

The Terror in the Navy

A Doc Savage Adventure
#33

Kenneth Robeson
[Lester Bernard Dent]
1937

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The Terror in the Navy A Doc Savage Adventure

by

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Chapter 1

WRECK!

The two seamen met in the darkness near the stern of the navy destroyer, under an awning. They were cautious. They stood for a long time listening, and at last they were satisfied that no one was near enough to overhear.

One growled, "The chief's orders are for none of us to be seen talkin' together!"

The other hissed, "I know it! But something's gone wrong!"

"What? We've covered every angle."

"That nosey Lieutenant Bowen Toy! He's haunting me. He's shadowing me. If he keeps it up, he may learn too much. He's got to be killed!"

There was no light and no sound to show that four other naval destroyers were steaming full speed in the wake of this one, guided by a radio beam transmitted from this, the leading craft.

"What put the bug in Lieutenant Toy's bonnet?" asked one of the two furtive seamen.

"His brother, Captain Blackstone Toy."

"How much do you think Lieutenant Toy knows about—well, to-night's business, for instance?"

"I've got no idea how much he knows. All I know is that if he keeps on haunting me, he'll learn too much!"

The other man laughed.

"What're you laughing at?" the first man wanted to know.

"I was just thinking that Lieutenant Toy will probably learn what it feels like to die."

"O. K. We take Toy at the first chance, then?"

"First chance."

The two separated and left the vicinity.

A moment after they had gone, a man swung down off the top of the awning under which the two men had met and secretly plotted death. He had heard every word that they had said.

This man walked away, headed toward the lower deck.

Lieutenant Bowen Toy went directly to his cabin, closed the door, locked it, and took out a revolver he had been carrying in an armpit holster. He went over to the mirror and looked at himself. He was pale. He held his hands up, first one, then the

other.

“Shaking like an old woman!” he snapped. Then aloud: “I’ve got to do something!”

Lieutenant Bowen Toy went to his bag, opened it and got out a long-bladed kris, an ugly weapon which was evidently a souvenir of a visit to China. About to close the bag, his gaze fell upon another object in it. An idea seemed to seize him. He lifted the object out.

It was a book.

THE ARMOR PLATE VALUE OF
CERTAIN ALLOYS
By Clark Savage, Jr.

It was a thick book, full of fine print and intricate mathematical computations.

Lieutenants Bowen Toy stowed the kris inside his belt, where it would evidently serve as reserve weapon. He did not take his attention off the book, or, rather, off the name of the author, Clark Savage, Jr.

Abruptly, Lieutenant Toy left his cabin and walked, with his hand always on his automatic and his eyes wary, to the bridge, where he addressed the navigating officer.

“Where can Doc Savage be found?” asked Toy.

“Doc Savage is well known enough that a telegram addressed to him in New York City should reach him,” said the officer.

It was dark on the bridge, except for a subdued glow from the binnacle. The navigating officer had been intrigued by something queer in Lieutenant Toy’s voice. He now thumbed a cigarette lighter aflame and held it to throw light on Toy’s features. The utter terror he saw there startled him.

“Lieutenant!” he gasped. “What on earth is wrong?”

Lieutenant Bowen Toy, in his nervous excitement, drew the revolver, which had been in one pocket, and held it in his hand.

“I have just made an incredible discovery,” he gulped. “The entire United States navy is menaced! No telling how many ships will be destroyed! No telling how many men will be killed, before the thing can be stopped! I’ll give you the whole incredible story in a minute! But first, I’m going to send a radiogram and ask this Doc Savage to get started on the New York end of it!”

He bounded off, eyes darting warily from side to side, the gun held ready for defense.

The navigating officer stared after him and exploded, “I’ll be damned! Lieutenant

Bowen Toy has gone nuts!”

The officer was blissfully unaware that imminent events would convince him that he himself, if anybody, was losing his mind.

Lieutenant Bowen Toy went to the radio room, seized a blank and wrote:

DOC SAVAGE

NEW YORK

HAVE DISCOVERED AMAZING AND TERRIBLE THING ABOUT
TO HAPPEN STOP GO TO APARTMENT OF MY BROTHER
CAPTAIN BLACKSTONE TOY IN PARKVIEW HOTEL AND GET
NOTES HIDDEN IN PICTURE OF MYSELF

LIEUT BOWEN TOY

“Send this to a commercial station,” Toy directed, handing the operator the message. “And get that message out instantly!”

“Yes, sir!”

Lieutenant Toy stepped out of the radio shack and walked warily toward the bridge.

Then, with stunning suddenness, he was flying headlong down the deck. He hit a stanchion, glanced off that, fell and turned over and over. There followed a moment of brittle silence.

The ship had been traveling at about thirty knots a moment before. Now it was at a standstill.

Bells began ringing. There was a loud report amidships, followed by a shrill hissing. This meant a steam line had been broken. The destroyer rolled heavily as a wave hit it, and there was a grinding from underneath the hull.

Lieutenant Toy gained his feet, scrambled across the sloping deck, hauled himself up a companionway and reached the navigating bridge.

The navigating officer’s face was pale and terrible. The helmsman was propped against his wheel, mouth open, eyes weird. Both men looked as if they had just seen a horned devil.

“*What ’d we hit!*” Toy shouted.

The navigating officer made feeble, stabbing gestures at the helmsman.

“Tell what—what happened—again!” he croaked.

The helmsman blinked. When he spoke, it was in a tone that sounded, somehow, as if he did not believe himself.

“Something—*something*—pulled the ship through the sea!” he mumbled. “*It just took hold of us and pulled us into whatever we hit!*”

Chapter 2

THE “POWER”!

Navy men are well trained, and it was natural that some one should immediately take a sounding. The cry of the one who had dropped the lead overboard came from forward.

“By the mark, two!” the voice yelled. “Solid rock!”

Lieutenant Toy gulped, “Only two fathoms of water under the stern, and a rock bottom! That’s impossible! Our course was ten miles offshore!”

The steersman gasped, “I tell you, a *thing* had this ship!”

“Don’t be ridiculous!” snapped the navigating officer.

The steersman said, sullenly, “I could *feel* the pull of the thing! It was *drawing* the ship through the water! I fought it. I put the wheel hard over half a dozen times, but the vessel simply wouldn’t respond. I tell you, there was a *thing*!”

Lieutenant Toy heard that, and his eyes came wide and seemed about to pop out of his head. “It struck this destroyer first!” he shrieked. “It’s *real*! It can destroy ships!” A moment of terrible silence followed.

“Those men—the two sailors I overheard talking under the awning—they know about it!” Toy howled. “Grab them before they can get away! Get them! Quick, I’ll point them out and tell——”

The rest of his howl was lost in a terrific crash alongside. There was a rending and grinding noise. There was that peculiar, uncanny screech made by steel plates being ripped apart. Men shouted wildly.

Lieutenant Toy grabbed a brass stanchion, and a ghastly expression came over his face.

“The other boats are hitting!” he gasped.

A second crash came, followed shortly by a third. A scraping rumble stopped Toy’s forthcoming groan. It came from farther away. The last destroyer had piled on the rock.

Rockets, parachute flares, began going up, and their light illuminated a confused scene. Five sleek gray war craft with their bellies torn out on hard rock. They rolled as big, greasy swells nudged them about, and there was an almost steady grinding of steel hull plates on stone.

Officers on the boats’ bridges megaphoned profanely at each other. They blamed the lead destroyer for what had happened.

The confusion became more orderly. Rockets got answers from shore, obviously not more than half a mile distant. The radio apparatus was used to secure radio compass bearings, and from this it was ascertained that the five war craft were piled up on a long, narrow reef which had deep water on each side.

Within fifteen minutes, one destroyer slid off the reef and sank. One sailor was drowned. The others got away in lifeboats.

It became evident that the big swell was going to jar the other unlucky vessels around until they also slid off the reef and sank. And it was not going to be long before this happened.

Other navy boats and two passenger steamers were heading for the scene of the holocaust at full speed, but they stood little chance of arriving on time.

Officers on the wrecked destroyers gave hurried orders. Lifeboats were launched, and the destroyers abandoned.

Lieutenant Bowen Toy was ignored in the excitement. No one had time to ask him questions. He moved about, doing his share, but all the time he kept a sharp watch, and his gun convenient.

When he got into a lifeboat, Lieutenant Toy sat in the bow, where no one was at his back. The lifeboat lunged into the surf breaking over the reef.

It was one of the two lifeboats which were unfortunate enough to be overturned in the surf.

Lieutenant Toy was a strong swimmer. The shore was not more than half a mile distant. The remaining lifeboats were full. Toy swam.

Flares had burned out by now, and the darkness was rather dense. Along the shore, automobile lights and regulation marine flares were making a prominent display.

The next thing heard of Lieutenant Bowen Toy was when a man—he happened to be the helmsman of the leading destroyer—came rushing madly to his superior officer, who stood on the beach swearing at what had happened.

“I felt it again!” the helmsman shrieked. “I felt it, I tell you! It was *something* you couldn’t see and couldn’t touch, but it *pulled* you!”

The man’s superior officer sprang upon the gibbering helmsman, grabbed his arms and held him tightly, shouting at other sailors, “Help hold this man! He’s gone off his nut!”

The helmsman screeched, “I’m not mad, I tell you! It got Toy! It grabbed Lieutenant Toy and pulled him under! I *felt* it!”

“You *what*?”

“I felt it’s *pull!*” screamed the helmsman. “It drew Toy under! It was something

you couldn't see! Oh, I know you don't believe me!"

Nor did they believe him, even after they found Lieutenant Bowen Toy. But his story sounded a little more credible after they found Lieutenant Toy.

Toy had been drowned.

Of course, there was a hullabaloo along the beach, and a great crowd of landlubbers came to see the wrecked warships and look at the wet, excited, dazed sailors. Newspaper reporters arrived and began to ask the sailors questions about what had happened, and to snort unbelievably at the answers they got.

But long before anything about the disaster was put in print, two men in navy uniforms—uniforms of common seamen—made their way ashore and skulked to a telephone.

They were the same two to whose furtive conversation Lieutenant Toy had eavesdropped.

They called a long-distance number in New York.

"Chief?" one asked.

"Yes," said a dry voice.

"Lieutenant Toy sent a message to Doc Savage," said one of the sailors. "We weren't able to stop the message or even get a look at it."

"This message went to *whom*?" the voice asked.

"Doc Savage. Ever hear of him?"

The "Chief" swore.

"I've heard entirely too much about him! How was this message sent?"

"Radio. It'll reach New York as a regular commercial message."

"Thanks," said the distant speaker. "We've got to do things fast."

He hung up.

Chapter 3

CAUTIOUS CROOKS

The man in New York did not replace the telephone on its stand after hanging up. He held the instrument close to his chest and thought deeply.

It was night, and the man was in bed.

He reached over and touched a tiny jack-switch concealed under the telephone stand. This apparently connected the telephone with a private wire. The man jiggled the hook.

“Yeah, chief?” said a sleepy voice.

“We have received what is sometimes called a bad break,” said the man in bed.

“Yeah?”

“You have the file of information which we gathered about Doc Savage?”

“Yeah,” said the sleepy voice, not so sleepy now. “But I still don’t see why we went to the trouble of finding out so much about Doc Savage.”

“Doc Savage is logically the one man we have most to fear,” reminded the man in bed. “In short, we learned everything we could about him because he might menace our plans. I thought it would be a wise move. Now I *know*.”

“You mean that Doc Savage has an inkling of what we’re going to do?”

“Lieutenant Toy sent a radiogram to Doc Savage before he—ah—before Toy met a mysterious fate, as the newspapers will put it. That is the bad break I mentioned. We’ve got to stop that message before it reaches Doc Savage.”

“Was it a radiogram?”

“Yes.”

“Leave it to me!” said the man on the other end of the wire, and listened until he heard his chief hang up. Then the fellow put the receiver on the hook and began to remove his pajamas.

He was a long, snaky man with an almost animal growth of black hair on his chest and up and down his back. It is a popular theory that eyes have to be small to be mean. This man’s eyes were big—and mean.

When he had dressed, he glanced about the close and rather untidy room, took two nasty-looking flat pistols in holsters off a wall hook, fastened them under his coat, and walked to the door. He passed into another close and untidy room, in which six men lay on cots.

One of the men on the cots opened an eye and said, “What a conscience you must have! Don’t it ever let you sleep?”

“Get dressed!” The snaky, hairy man shook the others. “Get dressed, you Davids—we’re gonna sally forth after a Goliath!”

Half an hour later, they were tying shoestrings and ties and yawning, as their car moved through downtown Manhattan. The snaky, hairy man was talking, explaining. When he finished, one of the others addressed him by what seemed to be his nickname.

“Fuzzy,” said the man, “this Doc Savage is big-time poison.”

“Keep your shirt on,” said the hairy “Fuzzy.” “We’ll do this so Savage will never know a thing about it.”

The driver stopped the sedan, and they all looked out. They saw a giant office building which hurled itself upward until it was lost against the cloudy night sky.

Fuzzy pointed a limber, hairy finger almost straight up into the night.

“Top floor,” he said. “Eighty-six stories up. Sort of an eagle’s nest.”

They got out and went into the giant building—it was admittedly the most imposing in New York City. An elevator let them out two flights below Doc Savage’s floor, and they climbed stairs, so as not to be seen.

On the last flight of steps, Fuzzy waved the others back.

“Kind of erase yourselves,” he directed. “Let me look the ground over.”

Fuzzy then ran up the final flight of stairs. There was a door which seemed to be made of bronze. Letters on it were so unobtrusive as to be almost difficult to locate.

Clark Savage, Jr.

There was no knob on the door, no handle; it seemed to be just a slab of bronze. Fuzzy happened to know it was a slab of armor steel, bronze-plated.

Repeated pressings of the button beside the door got no answer, and Fuzzy went back to his men.

“Coast clear,” he grinned. “The bronze guy ain’t in.”

“How we gonna get into that place?” asked the pessimist. “It’s more burglar-proof than a bank vault.”

Fuzzy held out a hand to one of the men. “Gimme that package I gave you to carry.”

The packet which the man handed over was the size of a pocket match box. Fuzzy tapped it with a finger.

“This holds a piece of radioactive metal,” he said. “Watch what happens.”

He walked toward the door of Doc Savage’s office. The door opened mysteriously.

“Hah!” said Fuzzy, pleased. “What’d I tell you? There’s a sensitive electroscope hidden beside the door. When a piece of radioactive metal is brought near it, the electroscope causes a relay to close and that makes a machine open the door.”

He walked through the door.

“You guys wait outside,” he directed.

The room in which hirsute, serpentine Fuzzy found himself seemed to be a reception room. Principal items of furniture were an enormous safe, a number of comfortable-appearing chairs, and a rather remarkable-looking inlaid table.

Fuzzy ignored everything in the room, and went into a library which held thousands of tomes.

Libraries are traditionally gloomy places, but this one was not. The windows along one side were so large that the wall seemed almost solidly of glass.

Fuzzy looked at the windows and grinned. It was by watching through these that a great deal had been learned about Doc Savage. The method employed had been ingenious, and Fuzzy was particularly proud of it because he had thought it up himself.

He picked up a telephone and called the office of the concern handling radio messages.

He asked, “Has a message come for Doc Savage, signed by Lieutenant Bowen Toy? This is Doc Savage’s headquarters. . . . No? Will you telephone the message as soon as it arrives? Do not send it by messenger. Telephone it. Thank you.”

Fuzzy hung up and gave every sign of being ready to wait as long as necessary. He wandered over to the window.

In the night sky, some distance away, blazed an electric sign advertising a little-known variety of beer. In fact, the variety of beer did not even exist!

The sign was held in the air by a balloon, which was in turn moored to a barge in the Hudson River.

Fuzzy waved both arms. The electric sign on the balloon promptly blinked. Fuzzy grinned. His men, with extremely powerful astronomical telescopes trained on Doc Savage’s office, had recognized their straw boss.

Some time elapsed before the telephone rang. Fuzzy sprang to the receiver, lifted it, said, “Doc Savage’s headquarters!”

“This is the radio office with a message,” the voice said.

The voice read Lieutenant Bowen Toy’s message.

“Thank you,” said Fuzzy. “Do not bother to send a copy by mail, or by messenger. It won’t be necessary.”

“Very well,” replied the radio office clerk. “We will not.”

Fuzzy hung up, went out, let the trick outer door close behind him, and shoved his chest out triumphantly at his men.

“That fixes it!” he said. “Doc Savage will never know a message was sent to him!”

They walked toward the stairs.

A young woman came up the stairs. She pointed on old-fashioned six-shooter at them—a six-shooter with a barrel so big that any man present could have put his little finger in the barrel with ease.

“They gave me this thing to cut my teeth on!” the girl said, jiggling the six-shooter in her hand.

The men goggled.

The young woman would have gotten a monopoly of male attention anywhere. She was tall and had every curve necessary to make an exquisitely moulded feminine form. Her features were what the old literary masters would have called finely chiseled, with an outdoor skin.

One remarkable quality was the unusual bronze hue of her hair and the almost matching color of her eyes. Or perhaps her eyes tended more to golden.

Her frock and accessories—it was a silver and white evening creation—were the ultra in fashion.

Fuzzy gulped, “Who’re you?”

“Patricia Savage,” the woman said. “Oh, you’ve never heard of me, probably. Doc Savage is my cousin. I have a beauty establishment uptown where I charge outrageous prices, and the customers like it.”

Fuzzy swallowed. The mouth of the six-shooter seemed incredibly big.

“Uh—well—uh,” he mumbled.

“You gentlemen look like a bunch of crooks to me,” Pat said brightly. “And why were you pussy-footing around? While you think up some lies to answer, you can back into Doc’s office, with your hands in the air.”

A man appeared silently on the stairs behind Pat Savage. He threw a gun which he held. It hit the back of Pat’s head.

Fuzzy, the others, lunged forward. Pat was dazed. She tried to get her gun up. Fuzzy kicked it out of her hand.

Another man drew an automatic pistol.

“Let her have it?” he wanted to know.

“And get Doc Savage on our trail for murder!” snorted Fuzzy. “Don’t be like

that! Here! We'll do this!"

He picked up Pat's big six-shooter, measured her, and hit her over the temple. She fell. Fuzzy dropped her big six-gun beside her.

"Amscray, as Cæsar would say!" he ordered.

They went down some flights of stairs, entered an elevator, and, looking very innocent, rode down to the street.

As they got into their car on the darkened street, the man who had thrown the gun reminded every one, "It was lucky I saw this dame and hid me out while she passed me up!"

"Don't worry, you'll get your bouquets!" said Fuzzy. The men did not drive away fast enough to attract attention from any cops who might be around.

Chapter 4

THE MAN OF METAL

Patricia Savage opened her gold eyes and with her hands tried to help herself up off the floor. She sniffed indignantly when she discovered she was sitting in a chair. She looked around.

“Oh!” she said. She sounded exasperated. “I might have known you would happen around and catch me when I wasn’t at my best!”

The giant bronze man standing before her smiled faintly, which was a rare thing for him to do. Some persons had known him for years and had never seen him smile. Not that he went around looking gloomy. His amazingly regular features, almost classic in their firm handsomeness, simply had no expression at all, most of the time.

He stood near the door, and it looked doubtful if he could pass through it without ducking. Yet, when he stepped away from the door, he seemed to shrink in stature, due to the remarkable symmetry of his development. There had to be something around to which his size might be compared before his full Herculean stature was apparent.

His hair was straight, a slightly darker bronze than that of Pat Savage, and his eyes were gold, also, but of a different nature. The bronze man’s orbs were like pools of flake metal, always stirred by some invisible force. They seemed also to possess a weird, compelling power.

The sinews in his neck were like hausers, the thews in the backs of his hands like round files.

“Doc Savage!” Pat exclaimed cheerfully. “You’re smiling! You’re actually becoming human!”

The remarkable-looking bronze man spoke. He had a voice that was arresting, not so much because of the things that were in it, but because of the feeling of things that were left out, things the voice could do if called upon.

“You happened along at an unlucky time, Pat.”

Pat sniffed audibly. “I’ll have you know if it hadn’t been for me, you might never have known some men had raided your office!”

“Wrong,” Doc Savage said quietly.

“You’re not telling me I got hit on the head for nothing?”

Doc Savage walked into the corridor. Despite his size, he seemed remarkably light on his feet. He touched the corridor wall, and an apparently solid section

opened, showing a recess large enough to hold a man.

Pat stepped into the niche and perceived there were obscure peepholes from which could be seen, not only the corridor, but the reception room, and library.

“You weren’t in here when those men came?” she demanded.

“And when you got your clip on the head.”

“But why?” Pat gasped.

Doc escorted her around and into the headquarters reception room.

“Notice the electric sign advertising beer in the sky beyond the window,” he suggested. “Do not stare noticeably at it, however.”

“Oh!” said Pat, understanding. “A balloon! Telescopes! How long has this been going on?”

“For days,” the bronze man replied.

“Who are they? What are they up to?”

“That,” Doc Savage said, “is what we have decided it is time to find out.”

Pat said cheerfully, “You figure something is getting ready to happen?”

“Possibly.”

“Big?”

“That balloon cost a few thousand dollars,” the bronze man reminded. “Whatever is about to happen must be big before any one would spend that much money just to get information on me.”

“Good!” said Pat. “Great! Swell! I like excitement, big excitement.”

Doc said quietly, “You are not going to get involved in this—whatever it is—and possibly get killed. Out you go.”

“I won’t!” Pat snapped. “I won’t go!”

But she did go. She made indignant noises as Doc propelled her out and shut the door and locked it.

There were small lights of appreciation in the bronze man’s flake-gold eyes as he went into the library. Pat was his cousin and she had many of his own qualities, not the least being her love for excitement. It was a rare week that passed without her being asked to be let in on something.

Doc refused as often as he could. Too dangerous. But Pat was hard to discourage.

Doc swung a bookcase away from the wall, disclosing a niche which held a machine.

The machine was the bronze man’s telephonic monitor. Attached to the telephone lines, it recorded all conversations with immense fidelity of tone.

Doc played the record back. It gave him the text of the radiogram sent by Lieutenant Bowen Toy from the destroyer which had met such a mysterious fate—the message directing Doc to go to the apartment of Captain Blackstone Toy in the Parkview Hotel.

Doc played the record back again. He wanted to fix Fuzzy's voice in his memory, so that he would know it if he heard it in the future.

The bronze man's private speed elevator lowered him to the garage in the skyscraper basement. Few persons knew of the garage.

The car he chose was a convertible coupé, discreetly dark, with a wheel base longer than usual. The top was down, the windows up. Glass in the windows was of the type known as bulletproof. The steel boot into which the top recessed came up high enough at the back to decrease the chances of being shot from behind.

The convertible coupé was equipped with a two-way radio, and the bronze man switched it on.

"Renny, Long Tom, Johnny!" Doc called into the microphone.

Doc Savage had five aids, men as remarkable, almost, as himself. The names he had just called belonged to three of the aids.

"Holy cow!" rumbled an answering voice out of the loudspeaker. "Don't you ever sleep, Doc?"

"Anything new, Renny?" Doc asked.

"Nope," said big-voiced "Renny."

"Be with you in a few minutes," Doc told him.

"So we're gonna do something about this at last!" Renny rumbled happily.

Doc drove toward the water front, and passed a newspaper plant from which late editions were being loaded. The bronze man stopped, got a paper and studied the page black with headlines.

NAVY PLANE CARRIER WRECKED!
CRASHES STEAMER!

The wreck of the aircraft carrier had occurred only a short time previously, near Norfolk, Virginia.

In an adjacent column was another expressive headline.

NAVAL EXPERTS BLAME MYSTERY
FORCE FOR FIVE DESTROYER
AND PLANE
CARRIER WRECKS.

Navy officials hinted to-night that some mysterious and unexplained influence caused the five destroyers and the plane carrier to run off their courses to disaster.

That was all of that angle of the story. Evidently navy officials had been afraid about hinting. It was enough of an inference, however, coupled with what was to follow, to set the entire country agog within the next twenty-four hours.

Doc Savage folded the paper slowly, his bronze features expressionless, and drove on.

Renny gave the impression of being a walking pair of fists. His hands were tremendous, each almost half a gallon of bone and gristle with the consistency of flint. He had a long face, and habitually wore the expression of a man going to the funeral of a good friend.

Renny was Colonel John Renwick, who loved two things: trouble and engineering. As an engineer, he was world-famed. As an associate of Doc Savage, he got his excitement.

Renny dropped out of a freight car near the water front. He had a newspaper in his hand and he rustled it in the murk.

“Queer thing about the wrecking of them five navy destroyers,” he said. “I’ve just been reading about it.”

“It is queer,” Doc agreed.

“Queer!” Renny tossed the newspaper aside. “Say! Long Tom and Johnny and me have been watching them guys in that beer-sign balloon for almost a week. How much longer do we have to keep it up?”

Renny had difficulty pitching his tremendous, rumbling voice in a low tone.

Doc said, “We’ll look into it now.”

They advanced through the murk, using care to avoid noise, and shortly came upon two other men crouched in the darkness on the river bank.

“I’ll be superamalgamated!” whispered one of the pair, who was very tall, and thinner than it seemed a man could be and still live.

He was William Harper Littlejohn, eminent archæologist and geologist, and an inveterate user of big words. He was commonly called “Johnny.”

“They’ve got one guy watching the balloon cable winch,” said the second of the two men.

This second man was not an impressive physical specimen. He gave the impression of having grown up some place where it was always dark.

He was Major Thomas J. Roberts, electrical wizard, a man whose appearance of being a physical wreck was deceptive. He had secured the nickname of “Long Tom” somewhere.

“How many in the balloon?” Doc queried.

“Two,” said pale Long Tom.

“And one watching the winch,” added Renny.

“Can you grab them?” Doc asked.

“We can have a swell time trying!” grinned big-fisted Renny.

“Question them,” Doc directed. “Find out what connection their watching me has with the wrecking of the destroyers and the aircraft carrier.”

The darkness then absorbed him, or seemed to, so silently did he depart.

Chapter 5

PERSISTENT PAT

Doc Savage's three aids—Renny, Long Tom and Johnny—looked at each other questioningly after their chief had gone.

“What's he up to?” Long Tom grunted.

“An interrogatory promulgation concerning what might be called an Ethiopian enigma,” said Johnny.

“I'll bet Doc already has this covered from all angles,” said Renny. “He covers things like the dew.”

“Doc,” said big-worded Johnny, “is a compendium of Machiavellian callidity.”

“He's *what*?” asked Long Tom.

“A lad who doesn't overlook any bets,” translated Renny.

Long Tom snorted quietly. “Let's give that balloon our attention.”

They crept forward, and before long could make out details. The balloon cable was of alloy wires wound around a core of two insulated telephone wires. The cable was attached to a winch turned by a gasoline motor. The winch was mounted on a heavy, ancient barge which was moored securely to the end of a dock.

A watchman sat on a box, his back against the winch. He was a blond man who looked as if he needed exercise. He was having difficulty keeping awake. At intervals, he reached up and slapped his own face.

The man was slapping his face when Renny leaped soundlessly from behind and grabbed his arms. Long Tom clamped a hand over the man's mouth. They held the fellow helpless.

“We could double as spooks, eh?” big-fisted Renny chuckled.

Tall, bony Johnny leaned close to the prisoner. He used small words.

“What's the idea of this balloon spying business?” he asked.

The man gritted, “You can kindly go——”

He did not finish, because Renny took the fellow's whole face in one huge hand. It was almost as if the big-fisted engineer had palmed an apple.

“If I squeezed, I think it might pop like a melon,” Renny rumbled, referring to the head.

“Let's get that balloon down first,” suggested Long Tom.

Doc Savage never used violence where it could possibly be avoided. This was a characteristic of the bronze man. His five aids, however, tended to the other extreme. They were not loath to use rough stuff occasionally.

They knocked their prisoner senseless to save the bother of tying him up.

They examined the balloon winch. There was no hand crank. They would have to drag it down with the gasoline motor, which would mean noise.

“No other way, though,” said Renny, “unless we can talk Long Tom into climbing the cable after them.”

“Don’t be silly!” sniffed the pallid electrical wizard. “We should have Monk for that.”

They started the motor, and the winch drum revolved, winding the balloon down.

Doc Savage’s three assistants kept a close watch. They held flashlights and peculiar machine pistols which Doc Savage himself had perfected, guns firing unconsciousness-producing “mercy” bullets at a tremendous speed.

The balloon seemed to get larger as it came down. It was like a fat wiener, not too well stuffed, with a basket hanging underneath. Its electric beer sign got brighter and brighter.

“This is as simple as catching catfish!” Renny grinned.

Then the wire cable came hissing down upon them, giving them a belaboring, and the winch engine raced madly.

The balloon bounded away into the night sky!

There was noise and confusion until Johnny, hopping about like a long-legged porch spider, got the winch engine shut off.

“Holy cow!” boomed Renny. “They unfastened the cable!”

Their prisoner, who had regained his senses during the excitement, snarled, “You guys ain’t the Slippery Slims you thotcha was!”

Renny promptly reached down, hit him, and the prisoner went to sleep again.

“Come on!” yelled Johnny, for once using small words. “We’ve got to keep track of that balloon! Get a plane! Get an airplane!”

The balloon was drifting down the river, toward the bay and, beyond, the open sea. But there was not enough wind to carry it very fast.

Doc Savage’s three aids raced for their car, which was hidden in a near-by alley. Pallid Long Tom stopped, grabbed bony Johnny, and gave him a shove back toward the wharf.

“You’re elected to stay and watch the prisoner!”

Johnny yelled, “But it was me that thought of using a plane——”

“A swell idea!” barked Long Tom. “And, as your reward for thinking of it, you stay where it is safe and watch that prisoner.”

Bony Johnny made disgusted noises, and the other two ran off in the darkness. Johnny liked excitement too well to fancy the prosaic job of guarding a senseless captive.

Long Tom, when he was out of hearing, chuckled, "We horsed that job off on him slick!"

Which would have thrown Johnny into a spasm, had he heard it.

Their car was one of Doc Savage's special machines. Renny switched the radio on. It was an all-wave set, and happened to be tuned on a local broadcast.

An extremely late dance program had been interrupted, evidently, and a news bulletin was being read.

"A late national radio press flash," said the announcer. "The United States battleship *Oglethorpe* less than fifteen minutes ago struck a rock on the Pacific Coast near San Francisco and is sinking. Hope of saving the *Oglethorpe* has been abandoned. Many lives are believed to have been lost."

Renny and Long Tom were grimly silent after that.

"Holy cow!" Renny muttered suddenly. "That's the third major naval disaster tonight!"

He moved the radio receiver knobs, shifting it from the broadcast band to the short-wave one, on which Doc Savage did his radio transmitting and receiving.

Long Tom was leaning forward, giving the tuning his close attention, when a bark from deep-voiced Renny startled him.

"Holy cow!" Renny rumbled. "Look! What'n blazes is happenin' to our balloon?"

The entire street suddenly became white with light.

Both craned their necks out of the car. The machine promptly hopped the curb, grazed a telephone pole, and upset a stack of ash cans.

"Watch where you're goin'!" Long Tom yelled.

Renny got the car back into the street, stopped, and they both looked out again.

"Who the heck can *that* be?" Long Tom exploded.

That was an airplane, a little streamlined trick which looked cute from that distance. From the manner in which it was swooping back and forth in the heavens, it could out-travel many a professional racing job.

The pretty little plane was visible because it was bathed in the glow from a parachute flare. The plane must have dropped the flare directly above the balloon.

Little whiskers of fire ran out from the nose of the plane.

"Machine gun!" Long Tom grunted.

“Riddling our balloon!” Renny boomed.

“Well, it’ll make it come down quicker!”

The balloon, it appeared, was sinking. The basket swinging beneath the bag was in shadow, so it was impossible to tell what the occupants were doing.

Renny and Long Tom drove recklessly down the waterfront streets, keeping under the bag. It became evident that the balloon was going to fall in the bay, just off Battery Park, on the lower-most end of Manhattan Island.

“We gotta find a boat and get out there when they come down!” thundered Renny.

They failed to find a boat, excepting a dory, which was padlocked and chained, and anyway, was minus oars.

“We’ll swim!” Renny decided.

All of Doc Savage’s aids were excellent swimmers.

“We don’t want to be under the bag when it hits the water!” warned Long Tom.

They might have saved their apprehensions, however, for the basket touched slowly, and the rest of the bag remained aloft for some time.

Renny and Long Tom swam to the bag, impulsively grasped the dangling lines, and hauled themselves up. They looked, Renny swinging the beam of a flashlight, and both became very silent. They climbed into the basket, peered around, then jumped out and swam clear as the bag collapsed.

“If they had been in there, they’d probably have shot us, anyway,” Renny said gloomily, treading water.

“But how’d they get out?” Long Tom snapped. “Where’d they go?”

“Only one explanation,” Renny said. “Parachutes!”

“Parachutes!” Long Tom gritted. “We should’ve kept a spotlight on the balloon!”

The little plane circled rapidly overhead, went off down the river, and approached against the wind. It was equipped with floats, and the pilot made a skillful landing.

Renny and Long Tom trod water and watched the plane approach. At the first sign of danger, they intended to duck beneath the surface.

Pat Savage shoved her attractive head out of the plane’s cabin when the craft was closer and greeted, “Do you boys often go swimming after midnight with all your clothes on?”

“Phooey to you!” said Long Tom.

Pat brought her plane alongside, and they climbed aboard.

“Where’d they go?” Renny wanted to know. “The two in the balloon, I mean.”

“Mystery to me,” said Pat.

“*Hm-m-m*.” Renny wrung water out of his coat skirts. “Where’d you get this plane?”

“Built it to enter races next summer,” said Pat.

Long Tom snapped suddenly, “Look here, Pat! Doc wouldn’t like to have you mixing in this! If Doc were here, he would tell you to clear out.”

“And telling,” snapped Pat, “is all the good it would do!”

“Look!” Renny grunted suddenly and pointed. “What’s them things?”

Two collapsed masses of silk were floating in the water, buoyed up by patches of air imprisoned under the cloth. Parachutes!

“That explains how they got out of the balloon,” said Renny disgustedly. “Left it before you dropped those flares!”

They gathered the parachutes aboard, aware they might serve as clues. Then Pat taxied her plane up the river.

“Kinda head for that pier to starboard,” Long Tom said. “We left Johnny there, guarding a prisoner.”

They alighted on the barge and looked about and called. Then they became alarmed. Excited dashing about followed for some time.

At last they found Johnny’s somewhat shapeless hat lying in a dark spot. Long Tom picked it up. He dropped it almost instantly, and held his hands out in front of him.

“Blood!” he said hoarsely. “On the hat!”

Chapter 6

THE TRAP

Gaunt, incredibly bony Johnny had blood on his hand, too. He was acutely conscious of this, the first thing as he awakened. He was also in a car. He opened his eyes, saw blackness, and something hurt his eyeballs. Blindfolded, of course! Somebody had banged him over the head on the pier, he recalled.

“An unpropitious situation,” Johnny said vaguely.

“Yep!” said a harsh voice. “He must be the one called Johnny. The one who uses big words.”

A man groaned. Johnny reflected that this one who groaned sounded about as he himself felt.

“How you comin’, pal?” a voice asked the other sufferer.

“I guess I’ll live,” mumbled the man who had groaned. “Say, did you two guys get out of the balloon with parachutes, then come back and get me?”

“That’s the idea,” said the voice. “We popped your bony pal, here, on his scholarly head.”

“Where we goin’ now?”

“To get in touch with Fuzzy,” the other replied. “He should be told that Doc Savage wasn’t as dumb as we figured. Fuzzy can tell the chief, and we’ll get our orders.”

Bony Johnny lay perfectly still. He didn’t want them knocking him senseless again. He wanted to stay awake and hear all he could. Maybe he could overhear enough information to explain the mystery of what was happening to the United States navy ships.

They rode for a long time. Johnny’s blindfold was removed. He could see suburban streets.

“Just yell,” he was told, “and you’ll learn what a dead man feels like.”

Johnny didn’t yell.

They drove into a neat driveway edged by green shrubbery and leading to a trim bungalow with green shutters and a red tile roof. The shutters were closed. A radio played behind them. The car drove into an attached garage, and Johnny was led up into the house.

A snaky-looking man with a growth of dark hair on his person met them.

“This is Johnny, one of Doc Savage’s men,” said one of Johnny’s captors. “We thought we’d bring him to you, Fuzzy.”

The snaky, hairy man shut off the radio, then yelled at the top of his voice, "What in the hell is this you're telling me?"

The story of what had happened came out in hurried sentences. Serpentine and hirsute Fuzzy heard it through in the manner of a man being told he has inadvertently exposed himself to a contagious disease.

When the recital was ended, Fuzzy walked toward the door.

"I'm gonna contact the chief and find out what to do about this," he said.

Fuzzy was gone perhaps ten minutes, and came back looking more worried than when he had left.

"The chief sure warmed up!" he grunted.

Fuzzy turned toward a lean fellow who wore a coal-black hat with the brim turned down all around.

"Shade, you get the bread truck ready to roll," he instructed. "We're taking this guy with us so as to bait the bronze guy."

"Right you are, Fuzzy," said "Shade," and left the room.

A few minutes later, the others came from the house, Johnny with them, and got into the truck. Shade drove. The others rode in the rear, and talked.

"What's on the schedule?" a man asked.

"Doc Savage, the chief figures, must have learned what was in that radiogram sent by Lieutenant Bowen Toy," said Fuzzy. "The message said for Savage to go to the Parkview Hotel and look inside a picture of Bowen for something. Well, the bronze guy ain't had a chance to be there yet, because he's checking at the place where the ships crashed."

"So what?"

"Doc Savage will probably follow the instructions when he's finished his examination, and when he does, that'll be the last thing he'll ever do!"

Shade, driving, was given an address. It was a big house, alone in three or four acres of landscaping. The house was of very dark red brick, with very white window frames and a tiny white porch.

A lean man with more than his share of nose met them at the door. He wore evening clothes, but looked much too wide awake. He grinned when he saw who they were, opened the door wide and dropped in the crook of one arm a shotgun which he had held behind himself, out of sight.

"Where's Lieber Von Zidney?" asked Fuzzy.

"In the library," said the man who had let them in.

The library had been filled with books in neat red and green and blue matched sets. The furniture was mission, the style popular when this type of house was the kind of house to build in the suburbs.

One man was in the library, seated in a wooden mission chair. He had a bright blanket around long, big legs. His tall, large body was encased in a Chinese robe on which a dragon was about to eat a man on a horse.

“Ach!” he exploded irritably. “What is it now? Is it no privacy at all that I get?”

“Things are kinda going wrong, Von Zidney,” Fuzzy said.

Von Zidney sat up straight and popped his eyes a little. His eyes were baby blue.

“Is it bad for me?” he demanded sharply.

His hair was reddish, cropped to the skin around the sides. His mouth was very big and filled with small teeth.

Fuzzy grunted, “We need India Allison, your secretary.”

“Eh?” snapped Von Zidney. “I do not understand.”

“India Allison,” said Fuzzy, “is an expert penwoman. We want her to do some forging. Get her.”

Von Zidney scowled, then got erect. He was taller by a foot than the tallest man in the room. He banged on a door.

“India!” he called. “Our friend Fuzzy and his men are here!”

“What do they want?” a sleepy feminine voice asked.

“Nothing nice, you may be sure,” Von Zidney said, in a dry voice.

The door opened, and a young woman came in.

Johnny, who had been brought inside the house, was not an impressionable gentleman where femininity was concerned. But Johnny now emitted a gasp of admiration worthy of the most susceptible youth.

The young woman was a knock-out! She had Pat Savage’s figure, almost, except that she tended a little more to nicely rounded curves, whereas Pat was sinewy. She had soft, brown hair and a tremendous wealth of it. She had the most gorgeous eyes Johnny had ever seen. The bony geologist swallowed twice and felt younger than he had in years.

“What do you want?” “India” Allison asked softly.

Fuzzy did not look at the young woman. None of his men looked at her. Johnny, staring for all he was worth, noted this, and was puzzled.

Fuzzy drew a letter from a pocket and said, “This is a letter written by Bowen Toy to his brother Blackstone. We stole it. It is a sample of Bowen’s handwriting.”

Fuzzy drew from another pocket a sheet of peculiarly heavy, porous note paper,

and grunted, "You'll use this to write a note on, duplicating Bowen Toy's handwriting."

"What shall I write?" asked India Allison.

Fuzzy said, still not looking at her, "Write for any one who reads the note to go to Captain Blackstone Toy for information about any one who might have been an enemy of Lieutenant Bowen Toy. Then write that the note must be burned immediately. Underline that part about the note being burned."

India Allison took the papers, murmured, "I must be alone to do a good job of copying the handwriting," and went out.

Johnny, looking after India Allison, reflected that she had the sweetest eyes he had ever seen, and that hidden deep in them was the light of an incredible fear.

India Allison, who looked like Michelangelo's idea of an angel, was scared stiff of something.

India Allison locked the door through which she had passed. She stood there a moment. She was trembling, and she became very white.

She went to a writing desk, turned the light on and examined the note paper closely.

"The old trick for eliminating a spy who was about to be caught!" she gasped.

She glanced about, as if fearful of being observed. Then she pulled the writing-desk light down, so that it bathed only a small area.

Outside, Fuzzy called, "Hey! We haven't a lot of time!"

The girl made no answer, and Fuzzy paced impatiently.

At last, the young woman came out and extended the bit of thick, porous paper, which now bore writing, and the letter with the sample handwriting.

"The chief won't forget this," Fuzzy said, taking them.

The girl said nothing. Fear was in the back of her soft eyes.

They left India Allison and Lieber Von Zidney in the big brick house and drove toward the Parkview Hotel.

The Parkview was an imposing block of masonry in the Bay View section of Brooklyn. The mouth of New York Bay and its parade of ships could be viewed from one side and two ends of the hotel. It was in an apartment district. As a hotel, the Parkview flourished by renting apartments to naval officers and their families, because it was not far from the Brooklyn Navy Yard.

Fuzzy seemed to know what he was doing. He went to an apartment on the fourth floor, the name plate on the door of which read:

Captain Blackstone Toy, U. S. N.

Fuzzy used what was evidently a skeleton key and let himself into a sitting room which held, in addition to the usual hotel furniture, some fittings purchased by the occupant. The customary French prints were missing from the walls, and in their place hung personal pictures.

Working with speed, Fuzzy lifted down a picture of Lieutenant Bowen Toy. He pulled brads out of the back, and took out the cardboard backing of the picture, disclosing three sheets of typewritten paper. He read these sketchily.

“Hell’s bells!” he gulped. “It’s lucky we got these before Doc Savage put his hands on them!”

Fuzzy removed from a pocket the sheet of thick, porous note paper on which the girl had written. He placed this where the sheets of typewritten paper had been.

He replaced the cardboard picture backing. He hung the picture back on the wall.

“That,” he said grimly, “will fix Doc Savage.”

“But I thought we were gonna set a trap to croak the bronze guy?” a man asked.

“We have,” Fuzzy told him.

“Huh?”

Fuzzy pointed at the picture.

“The writing on that note says to burn it.” He pointed to a fireplace across the room. “There’s a convenient place to burn it.”

As an afterthought, he went to the fireplace. It was a gas log. He turned it on, touched a match to it, and adjusted the flame so that it was not too high.

“That makes it even simpler,” he said.

“I don’t get it,” said the man. “I don’t see any death trap.”

Fuzzy chuckled.

“That piece of porous note paper is impregnated with a chemical which, when it is burned, releases a gas that will kill a man instantly,” he said. “The minute Doc Savage burns that paper, he will die.”

They went down to the street. It was almost dawn. Shade, black hat brim bent down over his eyes, waited behind the bakery truck wheel.

He extended a newspaper.

“Newsboy came past minute ago,” he said. “I got a paper off him. Thought you might be interested.”

Fuzzy took the journal. Headlines were large.

FOURTH NAVAL DISASTER OF
NIGHT. NAVY SUPPLY SHIP
CRASHES IN PANAMA CANAL

Hint of mysterious force driving vessel
into locks rumored as navy has
fourth disaster of night.

“Four!” Fuzzy laughed heartily. “If they only knew what is coming!”
They got into the truck.

A man glanced anxiously at the apartment house and asked, “Are we gonna hang around and see if the trap gets Doc Savage?”

“Hang around and have the bronze guy spot us!” snorted Fuzzy. “Don’t be naïve!”

He pronounced it “*navy*,” then laughed over his own pun. They drove away.

A man asked, “What about this fellow Johnny?”

“We’ll see how bulletproof he is, as soon as Doc Savage is done for,” Fuzzy said, calmly.

Chapter 7

INDIA ALLISON

When Doc Savage approached the Parkview Hotel, morning sun had flushed the sky. A newsboy stood in front of the place, howling headlines.

The “newsboy” was perhaps fifty years of age. He was plump, had gray hair and a face that did not look very pinched by care. His clothes were shabby, and he wore glasses with enormous shell rims.

Doc Savage bought a paper. He was recognized.

“You’re Doc Savage!” the newspaper vender exploded excitedly. “Say, what’s happening to all these battleships?”

“Imagine a good many people would like to know that,” Doc told him, and went into the hotel.

A hallway directory gave him the number of Captain Blackstone Toy’s apartment. A thin lock-picking probe let him into the apartment. He wore gloves.

Doc made a search of the place, found no one.

From inside his clothing came a tiny atomizer device with which he blew fine spray over the doorknob. This promptly became crusted with a brownish deposit.

Doc went to the picture of Lieutenant Bowen Toy. He sent a spray from the tiny atomizer over parts of the picture. The brown deposit appeared again, not in a smooth film, but in scattered patches.

The brown deposit was simply oily film left by human hands, as acted upon by chemical reagents from the atomizer. An infinitesimal oily deposit is left by the touch of almost any human hand.

The nature and consistency of the film naturally changes with time. The oil vaporizes, dries up. The less the oily film had vaporized, the more intense the brown deposit. Thus, Doc could judge accurately how long since hands had touched an object.

In the present case, he decided that men had been in the apartment not more than half an hour earlier, and had touched the picture. Close examination showed that the picture had been taken down from the wall. There was no dust on it, and there was never an ordinary housekeeper who dusted *behind* pictures regularly.

Doc did not use his bare fingers to remove the brads holding the cardboard backing of the picture. Brads can be poisoned. He used tiny pliers, also taken from inside his clothing.

He got the piece of porous note paper, and read it by the leaping flames of the

gas fire in the fireplace.

To whom it may concern:

In case of this note being read, something will probably have happened. My brother, Captain Blackstone Toy, will be able to give valuable information on the matter. *Please burn this note and examine the ashes.*

LIEUT. BOWEN TOY.

Doc Savage gave close attention to the last sentence, the one about burning the note and examining the ashes. His glance went to the fireplace, to the flames leaping merrily within.

Doc strode over and touched a corner of the note to the flames. The thing burned rapidly. It gave off much smoke, which curled up around Doc's face.

The man of bronze fell to the floor and lay utterly still.

An electric clock in the room continued its noise of tiny machinery running. The gas log in the fireplace hissed and its flames sounded windy.

The window came up.

"Oh!" choked a voice back of the window. "Oh!"

The owner of the voice came in. It was India Allison. More than ever horror was in her eyes as she flung across the floor and dropped beside Doc Savage.

"Why did it work?" she gasped. "What made it overcome you? I thought it was harmless paper?"

She reached for Doc Savage, as if to shake him.

Doc Savage, moving his metallic hands only a short distance, caught her wrists.

India Allison choked. "What—what did——"

"It *was* harmless paper," Doc Savage said quietly. "You substituted it for their paper impregnated with poison chemicals."

"You *knew* that!" she gasped. "How?"

Doc appeared not to hear her query, and put one of his own.

"Why are you here?" he asked.

"Listen!" she said rapidly. "When I heard they were afraid of you, I determined to get to you the first chance I could and ask you for help!"

Doc got to his feet. The young woman got up, also, and gripped one of his arms tightly with both her hands.

"They brought that piece of note paper to me, and I knew it was a death

instrument,” she said. “I decided they were going to trap you. They would use such a clever murder method only on some one such as you. So I exchanged a harmless piece of paper for the other one. Then I followed them here.”

She crowded closer to the bronze man.

“I climbed the fire escape, intending to wait until you came,” she continued. “You were here, and just as I came, I saw you burn the paper.”

Doc Savage walked to the window, not because he wanted to see the window, but because he wanted to get away from the disturbing presence of the young woman.

There was a fire escape outside the window. The street below was beginning to fill with traffic.

“What is your story?” he asked.

Exquisitely beautiful India Allison brought her soft presence close again and took hold of his arm.

“I’m scared!” she said. “We are menaced by something you can’t *see*!”

Doc Savage looked at the hand on his arm, and reflected that he had never seen a more perfectly shaped feminine extremity.

“Five weeks ago, it started,” the girl said. “First it was only—boxes and things falling off shelves. Once, a piano upset. Chairs turned over.”

She gave the most violent shudder which Doc Savage had ever seen a young woman give, holding onto his arm tightly as she did so.

“Then Lieber Von Zidney was seized and—and hurled against a wall and badly bruised by something—something he could not see!”

“It sounds rather ghostly,” Doc offered.

“You don’t believe me!” she said wearily. “I didn’t expect you to! It’s too fantastic to think there can be a force—something invisible—which can seize persons and hurl them about. Or which can grab one’s car and force it off the road, which is what happened to me at one time.”

“The navy ships which met disaster last night,” Doc reminded her. “There was talk of some mysterious force, according to the newspapers.”

The girl gathered herself. “Two weeks ago, a man with a sawed-off shotgun appeared. He said he was there to protect us against the mysterious attacks, and that we were to stay inside and inform no one of what was happening. The man refused to say who he was, why he was there, or what he was doing. He said he was there to guard us against what he called—a horrible thing.”

“I see.” Doc noted the exquisite texture of the skin of the slender hand on his

arm.

"I am Von Zidney's ghost writer," said the girl. "Von Zidney does technical articles for American journals on foreign trade. He is an importer of optical instruments. He is not good with English, and I speak his native language fluently, and can turn his work into English. I am also his secretary."

"Continue, please." Doc was aware of some of the young woman's exquisite curves, and of the warm grip she was keeping on his arm.

"We had never seen the man who walked in before," said the girl. "He simply took up his job of guarding us."

"Why?" Doc asked.

"I don't know." The young woman squeezed Doc's arm. "And I don't know why the mysterious attacks were aimed at us in the first place."

Doc Savage reached out and almost patted the young woman's small, marvelously built hand, almost took it in his own bronze fingers. Then some solidity of thought returned, and he drew in a breath and stepped away, so that the shapely hand slipped from his sleeve.

"Know anything else?" he asked, his voice vaguely stirred.

"No." The young woman gave the bronze man a glance which was nothing if not disturbing.

"Does Lieber Von Zidney know what it is all about?" Doc persisted.

"Not that he had told me," India Allison said, and looked as if she might get disturbingly close again.

"Let's talk to him!" Doc said hastily, and moved toward the door.

The newsboy selling the newspapers with the story of the five mysterious naval disasters of the night was doing a big business in front of the Parkview. If he saw Doc Savage, he gave no sign, and yet he could have hardly helped seeing the bronze man and his enchanting feminine companion enter the car at the curb.

Doc Savage stopped his convertible coupé just before it came in sight of the big, blocky house of Lieber Von Zidney. He looked at a near-by clump by bushes.

"Monk!" he called.

The bushes stirred, and India Allison—she had hold of Doc's arm again—emitted a soft, startled sound which would have been an outcry had Doc not hastily placed a hand over her soft lips.

A man had come out of the brush. He looked like exactly the kind of man one should expect to come out of brush. He would weigh in excess of two hundred and fifty pounds. His arms were perceptibly longer than his legs.

He had a titanic chest and no hips to speak of, and his mouth was big beyond all

sense; his eyes were small and almost lost in pits of gristle, and he was covered with coarse, reddish hairs which looked as if they might be clipped off, straightened out and used by a carpenter for finishing nails.

Doc Savage said, "This is one of my five aids, the world-renowned chemist, Lieutenant Colonel Andrew Blodgett Mayfair."

Lieutenant Colonel Andrew Blodgett Mayfair gave the pretty young lady a big grin with a face that was so homely it was, almost unbelievably, pleasant.

"Them that ain't afraid to, calls me Monk, miss," he said, in a very small voice which sounded as if it belonged to a juvenile.

"I'm not afraid of you," smiled India Allison, and extended a hand.

"Monk" made his grin even bigger. Monk was something of a connoisseur where feminine pulchritude was concerned, and he obviously rated this young woman high.

Doc asked, "Monk, has anything happened?"

"Nope," Monk said, in his small voice. "Lieber Von Zidney and that other guy with the shotgun are still around. Von Zidney is in the house. The other guy is mowing the lawn."

"The man with the shotgun is one of the gang, left there to watch us," said the girl. "I managed to give him the slip." Then India Allison gave Monk a sweetly angelic smile, and put her hand lightly on Doc Savage's sleeve.

"Now I see how you knew about my switching a harmless piece of paper for the deadly one!" she said. "But how did you happen to be watching?"

Monk glanced at Doc. "All right to tell her?"

"No harm," Doc said.

"We've known Doc was being watched several days," Monk explained. "Doc had three men watching the balloon. The other two of us were posted downstairs. The last two was myself and a guy who don't count, named Ham. Anyway, we trailed that guy Fuzzy. We've been on his trail all the time."

"Oh!" said India Allison admiringly.

Doc said, "We will talk to Von Zidney."

"But what about the guard?" the girl asked anxiously.

"We can sort of collaborate on him," Monk suggested.

They advanced—and were almost immediately passed by a newsboy. He was a gray-haired newsboy, well fed, with an unlined face.

"Paper?" he called. "Read all about the mysterious naval disasters."

Doc Savage stood looking after the departing newsboy.

“What’s wrong?” Monk asked.

“That newsboy was in front of the Parkview Hotel!” Doc said.

The newsboy walked around a corner out of sight.

“He’s kinda old to be hawking newspapers!” Monk grunted. “I’ll go round him up.”

Monk went around the corner where the elderly newsboy had vanished, and was out of sight three or four minutes. He came back with empty hands and a puzzled look.

“Gone!” Monk grunted. “Funny, huh?”

Monk now whistled softly. There was a stir in the bushes near by, and an animal of remarkable appearance came out of the shrubbery and across the sidewalk. It had elephantine ears, legs of great length, and a snout built for inquiry into remote places. A pig.

“Habeas Corpus—my pal,” Monk explained, indicating the pig.

Doc said, “We had better see Von Zidney without delay. First, we will have to take care of the guard.”

The guard had a straw hat pulled over his long nose, and had donned overalls and canvas sneakers, together with the look which a man who doesn’t like work wears when he has to work. He was pushing a lawn mower to which was attached a basket to catch the grass.

The basket held the man’s sawed-off shotgun, where he could fall upon it without delay.

The man stopped pushing his mowing machine when Monk appeared from the direction of the street. Monk carried his own coat rolled under his arm.

“Gotta de old clothes to sell, meester?” asked Monk, almost unintelligibly.

“Get the hell offin this place!” yelled the grass mower.

Monk, wearing a big idiotic grin at which he was particularly adept, ambled closer.

“De Englees me no savvy mucha,” he said. “She no spik wit’ me so good neither. Me, I am buying with ol’ clothes you got? Savvy? Me ol’ clothes feller. Me buy—”

But by this time Doc Savage had come out of the lawn shrubbery with the silence of a ghost and had put his trained, corded bronze hands upon the man at the mowing machine.

The man never made a sound loud enough to frighten birds out of the near-by bushes before he became senseless from a peculiar pressure which Doc Savage

exerted on his spinal nerve centers.

“That,” Monk told India Allison, “is what me and Doc call collaboration.”

“I think you’re wonderful!” the young woman murmured, and Monk beamed like a cat that had discovered cream in his whiskers.

“Stay here,” Doc said, “and watch the prisoner.”

“Sure,” Monk agreed, grinning at India Allison.

Doc walked toward the house. India Allison stayed behind.

Monk shook the prisoner, got no response, and thus assured that the fellow was senseless, gave his attention to the young woman.

India Allison was looking Monk over, apparently with approval. She smiled radiantly.

“You’re terribly strong, aren’t you?” she asked.

They were not making modest men the day Monk was created.

“Sure, I’m strong,” he grinned. “Did you ever see these circus strong men take horseshoes and straighten them out?”

“Oh!” gasped India Allison. “Can you do that?”

“I invented the trick,” Monk said.

India Allison pointed at the house. “Look! Isn’t that something moving?”

Monk looked. “I don’t see——”

He did not finish, for the simple reason that a good slice of the earth seemed to make sudden contact with the back of his head.

The intense blackness of unconsciousness enveloped him as he fell, and he was trying, trying to call out for Doc Savage, and failing. He wanted to tell Doc never to trust any woman, that this young female, with her sweet face and her nice way of looking so flatteringly at a man, had hit him over the head.

He did not feel the shock as he hit the lawn.

Doc Savage reached the house, listened, and heard nothing to indicate a human presence. He went into the big ugliness of the house and walked in gloomy silence, looking for some sign of life, and determining before long that there was none.

He used his atomizer. Brown deposit was brought out darkly by the reagent on a side door, indicating the presence of a hand not more than five minutes previously. Doc Savage passed through the door and studied the ground.

Doc Savage did unusual things and was obviously a unique personage, but in truth he was much more remarkable an individual than any one suspected. His senses, his faculties, were developed to an almost superhuman degree, thanks to a

full two hours of exercises which he had taken each day since childhood.

Doc had learned trailing and tracking from some of the world's masters, and it was not difficult for him to see that one man had come to the side door of the house, and two had gone away. Doc followed the trail of the two. A bent blade of grass, one among hundreds, disturbed dust on the leaves of bushes, dew drops splattered and smeared, showed him the way.

The two men had gotten into a car on a side street. A fresh drop or two of oil from the car was on the paving.

Near by, in a clump of bushes, Doc found hidden a lump of newspapers, all very late editions.

They were, Doc recalled, the same editions which the elderly "newsboy" had been selling—the "newsboy" who had appeared at the Parkview, then here.

Doc walked toward where he had left Monk.

Five minutes later, he was completing a search which convinced him Monk and the girl, India Allison, were gone. He had found the spot where Monk had fallen when struck down; Monk's apish frame had mashed down the grass perceptibly.

Doc went to his car and switched on the radio, adjusting the wave band to the short wave which he and his men used for intercommunication.

"Ham!" he called into the transmitter microphone.

"Ham," was Brigadier General Theodore Marley Brooks, the remaining member of Doc Savage's group of five aids. Ham was also the pride of Harvard law school alumni, and was frequently nominated by magazines of fashion as the best-dressed man in the United States.

"Ham!" Doc called, a rap of imperativeness in his trained voice.

Ham had been assigned the task of keeping track of Fuzzy and his gang. Doc had directed Ham to keep in touch by radio at every opportunity.

"Ham!" Doc called again.

There was no response, nothing to show how Ham was making out with his job of shadowing snaky, hairy Fuzzy and Shade and the rest of the gang which had gaunt Johnny a prisoner.

Chapter 8

THE DEATH PATROL

Long, bony, big-worded Johnny was seeking to extract some vague bit of information from his captors.

“This dilemma presents a labyrinthine physiognomy,” he murmured. “Truly a cosmorama infinitely——”

“Whew!” muttered Shade, from the driver’s compartment. “Have him speak English!”

“Shut up!” directed Fuzzy. “We’ll soon be home.”

Shortly after this, Shade drove the bread truck up the neat driveway edged by green shrubbery to the trim bungalow with the verdant shutters and tile roof the color of blood. No one got out until the car was in the attached garage.

They all unloaded. It was a bit gloomy in the garage.

Fuzzy selected a man with a finger and directed, “Useless, you go out and kinda gander around the place, just in case. I ain’t got no reason to think anything is wrong, but it never hurts to be careful—as the rooster said after he flew into the thorn tree.”

The designated man went out.

Fuzzy led the others inside. He was in an expansive good humor.

“Doc Savage will find that note and burn it,” he said. “That’ll be his end!”

“I’d watch that dame, India Allison, if I were you,” a man said.

“She’s doing what she’s told,” said Fuzzy. “Don’t worry about her.” Fuzzy then directed a man to make some coffee in the kitchen, after which he decided he’d get a late newspaper. He walked out to the street.

The newspaper boy who was fifty years old was still there, and Fuzzy bought a paper and made some comments as he read it.

“The whole dang navy is what a prissy guy would call ‘in a dither,’” he said. “Boy—are they balled up and wondering what’s coming next!”

In the house, Fuzzy laughed aloud, then stopped and looked suddenly sober.

“Wonder what they’ll say when Captain Blackstone Toy’s dawn patrol of naval airplanes is destroyed this morning?”

He seemed about to elaborate on this, but there was a shout from outside. The man designated as “Useless,” who had been sent to look the grounds over, came slamming back inside.

“Shade!” he bawled. “Shade! Something’s got Shade!”

The man who had driven the truck was in the room. He looked bewildered.

“If anything’s got me, it’s the first time I knew of it!” he snapped.

Useless stabbed an arm at him. “This guy ain’t Shade! I found Shade stuck with a sword cane that was lying beside ’im, and there was dope of some kind on the sword cane’s point! The sword cane only stuck ’im in the arm, but it made ’im senseless!”

For a matter of ten seconds or so, there was comparative silence.

Somebody became choked and gave a loud cough. It was as if he had fired a starting gun.

Shade—the fake one—whipped for the nearest window. Some one skidded a chair in his path. He went down, rolled as he fell, hands tearing at his coat.

He brought from an armpit a gun like a huge automatic pistol with a drum magazine. Some one hit him with another chair. He yelled loudly and his black hat with the yanked-down brim was knocked off. He lost his queer gun.

Johnny looked at the embattled fake Shade and recognized him.

“Ham!” Johnny howled. “I’ll be superamalgamated! Ham!”

Johnny promptly became a bundle of flailing arms and legs. Two men had kept always close to him, but these had their attention distracted at the moment. Johnny knocked them both down.

Fuzzy began jumping up and down like a man having a fit.

“Ham is one of Doc Savage’s men!” he squawled. “Ham put Shade out with a sword cane he carried and took Shade’s place and none of us noticed it!”

Johnny kicked Fuzzy in the stomach. A gun went off. Ham was striking the faces of two men and trying to kick a third in the midriff.

Another gun went off. Chairs were flying. A table came flying across the room and Johnny dodged it.

Fuzzy got his breath and squawked, “Get ’em! Kill ’em! If they get away, the boss’ll skin us alive!”

The uproar grew louder, the action more dizzy. Men were all over the floor. Other men came running in.

Johnny and Ham, outnumbered, were seized and held helpless.

Fuzzy and his men did nothing but pant for a few moments.

“Talk about—a merry-go-round!” one gulped. “These two birds are the ponies’ necks!”

“You oughta be thankful—they wasn’t Doc Savage himself!” another puffed.

Ham—erstwhile Shade—said loudly and impressively, “You men are trapped! Throw your weapons down, give yourselves up and it will go easier with you!”

“Kick *his* face in!” Fuzzy directed. “He’s bluffing!”

Ham was soundly drubbed while they held him. Ham had a high forehead, piercing eyes, and a large orator’s mouth. The piercing eyes were blacked and the orator’s mouth was split in three places.

During this excitement, bony Johnny lay flat on his back, his hands behind him and under him, with two men seated on his chest. He writhed about in a peculiar fashion.

Johnny asked suddenly and loudly, “Did I hear something said about disaster menacing a squadron of planes under the command of Captain Blackstone Toy?”

“Kick his face in!” Fuzzy yelled, pointing at Johnny.

In the midst of the drubbing being given to Johnny, hairy Fuzzy heard something. His serpentine aspect was enhanced, now that he was excited. He made a wild series of hissing noises, and finally got silence.

“Somebody comin’!” he croaked. “This bird Ham outfoxed us and has probably been keeping Doc Savage posted! This must be Doc Savage comin’!”

An automobile moaned up and slid to a stop in the driveway, tires squealing. Fuzzy and his men put their guns and their heads out of windows and examined the car.

The car held the man who had been watchman at Lieber Von Zidney’s residence. Also in the car was Lieber Von Zidney himself, the sweet-looking girl, India Allison, and a prisoner.

The prisoner was apelike Monk.

“Well, I hope to be buried at sea!” Fuzzy gulped. “Monk! Say, we’ve got three of Doc Savage’s men! Not a bad score!”

Then Fuzzy must have thought of something. He made a series of hissing noises in his wild haste to speak.

“This place is dangerous!” he squawled. “This bird Ham has outfoxed us and has probably been keeping Doc Savage posted! Savage may have the place surrounded now! Come on! We’ll blow!”

They charged out, hauling their prisoners, and got into their cars and drove wildly out of the grounds, their guns ready. They were agreeably surprised when nothing happened to deter their flight.

“What’re we gonna do?” a man asked Fuzzy.

“Contact the chief,” Fuzzy growled, “then lie low until Captain Blackstone Toy’s flight of planes is taken care of.”

“But what about Doc Savage?”

“He’ll never catch up with us now!”

Chapter 9

DOOMED FLIGHT

Doc Savage approached the white bungalow with the green shutters unobtrusively in his convertible roadster. The radio transmitter and receiver in the machine was turned on, and Renny's bull-like voice was coming out of the receiver speaker.

"We'll be with you in a minute, Doc," Renny was saying.

Doc parked and waited a bit, eyes roving, then got out and crossed the landscaped grounds. He walked slowly, and there was nothing in his manner to show that he was more than ordinarily alert.

He wore gloves. He came to the door, opened it and went in. His sensitive ears and remarkably trained nostrils had told him there was no one in the house.

The bronze man went over the room rapidly, then went to other rooms.

A car drove up outside and a voice called, "Doc!"

It was Renny's thumping tone, and a moment later, Renny came in behind the ready snout of a supermachine pistol. He was trailed by Long Tom, who looked infinitely more unhealthy by daylight than he had at night.

"Holy cow!" Renny said, looking around. "Who lives here?"

Long Tom grunted, "I thought Monk and Ham would be around!"

Then both of them began glancing over their shoulders.

Doc saw the glances.

"Out with it," he directed.

Renny opened and shut a pair of hands large enough to crack cocoanuts.

"It's—well, we know it's too dangerous to have anybody——"

A voice interrupted from outside, "Where is everybody? Look what I found!"

Pat, golden eyes alight, every slender inch of her alive and vibrant and on the trail of excitement, came in. She saw Doc Savage and stopped.

"Oh!" she said. "The big bronze day of reckoning again!"

Renny jabbed a hand at Pat. "That's it!" he said.

If Doc Savage heard, he gave no sign.

Pat Savage said again, "Look what I found!" and snapped her fingers, as if she were calling a dog.

An animal waddled into view. It was a remarkable animal in appearance. If the missing apish chemist, Monk, had been subjected to a reducing process, and shrunk

to the height of his own knees, he would have looked remarkably like the animal which now waddled into their presence.

“Chemistry!” Long Tom exploded. “Ham’s pet what-is-it!”

“I found Chemistry tied to a bush out where nobody could be expected to find him,” Pat explained.

“Where’s Ham?” big-fisted Renny demanded. “He probably tied his pet to the bush while he played the part of Shade. But where is he now?”

Doc Savage said nothing. He seemed to have lost interest in the conversation, and was moving toward the door. He went to the car and came back shortly with a device which might be mistaken for a small old-fashioned magic lantern.

“Pull the shades,” he requested.

The shades were pulled. It became gloomy in the house. Doc Savage pressed a button on the side of the lanternlike device which he carried. Nothing visible happened.

Doc Savage turned the ultra-violet lantern on the floor. Nothing happened in that room. But in the room where Johnny had lain on the floor and squirmed, writing sprang out in an unearthly fluorescent series of lines.

“That’s the hen tracks Johnny calls handwriting,” Long Tom offered.

It read:

Some danger menacing plane squadron of Captain Blackstone Toy.
Hurry on this. They’ve got both me and Ham.

“Doc!” Renny roared. “Do you know what airport this Captain Blackstone Toy flies from? Have you looked it up?”

“Yes,” Doc said.

“Well, hadn’t we better——”

“We had,” Doc said.

Captain Blackstone Toy was a navy man, and he was assigned to a training school temporarily established near New York City. It was the purpose of the school to train flyers for the highly exacting business of landing on the restricted decks of aircraft carriers, to teach them about catapults, and to give their aërobatics and formation flying a final polish.

The airport was a large civilian one built during the boom days, and now under lease to the navy. It was approached by a fine concrete road.

Doc Savage’s car rolled along the road toward the airport.

Pat said for the fourteenth time, "Now look, Doc, where's your chivalry?"

Doc Savage continued a complete silence.

He stopped the car when the sentry challenged them at the gate.

Pat said, "Doc, your own cousin! You wouldn't deny her a little innocent excitement?"

Doc Savage said, "Renny, keep her out of my sight or some one's health may suffer."

Renny escorted Pat to the rear, looking very gloomy, as he did when he was tickled at something.

Doc Savage talked to the sentry at the gate. It seems to be a rule that military establishments must have a sentry at the gate, although there may not even be a fence around the rest of the place.

Reaching into a hip pocket, Doc produced a black case which held, among other things, a document given him by the U. S. navy as a gesture of appreciation for presenting the United States government with a device which would guide a torpedo to any ship afloat within an area of miles, a contrivance that enabled submarines to launch torpedoes that would hit enemy ships without even being aimed at them. The document would do a great many things besides get Doc past a navy sentry.

Five minutes later, Doc was talking to the commandant, who was in a dressing robe, rubbing his eyes, it still being early in the morning.

"I wish to speak with Captain Blackstone Toy," Doc said.

"He is in the air now with the dawn patrol," the commandant explained.

"Radio Captain Blackstone Toy to return immediately and exercise every possible precaution against danger in any form," Doc directed.

The commandant looked startled, then glanced at the document which Doc had shown the sentry.

"Yes, *sir!*" he said.

He gave the necessary orders.

A sailor came in with a paper. The commanding officer read it.

"Incredible!" he muttered. "Look here, Savage, are you working on this infernal mystery of what is happening to our navy?"

"You mean the matter of five destroyers, the aircraft carrier, and the supply ship?" Doc queried.

"That's not all!" the commander yelled.

"No?"

The commander groaned, "More than ten different accidents, all of an utterly mysterious nature, occurred last night! In each case, there was unbelievable talk

about a mysterious force or something causing the accidents!”

A sailor came to the door and said, “Captain Blackstone Toy’s squad of planes is in sight, sir!”

Modern fighting ships of the United States navy, the breathtakingly speedy little jobs which operate from plane carriers, are probably the equal of any fighting craft in the world. Captain Blackstone Toy’s dawn patrol had six of them. They flew in close formation.

Naval air combat strategists having somewhat abandoned the idea that the fastest fighting planes can be built if only one man is carried, these ships each carried two men, both trained pilots and observers. Each plane was fitted with six machine guns, a rack for bombs, and the latest thing in aerial cameras.

“Nice crates, what?” remarked the commandant of the air base.

The airport was situated near the sea. The water at this point was deep and always in motion, due to a strong tidal current.

Wind direction required that Captain Toy lead his flight in a swing out over the sea to come in properly upon the runways.

They were hardly over the sea when something happened. The foremost plane suddenly put its nose down and headed straight for the sea! The others did likewise!

The pilots, it could be seen, were doing everything they could to resist! The ships began to spin. One actually leveled out for a short distance, but almost immediately went into another fall.

Crash-boat sirens began howling. Doc Savage and his aids managed to spring aboard one of the crash boats. They crouched in the enclosed cockpit, amid first-aid equipment and pumps for removing water from the lungs of drowning aviators, as the boat darted away from the wharf.

Captain Blackstone Toy’s plane had been first to start down. It was first to crash. Yet, with what appeared to be marvelous skill, Captain Toy fought it level just above the surface, so that it hit on the fuselage, glanced, hit again, and turned over.

An instant later, the other planes were down. They hit hard enough to vanish beneath the surface almost at once. Only two remained on top. They promptly burst into flames.

Captain Toy’s ship was one of those that burst into flame. It sank quickly and Captain Toy was carried down, still in the cockpit.

Doc Savage, when the crash boat was near enough, dived after Toy’s sinking plane.

The water was bitterly cold. It was full of tiny whirls and rushing up-and-down currents, for this was a tide rip so vigorous that it was avoided even by yachtsmen sailing this part of the coast.

The moving water tugged at the bronze man, pummeled him. He had to swim violently to reach the sinking plane.

The sinking craft was deep now. The streamlined fuselage offered few handholds. Doc reached the observer's cockpit. It was empty. He hauled himself forward.

The other cockpit was occupied. The slide hatch had jammed in some fashion, and the pit's occupant had been unable to break out. Doc tore at the hatch.

The plane was sinking fast. It was down so deep now that there was darkness all around. The pressure had become terrific. Doc's wrenching got the hatch loose at one corner. The efforts of the man in the cockpit helped.

The flyer was about exhausted, probably more than half drowned. In addition, terror seized him, and he grabbed frantically at Doc Savage, as drowning men, however strong their will power, will.

Doc held him off without much difficulty, the bronze man's developed strength making it unnecessary to resort to the usual expedient of knocking the man senseless.

"You've saved Captain Blackstone Toy!" an ensign yelled as Doc and the other man were hauled aboard a minute later.

"Better get him under a pulmotor," Doc advised. "He took in quite a bit of water."

The crash boat was busy for the next few minutes. All the planes had sunk by now. Some aviators were swimming. One of these drowned before he could be saved. It was necessary to dive for two more.

One man was moaning as they hauled him out of the water.

"Something seemed to grab my plane—to pull it down!" he gasped hysterically.

Half an hour later, Captain Blackstone Toy was able to talk. He addressed his first words to Doc Savage.

"There is no question but that you saved my life!" he said earnestly. "I hope that I shall never be so ungrateful as to forget that, and I hope that my chance shall come to repay you in whatever measure I can."

Pat, in the background, murmured, "A right nice speech, I call that."

Doc Savage asked, "What happened, Toy?"

Captain Blackstone Toy became very still on the cot on which he lay. He bit his

lips doubtfully.

“In the face of being called a liar, I will say that something unseen simply seemed to grab the plane,” he said finally. “I fought the controls. It was no use. I put forth my most Herculean effort just before we struck the water, but although the ship came level, I do not think I could have held it so.”

“What, exactly happened to the plane?” Doc persisted.

“Some *force* seemed to seize it!” said Captain Blackstone Toy.

Another man offered, “It is exactly such statements that the other disaster survivors make!”

There was silence in the hangar where the men were gathered.

“*What’s happening to the navy?*” a man asked hoarsely.

“Whatcha mean?” another grunted.

“*These disasters!*” the man said slowly. “What is wrecking these ships?”

Doc Savage studied Captain Blackstone Toy, then asked, “What do you know about this affair?”

Captain Toy pondered, then said, “Nothing.”

“I’d like to speak to this man alone,” Doc announced.

Chapter 10

ZEPHYR!

There was some hesitation, for Doc wore no insignia to show the navy men why any order he gave should be obeyed. The commandant, however, issued a sharp command, and a moment later, Doc was alone with Captain Blackstone Toy. Even Pat was escorted, indignant, outside.

Captain Toy was watching Doc Savage. He seemed to read something in the bronze man's manner.

"What's wrong?" Captain Toy demanded. After a minute, he added, "I can take it!"

"Your brother," Doc Savage said, "is dead."

Captain Toy wet his lips. "I knew it. I got the news last night."

"Before he died, he sent a message to me, asking to get something from behind his picture in your apartment," Doc Savage added.

Captain Blackstone Toy got off the cot. He collapsed almost immediately, holding his head in his hands.

"I knew of the stuff behind the picture," he mumbled. "Didn't you get it?"

"No."

Toy absently picked at his insignia of captain in the navy.

"It was a typewritten account of what my brother, Bowen Toy, had overheard, or thought he had overheard," he said. "Would you care to hear about it?"

"Go ahead," Doc directed.

"My brother was visiting me at this naval airport," said Captain Blackstone Toy. "He chanced to overhear something which led him to believe there was a plot underfoot against the navy."

"Just whom did he overhear?" Doc Savage asked.

"It was two mess stewards, little fellows who look like foreigners, that Bowen overheard talking," said Blackstone Toy. "One steward said: 'The preparations have been in the making for years. Now everything is ready. We will wipe out the American navy before we can be stopped. Then our nation will attack.'"

Captain Toy paused as if probing in his memory for further details.

"My brother heard the other steward answer, 'Our warships are already off the United States coast ready for the attack.' The steward had a newspaper when he said that. We did not get a glimpse of the newspaper, so we do not know what foreign navy was meant."

Doc Savage directed, "Show me the stewards who were overheard talking!"
Captain Blackstone Toy made a helpless gesture.

"They deserted the next day," he said. "They must have learned my brother and I suspected them."

Doc Savage said quietly, "This is not very much information."

"I know it's not," said Toy. "And I'm sorry. I think my brother knew, or had overheard, other things after the incident here at the flying field. Unfortunately, I do not know what he did overhear."

Captain Blackstone Toy was a sturdily built man with lots of chest and jaw, which might or might not mean anything with regard to character. He wore a military uniform, and all military uniforms look rather much alike. His hair was curly, looked as if he used a good grade of hair oil on it. He had eyes which looked somewhat as if they were cast out of file steel.

The pause was broken when Doc Savage got up suddenly. He had been standing where his gaze could range through the small side door of the hangar, and sweep a line of bushes which paralleled the flying-field edge at some distance.

Skulking in the bushes was the elderly newsboy who had haunted the scenes of action thus far.

Doc Savage barely glimpsed the fellow. The bronze man made no move to show that he was particularly interested. Instead, he strolled to the big outer hangar door, humming under his breath.

The humming became louder, and turned into words of some exotic, guttural song in a foreign language.

The song was not unmusical, and the interesting quality of it was enhanced by the power and depth of the bronze man's voice. Then he stopped singing, the song having apparently lost interest, and went back into the hangar.

"There is nothing more that you can tell me?" he asked Captain Blackstone Toy.

"I have been racking my brain," said Captain Toy. "There is nothing. And I'm terribly sorry."

He paused and rubbed the palms of his hands on his khaki-breeched thighs, then put out his prominent jaw.

"Look here, Savage! Some kind of devilish organization of spies or sabotage agents from a foreign power has apparently killed my brother! I will do anything in my power to secure vengeance! May I offer my services? May I take your orders until the devils are brought to justice?"

Captain Toy looked grimly determined as he waited for Doc's verdict. There

was also a plea in his eyes.

“Help is something no one ever has too much of,” Doc Savage said quietly.

Which statement would have surprised Renny, Long Tom, Pat and the others who knew Doc Savage well, for the unusual bronze man was noted for his lone-wolf manner of doing things. Doc rarely accepted aid from any one outside his circle of acquaintances.

“Then I can work with you?” Toy demanded.

“Yes.”

Then Doc Savage seemed to be waiting for something to happen outside—as in truth he was.

Patricia Savage, walking briskly on high heels and looking pleased with herself, came up to big-fisted Renny and invalidish-looking Long Tom.

“Didn’t you hear the orders Doc gave you a minute ago?” she demanded.

“Huh?” grunted pale Long Tom.

“Holy cow!” said Renny. “No! What’d Doc say?”

“He gave you orders,” Pat said. “He came to the door of the hangar and sang them in Mayan, that language that only Doc and the rest of our gang speaks. You know, the one you all learned when you had that fantastic affair in the Valley of the Vanished in Central America.”

“What were the orders?” Renny thumped.

Pat smiled sweetly. “Boys, you should have been close enough to hear the orders when Doc gave them. Of course, Doc is too swell a guy to raise Cain, but you’ll feel bad about it, won’t you?”

“Come on!” Renny growled. “What’d Doc want? Out with it!”

Pat’s smile grew more sugary. “Look, you two boys be nice and help persuade Doc to let me have a part in this excitement, and I’ll tell you.”

“Chiseler!”

“Blackmailer!”

“No helpee, no tellee.”

Long Tom and Renny tried to scowl her down, but had no luck.

“All right,” they agreed.

“Doc sang in Mayan that there was an elderly man skulking in the bushes near the road,” Pat explained swiftly. “The old fellow has been playing the part of a newsboy, and has appeared often enough so that his actions are suspicious. Doc wants us to get on the other side of the bushes, and grab the old fellow when he’s frightened toward us.”

“Come on!” Renny roared.

They took up their positions, not so hastily as to attract suspicion, being careful to keep out of sight of the bushes in which lurked the elderly newsboy.

They had hardly gotten themselves stationed when Doc Savage came out of the hangar. He was running—straight toward the bushes.

“Stop that old newsboy!” Doc yelled.

Naturally, the elderly news vender was frightened into flight. He popped out of the bushes, head cocked over one shoulder—and ran straight into Renny’s big hands.

What happened next was something that Renny put into his autobiography.

The old newsboy calmly put two fingers in both of Renny’s ears. An ordinary man could never have done that successfully. But this old fellow was no ordinary man. He was as fast as lightning.

Renny squawked. The old man kicked. A thunderbolt seemed to strike Renny in the midriff. Funny lights and things got in his eyeballs, along with pain.

The old man jerked away. Renny clutched madly, got hold of a coat. The old man jerked, slipped out of his coat.

Renny got a terrific smash on the head. It must have been a fist, but he had never felt a harder fist. And Renny’s experience with fists was not exactly limited. He went down. He was dazed. Ringing filled his head.

Through the ringing, he heard smacks and pops and grunts and hisses and frantic scuffling of feet.

Once, Pat said, “Why, he’s no gentleman! He’ll hit a lady!”

There was more noise, then the racket abruptly ceased.

Renny rolled over on his face, got some of the ringing out of his head, and tried to see. The gouging fingers had practically blinded him for the moment.

“I’m glad you could hold him!” he said dizzily.

“Hold him!” Long Tom yelled.

“Yes,” echoed Pat weakly. “*Who* held him?”

Renny recovered some vision, looked about and made a discovery which completely punctured the poor balloon that remained of his vanity.

The old newsboy was gone.

A car’s motor started in the distance. It went away with great rapidity.

“That’s him,” Pat enlightened. “Gone!”

Doc Savage came running up. The bronze man had been so far away, that it had been impossible for him to take a hand in the fight. He looked at them.

He said nothing. His metallic features did not show the slightest emotion; no accusation, no wrath, no criticism.

Pat said gloomily, "I know some people that I wish would raise old Jake when they're mad."

She squinted at Doc.

"Or maybe you're not human enough to get mad?" she asked.

Renny said, "You better quit deviling Doc, or you won't have no posterity."

Doc Savage went over and took from the dazed Renny's hands the coat which the big-fisted engineer had managed to shuck off the superannuated newsboy.

"He was wearing this?" the bronze man asked.

"Yeah," Renny admitted.

Doc Savage went through the pockets of the dark-gray coat, which was neatly pressed. He brought out a package of gum, a candy bar, a nickel, one penny, and a telegram. He went through the rest of the pockets and found nothing else.

"That telegram had better furnish us with something!" Renny thumped.

Doc opened the telegram. It was made up of gummed paper teletype strips pasted on a blank, and read:

LIEBER VON ZIDNEY

DAWN GARDENS

JAMAICA LONG ISLAND

AIRSHIP ZEPHYR IS MAKING A FLIGHT THIS
AFTERNOON FROM LAKEHURST STOP EVERYTHING
ARRANGED WITH REGARDS TO HER

INDIA

Startled exclamations came from Doc Savage's aids.

"The *Zephyr* is the navy's new Zeppelin type airship!" exploded Renny.

"Isn't Lieber Von Zidney the guy who owns the white bungalow with the green shutters—the place where Ham was seized?" Long Tom grunted.

"And a girl named India Allison claimed to be his secretary," Pat said dryly. "Was she good-looking, Doc?"

Doc Savage gave an excellent imitation of a deaf man. After a bit, he tapped the telegram, and said, "The fact that the dirigible *Zephyr* is taking a flight to-day——"

An orderly in a neat uniform trotted up and interrupted, "Mr. Clark Savage, Jr.?"

“Right,” Doc admitted.

“The secretary of the navy has requested your immediate presence,” said the orderly. He clicked off a salute. “I am asked to advise whether you can grant the request for an interview.”

Doc Savage said, “The answer is ‘yes.’”

Chapter 11

SOMETHING TO SELL

The incumbent secretary of the United States navy was a not-too-fat well-dressed man, with about the proper amount of gray hair for his years. He had a nice manner, a mellow voice and a way of getting what he wanted done without insulting any one or leaving them with the idea that he had been gyped. He was a swell fellow by reputation.

He sat at the head of the table.

The men who sat around the table were, to all intents and purposes, the United States navy and a good part of the United States government. There were senators and congressmen present, members of a naval appropriations committee.

Doc Savage, escorted in by a page, recognized them all and bowed slightly. He did not smile or glad-hand any one, but yet he managed to convey a feeling of good fellowship. He seemed to emanate a completely likeable personality, without making any undue effort to do so.

After preliminary introductions, the secretary of the navy took the floor. He addressed his words directly to Doc Savage.

“We are calling you here, Savage, to make a request,” he said. “It is an unusual one. This letter will explain it.”

He handed over a letter. It was typewritten, all in capital letters.

SECRETARY OF U. S. NAVY:

LAST NIGHT, NUMEROUS DISASTERS BEFELL SHIPS OF YOUR NAVY. WHAT CAUSED THESE DISASTERS IS A MYSTERY TO YOU.

THESE DISASTERS WILL CONTINUE. THEY WILL AFFECT CRAFT OF THE U. S. NAVY IN THE AIR AND ON THE SEA.

THEY WILL CONTINUE UNTIL A CERTAIN FOREIGN POWER FEELS IT IS SAFE TO ATTACK THE UNITED STATES.

THE BEST EFFORTS OF YOUR INTELLIGENCE. OFFICERS AND ALL YOUR PRECAUTIONS WILL NOT STOP THE DISASTERS. ONLY ONE LIVING MAN KNOWS HOW TO STOP THEM.

THE DISASTERS ARE CAUSED BY AN INFERNAL MACHINE. IT THROWS OUT AN INVISIBLE FIELD OF A PECULIAR

NATURE, AND NOTHING ON THE SEA, UNDER IT, OR IN THE AIR, CAN RESIST.

I AM THE INVENTOR OF A MACHINE WHICH GENERATES A FIELD OF FORCE NULLIFYING THE ONE WHICH IS CAUSING ALL THE DAMAGE.

I WILL TURN THIS NULLIFIER MACHINE OVER TO THE UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT. BUT FIRST, ONE CONDITION MUST BE MET. BEFORE THAT CONDITION IS MET, THERE MAY BE SOME BARGAINING NECESSARY. I WILL NEED AN INTERMEDIARY, A GO-BETWEEN.

I WANT DOC SAVAGE AS MY GO-BETWEEN. GET IN TOUCH WITH HIM. IF HE WILL SERVE, PUBLISH THE FACT IN THE NEWSPAPERS.

THIS IS NOT A CRANK LETTER. TO PROVE IT IS NOT, I AM GOING TO TELL YOU WHERE THE NEXT DISASTER WILL STRIKE. I HAVE MY AGENTS SHADOWING THE OPERATIVES OF THIS FOREIGN COUNTRY DOING THE DAMAGE, AND I KNOW THEIR PLANS.

THE NEXT DISASTER WILL BE TO CAPTAIN BLACKSTONE TOY'S DAWN PATROL OF NAVY PLANES.

AUGUST ATLANTA BRAUN.

The secretary of the navy said, "We thought it a crank letter, until it called the turn on the Toy disaster."

Doc Savage laid the letter down. He said nothing.

"Will you serve as intermediary?" he was asked.

"There is, naturally, only one answer," Doc Savage said. "Yes."

Pallid Long Tom Roberts, the electrical wizard, Pat and Renny met Doc Savage outside the ornate governmental building where the conference had occurred.

"I got a feeling things have taken a queer twist," Long Tom said.

"They have," Doc admitted, and told him about the demand to serve as an intermediary.

"Holy cow!" exploded Renny, who had listened.

Pat said, "So my famous cousin is going into the brokerage business. Or would you call it agent?"

They bought a newspaper on the way to the airport to take a plane back to

New York.

Headlines in the paper indicated that two more U. S. battleships had sunk, for no good reason that could be explained.

“Gosh!” grunted Long Tom. “A war would hardly knock off destroyers and battleships that fast!”

They rode a regular passenger line plane to Newark airport, and took a taxi from there. Long Tom, a frugal soul, sat in front and grumbled about the expense of taking a taxi. He had once asked half a million dollars to superintend a hydro-electric project in Africa.

They bought another newspaper in Manhattan.

It said that Doc Savage had been appointed as representative of the U. S. navy in a certain secret mission.

When they reached Doc’s skyscraper headquarters, the telephone was ringing. Doc lifted the receiver.

“This is August Atlanta Braun,” said a pleasantly robust voice over the wire. “In the street in front of your headquarters, a taxi is waiting. It will look like an ordinary taxi until you notice that a piece of bright-red string is tied to the right rear wheel, the wheel next to the curb. You will get in. The driver will do the rest. No harm will befall you, unless you neglect to come alone.”

At the start of the conversation, Doc had switched an amplifier and loudspeaker into the circuit, so that all in the room heard the voice.

Captain Blackstone Toy, who was along, exploded, “But you won’t go!”

“Of course,” Doc told him quietly.

“But it may be a trap!” the naval officer argued. “Probably is!”

Doc Savage said, “Clues, leads to what is behind this affair, are too scarce to warrant the exercise of too much discretion.”

The man of bronze walked out, and the others, attempting to follow him, found the door locked in some unexpected and mysterious fashion.

The taxi was like a thousand others, except that it had a red string tied to the spoke of one wheel. Doc Savage walked straight to the machine and got in. Without a word, the driver put the cab in motion.

The driver was a lean man. The hair on the back of his neck, below his hackman’s cap, was long, and the skin underneath had a different color. A wig, of course. By reaching forward, Doc could have grabbed the man’s face and turned it around to get a look at it. He did not.

They drove southward, then out on Long Island, and to the south shore, which is

low and marshy. It was a long drive. The chauffeur said not a word.

They got in a little flat-bottomed, canvas-covered boat fitted with an outboard. Doc saw the guide's face then.

It was a face easy to remember. The face was round, but the nose wasn't, and the ears were big, attached flaps. Doc could not recall ever having seen the man before, and had he, he would have remembered him.

The water was shallow. The boat ran rapidly, the driver guiding it with a practiced ease. Noise of the outboard motor frightened up birds. The salt water grass all around them was thick and tall. They saw no humans other than themselves.

They came at last to a small seaplane. The wings and fuselage were painted green, and from the air it was doubtful if it would attract attention. It was anchored. Moored to one seaplane float was a tiny outboard racing hull which could probably do fifty miles an hour.

On the seaplane wing stood the elderly newsboy.

He had changed his clothes, was wearing a pair of greenish coveralls and a neat white helmet, new looking, with the ear flaps turned up. He displayed a big grin.

"I'm August Atlanta Braun," he said. "Are you surprised?"

Doc Savage said nothing.

"I had better explain some things before I do anything else," said ex-elderly newsboy August Atlanta Braun, in a pleasantly cultured voice. "I was shadowing our enemies—the gentlemen representing that foreign power which is doing our navy so much damage. They have lady representatives, too, one of whom you met—the charming and clinging India Allison. As I say, I was watching the gang, and that is how you happened to see me. Have you any questions to ask about that?"

Doc Savage did not speak.

"Of course," said Braun, "I fled when you tried to seize me, because I do not wish to give up my liberty. Oh, no! You will notice that I have at hand here the means to escape by air or by water. I would not advise you to dive into the water in hope of reaching me before I can do anything about it. Look, and you will see the reason."

Doc had already looked at the water. It was covered with some kind of liquid film which floated on top, and which was not oily.

"An acid," said Braun. "Deadly poisonous. If it gets on your skin, you would die very shortly. So I do not advise you to try to swim to me. You see, I am a very cautious man."

Doc Savage said nothing.

Braun asked, "Is the navy convinced that a foreign power is really wiping it out?" Doc made no reply.

Braun scowled blackly, then twisted his lips into a thin smile and said, "As I said, I am not going to be seized! I have a bone to pick! Indeed I have!"

He began to look angry, and apparently what he was thinking about made him angrier and angrier until his jaw was out, his lips were off his teeth. He looked ready to spit sulphur.

"A year ago, I took my invention to the United States government!" he yelled. "I offered it to them free! Did they take it? No! I'll say they didn't! Instead, an incompetent nincompoop of a clerk insulted me! The nitwit as much as said I was a crank, a nut!"

"My dear Doc Savage, they will pay for that. Now that they need my invention, now that they have to have it, they will pay through their dear sweet nostrils for insinuating I was a goof!"

He was all but shaking in his rage. He stopped yelling and began cursing Uncle Sam.

"My country, is it!" he squawled. "Damn my soul, they'll pay me for being a patriot! They'll pay me one hundred million dollars!"

Doc Savage spoke for the first time. One word.

"What?"

"One hundred million dollars!" August Atlanta Braun howled. "*One hundred million dollars!* In cash! In French, Italian, English and German money, as well as small United States greenbacks. You will remember that, please! They may even include some Japanese yen and Argentine pesos. I intend to travel a bit after I am paid off. And, anyway, it would be almost impossible to pass one hundred million dollars in American money."

"You seem to think you will get it," Doc Savage said.

"I *know* I will," Braun said more quietly. "Otherwise, the United States navy will be destroyed. I have a tiny machine which will save the navy. I invented it. When I offered to give it to the navy, knowing what was coming, they laughed at me as a crank. Now they will pay me one hundred million dollars. Go tell them that!"

Doc Savage was silent.

"*Go tell them that!*" Braun howled. "I will get in touch with you and find out what they say!"

Doc Savage said quietly, "I can tell you right now what they will say."

"What?"

"That you are foolish to think the United States government can be black-jacked

in any such manner as this.”

August Atlanta Braun laughed loudly and nastily.

“Before long, the United States will awaken to the realization that a hundred million is a cheap price to pay for the safety of the United States,” he said. “This foreign nation is afraid to attack us if our navy is intact.”

“What nation is it?” Doc asked.

Braun laughed again. “You probably have a good idea. I am not going to say anything. After all, I don’t give a damn if the nation does go on sinking United States navy battleships. I’m not very patriotic where one hundred million dollars is concerned.”

“Obviously,” Doc agreed.

“This concludes our interview,” said Braun. “You will return alone. No doubt, you can run an outboard motor boat.”

The pilot of the motor boat climbed off onto the pontoon of the plane. Doc had no chance to make a move. Braun had drawn a gun.

“I’ll get in touch with you later,” said Braun again.

Doc Savage did not move for some time, made no gesture at departing.

“What about the *Zephyr*?” he asked suddenly.

Braun was startled. It showed on his face. But he shrugged.

“Nothing.”

“You are interested in it, Braun!”

Braun looked puzzled for some moments before a light of understanding came upon his face.

“The coat your man Renny snatched off me!” he said loudly. “Of course, it had that message about the *Zephyr* from one of the foreign operatives to their chief. I filched that telegram from the foreign crowd. It interests you?”

“It does.”

Doc waited, still looking unconcerned, and showing no sign of departing. A gull, unafraid of men, dipped close to pick up something floating in the film on the water. The gull’s beak made a little splash dipping beneath the surface. The bird did not fly far before it turned, end over end, squawling, and fell dead on the water.

“You see,” said Braun, “the stuff on the water is quite potent.”

Doc knew it was. He went away, and the minute he was able to reach a coastguard station, planes were in the air and boats were speeding into the salt marsh.

But August Atlanta Braun had made his get-away.

Doc Savage was joined by his aids and Captain Blackstone Toy.

“The navy department has assigned me to assist you in any way I can,” said Captain Toy. “That takes care of the official end of it.”

Big-fisted Renny had a newspaper, a late edition.

“Look here, Doc,” he said. “This came out while you were conferring with August Atlanta Braun.”

Doc looked at the headlines:

NAVY ONCE REFUSED TO CONSIDER
“NULLIFIER” MACHINE
WHICH WOULD SAVE
SHIPS NOW.

Inventor with grudge now wants hundred million. Demands huge price for device.

There was a story under that, obviously mailed to the newspapers before Doc Savage went to the marsh meeting with August Atlanta Braun.

The remarkable part about this story was that it stated the inventor, Braun, was sure the navy would refuse to pay a hundred million for salvation.

Braun, in his statement, insinuated the navy was just dunce enough to lose all of its ships rather than pay the sum, which was only equal to the cost of a few battleships.

“That kinda puts the navy in a bad light,” Renny said thoughtfully. “The public will give ’em hell for turnin’ down this guy’s invention, and maybe a lot of people will secretly kinda sympathize with this Braun lug. Nobody likes to be called a nut.”

Long Tom demanded gloomily of Doc, “Any sign of Ham, Monk or Johnny?”

“No sign,” Doc said.

They drove into New York City.

They were fired on in front of Doc Savage’s skyscraper headquarters. The firing was done with a high-powered rifle, evidently equipped with telescopic sights and a machine rest, for the spot from which the bullets came was proved to be a full half mile distant.

Doc and his party conducted a brisk search, aided by policemen, but the snipers had taken flight. Descriptions, however, by people who had seen them, indicated beyond any shadow of a doubt that they were Fuzzy and his gang.

Finally, Doc and the others entered the skyscraper aerie on the eighty-sixth

floor. Pat looked around curiously.

“The windows,” she said, “look kind of different, somehow. Is it some new kind of bulletproof glass you’ve put in? About time!”

“There’s been bulletproof glass in these windows for a long time,” pale Long Tom reminded her. “Ever since some guys on the tower of an unfinished skyscraper tried to shoot Doc, almost three and a half years ago.”

“Then what’s wrong?” Pat demanded. “The windows look different.”

“They’re a new type of glass.” Long Tom explained. “You can see out, but you can’t see in. In other words, it’s one-way glass.”

“Do tell!” said Pat. “Who invented it?”

“I dunno,” Long Tom told her. “But Doc did a lot of work to perfect it, and between you and me, he’s got two factories working twenty-four hours a day making it. It’ll be a big hit for windows in houses. And it’ll make plenty of money _____”

Doc Savage said, “We have one clue to work on in this affair. Only one.”

“What?” rumbled Renny.

“The new dirigible, *Zephyr*,” Doc said. “We know that the enemy was interested in knowing when it was to make a flight.”

Captain Blackstone Toy said, “I advance the idea that we be aboard when the *Zephyr* takes off this afternoon.”

“My plan,” Doc Savage said. “As soon as we telephone August Atlanta Braun’s ultimatum to Washington, we will leave for Lakehurst.”

Chapter 12

THE BIG DEATH

Battleships are popularly supposed to be the most expensive war machine put together by modern man, but the *Zephyr* had cost more than any battleship afloat. Not all of the millions charged against her cost sheet had gone into actual materials and labor in her construction. She was the product of years of experimenting, and experimenting with dirigibles is expensive.

The *Zephyr* was longer than a battleship, and she was the attempt of the United States of America to show the rest of the world that lighter-than-air craft are practical.

If the *Zephyr* crashed any time within the next year or two, aviation as centered upon lighter-than-air craft would receive a setback from which it was just possible it might not recover.

The *Zephyr* was all metal. There was not a stitch of fabric in her. She was so strong that the makers claimed she could fall a mile and not be damaged so badly that she could not fly. There was a catch to that, of course. A ship as light for her size as the *Zephyr* could not fall very fast.

The *Zephyr* had accommodations equal to those aboard a liner. She could carry enough poison-gas bombs to kill every man, woman and child in any city in the world, and she could fly so high and so silently that there was only a chance in a thousand of enemy war planes finding her.

She carried enough machine guns to whip a flotilla of fighting planes, and thousands of machine-gun bullets through her vitals would not bring her to the ground, because she was made like a honeycomb, with countless cells. The only way she could be vanquished was by being blown apart by a bomb, and blowing her apart would not be easy, because she could fly as fast as some war planes.

She was the marvel of her age. Who had designed her, the world did not know. The navy department had announced that the name of the designer was being kept a secret so that his life would not be in danger, since any enemy nation contemplating war on the United States would naturally seek to eliminate a designer of such genius.

The truth was that Doc Savage wanted to avoid publicity wherever possible, and had requested that his connection with the designing of the ship be kept a secret.

“She’s a darb, this *Zephyr*!” said big-fisted Renny, as they got out of a plane which had landed them at the Lakehurst dirigible airport.

Doc Savage said nothing. Neither did Pat who was wondering when she would

be requested to clear out. Long Tom and Captain Blackstone Toy were gloomily silent. Captain Toy wore a black band about his uniform sleeve in memory of his brother.

Doc's flake gold eyes came to rest on Pat, who was getting out of the plane. Doc lowered a large suitcase he was carrying.

"You needn't trouble to land," he told Pat. "You are taking our plane back to New York. The *Zephyr*, you know, is flying to Roosevelt Field, on Long Island. You can meet us there."

Pat put out a nice-looking jaw. "I'm going along!"

"Do you ever get tired of persistently trying to get yourself killed?" Doc asked wearily.

"No!" Pat said. "Neither do you!"

Big-fisted Renny put in gingerly, "Doc, you know Pat has been through some pretty fast action in the past, and has always come out all right. If she's so set on coming along, why not——"

"So she worked some trick to get you to take her part?" Doc said abruptly.

Renny blinked. "How'd you know that?"

"Every one knows Pat," Doc said. "The only way of getting rid of her is to tie her up."

"Or marry her off to somebody!" Long Tom put in.

"That would do no good," Doc told him. "The husband isn't built who could keep Pat at home when there's excitement around."

Two hundred yards away, big ground tractors backed the *Zephyr* out of her revolving hangar—revolving so that the mouth could always be made to face away from the wind.

High up in the body of the dirigible, several men lay and swore at their luck.

"Of all the damn things that had to happen!" one groaned.

"To have this Doc Savage show up!"

One man yanked at the brim of his navy cap, as if anxious to get it over his eyes. The man was Shade.

Fuzzy, who lay near by him, said, "Don't let your pants get full of ants. This will go through all right."

Fuzzy looked more snaky and hairy than ever in his uniform of a naval officer attached to aviation. He glared at his men.

"Don't you let this bronze guy get you all iced up!" he gritted. "The boss has given his orders, and I, by Harry, am going to see 'em carried out! Doc Savage and

his crowd won't come back from this flight!"

A man tried a laugh, to show that he was confident and wasn't at all scared. The laugh sounded something like the last noise a small cat makes when caught by a big bulldog.

"Gleeps!" muttered Fuzzy. "If you gotta make a noise like that, do it some other time. Don't get scared. Doc Savage, in a few hours, will be as finished as this dirigible that the world thinks is such a nifty!"

"Doc Savage is to be killed," a man said. "It's simple enough. He'll get his when the dirigible is destroyed."

"That's the talk," said Fuzzy. "Everybody will lay low here. We managed to get aboard by pretending we were inspectors making a final exam, and stowed away. They won't be using these catwalks, so we're safe until we get ready to spring the job."

They prepared to wait.

Down on the ground, Pat had settled things, at least to her own satisfaction, by putting her nose in the air and walking to the neat little gangplank that led up into the dirigible cabin.

Doc, Renny, Long Tom and Captain Blackstone Toy followed Pat to the ship. Doc carried his big suitcase.

Doc Savage stopped the commandant of the airship.

"I am conducting an experiment," he said. "You have orders to cooperate with me as long as it will not endanger the safety of the airship, have you not?"

"Yes, sir," said the *Zephyr* commander.

"I am experimenting with the malady known as airsickness," Doc said. "As you know, a cure for airsickness—a sure cure, effective on every one—has not yet been found."

"Yes, sir," said the commandant, puzzled.

"I want every man aboard the airship to take a spoonful of this preparation which I have with me," Doc said. "Have your men line up and pass by for their spoonful of medicine, and have your crew list checked so that no one will be missed."

"It's unusual," said the bewildered commandant "But the admiral said I was to do as you wished."

There were many humorous comments from aerial sailors who did not care for the taste of the concoction which Doc fed them.

"Phew-w-w!" complained one bluejacket. "That stuff must have been brewed

by a witch!”

“Or by a marine!”

The business of dosing the dirigible crew delayed the takeoff almost an hour, but finally the *Zephyr* took to the air. She lifted rapidly, driven forward by her multiple motors, so that much of the lift, or planing effect, of the air was taken advantage of.

The shape of the gas bag of the *Zephyr*, as a matter of fact, was an innovation suggested by Doc Savage, in his capacity of anonymous designer, to take advantage of the lift secured by a wing of aërofoil design.

The giant gas bag, instead of being cigar-shaped—the conventional style—had more the contour of an airplane wing cross-section.

The *Zephyr*'s flight was to take her out over the Atlantic, the object being to fly extremely high and test the efficiency of an intricate device which was intended to locate, in absolute darkness or the most intense fog, any enemy plane, airship, or even a battleship or submarine, in the vicinity.

When the corrugated surface of the Atlantic was below, Doc Savage picked up the suitcase which he had brought aboard. He climbed a spidery, extremely lightweight staircase to the catwalk, which ran from the bow to stem of the dirigible.

Renny, Pat and Long Tom, looking interested, followed the bronze man. They knew Doc well enough to know that something was about to happen.

Doc carried his suitcase to the nose of the dirigible, and stopped near the intakes of the big ventilators. These ventilators kept the catwalks and runways inside the giant gas bag free of seepage gas which might overcome a man at an inopportune moment.

Doc Savage opened the suitcase. It held four metal tube containers fitted with petcocks. Doc took these tubes out.

“All of you took that concoction which was given the crew before departure?” he asked his aids.

Renny, Long Tom and Captain Toy nodded.

“I didn't,” Pat said. “I didn't care for its taste! Any time I down something as rank as that stuff, I've got to know the reason first!”

Doc said, “This must be your contrary day, Pat. Fortunately, the results of your not taking the concoction, while not pleasant, will not necessarily be fatal.”

Pat snapped, “Say, what do you mean?”

Without answering, Doc held one of the metal tubes inside a ventilator intake and opened a petcock. There was a hissing, and a gas came out of the tube container. The vapor was blue in color.

The rush of air carried it through the ventilating ducts. In a few moments, it would penetrate throughout the dirigible.

Pat Savage happened to be standing where some of the gas enveloped her. She had a suspicion all was not going to be well, and she held her breath as long as she could. But at last, she had to inhale.

An incredulous expression came over her face.

“Oh!” she gasped. “Ha, ha, ha! I don’t see—ha, ha!—what—ha!—ha!”

She went off into a fit of laughter.

Big-fisted Renny shook his head slowly.

“Pat has her moments, but I never thought she’d go off this way,” he said gloomily. “There’s nothing to laugh at around here, what with the navy being wrecked and Johnny, Monk and Ham maybe dead.”

“Ha!—ha!” gurgled Pat. “I’m not—ha!—ha!—laughing—ha!”

Doc Savage said, “It’s the gas.”

“The what?” Renny thumped.

“A new type of laughing gas,” Doc answered. “It’s harmless, but it throws the victims into paroxysms of laughter which they cannot help. It affects the muscles and nerves of the throat.”

“But I’m not affected!” Renny boomed.

“The strong-tasting liquid given you and the crew was an antidote,” Doc explained. “Had Pat taken hers, she would not be affected.”

“Ha!—ha!” gurgled Pat. “I hope—ha!—ha!—somebody hangs for this!”

“But I don’t get the idea!” Long Tom exclaimed.

“If there are stowaways aboard,” Doc pointed out, “we can now hear them.”

At Doc’s command, the engines, the generators, the air compressors and other machines aboard the *Zephyr* were stopped. Squads of sailors began searching the catwalks and inspecting tunnels, stopping frequently to listen for laughter.

They heard it before long, audible mirth. Cackling, whooping, gagging mirth. Armed sailors made for the sounds, which were aft, near the stern.

“Them guys are what you might call laughing themselves into a hell of a pickle!” said a bluejacket.

“Laughing themselves to death, if they’re the ones who have been sinking navy ships!” grated another.

“They couldn’t have sunk *all* the ships,” corrected the first. “Some sank on the Pacific coast, thousands of miles from here.”

Doc Savage was in the main control room when word came to him that laughter

had been heard. The *Zephyr* was equipped with telephonic communication to all her remote portions.

“Commander,” Doc Savage said. “Keep every bit of machinery aboard stopped until you hear from me. If necessary to spend ballast, do so with the hand controls. Do the same if gas must be valved off.”

“Yes, sir,” said the commandant, looking bewildered.

Doc Savage ran toward the stern, followed by Renny, Long Tom and Captain Toy. They overhauled the searching sailors.

“The stowaways are right ahead,” said the man in charge of the searchers. “Hear them laughing.”

They could be heard. Fuzzy and some others. They sounded as if they were having a high, hilarious time of it, and they didn’t want to.

Doc went forward. The navy men followed him.

The catwalks were equipped with loud-speakers at intervals, making it simpler for orders to be given. The loud-speakers now bellowed out an alarm.

“Men are leaping out of the stern with parachutes!”

Doc Savage whipped to a lookout port, from which a view could be secured downward. Men, attached to white parachutes, were falling. Fuzzy and his gang!

The men swinging from the parachutes all laughed heartily as they fell. But they did not look happy.

“They knew they were trapped!” pale Long Tom snapped. “They’re trying to make a get-away! There’s a plane. They must expect it to pick them up!”

The plane flew close to the sea. To look as large as it did from this height, it must be a large craft. It swung over toward the men descending by parachute. It was a seaplane.

Chapter 13

CRACK-UP!

Doc Savage listened, and there was no sound of laughter, which meant the entire gang had quitted the *Zephyr* by parachute. The bronze man whirled and whipped along the catwalks to the mid-ship portion. These catwalks were roomy, unlike the old ones on such earlier crafts as the *Macon* and the *Los Angeles*.

He came to the enclosed hangars in the belly of the airship. Three of them, one behind the other, each holding a small pursuit plane.

Doc took a seat in one of the planes, touched the starting controls, and the motor began turning over. He reached up and grasped a lever.

“You had better follow in the other two defense planes,” he called to his men. “There are only these three planes aboard.”

The *Zephyr* was able to carry almost a score of small fighting planes, but these were her wartime complement, and never carried in peace time, except during war maneuvers. On ordinary cruises, she carried but these three.

Doc hauled the lever. Efficient machinery clicked, and the plane was suddenly plunging down toward the sea. The bronze man let it dive for some distance, so as to get clear of the dirigible underbody. Then he came back on the stick.

Both wings tore off!

There was nothing particularly violent about its happening. Simply a squeal of pins sheared through, and the wings, which were of the modern detachable type, came away from the fittings and fluttered away like big leaves in a wind overhead.

Doc did not look at the sea, or at the loose wings. He heaved up in the cockpit. The cushion was a seat type parachute. But a moment was required to swing it out. He did not buckle on the harness, but depended on the cabled strength in his hands to hang on. He plucked the ripcord.

The parachute opened with a *pop!* and a ripple—the ripple being torn strips of ’chute fabric. For the silken lobe had been ripped by a knife!

Doc let go the harness. There was nothing else left to do. Not enough of the parachute remained to break his fall.

He turned slowly as he fell and fought at his coat. The sea had been nearly a mile and a half below at the start of his fall. It was much nearer now.

It is possible for a man falling free in the air to control himself by kicking, by thrusting out his arms, by flipping them about violently. Doc kept himself falling feet

downward. At the same time, he removed his coat.

He was wearing, under his coat, a flat parachute of unusual light and strong chemical-product fabrikoid, a filmy stuff infinitely stronger and lighter than the best of silk. This fabrikoid had been perfected by the chemical genius, the apish Monk.

The parachute of fabrikoid came near opening too late. Doc hit the water with more force than he relished; it was barely possible that an individual whose physical strength was less might have died from the shock.

The bronze man went very deep, and when he had gained the top, he spouted some water and lay still on the surface, not entirely knocked out, but also not enthusiastic about immediate activity.

His flake gold eyes were open. He could see the dirigible. Trapdoors to the plane compartments were open, but the other two planes had not been released. Renny and Long Tom must have seen the wings come off Doc's ship in time to stay themselves from taking a chance in the other crafts.

Doc, lifted on a wave, saw one wing of his plane floating near by, and swam to it.

The bolts in the fittings which held the wings to the fuselage were clever imitations made out of lead. The plane had been tampered with.

Doc swam toward the spot where Fuzzy and his gang would have fallen with their parachutes. There was not much wind, but there had evidently been a blow not long ago, for the swell was considerable. It was like swimming up and down small hills.

The big seaplane was now landing to pick up Fuzzy and his gang.

Savage was fast in the water. But he was not fast enough to reach the plane before it got Fuzzy and the other men aboard, and took to the air. The unknown pilot did some nice flying.

Doc, watching the tremendous waves, somewhat doubted if he himself could be sure of getting a plane off such a sea. The plane banked, came toward him. *Sput!—sput!—sput!—sput!*—and a series of splashes spouted around the bronze man. They might have been raindrops, falling hard and fast.

Doc sank with great speed. He had been shot at from planes with machine guns before.

Doc swam down, and also to one side. He swam violently. They could see him from the plane, of course. And if they had bombs——

They had. A great weight seemed to compress the sea. Despite his best resistance, air was driven from Doc's lungs, and he felt all but crushed. His head pounded; strange lights came and went. He stroked weakly to the surface.

A few drops of water were still falling back. The bomb had expended most of its force upward. The plane was circling, coming back. Machine-gun slugs from it, badly aimed, fell into the sea, not close enough to worry about.

A fish came to the surface and floated, white stomach uppermost. It had been killed by the explosion. Doc's giant frame ached from head to foot.

Then something happened up above. The giant dirigible *Zephyr* began a steady, awful dive toward the sea—all the camouflaged hundreds of feet of her, the most modern air machine devised by man.

The plane slanted toward Doc. He changed position rapidly on the surface, at the same time digging inside his clothing, seeking a certain pocket in the remarkable vest which he wore—a vest with many pockets holding the innumerable gadgets which he frequently found occasion to use.

There was a pocket in the vest for smoke bombs, but they were gone, the pocket split open by the force of his fall. The man of bronze dived, stroked to the left madly.

The bomb explosion came again. Worse, if possible. He did not come to the surface again immediately. Instead, he slipped out of his outer clothing, and left it in the water. Soaked as it was, it would not rise to the surface immediately, and it might be mistaken for his body.

The ruse worked. Savage swam far away, and showed himself on top only momentarily for air, keeping the rest of the time well beneath the surface.

Of course, from the plane, they could see a surprising depth beneath the surface. But they had expected the bomb to kill Doc, and seeing his clothing, thought it had, so they dropped no more bombs. Then the dirigible came arching down and distracted their attention before they discovered the bronzeman.

The *Zephyr* was going to crash!

Doc saw it hit. The manner of its crash was uncanny. It was going almost full speed, all motors roaring, when it hit. The *Zephyr* was strong, but not strong enough for that. The nose caved—caved back full two hundred feet, as if the water were a solid wall. The backbone of the air giant broke in a dozen places.

Big, invisible hands might as well have taken it and mashed it between them. Hands a mile across the palms, perhaps.

Men sprang into the sea, wearing life preservers. The crash had apparently not killed a great many. They could get life preservers because they were handy everywhere about the great dirigible. They were fabrikoid containers, honeycomb, filled with helium, and were lighter than air, hence helped to lift the dirigible.

The motor nacelles of the *Zephyr*, the lower halves of them, were lowered away into the sea, and became lifeboats. They were designed for that purpose.

Doc Savage swam toward the ruined dirigible. His metallic features were expressionless, but that did not mean he had no feelings. He had worked for months, he and a crew of the world's leading experts, designing that airship.

Nor was that all that was going to happen. The big seaplane which had taken Fuzzy and his men aboard was circling, getting above the dirigible. Now it dived. It swept the length of the mangled *Zephyr*, not more than fifty feet above the great bag. Out of the plane poured a stream of tiny objects.

The objects hit the back of the dirigible, burst into white flame. All of the air giant seemed to blaze. And the *Zephyr* was supposed to be fireproof from stem to stern!

Doc Savage was sufficient of an expert on incendiarism as applied to military purposes to know what had happened. This was thermit, the same kind of stuff used in military incendiary bombs to set fire to enemy factories and cities. The stuff burned with a terrific heat, would melt metal, would sputter and scatter and go on burning.

It would riddle enough of the honeycomb cells of the dirigible so that it would sink.

After a bit, the seaplane flew away and lost itself in the afternoon sun, landward.

Doc Savage swam about the *Zephyr*, what was left of her.

He aided some of the wounded. And finally he found his aids, Renny and Long Tom, riding in a motor gondola lifeboat, along with Captain Blackstone Toy. Pat was near by in another of the queer craft, with the dirigible commander.

Pat was no longer laughing.

"What happened?" Doc Savage asked.

"We started the engines, intending to aid you," the commandant of the dirigible said, in a horror-stricken voice. "After that, something incredible happened! The ship would not answer to her controls! The motors would not stop! We could not shut them off! And before we could do much, we had crashed!"

"You do not know what really happened?" Doc persisted.

The commandant wet his lips. "I hate to say that an invisible something seemed to grasp the craft!"

Doc Savage said nothing. He did not remind the commandant that he had suggested that the dirigible's engines not be started until orders were given to that effect.

It was almost dark when the first of the destroyers arrived to pick up the survivors. The captain of the destroyer sought Doc Savage out.

“Confidential radio message for you,” he said.

The message read:

SUGGESTION THAT UNITED STATES PAY HUNDRED
MILLION FOR GADGET TO PROTECT ITS NAVY
PREPOSTEROUS STOP PROPOSAL ABSOLUTELY REFUSED

It was signed by the highest of authority.

“Well,” rumbled big-fisted Renny when Doc showed him the message, “what’s the outcome gonna be?”

“The outcome,” Doc Savage said, “is going to be unpleasant for quite a few people.”

Chapter 14

CHAOS

A navy destroyer landed Doc Savage's party at the Battery, on the lower end of Manhattan, that night. There was a crowd of something like thirty thousand people there to see the arrival of the first of the disaster survivors, and half the crowd seemed to be newspapermen and cameramen.

Newsreel planes had harassed the destroyer coming up the river, trying to take pictures with the new infra-red method by which photos could be taken in the dark, provided the proper sources of infra-red projection was handy.

Doc Savage, Renny, Long Tom, Pat and Captain Toy made a flying wedge and got through the crowd. The subway was fastest, so they took that uptown. Doc was besieged by autograph seekers. He was rude to no one, although Captain Toy became exasperated and threatened to crack a head or two.

They stepped out of the elevator on the eighty-sixth floor of their headquarters skyscraper, and a voice said, "Oh! At last!"

It was a woman's voice. They stared at the owner.

"India Allison!" exclaimed Pat.

India Allison, looking gentle and utterly terrified, huddled against the corridor wall, back in a corner, and she held, with two hands which shook, a big army automatic, pointed at the floor. She laid the gun down gently, as if she were afraid of it, and came toward Doc Savage.

Doc, who was always wary of the feminine sex, stepped back, but there was a wall in the way, and in a moment, India Allison had her arms around the bronze man's right arm. She hung on tightly.

Pat stood in the background and looked as if she wanted to say something catty.

"Mr. Savage!" India Allison gasped. "They turned me loose! They released me so I could——"

"How," asked Pat, who had heard the story of India Allison and had recognized her from Doc's description, "did you and Monk happen to get captured?"

"Oh!" said India Allison. "Monk and I were knocked senseless!"

"Oh!" echoed Pat. "I was under the impression that you knocked Monk senseless and turned him over to this mysterious gang we're fighting."

India Allison frowned at Pat. "Were you there?"

"No," Pat had to admit, "but it appeared——"

"Don't draw conclusions about something you don't know anything about!"

snapped India Allison.

Pat looked indignant.

Renny whispered to Pat, "I guess she got you told!"

Pat gritted, "If people keep on abusing me, I'm going to collect myself some heads!"

Doc Savage, since he could hardly loosen India Allison's frightened embrace with anything less than violence, resigned himself to having an extremely attractive young woman hanging onto one arm. He had, for once, some expression on his bronze features. It was not a comfortable expression.

"Mr. Savage!" gasped India Allison, in a frightened voice. "They turned me loose to tell you that Monk, Ham and Johnny would be killed if you made any further effort to interfere with their plans!"

She paused and held tighter to the bronze man, and Doc looked a bit more uncomfortable, but very interested in what she had to say.

"They told me to tell you something else," she said rapidly. "They will kill Monk, Ham and Johnny if you serve as go-between for this August Atlanta Braun in an effort to sell his machine to the United States government for one hundred million dollars."

"The skunks!" interjected pale Long Tom.

"Monk, Ham and Johnny will be freed if you can capture August Atlanta Braun and turn him over to the representatives of this foreign nation," said India Allison.

There was a pause while that soaked in.

"I think," said Captain Blackstone Toy grimly, "that this proves the importance of August Atlanta Braun's protective machine. Personally, I am a patriotic man with a respect for my government, but I think the United States is foolish not to buy the contraption."

Pat said nothing. She was smiling wryly as she watched India Allison clinging to Doc.

"A hundred million is a lot of money," Renny muttered.

"And I don't like the way this August Atlanta Braun is going at it!" added Long Tom.

"August Atlanta Braun deserves hanging!" snapped Captain Toy. "But a hundred million would be a cheap price for the lives that have already been lost!"

Pat asked India Allison, "Where did you get your gun, dear?"

"I ran home for it!" India Allison said. "It was my father's. Why?"

"I just wondered," Pat said.

They went into Doc Savage's office, and Doc, more to get himself disengaged from India Allison than for any desire to know the late news, went over to a teletype, or printing telegraph machine, which had been installed in his office and connected to the leading national news agency.

The teletype was rattling its keys rapidly, clicking out the latest news of the nation. Some of the items were interesting:

FLASH!

U. S. WARSHIP IN ORIENTAL WATERS REPORTED SUNK
BY MYSTERY FORCE!

A bit further on, there was another one:

FLASH!

NAVY PLANE CRASHES IN CALIFORNIA!

There was another:

FLASH!

PANAMA CANAL REPORTED BLOCKED BY SINKING
WARSHIP!

Then, possibly most alarming of all:

FLASH!

CONGRESS CALLED FOR SPECIAL SESSION! WAR
DECLARATION FEARED! UNKNOWN NATION WIPING OUT
U. S. NAVY IN PREPARATION FOR ATTACK!

Big-fisted Renny boomed, "This thing is getting bigger and bigger!"

Pretty, sweet-looking India Allison sank into a chair and took one of her shapely, suede-shod feet in soft-looking hands.

"I do wish I could faint or something," she said weakly. "I'm so terrified."

"Where were they holding you?" Doc asked.

"I don't know!" she gasped. "They kept me in a car, blindfolded, for a long time after we left the place where they were holding me."

She sighed, and fumbled with her suede foot covering.

"When they led me out of the place where they had been holding me, I stepped

in something and got my shoe full of it," she said. "It feels like sand, and hurts!"

She tugged off her suede slipper and upended it. A stream of grayish, hard-looking particles ran out.

Doc Savage picked up some of the particles and examined them closely.

Long Tom asked sharply, "They mean anything, Doc?"

"Probably," Doc Savage said, "they will result in our finding Monk, Ham and Johnny."

"Holy cow!" Renny boomed. "What is the stuff?"

"Salt," Doc Savage said. "Common rock salt."

An hour later—it was still dark now, of course—Doc Savage rolled his big, armor-plated, bulletproof-glassed sedan through a section of Long Island City devoted to manufacturing plants, and kept a sharp lookout through a powerful pair of magnifiers of the type commonly called "sportoculars."

Suddenly, a strange sound filled the big sedan. It was an exotic sound. Small, so vague as to be nearly unnoticeable at first; it mounted in volume and became a fantastic cadence which filled all of the sedan.

It was a trilling, although so eerie as to be almost indescribable. It might have been a wind filtering through some far, denuded jungle, or the song of some tropical feathered creature as yet uncatalogued by ornithologists.

This weird sound was a characteristic of Doc Savage, a small fantastic thing which he did in moments of mental stress. Frequently, he went for long intervals without making the sound. Again, it came often. Always, he was not conscious that he was making it—although he could stop making it, or start, at will.

"Hey!" barked Long Tom, color coming into his pale face. "What'd you see that caused that?"

Doc Savage said nothing in reply, which was another small, peculiar and frequently aggravating habit which he had.

The big sedan ran on, and after a while, turned into an alley. Doc got out. The others did likewise, because they knew of nothing else to do.

"Holy cow!" rumbled Renny. "Sometimes I like to know what I'm doing."

"What else can you expect out of Doc?" Pat asked.

They moved forward, following the bronze man.

Renny grunted at Pat. "What've you got it in for Doc for this time? You've done nothing but squawk at or about him."

Pat said, "I resent his idea that a woman cannot take care of herself as well as a man! Any woman is as entitled to adventure as a man! Why, look at the ancient

Amazons, who——”

“Quiet,” Doc Savage said. “Please!”

He stopped, pointed, and the others suddenly knew why they were in this part of town.

“The only factory of its kind near the city,” Doc explained.

The electric sign which the bronze man had indicated was a small one. It read:

Acme Salt Co.

“Rock salt shipped in and later refined,” Doc explained. “The salt which came out of Miss Allison’s shoe was of a type which this factory alone handles.”

“That means they led her through the salt storage yard when they took her away from their hiding place,” Renny grunted.

Doc said, “There seems to be only one logical hiding place in this neighborhood: that old power plant to the north. Come on.”

The abandoned power plant was a relic of a day when street cars were the most popular form of transportation. It looked as if at least five years had elapsed since electricity had flowed from the place.

Boards had been nailed over the windows, and were still in place, but appeared ancient. Four tall brick chimneys had originally stood in the back, but one had fallen down. There was a brick wall around the place.

“Wait here,” Doc Savage ordered.

The bronze man was gone before the others could object, or ask questions. So silently did he move, there was not often a stirring of shadows to show when he passed.

It was dark. The river was not far away, and a tugboat was going up it with a heavy tow, making considerable noise, what with the rattling of the exhaust and the boiling of water heaved up by the propellers.

Doc waited, watching a cloud sneak nearer the moon, and when it was darker, he went over the fence, then worked forward through a litter of bricks and rusting machinery, looking for signs of life.

A man on lookout stood near the base of one of the big chimneys. He betrayed his position by knocking dottle out of a pipe.

Doc crept toward him.

Then some one screamed in one of the darkened streets near by. It was a piercing scream, not of terror or fear, but of alarm.

“Watch it!” the voice shrieked. “Doc Savage’s crowd!”

Doc Savage whipped toward the sentinel. But he was too late. Alarmed, the guard whisked into the power plant and banged a big iron door shut.

Doc hit the door. He knew instantly that he might as well have saved his effort. The door was too solid.

Inside the old power plant, there was excited shouting. A man was crying out, wanting orders.

“Von Zidney!” the man was screaming. “Von Zidney! What’re we gonna do about this?”

There was no doubt about it. The man’s voice was distinctly understandable.

“Von Zidney!” he was shouting. “Doc Savage is here! What’ll we do?”

There was dull response from within the plant somewhere.

“What’d you say?” the door guard howled.

The voice within sounded louder, “We’ll take the underground route! Hurry up!”

It sounded like Lieber Von Zidney’s voice.

“What about the prisoners?” the guard shouted.

“We’ll take them, too,” said the muffled voice which sounded like Von Zidney’s.

“And what about the rest of the men—the ones in the next block——”

“Never mind!” shouted the Von Zidney voice. “They’ll attack Doc Savage’s crowd from the rear!”

Doc, distinctly overhearing this, thought at first that it was a bluff, a ruse to draw him out of the vicinity, so that the enemy might effect an escape. But an instant later, he knew it was no bluff.

Shots crashed in the streets near by. A man howled. It was Renny, whose howl was something not hard to recognize and not easy to forget.

Then came a brief whoop of sound that was remindful of a violent note from a great bullfiddle. This would be one of the tiny supermachine pistols perfected by Doc Savage and carried only by the bronze man and his aids.

Long Tom’s voice yelled, “Doc! We can take care of this! Go on with what you’re doing!”

Doc Savage leaped, caught the sill of a window, and an instant later was standing on the sill, tearing at the boards over the aperture.

The thick boards, the big nails, seemed no more than lath and brads under his strength. He got the window bared, and a blow from a sleeve-covered elbow sent the glass inward.

Darkness was inside. The bronze man listened briefly, and used his trained nostrils. No one seemed to be in the room, but men were running toward the

chamber—men who shouted a great deal.

Doc whipped inside. He bent low, hands out before him, feeling his way. His trained eyes aided. An instant later, he was in a wide hallway—and eased away from men who charged up with flashlights and looked into the room into which he had broken.

“We scared him away!” they decided, mistakenly.

They ran back the way they had come. Some one shouted at them from below.

“Come on!” said the voice. “We’re blowing!”

It sounded rather like Lieber Von Zidney.

After a moment, things became unexpectedly quiet.

Doc Savage ran downstairs, producing a big flashlight, and roving its beam. He saw no one, and there was such a litter of junk, such a labyrinth of old power rooms, that a thorough search would take possibly a quarter of an hour.

Suddenly Doc left the old power house. He vaulted the fence encircling the place, and ran toward the near-by river.

Shortly before he reached the river, he heard noises. Men moving. Men talking. A voice.

The voice said, “Hurry up and get them into this boat!”

Doc Savage had guessed what had happened. There was a big, old pipe running from the river to the plant. Originally it had carried waste, but now the men were utilizing it for escape, and they must have a boat anchored at the river end.

Doc went over the river bank with a great leap.

The attack was reckless, but it was dark enough to make recklessness safe. It would have helped, of course, if Doc Savage had managed to alight on the back of some one. But he didn’t.

He did, however, land close enough so that his first swing sent a man flying away into the water. The water was shallow here, and they were standing in it, loading their boat. The man who had been hit yelled.

“Savage!” some one choked.

Doc hit the man who had spoken, hit him guided by the voice sound alone.

“Doc!” piped out a squeaky voice.

That would be Monk. He was to the right. Doc made for him, arms striking. It was too dark to see anything. Some one fired a gun. The red flash was too momentary to show much.

The thing became a *mêlée*. Fists hit Doc. He struck back. Once a gun blew off so close to his face that his flake gold eyes were powder-burned.

He found Monk. The homely chemist was bound. Doc grasped him, heaved him up on the bank, and Monk landed so painfully that he grunted, which drew a man upon him, but Monk kicked the fellow far out into the river, where the water was several feet deep.

The boat's engine got going. Men yelled at other men to get into the boat, and the other men yelled back to get out of the boat and fight.

Doc located Ham next. He got Ham away from three men who were trying to hold him, and threw him up on the bank beside Monk.

Both Monk and Ham seemed to be tied hand and foot.

Then some one hit Doc over the head with a rifle. The blow was unexpected, something that could not be avoided. Doc sank, recoiled, made no sound to show that he was hurt, or where he'd crouched. His head sang and for a little while it seemed blacker than before, and sounds were faint.

There was a great deal of splashing, after which the motor boat went away.

Doc got out of the water finally and used his flashlight. There was no one in sight, except Monk and Ham, up on the bank.

"Some fight!" said the dapper lawyer, Ham.

"Doc," grunted the homely Monk, "they had Johnny, too. Did you get him?"

"No," Doc admitted. "They seem to have gotten away with him."

"That's too bad," Ham said, grimly. "Their chief was with them."

"Who?" Doc countered.

"Lieber Von Zidney," said Ham.

"How do you know that?"

"Why, they made no secret of it," said the lawyer. "They telephoned him for orders, and we heard him giving them orders in the next room."

"Lieber Von Zidney is the big shot, all right," Monk agreed.

"Come on," Doc said. "There is another fight in the street near that abandoned power plant."

They ran for the plant.

There was no fight. There was only silence.

Not until they were in the street, and had listened to automobiles in the distance, going away at a great speed, did they discover any sign of life. Then it was a feminine voice calling from some distance.

"Mr. Savage!" the voice called. "Mr. Savage!"

"India Allison!" the homely Monk grunted. "Does she know Von Zidney is the big-shot crook—the head of this ring of foreign sabotage agents?"

“No,” Doc said. “And do not tell her.”

“Sure,” Monk said. “She’s too pretty a little thing to be given such bad news. I don’t think she has an inkling of it. Von Zidney has fooled her into thinking he is just a persecuted old man.”

“Poor little girl!” Ham sniffed. “I wouldn’t be too sure she’s so innocent!”

“You shyster!” Monk grunted. “You’ve dealt with crooks for so long as a lawyer, that you’ve gotten the idea the world is full of crooks.”

“Listen, you exaggerated monkey model!” Ham began. “I’m telling you that _____”

Doc left them and went forward and found the frightened, trembling India Allison.

“It was awful!” she gasped. “We were attacked. They carried off Pat!”

“What?”

“They took Pat away!” The girl clung to Doc. “Renny and Long Tom and Captain Toy fought valiantly. They’re over here.”

She led the way down an alley, and Doc, peering in the murk, made out three figures. Two were senseless; one was stirring a bit. The latter was Long Tom.

“Where’s Pat?” Long Tom gulped.

He was grimly silent when told what had happened to Pat.

“That bird Fuzzy was heading this gang,” Long Tom said at last.

Doc Savage worked over Renny and Captain Toy, and they revived eventually. Renny had a bullet hole in an arm, but insisted it would not put him out of commission. Doc, examining the wound, agreed.

Monk, not at all ruffled by the recent excitement, watched his chance, and shortly India Allison found herself clinging to the big chemist rather than to Doc Savage.

Monk was a great admirer of feminine pulchritude, and lost no opportunity to afford it attention wherever he found it. Strangely enough, his frightful homeliness—Ham, at least, called it frightful—was an asset, apparently, instead of a liability.

“The ladies can always tell a man’s man when they see one,” Monk was wont to explain it. “They want hair on their menfolk’s chests.”

The dapper Ham, who was not bald, and certainly not unhandsome, could not explain it. True, the hair on his chest was moderate.

They did not find a trace of the gang who had seized Pat and fled.

Doc Savage, when they gave up the search, had one question.

“Who,” he asked, “gave the alarm back at that abandoned power plant? Who yelled that I was at the plant?”

Big-fisted Renny closed and unclosed his fists.

“That’s kind of a mystery, Doc. We heard a noise behind us. We separated to investigate. Then came that yell. I—well, I don’t know how we were discovered.”

India Allison said hoarsely, “I hope I’m not suspected!”

Doc Savage said nothing, but he made, for the briefest of moments, his strange, exotic trilling noise.

Chapter 15

TRIAL

Nearly a dozen men sat stiffly around the reception room of Doc Savage's skyscraper headquarters. None of the men was young. Some of them wore uniforms, and the others looked as if they belonged in uniforms, except for two or three, who were obviously big-time politicians.

One, evidently the spokesman, got up when Doc Savage came in.

"We were told you would have a package for us," he said.

There was always about the man of bronze a dignity and a reserve. It was not upset now, although this was the first he had heard of a package.

"Who advised that I would have a package for you?" he asked.

At that moment, Monk, who had stopped off downstairs for the mail, could be heard outside, insulting Ham, who had also stopped off for the mail.

"Ham, you shyster," Monk said, "suppose you open this box before you take it inside. Sure, go ahead. Take it in the corner, there, and open it."

"It might be a bomb!" Ham objected loudly.

"Sure," said Monk. "That's what I thought of."

"You accident of nature! How awful your mother must have felt after she looked at you and seen what had happened!"

Doc Savage requested quietly, "Will you two come in here?"

They came in. Ham was carrying a box, a very large box, which seemed about all he could carry. The apish Monk, who looked much bigger and stronger than the lawyer, was carrying a few ounces of letters.

"We matched to see who would carry the box," Monk explained. "He lost."

"I was gypped!" Ham yelled. "He used that trick nickel with heads on both sides!"

Doc Savage tore off a letter which was fastened to the outside of the box with adhesive paper.

"Who left this box here?" he asked.

"Somebody," Monk said, "who gave the name of August Atlanta Braun."

Doc Savage looked at the assembled naval men and the politicians, two of whom he recognized as senators on the appropriations committee.

"Who advised you there would be a box here for you?" he asked again.

"August Atlanta Braun!" said one of the senators.

"It is the nullifier machine," said a high naval officer.

“We are to be permitted to give it a trial,” another man, his uniform bearing the designation of a rear admiral, offered.

“I suppose,” Doc Savage said quietly, “that you know where an attempt to sink a navy ship will be made, so that you can give the machine its test under fire?”

“Yes,” the other replied. “The message from August Atlanta Braun told where the enemy will strike next.”

“What enemy?”

“This foreign power that is reducing our naval force in preparation for war,” the rear admiral said stiffly.

“Do you know what power it is?” Doc queried.

The rear admiral wet his lips, pulled at his regulation tie—or, at least, it looked regulation.

“No,” he said. “We don’t! We have made an effort to find out. Unfortunately, two of our secret agents, who were on the point of getting valuable information, were found killed.”

“Where?” Doc queried.

“Near the edge of the city, not far from a plant dealing in the refining of salt,” the man replied. “We searched the salt plant, but learned nothing.”

“You might have tried the abandoned power house near by,” Doc said. “But it is too late now.”

The bronze man examined the boxlike package.

The affair was almost as large as a trunk. It was covered with heavy brown paper, wrapped around with twine almost as large as rope.

“The thing is heavy,” Ham offered.

Doc Savage untied the cord, stripped off the heavy brown paper, removed cardboard protection covering which was underneath, and exposed a box which seemed to be covered with heavy canvas, stitched and cemented.

On the top was a little lid. Doc lifted this. A switch was revealed, and tied to the switch, which was open, was a tag. Words were typed on it:

When effect of enemy’s device is felt or expected, close this switch.
This puts machine in operation. It will operate for about a hundred hours
on the power contained within.

A navy official stepped over, examined the tag, and murmured, “Ah! The device must be of electrical nature, and has batteries that will run down!”

Monk, in the background, sniffed, just loud enough that the navy man did not hear. Monk was an army booster.

Ham casually kicked Monk's shins, and scowled, "The man was right in his deduction, you funny-looking thing!"

Monk snorted, "But his deduction was so childishly obvious. Electrical in nature! Hah!"

Doc Savage turned the box over. A legend, a warning, was painted on one side. He turned it again. The same warning was printed on all four sides and the bottom. It read:

WARNING!

An attempt of any kind to examine this case will have *dire consequences!*

"That 'dire consequence' sounds real melodramatic, don't it?" the homely chemist chuckled jeeringly.

When no one smiled or answered, Monk took the big grin off his homely face.

Doc Savage said, "So August Atlanta Braun tipped you of an attempt to be made to sink a ship, in order that you would have an opportunity to try out the protective machine?"

"The battleship *Missouri* is to be sunk as it sails from New London harbor tonight!" the rear admiral replied.

Doc Savage said nothing in reply, but his small, eerie trilling noise seemed to come into being somewhere in the far distance, and, after a bit, to go away without coming much closer.

The naval men and the politicians surrounded the box. They handled it, peered at it closely, and seemed on the point of closing the switch experimentally.

"Maybe this thing is a bomb intended to blow up navy bigwigs!" offered homely Monk. "Of course, anybody'd know a lot of big shots would be around when it was opened, so the thing would naturally kill——"

Two minutes later, every naval officer and senator had made a dignified departure.

Doc Savage faced his men.

"We will have to work fast," he said. "We want every bit of information available on *August Atlanta Braun*."

"Where'll we look first?" Long Tom wanted to know.

"The newspaper files," Doc said. "Scientific journals. The naval records.

Everywhere.”

New London is a seaport town on the Connecticut shore, where the Thames River makes a deep harbor. Once it was the whaling capital. Today it comes nearer being the submarine capital, what with a big submarine base and shipyard engaged in U-boat construction.

The navy officials and politicians, seeing no reason why they should risk their necks by flying to New London, had gone by train.

Doc and his party had delayed in New York until the last minute, digging up what they could on August Atlanta Braun. Now they were flying to New London in Doc's big tri-motored speedplane, which was probably the fastest aerial conveyance of its size in the world. Pale Long Tom handled the controls.

Doc and his party did not have August Atlanta Braun's machine in his box. It had gone to New London on a train, in a special car, in custody of some marines. The marines had not been told the thing might blow up, and might not have cared, anyway.

Big-fisted Renny was fingering some notes.

“August Atlanta Braun has had an eventful life, according to what I dug up,” the big-handed engineer reported.

“He was in the navy for almost ten years. He got kicked out. His dishonorable discharge was handed him for taking graft. You see, he was in charge of buying stores, and let concerns hand him a cut for buying from them.”

Renny continued, “Braun is a lucky one. He moved to Europe and became a citizen of a country over there. Now that helps him a lot. If he was a citizen of the United States, the government could do things to him. As it is, his status is that of a foreign inventor trying to sell something to the country.”

“Anything else?” Doc asked.

“Nope,” Renny said. “There's no record of Braun's whereabouts for the last few years, as far as I could learn, except that he is listed as a citizen of this European country.”

Long Tom brought the plane down on New London harbor, and anchored it up by the coast guard academy, where the guardsmen could watch it.

Doc Savage said, “Renny, you'll stay with me. The rest of you go on ahead aboard the *Missouri*. Renny and myself will join you.”

The *Missouri* was quite a few millions' worth of alloyed armor steel, guns and gadgets. She was chunky, her funnels and masts had an alert rake, and she looked, somehow, as haughty as a European dictator.

Pretty India Allison, Long Tom, quarreling Monk and Ham, all got a nice enough reception aboard when they arrived with Captain Blackstone Toy.

Doc Savage and Renny were not very late. About fifteen minutes. They offered no explanation of what had made them late.

The *Missouri's* electric donkey engines cranked up her anchor, and she pushed out of the harbor mouth. She got up enough speed for steerageway and no more.

The strange canvas-covered box of August Atlanta Braun, the contraption he was trying to sell to the U. S. government for a hundred million dollars, was set up on top of a gun turret, where it was figured the thing could blow up, if it was going to blow up, without killing anybody but marines, who were going to close the switch with a long pole.

What happened next all came very swiftly.

“She’s swinging!” the helmsman bawled suddenly, wildly.

“*Something’s pulling her!*” he added an instant later.

Every one could feel the sharp swerve of the war giant of the seas. Men yelled. Signal bells jangled.

“Turn on the protector!” the commander squawled at the turret.

There was an instant of silence.

“Protector on, sir,” came from the turret. The big battleship straightened back on her course.

Chapter 16

TRICK!

Great happenings are usually following by moments of silence. This one was. The same thought was probably in almost every mind. The U. S. navy was saved!

"I think," said an officer, "that this calls for a cheer!"

So, in a boyish spirit generated by a feeling of infinite relief, gray-bearded admirals and commanders sent a series of huzzahs ringing, frightening away the seagulls which were flying close in the dusk.

Doc Savage was already at a secluded spot back of the bridge. Here, big-fisted Renny and pale Long Tom crouched among a forest of delicate electrical and engineering gadgets.

"Your instruments register anything?" Doc asked.

"Nothing," said Long Tom.

"No trace of a magnetic field?" Doc persisted.

"None," said the pale electrical wizard. "And, brother, I'm here to tell the world that my instruments are sensitive enough to get one, if there had been any!"

Doc asked Renny, "What about variations in gravitational balance?"

"Zero," said Renny.

"Presence of gyro influences beyond ordinary?"

"Also zero," rumbled Renny.

"Good," Doc Savage said, and went back to join the naval potentates and the senators who virtually ran the appropriations committee of the Congress.

Captain Blackstone Toy was saying, "Gentlemen, it breaks my heart to think of paying this man Braun a hundred million dollars for his machine."

"It is not your position to criticize the decisions of your superior officers!" an admiral said stiffly.

Doc Savage asked, "So Braun has sold you his machine?"

"If you care to put it that way, he has," was the reply. "The efficiency of the device has just been demonstrated."

The battleship put about and reentered port.

"The machine must be protected," said an admiral. "We will keep it aboard."

After the *Missouri* had anchored, they brought the canvas-covered box onto the bridge, and sentries took up positions guarding it.

The high-ranking officers retired to the conference chamber and chart room to send a telegram to the navy department, and also to draft statements to the press.

The sentries guarding the box were alert, fully aware of the importance of their task. The canvas-covered box containing the machine stood on a table in plain sight of every one. The vicinity of the bridge was comparatively deserted, except for the guards.

Suddenly, mysteriously, one of the guards fell to the floor planking of the bridge. He had been leaning against the binnacle, and he fell quite heavily.

The other guards paid not the slightest attention.

Doc Savage walked onto the bridge. In his arms, he carried a box, canvas-covered, which was an exact duplicate of the one being guarded. It even bore the same warnings for the contents not to be examined.

Doc Savage exchanged his box for the one which August Atlanta Braun had furnished.

The guards seemed not to see nor realize what was going on.

Doc Savage picked up the guard who had fallen. The fellow's muscles were rigid, and when he was placed upright, leaning against the binnacle in the proper position, he remained there.

Doc Savage walked away, carrying the genuine box, and the guards did not make any attempt to follow him, nor indicate in any way that they had seen him.

Renny, Long Tom, Monk, Ham, India Allison and Captain Blackstone Toy met the bronze man. They all looked at Doc somewhat as they would look at an individual carrying a can of nitroglycerine into their midst.

"But the guards didn't interfere with you!" gulped Captain Toy. "What is wrong with them?"

The homely Monk took it on himself to explain, "Doc and me, working together a long time ago, fixed up a gas that causes temporary periods of absolute unconsciousness. A guy inhaling some of this gas goes to sleep for a minute or two, and never knows exactly what has happened to him."

"So you used that gas?"

"Doc did," Monk told Captain Toy.

From a spot aft, they watched the guards on the bridge. They all awakened about together, and, although there was some exchanging of furtive looks of puzzlement, they did not mention, any one of them, having felt queerly a moment earlier.

Doc had depended on this psychological trait which makes a man, somehow, too proud to complain about his small ailments, especially fainting spells.

A bit later, Renny went ashore, got a launch, brought it alongside, and the

canvas-covered box was lowered overside without any one being the wiser.

It was taken to Doc Savage's big seaplane, which they had left anchored before the coast guard academy.

"You stay outside and watch, to make sure no one comes around," Ham directed Monk.

"Who you giving orders to?" Monk demanded indignantly. "You try to push me around, and I'll walk the length and breadth of your puny chest bone!"

Doc Savage suggested, "Suppose both of you stay outside and watch."

Ham and Monk sat outside in the boat, insulting each other enthusiastically in whispers.

Captain Blackstone Toy asked Doc Savage, "What was the idea of stealing Braun's device from the navy? What are you going to do with it?"

"See what is inside it," Doc said.

"But the warnings on the outside, instructing not to attempt to examine it!"

"We'll X ray the thing," Doc said. "We brought X ray apparatus and big photographic films along for just that purpose."

Captain Toy considered. His face in the vicinity of his jaw became more solid. His eyes hardened in their expression.

"As a United States navy man, I must warn against it!" he snapped. "I do not know what possessed me to let the stealing of this device go as far as it has!"

Renny displayed his two big fists prominently.

"It wouldn't be too good an idea to try to upset Doc's apple cart now!" Renny rumbled ominously.

Captain Blackstone Toy did not seem to be the type of man easily bluffed.

"If that means a threat of bodily damage, I don't scare worth a damn!" he yelled. "I'm not going to stand for this. I demand that you return that device!"

Doc Savage said, "My movements are aimed at meting out justice to the murderers of your brother."

Captain Toy acted as if he had been struck with something solid. He grew perceptibly paler, moistened his lips, then got a grip on himself.

"I have followed you, taken your orders, so far!" he snapped. "I thought you had at heart the best interests of your country. Now I do not think so. I demand that you hand that box back to the navy officials!"

"No," Doc said.

"Then I'll tell the world you stole it!" yelled Captain Toy.

Renny said, "I guess I'm gonna have to give him a dose of knuckle anaesthetic!"

Doc Savage said nothing. He was arranging the big X ray machine and the flat container which held the huge film.

Captain Toy stood very still for some moments, and it was plain that he was thinking deeply. Then he shrugged, apparently in resignation.

“Well,” he said, “there is nothing I can do about it.”

He changed his position a little, casually. It brought him near the door. And suddenly, with a headlong dive, he was out of the cabin of the plane into the bay.

Monk and Ham, caught flat-footed, sputtered and abused each other. Then they produced flashlights and spurted the beams over the water.

“There he is!” Monk exploded. “Start the motor, Ham!”

Monk cast off. The launch drifted away with the tide. Ham fought the motor, which did not seem to want to start. Monk lumbered aft.

“Why not turn on the fuel?” he gritted.

“Well, why don’t you, you simp?” Ham demanded.

They got the launch going. By this time, Captain Blackstone Toy was swimming some distance away.

Monk and Ham sent the launch toward him. They would not have had the slightest difficulty in overhauling Toy, except for what happened next.

In the murk some distance away—it was quite dark now—a powerful motor boat started. It came closer. The engine made a shrill buzz.

The stranger craft came within range of Monk’s flashlight. It held four men. Two leaned over the side, arms extended, hands reaching to clutch Captain Toy. One of these was hairy, snaky Fuzzy.

They grabbed Captain Toy, hauled him out of the water and aboard without the speedboat more than swerving in its wild charge. Fuzzy nearly fell overboard, but didn’t quite.

“Help!” screamed Captain Blackstone Toy. “Help! Help!”

The speedboat took him away. Monk and Ham, trying to follow, lost ground swiftly in their infinitely slower boat.

“At least,” Monk yelled, “Captain Toy didn’t want to be rescued. Did you hear him howl for help? That shows then—”

Monk fell silent. From the cabin door of Doc Savage’s plane had spouted a round string of light. It picked up the fleeing speedboat. Fuzzy was standing in the craft, looking back.

But it was not the powerful hand searchlight Doc wielded that particularly interested Monk and Ham. It was the big-barreled rifle which the bronze man held,

and was aiming.

The rifle exploded. Once, twice, three times.

A storm of bullets came from the distant, fast-traveling speedboat. Monk and Ham, for safety's sake, both jumped into the river. Doc whipped back inside his plane, which had a bulletproof cabin.

"We can catch 'em in the plane!" Monk howled. He swam noisily to the aircraft and hauled himself inside. "Doc, ain't you gonna chase 'em?"

"No," the bronze man said.

"*What?*" Monk all but choked.

"No," Doc Savage said. "Let them go."

Monk groaned, "It's too bad your rifle shots missed 'em!"

"They didn't," Doc Savage said. "At least, it is fairly certain they hit."

The homely Monk muttered, "I don't see the idea of lettin' them guys get scat away when he might try to follow 'em?"

"We will make a gesture at chasing them," Doc said. "But we will be sure not to find them."

They started the motors of the big plane, and taxied down New London harbor with the wingtips searchlights turned on. They took to the air, and with the searchlight which gave such a narrow thread of a beam, raked the water front—but not too thoroughly.

Monk, who knew the plane held flares which would make all of New London, and most of Long Island Sound over to Long Island, only a little less brighter than full daylight was puzzled. Doc, it seemed, didn't want to find the speedboat.

"I guess," Monk said gloomily, "that you got this all figured out."

"Something like that," the bronze man agreed. "Our next move is to examine the Braun machine."

Examination of the Braun machine necessitated rearrangement of the X ray device and the big photographic film. They did the rearranging in New London harbor, near the yacht club.

"The coast guard might ask questions about that shooting if we anchored in front of the academy again," Doc said.

The bronze man, it was to be noted, set his X raying device up near the door of the plane. He did the work painstakingly, and at last stepped back.

"All set," he said. "Long Tom, you turn the current into the X ray apparatus."

Long Tom nodded and threw the switch. The results gave every one plenty to think about.

There was a popping noise inside the canvas-covered Braun box, then a burst of flame. A blinding glare filled the plane cabin. The entire top of the box had become like a molten cauldron of iron ore.

Doc Savage's quick action—and his foresight in placing the box near the door for the test—saved the plane. He lunged, hit the box with a foot. It fell out of the plane cabin into the water.

Sinking, the box gave off a startling amount of light, so hot was the flame which consumed it. Even after it was a score of feet down, the glow suffused the water for many yards in every direction.

"Huh!" Renny boomed. "That's the same stuff that damaged the *Zephyr*. Thermit!"

"Exactly," Doc Savage admitted. "The stuff can be purchased in the open market."

"But what set it off?" Renny wanted to know.

"Braun, when he made up that box, was clever," Doc said. "He put inside it a device sensitive to X rays. The moment X rays passed through the box, this device caused the thermit to be released, destroying the contents of the box before an X ray picture of it could be secured."

While they stood there, with the glow of the burning box still discernible in the depths—water seemed to have no effect on the thermit—the battleship *Missouri* passed, farther out in the bay, heading for the open sea.

"Guess they're putting to sea, perfectly sure they're safe with that fake box of ours aboard," Renny said gloomily. "Holy cow! Only they don't know it's a fake box!"

Long Tom suggested, "Suppose we bring up what's left after the thermit burns out and see if it will tell us anything?"

They did this. So potent was the thermit that a considerable interval of time elapsed before it became cool enough to be handled and brought to the surface.

A thorough examination told them nothing.

A motor boat approached. It was a naval craft of the type ordinarily called a "captain's gig," and was occupied by naval officers.

"The *Missouri* ran on a reef outside the harbor!" an officer yelled. "No one was killed, but the Braun machine proved worthless. It was opened by angry navy officials immediately after the crash. There was nothing inside but some scrap iron and excelsior waste!"

"That," Doc Savage said, innocently, "is unfortunate."

“Fortunate, I should say!” snapped the navy man. “Braun will never sell his worthless device to the U. S. navy now!”

Chapter 17

LOTS OF LUCK—ALL BAD

The navy men went away in the captain's gig.

Big-fisted Renny said slowly, "If the navy ever gets wise that we stole the genuine machine, we'll be lucky if they only skin us alive!"

"I do not like it either," said Ham.

"Phooey!" grunted Monk, disagreeing with Ham as usual. "I'm not worried!"

Pretty India Allison wrung her hands. "I'm so worried!"

Monk grinned at her. "We're perfectly safe."

"I don't feel that way!" she murmured.

Monk waited a few moments, until Doc Savage chanced to move into the rear of the plane cabin. Monk leaned closer to the girl and whispered:

"Don't get worried, Miss Allison," he advised. "I'm willin' to bet that Doc knows just about all there is to know about this affair."

"He hasn't shown many signs of it," wailed the girl. "He tried to examine that box, and it burned, so that he lost his only chance to learn what was inside it. Now _____"

Doc Savage came from the rear of the plane cabin. He was carrying an object of considerable size, wrapped in heavy paper.

"Renny, can you watch the young lady?" Doc asked. "Take care of her while Monk, Ham and myself go ashore."

"What about me?" pale Long Tom asked.

"You will stay here with Renny and the girl," Doc advised. "Keep a sharp lookout. Our lives are in danger every minute."

"Holy cow!" boomed Renny. "Won't nobody pull anything on us!"

The plane was equipped with a collapsible boat for use as a dinghy, and Doc Savage, Monk and Ham rowed ashore.

Habeas Corpus, the homely pig, and Chemistry, the grotesque monkey which bore such a resemblance to Monk, were aboard. Doc, when asked if there was any reason why they should not be brought, had said there was none that he could see.

Once ashore, the bronze man led his rather unique little caravan into the yacht club, where they got a good deal of attention—until they departed furtively by a back door. Doc still carried his package.

They went, without attracting attention, to a commercial airport on the outskirts of the city. At Doc's instruction, Ham, who looked less striking than Doc and Monk,

went forward alone, showed his transport pilot's license, and rented a plane, a six-place cabin job.

He taxied it down to the end of the field, under the pretense of getting ready to take off into the wind, and Doc and Monk loaded aboard hastily.

The plane took the air.

Monk and Ham were still in the dark as to what it was all about. They had not asked questions thus far, because Doc Savage had a habit of not answering questions unless he wanted to.

More often than not, he did not answer them for a good reason, though. But now curiosity got the best of Monk and Ham.

"Why all this business of hiring another airplane when we had a perfectly good seaplane in the harbor?" Monk asked. "A seaplane, I might add, which can fly rings around this ark."

"Our enemies will be watching our plane," Doc said. "They will if they have a fraction of the sense we credit them with. And if we had taken off and flown over the city, it would have looked suspicious, and might have warned them before we could find their hide-out."

"Oh!" mused Monk. "So we're looking for their hide-out now, huh?"

"Right."

Monk looked overside. It was very dark. Due to the lateness of the hour, alternate street lights had been turned out.

"Fat chance we've got of seeing anything in the dark!" snorted the homely chemist.

Doc Savage plucked the paper from the object which he had brought along. It was long—about three feet—made of metal, composition and glass. It was equipped with handles for holding, and an opening at the back to take a man's eyes and forehead. This opening was edged with black cat fur. The thing looked like an aerial camera, fitted with a stereopticon back.

Monk said one word loudly. "Oh!"

Which meant that he understood the nature of the device. It was a contrivance perfected by Doc Savage, its inner mechanism consisting in effect of a film which traveled in front of a lens in the bottom of the device, then traveled around and passed in front of the eye of the observer.

The film was coated with a chemical which caught and preserved for a moment in fluorescence any trace of certain wave lengths of infra-light. Thus, a user of the device could observe, from a great distance, certain wave lengths of invisible light.

"I don't see how we'll spot 'em yet," Monk said.

"Remember the shots fired by myself with the rifle?" Doc asked.

"Huh!" Monk exploded.

"The cartridges were shells filled with chemical," Doc elaborated. "They hit the boat and splashed on it. We should be able to spot the boat, wherever it is, by the glow it gives off."

Ham flew the plane above the seashore, not too high. Doc Savage used the infra-light spotter. The rays, of course, would be invisible to the naked eye, but Monk stared overside anyway.

They were well up the Thames River when Doc said, "There!"

Then he passed the device to Monk.

Monk looked. At first, he saw only blackness. Then he spotted a tiny, flickering dot of greenish phosphorescence. He got a bead on the thing, then jerked his eyes away from the viewing contrivance and decided where the launch was lying below.

"Right alongside that patch of electric lights," he said, "on the river bank."

"Exactly," Doc said. "Now we'll land and return to the seaplane."

They took the plane back to the field from which they had rented it. Half an hour later, they were standing on the shore near the spot where their seaplane was moored in the river.

"Ahoy the plane!" Doc called, and his trained voice carried surprisingly without being loud.

There was no answer from the plane.

"Ahoy, Renny, Long Tom!" Doc called.

"Ahoy, Miss Allison!" piped up Monk.

"Always got a woman on your mind!" Ham said scathingly. "You would call her _____"

"*Look!*" Monk howled. "Something's dragging the plane under!"

Doc Savage was in the water when Monk's excited howl ended. The homely chemist and the dapper lawyer dived after the bronze man closely.

They could see the plane. It was moving out toward deeper water, and at the same time, slowly going under. There was, as far as they could see in the darkness, nothing attached to the craft. It simply moved in uncanny fashion.

"Renny!" Ham shrieked. "What's wrong?"

No answer.

"Miss Allison!" Monk squeaked.

The plane fuselage was half under the surface now. It was the type of craft which

had no floats, but alighted upon the belly of the fuselage.

There was a great gurgling as it went down deeper. The fuselage vanished completely.

“Long Tom!” Ham shrieked.

Only wings of the plane showed now. One of these dipped under. Then the other. Only a boil of water, a great gurgling turmoil of rising bubbles, showed where it had gone under.

“Careful!” Doc shouted.

Monk either did not hear, or didn’t care, for he kept on swimming and Doc had to overhaul him, to hold him back. Monk was very fast in the water, but Doc seemed to have not the slightest difficulty in overhauling him.

“Long Tom—Renny—India Allison!” Monk croaked. “They’re in there!”

“Stay back!” Doc rapped, and by way of making sure that his command was obeyed, gave Monk a clip that rendered him dizzy for the next few minutes.

Then Doc swam forward. He dived, swam down and down until it seemed certain that his lungs would burst. It was very dark in the depths. He could see nothing. Only the swirl of water showed him which way the sunken plane was being dragged.

He endeavored to follow the craft, but the effort was useless. He could not overhaul the plane. And at last he lost all trace of it.

With Monk and Ham, Doc swam back to shore.

“But it was incredible!” Monk gulped. “I’ve really been kind of skeptical of this mysterious *something* business up until now, but I’m here to tell you I’ll now bet anybody my shirt there *is* such a thing!”

“It was the happening of something that couldn’t happen,” Ham said grimly.

Doc Savage offered, “We had better hurry to the launch which we spotted from the air.”

Ham said gloomily, “It was near a patch of bright lights on the riverbank.”

Chapter 18

TORPEDO ROOM!

Half an hour later, Doc Savage was saying, "The patch of bright lights, Ham, is the shipyard where the construction of new United States navy submarines is being pushed day and night."

Ham picked up his homely pet, Chemistry.

"You better leave that pest behind," Monk advised.

"What about your hog?"

"He's a well-behaved hog," Monk growled. "Furthermore——"

Doc said, "The launch seemed to be down this way."

The bronze man found the launch without much labor. It was tied up to an ancient dock, and there was no one near, nothing to show what had become of the men who had seized Captain Blackstone Toy.

"We're not a heck of a lot better off," Monk complained.

"Never satisfied!" grunted Ham.

Doc Savage said nothing, but studied their surroundings. Downstream a bit was the submarine building shipyard, a huge plant, one of the largest in the world.

Upstream was a large naval wharf. There seemed to be no craft tied to this, although it was impossible, because of the darkness and the angle of view, to see the seaward side.

Doc said, "There is only one explanation of why the launch came——"

He fell silent, listening. He had trained his ears since childhood with complicated exercises, and they were now registering sounds which Monk and Ham could not hear.

"Some one coming," Doc said.

After a time, feet shuffled down the shore. Two men were coming!

"Me, I think the boss is nuts to sink a good speedboat that we just bought!" complained one of the men.

He was Shade, the fellow whose place Ham had supplanted so skillfully for a time.

"The chief thinks there was something phony about the rifle shots Doc Savage fired at us," complained the other. "He thinks maybe Savage marked the launch, and he wants it sunk."

"He'll get it sunk!"

They climbed down, swore at each other, and after a time, got the seacocks in

the launch open. They climbed out and stood for a long time on the old wharf.

“Well, it’s sunk!” Shade said, and turned away.

They moved off into the night.

Doc Savage and his two aids kept close on their trail. Shade and his companion went upstream, striding along a footpath which led through weeds and some scrawny shrubbery, and around rocks and old masses of machinery.

“A typical sample of industrial America,” whispered Ham. “An ugly waste of trash and weeds and——”

“A heck of a time to start a lecture on natural beautification,” grunted Monk.

Doc Savage held out an arm and halted his two aids. They waited, listened, and the destination of the two men they were following became apparent.

“Huh!” Monk gulped. “They’re going back to that big dock. And say! There’s a submarine anchored off the end of the dock! I can see it now!”

“Exactly,” Doc said dryly. “They brought the launch here because they have their headquarters aboard that submarine.”

Monk craned his neck.

“Can’t see the flag,” he said.

“They don’t fly flags at night,” Ham reminded.

“All right, wise guy!” Monk muttered. “I’m tryin’ to see what nationality this submarine is. Cinch it ain’t American. Must belong to some foreign power, the one that’s causin’ all this trouble.”

“I hate to admit it, but you must be right,” Ham agreed. “I’d give a lot to know what nation it belongs to.”

Doc Savage said, “You two wait here.”

“But, Doc——”

The bronze man, however, was already gone, merging with the night as if his nature partook of the blackness itself.

Doc Savage worked through weeds and shrubbery and around big rocks and got close to the water. Sure enough, the tide was out, and there was a patch of bare sand and stone along which he could creep. The moon was in such a position that the narrow beach lay in intense shadow.

He could distinguish the submarine more distinctly now. She was a big craft, enormous for an undersea vessel. She floated high, fenders out to keep her away from the dock piling. A faint glow of light came out of two hatches, and out of a door in the side of the conning tower.

Waves made small noises on the gravel of the beach. A buried clam squirted

water with an audible sound. A dog barked. Across the river in town, a clock struck. Automobile horns honked abruptly in the distance, then were silent.

And suddenly, Doc Savage stopped. He listened. A tiny noise had come to his ears, a *click-click-click*. He waited, but it was not repeated.

He went on, veered over into darker shadow, then abruptly wheeled and crept back the way he had come. He had not doubled back far when he heard the *click-click-click* noise again. He came upon the balls of his feet.

An instant later, he had a man's neck in his corded bronze hands. He did not do anything lethal to the fellow—merely exerted pressure on certain spinal nerve centers which caused the man to be seized with an unconsciousness that was like a paralysis and would not wear off for some time.

Then Doc felt around. He found it quickly. A telegraph key! The man had a sounder headset on his head. Doc hurriedly appropriated it.

The wire, small and unnoticeable in the darkness, led toward the submarine. It had been tossed up on the brush to get it out of the way.

"A m-i-s-t-a-k-e h-a-s b-e-e-n m-a-d-e," Doc Savage tapped over the key slowly. *"E-v-e-r-y-t-h-i-n-g i-s a-l-l r-i-g-h-t."*

Which might not be the truth, but was not an outright lie, either.

"B-e m-o-r-e c-a-r-e-f-u-l," the sounder headset tapped back.

"O-k."

Doc waited. There was no more. He put headset and key down and worked forward. This was the old army method of equipping an outpost so the fellow could telegraph back an approach by the enemy. The system enabled a suitable reception to be prepared.

Doc came closer and closer to the submarine. He decided to slide into the water and swim beneath the surface to the submarine, and began removing his clothing.

There was some noise aboard the submarine. He waited. It was casual noise, such as men might make moving about. Doc got his outer clothing off. His undergarments were of a type which could double easily as a bathing suit. He waded out furtively.

From the submarine came an unearthly howl. Big-fisted Renny's voice! Big-fisted Renny himself popped out of the conning tower hatch.

Renny was whooping at the top of his voice, which meant he was probably awakening the residents of Noank. The way he crossed the gangplank to the dock was a miracle. At every jump, he emitted a howl.

Men piled out of the conning tower hatch. The darkness outside, after the light

within the submarine, seemed to baffle them. Renny gained ground.

Then Monk and Ham, down the shore, came charging recklessly to Renny's rescue, whooping at the top of their voices.

"Renny!" Monk bawled. "Stick with 'em! We'll be helpin' ya in a minute!"

Renny heard the reassuring shout. Its effect on him was exactly the opposite of what might have been expected. He came to an abrupt stop, threw back his head, and emitted a warning howl on his own account.

"Go back!" he squawled. "They turned me loose!"

"It don't sound like it!" Monk roared, in reply.

"They let me get away!" Renny bellowed. "Now I see why! They wanted to trick you guys into showing yourselves. They musta known you were near. They got sentries out with telegraph wires!"

Whether Monk and Ham heard all that or not was doubtful. And, anyway, it was too late. For armed men suddenly arose behind Monk and Ham and rushed upon them.

Doc Savage, crouched in the shrubbery near the water, knew that he was observing the springing of an almost perfect trap contrived by the enemy on the spur of the moment.

The sentry Doc had overpowered had telegraphed a warning, and Doc's later attempt to quiet any alarm had failed, but they had let it seem that he had succeeded. Then they had sent men out into the darkness, furtively noiseless, and had released Renny to draw Doc and the others into the open.

Monk and Ham did not fight for long. Almost immediately, they were overwhelmed by sheer force of numbers.

The obviously best thing for Doc Savage to do was to go to the aid of his two assistants, to help them fight clear. But Doc made no move. In the first place, there was a really excellent chance of getting shot. In the second place, he had another idea.

He glided along the beach, entered the water where the shadows were black, and sank beneath the surface. He swam underwater, swiftly at first, then more slowly when he knew the submarine must be near. The painted steel hull of the submarine did not have many barnacles on it.

Doc worked toward the bows, with the idea of clambering quietly upon the diving rudders, then gaining the deck and ducking down a hatch, to hide somewhere in the depths.

He managed it with even less difficulty than he had expected. The entire gang

seemed to be outside, capturing Monk and Ham. But surely not the entire submarine crew! Doc was puzzled on that point.

The bronze man noted one thing in creeping across the deck to the hatch. The hull was very wet. Below, it was warm, and the air had that odor and heaviness which it has in a submarine which has lately been beneath the surface.

Forward seemed the logical place to remain hidden, so Doc moved in that direction. He moved with certainty, for he knew a great deal about submarines, having possessed one himself, which he had designed. He knew, of course, the layout of this big, modern craft.

He concealed himself in the forward torpedo room, under a pile of heavy canvas which was evidently a weather cloth and an awning which were put up when the submarine made long surface cruises. With a tiny hole torn in the canvas, he could observe what went on.

Feet tramped on deck as men returned aboard. They came clattering down the hatches, and there was some swearing and fighting as Monk and Ham were hauled below. The two prisoners, both resisting stubbornly, were yanked forward into the torpedo room.

Doc Savage remained perfectly quiet. This was a bad break, for more and more men crowded into the torpedo room. If they should attempt to move the canvas

Fuzzy, Shade and the fellow once designated as Useless came in, along with others. Shade sat down on the canvas—on Doc's knee and foreleg to be exact. The bronze man gave no sign, made no movement, and Shade failed to detect the difference.

Fuzzy did the talking. But first he glared at the prisoners, Monk and Ham, as if he intended eating them.

"Where's Doc Savage?" Fuzzy growled.

Monk gave back a glare as fierce as Fuzzy's own.

"Don't kid us!" snarled the homely chemist. "You've got Doc already!"

"Oh, yes?" Fuzzy said, sarcastically.

"Yeah!" Monk gritted. "Doc disappeared! We know he was lookin' for you, and you musta grabbed 'im! We was prowlin' along the shore huntin' for 'im when this mess started!"

Fuzzy stared narrowly at his two captives. Ham's rather handsome features were inscrutable. Monk's homely face, however, was absolutely earnest. Monk was acting out the whopper he had just told, and doing a good job of it.

Apparently satisfied, Fuzzy jerked his head. "Put them with the prisoners."

Monk and Ham were carried out.

Chapter 19

BURIAL AT SEA

Shade got up off Doc Savage's leg, turned around, and with a display of ill temper, gave the canvas a kick.

"That's a damned hard seat!" he growled.

Doc Savage gave no sign, although the skin on his leg was broken and the spot began to ooze a bit of crimson.

All of the gang moved out of the torpedo room, which was at best an ill-ventilated place, but had the advantage of having only one entrance and exit, which was why the two prisoners had been questioned here.

Doc carefully extricated himself from beneath the pile of canvas, and eased to the bulkhead door. Shade and another man were standing on the metal ladder which led up to a hatch in the adjacent compartment. They were talking.

"Boy, this is our lucky night," Shade remarked. "That fight a minute ago don't seem to have attracted any attention."

"What about the sentry we found senseless down the beach, the one who gave the alarm by telegraph?" The other man asked.

"He's coming out of it," Fuzzy said. "He don't know who grabbed him, or who he saw, but he thinks it musta been that big gorilla guy, Monk."

"How come he figure that?"

"From the way he was mauled around."

A voice came crackling from forward. Fuzzy! He was giving orders. A moment later, the exact text of what he was saying became understandable.

"Orders were for this submarine to sail for a test run an hour before dawn," Fuzzy said loudly. "The chief says it'll look suspicious unless we sail, so we'd better be getting under way."

Doc Savage listened. There was noise of hatches being closed and dogged down. This was done only to the forward hatches, over which seas might break when the submarine was outside. The conning-tower hatches could be left open for ventilation.

Lines were cast off, hauled aboard and coiled down in recessed steel deck lockers. It became evident from the slowness of the preparations and the amount of swearing and galloping about that not all of the men handling the craft were submarine experts. Indeed, there appeared to be not more than half a dozen experienced pigboat men aboard.

Getting under way from the wharf required some time. There was also difficulty in starting the Diesels. The engines fired off bravely enough at first, but some one had forgotten to turn on the fuel from the tanks, and after the oil in the lines was consumed, the motors stopped.

In the silence which followed, Doc Savage distinctly heard Monk's voice, loud and startled.

"Blazes!" Monk was saying. "For the love of little fishes! This thing ain't no foreign submarine! *It's an American submarine!*"

A volley of profanity from the engine room drowned out Monk's voice.

"*An American submarine!*" Monk's voice came again, a bit later.

Then they got the Diesels started.

The submarine passed out of the harbor at a very slow rate of speed, with at least half a dozen men on the conning-tower bridge, arguing about which were channel lights. There was profanity in profusion when they nearly ran down a buoy.

Doc Savage heard two men come into the adjacent compartment. He chanced a brief glance and saw that they carried Monk and Ham's two pets, Habeas Corpus and Chemistry. Evidently the animals had been captured before the submarine sailed.

When the submarine was well out into the open water, Fuzzy came below. He called several of his men and they all started for the torpedo room.

It was a bad moment for Doc Savage, for it seemed they had discovered him. But no. They merely wanted to talk in the torpedo room, because it was the quietest place aboard the submarine.

Doc Savage concealed himself under the pile of canvas. He could overhear, but could not see, for there had been no time to locate the tear through which he had observed proceedings earlier.

"Bring the crew of the submarine in here!" Fuzzy ordered loudly.

There ensued much activity. Doc, listening, could tell by the sounds that bound men were being carried into the control room and arrayed along the wall. These men swore heartily at their captors.

Doc took a chance and lifted a corner of the canvas. He could just barely glimpse two of the prisoners.

They wore the uniforms of submarine men, U. S. navy.

"That's all of 'em," some one said finally.

"All right," Fuzzy snapped. "Get everybody in here that's not needed to run this pigboat."

"What about the other prisoners, Doc Savage's crowd and——"

“Leave a guard over them,” ordered Fuzzy. “But get everybody else in here. The chief has some things to say.”

“Is the chief aboard?” some one asked, in an awed voice.

“Yeah,” said Fuzzy. “Things are getting kinda critical, so he’s decided to keep out of sight. He’s in the skipper’s cabin, and he’ll join us in a minute.”

There was much scuffling as men entered the torpedo room. The air became close. There was some coughing. One of the prisoners created a commotion, and ended by getting himself knocked senseless.

Then abrupt silence fell. It was the kind of silence that reigns in a radio broadcasting studio the instant before the program goes on the air.

“The chief!” said Fuzzy. “I guess you all know who he is.”

“I’m here to have a little talk with you men,” said a new, authoritative voice.

Doc chanced lifting the canvas a bit again. But the leader was standing where it was impossible to see him.

The submarine engines made a good deal of noise, and there was vibration. Electric fans whined, sucking air down through the ventilators, and generators and compressors added to the general din.

“Close that door,” the leader directed.

It was quieter, but not a whole lot, after the door was closed.

“We have all five of Doc Savage’s assistants aboard as prisoners,” said the leader. “We have, also, the girl, Pat Savage, and the other girl, India Allison, together with the stupid ignoramus who is her boss, Lieber Von Zidney.”

There was a pause while a man opened the door, put his head in, and said, “We’re clear of the island. What course, sir?”

“East by south,” directed Fuzzy. “That O. K., chief?”

“We want to take the submarine into deep water and submerge her,” replied the leader. “Then we will expel these navy men through the torpedo tubes in water so deep that the pressure will kill them. Not one of the sub crew will reach the surface alive.”

“That’ll be simple,” said Fuzzy. “But what about the other prisoners?”

“The Doc Savage crowd will be shot when we are at sea, the bodies weighted and cast upside,” said the leader.

“Well,” grunted Fuzzy, “that takes a weight off my chest.”

It sounded at this point as if every one prepared to leave, thinking the proceedings were ended.

“Wait!” rapped the leader. “I have a few additional words. What I have to say

now is intended to restore your confidence and show you how absolutely foolproof is our scheme to make a hundred million dollars.”

Silence fell in the torpedo room. Silence as far as the men were concerned, although the machinery kept on making noise.

“My plan started out as a plot for revenge upon the United States navy for disgracing me,” said the leader. “But as it progressed, I thought of the hundred million.”

He paused to laugh. It was a perfectly intelligent, but greedily fierce, laugh.

“I started working almost five years ago,” the leader continued. “I assembled my men, picking them carefully, and got them to enlist in the navy until I had men in every branch of the service. By careful maneuvering, my men managed to get themselves stationed in strategic positions. They became steersmen on battleships and destroyers. They became aviators. Some of them even became airship men.”

He paused while Fuzzy went to the door and ordered the course changed a little. The submarine was beginning to heave and roll to a marked degree, indicating she was heading out into the open sea.

“Everything,” continued the leader, “was done according to probably the most clever and audacious plan ever organized.”

He paused for effect.

“The plan,” he continued, “of making the navy think a foreign power with a mysterious force, capable of drawing ships out of their course, was wrecking the United States fleet.”

He paused again.

“The deceit has gone over,” he said. “I think we have fooled every one.”

The submarine gave a pitch, and several men staggered about, off balance.

“Our first gesture was to maneuver the grounding of the five destroyers on a reef,” the leader said, after the momentary confusion had subsided. “This we could do because our man happened to be steering the leading destroyer. The other ships ran on the reef because they were following in the radio beam sent back by the leader.”

He paused and laughed.

“The men who told the story about a *thing* pulling the destroyer off her course did a very good job,” he continued. “That was exactly what we wanted. Later, when it was necessary to drown Lieutenant Bowen Toy, the men who drowned him told a convincing story about something invisible being the actual killer. Another excellent bit of lying.”

The waves sloshing over the deck made distinct gurgling noises.

“And so it went,” continued the leader. “Our men struck in U. S. navy ships all over the world, running them into reefs, causing collisions, opening seacocks and causing them to sink. In each case, the work was attributed to some fantastic force.”

There was general laughter.

“Oh, it was excellent acting,” the leader said grandly. “The unfortunate point was that Lieutenant Toy had managed to get an inkling of what was going on, and was instrumental in getting Doc Savage involved. That was unlucky. We had to fight Doc Savage.”

The mention of the name of the man of bronze brought silence. Evidently it was not a pleasant subject for thought.

“We locked the controls of the dirigible *Zephyr* and disconnected the throttle-closing controls,” continued the leader. “When they opened the throttles, the ship dived, and crashed before they could stop it.”

He laughed.

“Perhaps our best touch was in hooking this submarine to Doc Savage’s plane and dragging it beneath the surface, after we had captured the bronze man’s assistants,” he said. “That touch, I am sure, completely confused Savage.”

The sub rolled more heavily.

“The navy, I am sure, is absolutely convinced that there is a mysterious force,” the chief resumed. “It is now up to us to sell them the protective device, the sale of which is really behind this whole plot.”

There was a commotion on the floor, among the bound sailors. This was stopped with a series of cruel blows.

“Doc Savage put quite a crimp in the sale of the protective device when he stole the thing and gave the navy a box full of junk,” said Fuzzy.

“True,” admitted the leader. “That was a smart move on the bronze man’s part. But he did not learn that the actual contents of the box he had seized, the genuine box, were as worthless as the one he had substituted for it. He did not learn that thanks to the precautions we had taken against the box being opened or X rayed.”

“How are we gonna convince the navy the protector is really worth a hundred million?” Fuzzy wanted to know. “That’s what’s worryin’ the boys.”

“And it is to allay your fears that I am going over the whole affair so thoroughly,” the master mind replied. “We will free Captain Blackstone Toy, who will explain that Doc Savage stole the genuine device.”

“What about the girl, India Allison, and that cluck, Lieber Von Zidney?” Fuzzy

asked.

“They will be used as was intended all along,” replied the leader. “Guilt has been pointed at them. They cannot prove they are innocent, cannot prove that we have had a man following them around with a gun for days, forcing their every move. And, too, thanks to certain clever stunts we have pulled, they actually think there is a foreign power with a mysterious force machine. They do not suspect the truth.”

Fuzzy said, “I guess maybe we will get that hundred million after all.”

The other said, “There is not the slightest doubt of it. We already have the entire navy of the United States shaking in their boots.”

“But what about Doc Savage?”

“That, admittedly, is a dangerous point. First, we must find the fellow——”

At this precise moment, which might be called the dramatic one, the sub gave a much more violent roll than ordinary, and two men sat down on Doc Savage.

The bronze man did not move.

The leader did not finish his statement about Doc Savage, but, instead, said, “It is fortunate we had a good number of our own men in the crew of this submarine, so that we could seize it without difficulty. We will make it seem that the mysterious invisible monster or force drew the submarine to its destruction.

“Then we will keep the craft in a hiding place, to take away the money, and to furnish a method of escape should we need it. As for the crew, the ordinary navy men, we shall soon be in water deep enough——”

One of the men sitting on Doc lifted the canvas and looked at the bronze man’s face.

Chapter 20

TUMULT UNDER THE SEA

What happened next probably escaped a number of the men in the torpedo room. Some of them saw the bronze man, and realized he had been discovered in their midst, but others didn't.

Doc made no effort to scramble from under the canvas. That might have meant getting entangled with it. He simply exploded, heaving the canvas up and throwing it at Fuzzy and the others. The canvas filled the air like a great cloud, and they ducked wildly from instinct, and became confused.

In a flash, Doc was out of the torpedo room.

Fuzzy and the others fought the canvas off their heads and looked around wildly.

"I musta dreamed I saw 'im!" Fuzzy gulped, not discovering Doc Savage.

"You did in a cat's eye!" a voice snarled. "He went aft!"

They charged aft, through crew quarters, and storerooms, and into the control room.

"He's been here," Fuzzy said, looking at two senseless men lying on the control-room floor. He glanced upward at the open conning-tower hatch. "Maybe he went out and jumped overboard!"

A man screamed near the stern.

"Nope," Fuzzy groaned. "No such luck!"

The man who had screamed was a guard who held a pistol, but who had had no chance to use it. Doc Savage took the man by the arms first, and got the gun, then grasped the fellow's neck, and the man became unconscious. He was a thin man and he made a rattling sound falling on the steel floor-plates.

There was yelling behind the bronze man, a series of enraged howls.

"Monk, Ham!" Doc yelled.

"In here!" piped Monk's voice from a cabin to the right.

Doc wrenched at the dogs, got the door open, and not only Monk came tumbling out, but also Ham, Renny, Long Tom, Johnny and Pat.

Pretty India Allison and Lieber Von Zidney, the latter with his big mouth open and frightened, showing all of his small teeth, also appeared.

"Ach!" gasped Von Zidney. "Vat a cruel world, this one!"

Doc said sharply, "We'll take the engine room."

Monk scooped up the gun which the guard had dropped when Doc seized him.

"No shooting if it can be helped!" Doc warned.

“Sure,” grinned Monk. “This is just for sound effects!” With which he fired the weapon and missed, by not more than two inches, shooting through the forehead a man who came charging from the direction of the control room.

In some manner, Pat had managed to get ahead of Doc Savage in the direction of the engine room. Doc had delayed briefly to warn Monk, who frequently became so enthusiastic as to forget about Doc’s rule against taking life, even under the most extreme circumstances.

Pat was only a yard or so from the engine-room door.

Captain Blackstone Toy came out.

“Help us!” Pat shrilled at him. “We’re trying to retake the submarine!”

Captain Blackstone Toy swung a terrific blow which knocked pretty Pat Savage senseless.

The next instant, Doc hit Captain Blackstone Toy. The blow could be heard over all of the engine room, and the engine room was not quiet. Captain Toy went up in the air and came down and lay like a big rag in the corridor.

The men in the engine room were perspiring and hot, and were not wearing their guns, because there was not much room for guns in the cramped engine compartment. There was a box of tools near the door.

Doc and his men stood in the door and threw wrenches and hammers until they had taken the engine room, except for one man, whom they had to pull out from behind a generator, where he tried to hide. They knocked him senseless.

They got Pat inside and closed the engine-room door. Bullets smashed against the door from the direction of the control room. None of the lead got through.

“This type of submarine can be handled completely from inside the engine room,” Doc Savage said. “We can submerge her, and when the water comes in the conning-tower hatch, they will very soon decide to give up.”

“But they’ll close the conning-tower hatch!” Monk exploded.

“Not,” Doc said, “if we can work a trick on them.”

The bronze man scrambled aft to the engine-room hatch. It was closed, and he got it open, then fished about in a locker and came up with a length of rope.

“Won’t do,” he decided, and tossed the rope aside. “Get ready for a crash dive!”

He scrambled up through the hatch. The deck was slippery. The sub, taking one wave after another, was wet. Doc worked forward and found one of the lockers which held the wire ropes used for mooring purposes. They were stiff, heavy.

He tried to make as little noise as possible, and hauled the rope out of the

locker. He worked forward, reached the conning-tower hatch, and listened. There was a lot of cursing and shouting below, but no one had thought of coming up to see what was happening on deck.

Doc took a turn over the conning-tower hatch with the wire-rope end. He drew it tight, then tied it—a granny knot so that it would be hard to untie.

It was a stiff job, the tying of the wire line, even for his corded muscles. He had a suspicion that it would take several men some time, or a cutting torch, to get the wire rope off so the hatch could be closed.

They heard him toward the end. He dived back toward the engine-room hatch.

“Crash dive!” he barked, as he dropped down the hatch.

Monk, an experienced pigboat man, put the sub into a dive with the engine-room controls, which he had disconnected from the master controls in the control room.

Doc got the hatch shut then ran to the bulkhead door admitting to the forward part of the submersible.

“Give up, and we’ll keep you from drowning!” he called.

Profanity answered. That, and shots. Then men yelled. They screamed, as men will scream when they feel cold death washing down upon their heads and shoulders and slopping at their shanks.

There was more shooting.

Finally, a man beat at the door.

“Don’t drown us!” he squawled. “Please! They’re gone!”

“Bring her up,” Doc directed.

Monk sent the submarine back to the surface. They ran the bilge pumps for a time, then opened the bulkhead door. Some water came in, but not much more than enough to wash inside some men who had their hands in the air.

They were the sailors, the men who had been seized by the plotters.

“What happened?” Doc demanded.

“They decided to swim for it!” gasped the sailor. “They’re all gone! They managed to get overboard. Let the control room fill with water, and when it stopped coming in, they swam out.”

“The durned ignoramuses!” Monk grunted. “Didn’t they know they’d drown.”

“They have very little chance in this sea, even if they did reach the surface,” Doc said. “We must be miles from land by now.”

“I guess they didn’t care to stick around and face a surefire chance of getting hung,” replied the sailor. “After all, they’re guilty of murdering every man who has

been drowned or otherwise killed in all of these naval disasters.”

Doc set Monk to work attempting to revive Pat, who was still senseless from Captain Toy’s blow. Going on deck, the bronze man directed the sub put about, and used the searchlights in an effort to pick up swimmers.

There was practically no chance of finding any one in the darkness and the high seas.

But, strangely enough, they did find one body in a life Preserver. It was Captain Blackstone Toy. He had drowned.

“I can’t feel sorry for that guy,” Renny rumbled grimly. “He kept right on working with the gang that killed his own brother.”

They did not find any more bodies that night.

About dawn, Pat came to her senses. She had been, she admitted, knocked as thoroughly senseless as at any time in her eventful life. She looked terrible; she admitted she felt it.

“I don’t know, Doc,” she admitted gloomily. “Maybe you were right all along about these little parties of yours being too rough for a woman.”

Which, coming from Pat herself, was proof she did feel terrible.

The newspapers got the story. Doc Savage let the newspapers get the idea that he had a list of the entire gang of plotters.

During the next day, there were scores of desertions from the U. S. navy. Only by these desertions did the authorities know who had been involved in the plot, and who had not.

“This gang had undermined our navy,” said a high official, “more thoroughly than we believed any foreign power could. This will be a lesson to us. Suppose it had been a foreign power! We will be more careful!”

And they were. It became very difficult to enlist in the U. S. Navy.

Some days later, a number of bodies had drifted up on the coast, an indication that most of the plotters had drowned.

There was quite a hullabaloo when the body of August Atlanta Braun was found.

For, thanks to the newspapers, the American public now knew that August Atlanta Braun had been behind the whole thing.

“Braun sure was a clever fellow.” This came from Monk, who had been reading the facts concerning the finding of Braun’s body. “He almost had navy big shots believing they were seeing things and that some nation was knocking at our navy. In fact, I almost fell for it myself.”

“Nothing remarkable about that!” snapped Ham from his chair. “With a brain like yours, a child could convince you the earth is flat!”

There was a roar from Monk as he bounced from his chair. “You fashion plate!” he howled. “I’ll make you see things in a moment, as soon as I get my hands on you!”

Monk was going to regret that last crack.

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been fixed.

Inconsistency in hyphenation has been retained.

[The end of *The Terror in the Navy: A Doc Savage Adventure* by Kenneth Robeson]