SE-PAH-POO

A Doc Savage Adventure by Kenneth Robeson

Originally published in *Doc Savage Magazine* February 1946

Chapter I

HE swung off the passenger train unobtrusively. He moved at a very fast walk across the shallow ditch and a few yards of right-of-way, squeezed among some shoulder-high mesquite bushes, placed his suitcase on the sun-hardened earth and seated himself on it. He waited.

The train had almost stopped rolling. Now the locomotive whistle bleated briefly in answer to a signal from the conductor, then lunged ahead sending a clanking through the train, with a visible surge of energy. With a series of business-like puffings, the locomotive reached for the speed it had lost, and presently the

whole string of some eighteen baggage and passenger coaches was in full motion again.

The man did not stand up to look after the departing train, but he listened to it. This being let off furtively in the middle of the desert, had cost him twenty dollars in tips. That was what he was thinking.

He looked around. Twenty dollars had bought him a lot of heat, sand, cactus, mesquite, cholla, yucca, more sand, more heat.

He remained seated on his suitcase. It was a very good suitcase, but it had seen service. His clothing was also very good, but conservative, as though he wished not to attract attention to himself. It was a ridiculous precaution, because he was such a big man, so obviously a muscular marvel, and his bronze coloring was so striking, his strange-flake-gold eyes so impressive, that wearing plain, good clothes was about as effective as putting the English crown jewels on a plain oak tray.

The sand a few yards from his feet stirred, parted, and a small blunt reptilian head appeared and eyed him unwinkingly. The sidewinder rattlesnake evidently did not think he was a congenial companion, because it emerged the rest of itself and side-crawled away.

A hundred and ten, he thought. At least a hundred and ten. This was real heat. The temperature in the air-conditioned railway coach had been around sixty-five. Better still, in the club car, there had been soft music, cool drinks and someone with whom to carry on an intelligent conversation. What was best of all, no one but the porter'd had the good judgment to keep it to himself.

He turned his head slightly. A few inches away, on a mesquite twig, a spindle-legged lizard was examining him intently. The lizard looked stupid. It wouldn't make an intelligent conversationalist.

He sincerely hoped no one here in the desert would recognize him.

The man over the telephone had sounded so frightened.

THE sun in the sky was too hot for comfort, and the sky itself was absolutely blue and clear, except that around the horizon the air was full of dancing heat waves and the peculiar little things in the way of refraction that desert air does to the view. There was a distant mountain sitting in the sky, with only air under it; you could see right under the mountain to the horizon beyond.

He stood up now and inspected this mountain, and decided it wasn't the one. Too far away. He turned slowly. The desert, the real Painted Desert, lay in the other direction, and he imagined that was where he would be going. The frightened man hadn't been very explicit about the destination. But he had said desert.

He heard a dull moaning. He sat down quickly. The dull moaning became more emphatic and violent as it drew near, a loud, blatant sound which seemed to contain other sounds within itself, a shrill mechanical wail, a sucking and popping, the high hysterical laugh of a woman, the gay but slightly tired whoop of a man's mirth. Then the automobile was past and gone down the highway.

He consulted his watch. Three-five. The frightened man should be along presently.

He moved nearer the road.

It had been a little startling to have the roaring action of the car bawl past him in the solitude of the desert. The loneliness of the desert was a thing that quickly made itself felt.

The scared man had said wait.

He found the shade of a giant cactus and seated himself again. He waited. He was not exactly hidden, but the protective coloring of his tan suit made it unlikely anyone passing on the highway would see him.

“I'll have a station wagon,” the man had said.

Carl Peterson was the frightened man's name. Colonel Sir Carl Peterson, K.B.E., C.B., C.M.G., F.R.S., M.A., D. Litt, M.R.A.S., F.R.A.I. Maybe there were some more letters after Sir Carl's name. There could be. He was quite a guy.

Not, he thought wryly, a man who should scare easily.

His curiosity had been eating large holes in his composure. Which, of course, did no good.

Actually he knew very little, but what he did know was startling. He had gathered, from Sir Carl's incoherence over the long-distance telephone, that a man was dead and there was something hair-raising about it. The telephone connection from Arizona to New York had not been too good, but he didn't think this had given Carl's voice the ghostly haunted quality that had been in it. Frankly, he had been increasingly disturbed, because Carl was certainly not a fellow who would be easily put into a state of mind. Sir Carl, a round, fat gentleman of the old English sort, was what the psychologists would call a visceratonic, meaning a fat man who loved comfort, overstuffed furniture and good food.

Actually Carl wasn't the type to be an explorer, either, but he was, and so physiological psychology didn't bracket him exactly as a type. Carl Peterson, he knew, belonged to a group which had organized years ago and called themselves Wanderers, Inc., for the purpose of conducting exploration work in different parts of the world. Wanderers, Inc., had never done anything tremendous in a scientific way, but they plugged along, now and then turning up something worth while in an archaeological or geological way, and having fun. That was an important thing with most explorers anyway, having fun.

A station wagon came down the highway and stopped fifty yards away.

There was one man in the station wagon, the driver. A very lean, very dark-skinned man who sat quite still not looking right or left, hardly moving, until suddenly he made a cigarette from papers and tobacco and lighted it. He made the smoke with astonishing speed. Then he looked up.

An Indian. An American Indian, as dark as an old walnut plank and with a great hook of a nose.

“How,” he said. “You want lift?”

The Indian said this without looking around.

“No, thanks,” he told the Indian, and remained seated on the suitcase.

The Indian considered this.

“Heap hot,” the Indian said.

“Heap,” he agreed.

“Hard road.”

“Hard.”

“Long road.”

“Maybe.”

The Indian considered some more, then asked, “You crazy white man?”

“Could be.”

“Sure,” the Indian agreed. “Only crazy man walk long, hard hot road.”

He remained on the suitcase. He said, “Only Indian live in this country from choice. What does that make Indian?”

The Indian considered this, then looked down at the end of his limp cigarette as if examining it intently. “You got something there,” the Indian said. Then he reached over and knocked open the station wagon door. “Pete couldn't come,” he added.

“Who?”

“Carl Peterson.”

“Who's he?”

The Indian looked injured. “Okay, I started it,” he said. “Throw your warbag in the back end. We got eighty miles to go. Road no good.”

He picked up his bag, carried it over and put it down on the road beside the station wagon. He looked in at the Indian. The Indian was all of sixty years old, but probably as tough and active as a billygoat. His leathery old hide had a worn, shiny sheen as if it had been used for stropping razors. There were pouches under his eyes large enough to hold eggs, but the eyes themselves were as glittering and alert as those of a mouse.

Having examined the Indian closely, he asked, “What was wrong with Carl?”

“Ugh.”

“Eh?”

“Loose gut,” the Indian said. “Catchum shakes. Scared.”

“I doubt that.”

Undisturbed, the Indian said, “Go ahead and doubt it, but Indian know when white man scared, even if white man never know when Indian scared.”

He studied the Indian some more. He decided that the old Indian was frightened. The way the old Indian was talking, this funny stuff, meant the Indian was badly scared himself. He commented on this.

He asked, “Are you scared?”

“Huh?”

“Are you frightened?”

“Ugh,” the Indian said. “No tell.”

“What's your name?”

“Kul-ne-se-pah-pooh,” the Indian said.

“What do they call you?”

“Grunts,” the Indian admitted.

He said, “Okay, Grunts. You say put my bag in the back.” He picked up his bag and tried the handle of the rear door. The door was locked. “It's locked,” he said. Grunts reached back and knocked down the lock. After the bag was in the back, Grunts closed the door and again locked it by flipping up the handle. He asked the Indian, “What's the matter? Afraid it will come to life and jump out?”

“Ugh,” Grunts said.

He got in the station wagon with the Indian, in the front seat, and the Indian at once leaned across, yanked on the door to make sure it was shut, then threw up the handle, locking the door.

“What's the idea?”

“Ugh!”

“It's hot in here. It must be a hundred and forty with no ventilation.”

“Ugh!”

He started to roll down the window, but the Indian said another, “Ugh!” loudly and knocked his hand away from the window crank. “Ixnay,” the Indian added. “Window up, door locked.”

“Why?”

“Feel better,” the Indian said.

“What do you mean?”

“Never mind.”

It was already unbelievably hot in the station wagon, hot enough so he knew the Indian had been riding with the windows closed tightly. Sweat was already beginning to pop from every pore. Scared Indian or no scared Indian, he decided this was not his day to be cremated in an airtight station wagon in a desert. Furthermore he was sure the Indian was wearing at least one concealed gun.

He tried once more, asking, “Why keep this thing closed up like an oven?”

“Feel better.”

He took hold of both the Indian's wrists with his left hand, reaching across and pinning the Indian to the seat with his left elbow. He put enough pressure in his fingers, held the Indian, used his right hand to search for guns. Presently he found that he was mining firearms. He brought out of the Indian's clothing an army automatic, a Luger, two Colt single action six-shooters, a ladylike .25-calibre automatic, a fat derringer with double barrels, a tiny .22-calibre revolver, a single-shot .22 pistol.

“For God's sake!” he said. He was amazed. “Is that all?”

The Indian was indignant. “One in boot,” he explained.

The one in his boot was a nubbin gun of .22 calibre, single-shot.

“Any more?”

“Nope.”

“What are you, a traveling armament salesman or something?”

The Indian shrugged. “Nope.”

“Then why all the guns?” He counted the guns. “Nine guns! Why nine pistols?”

“Medicine.”

“For what?”

“For what ails me.” The Indian reached over and turned on the ignition, stamped the starter, tramped the accelerator, threw the gears in mesh, and the station wagon jumped ahead.

The Indian was unhappy. When the station wagon was doing fifty, he carelessly took his hands off the wheel to rub his wrists where they had been held while he was searched. He straightened his coat. He

pushed out his considerable jaw in indignation.

“Me old, frightened man,” he complained. “You hadn't oughta pick on me.”

“No?”

“You're Doc Savage,” the Indian grumbled. “Got reputation for heap big and tough. Pick on somebody your own size.”

Chapter II

HE had brought water. There were three quart thermos bottles of it in his suitcase, and a pair of tough walking shoes suitable for the desert. He had brought the thermos containers of water along because he had known what the desert would be this time of year. Now he felt thirsty, but he did not touch the water. Thirst was something that, if you gave in to it, would plague you unmercifully in the desert, and, anyway, he didn't know what was ahead. Three quarts of water, he had estimated, would be enough to carry him if he had to walk from the spot where he left the train to the nearest spot where drinking water was available. But now he was in the station wagon, and it was possible he might have much farther to walk. He didn't understand what was happening, didn't understand it at all. He preferred caution.

“Waterbag in back,” Grunts said.

He said nothing. He wasn't going to touch the Indian's water, not by a long shot. The Indian had him puzzled. The Indian was several parts phony. That is, he was an Indian who was a phony Indian.

What had happened was ridiculous. He was not, however, the least amused. Terror, when it wore a clown's costume, was double terror. He was certain the Indian was terrified.

Unexpectedly, the station wagon whipped off the blacktopped highway, lunged into the shallow grader ditch, vaulted out, and the tools and the handbag in the back jumped off the floor and fell back heavily. Wildly, madly, the machine plunged across the desert. There was no road now, no track. But the sun-baked earth was as hard, almost, as pavement, and the Indian seemed to know where he was going, and, it had become evident, was a skillful, if reckless, driver.

“So you knew I was Doc Savage?”

“Why not?” the Indian said.

“What are you afraid of?”

“Who? Me?”

“Yes.”

“Ugh!”

“Why didn't Carl Peterson come to meet me?”

“I told you. Him scared.”

“What of?”

“Huh?”

“Is he afraid of the same thing that's got you scared out of your wigwam?”

The Indian arched his neck indignantly. “Listen, city slicker, I'm an Apache. Apaches don't live in wigwams and never did. They live in hodags. Damn warm in winter. A hodag is a fine place to live.”

“For a mole, maybe. What is Peterson afraid of?”

The Indian said, “Ugh!”

“You won't talk, eh?”

“Listen, brother, you've insulted me,” the Indian said. “A hodag is a good home, and not for a mole either. A mole would think a hodag was a palace!”

“An underprivileged mole might,” he agreed.

THE station wagon averaged about forty miles an hour across desert of a sort which an uninitiated person would have sworn would be safe only for a donkey. The trick was knowing the terrain, and the Indian knew it. He made long and seemingly aimless corkscrew detours without slackening speed, sometimes riding the station wagon high on the sharp slope of bare eroded hills, and invariably a way continued to open ahead.

Except for the heat, it would have been a nice trip. It did not lack for excitement and scenery. Frequently they whipped near the edge of gullies, young canyons, as much as a hundred feet deep and with absolutely perpendicular walls. The magical coloring, the symphony of chromatism that had given the Painted Desert its name, was everywhere about them.

“How far?”

“Sixty miles.”

“As the crow flies?”

“No, the way we go.”

“A little more than an hour, then?”

Grunts snorted loudly. “Take hell of a lot longer than that. We ain't in tough going yet. Wait and see.”

“Is it a camp?”

“Diggings.”

He surmised this meant that Wanderers, Inc., was engaged in some sort of exploratory activity entailing excavation.

He asked, “Cliff dwelling?”

Cliff dwelling was the logical guess, because this shockingly arid country was fertile territory for cliff dwelling ruins. Mesa Verde, the Manhattan of all cliff dweller ruins, was far to the north across the Colorado border, but in between, and scattered over many thousands of square miles, other ruins had been found yielding up archaeological information the equal of, and often times excelling, that of Mesa Verde.

“That's right,” Grunts said.

The Indian settled himself to driving, and for the next hour said nothing, guiding the station wagon with skill and concentration.

The country changed. The way became rougher, more difficult. The engine labored, heated repeatedly, and Grunts had to stop to allow cooling. Twice he poured water from his waterbag into the radiator, and once he drank from the waterbag, a couple of swallows.

Suddenly they stopped.

The Indian switched off the motor, turned and dug around in the back seat, coming up with an ordinary mirror in a gilt frame, a mirror about a foot in diameter. He offered no explanation. He got out and began climbing a sharp ridge.

Doc Savage changed his dress shoes for the serviceable brogans he had brought for desert use. He followed the Indian, overtaking him without difficulty. The climbing was quite difficult and the Indian seemed disappointed at being overtaken so readily.

At the top, the Indian said, “Keep head down.”

The Indian then shoved his own head, arms, and mirror over the crest. He caught the sun with the mirror, began experimenting with aiming the reflected spot of light. He maneuvered it carefully over a hill slope about half a mile distant, getting range.

The ridge where they lay was the highest for miles. To the north, though, some seven or eight miles, there was a sugar loaf butte, and it was evident the Indian was trying to range this with his makeshift heliograph signaling device. He aimed carefully, flashed, aimed again, flashed. . . . He kept this up fully five minutes.

He got no response.

The Indian lay completely motionless for a while. “Bad,” he said. “Have to take long way now. Be careful.”

“You were supposed to get an answering signal?”

“Sure. If okay, get signal. If not okay, no signal.”

“Trouble, eh?”

“Maybe.”

“What kind of trouble?”

The Indian didn't grunt. He just didn't say anything. He went back to the station wagon.

THEY drove two hours in silence, and he concluded the Indian had him puzzled. The Indian was frightened, but that was not what puzzled him. The redskin was also talking and acting like an almost-aboriginal native of the forest-deserts in this case—but that did not puzzle him either. It was probably the old fellow's way of covering up his feelings. Actually, he finally concluded, it was difficult to put his finger on what he didn't understand about the Indian. It was inward thing, whatever it was. An inner light, a force. Japs rushing to die for their emperor, the few of them he had seen doing this, had a similar thing about them. Not that this old Indian was giving any indication of wanting to die for anyone.

Not much. But he did have some inward, secret thing about him.

The going had been incredible. Slow, laborious, the station wagon hardly ever getting out of second gear, up hill or down. The Indian's waterbags had been emptied into its radiator.

“Made it,” the Indian said unexpectedly. He stopped the machine.

He got out.

“Okay. Hunky-dory. You get out,” he added.

“Why?”

“Carl Peterson meet you here.”

“Where?”

“Up there.” The Indian pointed. “There's a cliff dwelling ruin up there.”

DOC SAVAGE alighted. He stretched, flexed his legs, for he was tired from the hours in the station wagon. It was almost dark. In fact, it was dark, and rather unusually dark for the desert, too, because a cloud bank had piled up in the west, shutting off the twilight. But there was enough light to see a few feet, to make out the beginning of what was obviously going to be a tough footpath.

“I got flashlight,” the Indian said.

The road where the station wagon had stopped seemed to be a narrow shelf, the trail surmounted a steep mountain on the left; on the right, lost in the darkness somewhere was evidently a deep canyon in which a stream ran, because he could hear the far-off mutter of water moving.

“Is it far?”

“No.”

He followed the Indian, not very trustfully. His ears kept careful tab on the desert sounds. There were too many of these. A harsh thermal wind, typical of the desert at nightfall, had sprung up and was rushing at him, seizing his shirt and slapping it against his body, stirring his hair, making all sorts of inexplicable sounds in the desert night.

The path was not as hard as he had expected. It had been used a great deal. The Indian did not use his flashlight during the climb.

“Narrow hole,” the Indian said suddenly.

They had reached the cliff dwelling. He used both hands in the darkness, felt the hard shapes of rocks fitted together, either without mortar, or with a little mortar which the weather had removed during the

ages. The Indian passed through the opening. His flashlight glowed brightly inside. Then he called, “Mr. Peterson! . . . Doc Savage is with me.”

There was no answer.

Doc Savage moved sidewise through the opening. It was not as narrow as he had thought.

“Mr. Peterson!” the Indian said loudly. He sounded frightened.

“He supposed to be here?”

“Damn right!”

Backglow from the flashlight showed the Indian's coppery skin with a frightened shine, as if it had been waxed and polished. He held the flashlight, a long five-cell black one, with both hands and fanned the beam slowly and with seeming difficulty, as if he were a fireman playing water from a hose nozzle.

Doc Savage, trailing the light with his eyes, saw that the cliff dwelling ruin was unusual. He knew a little about such stuff. Evidently this was a temple to the dark god, Cocopelli, because it did not have the conventional D-shape and south-facing layout of sun temples. He noticed two facts which didn't go together. The ruin was very old, at least a thousand years pre-Christ. He thought it older, probably. Yet it was excellently made and of higher order, apparently, than some of the well-known ruins at Mesa Verde of much later date, as late as the twelfth century, A. D.

He remarked, “Peterson has got something here!” He was impressed. His curiosity was aroused. The source of the Cliff Dwellers, from whence they came, was something of an archaeological puzzle. A very early ruin, such as this, would be extremely valuable.

The Indian moved to an opening into another room. He poked his flashlight beam through the aperture, and looked in. He said, “Eee-e-e-e-e-!” He said it softly, deep in his chest, the way a pigeon coos.

The next sound he made was louder, and definitely a scream. Horror changed it completely. Gone was the Indian's stoicism. Gone into wild fright. He wheeled.

“Run!” he urged.

His feet did some slipping in the dust, then he was going for the door.

Doc Savage reached out, got the Indians arm. The Indian made an inarticulate noise, a mewing, and struck at Doc with his left hand, which did not hold the flashlight, using the flashlight hand to press against Doc's chest as if setting him up for the punch. Doc leaned his jaw back out of the way. He put both hands over the Indian's hand and flashlight on his chest, twisted, and got the flashlight. The Indian fell to his hands and knees in the dust of centuries which covered the floor.

Doc took the flashlight to the opening which the Indian had looked through. The flashlight, focused for a narrow beam, was like a long, weightless, white-hot rod in the stygian interior of the place.

He half leaned through the hole, and presently was looking at the strangely dead body of Carl Peterson. Weirdly dead. There was absolutely nothing right about the way the body was dead. . . . Death was the only normal thing about it.

He got only a short look at Carl Peterson. Hearing a scraping sound behind him, he wheeled.

The Indian was leaving.

“Here, you!” he said sharply. “Hold on! Come back here!”

HE pursued the Indian, outside and down the cliff path. The Indian had no light, but he seemed to know the path, and was able to keep his lead. He piled into the station wagon, and the starter ground fiercely, angrily, urgently, trying to start the hot motor.

“You come!” The Indian had his head out of the window. “You come!” he howled. “We get the hell outa here!” Then he seemed to realize Doc was close, and said, “Oh! Get in! Hurry!”

Doc jerked open a rear door, paused to demand, “What's the rush?”

The Indian, no longer sounding like a circus Indian, said hoarsely, “Listen, I ain't gonna stay around here. Come on! I'll explain things later. This ain't no place for us right now!”

The motor caught, gasped and labored for a moment, then roared, the gears made a loud metallic gnashing, and the Indian added, “Get in! For God's sake, get in!” He was hunched over the wheel.

The back door of the station wagon slammed. The Indian sucked his breath inward noisily, asked, “You okay?”

“Okay,” Doc Savage said.

The station wagon began moving. It went cautiously, hugging the cliff on the left, and the Indian presently said, “This is bad road.”

“What is running away going to get you?” Doc Savage demanded.

“Save our necks, probably.”

The road, the crudest kind of trails, became wider, although it was still a shelf with a sheer cliff on either side. The machine gathered speed. The Indian leaned back, relaxing a little. He tramped on the accelerator.

A moment later, the station wagon leaped wildly to the right, toward the precipice edge. The Indian, using every muscle to the utmost, smashed the left-hand door open and pitched out. He screamed wordlessly as he went out, a frightened hoarse sound that presently came back from the surrounding cliffs as whimperings and mewings, in echoes. He hit hard, rolled, trying to stop himself rolling.

The station wagon then went over the cliff. It did not go over quite cleanly, the front wheels dropping after they passed over and the chassis underside dragging with a ghastly, metallic, tearing noise; then there was a solid rubbery bump as the rear tires hit and bounced over. The station wagon probably turned over and over, over and over, as it fell. It was too dark to see.

DOC SAVAGE had gotten out. He had jumped, as a matter of fact, before the Indian. The instant he had known something was wrong, he had gone out. He now stood, half crouching, against the side of the cliff where he had landed.

It was dark, intensely dark, where he stood. But a few yards away, on the road, he could distinguish the sprawled form of the Indian. The Indian wasn't moving.

It came to him that he had made almost no sound leaving the station wagon, that the Indian probably

thought he was in the machine when it went over the edge.

He did not make his presence known.

He did some thinking.

Then, with utmost care and silence, he began going away. He kept in the shadows, in the blackest darkness. The Indian had not moved.

Chapter III

HORRIFIED, rigid, the Indian lay exactly as he had stopped after rolling. For a time he did not have enough normalcy to breathe. But he did quiver noticeably as sounds came to him, as if he had become suddenly supersensitive to sounds, as if his nerves were raw to them.

There was, actually, a space of a few moments before the echoes began coming. The scrape and rubbery bump of the station wagon going over the cliff came back weirdly distorted, so that it was strangely like a voice that said, “Hyah, Bob!” The echoes proceeded to repeat. The “Hyah, Bob!” came again, three times in all, before the station wagon made its first strike far below, a loud rip and bang of metal on rock. It hit again; two tires let go like shots; it seemed to crash twice only, then hit in water. But it was hard to tell, because the canyon suddenly filled with conglomerate echoes of all the sounds that gabbled back and forth furiously, finally dying. And then, weirdest of all, from some very far point, came echoing back the Indian's first cry of terror as he had leaped from the station wagon. This seemed to put life into the Indian.

He got up and ran. He did not look around, or back. He kept close to the cliff on the right, hands out feeling for the rock, crashing into it frequently, stubbing his fingers on it so that his fingernails were torn loose. He began to gasp with agony that came partly from his fingers and partly from his mind.

He traveled in this mad way perhaps half a mile and was impaled by a flashlight beam.

“Grunts!” a voice said loudly. “What the hell's wrong?”

The Indian immediately fell down. His stoicism was gone.

“The station wagon went over the cliff, Mr. McKell,” he said, whimpering.

McKell, when that soaked in, began to curse. He called the Indian several very explicit things, said, “A twelve-hundred-dollar station wagon shot to hell, you damned fool!” Then, hearing someone in the darkness behind him, he turned and shouted, “Sam! The damned station wagon went off the road and into the river!”

Another man, a wide fat man puffing behind an electric hand lantern, arrived. He demanded, “Was Grunts in it?” He was alarmed and absolutely naked, the way he had been sleeping.

“No, he wasn't in it. I wish he had been,” McKell said bitterly.

Sam bent over the Indian, raking his light back and forth over the redman. He became puzzled. “What's the matter with you? You got out of it, didn't you?” he demanded.

Grunts shuddered violently. “Doc Savage didn't,” he said.

“Eh?”

“Doc Savage didn't,” the Indian said.

LIEUTENANT COLONEL ANDREW BLODGETT MAYFAIR received the telegram when he was eating breakfast in the coffee shop of the hotel where he lived in New York. It was not an important hotel and in fact had very little to recommend it except a willingness to extend to Monk Mayfair an item which he frequently needed—credit.

Monk Mayfair, one of a group of five men who usually worked with Doc Savage, was by profession an industrial chemist, a noted one. But he liked excitement better, so he was perpetually in a state of financial malnutrition, the result of not attending to business. He infinitely preferred chasing excitement. This morning, though, he was flush, having been driven by straightened circumstances to doing a trouble shooting job for a plastics manufacturer. Yesterday evening he had collected his fee, last night he had rested well and slept long in anticipation of getting rid of his funds as soon as possible in riotous living.

A short, extremely wide man, Monk Mayfair had the build and appearance of a hammered-down Cardiff giant. His mouth was too large, his eyes too small and too humorous, his forehead was inadequate, and the general effect was that dogs invariably barked at him.

Betsy, the waitress at the Forty-First Street Hotel Coffee Shop, approached with the yellow envelope.

“Hello there, lovely but cold-natured,” Monk said, reflecting that he would like to promote Betsy. He had reflected this on other occasions. “What you got there?” he added.

Betsy did not give him the telegram immediately. “Listen, you,” she said, fists on her hips. “I don't like guys telling me they're not married.”

“Me?” Monk gasped.

“You hairy ape!” Betsy added. “Just a wife would be bad enough, but thirteen children too! What are you, a rabbit?”

“Thirteen . . . ah!” Monk said. “Ah, I begin to see. . . . My good friend, Ham Brooks, has been talking to you, hasn't he?”

“Never mind who it was,” Betsy said. “I'm wise to you, brother.”

Monk became indignant. “You tell that Ham Brooks, the overdressed shyster lawyer, that he better cut out telling that lie on me!” Monk's indignation increased. “You tell him when I catch him, I'll choke him on one of his own torts.”

“I don't think he was lying,” the pretty waitress said. She threw the telegraph envelope on the table. “Here's a telegram came for you. Probably a fourteenth arrival!”

She left in indignation.

Monk glared at a fried egg on his plate for some time, thinking of several ways it resembled Brigadier General Theodore Marley “Ham" Brooks, his close associate and good friend of whom and to whom he never spoke a pleasant word, if he could help it. He proceeded to jab the egg out of shape with his fork, and pushed it on the back of his plate distastefully. He would, he decided, have to spend the morning figuring out a way of getting even with Ham.

He turned his attention to the telegram, opened it, read the message, then re-read it again. He became

quite rigid, quite pale, then stood up by putting both hands on the table for assistance, blindly upsetting a cup of coffee.

He stumbled with the same blind despair across the dining room to the telephone booths, entered a booth and had much trouble dialing a number, finally succeeding only by holding his right hand with his left hand to steady it.

"Ham . . . " he said hoarsely. "I just got a telegram. . . . Doc is dead. . . . Arizona. Last night. Went over a cliff. . . . Yes, of course. You telephone the airline for tickets. . . . I don't think I could talk so good right now."

HAM BROOKS, the attorney, was grinning when he met Monk. "Pick up your face," he said. "I don't know what it's all about, but Doc isn't dead. Here, take a look at this. It came a minute ago."

The telegram said:

ANY REPORTS YOU GET OF MY DEATH ARE UNTRUE BUT ACT AS THOUGH THEY WERE YOU WILL PROBABLY BE EXPECTED COME OUT HERE INVESTIGATE MY DEATH DO SO I WILL CONTACT YOU BY ALL MEANS PRETEND YOU THINK ME DEAD

DOC

Monk's first feeling was enough relief to make him weak. His second one was suspicion, and he demanded of Ham, "You really just get this? Or were you holding out on me to hand me a scare?"

"Don't be an ass. Or at least try not to be as much a one as usual."

Monk snorted. "We going to Arizona?"

"I have plane tickets, yes."

TWA FLIGHT SEVENTEEN, which left La Guardia field that morning at nine-fifteen, seemed to be their quickest plane out, and they had arranged to be put down at Winslow, Arizona. Scheduled arrival time would be about eleven o'clock that night.

Ham Brooks, the attorney, was an excessively dapper gentleman with the wide mobile mouth of a man equipped by nature for talking too much. He fancied greatly his reputation as a dresser, and had other peculiarities which did not go smoothly with his dignified reputation as one of the most distinguished lawyers Harvard Law School had ever turned out.

"How much information have you got about it?" He asked Monk.

Monk showed him the telegram.

Ham said, "That doesn't tell us much. Who is this man who signed the telegram—Stafford McKell?"

"I never heard of him."

Ham examined the telegram again. "He signs it Stafford McKell, secretary of Wanderers, Inc. . . . Any idea what Wanderers, Inc. is?"

The plane was preparing to take off. It had taxied down to the turning apron at the end of the runway, the motors were howling and the pilot was doing his check-off.

Monk said, “I think Wanderers, Inc., is a bunch-of explorers.”

“You mean a club?”

“I don't know.”

“It's surely not very large, because I've never heard of it.”

“I guess not.”

“Did you know Doc was in Arizona?”

“I knew he had gone somewhere.”

“Maybe he isn't in Arizona.”

Monk was startled. “What you mean?”

“Maybe this is a gag to get us out of town for some reason or other.”

“I don't know,” Monk said uneasily.

“There was nothing in the newspapers about anything happening to Doc Savage,” Ham said. “I looked. It seems to me the newspapers would have had it.”

The engines began roaring, the ship swung out on to the runway, gathered speed, and presently was air borne. They looked at each other uneasily, uncertain whether they had made a mistake. But it was too late to do anything about it now.

They were sitting there, wrapped in gloom and doubt, when a completely pleasant feminine voice said, “I beg your pardon . . . Aren't you Mr. Mayfair and Mr. Brooks?”

MONK looked up. His thought was: “Why did she happen to come along when I felt so low!”

Ham looked as if he was having the same thought.

She was a long girl in grays. Gray suit, gray eyes, blonde hair that was the gray of the lively drink they make with gin and cream and creme de cocoa. The whole effect was lively and interesting.

She added, “I thought I recognized you. I wanted to speak before, but the plane was taking off.”

A fan, was Monk's second thought. Somebody wanting an autograph, or wanting to talk about Doc Savage.

She disillusioned him.

“I'm Wanda Casey,” she said. “I imagine we're going to the same place. I'm a member of Wanderers.”

Ham came to his feet hastily. He said he was Mr. Brooks, and would she take his seat. She hesitated, and then took the seat. Ham stood in the aisle, still looking startled, and said, “Wanderers . . . ?” foolishly.

The girl said, “You are going to Arizona, aren't you?”

“That's right.”

She looked uncomfortably in doubt as to what to say next. “I . . . well, I'm awfully sorry about what happened.”

Monk forced himself to say, “You mean about Doc Savage?”

She nodded.

It was their turn to be speechless. A few moments before, hope that Doc Savage was alive after all had been a bright flame. It quenched now. Despair was black.

At length Monk said, “We really know nothing of what happened. I just got a telegram. Can you tell us anything?”

“Who signed the telegram?” she asked.

“A man named McKell.”

“Stafford McKell,” she said quickly. “He's one of our group. He is working on Tica City with Carl Peterson, Sam Gill and Pietro Jonas.”

“Working on what?”

“Tica City. It's the new cliff dwelling Wanderers found and is developing.”

The plane, climbing now, had left the thickly packed spires of Manhattan behind. The air, which had been bumpy for the first few minutes after takeoff, was smoothing out as altitude dissipated the thermals.

“Just what,” Monk asked, “is this Wanderers?”

His ignorance seemed to surprise her. “I supposed you had heard of us! We're an exploring organization. We're quite well known, really. We have our own museum, which we supply ourselves.”

“In New York?”

“Boston.”

“Oh,” Monk said. To soothe her feelings, he added, “I'm not very well acquainted in Boston.”

“You must not be.”

She sounds pretty mad, Monk thought. She must think this Wanderers and its museum is more important than it is.

HAM BROOKS said smoothly, “I understand your organization and museum is quite unusual.” He nodded at Monk, added, “My friend here hasn't heard of quite a few things. If he had heard of anything much, he'd have heard of Wanderers.”

Brother, you're a liar and a pole-cat, Monk thought. He scowled. Ham was just getting in solid with a very attractive young lady. Ham had never heard of Wanderers, either, Monk would bet.

The girl was pleased.

“Yes, we are unusual,” she said. “There are seven members, and I'm the only feminine one. The others are all men. Membership consists of the three I mentioned, Carl Peterson, Sam Gill, Pietro Jonas, and the one who sent you the telegram, Stafford McKell. The others are Charles Webster Bounds, Grunts Smith, and myself. All of them except Mr. Bounds and myself are out in Arizona, excavating Tica City. We're rather proud of Tica City. We think it's going to be one of the most important native American archaeological discoveries ever made, and will result in our private museum becoming as well-known as the Smithsonian.”

“Miss Casey, do you have the least idea why Doc Savage was in Arizona?” Ham asked.

Wanda Casey hesitated. She moved her purse in her hands as if she were troubled.

“They haven't confided in me!” she blurted finally.

“What do you mean?” Ham was puzzled.

“I have a feeling that something mysterious and sinister has happened.”

“When did you get this feeling?”

“Why, this morning, when Sam telephoned me.”

“What did he telephone you about?”

“He said that something had happened, that the Wanderers must hold a conference, and that I should come out, and that he would telephone our other member who was in the east, Charles Webster Bounds, and that I should catch the first plane. Naturally, I was curious, and asked some questions. He was evasive. Finally I demanded to know why I should come west. I'll never forget his answer. He said, 'Doc Savage was killed out here last night and there's something queer about it.' Then, when I asked a lot more questions, he wouldn't answer them.”

Ham was disappointed. “Is that all you know?”

She nodded. “It isn't much, is it? I think if the other Wanderers didn't resent me so much, I would have been told more.”

Ham was trying to think of a polite way of asking why she was resented when Monk came out bluntly and demanded, “What's the idea of the resentment?”

The young woman looked up sharply at Monk. She didn't seem to think much of Monk. She did not reply at once.

THE stewardess came past distributing magazines. Somewhere in the back, a woman was sick and a man, evidently her husband, was giving her hell about it. The plane had reached about six thousand and was still climbing. There were no longer any bumps; the plane seemed to hang perfectly still, as if embedded in glass.

Wanda Casey decided to answer Monk's question.

She said, “My father was an original member of Wanderers, Inc. There were seven men. Two years ago a Mr. Kissel passed away, and willed his share of Wanderers to Grunts Smith, a full-blooded Apache

Indian employee of Wanderers. The other members all liked Grunts, who likes to be sort of a character. Grunts is an educated Indian, but he pretends to be quite ignorant and primitive. Being educated, Grunts doesn't get away with this. He sounds phony, like a stage Indian. A poor one, too. But I'm talking too much about Grunts. The point I wanted to make is that Grunts inherited Mr. Kissel's share of Wanderers and no one objected."

She stopped abruptly, staring out of the window for a few moments. Below them a few hundred feet, a sheep-shaped cumulous cloud was moving past.

"Father passed away a year ago," she said. "He was killed in an accident—an excavating ditch in a Mayan ruin in Central America caved in on him, and he was smothered."

She was silent again.

Monk asked suspiciously, "What about the one before your father, Kissel . . . Was his death an accident?"

"Pneumonia."

"I see." Monk was wondering if there was foul play.

Wanda Casey made a grim mouth. "I inherited my father's share of Wanderers, naturally. And they didn't like it."

"Who didn't?" Ham asked.

"The other Wanderers."

"Why?"

"Because I was a girl, and no other reason!" she said angrily. "I'm interested in exploring. I always have been. But they didn't want a woman in the organization."

"That wasn't very agreeable of them," Ham suggested.

"I don't think so, either. But there wasn't much they could do about it. But they took care it wouldn't happen again."

"How?"

"Very simply. They all signed an agreement and added a codicil to their wills whereby their shares of Wanderers would revert to the organization itself in case of death." She grimaced. "They talked me into signing it, too."

"So now there'll be no members enter the group by inheritance?" Ham asked.

"That's right." Then she added, "I don't want to give you the wrong impression. I'm not a thorn in the side of Wanderers, not at all. I think they're beginning to accept me."

"I should think they would be delighted," Ham said gallantly.

The overdressed shyster lawyer, Monk reflected sourly, is making all the hay he can. Monk suddenly remembered the story Ham had told the waitress.

"Don't forget to send that telegram at the next stop," Monk told Ham.

“What telegram?” Ham was puzzled.

“The one telling your wife and thirteen kids you won't be home to dinner,” Monk said.

He was pleased at how shocked Miss Casey looked.

THEY got to Kansas City before Ham spoke to Monk again. The Kansas City stop, the stewardess advised, would be long enough for some leg-stretching. Monk and Miss Wanda Casey went into the terminal restaurant. Ham, keeping a jealous eye on them, sauntered into the restaurant himself. He discovered Monk sitting alone on a stool at the U-shaped counter.

“Where's your lady friend, you doublecrossing oaf?” Ham asked.

“What are you kicking about? God knows how many times you've told that wife and thirteen brats lie on me. Why don't you be original once?”

Ham said he would think of something original, give him time. “Something involving a sharp razor, probably,” he added. “Say, how did this babe come to get on the same plane with us?”

Monk had been wondering how this had happened also. He did not admit to any suspicions.

“Coincidence,” he said.

Ham snorted. “Could I interest you in something nice in gold bricks? . . . You're not that big a dope, you ape.”

“You think maybe she got on the plane because we were on it?” Monk inquired.

“What do *you* think?”

“She's lovely, a lovely temptress. If somebody is baiting a trap for us, I'm glad they're using that kind of bait.”

“Be funny about it if you want to. But don't holler to me that you weren't warned.”

“I won't,” Monk assured him. “You know, if she did get on the plane to rope us in, it means somebody was trailing us around in New York. They'd have to, to find out what plane we were taking. Did you see anyone following us?”

Ham shook his head soberly. “I wasn't in a frame of mind to notice anything,” he added.

“No, and I wasn't either,” Monk admitted. “What do you think we had better do?”

“Keep our eye on her.”

Monk said that wouldn't be hard to do. “It will be a pleasure,” he added. “However I think one of our eyes is enough. Why don't you just get another seat in another part of the plane and leave this watching to me?”

Ham replied feelingly that he entertained some doubts of the legitimacy of Monk's birth.

Monk mentioned that he had long held certain opinions of lawyers, particularly Harvard lawyers, especially a specific Harvard lawyer who dressed excessively well. He gave a small portion of this

opinion. Their waitress, overhearing, seemed stunned and looked about, probably seeking the manager or someone with authority to throw them out.

"I'm glad you mentioned the subject," Ham replied. "Because now it won't embarrass me to state that I think you're a double-dipped baboon, undoubtedly the result of a mésalliance between a half-wilted ape and something else, possibly a hyena. Furthermore. . . . oh! Oh, hello, there. Could we interest you in a coke?"

Miss Casey had returned.

She said interestedly, "You gentlemen looked as if you were having an absorbing discussion."

"We were," Monk admitted. "Ham was just admiring my haircut."

Ham agreed this was so, and added, "I was suggesting, though, that he have the barber clip closer next time, say remove everything from the shoulders up."

Miss Casey said, "I was just asking at the airlines desk if there were any way of finding whether Charles Webster Bounds is on his way out. They tell me there isn't." She frowned. "I don't think they want to coöperate, really."

"Where does Bounds come from?"

"New York. Or New Jersey, rather," Miss Casey explained. "Mr. Bounds is a bacteriologist on the staff of a company making medical supplies." She seemed concerned about Bounds, and wishing to take them into her confidence. Finally she added, "Mr. Bounds hasn't been working regularly lately, and I'm afraid he might be a little short of funds for the trip. Plane travel is rather expensive you know, or any travel is, for that matter."

They went into the soft drink fountain. Miss Casey told them more about Charles Webster Bounds. "He's a proud and rather testy old gentleman," she explained. "I wish he'd let us loan him funds occasionally. You see, the other Wanderers, except the Indian, Grunts, have independent incomes. Mr. Bounds and Grunts draw small salaries from Wanderers, but I'm sure Mr. Bounds' salary is insufficient for his needs. I'm sure money bothers him considerably. But he's very strange about it. Doesn't let anyone discuss it."

Monk thought Miss Casey was lovely. He hoped he would get to see a lot of her. However, he suspected she didn't believe that Ham was a married man.

Chapter IV

THE tall, dark, beautiful man said, "Hello there, darling, hello, my lovely! How are you, how are you?" He said this with all the sedateness of a freight train whistling for a crossing, but in a deeper voice, a most elegant voice. He sounded a little like Cary Grant.

"Pietro!" Miss Casey squealed. "Oh Pietro, you handy thing! You came to meet us, didn't you?"

This must be Pietro Jonas, another member of Wanderers, Inc.

Ham Brooks did not like Pietro. The reason for this was the way Pietro wrapped his arms around Miss Casey.

"Who's that guy?" Monk wished to know.

“Pietro.”

“One of the Wanderers?”

“I suppose so.”

“For one of a bunch of guys who didn't want a woman member in their outfit, he shows a lot of enthusiasm,” Monk complained.

“Maybe he's two-faced,” Ham said. “Maybe he hates her.”

“Sure, he hates her. Anybody can see that. He hates her like a mule hates an ear of corn.”

Pietro was telling Miss Casey how lovely she looked, how bright her eyes were, and how he and everyone else had missed her. This took some time. Finally Miss Casey was able to wedge in an introduction of Monk and Ham.

“Ham Brooks and Monk Mayfair . . . ?” said Pietro Jonas vaguely. Apparently he had never heard of them.

“They're friends of Doc Savage,” she explained.

Pietro seemed surprised. “What are they doing here?”

“They came to investigate Mr. Savage's death.”

Pietro frowned. “How did they know about that?”

“Mr. McKell telegraphed them.”

“He did, eh?” Pietro said. “He should have mentioned that.” Pietro finally decided to shove out his hand. Ham was tempted not to shake it, and finally he did, but Monk resisted the temptation. “Where's the circus playing tonight, Mr. Jonas?” Monk inquired.

Pietro glowered. Apparently he didn't like light references to his fawn-colored riding pants, his handmade and figured cowboy boots, his buckskin shirt and large correct cowboy hat. There was plenty of silver decoration on his belt and hatband.

The plane on which they had arrived now began to make a great deal of noise. It taxied out to the runway, took the air and departed in a great thunder. The night settled quietly and warmly over the Arizona airport.

Pietro tried to brush them off.

“Well, goodbye now,” he said. He took Miss Casey's well shaped elbow. “Come, my dear, the car is waiting.”

“Isn't there room for Mr. Brooks and Mr. Mayfair to ride with us?” Wanda Casey asked.

Pietro was pulling at her. “I hardly think so,” he said.

“How big a car is it?” Monk asked.

“It's full of supplies,” Pietro said. “Come, my angel. Sam is in the car, and he'll be anxious to get going.”

Miss Casey addressed Monk and Ham.

“I want you to meet Sam Gill,” she said.

SAM GILL was one of the most remarkably fat men Monk and Ham had seen in some time. He was about five feet tall, approximately as wide, and seemed to be composed of balloons stuffed inside a leather hide.

He knew who they were.

“Monk Mayfair, the chemist, and Ham Brooks, the lawyer!” he said amiably. “I'm glad you two guys showed up, mighty glad. I knew McKell had wired you, but I didn't think you would get here this quick.” He began pushing stuff around in the back seat. “Jump in, boys. Plenty of room for you. Where's your luggage?”

“We didn't bring any luggage,” Ham told him. “We left in too much of a hurry to think of it.”

Gill surveyed them for size. “The desert's pretty rough on city clothes. But I think we can fix you up with some stuff that'll do.”

Pietro suggested, “Maybe they'd better wait in town for the stores to open. They can buy some appropriate clothes and come out tomorrow.”

“Whatever they want to do,” Sam Gill said.

“We'll go with you,” Monk told him.

The car was a touring that was probably less dilapidated than a coating of dust made it look. Monk and Ham occupied what room boxes and sacks didn't fill in the rear seat. Miss Casey, Pietro and Sam Gill rode in front.

Settling his balloons behind the wheel, Sam Gill said, “I thought maybe Charles Webster Bounds would be on that plane. I guess he missed it.”

The car got going, reached town, and pulled into an all-night filling station for gasoline. Monk and Ham discovered the machine was equipped with an extra forty-gallon gas tank, and tanks for water.

Sam Gill used the filling station telephone. He called the local newspaper office and asked for some horse race results. Then he crossed the street to an all-night news stand, and came back with a racing form sticking out of his pocket.

He eyed the racing form while the water tanks were being filled. Presently he made a displeased noise.

“Lose some money?” Monk ventured.

“This damned fool!” The fat man shook the dope sheet angrily. “He rates my horse, Furlough Two, not even to place at Arlington today. If he's a dopester, I'm a starving Jap.”

“Oh, you own race horses!” Monk was surprised.

Miss Casey said, “Sam owns bushels of race horses. He's made a million dollars out of them.”

“Two million,” the fat man corrected. He got into the car, consulted his watch, and said, “We may be able to make it by daylight. I hope so. That road is only two degrees less hot than hell during the daytime.”

They got going. Monk decided he rather liked the fat man. But he thought it was rather unusual for the man to show interest in race horses when he was supposed to think that Doc Savage was dead. The fat man was probably cold-blooded.

The touring car rolled rapidly on a paved highway for a while, then turned on to gravel. The night was not as cool as Monk had expected; the air was dry and rather hot. There was a moon, and the vast, hard, silvered endlessness of the desert made itself noticed.

Monk said, “We're very anxious to hear what happened to Doc Savage.”

No one answered.

“What can you tell us?” Monk asked finally.

The fat man cleared his throat. “Pietro, you tell it,” he said.

Monk suddenly realized the fat man sounded frightened.

“No, no, you tell them,” Pietro croaked.

Pietro was frightened, too.

MONK suddenly understood something. The fat man, he realized, had been acting in an excessively callous manner to cover up uneasiness inside.

“What goes on?” Monk demanded.

“I wish to God we knew!” Sam Gill said explosively, and abruptly was mopping his round face with a handkerchief. “It's kind of a wild story.”

“Let's hear it.”

“You'll either think I'm a liar, or have come loose at the seams.”

“I'll let you know when I do.”

“Your friend Savage isn't the only dead one!” The fat man spoke grimly, fiercely. “Carl Peterson is dead too.”

Wanda Casey's gasp of horror was like the sound a stepped-on mouse might make. “Carl! Not Carl! Why didn't you tell me . . .”

“McKell thought it would be better to tell you when you got here,” the fat man said. He was silent a while, then added sharply, “There's strange things about the way he died.”

Ham Brooks cleared his throat. “I always like to hear a coherent story. Could you do it that way?”

The fat man said he could.

“Sure,” he said. “But it'll still sound queer. In the first place, we don't know why Carl Peterson sent for Doc Savage, but he did. We do know this—Carl was upset for two days. Mighty upset. Didn't eat, and jumped at his shadow. He said it was something he ate. Day before yesterday, he went to town, and we imagine that's when he sent for Savage.”

He stopped speaking and gave his attention to jockeying the car off the highway. There was, as far as Monk could tell, now no road. Gill fiddled with a gadget on the dash, got a light turned on inside it. It was an illuminated compass.

“ANYWAY,” Sam Gill continued, “Carl Peterson must have telephoned Doc Savage and made an arrangement for Savage to get off the train on the open desert. There was considerable secrecy about that, and I think the idea Peterson had was for Doc Savage to arrive unknown and unannounced. Peterson had Grunts pick Savage up in the station wagon, and that was secret, too.”

He reached forward abruptly and tapped the compass, then peered at it. He stopped the car and thrust his head out of the window, studying the shape of the surrounding hills. “Danged country is tricky in the moonlight,” he complained. “Easy to get lost right here. Better going later on, though.” The car got under way again.

“Grunts is the Indian?” Ham suggested.

“That's right. The passenger train let Savage off and Grunts picked him up. It was dark when Grunts arrived with Savage, and they didn't go to the camp. They went to Tica City, where Peterson was to be waiting for Savage.”

He paused. Ham prompted, “Tica City is the new cliff dwelling you fellows have discovered?”

“That's right, too. Grunts brought Doc Savage there. They went to look for Carl Peterson, and found his body. Grunts got scared, ran to the station wagon, Doc Savage with him. They jumped in the station wagon and got going for camp. The station wagon went over the cliff. Grunts got out. Doc Savage was in it.”

“This was at night?” Ham asked.

“Yes.”

Which would explain why they thought Doc Savage was dead when he wasn't, Ham reflected. He became silent, wondering why Doc was deceiving them.

Monk asked, “Have they found Doc's body?”

“No. The station wagon went into the river. We're going to try to get at it tomorrow. We think we've got it located.”

“What,” Monk asked, “scared the Indian?”

“When?”

“When he saw Carl Peterson's body.”

Sam Gill let that go unanswered for a moment. Monk got the idea that the fat man was taking time to put fright out of his voice.

“Carl Peterson didn't die a natural death,” Gill said finally.

He hadn't removed quite all the fear.

“What do you mean?”

Again Gill was silent.

Suddenly, explosively, Pietro Jonas said, “He was burned. Cooked. It is an impossibility!”

For a moment the car coasted down a long smooth desert slope, weathered to the smoothness of concrete by wind and drifting sand, and, although it was not particularly quiet in the car, Monk could hear the heavy breathing of Gill and Jonas.

“There wasn't any fire!” Jonas said finally. “How could he be cooked without any fire?”

Silence again. It was broken by a sound that stood their hair on edge, a choking whimper from the seat beside them. It was Wanda Casey, sobbing.

THE drive took four hours more, long enough for Monk and Ham to learn that the county sheriff, a man named Dusty Weinberg, had reached the scene with the coroner, made an investigation, and announced that Carl Peterson had died from burns.

“I thought you said there was no evidence of fire,” Monk reminded.

“The sheriff seems to think that death occurred elsewhere and the body was brought to the cliff dwelling where it was found,” Sam Gill explained.

The region around the cliff dwelling and camp was impressive. It was not as spectacular as the Grand Canyon, but it was more inaccessible than Monk had thought any place in the United States could be. He remarked on this. He said, “How the devil did you find how to bring an automobile in here?”

“Airplane.” The fat man nodded at Pietro. “Pietro has a private license and his own ship, and he spent nearly three weeks hunting and taking photographs, and was able to work out a route.”

Monk thought it was remarkable, the way they had managed to get automobiles into such an inaccessible region. He would have bet that it was impossible.

The car rounded a turn, and he exclaimed, “Blazes!”

Sam Gill was pleased. “Not bad for a camp, don't you think?” he asked. Reddish dawn light made his face seem flushed.

Monk thought it looked like a major engineering project. There were half a dozen adobe buildings of picturesque layout, together with power lines, floodlights, and an impressive amount of machinery standing around. He examined the electric transmission line which disappeared over the lip of a nearby canyon from which came the hard, sullen sound of fast-moving water. “Don't tell me you built a power plant down there, too?”

“That's right. Took advantage of a natural setup in the river. The canyon's over a thousand feet deep, narrow, and has a big drop at this point. We simply blasted in a portion of the canyon wall to make a crude dam, put in diversion pipes to a turbine, and we were set. You'd be astonished how much power we have on tap now. Enough, believe it or not, for a city of ten thousand people.”

“Why such elaborate preparations?” Monk wanted to know.

“Wait until you see Tica City,” the fat man said enthusiastically. “It's far beyond anything Mesa Verde has to offer.”

“Mesa Verde!” Pietro said, and sneered. “Mesa Verde is nothing but a second-rate tourist trap. It was never properly developed. Looted by cowboys in the beginning, its best relics scattered and lost.”

“You can't compare Tica City to Mesa Verde,” Sam Gill added. “Tica is a different age, a different race. It's great.” He tried to think of something to express how great it was, added excitedly, “Tica will be to America what the pyramids are to Egypt.”

“That's why we've prepared elaborately with machinery for the excavation,” Pietro finished.

THEY were assigned a small adobe cottage. In the pre-dawn light, the place looked crisp, neat, romantic. Pietro and the fat man took Wanda Casey to another cottage, leaving Monk and Ham alone.

“Quite a layout,” Monk ventured. “Funny thing about the desert—you get so you don't expect to find anything in it, and when you find something, you're shocked.”

Ham said nothing. He was looking in a clothes closet, under the bed, putting his head out of the window. He was trying to learn whether there was anyone around to overhear. Not entirely satisfied, he spoke in a whisper.

“What do we do, now we're here?” he wished to know.

Monk lowered his own voice. “Not much we can do, except go ahead as if we thought Doc was really dead. Doc will get in touch with us, I imagine.”

“What do you make of the setup?”

“Gill and Jonas are scared.”

“Out of their pants,” Monk agreed. “And I don't like that guy Pietro Jonas.”

“Which is probably a recommendation for him,” Ham said unkindly.

“Yeah? Well, if that fancy dude had had his way, we'd have had to walk out here. Stay in town and buy appropriate clothes, he says to us. And knowing all the time the camp was a layout like this! Listen, that bird didn't want us out here.”

“He was probably jealous of Miss Casey,” Ham declared.

“I'll give him something to be jealous of!” Monk stated.

“I bet you try,” Ham agreed. “I also bet you don't get to first base.”

Monk replied that Ham underestimated his abilities, particularly his abilities as a Don Juan. “I fascinate the ladies,” he declared. “I fascinate them like a . . .”

“Like a snake fascinates a bird, I know,” Ham agreed. “We'd better be showing proper anxiety. We'd better express a wish to find Doc's body.”

Dusty Weinberg, the sheriff, was a lean hungry man who looked more like Arizona than possibly nine out of ten inhabitants of Arizona looked.

“I don't know how the hell he was cooked to death,” he told them, “but I'm sure he was cooked.”

“Burned, you mean?” Monk said.

“I don't mean burned. I mean cooked.” When Monk looked puzzled, he added, “Take a look at the body, you'll see what I mean.”

“Where is the body?”

“It's here. You want to look at it?”

Monk and Ham exchanged glances, and Monk said dubiously, “Look isn't the word. But I expect we better.”

“Sure, might as well. It better be nearer daylight before you go poking around that canyon where the station wagon went in. Man could fall into that canyon with half an excuse.” Sheriff Weinberg gave his trousers a hitch. “Like to get your opinion about what happened to the guy, anyway.”

CARL PETERSON'S body was being preserved in the refrigeration plant, which, to their relief, was not being used for anything else as yet. When they came out, they didn't feel good.

“Well?” Sheriff Weinberg demanded.

Some comment seemed to be called for, so Monk offered, “I don't see what could have done that to him.”

The Sheriff was less confused. “I tell you, the guy got baked somewhere. I don't know where or how, but that's what happened.”

Monk and Ham didn't feel like arguing the question. Viewing Carl Peterson's body had been a shocking experience, and they wanted to get it out of their minds.

“Can we see where Doc Savage met his accident?” Ham suggested.

“Sure.”

Wanda Casey joined them for the tour of inspection. “I can't sleep, even if Pietro thinks I should,” she explained.

Sam Gill guided them to the spot where the station wagon had gone off the cliff trail. He was joined by Stafford McKell, who looked tired and sleepy and had forgotten to lace one of his boots. McKell, a tall, angular man, immediately seemed like a nice guy to Monk, although a bit on the serious side.

McKell and Sam Gill both explained how they had been awakened by the noise of the station wagon going off the cliff path, and how they had gone to investigate and met the partly hysterical Grunts on the trail. By the time they had finished the story, the party had reached the site of the incident.

Monk moved up and down the trail at the point, making a close inspection, but there were no tracks remaining that would give any information. At the cliff edge, however, there were marks where the station wagon had gone over.

Ham leaned over the edge. He drew back, alarmed. “It's straight down!”

McKell said, “We learned from the marks that the station wagon hit twice before it went into the river.”

Impressed, Ham exclaimed, “That means almost a thousand feet straight down.”

“About seven hundred feet,” McKell said.

Monk ventured to look over the edge. He was also impressed, and somewhat alarmed, because he suddenly wondered if Doc Savage could have been in the station wagon after all. The idea was shocking. He withdrew hastily, the color in his face suddenly unhealthy.

A cry from Wanda Casey brought them around.

She was holding up a piece of metal and saying, “Look! Look what I found. . . . Isn't this a piece broken off the steering gear of a car?”

Sam Gill, Pietro, McKell, the Sheriff, everyone crowded around the girl, and Sheriff Weinberg demanded, “Where'd you find that, Miss?”

Wanda Casey pointed at a spot near the cliff side of the road.

“There. I found it there,” she said.

“Is it off the station wagon?” the Sheriff asked.

McKell said, “I don't know. It looks like it.” He raised his voice and bellowed, “Grunts! Grunts! GRUNTS!” His bellow resounded in processions of echoes from the canyon walls. When there was no response, he said, “Pietro, go wake up Grunts.” To the others, he explained, “Grunts knows automobiles. He can tell us what this piece is.”

Pietro sauntered back toward camp. Apparently he resented McKell ordering him around.

Ham glanced at Monk. Monk had a strange expression on his face. Ham wondered why.

“So Grunts is an automobile expert?” Ham remarked.

McKell said he sure was. “Grunts operated a garage in Flagstaff for years,” McKell said. “That's how he first got connected with Wanderers, as our transportation expert.”

“Has Wanderers done all its exploring in the States?”

“Not by a long shot,” McKell assured him. “We've worked all over the world. You should see our museum in Boston. It's something special.”

“Miss Casey assured us it was,” Ham agreed.

Grunts returned presently with Pietro. The Indian's coppery face had a sunken look and a yellowish shine, as if it had been greased with butter. Ham thought he looked unwell, and secretly worried. But it was hard to tell about an Indian's looks.

The Indian looked at the piece of metal the girl had found.

“Station wagon,” he said.

“You're sure the piece is off the station wagon?” Sheriff Weinberg demanded.

“Heap sure.”

“What part of the station wagon?”

“Steering knuckle.”

“Then,” said the Sheriff, “that's what made it go over the cliff.”

“Sure. Steering knuckle broke.”

Ham thought the Indian looked infinitely relieved, and glanced at Monk to see whether Monk had noticed this. He was startled by the deeply suspicious expression Monk was wearing. He sidled over, whispered, “What's eating on you, dopey?”

Monk, also whispering, said, “How could she find that piece of iron when it wasn't there?”

“Huh?”

“It wasn't there.”

“What wasn't?”

Monk explained patiently, “That piece of steering knuckle, if that's what it is, wasn't lying where she said she found it when we first came here. I looked. I would have seen it.”

Ham was stunned. “You must be mistaken about where she found it.”

“Okay, ask her. . . .”

Ham sauntered over to Miss Casey and asked casually, “Where did you say you picked up that piece of steel?”

She pointed. “Right there.”

Ham glanced at Monk Mayfair, lifting his eyebrows slightly in inquiry. The inquiry was hardly necessary. He could tell from the way Monk was holding his mouth, somewhat like an alligator, that Monk was sure the piece of metal hadn't been there earlier.

“It must have flown over here when it broke off the station wagon,” Miss Casey said.

“Yes, it must have,” Ham agreed. “Yes, it probably flew.”

Chapter V

IT was nine o'clock before they got down into the bottom of the canyon. It had also become hotter than Monk and Ham had ever dreamed it could become anywhere. The descent had also put their hair on end. The last hundred feet they had clambered down a rope ladder, literally dangling in space over the boiling muddy water of the river.

“Impressive, eh?” McKell said.

“It would scare an iron monkey,” Ham agreed.

McKell suggested they rest on the ledge where they were while the others finished the descent. Then

McKell went over the edge. Sam Gill, Grunts and the Sheriff had already gone down. Miss Casey and Pietro had remained on top.

Ham asked, “What do you think?”

“I'll bet we never find that station wagon.” Monk was eyeing the river in fright. “I bet somebody drowns.”

“I mean about the lovely Miss Casey. What do you think about her?”

Monk tried to fan himself with his hat. “I think we better treat her with respect.” He was as wet from perspiration as if he had been swimming. “I think the little lady maybe didn't get on that plane with us by accident, and I think maybe she had that piece of steering knuckle in her handbag and planted it.”

“Tsk, tsk, you sound as if she had you scared.”

“She has. So has that Indian.”

“What about the Indian?”

“If the girl was covering up for anybody, it was him. It looks like he sent the car over the cliff deliberately.”

Ham shuddered. “I wish we knew where Doc is.”

They climbed the rest of the way down to the edge of the hissing, muddy snake that was the river. Those who had gone down already were gathered on a huge boulder which in some fashion had become wedged to defy the torrent. It was wet with spray, and the stream surged partly over it at times with a hungry intensity.

A rope stretched tautly out into the hissing river, slanting down rigidly into the water.

The Indian pointed at the rope.

“You good swimmer?” he asked Monk.

Monk looked at the river. He suddenly wished he couldn't swim at all.

“Only fair,” he said. He was about to refuse to go into the river to investigate the station wagon, which presumably was at the end of the rope. Then he remembered Doc Savage's body was supposed to be in the station wagon. “What's the matter, aren't there any divers in this country?”

“You scairt?” the Indian asked.

“You're damned right!” Monk said unpleasantly. “How dumb do you think I am, anyway?”

“I go, you scairt,” the Indian said. “I go yesterday. Can do again.”

“Never mind, I'll go,” Monk said. He was not very willing.

HAM was shocked at the expression on Monk's face when the homely chemist came crawling laboriously up the rope after making the dive. The muscular effort of fighting the rushing water must have been terrific. But it wasn't that. Monk's manner was strange also. He was so queerly quiet that everyone thought he had found Doc Savage's body, and Ham had a bad few moments.

“You find the station wagon?” McKell finally asked.

“Yes,” Monk said, and looked back at the water in considerable horror.

“Was . . . Did you find . . .”

“No body,” Monk said.

“But . . .”

“It isn't in the station wagon,” Monk said.

It was a let-down, an anti-climax, to all but Ham. Ham wondered what had happened to Monk. Something out of the ordinary, he'd bet.

Strangely enough, the climb back to the top of the canyon wasn't as difficult as the descent. It only required three hours, and Ham was able to stand up normally, by consciously bracing his knees, when they reached the top.

They went to their adobe cottage to rest. The thermometer, Ham noticed when he passed one, registered a hundred and fourteen in the shade. He wanted to faint. He hadn't really thought it was that hot.

“Okay, diving-boy, what did you really find in the river?” he demanded of Monk.

Monk looked around suspiciously at the inside of the cabin. Once more he went through the routine of examining under the bed and in clothes closets. He went over and jerked the entrance switch on the lighting circuit at the fuse box, muttering that sometimes people hooked microphones through the light wires.

“I found the back end of the station wagon,” he told Ham.

Ham was puzzled for a moment. “Oh, so it broke in two in the fall.”

“The fall didn't break it in two.”

Ham scowled. “You mean there was an explosion? Why so secretive?”

“No explosion.”

“What,” demanded Ham, “is wrong with you? You act like a guy sitting on an ant hill.”

Monk said, “Look at this, wise-guy.”

From his pocket, where he had kept it hidden, Monk produced his handkerchief. It was sodden, and contained something which he apparently had wrapped in it while under water. He had made the dive into the river, Ham recalled, wearing a pair of shorts which contained pockets. Evidently he'd had the handkerchief when he dived, or had wrapped the object in it later.

The object was a bit of steel.

Ham looked at the steel. “So what?”

“Take it.”

Ham took it.

“Okay,” Monk said. “Squeeze it.”

“Squeeze it! Have you gone nuts?” Ham wondered if the heat had fried Monk's wits. He said, “This heat must have made you a little crazier than usual.”

“Squeeze it, wise guy,” Monk invited grimly.

Ham didn't see much point in squeezing a piece of steel with his fingers. But he did so.

“Oh my gosh!” he yelled.

The bit of solid-looking steel had broken—in fact, it had turned instantly to powder and fragments. The effect was much as if he had squeezed a clod of earth, very dry earth. He was so shocked he dropped the stuff in his hand; it hit the floor, broke into smaller pieces and more powder, scattering.

Ham was stunned.

A MOMENT later feet rattled on the sun-baked earth outside and McKell's voice demanded, “What's wrong?”

“Nothing,” Monk said immediately.

“Can I come in?”

“Sure.”

McKell entered. “I thought I heard one of you fellows let out a yell a second ago.”

“Oh, that. It didn't mean anything,” Monk said.

McKell, moving across the room, stepped on the particles of what had been a bit of steel, and it powdered underfoot, making enough of a gritting, however, that he looked down and remarked, “I thought they had this place swept out for you.” He did no pursue the subject of the gritty material on the floor, but went over to show them how the air conditioning system worked. The conditioner was a central one, and fed into the different cabins through underground ducts. “Later, after you get some sleep, we'll show you the part of Tica City that is open,” he said.

Ham asked, “Wasn't another member of your organization supposed to show up?”

“Bounds? You mean Charles Webster Bounds? . . . Yes, he's supposed to come. In fact, we hoped to receive a telegram from him.” Seeing Monk's startled expression, he explained, “We have radio communication, you know. An amateur in Flagstaff, works with us on a special arrangement with the Federal Communications Commission.”

“You think Bounds will come?”

“Yes. He will probably fly out.”

McKell left.

Monk watched Ham go over and rub a finger thoughtfully in the grayish dust which had been a piece of steel. Ham looked up, frowning, “You got this off the station wagon?”

“That's right. Off the front end. That, as near as I could tell, was part of the engine.”

“You wouldn't kid me?”

Monk became enraged. “What the hell do you think I am?” Monk demanded. “A dope? If you don't want to believe me, you can go jump in the lake. Or better, jump in that river and see for yourself.”

Ham made soothing motions. “Don't get up in the air. This thing is a little cockeyed for me to believe, is all.” He examined the dust on the tips of his fingers. “You're a chemist. What do you think happened to the front end of the wagon?”

Monk said he didn't know. He said he wasn't chemist enough to answer that one. “But I think we oughta ask that Indian. That Indian's scared of something.”

“So are the others,” Ham added.

They undressed for bed. Now that the air-conditioner vent was blowing cold air, it was comfortable.

“But I don't believe I'll be able to sleep,” Monk said.

HE was wrong. They slept until it was black dark and the Indian came to see them. They never knew how the Indian got in; maybe they had forgotten to lock the door. But he was inside. His *psss-s-s-t!* awakened them.

He was holding a flashlight beam pointed at his right hand. This was to show them his right hand contained a gun.

“Be still! Don't whoop around,” he said.

They didn't whoop around.

Monk did say, “I had a notion to make pieces out of you this morning, Hiawatha. I wish I had.”

“Might have been a good idea,” the Indian said. He waved the gun in a general fashion. “Rocks hard on feet, so better put on shoes.”

“Where we going?”

“Outdoors.” The Indian scowled at their shoes, apparently not satisfied with the heavy brogans. He added, “Too noisy, wind up in trouble. Better leave shoes off after all.”

Monk and Ham dressed, under careful supervision. “No shirts,” the Indian said. “Don't need shirts. Roll up pants legs. Roll one higher than other so folds of cloth won't rub together. Don't want anybody to hear us.”

Ham by now had concluded the Indian was more completely terrified than at any previous time.

“What's the idea of this?” Ham demanded.

“Plot against the white race, maybe,” the Indian said. He didn't sound unfriendly. But he didn't sound exactly friendly, either.

They dressed finally as he suggested, in trousers rolled up and nothing else, and he cocked his revolver impressively, then opened the door and got behind them. Outside was a much blacker night than last night. “I'm a damned good shot,” the redskin remarked by way of warning. “Let's get going.”

He herded them north. The ground proved to be rough, covered with more sharp rocks than Monk had believed possible, plus cactus thorns and, when Monk happened to remember, probably sidewinder rattlesnakes. He balked. “Listen, my copper-colored friend, this is where I sit down. What are you going to do about it?” he said.

The Indian was surprisingly reasonable. “Sit down,” he said. “Good for your feet.”

“What the hell!” Monk muttered.

“But be sure you sit, both of you,” the Indian said.

There was silence for a few moments. Monk peered about vainly for their peculiar escort.

“Ham, is he gone?”

“How do I know!” Ham said bitterly. “I ran a cactus thorn clear through my foot a minute ago.”

“Probably it was only a snake,” Monk said. “I think Rain in the Face has deserted us. I think—”

“He's back again, though,” the Indian said calmly at Monk's elbow. Monk jumped violently. “Here, put on moccasin,” the Indian added. He handed them each moccasins. These smelled rather badly, but Monk and Ham lost no time getting their feet in them. “Okay,” the Indian said. “Now we go. Walk quiet. No talk. Plenty dangerous.”

“What's the idea?” Monk whispered.

“Got white man's devilment to show you. Get going.” The Indian didn't sound at all calm. He sounded like a man would sound if he spoke while trying to lift a two-hundred-pound dumbbell at the same time.

Their destination seemed to be the ruin. They did not reach it.

THEY had covered about two thirds of the way to the ruin, far enough to show them the cliff dwelling was their destination, when there was a sharp metallic click in the nearby darkness, then a voice saying, “This is the way I thought it'd be.”

The click froze Monk. He knew how a Winchester carbine, favorite saddle gun of the West, sounded

when it cocked. He recognized the voice. So did Ham, and Ham said, “McKell! My God. I'm glad somebody stopped this!”

McKell, the moonlight, what little there was, making him seem more tall, more angular, appeared from the shadows.

He said, “Glad to see me, eh?”

Monk blurted, “You're damned right! We were—” A hard dull sound stopped him.

The hard dull sound was something in the right hand which McKell used to hit the Indian. He hit the Indian above the right temple, and the redskin tilted forward without bending at ankles, knees or hips. The Indian landed facedown and did not move again. McKell, holding his rifle with his right hand, asked, “You were saying . . . ?”

Monk didn't like the cold, bitter quality in McKell's voice, didn't care for what the night permitted him to see of the look on McKell's face. “Never mind,” Monk said. “I could have been mistaken.”

McKell slanted his Winchester barrel briefly at the Indian and asked, “What was he doing to you?”

“Taking us for a little walk,” Monk said.

“He say why?”

“Yes.”

“Why?”

Monk examined the rifle and inquired, “You pointing that thing at us?”

“Yes.”

“I don't like it.”

“That'll do you a hell of a lot of good,” McKell said coldly. “I asked you what the Indian was doing with you. You want to argue about it, or do you want to answer?” The rifle moved angrily.

“I'll answer.”

“Do it.”

“Sitting Bull said he was going to show us some white man's devilment. If that doesn't make sense to you, it didn't to me either.”

McKell seemed surprised. “Is that what he said?”

“That's about all he said, too.”

“The hell he did!” McKell sounded even more surprised. “Maybe I shouldn't have hit him.” He went over, bent both knees enough to let one hand on the end of a long arm reach the Indian's wrist and try for a pulse. Evidently there was a pulse. McKell said, “He's just conked. Good thing, too, because when I hit him, I was not giving a damn whether or not I busted his skull.” He moved his rifle briefly, said, “All right. Continue. No noise. I can show it to you too.”

Monk said unpleasantly, “I hope this is interesting enough to justify all the gun-waving and knocking on

heads."

"It will be," McKell said. Then his head shot up on the end of his long, stiffened neck, and they could hear the astonished outrush of his breath. Farther up the trail, a man had screamed. The man seemed to be in the ruin, and he continued screaming.

McKell said hoarsely, "Oh my God! Too late! Too late!"

He ran toward the screaming.

When he had gone, Doc Savage came out of the darkness silently.

"We had better stay right where we are," Doc told Monk and Ham softly.

Chapter VI

THE night was getting a little crowded with events. The unknown man—his screaming voice was not any voice they recognized—was still bleating, McKell was making a lot of angry noise dashing toward the ruin, his flashlight splattering white-hot dabs of light on the sides of the cliff, on the trail, or jutting out a very long thin pale cone into the abyss that was the canyon below the trail.

Monk Mayfair said, "Whoee-e-e-e-e!" He was sure the new figure which had joined them was Doc Savage; the size indicated it was Doc; the voice had been Doc's. But he asked, "Doc, is that you?"

Doc said, "Yes, but don't broadcast it." He moved over near the cliff edge, added, "Come over here." When they were beside him, he asked, "What happened? What was McKell doing with you?"

Ham Brooks told him. "It wasn't making any more sense to us than it sounds like it would make," he finished.

They listened for a moment. It sounded as if McKell had reached the cliff dwelling, or was on the last lap up the path to the ruin.

The stranger was still screaming, but he was no longer just screaming screams. Evidently he had heard McKell coming for him. He was now howling, "Helps!" and, "Hurries!"

"Who's doing the yelling?" Monk demanded.

"You stay here," Doc said, "and I'll find out."

"Stay here, hell!" Monk said. "I want to know what's going on?"

Doc reconsidered. "Come on, then. But when I say run, don't stop to ask questions. Run!"

Monk remarked that wouldn't be hard to do. The way the man was screaming was unusual, because it was not often that a man screamed so terribly and so continuously.

They covered about fifty yards, and a change in the nature of the sounds ahead brought them to a stop.

McKell was coming back. Coming fast. Coming as fast as he possibly could.

McKell now did a little screaming himself.

"No, no, please!" he shrieked. "Oh, don't! No, no . . ."

They could tell when he reached the foot of the short path to the cliff-dwelling. He seemed to fall the last dozen feet or so and hit on his feet, running. They could hear the small sounds, half howls and half moans, which terrific effort was mixing in with his breathing.

Doc Savage had a flashlight. He impaled McKell with the beam, illuminating McKell's racing figure clearly and enabling them to witness the weird and inexplicable event that followed.

FIRST, McKell came to a stop. He did not halt when the flashlight beam blazed upon and about him, but took several steps afterward, indicating it was not surprise at the light which brought him up. He also stopped strangely, in a way that indicated violent pain, and for a moment he was quite rigid as if he hurt violently somewhere. He was not erect, but held a distorted posture which was the result of having halted so suddenly while running. He did not move appreciably, except to open his mouth, to give vent to a shriek of exquisite agony.

He gave only the one cry. It came back from the canyon walls, presently, in echoes, like a coyote howling.

McKell now struck madly at his clothing, as if fighting something inside his garments. He centered his attention first on his right leg. Suddenly he grasped the trouser covering that leg and tore the cloth off his leg, an effort requiring considerable hand strength, because the cloth was a tough brown gabardine. . . . Whatever was hurting him began hurting him elsewhere. . . . He tore, successively, a shirt sleeve, the bosom of his shirt. Then he stopped tearing. He lay down, and ceased all movement.

The man in the cliff dwelling ruin was still howling.

Monk started forward.

“No!” Doc said. “Don't go near him!”

“What happened to him?” Monk asked hoarsely.

Doc said, “Hold this light.”

Monk held the flashlight. It was a long five-cell affair, quite powerful.

“If I say run—run!” Doc said grimly. “And keep that light on the trail so we can all run!”

Doc began picking up rocks and throwing them at various spots near the body of McKell. McKell was now a body. Monk had a sickening certainty of that.

The two or three minutes during which Doc continued to throw small rocks seemed like two or three days or weeks. Nothing happened to any of the rocks. Nothing, at least, that should not happen to a thrown rock.

From the direction of the camp, people were coming. Presently some of their voices were distinguishable, a deep growl belonging to Sam Gill, a musical voice owned by Pietro Jonas, the feminine one of Miss Casey. All of the voices seemed to be asking each other what had happened, or describing what they thought had awakened them.

Doc Savage stopped tossing rocks. He looked toward the body with a suspicious, displeased air.

He said, “Monk?”

“What?”

“You dived in the river this afternoon, didn't you? I was watching from down the canyon a ways, but couldn't get too close lest they see me. I thought it was you who went down.”

“It was me,” Monk admitted.

“What did you find?”

Monk told him about the piece of steel that he could crush with his fingers. “And I hope that makes more sense to you than it does to me,” Monk added.

Doc didn't say anything. But he threw more rocks at spots near McKell's body.

DUSTY WEINBERG, leading the party from camp, stumbled over the Indian, remarked, “Here's a customer,” and stood pointing his flashlight at the unconscious Indian.

“Grunts!” Sam Gill exclaimed. He sank beside the Indian. “He's unconscious.”

Doc Savage called loudly, “The excitement was up this way. The Indian was a sideshow.”

The Sheriff jumped visibly, and approached. He had tucked his light under his arm, was holding it pressed between forearm and body, was using both hands to hold and aim a pair of pearl-handled automatic pistols that did not look at all wild west. He reached Doc Savage and looked at Doc with intent, intense interest. When he recognized Doc, the only sign he gave was a fractional arching of one eyebrow.

“You're Doc Savage,” Sheriff Weinberg said. “You don't look very dead.”

Doc said he hoped not, and added, “But there is one lying up yonder on the trail who should fill the bill.”

“Dead?”

“From what I saw, I would say so.”

“Who?”

“McKell.”

The Sheriff listened to the wailing from the ruin. “Then McKell isn't doing the squalling. Who is? Do you know?”

Doc said, “I don't know.”

Weinberg turned to Sam Gill with, “Have you got a gun, Sam?”

“Sure.”

The Sheriff indicated Monk, Ham and Doc Savage impartially with a shoulder movement, said, “These fellows are probably friends of mankind, but it won't hurt to be careful.”

Having shown by this statement that he suspected Doc, Monk and Ham of something reprehensible, the Sheriff advanced cautiously on the body of McKell. He reached the body, looked down at it, moving his flashlight beam back and forth slowly. He said, “For Heaven's sake!” He sounded awed. He continued to move the flashlight beam inquisitively, moved it for fully a minute back and forth, which under the circumstances was a long time. Then the Sheriff sank to a knee and inspected the body as closely, as thoroughly, as he could without touching it or getting his eyes nearer than ten inches of the body. He said something more. It was not understandable.

Sam Gill and Pietro Jonas went over to look at the body. Gill didn't say what he thought. But Pietro wheeled dramatically, grasped Miss Casey and stood between her and the body, saying anxiously, “Darling, you don't want to see it! He's like poor Carl Peterson! Just exactly like poor Peterson. You mustn't look!”

He said this in a way that made it sound worse than looking at the body probably would have been, but the girl stood up under it all right.

They listened to the wailing of the man in the cliff dwelling.

“We better see what his troubles are,” the Sheriff said.

THE cliff dwelling was at its most impressive when seen by night. In the daytime it was a spectacular thing, but in the darkness it took an air of antiquity, of unfathomable mystery. The reason for this was probably the fact that by day one could not help noticing that the ruin was really not so much compared to modern structures. Alongside the Empire State building, for example, it would have been unimpressive. But at night, under the lights, they could see only a part of it, and when seen by parts, it was a stirring thing.

The trail climbed steeply. This was not the trail used by the vanished race who had done their loving, fighting, birthing, starving, gluttoning in the place however many hundreds or thousands of years ago they had lived there. The explorers, Wanderers, Inc., had made the trail. But it was still scary. It admitted into the ruin through a narrow slit, and the man's whimpering was louder.

Sheriff Weinberg said, “Lights. Where's the lights?”

“Just a minute.” Pietro moved a few yards away, clicked a switch, and instantly there was so much light nobody could see anything.

The Sheriff, blinded, moved hurriedly to block the exit so that no one could leave without permission. He shaded his eyes, cursed, until he could see.

The wailing man heard them.

He proceeded to make words.

“Help!” he bellowed. “For God's sake, help me! This thing is tryin' to drag me into the bowels of the earth!”

Distance, intervening walls of stone, made the words garbled, although they were understandable. The Sheriff walked toward the sounds warily, his city slicker guns shoved out, his jaw following them. He looked as if he would have preferred to be somewhere else. Doc followed the Sheriff, and Monk, Ham, Sam Gill, Miss Casey, Pietro, trailed along in that order, Pietro walking sidewise trying to watch the rear. Pietro also looked as if he wished he were somewhere else.

They passed through two rooms, one large one, one small one, into another large room which had a hole in the east section of the floor, and a man who protruded from the hole from the shoulder up.

“Help!” the man screamed at them.

The man was above average height, angular, with a thatch of iron gray hair, small terrified piggish black eyes, a wide thin-lipped mouth which was in continuous motion from fright; a man who wore a powder blue tropical worsted suit which looked as if it might have been new twelve hours or so ago, and had received plenty of abuse since. The knot of his necktie was still neat, but reposed under one ear, and the sky-blue flash handkerchief was still fluffed correctly in his breast pocket, but the pocket was also full of dirt.

Miss Casey stared at the man.

“Charles Webster Bounds!” she said in amazement.

“Get me loose from this thing!” Charles Webster Bounds screamed at them.

He used both hands to point at something in the hole under him.

“Shoot it, whatever it is!” he urged.

They lost no time in pulling him out of the hole.

When they looked in the hole, there was nothing in it.

SHERIFF DUSTY WEINBERG came forth with the most rational remark that anyone could have made under the circumstances. He said, “Take it easy, Mr. Bounds. We'll get a doctor for you.” He obviously meant a doctor for Mr. Bounds' head.

Bounds, showing astonishment and puzzlement, pointed at the hole out of which they had dragged him and asked, “Don't you see anything down there?”

Doc Savage was now looking in the hole.

“What are we supposed to see?” Doc asked.

“Be careful, or it'll grab you!” Bounds gasped.

Doc Savage aimed his flashlight carefully into the hole, moving the light so that the beam slanted down at various angles, illuminating all parts of a hole perhaps a foot and a fraction across at the top, approximately round, about nine feet deep, widening out to a width of some two feet about halfway down, then tapering to a point at the bottom. The sides of the hole were smooth, without scratches, marks or cracks of any noticeable sort.

“Shoot it before it gets out!” Bounds urged wildly.

Sheriff Weinberg, standing close at Doc's elbow, said softly under his breath that he would be damned for a blind billygoat. Then he turned to Bounds and inquired, “What are we expected to see in there?”

“Why,” Bounds said, shocked, “the thing that was trying to drag me in there.”

“Something had hold of you?”

“Of course, you fool!”

“When did it get you?”

Bounds seemed confused. “I don't know. Maybe it got me in Winslow. Something did, right in Winslow. Maybe it was that damned thing.”

Sheriff Weinberg swung back to Doc Savage, and addressed Doc under his breath, whispering, “Crazy as a locoed steer!”

The sheriff then fired one of his guns into the hole. The report, ear-splittingly loud in the confines of the cliff dwelling ruin, frightened them all.

“Did you get it?” yelled Charles Webster Bounds excitedly.

“Sure,” the sheriff said soothingly. “Sure, I got it. Right between the eyes. You can take it easy now, Mr. Bounds. Nothing to worry about.”

Charles Webster Bounds became angry.

“Damn you, you think I'm crazy!” he bellowed. “I'm not! I tell you, something was trying to pull me into that hole!”

Chapter VII

TWO drinks of whiskey and the quieting influence of the main dining hall in the camp soothed Charles Webster Bounds somewhat, but did not change his story in the least. He still stuck to his insisting that something or other had overcome him in Winslow., Arizona, and had brought him to the cliff dwelling and tried to drag him into the hole. He seemed to think they were all fools for not believing him.

Sheriff Weinberg eyed the whiskey longingly himself. “Just where at in Winslow were you grabbed, and how, Mr. Bounds?” he asked.

“Listen, don't think I can't tell you!” Bounds said. He proceeded to tell them how he had come west on a plane—he gave the flight and seat number, said they could check that if they wanted to—and, arriving in Winslow, had at once inquired for a cab. The cab had been driven by a tall, dark-skinned man with aquiline features, a man who looked like a Mexican but who wasn't because he'd had light blue eyes. Bounds had ridden in the rear seat for about half a mile, and had realized he was feeling faint, and had started to roll down one of the windows. That was the last thing he remembered about the taxi ride, or any other intervening riding, for that matter. He had come out of it, come out of the gassing, trance, coma, spell—whatever had happened to him in the Winslow taxi—to find himself in the cliff dwelling ruin, with something trying to pull him down the hole.

He had not seen the thing pulling at him. But he had felt it, and he didn't like it one bit. So he had started yelling for help.

“You took your time getting there, too,” he said.

“How do you know when we heard you?” Sheriff Weinberg asked.

“I don't, but I've got a damned good idea. I could hear you people hollering around outside and moving on the trail. I say you took your time, and you did.”

The Sheriff gave his pants a hitch. He was getting irritated.

“You don't remember a thing between Winslow and Tica City? That your story?” he asked.

Bounds said that was his story and he was sticking to it, and he didn't give a damn how crazy they thought he was, because the story was the truth.

“What else did you see?”

“Nothing else.”

“I mean in the cliff dwelling, when the thing was, you say, pulling at you.”

“That's what I mean. I saw nothing. It was dark in there. And I mean dark!”

“How did you regain consciousness?”

“How does anybody regain consciousness! I merely got my senses back.”

“Kind of suddenly?”

“Sure.”

“Didn't feel groggy, or anything?”

Bounds sneered at the Sheriff. “Sure, I felt groggy. I felt groggy as hell, but it was scared out of me by that thing pulling at me. Brother, you wake up in a place as dark as dark can be, with something trying to drag you in a hole, and see if grogginess don't get scared out of you, too.”

The Sheriff sighed. “How did you happen to come to Arizona?”

“I got a telegram from McKell asking me to.”

“When?”

“What day is this? I got the telegram Thursday morning. What day is it now?”

The Sheriff didn't tell him what day it was. The Sheriff seemed to have run out of questions.

Doc Savage cleared his throat. “Does anyone mind if I ask a question?” he inquired. No one seemed to mind, so Doc asked Bounds, “This thing pulling at you—what did it feel like?”

Bounds said, “It felt like something pulling at me.”

“Did it feel hard? Like it had hands, or claws, or paws, or what?”

“It felt soft, but hard, too,” Bounds said. He pondered for a moment. “Soft, with a hardness inside the softness, if you get what I mean.”

The Sheriff got out a handkerchief and wiped his forehead and the back of his neck and said, “This is the doggonedest thing I ever ran into. I'm not fooling you.” He tried to poke the handkerchief back in his hip pocket, missed the pocket and the handkerchief fell to the floor without his noticing. “Has anybody got any ideas?” he asked plaintively.

Pietro Jonas looked quite immaculate and neat in contrast to the disheveled state of everyone else. He said, “Could I make a suggestion?”

“Shoot,” Weinberg told him.

“I suggest,” said Pietro precisely, “that we consider the archaeological significance of the hole.”

“What hole?”

“The one Mr. Bounds was being dragged into.”

“The one he says he was being dragged into,” Sheriff Weinberg corrected bitterly. “All right, what about the hole? It was a hole, wasn't it? What was it doing there?”

Pietro's expression became superior. “Sheriff, I'm afraid you don't realize the hole was a Se-pah-poo.”

“A what?”

“Se-pah-poo. At least, that is our pronunciation of it in a rough way.”

“This hole was a Se-pah-poo?”

“Exactly.”

“I'll be damned if that makes any sense to me,” Weinberg complained.

“For a resident of the cliff dwelling country,” Pietro said coldly, “you seem to have shown very little interest in your native archaeology.”

The Sheriff snorted violently. His humor was becoming very bad.

Sam Gill spoke up. “What Pietro means,” he told the Sheriff apologetically, “is that the room where we found Mr. Bounds in the cliff dwelling is the *kiva,* or ceremonial temple of the ruin, and that the hole is the ceremonial aperture always found in cliff dwelling temples. The presence of the Se-pah-poo in a cliff dwelling temple is as necessary, as essential, as thoroughly based on antiquity, as the presence of the cross in our own churches. This hole in the temple floor, and you always find them in the temple floors of cliff dwellings, represents the birthing aperture of the predominant deity, the Sun God, or the Great Spirit, or whatever.” Gill paused, groped for more words, finished, “The cliff-dwellers thought God came out of such a hole in the earth, and in their temples they always provided such a hole for his free coming and going.”

Sheriff Weinberg looked at Charles Webster Bounds and said bitterly, “So you claim God was trying to drag you into the bowels of the earth through that hole.”

Bounds' neck arched, his head shot up, and his ears seemed to lie back, with rage, flat against his skull. “No!” he said violently. “No, you stupid oaf of a sheriff, I claim nothing of the kind!”

The Sheriff said, “Stupid oaf, eh?” He did not say it pleasantly. One of his eyes, the right one, was narrowed almost shut with rage.

Doc Savage, feeling that a fight at this point probably wouldn't get anyone anything but skinned noses, said, “It seems quite possible to me that Mr. Bounds, regaining consciousness under such circumstances as he did, might readily have been deceived as to the effect of something attempting to haul him into the depths of the earth. Such a feeling could have come, for example, from muscular cramping.”

The Sheriff was evidently convinced that Bounds was crazy, and did not want to hit an insane man. Needing somewhere to dump his rage, the Sheriff wheeled on Doc Savage and said, nearly shouting, “Why have you been making people think you were dead for two days?”

“Because I wanted to,” Doc said.

“Okay, give me a sassy answer,” the Sheriff said bitterly.

“You might,” Doc suggested, “try using a civil manner.”

Weinberg's right eye stayed narrow with rage, but civility was in his manner, tone, words, as he said, “You doubtless had a good reason for keeping out of sight. I would like to know it.”

“Someone tried to kill me by sending the station wagon over the cliff.” Equal civility was in Doc Savage's manner, tone and words. “The attempt on my life worried me. I do not like such things. Since the first attempt failed, it was logical to believe others would be made, and the best way of avoiding them was to say nothing and keep out of sight. Also, I wished to investigate, to try to find who attempted to kill me.”

“Did you find out?”

“Not yet.”

“Did you find out why?”

“No.”

Weinberg rubbed his jaw thoughtfully. “Let's talk to that Indian,” he said.

THE Indian was unhappy. He had come to the point, in being mentally upset, where his native stoicism had failed him—he could no longer look like the Indians in the picture-books and pass off anything and everything with grunts. In fact, the Sheriff discouraged the grunt routine with a little speech in which he assured the Indian that, for every grunt, he would get a rib kicked in. The result was, no grunts.

“My head hurts,” the Indian said.

“You kidnapped these two”—the Sheriff indicated Monk and Ham—“out of their beds tonight, and were taking them toward the ruin when you got bopped over the head. That right?”

“Okay,” the Indian admitted.

“Why?”

“Huh?”

“Why? And don't grunt at me, either.”

“My head hurts,” the Indian said.

Sheriff Weinberg gave his britches a hitch, flexed his kicking leg purposefully and said, “Listen, you are an educated Indian even if you don't act like one, but I'm going to give you the same treatment I'd give a common ignorant horse thief variety of Indian, or white man either, for that matter. I'm going to kick the stuffing out of you unless you talk and talk straight.”

“My head hurts,” the Indian said again. Then, deciding hurriedly that wouldn't be enough of an answer, he grumbled, “I wanted to show Monk and Ham something.”

“Why didn't you just ask them to come take a look, then?”

“I did,” said the Indian in an injured tone. “That's exactly what I did.”

“They thought they saw a gun in your hand,” the Sheriff reminded.

“I guess they did,” the Indian confessed reluctantly. “Maybe I wasn't very tactful. You see, my story was sort of silly, and I didn't want to tell it to them right away and have them laughing at me.”

“It was a funny story, then?” the Sheriff said sourly.

“Not very.”

“What was it?”

The Indian squirmed for a few moments, said that his head hurt, and tried to look piteous, which was a mistake because it was difficult for a redskin of his construction to look like an object for pity.

“I went up to cliff dwelling ruin right after sundown,” the Indian said at last. “I went to see whether any lights were on, and to shut them off if they were.”

“Why?” Monk Mayfair demanded.

“To save electric light bulbs. Them floodlight bulbs cost three dollars seventy-five apiece.”

“Oh.”

“You had better let me think of the questions,” the Sheriff told Monk.

The Indian continued, “I was looking in the ruin, and I saw something. It scared the devil out of me. It wasn't shaped like anything should be in the first place, and it didn't act like anything should act. As nearly as I could tell, it was made of something solid, solid matter that changed shape the way liquid changes shape. I mean, if you would pour a bottle of ink in a jug of clear water, the ink would spread and change shape the way this thing did. It could make itself larger or smaller, as it wanted. It wasn't the color of ink. It was more the color of a sorrel horse, that kind of color, I mean. When I first saw it, it was just moving around aimless like. I yelled at it, or tried to yell, but I was scared and it wasn't a very loud yell. The thing came toward me. I ran. I got Mr. Mayfair and Mr. Brooks and was coming back when McKell hit me over the head. I don't know why McKell hit me.”

The Sheriff thought this over with much dissatisfaction.

He said, “It seems to me you could have told me more about the thing, seeing it in the light from these three dollar seventy-five cent light bulbs.”

“The lights weren't on.”

“Eh?”

“It was in the dark. I mean, it was kind of luminous, like the hands of these radium watches. Anyway, you could see it in the dark.”

“I'll be damned!” the Sheriff said in a surprised voice. “Have you any more interesting facts to tell us?”

“That's all.”

“Well, well,” the Sheriff said.

The Indian muttered, “You don't believe me, do you?”

“Not a damned word!” said Sheriff Weinberg.

Chapter VIII

DOC SAVAGE accompanied the Sheriff to the camp storeroom. The Sheriff thought this would make a good jail, and he locked the Indian inside.

“You haven't got any evidence against me!” the Indian objected. “It's hot in here. I'll suffocate. I don't want to be left alone.”

“Maybe your spook will show up and keep you company,” the Sheriff told him.

The Indian became angry, yelled, “You know everything, goddamit! If you'd seen that thing, like I did, you'd sing a different tune.”

“If I was telling a story like that, I'd have a logical explanation to go with it,” Weinberg said. He locked the door and shook the lock vigorously to make certain it was secure.

“I've got an explanation,” the Indian said through the door.

“Yeah?”

“Yeah, stupid, I have!” The Indian was so angry he was almost hysterical. “Tica City is no ordinary cliff dwelling. We've found that out, examining and excavating in the place no more than we have. Tica isn't like those ruins in Mesa Verde or scattered around over this desert. Tica is, or was, to the Cliff Dwellers what Jerusalem is to Christendom. It was the fountainhead of their religious beliefs, the source of all things.”

The Indian's voice, becoming louder, suddenly lost its rage and acquired an emotional feeling that made it impressive, and he shouted, “If you think the Cliff Dwellers didn't have a god, and he didn't come out of the earth, you're crazy! And gods don't die. Gods don't die, you understand!”

The Sheriff said, “Whoee-e-!” and put the key to the storeroom in his pocket. He walked away as if anxious to get out of the vicinity. Doc Savage, Monk and Ham went with him. They discovered the Sheriff wanted a drink. “This thing's getting me,” he explained.

Doc said, “We should move McKell's body, shouldn't we? Or does the coroner have to examine him?”

“We better get the coroner out,” Weinberg decided. “I'll use that radio gadget to get in touch with him. But Lord knows how he'll find the place after he starts out.”

The Sheriff went away to do his calling by radio, taking Sam Gill with him to show him how to work the apparatus.

“Nobody seems to be in a frame of mind for sleep,” said Miss Casey. “Suppose I make some coffee and sandwiches? How would everyone like that?”

Apparently everyone would like it fine.

DOC SAVAGE said he thought they should make another search of the cliff dwelling and vicinity. Pietro Jonas agreed it would be fine, but he thought that everyone should stick together, at least until daylight. There was a faint hint that Pietro thought Doc Savage would bear watching.

Miss Casey busied herself getting together coffee and a snack to eat. She looked very housewifely, although still quite alarmed, and Monk and Ham watched her in admiration. They would have liked to say something flattering, but they didn't think it would be appropriate so soon after McKell's death.

“Where is this radio transmitter the Sheriff is using?” Doc asked.

“In the office.” Pietro seemed divided between a desire not to let Doc Savage out of sight, and a dislike for leaving Monk and Ham alone with Miss Casey. Miss Casey's welfare won out.

Sheriff Weinberg didn't think much of the radio facilities. He was saying, “Why the hell can't you just call who you want to call over this thing? Why do you have to call this amateur, this guy Warner, and have him call who you want called? Why can't you just call somebody who can hook you on to a telephone line?”

Fat Sam Gill launched into a lengthy explanation of the shortcomings of Arizona radio facilities, the contrariness of the Federal Communications Commission about licensing radio transmitters, at the end of which the Sheriff snorted loudly.

“We called somebody who has got to call Injers, the coroner, and then call us back,” the Sheriff told Doc Savage. “Say, I wanted to ask you some questions. I might as well get that out of the way while we're waiting.”

Doc said he would be glad to help, hoped he could, and listened gravely to the Sheriff ask, “You said the first one of these explorers to die, Carl Peterson, got in touch with you and asked you to come out. That right?”

“That is correct.”

“Why'd he want you?”

“I gathered there was some kind of serious trouble he wished me to assist him with.”

“He never said what kind of trouble?”

“No, he didn't.”

“I wonder why?”

“That has puzzled me,” Doc admitted. “There may have been more than one reason for his not being specific, and it is hard to decide which one. For instance, he might have been afraid to tell too much, or he might not have wanted to tell something he couldn't prove.”

“Which do you think it was?”

“The first one—fear. Peterson was frightened when he contacted me, I'm quite sure. One indication of fear was the manner in which he wished me to arrive, by getting off a passenger train in the desert, where the Indian, Grunts, would meet me.”

“But you don't know why Peterson sent for you?”

“No. Except that it is now obvious why. He was in danger of being killed, as were other members of the

Wanderers, and he wished an investigation."

"You think this killing business is aimed just at Wanderers?"

"I don't know. But no one else has been killed so far."

"The Indian met you after you got off the train in the desert?"

"Yes."

"Then the Indian knew something."

"He said he didn't." Sam Gill was fiddling with the radio and getting a considerable outburst of static. Doc added, "Carl Peterson apparently trusted the Indian, or he wouldn't have sent him for me." Doc recalled the numerous guns the Indian had been wearing when he had driven into the desert. "I think the Indian was scared himself, but that might have been merely because Carl Peterson was frightened."

Sheriff Weinberg had been wearing an expression of inward thought, and now suddenly he doubled his fist and brought it down on his knee. "By Gosh, I thought of something queer!" he exploded.

Doc looked interested.

"That Indian, Grunts," the Sheriff added. "I just happened to remember his Indian name. It's Kul-ne-se-pah-poo. The first part, *kul-ne,* means in one of these Indian dialects the guardian of, or defender, or fighting son of. That leaves *se-pah-poo.* What'd they say that hole in that temple room was called? Se-pah-poo, didn't they say?"

"That's right," Doc agreed, making his voice hearty although he showed no other signs of thinking the Sheriff's discovery was important.

"That's a damned funny coincidence, that *se-pah-poo* in the Indian's name," Weinberg said excitedly. "You know, I'm going to keep that Indian locked up and work him over good for information when I get around to it."

Sam Gill became interested in the radio. "Here's our man," he reported, then said into the set, "Go ahead, Warner."

Warner, the radio amateur in Flagstaff they were using for a go-between, had a shrill thin sour voice and used it to tell them he had contacted Coroner Injers, who would come to the cliff dwelling if he could find it, and the telephone calls had cost two dollars and eleven cents. Warner sounded as if he was wondering whether he would get his money.

WALKING back to the building where Miss Casey was making sandwiches and coffee, Sheriff Weinberg summed it all up by saying, "Carl Peterson found out what was going on and sent for you and was killed for it, and an attempt was made to kill you. You escaped, and stayed around watching for anything queer, but didn't see anything. Meantime, McKell had gotten hold of the truth, so he was killed too, tonight. Our job is to find out how they were killed and who did it."

Having put it in a nutshell, he straightened his coat and went in to tell Miss Casey how good her sandwiches were and how much her coffee was like nectar of the gods. For this, he was scowled at by

Monk, Ham and Pietro.

Charles Webster Bounds was lying down. He said he had a headache, and looked as if he did.

When Miss Casey's snack had been consumed, everyone hunted up the strongest searchlights they could find, and Sheriff Weinberg led a closer search of the vicinity of the cliff dwelling.

Sam Gill turned on the floodlights. These were scattered about in surprising numbers, Gill explaining that, due to the terrific daytime heat, it had been planned to carry on the majority of the work on the cliff dwelling, at least during the summer time, at night. Hence the floodlights.

“You must have a lot of electricity available,” the Sheriff remarked.

Sam Gill told him how many kilowatts the power plant down in the river generated, and it was a lot. He pointed his flashlight beam at the power transmission lines. “Later, when the cliff dwelling is opened to the public, they'll be put underground so it will be more sightly,” he explained.

They found nothing outside the ruin.

“Let's see if we find anything inside,” the Sheriff said.

In climbing the path, Monk and Ham discovered a stout gate of heavy steel wire mesh which they hadn't noticed before. The hinges of this were embedded in the cliff side, and when swung shut, it would close off the entrance to the cliff dwelling completely.

Weinberg was interested in the gate. “This block the only way in or out?”

Sam Gill assured him it did.

“Why'd you put the gate in?” Weinberg wished to know.

“It was installed as soon as we found what an archaeological treasure we had found,” Gill explained. “It was impossible, at first, for anyone to be here. We were busy at the time in South America on an Aztec discovery, and had to leave this one stand. We put in the gate to keep prowlers out.”

The lights inside the cliff dwelling had a scalding brightness that made their eyes ache. Sheriff Weinberg spent several minutes looking in the obvious places, then declared, “Hell, this is a big place, ain't it! To look in all these rooms would take half a day.”

Pietro sniffed and said, “We plan to take about two years to look in the rooms, as you call it.”

“Yeah?”

“A thorough archaeological survey will take that long.”

“The survey I give the place won't be archaeological,” the sheriff said. “But I'm gonna let it wait until morning. I can't go forever without sleep.”

Sam Gill, Bounds and Pietro all seemed bothered by the thought that the sheriff was going to ransack the cliff dwelling. They seemed to be afraid he might damage some archaeological tidbit. Even they, they explained, hadn't been in all the rooms, and any entering that was done, they said, should be done most carefully in order not to damage anything.

The Sheriff was not impressed.

“We'll lock that gate for tonight,” he said. “And I'll go through the place tomorrow.”

DOC SAVAGE was assigned the same quarters as Monk and Ham, an arrangement they welcomed, because it gave them a chance for some private talk. Doc did the same thing Monk and Ham had done, went over the room for possible concealed microphones. Finding none, he said, “All right, what do you fellows know that you haven't told?”

They began at the beginning, with the coincidence of Miss Casey being on the same plane with them. Ham told this, and made it sound as if he, personally, was convinced that it was a coincidence and nothing else, and that Miss Casey was probably above suspicion. Monk was irritated by Hams interest in Miss Casey's welfare, and he demanded, “Yeah? What about the piece of the station wagon steering gear she pretended to find?”

“I don't think she pretended,” Ham snapped.

“The hell she didn't! Listen, you've fallen for her and you're making a black-faced liar out of yourself. I know what happened. I looked at the place she said she found the steering knuckle a minute before she found it and it wasn't there.”

Doc Savage asked some questions about the incident. His last query was, “if the piece was planted, who besides the girl could have planted it?”

“Almost anyone,” Ham said, sounding triumphant, as if he had already proved Miss Casey innocent.

Monk snorted unpleasantly. “Anyway, I'm keeping her on my horns-and-tail list.”

Doc remarked that he would like to know more about Monk's dive for the station wagon and what had been found. Monk then reviewed the matter of the metal which had become powder when he squeezed it, then got down on all fours with a sheet of paper and gathered some of the metallic dust.

“It doesn't look much like a piece of steel now,” he said, “but that's what it was.”

Doc Savage examined the steel dust, rubbed his finger in it, noted that this seemed to make it even finer powder, looked at it as closely as he could with a naked eye, then unscrewed the lens from a flashlight and used that as a magnifier. He did not say whether he had or had not decided what was making the steel act that way.

He did ask Monk, “You're a chemist . . . what do you think?”

Monk scratched the top of his nubbin of a head, using thumb and all four fingers to do the scratching, like Stan Laurel, the movie actor. His face was not very comic, however.

“Obviously the atomic structure of the metal has been changed, somehow,” Monk said finally. “That has been done on a laboratory scale; I've done it myself. But I don't understand how in hell it could happen to the whole front end of a station wagon. It wasn't a crystallization process, such as happens to metal subjected to continual vibration for a long period, although it might have been an intensified manifestation of such a thing.” He pulled at his jaw thoughtfully. “On the other hand, the whole thing might have been a phony rigging of time and circumstance for some definite purpose.”

“What do you mean by the last?” Doc asked.

“Well, I didn't find the station wagon myself, and I have only their word that it was the one you were

riding in, Doc. It wasn't in the river directly below the spot where it went over the cliff, either. The explanation of that was that the current had rolled it down the river bed like a rock, which was quite possible, as strong as the current was. . . . As a matter of fact, I don't see how they ever found it in the river bed, as hellishly powerful as that current is. . . . What I'm trying to say is: Maybe I was led to that station wagon in the river, which may not have been the real one . . .”

He stopped speaking, held his mouth roundly open, like a hole, listening to the rumbling and banging that had come through the night. “Thunder?” he said. “No. . . . Hell, what is that noise?”

They got in each other's way going through the door.

Chapter IX

NOT thunder. Not any other natural noise, either, but part of its banging, galloping unreality—the loud husking part of the sound, like a great animal clearing its throat of rage, that seemed to repeat itself—that part might have been the result of echoes bouncing off the canyon walls.

Everyone in camp piled outdoors, excepting the Indian, who was still locked in the storeroom. Sheriff Weinberg ran to see if the Indian was still there, and he was.

Miss Casey cried, “It came from the ruin, didn't it?” Everyone agreed it probably did. At least the cliff dwelling was where everyone was hoping nothing would happen, so if anything had, it was probably there.

The Sheriff was flourishing his six-shooters, so Doc let him take the lead. “I shoulda posted a guard,” the sheriff kept saying. “I shoulda had the sense to do that.”

Doc thought of something. “Sheriff, I think we'd better leave a guard over the Indian. How about putting one of my men, Monk or Ham, on that job?”

Weinberg didn't receive the idea well. “You guys stay with me where I can watch you. That Indian's all right where he is.”

Doc said, “I take it we're under suspicion?”

“Take it anyway you want to,” the sheriff said. But by the time they had covered most of the distance to the cliff dwelling, Weinberg decided to be more congenial. He explained, “I'm not trying to be a tough guy. If you want to know the damned truth, I don't have anybody to suspect except the Indian and I'm not betting on him.”

Doc said it was pretty baffling, all right, and they came in sight of, and their flashlight beams in range of, the cliff dwelling. “I don't see or hear anything,” the Sheriff said.

Then he said, “Well!”

That remark took care of everything anyone had to say for the next few minutes. They climbed nearer Tica City, and Sam Gill turned on the intensely bright floodlights, all of which worked except four.

The four lights that didn't work had been at path, gate, trail, and they didn't light up because they were no longer there. They were gone. So was most of the steel gate, a part of the path, and a part of the road below the path. All or parts of these had gone off into the canyon and, they learned later, into the boiling river far below.

“A landslide!” exclaimed Charles Webster Bounds.

It wasn't.

Or rather it was, and it wasn't. It was a landslide, or rock slide, where there had been no reason for one, and neither landslide or rock slide were words that would explain what had happened to the steel gate.

The sheriff examined the gate and was astonished. He used what cuss-words he knew, speaking them softly, and ran out before he expressed himself fully.

Doc Savage made no comment, except to pretend—it wasn't wholly pretense—that he was also surprised, and Monk and Ham followed his example.

They could see that the same thing had happened to the gate that had happened to the front of the station wagon.

“By damn!” said the sheriff. “We're going to keep a guard here the rest of the night.” He did some considering, added, “Savage, you think we should watch that Indian?”

“He should have some protection, at least,” Doc agreed.

“Protection?” The sheriff was startled. “You think he's in danger?”

“I think so.”

The sheriff tried to learn something from Doc's face, apparently did not learn anything, and pushed out his lips in surprise. “You sound like you know more than I thought you did. I want to talk to you about that.” He did some frowning. “I tell you what—send one of your friends along, and I'll put them to watching the Indian. Send that one.” He indicated Ham Brooks. “And I think one of the others should be with him.”

Miss Casey was looking frightened. Evidently she didn't like being around the cliff dwelling.

“Couldn't I go?” she asked. “Wouldn't I do?”

Ham was delighted. “Wonderful!”

The sheriff wasn't too pleased, but he said, “I guess you would, at that.” Monk looked enraged enough to eat his own hat.

The sheriff, Ham and Miss Casey departed for camp.

Doc Savage had been looking around. He said, “Monk!” softly.

Monk came over grumbling about Ham's luck in getting to stand guard with Miss Casey. “That guy would fall in a sewer and come out smelling like a rose,” he complained. “Here I have been finagling ever since we got here to get some time alone with that babe. And look what it got me!”

“How's you nose, your smeller?” Doc asked.

“Do you mean do I smell a rat? I sure do!” Monk scowled in the direction Ham had gone.

“Come down to earth,” Doc said. “Do you smell anything in the air? You should be chemist enough to identify it.”

Monk did some sniffing, angrily at first, then with more interest. “Gasoline!”

“I thought so, too,” Doc agreed. “Let's ask Sam Gill about it.”

Sam Gill, made fatter looking by the fact that he wore only shorts and cowboy boots, said there was a supply of gasoline in a tank at camp, but none around the cliff dwelling, as far as he knew.

“What about dynamite?”

“There's some of that in the ruin.”

“Let's look and see if there is,” Doc said.

Gill eyed the path to the cliff dwelling, what there was left of it, with no pleasure, raking it repeatedly with his light. Finally he said, “I guess a fat man can make it,” and began climbing.

Actually, they discovered, the path looked more damaged than it was because of the débris piled on it by the explosion, if there had been an explosion. And, judging from the condition of the steel-mesh gate, there had been an explosion. Also, the odor of gasoline became stronger.

Climbing beyond, into the gray stone walled interior of the cliff dwelling, Sam Gill turned left to a wooden box of an affair containing several compartments for tools and stores. The fat man stared into one of the cells.

Monk said, “Well?”

The fat man shook his head. “I thought you had something. I thought the dynamite had been used by somebody to blow the gate open, somebody who was trapped in here when we locked the gate, and the blast not only blew open the gate but loosened part of the path which slid into the canyon.”

“That was my idea,” Monk said. “Whoever used the dynamite spilled some gasoline around so the odor would cover up the smell of burned powder. I guess the idea was to mystify us.”

The fat man shook his head. “There's just one thing wrong with our reasoning.”

“Eh?”

He showed them cases labeled as containing eighty per cent dynamite with the lids all nailed shut. “Maybe we'd better figure out another idea. Nobody has taken any of this dynamite.”

CHARLES WEBSTER BOUNDS had followed them up the path. Except for the coat of his powder blue tropical worsted suit, he was dressed as they had found him sticking in the *se-pah-poo* hole. Both his shoes were untied, however.

He said, “I want to be sure about this dynamite business. Where's a hammer?” He found a hammer and fell upon the dynamite cases with a violence which brought a yelp of warning from Sam Gill, and caused Doc and Monk to retreat.

“That guy's upset,” Monk said. “But I guess if something had cast a spell over me, whisked me out here in the desert, and tried to drag me down a hole that leads no telling where, to hell maybe, I'd be upset too.”

“You believe that yarn?” Doc asked dryly.

Monk's grin had no humor in it. “I believe he was in the hole, because I saw him there. But I would

change the rest of it before I believed it."

"Change it how?" Doc asked curiously.

"I would rather think somebody gave him a shot of gas or something to knock him out, then brought him here, keeping him unconscious with the gas—that would account for the hell of a headache he says he got—and stuck him in the hole."

"How about something pulling at him?"

"His imagination, probably. Or a cramp in his legs."

With the air of a man who needed badly to prove his own sanity, Charles Webster Bounds was assailing the dynamite cases, but with a little more respect, prying up the lids, shoving his hands deep among the paper-wrapped sticks it contained, sifting the sawdust in which they were packed. He finished the last case.

Sounding very horrified, he said, "It's all here. Nobody took any . . . Unless there were more than three cases!"

Sam Gill declared, "There were only three. I'm positive."

"Any more at camp?" Doc inquired.

"No. Not a bit."

Bounds ran both hands through his hair. He looked wild. "God, I was hoping dynamite was used!" he said hoarsely. "I hoped I'd find that bit of reality. I tell you, this thing is beginning to run me crazy. I'm doubting my own sanity!"

A voice called, "Ahoy! What's going on in there?" It was Pietro Jonas.

"Come on in," Sam Gill called. "We're looking around."

Pietro was dubious about the path. "It's so damned dirty, so much dust," he complained.

Monk was of the opinion the handsome Pietro was scared, afraid to traverse the path. Recalling he had been frightened himself, Monk was positive of this.

"I smell gasoline," Pietro explained.

"So do the rest of us," Gill admitted.

"I'll stay out here," Pietro said.

"Afraid?" Monk asked.

Pietro called Monk a name. He crossed the dangerous part of the path as calmly as a tightrope walker would have performed. He called Monk another name and said, "You've been riding me ever since you got here, you blasted ape, and I've had enough of it."

"Get right on any time," Monk invited him.

Doc said, "Cut it out, Monk."

Monk said okay, but he didn't consider himself in any danger, and added that he was sorry to have

spoken, because anyone could see Pietro was scared stiff.

Sam Gill had to grab Pietro and hold him.

Charles Webster Bounds furnished a diversion by finding a shattered gasoline lantern which he pointed out as the source of the gasoline odor. Sam Gill added the information that he had forgotten that a number of gasoline lanterns were kept at various spots in the ruin in case the electric power failed.

"I guess the theory of a dynamite explosion and spilled gasoline to cover the burned dynamite odor has played out," Gill added gloomily.

SHERIFF WEINBERG returned and informed them he had placed Ham Brooks and Miss Casey to guard—or protect, as the case might be—the Indian. The Sheriff had added a lever action 30-30 rifle to his armament. "I'd like to see how this *se-pah-poo* thing likes a rifle bullet," he said sheepishly.

Charles Webster Bounds straightened his neck angrily, thinking he was being ribbed. "I didn't like that story about a *thing* any better than you did!" he snapped. "But it was the truth and I thought you wanted the truth!"

"Take it easy," the sheriff said. "That story of yours is one of the lesser improbable things that have happened around here. Now, what the devil caused that explosion?"

They told him about the intact dynamite, and the gasoline lantern which had been smashed causing the petrol odor. The sheriff examined the mangled vicinity of the gate, the gate itself, finally the partially demolished path outside, and finally concluded it must have been an explosion after all.

"What do you think?" he asked Doc.

Doc said it was obviously an explosion.

"I mean, what caused it?"

Doc's opinion on the point was never delivered, because Monk mixed a howl of astonished fright with a *whoosh!* of a sound. The *whoosh!* was not louder than Monk's bawl, but outlasted and smothered it.

They dashed madly into the cliff dwelling ruin and climbed a ladder, not a pole ladder of the type the original residents of the place had probably used, but a modern ladder painted red and labeled CENTRAL HARDWARE COMPANY, ARIZONA'S BIGGEST LITTLE STORE. At the top of the ladder were the rooms of the second tier of the ruin—Tica City seemed to lie in four levels which pretty well filled the cutback in the face of the cliff, actually the face of the canyon wall, where the ruin was situated—and Monk's howl had seemed to come from the right.

They next encountered a cloud of dust, or rather a roomful of dust, around a pile of dust and loose rock about three feet high occupying a spot where a wall had obviously been. The dust pile squirmed in the middle and presently Monk Mayfair emerged. He was feeling cautiously, blindly, with both hands when they grasped his arms to lay any danger of his falling off that terrace of the cliff dwelling, which would have meant falling off the cliff and, through a series of bounces, probably several hundred feet into the canyon below. He was glad to see them. "Oh, my gosh! I thought the cliff had fallen in on me!" he gasped.

"What happened to you?" Pietro Jonas asked, concealing his pleasure unsuccessfully.

Monk was making noisy and profane work of the job of cleaning dust out of his ears, eyes, nostrils and mouth. “Leaned against wall,” he explained, coughing. “The thing came down on me, *whoosh!”*

Sam Gill was concerned about the damage to the cliff dwelling. “You should be more careful,” he complained. “The archaeological value of this place is considerable, if you can get that through your head.”

Monk ventured an opinion of archaeological values. “What happened to that wall? What made it cave in?” he wanted to know.

Doc Savage was examining the wall.

The section which had caved out of the wall was near enough to a circle to be called circular in shape in spite of not being perfectly defined. This circle, irregular, was about seven feet across.

The rock dust, which did not look like rock dust, but like dirty gray flour, was too finely pulverized, too microscopic of particle, to be at all natural. Doc thought of the steel “dust!”. . . . Keeping a wary eye overhead lest more of the wall, or even the ceiling of the room beyond, should cave in, Doc stepped through the aperture and approached, by cautious stages, the other stone walls of the inner room. With one exception they were solid, the exception being a patch, also circular, but larger in diameter than the collapsed portion, of the wall directly opposite the hole. Here the stone seemed dusty when he rubbed it with his hand. His hand came away covered with dust fine enough to have been bone-gray face powder.

“I just leaned against it,” Monk repeated. “And it came down. . . .” He looked at Doc Savage questioningly.

Doc nodded. “Tell him about the piece off the station wagon.”

Monk told the story about the station wagon front end in such a way that it sounded matter of fact, but the matter of factness didn't made Sheriff Weinberg any less astonished.

“Just when I figure the thing is as goofy as it can get, another striped ape gallops in,” the sheriff complained.

Pietro Jonas listened. “Someone's coming!”

It was Miss Casey.

“The Indian wants to tell you something,” she explained. She looked excited.

Chapter X

A CASE of nerves was making the Indian look as if it were a great deal hotter in the storeroom than it possibly could have been. He grasped the barred door—the place was built like a jail to protect stores against thieving desert prowlers when the camp was deserted—and said that he wanted out of there, that they were doing him a great wrong keeping him there. He was a good Indian, he said.

Also he had an idea.

He began by apologizing for the idea, saying that he wanted them to hear him through patiently, reserving judgment, and wise cracks, until they had given thought to his story, which he would now tell.

He said he understood, from listening to Ham Brooks and Miss Casey discuss recent events, that

something had broken out of the cliff dwelling by violent, as well as mysterious, means. Keep that in mind, he said, while he told them the rest.

He, *Kul-ne-se-pah-poo*, actually was not, as he pretended to be, an Apache Indian. Nor was he a Navajo, which he had also pretended to be at various times. He was—he would explain his reason for pretending to be Apache and Navajo presently—by blooded descent a member of the race which had once inhabited Tica City; furthermore he was of direct descent of the priest clan, which in turn had sprung, at least the ancestors of the priest clan had, from the breast of the Supreme Deity, the Father of the Sun, he who had come from the *se-pah-poo* to create the cliff dwellers. Ordinary cliff dwellers were not of the deity's flesh and blood; he had created them with a hot breath and a gesture; whereas the priest clan's two ancestors had stepped whole-formed, hand in hand, male and female, man and wife, from the deity's breast. Despite being from such purple ancestry, Grunts explained, his tribe these days was held in very low favor by the other Indians, their rating being double-zero, bottom of the stink list. He did not know why; it was simply the foibles of mankind. At any rate, it accounted for Grunts being an Apache or a Navajo or even a Shoshoni, as was convenient.

He looked at them triumphantly.

“You see,” he said, “I know whereof I speak.”

“Of what are you speaking, buddy?” asked Sheriff Weinberg, expressing what everyone else was thinking.

“Why,” said the Indian, “I'm speaking of the holy hand that was taken from the *se-pah-poo* in Tica City.”

“What hand was that?” asked Sheriff Weinberg. “Is this something else I haven't heard of? Is this another zooney?”

Pietro shoved his flamboyant cowboy sombrero, which he was wearing although it was still pitch night, on the back of his head and said, “I believe I can explain what Grunts means. He must mean the mummified hand we found in the *se-pah-poo*. It was a remarkably well-preserved hand and created considerable interest at the time it was found. In fact, it is the most interesting relic we have found to date, and we named the cliff dwelling city after it. Tica City. Tica means, in the language of the cliff dwellers, the word for hand.”

“Wait a minute!” said the exasperated sheriff. “Are you talking about that hole where we found Mr. Bounds sticking?”

“Yes, of course.”

“You mean it wasn't empty when it was found?”

“Not entirely, no.”

“What was in it?”

“A quantity of remarkably preserved pottery, flint weapons, various garments apparently of a high ceremonial sort, and the hand, which was the hand of a cliff dweller, mummified to an almost supernatural state of preservation.”

The Indian spoke hollowly.

“The Hand of God!” he said.

NOBODY said or did anything for a few moments, and nobody thought of any wisecracks because the Indian was so damnably serious. His fervor, his complete belief—at least his tone, voice, face, eyes, manner, all seemed to radiate complete belief—was contagious. They all understood that by the Hand of God, he meant the god of the cliff dwellers. But this didn't make it any less impressive.

The Indian spoke again, deeply, seriously, saying, “It is the legend of my clan, the priest clan, that the prince of evil—the devil, if you wish to call him that—wrought the destruction of all the cliff-dwelling peoples, accomplishing this by stealing the Sun God's heat and using it as a terrible weapon that dried up the clouds, the rivers and the crops, and even dried men's bodies to husks. It is also in the same legend that Tica City, mother city of all the cliff dwelling race, was last to have men perish from it, and that the One of Perpetual Life, the Sun God himself, was last to go, and that he escaped back into the earth through the *se-pah-poo*, but escaped only after a terrific struggle with the prince of evil, a struggle in which he lost and left behind one hand. The Great One could have come back for his hand, but did not, leaving the hand as a symbol of his being, of his greatness, and as a gift in sorrow to the all but vanished cliff dweller race he had founded.”

The Indian let that soak in.

Then he added, “I think the Great One is angered because you have disturbed the tomb of his hand. I think he is manifesting his anger. I think, gentlemen—and I sincerely hope you do not take this lightly—that you are experiencing contact with something greater than any man.”

He became silent. He was done.

One minute of silence.

“Cripes!” exploded Sheriff Weinberg. “Of all the things I ever listened to, that takes the bride's cookies!”

Fat Sam Gill said, “I think we had better get some sleep, or at least some rest.”

“Sleep if you want to,” the sheriff said. “I'm gonna watch our Indian high priest here.” Then he demonstrated that he wasn't floored by any of the supernatural aspects that had been given—or anyone had attempted to give—the situation, by asking Miss Casey, “If you don't feel like sleeping, I'd be delighted to have your company.”

Miss Casey said she would be equally delighted to have the sheriff's company and protection.

Everyone else went to bed, either much disturbed over the influx of death and mystery, or quite unhappy because the handsome sheriff was making a run for Miss Casey.

DOC SAVAGE slept soundly the remaining hours of darkness, three of them. It was, he explained, the first sleep he'd had since stepping off the train in the desert in answer to the mysterious summons from the demised Carl Peterson.

Awakening, he found Monk and Ham had been outdoors spying on Sheriff Weinberg and Miss Casey. They were unhappy. Monk called the sheriff a number of choice words he knew; presently it came out that they had seen the sheriff's arm around Miss Casey, possibly for warmth and protection, but probably not.

The gay morning sunlight belied the grimness and mystification of the night. The river, gamboling through the canyon far below, sent up an effervescent sound that should have been cheering, but wasn't.

Pietro Jonas was turning out bacon, coffee and powdered egg omelets, also flapjacks that looked good enough to put in an advertisement. Pietro was obviously an excellent cook. Monk said he wasn't surprised, but damned if he was going to eat anything Pietro cooked. He said he had formed some suspicions of Pietro during the night. “I bet Pietro can't explain where he was when that explosion occurred last night,” Monk said.

Doc Savage suggested to Weinberg that, as a formality, they learn where everyone had been at the time of the explosion.

“Good idea,” the sheriff said. “I was asleep in my bedroll on the shelf over yonder, by those mesquite bushes. Nobody was with me. You'll have to take my word for it.”

In quick succession, the others explained where they had been at the time of, and immediately preceding, the explosion.

None of them had been with anyone else, excepting Doc's party.

“That's fine!” the sheriff said. “Everybody here's obviously innocent.” He didn't sound as if he believed this.

This unnerved Miss Casey, and she made breakfast rather depressing by repeating several times, each time a bit more tearfully, how mean she felt for having forced herself into the Wanderers group merely because her deceased father had left her a share. She also said she was glad all the Wanderers had signed an agreement that their shares, on death, reverted to Wanderers, not to kinfolk heirs, because it would keep anyone from ever again feeling as unwanted, as much an intruder, as she, Miss Casey, felt this morning.

“Nonsense!” said Charles Webster Bounds, who looked much more spruce this morning.

Miss Casey burst into tears afresh.

Alarmed, Sheriff Weinberg said, “You mustn't become hysterical, Miss Casey.”

Monk said, “If you hadn't kept her up all night, she'd have got some sleep and felt all right.”

The sheriff had the grace to blush and take a very big bite of flapjack.

AFTER breakfast, the sheriff admitted the question of the two bodies was bothering him. “But we better not bury 'em until the coroner gets here,” he decided. “If he ever does. This is a hell of a place to find, if you don't know the road real well.”

Doc Savage asked, “Any objections to Monk, Ham and I taking a look around outside the cliff dwelling? We won't disturb anything.”

After some deliberation, the sheriff consented. “Go ahead. I think I'll try my hand at Indian-frightening. That Grunts knows more than he's owned up to. I'll even bet you he don't pull that cockeyed story about the Great Spirit in daylight.”

He went off to bedevil Grunts.

Moving toward the cliff dwelling, Doc asked, “How do you two fellows find your credulity this morning?”

“Eh?” Monk said.

“He means your gullibility, your ability to believe lies, stupid,” Ham said. “If it's up to standard, it's a barrelful.”

“Oh that. It was badly stretched last night, but not ruined,” Monk told Doc Savage. He turned his head and told Ham, “Some bright day you're going to feel something walking across your face, and it'll be my feet.”

Doc Savage proceeded to give Monk and Ham a surprise. What surprised them was the fact that Doc seemed to know exactly what he was seeking, and not to be astonished when he found it. He went directly to the spot where McKell had died so weirdly and examined the desert vegetation.

The desert was no Garden of Eden, but it did have such hard-fisted vegetation as cactus, mesquite and a few shreds of sagebrush with, at intervals infrequent enough to make it a novelty, tufts of tough-looking grass.

This vegetation, as Doc pointed out, was dying—or dead; at least it was shriveled and brittle—around the spot where McKell had stood screaming and been cooked dead by something they couldn't see and which had no heat.

“Blazes!” Monk exploded. He backed away and looked at the dead or dying vegetation, then walked to various spots and examined it some more.

He pointed out, excitedly, that the shape of the area where the shrubs were dead was somewhat the same as the area that would have been covered by a burst from a flame-thrower—if there had been a flame-thrower. There hadn't been. But if there had been one, it would have, to cover the ground it had covered, located in the cliff dwelling, in the north end, on the second floor, or second tier, section, not far from a spot where the power lines carrying electric current entered the ruin.

If he had been located there—Monk indicated the place in the cliff dwelling—with a flame-thrower that threw heat, not flame, and invisible heat at that, he could have done what had been done.

“I'm gonna look for tracks,” Monk said.

THE tracks that probably had been there weren't there any more. They had been carefully scrubbed out with a mesquite shrub used like a broom.

“Our mistake last night,” Monk complained bitterly, “was in not searching this place. It should have been searched as soon as McKell was killed.”

Doc Savage was not as disappointed. In fact, he seemed rather indifferent—not callous or uncaring, but absorbed, as if his thoughts were on something else.

Ham forgot his usual policy and agreed with Monk that it was a damned shame they hadn't searched the place last night, because it was obvious the killer or killers had been hiding in the ruin. “He—or they—blew their way out later,” he added. “It's as plain as the nose on your face, and, incidentally, nothing could be plainer than that.” The discovery of something that didn't look like the work of an Indian spook was making him playful.

Monk was also pleased at finding something they could believe. “Don't get so smart, son. The cliff dweller spook probably has wiry breath and dragged it over the ground to wipe out his tracks, or maybe he switched his tail.”

“You weren't so funny last night,” Ham said.

“I didn't feel so funny last night.”

Doc Savage still had the detached look of intense thought. He went over and stood staring down at the path, the road, the canyon, and presently he made a soft sound that contained pleasure, satisfaction, decision.

“I think,” Doc said suddenly, “that we have waited long enough.”

Monk was surprised. “We haven't done much, that's a fact. But what is there to do until we get our teeth into something that makes sense.”

“We have our teeth in it,” Doc declared.

“Eh?”

“And it's about time we did some biting.”

Monk said it was all right with him, that if things kept happening as crazy as they had been, he might be driven to biting himself. He was excited. Ham was excited also. They could see Doc Savage had a theory, and was going to act on it.

Doc swung briskly from his thoughtful staring into the canyon. “First, see if the dynamite is gone,” he said.

“You mean the—”

“The only dynamite that's supposed to be here—the three boxes stored in the cliff-dwelling,” he said.

It was gone. Not all of it. Two boxes. Alarmed, Ham said, “Somebody's going to blow something up!”

“That's right,” Doc told him grimly. “And we're going to do the blowing.”

He set out for camp with long, purposeful strides.

“Who gets the first blast?” Monk demanded.

“The Indian,” Doc explained. “I think the Indian has all the answers, but is afraid to talk because he can't prove what he suspects.”

SHERIFF WEINBERG was engaged in goggling his eyes at Miss Casey when they reached camp, and he eyed them with curiosity. “Are you boys chasing the spook, or is it chasing you?” he wanted to know.

“You question the Indian?” Doc asked.

“Sure did.”

“What did you get out of him?”

“Nothing but a lot of sass. He's talking like Sitting Bull again this morning.” The Sheriff rubbed his jaw thoughtfully. “I think he slept on something in his mind, and has come up feeling better, or at least feeling sure of himself. He tried to question me. Can you beat that?”

Doc looked interested. “What kind of questions did he ask you?”

“Wanted to know exactly where everybody was at different times.”

“What special times?”

“Well, when the explosion came. Who found the dynamite was all there, and when we found that out. Things like that.”

“That,” Doc said, “is what I thought. He knows the answer.”

The Sheriff jumped visibly. “What the hell! You mean he wasn't kidding me.”

“No, the Indian knows what is happening, who caused it to happen, and why,” Doc said emphatically. “I'm quite positive of it. He hasn't talked because it is such a serious matter, and he can't prove what he knows.”

“Well, for God's sake!” The sheriff was astounded. “Let's get hold of him again. This time, I'll make him talk, or remove a leg.”

“We'll be,” Doc said firmly, “sensible with the Indian for a change. That Indian has more intelligence than most of us, and he's undergone a very trying experience.”

“How do you mean—sensible?”

“Treat him as a human being and offer to coöperate.”

The Sheriff gave his pants a habitual hitch. “Okay,” he agreed dubiously.

“Who is guarding the Indian now, anyone?”

“Pietro.”

“Come on,” Doc said. “Pietro can be a witness to this.”

PIETRO would not be a witness. Not to anything mortal again, ever. There was a barrel, an ordinary wooden barrel filled with water and evidently there for use in case of fire, beside the storeroom door, and the body of Pietro was in this as far as distended arms and bent knees would permit it going. His head was back and his thin-lipped mouth was parted a little, but not much, not parted much more nor of much more size than the cut place in his throat through which the fluid of his life had poured and made the water that filled and now overflowed the barrel as scarlet as the crimson cowboy shirt he was wearing.

They were running toward the body when they heard a low mewing sound from the other side of the

storeroom. They veered, by common consent, toward this latter sound. They rounded the corner and Sheriff Weinberg yelled, “Mr. Bounds! You too!”

Charles Webster Bounds, still trying to crawl over the ground and at the same time make one hand do the multiple duty of stopping blood from running out of various holes in him, looked up at them wildly—the wildness of hysteria and, only for a moment, at first, non-recognition.

“The Indian did it!” he exclaimed. “He killed Pietro and tried to kill me. He went that way.” He pointed.

“You hurt bad?” the Sheriff demanded.

“I'm bleeding to death,” Bounds said with the flat conviction of a man to whom nothing much more could happen that hadn't happened already.

Doc didn't think so. He was sure of it, or as sure as a quick inspection could make him, after he had examined Bounds for a moment. He told Monk, “Give him first aid.”

Doc sent back to make sure that Pietro was dead, to look at the evidences of a struggle around the entrance to the jail-like storehouse.

Pietro was dead.

There had been a fight.

Miss Casey appeared, lost color until she was a shade less white than typewriter paper, then, quite competent and silently, surprised everyone by helping with Charles Webster Bounds' wounds.

“Where is the knife?” Doc asked Bounds.

“He took it.”

“Who?”

“The Indian.”

“How did he get out of the storeroom?”

Bounds mingled anger and ferocity in a grimace and explained, “I guess he pulled one of the oldest tricks there is on us. He pretended to get ill, to have some kind of a fainting spell. Naturally Pietro and I—Pietro was talking to me at the time—opened the door to go in and help him. He sprang upon us.”

“Then he ran off?”

“Yes—that is, after he killed Pietro and thought he had killed me.”

“Which way?”

Pointing, Bounds said, “I told you once before—that way.”

“We'll follow him, damn him!” the Sheriff said.

Bounds, anxious, said, “Wait a minute! I want to tell you where he's going, I think. . . . I think he's going to Boston.”

“Boston where?”

“Massachusetts.”

“Well, for Cripe's sake,” said the Sheriff. “How did you find that out and what's he going for?”

Bounds grimaced, said, “This sounds crazy, but he talked while he was stabbing away at Pietro and I. He said he was going to get that hand, the Hand of God, he called it—I'm sure he meant the one we found in the *se-pah-poo;* it's now in our Boston museum—and he said nobody was going to stop him from getting it and returning it to where it belonged, where infidel hands would not touch it again. He sounded crazy. I think he is crazy. But he will head for Boston, I'm sure.”

The Sheriff said that Boston was a hell of a long ways off. “If he gets to Boston, I'll eat my hat,” the Sheriff said.

Charles Webster Bounds thought of something else. “He was wounded. Maybe you'll find a trail of blood.”

Sure enough, they located a train of blood droplets leading off into the desert. The droplets were not very large nor very close together, but they were encouraging. “That's the Indian's tracks,” the Sheriff said with excitement. “You see the square toes on them boot tracks? Well, his boots was the only ones made that way. I happen to have noticed.”

THEY followed the tracks of the Indian's boots across the desert without trouble. Following the trail was not at all difficult, in fact. The Sheriff displayed considerable skill as a tracker, and he and Doc Savage drew ahead of the others.

Doc told the Sheriff privately, “In view of what happened, how about doing me a favor?”

“Sure.”

“Don't mention to anybody what I told you about knowing all the answers, and all that remained was to prove it.”

The Sheriff nodded vehemently.

“Sure,” he agreed. “Say, you didn't think the Indian did all the murders, did you?”

“No,” Doc said.

“I'll keep quiet about your mistake,” the Sheriff said.

Doc made no comment. His expression didn't show any resentment at the Sheriff's implication that he had made a bad mistake in thinking the Indian wasn't the villain.

After traveling a distance less than they would have expected to travel to find where a car had been hidden, they came to a spot where an automobile had obviously been concealed. The car wasn't there now, but the radiator had been leaking slightly and the sand was still damp.

“Had his car hidden here, and pulled out in a hurry,” said the Sheriff. “We didn't hear it because the river makes too much noise.” He examined the tire prints. “Headed for the canyon road, and town.”

“Headed for Boston,” Doc said dryly.

“He won't make it.”

“Why not? Apparently he wasn't badly wounded.”

“I've had experience in desert tracking. That's one thing I know.”

They returned to camp, running now, and loaded into automobiles for pursuit of the Indian. This took a little time, for power had to be shut off and the storeroom locked and water and gasoline put in the cars. They took two automobiles, and everyone went along. Miss Casey, Sam Gill, Bounds, Monk, Ham, the Sheriff, Doc. They rode three to a car.

The road followed the rim of the canyon for several miles. Doc rode silently, watching the road, the sides of the road, the surrounding country. The Sheriff seemed to think Doc was sulking over the mistake he had made about the Indian's guilt.

“If that Indian gets to Boston,” the Sheriff said, “I'll eat my hat.”

“That's twice you've said that,” Doc reminded.

“I mean it.”

Chapter XI

BOSTON was cool, balmy, peaceful, and most of the gentlemen on the streets were wearing straw hats, and straw hats were on display in most of the haberdashery and hat shops.

“You get a break,” Monk told Sheriff Weinberg. “Straw hats make better eating than felt ones.”

Weinberg was looking around at the city. “I don't see how he made it. Maybe he didn't,” he said. He gave some notice to a pretty girl passing, then compared her to Miss Casey, who was wearing the effects of desert and plane trip east, and smiled at Miss Casey. “We haven't got any trace of the Indian since Arizona,” he pointed out.

This was true, but the trace they'd gotten was of Grunts buying a plane ticket to Boston, and getting aboard the plane. Charles Webster Bounds had unearthed this information, and they had immediately wired the police department en route to stop and search the plane for the Indian. Presumably the police had done their best, but the Indian hadn't been found. There was a report, not too well verified, that he had switched planes in Amarillo. But it was obvious he was eastbound, so, they had headed for Boston.

They were now losing no time getting to the Wanderer's Museum to learn whether the Indian had gotten his hands on the hand of god, or whatever it was. At nine-twenty in the morning, a sleeper plane had deposited them at the airport; now all of them were jammed into one cab.

Miss Casey seemed relieved to get out of the desert, and enthusiastic about the Wanderers' Museum. She wanted them to be enthusiastic too, so she was telling them about it.

“We, in the true sense, are not a museum,” she was explaining. “Wanderers, Inc., when it was originally formed, had the purpose—a purpose which it has always retained—of creative exploration and research and the dissemination of knowledge. As a result, our policy became that of supply as much as exhibition.”

“You mean in a commercial sense?” asked Ham Brooks, trying to be erudite.

“Exactly,” said Miss Casey. “We have, and by have, I mean we control exclusively, a number of important archaeological sources, an ancient city in Palestine, Mayan and Incan ruins in Central and South America, a ruin in Indo-China, and two other cliff dwellings in Arizona and Colorado besides Tica

City. We conduct excavations at each of these at various seasons of the year, and the gleanings are shipped to the home museum of Wanderers, Inc. here in Boston, where they are classified, catalogued and offered for re-sale to museums and institutions of learning all over the nation."

Ham was, or pretended to be impressed. "That sounds profitable."

"Oh it is. I don't mean that we make a lot of money out of it, because the income, while amounting to a total of quite a few thousand a year over and above expenses, is not a material sum when divided among all the members of Wanderers. As a matter of fact, it isn't divided, but put back into the business, except for modest remuneration paid two of our members who don't have extensive private incomes. Those two are Grunts and Mr. Bounds."

Charles Webster Bounds smiled and said, "In return for my salary, of course, I devote a majority of my time to the enterprise, more than the others devote."

"That's right," Wanda Casey agreed. "Look, there's the museum."

THE museum surprised Doc Savage. For some reason or other he had been expecting a rattletrap old warehouse full of relics, dust and impoverished old attendants. What he saw was a modernistic building, new and flashy, looking more like a modern airline terminal than a museum.

A uniformed doorman named Robert met them, said, "There has been no sign of Grunts?"

"I wired Robert to be on watch," Charles Webster Bounds explained. "What about the hand?"

"The hand is still here."

Doc Savage was introduced to the operating staff of the Museum, discovering that he already knew one of them, a man named J. R. Clifford, an archaeologist whom he had met through one of his friends, William Harper Littlejohn, himself an archaeologist and geologist. Clifford inquired about Johnny, and served as guide.

They looked at the hand first, of course. It was in a glass case, a case of armor-plate glass, heavily made and locked. The case, Clifford explained, had been acquired a couple of years ago as a container for some very genuine jewels taken from an Egyptian tomb, the jewels having later been sold to a museum in Kansas City.

The hand was not impressive, not impressive enough to arouse interest, not nauseating enough to shock them. It was just a dried, mummified human hand, a man's hand, with the nails intact, and a thick growth of dark hair on the fingers and back of the thing. The palm was shiny like the palm of an ape's hand.

"Hah! Kind of a comedown!" Sheriff Weinberg was sheepish. "All this bang and boom over a thing like that! I don't t get it."

Sam Gill settled his fat balloons in a chair. He was tired. "If that crazy Indian has gone to the kind of trouble he's gone to, and done those killings, he won't rest until he gets that hand."

Charles Webster Bounds thought so, too. "Exactly. I suggest we watch it closely, and seize the Indian when he appears."

They had a conference over that. Everyone was half dead from loss of sleep, so the idea of standing guard needed some selling.

Bounds came up with another idea. “Apparently, since we lost track of him completely on planes, the Indian switched to railway trains,” Bounds said. “That means he won't reach Boston for, say, at least twenty-four hours. But say twelve to be safe. Gives us time to get some sleep, and make preparations.”

Doc Savage was of the opinion they had better not be too positive the Indian had taken a plane and wouldn't be there for twenty-four hours, or twelve hours. They had best not relax. “If there was some arrangement so we could stand watches here, in the Museum, say four hours on and four off, as they do on shipboard.”

“Say, there's an excellent place!” Bounds declared. “The staff conference room on the north side. It's perfect.”

BOUNDS hadn't exaggerated too much. The staff conference room, as Bounds had called it, wasn't the usual plain hall of an affair used for conferences, but contained plenty of comfortable furniture, and a safe among other things. “The logical place to put the hand,” Bounds said, indicating the safe.

“There's a chance,” the sheriff warned, “of guarding the hand so well that Grunts will be discouraged.”

Fat Sam Gill said he didn't think so, not if the Indian had done all the things he was accused of doing. “He knows the combination to that safe, anyway.”

“Oh, the Indian knows how to get into the safe?”

“Sure. We all know the combination.”

Bounds looked disappointed, but brightened when Doc Savage said he thought it would be fine. “There are some small rooms adjoining, two of them,” Doc pointed out. “We can put in some cots and sleep right here.”

“Excellent!” Bounds said.

The Hand of God was brought, with more curiosity than ceremony, and locked in the iron safe, which was about three feet high and two thirds as wide and deep.

Miss Casey addressed Bounds. “Charles, haven't you got a portable burglar alarm thing we could put around the safe?”

Bounds said he had. He said he'd get it. It was at his apartment. He left.

While Bounds was gone, Monk and Doc Savage decided to get something to eat. They would eat in relays, two at a time, thus never leaving a minority of their number guarding the hand.

They sat on stools at an old-fashioned white counter and Doc, as a rebellion against desert fare, had a broiled mackerel for breakfast. Monk contented himself with ham and eggs, buckwheat cakes, oatmeal, fruit juice, toast, fried potatoes, and coffee.

Monk offered his candid opinion that he thought they might have made a sucker play in leaving Arizona. “I haven't felt right since we left Arizona,” he said. “I think maybe we're being sucked in.”

“We are,” Doc said.

“For God's sake!” Monk stared at him wildly. “Why haven't you said so before?”

“Because,” said Doc, “the idea of a double suction appeals to me.”

“Huh? What do you mean by that?”

“I think we're fooling the guy who thinks he's fooling us.”

“You're crazy!”

“Eat your breakfast,” Doc said. “You're getting in a frame of mind where you think everyone's cracked.”

When Monk tried to get more information, Doc pretended to be offended at being called crazy, and wouldn't tell him anything.

They were walking back to the museum when Monk said, “There's Bounds.” But the figure he had thought was Bounds turned into an apartment building, quite a large apartment building, adjoining the museum. “I guess it wasn't Bounds,” Monk said.

It was another hour before Bounds returned.

“HAD a little trouble getting the gimmick to work,” Bounds explained, presenting them with his burglar alarm. It was an affair of the so-called “capacity” type, a vacuum tube circuit whereby the capacity balance of an antenna was disturbed by anyone coming near it, operating a relay which in turn rang a bell. It was in a metal case; one had merely to plug it into the lighting circuit, ground it and string an antenna from the antenna post.

Doc Savage, who not only had seen the gadgets before, but had developed a vastly more sensitive improvement of the thing a few years ago, pretended to know very little about it. He let Bounds, and Sam Gill, who was, or said he was, an expert electrician, fix the thing and get it operating.

“There!” said Bounds proudly. “Now, if the Indian tries to get near the safe, we can hear him.”

Ham Brooks asked, “Should we notify the Boston police about this affair?”

They left that up to Sheriff Weinberg, who was dubious about it. “Normally, I wouldn't hesitate a minute to notify the cops,” Weinberg declared. “But this ain't normal. The thing is as screwy as a two-headed duck, and I got a hunch the cops would laugh themselves sick at us and this stuff about men being cooked to death where there isn't any heat, and steel and rocks falling to powder after they've been breathed on, or looked at—or whatever it was—by the spirit of an Indian god. Nah. . . . I think we'd better keep it to ourselves. After we get the Indian, we can turn him over to the law.”

It was decided to do it that way.

Doc Savage, with Monk and Ham, went over the museum, getting the lay of the ground. “This place would be a good property for one man,” Ham remarked, impressed. He looked at each of the attendants thoughtfully, and later asked Doc, “Do you suppose any of these guys could be in with the Indian?”

“No,” Doc said. “But they might bear watching.”

“If they ain't in with the Indian, why'll they bear watching?” Monk wanted to know.

Doc Savage didn't answer. He had become interested in a small porch—if you called a porch on such an utterly modernistic building a porch—opening off the conference room where they had placed the Hand of God as bait. The room was on the third floor, and the porch was isolated—at least there seemed to be

no way of reaching it any way except through the museum or by using a long ladder.

Charles Webster Bounds was placing some steamer chairs on the porch.

“We might as well do our waiting and watching in comfort, don't you think?” Bounds said.

Chapter XII

THEY had a quiet day and a quiet half of a night, but nobody showed any extreme desire for more sleep. Charles Webster Bounds said, “Perhaps I could sleep if I had some hot milk. I frequently try that. I think I shall.”

“It's your funeral,” said Sheriff Weinberg. He sounded as if he thought a man who had been seized in a Winslow, Arizona taxicab by an Indian ghost and had awakened with the ghost trying to drag him down a hole—such a man should be more cautious about venturing out at night. “Go ahead, if you want to.”

“I am not without protection,” Bounds said, and showed them he was carrying a small revolver. “I have a license for it.”

“Okay.”

Bounds departed.

It was a hot night. They had been sitting, all of them, on the small porch. Now Doc Savage stood up, explaining, “I think I'll follow along and see that Bounds doesn't get into trouble.”

The Sheriff looked relieved. “Good idea.”

Monk followed Doc Savage to the door. Monk had caught the bronze man's slight gesture. They conferred in. whispers near the door.

Doc said, “Wait three minutes, then get everyone off the porch—but put bundled blankets in the steamer chairs so it'll still look as if we were there.”

Monk was jolted by surprise. “Where'll we get the blankets?”

“Off the cots we fixed up for sleeping.”

“What—”

Doc interrupted, “Get everyone off the porch, turn off the lights—it's dark enough that no one can tell whether human figures or bundled blankets are in the steamer chairs, once the lights are off—and then get in the west end of the museum.”

“You mean,” Monk demanded, “get clear away from here?”

“Yes. Entirely clear.”

“Well I'll be damned!”

“Don't waste time. You've got maybe five minutes.”

“The sheriff,” Monk predicted, “won't like this. He'll want explanations.”

“You won't have time for them.”

Monk said there was the trifling matter of his not knowing what the blazes it was all about. “Shall I bop the sheriff one if I have to?” he wanted to know.

“Sure,” Doc said. “I've got to be going.”

LEAVING the museum by the front door—the door had a spring lock; Bounds must have a key for he had not pushed the small button that retarded the latch—and he left it with the latch retarded, so that he could enter again hastily if need be. He had eased the door open silently, and he moved fast, letting it shut as quietly as it had opened, and moving two paces to the left, sank down into the shadow of ornamental shrubs.

Charles Webster Bounds, he saw, was nowhere in sight.

He made no effort to find Bounds.

There was a driveway between the Museum and the apartment house located to the north. He crossed it going—because he might be seen—at a pace not fast enough to arouse anybody's suspicions. He used the same manner going into the apartment house foyer, which was a small space between an outer door that was unlocked and an inner door that was locked. Here there were mailboxes, nameplates, pushbuttons, a speaking tube.

He pressed three top floor call buttons at random, and presently the lock buzzed and he opened the door and went in. The elevator was not on the ground floor. He used the stairs.

His objective, the door of the apartment directly across—level with and opposite—from the museum balcony, he reached without incident. He could tell, from spacing of the doors in the hall, that the apartments were large, five or six rooms.

He put an ear against the door.

There was, for twenty seconds or so, no sound, then there was a series of four soft clickings, the kind of sounds electric switches of the tumbler variety make when thrown. The next sound was something like the one a fingernail makes when drawn over a nail file. There were two of these.

Doc tried the door. Locked. He decided the lock was an ordinary apartment variety and could, if he was lucky, be smashed. He backed across the hall, gathered himself, ran, jumped, landed both feet against, and as close as possible to, the lock.

An instant later he was in the apartment, on his side on the floor.

There was darkness for a moment or two. Then noise and fire, both out of a gun.

HE was rolling when the first bullet got there; he had the unpleasant impression the slug passed under him, under his body and the rug, like a mole. Then he was out of the light from the hall, flat against a wall, wishing he'd had the judgment to douse the hall lights before breaking down the door. He found some kind of a large piece of furniture, an overstuffed chair. He got behind that as silently as he could.

The gun went off again. The flash showed him some of the room, nothing else. It was impossible to see

much by a gunflash, regardless of reports that you could.

There was more than furniture in the room. There was a considerable amount of apparatus, which seemed to be in two sections.

One part of the gadget, a clumsy affair that looked quite complicated, stood in the center of the room—centrally located, but near the window facing the museum balcony, which was open—and was mounted on a very heavy tripod arrangement that was on casters. There seemed to be a cable, as thick as a man's leg, connecting this gadget with more stuff along one wall.

Three shots. Most revolvers held five, and he thought this was a revolver. He was fairly sure who held it, too.

He felt of his pockets, careful that his hands did not make sound moving against the cloth, and got out a fountain pen. He flipped it across the room, hoping to induce the other to get rid of another shot.

It didn't work.

He tried some ventriloquism, tightening his throat muscles and imitating a voice that wouldn't sound as if it came from where he was.

“Get some tear gas in here!” he said with the voice.

Evidently one of two things happened. Either the man already had him spotted, or the ventriloquism was a flop. Because the room roared, and two bullets came through the chair, one of them also passing through some part of him where there wasn't a bone. At least he wasn't knocked down, as he would have been had the bullet hit a bone.

Having emptied his gun, the man moved fast. He lunged for the gadget on the tripod, reached it, and must have thrown some switches, because there was a definite electrical sound from the thing, mostly a vibration. The man started swinging the contrivance on the tripod.

Doc came forward desperately, reached the man, and swung his right fist in a terrific punch that would have knocked the man's head off if it had come off. It didn't. The fist lifted about six inches from his side, no more. He knew then where the bullet had hit, or approximately where.

He tried his left hand and did better. The man fell down and away from the gadget. He landed on the floor. Doc fell on him.

For a long time, probably thirty seconds, they bit, kicked, twisted, gouged and hammered each other. Doc got so little results that he began to wonder, with horror, whether the bullet was in his chest and whether he was going to pass out.

He must have been more effective than he thought, because the victim began trying to get away, finally managed it, stood up, and staggered around the thing on the tripod, making for the door.

When he was about halfway around the gadget, the man began to screech.

THE fellow had, in his confusion, stepped into the lethal, or at least very agonizing, path of the thing's projecting. He accompanied his screeching with all the mad, frenzied gestures his hands and arms were capable of making.

He was in the beam of the thing three or four seconds, then fell, rather than stepped, out of it.

On the floor, he squirmed and shrieked.

Doc, afraid of the thing, not knowing exactly where it was pointed, or whether it shot a beam backward as well as forward—he was remembering the wall in the cliff dwelling which had collapsed on Monk Mayfair—backed away from it. He didn't dare go for a light switch. The only thing he dared do was back away in a straight line, which he judged would be safe.

Eventually he remembered he had a flashlight, and got it out and found it worked.

The man's hands, and probably his arms as well, were, considering the time they had been in the beam—three or four seconds only—were well-cooked.

Doc located the switch on the apparatus along the wall which supplied energy to the thing and which shut it off. This was the fourth switch he threw.

Chapter XIII

SHERIFF WEINBERG returned from the hospital at five-fifteen in the morning and reported that their criminal was doing nicely, would probably live long enough to be tried and executed, and would suffer plenty in the meantime. It had been necessary to amputate both arms near the shoulders, the operation already having been performed.

“Now I want to know what that thing is,” Weinberg said. “Sam Gill said it was a death-ray machine.”

Doc Savage's right side looked lumpy under his white shirt because of the bandages. The bullet had done more to him than he had thought, having penetrated the fleshy part of his arm and gone on through a part of his back, breaking a rib in the process. He didn't feel well.

“It's a projector of supersonic waves,” he explained. “In sound, as in light, radio, and so on, the higher the frequency, the shorter the wave-length. Very high frequency sound—up to sounds of actual radio frequency, or about five hundred thousand cycles a second—has the dimensions of bacteria, and also living cells. Which means that the sound wave will try to move one end of a cell violently toward the left, while the other part of the sound wave is moving it just as violently to the right. The cell gets ruptured, and the living cell becomes a dead jelly.”

“Good Lord!”

“It isn't new.”

“It's not!”

“No, considerable work has actually been done with supersonics. The Russians used it to detect flaws in steel. Like X-rays, the waves penetrate steel, but are altered if there are cracks or faults. Supersonics have been used to sterilize liquids, and to homogenize milk by what you might call grinding up the butterfat globules—the butterfat is reduced to such minute particles that it won't float out to the top. Incidentally, the milk can't be churned after the treatment, either.”

The sheriff eyed the apparatus warily. “Is it shut off? It won't bite a man now?”

“It's shut down. Would you like to see it work?”

“Never mind, I'll take your word for it. . . . Say, it's a bulky contraption, isn't it?”

“Too bulky for portable use,” Doc admitted. “That's why the killings took such a peculiar method.”

“Hell, he didn't have this gadget in the cliff dwelling!”

“Obviously not. He had another like it, though. Whether or not he confesses, we're pretty sure to be able to prove he did have. It was on the second floor of the cliff dwelling, I imagine, close to the point where the electric transmission lines entered, because the thing requires considerable power, at least fifty kilowatts of sound energy are put out by the thing.”

“Another outfit, eh. What'd he do with that one, throw it in the canyon?”

“Yes.”

“You think that's what the explosion was—to get the gate open so he could dump it in the river in the canyon?”

“Yes.”

“I expect that's right,” Weinberg admitted. “He had taken part of the dynamite out and planted it outside the gate to use in case the gate was locked, which it was that night. After everybody was asleep, or trying to sleep, he sneaked back and . . .” The sheriff was nervous; he jumped violently at a sound in the hall.

It was only Monk and Ham accompanying Miss Casey. They wanted to know how Charles Webster Bounds was coming.

“How'd Bounds make out?” Monk wished to know.

“They had to cut off both his arms,” Weinberg said. He added with satisfaction, “That should make it easier to hang him.”

CHARLES WEBSTER BOUNDS never spoke to them again. He never spoke to anyone. He pretended to be, and might actually have been, the victim of mental aberration, one symptom of which was inability to speak a word, or make a vocal sound. They never knew whether or not he was pretending, but the jury didn't think he was, and passed the death penalty.

The story of what he had done was necessarily incomplete as to detail, although in general it was clear and verified by enough circumstantial evidence that they—the jury, Doc Savage, everyone—knew it was true.

Bounds had developed the supersonic gadget—not invented it, but built an outfit which was stronger than most—in the course of working at his profession as a research bacteriologist. He had built the thing, originally, to kill germs. He had converted it to killing men, his partners in Wanderers, Inc.

Before Bounds had committed his first murder, Carl Peterson must have become suspicious, and sent for Doc Savage. Before Doc arrived, Peterson had been killed—in the cliff dwelling, no doubt—and when Doc arrived, the machine had been turned on him, or on the station wagon. The range from cliff dwelling to cliff road was only a few yards, within the capacity of the apparatus. The hitch there had been that the supersonic beam, which crystallized metal, destroying its molecular structure, had hit the front end of the station wagon first, causing it to swerve over the cliff. Doc had escaped. So had the Indian.

Bounds had planted, probably by dropping it from the cliff dwelling to the road, the bit of steering knuckle Miss Casey had found, hoping thus to make Monk and Ham think Doc had met death in a natural accident. They found where Bounds had acquired the steering knuckle from a Winslow garage.

All of the consequent mysterious goings-on were either produced by Charles Webster Bounds or his gadget. Becoming frightened, he had destroyed the thing by blowing open the locked gate to the cliff dwelling and shoving the thing into the river. . . . They found it in the river before the trial.

The body of the Indian was also found. The Indian, it was obvious, had suspected nothing of the truth; whether or not he really believed the Hand of God story was doubtful. If he did, it was something terror had driven him to believing.

Bounds, of course, had thought the Indian suspected him, and had killed the Indian, using the Indian's death as an excuse to get everyone within range of the other supersonic machine in Boston. There, Bounds had planned to finish his string of murders, and trust that some would believe a disgruntled Indian deity had done it, and those who didn't believe that wouldn't be able to learn the truth.

The motive, of course, was the arrangement the Wanderers had among themselves. The share of each was to revert to Wanderers on his, or her, death.

Had things gone to plan, Bounds in the end would have been the surviving Wanderer, modestly wealthy for life.

DOC SAVAGE came to Arizona to testify at the trial, but he was at a restaurant down the street when the jury produced its verdict. Monk and Ham brought him the news.

“That sheriff, that Weinberg, is strutting around like he did it all,” Monk complained. “We gotta do something about that guy. I think he's selling Miss Casey a bill of goods.”

Ham grinned smugly. “That's all taken care of.”

Doc Savage frowned. “You two had better lay off that sheriff. He's a pretty competent fellow.”

Monk ignored the advice. “Whatcha mean—taken care of?” he asked Ham. He was quite interested.

“I've got it fixed.” Ham explained. He explained that he had met a squaw named Mary, and by dint of persuasion, and fifty dollars cash, had induced her to agree to accost Weinberg, choosing an appropriate time when the Sheriff was with Miss Casey, and give the impression that Weinberg was her man.

Monk thought this an excellent idea. “This I want to see,” he declared. “Let's go watch it.”

Forty minutes later, Doc got a telephone call. From the county jail. It was Monk.

“Come get us out,” Monk urged.

“So Weinberg had you locked up?” Doc asked.

“Hell, no. Weinberg wants out, too. We had a little fight after Ham's stunt came off, and they locked us all up.”

“Miss Casey, too?”

“Miss Casey,” said Monk gloomily, “is more than somewhat mad. In fact, she caught a train back to

Boston.”

THE END