

Mystery Under the Sea

A Doc Savage Adventure
#27

Kenneth Robeson
[Lester Dent]
1936

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DOC SAVAGE'S AMAZING CREW

William Harper Littlejohn, the bespectacled scientist who was the world's greatest living expert on geology and archæology.

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

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

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

Brigadier General Theodore Marley Brooks, slender and waspy, he was never without his ominous, black sword cane.

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

Books by Kenneth Robeson

THE MAN OF BRONZE
THE THOUSAND-HEADED MAN
METEOR MENACE
THE POLAR TREASURE
BRAND OF THE WEREWOLF
THE LOST OASIS
THE MONSTERS
THE LAND OF TERROR
THE MYSTIC MULLAH
THE PHANTOM CITY
FEAR CAY
QUEST OF QUI
LAND OF ALWAYS-NIGHT
FANTASTIC ISLAND
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THE SPOOK LEGION
THE RED SKULL
THE SARGASSO OGRE
PIRATE OF THE PACIFIC
THE SECRET IN THE SKY
COLD DEATH
THE CZAR OF FEAR
FORTRESS OF SOLITUDE
THE GREEN EAGLE
THE DEVIL'S PLAYGROUND
DEATH IN SILVER
THE MYSTERY UNDER THE SEA

MYSTERY
UNDER THE SEA

A DOC SAVAGE ADVENTURE

BY KENNETH ROBESON

MYSTERY UNDER THE SEA

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MYSTERY UNDER THE SEA

Chapter 1

THE MAN WITH NO TONGUE

Paradise is a beach. It is on Long Island Sound near New York City and, being one of the most convenient spots for swimming, is much frequented during the summer. The patrons are jaded citizens of Manhattan who, having struggled for a living in the great city all week, come for a rest.

Paradise Beach was quiet. That was another reason why it was so popular.

On the first Saturday of September, however, the quiet of Paradise Beach was rudely shattered.

The life guard—he sat atop a tower which stood out where the water was deep—was first to see the thing in the water. It was night, about two hours after sunset. Big floodlights blazed along the locker house, while others were on high poles out beyond the life guard's tower. It was the illumination of these which first disclosed the thing in the water.

“Drowning man!” yelled the life guard, making a mistake.

The guard executed a snappy dive off his platform and swam rapidly out into the Sound. A man was swimming feebly out there. The guard had thought he was a bather who had ventured out too far. But, reaching the swimmer, he discovered the fellow was clothed, except for shoes and coat.

A wave came in; it was not large, for they do not have large waves on Long Island Sound during calm weather. Yet it submerged the man swimming in his clothing, and it was some moments before he came up, gasping feebly.

The life guard lent a hand, holding the fellow up and, at the same time, peering out into the Sound in an effort to learn where the unfortunate had come from. It was too dark to see much. The guard decided the man must have been in a boat, that had sunk.

“Were you alone?” he demanded. “Does anybody else need help?”

“Shut up!” said the one who was being rescued. “Either get me ashore or leggo so I can swim.”

A light skiff, rowed by another life guard, arrived at that moment and both the first life guard and the man swimming in his clothes were taken aboard and paddled to the beach. The rescued man started to get out of the boat, as if he were in a great hurry to leave.

The fellow was restrained, however, by the life guard, who knew that persons who have been near drowning sometimes become hysterical and do not quite know what they are doing.

“Leggo, dope,” snarled the man who had been found swimming in his clothes.

“Not until the doctor looks you over,” said one of the guards.

The rescued man then acted very ungallantly. He seized an oar and managed, after a short skirmish, to crack the life guards over the head, knocking them both senseless.

The man ran away, his wet clothing making slopping noises.

A throng of no small proportions was on the beach, but the rescue had been executed so quietly that only a few had realized what was happening. Most of the sharper observers had been advancing cautiously to investigate. They broke into a run, and a loud outcry went up as they saw the brief skirmish which felled the two life guards.

At first, there was no attempt to apprehend the fleeing man. New Yorkers learn early that attending to their own business is a policy which avoids trouble. However, two ambitious souls did attempt to stop the runner. One of them, a fat man, got an oar jabbed in the stomach for his pains. The other was discouraged by a blow over the head.

The fleeing man reached a row of bathhouses and ducked between them.

At this point, it was doubtful if many persons were aware that a dark motor boat had come into the floodlighted area from the Sound. This craft carried several men. Driven by a powerful motor, it swerved in close to the beach, and all but one of the occupants sprang overboard and waded ashore.

The man who remained in the boat took it back out into the Sound, and it was shortly lost in the darkness.

Electric excitement suddenly swept Paradise Beach. Those men who had gotten out of the motor boat were masked. Moreover, they carried revolvers.

The masked, armed men raced after the one who was fleeing. At first, they were not interfered with, the patrons of the bathing beach naturally being unarmed.

Then one of the Paradise special policemen came racing forward. He shouted, and had a gun in his hand. There was a prompt burst of shots. The special officer suddenly concluded that his salary did not cover gun fighting, and ignominiously took shelter.

The procession—fleeing swimmers and armed pursuer—left the confines of Paradise Beach behind them. In the pavilions, the bathhouses, half a dozen telephones were being employed to call policemen. This, incidentally, did no good whatever.

The fugitive, by now, knew the pursuit was close on his heels. There was a parking lot beyond the bathing beach buildings, and he ducked into this, dodging among the parked machines, peering frequently into vehicles, obviously trying to find one that was not locked.

On the far side of the lot, an automobile engine started. It was a motorist who, blissfully unaware of what was going on, had decided to leave. The fugitive raced madly for this machine.

His pursuers outguessed him. Hearing the car start, they surmised what he would do and directed their course to cut him off. They succeeded. In grim silence, they sprang upon the runner.

The late swimmer was virtually exhausted, which was one reason they had caught him so easily. He was beaten down, knocked as thoroughly senseless as had been the two life guards.

Half an hour later, the victim regained his senses. He looked about at the grim forms of his captors, still masked and visible in the glow of a single flashlight, and peered at thick scrub brush beyond them. This was plainly a remote spot.

“He should be dead by now,” one of the captors said, callously. “The guy has more lives than a cat.”

The prisoner said nothing, tried to move and did not succeed. He was being held tightly.

“He’s bound to be in Davy Jones’s locker before long,” said another of the men.

“Turn me adrift,” growled the prisoner. “You swabs have your lines tangled.”

“So you think,” snarled one of the masked group. “You scuttled our ship for us. Fixed it so it’ll sink sure.”

“I didn’t,” snapped the victim.

“We caught you,” the other pointed out.

“I don’t know anything about *Taz*, or the rest of it,” wailed the prisoner. “You got me all wrong! Sure you have!”

“We got you, all right,” one echoed, and laughed. Others also laughed, not pleasantly.

“Your name is Verne, ain’t it?” demanded one of the masked men. “Twenty-Thousand-Leagues Verne they call you, don’t they?”

The prisoner denied this vehemently. “No!”

“Oh yes, you are,” said the masked man. “And Diamond Eve Post hired you!”

“Diamond Eve Post?” the prisoner mumbled. “Never heard of her.”

He tried to sound puzzled, earnest, but he was not a very good actor.

“Listen, guy,” said the other, “don’t lie about it. We know she hired you.”

“No,” the man insisted.

“She sent you aboard to open the sea-cocks of our hooker, while all hands were ashore,” the other told him, grimly. “You went her one better than that. You smuggled a keg of acid aboard.”

“And dumped the acid in the bilge,” echoed another. “The cursed stuff ate the plates right out of the bottom of our hooker. She’s leakin’ like a sieve!”

“This is all a mistake,” insisted their captive.

“We found the empty acid keg,” he was told. “It was glass lined. It was a keg you said held your private stock of liquor.”

The prisoner rolled his eyes wildly.

The captive was a small man, but he had very large bones which gave him a sturdy aspect. There was a bald spot as round as a plate on top of his head. His clothing was rough and his pants legs had large bottoms, sailor fashion.

One thing about his appearance was particularly striking—his skin: it looked as if some weird phenomenon had brought all blood vessels to the surface. This gave a purple complexion which was rather hideous.

He struggled slightly, and there was a great horror coming over his features.

“I’m gonna die, if you don’t let me go,” he wailed. “After what you scuts done to me, there’s only one thing——”

A captor kicked him, snarled, “Put lashing on that tongue!”

The masked group seemed to be undecided about what to do next.

“Puttin’ a knife in his ’midships is the quickest way out,” one suggested.

“Nix,” another objected. “We want to give that Diamond Eve dame somethin’ to think about. We had him fixed, only he’s tougher than we expected.”

“He’s done for,” said a third. “It may take a little time, but he’s done for.”

The one who had suggested the knife snorted.

“What if he gets to a hospital? Some of them Manhattan hospitals are fitted up to take care of what’s gonna happen to him.”

They thought that over.

Suddenly, one grunted and drew a bottle from his clothing. He shook the bottle, so that the liquid inside gurgled.

“This is a sample of what’s left in that glass-lined keg,” he said. “I was keepin’ this stuff to show the big shot. But I got an idea.”

He fell upon the prisoner, wedged the fellow’s mouth open with a gun barrel, uncorked the bottle and poured some of the contents into the captive’s mouth. The result was grisly. The unfortunate man emitted a series of horrible shrieks, until they clamped a coat over his face. It was some moments before they removed the coat.

The captive’s mouth, lips and the lower part of his face were hideously burned. His whining and gagging noises were pitiful.

“Acid,” said the man with the bottle. “It’d eat the flukes off an anchor.”

“What about his hands?” a man objected. “He’ll write a note asking to be taken to a hospital.”

The man with the bottle leered. “I’ll fix that, too.”

He flashed a sheath knife and used it.

“Scuttlin’ our ship is nearly gonna make us lose out on that *Taz* thing,” he growled. “This pays you back for that. And it’ll teach Diamond Eve a lesson!”

He released the victim and the man staggered away, making small, unearthly noises. Agony from his burned mouth was so great that he was oblivious of the trickle of scarlet from his wrists. He began to run as best he could.

His hands were now useless. The tendons had been severed.

A shout, ugly, full of threat, came from those who had maltreated him. But it was doubtful if he heard.

“Tell the dame—if you can—that she’ll get worse than that, if she don’t furl her sails!” advised the one who shouted.

The mutilated man’s run was more of a stagger, which an average walk would have outpaced. He came, unexpectedly, out of the brush and found himself on close-mown

grass, beyond which glittered light on a great shedded platform which stood on steel stilts.

The victim's eyes were running with tears of pain and he had to peer for some moments before he recognized the structure as the terminus of an elevated line. He ran toward it.

There was a crowd of sweltering citizens, bound for the parks, the beaches. Many gasps of horror were brought by sight of the mutilated man. A woman fainted. Strangely enough, no one touched the fellow or offered to help him. Possibly, the hideous sight of him kept them away.

The metal steps of the elevated stairway were slippery with scarlet before the man got to the top, and he had fallen twice. The crowd—those who had stout stomachs, followed him up, but kept their distance, as if he were some poisonous thing. The man faced them, made his horrible sound at them, but nothing that could be understood.

Below, they were shouting for policemen, for an ambulance. A woman was screaming that a maniac was at large and had butchered himself.

The mutilated man was plainly desperate. He roved his pain-hazed eyes.

And at this point, fate stepped in. Probably the fact that the victim observed a certain poster, could not be attributed to anything but a combination of circumstances. But it was certain that he saw the poster. For he stumbled close to it, let his blurred eyes observe it more closely.

It was merely one of the large posters exhibited on railway station platforms in the metropolitan area for advertising purposes. This one was plugging a certain popular national magazine. The man plainly was not interested in the title of the magazine. His attention was centered on the words which described the leading features in the magazine for the month. It read:

DOC SAVAGE'S AMAZING SAGA—
ASTOUNDING DETAILS ABOUT THE
MAN OF MYSTERY
IN THIS MONTH'S ISSUE

What he had read suggested something to the mutilated man. He dived into a train which had been standing at the platform.

The train was due to leave and the conductor must have been unaware of what was happening, because he applied the current and the string of cars clanked away. The victim huddled in the rear of a coach and rebuffed those who sought to aid him.

Chapter 2

THE MUTE AND THE DEAD

An argument was taking place behind a door on the eighty-sixth floor of a towering midtown skyscraper. The lettering on the door read:

CLARK SAVAGE, JR.

One of the voices sounded as if its source might come from a small child. The other was suave, well modulated, one obviously accustomed to much public speaking.

“You’re nuts, Ham,” affirmed the childlike voice. “They wear ’em that way so they can get ’em on and off easy.”

“Monk, you thick-headed missing link,” said the other voice, “they wear them that way simply because it makes them look smart, and for no other reason!”

The pair who had been arguing, interrupted their dissension. They were as unlike as their voices. The one with the childlike voice, in the dim light of the reception room, might easily have been mistaken for a two-hundred-and-fifty-pound gorilla. He had practically no forehead, an incredibly homely face that was made pleasant by an overly large mouth, and arms which extended his furry hands to well below his knees. He was Lieutenant Colonel Andrew Blodgett Mayfair.

The other was a lean-hipped man whose garments were the absolute ultimate in fashionable perfection. He had a not unhandsome face with a high forehead, keen eyes and the mobile mouth of an orator. He carried a slender black cane, which he had been waving in an effort to drive home his arguments. He was Brigadier General Theodore Marley Brooks.

“You’re wrong, you ambulance-chasing shyster!” “Monk” continued the altercation. “They wear ’em that way because they can get out of ’em easy when they fall overboard.”

“Ham” waved his cane in Monk’s face.

“You have the mind of a child!” he shouted. “The fact that they are cut that way has no significance whatever!”

A newcomer had silently entered the office. A huge man of bronze.

“What are you two arguing about now?” he asked.

The two dissenters—Monk and Ham—jumped as if they had suddenly found their feet in cold water.

“Doc Savage!” Ham exclaimed.

“Gosh, Doc, you gimme a scare,” Monk said, surprised.

“What is the argument now?” Doc Savage asked them.

“Sailors’ pants,” Monk squeaked. “Any fool would know they’re cut big at the bottom so that the sailor can get in and out of them in a hurry, but this dumb shyster

Ham——”

“This accident of nature!” Ham slashed his cane at Monk. “Just to look at him, you would know his head could not possibly hold a brain cell! Now, sailors’ pants——”

An elevator door clanged in the corridor. Footsteps clattered. A figure came weaving through the door.

Monk stared at the hideous apparition and his big mouth opened very nearly to its widest. He must have tried to say something, but words did not come out.

The mutilated man stood before them. If possible, he was a more hideous specter than when he had frightened the crowd at the elevated station. His wrists had stopped leaking. His mouth, however, was now running scarlet, and with each of his faint breaths he blew a fine mist of spray.

He tried to speak. It was a gurgle.

“Hey,” Monk squeaked at him, “what’s wrong?”

The victim weaved and went down on all fours, but his slashed wrists would not hold him and he fell on the floor, squirmed. As they moved toward him, he scrambled to his feet with a species of mad energy. He gurgled and coughed, as if trying to speak. He gave it up. Then he staggered to the big, inlaid desk.

An inkstand with pens was on the table. Hitting this with his elbow, he knocked it to the floor. Black and red ink gushed over the costly rug.

“Nix, nix!” Monk shouted, too late. “The Khedive of Egypt himself gave Doc that rug.”

The mutilated man was in no condition to care. He stabbed a toe into the ink, began to draw lines on the rug. It was slow work, for his shoe proved to be no suitable brush.

It was now evident that the man was trying to print a message.

Doc Savage whisked across the reception room and through a door which gave onto a library, a huge room, yet one which was jammed almost to capacity with ponderous-looking tomes. This was a scientific library which was equalled by none.

Crossing the library, the bronze man entered a laboratory-workshop.

He got a can of paint—it was used in coating the unusual devices which he so frequently constructed—and a brush, also a coil of wire for use in lashing the brush to the man’s shoe. Carrying these, he whipped back into the reception room.

Something horrible had happened to their visitor. He was a contorted heap on the floor.

Monk, who was crouching over the fellow, looked up. “It beats me, Doc,” he barked. “The poor bird got some kind of cramps or somethin’ and just fell over in kind of a fit.”

Doc Savage went to the man, bent over him, examined him.

“My instrument case,” he directed Monk.

Monk ran into the laboratory and came back with the instrument case. Doc Savage had been trained in many things, but his first, and probably his greatest, forte was surgery. He straightened from his diagnosis.

“Monk, you stay here.” He pointed to the strange markings which the mistreated man had managed to ink on the carpet. “Watch those. And try to decipher them.”

Monk, who disliked being left out of anything, wailed, “But, Doc, what——”

“Only one thing will save this man,” Doc Savage said. “We have that thing down at our water-front place. I must take him there.”

Doc Savage gathered up the stricken man. Then he addressed Ham.

“Endeavor to find where this fellow came from,” he suggested.

“Righto,” Ham agreed.

Both Monk and Ham busied themselves at their assigned tasks.

It took Doc with his burden but a short time to reach what was ostensibly a huge unused warehouse on the Hudson River water front. The warehouse was really a combination hangar and boathouse.

Doc carried the victim to a device which resembled a large steel tank, with a hatch in the end and numerous valves and gauges on the outside. There was nothing unique about this thing. Any professional diver would have recognized it as an “iron doctor.” Divers enter the “iron doctor” for decompression, after being subjected to the terrific pressure of a deep dive, to prevent the formation of fatal air bubbles in their blood stream.

Doc Savage did not open the “iron doctor.” Rather slowly, he laid his burden down.

The man had died!

Doc Savage worked furiously over the body, attempting to return a spark of life, even taking the corpse into the “iron doctor” and turning on the pressure. It was, however, of no avail.

The victim had been seized with what divers call the “bends.” Recently, his body had been subjected to terrific pressure and he had not been properly decompressed. The resultant formation of nitrogen bubbles might not, necessarily, have been fatal. The “iron doctor,” perhaps, would have saved him.

But the “bends” had not killed the man. He had died from the effects of the acid burns about his mouth, the loss of his life stream through his slashed wrists.

Doc Savage searched the fellow’s clothing, examined the body. An untrained searcher, perhaps, would have sworn there was nothing to be found.

There were a few grains of sand in the cuff of the still-damp trousers. Doc Savage examined these under a pocket magnifier.

“North shore of Long Island Sound,” he said, as if to himself.

That would not have surprised a trained geologist. Sands from different localities frequently have as distinct a personality as have finger prints.

On the dead man’s shirt, the left shoulder, there was a reddish brown smear, which the water had not entirely washed away. Doc added lenses to his magnifier, increasing

its power, and scrutinized the stain.

“Copper bottom paint off a ship,” he concluded.

Next he got a clean metal pan and, not without some difficulty, managed to wring a few drops of water from the man’s clothing. He carried the pan across the building.

The interior of this building, which outwardly resembled an old warehouse, was of enormous size. The walls were thick. The roof as nearly bombproof as it could be made. The place housed a remarkable assortment of vehicles for travel in the air, on the water, and under the water. There were several planes, ranging from a huge speed ship to a small autogiro; there was a dirigible of unusual design; there were speed boats; and off to one side in a drydock of its own stood a small submarine.

From a locker, Doc Savage took a metal case and opened it. An array of chemicals and chemical equipment, ingeniously compact, was disclosed. This assortment, an unbelievably complete portable laboratory, belonged to the homely Monk, and he invariably took it along on expeditions.

With a skill born of much study, Doc Savage set to work analyzing his water sample. It was not easy, but neither was it impossible. Water in the vicinity of Manhattan contains a certain type of pollution, and this diminishes with distance from the metropolis. Before long, Doc Savage knew approximately where the water had come from.

“The neighborhood of Paradise Beach,” he decided.

That was the extent of the clue. The bronze man left the body in the “iron doctor,” padlocked the hatch.

Shortly afterward, he was back in the skyscraper laboratory. He listened. There was no sound.

“Monk!” he called. Then: “Ham!”

No answer.

The bronze man whipped across the laboratory, through the library, and stopped on the anteroom threshold. He remained there poised and made for a moment a small, peculiar sound, which was among the strangest of his characteristics. This note, a vague, eerie trilling, was indefinable as the vagaries of a wind in a denuded forest, rose and fell. It had a quality of ventriloquism, for one looking at the bronze man could not have told that he made the sound. It was doubtful if Doc Savage himself realized he was authoring the fantastic note. He made the sound only in moments of intense mental excitement.

Monk lay spread-eagled on the anteroom floor, flat on his face. And there was the stillness of the dead about his apish body.

Chapter 3

DIAMOND EVE

Part of the rug was gone.

The expensive panel of weaving had been cut with a sharp knife and a segment, roughly circular in shape, removed. No trace of this could be seen.

The missing section bore such printing as the mutilated man had managed to accomplish with his foot before he collapsed.

The door gaped open, and Doc Savage went to it. Half through, he found a form sprawled on the shiny tiling of the corridor floor. The victim was senseless, apparently having been knocked out by a blow over the head.

It was dapper Ham, and he had fallen atop his innocent-looking black cane. Doc Savage carried him into the reception room.

Monk proved upon examination, merely to be unconscious, likewise from a head blow, and Doc started administering to him, to Ham, to bring them out of their forcibly induced slumbers.

Monk, the toughest of the pair, revived first. Lost in a mental fog, he mumbled words.

“Justa dumb shyster, Ham,” he squeaked faintly. “Sailors’ pants are big at the bottoms because——”

He broke off, sat up suddenly, blinked several times, said abruptly in a rational voice, “Man, have I got bells in my head!”

“What happened?” Doc asked him.

Monk jabbed a hairy, contemptuous thumb at Ham, who was beginning to stir. “It was the shyster’s fault. He brought some woman and a guy with her. They——”

“It’s a lie!” Ham said, without opening his eyes. “It was Monk’s fault. He should have been on the lookout.”

“Lookout!” Monk squawked. “You brought them in——”

“And they promptly knocked me senseless,” Ham finished. “I met them down in the lobby, while I was trying to trace that fellow with the burned mouth. They said they had some important information, so I brought them up.”

“It was the woman,” Monk growled. “She had two guns. She tried to push one through that swell dinner I just ate. Then she popped me over the ear with the other one. I kinda lost interest.”

“They obviously tricked me into bringing them up,” Ham admitted without pride.

Doc Savage indicated the missing section of the rug. “How did they know about that?”

Ham puckered his forehead, as if trying to think of the best way of admitting an indiscretion.

Homely Monk snorted, “The girl was a knockout. Boy, did she have what it takes! I’ll bet Ham told her all about what had happened.”

“Shut up, you ape!” Ham snapped. “She said the man with the burned mouth was her brother, and wanted to know what had happened to him. She was sobbing and carrying on, and it kind of got under my skin.”

“So you told her about it,” Monk jeered.

“I did!” Ham yelled, angrily. “And you would have done the same thing, you missing link! She was so pretty and so grief-stricken——”

“You know just as much about women as you know about sailors’ pants,” Monk told him, unkindly.

Ham contemplated Monk, as if he would greatly relish separating the homely chemist from his gnarled ears.

“I made a mistake,” he admitted, grudgingly. “Those two tricked me into getting them in here, and knocked us out. Then they stole part of the rug, so that we would not have a chance to figure out what the poor devil was trying to print there.”

Monk scowled at Ham, as if the latter had committed some crime which could never be forgiven.

“That means the message was important,” the simian chemist pointed out. “It’s gone. And I think there was enough of it that we could have translated the thing. You couldn’t read it right off, of course, but——”

“We will see about that,” Doc Savage interposed.

The bronze man now moved the massive inlaid table into the center of the room and stood upon it, from which point he could reach the ceiling. This was decorated in modernistic fashion, with trim triangles and discs of shiny metals and colored glass. Under his manipulation, what had appeared to be an ordinary glass plate came away and proved itself a part of a motion picture camera, which was recessed into the ceiling.

“A few moments will be required to develop this,” he said, and took the film magazine into the laboratory.

After he had been working a few minutes, Doc called to Ham, “Telephone Paradise Beach on Long Island Sound and see if you can learn anything about a strange visitor.”

Ham consumed two headache pills. Then he used the telephone.

“The fellow appeared at Paradise Beach,” he said when he finished. “He swam in from the Sound, knocked out two guards and fled. A moment later, a motor boat landed a group of masked men who pursued him. No one at Paradise seems to know more than that.”

Doc Savage was using a quick-developing process of his own on the motion picture film, which was of miniature size. The whirring of the device which wound the film through the developer solution ceased. He transferred the film to a reel and carried it to a projector.

“When did you start that camera?” Monk asked, curiously.

“Just before leaving to take the man to the ‘iron doctor,’ ” Doc replied. “The camera control, you know, is just inside the library.”

The film clicked through the projector.

“There it is!” Monk exploded, suddenly. “Say, we got a fine shot of that message!”

“We will run the rest of the film,” Doc Savage said. “Another look at that woman would be interesting.”

It had happened about as Monk and Ham had said. The film showed Monk peering at the inscription on the rug and scratching his head, when the door opened and Ham came in, closely followed by a blonde girl.

“Boy, oh boy!” Monk murmured. “Is she a queen!”

The girl, twentyish, arrestingly blonde, might have stepped out of some particularly excellent chorus. Her frock had that careless modishness which only the best designers achieve.

One thing in particular caught their eyes: her jewels. Diamonds—on her fingers, on her throat, circlets of them about her wrists. They were all large stones.

“She was wearing a fortune,” Ham said.

Monk growled, “Look at the gorilla with her.”

Monk had called the girl’s companion a gorilla. It would have taken a psychologist to explain why he did that. Probably because he secretly resented any man being in the company of a specimen of the feminine sex so entrancing.

The diamond girl’s companion was a tall, sturdy and not unhandsome young fellow with a markedly weather-beaten face. His hair was either naturally light or sun-bleached, and was wavy; it bore a close resemblance to molding clay. The young man wore a blue pea-jacket, and trousers that did not have an ordinary cut.

Monk promptly drew attention to the trousers.

“Lookit,” he grunted. “Sailors’ pants, big at the bottoms.”

Ham began, “They wear them with large bottoms merely because it is the style
_____”

“Wrong!” Monk snapped. “They’re big so——”

“There is a sound track on this film,” Doc Savage interposed. “We will connect the scanning cell and the amplifier to the loud-speaker. Whatever they said might be of interest.”

The necessary connections did not require long. As the film began moving again, the loud-speaker hummed and the blows which struck down Monk and Ham were distinctly audible. Monk had emitted a tremendous groan in the course of his Waterloo and Ham now seemed to find this vastly amusing. He chuckled over it until a speech from the diamond girl silenced him.

“Quick, Seaworthy,” snapped the young woman. “We won’t try to smear that message on the rug. We’ll cut it out.”

She had a voice which recorded beautifully.

Her companion, whom she had called Seaworthy, frowned at the rug and said, “Just what was Verne trying to write? Can you make it out?”

The girl moved over and studied the rug.

“Oh!” she gasped. “That would have put Doc Savage right on the trail! He would have learned all about *Taz*. We must get rid of it. Cut it out.”

Seaworthy produced a knife and went to work.

The girl stood to one side during the cutting operation, and it was apparent that she was under strong emotional strain. Once she made a sound very like a sob.

“Poor Verne,” she said, quietly. “They must have caught him. I wonder if he got the acid into the bilge of their ship.”

“If he did, the tub’ll sure sink,” grunted Seaworthy. “That’ll cook their chances of getting to *Taz* ahead of us.”

The girl shuddered. “I wonder if it’s worth it. It means millions, and more than money, too. But is it worth it? Sometimes, I wonder why money isn’t abolished. It causes so much trouble.”

“Something else would take its place for people to fight over,” said Seaworthy, who seemed to be something of a philosopher.

Seaworthy rolled the piece of rug, tucked the bundle under his arm, then squinted at the diamond girl.

“Why don’t you want Doc Savage in on this?” he asked her, suddenly. “We might make a deal with him.”

She stamped a foot at him.

“I’m greedy,” she said with frankness. “I want the money, the power that will come from *Taz*. I wouldn’t get it, if Doc Savage mixed in the affair. He would throw the thing open to the world.”

The two now took their departure. Following which the movie film—it had run on and on—became rather uninteresting. Nothing in the room moved. Except that the part of the rug bearing the writing was gone, there was nothing which really held interest.

“There won’t be nothin’ else,” Monk said.

“No harm in running it through to the end,” Doc Savage replied.

Perhaps a minute later Monk let out an excited whoop.

“Look at that!” he squawled.

“That” was the figure of a man who had glided furtively into the anteroom.

The newcomer’s appearance partook of the more flamboyant qualities of a rainbow. His pants were plum-colored. His coat was of distinct red and blue checks. His shirt was a jaunty yellow; his tie a checkered green. A lemon handkerchief, a green hat and bright yellow shoes completed the ensemble.

The picture of this apparition was projected in the full brilliance of its color. For Doc Savage had long ago ceased using ordinary black and white negatives for photography.

The rainbow man peered furtively around the reception room, then ducked into the library and was lost from sight.

The man returned shortly and stood staring at the section which had been cut out of the rug. Then he went over and kicked Monk and Ham in turn, as if he thought that might awaken them.

“I wondered how I got that sore place on my ribs,” Monk growled.

A voice came from the loud-speaker. The exotically clad man had not spoken, for they could see that his lips had not moved.

“Find anything, Cap’n Flamingo?” the voice demanded.

“Nothin’!” boomed Captain Flamingo in a powerful voice.

“Flamingo, the bird of brilliant color,” Ham murmured. “That name certainly fits the gentleman.”

Captain Flamingo spoke again.

“I’d like to know just what happened,” he said. “What kind of a storm laid these two swabs out like this?”

He walked over and kicked Ham again.

Ham winced, as if the blow had actually fallen again, and said, “I object strenuously to that.”

The voice—it was coming from the corridor—called to Captain Flamingo, “Well, what’re we gonna do about it?”

“We will not drop anchor here, that’s certain,” said Captain Flamingo. “We’ll see if we can’t find a cove across the street where we can watch the channel into this little harbor.”

He walked out with the rolling gait of a seafaring man.

The film ran through to its end without anything more of importance occurring. Doc stopped the projector, reversed it until one of the best shots of the ink marks on the rug was depicted, and stopped it.

“An enlargement of this would help,” he said.

The bronze man started the process of making an enlargement from the miniature film frame.

Monk snorted and stabbed a big forefinger in the general direction of the street below.

“You heard what our sailor visitor with the bright duds said, Doc,” he squeaked. “Him and his buddy was gonna watch this place. Ain’t we gonna glom onto ’em?”

“That is one of the few excellent ideas Monk ever had,” Ham said. “If we catch those fellows and question them, it might clear the whole thing up.”

“Want to take care of that while this enlargement is being made?” Doc asked.

Monk rubbed his ribs where, as he had discovered in the picture, he had been kicked. “Do I!”

“Go ahead,” Doc consented.

Monk and Ham lost no time, but seized powerful binoculars, opened the windows, leaned out and began to scrutinize the street below, first turning out the lights in the

room behind them. There was little chance of their being observed. The sky above was cloud-gorged, intensely black, and luminance from the street lamps did not penetrate this high. Ham's eyes proved the most alert.

"See that!" He pointed.

Monk looked and saw an individual who was unmistakably their late visitor of the rainbow clothing. This fellow was stationed in a doorway from which he could observe the skyscraper entrance.

"He's waitin' for us, even if he don't know it," Monk grunted. "Come on."

Monk and Ham managed to gain from the rear the roof of the building in front of which their quarry stood. A bit later they left the roof, descended stairs, and peering around an angle in the corridor, they could discern through the frosted glass of an outer door the lurking watcher.

There was little light where Monk and Ham stood. They swapped scowls by way of assuring each other that they were ready. The door had a spring lock, which meant it could be opened from the inside. They turned the knob and went out suddenly.

The rainbow-hued man heard them, turned. He looked very much surprised, but let Monk take one of his arms, Ham the other.

"Well, reef my jib," he muttered. "I been boarded!"

He did not seem too greatly concerned about it. The reason for that was evident an instant later.

"You're on a rock, mates," said a quiet, bitter voice.

Monk and Ham looked up. The areaway was old, elaborate, built for merchandise displays, and there was a line of show windows and a tiny balcony above.

A man was leaning over the balcony with a sawed-off shotgun.

Monk hunched his big shoulders and started to rumble. It was a peculiar trait of Monk's that he lost his small voice when he got into a fight, his shouts assuming a deep, bass resonance; and he liked plenty of noise at his fights.

Ham emitted a slight, "*Ps-s-st!* Get smart!"

The bitter-voiced man with the shotgun spoke casually.

"You two birds may have yourselves decked out in bulletproof vests," he said. "But me shooting down this way kinda takes care of that. This scatter gun is loaded for deer."

Monk muttered, "Now, how'd that guy know about the vest?"

"It shows under your coat, stupid," Ham told him. "If you would get a decent tailor and have your garments padded so that vest would not show itself——"

"You two can argue fashions later," said the man in the rainbow attire.

"I'm comin' down, Cap'n Flamingo," said the one above. He tossed his shotgun down to Captain Flamingo, then grasped the railing, swung over and descended without much difficulty.

Flamingo, with his gun, had kept Doc's two aids covered.

“Get going,” the two prisoners were ordered.

“You guys were all set for this,” Monk complained.

“Sure,” chuckled Captain Flamingo. “Why do you think I been standin’ down there where I could be seen from Doc Savage’s windows?”

“I’ll bite,” Monk gritted. “Why?”

“Why, you might say we were fishing,” Captain Flamingo told him. “Fishing for just what we got, see?”

“But whatcha want with us?” Monk grunted.

“Observe, and ye shall learn,” chuckled Captain Flamingo. “Now, reef the tongues and let’s steer a course.”

They got underway. A series of hallways led completely through the block. When they reached the next street, Captain Flamingo showed himself on the sidewalk. A car promptly came cruising toward the unmistakable beacon which his gaudy raiment made.

The car was a sedan, not expensive, not new, and not well-kept, but very large. The driver had a thick neck and a round face. His skin had a raw, red look, as if it had been sandpapered recently.

He wore a sailor hat. There was a name on it.

Captain Flamingo looked at the sailor hat and gave an excellent demonstration of a man about to have a fit. He grabbed the driver’s throat with one hand and the sailor hat with the other.

“Have you plumb lost your ballast?” he snarled.

Then he got a look at the name on the cap:

TROPIC SEAS

“Huh!” gulped Captain Flamingo. “Put some wind in my sails, matey. What’s the idea?”

“If somebody got a look at me, or if I was to lose that hat,” said the driver, “I figured it would look——” He leaned over and whispered words in the gaudily clad man’s ear.

Monk and Ham did not catch it.

“Sure, sure,” said Captain Flamingo, delightedly.

Monk demanded, “What’s the idea here?”

Captain Flamingo glared at him.

“I lost a ship of mine tonight, matey,” he growled, unpleasantly. “A swab poured acid in the bilge and it ate the plates out of her. I ain’t in a helluva good humor. You better do what you’re told to do. Get under way.”

Monk, Ham were loaded into the machine and it rolled downtown.

The bulletproof vests were stripped off Monk and Ham and Captain Flamingo spent his time examining them curiously. The car joined traffic and rumbled over one of the

bridges spanning the East River into Brooklyn. It turned right and followed the water front.

Pier sheds along the river were large at first, but diminished in size and grew, for the most part, more ramshackle. They came to a section devoted to small shipyards.

Suddenly, for no reason that could be seen, Captain Flamingo's companion began to laugh. He laughed long and heartily and finally wound up by stuffing his own fist into his mouth.

"Batten your hatch," Captain Flamingo warned him.

Monk squirmed and demanded, "What do you fellows want with us?"

"I'll tell you," said Captain Flamingo, suddenly. "We want you to tell us just how much Doc Savage knows about this business."

Chapter 4

“TROPIC SEAS”

It was before one of the shipyards that the car finally pulled up. The driver switched off the lights. He left the engine running.

To a wharf at the bottom of the shipyard was tied a small rusty-looking steamer, a craft with a length of less than two hundred feet. She needed painting. Naked, blazing electric light bulbs dangled over her rails at intervals of not more than a score of feet, lighting every inch of the water and the wharf about her. Not a soul was visible on or around the craft.

Monk and Ham were forced into a small shed, foul-smelling of ship stores. They were questioned, after their ankles and wrists were bound. It seemed Flamingo wanted information of “Diamond Eve” and “Seaworthy.”

They stepped outside the shed for a private conversation. As they did so, a huge shadow glided into the shed. Monk felt fingers wrenching at his bonds, felt the ropes snap, and recognized the one person whose strength could accomplish the feat so easily.

“Doc!” he gulped.

“Quiet,” the bronze man breathed.

“How did you find us?” Monk whispered.

“By trailing the car which brought you,” the bronze man explained. He then released Ham, also.

Doc glided out the door of the shed, to attempt capture of Flamingo and his two men. But they suspicioned something and hastened for a pile of timbers. Doc threw a piece of wood at the gloom behind the timbers and it drew a shot that thumped into the side of the steamer.

Excitement in quantities now broke out aboard the trampish-looking steamer. Men with rifles appeared on her decks.

From where they lay, Doc and his men could make out the name of the boat:

TROPIC SEAS

The armed men from the ship ran down the gangplank and began an advance. Some of them carried hand searchlights.

Doc pressed into the hands of Monk and Ham the oversize machine pistols of Doc’s invention, shooting mercy bullets which did not kill but only produced unconsciousness.

“Watch the gate,” Doc Savage directed. “Keep Captain Flamingo and the other two from retreating in that direction. Their only chance will be to swim for it.”

Monk and Ham eased in the direction of the gate.

After they had departed, there was no stirring in the shadow to indicate Doc Savage had also moved. But he had changed position; doing so with the almost uncanny stealth of which he was capable. He was, in fact, now not more than a score of feet from Captain Flamingo and his two comrades. He could hear the trio quarreling.

“Bringin’ them two guys here to question ’em was a dam-fool, reckless stunt!” snarled one of the men.

“Belay that!” growled Captain Flamingo. “Sure, it was a risk. But I was tryin’ to get Doc Savage onto that *Tropic Seas* gang.”

At that moment, a loud and very astounded exclamation came from the direction of the gate. It was Monk. Plainly, he had just received a profound surprise.

Doc Savage made a cautious survey to ascertain what had so moved Monk. He saw almost at once.

The girl of the diamonds! She had come off the ship, *Tropic Seas*, and was directing the sailors, urging them to charge. With her was the man whom she had designated as Seaworthy, during her visit to Doc Savage’s office.

Captain Flamingo’s voice snarled, “Here’s where I teach Miss Diamond Eve Post a lesson!”

With all the speed of which his trained muscles were capable, Doc Savage got a small flashlight out of his clothing. He thumbed it, planting a beam squarely upon Captain Flamingo. The latter had a revolver leveled in the direction of the girl. The unexpected flashlight flare surprised him out of shooting at the young woman. Instead, he whirled and fired at Doc. But, by that time, Doc had doused the light, was down. Captain Flamingo’s lead hit the timber behind which Doc lay. It jarred the timber slightly.

Rifles crashed. Bullets stormed overhead. The *Tropic Seas* crowd had opened fire.

Captain Flamingo began to swear in a shrill, almost insanely mad voice. He could not remain where he was. The *Tropic Seas* attackers were spreading out, would soon have him flanked.

“We’ll hit the drink!” Captain Flamingo rapped.

He leaped up, ran toward the water. The other two trod his heels. The darkness aided them. They reached the water.

Surprisingly enough, they did not dive in immediately. Instead, they flung themselves down behind a painters’ float which had been hauled out, and did something. Just what they did, Doc Savage could not discern. The bronze man was at that moment engaged in getting himself into the background.

It was reasonable to expect that Captain Flamingo and the others had removed part of their clothing, to make swimming easier. But when they got to their feet, it proved they had done nothing of the sort. Fully dressed, they plunged into the bay. They disappeared and did not come up immediately, which was to be expected, since there was every chance that they would be shot the instant they broke the surface again.

What happened next was surprising, a bit unbelievable. Also, it was something that later offered a grim significance of entirely surprising nature. It was a thing that, in a sense, forecast the amazing, fantastic events that were to occur before the whole incredible adventure came to an end.

The men who had leaped into the water did not come up at all!

That they did not come up, was absolutely certain. The men from the *Tropic Seas* aligned along the shore had turned on their hand searchlights. Others lowered two motor tenders over the sides of the rusty old tramp, and cruised about. The tenders were equipped with surprisingly powerful searchlights.

The young woman who displayed the diamonds was in charge of the whole thing. And she handled it efficiently. The man called Seaworthy seemed to be second in charge.

Fully half an hour had passed before Doc Savage joined Monk and Ham near the gate. They were alone here and could converse.

“Captain Flamingo and the other two must have had portable diving apparatus,” Monk muttered.

“No,” Doc told him. “Their figures showed distinctly just before they entered the water, and they certainly had no diving equipment.”

“Then they drowned,” Ham said, dryly.

“It is strange,” Doc Savage said. And his words were slow. “They entered the water confidently, as if they knew what they were doing.”

Monk snorted. “This is a screwy business, and we still haven’t the slightest idea of what it’s all about.”

“We have two angles to work on,” Doc Savage told him.

“What do you mean?” Monk queried.

“This affair right here is one,” Doc replied. “The other is the writing the dying man did on our office rug.”

“What was the writing?” Monk demanded. “It didn’t look like anything to me but some funny marks.”

“There was not time to make sure about it,” Doc Savage told him.

The bronze man now withdrew from his clothing a rolled photographic print.

“This is the enlargement of the marks,” he said. “Keep it, and both of you stay undercover.”

“What’re you gonna do?” Monk asked.

He failed to get an answer, which did not completely surprise him. Doc Savage had a small habit, most aggravating at times, of completely neglecting to explain what he intended to do next. Now, was one of those occasions. He moved away soundlessly and was lost in the darkness.

Monk and Ham looked at each other, shrugged, crept out of the shipyard through the gate without being observed, and concealed themselves among discarded automobiles which littered a junk yard across the street.

Doc Savage had something very definite in mind, it was evident from his movements. The trampish-looking *Tropic Seas* was almost deserted, all hands being engaged still in the futile search for the three men who had simply vanished under the water. The lights would have revealed Doc Savage, had he attempted to walk down the wharf. So, near the shore, he swung over the edge and, hanging by his hands, swung along the stringers until he was close to the rust-scabbed hull.

Such portholes as were open were not large enough to admit him. He reached the gangplank, made sure no one was near, whipped onto the dock and got aboard the boat.

Shortly afterward, he heard the crew returning. He took pains to conceal himself where he could listen without being seen.

The voice of the man called Seaworthy was first to become distinguishable.

“Blast Cap’n Flamingo!” Seaworthy complained. “Him and the two with him got clean away.”

That statement was startling, to say the least—in view of the apparently obvious fact that the three men must have drowned.

“We are in a jam,” said the girl who wore the diamonds. “What was Captain Flamingo doing here? What caused him to fire the shot which attracted our attention?”

This indicated that they had no inkling of the presence of Doc Savage and his two aids.

There was the noise of fingers snapping loudly. Evidently, this was Seaworthy.

“You know what?” Seaworthy barked. “I’ll bet Cap’n Flamingo came here deliberately and started that shooting. He knew it would draw a police investigation.”

The girl emitted a mannish whistle of surprise.

“A police search of the ship would sink our whole plan,” she said, grimly.

“Listen,” Seaworthy suggested. Somewhere in the distance, a police siren was making a faint caterwauling noise.

“Police!” the girl gasped. “Some one telephoned them! Probably some neighbor! What are we going to do?”

“We’ll set sail!” Seaworthy yelled.

He began to bawl orders.

The disreputable ship had looked as if it were driven by steam, but evidently its appearance was deceiving. The power proved to be Diesels, and ones equipped for quick electrical starting, at that. Doc Savage could tell this by their sound as they began revolving.

The hawsers were cast off. Propellers churned in reverse. The ship moved with surprising facility for a hooker of her appearance.

The police arrived in time to do nothing but stand on the end of the dock and shout.

All hands, except those in the engine room, were on deck during the excitement of the departure. Doc Savage made use of the opportunity to examine a portion of the vessel. He learned a surprising fact.

The *Tropic Seas* had lately been a cargo carrier, but she had been built over for some purpose, the exact nature of which was difficult to determine. Living quarters for a very large force of men had been installed amidships, not in the forecabin as was customary.

Originally, there had been one hatch forward. Now there were three. Cargo booms had been taken off and substantial derrick affairs substituted. It could be seen that the hatches were heavily padlocked.

Doc Savage smothered a hearty desire to learn what was in the hold when the crew began to move about the decks and come below. The *Tropic Seas* was now well out in the harbor and, judging from the vibration, was heading for the open sea.

All lights were being extinguished. No illumination was needed for navigation. The ample number of lighted channel buoys took care of that. The green and red light points of these buoys were sliding past at a much greater rate than might have been expected. The old *Tropic Seas* was fast.

Doc Savage worked his way toward the bridge. He managed to attain that goal without being molested, aided no little by the intense darkness. The bridge was glass-enclosed, but windows were of the sliding type and now open. He took shelter in a niche behind the bridge, where he could overhear what was being said.

For a time, there was only the routine conversation having to do with the piloting of the speeding vessel. They had muffled the engine room gongs for the time being. Somewhere aboard, a ship's clock started striking and a man swore, ran to it, and muted it before it finished.

"The police are sure to radio the coast guard," the girl said, uneasily.

"It's not likely they'll pick us up," Seaworthy told her. "It's dark as a cave. And our radio man reported, before we started, that he had tuned in on some ships out off Scotland Light vessel. Fog out there."

"By morning, we should be so far out they will never find us," the girl admitted.

Seaworthy laughed.

"The world won't hear from us again until we spring *Taz* on them," he chuckled.

"How long do you think it will take us to reach *Taz*?" the girl asked.

"Don't know, Diamond Eve," Seaworthy said.

"Don't call me that nickname!" the girl snapped. "The newspapers hung it on me, and I do not care for it."

Seaworthy clicked off a prompt salute, and said, "Certainly miss."

The girl strode out on the starboard wing of the bridge and, with binoculars, swept the night. The *Tropic Seas* was now in the mouth of the harbor, the portion shown on the chart as the Narrows. Brooklyn was a diffused light bank on the left, while Staten Island lights were farther away to the right.

"Not a sign of the coast guard," the girl said.

"They run without lights, too," Seaworthy reminded her. "But I think we'll make it."

The young woman walked back to the center of the bridge, and questioned, “You are sure we can trust the men we have aboard?”

“Absolutely,” said Seaworthy. “I know every one of them personally. I’ve sailed with them all at one time or another.”

“Spare us another Captain Flamingo experience,” the girl said, grimly.

“Captain Flamingo!” Seaworthy made a growling noise. “We sure dismantled him! That idea of mine of getting acid into the bilge of this boat was swell, huh?”

The girl shuddered, said, “Poor Twenty-Thousand-Leagues Verne.”

“We’ll settle a fortune on his relatives,” Seaworthy said. “We can do a lot of things, after we get to *Taz*.”

The girl was silent a moment.

“You sure you have all the necessary equipment aboard?” she asked them.

“All we had the money to buy,” Seaworthy told her. “Of course, if we’d had more money, we’d ’a’ got a small submarine and fitted it up with locks by which divers could enter and leave.”

“I’m broke.” The girl’s voice was grim. “I staked everything on this. I even sold my diamonds. These things I’m wearing are glass.”

“They don’t look like glass,” Seaworthy told her.

“Oh, they make good imitations these days,” the girl replied, casually. “And I had to keep myself in character by wearing them.”

She turned and walked off the bridge.

Doc Savage was there in the darkness to meet her. Before she saw him, she was inside the trap which his corded arms made.

Chapter 5

THE SCIENTIST

To make a prisoner of one person within a few yards of another without the latter becoming aware, is no feat simple of execution. In this case, it was made more difficult by the comparative quiet reigning in the vicinity of the bridge.

Doc Savage held the girl tightly with his right arm, her feet off the deck; with his left hand he closed her mouth, her nostrils.

Her struggles, however, made enough small noise to attract the attention of Seaworthy, who was handling the wheel.

“Something wrong?” he demanded.

Doc Savage had spent countless hours experimenting with his own voice, striving to do unusual things with it. One of his major desires had long been to acquire the ability to imitate the voice of a woman. He had never achieved what he considered success. But, for a few words, he could do fairly well.

“I bumped into something,” he said in a voice very like that of Diamond Eve Post.

That was no lie.

“Oh,” said Seaworthy, deceived. “See you later.”

Doc Savage retreated with the greatest caution, carrying his struggling captive. Seizing her had not been an impulse. The *Tropic Seas* was obviously sailing for some far goal, and Doc did not wish that until the mystery was cleared up. If he could succeed in removing the young woman, it was a reasonable supposition that the sailing would be delayed.

In making his seizure, the bronze man was, as a matter of fact, taking no great chance, the vicinity of the bridge being deserted. But one ability he did not possess. He could not see into the future; he was no clairvoyant. He had no means of telling that Seaworthy would pick that instant to remember a question he wanted to ask the young woman.

“Hey, skipper!” Seaworthy barked. “Where did you put that piece we cut out of Doc Savage’s office rug?”

Doc tried to get out of the predicament by again imitating the young woman’s voice.

“Never mind that,” he called.

“I must know!” Seaworthy shouted. “I just remembered! Maybe we left it on the wharf!”

He was excited. He left the wheel and came racing through the passage. It was just another bad break that he paused to turn on the lights.

He saw Doc Savage and the girl.

Seaworthy had a remarkable voice. His howl of surprise must certainly have been heard in Brooklyn. And, still squawling, he charged.

Doc Savage used discretion and retreated, carrying his captive. There was a sizable crew on the *Tropic Seas*. They all looked competent. He could not fight the whole crowd.

He descended a companionway, taking the steps in a single long jump. A few feet beyond, was a bulkhead door. He got through it, slammed it. The panel was of the type which could be fastened from either side, and was of metal. He secured it.

The *Tropic Seas* was in an uproar. Fore, aft, amidships, men were shouting. And Seaworthy was certainly contributing his bit to the bedlam.

"It's the bronze guy!" he was bellowing. "He's grabbed the skipper! Head him off!"

Doc Savage was having a little difficulty with the girl. She was no weakling. She bit him twice, until he tightened the grip of his hand over her face.

The bronze man, instead of heading deeper into the inwards of the trampish vessel, changed his course and sought the topsides. He had surveyed the vessel carefully back at the pier, before coming aboard. The launches, motor-powered, in which the main search had been made for Captain Flamingo and his two companions after that trio had disappeared beneath the water, were hanging in the davits. They had not yet been swung aboard and lashed.

Doc Savage headed for the port side, where the launches hung. He moved as swiftly as he could manage. With the best of luck, he would have no more than a minute or two.

He reached the bow launch. Holding the girl so that she could not cry out while he disconnected the lowering lines from the cleats, proved to be a task. He managed it with one hand, but took some brisk punishment from the young woman.

The davits were rigged so that the lines could be handled from the descending launch itself. They had not, however, been intended for one-man operation. Doc Savage got the little shell down a dozen feet. Then something went wrong and he all but spilled himself and his captive into the sea. He had to free her. She promptly yelled bloody murder.

It did not make much difference. The blocks needed oiling, and their squeaking had betrayed them. Doc discarded caution for speed.

The boat hit the water with a distinct report. A wave promptly banged it against the hull plates. Doc Savage scrambled forward, and then aft, to throw off the davit lines. He got his foot against the *Tropic Seas*' hull and shoved off.

No lights had been turned on, as yet. That made their escape simpler. And there was also a warning which Seaworthy shouted repeatedly.

"Don't shoot!" Seaworthy howled. "He's got the skipper with him!"

Doc Savage had found it necessary to release the young woman. She immediately sought to jump overboard; but he caught her, hauled her back, held her as he worked over the engine.

Diamond Eve Post began shrieking.

“Seaworthy!” she hailed in her loudest voice.

“What is it?” demanded Seaworthy from the rail above.

“Sail without me!” the girl cried. “Go on to *Taz!*”

“Nix!” Seaworthy barked. “We’ll get you away from that bronze guy!”

“Don’t be a fool!” Diamond Eve Post shrieked. “Doc Savage seized me to make the *Tropic Seas* turn back! He thought you wouldn’t go on without me!”

Doc was having trouble with the engine. The gasoline seemed to be shut off, and the valve was difficult to locate. He shifted one hand to the girl’s mouth for the purpose of silencing her, but was not immediately successful.

“Sail for *Taz!*” the young woman shrieked at Seaworthy. “If you turn back, Doc Savage will spike the whole business!”

Seaworthy wailed, “But you——”

“I’ll be all right!” shouted the girl. “I’ll get rid of this Doc Savage! Then I’ll charter a plane, and find you at *Taz!* Or maybe I’ll wait until you return!”

Seaworthy objected, “But I don’t like the idea——”

“Go on!” the girl shouted.

At that point, Doc Savage succeeded in muffling her. He got the engine started almost simultaneously. The launch was fast. It lifted its nose and moved rapidly, lurching in the swell.

The bulk of the *Tropic Seas* was speedily lost and there was only the noise of the shouting men aboard to mark its position. But after a time, the night swallowed this, too. It was evident that the *Tropic Seas* had continued on toward the open ocean, as the young woman had commanded.

Doc Savage told Diamond Eve Post, “Now we will have a long talk and you can explain a number of things.”

“You’re an optimist,” she said.

By the time they had reached Doc Savage’s skyscraper headquarters, it was beginning to look as if the young woman was right, and that she was going to shed no light whatever on the general mystery.

As a matter of fact, she consented to answer only one question. She did this as they were riding up in the elevator.

“What became of the piece you cut out of the rug?” Doc asked her.

“It’s aboard the *Tropic Seas*,” she said, maliciously. “You’ll never learn what was on it.”

The elevator let them out on the eighty-sixth floor, and they swung along the corridor. Immediately, the sound of an altercation came to their ears.

“Just a dumb shyster,” insisted Monk’s squeaking voice. “You’re too bullheaded to admit it, but you know very well they’re big at the bottoms for a reason.”

“Ridiculous!” Ham snapped. “It is just an inane idea.”

It was the sailors' pants argument again.

The two dissenters called a recess and stared in frank amazement at Doc Savage's companion. Monk got up and executed a snappy bow.

"I do not know any one I would be more delighted to see right now," he said.

"I hate to throw cold water," the girl snapped.

"Huh?" Monk blinked.

"Having me here is not going to do you any good," she advised him. "So you might as well get unhappy."

Ham murmured, "A young lady of determination."

"You said it," agreed the young woman.

Ham treated her to a speculative examination.

"She's a bit saucy," he said. "Perhaps if we took her down and let her look at poor Twenty-Thousand-Leagues Verne, it would cool her off."

The girl lost a little of her ruddy color. But she kept her hard exterior.

"What did they do to him?" she asked.

"Burned his mouth with acid, and cut the ligaments of his wrists," Ham recited, callously. "And they did something to him that caused him to get the bends."

The girl swallowed several times.

"There was probably an 'iron doctor' on Captain Flamingo's schooner," she said. "No doubt they put Verne in that, subjected him to terrific pressure, then took him out without decompressing him slowly."

"What is *Taz*?" Doc Savage queried, abruptly.

The girl cupped her chin in a palm in a mocking attitude of deep thought and murmured sarcastically, "Let's see, what could it be? It might be a three-letter word meaning the first part of Tasmania. But no; that's wrong——"

"That crack fell pretty flat," Monk suggested.

"I'll brush up on my jokes," she retorted.

Doc Savage interposed, addressing Monk, "Do you have that enlargement?"

"Sure." Monk passed it over.

Doc spread the thing out on the table. Considering the smallness of the negative which had been its source, the enlargement was encouragingly distinct. The marks which the dying man had scraped with his toe were plainly discernible.

The girl stared at the picture, gasped, "What is that?"

"A photograph of the rug before your friend Seaworthy went to work on it with his knife," Doc told her.

"Oh!" The girl knotted and unknotted her hands. "Oh!"

She gave every indication of being completely floored.

Doc Savage now consigned the job of watching the young woman to Monk. This task the homely chemist plainly relished.

“If you give me your word not to try to get away, it might make it easier on you,” Monk told her.

“Nothing doing!” she snapped.

Ham looked at the ceiling and said, as if to himself, but in a loud voice, “That shows what a sucker Monk is for a pretty girl. He’d take her word, and it’s probably not worth anything.”

“I’ll remember that, you dude!” the girl snapped.

“I believe her word would be good,” Monk insisted.

“Thank you,” said the young woman. “It would, but I am not promising anything.”

It was evident that Monk was engaged in putting himself in solid.

Doc Savage gestured the young woman’s attention to the enlarged photograph.

“I do not suppose you would translate those marks for us,” he suggested.

“Right. I cannot see any meaning in them,” the young woman assured him.

“But the man who made them was working for you,” Doc reminded her. “He was trying to tell us something.”

She snapped, “He was mad with pain. He did not know what he was doing.”

The bronze man did not press her further. Ham, who had secured another sword cane, came over and studied the enlargement intently. Monk joined him, but was careful, however, to keep one eye cocked in the direction of the young woman. Monk was fully aware that, if she escaped, he would never hear the last of it from Ham.

Ham shook his head over the enlargement print. “I fail to make anything out of it.”

Monk looked at the puzzling hieroglyphics from several angles.

“There’s that wiggly line,” he said. “It kinda looks like a crawling snake. There’s kind of a half loop in the middle. There’s what looks like a cross mark on the edge of the loop. An’ there’s some other lines off to the side, as if somebody had tried to draw a checkerboard.”

The interior decorations of the anteroom had been made over recently, given a modernistic twist. The purpose behind this was not an appeal to the eye. The modernistic panels formed an excellent background for concealing such things as the map case which Doc Savage now opened.

This chart case was a large affair. It was rimmed with very brightly polished metal. This was an entirely effective mirror.

Doc Savage unrolled a chart of Long Island Sound. At the same time, he watched the girl’s reflected image in the bright chart case rim. Doc ran a finger along the chart.

The young woman tried not to look uneasy and did not entirely succeed.

“The dead man was a sailor,” Doc Savage said. “Therefore, he knew charts. The line he drew was a shore line.”

“Huh?” Monk exploded. “Then that half a loop is a cove! A little bay. Wonder what one.”

“Ten Fathom Cove, it would appear,” Doc Savage said.

The bronze man indicated the spot on the chart, and Monk and Ham, after a brief inspection, nodded, agreeing that the shore line contour depicted on the chart almost

exactly matched the wanderings of the wavy line which the dying man had inscribed on the floor.

Monk gave the young woman an amiable grin.

“We ain’t so dumb, eh?” he asked.

“You’d better watch your step,” nipped Diamond Eve Post. “That’s all I can say.”

The sun may come up like thunder in China, as the bards intimate, but along the north shore of Long Island at this season of the year the rising of the solar orb was something of a sneaking process. A mist usually crawls up out of the Sound and rolls inshore. Out of this the sun crawls with apparent reluctance.

The sun was not yet up as Doc Savage braked his car to a stop. As a matter of fact, there was no evidence of it. But the usual dawn mists were beginning to roll in.

Monk alighted, then turned, ostensibly to aid Diamond Eve Post, but actually to keep a grip on her arm to discourage flight. Ham got out of the front seat. Unless absolutely necessary, Ham made it a policy not to ride in the same seat with Monk. Doc Savage locked the car.

There was deep stillness about them. No breeze fluttered leaves. Birds were quiet. It evidently was not the usual time which roosters picked for crowing.

Monk suggested to the young woman, “It’d sure be nice, if you’d bust loose with some information.”

“Wouldn’t it,” she said shortly.

The road was behind them. They had pulled off on a disused lane, which led in the general direction of the Sound, and it was down this lane that they now walked.

“This is the quietest darn place I ever saw,” Monk mumbled.

He was mistaken. He knew that an instant later.

A voice in the brush said, “Holy cow! I thought you would never show up!”

The texture of that voice was somewhat astounding. It was reminiscent of a lion roaring in a cave.

“Renny!” Monk exploded. “What brought you out here?”

The newcomer now separated himself from the brush, lighting his way by a flashlight over the lens of which he had tied several thicknesses of handkerchief, so that it would afford only a dim glow.

The man was a giant. His size, however, faded to insignificance, once a glance was directed at his hands. These members were unnaturally large. Each fist was composed of only slightly less than a gallon of bone, gristle and leathery hide.

He had a long puritanical face, and, if its expression was any indication, he had not a friend on earth. It was a peculiar trait of “Renny’s” that he registered his emotions inversely—the happier he was, the more gloom that might register on his countenance.

“How’d you come to get out here, Renny?” Monk demanded again.

Doc Savage answered Monk’s question, saying, “Renny got the story from me over the telephone, while you and Ham were having your troubles with Captain Flamingo. It

was my suggestion that Renny come out here.”

“Then you had already deciphered them marks on the rug?” Monk questioned.

“It was only a guess at first,” Doc Savage said. “Later, our young lady here verified the accuracy of the guess by the anxious look on her face when this spot was indicated on the chart.”

Monk addressed Diamond Eve Post hopefully: “It would save a lot of head scratching, if you would tell us what this is all about.”

“Oh, quit bothering me,” she snapped.

Renny rumbled softly, “Plenty has been going on around here, Doc. I’ve got something I want to show you first.”

They moved forward, a silent cavalcade. Big-fisted Renny led the way.

Renny was Colonel John Renwick, world-famed civil engineer, and one of Doc Savage’s group of five aids.

There were two other members of Doc Savage’s organization—Major Thomas J. “Long Tom” Roberts, an electrical expert, and a geologist-archæologist, William Harper “Johnny” Littlejohn—but neither of them were at present in the United States. The electrical wizard was in South America, the geologist-archæologist in Europe, each engaged in following his respective trade.

Renny stopped them when they had reached the beach, before they had walked out where they might be seen.

“Now, isn’t that something?” he said, and pointed.

The scene in the little cove might have been lifted from some historical saga of pirate days, when stout ships were careened on coral sands of the Caribbees.

The ship had been run in hard, parallel to the beach, and grounded. This had been done at high tide, and a main part of the hull now showed. It was a sailing ship, with auxiliary power of some kind—they could see the faint outline of the propeller. Of the three masts the forward was rigged with squaresail and rafee, the other two carried fore-and-aft rig—a bit of a hybrid schooner.

There was no stir of life.

“The hooker isn’t as deserted as she looks, by a long shot,” Renny said, having difficulty keeping his great voice low.

Doc Savage asked, “What have you seen?”

“The ship had already been beached when I arrived,” Renny explained. “You told me just to nose around, and so that’s all I’ve been doing. They’ve been taking stuff out of that schooner and loading it on barges. And tugs have been dragging the barges away.”

He pointed out into the Sound, where the running lights of a tug with a tow could be seen.

“There it goes with the last load,” he said. “I don’t think they’ve emptied the schooner, though. The tide went out so much that they couldn’t get the barges alongside to load them. If you ask me, they’re taking a recess.”

Ham demanded, "Can you explain why they beached that boat?"

"I crawled down close," Renny told him. "That hooker has no more bottom than a sieve. Looks like the work of extremely strong acid in the bilge."

"Have you any idea what they are unloading to the barge?" Doc asked.

Renny shook his head. "All the stuff was boxed. There was one exception: some big drums of wire hawser."

"We will go down and look around," Doc Savage said.

"You either have lots of nerve, or no sense," the girl put in.

Doc Savage suggested, "Renny, you might remain here and watch the young woman, while the rest of us board the boat."

"I will not," said Renny, visioning himself missing out on a fight.

"I'll stay with her," Monk offered.

Ham said dryly, "Renny would, too. Only, it has been too dark, so far, for him to see what a beauty she is."

"I hope you all get your blocks knocked off," the girl said, unkindly.

They left her with Monk and crept along the beach, keeping close to the scrubby trees which overhung the sand. It was a simple matter not to make much noise. Small waves made small sounds.

Doc Savage breathed a suggestion: "Notice how the bowsprit runs up almost into the trees. That should offer us a chance to get aboard."

"Water must be deep in that place, to let 'em get this close in," Renny murmured.

"They call it Ten Fathom Cove for that reason," Doc Savage told him.

They caught sight of the name of the schooner, faintly discernible in the murk:

HIGHLOW

"Queer name," Renny breathed.

"On the contrary, a very fitting name," Doc Savage replied.

Renny frowned. "What do you mean——"

He neither finished his question nor got an answer. At the moment, a large crashing rose in the brush inshore. Several men seemed to be approaching and, judging from the noises, fighting as they came. Angry growls were frequent, as were blows.

"This," Renny breathed hollowly, "is something new."

Doc Savage and his aids were almost under the desired goal, the bowsprit. But, hearing a stirring on the deck above, they withdrew, easing themselves into the shrubbery as silently as was possible. Noises in the brush approached. A man was swearing. They recognized the voice.

Captain Flamingo!

It was incredible. It was like having some one arise from the dead. For Captain Flamingo, to all appearances, had certainly perished when he sank under the water at

the shipyard and did not appear again. But he was here now, and loud as life.

He was saying, "You might as well calm down, matey. We're keepin' you right with us."

"This is very puzzling to me," complained a shrill voice. "And it will go very hard with you for the indignities you have forced upon me!"

This speaker was plainly quite angry, yet he managed to maintain a scholastic dignity in his manner of speech.

Ham breathed close to Doc's ear, "The voice of that last speaker struck me as familiar."

"You have heard it over the radio a number of times, no doubt," Doc said.

"I fail to place it," Ham whispered. "Who is——"

A group of half a dozen men came out of the shrubbery and stood in the sand under the schooner's bowsprit. One of them carried an ordinary oil lantern. He held up the light, enabling Captain Flamingo to board the ship. The others were busy escorting their captive.

A little gray rabbit of a man was this prisoner. He had a little nose that twitched, big fugitive eyes, and even oversize ears. His suit, light-gray and of some very fuzzy material, bore out the general rabbit impression. He walked stiffly.

They had a rope around his neck and they held his arms, and indications were that he had been manhandled, somewhat.

Renny, doubtless irked by an evening of inactivity, breathed, "We can take this crowd, Doc."

It was possible that Renny spoke deliberately, in order to start things. The gang with the captive heard his whisper. They started violently and stared into the murk.

Then Renny hit them. He weighed around two hundred and sixty pounds, all of it bone and gristle. He knew just about every rough-and-tumble fighting trick in the book, and his huge fists were about as effective as two concrete blocks.

Two men dropped before they even had a chance. A third got his guard up, both fists doubled in front of his face. Renny swung, not around the guarding fists, but at them, driving them back against the man's jaw. The fellow dropped.

Doc Savage had entered the fray with Renny. His corded arms gathered in two men. He crushed them close, fell with them. His metallic fingers were very busy for a moment. When he stood up, the pair did not rise.

Doc Savage had developed the ability to produce abrupt unconsciousness in a somewhat unusual way—by administering pressure on certain spinal nerve centers. It was much more effective than a knockout blow.

Ham entered the mêlée in a manner calculated not to ruffle his immaculate clothing. He unsheathed his sword cane. The tip of the blade was coated with a sticky, bilious-looking substance, which was actually a chemical concoction that produced quick unconsciousness. A slight prick was sufficient to administer it.

He dropped the surviving man.

The late prisoner, he who resembled a rabbit, stumbled clear. All of his leg movements seemed rather clumsy.

“Wonderful! Marvelous!” he gasped. “They have had me in their power for weeks!”

“Ha!” Ham rapped sharply. “Now I remember who he is.”

“Stanley Watchford Topping is his name,” Doc Savage said. “He is one of the great authorities on deep-sea marine life.”

“That is indeed I,” said the rabbit man.

He said it so that it sounded, somehow, a bit silly.

Chapter 6

THE BRASS CASE

During the next few minutes, Doc Savage, Ham and Renny did little but remain concealed in the brush and keep the scrap with the schooner going. There had been no opportunity to question the man they had rescued, Stanley Watchford Topping. Now there came a lull.

Stanley Watchford Topping was at Doc Savage's elbow.

"You said something about their holding you prisoner," Doc suggested.

"For weeks," agreed the little rabbit of a man. "It has been quite hideous, I can assure you."

Doc queried, "What was their purpose?"

"The schooner," mumbled Topping. "She is my craft."

Six evenly spaced shots came from the schooner. It was a revolver. The lead knocked about in the foliage, the echoes rattled about the cove.

So far, the fighting had not drawn outside attention. Nor was it likely to do so, this being an isolated spot, the nearest traveled road nearly a mile distant. Moreover, not many persons were abroad this early in the morning. If the skirmish continued on into the day, it might tell a different story.

"Why did they hold you?" Doc Savage asked Topping again.

"Piracy!" said Topping.

"Piracy?"

"Exactly!" the rabbitlike man snapped. "They took possession of my schooner and they held me captive, so I could not give an alarm."

"Have you any idea why they wanted the boat?" Doc Savage asked.

"It is the one I use in my deep-sea expeditions," announced Topping. "It has some remarkable equipment aboard, devices such as you will not find anywhere else. Apparently, they wanted to use this equipment."

"For what purpose?"

"That," said Topping, dramatically, "is an amazing story. You would not believe it."

"Suppose you tell it," Doc Savage suggested.

Two tongues of flame spurted over the schooner rail—a rifle this time. The jacketed lead came too close for peace of mind.

"I will do better than tell you," Topping said, grimly. "I will show you."

"What do you mean?" Doc demanded.

"I own the land around this cove," Topping explained. "I keep my schooner here, because it is an excellent anchorage. I have a house. It is only a little distance from here, on the higher ground."

“Newspapers have run stories about your establishment here,” Doc Savage told him.

“Yes, I know,” agreed the man. “But if we can reach the house, I can show you something.”

“What?”

“I would rather show it,” Topping said, after hesitating. “It will be more believable.”

More shots whacked from the boat. Renny leveled his machine pistol, let it moan two short bursts. After the whooping echoes had died, there was silence—excepting for occasional sounds of movement aboard the schooner, which showed that the defending force had not been put out of commission.

Topping suggested, “If we could just get to the house——”

“All right,” Doc Savage told him. “Those fellows on the schooner will stay put, especially since it will be daylight before long.”

Doc Savage called to Ham and Renny and, with Stanley Watchford Topping, they eased back through the shrubbery.

Monk, they surmised, was still guarding the girl.

The house was big, which was about all it had to recommend it to the eye. It had as much architectural comeliness as three or four boxes of assorted sizes arrayed one against the other. There were not enough windows in the house.

“It is inside, this thing you want to show us?” Doc Savage asked.

Topping wiggled his nose. There was now light enough to see this small rabbitlike habit of his.

“Inside.” He nodded. “It will explain everything.”

Renny rumbled, “Holy cow! Then what’re we waitin’ outside for?”

They advanced to the door. Topping shoved it open, then he hesitated.

“My mind is not exactly easy,” he said.

“What do you mean?” Doc asked him.

“It is a strange thing,” Topping mumbled. “Their leader is really a woman. She works for that devil, a gaudy parrot of a person who calls himself Captain Flamingo.”

“Holy cow!” was all Renny could manage at that.

Ham, astonished, lipped, “Look here, do I get this right? That girl is really their chief?”

“She is,” Topping murmured. “But she has taken great pains to conceal it. With Captain Flamingo’s aid, she has even managed to keep it from their own gang.”

Doc Savage and the others thought that over. It was food for thought. Indeed, if anything could be called a stark surprise, this was it.

“But what makes you uneasy?” Doc Savage asked at last.

“The woman may come here,” Topping said, uneasily. “Or Captain Flamingo may appear.”

“The woman is a prisoner,” Doc Savage told him. “One of our men, Monk, is holding her at a point down the beach.”

Topping did not seem greatly reassured.

“Perhaps it would be better if we left a watchman at the door,” he suggested.

“We will do that,” Doc agreed. “Ham, you are elected.”

Ham said, “Certainly,” and took up a position just inside the door.

The air inside the house was heavy with two odors, one of them quite distinctly that of fish. The other smell was less easy to define, and Doc Savage put a query about it.

“It comes from the special food for my morays,” explained Topping.

“Huh?” Renny grunted. “What’s a moray?”

“I keep tropical fish and other live specimens,” Topping explained. “It’s my business, you know. I am a specialist on deep-sea life.”

“What’s a moray?” Renny repeated. “I’m no ichthyologist.”

“A moray is possibly the most ferocious and deadly thing in the sea,” Topping informed him. “They are eels.”

They were moving along a corridor. Cases on the walls held mounted fish.

“Eels?” Renny sniffed. “An eel don’t appeal to me as being a fierce critter.”

They entered a room, a large room in which there were many glass aquarium tanks in which fish swam, and in which strings of bubbles rose from aerating apparatus.

“Morays are fierce,” said Topping, dryly. “These I have can bite a man half in two, and they are of a particular species a great deal more poisonous than rattlesnakes.”

They crossed the aquarium room, and Topping unlocked another door. The doors of the house seemed to be made of metal, looked very strong.

“Nice customers,” Renny said, referring to the morays.

“Here they are,” Topping told him, and turned on the lights in the next room. The chamber was absolutely windowless.

Renny took one look.

“Holy cow!” he exploded.

He was not easily excited or surprised or appalled. The underwater specimens before him lived up to their advance notices. Not that, in repose, they looked particularly terrible. But one moray happened to have its jaws distended, offering an excellent chance to examine the equipment which made it so feared.

In this room were tanks little short of gigantic. The plate glass of their sides seemed to be very thick. They began at the floor, and a man on tiptoe could not touch the top. They held water. There was a grille of slender but stout steel bars over the top.

“One of the morays got out of its tank once,” Topping said. “We had a very difficult time with it. Of course, they cannot remain out of water for long. But they are very active.”

Renny frowned at the moray which had its jaws distended. Probably, the thing was yawning. Just looking at the jaw equipment caused the back of Renny’s neck to feel

cool. He held no doubts about the thing being able to remove one of his legs with a single snap.

Doc Savage interposed: "Where is the thing we came to see?"

"There." Topping pointed, indicating the end of the windowless room.

There was an aisle before them, with the huge moray tanks on either side. At the end of the room was a shelf, probably for use in making notes during scientific study of the habits of morays. On the shelf stood a case.

"Gold!" exploded Renny, looking at the case.

"Nothing so valuable," Topping corrected. "It is merely brass."

In the somewhat inadequate light, the case did look like gold. Its height was about six inches; its width near a foot. Renny would have had to stretch his arms to span its length. It had a hinged lid, and this was padlocked.

"Is it yours?" Doc Savage asked.

Topping gave a distinct shudder.

"It belongs to that terrible and clever girl," he said. "Captain Flamingo has been keeping it for her."

They advanced between the tanks. Doc Savage studied the morays curiously. He knew a great deal about the things, was fully aware that they were probably the most dangerous denizen of the tropical seas.

It was the first time the bronze man had seen morays, especially tank specimens, act as these did. They seemed particularly ferocious.

The party followed them then, eyes intent, the length of their tanks. Renny was carefully walking in the middle of the aisle and did not look especially comfortable.

"What is in the brass box?" Doc Savage queried.

"A terrible thing," said Topping. "An incredible thing!"

"That is repeating about the same statement you made before," Doc reminded him.

"I brought you here to show you the contents of that case," Topping replied. "I wanted you to see with your own eyes. It would be too much to expect you to believe a verbal recital."

Renny gave a distinct jump, as one of the morays rubbed against the side of its tank.

"You're sure one of these things can kill a man?" he demanded.

"I have seen it demonstrated." Topping shuddered again. "It is an altogether horrible death."

They reached the shelf on which the brass case stood.

"Will the thing blow up?" Renny queried.

"No, no, nothing like that," said Topping, hastily. "Not unless you are speaking figuratively, referring to the effect this thing will have upon the world if it ever gets out."

Renny scowled. "You make it sound big."

“I cannot exaggerate the importance of this terrible thing,” Topping said, and indicated the case.

Renny reached out and lifted the case, testing its weight. “Don’t feel very heavy,” he said.

“I will get a hammer,” Topping murmured. “We will have to break the lock.”

Renny let out a sigh that was like a small gale coming from a cavern.

“Boy, this has built up on me,” he said. “I’m as jittery as if I was gettin’ married. I’ll be glad to learn——”

The world came apart. It was not exactly that, of course. But it had all the abruptness, the violence.

There was an explosion. It threw them against the shelf. The brass box was knocked to the floor. The light went out. The windowless place blackened utterly.

There came a distinct *clang*, all too full of meaning. The door through which they had come had been slammed. A rattle which followed indicated it was being locked.

Stanley Watchford Topping emitted a scream, only a sound of fear and horror at first, then the words becoming articulate.

“The morays!” he squawked. “That explosion—a bomb! It broke the tanks!”

There was a pause, during which vivid splashings and slitherings could be heard.

Renny tried the shelf to ascertain if it would support their weight. It broke away from the wall.

“The morays are out!” Topping was gibbering now. “We can’t keep them off in the dark!”

It was true. There was water on the floor; the warmth of it came almost to their knees—water of a warmth to which these morays, vicious denizens of the tropic seas, had been accustomed. It felt, that water, like the life fluid of something living.

Chapter 7

MONK HUNTS DOC

Monk was in rags. His clothes looked literally as if they had been torn from his body. And they had.

Monk had been in a fight. While guarding the girl, Diamond Eve, the apelike one had been attacked by Captain Flamingo and some of his men. Monk had been blackjacked before he could get into action, and bound and guards put over him.

But during the struggle, Diamond Eve had slipped away unnoticed and came back with a revolver to hold up Monk's guards and release Monk from his bonds. Why she did this, Monk couldn't figure out.

It was then the fight had taken place, for the girl had taken the guns away from the guards and told Monk to defend himself.

And he had! Thus the condition of his raiment.

And then had come the explosion from the house.

Safety demanded that Monk retreat a bit. He did so. From his new position, he caught sight of the house.

"Doc!" Monk roared.

No answer.

The homely chemist made for the house. His progress had the noise and lack of caution of an elephant charge. He held to a straight line.

Guns began going off around him. The undergrowth seemed full of foes. Their lead made a great racket in the leaves and twigs.

Monk, when he got in a fight, often had what might be called unnatural luck. This was probably more a product of his fighting style. In combat, Monk often did what would seem the least sensible thing. Which probably explained why Monk was hit by none of the bullets. Any hunter who has failed to bag a deer running through brush could have explained it. Had Monk tried to be cautious and skulk, the likelihood of his collecting bullets would have been great.

A man was sprawled outside the door of the house. He lay on his side, legs drawn up a little, head reposing on one crooked arm. He looked as if he were asleep, but it was not a convincing imitation.

Ham certainly would not be asleep there!

Monk vaulted a low stone fence, hurtled across the yard. A fresh crash of gunfire made violent echoes. The bullets made ugly noises around Monk, rifles and revolvers. There was a perceptible difference between the noises the slugs made in passing. Rifle lead whistled shorter, fiercer.

Monk reached Ham, grabbed the dapper lawyer up and went on through the open door, leaving the storm of bullets behind.

"Doc!" Monk yelled.

Again he received no answer.

The thing which Monk valued most was, undoubtedly, the well-being of Doc Savage. But the thing which could concern Monk the greatest, although he would have parted with an arm rather than admit it, was danger to Ham.

Ham, Monk's anxious examination disclosed, was only senseless, and not very profoundly so at that. A knot on the back of the dapper lawyer's head indicated the cause. Finding it was not serious, Monk fingered the knot rather ungently.

This caused Ham to stir, groan.

Monk grabbed Ham's ears and gave them several violent twists. Ham revived enough to take a swing at his tormentor.

"You didn't need to do it that way," Ham gritted.

"I was waking you up," Monk said. "Where's Doc?"

Two bullets came in, dug plaster off the walls, and they moved back a little before Ham answered.

"In here somewhere," groaned the lawyer. "I was lookout. Something exploded. The blast of air through the door knocked me down. Some one ran around the corner of the house and kayoed me before I could get up."

"A swell lookout you turned out to be," Monk said, unkindly.

They entered the room which held the small aquariums. Most of the glass cages had been broken by the explosion. The doors of the room were of rather peculiar construction, with raised thresholds, and this had caused the floor to become a pond in which swam an amazing assortment of finny specimens. That the fish did not have dispositions to match their beautiful coloring, was evident from the way the big ones were already gobbling up the little ones.

"It's sure dog eat dog in this world," Monk grumbled, and waded in.

He reached the door at the end, which led into the tank room of the morays. It was locked, with the key gone. Monk wrenched. The door held. He hit it with his shoulder, and thereby discovered the panel was of heavy metal.

"Doc!" Monk bellowed. "You in there?"

No reply came from beyond the locked door. Monk put an ear against it, close to the keyhole. He could hear watery noises, gurglings, sloshings, slitherings. This threshold was also raised, and the sounds plainly indicated the room beyond had a floor covered with water. Monk examined the keyhole. The lock could be picked from either side, but Monk did not have suitable instruments.

A commotion behind him distracted his attention. It was Ham. The dapper lawyer was putting on a ludicrous performance. An especially large and brilliant piscatorial specimen had apparently decided to sample the nourishing qualities of Ham's shanks, and Ham was headed for the other door, the fish in pursuit.

Monk, amazingly, did not laugh. He made a run, did some fish dodging of his own, and joined Ham.

"What do you make of this?" Ham gasped.

Instead of answering, Monk squeaked, "Listen!"

There were sounds outside the house, sounds of men running. Monk and Ham raced to the door.

Heavily armed men, more than a dozen of them, were converging on the place. Captain Flamingo led the charge.

Monk slammed the door, rapped at Ham, "Give me your machine pistol."

"The man who knocked me out took it," Ham snapped.

"Then we're really jammed up," Monk growled.

Bullets began coming in through the door. They retreated to the threshold of the aquarium room. They stood there, trying to think of something to do.

Then sounds behind them caused them to spin. The door to the moray tank room had opened. Doc Savage came through!

Chapter 8

FOUR SLEEPERS

In one bronze hand, Doc Savage held a small picklike instrument, which he always carried for manipulating lock tumblers. His other hand gripped the end of a grille of steel rods. Renny and Stanley Watchford Topping held the end of this grating, and also the ends of three others, with which they had fashioned a pen about themselves.

They seemed very glad indeed to get out of the room. The instant they were through the door, they dashed for Monk and Ham. Renny was carrying Doc's small flashlight.

"Holy cow!" Renny thumped. "Is my hair white?"

"No," Monk grunted. "What happened?"

"Moray eels," Renny said. "Poison. Able to bite like sharks!"

"We tried to use our machine pistols on them," Doc Savage explained. "But those mercy bullets flattened, the instant they struck the water."

Renny boomed, "Then Doc managed to get the gratings off the top of the cases. We made ourselves a pen."

Stanley Watchford Topping piped out in a voice that was shrill, almost inarticulate with hysterical relief.

"We escaped!" he bleated. "Unbelievable—certain death—I shall never forget those moments!"

"Thank Doc for that," Renny rumbled at him. "Blast it, you were clumsy enough handling your share of those metal grilles——"

Then, apparently for the first time, Renny saw what had made Topping clumsy. The fellow had been carrying the brass case.

"I give you credit," the big-fisted engineer grunted. "You had presence of mind. I never even thought of that thing."

"Nor would I," Topping retorted. "Doc Savage requested me to bring it."

Monk frowned at the long brass box. "What's that thing?"

"Something that will explain what this whole terrible affair is about," answered Topping.

"Boy, that'll be somethin'," Monk grunted. "Open it up."

There was a terrific crash. The whole house seemed to tremble on its foundation. Walls creaked and plaster fell off. It was a grenade, and it had blown down the front door.

"We will have to postpone for a short time the examination of the box," Doc Savage said, and there was absolutely no emotion in his voice.

Renny's machine pistol was the only firearms in the party. The big-fisted engineer latched it to single-shot position, and whacked two random mercy bullets out through the door.

“The ammo drum is about empty,” Renny boomed, uneasily. “I gotta be a little stingy with what’s left.”

There was a door on the right side of the aquarium room which held the small fish tanks. This had almost escaped notice in the gloom. It admitted to a room which held a workbench and shelves on which were littered wicking, cotton, plaster, preserving fluid, varnish, coloring—the type of stuff used in mounting fish. There was a half-mounted barracuda on the table.

“My workroom!” gasped Topping. “Beyond it a stairway leads to the upper floor.”

“What about a back door?” Doc Savage asked.

“This way.” Topping guided them.

They were in the part of the house used for living purposes now, and it differed little from any other dwelling. There were rugs on the floor, substantial furniture. The stuff was not expensive, nor was it cheap.

The back door was a wooden one with a frosted-glass panel. The morning was still early enough that it was somewhat dark in the house, and Doc Savage was using his flashlight. The instant the glow fell upon the glass-paneled door, bullets began to strike. The glass fell out, jangling.

“They had the back covered,” Doc Savage said.

Renny boomed, “It begins to look like we went out of the pan into the fire!”

Doc Savage asked Topping, “Have you any guns in the house?”

“Only fowling pieces,” replied the rabbitlike authority on deep-sea life. “I am a skeet fan.”

He led them upstairs to a spot which, it developed, was almost ideal for defensive purposes. It was an enormous square, glass-enclosed sun room. A case on one wall held three expensive fowling pieces, two of them over-and-under English guns. There were boxes of shells and reloading kits. Topping, it appeared, did his own reloading, like a true gun lover.

They unlimbered the weapons. Carrying one, Doc dashed back downstairs. He sighted the door, which had been blown open, just in time to meet the charge of four men. He aimed at their legs, and his shotgun unloosed two ear-splitting blasts.

The four men ran away. The other two shotguns cut loose upstairs. Outdoors, men yelled in pain. Rifles, revolvers barked. Doc Savage fired twice more from the door, and their besiegers retreated back into the brush.

Going upstairs into the sun room, the bronze man found most of the windows shot out. Those that remained were rapidly disintegrating under a hail of lead. It was getting lighter now, and it would soon be very dangerous for the occupants to attempt to look out.

Doc Savage crawled to a dresser, upset it, broke the mirror into large fragments and passed these pieces around. They could lie on their backs, hold the mirror sections up, and get, reflected, a fair image of what was going on outside.

Before long, Captain Flamingo—his men rather, for Flamingo himself remained under cover—started a charge. A volley from the shotguns broke it up in short order. At that distance, a shotgun was not a fatal weapon, but the agony the little pellets wrought was very discouraging.

Guns continued to smash. The walls of the sun room below the windows were of masonry and thick enough to stop even the high-powered rifle bullets. Despite the tension, time began to drag.

It must have been an hour later when Doc Savage, lying on the seaward side of the house, suggested, "Have a look, you fellows."

They gathered on that side for a brief scrutiny of what the bronze man had seen. It was a tug and a barge, coming in from the open Sound. The tug skipper knew his business, and jockeyed his barge alongside the stern of the beached schooner without delay.

Quite a number of Captain Flamingo's men now gave up the siege of the house, hurried down to the schooner and began to transfer large boxes to the barge. Some of this merchandise appeared to be very heavy. Sails had been cut away from the schooner gaffs, and these were being employed as cargo booms.

Doc Savage still had his small microscope tube which, by altering the lenses, could be changed into a strong telescope.

"What's in the boxes, Doc?" Monk asked.

"They are unmarked," the bronze man replied, and glanced at Topping. "Do you know?"

"I am not sure," Topping told them, "but I suspect it is paraphernalia to aid them in this terrible thing they are trying to accomplish."

Renny rumbled, "Listen, Topping, it's about time you gave us the lowdown on that."

"Let's open the brass box," Monk suggested.

Renny peered about, gulped, "Holy cow! Where is it?"

Topping looked frightened and rabbitlike, and spoke hastily.

"Downstairs," he said.

Renny yelled, "What's it doing down there?"

"I left it in my workshop," Topping explained. "I guess I was excited. I'll go get it."

"And I'll just go along to see you don't forget what you went after," Renny snorted.

The two of them crawled across the floor and disappeared down the stairway.

It was the first opportunity which Monk had had to speak with Doc Savage when Topping was not present. The homely chemist made good use of his chance.

"Doc," he squeaked, "I think Topping's one of the gang!"

"What gave you that idea?" the bronze man queried.

“Things I overheard Captain Flamingo say when I was attacked with the girl,” Monk explained. “He seemed pretty sure you were headed for a trap. And you were, it turned out.”

Ham spoke up, probably more for the sake of argument with Monk than anything else.

“But Topping was in there with the morays, along with Doc and Renny,” he pointed out.

“Is that so?” Monk squinted at Doc.

“He was there,” the bronze man said.

Monk frowned, scratched his nubbin of a head. “Didn’t the guy have some way of duckin’ out or climbin’ onto the wall or somethin’? Some way of making sure the morays wouldn’t bite him?”

“There was absolutely nothing he could climb upon,” Doc Savage said. “There were no windows, and the one door was locked.”

“What do you say to that, Monk?” Ham demanded.

“Humph,” Monk grunted. “Maybe he had them eels trained so they wouldn’t bite him, or somethin’.”

“Not those morays,” Doc Savage assured the homely chemist. “No, they would have killed Topping just as quickly as they would have killed us.”

Monk said, “Well, that kinda makes it look like he’s straight. Now, after we see what’s in that brass case——”

A shout came up from the lower rooms. It was Renny’s voice—surprised, angry.

“The brass case is gone!” Renny thundered.

Monk heaved up, was shot at from outside, got down on all fours and scuttled to the stairway.

“Where’d it go?” he roared.

Renny seemed to be trying to find that out. He could be heard questioning Stanley Watchford Topping. In Renny’s bull-like voice there was much suspicion, and little patience.

A few minutes later, Renny and Topping came up. The rabbitlike expert on fishes looked as if he would have dearly loved to crawl in a hole somewhere.

“This guy,” Renny poked a derisive thumb at Topping, “still says he left the case down there. Somebody got it.”

“One of Captain Flamingo’s men must have sneaked in from outside,” Topping quavered.

Doc Savage, not without some risk, had his little telescope trained on the schooner.

“Have a look,” he invited, abruptly.

Ham took the telescope, peered, then said something explosive under his breath.

“Now what?” Monk demanded.

“The brass case,” Ham said. “Captain Flamingo’s men got it, all right. They took it onto the schooner, and from there to the barge. That was what Doc was looking at.”

Renny scowled darkly at Topping.

“You’ve done enough stallin’,” the big-fisted engineer rumbled. “Spill what you know.”

Topping was patently a very nervous and scared man, and individuals in that condition often do queer things. Topping now blew up. His rabbit face grew purple, and the veins stood out on his forehead. He made his rather scrawny hands into fists, seemed on the point of taking a swing at Renny.

“I’ve had all the bulldozing I’m going to stand for!” he shrieked. “All of you can go stick your heads in the ocean! I won’t tell you anything!”

“You runt,” Renny rumbled. “You’ll talk, or you’ll get your neck wrung!”

Just what the outcome of the quarrel would have been was something they were not to learn. The gunfire outside suddenly increased, until it took on the proportions of a pitched battle. Strangely enough, hardly a bullet was going through the sun room.

Doc Savage stood up for a look.

“State troopers,” he said. “All of this shooting was bound to attract them.”

Captain Flamingo and his men promptly fled. Retreat was orderly enough. They carried their wounded, converged on the schooner and got aboard. They shifted to the barge, then to the tug. The tug’s rail, of thick solid timbers, furnished an excellent bulwark.

Lines holding the barge to the schooner were cast off. The tug’s exhaust pipe spurted steam; water boiled under the stern, and tug and barge moved out into Ten Fathom Cove.

The police kept up a rattling fire, but this had no effect.

Doc Savage and his men were out of the house by now, and Doc explained the circumstances to the State police. Then, detailing Renny to watch Topping, Doc with Monk and Ham stood on the headland at the mouth of the cove and gazed over Long Island Sound. The tug and barge were lost to sight in an early morning fog.

Deciding to question Topping more closely, they could not find him. Then they discovered Renny in a clump of bushes, unconscious. Stanley Watchford Topping had taken Renny unawares, clubbed him down with a rock and escaped.

Doc suggested they return to their headquarters. On the way, he telephoned the coast guard, asking about the tramp steamer, *Tropic Seas*, which had last been seen heading outward into the Atlantic. The vessel had not been located. Fog conditions on the Atlantic were even worse than on the Sound.

Developments at this point seemed very much at a standstill. Monk and Ham even resumed their argument as to why sailors’ pants were tailored with oversize bottoms.

The argument was going strong, when Doc Savage, Renny, Monk and Ham entered their eighty-sixth floor headquarters in midtown Manhattan.

Swinging down the corridor toward the anteroom door, Ham insisted, “The cut of the pants is nothing but a style.”

“Nuts,” Monk declared. “Now, take them dude pants you got on there. If a wave washed over your feet and they got wet around the bottoms, how’d you get ’em off? You’d have a heck of a time. There, that proves my point.”

The anteroom door opened when Doc Savage drew near it. This phenomenon, mystifying to the unadvised, was simply explained. Concealed in the floor in front of the door was a sensitive electroscope connected to a relay, which, in turn, actuated the mechanism that opened the door. Doc wore a plaque of radio-active metal in a shoe heel, and this affected the electroscope, putting the apparatus in operation.

They entered the office.

The argument resumed.

“You’re pig-headed,” Monk told Ham.

“You baboon,” Ham gritted at Monk. “Arguing with you is about as hopeless as _____”

A sudden leap on Monk’s part caused Ham to break off. Monk was headed for the inlaid table. On this stood an article which had not been there when they were here before. It resembled an oversize traveling bag of very stiff black leather, with a ventilating screen at each end. Monk lifted the case, and a series of grunts came from it.

“Habeas Corpus,” Monk chuckled.

Ham exhibited symptoms of apoplexy, and yelled, “How’d that get here?”

“My secretary must have brought it up,” Monk grinned, and opened the carrying case.

Habeas Corpus came out. Habeas was Monk’s pet pig, and as homely a specimen of the porcine family as Monk was of the human race. The pig had unnaturally long legs, ears like sails, a snout built for inquisitiveness, and a body of no consequence.

Ham stalked indignantly to the window and looked out. Habeas, he had repeatedly maintained, was the one thing in the world he could not tolerate.

Monk began, “Sailors’ pants——”

“Shut up!” Ham screamed.

Ham seemed to have reached the end of his rope. He spun, lifted his fist, took a step toward Monk. Only one step; then something strange happened. Ham’s mouth opened very wide. A queer expression overspread his face. His knees hinged, and he sat down on the floor.

“Poisoned by his own spleen,” Monk said unkindly thinking it was some kind of an act.

Ham sank flat on his face. An instant later, Renny fell. He went down like a felled tree.

“Blazes!” Monk gasped. Then he, too, began to look strange.

Doc Savage moved. With all of the tremendous speed of which his great trained sinews were capable, he flashed across the anteroom, into the library, on to the laboratory. There was almost an incredible frenzy in his movements. He reached a chemical case in the laboratory.

The case held bottles. Labels on these bore the strange symbols with which chemicals and chemical formulæ are designated. Doc got out three bottles, drank from each in succession, holding the contents of all in his mouth, mixing them there, then swallowing.

The bronze man ran back into the reception room. There was still that strange frenzied speed in his movements.

Ham, Monk, Renny—all three were sprawled out on the floor. The pig, Habeas, was also down and not moving. Doc Savage stood, looked at them.

The bronze man's trilling sound, eerie and fantastic to a greater degree than usual, filled all the anteroom, the library and the laboratory beyond. Its loudness was greater than usual, and it was a bit steadier, at first, but it began to subside very slowly, as if its source were being throttled, stifled.

And, as his trilling subsided, so did the figure of the giant bronze man. The bend of his knees, hardly perceptible at first, increased, and he folded, finally to topple forward, braced with his hands on the floor, and remain there for a time. By slow jerks, he let himself down.

He seemed to relax completely.

Chapter 9

PASSENGERS FOR NASSAU

Doc Savage wore nothing above the waist. His muscles, even in repose, were like cables, bundled wire, over which the fine-textured bronze of skin had been painted.

Doc sat in a chair. A porthole behind him was open, and through this came salty sea breeze and the noise of water rushing past. In the room was a washstand, a built-in wardrobe, a rather worn rug, two life preservers in a rack, and a notice on the door telling where the lifeboat stations for the cabin were to be found. There was also a bed.

On the bed lay Renny, Ham, Monk and the pig, Habeas Corpus. There was no sound for many minutes. Doc Savage did not move. A ship's clock struck six bells. Two women passed in the corridor outside, chattering.

"We reach Nassau sometime late tonight," one of the women said.

Then they walked on.

Ham stirred a little on the bed, lifting an arm and letting it fall on Monk. Monk brushed at the hand, as if it had been an annoying insect. Renny, without stirring in the slightest, emitted a rumbling sound.

Doc Savage got up from the chair, went to the washstand, took a drinking glass out of its rack and drew water. He dashed a glass of water, very hard, into the face of each man. He threw one on Habeas Corpus. The pig promptly got up, jumped off the bed and scrambled under it.

Monk sat up slowly, keeping his eyes shut until he was in a sitting position. Then he opened his eyes, looked at Doc, looked at the cabin, at the rest of the men. He blinked a number of times. Then, with a perfectly sober face, he reached over and shook Ham.

"Hey, shyster," he mumbled thickly; "why are sailors' pants big at the bottoms?"

Ham opened his eyes after a bit, focused them with difficulty and looked at Monk, much as if he had just discovered his own personal devil. He said nothing. Renny rumbled again, rolled over on Ham, and the dapper lawyer set up a vague bleating.

It was fifteen minutes before they had entirely awakened. Monk ranged small eyes over the cabin once more.

"What I want to know," he mumbled, "is where are we? How'd we get here? And what're we doin' here?"

"You omitted an important question," Doc Savage told him, without expression.

"What?" Monk demanded.

"The day of the week," Doc replied.

"It was Saturday morning when we passed out," Monk grunted. "I guess this is Saturday afternoon."

"Thursday," Doc Savage said.

"Huh?" Monk squinted. "You wouldn't fool a guy?"

“This is Thursday,” Doc Savage repeated. “You have been out of the picture for the better part of five days.”

Had they awakened to the discovery that they had undergone transmigration to some unexpected form of afterlife, they could not have been a great deal more surprised. Ham sprang off the bed, ran to the door, tried it and found it locked. Monk merely sat on the bed and looked bewildered. Renny, however, lumbered to the porthole and managed to jam his head out.

“Water,” he said, taking a look around. “Nothing but ocean.”

“We have a starboard cabin,” Doc Savage told him. “We should be able to pick out Great Isaac before long.”

Renny frowned. “Who’s ‘Great Isaac’?”

“An island on which stands a lighthouse,” Doc Savage explained. “It is situated on the edge of the deep-channel steamer lane to Nassau.”

“Nassau?” Renny looked bewildered.

“The main port of New Providence, one of the more northerly islands of the Caribbean Sea,” the bronze man elaborated. “The ship is scheduled to reach there sometime tonight, judging from the conversation of two lady passengers, who went down the corridor a short time ago.”

Monk got down on his hands and knees on the floor, put a long furry arm under the bed and brought out Habeas Corpus. Habeas seemed pretty much disgusted by the whole business. His usual agility was missing, but he had enough life to reassure Monk.

Monk looked intently at Doc Savage.

“What happened to us?” he demanded.

“It is a queer story,” Doc informed him.

Monk snorted. “The whole thing has been queer, right from the minute that guy staggered into our office, about ready to die. And it wound up with the mystery talk Stanley Watchford Topping gave about that brass case.”

“What is the last thing you remember?” Doc queried.

“Something queer happening in the office,” Monk replied. “I went to sleep, it seemed like.”

“That was caused by a new type of anæsthetic, now coming into use in hospitals,” Doc told him. “It would not be hard to forge credentials and purchase it from chemical concerns. That, possibly, explains how the girl got it.”

“Girl?” Monk sprang off the bed. “Do you mean that Diamond Eve Post dame _____?”

“Diamond Eve Post did it,” Doc informed him, “probably by forcing the gas, which is nearly odorless, under the door sill. She then moved us all aboard this steamer, which is a small combination-passenger-and-freight vessel, making a regular round of the Caribbean islands.”

“She brought—us—aboard?” Monk said jerkily, as if the thing were too preposterous to believe.

“She managed it with great secrecy,” Doc advised. “We were put in large trunks, which were sent to this cabin, then removed after we were taken out. It is doubtful if any one but Diamond Eve Post knows we are aboard.”

“What’s her reason for doing this?” Monk demanded.

“That is a mystery,” the bronze man admitted.

Monk squinted at Doc. “How do you know what happened? Have you talked to the girl?”

“No,” Doc said. “She probably thinks we are still senseless.”

“Then how did you learn so much?” persisted the homely chemist.

“An antidote for the anæsthetic,” Doc Savage told him. “It was my fortune to recognize the nature of the stuff, when Ham went down, and there was time to get into the laboratory and mix stuff which would counteract its effect.”

“Then you haven’t been unconscious?” Monk grunted the query.

“At no time,” Doc told him.

Monk shook his head slowly, as if he found Doc’s motive very difficult of comprehension. After he had given the matter thought for a moment, he queried, “But why play possum? Why not just grab her?”

“She is a very difficult young woman to handle, as you may have noticed,” Doc Savage said slowly, a bit dryly. “She brought us aboard this boat for some specific purpose. The most simple and effective method seemed to be to trail along and ascertain what resulted.”

“Is Diamond Eve Post aboard?” Monk asked, with a perceptibly quickened interest.

Doc Savage nodded. “She is.”

Monk’s grin draped his homely face from ear to ear.

“Boy, it’s gonna be swell to put a fast one over on her,” he chuckled. “She sticks in my hair like chewing gum!”

After that, Monk appeared to recall something. He got down on all fours again, looked under the bed, grunted, and with his long arms raked out a number of metal boxes. These were numbered and equipped with carrying straps. He scowled at the boxes.

“This is the equipment we usually take along when we go on a job,” he murmured. “How’d it get here?”

“The girl,” Doc said.

“But how’d she know——”

“The equipment was all in one cabinet for convenience, you recall,” Doc reminded him. “She did not need to be a scientist to tell what it was. So she just brought it along.”

Monk demanded, “And why would she do that?”

“*Ps-s-st!*” Ham hissed. “Some one is coming!”

They listened. The water slopping outside the boat made noises like the sighing of a big green beast. Footsteps in the corridor were firm and bold, and they came up with

every indication that the one who made them was bound along the corridor. But they stopped quite unexpectedly outside the door.

A faint clicking gave the impression at first, that a key was being inserted in the lock; but the clicking persisted. It was no key. Some one was trying to pick the lock.

Doc Savage gestured at the bed. He made his meaning clear. They were all to play unconscious again.

It was, in truth, a relief to spread themselves out on the mattress once more. With the exception of Doc, they felt aftereffects of what they had gone through—dizziness and some nausea.

They got themselves positioned, without noise, before the door opened, and Doc Savage was with them. He had an arm carelessly across his eyes, so that he could watch without his open eyes being observed.

The door opened boldly. Stanley Watchford Topping came in. He entered with shoulders back, step firm, but he did not quite keep fear and uncertainty off his face. Obviously, he had forced himself to enter in this manner, in hopes of making it seem he was not skulking.

He shed his bold attitude the instant he saw the figures on the bed. He looked about as scared as a man could look, whirled, wrenched the door open and got half through it. Then it dawned on him that the figures on the bed had not moved.

He hesitated for some moments, and then reentered gingerly. His nose twitched rapidly, rabbit fashion. He trembled. He even wrung his hands.

“That terrible girl!” he gasped, distinctly enough that all the men feigning senselessness heard him. “That terrible girl!”

He peered at the men on the bed, but did not approach them.

“That girl,” he gulped. “She has killed them!”

Then, unexpectedly, the door opened behind him. The panel swung back with swift violence.

Captain Flamingo and three of his men came in, taking guns out of their pockets.

Doc Savage watched the entire action from under his arm, eyelids pinched to the thinnest slit possible that would still permit vision. The bronze man did not move.

Stanley Watchford Topping had plainly not expected the new arrivals. He recoiled wildly, got his back against one wall of the cabin and leaned there, the wall supporting him. He said no word.

Captain Flamingo stared at the forms on the bed.

“What’s wrong with them?” he demanded. Then, without waiting for any one to answer, he swung over, grabbed Renny and shook him violently. Renny was an actor. He managed to seem asleep.

“Well varnish my topmasts,” Captain Flamingo muttered, puzzled. “They’ve got somethin’ wrong with ’em!”

“It’s the work of that girl,” said one of his men.

“She’s slicker than pot lead,” muttered Captain Flamingo. “She’s had ’em in here since we sailed from New York, and we never got wise. We never even knowed she

was aboard, til we see her cruisin' into the dinin' room on the sly."

"Trailin' her, until we seen her come in here, was a lucky move for us," added a man behind him.

Captain Flamingo now exhibited every appearance of indulging in deep thought. He adjusted his bright necktie, shifted his gaudy hat on his head, and pulled out his lower lip and let it snap back against his teeth several times. Then he smacked the palms of his hands together.

"Fog's gone," he chuckled. "I see what the girl's game was."

"What?" demanded one of those with him.

"She trailed us and learned we come aboard with her stuff," said Captain Flamingo. "She guessed the kind of a course we planned sailin'. So she brought the bronze guy and the others aboard, figurin' she'd turn him loose on us."

"She sure did fix us up with a lee shore," the other agreed.

Captain Flamingo produced an enormous sailors' clasp knife and said in an utterly cold voice, "Here's where we sink our Doc Savage troubles permanent."

He stepped toward the bed. The men who had entered the room with him also produced knives. Stanley Watchford Topping had not moved or spoken.

Doc Savage came off the bed. The abruptness with which he did this just about defied the eye. One instant he was on the bed, the next he was erect on the floor.

Monk, Ham, Renny were on their feet a fraction of a moment later. They separated, confronting the foes. Prospects for a very bloody and terrific struggle looked excellent.

The scrap failed quite to jell. This was due to an interruption from a totally unexpected source.

The voice of Diamond Eve Post said casually, "It is very lucky indeed that this is a repeating shotgun."

A picture, so insignificant that no one had noticed it before, was now canted away from one stateroom wall—shoved aside by what was unmistakably the barrel of a repeating shotgun, held by some one in the adjoining cabin.

A scream came from Stanley Watchford Topping, a scream so shrill that it might have been emitted by a woman. He dived for the door, tore it open and popped out.

Whether it was because Topping's action unnerved them, or whether cold reason told them that flight was the best course, there was no indication. But Captain Flamingo and his followers fled, not even attempting to use their knives. The last one through the door got it shut before Doc Savage reached it.

Doc seized the knob. One, maybe more, of the fugitives was holding it on the other side. Doc wrenched. The screw which held the inner knob on its shaft must have been defective. The knob came off.

The man on the other side jerked the shaft out of its hole. The fellow's grunt of delight at this development was plainly audible. He could be heard running away with Captain Flamingo and the others.

The door was not locked, but it might as well have been, for the latch held it securely. Doc tried to insert a finger in the hole where the knob shaft had been, but there was not sufficient purchase to turn the mechanism. He hit the panel with his shoulder. In movies and fiction, doors are smashed quite easily. In practice, it is different, especially with a door as strong as this one.

Doc hit it at least half a dozen times. Then the lock ripped out and he was in the corridor. He looked forward, aft. The fugitives were not in sight. It had sounded as if they had run toward the stern. Doc moved in that direction.

The adjacent stateroom door opened. The barrel of a shotgun came out, then Diamond Eve Post.

The young woman tucked the shotgun under an arm and gave Doc Savage a most radiant smile.

“They’ve gotten away,” she said. “It would not be the healthiest thing in the world to pursue them.”

“Why not?” Doc asked, quietly.

“Captain Flamingo has not less than thirty men aboard,” the young woman announced.

“Thirty?” Doc Savage eyed her steadily.

Monk and the others had by now crowded out into the corridor. They did not look especially enthusiastic, being still weak from the long confinement, which, judging from the way their stomachs felt, had been without food.

“We will go back in the stateroom,” Doc Savage told the young woman, “and ask you questions.”

“You can ask them,” she said. “It won’t do you any good.”

“You are still not going to talk?” Doc queried.

“Still.” She nodded vehemently.

They filed back into the stateroom, and Doc’s three men, registering weakness, sat down—two of them on the bed, one of them on the chair.

The girl frowned at Doc Savage. “You’re entirely too wide awake. How come?”

In a tone which contained neither pride nor a sense of triumph, Doc Savage explained that he had been at no time unconscious as had the others.

The young woman looked somewhat stunned, and gasped, “But I have frequently observed you through that hole behind the picture, and never suspected a thing.”

“The hole was not hard to find,” Doc Savage assured her. “You could usually be heard entering your cabin.”

A sharp report reached their ears. The sound had an unusual quality. It was as if some one had hit the deck outside a single blow with a hammer.

“A shot!” Monk squeaked. “Somewhere down in the hold!”

“Captain Flamingo,” Diamond Eve Post wailed. “He’s going into action now!”

It was the first time they had heard genuine fear in her voice.

Chapter 10

PIRACY

Doc Savage was suddenly in motion. He grasped the girl's arm, and his trained voice put a question with an imperative crash.

"What is Captain Flamingo attempting?" he demanded.

"He wants this boat," said the girl.

"Robbery?" Doc demanded.

"No." She shook her head. "We put the schooner he was using out of commission. He has to have a boat. So he's seizing this one."

Doc Savage released her arm, whipped to the door, opened it and lunged into the corridor. She followed him. Monk, Ham and Renny, looking for once as if they would not relish a fight, staggered after them.

"Your equipment?" the girl snapped at Doc Savage. "In the stateroom."

"We may need it," Doc agreed.

They went back, gathered up the metal cases which enclosed their equipment, carried them along.

"I have concentrated food in my cabin," the girl said. "I'll get some of it."

She bobbed into her stateroom, which differed very little from the one occupied by Doc Savage and his men, and came out a moment later bearing a common weekend case of leather.

Monk noted the diminutive size of the case, and sniffed, "Huh? I could eat more than that can hold, right now."

"Not of the stuff that's in here," she assured him. "You put a pill of it in a kettle of water, and you've got beef broth."

Doc Savage interrupted with, "We will head for the most important spot on the ship."

"Where's that?" Monk demanded.

"The radio room," Doc retorted.

"I think it's topside somewhere," said the girl. "Near the bow——"

"Nearer the stern," Doc corrected her. "This is a one-design class of steamer. Its name is *Caribbenda*, is it not?"

They were running along a narrow corridor, bordered with handrails for use in a seaway. A stewardess stood gaping at them, then stepped hastily out of their path.

"How did you know what boat this was?" the girl demanded.

"Overheard the name several times in the last few days," Doc explained.

"Oh!" She smiled thinly. "I was beginning to think you were clairvoyant or something."

They clattered up a companionway. Somewhere, a man began to scream. The voice seemed to come from above, but it had an unnatural, far-away quality. It was, however, an absolutely horror-stricken voice.

They came out on deck. It was the topmost deck and presented the usual jumble of ventilators, funnels, masts, hatches, stays, deck chairs, and shuffleboard courts.

The radio shack was just that—a shack aft which looked as if it had been put there as an afterthought.

A man was standing in front of the open door of the radio shack. He held a revolver. Evidently, he was not a man who believed in taking chances, because the instant he saw Doc Savage, he took a flying leap over the rail toward the lower deck, disappearing from view.

Doc Savage reached the radio shack. One glance inside was enough. The operator on duty was unconscious on the floor. It was common for ships of this size to carry only two transmitting sets—one short-wave, one long-wave. A fire-ax had been used to demolish both of these.

The homely Monk had dropped his equipment case, picked up a deck chair, and run to the railing over which the man with the revolver had leaped. It was quite a drop to the lower deck, but the fellow had managed it and was running away. Monk threw the chair at him and did a very good job of it. The fugitive went down.

The fellow was not unconscious, however, only upset; and he did not lose his gun. After he stopped rolling, he did not try to get up, but lay there and began shooting at Monk. The homely chemist yanked himself backward.

The steamer's whistle started moaning, continued to moan steadily. It was an extremely loud whistle. It made conversation, even at a screaming pitch, impossible at more than the shortest distances.

Doc Savage and his aids, after bellowing ineffectually at each other a few times, resorted to sign talk on their fingers, deaf-and-dumb fashion. They had practiced this in the past until they were quite skillful.

“The radio apparatus is out of commission,” Monk stated on his fingers.

“Yes,” Doc Savage agreed in the same fashion. “We will try to keep them out of the engine room.”

They ran forward, headed for the companionway which would give admittance to the engine room. They passed a ventilator from which came various, unnatural sounds. Doc stopped the group.

“Listen,” he signaled on his fingers, and pointed at the ventilator.

Out of the flaring mouth of the horn-like airshaft came the stifled moaning of a man. There was a shot, a shout; and after a moment, silence.

Captain Flamingo's voice, coming out of the ventilator, said, “That puts us in charge of the engine room. We don't give a hoot about the rest of the vessel. And the radio is out of commission.”

Doc Savage got the attention of his men centered on his bronze fingers.

“This ventilator leads to the engine room,” he signaled. “Captain Flamingo seems to have taken over, down there.”

A gun banged from the bridge. One of Captain Flamingo’s men was shooting at them. It was a high-powered rifle, and the bullet made a deep perforation in the by no means thin metal of the ventilator.

Doc Savage and the other drifted hastily to cover. They still had their equipment cases. They opened these, took an inventory of the contents.

“Holy cow!” Renny’s big rumble penetrated even through the din of the whistle, which still blew. “No machine pistols.”

The girl shrieked, “I did the best I could! I couldn’t find them!”

Monk was pawing over his own share of the paraphernalia.

“No gas!” he shouted. “No masks, even if we did have gas! Say, this is gonna be a tough business!”

Diamond Eve Post added to the general cheer by managing to convey at the top of her voice a bit of information.

“Captain Flamingo has all kinds of weapons!” she advised. “He had a chance to bring everything that he would need!”

There were shots, now, in other parts of the ship. There was also a good deal of shrieking on the part of women passengers, and hoarse bawlings by men.

Unexpectedly, Doc Savage left the others and crawled forward to the radio shack. He managed to get inside. When he came out, he was carrying a bundle of yellow sheets which were fastened to a clip-board.

“What’s that?” Monk asked.

“Radiograms; sent and received since the ship left New York,” Doc told him.

Monk wanted to ask questions, the expression on his homely face plainly showed, but the inquiries were side-tracked by a sudden burst of shouting from below deck. Brittle voices were giving orders. Captain Flamingo’s bellowing tone was among them.

The passengers, it seemed, were being herded under the after deck.

Monk drew to one side, seeking the lee of a large skylight hatch. The thing had the size of a small house. It was almost as high as a man’s head. Monk was carrying a metal case. Opening this, he began to pore over the contents.

Doc Savage joined Monk. The box the homely chemist was examining contained one of the remarkable little portable chemical laboratories of which Monk was so proud. Monk had prepared several of these and kept them in various boxes, convenient for emergencies. The girl had evidently found this one, and included it with the other equipment.

Together, Doc and Monk went over the bottled contents.

“What can we rig up outa this, Doc?” Monk asked.

Monk, despite the fact that he was conceded to be one of the nation’s leading industrial chemists, was not hesitant in conceding that seeking Doc Savage’s help

would be a wise move. Monk had a deep suspicion that Doc knew the most chemistry of the two of them.

“We can try one thing, at least,” Doc Savage told him.

The bronze man now went to work. In three trays he mixed three different groups of chemicals. The trays were of an ingenious collapsible type, which were folded perfectly flat. He selected a number of small glass phials. These were of progressive sizes so that they nested, one within the other, for compact carrying. There were corks to fit each.

He filled the phials, drawing from each tray in about equal proportions. He promptly corked each one tightly, then shook it. It could be noted that during this operation he was very careful to hold his breath. When he did find it necessary to breathe, the bronze man crawled a number of feet distant, where he could get the fresh, sharp sea breeze from the bow.

“They’ll be able to see it,” Monk said, when the work was done. “It takes special equipment to make the stuff so that it is perfectly colorless. It’ll smell a little, too.”

“We will try to get around that problem,” Doc told him.

They could, they were discovering, move around with a surprising degree of freedom on the top deck. It seemed that Captain Flamingo’s men, occupied with taking over the rest of ship, were busy with their own devices for the time being. No doubt there were plenty of guards stationed in the companionways, however.

Doc Savage now crawled to a large wooden box, which had a hinged top. Boxes like this were distributed along each side of the deck. They held fire hose.

The hose was of cotton-and-rubber construction. Doc Savage made a bundle of it, and over this he sprinkled a highly inflammable chemical taken from Monk’s portable laboratory. Then he crawled to the base of a large ventilator, dragging the bundle, then applied a match to the hose. It began to burn with a blue, sizzling violence. Doc Savage hurriedly disengaged the grating which covered the mouth of the ventilator, and heaved the flaming bundle through.

“That ventilator is part of the system which supplies the saloon and cabins with fresh air,” he said. “The smoke will be distributed through the major part of the ship.”

“They’ll find the burning hose, and put it out,” said the girl, who had been watching curiously.

“Of course,” Doc agreed. “But not before it makes some smoke.”

They now waited, expectant ears cocked in the direction of the ventilator. Perhaps five minutes passed. Shouts began to go up.

“Fire!” bawled somebody, nervously.

Looking astern, and taking a chance and peering down the companionway, they could see smoke. The stuff was strong enough to set a number of persons coughing.

Monk began to chortle gleefully. “The smoke’ll keep ’em from smellin’ or seein’ our stuff!”

Doc Savage now worked forward. He carried with him the glass phials which he had filled with the chemical mixture. As he passed each ventilator, he hurled one of the

small bottles into the mouth of it—hurled it with sufficient violence that it broke. For good measure, he lobbed two at the bridge and then threw two entirely over it, so that they broke on the forward deck. Then he crawled back to join the others.

“Now we will watch them and see what happens,” he said.

Diamond Eve Post seized his arm, demanded, “What was that stuff in the bottles?”

“A liquid which will vaporize into a gas that produces unconsciousness when breathed,” Doc Savage told her. “It has the advantage of being effective at very low concentration.”

The wind—they noticed its direction carefully from the smoke drift from the funnels—was coming off the starboard bow. Accordingly, they positioned themselves as near the starboard rail as they safely could.

“Can’t they escape the gas with masks?” Diamond Eve Post asked, anxiously.

“They will not have time,” Doc Savage told her. “They will not discover the presence of the stuff in time, due to the smoke.”

“Want to make a bet?” asked the young woman.

“What?” the bronze man queried.

“You won’t get to first base with this gas gag,” she announced.

Monk, overhearing, snorted, “Huh, you don’t know this gas.”

“You have to breathe it before it works, is that right?” asked the young woman.

“That’s the general idea,” Monk told her.

“All right,” she said. “It won’t work. Watch and see.”

It might have been noticed that, during the next few moments, Doc Savage watched the young woman curiously, as if endeavoring to read her mind. What she had just said had, undoubtedly, interested him.

Meaningful sounds began to come up from the lower deck. Men shouted. There seemed to be a small panic.

“They’re dying!” a woman screamed. “They’re falling over dead!”

Monk grunted. “Too bad to scare her, of course, but they’re only fallin’ over unconscious.”

The panic noises began to subside. Fewer and fewer persons cried out. Within the course of the next several minutes, the ship acquired the quietness of a tomb.

Doc Savage said, “We might as well go down, now.”

Diamond Eve Post caught his arm nervously.

“Don’t!” she gasped.

Doc Savage studied her. “But the gas——”

“Oh, darn it,” she snapped. “Captain Flamingo won’t be taken in by this. I’m not going to tell you what, but I know he took them; all of his men took them before they started out to capture the ship.”

“Would you mind making yourself clear?” Doc Savage requested.

She gave him a very wide-eyed look.

“Do you remember, back in the shipyard in New York, when Captain Flamingo and two of his men went under the water and did not come up?” she demanded.

“That incident is not very easy to forget,” Doc told her. “It certainly seemed they were drowned. Yet they were not.”

“All right,” said the girl. “I’m not going to tell you any more, except this: Be careful when you go below.”

Doc Savage watched her steadily for some moments.

“We are going to lose patience with you,” he said. “Chivalry, you know, will extend only so far. There are ways of making even a young woman talk.”

“Boo,” she said, carelessly. “Am I scared?”

Doc Savage vouchsafed nothing more, but worked his way aft toward the companionway. Monk, Ham, and Renny trailed him. There was no sound from below.

“She’s sure a sassy gal,” Renny rumbled resentfully. “A good old-fashioned spanking would help her a lot.”

The ship now swung slightly, as if there were no hand at the wheel. The sun made shifting shadows that caused them to note the position of the solar orb. It was almost on the horizon; there would be darkness shortly.

Doc Savage halted his little cavalcade.

“The girl seemed very sure of herself,” the bronze man said, quietly. “It might be advisable for us to use a great deal of caution.”

The bronze man now changed his course and reached a smaller skylight. Being familiar with the layout of a small steamer such as this, he knew the skylight admitted to a diminutive writing room, located aft. The skylight could be opened from the outside—and without much noise, as trial proved. There was sufficient space for the bronze man to crawl through. He did so.

The drop to the floor of the writing room he managed without undue noise. He listened. No sound. He glided to a porthole which gave a view of the after deck.

Passengers and the regular crew of the steamer had been herded to the after deck before the gas struck them. They were now sprawled in such positions as they had chanced to drop. There did not seem to be a conscious individual among them.

Doc Savage moved to the door. He stepped through it into the gory red sunlight of the tropical dusk. Instantly, half a dozen guns crashed.

Chapter 11

HIDDEN CARGO

It is commonly recognized that the human eye requires a little time, brief though the interval may be, to recognize movement. Registration of an optical image is not instantaneous process. If it were not for this, many things would not be possible, among them the ordinary motion picture.

Doc Savage, through long, intense training, could possibly perceive a thing more quickly than the average person; but that was not what saved him now. He had spent a great deal of time acquiring the ability to move more quickly than the other man.

Captain Flamingo and his men were concealed about the deck. They had guns. It was necessary to aim the weapons after they saw Doc Savage. In the fraction of a second required for that, Doc flashed back out the door.

Roar of the shots was ear-splitting after the prolonged quiet. Chopping, rending, making ugly noises, the bullets did a great deal of damage to the door casing and the writing room walls.

Doc Savage wasted no time. The girl had been right. He flashed to position under the skylight, leaped, caught the edge. Monk and Renny, hanging their arms down, furnished welcome assistance to Doc in getting back on the top deck. They banged the skylight shut.

“Holy cow!” Renny rumbled. “The gas didn’t work!”

“It was effective on the passengers,” Doc replied. “But our young lady friend was correct about it not touching Captain Flamingo and his men.”

Monk scowled. “They must have had masks.”

“There were no masks in sight,” Doc assured him. “Had they been wearing them, they would undoubtedly still have had them on.”

Monk growled, “That’s what I call dang funny.”

Captain Flamingo’s shouting voice interrupted them. The leader of their foes was below somewhere.

“Come down offa there!” Captain Flamingo bellowed. “One at a time! Have your hands up!”

With his lips, Monk managed to make a very loud, disrespectful sound known as the “Bronx cheer.”

“Come up and get us!” the homely chemist invited at the top of his voice.

“Not us!” Captain Flamingo bellowed. “My man you caught outside the radio shack saw you carryin’ a bunch of metal boxes! I know all about them gadgets you swabs like to fight with!”

Renny used an enormous hand to wipe imaginary perspiration off his long, puritanical face.

“Nice to have a reputation,” he rumbled softly, careful that his words would not carry to the enemy.

“They been afraid of us all along.” Monk grunted. “That’s why they haven’t given us a rush.”

Diamond Eve Post crawled over and joined them. The light had failed perceptibly, the sun having dropped entirely from sight in the west. There was illumination enough, however, to show the “I-told-you-so” expression on the young woman’s attractive features.

“Who was wrong about the gas?” she asked.

If inquisitive looks could have penetrated, the young woman’s mind would promptly have been probed to its deepest recesses, and all its secrets laid bare. As it was, all they saw was her pretty countenance wearing a derisive look. Monk evidently decided on the spur of the moment to try his hand at verbal persuasion. He became the dignified chemist.

“We are in a very dangerous spot here, Miss Post,” he said, levelly. “You are in as much danger as ourselves. Don’t you think it is the better part of common sense and safety to tell us what you know?”

“Phooey,” said the young woman. “So now you try logic on me.”

“I am only talking common sense,” Monk assured her. “Those men are trying to kill all of us. We have no idea of what they are after, what is behind all of this, let alone why that gas didn’t get them.”

“Listen,” said Diamond Eve Post. “The less you know, the better I like it. We’re all—Captain Flamingo, Stanley Watchford Topping, myself, everybody—after *Taz*. You don’t know what *Taz* is. Swell!”

“The course you’re taking is not logical,” Monk told her.

“Oh, yes, it is,” she said. “I am after *Taz*. Rightfully, *Taz* belongs to me. I haven’t the slightest doubt but that you would think differently. You would insist *Taz* belongs to the whole world. It’s big like that, see? You and I are working together nicely, because Captain Flamingo is after both of us. After that—it’s me for me.”

Her long speech made Monk mad.

“For two cents, I’d put you across my knee,” he growled.

“I love you when you get ranty,” she told Monk.

Monk looked so indignant that Ham choked on suppressed mirth.

Captain Flamingo began howling at them from below.

“Doc Savage!” he roared.

“What is it?” the bronze man demanded.

“Take a look at the fore deck,” Captain Flamingo suggested. “You’ve got our word that we won’t take a shot at your bowsprit.”

Doc Savage moved at once.

Monk gulped a wild warning. “You can’t trust that sailor talkin’ mug, Doc.”

“It will not be necessary to trust him,” Doc Savage replied.

From within his clothing, Doc Savage produced his little telescopic device with interchangeable mirrors and lenses, which could become, alternately, periscope, telescope, and microscope. The girl had not removed this from his clothing during the period she had thought him unconscious—the period when she had brought Doc and his three aids aboard the steamer. Fitting the periscope mirrors on the device, Doc peered over the rail.

Captain Flamingo was not in sight. Several of his men were in view, however. They stood over various unconscious passengers. The guns in their hands were cocked and aimed at the motionless figures at their feet.

Captain Flamingo’s voice came from some point of concealment.

“You lookin’, bronze guy?” he demanded.

“Yes,” Doc Savage admitted.

“You can reach a lifeboat from the upper deck!” Captain Flamingo roared. “Great Stirrup Cay is a bit to the southeast. By bendin’ smart to your oars, you can reach ’er. You can get a trade schooner to Nassau, or wherever you want to go. It’s a good idea, don’t you think?”

“We might not like it,” Doc told him.

“Maybe you’d like seein’ these passengers shot better?” Captain Flamingo roared.

Doc Savage’s long silence, following the captain’s speech, might have meant that he was weighing the circumstances, the probabilities. They were not pleasant to contemplate, there being no reason to think Captain Flamingo did not mean what he was saying. The man had already committed piracy. For that, he stood an excellent chance of hanging, if he were caught.

“What about the passengers?” Doc asked.

“We’re puttin’ ’em over the side in boats,” Captain Flamingo replied.

Doc Savage told him, “You can hardly expect your word to be trusted on that.”

“You don’t have to trust me!” Captain Flamingo yelled. “I’m loadin’ ’em in the lifeboats and droppin’ ’em over the side right now. Ain’t much current here. They can see Great Stirrup lighthouse when they wake up. They’ll manage to row to it, all right. And if you don’t get off yourself, we’ll run down every lifeboat and sink it.”

That was final enough. There seemed to be nothing more to be said on the matter. It was a question of take it or leave it.

“We’ll get off in the lifeboats,” Doc Savage said. “But at the first sign of treachery on your part, there will be genuine trouble.”

“I’m sailin’ a clean course with ya, matey,” Captain Flamingo promised. “But there’s one thing I forgot.”

“What?” Doc queried.

“The girl—Diamond Eve Post,” said Captain Flamingo. “She stays.”

“No,” Doc said, promptly.

“Think it over,” the other suggested.

Doc Savage crawled back to his companions. The young woman laughed softly in the increasing darkness. Her voice held an unnatural quality.

“You really think a lot of me,” she said. “You’re all hepped up to get yourself killed for me.”

“Don’t be like that,” the homely Monk told her. “You’re scared stiff, and you know it.”

“Listen,” she said suddenly, “you fellows are swell!” And there was that in her voice which indicated she certainly did mean it.

The situation now confronting them held them silent. Captain Flamingo’s men were not moving about much. Lights were coming on. The ship’s clock struck.

“This is gonna be real tough, what I mean,” Monk mumbled. “We haven’t got any weapons worth——”

A rapid patter of footsteps silenced him. He failed to catch their significance immediately. When he did, he heaved up, roaring.

“The girl!” he howled. “She’s going——”

She was not only going. She was gone! Gone to join Captain Flamingo! They knew that when excited shouts came from below decks, followed by Captain Flamingo’s delighted howl.

Monk gulped, “Now, why’d she do that?”

“Try not to be such a sap,” Ham said, dryly. “That girl’s got what it takes. She saw we weren’t going to give her up. So she gave herself up. Just a smart gesture, my homely friend, toward saving our lives.”

Doc Savage went into action. Moving forward, he called down to Captain Flamingo, stating that he and his aids would leave in the lifeboat, providing the passengers were put off.

“It’s a go, matey!” whooped Captain Flamingo in high spirits.

Doc Savage went back to his men.

“Watch over each rail,” he directed. “Make sure the passengers are really put off into the lifeboats; and the crew, too. Then we will leave.”

Silent, their spirits very low, they separated to do as had been directed. It was quite dark now, with no lights on the upper deck, and they lost sight of Doc Savage. They naturally presumed the bronze man was somewhere near, likewise watching over the rail.

They were wrong. Doc Savage, a very few minutes after he had sent them to the rail, was not even on the upper deck. He had worked forward, silently removed the grating from a ventilator, and scrambled into the aperture. The ventilator was not so large but that he could lower himself by the pressure of his hands and feet against the sides. At the bottom was a hatch, obviously there to facilitate in cleaning.

Captain Flamingo put the passengers and crew of the little steamer over the side in lifeboats, as he had agreed. Monk, Ham and Renny watched closely to be sure of that. The operation was one that took some time.

A lighted lantern was placed in each lifeboat. This was no Samaritan gesture on Captain Flamingo's part, but a precaution to enable him to locate them for sinking, should Doc Savage not fulfill his end of the agreement.

"All set, Savage!" Captain Flamingo shouted, finally. "We're heavin' to, to make it easier for you to get off!"

Monk peered about in the gloom. He had not seen Doc Savage for some time, not since a moment after the girl had deserted them.

"Doc!" the homely chemist called.

"Over here," the bronze man said, quietly. "We will use this lifeboat."

The lifeboat was an all-metal one, with air tanks. Into it they loaded their metal equipment boxes. As a matter of precaution, they made sure the boat held the fresh water and emergency rations required by law. Renny thumped the metal sides of the boat with a big fist.

"Won't turn bullets," he said, disgustedly.

The davits had been maintained well. It was not difficult to swing the boat out.

"They could turn a searchlight on it and shoot us down," Ham said, uneasily.

"That thought occurred to me," Doc Savage told him, quietly. "A certain mixture of chemicals from Monk's little laboratory may help solve our problem."

The bronze man, it developed, had been delving into the homely chemist's pet piece of equipment. In his hands he held a copper can. This had not been amid Monk's paraphernalia, but was a container from a life preserver flare, which the bronze man had emptied and was using for his own purpose.

He extracted a match from a waterproof container, struck it, and applied the flame to the contents of the can. The stuff burned yellow, and also gave off a prodigious quantity of very black smoke. The ship was at a standstill. Doc heaved the can down into the water. The dense smoke which it gave off spread, mushroomed, climbed upward. It would effectually mask their descent.

"Down we go," Doc said.

"Wait, Doc," Monk squawked. He began to call, "Habeas, Habeas!"

"Leave the pig aboard," Doc Savage directed.

"No!" Monk roared, promptly.

It was the first instant that any of the others remembered, where Monk had openly revolted against a suggestion of the bronze man. But he was in rebellion now.

"Danged if I leave Habeas!" he shouted again.

Doc Savage did not discuss the matter. Argument with Monk, as Ham's experience had long proven, was an interminable process. Moreover, it was doubtful if the homely chemist could ever be convinced on the present point.

Doc simply gathered Monk up bodily and slammed him into the lifeboat, and before the apish fellow recovered, the lifeboat had descended nearly to the water.

Enraged profanity above and to the side, coupled with the ineffectual glow of searchlights, proved beyond a doubt that Captain Flamingo had really planned treachery. He had stationed riflemen along the rail. Guns began to crack; bullets screamed and smacked the lifeboat. The boat hit the water. They disconnected the falls, gave the little craft a violent shove. They did not row straight out, but diagonally.

“Anybody hit?” Doc asked.

“No,” Renny grumbled. “Holy cow, that smoke gag sure saved us!”

Monk got up from the floor of the boat, where he had been flung. He said no word, but seated himself and grabbed an oar.

The lifeboat was heavy, but they were not inexperienced oarsmen and they got the craft moving at a fair rate. They splashed as little water as possible. As another measure to keep the noise down, they scooped up water in their palms, kept the oar leathers—where they fitted into the oarlocks—wet, so they did not squeak as much.

They covered a full two hundred yards before searchlights from the steamer picked them up. Rifle lead promptly began to dig up water around them. Captain Flamingo, it was plain, did not intend for them to escape alive.

Doc Savage shipped his oar, and changed his position to the stern of the lifeboat. There was, it developed, a quantity remaining of the inflammable chemical mixture which gave off such intense smoke. Doc applied a match to it.

In the murk of the tropical night the smoke looked many times blacker than it could possibly have been. The breeze, fortunately, was not blowing in such a direction as to sweep the poll away and uncover them.

The rifle bullets began to go farther and farther amiss. The sharpshooters were baffled by the smoke.

The Caribbean, as oceans go, is a quiescent pond, although it does have its tantrums, during those few months of each year known as the hurricane season. It was quiet on this night, with few waves and little swell. The play of phosphorescence in the water was something of eerie, remarkable beauty.

“This is a fine mess,” Renny complained, audibly. “We got no idea of what this *Taz* thing is, or where it is.”

“It does look as if we had been pretty well shunted out of the affair,” Ham agreed.

Monk said a gloomy nothing. It was plain that he had Habeas Corpus on his mind.

They rowed briskly, keeping excellent time with their strokes. Phosphorescence, like writhing little monsters of fire, leaped back from each stroking oar blade, and a long snake of the stuff clung to their stern, only to shorten itself and disappear entirely when Doc Savage gave the word to cease rowing. They were now well out of rifle shot.

From within his clothing, the bronze man brought out a flat bundle of yellow papers. He began to go over these with his pocket flashlight.

“What are they?” Renny boomed, interested.

“The file of radio messages sent from the *Caribbenda*,” Doc told him.

The bronze man continued sorting through the missives. He removed one, then another, and another until he had an even half dozen. He showed them to his companions. The first was a message filed for sending:

SEAWORTHY
STEAMER TROPIC SEAS

PLANS GOING NICELY STOP THINK CAPTAIN FLAMINGO
CAN BE STOPPED STOP KEEP ME ADVISED YOUR
PROGRESS

POST

Doc's aids ran through the other messages. They were all copies of radiograms received. One read:

POST
STEAMSHIP CARIBBENDA
MAKING GOOD TIME TOWARD TAZ

SEAWORTHY

The other messages, received at later dates, were almost identical.

Renny looked up from the radiograms, stared, gave a violent start and emitted a roar.

"Look!" he howled. "Here comes the steamer! They're gonna run us down!"

Renny's excited cry was an exact statement of Captain Flamingo's intention. At the wheel of the *Caribbenda* stood Captain Flamingo himself. He was still attired in the civilian garb of bright rainbow hues which he affected. Cocked at a jaunty angle on his head, he wore a uniform cap purloined from one of the *Caribbenda* officers.

It was not the skipper's cap. Captain Flamingo had looked all the caps over and selected the one with the most gold braid and the jauntiest cut. This headgear, it chanced, had belonged to the purser.

"Man them searchlights," Captain Flamingo ordered, grimly.

Men flew to do his bidding. They were well-trained, this pirate crew.

"Bring the girl to the bridge," Captain Flamingo directed. "I want her to see this. She needs the wind taken out of her sails."

Shortly, two men appeared with Diamond Eve Post. The young woman's ruffled appearance was somewhat remindful of an angry cat. She had been working on her two captors, it was plain. They were plentifully scratched; their hair looked as if it had been thoroughly pulled; their clothing was torn; and each had the makings of an impressive black eye.

"Why don't you go ahead and shoot me?" she snapped at Captain Flamingo. "I know it's not because I'm a woman."

"No, that's not the reason," Captain Flamingo admitted, frankly. "We're makin' live ballast outa you. You might consider yourself a fact in an argument."

"Talk sense," the young woman suggested.

"Our good fellow sailor, Seaworthy," Captain Flamingo growled. "He'll reef down some when he finds you're aboard us. Seaworthy figures you're about the trimmest

little vessel afloat, my lady.”

Diamond Eve Post did not answer that. Instead, she moved suddenly and, before her captors could prevent, landed a vicious kick on Captain Flamingo’s kneecap. Flamingo hopped on one leg and howled in pain.

“We’re almost on Doc Savage’s lifeboat!” yelled a lookout forward.

Captain Flamingo, standing on one leg, gave his attention to the wheel. A searchlight had picked up Doc Savage’s little shell. The steamer was bearing down on it.

The bronze man could be observed in the stem, hurriedly igniting more of the chemical which gave off the heavy smoke.

“Won’t do him any good,” Captain Flamingo chuckled.

Diamond Eve Post, suddenly realizing what was contemplated, emitted strangled sounds of horror and began to struggle violently. This did her no good. She was dragged to the rail, forced to look in the direction of the menaced lifeboat.

Captain Flamingo went about the business at hand quite casually. He decreased the steamer’s speed, swung the helm expertly.

There was faint *thump* from the bow, as the lifeboat was run down.

Diamond Eve Post moaned. It was the first hint she had given that she was capable of deep emotion. She pinched her eyes shut tightly and swayed, and an instant later she was limp in a faint. Her two captors held onto her tightly, fearful that she might be pulling a trick.

Captain Flamingo was very busy. He slammed the engine room telegraph into reverse. The steamer trembled to a stop. A searchlight and gasoline lanterns were ablaze along the rail.

“Lifeboat’s on the starboard side!” a man yelled.

There was a surge for that rail. Light blazed downward. Gasoline lanterns were even tied to ropes and lowered.

The lifeboat was not more than two score feet from the steamer’s hull plates. It floated upright, buoyed by its air tanks. The oars floated near it.

Of Doc Savage and his aids, there was no sign.

“Break out bullets!” Captain Flamingo yelled. “They may be hidin’ under the opposite rail of that lifeboat!”

Rifle shots smashed in a scattering volley. So bright was the glare of searchlights that bullet holes, appearing in the sides of the lifeboat, could be distinctly seen.

“Stove the air tanks with your lead!” ordered Captain Flamingo. “Sink the bloomin’ thing!”

It required a few minutes to do this. In the meantime, searchlights were put to raking the sea. Their beams were intensely brilliant. They even picked up, far astern, the lifeboats carrying the late passengers and crew of the *Caribbenda*. But no trace of Doc Savage or his three companions was disclosed.

The lifeboat, air tanks riddled, went down amid a boiling of phosphorescence. Bubbles came up profusely.

Captain Flamingo strained his eyes overside until the bubbles ceased rising.

“We got three lifeboats left,” he said. “Get ’em into the drink. We gotta make sure this thing is furled up tight.”

The boats were lowered. Those who manned them carried gasoline lanterns. They spent all of an hour rowing back and forth. They even circled the *Caribbenda* several times, examining the water line to make sure that no one was accomplishing the seemingly impossible task of clinging there. By the time the boats were hauled back up in the davits, Captain Flamingo was satisfied.

“They’re in Davy Jones’s locker,” he said.

A man plucked at his arm anxiously, and mumbled, “Say, Cap’n, suppose they knew more about *Taz* than we figured. Suppose they could fix themselves up like we did back at that shipyard, when we went under water. And here, when their gas had no effect——”

“Not a chance,” Captain Flamingo snorted. “They’re drowned, that’s what.”

The man who had made the suggestion shrugged, and went away.

Captain Flamingo went to the bridge, set the engine room telegraph to full speed ahead.

“All canvas set for *Taz*,” he sang out, joyfully.

The ship had not yet gathered full headway, when two men approached the bridge. Between them, they carried Habeas Corpus, each man holding one of the shote’s enormous ears.

“We caught this insect below,” one of them advised. “What’ll we do? Feed him to a shark?”

Captain Flamingo adjusted his bright necktie in his brighter waistcoat, and deliberated. It took him several moments to decide on the disposition of the pig.

“We’ll make breakfast bacon out of him,” he said, “the day we reach *Taz*.”

Chapter 12

MYSTERY—AND HASH

Engines of the *Caribbenda* had stopped. The effect of this was as if something very necessary were missing, as if something had died.

“Sailors’ pants are big at the bottoms for another reason,” said a small voice that might have belonged to a child. “Now, you take a sailor when he’s on deck barefoot. Them big pants bottoms hangs down and keeps his feet warm.”

The speaker was Monk, and obviously he was continuing the interminable argument with Ham. His voice was somewhat startling, breaking out as it did in the eerie silence.

“Pipe down, baboon,” Ham advised, sourly. “They might hear you. The engines have stopped—so their vibrations won’t cover any sound we might make, as they have been doing.”

It was intensely dark around the voices. The air was bad, too, being breathable and not much more. Bilge odor was present, much too strongly. Bilge odor, especially that along the keel of a small steamer in the tropics, can acquire an unpredictable number of unpleasantnesses.

Big-voiced Renny tried to whisper, and the result was a series of noises about as soothing to the ear as steam escaping from a pipe.

“How long have we been in here?” seemed to be the substance of what Renny was trying to enquire.

“Seven days, sixteen hours, and thirty minutes,” Monk said.

“Pretty close,” Renny agreed, consulting a waterproof wrist watch. “Only it’s forty-eight minutes instead of thirty.”

Doc Savage’s voice sounded subdued, carrying no particular emotion.

“Something seems to be happening on deck,” he said.

They listened intently. It was a welcome diversion. For days they had crouched here, the spot where they were least likely to be found: literally, the bilge of the steamer. At times, especially when the little steamer had pitched considerably, during what must have been a blow, there was more than one occasion when they had been all but submerged.

Doc Savage alone had ventured forth during their period of hiding, and this he had done only twice; both times to ascertain if Diamond Eve Post was unharmed. The young woman, it seemed, had suffered no damage thus far, except to her dignity.

In the hiding place of the bronze man and his aids was the assortment of metal cases which contained their equipment. Getting the stuff aboard had not been easy, especially since it had been necessary to make Captain Flamingo think they had been drowned.

Deception of Captain Flamingo had been managed with the aid of what is commonly called “lungs.” The apparatus—a nasal clip and a mouthpiece through which oxygen was supplied from a tiny tank—was an adaptation of similar devices already on the market.

Doc Savage and his aids had been out of the lifeboat when the steamer ran it down. When the steamer stopped, they had managed to get under the hull without being discovered. They had worked aft on the starboard side, until they came to a rope which hung down in the water.

The rope was one Doc Savage had planted there for that specific purpose, before departing in the lifeboat. They had climbed it, pulled it up, concealed it, and sought their hiding place. This was done while Captain Flamingo was trying to find some signs of life around the lifeboat on the opposite side of the ship.

The days of doing nothing had followed.

“Doc,” called Monk’s small voice. “Why do you figure the engines have stopped?”

Monk had long ago gotten over his ire at having to leave Habeas Corpus behind, having realized that the shote would have been drowned in the course of the venture which Doc Savage contemplated.

Doc slopped aft in knee-deep, smelly water to join Monk. There was a small hatch, ill-fitting, through the cracks of which noises could be heard more distinctly.

The *Caribbenda* gave a lurch, and almost at once lost all headway. The movement was accompanied by a loud grinding and thumping from the starboard side. Men ran about on deck. They shouted. Heavy objects apparently being moved around. In the course of a few moments, the sound subsided.

Then silence fell. It was absolute, and was very puzzling.

With Doc Savage leading the way, the party worked their way cautiously to the deck. When their eyes, after the long days in the dark hold, became adjusted to the dazzling sunlight, they saw an astounding sight.

The *Caribbenda* was lying lashed alongside another vessel! It was the *Tropic Seas!*

For moments, Doc Savage and his aids remained where they were. They were listening for some indication of life on the two steamers. But they saw nothing, heard nothing.

A search of both ships produced no person. And, strangely, none of the lifeboats were missing, except those Captain Flamingo had used when putting the passengers off the *Caribbenda*.

No land was in sight. And in attempting to find their position from the ship’s charts, Doc Savage discovered them to be gone.

It was a complete mystery as to what had become of the news of the two ships.

Monk, looking over the *Caribbenda*, was overjoyed to find Habeas Corpus in a food locker near the galley. And on the galley stove he discovered a stew cooking over a slow fire.

Monk rushed on deck, swinging the pig as he always did, by one oversize ear, and yelling his happiness at the top of his small voice.

Big-fisted Renny turned a hungry eye on the porker.

“Brother, I could sure surround some food,” Renny rumbled. “That concentrated stuff we’ve been living on may furnish the necessary vitamins and things, but it sure don’t pad a man’s stomach comfortably.”

“Reckon they poisoned the grub, Doc?” Monk asked.

“Hardly likely,” Doc Savage replied. “It is almost certain they did not know we were aboard.”

Monk, in a state of high elation because he had found his pet pig, suddenly whirled and charged wildly toward the galley of the *Caribbenda*.

“That stew!” he shrilled over his shoulder. “I just thought of it!”

It was indicative of the hunger of the others that they reached the galley almost as quickly as did Monk. They found the homely chemist licking his lips and surveying the boiling pot of stew.

“Come here,” Monk said, and waved at the door into the dining saloon.

He showed them dishes on the table which had been used quite recently. Grease on the bacon platter had not yet hardened.

It did not take a close examination of the stains on the plates to show that a part of the same stew, now bubbling in the galley, had been a prominent viand in the repast.

“If they ate the stew, it wasn’t poisoned,” Monk announced. “Me, I’m going to town on the stuff.”

They got bowls and big spoons. The stew could have been very bad, and its quality still have escaped comment. They had existed on scientific rations for more than a week; and previous to that, while the girl held them, unconscious, they had practically been on a fast—with Doc the exception.

But hungry men, having their stomachs filled, become critical of quality. It is one of the symptoms of a full stomach.

“Their cook must have flavored this stuff with a few pieces of tarred rope,” complained Ham, who was only on his fifth bowl of the slumgullion.

Monk scowled and, because it was his habit to contradict everything Ham said, grunted, “This stuff is swell.”

“It tastes like the stuff they dip sheep in,” rumbled Renny. “I wonder how the heck I managed to get down eight bowls of the stuff. Holy cow, I must not care what I eat!”

Doc Savage, whose consumption of the stew had kept pace with that of the others, offered no comment, but he drank water, then tasted the concoction from the kettle again, so as to get a more exact idea of its flavor.

The result of the test produced no visible effect on the bronze man. Yet he was certainly not unmoved, for the small fantastic trilling sound, which was his characteristic reaction in moments of stress, came into being and traced its tiny, ethereal notes in no specific tune.

The sound died finally. It left the others staring at the bronze man, wide-eyed, wide-mouthed.

“Holy cow!” mumbled Renny.

“Blazes!” Monk exploded. “What’s wrong with the stuff, Doc?”

The bronze man did not answer. He went into the dining room. On the table lay a ladle with which the hash had been dished out to the diners during the preceding meal. There was still a little of the stuff in it. Doc tasted it.

“It is exactly the same,” he said. “These men ate it. So it can be presumed that we were not poisoned.”

“But the stuff does not taste right,” Ham clipped. “Is it because of the cook, or what?”

“Take a drink of water,” Doc suggested.

Ham complied, only to grimace distastefully.

“Water tastes the same way,” he said.

“Take a full breath,” Doc Savage requested. “Take several of them, rapidly.”

Ham did this, filling his lungs to capacity several times in succession. The results were remarkable. Ham’s face flushed. In the course of the next few moments, when he started to take a step, he teetered and nearly fell down. He gave them an idiotically happy leer.

“Nushing wrong wish shoup,” he said, having trouble with his speech.

Any one coming up on Ham at that moment would have sworn he was drunk.

Renny looked very gloomy—which meant he was happy—and rumbled, “I gotta notion to try that.”

“Suppose you hold your breath, instead,” Doc Savage requested.

Renny did so, curiosity on his long, puritanical face. A full minute passed. Then a second look of profound amazement crept over his long face. He had the look of a man who has just discovered that something incredible had happened to him. He stopped holding his breath.

“Holy cow!” he gulped. “Doc, it seems as if something——”

“Let us make sure of it,” Doc Savage told him. “The thing is possible, although science has never been able to accomplish it on much more than a laboratory scale.”

Renny swallowed several times before he could get words out. “But it—it’s so queer,” he gulped. “It scares me!”

That, coming from Renny, was an admission of consequence, because occasions when Renny admitted to being scared were very rare indeed.

Chapter 13

MONSTERS UNDER WATER

“Wait here,” Doc Savage suggested.

The bronze man went below to the engine room, and from the tool cabinet selected several wrenches, picking them for their weight, rather than their mechanical utility. He carried them back to the deck, where his men waited.

During the interim, Monk had apparently made a discovery of his own. He gesticulated wildly with his overly long arms.

“Doc!” he squawked. “Blast it! I’m dying or something! Why, I’ve discovered _____”

“We had better not discuss it until we have some clearer ideas,” Doc Savage interposed.

Monk howled, “But if I’m about to die——”

“No shush luck,” chimed up Ham, who was still giving an excellent imitation of a man in his cups.

Monk shrieked, “You shyster, I’m dying and you crack a joke! Why, I’ll——”

“Quiet,” Doc admonished Monk. “The thing that seems to have happened to us is rather weird to contemplate. Suppose we do not discuss it until we make some experiments. When we know more about it, we can talk it over.”

“I know too much about it now,” Monk muttered. “I know how I feel. I tell you, when I——”

“The thing has a scientific explanation,” Doc assured him. “You recall my statement of a moment ago that it has been done on a laboratory scale. You are chemist enough to realize the measures necessary to make such a thing possible.”

Monk groaned, “The stuff must have been in that hash.”

“It was,” Doc Savage told him. “And in the water, too.”

“We shoulda tasted it at first,” Monk wailed.

“The substance evidently requires some time to affect the taste glands,” Doc Savage told him. “And we ate in much too great a hurry. It serves us right.”

The bronze man now distributed his wrenches. “Each of you take one,” he directed.

Doc removed his outer clothing, his shoes. He walked to the rail, holding a heavy wrench in one hand. He swung atop the rail, hung poised there, and spoke over his shoulder.

“You men can use your own judgment about following me,” he said.

Then his bronze form arched downward into the water in a clean dive. He entered without much splash.

The bronze man’s three aids, on the deck of the *Caribbenda*, waited. A half minute—a minute. The seconds were long. Two minutes. If possible, the seconds seemed to

grow longer. Three minutes.

Those watching were worried, but not exactly appalled. For they knew that Doc Savage, who had studied the art among the master pearl divers of the South Seas, could remain under water an unbelievable length of time.

Four minutes. Five minutes. Monk was trembling. Six minutes. And six minutes is an unbelievable length of time for a man to remain beneath the surface.

Time ticked on.

The bronze man had now been beneath the surface longer than even he, with the incredible physique that a lifetime of training had given him, could remain and still live.

The tension of watching, of waiting, had been very effective upon Ham. He appeared to have completely shed his queer jag.

"I'm going in," he said, grimly.

He climbed to the rail, poised there only briefly, then hit the water in a dive that was not bad.

Big-fisted Renny preferred to follow Ham.

"Wait," exploded Monk. "Maybe you die when you hit the water, or something."

"Won't any water kill me," Renny thumped. The overconfidence in his tone indicated his boast was partially to reassure himself. "Doc may have jammed himself, somehow, down there. It's not too late for artificial respiration to bring him out of it."

Renny made his dive.

Monk climbed on the rail.

"Here goes the tail after the rest of the cow," he said, and jumped in.

It did not surprise Monk that the water was rather warm. The balminess of the air, and that particular intensesness of the sun which characterizes the tropics, had told him what to expect. Monk grasped his heavy wrench in both hands, so that he sank head-first.

For the few moments, a character study of the homely chemist's features would have shown that he was very apprehensive, concerned for some reason over the effect the water would have on his own person. He bent his neck frequently to look himself over. Streams of bubbles arose from his clothing, as the air was squeezed out of the garments by pressure of the water. The fact that he felt no profound ill effect seemed to reassure Monk.

The water was clear, almost fantastically so, in fact. A landlubber, accustomed to muddy streams and stagnant ponds, would have maintained such clearness was impossible. The clarity of the water, however, did not amaze Monk unduly. He was accustomed to such phenomena in the tropics.

Looking down, Monk abruptly distinguished bottom. He had not seen it previously, for the very good reason it was not the usual light sand to be found in the tropics, but was rather dark. Monk floated down more slowly than he had expected, doubled, and got his feet on the bottom. He stood there, held down by the weight of the wrench.

Around one hairy wrist, he wore a jeweled watch. He held this close enough to his eyes that he could distinguish its hands, figures. The second hand had made its circuit once. It circled again.

It was doubtful if an expression of greater amazement could have come over Monk's homely countenance. It was incredible, this thing which had happened to him. Monk goggled at the watch. The second hand had gone around again. The watch, of course, was waterproof, and there was not much doubt but that it was telling the truth.

Monk's small eyes were all but popping out of his head, and this was not caused by the water pressure. His knees shook visibly. He all but dropped the wrench.

The impossible had happened to him.

He could live without breathing! For his watch told him he had been under longer than was possible, and still live!

It was, of course, manifestly impossible to breathe under water, since Monk had no diving equipment for an air supply. Not even Doc's marvelously compact little diving "lungs." And the homely chemist had now been under water fully twice as long as he had ever been able to hold his breath. He felt not the slightest desire to breathe.

Half suspecting some weird form of death was laying hold of him, Monk pinched himself. There was nothing wrong, except that he overdid the pinch somewhat, all but taking off a section of hide. No, it had simply become no longer necessary for him to breathe.

The certainty of his strange condition fully realized, Monk began to look around for the others. Strangely enough, he found their trail. The bottom was of some kind of dark, powder-fine sand; and Renny and Ham, walking through this, had stirred it up. Monk followed the murky trail.

Ham and Renny had joined each other, according to indications, then had gone through a series of erratic wanderings, obviously in search of Doc Savage. No doubt, the eccentric nature of their movements was partially due to the state of amazement which must have gripped them when they found they had suddenly acquired the ability to get along without air.

Monk was still a bit nervous. He flexed his arms repeatedly, pinched himself, but not as violently as before. Physically, he seemed to be right enough. There was water pressure, of course. But Monk was familiar with this, having done a goodly bit of diving on other occasions.

The two serpents of murk lying on the sea bottom, that were the trails of Renny and Ham, abruptly straightened out. The pair had kept their sense of direction, and were heading toward the spot where the anchor of the *Tropic Seas* should be. They must have concluded that Doc Savage might have climbed up the anchor chain to the two lashed steamers.

Because there was a calm on the surface, the anchor chain was draped very slackly. Peering upward, Monk had distinguished the big links in the light which the tropic sun diffused through the depths.

Walking was slow business. Monk peered ahead, and the water seemed to be saltier than usual. But that was probably imagination. It stung his eyes, which were not yet accustomed to the stuff.

Monk caught sight of three figures ahead, near the anchor. Joy seized Monk. That would be Doc, Renny and Ham.

But no! Monk gaped, startled.

Four figures: Doc, Renny, Ham—and some one else: Monk, shoving himself forward against the inertia of the water, got close enough to distinguish the identity of the fourth person.

The girl, Diamond Eve Post!

Diamond Eve Post, it became apparent, was handcuffed to the heavy links which comprised the anchor chain of the *Tropic Seas*. The young woman wore no diving equipment, of any kind. It was a reasonable conjecture that she had been there, beneath the surface, for at least an hour. Doc Savage and his aids had prowled the decks of the two ships in their search for fully that interval.

Yet it was plain that Diamond Eve Post still retained her faculties. She was very much alive.

Doc Savage was engaged in the process of freeing her. To do this it would be necessary to snap the handcuff links, or to pick the lock. Doc was trying to break them. They were very stout links. He borrowed the sleeves from Renny's shirt—Renny still wore all his clothing—and was wrapping the links. His hands thus protected, he laid hold.

Sinews stood out on his arms and across his back in unearthly ridges. The bronze man seemed to become a great bundle of muscle that was as hard as the ligaments distinguishable on the back of an ordinary man's hands.

Monk was not surprised when the links snapped.

The young woman managed to convey a smile of tremendous gratitude through the clear water. She gestured upward, conveying that she wished to go to the surface.

Doc Savage nodded for her benefit. Then he flicked a hand to catch the attention of big-fisted Renny. The engineer watched the bronze man's hand.

Doc made a rapid succession of movements with his fingers. It was the deaf-and-dumb sign language, the system universally used by those thus afflicted. Doc Savage's men had learned it in the past, knowing there would be many occasions when they would desire to confer by visual means only.

"Captain Flamingo and his men obviously left under water," Doc Savage told Renny on his fingers. "We should station a lookout to watch for their return. How would you like to be watchman for a time?"

"O. K. by me," Renny signaled.

"If Captain Flamingo and his crowd return, they will probably climb up the anchor chain," Doc conveyed.

"I'll stick around," Renny flashed.

Doc Savage, Diamond Eve Post, Ham and Monk, all climbed the anchor chain. The links were not so large but that they could be gripped comfortably, and the climbers hauled themselves up easily by their hands. They did not throw away the wrenches.

Renny watched them go. He could follow them almost to the two long, dark shadows that were the hulls of the ships, afloat on the surface.

Some befuddlement still held Renny. The frankly unbelievable phenomenon of finding himself able to do without breathing had amazed him fully as much as it had Monk. He scratched his head and thought deeply about the matter. Probably Doc Savage would be able to explain it.

Renny made a mistake. Under the circumstances, it was possibly excusable. He became so wrapped up in his thoughts that he failed to keep a close watch on his surroundings.

Suddenly, he gave a violent start, stared, and his mouth came open. His enormous fists clenched. All about him the dark bottom of the sea seemed to be rising up, forming a cup around him, preparing to enclose him in some sinister grip.

The impossibility that the bottom was rising remained Renny's belief for only a moment. Momentary surprise was responsible for the mistake. He speedily realized that something was agitating the dark, powdery sand of the sea bottom, stirring it up. This was happening on all sides. He was completely encircled.

What was stirring up the pall, the horrified Renny had not the slightest idea. His gaze could not penetrate the dense cloud. Whatever the nature of the thing, monster or not, behind the ring, it was drawing closer.

The slow approach of the mystery thing affected Renny about as profoundly as anything he had ever encountered before. He felt very much as if the water around him had turned into ice. There was a distinct imaginary impression of small animals running up and down the back of his neck.

No one had ever questioned Renny's nerve. But this appeared to be a situation where nothing was to be gained by fighting, unless Renny knew the nature of the thing he battled. He released the heavy wrench, which was keeping him down, then straightened, powerful legs shooting him toward the surface.

Only then did he look up. He probably wished he had done so earlier. For there was something above him, too. It was grayish, pale almost nebulous. He could see the sun's reflection through it.

But it was something very solid, very real, he discovered when he hit it an instant later. He crowded the thing. His fingers slithered over it, gaining no hold. It felt slick, a bit slimy.

Renny had a momentary impression that the thing was the paunch of some monster of the deep. It seemed to possess a very definite weight. It was bearing him down, forcing him to the bottom. Directly into the center of that wall of roiled, boiling, sinister-powdered sand, he was being carried.

He fought madly. His great fists lashed. Their blows were terrific. Renny's boast, that there was no wooden door out of which he could not knock the panels with his

fists, was no exaggeration.

The boiled black sand closed on him. Higher than his head it towered. Its sepia opaqueness was that of ink. Renny heaved. He lunged. But that hideous gray, slimy thing pressed him down. Under his futile attack it recoiled; but always it came back.

A gripping something laid hold of Renny's ankle. He kicked it off. It came back, got his knee this time. Then something grabbed his other leg. Madly he floundered.

What was attacking him, it was impossible to tell. He was completely embedded in the roiled water now; and what seemed like scores of clutching claws had fastened upon him.

He was not exactly borne down. He was simply surrounded, embedded in the phantasm which had assailed him. His mightiest struggles availed only for the instant.

Renny was entirely helpless.

Chapter 14

THE INCREDIBLE DOMAIN

Diamond Eve Post stood on the deck of the steamer *Carribenda*, gingerly examined her rather shapely hands. The hands had been somewhat scuffed.

“I tried to pull out of the handcuffs,” she said. “Just one of my many mistakes.”

“Where is Captain Flamingo and his gang, and the rest?” Monk demanded.

“I could show you,” she said. “But, under the circumstances, it will be impossible for me to tell you.”

“Huh?” Monk blinked.

“See, I want to go along,” she said. “If I told you, you might leave me behind.”

Monk exaggerated a weary shrug.

“So now you’re going to keep on being sassy,” he complained.

“We’re still what you might call ‘friendly enemies,’” the young woman explained. “We’re fighting a common enemy. After we polish him off, we’ll turn around and fight each other.”

Monk tried his best to scowl blackly at her, but wound up by grinning.

“You sure get in my hair,” he chuckled. “But I like it.”

Ham, not quite so dapper in his drenched clothing, addressed Doc Savage, demanding, “Doc, we seem to be able to get along without breathing. How do you explain that?”

“It is rather remarkable,” Doc told him.

Diamond Eve Post interrupted sharply.

“It’s not half as remarkable as some of the things you’re going to buck into,” she said.

Ham told her peevishly, “If you’re not going to give us any information, I wish you’d keep quiet.”

“Thank you,” she said. “For that piece of politeness, I’ll bring a steam calliope to your funeral.”

Ham ignored her elaborately.

“What about this thing of our not needing to breathe?” he asked Doc Savage.

“The answer to that might best be started by asking a question,” Doc Savage told him. “Why do you breathe?”

“Mainly to get oxygen,” Ham said, promptly.

“Correct for the most part,” Doc agreed. “There are other reasons, but we will not invite confusion by discussing them. Supposing a chemical mixture which, if taken internally, would supply the oxygen to meet your bodily requirements; what would that mean?”

“You would not need to breathe,” Ham said.

Monk exploded. "But oxygen liquefied by compression would work something like liquid air. It would freeze a man's insides."

"Wait," Doc Savage interposed. "An explanation of that was coming up. Oxygen is taken into the body to accomplish certain very necessary functions. It is conceivable that these same functions might be accomplished by another chemical or element, much less bulky than oxygen, and which could be handled more easily than oxygen."

Monk scratched his nubbin of a head, obviously lost in a fog of technical, chemical possibilities.

"Use your head, missing link!" Ham told Monk, unkindly. "Sure, it is possible. Take those concentrated food tablets we've been living on, blast them! They were not beef steak and onions, but they gave you the same necessary elements, did they not?"

"Hah, an oracle!" the young woman said, bitingly.

"Yeah," Monk admitted, finally. "It's possible, all right."

Ham murmured, "The stuff was in the stew. That, I presume, is what made it taste like old overshoes."

The girl put in, "You've guessed it."

Doc Savage asked her, "You knew that?"

"Yes," she said. "They've been taking the stuff regularly, just on the chance it might come in handy for them to stop breathing. It did. That's why your gas failed to get them."

"How long will the effect of the quantity we got in the stew last?" the bronze man questioned.

"It depends on how much stew you ate," she countered.

"It was a lot," Monk muttered, feeling absently of his stomach.

"Several hours, possibly," she told them. "But they also have the stuff in concentrated paste. I know where it is kept."

"Show us," Doc requested.

"Anything to oblige," she replied, and led the way below.

There were many boxes in the forward hold, most of them of heavy wood strapped with metal. Close observation would show that a certain portion of these boxes had been constructed either by the same person or by the same gang of workmen. All of these similar boxes bore labels consigning them to a firm in Nassau.

"Captain Flamingo's equipment," the girl explained. "He shipped it aboard, and he and his men sailed as passengers."

They found a box which had been opened, delved into the contents, which proved to be wide-necked bottles, filled with a stuff that, as far as appearances went, resembled apple butter. Monk uncapped one of these, scooped up some of the contents on a finger nail, smelled it, tasted it.

"*Oo-o-o-o!*" he said. "This is what made that stew taste like old socks!"

The girl said, "A spoonful of that stuff, swallowed every two hours, is plenty. And don't breathe too much. You'll get oxygen drunk."

"Each of you take one of the bottles," Doc suggested.

They selected bottles, and Monk carefully pocketed an extra one.

"For Renny," he said. "I know he'll relish the taste of the stuff."

Monk, being no clairvoyant, was blissfully unaware that Renny had encountered the weird, remorseless attack where he had been keeping his vigil by the anchor chain.

Doc Savage ripped covers off some of the other cases. In some he found regulation diving equipment. In others were weapons. Quite a number held explosives, along with paraphernalia necessary for blasting. There was very complete diving equipment.

"Captain Flamingo was prepared against every emergency," said Diamond Eve Post.

Doc Savage eyed the young woman. "I suppose it is useless to ask you questions."

"You bet it is," she replied.

"Where is your friend, Seaworthy, and the men from his ship?" Doc Savage asked, suddenly.

The young woman looked concerned, a bit nervous. She moistened her lips and made fists out of her hands.

"*Taz*," she said.

Ham interposed, "This is once we won't ask you what *Taz* is. But I'll wager you we finally learn."

For once, she did not come back with a verbal dart.

"Captain Flamingo and his men also went to *Taz*," she advised. "I am worried. There is sure to be a fight."

Monk said, tapping the extra bottle which he had taken, "I am going to give this to Renny." The homely chemist went out.

Doc Savage and Ham engaged in several verbal exchanges with Diamond Eve Post during the next few moments. Their manner was casual and they did not ask her for information. Actually, however, they tried to maneuver her into dropping information unwittingly. They had no success. She was clever.

"How about guiding us to where we can find Captain Flamingo and his men?" Doc suggested.

She hesitated. Finally the idea intrigued her, but she put her lips together firmly and shook her head.

"No," she said. "Seaworthy is no weakling. I do not think Captain Flamingo can take him."

Ham pointed out grimly, "Captain Flamingo is clever."

She did not take the bait.

"I'm betting on Seaworthy," she said.

At that moment, a series of frenzied human squawks came to their ears. It was Monk, afloat by the anchor chain, yelling at the top of his voice.

“Renny’s gone!” the homely chemist howled. “Somethin’s got him!”

Doc Savage, Ham and the girl reached the sea bottom beside the anchor chain in the shortest time possible. The water was enveloped in a great pall of powder-fine sand. Doc Savage dived through this time after time, searching. But no Renny.

Locating Monk, who had gone to the bottom after giving the alarm, the bronze man made conversation on his fingers.

“Did you see any sign of Renny?” he asked.

“No,” Monk fingered back. “He was gone when I got down here. All I could see was that mess of mud.”

Doc Savage made a wider circle. He found a trail where the fine sand—it could hardly be classed as mud—was suspended close to the bottom, not unlike smoke. There seemed to be no current whatever in the sea at this point.

With scooping motions of his hands, Doc got the water in motion enough to wash the suspended sand to one side, so as to expose the tracks. But the marks thus revealed were not very illuminating. Indentations in the powdery sand did not retain a definite form.

The bronze man started to follow the trail. He progressed only a few yards, then turned back to explain to Monk on his hands.

“There were lead diving shoes in Captain Flamingo’s equipment in the hold of the *Caribbenda*,” he coded. “We will need them.”

They got the shoes. It required several minutes for this. Out of the water, the things were clumsy, but in the depths, not inconvenient.

Such clothing as they were wearing, they discovered, was a handicap. So they dispensed with shirts, undershirts, but not socks and shoes. They tore their trouser legs off above the knees. After that, they made better time.

Monk, drawing alongside Doc, fingered jerkily, “Any idea what got Renny?”

Doc Savage, for answer, pointed at the vague smokelike trail they were following.

“I know you can’t tell much by looking at the trail,” Monk fingered back. “Could it have been a shark?”

“Sharks do not move along the bottom,” Doc Savage reminded him by signals.

Monk nodded, propelled himself ahead of the others, and his furry hands managed to shift some of the suspended mud away from the trail. He scrutinized what was revealed closely. It did not tell him much. In fact, it had a tendency to make his hair feel as if it wanted to stand on end. It was difficult to conceive a monstrosity which would make such a mark.

The trail averaged two feet in width. There was a small ridge along each side, as if the soft sand had been pushed aside. The center of the trail was pocked with innumerable pits. These indentations adhered to no particular pattern.

Monk addressed Doc Savage on his fingers. “You know what this makes me think of?”

The bronze man gave the answer that was naturally expected: “What?”

“A centipede, one of them thousand-legged worm things,” Monk fingered. “All of them legs’d leave a trail just like this.”

Ham had come up in time to catch the hideous possibility suggested by Monk.

“Don’t you ever think of anything cheerful?” the lawyer demanded, and gave his fingers an angry flirt after they had formed the last signal.

Monk stuck to his guns.

“It would take a centipede six or eight feet high, and no telling how long, to make this trail,” he conveyed.

They went on, Monk looking very uneasy. Monk, the truth was, had managed to scare himself thoroughly with his own supposition, much as a small boy frightens himself by conjuring up ghosts.

Doc Savage, leading, halted abruptly. The others came up with him and looked their questions. A leveled arm was the bronze man’s reply.

They peered through the crystal-clear water, illuminated fairly well at this depth by the intense tropical sunlight above.

An ominous black hole, semiround, almost large enough for an automobile to have been driven in, gaped a few yards distant. Into this the murky trail disappeared.

Monk made frantic signals on his fingers.

“The den of some kind of a monster,” his digits wiggled.

They stood there, eyes fixed on the hole. The sea bottom sloped up sharply here.

It was remarkable, this place where they now stood. It was tropical water. The warmth showed that. There should have been marine growth, seaweed, some of the myriads of marine flora common to tropical water. There should have been crustaceans, shell fish. There should have been fish. There were none of these.

The whole watery domain was as barren as death itself.

They advanced. Inside the hole was intense blackness. No telling what it held. They had no light.

“I can go back to the *Caribbenda* for an underwater searchlight,” Monk signaled on his fingers.

“It would take too long,” Doc replied in the same manner.

They hesitated, exchanging glances. Sunlight, filtering through the water, gave their skins an eerie cast. They kept their mouths closed. They had stuffed bits of cloth in their nostrils. Salt water could be taken into their lungs without fatal consequences, but it caused an agonizing smarting.

Doc Savage moved first. He entered the hole. The instant he was inside he disappeared from sight of the others, as if gobbled up completely.

They followed, encountered the bronze man. He managed to convey that they should link hands. They did so, went forward. Sand was underfoot for a time, then stone. They could tell the difference through the heavy lead diving shoes. Doc Savage stopped.

Finding Monk's wrist, Doc Savage began to tap out a message in regulation wireless code. It was not difficult; Monk knew the code.

"Going on ahead," Doc tapped. "Will carry two small rocks. Follow me. Rocks tapped together rapidly will mean danger."

Then the bronze man was gone. He moved rapidly, leaning forward until his hands were frequently on the floor of the tunnel. It was a tunnel. Outlines of a flagged flooring could be felt, covered in many places with sand.

It was blood-chilling business, that creeping forward through blackness toward the unknown. Absolutely nothing could be seen. Doc kept his hands out ahead. Each held a small stone, fragments from the flagging underfoot. So suddenly that it was as if lightning had struck, they came out in brilliantly lighted water again.

Gathering in a compact group, they looked around. What they saw was profoundly interesting. Monk clamped an excited grip upon Doc's arm.

The homely chemist was so excited that the first letters he made with his stubby fingers were too erratic to be understood.

"This explains everything," he managed to convey, and waved an arm to take in their surroundings.

Ham, to one side, stood very straight. Ham's aplomb, his air of being always at ease, confident of himself, was remarkable. That it was not an atmosphere created by his usual sartorial perfection was proven by the present situation. He stood perfectly unruffled in the presence of what was one of the last things they had expected to see.

The young woman, Diamond Eve Post, caught their attention. Then she stepped to one side, where there was a patch of smooth sand. She gestured at their surroundings, then leaned over and made marks in the sand.

"*Taz*," she scraped with her finger.

And Monk, with fingers that seemed more than a little stiff, signaled, "Renny—here somewhere!"

Chapter 15

OUT OF MYTHOLOGY

Renny, had he been asked at that moment where he was, could not have told. He was in the throes of a hideous seizure. His lungs felt as if they were full of red ants. He gagged, pitched and wrenched, and his chest throbbed and ached. There was a fog in his head, but, quite suddenly, the fog cleared.

Renny lay perfectly still. The agony in his chest, he realized, was due simply to salt water which had entered his lungs. He was still under water, of course. Completely surrounding him was a wall of stone, very smooth and almost a score of feet high. The place seemed to be a well, lighted now because the sun was directly above. There was rubble on the floor. Renny looked upward again.

There was something strange about the sunlight, a weird quality which could not be explained by the fact that it was shining through water. It was queerly diffused. Renny stood up.

His head ached. That would be from a blow which had rendered him senseless.

Renny had been knocked out before he even learned the nature of the weird thing which had attacked him near the anchor chain of the *Tropic Seas*.

The big-fisted engineer swam upward. Movement, he discovered, made his head swim, put a blur of pain before his eyes; but he reached the top of the shaft. There he was stopped.

Stopped by something he could not see. Or could he see it? His vision was not up to par. He pushed his hands upward. It was difficult to feel things properly, but there was certainly something over the top of the shaft. It was resilient. It felt slimy.

Whatever it was, it was exactly the same thing which had prevented him from escaping upward during his weird fight.

Because he did not feel equal to protracted exertions at the moment, Renny relaxed. There was little or no air in his aching lungs, so, lacking buoyancy, he sank slowly to the bottom of the pit.

A slight sound—sound travels well through water—brought him around. He perceived then that he had a companion in misfortune.

Stanley Watchford Topping, the rabbitlike expert on deep-sea life, was draped listlessly on the sand, and had evidently been watching him. The two men stared at each other—Renny with what could hardly be called friendliness. Topping, according to Renny's way of thinking, had behaved queerly throughout the affair.

But Renny's desire for information exceeded all other considerations. He tried deaf-and-dumb sign language on Topping. No response. He leaned forward and scraped letters on the sandy portion of the floor with a huge forefinger.

"What brought me here?" he wrote.

Topping shook a negative. Then he parted the scanty hair on his head to exhibit a rather frightful bruise.

"I just regained my senses," he managed to scrape in the sand.

"Where are we?" Renny wrote.

Topping marked three letters.

"*Taz*."

Renny shook his head, smoothed out the patch of sand they were using as a slate, and wrote, "What is *Taz*?"

"The most amazing place on earth," Topping scratched back.

Renny looked as if he could have bitten heads off nails. He was not feeling so well, and this continued mystery about *Taz* was aggravating him to the point of madness.

"What is *Taz*?" he scratched so violently that he all but tore up the patch of sand.

Stanley Watchford Topping was naked above the waist; but he still wore his trousers, his socks, his shoes. The stiffness, the awkwardness with which he handled his legs was very noticeable as he bent to smooth the sand again.

"I do not really know what *Taz* is," he wrote. "That is the truth."

If he had felt a little more like his usual self, Renny would probably have blown up. As it was, he only sank back wearily, too disgusted to do more than wait for his strength to return. But inactivity palled, and within a few moments he was again grooving letters in the sand.

"How did you get here?" he queried.

Topping looked very rabbitlike and extremely defeated. He marked his reply.

"They kept me prisoner," he explained. "They brought me here. They thought I knew all about *Taz*. They were mistaken."

Renny printed, "What did you see as they brought you here?"

Topping smoothed out their sand slate.

"Nothing," he lettered. "They knocked me senseless, soon after I left the ship."

"Have you seen Seaworthy?" Renny tried.

"No," wrote the rabbit of a man.

Disgusted, feeling a little stronger, Renny got erect, leaped and swam up to the top again. Glancing down, he saw Topping following him up. For an expert on the deep sea, Topping handled himself very poorly under the water.

Renny gave attention to the thing over the top of the pit. His eyes were not blurred now, and he had a firmer grip on reality. He promptly made an astounding discovery.

The eerie, mysterious, slimy, semi-transparent thing was no mystery at all. It was simply a netting, not unlike window screen, only of much finer mesh. The stuff was made of bright, stainless-steel wire. When contacted under water, the polished smoothness of the wires and their close spacing gave the whole thing a slick feel.

Renny at once felt much better. He maneuvered around and got a grip on the pit edge with his huge left hand. Making the right hand into a fist, he drove it upward. It was one of his best blows, one he had practiced for the particular purpose of knocking panels out of doors.

The smash got results. The netting split. Tearing, Renny widened the aperture. He scrambled through.

Turning, he gave Stanley Watchford Topping assistance. Both men pushed themselves a few feet from the pit edge, then stopped.

Turning slowly, they surveyed their surroundings. The sight which loomed before his eyes caused Renny to stiffen, made his mouth come open. So startling was the spectacle that Renny all but sank to his knees. It was the last thing he had expected.

Not the last thing. That came now.

Colored flame seemed to burst in Renny's eyeballs, to spread, blaze through his brain, to shatter his whole body. With the flash, all things became swimming unreality.

As Renny melted down to the sand by the pit edge, he was seized, queerly enough, with one consuming wish. He wanted to hear what Doc Savage would say, if the bronze man ever saw *Taz*.

Then a monster of black gobbled Renny.

Chapter 16

TAZ

Renny was destined not to gratify the strange wish which had seized him in the midst of disaster, since it was unlikely that he would live his life over again. For Doc Savage was already looking at *Taz*.

The bronze man was also watching the comment which homely Monk scratched in such smooth sand patches as they passed. Monk was still trying to get information out of Diamond Eve Post.

“How did you find *Taz*?” Monk lettered.

The young woman stopped to scrape out a reply.

“I financed a deep-sea expedition,” she wrote at length. “Captain Flamingo commanded the ship. Seaworthy was second in charge. Topping was along as technical expert.”

Conveying the information took some time, but it was interesting enough to be worth it.

Monk wrote another inquiry: “What started the trouble?”

“Everybody wanted what was in *Taz*,” the young woman wrote. “We quarreled. Seaworthy sided with me, so——”

Doc Savage interrupted the exchange with an imperative gesture.

“Renny!” the bronze man’s fingers conveyed.

They went forward. There was enough of a trail for them to follow. One man could do that, while the others looked at *Taz*.

Taz was a city!

The black tunnel through which they had come, they knew now, was in the nature of a gate through a wall around *Taz*, a wall against which the sea and time had drifted sand.

There was drifted sand against the buildings about them, too, but not as much as might have been expected. Only a few barnacles, clung to the stone ramparts, which was little short of amazing, considering the length of time these architectural structures must have lain here beneath the surface.

Some of the buildings were huge, containing individual blocks of masonry which must have weighed tons. Everything was built in squares, rectangles, triangles. Nowhere was there a circular building. Nor had the original constructors seemed to understand the arch; if they had, they had neglected to employ it.

There was another remarkable aspect: the carvings. They were everywhere. The original architects of *Taz*, it appeared, had abhorred an unadorned surface. Wherever a smooth piece of stone presented, they had chiseled a design upon it, caricatures of animals, grotesque likenesses of men, combinations of man and beast. A few of the sculpturings defied recognition.

Not that the place looked as if the populace had just vacated it. Nothing of the sort. Some of the great buildings had fallen down. Sand was drifted high in many of the streets. No doubt it had completely filled a number of buildings. Yet, considering that *Taz* must have been under the sea for ages past, its condition was to be marvelled at.

And marvel they did, slowing frequently to stare at especially impressive sights. Within the course of a little time, they were strung out in a line, with Doc Savage leading, Monk perhaps a score of feet behind him, Ham even farther back, and the girl trailing the lawyer.

This was their position when Ham discovered the young woman in the act of escaping!

It was not entirely luck on Ham's part that caused him to make the discovery. Ham was nothing if not suspicious of Diamond Eve Post. Besides, her cocksure manner had gotten under his skin, and he was keeping an eye open to see that the young woman did not put anything else over on them.

And now she was diving in between two stone buildings, making frantic swimming motions with her hands to help herself along.

Ham promptly sped after her. Head down, he stroked furiously with his own hands. Speed was hard to attain. There is nothing much more clumsy, Ham reflected, than a man under water.

Ham's heavy lead shoes, which enabled him to remain upright in the water, chanced to clank together. This small sound reached Monk, but not Doc Savage.

Monk turned. Clear as the water was, he could barely distinguish what was happening.

Not exactly sure what was up, Monk set out after Ham. The homely chemist had been admirably fitted by nature for this kind of life. His long arms made first-rate flippers. He overhauled Ham.

The lawyer, by gestures, indicated the girl was trying to escape. Of course, this was by now entirely apparent. Monk and Ham both pursued her. They now made a discovery of which they were not especially proud. The young woman could just about hold her own. How she could do this was baffling.

Over the huge, tumbled blocks of what had once been a great building, the chase led. They seemed to be getting on higher ground—or in shallower water, rather. This was indicated by a lessening of the bodily pressure. Too, the architectural significance on each side of them was more impressive.

Some of these great buildings, Monk reflected, should very nearly break the surface of the sea. How had this place escaped the attention of the world? There might be a number of explanations. The tops of these great stone buildings, barely submerged, if observed from the crow's nest of a vessel, might readily be mistaken for reefs; and mariners are notoriously reluctant about venturing near reefs.

Unexpectedly, Monk discovered why the young woman was holding her own so well. She was taking small quantities of the unique chemical concoction which supplied the necessary functions of oxygen. Evidently, the stuff acted as a stimulant.

Monk and Ham now followed her example. Results were gratifying. They overhauled her.

Diamond Eve Post dodged frantically, veering sharply down a narrow passage, hoping to cause them to lose sight of her. The ruse very nearly worked. When they reached the passage, she was nowhere to be seen.

A few square openings gaped in the walls of either side. A haze of disturbed sand in one of these indicated where the girl had gone.

Monk and Ham half ran, half swam through the aperture and found themselves in Stygian gloom.

Monk and Ham kept their heads. For two individuals who had never been known to address a civil word to each other, they now did some nice teamwork. They joined hands and walked abreast, looking back over their shoulders at the lighted rectangle of the door, to make sure the girl did not duck out again. There was no use in looking ahead; the place was as dark as the inside of a box of lampblack.

It was possible, by long and short squeezes of their joined hands, to converse telegraphically.

“She wouldn’t go in far,” Monk coded. “She’d be afraid to.”

“She’s not afraid of anything,” Ham telegraphed back.

“Maybe not,” Monk admitted. “But she don’t know this place. She wouldn’t take chances.”

“How do you know she doesn’t know the place?” Ham continued.

“She does know it,” the lawyer pressured by dots and dashes. “She knew where she was going while we chased her. I noticed that.”

Those telegraphic communications were very slow, and by the time they had exchanged this much information, quite an interval had elapsed. There was no sign of the young woman.

They hesitated, trying to make up their minds. They decided to penetrate deeper. They went forward.

Monk banged a wall forcibly with his head, saw stars, recoiled and gave Ham’s arm a vicious jerk by way of relieving his feelings. For this trick, he got a kick on the left shin from Ham’s heavy lead diving shoe. Each squeezing the other’s hand fiercely, they worked along the wall and found a doorway.

The doorway was narrow and not tall enough for them to pass through erect. It was very cramped, in fact. Ham went through first, rather easily, and, when Monk became momentarily wedged in the cramped space, Ham gave the homely chemist several ungentle jerks. The result was that they both fell through into the room beyond.

There were other results, too, totally unexpected. Came a grinding and jarring, which they distinctly felt. There was a loud impact, as if a great weight had fallen.

They scrambled up. Both were badly scared, and honest enough to admit it. Their paramount thought was to get outside again. They shoved themselves to the door.

But there was no door!

The opening was now closed by a huge block, so ponderous that they could not possibly budge it. They tried several times. Both of them, at that instant, would have given a great deal to be out where they could see the sunlight through the water again.

Monk found Ham's arm and squeezed telegraphically.

"Some kind of a trap," he conveyed. "We sprang it by struggling in the door."

"Yes," Ham agreed.

It was no impossible hypothesis. The mechanism was, no doubt, of stone, which certainly would not disintegrate with time, as would metal.

Unexpectedly, Ham drove his fist into Monk's side. It was no fighting gesture. The lawyer merely wanted to call the homely chemist's attention to a sound. A series of sounds, rather.

Monk had heard them and was already trying to identify them. They were strange noises, eerie scrapings and scratchings. Something coming through the water, certainly. But what?

Monk thought, and the thought was curdling, of that queer trail which they had followed to this fantastic underwater metropolis of *Taz*—the trail which looked as if it had been made by some gigantic centipede. The sounds they were hearing now in the abysmal blackness were noises such as might conceivably be made by such a thing coming upon them.

Monk suddenly had not the slightest doubt but that they were being attacked by the same horror which had made away with Renny.

Chapter 17

DEATH IN THE DEPTHS

But Renny had not been made away with. He was only senseless—and would not be in that condition long, if indications could be trusted.

Doc Savage was working over the big-fisted engineer, kneading muscles, administering small pains calculated to stimulate wakefulness. There were now two unpleasant bruises on Renny's head, one appearing more recent than the other. The latter one probably explained his present senselessness.

The fact that Doc Savage had not followed Monk, Ham and the girl was simply explained. He had not, for a few moments, discovered their absence, his attention being centered on trailing Renny. Then, almost at the same time that he became aware of their non-presence, the bronze man had perceived Renny, a limp hulk beside the round, black maw of the big-fisted engineer's late prison.

Renny now awakened. He revived in a manner which gave a suspicion he did not much care what happened. After opening and shutting his eyes several times, he summoned enough energy to make sign talk with his hands.

"What was the thing that grabbed me?" he queried.

Doc Savage countered with sign language. "Do you not know?"

Renny shook his head, which evidently made it ache. For he felt of it hurriedly, gingerly. Then he used sign talk to explain how he had awakened in the pit. He described the presence of Stanley Watchford Topping, and narrated the fact of his climb to the top and his break through the stainless-steel net. He finished with the sudden, mysterious attack which had laid him senseless.

"And I have no idea what became of Topping," he completed.

A little time would be required for Renny to get in condition for movement. Doc Savage expended the interval in examining the stainless-steel net, which was still in place over the pit. He was particularly interested in the sling attachments around the edge of the net. These gave an idea of what the thing had been intended for.

A washing screen, a device for separating small articles from the fine sand of the sea floor. It could be stretched at a slant between supports, and used exactly as builders employ a screen to separate large stones from the sand they intend using in concrete.

Renny was now on his feet.

"We will hunt Monk, Ham and the girl," Doc signaled him.

They backtracked to the point where the young woman had deserted the cavalcade and had been pursued by Monk and Ham. There was a trail of sorts through the sand. It could be followed, even if slowly.

Renny, who had been senseless most of the time since he had been brought to *Taz*, showed great interest in his surroundings. He was an engineer, so the structural aspects of the place intrigued him.

“The size of some of these stone blocks!” he notified Doc on his fingers. “Handling them would be a problem, even with modern machinery.”

“What do you make the architecture out to be?” Doc queried.

Renny scrutinized his surroundings closely.

“Mayan,” he decided. “They covered everything with carvings.”

“It has Egyptian aspects also,” Doc pointed out.

“It does,” Renny admitted.

Several moments later, Doc Savage conveyed his own idea.

“You might call it Egypto-Mayan.”

They shoved themselves over huge, tumbled masonry piles. Progress was now not only difficult, but the trail was getting faint. Renny lost his balance atop a huge block, and fell head-first. Had he not been under water, he might have suffered fatal damage. As it was, the weight of his shoes pulled him down feet-first so that he landed without harm.

Renny went through a small pantomime. He made a cross with his arms. Then he put a hand against either side of his head, fingers sticking out to indicate horns, and moved his jaws as if chewing a cud. Thus he conveyed his ejaculation, “Holy cow!”

Doc Savage and Renny came finally to the doorway through which Monk and Ham had followed Diamond Eve Post. Entering, Doc and Renny discovered the stone block which barricaded the opposite end of the passage. Their best efforts failed to move it.

Outside again, they circled the building, endeavoring to find another entrance. The rather unusual design of the building itself now struck them. It was circular, the one circular building they had seen in the whole metropolis of *Taz*. Too, the building was in a remarkable state of preservation. Nowhere had even a single block fallen from the walls. The stone was of a hard obsidian variety, almost as glassy as the day it had been cut and set.

They came to what seemed to be the main entrance. But just as the building differed from all the other buildings, so was this entrance unlike the rest. It was an arch, the single one they had seen.

Over this arch was a carving which explained why the place had been called *Taz* by Diamond Eve Post and the rest. The design consisted of three groups, probably intended to depict men engaged in mortal combat. Their interlocked, contorted figures, as seen through the crystal water, looked like the three letters: T A Z.

The entrance was open, inviting. But they were getting cautious. They had approached among huge blocks of stone which offered concealment. They remained among these, reconnoitering.

It was fortunate that they did; perhaps unfortunate, in the light of later developments.

Doc Savage tapped Renny's arm unexpectedly, pointed. Renny followed the bronze man's indicating finger with his eyes, squinting. The salt water was making their eyes raw, and it was also having an unpleasant effect on their bare skin. The human body was probably never intended to take up a piscatorial existence.

A file of men was approaching. Seaworthy, looking young and remarkably stalwart, led them. The others—the crew of the *Tropic Seas*—trailed him. They moved in Indian file, one behind the other, each holding to the belt of the man ahead of him. This was the simplest method of locomotion, since keeping one's balance in the water was difficult; joined together thus, the matter was simplified.

Doc stared at the trail they were leaving in the sand. It explained a great many things. The numbers of treading feet left a long mark, exactly resembling the one left by Renny's captors.

Renny, then, when he was captured, had been seized by men.

Seaworthy led his procession directly through the arched door, being met just outside the opening by more of his crew. Within the space of a few moments, every one of them had gone inside.

Renny looked at Doc Savage. The bronze man nodded. They advanced. Outside the arched door, they listened carefully. There was no sound; and had there been any, the water would have carried it excellently. They shoved themselves inside, striving to make as little noise as possible.

The place was darker, Renny reflected, than any other spot in which he had ever been. He brought his hands up to his eyes and did not see the fingers—only felt them when they came in actual contact with the eyeballs. They advanced a few yards, stopped, used their ears.

They heard noises, scuffings, rattlings—distorted, of course, in the manner in which water alters sound; but the noises were indicative of a group of men in motion and they came from far ahead.

Doc and Renny put on speed.

With an unexpectedness that was total, light drenched them. As light goes, it was probably diffused, a bit pale; but, bursting out as it did in the intense darkness, it was blinding. They blinked, squinted, until their pupils became accustomed to the glow.

Diamond Eve Post stood near by. She held an electric, underwater hand flash, and the backglow revealed her figure.

Doc Savage and Renny acted quickly. They moved forward, separating so as to converge on the young woman from either side. She fathomed that their intention was to seize her.

She shook her head violently and, bending, smoothed out the trampled sand which covered the floor and stroked letters with her forefinger.

“No,” she printed. “I want to take you to Monk and Ham.”

Doc Savage turned, so that the young woman could not see what he was doing, and made finger talk at Renny.

Diamond Eve Post had previously given no indication that she understood the finger symbols, but she was so full of tricks that Doc was taking no chances.

“She is not telling the truth,” Doc informed Renny.

“It would not surprise me a bit,” Renny stated. “What makes you think so?”

“Her triumphant manner,” Doc signaled. “We will get her flashlight, then take her along with us.”

Both Doc Savage and Renny now looked as grateful as they could and drew near the young woman. She was not caught napping, however. She motioned them back, indicating that they keep their distance, and when they did not, she tried to flee. She was much too slow. Doc caught her, got the electric lantern without difficulty.

The girl had, indeed, been deceiving them. In fact, she had been playing with them. For lights now sprang up all around them, brilliant electric underwater hand lights, they were. Seaworthy and his men held them.

Doc Savage bent swiftly, loosened the straps which held on the heavy lead diving shoes. Renny did likewise. Freed of these encumbrances, they could put forth their best in swimming.

Doc retained the girl’s electric lantern, as he shot upward through the water. It might be useful, even if dragging its bulk did slow his movements.

Seaworthy, it developed, had evolved a system of signals for communication with his subordinates. He must have perfected them by much practice aboard the *Tropic Seas*, in New York.

By deserting their lead shoes, Doc and Renny secured a distinct advantage. Seaworthy and the others retained theirs, and when they wanted to get off the floor, it was necessary for them to swim furiously.

Renny seized Doc’s arm and, by pressure signals, telegraphed, “Which way?”

“In,” Doc replied by the same method.

This was agreeable with Renny. Monk and Ham, it was reasonable to believe, were somewhere in here.

For the next few moments, they swam furiously. Renny was an expert in the water. The fact that Doc was ordinarily much faster did not count for so much now, because the hand light slowed the bronze man perceptibly.

When the opportunity presented, Doc swam down to the floor and along that in darkness, in an effort to find small stones. He located none. He stroked up to the ceiling again, a distance of less than a score of feet, and tapped the electric lantern against the stone. There was method to his tapping—he was conveying as nearly as possible letters in the International Telegraph Code. He was requesting that Monk and Ham reveal their presence by a like tapping.

Answer came almost at once. It was hard to locate, for sound direction is deceptive under water. Doc judged its source by turning slowly, swam toward it, Renny following.

It was necessary that they wedge through a none too ample door. The room beyond was low of ceiling.

Monk and Ham were confined in a surprising fashion! Each lay on his back in a pit in the floor. These pits were each barely large enough to receive a human figure. Monk's bulk, in fact, bulged out of the one in which he was confined.

Across the chest of the two prisoners lay enormous blocks of stone. These covered each captive, except for his head and feet. The blocks were held in place by an ingenious contrivance of some metal which had not rusted. The device resembled an oversize screen door hook in some respects, and was so located that it could not be freed by the prisoners.

Monk had signaled by kicking his lead shoes against the stone of his cramped pit.

Doc's captured hand light revealed this. The bronze man swam swiftly to Monk. Renny went to Ham. They worked over the slabs' fastenings. These were not difficult.

Doc got his fastenings free first, but he did not shove the block immediately. He bent over, examined it.

What he found caused him to whip erect. Too late! The big-fisted engineer gave the block over Ham a lusty shove.

Results were dismaying. The block moved easily enough; but, simultaneously, came a great grinding and a crash behind them!

They spun. Doc flicked the light switch. Electric whiteness spouted, hit the door.

The door was now closed by parallel stone bars which had dropped down from above. They were square, would measure a foot either way. Plainly, the shifting of the blocks over the prisoners had actuated a trigger which dropped the bars.

Renny made signals in the light with his big hands.

"Great stuff!" was his comment.

Chapter 18

THE TREASURE FABULOUS

Brilliant light appeared a moment later beyond the bars, and Diamond Eve Post, Seaworthy, and their crew came up. They were grinning, triumphant. The young woman stuck out her tongue at the scowling Ham, small-girl fashion.

Seaworthy, it developed, was well prepared. He produced a slate and pencil of a type which could be used for communication under water.

“This place is full of traps, such as the one you just sprung on yourselves,” he wrote. “You have to be careful. On our previous visit, when we discovered the place, we lost four men.”

He passed the slate through the bars for them to read and to make a reply.

“What are you going to do with us?” Monk wrote on it.

Seaworthy took the slate back and scribbled, “Will you give me your word not to try to escape?”

Monk used the whole slate to write the two letters that comprised his reply: “No.”

That did not faze Seaworthy in the slightest. There was evidently a method of operating the bars from outside, because they now opened. Several of Seaworthy’s men came in.

The attackers had long poles with razor-sharp blades of steel on the ends. They were literally spears. Probably they had been brought along to use against sharks or other underwater denizens. They were very effective weapons. Doc and his aids were crowded backward.

Doc Savage did manage to seize one of the weapons. He wrenched, got control of it; but he threw it down again almost at once. Seaworthy’s men were a thick, determined wall before him. To escape, he would undoubtedly have had to take lives. He never did that, if it could be avoided.

Doc, Renny, Monk and Ham were crowded into a corner, seized, and light, stout ropes made fast to their necks. In tying these ropes to their necks, Seaworthy cunningly employed a common hangman’s knot, one of the most difficult for the victim to untie. They were led out.

Seaworthy had explored this place previously, it became certain. His manner, as he stepped away forward, was sure. Diamond Eve Post moved at his side. All of their electric torches were on. They traversed narrow corridors, descended runways, mounted stairs, turned often.

Monk dropped back to Doc Savage’s side and managed to convey a short explanation in the sign language.

“Ham and me chased the girl,” he signaled. “She led us into Seaworthy’s hands.”

The strange cavalcade came finally to its goal.

It was a large room, and it was reached by passing through a solid stone wall, every bit of twenty feet in thickness.

At first glance, the most amazing thing about the room was the ceiling. This—there was not the slightest doubt of it—was composed of a single, titanic block of stone. It was, Doc Savage realized, probably the largest single block of stone ever employed in construction work. Certainly there were no historical records of a larger one. Strangest of all, this colossal slab seemed not to lie over the top of the room, lid-fashion, but was cut to fit inside the walls. What held it up could not be discerned.

In geometrical rows on the room's floor stood what, at first glance, might have been mistaken for stone coffins; but they were shallower, narrower, somewhat longer. They were of some black stone so hard that it had managed to retain some of its original polish down through the ages. The lids fitted tightly, but had no visible fastenings. In number, these cases exceeded a hundred.

There was sand on the floor of the room to the depth of several inches. In this, near the entrance, lay the broken fragments of what must have once been a pottery jar. Seaworthy strode over to the jar bits and kicked about among them, stirring up a cloud of the fine sand. He got down on all fours and sifted the stuff through his fingers. Finally, he straightened, holding a tiny object, a thing that glinted green in the electric light. He extended this to Doc Savage.

It was an emerald, not large, not especially perfect, yet one which would have brought several thousands of dollars on the open market.

Seaworthy wrote on his slate, "Captain Flamingo got enough of these on our first visit to buy his equipment and pay his gang. He had big ideas of screening more of them out of the sand."

Doc Savage recalled the screen which had been over Renny's pit. Renny's captors, then, had been Captain Flamingo and his crowd.

Seaworthy wrote on the bottom of the slate, "Souvenir," and passed Doc Savage the emerald.

That surprised the bronze man. He took the slate.

"This is part of the treasure you came after?" he wrote.

Seaworthy grinned widely, shook his head. He reached for the slate.

"All the jewels in the world are not worth what we came after." His slate pencil made scratchings unpleasant to the ear, as they vibrated through the water.

Doc Savage shook his head and conveyed by gestures that he did not understand and was puzzled.

Seaworthy shrugged, stepped to one of the cases, grasped the lid, strained, got it off. The case was filled with metal plates. These stood on edge, not unlike the plates in a storage battery. Seaworthy extracted one.

It was of some strange black metal, as intensely black and shiny as emerald.

The entire surface was covered with remarkably clear hieroglyphics.

Doc Savage's flake-gold eyes were set unwaveringly upon the strange plaque.

Seaworthy placed it on the case, picked up the slate and conveyed the statement: "It is possible that that plate alone is worth millions of dollars." He put several exclamation points after the statement to gain an effect that was not necessary.

Doc Savage did not move. His eyes were still on the plate, on the symbols inscribed whitely thereon. It was writing, hieroglyphics—not Egyptian, not Mayan, a combination of both.

And Doc Savage, who was somewhat familiar with both, was slowly translating the symbols on the plaque. It was very interesting. Put into English, it would have read somewhat as:

CENTRAL SCIENCE LIBRARY
PLATE OF 1001—MENTAL
TELEPATHY

BEING A RECAPITULATION OF EXHAUSTIVE
EXPERIMENTS BY CENTRAL SCIENTIFIC LABORATORY
WHICH PROVE CONCLUSIVELY THAT THOUGHT IMPULSE
OVER THE NERVE STRUCTURE OF THE HUMAN BODY IS A
PHENOMENON AKIN TO THE FORCE KNOWN AS
ELECTRICITY; THAT SUCH THOUGHT CURRENTS ARE
GENERATED BY ATOMIC REACTIONS CHEMICALLY
PRODUCED; THAT THERE IS A DISTINCT THOUGHT
MAGNETIC FIELD AROUND HUMAN NERVES AND THE
BRAIN CELLULAR STRUCTURE, JUST AS A MAGNETIC
FIELD IS FOUND AROUND WIRES CARRYING ELECTRIC
CURRENT.

WHEREIN THIS AND FOLLOWING PLATES IS DESCRIBED
FOR POSTERITY CONSTRUCTION OF APPARATUS SUITABLE
FOR RECEPTION OF SUCH THOUGHT VIBRATIONS—

At that point, Seaworthy hastily replaced the plate in the case. He grabbed his slate and wrote, "Can you read the stuff?"

Doc Savage nodded.

"What do you think of it?" Seaworthy wrote.

"Incredible, if true," Doc Savage wrote machine-perfect characters on the slate.

Seaworthy took the slate and scribbled, "It is genuine."

Doc Savage lettered a question: "How do you know?"

Seaworthy grabbed the slate back.

"I took one set of plates away on my first visit," he wrote. "Translated, it told how to mix the chemical which has made it unnecessary to breathe."

Monk, Ham and Renny had crowded up to take in this written exchange. The proper amount of amazement was on their countenances. If they had visioned a treasure

as being behind all of the mystery and danger through which they had gone, it was certainly one of jewels and gold; but this—it was entirely different, just a bit unbelievable.

They stood there and tried to visualize more of this ancient city of the past.

Seaworthy was as happy as a small boy in a toy shop. He made signals to his men. They scattered. Around their waists they were wearing sashes, long lengths of narrow cloth. They now unwound these. Taking plates from the cases, they began to wrap them carefully in the sashes.

Once more, Seaworthy wrote on the slate and shoved it at Doc Savage.

“How would you like to be declared in on this?” he had written.

Doc Savage considered, then took the slate.

“On what basis?” he penciled.

Seaworthy frowned, as he composed his terms.

“You get a percentage for translating the plaques and building the apparatus they describe,” he wrote.

“A percentage of what?” Doc Savage countered.

“You don’t think we’re suckers enough not to cash in on this?” Seaworthy added two big exclamation points after this.

“A thing such as this should be administered for the benefit of mankind,” Doc Savage wrote.

Seaworthy grinned, seized the slate.

“Sure,” he printed. “And a lot of dollars will sure benefit me.” He added, “And Miss Post, too.”

Doc Savage looked at Monk.

“Phooey on the cluck,” Monk signaled with his fingers.

Doc Savage nodded. Those were his sentiments. The affair was not yet over.

Just how far it was from being over became apparent a moment later. There was excitement over by the door. It started mildly, with a clattering of lead shoes on the stone and sand of the floor and a rasp of one of the spear points as it scraped rock. All glances went in that direction. What they saw was eye-filling.

Captain Flamingo and his men were coming through the door. The foremost of them carried an ordinary glass jug of five-gallon capacity. To prevent breakage, this was encased in a wooden crate. The name of the jug’s contents had been put on the crate with black paint:



Doc Savage, Monk recognized the common chemical symbol. Sulphuric acid!

Doc Savage comprehended the purpose of the stuff instantly. It would be released in the room. Even diluted with the water, it would affect their eyes, blind them.

Chapter 19

THE DEVIL IS A RABBIT

Every light in the science library room of the ancient city now blazed in the direction of the door. Captain Flamingo stood in the door, arrogant, confident. Under other conditions, he would have been ridiculous. He wore his gaudy necktie, his brilliant vest, but had no shirt. He still had his brilliant trousers.

He wore underwater goggles. So did all his men. That would preserve their eyes from the sulphuric acid.

He strutted to one side of the door. A hand entered a pocket. What proved to be a colored crayon came into view. On the wall he wrote the message:

YOU GET A CHANCE. LIE DOWN ON YOUR FACES AND
WE TIE YOU. WE WON'T KILL YOU.

Doc Savage turned on Seaworthy. That young man had been so confident a minute before. Now he was thoroughly squashed. Doc took the slate.

“Say you accept,” the bronze man wrote. “Get over to the side wall. Remove the lead shoes.”

Seaworthy's first impulse plainly was to refuse. He scowled, then he shrugged. Looking at Captain Flamingo, he nodded vehemently. Which nod gaudy Flamingo undoubtedly took to mean assent to his wishes.

Seaworthy led the way to the right-hand wall. The girl, his men, followed closely. Bringing up the rear were Doc and his three aids.

The moment they were against the wall, Seaworthy made signals, then removed his own heavy lead shoes by way of illustrating what he wanted. The others followed suit.

Captain Flamingo was plainly puzzled by their actions. He advanced. Waving his arms, he caused his men to spread out across the room. They all carried knives, or spears such as Seaworthy's crew possessed.

The man with the jug also walked into the room. It was little concern of his whether the acid jug got broken or not.

Doc Savage waited. Flamingo's crowd drew close. Doc Savage made a gesture. Expressive, it conveyed his wishes perfectly.

Seaworthy and his men promptly planted their electric underwater lights on the floor, so that they shone directly into the eyes of the approaching Flamingo party.

Doc signaled again. Every one, relieved of the weight of the heavy lead shoes, swam upward.

The man with the jug broke it, releasing a mass of sulphuric acid.

Captain Flamingo, for once in his foxy career, was caught flatfooted. The lights in his eyes blinded him and his men momentarily. For a moment, they stared through pinched eyelids.

They were handicapped also by the fact that they still wore their lead shoes. They could get off the floor only by the most violent effort. For the space of a few seconds, they did nothing effective.

Doc Savage, his men, some of the others, might have escaped. But it was too much to hope for all to get away. Accordingly, none fled. They held together, a compact group, moving as swiftly as they could, ready for attack.

Attack came. Captain Flamingo, grotesque in his goggles, gestured frantically at his followers. Some of them got their lead shoes off, came up.

Spears, knives met them. Seaworthy's men had not dropped their arms.

It was a fantastic thing, that fight which followed. It might have been some rankly imaginary movie depicting combat in a land where there was no gravity, the film then being shown in slow motion. Almost none of the combatants wore more than trousers. The goggles on Flamingo's men gave them a semihuman aspect, as if they were beings from another world.

Doc Savage's maneuver had accomplished much. His force had managed to get completely over the heads of Captain Flamingo's crowd. They did not swim down to the floor, but kept high and worked as swiftly as possible for the door. They had a very good reason for this.

Doc Savage knew the specific gravity of sulphuric acid. It was heavier than water, hence would tend at first to remain near the floor. Excited, two of Captain Flamingo's men ran through the concentrated solution of sulphuric acid before it dissipated. It burned them. They flailed about madly.

Doc Savage, finding Diamond Eve Post beside him, gave her a brisk shove toward the door. She tumbled almost to it, spinning slowly through the water, regained her balance and grimaced at him. Then she evidently decided to see if Captain Flamingo had left lookouts outside. She disappeared through the door.

That was dangerous. She was an overconfident young woman, likely to get herself into trouble.

Doc Savage studied the fighting. Seaworthy's crowd, aided no little by Monk, Renny and Ham, were more than holding their own. Doc Savage's aid was not essential, and it was very necessary that the retreat trail should be opened.

Doc Savage eased back and whipped into the doorway. He traveled swiftly, swimming, for that was infinitely faster than walking under water.

A brilliant light appeared ahead. It was Diamond Eve Post, paddling along, not very swiftly, with an underwater light which she had managed to retain throughout the excitement. Doc caught her.

Without preliminary explanations, he grasped the light and extinguished it. She tried to pull his hair for that, but had no success. He left her there, no doubt sputtering with rage, and went on. He traversed darkened rooms, black passages, for a time, guided by his sense of touch.

Another light appeared ahead. It did not surprise him. Captain Flamingo possibly had left guards posted. Doc Savage drew closer, made a discovery. No Flamingo guard this.

It was rabbitlike Stanley Watchford Topping!

Topping was crouched in the middle of a glaring white blaze of light, given off by a powerful underwater lamp. Fully two-thirds of his time was devoted to casting nervous glances about. So close a watch was he keeping that it was doubtful if even a minnow could have swum close without being discerned.

During the moments when he was not watching his surroundings, Topping was working over a dark box, out of which projected a plunger that had a handle on it. Wires ran from the box into the sand that covered the floor. Where they went from there, it was difficult to tell.

Doc Savage eased backward. Surprising Topping would be a hopeless task, so he was leaving the rabbitlike expert on deep-sea life alone. Back through the passages, Doc Savage swam. Hearing the room which had proved to be the scientific library of the lost civilization, the bronze man was seized suddenly from behind. He received two painful blows in the ribs. The girl, Diamond Eve Post!

Doc successfully smothered an impulse to shake her, and dragged her on ignominiously to the fighting.

All of Seaworthy's men had gotten out of the library room. Captain Flamingo and his followers were still inside. Monk, Renny, Ham and Seaworthy had spears, were holding the door. The door itself had originally been closed by a huge slab of stone which swung on ingenious pivots. During the ages, however, sand had banked up in front of this. Too, the slab stuck on its pivot, probably due to the growth of a few barnacles. Seaworthy's men were fighting to free the slab.

They budged it, straining, lunging. They moved it. The four defenders of the portal drew back to let it close. It shut.

Captain Flamingo's crowd promptly began ramming it from the other side. Men scattered, searching for rubble with which to block the opening of the slab. The stone blocks, they discovered, could be pried from the floor of an adjacent room.

They made a mound of stone against the door, building it carefully. Doc placed the stones as they were brought. Eventually, he decided the stone would hold the door for a time. He signaled that fact with his arms.

Seaworthy had lost his slate, but he still had the pencil.

He wrote: "We'll go to the ship, get equipment, come back and clean up."

Doc took the slate pencil.

"Right," he printed. "But extinguish all lights. Make no noise."

"Why?" Seaworthy wanted to know.

"Topping," Doc printed. "He is connecting what appears to be a blasting machine."

Fist shakings and fierce faces conveyed what Seaworthy thought of Topping.

Stanley Watchford Topping still crouched where Doc had last seen him. He still worked over the generator, which was of a waterproof type, probably especially equipped for underwater work.

Doc Savage led the way to the left. They kept away from the wall, the floor, the ceiling, and they were careful, so as not to make noise, not to strike their persons with their hands as they swam. They passed Topping, entered the last passage and in a moment could discern the comparatively brilliant outer water.

In quick succession, they swam out of the strange, round building which housed the scientific library of the pre-historic civilization.

Doc Savage stopped Monk and addressed him in sign language.

“We are not out of this yet,” he fingered. “You and Renny and Ham are probably better swimmers than any of this crowd. Beat them back to the ship.”

“I get you,” Monk answered on his fingers.

“Make them come aboard one at a time,” Doc Savage continued. “Having them climb up the anchor chain would be excellent. Bind each one.”

“Whole gang prisoners,” Monk made a big grin. “I’ll like that.”

He conveyed the information to Renny and Ham. The three of them set out at once, rising to the surface so as to locate the ships and set a direct line for them.

Seaworthy and the girl were plainly stumped by this action. They got together and tried to exchange opinions, but their sign language was inadequate. They started looking around for a smooth patch of sand to use as a slate.

Doc Savage went back into the round building.

That Stanley Watchford Topping contemplated something desperate, there was not the slightest doubt. Topping, of course, had knocked out Renny, after Renny had managed to get them both out of the prison pit. Topping, no doubt, had then gone back to the ship, gotten the explosive.

Just what Topping intended to do was a mystery. Doc intended to find out what it was, and stop it if the move was counter to his own plans.

The bronze man caught sight of Topping.

Simultaneously, he saw a number of other things. Captain Flamingo! The man who loved gaudy clothing was closely trailed by some of his men. They must have broken through the barricaded stone block door to the library room.

The room in which Topping crouched was large. Doc Savage, on one side of it, could barely distinguish Captain Flamingo, on the opposite side, coming through a door. This, despite the fact that Captain Flamingo carried a brilliant electric hand light. The water in the room, of course, was roiled somewhat by the traffic.

Topping saw Captain Flamingo. The effect of the discovery was pronounced and, as it turned out, cataclysmic.

Doc Savage drove forward. He realized what was going to happen; but there was not time to prevent it.

Topping came down hard on the handle which generated the current that ran through the wires, and set off the blasting charge. The charge, it developed with a roar,

was planted just inside the door through which Captain Flamingo and his men were coming. The wires had been concealed under the sand.

Doc Savage saw the flash, a hideous red blaze; and a split-second before that he managed to get his hands over his ears. That probably saved his hearing.

The concussion was terrific. Pressure such as he had never before experienced rammed against every inch of his great frame.

The bronze man must have been knocked out for a moment. He was never quite sure. He was aware of a terrific shock as he slammed against the passage wall, and knew that the rush of water was carrying him out. Light blazed in his eyes. He was in the water outside.

There was a great rumbling and roaring, as of a tremendous earthquake.

Chapter 20

THE LOST

Something was happening to the titanic circular building which housed the amazing archives of the lost civilization. The walls cracked in a place or two. Masonry fell. Great clouds of mud, water and sand spouted from the door.

The motion in the water carried Doc Savage upward and he let himself go, stroking a little.

Then a force—a vortex—seized him, dragged him toward the building. The sea in the vicinity was moving as if rushing into a great pit. The cause of that was evident a moment later.

The library room roof—that titanic block of solid stone—had dropped. Perhaps its wedging had been loosened by the blast. Perhaps its original builders had rigged it as a cataclysmic trap of sorts, just as they had rigged strange traps elsewhere in the circular building.

But the roof had dropped. Countless tons of stone now weighted down the secrets of the ancient civilization.

A cloud of mud and sand boiled up, spreading, swirling, diffusing. It hid the whole, it smarted Doc Savage's eyes.

The bronze man swam to the surface. It had seemed bright in the depths, but the sunlight on the surface was infinitely painful in its whiteness.

Doc Savage swam about for a long time, waiting. No one came to the surface. No bodies rose.

He struck out for the two ships.

Monk, his hairy simian frame encased in dry clothing, leaned over the bow of the *Tropic Seas* and watched Doc Savage climb slowly up the anchor chain.

"Boy, are they squawking their heads off!" The homely chemist grinned.

"You got them all?" Doc Savage asked.

"Every one," Monk chuckled. "The girl, too. Is she saying things!"

Doc Savage swung aboard.

Monk asked, "What about Captain Flamingo?"

Doc Savage hesitated, then said slowly, "Gone."

They walked aft.

Renny met them and rumbled, "We were plenty worried about you, Doc. Holy cow, that was some explosion!"

Seaworthy, Diamond Eve Post and the crew of the *Tropic Seas* were bunched amidships. All were tied hand and foot. Doc's men had done a good job. Ham watched them, fingering a rifle.

The girl looked at Doc Savage, and her expression was that of a young woman who could think of many unpleasant things to say. Deliberation, however, evidently decided her to hold her tongue.

“What about Captain Flamingo?” she queried.

“Topping set off an explosion,” Doc replied. “Every one perished.”

“Topping,” the girl said slowly. “He was Captain Flamingo’s boss, at first. Captain Flamingo must have turned on him. Probably Topping demanded too big a cut.”

Monk made an explosive sound, intended to convey surprise.

“Topping one of them?” grunted the homely chemist. “I know it looked like it, at times. But back in New York, in that moray eel trap, he took the same chance of being killed as the rest of us.”

“Wrong,” Doc Savage corrected.

Monk blinked. “Huh?”

“The morays would have been unlikely to have bitten any of us higher than the knees,” Doc Savage told Monk. “Topping was safe.”

“Why?” Monk was still puzzled.

“Topping,” Doc Savage said, “had artificial legs. You would have known that, had you observed closely the way he walked.”

Monk looked dazed. “But if you knew he was one of them, why didn’t you——”

“There was the mystery of *Taz* that needed solving,” Doc Savage reminded.

“You’re right about those artificial legs,” the girl put in.

Seaworthy scowled at them. Seaworthy seemed to have a very low opinion of himself at the present moment.

“Now who gets the library of *Taz*?” he muttered.

“No one,” Doc Savage said.

Seaworthy started. “What do you mean?”

“The roof of the library dropped,” Doc told him. “No, equipment available in either of these ships will get at it.”

The bronze man’s surmise proved to be correct in the days that followed. They spent almost a month on the scene, attempting to penetrate again into the library with its undoubtedly fabulous wealth of scientific secrets. They used up all their dynamite. They tried every ruse suggested by Doc Savage’s and Renny’s combined engineering skill. They got exactly nowhere.

This city of ancient civilization—*Taz*, as it has been dubbed, stood on what was once the top of a mountain, exploration developed. Soundings taken a few miles away in any direction, showed rather deep water. Nor did a search of other buildings of the metropolis reveal much of value, although it proved highly interesting.

In the course of the explorations, Monk cleared up one more point that had puzzled him. It had nothing to do with exploring, however.

“What about that brass case that caused us so much trouble at Topping’s house?” he asked Diamond Eve Post. “What was in it?”

“It was probably Captain Flamingo’s chart box,” she replied. “It might have held a chart showing the location of *Taz*, possibly maps of *Taz* itself.”

They sailed from *Taz* on the thirtieth day. Doc Savage stood on the after deck of the *Caribbenda* and watched the light patch, like a shoal, which marked the location of *Taz*, watched it until the vastness of the sea swallowed it. A radio compass, improvised from the wrecked equipment of the *Caribbenda*, would guide them back to civilization.

The *Tropic Seas* was left riding to her anchor, to be sent back for when they reached land.

Doc Savage, although the others perhaps had not realized it, was not leaving empty-handed. That chemical concoction, the one which made the function of breathing unnecessary, was certain to prove invaluable to American medical science. It meant, in fact, a new lease on life to sufferers from lung afflictions; and it would have other uses.

The disappearance of the shoal patch, which marked the location of *Taz*, meant the end of this adventure. There would be others. The very pursuit of his strange career of righting wrongs, aiding the oppressed, meant unending trouble for Doc Savage and his aids.

Amidships, Monk and Ham were quarreling as usual. Pretty Diamond Eve Post was the subject of the squabble this time. Monk had been monopolizing the young woman, and Ham was trying to cut in.

“Beat it, shyster,” Monk told Ham. “The young lady is teaching me to dance.”

“You can dance better than she can,” Ham told Monk. “You’re deceiving her, telling her you can’t dance a step.”

Possibly it was the reflection on her dancing ability that caused Diamond Eve Post to blow up.

“Always quarreling,” she shrieked. “Keep away from me! I’m getting tired of it!”

Monk looked very contrite and said, “I’m awfully sorry. I wouldn’t have done——”

“Nuts!” said the girl. “And quit shining up to me. My husband don’t like it.”

“Your husband?” Monk gulped.

“Seaworthy,” advised the young woman. “We’ve been secretly married for almost a year.”

Monk looked very disappointed and scowled at Ham, who also looked very disappointed, but who brightened when he saw the degree of the homely chemist’s discomfiture.

“Which shows what you know about women,” Ham said, nastily.

Monk groped for something stinging. The only thing he could think of was a resumption of their old argument.

“At least, I know as much about them as you know about sailors’ pants,” he growled.

Seaworthy came around the corner of the deckhouse, demanding, “What’s this about sailors’ pants?”

Ham snapped, “Monk claims they’re large at the bottoms, so as to go on and off easily. He’s crazy!”

“Ham says they’re big just because it’s a style,” Monk growled. “He’s crazy!”

“You’re both crazy,” said Seaworthy. “How could a sailor roll his pants up when he wants to scrub a deck, if they weren’t big at the bottoms?”

Even though Seaworthy gave them an answer, Ham and Monk would probably continue their argument indefinitely—at least, until Doc called them to aid him in another adventure.

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

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[The end of *Mystery under the Sea* by Lester Dent (as Kenneth Robeson)]