

He Could Stop The World

A Doc Savage Adventure
#54

Kenneth Robeson
[Lawrence Donovan]
1937

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DOC SAVAGE'S AMAZING CREW

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

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

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

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

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

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

Books by Kenneth Robeson

THE MAN OF BRONZE
THE THOUSAND-HEADED MAN
METEOR MENACE
THE POLAR TREASURE
BRAND OF THE WEREWOLF
THE LOST OASIS
THE MONSTERS
THE LAND OF TERROR
THE MYSTIC MULLAH
THE PHANTOM CITY
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QUEST OF QUI
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THE GREEN EAGLE
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DEATH IN SILVER
THE MYSTERY UNDER THE SEA

THE DEADLY DWARF
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MERCHANTS OF DISASTER
THE GOLD OGRE
THE MAN WHO SHOOK THE
EARTH
THE SEA MAGICIAN
THE MAN WHO SMILED NO MORE
THE MIDAS MAN
LAND OF LONG JUJU
THE FEATHERED OCTOPUS
THE SEA ANGEL
DEVIL ON THE MOON
HAUNTED OCEAN
THE VANISHER
THE MENTAL WIZARD
HE COULD STOP THE WORLD

HE COULD
STOP THE WORLD

A DOC SAVAGE ADVENTURE

BY KENNETH ROBESON

HE COULD STOP THE WORLD

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Chapter I

RAIN OF DEATH

THE shining, metal ball fell from the sky. Its terrific impact obliterated a humble citizen of Texas. The ball cracked the cement and buried itself many feet in the ground.

José Pandrosa was walking near the Alamo. Probably he was the first to meet death by the shining ball. Women screamed and fell down. Men swore and lost the red heat from their faces.

As shuddering witnesses saw it, nothing remained of Pandrosa. His body was now scarcely more than a blot of blood where he had been standing a moment before. It was fortunate for society José Pandrosa was humble. Important only to his family.

The arrival of the metal ball was the first indication of the disastrous explosion that had taken place in the stratosphere.

Other pieces of metal started raining down. They fell over an area of many square miles. Other persons fortunately escaped a direct hit. A few of the metallic objects ripped into residences of San Antonio.

A newspaperman was walking near the Alamo. He witnessed the obliteration of José Pandrosa. The reporter looked up into the burning blue of the Texas sky.

“Randolph’s sky ship!” he shouted. “Look! There’s more stuff coming down! His *Silver Cylinder*’s exploded!”

There was more shocked horror over this announcement than at the terrible death of José Pandrosa. Citizens instinctively ducked for the doors of taller buildings.

Nearly everyone had been reading of Professor Homer Randolph. Only twenty-four hours before, his marvelous *Silver Cylinder* had taken off for a fifth flight into the stratosphere. The scientist had come to be recognized as America’s foremost explorer of the upper atmosphere.

Professor Randolph had established the unbelievable height record of forty-one and a half miles above the earth.

Within a few minutes after the striking of the metal ball, the wires and the radio from San Antonio were hot with the news. By this time it had been ascertained that many parts of the great *Silver Cylinder* had struck the earth.

Some of the pieces were partly fused, as if by terrific heat. This might have been from the explosion itself. Or it might have been caused by the tremendous friction of the miles of descent.

Some fifteen minutes after José Pandrosa died, another ball struck inside the walls of the old Alamo itself. But this had been attached to a small parachute.

The parachute ball was hollow and could be divided. From it were taken several delicate scientific instruments.

Shortly thereafter it was announced to the world that Professor Randolph had attained a height of fifty miles when something had happened.

The shock of the news was made greater by the knowledge that forty-two well-known scientists and scholars had accompanied Professor Randolph on this catastrophic ascent. It was taken for granted all the party had been blown to atoms.

THE fate of one man aboard the *Silver Cylinder* might not have interested the world at large so much. But news of the explosion brought the greatest shock to five of the world's most remarkable men.

William Harper Littlejohn had been among the scientists on board Professor Randolph's stratosphere ship. While he was not a publicized figure, among the most learned archæologists and geologists William Harper Littlejohn was perhaps known as the world's leading authority.

Yet for all his erudition and the row of letters he might have placed after his name, William Harper Littlejohn was known to five companions as "Johnny."

The leader of the five men who were the most grieved by news of the explosion in the stratosphere had been apparently the last man on earth to have contact with Professor Randolph's *Silver Cylinder*.

When the stratosphere ship had attained a height of twenty-five miles, a shortwave radio receiver had crackled out a summons in a big laboratory. This was an amazing room. It contained hundreds of devices, the results of experiments which others in the world's best laboratories were only beginning to attempt.

And more remarkable even than the hundreds of appliances about him was the man who manipulated the radio dials to the proper wave band. He was perhaps a head taller than the average tall man on the street.

The skin of his face and hands was of the smoothest bronze. This was the deep coloring of years of tropical sun and Arctic wind. The hair, also, was bronze, of a little lighter shade, and fitted smoothly like a mask.

This man had an intensity in his flake-gold eyes. At times, it seemed as if small whirlwinds of thought were mirrored in them. As he faced the shortwave radio dials and the message came from William Harper Littlejohn, a rare, trilling sound filled the great laboratory.

This did not seem to come from the man's lips. It was more like a vibration emanating from his whole amazing body.

For the man was Clark Savage, Jr., known to his companions and to thousands of others as Doc Savage.

"Yes, Johnny," he replied to the radio voice.

"This is Johnny, Doc," came from the radio. "We are now twenty-five miles up. Professor Randolph declares he will double that. I have observed that he——"

There was no shock. No loud crackling or other disturbances. Johnny's voice simply ceased speaking. The power of his sending apparatus might have been cut off. Though Doc stayed by the dials for several hours, no further communication came from the stratosphere.

IN the laboratory with Doc Savage at this time was Major Thomas J. Roberts, otherwise known as "Long Tom." He was the electrical wizard of the group.

"Something's happened to Johnny, Long Tom," Doc stated. "Or perhaps there was trouble with the power of the stratosphere ship. We shall soon have news of it."

"I don't care much myself for getting my feet that far off the ground," replied Long Tom. "But Johnny would go anywhere, if he thought he could find some new element."

Long Tom was a little man. His skin was pallid. His thinness suggested he might fall over any minute with some mortal illness. But, in reality, he was as tough as rawhide, and could handle half a dozen men bigger than himself.

Doc Savage started checking his record of Professor Randolph's present flight. The ascent had been made from a wide plain of the Trinity River. This was between the rival Texas cities of Forth Worth and Dallas.

Great public acclaim had accompanied the take-off. Professor Randolph's *Silver Cylinder* was not the balloon type of stratosphere ship. Its long, cigar-shaped envelope contained many compartments of noninflammable gas.

Besides this lifting power, the ship had other secret motive forces which could propel it upward at tremendous speed. Originally, Doc Savage had advised Professor Randolph concerning the construction of a new type of explosive air-force chambers.

Doc Savage had been a close friend of Professor Randolph for a number of years. The stratosphere scientist was youthful, in his early thirties. Somewhat like Doc, he had devoted his lifetime to scientific studies.

Hours had passed since Johnny's interrupted message.

Suddenly, Doc's big radio on the standard broadcast interrupted a musical program to announce:

SPECIAL NEWS BULLETIN FROM SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS. THE STRATOSPHERE SHIP OF PROFESSOR HOMER RANDOLPH, WITH FORTY-TWO NOTED PERSONS ABOARD, IS REPORTED DESTROYED BY AN EXPLOSION FIFTY MILES ABOVE THE EARTH. ALL ARE BELIEVED TO HAVE PERISHED. THE SHIP ASCENDED TWENTY-SIX HOURS AGO FROM NORTHERN TEXAS NEAR FORT WORTH. MORE DETAILS LATER.

"Johnny!" said Long Tom, in an awed voice. "This is terrible, Doc! Do you suppose there could be any chance?"

"There is always the chance of first reports being erroneous," stated Doc calmly. "Though I feared something was amiss when Johnny's message was not completed."

The hope that the first reports might be incorrect was not realized. Too many fused parts of the *Silver Cylinder* were being found over a fifty-mile area to make it possible that those on the ship fifty miles up had survived.

During this time Doc Savage had no means of knowing that Professor Randolph's *Silver Cylinder* had made one mysterious descent between the time of its take-off in Northern Texas and its destruction twenty-six hours later. That temporary landing had been after Johnny's message to Doc had been interrupted.

AT the time he started his message, Johnny was in the radio room of Professor Randolph's ship. The operator made no objection to Johnny's desire to send a private communication.

Johnny had informed Doc they were twenty-five miles up, and had started to tell something of what he had observed. At that instant, a tall man appeared in the door of the radio room. His hand flicked a command.

The operator moved a switch. For several seconds, Johnny continued speaking, unaware he had been cut off. Then he saw the tall, blue-eyed man standing in the doorway.

Professor Homer Randolph was smiling. Though young, his face held many tiny wrinkles. But these seemed to be the marks of thought and humor.

"I deeply regret, Professor Littlejohn, but I had meant to announce no messages were to be sent at this time," he remarked. "Please don't be offended at being cut off."

"You will observe, Professor Randolph, by the continuing convolutions of my risibilities, that I am not suffering with the slightest frustration," stated Johnny solemnly, a twinkle in his eyes and a grin across a face that looked like skin drawn over the skull of a skeleton. "I was conversing with Doc."

Johnny never used simple words when more complicated language would serve.

Randolph continued smiling.

"I know of no one I would rather communicate with myself," he said. "Doc Savage, I believe, is the best friend I have on earth. I only hope he will understand something of what I am about to undertake."

"There isn't much of your experimentation that has eluded Doc's attention," said Johnny. "I would not be surprised if he could now describe about what we will encounter fifty miles up."

"Neither would I," instantly agreed Randolph. "But I imagine you will be surprised by something else later. For example, right now, I have given the word to descend."

"Well, I'll be superamalgamated!" exclaimed Johnny. "And I judge, from your attitude, you are not contemplating more extensive enlightenment?"

"I am keeping it somewhat of a secret," said Professor Randolph. "Some of my guests know of it and others do not. However, I am convinced all will be pleased."

WHETHER RANDOLPH'S scholarly guests would or would not be pleased, the professor was descending the great *Silver Cylinder* toward the earth.

The stratosphere ship, under perfect control, bumped to a stop in the midst of an uninhabited area. Randolph ordered his guests to disembark for a short time.

"Unless I am suffering with olfactory illusion, we are in the midst of the wide-open spaces, and I would judge, in Arizona," said Johnny to one of his companion scientists.

Tang of alkali and mesquite permeated the air. The *Silver Cylinder* rested easily on a vast plain. Gaunt-armed cactus reared like stripped ghosts against the night horizon.

Randolph came directly to Johnny.

“I want you, first of all, to know of my new plans,” he said pleasantly. “Because very soon I hope to have Doc Savage know and understand, and perhaps join with me in this venture.”

Professor Randolph talked rapidly, for perhaps five minutes. Until he had finished, Johnny made no comment. Now he spoke.

“Frankly, Professor Randolph, all this is the height of impossible fantasy. I could not coöperate to any degree. Should such an experiment be carried forward, you make it incumbent upon me to inform Doc. Perhaps some of your friends have deluded you into thinking such an absurdity may be possible.”

Randolph’s blue eyes still smiled pleasantly at Johnny.

“Think it over for a few minutes,” he advised, “while we are busy about our preparations.”

A few moments later, Johnny managed to separate himself from the others. Randolph and his own group of aids were clustered near the tail of the *Silver Cylinder*. Johnny observed that the radio operator was in the group.

Moving with infinite caution, Johnny slid into the stratosphere ship. In the radio room, he discovered the power was now on. He could only hope that the crackling of the shortwave band might not reach the ears of Randolph and his men too soon.

Johnny’s skeleton face wore a scornful grin. Privately, he believed Randolph’s successes must have gone to his head. Perhaps his overtaxed brain needed rest.

Anyway, this was something Doc Savage should know. Johnny had decided then he would slip away into the darkness. Even the wilderness of the Arizona desert must have trails he could follow. He believed several others would join him.

The shortwave tubes glowed with purple light. Johnny became intent on attempting to tune in on Doc’s special shortwave set.

“I feared as much,” came the quiet voice of Randolph behind him.

Chapter II

ASHES AT UNION SQUARE

BEFORE JOHNNY could turn or reply, he was enveloped in the shrouding folds of a black cloth. No doubt, the mild Professor Randolph knew something of the geologist's prowess.

Johnny's bony, elongated figure doubled and straightened. Both his knuckled fists found instant marks. Though he could not see, the geologist sensed the presence of half a dozen misguided persons who possibly had imagined he would be easily overpowered.

Somehow, he got a neck-and-leg hold on the nearest man. His bony arms tightened. The man howled. Tubes, condensers and other parts of the intricate radio splintered and crashed. The man Johnny had thrown from him swore in a most unscientific manner. He was picking bits of glass and wire out of his ears.

"It is to be regretted," came the still cool voice of Randolph, "but we must use other means, Professor Littlejohn."

The other means used was a blackjack. It hit the bony Johnny on the head. Johnny shuddered and sank down.

WHEN JOHNNY recovered, he was free of the shrouding cloth. His head buzzed abominably. His first thought was it had resulted from the stiff blow on the skull. His brain seemed to be aching from that.

But the buzzing was something else. Johnny noticed he was now in a compartment of the *Silver Cylinder* into which he had not before been admitted. Also, he found he was seated in a chair not greatly different from the execution spot in some States.

Close to Johnny's head two shining, coppery discs gave off a whirring buzz. They were whirling at incredible speed. Johnny made out several others of his companions in similar chairs. He noted they were those who had not been directly in Randolph's group of aids.

Randolph was standing close by. He was glancing at his watch and observing Johnny. Johnny passed up his long words this time.

"Perhaps before the electrocution, you will inform the prisoner what it is all about?" said Johnny sarcastically.

Randolph's mild, blue eyes smiled at him. He glanced again at his watch.

"The venture I was speaking about, Professor Littlejohn?" he said interrogatively. "Do you not now believe it would meet with amazing results?"

"Certainly," replied Johnny promptly. "I am in thorough agreement with your infinitely astounding promulgation. You can count on me for thorough coöperation. The possibilities are unlimited. When do we embark upon this enterprise?"

Apparently, the abrupt reversal of his attitude was no ruse on the part of Johnny. Nor did Professor Randolph indicate he suspected it might be such.

Randolph walked along, speaking with others who had opposed his announced experiment. All must have given the same agreement as Johnny. They were being released from the weird chairs.

The coppery discs beside each chair ceased to whirr.

“All along,” stated Johnny, “I have believed in a universal and supreme ebullition of power.”

No one replied. None was listening at the moment. Professor Randolph was snapping out orders. The explosive force of the *Silver Cylinder* was being turned on.

Within a few minutes, the stratosphere ship was again in the air. Its course was on an upward angle, which would carry it back from the Arizona desert toward the Texas sky from which it had detoured.

As the silver airship rose rapidly into the sky, Professor Randolph looked around him.

“This time,” he announced solemnly, “we shall remain on top of the world.”

Professor Randolph must have been mistaken. He and his companions failed to “stay on top of the world.”

In the weeks which had elapsed since the disappearance of William Harper Littlejohn in the stratosphere ship of Professor Randolph, Doc Savage’s companions had been somewhat scattered.

Colonel John Renwick, known as “Renny,” the big-fisted engineer, was in Japan on a project that was to make him a wealthy man, although in his own right Renny was a millionaire.

Brigadier General Theodore Marley Brooks, the Beau Brummell of the group, but known as “Ham,” was absent from Manhattan. When it came to lawyers, it was doubtful if any were smarter than Ham, and certainly none were better dressed.

With Ham was the ugliest and most likeable personage perhaps of all. He was Andrew Blodgett Mayfair, but because of his resemblance to the apes in the jungle, he was known as “Monk.” As for Monk, industrial chemistry owed him many great debts, he being one of the best chemists in the land.

At the present time, Ham and Monk were together in the same city. Ham was attending a convention of the American Bar Association of Lawyers. Monk was at another conference named The World Society of Chemists. Both conferences were in Salt Lake City.

Long Tom was the only one who was with Doc at the present time. He was busy working at Doc’s complicated radio system. On his face was a look of gloom. Something like permanent sorrow had come upon Doc and his companions since the apparent fate of Johnny.

Long Tom suddenly stepped back from the complicated system of knobs and dials on Doc’s special shortwave radio set. Long Tom’s hands jerked loose.

“Great Scott, Doc!” he exploded. “I got something then I wasn’t expecting! Now how in thunderation could the juice leak through like that?”

“Perhaps it wasn’t the electricity,” commented Doc. “I have been noticing the vibration needles for some time. If you will take a look at the television plate, you will observe some shadowy substance.”

Doc’s televisior was one of his first radio triumphs. He was possibly the first man in the world to make it possible to see the broadcaster of a message. However, this was limited to the special shortwave band employed by his own men and himself.

At this time, a shadow appeared to be moving across the slate-colored glass. For a time it looked as if it were the replica of a man’s hand. Then it took on what might have been a human face.

“Throw the switch over to the amateur shortwave band,” Doc suddenly directed Long Tom. “Perhaps some enthusiast has come close to our own set-up.”

As Long Tom threw the switch over, bringing in what might have been any amateur on his allotted and limited broadcasting wave, a blurred voice mumbled.

“Blub-blub-blub——” it went.

At the same time, the shadow in the televisior became more like a human face. The features, however, were indistinct. They appeared somewhat like a futuristic painting.

“Great Scott!” came from Long Tom, who did not often grow excited. “I thought I heard it say, ‘Doc Savage!’ ”

“You are correct, Long Tom. Perhaps I can clear it up.”

The voice cleared only enough for thickly mumbled words to become intelligible. The bronze giant had the world’s keenest auditory sense. For years, his ears had been trained by a special scale-sounding instrument of his own devising.

At this time, he could make out words where Long Tom heard only the confused mumbling.

“Doc Savage—Union Square—eight o’clock to-night—affects millions—you will hear later—reception will be clearer—Doc—I—will tell——”

Whatever the voice out of the mysterious distance would tell was lost in strident static. But throughout the laboratory trilled the sound of surprise, of danger, of concentration. Only when something greatly stirred Doc’s emotions was this rare, indefinable trilling to be heard.

“What is it, Doc?” said Long Tom. “I couldn’t make head or tail of the voice.”

“Long Tom, no radio voice ever came from occult forces, so far as science has ever determined,” Doc stated quietly. “But only just now I came to believe Johnny is not dead. He did not perish on Professor Randolph’s ship.”

Long Tom gulped.

“We shall go to Union Square this evening at eight o’clock,” said Doc. “This could be some amateur broadcaster attempting his crude idea of a joke, but I believe it is serious.”

It is said that “anything can happen, and usually does” in Manhattan’s Union Square.

Over in one corner of the Square a group with banners held a place. A youth was on a box. His words and the banners indicated this group were backers of one of several forms of social security.

The Square was unusually crowded. More than the customary number of citizens seemed to have been drawn here to-night. Doc's keen ears caught the remark of a woman in a group close by.

"I was on the amateur shortwave, an' I heard a funny message to Doc Savage," she was saying. "I hope I do get to see that man. I've heard so much about him."

From the increasing number of people, it seemed that every radio fan on the amateur shortwave band had hurried to Union Square for a possible glimpse of the noted bronze adventurer.

Doc Savage searched the crowd with his flake-gold eyes. In all this milling Manhattan throng he was seeking something which even Long Tom did not suspect.

The banners of the group advocating its form of social security jutted above the heads of a score of persons. More than a hundred others were surrounding this box.

Near Doc and Long Tom a tall, pale-faced old man had taken up his stand. Before him a huge, long telescope was set upon a brass-legged tripod. The telescope pointed directly at one of the brightest stars.

Doc noted this was Jupiter, then in its ascendancy. The night was unusually clear. Jupiter glowed plainly.

Doc was watching, listening to the human movement and muttering of voices throughout the Square. His eyes turned back often to the thin, tall old man with his pointed telescope.

Business either was poor, or the telescope man was making no great effort to gain patronage. The man seemed more interested in the social security meeting.

A young woman was replacing the youth who had been speaking.

Doc Savage said nothing to Long Tom. He remained motionless. Only a score or more persons nearest him looked up and around quickly. Perhaps they imagined some rare, tropical bird had escaped and flown to Union Square.

From Doc was coming the note of sudden concentration, or of possible impending danger. His eyes whipped from the young woman to the old man beside the telescope.

Doc stood motionless, waiting. He was not sure what he was waiting for, but the very good-looking young woman now smiling from the speaker's box a few yards away was well known to him.

And she was Ann Garvin, herself a professor of sociology. This simple fact would not thus have riveted the bronze man to attention. What held him was knowing that Ann Garvin had been betrothed to Professor Homer Randolph up to the time his stratosphere ship had blown itself to bits.

"Be prepared for some quick action," Doc advised Long Tom, in a low tone. "I am not sure just what is about to happen, but I still believe it may have a great deal to do with Johnny."

ANN GARVIN commenced speaking. Her voice was liquidly pleasing. It rang with the sincerity of her belief.

“Not all of us were created for work!” she asserted. “I believe there should be provision made by society for support of all its creative artists——”

The pretty young woman’s idea of a workless era—presumably for the class now surrounding her—elicited ringing cheers. The flamboyant banners were jostled and shaken in encouragement.

“The old man with the telescope apparently is not greatly interested in earning dimes,” said Doc to Long Tom.

“Looks more like some photographer trying to get a slant on the woman speaker,” commented Long Tom. “Perhaps he has a camera hidden in the telescope.”

The tall man beside the telescope had pushed away a woman who had just held out a dime. He was slowly bringing the lense of the telescope lower. The instrument now seemed to point directly at the attractive Ann Garvin.

Doc touched Long Tom’s arm and started to glide slowly toward the speaker’s box. He accomplished this with the movement of a jungle cat. Though there was a crowd, none touched him and he touched no one.

The old telescope man appeared to have a sudden interest in all the social security group. He was applying one eye to the telescope, as if bringing the speaker and her cheering supporters closer.

For an instant, Ann Garvin hesitated in her speech. She stood perfectly motionless. She was a tall and striking blonde. If she could have held that pose, a sculptor would have been delighted.

But abruptly Ann Garvin threw out her hands.

“It’s all silly, ridiculous nonsense!” she cried out. “We cannot hope to accomplish anything in life without working for it! Suppose some are artistic, creative? If they cannot earn their own recognition, they do not deserve it——”

Doc Savage had halted. He stood, with Long Tom beside him, close to the pointed telescope.

Long Tom, who usually had little humor, drawled laughingly, “I would say the speaker has sure taken a woman’s privilege to change her mind. Doc, that is very odd. The crowd’s taking to her new line.”

It was extremely odd.

“That’s what we all want!” voices were shouting. “If we hope to get anywhere, we’ve got to work for it! Hey! Throw down the banners! We’ll face things like they are!”

A big Irish policeman who had been listening looked as if he were about to lose his lower jaw. His big mouth gaped open. The brawny copper had seen many human vagaries demonstrated in Union Square. None had ever been more disconcerting than this.

“Shure, an’ it’s some kind of a trick!” he grumbled.

He shouldered toward the speaker’s box. All the crowd had sensed something new—something beyond their understanding. Banners which had demanded workless

security for a definite class were being trampled underfoot.

DOC SAVAGE halted abruptly, waiting. His hand touched Long Tom's arm. His eyes were upon the old man with the telescope. The bronze giant apparently had an inner warning of something even more startling to take place.

Police were attempting to form a ring about Ann Garvin and her group. They were not sure what had happened, but they had seen mob violence break often from slighter origins than this.

Clearly, above the muttering of the crowd, the shuffling of many feet, a Voice spoke calmly. It might have been transmitted through the old man's telescope. Or it might have come from some other spot.

"Ann Garvin! You have become the first of a new and changing order! You do not understand, but you will be a leader in controlling a movement of vast benefit to society!"

Ann Garvin's lips still moved, but they made no sound. Standing on the box, yellow hair blowing a little, she was a queenly figure. One hand fluttered to her throat. A little scream of unbelieving bewilderment came from her.

"Homer! Homer! It can't be—it isn't you?"

"It is I, Ann!" announced the Voice quite clearly in the sudden hush over the crowd.

"Alive! Homer—Professor Randolph is alive!" cried Ann Garvin, springing from the box. "Where are you, Homer?"

Doc Savage at this instant caught Long Tom's shoulders in his strong hands. He lifted the lighter man, hurling him far to one side.

Doc himself moved with the gliding speed of a jungle animal avoiding the blow of an enemy. Nearly all the crowd had surged toward Ann Garvin and her group.

Three persons, two men and a woman were standing close to the old man and his telescope. The space about them was temporarily clear. It was away from the telescope Doc had so swiftly removed himself and Long Tom.

Doubtless none had felt the tingling which had suddenly flashed over Doc's highly sensitized body. This could have been the emanation of something like an electrical current. But it was different.

Voices shouted hoarsely now. There was no explosion. Not so much as a flash of light appeared. The persons around Ann Garvin were still centering their attention upon what might be happening to the striking young woman.

"What the hell an' all?" roared the big Irish policeman. "Hey, there, you! Get back!"

The copper's mouth dropped open again. He may have imagined he was yelling at the man with the telescope. But he had been addressing nothing but a small cloud of vaporish blue which had arisen around this man and the three persons nearest him.

"What happened, Doc?" jerked out Long Tom, pulling himself to his feet. "Great Scott! Look at that!"

Long Tom could now understand Doc's action. They had been the closest in the crowd to the others standing near the huge, old telescope.

Now there was no telescope. The blue vapor drifted quickly upward and was dispelled. The swearing Irish policeman had his service revolver in one hand. Perhaps he imagined some one had set off a gas bomb.

But no odor came from the vanishing little cloud of blue vapor. The light breeze tore it quickly to wisps that hung a few seconds and vanished.

"The old man is gone," breathed Long Tom. "Doc, there were some others there!"

The revolver in the Irish copper's hand was shaking up and down. The policeman was momentarily transfixed. Then he got hold of himself with a yell of authority.

"Alla yuh stay back! Keep movin' now!"

THIS command was hardly needed. Horrified cries broke out. Screams and oaths mingled. These came from those nearest where the telescope had stood on its tripod.

On the pavement were four small heaps of blowing gray ashes. The breeze caught these. The ash was rising. Those nearest cried out in fear and pushed their weight against others to escape the touch of these ashes.

One small heap of ash was where the old man had operated his telescope. The other three marked the spots where two men and a woman had stood. The bluish cloud had enveloped these four.

Doc Savage, Long Tom and the policeman were the three who had been watching. They knew better than the others that none of the four had come out of that cloud.

The policeman looked at the gray ashes. He started blowing his whistle. Fellow coppers elbowed toward him.

Even the ashes were drifting away. Not even a metal object remained. It would be a long time before the Bureau of Missing Persons would confirm the identity of the three citizens who had stood beside the man with the telescope.

Chapter III

LOST RADIO WAVES

DOC SAVAGE lingered only a matter of seconds near the gruesome gray ashes. He whirled, whipped into the crowd around Ann Garvin.

Long Tom followed the bronze man closely. The throng was closely packed. Doc did not seem to employ violence. His hands did not fall roughly on any person. But his massive, cabled arms became a smoothly moving wedge which opened the way to the blond young woman.

The greater part of the crowd had not witnessed the weird disappearance of the telescope and the dissolution of four persons. Most of the crowd could not understand why a few had suddenly become a small, fear-maddened mob seeking only escape from Union Square.

Police whistles shrilled. A number of hoodlums scattered here and there saw their opportunity. The sudden confusion gave them an opportunity for picking pockets. The police had their hands full.

Women screamed. Already, sirens were sounding in streets off the square. Emergency riot squads were arriving.

Two men appeared suddenly beside Ann Garvin. They were well dressed and had the appearance of dignified, intelligent citizens. One of these men caught the woman by an arm.

“Come with us quickly,” he said, in a low voice. “Professor Randolph sent us to bring you.”

“Homer sent you?” said Ann Garvin. “Then it’s all right.”

A taxicab had pulled up to the edge of the milling crowd. The two men had come from this vehicle. They started back toward the taxicab, with Ann Garvin walking willingly between them.

Doc Savage had changed the direction of his movements.

“Long Tom, move our sedan up to the nearest corner,” he instructed. “Hold it there.”

THE two men escorting Ann Garvin were smiling pleasantly.

“What is it all about?” said the young woman. “The world has believed Homer—Professor Randolph—died in his ship.”

“We cannot explain here,” said one of the men. “We are only obeying Professor Randolph’s instructions. He is here in Manhattan. His voice came to you by radio transmission.”

If Ann Garvin had known of the astounding annihilation of four persons and the strange telescope, she might have been more suspicious. She had been too closely

surrounded to observe this horror.

The driver of the taxicab was sitting rigidly upright in his seat. The men did not seem to think it unusual that he did not move to open the door. One of the pair preceded Ann Garvin.

The young woman was permitted to enter the cab ahead of her companions. She seated herself suddenly. No outcry of warning came from her.

There was hardly time to have given the two men a hint that all was not well inside the taxicab. Each man must have felt as though a numbing fire had shot into his skull from the back of his neck.

These men were of excellent physique and of good size. But they were lifted into the taxicab as easily as if they had been small boys. Though their hands flailed a little at first, they did no damage.

Doc Savage deposited both men on the floor of the taxi. The nerve pressure he had employed would keep them asleep for perhaps a couple of hours.

“Do not cry out, Professor Garvin,” said Doc quietly to the gasping young woman. “I believe you made only a natural mistake. I imagine you were informed by these men that they would take you to Professor Randolph.”

“Doc Savage!” exclaimed Ann Garvin. “What are you doing here? Yes, they were taking me to Homer. I think you have made a great mistake.”

“Mistakes are always possible, Professor Garvin. But in this case, the chance of error seemed to be worth taking. Four persons died in the crowd near you to-night.”

“That’s impossible!” declared Ann Garvin. “And if they did, how could that affect this strange revelation that came to me to-night?”

“I fear the two matters are very closely related,” stated Doc. “If Professor Randolph is living—and I believe he may be—he did not send these men to you. You will come with me. I am expecting a message of great importance in a short time.”

One of Doc’s hands had been touching the back of the taxi driver’s neck. The hackman shook his head a little, as if he had been sleeping. He looked greatly bewildered.

“Around the first corner into Fourteenth Street,” commanded Doc. “You will then take your other passengers wherever they may want to go.”

“O. K., boss,” grunted the very hazy driver.

“I think it best to permit these men to go for the present,” Doc said. “No doubt we shall hear from them again, and very quickly.”

Long Tom had Doc’s sedan in motion. The taxi driver did not know he had been put into a peculiar state of mind. He was an honest, law-abiding driver. If he had not been partly hypnotized by the man of bronze, he would not have started driving around town with two apparently dead men in his cab.

Doc was keeping a sharp lookout as Long Tom swung the sedan toward the brilliantly glittering tower in one of Manhattan’s towering skyscrapers.

In another sedan, several men must have had the greatest respect for Doc’s uncanny perceptions. They did not attempt to tail the bronze man’s car closely. Instead, their car

slipped into another block. The driver was also headed toward the skyscraper with its needlelike tower.

“What can it all mean?” said Ann Garvin to Doc. “I know now Homer must be alive. But that is not the queerest part of it. He always wanted me to give up my ideas for social security of creative artists. I could not see it his way. But to-night, as I was speaking, new words and new ideas came to me.”

“Then you have not changed your belief?” questioned Doc.

“That’s the strangest angle of it all, Doc Savage. I do not understand how I could ever have believed differently from Homer. He was absolutely right.”

“Perhaps,” said Doc reflectively. “But did you notice that all those to whom you were speaking had also changed their minds about what they were seeking?”

“It all happened so quickly,” murmured Ann Garvin. “Do you believe I will hear from Homer again? I have never had any faith in spiritualism.”

“The source of Professor Randolph’s voice was not of the occult,” Doc advised. “We will hear from him again, very shortly.”

ANN GARVIN had never before been in Doc Savage’s headquarters. The young woman professor was gasping over the forest of gleaming devices in Doc’s laboratory. Doc had glided to a telephone in the reception room. He called a number uptown.

A woman’s voice replied. As soon as Doc had spoken, the voice trilled with excitement.

“You want me to come right away? I’m all dressed to go out! Where are we going? I hope it’s something terrible! When do we start?”

Doc smiled patiently as the voice ran on. It was useless for even Doc to attempt to bottle up this young woman’s exuberance.

The young woman was in an ornate Park Avenue apartment. Near this, she conducted an exclusive beauty-and-physical-culture parlor. She would have given the business to the first person she met, if Doc Savage had consented to permit her to join his group of adventurers permanently.

The young woman was Patricia Savage, Doc’s cousin. She was an attractive golden blonde, in many features resembling her famous cousin. She resembled him most in her ready wit and dauntless courage.

“You are not going anywhere, Pat,” Doc assured her. “It happens that you know Professor Ann Garvin quite well, and she is here. She may be detained for some time, and you will be her companion. Something’s going to happen pretty soon and——”

“I’ll be along as quick as a taxi can get me there!” interrupted Pat Savage.

Doc smiled quietly. He was aware that even police lines could not have kept Pat from arriving at his headquarters.

“Do you think there is a possibility of contacting Homer?” asked Ann Garvin. “All this seems fantastic. His *Silver Cylinder* was destroyed. None of the others with him have come back. It was weeks ago!”

“Nothing could be more fantastic than your own mind,” stated Doc. “You do not find yourself changing your beliefs again?”

“Indeed I do not!” said Ann Garvin emphatically. “I know Homer was right!”

DOC said nothing. His smooth, bronze hands with their cabled wrists were manipulating dials and switches of his amazing shortwave radio and televisior.

From the wall came a sudden, strident whining. This was part of the alarm system that informed Doc or his men when visitors from the outside were anywhere on the eighty-sixth floor.

Into what had appeared to be merely a wall panel sprang a beautiful face. It was framed by neatly waved golden hair.

“Patricia!” exclaimed Ann Garvin.

Doc caused the intervening doors to open without replying or changing his position before the radio dials. Someone was trying to come through with a message. Doc pulled the televisior switch.

Ann Garvin gasped as the face appeared in the slate-colored glass. Certainly it resembled nothing human. It was more as if some jungle gorilla had suddenly found a means of connecting with Doc’s radio.

“It’s Monk!” exclaimed Pat Savage, who had come in. “Tell him I’m glad to see his handsome features, Doc!”

Monk began to speak.

“Doc, Ham an’ me are makin’ a hop over to Seattle, an’ we wanted to find out if there’s been any word of Johnny?”

“Nothing definite, Monk,” replied Doc. “But I hope to have some important news before long. Stay with the plane until I can again make contact.”

“Come on, you missing link!” snapped a sharp, penetrating voice. “Let someone talk to Doc who knows how!”

“You Park Avenue dude! You shyster mouthpiece! You don’t never do nothin’ but talk, daggonit!”

Ann Garvin stared at the radio and back to Pat. Pat smiled appreciatively.

“You might judge they would murder each other, but they are as inseparable as the Siamese twins,” said Pat.

A lean, ascetic face replaced Monk’s in the slate-colored glass. The nose was slightly arched, and the eyes were keen. This was Ham.

“We are flying a few miles northwest of Reno, Doc,” stated Ham. “Expect to make Seattle within a few hours. Mountains are foggy, but we are on the passenger plane radio beam from Reno to Portland. No, wait, Doc!”

The grumble of bickering between Ham and Monk came faintly. Ham returned.

“Have checked and find we are close to the peaks of Mount Lassen and Mount Shasta in the High Sierras,” advised Ham. “Visibility very poor. Fog seems to have no top or bottom. Will remain in contact and——”

“Howlin’ blazes!” came Monk’s voice, in a childlike squeal. “The snow on that mountain’s burning! Tell Doc that——”

Something crackled like an explosion of electrical static. Ham’s face disappeared from the television. The excited speech of Monk ceased abruptly.

Doc whirled the dials. All the tubes might have been blown out. Then a shrill static began to sound. This kept up for several seconds. It stopped, also.

Doc glided over to the standard radio set. He turned the knobs, but nothing happened. In half a minute, he had ascertained that none of the fuses had blown out. The power had not varied.

Nothing was mechanically wrong with the radio.

The modern wave contacts with the outside world had simply ceased to exist.

“WHAT could it be?” asked Ann Garvin. “Do you think this could have anything to do with Homer’s message to-night?”

“I have no doubt but this interruption of the radio has much to do with to-night’s peculiar circumstances,” Doc stated. “I have ascertained that some irresistible power has taken the place of all the long and short waves on which radio communication depends.”

“That would be a catastrophe of world importance,” suggested Patricia Savage hopefully. “And we will get in on it.”

Her cheerful tone implied, “Where do we go from here?”

Chapter IV

MESSAGE FROM THE DEAD

DOC SAVAGE lifted one bronzed hand. Patricia's enthusiastic hope for some disaster in which she might play a part was instantly stilled.

Static was again coming through on the shortwave. Because its switch had been left on, the same static was apparent in the standard broadcast instrument.

Doc manipulated the control dials. The light jumped from the shortwave to the long-wave weather band. It went back to the standard broadcasting wave, then up to the shortwave for foreign stations.

Doc's flake-gold eyes were whirlwinds of concentration. He pushed the light into the ship area, into the aircraft zone and over to police and amateur waves.

The increasing static was unchanged on any band. This was something hitherto unknown.

"It would seem," stated Doc, "the radios have been plunged into some universal wave or interference which none of the recognized waves of communication can overcome. Ordinary radio transmission is in the power of some greater force."

As if in response to Doc's amazing statement, words came simultaneously from the shortwave set and the standard broadcast instrument.

"I can pick you up on any wave," stated a calm, unhurried voice. *"No doubt, you can identify me."*

"It's Homer!" cried Ann Garvin. "What can it mean?"

"Doc Savage, others are listening, but your special televisor can pick me out," the voice went on.

Doc had already slid the switch of the televisor into the open notch. Ann Garvin emitted a gulping sob of happiness and unbelief.

The good-humored, smiling features of Professor Homer Randolph appeared in the slate-colored glass. His features and his tone were as controlled as if he were not now performing one of the most astounding feats of which the world had ever known.

"I am now talking to all the world listening to the English language over the radio," announced Randolph. *"There will be no waves of any length in service until the exact hour of midnight where I now am. That will be five hours from now. At that time, I will have a vital message for all the people of the world. That is all."*

The voice stopped speaking. The slate-colored glass instantly ceased to mirror the face of Professor Randolph.

Doc Savage whipped to the telephone. Seldom did the man of bronze have to wait for the putting through of a call. This moment was different.

Thousands of switchboard operators were trying to untangle a multiplicity of calls coming in from outside the zone of dial telephones.

Dial instruments everywhere were clicking. Radio fans from everywhere were calling radio stations, repair men, the police, anyone they could think of at the moment.

Perhaps no other man in Manhattan could have contacted the commissioner of police as quickly as Doc. After a half minute of conversation, Doc turned to Ann Garvin and Pat.

“There is no doubt but that Professor Randolph is alive,” he stated. “This means the others with him have survived. All this throttling and control of the radio waves is beyond all human comprehension. It is unprecedented in my own experience.”

Doc gazed thoughtfully at the now-silent radios. Lights showed power still flowed through their wires, but they were dead.

“Long Tom is taking quite a while to put away the car,” said Doc.

LONG TOM had driven Doc’s armored sedan down a slanting concrete apron. This was adjacent to the headquarters skyscraper. It was the ramp leading to Doc’s underground garage.

This subterranean storage place contained some remarkable motors. Their tires were punctureproof. Bullets could not penetrate their special alloy bodies or their glass. Engines were of superspeed and supersilence.

About these cars were innumerable devices for resisting attack and frustrating pursuit. The doors of the garage closed by a photo-electric eye.

Something had happened to Long Tom. The pallid little man was usually tight-lipped. He was level-headed and laconic. Somewhat like Doc, he wasted no words.

Long Tom was now seated on the running board of the sedan inside the garage. The doors from the ramp had automatically closed and locked. But Long Tom appeared to be in a strange state of mind. He was talking aloud to himself.

“If I didn’t know it was impossible,” he muttered, “I would believe someone was in here with me. There isn’t any one here but me, though.”

At the moment Long Tom gave forth this puzzling observation, a strident, whining noise filled Doc’s big laboratory. It came from what appeared to be only a gnarled and polished panel in the wood of the wall.

Ann Garvin, whose nerves were probably on edge, cried out sharply.

“It’s only Doc’s alarm system,” stated Pat Savage. “I hope it is something which will cause us to go somewhere.”

Under the panel several indicators were quivering. The swinging of one told Doc intruders had entered the underground garage. The alarm would not have worked unless Long Tom had locked the doors. This automatically set the alarm device.

Or perhaps Long Tom had failed to reach the garage. The matter of the radio had kept Doc tied up.

“Wait here and permit no one to enter,” instructed Doc.

The man of bronze whipped through the big reception room. He disregarded the phalanx of elevators. Entering his own high-speed elevator, he shot downward.

This elevator seemed to fall all eighty-six floors before there was the slightest checking of its speed. Doc caught his own weight on his massive, springy legs and was out of the door before the elevator had quit moving.

Doc entered his underground garage through a secret door. He was instantly alert. The ramp doors were standing open. All but one light had been cut off.

Under this light Long Tom sat on the running board of the sedan he had driven into the garage. The pallid electrician held his face in his hands. Mumbling speech spilled through his fingers.

Doc moved noiselessly, with infinite caution.

“What happened, Long Tom?” he asked, in a low voice. “Who has been in here with you?”

Long Tom raised his head and stared at Doc. But he made no reply. Doc deliberately spoke louder, making his speech seem as if he suspected nothing wrong.

“I came down, Long Tom, because I have some good news,” said Doc. “Professor Randolph has just contacted us over the radio. It means that Johnny is alive. All the radios in the world were cut off for a little while.”

Long Tom did not move from his place on the running board.

“What about it?” he snapped, in a tone none had ever heard the mild little man use before. “If Johnny can’t keep out of trouble, that’s his own affair. I’m tired of mixing up in the business of other people. This radio thing now, that isn’t any of your business, Doc, or mine!”

DOC’S keen senses were taking in all the surroundings. His brain was grappling with this new angle to the night’s weird happenings. Ann Garvin had changed her mind on social security while making a speech.

All the radio waves had been brought under a mysterious, perhaps a sinister influence. Now Long Tom.

The man of bronze did not betray outwardly his surprise at Long Tom’s demeanor. Watching and listening, he continued to talk.

“This affair of the radio waves is perhaps the greatest problem we have ever encountered,” he stated, speaking so his voice might carry. “Not only is Johnny involved in some way, but my good friend, Professor Randolph, seems to have control of this universal force. Your own knowledge of electrical energy will probably be called upon before we begin to solve the queer angles of this.”

“I don’t intend to get myself mixed up in any more messes!” said Long Tom, still snappishly. “You’ve got us into all kinds of trouble! I’ve been wanting to take a vacation for a long time! I think I will spend a few months in Bermuda!”

Doc Savage had ceased to listen now. He had become a shadow flowing along a wall toward the open door of the garage. The sound he had detected, the odor he had picked up, would have escaped any other man in the world.

Two men were standing in the darkness on the sloping ramp. Doc took them in from head to foot. Neither was of the type to be expected as associating with

crookedness. The men were well dressed, and their faces denoted keen intelligence.

Just then, though neither man moved his hands, a faint, far-away whirring sound came to Doc's ears. Doc was upon the men with the speed of a striking python. Both men jerked around.

Doc was caught by a queer and passing emotion he could not define. It was something that suddenly caused him to withhold a double grip that would have temporarily removed both men from active interest in their surroundings.

One man slipped away from him. Doc's fingers curled along the other man's neck. This man was quick, also. Doc was forced to snap up one fist in a sharp blow to the chin, in order to retain the hold seeking the great nerve at the base of the man's brain.

The man was sinking to his knees. A guttural shout came from his companion. Some instinct sent Doc leaping backward. Only his jump, quick as a missile thrown from a steel spring, got him inside the garage doors in time.

From the spot where Doc had stood arose a small cloud of blue vapor. The wind up the ramp caught the vapor and it was swiftly dissipated. Doc stood motionless. He was looking at two glowing heaps of white ashes.

There did not remain even a small metal object, a button or other small appurtenance that might have been carried by the two men. Doc held his place, watching until every vestige of the white ashes had been picked up by the wind.

The man of bronze could judge from what had occurred, that the ruthlessness of this incredible menace was as ready to destroy its own agents as other persons. He came to the quick conclusion that the mysterious force just applied had been meant to obliterate him.

DOC glided back to Long Tom. The pallid electrician had displayed no interest whatever in what Doc might have been doing.

"We'll go up to headquarters, Long Tom, and talk things over," suggested Doc. "Everything seems to be cleaned up down here."

"I think I will go home!" snapped Long Tom. "If I go up there, something will happen to get me mixed up in trouble! I've got my mind set on going to Bermuda!"

Doc refrained from further verbal argument. The man of bronze never engaged in an altercation with his men or any other person. On those personal matters where there was no agreement, he always kept his thoughts to himself.

However, Long Tom accompanied Doc to the eighty-sixth floor. It was accomplished so swiftly in Doc's private elevator that none would have known that Long Tom was wholly unconscious.

Doc had applied a quick nerve-deadening grip that had ended Long Tom's opposition instantly.

All doors of Doc's headquarters were standing open when he entered the room. Whining noises came from the alarm system inside the huge laboratory. This indicated some visitor had entered by other than the customary entrances.

This might have been through any of several passages leading through the walls of the immense skyscraper. Doc Savage had been one of the designers of the building.

There was no evidence of a struggle.

Patricia Savage and Ann Garvin had disappeared. It was apparent they might have departed by the regular elevators. An operator confirmed this.

“Miss Savage and the other young woman were taken down with one man,” he stated. “The man was well dressed, black of hair and generally good in appearance. He was saying something about taking the strange young woman to a man named Randolph.”

Doc kept Long Tom close beside him. The electrician was in a daze brought about by numbed nerves. He was beginning to revive somewhat from Doc’s administrations.

Doc went back to his laboratory.

“Well have to take up the matter of Ann Garvin later, Long Tom,” he announced. “Pat is smart enough to possibly outwit this man. I am much surprised she was tricked.”

At the moment, he was thinking of Ann Garvin’s change of mind, of the queer condition of Long Tom. Perhaps Patricia Savage had been brought to change her mind, too.

“Pat’s always getting into things that aren’t any of her business,” declared Long Tom. “And why should we fool around with this Ann Garvin? I don’t like college professors, and I like them less when they go around making speeches on boxes.”

Doc ignored this increasing antagonism of Long Tom. For a time, the man of bronze made various adjustments about the special radio. The power remained on, but the deadness of the instrument seemed to lie wholly in the lack of waves whereby communication might be established.

“I’m not staying around here any longer,” announced Long Tom. “The next thing, we’ll be mixed up in this mess.”

LONG TOM started for the outside door. Doc intercepted the electrician. One bronze hand gently, but firmly, touched Long Tom’s neck.

The man of bronze followed this by administering an anaesthetic. This did not put Long Tom to sleep. Doc stood before him. His flake-gold eyes fixed his strangely rebellious companion.

“Long Tom,” he stated slowly, “we have a great problem to solve. Pat is in danger.”

“‘We have a great problem to solve,’” repeated Long Tom. “‘Pat is in danger.’”

“Very soon we may have a message which will be of vital interest to us, to the whole world,” said Doc. “You and I must go to work on this at once.”

“There will be a great problem,” muttered Long Tom. “You and I must go to work on it at once.”

Thereafter, Long Tom became tractable. Doc had discovered that the mysterious force he was opposing at least would yield to hypnotic influence. This suggested that the power itself might have something of a hypnotic effect.

But in the meantime, all radio power was dead. Until the message came from Professor Randolph, Doc felt he could make no movement or take no action to seek the whereabouts of Patricia and Ann Garvin.

The same influence which temporarily delayed action by Doc Savage had, at this same time, put two more of his companions in deadly peril.

Chapter V

WHEN THE SNOW BURNED

“LET me take those controls and quit pawing the instruments with those gorilla hands!” rapped a voice avid with sarcasm. “If you hadn’t started trying to repair the goniometer, probably it would have been all right. Now it’s out for good, and where are we?”

“If you hadn’t talked so much, you daggoned dude, I’d’ve had us outta here!” came an angry voice. “This fog’s thick enough for fish to go swimmin’ in!”

No uglier and no more competent figure ever slouched over the controls of a plane. The big machine was a special twin-motored job from Doc Savage’s hangar on the Hudson River. It was capable of a speed of nearly four hundred miles an hour.

At this moment, the hairy, low-browed, scowling man at the controls was holding the machine at a minimum speed of about seventy-five miles an hour. This was barely sufficient to keep it in the air.

Even this speed, which was just about good landing velocity, promised at any second to be disastrous. The pilot was Monk. His chief aid and most caustic critic was the impeccable Ham.

Ham was properly dressed in the trimmest of aviation rigs. Monk had been on a hike just before they took off, so he still wore old trousers stuffed into boots too big for him.

Though one of the world’s greatest industrial chemists, Monk could always contrive to disguise himself to appear much like some trained baboon.

Just now, the two were accusing each other of being responsible for their predicament. While Doc Savage hopefully awaited some spark to come from the dead radio in his headquarters, Ham and Monk believed at the moment all their troubles were concentrated in the failure of their own radio and the goniometer with which they had been following the passenger plane’s radio beam.

The beam was laid between Salt Lake City, Reno and Portland. Until Ham and Monk had sighted the fog-wreathed summits of Lassen and Shasta, their goniometer had been picking out only a series of dashes.

This instrument had a new-type amplifier devised by Doc. The continuing dashes proved they were in the blur of the A and N waves, which put them on the direct beam. Suddenly, there were no dashes. Then there were no dots.

Above, below, all around, the fog was a thick mistlike smoke. Through this, Monk had suddenly seen what looked like a burning mountain. The map identified it as Mount Shasta, highest of California’s peaks.

Monk had yelled, “The snow is burning!”

THIS seemed to be true. In the fog, the whole upper bulk of the mountain had taken on a crimson glow. At this season, the snow lay many feet deep on all of Mount Shasta's upper ranges and in the valleys.

"If you had headed straight for the coast as I wanted you to do, we wouldn't have gotten into this mess," declared the sarcastic Ham. "Perhaps you should have brought Habeas Corpus along. I don't like that pig, but at least he has some brains."

Habeas Corpus was Monk's pet Arabian hog. He was a queer creature with sail-like ears and incredibly long legs.

Monk failed to reply. The reason was ample. Out of the fog a mountain seemed to jump straight at the plane. Monk's quick roll and bank dumped Ham on one ear.

If the amphibian plane had not had retractable wheels, the landing gear would have been sheered off.

Monk's next few minutes of flying were a revelation, only they seemed to have no special destination. None but Doc Savage himself could have handled a plane like that.

Against the fog, the scarlet splash of the snow on the mountain created weird lights. Monk attempted to climb above the fog. There seemed to be no top. Along the thousands of feet of the Siskiyou Mountains, in which were situated Mount Lassen and Mount Shasta, the fog had no ceiling.

In flying language, this meant the fog was touching the ground at all points.

"Let me take those controls!" snapped Ham. "You just shaved that last rock needle! Have you gone crazy?"

"Not crazy enough to let some dude shyster smack me all up in a mess of mountain!" squealed Monk. "Blazes, Ham! Whadda you suppose makes that snow look like fire?"

The fog persisted. Because of the uncanny condition of the snow on Mount Shasta, it afforded Monk's only point of location. Avoiding many traps of canyons and jutting shoulders, he kept the plane circling.

"If you knew anythin' but how to spill words, maybe you could take a chance at tryin' to patch up that radio!" declared Monk. "If we don't find that beam, I'm goin' to have to set her down! We didn't take on enough gas to go flyin' all over the Sierra mountains!"

Ham did not reply to this insult. Between their plane and the crimson peak of Mount Shasta roared a shape of huge, vampire proportions. The fog magnified it. The density made its riding lights appear to be immense eyes.

"There, get on his tail!" snapped Ham. "That's one of the regular passenger planes! He must be following the beam!"

The big passenger plane had roared by so close its slipstream rocked their smaller plane. Monk growled and set their nose on the bigger plane's taillight. Then, abruptly, he banked and swung to one side.

"He ain't on no beam!" squawked Monk. "That fellow's as lost as we are! He's makin' a circle of that burnin' mountain! I'll bet he don't know where he is, and he's afraid to get back into the fog!"

“I hate to admit you’re probably right,” remarked Ham. “But he is flying around the mountain and—— Look out, Monk! He’s dropping off! Perhaps one of his motors has cut out on him!”

THE passenger pilot’s erratic flying was proof he had lost the guiding beam. The big plane was headed directly toward the crimson snow of Mount Shasta.

“There are two or three miles of nearly flat slope between Mount Shasta and the highway,” announced Ham. “The town of Shasta is along the highway. Looks as if the pilot were trying to set down on that slope.”

Monk banked their plane sharply. He did not know enough of the terrain below to attempt a landing. But the falling of the gasoline indicator showed that the fuel tanks would soon be empty.

The strange, apparent burning of the snow painted a crimson wall against the rolling fog. This was worse than black darkness would have been. It made the landing lights of the passenger plane ineffective.

Ham and Monk could not observe whether the pilot misjudged his ground distance or perhaps pulled up the big plane’s nose too sharply. Neither expected what happened.

Knowing his situation, it was incredible that the pilot had not thrown the ignition switch before taking the bump. Or perhaps the fire came from some other source.

To the horrified eyes of Ham and Monk, the mushroom of fire appeared to have been communicated from the crimson snow on the mountain. This probably was an illusion created by the fog and distance.

“Howlin’ blazes!” yelled Monk. “Nobody’d ever get outta that fire alive!”

Ham’s thin face was a little white. He had been employing a pair of binoculars, specially designed for piercing the fog. He had seen two figures tumble from the plane. The running flame licked out and seemed to take their legs from under them.

“Possibly they struck a high-tension wire along the highway,” murmured Ham. “Anyway, it took them quickly.”

From the lawyer’s tone, it was evident he wanted to believe it had been a high-tension wire. But the continuous scarlet glow of the snow on Mount Shasta pulled his eyes toward it.

“Anyway,” said Monk, in a tense voice, “it looks like their troubles are over. Ours have just begun. We’ve gotta set down.”

One of the twin motors sputtered and coughed. Liquid in the fuel indicator was bubbling at the bottom. Monk took all the altitude he could collect on his one remaining prop. This was not much.

“Listen, you insane ape, where do you think you’re going?” rapped out Ham. “Those things ahead are trees!”

Monk could see the foreground consisted of trees. They were tall firs. They extended in a broad belt around Mount Shasta below the snow line. Sweat poured through the reddish fur over Monk’s ears and eyes.

The ugly chemist was doing all he could to lift the plane over this forest belt. It was almost as if his long arms did it with their own strength. Some of the top branches of the first actually brushed the fuselage.

Over this, the ground visibility was somewhat better. But Monk let out a childlike groan.

Ham had the binoculars glued to his eyes.

“Right out of one mess into another,” he announced. “The map didn’t show any lake up on Mount Shasta. Wait a minute, Monk! Don’t try setting down! That isn’t a lake, it’s a flood!”

THE fog blew aside temporarily. Monk could see what Ham meant. Certainly there should have been no lake here on the mountain. But a band of tumbling water, several miles in extent, loomed directly below.

“Look, Monk, if you haven’t gone blind tree-hopping,” directed Ham. “There are some beacon fires. Probably the natives heard that passenger plane and tried to guide it down.”

“It don’t look so good,” growled Monk, “but we have to smack somewhere.”

“Smack somewhere is the correct statement!” yelled Ham.

Monk seemed to have guided the big plane into a swampy field. Despite its rigid, strong construction, one wing tore into the ground and ripped loose. Ham was temporarily standing on one ear.

Monk, gripping the controls, stuck to his place.

“Howlin’ blazes!” exploded Monk. “You know what I forgot to do? I didn’t think about stickin’ out them landin’ wheels! Maybe I was thinkin’ about makin’ a water landin’!”

Ham caressed a bruise under one eye. Scrambling to his feet, he seized a smooth black cane. From this he extracted a shining, pointed blade.

“You forgot to put out the wheels, you jungle misfit!” he yelled. “Just for that, I’m taking off a piece of one of your ears!”

Probably, Ham would not have touched Monk with his drugged blade from the sword cane. Anyway, another matter interfered with any intention he might have had.

Sharp, crackling explosions started coming from the direction of the fires they had seen. Instantly, the windows of the fuselage seemed to undergo a peppering of many hailstones.

The metal alloy body of the fuselage itself gave forth little noises like drums being beaten.

“That makes it just perfect,” commented Ham. “Now apparently we have gotten into a nest of outlaws.”

Monk’s small eyes squinted through the windshield glass.

“They’re shootin’ long rifles an’ revolvers,” he announced. “An’ I didn’t bring along even a superfirer. Now what are we going to do?”

Ham opened one door slightly and shouted.

“Hold up on the gunplay! If you’re lookin’ for money, we haven’t got any! Outside of that, we’re friends! We ran out of gas and had to come down!”

Shooting ceased. Many scraggly-bearded, tall men quickly surrounded the plane.

Chapter VI

THE CRAZY MOUNTAIN

WHILE DOC SAVAGE was making various contacts which might have given him a lead to the location of Ann Garvin and Pat Savage, Ham and Monk on far-away Mount Shasta were wondering if they had wandered into a group of fugitives from some lunatic asylum.

One tall, lank-jawed mountaineer announced he was "Hank" Shallop. From his sweeping gestures, all the people with him were other Shallops. It seemed the Shallops had a monopoly on this region of the Siskiyou Mountains.

Their chief accomplishment seemed to be chewing tobacco. Hank Shallop's lanky jaw was stained with the juice.

"You ain't come off'n the mountain?" he demanded of Ham and Monk, with one cocked eye fixed mostly on the ungainly, apelike proportions of Monk. "'Cause if you be off'n the mountain, mebbe so you know about that thar burnin' snow, an' the flood in Afternoon Crick, an' them giant fellers what wunst was Shallops?"

The other mountaineers chewed their tobacco solemnly. They apparently believed Hank Shallop's words of wisdom were worth the hearing. They kept the points of their rifles carefully raised. Ham grinned a little.

"It doesn't seem to make much sense, Mr. Shallop," he stated. "You might think from the funny appearance of Monk here he came off the mountain. But I assure you he came from one of the deeper jungles, where they have no snow to speak of."

"You crazy Park Avenue fop!" howled Monk. "Why don't you ask him what he's talkin' about? What does he mean, 'burnin' snow an' giants that once were Shallops'?"

The bony Hank Shallop shook his head sententiously.

"Seems like you wouldn't be knowin'," he said sadly. "It's like this, stranger. That thar snow's burnin' an' meltin' like all hell, only she ain't what you'd call hot. You can walk in it an' not burn your feet none."

From some distant spot on Mount Shasta came a sudden, rumbling crash. Its echoes came from a canyon. They reverberated across the lush mountain meadows where the Shallops surrounded Ham and Monk.

"Thar she be ag'in," said Hank Shallop. "Like as not, that's one of them giants what wunst was a Shallop jest throwin' a fir tree down the hill."

"Blazes, Ham!" complained Monk. "I don't like this! I think maybe we'd better go some other place!"

"No you don't!" snapped Hank Shallop. "You'll be stayin' right hyar until we know if you came from the mountain!"

"If the snow's melting," stated Ham, "then undoubtedly that noise was an avalanche. It's only a natural phenomenon."

“Ain’t no such thing, whatever you said it was!” declared Hank Shallop. “We seen some of them giants, an’ they was Shallops which has been missin’! An’ look at Afternoon Crick!”

“What seems to be the trouble with Afternoon Creek?” suggested Ham. “Something is melting the snow, and so you are having a flood.”

HANK SHALLOP swore fiercely. His next words indicated all the Shallop clan had been chased from their homes by the vagaries of this Afternoon Creek.

Ham and Monk learned that Afternoon Creek got its name because it had always been dry except in the afternoon. Late in the day, when the sun was highest, perpetual snow on Mount Shasta would be melted.

Then for a few hours there was water in Afternoon Creek.

But, according to Hank Shallop, Afternoon Creek now had gone on a rampage. Flood waters were pouring from the glacial canyons of Mount Shasta. Such a phenomenon had never before occurred.

Afternoon Creek had become a twenty-foot menace to the valley. The cabin homes of the Shallops had been submerged in the torrents. They had been forced to flee with their scanty family possessions to the higher meadows.

These meadows were on a slightly higher plateau, closer to the mountain itself. The canyons and glaciers of Mount Shasta extended over several hundred square miles. Millions of tons of snow and ice had been packed in its higher valleys for centuries.

“And you say the snow seems to be burning, but it isn’t hot?” questioned Ham. “And this witch’s tale about giants?”

“Ain’t none of it a witch’s tale!” said Hank Shallop. “We seen them giants carryin’ fir trees an’ they was Shallops what went huntin’ an’ never come back. The snow ain’t hot, ’cause we been in it, startin’ up to find out about things.”

“What did you discover then?” said Ham.

“Nothin’ whatsoever,” said Hank Shallop. “’Cause all of a sudden somethin’ changed our minds, an’ we come marchin’ right back down again.”

“Listen, Ham,” said Monk plaintively, “what do you say we go away an’ come back when it’s daylight, or some other time?”

“Because we’re going up that mountain,” announced Ham suddenly. “Burning snow, giants carrying trees, men starting up the mountain and changing their minds—Monk, this is something Doc must know more about! Possibly it has much to do with what happened to the radio beam.”

“Blazes, Ham!” complained Monk. “I ain’t goin’ up that mountain! I’m goin’ to find this town of Shasta an’ get in touch with Doc! How do we get outta here, mister?”

Hank Shallop informed them that, owing to the flood in Afternoon Creek, they would have to travel many miles afoot to cross back to the Pacific Highway.

“There’s a log bridge across the gorge of the crick up the mountain,” said Hank Shallop. “If you wanta git to town, we could guide you up a piece.”

“We’ll go up that far, Monk,” stated Ham. “Then we’ll see. How long has this burning snow business been in progress?”

“About two weeks or thereabouts,” said Hank Shallop.

THE astute mind of Ham was working fast. The story of Hank Shallop in general was not to be credited. But with the snow of Mount Shasta casting a weird light all around them, some of it might be possible.

Ham recalled that the extinct volcano of Mount Lassen, less than a hundred miles south of Mount Shasta, was still a smoldering volcano. He considered the possibility of some inner fire being responsible for the eerie condition of the snow on Shasta.

But snow that melted, looked like fire and still burned nothing?

Three scabbly mountaineers went with Hank Shallop to guide Ham and Monk to the log footbridge over the gorge. Hank Shallop said it was two or three miles up the mountain.

These proved to be mountain miles. Monk’s short legs carried him over windfalls and through the bush of a mile of spruce and fir timber. Ham’s sartorial elegance suffered greatly.

Now Ham had made note of another peculiar factor:

On the plateau level of the meadows, the temperature was below freezing. As they ascended Mount Shasta’s slope, the cold definitely increased. It could not have been far from zero.

“Notice anything, Monk?” said Ham.

“Sure,” said Monk. “Since we come out of them trees, I’ve been bumpin’ my shins on bare rocks.”

They had emerged from the forest to a point above the timberline. Here the mountain was too barren and usually too cold to bear any vegetation. Ham knew that higher up on Mount Shasta the thermometer would have showed probably far below zero.

Yet to one side they could still hear the roaring of Afternoon Creek. Mount Shasta snow was melting as fast as if the old peak had suddenly been transferred to the equator.

Even in a tropical climate, the height of Mount Shasta—well above fourteen thousand feet—would have held snow for a long time.

“Snow can’t melt at zero or below,” stated Ham. “Monk, we’re not crossing that footbridge when we come to it. We’re going on up the mountain.”

“You and all the other shysters in the world can go up there, but I don’t like climbing mountains!” growled Monk. “I’m crossing that log and getting down to town where I can talk to Doc!”

“There’s your bridge,” announced Hank Shallop, pointing to a narrow section of the creek gorge.

The flood could be heard roaring a hundred feet or more below the log which Hank Shallop called a bridge. A giant spruce had been placed across about sixty feet of

canyon. Some slender limbs had been trimmed for handholds.

“She hain’t so tricky as she appears to be,” said Hank Shallop.

His tall figure swung ahead of the other three mountaineers. He stepped onto the log. Ham could see the footing was slippery with frozen water.

INSTINCT pulled a strident yell from Ham’s throat. Monk had been about to follow the long Hank Shallop onto the bridge. Being unable to reach Monk with his hands, Ham rapped the bullet head of the chemist a tremendous whack with his sword cane.

“Ouch!” roared Monk. “Lemme get my hands on you, you imitation of a misfit _____”

Ham never would know what the raging chemist might have called him. For Monk’s speech was whipped from his tongue. He stood for a few seconds in petrified silence.

From the three mountaineer companions of Hank Shallop came startled oaths. All were a split second slower than Ham in seeing what had happened.

The crimson glow of the snow on the mountain shed an eerie light. In all this the figures of the men looked somewhat distorted. The taut skins of the mountain men’s faces had become the color of gray chalk.

But it was Ham who had seen the puffing blue cloud. This might have come up out of the gorge. Its vapor billowed over the footbridge. No cry of fear or pain came from Hank Shallop.

The leader of the mountain men had taken several steps onto the bridge. The blue vapor whirled, twisted and vanished upward.

The jaws of the other mountaineers dropped. Their cuds of tobacco fell out. None had seen Hank Shallop fall. He had not dropped. There came no splash from below.

“Stay back, Monk!” ordered Ham. “I’ll see what it is!”

The lawyer moved cautiously. He dropped to his knees on the log bridge. A small heap of white ashes was slowly sifting off the log. In not more than ten seconds the last of the ashes had been caught and carried away by the wind.

“Blazes, Ham!” squealed Monk. “I’m for gettin’ outta here!”

“Git ’em!” yelled one of the mountaineers suddenly. “They killed pore old Hank!”

Before Ham could scramble back off the log bridge, three long-barreled repeating rifles were thrusting their mean muzzles toward Monk’s broad body. Even at a distance, Monk would have been a difficult target to miss.

“Watch yourself, Ham!” squawked Monk.

The chemist saw the most dangerous kind of killing fury in the faces of the mountaineers. It was the anger of fear. The uncanny disappearance of Hank Shallop had sapped their nerve.

This meant they could think only of their weapons. They would shoot first and not bother about questions. Ham was still on the log. He had raised to one knee. Unobserved, he was slowly getting the tempered blade from the black sheath of his sword cane.

“Ow-ee-ow-ee!” yelled Monk.

That cry would have done credit to a mad wildcat. With the muzzles of three rifles pointing directly at him, it looked as if Monk had invited death.

TWO rifles spouted fire. It was the intention of Monk’s squawk to surprise the mountaineers into letting go their first bullets. It did not seem as if they could miss.

“Git ’em!” shouted one of the mountaineers again.

Getting Monk was not so easy. Neither bullet had struck him. Monk had launched himself forward on his short legs, directly toward the flaming guns. His long arms flailed out with the writhing twist of an octopus seizing an enemy.

Two mountaineers screamed with pain. Their rifles had gone flying into the gorge.

Monk’s gorillalike arms jerked two of the men together. Their heads were tough, and they were only stunned as they collided.

“Down, Monk! Down!” came Ham’s shout from the end of the log bridge.

It was doubtful if Monk could have ducked quickly enough to have saved himself. The third mountaineer had drawn a steady bead on Monk’s broad back. He was so close, he could hardly have missed.

As Monk twisted and Ham shouted, there was a hissing sound. This was almost like the whirring of a suddenly angered rattlesnake. In the eerie light of the crimson snow came a brighter flash.

The mountaineer’s rifle exploded. The bullet smacked into the log close to Ham. The bead on Monk failed because the mountaineer had started to twist around. He failed to complete this movement.

“Hold them, Monk; I’m coming!” yelled Ham.

The third mountaineer to shoot was sitting down. He permitted his scraggly head to fall upon the crook of one arm. It looked as if he had suddenly decided to go to sleep.

Ham sprang past the recumbent man. As he came near, Ham bent and retrieved the blade of his sword. The drugged point was sticking several inches into the fallen mountaineer’s leg.

Ham chuckled to himself. He had spent many weeks practicing that throw. Perhaps he was not quite as accurate as a knife thrower would have been. But all he had to do was make sure the point of his sword met another man’s body somewhere.

Monk discovered the two mountain men were tough. His already flat nose received a battering punch. His enemies were like an animated pair of bundled bones.

Monk went to his back, his short legs kicking. He slid loose and scrambled up. Two old-fashioned revolvers appeared in the hands of the mountain men. One exploded, and Ham sat down with a queer expression on his lean face. Monk groaned.

Neither was wearing his bulletproof vest. They had started on what was intended to be a pleasure and business trip. The business had unexpectedly got rough.

Monk took one look, bellowed like a jungle animal and dived straight toward one erupting revolver. His hairy head went deep into a mountaineer’s stomach. There was

hardly enough force behind the drive of Monk's short legs to account for what happened.

The nearest man suddenly flattened and lay still. His companion weaved his gun around. It pointed at all four points of the compass. Five slugs spewed from its muzzle. They hit no one.

The gun wielder now was lying flat on his back. The spot seemed restful. He gently went to sleep.

HAM got groggily to his feet. He was digging a book from the inside of his trim aviator's coat. This was not thick, but it was filled with ponderous legal references.

However, the weight of the law had not put Ham down. A bullet from a .45 caliber gun had passed through the book and nicked his skin.

Ham recovered his sword. The two men Monk had put to sleep were still quiet. Monk scratched his furry, red hair. Little pieces of glass capsules fell out. The capsules hidden in Monk's hair had released a powerful anæsthetic gas.

In some respects, Monk was like a child. He had stuck the capsules there without much thought that he might need them.

Ham looked up at the crimson tinge of the snow.

"That snow is melting, but it isn't giving off a degree of heat," he stated. "Something queer is going on up in this mountain. I believe we should investigate."

"Doc ought to know about this," said Monk. "What happened to that tall fellow who called himself Hank Shallop? He didn't fall off that log."

"He evaporated in that blue cloud," said Ham. "Come on, Monk. Even that crazy story about the giants might be true."

They scrambled over black rocks for another five hundred feet. The eerie, crimson light was all around them.

Suddenly Ham, who was leading, plunged into soft snow. Immediately, his body was enwrapped in what looked like a fountain of fire. Ham turned his gray, long face to Monk.

"Do you feel anything, ape?"

"I'm all right, but you look like you'd met up with the devil," said Monk. "I'm goin' higher."

Snow slogged around their knees. They were at the lower edge of a glacier. This was melting and running in small cascades around them. Water rose to their waists.

They had climbed perhaps five hundred feet above where Hank Shallop had disappeared in a blue vapor. High above them loomed the tremendous bulk of Mount Shasta.

Off to the southeast another glowing point thrust into the sky. This was completely fogged in, but it was surrounded by a definitely purple halo.

That was Mount Lassen, the long extinct volcano.

They were waist-deep in the strange, soft snow. Up here it should have been down to zero or many degrees below, but Ham and Monk were beginning to perspire.

Now they could see through the lifting fog. Lights of the towns of Shasta and Weed appeared. Faint fireflies moved along the concrete Pacific Highway. These were cars.

Overhead, was the shadowy bulk of Mount Shasta. It loomed. Higher than all other peaks in the Siskiyou range. It was easy to determine why Afternoon Creek had belied its name. For here the perpetual snows had ceased to be perpetual.

The temperature was increasing rapidly.

IN the cleared space ahead appeared a spruce tree. It must have been brought up from some level below the timberline. This tree had been uprooted. It was moving across the mountain.

“Jumping Jupiter!” let out Ham, who seldom used an expletive. “There’s a man carrying that tree!”

Something must have happened at this juncture. Ham sat down in the snow. He said, “I’ve got to get some of this stuff off me, then we’ll go on up.”

Monk shook his hairy head stubbornly.

“This is all the bunk!” he grunted. “I’m not going up there! This ain’t none of our business! Me, I’m going back down and call it a day!”

“But,” argued Ham, “Doc ought to know all about this. We’ll go on up to that next saw-tooth and——”

Ham rubbed his hand slowly across his forehead.

“You missing link,” he said, “what’s wrong with you? We’ll have to find out what’s going on in this mountain.”

But Ham had joined Monk. Both were moving through the snow. They were going back down the mountain.

Chapter VII

ASHES OF MURDER

WHILE HAM and Monk had suddenly determined the magical properties of Mount Shasta were none of their business, Doc Savage was grappling with a problem which had to do with the same strange condition of mind.

Back in his Manhattan headquarters, Doc had put Long Tom into a semihypnotic trance. The pallid electrical wizard no longer expressed a desire to go home. However, Doc was, for a time, unable to bring Long Tom to an active interest in the night's mysteries.

Doc's radios and those elsewhere continued to remain silent. The man of bronze perhaps had an inkling of the power. For several minutes, he tested out his various devices dealing with rays and waves.

"Professor Randolph is, as far as we know, a good man," stated Doc. "Whatever he has discovered, none need fear he will misuse it. But he must have competent assistance. His aids may not be as honest in their intentions."

"That is true," assented Long Tom, in a monotone.

The electrical engineer still lacked interest in the subject. From the wall of the laboratory came a whining alarm. Doc switched on the "visionator." This might have been likened to a periscope, except that it had special electrical features.

The device showed clearly any visitor who might be in the corridor outside Doc's headquarters. It now revealed a man with a dark, smooth face and protruding eyes. His hair was brushed straight back. Gold eyeglasses dangled from a cord hooked over one ear.

"Professor Thomas Archer," announced Doc. "Probably he is seeking Ann Garvin. They are instructors in the same school."

It was not remarkable that Doc Savage should have so identified Professor Archer. Thousands of scholars, scientists, students of the mysteries of the stratosphere would have recognized the name instantly.

For Professor Thomas Archer was a genius in his own sphere. His keen eyes missed no detail of the bronze man's advanced laboratory equipment. But he said, "I came primarily to discover the whereabouts of Miss Ann Garvin, Doc Savage. I have been informed of and am greatly puzzled by the weird manifestation to-night in Union Square. I was informed Professor Ann Garvin left the scene in your company?"

Perhaps Doc Savage suspected Professor Archer had a deeper reason for his presence than finding Miss Garvin. But the bronze man betrayed no thought of this.

"We hope very much that Miss Garvin is safe," stated Doc. "She left here a short time ago accompanied by my cousin, Patricia."

“But that is strange,” said Professor Archer. “She has neither returned to nor communicated with the school. She must have known we would be gravely concerned.”

“I have been advised,” stated Doc, “that Miss Garvin left in company with a man who said he could take her to Professor Randolph.”

The gold glasses flipped from Professor Archer’s slender hands.

“But that would be impossible!” he exclaimed. “We have heard to-night’s messages, Mr. Savage! That is part of my purpose in coming here! Professor Randolph is not now on earth!”

“You were Randolph’s closest friend,” said Doc. “Possibly you know more of his plans than he had divulged to others?”

“That’s just it,” nodded Archer soberly. “Some of Randolph’s associates and friends were beginning to fear he was becoming a trifle mad. Did you know of his second stratosphere ship?”

“I was aware only of his first, the *Silver Cylinder*,” advised Doc. “He consulted with me concerning its motive power.”

“Then you should know of this other, Mr. Savage. Randolph had a second and much greater ship. It is beyond anything ever before attempted for stratosphere flight. Certain devices can keep its occupants supplied with oxygen for many weeks.”

“Had he stated his purpose in having this supership?”

“Not to many persons, only a choice group. But Randolph believed he had discovered a new power which would carry him almost beyond the gravitational pull of the earth. He boasted several times that he soon would be able to ‘stay on top of the world.’ ”

“That would be a great adventure,” agreed Doc. “Only I fear Professor Randolph is not on top of the world in the sense he expressed it to others.”

Their conversation was interrupted. Professor Archer gazed curiously at the corridor alarm and the visionator.

“Anthony Durant!” he exclaimed, as the face of a new visitor appeared. “He was one of those with Miss Garvin to-night. Probably he has followed her here.”

Doc touched the controls which opened the outside door. The chrome-steel doors between the laboratory and the library also swung open. Professor Archer moved as if to meet Anthony Durant in the ornate reception room.

“Be careful,” warned Doc quickly, one massive arm sweeping the light body of Archer to one side.

The chrome-steel door between them and their visitor closed. Doc was watching the face in the visionator glass. It appeared as if a whiff of blue smoke had crossed the visionator. The face of Anthony Durant vanished.

OPENING the library door with infinite caution, Doc led the way toward the outside. Near the corridor door now were only wisps of the strange vapor.

Professor Archer’s protruding eyes looked as if they would jump from his head.

“Where did he go? What happened, Mr. Savage?”

Doc was looking at the little heap of white ashes on the thick rug of the reception room. Even as he glanced at it, the heap of fluffy ashes seemed to dissolve. It drifted like a fine powder into the corridor and disappeared.

So far as ever discovered this was accountable for Anthony Durant becoming one of the great city’s missing persons.

Professor Archer’s handsome features had taken on a chalky pallor.

“It is reported this same thing happened to others in Union Square to-night,” he stated. “At least, I am sure my friend, Randolph, would have nothing to do with anything which would menace his fellow men.”

“You have been a deep student of atomic forces, Professor Archer,” stated Doc Savage. “There seems no doubt but that Randolph has discovered some strange power. Randolph has been a good man, but possession of any unusual force has been known to work unexpected changes in character. Randolph is only human. We should have a report soon on Ann Garvin and my cousin.”

The report on the two young women was quicker and more direct than even Doc had expected. One of the regular elevators stopped at the eighty-sixth floor.

Ann Garvin and Patricia Savage walked into Doc’s headquarters. Both were as calm as if their absence had meant nothing. Neither appeared to notice the few remaining white ashes blowing along the corridor.

Pat Savage was a cool, level-headed young woman. Hysteria did not seem to run in the Savage family. But as she entered, Pat was laughing somewhat wildly.

“That’s just one on us, Ann,” she stated to her companion.

“Yes, it was one on us,” agreed Ann Garvin. “Hello, Professor Archer. Perhaps you have also heard something from Homer?”

“Sorry, but I haven’t, Ann,” stated Archer. “Where have you been?”

“Oh, that?” said Ann Garvin. “The man named Barthon you sent for me had a cab waiting. So Pat and I went along.”

“Barthon? A man I sent for you, Ann?” exclaimed Archer. “I know no one of that name, and I have not even spoken to any person about your possible presence here.”

“Perhaps that’s why he did not return,” stated Pat Savage.

“Let’s get this straight,” said Doc. “A man named Barthon came for you and then he didn’t return?”

“That was it, Mr. Savage,” said Ann Garvin. “This man said he could take me to Homer—to Professor Randolph. Patricia agreed to go along. There were two other men in the taxicab. They took us over on the West Side above Central Park and left us there.”

“You mean they just walked away?” said Archer.

“That was the way of it,” said Pat. “They told us they would bring Professor Randolph. We waited nearly ten minutes. Then a messenger boy came to the taxicab with a note. It stated Professor Randolph had disappeared and if we wanted to avoid trouble we should leave at once. So we came back here.”

DOC SAVAGE was observing the two young women closely. He was watching Patricia especially. The man of bronze put a sudden question:

“Do you want to join us in helping solve this mystery, Pat?”

Patricia Savage would walk barefooted in the snow up Park Avenue if she believed it would carry her into an adventure. Now she shook her head apathetically.

“I don’t want to become involved,” she stated. “I’ve had enough excitement for one night. I believe I’ll go home.”

Doc’s compelling, flake-gold eyes caught and held those of his cousin. She sighed as if she were tired and sat down.

“But I do want to find Homer,” said Ann Garvin. “Even if he has silly ideas about creative artists working for what they get. Society should see that those who are creative are not forced to depend upon their own earnings.”

This second abrupt change of Ann Garvin’s beliefs during the night was amazing.

With the example of Long Tom, Doc was beginning to understand something of the mental reversals taking place. But for the time being, he was as much in the dark as the others concerning the origin of the mysterious force.

Leaving the others in the library, Doc glided into his laboratory. The contrivance he produced resembled nothing so much as a loaded sixteen-inch copper shell. From its appearance it might have been used in one of the most modern guns.

The device was of great weight. Doc handled it easily.

“After all,” he said to Professor Archer, “it is not impossible that Professor Randolph has found a means of sustaining his stratosphere ship above the greater pull of the earth’s gravitation.”

Professor Archer displayed keen understanding. Only a few scientists would have identified the device.

“I would venture the guess,” he said, “that this bomb contains pure Argon gas. The only element that will photograph cosmic rays.”

Doc nodded without speaking. The strange bomb did contain Argon gas. Also, its interior was of intricate mechanism.

“I would assume,” said Professor Archer, “you are planning to set a trap?”

“That is the general purpose,” stated Doc.

“But what about the tons of lead insulation required to make the Argon gas effective?” questioned Professor Archer.

Doc Savage glanced at the dead radio instruments. He had been making various other tests of the numerous devices in the laboratory. He smiled.

“At this moment, there seems to be no terrestrial radio activity. Perhaps the lead insulation may not be necessary.”

Professor Archer nodded agreement.

“I had not considered that angle of it,” he admitted.

Carrying the heavy bomb, Doc ascended to the hundred-foot tower topping the skyscraper.

DOC made his way into a small room at the very top of the tower. He had made this ascent alone. His next action was peculiar. Opening a window, Doc suspended the sixteen-inch bomb from a set of hooks.

From the care exercised by the bronze man, the device might have been some kind of a trap. It was a trap, but of a character never before employed. Doc hoped the result might give him a clue to all the radio-stopping force.

The idea he now held was so fantastic he would not confide in any of the others. Doc always confirmed his theories before making them known to others.

After fastening the bomb, outside, Doc stepped back across the small tower room. He had purposely refrained from employing any light. In the middle of the room, Doc became a motionless bronze statue.

Even his breathing ceased. Unless some other man had the keenest olfactory sense, he would not have been able to guess Doc's location.

Yet Doc both felt and heard movement. It might have been no more than the scuttling of a mouse across the floor. It sounded as if it could have been that.

The sound faded. Now Doc must have known that any threat which had existed had disappeared. The rare trilling from his body filled the little room. As he stepped toward the door, he flicked on his powerful generator flashlight.

While he had been fastening the bomb at the window, a man must have died in that room. The breeze was drawing white ashes through the window from a small heap on the rug.

Doc wasted no time getting back to the eighty-sixth floor. He was relieved to discover none of his companions there had followed him to the tower.

Professor Archer, Ann Garvin, Patricia and Long Tom were in the laboratory. Archer turned from Doc's special radio.

"A marvelous instrument," he commented. "But dead like all the others."

Doc addressed Long Tom.

"There has been no alarm, no new figure in the visionator?"

"No person has come onto this floor," stated Long Tom.

"It is almost time for Professor Randolph's promised announcement," stated Doc.

Chapter VIII

WORLD DICTATOR

SOUND leaped into Doc Savage's radios. It came with such volume that it sounded like a thunderous voice. Doc attempted to cut down the strength of it.

But over and above the power of the tubes the voice seemed to roar. The rolling tones seemed independent of the volume of the instruments. Only by disconnecting the standard broadcast radio could the tone be made clear.

Now the words rapped out of Doc's special shortwave set.

The same amazing volume and thunder of the message was being delivered over every connected radio in the world. Its force created a howling in the broadcast stations.

"There could be no such force!" shouted Professor Archer. "All the regular waves have been submerged."

This appeared to be true. Signals on all wave bands had been replaced by this sonorous voice.

Through its tremendous volume, the tone was that of Professor Homer Randolph.

At another time, Long Tom would have been intensely interested in the electrical angle of this phenomenon. The pallid man now seemed disinterested. His eyes followed Doc. It was clear that only the hypnotic spell held Long Tom from open rebellion.

"Homer! Homer!" screamed Ann Garvin at the first sound of the voice. "Where are you! I'll——"

The charming young woman must have been on the verge of hysteria. She sprang across the laboratory. Her small hands tore at the dials of the radio.

"We will listen, Miss Garvin," stated Doc quietly.

His flake-gold eyes caught and held the girl's blue orbs.

"Yes," said Ann Garvin faintly. "We will listen."

Doc had applied the same hypnotic spell he had employed to control Long Tom. All gave heed to the strange voice.

At the same time, millions everywhere were getting the message over their radios. Many believed it only some practical jest of the broadcasting stations. But many others knew this not to be true.

"*This is Professor Homer Randolph,*" stated the voice. "*I am talking to you from the top of the world. You have seen evidence to-night that I have the power to stop all radio communication. I have more. I am in possession of a supreme, universal and hitherto unsuspected force.*"

"Randolph has gone mad," declared Professor Archer. "This radio trick is something tremendous, but his mind is unbalanced."

As if in reply, Randolph's voice thundered, "*Many of my associates will think I am insane. Let them. For I can change their minds for them. I can change the minds of all the world. With this power I have established a world dictatorship!*"

DOC turned on the television switch. Ann Garvin stifled her cry. The clean-cut, smiling face of Professor Randolph was clearly revealed.

"Professor Randolph is far from mad," said Doc quietly. "If only it were his mind with which we must cope."

The voice spoke on:

"As the world's dictator, I shall correct all evils and reform society in spite of itself. I am in a spot which none can reach. All the armies of the world could not touch me. It is to be regretted that a few persons must be injured and some must die, but that shall be for the greater good of humanity."

"Isn't there any way you can reach him, Mr. Savage?" demanded Professor Archer. "This is sheer lunacy!"

"*All known science cannot interfere with me,*" came the voice of Randolph. "*I have the power to furnish light, heat and clothing for the world. I can produce food so none may ever go hungry. With this power, I shall serve as the world's dictator until drouth and flood and depression have been removed from the earth.*"

The voice ceased for perhaps ten momentous seconds.

"It's a crazy trick—nothing but a trick!" cried Professor Archer.

"Homer! I've lost you!" cried Ann Garvin.

But Randolph's voice came on again strongly.

"If necessary, I can stop the world!"

Randolph's face still smiled in the television. Suddenly, it became only a blurred shadow. Then his voice spoke hurriedly.

"Doc Savage, my friend! In half an hour connect me on your own special shortwave! It is important! We must work together! I will then disclose my location."

There was a noise as if two giant hands had slapped together. Professor Randolph ceased to speak. Almost instantly, the radios took on a new note.

The regular broadcasting waves had been restored.

Doc Savage's telephones started buzzing. Thousands had heard that final message from Randolph to the man of bronze.

The man of bronze whipped back into the laboratory.

"Professor Garvin, you and Pat will remain here," he directed. "Long Tom and Professor Archer, come with me."

Doc led the way swiftly toward the steel tower piercing the sky of Manhattan. Terrestrial radio waves were back to normal. The bronze giant was intensely interested in what the bomb hung from the window might reveal.

Arriving at the door of the small room, Doc said, "Both of you remain here. See that no person enters or leaves by this door."

Perhaps Doc believed the bomb itself might have become dangerous. Long Tom and Professor Archer were left outside as the man of bronze clicked the door behind him.

DOC SAVAGE was well aware there were others in the small room of the tower. He had not the slightest doubt but that an ambush trap had been prepared for him.

Doc's keen ears picked up the faint ticking of two watches. He could hear breathing that had been made as quiet as humans could make it. His keen nose detected body odors. These uncanny abilities were made possible by Doc Savage's two-hour routine of exercise each day.

The man of bronze made no attempt to use a flashlight, or to switch on the lights in the small room. He moved straight toward the open, window. None of those waiting could have guessed the man of bronze knew their exact location.

Doc Savage's reason for employing this strategy had a double purpose: The death by the blue vapor was beyond anything he could as yet understand. Thus he was seriously handicapped. Until he learned more, the bronze giant could hardly hope to put up an effective fight.

Then there was the bomb outside the window. On what this revealed might depend to a great extent the solution of the broader mystery. Doc already had a theory, but it was of such fantastic origin, he hesitated to bring himself to a final opinion.

Perhaps the copper bomb, swaying hundreds of feet above Manhattan, might have trapped Professor Randolph's secret power.

Though he knew his enemies were close by, Doc leaned with apparent carelessness from the open window. Below him the streets appeared as deep and narrow as mountain canyons. The lights illuminating the outside of the tower flashed on his bronzed skin.

Doc seemed to be unfastening the copper bomb. But he was doing more. A silk line, so light it hardly seemed more than a thread, was being hooked under the window.

Without a sound, Doc plunged headlong into space. Observers far below would have thought a spider was swinging wide on a gauzy web. As Doc went down, he was holding the copper bomb tightly between his knees.

The silken line was uncoiling from a compartment inside Doc's coat. The man of bronze dropped nearly fifty feet before he made any effort to check his fall. Then his cabled hands merely shut and twisted.

An average man would have had his arms jerked from their sockets. A lifetime of daily exercises of the most violent and strenuous form had built up those muscles.

As Doc checked his descent, he saw men's faces appear in the window he had just left. Curses snarled down at him. The watchers below could not see the faces in the tower window.

Perhaps they saw only what appeared to be a human fly. They were horrified when this figure was cut loose and started to drop. Women ran and screamed.

The light silk line had been severed. With the weight of the bomb between his knees, Doc was turned over and hurled downward.

But he had seen the flash of the knife across the line. As it parted, Doc performed an amazing feat. His body whipped into a double turn in mid-air.

Those amazing, cabled hands caught the projection above a window.

Doc's feet crashed glass. He let go, hung suspended an instant, then rolled into a deserted office. As he struck the floor inside, an unearthly scream wailed from outside the tower.

Doc saw the shadow of a body going down. One of the men had fallen from the window far above.

Doc made a quick decision. He identified the office in which he had landed. This contained a large closet. Three minutes later, Doc was in the closet using his flashlight.

"The most perfect ever made," said Doc slowly, after he had opened the copper bomb and extracted some of its mechanism. He held in his hand what appeared to be a roll of ordinary photographic film.

Now he suspected the queer, wavy dashes and dots which appeared might prove to be the force that would change the whole conduct of world governments and society itself. Doc placed the bomb behind some shelves. The imprinted film he thrust into an inner pocket.

Chapter IX

HIGH ABOVE MANHATTAN

AS DOC SAVAGE lunged from the window of the tower room, Long Tom and Professor Archer heard men's voices. Through the door came a snarling oath.

Long Tom was still under the hypnotic spell of Doc. With Professor Archer at his shoulder, Long Tom dived into the room.

Long Tom looked less like a fighter than most any other man on earth. Many persons had made the mistake of believing that. Before they learned the truth, it was usually too late.

There were four men near the window of the tower room. Long Tom saw the knife slashed across Doc's silk line. Instantly, the four men by the window must have been convinced a tiger had been turned loose in their midst.

Long Tom had no time to observe what might be happening to Professor Archer. Archer might or might not be a fighter. If he were not, he was in an unfortunate spot.

Despite his most valiant efforts, Long Tom was sent to his back. From this position, he produced a stomach toe kick which any Japanese wrestler might have envied.

The man it caught sailed toward the wall. If he had struck the wall, the impact probably would have put him out. Unfortunately, the open window of the tower was in his pathway.

Long Tom did not know this was the man who had used the knife on Doc's line. It would not have mattered to Long Tom if it had been.

The man had breath enough left for a bloodcurdling scream as he got his first glimpse of several hundred feet of very empty air.

Long Tom got to his feet. Guns now were thrust into his bony sides. Three men were around him. Long Tom put up his hands in the darkness. One man flicked a flashlight into his face.

"Keep him alive!" snarled this man. "We can use all the bronze guy's helpers! This fellow here is a wizard with electricity! Maybe we'll be needing him in Empire City!"

The speaker had wasted too much time in conversation.

Long Tom had been slowly grinding his bony knees together. He was holding his breath. He thought grimly that it was to be regretted he could not warn Professor Archer.

But Professor Archer appeared to have been knocked out.

Now the three men confronting Long Tom underwent a peculiar change of demeanor. All fell to the floor and started snoring. Long Tom's lung capacity was not great. He got to the open window and fresh air.

An envelope of anæsthetic gas had been released by the pressure of his knees. This was a special anæsthetic which would put any man to sleep for an hour or more.

Far below, Long Tom could see that a crowd had rushed into the street.

“If they got Doc,” muttered Long Tom, “I’ll see these fellows don’t get out of here alive.”

Professor Archer was still out on the floor. Long Tom carried him from the tower room. Professor Archer would be out for some time. He had not been warned, and he had breathed a good share of the sleeping gas.

THE battle in the tower room had taken up some time. Before Long Tom reached headquarters with Professor Archer, Doc reached the eighty-sixth floor corridor.

The man of bronze halted before the plain door marking his reception room. This door had only a neat sign: “Clark Savage, Jr.” But there was something about the closed door which warned Doc some sort of danger might be awaiting him inside.

Stepping to the smooth wall near the door, Doc pressed one foot on the corridor carpet. Immediately, a square panel opened in the wall. It was a special outside visionator.

This clearly showed the interior of the laboratory.

First, Doc saw Ann Garvin sitting before the radio. Her face was stony and hard. Patricia Savage was in none of the rooms.

Ann Garvin seemed to be alone. She was staring at the radio, as if she hoped Randolph’s voice would again come to her. Yet there was something strangely suspicious about the young woman’s attitude.

Doc noticed she glanced furtively around the laboratory. Doc wondered what had become of Patricia, and why she had departed. Then he recalled that Pat had apparently been given a shot of the mind-changing element, whatever it might be.

Behind Ann Garvin was a long wire cage. This contained scores of the smallest and rarest tropical birds. They had been brought back by Doc and his companions from many parts of the world.

The cage really was a concealment for one of Doc’s many exits from headquarters. Having helped design the skyscraper, Doc had caused many intricate passages to be constructed through the thick walls.

Holding the visionator open, Doc remained motionless. He saw the cage of tropical birds begin to swing outward. The bearded faces of two men appeared.

As they stepped into the laboratory, Ann Garvin turned, looking at them. But the young woman showed no signs of alarm. Instead, she gestured with one hand. Doc could hear Ann Garvin speaking.

Connected with this new visionator was the latest in dictaphones.

“Doc Savage and the others are out just now,” said Ann Garvin. “They will return.”

“We’ll lay for them behind this table,” said one of the men. “Stay where you are, Miss Garvin. Don’t change your position. It will be over quickly. We must get Doc Savage.”

The men concealed themselves hastily. Doc saw one was carrying what might have been a square camera box. It had a gleaming lens.

Now the man swung the box so that the lens was pointed at the door of the library. It was through this door that Doc Savage would probably come.

Still watching the visionator, Doc pressed what appeared to be merely a curl in the varnished wood of the wall.

Something must have affected the many tropical birds in the cage. They started fluttering and squawking.

Ann Garvin's sharp eyes were the first to detect something wrong.

"Look!" she cried out. "The birds in the cage! They're falling asleep! I know what it is——"

The tropical birds were tumbling to the floor of the cage. All birds are more susceptible to gas than humans. Ann Garvin's warning was too late.

"Run for it!" yelled one. "The whole thing's a trick!"

None of the three ran from the laboratory. Ann Garvin slid back into her chair. Her body was inert. The men tried crawling on their hands and knees, but they did not get far.

Doc smiled grimly. He knew the invaders and the birds would sleep peacefully for some time to come. The button had opened special gas jets inside the tropical bird cage.

MAKING sure Ann Garvin and her two apparent aids were sleeping soundly, Doc glided to his high-speed elevator. Long Tom and Professor Archer had not yet appeared from above.

Checking the time, Doc tuned in the shortwave instrument under the hood of one of his cars as he arrived in his private garage. First, he drove the car from the garage and into a side street. Even then, the man of bronze was not sure he was clear of spying eyes and ears.

Doc had the gas attachment on his sedan ready for use if any one should approach. He did not have to wait long for Professor Randolph.

"*Doc Savage!*"

"I am listening, Professor Randolph," stated the bronze man.

"*Then heed carefully, Doc Savage,*" came Randolph's calm voice. "*I am but carrying out your own great purpose in life. You are the one man in the world who can assist me the most. First of all, will you see that Ann Garvin is not molested?*"

"I will do what is best for Ann Garvin," stated Doc. "She is now in my headquarters."

"*Then listen, Doc Savage,*" said Professor Randolph. "*You cannot refuse to help in changing humanity. I tell you I can stop the world on its axis, if necessary. I can change the Arctic region to tropical, multiply the food of the world. I want you, Doc Savage. You will find me where——*"

Evidently something stopped Professor Randolph abruptly. A smothered, gurgling sound came over Doc's receiver.

The shortwave contact was broken instantly.

Chapter X

INTO BURNING SNOW

ON the far-away slope of Mount Shasta, Monk and Ham had listened to Randolph expounding his idea of being dictator of the world.

On descending the mountain, Monk and Ham had evaded the Shallops and, by circling, had entered their crashed plane. They had been making ineffectual efforts to contact Doc since their arrival, but had been unsuccessful because of the bronze man's activity in the Manhattan skyscraper.

Since their arrival, Ham and Monk had been tongue-lashing one another in regard to their sudden change of mind about climbing up the mountain. They hadn't quite clearly understood exactly what had taken place.

"You misfit of nature," Ham said, with heavy sarcasm, "if you hadn't refused to go on up the mountain, we would probably know right now where Professor Randolph is hiding out. You never were much use, but I never knew you to quit cold like that!"

"If I didn't have to look after you and get us out of this mess with the mountain people you got us into, I'd pin your ears back over your mouth!" piped Monk. "You're the one that changed his mind!"

Ham and Monk now were in a tight spot. The Shallop clan had discovered the three unconscious men up by the footbridge. They knew nothing of the white ashes, so they perhaps believed their visitors had pushed Hank Shallop into Afternoon Creek.

Ham and Monk had gotten their first lucky break when the Shallops wasted time seeking them higher up in the burning snow. They had followed the trail up, when the two had been back-tracking toward their plane.

"Those fellows we knocked out are on their feet again," announced Ham. "Hear them talking?"

There could be no mistaking that the three mountaineers had regained their voices. They were gabbling in high, angry tones.

"That thar feller with a knife in his cane shoved pore old Hank off'n the log bridge!" one of the men exclaimed a short distance from the plane. "There ain't nary a doubt about them bein' in cahoots with the devils up on Shasta! They went up, but they didn't come back!"

Though the mountaineers were familiar enough with planes, they were staying away from the one Ham and Monk had come in. This was because Doc's companions had protected the wrecked plane previously with an electrical current which delivered a considerable shock.

The Shallops had hesitated to repeat the experiment of examining the machine.

Suddenly Doc's second contact with Professor Randolph came. This was the message he received in his car which had been so abruptly terminated.

“Blazes, Ham!” Monk grunted. “He’s got Doc now, and it’s on our own shortwave!”

The truth of this brought a few seconds of forgetfulness. The loudspeaker of the radio inside the plane let out a few squawks before Ham got it toned down.

Ham started speaking.

“Ham and Monk, Doc! We were forced down on Mount Shasta! The Randolph radio messages seem to emanate from close by! The snow on the mountain seems to be burning, but it is only at melting heat! We’ve had some trouble! A number of mountain men are about to besiege our plane!”

They had not lessened the tone of their radio quickly enough. From all around, outside, came the shouts and rushing feet of the enraged Shallops.

“Them fellers is in thar! Let ’em have it!”

The Shallops had taken shelter in the rocks surrounding the plane. They opened up with both rifles and revolvers. Bullets drummed on the armored alloy of the fuselage and ran spidery cracks in the bulletproof glass windows.

EXCEPT for Ham’s sword cane and a few anæsthetic devices, the two were unarmed. Their flight had been a peaceful trip. After a few seconds, Ham was informed that Doc was getting their message.

The Shallops were creeping closer. They seemed to have plenty of lead to waste. The plane windows were being plastered with flattened slugs.

“Yes, Ham, I am listening,” came the voice of Doc in far-away Manhattan.

“One of the men with us died suddenly, Doc,” stated Ham. “We were close under the burning snow. The man walked onto a log. A blue cloud arose. Then there was only a heap of white ashes.”

Plainly over the radio came Doc Savage’s rare trilling emanation. Ham had just informed the bronze man of much more than he imagined. Doc had been given what he considered a direct line on the location of Professor Randolph.

Doc’s voice came to them clearly and calmly.

“Don’t take any chances. Stay off of the upper mountain. Stick where you are. I shall join you presently.”

Ham immediately attempted to inform Doc that staying where they were was likely to become most unhealthy. But Doc did not receive that part of the message.

One bullet from the rain of lead being poured upon the plane found its way inside. The slug smashed a condenser on the radio. The contact with Doc was terminated instantly.

“Doc advises us to stay off the mountain,” said Ham wryly. “On one side, we have the flood of Afternoon Creek. On two others, are our good friends of the mountain. About all the place left for us is in the direction of the peak.”

“Daggonit!” howled Monk. “Why didn’t we keep on going when we were up there? Outside of talking with Doc, we haven’t gained anything by coming back here!”

“You crazy missing link!” rapped Ham. “You wouldn’t go on up! You talked me into coming back!”

“You nutty dude shyster!” yelled Monk. “It was you that had the screwy idea of quittin’! You even told me we oughta keep out of other people’s business!”

Regardless of which was correct, there now came a reversal of the force which had so strangely affected them.

Equipped with a few high-explosive grenades of small size and several anæsthetic capsules, Ham and Monk slipped from the darkened plane. Lead split, whined and pounded around them.

“We can’t get at those fellows with the drugged capsules, and I don’t want to blow any of them to pieces with the grenade,” announced Ham. “They may be misinformed, but they are on the square in wanting to kill us. No doubt, they believe we are responsible for Hank Shallop’s disappearance.”

The canny mountaineers were scattered among the rocks. Only the imperfect illumination cast by the crimson snow above saved Ham and Monk from being filled with lead. Unable to employ any of their defensive devices, Doc’s companions again started up the mountain.

SKIPPING lead pursued the pair. They climbed rapidly through the belt of spruce and into the open space above the timberline. Here their bodies stood out against the eerie light of the snow.

Rivulets of water poured around their feet. These joined others, to create more tons of water flooding Afternoon Creek. In the distance against the fog was another queer light. This seemed to hang suspended in the sky like a red cloud.

“That’s about the location of Mount Lassen,” stated Ham. “I’ll bet some of this strange force around us has stirred up the old volcano. Perhaps that may be responsible for the light on the snow.”

Monk loped forward on his short legs. His broad body weaved from side to side. Bullets continued to whine from the ground near by. They reached the open stretch at the lower tip of a glacier.

Here the crimson snow would make them targets the mountaineers could hardly miss.

“There’s no way back,” gritted Ham, “so don’t change your mind again.”

This time, neither appeared to be affected by any change of mind. The pounding of rifle slugs was a convincing argument as to the direction they should follow.

They plunged into the scarlet snow at the lower tip of the melting glacier. They were wholly enveloped now in what seemed leaping scarlet flame. Yet they were aware of only what might have been pleasant summer heat.

Yet this heat was sufficient to be dissolving the tons of packed snow in the valleys of Mount Shasta.

“I don’t like this place up here,” complained Monk. “It ain’t noway natural. Daggonit, it was below freezin’ down below and it oughta be below zero up at this

altitude!”

“If you don’t like it then, suppose you go back,” suggested Ham maliciously. “There are worse things than a slight variation in normal temperature.”

Below them, the Shallops were still punching holes in the air with rifle bullets. Perhaps the crimson glow of the snow was confusing. Some slugs nipped close, but Ham and Monk remained untouched.

“What I don’t understand,” stated Ham, “is the way we are acting. The other time we came up, both of us wanted to go back. Now something seems to tell me we’ve got to keep going right on up to the peak.”

“Danged if that ain’t the way I feel, too!” exclaimed Monk. “I only hope them crazy Shallops don’t get the same idea!”

Thus Ham and Monk made known they felt some new, irresistible force. It seemed to be drawing them toward the slanting peak of Mount Shasta several thousand feet above them.

Suddenly the rain of pursuing bullets ceased. The new force must have been working in the reverse on the angry mountaineers. One of the Shallops let out a yell.

“Hi, fellers! What in time are we shootin’ at them for? They ain’t nary one of ’em done us no harm!”

The other Shallops agreed. They were regretting they had been trying to pulverize a pair of innocent citizens, as they viewed it in their new state of mind.

In fact, the Shallops started berating each other for this unjustified attack. And they started back down the mountain.

“I know what we’re going to find up here,” announced Ham. “This Professor Randolph, and he has Johnny with him.”

“Yeah,” agreed Monk. “I’ve known all the time Johnny was alive and that he would be up here.”

They were still floundering through the soft, knee-deep slush of the glacier. The temperature, contrary to the nature of world atmosphere, was becoming warmer as they ascended.

“Blazes, Ham!” jerked out Monk. “We’re comin’ into another belt of trees! Dagonit, they’re young an’ green, as if they hadn’t been planted long!”

“Funny,” murmured Ham; “they look something like bamboo. But there never was any bamboo in this climate.”

MONK had reached one long arm above his head. His prehensile fingers closed on a huge, peculiar knob jutting out from the small trunk.

“Well, I’ll be a monkey’s brother!” exploded Monk.

“Which adds nothing to past information,” drawled Ham. “What has penetrated your thick skull now?”

“You ignorant shyster fop!” yelled Monk. “These things ain’t trees! They’re corn—*corn like you eat!*”

Seldom did the astute Ham evince surprise. But his jaw sagged a little.

“I thought all the time it was a giant beanstalk in the story that Jack climbed, but for once you’re right. *This is corn!*”

The corn towered many feet above their heads. The ears were of fabulous size. Suddenly Monk jumped to one side, as if he had been stung. A hideous green worm, nearly a foot in length, had dropped on one of his hairy ears.

This worm had pincers several inches long. Its mouth gaped open.

“Great catamounts!” yelled Ham. “That’s a corn borer, but what a borer!”

“I wish I could make up my mind to go back down the mountain,” said Monk plaintively. “Look ahead, Ham! Them things couldn’t be tomato vines, could they?”

“After seeing that corn, they could be peanuts and still be as big as pumpkins,” said Ham. “But I judge they are tomatoes. And those plants which look like hazel bushes are the tops of carrots.”

They were enmeshed in the fantastic garden. They could see it had not sprung up there by chance. The corn had been set in even rows. The tomato vines were supported on climber uprights that had been young fir trees.

“Talk about your tropical valleys!” exploded Ham. “None of these plants are tropical, but you can almost see them grow!”

“Daggonit!” wailed Monk. “Maybe what them Shallops said about some of their people disappearin’ an’ becomin’ giants has somethin’ to do with it!”

“Keep your eyes open for signs of human habitation,” warned Ham. “I think we ought to get back down the mountain, but strangely enough I want to go on up to the peak.”

The fabulous garden occupied a wide valley on Mount Shasta. From the erosion of the ground, it was apparent this valley had been the home of a glacier not long before. A light wind rustled through the broad leaves of mammoth plants.

Suddenly, above the crimson shine of the snow, two bright columns of silver appeared a thousand feet or more above the garden. The columns were so tall they disappeared into the fog wreathing the peak of the mountain.

Monk laid one hand on Ham’s arm. He pointed beyond the edge of the vast cornfield.

“Well, I’ll be superamalgamated, as Johnny would put it!” said Ham. “I’ve heard of dreams walking, but I never before saw a tree doing it!”

Monk’s furry body shivered. The tree was a good-sized fir. It was at least fifty feet in length. And it was passing the edge of the crazy garden as if borne on the back of some huge beast of burden.

But this was not a beast of burden. Possibly an elephant could have transported the huge log. But no elephant ever spoke in a human voice with a distinct mountain twang.

“The master said as how we was to bring up them stone!”

A human voice, but it came with the volume that might have been created by a giant loudspeaker. Undoubtedly, the speech came from the man who was carrying the fir tree.

“I think it would be a good move to find our way around the garden and see if we can make contact with this Professor Randolph before we are detected,” advised Ham.

“Blazes! I’d say it would—— Look out, Ham!”

HAM’S decision had come too late. From between the rows of corn came tremendous hands. Monk’s warning only gave Ham time enough to whip to one side and draw out his sword blade. He slapped the drugged point of the blade at the pair of grabbing hands.

The resultant howl almost split their eardrums. It was as if some monstrous beast had suddenly been injured badly.

Monk got beside Ham, his hands filled with anæsthetic pellets. The drugged sword had been effective. The pair of huge hands flew upward. A long body fell and thrashed among the big cornstalks.

These flailed down upon Ham and Monk with the weight and force of small trees in a cyclone. Monk let go all the gas capsules at once as he was flattened to the ground.

Now the garden became filled with incredible figures. They formed a ring. Ham’s sword cane played like a streak of light. A hand as hard as bone caught the blade and snapped it off.

“Daggonit, I’ll show ’em!” yelled Monk.

Monk lashed out with his big fists. Not a single blow missed contact with their monstrous enemies. But for all the effect they had, Monk’s mighty fists might as well have been blows delivered by a baby.

A few of the giant figures were overcome by the drugged capsules, but Ham and Monk discovered they were as helpless as small children.

Neither was rendered unconscious. They were simply locked in grips they could not break. In this manner they were borne from the garden. Their captors were carrying them up the steep slope of Mount Shasta as if they were mere babies.

“Howlin’ calamities!” came the childlike voice of Monk. “Ham, do you see what I see?”

“I am looking at what might be the world’s greatest observatory,” said Ham quietly. “All the instruments are inclosed in rooms of clear crystal. Nothing is concealed from the outside.”

Monk became speechless. It seemed to him as if he were looking through the side of Mount Shasta itself.

Below them, near the valley of the giant garden, loomed other queer buildings of wood and stone. None had ever heard of a city existing in the wilderness of Mount Shasta.

Stranger still, Mount Shasta carried one of the most modern motor highways across its lower slopes. A north and south line of railroad paralleled the highway.

At no point on the mountain could it have been more than a few miles from ordinary, civilized transportation.

The glass wall of a room slid open. Ham and Monk were pushed inside. A low voice spoke soothingly. Neither of the prisoners were touched. But both fell immediately into a deep sleep.

Chapter XI

DOC'S MAMMOTH FOE

WHEN the radio set in Ham and Monk's plane had been cut off, Doc had driven his car back to the garage, bronze eyes watchful. He arrived on the eighty-sixth floor at about the time Ham and Monk were being put to sleep by a soothing voice.

The bronze giant moved with infinite caution. As he emerged from his special high-speed elevator, he had become aware that all was not right in the office.

Doc glided to one side. His foot contacted the button which should have started the visionator. Nothing happened.

The man of bronze realized instantly that some one had been in the laboratory. He glided into the reception room and then halted. On the floor in front of him lay two bodies. They were those of men. They were the bodies of Long Tom and Professor Archer. The men on the floor were breathing faintly.

Doc employed his generator flashlight gingerly. He verified the fact that Long Tom and Professor Archer were only unconscious. Doc flicked off the light.

Something queer was happening to him. His trained senses had picked up another presence, but his character, whether animal or human, was vague.

Doc whipped to a repository near his reception-room desk. From this, he picked out a black box somewhat like an old-fashioned stereoscope. Only it gave forth no light.

The ray whipping from the box was known as a violet ray, or the black light. Doc directed this briefly at the glass top of his desk. A few scrawled words glowed with eerie fluorescence.

The words had been written by Long Tom with a chalk which fluoresced under the violet ray.

DOC—THEY HAVE GOT PAT AND ANN GARVIN—A MONSTER
IS NOW——

At this juncture, Long Tom's message had been cut off.

Doc Savage stood as motionless as a statue for perhaps ten seconds. He had the deepest affection for his cousin, Patricia Savage. In all ordinary situations of danger, Pat could look after herself.

To-night's happenings, however, were beyond anything within human credence. For once, the bronze giant was considerably puzzled. The pattern of the amazing white-ash deaths, of mind-changing, of control of all world radio waves must have emanated from the power Professor Randolph boasted he possessed.

Doc had observed swiftly that his laboratory had been smashed. This had been accomplished as if some huge animal had gone crashing about in the interior. No sign remained of Ann Garvin, Patricia and the two men.

Doc could not determine how Long Tom was aware some one had got Pat. Pat had not been present when Doc had last peered into his headquarters through the visionator. The man of bronze had hoped then that Pat had grown tired of waiting and returned to her Park Avenue apartment.

In spite of Long Tom's message, perhaps the electrician was mistaken. Doc quietly made a telephone contact with Pat's residence. A maid replied.

"No," said the maid. "Miss Savage is not here. There was a call an hour or so ago which said she would not return for several days."

Recalling Pat's uncertain state of mind when he had last seen her. Doc decided fast action would be required. He wanted to know what Long Tom knew. It might help to a certain degree.

Doc bent over the pallid little man. Long Tom looked as dead as he ever would look. This proved nothing, for Long Tom looked almost as dead when he was walking around.

The man of bronze slipped a hypodermic needle from a pocket. Working in the darkness, he thrust the point into Long Tom's shoulder. For once, Doc's senses weren't working as they should have. He was concentrating all his efforts on Long Tom.

Had a clamshell steam shovel suddenly descended and pawed Doc into its iron grip, he could not have been more surprised at what suddenly took place. His neck was seized in a powerful grip.

THE man of bronze set his corded neck against the crushing hold. At the same time, he flashed both hands upward, seizing the wrists of his assailant.

Doc Savage was more than mildly surprised. His immense, cabled fingers were neither long enough nor powerful enough to have effect on the bony columns his attacker had for wrists.

Doc's instant effort was to bring one of his special anæsthetic devices into play. But his arms were locked behind him as if a vise had suddenly closed.

Still Doc fought against the amazingly overwhelming odds of size and strength, such as he had never before encountered. One of Doc's heels found a vulnerable nerve on one of his attacker's knees.

All this elicited was a grunt and a tightening of the grip on Doc's neck. Even with his muscles set ridged against it, the man of bronze realized his attacker had the strength to crush his spine.

The unseen man threw his weight on Doc's back. Knees of the general force of descending steel pillars seemed to crush Doc's ribs. Doc realized then that even his astounding physical powers were insufficient to cope with his enemy.

Suddenly, the bronze giant permitted his whole body to go lax. Cords that must have been cut in rawhide from animals were swiftly drawn around his arms and legs. The job of tying was expert and complete.

Next, Doc was lifted and carried into his wrecked laboratory. One faint light there revealed the face of his captor.

The man could not have been less than ten feet tall. He must have weighed nearly seven hundred pounds. His face was a bony, snag-toothed mask. The giant did not seem to be angry.

Also, he was unbelievably good-humored. His ugly, scraggly-bearded face broke into a broad smile. He seemed as pleasant as a child.

“I ain’t had no trouble like the master warned me about,” he stated. “They say to me you are a mighty strong man. I am stronger. My master has sent me to bring you.”

Doc was adding up his present information. No doubt, this giant was a mountaineer. The bronze man was familiar with the vernacular of nearly all peoples.

This giant had none of the Eastern or Middle Western mountain rendition of speech. Then he must have come from the far West. This linked up with the rather garbled message from Ham and Monk.

“You are a remarkable man,” said Doc pleasantly. “Will you tell me your name?”

“Ain’t no reason why not,” stated the giant. “I’m Walrath Shallop. Me and some of my people serve the master.”

“It is always well to obey your master,” agreed Doc. “And did you always have this great size and strength?”

Walrath Shallop grinned.

“Ain’t been so long I’ve got it,” he said. “Until I went out to shoot a goat a few weeks ago, I was kinda puny.”

TEMPORARILY in the giant’s power, Doc was sure the big fellow would be intensely loyal. Not because of any inherent integrity, but because of some mental as well as physical influence which controlled him.

Doc judged quickly another factor. This mountain giant being here denoted that others of Randolph’s friends were also in Manhattan by some special means of transportation.

Doc had intended making a swift flight to join Ham and Monk. Now he became aware he probably would make such a journey whether he willed it or not.

Doc Savage was slowly drawing the giant Walrath’s pale-blue eyes to look into the hypnotic depths of his own flake-gold orbs. Without appearing to do so, he was compelling Walrath Shallop to gaze at him more intently.

The man of bronze had been tossed roughly near one of the broken laboratory tables. He was so tightly bound, he could move neither feet nor hands to get at any of his defensive devices.

Doc was aware this giant mountaineer, who had only recently been a puny fellow, was being controlled in both mind and body by probably the same force that had changed Ann Garvin, Pat and Long Tom.

Would hypnotism affect the giant?

Doc knew the lesser the degree of intelligence, the easier it is to control the mind. He had Walrath looking at him steadily now. The giant’s good humor had apparently faded. His crooked mouth snarled over the snags of his teeth.

“I ain’t listenin’ to no propositions!” he rapped out, in a voice as loud as an amplifier radio.

This conveyed information to Doc that the giant was already feeling his hypnotic power. But the control broke with unexpected violence.

The giant Walrath suddenly seemed to go berserk. Catching up a heavy metal ball, he started smashing priceless retorts and tubes. His pale eyes were pulling back to Doc’s hypnotic ones, but this did not check what appeared to be an insane rage.

Doc judged two controls were fighting for domination of the mountaineer’s limited brain. This was too much for his mental balance. Now Walrath Shallop had completed a round of smashing inanimate objects.

He turned on the bound and helpless Doc. Very apparently, he had suddenly come to look upon the bronze giant as some kind of a tormentor.

“The master said I was to bring you!” growled Walrath.

He raised the ponderous metal ball high in his huge hands. The ball itself weighed not less than a hundred pounds.

Some of the power in the laboratory was on. Doc’s radio crackled. A mocking voice floated in on the shortwave.

“Bring Doc Savage to me, Walrath—dead or alive!”

The giant’s pale eyes glinted with a killer’s fury. Clearly, he was in some manner under the influence of the bound bronze man. Plainly enough he had will power enough left to resent this influence.

“Dead or alive!” growled Walrath.

The metal ball was lifted high above the giant’s head. Its descent would have crushed stone and metal.

THE cage of rare tropical birds did not move. But from within its interior flashed a brilliant light. It had the effect of a lightning bolt being flashed before human eyes.

Doc Savage had closed his own eyes. He had buried his face in his arms. Close beside him, the great metal ball struck with an impact that cracked the floor.

Walrath started swearing wildly. He was groping about the laboratory.

“I can’t see nothin’! I can’t see nothin’!” he was yelling.

Doc was rolling toward the glass fragments of smashed retorts. The giant blundered around the room, knocking over many objects. Doc was sawing the rawhide thongs from his arms.

“Gimme back my eyes!” shouted Walrath. “Where are you?”

“Here, Walrath,” spoke Doc quietly. “Right this way.”

The giant threw out his hands. He walked directly into Doc’s massive arms. Walrath flailed blindly with his fists. One arm closed around Doc’s ribs.

But this hold failed Walrath. One of Doc’s thumbs went under the giant’s armpit. Two other fingers were sunk in the flesh under one of Walrath’s ears. The giant went slack.

Soon he was sitting on the floor, his head nodding.

“You will now go with me to your master, Walrath,” stated Doc.

The giant’s eyes were glazed. He nodded dully in assent.

Doc wasted no time reviving Long Tom and Professor Archer.

The two men stared at the submissive giant from the mountains.

“He got us,” stated Long Tom, “and I was afraid he might get you.”

“He did get me,” stated Doc. “But I fear Walrath has never seen hypnotism applied. Possibly, he will become a valuable aid for our mission.”

Long Tom’s mood was not of the best. He had not been the same since the mind-changing force had struck him. But the disappearance of Pat Savage helped to control the electrician.

“Are you intending to seek Professor Randolph?” inquired Professor Archer. “If so, he has always been a good friend. Perhaps I could be of some assistance. Randolph’s actions are amazing to me.”

“I will require all the help I can get,” stated Doc. “Not only Johnny, but I believe Ham and Monk are now in the hands of Randolph and the others wielding this mysterious power for evil.”

“But where would Pat and Ann Garvin have been taken?” asked Long Tom.

“I suspect both are now several hundred miles from this spot,” stated Doc. “I shall check——”

The radio in the laboratory crackled. The words coming over it were broken, uttered as if with great difficulty. The final few were snatched away.

“Doc—Doc Savage—Denver—millions—Denver Mint—I can’t stop—can’t stop—to-morrow morning—Doc! Help me!”

Though the words could be distinguished, the voice was muffled. It might have been the voice of Professor Randolph. Or it could have been a disguised voice attempting trickery.

“What could he mean?” demanded Professor Archer. “He couldn’t be intimidating any one would attempt to rob a United States mint. Why, that is an absurd impossibility! An army couldn’t break into one of the government mints!”

“An army could not break into the mint at Denver,” stated Doc. “But much less than an army killed all the radio waves in the world. If you care to accompany us, Professor Archer, we shall be in Denver early to-morrow morning.”

NO trace had been obtained of Pat Savage or Ann Garvin. Flying fields had no reports of young women answering their description.

But about this time a watchman on one of the old Hudson River piers was calling Doc Savage by telephone. This watchman was stationed in a musty, unpainted warehouse.

“Hidalgo Trading Co.” was all the sign this one of many piers along the Hudson bore.

The watchman spoke rapidly with Doc.

“Four hundred feet long, if it was an inch, and looked like some kind of a silver fish,” said the man. “Only when I was watching for it to take a dive, the thing went up, not down. And it had neither propellers or explosion tubes. It made no sound.”

“Have the fastest twin-motored plane ready,” was Doc’s only reply. “I shall be at the hangar in a few minutes.”

With Long Tom at the wheel of his sedan, Doc Savage rode the running board outside. Clinging with one cabled hand, the bronze man was missing no detail of sound, sight or smell. At this juncture, any call might have been a trap.

A big Irish traffic policeman started to blow his whistle, then refrained. His finger tips saluted Doc Savage. The bronze man carried his own honorary commission in the city and State police.

But this did not prevent the big policeman from flopping his mouth open.

“Holy mackerel!” he jerked out. “There ain’t no such size man outside o’ a circus, an’ I don’t believe there’s one in a circus!”

The huge bulk of Walrath, the mountaineer, filled nearly all the rear seat of Doc’s sedan. The giant was “bringing Doc Savage to his master,” but hardly in the manner he had expected.

A few minutes later the car arrived at Doc’s hangar. The men got out and entered the hangar. Almost a moment later, a motor broke into sound.

The twin-motored cabin plane that glided out into the Hudson from the Hidalgo Trading Co. hangar did not oppose a square inch to the wind. Its powerful motors and streamlining made it the fastest model of its type anywhere in the world.

“We can pick up nearly five hundred miles an hour with this ship,” Doc told Professor Archer. “That will get us into Denver around daylight. But I am convinced those we are seeking will have reached Denver at four or five times our possible speed.”

Doc did not say why he believed this. As he took the plane’s controls, he carefully removed a roll of photographic film from a pocket and placed it in a tube compartment of the plane’s cabin.

Doc had his reason for this action. The film he had taken from the copper bomb remained elsewhere on his person.

Chapter XII

RAID ON THE MINT

DOC SAVAGE set his fast plane down on the Platte River. The valley above Denver toward the Colorado mountains permitted this stream to broaden into navigable proportions.

Because of many irrigation projects, dams had been built. South lay Pikes Peak. This was seventy miles from Denver. On clear days its needle could be seen from the city.

“Long Tom will look after the plane,” stated Doc. “Daylight will not arrive for nearly an hour. We will hire some farmer’s car. Long Tom will keep Walrath occupied. He might attract too much attention in Denver.”

“Surely, you hardly believe the story an attempt will be made to rob the United States mint?” questioned Professor Archer, fiddling with his gold eyeglasses. “Such a gigantic scheme could not be possible!”

Doc looked at Walrath, the giant mountaineer.

“Walrath doesn’t seem possible either, Professor Archer. I not only believe the plan has been laid to rob the mint, but I believe, also, the marauders are already on the ground. The trap is set.”

A farmer’s boy, driving a rickety car, stared in awe at Doc Savage. Perhaps in the far valley of the Platte River he had never heard of the bronze giant. Nevertheless, he was greatly impressed. He was more than pleased when the man of bronze hired his car.

The boy sent the car rocking down the valley toward the city. Denver, at one time the gold and silver center of America, does not set among sharp mountains. As they sighted the city, Doc Savage studied the surrounding country.

The city lay in a plateau valley. The nearest hogback mountain range was perhaps ten miles distant. Due to the high altitude, these ranges seemed only a mile or so.

There were hundreds of valleys which afforded possible concealment for almost any kind of aircraft. The first view of the city in the break of the rising sun was a gleaming point which looked much like gold.

“It is my first time in Denver,” said Professor Archer. “I have heard of the State Capitol’s golden dome. There are few spots on earth, especially in these days, where gold could thus be exposed.”

The State capitol building of Colorado was situated on perhaps the highest spot within the city of Denver. This was a rolling hill. The capitol’s high dome reflected the morning sun vividly.

None had ever found the means for purloining a single ounce of the glittering roof. It was made of thinly rolled gold. At the time this dome was built, the mines in the mountains around Denver promised to be inexhaustible.

“It was because of the vast supplies of gold and silver the original old mint was built here,” stated Doc Savage. “We are now coming to Cherry Creek. The first mint was near the creek.”

PROFESSOR ARCHER seemed less interested in this information than in the possible tactics the man of bronze might employ should there really be a raid on the mint.

At times, Professor Archer smiled covertly, as if he doubted the amazing powers of Doc Savage. However, Professor Archer was not alone in this. Many before him had doubted the bronze man’s resourcefulness.

“If there really is a plot to rob the mint, what steps do you propose to take?” inquired Professor Archer.

“That will depend upon circumstances,” stated Doc. “Most persons would believe the mint to be impregnable. It is safe-guarded by numerous devices. Its employees are the oldest and the most trusted in government service.”

The hired farm car went across the bridge over Cherry Creek. At Doc’s direction, the boy drove directly along Sixteenth Street. By this time the morning was clear and brilliant.

“When we reach Champa Street, turn left, then drive slowly toward the capitol dome,” instructed Doc.

A block from the United States mint, Doc ordered the farmer boy to halt the car.

The gray of Colorado granite made up the building in which was always a gold supply worth many millions. Doc had learned this store of treasure had been increased within the past few days.

A uniformed policeman appeared at a corner near the mint. He began directing the early traffic. Two motor-cycle traffic patrolmen gave Doc’s hired car the once-over.

It was an ordinary farmer’s auto, but the motor-cycle men turned to have a second look. The bronzed face and hair of Doc Savage made up a head that might have been sculptured from gold.

“Professor Randolph may have great power, but he hasn’t got enough to break through those barriers,” stated Professor Archer. “I’ll wager those bars at the doors and windows are of steel that would resist the most powerful cutting torch.”

“I haven’t a doubt of that,” agreed Doc. “However, Professor Archer, you are about to witness a robbery of a mint. The barred fence and windows will offer no obstacles.”

THREE armored trucks emerged from Sixteenth Street into Champa Street. They were of the ordinary type employed to transport city pay rolls or shipments of high value.

Two men occupied the seat of each of the trucks. They wore a uniform, with guns swinging in leather holsters at their hips. The traffic policeman immediately whistled other traffic back.

“Those trucks probably are on their way to the mint,” said Professor Archer. “Perhaps they are preparing to move a big shipment of gold. This would be an inauspicious time for outside bandits to try to break in.”

Doc said nothing. The whirlwinds in his flake-gold eyes stirred with some premonition. His rare, trilling emanation was heard faintly. The farm boy was startled.

The boy looked all around. He could not determine the source of the trilling which turned his skin to pimply goose-flesh.

One truck driver gestured to the traffic policeman. It was unusual for a traffic man to leave his post. But after the truck driver had spoken a few words, the policeman swung onto the step of his truck.

“Hey, buddy!” shouted the driver of the second truck. “Mind trailing along? We’re moving a heavy consignment of bullion! Ought to have had more guards!”

The call was directed at the cruising motor-cycle men.

“Sure! Sure!” replied one of the cops.

The motor-cycle men turned, forming an escort for the second truck.

“They have some other policemen with them,” said Professor Archer. “They are Denver city police. That ends all immediate chance for any possible holdup.”

“It would seem that way,” stated Doc. “They have half a dozen policemen of the city force. Some have machine-guns.”

“Looks as if we were only wasting time,” said Professor Archer. “I was hoping we could find some trace of Ann Garvin and your cousin, Patricia, to-day.”

“We happen to be closer to Ann Garvin and Patricia right now than we were in Manhattan,” smiled Doc. “I have no doubt but that the robbery of the mint will proceed on schedule.”

“Well, the whole affair has me guessing,” declared Archer.

IN the first watchman’s box the gray-haired occupant saw the three armored trucks swing into the entry.

At this point were heavily reinforced gates. Machine guns guarded each side. Before the trucks could enter, the gunman guards, the watchman, and finally the superintendent must be satisfied their call was legitimate.

The gray-haired watchman pushed a buzzer. He was connected with the superintendent’s office.

“Three trucks outside,” announced the watchman. “They have a flock of cops along, so I guess they’re all right.”

“Trucks?” came the superintendent’s voice. “We’ve nothing scheduled to go out or come in. I shall be right down.”

Four men from two of the trucks stood before the high iron gates. The machine-gun guards looked them over suspiciously. They had received no order to admit any one.

The middle-aged, nervous superintendent came from the office. He walked to the gates. He twiddled a small mustache.

“What’s this?” he demanded through the iron bars. “I have received no word of anything to be moved to-day.”

The driver of one of the trucks spoke quietly.

“You are Carnahan? Well, we are to remove for Hawaiian shipment the twenty millions in bullion received this week. It is a direct Washington order. I have nothing written, you understand?”

“No one ever gets in here without proper credentials!” snapped the superintendent. “The order and the receipts must be——”

The truck driver merely smiled. His head nodded slowly. He did not speak again.

The mint superintendent rubbed one hand across his forehead.

“Sure, I understand,” he said quickly, interrupting his own speech. “Let them drive in.”

The machine-gunners were already moving the gate levers. One by one, the armored trucks passed inside the rectangle of the barred fence. The superintendent himself caught the step of one of the trucks.

Several city policemen joined the machine-gun guards. Two coppers took up their positions a short distance from the gates. They made a close inspection of all pedestrians passing by.

“Some of the stuff has been removed from the boxes,” said the superintendent to the first truck driver. “I’ll have my men get it in shape while you are loading the other boxes.”

The loading of the trucks proceeded with unusual smoothness. The three drivers stood to one side, hands on their hip guns, keeping a careful check.

One of the policemen at the gates yelled, “Hey, there! You can’t stop near the mint! Keep moving!”

A huge moving van, with two men on the seat, had halted almost in a position to block the mint gates. The motor was suddenly silenced.

“Hell, I ain’t wantin’ to stop!” growled the van driver. “I’ve got a short in the ignition! I’ll have to fix it!”

From the sidewalk sprang a lone pedestrian. He was a stocky, young fellow, apparently an attaché of the mint on the way to his office.

“Move that van!” yelled this young man. “It’s a trick! I’ll get Carnahan out here!”

Plainly, this young fellow was not going to prove as agreeable as the mint guards and the others. He pulled an automatic from a pocket and walked to the front of the stalled van.

From near the gates came the racketing blast of a machine gun. This was in the hands of a regular city policeman. What inspired him to shoot was not apparent.

“Why, you damn killer——”

The young man with the automatic could say no more. He was sitting down, hands clutching at bleeding, raw flesh where the side of his throat had been torn out.

At this, one of the men on the van swung a machine-gun into position. It vomited flame. The policeman who had killed the young man dropped his weapon and slid to

the sidewalk.

In Doc Savage's hired car a block away, Professor Archer was jumping with excitement.

"They're shooting! They are trying to pull off the robbery! We'll have to do something! Can't we drive closer?"

None had ever known Doc Savage to hesitate because of danger. The marvelous bronze man had walked into more than one machine-gun nest. But he made no movement to interfere.

"Should we drive closer, perhaps we would be in no better position than the others at the mint," stated Doc. "The shooting may or may not be intentional. I rather imagine it is accidental, due to the result of a peculiar state of mind. The armored trucks are now coming out."

THE three armored trucks, loaded with gold bullion, moved toward the gates. The driver of the moving van apparently got his motor going. Sirens wailed on the motor cycles of the escorting policemen.

"Be ready to follow those trucks," advised Doc. "The robbery of the mint has taken place on schedule."

The big moving van swung off into the side street. The superintendent of the mint was smiling as he ordered the gates closed behind the trucks. The transaction had apparently been most pleasing.

There was at this time no indication that before the day ended, Superintendent Carnahan would lie dead by his own hand in the office he had so faithfully administered.

Four more motor-cycle cops joined the parade of the armored trucks. The truck guards were amply aided by these city policemen. The gold bullion was apparently headed for the Union Station down on Market Street.

In the first two blocks, the armored trucks developed high speed. Police sirens held up other traffic and cleared the way. But near the station, the first truck driver swung off on another street which crossed Cherry Creek.

Doc's hired car was by this time two blocks behind.

"That was to be expected," he stated suddenly. "Those trucks are headed for the mountain hogbacks. Here, son, I'll take the wheel."

Doc Savage swung under the wheel of the hired car. But as it reached the bridge over Cherry Creek, the three armored trucks were vanishing into a side road leading among the hills.

"For Heaven's sake, look!" rapped out Professor Archer. "That's—why, that's Professor Randolph's newest stratosphere ship! It's coming down in the mountains!"

The thing was a gleaming, cigar-shaped cylinder. It gave forth no sound. Yet it had come into view with the speed of an arrow. Now it was descending, miles ahead.

This second *Silver Cylinder* was no less than four hundred feet in length. It shot toward a ridged hogback. Without propellers or other visible means of locomotion or

control, the ship suddenly paused and hovered.

“We are too late,” stated Doc Savage. “The trap was sprung, and it worked perfectly. Here come our friends, the city policemen.”

THIS was true. Sirens screamed. Motor cycles and squad cars were pouring along the road over Cherry Creek. Too late, some mind that had not been under the influence of the mysterious force, had realized the truth.

The siren whistle on top of the United States mint was screaming. In broad daylight a mint had been robbed of millions. It would seem its officers and guards had assisted in that robbery.

This was why Superintendent Carnahan placed a pistol to his temple and pulled the trigger. He was bewildered. His state of mind had changed.

But that did not suffice to palliate the grave offense of which he had been guilty.

Police cars roared alongside Doc Savage’s old farm car. A sergeant halted a squad.

“Who are you?” demanded the sergeant. “You couldn’t be this famous Doc Savage of whom we’ve heard?”

“I could be Doc Savage,” said the man of bronze.

“Then why did you not interfere in that mint holdup?” demanded the sergeant.

“If your own armed men could accomplish nothing, perhaps my own mind isn’t so different from theirs,” stated Doc. “Anyway, there is now no further hope of overtaking the three armored trucks. You may find the trucks, but that will be all.”

Doc pointed upward. Randolph’s *Silver Cylinder* had touched the ground. Now it was ascending. It became merely a blurred shell vanishing over the mountains to the westward.

Chapter XIII

THE VALLEY OF GIANTS

SO speedy was Randolph's new *Silver Cylinder*, it is likely the stratosphere ship had reached the High Sierras before Doc Savage lifted his own fast plane from the Platte River. The bronze man had been somewhat delayed by questioning of the Denver authorities.

A raging inspector demanded, "You were near the scene of the mint robbery, yet you did not interfere! You say you had warning this holdup was to take place? Why did you not warn the police?"

"Possibly a warning would only have increased the bloodshed," said Doc calmly. "If the army and navy had been notified, it would have accomplished nothing. More than likely, the soldiers and sailors would have helped with the robbery."

"That sounds like poppycock to me!" rapped the inspector.

"Perhaps you can explain then why your own men left their regular posts to participate?" stated Doc.

"That's right," said a policeman who had been with the trucks. "I had no business acting as a guard, but when they asked me, it just seemed the right thing to do."

"Then you mean to tell me, Mr. Savage, that you felt if you attempted to interfere you yourself might have abetted the theft?"

"My brain is no more immune than others," said Doc. "The robbery of the United States mint is trivial compared to the problem now before the world. Interference there might simply have delayed the greater object."

But to Denver authorities, that which might happen to the world could not possibly be as important as the lifting of twenty millions in bullion from their mint.

It was late in the afternoon when Doc lifted his fast plane from the Platte River and headed it toward Mount Shasta.

IMPENETRABLE fog, tinged only by a crimson glowing, shrouded the peaks of Mount Shasta and Mount Lassen. A southwest storm was beginning to whip in from the coast.

Meeting the usually cold air of the Sierras, the ocean wind created a turmoil in which Doc's handling of his plane became an act of sheer wizardry. Canyon blasts blew the twin-motored ship close to formidable cliffs.

Doc's bronze hands played with the controls. There were times when he brought the plane to stalling stops. It seemed then to hover in the fog somewhat like an eagle over its prey.

Professor Archer's eyes protruded more than ever. He fumbled nervously with his gold eyeglasses.

“It looks as if there isn’t any possibility of setting the plane down anywhere,” he stated, “It’s amazing that Doc Savage can keep it in the air. But we had the report of the passenger ship that was burned.”

Long Tom still remained under Doc’s hypnotic influence, as did Walrath, the giant mountaineer. But Long Tom became all at once fiercely loyal.

“Doc can make a three-point landing on a thin dime and have room enough left to take-off again,” said Long Tom. “We are now about to land.”

As Ham and Monk had been guided, so Doc now was able to keep his sense of direction and altitude by the scarlet glow of the snow on Mount Shasta. Suddenly, he banked the plane into a place where the fog had cleared somewhat over the white ribbon of the Pacific Highway.

“Couldn’t we land on the highway?” suggested Professor Archer.

A slowly crawling row of lights caused Doc Savage to shake his head.

“We would only endanger other lives,” he advised. “There seems to be an unusual number of travelers on the Pacific Highway.”

The man of bronze switched on the infra-red beam to obtain a better view of what might be transpiring below. He handed Professor Archer a pair of clumsy-looking goggles.

“Great heavens!” snapped out Professor Archer, looking down. “I can see only black and white, but it looks to me as if hundreds of persons are converging upon Mount Shasta from this side!”

“I had expected that would be happening,” stated Doc. “But we needn’t worry about them. They will not progress very far up the mountain.”

“Do you believe we can do it?” asked Professor Archer. “Your own men are there. It would seem that Ann Garvin and Patricia Savage are also prisoners. What could be the purpose of that?”

Doc Savage said nothing. He had turned on the plane robot controls. He reached up and opened the compartment where he had placed a roll of photographic films. The roll had disappeared.

“I suspected they might be taken,” said Doc. “It does not matter greatly, for they are not the films taken from the bomb trap. Perhaps some one has directed the brain of Walrath to act.”

Doc looked straight at the mountain giant. The man’s snag-toothed grin greeted him.

“You will return to me the roll of red paper you took from this compartment, Walrath,” commanded Doc.

Walrath shook his head foolishly.

“I have taken nothing, master,” he said. “I only wish to get back to my people. This be the place of the Shallops. I reckon as how I’m still a Shallop.”

Doc was before the giant with the lithe spring of a cat. His bronze hands now found certain vulnerable nerves.

WALRATH and Doc rolled together to the floor of the cabin. The giant had vast strength. He had subdued Doc easily in their first encounter.

The tables were turned. Doc's superior knowledge of anatomy was too much for the mountain giant. The bronze man rendered the other helpless. From inside Walrath's shirt, Doc pulled the roll of film.

Perhaps the giant was not so dumb as he appeared to be. If the film had been the original taken from the copper bomb, Doc would have lost the only direct evidence he now had gained which might aid in combating the terrific force commanded by Professor Randolph.

"I would hardly have suspected the mountaineer," declared Professor Archer. "Big as he is, he seems harmless."

"Perhaps I do not even yet suspect him," stated Doc.

Long Tom let out a cry. He made a dive for the robot pilot flying the plane. The electrician almost tore the controls apart getting them into his own hands.

"The burning snow!" shouted Long Tom. "It's drawing us in!"

Perhaps this was not literally true. The plane had been flying directly toward Mount Shasta. But for Long Tom's quick action, a crash in the crimson snow would have resulted.

Doc pushed Long Tom away. He started gliding the plane toward the northern side of Mount Shasta. It was from the southward that mobs seemed to be pouring toward the peak.

Doc judged it would be only natural for the first assault on Professor Randolph's stronghold to come from that direction. To the south of Mount Shasta was the creek which formed the headwaters of the Sacramento River.

The country down there was more thickly populated. Mount Shasta's uncanny behavior naturally attracted the curious attention of the towns in Northern California.

At Dunsmuir, on the canyon creek above the break into the Sacramento River, a queer thing had happened. Below the town was a dam and a falls. Salmon ascended the Sacramento River as far as this falls.

The creek above the falls was filled with rainbow and steelhead trout. These fish often attained thirty inches in length. This was regarded as great size.

But two monsters had been speared. The fishermen fled from the spot after one was dragged ashore.

The thing was a rainbow trout. But its weight ran to several hundred pounds. Its length was more than ten feet.

Citizens from Dunsmuir, Redding and Red Bluff saw that fish. They knew it had come from waters draining off Mount Shasta. This was about the time the snow began to burn.

Reports of disappearing mountaineers, hunters in the hills, had been received by three sheriffs. They had assembled posses.

At the moment Doc Savage was vol-planing for a safe landing, sheriffs and deputies were heading a planned investigation of Mount Shasta's astounding behavior.

PROFESSOR ARCHER clung to a cabin seat. Walrath, the giant, lately subdued by Doc, braced himself on legs like small tree trunks. Long Tom showed no evidence of apprehension.

Long Tom had seen Doc set planes down in worse spots.

Doc sideslipped and was forced to zoom over some tall spruce trees. He flattened the plane's wings as it roared over a wide flood of tumbling water.

Then the man of bronze pancaked to a mushy but undamaged landing within a hundred yards of where Ham and Monk had wrecked their plane. Due to lack of hard surface for the wheels, the big plane stopped with an impact which hurled Professor Archer and Walrath from their feet.

Doc slid from the controls to the nearest door. But he did not open it. There came a sound like the drumming of cock partridge wings. This hammered at the door.

The pounding spread to all sides of the fuselage. Doc heard lead whining off the plane's bulletproof body. He could see dancing flares all around the cabin. These formed a trapping circle.

From between these flares came thin slices of fire. Walrath showed some sign of interest. The giant's eyes brightened.

"Them'd be us Shallops!" he grunted, with some satisfaction. "We hit what we point at!"

"There must be quite an army of 'us Shallops,' and we don't seem to be exactly popular with them," said Professor Archer. "Looks to me, Mr. Savage, as if they had assembled an army."

Spidery cracks showed in the glass of some of the windows. The metal gave forth the steady drumming of the bullets.

"Anyway, we have arrived," said Long Tom laconically. "What would you suggest we do now, Doc?"

"These mountain people are innocent and would be harmless, only they have been thrown into a panic," stated Doc. "Supernatural elements have maddened them. Perhaps more of the same thing might disperse them for a short time."

Doc was working with a curious drumlike machine. This had a snout like a brass tube. The tube projected through the side of the cabin. When Doc moved a switch, the low humming of a generator came from inside the machine.

The fog lay at ground level. Its grayness was tinged with the red of the crimson snow. Doc caused the plane's landing lights to shoot their beams into the fog.

This illumination seemed to give the mountain people better light for their shooting. They must have had an unusual amount of ammunition available.

Doc turned a small handle on the side of the drumlike machine behind the brass tube. Walrath, the giant, had his snag-toothed face pressed close to a window. He had quickly learned the bullets of his kin could not come through.

Walrath sprang back. Rearing upward, his head hit the top of the cabin. One great arm swept backward and struck through Professor Archer.

The professor landed in a heap at the far end of the cabin. He fiddled the gold eyeglasses, which he had managed to save from breaking.

“There ain’t no sich a thing!” roared Walrath. “Lemme git out of here before the devil catches up with me!”

There was a slight grin on Long Tom’s pallid face. Doc watching through a window, ground the handle of the brass-tubed machine and said nothing.

The firing of rifles abruptly ceased. Wild cries of fear filled the foggy darkness. The Shallops were fleeing in panic.

These superstitious mountain people had seen many ghostly apparitions since the snow had started burning. But it is doubtful if any of them had ever seen an elephant, even in the flesh.

What they saw now was a whole herd of mighty pachyderms. They appeared to be new monsters coming from the mountains. The Shallops did not stop to reason the tread of the elephants’ feet made no sound, or that the great beasts seemed to be floating on the fog.

The illusion of the herd of elephants had been created by the most ordinary means. The brass tube was simply a moving-picture projector. This machine had been perfected by Doc to a degree where it could reproduce from rolls of film without a curtain, provided there was sufficient darkness and the atmosphere at the time contained enough humidity.

The fog against which the moving elephants were to be seen was of particles so dense they formed a moisture like rain.

WHEN the shooting ceased, Doc turned off the machine. Walrath was mumbling to himself. Doc stepped past the giant, jerked open a door and sprang out.

“Close the door and remain inside,” instructed the man of bronze. “I shall return presently.”

Not all the Shallops had thrown away their pine-knot torches. The mountaineers were fleeing as fast as they could go.

Doc’s movement toward the disappearing torches was like the gliding of some swift mountain animal. He quickly overcame the lead the mountaineers had gained. Several tall, scraggly men, a woman and two children were in a group around one of the flares.

“I’ve been crazy enough to stay in these ’ere hills!” proclaimed one of the men. “All us Shallops is gittin’ down into the flat country amongst the heathens!”

Another Shallop yelled wildly. The pine-knot torch he had been carrying was suddenly twisted from his hand. His cry of fear was cut off abruptly. He fell down and seemed to go to sleep.

“They’re after us, by cracky!” yelled another Shallop.

Two or three other men had keen eyes in the darkness. They glimpsed a huge, shadowy figure among them. This moving shadow made no sound. Only there was the quick, hard crunch of fists striking on bone.

Two mountaineers fell down. Some others started slapping at the huge shadow with their rifle barrels. All were so close in the darkness, they feared to shoot.

The owners of the rifles found their weapons suddenly flying into the air. First their arms felt numb. The feeling crept to their brains. They were conscious only of quick, gripping holds on various parts of their bodies.

One of the Shallops remaining on his feet heard a voice speak to him. The woman with him was on the ground, crying with fear. The two children clung to her.

“You will return with me,” said the quiet, commanding voice. “You will not be harmed. Perhaps you can tell us some of that which we are seeking on the mountain.”

LONG TOM, PROFESSOR ARCHER and Walrath, the giant, had disobeyed Doc’s order to stay in the plane. They were standing outside. The beam of a landing light showed them plainly.

As the bronze man reappeared, the scrawny, bearded mountaineer and the thin woman with the two children were with him. They walked into the circle of light. All appeared to be hypnotized with fear.

Doc Savage spoke to the bearded man.

“I’ve only brought you here to ask you some questions. You will then be permitted to go unharmed.”

The bearded man was not looking at Doc. His lower jaw jumped up and down, as if it were on a loose hinge.

“It ain’t Walrath—it ain’t—Walrath?”

The thin woman screamed shrilly. Her skinny hands went around her two frightened children.

“Pappy! It’s pappy!” squealed the youngest of the children.

He was a boy in tattered clothes and bare feet. He started running toward the clumsy giant.

“My leetle Toddy,” mumbled Walrath, holding out his big arms.

The mountain woman had fainted. The other child lay beside her crying. The bearded prisoner pulled himself together.

“They said as how all us Shallops they caught on the mountain got turned into giants,” he said, in a quivering voice. “I don’t put no stock in sich talk.”

“You mean,” said Doc, “that the giant called Walrath here has not always been this size? You are safe enough here, so you can tell us what you know.”

“Walrath ain’t never been a big feller,” said the bearded man. “Mebbe ’twas four or five weeks past, him an’ three other Shallops went goatin’ back in the mountain. We done thought mebbe some o’ them game wardens got ’em. Then we heard from an airplane feller they was in that Valley of Giants.”

“Valley of Giants?” said Doc Savage. “Then you believe there is such a place?”

The giant Walrath suddenly put the boy who had called him “pappy” to one side. His snag-toothed countenance took on a gleam of intelligence.

“Yop!” said Walrath. “I’m one o’ them giants, like the corn an’ termaters an’ the trees they’s a-growin’ up thar. I kin tell yuh how——”

Doc Savage caught the child in his hands, whipping to one side. The giant Walrath never would complete his story.

Chapter XIV

MOUNTAIN UNCLIMBED

DOC SAVAGE'S catching up of the child was but part of his movement. His body struck Long Tom and Professor Archer. The two men rolled far to one side, falling under the fuselage of the plane.

With unbelievable speed and strength, Doc had the mountain woman and the other child. He got all behind a sheltering rock.

Thin blue vapor floated upward. It was dispelled in the beam of the plane's landing light. In the fog, on the ground, were two small heaps of white ashes.

These were the spots where Walrath and the bearded mountaineer had stood. The death had struck at the instant Walrath had revealed to Doc the fantastic existence of things in the Valley of Giants.

Professor Archer's eyes stuck out as he came from under the plane. His gold glasses twirled on one finger.

"If we can get the plane out of here, I'm for trying to seek some greater force before we attempt to find out more about this mystery," he said.

Doc put the woman and the two mountain children into the shelter of the plane's cabin.

"There is no need to seek more aid," he said to Professor Archer. "Mount Shasta already is besieged by the law on the other side. A posse is now trying to cross the flood to reach us."

"But what can we possibly do against this death?" said Long Tom.

"I became aware back in New York," said Doc, "that this death of the white ashes could strike one person and leave another standing beside him. The force behind this has created modern instruments perhaps a quarter of a century in advance of to-day's radio science. It is enough to turn even so upright a mind as that of Professor Randolph."

"You mean, Mr. Savage, we can be seen by the power controlling this fearful element?" said Professor Archer.

"Both seen and heard," stated Doc. "All our conversation now and every movement is being observed through some hitherto undreamed reception and television. We need make no attempt to cover what we are doing, because it is clear enough to those we seek. For the present, it was not desired we should know more about this Valley of Giants."

BOOTED feet slopped in the slushy meadow. Flashlights and lanterns waved in the fog. It seemed as if a small army were approaching. A cadaverous-looking individual headed the group.

“Put up your hands, you fellas, until I see what you are doin’ around here!” this man commanded. “I’m the sheriff of the county, an’ if you have anythin’ to do with these queer happenin’s, you’re under arrest!”

The cadaverous man stepped closer. He peered near-sightedly at Doc Savage.

“Well, I’ll swan!” he jerked out. “You look like a picture I seen of that fella Doc Savage!”

“I’m Doc Savage,” stated the bronze man quietly. “So you’re the sheriff? You are part of those who started up Mount Shasta on the other side. It’s easier climbing over there, but about halfway to the snow line you all changed your minds and decided you would come over where the climbing would be tougher.”

The sheriff’s long jaws separated. He gaped at Doc.

“Now how in thunderation could you know anythin’ about that?” he gulped. “We could have gone up the mountain to the snow on the other side, but all of a sudden we started back down. Somebody said we would have to cross the flood of Afternoon Creek and try up the spine.”

“How much have you learned?” said Doc. “You know about these mountain people disappearing?”

“Yup, we know that,” said the sheriff. “They’ve always hunted deer out of season back of Mount Shasta. They call it goin’ goatin’. Lately, we have been hearin’ about some of them gettin’ lost. But here a couple of weeks ago a whole crew of lumberjacks workin’ in the Lassen County woods went the same way.”

“How do you know they didn’t just quit their jobs and walk out?” said Doc.

“Because we followed their trail,” said the sheriff. “There was fifty of them fellas, an’ they left all their tools. Their tracks were plain enough for several miles. But between Mount Lassen and Mount Shasta, they just disappeared in the rocks.”

“Then you should have gone on up the mountain,” stated Doc.

“Dang it!” yelped the sheriff. “That’s what we’re aimin’ to do! An’ if you’re that Doc Savage, I’m askin’ your help!”

“All of us will climb the mountain on this side,” advised Doc.

He manipulated certain switches and controls of the plane. Any person attempting to molest it probably would not know for many hours what had happened. A zone of powerful anæsthetic gas had been created around the plane.

ALL the mountain-climbing party would have been amazed had they known of the eyes and ears seeing and listening to their plans. All with the possible exception of Doc Savage himself.

Two persons were in a room that appeared to have glass walls. This was not glass. Its crystal formation seemed to be as hard as diamond. One man in the room had a glass cutter concealed on his person. He had tried it.

This man was the lean, shrewd-witted Ham. Now his wits did not seem to serve him so well. With him was the ugly figure of Monk. When Doc Savage, the sheriff and the others started to climb, Ham and Monk were looking at one of the glass walls.

In that wall appeared distinctly all the mountain climbers. From flaring glass tubes in the same wall came the voices of the distant climbers.

“When they have Doc, he will become the world’s greatest giant,” stated Ham. “I wish Patricia wouldn’t grow so fast, though.”

Certainly these words did not make sense. Yet they must have seemed all right to Monk. For the time being he had no quarrel with Ham.

“If they make me into one of them giants, maybe Patricia will like me better,” said Monk’s childlike voice.

Both looked away from the television of the mountain climbers. Another wall was one of a series. The crystal clearness of the rooms made it possible for them to see the two pretty women in another glass room.

Ham and Monk had instantly identified Patricia Savage. She had been placed there only a few hours before. The young woman with Patricia was very attractive. Ham and Monk did not know she was Professor Ann Garvin.

The pair had been afforded no means of communicating with Pat. It was apparent she could see them as prisoners, for she had smiled and nodded. Ham had commenced talking, knowing his words could not be heard. But Pat, like Doc and the others, was an expert lip reader.

Something weird had affected Pat. She had turned her face toward Ham and Monk, but she could not seem to understand what Ham was saying. Pat, in turn, was speaking words.

Neither Ham nor Monk could then read her lips. Perhaps the series of crystal walls made lip movement seem different from what it should be. Or perhaps the master of what appeared to be a continuous honeycomb of crystal rooms had such control of the human mind as to halt undesired communication.

Strangest of all the surprises coming to Ham and Monk was apparent through still another wall. This showed a larger room than all others. In it were a number of men.

Among these was William Harper Littlejohn. And Johnny was at work with the others.

This greater room might have been a central control compartment. It was filled with a multitude of strange contrivances of metal and glass, of the kind Ham and Monk never before had seen.

Johnny’s skeletonlike figure moved among these devices. In fact, the geologist of Doc Savage’s group seemed himself to be directing much of what was taking place.

When Monk spoke of being made into a giant, he and Ham had been watching the pretty Pat Savage and the other young woman.

Now Ham said, “Pat is a foot taller than she was an hour ago. The other woman is growing, too. Maybe they mean to send them down into the valley.”

“I wish I’d grow, too,” repeated Monk. “Look, Ham! Doc an’ them other fellows have reached the red snow. I guess they are going to come on up the mountain. When Doc gets here, I hope they make him boss of all the other giants. Don’t you think maybe Pat would like me if I got to be a giant, Ham?”

“Pat always has liked some queer things,” stated Ham. “You forget that perhaps I also shall become a giant.”

“Look!” said Monk. “Doc an’ the other fellows are runnin’ into somethin’!”

THOUGH he had no means of knowing he was being observed by his own companions, Doc Savage was well aware his party was rapidly losing its determination to climb up Mount Shasta.

Doc was the first to reach the glacier. The melting snow cast what might have been a crimson cloud around Doc’s great body. There were more than fifty persons in the sheriff’s posse following.

“That there warm snow is causin’ the flood in Afternoon Creek,” said the cadaverous sheriff. “What in blazes, Mr. Savage, do you suppose could be makin’ it melt? It was dang nigh down to zero only a thousand feet lower than this.”

“When we have learned about the snow, probably we will know more about several other mysteries,” stated Doc. “I notice that all your men are well armed. Unless it becomes necessary to defend yourselves, we should be cautious about shooting. There may be many persons in this Valley of Giants, but possibly all of them are innocent of doing wrong.”

All the party was now floundering knee-deep in the soft snow. The glare of it seemed to burn their eyes. The temperature was possibly what would have been average summer heat.

“Doc Savage!” suddenly called the sheriff. “I ain’t goin’ no farther up the mountain! This here’s just a wild-goose chase! I ain’t got any right to be takin’ a posse outside of my own jurisdiction!”

None saw the mighty muscles of the bronze man strain against each other. So rigid had Doc become, small beads of sweat were popping on the bronze skin of his forehead.

“I have been waiting for you to say that,” said Doc calmly. “You have now encountered the same power which sent you down the mountain on the other side. We must ascend now, or we shall fail to find those who have been made prisoners.”

Even then, the bronze giant was fighting such a force as he never before had encountered. His own determination to reach the higher slopes of Mount Shasta was failing him.

“No, sir!” exploded the sheriff emphatically. “What goes on back in these here hills ain’t none of my business!”

Professor Archer was puffing and blowing with the exertion of the climb. He was close to Doc.

“I think the sheriff is correct,” said Professor Archer. “I feel we are making a grave mistake interfering with something we do not understand.”

“Do we have to climb the rest of the way, Doc?” came from Long Tom.

Others of the party were openly agreeing with the sheriff. They had halted in the crimson snow. Some were turning back.

Doc Savage looked straight toward the peak of the mountain. His extraordinary vision picked out two tall, shining columns which looked like silver stacks. Around the extreme rim of the mountain appeared something like a band of gleaming glass.

"We must ascend the mountain," stated Doc firmly. "Long Tom, Professor Archer, if the others turn back, we shall not."

The others had no means of knowing that Doc Savage was using his own words to strengthen an inner hypnotic power he was deliberately pitting against the force which had possessed the others.

"Come on, Long Tom," said Doc. "Professor Archer, we must not fail."

Since his strange obstinacy back in Manhattan, Long Tom had been under the hypnotic control of Doc. As Doc suggested, he kept on plodding upward.

Professor Archer halted. Doc Savage might have employed his hypnotic power against the professor, but just now his remarkable mental faculties were wholly engaged in keeping his brain clear.

WITH LONG TOM beside him, Doc pushed forward on the glacier. Perhaps Doc was to some extent employing the mysterious self-hypnotism so greatly developed in India. The man of bronze had made a deep study of the subject.

Doc was fully aware that, by whatever means it was being applied, this mind-changing force could be none other than a hypnotic force. Some master mind was willing that others should do as it suggested.

"I'm getting tired," said Long Tom. "Can't we rest here?"

"We dare not relax our efforts," stated Doc.

The man of bronze was beginning to experience an inner satisfaction. He was successfully fighting off the hypnotic suggestion that he turn back. Also, he was controlling Long Tom.

Doc was well equipped with numerous devices for use when he succeeded in reaching the Valley of Giants. He wondered what the master mind of all this might contrive when he discovered his uncanny force had failed to turn him back.

Doc could hear the mountain sheriff and his posse muttering and grumbling. They were descending from the glacier. Professor Archer accompanied them.

Until this moment, the task of climbing had been comparatively easy from a physical point of view. Up here the fog had cleared away. In his moment of triumph, Doc already was laying plans for reaching and aiding his imprisoned companions.

The man of bronze could expect no aid from the outside. He was positive now that armies might attempt to scale Mount Shasta and be driven back without a shot being fired or a drop of blood spilled.

He knew, too, that only by attaining the peak of the mountain could the origin of Professor Randolph's power be discovered.

Doc was also wondering how deeply Ann Garvin might be involved. He had no doubt but that Ann Garvin and Patricia Savage were now on the mountain peak.

All his thoughts were suddenly swept away. The blast was violent. The peak of Mount Shasta became a blurred, swirling mass of white. Doc Savage's mind had been the victor, but he was halted by the violence of a physical blow.

A cyclonic wind whirled the melting snow of the glacier into scores of mounting geysers. These became a solid mass on a circling wind which buried Doc and Long Tom to their necks before they could seek a sheltered spot.

All Doc's immense strength was required to extricate Long Tom from the snow. The storm's fury increased. Around them was a wall of snow so dense, even Doc was forced to stumble blindly before the wind.

"Are we still climbing, Doc?" said Long Tom. "I can't feel in which direction we are going."

"We are not climbing," stated Doc. "We are descending from the glacier. We must attempt to rescue the sheriff and his men."

PUSHING ahead of the wind, Doc slipped into a watery crevasse. He heard Long Tom cry out near him. Melted snow was sluicing, as if into a pit.

"Help!" came an agonized voice.

It was the sheriff. Doc lunged through the torrent, catching the sheriff's gaunt body. He fought his way back to a firmer footing. The wind shrieked like a million demons. The soft snow in the air plastered their eyes and mouths. Speaking was difficult.

"The others, sheriff, where have they gone?" Doc managed.

"Gone—yes—they've gone," mumbled the sheriff. "The glacier went right out from under us."

Doc could only stare into the storm. Perhaps some of the sheriff's posse would come out alive.

"Doc! Over here. Doc!" hailed Long Tom's voice. "I'm hangin' onto the professor!"

Doc pulled the sheriff with him to firmer snow. They could dimly see Long Tom and Professor Archer. The cyclonic wind was pushing all four figures back down the mountain.

Only Doc's vast strength enabled all to reach the bare ground below the glacier. The four men fought across it to the timberline.

"If we can get far enough back among the trees we will be safer," suggested Doc. "There never before has been a wind like that on this mountain."

"Never heard of one!" shouted the sheriff. "They do get some bad blows up around the peak, but not down here!"

Doc was guiding the others. He had known this was a record storm by a simple deduction. Great fir and spruce trees had been uprooted. Some of these trees were centuries old. All the first line of the forest had been sheared off like wheat before a reaper's knife.

Chapter XV

DOC PLAYS A LONE HAND

SELDOM in any of his adventures had Doc Savage been deprived of the aid of all his companions. Now he realized that none in the world could give him any help.

Sheltered below the forest, the meadow where Doc's plane rested was comparatively a calm spot. None of the sheriff's posse had reached this place.

"How in blazes am I ever goin' to face the people back home?" worried the cadaverous sheriff. "I've gotta stick here an' see if maybe some of the fellas don't make it out."

The twin-motored plane in the flat meadow was undamaged. Two long-limbed mountaineers lay in the grass a few yards away.

"Great gosh!" exploded the sheriff. "A couple more dead ones! There won't be any population left in Shasta or Lassen counties!"

"These two men will be all right in a short time," assured Doc. "Perhaps you can rally some of the other mountaineers to help search for your lost posse."

The sheriff's eyes were popping. Doc had done something to the necks of each of the men lying on the grass. They were coming out of an apparent trance. In the meantime, Doc had directed Long Tom to turn off the gas which had protected the plane.

The two mountaineers had made the mistake of venturing too close. The sheriff called the men Shallops. They displayed a terror which precluded them being of great assistance in hunting for lost men.

Professor Archer was white-faced. His appearance was no longer neatly groomed. He looked as if he wished he had not come with Doc Savage. Perhaps a great many other persons had had that same wish from time to time.

Doc Savage had been conversing in a low tone with the worried sheriff. Even though the wind was comparatively calm here, it still retained the force of a fifty-mile-an-hour gale.

"We shall try getting the plane into the air," the man of bronze announced. "The instruments show we are in the midst of a stiff gale. We will swing the nose of the ship into it and that will overcome our lack of runway."

"Then you've abandoned your idea of climbing up the mountain?" demanded Professor Archer, with an air of relief.

"Exactly," agreed Doc. "It would be foolish to make an attempt to ascend Mount Shasta. A force we cannot overcome can keep the world from climbing that mountain. You can readily see why Professor Randolph is so positive he can become a world dictator."

WITH the plane's nose to the gale, Doc had little difficulty lifting the aircraft into the air. Visibility was no better than when they had landed. The forlorn figure of the sheriff who had lost his posse faded almost instantly from view.

"Great Scott, Doc!" came from Long Tom. "Did you know we are climbing in almost a straight line on this storm?"

"I have been aware of that," stated Doc. "Our best chance is to gain an altitude above the gale, then we will possibly be above the ground fog."

Professor Archer twirled the gold eyeglasses on one finger.

"Perhaps we should seek one of the near-by cities," he suggested. "I fear I haven't much confidence in the air, since all that has happened."

Doc Savage said nothing. The twin propellers were biting into clearer air. Perhaps two miles below lay what seemed to be a welter of fog and fire.

Between Mount Shasta and Mount Lassen, all the country took on the appearance of a seething, crimson cauldron. From the old volcano of Mount Lassen an eerie beam of red seemed to make contact with the scarlet snow on Shasta. Perhaps that accounted for the weird effect of the melting snow.

"Among the next manifestations will be an eruption of Mount Lassen," stated Doc. "For years, the only evidence of internal fires has been the hot springs in Lassen County and in the upper Sacramento valley."

The subject seemed to be of greatest interest to Professor Archer. He launched immediately into a technical dissertation on volcanic origins. As he did this, Doc quietly set Long Tom working at one of the generator devices.

Neither of Doc's companions suspected he had deliberately diverted their attention from the change in direction the plane had made.

The man of bronze had fixed one goal in the murky cauldron far below. This spot seemed to contain two long, silvery pencils reaching hundreds of feet into the sky.

Though he had at first set a southward course, Doc had slowly changed the compass points. Estimating wind force and direction, and picking up distance from the peak of Mount Shasta by the directional finder, the man of bronze smiled slightly.

Doc seemed to be agreeing with Professor Archer's learned exposition on the habits of volcanoes, dead or alive.

ONE of the motors stopped. It did this without a preliminary sputter. The big plane sideslipped.

"What's happened now?" exclaimed Professor Archer.

"We have only one motor working," stated Doc calmly.

The other motor quit. The second engine gave no warning. But there was a sudden minor explosion in the nose of the plane.

A light beam flashed out. The metal alloy covering of the nose had been ripped off. After one spurt of flame, a smaller blaze started creeping along toward the engine casings.

“Good grief, Doc!” exploded Long Tom. “It’s burning! There wasn’t anything under there that could have exploded!”

Doc’s hands were busy working at the instrument board. He said nothing. Long Tom’s statement hardly seemed justified.

Professor Archer reared upright. His protruding eyes seemed an inch from his forehead.

“On fire?” he shouted. “We’ll have to get down! Is there any place we can land?”

The flame over the nose of the plane was spreading. Now it could be seen that both propellers had been twisted by the explosion. The blaze beat back against the windshield.

“We’re more than two miles up,” stated Doc. “The plane would be consumed before we could land. It will reach the tanks in a minute or two. Long Tom, get out the ’chutes.”

Professor Archer stared at Doc unbelievably.

“The parachutes?” he gasped. “I never have—I couldn’t—you mean we’ll have to jump from here?”

“Jumping will probably be much pleasanter than burning,” said Doc. “You hook your thumb in that ring. You won’t have to think about pulling the cord. The ’chute will open by its own control.”

The parachute perfected by Doc eliminated the feature of the wearer being responsible for the time of its opening. Professor Archer’s whitening face indicated he had very little appreciation for this or any other feature of the ’chute two miles in the air.

Long Tom fastened the ’chute harness. Doc was the last to slip into his ’chute. The flame now had jumped to one of the wings. The plane was descending in a short spiral.

Long Tom forced open a door and Professor Archer looked down. His voice held a shudder.

“I can’t do it—I never could stand to be up high——”

One of Doc’s quick hands solved that problem for Professor Archer. With a wild scream the professor took the air. His parachute blossomed only a few yards below the plane.

“We will drop the flares as we go, Long Tom,” instructed Doc. “Keep pulling your cords to stay close to Professor Archer. I will not be far away.”

Long Tom looked steadily at Doc.

“There was nothing under the nose that could have exploded, Doc.”

“Nothing except the combustion bomb I placed there,” stated Doc calmly.

“With this wind,” said Long Tom, “we can hardly miss landing on top of Mount Shasta.”

“I had judged that,” stated Doc. “We are seen and heard, but they cannot change the mind of a parachute if it wants to land on the mountain.”

THOUGH he had conquered the mind-changing power temporarily for himself, the man of bronze had become aware he could not extend his own mental resistance to others. He knew the terrific storm had, in some manner, been invoked to drive him back down the mountain.

Desiring to keep Long Tom and Professor Archer with him, he had determined to reach the peak of Mount Shasta by jumping.

Doc and Long Tom hurtled from the burning plane together. The parachute of Professor Archer had disappeared. Doc broke out some small metal objects no larger than the tip of a lead pencil.

Flicking two of these with his thumb nail, he tossed them into space at the moment his parachute spread. Almost instantly, brilliant light revealed everything for several hundred yards. These were special flares devised by Monk at Doc's direction.

Long Tom's voice floated over.

"Professor Archer's blown a long way to the right!"

Doc saw the white blossom of Professor Archer's 'chute. It was swaying, as if the professor was still struggling against jumping into space.

Doc and Long Tom each gathered their own parachute cords at one side. Both dropped faster and slid on the wind in the direction of Professor Archer.

Long Tom remained close to Doc.

"Do you still believe we are seen and heard?" called Long Tom.

"Hardly any doubt of that," stated Doc, swinging his 'chute closer to Professor Archer. "We were seen and heard, but our thoughts could not be read. Therefore, we were able to leave the plane without the mind-changing power being applied. However, we may look for a reception committee as we land."

Doc tossed a couple more of the brilliant flares. They acted almost like daylight over a wide area below. Long Tom gasped with amazement.

"Great Scott, Doc!" he yelled. "There couldn't be a city in this mountain wilderness, but it looks as if we are falling right into one!"

From Professor Archer, floating near by, came a deep groan.

"It would seem to be a city of strange design," Doc replied, tipping his 'chute so he remained close to Long Tom. "A city that might have been built by giants."

PERHAPS no stranger panorama had ever been spread before Doc Savage. Viewed from the much-traveled Pacific Highway or from the more-settled regions on its western side, Mount Shasta had always been a rearing, snow-covered bulk.

Only a few of the hardiest mountaineers ventured into the bleak and unfriendly wilds back of the peak. The nearest traveled highway to the southward was fifty miles distant. This was a government motor road passing from Red Bluff through to Reno.

The southern highway circled the hot springs base of Mount Lassen.

But the three men descending in parachutes apparently were not approaching a wilderness.

Several buildings of stone and timber and crystal slabs like glass reared themselves around what must have been meant for a public square. Domes topped three of these buildings.

“We might be arriving at any one of several of the world’s capitals,” Doc said to Long Tom. “No doubt, Professor Randolph has made extensive plans to establish a city that would be worthy of a world dictator.”

Now the ’chutes had descended to where figures could be seen moving among the buildings. Doc Savage was equipped with many devices. He had loaded Long Tom with more. But the man of bronze now realized the employment of several means of defense might get them nothing but trouble, perhaps death.

Doc produced a pair of binoculars of queerly constructed side lenses. These were perhaps the world’s most powerful four-dimensional glasses. Though they were still possibly three thousand feet above the fantastic mountain city, Doc had brought its inhabitants within what might have been a range of a hundred feet.

He was amazed to discover some two or three hundred men thronging the spaces between the buildings. Most of these were in the public square. The buildings surrounding this space must have been especially designed along Professor Randolph’s idea of becoming ruler of the world’s destinies.

Of all the men visible, less than a score were of normal size. The others were huge. Many were far larger than Walrath, the giant who had been sent to Manhattan.

Doc said to Long Tom, “This is doubtless the valley of the giants. Moreover, these abnormal men are guarded by others of average size. None of the giants and none of the guards have any weapons. We will attempt to land on top of the flat building north of the square.”

Doc and Long Tom were experts at manipulating ’chute cords. Judging the wind, they could land on almost any given spot. Professor Archer had none of this skill.

“Professor Archer,” called Doc. “Gather the cords near your right hand. You will drop faster, but it will swing us to the top of a building where we may have temporary respite from attack.”

If he understood, Professor Archer seemed too paralyzed by fear to follow directions. Doc and Long Tom plummeted squarely to the broad roof of the building the bronze man had selected.

They struck heavily, but without injury. They freed themselves and discovered they were standing on a roofing of glasslike slabs set into hewn spruce logs. The roof itself was of massive construction.

Long Tom got to his feet close to Doc.

“Professor Archer went down in the square, Doc. Look! What do you suppose is happening!”

FROM their position on the glasslike roof, Doc and Long Tom had a perfect view of the square. Professor Archer’s small body struck. The professor scrambled quickly to disengage himself from the entangling parachute.

The air shuddered with the roar of menace coming from the throats of the scores of giants. They surged toward the professor in a great wave. The ground almost seemed to shake under the pounding of their immense feet.

Half a dozen guards, who were half the size of the giants, suddenly waved short, black rods. No visible ray or fire was emitted, but the roaring charge upon the helpless professor halted for a moment.

“There’s nothing we can do against that mob of monsters,” said Long Tom. “They could tear us to pieces, unless we started blowing the city to pieces and killed all of them.”

“Unfortunately for that plan,” advised Doc, “none of those giants are monsters. They are or have been men like ourselves. Some are mountain people, others from lumber camps and I can see a few Asiatics that may have been brought from lower California. We cannot be justified in injuring any of them.”

The giants might be, as Doc stated, originally peaceful men, but at this moment they seemed no more than great man-beasts without intelligent direction.

Professor Archer swayed on his feet.

“I will say one thing for the professor,” said Long Tom. “For a man who had been through cyclones, gun attacks and the burning of a plane he is most remarkable. He still hasn’t broken those gold eyeglasses.”

Professor Archer faced the halted giants. The forefinger of his right hand twirled. In a curious clear light which seemed emanating from all the buildings, it could be seen the gold glasses were intact.

Two guards started toward the professor, extending their short, black rods. Doc heard Professor Archer call out:

“Keep away—keep away or I’ll——”

There was no more of this speech. The two guards advanced. But behind them the control of the giant mob must have broken. The wave of monster men again rolled upon Professor Archer and the two guards nearest him.

This was a crushing wave, like a mountainous sea, topped by tossing faces that were hardly human.

“They’ve got the guards, too!” exclaimed Long Tom. “They’re trampling all of them!”

Professor Archer and the two guards vanished before the rush of great bodies. The giants had no weapons. They appeared to be like elephants, merely using their feet to crush.

All the giants went over the spot. When they had passed, Long Tom was staring with horror.

Doc was preparing a diminutive high-explosive grenade.

Chapter XVI

TORTURE OF MONSTROSITY

DOC SAVAGE could not have used the small glass marble with its tiny lever. That is, without perhaps destroying a score or more of the giants in the square.

The danger of such an explosion would have been as great for Professor Archer as for the others. Also, the bronze giant was aware all this happening below was probably taking place in every detail at the control of the one Walrath had called the master.

Doc acted with the hope of diverting the attention of the giants and the guards. Flicking the tiny lever on the explosive grenade, he tossed it to the farthest corner of the roof on which Long Tom and he were standing.

“By all the powers!” gulped Long Tom. “Even if we wanted to kill off those fellows, we’re sunk!”

Doc himself seldom expressed amazement. Even now his face remained unperturbed, and he said nothing. Both had seen the usually powerful grenade apparently pause in mid-air.

Though Doc had tossed it away, it was as if some invisible hand had caught it and tossed it back. Set to let go with terrific effect, the tiny, gleaming object now was falling to alight at their feet.

Long Tom knew what one of those grenades could do. The pallid electrician made a sudden leap for the edge of the glasslike roof. One of Doc’s cabled hands kept him from jumping.

“The grenade will not explode,” stated Doc quietly. “I have every reason to believe the master wishes to keep us alive.”

Long Tom shivered in Doc’s grasp. The man of bronze had outguessed the weird trickery of the mountain master. For the tiny grenade suddenly moved upward. It exploded with only a slight whooshing flare.

“I suspected something like that might happen,” stated Doc. “I used a grenade from which the high explosive had been extracted.”

From the spot in the square at which Long Tom had been staring with horror, came a high-pitched scream. This was the voice of Professor Archer.

Yet as the wave of giants had passed, neither the professor nor the guards had remained.

The growling of the giants abruptly changed to a gurgling note of terror. The big fellows jammed each other back to the surrounding buildings.

“I had feared that would happen,” said Doc. “We must find our way from this building, though that may be impossible.”

“They got him,” breathed Long Tom. “It wasn’t the giants who did it. Poor Professor Archer, perhaps it would have been better if we hadn’t jumped.”

DOC SAVAGE said nothing. He was watching the wisps of blue vapor arising in the middle of the square. On the spot where Professor Archer and the two guards had been overwhelmed by the giants was a small heap of white ashes.

“Something strange is taking place,” stated Doc a few minutes later. “There is no doubt that the master sees and hears us. The control of all this comes from the peak up there. They are waiting for something.”

“If they wait much longer I’ll have the jitters so bad it won’t make much difference,” said Long Tom. “It doesn’t seem possible, but look at that crazy garden. The corn is as tall as trees. Honest, Doc, I can see some of the plants move they are going so fast. Nothing like that could possibly be!”

“On the contrary,” advised Doc, “the giant garden and its growth, and the giant men are possibly the least mysterious of all that has happened. The element probably discovered by Professor Randolph has only hastened experiments which already have progressed through ordinary channels.”

“You mean making giant gardens and bigger men?”

“For some time they have had at the California Institute of Technology a small bottle of crystals they have named Auxin,” advised Doc. “It has been proved there is enough of a new plant growth hormone in that bottle to increase the size of the world’s vegetable kingdom at least three times. It has been applied and tested.”

“And if it could create giants of vegetable life,” said Long Tom, “after all the chemical composition of plants and animals, including the human race, is about the same.”

“Exactly,” stated Doc. “Experiments soon may apply the same hormone principle to men. It becomes a matter of affecting the glands of the animal body. So far, this hormone substance had given roots to trees and plants which had none, and greatly enlarged their fiber and expanded their vitality. In some manner, the basic element discovered by Professor Randolph is responsible for this great diversity of power.”

Whether all of this might be brought about by the breaking up of atoms, the intelligent direction of hormones or some other source, there was no further time for conjecture.

Once more a roar of rage rolled among the giants in the square. Herded by their smaller guards, all were converging up the building on which Doc and Long Tom were sheltered.

“There seems no skylight or other opening for us to get under this roof,” stated Long Tom.

“There is a way inside,” stated Doc. “Perhaps we may find the means of checking the attack, though I am sure these giants hardly count on what might happen. None of them appear to be armed. This death of the white ashes comes from some invisible source.”

One of Doc’s massive arms encircled Long Tom’s slight body. The weight of both men suddenly swung over the edge of the high roof. More than one hundred feet of space was below their dangling feet.

Some twenty feet below them was a projecting ell. A raised opening showed in its center.

Doc had been sustaining their weight with one powerfully corded wrist. From the other side of the building came the thudding of feet and the growling, rage-filled voices of the giants.

Doc let go and dropped. His own massive legs seemed to be made of rubber. They took all the impact as they struck the ell. Long Tom hardly felt the blow. Doc quickly rolled the electrician toward the open skylight.

The man of bronze was aware this might be a trap, but it appeared to be their nearest refuge. He wanted a few minutes more to perfect the strategy with which he hoped to cope with what seemed now to be an invisible, unbeatable enemy.

DROPPING to the floor of the room under the skylight, Doc found they were in a small room. Three of its walls were of the transparent crystal substance. The fourth side was open.

“We are cornered in here,” said Long Tom. “Anyway, we can put some of them out with the mercy bullets and the capsules.”

The remark was called forth by the broad runway or ramp which extended into the main building. This ran down into what appeared to be some sort of mosquelike cathedral. All its inner walls were of crystal. A mellow light emanated from these.

“*Take them alive!*” ordered a deep voice which seemed to come from nowhere.

Immediately, the front entrance of the building admitted the flood of unarmed giants. Some were of the brand of the snag-toothed Shallops of the mountains. Others were immense, bearded lumberjacks.

The most fearsome were a score or more Asiatics. These yellow men, ordinarily small in stature, now towered to ten and twelve feet.

“If they ever get their hands on us we haven’t got a chance,” said Long Tom. “They haven’t any guns. I’m going to let them have it.”

Doc Savage had his own reason for permitting Long Tom to open fire with his supermachine pistol. This apparently clumsy weapon could discharge bullets with the speed of a machine-gun.

Because Doc never killed if it could be avoided, the stream of slugs pouring suddenly from the whooping pistol were merely anæsthetic “mercy” bullets.

It was incredible how that sweeping wave of white and yellow giants took the blast of stunning bullets. Wherever a bullet hit, a towering man pitched to his face asleep.

Yet, without weapons of any kind, the horde of other giants kept moving straight into the withering stream. In a minute, they were walking over the prone bodies of their companions.

From the throats of all came snarls like wild beasts about to begin tearing at their prey. Doc took a number of small metallic objects from his pockets. These he started tossing into the big room. Some of the giants were being piled at the foot of the ramp by the mercy bullets.

“Great Scott, Doc!” groaned Long Tom. “We might as well try stopping all the elephants in Africa or Asia!”

Anæsthetic gas filled the big room. A white glare burst out, blinding all those in the front ranks of the oncoming wave.

The foot of the ramp was piled with unconscious bodies. Among these, other giants staggered around, groping where they could not see. Yet none of this halted for an instant the menacing movement toward the room in which Doc and Long Tom were sheltered.

“Maybe we had better get back to the roof, Doc,” said Long Tom. “Even if we knocked out the whole mob, what would we do then?”

“That is our problem,” said Doc calmly. “Something more is due to happen. The master mind behind all this sees and knows all that is taking place. He is only waiting for something.”

“Look, Doc!” directed Long Tom, even while he inserted a new drum of mercy bullets into the superfirer. “We’ve got a picture on the glass wall over there!”

Long Tom was correct. There appeared a life-size television picture which made it seem as if the participants were there in the wall. Voices sprang from flaring funnels of crystal.

At the moment this picture appeared, some of the giants were pulling away unconscious bodies to clear a way up the ramp. And another thousand feet or more up the mountain, where the row of glass structures appeared as a crystal honeycomb, something was happening in each of several closed rooms.

The serious-faced Johnny was seated before a remarkable instrument board. Its many panels were like small screens of moving pictures. Chiefly these were composed of the giants attacking Doc and Long Tom.

It would have been unbelievably apparent to any close observer that William Harper Littlejohn, for years the staunch companion of the bronze adventurer, was manipulating controls which directed the attack in the fantastic city below.

There were many more such instruments. Before these sat other men. Some wore black masks and long black robes. Beside each instrument board stood what seemed to be a great storage cylinder.

Whatever the instruments might have been, they apparently drew their immediate power from these cylinders.

In another glass room near by a strange conversation was taking place.

“Daggonit, Ham!” said a childlike voice. “I wish we could tell Doc he might as well give up! Won’t he be surprised when he finds out it’s Johnny running the whole show down there?”

“Doc will find out soon enough,” stated the voice of Ham. The lawyer seemed to have about the same interest in the battle as Monk. “Patricia’s getting to be the biggest girl I ever saw.”

Whereupon both of Doc's companions turned from watching the unequal and hopeless fight and looked toward another wall.

Patricia Savage smiled at them from a distant room. But it was the ghastly smile on a once-attractive face which had suddenly become enlarged to giant size.

Pat Savage was standing. She had become a tremendous figure. Beside her was even a taller woman.

The terrible thing that was happening engaged the minds of Ham and Monk much more than the apparent danger of Doc Savage.

One large room was apart from the others, though its walls gave vision throughout the honeycomb. Into this crystal room descended two shining silver columns. From their bases projected a multitude of gleaming coils.

At times these coils glowed with an unearthly brilliance. The lone man occupying the room wore a mask with colored glasses over the eyes. This was much the same as used by those who face the blinding glare of welding torches.

WHILE JOHNNY was sending the blinded, blundering giants in a continuous flood upon Doc and Long Tom, a door opened into the room of the silver columns. Into the room stepped a figure clad in a flowing red robe and a hooded mask to match.

The red-masked man spoke harshly.

"Randolph, there has been a lessening of the flow into the control-room batteries! I have warned you that you cannot play any tricks! You know better than any other person that in a short time it will be too late to save Ann Garvin! Have another look at your fine sweetheart, professor!"

The coils of the silver columns ceased to glow. A man whipped off his eye mask. His features were drained and white. His eyes were deeply sunken.

He was Professor Homer Randolph. Apparently there had been a sharp division of authority in the empire controlling the Valley of the Giants. Professor Randolph spoke.

"I'll end this—I'll cut off all power—I'll destroy all of it and us——"

The man in the red mask cut in mockingly.

"Unfortunately you can only cut off more power coming in and you have no access to the control room to destroy anything, Randolph! We have enough power already stored to complete what we have set out to do! Your Empire City will be completed, but I will sit in the dictator's seat! Again, look at the beautiful Ann Garvin!"

In the crystal wall appeared the figures of Ann Garvin and Patricia Savage. Mere size perhaps could not change their graceful features, but what Professor Randolph now saw was a monstrosity, a horror, a terrible distortion of the face and body of the pretty young woman he had intended to marry.

"No! No! You can't do that to me!" he screamed. "I'll kill you myself! I'll do it now!"

Professor Randolph sprang toward the man in the red mask.

Chapter XVII

MIND OF THE MASTER

THE man in the red mask laughed scornfully. He made no move to intercept the plunging body of Professor Randolph. Nor did he move to evade the automatic pistol in Randolph's extended hand.

"I suspected you had armed yourself with some such silly weapon," said the red-masked man. "Think of the moment when we shall return Ann Garvin to the world of her own people. She will be a great freak for some sideshow to pick up."

Even these taunting words brought no bullets from the pointed automatic. Professor Randolph had reached an invisible line bisecting his control room. In the room where Johnny still played with his marionette giants, another man had touched a light on his instrument board.

"I'll kill you—I'll kill myself—I'll end it for all of us!"

These choked screams emanated from Professor Randolph's throat. But apparently his brain had ceased to have any power over his muscles.

"If you should kill me now, Randolph," said the man in the red mask, "the others have instructions to carry on. They have done splendidly at times when I have been absent. You should now know more.

"In a short time we shall have the amazing Doc Savage in our control. We have judged him to be the one man in the world who can take up your system of power in event you resist seeing your precious sweetheart become a monster woman."

Randolph's sunken eyes glowed with an insane light. Mumbling, he turned back to the silver columns. He resumed his mask with the eye protection. Once more the coils from the silver columns glowed with unearthly light.

Apparently Professor Randolph was too human to endure seeing Ann Garvin irrevocably evolved into a monster woman.

In the glass room which Professor Randolph had looked into, Patricia Savage was speaking.

"Why do you suppose your Professor Randolph acted so strangely? It looked, Ann, as if he intended to shoot the man in the red robe, but changed his mind."

"I wish Homer would come and talk to me," said Ann Garvin. "I want to understand more of what he is doing."

But Pat Savage seemed to have abruptly lost interest in the subject. She laughed lightly.

"Isn't Monk the funniest-looking thing since he started growing into a giant?" she said. "And if Ham gets any taller, he's so thin he'll break in two."

Pat and Ann Garvin smiled at each other over this grotesque view they were getting of Ham and Monk. Yet neither seemed in the least disturbed over the tremendous size Professor Randolph had seen them attain.

At this time, on a wall of the small room in Empire City, Doc Savage must have seen and heard something of what had taken place in the honeycomb of glass higher on the mountain. For a few minutes there had been a respite from the movement of the giants.

The progress of the mob had been temporarily blocked by the mass of unconscious men. Now they were moving again.

Long Tom's superfirer started buzzing loudly. But Doc did not join with him in this defense.

The man of bronze had become conscious of a new battle taking place in his mind. He was being made the object of an invisible attack. This was telling him they should no longer resist the giants.

While Long Tom continued blocking the ramp, guards ran about and shouted. They waved their short, black rods. Scores of living giants remained at their command, or rather at the command of Johnny in the control room.

Suddenly, Doc Savage took on a queer expression. He turned upon Long Tom. Seizing the pallid man's arm, he wrested the superfirer from his grasp.

This in itself was strange behavior. Doc never carried a gun or other weapon of that type. He depended upon his own wits and a variety of devices with which he could subdue his enemies.

The man of bronze had never intentionally killed a man. His philosophy of fighting crime and bringing about justice had been developed in his "fortress of Solitude" far in the Arctic Circle.

In this retreat, for several weeks each year, Doc perfected himself in mental and physical abilities. His beliefs included the fact that most cases of crime were a form of mental illness which was curable.

Yet Doc Savage now turned Long Tom's own superfirer on that small and defenseless man. The electrical wizard went to the floor with a look of utter amazement on his pallid face.

Doc had shot him with one of his own mercy bullets.

Doc then did another thing which no person had ever previously known him to do. He raised his voice above its even penetrating tenor tone.

"We must fight for the master of this world empire!" he proclaimed loudly. "Long Tom, you should not have been fighting with these fellows!"

The man of bronze then walked quietly down the ramp of the crystal-walled building. Behind him from the radio-active wall came a voice.

"We have attained what we have sought! You will bring Doc Savage and his companion to me!"

TWO of the smaller guards walked beside the man of bronze. Perhaps they hardly believed the remarkable Doc Savage had been overpowered by the mind-changing force.

No doubt they were aware of the battle Doc had waged when he had attempted to ascend Mount Shasta with the sheriff's posse. They must have known, too, that the mind-changing force had been in operation during the descent of Doc, Long Tom and Professor Archer in their parachutes.

But here, surrounded by the maximum of this power, the bronze man had become submissive and instantly obedient to the short rods they held. No visible light came from these rods.

Yet these few guards, with their comparatively small number of giants whose will they commanded, no doubt could have prevented the greatest armies from penetrating to the world empire on Mount Shasta.

While in the air, Doc had thought out that feature. The mind-changing wave was effective above as well as upon the earth. Squadrons of bombing planes might have been sent over the mountain kingdom, but it is likely their pilots would have changed their minds about dropping bombs.

Doc Savage seemed now to see all this place with a new mind. His guards conducted him toward the peak, passing through the gigantic garden.

"We can grow corn that size in three days," stated one of the guards. "We can make the rainbow trout in that creek the size of porpoises. We could make our giants much bigger. Up to a certain stage, they may be returned to normal size by a reversal of the force that is used. We——"

What had inspired this guard to become so loquacious could hardly be determined. But whatever more he had intended to reveal was lost to Doc.

The guard's voice ceased instantly. There was no explosion. There was no sudden light. Nothing but thin blue vapor drifting across the creek in which the guard spoke of growing monster trout.

Perhaps there was such an angle to this power as a mind that went off at a tangent after having been under its influence.

The other guard showed no great concern. Doc looked down at the small heap of white ashes. All that remained beside it was the short, black rod the guard had carried.

Long Tom, unconscious from the mercy bullet fired by Doc himself, was being carried by one of the giants.

A smooth plane, much like an escalator on a great scale, moved under their feet. Doc Savage saw the honeycomb of crystal walls. Through one wall he saw the scholarly Johnny before an instrument board.

Johnny glanced up and smiled slightly. The words did not come, but Doc read from Johnny's lips what he was saying.

"Hello, Doc! We have been waiting for you. My giants would not have injured you or Long Tom. The master has sent to Tokyo for Renny. Then we will all be together in the new empire of the world!"

Doc's lips moved. "I did not come to aid the master, but I have decided it is the thing I should do," was what he said.

Two of the men in black robes and hoods now stood beside Doc Savage. He was conducted directly into the glass room containing Ham and Monk.

Without any word or ceremony, one man motioned for him to enter. Doc's flake-gold eyes evinced not even a flicker of surprise at the presence of two of his companions.

"We have been favored," he said to the pair, "by being permitted to participate in something I believe will enable us to apply our own devices in such manner as we would have thought impossible."

QUICK glances shot between the black-robed men. Their eyes shifted to one of the walls. They betrayed by this that another must be listening. Doc, however, seemed not at all concerned with this.

"I would see my good friend, Professor Randolph, as quickly as possible," he said to the robed men. "Perhaps it is he who has gained this power to form a world empire?"

"We shall convey your wish to the master," said one of the men. "Your other man, the pale-faced one, shall be cared for."

"You mean Long Tom," started Doc. "I had to shoot him, but the bullet will not kill. He seemed to be slow to understand what a great opportunity had been given us."

Was it imagination, or was there a slight chuckle of satisfaction from a panel in the crystal wall?

The hooded men withdrew. Ham and Monk looked at Doc. His flaky eyes mirrored a deep stirring, but outwardly they had become almost opaque.

"We do not like what is happening to Patricia and that other woman," stated Ham. "See how big they are getting. They are like those giants building the city."

Doc Savage was silent for a moment as he looked through the several walls of glass separating this room from that in which Pat and Ann Garvin were imprisoned.

Ann Garvin, who normally had been a tall, striking blond woman, was now indeed a grotesque giant. Patricia's dainty features looked hideous. Both women appeared to be at least eight feet tall.

"Patricia should stay out of trouble," stated Doc calmly. "I knew some day she would encounter something that would get the best of her."

"Daggonit!" complained Monk. "If Pat is going to be a giant girl, then I'm wantin' to be one of them giants myself! She wouldn't like me lookin' like I do!"

Doc's expression did not change.

"I hope our devices find favor with the master of this great power," he said solemnly. "If they do, I will ask that you be made into a giant, Monk."

Patricia must have seen Doc in with Ham and Monk. The smile on her Gargantuan features was terrific. Ham groaned. He couldn't, even in a changed state of mind, regard Patricia as other than lovely.

Again the low, mocking chuckle seemed to come from one of the glass walls. Doc could see Johnny still working at the control board which must have animated the brains of the motley crew of giants.

Another televisior wall showed the public square of the Empire City. Giants stunned by Long Tom's superfirer were beginning to awaken.

“Yes,” stated Doc, stepping close to Monk, “I will do what I can to have you made into a giant.”

One bronze hand was buried in Monk’s furry neck for an instant.

Chapter XVIII

MOUNT LASSEN GROWLS

DOUBTLESS the master was confident no man, no power on earth could thwart his plans of tyrannical world domination.

Doc Savage, mental and physical marvel, had been overcome.

All but one of Doc's learned companions were under the master's control. Professor Randolph could now be eliminated.

Eyes gleaming through the holes of his red mask, this man strode into the glasslike control room. He was accompanied by a dozen other robed and masked men, but these were distinguished by their black garb.

Doc Savage made no further effort to speak with Ham and Monk. The master saw that the man of bronze was looking with deepest and friendliest interest into the control room.

The master was confident he could understand Doc's new state of mind. The bronze wizard had many devices of his own to which Professor Randolph's strange new force could be applied.

"We will give Doc Savage instructions," said the master to his cohorts. "As his mind now operates, he will quickly gain Randolph's own secret of supplying this power. After that, Professor Randolph, in any state of mind, might prove a menace."

"The vapor death then?" suggested the voice of a black-robed aid.

"The vapor death and the white ashes which Professor Randolph so foolishly placed in our hands," mocked the voice of the master.

These crystal walls were equipped with the latest in radio, dictaphone and television devices. Doc Savage could hear distinctly the words being spoken by the master.

The master was a shrewd individual. He had meant for Doc to hear this speech condemning Professor Randolph to the death of the white ashes. His glittering eyes were fixed upon the bronze giant's face.

Doc Savage must have been pleased, in the judgment of the master. A slight smile of satisfaction played over the bronze face. Doc's head nodded, as if the proposed replacement of Randolph by himself was worth the doing.

"We will now speak with Doc Savage," said the master.

One glasslike wall seemed to separate. The opening connected the room Doc occupied with the control compartment.

AS he stepped lightly through this aperture, the man of bronze had a passing view of a white face, stricken with horror and despair. He saw two hands raised, as if in an attempt to warn him against that upon which he was about to embark.

The horrified face was that of Professor Randolph. The genius who had torn this terrific, mysterious power from the stratosphere, was straining to peer through the walls of his power control room.

Doc could also see what Professor Randolph had been watching. This was the distorted, Gargantuan figure of Ann Garvin, the woman he loved. It could be easily understood how pressure had been brought to bear upon Randolph.

For that direct reason Ann Garvin had been abducted from the heart of Manhattan. It was Pat Savage's misfortune that she was also going to be a giant monstrosity.

Doc Savage ignored the gestures of the imprisoned Randolph. The bronze man's eyes were apparently blank and emotionless.

But he had not missed something far outside the walls of this infernal honeycomb of the master. That crimson light on the melting snows of Mount Shasta had changed to orange.

In the distant sky a dimly seen fountain of fire seemed to arise and spread like a vast umbrella. From it rained yellowish, darting serpents of fire. Throughout this fantastic mountain empire came a low, rumbling growl.

It was as if the old earth itself resented the supernatural liberties being taken by these puny man creatures on the great mountain.

Perhaps it was the disturbance of the strange stratosphere force itself, hurling abnormal influences possibly deep into the long undisturbed valleys of the glaciers.

Old Mount Lassen, peaceful for centuries, was growling.

This unusual demonstration was starting thousands in this earthquake belt of the Pacific Coast to prepare for an expected shock.

But the master of Mount Shasta's empire noticed little of this. His eyes gleamed as he looked at Doc Savage. Though he had stolen control of a mighty force, perhaps it still seemed inconceivable that he should be the master of this hitherto invincible Doc Savage.

The master spoke through one of his black-hooded men, but he made the most of his moment of triumph.

Said the black-hooded aid, "The master is pleased to have you join us, Doc Savage."

Doc replied with slow emphasis, "I do not quite understand all this, but I find myself immensely pleased to be here. I can see great possibilities for some of my own partly completed experiments when supplied with the force you have discovered."

Johnny spoke suddenly from beside his mind-changing control board.

"Tortuous problems hitherto only vague scientific prognostication have been solved by the simplest process. Doc, I think our gold-locating device can be perfected with this power."

The master's eyes gleamed appreciatively. No doubt, he had contrived to put these words in Johnny's mouth.

"I had already thought of that," stated Doc, showing a degree of enthusiasm unusual for him. "That is but one invention of our own which may be used to make your world empire idea impossible to defeat."

The master's black-hooded aid spoke again.

"The master has known of the gold-locating device, Doc Savage. Before this time, even though it might point directly to the hidden mother lodes in any country, the taking of the gold would, of course, be blocked by the nation controlling the land. Now we have the means of abstracting gold in any amount from any nation without opposition."

This speech could readily be understood. The robbery of the United States mint in Denver had been an example of how the very defenders of great gold deposits would be helpless against the mind-changing power and the rocket speed of the *Silver Cylinder*.

A WILD scream rang through the control room. Doubtless Professor Randolph was hearing all that was taking place. His mouth gaped open with the shriek that tore from his throat. His hands clawed at the glass wall of his prison.

Doc Savage appeared not to notice this.

"I find myself agreeing that gold belongs to him who finds it, regardless of location," stated the bronze man.

That assertion was contrary to all Doc's normal beliefs. The man of bronze always had the firmest faith in the rights of individuals, groups and nations to all resources within their lands.

Perhaps none noticed the gentle pattering on the glasslike honeycomb. The deepening orange of the melting snow might have been a new manifestation of the abnormal stratosphere force.

But old Mount Lassen growled more loudly. The canopy of yellow fire against the sky to the southward was spreading.

Through his black-hooded aid, the master seemed to be deriving great enjoyment from this agreeable spirit of the great Doc Savage. Apparently, the man of bronze had been looking straight at the master all the time.

There were scores of panels and indicators on the mind-changing control board operated by Johnny. These panels showed zones and distances. They gave the operator the power to reach an individual or a group at any point in the world.

In each case though, there seemed to be a form of transmission required at distant spots. In Manhattan there had been a telescope. In the hands of the guards down below in the weird city were the black rods.

The master would not have believed at this moment that Doc Savage's marvelous brain had read and memorized every detail of the mind-changing board. Nor would he have believed the man of bronze had placed in his mind each other instrument in the room.

Particularly, he marked the location of the machine which must be the origin of the vapor death of white ashes.

With the master himself, there were exactly thirteen of the hooded men. None gave any heed to the continuous gibbering screams of Professor Randolph.

Doc Savage, at last, spoke calmly.

He said, “First, I shall have to know something of the origin of this power. Perhaps Johnny will be able to give me more knowledge than others.”

As he talked, the man of bronze moved casually toward the pleased Johnny. The skeleton face of the geologist smiled in agreement with Doc’s words.

“The master instructs me to say that Doc Savage will be given more power than any others in the empire, with the exception of himself,” stated the black-hooded aid. “Professor Randolph will be led to impart his one secret—the manner by which he has brought this force to the world.”

Doc Savage bowed slightly, without speaking. One bronzed hand moved Johnny aside. Doc was standing with his back turned to the mind-changing board. A little smile showed on his face.

“Doc Savage!” screamed Professor Randolph, from his prison. “Don’t let them do it! They’ve stolen my power to enslave the world! What I meant to make all peoples better they will use to destroy, and murder, and plunder!”

If the master and his aids had noticed, one of Doc’s hands was out of their sight for the fraction of a second. He could not see the mind-changing control panels, but they were clearly fixed in his mind.

Now he spoke as calmly as if nothing whatever had happened.

“The master may be surprised to know that I have had the secret of Professor Randolph’s power for some time,” he stated. “I know of its terrific bombarding power that will rend atoms asunder. I have a perfect photograph of this force in action, and that has already told me how it has been brought from the stratosphere.”

The eyes in the red mask seemed almost to jump at the man of bronze. The master had at last broken into speech.

“But that is impossible—you couldn’t have——”

“Nothing is impossible,” interrupted Doc. “Listen, and you will perhaps understand that your game is ended.”

FROM a thousand feet down the mountain came the increasing roar of human voices. These were emitted from throats of giants. A black-hooded aid sprang to the wall.

“The giants!” he shouted, in wild alarm. “They are coming up the mountain! Something has happened, master! They have gone mad! They are tearing up small trees by the roots and swinging them as clubs!”

“Doc Savage!” squawked the voice of the master. “You? You have not been——”

“Keep back,” interrupted Doc quietly. “Johnny, stay away.”

Johnny’s mind at this moment did not respond to Doc’s command. He threw his bony body toward the mind-control board. Perhaps the greatest scholar in Doc’s group had become attached to the amazing power that had been under his hands.

Doc was compelled to act with dispatch. With sweeping arms and gibbered orders, the master was moving his dozen aids upon the man of bronze.

“I don’t like to do it, Johnny,” said Doc.

But his incredibly fast hand had disrupted a nerve center at the base of Johnny's brain so quickly, it is doubtful if he heard Doc's words.

The master suddenly halted his black-robed aids. From his masked lips rang a scornful, derisive laugh.

"You're smart, Doc Savage, smart!" he shouted. "But not quite smart enough! The vapor death! Close the walls!"

A black-robed figure already was beside a small control board several yards from Doc. His hand pushed a switch.

Still half a thousand feet down the mountain, the apparent leader of the enraged giants disappeared in swirling blue vapor. His companion trampled white ashes into the soggy ground. But still they came on.

The black-robed figure in the control room moved his hand again. But it did not touch the instrument of the vapor death. The control board of that ghastly means of murder had vanished with the speed of light.

Smoky flame blasted the black-robed operator from his feet. He was hurled into the farthest glasslike wall. Though he was not burned or injured by the explosion, the black-robed man was out cold.

Doc had flicked one of his feet. From under the toe of his shoe had snapped one of his most powerful devices. This was a high-explosive bomb of miniature size.

It had been designed by the man of bronze along a new idea for explosive force. Its blast was effective only within a few feet of the object which it might strike. This had saved the life of the black-robed killer.

"The walls—the walls!" again cried the master.

Doc was looking into the room occupied by Ham and Monk. His own spine chilled a little. The crystal walls were moving together. They were coming with smooth, irrevocable crushing force upon the helpless Ham and Monk.

"Ham, Monk!" called Doc. "Try to break out!"

Along with the minds of the giants, the thoughts of Ham and Monk had been changed. This means of changing the mind-control power had been brought about by the short, black rod Doc had secreted on Monk when he had touched the chemist's neck with his fingers. It was the rod belonging to the guard who had been killed.

Now that the minds of the giants had been restored to normal, no one had to tell them just who was responsible. They realized the fiend whose power they had been under was in that glass honeycomb. They did not have to be directed to move against the one who had enslaved them.

"Crush the prisoners!" yelled the master. "You see, Doc Savage, what you have brought upon your own companions! Your own cousin, too, will die!"

Through the several walls Doc could see Patricia and Ann Garvin clearly. Their gigantic size still made them monstrous women. But their state of mind could not save them from fear. Pat Savage and Ann Garvin were being slowly pinned between the moving walls of crystal. Their open mouths showed they were crying out in terror. Their hands were pushing, trying to stop the horrible, crushing death that would be inevitable.

Professor Randolph saw this, too. His screams became the shrieks of a madman. Without knowing it, the genius who had brought about all this without intending harm, was tearing out chunks of his own hair and scalp.

The body of Long Tom lay in the room with Ham and Monk.

In his amazing feat of memorizing what was in the control room, Doc Savage had missed a board or set of hidden switches which might be responsible for closing the traplike walls.

The master uttered a mocking laugh.

“Stop those giants, Doc Savage! Change their minds to my control! Otherwise your companions die!”

Chapter XIX

END OF THE MASTER

DOC'S reply to this was amazing, cyclonic action. His great hands gripped portions of the mind-changing control board. He heaved himself suddenly forward.

Behind him sounded the splintering and rending of metal and glass. The bronze man pivoted on his toes. The weight of the mind-changing board hurtled across the room. Four or five of the black-robed figures went down before its impact.

Doc did not seem to touch the floor in crossing the space between the master and himself.

Three or four black-robed aids sprang to the master's defense. In the hand of one appeared a snubnosed automatic. It was spitting vicious lead. The bullets could not have missed.

This did not save the unexpected gunman from being one of the few men who had ever taken the full force of a straight punch from the bronze man's fist.

The bronzed knuckles hit so hard, the man turned over in one direction and the automatic flew to the wall in another.

The other robed men sought to jam their weight ahead of the hurtling man of bronze. This was a sad mistake. The area of a tornado is limited, but it takes all directly in its path.

It must have seemed to this opposing group that Doc's fists were composed of solid iron horseshoes instead of smooth bronze skin. Doc's body opened a way to the master, much as some football team would have wedged toward a goal.

"Don't! You wouldn't!" screamed the master.

Rarely did Doc Savage use a hold other than a merciful nerve-deadening touch. His massive hands had lifted the master clear of the floor. Big bronze thumbs found nerves and pressed.

The master shrieked. These nerves found by Doc were not deadening the master's senses. They were setting him on fire from his toenails to the roots of his hair.

"Stop those walls," said Doc quietly. "It is your only chance."

"Hold them—don't move the walls—stop—stop! He'll kill me!" screamed the red-masked man who was no longer master.

Only a foot or so of space remained for Ham and Monk and Long Tom, and for the two women when the crystal walls ceased to move. Doc dropped the limp master to the floor.

Other black-hooded men were pouring upon the bronze man. His fists became fearful bludgeoning weapons. All his devices but that one powerful grenade had been taken from him. This became a man-to-man encounter.

EVEN the amazing strength of the man of bronze could not overcome new forces now being hurled upon him. The black-hooded men had armed themselves with short clubs, pieces of broken instrument boards and other weapons.

As Monk yelled and barged from the glass room with Ham close beside him, Doc went down under raining blows. Monk's fists swung far on each side. Men went down. Ham, lacking his sword cane, was much less effective with his hands.

But the force of numbers was too great. The robed men trampled over Doc's body as they rammed Monk and Ham back toward the room from which they had emerged.

"Give it to all of them!" snarled a command from the reviving master.

Three robed men lifted Doc and threw him back into the room where Ham and Monk had been driven. The crystal door started to close.

At this moment, Pat Savage and Ann Garvin found a way from their prison. Ann Garvin ran, screaming hysterically, toward the control room in which Professor Randolph still shouted in insane horror.

The master's arm encircled Pat Savage. The girl whipped from his grasp, tearing off his hooded mask.

Two other men seized Pat and held her firmly.

The flame of old Mount Lassen became a more brilliant orange. A rumbling tremor shook the honeycomb rooms.

"Earthquake!" squawked one of the black-robed men. "Let's get out! We can destroy all of it!"

This was not yet an earthquake. But it seemed so. Uprooted young trees in the hands of more than a hundred raging giants were crashing through the outer crystal walls.

One immense Asiatic was first to reach the inside. He swung a terrible club. Two of the master's men were nearly decapitated.

The master shouted a command. He and his black-robed crowd moved swiftly out of the control room. From one side, a machine-gun started blasting.

The racketing snarl of the vicious weapon lasted only a few seconds. But it was sufficient to topple the first line of the roaring giants. This held up the others.

Pat Savage cried out. She was being borne along with the master's men.

Ann Garvin was on her knees before the glass of the main control room in which Professor Randolph was imprisoned. She was beating at the crystal wall with her hands. Randolph pressed his face to the glass close to her.

Apparently the roaring giants recognized that Doc and his men had been prisoners like themselves. With their mighty clubs they swept on again over the bodies of those who had died by the machine-gun.

They were too late. From outside the crystal walls came a woman's scream. It sounded remarkably like the voice of Pat, though she was not the screaming kind.

Doc had come to his feet. Monk and Ham and Long Tom were still dazed. Johnny was unconscious.

There was no sound of a take-off. But from back of the crystal honeycomb a long, silvery shape shot into the orange glow from Mount Lassen.

“They’ve got Pat!” exploded Ham. “Doc, what can we do?”

DOC SAVAGE said nothing. He stood motionless as the *Silver Cylinder* carrying the master and his henchman rocketed into the sky. The stratosphere ship became a gleaming arrow, pointing directly over the spouting cone of Mount Lassen.

Inside his room controlling the basic power, Professor Randolph leaped to his feet. He laughed insanely. Springing across the room, he pulled a lever out from the wall.

In front of him, the bases of the two silver columns seemed to dissolve. Outside sounded a rending crash. Those towering stacks like sky-touching silver pencils were crashing into the valley.

“Blazes, Doc!” groaned Monk. “The volcano! That sky ship!”

“I’ve ended it all! Ended it all!” screamed Professor Randolph’s maniacal voice.

The tip of old Mount Lassen seemed to explode. The long *Silver Cylinder* poised for an instant.

Flame, lava and rock shot into the sky. The last seen of the stratosphere ship was when the eruption engulfed its suddenly powerless hulk.

Professor Randolph had cut off the basic control with the toppling of the silver stacks. With these gone, the marvelous stratosphere ship was only a vast coffin of metal carrying its crew on their last flight.

Lava poured down the sides of Mount Lassen where the *Silver Cylinder* had vanished.

Mount Shasta was shaken by heavy tremors. Yet the air suddenly turned intensely cold. The power that had changed the snow to a crimson flood was gone.

Doc and his companions looked at each other without speaking. What they might have said was evident in the grief etched on their faces. Pat Savage had held the deepest affection of all these men.

Professor Randolph stood white-faced and shaking before them. The beautiful Ann Garvin clung to his arm. Ham and Monk looked at the woman with amazement.

“Howlin’ calamities!” sputtered Monk. “You was supposed to be one of them giantesses or something!”

Doc smiled and said, “Only a variation of an old trick did that. The crystal walls were movable. Some magnified more than the others. The master changed them from day to day.”

Professor Randolph spoke in a low, stricken voice.

“I put myself in your hands, Doc Savage. That which I have done deserves the most extreme penalty.”

The mountain giants, satisfied with the destruction they had wrought, were going back down the mountain. Below, they would encounter sheriff’s posses and authority in numbers.

“We shall discuss that later, professor,” said Doc. “No man is immune from mistakes. Yours perhaps was in thinking that some small group could be kept intact to control the terrible power of the supercosmic waves of the higher stratosphere. You have great genius, but the world will have to be a better organized society before such superlative force is applied.”

“You knew it was the cosmic wave?” questioned Professor Randolph.

“Its first bombardment was photographed in the Argon gas of my own cosmic-wave trap,” stated Doc. “Its wide diversity of application stopped me for some time. Then it seemed all I could do was to trick this master into believing I had succumbed to the mind control.”

“I would say it was more than the mere cosmic wave,” said the erudite Johnny. “I have named it the Z-wave, or the universal ray. Its length can hardly be given in fractions like the other waves. It multiplies the penetrating power of the cosmic wave as science now knows it so many times that it seems incredible.”

“The world thought you were destroyed in your other stratosphere ship, professor,” suggested Ham.

“It was part of the duplicity for which I must face punishment,” said Professor Randolph sadly. “I had the second, greater ship waiting in the Arizona desert. There was no person aboard the other *Cylinder* when it exploded. For months, we had been preparing our machinery, testing our devices and planning world dictatorship in this mountain stronghold.”

DOC SAVAGE had started to lead the party back over the now freezing glacier toward Afternoon Creek. The cone of Mount Lassen had suddenly died to only a smoldering flare in the sky.

The man of bronze suddenly whipped to one side in the snow. His bronze hands caught two other white hands which were waving helplessly. The slender, shaking figure of Patricia Savage appeared.

“Well, I’ll be superamalgamated!” exclaimed Johnny.

“Holy blazes, it’s Pat herself in person!” yelled Monk.

“What happened, Pat?” asked Doc.

Patricia Savage was a very pretty young person. She was even prettier when she smiled.

“Two men were carrying me to that silver ship,” she laughed softly. “Perhaps they thought it nice for me to have my arms around their necks. It wasn’t so nice for them when I got my thumbs twisted into their necks. They went to sleep, and I got away.”

Pat knew how to apply many of the same tricks as her famous cousin. She joined the party in descending the mountain. A little farther on the man of bronze halted the party.

Doc Savage said, “It should not be far from here.”

From farther down the mountain voices were shouting. Ann Garvin clutched Professor Randolph’s arm.

“Doc Savage, Homer wants to go down the mountain and surrender himself.”

Doc said, “Wait a little while. We can have my plane in the air within a few minutes. You see, when I put on the burning bomb, I fixed the crash stabilizers. The plane is but little damaged.”

These stabilizers were Doc’s own invention. They had worked perfectly. His fast, twin-motored ship was setting upright in the snow.

Within a short time, both motors caught and exploded.

“It would be best for us all to leave in the plane,” said Doc. “I judge, Professor Randolph, you have seen the mistake of individual attempt to reform the world?”

“If I were ever again permitted to go free,” said Professor Randolph, “all my scientific research would be confined strictly to the benefit of mankind. I will never disclose the secret manner in which the superwave was brought to earth.”

“You are going free very soon, Professor Randolph,” stated Doc. “We shall fly directly to a Mexican port. There is an island in the South Seas where I shall see you and Ann Garvin—or shall we say, Mrs. Randolph—will never be molested.”

Long Tom had not spoken for some time.

“Doc, when did you first suspect the identity of the man they called the master?” he questioned.

“When I first noticed Professor Archer twirling those gold eyeglasses around his finger,” stated Doc. “Those glasses were his own transmitter for the great power of the wave into either mind control or the death by the blue vapor.”

“But he was killed,” said Long Tom. “We saw the white ashes down there in New York.”

“They were those of a guard Professor Archer probably murdered deliberately to mislead us,” said Doc. “Remember, we were not subject to the final attack for some time after we landed on the roof. I judge Professor Archer’s men were waiting for him to come up the mountain.”

PAT SAVAGE was paying little attention to the serious conversation. She was looking at the homely countenance of Monk. She suddenly laughed softly.

“Monk, you surely would make a funny-looking giant,” she said. “I didn’t think anything human could look so queer, just by being made bigger.”

“Huh!” rapped the ready Ham. “Nothing human could, Pat.”

The plane whizzed southward, carrying Professor Randolph and Ann Garvin to their honeymoon port in the south.

High behind Mount Shasta, giant corn and other plants, and what would have been a remarkable city, were rapidly being buried in the deepening snow. After centuries some of these things might be rediscovered.

Of Professor Randolph’s great experiment, the after years would see only a few scattered mountaineers and Asiatics who had become giants in size.

In a short time, none would believe the stories told by the giant Shallops. In the back country the Shallops always were held to be the greatest tellers of tall tales.

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 *He Could Stop the World* by Lawrence Donovan (as Kenneth Robeson)]