemistry faded into the background. Doc's three aids were stoutly tied.

## **Chapter XII. MONK ESCAPES**

WHEN Monk regained consciousness, he tried to stand erect. He was too dizzy, so he settled down to a crouch, steadying himself on the floor with his knuckles. A raucous laugh assailed him from outside the wooden cage in which he was confined.

"By damn, it looks just like Gargantua!" the reedy voice sneered. "I've heard about him. But I never seen him before."

One of the hired gunmen stood in front of the cage. Evidently the capture of Monk had been a highlight in the campaign of terror.

"Why don't you get in the cage with him?" a cultured voice suggested to the thug. "You'll find out that way how much like Gargantua he really is."

Monk made ferocious noises in his throat. The thug looked nervously at the wooden bars and slunk away. Ham, in the adjoining cage, started to laugh.

"I knew you scared little children by smiling at them," Ham said. "But I never knew a man with a gun would take one look at you and run."

"Aw, shut up, shyster," Monk grunted. "You—"

A disguised voice cut into their quarrel.

"I think that removing your minds will really improve both of you," the man with the queer, gownlike cape and the plastic mask informed Monk and Ham.

Doc's two aids fell silent. There was nothing to be gained by conversation with this master crook. The masked one looked them over closely.

"You will make excellent mindless monsters," he said finally. "And the horse-faced one with the big fists will be even better." He jerked a thumb in the direction of another cage in which Renny was held. The big engineer merely glared back. Down the line, Long Tom's voice was heard.

"Hello fellows," Long Tom said. "I didn't know you were here."

The masked man passed on. His voice was a sneer.

"It doesn't make any difference to you whether they are here or not," he rasped. "In fact, nothing makes any further difference to you."

The masked leader talked to himself as he went away.

"Ah, when I started this thing I had no idea where it would lead! Now, I will keep the monsters moving until I have millions."

There was silence for a moment after the masked leader left.

"Pleasant fellow," Ham said finally.

"Sh-h-h-h!" Monk warned.

There was a faint scratching sound as if some animal was trying to burrow its way through the tough underbrush. A blur of quick movement was followed by the appearance of a scrawny figure in front of Monk's cage. It was Ding Ding Corvestan, who had fled when Romley Rutledge and Ingrid Nordstrom drove up to the power relay station in which Ding Ding had been tied.

"HOLY cow!" Renny blurted. "How did you get here?"

Ding Ding held one finger up to his small mouth.

"Sh-h-h!" he warned. "Speak softly. I followed Rutledge and the blonde girl to the bay and came across in their speedboat. I stowed away under a piece of canvas in the stern cockpit."

Ding Ding had to duck back into the underbrush then. The thug who had dubbed Monk Gargantua, lounged around in front of the cages. He cradled a Tommy-gun under one arm. Apparently guarding prisoners took sufficient initiative that the master mind preferred hired thugs rather than the mindless ones for that work.

The thug made no comment. He passed on out of sight. Ding Ding popped up again. He gulped, apparently scared. His stuttering returned.

"Every f-f-f-five m-m-minutes he has to go by," he said. Then he looked at Monk. "W-w-why don't you escape? You could trade places with that pet ape. I just saw him out in the underbrush."

Ham could not repress a laugh.

"Even strangers recognize the relationship," he grinned.

Monk for once didn't pay any attention to Ham.

"Criminy!" he grunted. "If I get out of here I might be able to locate Doc."

Ding Ding's next words were a bombshell.

"I know where Doc Savage is. I can take you to him."

Monk whirled toward Ham.

"Call your pet ape," he shrilled. "We'll have to move fast."

Ham took out a small whistle and blew on it. No sound issued that was audible to the human ear. Something like a commercially distributed type of dog whistle that operates on a similar principle, the whistle reached into upper registers of the scale that were beyond interception by the human ear.

Chemistry, who had been hiding just beyond the fringe of the clearing, bounded into view. Meanwhile, Ding Ding was helping Monk with the cage bars. There was a fairly simple latch to the door for anyone who was outside of the cage.

In a dozen seconds, Monk was outside of the cage. Chemistry huddled in the darkest corner of the prison wearing the coat of Monk's suit. It was not likely in the weird, dim bluish light that the guard would notice the change.

"You guys want me to let you out?" Monk asked.

Ham answered quickly.

"No. That would tip the whole thing off the next round of the guard. You find Doc and find out what the score is."

Monk moved quickly away then, padding after Ding Ding Corvestan into the gloom. The hairy chemist knew that it was essential that he learn if Doc was all right. If the bronze man really were now a mindless monster, if he had become a terrible automaton at the beck and call of some crime genius, his aids would have to do something to stop it.

Monk realized that irreparable harm would be done by such a thing. Doc Savage represented honesty, decency and justice to thousands of men and women throughout the country. If he should suddenly be found leading a horde of mindless men to crime and murder, years of work would be ruined.

There was a lump in Monk's throat as Ding Ding led him down a crevice between two huge and rotted tree trunks. A narrow path led to the mouth of a cave. The cave stank of leaf mold and rotting wood and moss. There was one fluorescent tube attached to the roof. Below that, fastened to a heavy stone slab by steel strips more than three inches across lay Doc Savage.

The bronze man's eyes were closed. His breathing came regularly, like the breath of one who is sleeping. Monk approached the slab. There was a hint of relief in his deep-sunk eyes. At least, Doc was still alive.

Monk touched the unconscious form of Doc Savage. A look of surprise came into his face. Doc's muscles were knotted as hard as chunks of iron. A sheen of perspiration was spread over his body. Every muscle in it was tense, knotted. Monk turned to Ding Ding.

"Do you know any of the early symptoms of this stuff?" he asked.

Corvestan shook his head.

"No," he admitted. "But I did hear that masked guy say that Doc Savage was coming along fine."

That decided Monk.

"Let's go," he said.

Monk learned from Ding Ding that there were two speedboats on the island. He decided to have a look at the spot where they were moored, then go back and get Long Tom, Renny and Ham. Between the four of them, they could probably carry Doc's body, steel bands, slab and all to one of the boats. Once they got Doc away, their problem would be somewhat simpler.

As they approached the shore of the bay, Ding Ding stopped suddenly. He put one hand on Monk's arm. A speedboat racketed just ahead of them. Monk rushed on. A lone figure was at the wheel of one of the boats. In the reflected light dashboard illumination, Monk made out features of Romley Rutledge, the white-haired utilities executive.

RUTLEDGE did not seem to be fleeing from anything. His movements were all calm and slow. The boat left a small dock, headed out into the bay. Its lights gleamed boldly in the night.

"He's the masked leader, all right," Ding Ding said shrilly. "We gotta get him somehow."

Monk grunted. Then he whirled around. A tremendous commotion broke out in the clearing of the cages. Ding Ding listened closely.

"They've discovered you got away," he blurted. "We got to get moving."

Ding Ding moved toward the speedboat. Monk grabbed him by the shoulder, twisted him around.

"We're still going to try to get the rest of Doc's men free," he growled.

Monk lunged forward. Ding Ding scrambled along beside him, even ahead of him. Then they met the mindless monsters. Monk dodged one, ran into another. He managed to squirm free, saw that another of the things had already seized Ding Ding Corvestan. To go on further would be absolute folly. Not only would Monk undoubtedly fail to free the others, but he would be back in the cage himself.

Monk leaped toward the shore. He was about two fingers' breadth away from the pursuing automatons. He made the speedboat—just. He shoved it off from the little dock, paddled frantically for a few hundred feet with an oar.

Then he turned on the switch and punched the starter. The motor started with a roar. He shot the clutch into gear and the little boat practically lifted out of the water. As Monk headed out into the bay, he saw the lights of the speedboat Romley Rutledge had taken. They swung around, headed back for the island. Monk presumed that the utilities executive had either heard the rumpus or had been summoned back by a short-wave radio set. Monk kept the lights of his speedboat out. He circled wide of the other boat, then headed for Patchogue and the main shore of Long Island.

He was just about halfway there when the motor stopped. Monk swore at it, exhausted the battery, pinched himself with a pair of pliers and stabbed himself with a screwdriver before he discovered that the gas tank was empty.

"No wonder they haven't been in a hurry to follow me!" he grunted. "They probably know how much gas there was in here."

Monk drifted. Then he thought he would swim for it. But he encountered obstacles. A strong man may

be able to swim two miles an hour. The tide at that point in the bay was running in the opposite direction that Monk wanted to go at a good three-mile clip. That left him a deficit of a mile an hour at full speed ahead.

That, naturally, didn't make sense.

Some boats passed. Monk yelled. They didn't hear him. Also, he couldn't find any signal flares in the speedboat. Finally, it was the coast guard who found him. The coast guard finds most things that need help in Great South Bay.

At least four hours had passed since Monk had left the sunken forest. Now Fire Island is a narrow sand spit about forty-three miles long. Monk had drifted past a lot of it. He was nearly down to Saltaire, by the Bay Shore channel buoy, when he was picked up.

The officer in charge was a pleasant fellow. And Monk was afraid of much more delay in getting things started to save Doc Savage and the others. The chemist was just about to tell the officer a good bit of what had gone on.

"Say!" the guardsman said suddenly. "You're one of Doc Savage's men, aren't you?"

Monk blinked, admitted that he was. The coast guard officer yelled to his crew. He jumped Monk at the same moment.

"It's one of them. Get him, boys!"

It is an unquestionable fact that Monk was startled. But he didn't let that interfere with what he had to do. Mindless monsters with incredible strength from a weird source were one thing. Mortal man, as he was originally made, was something else.

Monk waded in. He did it with his mouth wide open and yelling. Monk fought best when he yelled. The lee side of the picket boat piled up some with men who were sleeping. The officer rushed Monk. The hairy chemist picked him up by his feet and swung him around like a club. That took three of the crew overboard.

It is fortunate that men in the coast guard service must know how to swim.

By that time, the conscious members of the crew consisted of the officer in charge and one man on the engines. Monk left him in the engine room. But first, he battened down the hatch. Then he turned to the officer he had recently swung around his head.

"Now," he said, "will you tell me what this is all about?"

The coast guardsman tried to talk. But his throat and neck were still full of little bumps that Monk had put there in the course of subduing a boat load of adversaries. He compromised by pounding a fractured finger at a wireless blank. Monk picked it up, began to read.

Then he understood why the combined crew of the picket boat had tried to take him into camp. The wireless was a repeat from the police short-wave band and for general information of all coast guard commanders:

*"Reports previously received that Doc Savage is the moving genius behind the scourge now known as the mindless monsters is given credence by eyewitness reports of a midnight raid on a*

*Long Island railroad train bearing fifty-thousand-dollars payroll money for a suburban airplane manufacturing plant. Competent witnesses said there was no question that the man of bronze was the leader of a gang of five vacant-eyed men who boarded the train at a flag stop. They overpowered armed company guards, three brakemen and the conductor of the train. The fifty thousand dollars was taken in the strong box, which in itself weighed nearly two hundred pounds. A general alarm is out for the arrest on sight of Doc Savage or any of his five aids."*

Monk Mayfair looked hollow-eyed at the coast guardsman. He wanted to denounce the wireless message, wanted to shout that it wasn't true. But he was far from certain that it wasn't. Monk's normally good-humored features showed rage as he turned back to the officer of the picket boat.

"I'm sorry I had to put up so much of a fight," he apologized. "But if this thing is true, Doc Savage is not responsible. If it is true, Doc fell a victim to this thing trying to fight it. If you want to help things, you'll have any other men of yours stay out of my way until this business is cleared up."

That was a long speech for Monk. The hairy chemist was more accustomed to using his fists than he was to using words. But he was now confronted with a problem that could not be solved by the simple expedient of a fight.

Monk tied up the coast guard officer so that it would take him at least a couple of hours to get free. Then he released the anchor windlass and dropped the hook into the bay. There was a dinghy with a fast outboard motor in the stern of the picket boat. Monk got that over the side and headed for the nearest Long Island town, which by that time was Babylon.

### **Chapter XIII. A POSSE FOR DOC**

MONK whipped the little dinghy up into one of the creeks that runs almost to the main street of Babylon. As he moored the small craft, he heard sounds of angry voices from the center of the town. It was late for citizens to be abroad in the little town of Babylon. But apparently the reports of the mindless monsters had cast aside any idea of sleep.

Monk walked cautiously to the center of the village. There was a crowd assembled in front of some sort of public building. A burly man was addressing the mob from a high stone stoop. Beside the man who was shouting, stood two other figures. One of them was snappily dressed, gray-haired and scared half to death. The other was nondescript, stared blankly at the crowd.

Monk had never seen H. Cadwallader Smith, the banker whom the leader of the mindless monsters had planned to send back with a message to the world. But the chemist had heard of the bank robbery and the seizure of Smith. The burly man who was speaking identified the banker for the crowd.

"This man was kidnaped by the mindless monsters," he shouted. "He was in their stronghold when Doc Savage became a mindless monster. He can swear that it was really Doc."

An angry mutter rose from the crowd. H. Cadwallader Smith cleared his throat. Sweat stood out on his brow. He spoke as if the words choked him.

"You can't stop the things!" he shrilled. "They're almost impossible to kill. And now, with Doc Savage's tremendous strength magnified twenty times, it will be terrible. He's going to make mindless monsters out of Doc's aids, too."

The crowd howled.



"Who is *he*, and where is this place?"

H. Cadwallader Smith shuddered. He glanced nervously at the figure beside him who stared at the crowd, apparently not hearing a thing that was being said.

"I-I-I don't know who he is," the banker told them. "A-and I can't tell where—I-I—"

He glanced fearfully at his companion. Blank, lackluster eyes stared back at him. The crowd came to an instant decision. A single idea can sweep through a mob with tremendous rapidity. This one did.

"The other guy is one of them!" someone yelled.

Bodies surged up the steps. With as little effort as if Smith had been a doll, the mindless one who had been sent to guard him reached out with one hand. The fingers encircled the banker's throat. A dozen men were mauling the mindless one by that time. He paid them no attention whatever until he had disposed of Smith. It was not a pretty sight.

There was a snap as the banker's backbone broke. His eyes stuck out of their sockets from terrific internal force. The mindless one literally severed H. Cadwallader Smith's head from his body in the manner that a farmer would wring a chicken's neck.

The crowd gasped. But bodies on the outskirts of the crowd pushed forward. They forced those in front to grips with the monster. Crowds are often like that. The enthusiasm of those who are beyond danger themselves involves the others out in front.

The mindless one tossed men from his path. He moved ahead like a grim, mechanical reaper. As he exerted his tremendous strength a chemical change seemed to come over his body. His thrusts became weaker. His flesh wrinkled, became gray. The crowd broke, separated. Strong men gasped in horror.

As if the blowtorch of time had been turned upon him, the mindless one shriveled and died before their eyes. One peculiar thing was later mentioned in the newspapers. There were plenty of witnesses who were willing to swear that the body weighed at least twenty pounds less than the monster had when the battle started.

MONK MAYFAIR took advantage of the confusion that followed. He borrowed a car that was parked a block down the street. The word "borrow" is perhaps not quite accurate, in that the word usually carries the suggestion that the owner had coöperated. But it was the only way that Monk dared acquire a machine at the moment. It would be returned in at least as good condition as he found it, with a suitable bonus for its owner.

Monk raced out of Babylon on Montauk highway in the direction of New York. At Amityville he found a cigar store that was still open. The owner sat in the threshold with a shotgun across his knee.

"Ain't none of them danged things comin' in here," he told Monk. Fortunately, he did not recognize the hairy chemist. Monk got a handful of nickels, dimes and quarters from the proprietor and went into a phone booth. The store man went back to his vigilance in the doorway.

Monk called the telephone-exchange operator in a small town in Ohio.

"I want to locate William Harper Littlejohn," Monk told the chief operator. "He's down there on a bone-burying expedition or something. It's connected with the college."

"Oh, you mean the Indian Mound research party," the operator told him. "Just hold the line please."

Monk held it. The man he was trying to locate was probably one of the world's most prominent geologists and archaeologists. The fifth of Doc's aids, Johnny Littlejohn, had gone to the Ohio town to help other archaeologists classify a new discovery of North American Indian relics unearthed in a burial mound that had just been found. With Ham, Renny and Long Tom in the clutches of the leader of the mindless monsters, Monk wanted to consult Johnny before deciding on a course of action. Monk had never before felt so alone in the world. He didn't know what to do. Monk's voice was tense with eagerness when the operator came back on the wire, told him what the charges were. He dropped his coins in the slot.

"Thank you. Go ahead, New York," the operator said.

"Hello. Hello, Johnny?" Monk blurted.

"Dr. Littlejohn is not here," a voice told Monk. "This is Dr. Hurley. Is there anything I can do for you?"

Monk groaned.

"This is a friend of his," he said. "I've got to get hold of him. Where is he?"

"It is very strange," Dr. Hurley told him. "Dr. Littlejohn disappeared from his room about three hours ago and we have not been able to find any trace of him."

Monk groaned again, hung up and went back to his purloined automobile. He got behind the wheel, absently slid the car into gear. He headed for New York. Then, suddenly, he smacked down hard on the accelerator. If Johnny had changed his location he would have, by standing agreement, phoned the skyscraper headquarters of the change. In the absence of Doc or his aids, the message would have been automatically inscribed on an incoming call recorder of Doc's devising.

Monk gave the car all it had. It was a good machine and in perfect running order. The speedometer clocked well above eighty-five. The radio on the dashboard told Monk that most of Long Island's cops were now out in Suffolk County trying to round up the mindless monsters. He didn't even see a speedcop until he got into Queens. Then he slowed down somewhat.

Monk had had enough surprises that night. He ditched the car in one of the deserted financial district streets not far from the Brooklyn Bridge. Then he took a taxi to the midtown area. He didn't see any sign of activity around the great building that housed Doc's headquarters. So he paid off the cab and went across the street.

Monk didn't see a single cop until he was inside the lobby. Then he saw half a dozen of them.

"Here he is!" one with captain's bars shouted. "That coast guard guy said he thought he'd show up here."

The cops made a mass running tackle. Each apparently had exactly the same idea at the same instant. Monk instinctively leaped straight into the air. Which brought the cops together in considerable of a tangle of legs and arms. Monk scampered through the lobby and toward an emergency stairway. It sounded as if half of New York's police department was after him.

Some of the cops rushed up the stairway after Monk. The captain in charge tore over to an intra-building phone panel on one wall of the lobby. He called other policemen who were high up in the building, told them to come down the emergency stairway from the top.

There was one broad, decorative stairway that led only to the second floor. At the head of it there was a

utility room where scrubwomen kept their things, a rest and locker room for elevator operators and other building-maintenance equipment. A bent, limping charwoman emerged from the door, hobbled down the broad stairs. She carried mop and bucket. She dragged the heavy bucket toward the express elevators.

"Watch your step, grandma," the police captain snapped. "You're liable to get shot if you get in the way."

The charwoman mumbled something in a high falsetto. Then she stepped into the express elevator, pressed a button for the eighty-sixth floor. The cage swished upward, making a sound something like the plunger of a gigantic air pump. When the cage stopped, the charwomen stepped cautiously into the corridor. If there had been any policemen in the corridor outside Doc Savage's office, they evidently had gone down the emergency stairway to head off Monk.

The charwoman chuckled softly, went into Doc's big suite of offices. Then "she" fell flat on her face and began to moan. A long, thin man, who wore an ill-fitting suit and a monocle, sat on the charwoman.

"It is comprehensible that you might be what you seem," an extremely cultured voice announced. "But, on the other hand, I wish to encounter no more misanthropic emissaries of the municipal law-enforcement agencies."

The "charwoman" gasped.

"Johnny!" Monk's shrill voice blurted. "How did you get here?"

William Harper Littlejohn, who never used a small word where a big one would do, untangled himself from the body on the floor and scrambled to his feet.

"I came by air transport as soon as I heard about Doc over the radio. But how did you get into this peculiar disguise?"

Monk grinned. He unwound an old bandanna from his head, pulled off the soiled work clothes some amazon of a woman had left in the locker room on the second floor of the building.

"The cops are still looking for me on the stairs," he said. "I stopped off on the second floor and then went back to the lobby."

Johnny fingered the monocle nervously. Actually, the thing was a powerful magnifying glass which the scientist needed in his profession. It was attached to his coat lapel by a long silk ribbon.

"Just what has really occurred?" Johnny asked Monk.

The hairy chemist told him about the mindless monsters and of his own experiences in the sunken forest on Fire Island. Johnny nodded.

"I had the radio on just before you came in," he said. "The newspapers are demanding that some drastic action be taken. Several persons have offered rewards for the capture of Doc Savage and the other mindless monsters dead or alive."

Monk turned on the radio then, to see if any further information was available. He got into the middle of what apparently was an emergency broadcast:

*"—the trail of the monsters led to a small river on the South Shore of Long Island. On the banks of this stream it vanished without trace. It had been reliably testified that the leader of this band that took four lives was definitely Doc Savage. While this eventuality is greatly to be deplored, even staunch supporters of the unorthodox methods of the man of bronze have come to realize that*

*it is essential that this thing be stopped whether it costs the life of Doc Savage or not. Even Senator Bronson has offered ten thousand dollars if—*"

Monk cut the switch. He couldn't stand any more. Johnny fumbled with the monocle magnifying glass.

"This is preposterous!" he exclaimed. "Don't these people realize what Doc has done for the world?"

Monk shrugged. His little eyes blazed with anger. Suddenly he pounded one hairy fist into the palm of the other hand.

"Dang it, Johnny, maybe we've got one chance!"

Johnny brightened, waited for Monk to continue.

"I've been working on a new gas for Doc. It's about twice as effective as the anaesthetic stuff we've been using in the bombs. Suppose we dump a tank of the stuff into the sunken forest. I think it'll even affect the monsters."

"B-b-but Doc—" Johnny began.

"Sure, it'll knock him out, too," Monk agreed. "But we can revive him after we've got the rest of the gang tied up."

Long Johnny nodded. It sounded like a good idea to him. But just in case it didn't work, he took a surperfirer from the rack, three different types of bullets and a small sack of bombs.

"You think they've gone back to the sunken forest?" he asked.

Monk nodded.

"The trail ended on a river bank on the South Shore. That would empty into Great South Bay."

Both men were ready in a few seconds. Monk led the way to the "flea run."

"Only way we got a chance," he grunted. "The cops may not be watching the Hidalgo dock."

The compressed-air conveyance shot down eighty-six floors and horizontally underground at express-train speed. It jolted to a stop at the river terminus. Monk opened the hatch and climbed out.

He found himself surrounded by more than a dozen cops. They had Tommy-guns and riot guns ready for action. Monk and Johnny didn't even stand a chance.

IN the office of the police commissioner on Centre Street, leaders of business, politics and the highest ranking police officers of the State were present. The governor of New York presided at the meeting. His face was worried and drawn.

"It is not that I disbelieve you, Dr. Littlejohn," he explained. "I have never known of an aid of Doc Savage to tell an untruth. But the sad fact is that this horror must be stopped at all cost!"

The governor was patently unhappy. He was a great supporter of Doc Savage, had co-operated with the bronze man in many enterprises that needed the aid of public officials. Johnny cleared his throat. He and Monk both wished that Ham were present with his powers of oratorical persuasion.

The police commissioner was another one who wanted to co-operate with Doc's men. He well knew the extent to which juvenile crime tendencies were kept in check by the mere influence of the bronze man and the things for which he stood.

"Let me get this straight," he said. "You men will lead a picked posse of men into this stronghold on condition that Doc Savage be taken alive and be delivered to you?"

Johnny nodded. Monk interrupted.

"They gotta take Ham alive, too," he insisted.

He added that the stipulation also held for Long Tom and Renny.

The police commissioner thought over the offer of Doc's two aids, made up his mind.

"I am for it," he said. "I want these men to have every opportunity to save Doc."

The governor cleared his throat again. What he had to say obviously hurt him plenty.

"It shall be that way," he agreed. "But I cannot guarantee what the aftermath of this thing will be for Doc. There are some things that are beyond my power to stop."

Monk and Johnny nodded. Neither could look the other in the eyes. They knew that by now several murders were laid at Doc Savage's door. Whether he was under the influence of some strange force or not, those murders could not be simply explained away. The two men left the police commissioner's office.

"We will meet at the Hidalgo warehouse," Johnny said. "The amphibian transport will be large enough to take us all."

A picked posse of twenty men, who had sufficient faith in Doc to co-operate, were to make up the party. Monk and Johnny were heavy of heart as their cab took them up to the West Side elevated highway. Silent policemen parted their lines to let the two men enter the building.

## **Chapter XIV. UNDERGROUND VIGIL**

A SHORT time before Monk had vowed that he'd never conspire to irritate Ham again, the dapper lawyer was the recipient of aid from a source that was usually only one of annoyance to him.

The campfire in the clearing had long since gone out. But the weird blue luminescence from the partly concealed fluorescent lighting system persisted. In front of the wooden cage in which Ham was confined, the masked leader of the mindless monsters cavorted. He seemed immensely pleased with himself.

A small, battery portable radio blared special news reports for the master mind. The only stations still functioning were those devoting extra time to the horror of the mindless monsters. Each report involved Doc Savage more deeply. The man in the plastic mask laughed raucously. He sneered at Ham and Doc's other two aids.

"I was quite willing that your ugly friend got away," the masked one rasped. "Considering the length of time that it would take him to get ashore without gas in the boat, he could do no good to Doc Savage. He could only testify that Doc was here, that the reports of Doc Savage leading the mindless monsters are true. In the end, I shall destroy the bronze man. Then, with the help of your apelike friend, and probably by now your other companion, the authorities will spend years searching for the bronze man

instead of for me."

The man took a diabolical pleasure in what he considered his smartness. He doubled over with mirth, chuckling evilly. He was still convulsed when another masked figure joined him. The second masked figure stamped a dainty foot.

"I don't care what happens," the husky contralto of Ingrid Nordstrom announced. "I've had enough of this!"

The girl drew off the plastic mask, hurled it to the ground. She moved toward the master mind, hands extended.

"I'll tear that mask from your face. I'll let these men of Doc Savage see who you really—"

A rasping cry of hate welled from the masked lips of the man. He leaped upon the girl, clamped one hand over her mouth.

"The consequences, my dear, of such an act are great. Consider them fully."

Hands of considerable strength held Ingrid Nordstrom's shoulders. The masked man leaned over her, stared into her eyes. Slowly, the girl wilted. Some power greater than her will broke her. With a shuddering cry, she broke free. Sobs wracked her body. She plunged off into the underbrush with a wailing plaint.

The masked man turned to sneer at Ham, Renny and Long Tom. One more radio report brought him a malicious grin of triumph. It was the one detailing the end of Doc Savage's trail at the river bank on the South Shore of Long Island. The masked one laughed again and followed Ingrid Nordstrom into the brush.

Ham turned angrily toward Long Tom and Renny. His comments were much to the point, though scarcely in courtroom language. Long Tom and Renny thoroughly agreed with him.

A guttural barking from the cage on the other side of the dapper lawyer made him turn his head. Chemistry jumped up and down. He beat his hairy chest. The anthropoid didn't know what had transpired, but, animallike, he sensed the irritation of his master. Ham sighed.

"I hope Monk is all right," he said. "The big baboon is liable to get in trouble by himself."

A squealing and grunting pandemonium broke loose then in the thick underbrush. A furry, rodentlike form hurtled into the clearing and out of the other side. It was one of the opossums that are quite prevalent on Fire Island. Behind the 'possum in bunch-legged haste raced the peculiar porker, Habeas.

The pig wheeled in front of Ham's wooden cage, raced up to the bars. While the 'possum kept on hightailing through the underbrush, Habeas began to exhibit some of the sense Monk had always insisted his pet really had. The pig's teeth had crunched oyster shells and all sorts of tough fibrous roots. Now they went to work on the green wood that made up the bars of Ham's cage.

The pig's jaws forced sharp teeth into the wood, sawed back and forth like an efficient machine. One bar loosened, permitted Ham to put one long arm through and reach the trap that opened one side of the cage. In another instant he was outside. Quickly, Ham moved toward the cages that held the other aids of Doc Savage. He released Renny and Long Tom, started to go on farther.

"Where's Merwin Malo?" he asked.

Long Tom, whose cage had been farther away, answered.

"They took him out quite a while ago," he said. "From the conversation, I judge that they've either made a mindless monster of him or have killed him."

Ham kicked out one foot.

"Quit it, Habeas!" he snapped. "Just because you saved us, you haven't any business chewing on my ankle."

Long Tom corrected Ham.

"He's not chewing on you. He's trying to make us follow him."

The pig backed up like a dog that wants its master to throw a stick to be pursued and retrieved. Ham had seen the pig in action before; had seen the odd porker exhibit rare intelligence upon occasion. Right now, the hog rooted his nose into the ground. He snorted, pawed the earth. Habeas was probably an old truffle hunter from 'way back. Anything that was under the earth he could, no doubt, ferret out with his remarkable schnozzle.

"Let's follow him," Ham said. "Maybe he's got something."

Habeas led Doc's three aids on a circuitous path. They went down deeper in the earth. They passed a crevice between two rotten logs. And they found Doc Savage!

THE bronze man still lay upon the stone slab where Monk had found him. The three-inch steel bands still held him riveted to the slab. Doc was not entirely unconscious now. He stirred, moaned faintly. The eyelids flickered, showed the flake-gold eyes stirring strangely.

Ham stiffened, held up one hand to warn his companions. All three men were tensely quiet as they watched the form of Doc Savage. A sheen of perspiration covered the bronze body. Corded muscles bunched under the skin. Doc's powerful body seemed to be convulsed by some inner pain that brought sharp spasms of tremendous muscular effort.

Doc took a deep breath. His great chest expanded, pressed against the three-inch steel band that held it.

"Holy cow!" Renny blurted. "Even Doc couldn't do that."

The steel band parted, tore raggedly like a shiny piece of tin foil! A second mighty heave of muscles ripped another of the steel bands from the bolts that held it to the slab.

Doc's three aids watched with fascination and horror as the bronze man freed himself. It was obvious that Doc's normal strength would not have performed the feat they had just witnessed. They knew, therefore, that Doc had undergone the treatment that made the mindless monsters. There was no possible way that they could know what sort of a Doc Savage they were going to find.

Slowly, Doc opened his eyes. An expression of pain, of tremendous concentration, was in those eyes. It was extremely unusual for Doc Savage's features to display any emotion. The experience he had been subjected to must have been of tremendous force. Tiny winds again seemed to stir the flake-gold eyes, and Doc's features assumed a more normal expression. Recognition of his three aids showed in his eyes.

Then, as if the effort had been too great, the eyes dulled again. Doc got up from the slab, moved

mechanically toward Ham, who was closest to him. He did not appear to see the dapper lawyer at all. But cabled hands reached out, seized Ham by the shoulders, began to bend him back. Ham was as powerless as if he had been caught in a great drill press.

"Doc!" Ham yelled. "Doc, look what you're doing!"

Beads of perspiration stood out on the bronze man's forehead. The frown of intense concentration appeared again. Slowly, his eyes again became normal. The grip on Ham's shoulders relaxed. Doc backed to the slab, sat down on it as if he was fatigued by terrific effort. His face was weary.

"It is fortunate that you cried out," he told Ham. "Otherwise I might have killed you."

HAM'S face was pale. To witness anything that could so change Doc Savage really frightened him.

"W-what happened?" Ham wanted to know.

Doc spoke slowly, haltingly. It seemed that each word was a tremendous effort.

"There is little that I can tell you," he said. "The only way I could combat the controlling force of this strange thing was to rob myself of consciousness. Before the attempt was made to transform me into a mindless monster, I forced myself into an autohypnotic trance."

Doc looked at the three-inch steel bands that he had burst.

"Apparently the tremendous increase in strength was accomplished," he decided. "But the operator could not get into my mind to make me obey him."

"Holy cow, Doc!" Renny said. "The radio reports say you've been leading a gang of the mindless things all over Long Island."

Doc Savage did not show surprise.

"They have disguised someone to look like me," he said. "The master mind believed that he could induce a maximum amount of terror by convincing people that I was leading the things and was one of them."

Renny's long, puritanical face was thoughtful.

"What is the stuff, Doc?" he asked. "How does this bird do these things to men?"

Doc's expression clouded slightly.

"I cannot be sure," he said. "In escaping the brain-deadening effect of the stuff, I was forced to rob myself of the consciousness needed to identify any of the symptoms."

As Doc spoke, the beads of perspiration again oozed from the pores of his forehead. The muscles of the neck and throat contracted with mighty effort. Doc was fighting off the effect of the weird stuff he had been given. Slowly, his eyes again glazed, became dull and lusterless. He swayed, then lay down on the slab. Doc was either in an autohypnotic trance, or the effect of the weird force of the mindless monsters had gripped him. His aids could not tell which.

"Holy cow!" Renny gulped. "I wish he'd come out of that."

A rasping chuckle sounded from the cave mouth behind them.



"In that desire, I concur with you, horseface! When consciousness returns to the bronze man, he will not escape me by a trick of hypnosis."

RENNY whirled around and leaped, all in one motion. The man in the plastic mask proved more spry than he appeared. Renny's big body shot into empty space where the masked leader had been. Harsh orders ripped from the mouth of the crime leader. Instantly, dead-eyed, mechanical men stalked into the room.

Doc's aids were all unarmed. Even had they been, short of using demolition explosives, they could have accomplished nothing. Renny's big fists pistoned up and down as he tried to fight. He had the satisfaction of punching one of the monsters until he was slightly groggy. Ham and Long Tom gave good accountings of themselves. But there was no real chance of their accomplishing anything.

This group of the monsters seemed even more robotlike, less possessed of human intelligence than others that Doc's aids had encountered. One of them leaning over Renny tied the big engineer tightly. He turned to watch the others. Then he began visibly to shrivel. His eyes protruded briefly. Muscles expanded and contracted in knots of power. Then the man began to sag. Like a spring-wound machine running down, the vast strength seemed to vanish.

Wrinkles showed on his grayish face. The man's jaw dropped open, his shoulders went limp. Then he sank slowly to the floor of the cage and died.

Big-fisted Renny shuddered. It was the first weird death of a mindless monster that he had actually witnessed. Other mindless ones tied Renny securely. Monk and Ham were already trussed like pigs waiting for a barbecue. The masked man laughed as he watched the expression of horror on Renny's face.

"Some of my babies, I dispose of, as you see. Others I permit to live, even if it is only in a sort of half world."

The hypodermic syringe came again from his voluminous clothing. He moved first toward Renny.

"I shall place you all under my power immediately," he gloated. "And you will not defeat me by any tricks of autohypnosis. As you came out of a cataleptic trance, you would be helpless to resist my suggestion."

He gloated silently for a moment.

"Such will be the case of the bronze man. His little trick will not long avail him."

The masked one then drove the needle into the nerves at the base of Renny's neck. The big engineer's eyes went glassy. His face lost all expression. The master mind was engrossed in what he was doing. He did not see Doc Savage over in the other corner of the room. Two mindless men were guarding Doc. But the bronze man was not doing anything that seemed to call for their interference.

Doc's strong jaw was clenched in mighty effort. His eyes were again wind-swept whirlpools of flake gold. Doc's mighty fingers were moving strangely over the stone slab on which he had lain. At the moment, Doc Savage was not tied. He was apparently a victim of his own autohypnosis.

When the masked leader turned toward the bronze man, Doc was again limp and motionless. His eyes were closed, as if in sleep. The masked one thrust the hypodermic into Long Tom and Ham. Then he padded over to Doc.

"I shall wait," he snarled. "When you regain consciousness, you will not be able to resist my suggestions."

A sound of running feet caused him to turn around. The skinny gangster with the Tommy-gun burst into the room.

"The boys are back from Long Island!" he yelled nasally. "The cops were just about on their trail when they got on the boat."

The masked man rubbed his hands together.

"It is well," he said. "I expect other developments to come to a head shortly. We shall move rapidly from now on."

## Chapter XV. SHOOT TO KILL

ONE development occurred then which he apparently did not expect. Ingrid Nordstrom stamped into the cave. She pulled the plastic mask from her face and hurled it to the floor. Her deep-blue eyes blazed with determination.

It made her so beautiful that Ham, in his normal state, would have been gaping openly. But the dapper lawyer was merely staring blankly at the opposite wall of the cave. Ingrid's husky contralto voice shook with emotion.

"I'm not going any further in this business," she stated. "I don't care what your threats are going to be."

The man in the mask twisted around. His voice became a soft purr—a purring sound that also carried menace. He moved slowly toward the girl.

"Why, that is impossible, my dear. I need the pleasure of your company."

He approached Ingrid from one side. His right hand snaked out of the gownlike garment that he wore. The hypodermic was clutched tightly in his fingers. Slowly, that hand went around behind her, moved toward the neck.

"I forgave your attempt to betray me when the men came from the gyro," he said smoothly. "I much prefer to have your normal co-operation. But—"

Ingrid Nordstrom screamed. She twisted away from the master mind just as the needle grazed her neck. Her eyes blazed.

"Y-you beast!" she husked. "You'll not get your hands on me again if I'm alive!"

The girl raced toward the mouth of the cave. She collided with a burly figure entering. She gasped, backed slowly into the cave. The incoming man was Rolf Nordstrom, her brother. The masked leader yelled at Rolf: "Stop her! She is running away to give aid to our enemies."

Rolf Nordstrom displayed little or no emotion. He swung slowly toward his sister. His voice was flat, without inflection.

"You will aid our leader," he stated. "You will do as you are told, or I will kill you myself."

Rolf moved slowly toward the girl. Ingrid put one hand to her mouth. She backed. Her eyes were wide with an unbelieving horror. It seemed that those words from her own brother were more than she could

stand.

"N-nothing seems to matter," she mumbled. Then hysteria overcame the girl. Great, wracking sobs shook her body. She sank to the floor.

HAM still stared vacantly at the wall on the other side of the cave. Big Renny absently scratched an ear, as if he hadn't a worry in the world. Long Tom's mushroom pallor gave him a dazed, brink-of-death sort of look. The three had all been untied at the leader's orders. They all should be under the complete domination of the mastermind. The masked one strode over to them to satisfy himself as to their reactions. He started with Ham.

"How do you feel?" he asked.

"I do not know how I feel," Ham said in a stilted, wooden voice. "There is no basis for comparison to the way I feel now. Nothing seems to have any weight."

The masked one laughed.

"For you, nothing does have enough weight to matter."

He pointed at a stout piece of oak plank that lay on the cave's floor.

"Pick it up," he snapped. "Break it in two."

Ham moved mechanically. He leaned over and picked up the plank. Then, as if it had been an old shingle, he broke the two-inch plank with his hands. Renny and Long Tom watched that performance. There was nothing in their faces to indicate that such a feat of strength was not an every-day occurrence for dapper Ham.

He went through a similar routine with Long Tom and Renny. Each of them reacted in a manner that met with the masked one's satisfaction. He chuckled.

"Perfect," he said. "We will now proceed to Jamaica. Just before dawn we will descend upon a bank there. All who interfere will be either crushed to death or shot. This will be the final stroke of terror before we settle down to the serious business of extortion."

He laughed evilly, rubbed his hands together.

"Doc Savage will be identified as the leader of this final job."

He swung around abruptly, watched closely the reactions of Doc's three aids. He knew well what was the most powerful influence in their lives. If disaster to the bronze man did not cut through the spell that held them, they were safe for any venture that he might wish to impose upon them. Not one of the three was in any way affected by the announcement of the plastic-masked master criminal. He looked at Ham, particularly.

"Many persons will be killed. We will literally blast our way into the bank," he said. "But it does not matter."

Ham looked straight ahead of him.

"It does not matter," Ham repeated.

THE masked one shook hands with himself in self-congratulation. He was extremely pleased. He turned toward the recumbent form of Doc Savage which lay on the stone slab between two mindless monsters who watched the bronze man with a queer fixed sort of vigilance. A quick expression of surprise came from the master mind. Doc Savage's hands were moving convulsively. Apparently, consciousness was coming back to the bronze man.

Slowly, the bronze man swung around. He propped himself to a sitting position, mumbled vague words.

The plastic mask completely hid the features of the master crook. But no mask could have concealed the tension that gripped him at that moment. He slunk up beside the bronze man, his every move showing that he had all of his eggs right then in one basket.

"Stand up, Doc Savage!" he snapped.

Slowly, Doc moved to his feet. As he stood erect, his eyelids fluttered, opened. No tiny whirlwinds stirred the flake-gold eyes now. They were flat, lusterless.

Breath hissed between the mastermind's teeth like a small, vicious whistle. A burden seemed to drop from his shoulders.

"I was worried about you, my friend," he said with a new note of smugness. "You resisted one treatment so long there was a chance that its power might have been dissipated. But now, I know that is not the case."

Again, he rubbed his hands. Apparently all was well for the men of crime. Ingrid Nordstrom was still in the cave. Her eyes were bleak with despair. She looked at Doc and shuddered. If the great Doc Savage could not withstand the effect of the terrible power of the mindless monsters, there did not seem to Ingrid that there was any hope. The girl did not speak. But her eyes carried eloquence enough.

Her brother seemed entirely unaffected. He looked from Doc Savage to his chief.

"We go to Jamaica," was all that Rolf said. The business partner of Romley Rutledge and brother of the blond girl seemed obviously to be under the mindless monster power. But he also seemed somewhat different. In most of the mindless ones, specific orders were obeyed, but no initiative was visible in the men. In Rolf's case, certain ideas seemed to be his own. After that one statement, Rolf lapsed into a silence that might have been a sullen one, or might have merely been an indication that he had nothing to say.

The other man in the room—aside from the two mindless automatons who were guarding Doc—was the rat-faced thug. His reactions were extremely definite.

"Hell," he muttered. "If you can do that to Doc Savage, boss, you sure as hell got the world by the tail."

The rasping laugh came again. The masked leader strode to a small radio on a ledge of the cave. He flicked it on.

"We will find out what the world is doing about the mindless monsters. We should be getting some reports on the gorillalike assistant who escaped."

The radio coughed, crackled a bit with static. Then one of the emergency all-night news broadcasters, who had been held on because of the new wave of terror, began giving out bulletins. He said that picked men had been scouring every swamp in the bay section of Long Island; that no further trace had been

found of the mindless monsters or of Doc Savage. While police were trying to minimize the terror, the announcer requested, on behalf of the police, that residents who did not have urgent business remain indoors until the thing had been cleared up. Most of that was a rehash of things that had been said before. But the announcer was saving a late bulletin for the last:

*"This station has learned exclusively that Monk Mayfair, the celebrated chemist, has escaped from the mindless monsters. Our reporter has learned that Monk, with William Harper Littlejohn, is going to lead a posse on some stronghold, the location of which we have not yet been able to learn. Reliable authority has it that there is a supernatural quality, somewhat akin to witchcraft, behind this mysterious terror. While, of course, none of us believe that sort of thing, neither did we previously believe that a small man could tear marble slabs to pieces with his bare hands."*

With that cheering statement to keep imaginative listeners up for the rest of the night, the newscaster said that the station would be on the air again as soon as any new developments were reported. The man in the plastic mask shut off the radio. He grunted with unconcealed pleasure.

"The apelike man will lead his posse here," he sneered. "He will show them where he last saw Doc Savage, apparently a helpless prisoner. And when the posse searches the sunken forest they will find nothing that will answer any of their problems. We will leave land mines that will take some lives. The survivors will know that Savage is creating a new wave of terror."

He laughed raucously.

"Come," he said. "We have no time to waste. The apelike chemist will no doubt use a plane to get here quickly."

THE trip to the small dock was made in silence. There had been ten of the mindless ones before the one tying Renny had fallen victim to the weird, aging death. Now there were only nine. They were dim shapes in the gloom that preceded a murky, cloud-ridden fall dawn. The leader broke the silence.

"This stronghold has served its purpose," he said, as if to himself. "While we were experimenting, it was a good, concealed proving ground."

The ratty thug with the submachine gun crashed through the underbrush. With him were three other gunmen who seemed to take their orders from the rat-faced one.

"Where do we go now, boss?" he asked.

The man in the plastic mask handed him a slip of paper.

"This address will serve for temporary headquarters," he said. "We will then purchase a small yacht which will become a floating center of activity."

They reached the dock then. A forty-five-foot bridge-deck cruiser was moored there now. The party climbed aboard. The craft had a good, seaworthy beam and plenty of room. The cabin lights were kept out. The masked leader used a flashlight to inspect his passenger list. Only he could be certain just who or how many were aboard. When he had checked the list to his satisfaction, he ordered Rolf Nordstrom to cast off the lines. The engine hookup permitted one-man control of the cruiser. The masked man took the wheel and throttle.

In the bridge-deck cabin with the leader were his particularly prized prisoners. Doc and his three aids were there. So, also, were Ingrid and Rolf Nordstrom. Doc Savage had come aboard following specific

orders as had the rest of the mindless monsters. His reactions seemed to provide special delight for the crime boss. He started to chuckle and gloat every time his eyes rested on the bronze man.

"This is one raid that really will be led by Doc Savage," he rasped. Then he looked more closely at the bronze man. He let out a long, vicious stream of oaths without repeating himself.

Sweat again stood out on Doc Savage's forehead. Slowly, Doc seemed to wilt. Consciousness again left him, a manifestation of some mental battle going on in his subconscious mind.

"Tie him up," the masked one snapped to Rolf Nordstrom. "Unless he snaps out of that, we'll have to use the double again. I'm afraid somebody who really knows the bronze man might get wise, in time."

There was no further conversation on the trip across Great South Bay. Dawn was breaking as the sleek cruiser pulled into the town of Bay Shore. Bay Shore is more heavily populated than most of the surrounding municipalities. The arrival of a cruiser in any of its several creeks that run almost to the main street from the bay would cause no special attention at all. It was a quite-ordinary occurrence.

There was a boathouse with a slightly overhanging roof beside the dock at which the cruiser tied up. Three machines stood on the dock. Two of them were pleasure vehicles, light fast sedans. The other was a good-sized truck bearing the name of a well-known bakery. It was a truck that apparently had legitimate business being abroad so early in the morning. There would be no reason to suspect it at all.

A man, dimly visible in the early light of dawn, leaped from the cab of the truck. As he came closer, Ingrid Nordstrom gasped. At a little distance, particularly in the uncertain light, the man seemed a dead ringer for Doc Savage! It was also immediately apparent from the man's plodding, mechanical gait, that he was under the spell of the mindless monsters.

The other mindless ones in the forward cabin of the cruiser marched out and into the body of the truck. Long Tom, Ham and Renny walked along behind them. At the order of the masked leader, they carried the limp, unconscious form of Doc.

The four murder-for-hire thugs got into one of the sedans. Ingrid Nordstrom and the leader got into the other. Between them there was another figure, scarcely visible in the gloom. The two sedans were the first to leave the dock. The fake bakery truck followed. Rolf Nordstrom drove. The false Doc Savage stayed hidden inside the car. The two men seemed both to be in charge of the expedition. It was apparent that the masked leader was not going to be seen in the assault upon the bank.

The truck had a fast, powerful motor. It roared along at nearly seventy miles an hour. The business buildings of Jamaica made a jagged horizon in the early morning sky as the car of robbery and death rolled into the Queens suburb.

THE bank was on a wide street in the business section of Jamaica. At that hour, very few vehicles were in evidence. Half a block from the bank, a sedan was parked. It was the one in which the masked crime master had left Bay Shore. Apparently, he was going to be certain that operations started as he had planned them. The masked head stuck out of the open window, watched the bakery truck brake to a halt before the bank.

The bronze-haired, bronze-skinned figure climbed mechanically from the truck then, seemed to pause to issue orders to others. Doc Savage's three aids came out next. Then the rest of the mindless ones. Rolf Nordstrom stood near the wheel of the machine, gave directions to some of the others.

Then the siege began. It was apparently calculated to inspire terror as much as to get funds from the bank. The leader of the mindless monsters had said that he wanted a situation so loaded with terror that extortion would be merely a matter of expressing a desire for money.

The bronze figure in the lead hauled out high explosive bombs given him by the master mind. These he hurled at the doors of the bank. A rending explosion shattered the early-morning quiet. The outer door of the bank crashed from its hinges.

Two watchmen charged out of the bank, their guns blazing. The bronze man was so close to them that they didn't have a chance to really take aim at all. With incredible strength, the straw boss of the mindless monsters picked up a watchman with each hand. The two men struggled briefly; kicked like rabbits caught in snares. Then their struggles ceased. They were limp burdens when the bronzed man put them down on the pavement.

Meanwhile, others of the fantastic crew ripped into the bank, tore bars apart as if they were matchwood. There was another tremendous explosion, muffled somewhat this time by the confining walls of the building. The alarm bell jangled in the street. But the ear-shattering explosion drowned it out.

TNT had shattered the main vault door. Mindless men were inside, scooping up currency. By that time, police sirens wailed in the distance. Also by that time the sedan of the master mind was nowhere to be seen. Apparently, he was not concerned about what might happen to the mindless ones. Doc Savage had learned that the mindless monsters, if they returned to normalcy, had no recollection of what they had done or who had told them to do it.

Two police cars roared around the corner, rubber screaming. Cops leaped out, began to blaze away with riot guns. Four of the mindless ones stalked ploddingly up to the nearest police car. One of them was struck in a vital spot by a police bullet. That one dropped, apparently wounded mortally. The other three, bleeding from gaping flesh wounds, smashed into the car. One ripped the top off. The other two reached in and seized the two police officers with hands of merciless strength. The cops screamed—at first. Then they were silent in death.

Other mindless ones turned over the second police car. The cops in that one, fortunately for them, were pinned under the smashed machine and could not get out. The looting of the bank finished, the bronzed man and Rolf Nordstrom yelled at the mindless helpers to get back into the truck. Like a pack of hunting dogs, the automatons obeyed. Ham, Renny and Long Tom were among them. Their role had seemed mainly to be present and identified in the gang. That, apparently, was the strategy of the master crook.

Rolf Nordstrom still drove the truck. It roared around a corner and out of sight about fifteen seconds before a third police car reached the scene. An officer of the bank had been called out of bed. He and the cops from the newly arrived patrol made a quick preliminary check on the damage.

The score was two policemen killed, two injured; one of the mindless monsters dead, with a bullet through the heart; thirty thousand dollars stolen from the bank vault. The two bank guards, peculiarly, were merely shaken up.

All the cops got was that score. The bakery truck seemed to have vanished.

## **Chapter XVI. MIXTURE FOR MONK**

THE police commissioner of New York was the official head of the posse that Monk and Johnny were to escort to the sunken forest on Fire Island. There were nineteen other representative men beside the

commissioner and Doc's two aids.

There were bankers, lawyers, industrialists and one big-game hunter in the roster. All were men of known integrity and bravery. They all got to the Hidalgo warehouse on the West Side within a few minutes after the decision reached by the governor downtown.

Monk was warming up the twin radials of the amphibian transport when the posse members arrived. Johnny was checking on gas and oil. There was little conversation as the men took their places. They had brought a variety of weapons along. There was everything from an elephant gun to a pair of old-fashioned horsepistols.

The hairy chemist nodded to Johnny that he was ready. The police commissioner stood in the alleyway that connected the control cockpit with the main cabin of the big plane. Johnny pointed an infrared flashlight at a round bull's-eye near the river-side wall of the big building. There was the faint rumble of well-oiled machinery. A huge section of the wall slid back, controlled by the automatic machinery set in motion by the infrared photo-electric cell.

Monk fed gas to the motors. The ship moved smoothly down the apron on wheels that protruded from twin pontoons. Then she struck the water. As Monk opened the throttle to give her take-off power, the big doors closed automatically behind them. In another thirty seconds, the big ship soared gracefully over the early-morning river traffic and headed almost due east.

Monk turned the wheel over to Johnny then. With the police commissioner, he went back into the main cabin. Monk then explained to the entire group just what sort of terrain they would find and what he expected to do. His description of the sunken forest brought surprised glances from most of the posse members. They didn't know that such a natural phenomenon existed less than fifty miles from New York.

"I'm going to use gas," Monk said. "It's a new anaesthetic type that Doc has developed. It'll put everything it contacts to sleep, but won't hurt them any."

Monk did not add that he had a substantial part in the development of the gas. The idea had been Doc's, but a big percentage of the work was done by the hairy chemist.

By the time Monk had finished talking to the group, the big plane was over Fire Island. Johnny, at the controls, flashed a signal for Monk. The chemist raced up to the cockpit. Johnny put the plane down low and dropped a flare to get wind direction. Then he began a methodical crisscross of the sunken forest area. Monk twisted dials on two light compression tanks that were strapped to the floor. There was a hissing noise as gas rushed out of pressure nozzles.

After about twenty minutes of that, Johnny put the plane down near the shore on Great South Bay. Some of the posse members complained that they should have brought gas masks.

"The stuff dissipates its power after a few minutes," Monk told them. "But the effect, if breathed during that time, will last quite a while."

There was some desultory conversation as Johnny and Monk led the others into the sunken forest. Then the weird effect of the blue fluorescence upon the foliage had an effect of choking off conversation. Aside from the careful footsteps of the men, the forest was silent. It seemed to be entirely deserted. Then there was a sound. It was a snoring noise. Sort of a two-tone snore.



MONK and Johnny drew superfiring machine pistols from their pockets and advanced slowly. Suddenly Monk began to grin. The reason for the two-tone snore was quickly apparent. One tone was Habeas Corpus. The other was Chemistry. The two animals had been left behind when the mindless monsters had been taken to Long Island.

The police commissioner was crouching behind Monk. He snorted in disgust.

"So far, this is only a pig hunt," he growled. "I hope you can deliver something."

Monk did not reply. He bent over Habeas, took a hypodermic from his pocket and administered an antidote for the gas. He did the same thing with Chemistry. Both animals recovered quickly. The police commissioner continued making uncomplimentary remarks about the pig hunt they seemed to have gotten into. But suddenly, Habeas Corpus began to squeal angrily. He nipped the police commissioner by one ankle, tried to stop him from continuing on the path he was using.

The official drew back one foot, as if to kick the offending hog. Monk stopped him.

"Wait a minute," he argued. "Habeas heard someone say something that makes him think you shouldn't go down that path."

The commissioner was indignant.

"Humph! An educated pig, I presume."

Monk admitted that. He told the official that Habeas understood a lot of conversation. The commissioner was about to push on anyway, when Chemistry came scuttling out of the bushes where he had disappeared a few seconds before. The monkey carried an armful of rocks. He put these down and began pegging them one at a time down the trail on which the commissioner had been walking. A land mine exploded.

The detonation was so close that the concussion knocked every man in the party off his feet. The police commissioner went head foremost into a rambler-rose vine. It did things to his features. But it must have occurred to him that if it hadn't been for Habeas' warning, he wouldn't have had any features. The commissioner was bleeding. But he was also grateful.

THEY determined that there were no members of the gang in the woods. At Monk's suggestion, the group headed for the cave where Monk and Ding Ding Corvestan had found Doc Savage bound to the stone slab. They made their way cautiously, laying down a barrage of stones before venturing on untried ground.

Three more land mines were discovered that way. Each went up with a tremendous roar and a shower of rocks, trees and shrubbery. The master of the mindless monsters did not display a disposition of exactly humanitarian qualities.

Monk finally led the way into the cave. No living soul was in the place. There was only the dried-up and shriveled corpse of the man who had been a monster of strength until life went out of him in a tired, used-up puff of breath.

Half a dozen members of the posse inspected the body. The police commissioner was strolling around the cavern.

"Looks like somebody was playing Indian," he grunted.

At that remark, both Johnny and Monk leaped toward the commissioner. That sounded like a message from Doc.

And it was. Scratched in the stone slab with some sort of a sharp instrument, was an inscription in Mayan, the Central American Indian tongue that is known only to a small handful of civilized men. The message told Monk and Johnny that Doc had heard over the radio that they were leading a posse. It told about the Jamaica bank job that was planned. And it gave Monk some quite specific instructions. They were of a chemical nature, and made Monk gasp.

The police commissioner looked quickly at the hairy chemist.

"What d'you make of it?" he demanded.

"Sure looks like Indian writing," Monk evaded. One stipulation of the message was that Monk and Johnny should be alone when they performed the task that Doc had mentioned.

The portable radio was still on the ledge in the cave. The police chief turned it on. He was impatient for action. The trip to the sunken forest had been a washout, even if they had nearly been blown up by land mines. The newscaster was on the air when the tubes of the little radio warmed up. He was all excited. He had all the details of the Jamaica bank robbery.

Monk took advantage of the interruption of the radio to ask Johnny a question without being overheard.

"Do you suppose Doc was in his right mind when he wrote those instructions?"

Big Johnny fingered his monocle nervously.

"A difficult circumstance to comprehend," he said. "I scarcely—"

The nervous pitch of the newscaster's voice caught their attention then. He was giving the casualty score on the robbery. Another of the policemen had died by that time. That made it three cops, one of the monsters and two watchmen shaken up.

Monk looked suddenly at Johnny.

"Let's get going," he whispered. Johnny nodded. He cleared his throat, preparatory to delivering some argument for moving the posse to other points. The police commissioner saved him the trouble.

"Let's get out of here!" he growled. "We're just wasting time."

"Yeah," Monk agreed with him. "Maybe you'd like to take a look at that Jamaica job."

The commissioner brightened. That was more down his alley. The sunken forest made him jumpy.

"This place gives me the willies," he said. "I'm sorry there isn't anything we can do about Doc Savage. But you fellows have done your part."

What he meant was that Doc Savage was still a fugitive from justice, so far as he was concerned. The bronze man had been seen again in the Jamaica job. There had been some talk that a double might have been used to involve Doc in the thing. Privately, the police commissioner hoped that was so.

But the clincher came out of the radio with a suddenness that dispelled all doubt among the members of that posse.

*"Fingerprints found on the door of the wrecked safe in the Jamaica bank match those left with*

*the F.B.I. by Doc Savage. There is no doubt now that the bronze man who led the raid really was Doc Savage."*

THERE was little conversation on the way back to the amphibian. The only topic of conversation anyone could think about was Doc Savage. And Monk and Johnny looked unhappy enough now without heaping any more coals on the fire. Monk took the controls and lifted the big ship up over the bay.

Over Jamaica, Monk lowered the landing wheels through the pontoons. He went into a long glide, set the plane down on a golf course not far out of the business center. Doc's two aids declined to accompany the posse members to the scene of the crime. They said they thought it would be better for the official law-enforcement agencies to check up there. They all got out. Chemistry and Habeas were locked in the plane.

Four taxicabs took the twenty men away. A fifth taxi took Monk and Johnny as fast as it could over another street. Johnny spoke.

"If we can catch Doc before he has another relapse, things may work out all right."

"I still can't figure it out," Monk said. "If anyone but Doc had left those directions, I'd have said he was nuts."

The cab screeched to a stop on a side street scarcely a mile from the Jamaica bank. Monk told the driver to wait. Then he got out, followed closely by Johnny. On the second floor of an unimpressive building, Monk maintained an experimental laboratory in Queens. Many times during their attempts to solve some criminal menace, Monk's regular lab in downtown New York had been the target of gangsters' guns. The existence of the little laboratory in Queens was a secret which the bronze man and his five aids shared with no one else.

Johnny did not bother Monk with conversation while the hairy chemist worked. Once in a laboratory, Monk moved with a swift smoothness and a precision that was really something to watch. He took out vials, test tubes, mortar and pestle. In an unbelievably short time, Monk was going full blast in mixing some concoction from half a dozen chemicals; some well-known, others extremely rare. Johnny wandered about the room giving an impression of having all day with nothing to do. It gave the appearance that the long, thin man was not much interested in anything Monk was doing and didn't intend to become so. Actually, Johnny was seething to get moving and find Doc Savage.

Finally, Monk was through. He pocketed a large vial of greenish liquid and a heavy hypodermic syringe.

"Let's go," he said. "We're set."

Johnny was so worried about Doc that he forgot to use any words longer than necessary. At the moment, he didn't use any. He just followed Monk out to the cab. Monk gave the driver the address of the bank that had been held up.

"Do you think it will work?" Johnny asked then.

Monk shrugged.

"Haven't any idea," he said. "It's a new technique and a new theory."

Worry showed in the little eyes of the chemist. His words and actions showed that he was up against something that was almost too big for him.

"How long is it since that bank job was pulled?" he wanted to know. Johnny looked at his watch.

"Almost two hours," he said.

Monk grunted. The frown of worry deepened.

"Doc said in his message that he didn't think he could hold the thing off for much more than that length of time at a stretch."

There was an atmosphere of tension in the cab as it turned down. Monk observed that they knew Doc had been in his right mind when the bank job had been pulled. The two guards would have been killed if anyone else in the raiding party had got to them. Doc's two aides had recognized that touch in the first news report of the robbery. Instead of killing or maiming, the bronze man had simply put them to sleep by proper pressure on a nerve center.

Monk suddenly stiffened in the seat. They were on the same street with the bank.

"Around the next corner," the chemist shrilled.

Around the corner there was a small park with half a dozen benches. On one of the benches a nondescript figure was huddled. The man's entire frame shook, as if fever had turned to a sudden, racking chill. Monk and Johnny left the cab, strode quickly to the quaking figure. The man's face was buried in his hands, as if he wished to keep the glare of day from his eyes.

Johnny stood directly in front of the obvious derelict, cut off view from that direction. Monk sat down on the bench beside the man, lifted his face from his hands. The face was that of Doc Savage. It was lined with evidence of terrific strain. Doc's lips were compressed. He stared, only half seeing, when Monk spoke to him. The gold-flaked eyes gave just a spark of life, then began to glaze, flat and lusterless.

Monk heaved a sigh. He had his instructions to the letter. Doc had said he would try to be somewhere near the bank. They would have to figure on some last-minute disguise. Monk took out the hypodermic, filled it full of greenish liquid from the vial. Then he shot the needle between two of Doc's ribs, near the heart. Half a cupful of the liquid entered the bronze man's system.

Both Johnny and Monk held onto Doc then. Giant muscles strained, as if a Herculean task confronted them. Monk put one hand on Doc's forehead, gasped.

"Betcha he's running a hundred and two," he muttered.

In the next moment, Doc's forehead felt icy-cold. Then the shaking began to subside. A more normal color came back to the skin. The mighty muscles relaxed. When Doc spoke then, it was in the musical, compelling tones that were normal for him.

"Thank you, Monk. I do not believe there is much time left."

Monk's homely face was wreathed in a smile of happiness. He'd been pretty scared that this thing might not work.

"What do you mean, Doc? How could you figure the time?"

"The master mind was right back in the cave when he said he feared my hypnotic trance may have weakened his power to control my mind," Doc said. "I found that I could successfully fight off obeying his will for short periods, even while conscious and not in the trance of hypnotism. But the danger was great. I so weakened my own will, fighting the thing, that I could not bring about autohypnosis again. I would

become a mindless monster."

Sweat stood out on Monk's face. The prospect horrified him.

"I still don't know what it's all about," he complained. "I made the stuff up as you directed. But I still don't know exactly what it does."

Doc Savage stood up. Instead of answering Monk's question, he mentioned the speed with which time was escaping them. Monk leaped to his feet.

"Criminy!" he grunted. "Ham is one of those things. And we've got to get him out. Ham and Long Tom and Renny."

They moved quickly toward the taxicab which was still waiting. The driver was a bit curious. But he hadn't seen much of what had gone on. Johnny had stood in such a position as to cut off his view. Doc wore an old duster and a slouch hat. Both of them he had found in the fake bakery truck that had brought the mindless monsters from Bay Shore.

"I suppose we'd better go right over to Manhattan," Monk said. "Unless Rutledge has got a place in Queens where he might hole up."

Doc Savage smiled slightly, gave the driver an address in Queens. As the cab jolted forward, Doc sketched in a little of what he suspected.

## **Chapter XVII. END OF THE MONSTERS**

"THERE was so much handy evidence against Rutledge that it looked like a frame-up, Doc said. "Also the really basic motive indicates a plot against Rutledge."

Monk was about to ask him what that was when the cab roared down a street in Long Island City. It came to a halt beside a vacant lot. This lot was not the same one in which Rocky Emben had been shot down. It was one block away, ran from the street to the back door of Merwin Malo's apothecary shop; the door through which Jacob Ringle, the bank president had gone ultimately to his death as a mindless monster.

On the other side of the street there was a fenced-in area that had been a coal yard. The fence now bore no name. Doc nodded toward it.

"I believe we may find what we are seeking around here," he said.

Monk and Johnny were on the curb side of the taxi. They were therefore the first ones out of the cab. Johnny's appearance caused no commotion. None of the mindless monster leaders had seen Johnny. But they did know Monk.

A staccato roar burst out from a square hole that suddenly appeared in the fence. The ratty face of the head gunman of the sunken forest on Fire Island showed through the small square door. Monk and Johnny whirled around, whipped out their superfirers. The machine gun chattered again. Ratface must have been excited. If he hadn't been, he would have realized the two men were wearing bulletproof underwear, a device that Doc had made quite famous. Slugs struck so hard that Monk and Johnny weaved slightly as they walked. But aside from a few bruises from the force of impact, they were unhurt.

Monk dived for the edge of the fence.

"Get close to the fence, Johnny!" he yelled. "The guy won't be able to fire then without sticking his head out."

Johnny took the advice. He dived, landed beside Monk. Doc's voice came to them. They could hear it. But they couldn't see Doc.

"Use incendiary bullets on the fence," Doc advised. "We will burn them out into the open."

Monk and Johnny shifted ammo drums.

A high shed ran along one side of the old coal yard. Doc Savage stood below that for a moment. A thin silk cord came from one pocket. On each end of the cord there was a tiny grappling hook made from tooled steel. The cord looked scarcely stronger than a light fishline.

Doc swung the end of the line around his head a couple of times. Then it shot upward, caught on the edge of the high shed roof. In another half dozen seconds, the bronze man was on the roof.

Redoubled sounds of shooting burst out as Doc moved swiftly over the roof. Cries of rage and fear came from the yard below. Smoke was billowing up from the fence in two places. Monk and Johnny were making good with the incendiary bullets.

There was pandemonium within the inclosure. Doc could see the masked leader of the mindless monsters. He was surrounded by his charges. Nearby were Ham, Renny and Long Tom. Doc's three aids stared vacantly at the flames now curling up from the base of the fence. The masked leader stood above a recumbent and tightly bound figure. From a distance, it looked exactly like Doc Savage. The masked leader seemed to be trying to make up his mind about something. Finally, he leaned down close to the figure that was bound.

Doc dropped lightly inside the fence. He hugged the shadows of the wall, moved forward on silent feet. Ahead of him, he saw Ingrid Nordstrom trying to hold her brother back. Rolf Nordstrom was surging toward the blazing fence. He did not seem to fear the fire, or anything else, for that matter.

The only persons within the enclosure who did seem to fear the fire were the four professional killers with the submachine guns. As the flames crackled higher, the scream of sirens sounded in the distance. Ratface let out a yell.

"I ain't goin' to stay here and fry!" he yelled. He whirled around, whipped up the machine gun to give a leaden kiss to anyone who tried to stop his exit. The other three gunmen joined him. The masked man yelled to his mindless ones. Without hesitation, they hurled themselves upon the machine gunners.

The guns racketed like a dozen racing cars all backfiring at once. The guns literally cut two of the men in halves. Others dropped, mortally wounded.

Doc Savage, meanwhile, had stolen quietly to his men. His first thought was to free them from the terrible power that robbed them of their minds but gave them amazing strength. Renny was the closest one to Doc. The bronze man had taken the vial of greenish liquid and the hypodermic from Monk. He shot home the needle.

"Holy cow!" Renny grumbled. "I must have been asleep."

The big engineer rubbed his eyes in astonishment. He started to ask where he was. But when he saw Doc, he changed his mind. The bronze man did not seem to have time to answer questions. Doc brought Long Tom back to normalcy next. The unhealthy-looking electrical wizard displayed as much surprise as had Renny.

Doc Savage didn't have an opportunity to free Ham right at that moment. The four machine gunners got away from the mindless monsters who had not been killed. They plunged through a gaping, burning hole in the fence. Then a different sound filled the air. It was the low, bull-fiddle moan of the superfiring machine pistols. Monk and Johnny had evidently changed back to mercy bullets. The hired killers seemed to grow weary as they staggered into the street carrying their Tommy-guns. One by one, they lay down and went to sleep.

Doc Savage turned then, just as Monk and Johnny rushed in. He did not see Ham, the mindless automaton, start for Monk.

The masked leader of the mindless ones had screamed in rage as his gunners walked out on him. The rage turned to fear when he saw the superfirers of Monk and Johnny cut the gunmen down like so much wheat. The masked man bent down over the bound form below him. He cut the bonds, swiftly.

"Go after your own men, damn you!" he rasped. "Kill them. Every one!"

The bronze man got uncertainly to his feet. Apparently, the directions were not clear to him. The masked one looked uncertainly at the bronzed man before him. Then he peered into the eyes. He saw then that the eyes were not flake-gold in color. The masked one screamed.

"Y-you . . . you . . . he changed places with you!" Then he turned, saw Doc Savage. A hideous laugh crawled from the lips of the plastic mask. The masked one twisted to look once more at the fake Doc Savage. Then that weird laugh came again.

"He developed it, and now it's going to get him. I've just given him the fatal dose, the dose that burns the body to an ancient crisp! I thought he was really Doc Savage!"

The false Doc Savage was moving mechanically. But there was something in that statement about the fatal dosage that seemed to cut through the sluggish mental processes of the man.

Slowly, the robot of a human swung around. The vacant, expressionless face tightened slightly. A suspicion of a snarl came from his lips. Slowly, but with the deadly precision of a machine that has been set to do a given job, he advanced toward the masked one.

A sudden, piercing scream came from the latter.

"Stop! Stop!" he begged. "I didn't mean to give it to you. I thought you were Doc. I thought you had gone back to your own identity after the bank job, to throw off pursuit."

The mindless one kept moving toward him. Words came dully from his lips, a repetition without intonation.

"You gave *me* the fatal dose! You gave me the fatal dose!"

The only accent was on the word *me*.

The masked leader screamed in genuine terror as the figure drew closer. He began to run. The false Doc Savage began to run then, too. Doc, himself, plunged after the fleeing pair. He might have been able, with an instant injection of the green fluid, to avert the catastrophe that was coming.

But the masked one darted quickly to a trapdoor in the ground that was concealed by a covering of loose dirt. He darted down that, and his doomed confederate leaped to follow. The trapdoor slammed behind him. It apparently locked on the inside with an automatic catch.

Big-fisted Renny came over to help Doc. They struggled with the door. It was several minutes before it would come free. Doc handed the hypodermic syringe to Renny.

"I'm afraid it's too late, now," Doc said. Then he went down through the trapdoor.

ROLF NORDSTROM broke away from his sister as Monk and Johnny came through the fence. Rolf headed for Monk. There was a queer mixture of understanding and blank idiocy in Nordstrom's eyes. He extended hands that were made strong by the weird force of the mindless monsters.

Monk hosed a spray of mercy bullets at the onrushing man. Rolf swayed. The mercy slugs did not take full effect. But they slowed the man. A second burst of the anaesthetic shells made him sit down where he was. Either Rolf was not as completely under the mindless monster influence as usual, or he was becoming so accustomed to it that a greater amount of the treatment would be needed to get him in control.

Monk turned from Rolf to find himself confronted with a new menace. Ham, glassy-eyed and heavy of tread, marched mechanically toward the hairy chemist. No expression appeared on his face.

"Doc! Oh, Doc! Help!" Monk yowled.

He rushed to use his superfirer on the advancing attorney. He looked frantically around him. Renny and Long Tom were tying up the gangsters, who were sleeping off the effects of the mercy bullets. Johnny was poking at the trap door through which Doc had disappeared in pursuit of the masked leader and the fake bronze man.

Monk backed up from Ham and wailed.

"You danged shyster! I can't even slug you now. It ain't fair, daggone it!"

Ham moved relentlessly up to Monk, reached out tense fingers. Monk gave up. He went limp.

"Get Doc!" he implored. "Doc! Help!"

Ham pushed the chemist onto the ground and promptly sat on him.

MEANWHILE Doc Savage discovered that a tunnel led from the ancient coal yard to the cellar of Merwin Malo's store. The master mind and the doomed man had raced down that tunnel. Doc followed. In the cellar of Malo's store, he found them. It was too late to do anything about it. The mask was off, showing the pointed nose and weak chin of Ding Ding Corvestan. The hands of the false bronze man had twisted Ding Ding's skinny neck until it looked like a piece of bumpy rubber stretched tighter than it should go. Ding Ding was dead.

The false bronzed man swung around then, saw Doc Savage. Foam flecked the lips of the doomed man. Fear of a certain death brought a semblance of understanding to his eyes. Sweat stood out on his face. Nervously, he ran one hand over his face and through his hair. The wig came off, baring hair that was pale-blond. Grease paint make-up began to run, revealed the pale features of Merwin Malo.

His hands clenched and unclenched as he moved toward Doc. His motions were somewhat those of a man wading upstream against a swift current. He almost reached the bronze man. Then that sudden lack of power, that weird effect of the waving of the blowtorch of time swept over Merwin Malo. There was



one agonizing, fleeting flash of terror in his eyes. One phrase escaped his lips.

"Rex Superol!" Malo croaked.

Then his skin turned gray. Wrinkles appeared in his face. His shoulders stooped, as if with age. Merwin Malo grew old, and died. Doc Savage knew now that the greenish-fluid antidote was worthless to combat the tremendous dosage of Rex Superol that Malo had gotten. For Doc knew, also, the name and nature of the fearsome drug that controlled the mindless monsters.

There was one other figure in the cellar of the drugstore. That was platinum-haired, red-faced Romley Rutledge. The young utilities executive was lashed tightly to a chair. He was also gagged. As Doc Savage released him, he began to talk fluently. He told Doc many things that the bronze man already knew, and some that he suspected.

"Corvestan always had a persecution complex," he said. "He really believed that my association stole his little traction company. In fact, we paid him a good stiff price. He could have retired on it, had he not spent the whole thing in lawyers' fees trying to invalidate the contract. The persecution complex again."

Doc nodded.

"And you kept your mouth shut about what you knew because you and Miss Nordstrom were trying to get her brother away from Corvestan's control."

Romley Rutledge smiled slightly.

"Yes," he agreed. "Ding Ding kept Rolf alive to have a hold over Ingrid and therefore over me. Besides, Ding Ding was in love with Ingrid; as much as a madman like that can be in love."

Rutledge looked at Doc then, a question in his eyes.

"Just what was the stuff that made the mindless monsters?"

"I think it started with Merwin Malo's habit of mixing up quack nostrums and experimenting with them. Added to that was the fact that Corvestan, a mental case since he lost his business, was always afflicted with headaches. Between the two of them, they developed what they thought was a world-beating pep producer.

"It was something like the effect of benzedrine. There the Nazi air force uses some such drug to make it possible for dive-bomber pilots to stand up under the terrific punishment they get. This one speeded up the physical processes to the point where a man who could, say, lift a hundred pounds twenty times in an hour, would be able to lift twenty hundred pounds in a single pull by concentrating the lifting power of an hour into one unit of a few seconds. The drug then called on more advance power. A real overdose of the drug concentrated so much strength output that the victim actually aged and died as you have seen them.

"I don't know just what they were after. I suppose at first they were just out to get me, because Ding Ding figured I was a bitter enemy, but when they saw the power they had in their concoction, they were ready to make the whole world pay for protection."

"What's the Rex Superol?" Rutledge wanted to know.

"That apparently was Malo's name for the nostrum without the drug that creates the mindless monsters. He sells it that way and as such it is merely an ordinary headache powder."

DOC rose then and strode up the steps into the drugstore and out of the back door. Romley Rutledge followed him. The fence around the old coal yard was almost entirely burned away. Fire apparatus had arrived. Neither the four gunmen, Rolf Nordstrom, nor any of the mindless monsters who had been alive were in sight. Johnny and Long Tom were standing near the fake bakery truck. Doc Savage nodded in understanding.

On the ground near where the fence had been, Monk was still spread-eagled. He looked something like the red fur rug that Ham had frequently threatened he would make of him. The lawyer, a blank stare in his eyes, was perched on top of the recumbent Monk, like a well-dressed crow sitting on a rail. Monk let out a wail when he saw the bronze man.

"Criminy, Doc! Give this guy some of that antidote. I'm getting tired of this."

Doc Savage looked mildly surprised.

"Why, I gave the antidote to Renny some time ago."

Monk began to yell.

"Why, you big bag of bones, what're you holding out on me for? Why don't you give this scarecrow the antidote and get him off of me."

Renny's puritanical face almost smiled.

"I did give it to him," he said in his hollow voice. "Before you tangled with him."

Monk let out a yell like a Comanche Indian who is in the process of having his scalp lifted. The hairy chemist sat up abruptly. He bounded to his feet and started after Ham who was then running.

"You cheating shyster! You snake in the grass! You . . . you—"

Monk's face got red. Most of the things he really wanted to call Ham he choked on. He couldn't say them with a girl present. Not a girl as pretty as Ingrid Nordstrom. He compromised by grabbing Ham by the neck and starting to wring it.

"Be a gentleman," Ham yelled. "She likes gentlemen."

Monk dropped Ham. It seemed like a good idea.

"How about dinner tonight?" he asked the girl.

Ingrid smiled at Monk. But she slipped her hand through Romley Rutledge's arm.

"Certainly," she told Monk. "If my fiancé can come along."

Monk got red again. He knew he was stuck.

"Hey, Doc," he yelled hopefully, "who's going to drive them fellows up to the college?"

"You are," Doc said.

Monk sighed. He liked to drive anyway. Those men would all come out of the college with no recollection of the past and no tendencies toward crime. Ingrid had agreed with Doc that her brother

should start out life anew. His own conscience would not make existence livable with the things on his mind that he had done as a mindless monster. Monk looked wistfully at the girl as she walked off with Romley Rutledge.

"Well," he grunted, "if I can't take her to dinner, I can at least take her brother for a ride."

He climbed into the truck.

THE END