



THE MAGIC FOREST

A Doc Savage Adventure by Kenneth Robeson

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Chapter I. WESTWARD FLIGHT

IT didn't start off with the Indian thing at first. That was discovered later. The little Indian with eyes like a Chinaman's was given to Doc Savage. But that was after Renny, one of the bronze man's aids, disappeared.

It all happened in a very ordinary manner but, in time, developed into quite a mystery.

Renny went to LaGuardia Field as the guest of Clarence Faulkner. Faulkner was a new member of the International Society of Master Engineers, of which Renny was a charter member.

Just recently, it was said, Clarence Faulkner had cleaned up almost a million dollars on the stock market. He had made it in airplane stocks, the rumor went. And, now, because of his new wealth, he had just become one of the directors of a company manufacturing a new stratosphere plane.

What Clarence Faulkner knew about engineering, or planes, for that matter, Renny didn't know. Little was known about Faulkner's past. But he had money, and money gets you places; so he had got into the society.

And being a member of the reception committee, big Renny had been asked to make the wealthy man

feel at home during his first few days in the engineering society. In turn, Clarence Faulkner had suddenly asked Renny to accompany him on this flight.

The two men made an incongruous-looking pair.

Renny—better known as Colonel John Renwick—was a giant of a fellow. He had a long, gloomy face that was like the expression of a man on his way to a funeral. Surprisingly, Renny always looked like this. The other strange thing about him was his hands. They were enormous, about the size of quart pails.

Clarence Faulkner was a mousy little man, well-dressed, and with a continual pleasant smile upon his rather ordinary features.

As the two men walked toward the mammoth silver plane, Clarence Faulkner kept saying things like, "Isn't it wonderful?" and "Oh, my!" as he observed the vastness of the airport and the continual arrival and departure of transport planes.

Renny commented, "Quite."

His voice sounded somewhat bored. It also sounded—each time he spoke—like the roar of a bear in a big cave. Renny's voice was like that. It rumbled. And Clarence Faulkner could not get over the habit of jumping a little every time the giant engineer spoke.

The two men reached the stratosphere plane and found attendants awaiting them. Men in regulation uniforms stood by the portable flight of steps used for boarding the big metal ship. A closed-off area of the field surrounded the ship.

One attendant said, "Everything is ready, gentlemen."

For a moment, Faulkner looked worried.

"You're sure," he asked, "that this new plane has been thoroughly tested for safety?"

An attendant nodded. "Naturally. You need have no fear."

Renny was already climbing the steps and ducking his massive form into the plane's cabin.

Clarence Faulkner followed, exclaiming, "Isn't this wonderful?" He was trying to smile, but looking frightened at the same time.

Other passengers were already seated. Renny had not been informed that there would be other guests aboard the trial flight. But he guessed the plane manufacturers had arranged it. There were half a dozen men in the comfortable leather seats.

A moment later, they took off.

THE flight was over Manhattan Island. The big ship climbed to ten thousand feet, leveled off at that altitude, and started a long, sweeping circle of greater New York.

Renny had had time to make a few observations.

Windows, doorways, every conceivable opening of the giant ship was sealed against the outside air. Inside, there was perfect air conditioning. Renny knew that, at greater altitudes, this hermetic-sealing process was for the benefit of passengers. They would feel no discomfort at high altitudes, where the air

was thin.

Everyone was sitting there, gazing out the windows at the panorama thousands of feet below.

Clarence Faulkner had lost some of his fear.

"Wonderful!" he said, smiling.

Renny hardly heard him. He had been observing two of the other passengers who were apparently intent on taking in the view.

Though the other passengers were well dressed, there was something about them that made Renny ponder. They were well-built, thickset men. They hardly had the kind of faces found on men who work in offices.

His glance strayed to a couple of others. He noted the heavy features, the blocky jaws. Funny, he thought.

Just then, one of the pilots came through a doorway that led to the cockpit of the plane. He said, "We'll show you the control part of the ship. We'll take a few at a time."

He motioned to some of the other passengers and three of them got up, moving forward and disappearing through the doorway. The door was closed behind them.

Shortly, the co-pilot appeared again and beckoned to the three remaining strangers. They, too, disappeared through the doorway.

Even little Clarence Faulkner noticed a thing that had occurred to Renny. He jumped up, demanded, "Say! What happened to those other three? Why haven't they come back? What about *us*?"

"That just occurred to me," Renny commented in his booming voice.

He, too, stood up.

Faulkner was ahead of him, moving forward toward the doorway of the pilots' compartment.

Suddenly, he paused, his hand fluttering toward his face. He gasped, "Oh! Gracious! What—"

Renny leaped back.

"Holy cow!" he boomed.

He had heard the tiny *putt* of a sound, had barely caught the flash of a small object coming through a small hole in the door. Clarence Faulkner got down on his hands and knees and appeared to be looking for something on the floor. But swiftly, he stopped doing that; he sprawled flat on his face and lay still.

"Holy cow!" Renny repeated, leaping toward the man. At the same time he heard another *putt*. He swerved, felt something tug at his coat sleeve. Renny saw the tiny dart that had not quite penetrated the cloth. His brain clicked.

He clutched his arm, put a contorted expression on his face and started staggering around the cabin.

Even as he swayed on his feet, Renny's heavy foot located and crushed down over the tiny dart that had fallen to the floor. He scuffed the fragments beneath a chair seat.

He had an idea that he was being watched from the cockpit. He let his eyes roll. He looked like a man ready to lose consciousness. But, at the same time, he was thinking of the dart that had caught Clarence Faulkner in the face.

It contained some kind of powerful drug or was poisoned!

Renny fell down. He sprawled across one of the cabin seats and lay very still.

The cockpit door opened.

Two of the "passengers" appeared. The others followed, including the man dressed as the co-pilot. All were big, powerful-looking individuals, though the co-pilot seemed a trifle bigger than the rest. All had leathery, sun-burned features, indicating they had spent much time outdoors.

The leader said, "Blamed if I know who this big fellow is, but it's just too bad he had to come along with Faulkner. Now, we'll have to take him along, too."

"We didn't figure on that," said someone.

"Of course not. It's just dumb luck."

The leader gave brief orders. "All right. Tie them both up." He stepped over Clarence Faulkner, yelled an order through the doorway. "All right, start this crate west."

THE plane came off its long, circular course and headed westward. Soon, New York was a vague blur in the distance.

Ropes had been brought into the cabin. Clarence Faulkner was securely tied hand and foot.

The men moved toward Renny, and one man grasped the giant engineer by the legs, to yank him to the floor and straighten him out for tying.

But Renny came off the seat as though he'd been exploded from a cannon. He came up with his massive fists swinging and his long face looking more gloomy than ever.

He started knocking men down!

Two men were hurled half the length of the cabin. Another was thrown up against the cockpit doorway, just as the man in co-pilot's uniform appeared there with some more lengths of rope.

The leader stared. "What the hell!" he exclaimed.

One of his assistants yelled a warning.

"Watch out! Trick! This big guy wasn't knocked out by the dart!"

The warning was hardly necessary. The leader could see for himself. He leaped in to help his partners.

It didn't seem possible that one man could hold out against seven. But Renny did—for a time.

His great hands pumped destruction. His fists looked like lumps of cement, properly hardened. Those fists now cracked jaws, and there were howls of pain.

Renny's face was more gloomy than ever, as it always was whenever he was in a fight.

Two of the men whom he had knocked down were up again, dazed, swaying toward him. They joined a concerted rush of some of the others.

Renny's powerful hands took hold of a cabin seat, ripped the chair from its fastenings and swung it in the air. The attackers were mowed down before him like wheat in a strong wind.

Renny dropped the chair and grabbed two assailants by the throat. He banged their heads against the metal cabin walls. There was cursing and shouting.

It was when the two-fisted engineer stumbled over Clarence Faulkner, still lying unconscious on the floor, that he was overpowered.

An attacker had raised a blackjack. He brought it down on the back of Renny's skull as the big engineer stumbled and pitched forward, striving to regain his balance.

The blow brought unconsciousness!

"WHEW!"

someone said with relief. "That guy sure can fight! Wonder who he is?"

The leader shrugged. "Some friend of Faulkner's, I suppose," he offered. He went around prodding limp figures with his foot. "Come on, you birds," he said harshly. "This ain't any holiday!"

They finally got Renny and Clarence Faulkner tied up. The captives were placed near the rear of the cabin.

One man was massaging his aching, swollen jaw. He glanced through a cabin window.

"Wonder where we are, now?" he wanted to know.

The leader grimaced. "What the hell difference does it make? Take it easy. It'll be a long time before we get there."

The men took seats and relaxed. They acted like passengers resigning themselves to a long journey.

The plane climbed higher and higher. The men were conscious of a funny feeling in their ears, as they mounted higher toward the stratosphere. It meant that they must be riding pretty high, because the sealing process was supposed to eliminate such trouble.

One man had been fumbling through his pockets. Abruptly, he swore. He stood up and started feeling around the seat cushion. Then he got down on the floor and peered beneath the chair.

"What's eating you?" someone prodded.

"Lost it!" said the searcher.

"Lost what, dope?"

"I've gone and lost my totem pole—and that's bad luck!"

Everyone started searching for the totem pole.

Chapter II. WHO IS NOME DALE?

THE unusual pair of fellows walking up and down at the edge of the huge city airport seemed to be searching for something, too. And one of them looked mighty disgusted about it.

This one was about as wide as he was tall. All visible parts of his body were covered with stubby, bristly hair the color of rusted shingle nails. He had a peculiar waddling gait, and his arms hung almost to his knees. He reminded one of a gorilla.

He muttered, "Dang that Renny, anyway! He told me to meet him here at five o'clock."

The lean-waisted, well-dressed man with him said, "There's a mechanic, Monk. Maybe he knows about that stratosphere plane."

Monk, the hairy-looking, apelike one, was really Lieutenant Colonel Andrew Blodgett Mayfair, a well-known chemist and an aid of Doc Savage. Behind his broad, flat forehead was concealed a brain that was second to none in the field of chemistry.

The slender, fashionably dressed man was Brigadier General Theodore Marley Brooks, better known as Ham to his friends. He was probably the most astute lawyer Harvard had ever turned out. Also, his afternoon garb was sartorial perfection, for Ham was perhaps the best-dressed man in New York.

Ham carried a black cane that he was seldom without. It was, among other things, a sword cane, tipped with a chemical that put its victims to sleep.

They had overtaken the plane mechanic. He was a powerful fellow with plenty of jaw.

Monk grabbed the man's arm and demanded, "Hey! What happened to that new stratosphere plane? It was due back here almost an hour ago!"

The mechanic gave Monk a frown.

"Look, wise guy, I ain't the information bureau. Go ask them in the office." He started to move on.

Monk, with a seemingly effortless motion, whirled the heavily built man around.

"You act like that," the hairy chemist snorted, "and you're gonna get hurt. I asked you—where's that plane?"

The man glared. And, yet, in his eyes was an expression which said he knew something but was not permitted to speak.

"You'll have to go to the office," he repeated.

Ham, always quick-thinking, ever tactful, stepped forward. "What this uncouth partner of mine is trying to tell you," he said smoothly, "is that a friend of ours was on the stratosphere plane. He is a member of the Doc Savage organization. We were a little worried—"

The mechanic jumped, swallowed something which seemed to stick in his throat, then gasped, "*Doc Savage?*"

"We are part of that organization," offered Ham.

The mechanic's eyes widened. "Well, then," he exclaimed, that's *different!*" And then, tensely, "Look, maybe I shouldn't be telling you—that is; you can get more details from them inside; but here's something

I know: That stratosphere plane has—well, it *hasn't* returned. They don't know what to think. It's disappeared!"

"Disappeared?" Monk piped shrilly. "Where?"

The mechanic shrugged. "That's what nobody can find out. It was last seen flying over Philadelphia, heading south. And that's all!"

Ham grabbed his hairy partner's arm and snapped, "Come on!"

They started toward a large building on one side of the field.

Inside, they located an official, drew him to one side, identified themselves, then fired questions.

But the official's words were no more revealing than the mechanic's. No, he didn't have any idea where the stratosphere plane was. It had not landed at any airport. It had not contacted this field or reported any trouble. It simply had not returned according to schedule. It had been last seen flying high over the city of Philadelphia.

Ham phoned Doc Savage.

Doc's orders were brief. They were to stay at the field a few more moments, try to pick up any further information, then return to headquarters. Especially, they were to question any attendants who had been present when the plane departed.

They went back toward the landing field.

THEY learned a surprising thing. All mechanics who had attended the take-off of the stratosphere plane had quit; walked off their jobs just half an hour ago! No one knew a thing about who had been present, or who had boarded the great ship just before it took the air.

To a ground attendant who had been nearby, Monk said, "Maybe that danged ship didn't take off at all! Maybe they made a mistake about seeing it over Philadelphia!"

But the man shook his head. "Come along," he offered. "I can show you right where it was."

Ham and Monk followed.

And they saw for themselves. They noted the tire tracks right there in the ground, where the massive ship had rolled down the field. They followed the tracks, shortly returned to the point where the attendant said he had seen the plane waiting before take-off.

It was there that Monk found the totem pole.

The object was less than four inches long. Carved out of cedar, its surface was an intricate array of gargoylike faces.

But at one end of the tiny pole—which would be the top if it was a real totem pole and standing upright—was the carved features of an Indian. An Indian's face. The eyes were somewhat slanted. They had a Mongolian cast.

Monk and Ham stared at the totem pole.

"What the heck!" the homely chemist muttered. He had turned the object around and was indicating something on the other half.

It was the carving of the likeness of an owl.

Monk demanded, "Who would ever own a thing like this?"

"It might be a good idea to show it to Doc," suggested the well-dressed lawyer. "It might mean something, and it might not. But it *could* have been dropped by someone boarding that stratosphere plane."

"Yeah," agreed Monk, though it was usually against his policy to ever agree with his dapper partner.

A few moments later they took a taxicab for Manhattan.

IN the library of the skyscraper headquarters of the bronze man's organization, Doc Savage said, "There are certain races of Indians who use the owl as an emblem of good luck. To them, the owl is sacred."

Doc Savage referred to the tiny totem pole which had been turned over to him by Monk.

"But this image of an Indian on the other side," said Monk, "looks something like a Chinaman! How about that, Doc?"

Doc Savage said, "Most Alaskan Indians have distinct Mongolian features."

"Alaska!" the chemist piped in his squeaky voice. "Blazes, if this gadget was dropped by somebody boarding that stratosphere plane, how could this be— Doc, that plane was seen flying *south*."

They were grouped about radio apparatus in one corner of the bronze man's vast laboratory. The array of equipment was remarkable, probably equaling anything ever found in any radio station.

And just a moment before discussion had turned to the totem pole of a thing, Doc Savage had been in contact with large airports from New York to Texas. He had picked up two definite reports concerning the stratosphere plane and now learned that the plane had been sighted near Galveston, Texas, headed south toward the Gulf of Mexico.

Doc made no reply to Monk's comment. His metallic features were thoughtful as he listened at the loudspeaker. In fact, his whole appearance was quite remarkable.

Standing alone, he would have appeared as a symmetrically built athlete of unusual bronze features and hair of a slightly darker hue.

But next to Monk and Ham, the bronze giant completely dwarfed the two aids. His entire physique denoted remarkable power and strength. His eyes, flake-gold in color, had compelling magnetic qualities. They stirred restlessly.

But his physical development was only a part of the bronze man's remarkable capabilities.

Doc Savage was known more for his fabulous mental ability, his uncanny mastery of electricity, chemistry, surgery and other professions. Also, almost everyone who had heard of Doc Savage knew that he practiced one of the most unusual professions in the world. Doc Savage was a modern Galahad. He went around mixing in other people's troubles, aiding the oppressed, righting wrongs, and meting out his special kind of justice to evildoers.

It was known that he had a limitless source of wealth for these activities that brought no profit.

Doc now turned the miniature totem pole over in his hand as he waited at the radio loudspeaker. For the past half-hour, Doc had been in continuous contact with various airports. But no further reports had come in about the stratosphere plane. Since being sighted over Texas, flying southward, it had completely vanished.

Ham looked worried.

Monk stalked up and down the laboratory, coming back at intervals to stand near the radio and listen.

They heard nothing.

Monk exclaimed, "Renny just went along on the flight as a guest. Faulkner did, too, for that matter. So why didn't the plane come back?"

Ham gave his burly partner a frigid look. "If we knew, you hairy ape, we wouldn't be sitting here waiting for some kind of report from the plane."

Monk went on, "But a plane, flying south, and a whatchamacallit thing from Alaska. It don't make sense!"

Doc said quietly, "There is a phone call. One of you had better take it."

A tiny bulb, observed by the bronze giant, had flickered in a panel on the laboratory wall. The light indicated that the telephone, in the library outside the lab, was ringing. Connection to the outer room had temporarily been cut off, while Doc Savage listened attentively at the loud-speaker.

Ham stepped outside to get the incoming call.

He was back in a moment, saying, "Doc, there's a man named Nome Dale coming up here to see you right away. I informed him it would be all right."

Monk frowned. "Look, shyster," he said, "you know that Doc only sees visitors by appointment, and then only after we've completely investigated their cases. What's the idea?"

The lawyer ignored his partner's remark. He spoke to Doc Savage.

"This Nome Dale says he knows something about Renny," Ham announced.

It developed that no one had ever heard of a young man named Nome Dale. Nevertheless, Ham had acted properly in granting the man an interview with Doc Savage. Anything that Nome Dale might know about Renny's whereabouts was quite important, at the moment.

They remained—Doc, Ham and Monk—at the loud-speaker while they awaited Nome Dale's arrival. No further news came from any airports. Apparently, no further traces had been found of the stratosphere plane.

Shortly, another panel light blinked, indicating that someone was at the reception-room door. The reception room faced on a wide hallway on this floor of the bronze man's skyscraper headquarters. Entrance to the private hallway was only by means of express elevators that came directly to Doc Savage's floor.

Monk and Ham hurried ahead to see if it was Nome Dale who had arrived. They passed through the library, a huge room lined with shelves containing books on every known subject.

The room beyond was the reception quarters, and it contained merely a few comfortable chairs and a massive inlaid table of handmade design. Ham's cane was lying on the table.

Also, two strange-looking pets, at the moment, appeared intent on doing a marathon around the reception room.

One animal was, in a way, a small-size reproduction of the homely chemist himself. It was a chimpanzee of questionable origin. The animal was fairly small, hairy, and its little eyes were almost lost in its homely face. Strangely, Monk's features had a similar pattern.

The chimp was named Chemistry and was Ham's pet. At the moment, it was scampering about the room, squealing loudly, chased by what looked like a runt pig.

The pig had ears, legs, and snout—more of these things than anything else. It made snorting sounds and kept nipping at various parts of the small chimps anatomy.

Monk howled. He shouted, "Get him, Habeas!"

For the pig was Habeas Corpus, Monk's own pet. The two animals were a constant source of trouble between the chemist and Ham.

Ham suddenly pushed the chemist aside and made a worried dive after his chattering pet. The two animals disappeared toward another part of the headquarters.

Behind the two aids, Doc said quietly, "It would be best to see who is at the door."

Ham opened the door.

The man who was standing there was young, had shoulders like a football player and was quite good-looking. His features had a rugged, healthy glow. He wore no hat, and his hair was almost straw-blond in color.

He said, still standing in the doorway, "I'm Nome Dale."

He hardly noticed Monk and Ham. He stared beyond them at Doc Savage, obviously recognizing the bronze man.

Nome Dale stammered, "I . . . er . . . came to tell you about a fellow named Renny. That is, about him and Clarence Faulkner."

Doc moved forward quickly.

"Yes?" he prompted.

Nome Dale continued, "Well, it's about my—" Then he paused, his gaze going to the bronze man's left hand. Terror leaped into the young man's wide eyes.

Doc Savages metallic features were expressionless, like something carved in bronze. But his unusual flake-gold eyes flickered.

In Doc's left hand was the totem pole that had been turned over to him by Monk and Ham.

Nome Dale, trembling, backed toward the hallway. He suddenly flung a glance behind him, stiffened. Then he screamed.

Doc Savage and his two aids were knocked flat to the floor as the hallway behind Nome Dale seemed to disintegrate in a shattering blast!

GLASS was still cascading from broken windows when Doc and his two assistants picked themselves up from the floor. It was the bronze man who caught a fleeting glimpse of Nome Dale also swaying to his feet, to suddenly whirl away from the doorway and leap down the hall.

Doc followed, Ham and Monk behind him.

The hallway was intact, though all windows at either end were smashed. There was a peculiar odor of something like illuminating gas in the air.

Monk howled, "Look!"

Down the hall, toward the elevators, four men were moving toward them. There were short clubs in their hands, and they had the kind of faces found on retired prize fighters.

Between the advancing group and Doc Savage, an elevator door was open. It was into this waiting cage that young Nome Dale had raced.

Doc's corded hand moved swiftly. Even as it did, he rapped an order to his two aids.

"Grab Nome Dale!"

What flew from the bronze man's fingers was a small round object that looked like a grenade of some sort. It struck a marble wall and exploded. Immediately, thick clouds of dense black smoke filled the wide passageway.

The advancing thugs were confused. They yelled orders at one another and got lost in the heavy smoke screen.

But Monk and Ham dived through it, reached the vicinity of the elevator door where Nome Dale had disappeared and started inside.

Then Monk let out a howl of pain. "*Ouch!*" He backed off, having crashed into sliding shaftway doors that had been closed.

From the black cloud, Ham yelled, "Nome Dale got away!"

Monk was mad enough to want to crack skulls. He whipped back, arms flailing in a wild attempt to grab some of the assailants hidden in the blackness which enveloped everything.

But he found no one. He bellowed in anger.

And from somewhere ahead, Doc Savage called, "This way!"

Ham and Monk followed the bronze man's voice through the black fog.

They located Doc standing before a second set of elevator doors. They knew it was Doc Savage from the size of the bronze man when they touched him.

Doc said swiftly, "They must have overpowered the regular operators. They're running the cars themselves. Nome Dale grabbed one of the cars they had waiting. This way!"

Doc continued along the hall in the blackness, and his two aids understood. Set aside for the bronze man's own use was a high-speed, express elevator located farther down the hall. Doc and his assistants were the only persons who could gain admittance to the elevator. It ran without stop to the ground floor of the skyscraper.

The cage dropped like a comet through space. Shortly, they were emerging into the entrance lobby of the towering building. There was no one moving through the lobby who even remotely resembled Nome Dale or the four assorted thugs.

A doorman, though, mentioned seeing four men leave the building in a hurry. They had driven away in a car, he informed Doc Savage.

And questioned about Nome Dale, after the good-looking young man had been carefully described, the doorman said: "Yes, he left in a private car, too. Just a little ahead of those other guys."

Doc said, "If Nome Dale had taken a taxicab, he might have been traced. But that's impossible, now."

Questioning revealed that no one outside the skyscraper building had seen the license tags on either departing car. And hundreds of cars were moving up and down the busy thoroughfare.

They returned to the lobby, located the cage the escaping men had used, found two operators unconscious inside. Building attendants took charge, and Doc and his two assistants rode another elevator back to their top-floor headquarters.

THE black cloud had thinned, almost disappeared. Wind coming through the smashed windows accounted for this.

Monk wanted to know, "What the blazes, Doc? Do you think they were after that Nome Dale?"

Doc said, "It would look that way." He indicated the totem pole, still in his hand. "But Dale seemed to have more fear of this."

They inspected the hallway, looking for clues, found nothing. The two pets, frightened, were somewhere in hiding. Doc and his two aids returned to the reception room.

The girl in expensive spring furs was seated there, waiting for them.

Chapter III. ATTACK!

ORDINARILY, entrance to the bronze man's headquarters would have been impossible. But because of the chase that had taken Doc Savage, Monk, and Ham to the lobby, the reception-room steel door had been left open.

Of course, the most valuable part of the headquarters was the vast laboratory, and this had been locked when Doc had followed his aids out to the reception room. So there was nothing of value that the girl could have touched.

Besides, she was just sitting there, waiting.

Her dress showed refinement. Her hair, neatly done, was a coppery-red color. She was small and trim

and quite lovely.

Monk immediately lost his looking-for-someone-to-fight attitude. A broad grin spread over his homely features.

"Hello," the hairy chemist said.

Monk liked nothing better than a pretty redhead. Blondes and brunettes, too, for that matter.

Ham tried to get in front of his burly partner. He was smiling now, also.

Doc merely looked at the girl and waited.

The girl came to her feet, dropping her expensive furs on the chair behind her. She looked at the bronze man.

"You're Doc Savage," she said quickly. "I've got to talk to you." Her pert nose puckered up, and she made a sniffing sound, indicating the hallway. "I came up here, and there was no one around; so I waited. Has there been a fire?"

Doc moved forward.

"Just a slight accident," he said. He studied the girl. "What is it you wanted?"

"It's about my uncle." A tone crept into the girl's voice that sounded like worry. She was nervously fumbling with her handbag.

"Your uncle?"

Monk and Ham were listening, standing a little to one side as Doc questioned the girl.

"Yes," she said. Her voice quavered a little. "He . . . well, he's vanished!"

Doc motioned the girl back into the chair and sat down himself. Expression of his face gave no indication of what he might be thinking.

And the girl seemed somewhat awed in the bronze man's presence. Her eyes—they appeared to be a shade of violet—never left his face. She was almost staring at Doc Savage as she spoke.

"I can't find him!" she exclaimed. "I've looked everywhere. That isn't all. His three sons have vanished along with him!"

"You mean, they are in some sort of trouble?"

"I don't know!" the girl gasped. "They . . . they're just *gone!*"

Doc Savage said, "Perhaps you'd better start at the beginning and tell us exactly what has happened."

THE girl nodded. She was still fumbling with her bag.

She said tensely, "It was about a week ago. I went up to see them. They have an apartment on Central Park West. No one was home, and I figured they were out at the time. But, now, I've been back every day since. No one's there. No one's been there. I've made inquiries at the apartment house and at my uncle's downtown office. The office has been closed. No one knows a thing. My uncle and his three sons

have vanished."

Doc said nothing for a moment, then asked, "Most anyone living in that section of New York employs servants. Certainly, the servants must know the whereabouts of your uncle."

"But that's the strange part of it!" the girl cried. "There are *no* servants! They've disappeared, too—the butler, chauffeur, everyone!"

Monk's homely face brightened. "Well," he put in, "maybe your uncle just up and moved out."

But the girl shook her pretty red head. "No," she said, "I had the building superintendent let me into the apartment. Everything is still there, just like it was before. The table was even set for dinner last night. Nothing has been changed. But . . . *but nobody is living there!*"

The girl's last words almost ended in a sob.

Monk, however, was not to be deterred.

"Maybe," he suggested, "your uncle went broke. Maybe he didn't have any money and just scrambled out of there, leaving everything behind him. It's been done before, you know, in New York."

The girl stood up again. She drew herself up proudly and gave Monk a hurt look.

"My uncle," she announced, "is one of the wealthiest men in the United States!"

Ham gave his partner a withering regard, enough to say: "Dunce!"

"Who is your uncle?" asked Doc Savage.

"Homer Dale, the lumber king," the girl said.

Monk jumped. Ham stared. Doc Savage's eyes flickered, the first indication of any kind that anything had surprised him, so far. The bronze man knew that Homer Dale was rated as one of the leading businessmen of the United States.

Monk prodded, "You said Dale?"

"Yes. Homer Dale."

"Any relation to a guy named Nome Dale?"

The girl looked quickly at Monk.

"Nome Dale is one of his sons," she said. "He has disappeared also, and—" She stopped, took a step toward the squat chemist, her eyes wide. "Have you *seen* Nome Dale? Do you know where he is?"

Monk glanced at Doc Savage. He said nothing.

They learned that the girl's name was Georgiana Lee.

Georgiana Lee told how Homer Dale, the millionaire, had lived with his three sons alone in the New York apartment. Homer Dale's wife was dead.

But surely, Doc had mentioned, someone should know about Homer Dale's disappearance along with his three sons. Had there been any kind of threatening notes; perhaps a demand for ransom?

And Georgiana Lee replied, "There has been nothing! It's the most mysterious thing that has ever happened!"

Everyone agreed that it was.

Doc Savage decided to accompany the girl to her uncle's address. They departed a few minutes later.

ON the way uptown in the bronze man's car, Doc asked further questions. But there was no slightest clue that Georgiana Lee could give him, regarding her uncle's whereabouts.

Naturally, before starting the investigation, Doc checked on Georgiana Lee's identity. Doc Savage realized that she might be a fake.

But she wasn't. She offered enough papers and evidence to prove that she was really Georgiana Lee, even to supplying a birth certificate. From this, Doc saw that she was just nineteen. She looked somewhat older. That was accounted for by her stylish manner of dress.

Georgiana Lee also convinced the bronze man that she was a niece of Homer Dale, the millionaire lumber king.

At the Central Park West address, they had no difficulty gaining admittance to Homer Dale's apartment. Obviously, the girl had visited here often, and was well-known by the building officials. She was given a key and permitted to take Doc Savage upstairs.

Doc, his eyes missing no single detail, went through the richly furnished rooms. And he found that the girl had told the truth.

Everything was in order, even to a table set for a meal.

But there was no clue as to the whereabouts of wealthy Homer Dale or his three sons, who, the girl explained, had been associated with him in business.

An hour later, they left the apartment.

BACK in Doc's car, the bronze man asked, "Who would be the most likely person, besides yourself, to know about Homer Dale's activities?"

Doc was driving the big, closed car, and Georgiana Lee was seated beside him. For a moment, she gave him a thoughtful look. Then she said, "Howard Bullock!"

"Howard Bullock?"

She nodded, continuing, "Yes, he was associated with uncle in business. That is, until just recently. I was talking to Howard just a few days ago on the phone. And he had seen my uncle. *He* should know about him if anyone does!"

It was dark now, almost six o'clock, and there was the chill of early spring in the air. Too late now, Doc knew, to visit the offices of Howard Bullock, which the girl stated were downtown.

But she gave an address near the East River Drive, and Doc swung the car in that direction. They crossed Fifty-ninth Street, cut onto the drive and headed uptown again.

Where the express highway dropped beneath apartment buildings that were constructed almost up to the river's edge, the second car that was using the center lane in order to pass the bronze man's limousine suddenly swerved, strangely.

Then, without warning, it cut in front of Doc Savage's car, almost jamming the bronze man's limousine against a wall that overhung the East River!

A man jumped out of the blocking sedan, leaped upon the running board of Doc's car. There was a large envelope in his hand. He said, "You dropped this at the apartment house, sir. I've been trying to catch you."

He handed the envelope through the window, got down off the car. And immediately the envelope flew to pieces! Choking, throat-irritating vapor spread swiftly.

The girl screamed.

DOC SAVAGE'S car was bulletproof and, when the windows were closed, gasproof. But the surprise attack of the blocking car had happened so swiftly, and looked so much like a traffic accident at first, that the man had jumped aboard the car before the open window could be closed.

And so the bronze giant did the only thing possible.

He leaped out of the car, pulling the girl along with him, before they were knocked out by the gas.

Georgiana Lee was already gasping for breath, her eyes tear-filled as a result of the biting fumes.

Doc pushed the girl behind the protection of the machine, warning, "Keep down!"

He whirled to face the man who had jumped on his car. The fellow had been joined by two others now from the blocking sedan. All three were amazed by Doc's deceptive, blurred speed.

Doc seized two men. His corded, powerful hands made certain movements on the two men's throats. They gasped, their eyes glazed; then they dropped to the ground, unconscious. They would remain that way for some time, because the bronze man had exerted finger pressure on certain nerve centers at the side of the throat.

The third man, terrified, leaped toward an iron railing bordering the East River wall. He climbed frantically to the topmost rail, poised there a moment, then plunged from sight.

Doc Savage followed, clearing the railing in a diving arc that carried him toward the water, twenty feet below. And as he cut through the air, he heard a cry. There was thudding impact from the surface below.

The bronze man's remarkable eyes caught something in the darkness.

A floating piece of driftwood! The escaping man, in diving, had struck the log and disappeared.

He did not come to the surface.

In the heartbeat of time that Doc Savage noted this, he twisted agilely, managed to clear the log and slice the water neatly. Doc made a shallow dive and popped above the surface in an instant, staring around in the dark night. He could see nothing and heard no sounds of anyone swimming.

Of course, it was possible that the man was swimming underwater. Tides in the river were powerful

enough to have already carried the fellow downstream. Yet, there had been that short cry, the impact of a body against something solid. The man had probably been knocked unconscious and drowned.

Swimming with one hand, scarcely making a sound, Doc pulled a waterproof flashlight from the pocket of a special equipment vest which he always wore beneath his clothing. He shot the light ray around.

Due to the currents, water swirled and bubbled at various points. But there was still no sign of the other man.

For some time, Doc swam around in the vicinity. But he did not find his quarry. It was quite obvious that the man must have drowned and had not returned to the surface. The tide, by now, had probably carried him far down the river.

Doc swam to shore, located a ladder that led upward to the top of the wall and hurried back to where the girl, frightened, was standing by the limousine.

She gasped, "There was another car following that first one! It stopped, and men got out and rescued those two you knocked out. Another man drove away in the first car. They've all escaped!"

Other cars had stopped, now, and a crowd was gathering. People were pressing close, staring at Doc Savage, at his remarkable features and physique. They were beginning to get curious.

Doc, leading the girl, hurried to his limousine and rolled down the other windows. But the gas seemed to have cleared. "Get inside!" he ordered.

A second later, Doc Savage sent the machine racing away from the spot. At the first exit point, they left the express drive and found the side street that led toward Howard Bullock's apartment building.

Doc said, "Did you get the license number of the car that contained the second gang?"

The girl shook her head.

"There was so much excitement. I was scared, and I guess I forgot."

Doc understood as he glanced at the girl. Yet, there was something abruptly odd about her manner. She seemed to be watching the bronze man furtively, her hands clutched together in her lap, her pretty face very white and strained.

Doc said nothing further.

They arrived at the address the girl had previously given.

As Doc swung the limousine into the curb, he was aware of some kind of excitement beneath the canopy that led to the building entrance.

A doorman had hurried out to the curb. He was excitedly blowing a whistle for a cab. Another building attendant came running outside, followed by a heavy-set gray-haired man in his fifties.

The girl beside Doc Savage exclaimed, "That's Anderson Bullock, Howard's father! He seems to be excited about something!"

The moment their car stopped, Georgiana Lee was out on the sidewalk, hurrying toward Anderson Bullock. Evidently, the big, elderly man knew her, for he turned, spoke quickly.

Doc, arriving behind the girl, heard her startled: "No!"

She swung toward the bronze man, her eyes wide with horror. She gasped, "Howard is . . . is missing!"

Doc went silent. Howard Bullock, the young man who, according to the girl had been the last to see Homer Dale, had now vanished.

It left the mystery more puzzling than ever.

Chapter IV. UNKNOWN HIDE-OUT

ANDERSON BULLOCK, the man now with the girl, at one time had been a fairly well-known attorney. Doc Savage recalled the name and the man's face.

The girl had already informed Doc that Bullock's son also was a lawyer and that he had been associated with her uncle.

A taxicab pulled up to the curb and Anderson Bullock was ready to climb inside. He was hatless and looked worried. Recognizing the bronze man, he spoke quickly.

"Would you mind," he asked, "calling me back in an hour?"

Doc nodded, waiting for a further explanation.

"A man just called me," Bullock said tensely. "It was something about my son. He sounded . . . terrified about something. He's going to meet me right away!"

Doc said, "If you would like me to go along—"

Bullock shook his head quickly. "No! That would be dangerous—for Howard. The man who phoned warned me to come alone. But I'll be back. Perhaps, then, you can help me. I hope you will."

The last was said pleadingly, as Bullock paused with his foot on the cab's running board.

Doc nodded. "You will hear from me later tonight," he offered.

Bullock left then, urging the driver to full speed. For a brief moment, Doc and the girl stood watching the disappearing cab.

Then Georgiana Lee touched the bronze man's arm, said breathlessly. "I was hoping Howard might know something about Uncle Homer. But now, with him missing—"

She broke off, staring at Doc Savage. She was trembling as she asked, "How do you explain that attack by the men in the car? And what could have *happened* to those others?"

Doc Savage appeared not to have heard the questions, a disturbing trait he had when he did not wish to explain a certain thing.

He motioned to his own car and said, "You can wait at our headquarters until after my interview with Anderson Bullock. That might be best."

Frowning, the girl climbed back into the car. But as they started up, she said, "But what about Homer Dale? Aren't you going to try and find *him*?"

"That will be taken care of also," Doc said quietly.

But Georgiana Lee appeared upset about something, and she sat there, her hands again knotted in her lap. And from time to time she cast furtive glances in the bronze man's direction.

Doc had noted these actions. He had also seen something else. He said abruptly, "You might show me that object which you have been trying to hide."

The girl jumped. "What—" she started, evasively.

Doc continued, "You have been holding it ever since we left the East River Drive."

The girl was on the point of making another denial, but there was something about the magnetic power of the bronze man's eyes that caused her to give in.

She opened her hand and held a small object toward Doc.

It was a tiny totem pole, not quite four inches long, and intricately carved on its surface were grotesque images. One was of an Indian with slanted eyes. Doc took his gaze from the road a moment and rolled the small object over in his hand. The carving of an owl was on the reverse side.

The tiny totem pole was almost an exact duplicate of the one Monk had found at the airport.

Doc's eyes happened to catch the girl watching the totem pole rigidly. Fright was plain on her pretty features.

He said abruptly, "Why do you fear it?"

The girl gave a start. She looked up at the bronze man.

"Fear it?" she asked. "I don't understand?"

"You seem to be frightened."

"I . . . I'm not frightened," Georgiana Lee said. "I never saw it before in my life. It was on the car seat when we left the river."

Doc Savage was convinced that she was lying about her fear.

LATER that night, alone, Doc Savage returned to interview Anderson Bullock. He left the girl, Georgiana Lee, at headquarters with Monk and Ham.

Monk had reported that there had been no further reports about the stratosphere plane. Renny's disappearance was still quite a mystery. The bronze man had made no mention of the miniature totem pole which the girl still had in her possession.

Doc Savage left his car parked in a dark side street and walked a block to the Bullock residence. The doorman gave a start when Doc suddenly appeared in the doorway.

Then he recognized the bronze giant, having seen him earlier, when Doc had talked to Anderson Bullock at the curb.

"You are to go right upstairs," the doorman said.

"Mr. Bullock is at home?" Doc asked.

The uniformed man shook his head.

"He returned, sir, but he has departed again. However, he left a message for you, and you are to go right up." He named the floor and apartment number. Doc took the elevator.

A butler admitted him to the Bullock apartment. Obviously, he had been expecting Doc's visit and recognized him, for he said, "This was left for you, sir. Mr. Bullock had to leave again immediately, but I was to be sure that this envelope was turned over to you."

Doc looked at the white envelope which the butler picked up from a table and handed to him. He broke the seal and studied the brief note that was inside. The hastily written message read:

I am certain that I have met the man who knows what terrible fate has happened to my son. I am going with him to make positive that Howard is alive. Any investigation at this time might be disastrous. Wait five days. If I have not returned within that time, please investigate.

Anderson Bullock.

Doc looked at the butler. "Mr. Bullock wrote this note?"

"Yes, sir." The butler jerked his head. "I saw him write it myself, sir."

"Have you any idea whom he met?"

"No, sir."

"Or where he went?"

"No, sir. I have no idea. He wouldn't say, sir."

Doc put the message in his pocket and departed. He did not intend to wait for the five-day limit to expire. He decided to investigate immediately.

The doorman of the building recalled a certain cab that Anderson Bullock had taken. He gave the name of the driver and the address of the company which owned the string of taxis.

He said, "That driver is on the stand here every night, sir. But he finishes at midnight." He looked at his watch. "You ought to be able to catch him as he's checking in tonight, sir." He gave the address where the cabs were turned in.

DOC arrived there ten minutes later. He located the driver who had picked up Anderson Bullock. The driver told that Bullock had been driven to a small flying field near the New Jersey end of the George Washington Bridge.

Doc drove out there.

The field, except for red marker lights, was in darkness. But there was a small office near the edge of the field, and it was inside the building that Doc located the night watchman.

He asked discreet questions.

Shortly the man was explaining, "Why, sure, they left some time ago."

Doc's eyes flickered. "They?"

"Yeah. The gray-haired man you describe, and three or four other guys. It was these other guys who owned the plane, and they waited until your friend arrived."

The watchman, with gestures, described a modern-type plane that obviously was equipped for long-distance flights. The plane, he said, had been kept at the field for the past couple of days. No, he didn't know the owners. They had merely rented temporary space at the field.

The watchman's only description of them was, "They were big, healthy-looking guys!"

"What was their destination?" Doc prodded.

The man scratched his beard.

"Well, now," he murmured, "I wouldn't know, exactly. But they did a funny thing before taking off. They changed to white tropical suits. And I heard one of them guys say it was going to be pretty blasted hot down there near Central America."

That seemed to be all Doc Savage could learn about Anderson Bullock's whereabouts. And so he returned to his New York headquarters.

BUT if Doc Savage had been in Anderson Bullock's place, at that moment, he would have known little more.

The gray-haired man was seated in the cabin of the big plane, and the men were grouped around him as the ship droned through the night.

One man was saying, "And so, that's the way it is. We're taking you south to see your son. You will be shown that he's still alive. But we do this only under one condition!"

Anderson Bullock glared at the speaker. "And that is—"

A hypodermic needle flashed in the big man's hand. The fellow had leathery, sunburned skin and a lot of jaw.

He said, "You take an injection of this stuff which keeps you asleep until we get there. You'll also get a shot on the return trip. It's harmless. Only thing is, you won't have any idea where you've been taken. O. K.?"

"How do I know I'll ever wake up again?" Bullock demanded.

The man with the hypodermic needle grinned.

"Don't be a chump. *You're* the guy who's gonna save your son from death. So you don't think we'd kill you, do you?"

That appeared to be logical. And if Anderson Bullock was going to see his son alive, it looked like he'd have to agree to the proposition. He yanked off his coat and pulled up his shirt sleeve.

"All right," he said.

There was only the prick of the long needle that hurt for a moment; then Anderson Bullock was aware of

a swift drowsiness that was flowing over him.

He tried to remain awake, to hear what was being said, but all he could remember at the very last was someone saying, "Wait'll he wakes up two days from now!"

ANDERSON BULLOCK was surprised when he did wake up. He had experienced doubts, just before losing consciousness, that he might ever see this world again.

But he did, and it was a strange world at first—very silent, very mysterious, as though all time had suddenly stopped and he was the only individual in the entire universe.

He was lying in a swing, on the porch of a rustic cabin of some sort. Bullock sat up and rubbed kinks from his arms and legs. He felt incredibly hungry. He stared around him.

And all that met the eye in every direction was deep forest. Trees grew everywhere, tall, stately, like guarding sentinels of a silent world. From somewhere overhead, the rays of a hot sun slanted through the trees and cast grotesque patterns on the earth.

Anderson Bullock had no idea how long he'd been asleep.

He stood up and walked the length of the cabin porch and was amazed at the size of the building. It had been well built of sturdy logs, and a half dozen small cottages could easily have been set inside the cabin.

He returned to the open front doorway and yelled, "Hey!"

Immediately, someone moved inside the house. A man shortly appeared in the cabin doorway. He was one of the big fellows who had been aboard the plane, and he was rubbing sleep from his eyes.

Seeing Anderson Bullock awake, he gave a shout and hurried out onto the porch. Soon, more of his associates were out there with him. They, too, looked as if they had been asleep. Half a dozen men gathered around Bullock.

One, though, appeared to be the leader. This one had not been on the plane.

He was a tall, well-built young man with sandy-colored hair. He looked very healthy and very grim.

He said, "You understand why you were brought here?"

Bullock nodded. "My son disappeared mysteriously. Why—I do not know. But I have been told that he is here, and I have been brought to see him."

"Come along," said the leader.

He led the way inside the house. They passed through a huge living room, out to a hallway that led back through the massive cabin. They passed the doorways of various rooms.

Near the back of the hall, the leader swung into a room, stepped aside as, closely watched, Bullock was followed in by the other men.

The cage, extending from floor to ceiling, had been built in the center of the large room. It was made of poles stout enough to have the strength of steel bars.

Inside the cage, sitting on a chair and looking terrified, was a slender young man with dark hair and

somewhat pallid features. He had the same angular, strong face of Anderson Bullock.

He jumped up and cried, "Father!"

Anderson Bullock stood there, emotion plain on his stern face, his big form trembling. "Howard!" he said. "You *are* alive!"

Gripping the stout bars, Howard Bullock asked tensely, "Did they tell you about the . . . the totem pole?"

Bullock's eyes narrowed carefully. "The totem pole?" he asked.

Before his son could answer, two men grabbed Anderson Bullock by the arms and started out of the room with him.

"That's what you're gonna learn about now!" one guard said.

THE others, in the room with Anderson Bullock's son, waited silently. A half-hour passed. Finally, Bullock was led back into the room.

Sweat covered the man's features. He was trembling. Terror was mirrored in his wildly staring eyes.

His son stared, asked, "What is it? What did you see in there?"

But Anderson Bullock merely shook his head dazedly. He muttered, "They're taking me back to New York. I'll raise the hundred thousand dollars. Then . . . then you'll be released."

"Raise the money for *what?*" young Bullock prodded.

But the elderly Bullock merely shook his head. He appeared too terrified to speak. "I can't tell you!" he blurted.

He was led out.

But outside the room, a trace of courage seemed to return to him. Bullock was a solidly-built man, and he suddenly whirled on his captors. He roared, "Damn you!"

He was slugged from behind by someone with a blackjack.

WHEN Bullock awoke, he was in a plane, and the plane was moving. He was tied hand and foot—in the cabin of the same ship that had brought him to the mysterious hideout.

A man stood over him, and now the fellow smiled.

He said, "This will hold you until we get to New York!"

He had a hypodermic needle in his hand, and he quickly seized Anderson Bullock's arm, rolled back the sleeve and jabbed in the long needle.

Within seconds, the drowsy feeling was stealing over Bullock. He tried to fight off the heaviness. It was hopeless. There was only the droning of the plane motors and someone talking at another point in the big cabin and—

ANDERSON BULLOCK woke up on a park bench behind the big library at Forty-second Street and Fifth Avenue in New York City. It was just shortly after dawn, and there was the cold chill of spring in the air. He felt half starved.

But before doing anything about his hunger, he hurried to a cigar store and put through a telephone call to Doc Savage.

Chapter V. CONTACT

EARLY that same morning, shortly after receiving the telephone call from Anderson Bullock, Doc Savage left his headquarters. But first, he gave himself an injection of a peculiar chemical. He also left a message for Ham and Monk stating that they were to wait, in case there should be any word from Renny.

It had been six days now since the big engineer had vanished with Clarence Faulkner.

Strangely, Doc had done nothing, so far, about the disappearance of Homer Dale, the lumber king, and his three sons. The girl, Georgiana Lee, had been quite upset about this. And she was so anxious for information, that she had remained at the bronze man's headquarters, waiting for news.

She had been given a private room in Doc's skyscraper apartment.

Georgiana Lee, looking as bright and attractive as a new spring hat, was in the library when, some time after Doc Savage's departure, Monk and Ham came from their rooms.

Ham was wearing a cutaway morning coat and striped gray trousers. The clothes had been made by the most expensive tailor in New York. A fresh flower was in the lapel of his coat.

Monk, yawning as he strolled into the room, looked as though he had slept in his clothes. Both men brightened at the sight of trim, pretty Georgiana Lee.

The girl said, "There was just a call from a man named Long Tom. He said to tell you he would be back some time today."

Long Tom, Ham explained for the girl's benefit, was another member of Doc Savage's organization. He was an electrical expert, second to none, and because of his experience had been invited to a convention of electrical engineers being held in Chicago.

There was a fifth member of the organization, a man referred to as Johnny. He was an archaeologist and scientist. He was temporarily in South America on some sort of expedition.

Ham said, "I'm glad Long Tom's getting in today."

The phone was ringing. Monk leaped to answer it. It was Doc.

Doc said, "Anderson Bullock has returned to New York."

That was news for Monk. He had not known where the bronze man had gone this morning.

The others in the room could hear Doc Savage's words, for the bronze man's unusual, clear-carrying words were audible in the library.

Doc continued: "You and Ham will remain at headquarters and wait for Long Tom. He is due in today. Also, try to pick up any word about Renny from any of the airports. I might be gone for several days."

Monk frowned. "Where you going, Doc?"

There was a slight pause, then the bronze man said, "Anderson Bullock has seen his son, but is too terrified to go on. I am replacing him. The journey will take several days."

Georgiana Lee heard Doc's words. She seemed startled. She moved forward, took the phone from Monk's hand, said into the mouthpiece, "But what about my uncle, Homer Dale, and his sons?"

Doc did not reply to the question.

"Damn!" the girl said, stamping her foot. She handed the phone back to Monk.

"Doc?" the chemist said.

"Yes?"

"What about the little totem pole we found at the airport?"

"That seems to be tied in with the mystery."

"But—"

"You will," continued Doc Savage, "keep your eyes open for any further sign of that omen."

"Omen?" Monk was puzzled.

"It is an Indian superstition," said the bronze man. "Investigate anyone who shows he knows something about that thing. That is quite important. Also, you might keep a lookout for Nome Dale. He was apparently frightened away because of it."

"You mean," asked Monk, "because of that omen?"

"Yes."

A moment later, Doc hung up.

The girl, her lovely face tense, looked at the two aids. She said, "Where is Doc Savage going?"

Ham shrugged. "We have no idea," he said.

"No, we can't even guess," said Monk, looking suddenly gloomy.

If they had only known, they would have been convinced that Doc Savage had no idea, either.

NEITHER would they have recognized the bronze man.

Skin stain and pieces of paraffin inserted inside his cheeks had changed the bronze man's entire character. He now had dark, leathery features and a limp. He was stoop-shouldered. Doc looked like an old codger who might have spent most of his life in the Maine backwoods.

The instructions for meeting those who knew about the totem menace—turned over to Doc Savage by

Anderson Bullock—had been quite specific. Doc was to take the noon ferry from 125th Street to Fort Lee and, en route, watch for a man on board who would be wearing a derby and whistling "Mexicali Rose." He was to follow this person from the ferry on the Jersey side and get into the car which the man in the derby hat approached.

The contact was made, and Derby Hat was a big, powerful fellow with sunburned features and wedge-shaped shoulders. There were three other men waiting in the car on the Jersey shore.

Doc, limping a little and bent over, climbed into the car, and the machine started up and they went away.

All the individuals in the machine were browned and husky-looking. The driver seemed to be in charge. Without turning his head as he sent the car climbing the long hill out of town, he said, "You have the money?"

Doc, speaking with a slight twang, said, "Reckon as I have. Check."

"A check?"

"Yep. It will be handed over to you when I see Howard Bullock released, in my custody."

"Let's see that check," someone demanded.

Doc slowly and painstakingly extracted a check from a worn billfold that he carried in his inner pocket. His coat was a design that had gone out of style almost a dozen years ago.

The two men seated on either side of him looked at the check.

One exclaimed, "What the hell! There's places on that check for two signatures, but only Bullock has signed it!"

"Yes," agreed Doc, still using his old-codger twang.

"What's the idea?"

"When the other signature is put on the check, that piece of paper will be honored at any bank in New York. That's Anderson Bullock's agreement."

"Whose signature?" someone wanted to know.

"Mine," said Doc.

Another man commented, "Nobody's kidding that guy Bullock!"

"I guess *not!*" said the driver. Then: "Well, that plan is O. K. with us, I think. We'll take this old geezer out there."

He continued driving at a fairly good rate of speed.

And some time before one o'clock that afternoon, they arrived at the small, private airport somewhere in the Jersey hills. The big silver plane was waiting on the field, and Doc, as the old man, was taken aboard. A few moments later the plane took the air, circled the field twice so the pilot could make certain that no one had followed, then headed south.

Two men came into the cabin where Doc was seated. One said, "Pop, you gotta get a treatment."

"Treatment?"

"Yeah. We're gonna give you a little shot. It won't hurt you any. You'll just sleep the rest of the way. You see, we ain't taking chances on you finding out where we're taking you."

The old fellow seemed to think that over for a moment.

"Reckon I'll have to take it," he said finally.

They gave Doc Savage the kind of an injection they had administered to Anderson Bullock.

Soon, Doc Savage was stretched out limply on a bunk that had been installed in place of some of the cabin seats. He snored loudly.

One of the passengers grinned.

"Won't that old boy be surprised when he wakes up?" he said.

"I guess so!" agreed his partner.

Doc Savage listened to the remarks and tried to decide whether the plane was still heading south or not. Later, if the men should step into the cockpit, he might be able to find out.

AT first, the drug reaction in the bronze man's remarkable body was terrific. For the injection that Doc Savage had taken earlier, as an antidote for the hypodermic given him aboard the plane, was now counteracting effects of that anaesthetic. Doc Savage fought off the strange sleep.

Anderson Bullock had told him of the injection which kept him asleep throughout the journey to the mysterious hide-out. Thus, Doc had been prepared for the same thing.

He was not asleep now. In fact, he was quite wide awake, as a result of one drug trying to overcome the other in his system. It was the bronze man's unusual strength and body condition that finally won out. He remained awake, though to anyone who might have closely examined him, he appeared a person in deepest slumber.

He listened carefully, though he dared not make any movements, and, after a while, he was certain that the plane was not heading south.

Men came into the cabin at intervals. They discussed the flight. Doc listened.

TWO days and a night passed, and some time, early in the morning of the following day, the big ship came down out of the stratosphere and landed on a long, curving stretch of hard-packed sand that formed the beach of a deserted cove.

Outside the isolated cove, the ocean stretched to the horizon. It was very calm, a deep-blue mirror for the majestic picture that was reflected in it. For a heavy cedar forest grew down almost to the water's edge, excepting the strip of beach, and this forest of stately trees slowly mounted upward into the mountains that lay beyond. Great peaks surmounted the mountains, snow-capped, tremendous and inspiring. The snow line might have been two or three thousand feet above the timber growth; it was hard to tell.

But the entire thing, the forests, the peaks, even the cloud-studded sky was reflected in the flat, smooth water like something done in oils.

The great silence everywhere was somewhat breathtaking.

Doc Savage was removed from the plane, laid down on the beach, and a discussion followed as to just how the big fellow was to be carried. Nobody seemed to relish the job.

While the men were talking about that, a man appeared along a trail that led out of the cedar forest. He hailed them and came down the beach to the plane.

Someone said, "It's Juneau. He'll tell us what to do."

Juneau, it turned out, was a young man with sandy-colored hair, a powerful, thick-shouldered physique and darkly tanned features. It appeared he had arrived from some camp located not far from the cove.

He said, now, "We're not taking this old guy up to the camp."

"Why not?" one of the men from the plane demanded.

"Because we've moved Howard Bullock."

"Moved him?"

"Yeah. We think maybe his father might have figured out something. Maybe he guessed the location. So we've sent him up to Kensington Passage. That's where you'll take this contact man."

"You mean," someone said in surprise, "up into Glacier Inlet?"

"That's right."

There seemed to be some doubt in the men's minds about making the trip into Glacier Inlet at this time; this was more of a feeling that Doc sensed, rather than hearing any actual words spoken.

"Howard Bullock," continued Juneau, "is in the hide-out at Hidden Forest. It'll take you about two days. We've got a boat all ready and waiting for you. So you'd better get started."

Doc Savage, listening, continued to assume his sleeping, unconscious attitude. He had planned a break when the plane flight was ended, but that plan was swiftly changed, now.

For he knew where he was. Names mentioned told him that they were somewhere along the southeastern coast of Alaska!

It was spring, and the weather was not cold. But the new journey mentioned was into the interior, and it was impossible to say what he would run up against.

But that's where they were holding Howard Bullock, and that's where Doc Savage had to go. Also, there was something else. It was a comment that was made within the next moment.

Juneau said, "You guys will be met by the chief when you get up there in Glacier Inlet. So be on the lookout for him. He's got some other stuff lined up."

Somebody whistled. There were exclamations. And from the undercurrent of tenseness that the bronze man quickly sensed, he knew that they referred to the real brains behind the mystery.

Whether Doc Savage knew the whereabouts of Homer Dale, pretty Georgiana Lee's uncle, and the mystery concerning the wealthy man's disappearance, was still a question. But the journey to the interior seemed to have some significance for Doc, and it was thus that he continued to remain "asleep."

Perhaps, if he had known that he was to face death in that Alaskan wilderness, he would have altered his plans.

Chapter VI. WILDERNESS TREK

THROUGHOUT the journey up Glacier Inlet, Doc Savage was kept in a locked cabin aboard the boat. Long hours had passed, and, now, almost two days had gone by.

In the heavily timbered cabin was a single porthole, and it was only during the daylight hours that Doc was able to see anything of the country through which they passed.

There had been mountains, forest-covered, that grew higher and higher as the boat moved steadily toward the interior. Now, some of those mountains had changed from snow-covered peaks to icy glaciers. It had grown considerably colder, also.

Doc Savage knew that two men stood guard outside the cabin. He had heard them talking from time to time. Juneau, obviously, was taking no chances, though everyone still believed Doc to be under the influence of the sleeping drug.

Night came again, and some time after dark the boat stopped. There was heavy silence for a while; then activity began. Doc Savage listened.

He heard men talking.

Someone came into the dark cabin where Doc lay motionless on a hard bunk. Others followed. Doc chanced to look before a lamp was lighted.

They were Juneau's men, but the leader was not with them.

One said, "I got this thing all figured out, and this is one job we get out of. We'll make that big fellow carry this old guy!"

Doc was suddenly very alert.

"You mean," someone asked, "that guy they captured along with Clarence Faulkner?"

"Yeah. Him. He's built like a horse."

"Then we're gonna push through to Hidden Forest without waiting for the chief?"

"Right," someone answered.

Men picked up Doc Savage and carried him out on deck. Lanterns moved in the night. It was quite cold, now, though not unbearably so. This part of Alaska had a fairly temperate climate. It was only the glaciers, inland, that caused the chill in the air.

"Bring that big bozo out here," someone ordered.

Shortly, under guard, giant Renny was led out on deck.

If the big engineer of Doc Savage's organization recognized the bronze man, he gave no sign. He stood there in the quiet night, his long face more gloomy than ever. Behind him, handcuffed to a guard, was little, well-dressed Clarence Faulkner.

The mousy-looking little man stared at the great peaks that rose seemingly right out of the water, and he gasped, "My gracious! What are you men going to do with us now?"

Somebody laughed.

"We're gonna take a little hike, pal," a guard said.

Obviously, no one knew Renny Renwick's true identity. No one had yet called him by name. Luckily, it appeared, Clarence Faulkner had been smart enough not to give away that identity. Perhaps he had realized that Doc Savage would start a search for the man who had disappeared from his organization. And he had been clever enough not to reveal that Renny was connected with Doc Savage.

A small boat took everyone ashore.

Doc was picked up and loaded on powerful Renny's massive shoulders. He was slung across the big engineer's back like a limp sack. Then the crooks used a neat trick to assure themselves that Renny could make no dangerous move.

Heavy rope was passed around Renny's waist, and the rope bound Doc Savage's hands and feet to this. And, where Renny's huge hands were supporting Doc Savage's body, they were also tied in this position. Thus Renny was tied to his heavy burden, and it would have been impossible for him to make any sort of attack against the men who accompanied him.

The party—there must have been at least fifteen men, not counting Doc Savage, Renny, and birdlike Clarence Faulkner—set out through a fringe of cedar forest that covered the shore line.

From the water, the glacier had seemed to come right to the edge of the inlet. But instead, there were trees growing for several hundred feet upward along the coast. The glacier, itself, was farther inland. The sharp clear air, the magnitude of everything up here, had been deceiving.

THROUGHOUT the remainder of that night, using lanterns and flashlights, the party trekked through the wilderness. At intervals, there were rest stops. Big Renny was made to lie down with his heavy burden still tied securely to him. He was watched every moment by two men who carried guns.

Doc, to all appearances, was still unconscious.

There was one thing the bronze man still sought—location of the Hidden Forest! It was clear to him that there was where Howard Bullock was being held. And, perhaps, others. Also, it must be the real hide-out of the person behind these mysterious disappearances.

Who was he? What was the significance of the little wooden totem pole with the Indian head and sacred owl?

The trek kept moving onward through the night.

And some time shortly after dawn, the forest ended. There was nothing but an expanse of whiteness ahead, a part of the glacier itself. Sunlight on the ice was almost blinding.

For, through the night, the party had steadily climbed higher, until the timber line was left behind; and now, from where they stood, there was a view for miles ahead along one side of the glacier that still rose above them.

Strangely, one part of the equipment that the guards had brought along was a surveyor's transit. Reason for this was demonstrated, now.

The transit, supported by a tripod, was set up by one of the men. Another man stood by with a notebook in his hand and called off figures. The man at the surveyor's transit pointed the telescopic sight off to the right, across the flatness of the glacier ahead, and seemed to be locating some distant point.

Everyone was kept busy watching.

Doc Savage chanced a look, and his remarkably trained eyes tried to see that distant object that the telescope was trained upon. But he could not make out anything.

His marvelous memory made note of the readings called out.

The man at the instrument said, "There she is! It'll take us about four more hours to reach Hidden Forest."

He gave a few more figures to the man with the notebook. Apparently, they were the directions to be followed until Hidden Forest was reached.

Just as the party was ready to set out again, a man approached from the rear. He had been trailing the group, was one of the guards himself. He carried some sort of small paper in his hand.

"Damn good thing I brought up the rear!" he announced. He passed the paper to the leader, Juneau; but to the others who were watching him, he said, "That dropped from inside the old guy's shirt while he was being lugged through the forest. *He's Doc Savage!*"

Doc Savage slid from Renny's wide shoulders, the ropes seemed to fall away as though they'd been severed in a dozen places by a knife, and both Doc and powerful Renny leaped toward their nearest guards.

A wild, confused battle followed!

AT the first hint of trouble, two guards had seized little Clarence Faulkner and rushed on ahead with him. They were soon out of sight across the ice pack, lost against the glare of the morning sun touching the blinding whiteness that was everywhere.

The others closed in on Doc Savage and big Renny.

Renny, rumbling with rage and making big bear sounds, grabbed two men, got his massive arms around them and started banging their heads together.

Doc had already knocked out two more men with two single blows. The bronze man's speed was astounding.

The fight moved back and forth across the hard field of ice. Men slipped and fell, or were knocked down, only to get up again and keep slugging at Doc and Renny.

There were so many in the fight, that confusion was too great for the use of guns.

But one man—he had been carrying an equipment pack—broke free of the mêlée at the beginning and had now run off to one side and was frantically working at the drawstring on his pack.

Shortly, he had a heavy-looking weapon in his hands, was busy snapping two portable parts of it together. He inserted what looked like a magazine drum filled with cartridges.

The weapon was a portable machine gun. The man straightened with the machine in his hands and yelled:

"Back, you guys! Out of the way!"

Those who had not been knocked out fell swiftly away from Doc Savage and the giant engineer. They ran.

The machine gun was pointed toward Doc and his aid.

But even in the split second when the gunner had yelled to his partners, Doc and Renny moved with sudden speed. They carried no guns themselves. To remain there and face the gunman would mean certain death.

And so they ran. Luckily, there were, at intervals, great humps of ice that had broken from the ice peaks at various times in the past. The ice humps afforded protection, in a degree, as Doc and the big engineer went in a weaving path toward the edge of the forest, some distance behind them.

The machine gun roared, and ice slivers danced all around them. But the gunner was excited. His aim was poor. By the time he got the machine gun under control and pointed in the right direction, Doc and Renny were behind the protection of a large ice hump, keeping it between themselves and the gunner as they raced toward the forest. Shortly, they were safe beyond the tall trees.

The gun, though, continued to send out blasts at intervals. It continued to do so throughout the morning. There was, it was quite clear, no chance of Doc and Renny returning.

And so, since they were without weapons, they continued along the backtrail through the silent forest. And some time during the afternoon of that day, they reached the point where they had been landed from the boat.

It was gone.

RENNY said, "We're in a tough fix! We need equipment—plenty of it—if we're going after the guy behind this business."

Doc nodded.

They were surrounded by wilderness. Before them, the wide, deep-watered inlet ran in from Kensington Passage; behind and on either side of them were the endless forest and glaciers.

Renny said, "Using those Morse-code taps on my back, while I was carrying you through the woods during the night, was a good idea. If we had tried to talk, they would have spotted us quicker."

"They had those ropes well tied," said Doc. "It took most of the night to loosen them."

As he spoke, Doc Savage had been studying the wilderness on three sides of them and the calm-surfaced, mirrorlike inlet that led in from the sea.

Doc said finally, "We'll have to get word to Monk and Ham." He told Renny about the girl, Georgiana Lee. "We've got to get supplies up here before we can start a search for Hidden Forest."

Renny thought that over. His gloomy face showed hopelessness. He indicated their surroundings.

"Sure," he agreed. "But how are we going to do it?"

Doc said, "There must be some way back to civilization. We will try."

They started out.

Chapter VII. GIRL TROUBLE

IT was about two weeks later that the message reached Doc Savage's headquarters. Monk and Ham, at the moment, were in the midst of one of their frequent arguments.

The argument appeared to center around the girl, pretty, red-headed Georgiana Lee. Monk, shaking his hairy fist in Ham's face, was saying shrilly:

"The poor girl moved out because of *you*, that's what! Wait'll Doc hears that she's gone!"

Ham glared.

"I had nothing to do with it!" he snapped. "She got tired of waiting to hear from Doc. She thinks Doc isn't going to do anything about Homer Dale's disappearance."

"Anyway," Monk said glumly, "I'm worried about her. I'm at my wit's end."

"Well," agreed Ham, "you didn't have far to go!"

Monk grabbed up a telephone book and was ready to let it fly when the skinny, unhealthy-looking man appeared in the doorway.

The skinny man said, "I've just received a telegram from Doc!"

Monk and Ham forgot about Georgiana and turned to face the man who had entered the room.

Major Thomas J. Roberts, the electrical wizard of Doc Savage's crowd, looked as though he might have lived his entire life in a mushroom cellar. He was thin, rather tall, and with a pale, none-too-healthy appearance. He looked like a physical weakling. He was better known as Long Tom.

Strangely, Long Tom had never known a sick day in his life. He also had a temper and could fight like a wildcat.

Monk stared at Long Tom and exclaimed, "You've heard from Doc? Where is he?"

Long Tom showed them the telegram. Ham grabbed it, noted that it was in code, then said, "Tell us about it, Long Tom. It will save time."

"Well," continued the puny-looking electrical expert, "Doc is somewhere in Alaska. It's some place called Lost Cove, and directions for finding the spot are in the telegram. He's found Renny, and we're to take the biggest amphibian plane and get up there with all the equipment we can load aboard. If we can, we're to bring along the girl, because Doc thinks he has a clue to old Homer Dale's whereabouts."

Monk grinned. "Wow!" he yelled.

Ham asked, "Did Doc say what kept him so long?"

Long Tom nodded. "Doc and Renny were almost trapped near some hide-out called Hidden Forest. It took them a week to reach the seacoast, another to get to a town and a telegraph line. Doc is going to wait there until we answer, he says."

"What's this about Hidden Forest?" Ham wanted to know.

Long Tom indicated the message.

"There's some figures in here," he explained. "We're to go there if we should miss Doc and Renny when we arrive up there. Doc's even got surveyor's readings in here and a specific point described. From there, we'll be able to locate the hide-out."

It was decided that Monk and Ham would pick up Georgiana Lee. Monk was all for going alone, but the lawyer said, "They wouldn't even allow you in the building, you hairy misfit!"

Long Tom would take care of having men load the plane, which was kept at the bronze man's Hudson River water-front hangar-warehouse. There were watchmen located at the hangar who could take care of this.

Monk said, "Long Tom, you take care of the pets, too. They're up on the roof some place, taking a sun bath. That is, Habeas is. I hope he's pushed that blasted Chemistry over the edge!"

On the way out, Ham turned back, remembering something.

He said to Long Tom, "Maybe you'd better call Georgiana Lee's maid and tell her to have Georgiana wait when she comes in. Tell her we're on the way over." He gave the phone number, and they left. As usual, Ham was carrying his black cane.

SOME time later, they arrived, in one of the bronze man's cars, at an exclusive apartment near Riverside Drive. Ham wanted Monk to wait in the car, but the chemist only grinned and followed him into the ornate lobby of the apartment building.

There was a reception clerk and a switchboard operator. Both gave Monk a doubtful regard. The chemist's features and clothes were enough to place him as a roustabout.

So Ham, in his smooth, oratorical way, did the talking. He stated that they wished to see Miss Georgiana Lee, if she had returned.

The operator called the apartment, waited, then spoke to someone. She turned and said, "Yes, there's someone up there. You may go right up. Suite 1001."

They took the elevator.

On the tenth floor, Monk pushed on ahead. He rapped on the door, waited.

From inside the apartment, a voice called, "Come in."

They opened the door, found themselves in a small foyer and moved toward what looked like a large living room, beyond. The living room was expensively furnished. There were numerous deep armchairs.

The hall door slammed behind them.

The men with guns in their hands rose up from behind the wide chairs. One particularly ugly-looking fellow said, "We *thought* you Romeos would come here sooner or later!"

The speaker started shooting!

TO the amazement of both Monk and Ham, there was no thunder of gunfire.

The gun simply made a little *phhhh!* of sound, and a small object whizzed past Ham's arm.

He suddenly understood.

"Darts!" he yelled at Monk, and the Doc Savage aids went into speedy action.

Ham's fast-moving hand whipped the thin sword from its innocent-looking sheath. The sword tip caught one assailant across the wrist just as he was aiming one of the peculiar-looking air guns.

The fellow dropped the gun and a funny expression came into his hard eyes, and he sank behind the couch. He would remain unconscious for some time, a result of the anaesthetic drug that tipped the sword point.

Monk, in the meantime, and with a bellow of rage, leaped over a chair and took hold of the man who had shot at him. There were five assailants in all. Monk reached out and seized another who was trying to aim a dart gun.

Obviously, the thugs had decided on the dart guns in order to avoid too much noise in the apartment building. The darts were probably poisoned, or contained a knockout drug.

But now, with Monk ripping loose in the midst of the assailants, there was little chance to use the strange weapons. Monk swept up a pair of heavy metal book ends from a table, gripped them in his fists and started cracking skulls.

Monk was never happier than when in a good fight. At such times, his squeaky, childlike voice left him. He roared and bellowed. He made a lot of racket, and he did a lot of damage.

Ham leaped after a man who was trying to escape toward the hall door. He reached the fellow and, instead of using his sword, brought him down with a vase that he had scooped up from a table.

The man lay still.

Monk was in the midst of three others who were still on their feet. But not for long.

The chemist hit a man with one of the book ends. Monk followed through with his foot. The fellow did a flying dive over a chair and didn't get up.

Another man had reversed the air gun in his hand, was bringing it down in a smashing drive toward the chemist's head. Monk was not quite fast enough to avoid the blow. The steel gun butt struck his skull.

For a moment, homely Monk looked dazed. Then, shaking his head, blinking his small eyes, he dived in again! He was making a terrific racket.

Meanwhile, outside the apartment, someone was pounding on the door.

Someone yelled behind the panel. "Hey, you guys! I've located the dame! She sneaked into the building next door!"

Monk hardly heard. Another man went down. The last one remaining on his feet suddenly looked scared to death, dived down the long room and headed for a window that was open. There was a fire-escape platform directly outside the window.

Ham jumped after the man; Monk bent down to scoop up three of the dropped air pistols. He put them in his pocket, then leaped to help Ham.

But the swift-moving lawyer had already nicked the last thug with his sword. Out on his feet, the fellow swayed around in a crazy circle; he sagged down across the window sill.

Ham started to lower him to the floor. He started to say, "Georgiana must have ducked out just before they broke in here—"

He paused, his gaze going out the window and apparently freezing on something out there.

Monk demanded, "What the blazes are you staring at?"

In the next moment, he stared also.

The tenth floor of this building was just slightly above the room level of an adjacent structure. Ventilators and air-shaft chimneys dotted the rooftop.

The girl had been standing there looking toward the apartment where the fight was taking place. But now she turned, streaking toward a doorway that was open atop the roof.

It was Georgiana Lee, hatless, her lovely red hair shimmering in the morning sunlight.

IN the next second, Monk had the sash up and was out on the fire escape. Distance to the adjacent building was only about three feet. Monk leaped.

Ham was right behind him.

"Hey!" Monk yelled, as he took out across the roof. The girl was almost to the open doorway.

But at Monk's yell, she stumbled, went to her knees. However, she was quickly on her feet again, running.

Behind Monk and Ham, a gun blasted. The slug whined across their heads and a voice bellowed: "Halt in the name of the law!"

Both men spun around.

A policeman was sticking his head out the open window of Georgiana Lee's apartment. There was a smoking .38 in his fist.

Another cop appeared in a window adjacent, and he started to raise a gun also.

Monk, without waiting, shoved Ham behind an air-shaft projection nearby. "We have to help Georgiana!" he said. "Come on!"

Ham paused long enough to scoop up some small object from the roof. Slugs knocked up gravel around his feet.

Ducking low, Monk and the lawyer reached the door opening through which the girl had now disappeared. They plunged down a flight of iron stairs, found themselves behind a fire door that led to a top-floor hallway of the apartment building.

They flung out into the hallway and saw two sets of elevator doors. The elevators were the self-operating type, and a small glass button next to one shaft was lighted, showing that the car was in use.

They leaped to the other, and Ham held his hand on the button. The glass above it lighted, and they waited, fuming.

Monk said, "She's in the other car!"

"Must be!" agreed Ham, forgetting to argue, for once.

It seemed hours until their car arrived, and then they were inside, pushing a button that would take the cage to the ground floor. Even as the elevator started slowly downward, they both heard a commotion in the hallway outside.

Monk, still pressing the first-floor button within the car, grinned. "They can't follow until one of these elevators is not in use!" he said.

Ham jerked his head. "I hope not," he said. "There'd be a lot of questioning, and we haven't got time for that, now!"

They finally reached the ground floor and raced out into the hallway. It was deserted.

They hurried out to the street, pulled up short as they saw police prowler cars drawn up before the building next to the one they had just left.

But Ham pointed out, "Nobody in the cars. Come on!"

They managed to reach their own machine without seeing any police and, with Monk at the wheel, got away from there.

MONK'S driving would hardly be recommended for persons with weak hearts.

Ham gripped the seat. He said, "Take it easy!"

"Got to find Georgiana!" Monk said.

He went down the block at breakneck speed. They saw no signs of the girl. He took the corner on screaming tires, went down a square and turned in again at the street which paralleled the girls.

They found no trace of her.

But Monk, determined, turned in at the girl's street again. Just as he did so, a police car left the curb, its siren whining.

Monk flung the steering wheel over hard, started a complete circle in the street. He went up and over the curb, missing a lamppost by inches. But they managed to make the turn, and Monk sent the car racing

away from the spot.

The siren behind them made wailing sounds in the morning air, but the Doc Savage machine was faster. Soon, they had outdistanced the police car, turned numerous corners and were safely away from the spot.

Monk finally slowed down, and Ham let out his breath with relief.

He said, "Well, I hope you're satisfied!"

"About what?" Monk asked.

"That girl! She's in with those crooks, of course. We almost got caught in that nicely planted trap!"

Monk frowned, shaking his head. "Don't believe it!" he snapped.

"All right," Ham sighed. "What have you got to say about *this*, then?"

He held out his hand. In it was the small object that he had picked up on the roof, the thing the girl had dropped when she had stumbled.

It was one of the small totem-pole things, with figures of an Indian and an owl carved on opposite sides.

Ham said grimly, "Every time we run into one of these things, there's trouble!"

For once, Monk made no comment. As they continued toward Doc Savage's headquarters, he thought of the girl. Perhaps Ham was right.

Could the girl be involved with those behind this unexplainable mystery?

Both aids decided to contact Doc Savage when they reached headquarters, to report the incident and the girl's escape.

Chapter VIII. STRANGE MAGIC

BECAUSE of the girl, Georgiana Lee, departure for Alaska was delayed. Also, on Long Tom's suggestion, they held off upon contacting Doc Savage.

For, as the skinny electrical expert said, "Dames are trouble. And, yet, Doc said to get in touch with Georgiana Lee. We'd better try once more to reach her."

"How?" Ham demanded.

"I'll go over there to her apartment myself," Long Tom suggested. "Those cops might still be around looking for you two guys. I'll see what I can find out."

Long Tom left, and Monk and the lawyer spent the time arguing about whether Georgiana Lee was a crook or not.

It was quite late that evening when the electrical wizard returned.

"Well?" Monk asked hopefully.

Long Tom shrugged.

"Can't find a trace of her," he said. "I've tracked down half a dozen leads, and I've found out that she hasn't been at that apartment in almost two days!"

Monk didn't believe that.

"Blazes!" he snorted. "Why, I talked to her maid on the phone. Don't try to tell me—"

"You mean, Clarabelle?" Long Tom put in.

Monk nodded.

"She never had a maid named Clarabelle," said Long Tom. "That's something else I found out at the apartment."

Monk stared.

"But—" he started.

"That was a gag," continued the unhealthy-looking electrical expert. "Those crooks just did that to lead you two birds into a trap!"

Mention of the five thugs who had hidden in the girl's apartment brought Ham up tense.

"What happened to those guys?" he demanded. "Have the police—"

"They got away," Long Tom said. "While those cops were chasing you two, the crooks followed *them*. Only they continued right across the rooftops and escaped!"

Later that night, they went to the water-front hangar and helped load the giant amphibian plane. Doc had mentioned certain equipment cases in particular, which were to be brought along.

At dawn, they were ready to depart. Instead of sending a telegram to the bronze man, Long Tom checked with the local telegraph office on the phone number of the backwoods branch from which Doc's own wire had been sent. He was able to get the number.

He put through a direct call.

And, several moments later, was informed, "We can't get through to that number. It seems the phone has been removed, or there is something wrong at that end!"

Long Tom and the others decided to send Doc a wire, anyway, and trust that it would reach the bronze man while they, themselves, were en route to Alaska.

AT the very last moment, when the big plane was ready to be eased down a ramp into the Hudson River, Monk had disappeared.

Ham looked worried. This seemed strange for, whenever the two aids were together, they were squabbling. And yet, each man, in his own way, had a deep regard for the other. If danger menaced one, the other would gladly risk his life in order to protect the one threatened.

Ham said, "Maybe Monk's in trouble."

"He'll be back," Long Tom assured him. He indicated the two pets, safely aboard the plane. "Monk

would never go very far away without Habeas."

That seemed logical. And it was. Ten minutes later, the hairy chemist arrived in a cab piled high with furs and equipment.

They prepared to take off. Attendants at the warehouse-hangar—it was a big building containing all sorts of planes, flying equipment and supplies that the bronze man used in his work—helped the three aids.

Long Tom handled the controls. They took off.

SHELTERED from the sea, Lost Cove was like a great sheet of plate glass, reflecting the beauty of forests and snowcapped mountains beyond. From the air, it was an inspiring sight.

They circled the large cove, spotted the cabin back in the deep woods, saw no signs of activity, and finally came down and landed on the water, close to shore. Soon, they were hurrying along a trail that led beneath the tall cedars. Deep, heavy silence was everywhere.

The pets had been left aboard the plane.

Shortly, they saw the rambling log cabin ahead and proceeded cautiously. But there seemed to be no one about.

"Heck!" Monk said, moving ahead noisily. "Nobody there!"

Ham said worriedly, "Some day, that hairy misfit is going to get hurt!"

But Monk happened to be right.

The camp was deserted.

They searched through the empty rooms of the cabin. There was evidence that all furnishings had been hastily, but completely, removed.

They found the room at the back which contained a stoutly made cage.

Ham pointed out, "Someone was held captive here!"

Monk's bright little eyes were worried.

"You think," he asked, "maybe Doc—or Renny?"

Long Tom and Ham were silent. Neither wanted to believe that.

They kept searching through the rooms, trying to pick up some clue. Long Tom paused in one of the rooms that must have been used for a bedroom. Finally, Ham and Monk realized that he had remained back in the room. They returned.

Long Tom was standing before a mirror that was fastened to a door.

"What have you got?" Ham asked.

"Look!" said the skinny electrical wizard.

Some form of powder had been dusted over the mirror by Long Tom. The invisible writing—it had been

done in a special colorless chalk—was now quite plain on the glass. It said:

Follow to hidden forest, according to directions given in telegram. Watch out for anything connected with the totem menace.

There was a peculiar mark at the end of the message.

"Doc wrote that!" Monk cried.

"Exactly," agreed Long Tom.

He took out a handkerchief and carefully wiped away all traces of the writing. Leading the way out of the cabin and back toward the plane, Long Tom said thoughtfully, "Doc's figured out something about this totem-pole menace, you can bet!"

Both Monk and Ham agreed. They hurried back to the plane, and shortly they were in the air again.

SOMETIME that day, they landed again, far up Glacier Inlet. Doc's telegram had been specific. They even found the point where Doc had been landed from the boat that had made the fairly slow journey inland. They saw the heavy forest that bordered the shores of the wide inlet, the rising mountains and glacier that lay inland.

It was decided to conceal the plane up the shore, then start the trek overland. They knew that it was absolutely necessary to reach the point where the surveyor's bearings had been taken at the beginning of the glacier.

That afternoon, they got started. Monk had a pack of furs on his back that would suffice for all of them, should it get cold. The pets went along, also.

Due to the long hours of daylight, they managed to get through the forest before dusk. They reached the spot where Renny and Doc had fought their kidnapers. Long Tom paced off distances from a certain point at the edge of the forest, out onto the beginning of the ice field that was a part of the glacier.

They had brought along a surveyor's level, and now they took bearings as accurately transmitted to them by the bronze man. They mapped their course across the glacier.

Long Tom explained, "Doc said we ought to reach Hidden Forest in about five hours."

They started out again.

And long after dawn the following day, they were still walking, utterly weary, their eyes tired from continual view of nothing save an expanse of glaring whiteness ahead.

They came to a halt and stared around. The ice barrier lay for endless miles ahead.

Monk, disgusted, muttered, "That ain't no Hidden Forest. It's a *magic* forest. It's gone and *disappeared!*"

That appeared to be the truth. There was no forest anywhere. To their left, rising steadily above them, were the snow-peaked mountains. Ahead, the endless glacier ice.

Ham said slowly, "That isn't the worst of it."

Monk looked at his partner.

"Doc would have left some sign," continued Ham. "But there's been nothing!"

The two pets, Habeas and Chemistry, huddled together and looked scared.

The three aids stared at one another.

Chapter IX. CABIN TRAP

THROUGHOUT the night, the three Doc Savage men had found it necessary to wear the fur parkas. The garments felt good, because it had grown intensely cold during the night.

But now, as the morning sun rose higher, the furs became unbearable. They were soon taking them off again and Monk, protesting, was elected to carry them in his pack. The pets, also, had been wearing special small suits, and now they were removed.

The journey continued throughout the day. But, at Long Tom's suggestion, they altered their course. As he explained:

"Glacier Inlet must be somewhere off to the south. It's *got* to be! We'll find it again if we keep headed in that direction."

All three men wore sunglasses, now. But even with these, it was hard to see anything very far ahead, due to the glare of sunlight on the expanse of whiteness. But they did notice that the terrain was steadily dropping downward. That was a good indication.

At four that afternoon, unexpectedly, they came upon the water. A river, wide and very blue and very deep-looking.

Long Tom consulted a map that he had carried throughout the journey.

"This is the same river," he announced. "Glacier Inlet."

Monk sat down on the bank and sighed.

"Blazes!" he said. "What are we gonna do—*swim* back?"

"You mean, to where we left the plane?" Ham prodded.

"Yeah. My feet are sore!"

Just about then, all three heard the sound of the gasoline engine.

The engine appeared to be on a boat, and the boat was somewhere out of sight around a bend in the glass-smooth river. They listened.

"Coming this way!" Long Tom exclaimed.

Shortly, the boat appeared. It was an old gas boat with a small cabin built on its deck. It needed painting badly. Obviously, it was a type of boat used by hand-loggers in this backwoods country.

As the boat approached, they made out the figure of a man at the wheel. Monk yelled. But this wouldn't have been necessary. For all three aids saw that the fellow had already headed toward where they were

standing.

Monk said, "Golly! He's an Indian!"

This was true.

The man at the wheel was a tall, big man with coppery features and heavy, straight black hair. He was clad in old buckskins. His features were very sharp and very grim-looking.

The Doc Savage men noted these things as the motor on the boat was silenced and the craft drifted slowly toward them. They waded out into the water and waited, Monk and Ham each holding their pets.

It was Monk who exclaimed softly, "Look at that guy's face! He looks almost like one of those things on the little totem poles!"

The others saw what Monk meant.

The Indian's eyes were slanted, giving him a Mongolian cast. He did not smile, nor show any expression whatsoever—outside of the grim, steady regard which he gave the three waiting men.

Then Monk yelled, "We want a ride. How about it?"

The boat was almost up to them, now. It's bow gently scraped the bottom and the Indian, disregarding Monk's request, turned and said something to another person who must have been in the cabin.

There was some sort of answer; then the girl appeared abruptly on deck.

Monk, Ham and Long Tom all gasped.

The girl, as pretty as ever, was Georgiana Lee!

MONK was excited. Even Ham seemed to forget that he had distrusted the girl, and he was now all smiles.

It was Long Tom who said sourly, "Trouble! I can see it coming!"

But disregarding his remark, Monk and Ham climbed aboard with the two pets. The skinny electrical expert followed, looking disgruntled.

There was a lot of talking at once; and after that died down, they learned that Georgiana Lee, feeling that Doc Savage was not helping her, had hired a plane and come to Alaska. She told them that her uncle, Homer Dale, owned a hunting lodge up here, and it was her belief that he might be there.

Monk indicated the poker-faced Indian who stood to one side, suspiciously watching the Doc Savage men.

"And who's *that*?" Monk prodded.

"The best guide in all Alaska," explained the girl. "His name is Skagway Willie."

"Makes me think of those blasted totem poles!" said Monk.

Georgiana Lee gave a start.

"You'd better not say too much about those things to him!" the girl warned. "There's an omen or something about them. The Indians hold the sign of the owl quite sacred."

They stared at Skagway Willie.

The tall Indian returned the stare, his face immobile. Then, abruptly, his big jaws started working and he spat a stream of tobacco juice over the side of the boat. He spoke for the first time.

"We go, now," he announced.

Ham looked at the girl. "Go where?"

"The lodge," she said, "is not far, now. We were on the way there. I have a feeling that we're going to find Uncle Homer."

Monk, frowning, gave the guide a dubious look. Then he shrugged.

"O. K.," he said, "tell that lanky totem pole to get going!"

The girl gave a slight shudder. Apparently, any reference to the small, hand-carved objects brought up unpleasant memories.

Ham poked the hairy chemist in the ribs and whispered, "Lay off, dope. She's scared enough as it is!"

They told her how they were searching for Doc Savage and the others. But Georgiana Lee had not seen the bronze man. Obviously, the whole mystery was as puzzling to her as to the three aids.

The journey continued inland.

The river grew narrower. The mountains closed in around them as dusk neared and seemed to hang right over them like great, silent guardians. The solitude was tremendous, only disturbed by the steady throb of the boat engine which echoed far up and down the inland waterway.

They had left the glacier flow behind now, and there was nothing but forest lining the shores again.

Monk asked, "Maybe this is Hidden Forest?"

The girl shrugged. "I don't know," she said.

But the chemist happened to glance at Skagway Willie, and he caught the Indian guide watching him from where he stood at the wheel.

Skagway Willie turned away, spat tobacco juice and said nothing.

It was almost dark when the guide suddenly sent the craft toward shore again. All saw the float made of heavy logs, which served as a landing point. The raft was anchored to the shore by heavy chains.

They went ashore.

MONK and Ham were particularly solicitous about the girl. She looked smaller and more fragile than ever in whipcord breeches and heavy leather boots. And she was wearing a regular lumberjack shirt, which made her slim throat look hopelessly lost in the large collar.

But Georgiana Lee, for her size, had all the energy and fire that went with her red hair. She was first off

the boat, first to have a pack sack up on her shoulders.

She said impatiently, "We'll have to hurry! Skagway Willie says the lodge is a mile from here."

Luckily, they had brought lanterns as part of their equipment. Ham and Monk used these, now, while Long Tom looked out for the two pets. So far, he had little to say to the girl.

However, as far as Monk and the lawyer were concerned, she was tops. She had explained, to their satisfaction, why she had so abruptly disappeared from New York. It was her belief, too, that young Nome Dale had come to Alaska in search of his father, though she had not yet seen the young man.

Skagway Willie, saying nothing, his jaws occasionally working on his wad of tobacco, led the way through the woods.

Everywhere was the vast silence, as though the whole world were waiting for something to happen in the next moment. It was uncanny. What menace lay ahead in the deep interior of this vast country?

This feeling grew upon them as they plodded beneath the trees. The spongy, slightly damp ground muffled their steps, and about the only sound was when they spoke to one another.

They abruptly emerged in a large clearing, and there before them was the lodge.

Whoever had built the cabin should have been given credit. It was well made; heavy logs formed its sides, each fitted to the next as though all had been turned out on a machine. The lodge was a wide, solid-looking building that looked like it had withstood a number of Alaskan winters.

The girl pointed ahead and exclaimed, "There's someone here! There's a light."

There was a wide porch running the width of the lodge, and on one side, where windows faced the porch, there was flickering lamplight.

They all hurried forward.

BUT as they climbed the steps of the cabin, Long Tom, still handling the pets, said, "What the devil is wrong with this Chemistry? He's as nervous as a fox!"

The chimp leaped to Ham's side, took hold of his master's hand and swung up into the lawyer's arms.

Monk said, "That blasted monkey is just afraid of the dark, that's all!"

He turned toward the doorway of the building.

But suddenly the guide, Skagway Willie, spoke in a voice that was more of a soft warning than anything else.

"You wait!" he said.

Monk gave the Indian one of his belligerent looks. "Wait for what?" he demanded.

Skagway Willie had turned, was motioning for the others to crouch down on the porch. He pointed behind them, toward the heavy woods from which they'd barely emerged.

"Look!" he said very quietly.

They all stared.

Monk, impatient, started to mutter, "What the blazes—"

Then he paused, his small eyes blinking. All of them saw now as their eyes concentrated on the darkness beyond them.

Dark forms were moving out from the trees. Those on the porch of the cabin were being completely circled.

The moving forms were men!

Skagway Willie made a deep sound that sounded like a grunt.

"Trap!" he announced.

Monk shot a look in the general direction where the guide was also crouched down in the darkness. "Yeah," he agreed. "And heap big!"

They could perceive a dozen forms now, advancing swiftly across the clearing.

Ham was the first to act. He leaped to the door of the cabin, pushed the girl and the two pets inside.

"Keep out of sight!" he ordered. "There's going to be a little trouble, I'm afraid!"

Monk had dropped his pack, was advancing across the wide porch. His bright, small eyes gleamed, and his fists knotted.

"I'll say there's going to be trouble," he yelled.

He was the first to meet the circle of advancing assailants. Ham, skinny Long Tom, and Skagway Willie were quickly at his side.

Fists swung! Men yelled! Bones cracked!

There was enough night light in the clearing around the cabin to show which were attackers and which were those trapped. Monk banged his way through four or five of the largest assailants.

He was shouting now, making a terrific racket. He grinned every time a man went down beneath his flailing fists.

Ham was not quite so lucky. Though he had carried his sword cane throughout the journey, it had been knocked from his hand at the first onslaught. He was busy with his fists, too, trying to handle three men at once.

Skagway Willie and Long Tom were having their share of trouble also.

Long Tom, for all his unhealthy appearance, was as tough as nails, as one man found out when he confidently stepped in to knock out the electrical wizard with a single blow.

The blow never landed—but Long Tom did. He was all over the fellow at once, his fists moving blindingly, his eyes blazing. He dropped the man with a staggering uppercut and leaped toward another.

Monk worked out a little system. He picked up a man, whirled around and around with him until the fellow was dizzy.

Then, setting him upon his feet again, Monk sent a single haymaker to the jaw. The man went staggering backward like a drunk looking for a place to sit down.

Ham was waiting. He had picked up a rock. He bopped the dazed man with the rock as the fellow staggered past him.

Monk tried the same method with another victim. It worked.

Three men leaped on the chemist! And this time, Ham hit Monk with the rock instead. It was a mistake, a result of the confusion. But that didn't help the hairy chemist.

He fell flat on his face!

When Monk swayed to his feet, he was aware that the fight had worked its way around to the rear of the cabin. There was a commotion back there, and he leaped that way.

But it wasn't a fight. It was Ham, yelling worriedly as he spoke to Long Tom. The attackers seemed to have disappeared.

Monk glared at his slender partner.

"Where are they?" the chemist demanded.

Ham waved toward the deep, surrounding woods. "They took out for the open spaces," he announced.

Monk moved toward the lawyer.

"In that case," he muttered, "this gives me a chance for evening up with you. What's the idea hitting me with that rock?"

"Mistake," Ham said.

"Well," roared Monk, "this is a mistake, too!"

But Long Tom grabbed the chemist, held him back, said, "You'd better start worrying about something else. We're in one sweet mess. Those birds grabbed Skagway Willie!"

Monk stared.

"You mean, he's gone?"

His partners nodded.

"And," Long Tom pointed out, "we need the guide, or we're sunk! I have a hunch he knows something about the totem mystery. Besides, he's the only one can lead us through this wilderness!"

Suddenly, Monk yelled, "Poor Georgiana! She must be scared to death!" He leaped toward the rear door of the lodge.

A moment later he appeared outside again. His eyes goggled.

"Those guys have got Georgiana, too!"

Chapter X. GUIDE TO DANGER!

FOR a tense moment following Monk's announcement, Long Tom and Ham said nothing. Around them was the dark, deep solitude of the forest, more ominous than ever. Nothing stirred.

Monk finally said, "I'll bet those guys figured Skagway Willie told the girl something. That's why she was seized, too!"

Ham nodded. "That's what I was just thinking."

Long Tom's pale features were grim. "Has it occurred to you two guys," he demanded, "that she might have *arranged* this trap?"

Apparently it had not, for both Ham and Monk looked surprised at even a mention of the idea.

"Don't believe it!" the chemist exploded.

Ham said, "Georgiana's in trouble. Her uncle, Homer Dale, is also in some sort of trouble, as are his three sons. Where are they? What's happened to them?" He spread his hands hopelessly. "It looks like some menace threatens that entire family!"

Long Tom still didn't look convinced.

"I don't trust dames!" he said emphatically.

Just then Habeas, the runt pig, stuck his snout out the back doorway of the lodge and next came inquisitively toward them. He sniffed the ground, ran off a few paces and then came back. He looked up at hairy Monk.

"What is it?" the chemist prodded, watching the pig.

Habeas started off again, his long snout to the ground. He went several yards, then returned once again.

"He's tryin' to tell us something!" Monk exclaimed. "Maybe he's picked up Georgiana's trail!"

"Yeah," Long Tom said, "and maybe he's picked up something else. That gang of guys, for instance!"

Monk's face brightened. "Well, that would be all right, too! Let's follow anyway!"

They spent a few moments locating lanterns that had been lost in the fight. Ham located his sword cane which, luckily, the crooks had overlooked. They went into the lodge and got additional supplies of canned goods from the kitchen, loaded these into their already heavily-laden pack sacks.

Monk pointed out, "No tellin' when we'll get back here." And little did the chemist know how true that statement was to be.

Monk helped himself to a dozen cans of beans. He found some foods for the pets. For the lodge seemed to be well stocked with provisions, as though someone had planned on staying here quite some time.

Finally, they got started.

Chemistry, the chimp, came out from beneath a couch and went along with them. The pet was still scared.

MONK let Habeas pick out the start of the trail and shortly noted that it led along a fairly well-defined

path through the big woods. Men, or animals, had made the trail. It skirted the thicker undergrowth. Walking was not too difficult.

They continued onward for about an hour. They found no signs of the girl, or of anyone else for that matter.

The trail had narrowed now and was nothing more than a narrow pathway. They came to a fork.

Since the left branch of the fork seemed to be the main route, they followed this. Naturally, they first searched for footprints. But the heavy carpet of pine needles that lay on the ground gave no clues.

They continued.

And there were more forks in the skimpy trail beneath the dense trees. At each of these points, the three aids stopped and argued about which trail to follow.

For another hour, they kept boring deeper into the heavy forest.

Finally, Monk drew up short and said, "I think we took the wrong turn at that last fork. Better go back." He pointed ahead. There was nothing but a wall of trees, now. "I think we made a mistake."

They returned, watching for the last fork where they had turned off. And they discovered a startling fact.

Going in the opposite direction, things were reversed. They came to forks in the trail that could lead in other directions. They tried one, discovered that the pathway ended against a regular junglelike mass of undergrowth. They returned again, to find that they had somehow missed the trail they'd been on.

Monk blinked his eyes.

Ham frowned. "I could have sworn this was the right path," he said.

Long Tom looked at them, saying nothing.

Habeas, the pig, was not even sniffing the ground now. He had a hopeless expression, also, as did Chemistry.

Ham stared at the skinny electrical wizard. "What do you think, Long Tom?"

Long Tom's thin face was grim.

"I'll tell you what I think," he snapped. "We're lost!"

Monk nodded. "I sorta figured that an hour ago!" he admitted. And then, as an afterthought, "I wonder if Doc is lost, too!"

IF Doc Savage was lost, his movements at dawn the following morning did not indicate the fact.

With big Renny, the gloomy-faced engineer, at his side, the bronze man seemed to be following something or somebody. The two men moved silently along the forest trail, not hurrying, pausing from time to time in order to listen for some sound that seemed to come from ahead.

Renny, in those moments, looked puzzled.

"Holy cow!" he whispered. "You sure we're still on their trail, Doc? I can't hear a sound!"

The bronze man nodded, his flake-gold eyes flickering.

"The girl and the Indian are only a short distance ahead," he said quietly.

Renny knew that the bronze man's hearing was something remarkable, a result of daily training he had undergone since early childhood. For the past hour, Renny had seen no signs of the two whose trail they had picked up; yet Doc was certain that the girl and the Indian were still leading them.

A few moments later, he saw that Doc Savage was right.

Sunlight showed through the tall trees just ahead, and, in almost the same moment, Renny saw blue water. It looked as if they were approaching a river.

Leading the way quietly, Doc moved closer to the clearing that led down to the water. Suddenly, he paused, motioning Renny to a position behind a big tree trunk.

They watched ahead.

The Indian had obtained a boat from somewhere along the shore. Quickly he had the craft in the water; then he and the girl were aboard. Each handled a paddle.

The canoe slid out into the water and headed downstream.

Renny said worriedly, "Hey! That might be the only canoe within miles of this place. We'd better grab it—and the girl, too!"

Doc shook his head.

"It would be better," he pointed out, "to try to follow them. We can keep to the trees along shore."

"But why not grab them, now?" Renny demanded.

For an instant, the bronze man did not answer. Then he said quietly, "It is obvious that the girl and the Indian are headed some place. We will learn more by following them."

They set out.

The canoe containing Georgiana Lee and the Indian guide made good time. It was necessary for Renny and Doc Savage to run, keeping themselves concealed along the shore line. This was somewhat difficult.

Renny was panting when they had covered several miles. The bronze man, however, showed no signs of fatigue, due to his unusual physical development. There was just the slightest sign of perspiration on his metallic features.

The river was narrow, and made a considerable number of bends in its course. It was around one of these bends that the canoe had disappeared, now. And when Doc Savage and the big engineer again caught sight of it, they stopped short.

The bronze man's own amphibian plane was drawn up close to the shore, practically concealed from the river by low-hanging tree branches.

Renny said, "Holy cow!" He tried to hold his great voice to a whisper. "That means that Long Tom and the others must have arrived!"

Doc nodded, his bronze features thoughtful.

"Wonder if they're on the plane?" Renny said. He started forward again.

"Wait!" Doc Savage said.

And then Renny saw the reason for Doc's warning.

Because the Indian guide had seen the plane, and had now paused, his paddle resting across the gunwales. He said something to the girl.

In the next moment, she was slipping from the forward seat and easing her slim form into the bottom of the canoe. She lay down and remained out of sight.

The Indian picked up his paddle and, looking alert, started toward the spot where the plane was moored near shore. He used his paddle silently, making no splashes as it dipped the smooth water.

The gun, being fired by someone aboard the plane, started making great gobbling sounds in the still, morning air!

DOC SAVAGE immediately swept into smooth action.

"Get to the canoe!" he ordered Renny. "Take care of the girl."

Instantly, Doc Savage disappeared through a screen of underbrush that hid him from the moored plane. He made little sound as he worked his way down close to shore. It would have been unlikely if anyone aboard the plane would have heard him anyway so great was the racket being created by the blasting gun.

The Indian guide had, at first, desperately tried to paddle away from the spot. But slugs kicked up water dangerously close to the flimsy craft.

Perhaps figuring on drawing the gunfire away from the canoe, the Indian leaped overboard and started swimming frantically toward a protecting overhang along the river bank. The canoe drifted.

Cabin door of the plane was open. Firing stopped for just a moment. Perhaps the gunman suspected a trick. Perhaps he knew someone was still aboard the canoe.

He appeared in the cabin doorway of the plane and raised the gun again.

That was when he was seized by the bronze man's corded, powerful hands!

The gunman was fairly young and well built. His cheeks were pale for a man found in this part of the country. He tried to fling Doc Savage from the plane. And, instead, he found himself held in a viselike grip as he was thrown back inside the cabin of the ship. The cabin was crowded with equipment cases and paraphernalia. The man stumbled over a case—and the gun fell from his fingers.

His feet whipped out and attempted to kick the bronze giant. The fellow could have saved his energy.

Because Doc picked him up, pinioned his arms, then held him. The man found himself absolutely helpless. He was amazed as, for the first time, he got a good look at the bronze, immobile features.

He stared in bewilderment.

Doc said quietly, "It might be a good idea to learn identities before trying to kill people."

There was a commotion just then, outside the plane.

Big Renny climbed aboard. With his massive left hand, he gripped the tall, grim-faced Indian. In his other was the girl, Georgiana Lee.

Georgiana Lee took one look at Doc Savage and gasped. Then she cried, "Someone aboard this plane was trying to shoot—"

She broke off, her violet-colored eyes widening. She stared in wonder at the man held by Doc Savage.

She stammered, "Howard! Howard Bullock!"

Chapter XI. MEN WITH GUNS

HOWARD BULLOCK stared at the girl, at Doc Savage and at Renny. He appeared too stunned to speak.

Finally he blurted, "I . . . I thought you were some of *them*, following me! I . . . I guess I was pretty scared!"

"That was quite evident," said Doc Savage. "That is why it was necessary to hold you. You might have shot somebody."

Howard Bullock gave the bronze man a grateful smile.

"Thanks," he murmured.

Doc questioned, "You said you were escaping from 'them'? Whom?"

Howard Bullock, though he was a tall, very capable-looking man, started trembling.

He stammered, "I . . . I—"

"Were you seized," asked Doc, "because of the totem pole menace?"

Howard Bullock jumped as though he might have been struck by someone. Terror was now plain in his eyes. He said evasively, "Well, yes—in a way!"

"What is it all about?" Renny rapped.

"I . . . I don't know!" Bullock gasped. But at the same time, his wild gaze veered to Skagway Willie. It was a fleeting glance; yet it was observed by Doc Savage. Doc said nothing.

"Well, then," big Renny announced in his booming voice, "all we do is return to this place where you were being held and blast out this crowd!"

Howard Bullock shook his head.

"It won't be as easy as that," he said.

"Why not?" demanded Renny.

"Because, first, you've got to find Hidden Forest. That's where they have the real hide-out; where they hold all captives. I was being taken there when I escaped."

"And you didn't learn the location of the place?" Renny said.

"No. I was unconscious part of the time. And they were pretty careful about mentioning definite locations. I escaped two days ago, reached Glacier Inlet and followed the shore downstream. I came upon this plane and was investigating."

Doc Savage had been quietly listening. Howard Bullock's story seemed true enough. In Doc's pocket was a check that had been drawn by the young man's own father, for his release.

Strangely, though, Doc made no mention of that fact, now, or that he had played the part of contact man. The old clothes which he'd been wearing at that time, since they had been worn over his regular attire, had now been discarded.

The bronze man said, "Perhaps the guide, here, can help us?"

They all looked at Skagway Willie, whose name the girl had mentioned.

Skagway Willie had been listening to the conversation, his lean hard jaws working on his tobacco cud from time to time.

He said flatly, "Maybe I find."

He made a motion with his long arm, indicating the general direction of the sea that lay at the end of Glacier Inlet.

Georgiana Lee's small, piquant face lost some of its tenseness for the first time. She looked at Doc Savage, and she was very beautiful.

"Thank heavens," she murmured, "you showed up!" She indicated Skagway Willie. "I think he knows the way, all right. But . . . but I was a little afraid, alone with him like that!"

She stepped over to Howard Bullock and asked hopefully, "Perhaps you heard them say something about my uncle, Homer Dale, while they were holding you captive?"

Bullock nodded. "Yes," he said, "Homer Dale's name was mentioned. Also that of a man named Clarence Faulkner, and others."

The girl brightened.

"You know where he is, then?"

But Howard Bullock shook his head.

"That is still a mystery," he said.

Doc Savage was suddenly directing everyone aboard the amphibian.

"We will use the plane," he said.

But getting Skagway Willie on the plane turned out to be something of a problem.

THE Indian, moving agilely, twisted away from big Renny and started streaking for the woods. Renny took out after him, his great voice crashing out and making a tremendous lot of sound in the solitude of

the wilderness.

Luckily, Renny caught Skagway Willie before he had gone far. Once the guide could have reached the protection of the big trees, pursuit would have been impossible.

Renny half dragged his captive back to the plane. The girl talked to him. He cooled off somewhat, spat, finally allowed himself to be led aboard.

When Doc Savage started up the powerful engines, it was necessary for Renny to sit on Skagway Willie's chest to keep him from jumping out into the river.

Doc had checked the fuel tanks and the reserve supply of gas. There was still enough gas for a number of hours in the air.

It was crowded aboard the plane, but everyone managed to find a spot to sit down. The girl, Georgiana, was in the cockpit with Doc Savage.

She told Doc about the lodge farther up Glacier Inlet, where the attack had taken place against Monk, Long Tom and Ham.

She explained, "I escaped from there during the excitement last night. I was afraid."

Doc made no comment. And in the next few moments, he was busy getting the heavy ship in the air. They climbed for altitude, headed back up the river.

To their right, for endless miles, was the forest. It looked like wild jungle.

On the left of the river, some distance inland, were the glacier barrens and the mountains, their snowcapped peaks gleaming in the sunlight.

Doc said, "We will first try to locate the rest of our men."

A HALF-HOUR later he was setting the plane down again, taxiing close to the log landing raft which Monk and the others had used the night before.

Leaving Renny in charge of the plane, they had Skagway Willie lead the way through the woods to the lodge.

It was deserted.

Rooms of the cabin, from their appearance, showed that they had been used by a number of men who were none too particular about tidiness. The girl shuddered.

She said, "This was uncle's place. It was sort of a . . . a retreat he had up here in Alaska. Those crooks have almost wrecked the place."

They looked around outside, but there was nothing to show that Ham and the others might have returned. Doc Savage made a special examination for any hidden messages that might have been left for him.

He found none.

However, the bronze man did not seem particularly concerned by his aids' absence. He said, "Perhaps we can contact them later, from the plane."

Georgiana Lee looked at him questioningly.

Doc explained that a part of their equipment included short-wave-radio sets, by means of which they communicated with one another when separated. Long Tom and the others were probably carrying sets with them, now, as part of their equipment in their packs.

They returned to the plane and were soon in the air again.

Skagway Willie, now that his first apparent fright of the flying bird had passed, watched the winding river below and gave directions.

At no time was it possible to tell whether the pokerfaced guide was trying to be co-operative or not. His coppery features continually held a grim look. It was as though he was always mad about something.

While Doc Savage checked the route with the Indian, Renny manipulated dials that controlled the short-wave sending-and-receiving apparatus. He tuned in on a wave length used by all the bronze man's aids.

After a moment, Renny's booming voice said, "I can't pick up Monk and the others!"

Doc Savage himself tried the dials but got no response. His eyes were thoughtful.

Next, he sent the plane in a banking circle and turned back up the river. They reached the point where the lodge was located a mile back from shore. From there, Doc flew a course inland, in ever-widening circles.

Below them spread the thick tangle of forest, the trees growing so close together that it was impossible to see the ground beneath them. Here and there, they picked up a tiny, isolated lake. But the forest itself appeared endless.

Doc said, "If they were down there, they would hear the plane. They would build a fire or give us some kind of sign."

Renny nodded. "In other words, they're not down there?"

"Apparently not," said Doc.

The bronze man turned back to their original course, after instructing Renny, "Keep the radio tuned in."

What would take days of weary travel on the ground, was now covered in a matter of minutes. But the plane was only good as long as they followed some waterway. Remainder of the interior was no different than wildly growing jungle. There were the forests and, here and there, a glacier or a snow-covered peak. There was little of anything else.

Sometime later, they reached the sea again. Skagway Willie indicated that Doc was to swing north and follow the coast.

They flew perhaps twenty miles—distances were deceiving to those aboard the plane, due to the vastness of this great country—and then the Indian motioned to a river that lay below them.

It was another of the many waterways that sliced into the interior of Alaska.

"Follow," Skagway Willie ordered briefly.

They swung inland.

And after about a half-hour of flying, the guide pointed to a tiny indentation along the shore.

"Down," he said.

Doc brought the ship down from five thousand feet, and they all saw that the cove was of a good size. A crane, startled, took off from the water and disappeared toward a marsh near shore.

They landed.

RENNY said doubtfully, "Nothing here but more wilderness!"

But Doc Savage indicated something that was almost hidden beneath trees far back in the cove. Only a sharp eye would have detected the object.

"A gas boat!" Renny said.

Everyone saw the deserted craft tied up near shore.

Doc nodded, looking at their guide, Skagway Willie.

It was as though the bronze man had intercepted the Indian's thought, for Skagway Willie said gruffly, "We use boat, now. This no good." He indicated the plane.

It was impossible to get too close to shore, due to rocks that appeared just beneath the surface. There was danger of wrecking the plane.

But part of the plane equipment included a portable rubber raft. This was inflated and put overboard.

The girl, Georgiana, and the Indian were first taken ashore by Renny. The trip was perhaps two hundred yards across the inner curve of the cove.

Then Renny returned for Doc Savage and young Howard Bullock. Doc had anchored the plane and set a locking device that would keep anyone from getting inside the big ship.

They started out for shore.

From the gas boat, another hundred yards off to the right, men suddenly appeared on deck and started shooting!

Chapter XII. DISAPPEARANCE

AT the first staccato sound of gunfire, Doc whipped toward Howard Bullock.

"Can you swim?" he asked swiftly.

The young man jerked his head.

"Then try to get on the far side of the plane," Doc advised. "Dive!"

Doc Savage and Renny were both excellent swimmers. They plunged from the raft, Howard Bullock between them. They disappeared below the surface. The water was cold, but not unbearably so. They swam underwater. When Howard Bullock—after a scant half moment beneath the surface would have

popped up into view again, Doc grabbed his mouth and nose, kept him from breathing and swam with him beneath the surface.

The guns held by the assorted group of hard-looking men aboard the fifty-foot gas boat blasted lead, and spray was knocked up from the water.

But the range was bad for small arms. It was too far. A man appeared on deck with an armful of rifles, and these were put into use.

The gunmen, however, jumped to one wrong conclusion. They figured that the three swimming men must be making toward shore. Judging about where heads would break the surface, they directed the gunfire that way.

Doc, Renny and Howard Bullock, meanwhile, came to the surface on the far side of the plane.

Howard Bullock gulped in air. He was a moment getting his breath back. Clinging to a wing, he gasped, "Thanks. I guess I would have been shot if you hadn't held me under!"

"Probably," Doc admitted.

They worked their way, by reaching up with their hands and still remaining in the water, toward the cabin of the big plane. On the other side of the plane, rifles were cracking. There was some shouting from the gas boat, located across the cove.

Obviously, the gunmen now suspected the truth: that their prey was behind the protection of the plane. Bullets started thumping into the metal body of the giant amphibian.

But Doc's plane was constructed of a special-alloy metal. The slugs did not penetrate.

Renny said, "Hope those birds haven't got a machine gun!"

Doc had swung up to a wing and, crouched down, had reached over and opened the cabin door on their side. A special contrivance released the lock that the bronze man had set when he left the plane.

In a moment, they were inside.

Renny stared through a window, all of which were bulletproof.

"Holy cow!" he thundered.

But Doc had already seen.

A small rowboat had set out from shore. In it were half a dozen men, five of them with rifles. A sixth rowed. The gunmen kept firing in the direction of the plane.

Renny said worriedly, "I don't see the girl or that blasted Indian!"

Doc nodded. He was working with something that looked like a type of flare pistol. His metallic hands moved swiftly, and he seemed oblivious of the crashing impact of lead against sides of the plane.

"The Indian," said Doc quietly, "is probably hiding with the girl in the woods."

That seemed to be the logical answer, since neither Georgiana Lee nor Skagway Willie could be seen from the plane windows.

Howard Bullock said excitedly, "What're we going to do? Those men—they're almost out here to the plane!"

Doc had the pistol ready, now. It contained a short barrel, perhaps an inch in diameter. He stepped to a sliding panel located in the cabin wall of the amphibian. He fired a single shot.

There was a terrific roar of sound, then a peculiar phenomenon took place.

A great black cloud seemed to settle over the cove. It spread rapidly, thick and dense, and enveloped everything within sight—water, trees, men.

Doc put away the gun, motioned to the others and ordered, "Swim for shore."

He was already urging them out of the cabin, for the darkness was fast enclosing the plane; and shortly they wouldn't be able to see a thing.

Renny, understanding something of the bronze man's scheme, said, "We'll circle and get aboard that gas boat?" Doc nodded.

"But how will we *see*?" Howard Bullock queried.

"Stick close to us," suggested Doc Savage.

They got out onto a wing, and the cabin door was locked again, and they slipped back into the water. The shooting had stopped, now, and all around the cove was the racket of men trying to shout directions to one another.

The black curtain, however, had them all confused.

TO Howard Bullock, the bronze man's sense of direction must have seemed amazing. All around them was the shouting of excited gunmen, and the blackness; yet Doc Savage pushed through the water quietly, intent on one course.

Renny, having already warned Bullock to make no sound, did likewise.

Shortly, their feet touched bottom, and they were climbing out onto the shore.

Doc passed something to Renny. Bullock saw that it was a large pistol with a drumlike magazine. He had never seen a weapon quite like it before.

"Only use it if necessary," Doc said to his aid.

Renny nodded.

They could barely see each other in the black cloud that had even spread to shore. But Doc led the way quickly, as certain of his route as though it had been daylight.

They circled the shore of the cove. The men out on the water and aboard the gas boat were still yelling excited orders to one another, and there were so many voices that it was confusing. But abruptly someone yelled an order, and the shouting suddenly stopped. There was heavy silence.

"Careful," Doc advised, still leading the way. "It might be a trick."

They were keeping to the woods, so naturally their progress was necessarily slow. Howard Bullock was still puzzled as to how Doc could tell the direction.

They finally reached that part of the inlet near where the gas boat had been tied up. Doc moved ahead silently, every sense alert. Renny and Bullock were close beside him. The black cloud was like a heavy fog all around them. And then, from out of the fog, loomed the bulky outlines of the boat. Doc had stopped almost at the water's edge, warning the two men with him.

"Wait here," he said very quietly.

He was gone two or three moments, then his giant figure appeared from out of the foggy blackness.

"What's happened?" Renny wanted to know.

"They've disappeared," Doc said.

They started a quiet search. They covered the shore line, located the point where the Indian guide and the girl had been landed.

They met no one and heard no further sound from the gunmen who had been aboard the boat. It was obvious that the men, scared off, must have taken to the woods. What their plans might be was a question.

Doc had been stooped over, examining the ground. Abruptly, a peculiar, soft musical sound filled the air near them.

Howard Bullock stiffened, said, "What's that?"

Doc Savage said nothing. Renny shook his head.

But the two-fisted engineer knew what the sound had been.

It was a trilling—elusive, a little weird—that Doc Savage unconsciously made in moments of startling discovery or surprise.

Doc, studying the ground, had found something that now held his interest.

He finally said, "The Indian guide entered the woods at this point. There are the imprints of his moccasins."

Howard Bullock blinked. He could see no prints upon the ground.

Renny asked, "What about the girl? Was she with Skagway Willie, too?"

Doc shook his head.

"There is only one set of prints," he said.

Renny swore. "Just as I figured!" he said. "I didn't like her actions aboard the plane!"

Howard Bullock's eyes flashed. "What do you mean?" he asked. "What was wrong about her actions?"

"It was when you were talking about being held a captive," Renny pointed out. "You happened to mention a guy named Juneau, who was one of the leaders of that gang. You didn't see the girl's reaction when you named that bird. But I *did!*"

Bullock looked puzzled. "Yes?" he prompted.

"Well," continued Renny, "she acted funny right after that. She seemed to be worried about something. And if you ask me, I think she's in with that crowd. She's escaped with them."

Bullock's face showed disbelief.

The cloud had been slowly lifting. It had raised several feet above the water, now. They could see the gas boat, deserted; and off to the right, they noted the bronze man's plane, intact.

There was no sign of the gunmen, though, or of Georgiana Lee and Skagway Willie.

Doc said, "There is only one other possibility in regard to the girl."

"What would that be?" queried Renny.

"Skagway Willie could have been carrying her. There is a chance that they are in hiding nearby."

IT had started to grow dark, now. They had little time to prepare for the search.

Renny located the rubber raft some distance up the shore. The three returned to the plane and changed their wet clothing. Doc selected certain items from his equipment, as much as could comfortably be carried.

Then the bronze man tried once more to contact Monk and the others. There was no reply. He moved a switch that set some sort of device on the plane, then ordered that they get started. He locked the plane cabin again, and they returned to shore.

They made a complete search of the fifty-foot gas boat and found nothing of importance except a number of five-gallon tin cans containing gas.

It was very dark when Doc Savage finally picked up the trail of Skagway Willie, the guide, and led the way into the deep forest.

Howard Bullock was still amazed that the bronze man could follow footprints that he, himself, could not even see. But Doc was using a box-like contrivance that looked something like a camp lantern. The device was a light scanner, and with it Doc Savage was able to pick up the almost imperceptible imprints of moccasins.

Skagway Willie's knowledge of the wilderness must have been uncanny. For, as Renny remarked, "Holy cow! How anyone could know where he's going in this place is beyond me!"

Yet the route seemed to be following a fairly definite course. It did not waver.

Howard Bullock asked worriedly, "Is there anything to show that Georgiana Lee is with that Indian?"

Doc Savage shook his head.

"There is no way to tell," he said.

Renny's long, gloomy face was grim. "She's up to something," he rumbled. "It's damned funny how she acted when she heard that Juneau guy's name mentioned!"

The big engineer was carrying a small black device in his massive fist. It looked not unlike a voltmeter. Renny had been holding onto the thing ever since they left the cove.

And, now, unexpectedly, the device started making a small vibrating sound. Renny looked at it, then at Doc Savage.

The bronze man took a brief glance at the object in Renny's hand, seemed to come to an instant decision.

"If we hurry," he said, "we can reach the plane in half an hour."

Bullock stared. "You're going back?" he asked, puzzled.

Doc nodded.

"It is possible that Monk, Ham and Long Tom are in more danger than we figured," he said. "There is more than the totem-pole menace to this thing, and it is obvious that there is a reason for the girl and that guide disappearing so frequently."

Bullock looked nervous again at mention of the totem pole. He said, "What . . . what do you mean?"

Renny's face was questioning, too.

Doc explained, "There is a second crowd in this mystery. What its exact purpose might be, is not yet clear. But the danger from it is just as great as this other thing. It is possible that this second group is trying to trap Monk and the others."

"But the girl—" Renny started.

"The girl," said Doc, "apparently is acquainted with one group. She is either working with it or is trying to reach it. At the same time, she is terrified of the other. That would explain her actions, her disappearances from time to time."

"But what about the guide, Skagway Willie?"

"He could be working for either crowd," said Doc. "Which one, we do not know."

Renny understood. "Then there is a purpose in their trying to confuse anyone who is trailing them!" he exclaimed. "One crowd wants to get us off the trail; the other would just as well kill us as not!"

Doc Savage nodded.

Worried, Howard Bullock asked, "Which one?"

But the bronze man did not answer.

They had been returning through the forest. Bullock was silent awhile, asking no further questions, then suddenly he asked, "But what about this thing that you say is installed on the plane? How did you know—"

Renny explained, indicating the device which he carried in his hand.

"Doc turned on a sensitized-alarm gadget before we left the plane," he said. "It sends out short-wave impulses. That's what is making this thing register, now."

"You mean," asked Bullock, "someone is trying to get aboard the plane?"

Renny nodded. "Either that, or Monk and the others are trying to reach us on the radio."

Chapter XIII. THE FLOOD

MONK wasn't trying to reach anything, at that moment. In fact, it was Ham, the lawyer, who was trying to do the reaching. He had swung his sword cane at the homely chemist's head, at the same time exclaiming harshly:

"If I get hold of you, you hopeless misfit, I'll wrap this around your neck!"

Monk ducked the blow, dived behind a big cedar tree, disappeared. He was out of sight for several moments.

Then, as abruptly, he leaped back into view again, hurrying up to the small clearing where Long Tom, Ham and the pets were resting. Everyone looked weary.

"*Whew!*"

Monk said with relief. "Almost got lost!"

Ham gave the chemist a disgusted look. "What do you think *this* is?" he rapped coolly.

For long hours, now, they had pushed through the forest, searching for some sort of definite trail, each knowing that he was getting more and more confused as to direction as time wore on.

It had been fairly warm throughout the day, and they were tired. But now that darkness was approaching, the question had been—should they continue on or not?

Long Tom had commented, "Where the hell is it getting us? We don't know where we are!"

The argument between Monk and Ham, strangely, had started over Long Tom's suggestion that they try to contact Doc Savage by radio. Long Tom remembered that one of the small portable sets had been packed in Monk's pack, and he had asked the chemist to get it out.

It was then that Monk had given his two partners a funny grin. Making no comment, he started unpacking his knapsack. Monk had ten cans of beans stacked out on the ground and was still bringing out more cans, when Long Tom demanded, "What the dickens?"

Monk had grinned.

"Was afraid we might get hungry," he announced. "You see, I left the radio back there at the lodge—and brought beans instead!"

That was when Ham had gone after the hairy chemist with his cane.

"Beans!" the lawyer snapped now. He had fumbled through his pockets. He was holding a packet of damp, useless matches, made wet by the perspiration on his clothing.

"Cold beans at that!" he snorted. "We can't make a fire."

Monk and Long Tom had already looked for matches. Theirs were wet, too.

To add to their gloom, it started to rain.

The gray dusk swiftly changed to night, and blackness clamped down over the endless forest like the closing lid of a can.

With the rain, it grew colder. The only protection the three men had were the clothes they were wearing. Thus, it was impossible to stand still. They found it necessary to keep moving.

"We might as well walk," Long Tom said.

"Where?" asked Monk.

"Any place!" said the fiery electrical expert. "We won't be any worse off, and at least we'll keep warm!"

So they walked.

And they heard the shot.

Carrying above the sound of wind and rain, the crack had come from directly ahead.

"A rifle!" Ham said.

Monk wasn't waiting for anything, now. "*Yeo-o-ow!*" he yelled. "Let's get goin'!"

They followed in the direction of the shot. Twice again, they heard a rifle crack, and their hopes soared.

And then, they heard—nothing.

And after walking an hour, Ham said, "The devil with this! I've already walked into half of the trees in this forest." His face was scratched from shoving into brush; his well tailored clothes were torn. "It will be safer just standing still," he pointed out.

They halted.

In the blackness—they could not see each other—Monk asked, "How about some beans?"

They ate cold beans from cans that Monk managed to pry open with a knife. The beans tasted pretty good, now. They were half starved.

They were also pretty exhausted.

When the blackness settled over them that night, it was still raining hard, with no indications whatsoever that it was ever going to let up. They heard no more shots.

It rained throughout the next day. If anything, it seemed to increase, the torrential downpour making it almost dark beneath the big trees. And with night came the moan of the wind.

The three aids had been standing there in the blackness, grimly silent, when Monk said worriedly, "There's water up to my ankles!"

Long Tom added tensely, "I noticed it five minutes ago. We'd better try to reach higher ground!"

"How we going to find it?" Monk said into the darkness.

"There's nothing like trying!" Long Tom said. "Come on."

Habeas was in Monk's arms, now. The chimp, Chemistry, was chattering wildly atop the lawyer's shoulder.

They walked slowly, remaining close together and talking, so that one man would not wander off from the others. Water slopped around their ankles and was cold. They couldn't see a thing.

Then they discovered that it was better if one man led the way, the others in a single file behind, holding belts so they could stick together. That way, they were able to push ahead faster.

The noise of the rain almost deafened their ears. It seemed to grow louder.

Ham, leading, stopped. He said swiftly, "Wait!"

He had to yell above the roar of the downpour. It seemed to be everywhere. It smashed against their eardrums.

Long Tom yelled close to Ham, "What's wrong?"

"Step up here a minute," Ham yelled.

Long Tom did so. Immediately, water swirled up around his skinny knees. He took another tentative step forward in the darkness. The water came higher.

He drew back with a start. "We must be at the edge of an overflowing stream!" he shouted.

All understood the roaring sound, now. It wasn't only the rain; it was water—water rushing along banks that must be half washed away. They had no way of knowing the depth of that water.

"Better go back!" Ham yelled.

Hanging close together, they reversed their course. It was maddening, trying to move in the absolute blackness. They had no way of telling what lay ahead.

"Listen!" Long Tom snapped. "We've got to reach higher ground. We must be in some sort of lowland!"

Ham and Monk understood what he meant as they moved on. The water was getting constantly deeper. It rushed past their legs now, halfway to their knees. It made each step hazardous, because there was quite a current.

They kept pushing through the rain.

Finally, worried, Ham said, "It's still getting deeper!"

Monk had an idea.

"Let's get up in one of these trees," he suggested.

No sooner had he said it when there was a crackling sound somewhere ahead of them. It was followed by a great crashing as massive limbs ripped through the trees of the forest. There was nothing they could do but stand still and listen to the weird sound. The earth beneath them trembled a moment, then was still. They knew what had happened. The wind and the rain had knocked down a giant cedar.

A shiver ran down their spines.

"Like blazes we'll climb a tree!" Long Tom yelled.

Monk roared, "Well, what will we do—stand here and *drown*?"

It looked as if they were trapped by the flood.

And again, just at that moment, came the crack of a rifle. It was followed by three more shots. No question about it, this time. Someone was shooting!

Long Tom said tensely, "Either someone is trying to help us, or he is trying to lead us to our deaths!"

Monk said, "Point is, let's *find* the guy! We can argue with him about that later!"

Ham had another idea. "I wonder if we've really been lost at all?" he put in. "I'll bet that guy with the gun has been near us all the time, following us, leading us into something, maybe!"

Monk blurted, "Well, then, I'm going to find out!" He plunged ahead, pulling the others with him.

Again they heard a shot, and they kept plodding through the swirling water and blackness. And after a while, it seemed to them that the water was not quite so deep. There was a chance that they were reaching higher ground.

Perhaps, after all, they had a chance of escaping the flood.

But none of the three aids would have given odds on that chance. The possibility of escaping death looked pretty slim!

Chapter XIV. RETURN TO TROUBLE!

SOMETIME that night, it stopped raining. By dawn, it was bright and clear, and the sun came up warm. In the woods, birds came from places of concealment and started singing.

The tall, lean-looking man with the two weeks' growth of beard came out of the cabin door and smelled the clean, fresh air. He looked relieved.

The cabin was on a flat spot half-way up a sloping hillside. A section of forest had, in the past, been cleared here. There was a new growth of trees coming up now; they were still hardly more than saplings.

At the foot of the hillside was a salt chuck where logs had once been rolled. An old hand-logger's raft still floated against the shore, chained to a stake that had been driven into the bank. The raft—it would have covered two fair-sized building lots—was made of big logs fastened together. It was the type used by hand-loggers, to move from section to section during the lumbering season.

But this was a deserted camp, apparently, and the only sign of activity was the single fellow with the beard prowling around, looking for some dry wood.

He finally located a short length of log stump beneath the raised floor of the cabin. He dragged it out, returned inside the cabin for an ax, then went to work on the stump with hefty swings of the ax.

From time to time, he paused, resting the ax blade on the ground and staring around. He seemed uneasy about something. When he had enough wood to make an armful, he went into the shack, started a fire in the old iron stove and put a pot of day-old coffee on the stove to heat.

He came outside and continued to chop wood. He'd take a dozen licks with the ax, then pause, looking around. Heavy timber was some distance away, due to the new growth that was on the section all around

the old lumbering camp. The man's gray eyes would search to the edge of the timber line, travel down to the salt chuck, then cover the far side of the camp. Reassured, apparently, that he was still alone, he continued chopping.

After a while, he went inside and had a cup of coffee. There was no food in the cabin.

It was while the bearded man was inside that Monk, Ham and Long Tom appeared. They emerged from the heavier timber, cut across the section planted with young trees. Obviously, they had been led near by the sounds of the man chopping wood. But now, they saw the cabin, with smoke rising from the chimney. Their pace quickened.

The fellow with the beard heard them, heard the shout that came across the clear morning air.

He leaped outside, a rifle now in his hands. Already spotted by the three men, he stood his ground, waiting. His gray eyes narrowed.

Monk, Ham and Long Tom, along with the two pets, made a sorry-looking appearance. Their torn clothes were still plastered to their bodies. Their shoes were half worn out. They all needed a shave.

It was Monk who shouted, "*Ye-o-ow!* Coffee! And a fire, too!" He started toward the cabin.

The tall, spare fellow with the rifle made a quick, smooth movement. He blocked the chemist's path.

"Hold on!" he rapped.

Monk drew up, staring. He was aware of the threatening manner in which the rifle was held. Ham and Long Tom drew up short, also.

Monk said, "Look, brother, we were caught in a flood in that blasted forest. We darn near drowned. Also, in case you're interested, we darn near froze, too!" Monk sniffed. "And you've got a pot of coffee on the stove there. So—"

He started forward again.

"Wait!" the man with the beard snapped. He still held the rifle steady in his hands.

"Just who are you?" he demanded, eyes narrowed.

Monk sighed. Very elaborately—and looking comical in his tattered appearance—he introduced Long Tom, Ham and himself.

The man stared, wide-eyed, now.

"You mean," he asked, "you're connected with Doc Savage?"

Monk nodded.

"With the *real* Doc Savage?"

"Yes, blast it!" the chemist snorted impatiently. "Now, if you'll just—"

The fellow with the beard suddenly put aside the rifle and gave a big sigh of relief. He said, "In that case, I'll tell you!"

"Tell us what?" Monk scowled.

"I've escaped from that devil who seized Clarence Faulkner and the others!" he said.

THEY learned that the man's name was Henry Collard. He told how it had taken him a week to reach this camp; then the storm had caught up with him.

Collard indicated the logging raft down in the salt chuck, explained, "I figured I'd use that thing and head downstream. That way, maybe I can find a way out of this damned wilderness."

Monk had warmed up some of the beans, which he'd managed to hang onto throughout the storm. They had coffee and dried their clothes by the stove. They all felt considerably better. The pets were still hugging the fire.

They questioned Henry Collard and ran up against the same problems everyone had experienced so far in this trouble.

The man seemed fearful of something. He said, "I was seized from a yacht, sailing out of Seattle. I was on a vacation, fishing. I was taken to some place called Hidden Forest and, most of the time, was kept either blindfolded or under the influence of a drug."

Monk nodded. "That blasted forest!" he said. "It's magic, that's what it is!"

Ham demanded, "Who seized you?"

Henry Collard chewed his lip. He looked scared. "I don't know!" he exclaimed.

"Did it have anything to do with them blasted totem things?" Monk prodded.

Collard gave a start. "I . . . that is—" he began. Then he shook his head. "I'd rather not talk about that!"

"What about Clarence Faulkner?" Long Tom asked.

"And Homer Dale, the millionaire?" Monk added.

Henry Collard shook his head slowly. "I think they're victims, too," he said. "I heard them mentioned, but I never saw them. There was a lot of mystery concerning them!"

Ham, his eyes shrewd, said, "But the totem-pole business is behind this?"

Collard nodded. "Y-yes!" he admitted worriedly.

Later, it was decided that they would try and find the plane which they had left on Glacier Inlet. Long Tom still carried the map. It was sodden, torn, but he consulted it before they set out on the log raft.

"Where are we?" Monk wanted to know.

Long Tom stared at the map. "Your guess is as good as mine," he said. "But we'll start out. Maybe this salt chuck leads to the inlet. Maybe we'll locate the plane."

THERE were long poles that could be used for poling the raft away from shore. Once they reached some sort of sizable stream, the current would carry them along.

The salt chuck proved to be a small inlet from a larger water course, a river. The raft eased out into the

river and was picked up by the moving current.

Ham said, "This doesn't look much like that Glacier Inlet."

They were moving along at a fair rate, now. Monk sat down and relaxed. He scratched at his growth of beard.

"Well, blast it," he commented, "we're at least getting some place, aren't we?"

"Where?" Ham demanded.

Monk didn't reply. He was sitting on the raft with his jaw cupped in his hands, apparently deep in thought about something. Suddenly he looked over at Ham, now also sitting down. The lawyer was watching the river.

Long Tom was nearby, standing near the edge of the raft with one of the long poles in his hand, in case it was needed.

"Pssst!"

Monk hissed.

Ham looked his way.

Glancing over his shoulder, the chemist made a motion to his slender partner. Ham came over and sat down beside him.

Henry Collard was some distance behind them, at the very rear end of the log raft. He, too, was holding a long pole, watching the river currents.

"What's the matter with you?" Ham prodded, noting Monk's frowning features.

"I just thought of something," said the chemist.

"Thought of what?"

Without turning, Monk jerked his head, indicating the stranger behind them.

"That guy said he escaped from Hidden Forest, didn't he?" said Monk.

"Yes, stupid, that's what he said," Ham admitted.

"And he, himself, was lost in the woods?"

Ham nodded, looking impatient.

"And he got to that deserted cabin where there ain't been no loggers in one blasted long time, right?"

"Sure," agreed the lawyer. "So what?"

"So where," finished Monk, "did Henry Collard pick up that nice new rifle along the way? Don't you get it? *He's* the guy who led us all around that blamed forest! It was a trick!"

Ham's eyes narrowed. He looked thoughtfully at Monk.

"Did you tell Long Tom about it?" the lawyer asked quietly.

Monk shook his head. "Not yet."

The chemist tried to catch Long Tom's attention, at the same time trying not to arouse the curiosity of Henry Collard, at the rear of the raft. Also, Monk continued talking to Ham.

"We got a couple of machine pistols in these pack sacks," he said, nodding toward the objects, dumped on the raft some distance away from them. The two pets were asleep on top of the packs. "But those guns got soaked with water. Doubt if they're any good!"

Long Tom had noticed them talking. He laid down his pole and came over.

"What are you two guys acting so mysterious about?" he demanded.

They told him about Henry Collard and the new rifle.

The skinny electrical expert stiffened. "Never thought of that!" he said.

He turned and looked back at the fellow with the heavy growth of beard. "Well, there's nothing like finding out whether he's fooled us or not," he remarked, and started back along the raft.

Henry Collard had been watching the three aids, now. As Long Tom started his way, he put down his own pole, bent and picked up the rifle, which had been placed on the raft near his feet.

He pointed the rifle at Long Tom and said, "I'd stand right there if I were you!" His eyes, now, were cold. There was a sneer on his mouth.

Long Tom swore. He stood still.

Monk jumped up and let out a yell of rage.

"Blazes! I was right!" he shouted. He started running back along the raft.

Henry Collard aimed the rifle, pulled the trigger, and a slug bit into a log close to the hairy chemist's feet. Monk drew up short, his small eyes blinking.

Behind him, Ham let out a yell.

"Look!" the lawyer said.

They all stared.

The raft had reached a fairly wide part of the river now. It was moving along with the current. They were in midstream, and the water appeared to be deep.

The white, sleek-looking yacht was moving in midstream, too. It was bearing down on them with remarkably fast speed. It was the kind of a yacht that, new, must have cost close to half a million dollars. Men were lined along the rails of the boat.

Ham gave a sigh of relief. "Our troubles are over!" he said, smiling.

Monk was grinning. He looked back at Henry Collard, still holding the rifle, and said, "You'd better put away that gun, fella!"

There was a *crack* from the deck of the fast-approaching yacht. Something whined close over the hairy chemist's head. He dropped to his stomach, and then stared.

Men on the yacht were holding guns, now! Several had rifles. All the weapons were aimed in the general direction of Monk, Ham, and Long Tom.

From the rear of the raft, Henry Collard said, "Don't move!"

He was aiming the rifle at them, and there was a satisfied grin on his face.

Ham, wide-eyed, cried, "Trick! That Henry Collard is in with these devils!"

"Nice time to find it out," commented Long Tom.

Somebody hailed Collard from the rail of the boat. "Nice going, Bethel! Hold everything until we give you some help!"

Monk jumped. "Bethel!" he muttered. "So *that's* his name!"

The yacht slid smoothly alongside. There was the sound of powerful diesel engines throbbing. The yacht bumped the raft. Instantly men leaped over the rail and landed on the raft. They held clubs in their hands, now.

And, for just a moment, the arriving thugs were between the Doc Savage aids and the rifleman, Bethel, at the rear of the log raft.

Monk yelled and went into action. He leaped into the midst of the arriving crooks. Ham and Long Tom immediately joined him.

But they were at last trapped, it seemed.

Chapter XV. CRY IN THE NIGHT

THERE had been no chance for Monk or his partners to reach their packs. Bethel had seen to that as he kept them covered during arrival of the white yacht.

But, luckily, the crooks had been overconfident in seeing the three Doc Savage aids being held at bay by Bethel. They had piled onto the raft with only clubs in their hands. That was their mistake.

The fight, with Monk and his partners a tight, furiously moving knot in the center, swayed back and forth across the raft. About a dozen assailants were on the raft, now. The yacht pulled away, standing off as the battle took place.

Monk slugged one heavy-set fellow, dumped him overboard as though he were an empty sack. He grabbed another. He managed to twist one of the clubs out of the fellow's hand. He hit the man a single crack, saw him sway crazily. Monk booted him in the pants and knocked him, too, into the river. He leaped back into the mêlée, the club swinging.

Ham and skinny Long Tom were trying to hold their own on the opposite end of the raft. Bethel, seeing that it was too dangerous to use the rifle, now, had leaped in to help his partners.

Bethel, confident, made a grab for the unhealthy-looking electrical expert, Long Tom. A fist came out of space and caught him under the chin. There was a surprised look on Bethel's face as he was lifted completely off his feet. He landed on his back.

Long Tom tore into another opponent.

All three Doc Savage aids were so busy fighting that they had not noticed something about the raft. But Ham got a quick view, now.

Ahead, the river divided into two channels where it passed a wooded island, that lay right in midstream. The raft was doing a crazy circle in the river currents, swinging to the left of the island. But it was quite close to shore, moving swiftly.

Monk had already eliminated half a dozen assailants. All were in the river, swimming, being carried downstream.

Three others were picking themselves up dazedly from the raft, looking somewhat amazed. They had figured capture of the Doc Savage crowd was going to be something easy.

The three men remaining on their feet suddenly backed off as Monk and his partners started a wedge-formed drive in their direction. And then, with wild yells, they ran back along the float and dived into the river. They had had enough of Monk's brand of fighting.

The yacht, meanwhile, had held back, its pilot apparently afraid to venture too close to shore. And for good reason.

Abruptly, a submerged rock hooked the forward end of the moving raft, jammed it; then suddenly, the huge float swiveled in the swift current and made a half circle, its forward end still jammed. The raft slammed against the river bank, pushing up beneath low-hanging branches that hung down almost to the water.

Ham, Long Tom, and Monk were sent sprawling across the logs. The two pets, who had been hiding behind the packs, let out assorted squeals and leaped from the jammed raft to the shore of the island.

Someone was shouting from the yacht, still out in midstream. A small boat was being lowered over the side. Aid was being sent to those struggling in the water.

For a moment, Monk and his partners were screened from those remaining on the yacht. The raft was still stuck against the jamming rocks. It was half hidden beneath the over-hanging trees.

Monk yelled, "We'd better hurry!"

He was ripping at a drawstring on his pack sack. Shortly, he had one of Doc Savage's machine pistols in his hairy fist. Breaking the gun open, he removed the special drum-type magazine and started wiping it dry with his shirt.

Long Tom located one of the guns in his sack and started doing likewise.

Monk grumbled, "Hope these blasted things still work!"

They got the guns ready, crouched down near the back of the raft, and waited for the attack that, they knew, was soon to come.

But before that happened, they heard the screaming of the girl!

MONK, screened by the low-hanging branches, had been standing with one of the machine pistols held ready in his hand.

He tensed, stared at Ham and Long Tom.

"Did you hear that?" the chemist asked.

They both nodded.

Taking a desperate chance, Monk ran out along that part of the log raft which still protruded into the river. The small boat had just returned to the yacht, and it was loaded with men rescued from the river. But on the deck of the yacht itself, another form of activity was taking place.

There were two men struggling with someone. Monk stared.

It was a girl!

At first it was difficult to see who it was. But then the bright sunlight touched something that brought Monk up tense.

Sunlight touching the red of the girl's hair! The chemist gasped.

Georgiana Lee!

And Georgiana was struggling with men who held her captive aboard the sleek-looking yacht!

The homely chemist gave a bellowing yell. He raised the machine pistol and fired a blast over the yacht.

Long Tom and Ham had come running up behind Monk, also staring across the water toward the yacht rail. Ham started to say, "She must be a prisoner—"

And then all three aids threw themselves flat.

Guns blasted from the yacht. Lead sprayed all around the Doc Savage men, peppering the leaves and tree branches just above their heads.

They bellied along the raft, reached the inland bank and dived behind protecting trees. It was either that—or get shot!

The siege of the island took place throughout the remainder of the day. Each time one of the Doc Savage aids ventured out onto the log float, to note what was happening aboard the yacht, there was a rattle of gunfire, and he was forced to retreat to the island again.

The yacht, diesels throbbing as it held steady against the downriver current, lay two hundred yards off shore. The yacht could not venture closer than this because of the rocks.

Neither did the small boat put out for the island. The raiders knew now that the Doc Savage men had guns. They were taking no chances. But the moment there was any sign of activity from those stranded on the island, they sent bullets whining that way.

Monk, Ham, and Long Tom were checkmated. There was nothing they could do. Darkness finally came, and the situation was the same. There had been no further sign of the girl on deck, nor had they heard any further cries for help.

LATER that night, they heard men suddenly shouting aboard the yacht. Clearly across the water, they could hear men pounding along the deck, shouting.

And then there was the girl's cry again. A cry of terror!

Monk, out on the raft now with his two partners, squinted his gaze as he tried to see across the water. They could see the trim outlines of the white yacht.

The chemist said grimly, "Blazes! I'm gonna swim out there! I'm gonna find out if—"

Even as they spoke, they saw something clear the railing of the yacht. There was a brief, shrill scream. And then a splash.

Silence, strained and ominous, followed.

Almost immediately the boat's powerful engines swung into a deep throb, and the yacht started moving upstream. Its speed was amazing. Within moments, it was out of sight.

Monk, meanwhile, had been ripping off his tattered shirt and shoes. He announced, "I'm going after her!"

He leaped into the river and started swimming with powerful overhand strokes. He soon disappeared in the surrounding gloom.

Worried, Ham said, "He'll have one tough time of it in that current out there!"

Long Tom murmured, "He'll make it."

They waited. Minutes passed. A half-hour!

Finally, they heard underbrush crackling; then Monk, water still dripping from him, appeared from behind them.

"Worked my way back to shore at the other end of the island!" he said. He was still breathing hard from the exertion of swimming. "Darned current almost got me!" he said.

Ham said, "And the girl—"

Monk held something in his hand. His two partners looked at the object in silence.

It was a brightly colored scarf. Georgiana Lee had been wearing the neckerchief the last time they had seen her, her dainty figure trim and tempting in breeches and leather boots.

Monk, his homely features strained, said quietly, "I found this . . . floating in the river. But . . . but that's all I found."

The three of them stood there, and they were silent.

It was Long Tom who said, "We misjudged Georgiana Lee. She's been a captive of that crowd all the time, She must have tried to escape, tonight, and rather than be held by those devils, she jumped off the yacht."

He looked at Monk. "You don't think she reached shore?"

The chemist shook his head. His face was somber.

"Not a chance," he explained. "The current out there is pretty bad, spring rains have swelled the rivers, and this one is running plenty strong. Also, I'm certain she must have gone right down. I didn't get a glimpse of her."

Ham's face was strained. For once, he didn't contradict his homely partner.

Instead, he said, "We've got to get off this island. No telling if those birds will come back."

Monk nodded. "But we'd better not try swimming," he pointed out. "We'll never make the mainland. Best thing to do is to get this blasted raft started again."

They spent two hours trying to pry the big log float loose. They used the long poles that had already been on the float. And, using pieces of driftwood as fulcrums, they pried the raft slowly off the rocks. It finally came loose and started easing away from the shore.

The pets were called. They had been hiding in the woods, and they leaped aboard the raft at the last possible moment. Swiftly, the river currents caught up the raft and carried it again downstream.

The moon had come up, now. All around them was the night, white and bright, and in the distance the dark, somber fringes of the forest.

Monk said, "We're in one sweet fix now if that yacht comes back!"

He still held one of the machine pistols. But like his partners, the chemist realized their chances were slim if the yacht returned. They would be starkly revealed out there in the white moonlight.

It was while Monk was worrying about the return of the yacht, that they heard the drone of the airplane. All three Doc Savage aids stared overhead. The steady drone became louder, and then they saw the silver object silhouetted against the moon-bright sky.

Monk squinted. Then he gulped in amazement as the plane swooped rapidly toward them and came down out of the skies.

"That's *our* ship!" Monk howled.

Ham added: "It must be Doc!"

The plane had leveled off now, was flying close above the water. It zoomed over them, and Long Tom bawled, "Get down! *Maybe Doc isn't in the plane!*"

Monk and Ham had not thought of that. They threw themselves flat. The electrical expert did likewise.

The plane skimmed the raft, lifted a little, circled.

"*Yeo-o-ow!*"

Monk howled. "That was close!" The roar of the plane motors was still in his ears.

"Look!" Long Tom yelled.

The ship was returning, flying even lower this time. All saw that a cabin window was open, and a man was leaning out of the plane. The man was holding something in his hand.

"Watch out!" Monk warned the others.

But then, in the next instant, he let out a whoop and jumped to his feet. He started waving his arms.

"Doc!" he yelled. "It's Doc!"

The others saw for themselves.

Doc Savage was the man leaning out of the cabin window. Just as the plane skimmed close over the log raft, the package that he was holding dropped. It landed on the raft. The plane lifted and continued on.

Monk leaped toward the object that Doc had dropped. And then he let out a yell.

"Wow!"

the chemist said happily. "Food!"

Ham, in the meantime, had been watching the silver ship. He said curiously, "I wonder why Doc doesn't land and—"

He paused, his gaze going up the river behind them. The others followed his stare.

Like a sleek white ghost, the yacht had appeared again. It was moving downstream swiftly, heading toward them.

Long Tom shouted, "Doc's spotted that boat. That's why he didn't land. Look!"

They saw the bronze man's plane start to circle the yacht. It dropped low again.

And then, without warning, the thing happened.

A powerful searchlight sprang into life aboard the yacht. Its revealing gleam picked up the silver wings of the bronze man's plane!

DOC SAVAGE must have suspected some trick. He immediately sent the amphibian in a steep climb. The motors were a deep roar, now.

The gun that was mounted on the deck of the yacht made a great *barr-o-om!* of sound. A shell exploded high in the air, dangerously close to the bronze man's climbing ship.

Another followed.

Astounded, Monk and the others watched.

Then, suddenly, Doc Savage's plane stopped its climb, jiggled crazily in the air for a moment, then started a screaming descent toward the shore of the river! Smoke billowed out behind it. Within seconds, the plane had disappeared behind the treetops, out of sight. But shortly, the terrific explosion followed. There was a roaring blast, and red glare touched the sky.

Monk muttered something that sounded like a prayer. "They crashed!" he gasped.

Long Tom exclaimed, "Come on! We've got to get ashore. We've got to do *something!*"

He grabbed up the tin box of food. The box was tied with rope. Long Tom loosened his belt, slid the belt through the ropes on the tin box and fastened his buckle again.

"Grab the pets!" he ordered, and dived overboard.

Ham and Monk, each holding a pet beneath one arm, did likewise.

Whether they would be able to outswim the river currents or not was a question.

Chapter XVI. AMBUSH!

THE river made a long, sweeping curve near the point where the three aids dived from the raft. Ahead, there was a finger of land that jutted out into the curve of the river. It was toward this point that the river currents flowed.

Monk, Ham, and Long Tom made use of the currents. They managed to reach land about a half-hour later. They dragged themselves up on shore. The pets, safe, bounded up to dry rocks.

For moments, they were all too exhausted to speak.

But thoughts of the bronze man, and what must have happened to him, spurred them on. Soon, they were headed up the shore.

They had been carried far enough downstream that they could no longer see the mysterious white yacht.

Monk said, "They're probably waiting to make sure Doc is dead!"

The comment did not help their depressed feelings.

Ham said sharply, "Let's don't jump to conclusions about Doc until we're certain!"

"Right!" Long Tom agreed. He pointed to the stars overhead, said, "If we hurry, we can take a bearing by the stars and maybe find our way in and out of the forest before dawn. From the quickness of that plane crash, Doc couldn't have been very far inland."

Ham thought the suggestion was a good one.

But Monk said, "You any idea where to look?"

Long Tom nodded.

"I noticed a particular bit of shore line where the plane disappeared," he explained. "We'll head in from there."

They continued along the riverbank.

Abruptly, Long Tom drew up short, pointed ahead.

"It was about here," he said, "and Doc's plane was headed straight into the interior." He stared upward a moment, placing the position of the stars, explaining that they probably could get a glimpse of the heavens from within the forest, also.

Ham started to say, "Let's hope—" Then he paused, looking ahead. The others followed his gaze.

They saw the yacht for the first time, anchored some distance off-shore.

And, as their eyes trained on the river, they saw something else.

The small boat was putting out from the yacht, pointed for the very shore on which they stood. There appeared to be several men in the small boat.

Monk gripped Ham's arm, said, "I have an idea!"

Ham, surprisingly, nodded. "I think I have, too!"

"We'll grab those guys when they reach shore, right after they land!" said Monk. "They'll have guns, most likely, and that's what we need more of!"

They started forward, keeping to the fringe of trees, now. The pets, who had long since been rigidly trained to obey certain orders, were cautioned to remain behind them and make no noise.

The point where the small boat would land was about a quarter of a mile ahead. They were forced to hurry, at the same time making certain that they were not discovered.

And they barely reached a hide-out along shore before the rowboat touched the bank.

There were three men in the boat, besides the man at the oars. The three piled out, rifles in their hands. One also carried an electric lantern, which he now paused to light.

One man said gruffly, "O. K., Joe. Pick up a couple more guys and hurry back. We'll start ahead."

The man at the oars muttered something, started back toward the yacht again.

MEANWHILE, from where they were hidden some distance back among the trees, Ham was making silent motions to his two partners. The lawyer's sign language indicated which of the three men each of them was to take. The attack, once the three gunmen entered the woods, would have to be swift and silent.

Monk and Long Tom nodded.

They waited.

And in a few moments, the three riflemen approached the spot where the Doc Savage men waited in ambush.

Then Monk, Ham and Long Tom struck with blurred speed. They knew that surprise, temporarily, was in their favor—and needed. If the three men ever got a chance to use the rifles, or to cry out a warning—

Monk grabbed a man, clamped a powerful hand over the fellow's mouth, jerked the rifle free of his captive's grasp. The chemist, in a fight, was not particular about the methods he used.

He spun the rifle in his hand, got the stock uppermost and used it as a club.

Crack!

The man went down, the electric lantern dropping from his other hand, but luckily remaining lighted. It gave enough light so that the Doc Savage aids could see what they were doing.

Ham and Long Tom were struggling with the other two men. The captives were big men, powerful. Ham and Long Tom had their hands full.

Monk called, "Hold them!"

One captive was attempting to twist his rifle into position for firing. At the same time, Long Tom was trying to keep the fellow from making an outcry.

Monk jumped to Long Tom's side, swung the rifle and knocked the second captive senseless!

Then he whirled to help his partner Ham. The lawyer also had a rifle in his hands, now, and he let swing at the same moment as the chemist.

The third victim probably never knew what hit him. He folded up and went to sleep.

Monk said with a sigh, "Shucks! Too bad they didn't send along the whole crew!"

They had nothing with which to tie up the victims. So, for precautionary measures, Monk went around and tapped each man on the jaw again. He was taking no chances.

"That'll keep them asleep for a while!" he said.

They dragged the men beneath some brush, then scuffed dirt and old leaves over the spot where the fight had taken place. They each took a rifle, and Long Tom held the lantern.

Ham said, "If anybody follows this same way, they'll think our trail was made by these three guys."

Long Tom had paused, using the lantern to study the hard faces of the three unconscious figures.

Now, he said thoughtfully, "There's something screwy about this business!"

Ham and Monk looked at him.

"Meaning what?" the chemist said.

"I have an idea," said Long Tom, "These guys aren't the ones connected with the totem-pole mystery. They're from another crowd."

"How do you figure that?" Ham asked.

Long Tom's eyes narrowed shrewdly. "For one thing, trying to capture anyone connected with that totem thing has been a problem. They've led us a merry chase. Whereas, *these* guys and the bunch on the yacht seem intent on grabbing *us*! There must be a reason! And I'll bet you that's why Doc pulled that stunt!"

Monk scratched his head, puzzled, as he piped shrilly, "Doc's in trouble. That didn't look like any stunt to me!"

"I wonder," mused the electrical expert.

"Wonder what?"

"Maybe Doc is leading those guys on. The ones on the yacht. Maybe he wants to find out just what their purpose really is. Doc might have pretended a crash just in order to help *us* out!"

"Well," said Monk, "There's only one way to find out. We gotta see if Doc crashed or not." He sounded worried.

All three aids figured this would be the first thing to do. Afterward, they could learn more about their captives.

They headed inland.

FROM time to time, they checked their position with the stars, and they followed a route which Long

Tom pointed out. They had traveled for about half an hour when all became aware of the heat.

Monk looked at his slender partner, Ham. The chemist was perspiring. "Blazes!" he complained. "Do you feel hot?"

Ham was also perspiring. He nodded.

Long Tom was trying to peer through the crisscrossed aiseways which were formed by the hundreds of big trees. He frowned.

"It's something ahead," he said quietly.

They pushed on, and the heat grew more intense; then, almost directly ahead, they saw the glare of something red.

They started running, now.

"Fire!" Monk bawled.

"It must be the plane!" Ham said, his voice tight and strained.

They came to the rocky stretch of ground. There were no trees, but a sort of clearing instead. The fire was coming from some object in the center of the clearing, and it created a red glow that was now fading.

But there was no plane—nothing!

Monk and Ham stared.

Long Tom said, "Don't you get it! Trick! Used by Doc to fool those guys on the yacht!"

To verify his comment, Long Tom moved forward, one arm raised across his face to ward off the intense heat still coming from an object atop the expanse of rock. He got near enough to examine the object which was fast losing its glow, dying out of its own accord.

He motioned for the others to take a look.

"A thermite pot," the electrical wizard explained. "Doc must have used one of those small parachutes in order to drop it. And he probably set off a time bomb and red flare from the plane to fool those birds."

Ham nodded. "Doc knew he wouldn't start any fires because these woods are still plenty wet from the rain."

Monk gave an explosive sigh of relief. "And I thought Doc was killed!"

He moved away, sat down and opened the tin box which Long Tom had been carrying ever since they dived off the raft. The tin box dropped from the plane by Doc Savage. The cover fitted tightly, and the box had been securely tied.

"Let's eat!" Monk said.

But Ham came over and gave the hairy chemist a jab with his foot.

"Use your head!" he said coolly. "First we should get away from this spot. It's a good place to be trapped."

From somewhere behind them, a voice snarled, "Brother, you should have thought of that sooner!"

Ham and Long Tom whirled. A man stood at the edge of the trees, a gun in his hand. With a yell, Monk started a dive for one of the rifles, which had been rested on the ground. And then he paused, staring.

At least a dozen men had stepped out of the woods! Guns were in each man's hands.

A voice grated, "That ambush trick works both ways, smart guys."

Ham and Long Tom stood very still, seeing that they were trapped by the line of men against the background of big trees.

Monk slowly straightened from his dive toward a rifle. He, too, stood still. The odds were too great against them.

And in that short, tense moment, when no one moved, came a great crashing sound from the far side of the rocky clearing.

A moment later a giant figure of a man plunged out into the open. The fellow had great fists the size of small pails.

"Renny!" Monk yelled, forgetting everything for a moment.

The big engineer drew up short, seeing the three Doc Savage men standing there.

"Holy cow!" Renny said in his rumbling voice. "Doc was right! He had an idea you guys might try to reach this place. That's why he sent me—"

Renny stopped, the words dying in his throat.

Obviously, he had not seen the gunmen, partly shielded by the woods on the opposite of the clearing.

The gunmen, apparently, were surprised also by the appearance of this giant of a fellow. Some of them were staring, too.

That was when Monk made a break!

He leaped with deceptive speed, smashed into the nearest of the gunmen, knocking the fellow sprawling. For a second, there was shouting and wild confusion.

Renny, Ham, and Long Tom took advantage of that surprise move of the chemist's. They slammed into those trying to grab hold of Monk.

The fight was somewhat of a honey while it lasted. But there were enough men with guns to make it too one-sided. Those who weren't tangling with Monk and the other Doc Savage aids, backed off. Some held rifles.

One gunman snarled, "Break it up—or we'll blow your heads off!"

Monk kept on fighting. A man came up behind him with a rifle reversed in his hands. He swung the rifle stock in a wide arc. It caught Monk on the back of the head!

WHEN Monk woke up, he saw that he was a captive along with Ham, Renny and Long Tom. They

were tied hand and foot and lay on the floor of a room. The two pets, Habeas and Chemistry, were in there with them.

The room had a peculiar way of seeming to rock beneath the hairy chemist's aching skull. And then, after a while, he knew it wasn't his pounding head that caused this.

He realized that the room was a cabin, and the cabin was located on a boat.

The yacht!

Chapter XVII. RETURN OF THE DEAD!

WHEN Habeas, the scrawny pig, observed that his master was awake, he scrambled over and leaped on Monk's chest.

"Ouch!" the chemist yelled, painfully. He felt as if he had been run through a wringer.

Renny's voice boomed, "So you're awake again?"

Monk groaned. "I'm beginning to wonder."

He stared around, from where he was lying flat on his back. Chemistry was licking Ham's face.

With a groan, Ham woke up, tried to sit up, fell to his back again when he found that he was securely tied hand and foot.

"What the devil?"

Renny said, "Maybe somebody can figure a way out of *this* mess!"

Everyone was silent for a moment. Then Ham voiced a question that had been bothering him for some time.

"Renny," the lawyer said, "what's happened to Doc? Where have you been with him?"

The two-fisted engineer explained what had occurred in the past few days. He told them about the search that had been started for the girl and Skagway Willie, in the forest.

"But we couldn't finish it," explained Renny. "Doc had set that alarm device on the plane, and it started emanating impulses, so we returned."

"And what did you find?" Ham questioned.

"Skagway Willie—looking for us. He told us that Georgiana Lee had given him the slip, and he thought she was with some guys who tried to grab us and Howard Bullock."

"Bullock and Skagway Willie are with Doc?" Long Tom asked.

"Yes."

Renny explained how the girl had acted after the mention of a man named Juneau. "Apparently she knows that guy," Renny said. "And as soon as she got the chance, she gave us the slip. I think she wanted to get to Juneau and warn him about something."

And then Monk and Ham told Renny about seeing the girl on this very boat, and of her screams, and that she had dived overboard.

"She . . . she's dead!" Monk said quietly.

Renny's gloomy face was set in a frown.

"She was on *this* boat?" he asked.

"Yeah," said Monk.

"Then she made an awful mistake!" Renny said. "The poor kid!"

"What the blazes you talking about?" Monk demanded.

"Look," said Renny, and he tried to hold his voice to a whisper. "The crooks in charge of this yacht are not behind the totem menace. They're not even *afraid* of it. They're a bunch of chiselers trying to cut in on something, and they don't care much who they bump off while doing it. Doc figured that out tonight, because he and Skagway Willie have located Hidden Forest and the victims that are being held there."

"But—" Ham started.

"So you see," Renny continued, "the girl made a mistake. She thought this was the outfit that Juneau was connected with. It seems she knows Juneau. And so she must have come to these guys—and walked into trouble!"

The others thought about that for a moment.

And then Monk said, "Where's Doc and Bullock and Skagway Willie, now?"

"They've gone to seize Hidden Forest," Renny said.

The other Doc Savage aids stared. Long Tom twisted his head around and gave big Renny a puzzled frown.

"Listen," he snapped. "You don't *seize* a forest! What the devil you talking about?"

"Hidden Forest," said Renny, "is the real hide-out of the person behind all this confounded trouble. And now Doc's gone to help them. That's why he sent me to try and locate you. There's going to be a showdown with this yacht crowd, and we're supposed to be ready to help out." Renny swore. "We have a swell chance, now!"

Monk, blinking, said, "What the blazes! You say Doc's going to *help* the guy behind the totem mystery?"

Renny nodded.

"Yes. And Doc only had a little time to get there to Hidden Forest. If we could only get out of here and be ready for the moment when—"

Long Tom had been trying to get a word in. Something was bothering him. He exclaimed, now, "Listen, what's this business about seizing a—"

Renny said, "Hidden Forest is a *boat!*"

"I'll be blasted!" muttered Monk, voicing the opinion of his partners.

Renny explained, "The reason you guys got lost when you tried to locate Hidden Forest is because of the glacier."

"The glacier?" Long Tom asked, puzzled.

"Yes. You see, we first saw them take bearings from the edge of that glacier. What they were locating was the boat, on a river some distance away. But by the time you guys got up there from New York, things had changed!"

"What changed?" Monk prodded.

"The glacier! Doc figured that out. The glacier moves a couple feet a month, and it was just enough to throw off all the calculations. That's why you didn't find the boat."

If Renny's report came as a surprise, the thing that happened in the next few moments was even more astounding.

There was a sudden commotion above deck. They heard men shouting. Then the sounds of feet pounding up and down the decks. They could not catch what was being said, but there was obviously some kind of trouble.

They listened.

And then, abruptly, a key was turning in the lock of their cabin door. A second later, the door pushed open cautiously. Someone came into the half gloom of the cabin, closed the door, then moved swiftly across the room into the circle of light cast by the single wall light.

Monk gasped.

"Ghosts!" he said.

The other Doc Savage aids stared, blinked their eyes and were too amazed to speak.

The girl looked more beautiful than ever. Excitement had given color to her cheeks. Her violet eyes were bright and alive. Light from the wall bracket caught the red of her soft hair.

She whispered breathlessly, "Don't make a sound! They're searching for me up on deck!"

It was Georgiana Lee.

MONK murmured, "I must still be unconscious!"

"You always were!" Ham said acidly.

Then the lawyer looked at the girl. "How about enlightening us?" he said quickly. "We thought you were drowned."

"After I got aboard this boat," Georgiana Lee explained, "I saw that I had made a mistake. I was scared. But I pretended I knew the real hide-out of . . . of the man who was holding Clarence Faulkner, the millionaire, and the other victims. We had just started the search, when they spotted you and the raft."

She looked at Long Tom, Ham and Monk.

"And then?" Long Tom prompted, suspiciously. He still distrusted the girl.

"They were trying to figure a way to get you off that island in the river, without getting any of their own men killed. I was worried about you. I told them you were really after me. And so, then they got the idea."

"What idea?" said Long Tom.

"They would pretend I had tried to escape from the yacht, and was drowned. They figured that would take you off their trail, since I was the one you were after."

Monk blinked.

The chemist gulped. "Then it wasn't you who dived in the river?"

The girl shook her head.

"They dumped a sack filled with sand overboard," she told them. "They had me do some screaming." Her face was suddenly somber. "I played along with them, so they would get under way again and leave you there on the island. I was afraid you would all be killed!"

Monk beamed. "Swell girl!" he said.

Ham added: "I'll give you a kiss for that sometime."

The chemist grimaced, looking at his partner. "You get a look in the mirror, shyster, and you'll scare yourself to death!"

He referred to Ham's beard, his tattered appearance. The lawyer, always so meticulous about his attire, looked as ragged as the chemist himself. And Monk knew that, before the pretty girl's eyes, Ham was in misery.

Ham struggled against his bonds. He looked at the girl. "Untie us!" he said.

The girl started to bend over them to untie the heavy knots that held them helpless.

"Listen!" rapped Renny.

They distinctly heard the sound of running footsteps along the passageway outside the cabin. The girl straightened, her face going pale.

She whispered swiftly, "A little while ago, I overheard some of them talking. Somehow, they've discovered who I really am. They're going to hold all of us for ransom—or death! So I pretended I had escaped from the boat. Then I came down here!"

Georgiana Lee was staring around frantically, trying to locate some place of concealment.

Ham hissed a warning, jerked his chin in order to indicate a double tier of bunks across the cabin. "Get in the upper bunk," he directed quietly. "Flatten yourself back against the wall. Hurry!"

The girl moved speedily. Trim legs swung her up over the top bunk. She rolled back against the wall and lay perfectly still. She was in shadows cast by a single dim light within the cabin.

And none too soon!

THE cabin door opened, and a big, bony looking man with a gun in his fist stuck his head in the room and looked over the Doc Savage crowd.

Renny, Long Tom, Monk and Ham lay perfectly still, their eyes closed. Georgiana Lee, up in the bunk, held her breath. The two pets, in a corner of the room, pretended to be asleep.

The gunman spoke to someone behind him.

"They're still out cold," he muttered. And then, frowning, added: "Some dope left this door unlocked!"

The man who was with him gave a brittle laugh.

"What the hell difference does it make? Those birds are tied up better than mummies!"

The man with the gun said, "That dame must have escaped, all right. She swam to shore, like I said." He laughed. "I wonder how she'll like starving!"

They departed, then; the key clicked in the lock.

Footsteps faded along the passageway outside. There was silence.

"O. K.," Monk called softly to the girl.

Georgiana Lee slid down from the upper bunk. Again, she bent over Doc Savage's aids. She started working furiously on Renny's bonds.

It was a good fifteen minutes before she could get even one of the knots loose. The rope used was heavy and had been first soaked in water. The knots were almost solid.

But Renny finally got a hand free, and then he was helping the girl untie his other wrist. The big engineer's powerful fingers swiftly pried loose the knots. He shortly had both hands free, then his ankles.

Then he was on his feet. He whipped toward his partners, and helped the girl untie them.

Monk got up and stretched his hairy arms and legs and announced, "Let's get up there on deck and bust a few skulls!"

The girl was suddenly in front of him.

"Wait!" she warned.

They looked at her.

"I didn't get a chance to finish before those men came down here. I didn't tell you the worst of it!"

"What do you mean?" asked Long Tom.

"There was something else they were talking about," explained Georgiana Lee. "I heard them just before I sneaked down here."

The girl caught her breath, raced on:

"They've located the . . . the man who captured Clarence Faulkner and some of the others. They're setting a trap for that other boat. There's going to be an awful fight! And that isn't all!"

"What—" Monk started.

"They've learned," said the girl, "that Doc Savage has slipped aboard that other boat. They're going to capture him too. They're going to hold the whole crowd of you for ransom!"

The girl was trembling, now.

She started to reach in the pocket of her flannel shirt for a handkerchief.

The Doc Savage aids all started talking at once. And then, realizing that their voices might draw someone back here to their cabin, they stopped. They let Ham do the talking.

Ham said shrewdly, "Listen, Georgiana, every time you've mentioned this crook who is commanding the boat called the *Hidden Forest*, you've acted strangely. You act as though you *know* who that guy is. Now, how about it?"

They waited. None wanted to accuse the girl, but Ham's words were true.

She pulled the handkerchief from her pocket, started to wipe at her perspiring forehead. Something struck the desk. Something that had been pulled out with the handkerchief.

Ham bent down quickly, straightened with a small wooden object in his hand.

All saw what Ham turned over in his hand. It was one of the small, carved wooden totem poles. There was the face of an Indian with slanted eyes on one side. On the other, the image of an owl.

The girl was suddenly chewing her lower lip. Her hands trembled.

Ham, studying her carefully, said, "Why have you always been frightened when you came across this thing?"

The girl hesitated a moment; then, surprisingly, her chin came up proudly.

"All right," she said. "I'll tell you. For years, he's made a hobby of carving these things. He got his start up here, logging cedar, and those little totem poles are sort of an emblem of his first start toward the fortune he accumulated. He only gave them to intimate friends and a few men who had been associated with him in business. Anyone receiving one of these things would immediately know from whom it had come—if they had ever been associated with him!"

"Who?" Ham prodded.

"My uncle, Homer Dale," announced the girl tremulously. "Homer Dale is the person on the *Hidden Forest*. He is the man who directed the kidnapping of Clarence Faulkner and Howard Bullock!"

Amazement was on Monk's face.

"Then Doc must know it's Homer Dale!" the chemist exclaimed. "That's why he's gone aboard the *Hidden Forest*, to grab Homer Dale!"

But the girl shook her head.

"I'm afraid not," she said. "You see, Skagway Willie really works for my uncle. I didn't know that, at first. Skagway Willie was employed to lead you and Doc Savage astray, to keep you off Homer Dale's trail. But, now—"

"Yes?" someone prompted.

"Skagway Willie, from what I've learned, has led Doc Savage aboard the *Hidden Forest*, into a trap. That's what the men aboard this yacht were waiting for. They're going to attack Homer Dale's boat!"

Monk and the others groaned.

Chapter XVIII. RETRIBUTION

IT was the hour before dawn, and silence lay like a great shroud over the Alaskan wilderness. Nothing stirred. As though a mammoth curtain were being soundlessly drawn down over the sky, the stars blinked out one by one, and a soft grayness spread across the heavens.

Doc Savage and the Indian guide, Skagway Willie, were the only two humans that moved in a world of silence. They swung up over the railing of the old sailing ship and moved soundlessly along the scrubbed wooden decks.

The Indian, making silent motions with his hands, indicated the way.

They reached a hatch opening, descended a companionway toward the captain's quarters of the old ship. They moved quietly through the dark passageway below deck.

And then Skagway Willie paused before a door. He made a motion. He said softly, "Homer Dale, man you want, in there!"

Doc Savage nodded. His metallic fingers, making no sound, touched the doorknob. The cabin door opened noiselessly.

Doc looked over his shoulder and spoke very quietly. "Wait outside," he murmured.

The Indian guide nodded. He stepped back and watched the door close again as Doc Savage disappeared into the cabin.

Then a brief, satisfied smile crossed Skagway Willie's lean features. He spat tobacco juice, turned, hurried back along the passageway. He went swiftly toward the crew's quarter of the old sailing boat.

He thumped on doors, aroused sleeping men. The men piled out of their bunks and appeared with guns. Recognizing the Indian, the men gave exclamations of surprise.

"Skagway!" one said.

"What's up?" another wanted to know.

Shortly, two dozen men were jammed around Skagway Willie. They were husky fellows, with tanned, blocky features.

The Indian said, "Well, we've got Doc Savage. He's in boss's cabin, now. Come!"

Wild yells accompanied the rush forward. Other crew members joined the stampede. A moment later, the passageway outside the cabin into which Doc Savage had disappeared, was packed with grim-faced men.

There was great yelling and racket as one of the men thumped on the door.

There was no answer.

One particularly husky fellow threw his solid weight against the panel. The door rattled on its hinges.

"Come out, Savage, or we'll bust this damned door down!" the man roared.

Then the door opened, and the men with guns fell back. Homer Dale himself stood there before them.

"All right," he said. "Relax! I've taken care of that bronze guy!"

Homer Dale was a big man, towering above the others who stood there before him. He had massive shoulders, healthy, weather-burned features and a shock of gray hair. For all his age, he looked like a man well able to handle himself.

He closed the door behind him, snapped an order.

He said, "Every man on deck! There's going to be trouble!"

The men with guns stared.

"Trouble?" someone asked.

"That mob aboard the yacht is headed this way. There's going to be one hell of a battle. Snap to it!"

Excited, the men started piling toward the companionway that led topside. Every man aboard the old boat was ordered to the deck. Guns and ammunition were distributed.

The gray-haired, ruddy-faced leader did not follow immediately. He went back into his captain's quarters and locked the door behind him.

He looked at the man who was strapped down in the bunk, a man who was an identical image of himself.

He said, "That truth serum ought to be about ready to work." He pulled adhesive tape from the bound captive's lips.

The big man on the bunk rolled wide eyes upward. He stared in amazement. Then he blurted, "You're Doc Savage!"

Doc Savage, whose features now appeared the same as those of the helpless man in the bunk, whose clothes were those that had been taken from the victim, nodded.

"Yes," he said. "That ought to save us a lot of preliminary talk."

THE bronze man's duplication of Homer Dale had been swift and accurate, the moment Skagway Willie had left him at the cabin doorway.

The real Homer Dale, asleep in his bunk, had been seized, his mouth taped, his entire muscular system made incapable of movement by sudden nerve pressure that Doc Savage had applied to certain parts of his body with his capable, swift-moving fingers.

Substitution of Homer Dale's clothing had been fast. Make-up of the bronze man's features had necessarily been hasty, but in the half-dark passageway outside, the members of the crew had not noticed this. A wig had completed the make-up, and Doc had been carrying the necessary supplies in his

special equipment vest, which he wore beneath his clothing.

He bent over helpless Homer Dale, examined the arm where he had injected the truth serum. There was a slight swelling where the needle had punctured the flesh.

Doc said, "You had better talk—and you had better make it fast!"

The big man lying in the bunk started to sweat. He tried to keep his jaws clamped together.

"To hell with you!" he managed to say.

Doc removed the hypodermic needle from his equipment vest. He swiftly prepared another injection.

"Two doses of this stuff is going to leave you with quite a headache," he said.

He gave the injection, waited a moment, then snapped, "You kidnapped Clarence Faulkner. You seized Howard Bullock. There are others, some held aboard this boat. A few you have released. Why were those men seized?"

Homer Dale glared at the bronze man. A man of strong character himself, he tried to outstare Doc Savage's cool gaze. But there was something about the compelling, hypnotic penetration of those eyes that caused him to drop his eyes. Also, the truth serum was beginning to work on his system.

He suddenly blurted, "They robbed me, that's why!"

"Robbed you?" Doc asked quietly.

"Yes, damn their dirty rotten souls! I was a millionaire. I made every cent I had the hard way. I've worked all my life!"

"Yes?" Doc Savage prompted gently. He watched the trembling of Homer Dale, saw the terrible emotional reaction that was gripping the man.

"Well," continued Doc's captive, "today I'm practically a pauper. All I own in the world is this boat, a couple of camps that I built years ago up here in Alaska!"

"What happened?" said the bronze man quietly.

Homer Dale stared wildly.

"Bullock, Clarence Faulkner, a dozen others," he stammered, "they swindled me out of every dime I had in this world. The devils tricked me, left me penniless. They . . . they—"

Homer Dale almost had a convulsion then. Saliva drooled from his mouth. His eyes bulged and became red-rimmed.

Doc spoke swiftly, soothingly. There was something about the magnetic quality of his remarkable voice that calmed the man in the bunk. Homer Dale relaxed a little.

"Tell me," said Doc softly, "the rest?"

Keeping control of himself with a mighty effort, Homer Dale continued, "They were clever about it, those crooks. There was no way I could prove in a court of law that I had been swindled. So I decided to take things into my own hands. I would kidnap them, one by one, and get every cent they had in ransom. I would even the slate for what those swindlers did to me. I . . . I—" The man's voice started to rise shrilly

again.

Doc, himself a surgeon, suddenly understood the look that was in Homer Dale's eyes. The man was not insane; but grief over the loss of his fortune, the trick that had been played on him, had almost cost him his reason. Here was a man who, because of circumstances, had gone berserk on the idea of gaining retribution. He had taken the law into his hands. He had gone a little mad, Doc thought, and yet he suddenly felt sorry for Homer Dale. Shock, the bronze man realized, can do strange things to a brilliant man. And Homer Dale had been a brilliant man in his day!

Doc said, "It might be possible to get back your money without breaking the law, without bloodshed. Perhaps we can help you."

Homer Dale stared. "You really mean—"

And then, in the next moment, it looked as if the bronze man's offer had come too late.

Somewhere outside in the early morning grayness, a gun thundered. Something struck the ship which carried Doc Savage and his captive. It trembled from end to end.

From the decks above came wild shouting and the sound of small-arms gunfire. A man yelled. His words carried down from above.

"It's the white yacht! They've got a deck gun!"

When Doc Savage, still in the make-up of Homer Dale, reached the deck of the old ship, his eyes flashed with quick discovery. Standing off their port bow was the yacht, sleek and trim and fast-looking. Even as Doc arrived on deck, the modern-looking weapon on the deck of the other boat flashed again. Thunder rolled across the river.

The topmast overhead cracked, came toppling downward as men leaped to get out of its way. There was excitement and confusion. The crack of small weapons sounded insignificant after the booming roar of the deck gun aboard the yacht.

And with each moment, the yacht was drawing closer. The old sailing boat didn't have a chance. Men stood at the rails of the yacht with modern rifles in their hands. Someone bellowed an order across the intervening water.

"Surrender—or we blast you to hell and gone!"

Above the man's shouted demand, came a thunderous bellow from aboard the yacht.

"Grab them, Monk!"

It was big Renny's booming voice that crashed out from the yacht. The man who had shouted the surrender order was seized. There was sudden wild fighting aboard the yacht.

Someone on the sailing boat, near the bronze man, said puzzledly, "What the hell! Mutiny!" And then, "Come on, now's our chance!"

Men aboard Homer Dale's *Hidden Forest* leaped up to the rail. The white yacht was fast moving close. Within seconds the boats bumped sides.

Men from the *Hidden Forest* started tumbling aboard the yacht. The free-for-all battle that followed was really something to talk about.

And then, as fists slugged and men cursed and the battle surged across the decks, the crew of the *Hidden Forest* became aware of a startling fact.

Four of the men on the yacht were not fighting the *Hidden Forest* crew. Rather, they were helping knock out the hard-faced thugs of the yacht.

The four were Monk, Ham, big Renny and skinny Long Tom.

And with them, a fifth man was fighting. He was accounting for more unconscious thugs than anyone.

Everyone was amazed. Homer Dale, for a middle-aged man, was supposed to be a good fighter. But not *that* good!

And then, in the mêlée, the bronze man's gray wig was knocked loose. His bronze-colored hair was revealed in the morning light. Grease paint had been smeared from his features, showing up his real bronze skin.

It was Monk who gulped, "Doc!"

THE last member of the yacht mob had been knocked out or tied up.

Georgiana Lee was there with the Doc Savage aids, her cheeks flushed with excitement, her violet eyes bright. A club was in her small hand.

She stammered, "I . . . I tried to help a little!"

A tall, sandy-haired man, who had been leading the *Hidden Forest* crew, suddenly stepped forward. He stared at Doc Savage, at those with Doc, at the girl.

"I don't get this?" he said, puzzled.

The girl stepped forward. "Juneau!" she cried.

Monk and Ham looked at her.

"Who—" the chemist started.

The girl said, "Juneau is one of uncle Homer Dale's sons!" And then, swiftly, she was singling out two other young men, each tall and wiry-looking, each with the same type of sandy-colored hair.

The men were battered and bruised, and there were clubs in their fists. But they managed a smile.

"And these two are Bethel and Nome Dale," the girl said. "Those are nicknames they were given years ago by their father. He picked out names of Alaskan towns, and called his sons by those names."

Monk, Long Tom and Ham were staring at the man the girl had called Bethel. It was their bearded rifleman of the log-raft episode!

Ham started to say, "But I thought—"

Bethel smiled. "That I was one of the yacht mob?" he finished. He shook his head. "Father planted me in that gang so that I could get information. I was also the one who led you on the wrong trail through the forest. But it wasn't until later that I learned you were Doc Savage men!"

Doc Savage said quietly, "Put the captives in chains, temporarily. Clarence Faulkner is aboard the *Hidden Forest*. Put him with the other captives. We can pick up Howard Bullock later. He is tied up aboard the plane, about ten miles down the river."

Ham said, "But, Doc, I thought they were—"

"Crooks!" said the bronze man. "As much so as the mobsters aboard the yacht. They will all be given a special treatment, and made to repay what rightfully belongs to Homer Dale."

"You mean," Monk gasped, "that guy Homer Dale isn't a crook?"

"Not exactly," said Doc Savage. "He was an honest man driven somewhat berserk by the theft of his fortune by unscrupulous persons."

AN unusual form of activity kept the bronze man and his aids in Alaska for several weeks following that eventful morning.

From Doc Savage's plane, special equipment cases were brought aboard the yacht—it was more modern and more suitable than the *Hidden Forest*—and there, in one of the large staterooms, a strange laboratory was set up. As a matter of fact, it was not unlike an operating room. Doc Savage spent long hours performing a delicate type of brain operation on all the captives.

The process which the bronze man used was one that had been established at a special institution of Doc's own in upper New York State. There, at what was known as the "college," crooks underwent delicate operations that wiped out all memory of their shady pasts. They again became good citizens and honest men, to again take their places in society.

The operations that Doc performed in Alaska were somewhat along this line.

Six men—including little Clarence Faulkner and Howard Bullock—were among those who had swindled Homer Dale and, in turn, had been kidnaped by the former millionaire lumber king.

They were given treatments. Later, they were shown actual figures proving, right down to actual cents and dollars, how much they had swindled from Homer Dale.

All, horrified when they saw that they had been dishonest, made specific arrangements to repay immediately. Each of the victims was wealthy, though he had come by his wealth dishonestly. But now they were overly anxious to become honest men. The idea that they had done such a thing appalled them.

None realized how successful the bronze man's operations had been.

Homer Dale, himself, underwent a different course of treatment beneath Doc Savage's skilled hands. He lost all desire for revenge. The quirk that had affected his mind was straightened out.

Meanwhile, Monk and Ham had been spending every possible moment apologizing to lovely Georgiana Lee for having suspected of her of being involved with crooks.

THE END