

The Sea Magician

A Doc Savage Adventure
#44

Kenneth Robeson
[Lester Dent]
1934

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Title: The Sea Magician

Date of first publication: 1934

Author: Lester Dent (as Kenneth Robeson) (1904-1959)

Date first posted: Mar. 23, 2020

Date last updated: Mar. 23, 2020

Faded Page eBook #20200349

This eBook was produced by: Al Haines, Cindy Beyer & the online Distributed Proofreaders Canada team at <https://www.pgdpCanada.net>

DOC SAVAGE'S AMAZING CREW

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

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
MURDER MELODY
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
THE DEADLY DWARF
THE OTHER WORLD
THE FLAMING FALCONS
THE ANNIHILIST
THE SQUEAKING GOBLINS
MAD EYES
THE TERROR IN THE NAVY
DUST OF DEATH
RESURRECTION DAY
HEX
RED SNOW
WORLD'S FAIR GOBLIN
THE DAGGER IN THE SKY
MERCHANTS OF DISASTER
THE GOLD OGRE
THE MAN WHO SHOOK THE EARTH
THE SEA MAGICIAN

THE SEA MAGICIAN

A DOC SAVAGE ADVENTURE

BY KENNETH ROBESON

THE SEA MAGICIAN

Originally published in DOC SAVAGE Magazine November 1934

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CONTENTS

Chapter		Page
I	THE KILLING SPOOK	1
II	KING JOHN'S CAPTIVE	7
III	THE PRIVATE DETECTIVE	13
IV	SOUTH AMERICA BOUND	23
V	THE UNCLE IN INDIA	29
VI	THE MAN OF BRONZE	37
VII	THE GOLD MAKER	45
VIII	THE SAMARITAN	53
IX	SEA SPAWN	59
X	THE KING JOHN TRAIL	66
XI	THE PLANT IN THE MARSH	72
XII	KING JOHN'S GOBLET	79
XIII	THE ATTEMPT TO KILL	87
XIV	GOLD FROM THE SEA	99
XV	ATTACK IN LONDON	110
XVI	FLAME THREADS	116
XVII	TROUBLE IN THE NIGHT	122
XVIII	THE SCHOOL HOUSE	128
XIX	KING JOHN'S LOOT	135

Chapter I

THE KILLING SPOOK

THE item which really got Doc Savage embroiled in the fantastic affair was one which came out in a London afternoon newspaper.

KING'S SPOOK KILLS

The good farmers in The Wash marshlands of Holland county are saying to-day that King John's ghost took another victim last night in the person of Joseph Shires, the peasant farmer who staggered into his home, mortally wounded.

Joseph Shires is reported to have gasped out that King John's ghost stabbed him; then he died.

The thing now puzzling the local police is that wounds in the dead man's body do look as if they had been made by an ancient broadsword such as King John, English ruler who reigned in the thirteenth century, might have carried.

Another puzzling thing is the tradepiece, or coin, dated 1216, which was found in Joseph Shires's pocket after he died. King John reigned in 1216.

Moreover, it is rumored that numerous persons in the vicinity of The Wash have recently seen a King John apparition—a towering ogre in armor, carrying a broadsword. King John is even said to have spoken to some, proclaiming his identity.

All in all, though, the police are inclined to believe the ghost stories are on a par with the sea serpent tales given such wide publicity some months ago. They are questioning Joseph Shires's neighbors, seeking to ascertain if one did not commit the crime with some farm implement, perhaps a scythe.

It was probable that quite a number of persons read this article, but it created no great stir among most of those who perused it, for the bit was relegated to an inside page, since Joseph Shires was not an individual who had ranked highly.

William Harper Littlejohn was one exception. He first read the story casually, then went over it again with greatly accelerated interest.

WILLIAM HARPER LITTLEJOHN was a very tall man, and he was also thinner than it seemed any human being could be and still live. His intimates frequently described him as looking like the advance agent for a famine.

When William Harper Littlejohn stood before gatherings of geologists and archaeologists, no one smiled at the fact that he resembled an empty suit of clothes

standing erect, nor commented on the monocle with which he always fumbled but never stuffed in an eye. William Harper Littlejohn was conceded to know more about archaeology and geology than almost any living man.

The item about the royal spook that killed caught William Harper Littlejohn's eye because he was hunting excitement. He had been lecturing for some weeks before the Fellowship of Scientists, and he was getting tired of it.

One would never suspect it by looking at him, but William Harper Littlejohn's big love in life was excitement. He was happiest when in trouble.

That was why he was one of Doc Savage's group of five aides. Trouble was Doc Savage's business—other person's troubles. For Doc Savage was that amazing man of bronze, that combination of scientific genius and physical daring, who made a business of helping others out of serious trouble.

"Johnny"—he was called that by Doc Savage and his group of assistants—laid aside the newspaper which contained the spook story. He fished two radiograms from a pocket. The first was dated four days previously and read:

ARRIVING IN LONDON IN FIVE DAYS

DOC SAVAGE

The second radiogram, dated only a few hours later than the first, was evidently in answer to a message of inquiry which Johnny had dispatched, and read:

SORRY BUT HAVE NO ACTION TO PROMISE STOP AM COMING ONLY TO FILL SHORT
LECTURE ENGAGEMENT BEFORE FELLOWSHIP OF SCIENTISTS

DOC

Johnny sighed gloomily. That second message had been a great disappointment, for he had held visions of Doc Savage coming to England for the purpose of helping some one who was in trouble. This would have been sure to mean plenty of action.

JOHNNY looked at the newspaper again and reached an abrupt decision. Doc Savage was not due in London until the following day; he would reach Southampton that night by liner. There was time, before his arrival, for a short trip up to The Wash to investigate this story of a kingly spook who slew with a broadsword. Johnny reached for the telephone.

"Connect me with the nearest aeronautical depot," he requested; then, having secured his connection, he stated, "Would it be feasible to charter an aerial conveyance for an immediate peregrination?"

"For a *what*?" the voice wanted to know.

"For an immediate noctambulation to the neighborhood of The Wash," said Johnny.

Johnny never used a small word when he had time to think of a big one. He was a walking dictionary of words of more than three syllables, and when he was really going good, an ordinary man could not even understand him.

"I'm not sure what you want, gov'nor," the voice at the airport told him. "But if you've got the money to pay for it, you can get it here."

“Expect me shortly,” Johnny advised.

Hardly more than two hours later, his chartered plane deposited Johnny close to the village of Swineshead, which was on the edge of that great stretch of marshland surrounding the curious tidal bay known as The Wash. Johnny paid off his pilot and watched the plane take the air on its return trip to London. Johnny intended to charter another plane the next day, or motor back to the metropolis.

Despite the lateness of the hour, Johnny found that Swineshead pubs were still open, catering to various local citizens, not a few of whom were sufficiently inebriated to talk freely.

Johnny underwent a curious change. In engaging the plane and during the flight, he had scarcely spoken a sentence containing words small enough for the pilot to understand. But now he cocked his hat over an eye, tucked his monocle-magnifier where it would not be noticed, and began speaking a brand of English which would have shocked his learned colleagues of the Fellowship of Scientists. Furthermore, his manner was certainly not that of an intellectual giant.

He asked questions about John Shires, whom King John’s ghost was supposed to have stabbed to death with a broadsword. He learned several things.

For instance, the citizens of Swineshead—those abroad at this unearthly hour, at least—were fully convinced King John was really a spectral reality. Two men insisted absolutely that they had seen him.

“Hi talked to the bloomin’ king not a fortnight ago!” asserted one man; then he paused to quaff the ale which Johnny thoughtfully provided. “’Twas while Hi was ’untin’ ’ares in the rushes near the shore o’ The Wash. King John walked right up an’ gabbed to me, ’e did.”

JOHNNY studied his informant, wondering just how intoxicated the fellow was; the speaker was pleasantly flushed, but certainly not entirely inebriated.

“How did you know he was King John’s ghost?” Johnny asked quite seriously.

“’E told me so,” said the other.

“Told you?”

“’E did, an’ that’s the truth, gov’nor. I’d ’ave known it anyway, on account of the way ’e was dressed. ’Ad on a coat of mail, ’e did, and carried a bloomin’ broadsword. It was King John, all right. I’ve seen ’is pictures in the school books.”

Johnny paid for more ale. “What was this talk about?”

“Mostly about whether King John’s ghost was to kill me or not,” said the informant.

“Kill you?”

“’E claimed as ’ow I was the bloke who give ’im poison seven hundred years ago. ’E said ’e was ’untin’ that bloke. Said ’e’d been ’untin’ seven ’undred years, and that ’e’d finally find the bloke who poisoned ’im, an when that ’appened, ’e’d run the lad through with ’is broadsword.”

“Very interesting,” said Johnny.

“King John’s ghost said as ’ow ’e killed people ’e met in ’is nightly wanderings, just on the chance ’e’d get the bloke who done the poisoning,” the other went on. “Said ’e wasn’t quite sure who did poison ’im, and that’s why ’e did so much killin’.”

“I see,” said Johnny. “Was there anything else?”

“Only that Hi’d better stay away from The Wash,” the other, man muttered. “King John’s ghost said as ’ow ’e might kill me next time we met. Said ’e was liable to kill anybody ’e met. I think that’s ’ow poor Joseph Shires got ’is.”

“Is this ghost usually seen in the same vicinity?” Johnny questioned.

“Mostly, yes, gov’nor,” declared the other. “’E ’angs out near the mouth of the Wellstream.”

Johnny retired to the quiet of the village street to consider what he had learned. King John, so history said, had been poisoned in this vicinity, and as a result of which, had died. King John had been a violent and intemperate ruler, Johnny recalled having read. It was King John who had signed the Magna Charta which formed the charter of English liberties and the inspiration of the “personal rights” portion of the United States constitution.

King John had a very violent temper, history said, and after being forced to sign the Magna Charta, had rolled on the floor, bit the oak legs of a table, and butted his head against a stone wall. Then he had raised an army and gone out to rob the barons who had forced him to sign. It was on this foray that he had died, either from overeating peaches and drinking new cider—or from poisoning.

Johnny fumbled out his monocle and twirled it idly, a habit he had when puzzled. He did not believe in ghosts abroad with armor and broadswords, but at the same time, the story of the apparition was a bit too prevalent to be dismissed.

“I’ll be superamalgamated!” he murmured. “I think I shall investigate more comprehensively.”

THE night was not much further along when Johnny turned up alone in the region of the junction of the river Wellstream and The Wash. Since it was night and the region one without population, the eminent archaeologist shed shoes, socks and trousers and moved about clad only in underwear shorts, vest, coat and shirt. His bony shanks presented a grotesque appearance.

Frequent stretches of water and bog holes made the dishabille necessary. There were also patches of quicksand, very treacherous, which could best be detected with bare feet.

At first, Johnny attempted to reach the beach and follow that, but he surrendered this idea upon discovering that there was actually no beach, but only salt water grass and mud flats. It was a grim and dreary region which presented an aspect similar to nothing so much as a storm-swept wheat field of vast expanse, spotted here and there with pools and stretches of slime.

He had been prowling the vicinity for perhaps an hour when he had a narrow escape. The tide came in. It was not like the advance of ordinary tide, this one, but it

came in swiftly, rolling over the salt marsh a good deal faster than it was possible for a man to run. Johnny was soaked to the belt line before he reached higher ground.

He stood on a knoll, among gnarled bushes, and eyed the marshes surrounding The Wash with new respect. The moon was out, and the tidal waters creeping through the marsh grass caused the latter to undulate as if it were fur on the back of some fabulous monster.

Johnny jumped a full foot in the air when a hollowly ominous voice spoke behind him.

“Turnest thou around, that thine face may be seen!” commanded the sepulchral tones.

Johnny whirled, his first inclination being to laugh. The words were so foreign to the English of the present day that they were comical. But the bony geologist forgot to be mirthful as he looked at the figure before him.

Chapter II

KING JOHN'S CAPTIVE

THE individual who had spoken might have stepped from the pages of some historical tome, for his garb was that of a fighting man of the thirteenth century. Chain mail of fine workmanship shod him from head to foot, and over that was worn a short gown affair of white silk which was gathered in by a belt that supported a dagger and a short sword, both in scabbards.

The features of the apparitional being were concealed behind a fierce bush of black beard. The eyes were dark, piercing, the nose a hooked beak.

Tilted back over a shoulder, rifle fashion, the figure carried one of the biggest broadswords Johnny had ever seen in a museum or outside of one.

“For the love of mud!” Johnny gulped, forgetting his big words for once.

“Ah,” breathed the apparition. “Methinks thou art the rascal who touched my wine goblet with poison.”

The absurdity of the picture the other presented again seized Johnny, who was an extremely modern gentleman who did not believe in ghosts in any form. He burst into a snort of laughter.

“Listen, my friend,” he chuckled. “Why the masquerading in that rig?”

The ghostly figure advanced two paces, the chain mail clinking and grinding softly, the moonlight shimmering on the metallic links.

“Fool, dost thou not know to whom thou speakest?” demanded the cavernous voice.

“To King John, I suppose,” Johnny said dryly.

Then Johnny’s facetiousness suddenly evaporated, for he caught sight of brownish stains upon the broadsword which certainly looked like remnants of dried blood.

“Down to thy knees!” rumbled the figure. “Dost thou not know how to come before royalty?”

Johnny stood his ground warily. He was now convinced that he faced a madman, some poor fellow who had gone insane and imagined himself to be the long-dead English ruler. The fellow was probably violent, and there was no telling what he would do.

“What are you doing here, King John?” Johnny queried.

“Somewhere in these fens dwells the person who didst cause me to die,” boomed the one in mail. “I hunt him. Methinks thou art he.”

Johnny was carrying his shoes, socks and trousers under an arm. They made a compact bundle which he shifted uncertainly.

“I thought you found the poisoner last night,” he said.

“What meanest thou?”

“Didn’t you chop a fellow up with that broadsword last night?” Johnny elaborated. “He was a farmer named Joseph Shires.”

The black-bearded head shook slowly. “King John dost not trouble to remember the events which art in the past.”

A hopeless lunatic, Johnny decided firmly. If the fellow was permitted to continue running loose, no telling how many persons he would slay or injure. It would be a service to the English countryside if he were seized and confined in an institution where he belonged.

Johnny knew insane persons could often be persuaded to do things, if one sympathized with them.

“I am not the man who poisoned you,” he told the other solemnly. “But I know where he can be found, perhaps.”

“Whence?” questioned the figure.

“In the village of Swineshead,” Johnny said promptly. “Come with me and I will show you the way.”

If Johnny could get the individual who claimed to be King John to the village, he could be seized easily. He could be seized here, too, if care was used, but there might be difficulty in getting him out of the marsh. If he could be persuaded to come out under his own power, so much the better.

But King John’s ghost balked. “Nay, vassal. I knowest the one who poisoned me can be found here. I think *thou* art he!”

Lunging suddenly, the mailed figure slashed furiously at Johnny’s head with his broadsword.

JOHNNY ducked. Simultaneously, he hurled the bundle composed of his shoes, socks and trousers. The lump of clothing hit the other in the face just as the broadsword missed Johnny’s head.

The bony geologist leaped forward, feet-first. He landed squarely on the other’s midriff. Air tore through the black beard with a swishing moan and the fellow went over backward.

Johnny pounced on the wide handle of the broadsword. It was intended for two-fisted operation anyway, and there was room enough for him to get a grip. He wrenched and wrestled, got the weapon, then threw it away.

A mailed fist bounced off Johnny’s head, leaving a ringing and colored lights behind in his skull. He pumped two blows at his foe, but only barked his knuckles on the chain mail armor.

The fight was, Johnny perceived, going to be tough. The other was a big man, and strong; moreover, the fellow was incased in the protective linkage of metal.

Seizing his foe’s arms, Johnny tried to hold the fellow. The other snapped like a dog at his throat. Johnny retaliated by sticking a thumb in one of his opponent’s eyes. They went over and over in the reeds and soft mud.

William Harper Littlejohn's eminent associates in the Fellowship of Scientists would have been surprised to see him now, for the famous geologist and archaeologist was showing a knowledge of gutter fighting methods which would have been envied by the most brutal London dockwalloper. At that, he was barely holding his own.

The pseudo King John had lost the use of one eye temporarily, thanks to Johnny's probing thumb. But Johnny's lips were split, he had lost his coat, and his shirt hung to his person only by the sleeves.

Johnny managed to jam both hands inside the facial opening of the armor hood and got hold of his foe's throat. He squeezed; at the same time, he wrapped his bony legs around the other's torso, pinioning his arms.

King John began making squawking sounds. His dark face purpled. Foam shot past his teeth and his tongue came out. Finally his struggle weakened.

Johnny ceased his choking before the other was seriously damaged, and utilized stripes of his own torn garments for binding. Yanking the knots tight, he started to stand erect—and a firecracker seemed to go off in the back of his head.

He saw the black muck of the marsh rush up at his face; he seemed to plunge far down into the earth where it was infinitely black and silent, and to remain there for a long time.

WHEN JOHNNY came up out of the earth and opened his eyes, the pseudo King John was standing at his side, leaning on the broadsword.

"What—what happened?" Johnny gulped vaguely.

"Mine faithful horse came to mine rescue," rumbled the other. "Yea. With his hoofs, mine animal subdued thee."

"Hell," growled Johnny, and felt of the back of his head.

There was a knob on the rear of his cranium, and it did feel as if a horse had kicked him. But Johnny knew no horse could have approached without being seen or heard. A horse could not travel over this marshy ground, anyway, because quicksands were too plentiful.

Johnny sat up. He was promptly knocked back with a forcible blow from the flat of the heavy broadsword, but before that happened, he saw that there was no one else around them. The marsh was as empty of life as if no one dwelled within hundreds of miles.

The figure in chain mail was rubbing his throat where Johnny's fingers had tightened, this indicating the fight must not have occurred long ago. The moon had not changed its position perceptibly, so Johnny concluded he had not been unconscious for long.

Throat massaged to his satisfaction, Johnny's captor fumbled inside his white-silk doublet and produced a flint and tinder device for starting a fire. This surprised Johnny. He stared at the apparatus. Then he whistled softly in astonishment.

The fire-making mechanism was undoubtedly ancient, an historical piece. It was deeply pitted, as if it had lain in the weather for a long time, but was still serviceable. It

struck sparks, the tinder ignited, and the flame was applied to a tallow candle which the ghostly figure also brought from under the white doublet. The figure bent over a pile of papers lying on the soft marsh muck.

Johnny, staring, perceived that the contents of his own pockets were being inspected. Among these was a weapon which resembled an overgrown automatic pistol, but which was in reality a machine pistol capable of firing shots with extreme rapidity.

The weapon was an invention of Doc Savage, and Doc's men all carried them, although they used them only on occasions of extreme necessity. Doc Savage and his five aides made it a practice never to take human life directly. They never killed an enemy, even when their lives were in the greatest danger.

The pseudo King John seemed unfamiliar with firearms, and fumbled the weapon in a manner which caused Johnny's thin hair to stand erect.

"Turn that thing the other way!" Johnny snapped. "You'll shoot somebody!"

The other seemed not to hear, but put the machine pistol down and picked up the papers.

"Verily, it is a strange writing which men use these days," he remarked.

Among the papers was the cablegram which Johnny had received from Doc Savage, advising of Doc's arrival in London. Its text was such to indicate that Johnny was one of Doc's five aides.

The weird individual who claimed to be King John seemed greatly interested in the cablegram. He scowled blackly at Johnny.

"Are you one of Doc Savage's men?" he growled.

JOHNNY did his best to keep from starting—for the other had spoken without using the weird English of other centuries.

"What difference does it make?" Johnny demanded.

"Are you?" the other snarled.

"Yes," said Johnny.

The figure in armor swore explosively, and they were violent Twentieth century oaths.

"Did Doc Savage send you up here?" he questioned harshly.

"No," Johnny denied.

"I think that's a damn lie, bloke!" snarled the other.

Johnny squirmed about, realizing fully for the first time that his arms and legs were loosely but effectively bound with stout cotton cords. He could move, but not enough to put up a fight.

"You seem to have abandoned your antiquated mannerisms of speech, King John," he suggested.

The other only glared.

Johnny, studying the man, abruptly decided the fellow was not insane after all, and that meant the individual had been playing the King John role for a deliberate purpose.

“What is the game?” Johnny asked sharply.

“Bloke, it’ll be a long time before you know!” the other snarled.

He lunged over suddenly and struck Johnny with his broadsword. He used the flat of the blade, but the blow was heavy and sufficient to introduce Johnny to quick unconsciousness.

“Doc Savage must have sent you up here!” the pseudo King John told Johnny’s insensible form. “And that’ll bear lookin’ into.”

Chapter III

THE PRIVATE DETECTIVE

SOUTHAMPTON is one of the major ports for express passenger traffic across the Atlantic, and, as such, had seen the arrival and departure of more than one notable.

The chief London and Paris newspapers had ship reporters regularly assigned to the port, and it was a rare occasion when a personage arrived who was so important that the battery of regular journalists was amplified by the arrival of additional special writers.

But to-night, some of the leading newspaper men of England and the Continent were on hand as snorting tugs pushed a certain transatlantic liner into her berth. The journalists were augmented by a battery of cameramen and quite a number of curious citizens.

The mayor was down in his robes of office, and numerous Englishmen of high rank were present in full regalia. Had a foreign potentate been arriving, the reception would hardly have been more elaborate.

It was all in honor of Doc Savage, the man of mystery, the individual who was a symbol of scientific knowledge and physical daring, the man who was by way of being the supreme adventurer of all time.

The newspaper men were down there because Doc Savage never did things in the ordinary fashion. Almost any move he made was good for a headline. Furthermore, it was a fact that Doc Savage did not look with a permissive eye on newspaper publicity. He was that rare individual, a celebrity who did not care about seeing his name and picture in the newspaper. More particularly, he did not care about seeing his picture, because it gave his enemies a means of familiarizing themselves with his physical appearance.

The reluctance which Doc Savage displayed toward newspaper publicity had the effect of making the journalists more determined. Had Doc Savage hired a publicity agent and showed a desire for news space, the scribes would have ignored him to a degree; as it was, they fell over themselves to get a story about him.

The high-ranking Englishmen were present because Doc Savage had done great service for their country in the past. For instance, there were delicate procedures in surgery which the unusual man of mystery had instituted and which had saved numerous lives. Too, there were charities to which Doc Savage had contributed enormous sums of money—money which, incidentally, he had taken from villainous individuals who had no right to it.

Doc Savage had cabled specifically that there was to be no reception in his honor; but the Englishmen had ignored that. They stood at the gangplank with the journalists and scrutinized each passenger to alight, in search of their remarkable visitor.

Roustabouts unloaded baggage at the cargo gangway, sweating and swearing. Several of these noted a tall figure which strode past them and went ashore.

The individual wore a turban and a flowing robe. His face was almost hidden by a ruffle of the robe, but that portion of it which showed to view was a nut-brown color.

The roustabouts, thinking the one who had disembarked was an oriental, of which several were aboard the liner, paid no great attention, especially after they saw the individual in the turban show the proper papers to an officer on the dock. They did note that officer bowed with marked deference after he had seen the name on the papers.

Observers would have been surprised had they seen the strange personage after he entered an unused shed on the shore end of the dock.

Indeed, one person was watching as the individual in the turban entered the shack, but this watcher kept out of sight behind a huge wooden bitt on the dock, being very careful not to show himself.

AS soon as he was concealed inside the shed, the man who had just come ashore removed the turban. A few strokes erased brown grease paint from his features. He had been walking with a stoop, but as he whipped off the white robe, he straightened.

The erstwhile wearer of oriental garb, when he left the shack, was a striking personality. He seemed enormously larger than he had before, but it was only by comparing his size to the proportions of the shack that his true Herculean build was evident.

The man's complexion was a metallic bronze, a hue that could only have come from exposure to a good many tropical suns. His hands and neck were notable for the unearthly size of the tendons and muscles which stood out under the bronze skin at each movement.

Most striking of all, however, were the eyes which caught stray light rays from a near-by street lamp. They were weird eyes, like pools of flake-gold which were being stirred continuously. There was a strange quality in them, a power to compel. They were hypnotic eyes.

The bronze man's features were regular, firm, and possessed an aspect of undeniable handsomeness. He swung along the gloomy street with a silent, athletic ease.

So outstanding was his appearance that a cab driver, glimpsing him by chance, stopped short and stared, mouth agape.

"Blimme!" breathed the hackman. "Wouldn't *that* bloke be a tough one in a fight!"

It was many hours before that hack driver ceased to see, in his mental eye, the astounding bronze man whom he had merely glimpsed.

The driver was so awe-struck that he failed to note a furtive individual who passed him in the near-by gloom. This man was the one who had been watching from behind the dock bitt, and he was trailing the giant of bronze. He did his shadowing furtively, showing experience at the art, and he seemed confident that the bronze man had not observed him.

The bronze man seemed in no hurry, nor did he give evidence of having a definite destination. He walked to the north, then swung west, and came finally to a corner. He

loitered there for a time, apparently waiting for some one. His hands rested behind him, as if to support his weight, as he lunged against the corner.

The man who was shadowing the bronze individual was not close enough to note that the bronze man was doing something with one of his hands—he was apparently writing on the glass of the show window against which he leaned.

After a while, the bronze man walked on, moving slowly, heading into streets which were dark and filled with smells none too appetizing.

The shadow fell in behind.

SLIGHTLY less than five minutes later, two men approached the corner where the bronze giant had loitered and written on the glass show window. These two newcomers carried bags, and came from the direction of the dock where the transatlantic liner had tied up.

The pair were quarreling. They seemed on the point of flying at each other's throats.

"You awful mistake of nature!" gritted the one who was slender and extremely dapper of dress, and who carried a thin, black cane. "I'm ashamed to be seen with you, and especially with that filthy hog you're leading!"

"A horse collar for you, you overdressed shyster!" growled the other.

The latter's head came scarcely to the shoulders of his companion, who was not tall. But the man lacked very little of being as wide as he was tall. His arms were some inches longer than his stubby, bowed legs, and hands and wrists were rusty monstrosities from which grew hairs as thick as small shingle nails.

The man had an incredibly homely face, garnished with a mouth so huge that it seemed his maker had had an accident. He could easily be mistaken for a gorilla on the gloomy street.

"Go on, take a taxi to your hotel," snapped the man with the black cane. "Otherwise, some of these bobbies are likely to throw you in the local zoo, you missing link!"

The homely one said with a small, almost childlike voice, "If you think I like going around with an overdressed snob, you're nuts, you pain in the neck!"

At the apish man's heels trailed a pig. The pig was a remarkable specimen of the porker family, obviously a runt who would never grow beyond his present size—that of a small dog. The pig had long, thin legs, a gaunt body, and ears so huge that they looked as if they might serve for wings in an emergency.

The dapperly dressed man glared at the pig and wrenched at his black cane, which came apart near the handle, disclosing that it was a sword cane with a blade of fine steel.

"I'm certainly going to turn that hog into breakfast bacon one of these days, Monk!" he promised fiercely.

"Any time you're ready, Ham," growled the apish "Monk."

They came within sight of the corner where the bronze man had loitered. They stopped, seeming surprised.

“Doc ain’t there!” grunted the gorillalike Monk.

“*Hm-m-m,*” said “Ham,” and absently sheathed his sword cane. “I wonder what happened? Doc said he would meet us there after he gave those newspaper men the slip.”

They advanced, looked the vicinity over, and found no trace of the individual whom they sought.

“Maybe Doc left a message,” Monk said, small-voiced.

The hairy fellow opened one of the leather bags and withdrew what at first might have been mistaken for a folding camera. He touched a switch on the side of this and pointed the round lense at the corner. The lense, instead of being clear glass, was purple, almost black.

Eventually, the homely man passed his queer device over the glass window. A strange thing happened. Written words sprang out where none had been before. They glowed in an eerie, electric blue.

MONK AND HAM: A MAN IS FOLLOWING ME. I AM CONTINUING ALONG THIS STREET. FOLLOW AND GRAB THE FELLOW.

DOC

Monk switched off the cameralike device without comment. Both he and Ham had received such messages from Doc Savage on other occasions, and knew that Doc had written the missive with a chemical chalk which was normally invisible, even with a moderately strong microscope, but which fluoresced, or glowed, when exposed to the ultraviolet light exuded by the lantern device which resembled a folding camera, or possibly a small magic lantern.

It was by this method that Doc Savage habitually left messages for his associates—and Monk and Ham were two members of Doc’s group of five unusual aides.

Monk—Lieutenant Colonel Andrew Blodgett Mayfair—despite his low forehead and apish appearance, was one of the most learned industrial chemists alive. Ham—Brigadier General Theodore Marley Brooks—the dapper dresser was a lawyer whose oratorical powers had swayed many a jury, and whose keen legal mind was capable of grasping the most intricate problem of law.

The two sought the shadows and glided up the street. They were working in harmony now, their late quarrel temporarily elapsed. As a matter of fact, they were the best of friends, although acquaintances could not recall having heard one speak a civil word to the other.

The homely pig—Monk had long ago named him Habeas Corpus to aggravate Ham—followed them silently at a word from Monk. The pig was well trained. Monk spent all his spare time—rather, that which was not expended in goading Ham—in training Habeas.

A FEW minutes after Monk and Ham merged themselves with the shadows of the Southampton street, there was a sudden outburst of peculiar sounds. These came from a point some distance up the murky thoroughfare.

The sounds were such as might be made by two small dogs and a very big rat. The growling of the dogs was absent, but not so the noises of the rodent. Perhaps such burghers of Southampton as were aroused by the brief outburst did believe it to be made by prowling canines, and accordingly dismissed it, for no one came to investigate.

No one, that is, with the exception of Doc Savage. The giant of bronze was loitering along when he heard the small tumult. He promptly wheeled, retraced his steps and almost at once came upon Monk and Ham.

“Good work,” said the bronze man, in a voice which was striking for its controlled power.

Monk and Ham had seized the individual who had been trailing Doc Savage. This man was a thin-faced fellow with the neck of a turkey and the round body of a stunted ostrich. There was an ostrich aspect about his eyes, as well, for they were large for his thin face. He was attired in dark clothing, and his black hat had fallen off in the scuffle as he was seized.

The pig, Habeas Corpus, was engaged in systematically pulling the hat to pieces.

Doc Savage produced a flashlight which got its current from a self-contained spring generator, gave it a wind, and then twisted the lense head so that the beam became very wide. Not only was the captive’s scrawny face illuminated, but the bronze man’s as well.

For several seconds, nothing was said or done. The remarkable bronze man merely studied the captive—and the latter stared at Doc, looking very uneasy, moistening his lips often. There was something grim and terrible about the bronze giant’s features.

“Blimme!” the captive gulped. “I wasn’t meaning no harm!”

“You were following me,” Doc pointed out.

The other nodded. “Picked your trail up at the boat. I won’t deny that.”

The homely Monk put in, “Here’s what he had in his pockets,” and extended several articles in the palm of a hairy hand.

Doc turned the flashlight on the objects and saw cards bearing the inscription:

W. P. WALL-SAMUELS
PRIVATE INVESTIGATIONS

There was also a badge of the type issued to private detectives in England.

“That’s right,” the prisoner said earnestly. “I am W. P. Wall-Samuels, a private operative.”

“Who hired you to trail me?” Doc questioned.

“No one,” Wall-Samuels denied.

“Of course we will believe that!” the sword-cane carrying Ham clipped dryly.

“It’s the truth,” Wall-Samuels insisted. “I was following you on my own initiative. You see, I had a business proposition to put up to you. I had an idea you would avoid the newspaper men, so I watched the gangways where they were unloading baggage. Sure enough, I recognized you under your oriental disguise. I had seen your picture before.”

Doc Savage asked, “What is your business proposition?”

“I hoped to persuade you to become my partner in a London detective agency,” said Wall-Samuels. “With you as my partner, I could make a lot of money. You would not even have to do any of the work. Just lend your name to my firm, and take half the profits.”

“Blazes!” snorted Monk. “The brass of this guy!”

Wall-Samuels looked injured. “Then you won’t become my partner.”

“No,” Doc said.

“If you were Doc’s partner, somebody would kill you within twenty-four hours,” the homely Monk growled.

“I’ll take that chance,” said Wall-Samuels.

“No,” Doc told him again.

Wall-Samuels scowled and snapped, “Then I’ll thank you to let me go free!”

“Release him,” Doc directed.

With reluctance, Monk and Ham took their hands off the person of the private detective, and the latter stood erect, glanced around, saw Habeas Corpus putting the final touches on the ruination of his hat, and fell to glaring.

“You owe me a new hat!” he grated.

“You’ll get a swift kick where it’ll do the most good, if you don’t haul out of here,” Monk promised.

Muttering under his breath, Wall-Samuels took a hasty departure.

WALL-SAMUELS walked in the middle of the sidewalk, making his footsteps heavy, until he rounded a corner and judged himself out of hearing of Doc Savage and his two companions. Then Wall-Samuels ducked into a doorway and waited for some minutes, eying the gloomy shadows along his back trail and listening. He became satisfied that he was not being followed.

Arising on tiptoe, Wall-Samuels began to run. He slackened his pace to a walk when he sighted a bobby, then ran again, keeping to the more gloomy side streets until at last he reached a corner which held a shop that was labeled, “Apothecary.” In the United States, this establishment would have been called a drug store. It held telephone booths.

Wall-Samuels secured a number.

“Chief?” he asked.

“All right, what is it?” snapped an impatient voice. “Did you follow Doc Savage?”

“Not very far,” Wall-Samuels admitted ruefully. “I picked up his trail when he left the liner by the cargo gangway which I was watching. But somehow he found out I was on his heels—or his two men, Monk and Ham, found it out. I don’t know how they did it. But they grabbed me before I knew what was happening.”

“You were warned to be very careful!” grated the other over the telephone wire.

“How in the bloody deuce was I to know this man Savage wasn’t human?” Wall-Samuels snapped. “I was as careful as I could be.”

“What happened?” queried the other impatiently.

“I fed Doc Savage and his two men a fast story,” Wall-Samuels chuckled. “I always carry fake private detective credentials with me, and I told them I was a private sleuth who wanted to take Doc Savage on as a partner.”

“Did you think they would swallow that silly yarn?” the distant man asked sarcastically.

“It was a good story,” the false detective growled. “And they believed it.”

“You sure?” asked the distant man.

“Positive!”

“All right—here is what you are to do,” said the voice over the wire. “You are to go back and shadow Doc Savage again. Do it so that he will catch you once more. I don’t think you will have any trouble with that part, after the flop you just made.”

“Let him—catch me again!” Wall-Samuels wailed. “But I do not understand this.”

“It has become necessary to get Doc Savage out of England,” said the other. “When he catches you this second time, you are to tell him a story which will cause him to leave.”

“But what can I tell him?” Wall-Samuels asked wildly.

“Tell him that William Harper Littlejohn, one of his men, sailed on a boat last night for South America,” directed the other. “Tell him you are not sure what it is all about, except that William Harper Littlejohn was trailing somebody, and left a letter containing the particulars behind for Doc Savage.

“Tell Doc Savage you were hired by the man whom Littlejohn was trailing, and that you stole the letter and gave it to that man. Then tell Savage that you were hired to watch him and radio the man who hired you if Doc Savage made a move to go to South America.”

“This is complicated,” Wall-Samuels groaned.

“You are an expert liar,” the distant speaker complimented. “You can put it over. The idea is to get Doc Savage to take a boat for South America, thinking he is following his helper, William Harper Littlejohn, or Johnny, as they call him.”

“Where is Johnny?” the fake detective wanted to know.

“We have him,” said the other. “The fool got to chasing King John’s ghost up in The Wash region, and we had to seize him.”

“This is bad,” Wall-Samuels muttered.

“Do not fall down on this,” growled the distant voice. “We have other troubles on our hands, too, I’m afraid.”

“What do you mean?”

“Wehman Mills.”

“What about him?”

“He has disappeared in Brest, France.”

“What in the hell was he doing over there?” asked Wall-Samuels.

“He said he had to have certain machinery, and I sent him over with some of the men,” replied the mastermind. “Now he’s disappeared.”

“Think he’s wise to the set-up?”

“It looks as if he was. I have the men hunting for him.”

“What about his niece? She’s in Brest, isn’t she?”

“Yes. But we’ll take care of that end. You get Doc Savage out of England. We cannot have him hunting this Johnny.”

“I’ll do my best,” promised Wall-Samuels.

Then he hung up, freed himself from the telephone booth and walked outside.

The instant he was through the door, two men stepped close to him from either side. It happened so swiftly that he did not even have time to try to escape. Muscular hands gripped his arms.

Wall-Samuels tried to assemble his shattered composure, and exploded, “What does this mean?”

His two captors were Monk and Ham.

Chapter IV

SOUTH AMERICA BOUND

“KEEP your shirt on, guy,” Monk advised.

Wall-Samuels was walked forcibly toward the nearest corner. He dared not protest; the formidable expressions on the features of Monk and Ham promised violent handling if there was the slightest resistance. Around the corner, they halted.

“Doc will be here shortly,” imparted Ham. The dapper lawyer had shoved his sword cane through his belt.

There was a brief wait, then Doc Savage approached. The bronze man seemed more Herculean than ever as he swung up out of the murk.

“What do you want with me?” Wall-Samuels demanded, trying to bristle. “I told you my story.”

“You told us a string of lies,” Monk informed him.

“I did not!”

“Then why did you run after you left us? And who did you just call?”

Wall-Samuels moistened his lips. “So you followed me?”

“Sure,” said Monk. “What kind of saps did you think we were?”

The pretended detective neglected to reply to that; he was reflecting that if any one had showed a lack of canniness, it was himself. These men, he was realizing, were considerably harder to deceive than he had thought.

Doc Savage inquired, “What about telling the truth, Wall-Samuels, or whatever your name is?”

Wall-Samuels swallowed rapidly. He looked scared. He tried to assume an appearance of even greater fright, which was unnecessary.

“Listen,” he whined. “I can’t talk. It’ll get me into all kinds of trouble.”

“Maybe you think you’re at a tea social now?” Monk asked sourly. “Doc, how about me giving this guy a little osteopath treatment?”

Monk opened and closed his enormous furry hands, and Wall-Samuels stared at the hirsute digits as if they were ravenous animals. Then he peered at Doc’s bronze-cabled hands, and his fright increased. He knew inhuman strength when he saw it, and was fully convinced either of these men could do him infinite damage.

“I was hired by a man who is being chased by William Harper Littlejohn,” the man gulped, rolling his ostrich eyes.

“Hey!” Monk exploded. “What’s Johnny got himself mixed in?”

Wall-Samuels told his false story slyly, letting a bit of it slip each time he was threatened. The whole fabrication came out as if it were being rendered by a man in mortal terror. Wall-Samuels, studying the faces of his three unusual captors, became convinced that the story was getting over.

The yarn was substantially the same one which the man on the telephone had outlined.

“Wait here,” Doc Savage directed, at the end of the tale.

The bronze man departed with the silence of a metallic wraith, a silence which caused Wall-Samuels to shiver. He was becoming convinced that this giant of metal was not entirely human.

Early milk wagons and delivery trucks were beginning to rumble over the Southampton streets, and a few porters had started to work on show windows with sponges, wipers and suds buckets, cleaning up for the day which was soon to come.

DOC SAVAGE reappeared.

“A call to Johnny’s London hotel discloses that he left last night,” the bronze man imparted. “He has not come back.”

“I told you he sailed for South America,” Wall-Samuels stuttered.

“Pipe down!” Monk growled.

“Other calls reveal that a steamer did sail for South America last night,” Doc continued. “The vessel was fitted with ship-to-shore radio telephone, so it was a simple matter to establish communication.”

Wall-Samuels began to tremble violently. He had not foreseen this contingency. He would have to try to make them believe that Johnny must have taken another ship.

“Was Johnny aboard the ship?” Ham questioned.

“His name is on the passenger list,” Doc informed them. “But the authorities aboard the vessel were unable to locate him. A steward did report, however, that the bed in his stateroom had been slept in. The steward reported also that there were bloodstains on the bed clothing.”

“Damn it!” Monk grated. “Something has happened to Johnny!”

Wall-Samuels tried not to look as relieved as he felt. At the same time, he experienced a rush of admiration for the chief of the sinister organization to which he belonged. Nothing had been overlooked; they must have put a man aboard the South American-bound vessel. The fellow was using the name of William Harper Littlejohn to mislead further Doc Savage.

“You can see,” Wall-Samuels said happily, “that I have told you the truth.”

“There any chance of our overhauling Johnny’s ship?” Monk demanded.

“No,” Doc advised. “But we can take passage on another craft which sails almost at once. It is a faster vessel, and arrives in Buenos Aires, South America, a day ahead of Johnny’s ship.”

“Then we’d better grab it,” Monk grunted.

Wall-Samuels swallowed and asked, “What about me?”

“How about a nice English jail for him, Doc?” Monk questioned.

“That is as good a solution as any for the present,” Doc decided.

HARDLY more than fifteen minutes after that, Wall-Samuels found himself behind bars, charged with nothing more serious than malicious mischief. He immediately demanded a lawyer—and got something of a shock. The lawyer was refused him. Furthermore, he was denied even the privilege of telephoning outside the jail.

The indignant pseudo detective failed to understand exactly what had happened. The charge against him was one which was ordinarily bailable, but he could not get bail without contacting some one to put it up for him, and he was being kept strictly incommunicado. This was not like the usual procedure of the police.

Wall-Samuels did not know that Doc Savage had once been tendered an honorary inspector's commission with Scotland Yard as an expression of gratitude for services rendered. A word from the bronze man had been sufficient to cause the fake detective to be held in the state which an American cop would have called "buried."

But Wall-Samuels had been in jails before, and he knew the ropes. There is scarcely a bastille existent where the inmates do not have secret methods of smuggling messages outside. Quite often this is done through the trusty who delivers the meals.

Wall-Samuels had an early breakfast, and, at his request, was served with milk. Fashioning a brush of a twist of cloth wrenched from the lining of his coat, he dipped into the milk and wrote on the bottom of the plate on which the breakfast was served. He was careful not to make too pronounced smears out of the milk.

The trusty was given the accepted signal; the cook, also a trusty, placed the plates on the stove, and when it became very hot, the milk stains came out in a readily decipherable brown.

Wall-Samuels had used one of the most primitive of invisible inks; but it had served its purpose, and before long, his message was relayed to the intended destination. It read:

DOC SAVAGE on way to South America. Better check on him to see that he actually leaves. Savage clever. And get me out of this jail.

WALL-SAMUELS.

In due course of time an answer came by the same obscure route.

Savage angle being taken care of. You will stay in jail and be paid for it. To release you might give a line on the organization.

The communication was unsigned—and Wall-Samuels, after swearing steadily for some minutes, carefully destroyed it. His position was not so bad. He could not imagine an easier way of earning money than reposing in jail—at least, no other method of earning the amount of money which he was being paid.

IN the meantime, Doc Savage and his two men arrived, amid a flurry of excitement, at the dock from which the South American-bound boat was due to sail in a very few minutes. A small army of flunkies rushed their baggage aboard.

Doc and his men were ensconced in a suite. The bronze man retired at once to the radio room, where he attempted to get in touch with Johnny on the other South American boat. He was unsuccessful. The commander of the other boat transmitted that his stewards had been unable to find a trace of William Harper Littlejohn.

Mooring lines were cast off; the gangplanks hauled in, and a bevy of snorting and whistling tugs busied themselves at jockeying the liner out into the harbor.

It is the custom on passenger ships to put such visitors as are caught aboard at sailing time, off on the tugs or pilot boats. It now developed that there was one such individual who had failed to heed the warning gong that meant visitors down the gangplank.

This man was a fat fellow who kept his coat collar turned up so as not to show too much of his features, and he was put aboard a tug amid some mild excitement.

The South American liner nosed out into the Channel and set a course into the Atlantic.

The man who had been taken off on the tug showed extreme anxiety to reach shore, and the instant he set his foot on land, he sought a telephone and called a number.

"It worked," he reported. "Doc Savage and his two men are on the boat bound for South America."

"Excellent!" said the same gruff voice which had given Wall-Samuels his orders. "But something else has come up, and there is hell to pay."

"What?" gulped the informant.

"Old Wehman Mills," said the other.

"What about that old buzzard?"

"He's gotten away!"

The fat man swore in a low, uneasy voice. "How did it happen?"

"The old man said he had to get some machinery from France," replied the other. "In order to keep him from getting suspicious, we took him over. But he must have been wise. When we got him to Brest, he cut loose and skipped out."

The fat man swore again. "He'll try to see the girl," he said.

"Of course he will," said the voice over the wire. "And that has me worried."

"What are you going to do?"

"I'm going to Brest," said the distant mastermind. "I'll keep in the background there, but it's best for me to be on hand."

Chapter V

THE UNCLE IN INDIA

It was a dark night in the French seaport town of Brest.

It was also dark inside the house, as dark as if there had never been light. A man stopped just inside the door and breathed with a rattling hoarseness which made it sound as if the lining of his throat had worked loose in flaps. His fingers dug at the cloth over his chest while he caught up with his breathing.

“Elaine!” he yelled shrilly.

In the infinitely thick blackness, a second and harsher voice said, “So here’s where you headed for, Mills! You dumb old lug, you must have thought we were kidding when——”

“Do not tell him about it, monsieur,” purred a third voice, calm, catlike, out of the sable interior. “Seize him! *Dépechez-vous!* Make haste!”

The sounds which followed might have been made by pieces of raw meat being thrown together in a pile, except that they were louder. Sliding feet made sharp hisses on the bare wooden floor, and twice men cursed because they had fallen down.

“Elaine!” cried the victim—and a bit later, he managed to get out the French cry for help, “*Au secours!*”

At least four men were striving to hold the victim and hit him at the same time. The victim had been fighting back and trying to escape; now he knew it was useless, so he devoted all efforts to getting a hand into the watch pocket of his trousers. The pocket was torn open; a small object fell out.

The victim caught the object, but instantly threw it away, over the heads of his assailants.

“Elaine!” he shrieked, to cover the sound as it fell somewhere down the hallway.

Then a fist hit his jaw, causing his struggles to become aimless, so that he was easily seized and carried to the door which the fellow with the catlike voice opened.

They all passed out into a night only slightly less dark than the hall interior. As they went down a cobbled street, it was evident that they all wore shoes with rubber soles, for they were very silent.

There was a slight breeze, salty, with a tang of petrol, from the warehouses on the commercial side of Brest, across the Cours d’Ajet. There were numerous harbor lights on the water, especially down where the castle with its donjon and seven towers commanded the entrance to the river.

Here, however, where things were happening, there were few lights, until one of the men darted a flashlight beam briefly at their victim. The light hunted over the half-conscious form like a small, hungry white animal.

The victim was a long linkage of bone and cartilage encased in a shiny black suit. He wore old-fashioned Congress gaiters, a wing collar of the type affected by United

States senators of the last generation, and a black shoestring tie. His hair was white.

“Where is his *chapeau, m’sieu’s*?” demanded the cat voice.

“His hat?” grunted a man. “I picked it up.”

The hat, black and broad of brim, was shoved into the path of the flashlight. It was a picturesque headpiece.

“*Bon!*” said the feline voice. “Good! Take him on a short distance and wait for me.”

“Where you going, Paquis?” asked the man with the hat.

“Back,” said the other. “Back, to take care of a small detail.”

THE house from which the victim had been taken was of stone, rambling and old, and it possessed the flattering designation, *l’auberge*, bestowed on it by the owner, who was also the proprietor. But it was more of a rooming house than an inn. An entirely respectable place, to be sure.

The house guests were awake. Some were up, others were getting up. The fray downstairs, just inside the street door, had been short for all of its violence, and no one in the house knew what it was all about.

They began venturing downstairs, one at a time, with the proprietor, a night-shirted gentleman notable for his skinny shanks and the size of his mustache, carrying the same *chau-chau* rifle which he had no doubt used in the Great War. The innkeeper’s overweight wife brought an old-fashioned candle lantern, and they took note of the upset furniture and the scratches on the floor where straining shoes had slipped.

“It is very mysterious,” said a guest in French. “I thought I heard a name yelled loudly. It was ‘Elaine’, or something like that.”

The proprietor crooked his rifle with an arm, looked up the stairs and called through his mustache, “*Mademoiselle Elaine Mills!*”

“*Oui,*” replied a faint feminine voice. “*Que vou—vou—*” She gave it up and demanded in English, “What do you want?”

Her last words had the rolling freedom of American speech.

“Did some one mak’ call to yo’?” asked the proprietor, struggling along in English.

Instead of answering, Elaine Mills appeared at the top of the stairs. Several male eyebrows shot skyward and the owners drew their stomachs in and shoved their chests out, at the same time putting very polite expressions on their faces, as men are wont to do in the presence of an entrancing member of the opposite sex.

And Elaine Mills was entrancing. She was tall, young, altogether luscious and feminine. Her hair was the color of sand, her eyes a dark blue which made them bright by contrast, and her lips were perfect. She had apparently dressed in a hurry, for she wore brown pumps, but no hose, and she was twisting her brown sports frock into its proper hang.

“What happened?” Elaine demanded, and came down the stairs.

Two Frenchmen bowed and tried to explain, but they did not speak English and the young woman, without smiling, said, “I am sorry, but I speak very little French. Who was it called my name? And what was the noise?”

Before she could get her answer, there was an interruption. A man reeled in from the street darkness. He was a tall man, with his hair down over his eyes, his coat askew and a slack expression on his features. He brought with him the odor of strong cognac.

“Whoopee!” he yelled thickly. “I’m a ring-tailed wolf from Wyoming! Listen to me howl! *Ye-e-o-w-w!*”

He tried to wave an arm, lost his balance, teetered across the floor and tried to anchor himself to the proprietor; but that worthy stepped out of the way, and the newcomer slammed down on the floor. With much noisy difficulty with his feet, he heaved partially erect.

“Feels likesh shame floor I was on a whilesh ago,” he mouthed. “Yesh shir! Shame floor!”

He endeavored to wave the arm again, and this time succeeded.

“Hurray!” he howled. “Hurray for France! Hurray for everybody!”

He made his “hurrays” sound very like “Elaines!”

“*Cochon!*” snarled the proprietor. “Pig! So it was *you* who caused all the uproar.”

With that, the celebrant was seized and propelled into the street.

A FEW minutes later, the erstwhile inebriant joined his fellows, who were holding their prisoner down the street. The man had combed his hair, straightened his coat, and was smiling slyly.

“What’d you do, Paquis?” he was asked.

Paquis traded his sly smile for a chuckle. “You should have seen me work, m’sieu’s. Not for nothing was I formerly an actor for a short time in the American Hollywood.”

“What did you do?” the interrogator repeated.

“Made them think the noise of the fight as we seized Wehman Mills, here, was caused by the playfulness of a Yankee tourist celebrating,” said Paquis.

Carrying their captive, the men moved away, one of their number, who seemed to know the streets of Brest, acting as guide. Once they changed their course hastily to avoid a gendarme, and again they swung wide to circle an omnibus station where there was light and activity.

Eventually they entered a neat dwelling, the windows of which were carefully curtained. Inside were several men, one or two apparently Americans, but the rest speaking with the more precise speech of the English. Only Paquis seemed to be French.

“We succeeded in stopping him, *mes enfants*,” chuckled Paquis, and ordered Wehman Mills dumped on the floor.

Wehman Mills was conscious now, and he got to his feet, trembling with anger. Mills had a high forehead and many wrinkles about the mouth. His eyes were the bright orbs of a dreamer. His age must have been well past sixty.

He glared at the men and his manner was not that of one looking at strangers.

“You cannot make a fool out of me!” he shouted.

“We would not try to improve the jolly job nature did,” smiled one of the Englishmen. “And do not yell your bloody head off.”

Old Wehman Mills moistened his lips. “What are you going to do about it?”

“Keep you under cover,” said the other. “That is all we have to do. Everything else is running smoothly.”

At this point a newcomer put in an appearance, coming in from the outer night. He greeted those present in a casual manner.

“I just came from the cable office,” he said.

“Any word from the chief?” a man asked.

“Sure.” The newcomer tossed a fold of paper on the table. “That.”

Paquis and the others bent over the paper, which proved to be a cablegram in code, but the messenger had translated it already, writing the true text between the lines of typing. Address and signature had been torn off.

“I burned them,” explained the messenger.

They all read the decoded missive:

ELAINE MILLS MAY GIVE TROUBLE IF SHE STARTS HUNTING FOR HER UNCLE
WEHMAN MILLS STOP SUGGEST SHE BE LED TO THINK UNCLE WEHMAN HAS GONE TO
INDIA STOP GOOD IDEA IF SHE COULD BE LED TO TAKE TRIP TO INDIA HERSELF
STOP SPARE NO EXPENSE ON THIS

The suave Paquis teetered back on his heels and his catlike voice held much elation as he said, “M’sieu’s, depend on Paquis!”

“Yeah?” growled one of the Yankees.

“*Que c’est beau!*” smirked Paquis. “How beautiful, this idea of mine!”

ELAINE MILLS had retired to her room in the *auberge*, as had the rest of the guests; but whereas the others had gone to sleep again, Elaine had not disrobed. She had even added sheer hose to her attire, as if she did not expect to sleep.

In Elaine Mills’s slender, shapely hands was a sheaf of papers, through which she riffled repeatedly. The topmost was from the French equivalent of a private detective agency, and stated:

REGRET TO INFORM YOU WE HAVE BEEN UNABLE TO FIND A TRACE OF YOUR
UNCLE WEHMAN MILLS STOP HE SEEMS TO HAVE DISAPPEARED COMPLETELY WHILE
YOU AND HE WERE STAYING AT THE BREST HOTEL

There were others, all in the same vein. It was evident that Elaine Mills had employed private detectives to search for her uncle, and they had been unable to locate the elderly gentleman.

There came a gentle knock at the door and the mustached *auberge* proprietor said, “A Monsieur Smith to see you, mademoiselle.”

A few seconds later, Elaine Mills was appraising her visitor, Monsieur Smith, with curious eyes. Smith was squat, had a thick neck, and looked like the popular conception of an overfed lawyer. He wore pince-nez spectacles and carried a briefcase.

“I have a message from your uncle, Wehman Mills,” stated Smith. “I am his lawyer.”

“I didn’t know he had a lawyer,” Elaine said shortly.

Smith, seeming not to have heard, continued, “Your uncle, Wehman Mills, has found it necessary to sail immediately for India——”

“Why?” Elaine demanded.

“He neglected to tell me,” said Smith. “He only provided me with the means of sending you to join him at such a time as he should authorize me to do so by cable. Here is the card I received a few hours ago.”

From his briefcase, Smith extracted a cablegram, which he extended. The young woman took it, and read:

THIS WILL COME TO YOU THROUGH MY LAWYER SMITH STOP AWFULLY SORRY
YOU HAVE BEEN UNAWARE MY WHEREABOUTS STOP PRESSING AND VERY SPECIAL
BUSINESS DEMANDED MY PRESENCE IN INDIA STOP EVERYTHING ALL RIGHT
STOP SMITH WILL GIVE YOU STEAMSHIP TICKET AND EXPENSE MONEY TO INDIA
STOP PLEASE JOIN ME

WEHMAN MILLS

Elaine Mills looked up from the cablegram and said, “This is not at all like Uncle Wehman.”

Smith smiled and murmured, “I think everything is as it should be,” as he extracted from his briefcase a small bundle of currency snapped around with a rubber band, and one of the tough brown envelopes in which steamship companies enclose their tickets. He extended these.

“A paid passage to India on a liner sailing to-morrow, together with some expense funds,” he stated.

“But what about a passport?” Elaine gasped.

Smith bowed, said, “A lawyer’s business is to think of everything,” and produced from the case a passport folder.

Elaine opened the passport and stared in astonishment at her own picture.

“Why, this is a picture of me that Uncle Wehman had,” she exclaimed.

“Your Uncle Wehman gave it to me before sailing,” Smith smirked.

Elaine fumbled with passport, money and steamship tickets and said queerly, “This is all very strange. Uncle Wehman never acted like this before.”

Smith patted her shoulder in a kindly fashion. “I wouldn’t worry about it. Your uncle is rather an eccentric character and I presume he has his own very good reasons for what he did.”

Elaine sighed. “That may be,” she said.

“You intend to go to India, of course?” Smith queried casually.

Elaine hesitated; then: “Why, yes.”

“Then I wish you a happy voyage.”

With that platitude, Smith gathered up his briefcase and took his departure.

SOME five minutes later, Smith joined the cat-voiced Paquis, who was awaiting some blocks distant in a small French car.

Paquis laughed at sight of Smith.

“One would not think, m’sieu’, that you are a man much wanted by Scotland Yard,” he chuckled. “You look most respectable.”

“Keep your bloomin’ jokes under your ’at,” growled Smith, lapsing into the gutter dialect of London.

“*Oui*,” Paquis agreed. “How did it go?”

“She swallowed it, ’ook, line an’ sinker,” said Smith.

“She is going to sail for India?”

“She said as ’ow she was.”

Paquis sighed happily as he put the little car into motion over the none-too-smooth streets in that section of Brest.

“A great idea, m’sieu’,” he chuckled. “But then, all the ideas of Paquis are great, *non?*”

“You guff too much about yourself,” grunted the other.

Paquis ignored the sarcasm.

“Elaine Mills will soon be off for India,” he said. “It is a long journey to India. The young lady will be out of our way for some time.”

Chapter VI

THE MAN OF BRONZE

PAQUIS was too optimistic.

Elaine Mills stood still in the hallway of the French inn, her thoughts in a whirl, eyeing the papers given her by Smith. She counted the money and found it hardly sufficient to cover the tips the stewards would expect on an India voyage, but that did not arouse her suspicions, because Wehman Mills had never been exactly a prodigal.

“Poor Uncle Wehman,” she murmured. “He has never made much money. I hope he has found something now that will make him rich.”

Consulting a wrist watch, Elaine learned the night was well along.

“I had better start packing,” she decided, and turned for the stairway.

In her hand she carried a small, flat flashlight. This inn, in common with many such establishments in France, was not fitted with electric lights, because a certain section of the population liked to live as their ancestors had.

The flashlight beam darted toward the stairs casually, missed them, went beyond and glinted on a small metal object which reposed under a rickety antique chair.

Curious, Elaine went over and picked the article up. It was a watch, a rather thick timepiece built for service.

Elaine turned the watch over and emitted a gasp. She had recognized it. She pried the back open and turned her flashlight on the inscription within:

TO UNCLE WEHMAN MILLS FROM ELAINE

Elaine Mills was a quick-witted young woman, and the significance of the watch being where it was dawned on her.

“Uncle Wehman came here,” she told herself grimly. “He called out my name, then something happened to him.”

Elaine did not go upstairs; instead she hurried out into the night and made her way to the nearest *poste de police*. A good-natured gendarme was on duty. He recognized his visitor.

“Ah, you are the mademoiselle who has lost her uncle,” he said in fair English. “We are very sorry to report that we have no clue to his whereabouts.”

“Well, I have a clue,” Elaine told him.

Then she imparted a brief outline of what had happened at her lodgings.

“I am convinced something is wrong,” she declared. “Uncle Wehman tried to come to me, and he must have been seized and carried away.”

“This Monsieur Uncle Wehman—what is his business?” the gendarme asked curiously.

“He is a chemist and an inventor,” Elaine replied.

The gendarme drew some papers from his desk. These were fastened together with a paper clip. He consulted them, then leaned back in his squeaking chair.

“Is it not a fact that the Monsieur Uncle Wehman was once in trouble in the United States because he sold some mining stock that was of no value?” he inquired politely.

Elaine flushed. “That was not Uncle Wehman’s fault. He had a process for recovering metals which he thought would work. Some men put money behind him, and had it fixed up so they would hog the profits. The process was a failure and they turned around and tried to send Uncle Wehman to jail. They were not good sports. Uncle Wehman lost more than they did.”

The gendarme nodded sagely. “Is it not true that Monsieur Uncle Wehman has invented a number of things which have been a failure?”

“What has that got to do with the fact that something has happened to him?” Elaine wanted to know.

The gendarme smiled and said, “You may rest assured, mademoiselle, that we shall investigate.”

But Elaine left the *poste de police* with the feeling that the hunt for Wehman Mills had hit a snag. Not that the French police were sluggards; they were as efficient as the law enforcement agencies of other nations. But the discovery that Wehman Mills had once been in trouble with the law in the United States had dampened their ardor.

Elaine stood in the street and punished an attractive lower lip with her teeth.

“Darn it!” she said angrily, and stamped a foot.

THE young woman’s wrathful ejaculation was destined to have far-reaching consequences. Simply because she stamped her foot and exclaimed aloud, many men were to come under a pall of horrible danger, and some were to die.

A news vendor had his sidewalk stand a few yards distant, and not understanding English and unable to see the young woman’s facial expression because of the darkness, he thought she wanted a newspaper. He ran over with an armload of his wares and began to spout profusely in French.

Elaine had enough experience with French street hawkers to know that the easiest way of getting rid of the vendor was to spend a few pennies for one of his papers. She passed over the Paris and Brest editions and selected a London paper, one she could read because it was in English.

She glanced casually at the headlines.

DOC SAVAGE TO VISIT ENGLAND

Back in Elaine’s memory something stirred. She read the subheads and the story below:

MAN OF MYSTERY DUE TO LAND
SOUTHAMPTON TO-NIGHT

Clark Savage, Jr., better known in the far corners of the world as Doc Savage, is due aboard a liner which arrives at Southampton from New York City to-night.

He is a man of mystery, this Doc Savage, probably one of the most amazing combinations of scientific genius and physical daring to be found in the world. He is a man of profound learning, a man whose knowledge is said to be unequalled in the fields of electricity, chemistry, geology, archaeology, engineering and other lines. He is reported to be a mental wizard.

Equal to his mental ability are Doc Savage's physical powers, according to those who know of his work. Scientific exercise routines, carried on unflinchingly from childhood, have given him a muscular strength which borders on the supernatural.

Strangest thing of all about this man, perhaps, is his profession—that of aiding those in trouble and punishing wrongdoers. It is said that he never accepts financial remuneration for anything that he does.

Doc Savage is coming to England to aid one of his colleagues, William Harper Littlejohn, famous archaeologist and geologist, who is now delivering a series of lectures before the Fellowship of Scientists.

William Harper Littlejohn is one of a group of five men closely associated with Doc Savage in his strange career. The other four men are lawyer, chemist, engineer and electrical expert, each famous in his profession. Yet it is reported that each of the five is exceeded in his own specialty by this superman, Doc Savage.

“Good night!” exclaimed Elaine Mills, and glanced up at the title of the paper, thinking she must have gotten hold of the London equivalent of a New York tabloid. But the newspaper was one of the more staid of Britain's journalistic sheets.

That such a paper should eulogize an individual, especially an American, in this fashion, was unusual. This paper happened to be one addicted to taking digs at Americans.

ELAINE re-read the portion of the highly-flattering—for that newspaper—story which dealt with Doc Savage's profession of helping those who were in trouble. Then she folded the paper slowly, her thoughts busy.

She was recalling what she had heard of this man of mystery, Doc Savage. Now that she concentrated, she could remember having heard a great deal of the man. The newspapers frequently carried stories about him. Just recently, there had been an affair in which some clever criminal had hit upon the idea of using a submarine in New York harbor as a get-away vehicle, and Doc Savage had put him out of business.

A bit earlier than that, Doc Savage had, it was rumored, put down a revolution in one of the Balkan countries. Doc Savage seemed always to be in the thick of trouble.

“Doc Savage must have something on the ball,” Elaine Mills told herself. “Otherwise this old foggy London paper would not give him a write-up like that.” She

reached a decision. Tucking the paper under an arm, she swung rapidly along the narrow, dark streets of Brest until she found a cab. Twenty minutes later, she was at the ticket office of the line which had issued her passage to India.

There was a good deal of argument. The French clerk shouted and waved his arms; Elaine looked grim and determined. Probably the fact that she was a beauty helped.

Eventually, Elaine got the money back on her ticket. She bought another ticket, this one to Southampton—where Doc Savage had arrived, by this time.

Elaine had determined to call on this man of mystery for assistance in the matter of her uncle, Wehman Mills. That Uncle Wehman was in trouble, she was convinced. And Doc Savage had the reputation of helping people who were in trouble.

If Doc Savage should be hesitant about looking into the matter, Elaine Mills was confident that her own beauty, of which she was not unaware, would sway him. Not that Elaine depended entirely upon her beauty. But men usually showed great willingness to aid her.

Elaine was due for a surprise when she tried her wiles on Doc Savage. And she was also due for other and more unpleasant surprises much before that.

THE shipping company clerk was a bit concerned after the young woman departed. He did some thinking, the result of which was that he picked up the telephone and called the number of the stout gentleman, Monsieur Smith, who had purchased the ticket which Elaine had cashed in.

The clerk wanted to know if it was all right that he had given the money back.

Smith thanked him and said it was quite all right, then he asked where the young woman had gone after getting her money. He was advised that she had purchased a steamer passage to Southampton, England.

Smith inquired for and was given the name of the boat, a craft which made regular cross-Channel passages.

The clerk hung up, thinking Monsieur Smith a very kindly, benevolent gentleman. He would have put his fingers tightly in his ears if he had heard the blistering profanity which Smith exercised after he had hung up.

“What is it?” asked Paquis, who was present.

“There’s ’ell to pay!” Smith said fervently, relapsing into Cockney. “The blarsted female ’as smelled the rat!”

Paquis purred blandly, “Ah, then I shall have to exercise my remarkable wits again.”

LA COLOMBE is French for “The Dove.” It was also the name of the Channel boat on which Elaine Mills had taken passage.

La Colombe looked more like a broken-down crow which had fallen victim to a shotgun firing rust specks, than it looked like a dove. Her bows were blunt, black, and the superstructure either needed a paint job or a good washing.

The one smokestack was very tall and seemed entirely too large for a boat of *La Colombe's* size; it spouted prodigious quantities of sparks and black smoke, which promptly settled down on deck to burn small holes in clothing and dirty the passenger's faces.

Elaine Mills stood in her cabin, peering through a grimy porthole and watching the last of Brest slip past. They were beyond the portion of the harbor which served as a naval base, and because of the darkness the castle, with its donjon and seven towers, was not even discernible.

La Colombe kept up a great rumbling and thumping which sounded, here in the young woman's cabin, not unlike the cooing of a gigantic and extremely decrepit dove, this being about the only characteristic the good ship bore in keeping with her name.

The riding lights of vessels at anchor in Brest harbor were blotted from sight, and eventually the winking of the lighthouse receded until it was only a scared scud of light in the infinite blackness of the sea night.

Assured they were off, Elaine sought out the radio cabin, her intention being to send a message to Doc Savage on his liner, apprising the man of mystery of her coming.

She did not send the message. The skipper of *La Colombe* and two of his officers were in the radio cabin, and much head-scratching was going on. A vandal, it seemed, had given each transmitting tube a tap with a hammer during the absence of the operator from his key.

Elaine Mills shivered when she heard the news. She thought of a small automatic which she carried in her handbag. The gun was a target weapon, not built for knocking men down, but it would be a great consolation in case of trouble.

The young woman was hurrying down the corridor to her stateroom when she heard a sound behind her. She whirled, took one glance, and opened her mouth to shout for aid.

She had faced the same tall, darkhaired man who had pretended to be a drunken tourist in the *auberge* back in Brest. He lunged swiftly and clamped a hand over Elaine's mouth, halting her outcry.

The girl bit him. He growled profanely, whipped out a silk handkerchief and managed to jam it between her jaws. Then he picked her up and carried her into the nearest stateroom.

"Bite Paquis, would you!" he purred. "I ought to hand you a good American bust on the jaw, mademoiselle!"

Elaine ignored him. She was looking at the other occupants of the stateroom. These numbered more than half a dozen, and she had seen only one of them before. That one was the portly man who had played lawyer, giving the name of Smith.

The men assisted in tying Elaine to a chair, not at all abashed by the frosty stares which she bent upon them. One contributed his necktie so that it could be tied across her jaws to keep the gag in place.

Smith had departed, and his mission remained a mystery only until he came back bearing Elaine's handbag. This was opened and the contents dumped on the floor in full

view. The target pistol came to light, as well as the folded newspaper.

The men read the newspaper, and Paquis, living up to his vaunted quick wit, was first to catch its significance.

“This Doc Savage!” he snapped. “M’sieu’s, the young lady here must have been on her way to enlist his aid.”

“’Ell’s on fire!” Smith swore in a strangely shrill voice. He had become slightly pale. He walked over to the group’s baggage, selected a yellow atrocity which must have been his own luggage, and started for the door.

“*Qu’y a-t-il?*” Paquis purred wonderingly. “What is the matter, m’sieu’?”

Smith scowled. “’Aven’t you ’eard of this Doc Savage bloke?”

Paquis shrugged. “*Oui*, vaguely, m’sieu’.”

“Vaguely!” Smith snorted. “That’s ’ow you’ll remember ’im, too, if you’re in any shape to remember ’im at all.”

“What do you mean, m’sieu’?” Paquis demanded.

“Hi means that fightin’ all ’is Majesty’s bloody navy would be safer’n tanglin’ with this Savage bloke,” Smith said grimly. “Count me out from now on. Count me out on everything.”

“Do you mean you would give up your share of some millions of pounds in order to avoid fighting this Doc Savage?” Paquis queried sarcastically.

“Bloomin’ right,” Smith growled. “And hit wouldn’t be no fight. That Doc Savage just comes along and before you know ’arf of what hits about, ’e’s got you laid by the ’eels.”

“You seem to have met this Monsieur Savage,” Paquis purred.

Smith grunted. “A friend o’ mine ’ired ’imself out once to croak Doc Savage.”

Paquis looked interested. “What happened to the friend? Tell us that.”

Smith shifted his yellow bag from one thick hand to the other while he considered. Not only was his face pale, but he was now perspiring freely.

“Somethin’ deuced queer ’appened to me friend,” he imparted at last “Doc Savage caught ’im and ’e must’ve done somethin’ to the poor bloke’s head. I met me friend an ’e didn’t know me from Adam’s left overshoe. ’E didn’t know any of ’is old pals. The poor goose got ’imself a position in a box factory, an ’e’s workin’ there now, ’onest as they come. ’E ’asn’t never remembered a thing in ’is life before ’e went up against Doc Savage.”

“Very interesting, *oui*,” Paquis said skeptically.

“This Doc Savage ain’t ’arf an ordinary man,” Smith said firmly. “’E’s a bloomin’ male witch, that’s what ’e is!”

Paquis laughed loudly.

“I will tell you a secret which our chief imparted only to me,” he smirked. “One of Doc Savage’s men, this William Harper Littlejohn, was so foolish as to invade The Wash vicinity, looking for King John’s ghost. Our men found it necessary to seize him, and they hold him now.”

“Blimme!” Smith wailed. “We’re the same as sunk! This Doc Savage bloke will _____”

“Will do nothing, m’sieu’,” smirked Paquis. “Doc Savage has been deceived by our estimable leader.”

“What d’you mean?” Smith demanded.

“Doc Savage is now on his way to South America, chasing the wild goose,” Paquis laughed.

Chapter VII

THE GOLD MAKER

DOC SAVAGE was not on his way to South America.

The bronze man was not even going in the direction of the continent which Columbus discovered on his third voyage. He was headed in a direction almost exactly opposite.

The bronze man had made careful arrangements, guessing that the South American boat would be watched by his mysterious foes. A tug had met the boat well beyond the mouth of the harbor, taken off Doc, Monk, Habeas Corpus and Ham, and put them ashore at a point where there was little chance of their being observed.

The whole affair of the false start for South America had been executed with such a pell-mell rush that Monk and Ham were a bit confused on certain major points.

"How in blazes did you know that whole story about Johnny being on his way to South America was a fake?" Monk demanded.

"Remember when the man who pretended to be a detective, Wall-Samuels, was talking over the drug store telephone just before you seized him?" Doc queried.

Monk nodded. "Sure."

"Remember I was with you until we saw Wall-Samuels go into the telephone, then I asked you fellows to watch him and seize him when he came out?"

Monk nodded again. "You turned around and went back while we watched him."

"Exactly," Doc agreed. "It was not a difficult task to find where those telephone wires passed through the rear wall of the drug store, then tap them."

Monk grinned. "Who did Wall-Samuels talk to?"

"An unnamed gentleman," Doc explained. "The latter carefully outlined the story which was to lead us off on the wild-goose chase to South America."

"But what was behind it?" Monk demanded.

"A rather mysterious affair having to do with a ghost of King John, a man named Wehman Mills and a young woman who is Wehman Mills's niece," Doc replied.

Monk muttered, "I still don't see why they mixed us up in it in the first place."

"Johnny was responsible for that," Doc answered.

"Johnny?"

"Johnny evidently went to investigate the King John ghost," Doc explained. "He was seized."

"He was *what*?" Monk howled. "When? Where?"

"In the vicinity of The Wash," Doc said. "And it must have happened earlier in the night."

The bronze man hailed a taxi. "To the nearest airport from which we can get a plane for London," he directed—and the cab got under way noisily.

Monk, showing puzzlement, queried, "Where are we heading for?"

"When Wall-Samuels telephoned from the drug store, and I tapped the wire, there was a chance to trace the call," Doc replied. "It came from an office in the name of Benjamin Giltstein, on Fleet Street in London."

"Benjamin Giltstein," Ham murmured. "Ever hear of him before, Doc?"

The bronze man shook his head in a negative.

The Southampton airport was astir at this early hour, since it was a focus for various air lines operating planes to the islands in the English Channel. Another line also ran to London, and the early plane was on the point of departing.

FLEET STREET, beginning at Ludgate Circus and leading to the Strand and the West End, is one of London's busiest streets. But the principal fame of Fleet Street comes from its multiplicity of newspaper plants. The leading journals of England have their headquarters there, together with book publishers, press associations, literary agents, clipping bureaus, and the other professions which gain their livelihood from the printed word.

The high-pressure methods of modern existence has come to demand many specialists in peculiar lines. Some men devote their working lives to nothing but making a particular type of motor casting. In the literary field, some writers turn out only detective yarns; in the newspaper business, some reporters specialize in writing about the stock exchange, to the exclusion of all else.

Benjamin Giltstein was a specialist. His forte was publicity. In the United States, he would have called himself a public relations counsel, and the newspaper reporters would probably have dubbed him a press agent.

If an actor wanted his name in the newspapers, his best bet was to employ a man in Benjamin Giltstein's profession. The press agent would think up stunts that would pass as news, write them up, give them to the newspapers, and some would be printed.

Should an industrial magnate desire his concern publicized in a favorable light, he usually engaged one of these public relations counselors, who, being a specialist, knew the best way to inveigle the newspaper into printing the publicity matter under the impression that they were disseminating news.

Benjamin Giltstein was a portly fellow with a red face. He affected spats and eyeglasses on a ribbon. A newspaper reporter who got hard up could always borrow a few dollars from Giltstein. He stood in well with the Press, for that was his business. The news hawks for whom he did favors reciprocated by getting his publicity stuff printed.

At this early morning hour, sleepy-eyed reporters were gathering at Benjamin Giltstein's comfortably furnished offices in Fleet Street. The scribes grumbled about being robbed of their sleep, but Giltstein had telephoned them, saying he had a piece of news which was due to shake the world.

Great enthusiasm had been in Giltstein's voice. In the past, the press agent had always been frank, telling the reporters when he was trying to put out straight publicity. It did not pay to try to fool the gentlemen of the press, as Giltstein well knew.

Fearing Benjamin Giltstein really did have a big piece of news, the journalists had not dared stay away. But they arrived in a cloud of skepticism, sprawled themselves in the luxurious chairs, and demanded to know what was what.

“It is big, gentlemen,” Giltstein insisted. “When you are all present, I shall talk.”

The press agent knew most of the leading London reporters, but two scribes put in an appearance whom he could not recall. They did not come together.

One stranger was a broad man, smooth-shaven and very pale of face, who wore glasses with thick lenses and shell rims. This fellow had a tremendous stomach and walked with a pronounced limp. He also smoked a large and extremely evil-smelling cigar.

The second stranger, who arrived almost half an hour later, was a lean chap who had two large gold teeth in front and wore a perpetual scowl. His clothing was baggy and would have been the better for a visit to the cleaner’s. He spoke with a pronounced Latin accent.

“I worka for da Italian Newspaper Union,” he explained. “I just geta da job.”

The other scribe, the one with the big stomach and the limp, said that he was a new reporter on the *Crown Daily*.

BENJAMIN GILTSTEIN passed good cigars, then expanded his chest with a full breath.

“Gentlemen, I am about to break one of the greatest stories of the Twentieth century!” he said grandly. “What I am about to tell you is highly likely to alter the whole course of the world’s economic existence. It is colossal, stupendous, as an American motion picture man would say.”

“Cut the blarney and out with it,” a journalist suggested. “We can tell whether it’s worth a line or two on an inside page.”

Giltstein looked patient. “You will put this on the front page. Every paper in the world will put it on the front page.”

“What is it?” repeated the scribe.

“Do you gentlemen know what ingredients make up sea water?” Giltstein asked suddenly.

“Water,” some one said.

“Salt water,” said somebody else. “Whales, sharks, and assorted fishes.”

“Please,” suggested Giltstein. “Be serious about this. Sea water contains, in solution, some thirty-two of the eighty known elements. In sea water you will find, besides salt, magnesium chloride, gypsum, copper, zinc, nickel, lead, cobalt, manganese, bromide, chlorine——”

“We’ll take your word for it,” interjected the scribe. “What is this leading up to.”

“There are at present in existence plants which take bromine from the sea water in commercial quantities,” said Giltstein.

“Are you trying to get publicity for one of them?” another newspaper man demanded.

“No!” snapped the press agent. “Keep still and listen. There is another substance present in sea water. It is gold!”

No one said anything.

“Gold!” Giltstein repeated dramatically.

“Is this where we all applaud?” asked a journalist sarcastically.

Benjamin Giltstein was beginning to perspire. It seemed that the scribes were unusually cold toward press agents this morning.

“The gold in its native state in the water is in colloidal suspension form,” said the publicity man. “There is approximately ten million dollars worth of gold in a cubic mile of water. There are nearly three hundred million cubic miles of sea water on the earth. That gives us, as the total value of the gold in the sea——”

“Don’t say it!” groaned a reporter. “Not with me flat broke. Say, just what are you trying to tell us?”

“Gentlemen, a feasible method has been discovered for taking gold from sea water,” said Benjamin Giltstein.

THE journalists digested this information. Having had experience in the past with press agents, they took anything from such a source with several grains of salt. Their jobs depended a good deal on such precautions.

“Nothing doing on this,” one snapped. “We print a story and somebody unloads stock in this gold-from-sea-water idea. Isn’t that it?”

“On the contrary, you could not buy a share of stock in this project with a million dollars in cash,” Giltstein said promptly.

“When is the plant for getting the gold to be built?” some one queried.

“It is already completed,” said Giltstein.

There was a pronounced perking up of ears at this information. It removed the story from the category of a press agent’s dream and made it strictly news.

“Where is the place?” the reporter with the big stomach and the limp questioned.

“Have you ever heard of Magna Island?” asked Giltstein.

“Sure,” said the reporter whom Giltstein had not met before this conclave. “It is a tiny island near here. It holds the position of an independent monarchy, under our protectorate, but it pays no taxes to us, and we English have no voice in its government or anything that goes on there.”

“There was talk that an American utilities king who was running away from the law intended to buy the island and set himself up as king, so he would be safe,” put in another reporter.

“Magna Island was recently purchased,” Giltstein said blandly. “And the plant for taking gold from sea water is now in operation there.”

“Can you prove dis, meester?” inquired the lean reporter with the perpetual scowl.

“I am prepared to prove every word,” Benjamin Giltstein snapped. “If you gentlemen care to charter planes, I shall be glad to accompany you to Magna Island,

where you will be shown over the plant which is taking gold from sea water. Furthermore, I can guarantee that each of you will receive a small sample of the sea gold as proof.”

“Can we bring a technical expert along?”

“You certainly can.”

A reporter, who was still skeptical, demanded, “Listen here, Giltstein, are you sure this is not a high-powered stock-selling scheme?”

“It positively is nothing of the sort,” the press agent asserted.

“Who is the scientist who is taking this gold out of the sea water?”

Benjamin Giltstein put the proper drama on this announcement of the identity.

“An American inventor named Wehman Mills,” he said.

THE meeting now broke up, for the reporters wanted to telephone the story to their respective sheets, as well as get permission to visit Magna Island. Since there was only one telephone in Benjamin Giltstein’s office, the scribes scattered.

Strangely enough, the reporter with the big stomach and the limp, and the scribe with the scowl and the Latin accent, made it a point to meet in a corner of the lobby downstairs.

“That pot belly certainly becomes you, Monk,” chuckled the one who had used the Latin accent.

The other leered, “That’s a nice suit you’re wearing, Ham.”

Ham retrieved his scowl, which he had temporarily wiped off his features. He hated the baggy suit which he had assumed for a disguise.

It was doubtful if intimate acquaintances would have recognized either Monk or Ham. Doc Savage had equipped them with their disguises and done an excellent job of it.

Monk abandoned personalities, and demanded, “What do you make of this gold-out-of-sea-water business?”

“Hokum?” said Ham.

“On the contrary,” Monk told him. “It can be done. It *has* been done on a laboratory scale, in fact, but the cost of recovery has always exceeded the value of the gold taken.”

Ham shrugged. “We’d better consult Doc.”

They left the building, walked down the street and entered a small hotel. Doc Savage occupied a room there, and was seated before a telephone. Monk’s pig, Habeas Corpus, was also in the room.

“I have been doing some calling,” Doc told them. “Johnny seems to have chartered a plane which took him to Swineshead, a village in the vicinity of The Wash. Johnny made inquiries at the local pubs about King John’s ghost, then he disappeared from the settlement and has not been heard from since.”

“This whole blasted thing is mighty queer,” Monk growled.

“What did you learn at Benjamin Giltstein’s office?” Doc questioned.

Monk and Ham collaborated in reciting the story about the discovery of the process for taking the rare yellow metal from ocean brine, ending with the information that the gentlemen of the press had been invited to pay Magna Island a visit to inspect the new plant.

“What are we going to do about this gold angle?” Ham pondered aloud.

“In your assumed personality of newspaper men, you will go to the island and look things over,” Doc suggested. “Monk, being one of the greatest living chemists, should be able to tell whether the thing is a fake.”

“But suppose they learn we are not newspaper men?” Monk grunted.

“It is not likely,” Doc replied. “I have made arrangements with the newspapers for which you are supposed to work. Your names are on the pay rolls of those sheets, in case any one calls up.”

Neither Monk nor Ham commented on that, for they were accustomed to the manner in which Doc Savage cared for details, rarely overlooking anything.

“What’s your end, Doc?” Monk asked.

“Johnny,” said the bronze man; “we must find him.”

“Maybe we’d better go with you,” Ham suggested hopefully.

“No,” Doc said. “You take care of the gold from the sea angle. And try to find out what you can about this Wehman Mills who is supposed to have discovered the process.”

“We’ll interview him,” Monk grinned.

“I doubt it,” Doc said.

“Huh? Why not?”

“From the telephone conversation I overheard between Wall-Samuels and the mysterious chief of the organization, it seems that Wehman Mills has escaped from the gang and they are trying to find him. This happened in Brest. Wehman Mills happens to have a niece in Brest.”

“Maybe one of us had better look into the Brest angle,” Monk suggested.

“We’ll take care of that later,” Doc said. “Johnny comes first. And I think you two will do more good investigating Benjamin Giltstein and his gold-from-sea-water-story.”

“I wonder how Wehman Mills hooks into this,” Monk pondered aloud. “And I wonder what it’s all about, anyhow.”

Chapter VIII

THE SAMARITAN

ELAINE MILLS, on the Channel boat *La Colombe*, was mentally echoing the same questions which Monk had put into words. Her attempts to raise an alarm had been futile and she was beginning to be badly scared. She was tightly bound and gagged.

So far, she had not the slightest idea of what was behind all of the trouble, although she had listened to all that was said by her captors.

Paquis, the suave gentleman with the voice of a cat, was absent. He had been gone some minutes, and putting in an appearance now, he winked broadly at his fellows.

"I have decided how we shall dispose of the girl," he said. "We are now doctors, m'sieu's. Be sure and act the part."

"'Ave you gone balmy?" Smith demanded.

Paquis exhibited a small bottle which he drew from a pocket. "This, m'sieu's, is a drug which will cause mademoiselle to go out of her head. It will cause her to become sleepy, and later go into a stupor."

"Hi don't get this, gov'nor," Smith muttered.

"We are *médicins*, doctors," Paquis repeated. "The unfortunate young mademoiselle in our charge is a victim of madness, and we have to keep her drugged. We are taking her to an English institution."

"You mean we put her in a bloomin' madhouse?"

"Exactly!" smiled Paquis.

"Hit won't work."

"On the contrary, it will be simple," Paquis assured Smith. "Our chief will arrange it. Mademoiselle will be thoroughly out of the way."

Smith snorted. "Hi'll give you blokes credit. You think of things!"

Paquis expanded under this praise, tucking thumbs in vest pockets and riding his heels.

"The English are not slow about releasing persons from their madhouses, m'sieu's," he smiled. "Elaine Mills will be confined for some months—and long before that, our present project will be completed."

ELAINE MILLS remained perfectly still in her chair, relaxed so that the cotton cords which secured her would not cause so much muscle ache.

The steamer whistle was moaning at intervals, an indication that they must have entered one of the Channel's frequent fogs; but Elaine Mills hardly heard the mournful blasts.

At first, the disposition these men intended to make of her had not seemed especially terrifying; but now that she thought it over, the prospect was not pleasant. A madhouse would be infinitely worse than a penitentiary, and it would carry a stigma. Moreover, she would be in a position where any opportunity to aid her uncle would be hopelessly impossible.

Attendants in institutions for the insane paid little attention of the talk of the patients therein. If she told the story of what had happened to her to-night, it would be ignored as the raving of an unbalanced individual.

Elaine Mills suddenly wrenched as bolt upright in her chair as the ropes would permit. Then she slumped; her head dropped forward.

“What’s wrong with the blarsted wench?” Smith growled.

Paquis eyed the young woman doubtfully, then advanced and felt of her wrist. Then he watched for some sign of breathing. He heard none.

“*Dépechez-vous!*” he exploded. “Make haste! Untie the mademoiselle!”

Smith questioned, “What’s ’appened?”

“Take the gag out!” rapped Paquis.

Smith snarled, “Listen, bloke, Hi arsked you——”

“Did you ever hear of a person with a bad case of adenoids smothering when they are gagged?” Paquis demanded. “They cannot breathe, except through their mouths, and the gag strangles them.”

Smith sprang to aid in extracting the gag. He listened for a trace of breathing from the girl, heard none, and showed sudden worryment.

“If she’s up an’ died, we’re in an ’ell of a kettle!” he groaned.

“She has only fainted, m’sieu’,” replied Paquis. “But we must revive her or she may die.”

Elaine Mills was a strikingly beautiful young woman, and it was doubtful if any male, however tough he might consider himself, could help showing concern over her life. Too, the death of the girl would certainly interest the English police, and those hounds of the law had a reputation of being very difficult to evade.

Not only was Elaine’s gag removed, but she was untied and placed on a berth. Her wrists were massaged and her face slapped lightly; but nothing happened, except that her limbs seemed to become slightly stiff.

“Get water!” Paquis snapped. “*Non!* Never mind! I shall get it myself.”

He sprang to the wash basin and roared the steam into the bowl. A startled shout behind him caused him to wheel. His eyes protruded.

He was just in time to see Elaine Mills dive through the stateroom door into the passage outside.

“The blarsted hussy tricked us!” Smith snarled.

ELAINE MILLS ran wildly down the corridor. She had no delusions about her escape or the dumbness of her captors. They were not dumb. They had fallen for one of

the oldest ruses, simply because Elaine was exquisitely beautiful.

A man in the same circumstances could never have worked the trick. A pretty girl about to die on their hands, seemingly, had excited them greatly and caused them to relax their usual caution.

Elaine had slammed the door of the stateroom from which she had escaped. She heard it bang open. Without turning her head, she knew Paquis, Smith and the others were charging in pursuit.

A cross passage opened to one side and Elaine wheeled into that. The nap on the carpet was worn, making that covering slick, and she nearly slipped and fell.

“Help!” she shrieked.

No one was in sight, and the boat’s engines were making considerable noise. The chances were that no one had heard her. She continued to run, shouting loudly.

She became convinced that she would not reach the end of the corridor and the deck before she was overhauled. Her limbs were stiff from the bonds, and did not function with full efficiency.

“Help!” she called shrilly.

Ahead, to the left, a stateroom door opened.

Elaine did not wait to see who had opened the door. Head down, she plunged inside. Her shoulder struck a figure forcibly.

The individual with whom she had collided gasped in a startled fashion. The voice was masculine, but gloom was too thick in the cabin to make out the man’s features.

Seizing the door, Elaine slammed it shut. She found the lock—a bolt—clicked it, then leaped to one side. She did not put it above her late captors to drive a few bullets through the panel.

“Beauty in distress, eh?” murmured a rather pleasant voice.

The occupant of the room in which she had taken refuge was the speaker, and Elaine studied him curiously.

She saw a rather amply muscled young man with wide, amazed blue eyes, a mouth which was open and showing a firm set of white teeth, and a face which was healthily tanned. The young man was well under thirty, and he had a shock of curly brown hair. His shirt was off and he held a tube of patent shaving cream in one hand, a safety razor in the other.

“Just what does this mean?” he demanded.

“*Sh-h-h!*” warned Elaine.

She could hear her late hosts outside. They went past with a great tumult of footsteps, reached the deck and, judging by the sounds, turned back and began opening cabin doors. Elaine clenched her fists anxiously.

“Can’t you hide me in here somewhere?” she demanded of the shirtless young man.

“I’ll be darned if I see why I should,” said that worthy.

“Those men are after me!” Elaine gasped.

The young man looked her up and down with an appreciative glance, then said, “If I don’t miss my guess, almost any man would run after you. You’re pretty enough.”

“Damn it!” Elaine snapped. “They will probably kill me if they catch me.”

“Oh!” said the young man. “That’s different.”

He tossed his shaving cream and razor on the berth, wrenched open a handbag and produced an enormous black automatic pistol.

“We’ll see about the killing,” he said grimly. “Who are they?”

“I only know the names of two named Paquis and Smith,” Elaine breathed. “There are others with them. They belong to a gang which has done something to my uncle, Wehman Mills.”

Elaine and her new-found champion listened to the sounds in the corridor. These had changed in quality. There were many voices, some of which Elaine had not heard before. The explanation dawned upon her.

“The ships’ officers had heard the noise and come to investigate,” she said in a relieved voice.

She grasped the door and started to open it, intending to go outside.

The young man knocked her hand off the door fastening.

“Don’t be a fool!” he growled quietly.

ELAINE MILLS stared at the young man wonderingly, and said, “I am going out there and accuse those fellows. Why is that foolish?”

“Are they armed?”

“Yes. Of course.”

“Then don’t be a fool,” whispered the young man. “They would only shoot you and the ship officers. The latter are probably not armed. They might shoot me, too.”

Considering, Elaine saw the possibilities of that. She retreated from the door.

“What am I going to do, then?” she asked wildly.

“Stay here, and in a little while I will go to the captain and tell him your story. You can stay here.”

“I won’t stay here,” Elaine retorted. “They might find me while you are gone.”

“I’ll leave you my gun.”

“You are very kind,” Elaine told the young man.

“Trump is the name,” he told her. “Henry Trump.”

“Well, you certainly turned out to be my trump card,” Elaine advised.

The young man scowled mildly and said, “I do not like for people to make puns about my name, ordinarily.”

“Sorry,” Elaine told him.

“Ordinarily, I said,” he grinned. “When *you* do it, it sounds all right.”

Outside, the voices were receding. The door was sufficient of a muffler that they could not understand what was being said, but the purring voice of Paquis was going at full speed, injecting “*ouis*” and “*m’sieu’s*” in every sentence.

“You’re an American, aren’t you?” Elaine asked Henry Trump.

He nodded. "Missourian, to be exact. An aunt kindly left me a few thousand dollars in hopes I would set myself up in business. I've been using the dough to see Europe."

"A tourist," Elaine murmured.

"Guilty," Henry Trump grinned.

Elaine listened at the door.

"I think those men are gone," she decided aloud.

"We'll wait a bit yet," Henry Trump suggested. "Say, are you married?"

"What?"

"Are you tied up in matrimonial bonds with some mug?"

"No," Elaine told him. "And I think that is a very impertinent question."

"Sure," Henry Trump grinned. "But it suddenly struck me as a very important thing to know."

"Anything else you are interested in learning?" Elaine asked him in as frosty a voice as she could manage.

"You bet!" he told her. "I'd like to hear your story."

Elaine could think of no reason why she should not tell him, so she immediately launched on the tale, starting with the excitement at the French *auberge* when, as she was now convinced, her uncle, Wehman Mills, had entered, called her name, then been carried off.

Henry Trump heard her through between low whistles of interest and sly glances at the young woman's attractive features. It was hard to tell which interested him the more.

"A whooping mystery, eh?" he smiled when Elaine had finished. "Elaine, I'm going to like this. Now it looks like things are sort of breaking out around me. That is, if you are going to permit me to help you."

"I don't want any one to get hurt," Elaine told him.

"Don't worry about me," Trump chuckled. "Here's my gun. I'm going to talk to the captain."

Elaine received the big automatic, made sure she knew how to fire it, then Henry Trump let himself out of the stateroom.

"I'll be back in a jiff," he breathed, just before shutting the door.

Chapter IX

SEA SPAWN

HENRY TRUMP, returning to the stateroom, closed the door swiftly, shot the bolt and leaned against the panel. His boyish face had a worried expression.

“A dickens of a way for things to turn out!” he muttered.

Wide-eyed, Elaine Mills demanded, “What is wrong?”

Instead of answering, Henry Trump looked the young woman up and down, his manner one of solemn appraisal, his features still wearing their serious cast.

“Nope,” he said to himself. “You can’t be.”

“Be what?” Elaine demanded.

“A nut,” said Trump.

Elaine snapped, “Well, I like that!”

“Oh, don’t get hot around the collar,” Henry Trump advised her gloomily. “The captain of the ship has been sold on the idea that you are a goof on the way to an English nut house.”

“So Paquis and Smith and the rest told him that!” Elaine snapped.

“They sure did. They did a swell job of it, too.”

Elaine advanced on the door. “Let me out of here. I’ll see about that.”

“Nix,” said Henry Trump. “This captain is a thick-headed dope. You couldn’t tell him a thing. Paquis has him sold, I tell you. Say, I listened to this Paquis talk. He’s some spieler. His purring voice almost got me to thinking he was really a doctor and you were his patient.”

Elaine waved the heavy automatic. “After I get sight of Paquis, he won’t tell anybody anything.”

Henry Trump looked interested. “You’d shoot him?”

“No,” said Elaine. “But I’d scare him until he lost that purring voice.”

Henry Trump grinned, but shook his head. “It might be a pleasant diversion, but it would not get you anywhere. It would just convince the captain of the boat that you were really unbalanced. They’d throw you in the brig, probably.”

The whistle moaned a long blast, and Elaine waited until the mournful orchestration of echoes had died.

“I’ve got to do something,” she declared.

“Stay in here until we dock at Southampton,” Henry Trump suggested. “I’ll stay with you until the stewards come. They’ll be around, because they’re going to search the ship for you. You get in the clothes locker, and I’ll convince them you’re not here.”

Elaine did not answer to that.

“Well, maybe you can think of something better,” the young man suggested. “After the stewards go, I’ll leave you alone if you wish. I’ll put a deck chair outside, under this

porthole, and you can yell if you want me.”

“I don’t know how I’ll ever repay you for this,” Elaine smiled.

“Am I kicking?” Henry Trump grinned. “Say, the nearest I ever got to playing hero to a girl as pretty as you are was watching a movie.”

Elaine said hastily, “There is one thing more we can do.”

“What’s that?”

“Send Doc Savage a message telling him he has been tricked.”

“Swell idea,” Henry Trump agreed. “But I thought the radio apparatus on this ship had been put out of commission by Paquis and his gang.”

“It may have been repaired by now.”

“In that case, how will we know what boat Doc Savage is on?”

“We can find what boats sailed for South America last night and send a message to all of them.” Elaine eyed the young man curiously. “Say, I don’t believe you’re very enthusiastic about this.”

Henry Trump grinned sheepishly. “To tell the truth, I’m afraid Paquis and his crowd will find us.”

Elaine Mills, in a determined voice, said, “I am going to the radio room.”

“I’ll go along,” Henry Trump told her. “But I think we’re taking unnecessary chances.”

They opened the stateroom door and reconnoitered cautiously. Seeing no one, they stepped outside, Elaine bundled in a spare topcoat which Henry Trump produced.

They rounded a corner and saw a deck hand in worn coveralls on hands and knees, polishing brass and washing down woodwork.

“Don’t let the sailor see your face,” Henry Trump breathed, as he and the young woman hurried forward.

They were abreast of the deck hand when he dipped his cleaning rag into his pail of suds. But instead of bringing it out, he wrenched a dripping revolver from the bucket.

“These cartridges are the kind which do not get wet!” he said grimly. “Stand still, you two!”

HENRY TRUMP had declared he craved action, and he now lived up to his word. He lunged with astonishing speed, kicked, and the fake deck hand’s revolver spun down the passage.

Snarling, the other man scuttled backward. He tore buttons off his shirt getting a hand under it, and brought out a long knife.

Henry Trump picked up the bucket of suds and dashed it into the fellow’s face. The man swore hoarsely and pawed at his eyes, which were blinded by the soapy spray.

“Come on!” Trump exploded, and grabbed Elaine’s arm.

They whirled to flee—and froze to stillness. Cabin doors near by had opened and Paquis, Smith and the others had appeared, guns in hand. Henry Trump started to reach for his gun.

“*Non!*” Paquis advised vehemently.

Henry Trump thought better of it and lifted his hands.

“We realized mademoiselle must have entered one of the cabins,” Paquis chuckled. “By the judicious use of a few francs, we managed to put one of our men to scrubbing. He served as a lookout.”

“You mugs seem to think you’re slick,” Henry Trump growled.

“Smarter than you, m’sieu’,” Paquis murmured ominously. “You are going to wish you had never met the pretty mademoiselle.”

“Rats!” Trump snapped. “Mark me, you lads will get yours for this.”

Guns were held on Elaine Mills and Henry Trump while their wrists were bound. Then gags were forced between their jaws.

“Mademoiselle will not trick us again,” Paquis assured the young woman.

Their ankles were not secured, and the reason for this became apparent when they were forced toward the door. One of the gang scuttled out and reconnoitered the corridor, came back and reported the coast clear.

Thanks to a wet drizzle and plenty of fog, the decks were virtually deserted. No one observed the prisoners being hurried toward the stern.

Paquis issued quiet orders. Ring life buoys were yanked loose from the rail, lengths of line were cut from around the edge of a lifeboat, and the buoys were bound to the prisoners.

Each of the buoys had a canister device attached to it.

Elaine watched in wide-eyed horror as Henry Trump was seized, lifted and hurled, feet-first, over the rail. Then she herself received the same treatment.

The young woman hit the water with a terrific shock. She saw the rusty sides of the Channel boat racing past her, was spun around and around in the disturbed water, then all but drawn under by the churning of the propellers. Almost choking, breathing impeded by the gag, she came back to the surface.

There was a loud bubbling sound made by the steamer, the sight of a receding hump of darkness that was the stern, then both receded and there was only the watery loneliness of the Channel.

Elaine bobbed wildly, for the sea was still upset by the passage of the ship; but soon that subsided and there was only the rather ugly chop of the Channel itself. Waves broke over the buoy and splashed into her face.

It must have been near dawn, but the fog and the rain clouds above made thick gloom, thicker gloom than Elaine believed she had ever seen before.

Abruptly there was a hissing roar, and a blinding light sprang up almost beside her. The young woman squeezed her eyes shut and struggled to get free of the ring buoy; but the bindings were too secure. It was doubtful if she could have stayed afloat for long, anyway, with her hands bound.

Then she realized what was making the eye-hurting light. It was the canister which had been attached to the buoy. It was a modern safety flare—a can of chemicals which ignited upon contact with the water and would burn for many minutes. They were intended to facilitate locating persons lost overboard at night.

The fog, however, would prevent any one aboard *La Colombe* from sighting them.

Elaine was shuddering, and between shudders endeavoring to free herself, when she got a shock.

“Elaine!” called a masculine voice near by.

A MOMENT later, Henry Trump appeared in the glare of the flare, rafting himself along on his ring buoy. His hands were free and he had ridded himself of the gag.

“I managed to get loose,” Trump puffed. “Gosh, I’m glad you’re safe! I was worried—afraid you had been pulled into the ship’s propellers.”

At that point, the chemical flare attached to Trump’s life ring ignited itself and, fizzing and spitting, made such a terrific glare that they could not see each other. Overhead, thunder whooped and gobbled, and the rain fell more furiously, making a white cream on the green water around about.

“Danged if we aren’t in a mess,” Trump said grimly. “I wonder how far it is to shore?”

A series of grunts answered him—and Trump, remembering, removed the young woman’s gag.

“Too far,” Elaine shivered. “I’m no Channel swimmer.”

Trump was working at Elaine’s bonds now, and soon got them free. Then they worked together and joined their life preservers with ropes, in order that they might not drift apart.

“They picked a queer way of getting rid of us,” Trump growled.

“That is what I cannot understand,” Elaine murmured. “Why did they tie us to life preservers before they threw us overboard.”

“Listen!” Trump barked.

Elaine strained her ears. At first, there was only the burning noises made by their chemical flares, which seemed quite proof against extinguishing by water. Then the young woman caught a sound which might have been made by a distant doorbell from which the clapper had been removed. This grew louder, approaching.

“Plane,” decided Trump.

Before long, the plane materialized in the being of two brilliant wingtip landing lights which were pale in comparison with the nearer brilliance of the flares. The ship settled to a landing, a feat which could only have been accomplished by a large and sturdy seaplane. It taxied close.

A man appeared on the seaplane, and with both legs and one arm wrapped around struts, fished for Trump and Elaine with a boat hook. He was proficient. A moment later they both were scrambling up into the seaplane cabin.

Three other men were inside the ship. Elaine looked them over and was quite sure she had never seen any of the trio previously.

“We had a bloody time findin’ you,” advised one of the rescuers. “We thought for a while we weren’t going to be able to locate the flares in the fog.”

“You were looking for us?” Elaine gulped.

“Sure!” the other told her.

“But why?”

The man produced a nickel-plated revolver, waved it idly and said, “Maybe you did not know it, but you have just been changing conveyances.”

HENRY TRUMP yelled angrily, “So you are in with Paquis, Smith and that gang?”

“I’m not ashamed of it,” their new captor grinned. “That Paquis is almost half as smart as he thinks he is, but that makes him a very clever gentleman indeed.”

Elaine gasped, “But why the elaborate affair of dropping us overboard to be picked up by this plane?”

“To save trouble,” the informant smirked. “You see, young lady, the captain of that ship got the bright idea of having the police at Southampton look into the story of the insane girl.”

Elaine and Henry Trump exchanged glances.

“I wish I had known of that,” Trump groaned.

A man produced thin but stout cords and prepared to bind Elaine and Trump.

“Where are we going?” Elaine demanded.

“To visit your esteemed uncle, Wehman Mills,” the other growled. “But you won’t like that. Not a bit!”

Another man chuckled. “Tell them about the other guest they’ll have for company—an esteemed archaeologist and geologist known as William Harper Littlejohn.”

“You blokes talk too much!” snarled the man who was doing the flying.

The plane now bounced across the water’s surface, motors making a great deal of uproar, and finally went on step, skipping from one wave top to another. The result was a procession of terrific slams which threatened to jar the wings off the seaplane.

Apprehension overspread the features of pilot and passengers. It was a dangerous moment, alleviated only when the ship got into the fog-gorged halfflight of early morning.

The man with the cords resumed the task of tying the prisoners. Then he produced handkerchiefs which were evidently to serve as gags.

“You birds are in for trouble!” Henry Trump threatened. “Doc Savage is tangled up in this.”

“Doc Savage is on his way to South America,” the man smirked.

Chapter X

THE KING JOHN TRAIL

FOG lay over The Wash. It was a particularly soupy fog, so very wet it deposited big globules of moisture on the rushes which composed most of the marsh vegetation. The sun was a weak red eye overhead.

An occasional flying water bird seemed about the only vestige of animate life, and even the feathered amphibians did not show much energy in the face of a day which, starting off with a clear sky, had turned dreary and moist.

There was movement in The Wash, however. But it was furtive action, carefully managed, to escape notice.

Doc Savage was following Johnny's trail. The Swineshead village stories about the ghost of King John had given him a clue as to where Johnny might have gone. Johnny's tracks had not been difficult to locate, because muck of The Wash was soft and retained footprints.

They were unusually long and slender, these tracks of Johnny's, indicating with accuracy the skeletonlike physical build of the man who made them.

The track showed where the bony archaeologist and geologist had prowled in search of the spectre of an ancient English monarch, or something less fantastic, which would explain the ghost stories. Then came the point where Johnny had encountered the nocturnal prowler.

With great interest Doc Savage scrutinized the prints of the individual Johnny had met. The peculiar pattern was easily identified as having been made by an ancient sandal. Doc found the mark made by the big broadsword when Johnny seized it and threw it away.

Then came the marks made during the fight in which Johnny had overpowered his strange foe. Reeds were crushed down and salt water grass uprooted, where the fight had occurred.

At this point, Doc Savage located a third set of tracks, also made by a man. It was this individual who had belted Johnny over the head, bringing the unconsciousness which had been so inexplicable to Johnny. There seemed to be two King John ghosts.

The third arrival, after striking Johnny down, seemed to have crept away and concealed himself in the marsh growth near by while the pretended ghost of King John questioned Johnny, perhaps; then he had returned, and Johnny had been marched off through the muck and reeds by both the King John apparitions.

Doc followed. He kept close to the ground, although there hardly seemed necessity for that in view of the fog.

The great marsh, being partially inundated by the tide at times, was cut here and there by streams, rips which the violent tidal currents had opened. At the present moment the tide seemed to be high, and these rips were either full or overflowing.

Doc lost the trail at one of the rips. He swam across with a few strokes which showed a remarkable swimming ability, and examined the other bank. He became convinced that Johnny had been put aboard a boat of some type.

Doc proceeded to move along the bank of the watercourse. Since it was impossible to tell what direction the water craft had taken, the only thing he could do was trace the stream—first toward the sea, then inland.

POSSIBLY half a mile from where Doc Savage was working his way, a strange-looking figure crouched in the rushes. This individual had a bushy black beard, wore a close-fitting suit of chain mail and a white silk jerkin. An enormous broadsword was thrust point down into the soft earth beside him.

The individual himself presented an exotic picture, a touch of the thirteenth century. He looked very like pictures of King John.

But he had peeled back his helmet to permit the wearing of an extremely modern-looking telephonic headset. The cord of this connected to a box of electrical apparatus; from this in turn ran wires that terminated in devices buried in the ground, and other devices which dangled in the water of the stream which Doc Savage had crossed.

The contrivance over which the queer figure crouched was a listening device utilizing sensitive microphones, vacuum tube amplifiers and the headset. It caught the faintest sounds through earth or water and stepped them up to tremendous volume. The splash of a fish a quarter of a mile distant sounded as a great crackling and rushing.

The listener now unplugged his headset from the listening device and inserted the receivers into the circuit of a small portable radio. He spoke into the microphone.

“Some one is approaching,” he advised.

“Know who it is?” asked a voice over the radio.

“No,” said the informant. “But he seems to be heading this way.”

“Pull your King John act on him,” commanded the distant voice. “Scare him away from here.”

The King John now picked up his broadsword, wiped mud off the point, examined the edge to make sure it was razor-sharp, then started forward. He moved in a crouching position, a posture which his mail armor made difficult, and he stopped frequently to rub his aching back and rest his muscles. But this method of travel was necessary, if his head was not to be seen above the rushes.

Frequently the man paused and jammed an ear to the ground. He heard nothing. After he had repeated this procedure several times, he looked a bit worried. He began searching for tracks.

Eventually, he found where Doc Savage had crossed the stream. But there was no trace of Doc.

The prowler now tried to follow Doc’s trail. He managed to accomplish this for perhaps a hundred yards. What he discovered caused his lips to pull thin over his teeth. He broke out in a thin film of perspiration.

For it was perfectly evident that Doc Savage had heard him approach, and was in turn shadowing him.

The man in chain mail and jerkin did not show a great deal of fright, but merely looked worried. He tucked his broadsword under an arm, fished a very modern pistol from under his jerkin and kept it in his hand. Then he devoted himself to hunting industriously for his quarry. He was able to locate no one.

Walking warily, keeping away from taller patches of reeds, the man returned to the spot where his listening device and radio apparatus were concealed. He used the listener. It brought him no sound which could be ascribed to other than natural causes.

The man shifted to the radio and got in touch with his associates.

“Something very strange about this,” he advised. “I have not been able to find the fellow, but I did locate his tracks. I think he is following me.”

“Only one man?” he was asked.

“One, according to the signs. What shall I do?”

“Look scared,” advised the voice over the radio. “Gather up your apparatus and follow the stream inshore.”

“But that will lead him toward——”

“Do not worry about that,” directed the other. “We will take care of this person. You have not seen him? You have no idea what he looks like?”

“No idea at all.”

The conversation terminated, and the King John gathered up the electrical apparatus, as he had been ordered, and moved along the bank of the stream.

THE air was becoming slightly warmer, and the fog correspondingly more oppressive. The vapor took on the quality of steam. Occasionally, a breath of a breeze wafted across The Wash lowlands, causing the fog to writhe and dance along in nebulous bundles. These, when seen unexpectedly, had an unnerving likeness to creeping figures, and the King John jutted his gun at more than one, thinking he was being attacked.

The man had not relaxed his vigilance. He was positive there was some stranger here in the marsh, but the other’s uncanny ability in keeping himself from being seen was more than a little nerve-racking.

The ground became higher, more dry. The stream which he followed was hardly flowing, while the water it held was green, vile of hue. A water bird flew up with a noisy clattering of wings, dragging its legs for a time in the stream as it took to the air.

The King John stumbled on another hundred yards. Perspiration was oozing through the apertures in the chain mail, for the armor itself was heavy and the boxes of electrical apparatus had considerable weight.

Nervousness and physical exertion had the man nearly fagged. Tripping finally, he lowered the boxes and sat upon them, puffing.

Forty paces to his left, a bit behind, a gun whacked out thunder that bumped and rolled over the marsh in long-resounding waves.

The King John popped erect. He thought at first that he had been attacked. But there was no bullet squeak nearby.

More shots crashed. A machine gun began a staccato gobbling. The shots came from both sides and the rear. Men were standing up in the marsh grass and reeds.

They all wore King John costumes, these men, and they were doing the shooting. As they fired, they charged along the back trail just traversed by the first King John.

The first King John abruptly comprehended what had happened. His companions had set a trap to catch the mysterious individual who was following him. They must have sighted the fellow.

Dropping his electrical apparatus, the first King John joined in the chase. Fatigue was forgotten. He overhauled a mailed figure with a submachine gun.

“Did you see the bloke?” he yelled.

“Not clear!” barked the other. “’E was in the bloomin’ rushes. Just got a flash of ’im. But ’e ain’t goin’ to get away.”

Yelling, using their guns steadily, the King Johns converged on the stream bank. They had their quarry hemmed in.

A man shouted suddenly. His gun muzzle guttered red flame; the ejector mechanism spouted emptied brass cartridges.

There was a loud splash.

“Got ’im!” howled the gunner.

They piled forward to the creek bank. The mud slope was scraped and indented as if a body had fallen down it. Up from the dark green water came a softly-bursting procession of bubbles.

“’E’s under there,” chuckled the King John who had done the last shooting.

“DIVE in and get ’im,” somebody suggested.

“With these bloomin’ tin suits on?” another snorted. “You’d never come up!”

Two men strove hurriedly to undo their armor of chain mail, but it was a task requiring time. They grunted, cursed, tore their finger nails, but made little headway.

Another King John, more alert, fumbled in a knapsack which he wore and brought out what might have been paper-covered candles tied together with a string. The stuff was dynamite, already capped and fused. He used a patent lighter to set the fuse to sparking.

“Leg it away from ’ere,” he warned.

Leaning over, he very carefully dropped the package of dynamite in the middle of the bubbles which were still arising from the water. The explosive sank slowly until it was out of sight, and only smoke crawling from the water denoted its presence.

The man whirled and ran. Because of the armor, he was forced to use a peculiar hopping gait. He tangled with rushes and fell down, cursing wildly.

A great sheet of water climbed over the stream bank, reached the fallen man and washed him head over heels. Flame, a gush of smoke leaped into the fog. The earth

seemed to pull down several inches, then spring back into place.

The concussion bent reeds and saw-edged grass over a considerable area; and startled birds flew up. The stream was boiling mud, and the water which had been blown out made a gurgling as it ran back.

The man who had dropped the bomb got up, still swearing, his armor leaking water. He ran to the stream. His companions joined him. They stared, waiting.

“Some pieces of the body should come up,” one muttered.

“Probably it was blowed right down into the mud,” the bomber grunted.

“Look!” said another.

The stream was riled, very muddy, but the mud was taking on a pronounced reddish tinge.

“Blood!” some one offered.

“What do you say we get the ’ell out of ’ere?” the first King John queried.

They turned away.

Chapter XI

THE PLANT IN THE MARSH

NOWHERE did the marsh growth around The Wash exceed six feet in height. But at some points there were tufts of high ground, and these promontories had a slightly greater altitude which made them distinguishable from a distance. There were enough of these, however, that no one of them stood out with particular distinctness.

Some half dozen of these tufts stood close to the bank of the stream in which the bomb had been dropped. The stream here was wider and more shallow, almost a lake.

The tufts were not natural, but it would have taken a close observer to discern this, even at a distance of only a few rods. The reeds and grass stuck up very naturally; they had been treated with green paint or perhaps dye. In other places, there was only paint over sheet tin, but the work had been expertly done. The camouflaging was perfect.

The sheds were low and rather extensive. The frames were of wood, covered with the tin, then the paint and the dyed reeds and grass on top.

One structure, abutting on the water, housed a seaplane. The craft was large, sturdy, a ship built for hard service rather than great speed or fancy looks.

What the other buildings housed was not apparent, but from one came a low mutter which could not be heard many yards, and which an expert could have identified as an excellently muffled engine.

The group of King Johns approached the camouflaged group of buildings. They walked swiftly, and all were perspiring.

Paquis came out of the secreted hut in which the engine was running. He was dapper, having changed to a tweed hunting jacket, knickers and rubber boots.

Smith also appeared, drawn by the noise of the approaching men, the clinking of their armor, the occasional clang of the broadswords. Muck smeared Smith from head to foot, and in one hand he carried a large rag. He dabbed at his face with this.

"*Bonjour, m'sieu's,*" Paquis said dryly. "What is it that brings you back looking so excited?"

"What the 'ell's wrong?" Smith echoed. "Did something go bad, you blokes?"

The King Johns dropped to the soft ground, puffing, and the man who had dropped the dynamite bomb told the story. He left out no details.

"Who was this *homme* whom you blew up?" Paquis demanded.

"We did not see 'is face," said the spokesman. "We did not even see enough of him to get an idea of what 'e looked like."

"But the body, m'sieu's," Paquis murmured. "Surely, you examined that closely?"

"It was blown up."

"What about the fragments?" asked Paquis.

The spokesman shrugged. "We saw blood, gov'nor."

“*En vérité!*” Paquis exploded. “Indeed! Did you not examine? Did you not search for the parts of the body?”

The other shrugged again. “The blood——”

“Have I the only brains here?” Paquis yelled. “You should have made sure, m’sieu’s. The man might only have been wounded.”

Paquis waved his arms and launched into choice expletives garnered from his native tongue. He was quite explicit about the ancestry of his colleagues.

“We will go back and make sure,” he snapped. “*Dépechez-vous!* Quickly!”

RETURN to the bank of the creek required half an hour, because the King Johns were tired. They cursed the weight of their armor with each step, and some paused to remove the weighty costumes.

The stream was still riled, cloudy with mud. Water birds, circling over head, had not returned to their feeding.

At Paquis’s profane order, two King Johns stripped to their underwear and dived into the green water, which was not foul, but seemed so only because of its color.

They brought up fragments of glass. These were fitted together, and it became evident that they had once been parts of two tiny glass bottles.

Nothing else came to light.

“*Cela est impossible!*” Paquis murmured. “It is impossible. *Oui.* There should be at least some small part of a body.”

“Probably washed away, gov’nor,” grunted Smith.

“Maybe, m’sieu’,” Paquis admitted. “But we cannot take the chance.”

“What’s the bloody difference?” snorted Smith. “We finish up ’ere to-day, anyhow.”

Paquis nodded. “But no one, m’sieu’, must suspect a connection between this and our delightful arrangement at Magna Island.”

Smith emitted a snort. “If anybody suspects Magna Island it’ll be because that publicity bloke, Benjamin Giltstein, fell down on the bloomin’ job.”

“Giltstein is very wise,” said Paquis. “He will handle his portion.”

They argued a while longer, and because there seemed to be nothing else to do, they turned back.

All was quiet around the camouflaged buildings. The engine still ran exhaust into its silencers. A man crouched just under cover, watchful, a submachine gun on his knees.

“No action ’ere gov’nor,” he reported.

Paquis entered another of the buildings. He was not inside long.

“We will push the work to completion,” he directed upon reappearing. “I have consulted with our chief.”

“The boss is goin’ to a blarsted lot of trouble to keep ’imself under cover,” a man snorted.

“The chief is taking no chances, m’sieu’s,” said Paquis. “He is clever.”

And that, coming from Paquis, who was wont to brag about his own cunning, was high praise indeed.

Work got under way, the men entering the secreted hut. An occasional clang of tools could be heard. The men did not show themselves, for the buildings were connected by low thatched sheds. There was also activity in the shed which housed the seaplane. A man was working on the motor.

Once, all activity ceased while a plane passed overhead, bound northward. The marshes were quiet, with no movement and no sound to show that anything untoward was going on.

Solitary evidence of near-by civilization was that plane; except for its advent, the marsh remained as deserted as if it had been in some uninhabited nook of the world instead of within a few miles of fertile farms which stout Dutch emigrants had won from this swampy section of England with the same industry shown by their race in turning stretches of the Zuider Zee into tillable acreage.

Paquis seated himself before a radio transmitting-and-receiving apparatus and spoke softly. The outfit was one of small power, and it was doubtful if its etheric waves reached beyond the confines of The Wash.

Later, in compliance with Paquis's orders, King Johns came trooping in and shed their heavy armor with grateful grunts. It was evident that numerous men, all wearing the same disguise, had been posted about the marsh to keep away chance visitors, either by terrorism or violence.

About the only attraction the marshlands held was waterfowl shooting, and it was out of season for that.

The false beards, the armor, the broadswords, composing the King John masquerades were made into compact bundles and thrown into a convenient pool of quicksand, into the depths of which they were rapidly sucked.

"We had best post a guard with the listening devices, m'sieu'," Paquis decided, and dispatched a man with one of the intricate electrical contrivances.

The man penetrated alone through the rushes for a few yards, carrying his box, then knelt down to fit the connections.

Unexpectedly, there was a faint crunching sound at the man's side. He looked down. There were shiny particles on the ground; they might have been gossamery flakes of glass, and they reposed in a smear of liquid which seemed to evaporate with magical suddenness.

The man sighed deeply and lay down quite motionless beside his apparatus.

A STIRRING in the fog, and a giant man of bronze materialized among the rushes, came close and held the wrist of the fallen man briefly. There was strong pulse. The prone man's lower lip fluttered and outgoing breath made a sound faintly reminiscent of a snore.

The thing which had broken beside the unconscious victim was a glass ball, thin-walled, holding a chemical compound which vaporized instantly and produced senselessness, should any one be breathing within a few feet of it.

Doc Savage wore a peculiar type of vest beneath his outer clothing. Its foundation was composed of light, bulletproof plates, lying scale fashion, and over the plates were pockets and numerous receptacles. Padding between these made the vest almost unnoticeable.

The contents of the vest pockets made up a remarkable assortment. There were delicate mechanical devices, strange scientific weapons, glass vials holding chemical concoctions calculated to accomplish the unusual.

It was two of these glass bottles which had enabled the bronze man to feign his death in the stream. One contained a chemical which, mixing with water, caused bubbles; the other held merely red dye, imitation blood.

The bronze giant, cornered, not wishing his identity to become known, had taken to the water, swimming beneath the surface until he was clear of pursuit. He had been out of the stream when the explosive was tossed in.

Doc Savage advanced, moving like a wraith through the fog. The strange marsh structure loomed ahead. He sank flat and seemed to vanish, only to reappear shortly, close against the wall of a structure.

The surface was of tin, daubed with streaks of green and pale brown to imitate rushes growing from mud. The paint had a fresh appearance, as if it had not been there long. Doc planted an ear to the gaudy metal.

Near by, the muffled engine labored steadily. There was a faint sighing, as if pumps were at work, and occasionally a dull sizzling noise. Men moving about made some sound.

Doc Savage became convinced that the hut at which he listened was occupied. A time or two, some one shifted position.

A voice said, "This inaction comes under the nomenclature of an unmitigatedly irksome vocation."

Doc Savage remained very quiet, but there came into being a weird, tiny sound. This note was so vague that it might easily have been mistaken for some vagary of the fitful breezes which stirred the fog. It was a trilling, one which might have been made by a wind through a cold, denuded forest; or it might have been the note of some exotic tropical songster.

This was the sound of Doc Savage, a tiny and unconscious thing which he often made in moments of stress. But such a quality of ventriloquism did the trilling possess that a close bystander, looking at the bronze man, could not have told from whence it came. The metallic lips did not move; there was no undulation of throat sinews. It was doubtful that Doc himself was aware just how the sound came into being.

The trilling must have penetrated the hut. The voice which had spoken before, spoke again. It was not English, French or any language known to the so-called civilized world which was uttered. The dialect was the language of a lost race, that of the ancient Mayan civilization of Central America. It was a tongue known only to a few white men—and the inhabitants of a remote valley in Central America, which Doc Savage had once visited in successful quest of the immense treasure trove of ancient Maya.

"There is one guard in here, Doc," said the voice in Mayan.

It was Johnny's scholastic tone.

"WHAT in 'ades are you sayin'?" the guard snarled, glaring at the gaunt Johnny.

"That was an incantation calculated to engender a smile from good dame fortune," Johnny said dryly.

The guard scowled, mulling over Johnny's large words. He was a beetle of a fellow with overhanging brows and a vague forehead.

"Pipe down!" he advised.

"I am an individual with a superpreponderance of terminology," Johnny said. "I am a verbarian, a glossographer, abundantly interested in the intricacies of allocution."

"Whew!" gulped the guard. "Such a gab! Lay off, will you!"

The man fumbled his gun, but not too purposefully; he seemed to be intrigued by Johnny's flow of many-syllabled words.

Johnny went on speaking. He had heard Doc's trilling sound, and knew the bronze man was near. No hint of inner excitement appeared on his long, angular features, but he was greatly interested in fastening the watchman's attention until Doc completed whatever move he might have in mind.

"The art of harangue," Johnny advised, "is the essence of erudition, one of the acmes of menticulture. It is——"

A hard metallic cloud seemed to fill the hut entrance. It shifted with lightning speed, flashing for the guard who was entranced by the big words.

The guard was warned by some drifting shadow. He whirled. His mouth flew open, his gun came up. But his motions seemed infinitely slow in comparison to the speed of the bronze giant.

Metallic fingers clamped the guard's gun hand, twisted, and removed the weapon. Another hand found the fellow's mouth, gathering his lips together tightly so that he could not cry out.

Doc Savage dropped the gun and snapped the hand which had held it to the back of the prisoner's neck. The fingers tensed, exerting tremendous pressure upon certain nerve centers.

A peculiar thing happened. The guard gave one tremendous jerk, then became quite stiff. Doc lowered him to the ground. The guard was quite conscious, endeavoring to move, but gripped by a strange paralysis.

Johnny eyed the stricken man curiously. Johnny had seen Doc Savage do this thing before, but the feat still amazed him. It would be hours before the guard recovered the use of his limbs, unless Doc made a readjustment which would relieve the paralyzing pressure. The bronze man's remarkable knowledge of human anatomy made the feat possible.

Doc Savage swooped beside Johnny, grasped the handcuff links, and his tremendous sinews coiled and tensed. Bundles of thews the size of small footballs stood out on his vast shoulders.

Johnny's eyes widened as the links snapped. He knew just how much strength that performance really required. It was something few professional strong men could have performed.

“What is going on here?” Doc demanded.

“Blessed if I know,” breathed Johnny. “They have been very careful not to tell me.”

Doc moved an admonishing hand. “Listen!”

Johnny strained his ears. “Some one coming!”

Chapter XII

KING JOHN'S GOBLET

It was Smith who was approaching. He had donned hip boots and there must have been a leak in one, because it made sobbing noises with each step. His coat was off, revealing the harness which held an automatic under each armpit.

He reached the hut which held the prisoner, stooped and peered inside.

Johnny sat on the floor, arms held together in front of him, so that it seemed as if he were still handcuffed. The faint light glinted on the manacle circlets.

Smith's jaw sagged as he saw the guard reposing motionless in the soft muck just inside.

"What the bloody 'ell?" he growled.

"Your custodian seems to have encountered an unpropitious eventuation," said Johnny.

"Damn you an' them big words!" grated Smith. "What'd you do to this bloke?"

"I did not molest him," Johnny advised truthfully.

Smith, unsuspecting and enraged at Johnny, lunged inside, driving a hand at his left armpit gun. At that point, he suffered a mild accident. He stumbled, turned half sidewise and put his free hand down to keep from falling.

This caused him to face Doc Savage, who was poised just inside the door.

Smith squalled. He still fought to get the gun out, and because the weapon was holstered on the side of Doc Savage, Smith flung up the arm which covered it and began to pull the trigger. That was a mistake. The slide jacked back the first time and stuck, empty cartridge jammed in the ejector. With a revolver, the firing from the holster trick might have been accomplished.

Doc whipped forward. Smith whirled and ran. His face was a mask of terror, for he had recognized Doc Savage and all his earlier fear of the bronze man had returned manifold.

Smith was not headed toward the door; the sheet-tin wall of the shack barred his way. He put his head down, bundled his round skull in his arms and hit the wall full speed. Construction was rickety. Thin metal plates caved off and let the scared man out.

Johnny clattered up from the floor, a lean scarecrow who looked angry.

"Of all the breaks!" he yelled. "Of all the unmitigated misfortunes!"

The vicinity was in an uproar. Men shouted, swore. Smith was screaming as might a man who was being mauled by a tiger. Terror ripped and guttered in his tone.

Inside the hut there was suddenly a sound as if some giant had a handful of oversize buckshot and was dropping them in quick succession on the roof. Rents opened. The pop and clank of lead made the more distant bawl of the machine gun almost indistinguishable.

The shooting interrupted itself. They could hear tufts of dyed reeds, cut loose from the roof by the bullets, sifting to the ground. They fell with a small, very dry noise.

“How many are here?” Doc asked.

“Dozen, anyway,” said Johnny.

“Come,” Doc directed. “We had best get out of here.”

The bronze man approached one tin wall, turned sidewise when he was close, and went through as easily as if the sheet metal had been paper. Johnny followed.

ONE of the King Johns—without his costume now—had been close to the wall. The crash and roar as Doc came through caused him to leap backward. He lifted his gun.

What happened then smacked of the miraculous. The gun gushed noise and powder lightning. But the bullet missed, missed because the bronze giant had shifted with uncanny speed. With eyes trying to get out of their sockets like bugs out of holes, the King John tried for a second shot. He did not make it.

Metallic fingers clamped the nape of his neck, twisted. The King John jammed his arms down stiff at his sides and his whole body seemed to become rigid.

After Doc released him the man stood upright for a moment, as if he were a log standing on end, and when he fell, it was as a log would fall, rigidly unbending. After he lay on the ground he breathed and his eyes were open, but none of his limbs functioned.

Doc Savage dived a hand inside his clothing, brought out a tiny sphere of metal and threw it. The ball sailed over the hut roof, to land among the men beyond. It opened with a hand-clap report. Black smoke geysered and spread with uncanny speed.

Howling, Paquis and his men ran from the pall, fearing it had a gaseous content. Order was in their retreat, however. They piled into another of the huts, and, after the elapse of some ten seconds, began coming out again, wrenching gas mask hoods over their heads.

Johnny said dryly, “They are going to make a fight of it, Doc.”

The bronze man gestured with his head, then flattened and crept back through the tall reeds.

Johnny, following, was very quiet, because their foes had fallen silent. The smoke, a sepia worm that still uncoiled from the metallic egg that Doc had thrown, concealed them for the moment. Paquis and his crew were trying to locate them by ear.

Doc was a silent ghost of bronze. Johnny picked each step with care. It was very possible that their lives depended on not being heard, for they were in the open now. The reeds and salt water grass would not turn bullets.

They covered perhaps a hundred yards. The fitful breezes that had been doing things with the fog moved the smoke cloud away from the cluster of camouflaged buildings. Paquis began barking angry orders.

“They are going to trail us,” murmured Johnny, who had a habit of forgetting his big words when the going became tough.

Doc Savage's answer to that was to pause and employ one finger to make a small pit in the ground. In this he buried one of his thin-walled glass anaesthetic balls. He left it near the surface, where treading feet would break it. The gas, being odorless, would overcome the unwary.

"But they're wearing gas masks," Johnny pointed out.

"They may have them off by the time they reach here," Doc reminded. "This fog will smear the windows of the eyepieces and make the masks a nuisance."

The two men continued to crawl. They were soaked, fog having deposited on the marsh growth like rain. Doc left others of the anaesthetic bulbs buried.

After a while they heard surprised, horrified yells. As Doc had surmised, the gas masks must have been removed, and one of the glass balls had been broken unwittingly underfoot.

They did not see how many men were overcome. Pursuit, however, ended suddenly.

JOHNNY, listening intently, was unable to tell just what their foes were doing.

"They are going back," Doc said.

Johnny nodded, not at all surprised at the evidence of the bronze man's superior hearing. Doc had developed all his faculties to an almost incredible sensitivity. He did this by scientific exercises, two hours of them daily since childhood.

Johnny crouched and considered. He was scarcely breathing rapidly. There was an astonishing endurance in his bony frame, and he had been in tight places before.

"Think," Doc requested. "Didn't you overhear anything that might show what they are doing here in the marsh?"

"They blindfolded me when they brought me here," Johnny said slowly. "What I saw was insignificant."

"The engine seemed to be operating a compressor," Doc stated.

Johnny nodded. "Yes. A pump or kindred appurtenance. The specific category to which the appliance is affinitive defeats me for the moment."

The bony archaeologist and geologist was falling back upon his large words, now that danger had receded.

"Smell anything?" Doc questioned.

Johnny sniffed. "Only the rather unpleasant aroma of this inelegant terrain."

"Ammonia," Doc said.

Johnny tried again with his olfactory organs. Then he nodded soberly.

"Correct," he admitted. "I mistook it for one of the marsh smells. Do you attach significance to it?"

Doc said, "We must get a look at their plant."

There came a few scattered reports from the direction of their foes. An inexperienced ear might have mistaken the sounds for shots.

"Engine backfiring," Doc said.

An instant later, the engine started. It was an airplane motor, for there was the added quality of a propeller turning, a hollow whining note. Shouts reached them, voices lifted over the motor sound.

“Maybe they are going to hunt us from the air?” Johnny groaned.

“Don’t worry,” Doc told him. “I have enough smoke bombs to keep us hidden.”

Doc and Johnny now worked toward the strange marsh establishment of their enemies. But before they came near, the plane took the air. The craft ran down the stream and was out of sight in the fog before it lifted. It had not taken the air easily.

Instead of circling back, the ship continued straight out over The Wash until its sound died completely.

“I’ll be superamalgamated!” said Johnny. “I fail to understand this.”

Doc leveled an arm. “Look.”

The fog above the camouflaged shacks was turning black, as if it were being mixed with a vaporized ink or dye.

“Smoke!” gasped Johnny.

“Exactly!” Doc began to run. “They have set fire to their buildings.”

Johnny set out, longlegged, after the bronze man. They covered ground swiftly until the shacks—they were bundled in red flames now—loomed out of the fog. The two men slackened their pace, even stopping to listen.

But they might as well have come on boldly, they found out a few moments later—for Paquis and the rest of their foes had departed, taking along the men whom Doc had made unconscious.

“WE scared them out!” Johnny shouted.

Doc Savage did not answer. The silenced engine no longer ran. He lunged to the shack which held it, but instead of going in the door, swerved around and kicked in a side slab of tin.

Johnny leaped for the door.

“Careful!” Doc warned. “Don’t go in that way.”

Johnny shifted from the door, came to Doc’s side and peered into the shack. His eyes flew wide. The door was partially ajar, and wedged under it was a hand grenade, fastened in such a position that a movement of the door would have caused the key to be wrenched out with a resultant explosion.

“Their parting gift,” Doc said quietly.

It was very hot inside the shed, for flames were all over the roof, consuming the camouflaging reeds and rushes. Gasoline seemed to have been doused on the wooden framework, too, as this was burning savagely.

Machinery occupied the center of the structure. In it was a large Diesel engine, silenced; there was also a compressing device. The odor of ammonia was very strong.

“Back,” Doc advised. “One of the ammonia pipes has ruptured.”

Johnny was puzzled enough that he forgot his exaggerated phraseology.

"I don't get it," he exploded. "That looks like a——"

"Refrigerating machine," Doc agreed. "It is."

"But why a refrigerating plant here in the marsh?"

"Let's see if some of these other shacks will answer that."

The next camouflaged building proved to be a crude barracks. The bunks and tables inside had been fired thoroughly. They tried another structure, which was by far the largest of the lot.

Roof and sides of this edifice were burning, but there was an infinitely hotter flame in the center of the floor. It poured up with a violent roar from a chimneylike aperture.

"A hole, a shaft of some kind," Doc stated.

"They poured down a barrel of gasoline and dropped in a match," added Johnny.

Pipes made a complex interlacing around the burning shaft mouth. Some of these ran off in the direction of the refrigerating plant. Others extended toward the near-by stream. Still more, smaller pipes stood up like pickets around the shaft maw. There was another engine and a large-capacity muck suction pump.

"Simple," Doc said.

"Sure," Johnny echoed. "So juvenile that I fail to make heads or tails of it."

"Ever hear of the method used in sinking ventilating shafts in the large vehicular tunnel at Antwerp, Belgium, when it was necessary to go through soft quicksand and muck such as this?"

"I'm not an engineer," Johnny replied.

"They simply installed a large refrigerating plant and froze the muck," Doc explained. "Then they could excavate without sinking caissons."

"You mean——"

"That our friends simply sank a shaft by using the most up-to-date engineering methods."

"But what were they after?"

IF DOC SAVAGE had any ideas on that question, he did not voice them. It was furnace-hot in the hut; parts of the room were already falling in. They backed away.

Johnny said thoughtfully, "I believe the men completed whatever machination they had under way."

Doc Savage's strange flake-gold eyes were roving, searching. Without glancing at his aide, he queried, "What makes you think that?"

"Morsels of information which I overheard," said Johnny. "On several occasions, my captors mentioned that their work here was nearly completed. It was to be finished to-day, I gathered. Then they were going to take me to some island where I could be held until I could no longer endanger their plans."

"Get the name of the island?" Doc asked.

"Maggie, or something similar," Johnny murmured.

"Magna Island?"

“That was it.” Johnny’s nod was vehement. “What do you know about Magna Island?”

“Monk and Ham are investigating it now,” Doc advised.

The bronze man now moved away. He seemed to have a definite objective, striding through the rushes and wading mud puddles. Johnny, trailing curiously, discovered that Doc was following a series of footprints.

“You think one of them did not flee——” Johnny began, then failed to finish when he saw that the footprints were double, going and coming.

“One man seems to have crept out of the camp just before they departed,” Doc said. “The prints are fresh. And if you will notice closely, the man was taking pains not to be seen by his companions. It looks as if he had something hidden out here, and went to get it before they left.”

Doc’s surmise seemed to be accurate, for they soon came upon a spot where moist earth had been clawed up hastily.

“They must have trusted each other,” Johnny snorted. “This fellow evidently incarcerated his valuables away from his friends, fearing he would be robbed.”

Doc did not comment. He knelt and sifted through the soft loam, turning over lumps as if to ascertain if there were indentations which would show the nature of the thing that had been hidden. He found no such molds. But he did turn up an object which had been overlooked, possibly because of haste.

The bronze man scraped mud from the piece. He used a handkerchief to wipe it carefully. Then he held it up. It was of bright yellow metal.

The object was large, of almost quart capacity. Its lines were those of a rather grotesque cup. A rather elaborate design of enamel was done on one side.

Johnny peered closely.

“The coat of arms of King John,” he murmured. “Is it brass?”

“Gold,” Doc said. “Soft enough that it can be dented with a finger nail. That means very pure gold.”

“Fake?” Johnny questioned.

“Genuine,” Doc corrected. “A museum piece. You are an authority on ancient things. What would you say it was worth?”

“A thousand pounds,” said Johnny.

“A bit more,” Doc decided. “You remember the local peasant who was wounded by one of the King Johns last night?”

“Yes.” Johnny nodded vehemently. “They said that he had a coin in his pocket. A coin dated during King John’s reign. But how did you know that?”

“The newspapers,” Doc told him.

“They must have robbed a museum,” Johnny murmured. “Yes, they must have done that to get genuine relics to help out their King John ghost deception. But why?”

“The King John scheme was to keep the natives away, so this establishment would not be found.”

“That wasn’t what I meant,” said Johnny. “Why all this rigamarole? What is behind it all?”

“The answer to that must be on Magna Island,” Doc decided slowly. “Monk and Ham may turn it up.”

Chapter XIII

THE ATTEMPT TO KILL

MONK and Ham jammed their faces to the windows of the big transport seaplane and got their first glimpse of Magna Island. Nearly a dozen other correspondents in the aircraft did the same thing. The plane was very large and had three motors.

“The thing looks like a big green frog spraddled out in the ocean,” Monk decided.

“She is gooda way for describe da place,” said Ham, who was still playing the part of a Latin who did not speak any too good English.

Out of the corner of his mouth, Monk said, “Blast you, get away from me! They’ll get suspicious.”

“If you think I want your company, you’re crazy, you bug-eyed gorilla,” Ham advised, also in an aside.

Ham then changed his position, ostensibly to see Magna Island better, and to take some pictures with the camera which he had thoughtfully brought. It was the first time since leaving London that he and Monk had been in close proximity.

Suave Benjamin Giltstein was forward, where he had been haranguing the newspaper correspondents vociferously up to the point when Magna Island had been sighted. The plane, which Giltstein had provided, had a cabin which was nearly soundproof, permitting conversation if voices were lifted slightly.

If Benjamin Giltstein suspected Monk and Ham, he had shown no sign of it. He had treated them with that glad-handed manner that a press agent always displays toward a newspaper man.

The plane circled Magna Island at an altitude of less than two hundred feet. The isle was low, slightly rocky, and in shape did resemble a sprawled frog of a particularly bilious green hue.

The open, spraddled legs faced in the direction of the prevailing ocean current, and might have been likened to dikes.

Benjamin Giltstein pointed at the crotch where the legs, had the island been a frog, would have joined.

“Look, gentlemen!” he said. “The plant which accomplishes what man has always dreamed of—taking gold from sea water.”

The plant was a scattering of buildings of bright new brick and freshly painted roofing. The structures numbered four. One was a gate house, close to the water, and from this a canal ran to another building, which was very large. The other two structures were obviously a power house and tool shed.

From the building, a waste canal carried the water across the island and emptied it out of what would have been the frog’s mouth.

“You see, the island is perfect,” said Giltstein. “Prevailing ocean currents bring water in between two arms of land, and after the gold is extracted, the water is

permitted to flow out at the other end of the island, where the currents carry it away. That way, we do not treat the same water twice.”

Monk paid no particular attention. He was studying the rest of Magna Island. Along the west side, where the ground was a bit higher, there were several ancient-looking stone houses arrayed along a street.

“What’s that?” Monk asked, nudging Giltstein.

“The small village which was formerly on the island,” said the press agent. “It is now occupied by workmen who operate the gold-extracting plant.”

The pilot of the seaplane executed a fair enough landing between the frog-leg peninsulas, then beached the craft.

THE journalists pulled off shoes and socks and waded ashore, those who had cameras carrying them above their heads. They were met by several grim-looking men who carried rifles and pistols.

Each of these armed men also wore a uniform comprised of boots, laced breeches, jacket and a rather picturesque beret.

“Why the bally regalia?” asked the representative of a London afternoon sheet.

“These are Royal Magna Guards,” said Giltstein.

“Royal?” murmured the other questioningly.

Benjamin Giltstein smiled. “Have you forgotten that I told you this island is independent? It is not owned by any nation. The king of Magna Island is an absolute monarch.”

“Who is king?” Monk put in.

Without batting an eye, Giltstein said, “Wehman Mills.”

“The man who discovered the method of taking gold from sea water?”

“Correct.”

“May we interview King Wehman Mills?” Monk requested promptly.

Giltstein smiled. “I am sorry. He is not receiving the press.”

“Then will he pose for a picture?” persisted Monk.

“No,” said Giltstein. “But later I shall give each of you gentlemen a picture of Wehman Mills.”

They were working toward the cluster of buildings which housed the gold-extraction plant.

Ham came to an abrupt stop. The dapper lawyer looked very unlike his usual self in the baggy suit. To his credit, he did wear the disguise excellently. No examination with the naked eye would show that the dark cast of his skin came from a dye. The large gold front teeth were merely shells which clipped in place.

“Me, I forgetta da plate for the cam’ra,” Ham declared. “Gotta go back and get, or no da picture tak’.”

He started back toward the plane.

“Wait!” Benjamin Giltstein said sharply. “One of the Royal Magna Guards will have to accompany you.”

“Whatsa da idea?” demanded Ham.

“A rule of King Wehman Mills,” the other said smugly.

Ham, hurrying toward the plane, found himself accompanied by a strapping, sour-faced man with a rifle. The lawyer was disgusted. He had hoped to get a chance to do some scouting, once he was clear of the others.

Just why the newspaper correspondents had been brought to the island, Ham was not sure, but he was certain they would only be shown the gold-from-sea-water plant. Monk, who had few equals in the realms of chemistry, could tell whether the plant would actually work. Ham had wanted to examine other parts of the island, the small village on the west side, for instance.

Ham and his escort were working through brush now. Sounds made by the other party were lost to their ears.

With great casualness, Ham drifted a hand inside his clothing. When he brought it out, he held one of the little glass anæsthetic bombs which were Doc Savage’s invention.

The barrister halted suddenly.

“Whew!” he exclaimed. “Whatsa da smell?”

The guard sniffed, scowled and said, “I don’t smell a thing.”

Ham put a blank, wide-mouthed expression on his face, swayed violently, then sagged down on all fours. He slumped prone. As he did this, he held his breath and broke the anæsthetic bulb in his hand.

The escort stared. He sniffed again, thinking something had overcome Ham. Then he slouched down, toppling over on his back and went soundly asleep.

Ham bounded erect. The anæsthetic gas dissipated itself in less than a minute, and he had escaped its effects simply by holding his breath.

He chuckled as he eyed the sleeping escort. Ham intended to do a bit of investigating, then come back and lie down beside the guard, faking the same kind of unconsciousness. When the guard revived, he would think they had both lain senseless; he would be certain Ham had been overcome first.

THE village on the west side of the island had never been very pretentious, and it now showed signs of having received very little care for some weeks. Weeds were uncut, the grass untrimmed; windows needed washing, and wadded newspapers had been stuffed in where some panes had been broken.

The houses were of stone, some with tiled roofs, and others thatched. The one narrow street was unpaved, but the gravelly nature of the ground made that unimportant. Instead of sidewalks, there were trampled paths.

Ham silently blessed the height and profusion of the weeds, then got down on all fours and crawled ahead. He missed his sword cane; carrying the unique weapon had been out of the question, for it would have furnished too strong a clue to his identity.

The open rear door of a house invited. Ham approached it, only to stop abruptly as a voice came from within.

“There is no cause for alarm, m’sieu’s.” The tone was remindful of the purr of a big cat. “What if Doc Savage did appear at The Wash? He learned nothing. We destroyed our plant there, so that he will have no idea of what we were doing.”

“Hi wouldn’t be too blarsted sure, Paquis,” growled another voice. “That bronze bloke ain’t human!”

“I must admit he is difficult to deceive,” said Paquis. “*Oui*. It was a great shock when he turned up and rescued his friend, William Harper Littlejohn. *Quelle honte!* What a shame! But Doc Savage has no inkling of the connection of this island with The Wash.”

Ham, digesting this, permitted himself a wide grin. Johnny, it seemed, was now safe.

Smith said in his strong Cockney, “Bringin’ them bloomin’ journalists ’ere was a bad move, if you’d arsk me.”

“It was the idea of *le commandant-enchef*,” Paquis reminded.

“Hi know,” Smith muttered. “The big boss ’as ’is own ideas.”

“*Oui*, and excellent ones, too,” said Paquis, his purr more pronounced. “The visit of the newspaper men was quite necessary.”

“Hi fails to see why.”

“Publicity,” explained cat-voiced Paquis. “The more publicity we have, the less likelihood there is of any one becoming suspicious.”

Smith snorted. “If one of our prisoners ’ere was to get away an’ talk to a journalist bloke, there’d be some publicity of the wrong bloomin’ kind.”

“*Oui*,” Paquis agreed. “And for that reason, I suggest that you assist the guard now watching our prisoners.”

Smith, burly and uneasy of face, came out of the house and moved along one of the paths.

HAM trickled along through the weeds behind the Cockney. Ham was recovering from a surprise. He had not known there were other prisoners. He was highly curious to know who they could be.

Smith reached a stone house, paused under the overhang of the thatched roof and peered about intently. Ham lay perfectly motionless in the weeds.

Overhead, gulls circled and quarreled. A faint pounding of surf could be heard, and from the direction of the gold-extracting plant came the muted rumble of machinery.

Smith entered the house.

Ham drifted a hand to an armpit, where there was a holster so cleverly padded that its presence was hardly discernible. He withdrew one of Doc Savage’s compact machine pistols. Fitted in a pocket at the side of the holster was a canisterlike device—a silencer for use on the weapons.

Ham fitted it in place, then examined the ammo drum to make sure it was charged with mercy bullets, slugs which would penetrate barely through the skin and produce unconsciousness. He latched the gun into single-fire position.

Changing his position, he managed to sight Smith. The portly man stood just inside the door—and Ham, sighting carefully, shot him in one leg.

The report of the silenced gun could be heard—it fired only one bullet and that was launched with a tongue-click of a noise.

Smith jumped violently, clapped a hand to the spot where the metal chemical-bearing shell had bitten him. He bent backward and tried to examine the wound. He was still bending backward when he upset and hit the floor heavily. After that, he did not move.

A second man leaped to Smith's side. He was burly, and cradled a submachine gun under an arm.

Ham's silenced rapid-firer clicked again; the empty cartridge which jumped from the ejector hit a rock in falling and made a sound almost as loud as the gun report.

In the house, the burly man stood up stiffly and put a hand to his side. He reeled to the door, leaned over to look out, and seemed unable to stop himself from tilting. A sluggish bundle of arms and legs, he rolled through the door.

Ham ran for the door. If there was another man inside, he had little hopes of potting him; he could shoot on the run if he had to. Ham was an excellent shot.

But there was only one man in the room. He was an elderly chain of bone and sinew in a rumpled black suit that had once been shiny. His white hair was mussed and stood out like the wig of an elderly circus wild man.

The man was a prisoner by a simple device. A steel flywheel, which must have weighed five hundred pounds, was shackled to one of his ankles.

Ham tangled fingers in the hair of the last man to fall a victim to the mercy bullets and hauled him back into the room, where he would not be seen. Then he eyed the white-haired prisoner.

“Who,” Ham demanded, “are you?”

The other got to his feet. He looked as if he had not been fed recently.

“Where is my niece?” he demanded. “Is she all right?”

Ham said, “I asked who in blazes you are?”

“Wehman Mills,” muttered the old man.

HAM had no idea what name to expect, but he was surprised. Wehman Mills was the name of the man who was supposed to be king of the island, as well as the inventor of the process for taking gold from the ocean.

“My niece!” said Wehman Mills anxiously. “Find her! Never mind me. Look for Elaine.”

“Where is she?” Ham demanded.

Wehman Mills kicked the leg which was shackled to the flywheel and the manacle links jingled.

“How do I know,” he groaned. “Around here somewhere. In one of these houses, I suppose.”

Ham clipped a fresh ammo drum into his machine pistol, then lifted the unusual weapon.

Wehman Mills recoiled, tried wildly to break his chain, then wailed, “Please, I haven’t done anything!”

Ham pulled the trigger and got a sound as if some one in a speeding automobile had put out a stick as a picket fence was being passed. Lead boiled on the flywheel; Wehman’s shackled chain whipped madly. Then the padlock which held it came apart, spewing its innards.

Wehman Mills snapped, “You might have told me what you were going to do! You scared me silly!”

“Where do you think this Elaine is?” Ham demanded.

“They talked like she was near here,” said Mills. “Let’s look around.”

The elderly man would have rushed outside had Ham not stayed him with an arm. Ham made a survey through a window, and saw a man come to the door of the shack in which he had first heard voices. The fellow had heard the noise as the supermachine gun cut through the cuff padlock, and he was curious.

“Anything wrong, Monsieur Smith?” he called.

Ham lacked a great deal of being the expert voice mimic that Doc Savage was, but he did his best.

“Blimme, no!” he shouted.

He managed a faint resemblance to Smith’s harsh voice, and the hollow reverberations within the room disguised the tone further, so that Paquis’s suspicions were allayed. He turned back out of sight.

Ham selected a window on the other side, and worked at getting the hinged sash open.

“Will this island plant really take gold from sea water?” he asked.

“Yes,” said Wehman Mills. “Emphatically!”

“Then what is this all about?”

“I am being robbed of my secret,” snarled Mills. “Men came to me and financed the construction of the plant. Then I discovered they were holding up letters which I had written to my niece, Elaine. I pretended that I needed some materials which could only be purchased in the French town of Brest, where Elaine was staying. They took me there, and I managed to escape. But they seized me again. Then they seized Elaine when she became suspicious and started investigating.”

Ham had the window open. He peered through, saw no one and eased outside.

“You escaped in Brest,” repeated Ham. “And they caught you and brought you back. Then they caught Elaine, too.”

“Elaine and some young man named Henry Trump.” Mills showed his age by the difficulty with which he negotiated the passage through the open window. He grunted and winced as stiffened joints bothered him.

“Where does The Wash angle come in?” Ham asked.

“What?”

“The Wash. These men were doing something up there. You know, that’s the marsh region on the east coast of England.”

“I haven’t the slightest idea why the men should have been at The Wash,” declared Wehman Mills. “It is all quite simple. They are stealing my plan for taking gold from sea water. It amounts to nothing more than that.”

“Let’s find Elaine and Henry Trump,” Ham suggested. “Then we’ll argue.”

THEY found Elaine in the first house into which they looked. Like Wehman Mills had been, she was manacled to a heavy piece of machinery.

There was one guard. Ham shot him through the window, after clipping mercy bullets into the rapid-firer, and the man weaved around for only a short time before he slammed himself down on the floor, unconscious.

“Uncle Wehman!” the young woman gasped.

Ham gazed at the young woman in astonishment, reflecting that she offered about as entrancing a picture as he had ever seen. The rigors of confinement had done little to detract from her charm.

The superfirer stuttered through its excellent muffler. The padlock did not give and Elaine Mills gasped as needlelike bits of splashing lead imbedded in her shapely ankle.

Ham shed his coat, folded it and used it as a pad, then tried again. This time, the lock was blasted open.

“Henry Trump,” Elaine exclaimed. “We’ve got to free him, too.”

Ham frowned. “Who’s Henry Trump?”

“A young man who was very kind to me on the boat,” said Elaine Mills. “They locked him up in the house next door, I think.”

Ham nodded, and peered through a window to ascertain if the noise of the silenced gun—the impact of the lead bullets on the padlock had made considerable noise—had attracted attention; but the straggling village remained deserted.

“What become of the original inhabitants of this town?” Ham demanded.

“They were moved away when the village was purchased,” Wehman Mills advised.

“Why was this island selected as the spot to take gold from sea water?” Ham asked curiously.

“Because it is independent,” the elderly inventor told him. “Taxes do not have to be paid to anybody.”

“Taxes?”

“Income taxes,” Wehman Mills reminded, “are terrible. They are bad enough in America, but worse in England. We figured it all out. If you make a million dollars, the

government takes more than half of it.”

“It’s hard for me to feel sorry for the poor fellow who worries about the taxes on a million,” Ham snorted.

“The island cost only fifty thousand,” said Wehman Mills. “That equals only a few days taxes on the profits from my process of taking gold from the sea.”

“How fast do you think the plant will recover gold?”

“At the rate of at least half a million dollars a day,” the other declared solemnly.

Ham was still watching for some sign that an alarm had been spread, although Magna Island seemed outwardly quiet.

“Can you show me the house where you think they are holding Henry Trump?” he asked.

Elaine Mills came to his side, selected a cottage and pointed. “There,” she said.

“We can make it there all right, keeping under cover,” Ham decided.

“We must rescue Henry Trump,” Elaine said fervently.

Ham tried to keep it from showing on his face, but he did not care for the fervor with which the attractive young woman spoke of Henry Trump. Trump seemed to have made a hit.

THE house which was supposed to hold Henry Trump was closed up tightly, the windows being shuttered and the door locked.

Ham circled the place once, sheltered by a low stone wall and an arbor of untrimmed grapevines.

“Sure this is the place?” he asked Elaine Mills.

“I think so,” said the young woman.

Ham recharged his gun with mercy bullets, concealed the weapon under his coat, and rapped on the door. Elaine Mills was close at Ham’s elbow.

“Yes?” said a pleasant masculine voice from within the house.

“That’s Henry Trump,” Elaine breathed.

“Any guards over you, Trump?” Ham called.

“No!” exploded the voice from within. “Who the devil are you?”

“It’s a rescue party,” Elaine gasped. “We’re coming in!”

It sounded as if Henry Trump swore softly and in a highly surprised tone. Then Ham was shoving at the door. It was stuck rather than locked, and it came open briskly, spilling him inside.

The closed shutters made the place gloomy. The lawyer blinked about, gun ready.

A clinking of metal came from the corner.

“Over here,” said Henry Trump’s voice.

Ham made out the young man then. Trump was seated on the floor, wrists and ankles ornamented with handcuffs.

“Who are you?” he demanded.

“Brigadier General Theodore Marley Brooks, more often known as Ham,” Ham told him. “One of Doc Savage’s men.”

“One of *whose* men?” Henry Trump demanded, and his mouth fell open.

“Doc Savage’s.”

“Is *he* here?” Trump asked, then let his mouth fall open again.

“No,” said Ham. “Let me try to pick the lock on those bracelets.”

“You won’t have much luck,” Trump grunted. “I’ve been trying to do it for hours.”

“Got a hairpin?” Ham asked Elaine.

“A bobbie pin,” she admitted, and fumbled at her hair.

Ham took the bobbie pin, which was superior to the ordinary wire type, being stiffer, and went to work on the locks. Ham had studied many things besides law, locks being one of them.

“What’s going on here?” Henry Trump demanded. “What is behind all of this trouble?”

“Search me,” said Ham.

“These men are trying to steal my system of taking gold from the sea!” snapped thin, white-haired Wehman Mills. “That is what is behind it.”

The handcuff locks came open in quick succession.

“I’ll be danged,” Trump grinned. “And I worked my head off trying to open them.”

He got to his feet.

There was a crash. Slats fell out of a window shutter. Glass broke and spilled in a jingling stream on the floor.

The rifle barrel which had broken shutter and pane became plainly visible. It was obvious from the shape of the magazine that the rifle was of the automatic variety.

“*Ne bougez pas,*” said Paquis’s cat voice.

Pretty Elaine Mills, who did not speak French, breathed, “What did he say?”

“‘Don’t stir’,” Ham translated. “Better take the advice.”

PAQUIS kept his rifle perfectly steady, did not move his eye from the sights, and gave an order to some one behind him. There was fluttering outside in the weeds, the crunch of an occasional dry stick. Then the door slammed ajar and men walked in. They let Ham and the others look down the muzzles of submachine guns.

“Give up your gun, my dark-faced friend in the baggy clothes!” directed Paquis.

Stress of the moment had caused Ham to forget his disguise of dyed features and ill-fitting garb; at first, he did not realize he was being spoken to. A gritted oath from Paquis put him aright.

Ham surrendered his superfirer. Under other circumstances, he might have made a fight of it. One sweep of the machine pistol would throw bullets about the room as a hose would hurl water. But Elaine Mills and the others would be in deadly danger should gunplay occur.

The men examined the superfirer wonderingly, showing the admiration of men inspecting a superior tool of their trade.

“A beaut of a thing!” a man grunted. “Just like the one we took from that bony Johnny bloke at The Wash.”

“Silence, m’sieu’s,” growled Paquis. “Search him.”

A man came over and put a hand in Ham’s pocket. Ham made a face, lifted a foot and drove it down on the other’s instep. Bones crunched in the man’s foot.

The fellow howled, leaped back and with the same gesture whipped a fist at Ham’s jaw.

Ham was boxer enough to have evaded the blow. He did shift, but just enough to take the smash high up on his head, where it would not stun him.

But Ham’s actions after he had been hit were those of a man who had been knocked out. His arms flailed loosely; his eyes rolled. He slammed down heavily.

It was with great care that Ham managed to land on his left side, body bending so as to put his full weight on one coat pocket. In that pocket reposed the case which held the glass bulbs of anæsthetic gas. Ham knew if he hit hard enough, the case would be crushed.

He felt the container mash flat. He held his breath.

A moment later, men began to topple over. The gas had no color, no odor, hence they were without warning of its presence.

But Paquis lived up to the reputation for cleverness which he habitually gave himself. Up on his toes, he danced backward. He reached the door and bobbed outside.

“*Au secours!*” he bawled. “Help!”

Ham ran for the door, but the menace of Paquis’s gun drove him back. Next, the lawyer broke open a shuttered window. When he tried to clamber through, he was met by the threatening muzzles of men who were running up in answer to Paquis’s howl.

Ham began to breathe again, for the anæsthetic gas had by now become harmless.

Paquis’s men had nerve. They rushed the house, pitching through the door, smashing in the shuttered windows. They were too many to hope to fight.

Ham did the wise thing. He surrendered.

Chapter XIV

GOLD FROM THE SEA

MONK heard the yell for assistance which Paquis voiced. The homely chemist halted. With his bleached close-shaven features, his thick spectacles, his padded stomach, his pronounced limp and the large and foul cigars which he smoked, Monk bore little resemblance to a gorillalike chemist. The spectacles had magnifying lenses which hampered his vision somewhat, but made his eyes look larger.

“What was that?” Monk growled.

“One of the workmen celebrating, no doubt,” smiled suave Benjamin Giltstein. “Let us now enter the plant.”

Monk hesitated. He was worried about Ham, although he kept his features from showing it. But to push an inquiry into that shout might stir up trouble, and Monk wanted to delay showing his true identity as long as possible. The fact that the yell had not been in Ham’s voice was somewhat reassuring.

The quota of newspaper men had been shown the salt water intake. This was nothing more than a hastily excavated canal which carried a rushing stream of sea water to the plant.

Two armed men guarded the door of the plant, but at a word from Giltstein, they opened it. Giltstein made a little speech before escorting the journalists inside.

“When you return to London, gentlemen, you may want to refer to a similar process in handling sea water, in order to write your stories intelligently,” the press agent stated. “In that case, you have merely to describe the ordinary method used in extracting bromine from sea water.”

“What is bromine?” asked a scribe.

“It is a dark reddish-brown nonmetallic liquid used in synthetic chemistry, medicine and the color industry, and also in the making of what motorists know as ‘ethyl’,” explained Giltstein. “And it has nothing to do with this plant here, except that our plant resembles those used in extracting bromine.”

There followed a somewhat dry technical discourse, during which the party was conducted to each piece of machinery as it was described. Benjamin Giltstein proved to have a complete vocabulary of technical phraseology.

After the sea water came from the canal, it was explained, the brine went into a chamber where it received an injection of sulphuric acid. This made the future processes feasible.

Next the water was conducted into a second tank, a long affair with valves and numerous electrodes. From this, a dense fog of vapor was arising, to be trapped overhead and conducted to other apparatus.

“In this tank,” Giltstein announced, “the gold content of the sea water is ionized, or made electrically conductive. This is a very difficult process, since the gold in its native

state in the water is in the form of a colloidal suspension. Chlorine is pumped into this tank, which, as any chemist will tell you, joins with the sodium in the sea water and literally “kicks” the bromine out.”

“Is this a scientific fact?” asked some one. “Or is it hocus pocus?”

“A fact!” insisted Giltstein.

Monk, looking on, nodded soberly to himself. So far, the process was perfectly feasible. Monk had not the slightest doubt of that.

“Where is the gold now?” asked the reporter.

Giltstein pointed to the vapor that arose like fog. “In there.”

“Rats!” snorted the scribe. “Now I know this is a fake. Gold is a heavy yellow metal.”

“Do you see the gold in the sea water?” Benjamin Giltstein countered.

The other was stumped there. “No.”

“All right,” snapped the press agent. “You still don’t see it. But follow me and you will.”

The party now moved to a room which held a long metal cylinder. The cylinder was replete with pipes and cables.

Giltstein gave an order, and valves were turned, shutting off the stream of vapor, after which the cylinder was unlocked and the scribes were permitted to look within. There was nothing inside.

“Here is the heart of the whole process,” said Giltstein. “Chemicals are introduced, and the gold is filtered out because it adheres to these chemicals.”

“What are the chemicals?” questioned the representative of an afternoon sheet.

“I cannot reveal that,” said Giltstein. “It is the invention, the secret.”

The vapor stream was now turned back into the tank; a bit later, a valve was opened, permitting a thick, creamy mass to ooze out.

“The gold,” Giltstein exclaimed dramatically.

“It don’t look like gold to me!” some one snorted.

The press agent ignored that, and followed the creamy stream to where it was introduced into a roaring furnace.

“The chemicals are now driven off by heat,” he exclaimed. “That leaves the raw gold.”

A man appeared with a ladle on a long handle. He opened a valve; there was a blaze of brilliant heat from the furnace. The man with the ladle ran to a mold. A few moments later he broke the mold, and there was disclosed a small yellow cube.

The workman dunked the cube in water to cool it, then gave it to Giltstein, who passed it to the most doubting of the reporters.

“Gold!” he said. “Approximately a thousand dollars’ worth.”

“Bless me!” gasped the reporter. “I believe it *is* gold.”

“It is yours,” said the press agent. “Have it tested when you get back to London.”

“What?” yelled the scribbler. “This is mine?”

Giltstein smiled smugly. "There will be a cube for each of you gentlemen. We have plenty. The oceans of the world are large, and there are ten million dollars in each cubic mile of sea water."

Monk shoved forward. He took the gold cube from the reluctant reporter, scratched it, examined it closely, then handed it back, looking somewhat stunned.

It was gold!

FOR the next five minutes, there was uproar. The British minions of the press were no more highly paid than their fellows in the United States, and finding they were to be given a thousand-dollar gold brick was a shock comparable to being struck by lightning. Finally, they sobered.

"Listen," one demanded, "what is the catch in this?"

"No catch," Benjamin Giltstein insisted. "These samples are merely in the nature of proof, so that you can go back to London and write the truth."

One journalist fell to scratching his head. "But why are you taking such pains to get this in the newspapers?"

"I will explain, providing you do not publish the facts," said the press agent.

"Shoot!"

"Wehman Mills, the owner, king and sole ruler of Magna Island, is a man who does not believe in giving his money to a lot of government chair warmers in the form of taxes."

"Taxes have gotten terrible," admitted a reporter.

"Exactly! That is why the plant was built here. This is an independent island. Therefore, no taxes will be paid. That means a tremendous saving. If we took out ten million dollars' worth of gold, we would have to pay at least half of it in taxes. Well, we don't like the idea. Securing the island was a business proposition with us."

A scribe chuckled, "Pretty slick!"

"We are going to give a third of our gold to charity," said Benjamin Giltstein. "I wish you would publish that."

"Sure," the reporter agreed. "But why the wish to have that in the newspapers?"

"Partly a philanthropic spirit on Wehman Mills's part," said the press agent, "and partly business. You see, if we build up a favorable feeling with the public, there will be a big howl if the government of England tries to seize this island."

"Can they seize it legally?"

"No, sir! We had lawyers investigate thoroughly before we bought the place."

A man entered the plant. He seemed excited. Drawing Benjamin Giltstein aside, the fellow spoke in a rapid whisper which none of the scribes could hear.

Monk watched closely. His homely face became a bit paler than the bleached hue lent by the disguise. Doc Savage was a skilled lip reader, and Monk had been studying the art from the bronze man. He was not an expert, but he got part of what was said.

The messenger advised, “We just caught a man named Ham, who is one of Doc Savage’s assistants.”

Monk failed to get the rest.

MONK slapped a hand to his armpit. A guard standing near by started and began to bring up his gun. He froze when he found himself eying the round snout of the supermachine pistol which Monk had produced.

“Grab a cloud!” Monk grated, and spat out his black cigar.

Benjamin Giltstein screamed, “What does this mean?”

“It means a big lead party if you guys don’t do what I tell you!” Monk said, an angry grit in his childlike voice. “And it means I’m gonna find what is behind this if I have to bust your scatter wide open!”

Monk had one characteristic which occasionally got the best of him. He liked violent action. When he got in a tight place, he had a habit of cutting loose and blasting his way out. He had now decided to start blasting.

Benjamin Giltstein tried to speak, but he was so excited he could only stutter.

Monk took off the magnifying spectacles and threw them aside. They broke on the concrete floor.

A reporter surreptitiously drew back a hand holding a gold brick, evidently with the idea of lobbing the rich yellow cube at Monk.

“If you feel that you’re bulletproof, go ahead and throw it,” Monk advised him.

The scribe shuddered and let his gold brick fall.

Giltstein, pointing at Monk, managed to get words out. “This man is no newspaper reporter! I should have been suspicious of him from the first! Guards, shoot him!”

Monk’s gun banged. Giltstein sprang high in the air and fell down when he came back to the floor. He rolled over and over, a hand clenched to his side.

The reporters saw crimson oozing through the press agent’s fingers, and had no way of knowing that the wound was only a superficial one made by a mercy bullet. When Benjamin Giltstein relaxed motionless upon the floor, they thought he was dead.

“You murderer!” one howled at Monk.

Monk spied an outside guard working at one of the windows. He shot glass out of the window, but the guard ducked clear, then shoved his rifle inside and began to shoot wildly.

Newspaper reporters knocked each other down getting behind the bulky iron gold-extraction tank.

Another guard tried to take advantage of the confusion and shoot Monk. Monk drifted out a fist from which the usual adornment of shingle nail-sized bristles had been shaved. The guard went around and around, top fashion, senseless on his feet.

Monk could open a large horseshoe with the brute strength in his two bare hands, and he packed a comparative wallop.

The man was still shooting wildly through the window. Monk ran over, grasped the hot rifle barrel, jerked it out of the fellow's grasp, then leaned through the window and jabbed the man's head as if he were making a billiard shot with the rifle stock.

"Three!" Monk snorted.

Then he calmly ran the total up to seven by mowing four more guards down with a hooting blast of mercy bullets from the machine pistol. They were still jiggling around and falling over senseless when the apish chemist charged out into the afternoon sunlight.

It was doubtful if Monk stopped to debate the chances of whipping Magna Island single-handed, but he started out as if that were his intention.

Two guards who had been at the door took point-blank aim at Monk with submachine guns.

With the precision of a man who had looked into gun snouts before, Monk twisted aside. His superfirer hooted as he fell. It sounded as if some one had sawed violently on the base string of a huge bullfiddle.

Impact of mercy bullets kicked the two back. Guns fell from their torn hands; and before they could recover, the powerful chemical in the slugs was stupefying them.

"Nine!" said Monk, keeping count.

There seemed to be no one else in the immediate vicinity of the gold-extracting plant. Monk listened.

Inside the building, frightened reporters were talking in low voices, demanding of each other if any one had been injured, commenting forcibly on Monk's bloodthirstiness. In the distance, the surf grumbled noisily on the rocky shore line, and the inevitable gulls spun and squeaked high overhead.

From the direction of the village, a yell came. "Why the shootin' over there?"

"Forget it!" Monk howled back. "The guards were putting on a show."

Then the homely chemist ran in the direction of the village. He kept his head up and the supermachine pistol alert. There was a path and he followed that, frightening up songbirds which lurked in the brush and low-hanging tree branches.

Brush fluttered behind Monk. A voice gritted, "You! Stop!"

Monk knew better than to attempt to dodge bullets from a gun which he could not see. He pulled up, wheeled slowly and eyed the individual who had halted him. This personage stepped from the brush beside the path. He was a short man, nondescript except for his eyes, which were ugly.

He jutted an automatic pistol and demanded, "Who are you, bloke? And what's goin' on 'ere?"

"I'm one of the newspaper gang," Monk said promptly. "I was coming for help."

"Why?" the other growled.

"One of the blasted journalists up and cut loose like a wild man," declared Monk. "He's shot four or five people. Maybe he's trying to grab what gold you've got on the island."

All of which was not exactly the truth, but also not entirely wide of the facts. To Monk's disgust, however, the man he had encountered did not seem to be particularly gullible.

"Go help them!" Monk rapped. "I'll secure more assistance."

The other scowled, and moved his automatic suggestively.

"This sounds thin, gov'nor," he growled. "Drop that funny-lookin' gun you're carryin'!"

Monk promptly dropped the gun. He held it directly in front of his stomach as he let it fall, then he put his hands up swiftly. The other advanced.

Monk kicked with his right foot. The supermachine pistol which he had dropped had landed on his foot, and it was propelled forward by the kick.

The other man tried to dodge, failed partially and reeled aside, stunned by the blow which the flying weapon delivered to the side of his head.

An instant later, Monk's hard-swinging fist dropped him.

"Ten!" Monk enumerated gleefully.

AS MONK ran on, he abandoned the path, not wishing to encounter other foes in such an unexpected fashion. He could hear some excited cries from the vicinity of the village, and these indicated his foes were becoming alarmed. Too, from the plant, newspaper reporters were howling at the tops of their voices, adding to the general confusion.

Monk grinned, loosened his belt and hauled out the padding which had given him the abdominal bulge. He pulled off his shirt, as well as coat and vest, and discarded them. Then he cinched his belt very tight.

Monk considered himself to be doing very nicely, and his nubbin of a head entertained not a doubt as to the future. In this respect, Monk had the psychology of the perfect fighting man. He never reckoned consequences, once conflict started. He took the most unearthly chances and, accordingly, had a habit of securing results.

A squad of his foes came down the path. They went swiftly, making much noise. Monk got behind a tree and let them go past. He looked them over. None of them were men he had seen before.

Monk continued, intent on finding Ham and releasing him. But he took no more than a dozen steps and then halted.

Feet were slapping rapidly on the path. Evidently a straggler was hurrying to join the group which had just passed.

Monk selected a bush close to the trail and crouched there.

The straggler had his mouth open wide for easier breathing, and this had the effect of making him seem chinless. He emitted a sheep bleat as Monk exploded from behind the shrub and crouched into him. They went over and over and when they came to a stop, Monk was astride his prize.

The captive had watery eyes, and Monk mashed the left one slightly with the muzzle of his supermachine pistol.

“Where’s Ham?” he demanded.

“Blimme!” the other choked. “Don’t shoot——”

“Where’s Ham, you lug?” Monk gritted.

“Fourth house as yer goes into the bloomin’ village!” gulped the captive.

Monk grasped the wagging chin, pushed it up so that the fellow’s mouth was closed; then, before the other knew what was going to happen, Monk struck once, as if he were seeking to drive a large nail with a single blow.

The man made a blubbling noise and his eyeballs rolled as if trying to turn around and around in their sockets.

“Eleven!” Monk grinned.

The fourth house, as one went into the village, was a rambling edifice with unusually steep roofs and a large chimney at each end. Architecturally, it was possibly the most imposing structure in the village—with one exception, a stone school house which stood slightly apart on a small hill.

A fat man stood in front of the door, a rifle in one hand, the other hand cupped to an ear. Since all of his attention was concentrated on intercepting any sound which came from the direction of the plant, he did not hear Monk glide up behind him. On occasion, Monk could move with surprising lightness for one of his bulk.

Monk dashed one big hand, knocking the man’s rifle to the ground. Then Monk seized the fellow by the throat, held him at arm’s length, and used him as a club to knock the door open.

In the house, Monk had not expected to find more men. He had reasoned that they would all be out hunting him.

He got a surprise.

SEVERAL men were inside. There was a table in the center of the room and on this a box, around which they were gathered. They were engaged in opening the box, and passing out rifles which it contained.

The men whirled as Monk came in behind his squirming, bruised victim. They wore expressions of gap-mouthed surprise.

Monk lifted his machine pistol and tightened on the firing lever, his idea being to mow the gang down with the mercy bullets before they could go into action.

Monk’s captive spoiled the plan. He grabbed the superfirer with both hands and held on as if he was a drowning man and the gun was the only life preserver in a large ocean.

A lump of bone and bone-hard gristle, Monk’s free fist bounced off the fellow’s head. The man screamed, but continued to hold on. Monk growled, then got down on his knees, endeavoring to twist the gun muzzle up at his foes.

One enemy took a running jump and came down feet-first on the small of Monk’s back. The impact would have broken an ordinary spine. Monk only snorted, reached up and knocked the other head over heels with a lusty swing.

Then Monk hit the man holding the gun another blow, harder than those which had been struck before. The fellow began to tremble all over.

“Twelve!” Monk roared.

He tried to free his superfirer from the spasmodic clutch of the unconscious man, but could not do so before he was forced to rear up and meet the rush of two foes. The pair had nothing but their fists, which was unfortunate, because one sat down with an unutterably pained expression and wrapped both arms over his middle, where Monk’s fist had rested momentarily.

The other man missed a swing. Then he danced back, wary, brushed into a chair, nearly fell over it, then picked the chair up. He threw it at Monk.

The homely chemist had plenty of time to dodge the chair, for he saw it coming. But he did not dodge; he reached up and, with a skill that made the feat seem easy, caught the chair. Holding it by one leg, he swung it club-fashion and charged.

Men faded before him. One got out a revolver, only to lose it and get a broken wrist as Monk clubbed with his chair.

The outer door darkened as men came in. The party which had gone down the trail had heard the uproar and dashed back.

“Take the ape alive!” some one yelled. “We’ve got to make him tell how much Doc Savage knows about us!”

Two men picked up the table, spilling the box of rifles. They ran at Monk with the table held high enough that the gorillalike chemist could not wield his chair. They pinned him to the wall.

Monk dropped his chair and climbed, roaring, from between table and wall. His fists windmilled. Men leeches to his legs, his midriff, and finally to his arms. He was borne down.

The mêlée became like excited flies after a morsel of sugar. Several times Monk, squalling at the top of his voice, emerged from the top of the dogpile, only to be dragged down and submerged.

The more violent the combat became, the louder Monk howled. The amount of noise Monk made always gauged the violence of a fight. He would start off barely whispering in his childlike tone, and in a particularly hard fray would bellow himself hoarse.

Monk was now yelling so loudly that the loss of his voice threatened. He was far under the pile of men, and since there was no room for blows, he pinched, gouged and twisted, getting handfuls of cloth and, not infrequently, fragments of flesh. By a Herculean effort, he got his head out of the pile to breathe.

Some one began to kick his head. Monk tried to withdraw into the mound of bodies, turtle-fashion, but could not. Again and again the kicking foot impacted against Monk’s temple. The shocks were too much even for the homely chemist’s vast endurance.

“Thirteen!” he moaned, and went to sleep.

WITHIN slightly less than an hour, the big seaplane took off, rising easily from the stretch of comparatively calm water between the headlands which had resembled, from the sky, the spraddled legs of a great green bullfrog.

Inside the plane cabin, the newspaper correspondents were cackling among themselves—those who were not already hunched over their portable typewriters battering out stories which would be rushed into print the instant they reached their home sheets.

They had been given a story which accounted for the trouble which had engulfed Monk and Ham, and they believed every word of it, a fact that was not entirely to their discredit, for it had been an exceedingly glib and plausible yarn.

Monk and Ham, it had been explained, were not journalists at all, but plotters out to steal the secret of the process of taking yellow gold from the green, briny sea.

Monk and Ham were not on the plane. They were prisoners, the scribes had been assured, and such they would remain, awaiting the judgment of the rulers of Magna Island.

The newspaper men had been asked not to forget that Magna Island was an independent power, as much a separate nation as England herself, or France, or the United States.

The gentlemen of the press were not likely to forget that. In fact, it would be a long time before they forgot anything about this remarkable island and the things which had occurred there. Nor would the newspapers of England, the Continent or America forget it for some time to come. This was a story fit to be spread on the front pages of even the most conservative London journal.

Benjamin Giltstein, suave purveyor of publicity, was not returning in the plane. The reporters still thought Giltstein was dead, as the latter worthy had not yet awakened from the effects of Monk's mercy bullet.

By way of a reminder, each reporter carried his small gold brick, worth approximately a thousand dollars.

Chapter XV

ATTACK IN LONDON

THE newspapers made a hullabaloo. Those sheets whose reporters had been so thoughtless as not to take cameras to Magna Island, reproduced sketches which their artists hastily drew.

Only two papers, the most conservative, did not put out extras, but one of these had not published an extra edition when the World War ended, so that did not mean that they failed to consider the business about Magna Island a good yarn.

A hotel flunky delivered the latest editions of the extras to Doc Savage in his London hotel. The remarkable bronze man was alone, and he went over the sheets without a change appearing on his unusual metallic features.

However the bronze man's weird trilling note, the strangely exotic sound which was a part of him, did come into being and trace its nebulous way up and down the musical scale, adhering to no definite tune, but nevertheless plainly musical in its undulating quality.

The newspaper stories told of the process for taking gold from sea water, the dream of mankind for many years. The more staid journalists made this the main point, with the attempt of two criminals to seize the secret subordinated to minor headlines. The more bombastic sheets played up the theft attempt.

One sheet published the opinion of an international lawyer that Magna Island was definitely an independency, free of taxation. This barrister also expressed the view that the authorities of Magna Island were entitled to do whatever they pleased with the two crooks who had been so unwise as to endeavor to steal the secret of taking gold from the ocean.

Doc Savage put the papers aside, picked up a telephone and called, long-distance, the jail in Southampton where Wall-Samuels, the man who had pretended to be a private detective, had been confined.

Had been was correct. A clever lawyer had succeeded in getting Wall-Samuels out on bail. This had occurred some hours previously, and Wall-Samuels had lost no time ridding his feet of the dust of Southampton. No one knew his present whereabouts.

Doc Savage turned out the lights, then went to the window and peered down into the London street. It was near dusk, and he was waiting for the return of Johnny. Turning off the lights was by way of precaution, one of the habitual safety-first touches which had kept this bronze man alive through years of infinite peril.

Down in the street a taxicab stopped, and a tall man who was so thin that he seemed merely a suit of clothes animated with life, alighted. Johnny's bony frame was striking, even from that distance.

Johnny paid off his hack and entered the hostelry.

Perhaps three minutes later a hand tried the doorknob, found it locked, and delivered a sharp rapping.

Doc went over and turned the key, then swung the panel open.

Powder sound roared in his ears and a stiff red lance lunged hungrily at his chest.

DOC SAVAGE, flexing his arms, got them up level with his massive shoulders so that they would be clear as he twisted aside. He wore a bulletproof vest, but his arms were unprotected.

The bullet, passing him by the grace of an inch or two, went on and ripped a spread on the table, jerking it awry, making a furrow of splinters in the table-top wood. Acrid powder smell followed the lead.

Doc had stepped to the side on which the door swung. He shoved the panel, starting it shut. A shoulder hit the wood, trying to keep the door from closing. The bronze man exerted force, got the panel shut; and the spring lock, clicking, fastened itself.

Big splinters began falling out of the door to the accompaniment of the smashing impact of bullets.

“Fools!” snarled the voice of Wall-Samuels. “Shoot at the lock!”

The firing became less random and *slam-slammed* with violent precision. The lock jumped, then exploded out of its bed, taking wood with it, and gyrated across the floor.

“Careful!” Wall-Samuels ordered.

He gave the door a kick and it flew ajar. With a revolver—an automatic revolver, practically the only weapon of its kind, manufactured by an English concern—he smashed bullets at various corners of the room. He swore because the chamber was dark. Then he felt for the switch, located it and thumbed it up.

“Hell!” said Wall-Samuels when the lights did not come on.

Another man struck a match, held himself behind the door and shoved the light within. At that point, a curious guest popped into the hallway, only to fly back into his room as a bullet chopped plaster off the wall near his head.

Wall-Samuels had nerve, or maybe he still smarted because of his earlier bad showing against Doc Savage. He walked into the hotel room, automatic revolver ready. He turned, holding the deadly weapon close to his chest.

His lips separated slightly. His expression became that of a man who has just seen a particularly baffling act of magic.

“Search the closet,” he grated.

His men ran over—four men accompanied him, and they all wore the grim expressions of those who had set their minds on taking life. They opened the closet; they upended the bed.

“Where’d the bronze bloke go?” one demanded wonderingly.

Wall-Samuels peered around the room, which was undeniably empty. Finally his gaze found the window, and he swung over. The sash was down, but not locked.

“He went this way,” grated Wall-Samuels.

But after looking out, he changed his mind, for the wall was of bricks closely fitted together, and no human fly, however skilled, could have gone up or down it. Of that, Wall-Samuels was positive.

“Damn me!” he muttered. “The more I see of the bronze devil the more I am convinced that he is not human.”

“Where’d he go?” some one asked foolishly.

“How do I know?” Wall-Samuels snapped. “I thought we had him when we waited until we saw his man arrive downstairs, then we came up. I was reasonably sure he would think it was his man at the door, and that would give us our chance.”

“We’d better get out of here,” said the man.

“Yes,” said Wall-Samuels, “we had.”

They left in great haste.

DOWNSTAIRS somewhere, a woman began screaming.

The woman doing the shrieking was elderly, raw-boned and had a face that made one think of a jinn mule. She had her mouth open to its widest, and the howls which poured forth were raucous and startled. She was the perfect picture of a frightened old maid.

“There’s a man in my room!” she screeched.

“Quiet, please, madam,” Doc Savage requested mildly.

The bronze man had come in through the window, being deposited on the ledge outside by a thin silk cord down which he had slid from the room above. There was a grapple hook attached to the cord; this had engaged the ledge higher up, and a flip of the cord had freed it.

Doc was coiling the cord about the grapple, which was collapsible, and stowing it within his clothing.

“Help! Murder! Police!” squalled the mule-faced woman; then she got a better look at the bronze man’s remarkable physique, stopped her yelling and demanded in a mollified voice, “What on earth are you doing in here?”

The key was on the inside of the door. The bronze man turned it and an instant later was outside in the corridor.

The mule-faced woman began yelling again.

Doc Savage listened at the elevator shafts and heard an uproar which told him there was a scuffle going on in one of the cages—evidently the operator being overpowered. He promptly ran down the stairs, his speed amazing. Shots banged below.

He found the lobby in confusion, the big central chandelier having been shot loose by Wall-Samuels and his gang by way of terrorizing those present. Cars waiting outside had wafted the gang away. Doc got a fleeting glimpse of the last machine.

An elevator came down and Johnny sloped out, slightly under seven feet of ungainly disgust.

“Of all the unmitigated caprices of mordacious adversity,” he groaned. “I missed the excitement!”

“They apparently timed their attack to your arrival,” Doc said. “They took it for granted I would let you in myself, and they would get a chance at me.”

“Did they?”

“They did,” Doc assured the bony archaeologist and geologist.

“Ultrareprehensible!” said Johnny. “And they got away?”

“So it seems,” the bronze man admitted. “But I saw the last of their cars, and secured the license number.”

Doc strode off, found a London policeman and gave the license numerals of the machine which he had seen. The bobbie promised to broadcast an immediate alarm for the vehicle.

Johnny was reading extra editions of the afternoon newspapers when Doc rejoined him. The archaeologist’s nodular features were a study as he digested the story. Names of Monk and Ham were not mentioned, they being designated merely as mercenary crooks by the authorities of Magna Island; but Johnny knew who was meant.

Johnny looked up at Doc. He did not use big words.

“This is a devil of a note,” he said slowly.

DOC SAVAGE led the way to an untenanted corner of the hotel lobby.

“What did you learn?” he asked.

Johnny tapped the newspaper: “From this story, it is hard to tell——”

“I do not mean about that,” Doc interpolated. “Before you returned to the hotel, you were getting historical data on the events during the reign of King John.”

“Oh, that!” The bony man fumbled inside his slack coat and brought out a sheaf of documents. “Here is a brief synopsis of King John’s reign. Say, King John was some tough lad, probably one of the worst kings England ever had!”

At this point, a police officer approached with word that Wall-Samuels’s car had been sighted near Kentish Town. Wall-Samuels and all four of his men now occupied the one machine. Bobbies had sought to stop them and had been fired upon, the car roaring on northward.

Doc Savage heard that through in silence. Then he riffled over the documents concerning King John, which Johnny had given him. He pocketed them without comment, and it was impossible to tell from his features whether or not he had secured anything of value from them.

“Come on,” he directed Johnny.

They went to Doc’s room and got a number of metal cases fitted with carrying straps. These containers held the bronze man’s numerous scientific devices. They were, figuratively speaking, his bag of tricks, and he took them wherever he went.

A fast taxicab carried them from the hotel, worked through the early evening London traffic jams, and eventually reached an airport. The field was not Croydon,

where the commercial lines came in, but another 'drome patronized by sportsmen and smaller concerns which made a business of selling planes.

The bronze man bought a plane, one of the latest and fastest types of ships, a job which sold for slightly in excess of two thousand pounds.

Doc Savage paid the sum in cash, without comment or perceptible concern. Two thousand pounds, in fact, was not an excessive amount of money in his life, for the bronze man possessed access to a treasure trove, the value of which would stagger some imaginations.

Before taking off in the newly purchased plane, and while the craft was being loaded with fuel and oil, Doc made a telephone call to the police.

Wall-Samuels's car had been found—at another airport. And Wall-Samuels and his four men had taken off in a plane and lost themselves in the night.

“My hypothesis is that they have departed for Magna Island,” Johnny hazarded.

Doc tested the single powerful motor of the new plane. It ran perfectly.

“Magna Island is a good bet,” he admitted.

Johnny began loading duffle into the cabin of the fast craft.

“I gather that we are going to direct a scrutiny at the mystery which is Magna Island,” he said.

“Exactly!” Doc agreed.

Chapter XVI

FLAME THREADS

THE moon was bright; the stars, like iridescent sparks, glittered permanently in the sky; but some seven or eight thousand feet above the earth clouds were massed—first, in gray and bulging masses which were given the aspect of silver foam by the moonlight, then, below these, ranged darker, thicker phalanxes of vapor which threatened momentarily to leak rain. On the sea, and for two thousand feet above, it was very dark.

Doc Savage sent the new plane toward Magna Island at an altitude of fourteen thousand, where it was clear and cold. From time to time he consulted instruments, then shifted a position pin in the chart which was clamped to the sliding map board under the instrument panel. His idea of their position was uncannily accurate.

Johnny was going over supermachine pistols, springing cartridges from the ammo drums and running each through a chambering device which made sure there were no microscopic flaws that might cause one of the weapons to jam.

“This is still a profound enigma,” he murmured. “The fact remains unalterably clear that we can conjure up no hypothesis that will clarify the connection of The Wash with Magna Island.”

“Guns in good shape?” Doc asked.

“Yes.”

“We are going down now,” Doc advised. “Magna Island is a few miles directly ahead.”

The bronze man cut the ignition switch and the propeller, unable to turn over against the compression in the new motor, became a rigid blade of aluminum alloy which glittered in the moonlight. The ship tilted in a glide and went down like a whining, stiff-winged ghost.

The cloud mass bulged up at them. Vapor streamers whipped past like foam, and darker spires and chasms appeared as if they were hungry mouths and stained fangs.

“Entrancing place,” offered Johnny.

As if they had been swallowed completely, blackness took them in. The plane interior became damp. Once rain shotted against the windows.

“The infra-ray searchlight,” Doc directed.

Johnny sprang to one of the metal equipment cases, opened it and brought out a bulky apparatus. A cable from this he connected to another case which held a generator that operated from a powerful spring motor. He grunted and perspired winding the motor.

A third case yielded box-shaped eyepieces, which both Johnny and Doc donned. Then Johnny opened a window, shoved the infra-ray lantern through and clicked a switch.

There had been only dense blackness ahead and below, a blackness that was infinitely forbidding. But the beam from the infra-ray lantern wrought a startling change. The clouds and fog were pierced to a much greater degree than would have been possible with an ordinary searchlight.

The infra rays, being outside the visible spectrum, were unnoticeable to the unaided eye. Only with the intricate eyepieces which Doc and Johnny had strapped to their orbs could the beam be utilized for a survey.

They were not below the clouds. Doc flattened the plane a bit more, not wishing the howl of wind past flying wires to become loud enough to reveal their approach.

With a suddenness which caused Johnny to start slightly, they dropped under the clouds. He peered through his eyepiece.

“There!” he breathed.

MAGNA ISLAND was below. It looked strangely unnatural, for there were no impressions of color through the infra-ray device, only varying shades of light and darkness.

Doc Savage did not fly directly over the island, but circled widely, keeping clear of the shore line. They could make out the village, the plant for taking gold from sea water. The latter was dark.

There was a beach along the inside of the two arms of land on which they could land. Other than this, no other suitable landing place presented.

Doc sent the plane in a bit closer.

Down on the island, there was a small flash, and from it a string of sparks stretched upward. This passed the plane and became a sudden, blinding ball of light which hung almost motionless in the night sky.

“Parachute flare,” Doc said grimly. “They were not asleep.”

The plane began to vibrate slightly. It was an all-metal job, and out on the left wingtip the skin was getting ragged, while down on the ground, a machine gun fluttered an ugly red eye.

“The beginning of a hectic night,” Johnny prophesied quietly.

DOC banked the plane right, left, right, and got away from the stream of machine gun slugs. The flare, suspended from its swaying parachute, sank until they were above it and in darkness.

On the most westerly of the frog-leg peninsulas, two planes were being urged into the water. They had been almost hidden in the trees which covered that end of the island.

A second flare climbed up and ripened whitely; machine guns opened again. They were using tracer this time, and Doc’s best maneuvering did not escape an occasional hit.

“I have a remedy for such obstreperous conduct,” Johnny commented.

He replaced a drum of mercy bullets in his machine pistol with a drum marked by a different identifying numeral, then leaned out, took a deliberate aim and fired a single shot.

On the ground there was a great gush of flame, and a tree toppled over, uprooted. This happened near one of the machine guns.

Johnny fired again. That slug dug a great pock in the earth. The explosive in the pellets was tremendously powerful.

Johnny continued to fire, and the men manning the machine gun—it was a regulation anti-aircraft type—lost their nerve and ran. Johnny had to shoot five more times before he destroyed the gun itself.

The two planes were now in the water, scudding along at the heads of long wake streamers. Doc stood his ship on a wingtip and went spinning down over one. Johnny took his time, then launched a brief burst of explosive bullets.

Water was kicked up in a boiling turmoil ahead of one of the planes. The craft heaved, bucked. For a moment, it seemed that the ship would go on safely. Then it tilted until a wingtip knifed the surface, and the resultant drag spun it around so violently that it turned completely over. As it began sinking, men clambered wildly through the cabin windows.

The second plane got on step and vaulted off. The pilot banked steeply, then gave his craft all of the climbing angle it would handle. In a few moments it was pointing in the direction of Doc's ship. Two faint red sparks danced atop the engine cowling.

There was a violent vibration, then Doc battled the controls and skidded his new craft aside. He snapped open the cockpit window and looked out and down.

The landing gear was dangling from mutilated struts.

"Synchronized guns," he told Johnny. "This second ship is not going to be an easy nut to crack. It seems to be as fast or faster than our own bus."

A third flare had crawled up against the clouds and was spreading its calcium whiteness. Johnny, squinting narrowly, saw that the flares were being secured from the tool shed near the large building which he reasoned was the gold-extraction plant.

The gaunt geologist took a careful aim at the tool house and launched an explosive bullet. He missed, and had to fire three times more before the shed jumped apart in a puff of timbers, tin and dust.

"That stops the business of the flares," he grunted.

If the occupants of the plane with the synchronized machine guns expected Doc Savage to stay aloft and make a bat battle of the affair, they got a surprise. The instant the last flare sank, sizzling, into the sea, Doc banked sharply and put the nose of his craft down.

"We came to help Monk and Ham," the bronze man told Johnny, "and not to fight for the fun of it."

The thunder of the other plane throbbed across the island and swallowed completely such small sounds as were made by Doc's ship after he cut the motors. He

hoped to land without the engines, but if they were needed, there was an electro-inertia starter for setting them off again while still in the air.

Once more the infra-red projector and the strange eyepieces were employed. Doc sent the plane for the beach, swung around into the wind—he had previously noted its direction from the drift of the parachute flares—and flattened out.

Johnny flattened himself against the instrument board and padded his face with his coat. They had no landing gear, and there was no telling what would happen.

Doc Savage picked a spot in the mild surf, a few yards offshore, killed all the headway possible by trampling the rudder violently, then put the plane down. There was a smash, a bounce, then a terrific jarring as the surf mauled them. With a whining of metal as one wing collapsed, the plane finally stood on its nose.

Then there was silence, except for the gurgle of sea water and the excited shouts of their enemies above the distant buzz of the other plane.

“Hurt?” Doc asked.

“No,” said Johnny.

The bronze man climbed out, found the water waist-deep, and waded for shore. Johnny made splashings coming after him.

They found it most convenient to run in the direction of the gold-extracting plant. Behind them, men shouted anxiously to each other. Flashlights and hand searchlights raced hungry plumes of luminosity.

A volley of profanity indicated the finding of the plane in the surf. Lights were turned upon the wreck to indicate to those overhead in the other plane that they might as well land.

Ahead of Doc, a square building showed up. Near by, wreckage was smoking and burning redly—the remnants of the tool shed which Johnny had destroyed.

“Wait!” Doc directed.

Johnny opened his mouth to ask what Doc intended doing, but the bronze man left him too quickly, and the bony geologist stood rigid, his breath rapid and uneasily hoarse, listening.

Doc Savage went to the door of the gold-extraction plant. There was a massive padlock on it, but that surrendered to the probing of the metal pick which he removed from a pocket of his unusual vest.

Passing inside, Doc produced a flashlight from the vest. This operated from a spring generator, and the head could be focused until it threw a beam no larger than an ordinary lead pencil.

The beam traveled rapidly over the ponderous tanks and arrays of piping. A time or two, the light widened briefly; it remained wide for some seconds when Doc came to the long tank from which came the final concentration of stuff that the newspaper correspondents had seen retorted into a small gold brick.

Outside, Johnny shifted from one bony leg to the other. He was getting anxious, for he could hear their enemies coming closer. The men were following the tracks which Doc and himself had made in the soft beach sand.

Johnny latched his machine pistol into rapid-fire position, and made sure there was an ammo drum of mercy bullets in place.

When Doc appeared at his side, Johnny started and all but began shooting.

“What did you find?” Johnny gulped.

“They’ll hear us,” Doc breathed. “Let’s head toward the village.”

They crept away, and in the intense darkness, it was necessary to ferret out a course by the sense of touch alone. Doc went ahead. Often his hands guided Johnny over or around obstructions which the latter failed to distinguish.

“They won’t hear us now,” Johnny whispered after a time. “What did you find?”

“Plenty!” Doc told him. “The gold-from-sea-water plant is a fake!”

“What?”

“A fake!” Doc repeated. “They are not taking gold from the ocean.”

Chapter XVII

TROUBLE IN THE NIGHT

JOHNNY followed Doc Savage in silence for some little distance, digesting what he had just been told.

He began, "But the newspaper men said——"

"Were deceived," Doc interposed. "The whole idea of taking gold from sea water is not impossible. It has actually been done on a laboratory scale. But these men are not doing it with the apparatus they have back there."

Johnny grumbled his disgust. "Then what is behind this? They've spent a lot of money building this plant and buying the island."

"Considerably less than a hundred thousand, all told," Doc reminded. "If you deal in millions, that is not a great deal of money."

"Then suppose you tell me why they built the plant?" Johnny requested dryly.

"That may come out before we're through," Doc replied. "Quiet! The village is close ahead."

Lights burned in some of the cottages. Fast-moving figures darted past windows. A man appeared in a door, his shoulders draped with serpentine ammo belts for full-size machine guns.

"They were certainly prepared for a siege," Johnny breathed.

Doc Savage said nothing, but stared intently ahead. Another man strode through the lighted door, his hands filled with metallic eggs which were undoubtedly grenades. That particular house, Doc concluded, was the armory.

"Wait here," he advised Johnny.

He glided forward, making few sounds. Because of the intense darkness, it was unnecessary to use much care against being seen, except to be ready to drop should some one turn on a flashlight. He reached a window of the cottage from which the men had carried weapons.

Inside, there was one large room, the floor littered with packing cases containing guns and ammunition. Doc worked at the window, got it open and eased inside. He found a small hammer which had been used in opening the cases.

Sharp blows with the hammer rendered gun after gun useless.

There was a case of ammo belts for the machine guns, already plugged full of cartridges. With a pocket knife, Doc rendered the belts useless.

There was a box of grenades. Putting them out of commission would take too long. He would have to conceal them.

Another item which held his interest was a case of dynamite, high-percentage stuff which must have been used in blasting for the gold-extraction plant. Only a few sticks were missing.

Near by was a large coil of insulated wire and a detonating generator of the old-fashioned type which had an upright handle. The shoving down of the handle spun the generator and hurled current to the electrical detonating caps attached to the device.

Doc Savage made two trips outside, taking first the grenades, then the dynamite, the wire and the generator. They might come in useful. He hid them all in the shrubbery, covering them with soft dirt. A few of the grenades he kept in a pocket.

If the blows as he broke the guns had been heard—and no doubt they had—the sound had been dismissed as being made by one of the men themselves.

Johnny was waiting anxiously.

“What now?” he questioned.

“Find Monk and Ham,” Doc breathed. “But first, this gang will have to think we are near the other end of the island. You wait here.”

SOME five minutes later, Paquis was holding a profane conference with his men on the opposite side of Magna Island. Paquis had recovered fully from his encounter with the anæsthetic gas bulbs which had been broken in Ham’s pocket.

“*Non, non!*” Paquis snapped insistently. “They would not dare go toward the village.”

“This Doc Savage bloke would do anything, gov’nor,” the pursy Smith insisted.

Paquis shrugged. “Anyway, we have him cornered here on the island. Our one plane is the only way he can get off. And I have ordered the craft to take the air and stay there, where he cannot get it, until we have this thing settled.”

A moment later, the plane motor began to roar. The sound receded, changed note as the ship took the air, then the wingtip searchlights appeared, racing like two big eyes over the treetops. The craft started cruising in slow circles around the island.

Paquis swore thickly. “The fools! They are so close that the roar of the motor will prevent us hearing this Doc Savage.”

He began to yell and wave a flashlight, trying to signal the pilot of the plane to put more distance between himself and the island.

Almost beside Paquis, there was a terrific report and a flash. Paquis’s hair all but stood on end and he lost his hat diving for cover.

“*Prenez garde!*” he shrieked. “Take care! A grenade!”

A second grenade exploded, closer than the first. Men scattered. Some had presence of mind enough to use flashlights. The white funnels, spiking through the darkness and the vegetation, picked up a gigantic man-figure.

“Doc Savage!” Paquis roared. “I told you he was at this side of the island!”

Leaping backward, Doc Savage lost himself to the flashlight beam. A solitary pistol whacked, then an ear-splitting salvo of gunfire crashed out. Bark, small limbs, leaves showered down. A sapling, cut completely by the blast of lead, toppled over noisily.

But Doc Savage was some yards away, and moving swiftly. Before throwing the two grenades to attract attention, he had gone over the terrain. He made no noise that was perceptible over the moan of the plane motor.

"*Ecoutez!*" Paquis was yelling. "Listen. Maybe we can hear him! Damn that infernal plane!"

Paquis was still yelling and swearing in the distance when Doc Savage appeared beside Johnny, as soundless in his coming as a phantom of the night.

"I was worried," Johnny gulped. "The grenades——"

"The grenades were some from their own armory," Doc explained. "The rest are hidden. Did any one leave the village during the excitement?"

"Three men," said Johnny, and pointed. "I think one of the prisoners is in that house yonder. At least there is a man at the door, obviously on guard."

THE house—the lights of a house, rather—which Johnny indicated, lay on the south side of the street. He and Doc went toward it cautiously. Before they had gone far the door opened, spilling reddish light which must come from a lantern, and an armed man stood in the aperture for a moment, listening.

"Look! There's the guard!" Johnny breathed.

With hand pressure, Doc indicated that Johnny was to wait. Then the bronze man glided ahead. There was little chance of his being discovered, thanks to the night and the noisy plane overhead.

The guard cupped a hand back of his ear. Then he removed it and scowled up at the boisterous plane. There was a distinctly fleshy smack of a sound. The guard's scowl faded to utter blankness and he took two rubber-kneed steps, then folded down atop his gun.

The grenade which Doc had thrown bounced off the partially open door, whence it had glanced from the man's head, and sailed into the house, where it rattled about.

A hoarse scream in a man's voice came out of the house, a stifled shriek full of the fear of death.

Doc Savage ran to the door. A thin old man with white hair sat on the floor. He wore Congress gaiters and a soiled, sweated-down wing collar. He was handcuffed to an iron flywheel too heavy for him possibly to move, and he stared with an awful expression at the grenade, which had stopped barely a yard distant from him.

"The pin has not been pulled," Doc told him. "It will not explode."

Surprise shook the old man as if he had received a violent electrical shock. He spoke, but his words were at first unintelligible. Taking a full breath, he tried again.

"D-Doc Savage!" he floundered. "You c-couldn't be any one else."

The bronze giant sank beside the old man and took the handcuff chain in cabled fingers. His arms, straining apart, became great, corded bars.

The white-haired man made a choking sound of wonder as the links snapped.

"I'm Wehman Mills," he mumbled, and got to his feet as rapidly as age-stiffened joints would permit. "My niece! She's next door."

"Who?" Doc questioned.

"Elaine!"

It was the first the bronze man had heard of Elaine, but full explanations would have to wait.

“Where are Monk and Ham?” he asked.

“I don’t know,” Wehman Mills gulped. “But Elaine——”

“We’ll get Elaine.” Because the old man was slow on his feet, Doc grasped him bodily and ran him through the door. The bronze man paused briefly to examine the guard. That worthy would be fortunate if he awakened some time the following day.

Elaine was in the next dwelling. There was no guard over her. Doc used a flashlight to illuminate her handcuff links as he performed the amazing feat of breaking them with his bare hands.

PRETTY ELAINE MILLS looked the bronze man over, and seemed eminently satisfied with what she saw.

“I don’t believe this rescue attempt will turn out like the other one,” she said, and there was no perceptible tremble in her pleasant voice.

“What other one?” Doc asked.

“Your man, Ham, tried it once.”

Doc said, “Ham usually manages to do fairly well.”

“He did excellently,” said Elaine Mills. “I think he would have gotten away with it, except that Paquis and his men found out where Ham was. They turned up at just the wrong moment. How they managed to do that was very mysterious.”

“Where is Ham now?” Doc demanded. “And Monk?”

“Up the street,” said Elaine Mills. “I think they are together.”

Doc and his party left the house hurriedly. Johnny was helping elderly Wehman Mills. Elaine managed by herself, although she limped a little, being stiff from the handcuff confinement.

The first house they tried was empty. So was the second, and a third. Before they reached the fourth, they heard voices.

“Listen, you blasted shyster!” complained Monk’s childlike voice. “You’re gouging me purposely with that pin!”

“Shut up!” Ham snapped. “I’ve still got a notion to try that window glass idea.”

Monk and Ham were handcuffed to heavy pieces of machinery, and they had managed to drag these until they sat close together. Ham was employing a tie pin in an endeavor to pick the lock on Monk’s manacles.

They greeted Doc with wide grins. The bronze man took the tie pin and went to work on the locks.

“You should have heard the bright idea this shyster had for getting us loose,” Monk said indignantly. “He wanted to break a window and use the glass to cut one of my thumbs off so the handcuff ring would slide over my hand.”

“I am sure it would have worked,” Ham declared, and kept his features serious.

Monk snorted, then asked, “Where’s the other guy—Henry Trump?”

The bronze man shook his head. "I'm behind on the story, Monk. Who is Henry Trump?"

Elaine Mills supplied, "A very nice young man who tried to help me and got involved in this awful mess for his pains."

"We'll look for him," Doc said. "And we'll look for a house which is probably under heavy guard."

Monk registered surprise. "What's that last?"

"A house under guard," Doc repeated. "Or it may not be in a house. It may be somewhere else on the island."

"What?" Monk demanded.

"The thing which will explain all of this," Doc told him.

Old Wehman Mills hobbled to the door, glanced out choked, "Oh, my goodness!" and fell backward just before a bullet made a neat round hole in the door jamb.

Chapter XVIII

THE SCHOOL HOUSE

“OUR sinecure has terminated precipitously,” big-worded Johnny offered dryly.

Without obvious haste, Johnny sloped to a window, smashed through with a shower of glass and galloped for the house corner.

The man who had fired on Wehman Mills heard the window breaking and ran to get in a shot. He had a strong hand searchlight and he turned this on.

Johnny glimpsed the light, surmised the fellow would be holding it out to one side, and latched his superfirer into continuous discharge position. He triggered slugs over an area extending a dozen feet on either side of the light.

The light fell; the man who had held it yelled, and a moment later he staggered into view, clutching at his chest where mercy bullets had hit him, and probably wondering just exactly what was wrong. He weakened and sat down, then laid his full length on the ground.

“We had best retreat through the village,” Doc advised. “Search the houses as we go.”

“Yes,” gasped Elaine Mills. “We must find Henry Trump!”

“And something these men will be guarding,” Doc added.

The houses were smaller now, little more than hovels. Beyond them, but invisible in the night, was the big stone school house which stood on the hill.

Paquis was yelling, not on the other side now, but nearer; his shouts were directed at his men, summoning them to the attack. He took time out at frequent intervals to curse the airplane which still made noise overhead.

Monk and Ham had taken the left side of the street, growling uncomplimentary things at each other while they searched houses.

“Listen, stupid,” Ham requested of Monk, “just what does Doc think we’re going to find around here?”

Monk kicked down a door which was locked. “I suppose all things were clear to that great brain of yours,” he told Ham sourly.

Ham found a flashlight on a table in the shack which they were investigating. He thumbed it on, and the beam illuminated Monk briefly. Ham extinguished it with great haste.

Monk squalled and dived for the nearest cover, just ahead of a shower of bullets directed at Ham’s light.

“You turned that on me a-purpose!” Monk grated. “You tried to get me shot!”

“No such luck,” Ham gritted back. “The light came on pointed toward you by accident.”

“If I was to throw a rock and it bashed your head in, that’d be an accident, too,” Monk said fiercely.

“Any time you feel ambitious,” Ham invited.

Elaine Mills, overhearing the exchange, and detecting nothing but utter hate and rage in the tones of the two men, moved over and grasped Doc Savage’s elbow apprehensively.

“I am afraid your two men are going to fight,” she said. “Can’t you do something?”

“Don’t worry,” Doc told her. “They’re like that all the time.”

From a spot ahead, a voice called, “Doc Savage! Help!”

“That’s Henry Trump!” gasped Elaine Mills, and ran forward.

THEY found Henry Trump seated in an open shed, a none-too-clean place where the original inhabitants of the island must have kept cows. Trump’s legs were manacled around a post which supported the shed roof.

“I could tell you were hunting me,” he gasped.

Doc went to work on the handcuffs. Henry Trump swore wonderingly when the links parted under Doc’s incredible hands.

“Good night!” he exploded. “I’ve read about you, Savage, and didn’t believe half of the stuff. But I don’t think it was exaggerated.”

Doc hauled the young man to his feet.

“Have you noticed any particular spot on the island that the men were guarding?” he asked.

“No,” said Trump in a puzzled tone. “Why?”

“We’re trying to find such a place.”

Monk put in, “There’s the school house. It’s on the hill ahead.”

“And it is the only building of any size left,” added Ham.

Doc said swiftly, “We’ll try the school house.”

Old Wehman Mills interjected anxiously, “Now, look here, I think we should try to escape from this——”

“The plane is the only route of escape,” Doc told him. “And that is in the air. We’ll have to make a fight of it.”

Paquis and his men were closing in, but not recklessly. They fired an occasional shot, and were evidently keeping in groups for the sake of safety.

Doc distinguished the voice of Smith, and then the squealing tone of Wall-Samuels, the fake detective.

Henry Trump came close to Doc Savage. “Are you heading for the school house?”

“Right!” Doc told him.

“Why?”

“They may have their cache there.”

“Cache?” Trump murmured. “You mean—the gold they have taken from the ocean?”

“They have not taken any gold from the sea,” Doc advised Trump. “Their plant is a fake.”

“For the love of mud!” Trump gulped. “Then what is behind all of this?”

“I’ll explain as soon as we are under cover,” Doc replied. “The school house is of stone. We can barricade ourselves there.”

Trump muttered, “I don’t think it’s a good idea to pen ourselves up.”

Doc did not reply, but moved on in the darkness. He found Johnny, Monk, Ham and the others, breathed a low command, and they strung out in single file, so that they could travel with more stealth.

Behind them, Paquis was expressing profane opinions about the intellect of the pilot who was still circling the big plane so close to the island that its noise interfered with the search.

PAQUIS was worried. He was a little frightened too, and part of his profanity was intended to bolster his own nerve. He did not like the idea of hunting for Doc Savage in the darkness.

“*Prenez garde!*” he warned his men. “Take care! There is no great hurry.”

“I been tellin’ you that bronze bloke is bad medicine,” Smith mumbled.

“Shut up!” advised Benjamin Giltstein. “We still have a hole card which the bronze man does not know about.”

“*Oui,*” Paquis agreed. “But he must not suspect. Therefore it is up to us to make a great pretense of hunting him.”

At that point, Paquis gave a violent lunge and fell flat on the earth: a voice out of the adjacent darkness had given him one of the big starts of his checkered career.

“Fool!” snarled the voice. “Do not make a noise that will cause Savage to suspect that I am near.”

“The chief!” some one breathed.

“*Oui,*” said Paquis. “What is it?”

“Doc Savage is taking his party to the school house,” said the voice.

“*Comment!*” exploded Paquis. “What? But how did he guess——”

“He searched the village,” said the voice of the leader who had kept himself in the background throughout. “He is now going to try the school house.”

“Then he must suspect the truth, m’sieu’,” Paquis groaned.

“He does,” agreed the other. “The incident at The Wash must have given him a clue.”

Paquis demanded, “What shall we do?”

“Take all of your men to the school house,” directed the other. “Get them inside. When Doc Savage appears, try to get him and some of his men. But keep them out of the school house, at all costs.”

“*Oui*,” Paquis agreed.

“Later, we will corner Savage,” stated the other. “I will arrange that. He does not suspect me.”

“You are going to join him again?” Paquis questioned.

“Of course,” chuckled the man who had given orders.

The mysterious speaker took only a few feet from Paquis and the others. Now he stepped backward, parted the shrubbery and eased himself off in the direction of Doc Savage and his party. The man traveled with all the speed consistent with silence, and, glancing upward where the plane moaned in the darkness, he grinned fiercely, thankful for the noise the craft was making.

Scarcely four minutes later, he had made himself one of Doc Savage’s group. Apparently, his absence had not been missed. Not once had a light shone on his features.

Paquis was busy mustering his men. When he had them assembled they set off, running, in a roundabout way for the school house. It did not take them long to reach the structure.

Playing children had worn grass and vegetation off the ground adjacent to the school house, so that it was bare, a dome of rocky clay atop which the building towered.

Nearing the door, Paquis called softly. There was no answer. Paquis muttered uneasily, took a chance, and dabbed his flashlight beam. Then he swore.

The door was ajar, and a man sprawled beside it. His eyes were wide open and he breathed regularly, but his limbs were weirdly stiff, incapable of movement.

“The work of that devil, Savage!” Paquis breathed.

“Righto,” muttered Smith. “That same thing ’appened to one of our men in The Wash. Doc Savage squeezes the back of ’is neck some bloomin’ way.”

“Inside!” Paquis grated. “We must rush them, m’sieu’s!”

The order had to be issued twice again before men got up nerve enough to dive inside the school house. They had their guns ready.

But to their unbounded astonishment, nothing happened. There was no one in the building.

“*Bon!*” Paquis exploded. “Doc Savage came ahead and cleared the way, then went back for the others. We have beaten them!”

With all of the men inside, the door was slammed and bolted. The windows had been fitted with large sheet shields of bulletproof steel. Loopholes perforated these.

Smith chuckled. “Hit looks like we’re sittin’ hon top o’ the bloomin’ world.”

His satisfaction had a short life.

From outside, Doc Savage’s powerful voice called, “You gentlemen have walked into a trap!”

THE men in the school house received the words with varied mien.

Smith groaned. Benjamin Giltstein said a tight-lipped nothing. Paquis was frankly skeptical.

“Use your guns, *mon hommes!*” he barked. “Shoot at his voice!”

“Wait!” Doc Savage called, and there was an unconcerned grimness in his powerful tone which compelled attention. “I was inside before you came.”

“He ain’t lyin’,” Smith mumbled. “Remember the bloke we found at the door!”

“In the basement,” Doc Savage continued, “is a packing box. It contains the dynamite which was removed from your armory. Attached to it are the wires of the blasting generator.”

Paquis rapped, “Look and see if he is lying!”

“The light is on in the basement,” Doc called. “We can see the container of explosive, and can set it off before one of you can move it.”

The basement door was torn open, and Smith peered down into the brilliantly lighted interior.

“Blimme!” he exploded, and drew back.

The case of explosives was suspended by a length of wire from the ceiling, perhaps six feet inside the open window. Other wires, insulated, extended from it through the window.

“Out with the lights,” Benjamin Giltstein suggested. “Then the wires can be cut without him seeing.”

“*Non!*” gulped Paquis. “He would set the stuff off the instant the lights went out.”

Doc Savage’s voice reached them faintly. “Think it over, you fellows. Then get rid of your guns and come out.”

Outside, Doc Savage and his party waited. They had planted flashlights so that the beams illuminated the four sides of the school house.

The backglow from the flashes bathed Doc’s group faintly, so that they kept behind rocks and trees. Johnny, gaunt and bony as death itself, hunched over the electrical generator which was attached to the explosive.

Henry Trump was very tense, very pale. He wet his lips repeatedly and looked at Doc Savage, who had been continually near him during the last few moments.

“You pretended to help Elaine Mills so as to make sure she was captured, did you not?” Doc asked him abruptly.

Henry Trump did not start. Possibly his features grew a bit more pallid.

“What gave me away?” he asked thickly.

“Your going back to talk to Paquis after we started for the school house,” Doc told him. “You thought I was in front, but I was behind, making sure that none of the enemy overhauled us. I heard you slip away.”

Trump bowed slightly, then put both arms down stiffly at his sides.

“I am not going to be fool enough to deny it,” he said. “Yes, I did throw in with the girl to make sure she was seized. I also was responsible for the capture of Ham. When Ham came for me, I had time to signal my men before putting on handcuffs and pretending to be a prisoner.”

“You were rather clever,” Doc admitted.

“Yes, rather,” Trump grated, and shook his right arm violently.

A small automatic—it must have been on a hook inside his sleeve—dropped into view. Trump, cupping his right hand, managed to catch it.

But he never used the weapon. Doc Savage, lunging at the first shake of the right arm, lashed with a fist and reached Trump’s jaw. The young man’s head flew back, then forward; he coughed and the explosion blew loosened teeth past his lips. Then he went down.

The noise as he fell got Elaine Mills attention. She ran up.

“Why, what happened to him?” she gasped. “He was such a nice young man.”

The door of the school house opened and Paquis came out. He had no gun and his hands were stiffly above his head. The rest of his men trailed after him, looking back nervously, as if fearing the explosive would detonate before they got out.

Chapter XIX

KING JOHN'S LOOT

THE room had once been the office of the principal of the little school. An empty desk and bookcase still remained.

On the floor were many packages done in burlap, and numerous stout boxes, none of the latter very large, but stoutly built. Some of the packages and boxes had been opened.

The contents, strewn on the floor, looked at first glance like junk. There were vases, goblets, eating utensils. There were shapeless lumps which had once been bowls, and there were bulky statues, plaques, chains.

Monk threw down the hammer with which he had been opening the containers.

"Gold, all of it!" he said. "There's no need of making chemical tests."

Old Wehman Mills drew himself up to his trembling height and wailed, "Gentlemen, I tell you there is a mistake. You are wrong! The plant for taking gold from sea water will actually work!"

"Uncle!" admonished Elaine Mills.

"I'm sorry," Doc told him, "but it will not work. I made a further examination this morning."

Johnny, his disheveled clothing making him look slightly more bony than usual, finished reading the sheaf of papers which contained the data he had assembled in London on King John.

"It all hooks up," he said absently, forgetting to use big words. "When King John was forced to sign the Magna Charta in the year of 1215, he was enraged at the barons who made him sign. He got together an army of ruffians and set out to loot the castles of his barons by way of revenge. He was very successful, and got a great deal of swag."

"Where'd you get that stuff?" Monk demanded.

"Out of the official history of England," Johnny retorted. "Quiet, please, while I finish. The outraged barons got together and pursued King John. To escape them, he took a short cut across The Wash. The tide trapped his treasure train, and it was lost, King John barely escaping with his life. The shock of losing the loot is believed to have been a cause contributing to his death shortly afterward."

Monk indicated the stuff in the packages and boxes. "This is King John's treasure?"

"It is," Doc Savage put in. "Henry Trump, Paquis, Smith, Benjamin Giltstein and the rest found it. They removed it from the quicksands by sinking shafts, using the modern expedient of freezing the muck so that it could be excavated."

"That explains the refrigerating apparatus which we found in the marshes near The Wash," added Johnny.

Wehman Mills groaned. "I tell you, my process for taking gold from the sea is feasible," he cried.

“Maybe,” Doc agreed quietly. “But it will require more work before it is practical on a commercial scale. These men simply duped you. They used your plant as a cover for producing the King John gold and marketing it.”

“It was an elaborate tax-evasion scheme, uncle,” said Elaine.

Outside, Ham yelled, “Say, have I got to watch these prisoners all day? How about a little help?”

FROM a window, Doc glanced over the captives. They were all there—from Henry Trump, the ringleader, down to the most disgruntled of the lot, the pilot of the plane, which had run out of gasoline near dawn. Forced down, the pilot had been captured easily.

The pilot was the butt of considerable sarcasm from his fellows, they insisting that had he not made so much noise overhead, Doc Savage might have been seized.

Doc Savage listened to the wrangling without interest. It was not important.

Nor was the bronze man greatly excited over the treasure behind him, although it would undoubtedly total into the millions. Doc held no possessive interest in the trove. Like all of the moneys which he recovered in the course of his strange career of helping others out of trouble, this King John wealth would go to worthy charities, to the construction of hospitals, to the establishment of trust funds for the school of ambitious students.

Old Wehman Mills wanted to stay on the island and work with his dream of extracting gold from the sea. That could be arranged. And old Wehman Mills might succeed. Some day, some one would accomplish the feat. The ideas of Wehman Mills were not crackbrained, by any means.

Elaine, of course, would stay with her uncle. No doubt she would be a prominent figure in the flurry of newspaper publicity which was sure to come. Her features would photograph excellently.

Elaine had said little, so far. She was bitter toward Henry Trump, and with cause. True, she had shown a marked liking for the company of Doc Savage through the morning, a fact that had embarrassed the bronze man somewhat. There was no place for feminine entanglements in the perilous existence which he led.

Doc Savage glanced upward. The clouds had cleared away, except for the west, where they lay thick still.

Monk, standing in the middle of the treasure of King John, grinned widely and started a yawn. His big mouth froze suddenly in midstretch.

“Blazes!” he exploded. “I just thought of something funny.”

Doc eyed him questioningly.

“Since this thing started,” Monk explained, “there ain’t been a dang soul killed. Boy, are we getting efficient!”

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 *The Sea Magician* by Lester Dent (as Kenneth Robeson)]