

DOC SAVAGE
THE MEN VANISHED

Kenneth Robeson

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WHO IS

DOC SAVAGE

The bronze giant, who with his five aides became world famous, whose name was as well known in the far regions of China and the jungles of Africa as in the skyscrapers of New York.

There were stories of Doc Savage's almost incredible strength; of his amazing scientific discoveries of strange weapons and dangerous exploits.

Doc had dedicated his life to aiding those faced by dangers with which they could not cope.

His name brought fear to those who sought to prey upon the unsuspecting. His name was praised by thousands he had saved.

DOC SAVAGE'S AMAZING CREW

"Ham," Brigadier General Theodore Marley Brooks, was

never without his ominous, black sword cane.

"Monk," Lieutenant Colonel Andrew Blodgett Mayfair, just over five feet tall, yet over 260 pounds. His brutish exterior concealed the mind of a great scientist.

"Renny," Colonel John Renwick, his favorite sport was pounding his massive fists through heavy, paneled doors.

"Long Tom," Major Thomas J. Roberts, was the physical weakling of the crowd, but a genius at electricity.

"Johnny," William Harper Littlejohn, the scientist and greatest living expert on geology and archaeology.

**WITH THEIR LEADER, THEY WOULD
GO ANYWHERE, FIGHT ANYONE,
DARE EVERYTHING—SEEKING EXCITEMENT
AND PERILOUS ADVENTURE!**

Omnibus #1 THE ALL-WHITE ELF, THE RUNNING
SKELETONS, THE ANGRY CANARY, *and*
THE SWOONING LADY

Omnibus #2 THE MINDLESS MONSTERS, THE
RUSTLING DEATH, KIND JOE CAY, *and*
THE THING THAT PURSUED

Omnibus #3 THE SPOOK OF GRANDPA EBEN,

MEASURES FOR A COFFIN, THE THREE
DEVILS, *and* STRANGE FISH

Omnibus #4 MYSTERY ISLAND, ROCK SINISTER,
MEN OF FEAR, *and* THE PURE EVIL

Omnibus #5 NO LIGHT TO DIE BY, THE MONKEY
SUIT, LET'S KILL AMES, ONCE OVER
LIGHTLY, *and* I DIED YESTERDAY

Omnibus #6 THE AWFUL DYNASTY, THE
DISAPPEARING LADY, FIRE AND ICE, *and*
THE MAGIC FOREST

Omnibus #7 THE MEN VANISHED, FIVE FATHOMS
DEAD, THE TERRIBLE STORK, *and*
DANGER LIES EAST

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SAVAGE

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DOC SAVAGE

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I

THE MAN WITH THE FACE

The man with the ugly face was lying. He walked up to the doorman of the Explorers League—the doorman at the service door, not the man who was accepting the engraved invitations at the main entrance—with a confident manner. He carried a press camera, a carton of photoflash bulbs, a tripod; he had a card that read PRESS stuck in his hatband.

"Photographer from the *News-Press*," he said.

He had a voice that was stilted, unnatural, somewhat strange. His words were sounded queerly, as if there was something wrong with his tongue, or as if he was not familiar with the English language.

The doorman was not suspicious. "Press section in front, to the left," he said.

Then he took another look, and his mouth became round

with shock. It was a little appalling, his first look at the face of the man who had just said he was a photographer. The man's face was really two faces—that is, the left side of it was radically different from the right side. The right side was an ordinary face, rather young, almost handsome. The left side was heavy, thick-lipped, darker of cast, with an aboriginal cast to the features. The line of demarcation—the line where one half face left off, and the other began—was sharply defined, like a line drawn down through the middle of the forehead, down the nose, and on down the middle of the chin.

"Say, what done that?" The doorman was looking at the face.

The other man pointed at his camera. "Remember that powder they used to use to take flashlight pictures?" he asked. "Ever think what would happen if that stuff fell on a man's face as it burned?"

"Oh," said the doorman.

"You should have seen it," the man with the face said, "before the plastic surgeon worked on it."

"Oh," repeated the doorman. "Yeah. Well—uh—the press section's in front, and to the left, like I said."

The man with the ugly face strode on into the Explorers League.

His lip, the lip of his right face, curled scornfully.

"The gullible fool," he muttered to himself. "He would

believe anything." He touched his face. In a secluded spot, he got out a hand mirror and looked at his face. The lip of his right face hooked up fiercely on the end; the one on his left face got a sardonic warp. In returning the mirror to his pocket, he touched the spot under his clothing where a revolver was hidden, to make sure the gun was still there.

Well satisfied with himself, he entered the auditorium. The place was normally the large main lounge of the Explorers League, but it had been converted, for the purpose of this meeting, for the presentation of the *Explorers League Ten Year Medal*, into an auditorium by the placing of folding chairs. The man with the ugly face made himself inconspicuous—not in the press section—by standing against a wall.

The auditorium was packed with a distinguished gathering. Probably there would not, for another ten years at least, be another as distinguished. Famous explorers, noted scientists, could be found in the Explorers League clubrooms any evening; but this conclave tonight was a special occasion, one so outstanding that it came but once in each ten years.

The chairman of the board of presentation was speaking.

He had finished his preliminary words. He was pausing regretfully.

"We are sorry," he said, "that seven of our most valued and brilliant members cannot be here tonight. I refer to young Daniel Stage, the explorer who was lost more than a year ago in the South American jungle. And I refer also to those

members of the Explorers League who went on expeditions to find Daniel Stage, and never came back, and have not been heard from. Those six are Joseph Branch, Elmo Walker Eagle, Tom Kennedy, Baron Edouard Corby, Felix Point-Mackey, and Jock van Biltmore. To those six, the history of science and exploration owes a great deal, for they were more than six wealthy men. They were men who devoted their lives to progress in science and exploration, and, when called upon to do so, went unhesitatingly into the face of unknown peril in the hope of rescuing Daniel Stage. Greater courage than that, no man has."

The speaker paused. There was somber silence. The man with the ugly face had a look of sardonic evil. Suddenly realizing the expression that must be on his visage, he wiped it off.

"Having touched on this sad note," continued the speaker, "I will leave it. But I will pause for a few moments, and I know that each of you will pray silently that Daniel Stage and the six who have tried to find him will be able to return safely to us."

The man with the face started to sneer, caught himself. He moved back a step, to a spot where it was darker. His eyes roved over the audience.

"Tonight," said the speaker, "we are presenting the Explorers League Ten Year Medal. Each year, as you know, we make a presentation for the most outstanding achievement in the science or exploration for the year. And each ten years, we present the League's Ten Year Medal. As you know, this is the highest honor the world of science and exploration is able

to pay to any man. In the past, only men of the caliber of Thomas A. Edison and Admiral Richard E. Byrd have earned distinction worthy of its bestowal."

Although his eyes still were on the audience, the gaze of the man with the ugly face had become fixed. He had singled out two stocky men. They were seated together. They saw him, stared at him. When he shook his head, they looked away quickly.

"This time, there were many worthy candidates for the award," continued the speaker, "but the board of presentation, upon its final vote, was unanimously for the award going to Clark Savage, Jr."

An apish-looking gentleman in the front row suddenly applauded loudly. His companion, a very dapperly dressed man, gave him a jab in the ribs. "Monk, you lout, this is the wrong time to applaud," snapped the dapper man. "Everybody already knows who got the award. It was on the invitation." These words rang out in the stillness, and everyone laughed; then there was applause that rose to deafening volume.

The speaker smiled, waved his arms for silence. It was some time before he got it.

"Please, please!" exhorted the speaker. "Let me tell you something of Clark Savage." He smiled and turned toward the newspapermen. "The gentlemen of the press happen to be particularly interested, because they have in the past seemed to be somewhat baffled by Mr. Savage. So much so that they refer to him as the man of mystery, or the man of bronze."

The reporters grinned.

"Gentlemen, I will refer to Clark Savage as Doc Savage, because we all know him as Doc," said the speaker. "I will also be brief. Doc Savage is probably more of a scientist than any of us, because he is a product of science. As most of you know, he was placed in the hands of scientists in childhood, and throughout youth and until early manhood, underwent rigorous training at the hands of these scientists. Most of the things the newspapers"—the speaker glanced at the press row again—"print about Doc happen to be true. They call him a mental wizard, a physical marvel. And this happens to be true. Within, of course, human limits. Doc is no fantastic, inhuman creation, as we, who are well acquainted with him, know.

"Doc Savage's career is an unusual one. It is the rather strange career of righting wrongs and bringing to justice those who are outside the law, particularly in the far corners of the earth. I imagine it is this unusual work which has contributed to the mystery which surrounds him.

"Fundamentally, though, Doc Savage is a scientist, a surgeon, an explorer. His knowledge in many fields is fabulous, his accomplishments of infinite value. I am not going to delve deeply into his work in science and exploration, any one of which would more than warrant his receiving this honor."

The speaker took a deep breath.

"Gentlemen," he said, "I present a truly modest man—Doc Savage."

Doc Savage appeared from an adjacent room.

The dapper man on the front row punched the apish one. "Applaud now, you mistake of nature," he said.

The admonition was not needed. Applause was tremendous, continued for minutes.

Doc Savage was a giant man of bronze, but physically so well proportioned that it was not until he stood beside the speaker, and shook hands with him, that his real size was apparent. A few small things—the sudden leaping out of bars of sinew in his neck, the flowing cables of strength in his hands—indicated fabulous physical strength. Tropical suns had given his skin a permanent bronze, his hair was a bronze hue only slightly darker.

Strength, power, vitality, all carefully reserved, was the impression he gave. His eyes in particular were striking; they were like pools of flake gold being continually stirred.

The room was full of white light popping from press camera flashbulbs. Newsreel men had turned on powerful spotlights. The engineers of two radio networks, having scuttled over to the rostrum, were making last-minute placements of their microphones. Finally quiet was restored, the confusion subsided, and Doc Savage began speaking.

The giant bronze man's voice was modulated, reserved, charged with a vibrant resonance that filled the auditorium. He spoke simply, and very briefly.

The man with the ugly face was looking at the two stocky

men at whom he had shaken his head earlier. He caught their eyes. Then he made, very slowly and deliberately so that the gesture would attract no attention, a stroking motion with his hand over the left—the inhuman—side of his face. The stocky pair nodded.

The man with the face picked up his camera, his tripod, the other stuff, and left the clubrooms of the Explorers League. He had taken no pictures.

In the auditorium, departure of the man was not noticed, because Doc Savage was still speaking. He was not saying anything particularly important; acceptance speeches at award presentations are never vital. But the attention was rapt, because the bronze man's voice and manner were like a vibrant magnetic force in the room.

A tall, powerful man with a thick neck, occupying a seat on the center aisle, where he could see Doc Savage clearly, was the first to applaud on several occasions. He did so loudly, and once the bronze man's flake gold eyes rested on him for a moment.

Possibly the powerful, thick-necked man's vociferous applauding accounted for the fact that Doc Savage saw something that happened when the gathering in the Explorers League auditorium ended.

The incident created no turmoil. It attracted no notice from

anyone, in fact, except Doc Savage. The bronze man saw it.

The two stocky men walked up to the thick-necked man. One of the stocky pair, keeping his right hand in his coat pocket, gouged the powerful man in the back with a hard object in the pocket.

"This is a gun, brother," he said. "If you don't want your insides to leak out, you better come with us."

The man's face was toward Doc Savage when he said that, and the light overhead was bright. Doc was watching the man's lips. And Doc Savage was an adept lip reader.

No flicker of emotion crossed the bronze man's face to show that he knew what had been said. However, he did politely excuse himself from the group where he was standing. He moved to the left, skirted the crowd swiftly.

The two stocky men and their prisoner left the auditorium, the captive walking stiffly, his face fixed. They reached the sidewalk, turned right, moved to the corner. They waited until a traffic light changed, then crossed with it into the park.

The park was a luxuriant green lung in the center of the darkened city. Farther south, and farther north, where the bordering district was less exclusive, there were people on the benches, some sleeping on the grass. But here, the park was almost empty.

Doc Savage, moving like a bronze ghost in the murk, vaulted the stone wall, vanished in the shrubbery. A moment later, the bronze man stepped from behind a bush onto the

path.

The two stocky men were taken completely by surprise. One groaned involuntarily as the gun was crushed out of his fingers by a grip of terrific strength. There was a loud ripping and snapping sound as Doc Savage grabbed the other man's gun—the weapon was in an armpit holster; Doc gripped it through coat fabric—and tore it out bodily, snapping the holster straps. The man, wrenched sidewise by the force of the bronze man's strength, stumbled over a bush, fell heavily.

There was a moment of startled silence. Doc Savage said nothing. He took the two guns, one at a time—they were revolvers—and broke them. The cartridges splattered into the grass. He threw the guns, one after the other, off to the left, toward the mirrored gleam of water in the moonlight. Two chugging splashes came back, and the water rippled and danced for a moment, then became flat again.

Doc said, "Stand close together, you two."

The stocky pair got together, stood with their hands lifted shoulder-high.

The bronze man eyed them. He looked at their prisoner, the big man with the thick neck.

"None of you belong to the Explorers League," the bronze man said. "How did you get in?"

The thick-necked man suddenly pointed a hand at Doc

Savage. There was a stubby black two-barreled derringer in it, and the twin snouts of steel menaced the bronze man.

"You stand still!" said the thick man. "If you as much as bat an eye, I'll blow you open, so help me!"

Doc Savage became rigid, motionless.

"Search him, Lon," ordered the thick-necked man. "And be damned careful. The guy is poison."

The stocky man, named Lon, patted his hands over Doc's clothing, reaching far out to do it, and his hands, whenever they were on the motionless bronze man, trembling.

"Clean," he said. "He's clean, Tiny."

Tiny said, "You go get the car, Bat."

Bat, frightened, said, "We're calling too many names."

"It won't make any difference," said Tiny grimly. "Go get the car."

Bat went away, breathing heavily. He headed in the direction of the street which bordered the park, and his footsteps died away.

The large man with the thick neck, Tiny, watched Doc Savage intently.

"Nice trick, didn't you think?" he asked.

"A good trick," Doc agreed.

"It took you in, didn't it?" Tiny laughed the laugh of a scared man who was feeling desperate. "By applauding, I got you to noticing me in the hall. When Bat and Lon closed in, they did it when they were sure you would notice. But the lip-reading part of it was best of all, don't you think?"

"You knew I could read lips?"

"Sure."

"What is the idea behind it?" Doc asked.

Tiny said, "Shut up!"

There followed three or four minutes of silence, then Lon muttered, "Here comes Bat with the car." Lon sounded as if he was a little ill. He kept feeling of his ribs, his shoulder, where the holster straps had bruised him when Doc snapped them. "I think I got two broken ribs," he said.

The car was a sedan, not an obtrusive one. It was black, with some chromium trim, and white-sidewall tires. They got in. Lon sat on the right of Doc Savage; Tiny straddled the jump-seat, facing the bronze man with his gun.

"Take that drive that cuts in toward the center of the park, Bat," Tiny said. "There won't be any traffic there this time of night."

The car moved. The muffler was loose, or the exhaust manifold, because the engine made a little more noise than it

should have. Otherwise the car seemed to be in good condition.

Doc Savage asked, "What is behind this?"

"You said that once before," Tiny growled. "Shut up."

"You intend to kill me?"

"Oh, no, no," Tiny said. "No, of course not."

He did. There was lie all through his voice.

Doc said quietly, "You might tell me why."

Lon growled, "Because a guy was going to come to you for help, and we didn't want it that way. That's why."

"Shut up, Lon," Tiny snapped.

Doc Savage leaned back on the cushions and squirmed a little; he seemed to be relaxing. His feet were close together, and one of them rubbed the other. A moment later, the heel came off his right shoe without making enough sound to be noticed above the exhaust mutter of the engine. Doc stepped down on the heel rather hard.

Then the bronze man's body became slack, his eyes closing. He lay that way, his head rolling to the side.

"What the hell!" exclaimed Lon.

"Careful!" warned Tiny.

Lon leaned over, very cautiously, and put a hand over the bronze man's mouth and nose. He held the hand there for some moments.

"He ain't breathin'!" Lon exploded. "He's fainted."

"They keep on breathing after they've fainted," said Bat. "Maybe it was his heart?"

Tiny growled with satisfaction. "What's the difference? He's out. Pull over on the side, Bat. And hand me that thing of yours."

Bat asked, "You mean my knife?"

"Yes," Tiny said in a low voice. "Give me your knife."

And that was all they said.

II

THE MISSING MAN

Phil O'Reilly was one of the younger members of the Explorers League, and he was proud of his membership, although painfully aware that he probably had accomplished

less than anyone else who belonged to the League. He hoped to remedy that. He was a wide, powerful young man, rather serious, with a good academic knowledge of general science. He happened to be quite wealthy.

He had been proud to receive an invitation to the Ten Year Medal presentation ceremonies.

For almost an hour now, he had prowled through the league clubrooms, seeking Doc Savage, and not finding him.

He accosted a steward. "Have you seen Mr. Savage? It is rather important that I talk to him."

The steward shook his head. "I believe he's gone."

"What about his two associates who were here?" Phil asked. "Monk—I mean, Lieutenant Colonel Andrew Blodgett Mayfair. And Ham Brooks—Brigadier General Theodore Marley Brooks. Do you know them?"

"Oh, yes, I know them," said the steward. "Monk was the fellow who sat on the front row and applauded, and Ham Brooks was the well-dressed man who punched him in the ribs." The steward chuckled. "You should hear those two argue some time. The things they call each other!"

"Are they still here?"

"No. They left a few minutes ago."

Phil was disappointed. "I wanted to talk to Savage about Daniel Stage," he remarked, more to himself than the steward.

"I think I'll try to telephone him at his headquarters."

Phil got on the telephone, put in a call. He recognized the squeaky, childlike voice that answered—it belonged to the apish-looking Monk Mayfair, who, Phil happened to know, was one of the country's leading industrial chemists, in spite of the fact that there didn't appear to be room for more than a spoonful of brains in his head.

"Doc ain't here. I dunno where he went," Monk said with ungrammatical carelessness. "What you want with him?"

"I want to talk to him," Phil said. "I have an enormous admiration for Doc Savage."

"So have I," Monk said. "So has everybody who knows him. Who did you say you are?"

"Mr. Philip O'Reilly."

"Oh, yeah. That young squirt with a lot of money who is trying to be an explorer. I remember."

Phil, angered, said, "I *am* an explorer."

"Oh, sure. You crossed Africa in a Rolls-Royce and a trailer, complete with refrigerator and lace curtains. I heard about it."

Phil reddened with indignation. That African venture had been his initial whirl at exploring, and the newspapers had mortified him by calling it a luxury cruise, a joy jaunt, a plush-lined caravan, and other things.

He snapped, "I want to talk to Mr. Savage about Daniel Stage."

"You mean Daniel Stage, the explorer who has been lost in the South American jungles. What about him?"

"Daniel Stage was my friend."

"Yeah?"

"I am thinking about taking an expedition to hunt for him."

Monk snorted.

"Listen, sonny boy, you better stick to plush-cushion exploring," the homely chemist said. "Down where Daniel Stage went, you won't be driving a Rolls and a trailer."

"I'm perfectly competent!"

"Sure, we all think we're competent," Monk said. "It would be a tough world if we didn't. But you'll find out there's a good reason why several thousand square miles of country down there are still unexplored."

"I called you up," snapped Phil, "to ask you if Doc Savage was there. Is he?"

"No, he ain't."

"Thank you," Phil said, and hung up with an ill-tempered bang. Then he grinned wryly at the instrument. "I guess I did turn out to be kind of a panty-waist explorer the first time," he

muttered. "But, you homely clown, you wait until I get another chance!"

He had a grim determination to win his spurs as an explorer, and not have to feel uncomfortable every time he approached a group of old-timers, because he thought he detected traces of sly grins on their faces. It was this which had started him toying with the idea of organizing an expedition to hunt Daniel Stage.

He was thoughtful about the venture during the ride to his apartment in a taxicab.

In his hall, Phil O'Reilly came upon the man with the ugly face.

The encounter was brief. But it was a cat-and-dog thing while it lasted. Phil O'Reilly, being richer than a young man really should be, occupied a marble home facing the park. Tourists usually thought the place was a museum. He pushed open his door, surprised to find it unlocked.

The man with the ugly face was crouched over the mailbox. The mailbox was placed at the side of the door, with a slot that opened outside the house.

The man with the face whipped erect, whirled and ran down the hall. Apparently he had been taken by surprise.

"Hey!" Phil yelled. "Stop, you!"

He hurled his evening stick. The cane whistled over and over through the air, hit the fleeing man, and knocked him off stride. He slammed into the wall, went to his knees, skated along on all fours. But he heaved up again, went on.

"Jonas!" Phil roared.

Jonas was the butler.

Lunging in pursuit of the man, Phil hesitated momentarily to scoop up his cane. He threw it again. This time, he missed.

The man with the ugly face came to a big window in the back of the house, wrapped arms around his face, and ran through the window as if it wasn't there. Glass cascaded to the floor, leaving a big hole in the window.

Phil got his cane again, leaped out into the night. There was a small lawn, tufted with shrubbery; an entry-way led around to the street, where it was blocked by a high iron gate. The gate was easily climbed.

Taking aim, Phil hurled his stick at the man as he went over the gate. Another miss. The stick hurtled on out into the street and broke the window of a taxicab. The cab stopped; the driver stuck his head out and said some words that probably had never been heard on that street before.

The man with the face ran like an antelope, bounding up and down. He rounded the nearest corner.

Phil climbed over the gate, raced to the corner. The quarry had disappeared.

A policeman arrived on the scene. He was the patrolman on the beat; he knew Phil, and he was respectful.

"What did this intruder look like, sir?" he asked.

"His face," said Phil O'Reilly, "was the most hideous thing I ever saw on a human being. One half of it seemed to be completely different from the other half. One half was a white man's face, but the other was—well, different."

"Different how?"

"Kind of thick-lipped, and foreign, and—well—" Phil wiped his face with a handkerchief while trying to think how to describe the face. "Say, Casey, did you ever see the faces on them little images they dig up in South American ruins?"

"You mean them things they got in the museum? Them Inca things?" the officer asked. "Sure, I seen 'em."

"Well, the other half of this fellow's face was like one of those."

"Hm-m-m." Casey was confused. "He must have been a right active guy," he added, looking at Phil's height and squareness.

He knew Phil O'Reilly had been collegiate champ in several branches of athletics. Phil was also quite handsome—it was Phil's secret and horrible suspicion at times that he was pretty, and he dressed in a rough, tweedy fashion to overcome this.

"The man with the face," said Phil, "was as tough as a brass

gorilla, and as active as a real one."

"I'll look around," the cop promised. "If I find him, we'll see if he can outrun a hunk of lead."

"Thanks, Casey," Phil said.

Going back to the house, Phil looked in the mailbox, and found the letter from Obidos, South America.

It was a queer-looking letter. The covering was grayish black and felt like a rubber boot. And it *was* rubber. The letter had been sealed inside a coating of crude-processed native rubber. The address was on a tag, which was attached.

Phil eyed the foreign stamps, the cancellation marks, the grime on the tag, the queerly stilted printing of the address. Then he got a knife and chopped the crude rubber covering loose at one end.

His eyes got round as he read one of two letters that were contained inside.

It was written on some kind of animal hide that resembled buckskin. The ink was a rather strange, deep-violet color.

The letter read:

Dear Phil:

This is an appeal for help. I am getting desperate. Also, it is not likely that I will be allowed to go on living much longer.

You see, Phil, I have made a fantastic discovery here in the jungle. It is the most amazing thing any explorer ever found. But now I cannot get away unaided. I have sent out other appeals for help, and those men have tried to rescue me, and failed. They are here now, all of them—Joseph Branch, Elmo Eagle, Kennedy, Baron Corby, Point-Mackey and Van Biltmore. They are here, and as helpless as myself.

Any attempt to rescue us **MUST BE KEPT SECRET**. You do not understand why now, but you will.

I am getting this out by Kul, a messenger who can be trusted. He will wait to guide you here, if he is able to get out with this.

Our lives depend on help, Phil. And you must keep it secret. The others let it be known they were coming to rescue me, and that is why they never came back.

Daniel Stage.

Phil O'Reilly gaped at the missive unbelievably. He was astounded. He had been planning an expedition to rescue

Daniel Stage. And here was a letter from the man!

The other note was shorter. It was scrawled on parchment in the same odd handwriting that was on the tag bearing the address.

The note informed:

Señor Phil O'Reilly:

I have forward this you. Kul are wait. You come, he guide.

You say nothing about this, please. You say, you more likely be dead. Very serious. No one understand.

You come by my trading post. Kul here. He guide.

Location of trading post you can learn in Obidos. Come secretly. I keep Kul here for you.

Niji.

Suddenly excited, Phil O'Reilly jammed the two messages in a pocket. He yelled at the butler, "Don't wait up for me, Jonas," and dashed out of the door.

He encountered Casey, the patrolman, on the sidewalk.

"Sure, and now I can't find no trace of this guy with the face," Casey said.

Phil exclaimed, "Casey, I think I know what the fellow was doing in my house."

"The devil you do! He stole something, maybe?"

"I think I surprised him before he had a chance," Phil explained. "He was bending over my mailbox. There was a letter in the box. A very unusual and valuable letter from South America."

Casey peered at Phil. "Sure, and didn't you say one half of this guy's face looked South American?"

"He didn't look like a modern South American," Phil corrected. "I said half of his face was like the face on one of those prehistoric images they dig up in ruins."

Casey scratched his head.

"A bit screwy, ain't it, sir?" he said. "You think the guy was after the letter, you say?"

"Yes."

"I'll keep looking for the guy," Casey promised.

"Thanks, Casey," Phil said. Then, as an afterthought, he declared, "I think I'll go back and get a gun."

"Have you got a permit for the carryin' of a gun, now?"

Casey asked sharply.

"Yes."

"Sure, then it'll be a good idea, I'm thinkin'."

Phil dashed back into the house, ran to his gun room—the place was stocked with guns for everything from air-pistol target practice to shooting elephants—and got a dependable revolver that had a long barrel. It was his favorite weapon.

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A taxicab took him to one of the tallest skyscrapers in the city. Alighting on the sidewalk, he peered upward. Haze concealed the top floor—the eighty-sixth floor—of the structure, so that he could not tell whether windows were lighted up there. He knew that the eighty-sixth floor housed Doc Savage's headquarters.

A private elevator carried him up. He stepped out in a rather plain hallway, approached a bronze-colored door, which was immediately opened—Phil learned later there was a capacity-type burglar-alarm device which showed when anyone came near the door—by the homely chemist, Monk Mayfair.

"Oh, you," Monk said. "What's the matter? You get mad over them remarks I made about your exploring ability, and come down here to punch me in the nose?"

Monk sounded hopeful. He sounded as if he would enjoy a fight.

"No, no," Phil said. "I've got something important to talk to you about."

A deep-throated orator's voice—this one belonged to Ham Brooks—asked from the room beyond, "Who is it, you hairy accident?"

Monk ignored the question. "Come on in," he told Phil.

Stepping back, Monk allowed Phil to enter. Noting the width of Phil's shoulders, the capable blocks that were the young man's fists, Monk grinned and rubbed his jaw. Then the homely chemist's alert eyes noted that a small electric light on the wall across the room had flashed on.

Monk's eyes narrowed. There was a metal detector device, somewhat like those used in penitentiaries to learn whether the inmates are carrying weapons, concealed in the door frame. The flashing of the light meant that their visitor had a piece of metal as large as a gun concealed on his person.

"Hey, sonny boy," Monk said. "This place is like the old-time Western saloons."

"Eh?" Phil stared at him.

"You check your guns at the door."

"Oh." Phil hesitated. Then he removed his revolver, and placed it on a large inlaid table, which, with a big safe, was the principal furniture in the reception room. "That satisfy you?"

"Partly," Monk said. "But generally, when a citizen goes

around carrying a gun, there's a story connected with it."

Phil O'Reilly was looking at the other occupants of the room. There was Ham Brooks, the fashion-plate with the orator's voice. Phil knew he was an eminent lawyer.

There was a third man, a man who was a string of bones. He was longer and thinner than it seemed any man could possibly be, and still live. Phil recognized him also. He was Johnny—William Harper Littlejohn, internationally famous as an archaeologist and geologist, and noted for his big words.

"Hello, Johnny," Phil said.

"A paradisaical consociative conflux," Johnny remarked.

"I hope that's good," Phil said, smiling.

"It probably is," a feminine voice said. The woman was seated to the side, where she had not been noticed.

Phil stared at the young woman. He was dazzled. Seeing her unexpectedly was like having lightning jump out of a clear sky. She was marvelously beautiful.

"This is Patricia Savage," the dapper Ham explained. "Doc's cousin."

"I'm very glad to meet you, Miss Savage," Phil said.

He was, too. She was the most delightful thing that he could recall having happened to him. He could see the Savage family resemblance. The bronze hair, a little darker than gold, and the

compelling flake-gold eyes.

Monk demanded, "O'Reilly, you say you got business?"

"Yes." Phil nodded. "Very important business."

"Any mystery connected to it?"

"Yes."

Monk jerked his thumb at Patricia Savage. "You scram, Pat."

The young woman shook her head. "Nothing doing."

"You know the orders Doc gave," Monk said ominously. "You don't get mixed up in any more of our messes. Now, don't start arguing. I know you like excitement, and I don't want any argument from you."

"I won't argue," Pat said. "I'll just stay." She turned to Phil O'Reilly and gave him a smile that would have melted a brass man. "You don't mind, do you?"

"Of course not," Phil said quickly. "In fact, I want you to stay."

There was about five minutes of heated argument, and Pat won it.

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Phil O'Reilly took a deep breath. "Here is my story," he said.

It took him about seven or eight minutes to tell it. When Phil finished, Monk said, "It adds up to this, then: You were planning on going on an expedition to rescue Daniel Stage. And tonight, all of a sudden out of a clear sky, you get a message from him asking for help. And some guy with an ugly face tried to intercept the message, you think. That the story?"

"That's it," Phil replied.

"Ain't it a funny coincidence, you getting the message just as you had made up your mind?" Monk inquired.

"I don't think so." Phil shook his head. "You see, Daniel Stage and I were well acquainted. It is logical that he would call on me for help."

"How come he didn't call on you first? He's had several others try to rescue him."

Phil flushed. "As a matter of fact, Daniel Stage shared your opinion of my ability as an explorer. Once he told me I was a plush-chair explorer. He would call on men he thought were more competent in the beginning."

"What do you want Doc to do?" Monk asked.

"I wondered if Doc would be interested in the venture of rescuing Daniel Stage."

"You want to hire Doc?"

Phil looked indignant. "I'm not a fool. I know people do not hire Doc Savage. I hoped I might prevail on Doc leading an

expedition, if I would finance it."

"You aren't just fishing for the credit of having gone on an expedition with Doc Savage?" Monk asked rather unkindly.

"No. I don't want any credit."

"I'm surprised," Monk said.

Phil O'Reilly stood up.

"You're gonna get surprised again with a bust on the nose," he told Monk, "if you don't quit making cracks about me."

Ham Brooks chuckled. "Sit down, O'Reilly," he said. "This homely baboon hasn't got any manners."

Phil subsided reluctantly. "Do you think Doc will be interested?" he asked.

"I think he might be," Ham said.

"Listen, *I'm* interested," interjected Pat Savage. "And I know Doc will be."

"You better be interested in staying out of this," Monk told her.

Pat wrinkled her nose at him. "I'm going home and get some sleep," she said. "Tomorrow, we'll find Doc and talk this over with him, and start organizing our expedition."

Ham said, "We're leaving, too. We can all go in my car, and

we'll drop you and young O'Reilly."

That was all right with Phil. Already he was much interested in the attractive Pat. The idea of going on an exploring expedition with her intrigued him.

They rode down in the private elevator together. The vast lobby of the skyscraper was empty, and their heels made clickings on the parquet flooring.

They moved out onto the sidewalk in a compact group, not expecting trouble.

A man, pushing a small hot-chestnut wagon, saw them, wheeled his wagon over, stopped it in their path.

"Buy some hot chestnuts, people?" he asked.

"Naw, we don't want any," Monk said. "Hey, move that wagon outa our way."

The man said, "Sure you want some chestnuts."

He upset the wagon. Chestnuts cascaded around their feet. Along with the chestnuts, a glass bottle fell from the cart. It broke, sprayed liquid over the sidewalk, and the liquid rapidly vaporized.

The man jerked a transparent hood out of his pocket, yanked it over his head. It was equipped with an elastic which drew the hood mouth tight around his neck.

"Tear gas!" Monk yelled.

The warning was too late to do any good. The vapor surged up around them, brought stinging agony to their throats and nasal passages, blinded them.

Monk lunged forward, swung a haymaker with his fist. It missed. The chestnut vender tripped Monk; the chemist sprawled on the sidewalk. Phil O'Reilly clubbed around with both fists, yelled, "Somebody grab the guy!"

The chestnut vender waved his arms. Answering the signal, a gray car—it had been parked down the street, and was already approaching—swerved to the curb. There were two men in it, one driving, one a passenger. The driver remained at the wheel. The other got out.

Both the driver of the gray car and the fellow who alighted had pulled transparent hoods over their heads. These, while by no means gas masks, would keep out the tear gas, and a man could exist on the air inside the hood for a few minutes.

The two men, the vender and the one from the gray car, seized Pat Savage. Pat screamed. The vender struck her on the jaw.

They hurled Pat into the car, piled in after her, and the machine jumped away from the curb.

THE TOUGH MR. MASKET

It was then that Mr. Dink Masket made his initial appearance.

Phil O'Reilly and Ham Brooks—both of them had the same idea at once, and it was a good idea—saw Dink Masket about the same time. They had dashed out of the gas. Also, they'd had the judgment to keep their eyes shut, so that when they opened them, they could see after a fashion.

"Look!" Phil yelled.

"I see it," Ham said.

They both stared.

A very large man who was also very brown, a man Phil decided he had never seen before, had dashed across the sidewalk, and out into the street, and clamped on to the spare tire and bumper at the rear of the departing gray car. He clung there.

"He must be one of the gang they were going to leave behind!" Phil exclaimed.

"I don't think so," Ham snapped. "Come on!"

Ham's car, a limousine that looked every penny of the seven thousand-odd dollars of it had cost, was parked at the end of

the block. They raced to it, piled in.

Ham made the machine leap ahead, and stop with screaming tires near Monk and Johnny, who, completely blinded, were cautiously sparring with their fists, each under the impression the other was a foe. The bony Johnny, with arms practically twice the length of Monk's, had managed to poke Monk once between the eyes.

"Quit fighting with each other!" Ham yelled. "Get in this car!" Then, as Monk and Johnny stumbled toward the sound of Ham's voice, Ham told Phil, "Steer them in the back seat."

Phil did so. He closed the glass partition between front and rear seats. "That'll keep the gas out, I hope," he said.

Ham said nothing. He dropped one eye briefly on the speedometer. It was already past fifty. He punched a button on the dash, and a police siren began howling under the hood.

"It's against the law for a private citizen to have a police siren on his car," Phil said.

"That's all right." Ham stamped the accelerator. "We've got honorary commissions."

The gray car was a pale-red tail light on the end of a rocket far ahead. But Ham's big machine was supercharged, had special low springing. It could do, on a straightaway, close to two hundred, if it had run enough. It was over ninety now.

The tail light of the gray car got closer. There was not much traffic on the streets; what there was hugged the curbsings,

because of the siren.

Suddenly the gray car took a corner. Ham braked at the last minute. He was doing fifty when he started into the curb, and all four tires locked and slid and smoked and howled like wolves.

In the rear seat, centrifugal force tried to throw Monk and Johnny out through the side of the car.

Monk roared, "Who's driving this thing?"

"Ham Brooks," Phil squalled back at him.

"Great grief!" Monk howled. "Let me outa here!"

The speedometer was back up to seventy.

"Go ahead and get out," Ham said.

Dark buildings, street lights went moaning past. The limousine took a high bump of a street intersection, must have gone fifty feet before its wheels got on the pavement again.

Their headlights were now splashing white glare on the gray car.

"Look!" Phil barked.

The big man, the stranger they had seen leap on the back of the gray car, was hanging down, and, with one hand, clamping

his hat over the mouth of the exhaust pipe.

"That's why we're catching up with them so fast," Ham said grimly. "You can kill a car's speed by blocking the exhaust. Sometimes you can stop the motor."

A man leaned out of the window of the gray car. A moment later, a spider-webbed design of cracks appeared in the windshield in front of Phil's nose.

"A rock flew up and cracked the windshield," he said.

"Yes, a rock made of lead," Ham said.

Phil blanched. "A bullet!"

"If you think that guy is just shaking his finger at us, you're crazy." Ham tramped down on the accelerator. "This windshield is bulletproof. I hope."

Phil sat back, white-faced. He could see the bobbing figure on the rear of the gray car. Apparently the occupants of the machine did not know the stranger was clinging there.

"He's got a knife!" Phil gasped.

"Who?"

"The guy on the back of that car." Phil pointed. "He's trying to stick it in the tires."

Ham corrected, "Trying to reach down and cut through the side wall of a tire. That's a heck of a job. He couldn't have done

it on those rough streets. But we're on new pavement now."

A moment later, the man with the knife succeeded. The tire let go. The man lost his knife, clung wildly to the spare tire and bumper.

For moments, it seemed the gray car was going to dive into some one of the buildings along the street. But it straightened out, stopped.

The three men piled out of the machine instantly. Two of them dragging Pat Savage. Apparently Pat was still out from the blow on the jaw.

The man on the spare tire alighted. He was around the car, upon the trio with flashing speed. He swung a fist, and one of the three released Pat, walked backward a dozen feet or so and sat down.

The man who had been on the tire scooped up Pat, whipped around the machine, and half across the street.

Ham put all his weight on the brake pedal, stopped the limousine so that it was a barricade between Pat and her rescuer. Ham had the window down on that side a crack.

"Get in the car," he yelled. "It's armor plated!"

The rescuer wrenched open the rear door, tossed Pat inside, got in himself, and banged the door.

"Run over 'em, mates," he said.

Ham did his best. But the two occupants of the gray car had grabbed their stunned companion by the arms. A subway entrance was nearby. They ran him to that, and down the steps. Then they turned back, guns in hand. The gun muzzles emptied out fire, and noise that whooped like thunder as it echoed in the street. More spider webs appeared in the limousine glass. There were sounds like huge hammerblows against the car body.

"Monk!" Ham roared. "Give me your machine pistol!"

"I haven't got it," Monk said. "Do you think I would go to the Explorers League in a tux packing one of those things?"

"Johnny, have you got yours?"

"No, I haven't," Johnny said.

Ham grinned. "Johnny's excited. He's using small words," he told Phil O'Reilly. Then Ham drove the car up on the sidewalk and headed it for the subway entrance. It looked as if he was going to drive down the stairs themselves, and the three men with guns ducked out of sight. Ham braked in time.

Pat's rescuer flung open the limousine door. He was huge, wide, very freckled, very red-headed. He had four gold teeth in the center of his mouth, and he was showing them. He seemed as happy as a bulldog with a strange cat.

"I'm goin' after them hull worms," he said.

He did not go down that subway entrance, but ran across the street to the other one, and disappeared into that. Ham and Phil

and the others strained their ears.

There was no shooting. But they *did* hear a subway train leave the station.

When the big red-thatched, freckled man came back—he had crossed from one side of the subway to the other underground—he looked disgusted.

"The swabs got away," he explained. "Jumped in the front car, and made the motorman take the train out in a hurry." He rubbed his left leg, then made kicking motions with the leg, and scowled at it. "Say, when I jumped down on them tracks to cross over, somethin' bit me."

"Bit you?"

"Yeah. Couldn't see what kind of a varmint it was."

"Maybe you touched the third rail," Phil suggested.

"Come to think of it, I was steppin' on that extra rail when the varmint bit me."

Phil gaped at him. "For the love of mud! That's supposed to kill a man."

"Kill Dink Masket?" The unusual red-headed fellow snorted. "There ain't nothin' a man can't see that is tough enough to bother Dink."

"Your name is Dink Masket?" Phil asked.

"You heard me." Dink Masket eyed Phil curiously. "Right pretty young craft, ain't you?"

Monk laughed.

Phil was insulted. But he decided to let the remark pass. "You seem to have saved this young woman," he said. "We're grateful."

Phil extended his hand. Dink Masket took it. Phil all but howled in agony. Dink Masket had a grip like a stone crusher. Dink Masket then shook hands with Ham, Johnny and Monk, all three of whom wrung their knuckles and blew on them afterward.

"Hurt you, boys?" Dink Masket asked. "I'm a little tough by nature. Sometimes I forget to be gentle."

Scowling, Monk said, "You crack my knuckles like that again, my sunset-complexioned friend, and you're gonna find out there is somebody else that is tough."

"Meaning you?" Dink Masket asked skeptically.

"Yeah, me," Monk growled.

"Ho, ho, ho!" said Dink Masket.

Monk took a step forward. "Listen, you big—"

Ham got in front of Monk and said, "You dope! He just

saved Pat, didn't he?"

"Yeah," Monk admitted, subsiding. "And by remindin' me of it, you just saved *him*."

Dink Masket ambled over to the limousine, looked inside, found it was too dark to see Pat, and fumbled in his trousers pockets for a match.

"There's a dome-light switch by the door," Ham said. "Turn it on."

"Don't put no stock in them electrical contraptions," Dink Masket said. He went on fishing until he found a match, which he struck. By the illumination it shed, he inspected Pat Savage. She was still unconscious.

"Trimmiest craft I've seen in some time," Dink Masket remarked of Pat's form.

Ham climbed into the car and inspected Pat anxiously. "She's just kayoed," he said, relieved.

Monk was scowling at Dink Masket. "Look here, how'd you happen to mix in this thing?" Monk asked.

"Me?" Dink showed his four gold teeth cheerfully. "I was just cruisin' past."

"You mean," Monk demanded suspiciously, "that you got mixed up in that for no reason at all?"

"Seen a squall of trouble. That's enough reason for me,

mate."

"You like trouble, eh?"

"Yeah, mate, figure I must."

Monk growled, "Stop calling me mate."

Dink Masket eyed him critically. "Think I will," he said. "Guess your family was baboons a lot more recent than mine."

Ham snorted gleefully. Phil O'Reilly, who had been the victim of Monk's complete lack of manners, grinned with pleasure.

At this point, Pat Savage sat up, held her head, and opened and shut her eyes several times. She looked at their surroundings.

The limousine was still standing on the sidewalk, and a crowd had started to gather.

"I must have missed something," Pat said.

"You did," Ham assured her. "And I see no reason for us hanging around here." The lawyer climbed into the machine, waited until the others were also aboard—it was a tight fit in the back seat with Monk, Johnny, Pat and Dink Masket all wedged in—then the limousine backed off the sidewalk and left the spot.

Monk asked, "Pat, did you get a good look at those men?"

"Well, a fair look, anyway," Pat replied.

"Ever see them before?"

"No."

"Any idea why they grabbed you?" Monk persisted. "Did they say something, maybe, that would explain it?"

"Being unconscious, I wouldn't know what they said," Phil replied.

Monk scratched his head. Monk's knot of a head was covered with short red hair which had some of the appearance of rusty finishing nails. "It gets me," he said.

Phil O'Reilly leaned back on the limousine cushions, and contemplated the darkened pavement as it crawled toward them like a dark snake. "You know," he remarked cheerfully, "that was the first time I was ever shot at."

Ham threw him an approving glance. "It didn't seem to bother you much."

"Not as much as I thought it would."

Suddenly, Ham frowned. "Say, you said a guy with an ugly face tried to intercept that letter. Do you suppose—"

Phil stopped Ham by clutching his arm. "Let's get rid of this Masket," he whispered, "before we discuss anything."

Dink Masket evidently heard that, because he growled, "What's that wind you're makin' up there in the front seat?"

Producing his billfold, Phil extracted several greenbacks, the lowest denomination of which was a twenty. He turned around in the seat and extended the money toward Dink Masket.

"What's that pocket lettuce for?" Dink Masket asked.

"A reward," Phil explained.

"What for?"

"For saving Miss Savage's life."

Dink Masket blew out his cheeks indignantly. "Don't want it," he said.

"There's quite a bit of money here, and you're entitled to it for what you've done," Phil told him patiently. "With that much money, you can have yourself a time. Take it, and start painting the town red. You're a sailor, aren't you? Well, have yourself a real whoop-tearing shore-leave."

Dink Masket scowled.

"Meanin'," he demanded, "that you're tryin' to get rid of me?"

"Well, to tell the truth, we have some private business to discuss," Phil said.

"Is it about this trouble?"

"Yes, of course."

"Then," said Dink Masket triumphantly, "I'm in on it. There's no weather I like better than squally weather, at sea or ashore. Looks like I found me a squall on shore here, and durned if I don't sail right along in it."

Phil was exasperated.

He yelled, "You can't force yourself onto us."

Pat entered the conversation.

"I think Mr. Masket is right," Pat declared. "If he likes excitement, I know exactly how he feels. I like a little now and then myself. If Mr. Masket wants to help us, I see no reason why he shouldn't. I think he's earned the privilege."

"But Pat," Monk ejaculated, "we just don't want the lug along."

"I do," Pat said stubbornly.

Phil O'Reilly discovered he was caught on the horns of a dilemma. He wanted to make a hit with Pat, and here she was sponsoring Dink Masket. Phil swallowed his irritation, and reversed himself.

"If Pat thinks we need Mr. Masket, I'm in favor of his staying," Phil said.

"So am I," Ham announced.

Monk made a disgusted noise. "Why didn't you stick with me?" he growled at Phil. "We could've outvoted 'em, and got rid of this . . . this—"

"Brobdingnagian," Johnny supplied.

"What's a Brod-brodbig—whatever you call it?" Dink Masket demanded loudly.

"A large, strong fellow," Johnny explained prudently.

"That's me," Dink Masket declared. "You swabs go ahead and discuss your trouble. I want to hear it."

Ham had been thinking. "It is just possible," he said, "that this thing was an attempt to prevent us going with Phil on an expedition to hunt Daniel Stage in South America."

"If the seizure of Miss Savage had been successful," Phil suggested, "you would have had to stay here in New York and hunt her."

"That's exactly what I mean," Ham agreed.

Monk snorted. "That's a hind-foremost idea."

"How do you figure?"

"When they grabbed Pat, they had us all on the sidewalk, and they gassed us. They could have shot us all down just as easy. I would say it would've been easier than seizing Pat."

"Yes," Phil said, "but that would have been murder."

"Listen, there ain't much difference between the penalty for kidnapping and for murder."

"That *is* puzzling," Ham admitted.

Dink Masket asked, "Who is this Daniel Stage you mentioned, mates?"

Ham glanced at Phil O'Reilly. "Yes, you might tell us more about him. He was a friend of yours, wasn't he?"

"Not what you would call a close friend," Phil said. "But I *did* know him rather well." He rubbed his jaw while he was pondering. "I went to college with Daniel Stage. He was very ambitious, even then."

"Ambitious, eh?" Ham said.

"Extremely. You see, Daniel Stage came of rather poor parents, and he had an intense ambition to make a high mark in the world. He was a dreamer, rather idealistic, and impatient with a great many of life's problems. To tell the truth, he wasn't very well liked at school. He was something of a genius, I'm afraid, and eccentric after the fashion of genius."

"What would you say was his outstanding characteristic?" Ham inquired.

"An intense determination to be famous and powerful. That, and an inclination to be a reckless adventurer at heart. Just the type to be a spectacular explorer."

"He went into the back-country Amazon basin by plane, didn't he?"

"Yes."

"Where did he get the money for the plane?"

"A man named Chief John Eagle financed that," Phil explained. "You see, Daniel Stage already had a reputation as an explorer. He had been in the Smith Sound Eskimo region, and in the Rub Al Khali desert in Arabia, and some other places." Phil sighed. "As an explorer, he made me look pretty punk."

Monk leaned forward. "Any reason for John Eagle not wanting Daniel Stage to get help?"

"Oh, no," Phil said quickly. "As a matter of fact, Chief John Eagle's son is one of those who were lost hunting Daniel Stage."

"Is Elmo Walker Eagle the chief's son?"

"Yes."

"Why do they call him Chief?"

Phil smiled. "Wait until you see him. You'll understand. The chief is an Oklahoma Indian who made millions out of oil."

"Does the chief wear feathers?"

"Not at all. He'll surprise you," Phil said. "He's a remarkable

mixture of the aboriginal redskin who lived in a teepee and the modernized version."

Ham shifted the discussion to another thread. "Has Daniel Stage got any relatives around?" he asked.

"Yes, a sister," Phil replied.

Pat asked, "Good looking?"

"Er—rather," Phil admitted.

Monk enthusiastically suggested, "Maybe we'd better talk to the sister."

"We'll do that in the morning," Ham said. "It's way after midnight. We can't go rousing people out of bed at this time of night."

Johnny Littlejohn stretched his incredibly long and thin body and yawned.

"Somniferous satuvolism seems perspicacious," he remarked.

"Eh?" Phil stared at him.

"I said that time out for sleep seems wise," Johnny explained. "You might drop me at the next corner. My apartment is close."

Johnny got out at the corner, and his long frame disappeared in the darkness.

"An unusual fellow," Phil remarked.

"That's putting it mildly," Pat said. "But then, you'll find out all of Doc's associates are unusual."

Phil said, "Doc has five aids, hasn't he?"

"Yes. Monk, Ham and Johnny are three of them. Then there is Major Thomas J. Roberts, better known as Long Tom. And Colonel John Renwick, called Renny."

"Where are those two?"

"They're in South Africa on an engineering project," Pat explained. "Long Tom is an electrical engineer, and Renny Renwick is a civil engineer. They're installing a new system of mining diamonds in the Kimberly district."

Phil pondered. "I wonder what became of Doc Savage?"

Ham said, "I'll stop a minute at that drugstore yonder. Monk, you go in and try to call Doc."

A few minutes later, when Monk came out of the drugstore, he shrugged his shoulders.

"Doc hasn't showed up," he explained.

"Doesn't that worry you fellows?" Phil demanded.

Monk shrugged. "Naw, Doc often disappears. Sometimes he's gone two or three months at a time, and nobody hears from him. But he always turns up."

"Where does he go?"

"Off to a place he calls his Fortress of Solitude, to study or work on scientific experiments where he won't be bothered," Monk explained.

"Where is this Fortress of Solitude?"

"Search us," Monk said. "We don't know, except that it's in the polar regions somewhere. You see, Doc keeps a lot of valuable scientific discoveries at the place, and one time some guys found it, and we had a heck of a time. After that, he moved the Fortress. We don't know where he moved it to."

IV

THE TRICKY MR. MASKET

The attempt to shoot Phil O'Reilly was made in front of his home.

They were just alighting from the limousine. All of them had stepped out to say good night.

"Watch out!" Dink Masket bellowed suddenly.

He lunged, threw his weight against Phil, and both of them sprawled into the entryway of the house. Simultaneously, there was a sound like a sledge striking the stone side of the house. Chips of stone flew. Then the echoes of a shot banged back and forth between the buildings.

Pat dived back into the car.

"Stay down!" she shrieked at Phil. "Somebody tried to shoot you!"

Ham flung himself alongside Phil, and forced the young man to keep down.

Dink Masket and Monk crossed the street—the shot had come from the park—running in zigzag fashion, doubled low. They reached the stone fence around the park, vaulted it, charged into the bushes.

As soon as they were out of sight, Dink Masket and Monk stopped.

Dink Masket produced a revolver and fired it three times into the ground.

Monk watched, grinning. Then Monk bellowed, "There he goes! That way, Dink!"

They crashed through the brush some more.

Dink Masket fired two more shots into the ground.

"Over here, Dink!" Monk roared.

They made noise in the brush for some time. They had not seen anyone. All the shots that had been fired had been discharged by Dink Masket in Monk's presence.

They walked out of the park, and joined Phil, Ham and Pat.

Monk said, "It was that guy you described, Phil."

"You mean the man with the ugly face?" Phil was amazed. "You mean he is the one who shot at me?"

"Yep."

"Are you sure?"

"I got a good clear look at him," Monk declared.

Dink Masket said, "And I saw exactly what Monk saw."

"Which way'd he go?" Phil barked. "Let's go after him."

"He got away," Monk said. "Anyway, he's too free with that gun for anybody to go prowling around in the park after him."

Phil shuddered. "Let's get in the house," he said.

While they were entering the house, Monk got an opportunity to whisper a few words to Dink Masket. "We put that over, didn't we?" Monk breathed.

"Sh-h-h-h," said Dink Masket. "Let's not be too friendly."

In the large, comfortable O'Reilly library, they waited for

the police to come. Undoubtedly, some of the neighbors would call the officers about the shooting. Phil paced the floor. He was excited, but not nervous.

"Thanks," he told Dink Masket. "I guess you saved my life, too."

"Don't mention it, mate," said Dink Masket modestly.

Phil stopped and slammed his right fist into his left palm.

"This proves one thing!" he declared. "That man with the ugly face doesn't want me going after Daniel Stage. He tried to intercept Dan's letter. Then, when that failed, he tried to shoot me."

"Let's see that letter," Dink Masket suggested.

They were examining the two missives which Phil had received in the rubber-coated envelope when the police arrived. There were two uniformed cops in a patrol car, and they were calmly efficient. Ham Brooks happened to know both officers, and they took his word for what had occurred. Ham made no mention of the letter, or of the matter of the missing explorer, Daniel Stage.

The police left, saying they would give the park a thorough search and put out a net for the man with the ugly face.

After the officers had gone, Phil eyed Ham. "Why didn't you tell them about the letter, and Daniel Stage?" he asked.

"We're working on that ourselves," Ham explained.

Pat yawned sleepily. "Well, it looks like the excitement is over for the night. How about all of us going home, and meeting in the morning?"

Phil nodded. "We're going to talk to Daniel Stage's sister in the morning—her name is Junith, incidentally. Is that our first move?"

Ham told him that it would be.

Ham drove his limousine downtown. In the seat beside him, Dink Masket was relaxed. Monk and Pat rode in the rear.

Monk chuckled for a while. "That was a nice piece of showmanship. It all came out timed right, too. When we stopped to make that telephone call to headquarters, it gave Johnny all the time he needed to get across the street from Phil O'Reilly's place with a rifle."

Dink Masket said, "I was sure glad Johnny's finger didn't slip on the trigger. He put a bullet right through where Phil had been standing."

Pat made a disgusted sound.

"A lot of good that elaborate trick did you!" she said.

Ham said, "But it did plenty of good, Pat. We feel confident now that Phil really doesn't know who that fellow with the ugly face is. We could tell that from the way he acted."

"Sure," Monk said, forgetting himself and agreeing with Ham, something he rarely did. "If Phil had been working with the man with the ugly face, and the fellow had tried to kill him, Phil would have been almost certain to give it away."

Pat sniffed. "I could have told you Phil is a straight boy."

"Oh, sure," Monk said skeptically. "He's handsome, too, ain't he?"

Pat maintained an indignant silence.

They passed two police cars cruising toward the park, evidently on their way to look for the man who had fired the shot at Phil O'Reilly.

Ham asked anxiously, "You think Johnny had time to get out of the park? It might be kind of embarrassing if they caught him wandering around in there with a rifle."

"He had plenty of time to scam," Monk said. "Big words and all."

They dropped Pat at her apartment building, which was a swanky structure on Park Avenue. Pat operated one of the most profitable beauty and reducing establishments in the city, making considerably more money from the place than she could conveniently spend.

"I'll see you in the morning," she said.

They drove next to Ham's quarters, which were in an exclusive club.

"I got to stop here and get Habeas Corpus," Monk explained. "I left him in Ham's place while we went to the Explorers League."

Habeas Corpus was Monk's pet pig, an animal with overlong legs, wing-sized ears, an inquisitive disposition, and an ability to irritate Ham unreasonably.

Ham also had a pet, a chimpanzee or dwarf baboon—there was some scientific doubt which—named Chemistry, this pet of Ham's being notable for the spit-image likeness which it bore to the homely chemist, Monk. Chemistry did not like Monk, and these sentiments were returned. Neither did Habeas Corpus like Chemistry; Ham professed no approval for Monk or Habeas Corpus, and Monk did not care for Ham or Chemistry—so that it was one large and noisy family when all four got together.

Dink Masket said, "Suppose you stay with Ham tonight, Monk. I want to borrow the car."

"I would sooner have a buck goat in my apartment," Ham declared. "But all right."

Monk looked at Dink Masket. "Where you going?"

"Got a little business, mate."

Monk grinned. "All right," he said. "Say, you do pretty well as a screwball sailor."

"Think anyone will recognize me?"

"Oh, any disguise can be seen through in time," Monk said. "But anybody would have to know you pretty well. By the way, I haven't had a chance to ask you how you really came to pile on the back of that gray car when they grabbed Pat."

"That was simple. I started to come into the building earlier, but noticed those men hanging around. Particularly the chestnut vender. That seemed peculiar, because you seldom see them selling chestnuts in that district. Of course, after they turned loose the gas and seized Pat, the only thing to do was grab on to their car."

"Well, it was fast work," Monk said.

"Be seeing you in the morning."

"Sure."

Dink Masket drove Ham's limousine toward the Hudson River, and approached a large building of brick, a warehouse that was built partially out into the river, so that it resembled nothing more than another of the shedded piers which were plentiful in that section. The place appeared disused. A barely legible sign on the front said, *Hidalgo Trading Co.*

When Dink Masket pressed a radio-control signal button on the car radio—the limousine was equipped with transmitting and receiving apparatus; the signal put out by the button was simply a dot-and-dash combination on a certain frequency—the big hangar doors opened automatically as a result. The limousine rolled inside.

Dink Masket seemed perfectly familiar with the place. He alighted, turned on the lights, closed the door. The interior of the big warehouse was deceptive. It contained a number of airplanes, one very large one for fast long-distance flights, and smaller craft, two of which were gyro planes. At the far end, there was a slip in which boats lay, the craft including a rather small submarine. All the planes were amphibians, capable of working from land or water, and there was a sloping ramp down which they could be rolled into the water, thence through large rolling doors to the Hudson River.

Striding to the river end of the hangar-warehouse, Dink Masket dropped to all fours and leaned over the edge of the slip.

Dink Masket spoke with the modulated, trained voice of Doc Savage.

"Well, well," he remarked. "The tide hasn't come in quite enough, has it?"

In the darkness below, three horror-stricken men—Tiny, Bat and Lon, the trio who had staged the trick and seized Doc Savage at the Explorers League earlier in the night—were handcuffed to three dock pilings. Only their necks were out of the water.

The tide had been coming in for some hours. When the trio had been first handcuffed there, the water had been less than waist deep. But now it was under their chins. And in a few minutes, they fully believed, it would be over their heads.

With complete amiability, Doc Savage's voice said, "You

fellows have not drowned yet, have you? Well, I can always give you more time."

He reached down, felt around in the darkness, and jerked off the adhesive tape which gagged Tiny.

"You have not, by any chance, decided to tell me all about it?" he asked.

"Listen," Tiny croaked, "you ain't running no whizzer on us. We know you don't kill anybody."

Doc Savage's chuckle was grim.

"I won't be doing it," he said. "The tide might, however."

"The hell with you!" Tiny snarled.

"The tide," Doc said, "is still coming in."

Doc Savage placed the gag back over Tiny's mouth, slapped it rather hard several times to make the tape stick, then stood. He walked away, making noise with his feet. He reached the door, operated the mechanism that opened it—the rollers and motors filled the place with drumming sound as the door opened—then closed the door again. But he was still inside the warehouse-hangar when the door closed.

There was a small compartment at one side of the hangar which was completely inclosed and soundproofed. It was used for test work where a soundproof, dust-tight inclosure was necessary. It contained, among other things, a desk and telephone.

Doc entered the compartment, closed the door silently, and picked up the telephone. He got Monk Mayfair on the wire.

"They are not ready to talk yet," Doc said.

"Who do you mean?"

"The three men who tried to seize me at the Explorers League."

"Are you using truth serum on them?" Monk demanded.

"No, we have had some bad luck with that stuff, and to use it in its strongest form is always dangerous," the bronze man explained. "I am going to try to scare them badly enough to make them talk."

"Do they know you've disguised yourself, and are using the name of Dink Masket?"

"No."

Monk was thoughtful. "I been wondering if that disguise is going to help you much."

"I think it has already," the bronze man said. "These three fellows had orders to grab me tonight and kill me. They were hired by someone, I suspect. And if the person who hired them can be made to think I am dead, that will enable me to work on the thing without being suspected."

"Well, yeah, it might at that."

"I called you," Doc Savage said, "to tell you to act more worried about me. Call the police, and tell them that I am missing, and you suspect foul play. Tell the police that you got an anonymous telephone call that three men were seen forcing me into a car in the park near the Explorers League at the point of a gun. Then telephone the newspapers anonymously yourself, and give them that story. Merely say that you saw three armed men forcing me to get in a car in the park near the Explorers League at about eleven o'clock in the evening."

"I get it," Monk agreed. "You want the impression to get around that you are dead."

"Yes," Doc said. "You might, in your anonymous call to the newspapers, add that the car drove away, and that shortly afterward, you heard a shot. To dress it up a little more, you might put in that you heard me scream, 'Please don't kill me!' just before the shot. Say that you have heard my voice over the radio, and recognized it."

"Right."

"I hope you do not mind telling those lies."

"You know me," Monk said cheerfully. "Liar is my middle name. Say, had Ham and me better go to bed at all? Maybe there will be some more excitement tonight."

"No, get some sleep. I will telephone you if anything breaks."

Dropping the receiver on its prong, Doc glanced at the electric clock on the wall. He happened to know the exact minute of high tide for that day, and it was not yet that time by almost half an hour.

He settled back, and waited. The three were in no danger of drowning, actually. He had handcuffed them so that their heads were above high-tide mark for this date.

The bronze man removed one of the colored glass caps—the same type of a gadget as the so-called "invisible" eyeglasses obtained from opticians, and particularly popular with actors—with which he had disguised the flake-gold color of his eyes. The cap was irritating his eye slightly. He cleaned it carefully, and replaced it.

The rest of his disguise—the dye on his hair, his skin, and the spattering of dyed-on freckles—were giving no trouble. The gum padding in his cheeks which had the effect of widening out his face was mildly disturbing at times, but he left it in place.

V

TRAIL

Half an hour later, when Doc Savage went back to the rear of the hangar, he used the disguise of Dink Masket, including the voice. Dropping into a rowboat, he pulled himself along the slip until he reached the three men handcuffed to the piles.

He thumbed on a flashlight. The glow showed that the water was above the chins of the three. Their eyes protruded as they stared at him. All three tried to make talking noises through their noses, the result being somewhat like a swarm of bumblebees.

"So this is what he was doing to you," Dink Masket's voice remarked. "Well, I guess you had it comin' to you."

He contemplated them cold-bloodedly, listening with idle interest to the horrified buzzing they made. He glanced at the water.

"Tide is gonna fix you swabs if it comes much higher," he remarked.

One of the men looked as if he was going to faint. It was the big, thick-necked one, Tiny.

Doc plucked the gag off Tiny's face, and using the Dink Masket voice, he asked, "Any little message you'd like to send your folks?"

Tiny could only gurgle incoherently.

"Of course," Dink's voice added, "I couldn't tell your folks what happened to you. But I might pass on some other little message."

Tiny finally managed to get his voice functioning. "Turn us loose!" he bleated.

"Can't."

"Why not?"

"Doc Savage wouldn't like it. You see, I'm kind of connected with him. Tonight, I'm attending to things here in the hangar and boathouse. I knew you guys were over here, but I thought for a while I wouldn't do anything about it. Finally my curiosity got the best of me, though, and here I am."

Apparently it never entered Tiny's head that he was talking to Doc Savage.

"How did Savage happen to catch you?" Doc continued.

Tiny swore hoarsely. "It was a trick. He had some kind of gas or something in the heel of his shoe. He pulled the heel off his shoe, and we didn't notice it."

"The gas overcame you?"

"Yeah—just as we was gonna knife the bronze guy." Tiny groaned. "I guess he didn't get the gas because he held his breath, or somethin'. I remember we noticed he was holdin' his breath just before we passed out. We thought he'd had a heart attack or somethin', and had passed out. But he must 'a' been just holdin' his breath."

"That's bad. Savage won't forget that."

"You turn us loose," Tiny promised, "and I'll pay you plenty."

"How much?"

"Fifty dollars."

"Ho, ho, ho!" said Dink Masket's voice disgustedly. "You piker! I'll enjoy watchin' you drown."

Tiny kept arguing frantically, and before long, had his offer up to twenty thousand dollars, a sum it was hardly likely he could have paid.

"Nope. Can't buy me," Dink Masket's voice said finally. He seemed to ponder. "Tell you what, though. There might be one way."

Tiny got his mouth full of water, and gargled it in horror.

"I'll do anything," he croaked.

"Well, now, it kind of looked like Savage was pretty mad at you guys, and went off and left you here to drown. I think he did that, you understand, because you tried to kill him. Trying to kill him didn't get him very friendly toward you."

"Stop wasting time!" Tiny yelled. "What can you do?"

"Well, now, I might prevail on Savage not to let you drown. But I could only do that if you was to tell me the truth. If you tell me who hired you to kill him, I might have a point to argue with him. I'd be willin' to try, anyhow."

Tiny didn't like that idea. But a wave came slopping along, filled his mouth, and changed his mind.

He moaned. "We *can't* tell who hired us," he said.

Doc Savage straightened up and grunted. In the make-up as Dink Masket, he looked cold-blooded, fierce. "Well, that's too bad," he said. "I guess the tide will have to take you."

"Wait a minute!" Tiny wailed. "We'll tell you all we know."

The story came out of Tiny with babbling force. He belonged with Lon and Bat and three others, to a local crime syndicate which made a specialty of doing jobs for hire. This, Tiny insisted frantically, was their first venture into the bigger brackets of murder business.

It seemed they had been approached by a man with a strange face, a man the left side of whose face was different from the right. They did not know this man, had never learned his name. He had been vouched for, however, by a mutual acquaintance, who was a gangster. Lon, Tiny, Bat and their three colleagues had been propositioned—had been offered a tremendous, to them, sum of money to kill Doc Savage, and to seize Pat Savage and hold her. Later, it had been the understanding that they could kill Pat if they thought that would be safest.

"Why did this man with the ugly face want Doc Savage killed and Pat kidnaped?"

"Because a guy named Phil O'Reilly was coming to Doc

with some kind of a proposition."

"And this man with the face didn't want Doc accepting O'Reilly's proposition?"

"That's it."

"And why was Pat to be seized?"

"To keep Doc Savage's men busy hunting her," Tiny explained. "You see, if Phil O'Reilly went to Doc's men, they might be interested in the proposition. But if this girl was kidnaped, they would have to spend their time hunting her."

Doc Savage was silent for a while. It was a reasonable story. A man hiring professional killers would hardly let them know his identity if it could be avoided.

"What is behind this whole thing?" he asked. "Why all this effort to keep Doc Savage out of South America?"

It developed that Tiny knew nothing at all about South America. Neither did the others. Nor had they ever heard of the explorer named Daniel Stage, who was lost in the Amazon back country jungle.

"This is no help," Dink Masket's voice said angrily. "You have given no indication of how Doc can get in touch with this fellow with the ugly face."

Tiny shuddered.

"Look," he said. "We was to turn up at a place and collect

the rest of our pay."

"When?"

"Ten o'clock this morning."

"Where?"

Tiny described the spot frantically. "This guy with the face will be there at ten o'clock in the morning," he insisted. "He was gonna pay us. We rented Room 608 in this hotel. The guy with the face was going to meet us there."

Doc was skeptical. "Sometimes those fellows don't pay you," he reminded.

"Oh, he'll be there. The other three of our crowd, the ones who were to grab Pat Savage, were to take her to the place, and this guy with the face was going to show up and make the girl answer some questions."

That sounded more reasonable. As a whole, Tiny and the others had told all they knew, Doc concluded. However, he was still puzzled about why the three who had seized Pat had made no effort to harm Monk, Ham, Johnny or Phil O'Reilly.

He asked Tiny about that.

"Listen, we do what we get paid for," Tiny said. "If they didn't bump off them Doc Savage men, it was because they weren't getting paid for *that* job. The snatch was all they had been hired to pull."

Doc had suspected that was the reason. That, and the fact that the kidnaping trio had not been set for a wholesale killing on the sidewalk in front of the skyscraper which housed Doc's headquarters.

The bronze man unlocked the handcuffs which held Tiny, Lon and Bat in the water. He heaved them up on the slip. They were still handcuffed, and helpless, weakened from their immersion.

Doc went to a steel cabinet which contained equipment, and came back with a hypodermic needle. He used the hypo on each of the three, although they howled protest.

The trio went to sleep shortly. The needle contained a drug that induced a state of helpless semi-consciousness that would last many hours.

Doc loaded the trio into the limousine. He drove with them to a small garage far uptown. The garage was closed for the night, but the proprietor, a rather quiet young man, lived in an apartment above the place. The young man came down, looked in the car, and, without a word, opened the door of his garage.

Inside the garage was an ambulance. Doc Savage and the garage man transferred Tiny, Lon and Bat to the ambulance.

"Will they need another shot to keep them unconscious?" the garage man asked.

"Not if you make good driving time."

"O. K. I'll start right away."

Nothing more was said. The young garage man had done this thing before—taken unconscious men to a strange institution in the remote mountainous upstate section of New York. He knew something of what it was all about. He knew that the men he hauled were criminals.

What he did not know—what no one knew except Doc Savage and his associates and the specialists immediately concerned—was that the criminals were being consigned to Doc Savage's "college" for reforming. Here they would undergo delicate brain operations which would wipe out all memory of the past—a sort of enforced amnesia. Afterward they would be taught to hate crime, would receive training at trades which would enable them to earn useful livings.

Doc's method of reforming criminals, while less painful and more effective than penitentiaries, was a little drastic for the public consumption, so he kept its existence unknown.

VI

TROUBLE LEADING TO JUNITH

At ten o'clock the next morning, it was raining.

Doc Savage studied the building where the man with the

ugly face was to meet the thugs he had hired. It was a hotel, a small one, not impressive looking, not too clean, and probably not with an overly savory reputation. It was on the wrong side of Broadway.

He joined the others—Monk, Ham, Johnny, Pat and Phil O'Reilly—who were parked around the corner. Doc was still using the Dink Masket disguise. Fortunately, the dye was waterproof.

Because it would not have looked right for Dink Masket to issue orders, Monk gave them. The commands he issued were ones he had previously received from Doc.

"Me and Johnny and Phil will go to this Room 608," Monk said, "and be parked outside in the hall. We will stay under cover in the stairway, and we'll have anaesthetic gas, gas masks, and machine pistols loaded with mercy bullets.

"Johnny, you and Dink Masket park in the lobby, and keep out of sight," Monk continued. "As soon as this guy with the face shows up, you be ready to head him off should he attempt to escape."

Monk turned to Pat.

"Pat, you stay with the car," he said. "You'll be safer."

"I don't want to be safe," Pat said.

"Well, somebody's got to have the car ready for a chase," Monk snapped. "Anyway, there's another job somebody has got to do."

"What kind of a job?" Pat asked skeptically.

Monk fumbled around in a compartment, and brought out a small dark box. This container was adorned with a switch, and to it was attached a powerful clamp of the spring-and-jaws type.

"If the man with the face comes in a car," he said, "somebody has got to fasten this box on his car."

Pat peered at the box. "Isn't that one of those little short-wave radio transmitters that you can locate with a direction finder?"

Monk nodded. "With this on the ugly guy's car, we can locate it, even if he should get away in the machine," he said.

Pat was more satisfied. "All right, I'll do it," she said.

They got out into the drizzling rain and separated. Monk, Phil and Johnny worked around to the rear of the hotel, their plan to enter by the back door, and get upstairs without being observed.

Pat took up a position in a drugstore across the street, with her radio-transmitter box.

Doc Savage and Ham, surveying the street carefully, decided no one was in sight. They entered the hotel lobby. The place smelled stale. A few guests occupied lobby chairs.

In the back were three telephone booths, through the glass doors of which a watch could be kept on the entrance. They

took up a position there, and waited.

Ham, holding the booth door open a crack, asked, "Doc, you sure nobody shadowed us here?"

"I think not. I kept a sharp watch."

"Then, if this guy with the ugly face is tipped off, we'll figure that Phil O'Reilly must have done it."

"Don't you trust Phil?"

"I don't know," Ham said. "He seems straight. But when a thing like this starts, you're wiser if you don't trust anybody."

Doc Savage's voice dropped, became imperative. "Close your door," he said.

"Is—" Ham looked, swallowed. Their man was coming into the hotel.

He was a big, wide man. The swing of his shoulders, the lithe ease of his carriage, indicated that he had more than an average amount of agility. He wore a long tan raincoat, the collar turned up around his neck; a felt hat was yanked low over his eyes. But they could see the hideous character of his face, the inhuman aspect of it.

It was their intention to stay under cover, let the man go up to the room, and seize him along with the three men he had hired to kidnap Pat.

But the man did an unexpected thing. He stepped to one side of the door, stood there for a while, then moved over to the lobby window and looked out.

His hand leaped to his coat pocket, came out with a gun.

"He sees Pat!" Ham yelled.

Doc Savage realized that, too. Pat had rushed across the street to affix the radio-transmitter box to the man's car, and he had discovered her.

Out of the booth, Doc scooped up a light chair. He threw it. Ham's yell had attracted the ugly man's attention. He swung, faced them, started to lift his gun. Then he saw the chair coming, and dodged, at the same time trying to snap a shot. The bullet cut a long furrow in the carpet.

Doc went down, got behind a heavy divan. Ham dived for a corner, got around it. He stopped, unlimbered his machine pistol.

The machine pistols which they used, resembling oversized automatics, had been developed by Doc Savage, and could release an amazing number of bullets per minute. Although they fired various types of bullets, just now they were charged with so-called "mercy" slugs—bullets which were shells containing a potent chemical producing quick unconsciousness, without doing much damage.

Ham's pistol made a sound like a big bull fiddle. A noise that was earsplitting.

The burst missed.

The man with the ugly face got down, dived for the door, made it outside before Ham could wing him.

Ham said something violent, plunged in pursuit. The man with the ugly face ran across the sidewalk. He fired once at Pat, just as she was going into the drugstore.

Pat stumbled and was going down when she disappeared from view; either she had been hit, or she had tripped.

The man with the face dived into his car, slammed the door. The machine jumped away from the curb.

Ham leveled his machine pistol carefully, and it made another big noise. But the mercy bullets, mere shells, did not strike with enough foot-pounds of energy to break the windows of the car. The machine drove away with great speed.

"Come on!" Ham yelled. "We'll get our car and chase him!"

Pat came out of the drugstore, running with an ease that showed she had not been harmed. She joined them in the sprint toward the spot where they had left their own machine.

"Did you get that radio on his car?" Doc rapped.

"Yes," Pat said. "I was going away when he saw me. Darn it, I'm sorry I muffed that!"

"You think he saw you put the radio on?"

"No, I don't believe so. I clipped it underneath, to the chassis."

"Did you throw the switch and start the radio functioning?"

"Yes."

"Then you did all right," Doc said.

They reached their machine, piled inside, and set out in pursuit. Doc Savage, at the wheel, drove furiously for a while, using the siren, and tying up traffic.

"It's no use," he said finally.

He pulled up before a cigar store which displayed a telephone sign, and entered.

While Ham was waiting in the car, he looked at Pat anxiously. "When that guy shot at you," he said, "it looked as if he hit you."

Pat wryly exhibited a long rip in the shoulder of her expensively tailored frock.

"It was *that* close," she said. "Boy, that fellow can shoot, whoever he is."

Ham frowned. "Pat, you had better get out of this thing. We would never forgive ourselves if you got hurt."

Pat smiled and shook her head. "I like this kind of thing, believe it or not." She nodded in the direction of the cigar store. "It runs in the family. You know that Doc likes excitement."

"He never admits it," Ham said.

"Just the same, he does like it. Do you think he would follow a career like this, righting wrongs and helping other people out of trouble, if he didn't like it?"

"He was trained for it," Ham reminded her. "He was placed in the hands of scientists when he was very young and thoroughly trained for just this job."

Pat eyed Ham impishly. "What did your folks train you for, Ham?"

Ham looked uncomfortable. "A banker," he admitted.

"There you are. If you had liked banking, you would still be at it. You liked law, and this excitement of being one of Doc's group of assistants, so that's what you're doing."

They fell silent as Doc Savage reappeared from the cigar store. He swung into the car.

"I used the telephone and called that hotel," he said. "Monk, Johnny and Phil O'Reilly closed in on the three fellows who tried to kidnap you last night, Pat. They got them."

"What are they going to do with them?" Pat inquired.

"Question them," Doc explained. "I do not think they will know any more than the trio who tried to kill me, but there is a chance they will, so Monk and the others are going to give them a third degree."

"And afterward?"

"College," Doc said cryptically.

The bronze man switched on the sensitive radio receiver in the car, carefully adjusted the dial to the frequency of the little transmitter in the box which Pat had fastened to the chassis of the ugly man's car. Doc rotated the loop aerial, eventually picked up the signal of the transmitter. It was a steady series of staggered dots, the letter C in the continental Morse code—not the usual international wireless code—repeated over and over again.

Moving the loop control, Doc lifted the signal to its loudest point, then sank it to its lowest. He made a brief calculation.

"Going north," he decided. "Either north or south, and the car started off south, so my guess would be that he doubled back. We can make a short run and find out. If the signal drops in power, we are going the wrong way."

"How far is that little transmitter good for?" Pat asked.

"Not very far," Doc said. "That is why we can not let him get too much lead on us."

The bronze man drove carefully, but made good time. He made no effort to seek out the direct trail, but took streets

where traffic was the least troublesome, so that he made, undoubtedly, a great deal better time than their quarry.

Ham said, "That guy must have been surprised when he found the trap there in the hotel. Monk called the newspapers, like you said for him to do. Every newspaper in town is carrying a story that Doc Savage has probably been murdered."

Doc nodded. "I wanted the man with the face to think that his hirelings had succeeded in killing me. If he had suspected I had escaped, he would hardly have come to the hotel."

In a miserable voice, Pat said, "Well, thanks to me, the plan blew up."

Ham laughed.

"The only way you could have helped what happened," the dapper lawyer said, "was to have been invisible."

"I guess so," Pat agreed. "Anyway, I should have been more careful. And I feel bad about it."

They caught sight of their quarry in the park. But again, luck was with the ugly man; either that, or he had faculties of extreme keenness. For he saw them; saw them in time to cut over frantically, sideswipe a car, and cause a traffic pile-up that blocked the side road into which he turned.

There were several cars jammed together. The only way to get around them was to swing out over the curbing and take to

the grass. And the sod was wet, soft. Their car was heavy; its wheels knifed into the sod. The machine, bogging, slowed so fast that they were tossed against the windshield and against the front seat.

Ham snarled, "Of all the tough breaks! Three in a row!"

The machine was stuck now.

Fifty yards or so distant, there was some construction work, and a few planks piled nearby. Ham and Doc leaped out, ran toward the planks, and came back bearing a pair apiece.

By now, the car carrying the man with the ugly face had disappeared down the park driveway.

Doc took one side of the car, Ham took the other, and they jammed their planks in front of the wheels, making crude tracks.

"Gun it, Pat," Doc said. "But not too hard."

Pat tramped on the accelerator carefully. They got the car to ride the boards, and back on to the pavement. A cop arrived then, an officious patrolman of the park detail, and he had never heard of Doc Savage, and it was, in case they didn't know it, a crime to walk on the grass, much less to drive a car on it. The officer said the car tracks in the park sod were as deep as trenches in the Maginot Line. He said a great deal more. And finally they got away from him.

Doc drove.

"You work the radio finder," he directed Ham.

The trail led north, then west, then back south again. And when they sighted the ugly man's car, Doc Savage slowed down immediately, then stopped.

"We might drive past the machine," Ham suggested. "It looks empty."

"If he should happen to roll a grenade under us, it wouldn't be very funny," Doc said. "This car is armor-plated on the top and all sides, but the flooring is the same as an ordinary car."

It was Ham's limousine they were using.

"I'll have that fixed," he said.

When it became obvious that the ugly man's car was empty, Doc Savage glanced at the street name.

"Ham," he said, "did you check up on Daniel Stage's sister, Junith Stage?"

"Yes."

"Where did she live?"

"March Street. No. 1456."

"Notice what street this is?"

Ham looked. "Melrose Street," he said. "What about it?"

"Have you forgotten how the town is laid out? March Street is two blocks over. And the next block up on March will be the 1400 block."

"You mean," Pat exclaimed, "that Junith Stage lives close to where this ugly-faced man abandoned his car?"

Doc Savage nodded. "I think it might be a good idea to call on Miss Stage," he said. "And Pat—"

"Yes?" Pat said.

"You get on a telephone, call that hotel and tell Monk, Johnny and Phil O'Reilly where we are."

"Just in case something happens." Pat nodded. "I get it."

"Ham—"

"Yes?"

"You take the rear of the Stage house. And if this man with the ugly face should appear, turn loose on him with a machine pistol and mercy bullets. You remember how he was dressed."

"A greenish tweed suit," Ham said. "Black raincoat. Tan hat."

Doc nodded. "Also tan shoes, yellow-striped necktie, and the tan hat had a dark-brown band, and there was no crease in the top."

"I'll recognize him," Ham said.

"I will take the front door," Doc said.

Junith Stage was a little too tall to have a figure, yet she had one, and a very noticeable one, too. She was dark, almost Spanish, and her beauty was the type usually associated with a tiny girl, although she was by no means tiny. As a whole, she was striking. Her voice was low, well-modulated.

She opened the door herself.

"Mr. Savage?" she said. She was puzzled for a moment. "Oh, I believe I have read of you? Doc Savage?"

The bronze man nodded.

Junith Stage remembered something, and her eyes flew wide. "But the newspapers! This morning—they said you had been killed!"

"To make a reply not exactly original," Doc said, "the report was somewhat exaggerated."

Her eyes remained wide. "What do you want?"

"A few words with you about your brother."

"Oh."

He thought she paled a little. She said nothing.

"May I come in?" he asked.

She hesitated. "Well, I—" He was sure about the paleness now. It was growing.

A pleasantly modulated voice behind her said, "By all means invite him in, Junith. We should like very much to hear about poor Daniel."

The speaker was a tall, broad-shouldered young man, as dark of hair and eyes as Junith Stage, but with features that were thin and overly handsome to the point of being aesthetic. His face was not exactly handsome. It was too thin, too intense.

Junith explained, "Mr. Marbetti. Mr. Savage, this is Mr. Marbetti."

Marbetti stepped forward, took Doc's hand. His grip was quick, hot, intense.

"I'm delighted," Marbetti said. "I have heard a great deal about you, incidentally. And the name is Rollo Marbetti."

"Rollo Marbetti," Doc said.

Marbetti smiled. "You Americans make fun of the name Rollo, I understand. But of it I am not ashamed."

Most of the time he had no accent whatever; only now and then did a twisted word, or a transposed bit of construction appear in one of his spoken sentences.

He said, "Miss Stage is my fiancée. Of that I am very proud."

"Yes," Junith Stage said quickly. "Yes, yes, Rollo and I are to be married."

"In November," Marbetti said.

"Yes, in November."

Junith Stage was still pale.

Doc Savage watched them thoughtfully. "Is there anyone else in the house?"

"Why, no," Junith said quickly.

Doc Savage's eyes narrowed. "Have you had any visitors recently?"

Marbetti answered that. "Not," he said, "within the last"—he consulted his watch—"one and three quarters hours."

Doc studied him. "Rather early to pay a call. It must have been around a quarter of nine when you came."

"Yes, exactly," Marbetti said. He smiled. "As a matter of fact, I had a good reason for an early call. Not that I see any reason why I should tell you my reasons for being here." His face darkened. "Nor, for that matter," he added, "do I see any reason for your coming in here and asking questions."

Doc said, "I want to find out some things."

Marbetti's face became even darker. "Mr. Savage, I am not in the least impressed by your reputation. Doubtless you

consider that people should be, and are accustomed to taking advantage of it to force yourself in where you may have no business."

"Rollo!" Junith Stage said sharply.

Marbetti clicked his heels. "Sorry, darling," he said. "As a matter of fact, I'm not sure this fellow is Doc Savage. I saw a picture of Savage once, and he certainly did not look like this man."

"I happen to be disguised," Doc said.

"I would like to know why he came," Junith said, after hesitating.

Marbetti frowned. "Yes. So would I."

Doc asked, "Miss Stage, have you any objection to my searching the house?"

"Of course she has!" Marbetti snapped. "I call it an infernal outrage to suggest—"

"Please!" Junith said sharply. She turned to Doc. Her voice, her manner was strained. "Go ahead and search," she said.

It was then that a loud yell came from the back of the house, along with blow noises and other sounds of a fight.

VII

THE RED MAN

Doc Savage did not lunge off recklessly toward the fight. First, he laid one hand on Junith Stage's wrist, fastened the other to Marbetti's arm.

"You had better go with me," he said.

Marbetti twisted, tried to wrench his arm free. Pain, like a convulsion caused by electricity, crossed his face as the bronze man's grip tightened.

"You've . . . no . . . right!" Marbetti gasped.

Doc said, "Come on!"

There was a biting force in his tone, a quality of compelling power that caused Marbetti to subside. Doc marched them toward the rear of the house.

The fighting was not in the house; it was outdoors, in the back yard. Doc shouldered the door open, moved out on a small porch, pushing Junith Stage and Marbetti before him. He kept a watch on their faces so as to catch their expressions, and also flicked his eyes over the yard.

This house—it was far enough out of Manhattan to be in the district where the houses had yards—was surrounded with

fairly extensive grounds. The house itself was not elaborate, nor was the district by any means exclusive, but it happened that the lot was very large, and covered with shrubbery, and there was an adjoining lot to the side and another to the back, both vacant, both covered with brush and high weeds.

The fight was taking place in one of the vacant lots. Doc ran toward the sound, shoving along Miss Stage and Marbetti.

Ham had lost his coat, one shirt sleeve, half his suspenders, a trouser leg, and one shoe. His foe was now endeavoring to pound him on the head with the shoe. Ham looked as if, for once in his life, he'd had enough fight.

Ham's opponent was a large redskin. There was no doubt that the man was an American Indian, because he might have been the model for the redskin depicted on buffalo nickels. He was a very large Indian, very old, very active, and apparently all of his muscles were as tough as the hamstrings on a horse. He had lost his shirt, and his cabled torso heaved and writhed as he worked on Ham.

Doc reached down, got the redskin by the nape of the neck. The redskin immediately tried to clutch Doc's throat. The bronze man swung a fist expertly, and the aborigine sat down heavily. He was not knocked out, but he remained on the ground, blinking his eyes.

Ham stood up. Ham looked like a wiser man. He peered unbelievably at the redskin.

"He looks as old as a hill," Ham said breathlessly. "But he's sure a bobcat when you get hold of him."

Junith Stage stared at the red man.

"Oh!" she gasped.

"Know him?" Doc asked.

"Why, yes!" Junith exclaimed. "Yes. He . . . I have seen him following me twice. The last time I saw him was just yesterday."

Ham puffed to get his breath back.

"Hiawatha," he gasped, "was watching . . . house . . . when I sneaked up on him."

The redskin grunted.

"Name not Hiawatha," he said. "Name Chief John Eagle."

The red man got to his feet. He made a majestic figure, and he still retained his dignity, even while he was picking up the parts of his shirt and looking at them ruefully. He grunted, then looked at Ham.

"You have to buy me new shirt," he said.

"I will," Ham told him grimly, "if you'll pay an osteopath to put my arms and legs back in joint again."

Doc Savage watched the Indian steadily. "You are John Eagle?"

The red man nodded.

Junith Stage put her fingers to her lips. "Are you the father of Elmo Walker Eagle, one of the explorers who went to hunt my brother?"

Chief John Eagle nodded. A slight trace of sadness appeared on his otherwise inscrutable face.

"Elmo never come back," he said.

"What has that got to do with your lying out here in the brush watching Miss Stage's home?" Doc inquired.

The chief hesitated. He looked at Doc Savage, and seemed to approve of what he saw, although Doc, in the guise of Dink Masket, fell far short of being the prepossessing figure he normally was.

"Who are you?" he asked.

"Doc Savage," Doc explained.

Chief Eagle stepped closer to Doc.

Ham exclaimed, "Watch him, Doc! He's as tricky as a fox in a hen house!"

But the chief only wanted to examine Doc more intently. "Disguise," he said. "Dye on hair and on skin, colored glass things on eyeballs." The chief extended his hand. "How do you do," he said. "Glad to meet you. Heard lot about you."

Doc shook hands with him. "I'm investigating this business of all those explorers disappearing when they went to hunt Daniel Stage," the bronze man explained. "Do you know anything that can help us?"

Chief Eagle shrugged. "Nothing really constructive," he said.

He spoke like any other American, now, having dropped the cryptic bluntness that had characterized his speech during the excitement immediately following his brawl with Ham.

"Why were you watching Miss Stage's home?" Doc inquired.

The chief glanced toward the house. "I had no very definite reason," he said. "I was here simply because I happened to be searching everywhere for the answer to this mystery, and I had gotten around to examining Miss Stage. Incidentally, I have no grounds to suspect Miss Stage of anything."

Marbetti snapped, "I should think you wouldn't!"

Chief Eagle eyed him. "Who are you?"

Rather curtly, Marbetti explained who he was, and that he was Miss Junith Stage's future husband. Ham, who had been examining Junith, looked rather disappointed when he heard this. Ham had the same failing as his sparring mate, Monk—both of them were susceptible to feminine beauty.

Doc said, "Chief Eagle, suppose you explain why you were here."

The red man nodded. "Of course. Three weeks ago, I announced my intention of organizing an expedition to go hunting for my son, Elmo, who went seeking Daniel Stage, and did not come back. Shortly after I made the announcement, my one servant, who was my valet and chauffeur and cook all in one, died. He had been poisoned. The poison, I am sure, was meant for me. The police called it suicide, and I did not argue with them. But I know someone tried to kill me."

The chief frowned, and his aboriginal face became very formidable. "Later, an attempt was made to shoot me. The shot came from a long distance, evidently from a rifle equipped with a telescopic sight. I became convinced that someone was trying to keep me from going to hunt my son."

Ham said, "That's funny."

"I see nothing humorous," Chief Eagle said bluntly.

"I don't mean humorous," Ham told him. "You see, we have decided to go hunting for Daniel Stage and the men who were lost seeking him, and somebody has been trying to kill us, too."

Chief Eagle grunted. It was very much a redskin grunt. He said nothing.

Ham asked him, "Have you seen anything of a man with an ugly face—a man with one side of his face resembling that of a South American stone image, and the other side a normal white man's face?"

"No," Chief Eagle said.

Junith Stage had made no sound, but her fingers had gone to her mouth and remained there, pressing her lips out of shape.

Doc eyed her. "Have *you* seen such a man, Miss Stage?" he asked.

For a moment, Junith seemed paralyzed. Then she shook her head. Shook it too vehemently.

"No," she said. "Oh, no, I haven't. Of course not."

Doc Savage and Ham exchanged glances.

When they were in the Stage home, Doc said, "I think I will search the place."

Marbetti, looking somewhat worried now, said, "I think that would be a good idea." He stepped forward impulsively. "Will you accept my apology for being a little abrupt earlier. I did not understand that this matter was so serious."

Doc Savage nodded agreeably.

Doc left them. The Stage house was not large, had nothing extraordinary about it. He searched very carefully, covering the place from one end to another, and finding no trace of the man with the ugly face, nothing to show that the fellow had been there.

The living room had a fireplace, an ordinary brick one with a mantel painted white. There was a fire burning in this, which

was understandable because the rain had made the morning damp and slightly chilly. In the ashes were a few charred remains of what Doc Savage decided were papers.

"What are these?" Doc asked Junith Stage, indicating the ashes.

"Why, I started the fire with some old newspapers and magazines," Junith explained.

Doc Savage looked at the ashes carefully. He made no comment.

There was a knock on the door. It was Pat.

She said, "I talked to Monk, Johnny and Phil O'Reilly," she said. "They are questioning those three men who were to meet the man with the ugly face. They haven't learned anything yet, and they don't think the three know anything, but they are going to keep at the questioning."

Doc said, "I hope they will not waste too much time at that."

"They won't," Pat told him. "They will call us when they finish."

The bronze man nodded. He took a chair. Addressing Junith Stage, he said, "I wish you would tell us anything that you think might help us. Was there anything peculiar about this exploration trip your brother made to South America?"

Junith hesitated. She looked at Marbetti. "Should I tell them, Rollo?" she asked.

Marbetti's nod was abrupt. "Of course. We want to be of every assistance to Mr. Savage. It may be that this will result in the rescuing of your brother."

Junith clamped her hands together and remained very still in a chair for a few moments. Doc Savage—he might have been mistaken, he knew—thought that she shuddered.

"There was something queer about it," she said finally. "But I am afraid I cannot give you a satisfactory explanation of what it was."

"Go ahead and try," Doc suggested.

"Well, it was something that my brother—hoped to find," she said slowly, hesitating between parts of her sentences. "You see, I think that Daniel learned of some incredible discovery in the South American jungles, something that would establish him, if he managed to locate it, as one of the great explorers of all time. Once, when he did not know I was near, I heard him muttering something about, 'All Columbus discovered was America. And as for those guys who dug up those Egyptian tombs—pfft!'"

"You gathered that your brother was on the trail of something fabulous?" Doc asked.

"Yes. And fantastic."

"Any idea what?"

"No."

"No idea whatever, eh?"

"You see," Junith explained, "Daniel did not take me into his confidence. Not that he distrusted me. But, you see, I had never been in sympathy with his ambition—his ambition to be an explorer, I mean. I thought it was rather foolish, and a terribly hard way to become wealthy and famous. But Daniel seemed to think differently. We quarreled over the subject now and then, and for that reason, Dan wasn't too communicative with his information."

Doc nodded thoughtfully. "Do you know anything else?"

She considered. "Only that Daniel financed his exploration trip, indirectly, through Mr. Eagle, here." She nodded at the chief.

"What do you mean, indirectly?" the bronze man inquired.

Chief Eagle answered that. "Daniel Stage came to my son, Elmo, and asked him if he knew of a backer," the chief explained. "Elmo come to me, and I agreed to back the venture. I agreed largely because he was a friend of Elmo's, and Elmo said he was up and coming, an explorer with a future. As a matter of fact, I have never met young Daniel Stage personally."

Ham looked skeptical. "You never met young Stage, but you backed his expedition?"

"Yes."

"Strikes me as queer," Ham commented rather unpleasantly.

The chief eyed him. "I don't give a damn what strikes you as queer," he snapped. "I took my son's word for it. I trust my son."

"You think your son is still alive?" Ham asked.

Chief Eagle became stiff in his chair. His face acquired the texture and forbidding ridges of a piece of red marble. He made no answer.

Doc Savage said, "We are not trying to antagonize you, Chief Eagle. We are merely endeavoring to find out the truth."

The chief grunted.

"Is that all you can tell us?" Doc asked Junith Stage.

She nodded.

The bronze man watched her. He was almost positive she was scared, but he wished he could be certain. He wished he was a better judge of women—or any judge at all, for that matter. He had long ago discovered that his judgment of feminine character was not to be trusted.

While he was wondering why Junith Stage was scared, the telephone bell whirred angrily. Pat picked up the receiver.

"Monk on the wire," she said.

Doc looked up. "What does he want?"

"Says they've finished with the three prisoners, and got nothing out of them," Pat said. "They turned the three over to—well, they sent the three to college."

Doc Savage nodded.

"Tell Monk, Johnny and Phil O'Reilly to come out here," he directed.

Pat relayed the information, and hung up.

Junith Stage, white-faced, asked, "Is Phil O'Reilly coming out here?"

"Yes," Pat told her.

Junith Stage took a small automatic pistol out of the front of her frock.

"You will all put your hands up," she said.

VIII

DEATH BOUND SOUTH

No one moved. The stark whiteness on the girl's face

bespoke desperation. And nerves made the muzzle of her automatic jerk around in a way that was disquieting.

"Junith!" Rollo Marbetti gasped.

"Shut up!" the girl told him. "You come with me. I am going to make you drive the car."

She backed to the front door, and stood there, menacing them with the gun, while she jerked the door open. Strong breeze and a little rain came into the room, caught the girl's skirts and pounded them against her legs.

"Get out, Rollo!" she said. "Get in the car!"

"But I don't—"

"Get in the car!" Junith Stage's voice was wild.

Marbetti cast a distraught glance at Doc Savage. "I'll try to talk her out of this insane thing, Mr. Savage," he said. "I . . . I can't imagine what is wrong, but I'll try to talk her out of it."

Doc Savage nodded. Someone would have to do something. He had done what he could—he had worked the heel off his right shoe and released anaesthetic gas into the room. But the wind, coming in through the door, was sweeping the gas back, so that it was harmless. Ham and Pat were holding their breath, so that the gas had no effect upon them.

Chief Eagle drew in a deep breath, took hold of his throat, made a grunting noise, then sank to the floor. The anaesthetic gas had gotten him.

Rollo Marbetti went out of the room.

Junith stepped out after him, slammed the door.

Doc Savage, Ham and Pat leaped to windows. They saw Junith Stage leave in Doc Savage's limousine. Marbetti was driving.

Ham got the door open again, so that the wind would continue to blow the gas out of the room.

Doc flung to the telephone. "Maybe we can get the police to pick them up," he said.

"What got into that girl?" Pat asked.

"She was scared," Doc said. "She was scared all the time we were here."

"Yes, I know that," Pat told him. "But why? What was scaring her?"

The bronze man shrugged. He contacted the police, and had a call put out for the car which Junith Stage had seized and made young Marbetti drive away.

Putting down the telephone, the bronze man went to the fireplace. He examined the ashes again, giving them a closer inspection, taking a poker and raking through the coals.

"That wasn't any newspaper she burned," he said.

"Eh?" Ham came over quickly. He inspected the fragments.

"I would say it was a picture," he said. "Or pictures."

Doc nodded. He was carefully assembling some of the crumpled fragments. He kept at it, until he had enough that they could identify the subject of the photograph.

"Why, that's Junith herself!" Pat exclaimed. "Why on earth would she be burning her own picture."

Ham scowled. "Say, maybe she isn't Junith Stage at all."

"In that case," Doc said, "young Marbetti may be posing falsely also."

"Wouldn't surprise me any to find he was," Ham declared.

"I thought Marbetti was handsome," Pat said. "And he didn't look like a crook to me."

"The trouble with you, Pat," Ham assured her, "is that all handsome young men look honest to you. As gullible as you are, it's a wonder some handsome young empty head hasn't married you for all that money you make."

Pat sniffed.

Chief Eagle rolled over on the floor, and sat up. The anaesthetic gas, while its effects were quick and potent, did not render a victim unconscious for long. The after results were negligible, except for a dizziness, and a slight fuzzy confusion which would work off shortly.

The chief sat there, trying to get his mind to functioning. He

must be well past sixty years of age, Doc concluded. Yet he had been active enough to take Ham to the cleaners, which was a considerable feat in itself.

Doc asked idly, "Ham, why aren't you carrying your sword-cane?"

Ham, usually, was never seen without his sword-cane, an innocent black thing that carried a long blade inside, the blade kept tipped with a chemical which produced unconsciousness.

"Monk and I got to fooling around, and broke the blade a couple of days ago," Ham explained. "I left it with a fellow to have a new blade put in. I'm going to pick it up when we leave here."

Chief Eagle decided he had his wits back sufficiently to talk.

"Did they get away?" he asked.

"They didn't do anything less," Ham told him.

Shortly, Monk, Johnny and Phil O'Reilly drove up in front of the Stage home. Ham, watching them alight from their car, was smitten by a sudden idea.

"Hey!" exploded the lawyer. "That girl—Junith Stage—she made up her mind to clear out of here when she heard young Phil O'Reilly was coming."

Doc Savage nodded. "We'll ask Phil about that," he said.

But Phil O'Reilly could shed no light on the mystery. "Yes, I know Junith," he said. "I know her quite well, in fact. I have had a number of dates with her."

"Recently?"

"Well, last week."

"Know she was engaged to marry a young man named Rollo Marbetti?"

"Great grief, no!" Phil exclaimed. "Is she?"

"So she said. Do you know Marbetti?"

"Never heard of him." Phil scratched his head and pondered. "No, I have never even heard the name."

"Well, he's got the inside track," Ham said.

They explained what had occurred—how they had trailed the man with the ugly face to this neighborhood, and how they had found Junith Stage frightened, and finally, when she heard that Phil O'Reilly was coming, she drew a gun and forced them to flee, made Marbetti drive her away in Doc's car.

"I'm dumfounded!" exclaimed Phil.

"You don't know why Miss Stage should flee because she heard you were coming out here?" Doc asked him.

"No." Phil seemed genuinely bewildered as he shook his head. "I have no idea."

Pat remarked, "Of course, we're not really sure it was Phil who scared the girl away. When it was said that Monk, Johnny and Phil were coming out—then was when she took off. It might have been Monk or Johnny who scared her."

Ham said, "If she had seen Monk's face, I could understand her being scared."

Monk eyed Ham's ripped garments and somewhat skinned and soiled person.

"You're not exactly something to soothe a baby with, yourself," the homely chemist said in a pleased voice. "What kind of a train ran over you?"

Ham became silent. It was Pat who explained about Ham's encounter with Chief John Eagle. Monk was infinitely delighted by the narrative.

"You mean this old gaffer"—Monk indicated Chief Eagle—"did all that to Ham?"

"Yes," Pat said.

Ham glared.

Monk walked over and enthusiastically shook hands with Chief Eagle.

"How," he said.

"How," said the chief.

"Me your friend," Monk said.

"How, friend," the chief said.

"How, friend," Monk replied.

Pat burst into laughter.

The telephone call came at almost exactly twelve o'clock. It was from a State police patrolman. He spoke briefly to Doc Savage over the wire.

The bronze man put down the instrument and turned to his men.

"They have found our car," he said. "Junith Stage abandoned it at the North Meadow airport, on Long Island. That is the large airport that caters to private planes, you know."

"Did Miss Stage take a plane?" Ham asked.

"Yes," Doc said. "We will go out there now and get the details."

"That's swell," Ham said.

"But you won't go along," Doc said.

"Huh?"

The bronze man drew the lawyer aside. He spoke in a voice

which he was positive the others could not overhear, and also kept his face away from the others, in case Chief Eagle should be a lipreader. Doc already held considerable respect for Chief Eagle.

"Ham, I want you to take Pat with you, and check up this Chief John Eagle," Doc directed.

The lawyer was surprised. "You think he's a phony?"

"I think John Eagle is a deep river," Doc replied, "and I really know nothing whatever about him. I do know that he is extremely wealthy, and so is his son, Elmo, the young man who disappeared while hunting Daniel Stage. They got their money from Oklahoma oil. They are Osage Indians, and their family got in on the richest inheritances, and were intelligent enough to reinvest the money in oil lands, and they had luck."

Ham asked, "Just what do you want to know about the chief?"

"Anything that may be useful. Where he lives here in the city. How long he has been here. How he travels. His associates. Whether he has lost a great deal of money recently, or made a great deal. If you and Pat and Johnny all get on that, you should be able to find out considerable."

"You want us to light out on that right now?"

"Yes."

"Righto," Ham said.

Ham collected Pat, and departed. Chief Eagle and Phil O'Reilly both stared after them, then looked questioningly at Doc Savage.

"They are going to do some investigating along other lines," Doc explained. "Johnny—"

"Yes," Johnny said.

"You search the surroundings of this house," Doc directed. "Give the place a thorough search, and if you find anything, telephone the news to headquarters."

"Right," Johnny said.

Chief Eagle grunted. "My car is not far away," he said, "if you care to use it to go to the airport."

"Good," Doc said.

The chief's car turned out to be quite typical of the red man's love of color and pageantry. As Monk said later, the vehicle was a circus in itself. It was a foreign chassis with a wheelbase that must have been over two hundred inches, and the body, where it was not chrome, was covered with a basket weave of some kind of rich wicker-work.

It had five different horns. Monk tried them all out. There was one that sounded like a cow, another that imitated a dog, one ordinary horn, and two musical ones, which played different tunes.

"Oh, boy!" Monk said. "Chief, what'll you take for this

boat?"

"Ugh!" said the chief.

Apparently he didn't want to sell.

The motor was as quiet as a stalking tiger under the hood, and it was hard to realize they were in motion, except for an occasional swaying lift over a particularly high bump. Monk drove. When they were clear of the city, he broke a few speed laws. Chief Eagle sat back and grinned. He seemed to like speed.

The North Meadow airport had discreetness for its keynote. There was nothing bawdy or gaudy—no hangars stuck up like modernistic nightmares, for all the hangars were disguised as English country barns. There was not even a wind sock; instead, a plume of smoke trailed from one of the chimneys and gave wind direction. Hangar rent was expensive.

An obsequious attendant answered their questions. He was obviously disturbed at the presence of a State patrolman, and horrified at the thought that a word about the airport might get in the newspapers. Publicity, it seemed, was all right for commercial ventures, but North Meadow was on a higher plane.

"The woman who answers the description of Miss Stage," he said, "drove up here about eleven thirty. She was accompanied by a young man. She asked for her plane, and also requested charts of the Atlantic coast southward, of the Caribbean, of

northern South America, and of the Brazil jungle district, as much of it as has been charted."

Doc Savage made, for a brief moment, a strange small trilling sound. It was a peculiar characteristic of the bronze man, that sound, a thing which he made unconsciously in moments of mental stress. It was low, exotic, difficult of description; it was so weird that it might have been the trick of some passing breeze.

He said, "You say Miss Stage got *her* plane?"

"Yes, sir."

"How long has the plane been hangared here?"

"A little over a week, sir. A man flew it in, landing at the field here and requesting hangar space, and paying for the rent in advance. He told me personally it was Miss Junith Stage's plane, and that she was to have the craft whenever she called for it, or he was to have it, should he call. But his instructions were that no one else was to have access to the ship. I remember the occasion well because of . . . er . . . the man's unusual appearance."

Doc's flake-gold eyes—he had removed his disguise as Dink Masket—seemed to grow more intense.

"You mean the man's face?" he asked.

"Well . . . yes."

"How did it look?"

"It was a rather—well, unusual face," the attendant said.

"Was half of it different from the other half?"

"Yes. That's it exactly."

Monk grunted excitedly. "The ugly-faced man flew that plane in here and left it. Either he could get it, or Miss Stage could. That the idea?"

The attendant nodded.

Doc Savage was silent a moment. "This young man who was with Miss Stage when she took off in the plane—was it the same man who flew here with the ship?"

"Oh, no. This young man was rather handsome."

Doc Savage described Rollo Marbetti. "That the young man?"

"Yes, that was him," the attendant declared positively.

"So she took Marbetti with her," Monk muttered.

Doc asked, "And they got charts as far south as the Amazon jungle country?"

The attendant nodded. "We keep a rather complete assortment of charts here." He drew himself up. "We are proud of the service we offer."

Doc Savage went back to the car. "That settles that," he said.

"They're off for the Amazon," Monk declared. "You know something? We seem to have part of the gang on the run, anyway. That Stage girl is in on it, whatever it is."

Doc Savage shook his head slightly. He seemed doubtful. But he did not offer any explanation of his opinion.

The bronze man got behind the wheel of Chief Eagle's car. Monk, Phil O'Reilly and Chief Eagle also entered the machine, the chief riding in front. They seemed confused, said little. Doc himself did not speak until he had driven down the country road some distance and a roadhouse appeared.

Evidently the roadhouse did an afternoon luncheon business, because there were several cars and two taxis parked nearby. The place also displayed a telephone sign.

Doc stopped the car.

"I am going in here and check with Ham, Pat and Johnny," he said. "They may not have found out anything yet, but it is worth a try."

The bronze man was inside the roadhouse, crossing to the telephones, when he chanced to glance back.

Chief John Eagle was standing up in the seat. He had an enormous single-action revolver in his hand—evidently the weapon had been concealed in a door pocket of the car.

The chief forced Monk and Phil to get in the front seat. He made Monk drive. The car left in haste, the chief riding in the back seat, keeping his gun menacingly upon Monk and Phil.

IX

STOWAWAY

Doc Savage stood there and watched them go. There was nothing he could have done—and, strangely enough, there seemed to be nothing that he cared to do. As the car disappeared down the road, the bronze man even seemed satisfied.

He lifted his voice.

"Taxi!" he called.

Two taxi drivers appeared hastily. Doc studied them, selected the more competent-looking of the two. "How fast will your cab go?"

"Ninety-five for certain," the man said quietly. "Maybe more. But I don't pay the fines."

"There won't be any fines," Doc said. "And you will get a dollar a minute."

"Yeah. What do I do?"

"You wait here for a few minutes while I make a telephone call," Doc told him. "No. Better go out and get your machine filled up with oil and gas, the tires checked and the motor warm."

The taxi driver looked at Doc appraisingly. "You Doc Savage, ain't you?"

"Yes."

"I'll be waiting," the man said.

Doc went to the telephone. Ham sounded rather disappointed over the wire.

"We haven't been working on the chief long," he said. "But he seems to be a straight Indian. We haven't dug up anything against him."

"He just kidnaped Monk and Phil O'Reilly," Doc said. "So you'd better tell me every detail you have found out."

"Well, his bank balance is about where it was a few months ago—"

"Skip his money matters for the time being."

"He lives in the Ritz-Westchester Hotel. His servant died a few days ago from what the police said was suicide—"

"He told us that."

"He controls a major oil company and two smaller ones—"

"Don't bother with his finances, I said."

"Well, the only other thing I found out," Ham said, "was that he keeps a fast plane in which he commutes from the city to Tulsa and Pawhuska, Oklahoma. Pawhuska is the capital of the Osage Indian nation—"

"Where does he hangar this plane?"

"South Shore Airport. That's out by—"

"I know where it is," Doc said quickly. "Now, listen, Ham. Continue your investigation until three o'clock this afternoon. Give it everything. Then drop it at three o'clock."

"Stop investigating at three," Ham said. "All right. Then what?"

"Go down to the warehouse-hangar on the Hudson," Doc directed. "Take off in *two* of the gyro planes. You fly one. Johnny can fly the other. But take two of the gyro planes. Leave Pat behind if you can possibly arrange it, but if you can't, let her come along. Bring plenty of jungle supplies."

"Jungle supplies?" Ham was startled.

"Head for the Amazon jungles," Doc directed.

"You mean—"

"Do you remember what that message Phil O'Reilly got said about how to find Daniel Stage?"

"Yes," Ham said. "It directed him to go to a trading post run by a guy named Niji, the location of which could be found by inquiring at Obidos, in the Amazon basin. A guide named Kul was to be waiting at Niji's place, to conduct Phil the rest of the way."

"That's right," Doc said. "You two take the gyros and head for that Niji trading post. Fly day and night, and keep together. You will lose some sleep, but by using the automatic pilots, and having Pat relieve you as pilot, you can keep in the air continuously."

"Those gyros are slow."

"I know. That is why it will be necessary for you to fly day and night."

"What will *you* be doing?"

"Never mind that," Doc said. "Now you fellows take off right after three o'clock—providing I do not call you before three to cancel the whole thing."

"If you don't call us, we take off for the Amazon," Ham said. "I understand."

The dapper lawyer sounded matter-of-fact. He was accustomed to receiving unusual orders, sudden and almost fantastic orders, from Doc Savage. But that was part of the association with the bronze man, a part of the excitement that made the whole thing so fascinating.

Doc Savage hung up. He strode out, swung in the waiting

cab.

"I'll drive this thing," he said, "and we'll see if it will do ninety-five."

It would. It did—twice—a little better than ninety-seven, in fact.

South Shore airport lacked almost entirely the rigid atmosphere that characterized the North Meadow haven of snobbery. The buildings were large and looked like what they were, hangars that were as cheap as they could be built. The runway, however, was long and smooth. A slanting ramp gave access to the smooth water of an inlet, where seaplanes could arrive and depart.

Doc whipped the cab to a stop alongside the operations office. The driver, in the back, was white. Doc consulted his watch.

"Twenty-three minutes," he said. "We'll call it thirty, and make it even, providing you turn around and drive away from here right now, and say nothing about this until this afternoon, at the earliest."

The driver nodded stiffly, and Doc paid him. The hackman then got behind the wheel of his machine, and drove away. He traveled at a conservative speed of about ten miles an hour. He seemed to have had his fill of speed for some time.

The operations manager here was acquainted with Doc

Savage to a slight degree. He was a man of few words. He listened to what Doc had to say.

"Eagle's plane," he said shortly. "Hangar Five. Want me to show you?"

"Please."

Chief John Eagle's plane was modern, large, fast, capable of cruising long distances without refueling. It was, moreover, an amphibian, capable of operation from land or water.

"Thank you," Doc said. He looked at the operations manager steadily. "You haven't seen me."

The man glanced about. There was no one else in the hangar. "I haven't seen you," he said. "Anything else?"

"Just one thing more," Doc said.

Doc Savage was well acquainted with the layout of the plane. Back in the body of the hull, there was a space where a man could conceal himself. Where several men could have hidden, if necessary. This cavity was back of the regular baggage compartment, and it was closed off by an opening which could be fastened from the outside, but not from the inside. It was not a very strong barricade; a man, once imprisoned in the back, could break out without much trouble.

Doc got in the cavity.

"Fasten me in here," he directed. "I do not want it to look as if I am in here."

The manager smiled slightly, but said nothing. He did as requested, then tapped on the bulkhead. "All set," he said. "Luck."

"Thanks."

Doc heard him walk away, and heard the small side door of the hangar close.

X

WEIRD JUNGLE

Doc Savage was not sure exactly how long he had been in the back of the plane. His watch had stopped, and upon investigating, he had found that nothing was wrong with the watch, that it had simply run down, and the fact worried him somewhat, because he had schooled himself not to overlook details, not even the smallest ones.

He did know that Chief John Eagle had arrived at the South Shore airport a little less than half an hour after he had taken his place of concealment. He knew Monk and Phil O'Reilly were with the chief. And he knew Monk and Phil were now lashed and gagged in the baggage compartment of the plane—he had opened a small peekhole with the blade of his knife,

and had studied them. Except for a natural amount of irritation, both Monk and Phil seemed to be unharmed.

Days had passed, and the bronze man had not moved from his hiding place, had no intention of doing so as long as the plane flew south. He had slept for unusually long periods, and passage of time had become a little uncertain.

Ordinarily, during a period of confinement such as this, he would have managed to take, at least daily, the two-hour routine of exercises which he had not neglected for years, and which were largely responsible for his unusual physical development. But confined here, he had no food, and did not want to work up an appetite, so he toned down on all but the mental phases of his exercise routine. He took those.

Chief Eagle's plane was equipped with an automatic pilot of the conventional type, so that the chief could keep the ship in the air, and doze at the controls whenever he became extremely sleepy.

The plane had landed at the Miami airport for refueling, and at an airport in Haiti for the same purpose. From there, the ship had angled down to Trinidad, and taken on a load of fuel at the passenger seaplane base there. The next stop had been farther down the South American coast, and the last halt had been inland somewhere, on a river, where natives had carried fuel out in five-gallon tin drums, splashing through the shallow water while other natives with long poles beat the surface to keep the alligators away.

Doc Savage knew all this because he had punched peekholes

in the thin metal skin of the plane with his knife.

While the plane had taken on gas that last time, he had watched the alligators. They were not true alligators, but caimans, although more like alligators than crocodiles. In the crocodile, the fourth tooth from the front on either side of the lower jaw fitted, when the jaw was closed, into a notch in the upper jaw, protruding so that it resembled a tusk. The same tooth, in an alligator, fitted into a pit in the upper jaw, where it was hidden when the jaw was closed. That was the principal difference between the two; that, and a difference in snout contour and slight characteristics in coloring.

The species of caimans gave him an idea of the land of country they were getting into—well back in the Brazilian jungle, in the Amazon tributary section. These caimans were the black type, the dangerous variety sometimes reaching a length of twenty-five feet.

For a long time, there had been a wide muddy yellow river beneath. The Amazon, Doc knew. That meant the chief had swung wide, following the coast for a great deal of the distance.

The plane swung north on the Trombetas River. Doc pressed an eye to his peephole frequently, judging their progress, noting the kind of a season the jungle was having.

This, fortunately, he thought, was not the time of the *igapo*. Twice each year, once in November and December, and once in March to June, the great flood came down and hundreds of thousands of square miles of the Amazon valley were under

water. These floods were known as the *igapo*.

Chief John Eagle made a rather ragged landing on the Trombetas near the town of Obidos. Doc Savage held his breath until the descent was completed; the bronze man did not have too high an opinion of the chief's flying ability. It partook too much of the reckless abandon of a redskin riding a mustang around a covered-wagon train at which he was discharging arrows.

The plane taxied for nearly a mile. Then the chief put out a collapsible anchor, and got it to snag bottom and hold the plane. By that time, dugout canoes were paddling from shore.

The chief, it developed, wanted gasoline, oil and food—and the location of a trading post run by a man named Niji. He had trouble making himself understood, because he did not speak the Portuguese language of Brazilians, or any of the native dialects. He tried English, finally resorting in exasperation to the Osage tongue, and ended up by swearing extensively in both languages. But he finally got what he wanted.

Doc Savage was thoughtful during the loading. He had not told Chief John Eagle the contents of Phil O'Reilly's message—the orders to come to Niji's trading post to pick up a guide named Kul. He wondered how the chief knew about that.

Through the peephole, Doc noted the food being put aboard. There was a plentiful supply of long strips of smoked *pirarucu*. That was understandable. *Pirarucu* was one of the chief items of Amazonian diet, and was noteworthy in other respects. It

was one of the largest fresh-water fish in the world, and had enormous scales, frequently six inches long, the scales being used by the native women as manicuring instruments.

A *pirarucu* scale was a whole manicuring kit by itself, the curved tip serving to press back cuticle, the upper side being rough enough to serve as a nail file, while the lower side was very good as a buffer or polisher.

Chief Eagle evidently obtained the location of Niji's trading post, because a Brazilian who spoke fair English appeared, and they spent some time consulting over charts. The Brazilian took the chiefs fountain pen and drew in several rivers which weren't on the chart.

Doc could hear their speech, which took place in a dugout canoe beside the plane—Monk and Phil O'Reilly being thoroughly gagged and tied in the baggage compartment of the cabin.

"I put in parts thees reevers," the Brazilian said. "Thees what you call heem—surveyor—ees not been there yet, señor. But me, I have seen reever, so I know she ees where I draw heem."

"Thanks," said Chief Eagle.

The Brazilian eyed him curiously.

"You ees look for thees explorer, Daniel Stage?" he asked.

The chief's copper-colored face remained inscrutable. "No, not at all," he said. "What makes you think so?"

The Brazilian shrugged elaborately. "Several planes come this route last year, hunt for Señor Stage," he explained.

Chief Eagle was silent for a while.

"Did a young man named Elmo Eagle stop here?" he asked.

The Brazilian nodded.

"Yes," he said. "I remember him. He's young man who looks a little like you."

Chief Eagle's face might have been made of red sandstone.

"Thanks," he said. "Did this Elmo Eagle ask for Niji, too?"

The Brazilian nodded again.

The chief climbed into the plane.

"Thanks," he said. "Has any other plane landed here within the last few days?"

"No, señor."

"The plane would have had a girl named Junith Stage aboard, and a young man named Marbetti."

"There has been no such plane."

"Good-by," the chief said.

The next morning, they landed at Niji's trading post. Part of the night had been spent on a river, the chief apparently mistrusting his night-flying ability. The distance required for the journey would have taken weeks along the jungle rivers; to penetrate the jungle itself would have taken two or three years, probably.

Niji's trading post stood in a large clearing on a bluff near the river. At the foot of the bluff ran a river, wide, sluggish, coffee-colored. On the bluff grew graceful white-stemmed *assai* palms, in their clusters of two or three. The fruit of these, a thin layer of meat over a hard stone, somewhat like a cherry, was mixed with water and became a thick dark liquid which was drunk by the natives.

Chief John Eagle landed the plane without incident on the river. When he got out of the ship, he had the big single-action six-shooter shoved in his belt, and he was carrying a stubby Model 94 lever-action .30-30 rifle.

He swung down cautiously, testing the depths of the water, and found it not much over his knees—he had anchored the plane close to shore—and started to wade to solid ground. He had taken only a few paces when he barked out in agony, and dived wildly for the beach, making a great splashing.

When the chief dashed onto solid land, two small fish were clinging to him, and he had been cut in places by others. He had also left traces of blood in the water.

Suddenly, where the blood was, the water began to boil as hundreds of the fish streaked about with frenzied ferocity. The

chief knocked loose the two fish that had bitten him, and stamped on them. He stared at the water, scratched his head.

His amazed grunt was audible. Then he turned and began climbing toward the trading post, his manner alert.

Doc Savage hurriedly shoved against the fastening of the little hatch which closed off the compartment where he had been hidden. A moment later, he was bending beside Monk and Phil O'Reilly. He ungagged the two.

"Doc!" Monk exploded. "Have you been hidden back there the whole time?"

"Yes," the bronze man said.

Phil O'Reilly was speechless.

Doc worked for a time with the ropes which bound the two men.

"Now," he said finally. "The ropes look just about as they were, but by pulling here"—he showed them where to pull—"you can get free in a moment. However, stay as you are for the time being."

"Where are we?" Monk demanded. "It's a jungle river somewhere, ain't it? I can tell that by the smell."

"We're at Niji's trading post—farther back in the Amazon jungle than mapping parties have ever gone."

Monk grunted his astonishment. "Boy, that's a long ways

from New York. I hope the chief has been taking us in the right direction."

"He is probably hoping the same thing," Doc said. "You stay here. I am going ashore."

He started to leave the cabin, then turned back to give a warning.

"Don't step into the river," he said. "The water is swarming with *piranha*. They nearly got the chief, who was foolish enough to wade ashore. I do not think he knew what they were."

"*Piranha*, eh?" Monk said. "Don't worry about me getting in the water, then. I saw them take a native once. He wasn't in the water more than five minutes, and all we recovered were his bones."

Phil O'Reilly had his mouth open. "What are you talking about?"

"A fish. They're shaped a little like an ordinary sole." Monk shuddered. "They go mad at the presence of blood, and they've got teeth like razors. They'll take everything off a body right down to the bones, so fast that it's incredible."

Doc Savage left the plane. He did not enter the water. Instead, he climbed on the wing—the ship was a low-wing monoplane—and by running to the tip of one wing and leaping, managed to alight on dry land.

The bronze man climbed toward Niji's trading post. He kept

out of sight.

Niji was a round brown man, with the solid look of a fat man who is very strong. His brown color was deep, almost the hue of oiled teakwood. He had piercing dark eyes.

His attire consisted of a pair of red boxing trunks with silver stripes down the sides, a yellow silk shirt with flowing sleeves, and a high silk hat which had seen better days.

Niji seemed a little embarrassed by his own attire.

"You caught me," he explained sheepishly, "when I was dressed for business. So I hope you won't get the idea from this crazy stuff that I am wearing that I'm crazy."

The chief looked at Niji's eyes, which were intent, level and intelligent, even a little masked and sinister.

"No, I wouldn't think you were crazy," the chief said.

"Thank you."

Chief John Eagle produced some papers from his pockets—papers he had taken from Phil O'Reilly—and did some lying.

"I am Phil O'Reilly," he said. "Here are some papers which prove my identity."

Niji glanced at the letters which the chief extended, letters which actually proved nothing except that the chief had them

in his possession.

"You have a letter which I wrote you?"

The chief nodded. "I *did* have it," he said. "But I thought it more advisable to destroy the missive."

"Why destroy it?"

"Did you not remark in it that secrecy was essential?"

Niji nodded thoughtfully. "I did," he said.

"Well, so I destroyed the notes. As long as I remembered the gist of what was in them, what else was necessary?"

Niji shrugged. "I am sorry," he said.

"Sorry about what?"

"You remember the one you were to meet here?" Niji's eyes narrowed. "Or do you?"

"Kul," the chief said promptly. "He was to guide me to my friend, Daniel Stage."

Niji, apparently satisfied, nodded soberly.

"Kul is dead," he said.

"*What?*"

Niji shrugged again. "He stepped outdoors one dark night, and a *sucureija* found him. The *sucureija* lives partly on land

and partly in water, and this one was forty-five feet long. A *sucureija*, you know, can swallow a horse or an ox whole. Their teeth slant inward, and they fasten them upon their victim, then wrap their coils around the quarry until every bone in the body is broke to fragments and the victim is nothing but a mass of bloody pulp and bones. It is not pleasant, I assure you. Then they coat it carefully with saliva, and, opening their huge jaws, begin the swallowing operations. An ox, for instance, may last a *sucureija* a month, and in case the ox should have horns, the horns are merely allowed to protrude from the creature's mouth until that part of the carcass has rotted, after which the horns are scraped off on a convenient tree."

Chief Eagle peered at him. "You mean the snakes here are *that* big?"

"The *sucureija*," said Niji, "is also called anaconda." He frowned. "Will you come with me?"

They walked a few dozen yards through the jungle. It was noticeable that the chief kept his rifle ready for quick operation.

Doc Savage followed warily, keeping out of sight. He had been close enough to hear what they were saying, and now he got close enough again. It was not difficult, because of the thickness of the jungle growth.

There was a mound of earth on the jungle floor. It was comparatively fresh, although the quick-growing tropical plants were already springing up out of it. At the head of the

mound was a crude cross.

"Kul was not a Christian," Niji said thoughtfully. "But I thought I would put a cross at the head of his grave, anyway. He would have felt honored to know that a white man had placed the emblem of his religion over a poor native's grave."

The chiefs face was stark. "Kul, the guide, is buried here?"

"Yes."

"Then how am I going to find Daniel Stage?"

Niji smiled thinly. "Kul did not die until some time after we found him. He had life enough to guide me in the drawing of a kind of map."

"Map?"

"I will give it to you."

Doc Savage could not get close enough to observe the map, but Chief Eagle showed a great deal of interest in it. He pored over it, using a pencil to add written designations of his own while he asked Niji questions.

"I have never been in that country," Niji said. "So I cannot tell you much. It is a great distance. Kul was on the trail four months reaching here."

"Four months?" The chief was astounded.

Niji shrugged his round shoulders. "It is a great distance."

"Then I'll need more gasoline," the chief said grimly. "Say, have you got high-test aviation gas here?"

Niji nodded. "Yes."

The chief was surprised. "How come?"

"Why, I have a plane fly in here once each month," Niji said. "I trade, a little platinum out of the natives, and the plane flies that out."

The chief eyed him. "You must get quite a bit of platinum, or a man like you wouldn't be inclined to stay in a place like this."

Niji shrugged. "That is my business," he said frankly.

Chief Eagle nodded. "That's all right. Will you sell me some gas?"

"Five dollars a gallon."

The chief said, "All right. How about food?"

"I will give you all the food you want. It will be native stuff."

"Let's get busy loading," the chief said.

Doc Savage eased away from his hiding place, and returned as rapidly and as unobtrusively as he could to the edge of the

river. The current had swung the plane so that the nose pointed upstream, and, by running and leaping, he managed to grasp the edge of the wing and swing aboard. He entered the cabin.

"Don't make any move," he warned Monk and Phil O'Reilly. "I think the chief is falling into a trap."

The bronze man returned to his hiding place, closed the hatch—making a mental note that he hoped the chief would not notice the unfastened hatch—and waited.

From his peekholes—they were too small to be noticed by a casual observer—he watched the ship being loaded. Gasoline was poured into the wing-tanks. Food was piled into the cabin.

Chief Eagle paid money to Niji; then the chief climbed in the plane. The mechanical starters made their whining noise for a while, and the motors burst into life.

The plane began moving, gathered speed, rattled across the short river waves, and took the air.

Doc Savage crawled out of his hiding place. He went forward. Monk and Phil O'Reilly saw him coming, freed themselves. Doc motioned for silence.

The bronze man moved up behind Chief Eagle, grabbed the rifle and scooped the big single-action six-shooter out of the chief's belt.

Chief Eagle had the stoicism of his race. He turned, faced the bronze man. There was surprise, only a little, on the red man's face. Knots of muscle gathered in front of his ears.

Rather surprisingly, he said, "It was beginning to dawn on me that I should have brought you along."

Doc got Chief Eagle by the shoulder, hauled him away from the controls. Monk and Phil O'Reilly got in close to the chief. They could handle him.

Doc glanced downward. There was nothing but jungle below.

"Monk," Doc said sharply, "search that food. Look through it fast, and dump it overboard as you do so."

"But—"

"Hurry up!"

Monk leaped to obey.

Doc took the controls. He slanted the plane downward sharply toward the jungle. When he was a few hundred feet above the tangled mass of vegetation, he banked abruptly and headed the ship back toward Niji's trading post.

Monk dumped the food overboard rapidly. It was not long before he came back. He was pale. He had a two-gallon tin container, wrapped with wire, to which an ordinary clock and some batteries were attached.

"Time bomb," he said. "It was set to go off in an hour."

Chief Eagle grunted. "Niji crook," he said cryptically. "Yes," Doc said. "He took you in. Furthermore, this gas he sold you is probably doped so that it will stop the motors in a short time."

The dread significance of that hit Monk before any of the others. The homely chemist let out a howl of unpleasant astonishment.

"Doc, why ain't you flyin' higher!" he yelled. "If the motors stop, that would give us a chance to pick our landing place."

"One place is about the same as another, until we reach the river," Doc told him. "And flying low, this way, Niji will not hear us returning until we get within three or four miles of the trading post!"

"You think we'll make it?" Phil asked hollowly.

The motors answered that. They stopped, one at a time.

XI

THE UNKNOWN

Phil O'Reilly became pale. But he went back in the cabin

and sat down, something that took courage.

"Fasten the safety belts," Doc directed.

Monk and Chief Eagle complied. The bronze man was working furiously with the controls, the starters. But there was nothing that he could do. He gave his attention to landing the big ship. He set the controls to the slowest possible speed.

The trees were like green moss below; here and there a larger one protruded above the surrounding jungle. But for the most part the green was fairly level.

He leveled; at the last moment he kicked rudder, and fish-tailed the big plane, so that it went into a virtual stall a moment before it hit. The ship struck at the slowest speed possible.

There was a noise as if a small boy had jumped into a pile of tin cans and kicked around. That stopped. A branch came up through the floor and slapped Monk's face. The homely chemist went pale for an instant, thinking he was going to be impaled, but the stab missed him.

Doc Savage unbuckled the safety belt, turned. They seemed to be safe. Except that the earth was a good forty feet below.

The chief stuck his head out and looked at his plane. One wing was gone. Branches were sticking through the other. The fuselage was slightly out of shape.

"Sixty-three thousand dollars," he said.

Evidently that was what the plane had cost.

Doc had a small pocket compass. He gave it to Monk.

"Niji's trading post is about ten miles south and west," the bronze man explained. "But the river is only about three miles to the west. Head for the river. Make a raft, and float down to the trading post."

Monk and Phil nodded.

Chief Eagle stared at Doc. "Don't you want to know what made me grab your two friends and head for South America, like I did?"

Doc said, "It was obvious you didn't trust us."

The faintest of grins moved the chiefs lips. "I am of a suspicious people," he said. "And there is something mysterious behind this. My son *announced* that he was going to rescue Daniel Stage—and he never came back. I think *that* was why he didn't come back."

Doc Savage said, "It is rather obvious that everyone who tries to rescue Daniel Stage runs into trouble."

"Yes," the chief agreed. "So I was going to try it without letting anyone know."

"Why did you take Monk and Phil along?"

The Indian eyed him. "If you half suspected some men might know what became of your son, wouldn't you take them along?"

Doc nodded. "That's what I thought," he said. The bronze man turned to Monk and Phil. "Head for the river, then float down to the trading post," he directed. "Travel light, but take blankets to keep off the mosquitoes. And watch for *maquims*, the little red mites that burrow under your skin and cause infection and itching."

Monk nodded. "I know something about this jungle. There's another thing called a *puim*, a small louse with wings. It makes you itch terribly, and leaves a scar like a burn."

"Where you going?" Phil O'Reilly was looking at Doc.

"I hope to be there ahead of you," Doc said.

When Phil O'Reilly watched the bronze man swing away from the plane, he understood why Doc was not waiting for them. He was also astounded. He had known Doc Savage was a man of extraordinary physical ability, but he had not dreamed just how amazing an individual he was.

Doc removed his shoes, discarded them, and stripped down to trousers. He ripped the legs off his trousers above the knees. Then he got out of the plane, moved along a limb, far out into dizzy space, swayed there a moment, then pitched forward and downward. Phil yelled in horror. He thought Doc had fallen. Then, to his astonishment, he saw the bronze man grasp a thick vine, swing there a moment, move along it hand over hand, and again fly into space, this time alighting on a limb. After that, the jungle foliage hid him.

"For the love of little fishes!" Phil said wonderingly.

"Ugh!" The chief got out of the plane, peered at the ground far below, and made no effort to imitate the bronze man's example.

Niji was sitting in front of a portable radio transmitter when Doc Savage walked in on him. Niji was alone, and the radio outfit, while portable, could hardly be carried on one man's back; it was portable by airplane, or several natives could carry it. Power for the apparatus was furnished by a small generator driven by a gasoline motor, and the motor was making enough noise to cover any sound Doc might have made in approaching.

He was just finishing his communication over the instrument.

"If the bomb doesn't get this man Eagle," he was saying into the transmitter, "the doctored gasoline will. I put a chemical into the gas which I poured into the tanks."

That evidently terminated his report, because he placed the microphone on the table and switched off the apparatus. And it was then that Doc walked in.

Niji came half out of his chair, and his hand started for a gun lying on the table. He remained that way, arrested in midmovement, for a while. Then he sank back.

"You!" he said.

Obviously he recognized Doc. The bronze man studied Niji

intently. He had never seen the fellow before. And he was puzzled by the expression on Niji's face.

Doc tossed the gun in a corner.

"I was on that plane," he said.

Niji blanched. "Why didn't that fool, Eagle, tell me?"

"What difference would it have made?"

"A great deal," Niji said quietly.

Doc continued to watch him. Niji looked miserable. That was puzzling.

Doc said, "You'd better explain just what you mean."

Niji's gaze was level. "You do not know me," he said. "But I have a brother. Niji is not my name, and it was not my brother's name. He was Carl Voorheis, and, four or five years ago, he was in danger of losing everything he owned, and his life and family as well. Carl is not like me; he is an honest man. Carl had a plantation in Hidalgo, a Central American republic. He— But you know what happened. You saved everything for him."

Doc remembered. "What has that to do with this?"

Niji shrugged. "I am a crook," he said. "But first, I am a man with a certain code. When a man does me or mine good, I return it. The same for wrong."

"You mean," Doc said, "that you are my friend."

Niji shook his head. "Not your friend. Crooks are never your friends. What I mean is this: If I can help you in any way, I will."

Doc was pleased. This break, unexpected, was the kind that came out of a clear sky now and then.

"You can tell me what this is all about," Doc said.

Niji hesitated. He got up and went to a window. A group of natives was husking *castanha* nuts in the clearing. The *castanha* nuts grew inside an extremely large, round cannonball of a shell, twenty to forty nuts inside a ball. Shipped to the American market, they were called Brazil nuts.

"You see those natives?" Niji said. "They are not my men. They will kill me if I talk."

"Then," Doc said, "you are going to refuse to talk?"

Niji shook his head. "On the contrary, I'll tell you anything you want to know. But I would like to make a deal. I would like for you to arrange some method by which I can escape."

Doc considered the point.

"That can be done," he said.

Niji left the window, went to the door, made sure no one

was listening. Then he lowered his voice. "This is going to disappoint you," he said. "I don't actually know what is behind it."

"Nearly a year ago," he said, "a man came to me, and told me that exploring expeditions would begin coming to hunt a man named Daniel Stage. This man gave me several maps, all alike. I was to give each of these expeditions one of the maps, and say that a guide had brought it to me, but had died while waiting for them to come. I received a list of men, all explorers, to whom I was to write letters saying that a native had reached my trading post, a native who knew the whereabouts of Daniel Stage."

Doc Savage's metallic features were grim. "In other words, you were to decoy explorers down here, and when they got this far, you were to give them maps which would lead them on into the jungle."

"That is it."

"The maps were all alike, you say?"

"Yes."

"Then these explorers—none of them came back, incidentally—were all sent to the same spot searching for Daniel Stage?"

"Yes."

Doc pointed at the radio. "What about that?"

"That?" Niji looked at the radio. "The man who hired me supplied that. I used it to get in touch with him. It was over the radio that he told me to put a bomb in Eagle's plane and to dope the gasoline."

"What about the natives you said would kill you if they found out you were talking?"

"This man left them here." Niji frowned. "You understand, I was getting well paid for this. I am essentially a crook. Did you examine that bomb I put in the plane?"

"Monk dumped it overboard in a hurry."

"It would never have exploded," Niji said. "I am not a murderer. As for the doped gasoline, a plane could land on the top of this jungle without a great deal of danger of killing the occupants."

"You are saying you are not a murderer?"

"Yes."

Doc studied him. He believed the man. Niji was a crook, as he said, but he had a certain code that he followed.

"Did you ever think of reforming?" the bronze man asked.

"I am thinking very strongly about it."

"Would you go so far as to make a promise? I believe you are a man who keeps his word."

Niji hesitated. Finally he said, "If I get out of this, I quit. You understand, it does not take a great deal of will power on my part to do so. I have enough money to retire on."

Doc said, "There is just one more thing."

"What?"

"The name of the man who hired you."

"Marbetti."

"Rollo Marbetti? A young man, rather handsome, with a dark skin?"

"Yes. Marbetti is the man behind all this," Niji said.

It was four days before the two gyro planes arrived. They were slow, and although Ham and Johnny and Pat had made all the speed possible, their advent was delayed four days. They landed—the ships were equipped with floats—on the river.

Monk, Phil O'Reilly and Chief Eagle had reached Niji's trading post by that time. Doc had met them; they had remained encamped in the jungle, where the natives about Niji's post had not found them.

But when the gyro ships landed—the big rotors that served them instead of wings made them look like air-traveling windmills—Doc and the others stepped out on the beach.

Ham and his party taxied to land after Doc shouted a warning about the ferocious *piranha* that swarmed in the river. They sprang ashore.

"Columbus made better time crossing the Atlantic than we made in these things," Ham said disgustedly.

"There is no better ship for use in the jungle," Doc told him.

Monk was bursting with information.

"Ham, we know who is behind this thing," the homely chemist declared.

"Who?"

"Marbetti."

"I never did trust him," Ham declared. "What's he pulling? What is the idea of decoying all those explorers down here in the jungle? Why didn't any of them ever come back?"

Monk's face fell. "We don't know yet," he had to admit. "But whatever the reason, we are hot on the trail—"

A shot silenced him. It came from the direction of the trading post. A single report, evidently of a rifle. The echoes gobbled back and forth in the jungle, and a flock of birds swarmed up.

"Come on!" Doc rapped.

The bronze man led the race for the trading post. They got

there in time to find natives, half-naked fellows, some of them *caboclas*, as the local breeds were called, trying to break down the door.

"Get back!" Doc told them.

Chief Eagle had his big single-action gun in his hands; Monk had the .30-30 carbine. Ham and the others held grim blue machine pistols. The natives withdrew sullenly.

"Watch them," Doc warned. "They are employed by Marbetti. They might make trouble."

The bronze man struck the door then, using his shoulder. The door was strong. It resisted. Doc said, "Locked on the inside." He said this in the native language, so the sullen half-naked men would understand.

Again he hit the door, with more force this time, and the panel flew open. Ham went in.

Niji sprawled on the floor, legs and arms twisted grotesquely. A stream of wet scarlet crawled slowly from under the body to a crack in the floor and ran down through the crack. There was a revolver by the outstretched hand.

Doc went to the door. "Get those natives in here!" he said loudly and angrily. "Find out who did this!"

He translated the order into the local vernacular, and stood there, a frowning bronze tower of a man, as natives were shoved inside. They stared at the body, not greatly concerned in the presence of death.

"None of us killed him," a man pointed out. "The door was locked, was it not?"

That was a perfectly logical argument, but Doc seemed unconvinced. He frowned for a while, and did a little brow-beating.

"We'll have to bury Niji," he said finally.

Monk and the bronze man carried Niji's form into the jungle. They placed the body in a thicket, and hastily dug a trench.

"All right," Doc said.

Niji leaped to his feet. He shook Doc's hand.

"Thanks," he said. "You will keep them thinking I am dead?"

Doc nodded.

Niji vanished in the jungle. Doc had already hidden a supply of food, and, farther down the river where the man could reach it, a dugout canoe.

Doc and Monk carefully filled in the grave they had dug, and rounded up the earth.

When they got back to the trading post, Phil O'Reilly had destroyed the radio apparatus. Chief Eagle had taken Ham, Johnny and Pat aside and informed them of the situation. "Doc

Savage has one of those maps from Niji," the chief finished, "and, since Niji was a white guy, Doc is letting him go. Niji has promised to reform. What Niji does not know is that Doc is going to keep an eye on him in the future, and if Niji doesn't reform, it'll be just too bad for him. As for us, we're going on to the spot to which these missing explorers were directed."

Phil joined Doc. "I put the radio on the blink," he said.

"Collect any supplies we may need from the trading post," Doc directed. "And load everything in the gyros."

This operation took a little time. The work was made slow by the necessity for watching the hostile natives each moment. Doc, Ham and Johnny went among them, and collected several blowguns and a supply of poisoned arrows, but in spite of that, Doc shortly felt a sharp impact against his back. It was a poisoned blowgun dart that, except for the fact that he was wearing a chain-mesh shirt that had stopped the thing, would have been unpleasant. He plucked out the dart, chased the native who had blown the thing at him, caught the fellow, and gave him a trouncing in the presence of his fellows.

That put a stop to the hostility. The idea that the bronze man was invulnerable to the darts aroused a superstitious fear, and the natives skulked out of sight.

A moment before they were to take off, Monk appeared. The homely chemist was dirty and puzzled.

"Say, you remember that guide named Kul who was supposed to be waiting here?" Monk asked.

"There never was any guide named Kul."

"Oh," Monk said. "That explains why there was no body in that grave Niji showed the chief."

The bronze man indicated how they should divide their forces. Monk, Ham and Phil O'Reilly would take one gyro. Johnny, Pat, Chief Eagle and himself took the other craft, which, while no larger than the first, was a more advanced model and could carry greater weight.

They took the air without incident. The gyros—they were not true gyros with the ability to rise straight up, but neither were they the common auto-gyro plane that required considerable forward speed to keep in the air—lifted off the water after very brief runs.

Doc turned the controls over to Johnny, and spread out the chart which Niji had given him. The bronze man computed flying time, finally announced his conclusions as, "If we are lucky, we will make it by night."

It was now midmorning.

Pat said, "I never knew this jungle was so big. On the map, you think of it as just being a part of Brazil."

DANGEROUS DECOY

The plateau was an astounding thing. They came upon it late that afternoon, when they were flying west, and at first it was hard to distinguish, resembling a low cloud bank on the horizon. Sun glare made the western skyline a furnace, and that did not help them to distinguish the plateau.

The plateau had a perfectly flat top, and sheer sides. There was nothing fabulous about the thing, except that it was unexpected, there in the jungle. The sides were very steep, in some places being cliffs some hundreds of feet high. In other spots, the slope was slightly less precipitous.

Chief Eagle sighed at the place, and made some mental calculations.

"The top of that thing is about two thousand feet above the surrounding jungle." He frowned at Doc. "Great blazes, isn't there any trace of that on the charts?"

"None," the bronze man said.

"It's not so amazing," Pat offered dryly. "The jungle is perpetually covered with a haze or fog, and that thing looks like a cloud bank sticking up. If we hadn't had accurate bearings, we wouldn't have noticed it."

"The map indicates that thing as our goal?" the chief

demanded.

"Yes."

Doc Savage, in the leading gyro, sent the craft up toward the lip of the plateau. The size of the place, not so impressive from a distance, became somewhat breath-taking as they drew close. Its contours resembled those of the big mesas of the western United States.

There was radio for communication between the two gyros.

Doc said into the microphone, "We will circle the edge of the place. Make a quick survey before darkness."

"Right," Monk's voice said in the receivers.

"You take one direction. We'll take the other. Keep in touch with us by radio."

"Right."

The bronze man headed left. He flew almost directly above the rim, but at an altitude that would not make it too easy for a rifle shot from below. And all of them used binoculars.

The vegetation on the top of the plateau, probably because so much jungle surrounded the place that the climate was very much the same, did not differ a great deal from the lowland.

Doc distinguished *hevea* and *castilloa* trees, as well as the two drug-producing shrubs, *cinchona* and cocoa, common to higher elevations. He was surprised at the presence of

castilloa, because he understood it was found in the upper *Negro-Branco* basin, and nowhere else.

There was also the big *massaranduba*, or cow tree, one of the largest of Amazon trees. The evening sunlight made the reddish bark of the tree seem redder—that bark, when tapped, would give a liquid similar in appearance and taste to milk, and which was even sometimes used in coffee and for other purposes which genuine milk served. However, drinking much of the milk from the cow tree would cause illness, because it coagulated into a material similar to rubber latex. The wood was very hard, so hard that nails could not be driven into it, and it had to be drilled like steel. The wood would also sink in water.

Doc said, "Monk—"

"Yes?"

"Find anything?"

"Naw, not exactly," Monk said. "There's kind of a canyon ahead, though, and it looks as if there was some paths leading down to that, and what looks like cultivated fields near it. We'll know in a minute."

Phil O'Reilly emitted a yell, grabbed Doc's arm.

"Look!" he bellowed.

Below them, to the left, there was a clearing, a meadow of some area. In this, a man had appeared. He was running, waving his arms to get their attention.

Phil glued binoculars to his eyes.

"That is Daniel Stage!" Phil shrieked.

Doc Savage turned the gyro, let it sink. He used his own glasses.

The man below appeared to be in bad shape. He was almost naked, and he was crusted with dirt. He had made himself a garment of leaves and plaited bark. He seemed hardly to have the strength to run, because he fell repeatedly. The rest of the time, he ran with an awkward leaping motion.

"That's Stage," Phil gasped. "I recognize the way he runs."

"Behind him," Doc said sharply. "Take a look!"

There was a group of men, rather light-skinned for natives, running grimly toward the fellow waving at them from the meadow.

Phil made an angry noise. "He must have yelled at us, or something, and they heard him," Phil growled.

Doc Savage fed the motor a little gas. The gyro started to lift and circle.

"Aren't you going to land?" Phil yelled.

He looked grim.

"Not immediately," Doc said.

Phil swore.

"But we've come all this way to rescue Daniel Stage!" he shrieked. "You've got a chance. You can land and pick him up before those natives get him!"

Doc said, "Not until we make sure what this is."

"But we want to rescue Stage!"

Doc's voice hardened. "We also want to find those explorers who went after him—to say nothing of Junith, Daniel Stage's sister."

Phil glared at him. Phil was not a young man who believed in sober, cautious action. When he saw a thing that seemed to need doing, he was in favor of doing it.

Suddenly Phil lunged forward. He picked a moment when Doc Savage was manipulating the controls, so he took the bronze man partly by surprise. Phil got his arm under the instrument panel, clutched the ignition wires, and wrenched them loose.

The motor stopped.

Long, bony Johnny hit Phil with his fist. Johnny did not appear to have much strength, but his blow put Phil on the floor, dazed.

"You supermagnitudinous fool!" Johnny said.

Doc worked with the controls. The gyro sank earthward. It would land in the clearing, very close to the man staggering there.

Phil stirred on the floor.

"You can fix those wires in a minute," he muttered. "I just forced you to land."

He sounded triumphant.

Doc said, "Take a closer look at this man."

Phil got to his feet. As the gyro sank, and the man in the clearing came closer, Phil's expression changed strangely.

"Well?" Doc asked.

"It's not . . . not Daniel Stage!" Phil gasped.

"What made you think it was Stage in the first place?" Doc demanded.

"The way he ran—that loping gait," Phil muttered. "Dan always ran like that. We used to kid him a lot about it. Told him he ran like a girl."

The gyro hit with a considerable jar.

"Get him in here!" Doc rapped.

The bronze man doubled under the instrument panel, began splicing the torn ignition wires. The wires were tangled; it

would take a few minutes to sort them.

Phil leaped out, yelled at the running man, "Get in here! We've got to fix the ignition wires, but we'll be able to take off."

The man Phil had thought was Daniel Stage, it developed, was not a white man at all, but a rather swarthy breed with a face that was not very pleasant. He galloped close to the plane.

Then, so unexpectedly that no one had a chance to do anything about it, he whipped two guns out of his clothing. One was an ordinary revolver; the other weapon was a big-barreled signal pistol, the type of thing called a Very gun.

He shot a hole in the gas tank. The gas ran out. He fired the Very pistol into the gasoline. With a gusty roar, flame enveloped that part of the plane.

The man then turned his revolver on them.

"Everybody sit still," he said.

The natives ran toward them, and when they arrived, the man spoke to them in a dialect which Doc Savage did not understand, although it bore some resemblance to the basic language of the tribes of the outer reaches of the Amazon region.

The natives—they were stalwart men who appeared more white than Indian—scrambled into the gyro, seized Doc, Pat, Johnny, Chief Eagle and Phil. They had bark-plaited ropes ready to bind their prisoners.

Phil groaned. He was utterly miserable.

"Nice job you did," Johnny told him grimly.

Doc Savage shrugged.

"They might have gotten us anyway," the bronze man said. "Look." He nodded toward the other gyro, which they could distinguish in the red light of evening.

A plane, a low-wing monoplane that was fast, had climbed up from somewhere, and set upon the slow gyro plane. They could hear the enraged snarl of a machine gun from the plane, a sound that cackled across the top of the plateau in short bursts, sounding like a turkey gobbler in the distance.

The gyro landed quickly. There was nothing else to do. It did not have the speed or defensive weapons to cope with the fast plane.

XIII

THE SUN CAT

Doc Savage did not see the city until they had led him to the lip of the canyon.

He was not exactly surprised. For the last few hundred yards, they had passed through patches of cultivated ground. The fields were rather slovenly. Farming done the lazy way.

The city was like a cliff-dweller city, except that it was not under an overhanging cliff, and was not where it could be reached by rolling boulders. A ridge jutted out into the canyon, and at the end of the ridge was a round peak, where the white city stood.

"I'll be superamalgamated!" Johnny gasped.

Phil O'Reilly made a strangled noise of astonishment. Chief Eagle grunted.

"It's wonderful!" Pat exclaimed.

The captors jerked them to a halt near a path that led downward, then out along the ridge to the city. They waited there. Doc Savage studied the natives, puzzled by the shape of their features, which bore some traces of Incan ancestry, yet were predominately the features of white men.

The reason for the wait was apparent when Monk and the others were hauled into view. They were a downcast lot.

Monk looked at Doc miserably. "Doc, I had to land. That blasted plane had machine guns stuck all over it, and it could fly circles around us."

The bronze man said, "You did the intelligent thing in coming down."

"But we're prisoners."

Doc shrugged.

Monk peered at the city on the pinnacle. Then the homely chemist turned to Johnny, who, as a noted archaeologist, would know what the city meant, if anyone would.

"What kind of people live there, Johnny?" Monk demanded. "And this ain't no time to spring them big words on us!"

"The construction is entirely cubes and circles," Johnny said. "That is a characteristic of the cliff-dweller people of the Mesa Verde and other districts in Colorado, Arizona and New Mexico. It is a characteristic, too, of Incan, Mayan and Aztec architecture. The Mayans, for instance, never mastered the arch, or at least never used it. Probably they mastered it, all right, because their knowledge of astronomy and other complicated subjects was remarkable, as well as their skill at surgery. There are known instances where skulls have been found upon which fairly expert trepanning operations have been performed. I should say—"

One of the natives gave him a jab with a short spear, so they never found out what he should say. The prisoners were marched out on the ridge path.

The path was quite narrow, little over a foot wide in spots, and at intervals there were defensive arches which would make the work of an attacking force quite difficult.

The city itself was of stone and mortar. The workmanship was not as skilled as it had seemed from a distance, being not

greatly superior, in fact, to the workmanship on the pueblo dwellings of the southwestern United States.

The place, however, was extensive, being at least two hundred yards in length, and probably of a greater depth. They were led up a long flight of stair-ladders—wooden arrangements which could be drawn up in case of attack.

A native grunted an order. The prisoners were searched.

They were forced, all of them, to climb down a ladder into darkness. At the bottom, perhaps fifteen feet down, they found a large circular chamber in the stone. The walls were indented with six evenly spaced pockets which were like bunks, and in the center of the room there was a large round depression, with a very small hole, no larger than a rifle barrel. To the east, in the direction of the setting sun, there was a slab of stone a foot thick, two feet wide, three feet high, projecting from the floor. And behind this in the wall was a round hole, a little larger than a man's fist, through which fresh air came.

After they were in the bottom, the ladder was pulled out.

After a few minutes, their eyes became accustomed to the darkness. The sun was not yet down, and some light penetrated through the square hole above their heads.

"This ain't so bad," Monk said.

Johnny grunted uneasily. "Personally, I think we're in a bad spot."

Monk peered at him. He did not often hear Johnny sound so concerned.

"What's eating you?" Monk asked.

"You ever been in the cliff ruins in the western United States?" Johnny asked. "Those on Mesa Verde, for instance?"

"Yeah. This place is kinda like some of them must have been when they were inhabited, only this one is bigger. What about it?"

"Remember the *kivas*?"

"The what?"

"*Kivas*. The ceremonial rooms. Circular, with six supporting pillars cut into the edge, a ventilating hole and a deflecting stone like this one, and a *see-pah-poo* in the center."

"A *what* in the center?"

"*See-pah-poo*. There are various ways of spelling it, and I'm using the easy one." Johnny spelled it out for Monk.

"Well, what about them things?"

Johnny rubbed his jaw. He looked upward. There was a reddish glow flickering over the square entrance to their strange prison, and they realized that their captors had lighted one or more fires outside.

Johnny, his tone more worried, said, "It is generally

conceded that the circle was considered sacred among many of these ancient people," he explained. "Circular rooms were always their religious rooms, their temples, or rooms where they placed their grains in the hands of the gods for safekeeping. And also their sacrificial rooms."

"Sacrificial rooms?" Monk asked.

"Well—the thought just occurred to me."

"You mean—they intend to sacrifice us?"

"Now, don't get excited," Johnny said. "But at the same time, don't get too optimistic."

Phil O'Reilly flung himself down with his back against the wall. He muttered disconsolately.

"This is all my fault," he complained. "If I hadn't forced the gyro to land, we wouldn't be here."

Doc Savage said quietly, "That plane had machine guns. They could have caught us and forced us down anyhow."

Pat asked, "Has anybody seen Daniel Stage?"

No one had, apparently.

Doc asked, "Monk, who was flying the plane armed with machine guns?"

"That Rollo Marbetti. I got a good look at him."

Ham snapped, "Marbetti is the lug behind this mess."

"I wonder where Junith Stage is?" Pat pondered aloud.

No one answered.

"And my son," Chief Eagle said finally. "What became of him? And the other explorers who have come down here and vanished."

"This room is circular," Johnny said. "I don't like that."

Monk said, "While we're wondering—why not wonder what became of the guy with one half of his face different from the other half? Me, I'd like to know about him."

No one answered that.

"There must be some *reason* behind this," Pat said finally.

It was nearly two hours later when the ladder came down into the pit like a long tongue that, colored by the firelight above, looked jagged and red. A native took up a position at the top with a heavy club, and wagged the club menacingly to discourage any attempt to escape.

Another native shoved his head over the opening. It was the same man who had served as a decoy in the meadow.

"Doc Savage come alone," he said.

The bronze man climbed half up the ladder, then stopped. "What is the meaning of this?" he demanded. "Where is Daniel Stage? Where are Elmo Eagle and the others?"

The native said something in his own tongue. Doc got the general meaning of what the fellow was saying. Looking down at the others, Doc explained.

"This fellow does not speak English," he said. "He is just repeating the words he has been told to repeat."

"Doc Savage come alone," the native said impatiently.

Doc said, "Take it easy, Monk. The same for the rest of you."

The bronze man climbed the rest of the way, and men laid hold of him. They were wary, and three of them stood nearby holding small daggers made of long thorns. The sticky substance on the ends of the thorns was evidently some kind of poison.

Half a dozen long, stout cords braided of bark were tied to the bronze man's arms and legs, so that he could be spread-eagled instantly if he made any attempt at resistance. Following that, he was marched away.

Two natives went ahead carrying torches which shed smoke and some ruby-colored light that spread over the long passages of stone and mortar, and the low, worn steps which they climbed, the narrow doorways through which they passed. The air was still, and now that the sun had gone down, it was not particularly warm.

The climate at this altitude was undoubtedly pleasant, and judging from the profuse vegetation, and the fact that the surrounding jungle undoubtedly swarmed with game, life here was probably pleasant.

Doc was conducted into a room that was very long, but not wide, and—if Johnny's surmise about circles being sacred was correct—some kind of an inner temple, because the floor, walls and ceiling were ornamented with inlays of brilliant color, all circular in formation.

At the far end of the room, there were three circular, lifted platforms. They were drum-shaped. The one in the center was highest, and painted brilliant scarlet; the other two, while larger, were not as high, and one was black, the other blue.

On the black platform, perhaps a dozen natives were seated. They were elderly men, looked wise in the ways of life, and were evidently some kind of a council.

On the blue platform were half a dozen white men. Not half-breeds. These men were entirely white. They were not pleasant-looking characters.

The man with the ugly face sat on the center platform.

Doc Savage was conducted to a spot in front of the platforms, and halted, his guards keeping a firm grip on the cords which were fastened to his arms and legs.

The man with the ugly face looked at one of the elderly men

on the black platform. The man arose, and spoke. His voice went on monotonously, in the manner of a man who is repeating part of a ritual.

After the elderly native finished, and sat down, the man with the face spoke in English. His handling of the speech was stilted and unnatural.

"Do you understand what was just said?" he asked.

"Not very clearly," Doc said. "This is an offshoot of the Incan language, mixed with a little Spanish, but I cannot get all of it."

"The council wishes you to understand everything," the ugly man said. "So I will repeat. You are in the presence of the Sun, the Sky and the Night." He gestured briefly at the platforms. "The colors will explain what I mean. The Sun, the Sky and the Night. Of these three things are made the things that man cannot control. In the creation of the universe, these three things were given man to teach him that he must always be modest, for there are things that he can never control."

He was silent a while, contemplating Doc Savage. There was nothing but hate in the look he gave the bronze man. Doc, in turn, was studying the fellow's face closely, this being his first opportunity to do so. Unfortunately, the torchlight furnished very poor illumination.

"The Sun, the Sky and the Night," continued the man with the face, "are beyond the control of man, hence his superiors, and therefore qualified to sit in judgment upon him. Therefore they are sitting in judgment now, the duly elected servants of

these three powers, in order to pass judgment upon intruders upon our peace."

Doc said, "You are taking a long-winded way of saying what you have on your mind. Why not out with it?"

"You want it short?"

"Yes."

"All right," the man said. "On the day of the Speaking Bird, which is tomorrow, you will be tested for fitness. Only one of you need pass the test in order that all of you may live. You have the privilege of determining which of you shall be first to take the test, and which second, and so on."

Doc watched him steadily.

"What kind of a test?" the bronze man asked.

"You will be placed with the Sun Cat," the man with the face replied. "And if you meet with approval, and are permitted to live, all of you may live."

"What is the Sun Cat?" Doc inquired curiously.

The other ignored him, turned to the elderly men and spoke in the native tongue. Doc listened closely, decided he was telling them that he had informed the prisoner of the judgment of the council, and desired to know if there was anything more he should tell the captive. The answer was that nothing more need be said.

Before Doc was led away, he eyed the white men on the blue platform.

"You fellows must have a nice racket here," he said. "I suppose you rate the sky platform because you came here by plane. As a matter of fact, I think I know what your racket is."

"A lot of good it'll do you, bozo," one of the men said.

Doc was dragged away, forced to walk down several passages, and shoved into a room which was lighted by a primitive kind of a lamp that consisted of a wick lying in a jar containing some type of oil.

There was an array of food on a low wooden platform.

He decided he was to be fed before being returned to the prison hole. Either that, or they were trying to poison him. He went over and looked at the food, smelled of it doubtfully. There was *pescada*, a fish that would taste something like cod, and *tartaruga* eggs. The *tartaruga* eggs—they were the local fresh-water turtle eggs—had the peculiar quality of the whites never hardening during cooking, so only the yolk was served very hard-boiled, resembling the dry yolk of hen's eggs.

"Psssst!"

Doc half turned, and listened.

The sound came again, from the other side of the room. It was a human sound. Doc discovered a small aperture across the room, evidently a ventilating slit, and went to it.

"Yes," he said.

"Mr. Savage," said a low feminine voice. "Come close. I want to talk to you."

It was Junith Stage.

XIV

SACRIFICE IN THE SUN

Doc Savage leaned close to the aperture and asked, "How did you get here?"

"By plane," she explained. "We left immediately after I pointed that gun at you in my house in the city, and escaped. Now listen closely. I have thought of a way—"

"Did the man with the ugly face fly down with you?" Doc asked.

She hesitated. She was silent for so long that he wondered if she could have gone away from the other end of the ventilator.

"Yes, he came with me," she said.

"Who is he?"

"I can't tell you that."

Doc Savage half opened his mouth to tell her that he believed he already knew, then he changed his mind. Instead he asked another question, beginning it with a statement.

"He is a white man," he said, "and I have been wondering how he got control over these natives."

"He doesn't control them entirely."

"You mean that he has to do what the council says?"

"On vital points," the girl answered, "he does. The council will not stand for murders, and that is why you are now alive. Although what is to happen to you is the same as murder."

Doc asked persistently, "How did he get control over these natives?"

"By coming in an airplane when he found the place," Junith Stage replied. "Like all the old Incan legendary beliefs, these people think that their deities came out of the sky, sent to them by the sun."

"They are Incans? Their language isn't pure."

"Oh, we're wasting time!" Junith snapped. "I'm trying to tell you—"

"There is Spanish mixed in their language," Doc said.

"Yes. Back during the Spanish exploration of South America, an exploring party somehow managed to get this far. How, I don't know. But they found this mesa after becoming lost and wandering for years. There was a tribe of Incans here then, and the Spanish explorers simply stayed here. They killed off most of the Incan men at the time, which accounts for the predominantly white features of these natives."

Doc said, "I supposed it was something like that."

Junith Stage's whisper was imperative. "Listen, I think that I can overpower the one guard at your door. If I can do that, you may be able—"

Interrupting, Doc asked, "What became of the other explorers who were lost?"

"They are here. But you can't help them. They are prisoners, and safe enough as long as—well, for the time being."

"What do you mean?"

She hesitated. "As long as they have money left."

"You mean that this is an extortion scheme?"

"Yes."

"The explorers were decoyed down here and seized, and held in order that money could be extorted from them?"

"Yes."

That was about what Doc Savage had thought. He did not mention the fact that he had suspected the truth.

"Where is your brother?"

"He . . . he's here." Her voice, more strained, rushed into an explanation. "That is why I acted as I did. My brother—I had to do it to save him."

Doc said, "I could tell you were not taking part in this willingly."

"Please! I think I can sneak up behind your guard from behind, and knock him out. Then you might escape."

"No," Doc said.

"But—they're going to put you in with that thing they call the Sun Cat."

"What is it?"

"A gigantic *onca*."

"Jaguar?"

"Yes."

"They are not particularly large."

"This one"—her voice was terrified—"is enormous."

"What is this test of the Sun Cat?"

"They put you in an amphitheater with the animal. There are seats around the top, and everyone watches."

The bronze man was thoughtful for a while. He made, unconsciously, the small trilling sound that was his habit in moments of intense mental stress.

"Can you reach the stuff from our planes?" he asked.

"I—yes, I believe I can." She sounded frightened.

"Will you be watching this business of a test with the Sun Cat?"

"I—hadn't intended to."

"Watch it," Doc directed. "Go to the stuff from our plane. You will find a metal case numbered eleven. In it will be a small bottle, numbered seventy-six. Get that bottle. Can you remember that? Case number eleven. Bottle seventy-six."

"Yes—I can remember."

"Tie the bottle inside a bouquet of flowers. Wrap it in a handkerchief so it will not break. Then, as I am put in the arena, toss me the flowers with the bottle inside. Can you do that?"

"I'll try."

"It will probably be the difference between life and death."

"I . . . I will do my best," she said. "I think I can."

"Good," Doc said.

She didn't think it was good. She was sobbing.

When Doc Savage was returned to the subterranean prison chamber, Monk and the rest were infinitely relieved. Ham said, "We were afraid—well, we didn't know but what they were going to bump you off."

"What happened, Doc?" Pat asked.

Pat sounded quite calm, and her quietness irritated Doc Savage. Pat enjoyed this land of excitement, and that was a perpetual source of irritation to the bronze man. He got a kick out of it himself, he had to admit, but it was a grim kind of thrill, and he often wished he did not have a taste for adventure.

He told them what had occurred, including what Junith Stage had told him.

Chief Eagle swore in a low, guttural tone. "I have suspected they were holding my son here, and forcing him to turn over his money to them. I examined my son's bank balances and stock holdings. His money has been disappearing since he came here and vanished. They made him sign over money to them, and made him sign checks. The transactions were dated back, though, so that it would appear he had made them before he left the States."

Johnny, the long, bony geologist and archaeologist, said,

"An *onca*, eh? They aren't very big."

"There are four types of jaguars," Doc reminded him. "One kind is small and yellow, and not very dangerous. Another has small spots, the third larger spots. But the fourth is the color of milk chocolate, and is ferocious."

Monk asked, "The idea is that you fight this critter, and if you lick it, we all get turned loose?"

"Something like that," Doc agreed.

It was not a pleasant prospect, and the grimness of the situation silenced them. They were tired, too. They had flown for days in the planes, and sleep had been sporadic, and strain continuous.

They took turns at trying to dig out through the ventilating tunnel. But it ran through several feet of solid rock, and they had no tools. Their belt buckles soon wore out on the stone, and after that, they made no progress whatever.

About three o'clock in the morning, Monk took up a position against the wall, Ham climbed on his shoulders, and Doc clambered atop both of them, and was able to wrap his hands over the edge of the square hole.

He drew himself up. Then he dropped back.

"That won't do," the bronze man said. "They have half a dozen *jararacas* picketed around the hole."

Phil O'Reilly asked, "What's a *jararaca*?"

"Snake," the bronze man explained cryptically. "Quite deadly. Blindness results about two minutes after one of them bites you, and death usually occurs in about five minutes."

Phil O'Reilly made a sound that had no meaning, except that it was frightened.

"I guess I'm not cut out for an explorer," he said. "I'm so scared my legs feel like sacks full of ice water."

Monk snorted. "Brother, don't let that worry you. I'm scared a lot worse."

Pat said, "We're all scared, Phil."

"You wouldn't think so, to listen to you," Phil muttered.

"Well, if I could get out of here right now," Pat said, "I would take a vow never to get mixed up in another one of these messes. Maybe."

Probably Doc Savage was the only one who really slept any at all.

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The amphitheater had the ceremonial shape—it was round. It was somewhat like a bull ring, with seats that entirely circled it. The arena itself was deep—nearly thirty feet deep, with sides that were glass-smooth, so that the Sun Cat could not climb out.

There was one opening in the deep cup, to the west, near the

base. It was circular, and surrounded by a red circle.

Above this opening were seats inclosed in boxes. They might have been seats of honor, but they were anything but that.

Monk and the others—they had shaken hands gravely with Doc Savage upon separating—were led into one of the boxes.

They stared in amazement at the occupants of the box across from them.

They were looking at several gaunt, ragged, forlorn-looking white men. Monk, who had a wide acquaintance among explorers, recognized some of them. So did Ham and Johnny.

"Hey!" Monk yelled. "Tom Kennedy! Ed Corby! How are you guys?"

A native struck Monk over the head with a long club. The homely chemist subsided, dazed; then, fighting mad, tried to rear up and assault the native. Ham and Johnny seized his arms, held him.

Chief Eagle was looking at his son, Elmo Walker Eagle. The chief's copper-colored face was utterly fixed, frozen with emotion.

The other lost explorers—Joseph Branch, Joe Biltmore, Felix Point-Mackey—were there in the adjacent box. They were confined with stout cords about their legs, and it was obvious that they had been brought here to watch the execution.

"I see the fine hand of that guy with the ugly face in this," Ham whispered. "He wants to throw a bigger scare into them."

"Lemme at 'em!" Monk snarled. "Where's that guy with the face? I'll take him, too!"

The man with the ugly face was out of reach, seated to the right, along with the white men who were his associates. He sat there, inscrutable, his evil face doubly unpleasant in the morning sunlight.

The day was glaring with sunlight. A few jungle birds, macaws and small blue *uirapuru* and *iuramimbe*, or trumpet birds, floated in the air. A few toucans, evidently pets, were about. They looked strange, their beaks almost as large as their bodies—beaks that were long for the same purpose that a giraffe's neck is long, so that the birds could reach their food, fruit that grew out on the ends of branches too fragile to support their weight. They were surprisingly light, these beaks, although they appeared ponderous.

Very high in the white-hot dome of the sky floated a *caracara-i*, a type of eagle, the cry of which, according to superstition, was an omen of death.

Pat's eyes, searching, located Junith Stage. She was seated near the ugly-faced man and his group of associates. Pat watched her closely. Pat had an inner impulse to distrust all women, and to her notion, Junith Stage had shown little reason to be trusted.

The fact that Junith was holding a bouquet of flowers was a little comforting, but not much.

Suddenly, there was a sound, a sigh, that was a kind of moan in concert. And simultaneously, every native onlooker came erect and stared down into the pit.

Monk jumped up, looked. He was in time to see a snarling, chocolate-hued streak of ferocity whip through the round opening in the wall. It was an *onca*, all right. A jaguar. But it was by far the largest of the species Monk had ever seen. Larger than a mountain lion from the Rockies. For a moment, he thought the Sun Cat was as large as a Bengal tiger, then modified his opinion somewhat. Not as large as a tiger, but fully as formidable.

"Blazes!" Monk said hoarsely.

Johnny's eyes were protruding. He had not imagined a jaguar grew this large. And this was the brownish species, the ferocious type.

Phil O'Reilly said hoarsely, "Doc hasn't a chance!"

Pat nudged him. "Keep your shirt on."

XV

BAD LOSERS

The round aperture into the arena was so low that Doc Savage had to stoop. They were holding him just back of a heavy wooden gate which closed the opening, and two natives had cut the cords loose from his arms and legs—cords of the same type which they had used to lead him about before.

When they shoved the big door open, the jaguar was in the center of the ring. Doc saw the animal, saw that it was looking toward the opening. He realized that if his captors shoved him into the ring at that moment the beast would doubtless spring upon him without delay.

He had no false ideas about his ability to cope with the jaguar in a bare-handed combat. If luck was with him, he might manage such a thing. But luck was a doubtful quantity upon which to stake his life.

The bronze man stalled. He jerked free of his captors, began making various meaningless gestures, and mumbling a singsong gibberish. The device worked. They thought he was making a preliminary supplication to some private deity, and they let him proceed.

He kept on stalling until the big cat tired of looking at the door, and stalked to the other side of the arena.

Then the bronze man entered.

His appearance brought forth a prolonged yell from the audience, as he had expected. The noise distracted the attention of the jaguar, further, and the animal snarled up at the crowd. It even made a run and a leap, and mounted to astonishing height on the wall. Its claws made a sound like steel knives ripping

down a concrete wall as it slid back, and a few sparks flew.

Doc moved with flowing speed, not too fast, and not too slow, to the center of the right. He lifted his arms, turned slowly to face each side of the arena. He had a double purpose—to give the impression that he was not scared, and to locate Junith Stage.

He saw Junith's flowers before he saw Junith. She had become frightened, and thrown them too soon. The bouquet, quite large, the blossoms making it very bright, arched slowly through the sunlight and fell to the stone floor of the pit.

The jaguar sprang upon the flowers instantly. Snarling, spitting, the cat picked the bouquet up and shook it, ripped it to pieces.

Above, Junith Stage screamed. When Doc threw a glance in her direction, she was doubling over on her seat in a faint.

Doc Savage took a chance. He leaped toward the jaguar, and yelled his loudest.

Startled, the huge cat sprang back. It crouched, watching him with eyes that were utterly evil. Its tail switched slowly from one side to another.

Doc stood perfectly still. The cat was too close to the remains of the bouquet. And Doc had to reach the flowers.

The bottle which he had instructed Junith Stage to place with the flowers—she must have done so, or she would not have thrown the flowers into the arena—contained a powerful

anaesthetic gas. He had hoped to use it to overcome the Sun Cat, as the natives called this enormous jaguar.

Very cautiously, the bronze man took a step toward the bouquet remnants. And the jaguar leaped for him.

The cat was a toast-colored monster of fury, paws extended, the claws showing like curved white bones. Its jaws were open.

Doc was set. His movements—they were so fast that all motion became a blur to the onlookers—were far slower than he wished they could be. But he got to one side. With his right arm, he struck at the paw of the jaguar as it lashed out for him. He managed to hit the paw without being clawed. Then the cat was past.

Doc dived ahead. His way to the flowers was clear now. He stooped, got them. The handkerchief was with them, and he felt the bottle inside it. He wrenched both bottle and handkerchief free. The handkerchief had kept the bottle from breaking.

He threw the flowers at the jaguar. That distracted the animal for a moment. But it leaped again, swiftly.

Again the bronze man went to one side at the last instant. But this time, his right hand got a grip on the jaguar's paw, fastened there with steel trap tenacity. He jerked. The impetus of the big animal's leap sent them both down. The jaguar landed heavily. Doc let it go. The cat's paws waved; it had not landed on its feet, but on its side. It twisted, rolled over to get

to its feet.

Doc fell upon the animal's back, legs going around the big cat's hips and locking there, in such a position that, for the moment, it could not get its rear paws forward to claw him. He fastened his arm under the animal's throat.

The jaguar made a hideous sound. Its lashing, corded strength was incredible. It was as if the bronze man had seized a huge machine and tried to stop it with puny human strength. They went over and over, end for end, in a mad tornado of fury and motion.

Doc held his breath. He crushed the bottle on the jaguar's forehead, rubbed the saturated handkerchief over the nostrils of the beast.

It was humanly impossible to retain his grip for long. But he put forth every effort. A little time was required for the gas to take effect. Finally he got his chance, loosened his grip, sprang clear.

The jaguar, beginning to feel the effects of the gas, sprawled out, and whirled to face the bronze man. The beast showed its fangs, snarled.

Doc remained perfectly motionless. The animal was becoming dazed; its brain distracted, it might not leap. But any motion would cause it to spring. And the bronze man himself was shaken, somewhat dizzy, so that if the cat sprang now, he might not be able to avoid it.

Doc watched until the filmed blinking of the jaguar's eyes

told him the animal was about to succumb.

Then the bronze man lifted his voice in a long, sustained yell that was as peculiar a sound as he could make at the moment. At the same time, he made mystic gestures with his hands.

Following the weird yell, he announced as best he could in the native language, using the Incan tongue, which the crowd could probably understand to some extent—Doc spoke some Incan vernacular, just as he had a smattering of most spoken languages—that he was exerting his power over the Sun Cat. He told the animal to lie down and go to sleep.

When the animal rolled over, overcome by the gas, it must have looked effective to the crowd.

The effect was spoiled somewhat when the man with the ugly face leaned over the pit rim and leveled a revolver at Doc Savage.

Phil O'Reilly redeemed himself for whatever mistakes he had made previously. During the excitement, he had cautiously edged toward one of their guards, with the idea of seizing the man's spear and throwing it down to Doc to use as a weapon.

Now Phil snatched the spear, whirled, hurled it at the man with the ugly face. It would have been a good job of spear-throwing for a native. Because the shaft impaled the man with the face, and he fell, without as much as screaming, into the pit.

Doc leaped, got the man's revolver, which hit the pit floor ahead of the body. With the gun, he sprang back, and menaced the other white men.

One white man had a flat automatic in his hand. Doc fired. The man shrieked, began to paw his mangled fist with his other hand.

"Don't move!" Doc warned them.

They remained motionless, watching the bronze man's gun.

"Ham, Monk, Johnny!" Doc shouted. "Get around there and disarm those fellows!"

Monk moved to obey, keeping a wary watch on their native captors. But no one made a move to interfere. Reaching the white men, Monk and the others disarmed them.

Doc said, "Ask any of those fellows if they can speak the local language."

One of the white men nodded.

"Tell these natives that we are not ordinary humans," Doc directed. "Tell them we are messengers from the outer world, and it will be very bad for them if we are interfered with. And it will be a lot worse for you if you don't say exactly that. I can understand enough of the language to tell whether you say what you've been ordered to tell them."

In a frightened voice, the man made his speech. He added a little for good measure. He announced that the man with the

face—he called him some kind of a name that meant a deity from the ancestral gods of both Spaniards and Incans—had abdicated his power in favor of a new and supreme representative, who was Doc Savage.

The announcement might not have been necessary, because the overcoming of the jaguar had completely silenced the crowd.

Monk looked down into the pit, at the slack form of the man with the face.

Then the chemist glanced at Phil.

"Where'd you learn to throw a spear like that?" Monk demanded.

"Oh, I've got a trunkful of medals for javelin throwing in college," Phil explained modestly.

Monk grinned. "You remember them cracks I made about you being a plush-armchair explorer?"

Phil flushed. "Yes."

Monk extended his hand. "Well, I take 'em back. How about letting me shake hands with a real guy?"

Phil gripped the homely chemist's fist enthusiastically.

Ham said, "Phil, you don't realize what an effect you've made on Monk. This is the first time in his life he has admitted he was wrong."

From the arena, Doc called up, "Is Junith Stage conscious?"

"Not yet," Pat called back.

"Get her out of here. Wait until she is feeling all right again before you tell her what happened."

"What do you mean?" Pat asked. "Tell her about what?"

Doc Savage hesitated.

"Look," he said.

He went over to the man with the face, bent down, and worked for a moment. He stripped off a contraption of rubber and make-up which gave one half of the man's face such a grotesque appearance.

Doc straightened with the half-face mask in his hand, and the others got a look at the features of the man who had been impaled by the spear.

"Daniel Stage!" Phil O'Reilly exploded.

"No, no, his name is Rollo Marbetti," Monk declared.

Doc said, "Daniel Stage, Rollo Marbetti, and the man with the face are all the same individual."

"Is he dead?"

"Yes."

During the next hour, as a matter of safety, Doc got the rescued explorers together, and found an arms cache which had been used by Daniel Stage and the white men who were helping him.

They also located Stage's plane, concealed under trees at the edge of a clearing not far from the city.

Elmo Eagle, copper-colored like his father, and with the same stoical aquiline features, said, "It was the way Junith Stage told you, Mr. Savage."

"An extortion scheme?"

"Yes. Daniel Stage found this place while exploring, and thought he had something that would make him world-famous. As a matter of fact, there is nothing really unique about the place. These people do not have even as advanced a civilization as the ancient Mayans. I think the disappointment when his discovery turned out to be not so important upset Daniel Stage's mind."

Doc said, "He deliberately disappeared, then began getting notes out to decoy rich young explorers down here, where he could seize them."

Young Eagle nodded.

Johnny said, "Doc—"

"Yes."

"Back there in New York, when we set that trap at the hotel for the man with the face, then fastened the radio to his car and trailed him. He fled to his sister's home, didn't he? And assumed the name of Rollo Marbetti."

Doc nodded. "He was making his sister cooperate with him. She had no choice."

"What are you going to do with the sister?" Pat asked.

"Turn her loose," Doc said. "She saved our lives when she threw that bottle of chemical into the arena."

"At Junith's house," Johnny persisted, "did you have any suspicion Marbetti was her brother?"

"Not until she fled," Doc said grimly. "Then I looked in the fireplace and decided the pictures she had burned there were really her brother's photographs. That meant she didn't want us to find any pictures by which we could identify her brother."

Phil O'Reilly said, "There was something else, too?"

"The fact that she fled with her brother when she heard you were coming?" Doc suggested. "Yes, that made it very plain that her brother was Marbetti. You see, none of us had seen her brother except you."

Elmo Eagle had been talking to one side with the rescued explorers.

"How we going to get out of here?" Eagle asked. "The plane?"

"Yes. It will be necessary to make several trips, but that will be simple. Daniel Stage had done it repeatedly."

"Will the natives interfere?" Pat asked.

"No." Eagle shook his head. "That business with the jaguar has fixed everything."

Monk and Ham had gone off on a private mission of their own—they were hunting Habeas Corpus and Chemistry. The pig and the chimp had been neglected somewhat more on this adventure than on most occasions. Both animals had become lost when the gyro was forced down—Habeas and Chemistry had been riding in the gyro occupied by Monk—and had been chased into the jungle by the natives.

Junith Stage revived, and, after waiting until she had fully recovered, they told her about her brother. She buried her face in her hands for a while.

"The money he extorted from those men," she said. "I can show you where it is."

"You mean it's here?" Doc asked.

She nodded. "My brother intended to stay here permanently. He had a kind of plan for setting up a little empire here in the jungle, with himself as its ruler."

She showed them where the money was stored. It was in cash, currency and silver, with some gold coins of nationalities other than American. There were quite a few bars of gold bullion. Daniel Stage had been a methodical man, for there

were records of his extortions, and these would enable the money to be returned to the rightful owners.

By noon, Monk and Ham had found their pets and returned. They arrived separately, Ham about a hundred yards ahead of Monk. It was at once apparent that they were not on speaking terms.

"What's wrong?" Junith asked.

Ham exhibited his pet chimp. "Look at him!" he said sourly.

Chemistry was bedraggled, bruised, bitten in several places.

"What on earth happened to him?" Johnny demanded.

"That blasted pig of Monk's," said Ham, "found a lot of these wild hogs called peccaries—that infernal Habeas Corpus must be half peccary anyway—and somehow got to leading the pack. They had run poor Chemistry up a bush, and had him half scared to death. I'll fix that hog of Monk's."

Johnny masked a grin, recalling past devilment Chemistry had perpetrated on Monk's pig.

The slight difficulty came to a climax later in the afternoon.

There was an agonized howl from another room. Monk dashed into the room, took one look, and swelled with rage.

"Whatcha mean, you shyster!" Monk yelled. "Whatcha

stickin' your hand in that hog's mouth for?"

"Sticking it in, you idiot!" Ham snarled. "I'm trying to pull it out!"

[The end of *The Men Vanished* by Lester Dent (as Kenneth Robeson)]